Transmission and Masculinity between Ancient Mesopotamian, Greek, and Hebrew Literary Traditions

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Transmission and Masculinity between Ancient Mesopotamian, Greek, and Hebrew Literary Traditions

By Daniel Bodi

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Dedicated to my teacher, Professor Phyllis Trible, for the privilege of having served as her Teaching Assistant while working towards my PhD in New York.

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Contents

List of Abbreviations		viii
	Introduction	1
1	"Be a Man!" in the Hebrew Bible, Amorite Mari, and the Homeric Epic *Iliad*	5
2	King David and His Wives in Light of Amorite Matrimonial Practices	43
3	The Four Wives of King David and the Four Women of Odysseus: Comparisons and Contrasts	71
4	A Brief Account of the History of Mari	119
5	The Amorite and Hebrew Tribes: Analogies, Parallels, and Contrasts	143
6	Acts of Derision in the Stream of Tradition: Mockery and Scatological Pranks from Sumer to Athens	171
7	The Dating of the Legendary Homer	189
8	To Make Oneself a Name in the Ancient Near East, Hebrew Bible, and Greek Antiquity	233
9	The Stories of King David and His Wives as a Hebrew Version of the Advice to a Prince	255
	Conclusion	271
Bibliography		275
Index of Subjects		325
Index of References		331
Index of Authors		346

Bodi_9781666979138_C000.indd 7 7/14/2026 10:01:48 PM

List of Abbreviations

AASOR	The Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research
ÄAT	Ägypten und Altes Testament
AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary
ACF	Annuaire du Collège de France
AfO	*Archiv für Orientforschung*
AHw	W. von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*
AION	*Annali dell'Istituto Orientale di Napoli*
AIPHOS	*Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientales et Slaves*
AJA	*American Journal of Archaeology*
AJBA	*Australian Journal of Biblical Archaeology*
AJSL	*American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*
AMD	Ancient Magic and Divination
AnBib	Analecta biblica
ANEP	*The Ancient Near East in Pictures Relating to the Old Testament* (ed.), J. B. Pritchard
ANET	*The Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (ed.), J. B. Pritchard
AnOr	Analecta Orientalia
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AoF	*Altorientalische Forschungen*
AOS	American Oriental Series
ARET	Archivi Reali di Ebla Testi
ARM(T)	*Archives Royales de Mari*, textes, transcription et traduction, Paris, 1950–.
ArOr	*Archiv Orientalni*
AS	Assyriological Studies
ASTI	*Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute*
ATANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
AUSS	*Andrews University Seminary Studies*
b.	Babylonian Talmud
BA	*The Biblical Archaeologist*
BAR	*The Biblical Archaeologist Reader*
BASOR	*Bulletin of the American School of Oriental Research*
BBB	Bonner biblische Beiträge
BBET	Beiträge zur biblischen Exegese und Theologie
BBVO	Berliner Beiträge zum Vorderen Orient

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BDB	Francis Brown, Samuel R. Driver & Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1907; 1968).
BETL	*Bibliotheca Ephemeridium Theologicarum Lovaniensium*
BEATAJ	Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des Antiken Judentums
BFPLUL	Bibliothèque de la Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres de l'Université de Liège
BHT	Beiträge zur historischen Theologie
Bib	*Biblica*
BibOr	Biblica et Orientalia
BIFAO	Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, Cairo, Egypt
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BK	Biblischer Kommentar
BM	Bibliotheca Mesopotamica
BN	*Biblische Notizen*
BR	*Biblical Research*
BBB	Bonner Biblische Beiträge
BWL	Wilfred G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1960).
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft von Alten und Neuen Testament
BZ	*Biblische Zeitschrift*
BZAW	*Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für dieAlttestamentliche Wissenschaft*
CAD	*The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quartely*
CC	Covenant Code
CCT	Cuneiform Texts from Cappadocian Tablets in the British Museum I-V, London, 1921–.
CE	Codex Ešnunna
CH	Codex Ḫammurabi
CHANE	Culture and History of the Ancient Near East
CIPOA	Cahiers de l'Institut du Proche-Orient Ancien
CL	Codex Lipit-Ištar
CM	Cuneiform Monographs
CNIP	Carsten Niebuhr Institute Publications Carsten
CNRS	Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, France
COS	The Context of Scripture, 3 vols.
CRAIBL	*Comptes Rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres*
CT	Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum
CU	Codex Ur-Namma
DBS	*Dictionnaire de la Bible, Supplément*
DMOA	Documenta et Monumenta Orientis Antiqui
DNWSI	J. Hoftijzer & K. Jongeling, *Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions*, Brill, 1995.

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DUL	*Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition*, Del Olmo Lete Gregorio and Joaquín Sanmartín (2003) HOS, 67; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2 vols.
EA	El Amarna Tablets: J. A. Knudtzon, *Die El-Amarna-Tafeln (1-358)*; A. F. Rainey, *El Amarna Tablets (359-79)*
ErIs	*Eretz Israel*
EJ	*Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1971).
En.el.	*Enūma eliš*
EPHE	*Annuaire de l'École Pratique des Hautes Études*
ERC	Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations
EstBib	Estudios Biblicos
ETL	*Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FM	Florilegium marianum
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
FzB	Forschung zur Bibel
GAG	*Grundriss der akkadischen Grammatik*, W. von Soden (1969)
Gilg.	*The Gilgameš Epic*
GBAO	Göttinger Beiträge zum alten Orient
GLECS	*Comptes rendus du groupe linguistique d'études chamito-sémitiques*
HALAT	*Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament*, Leiden, Brill, (eds.), v. 1 W. Baumgartner, B. Hartmann, E. Y. Kutscher, 1967; v. 2: W. Baumgartner, B. Hartmann, E. Y. Kutscher, Ph. Raymond, J. J. Stamm, 1974; v. 3: W. Baumgartner, J. J. Stamm, Z. Ben-Hayyim, B. Hartmann, Ph. Raymond, 1983.
HeBAI	*Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel*
HBM	Hebrew Bible Monographs
HdO	Handbuch der Orientalistik
HOS	Handbook of Oriental Studies
HSAO	Heidelberger Studien zum alten Orient
HSCP	Harvard Studies in Classical Philology
HSMP	Harvard Semitic Museum Publications
HSMS	Harvard Semitic Monograph Series
HSS	Harvard Semitic Series
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual*
IB	*The Interpreter's Bible*, Nashville, Abingdon.
ICC	The International Critical Commentary
IDB	*The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*
IDBS	*The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplementary Volume*
IEJ	*Israel Exploration Journal*
IFAO	Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, Cairo, Egypt
IHEB	Institut des Hautes Etudes de Belgique

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JANES	*Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JBLMS	Journal of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
JBR	*The Journal of Bible and Religion*
JCS	*Journal of Cuneiform Studies*
JEA	*Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*
JEOL	*Jaarbericht ex Oriente Lux*
JESHO	*Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient*
JHNES	The Johns Hopkins Near Eastern Studies
JJS	*Journal of Jewish Studies*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JNWSL	*Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages*
JQR	*Jewish Quarterly Review*
JRAS	*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSS	*Journal of Semitic Studies*
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
KAI	*Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1973, 1976, 1979), 3 vols.
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
KB	Keilinschriftliche Bibliothek
KBo	Keilschrifttexte aus Boğazköy
KTU	Keilalphabetische Texte aus Ugarit
KUB	Keilschrifturkunden aus Boğazköy
LAOS	Leipziger Altorientalische Studien
LAPO	Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient, Paris: Cerf
LAS	Leipziger Altorientalische Studien
LKA	*Literarische Keilschrifttexte aus Assur*, E. Ebeling and F. Köcher, Berlin, 1953.
LSJ	Liddell-Scott-Jones, *Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1996.
LXX	Septaguinta
MAL	Middle Assyrian Laws
MAM	Metropolitan Museum of Art
MAOG	Mitteilungen der Altorientalischen Gesellschaft
MARI	Mari Annales de Recherches Interdisciplinaires
MC	Mesopotamian Civilizations
MEA	*Manuel d'épigraphie akkadienne* by René Labat, Paris: Geuthner, 1996, 6th ed.
MIFAO	*Mitteilungen des Instituts für Orientforschung*
MVAG	Mitteilungen der Vorderasiatisch-Aegyptischen Gesellschaft
NEA	*Near Eastern Archaeology*
NINO	Nederlands Instituut vor het Nabije Oosten
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis, Fribourg, Switzerland.

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OIP	Oriental Institute Publications
OIS	Oriental Institute Seminars
Or	*Orientalia*
ORA	Orientalische Religionen in der Antike
OTL	The Old Testament Library
OTS	*Oudtestamentische Studiën*
PBSB	Petite Bibliothèque des Sciences Bibliques
PGA	D. Bodi, *Petite grammaire d'akkadien à l'usage des débutants*, Paris: Geuthner, 2001.
PIPOAC	Publications de l'Institut du Proche-Orient Ancien du Collège de France
PRU	Palais royal d'Ugarit
PUF	Presses Universitaires de France
QUCC	*Quadreni Urbinati di Cultura Classica*
RA	*Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale*
RAI	Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale
RB	*Revue biblique*
RdE	*Revue d'égyptologie*
RÉJ	*Revue des études juives*
RHDFE	Revue Historique de Droit Français et Étranger
RHPR	*Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuse*
RHR	*Revue de l'histoire des religions*
RIMA	Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia. Assyrian Periods
RIMB	Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia. Babylonian Periods
RIME	Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia. Early Periods
RINAP	Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period
RlA	*Reallexikon der Assyriologie*, Berlin: de Gruyter
RSR	*Recherches de science religieuse*
RSV	Revised Standard Version of the Bible
SAA	State Archives of Assyria
SAAS	State Archives of Assyria Studies
SAACT	State Archives of Assyria Cuneiform Texts
SANE	Sources and Monographs on the Ancient Near East
SANER	Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Records
SBH	G. A. Reisner, *Sumerisch-babylonische Hymnen nach Thontafeln griechischer Zeit*
SANTAG	Santag – Arbeiten und Untersuchungen zur Keilschriftkunde, Harassowitz
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBLSS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SDJOA	Studia et documenta ad jura Orientis antiqui
SEL	*Studi Epigrafici e Linguistici sul Vicino Oriente Antico*

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SEPOA	Société pour l'Étude du Proche-Orient Ancien, Paris
SJSJ	Supplements to Journal for the Study of Judaism
SJT	*Scottish Journal of Theology*
SLEx	Sumerian Laws Exercise Tablet
SMEA	Studi Micenei ed Egeo-Anatolici
SMS	Syro-Mesopotamian Studies
SPCK	Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge
SSN	Studia Semitica Neerlandica
StBoT	Studien zu den Boğazköy-Texten
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
TAPA	Transactions of the American Philological Association
TAPS	Transactions of the American Philosophical Society
TCRPOGA	Travaux du Centre de Recherche sur le Proche-Orient et la Grèce Antiques
TCS	Texts from Cuneiform Sources
TOB	Traduction Œcuménique de la Bible
TPAPA	*Transactions and the Proceedings of theAmerican Philological Association*
TynB	*Tyndale Bulletin*
TUAT	Texte aus Umwelt des Alten Testaments
TZ	*Theologische Zeitschrift*
UF	*Ugarit-Forschungen*
VAB	Vorderasiatische Bibliothek
VWGT	Veröffentlichung der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft für Theologie
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTS	*Vetus Testamentum Supplement*
WAWSBL	Writings from the Ancient World, Society of Biblical Literature
WAWSS	Writings from the Ancient World Supplement Series
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary, Waco, Texas
WdO	*Die Welt des Orients*
WVDOG	Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft
y.	Jerusalem Talmud
YBC	Yale Babylonian Collection
YNER	Yale Near Eastern Researches
YOS	Yale Oriental Series, Babylonian Texts
ZA	*Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und verwandte Gebiete*
ZABR	*Zeitschrift für Altorientalische und Biblische Rechtsgeschichte*
ZAH	*Zeitschrift für Althebräistik*
ZÄS	*Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde*
ZDPV	*Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins*

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Introduction

The book has a double aim. Its primary goal is to identify the stream of tradition and the vectors of transmission for a series of themes and motifs from ancient Near Eastern to classical Greek literatures. The secondary goal is to analyze how several past cultures went about educating their male and female public on what it meant to be a responsible man or woman through the genre of the *Advice to a Prince* found in Mesopotamia, the Hebrew Bible, and the Homeric Epic. To be a man was perceived as a process of maturation from martial prowess to socially responsible manhood. The hero must know how to fight but also learn how to take care of the larger community, his household, and family.

The injunction, "Be a Man!" is analyzed in Chapter 1, while Chapters 2 and 3 deal with female characters. What it meant to be a man in antiquity is perceived in a dynamic polarity with being a woman. Indeed, one did not become a man only in combat, where the warrior was exhorted to be courageous and steadfast in battle, holding the line. To prove their mettle and valor in a fight, men had to be combative, aggressive, confrontational, and belligerent, developing mainly predatory personality traits. While highly useful in war, such characteristics could be detrimental to society in a peaceful context. The difference between these aspects of human existence was aptly captured by the contrast between the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*, named after Ilium, the alternative name for Troy. The *Iliad* relates the end of the ten-year-long Trojan War, with the sufferings and premature deaths of many Achaean and Trojan warriors, including Achilles and Hector, respectively. Their young lives were cut short while they acquired eternal glory and a lasting name, immortalized by the bards of the Homeric Epic. By contrast, the *Odyssey* describes the ten-year-long homecoming (*nostos*) of the legendary hero of the Trojan War, Odysseus. According to the epic, it took him as many years of wandering to tame his predatory instincts through his interactions with several semi-divine and human females, Circe, Calypso, and Nausicaa. As if he needed to heal the trauma experienced during the protracted war and the sack of Troy before being able to reunite with his wife, Penelope. There is an intentional chronological correspondence between these two long periods of his life.

Chapter 2, on David's wives in light of Amorite matrimonial practices, as well as Chapter 3, dealing with the four wives of King David and the four women of Odysseus, show that being a man also implied relations with women. The two stand in a dialectic tension. "Masculinity is not essential but relational" (Nissinen 2017b: 224). Both in the Hebrew Bible and the Homeric Epic, the culture heroes par excellence of Hebrew and Greek cultures, David and Odysseus, forge their characters through interaction with four women, for whom detailed circumstantial accounts have been preserved. Through their military exploits, both David and Odysseus displayed their warrior qualities: the

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former by killing the Philistine giant Goliath in single combat, and the latter by devising the trick of the Trojan Horse to sack and burn the city of Troy. However, the accounts of David's encounter with Michal, Abigail, Bathsheba, and Abishag in the Hebrew Bible correspond to those of Odysseus with Circe, Calypso, Nausicaa, and Penelope in the *Odyssey*, showing the slow process of maturation toward responsible manhood. In the cases of both culture heroes, it was a protracted, lifelong process.

Through the lenses of comparative studies of ancient literary and poetic texts, the book reflects contemporary interests in gender studies, placing them in a historical, cross-cultural, and multidisciplinary perspective. Moreover, whenever possible, the long Chapter 3 on the four wives of King David and the four women of Odysseus explores psychoanalytic insights into these relationships between men and women, making the discussion valuable for contemporary issues in modern society.

The steady flow of new studies and improved translations of ancient Near Eastern texts has contributed to a new comparative discipline dealing with different ancient cultures and civilizations and their epic traditions: Mesopotamia with one of the oldest surviving works of literature, the *Epic of Gilgameš*, classical Greece and its Homeric Epic, *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and ancient Israelites with their poetic and literary traditions recorded in the Hebrew Bible (Beye 1984: 7–19; 2006). The present book explores literary and poetic documents in the history of ideas, placing them in the stream of tradition. It points out common literary motifs, tropes (type scenes), topoi (traditional themes and motifs), expressions, value and belief systems, such as the prominence of divine retribution in the interpretation of historical events. It deals with social values: "Making oneself a name" and achieving a lasting fame (*kleos*) (in Chapter 8); a worldview with its religious rites and practices, such as the consultation of the spirits of the dead (necromancy). King Saul consults a female medium in 1 Sam 28:3–25, wanting to know why God has abandoned him. Similarly, Odysseus visits Hades, being told the circumstances under which he will die (*Odyssey* 11.100–137). Haunted by the idea of death, using the divinatory technique of a ritual pit, Gilgameš brings up his friend Enkidu from the dead in the *Gilgameš Epic* Tablet 12. Each time, with Gilgameš, Odysseus, Saul, and David, after the death of his unnamed child in (2 Sam 12:23–24), a woman acts as mediator, helping the hero realize his mortality (Chapter 3. Section 7).

This book analyzes oral and written traditions common to the Hebrew Bible, the Amorite semi-nomads as found in the cuneiform tablets from Mari in Northern Syria, and the Homeric Epic. Chapters 4 and 5 on the Hebrew and Amorite Tribes draw on the Old Babylonian Mari texts, customs, and religious traditions. The Amorites were a conglomerate of Northwest Semitic tribes composed of Sim'alites (northern tribes) and Benjaminites (southern tribes). The name comes from Akkadian (*amurru*), meaning "West," referring to their habitat in Northern Syria in Old Babylonian times. Some Amorites settled in central Mesopotamia, where they became acculturated to urban centers (Wasserman and Bloch 2023). By the end of the second millennium BCE, Arameans occupied the geographic habitat of the former Amorites. The Hebrew cultural memory affirms that the ancestor of the Hebrew tribes was an Aramean (Deut 26:5). Therefore, there may exist a cultural and religious continuity between the Amorites, Arameans, and Hebrews.

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Scholars often recognize a common linguistic, cultural, and religious background and derivation of several shared features between these Northwest Semitic literary traditions. However, the vectors and means of their transmission, adoption, and adaptation have remained elusive, being more difficult to pin down. Through a series of examples analyzed here, as in Chapter 6 on acts of mockery, derision, and scatological pranks from Sumer to Athens, this book attempts to make a case for some degree of interactions and interconnections between these different yet related cultures around the Mediterranean shoreline, the Levant, Northern Syria, the Euphrates and Tigris Valleys, Hittite Anatolia, and classical Greece.

Comparing Akkadian material from Mesopotamia (*Gilgameš Epic*), Mari documents from Northern Syria, classical Greek Homeric Epic (*Iliad* and *Odyssey*), and the Hebrew Bible has become an established and methodologically valid approach (Haubold 2013: 18). Moreover, the results of such comparisons may be significant for our understanding of the history of "Western culture." It shows that what we call "Western culture" originates in the ancient Near East (Quinn 2024: 133–45). The discovery of cuneiform literary precursors of the Hebrew Bible and the Homeric Epic has profoundly changed Western literary history.

As soon as the Assyriologists, by the mid-nineteenth century, began recovering, deciphering, and translating the cuneiform tablets and fragments of the *Epic of Gilgameš*, they noticed several parallel themes and motifs found in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. A new genre of comparative study of heroic epics slowly developed (Rollinger 2011: 213). The comparative material increased with the decipherment of Hittite and Ugaritic texts that followed. Today, several classical scholars stand out in their convincing demonstration of the existence of common traditional material: Walter Burkert from Zürich, with his *Orientalizing Revolution* (1992), and Martin West from Oxford, with *The East Face of Helicon* (1997). The first one pursued a philological approach connecting Akkadian and Hittite terms with classical Greek. The second, compiled over a century of research on the links between classical Greek and Akkadian literatures, and produced a veritable textbook on this topic. More recently, the Hittitologist and classical scholar, Mary Bachvarova, in her book, *From Hittites to Homer* (2016a), tried to demonstrate the influence of a fourteenth-century BCE bilingual Hurro-Hittite poetic composition, *Song of Release*, on the basic theme and motifs of the *Iliad*. These tablets are bilingual, implying the work of scribes as vectors of transmission of the stream of tradition. Moreover, Michael Clarke (2019) drew parallels and contrasts between Achilles and Gilgamesh, the *Iliad* and the Standard Babylonian Version of the *Epic of Gilgameš*. Both deal with the problem of mortality and how to achieve a lasting name. As affirmed in the oft-quoted statement found at the beginning of Martin West's *East Face of Helicon*, "The days of an exclusively 'classical' scholarship are over. To write about Greek literature without knowing something of the West Asiatic has become as impossible as studying Roman literature without knowledge of the Greek" (West 1997: xi).

The influence of literary and mythological traditions of neighboring ancient Near Eastern cultures on the Greek epic and literature has acquired the status of a new Homeric question (López-Ruiz 2014: 152–99). Johannes Haubold makes the case for an ancient genre of "cosmic history," which includes Greek (Hesiod's *Theogony*) and

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Mesopotamian epics (*Atraḫasīs*, *Gilgameš* Tabet 11; *Enūma eliš, Erra Epic*) as well as the Hebrew Bible, Canaanite, Hurrian, and Hittite texts (Haubold 2002: 8–11; López-Ruiz 2010). The declining spiritual quality in the successive cycles of time is found in Hesiod's "Myth of the Ages" (*Works and Days* 109–200) and in *Gilgameš* Tablet 11 (Ataç 2004: 68 n.19; Rutherford 2009: 14–16). The transmission of ancient Near Eastern themes and motifs from Mesopotamia to pre-Hellenic Greece most probably occurred through the mediation of the bilingual Hurro-Hittite scribes who translated texts and ancient bards and musicians who orally transmitted epic songs (Bachvarova 2016a).

A similar development occurred in biblical studies, which were revolutionized by a radical paradigm shift. Cultural contextualizing and comparisons between the literature of ancient Hebrews and the surrounding cultures and languages of the ancient Near East have become heuristically the most productive method used by biblical scholars. The geographic, cultural, linguistic, and literary contexts affect the way both Hebrew and classical Greek epics should be interpreted.

Bodi_9781666979138_Introduction.indd 4 6/24/2026 1:43:55 PM

1

"Be a Man!" in the Hebrew Bible, Amorite Mari, and the Homeric Epic *Iliad*

1. Introduction

The chapter explores the meaning of the expression King David used in exhorting his young son and successor, Solomon, to behave like a strong ruler with the injunction to "Be a man!" (*wāhāyîtā lĕ'îš*! 1 Kgs 2:2). Chronologically, in the literature of the ancient Near East, the expression first occurs in an Old Babylonian Mari text where the corresponding Akkadian expression (*lū awīlāt*) "be a man!" is employed. It is further used in a military context in the fourteenth-century BCE Amarna letter before a military confrontation (EA 289:26 "Be ye men!"). Moreover, one finds almost a dozen Greek examples in the eighth-century BCE Homeric Epic, the *Iliad*. In the Trojan War, Achilles, Agamemnon, and Ajax exhort their fellow Achaeans to be men (*aneres este*), meaning to be brave in combat, hold fast the line of attack, and be ready and courageous to affront the enemy. The chapter also includes two instances where a woman acquires the status of a warrior (in Akkadian *qurādu*), in a Mesopotamian birth incantation, and in Judges 4 and 5, where Jael seduces and kills the Canaanite General, Sisera, commander of 900 iron chariots. In Judges 5, the Song of Deborah praises Jael for her heroic act. In the ancient Near East, women, too, could be heroic, as brave as men, and praised for their courage and cunning. Achieving a great military exploit and glory are not uniquely male prerogatives.

The injunction "Be a Man!" is a literary topos common to the ancient Near Eastern world and classical Greeks. Originally, the expression stands for an individual martial ethos, implying that the literary topos stems from military confrontation. The chronologically oldest attestations of this injunction come from a military context, with a specific meaning of being manly, fearless, acting like a soldier, braving up for combat, ready to fight and slaughter the enemy, and being up to one's duty either as a warrior or as a ruler. It implied upholding the cause of the ruler or commander who uttered the exhortation. It is used in this way at Mari when the Amorite warlord, King Samsī-Addu, admonishes his son Yasmaḫ-Addu to be a strong ruler over the city and region of Mari and courageous in the pending military campaign against the city of Qaṭna, in Northern Syria. Samsī-Addu wanted his young son, Yasmaḫ-Addu, to fight for the cause of the Addu Amorite clan and join forces in his father's attempt to carve himself an empire in northern Mesopotamia. In the Hebrew Bible, the Philistines use

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it before the battle as an encouragement for combat against the Israelites in 1 Sam 4:9 (*wihyû la'ănāšîm* "Be ye men!"). In respect to Solomon, David's injunction to act "as a man" in 1 Kgs 2:2 means to use firmness and strength to secure his fledgling rule. Most biblical commentators take this admonition as part of late post-exilic Deuteronomistic phraseology. However, this position should now be abandoned in light of abundant comparative material firmly establishing the specific meaning of this literary topos in earlier times in the Northwest Semitic domain. Moreover, in post-exilic times, as far as the Greek world was concerned, the expression evolved to mean something else. Beginning with the fifth-century BCE Greece, the notion of manliness gradually developed into a collective political one as an abstract concept. The Greek term (*andreia*) "manliness" is post-Homeric and is distinguished from masculinity per se as physical, biological, and psychological attributes of warriors evolving into a collective Athenian political self-representation designated as (*andreia politikē*) "political manliness or courage" by the philosophers, Plato and Aristotle. By contrast, its use in the Hebrew Bible is more archaic, faithful to its North Syrian Amorite precursor as well as to its pre-Deuteronomistic usage of an injunction to display martial courage and prowess. The chapter tries to show the probable ancient Near Eastern influence on classical Greek epic in the wake of Martin West's (1997), Walter Burkert's (2004), and Mary Bachvarova's (2016a) studies.

2. The Admonition to "Be a Man!" in an Old Babylonian Mari Text (ARM I 69 + M. 7538)

In a letter that King Samsī-Addu I (ca. 1792–1782 BCE) sent to his younger son, Yasmaḫ-Addu, whom he appointed to reign over the city of Mari on the banks of the Euphrates, the aged father describes yet another military exploit of his older son, Išme-Dagan. The latter ruled in the city of Ekallātum, located in the eastern part of the "Realm of Northern Mesopotamia," along the Tigris River. Unabashedly proud of his successes in battle, he extols his military acumen, courage, and bravura, and cites him as an example to follow. While the aging father, Samsī-Addu, saw his older son, Išme-Dagan, as his *alter ego*, reflecting and incarnating his warlord qualities, he tended to disparage his younger son, Yasmaḫ-Addu. The letters he wrote to his younger son reflect an overbearing father. He disliked his womanizing, lax, and slothful existence, not befitting a tribal chieftain and warlord. Both in the Amorite warlord ideology and among the Hebrew tribes, as exemplified in the story of David and Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11–12, womanizing, lying with one's wives and concubines instead of leading armies to war, was a shameful behavior unworthy of a tribal leader and warlord (Bodi 2010a: 101–37, see Chapter 2. Section 4).

The father, King Samsī-Addu, was a successful warlord belonging to the Benjaminite or southern Amorite tribes (see Chapter 5. Section 7). His name means "the god Addu is my sun (that is, patron, protector)." The most common orthography of his name is ^{d}UTU^{ši}-^{d}IM, or ^{d}UTU^{ši}-^{d}IŠKUR, and, assuming that (ś) is represented with (š), hence Samsī as attested in an Amorite phonetic spelling; the last part of his name could have

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been pronounced in different ways Addu, Adad, or Hadda/u (Ziegler 2006–2008: 632). This contemporary of King Ḫammurabi of Babylon achieved such prestige as a warlord and tribal chieftain that Assyrian kings were proud to include him among their dynastic ancestors in the Assyrian King List (Chavalas 1994: 117–18). Hammurabi's dynasty of Babylon was also linked to the Amorite tribe of the Binū-Yamīna "sons of the right," that is, "south" (Charpin 2012: 78). In his inscriptions, Samsī-Addu calls himself king of Ekallātum (meaning "palaces"), a city located on the Tigris River a few kilometers north of Aššur (Ziegler 2002: 2011–74). His reign, however, must be studied from documents found in other cities of his realm, where he also reigned, Mari (Tell Ḥarīrī), Šubat-Enlil (modern Tell Leilān), and Šušarra (Tell Shemshara), since Ekallātum has not yet been located.

Emulating King Narām-Sîn of Ešnunna (2254–2218 BCE), Samsī-Addu took up the title of "King of the Universe" (*šār kiššātim*), introduced for the first time by the former, and enabling him to pose as the successor of the prestigious sovereigns of the city of Agade (Akkad). He had a pragmatic approach to local conditions. To legitimize his rule, in the city of Aššur, he presented himself as the "beloved" and "vicar" of the god Ashur, showing respect for the local theocratic tradition. At Terqa (modern Tell ʾAshara on the banks of the Euphrates), about 50 kilometers north of Mari, he is the one "who worships Dagan," the god who had a major temple there. At Mari, he claims to derive his right to rule from the city god, the tutelary deity Itūr-Mēr. Samsī-Addu dwelt in the city called Šubat-Enlil, meaning "Enlil's Abode or Dwelling," which was his capital. The ancient Šubat-Enlil was identified with present-day Tell Leilān, situated in the heart of the fertile Ḫabur plains of northeastern Syria, between the Euphrates and the Tigris Rivers (Charpin 1987: 140; Veenhof and Eidem 2008: 269–89). The city enclosed an area of 90 hectares, making it one of the largest ancient cities in northern Mesopotamia, even larger than Ebla (56 hectares), Aššur (50 hectares), and Tell Brak (43 hectares) (Weiss 1985: 6; Lewy 1953: 293). He became the ruler of Assyria and the vast territory in northern Mesopotamia by force of arms, incarnating the supreme Amorite cultural value of making oneself a name through military exploits. This remarkable tribal leader, king, and conqueror wanted his two sons to follow his example, and in managing his vast realm, he relied on their help. Samsī-Addu was probably an elderly warlord, and the realm he conquered was so large that he needed the assistance of his two sons to defend, control, and administer it (Villard 2000: 874). The so-called "Realm of Northern Mesopotamia" became a state ruled by three heads: an older father with his two younger sons.

King Samsī-Addu had two sons, Yasmaḫ-Addu and Išme-Dagan, who are well-known thanks to a series of Old Babylonian Mari texts. Both names mean the same thing, except for the variation of the divine name: "The storm-god Adad or Dagan has heard." Samsī-Addu placed his older son, Išme-Dagan, to rule over the eastern part of their "Realm of Northern Mesopotamia," the territory stretching along the river Tigris. The father appointed him to reign over the city of Ekallātum, meaning "palaces," which was Samsī-Addu's former capital. He bears an East-Semitic or Akkadian name that means "(The god) Dagan has heard (prayers)." After Samsī-Addu's death, Išme-Dagan inherited the throne of Assyria. However, Samsī-Addu's younger

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son, Yasmaḫ-Addu, also transcribed as Yaśmaʿ-ḫaddu (Streck 2000: 139 § 1.121), was not so warlike, being more interested in soft life, banqueting, and feasting among his numerous women and concubines, and organizing expensive religious celebrations, anointing and dedicating new divine statues.

One of the first archaeological objects found at the site of Mari was a decapitated statue of the sun god Šamaš, now deposited at the Aleppo Museum in Syria. It contains the following votive inscription, "Yasmaḫ-Addu, governor of Enlil (*š*[*āk*]*in* ^{d}En-líl), son of Samsī-Adad." The expression *šākin Enlil* is an Assyrian royal title attested since the time of Samsī-Adad (Thureau-Dangin 1937: 135). The latter's younger son, Yasmaḫ-Addu, was appointed by his father to rule over Mari and its region in the western part of the "Realm of Northern Mesopotamia," over territory along the banks of the Euphrates. Yasmaḫ-Addu also administered the adjacent districts of Terqa, 50 kilometers upstream on the Euphrates, as well as the city of Tuṭṭul, on the lower Baliḫ, a confluent of the Euphrates.

While in Išme-Dagan's name the verb "to hear" √*šmʿ* is written in classical Akkadian (*Išme*) as spoken in Mesopotamia proper, in the name of the younger son Yasmaḫ-Addu, the same verb is written in its West-Semitic or Amorite form *yasmaḫ* [*yaśmaʿ*] akin to the Hebrew *yišmaʿ* from the root √*šmʿ* "to hear." In Mari letters, there are over 90 Amoritisms, terms not found in Akkadian spoken in Mesopotamia proper, but which can be explained in light of the later Hebrew cognate terms (Streck 2000: 82–123, § 1.95, and § 1.86). Moreover, two recently published cuneiform tablets firmly established the existence of a specific Amorite language, within the family of Northwest Semitic languages to which Hebrew also belongs (George and Krebernik 2020: 113–66).

In contemporary linguistic studies, the Amorite language is defined by the concept of hybridity, resulting from the hybridization of Akkadian. Instead of using the traditional terminology "Peripheral Akkadian" to describe the language of letters and inscriptions found outside of central Mesopotamia, it has become more appropriate to speak of "Western hybrid Akkadian" (Vita 2020: 357; 2021: 1213). It encompasses corpora of cuneiform texts from several different sites in Anatolia, the Levant, and Egypt, usually dating to the Late Bronze Age: Alalaḫ, Hattuša, Ekalte, Emar, Ugarit, Taanach, Amarna, and Canaanite from Tyre. The traditional designation, "Peripheral Akkadian," implied that it was "wrong" or deviant from the Akkadian used in central Mesopotamia. Western hybrid Akkadian underlines that the language was a product of a complex interaction of linguistic, material, and historical factors. What unites these texts is that their morphology, phonology, syntax, and lexicon differ from standard Akkadian dialects through hybridization by local dialects (Lauinger 2024: 24).

In the field of ancient Near Eastern studies, the notion of hybridity is used to overcome the dichotomy and the contrast between purity and impurity or originality and imitation. Art historians in particular are inclined to deconstruct iconographic representations into motifs and to subsume the intermixing of elements from various traditions under the notion of hybridity (Feldman 2006; Stockhammer 2012: 43; 2013: 11; Pongratz-Leisten 2024: 279).

When Yasmaḫ-Addu appears in the Mari documentation, he seems to be still a very young man (Durand 2003–2004: 840). He first occupied the fortress of one of his

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predecessors, Yaḫdun-Līm, located upstream from the confluence of the Ḫabur and the Euphrates, bearing the name of the former Līm clan, which his father Samsī-Addu defeated. Its name was altered to Yasmaḫ-Addu's fortress. He arrived at Mari accompanied by his mother, Ama-duga, meaning "Good Mother," and settled at the eastern palace in 1786 BCE. The great royal palace, which had been abandoned since the assassination of the previous ruler Sūmū-Yamam, had to be restored. It was only in 1782 BCE, on the occasion of his marriage, that Yasmaḫ-Addu settled in the "Palace of the Palm," on the Mari acropolis. He was married to Dām-ḫurāṣim, a princess from Qaṭna. It was a diplomatic marriage sealing a political and military alliance between Samsī-Addu and Išḫi-Addu of Qaṭna. The father, Samsī-Addu, was reluctant to give his younger son additional territory. Both his father, Samsī-Addu, and his brother, Išme-Dagan, sent him reproachful letters saying that he was not able to receive additional lands because he was mismanaging his realm. Yasmaḫ-Addu refused to assume the life of a responsible ruler, spending his time in luxury. Under the disguise of religious celebrations and inaugurations of new divine statues, he is making disbursements far beyond his means. His soft and idle lifestyle is epitomized in the following letter, where he is reproached for "lying among women." Yasmaḫ-Addu's main companions are not his comrades in arms but his wives and concubines. Instead of going out to military campaigns like his older brother, Išme-Dagan, who marches at the head of his troops, Yasmaḫ-Addu does not care for the glory of acquiring a great name as a famous Amorite warrior, chieftain, and tribal leader. In their eyes, Yasmaḫ-Addu is not a real man (*awīlum*) as their Amorite culture defines it. He is exhorted to abandon his dissolute and unbecoming life and effectively participate in the empire-building undertaken by his father, Samsī-Addu, and his older brother Išme-Dagan.

When Dossin's (1950: 130–31) edition of ARM I 69 appeared, only a part of the tablet was known. Thirty-five years later, Charpin and Durand (1985: 313) have identified a join (M. 7538) that completed the tablet and significantly improved our overall understanding of this letter: "Rejoice! Your brother, here, inflicts a defeat (to the enemy) (*annikīam dawīdâm idûk*), and you, there, remain lying among women (*ina birīt sinnišātim ṣallāt*).[1] Now, therefore, when you march on to Qaṭna with the army, may you be a man! (*lū awīlāt*). Just as your brother made himself a great name (*šumam rabêm*), you, too, in the Qaṭna campaign make yourself a great name!" (*šumam rabê*[*m*] *ši-i*[*t-k*]*a***-an**) (Durand 1998: 24–26, LAPO 17 452; ARM I 69 + M. 7538, lines 35′–44′). In the last line, the word *šitkan* may be parsed as a Gt-stem imperative 2ms, from the verb *šakānu* "to establish, to set," with a reflexive meaning, "make yourself, to establish for yourself" (a great name).

The second part of Samsī-Addu's message to his son contains the literary topos we are examining. While the older son, Išme-Dagan, was energetic, having inherited his father's outstanding abilities as a warlord and successful army leader, the younger son, Yasmaḫ-Addu, seems to have been laid-back, idle, and lethargic. The father admonished

[1] The form *ṣallāt* is a G-stem stative 2ms from *ṣalālum* "to lie (down), sleep" but also "to lie with sexually." Normally, 2ms stative should be *–āta*.

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the younger son, juxtaposing the behavior of his older son to that of the younger one, saying, "Your brother (i.e., Išme-Dagan), here, inflicts a defeat (to the enemy) (*dawidam dâku*), and you (i.e., Yasmaḫ-Addu), there, remain lying among women. Now, therefore, when you go to Qaṭna with the army, be a man (*lū awīlat*)!" (ARM I 69: 41′–43′), that is, behave like a warrior.

The expression *dawīdam dâku* that appears here was originally understood to mean, "to kill the commander, the tribal chieftain, the constable, the generalissimo" (Dossin 1939, vol. 2: 981 n. 1). Moreover, Dossin (1938: 109) thought to have discovered in the term *dawīdum* one of the etymologies of the name of the biblical King David. However, Tadmor (1958: 130) offered the correct explanation, seeing here a West-Semitic idiom corresponding to Akkadian *dabdam dâku* "to inflict a defeat" (Stillman 1983–84: 171–76).

The phrase is coached in a striking contrast: While his older brother Išme-Dagan is fighting and leading armies, the younger Yasmaḫ-Addu remains at Mari "lying among women." Spending one's time between female legs during the day was shameful for an Amorite warlord. Love-making was reserved for the night (Bodi 2021b: 19–36). Moreover, the admonitions that are found in the closing lines of Samsī-Addu's letter to his son Yasmaḫ-Addu are precursors of two almost identical ideological points of view found in the David story: "To be a man," and "to make oneself a great name" (see Chapter 8. Section 9).

Line 40′, contains the key expression "Be a Man!": "Now, therefore, when you march on to Qaṭna with the army, may you be a man (*lū awīlat*)!" The modal particle *lū* followed by a G-stem 2ms stative *awīlāt* may be rendered by "may you be a man," or "be a real man." The context of the expression "be a man" related to the pending military campaign against Qaṭna makes it clear that Samsī-Addu enjoins his younger son Yasmaḫ-Addu to behave in a virile, military manner as a true warlord at the head of the army he is about to lead. It also implies that he should rule over Mari as a strong, responsible king if he wants to acquire additional territories.

3. The Injunction "Be Ye Men!" in an Amarna Letter from Jerusalem (EA 289:26)

Most of the Amarna cuneiform tablets were discovered in Egypt in 1887, at the site of Tell el-Amarna, and were given their first major edition in 1915 by Knudtzon. Subsequently, several other tablets appeared, and the total now reaches 382 pieces (Lauinger and Yoder 2025: 536). These tablets provide valuable historical insights into international diplomacy, politics, and society of the fourteenth-century BCE. They reflect the situation in the land of Canaan, a couple of centuries before the time when some Hebrew tribes settled there. The Amarna letters are important as they provide valuable historical information on the culture, people, and land where ancient Israelites developed their epics and stories. Most of the tablets reflect the correspondence between the Egyptian court and its vassals, kinglets, and petty rulers in Syro-Palestine. About fifty letters reflect the exchange between the Egyptian Pharaohs and other rulers

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of the ancient Near East: The Babylonian king in Mesopotamia and the Hittite kings in Asia Minor. Almost all of the letters come from the latter years of Amenophis III, who reigned from ca. 1402–1364 BCE, and from the time of his son, Amenophis IV (ca. 1364–1347 BCE), better known as Akhenaten. It was a period of international unrest. On the one hand, the Hittites were threatening the northern borders of the Egyptian Empire, while various landless groups were seeking to find a place in the Fertile Crescent. On the other hand, the City-states in the land of Canaan were in constant tension with each other and rebelling against the ruling power in Egypt. Many of the letters contain complaints from a given city ruler about the actions of his neighbors, as well as appeals for Egyptian military aid, garrison, and horses. (EA 263:6–14) "My lord (The Pharaoh) should hear the words of his servant: When I entered the house of my lord, everything was captured from the house of your servant. The silver was captured, the men were captured, the sheep were captured. The cities of my lord were captured (. . .) My lord should dispatch men (Canaanite gloss *maṣarta* 'a garrison' and horses" (Lauinger and Yoder 2025: 388, lines 23–35)).

The admonition "Be ye men!" appears in the fourteenth-century BCE Amarna letter (EA 289:26), written by a kinglet or mayor (*ḫazănnu*) of Jerusalem, ʿAbdi-Ḫebat, and addressed to his suzerain, the Pharaoh. He is complaining about the aggressive and predatory behavior of Milki-ʾili and Tagi, who behave like the sons of Lab'ayu and Arzayu. The latter betrayed Egyptian interests and rule, rebelled against their overlord, and did not defend the cities they were supposed to protect. He is reporting their treason in not doing their duty of guarding the towns and territories that belong to the Pharaoh. Instead, they are turning them over to the *ʿApîru* brigands and robbers, as Lab'ayu did with the land of Shechem. The mayor of Jerusalem fears that without protection, his city too will be overrun by the *ḫabiru* brigands.

> Look, the land (KUR) of the city (URU) of Gintu-kirmil (Gath-Carmel) belongs to Tagi, but the men of Gintu(-kirmil) [or of (Gath)] are (i.e., comprise) the garrison of Bit-sanu (Beth-Shean), "*Should we act like Lab'aya*" (i.e., a rebel against Egypt) *and the land of Shechem*? (KUR *Ša-ak-mi*). *They gave to the habiru* (i.e., to the bandits and robbers). (25–29) Milki-ʾili sent a message to Tagi and to the sons: "Be ye men!" (*lu-ú a-mil-la-tu-nu*) Give their every request to the men of Qiltu! (Keilah). Let us desert Jerusalem! (EA 289:18–24; Lauinger and Yoder 2025: 457; Rainey 2015: 1120–23 and 1596).

In this letter, the ruler of Jerusalem, Abdi-Ḫebat, is complaining of generalized treason in the region. His allies, who were supposed to join forces with him in defending his city, are all deserting him. Tagi was the ruler of Ginti-kirmil (Gath-Carmel) and the father-in-law of Milki-ʾili. The latter was the mayor (*ḫazānu*) of Gazru, modern Gezer, a city strategically located on the road from Jerusalem to Joppa on the northernmost ridge of the Shephelah. In ancient times, it controlled both an important route from the coast to the interior (now traversed in large part by the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv freeway) and the *Via Maris* or the "Way of the Sea" (Isa 8:22, Eng. 9:1 *derek hayyām*), which led from Damascus to Egypt by way of Hazor, Megiddo, Aphek, and Gezer. It was strategically located, being in a position either to defend or attack Egyptian strongholds in Gaza and

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Joppa. This valley's name, Shephelah, means the "Lowland," being the feminine stative from the root √*špl* "to be low, be abased."[2] The Septuagint renders it with τό πεδιον "the plain." The valley of the Shephelah is sandwiched between the Judean hill country in the east and the region along the Mediterranean coast, where, after the twelfth-century BCE, the Philistines established their "Pentapolis," five cities (Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron), along the Philistine coastline. The principal sources of water throughout the Shephelah attracted the main settlements in antiquity. Rainey (1983: 2) identifies eight wâdīs and two torrents (*nḥl*) in the valley. It was famous for its olives and especially sycamore trees (1 Chr 27:28; 1 Kgs 10:27 "as the sycamores of the Shephelah" *keššiqmîm ăšer-bašĕpēlâ*), a fig species called *Ficus sycomorus*. The eighth-century BCE prophet Amos, who exercised his prophetic activity in Samaria, which included the central and northern part of the Shephelah, was "a tender of sycamore figs" (*bôlēs šiqmîm*, Amos 7:14). Moreover, Amos 9:2–3 quotes the same proverbial expression as Tagi, the ruler of Ginti-kirmil in EA 264: 16–17, "to go up to the skies and to descend to the Netherworld." In an oracle against the leaders of northern Israel, Amos threatens them in the name of Yahweh, saying, "Though they dig into Sheol/Netherworld, from there shall my hand take them, though they climb up to heaven, from there I will bring them down."

Tagi was the author of three EA letters (EA 264–66). In one letter (EA 264:15–19), he claims his innocence in being unable to send a caravan to the Pharaoh: "Whether we go up to the heavens (Canaanite gloss: *ša-me-ma*), whether we go down to the underworld, our head (gloss: *ru-šu-nu*) is in your control" (Lauinger and Yoder 2025: 404). The scribe who wrote the text in Akkadian, the language used in international exchange in the second-millennium BCE, added two Canaanite glosses, reflecting his Levantine origin. The Akkadian proverbial locution: "To go up to the skies and to descend to the Netherworld" (*ana šamê elû u ana erṣeti warādu*) is found both in Akkadian literature and the biblical one (Bodi 2006: 39–52). The expression is a literary topos occurring twice in the Mari texts (eighteenth century BCE), once in texts from Alalaḫ (Old Babylonian period), once in an Amarna letter (fourteenth century BCE), once in the Babylonian *Poem of Erra* (ninth century BCE), and twice in a Middle Babylonian composition called *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*. In the Hebrew Bible, it occurs in Amos 9:2–3 and Psalm 139:8. It is probably the wisdom circles to which the prophet Amos belonged that orally transmitted this proverbial locution through an older Canaanite milieu, as the use of the locution in EA 264:15–19 seems to indicate.

Since the expression "to be a man" presumably occurs in David's time according to the oral tradition, the towns in the Shephelah mentioned in this Amarna letter will be discussed regarding the Late Bronze Age and the Iron Age, that is, the late Canaanite and Israelite periods. Moreover, Na'aman (2010: 87–97) has pointed out remarkable overlapping and accord between the biblical and extra-biblical descriptions concerning the location and social condition in the region in the Amarna and David's times. Concerning Qilti (Keilah) in both epochs, the context is that of treason, betrayal, and

[2] There are 12 letters from the three rulers of Gezer (EA 268–72; 292–93; 297–300; 378). According to 1 Kgs 9:15–17, Gezer became an Israelite possession when the Egyptian Pharaoh gave it as a dowry to his daughter on her marriage to Solomon.

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conflict with an overlord, the Pharaoh, and King Saul, respectively. The texts reveal the presence of endemic rebellion, spreading over several centuries.

The cities of Ginti-kirmil (Gath-Carmel), written ^{URU}Gin$_8$-ti-ki-ir-mi-il,^{KI} and Ginti (Gath), written ^{URU}Gin$_8$-ti^{KI} are considered to be two different place names (Grabbe 2023: 135). Gath is nº 63 on the Karnak inscription of Thutmose III (ca. 1481–1425 BCE), in Egyptian (*k-n-t*) (Aharoni 1979: 61). Ginti-kirmil (Gath-Carmel) is supposed to be in the northwest, close to Mount Carmel. It was identified with Jatt in the Sharon Plain, the central section of the coastal plain in Israel between the Mediterranean Sea and the Samarian hills, 15 km (9.3 miles) to the east (Finkelstein 2013: 18). However, Lauinger and Yoder (2025: 457) think that Gintu-kirmil (^{uru}*gin*$_8$-*ti-ki-ir-mi-il*^{ki}) in line 18, and (^{uru}*gin*$_8$-*ti*^{ki}) in line 19, refer to the same place and complete what the scribe omitted, by transcribing the second reference with Gintu(-kirmil).

3.1. The Topos of the Single Combat in the Stream of Tradition

In the Iron Age, Gath (modern Tell eṣ-Ṣâfī) was a Philistine city (Maeir 2013: 191–232). In the narratives about Saul and David, the place name occurs as the home of the well-known Philistine champion, Goliath (1 Sam 17:4–7), who fought a single combat with the youthful David in the Elah Valley.

Seventy years ago, Herbert Donner (1956: 61) pointed out the existence of a specific "Literary Genre of Single Combat Narratives" ("literarische Gattung von Einzelkämpfberichten"). It includes the Egyptian fictional narrative of the single combat in the *Story of Sinuhe* against the "Strong one" (*nḫt* "champion"), dating from the nineteenth-century BCE, the thirteenth-century BCE *Hittite Apology of Hattušiliš*; it is referred to in the thirteenth-century BCE Babylonian Creation Epic (*Enūma eliš*) in the battle between Marduk and Tiamat, in the tenth-century BCE Hebrew oral tradition about the combat of David against the Philistine elite warrior, Goliath, in 1 Sam 17, and in the eighth-century BCE *Iliad* (Hoffmeier 2011: 87–114). Since it also occurs in the eighteenth-century BCE Mari document with a clearly defined genre as a "letter with prophetic content" (ARM 26 nº 207), it is preferable to use the designation "the topos of the single combat." Nevertheless, as pointed out by Morenz (2019: 247), there is a series of clearly identifiable formal characteristics of such narratives that help identify them. Moreover, the context of a war helps in differentiating between a "single combat" and a "duel."

It is a methodological error to argue that Deuteronomistic historiography reflects the times of its late postexilic sources exclusively, thereby reflecting the views of its multiple redactors, with no valuable data on earlier times. The early tenth-century BCE traditions about the rise of King David were first transmitted orally. Garsiel (2009: 397) identified numerous wordplays and puns in 1 Samuel 17 that attest to the prolonged oral transmission of this epic story, stemming from the Heroic Age in Israel. The abundant differences between the Masoretic and Septuagint versions of the David and Goliath story, as well as the mention of Elhanan as the slayer of Goliath (1 Sam 21:19), can be explained as the result of the stream of tradition and the story's original oral transmission. Such divergencies are typical in folktales and are the hallmarks of stories produced by

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collective memory (Isser 2003: 29–34). It is not necessary to assume that 1 Sam 17 was elaborated based on 2 Sam 21:19 (*pace* Smith 2014: 316). These are simply two independent stories that the collective memory spun around the demise of the Philistine champion Goliath. In the Hebrew version (MT), Goliath is described as "six cubits and a span" tall (9 feet 9 inches, or 2.97 meters). In the Greek version (LXX), Goliath is "four cubits and a span" (6 feet and 9 inches, 2.06 meters). Embellishing the story, making amalgams, attributing to a person the exploits of another, changing geographic directions, and place names are typical features of the growth of epic literature in the stream of tradition. For example, in the earlier Sumerian version of *Bilgames and Enkidu*, the two companions travel east beyond the Zagros Iranian plateau to fight the guardian of the forest, Huwawa, and fell the cedars. In the Akkadian version, however, they travel west to Lebanon and Anatolia, where cedar forests are still found. The two geographical regions are radically different. The Old Babylonian Akkadian version of the *Gilgameš Epic* reflects a reimagining of the Sumerian Huwawa tale rather than a direct translation, recasting the main characters in a new composition (Fleming and Milstein 2010: 55). Moreover, in the Sumerian version, the hero's name is Bilgames, in the Akkadian, Gilgameš. In fact, the Mesopotamian hero has a multiplicity of names (Rubio 2012: 3; Parpola 1998: 315–29).

The account of the single combat between David and Goliath incorporates a series of literary topoi of epic literature and resembles the "single combat" between Paris and Menelaus in the *Iliad* Book 3, Hector and Ajax in Book 7, Hector and Achilles in Book 22 (de Vaux, 1971: 128). Hector reports the words of his brother, Paris: "He (Paris) suggests that all the troops should ground their arms while he and the warrior Menelaus fight a duel, between the two armies, for Helen and her wealth. The one who wins and proves himself the better man shall have the lady, goods and all, and take them home with him, while the rest of us make a treaty of peace (ὅρκια πιστὰ [*horkia pista*]) (*Iliad* 3.86–94)."[3]

The single combat should have decided the war, but the intervention of the Greek goddess of love, Aphrodite, saved Paris from death, hiding him in a cloud of mist, and the conflict with the Trojans continued. The goddess transported him from the battlefield to the women's quarters, the *thalamos*, or Helen's bedchamber, underlining his weakness and ineptitude as a warrior. "He is more a love partner than a warrior in whom Aphrodite's powers dissolved his warrior's energy" (Smoes 1995: 34). What is continuously characteristic of Paris is his preference for Helen's bed over the battlefield. He is more a man who is "woman-crazed" (*gunaimanēs*, *Iliad* 3.9; 13.769) than he is a warrior. In this respect, he resembles Yasmaḫ-Addu, whom his father, the seasoned Amorite warlord Samsī-Addu, reproaches for his womanizing, as well as Solomon, King David's son, with his epic 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Kgs 11:3). As pointed out by Monsacré (2018: 68), "This man (Paris) has no recognized place in the masculine world of the warriors in the *Iliad*, where there is only one possible course of action: to bravely confront one's enemies on the field."

Achilles, "the best of the Achaeans" (*Iliad* 1.244, 412; 16.271), defeats the Trojan champion, Hector, in a single combat, saying to the Trojan champion pinned down to the

[3] The expression ὅρκια πιστὰ [*horkia pista*] means "oaths of good faith," or "oaths to be trusted."

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ground: "the dogs and birds of prey shall eat you up" (*Iliad* 22.335–36). The passage in the *Iliad* describes how the dying Hector beseeches Achilles to let his father, Priam, ransom his dead body with gold (Bodi 2025: 163–78). The dead bodies of the nobles were burnt, and Hector mentions having his "part of fire," meaning purified and glorified by fire, allowing him to achieve eternal *kleos*. But angry Achilles refuses, telling Hector that his body will be desecrated, eaten by dogs, receiving a dishonorable death (the topos is shared by the Hebrew Bible in 1 Kgs 21:19 (King Ahab); 2 Kgs 9:36, Queen Jezebel eaten by the dogs).

The Philistine champion, Goliath, promised the same fate to David: "I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the beasts of the field" (1 Sam 17:44). In the *Gilgameš Epic*, the fearsome Huwawa similarly threatens Gilgameš: "I will feed his flesh to the 'locust' birds, the ravening eagles and vultures!" (*Gilg.* 2: 94; George 2003, 1: 607). The variations of the expression represent a topos of the ignominious death. In *Gilgameš*, however, it is not a case of single combat since Huwawa fights against both Gilgameš and Enkidu and is overpowered by these two strong challengers. Also, the belt-wrestling contest between Gilgameš and Enkidu in *Gilg.* 2 was not a contest of champions in a war context, but rather a duel between two antagonists (Hoffner 1968: 220). In the archaic age of heroes, two warriors face off in single combat as representatives of their respective sides. The single combat of champions was intended to obviate the need for a general engagement of troops that would spill more blood than necessary to resolve the conflict. It could determine the outcome of the entire military campaign.

Goliath wore heavy armor of scales (*širyôn qaśqaśśîm*), which is an absolute *hapax legomenon* in Hebrew, indicating its foreign origin (1 Sam 17:5). Zorn (2010: 8 Fig. 5; and 17) describes Goliath's gear as "scale hauberk" which is not part of the seventh-century Greek hoplite's armor but corresponds more to the equipment of an elite *maryannu* warrior without a chariot. The *maryannu* warriors are mentioned in a Ramesside historical romance called *The Taking of Joppa* (see Chapter 7. Section 6). The Alalaḫ tablets (20 kilometers NW of Antakya—historic Antioch—now Turkey's Hatay Province), dating from the fifteenth-century BCE, mention the *maryannu* who owned chariots (*ša narkabti*), and those who did not have chariots (*narkabta lā išū*) (Reviv 1972: 219). The *maryannu* chariot warriors wore a *širyôn*, a special cuirass of scales mentioned in Egyptian, Akkadian, Hittite, Ugaritic, and Hebrew texts. The term comes from Hurrian *šaryan*(*n*)*u* (Vaux 1967: 485). The fifteenth–fourteenth-century BCE Nuzi tablets (from ancient Arrapḫa, modern Kirkuk) near the Tigris River mention *za-ri-*(*a*)*-am* "coat of mail." Amarna ^{KUŠ}*sa-ri-am siparru* "bronze coat of mail" (EA 22.iii.37–41) in a list of gifts by King Tušratta of Mitanni, might indicate that a leather base (KUŠ) was covered with metal scales (Speiser 1950: 47), since the determinative (KUŠ) designates leather objects. In the thirteenth-century BCE Egyptian account of the Battle of Kadesh, Ramesses II dons his "cuirass" or "coat of mail" (Egyptian *ṯu r-n3 = širyani*) (Hoffmeier 2011: 92).

Another Hebrew term, *kīdōn* (1 Sam 17:5, 45), of probable Hurrian origin, is related to Akkadian *katinnu* and stands for a sickle-blade sword. It is attested in texts from Amarna, Emar, Alalaḫ, Nuzi, and Qumran (Heltzer 1989: 68).

The David and Goliath single combat narrative is conspicuous by the number of *hapax legomena* that it contains: "greaves of bronze" (*miṣḥat nĕḥōšet*, 1 Sam 17:6), "the spear's head . . . (of iron)" (*lahebet ḥănît*, 1 Sam 17:7), "armor of scales" (*širyôn qaśqaśśîm*, 1 Sam 17:5; Yadin 2004: 380). Moreover, Goliath's helmet is called *kôbʿa*, in 1 Sam 17:5, while Saul's in v. 38 is spelt *qôbʿa*. The alteration of the velar stops would point to a foreign phoneme. The word might be borrowed from the Philistines and traced back to an Anatolian origin, as in Hittite *kupaḫi*, "helmet, headgear" (Hoffner 1964: 67). The Hebrew term has long been recognized as a loanword of Indo-European origin that may be related to the Greek *kumbachos* "the top of the helmet" (Sapir 1937: 73–77; Brown 1995: 165–66). Such a concentration of unique words in the David and Goliath narrative could indicate a reminiscence of a story from the Hebrew heroic age, orally transmitted until it was written down in a later period. It is comparable to the boar's tusk helmet and the sword with rivets in the *Iliad*. They stem from the Mycenaean times but were no longer in use at the time the *Iliad* was written down by the end of the eighth-century BCE (see Chapter 7. Section 10).

However, single combat was not limited to Mycenaean, Greek-Philistine, or Hebrew traditions. It is also attested in Egyptian and Hittite texts. It appears in the nineteenth-century BCE Egyptian *Story of Sinuhe* (*COS* 1.38, lines 140–45, Lichtheim 2003: 77–82), composed probably shortly after the end of the reign of Senwosret I (ca. 1875 BCE) (Parkinson 1997: 21). The fictional autobiography of Sinuhe (Morenz 1997: 1–18) describes how an Egyptian official of the Middle Kingdom went into voluntary exile in the Levant. There, he was challenged to a duel by a champion of Retjenu (*Rṭnw*), the Egyptian name for Canaanites (Kunz-Lübke 2004: 90). Sinuhe wins the combat, carries off his goods, and plunders his oxen (Foster 1993). In the story of David and Goliath (1 Sam 17) and the *Story of Sinuhe*, the intelligence and ability of one of the champions win over the brute force and heavy armor of the other. As Goedicke (1984: 201) put it, "It is the ultimate demonstration of Sinuhe's superior fighting technique, which is an application of the intelligence rather than the material force emphasized by his Palestinian opponent's bringing quantities of armament to the duel."

David and Goliath's single combat, illustrating intelligence and agility winning over heavy equipment, should be interpreted in light of the ancient Near Eastern stream of tradition. It's a topos shared by bards in warrior poetry, praising the military exploits of prominent leaders and fighters. Moreover, the single combat described in this Egyptian story would be of Syrian–Palestinian origin (Lanczkowski 1958: 214–18). The Egyptologist Morenz (2019: 248) surmises that an originally Old Canaanite narrative dating from the twentieth-century BCE influenced both the nineteenth-century BCE Egyptian *Story of Sinuhe* and the Hebrew oral story of David and Goliath in the tenth-century BCE. The evidence coming from Mari would tend to confirm his suggestion.

The Mari letter ARM 26 nº 207 refers to a war between the Sim'alite tribal chieftain Zimrī-Līm and the Benjaminite Išme-Dagan, Samsī-Addu's son. Queen Šibtu, Zimrī-Līm's second wife, proceeds with an oracular consultation regarding her husband's pending military campaign (lines 3-4: *aššum ṭēm gerrim ša bēlī illakkū* "concerning the military campaign my lord is planning"). She makes male and female

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persons drink a special potion to obtain oracular messages. The speech omen (*egerrûm*) is favorable for Zimrī-Līm but unfavorable for Išme-Dagan. The soothsayers convey a vision of a single combat in the form of a belt-wrestling match between Išme-Dagan and Zimrī-Līm: "My lord lifted the wrestling-belt (*ḫumāšam i*[*šši*]), for the *ḫumāšum*-wrestling with Išme-Dagan (*ana Išme-Dagan ḫumāšam iššī-ma*), saying: In the wrestling (*ina ḫumāšam*) I will overpower you in the *ḫumāšum*-wrestling. Struggle as you might, I will overpower you in the struggle" (*šutpuṣum šitpaṣ-ma ina šitpuṣu ele"ika*) (ARM 26 nº 207:13–17). The rest of the oracular consultation of the interrogated persons reveals that after the initial victory of Zimrī-Līm over Išme-Dagan in belt wrestling, the two armies will not engage in battle. It is acknowledged twice that the army of Išme-Dagan is large (*ṣabum ša Išme-Dagan mād*, lines 28–29); nevertheless, it will be scattered (*sapāḫum*, lines 30, 45). The last lines of the message reiterate the statement that Išme-Dagan's army will be scattered ([*an*]*a pāni bēlīya ṣābū-šu* [*is*]*sappaḫ* "before my lord's arrival, his army will be scattered," lines 44–45). This internal *inclusio* serves to highlight an important point in the message. The single combat between the two Amorite warlords is the most decisive factor in the outcome of the war as presented in Queen Šibtu's report of the oracular consultation. The verb *šapāṣum* in the Gt form means "to grapple with one another" (*CAD* Š/1: 449). While Durand (2000: 323, LAPO 18 1144) understands *ḫumāšum* as a wooden "cane," it makes more sense to follow Sasson (1974: 408; 2015: 283), who takes it as a "wrestling belt" related to Hebrew *ḥōmeš* "belt," or "girdle." The numerous iconographic representations of belt wrestlers in the ancient Near East (Beni Hasan in Egypt and Khafaje in Mesopotamia) (Frankfort 1942 pl. 54) show them naked with a girdle around their waist and covering their genitals, like Sumo wrestlers. Moreover, belt-wrestling appears as an ordeal in court in a Nuzi text (Gordon 1950–51: 134). The *Iliad* 23.700–739 describes a wrestling match between Ajax and Odysseus, fighting for a prize. The *Iliad* 23.710 mentions the putting on a belt for wrestling (*xōzameno*), and the word "to lift up" (*anaeirō*) occurs in lines 724–725. The expression became an idiom for "getting ready for action" as in *Odyssey* 28.89, "the young men gird themselves and make ready to win the prizes." To prevent Odysseus and Ajax from seriously hurting each other, Achilles declares the wrestling match a tie.

In Mesopotamia, the twelfth-century BCE Babylonian Creation Epic, *Enūma eliš*, transposes this literary topos to the divine sphere in describing the single combat between the god Marduk and Tiamat: "You and I will take our stand and do the battle" (*En.el.* 4 86; Lambert 2013: 91; de Vaux 1971: 131; Smith 2014: 167). Yadin argued for greater likeness between the single combat described in 1 Samuel 17 and the Homeric Epic. In his view, the story in 1 Samuel 17 would retroject the reality of sixth-century BCE Philistines, who were culturally Greeks, onto an earlier tradition of the battle as the outworking of cultural memory. The characterization of Goliath's armor and the depiction of single combat are interpreted as a polemical intertextual engagement with the *Iliad* (Yadin 2004: 395). By contrast, Frolov and Wright (2011: 470) find greater similarities between the *Story of Sinuhe* and the *Epic of Gilgameš* than with the *Iliad* and argue that the putative ancient Near Eastern parallels of 1 Samuel 17 are substantially closer than the Greek ones. They compare the fight of Gilgameš and

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Enkidu against Huwawa, who guards the cedar forest (*erēnu*), while the showdown between David and Goliath occurs in the Valley of *ʾēlâ*, or the Valley of the Terebinth. It is now called Wādi es-Sant, and runs westward from Bethlehem, from the hill country of Judah, toward the Philistine cities of Gath and Ekron.

In the thirteenth-century BCE *Apology of Hattušiliš* III (II 31–47), the Hittite General Hattušiliš III, who was at that time under the command of his older brother, King Muwatalliš, was dispatched with 120 chariots and no infantry to meet the invading force of the unruly Kaškean tribes which disposed of 800 chariots and innumerable infantry (II 34–36). Hattušiliš III boasts of having resolved the conflict by himself: "At that time I personally conquered the enemy. For when I slew the man who was the *piran ḫuyanza*, the (rest of the) enemy fled" (Hoffner 1968: 222; Knapp 2015: 144). The expression *piran ḫuyanza* means "one who runs/marches in front." In the *Iliad* 3.69, Paris suggests that Hector set him "in the midst" to engage in single combat with Menelaus. The Greek term for the champion is *promachizein* (*Iliad* 3.16; 20.376), of which the particle (*pro-*) signifies that he fights in front of the host. The Hebrew corresponding term would be yet another *hapax legomenon*: *ʾîš habbēnayim* "a man between two (armies)" (1 Sam 17:4, 23), referring to Goliath. It is comparable to Ugaritic *iš bnny* "intermediary, umpire." In the Qumran *War Scroll*, *ʾnšy bynym* and *dlgy bynym* stand for "skirmishers" (Frolov and Wright 2011: 459 n.36).

Confronted with a largely superior force of 800 chariots and massive infantry, having only 120 chariots and no infantry, Hattušiliš III decides to risk his life in single combat. His account ends with the flight of the enemy, comparable to 1 Sam 17:51, "When the Philistines saw that their champion (*gibbôrām*) was dead, they fled." Afterward, Hattušiliš III devoted the weapon he carried on that day to his patron goddess, Ištar: "The weapon which I wielded then I (afterward) dedicated and placed it before the goddess my lady (i.e., in her sanctuary)" (*Apology of Hattušiliš* III, ii 46–47). Similarly, the sword of Goliath, with which David cut off his head, was placed in the sanctuary of Yahweh in Nob (1 Sam 21:8–10). Nob became the refuge of the Elide priests of Shiloh after the destruction of their sanctuary by the Philistines in 1 Samuel 4 (Isser 2003: 34–37). Elsewhere, it is said that Saul's armor was placed in the temple of Ashtaroth—probably a local avatar of the goddess of war (1 Sam 31:10). There, the weapons would have served not only as trophies of war, but as an offering symbolizing the defeat of the divinity he served. The presence of scale armor in the Deir ʿAllā sanctuary (thirteenth to twelfth-century BCE) might also be explained in this way (Franken 1961: 365–66, pl. 12; Desző 2002: 196 n. 11).

The similarities between the Greek (Trojan-Achaean), Hittite (Anatolian), Egyptian (Syro-Palestinian), Hebrew, and Mesopotamian stories should probably be explained by the presence of a common literary topos in describing the single combat, but ultimately rooted in an existing ancient practice on the battlefield.

Winter (1995: 259) has analyzed the socio-political development that took place after the commonly accepted date for the Homeric Epic (mid-eighth-century BCE) and the consolidation of the Greek city (*polis*). According to some scholars, it entailed a shift from an archaic Greek aristocratic ideal toward organized warfare and strategic deployment of the phalanx and the hoplites. The Homeric Epic maintained a nostalgia

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for the earlier times of the exceptionally divinely gifted individual hero and single combat. Therefore, the single combat narratives would reflect the Heroic Age and an earlier stage in ancient warfare, in the Homeric Epic and the Hebrew Bible.

3.2. The Names of Cities in Amarna and David Times: Gath, Beth-Shean, and Keilah

The gentilic term "Gittites" is derived from the name of Gath (*ginti* > *gitti*). In his time, David had 600 Gittite mercenaries (2 Sam 15:18), "and all the Cherethites, and all the Pelethites, and all the six hundred Gittites [הַגִּתִּי] who had followed him from Gath."[4] The Egyptians had Asiatic mercenaries already in the second millennium BCE. During the archaeological excavations at Tell el-Dibʿa, ancient Avaris, in the Nile Delta, despite heavy plundering of the tombs, 50 percent of the male burials still contained weapons of Western Asiatic Middle Bronze Age typology, such as javelins, daggers, and duckbill axes. They seem to have been employed as soldiers, as depicted on contemporary obelisk-shaped stela at Serabit el-Khadem, and on representations of Asiatic mercenaries in tomb paintings at Beni Hassan (Bietak 2018: 78; Mourad 2015: 81). The Egyptians used Nubian mercenaries for their archery skills, Shasu mercenaries from the Sinai Peninsula, and Sea Peoples during the New Kingdom Period.

Gath (Ginti in EA 289:18–19) is on the other side of Naḥal Elah, in the lower Shephelah, about 10 miles northwest of Qilti/Keilah.[5] The terms used to designate Philistine "leaders, lords" (*seren, sĕrānîm*) (1 Sam 6:4, 16, 18), one ruling each of the five cities of the Pentapolis named in 1 Sam 6:17, are related to Greek τύραννος [*tyrannos*] "lord, ruler." A royal dedicatory inscription found at Tel Miqne, the ancient Philistine city of Ekron, mentions a king called (*'kyš bn pdy . . . sr 'qrn*) "Achish son of Padi . . . ruler of Ekron" (Levin 2012: 145). Padî was known as the ruler of Ekron and a pro-Assyrian king in the time of Sennacherib (688–681 BCE). The nobles and citizens of Ekron had deposited him, and he was kept as a prisoner by Hezekiah. During his fourth campaign in 701 BCE, Sennacherib took Hezekiah by surprise, and Padî was released. Rewarding Padî for his loyalty to his vassal oath, Sennacherib returned him to his rightful place as ruler of Ekron (Grayson and Novotny 2012: 14–15, RINAP 3/1 and RINAP 3/2: 80, 184–85; 189). Two centuries earlier, in the times of David and Solomon, *'Akîš* was king of Gath (אָכִישׁ) (1 Sam 21:11–6; 1 Sam 27–29; 1 Kgs 2:39–40). He is mentioned in seventh-century BCE Assyrian royal inscriptions of Esarhaddon (680–669 BCE) and Assurbanipal (668 BCE) as Ikausu (Leichty 2011: 23, 46 RINAP 4, I v 58; vi 10´). The form *'kyš* must have been derived from **Ik(h)ayus/š* which eventually leads to Akhayus, that is, Ἀχαιός "Achaean" meaning Greek (Naveh 1998: 35–37). The Septuagint renders his name with Ἀγχούς. The name forms '(A)kashu and '(A)kasht are found in a list of names from Crete (*kftiw* [Keftiu]) on an Egyptian school writing board of the eighteenth Dynasty or sixteenth-century BCE (Mitchell 1967: 415; Kitchen 1973: 67). In the

[4] The Cherethite and the Pelethite mercenaries could have been Philistines of Aegean-Cretan (Caphtor/Keftiu/Κρήτη) origin (2 Sam 8:18; 20:7, 23; 1 Kgs 1:44; 1 Chr 18:17). Pelethite is possibly a dialectal variant of *pĕlištî* "Philistine" (Gordon 1988: 247).

[5] There are 11 letters from the two rulers of Gath (EA 278–94; 63; 65; 335; 366).

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Homeric Epic, it is related to a leader of the Dardanian tribe, Ἀγχίσῃ or Anchises, who fathered Aeneas with the goddess Aphrodite, and himself being a descendant of Zeus, a way the bards of the epic provided the heroes of old with divine origin (*Iliad* 2.819). According to the Homeric Epic (*Iliad* 20.215), the Dardanians were created by Zeus and lived in the Troad, a historical region in northwest Anatolia, before Troy even rose as a city.[6] Significantly, during the campaign in the ninth regnal year of Sargon II (709–705 BCE), the city of Ashdod was ruled by a usurper, Iāmāni, meaning "Greek" (Frame 2021: 24 n. 96, text nº 82 vii 15′′). The people of Ashdod "made king over them Iāmāni, a member of the low[er class who had no right to the throne] (and) they set [him on the throne] of his lord." He was either a condottiere or a mercenary (Niemeier 2001: 17). The link between the Philistine Achish, king of Gath, and Dardanian Anchises of Troad would confirm the origin of some of the Philistines as Greeks who left Anatolian regions and settled in the Levant.

Beth-Shean is archaeologically the most extensively explored site. It was an Egyptian fortified outpost. Already in the fifteenth-century BCE, Tuthmose III (1481–1425 BCE) mentions it as a place under his control in his Karnak list of cities (nº 110: *bt šʾir*) (Mazar 2010: 239). Scarabs bearing his name were found there. In the following century, an Amarna letter speaks of a garrison in Beth-Shean (E_2-*sa-a-ni*, line 20, where Sumerogram E_2 stands for *bīt*-), implying that it was under Egyptian rule (EA 289:18–24). Three centuries later, at the time of Saul, it was in Philistine hands, for it was upon its walls that his body and those of his sons were hung, and from which the men of Jabesh-Gilead in Transjordan recovered them (1 Sam 31:10, 12). In the reign of Rehoboam, Solomon's immediate successor (1 Kgs 14:25), Pharaoh Shoshenq (biblical Shishak) claimed it among his conquests in 922 BCE, recovering the city as their ancient Egyptian possession (Ben-Dor Evian 2011: 11–22).

The recognition of a literary topos "Be Men!" found at Mari, in the *Iliad*, and the Hebrew Bible, provides an answer to Moran's (1975: 162 n. 42) question: "It is not clear what, in context, 'be ye men' means." In this Amarna letter (EA 289: 18–24), Liverani (1998: vol. 1: 90, "Siate uomini!"), Rainey (2015: 1120), as well as Lauinger and Yoder (2024: 457 "Be men!"), correctly recognized the expression "be ye men" (*lu-ú a-mil-la-tu-nu*) as a well-known idiom, recorded in Old Babylonian texts and elsewhere (*CAD* A/2:54b). They read the initial cuneiform sign as an "*a*" following (*AHw*: 90b and *CAD* A/2:54b) and not as the number "2" (Knudtzon 1915: 872), followed by (Moran 1992: 333 n. 3) "two," that is, "both of you." This cuneiform sign can be read either as "*a*" or "two" (two vertical lines) and is typical in many places in Jerusalem cuneiform letters and elsewhere.

The infamous Lab'ayu was a fourteenth-century BCE warlord who attempted to appropriate for himself territories in the central hill country of southern Canaan (see Chapter 1. Section 3.3). He lived contemporaneously with the Amarna Pharaoh, Amenophis IV (Akhenaten). Lab'ayu is mentioned in several Amarna letters and is the author of letters EA 252–54 (Grabbe 2023: 135). He was a famous traitor and rebel who took cities that belonged to the Pharaoh. He gave up protecting Shechem territory

[6] Aeneas further appears in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* and in Virgil's *Aeneid*, telling the story of Aeneas, who fled Troy and traveled to Italy.

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while at the same time in the three letters he sent to the Pharaoh he is particularly obsequious saying, "If the king sent a message about my wife, How could I hold her back? If the king sent a message to me, 'Put a bronze dagger into your heart and die!' How could I not do the king's instruction?" (EA 254:38–46, Lauinger and Yoder 2025: 394). The possibility that the Pharaoh could take away the wife of another man, as it pleases him, was something that Abram was aware of, according to Gen 12:11–12. Fearing for his life, Abram reverted to a half-lie, pretending that Sarah was not his wife but only his sister.

The place named Qilti (EA 279–80, 290) corresponds to Keilah and is associated with David's career when he was hiding from Saul, who wanted to kill him. It is located at the southeastern end of Naḥal Elah (Wādi es-Sant), at the eastern end of the Upper Shephelah, and close to the mountain plateau. Keilah, a town in the Shephelah, is nominally a city of Judah (Jos 15:44). The name is preserved in modern Khirbet Qîlâ, about 8 miles NW of Hebron, while the ancient site Tell Qîlā is found a few miles south of modern Tell eš-Šeikh Madhkûr, an ancient hideout (*mĕʿārâ* related to *mĕṣûdâ*) of Adullam, 16 miles southwest of Jerusalem in the Shephelah where David took refuge (McCarter 1980: 357, 370; Schunck 1983: 110). In Saul's time, David liberated Keilah from a Philistine attack (1 Sam 23:1–14). The place was considered by David's warriors to be "deep in the recesses of the Philistines" (v. 3). The attitude of the lords of Keilah as described in v. 12 suggests that the inhabitants were not Judahites at this time. David wanted to settle there with his 600 mercenary warriors. However, having found out that the people of Keilah were about to betray him to Saul, he fled the city. The David story cycle portrays him as a *condottiere*, a captain of a marauding band (*gĕdūd*), constituted either of 400 (1 Sam 22:2) or 600 men (1 Sam 23:13; 27:2; 30:9) (Naʾaman 2010: 96). Davidʼs manner in seizing power in his time mirrors the pattern of seizing political power in the ancient Near East as reflected by a series of texts (Bodi 2014a: 190–226). It relied on the use of mercenary soldiers. Furthermore, behind David's rise to power, Edward Greenstein (2015: 22) has identified a common ancient Near Eastern "Fugitive Hero Narrative Pattern" or a tale of individuals who must leave their homeland and survive a precarious exile before returning in triumph. The main extrabiblical sources in which a large majority of the narrative elements can be found are as follows: The Egyptian *Story of Sinuhe* (early second-millennium BCE), the story of Idrimi, king of Alalaḫ (mid-fifteenth-century BCE), ʿAbdi-Aširta of Amurru and the ʿ*Apiru* brigands of the Amarna tablets (fourteenth-century BCE), the story of Hattušiliš III, king of Hatti (early thirteenth-century BCE), the story of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria (early seventeenth-century BCE), and the story of Nabonidus, king of Babylon (mid-sixth century BCE).

The Amarna letter (EA 289: 18–24) reveals the intentions of Jerusalem's neighboring cities and mayors to betray the Pharaoh and overturn Egyptian rule and interests. This is further confirmed by another letter of *Baʿlu qarrādu* (UR.SAG) denouncing the treachery of Labʾayu's sons: "The king, my lord, should know that the two son(s) of the evil-doer against the king, my lord—the two son(s) of Labʾayu—intend to make the land of the king, my lord, go out of (the king's) control, after the[ir] father made it go out of (his) control" (EA 250: 4–8; Moran 1992: 303; Lauinger and Yoder 2025: 385).

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It was a time of shifting alliances and city-grabbing between the kinglets and petty rulers of the land of Canaan. The mayor of Jerusalem, ʿAbdi-Ḫebat, too, was involved in bribing the people of Keilah. He was denounced to the Pharaoh in another Amarna letter:

> Šuwardata to the Pharaoh (EA 280: 9–15) The king, my lo[rd], permitted me to wage war against Qiltu (Keilah). I waged war. My city is intact for me and has been returned to me. (17) Why did (IR_3) ʿAbdi-Ḫebat send a message to the men of Qiltu (Keilah), "Bring silver and [f]ollow me!"? (30–35) something else: Lab'ayu is dead—he who used to capture our cities—but, now ʿAbdi-Ḫebat is another Lab'aya, and he is capturing our cities! (EA 280: 9–35; Moran 1992: 321; Lauinger and Yoder 2025: 434).

The letter depicts ʿAbdi-Ḫebat, the mayor of Jerusalem, as Lab'ayu *redivivus*. He bribed the elders of Qîltu to abandon their fealty to Šuwardata and to follow him. Šuwardata had complained to the Pharaoh and had received permission to use force in reoccupying his town, which he successfully did (EA 280: 9–15).

3.3. The Case of Lab'ayu, the Rebel

A few words should be said about Lab'ayu since he is seen as a key Canaanite warlord who carved for himself a sizeable territory in central Canaan, a small "Lab'ayan Empire" west of Jordan. I. Finkelstein (2013: 16) argues that Lab'ayu ruled Shechem and its territory, over presumably a powerful polity of the northern highlands, long before the southern kingdom of Judah existed. He perceives Israel's northern kingdom, with its capital Samaria about 30 miles (48 kilometers) from Shechem, as a continuation of the historical memory of Laba'yu's forgotten kingdom. The claim is truly surprising since all the Amarna letters concern Lab'ayu's botched rebellion. Moreover, Finkelstein's hypothesis has received a scathing review by another archaeologist, Aaron Burke, who points out that the Amarna letters never explicitly identify Laba'yu as the ruler of Shechem. Thus, the "central tenet" of Finkelstein's argument collapses. Finkelstein minimizes David's kingdom to maximize Laba'yu's supposed achievement.

> The problem, however, as Finkelstein recognizes, is that although "the land of Shechem" appears prominently in the Amarna correspondence, it is impossible to identify it with any certainty as the central and strongest polity in the northern highlands, particularly since neither Labayu, the leader of an insurgency against Egyptian rule, nor his sons is ever identified as a ruler of Shechem and its territory. Consequently, this central tenet of Finkelstein's argument in support of the prominence of a polity in the northern highlands (and all of Finkelstein's speculation therefrom) does not follow from the evidence he adduces. Indeed, it seems that Finkelstein's Labayu tradition here serves only as a surrogate to support the origin of the Iron Age northern kingdom of Israel (Burke 2014: 40).

The only reference to Lab'ayu in the entire Amarna corpus where there is any possible connection with Shechem is the first letter (EA 289: 20–24) quoted above. It states the

Bodi_9781666979138_C001.indd 22 7/13/2026 2:52:10 PM

exact opposite, that the Pharaoh's vassal, Lab'ayu, gave up the land of Shechem to the ʿ*Apiru* robbers instead of defending it. As argued by Adamthwaite, it is more plausible that Lab'ayu's capital was at Pella in Transjordan, where his son Mut-Ba'lu reigned after his father's demise (EA 256: 8, 13 *Pí-ḫi-lì* = Pella; and EA 255:15). Both letters probably reveal the nature of Lab'ayu's and his sons' marauding activities. The Amarna tablet EA 255 deals with the caravan traffic in Transjordan, and EA 256, with Ayab of Astaroth, a city in Transjordan, and a whole array of cities in that northeastern region. As pointed out by Adamthwaite (1992: 7 and 14), "Why should either Lab'aya or his sons give up any of the territory of their capital city to the Hapiru, when the former sought to build an empire based on the central hill country (. . .) Hence the sons of Lab'aya, from this vantage point, should be seen as controlling the Transjordan and pushing west and southwest, ultimately to Gezer, rather than the central hill-country pushing north."

In EA 253: 18–22, Lab'ayu protests his loyalty to the Pharaoh, saying that his only "sin" was that he entered the city of Gezer. Moreover, Adamthwaite's placing of Lab'ayu's capital in Transjordan was confirmed by a newly found cuneiform inscription on a small cylinder found at Beth Shean. The sender of the small cylinder, less than three centimeters long (Horowitz 2019: 208), was Tagi, and the recipient was Lab'ayu. The cylinder preserves holes at its top and bottom, which could have been hung from the courier's neck as a pendant and more easily dissimulated. The two rebels in Canaan known from the fourteenth-century Amarna correspondence were communicating in a singularly small, probably secretive letter that was intercepted by the Egyptian garrison in Beth Shean on the border of Transjordan. Why would Tagi from Ginti-Kirmil in the west write in the direction of Transjordan in the east if Lab'ayu lived in Shechem in Canaan's central hill country? The small cylinder letter confirms the fact that Lab'ayu and his clan were located in Transjordan.

The interception of a document carried by a messenger around his neck is illustrated by a text on the Memphis stele of Pharaoh Amenhotep/Amenophis II (1427–1400 BCE) describing his military campaign in Syria-Palestine: "Now, at that time, his majesty (the Pharaoh) traveled south within the Valley of Sharon.[7] He discovered a messenger of the chieftain of Naharin carrying a document around his neck. He carried him off as a prisoner-of-war at the rear of the chariot" (Hoffmeier *COS* 2.3, 2003: 21).

Lab'ayu attacked the northern strongholds. He captured Giti-padalla and Giti-rimuni and attacked Shunama (biblical Shunem), Burquna, and Harabu (EA 250:12-14, 42–46). All of these are in or near the valley of Jezreel in the north. Lab'ayu's objective was Megiddo, the major Egyptian base in the area. Biridya, the ruler of Megiddo, writes a letter (EA 244: 25–33) saying that the fortress is under siege and asks for an Egyptian garrison of 100 men to guard the city. Lab'ayu was captured by Biridya. On the Pharaoh's order, he was to be sent from Megiddo to Egypt to be punished. Lab'ayu bribed his escort and escaped, but his freedom was of brief duration. Before Biridya could recapture him, Lab'ayu was killed by the men of Qena (EA 245 and 250:17–18) (Ross 1967: 66).

[7] (Isa 33:9; 35:2; 1 Chr 5:16; 27:29).

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In such a context of generalized uprising against Egyptian rule, of taking sides, bribing rulers of small Canaanite towns, and sending secretive messages, the expression "Be ye men!" in EA 289:26 could mean, be decisive, assume your action, do not be cowardly, and join the rebellion against the Pharaoh. It hints at the danger of the death penalty if the Pharaoh sends his army to quell the rebellion. The exhortation "Be ye men!" implies being prepared to risk one's life in overturning Egyptian rule and betraying their overlord.

4. The Admonition to "Be Men!" in the *Iliad*

The composition of the Homeric Epic, the *Iliad*, with its description of a tenth year of the war between the Achaeans and the Trojans, dates from the end of the eighth-century BCE. It uses the expression "Be ye men!" ten times. Martin West argues that the composition of the Homeric Epic could most probably be placed in the period between 750 and 600 BCE. In his view, originally, Homer was not the name of a historical poet (West 2011: 392 and 389). Behind the name of Homer, one should understand a series of ancient Greek bards who composed individual episodes that eventually became the twenty-four Books of the *Iliad* (Smoes 1995; Bassi 2003).

In the *Iliad*, the warriors are frequently admonished by their commanders to fight courageously with the injunction, "Be ye men!" (ἀνέρες ἔστε [*aneres este*]), where ἀνέρες [*aneres*] is a plural form of the noun ἀνήρ [*anēr*] "man," and ἔστε [*este*] is a verb, 2mpl present imperative active from *eimi* "to be." In contrast to the Old Babylonian Mari usage and the Hebrew biblical one, in the Homeric Epic, there seems to be no admonition to "be a man!" in the singular. It corresponds to the Amarna injunction, which is also in plural: "Be ye men" (EA 289:26). Both in the Amarna rebellion and in the Trojan War, the appeal aims at a collective effort. It is found in *Iliad* 6.112–114 when Hector enjoins his fellow Trojans to show themselves as men in battle: "Be ye men, friends, and remember your furious strength" (ἀνέρες ἔστε, φίλοι, μνήσασθε δὲ θούριδος ἀλκῆς). This exhortation to strength and bravery expresses a close relationship between being a man and possessing bodily strength (*alkê*). "And Hector shouted aloud and called to the Trojans: 'Ye Trojans, high of heart, and far-famed allies, be ye men, my friends, and remember your furious strength (ἀνέρες ἔστε, φίλοι, μνήσασθε δὲ θούριδος ἀλκῆς), the while I go to Ilios and bid the elders that give counsel, and our wives to make prayer to the gods, and promise them hecatombs'" (*Iliad* 6.112–114).

While the warriors are exhorted to be up to their duty in facing great danger, relying on their strength, the women are solicited to pray to the gods and prepare the hecatombs—sacrifices that originally designated 100 oxen, but in practice, as few as twelve could make a hecatomb. The mention of women in such texts dealing with pending battles serves as a literary code, establishing a contrast. Combat is for warriors, and prayer is for women. A similar contrast between warriors and women is found in Akkadian epics like the "Warrior's Manifesto" in the ninth-century BCE *Erra Epic* 1 49, "Are we (the *Sebetti*, divinized Erra's weapons) to eat women's bread, like one who has never marched on to the battlefield?" (Bodi 2010a: 123–29; Konstantopoulos 2023: 112). Going to battle in

Bodi_9781666979138_C001.indd 24 7/13/2026 2:52:10 PM

war is more of a man's skill, occupation, and destiny, and not the habitual vocation of women. These are clearly defined gender roles.

An author compares such admonitions in the *Iliad* with passages in which men are rebuked for acting like weak women. In other words, it means, "be men, not women," referring to this as the "sexist aspect of courage" (Smoes 1995: 33). However, when dealing with ancient texts, instead of using the term "sexist," which is a modern concept, it would be more appropriate to see here a traditional division of labor where war and battle are the tasks of men, while prayer, making bread, fermented beverages ("beer") an eminently female task in Mesopotamia, and birthing children are for women. However, the danger and frequency of death at childbirth give women warrior status. Facing death bravely is an eminently warrior quality that men and women share.

5. The Metaphor of Women as Warriors in Childbirth

There is a recurring Akkadian literary topos where women at childbirth are called "warriors." A Middle Assyrian tablet dating from the time of King Tiglath-Pileser I (1114–1076 BCE) states in line 40: "Like a warrior (UR.SAG *qurādu*) in the fray, she is cast down in her blood." In childbirth, the woman is losing so much blood that she is likened to a warrior lying on the ground and bleeding (Lambert 1969a: 31; Stol 2000: 130). Given the high mortality of women at childbirth in the past, it was admitted that, just like men-warriors, they were risking their lives while ensuring the continuation of the clan. A similar point of view is found in Sparta. Plutarch (46–119 CE), in *Life of Lycurgus* 27.2–3, states that in Sparta "it was not permitted to inscribe on the tombstone the names of the dead except for the men who fell in battle and women who died in childbirth" (Flacilière 1948: 403). The tomb inscriptions were laconic (*en polemoi, lechoi* "in war, in childbirth-bed," from πόλεμος [*polemos*] "war" and λέχος [*lechos*] "bed"), respecting Spartan proverbial conciseness. Nevertheless, these few words spoke volumes while complying with their legislation concerning mortuary inscription (Loraux 1981: 37). In Sparta, young girls and women were required to engage in gymnastics and regular sporting activities, to make them more resistant to labor pains of childbearing, increasing their chances of survival, and giving birth to healthy babies. The words employed by Plutarch are telling: ἀγωνίζεσθαι πρὸς τὰς ὠδίνας "fighting (literally "agonizing") at childbirth." The term for "bed" *lechos* is related to *lochos* "ambush," and "military troop," and all those derived terms refer either to childbearing or to military activity (Chantraine 1999: 634). The Spartan mothers give birth to warriors, future hoplites for the city-state. Both in Assyria and Sparta, the woman in childbirth is perceived as a fighter and a warrior. In his play *Medea*, the fifth-century BCE Greek tragedian, Euripides (ca. 480–406 BCE), makes Medea admit that she would prefer to hold the battle line three times than to give birth a single time: "I would rather stand by a shield three times than give birth once," (ὡς τρὶς ἂν παρ᾽ ἀσπίδα στῆναι θέλοιμ᾽ ἂν μᾶλλον ἢ τεκεῖν ἅπαξ, *Medea*, 248–251). For Medea, the act of childbearing is a more dangerous combat than the one a hoplite

encounters (Loraux 1981: 44 n. 29). Her chances of survival were apparently less than those of a hoplite soldier.

The recognition that the pain women endured during childbirth equaled that of warriors is highlighted by a passage in the *Iliad* that compares the pain of the injured King Agamemnon to that of a woman in labor (*Iliad* 11.267–272): ". . . but when the blood had ceased to flow, and the wound grew dry, the pain (*odunē*) became great. As the sharp pangs which the Eileithuiai, goddesses of childbirth, daughters of Hera and dispensers of cruel pain, send upon a woman when she is in labor, even so sharp were the pangs of the son of Atreus."

The term *odunē* refers to sharp, shooting, heavy, grueling pain characteristic of childbirth. In this way, "the masculine universe of the Achaean combatants . . . attributes the suffering of a woman in labor to the king of kings among the heroes" (Loraux 1981: 48 n.60; Monsacré 2018: 74).

6. The Male-Female Contrast

Of the ten occurrences of the phrase *aneres este* "Be ye men," in Homer, all of which occur in the *Iliad*, eight refer to *alkē* "strength, valor" (*Iliad* 5.529; 6.112; 8.174; 11.287; 15.487; 15.734; 16.270; 17.185). The remaining two examples (*Iliad* 15.561 and 15.661) occur in lines in which Ajax and Nestor, respectively, exhort the fighters to stand their ground: "O friends, be men, and put a feeling of shame in your heart" (ὦ φίλοι, ἀνέρες ἔστε *καὶ αἰδῶ θέσθ' ἐνὶ θυμῷ*) (*Iliad* 15.561).

> Although *aidōs* may be considered an internal and perhaps even an ethical attribute, the metaphorical force of *thesthe* together with the implicit physical localization of the *thumos* makes the admonition a call to physical or bodily action (. . .). In other words, being a man is the effect of a disciplinary regime in which the collective actions of the troops are modeled on the individual actions of the hero or "best man" (*aristos anēr*). As such, being men is both an ontological and an ideological category; it functions in the service of maintaining dominant social structures, even, or perhaps especially, in the face of death in battle. This collective masculinity may be said to anticipate manliness or *andreia* as an abstract ethical quality (Bassi 2003: 33–34).

Agamemnon, called "the son of Atreus," encourages the Achaean troops before the battle to be men, show a strong or brave (*alkimos*) heart, and hold the line: "My friends, be men. Let courage fill your hearts (ὦ φίλοι ἀνέρες ἔστε καὶ ἄλκιμον ἦτορ ἔλεσθε). In the heat of battle, remember honour, each man's reputation. When men recall their honour, more troops are saved than slaughtered. Those who run away lose life and fame" (*Iliad* 5.529–532; Johnston 2006: 110).[8]

The admonition to "be men!" is uttered in preparation for armed combat, where being a man is proven by physical action, by standing one's ground, and refusing retreat,

[8] https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/

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as in *Iliad* 15.665–6. "As a collective fighting force, men prove they are men by putting their bodies to the test at the behest and in view of their leaders" (Bassi 2003: 33). In *Iliad* 7.95–100, Menelaus harangues the troops by calling them females: "Alas, you boasters, you're Achaean women, not men (Ἀχαιΐδες οὐκέτ᾽ Ἀχαιοί). This shame will mean total disgrace, unless some Danaan now stands up to Hector. All of you sitting here, without heart, disgraced like this, may all of you dissolve, disintegrate to earth and water" (Johnston 2006: 145).

In its historical development, the English language eliminated the distinction between the masculine and feminine gender of words, making it almost impossible to translate the original gendered Greek single words (Ἀχαιΐδες οὐκέτ᾽ Ἀχαιοί) using two words in English: "female Achaeans, no longer male Achaeans."

Menelaus will himself be unmanned. When, during the sack of Troy, Menelaus caught sight of Helen's naked breasts, he cast aside his sword and accepted her embrace. Stunned by her erotic radiance and in the eyes of his peers, humiliated by the irresistible charms of Helen, the goddess who makes men base and womanly is not Greek, but Near Eastern. According to Crane (1988: 66), these are the works of Ištar when Gilgameš lambastes the goddess of love, describing all the evil she brought upon her numerous human and animal lovers she seduced (*Gilg.* 6 46–76). The significance of the sword that Menelaus casts aside in this context hardly needs comment. The rabbis in the Jerusalem Talmud (*y. Sanh.* 2.3) and *Midrash Shemuel* (23.11, referring to 1 Sam 25:20) impute a similar erotic radiance to Abigail with which she seduced David, and made his murderous rage abate (Bodi 2013c: 81).

When another Achaean champion, Diomedes, turns his chariot around, fleeing away from Hector, the latter jeers and mocks him: "Son of Tydeus, fast-riding Danaans at their banquets have awarded you a place of honour, with lots of meat, a wine cup always full. Now they're ashamed of you. You've turned out no better than a woman (γυναικὸς ἄρ᾽ ἀντὶ τέτυξο). Run off then, you coward girl (κακὴ γλήνη)" (*Iliad* 8.160–65; Johnston 2006: 164). The expression (κακὴ γλήνη) [*kakē glēnē*] refers to a "cowardly young girl" (Monsacré 2018: 67).

The Homeric Epic is full of psychological warfare using a particular rhetoric. Its goal is to weaken the adversary by telling him that he is witless, has no warcraft (*polemēia erga*), that is, has not learned the skills of war, and is up against one who has it. To the taunt of Ajax, who challenges him to fight, Hector responds, "Don't tease me as though I were a weak little boy or a woman who does not know warcraft (*polemēia erga*)" (*Iliad* 7.235; Vermeule 1979: 101).

In their dispute over the young female slave Briseis, Achilles insults Agamemnon, implying that he has the heart of a coward, "Heavy with wine, with a face of a dog but the heart of a doe (*elaphoio*)" (*Iliad* 1.225). The last term is a feminine singular noun designating a female deer. Achilles accuses him of drunkenness, shamelessness (1.149), and cowardice, a person deprived of kingly virtues. He is not a leader showing self-control and courage; his heart is that of a doe, a particularly fearful female animal. The most infamous comparisons for a warrior are those that equate him with a female, denying his virility. To prevent him from killing Agamemnon, Athena grasps the fiery youth by his golden hair and warns him to check his anger (*Iliad* 1.188–214).

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In the episode between Odysseus and Circe, the messenger of the gods, Hermes, warns that this nature goddess may unman him, that is, make him "weak and not a man"(*kakon kai anēnora thēē*, *Odyssey* 10.301 and 341). The threat is physical. Circe knows the usage of magic herbs and pours her *pharmakon* "drug" into wine, transforming men into animals according to the propensities of their nature, into pigs, dogs, lions, and wolves (*Odyssey* 10.284–91).

The fifth-century BCE Greek comedian, Aristophanes, frequently derides the eminent Athenian leaders, pointing out their weaknesses. In his comedy *Wasps*, 19, and 27, he ridicules the military cowardice of the prominent Athenian statesman, Cleonymos, who wrote two decrees in 426/425 BCE dealing with the relationship between Athens and its allies. In a battle, Cleonymos threw away his shield and his weapon and fled. He is derided with a *double entendre* as the man who has lost his "weapon, tool, instrument" ὅπλον [*hoplon*], which can also mean "penis." The great statesman is not a man, but an emasculated coward (Henderson 1991: 123). It is comparable to the raunchy expression an Amorite chieftain hurls at another one who eschews joining a military campaign, telling him that he has "got no balls to fight" (see Chapter 2. Section 4.1).

The fifth-century BCE Greek historian Herodotus attributes the same contrasted perception of male-strength versus female-weakness dichotomy to the Persians. King Xerxes (485–465 BCE) reproaches his uncle Artabanus, the general of the Persian army, in the following speech: "Artabanus, you are my father's brother; that will save you from receiving the fitting reward of foolish words. But for your cowardly lack of spirit, I lay upon you this disgrace, that you will not go with me and my army against Hellas, but will stay here with the women; I myself will accomplish all that I have said, with no help from you" (Herodotus, *Histories* 7.11.1).[9]

After the repeated defeat of the Persians against the Greeks, the son of Darius tells his general that his leadership in war is worse than that of a woman: "Masistes son of Darius, who happened to have been present at the Persian disaster, reviled the admiral Artayntes very bitterly, telling him (with much beside) that such generalship as his proved him worse than a woman, and that no punishment was too severe for the harm he had done the king's estate. Now it is the greatest of all taunts in Persia to be called worse than a woman" (Herodotus, *Histories* 11.107.1)

Manliness and aptitude for combat are presented as hereditary features. Odysseus explains the fighting prowess of his *genos* "family, race," to his son Telemachus: "For always before we have excelled in strength (*alkē*) and masculinity (*ēnoreē*) over all the earth" (*Odyssey* 24.508–9). "Heroes are sons of heroes, recapitulations of their fathers; they maintain the masculinity of their ancestors" (Monsacré 2018: 81). This desirable masculinity (*ēnoreē*) is also attributed to Bellerophōn, Ajax, and Achilles. In the Homeric Epic, manliness, strength, and virility are features of aristocratic ideology based on external appearance, success in individual combat against foreign enemies, and heredity (Smoes 1995: 35; Bassi 2003: 36).

[9] https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/

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7. The Evolution of Manliness as a Political Self-Representation

In the fifth-century BCE, the term ἀνήρ [*anēr*], pl. *aneres* was replaced by ἀνδρεία [*andreia*] "manly courage." The term *andreai* is a post-Homeric word appearing for the first time in Herodotus' *History* in 450 BCE (Smoes 1995: 33). Although *andreia* can still occasionally refer to "military bravura and courage," it gradually developed as an abstract concept, distinguished from masculinity as a physical or biological attribute, and became an Athenian political aspect of self-representation. The term *andreia* and related terms are found in fifth-century Athenian drama and historiography, and finally in Plato's and Aristotle's discussions of "political manliness" (*andreia politikê*) in the fourth-century BCE. As Karen Bassi (2003: 25–26) put it, "The semantic history of manliness is one in which what it means to be a man begins as an observable act of facing death on the battlefield in epic poetry and becomes a defining ethical characteristic of the citizen in the fifth-century *polis*."

8. The Admonition to "Be a Man!" in the Hebrew Bible (*wāhāyîtā lĕʾîš* 1 Kgs 2:2)

David's last words to his son Solomon contain the following admonition: "I go by the way of all the earth. Be strong (*wĕḥāzaqtā*) and be a man (*wāhāyîtā lĕʾîš*)!" meaning "show yourself a man!" or "act as it behoves a man!" (1 Kgs 2:2). NIV has "act like a man," while the NRSV preferred to be more inclusive by offering a paraphrase: "be courageous." "The Hebrew idiom is *hayah leʾish*—literally "become/turn into a man," indicating that this is not a biological but a social category" (Brettler 2017: 201). The Septuagint renders it literally with ἔσῃ εἰς ἄνδρα "show yourself a man," a wording that does not reflect the classical Greek ἀνέρες ἔστε [*aneres este*] from the Homeric Epic. Most commentators take both Hebrew injunctions "be strong" and "be a man" to be late Deuteronomistic (Dtr) formulas. Thus, according to Cogan (2000: 181), "Dtr interposed himself into the narrative of 1 Kgs 2 more than in the previous chapter. Deuteronomistic passages are identifiable in: the stereotypical statement regarding the proper behavior expected of Israel's new king vv 2–4; v 4 is a Dtr_2 expansion." However, as pointed out already by Montgomery (1976: 89), this is "a veritable soldier's challenge, used by the Philistines in mutual encouragement (1 Sam 4:9). This summons to a strong-handed *régime* is followed by the harsh injunctions of vv. 5–9." Indeed, in the following verses, David enjoins his son to execute both his general Joab and Shimei, and settle on his behalf an old feud.

In the Hebrew Bible, the expression "be a man" is found in a military context in a battle against the Philistines. Frightened by the arrival of Yahweh's Ark in the Israelite camp (1 Sam 4:9), the Philistines warriors gathered at Aphek for battle encouraged each other with this expression: "Be strong (*hitḥazzĕqû*), and be ye men (*wihĕyû laʾănāšîm*), O Philistines, lest you become slaves to the Hebrews as

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they have been to you; be ye men/acquit yourselves as men and fight (*wihĕyîtem laʾănāšîm wĕnilḥaměten*)." The Philistines exhort each other to a collective war effort as the Achaeans and Trojans in the *Iliad*.

The phraseology used helps in identifying what comes from Deuteronomistic redactors and what belongs to pre-Deuteronomistic traditions. The use of the verb *ḥāzaq* "to be strong" seems to belong to late Deuteronomistic language as indicated by the phraseology of Moses' farewell exhortation to Joshua: "be strong and of good courage" (*ḥăzaq wĕʾemāṣ*) (Deut 31:32) (Gray 1976: 99). The same two words are repeated in Josh 1:6, 9, 18. However, the expression "be a man" is not part of the Deuteronomistic phraseology, and its connection with the corresponding Mari Akkadian expression *lū awīlāt* in a military context indicates its antiquity as a martial ethos.

There is another feature that makes the Mari text pertinent to the relationship between David, the father, and his son Solomon. Commenting on 1 Kgs 2:2 in the Rabbinic Bible, Radaq explains David's injunction "to be a man" as "be zealous (*zryz*), reigning over your vital force or soul (*npš*), restraining your inclinations or instincts (*yṣr*)." Medieval rabbinic commentators found in this injunction the ideal of a wise man and sage leading a truly philosophical life as the person who rules over the passions of his soul (Cohen 1997: 27). Just as King Samsī-Addu, the father of Yasmaḫ-Addu, was exasperated with his son's excessive womanizing and absence of warlord virility, one may suggest that David too was worried by his son's and successor's excessive love for women. The expression *wĕʾānōkî naʿar qāṭōn*, which Solomon uses to describe himself in his prayer in 1 Kgs 3:7, represents a typical conventional expression of humility found in comparable Egyptian texts and does not necessarily reflect his young age (Gray 1976: 125). Solomon already began constituting himself a harem through a political marriage as indicated at the beginning of the same periscope (in 3:1). Both Yasmaḫ-Addu and Solomon are young, and they went down in history not as famous warriors and warlords but as prodigious womanizers. Compulsive womanizing is a transgenerational trait in David's family. At the peak of his political career, King David almost lost his city, his realm, and the allegiance of his people following the rape and abduction of Bathsheba, the wife of one of his elite officers, Uriah the Hittite. For the topos of the warlord's loss of honor when, instead of leading armies, he indulges in the soft life with his women and concubines (see Chapter 2. Section 4).

Second, the closing admonition of King Samsī-Addu to his son Yasmaḫ-Addu to make himself a great name in the pending Qaṭna military campaign (*šumam rabêm šakānum*, lines 41′–43′), reflects a similar ideology of military honor and fame as found in the admonition Joab makes to his king, and commander in chief, the Hebrew warlord David in 2 Sam 12:27–28, "And Joab sent messengers (*wayyišlaḥ yôʾāb malʾākîm*) to David, and said, 'I have fought against Rabbah; moreover, I have captured (*lākadtî*) the city of waters. Now, then, gather the rest of the people together, and encamp (*waḥănēh*) against the city, and capture it (*wĕlākdāh*); lest I capture (*pen-ʾelkōd*) the city, and it be called by my name (*wĕniqrāʾ šĕmî ʿālêhā*).'"

The goal of the warlord's existence and his military campaigns is to make himself a great name and leave the memory of his military conquests and exploits for posterity.

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Both Yasmaḫ-Addu and David are admonished by a third party, Samsī-Addu and Joab, respectively, to rise to the occasion and honor the ideology of semi-nomadic warlords.

9. Jael or the Reversal of the Male Military Glory—A General Vanquished by a Woman

Judges 4, written in prose, and the following one, Judg 5, written in poetry, should be read together as two texts standing in dialectic tension. The first gives a detailed account of the war, while the second offers the song that the women usually sang after the victory in battle. This feature is expressed iconographically on the thirteenth to twefth-century BCE ivory plaque discussed in Chapter 7. Section 10 entitled, "The Megiddo Homer." The Song of Deborah in Judges 5 is comparable to the Song of the Sea in Exod 15:1b–18, after the Reed Sea victory described in Exodus 14 (Leuchter 2010: 260). Both texts are part of the so-called "Yahweh War Accounts" (Weippert 1997: 71). The comparison between the Trojan War in the *Iliad* of the Homeric Epic with the Hebrew Yahweh War accounts (Exod 15:3 "Yahweh is a warrior [*'îš milḥamâ*]"; and Judg 5:20–21, where the stars and the torrent fight against Sisera) is facilitated by the use of elevated epic diction and style, where battles were described as fought between gods alongside humans. In epics, warriors are heroic, and gods intervene directly in human events. In the *Iliad*, the god of war, Ares, hovers over the battlefield. In Aeschylus' *The Persians*, the courier describes the debacle of Xerxes' army, suggesting that some supernatural being, a god (*daimōn*, line 345), defeated the army, and later cut off their escape on the frozen river (lines 495–502, where forms of *theos* "god" appear three times). The strongest evidence of direct divine implication in Persian demise comes from the gods themselves. Queen Atossa's dream and the destruction of the eagle, the royal bird, at the altar of Apollo, are perceived as direct revelatory messages from the other world (Spatz 1982: 23).

The genre of Judges 5 is that of a "heroic song" since it "breathes a heroic spirit in its joy over the rout of a formidable enemy" (Lichtenstein 2019: 141). "If Deborah and Barak really sang it . . . their proclaimed purpose was to praise Jael, the slayer of Sisera" (Bowra 1952: 9). This dialectic reading of Judg 4 and 5 reveals the bawdy ridicule of Sisera and resolves the difficulties that adhere to previous analyses. Admitting the relative synchronicity of Judges 4 and 5 illuminates these chapters' correspondence and agreement, their matching style of ironic humor, and their unifying linguistic craftsmanship (Brenner 1990: 129; Reis 2005: 24–47).

The events described refer to the conflict between six northern and central Hebrew hill tribes west of Jordan and the Canaanites in the twelfth-century BCE. The traditional material was transmitted orally before being written down centuries later with redactional accretions and reworking due to collective memory. This is comparable to the gradual growth of the Homeric Epic, describing a military conflict between the Achaeans and the Trojans that might have taken place in the twelfth-century BCE and was written down by the end of the eighth-century BCE.

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Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, plays a pivotal role in killing the Canaanite general Sisera in Judges 4. He was the commander (*śār*) of King Jabin's army who ruled in the city of Hazor, in northern Canaan. This woman achieves military glory through her elaborate deception, and her heroic exploit is exalted in Deborah's victory song. "Most blessed of women (*tĕbōrak minnāšîm*) be Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite. She put her hand to the tent peg and her right hand to the workman's mallet; she struck Sisera a blow, she crushed his head, she shattered and pierced his temple" (Judg 5:26).

The story of Jael has often been described as one of multiple inversions: A woman is a hero and the slayer, she employs tent tools at hand to do the killing, a hammer, and a tent peg, and she uses the life-giving milk to lull her victim to sleep, the prelude to death. Sisera responded to her invitation because she was the wife of Heber the Kenite, who was allied with Jabin, his Canaanite king and overlord (Judg 4:17). He believed he was entering a friendly tent. However, Jael did not honor her husband's *šālôm* with Jabin (Judg 4:17).

Jael steps out of her tent to lure the fleeing general while her husband is not home akin to the prostitute in Prov 7:10. She treats Sisera with deference—calling him "my lord," and twice encouraging him to enter her tent, assuring him that he would be hidden and safe there with her, covering him with a blanket (Judg 4:18). When Sisera asks for water to quench his thirst, she gives him milk instead and again covers him (4:19). Asking for water is a typical ancient Near Eastern cultural code indicating a request for hospitality. Ancient Near Eastern literature has numerous references to a ritual of hospitality with a highly coded pattern of behavior (Kilmer 1971: 299).

The text offers a series of common traditional sexual symbols, and the wording and imagery in Judges 4 and 5 are sexually charged: The cover of a blanket, the hammer and the peg, the milk, and an encounter between a man and a woman in the secrecy of a tent. The Song of Deborah also employs sexual innuendo in the description of Sisera's death, after Jael uses a mallet to pierce his head with the tent peg (5:27): "Between her legs he sank, he fell, he lay still; between her legs he sank, he fell; where he sank, there he fell dead." Already, the rabbis in the Talmud surmised that Sisera engaged in sex with Jael: "The Gemara asks: How is it derived that Jael engaged in sexual intercourse with Sisera? As Rabbi Yoḥanan said: That wicked one, Sisera, engaged in seven acts of sexual intercourse with Jael at that time, as it is stated: 'Between her feet he sunk, he fell, he lay; between her feet he sunk, he fell; where he sunk, there he fell down dead' (Judges 5:27). Each mention of falling is referring to another act of intercourse" (*b. Naz.* 23b).[10] Rabbi Yoḥanan is quoted two more times in the Talmud (*b. Hor.* 10b and *b. Yebam.* 103a). In commenting on the last reference, Rashi (1045–1105) from Troyes, explains that the seven verbs in this verse indicate that there were seven sexual acts.

To Sisera's request for water, the text says that Jael "opened a skin of milk and gave him a drink and covered him" (Judg 4:19). The Masoretic text spells the "skin bottle" (*nĕʾôd* נאוד) instead of usual (נאד *nōʾd*), leading rabbinic interpreters to argue that this

[10] The number seven comes from understanding all the verbs in the verse as references to sex and counting them: כרע(sank, x3), נפל(fell, x3), שכב(lay outstretched, x1). https://www.sefaria.org/Nazir.23b.7?

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anomalous spelling is a further hint to sexual activity between Sisera and Jael. In the same vein, she gives him (חלב), which depending on vocalization can be read (*ḥālāb*) "milk" or (*ḥēleb*) "fat, ghee, clarified butter." The creaminess of the latter also has a sexual connotation as opposed to the less viscous water, which was what Sisera asked for (Klein 2024: 9). However, there are rabbinic interpreters opposed to any idea that Sisera and Jael had sex. That alternative tradition expounds on the word blanket in "she covered him with a blanket" (שמיכה) [*śĕmîkâ*], which is an absolute *hapax legomenon* in the Hebrew Bible meaning "rug," or "thick blanket." Using a rabbinic exegetical technique, the term is interpreted as a portmanteau of two words: *šĕmî* + *koh*, meaning "my name is here," implying that God testifies that Sisera did not touch her. David Kimhi (1160–1235) from Narbonne commenting on Judg 5:27, favors the tradition that nothing sexual happened between Sisera and Jael (Klein 2024: 16 n. 20). Similarly, Frolov (2013: 308–27) criticizes the modern exegetes' tendency to stretch semantics of the biblical lexemes, ignore the syntactic layout and context of the discussed fragments, rely on problematic sexual symbolism, and produce dubious interpretations. As a result, much, although by no means all, of the recent quest for sexuality in Judges is unsustainable, as far as both the text and the reader are concerned.

One Midrash also suggested that Jael offered Sisera milk from her breasts (*b. Niddah* 55b). She would offer him both maternal comfort and the rest of the warrior. "When Jael approaches Sisera to kill him, the text says וַתָּבוֹא אֵלָיו, 'she came to him' (4:21), a phrase that is often associated with sex. The act of killing by forced penetration mimics a rape, a connection made clearer by the musings of Sisera's mother about the wartime sex slaves he might bring home" (Caryn Tamber-Rosenau 2022: 5). In analyzing three instances in the Hebrew Bible (Sisera and Jael, Zimri and Kozbi, and David and Bathsheba) involving sexual encounters, where the rabbinic exegesis systematically used hyperbole and "stock numbers" of multiple sexual encounters, Klein (2024: 3) identified a Talmudic topos of "sex as power" serving to show how these male characters used sexual prowess and multi-coital abilities to demonstrate their power to control others, asserting dominance in a social hierarchy, or manipulating others for personal objectives.

However, despite these critical voices, the probability that Sisera might have abused Jael sexually is implied in the words of his mother. The aristocratic Canaanite mother is presented in the stereotypical ancient Near Eastern iconographic and literary topos of "a woman looking through the window" (Winter 2019: 186). Sisera's mother takes comfort in the explanation of her son's delayed homecoming because he and his warriors are raping the Israelite women. That rape was part and parcel of ancient Near Eastern warfare can be deduced from a Neo-Assyrian treaty curse: "May Venus (Ištar) . . . before your eyes make your wives lie in the lap of your enemy!" (Parpola and Watanabe 1988: 46 line 428, SAA 2; Cooper 2017: 122 n. 49). The violent language and the joy that Sisera's mother takes in the vision of her son and his men taking spoils and female captives stand for her vicarious participation in the ferocity of war. She is referring to the female victims with a purposefully crass term as "womb" (*rḥm*), objectifying them to their reproductive organ: "Are they not finding and dividing the spoil? A womb or two for each man" (Judg 5:30) Nehama Aschkenasy (1998: 23) aptly describes Sisera's mother as "the treacherous matron looking through the lattice," expecting to cash in on the spoils of war.

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In his next statement, Sisera, hitherto submissive to Jael, becomes bolder and commands her in a tone of a master: "Stand at the entrance of the tent. If anybody comes and asks you if there is anybody here, say 'No'" (4:20). Sisera tells her that if anyone asked, "Is a man here?" (*hayēš-pō ʾîš*), she should answer, "No." In his own words, Sisera condemned himself, announcing his pending demise, as if it were a case of what the Greeks called *kledon*, a chance utterance with prophetic portent (Oppenheim 1955–56: 49–55). He will end his life not as a mighty warrior and famous general but as a weakling, defeated by a woman (Reis 2005: 31). His military glory as a mighty Canaanite general will be stolen by a woman.

> The change in attitude suggests that Sisera has interpreted Yael's welcome as more than mere hospitality. He reads her actions—offering him milk and covering him with a blanket—as intimate, hinting at her readiness to satisfy Sisera with the totality of her femininity. The scene thus aligns with the literary pattern in which a man erroneously supposes that a sexual act or overture endows him with mastery, while in reality, it puts him in the woman's hands. Sisera deludes himself that he is the master of this woman, and he allows himself to fall asleep (v. 21) because he is no longer suspicious of her (Aschkenasy 2023: 2).

She promised him, or that is what she made him think, "*la petite mort*," the so-called little death, the temporary loss or weakening of consciousness that accompanies lovemaking. Instead, she dispatched him to eternal sleep. Jael's ruse ends Sisera's military career as a redoubtable general operating an inversion—she appropriates for herself the great man's military glory. He possessed advanced weapons and technology of war—"900 iron chariots" (4:3). Ironically, and ingloriously, he ends his life killed by a woman, slain in his sleep by tools used by nomads for pitching up tents, a hammer, and a peg (4:21). The great General Sisera was "sold into the hand of a woman" (4:9). To accredit her exploit, Jael ushers Barak, the leader of the Hebrew tribes, who had been chasing Sisera, into her tent to display her bloody prize (4:22).

Jael's exploit entails an even more fundamental inversion, infringing on a taboo, shattering an ancient Near Eastern traditional legal obligation. She inverts and violates the proverbial sacrosanct rules of hospitality of tent dwellers, which hold that even the killer of a clansman may not be harmed once admitted in a tent. Jael fools and betrays Sisera, to put him at her mercy, killing him in her very tent. She offers a sanctuary and then turns to assassination. An anthropologist who spent 50 years living with and studying various Sinai Bedouin tribes, Clinton Bailey (2018: 123–27), cites a series of examples from premodern and modern Sinai Bedouins where amid a feud, a warlord would enter the protection of a tent of an enemy clan, knowing that once inside he would be safeguarded from a vendetta and his life spared. To achieve her exploit, Jael breached a taboo. That a simple Bedouin woman would kill a mighty general, commander of a chariot armada, was probably also seen as a taboo, the kind of shameful death that a warrior should avoid like a plague: dying between a woman's legs. "Sisera lies ravaged between Jael's legs in a pose of sexual submission" (Ackerman 1998: 130).

Both General Sisera in Judges 4–5 and Paris in the *Iliad* are warriors overcome by the ruse and enticement of Aphrodite's charms. As pointed out by Nehama Aschkenasy

Bodi_9781666979138_C001.indd 34 7/13/2026 2:52:10 PM

(2023: 4), "Deborah implies that by killing Sisera, Jael came to the aid of Yhwh Himself, and further, that she was aligned with the cosmic powers and natural forces, thus recasting her action in the framework of a sacred mission in a divine grand plan."

In the second Nekyia (descent to the Netherworld) described in *Odyssey* 24, Amphimedon, one of the suitors executed by Odysseus, speaks with the ghost of King Agamemnon and describes Penelope's guile with weaving the shroud (*dolos* "trick," *Odyssey* 24.128 and 141). Penelope precedes her account of "weaving" of the shroud with her "weaving of guile" (*Odyssey* 19.137 *egō de dolous tolupeuō* "I keep spinning deceptions"; Segal 1983: 31). He contrasts her with Clytemnestra, who cheated on her husband Agamemnon and contrived his assassination. He praises Penelope's "great virtue (*arete*)" and "good sense," declaring that "the renown (*kleos*) of her virtue will never perish" (*Odyssey* 24.196). She will be the subject of a "lovely song," whereas Clytemnestra will be the subject of a "hateful song," and bring ill fame to women (*Odyssey* 24.200–201). Penelope can use guile and trickery (*dolos*) but still win fame (*kleos*) and virtue (*arete*). In this respect, her exploit is comparable to that of Jael in Judges 4–5, who killed the General Sisera using deception and obtained lasting glory and renown. In both the Homeric and Hebrew epic traditions, the trickery of a woman is praised and immortalized for posterity. Penelope's ruse bought time for Odysseus to reach his island and palace on Ithaca, disguised as a beggar, to trick and kill her 108 suitors. Using ruse, Jael killed a Canaanite general. In the Story of Samson and the four women in his life (see Chapter 9. Section 5), only the name of Delilah is mentioned. Her name was immortalized as the heroine whose famous betrayal brought down the Hebrew tragic hero.

The woman Jael could be considered the feminine counterpart of both Penelope and Odysseus. Both were famous for their ruse, trickery, and versatility. Penelope incarnates the efficient feminine ruse. Odysseus is called the *polytropos*, a complex word that can be rendered with "the crafty one, the man of many a turn, the versatile, resourceful one" (*Odyssey* 1.1; 10.330). Jael's exploit was immortalized in Judges 4–5 as a literary and poetic topos that glorified her name and gave her eternal renown through the tradition preserved in the Hebrew Bible. It confirms that the name-making enterprise is not an exclusively masculine feature. Ancient women were as heroic as men, and their exploits and daring were praised and glorified.

The gender contrast should not be made into a cornerstone of warrior culture. Both Emily Vermeule (1979: 99–105) and Helen Monsacré (2018: 52–61) have pointed out a series of metaphors and features that link eroticism, sex, marriage, and combat, blurring the categories of masculine and feminine in battle. In the *Iliad*, war is an erotic activity, and death in battle confirms the close association between *eros* and *thanatos*, as in sex. Similar to the urge for sex, Nestor evokes "the desire for war" (*Iliad* 9.64); "So in eager desire strong Diomedes penetrated the Trojans" (*Iliad* 5.143); Achilles throws the "love talk" of war at Hector, "Come closer and die quicker" (*Iliad* 20.429). In the Homeric Epic, the warrior attacks with a spear that he intends to plunge into the flesh of his partner in a duel. His immediate desire is to possess his adversary.

Hector fears he will be stripped naked like a woman and killed by some piercing weapon, which is what happens (*Iliad* 22.126). When he is dead, the Achaeans find

Bodi_9781666979138_C001.indd 35 7/13/2026 2:52:10 PM

him "soft to handle," as a girl would be (*Iliad* 22.373). Physical characteristics of femininity are attributed to the warrior. His skin is "beautiful" (*kalos*, *Iliad* 5.858; 22.321), "tender" (*terēn*, *Iliad* 4.237; 13.553; 14.406), "virginal" like that of a young girl (*parthenikēs . . . terena chora*, Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 519, 522). The neck is delicate (*hapalos*, *Iliad* 3.371; 17.49; 23.327; *Odyssey* 22.16) like the fair skin of a virgin (*parthenos*, Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 519). When taunting, the aim is to turn the opposing warrior into a female. Female prettiness may be detected in the prettiness of the face, "O, handsome, Hector, but not much in fighting" (*Iliad* 17.142). The same applies to his brother Paris, "virgin-face, shiny with hair wax" (*Iliad* 11.385).

The combat-to-death iconically resembles a rendezvous between a man and a woman. In the melee, bodies blend and intermingle (*meignumi, mignumi*) as in love (*Iliad* 2.232; 3.445; 6.161; *Theogony* 375, 994). "A duel at close quarters may be treated formally as a love-struggle, two bodies straining against each other in a match of death (. . .) There is an ambiguity to killing, as to loving, and a verb like μείγνυμι with both connotations, mingling in battle and mingling in sex, helps the poet in his play" (Vermeule 1979: 101). Female authors like Sappho, in her poetry uses the model warrior from the *Iliad* to define the "love" (*philotas*) of women (Svenbro 1984: 57–79). Sexual encounters can be as violent as the battle between warriors. On the one hand, there might be a physiological basis in the link between fighting and lovemaking since both require a surge of testosterone and adrenaline. On the other hand, the military milieu of men, either bonding or fighting each other, tends to use sexual wordplay and raunchy metaphors. Zeus forced the goddess Thetis to submit to a mortal to conceive the hero Achilles (*Iliad* 18.432), and in battle, the victim submits unwillingly. "Men do it to each other, to women, and to animals; gods do it to men; so, do Fate, Eros, Sleep, and Night" (Vermeule 1979: 101).

10. Queen Artemisia's Naval Exploit or the Woman-Man

In the fifth-century BCE, the historian Herodotus, who was from Halicarnassus, present-day Bodrum in Turkey, wrote the story of a famous queen from his native city: Artemisia, Queen of Halicarnassus (*Histories* 7.99; 8.68–69, 87–88, 101–103). She outfitted a navy and joined Xerxes I (485–465 BCE) on his invasion of Greece, commanding five ships from Halicarnassus, Cos, Nisyros, and Calyndos from the region of Caria. She fought alongside the Persians during the Battle of Salamis in 480 BCE. About that time, Herodotus was born in Halicarnassus in Caria (Sebillotte Cuchet 2008: 16). She was, therefore, his compatriot, belonging to the previous generation. Therefore, Blok's (2002: 241) suspicion is justified: "It is impossible to say how much of Herodotus' account of Artemisia is his own invention." In Book seven, he describes Artemisia's character and her contribution to the Persian fleet, which had a total of 1,207 ships (*Histories* 7.89; 7.99). "She served on account of daring and manly courage and not under any compulsion" (Histories 7.99). The statement is similar to the one in the Song of Deborah (Judg 5:2, 9) saying: "When the people offer themselves willingly" to enroll in a battle. Artemisia joined the Persians of her free will and fought

Bodi_9781666979138_C001.indd 36 7/13/2026 2:52:10 PM

with "male courage": "The word *andrēiē* paradoxically applied to Artemisia in the introduction (7.99) coupled with Xerxes' comment in reference to her action at Salamis that 'his men have become women and the women men' (8.88) indicates that Artemisia somehow partakes of the Greek–Barbarian antithesis cast in the terms of the contrast between male and female" (Munson 1988: 92). She possesses the positive and glorious *andreia* of heroes. Throughout his description of her, Herodotus underlines the male–female divergence, reflecting the conflict between two cultures, the West and the East. Her father was from Halicarnassus and her mother from Crete, implying that she was a Metis, that is, of mixed racial origin. Just like Herodotus, himself from Asia Minor, they were not considered 100 percent Greek. According to an Athenian law dating from 451 BCE, to be a true Hellene, both parents had to be born in Athens. Her portrayal attempts to show that some non-Greeks, that is, barbarians, are just as capable as the Hellenes. Herodotus highlights her as one of the notable figures in the battle, a wise and capable leader who commanded her own ships and played a significant role in the Persian fleet. In Book eight, he details her bravery at Salamis, where she helped save Xerxes's ship and impressed him with her tactics. She alone among his advisors recommended postponing a naval conflict with the Greeks on the eve of the battle of Salamis. In Book 8.68, Artemisia said that on the sea, the Greeks are superior to the Persians, being better navigators, just as men are superior to women. The Persians are not manly because they prove inadequate in the masculine task of war, as the utterances of both Artemisia and Xerxes convey. Herodotus recounts her counsel to Xerxes, in which she advised him that engaging the Greek navy at Salamis would be a mistake, warning him of the strength of the Greek force. Xerxes ignored her advice, deciding to follow the opinion of the majority of his allies. However, Artemisia's insights proved to be accurate since the battle turned into a disaster for the Persians. In one incident, described in Book 8.87, when her ship was in peril of getting rammed by an Athenian ship, she is said to have turned her boat and rammed a Persian ally from Caria, the ship of Calyndos (on the southwest coast of Asia Minor across from Rhodes) commanded by King Damasithymus. By this action, she escaped from the Greek clutches because they believed that she had betrayed Xerxes and come over to their side. She fought bravely and impressed Xerxes with her strategic maneuver, who believed she destroyed a Greek ship. He is quoted as exclaiming: "My men (*andres*) have become women (*gunaikes*), and my women, men (*gunaikes andres*)!" The phrase serves to describe the Greek point of view, where Artemisia embodies the "monde à l'envers," the upside-down world, where the women are "men," and the men are "women" and "slaves," a society made up of effeminate and enslaved men, a complete reversal with respect to the Greek ideal of the city (*polis*). Artemisia is the Asian counterpart of the goddess Athena.

Turning men into women, and women into men, was a specialty of the goddess Ištar, described in the ninth-century BCE *Erra Epic* 4 52–68, as a demonstration of her divine powers to inspire fear in men. Being also a goddess of fertility, wild animals, and war, there is probably a link between Mesopotamian Ištar and the Greek goddess Artemis in the stream of tradition. As pointed out by Konstantopoulos (2021a: 363), there exists a long ancient Near Eastern

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tradition of curses invoked against the enemy or in loyalty oaths, threatening the transgressor or the one who breaks the oath, of turning men into women as a punishment. The Assyrian King Tukulti-Ninurta I (1243–1207 BCE) threatens his enemy with such a curse: "May she (Ištar) change him from a man to a woman (*zikrūssu sinnisāniš*), may she cause his manhood to dwindle away" (Grayson 1987: 238; Tukulti-Ninurta I A 0 78 1: vi 13–17).

Herodotus' description of Artemisia reflects both her intelligence and martial abilities, distinguishing her as a notable figure in the narrative of the Greco–Persian wars. The fifth-century BCE playwright, Aristophanes, equates Artemisia with the Amazons (*Lysistrata* 671). Hornblower (1982: 24) describes her as "the Carian virago Artemisia." Herodotus reports that the Athenian generals, outraged that a woman should appear in arms against them, put a special reward for her capture (*Histories* 8.93). The reward was fixed at 10,000 drachmas, which was roughly equal to what the city of Halicarnassus had to pay Athens for its participation in the Delian League (Sebillotte-Cuchet 2008: 21).

Artemisia's military exploit resembles Jael's in Judg 4–5. Artemisia presides over the failure of Xerxes at Salamis just as Jael strikes the final blow in the Canaanite defeat of King Jabin and his General Sisera. Both turned against their allies and used a trick or ruse of war. Both should be seen in a positive light, exemplifying the triumph of intelligence, quick thinking, and decisive action. They are tricksters like Odysseus, who used cunning, ruse, and subterfuge to defeat Troy. Cunning and cleverness belong to the wise person's suit of armor. Artemisia displays the same *polythropos* quality as Odysseus, the man of a thousand tricks. She incarnates the archaic understanding of wisdom in Greek antiquity (Bodi 2021a: 310–11). Artemisia's manliness is comparable to that of a hero, an individual close to the gods and whose glory is carried by her very name. Artemis was an ancient Greek goddess of hunting, wild animals, nature, transitions, and childbirth. She would protect young girls until the time of their marriage. She is the goddess at the boundary and of the unexpected turnaround. In ancient art, Artemis was usually depicted as a young maiden with a hunting bow and quiver of arrows, typical symbols of masculinity (see Chapter 7. Section 7).

11. The Stream of Tradition and Vectors of Transmission

11.1. The Stream of Tradition

In the present work, the concept of "stream of tradition" is frequently mentioned. It is, therefore, necessary to explain what it means. Originally, Leo Oppenheim (1977: 13) applied it to the faithful copying of older cuneiform tablets by the scribes sponsored by King Assurbanipal (668–627 BCE) in the royal library of Kuyunjik-Nineveh. Here, I follow the modern understanding of it as aptly described by Marc Van De Mieroop (2016: 30):

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> (It) was not the slavish reproduction of a corpus with a resistance to change. On the contrary, Mesopotamian intellectuals had an enormous freedom with respect to the materials they read and copied. Writing was creative, not imitative, and all writers were part of an unbroken chain of people working in the same tradition. Political powers not only tolerated this work but they also actively sponsored the preservation of scholarship. There was no book burning in ancient Mesopotamia! The Assyrians repeatedly confiscated libraries and manuscripts when they controlled Babylonia, not to destroy them but to take them home and enrich their own collections. In Mesopotamia, a three-thousand-year-long written intellectual history is documented for us, the result of the creative genius of thousands of individuals, each one participating in a grand tradition that mandated certain principles but at the same time allowed for flexibility and personal input.

The stream of tradition facilitates the preservation of a cultural continuum. Similarly, Eleanor Robson (2011: 557) points out that the concept of the stream of tradition should not be reduced to simple copying, implying the absence of the scribe's creativity, innovation, individualism, and localism. Instead of the expression stream of tradition, in her study of the connections between Northern Syria, Hittite Anatolia, and ancient Greece, Mary Bachvarova (2016a: 285) uses the term "stream of influence," looking for more specific links: "With the addition of the influence from the Kumarbi cycle and *Illuyanka* on the *Theogony*, we can single out a stream of influence on Hesiod, coming from Syro-Anatolia via Cyprus to Euboea in the beginning of the Early Iron Age."

The redefined and broadened notion of the stream of tradition offers a meaningful approach, and an apt paradigm with sufficient flexibility and latitude in the task of investigating the process through which texts, literary and artistic themes and motifs, iconography, artifacts, and ideas were moved, translated, transformed, adapted, reimagined, and reinvented in the ceaseless interaction of cultures in the ancient Near East and across the Mediterranean shoreline. Furthermore, the stream of tradition allows going beyond the "catalog model," where comparatists aim to demonstrate the influence of ancient Near Eastern material on the Homeric Epic by accumulating parallels between texts. Focusing on the tiniest differences, the skeptics respond by challenging the plausibility of each parallel proposed (Davies 2023: 4).

A famous lion simile appears in the *Iliad* 18.316–322 and in the Standard Babylonian version of the *Gilgameš Epic* 8 59–62, where the culture hero, grieving over the body of his dead friend, is compared to a lion who has lost his cubs (Davies 2023: 2). Achilles is compared to a male lion, Gilgameš to a lioness; such differences could reflect the presence of the stream of tradition with translations and adaptations. Numerous Hurrian and Hittite fragments of the *Epic of Gilgameš* were found in Anatolia (Beckman 2019). It would explain the spread of originally Mesopotamian poetic topoi in Asia Minor, eventually reaching the Ionian Greek bards.

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11.2. Vectors of Transmission

What were the vectors of transmission of the stream of tradition? Musical instruments are often mentioned in Hittite texts, confirming the presence of songs. The term designating the cult functionary ^{LÚ}*ḫalliyariš* derived from the Hurrian root *ḫal-* "sing" (cf. Hurrian *ḫalmi* "song"), indicates that early Hittite contact with the musical culture of Syro-Mesopotamia was mediated by the Hurrians (Bachvarova 2016a: 162 and 223). The singers of tales played a major role in transmitting, translating, and disseminating epic songs. Itinerant healers were another vector of transmission. Incantations accompanied by various musical instruments have been transmitted in different languages since the Fara period. Sumerian, Akkadian, Subaro-Hurrian, and Elamite are all used in Old Babylonian incantations (Krispijn 2008: 181). Moreover, athletic competitions like foot races, wrestling, boxing, and throwing stones were typical of Hittite festivals, as well as chanting, singing, dancing, and playing of the lyre and other instruments.

The Homeric Epic enumerates a series of agents of transmission in the *Odyssey* 17.382–5, in the reply that the loyal swineherd Eumaeus directed toward the uncouth Antinous: "For who goes visiting elsewhere so as to call in another stranger, unless they be *dēmioergoí*, either a prophet, or a healer of sickness, or a skilled workman, or inspired singer, one who can give delight by his singing? These are the men who all over the endless earth are invited (Gordon 1965: 38; Sasson 1972: 276)." The term *dēmioergoí* means "those who work for the people," and refers to skilled craftsmen and members of the guilds.

The existence of a Mesopotamian–Anatolian interface has become a well-accepted feature in comparative studies. On the one hand, the transmission of Syro-Mesopotamian myths to the Hittites was probably done orally by the bards. Hittite rituals were punctuated by some sort of discourse or song. On the other hand, this was also done in written form by the scribes. As pointed out by Gary Beckman (2013: 208; 1983: 97), "Hittite cuneiform scribal culture was originally borrowed from the centers of Syro-Mesopotamia, and Hittite bureaucrats were kept abreast of the latest intellectual developments there through the residencies of *Gastprofessoren* from Assyria and Babylonia. One of these visitors, Anu-šar-ilāni, established a line of scribes active for over two centuries at the Hittite capital."

It is, therefore, unlikely to admit the continuity of Syro-Mesopotamian influence on the development of the Hittite cuneiform writing, myths, music, and rituals, and to refuse a similar development between Hurro-Hittite traditions and proto-Hellenic ones along the Ionian settlements in Asia Minor (Puhvel 1983: 217–27).

The Hittite society was multilingual. The languages used reflect Late Bronze Age Anatolia: Hittite, Hattic, Luwian, Palaic, Hurrian, and some other unknown languages, such as Taggurka attested in one ritual song (Rutherford 2020: 44). In line with recent studies, the Hurrians are not defined as an ethnic unity but as a conglomerate of tribes.

The geographical region of Kizzuwatna, between Mesopotamia and Anatolia, played a major role as an interface in the transmission of traditional epic and mythological material. The region was multilingual and produced bilingual

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Hurro-Hittite scribes, singers, and bards. Kizzuwatna is a Southern Anatolian region with a mixed cultural zone comprising Hurrina, North Syrian, and Luwian Anatolian elements. Beginning roughly around the reigns of Arnuwanda and Tudḫaliya III (first half of the fourteenth century), the Kizzuwatnean tradition was enthusiastically imported into the archives and temples of the Hittite capital Hattuša. According to Campbell (2016: 295–306), there is, however, some detectable Hurrian influence in Hattuša from as early as the reign of Tudḫaliya I/II (fifteenth-century BCE). The cuneiform documents allow Hittitologists to elaborate a precise chronological timeline and mechanics of the importation of Kizzuwatnean religious culture into Hattuša (Trameri 2025: 480–513).

Mary Bachvarova (2016b: 52–53) places the nucleus of the story about the fall of Troy, which was later developed by the bards who produced the Homeric Epic, that is, the poetic tradition that shaped the storyline of the *Iliad*, between 1160 and 1050 BCE. The Homeric Epic would be a product of the competitive and collaborative process of Ionian bards in Asia Minor. The *Iliad* would have originated in a festival setting in which rhapsodists competed by performing one after another, the separate episodes of the epic. According to Bachvarova's theory (2018: 151), that would have taken place in pre-eighth-century BCE Troad. The musical instruments in the Greco-Lydian world continue to have connections with Mesopotamia in later Assyrian times.

The Homeric Epic is a product of a long stream of cultural, legal, and literary traditions connecting Northern Syria, Hurro-Hittites, and Ionian Greeks in Asia Minor. Among different vectors of transmission were the bards and entertainers as singers of tales at royal courts, public celebrations, and festivals, who shared and transmitted some common themes, motifs, and topoi as part of their artistic *répertoire*.

Maritime navigation, land travel and trade, and the exchange of trained musicians and rhapsodes between rulers could have been vectors of transmission, facilitating the spreading and swapping of common topoi and "mythologems." The latter refers to the smallest significant units of a myth as basic common elements of several myths. The Homeric term for a poet is *aoidos*, "singer." The *Odyssey* describes two such singer-poets in some detail: Phemius, the court singer in the palace of Odysseus in Ithaca (*Odyssey*, Books 1 and 22), and Demodocus (Books 8 and 13), who lived on Scheria, the island of the Phaeacians. The latter sang both for the king and his nobles in Alcinous's palace and for the assembled public gathered to watch the athletic games held in honor of Odysseus.

The stream of tradition was not one-directional, from Northern Syria to the Hurro-Hittites and proto-Hellenic Greeks. The influence also went from the Hurro-Hittites to Northern Syria. This latter feature has a direct bearing on the narrative plot in the fifth-century BCE Aramaic Aḥiqar story and proverbs: the narrative motif of the ungrateful apprentice. Together with the fragments of the Hurro-Hittite *Song of Release* were found two tablets (KBo 32.12 and 14) with a relatively well-preserved series of parables, each making the same point: the ungrateful apprentice will be punished. These tablets are bilingual, implying the work of scribes as vectors of transmission of the stream of tradition (Bodi 2027).

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2

King David and His Wives in Light of Amorite Matrimonial Practices

1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is not to "prove" the historicity of Hebrew tribal chieftains Saul, David, and Solomon by making comparisons with Mari Amorite warlords. It strives to show that their interactions with royal women and princesses correspond to what is known in Mari documents dealing with matrimonial transactions of ruling families. In this part of the world, the customs related to marriage transactions are very conservative and can span centuries with little change. This would explain why the matrimonial customs of Amorite semi-nomadic sheikhs square well with those of the Hebrew tribal chieftains. The redactors of the biblical stories reflect an accurate knowledge of these customs. The chapter also presents the results of more than fifteen years of research on King David's wives. Each one of David's wives has already received a book-length analysis (Bodi 2005, 2010a, 2013a, 2021a). I analyze elements from the stories of Michal, Abigail, Bathsheba, and Abishag in light of comparative data from Northern Syria and Mesopotamia. In Chapter 3, comparisons are drawn with the four women of Odysseus in the Homeric Epic. A lot can be learned from analogies with the elaborate matrimonial practices of the Amorite warlords like Zimrī-Līm of Mari and his use of the princely ladies as political "exchange money." In the ancient Near East and the Hebrew Bible (Niemann 2006: 225–38), aristocratic and upper-echelon ladies were part of the so-called Diplomatic Marriages with political significance (Schulman 1979: 183–84).

The biblical narratives about King David found in the Books of Samuel place a woman at each key stage of David's career. The women with whom David interacts play significant roles in his maturation. In his youth, he entered the royal family by marrying Michal, Saul's daughter. He became king of Judah in the city of Hebron, where he reigned for seven years after marrying a rich widow, Abigail. She was first the wife of Nabal, from the clan of Caleb, a wealthy farmer and cattle owner from Maon, a region in Judah. Once he conquered the Jebusite citadel, transforming it into the City of David, at the peak of his career, after an egregious abuse of royal power, he almost lost everything: his city, his realm, and the allegiance of his people. In Jerusalem, David commits a hubristic act by abducting Bathsheba, the wife of one of his elite officers, Uriah the Hittite, instead of leading his army in war. At the end of David's life described

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in 1 Kings 1–2, seen as a conclusion of his story in the Books of Samuel, appears a young virgin Abishag, who was appointed as administrator of his royal household, and who plays a key role in the court cabal ensuring Solomon's succession (Berlin 1982: 69–85. Levenson and Halpern 1980: 507–18. Bodi 2008a: 1–18).

First, the chapter compares Saul's offer of his two daughters, Merab and Michal, to David with the particular story of the two daughters of Zimrī-Līm. This eighteenth-century BCE tribal chieftain offered his two daughters, Kirûm and Šimātum, to the same vassal, Ḫāya-Sūmû, to spy on him and better control his political alliances. The Amorite princess, Kirûm, eventually managed to extricate herself from this ill-starred marriage by requesting a divorce from him. Being the daughter of a still-living and most powerful warlord in Northern Syria, she succeeds in obtaining a divorce. By contrast, the Hebrew princess, Michal, first given to David and then to Palti, due to the treacherous dealings of her father, Saul, is brought back to David. She remained in his custody and was probably sequestered until the end of her life (2 Sam 6:23). Her father, King Saul, was no longer alive to protect her. She was a pawn in the political transactions of two powerful men.

Second, the story in 1 Samuel 25 is seen in the light of a major historical analogy culled from Mari documents, seen as a forerunner of the triangular relationship between Abigail, Nabal, and David. The career of Inib-šarri, Zimrī-Līm's daughter, who first married an old sheikh, Zakura-abum, and, after his sudden death, a younger vassal, Ibâl-Addu, is comparable to 1 Samuel 25, providing a very apt analogy and a precedent to the similar career of Abigail, who navigated between her older husband Nabal and young upstart David.

Third, the David and Bathsheba episode in 2 Samuel 11–12 is interpreted in light of several texts from Mari and Mesopotamia. The Akkadian literary topos depicting the ideal warlike existence of a tribal chieftain requires the leader to risk his life for the clan, which, in turn, makes the clan trust him. David's dalliance with the wife of one of his officers, eating, drinking, and living in the shade rather than leading armies into war, would be considered unworthy of a warlord, disparaging his reputation, questioning his leadership, and calling for his replacement.

Fourth, Abishag's appointment as administrator (*sōkenet*) of King David's household is comparable to the role of female palace administrators found throughout the ancient Near East. Abishag is more than just a "hot-water bottle," as most androcentric readings suggest. She is part of the "royal economics of women," that is, female personnel working in the service of tribal leaders, sheikhs, and Neo-Assyrian kings. The similarities in the way the Amorite warlord, Zimrī-Līm, handled his princely daughters, principal wives, and womenfolk that worked for him with the royal ladies around Saul, David, and Solomon show the role women played in the political power play, a feature the ancient Hebrew tribal warlords shared with their Northwest Semitic precursors.

The comparisons made about the way ancient Hebrew warlords like Saul and David obtained, exchanged, or dealt with their wives or daughters and the matrimonial transactions of the Amorite warlord, Zimrī-Līm, show that marriage interactions among semi-nomadic populations share numerous details that are best explained as being due to the conservatism of marriage customs in Northern Syria and ancient

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Israel. For example, Jack Sasson (2006: 247) pointed out the remarkable continuity of marital customs between the North Syrian Amorites and biblical Hebrew tribes. He analyzed the betrothal of Rebecca from Aram-Naharaim, in Northern Syria, and Isaac in Genesis 24, both belonging to the same Aramean tribal ancestors, and that of Zimrī-Līm (1775–1761 BCE) from Mari with his second wife, Šibtu. She was a princess from Aleppo, daughter of Yarim-Līm, another ruler belonging to the Bensim'alite, northern Amorite tribes, as Zimrī-Līm himself.

2. The Daughters of Saul and the Daughters of Zimrī-Līm—The Practice of Giving Two Females to the Same Man

The eighteenth-century BCE Mari Royal Archives have over one hundred letters that were sent by women. Several of these letters seem to have been written by female scribes (Ziegler 1999a: 91–92; Meier 1991: 540–47), showing that in the Northwest Semitic domain in the second millennium BCE, and in the royal entourage, literacy was not necessarily a prerogative of male scribes.

A similar situation appears in the royal court of the Neo-Assyrian kings. One of the senior masters of the scribal art and cuneiform literature at the Neo-Assyrian court, Balasî was appointed by King Esarhaddon in 671 BCE to be the tutor of the crown prince Assurbanipal. He thanks Esarhaddon for the appointment to serve the crown prince, so that "I should be his master (*ummānšu anākuni*) and read with him his exercise (*liginnu aqabbâšuni*)" (SAA 10 39 r. 8-9, Parpola 1993a; Livingstone 2007: 102). The term *liginnu* (IM.GÍD) designates a tablet containing texts or excerpts, especially for teaching purposes, and *liginna qabû* means "to recite" from such a tablet (*CAD* L: 183). Here, reading is closely associated with Balasî's teaching of cuneiform script and Assurbanipal learning it. In another letter, Esarhaddon's eldest daughter, Šērūʾa-ēṭirat, writes a memo to her sister-in-law, Libbi-āli-šarrat, inquiring why she is not doing her homework, learning to read and write cuneiform script (SAA 16 23:3, Luukko and Van Buylaere 2002), "Why are you not writing your tablets? (*a-t-a-a ṭup-pi-ki la ta-šat-ṭi-ri*)," and (line 4), "(Why) are you not reciting/reading aloud your tablets? (IM.GÍD-*ki la ta-qab-bi-i*)." If at the Neo-Assyrian court, the royal ladies were required to learn the cuneiform script, *a fortiori*, the crown prince, Assurbanipal, too, was required to master reading and writing cuneiform tablets. "But the memo demonstrates extremely clearly that there was an expectation that she [Libbi-āli-šarrat] should be doing lessons. And if this were the case, it would be surprising if other young people at the royal court were not similarly expected to learn and write" (Livingstone 2007: 105).

This feature may have repercussions for the situation in the Jerusalem court by the end of the eighth-century BCE. In Chapter 9, I argue that the stories of King David's wives would most probably have been written down in King Hezekiah's court in Jerusalem (716–687 BCE), for the education of young princes and princesses of the Davidic dynasty as a Hebrew version of the *Advice to a Prince* or Mirror for Princes, the so-called *Fürstenspiegel* (Bodi 2021d: 269–302).

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The special collection of one hundred Mari letters, unique in its genre and of exceptional importance for the study of the role of women in the ancient Near East, has been edited in a distinct volume entitled "Feminine Correspondence" (Dossin and Finet 1978; Durand 2000: 259–504, LAPO 18). Nele Ziegler wrote an entire book on Zimrī-Līm's "harem" (Ziegler 1999a: 64 on Princess Kirûm; Lafont 1987: 114). The letters reveal Zimrī-Līm's highly elaborate matrimonial policy of using his daughters as bargaining chips in the pursuit of his political ambitions. Zimrī-Līm had at least ten daughters, all of whom were expressly named in the cuneiform documents, allowing us to identify them precisely and for some of them to follow their marital misadventures. In the palace catalog, the royal princesses are listed in the "ladies' quarters," implying that they lived in the special part of the Mari palace reserved for women.

2.1. Saul's Daughters Merab and Michal, and Zimrī-Līm's Daughters Šimātum and Kirûm

Among the daughters of Zimrī-Līm, the tragic story of Kirûm and her sister, Šimātum, has attracted the attention of several scholars who established a very precise historical analysis of the chronological sequence of their marriages to the same man, Ḫāya-Sūmû, one of Zimrī-Līm's vassals (Sasson 1975: 78; Durand 1984: 162–80; Heimpel 2003: 80). Kirûm, whose name means "Garden," was the younger daughter, and Šimātum was the elder one. Although they were sisters, their father's matrimonial transactions turned their lives into a nightmare, first straining and eventually breaking up the friendship and complicity they probably enjoyed in their youth. Their difficulties arose when their father Zimrī-Līm decided to marry them off, one after another, to the same man. Ḫāya-Sūmû was Zimrī-Līm's vassal from the city of Ilān-ṣurā. His city was located in a region north of Mari, close to one of the sources of the Ḫabur River, near Šagar Bazar, and east of Ḫarran. He was one of Zimrī-Līm's principal military allies. In a region that was troubled with chronic unrest and shifting alliances (Charpin and Ziegler 2002), the Mari princesses who were married and living at foreign courts also exercised a political role in the service of their father. Zimrī-Līm was using his daughters as spies to obtain information on the dealings of some of his less-than-trustworthy vassals. Benefiting from their rank and pre-eminent position at their vassals' courts, Zimrī-Līm's daughters were employed by their father to provide him with first-hand intelligence concerning the political activities of their royal husbands, local sheikhs (Charpin and Durand 1984: 335; Lafont 1987: 121).

The younger daughter, Kirûm, was given in marriage to Ḫāya-Sūmû, two years after her elder sister, Šimātum, in the second year of Zimrī-Līm's reign (1773 BCE), to strengthen their military cooperation, while trying to spy on his political alliances. Being no dupe, the vassal quickly realized his father-in-law's indelicate maneuver. Ḫāya-Sūmû threatened to kill his newlywed bride, Kirûm, and decided to isolate her from his palace, barring her access to his political friends and allies. By contrast, Šimātum had succeeded in convincing her husband of her undivided allegiance to his cause. In her letters to her father, she tried to convince Zimrī-Līm of her husband's political loyalty. Should this be taken as her making a sly maneuver, seeing the

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predicament that befell her younger sister? Was she genuinely in love with Ḫāya-Sūmû and convinced of her husband's innocence? Šimātum was behaving like Michal, the daughter of Saul, at an early, loving stage of her relationship with David, described in 1 Sam 19:10–18. There, she sided with her husband, David, against her father Saul. Realizing that Michal helped David to escape when Saul tried to capture and kill him, he asks his daughter, "Why have you deceived me (*rimmîtinî*) like this, and let my enemy go, so that he has escaped" (v. 17). Just like David, Michal also acts as a trickster. The related noun is *mirmâ* "deceit, treachery." In the narratives about King David, cunning is recurrent. He is presented as a trickster akin to Odysseus in the Homeric Epic. In these early accounts, part of the Hebrew *Advice to a Prince* and dating from the end of the eighth-century BCE, cunning and craftiness reflect the archaic forms of wisdom both in the Hebrew Bible and in classical Greece (Bodi 2021a: 303–26). Saul counted on Michal's cooperation in eliminating this young upstart whom he perceived as a potential political rival. Michal sides with David against her father, Saul. Similarly, the tradition about Penelope's father, Icarios, states that, pressed by her father to stay with him in Sparta, Penelope chose to follow her husband Odysseus to the island of Ithaca (Grimal 1986: 337). Šimātum in the Mari letters, Penelope in the Homeric Epic, and Michal in the Hebrew narrative take the side of their husbands against their fathers. Michal and Penelope side with their husbands out of genuine love. In the case of Šimātum, there might also have been a political motive to preserve her privileged position and survive at Ḫāya-Sūmû's court.

Yamṣûm, the captain of the Mari garrison stationed in Ilān-ṣurā, Ḫāya-Sūmû's capital, sent letters to King Zimrī-Līm, offering precious details on the court intrigues and the life that the two sisters Kirûm and Šimātum experienced there. In one letter, Yamṣûm points out something unusual in that a vassal should be given two daughters by his suzerain. He presents this favor as a significant political gesture. He underlines the trust that Zimrī-Līm places in Ḫāya-Sūmû, saying, "Since Samsī-Addu died, there were four powerful kings. However, they had not married two daughters of Yaḫdun-Līm's (dynasty). Now, you have married two daughters of my lord. You have, nevertheless, uttered disparaging words in respect to my lord" (Charpin 1988: 57 n° 303 [A.1168], lines 20′–25′).

The military man, Yamṣûm, points out the extraordinary feature of a vassal receiving two daughters of Zimrī-Līm for wives and underlines the "official" reason for this unusual matrimonial transaction. It indicates the particular favor that the suzerain Zimrī-Līm showed to his vassal Ḫāya-Sūmû. We may suggest two unofficial or hidden reasons behind this transaction.

First, Zimrī-Līm was trying to secure his vassal's military support. During his thirteen-year-long reign, Zimrī-Līm had to fight numerous battles to ensure his rule over rebellious tribes and unruly vassals. In a letter sent to his father-in-law, the king of Aleppo, Zimrī-Līm complains, saying, "Now, since the many days that I acceded to the throne, I have led battles and fights and have never brought in a harvest to my land in peace" (Guichard 1999: 28, ARM 28 16:27–30). Being constantly on a warpath, Zimrī-Līm had a chronic lack of fresh soldiers to replenish his troops. Therefore, he needed to rely on faithful vassals, and that was not always the case. This is where his

matrimonial policy with his daughters played a key role. The offer of the younger daughter of Zimrī-Līm, Kirûm, to the same vassal was made to reward Ḫāya-Sūmû by giving him a particular sign of recognition while at the same time tightening the links between the cities of Mari and Ilān-ṣurā. This political alliance was a key element in Zimrī-Līm's attempt to control parts of the Realm of Upper Mesopotamia, which one of his predecessors, King Samsī-Addu, an empire builder, controlled before him (Charpin 1988: 44–45).

Second, Zimrī-Līm used his princely daughters married at foreign courts as a means of providing him with information about his vassals' political faithfulness and reliability. Moreover, one finds other examples in the ancient Near Eastern literature of two daughters given to the same man: (1) In Egypt, during the New Kingdom, the two daughters of Queen Hatshepsut were given as wives to their half-brother Thutmose III (fifteenth-century BCE). (2) In the Hittite-Egyptian realm, two Hittite princesses and sisters were given to Ramses II as wives (thirteenth-century BCE). (3) In the Hebrew realm, according to Genesis 29, the two daughters of Laban, the Aramean, were given as wives to Jacob. In the case of Jacob, who was offered two sisters, Leah and Rachel, as wives, the transaction reflects Laban's indelicate attempt to manipulate, exploit, and control his son-in-law (Bodi 2014b: 275–89).

In the time of the early Hebrew tribal chiefdom, the two sisters, Merab and Michal, the daughters of Saul, were offered to David as wives. Many scholars consider that Merab is a calque of the Michal story, a ghost character in an offer that never took place. In the nineteenth century, the scholars of the Homeric Epic argued that Calypso was a doublet of the Circe episode in the *Odyssey*. Calypso was considered to be a fictitious person (Von Willamowitz-Möllendorff 1884: 116). The biblical scholars were quick to seize a parallel where the Circe and Calypso episodes would correspond to the narrative of Saul's daughters, considering the elder, Merab, to be a fictitious person and a doublet of Saul's younger daughter, Michal. This feature in classical Greek scholarship influenced biblical commentators in a lasting way, applying the same kind of thinking to the Merab and Michal episodes. However, seen in the wider ancient Near Eastern comparative light, Merab's existence and the initial transaction between Saul and David on her account gain some probability (Glück 1965: 72–81). Saul offered Merab as a price for the man who would win in the single combat against Goliath (1 Sam 17:25). When she was supposed to become David's wife, Saul deceived him by giving her to someone else (1 Sam 18:17–19). Then, again, Saul used his younger daughter, Michal, hoping to get rid of David, requiring him to bring proof of having killed one-hundred Philistines, which David did. In both cases, Saul first offered his daughters, Merab and Michal, to David, and then took them away from him by marrying them off to another man. Saul had no confidence in David's loyalty and mistrusted the political intentions of this young upstart.

Mari letters indicate that Zimrī-Līm used his daughters as political informants. After her marriage to Ḫāya-Sūmû and having reached her husband's capital Ilān-ṣurā, the elder daughter, Šimātum, sends a letter to her father (ARM 10 94), saying that she has visited all the cities, "residences of my husband," as well as the cities of their allies (lines 3–7). "Since the day I left Mari, I have not ceased traveling. I have seen all the

Bodi_9781666979138_C002.indd 48 7/14/2026 9:18:46 PM

cities, those that serve as dwellings to my lord, and the officers of my lord have seen me" (ARM 10 94:3–7; Durand 2000: 430, LAPO 18 1221). She is assuming her role as a new queen. Another letter (ARM 10 5) reads like a memento written by the secret service. Šimātum[1] provides Zimrī-Līm with the information that he requests: (line 3) "concerning the report about which my lord had wr[ritt]en me" (*aššum ṭēmim ša bēlī i*[*špur*]*am*). She tells him that another spy named Maṣi-El, whom the king had ordered to watch the hostile city of Šubat-Enlil and to enter it, has not come out of it yet (Durand 2000: 433 n. a; LAPO 18 1222).

It seems that Zimrī-Līm gave his second, younger daughter, Kirûm, to the same vassal to get a better grip on his politically volatile son-in-law. While Šimātum succeeds in preserving the trust of her husband and her privileged position at Ḫāya-Sūmû's court, Kirûm falls from grace. Bitter strife erupts between the two sisters, heightened by political rivalry. Kirûm, faithful to her father's injunctions, keeps sending letters providing him with political intelligence unfavorable to Ḫāya-Sūmû, revealing his duplicity. Šimātum does the opposite. She never fails to reassure her father of her husband's loyalty. Aware of treason in his backyard, Ḫāya-Sūmû banishes Kirûm, giving her harsh treatment. Kirûm's position at Ḫāya-Sūmû's court is so jeopardized that she prefers to leave him and return to her father's court at the Mari palace. Kirûm writes to her father: "I faced Ḫāya-Sūmû saying, 'You are certainly king; but I, am I a commoner's wife?' Over this matter, my life is ebbing away. My father should write so I can be brought back to Mari. I do not desire fancy quarters in the palace" (ARM 10 33; Sasson 2015: 115). Kirûm is here comparable to Michal in 2 Sam 6:20–23, who also confronted David after he exposed himself during his public dance. In both cases, the confrontation was taken as an insult by the king, ending negatively for the queen.

From the beginning of her relationship with her husband, Kirûm seems to have been hampered in her travels, as indicated in two fragments of the same letter (ARM 10 34 and 113) (Durand 1984: 164).[2] She sends a message concerning her resolve to return to Mari (ARM 10 34). Her father had promised "once, twice," to take her back, but he had not carried out his promise. On the back of the same tablet, Kirûm requests that her father secure her a "throne for a queen." In him alone does she trust, because in her husband's town, Ilān-ṣurā, she is not treated like a queen: "My father and lord should install me on a throne (worthy) of a queen: Let him do what is needed so that my heart may no longer be grieved" (ARM 10 34:8′–13′).

Four years elapse before Kirûm gives birth to a son. This event took place in the sixth year of Zimrī-Līm's reign. Šaknum, one of Zimrī-Līm's servants, informed the sovereign in a letter, "Another matter: Kirûm has given birth to a boy, may my lord rejoice!" (Charpin 1988: 125).[3]

However, Kirûm's position at her husband's court is steadily deteriorating. Ḫāya-Sūmû and his first wife, Šimātum, Kirûm's older sister, have become hostile to

[1] The text reads ^{f}*ši-tum*, which Durand emends to ^{f}*ši-*<*ma*>*-tum*.

[2] Durand established a join between ARM 34 and 113, showing that letter n^{o} 113 comes from Kirûm.

[3] [M.8467] (line 24: *ša-ni-tam* ^{f}*ki-ru-ú* dumu-nita$_2$ *iš-li-im be-lí ḫa-di*). The verb *išlim* is derived from the root *šlm* with a transitive sense expressing the idea that the birth had a successful outcome.

Bodi_9781666979138_C002.indd 49 7/14/2026 9:18:46 PM

her and have deprived her of her female servants. In a letter Kirûm writes, "Moreover, even the last female servants, she (Šimātum) had taken them away, saying, 'My lord has decided so!'" (ARM 10 32:15′).

"Ḫāya-Sūmû tells me to my face, 'You occupy here the office of *ḫazannūtum* (political representative or official resident). Once I kill you, may your Star (Zimrī-Līm) come and take you back!'" (lines 11′–14′).

Now, even her sister Šimātum threatens her and treats her with hostility, "Šimātum tells me to my face, 'May my Star (Zimrī-Līm) do to me as he wishes! I, however, will do with you as I wish!' If my lord should leave me here and not take me back, I will die, I will not survive (*a-ma-at ú-ul a-ba-lu-uṭ*)!" (lines 20′–28′).

In the conflict that opposed Ḫāya-Sūmû and Kirûm, Yamṣûm, the chief of the Mari garrison stationed in Ilān-ṣurā, sided with the latter and reproached the former for his submission and cooperation with the Elamites, Zimrī-Līm's political enemies. The court in Ilān-ṣurā was divided into two opposing political factions. On one side, there was the pro-Elamite party with Šimātum, Aqba-abum, and Luria. On the other side was the anti-Elamite party with Kirûm, Yamṣûm, and Ulluri. One important feature of these documents is to show the political role that the wives of the vassal played and the part they adopted in the political factions and quarrels that divided the local court (Charpin, Joannès, Lackenbacher, and Lafont 1988: 45). Similarly, in the Hebrew Bible, in the narratives about the first kings of the Israelite tribes, one reads of the opposition between King Saul and David, as well as the opposing political factions between David and his son Absalom, and the strife between his two sons, Solomon and Adonijah, in their power struggle to succeed him on the throne in Jerusalem.

The tensions at Ḫāya-Sūmû's court came to a head. The letters reveal a desperate Kirûm sequestered by her husband, who is threatening to kill her. She is undergoing severe "moral harassment."

Kirûm wrote her father herself. Her letter ARM 10 33 may have been mailed to Mari together with ARM 26 204. In both letters, she threatens to commit suicide. However, it is possible that Kirûm threatened it repeatedly (Heimpel 2003: 81). In ARM 10 33:5, 18, Kirûm twice says that her life is endangered: "my life is in desperate straits" (*iktaru napaštī*).[4] She feels so outraged and scorned by her husband that she threatens to commit suicide: "I am tired of living from hearing Šimātum's words! If my lord does not take me back to Mari, I will run and immediately (*a-ṣa-ba-at ap-pi*) throw myself from a roof ([*i*]*š-tu ú-ri-im a-ma-qú-ut*, lines 5-9)" (Durand 2000: 444, n.a., LAPO 18 1230).[5] She is desperate to leave her husband Ḫāya-Sūmû and his court, where she is sequestered. She wants to get out of this arranged diplomatic marriage.

Kirûm did not jump from the roof; she stayed in Ilān-ṣura, and Ḫāya-Sūmû did not kill her, but things did not improve either. Several months later, Yamṣum reported a second altercation in a badly preserved section of ARM 26 315. Ḫāya-Sūmû was planning to leave Ilān-ṣurā, and this time he wanted his wife to accompany him, but

[4] The term *karû* B with *napišti* means, "to be near death" (*CAD* K: 230).

[5] The expression *appam ṣabātum*, corresponds to *ṣibit appim*, literally "in a sneeze," meaning an action performed rapidly, "in a twinkle of an eye."

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she refused. She told him that she preferred to go back to Mari. Ḫāya-Sūmû threatened to kill her "with a bronze dagger" if she did not come with him. The chief of the Mari soldiers stationed in Ilān-ṣurā, Yamṣum, after reporting the affair to Zimrī-Līm, advised him to keep the threat to himself and not tell it to his messenger, presumably the messenger shuttling between Ilān-ṣurā and Mari. He may have been concerned that Ḫāya-Sūmû would become even more hostile toward Kirûm if it became public knowledge (Heimpel 2003: 81).

Her unhappy marriage ends in divorce. By insisting and claiming her profound unhappiness with the way she is treated, Kirûm succeeds in obtaining a public divorce procedure: "He (Ḫāya-Sūmû) cut (*ibtuq*) my cord (*biqtī-ni*), in front of the kings (*maḫar šarrāni*), saying, 'Go away to your father's house! (*atlakī ana bīt abīki* lines 25–29). I have turned my eyes away from the face of my wife!' Moreover, the female servant I spoke about to my lord, he took her away from me and gave her to Šimātum" (ARM 10 33; Durand 2000: 445 n.e., LAPO 18 1230). In an Old Babylonian contract, the expression "to cut off the hem" (*sissiktam batāqum*) appears, signifying the divorce (Finkelstein 1975: 238; Veenhof 1976: 160).

This Mari document offers a detailed description of the divorce procedure practiced in the Jezirah in the Old Babylonian times. The divorce is symbolically signified by the cutting of the cord, a gesture opposite to binding (*rakāsum*) it. The kings who witness the symbolic action are vassals of Ilān-ṣūrā. Elsewhere in Mesopotamia, the dissolution of marriage was effected by a speech act: "You are (she is) not my wife," and "You are (he is) not my husband," respectively (Westbrook 2003: 48). In practice, many systems precluded the wife's right to divorce. Some contracts condemn her to be sold into slavery or even to be killed: "If (the wife) says (to her husband), 'You are not my husband,' she shall be thrown into water" (Westbrook 2003: 49). The Mari letter enumerates a series of symbolic actions related to the divorce procedure in Northern Syria in the eighteen-century BCE. While the pre-exilic Hebrew laws in Deut 21:1–4 allowed a man to divorce his wife, a Hebrew woman, however, had to wait until the end of the fifth-century BCE to be legally authorized to divorce her husband (Nutkowicz 2004: 165–73). The earliest extra-biblical evidence for the right to divorce given to a Jewish woman stems from the Aramaic marriage contracts from the Elephantine Jewish community (Geller 1977: 139–48). Only three marriage contracts have survived to the present day in a good state of preservation. These marriage contracts contain a divorce clause. The Elephantine marriage contract B2.6, line 23, states the words that the woman named Miptaḥyah will have to say in case of divorce: "I hate (*śn*') Esḥor, my husband." The document adds that she will have to pay "the silver of hate" (*ksp śn*') for the divorce.

Kirûm, being a royal princess and the daughter of the most powerful local king in the region, took full advantage of the theoretical possibility that existed in Old Babylonian times for women to obtain a divorce. She continued to claim her rights until she obtained the official divorce procedure from her husband. The divorce between Ḫāya-Sūmû and Kirûm took place at the end of the first half of the ninth year of Zimrī-Līm's reign. After that date, it is supposed that Kirûm was free to return to her father's house in Mari. However, this information cannot be confirmed since the palace

Bodi_9781666979138_C002.indd 51 7/14/2026 9:18:46 PM

roster with the ration list for the sheikh's 515 women from the end of Zimrī-Līm's reign is missing (Ziegler 1999a: 64). Moreover, there is no indication that Zimrī-Līm sent a detachment of soldiers to bring her back to the city of Mari as he did for another one of his daughters, Inib-šarri (see below). Kirûm might have ended her life sequestered like Michal, David's rejected first wife.

By offering his two daughters, Šimātum and Kirûm, to the same man, Zimrī-Līm tried to better control the dealings of his duplicitous vassal Ḫāya-Sūmû. In the biblical narrative, Saul's offer of his daughters, Merab and Michal, to David underlines Saul's manipulative and controlling nature. Both tribal chieftains, Zimrī-Līm and Saul, had difficulties in establishing a firm reign and a tight grip over their respective territories. Both used their daughters to bolster their own power.

2.2. The Suicide Motif in Mari, Aeschylus, and the Books of Samuel

The threat made by Kirûm to throw herself from the roof if she is not freed from her husband and taken back home to Mari allows us to continue the search for analogies and to trace the motif of suicide by oppressed women to a classical Greek tragedian, Aeschylus, who described it in one of his plays. In the latter, however, we are dealing with a different genre. It is not a piece of correspondence as in Mari but a myth used in the context of a fictional play. In the tragedy *Suppliants*, dating from about 466 BCE, Aeschylus elaborates on his intrigue starting from the Greek myth of two brothers, Danaos and Aegyptos (Garvie 1969: 11; Podlecki 1983: 59–71). They are the two sons of Io, a priestess of the goddess Hera in Argos, Peloponnese. The god Zeus, an inveterate womanizer, seduces the young priestess Io, who becomes pregnant. To hide this misdeed from his wife, Hera, he transforms Io into a cow. Hera, jealous and furious, expels the young woman-cow, forcing her to wander across the Bosporus, thus revealing the etiology of that geographical name, which means "the passage of the cow." She travels across the Mediterranean and ends her journey in Egypt. Her two sons, Danaos and Aegyptos, beget fifty children each. The numerous sons of Aegyptos want to marry their cousins, the fifty virgin daughters of Danaos, and are ready to use violence to obtain what they want. The young female cousins refuse the imposed marriage, which amounts to becoming the slaves of the sons of Aegyptos. They are either rejecting a forced, violent marriage or an incestuous kin-marriage with their cousin-suitors. The latter is paradoxical since marriage with first cousins was common in fifth-century BCE Athens (Thompson 1967: 281). The tragedy describes the daughters of Danaos, fifty female refugees fleeing Egypt, seeking asylum in their ancestral land, pursued by their powerful and aggressive male cousins, imploring, weeping, and defenseless, with a claim of victimization. They flee to Argos, on the Peloponnese, the homeland of their illustrious grandmother, Io, and ask the local king, Pelasgos, for asylum and protection. In one song, they implore the god, Zeus, once the lover of their ancestress, to protect them as defenseless women against their pursuing enemies, "a hive of insolent males" (*arsenoplēthē d'hesmon hubristēn*, lines 29–30). They fear their male cousins, powerful men inflamed with *hubris* and with no respect for women (line 81). In this context, the Greek term *hubris* is synonymous with

Bodi_9781666979138_C002.indd 52 7/14/2026 9:18:46 PM

"oppression." The Danaids were the original divinities of wells associated with water in Argos. They belonged to the pre-Hellenic substrate of the Peloponnese population since the Pelasgians were the predecessors of the Greeks. According to the myth, they emerged from the ground before the Greeks settled there. King Pelasgos' ancestor, Palaichthōn, meaning "The Old One of the Land," emerged from the ground like the ancient kings of Attica (*Suppliants* 250–253; Jouon 1998: 13).

The Danaids describe the eternal system of reward and punishment, even referring to the "third commandment of *Dikē* (divine justice personified as Zeus' maiden daughter)" (lines 707–709; Havelock 1978: 246). Once Danaos has attended the Argive assembly, he recognizes a relationship between this divine order and the Greek political organization. He reports that, "Zeus added his final ratification" of the vote (line 624) (Spatz 1982: 79). Hope is placed in the Greek democratic system.

The Danaids harbor a radical aversion toward marriage, instilled in them by their father Danaos, who reflects a despotic and tyrannical attitude. According to later sources, he learned from an oracle of Zeus Ammon in Egypt that he would be murdered by one of his sons-in-law (Sicherl 1986: 81; Sommerstein 2010: 103). Therefore, he ordered his daughters to kill their respective bridegrooms on their wedding night. The play *Suppliants* presents the conflict between the Danaids and the sons of Aegyptos as a structural equivalent of the war between the Greeks and the Persians in another one of Aeschylus' tragedies, the *Persae*. Finally, marriage wins out over extreme virginity, and Greek democratic values triumph over Persian-style despotism and tyranny (Turner 2001: 47–48).

The Danaids ask Pelasgos, the king of Argos, to grasp "the extent of the hubris of the males" (line 426 *hubris*). The king, however, desirous to avoid a war with the Egyptians, refuses to help them. Desperate, the young women point to their belts with which they keep their robes tight around their waists. These belts are their *mēchanē kalē* "marvelous expedient." If the king refuses to offer them his protection in their ancestral land, they too will commit an act of hubris: by transgressing the imposed limits and committing sacrilege against the gods of the land, they will hang themselves with their belts from the statues of the gods. In so doing, they would pollute, defile, and desacralize the divine statues and the land.

The main theme of this tragedy is the relationship between women and those holding power and authority, which makes this play an exceptional testimony of classical Greek literature. The role of women in Greek society is here depicted from the point of view of those who wield social and political authority and who control female sexuality. The myth at the basis of this tragedy reveals the dismal condition of women in classical Greek society in the fifth-century BCE.

The Akkadian term *ḫubūru* in the Old Babylonian story of the Flood, the *Atraḫasīs Epic*, can stand for "excess and immoderation," and might come close to the Greek *hubris*, defined in classical Greek literature as the human tendency to overstep the natural limits set by the gods (Bodi 1991: 125–28).

Both in Mari's letters and in the Aeschylus tragedy, women threaten to commit suicide if their respective fathers, Zimrī-Līm and Danaos, or those wielding power, do not step in to rescue them. In the Books of Samuel, suicide is mentioned twice. First,

Bodi_9781666979138_C002.indd 53 7/14/2026 9:18:46 PM

David's counselor, the wise Ahitophel in 2 Sam 17:23, advised Absalom, who rebelled against his father, to seize the politically favorable moment, the *Kairos*, exploit David's political weakness, pursue his father, and finish him off by executing him. He betrayed David by siding with the opposing political party and Absalom's rebellion. Seeing that Absalom did not heed his advice, instead of waiting for David's return and vengeance, he went ahead and committed suicide. As pointed out by Alter (1999: 301), with his decision to commit suicide, Ahitophel displays one feature of wisdom: anticipation. "Ahitophel kills himself not only because, in quasi-Japanese fashion, he lost face, but also out of sober calculation: he realizes that Hushai's counsel will enable David to defeat Absalom, and with the old king returned to the throne, an arch-traitor like Ahitophel will surely face death."

The second suicide is associated with King Saul in 1 Sam 31:3–4. Wounded by Philistine archers, Saul asked his armor-bearer to kill him. Refusing to do so, Saul "took his own sword and fell upon it." Here, one should also include Samson, whose suicide is presented as a heroic death of the Hebrew tragic hero (Judg 16:23–30; see Chapter 9. Section 5). As already pointed out by Aristotle (*Poetics* 13.5), the tragic hero is a great man, and his fall is a fall from high estate. From these three suicides described in the Hebrew Bible, one gains the impression that being a man may imply having the courage to kill oneself when situations become desperate. While women, Kirûm in the Mari texts and the Danaids in Aeschylus's *Suppliants*, threaten their superiors with suicide and show some restraint, Hebrew men in the Bible (Saul, Ahitophel, and Samson) seem to be more violent and go ahead with it as a form of heroic death (Harris 2012: 67–91).

3. The Triangular Relationship Between Abigail, Nabal, and David in Light of a Mari Analogy

The Mari letters provide a striking historical analogy to the relationship between David, Nabal, and Abigail in 1 Samuel 25. Princess Inib-šarri, Zimrī-Līm's daughter, bears a certain likeness to Abigail because she was also married to two successive political leaders who might have been rivals. Inib-šarri, Zimrī-Līm's daughter, was first married to an old sheikh, Zakura-abum, and after his sudden death, to a younger one, Ibâl-Addu. This life trajectory resembles that of Abigail, who was first the wife of Nabal and then of young David. Among the Mari letters reflecting Inib-šarri's correspondence with her father, ten have been published so far.[6] At least five new and unpublished texts should be added to this list.

For a long time, scholars thought that Inib-šarri was married only to a young warlord, Ibâl-Addu, the king of the city of Ašlakkā, located in the Northwest of the

[6] They have been initially edited by (Dossin and Finet 1978), and re-edited by Durand (2000: 462–79, LAPO 18). Here is a list of her letters in chronological order: LAPO 1246, ARM 10 79; LAPO 1247, ARM 10 75; LAPO 1248, ARM 10 78 (seventh year of Zimrī-Līm); LAPO 1249, ARM 10 73; LAPO 1243, ARM 10 76; LAPO 1244, ARM 2 113; LAPO 1245, ARM 2 112; LAPO 1242, ARM 10 74; LAPO 1250, ARM 10 77 (eleventh and twelfth years 11 and 12 of Zimrī-Līm).

Bodi_9781666979138_C002.indd 54 7/14/2026 9:18:46 PM

Ḫabur triangle in Northern Syria. All the reconstructions of Inib-šarri's story so far were based on the assumption of her single marriage (Römer 1971: 45–50; Batto 1974: 37–42; Sasson 1975: 63–67; Durand 2000: 462–79; and Charpin and Ziegler 2002: 193). Here, I follow the latest reconstruction of her career made by Guichard (2009: 19–30). A closer study of her story in light of the new documentation shows, however, that she was first married to an older sheikh, Zakura-abum, who reigned over the little town of Zalluḫan, near the upper course of the river Ḫabur, and south of the city of Ašlakkā in Northern Syria. This connection was established for the first time by Guichard (2005: 109). However, the existence of a closer association between the old sheikh Zakura-abum and the Mari princess Inib-šarri was previously surmised: "Inib-šarri seems to have had a relationship of great friendship with Zakura-abum" (Durand 2000: 471, LAPO 18 1245). Her life, like that of any other Mari princess, began in her father's "ladies' quarters" at the Mari palace, on the banks of the Euphrates. During the first years of Zimrī-Līm's reign at Mari, she was receiving allotments of food and clothing, being on the same palace roster of rations as her sisters, Šimātum, Kirûm, and others with whom she lived (ARM 21 379; Ziegler 1999: 62).

Because of her correspondence, her career outside the palace is better known. It reveals her marriage to an older sheikh, Zakura-abum, from Zalluḫan followed by a brief period of mourning. Her widowhood was abruptly curtailed when her father, Zimrī-Līm, married her rapidly to a younger sheikh, Ibâl-Addu, where she continued her life as the queen of Ašlakkā, a title she claimed.

3.1. Inib-šarri's First Marriage with the Old Sheikh Zakura-Abum

Toward the end of the fourth year of Zimrī-Līm's reign, the king of Mari arranged a marriage between his daughter, Inib-šarri, and Zakura-abum, a former Simʾalite semi-nomadic chieftain, who became the ruler of the city of Zalluḫan (Guichard 2014b: 77–108). He was a Simʾalite, just like Zimrī-Līm, and there might have been a tribal affinity in this arrangement. He was a man advanced in years, having already assumed the important function of "pasture chief" (*merʾûm*), the highest rank in the Bensimʾalite hierarchy, after that of the king of Mari (Guichard 2002: 154–56). In 1 Sam 25:1, Nabal is depicted as a wealthy sheep and goat owner, belonging to the clan of Caleb: "He had a thousand goats and three thousand sheep, which he was shearing in Carmel." His status and clout could correspond to that of an Amorite "pasture chief" (*merʾûm*). Nabal's political importance was correctly pointed out in the rabbinic exegesis. The rabbis in both the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmuds discussed Nabal's position as a worthy potential successor of King Saul (*y. Sanh*. 2.3; *b. Yeb*. 72b; Bodi 2005: 29–30). Zakura-abum, as an older sheikh, would correspond to Nabal, while the younger one, Ibâl-Addu, who married his widow, corresponds to David. The latter was still an upstart at the beginning of his political career.

The dowry or bridal gift (*nidittum*) that was prepared for the young princess, Inib-šarri, in Zimrī-Līm's fourth year of reign, contained a substantial quantity of bronze vases (ARM 31 59; 25 485). There is little information concerning the first period in the life of the royal couple. This silence could be interpreted as a sign of a

good relationship. However, Inib-šarri did not give birth to a "male" child who could become the heir to the throne of the city of Zalluḫan. Had Inib-šarri given birth to a son, the written documentation would not have failed to mention it. Zakura-abum already had a son from a previous marriage.

Zakura-abum's letters (ARM 28 79) reveal how his kingdom went through difficult times, affected by bad harvests, locust invasions, farmers leaving their land, and indications of economic hardships. Zakura-abum faced an important problem with the clan of the former Zalluḫan's ruling family, whom he expelled before becoming king, and who rallied a mounting opposition outside his kingdom. His rivals were brothers united by a common desire to regain their lost heritage. While they waited for an occasion to take their revenge, the king Ibâl-Addu of Ašlakkā gave them refuge. He was a warlord and chieftain who later became Inib-šarri's second husband. By his regional political role, he was very influential at this time, which provoked strong diplomatic tension between Zalluḫan and Ašlakkā as reported in a letter by Ibâl-Addu, the king of the city of Ašlakkā (ARM 38 53). The antagonism between Zakura-abum and Ibâl-Addu, where the wife of the former rapidly marries the latter, resembles the tension between Nabal and David, with Abigail passing hands from the older man to a young political upstart.

Everything was brutally interrupted following Zakura-abum's illness, which led to his sudden death. This feature is comparable to Nabal's illness and sudden death (1 Sam 25:37–39). Zakura-abum's affliction occurred during the second part of the sixth year of Zimrī-Līm, while Inib-šarri went to the Mari capital to visit her father. This approximate date can be determined from the correspondence of Itūr-Asdu, governor of the city of Naḫur. Upon her return to Zalluḫan, Inib-šarri found her husband in critical condition and witnessed his final hour. Couriers with tablets were sent to Mari to inform the suzerain, Zimrī-Līm, about the abrupt death of his vassal, Zakura-abum. In 1 Sam 25:39, David too was informed of Nabal's death: "When David heard that Nabal was dead . . . David sent for and wooed Abigail to make her his wife."

Zakura-abum fell sick and died after several days or weeks. In the same manner that Nabal's timely death benefits David in 1 Samuel 25, Zakura-abum's sudden demise indirectly benefited the younger vassal Ibâl-Addu of Ašlakkā. Almost immediately, he married the king's widow, the young Mari princess Inib-šarri, barely giving her time to mourn her deceased husband. From this prestigious alliance, he drew the obvious political benefit of having married the daughter of his suzerain, Zimrī-Līm, the most powerful sheikh in the region. Nevertheless, their marriage was a lackluster one, and Inib-šarri was ready to betray her husband. Such was not the case with Abigail and David, who negotiated with the latter to save Nabal's life.

3.2. Princess Inib-šarri's Brief Period of Mourning

Zakura-abum's sudden death marked the beginning of Inib-šarri's misfortunes. The mourning rites for her dead husband had barely begun (ARM 10 79; Durand 2000: 472, nº 1246) when the Zalluḫan kingdom was affected by a period of political turmoil due to the sudden return of the deposed ruler's family, who found refuge at

Bodi_9781666979138_C002.indd 56 7/14/2026 9:18:46 PM

Ašlakkā or Susā (the kingdom bordering Zalluḫan). In a letter, Inib-šarri recounts the events herself. After Ḫatnammuru, her late husband's principal enemy, returned to Zalluḫan, she was expelled from the palace where she lived and from where she exerted her authority as the queen. She was provisionally lodged in a modest house of a commoner, which she took as an act of humiliation. Her father, Zimrī-Līm, sent a detachment of Mari soldiers who came to her rescue and installed her in the garrison city of Naḫur. This town was located in the middle of the Ḫabur triangle and held by the Mari troops. Zimrī-Līm showed similar concern and behavior concerning Princess Liqtum in the town of Burundum and Princess Ḫaliyatum in the town of Ašnakkum. The Mari Palace was always preoccupied with the security of the royal ladies stemming from its clan. His numerous daughters, the Mari princesses, were Zimrī-Līm's valuable political bargaining chips. Inib-šarri seems to have been in real danger, as indicated by the dispatch of a troop of fifty men for her rescue. She was already under the protection of about ten Mari soldiers in the city of Zalluḫan. Despite this personal guard, she states that during the takeover, she barely escaped lynching and lapidation. The village communities of Zalluḫan had a dislike for the reigning family and supported the return of the former clan. Zimrī-Līm, the suzerain of Zalluḫan's population, and also former Zakura-abum's father-in-law, was forced to accept the result of this political "revolution" and change of ruling family with the expulsion of his royal daughter. Inib-šarri's stay in Naḫur was extended. When the situation became more peaceful at Zalluḫan, she wrote several letters to Mari asking for help in recovering one of her servants (Durand 2000: 472, n° 1246, ARM 10 79; n° 1247, ARM 10 75).

Once a widow, Inib-šarri could have been rapidly brought back to Mari. However, it did not happen because Zimrī-Līm seized the opportunity to marry her off quickly to another vassal. Zimrī-Līm used his daughters to gain leverage with his vassals, marrying them off to local sheikhs in exchange for troops. Due to his endless wars, Zimrī-Līm was chronically short on troops. It seems that a brief negotiation took place between him and Ibâl-Addu, who supported the return of the former rulers of Zalluḫān. Inib-šarri mentions that a wedding present or "counter-gift" (*terḫatum*) was about to arrive at her father's place. The sending of the *terḫatum* sealed the marriage offer—the groom had to send the "counter-gift" to his future father-in-law (Durand 2000: 473, n° 1247, ARM 10 75). The mention of the *terḫatum* in the case of a remarriage deserves to be mentioned since the sending of a counter-gift is rarely attested in such a context. This case invalidates the older explanation according to which the *terḫatum* compensated for the loss of virginity (Westbrook 1988: 59 and 62). The "counter-gift" (*terḫatum*) serves as compensation for the services and economic support the daughter will no longer provide to her clan by marrying into another one.

Among the ancient Hebrews, the one-hundred Philistine foreskins that David had to bring to King Saul as a counter-gift for the hand of his daughter, Michal, called *mōhar* in Hebrew (1 Sam 18:25), correspond to Akkadian *terḫatum* "the counter-gift" (Bodi 2005: 80–83; Lemos 2010). It seems that the marriage between the younger sheikh, Ibâl-Addu, and Princess Inib-šarri was promptly organized during Zimrī-Līm's seventh year of reign.

Bodi_9781666979138_C002.indd 57 7/14/2026 9:18:46 PM

In the *Iliad*, the Trojan Othryoneus is killed by the Greek Idomeneus as he was planning to marry Cassandra, the beautiful daughter of King Priam. In place of the (*hedna*) "gifts offered by the suitor to the parents of the young woman," that he could not offer for the daughter's hand, probably being poor, he promised to perform great military feats and drive away the Greeks and ensure the victory of the Trojans. The old King Priam accepted Othryoneus' offer of a military exploit in exchange for his daughter's hand. However, Idomeneus kills him by piercing Othryneus' belly with a spear. While the latter is falling to the ground, Idomeneus gloats over his dying adversary, proposing his own macabre version of a marriage deal without the customary gifts: "So come along with me that we may make a covenant at the ships about the marriage, and we will not be hard on you about the gifts of wooing" (*Iliad* 13.381–382; Monsacré 2018: 57). Both in the *Iliad* in the agreement between King Priam and Othryneus and between King Saul and David (1 Sam 18:20–28), a military exploit is combined with a marriage proposal for the hand of the king's daughter.

3.3. Inib-šarri and Ibâl-Addu: The Couple's Dissent

Although Inib-šarri's new marriage arrangement and wedding did not delight her, she nevertheless complied with her father's orders. The agreement between the rulers of Ašlakkā and Mari ensured that Zimrī-Līm's daughter would have the rank of the main spouse and queen. Moreover, that was her rank while she was in Zalluḫan, married to her previous husband, the old sheikh Zakura-abum. In this respect, Inib-šarri did not remain passive and tried to have her voice heard by the Mari king through the intermediary of the official, Šunuḫra-ḫālū (Durand 2000: 472 nº 1247, ARM 10 75).

Her marriage to Ibâl-Addu, which may have lasted five years (from year 7 to year 12 of Zimrī-Līm's reign), remained childless. The deterioration of their marital relationship became apparent in one of her letters (Durand 2000: 475 nº 1249, ARM 10 73). She denounced her husband's dealings, considering them outrageous, as part of her role as her father's informant. This feature reveals Inib-šarri's personality and the part she intended to play as the new queen of Ašlakkā. The subject of disagreement is still uncertain (even if several officials wrote about it), dealing with a quarrel between Yapḫur-Līm and Ibâl-Addu, the king of Ašlakkā. The latter exacerbated the clash by looting the house of Yapḫur-Līm, a man who was important and powerful. He was severely reproved by the Mari clan, who showed solidarity with Yapḫur-Līm. Moreover, the governor of the city of Naḫur reprimanded Ibâl-Addu for his action, and, unexpectedly, Inib-šarri added her voice to that of the governor. Usually, the royal princesses married to foreign kings would stand by their spouses. Here, the contrary took place since Inib-šarri rebelled against her husband and openly challenged him, according to her own words. It happened after the war against the Elamites (Charpin and Ziegler 2002: 216–27), which took place in the tenth year of Zimrī-Līm's reign, that deeply affected the entire upper Ḫabur region (Durand 2000: 475 nº 1249, ARM 10 73 is provisionally dated to the eleventh year of Zimrī-Līm's reign).

Abigail also challenged her husband, Nabal, though behind his back. When speaking with David, Abigail makes a disobliging *nomen-omen* type of wordplay on her husband's

Bodi_9781666979138_C002.indd 58 7/14/2026 9:18:46 PM

name, Nabal, which can also mean "Fool" or "Churl," calling him a "man of Belial" (*ben-belîyyaʿal*), meaning, "a hellish fellow" or a "scoundrel" (1 Sam 25:25) (Winton Thomas 1963: 11–19; Barr 1969a: 21–28). Describing Abigail's action, Robert Alter (1999: 156) notes, "It is hard to think of another instance in literature in which a wife so quickly and so devastatingly interposes distance between herself and her husband."

In 1 Samuel 25 David utters a threat, bent on exterminating Nabal's entire household. In 1 Sam 25:22, he literally says, "God do so to the enemies of David and more so, if by morning I leave so much as the one who urinates against the wall (*mštyn bqyr*) who belongs to him." David repeats the same phrase in v. 34. He uses a well-known, Oriental, roundabout way in swearing solemnly, "God do so to the enemies of David," meaning, "God do so to David." This type of periphrasis is found in Inib-šarri's letter, denouncing to her father the treacherousness of her second husband, Ibâl-Addu, king of Ašlakkā: "To me, he did not show contempt, but Ibâl-Addu has despised the enemies of my lord (Zimrī-Līm)" (*iyattam ul ilqe qaqqad ayyāb bēlīya* ^{I}*Ibal-*^{d}[*Addu*] *uqallil*) (ARM 2 113:28–31; Anbar 1979b: 109–11). This particular manner of speech, using periphrasis, provides yet another link between 1 Samuel 25 and the story of Inib-šarri. The Medieval rabbinic commentators had already pointed out the use of the term "enemies of" as a euphemism in the books of Samuel (Rashi on 1 Sam 20:16; 2 Sam 12:14); Radaq (1 Sam 20:16; 25:22; 2 Sam 12:14). The same periphrastic way of expressing the curse is found in an Egyptian text known as "The Coptos Decree" dating from the eighteenth-century BCE (Yaron 1959: 89–91). It really amounts to an invocation of a curse on himself if he does not carry out his homicidal intention of exterminating Nabal and his home. Line 6 of the Coptos Decree reads, "His name shall not be remembered in this temple, according as it is done toward one like him, who is hostile toward the enemies of his god." The expression "being hostile to the enemies of his god" stands for "being hostile to his god."

In the eleventh year of Zimrī-Līm, the discord between the royal couple came to a head, and regardless of Zimrī-Līm's mediation, Ibâl-Addu banished Inib-šarri to the city of Naḫur (Durand 2000: 467, nº 1243, ARM 10 76; nº 1244, ARM 2 113). This gesture, however, did not mean they were divorced. It was common practice for kings to send away some of their spouses, who were exiled to secondary cities in their kingdom.

The two letters (ARM 10 76 and ARM 2 113) are difficult and have given rise to different translations and interpretations. Zimrī-Līm met somewhere in the kingdom of Mari with his vassal and son-in-law, Ibâl-Addu, and his daughter, Inib-šarri, either separately or with both of them together. Inib-šarri accused her husband, Ibâl-Addu, of not heeding Zimrī-Līm's order concerning their marriage, and her status as Ašlakkā's queen, and of having forgotten his obligations as soon as he crossed the river Ḫabur on his way home. He left his wife in the city of Naḫur and did not bring her to his capital, Ašlakkā, as he was supposed to do. Worse, he made sarcastic statements about Zimrī-Līm's power to make him bring his daughter to Ašlakkā. While Inib-šarri was still before her father (at Mari?), the latter gave her an order to go back home with no delay (hence to Ašlakkā) as a married woman with a covered head. The mention of the veil in this passage: "Cover your head!" (*qaqqadki kutmī* ARM 2 113:8) generated a lot of interest among scholars, being one of the earliest references to married women covering their heads in the ancient Near East (van der Toorn 1995: 327; Ziegler 1999a: 467; Démare-Lafont 2008: 235).

Bodi_9781666979138_C002.indd 59 7/14/2026 9:18:46 PM

During the marriage rite, the woman would cover her head with a veil (*kutummum*). The gesture meant that the wife should not openly break up with her husband; on the contrary, she was summoned to assume her status as a married woman (Durand 2000: 467). It is possible that the couple envisaged a separation, and that the wife was the first to ask for a divorce. Inib-šarri, who seems to have been the most dissatisfied of the two, must have complained about the deterioration of her situation in the city of Ašlakkā. However, the firm stance of the king of Mari did not produce any significant results.

Ibâl-Addu may have had political pretensions on Naḫur's territory. Nevertheless, this action marked the degradation of Inib-šarri's position, a situation that became painful and humiliating for her. She spent the winter of Zimrī-Līm's eleventh and twelfth years of reign in the city of Naḫur in a condition she described as being that of utter misery for a woman of her rank: "Ever since I left my lord, I am deprived of food and firewood" (Durand 2000: 470 n.e.). Burning wood was the main source of heating, and this detail indicates that the events took place in winter.

Eventually, Zimrī-Līm managed to have Inib-šarri reintegrate the court at Ašlakkā. Ibâl-Addu's letter (ARM 28 67) should also be taken into account. The agreement to bring Inib-šarri back to his city may have been part of it, under the condition of providing more troops. Another possible interpretation is to see Inib-šarri going to Mari for the traditional Ištar festival in the winter of the same year.

This is the subject of Inib-šarri's most heart-rending letter (Durand 2000: 464 nº 1242, ARM 10 74). The previous letters sent from Naḫur clearly expressed her wish to be brought back to Mari. Her father, however, remained inflexible: "Go! Go back to Ašlakkā! Stop crying! Go!" (Durand 2000, nº 1242, ARM 10 74). The letter could be considered the first one attesting to her entry into Ašlakkā as Ibâl-Addu's wife. However, several objections can be raised against this interpretation: Nothing links this letter to the ones dealing with the wine expert from Zalluḫan, an issue concomitant to the marriage counter-gift (*terḫatum*), marking the transition from her time at Zalluḫan to that at Ašlakkā. Letter nº 1242, ARM 10 74, presupposes complaints and strong reserves which Inib-šarri expressed concerning her husband Ibâl-Addu. These can hardly be explained in the seventh year of Zimrī-Līm, when she had not yet reached Ašlakkā. Finally, in the same letter, she presents her husband, Ibâl-Addu, as an enemy of the king of Mari. This accusation makes more sense at the end of Zimrī-Līm's reign, even though we know that this sheikh never behaved as a faithful vassal from Mari's point of view.

Forced to return to Ašlakkā, she found out that her position as queen (*šarratum*) was occupied by another! This other woman received all the usual gifts and privileges. Moreover, Ibâl-Addu took all his meals with her, while he banished Inib-šarri to the "ladies' quarters," literally a "corner" (*tubqum*). She was put aside as a "silly" woman (*lillatum*), and she could not stop crying. Not trusting her, Ibâl-Addu ordered that she be kept under close surveillance. Ibâl-Addu repeated a similar approach he already applied to his first wife before he obtained Inib-šarri from Zimrī-Līm. In ARM 28 68, Ibâl-Addu wrote: "Why has my lord detained Inib-šarri? . . . I will send this woman (that is, my first wife) to Hummatum, and she (Inib-šarri) will fully have her throne and her country" (Durand 2000: 463).

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However, Inib-šarri retained her freedom to write. From this point on, she reiterated in vain her request to be brought back to the city of Mari. Inib-šarri's last letter could very well be the final denunciation of her husband's politics. The correspondence of several informants reveals that in the twelfth year of Zimrī-Līm, Ibâl-Addu instigated a massive insurrection against his Mari suzerain in the Ḫabur region. He behaved like Lab'ayu, who in the fourteenth-century BCE orchestrated a generalized rebellion in the land of Canaan against his suzerain, the Pharaoh (see Chapter 1. Section 3.3). With remarkable courage, and on several occasions, in her letters, Inib-šarri denounced her husband's political treason (Durand 2000: 478 n° 1250, ARM 10 77).

Zimrī-Lîm reacted forcefully and with his troops besieged the city of Ašlakkā. The rebel vassal managed to escape to the mountains and continued waging war the following year (Guichard 2010: 88–89). The deportation of a part of the population from Ašlakkā's kingdom and, notably, of its elite was a matter of several written inventories (Marello 1994: 115–29; Ziegler 1999b: 1–26; Lion 2004: 217–24). Inib-šarri's fate at the end of these events, however, remains unknown.

3.4. Some Parallels with Nabal, David, and Abigail in 1 Samuel 25

Both Nabal in 1 Samuel 25 and the old sheikh Zakura-abum fall sick and rapidly die after several days or weeks. Nabal's timely death benefits David. Likewise, Zakura-abum's death indirectly benefits the King Ibâl-Addu of Ašlakkā, allowing the people he protected to recover their lost city of Zalluḫan and their inheritance. Moreover, almost immediately, he marries the old sheikh's widow, Inib-šarri, Zimrī Līm's daughter. From this prestigious alliance, he draws the obvious political benefit of having married the daughter of the most powerful sheikh in the region. Nevertheless, their marriage is the result of political expediency and might have been loveless. Whether it was Ibâl-Addu's choice to have Zimrī Līm's daughter as his wife, or the result of her father's political maneuver, remains unknown. In such conditions, Inib-šarri was ready to betray her husband. Inib's šarri's second marriage was an unhappy one for her, but such was not the case with Abigail, who rapidly became one of David's wives and gave him a son named Chileab (2 Sam 3:3).

Princess Inib-šarri was first married to the old sheikh Zakura-abum and then to the younger one Ibâl-Addu. The two tribal chieftains were indirectly involved in a protracted conflict. The most important problem that the old sheikh, Zakura-abum, faced was the continuous opposition that rallied outside his kingdom by the former Zalluḫan's ruling family, whom he expelled before becoming king. His direct rivals were brothers united by a common desire to regain their lost rule and inheritance. While their clan waited for an occasion to take their revenge, the young warlord, Ibâl-Addu, king of Ašlakkā, gave them refuge and support. He later became Inib-šarri's second husband. This element of tribal quarrels concerning the legitimate ruler from the right tribal ancestry resembles the tension between the rich farmer, Nabal, from the tribe of Caleb, and the young warlord David from the tribes of Judah and Moab.

The conflict between David and Nabal described in 1 Samuel 25 received a lengthy rabbinic discussion in the Talmud (*y. Sanh*. 2.3), where the rabbis argue that Nabal would

Bodi_9781666979138_C002.indd 61 7/14/2026 9:18:46 PM

have been a better royal candidate than David, given the latter's partly Moabite origin. David came from the wrong tribal connections. Both among the Mari Amorite and the Hebrew tribes, the clan and tribal connections were of paramount importance in the choice of the right ruler. Arguing anachronistically from a late text in Deut 17:15: "You may not put a foreigner (*nkry*) over you, who is not your brother," both the Jerusalem and the Babylonian Talmuds have lengthy discussions demonstrating that David, despite his Moabite origins and the prohibition in Deut 23:3, was permitted to rule as king over Israelite tribes (*b. Yeb*. 72b; *y. Sanh*. 2.3) (Bodi 2005: 29–31; Knoppers 2001: 35–50).

Great-grandson of a Moabite woman, Ruth, and a man from the tribe of Judah, Boaz, David was the youngest of eight sons of Jesse (1 Sam 17:12). However, 1 Chron 2:15 and 1 Sam 16:9 mention only seven sons, implying that David was the eighth, number seven being conventional, as in the story of Idrimi (Greenstein 2015: 17–35).

The name of David's mother is not mentioned, while the fact that he had a Moabite great-grandmother was deemed more important. When forced to flee his rival Saul, in 1 Sam 22:3–4, David takes refuge with the king of Moab, whom he asks to protect his parents. David's relationship with the king of Moab is natural, given David's Moabite origins through Ruth, the mother of Obed, Jesse's father. The rabbis in the Jerusalem Talmud (*y. Sanh.* 2.3) argued that Nabal, from the Calebite tribe, having a better genealogy, would have been a more suitable royal candidate than David as Saul's successor. This might have been prompted by Nabal's words in 1 Sam 25:10, "Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse?" The rabbis in Babylon were aware of the objections raised by their colleagues in Palestine and provided a legal discussion to rehabilitate David (in *b.Yeb.* 72b). Using a series of biblical quotes and establishing a very intricate relationship between different verses, they succeed in "deconstructing" the statement in Deut 23:3 and conclude that an Israelite is permitted to marry a woman from the Moabite or Ammonite tribes; therefore, David should be considered a full-fledged Israelite. Garsiel (2013: 66–78) analyzed the political implications of the exchange between Nabal and David's men, pointing out the underlying conflict between Nabal's and David's clans.

Moreover, both historical-critical scholarship and rabbinic tradition agree in seeing David's marriage to Michal, the daughter of Saul, as an opportunistic move to enter the royal family of the first king (Bodi 2005: 11–22, and 97 with Malbim's comments on 1 Sam 18:26). Likewise, the marriage between Inib-šarri and Ibâl-Addu of Ašlakkā is an opportunistic arrangement. In marrying his daughter Inib-šarri to this vassal, Ibâl-Addu, Zimrī Līm expected to receive more troops for his wars, while the vassal was buying time before openly rebelling and challenging the rule of his father-in-law.

4. David and Bathsheba in Light of an Akkadian Literary Topos: The Warlord's Lost Honor

One can better understand the underlying ideology of the Hebrew story of David and Bathsheba in 2 Sam 11–12 by placing it in the context of the behavior of nomadic warlords and Amorite tribal chieftains as reflected in three texts from Mari and Mesopotamia. The biblical story can be interpreted in light of an Akkadian literary

topos reflecting the ideal of the warlike existence of the Amorite tribal chieftain. According to this warrior ideology, dallying with women, eating, drinking, and living in the shade instead of leading armies into military exploits is considered unworthy of a warlord, disparaging to his reputation, and disqualifying him as a tribal leader.

The literary topos of the warlike existence of Amorite warlords is first found in a long Mari tablet named by its editor, "The Nomadic Life"; second, in a letter written by the famous Amorite tribal chieftain Samsī-Addu (ca. 1792-1782 BCE), king of Assyria to his colorless and passive son Yasmaḫ-Addu (1782-1775 BCE). While the latter ruled in Mari, he spent more time dallying with his favorite women and concubines than fighting or competently managing his realm. He eventually lost his city to Zimrī-Līm (1775-1762 BCE), the last king of Mari; and third, in the ninth-century BCE Babylonian *Erra Epic* containing a "Warriors' Manifesto" extolling the superiority of the warrior's rough outdoor life over the sedentary urban lifestyle (Bodi 2010a: 123–29). In all three compositions, the association of the tribal chieftain or the war leader with women is presented as shameful, degrading, and unworthy of a true warrior or tribal leader.

4.1. The Warriors' Ideal in "The Nomadic Life"

In a Mari tablet (A.1146) entitled "*La vie nomade*" by its editor (Marello 1992: 115–25; Durand 1997a: 146–61, LAPO 16 36), a warlord named Ḫammī-ištamar writes to another Amorite chieftain named Yasmaḫ-Addu. The latter should not be confused with Yasmaḫ-Addu, the son of Samsī-Addu, who is the recipient of a letter addressed to him by his father (see Chapter 2. Section 4.2). Ḫammī-ištamar is trying to persuade Yasmaḫ-Addu, also a tribal leader like him, but reluctant to join him in a military campaign, going to battle under the banner of their common suzerain, Zimrī-Līm. The text of this tablet is extremely precious because it offers a glimpse of the way Amorite chieftains spoke among themselves. It is full of wordplay, striking expressions, and raunchy metaphors. For the sake of space, only the key elements will be quoted here:

> Zimrī-Līm decided to go on a (military) campaign; you, (Yasmaḫ-Addu, however), plan to eat (*akālum*), to drink (*šatûm*), and to lie down (*itūlum*), and do not plan to come along with me. To sit (*wašābum*) and to lie does not make you red-faced (lines 13–16). Yesterday, your entire clan gathered in the camp Ḫēn (line 24). Perhaps a hot or a cold wind had never struck your face. The scrotum you (f.) carry is not yours! And the place where your father and mother saw your face after you fell out of a vulva, here a vulva received you. You know nothing of what is before (i.e., you are inexperienced) (lines 32–38). Now, listen to (the words written on) this tablet of mine! If the king is late to go on the (military) campaign, silver, fine flour, and anything that is in your possession, take it for me now that I am here and join me here (lines 58–63) (A.1146).

In line 16, the use of the verb *wašābum* "to sit," "to dwell" corresponds to Hebrew *yāšab* in 2 Sam 11:1 when King David's general Joab with the army went to war in Rabbat-Ammon, the capital of the Ammonites in Transjordan, ". . . while David remained sitting (*yôšēb*) in Jerusalem." Both the Amorite chieftain Yasmaḫ-Addu and

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David decided to sit out the military campaign and let others fight instead. The Mari text is immediately followed by the verb *ṣalālum*, meaning "to lie (down), to sleep," speaking of humans. The verb can also mean to "lie" (with) sexually, or "to share one's couch with a woman," as in the *Erra Epic* I 19 (the god Erra shares a bed with the goddess Mami). The conjunction of these two verbs is significant. It equals the same conjunction of corresponding Hebrew verbs found in 1 Sam 11:1 *yôšēb* "he was sitting" and v. 2 *miškābô* "from his bed," v. 4 *wayyiškab ʿimmāh* "and he (David) lay with her," (that is, with Bathsheba, the wife of his elite officer Uriah).

The Akkadian terms *akālum* "to eat," *šatûm* "to drink," and *itūlum* "to lie down (with a woman)," find exact parallels in the ironic reproach Uriah makes to David's behavior: Uriah said to David, "The Ark and Israel and Judah are dwelling (*yōšĕbîm*) in the booths (*bassukkôt*), and my lord Joab and the officers of my lord are pitching camp (*ḥōnîm*) in the open field; shall I then go to my house, to eat (*leʾĕkōl*) and to drink (*lištôt*), and to lie with my wife (*wĕliškab ʿim-ʾištî*)?" (2 Sam 11:11).

Uriel Simon's remark (1967: 214) is to the point when he describes Uriah's refusal to adopt David's blameworthy behavior: "Uriah is not ready to do legitimately what he (David) has done criminally. Presumably, Uriah would not have dared to apply to the king the same stringent standard he applied to himself as the servant of Joab recalled from the front to be posted there, but the moral is poignantly obvious to the king: Not only did he behave thus, but worse than thus and at that with the wife of his subject!"

The term Ḫēn in line 24 means "camp" and corresponds to Maḫanum of the Bensim'alite or northern Amorite tribes. It is not certain that its precise location corresponded to a fixed spot in the region. Being a temporary military camp erected *ad hoc*, its location could vary following the movements of troops. Moreover, the mention of the camp in this text reminds us of Uriah's words referring to General Joab, the officers, and the Israelite army doing the same, "camping" or "establishing a camp" (*ḥōnîm*) in the open fields in 2 Sam 11:11. In both texts, the same term is used.

In (A.1146) line 34, Ḫammī-ištamar throws a gibe at Yasmaḫ-Addu, saying: "the scrotum you (2fs.) carry is not yours" (*lipištam lā kâtam našêti*). The term *lipištu* means "scrotum, sperm" (*AHw*: 554), "an abnormal fleshy or membranous substance," and with a transferred meaning "descent, offspring" (*CAD* L: 199). Moreover, the G-stem stative, *našêti* "you carry" is written in the second person feminine form. It might be intentional, although some Assyrian examples might support this grammatical anomaly. In this context, Ḫammī-ištamar makes a very disobliging remark about the other warlord, implying that he is an effeminate person who eschews military engagements. We might have here an Amorite expression of the colloquial, "You haven't got the balls to fight." These ancient Amorite texts attest to a particularity of the warriors' world based on male bonding, which is perpetuated even in the modern-day military milieu—the preference for "macho" language and raunchy metaphors. Emily Vermeule (1979: 101) has analyzed the Homeric bards' habit of playing on sex and war in the *Iliad*, as well as Aeschylus' delight in the interpenetration of war and love, like the two sides of a drinking cup, as common war talk and wartime humor. The idea was equally popular in classical Greek art as found in suggestive and ambiguous war scene representations on amphoras and wine jugs.

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In the world of the Amorite and Israelite nomadic chieftains, to be a warlord leading his people and troops into battle, one had to possess certain virile qualities. In analyzing the relationship between David and Jonathan, Peleg (2005: 171–89) argues that the Hebrew tradition presents Jonathan as passive and effeminate. The biblical texts do not suggest that Jonathan is homosexual, but rather that he is acting more like a woman. In so doing, he disqualified himself from being a tribal leader and a ruler according to ancient Israelite conceptions of this office. Susan Ackerman (2005: 218–22) argues that Jonathan's willingness to take the feminine role is used by the Samuel redactor, employing an "erotic apologetic," to justify David's becoming king. Warriors tend to use sexual metaphors. The lament over the lost friend and the death of a close companion is found across the Akkadian, Hebrew, and classical Greek epic traditions: Gilgameš and Enkidu in the *Epic of Gilgameš*, David and Jonathan in the Hebrew Bible, and Achilles and Patroclus in the *Iliad* (Rollinger 2011: 221; Clarke 2019: 328; Smith 2014: 59; Tiemeyer 2023).

Lines 35–37 of the tablet (A.1146) reflect scathing sarcasm, if not outright insult, which Ḫammī-ištamar hurls at his fellow sheikh who is dodging the military campaign: "And the place where your father and mother saw your face after you fell out of a vulva (*ištu biṣṣurim*), here a vulva (*biṣṣurum*) received you."

First, the text uses the stylistic figure attested in Akkadian and in Greek classical literature called *hysteron proteron*, meaning "latter before." It is a rhetorical device in which the first keyword or idea refers to something that happens temporally later than the second word. The author of the letter has placed first "your father and mother saw your face," an action that is temporally subsequent to "after you fell out of a vulva," judging that what came chronologically later was worthier to be emphasized.

Second, the term *biṣṣūrum* means specifically "female genitals, vulva" and not "uterus," for which the statelier term *šassūrum* is used, as in the *Epic of Zimrī-Līm*, lines ii.22–23: "Speaking to his men (Zimrī-Līm said) a uterus (*šassūrum*) formed you; like yourselves, a mother gave birth to me." In a literary composition like the *Epic of Zimrī-Līm*, a loftier term is used. The letter reflects the spoken Akkadian between Amorite chieftains and warlords, and, therefore, a cruder term appears, reflecting the proverbial bawdiness of the military milieu based on male bonding. The term (*šassūrum*) is also used as a name of mother goddesses, as divinized wombs. One text enumerates the names of mother goddesses equating them with the womb: ^{d}Še.en.tu = ^{d}Nin.tu = ^{d}*Bēlet ilī*, *šassūrum* (Emesal voc. 1 34; CAD Š/2: 146). It means that ancient Mesopotamians correctly understood that the baby was formed in the womb. Therefore, (*biṣṣūrum*) should be differentiated from the womb.

The author of this letter used the crudest term at his disposal with an obvious pejorative and insulting end. The sheikh, Yasmaḫ-Addu, has acquired a reputation for being an inveterate womanizer, spending more time with the opposite sex than in the company of warriors. The idea, however, has been expressed in an extremely coarse manner, turning it into an overt reproach. To tell a chieftain and warlord that he is spending his life between female thighs must have been felt as a jolting insult.

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For the rabbinic tradition, David's inordinately long afternoon siesta was due to his particularly active sexual life. The Babylonian Talmud says that he exchanged the night bed for day one, meaning that what a man usually does at night in bed with his wife, David did during the day. Furthermore, it adds a keen observation on human sexuality: "David forgot that a man has a small organ which is sated when you do not feed it and is hungry when it is sated" (*b. Sanh*. 107a).

4.2. The Literary Topos in a Letter of Samsī-Addu to His Son Yasmaḫ-Addu

When Dossin's (1950: 130) initial edition of the tablet (ARM 1 69) was published, only the first part of the text was known. Thirty-five years later, Charpin and Durand (1985: 313–14 n. 96) have identified a join (M. 7538) completing the tablet and improving the overall understanding of this letter (Durand 1998: 24–26, LAPO 17 452).

The elderly father, King Samsī-Addu, who was of Amorite stock, dwelt in his capital, the city called Šubat-Enlil, meaning "Enlil's Dwelling." He became the ruler of Assyria and a vast territory in northern Mesopotamia by force of arms, being a true Amorite warlord who excelled in military campaigns. This remarkable king and conqueror wanted his two sons to follow his example and manage his vast Realm of Upper Mesopotamia with their help. Samsī-Addu had two sons, Yasmaḫ-Addu and Išme-Dagan, both well known in the Mari letters. Samsī-Addu placed one of his sons, Išme-Dagan, to rule over the Eastern part of Upper Mesopotamia, the realm stretching along the river Tigris, in the city of Ekallātum. Yasmaḫ-Addu was placed to rule over Mari on the banks of the Euphrates.

The younger son, Yasmaḫ-Addu, refuses to assume a life of responsibilities and indulges in a luxurious lifestyle, making payments far beyond his means. His languid lifestyle is epitomized in the following letter, where he is reproached for "lying among women." His main companions are his wives and concubines, not his warriors. Yasmaḫ-Addu does not care for the glory of making himself a great name as a famous warrior. His father exhorts him to abandon his dissolute life and effectively participate in the empire-building undertaken by him and his older brother Išme-Dagan.

> To Yasmaḫ-Addu say: thus Samsī-Addu, your father (lines 1–4). I sent Išme-Dagan with an army to the land of Aḫazum, and I went to the City (Ekallātum) (lines 6–8). Išme-Dagan took a position against that city. Not approaching (beyond) a certain distance (less than 300 cubits), the troops of all that country, together with the Turukkeans who are with them, who gathered against Išme-Dagan [to do] battle, the weapons [they lifted . . .] (lines 20′–27′). The main force of that land and the Turukkeans who gathered together with them, he captured (*lakādum*). Not a single man escaped, and that day he seized the entire land of Aḫazum. This defeat is great for the (enemy) land. Rejoice! Your brother, here, inflicts a defeat (to the enemy) and you, there, remain lying among women (*aḫū-ka annikīam dawīdâm idûk u atta ašrānum ina birīt sinnišātim*(mí^{meš}) *ṣallāt*). Now, therefore, when you march on to Qaṭna with the army, may you be a man! (*lū awīlat*). Just as

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> your brother made himself a great name, you, too, in the Qaṭna campaign, make yourself a great name! (lines 29–′43′)

The way Samsī-Addu's scribe structured the message on this tablet is significant for our comparison with 2 Samuel 11–12. The missive is written in two parts. In the first part of the letter, written on the obverse side of the tablet, Samsī-Addu took a lot of care to describe in detail how his favorite son, Išme-Dagan, conducted his successful military campaign against the city of Ikkallum, in the land of Aḫazum, and against their allies, the Turukkeans. He gives specifics concerning the war strategy he employed and praises his final success, the capture of the bulk of the enemy army. There seems to be a clear didactic intent in this extended description of a military conflict aimed at imparting to the less-experienced son, Yasmaḫ-Addu, some elements of military strategy. Once the military lesson has been delivered, in the second part of the letter, written on the reverse of the tablet, Samsī-Addu reproaches his son for his excessive dalliance with women instead of mastering the art of war, what the *Iliad* 7.235 calls the "warcraft" (*polemēia erga*).

4.3. Instructions About Military Strategy

In ARM I 69:22′, Samsī-Addu gives the precise distance between the two armies before the attack, less than 300 cubits or between 100 and 150 yards. The reason why Išme-Dagan's troops kept this distance is probably to keep themselves beyond the reach of enemy arrows. In the David story, his General Joab committed a beginner's mistake by not respecting the distance prescribed in military lore and "manuals," as evidenced in the reference to the Abimelech precedent. To save his reputation as an experienced army leader from David's reproach, he reassures the latter of Uriah's death in 2 Sam 11:20–21: "Then, the king may get angry and say to you, 'Why did you come so close to the city to attack it? Did you not know that they would shoot from the wall? Who struck down Abimelech, the son of Jerubbesheth? Was it not a woman who cast an upper millstone upon him from the wall, so that he died at Thebez? Why did you come so close to the wall?' Then you shall say, 'Your officer Uriah the Hittite is dead too.'" Both the Mari and the biblical texts deal with the issue of the appropriate distance in launching an attack.

The Akkadian verb *lakādum* corresponds to Hebrew *lākad* "to capture, to seize, to take," especially used in military contexts (Judg 1:8,12; Jos 8:21; 10:1; Deut 2:35). The verb appears four times in 2 Sam 12:27–29. Joab sends a messenger to David saying, "I have captured (*lākadtî*) the city of waters." Joab describes the first part of his military strategy, capturing the lower city where the water supplies were found. He then invites David to finish off the conquest by capturing the acropolis of Rabbat Ammon: "'Now, gather (*wĕʿattâ ʾĕsōp*) the rest of the people together and encamp (*waḥănēh*) against the city, and capture it (*wĕlākdāh*); lest I capture (*pen-ʾelkōd*) the city, and it be called by my name (*wĕniqrāʾ šĕmî ʿālêhā*)'. So David gathered all the people together (*wayyeʾĕsōp Dāwid ʾet-kol-hāʿām*) and went to Rabbah, and fought against it and captured it (*wayyilkĕdāh*)" (2 Sam 12:28–29).

4.4. The Topos of Dallying with Women Instead of Leading Armies

The second part of Samsī-Addu's message contains the literary topos we are examining. While the older son, Išme-Dagan, was energetic, having inherited his father's capacities as a warlord and successful army leader, the younger son, Yasmaḫ-Addu, seems to have been idle and slothful. The father reprimands the younger son, saying, "Your brother, here, inflicts a defeat (to the enemy) (*dawidam dâku*), and you, there, remain lying among women *u atta ašrānum ina birīt sinnišātim ṣallāt*. Now, therefore, when you go to Qaṭna with the army, be a man *lū awīlat*! Just as your brother made himself a great name, you, too, in the Qaṭna campaign, make yourself a great name!" (ARM 1 69:41′–43′).

The admonitions found in the closing lines of Samsi-Addu's letter to his son Yasmaḫ-Addu are precursors of two almost identical ideological points of view found in the David story. They contain two topoi analyzed elsewhere in this book: (Chapter 1) The admonition "to be a man," the topos of dallying with women instead of leading armies to war, and the exhortation to make oneself a name in Chapter 8.

The injunction in this Mari text is pertinent to the relationship between David, the father, and his son Solomon. Just as King Samsī-Addu, the father of Yasmaḫ-Addu, was annoyed with his son's excessive womanizing and absence of warlord virility, one may suggest that David, too, was worried by his son's and successor's excessive love for women. Both Yasmaḫ-Addu and Solomon went down in history not as famous warriors but as womanizers.

The role of the four wives of David finds a parallel in the role of four women that the Greek culture hero, Odysseus, meets on his journey home in the *Odyssey*: Circe, Calypso, Nausicaa, and Penelope (see Chapter 3). The topography of the scene is significant. Narratives of rape and abduction of females take place when women temporarily escape the protection of the *polis*: near water, seashores, riverbanks, and springs. While Odysseus in the wild succeeds in manifesting self-control, David gives in to his lust and abducts Bathsheba in his city. Instead of protecting the young woman, David's city became a place of wanton lawlessness, where the king abuses the wife of one of his elite officers, Uriah the Hittite, a resident alien.

5. Abishag as Administrator of King David's Household

In scholarly literature and rabbinic tradition, Abishag receives an androcentric reading. Her official position as "administrator" is systematically demoted to a simple "housekeeper" (Cogan 2000: 156), "hot-water bottle" (Wright 2014: 7), "heating pad" (Pope 1977: 597), "bedfellow" (DeVries 2003: 2), "warmer" (*mḥmmt*) (Rashi, 1040–1105). The rabbis deconstruct Abishag's gender, transforming her into an "androgynous" being (*ʾaylônît*) since, according to Rabbi Eliezer bar Solomon, an androgynous intersex person warms better than a young female virgin (Bodi 2021a: 49–81, in *Yalqut Meʿam Loʿez*). One can gain a better insight into her role when comparing the Hebrew feminine *sōkenet* describing Abishag's office at David's court in

Bodi_9781666979138_C002.indd 68 7/14/2026 9:18:47 PM

1 Kgs 1:2, 4 with its masculine counterpart *sōken* "palace steward" in Isa 22:15. Comparative Semitic philology and ancient Near Eastern texts reveal numerous cognates of the Hebrew term: West-Semitic *sākinu*, Amarna *sōkinu*, Ugaritic *sākinu*, and Nuzi *šākin bīti* "household administrator." Akkadian *šākintu* appears in Neo-Assyrian documents designating the female administrator of the queen's household at the Nimrud royal palace. Dating from the tenth- to the seventh-century BCE, these documents name nearly two dozen households where female administrators (*šākintus*) were working. When applied to Abishag, *sōkenet* should best be rendered as the "administrator" of David's household. It is comparable to an intermediary position of house administrators like the *šākin bīti* at Nuzi.

At the Late Bronze Age city of Ugarit (thirteenth-century BCE), some 250 miles north of biblical Israel, the *sākinu* served as a witness in important royal transactions and judicial matters. This role is attested in both the king's and queen's households. Some examples even suggest the *sākinu* was called upon when the king was unable to perform his duties, echoing the story of Abishag and the ailing David. "It was only when the king was unable to perform his political duties that the *sākinu* was called upon, as in letter (RS) 34.129" (van Soldt 2002: 827).

Moreover, seals and seal impressions that bear women's names further corroborate their status and authority in ancient Israel. Seal impressions found on storage jar handles are quite common and usually bear impressions of men's seals or the emblems of the state. Such are the famous *lmlk* stamps that identified a jar's contents as "belonging to the king." In addition, however, almost forty seal impressions bearing women's names have come to light, including five found in Jerusalem. One seal, found in the Givati Parking Lot excavations in Jerusalem, reads, "Belonging to Elihana, daughter of Gael" (*l'lyhnh bt g'l*), thus demonstrating her active administration of the production and trade of agricultural products. Such archaeological finds can be interpreted as signs of the high social and economic positions some women held in Jerusalem and elsewhere in pre-exilic times (Garfinkel and Mendel-Geberovich 2020: 159–76; Avigad and Sass 1997: 60–65). Abishag is more than a simple housekeeper since she is wielding some administrative power with a legal role as a witness in Solomon's appointment. It is simplistic to assume that women were everywhere and always the oppressed social class. Historical and comparative studies call for a more balanced approach.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, we may say a few words about the dating of the "Story of King David's Four Wives." Since there is a gap of over six hundred years between Zimrī-Līm and the time of Saul and David, the various parallels between King David's wives and the Mari royal ladies that I pointed out in this chapter provide historical analogies. They offer a corresponding Northwest Semitic cultural, linguistic, religious, sociological, and historical context as a background in which later Hebrew tribal and literary traditions can be better understood and explained. For the redactional history, however, the story of the four women of Odysseus described in Chapter 3 offer a better comparison since

Bodi_9781666979138_C002.indd 69 7/14/2026 9:18:47 PM

their elaboration covers the same chronological period and follows the same pattern from oral to written. The growth of biblical traditions on David's wives and of those found in the *Odyssey* followed a similar development from an original oral stage that might have begun in the tenth-century BCE, in the form of brief, separate narratives or songs, respectively. They were gradually written down some centuries later when the Hebrew and the Greek scripts were sufficiently developed and generalized. The tenth-century BCE for the Greeks and the ninth-century BCE for the Hebrews would be the most probable time when the script and writing were being established (Waal 2018: 83–125; Rollston 2018: 457–73). The stories of David's wives would most probably have been written down at King Hezekiah's court in Jerusalem, by the end of the eighth-century BCE (Schniedewind 2005: 64–90). This Hebrew version of the *Advice for a Prince* was composed for the education of young Davidic princes and princesses by being reminded of the errors, strengths, and weaknesses of the founder of the dynasty (Bodi 2021a: 269–302). For the Homeric Epic, the period of compiling originally oral songs into a written form and a larger composition began by the end of the eighth century and lasted probably until the sixth-century BCE (M. Parry 1928; A. Parry 1987; Lord 2001; West 2011: 392, "between 750 and 600 BCE").

The *Odyssey* describes the world of Greek noblemen and women and how they should behave. The Homeric Epic is perceived as having a didactic purpose, highlighting the virtues that nobles should develop and practice. "As men learned from the *epos* to adapt themselves to the model of the hero, so women listening to the poets learned what sort of behavior they should adopt and what they should avoid" (Cantarella 1987: 25).

Although the final redaction of the Deuteronomistic Historiography, of which the story of David is part, dates from the post-exilic times, it does not preclude the presence of some ancient traditions describing political patterns, ancestral tribal customs, and matrimonial practices that the ancient Hebrews shared with the Amorite semi-nomadic tribes.

The comparisons between the Amorite princesses of Zimrī-Līm and the royal ladies around Saul and David show the role women played in the political power play between these two Hebrew tribal chieftains.

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3

The Four Wives of King David and the Four Women of Odysseus

Comparisons and Contrasts

1. Introduction

Each new relationship brings out a particular facet of one's personality, comparable to reflections in a prism. As pointed out by C. S. Lewis (1960: 92), "In each of my friends there is something that only some other friend can fully bring out. By myself, I am not large enough to call the whole man into activity." The four women in the lives of Odysseus and David bring to the fore different aspects of their personalities, acting as reflecting mirrors, revealing the hero's hidden *Doppelgänger*, allowing both characters to acquire a more accurate perception of themselves, including their limits, shortcomings, and concealed, predatory, and dark sides. Moreover, in the twelve fabulous adventures with monsters, nymphs, demigods, sorceresses, and ghosts he encounters on his ten-year-long voyage from Troy to Ithaca, Odysseus confronts the monstrous personifications of inhuman facets of his own nature, like Polyphemus and the Laestrygonians (Lord 1954: 415).

In this chapter, I draw comparisons and contrasts between the four wives of King David and the four women of Odysseus. David's wives, Michal, Abigail, Bathsheba, and Abishag, played a crucial role in his life and career and received a detailed narrative in the Hebrew Bible. Likewise, Circe, Calypso, Nausicaa, and Penelope saved Odysseus' life, helped him on his homeward journey, and welcomed him back home. The Hebrew literary tradition places a woman at significant moments in David's career, from his beginning as a young, humble warrior to the seasoned warlord and an aging, impotent ruler at the end of his story. This feature is comparable to the role of women in Odysseus's career in the Greek epic. It begins after his ten-year absence from Ithaca for the duration of the Trojan War described in the *Iliad* and follows his decade-long return voyage home to his island of Ithaca and his waiting wife, Penelope, as described in the *Odyssey*.

The *Odyssey* was used as a "Mirror for Princes" to educate young Greek noblemen and aristocratic women. I suggest that the stories of David's wives were used similarly in Hezekiah's court in Jerusalem, by the end of the eighth-century BCE, to educate

Bodi_9781666979138_C003.indd 71 7/13/2026 3:04:18 PM

young princes and princesses of the Davidic line on the errors to avoid, being instructed by the stories about the dynasty's founder (Bodi 2021a: 269–302).

Classical scholars increasingly search for ancient Near Eastern influences on the Homeric Epic. When describing Circe as a nature goddess, as well as the rules of hospitality common to the cultures of the Mediterranean shoreline, I refer to *Ištar's Descent to the Netherworld*, *The Epic of Gilgameš,* and other pieces of Akkadian literature. In this chapter, I also draw parallels between three major culture heroes of antiquity in their relationships with women: Odysseus for the Greeks, David for the Hebrews, and Gilgameš for the Mesopotamians.

Both Odysseus and David are the main characters of the stories associated with them. Nevertheless, one can deconstruct these stories by reading them against the grain, from the perspective of the female characters with whom they interact. The women in the *Odyssey*: Helen, Arete, Circe, Calypso, Nausicaa, Leucothea, Clytemnestra, Penelope, and Eurycleia, are present at key moments of the hero's career. They are, in addition, subtly characterized and wield much power, to such a degree that Samuel Butler's provocative Victorian hypothesis that the *Odyssey* was composed by a female author is now being revived (Butler 1897; 1967; Ebbott 2018). Butler argued that the composer of the *Odyssey* was a Sicilian virgin (maybe Nausicaa?), that the landscape in the epic reflects Trapani on the Sicilian coast, and that Penelope's infidelity was whitewashed by the female author. This nineteenth-century hypothesis of a female author of the *Odyssey* was revived by the French philosopher, Raymond Ruyer (1977).

2. The Ambiguity Between the Terms "Woman" and "Wife" in Greek and Hebrew

As pointed out by O'Nolan, languages derived from Indo-European do not distinguish between "wife" and "woman" (the word "wife" itself is not Indo-European). Greek Ἄλοχος (related to λέχος "bed," λόχος, Lat. *lectus* "bed" Old Irish lige "lying") means "female bedfellow," in French, "*compagne de couche, épouse*," while μνηστός (connected with μνάομαι, Irish mná, "women," cf. Greek γυνή, Boeotian βανά) is no more than the adjective "made a woman" (Homer's word for suitors is μνηστῆρες, "men after women," O'Nolan 1978: 25). The situation is comparable in Hebrew where the term *'iššâ* can mean both "woman" and "wife," depending on the context. In 2 Sam 11:2, David saw a "woman (*'iššâ*) bathing," which awakened his lust to possess her. In v. 3, he inquired about her identity and was told that Bathsheba was "the wife of (*'ēšet*) Uriah the Hittite," one of his elite officers. This important information, however, did not stop him from bringing her to his bed. Once he carried out Uriah's assassination, David sent for Bathsheba, "to become his wife (*lĕ'iššâ*)" (v. 27), giving himself an enviable role of a king who takes care of the widows of his fallen officers. David would have spared himself a lot of trouble had Bathsheba been just a free "woman" (*'iššâ*) and not already another man's "wife" (*'iššâ*) (Yee 1988: 240–53).

Zeus' sister and wife, Hera, is a goddess whose mythical biography reflects the regular life of a Greek woman (Pirenne-Delforge and Pironti 2022: 19). She can

Bodi_9781666979138_C003.indd 72 7/13/2026 3:04:18 PM

simultaneously be called "Maiden" (παῖς), "Wife" (τέλεια), "Widow" (χήρα) (Pausanias 8,22,2), bear the epithet "Bride" (νύμφευμα), or even ritually regain her virginity (Pausanias 3,28,2). As a goddess presiding over marriage, she is consistently called Teleia, from *telos* "completion," pointing to the purpose of a Greek woman's existence—marriage and motherhood (temple of "Hera Teleia" in Plataea, Pausanias 9,2,7; Graf 2005: 146).

3. Differences Between the Compared Texts

It might be helpful to say a few words about the texts in question. The comparison is based on the Greek epic and mythological text, the *Odyssey*, dating approximately from the end of the eighth-century BCE, and the Hebrew "Story of the House of David." Leonard Rost (1982) spoke of "David's Rise to Power" and the "Succession Narrative" as well as of several independent sources that went into the story of King David in the Books of Samuel. His explanation should not be completely dismissed despite the newer position espoused by Jacques Vermeylen (1999: 53; 2000). The latter postulates the existence of the story of the "House of Saul" from the tribe of Benjamin, pitting itself against the "House of David" of the tribe of Judah (see Chapter 5. Section 11).

The Hebrew and Greek narratives arose in different cultural and social contexts, and both had a protracted oral and literary history of composition. Bruce Louden (2011) has drawn fruitful parallels between the *Odyssey* and some male and female characters in the Book of Genesis. However, a systematic comparison between the women of Odysseus and the wives of David seems particularly pertinent (Doherty 1995; Cohen 1995).

Moreover, the two texts reflect fundamentally different religious ideas. Homer mirrors ancient Greek polytheism, where human characteristics and behavior are projected upon the numerous gods of the Greek pantheon. Ancient Greece shares with Mesopotamia a similar anthropomorphic conception of the gods. The Hebrew religion has this aspect as well, but to a lesser degree. Apart from the fact that humans are mortal and gods do not die, the only difference between gods and humans in the Homeric poems is that gods have more ἀρετή "excellence, courage, performance," τιμή "esteem, honor, consideration," βιή "life power" than men (*Iliad* 9.498). The gods have the same qualities or characteristics as humans but to a greater degree. As one scholar puts it, "The problem of the Homeric gods is how to reconcile the cosmic gods with the comic gods" (Grube 1951: 62). This feature of the Greek gods allows them to be viewed as expressions of human personality traits and behavior patterns, hence the importance of Greek myths in psychoanalytical studies. In the Homeric Epic, divine behavior is governed by the same values as human behavior. By contrast, throughout its stories, in its final form, the Hebrew Bible is consistently monotheistic. It presents a single God under several names: Yahweh, Elohim, El "God," El-Elyôn "God Most High," El-ʿOlām "Everlasting God," El/Yahweh Ṣebaoth "God of Hosts," Abîr "Mighty One," Paḥad "Fear," Adôn/Adônay "Lord," Baʿal "Master" (Rose 1992: 1001–11). Moreover, the difference between this God and human beings as mortal creatures is duly emphasized.

Bodi_9781666979138_C003.indd 73 7/13/2026 3:04:18 PM

For example, in the Book of Ezekiel, the prophet is systematically addressed (95 times) by Yahweh with the expression *ben-ʾādām*, which is best translated as "mortal," indicating a human creature. It underlines the radical difference between a divine being and a human one. Each time Ezekiel is addressed with "mortal" lit. "son of man" (*ben-ʾādām*), he falls upon his face, prostrating himself in *proskunēsis*. Ezekiel's reaction underlies his inferior position (Bodi 1991a: 35 n.5). Moreover, in the Hebrew Bible, humans, in general, are not divinized. In the *Odyssey*, however, one meets characters like Odysseus, whose behavior is close to that of the gods, and who is offered the possibility of acquiring immortality by Calypso. Among the female figures in the *Odyssey*, one meets minor nature goddesses like Calypso and Circe, who entertain a sexual relationship with a mortal man, Odysseus. While one cannot compare each of Odysseus' women with a corresponding wife of David, it is nevertheless possible to compare similar behaviors of selected women in their relationship with the main heroes in both the *Odyssey* and the story of David as they influence or facilitate their careers. The comparison is enabled by the stereotypical depiction of female characters in both works; the use of literary topoi abounds since both compositions reflect typical features of epics.

4. The Names Odysseus and David

According to a common view, the *Odyssey* is about the human condition, and one way of defining its main theme is to see Odysseus as the hero striving to establish his identity, place, and role in society. This is introduced in the form of an *inclusio* with the initial statement expressed by his son, Telemachus, in the first book. Telemachus' mother, Penelope, tells him that he is Odysseus's son, but he doubts it, "After all, who knows who his father is?" (*Odyssey* 1.216). When Odysseus had gone away to participate in the war against Troy, Telemachus was a little boy (*Odyssey* 4.144). Telemachus travels to Sparta to see King Menelaus and inquire about his father by talking with the last person who saw him alive. Seeing Telemachus before her husband Menelaus in Sparta, Queen Helen says, "It amazes me quite, how this young man looks exactly like the son of Odysseus! I mean Telemachus, whom Odysseus left a newborn babe behind him, when you, with all the Achaeans, invaded Troy for me, bitch-eyed (κυνώπιδος), and began that cruel war" (*Odyssey* 4.139–146).

Helen expresses regret for the sufferings her infidelity brought about to the Trojans and the Achaeans alike, as though she utterly abominates the adulterous woman that she once was. In the *Iliad*, Helen regretted having followed Paris (*Iliad* 3.180), calling herself "a bitch" (*Iliad* 6.344) and wishing to have died instead (*Iliad* 2.173–5; 24.764). The term κυνώπιδος [*kunōpidos*] comes from κυνώπης [*kunōpēs*] "dog-eyed," the bitch being considered as the personification of effrontery (*Iliad* 18.396). Her portrayal in the *Iliad* is occasionally contradictory, probably due to the different bards who composed and sang the successive episodes of the epic (Farron 1979: 15–31). Her abduction by Paris implies a criminal breach of the ancient sacrosanct custom of hospitality. However, the question lingers: did Helen decide to leave her husband, Menelaus, and willingly

Bodi_9781666979138_C003.indd 74 7/13/2026 3:04:18 PM

elope with Paris? The ambiguity is probably intentional, making the audience meditate and discuss it after hearing the epic. Moreover, Helen's self-reproach reflects regret but not guilt (Edmunds 2015; 2019). The literary theory of "gap-filling" places the burden of reconstructing the motives for the action onto the hearers or readers of the epic. It implies that every story raises questions about the heroes, the dramatis personae, and the plot, which the reader or hearer is solicited to answer (Sternberg 1987: 186–228).

As an echo to Telemachus' doubts expressed in the first book, in the last book of the epic, Odysseus' elderly father, Laertes, expresses doubts about his son's very existence: "My son, if he really ever existed?" (*Odyssey* 24.289). To forge his identity, reestablish the link with his son, Telemachus; his father, Laertes; his wife, Penelope; save his royal house and realm on the island of Ithaca; and assume his role as a husband, father, and caring son, Odysseus must live up to his name. A nameless ancient scholiast has glossed the word *hēbēsas* in (*Odyssey* 19.410) with *odyssamenos*. The word *hēbēsas* means "when he has grown up," while *odyssamenos*, "to odysseus" is derived from *odyssasthai*, "to cause pain." As argued by George Dimock, Odysseus is both the "causer of pain" and the one who endures a lot of pain. The scholiast would imply that for Odysseus to grow up, to achieve his full stature as a man, he must suffer. His trajectory in the Homeric Epic illustrates the Greek saying *pathei mathos* (πάθει μάθος) "learning through suffering." Dimock (1957: 52 and 57) renders Odysseus' name with "Trouble," being the Hated and the Hater, and further comments on his name, "We are much closer to *polytropon* 'crafty' of the *Odyssey*'s first line . . . a hand and mind against every man, by nature or as a matter of policy (. . .). He is the *polytropos* man, the Autolycan (lit. 'Lone wolf') rogue who treats the world as his enemy, but who sacks Troy only to be driven astray thereafter, and takes a beating" (Dimock 1957: 53, 54). Odysseus, the *polytropos*, has a complicated life trajectory.

Furthermore, the name of Odysseus is the subject of the most conspicuous paronomasia in the epic. On four occasions the verb *ody*(*ss*)*omai* is used for the hostility of the gods toward Odysseus, once of Zeus (*Odyssey* 1.62), twice of Poseidon (*Odyssey* 5.340, 423), and once of Zeus and Helios (*Odyssey* 19.275) (Austin 1972: 2). Poseidon is the god whose anger toward Odysseus runs as an undercurrent through most of his adventures. Just like King David in the Hebrew Bible after his affair with Bathsheba, Odysseus is pursued by the retributive justice of the gods he offended (Allan 2006: 1–35).

The fame (*kleos*) of Odysseus does not derive from heroic acts achieved in battle, like Hector's in *Iliad* 6.446, but from their opposite (*doloi*) "trickery, ruse." He won fame for the thoroughness of his trickery and guile, allowing the Achaeans to penetrate and sack the city of Troy. His identity is related to the sinister side of himself contained in his name as "the man of pains" (*odunai*) or the man "doomed to odium" (*odyssomai*) (*Odyssey* 1.62; 5.340, 432; 19.275, 406–9) (Segal 1983: 28). He is a descendant of the trickster Autolycus, whose name means "the wolf himself, or lone wolf." Moreover, it is characteristic of a wily person like Odysseus or his grandfather Autolycus to incur the anger of those whom they cheat or outsmart. The accomplished cheat often has either contempt or condescension for the victims of his dexterity. Unpopularity may pursue a person with a reputation for unusual cleverness.

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Gilles Courtieu (2020) has explored the mythological origins and the dark side of Odysseus. In the opening line of the *Odyssey*, the hero is described as *polytropos*, a qualifier that resists translation: "complicated, tortuous, protean, cleaved, sly, crafty, devious, wily"? Unlike Achilles, he is neither simple, nor powerful, nor brilliant. He was imagined as a mirror of the Peleid, also based on a primitive and dark model, whose traces are numerous in the epics, and elsewhere: a kind of demon running through the woods, vicious and clever, the trickster par excellence. Little by little, as the hero navigates through his multiple adventures in the two poems, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the sinister, wild, monster-like, and hypothetical "Olisseus" is transformed and transfigured until he becomes this streamlined, classical Greek hero, Odysseus, of whom we prefer to see the favorable aspects, the one worthy of the "Mirror for Princes" of the classical Greeks and of our modern school textbooks. This original "Olisseus," before becoming Odysseus, was the Greek counterpart of the Mesopotamian Enkidu in the *Gilgameš Epic*. Both Odysseus and Enkidu became civilized through interaction with women.

While Odysseus' name would make him "the man doomed to odium," the Homeric bard "rejected the stricter doctrine of etymological predestination (. . .) by means of intelligence and endurance in suffering the worst that the hatred of gods and men could do to him, he surmounted the nemesis of his name" (Stanford 1952: 212).

He is to suffer much divine wrath and odium and is a man accustomed to trouble, acquainted with sorrow, and inflicting pain on others. Through the various episodes, confrontations, difficulties, and encounters with different women, Odysseus is to win his (*psychē*), which roughly stands for his life and identity. Through his acts of cruelty, such as the boring of the red-hot iron into Polyphemus' unique eyeball, or the cold-blooded killing of 108 suitors and the execution by hanging of the twelve female servants from Odysseus' household who slept with the suitors, he moves from being *Outis*, "nobody," to becoming somebody. The *Odyssey* is the epic that recounts the making of the Greek culture hero, par excellence. Odysseus' vicissitudes are intimately related to his varying attitudes toward himself, his fellow human beings, both men and women, and his gods. His journey is to discover himself, his world, and to act in the wake of these discoveries. The worldview expressed through Odysseus' name and career is that of vengeance and retribution: If someone hurts you, you should pay back the hurt and try to expunge the affront. This attitude is part of the Mediterranean anthropology of honor and shame as identified by Julian Pitt-Rivers (1977) and Peristiany (1976).

All the 108 men who dishonored his household were killed, as well as the twelve female slaves who were polluted and defiled by sleeping with Penelope's suitors, even though they were just female servants of her household. Dishonor brings a *miasma*-like effect on the house. The Greek religious worldview was concerned with pollution (*miasma*) and its elimination. There existed rituals of purification of armies after battle, of individuals from bloodguilt, or when cities were affected by epidemics. In *Iliad* 1.314, the plague decimates both the warriors and the beasts in the Greek camp, attributed to the arrows of the archer god, Apollo. The Achaeans had to purify themselves, cast the impurities into the sea, and make sacrifices and offerings.

Bodi_9781666979138_C003.indd 76 7/13/2026 3:04:19 PM

Occasionally, scapegoats were used during the Thargelia festival in the last month of the year in sixth-century BCE Athens. Two men were chosen for their ugliness and poverty and fed at public expense. One represented the Athenian men, and the other stood for the women. They were known as *pharmakoi*. In the festival procession, they were taken around the city, then beaten with fig branches and pelted with the hard bulbs of the squill plant, known as *pharmakon*, a drug employed for its emetic and skin-irritation properties. They were eventually driven out of the city (Rutherford 2020: 71 and 136). In the second-century CE, the city of Ephesus was affected by an epidemic. The reputed healer, Apollonius of Tyana called the Ephesians to take a stone each and lapidate a beggar, "Pick up as many stones as you can and hurl them at this enemy of the gods" (Girard 2001: 49). Philostratus, a Greek writer of the third-century CE, and author of *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana* described the removal of the plague from the city by this ancient custom of *pharmakos* as a scapegoat.

In the Hebrew tradition, something similar is done with the scapegoat Azazel, who carried away the sins and impurities of the community in Leviticus 16. Moreover, the ancient Hebrews shared the common Mediterranean honor and shame ideology. In 2 Samuel 13, David's son, Absalom, takes it upon himself to avenge the shame of his sister Tamar by killing his half-brother Amnon because she had been raped, polluted, and dishonored. Klaus Koch describes a similar mystical ontology shared by the Hebrew prophets. Uncleanness is caused by sin, transgression, crimes, and oppression, and by any behavior that is unfavorable to the members of the community. "Anyone who is touched by impurity will be drawn into a negative field of force" (Koch 1982: 110). Isaiah's impurity is conditioned both individually and collectively: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips" (Isa 6:5). The defilement of the people affects and pollutes the land. "For the land is defiled; therefore, I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants" (Lev 18:25). The ancient Hebrews seem to share the Greek understanding of the *miasma*-like effect of sin that pollutes the community and the land, being probably a common feature of the cultures around the Mediterranean shoreline.

David Shepherd's study of *Innocent Blood and Bloodguilt* (2023) pointed out the presence of a major theme of bloodguilt in the David story, which has so far been insufficiently researched. It brought this Hebrew narrative closer to the Homeric Epic, roughly dating from the same period (between 750 and 600 BCE), and to the Greek classical tragedies around the Argolid dynasty of Agamemnon (Homer, Sophocles, Aeschylus). Both in the Hebrew literary tradition and the Greek classical literature, the theme of the potentially nefarious and tragic consequences of bloodguilt is present.

Odysseus' *nostos* or "homecoming" is not a return to a state of permanent rest and immobility. Once he regained Ithaca, killed the suitors, recovered his wife, palace, and domain, and rested from his long voyage, Odysseus will have to leave again on a new journey. The prophecy of Tiresias in *Odyssey* Book 11 announced that he must visit a land where people are unfamiliar with the sea and ships, indicating that he must carry an oar, an object associated with the sea and the god Poseidon. By bringing Poseidon's knowledge to people who do not know him, Odysseus will become reconciled with this god and abate his anger. For blinding his son, Polyphemus, Poseidon caused

Bodi_9781666979138_C003.indd 77 7/13/2026 3:04:19 PM

Odysseus his long-drawn-out sufferings. In this manner, Odysseus is hinted to have further adventures. He will face additional challenges, underscoring the need for continued striving and a never-ending journey, hallmarks of his life.

Odysseus boasts about the numerous raids and razzias he has led. In *Odyssey* 9.39–52, he describes the attack on Ismaros among the Ciconians, a tribe in Thrace, where Odysseus and his companions made their first stop after leaving Troy on their way home. The *Iliad* 2.846–847 lists the Ciconians as allied to the Trojans. Odysseus' boast of having equitably distributed among his men the women they had captured (ἄλοχος [*alochos*] "partner of one's bed, wife, concubine," *LSJ* 1996: 73). In *Odyssey* 14.230, he brags that before the Achaean expedition against Troy, he led nine (εἰνάκις) raids: "I had nine times led warriors and swift-faring ships against foreign folk, and great spoil had ever fallen to my hands" (καί μοι μάλα τύγχανε πολλά, literally, "I have obtained exceedingly lot"). In *Odyssey* 14.246–257 and 17.426–41, he describes how, with his crew, he raided the coast of Egypt.

The Greeks considered plunder and piracy as respectable ways of increasing one's wealth (Thucydides 1.5). One Neo-Assyrian cuneiform document from the time of Tiglath-Pileser III (745–727 BCE), dating from ca. 738 BCE, and found at Kalḫu (modern Nimrud), mentions for the first time the Greek raiding party of razzia-like plunder of the cities on the Northern Syrian coast made by "the people of the land of Iaunaya (^{mat}*ia-ú-na-a-a*)" (SAA 19 n. 25:3) "The Ionians (KUR*ia-*$^{\lceil}$*ú*$^{\rceil}$*-na-a-a*) came and gave battle in Samsim[uruna] Hariṣû, and [GN]" (Luukko 2012: 32).

The first editor of the text identifies the reference with the Ionians. It refers to the Greeks carrying out razzias, with ships mentioned in line eleven, against Phoenician and other cities in a region between Que (Cilicia) and the northern Levant. While Burkert (1992: 12) adopted the identification of *Iaunaya* with the Greeks, Kuhrt (2002: 18) is more reserved.

The term is related to the archaic Greek Ἰά(ϝ)ονες [*iawones*] found in classical Homeric Greek in the *Iliad* 13.685 as (Ἰάονες). It shows resemblance with Persian *yauna* and Hebrew (יון,*yāwān* in Gen 10:2), as well as the much earlier Linear B from two tablets from Knossos (ca. 1400 BCE). The latter mentions a group of people called *i-ja-wo-ne* (Radner and Vacek 2020: 74).

Another letter describes how the Assyrians caught people from the city of Yauna: "We caught them from the town of Yauna (^{URU}*ia-ú-na*) and R[e]š-ṣuri" (SAA 19 n. 26:14′-15′ Luukko 2012: 33). In the Neo-Assyrian sources, the Yauneans are said to have arrived in the Levant by ship, "from the midst of the sea," and are described as pirates, sailors, and possessing an expertise in shipbuilding comparable to the Phoenicians. By the time of Sennacherib (ca. 704–681 BCE), the Yauneans appear as specialist seafarers employed in the fleet the king has assembled at Nineveh, which sailed down the Tigris in 694 BCE to be deployed in a military expedition to the Persian Gulf (Grayson and Novotny 2014 RINAP 3/2 n. 46, lines 57–60).

The cuneiform references to Yauneans have generated divergent explanations. It might be safe to follow Rollinger's analysis in taking the term as a collective designation for several linguistic, cultural, and ethnic groups deriving from a region west of Cilicia, where Que, the westernmost province of the Assyrian Empire, was located (Rollinger

Bodi_9781666979138_C003.indd 78 7/13/2026 3:04:19 PM

2007: 80–5). Yauneans might comprise various Anatolian populations, including Greeks from the west coast of Asia Minor or even as far as the Peloponnesus. Having examined the evidence, Radner and Vacek (2020: 67) argue that the Assyrians encountered Yauneans in the locality mentioned in the letter as "town of Yauna" (^{URU}*ia-ú-na*, SAA 19 n. 26:14′), and that due to the similarities perceived between the inhabitants of this place and the other Greeks raiding cities in the Levant, the Assyrians came to apply this ethnonym universally to all these people, and no longer solely to the citizens of the "town of Yauna." The site of this Greek emporium would be located in the coastal region of Hamath, between Aleppo and Damascus, and later in the Assyrian province of Ṣimirra, where excavations have produced finds of Greek pottery (Lanfranchi 2000: 9–10).

The Hebrew culture hero, King David, is both loved by God and by women, reminding us of one of the etymologies of his name (*dôd*), "beloved." The name that the prophet Nathan gave to Solomon in 2 Sam 12:25—Jedidiah "Beloved of Yah (Lord)"—would be in the same vein. It expresses divine favor shown to a certain ruler. It corresponds to 1 Sam 13:14, where David is called "a man after (Yahweh's) heart." Stamm (1980: 25) translates the name David with "*Liebling*," that is, "beloved." Baruch Halpern (2004: 269) explains the second manner in which the name is understood as "(paternal) uncle," and its connection with the meaning "beloved." The term *dwd* "paternal uncle" is the family member responsible for burial when a household is without direct heirs (*dwdw* Amos 6:10). He is the nearest relation to whom the incest taboo does not apply, which is the reason the term also denotes one's "beloved." However, since no biblical text spells David's name *dd*, as "uncle" as sometimes written, this explanation remains problematic (Dietrich 1997: 17–32). It is more probable that in the case of David and Jedidiah, the use of the term "beloved" reflects common ancient Near Eastern political propaganda for the chosen ruler, akin to the Egyptian (*mr*) "beloved" found in the names of the Pharaohs, "Beloved (*mr*)-of-DN" (Wyatt 1985: 112–35; Bodi 2010a: 96–7). Moreover, in his multiple relationships with women portrayed in the Hebrew literary tradition, David comes across as "*un homme à femmes*" (Kelen 1987: 88), a "lady's man," or more prosaically, a womanizer.

The relationship between Odysseus and the goddess Athena in the *Odyssey* is that of a privileged mortal enjoying the protection of a divine patroness. The *Odyssey* focuses on one hero and his main divine patron and foe. Similarly, the Hebrew story presents David as a hero enjoying the divine favor of Yahweh, the patron god of his nascent dynasty. Only after David orders the assassination of Uriah to cover the abduction of his wife Bathsheba, does Yahweh turn against him the wheel of retribution announced by the prophet Nathan: "You have smitten Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife . . . Now, therefore, the sword shall never depart from your home . . . For you have done things secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun" (2 Sam 12:9–12) (Bodi 2010a: 71; 192). Both Odysseus and David are culture heroes buffeted by divine anger. The retribution principle is a key element in Odysseus's extended wanderings and is a feature in storytelling and history writing common to all Mediterranean cultures. Both Greeks and Hebrews share the belief that their gods will punish moral crime, even if you are king (Bodi 2014c: 285–300). In 2 Samuel 11, David abducts Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, one of his

Bodi_9781666979138_C003.indd 79 7/13/2026 3:04:19 PM

elite officers. In the *Odyssey*, the Trojan Prince Paris abducts Helen, the Queen of Sparta, triggering the Trojan War, an expression of divine retribution (Edmunds 2015).

The *Odyssey* ends with a gruesome massacre of the 108 suitors who abused Penelope's hospitality and with the hanging of the twelve female servants, betraying and defiling Odysseus's household. The *Odyssey*, as well as the *Iliad*, reflects the immutable law of divine retribution, which is here brought to its paroxysm. The idea that every crime and error must ultimately be punished lies at the heart of classical Greek thought and is one of the mainsprings of its great epics. The gods are the warrants of this supreme law of the human and divine worlds.

Loney (2010: v) argues that returning equivalent harm for harm runs through the heart of archaic Greek culture. Retribution represents the narrative template of the *Odyssey*, which uses a series of terms to designate "revenge" and "retribution" (Loney 2019: 14 and 60). Through creative interpretation and use of the term (*tisis*) "revenge," the bards of the Homeric Epic make a series of rhetorical moves to recast the acts of the 108 suitors as murder, spoliation, and abuse of Penelope. This allows Odysseus to play the part of an avenger.

The Hebrew Bible shares this perspective, but some of its texts, such as the Book of Job, attempt to deconstruct this implacable view of the world. Moreover, in the David, Bathsheba, and Uriah triangle, Uriah, the model soldier, dies and exits the story while David continues, although he outrageously abused kingly power over the weak. The Hebrew narrative in 2 Samuel 11–12 partially deconstructs the implacable law of revenge and retribution by offering the culprit a way of saving his life through repentance. Nevertheless, David continues paying for the consequences of his act until his deathbed.

5. Odysseus and the Four Women in His Life

In the *Odyssey*, the role of women is varied and well-developed. At least four important women intervene in Odysseus's life. According to the Homeric Epic, these women come across as four types of women a man can meet in his life: Penelope is the faithful wife who waits for twenty years for her husband to come back home. The two nymphs, divine females that incarnate chthonic powers of nature, sex, and wildlife, such as Circe, or who live in a grotto, such as Calypso, maintain an ambiguous relationship with Odysseus. While Circe, the enchantress who turns men into animals, tries to transform him into a pig and keeps him as a sex partner for a year, Calypso saves and nurtures him, keeping him captive for seven years, offering him immortality in exchange for agreeing to remain on her island as her husband forever. There is also the young virgin, Nausicaa, who wishes to marry him, even though he is an older man, more than twice her age. His wife Penelope has a unique and important role in the epic.

Women are not one-dimensional, static characters, and they are not a homogeneous group even in archaic Greece. They change with time and the relationships they encounter. It's altogether a human condition. The categorization of women into four types in the *Odyssey* is the ancient Greek perspective, not modern. In our times, the

Bodi_9781666979138_C003.indd 80 7/13/2026 3:04:19 PM

model of Circe is far more appealing to a modern woman than that of ever faithful Penelope. The best-selling book by Madeline Miller, *Circe*, would tend to confirm this point of view. Miller depicts Circe as a *pharmakis*, an expert in various herbs and drugs, a "witch with unbound powers. Who need answer to none but herself" (Miller 2018: 150).

All these women enjoy a social rank corresponding to that of Odysseus. Circe and Calypso are creatures between women and goddesses. Nausicaa is the daughter of Queen Arete and King Alkinoös, and Penelope, the Queen of Ithaca, is the daughter of Icarius, the King of Sparta. These women belong to the superior, aristocratic or noble class, just like Odysseus himself, who is the ruler of Ithaca. His travels, quests, and temptations are there to teach Greek noblemen how to assume their place in society. Since the women in the *Odyssey* are noble, the Homeric bard is also suggesting to Greek noblewomen listening to these poems how to achieve moral excellence like Nausicaa and Penelope. The subtle portrait of Nausicaa as a maiden of marriageable age in *Odyssey* Books 6–8, courageous and brave, proper yet eager, beautiful yet unaffected, offers a model for young Greek princesses. Another far more patriarchal perception of women in ancient Greece is found in the dictum of Pseudo-Demosthenes (Dem. 59.118–22) in the fourth-century BCE: "We have mistresses for our enjoyment, concubines to serve our person, and wives for the bearing of legitimate offspring" (Pomeroy 1995: 8).

The literary structure of the *Odyssey* has a direct bearing on the perception of the female roles in this epic. The adventures of Odysseus, where he is the direct protagonist, are set apart and placed in a frame by the use of the flashback technique. The hero's adventures have a fabulous character, presenting a striking contrast to the "realism" of the opening events described on Ithaca. The ingenious combination of fanciful and realistic elements contributes to the entertaining quality of the work. Abrahamson (1956: 313) convincingly demonstrated that the distinction between adventures and the rest of the story is meaningfully intended. The story of the *Odyssey* begins at Ithaca and not with Odysseus leaving after the sack of Troy, which would be the chronologically more accurate sequence. The "historical" order of events has been inverted both in time and space. In the *Odyssey*, the return "*nostos*" and home stand in dialectic tension. "For Return and Home are correlatives; the idea of a Return not only implies but presupposes the idea of Home" (Abrahamson 1956: 313). If Penelope's undying love, faith, and hope are not to be in vain, Odysseus must return. Penelope is an almost proleptic illustration of the believer's hope expressed in 1 Cor 13:7, "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things," and v. 13, "So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

The young Telemachus, who has never known his father, grows to the awareness of the necessity of his father's return. The decisive event that changes him from a helpless boy into a courageous young man is his voyage to Sparta, undertaken with the hope of finding peace of mind and forging his own identity. It has become an existential necessity for him to find an answer to the question that troubles him: If my father is not dead, what keeps him from coming home? Telemachus' encounters, which seem like mere chance, are the outworking of divine providence. The *Odyssey* starts with the perspective

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of Ithaca. The hero's return is considered from the viewpoint of hope for his eventual homecoming. The love of Penelope has kept this desperate hope, which symbolizes faith against all odds. The realization of her hope is all the more urgent as the insolence and iniquity of the suitors threaten her, her son, Telemachus, and their household.

Eustathius, the twelfth-century archbishop of Thessalonica, commented on the *Odyssey*, saying that it is "more pungent" or "sharper" than the *Iliad* because of its depths of thought within a fantasy of surface simplicity.[1] Within this poetic work of fiction, one finds subtle perspectives on the human condition, comments on ancient Greek values concerning an accomplished and noble human life, and a reflection on the nature of male-female relationships. "It is impossible to read the *Odyssey* without some sense that there are 'depths' to be explored: The poem impresses at once by the complexity of its structure and the seriousness of its treatment" (Segal 1962: 17). Modern Criticism, with its interest in the preconscious and subconscious and its awareness of symbolic patterns and meanings in literature and folklore, has developed the tools for a sympathetic plumbing of these depths.

6. The Nymph Circe (Κίρκη)

Circe can be interpreted as being both an actual person and an emblem of sensuality (Stanford 1968: 42). The meaning of her name refers to a bird of prey, κίρκη, "a kind of hawk, or falcon," also "a kind of wolf" (*LSJ* 1996: 953), and κίρκος, which means "the turning, circling one," relating to the gyre of the hawk (Bailly 1950: 1094). It may also refer to her role in the *Odyssey* and to the transformations that she performs, turning men into pigs. Therefore, her name may mean "Turner." Segal (1969: 419) points out that "the *Odyssey* is unusually cognizant of the charm and subtle power, the potential helpfulness and dangerousness of woman; and Circe embodies in concentrated form the complex ambiguity of the Odyssean female." She is an enigmatic and darkly potent female figure, combining redoubtable magic and quintessence of sensuality, feminine generosity, and malignancy. Circe is sensual but not sentimental. She invites Odysseus to her bed as soon as he demonstrates his power to withstand her magic. As a nature fertility goddess, she incarnates the mating instinct that humans have in common with animals. Just like herself, Circe's serving maids come "from springs and groves and from holy rivers which flow forth into the salt sea" (*Odyssey* 10.350–51).

The Homeric bard warns his audience, by a genealogical clue, to expect something ambivalent from Circe, both sinister and positive. Her ominous ancestry is significant. Circe is presented as a sister of the darkly malevolent Aeetes, King of Colchis, and thereby an aunt of the baneful enchantress Medea.[2] But she is also the

[1] In his premium to his *Commentary on Odyssey*, Eusthatius, Archbishop of Thessalonica (1115–1195/6), uses the Greek term "*oxutēs*," "sharper," (Segal 1962: 17).

[2] Aeetes, King of Colchis, the land at the Eastern end of the Black Sea, is the keeper of the Golden Fleece. An oracle declared that Aeetes's kingship would end whenever strangers landed in Colchis and carried off the Golden Fleece. Fearing this fate, Aeetes offered up in sacrifice all foreigners who came to his country, hoping for the Colchians' cruelty to spread fame throughout the world, so that refugees, immigrants, and all other kinds of wanderers would not dare to set foot on his land. For

Bodi_9781666979138_C003.indd 82 7/13/2026 3:04:19 PM

daughter of the life-giving Sun, able to delight men and animals with every sensuous joy (Stanford 1968: 46).

The adventures of Odysseus after the Trojan War alternate between various acts of violence and varieties of sensual experiences with divine females who desire him as a sexual partner. An example of the former is manifest in the blinding of Polyphemus, while his encounter with Κίρκη-Circe, who is a nymph, a divinization of the powers of nature with the capacity to bewitch, is an example of the latter (*Odyssey* 10.133–574). She is a goddess who walks a fine line between the human and the bestial, between culture and nature.

Scenes from the *Odyssey* appear on painted Greek vases. The blinding of the Cyclops is depicted as early as 675 BCE. However, "it doesn't follow that there already existed an *Odyssey* anything like ours" (West 2011: 393). The painted and literary scenes of the Homeric Epic do not always correspond (Lowenstam 1997: 23).

Circe is the daughter of the sun god, Helios, and Perseis, herself the daughter of the Ocean. She dwells on the island of Aeaea, which some try to locate in the vicinity of Italy.[3] Odysseus' encounter with Circe, set on a strange, remote island, with elements of witchcraft, love, and passion, offers a rich field for the display of poetic craft. After Odysseus lands on her island, he sends his crew inland to scout for food and supplies. In a valley, the entire crew enters the palace of "smooth-polished stones" (*Odyssey* 10.210–11), except Eurylochus, who, suspecting a trap, remains on his guard and decides to observe from afar. The men are attracted by her singing, yet the echo is described by the verb *amphimemuken* from *amphimukaomai* "to roar all around" (*Odyssey* 10.227): "The strong metaphor unexpectedly suggests a bestial sound rather than a female voice. It locates the mystery within Circe, at the very center of her charms, and suggests . . . the ambiguous hint to bestiality which runs beneath her grace and art" (Segal 1969: 433).

She is the goddess of wildlife. Circe invites all the crew to a sumptuous banquet and offers them a drink with a drug that transforms them into animals: Pigs, lions, dogs, and wolves, each man according to the deep propensities of his personality and nature. This might mean that, according to the ancient Greek perspective, women can embody nature itself. Circe embodies the pleasures of the flesh in both their restorative and dangerous aspects. The terrified Eurylochus runs back and, in shock, is almost unable to utter a word. He finally reports to Odysseus what happened to his crew.

Odysseus is willing to undertake the adventure of rescuing his men. The herb brought to him by Hermes, the messenger of the gods, bolsters his courage. Hermes gives Odysseus a magic plant, "Moly," an antidote that he is to put in the drink that Circe will give him. The belief in the magic power of the plants underlies the episode of Hermes and the black root of the "Moly" drug (*Odyssey* 10.276–306). The term

performing such deeds, Aeetes has been called both cruel and treacherous. Medea, the mythological sorceress and wife of Jason of the Argonauts, has a name meaning "ponder," "cunning," "contriving." She helped him steal the Golden Fleece through her magical abilities and knowledge of sorcery. Madea is an early form of a female serial killer.

[3] Today identified with the promontory Monte Circeo in the region of Lazio, Italy, at the southwestern limit of the former Pontine Marshes, about 100 km (62 miles) southeast of Rome. However, this identification is no more than an educated guess.

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"Moly" may be cognate with the Sanskrit *mûlam* "root" (Louden 2011: 148). The contrasting aspect of the plant illustrates its capacity to invert the magic effect of Circe, the "Turner": "The root was black, but the flower was milk-white" (*Odyssey* 10.304).

His human weaknesses contrast sharply with Homer's portrayal of Odysseus as a man of outstanding shrewdness, eloquence, resourcefulness, courage, and endurance. He is renowned for his guile and versatility expressed by the epithet "Odysseus the Cunning," possessing μῆτις [*mētis*], "cunning intelligence." *Mētis* works by continual shape-shifting and situation-altering, turning the *morphē* of defeat into victory's tool. Its methods include the trick or trap (*dolos*), the profit-gaining scheme (*kerdos*), and the ability to recognize and seize the opportunity or propitious, favorable occasion (*kairos*) (Détienne and Vernant 1991). In the Homeric Epic, human civilization depends upon preserving man's place in the hierarchy between beast and god. Civilization thus rests upon a double opposition: man versus beast and man versus god. This double antinomy characterizes the hero of early Greek poetry, Odysseus, who best epitomizes human intelligence, which enables humans to survive in a threatening and hostile world. He is the king of a city whose order he restores against hopeless odds, founder and defender of a royal house, and father of a family that extends both forward and backwards in time and thus possesses the special human attribute of self-conscious continuity. His distinctive virtues are not the great physical force of a potential berserker like Ajax, Achilles, or Heracles, but patience, cleverness, adaptability, and dogged perseverance. His great exploits consist of triumphing over difficulties through intelligence and cunning (*mētis*). Odysseus incarnates what it means to be a man in the Greek culture and society.

With the help of the drug "Moly," the charm does not work on Odysseus, who threatens Circe with his sword and makes her swear a "great oath" not to harm him and to restore his men to their human form (*Odyssey* 10.299–301, 340–44). Odysseus's sword matches the power of Circe's sexual seduction. "The hero's encounter with the goddess is played out on the level of an archetypal conflict between the sexes" (Segal 1969: 427). The sword is both the mark of his heroic warrior identity and a symbol of his male sexuality. The line in *Odyssey* 10.321 uses the formula describing Achilles when he draws his sword against Agamemnon in the *Iliad* 1.190, linking sex with war. Fortunately, Circe can undo the harm she has wrought, and the victims of her eerie magic come off metamorphosed, looking younger, more handsome, and taller than before (*Odyssey* 10.395–96), symbolizing the restorative power of sex. Odysseus does not fall immediately into Circe's sensual trap. He keeps the initiative, and the encounter turns into a subtle feint between a shrewd man of the world and an expert seductress. She acknowledges that she has met her match and reaffirms his identity in terms that pick up the epic's opening line (*Odyssey* 10.330): "Aren't you Odysseus *polytropos*, the resourceful one?" The initial violence between Circe and Odysseus is not comparable to the violent encounter between Nergal and Ereškigal, according to the fourteenth-century BCE Amarna version (*pace* West 1997: 409). The Akkadian myth describes how Nergal rapes her and takes over her realm of the Netherworld. By contrast, Odysseus negotiates with Circe and concludes a pact with her. West's comparison of the initial violence between Circe and Odysseus with the violent

Bodi_9781666979138_C003.indd 84 7/13/2026 3:04:19 PM

encounter between Nergal and Ereškigal is superficial. He ignores the difference between the more violent fourteenth-century BCE Amarna version and the seventh-century BCE Sultantepe, Anatolian version describing female seduction. First, the Akkadian myth deals with Nergal seizing the rule over another realm, Ereškigal's kingdom of the Netherworld. Second, the Amarna version depicts rape and violence, while the Neo-Assyrian version depicts Ereškigal's seduction, bathing nude in his sight to entice Nergal to become her husband (Bodi 2013b: 52–9).

Odysseus spends a year on Circe's island as her bedfellow. In all his encounters, Odysseus proves superior to his men, but he is not entirely exempt from the consequences of these experiences. After containing Circe's nefarious influence, he lets himself be conquered in turn and remains on the island, idly indulging himself with her for a year, until his men protest. Circe's magic in her encounter with Odysseus (*Odyssey* 10.314–44) and his crew underlines the mysterious and bewitching power of sex, which she embodies.

Circe is comparable to the Mesopotamian goddess of love and fertility, Ištar, in the *Gilgameš Epic*, who offers marriage to the hero and has the power of transforming human beings by operating inversions (Crane 1988: 63–85). In *Gilg*. 6 7–9, Ištar says to Gilgameš: "Come, Gilgameš, you be the bridegroom! Grant me your fruits (*inbīka*), I insist! You shall be my husband, and I will be your wife!" (George 2003, 1: 619). In this context, the term "fruits" (*inbū*) is part of the erotic vocabulary and stands for "penis, genitals." "'Give me your penis' seems to be the demand of the adventurous goddess of sexual attraction" (Veenker 1999/2000: 59; Groneberg 1999: 181). Gilgameš rebukes her with the reminder that she hurt most of her animal and human lovers (*Gilg*. 6:48–76): The *allallu*-bird, the lion, the horse, and that she transformed the shepherd into a wolf and the gardener into a dwarf or frog (*dalīlu* "a small, stunted, wretched creature"). Ištar, like Circe, transforms men into animals. In her insistence on having Odysseus come to her bed, Circe resembles the goddess Ištar. Also, the Queen of the Netherworld, Ereškigal, uses the same words as Ištar in proposing marriage to Nergal in *Nergal and Ereškigal*, line 83: "You be my husband, I will be your wife!" (Foster 2005: 512). The phrase represents a juridical formula in a marriage agreement (*CAD* M/2: 315).

Circe, who relates to "the Great Mother, goddess of sexuality, death, and rebirth in the cycles of vegetation, has both life-giving and destructive functions; she holds the key to both love and death" (Segal 1969: 428). Surrounded by wolves and lions, she appears as the mistress of the animals. In Mesopotamia, the title of "mistress of wild animals" (*bēlet nammašti*) is applied to the goddess Ištar, who is also described as yoking lions and leopards, and watching over the wild beasts: "Constantly? you (Ištar) watch over living beings, over the animals of the earth" ([*šiknat na*]*pišti na-maš-ti qaqqari tabarri k*[*ayān*?] *CAD* N: 234; West 1997: 408). Most fertility goddesses have this connection. Artemis is called *potnia thērōn* "mistress of wild animals," in the *Iliad* 21.470. In Circe's use of a cunning trick, she resembles the god Nergal, who reigns over the Netherworld with his spouse, Ereškigal. Nergal's epithets are "King of tricks" (Lugal-galamma), "cunning in tricks" (*uzun nikilti*), and "of handsome face" (*ša pāni banû*) (Parpola 1993b: 180 n.78). Sumerian (galam) corresponds to Akkadian (*nakālu*) "resourceful, ingenious."

Another feature that the poet brings to the fore is that, despite repeated forewarnings of the danger, Odysseus is either casual about it or simply caught off guard. Circe is not just a character created as an obstacle on Odysseus' journey. She alerts the hero to the danger of hubris, one of his personality flaws. Circe, like Ištar, is the goddess of animals and reproduction, and both have connections with the Netherworld. After her failed attempt to seize the rule of the Netherworld from her sister, Ereškigal, as described in the *Descent of Ištar to the Netherworld*, Ištar spends half of each year in the Netherworld. Both Circe and Ištar embody the *eros-thanatos* nexus, sexuality, and death. Circe can show Odysseus the way to Hades. Odysseus's encounter with his dead mother and fallen comrades reminds him of his own mortality (Sourvinou-Inwood 1996: 72). On his journey to Hades, Circe, who knows the power of bewitching effects, forewarns Odysseus of the deadly danger of the Sirens' song. Nevertheless, Odysseus insists on experiencing their enchanting songs, his curiosity gaining the better of him. Following Circe's advice, he orders his men to have their ears plugged with wax, while he remains firmly attached to the mast. The episode illustrates the weakness of excessive trust in one's willpower. The human being is too weak to resist temptation by himself. One can overcome temptation not by taking it on frontally but by cunning. Second, during his visit to Hades, the blind seer, Teiresias, warns him about the island of Circe's father, the sun god, Helios, which he will visit in the future. When they land on the island of Thrinacia, Odysseus' men ignore the warnings of Teiresias and Circe by hunting down and eating the sacred cattle of Helios. Odysseus appears as an irresponsible leader who sleeps while his men are committing sacrilege. The episode with the Sun god's sacred cows on the island of Helios is a scalding critique of the cleverest of the Greeks, the adventurer whom Goethe called "Überklug" (Stanford 1968: 191). The *Odyssey* places prudence over cleverness. Bottéro used the same expression for the Babylonian Atraḫasīs who survived the Flood and became immortal by calling him "Supersage" (Bottéro-Kramer 1989: 527). The difference is that wisdom in the Semitic world is inseparable from piety. From the shipwreck that immediately engulfs his men as divine retribution for having infringed a taboo, a clear comment on Odysseus' failure as a leader of men, only the hero escapes and, after ten days of drifting on the sea, is cast on Calypso's island of Ogygia.

This is the tale that Odysseus tells Alcinoös, the king of the Phaeacians, making no pretense of priding himself on his achievements. At this later stage, he seems to have learned the lesson. He admits that he has suffered a lot (*Odyssey* 9.15), having been inflicted with many sorrows (*Odyssey* 9.37). Through suffering, he gained insight and became wiser. In contrast to the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey* presents Odysseus as an unreliable leader of men. In the end, he manages to save only his life, having lost all his boats and the totality of his crew. Moreover, the Aeolus episode (*Odyssey* 10.46–49) shows that his crew distrusts him. While he sleeps, they open the bag with the sailing winds, thinking that he is hiding some valuable loot. The Greek ideal of a leader is that of a man cautious, watchful, and on his guard for both himself and the men under his command.

The motif of the leader who is unreliable and cannot be trusted is also found in David's career. The David and Bathsheba episode in 2 Samuel 11 follows several literary topoi from Mari and Mesopotamia. The Akkadian literary topos, depicting the

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ideal warlike existence of a tribal chieftain, requires the leader to risk his life for the clan, which, in turn, makes the clan trust him. David sent his army and his General Joab to fight the Ammonites in Transjordan while he remained idly in Jerusalem. After a long siesta, he dallied with the wife of one of his officers. According to several Akkadian texts, eating, drinking, and living in the shade rather than leading armies into military exploits is considered unworthy of a warlord, disparaging to his reputation, questioning his leadership, and calling for his replacement (Chapter 2. Section 4) (Bodi 2010a: 101–37).

7. The Visit to Hades—Realization of One's Mortality

The visit to Hades in Book 11 is a main signpost in the *Odyssey*. The centrality of the Hades episode, the seventh in a series of thirteen adventures and midmost in the poem itself, is significant as a "still-point." It divides the various adventures into equal halves and separates them into experiences prior to and posterior to Hades (Scully 1987: 403–4).

"If not yet *la belle dame sans merci*, (Circe) is still never quite free of the awesome, non-human, or even sub-human, distance of a demonic power" (Segal 1969: 419). She is a "dread goddess" (*deinê theos*, *Odyssey* 10.136), the sister of "evil-minded Aeetes," the guardian of the Golden Fleece from an earlier epic, and father of the murderous Medea. When first landing on Circe's island of Aeaea, Odysseus notes that the sun-god Helios is her father (*Odyssey* 10.138). In antiquity, it was believed that during the night, the sun visited Hades, a belief that the Greeks shared with the Mesopotamians concerning the sun-god Šamaš. Odysseus confesses his disorientation (*Odyssey* 10.189–97); he does not know the celestial coordinates of East and West, sunrise and sunset, and finds himself at a loss for his usual *mētis* "cunning" (*Odyssey* 10.190–92); he just spots the island of Aeaea. When Odysseus returns from the voyage to Hades, however, he says that Circe's island of Aeaea is where Helios has his *antolai*, his "risings" (*Odyssey* 12.4), which would place it in the East. By contrast, Hesiod's description in *Theogony* 1011–16 suggests the West, implying that concerning Hades, man's compass is of no use (Scully 1987: 407; West 1966: 433–6). This feature is strikingly similar to the ambiguity found in *Inanna's Descent to the Netherworld*, where the Sumerian verb used for Inanna's journey is (ed_3), meaning both "to go up," rendered in Akkadian with *elû*, and "to go down," in Akkadian *warādu*. One does not know whether the Sumerian Netherworld is located in the upper or lower region.[4] West (1997: 407) connects the name of the island Aeaea with the name of the Babylonian goddess of love, in Akkadian known as Aya, consort of the sun god, Šamaš, himself brother of Inanna/Ištar.

[4] In *Inanna's Descent*, line 5: ^{d}Inanna an mu-un-šub ki mu-un-šub kur-ra ba-e-a-ed_3 meaning literally, "Inanna has left the heaven, she has left the earth, to the Netherworld she went down (or she went up)?" see, https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/section1/tr141.htm. The Electronic Pennsylvania Sumerian Dictionary (ePSD) states that the verb (ed_3) may mean both, "to go up or to go down." The verb (ed_3) sometimes alternates with (e_{11}) and can be rendered in Akkadian with *elû* "to ascend," and (*w*)*arādu* "to descend."

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Circe knows how to use powerful drugs (*Odyssey* 10.235, 276, 394) and destructive wiles (*Odyssey* 10.289). Nevertheless, she shows compassion and generosity toward her lover by warning him of pending dangers. In the epic, she starts as a perfidious enchantress and ends as a benevolent, caring woman. Circe provides essential instruction, equipment, and useful advice both before the Netherworld journey and after (*Odyssey* 10.504–540, 563, 571; 12.18–20, 25–7, 37–141). When the Phaeacian Queen Arete suggests that Odysseus bind up his gifts to prevent thievery during the voyage, he uses a knot, "intricate, which Lady Circe taught him" (*Odyssey* 8.448). After Odysseus and his crew return from their voyage to Hades, Circe meets them on the shores of her island, dressed up and accompanied by her servant maids. Like faithful wives of the sailors, they bring bread, meat, and wine in abundance for the men to restore themselves. Once everyone has eaten and the crew is sleeping, she takes Odysseus by the hand, draws him apart, and lies next to him on the beach. In a warm and human gesture, she offers him intimacy (*Odyssey* 12.33–34). She is eager to hear about his experience of Hades. When the morning light rises, Circe retreats to her island as Odysseus prepares to leave the shores and embark on his voyage once more (*Odyssey* 12.143–44). Circe seems to understand Odysseus better than Calypso. Rather than keep him, a pinning, unwilling lover, in her bed for seven years, she sends him off at the first signs of uneasiness (Segal 1969: 424). Or being a wild beast in nature, Circe does not follow the rules of average romantic relationships. Just like a beast, she mates and leaves; animals mate while humans meet. Circe ultimately aids him in his journey and proves indispensable to it. When they part, the reader sees clearly and unsentimentally the inevitable brevity of purely physical liaison, the limited expectations on both sides, and the weakness and immateriality of the sexual encounter between Circe and Odysseus. We are thus subtly turned toward the very different bond Odysseus is seeking in Ithaca with Penelope. A fairyland character like Circe cannot offer anything but an ephemeral affair. Odysseus's year with Circe is like a sensual dream of endless dinners of meat, wine (*Odyssey* 10.467–68), and sex, but without real substance, and Odysseus awakens as soon as his companions mention home. That single reminder of reality helps to dispel the charm. "The Circe episode of Homer is characterized by a clarity and intelligibility of action and motivation and by a subtle fusion of the imaginative charm of the fairy tale with precise observation of human nature" (Segal 1969: 441). There is no discussion of marriage between Circe and Odysseus other than the formula "desiring him as husband," applied to her outside of the actual episode (*Odyssey* 9.32). She stands more for the bewitching power of sensuality. In this aspect, she can be compared to Bathsheba, whose naked beauty ignited David's lust for her. Initially, David had no intention of marrying Bathsheba—it was more like a "one-night stand." The power of lust turned a noble king into a pig. The problem for David arises when Bathsheba reveals that she is pregnant (2 Sam 11:5). The arrival of the child will bring to light the king's deceitfulness toward his men, who were fighting his war in Transjordan, while he was enjoying himself at home with the wife of one of his officers. David tries to solve his problem by summoning Uriah back to Jerusalem, making him inebriated, trying to get him to have sex with his wife, and saddling Uriah with the child. But as noted by Ackroyd (1977: 102), "Uriah drunk is more pious than David

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sober!" When Uriah refuses the offer of sexual union with his wife while his troops are at the battlefront, David orders the assassination of his elite officer. After Uriah's demise, he marries Bathsheba to present himself as the magnanimous king who personally takes care of his fallen officer's widow (1 Sam 11:27).

Odysseus' visit to Hades, described in Book 11, also called Nakyia or, the evocation of the dead, which occurs within the Circe episode, marks his recognition of mortality and, in the light of the diviner Teiresias' prophecy, an acceptance of death from which he can no longer turn away. Through the consultation of the ritual pit, Odysseus raises the spirit of his mother from the Netherworld. She died of grief during his long absence. From her, he obtains, for the first time, news of his household threatened with ruin by the greed of Penelope's numerous suitors. Odysseus also talks to his fallen comrades and the shade of Heracles. According to Carp (1970: 66), King Saul, who consults a female medium in 1 Sam 28:3–25, seeks to know why God has abandoned him, while Odysseus is seeking self-awareness, being told the circumstances under which he will die (*Odyssey* 10.100–137). Both characters are disoriented at a critical point in their career. The *bothros* "pit, hole," in the *Odyssey* 11.20–50, has been compared to Hebrew *'ōb* (Straßburger 2018: 15), reflecting a similar divinatory technique in consulting the dead by using the ritual pit in Sumer, Assyria, Anatolia (Hurrian *āpi*, Hoffner 1967: 385–401; Collins 2002: 224–42, n. 1, 6, 11), and Greece (Rutherford 2020: 42). Both Odysseus and Saul must appeal to a female character to gain access to the world of the spirits and talk with a dead seer: The Witch Circe, who advises him to see the diviner Teiresias in Hades and the Witch of Endor, who brings up the ghost of the prophet Samuel. The latter tells Saul that he will soon die in the pending battle with the Philistines. In the epics, a woman is often depicted as a mediator, allowing the hero to cross between worlds (e.g., the courtesan Šamḫat, who helps the wild man Enkidu cross from life in the steppe to the city). In *The Epic of Gilgameš* Tablet 12, the sun-god Šamaš makes an opening, a window or a nook (ab.làl = *aptu* "window, hole"), in the Netherworld so that the spirit or demon (*utukku*) of Enkidu may come out, bringing a grim description of the conditions that reign there. This hole is called, in the Sumerian fragment, a word that is cognate with the Hebrew *'ōb*, which has Assyrian and Hittite equivalents. It would thus appear that raising the dead through a hole in the ground, whether natural or made for the occasion, is a traditional element of the narrative pattern of the consultation of the spirits in ancient Near Eastern as well as Western Mediterranean cultures. It connects ancient Mesopotamia with classical Greece through a long stream of tradition around a particular divinatory technique.

In the Sumerian and Akkadian versions of Gilgameš, the sun god Šamaš makes a hole in the wall of the Netherworld to let Enkidu's spirit out. *Gilg*. 12 85–87: "The Young Hero Šamaš, [. . .] son of Ningal, opened a chink (*takkap erṣēti iptema)* in the Netherworld, he brought the shade (*utukku*) of Enkidu up from the Netherworld like a phantom (*kî zaqīqi*)" (George 2003, 1: 733). Enkidu's spirit is called *utukku*, which is the name of a demon, while *zaqīqu* stands for "breeze, breath, spirit, phantom." Tropper (1986: 23) argues that ab.làl-*takkapu* refers to "bird or pigeon hole." He follows the explanation given by Gadd (1948: 89), who equates (ab.làl) with *qinu ša iṣṣuri* "bird's nest." For the term ab.làl, the ePSD gives the meaning "nest, nook."

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These encounters with death are comparable to David's realization of his mortality after his fateful experience with Bathsheba and the death of their illegitimate child. He fasted, lying prostrated on the ground without bathing or eating, for seven days, symbolizing his exit from life. When the baby, the fruit of his lustful indulgence with the wife of his officer dies on the seventh day, David states: "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who knows whether Yahweh will be gracious to me, that the child may live?' But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me" (2 Sam 12:22–23). With the pain of losing his unnamed child, David gains maturity and lucidity, indispensable in the face of death.

According to Abusch (2015: 130), the growth and transformation of Gilgameš and Odysseus are symbolized by wanderings and extensive travels, which both reflect and elicit changes in the epic heroes. However, it takes more than travel to implement this change. What is even more decisive are the female characters Odysseus and Gilgameš encounter during their wanderings. One such key woman in Gilgameš's transformation is the female tavern keeper. In the *Epic of Gilgameš*, Tablet 10, after a long, harrowing journey, Gilgameš meets another famous woman in a tavern by the edge of the ocean, the "alewife" (*sābitu*), named ^{d}Šiduri. In the Akkadian text, her name is preceded by a determinative (^{d}) for diĝir, "god," indicating that she, too, like Circe and Calypso, is a divine being. The alewife, Šiduri, is the typical model, projected into the legend, of those taverns at the crossroads (*bīt aštami* "the house of beverage"), though it is difficult to see what kind of clients, if any, she would have at this place, at the extreme outskirts of the inhabited world. She is necessary for the plot in the *Epic of Gilgameš* and is there to provide vital information. Moreover, epics, folklore, and fairy tales do not always follow strict logical thinking. She releases the Mesopotamian hero from his existential Angst, telling him that he is mortal and that the gods have reserved immortality for themselves (Bodi 2015b: 1–19). Each time, with Gilgameš, Odysseus, Saul, and David, a woman acts as the mediator, helping the hero realize his mortality.

Odysseus is confused about his identity at a critical point in his career. King David, just like Odysseus, finds himself in a situational and spiritual crisis. In both cases, the crisis is defined in terms of the hero's relationship with the divine, and the latter relates to the women in both stories: Circe is a half-divine being, and Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, who is a resident alien, is considered off limits, under a taboo, hence "sacred." By violating this taboo, David cursed himself. Moreover, David's relationship with Yahweh derives from his being chosen as the warlord of the Israelite tribes. In the affair with Bathsheba, leading to the assassination of Uriah the Hittite, a resident alien, he forfeits his moral right to assume leadership of the tribes, which prompted Absalom's revolt. In the case of Odysseus, the gods on Olympus send Hermes, the messenger of the gods, while in the case of David, Yahweh sends the prophet Nathan in 2 Sam 12. The latter tells David a juridical parable of the ewe-lamb, which helps the hero achieve self-awareness of his crime and confront his dark side, his *Doppelgänger*, which he would not otherwise have recognized.

The concept of the shadow and the importance of bringing it to one's consciousness has been elaborated by C. G. Jung: "What is not brought to consciousness is manifest in life as fate." With Nathan's help, David realizes that his "*Doppelgänger*" (Rank 1971),

Bodi_9781666979138_C003.indd 90 7/13/2026 3:04:19 PM

or the hidden, unacknowledged, dark part of his personality, harbors a rapist and an assassin. However, both Odysseus and David must undergo a sexual experience with a female character, Circe and Bathsheba, to gain access to their deeper selves.

In the Sumerian epic tradition, Enkidu was a servant of Bilgames, whereas in the Akkadian version, Enkidu becomes Gilgameš's closest friend and buddy. Gresseth (1975: 15 n. 25) suggests viewing them as two facets of the same person. Enkidu could be seen as Gilgameš's *Doppelgänger*.

8. The Nymph Calypso (Καλυψώ)

The nineteenth-century Homeric scholars considered the Calypso episode as a doublet of Circe: "It is quite inconceivable that these two persons should not be identical, one modeled on the other, the relationship of the legend provides the answer: Calypso is a fictitious person, so she is the later one, consequently there was a time when Odysseus was with Kirke, but not with Calypso" (Von Willamowitz-Möllendorff, 1884: 116).

In their wake, biblical scholars similarly consider Merab to be a fictitious person and a pale doublet of Michal. However, in meeting the beautiful Calypso, Odysseus is facing a different type of temptation, which he has to overcome if he wants to find and preserve his identity. We first hear about another female chthonic divinity, Calypso, in the long discourse King Menelaus holds with Odysseus' son, Telemachus. The latter sailed to Sparta to obtain information about his absent father (*Odyssey* 4). The story in Book 4 has to be supplemented with the account offered by Odysseus himself in Books 9–12, in which the hero explains how he came to be alone on Calypso's island, Ogygia. Menelaus explicitly associates himself with Odysseus, and the two characters are contrasted. Menelaus refers to the prophecy of the blessed future awaiting him in Elysium, stating that he was not destined to die in the horse-raising Argos (Peloponnese). Being Zeus' son-in-law, eternal bliss in Elysium was reserved for him. He immediately continues by telling what he knows about Odysseus, what he learned from Proteus, a magician in Egypt, that the architect of the Greek victory over the Trojans, who alone has not returned home, the king of Ithaca, sits helplessly on Calypso's island, weeping without comrades or ship to carry him home (*Odyssey* 4.555–60). This juxtaposition between Menelaus and Odysseus creates a striking contrast. Moreover, the seven years of King Menelaus' separation from Sparta constitute the nearest analogy with Odysseus' longer absence, also containing seven years spent with Calypso. Her island, Ogygia, represents Greek ideas about an idyllic place. The four fountains on Ogygia (*Odyssey* 5.70–1) offer a parallel to the four rivers in the Garden of Eden in Gen 2:10–14 (Louden 2011: 125). The promise of eternal existence, the balmy atmosphere of an ideal climate, and Menelaus' repossession of Helen, Zeus' daughter, would epitomize happiness. "If any man can be said to rival the gods, as Telemachus innocently remarks, Menelaus is that man, with his Olympian wealth and his wife like Artemis. In character, then Elysium offers him no compensation for earthly trials; rather, it continues the same sensuous tenor of his present existence, continues it indefinitely" (Anderson 1958: 5).

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Although being another divinization of the powers of nature, Calypso, unlike Circe, is not an enchantress and does not transform men into animals. Calypso strives to replace Penelope, as Circe never intends to do, saying that her beautiful body is superior to that of his wife and that no mortal woman can match her beauty (*Odyssey* 5.203–24). Calypso poses a very different kind of threat from Circe's. Athena informs her father, Zeus, that Calypso is holding Odysseus "by force" (*anagkē*) on her island, for her erotic gratification, asking him to intervene and free her protégé (*Odyssey* 4.14–15). Calypso wants him, and her obstinacy makes her immune to mortal forms of arguing, bantering, cajoling, or stratagems of logic. She acts like a possessive mother. On Ogygia, the master of persuasion is not in a situation to persuade. Only a *deus ex machina* can break the deadlock, and it comes in the form of Hermes, the messenger of the gods (Zerba 2009: 319).

Calypso saved Odysseus from the sea, nursed him, brought him back to health (*Odyssey* 5.130), and loved him. That love was not one-sided. When the actual Odysseus appears in Book 5, Homer depicts him weeping and offers two explanations: Odysseus is homesick, he is sitting on the beach, shedding tears, for the nymph no longer pleases him *ouketi* (*Odyssey* 5.152–53). It implies that in the seven years that he spent with her, Odysseus was pleased with her and that their love was mutual. Odysseus, in his way, is a victim of abduction. He is virtually a prisoner of Calypso. As pointed out by Hélène Monsacré (2018: 120): "She found him sitting upon the beach with his eyes ever filled with tears, his sweet life wasting away as he wept for his homecoming; for he had got tired of Calypso, and though he was forced to sleep with her in the cave by night, it was she, not he, that would have it so. As for the daytime, he spent it on the rocks and the seashore, weeping, crying aloud for his despair, and always looking out upon the sea" (*Odyssey* 5.151–158).

However, his desires no longer match hers, maybe meaning that the love of a mortal inevitably fades. The central motif of the *Odyssey* is the hero's return in the sense of the return to life and light, with the possibility of understanding the meaning of *nostos*, "homecoming," as "discovery of oneself" (Frame 2005). Odysseus' recognition at this point that his innermost identity is inseparably bound up with his home and wife becomes the key to his escape from Calypso's fantastic yet oppressive world (Lord 1954: 416). "The seven years of this sojourn with Calypso, in the economy of the epic, render this the most severe trial of the hero. With no external commitments, with none of his martial and kingly accouterments to remind him of his position, Odysseus must search his own conscience and find his purpose in life" (Anderson 1958: 9).

Odysseus' interaction with Calypso serves to underline an important feature of the Greek hero. In striking contrast to Gilgameš, the Mesopotamian culture hero par excellence, Odysseus does not aspire to immortality. That is not the main purpose of his quest. To Calypso's offer of immortality, Odysseus prefers the return to his mortal wife, Penelope, to end his life as a simple human being, taking care of his family, wife, son, father, home, and realm. In comparison with the *Gilgameš Epic*, the *Odyssey* reflects a world fundamentally focused on this earthly, human existence, which finds meaning in fully assuming basic human responsibilities. It is difficult to imagine a worldview more centered on human earthly life (de Romilly 1992: 36).

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The Elysium promised to King Menelaus is an imaginary island. Ogygia, where Calypso lives, and probably the island of Circe, are likewise idealized islands. Calypso's island, Ogygia, is a fantasy island, located in the West, enjoying a pleasant climate and ease of life, and yet a place which, paradoxically, has associations with death. On his arrival there, the messenger of the gods, Hermes, pauses in admiration over the luxuriant growth of trees and vines, swarms of birds, and water in abundance, epitomizing the effortlessness of existence (*Odyssey* 5.73–74). In a way similar to the promise of Elysium, Calypso can confer upon Odysseus immortality along with security and sensuous ease. Just as Menelaus earns his immortality through Helen, Zeus' daughter, so Odysseus can become deathless only by succumbing forever to the charms of the nymph Calypso. Odysseus rejects her offer of immortality for the sake of home, for the family roots and ties to his human existence, even if the latter ends in death. The divine council that sets Odysseus free through the agency of Hermes can stand for the hero's resolution to accept his human lot and leave Calypso's smothering paradise. What Odysseus lacked for the seven years he spent on her island was the courage to face once more a strenuous journey on the sea, which, Zeus specifies as he sends Hermes, must be made "with guidance neither of mortal men nor gods" (*Odyssey* 5.32).

In the *Odyssey*'s opening lines (1.50) with the divine council, Athena calls Ogygia the "navel of the sea" (*omphalos esti thalassēs*). The Greek term is cognate with the Latin *umbilicus*, and from a psychoanalytical point of view, it calls to mind a regression to an intrauterine, paradisiacal condition of a baby being fed and taken care of by one's mother through an umbilical cord. The epic underlines Calypso's maternal aspects when she states, "I loved (*phileon*) him, and I nurtured (*etrephon*) him" (*Odyssey* 5.135). As pointed out by Ferenczi (1992: 27), in psychoanalytic terms, the visions of paradise or ideas of a paradisiacal island may symbolize human desire to regress to a blissful prenatal condition. These unconscious hallucinations, akin to orgasm, aim at the restoration of an anterior condition of rest of an original, blissful intra-uterine existence. Moreover, Calypso's name is related to the verb καλύπτειν "to cover, conceal," and her name could be rendered with "the Concealer." Calypso's cave or grotto (*Odyssey* 1.15; 5.57–74; 5.194), where he sleeps with her at night, could symbolize her womb. "Leaving the *omphalos*, Odysseus cuts the umbilical cord that ties him to paradise and to a divine, non-aging life centered around Calypso. Ogygia, under Calypso, has womb-like associations; Odysseus' departure from it draws on metaphors for birth" (Louden 2011: 127).

While on her island, Odysseus is "hidden" for seven years, after which he reaches a crisis and is ready for a change. The period of seven years reminds one of Erik Erikson's theory of life cycles punctuated by a crisis and a need for change. This Harvard psychologist postulated that human life tends to evolve in cycles of approximately seven years, interrupted by a crisis due to a need for change. In this context, the word "crisis" stands for a watershed, when the individual is affected by deep inner changes, his or her tastes are no longer the same, as well as preoccupations, interests, and motivations (Erikson 1963; 1992). According to Moran (1995: 2327–36), the story in the *Gilgameš Epic* is structured around three seven-day periods, each being associated with a profound transformation of Gilgameš or his companion Enkidu.

Bodi_9781666979138_C003.indd 93 7/13/2026 3:04:19 PM

There exist multiple links between Ogygia and Hades, and the relationship between Odysseus and Calypso reflects the *Eros-Thanatos* theme, where love and death unite: "Calypso then, in one sense, is death, with all its attractions of escape and self-indulgence. (. . .) Menelaus will end his human life by escaping to Elysium, where he will enjoy permanent ease in an atmosphere worthy of the son-in-law of Zeus; Odysseus begins his human life again by escaping from that oblivious ease offered him by Calypso, the one who buries" (Anderson 1958: 7).

Odysseus's rejection of Calypso's offer of immortality was a refusal of eternal and monotonous existence, approximating death, the endless cycle of gratifications that left the spirit unsatisfied. One can forget oneself in love, and actually and symbolically die in love. Odysseus summons his courage to resume his human life by escaping from the oblivious ease and flight from life that Calypso's offer of immortality represents. His refusal of Calypso's offer parallels a similar refusal of Ištar's advances to Gilgameš. Both can be interpreted as important stages in the maturation process and development of male consciousness. According to Erich Neumann (1989: 62), "the stronger the masculine ego-consciousness becomes, the more it is aware of the emasculating, bewitching, deadly and stupefying nature of the Great Goddess." In Jungian terms of analytic psychology, the latter stands for the return to the womb of the great mother or regression to the undifferentiated, pre-ego state.

Calypso who lets Odysseus go away, prompted by a *force majeure*, when Hermes, the messenger of the gods informs her of a divine decision, is comparable to the behavior of Michal, David's first wife who saves his life by letting him down through the window so that he may escape, in 1 Sam 19:10b-18a (Bodi 2005: 22–7). Affected by his fear of being supplanted by a better and younger leader, which triggered his morbid jealousy, Saul wants to kill David, his son-in-law. Saul is the external agent influencing events, and David leaves his wife, prompted by a *force majeure*. Michal is informed of her father's murderous intentions and warns David: "If you do not save your life tonight, tomorrow you will be killed. So Michal let David down through the window; and he went, fled, and escaped" (1 Sam 19:11–12). The three verbs for the one in Michal's breathless instructions underline David's single-minded attention to the crucial business of saving himself (Alter 1981: 120). The episode follows immediately after Saul's frenzy with the second attempt to murder David with his spear (1 Sam 18:8–10a). Michal sides with David against her father, Saul. The tradition about Penelope's father, Icarius, states that, pressed by her father to stay with him in Sparta, Penelope chose to follow her husband Odysseus to Ithaca (Grimal 1999: 225). Both Michal and Penelope side with their man against their father.

Saul sends messengers to Michal's house to kill David when he comes out in the morning. They follow the Oriental custom described by scholars as *Heiligkeit des Schlafes* ("sacredness of sleep"), that is, during the night, the neighbor should not be disturbed; his or her sleep is considered sacred. The motif occurs again in the story of Samson and Delilah (see Chapter 9. Section 5). The Hebrew Bible, with David's episode, the Quran and the Hadiths about an incident in Muhammad's life, perpetuate an ancient Near Eastern topos that goes back to a proverbial Sumerian taboo (Bodi 2021b: 19–36). The window through which David escapes from Michal's house represents a

Bodi_9781666979138_C003.indd 94 7/13/2026 3:04:19 PM

limit between inside and outside and therefore stands for a dangerous or liminal space between life and death. Exum (1993: 47) captures some of its symbolism when she comments, "By letting David out of the window—and Michal is the subject of all these verbs, *wtrd* ('let [David] down'), *wtšlḥy* ('you have let [my enemy] go') *šlḥny* ('let me go')—Michal figuratively births David into freedom." Michal's house, which should normally be a place of shelter and security, threatened to become his tomb. Michal saves David's life, allowing him to continue his existence by lowering him down the window of his house and letting him take to the road. This sharp contrast could be taken as an illustration of a basic principle. To live, it is necessary to have a point of reference, a place where one rests. It is just as necessary to go out of that place and to be ready to take risks. Etymologically, the word "to exist" comes from *sistere* ("to stand") and *ex* ("outside"). One only exists in "ex-posing" oneself, that is, placing oneself outside, going beyond the limits of one's comfort zone or supposed security, and reaching outside, transforming one's place into a base for departure and exploration of what is new and unknown. In this respect, the roles of Michal and Calypso are comparable. They both save the hero and make it possible for him to exist independently. In both cases, the necessity of cutting the "umbilical cord" comes under the pressure or intervention of a third party. Hermes, the messenger of the gods, assumes this role, helping Odysseus to extricate himself from Calypso's grip. Sometimes a person cannot break away from a toxic relationship, a protracted liaison, or an addiction without external help, or a third party that plays the role of the so-called "psychological crutch."

Circe and Calypso, delaying the hero with their charms, love, and a promise of immortality, represent equal but opposite threats to Odysseus' identity as a man: "For Odysseus, leaving this universe means leaving a world that is not that of men, a world that will be alternately superhuman or subhuman, a world where, with Calypso, he will be offered divinity, or risk falling into animality with Circe, but which he will have to leave to return to normality. The whole *Odyssey*, in a sense, is the story of Odysseus' return to normality and his deliberate acceptance of the human condition" (Vidal-Naquet 1970: 1283).

9. The Young Virgin Nausicaa (Ναυσικάα)

The episode with princess Nausicaa gives an unusual emphasis to the perspective of its female characters (Doherty 2008: 64). Odysseus behaves with more self-control in the second half of the poem, marking progress in the process of individuation through endured suffering. So far, he is presented as a sailor "with a girl in every port." Each time he lands on an island, he ends up in bed with the leading female on the island, for example, Circe and Calypso. This time, his test consists of the hero curbing his predatory urges, exercising self-control, and undergoing a veritable spiritual rebirth (Holtsmark 1966: 206). The inveterate womanizer must conquer the temptation to bed yet another female. This is the only passage in which the names of Circe (*Odyssey* 8.448) and Calypso (8.452), Odysseus' divine lovers, and Nausicaa are mentioned in proximity. Her beauty is described as divine: "Nausicaa, whom the gods made beautiful" (*Odyssey* 8.457).

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Odysseus is careful not to reveal any insensitivity to Nausicaa. His reply and rapid departure from her island express tactfulness, restraint, and wisdom. Despite the temptation, Odysseus, now more provident for his two days on Scheria, must realize that consummation of his predatory urges with this young beauty could only damage them both (Gross 1976: 317). The encounter between Odysseus and Nausicaa is described within a clear marital framework charged with sexual overtones. The poet-bard compares Odysseus to a marauding, hungry lion, a libidinal animal, and the scourge of unprotected people. The lion similes reveal, "the raw forces of nature in the beast and by analogy, in the human object" (Londsdale 1990: 35). This bloodthirsty and flesh-hungry lion creeps out of the bushes and approaches an unprotected flock of young women who have taken off their veils to play with a ball (*Odyssey* 6.130–6). The face-to-face confrontation between Nausicaa and Odysseus is a major issue in this episode, and the hero, observed by his protective goddess, Athena, who tests him, must resist both his erotic desire and his warrior habits (Bouvier 2021: 1–13). To be a man requires restraint and self-discipline. Compared to a lion, he must tame the raw force of the beast within him. Penelope, too, is described as a beleaguered male lion (*leōn*) deserving praise for the prowess and nobility with which she resists the suitors in the absence of her husband (*Odyssey* 4.791–3). The virgin Nausicaa is the leader of a party of young maidens, who, as described in other accounts, can easily fall prey to the lustful appetites of gods or become abducted by rapists and satyrs, who are perpetually sexually aroused creatures. The cries of the girls playing ball, the symbol of the eternally playful Eros, wake Odysseus up. A well-known topos of Greek myths was that young girls were a particularly irresistible target of rapists when playing with friends and performing in a dance, even in a sanctuary. Odysseus had spent the night, morning, and noon sleeping naked in a heap of leaves beneath an olive tree. Despite his disheveled and frightening appearance, Odysseus succeeds in cajoling Nausicaa, who helps him obtain proper (*philoxenia*), "hospitality" with her royal parents. Moreover, Nausicaa devises a sophisticated plan to engineer their entrance to the city without compromising her reputation as a noble virgin. The topography of the scene is significant. Narratives of divine rape and abduction of females take place in similarly erotic and sexually charged places, populated by lustful creatures, where young maidens escape the protection of the *polis*. Places in the countryside, near water, seashores, riverbanks, and freshwater springs, are fraught with the danger of sexual assault for women, being places beyond the limits of an ordered city. Moreover, these localities and the female universe are closely associated. They are identified with Mother Earth and the source of life. In the Nausicaa episode, the place is said to be covered with sweet clover or grass (*agrōstin meliēdea*, *Odyssey* 6.90) on which the mules of the cart are left to graze (Shapiro 1995: 160). "In Greek mythic accounts, marriage, seduction, and rape are barely distinguishable, and metaphorically the acculturated form of marriage is consummated through the pursuit, capture, and taming of a young girl, who then becomes a woman proper, a *gynē*" (Karakantza 2003: 15). The situation is similar in the Hebrew tribal society. In Judges 21, although the narrator speaks only of virgin women of Jabesh-Gilead and Shiloh being "given" to the survivors of the Benjaminite tribe (v. 14), or "seized" (v. 21), and "carried off" (v. 22) by them as wives emphasizing procreation as a goal, these women were coerced into sexual relationships.

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The contrast is even more striking concerning King David, who abducted Bathsheba in his city. Instead of protecting the young woman, the City of David became a place of wanton lawlessness, where the king abuses the wife of one of his elite officers, Uriah the Hittite, a resident alien (Chapter 4. Section 4).

Odysseus's last encounter with the wrath of the sea god, Poseidon, brings him to his knees and drives him out of the attitude of arrogant self-sufficiency that characterized him when he was with Circe. Having lost all his comrades at sea and wrecked his raft, Odysseus drifts ashore naked on the island of the Phaeacians. He needs the protection of Zeus *xenios*, the god who shelters strangers, and Zeus *hiketēsios*, "who safeguards supplicants." Through well-thought-out words and using the young girl, Nausicaa, as a means to achieve his goal, Odysseus succeeds in being accepted as a refugee by her royal parents. Adopting the posture of the supplicant (*hiketes*), he threw himself at the feet of Nausicaa's mother, pleading as a suppliant in distress. The decisive action was when he embraced the knees (*gounazein*) of Queen Arete, Nausicaa's mother, in the stereotyped gesture of the supplicant demanding protection. She bears a significant name meaning "the one to whom one addresses prayers" (Auffarth 1992: 200; Whittaker 1999: 140–50). Thereby, he comes under the protection of a (*despoina*) mistress of the house since women have the right to grant asylum in their own house (Pitt-Rivers 1977: 113–25). Consequently, he is received as a refugee by the queen, the king, and the entire community. This is the second time in the *Odyssey* that access to the hospitality of islanders is achieved first through contact with the daughter of the king and then by the queen. The same pattern was followed in accosting the island of the giant Lastrygones (*Odyssey* 10.103–15).

The epithet *polytropos*—shifty and resourceful—does not carry unqualified approval, especially when it applies to Odysseus's rugged individualism. It reflects values before those established by the Athenian *polis*, where an individual sacrifices his life for the security and well-being of his city. The extremities he suffers after his raft is wrecked compel him to turn to a young maiden for help. The scene suggests the fundamental weakness of all men and their dependence on their fellow human beings. The architect of the Achaean victory over the Trojans, who is washed up on the island of the Phaeacians, with no crew to enhance his prestige, with no splendid clothes and weapons or any of the loot of Troy or Ismarus, bruised and battered by ten days of exposure to the salt and sun, this man is stripped of all his heroic veneer. He appears stark naked before Nausicaa with just a branch to hide his genitals. "He broke off a branch thick with leaves, and held it before him in his hand, to hide his genitals (*mēdos*)" (*Odyssey* 6.126–30).

In his exploration of Indo-European roots of a series of Homeric motifs, Nicolas Allen (2020: 81 n. 13) points out elements of Indian asceticism in the scene of Odysseus on the island of Scheria. When he sleeps in the pile of leaves, the Greek hero is likened to a firebrand (*dalos*, *dalon*), carefully kept alight under a heap of ashes (*Odyssey* 5.487). In a series of Jain scriptural stories, a king-turned-ascetic undertakes intense austerities and is likened to "fire confined within a heap of ashes." It conveys the idea of heat not extinguished by being contained and controlled. Contrary to his encounters with Circe and Calypso, the relationship between Odysseus and Nausicaa remains chaste and ascetic, with the absence of sex.

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He must entirely depend on Nausicaa's goodwill and that of her royal parents. In this respect, Odysseus resembles David both at the beginning and at the end of his career. In the negotiation between Saul and David concerning Michal's hand in 1 Sam 18:20–29, Michal's love is mentioned in the first and last clauses of the episode (v. 20 and 28). Her goodwill toward David helps him become part of the first royal family in the history of the Hebrew tribes. As pointed out by Susan Ackerman (2002: 452): "Crucial to recognize here is the position of status Michal holds at this point in the text in comparison to David. She is the king's daughter, while he is a shepherd boy who has only recently entered into Saul's service and whose fame is just beginning to grow. He is thus her social inferior, a fact which the text signals repeatedly."

Although the story revolves around Michal's marriage, she functions as a pawn on the chessboard in a transaction between two males of unequal power. At the end of David's life, when he is no longer an able warrior but a feeble old man, lying on his bed, cold and helpless, unable to warm his body despite the blankets with which he is covered, the king is taken care of by the young, beautiful virgin, Abishag the Shunammite (1 Kgs 1:1–4). She, too, becomes a means to an end, used by David's shivering body and by the pro-Solomon party, who takes advantage of her role as administrator of the king's household to gain access to the dying king and obtain *in extremis* the nomination of Solomon as his successor (Bodi 2021a: 81).

10. Nausicaa's Courage

After Odysseus makes the passage from the island of Ogygia to Scheria, where the Phaeacians dwell, Nausicaa is the first mortal woman he encounters. She is a maiden on the brink of maturity and marriage who possesses some of the virtues of her mother, Arete, being poised, self-assured, courageous, and quick-witted. Books 6–8 describe Nausicaa as a princess swept off her feet by the hero. He meets her in Book 6 as she comes to a lush, verdant place to wash the clothes by a brook, which is a metaphor for a young woman preparing her trousseau for marriage. When Penelope appears before the suitors, she wears a veil and is accompanied by female attendants on each side, signifiers of her status, chastity, and fidelity to her husband. "I will not go in alone among men; for I feel *aidōs*-shame" (*Odyssey* 18.184; 1.335; 18.206–13). Her chastity arouses the suitors to a frenzy of desire: "And the suitors grew weak at the knees, their *thumós* burned with desire. And all clamored to lie beside her in bed." In this context, the term *thumós* stands for the physical seat of passion. By contrast, Nausicaa casts aside her veil and goes on to meet Odysseus alone and unattended (*Odyssey* 6.100). This is improper behavior for an aristocratic young woman. While her frightened female companions flee from Odysseus, Nausicaa stands her ground, ready to face the danger with courage. Her nonverbal communication signals to him that she is looking for a husband. She has been prompted in a dream by Athena to go down to the river to wash her trousseau in preparation for a potential wedding (*Odyssey* 6.15–40). Athena also appears to Odysseus in the form of a girl fetching water in *Odyssey* 7.19–78, a passage seen as a doublet of the Nausicaa episode

Bodi_9781666979138_C003.indd 98 7/13/2026 3:04:19 PM

(Louden 2011: 136). Nausicaa who casts aside her veil (*krēdemnon*, *Odyssey* 6.100) and goes to meet Odysseus alone and unattended speaks volumes since in the *Odyssey* the decency of aristocratic society has more room than in the *Iliad*, as well as custom and convention (von Erffa 1937: 18; Reece 1993: 13). Nausicaa's exceptional courage also stems from "Athena who put courage into her heart and took the fear from her body" (*Odyssey* 6.139–40). Moreover, Athena pours *kharis* "grace" onto Odysseus' head and shoulders, increasing his beauty (*kallos*), which causes Nausicaa to "gaze" at him (*Odyssey* 6.237 *thêeito*) with fascination.

After the sudden death of her husband, Nabal, and at David's request, Abigail goes to meet him riding on a donkey and accompanied by five attending ladies, symbols of her noble status, chastity, and proper behavior (1 Sam 25:42). She respects the decorum and decency of a noble lady. Therefore, the rabbis who depict Abigail as a "Scarlet Woman" attempt to deconstruct an important woman who plays a major role in the David story, trying to discredit, denigrate, and minimize her (Bodi 2013b: 79–95).

The encounter with Nausicaa belongs to the "betrothal type-scene" also described as an "allurement scene" (Forsyth 1979: 107) as in Gen 24:10–61 (Isaac and Rebekah) and Gen 29:1–20 (Jacob and Rachel [and Leah]), which,

> must take place with the future bridegroom, or his surrogate, having journeyed to a foreign land. There he encounters a girl—the term *naʿarah* invariably occurs unless the maiden is identified as so-and-so's daughter—or girls at a well; afterward, the girl or girls rush to bring home the news of the stranger's arrival (the verbs "hurry" and "run" are given recurrent emphasis at this junction of the type-scene); finally, a betrothal is concluded between the stranger and the girl, in the majority of instances, only after he has been invited to a meal. (Alter 1981: 52)

The final meal that Alter mentions can also follow once the newcomer has been subjected to a test of valor, either verbal or athletic, as part of the formal hospitality rites. All these features occur in the encounter between Odysseus and Nausicaa. In the Semitic world, this betrothal pattern is attested already in Old Babylonian times as found in the North Syrian Mari letters (ARM 10 26:10, 11, 13) describing the marriage between the Amorite warlord Zimrī-Līm and dame Šibtu, the daughter of another Sim'alite warlord, Yarim-Līm, from Ḫalab (Aleppo) (Sasson 2006: 247). The Nausicaa episode shows that similar betrothal procedures were shared for centuries by the various inhabitants of the Mediterranean shoreline. Although Odysseus has no interest in marrying Nausicaa, his calculated interactions with her, the ensuing competition with the Phaeacian athletes, the feast (Sherratt 2004: 301–37), and negotiations with her father, King Alcinoös, contain all the elements of the Hebrew as well as North Syrian betrothal procedures.

King Alcinoös and his Queen, Arete, have an incestuous marriage. According to their genealogy, their grandfather, Nausithoös, had two sons, Rhexenor and Alcinoös. Rhexenor was killed while he was a young bridegroom, and he left an only daughter, Arete. Hence, Alcinoös married his niece (*Odyssey* 7.44–45). This feature of incestuous marriages parallels the story of Abraham, who marries his half-sister, Sarah, and Jacob, who marries two sisters, Rachel and Leah.

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In Homer's poem, Odysseus describes the ideal of like-mindedness (*homophrosynē*) in marriage. He refers to his marriage with Penelope as a partnership of intellectual equals, based on true love and a shared outlook on life (Felson-Rubin 1994: 45). Speaking to Nausicaa, Odysseus says, "Show me the city and give me some rags to throw about me. (. . .) For thyself, may the gods grant thee all thy heart desires—a husband and a home and like-mindedness—great gifts. For nothing is finer than when husband and wife live in one house in one accord, a great grief to their foes and joy to their friends. But they themselves know this best" (*Odyssey* 6.178–85).

He also makes clear that such a marriage is a highly unusual occurrence (Bolmarcich 2001: 205). However, as pointed out by Emily Wilson (2017: 2), "It is not usually mentioned that he brings it up only when talking to an impressionable teenage girl, Nausicaa, whom he avoids telling that he's married, and whom he has a strong ulterior motive for buttering up, since his life depends on her help. (We should know by now that powerful older men do not always tell young women the truth)."

Odysseus skillfully suggests that this like-mindedness (*homophrosynē*) is what he has to offer to a woman who would become his wife, and Nausicaa falls into the trap. She falls head over heels in love with this smooth talker. She orders her female servants to hurry and bring the stranger something to eat and drink, to bathe him in the river, to rub his skin with olive oil, and give him a tunic. It was customary for women to wash men, but crafty Odysseus declined. He was perhaps showing good manners, being too dirty to be approached: "Just stand a little off, good maids . . . I will not wash before you, for I am too shy to show myself naked before a lot of girls with pretty curls" (*Odyssey* 6.218–222). Seeing him clean and dressed up, Nausicaa expresses her wish for him to become her husband. "When I saw him, I thought him an ugly creature, but now he is like one of the gods who rule the broad heavens. I only wish that I might have one like him for my husband! I wish it might please him to stay here and live with us!" (*Odyssey* 6.243–246). Her father, King Alcinoös, will later express the identical wish for Odysseus to become Nausicaa's husband (*Odyssey* 7.311–314). However, Odysseus's refusal to be seen naked by Nausicaa's maids should be taken as his refusal to have intimacy with her. It indicates that there will be no marriage. "Seeing nakedness" reminds one of the Hebrew expression "to uncover (someone's) nakedness" (*lĕgallôt ʿerwâ*) in Ezekiel 22:10, Leviticus 18:6, 17,19 about the taboo of sexual intercourse with kinsfolk. It is characteristic of Odysseus, *polytropos*, the Wily One, to get on well with strangers. Like scammers and cheaters, he is particularly skilled in first impressions. However, closer acquaintance generates mistrust, as the Aeolus episode shows. His crew on the boat suspects that Odysseus is concealing treasure from them in the bag containing the sailing winds, and their distrust of him leads to disaster as they open the bag and unleash the winds while he sleeps (*Odyssey* 10.46–49).

The behavior of Odysseus is comparable to that of David concerning Michal. The daughter of King Saul falls head over heels in love with David. "Michal, the daughter of Saul, loved (*wat-teʾĕhab*) David," 1 Sam 18:20, repeated in v. 28, "And Michal the daughter of Saul loved him (*ʾahēbatĕhû*)." The two statements mentioning Michal's love for David form an *inclusio*. Her love, twice stated, has a special significance because it is the only instance in the Hebrew Bible, apart from the Song of Songs

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("he whom my *nepeš* loves" 1:7; 3:1.2.3.4), where it is explicitly said that a woman loves a man. In this episode, Saul makes the offer to David to become his *ḥatan* "son-in-law" repeated five times: (vv. 21.22.23.26.27). For David, marriage to Michal is an opportunity to enter the royal family, advance his ambition, and enhance his social status. In the thirty-six verses that constitute the six fragments of the so-called "Michal Tradition" in the Hebrew Bible, David speaks with Michal only once, and that only at the moment of the final breakup of their relationship in 2 Sam 6:16–23. All that we can infer from the biblical texts is that Michal was a useful rung in the social ladder he sought to climb, but we can never know whether he ever loved her. She is the actor and the speaker. David is a silent and cunning beneficiary of her love (Bodi 2005: 11–22). His relationship with her is always colored by practical considerations. Odysseus exploits Nausicaa's infatuation just as David exploits Michal's love. Odysseus uses Nausicaa to get to her royal parents, who are alone capable of providing him with a new boat and helping him to get back to Ithaca. David uses Michal to gain access to the royal family and advance his career from shepherd to the king's son-in-law.

Saul's request that David should bring 100 foreskins of Philistines as proof of having killed them, although presented as a *mōḥar* or "counter-gift" for the hand of Michal, can also represent the test of his valor and worthiness to enter the royal family, that is, the prenuptial test of the potential groom. Icarius, the king of Sparta and father of Penelope, organized a race competition between suitors before deciding to give his daughter to the winner, in this case, Odysseus. David might have been lucky to have killed one formidable Philistine warrior, Goliath, in 1 Samuel 17, but can he kill 100 of them?

After Nausicaa brings him to her mother and father, Arete and Alcinoös, Odysseus is seated next to the king, who displaced his favorite son, Laodamas (*Odyssey* 7.167–171), to seat him. The next day, Laodamas challenges Odysseus to compete in athletic games and disc throwing (*Odyssey* 8.123–151). There is a parallel with the son of Saul, Jonathan, who is displaced by David. However, Jonathan deals with this displacement by concluding a covenant (*kārat bĕrît*) with David, because "his soul (*nepeš*) was knit to David's soul (*nepeš*) and he loved him (*wayye'ĕhabô*) as his own soul (*nepeš*)" (1 Sam 18:1). In the ancient Near East, these were typical covenantal expressions taken in loyalty oaths. In Assyria, the vassals convoked by King Esarhaddon (680–69 BCE) to ensure loyalty to his successor Assurbanipal (668–627 BCE) are told *kî napšatkuna la tar'amani* "you will love [Assurbanipal] as your *napištu* [= Hebrew *nepeš*]" (Wiseman 1958: 49–50 VI.266–68; Parpola and Watanabe 1988: 38, SAA 2). Solemn oaths were the means used to create legal obligations, and the judicial use of oaths is the same for all societies of the region (Westbrook 2003: 13, 24, 34). It was usual for vassals' loyalty oaths and treaties to be renewed upon succession.

The young Laodamas feels superior to an older man, Odysseus, who is probably twice his age, and is convinced that he can easily defeat him in an athletic contest. By contrast, Jonathan deals differently with his equal, a young man of his age who already enjoys a reputation as an intrepid warrior. He prefers to make a pact with David. Jonathan is subservient to David, but not necessarily a girly man (Tiemeyer 2023).

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The athletic games to which Odysseus is challenged (*Odyssey* 8.215–222) can be seen as part of the test to which a stranger is submitted to prove his worth. These are formal hospitality rites and codes. They anticipate the abuse of hospitality by the suitors on Ithaca at Odysseus' court and the athletic test with the bow awaiting him there. During Odysseus' long absence, many young chieftains of Ithaca and nearby islands became Penelope's suitors.

The phase of dangers and the hostility of nature that comes between Odysseus' departure from Troy and his arrival in Phaeacia and Ithaca, separates two different human worlds, that of the Trojan War, dominated by the heroic code of warriors, and that of family and community life, whose values are centered in several extraordinary women—Nausicaa, Arete, and Penelope. The domestic and social values embodied in these women act as a critique of the code of the male warrior, revealing the inadequacy of the heroic code. "The behavior of warriors is subjected to a searching and critical scrutiny in the *Odyssey*, although not by much direct comment" (Lord 1954: 415). One finds a parallel in the theological critique of violence, war ideology, and its ravages in the David and Bathsheba episode in 2 Samuel 11–12. First, there are several innocent victims in this narrative—Bathsheba, Uriah, and a number of Joab's officers—who are callously sacrificed and murdered to mask Uriah's execution, as well as the victims in the conquered and plundered Ammonite capital, Rabbat Amon, comparable to the plunder and sack of Troy. Second, the Hebrew narrative seems to underline the nefarious consequences of docility and compliance with the violent and unbridled desires of one's superior. Bathsheba's passive compliance with David's insistence on having sex with her and with his scheme to saddle Uriah with David's child corresponds to Joab's blind execution of David's orders. Third, the inordinately frequent use of the word *šālaḥ* "to send" (twelve times in twenty-seven verses of 1 Samuel 11 and twice in Chapter 12) turns the story into a parable (*māšāl*) on the illusion of controlling persons, situations, and events. David, like Odysseus, saves his life *in extremis*. In the aftermath of his affair with Bathsheba, he discovers that he no longer controls anything—his household, his concubines, his sons, his country, and his kingdom (Bodi 2021a: 227–28). Bathsheba in the Hebrew Bible and Helen in the Homeric Epic could be described as the world's most notorious adulteresses. While their respective motivation for adultery differs considerably, in both cases, the consequences are comparable, entailing tragedy and the waste of numerous human lives. Penelope, the *polytropos*, compares herself with Helen and says that not even Helen would have committed adultery had she known the consequences of her act (*Odyssey* 23.218–21): "Not even Zeus' daughter, Helen of Argos, would have made love with a stranger, had she known that the warlike sons of the Achaeans were going to bring her home again to her dear fatherland" (Fredricksmeyer 1997: 489).

In the encounter with Nausica, Odysseus shows exceptional self-control, restraint, and prudence. He has matured and abandoned his initial hubris, boastfulness, and arrogant behavior. At the beginning of his journey, leaving the island of the Cyclops, after having blinded Polyphemus, triumphant and overconfident, Odysseus revealed his name (*Odyssey* 9.500–505). Blinded by hubris, he made it possible for Polyphemus to lay a curse on him. Polyphemus made an exact repetition of Odysseus's name,

Bodi_9781666979138_C003.indd 102 7/13/2026 3:04:19 PM

patronymic, and homeland, making his curse extremely efficacious (*Odyssey* 5.528–535; Brown 1966: 194). On Nausicaa's island, Scheria, among the Phaeacians, Odysseus uses the tactics of evasion and withholds revealing his name to his hosts. He carries caution almost to the point of incivility. Having learned the lesson, he does not want to take any risk (Austin 1972: 4). Travel alone does not suffice to make Odysseus wiser; it is more his interaction with the people he encounters that makes him prudent and circumspect. By the time he reached Nausicaa and her royal parents, Odysseus had learned to regard himself less as a triumphant "sacker of cities" (*ptoluporthion Odyssey* 9.504; Segal 1983: 34) and more of a humble traveler in need of a helping hand.

11. Penelope (Πηνελόπη)—The Emblematic Faithful Wife

The importance of Penelope in the *Odyssey* was noticed already in antiquity. A statement in the *Palatine Anthology* (PA IX.152) opposed the *Iliad* with its two male heroes, Achilles and Hector, to the *Odyssey* with the following epigram: "The toils of Odysseus and the virtuous tears of Penelope over her deserted bed" (Saïd 2010: 365).

Telemachus' visit to Sparta occupies most of Book 4, but in the last 220 lines, the scene shifts back to the desolate conditions reigning in Odysseus' home on Ithaca and the difficult circumstances in which Penelope lives, besieged by suitors and fearing that they may harm her son, Telemachus. It underlines the desperate need for Odysseus's return and presence (Byre 1988: 159–73). Ithaca is described as a society in deep crisis, experiencing the disruption of economic, social, and ethical relations. The three generations of the royal family are represented by Odysseus's old father, Laertes. His exclusion from the throne, however, is curious considering the aged ruler Nestor, who still manages his domain in Pylos. In Ithaca, instead of Laertes, his daughter-in-law, Penelope, reigns with a young son who is neither taken seriously as an adult nor as a potential king (Vidal-Naquet 1970: 1291). Penelope's special position is explained either by Odysseus' absence or by a reflection of some form of matriarchy from an earlier time (Hirvonen 1968: 135–62). On the opposite side of the Mediterranean, it would correspond to the time when Deborah ruled (*špṭ*) among the Hebrew tribes (Judg 4:4 *ûdĕbôrâ . . . šōpṭâ . . . bĕʿēt hahîʾ*). In 1 Samuel 25, while her husband Nabal is drunk, Abigail treats, welcomes, and negotiates directly with David and his men. In the absence of her husband, she assumes the role of the owner and manager, like the Nuzi (*šākin bīti*) and Neo-Assyrian (*šākintu*), female "household administrator" (Bodi 2021a: 49–81). Moreover, just like David, who, with Abigail in 1 Samuel 25, inherits her dead husband's domain, Penelope is supposed to transfer Odysseus's palace and domain to the new husband she was asked to choose. In *Odyssey* 15.522, Telemachus says that the one who would marry his mother would inherit his father's privileges (*géras*), that is, the royal prerogatives. The somewhat conflicting views on the inheritance of a royal domain through the female line in the *Odyssey* may reflect the presence of different poet-bards. It may also be a projection of an earlier situation. Telemachus is perceived as being too weak to assume royal rule over Ithaca. Delcourt

Bodi_9781666979138_C003.indd 103 7/13/2026 3:04:19 PM

(1981: 161–4) seems to make a difference between inheriting royal privileges and material inheritance through a royal woman.

Penelope is the dominating female figure in the *Odyssey*. She is almost the only wife of the heroes who took part in the Trojan War and who did not succumb to the demons of the husband's absence (Grimal 1999: 356). As the spouse of the main hero, she takes care of the house (*oikos*) during Odysseus's long absence, sharing this responsibility with her husband's old friend, Mentor, and Euryclea, his wet nurse. Penelope is also assisted by Telemachus, her son, Eumaeus, the swineherd, and Philotetius, the cowherd. She is the female administrator of Odysseus' household, first for the ten years of the war with Troy and subsequently for a further ten years waiting for him. Altogether, Penelope spends twenty years in tearful loneliness, waiting for her husband to come home from war and the beds of two beautiful chthonic goddesses. She is caring for her son, Telemachus, and warding off the advances of 108 young, insolent, and abusive suitors who prey on this presumed widow. Years are passing, and the hope of seeing her husband again is waning. Penelope is as crafty as her husband, Odysseus. She devises a plan to delay choosing which of the suitors to marry, while the latter are besieging her house and living off her hospitality. But time is running out, and she can no longer dupe the suitors with her trick of weaving by day and unpicking her work at night, having told them that she cannot marry until the shroud for her father-in-law, Laertes, is finished.

If Penelope's undying love, faith, and hope are to be requited, if the wrong that the suitors are doing to her is to be avenged, Odysseus must return. This is underlined by the structure of the *Odyssey*, which begins with what is happening in Odysseus' home in Ithaca. Penelope illustrates hope, which is desperate, unreasonable, and against all expectations. She is a literary type and an ideal, the incarnation of the faithful wife, the way a noble Greek queen should be, according to the epic.

Penelope's bed trick is another test that Odysseus must pass to win back her trust. It is not the primal sexual conquest that Circe demands but rather his knowledge of the shared secret of their marriage bed. One of its legs was made out of a living olive tree, still fixed to its roots in the ground. Whoever wants admission to Penelope's bed must have the secret knowledge that only Odysseus possesses, that the bed is unmovably rooted in the ground. This fixed post is a symbol and an affirmation of the continuity of their family, the responsibility to life, and the nurture of the fruit of their love, their progeny, and the sacred bonds on which human social order rests. In ancient Greek culture, the olive tree symbolized peace, wisdom, victory, and prosperity. Athena, goddess of wisdom, gifted the olive tree to the city named after her, making it the symbol of prosperity. Olive branches were also used to crown winners. The olive tree in which Odysseus carved their conjugal bed carries the symbolism of the deep-rootedness of their union. Odysseus's own life and progeny are "rooted" in Penelope and their conjugal bed. Using cunning (*mētis*), she successfully prods her husband by pretending to have moved the bed that he built, implying that she severed it from its roots, a reminder that she has the power to hurt him by sleeping with other men. "She's canny, she's strong-willed, she has grit, she has vivid imagination, she's loyal, she's competent, mostly single mother who shows deep love for her difficult, moody son, and she keeps

Bodi_9781666979138_C003.indd 104 7/13/2026 3:04:19 PM

a big and complex household running for two decades" (Wilson 2017: 2). Penelope is the Greek ideal of the Hebrew *'ēšet ḥayîl* "the woman of valor," "the capable wife," or "strong woman," in Prov 31:10. The Septuagint renders this expression with *gunaika andreian*, literally "a woman with manly courage," or "bravura." In *Odyssey* 4.791–3 occurs the only Homeric lion-comparison describing a female character, Penelope being defined as "male lion" (*leōn*), a heroic warrior (de Jong 2001: 120; Foley 1984: 59–78). It underpins her like-mindedness with Odysseus. Being cornered by suitors, under pressure from others, and without the possibility of escape is Penelope's predicament. Unlike Odysseus, who has the ear of the goddess Athena, Penelope has no help from the gods. She has to rely entirely on her wits and cunning. The lion comparison draws husband and wife into the world of similes, where Penelope stands in a dialectic tension with Odysseus: "At first sight, the comparison of Penelope with a lion may seem rather odd, but it reminds us how close the unity is between Odysseus, the aggressive lion-avenger, soon to return, and his wife, the lion encircled by its hunters and at a momentary loss; she shares some of his fierce will to live, and the choice of a lion in the simile suggests that the misfortunes of the royal house are only temporary: the lion can be expected to turn on its hunters and destroy them" (Podlecki 1971: 84).

The lion is also a symbol of cruelty. The simile is in the service of a heroic worldview that does not tolerate offense and is based on revenge. The slightest offense affected the "honor" (*timē*) and the social standing of the one offended. The one whose honor was outraged was under obligation to restore his (*timē*) through vengeance. Indeed, the destruction of the 108 suitors is teamwork. Penelope befuddles the suitors with a weaving trick, a symbol of the spider's net in which they are caught and killed. Odysseus and her son Telemachus do the killing. While lamenting over Odysseus' absence, Penelope calls him twice *thymoleōn* "lion-hearted" (*θυμολέων*, *Odyssey* 4.724–6 = 6.814–6), which encapsulates the virtue of courage but also characteristics such as aggressiveness, assertiveness, decisiveness, fortitude, and the capacity to fight and restore one's honor (Turkeltaub 2015: 281). The Homeric Epics never tire of calling for revenge. Realizing that her lover, Paris, is fearful and lacks courage, Helen expresses her disappointment, "would that I had been wife to a better man, who could feel the indignation of his fellows and their many revilings" (*Iliad* 6.351–3). The man who is unable to wash an affront is not worthy of a Greek noblewoman's love.

Penelope resembles Abigail in 1 Samuel 25, who is courageous and fully assumes responsibility for her bad-mannered husband, Nabal. She takes fast and concrete measures to appease David's murderous rage. The latter is bent on avenging the outrage that Nabal inflicted on him and his men, and is ready to make a carnage. The ancient Hebrews shared the common Mediterranean anthropology of honor and shame, associated with revenge. Abigail's intervention and conciliatory words calm down David's wrath and help him exercise restraint. "Abigail's intelligence and charm match David's and suggest that her first husband, who is her opposite, does not deserve her" (McKenzie 2000: 180). Similarly, Penelope's resourcefulness matches that of Odysseus. She, too, is *polytropos*, a woman of many a turn, resourceful, and versatile as much as her husband (Emlyn-Jones 1984: 1–18; Marquart 1985: 32–48). The significant difference in the David and Nabal episode described in 1 Samuel 25 is Abigail's

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restraining and civilizing intervention. With her persuasiveness, she succeeds in diverting an Odysseus-like final bloodbath. The specific contribution of this Hebrew story is the deconstruction of the Mediterranean ideology of revenge. According to Girard (1987: 63), the lasting impact of the deconstruction of violence in biblical texts is the abolition of the spiral of violence by leaving the revenge in the hands of God (North 1985: 1–27). By contrast, sharing the Homeric ideal of *agathos*, "good, appropriate behavior," an ancient Greek would have felt that, as a father, the god Poseidon was justified in wanting to kill Odysseus and avenge his son Polyphemus, whatever his son's original crime. Moreover, in the classical Greek perspective, the final carnage in the *Odyssey* is perceived as appropriate behavior.

In contrast to Odysseus' eagerness to attain Ithaca, his restraint once there, and exceptional self-control are displayed to such a degree that even his patroness, Athena, who is surprised, notes as remarkable (*Odyssey* 13.330–336). In this context, Athena can be perceived as the image of his rationally acting self. There is first the difficulty of defeating such a large and powerful group as the 108 suitors, and second, there is his own need for inquiring, testing, and gathering information about his wife, son, and household, as well as the necessary time of adaptation and the psychological implications of return after twenty years of absence. Odysseus' return has a slow, tense rhythm as he faces these contingencies. The return of Odysseus can be regarded as a return to the human condition, to the familiar, human-scale realities of Ithaca, his domain, as well as the renewal of basic human relations with his wife, son, parents, friends, and servants. The ordeals he undergoes, disguised as a beggar appealing to the hospitality of his wife's suitors, the blows and insults he must suffer without answering their violence, require self-mastery that he has not shown before. He displays Stoic qualities of endurance and restraint.

The *homophrosynē* – "like-mindedness" between disguised Odysseus and Penelope increases during their exchange in Book 19. He addresses her for the first time in the halls of his palace: "Lady (. . .) for truly your glory (*kleos*) has reached the broad heaven" (*Odyssey* 19.108–109). The heroic fame (*kleos*) is here placed in a new light. A noble queen keeping her fidelity to her absent husband in the palace has as much *kleos* as a warrior facing his enemies on the open field of battle. She receives this formula of heroic honor in the form of a reversed simile from her husband and king, disguised as a starving, homeless beggar (Segal 1983: 30; Foley 1984: 63). In real life, instead of *kleos*, which should give her joy, she has only grief (*achos*) (*Odyssey* 19.129; 18.256). However, thanks to the bards, her name and exploits are immortalized.

Penelope cannot believe that her husband has returned. She fears that it is perhaps some god in disguise, as in the story of Alcmene (mother of Heracles), and tests him by ordering her female servant, Eurycleia, to move the bed in their wedding chamber. Odysseus protests that this cannot be done since he made the bed himself and knows that one of its legs is a living olive tree. Penelope then finally accepts that he truly is her husband, a moment that highlights their *homophrosynē*. Odysseus, meeting Penelope on her own ground, can enlist their separate guile (*doloi*) jointly in the reestablishment, rather than destruction, of their house and their fame (*kleos*) (Segal 1983: 32).

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12. The Abuse of Hospitality (xenia) at Odysseus' Palace

As pointed out by Julian Pitt-Rivers (1977: 94), the whole epic of the *Odyssey* may be viewed as a study in the law of hospitality, or the issue of how to deal with strangers. Phaeacia is used by the bard as a model of the proper social order to be contrasted with the confusion Odysseus finds when he reaches home. Both in the Nausicaa episode at the Phaeacian court as well as at Odysseus' palace in Ithaca, there is an athletic contest associated with codes of hospitality. The suitors who besiege Penelope abuse the hospitality of the house by feasting on the flocks, consuming her wine, and sleeping with her female servant slaves. The abuse of *xenia*, "hospitality," occurs in the killing of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra in Euripides' play *Electra* (Verheij 2016: 760–94). The issue of hospitality is another feature that the *Odyssey* shares with the Hebrew Bible (1 Sam 25) and the literature of the ancient Near East.

When Odysseus appears at the gate of his palace in Ithaca disguised as a tramp, he is offered food by Telemachus and invited to beg at the table of the nobles sitting and eating in the dining hall (*Odyssey* 17.345). He is insulted and physically assaulted by Altinoös, the ringleader of the suitors, who were eating, drinking, feasting, and sexually abusing the female slaves (*Odyssey* 17.375). They are profiting from their host's hospitality and refusing to extend the same hospitality to a beggar. Telemachus reproaches Altinoös, saying: "You like eating better than giving!" (*Odyssey* 17.404). The selfish and callous attitude of Altinoös parallels that of Nabal in 1 Samuel 25, who holds a feast for his shearers but refuses to give food to David and his men. From the start of the story, the narrator engages in character assassination by describing Nabal as "surly and mean" (1 Sam 25:3). In the rest of his interaction with David and his men, Nabal is coarse, boorish, and acting as a swaggering bully.

As in Troy, Odysseus in disguise is spying on the suitors, buying time, and planning the appropriate strategy to execute his revenge. Altinoös throws a chair at Odysseus, wounding him in the shoulder (*Odyssey* 17.463–464). Like Abigail in 1 Samuel 25, when Penelope hears that in her hall a beggar, a stranger, has been insulted, hit, and injured, she realizes the magnitude of the outrage against the sacred custom of hospitality. She utters words that amount to a prophecy about the way Altinoös will meet his death: "So may Archer Apollo strike him!" (*Odyssey* 17.495). Penelope invites the beggar to come to her, hoping that he might bring some news from her absent husband, Odysseus.

Book 20 mentions an additional outrage done to Odysseus. Ctesippos, one of the suitors, is described as an "iniquitous or brutish fellow" (*aner athemistia* 20.287), comparable to Nabal, who is designated as a "brutish fellow and evil in his actions" (*qāšeh wĕraʿ maʿălālîm*, 1 Sam 25:3). He picks a cow's hoof out of the basket and throws it straight at Odysseus (*Odyssey* 20.299), which he manages to dodge. Theoclymenos, the hereditary seer of Apollo, exercising second sight, interprets this despicable act of humiliation as a bad omen, foretells the suitors' imminent death, and leaves the palace, having anticipated the pending bloodbath.

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In Book 21.66, Penelope announces before the suitors and the incognito hero an athletic contest, offering herself to the winner as the prize. Whoever can string Odysseus's rigid bow and shoot an arrow through twelve axe shafts will have her as a wife. When the contest of the bow begins, none of the suitors can string Apollo's bow. After all the suitors have given up, the disguised Odysseus comes along, bends the bow, shoots the arrow, and wins the contest. Having done so, assisted by his son, Telemachus, and two of his former servants, Eumaeus the swineherd and Philoetius, the cowherd, in Book 22, he slaughters the suitors, beginning with Antinoös, whom he finds drinking from Odysseus' cup. After the bloodbath, Odysseus tells the female slave servants who slept with the suitors to clean up the mess of blood and corpses of slain suitors, and then has those women hanged. Penelope is excluded from the vengeance, being sent to her chamber before the carnage begins (Nickel 2010: 29–54).

The threefold sequence, constituted first of a banquet, followed by the challenge to an athletic contest, leading to acquiring a wife, is the same as in the *Marriage of Martu* in Mesopotamia (see Chapter 3. Section 14). The contest and killing of 108 suitors partially overlap with David's killing of 100 Philistines, the cutting off of their foreskins, and obtaining the hand of Michal in 1 Sam 18:25, 27. It indicates a literary topos, shared by the epic compositions of various cultures of the Mediterranean seashore. While executing the suitors, Odysseus cuts off the nose, ears, and penis of Melanthios and throws them to the dogs (*Odyssey* 22.474–479). The Greek plural noun employed here, *mēdea*, comes from *mēdos*, meaning "genitals" (*Odyssey* 22.476). The term occurs three times in the *Odyssey* (6.129, Odysseus before Nausicaa; and in 18.67, 87). In these last two references, Antinoös, the ringleader of the suitors, threatens Odysseus, disguised as a beggar, that if he loses the fight with another beggar, Iros, he will cut off his nose, ears, and penis and throw them to the dogs. It refers to a traditional punishment inflicted on the one who loses a fight in particular circumstances. In the case of David and the foreskins of 100 Philistines, a traditional procedure was given a religious connotation, giving the combat a stamp of "holy war," fighting the uncircumcised. The mutilation of body parts, including the cutting of genitals in the context of battle or combat, is a practice found in ancient Greece, among the Hebrews, Egyptians, and Assyrians. In the Old Assyrian Sargon Legend, Sargon the Great (2334–2279 BCE) boasts, "As to the Amorites, instead of tearing off their nose, I cut off their penis (*i-ša-ar-šu-nu* from *išaru* "penis")" (lines 55–7) (Alster and Oshima 2007: 10 and 15). In Egypt, the Pharaoh Ramses III (1182–1151 BCE) boasts that his warriors took 12,555 pieces of the cut-off genitals (*qrnt*) from their enemies as trophies (Bodi 2005: 20–22). The Annals of the Assyrian King Sennacherib (704–681 BCE) state: "I filled the pl[ain with the corpses of their warriors like grass. I cut off (their) lips and (thus destroyed their pride). I cut off their han]ds like the stems of cucu]mbers" (Grayson and Novotny 2014: 196 text 145, lines 1′–4′). The practice of body mutilation seems to have been common to most of the cultures of the Mediterranean shoreline.

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13. Abigail's Intervention in 1 Samuel 25 in Light of Ancient Near Eastern Hospitality Customs

Concerning David's conduct toward Nabal in 1 Samuel 25, instead of viewing his behavior as "something more like a gangster" (Barr 1969a: 22) or a case of "protection racket" (Alter 1999: 153) as is usually done, one may offer an alternative view. The text reflects a literary topos based on an ancient Near Eastern hospitality custom that has been breached by Nabal. The Masoretic text calls Nabal a Calebite (*klby*) (1 Sam 25:3). The Syriac version plays with the root √*klb*, which means "dog," while the Septuagint renders it with an adjective (*kunikos*) meaning "dog-like," from which the English word "cynical" is derived. These versions show that from the earliest times, Nabal's refusal to offer hospitality to David and his men was perceived as churlish, lacking basic humanity, and a violation of the hospitality code. Nabal is an opulent farmer from Karmel in the vicinity of Hebron with three thousand sheep and a thousand goats, who offers a feast for his shearers and yet refuses to give food to David, his men, and starving outcasts. He does not respect the ancient custom of hospitality, which is sacred in ancient Near Eastern cultures. Moreover, when in 1 Sam 25:7 David's envoys say to the rich owner of herds, Nabal, "Nothing of theirs (Nabal's shepherds' flocks) was missing," repeated in v. 16, "they were a wall around us both night and day," and in v. 21, the statements imply initially favorable contact between David's and Nabal's men. However, the latter refuses to share his banquet with David and his men.

This "code of honor" is linked to rites of hospitality, permitting outsiders to integrate into a community. The following four stages have been identified: (1) An exchange of conventional words, carefully avoiding offending the other party—something that David and his men practiced with Nabal's shepherds, but Nabal did not. (2) A meal is offered to celebrate the arrival of the stranger when food, drink, and some convivial moments are shared—elements which Nabal refused to share with David. (3) The occasion of a toast often becomes a prelude to a challenge followed by a verbal joust or an athletic confrontation. The stranger is put to the test to gauge his strength or depth. Its goal is to judge the newcomer according to the norms of the community. His strength, courage, quick wit, or any other quality may be tested. (4) The competition ends with a peaceful conclusion, followed by an agreement and the acceptance of the newcomer (Pitt-Rivers 1977: 94–112). Garsiel's (2013: 66–78) analysis of the exchange between Nabal and David reveals the presence of a subtle verbal joust. Nabal's behavior reflects the outright rejection of extending any form of hospitality to David and his men.

Referring to the Akkadian *Myth of Adapa* and *Ištar's Descent*, Anne Kilmer (1971) points out that initial contact is crucial. If leniency is gained through the manipulation of hospitality rules with flattery or humble supplication, the host will be bound to offer protection to the guest. The leniency consists of a friendly smile, if not in a direct salutation. Odysseus's success in being accepted as a refugee by the Phaeacian queen and king was probably due to the initial contact he established with their daughter, Nausicaa. In the case of David and Nabal, several verses imply initially favorable

Bodi_9781666979138_C003.indd 109 7/13/2026 3:04:19 PM

contact between David's and Nabal's men (1 Sam 25:7, 15–16, 21): "The salutation is as good as uttering an oath inasmuch as it commits the speaker. This is why a Bedouin may be silent to a stranger or will question him before offering a salutation, and this is why a stranger may first approach a small child, for once the child has returned the salutation, the family may stand bound by the rule of hospitality" (Kilmer 1971: 306).

Nabal would have been bound to respond favorably to the request of David's men because his shepherds had already practiced some form of bonding. David sends ten messengers with the specific salutation using *šālôm* trice in a "trigemination formula" akin to a blessing: "Peace (*šlm*) be to you, and peace (*šlm*) be to your house and peace (*šlm*) be to all that you have" (v. 6) followed by the request for hospitality, that is, food and protection. David expected to receive these in return since he had, in the past, given hospitality and protection to Nabal's shepherds. Nabal's violent refusal is a breach of the traditional rules of hospitality between the sedentary farmers and nomadic groups living on the outskirts of settled regions. Having heard of David's plan to destroy Nabal and all that belongs to him, Abigail rushes out to meet David and his retinue with all the trappings of hospitality: bread, wine, meat, grain, and fruit. In v. 28, she says, "Forgive the offense (*pš*ʿ) of your handmaid." The term is highly significant since it is used for the transgression of covenants taken under oath (Hos 8:1; Jer 3:13). Moreover, in Amos 5:12, one commits a (*pš*ʿ) "when turning away a needy at the gate" (v. 13), implying an unwritten law of hospitality toward the beggars, poor, and needy. As pointed out by Knierim (1979: 491), "The term first appears as a technical term in the context of non-cultic legal regulations, lawsuits, and disputes with legal implications."

Abigail's prompt intervention prevents the bloodbath, saves her servants from massacre, her husband from certain death, and the lives of the entire household. With her servants, she readies food for David and his men and does everything to repair her husband's breach of the traditional codes of the hospitality rites.

14. Hospitality Customs in Ancient Mesopotamia

Ancient Near Eastern literature has numerous references attesting to hospitality rites, with a highly coded pattern of behavior. It appears in *The Myth of Adapa* (Foster 2005: 525), *Nergal and Ereškigal* (Foster 2005: 506), *Ištar's Descent to the Netherworld* (Foster 2005: 498), *The Gilgameš Epic* tablet 2 (George 2003, 1: 159), and *Inana and Enki* (Farber-Flügge 1973). When Adapa arrives in heaven, he is offered food, water, a clean garment, and oil for anointing. These items stand for the most basic expression of humanity, being traditional tokens of hospitality (Adapa Fragment B: 29′–32′).

In Mesopotamia, the rules of hospitality stipulate that every newly arrived foreigner in a city should be dressed in festive clothes and fed at a banquet offered in his honor. This is followed by a contest with clearly defined norms between him and his hosts, ending with a winner and a loser. The confrontation can take the form of either wrestling or an oratory joust (Glassner 1990: 60–75; 2013: 60–5). Pitt-Rivers (1977: 96) has identified the four constitutive elements of the hospitality code for the eastern part

Bodi_9781666979138_C003.indd 110 7/13/2026 3:04:19 PM

of the Mediterranean seashore. The *Epic of Gilgameš* presents one such story where a woman plays an important role. The main protagonists are the Mesopotamian culture hero, who gives his name to the epic, and his companion, the wild man Enkidu. The latter lives in the steppe, nursed and raised by his mother, a gazelle (*ṣabītu*), and his father, a wild donkey (*akkannu*) (Gurney 1954: 92 and 94). Enkidu is the not-yet-human foreigner, the representative of the semi-nomadic inhabitants of the steppe and their lifestyle, who wants to assimilate into the city of Uruk. At the same time, Enkidu stands for the atavistic remnant of early humanity (*lullu amēlu*), the primordial man (Mobley 1997: 222). The wild man is the leader of his herd, which he protects by tearing the nets prepared by hunters and by filling in the trap holes they had dug. Annoyed, the hunters decide to capture Enkidu and elaborate a strategy to tame him. He was to be weaned from living with animals in the steppe, initiated into sexual pleasure with a woman, and transformed into a sociable human, ready to integrate the urban community. Given over to the expert care of a courtesan named the "Joyful Lass" (in Akkadian *ḫarimtu šamḫat*), the plan proves to be a success. As soon as he is sexually initiated, the wild animals run away from Enkidu. The text states that through sex with a courtesan, "Enkidu had defiled his body so pure" (SB I 199; George 2003 1: 551; 2: 798). The verb *šuḫḫû* used in this line seems to denote the harmful, defiling aspects of sex, like English "fornicate" (Westenhololz and Koch-Westenholz 2000: 439). It signifies defilement through illicit sexual congress. He had become impure to the animals from his sexual contact with the courtesan who stands for civilized, urban life. Enkidu's life with animals is presented here as his time of innocence. Living in the steppe was his Garden of Eden. This sequence implies that before his sexual initiation by the Joyful Lass, Enkidu copulated with wild animals. Elena Cassin (1987: 36–49) has shown how, owing to the courtesan's decisive humanizing intervention, Enkidu's life takes the side of civilization. The courtesan in the *Epic of Gilgameš* is a literary topos corresponding to the prostitute Raḥab in the Hebrew narrative in Joshua 2. Both Šamḫat and Raḥab, are representatives par excellence of urban civilization in Mesopotamia and the land of Canaan, and symbols of acculturation. The first contact of the nomadic Hebrews with the sophisticated city life in Canaan occurs through a courtesan. In both ancient Near Eastern literary traditions, the encounter with a sexually free woman symbolizes the transition from the wild and nomadic lifestyle to the civilized, urban type. This encounter is a literary topos indicating a status change where the nomad becomes sedentary and an acculturated city dweller (Bodi 2013d: 3–18).

Moreover, an echo of the story of the wild man, Enkidu, living and copulating with the animals, might be found in the rabbinic interpretation of the first man, Adam, who, likewise, before discovering lovemaking with the first woman, Eve, was mating with various animals that were brought to him. In Gen 2:23, Adam exclaims, "This time, bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh (*wayyō'mer hā'ādām zō't happaʿam ʿeṣem mēʿăṣāmay ûbāśār mibĕśārî*)." Commenting on this verse in the Rabbinic Bible *Miqra'ôt Gĕdolôt*, Rashi (1045–105) refers to the Talmudic explanation found in *b. Yebam.* 63a (Steinsaltz 1985. vol. 1, 266), "It is taught that Adam came upon all the animals and beasts and he was not satisfied until he came upon Eve" (מלמד שבא אדם על כל בהמה וחיה ולא נתקררה דעתו עד שבא על חוה). Rashi said that Adam's exclamation "this time" implies that he was previously

mating with animals, literally, "he came upon" (*bō*ʿ*al*) all the animals and the beasts in search of a mate, but he was not satisfied until he met a woman and made love to her. According to this exegetical tradition, in the Genesis account too, the woman has a fundamental, initiating role, allowing a man to cross the boundary from animality to humanity. The Joyful Lass makes Enkidu discover the pleasures of intercourse with a courtesan, leading to potentially life-giving sexuality with a future wife, essential for the survival of the human community (Lawee 2007: 33–66). This example confirms the view that the Midrash often tends to remythologize the biblical text, while the multiple redactors of the Masoretic text tended to do the opposite, purging ancient Hebrew traditions from mythology. The Rabbinic exegesis follows the stream of tradition of several episodes of the *Gilgameš Epic*, bringing to the fore what the Masoretic text and the redactors of the Genesis story censored.

In the Old Babylonian version, Enkidu and the courtesan engage in epic lovemaking for seven days and seven nights (*Gilg*. 2 ii 45–54), while in the Standard Babylonian version (SB 1 188–94) Enkidu makes love with the Joyful Lass for six days and seven nights: "Enkidu was sitting before the courtesan. The two of them were making love together, he forgot the wild where he was born. For [seven] days and seven nights, Enkidu was erect and coupled with Šamkat. The courtesan opened her mouth, saying to Enkidu: 'I look at you, Enkidu, you are like a god *kīma ilim*(diĝir), why with the animals do you range (*ta-at-ta-*[*n*]*a-la-ak*) through the wild?'" (George 2003, 1: 175; I have replaced the word "harlot" with "courtesan").

A new cuneiform tablet of the *Gilgameš Epic* shows that Enkidu's seven-day sexual marathon was repeated twice. The Joyful Lass seduces him with her charms, and, after the first seven-day session, weans him away from the wild animals of the steppe, his former companions. He was no longer able to run as fast as the gazelles, and the herd shunned him and his defiled body. The second seven-day session civilizes him, preparing him for his new urban life and integration in the human community (George 2018: 10–21). The courtesan clothes the wild man with a part of her dress, covering his nakedness. Enkidu and the animals in the *Gilgameš Epic*, Circe pressed by Odysseus to bring back his men from animals to humans, as well as Adam and the animals in Genesis 2 in the rabbinic tradition, offer three different versions of beastly existence and of the mediating role of women in transcending the condition from animality to humanity.

The Joyful Lass is also the source of the curse of civilization, as if urban life carried with it a deadly aspect. This sexually free woman is present throughout Enkidu's initiation journey, acting as a mediator, allowing the passage of the hero from one domain to another, facilitating the transformation of the stranger, of which he was the absolute model, into a full-fledged member of the human and urban community. In doing so, she is nothing less than a representative and a personification of the goddess Ištar, whose role she plays. Ištar is the goddess of fertility on earth, but she spends half of the year in the Netherworld. She is a great mediator who facilitates the passage from the world of the living into the world of the dead, while also providing the transformation of non-acculturated beings into members of human society. As pointed out by Glassner (2002: 162), in the context of the *Gilgameš Epic*, "the feminine sex serves as a powerful

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metaphor of the mediation between the outside and the inside, the wild and the civilized, between a social status and another one, in short, it plays the role of a catalyst of inversion."

However, Enkidu's initiation into the life of human society does not stop there. He remains a stranger to the inhabitants of the city of Uruk and still needs to go through the subsequent stages, allowing him to become a full member of the urban community. Enkidu's encounter with Šamḫat underlines a sharp nature-culture contrast. She is the agent of acculturation. Besides human lovemaking, she also teaches him how to bathe, anoint, and clothe himself, and how to eat human fare—bread. As Girard (2017: 56) points out, "There would be no human mind, no education, no transmission of culture without mimesis." Enkidu becomes humanized by imitating Šamḫat's behavior. After drinking seven kegs of beer, he breaks into song. Only when the wild man, Enkidu, becomes humanized and civilized is he ready to enter the city of Uruk and attempt to curb Giglameš's tyrannical rule, the latter having turned his city into a place of oppression, exploitation, abuse, and harassment of both male and female citizens (Moran 1995: 2327–36).

Girard's (1987: 283) theory of the "mimetic desire" applies to Enkidu. When the latter hears of the extraordinary privileges enjoyed by Gilgameš, who, owing to the practice of *ius primae noctis*, has unlimited access to the females in his city of Uruk, Enkidu too desires some of these benefits. To obtain these privileges, Enkidu continues his journey to Uruk, where several episodes follow, ending with the last step of his initiation into civilized life. The stages that Enkidu undergoes to achieve integration into the Uruk urban community resemble those described by Pitt-Rivers. In the case of Enkidu, however, we note the central role occupied by a woman as an agent of acculturation. (1) He is initially offered a meal made from bread and beer when he reaches the hut of the shepherds, accompanied by the courtesan. (2) Enkidu is revolted by the news he receives concerning Gilgameš, who exercises extraordinary sexual privilege over local women, the so-called *droit du seigneur* or the "lord's right" (Landsberger 1968: 41–105; Westenholz and Koch-Westenholz 2000: 441 *ius primae noctis*). It generates in him the mimetic desire to obtain a wife. According to Jacobsen and Kilmer, Gilgamesh also abuses the young men of Uruk. The poet describes the King of Uruk's unrivaled sexual predatoriness with a "martial simile for royal genitalia" (Asante 2017: 46): "[Gilgameš's] weapons are (ever) raised" (*ul īši šāninamma tebû kakkū*-[*šu*]) (*Gilg*. I ii 54 Standard Babylonian Version).[5] The context of this line is Gilgameš's oppression of the citizens of Uruk. (3) He confronts Gilgameš in a wrestling combat where Enkidu is vanquished as the weaker one. According to Finet (1996: 50), in the description of their wrestling match, Enkidu, the wild man from the steppe, has his knee bent while Gilgameš has his foot on the ground, meaning that he was still standing upright, unvanquished, while Enkidu's posture of a bent knee indicates defeat. (4) The two adversaries eventually become friends, but having lost the athletic contest, Enkidu does not obtain a wife. He probably becomes the passive homosexual partner of Gilgameš (Jacobsen 1930: 62–74; Kilmer 1992: 264–68; Cooper 2002: 73–85; Ziegler

[5] (George 2003: 1, 543), line 65: "He has no equal, [his] weapons being ready."

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2011: 289–305). One anthropologist argues that by exercising "the lord's right," allowing him to sire many sons, Gilgamesh strengthens the hold of his dynasty in his city and over the hostile territories (Lanoue 2016: 553–73).

In the Sumerian version, Enkidu remains a servant of Gilgameš, while in the Akkadian one, he becomes his friend. From his creation until his death, Enkidu serves as the *Doppelgänger* of the hero, Gilgameš. The relationship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu recalls that of David and Jonathan. Susan Ackerman (2005: 218–22) argues that Jonathan's willingness to take the feminine role is used by the Samuel redactor to justify, using an "erotic apologetic," in David's becoming king. For David Halperin (1990: 75–87), however, David's use of the eroticized language of marriage when mourning Jonathan's death reflects the depth of male bonding (Tiemeyer 2023).

Another Mesopotamian example of hospitality where the hero obtains a wife comes from the Sumerian composition known as *The Marriage of Martu*, describing the fate of the nomadic god of the Amurrum (Akkadian equivalent of Sumerian Martu)—Amorites in the myth bearing his name (Bottéro and Kramer 1989: 430; Klein 1997: 99; Charpin 2015a: 31). The god Martu is presented as a nomad living in the vicinity of the Sumerian city of Ninab. He sells his strength as a manual worker to the city-dwellers in exchange for a meager reward: a ration of bread for a single man, or two loaves for a married one. Having received two rations of bread, this error in food distribution arouses a desire in him to take a wife. He seizes the occasion of a feast to inquire about a prospective wife, participates in the contests and tournaments usual to this type of festival, and comes out as the winner in all the contests. As a reward, he asks for and obtains the hand of the king's daughter. Again, the narrative follows the four-stage stereotypical sequence: (1) A meal is offered, which in this case takes the form of food rations offered to manual laborers who came to the city looking for work. (2) A challenge is set: the error in the allotted distribution of loaves. (3) Normative contests are organized. (4) The winner of the contest obtains a wife. A stranger who desires to establish himself permanently within a community must rise to the occasion and accept the challenge, at the risk of being rejected. Once the challenge is accepted, he has the possibility of obtaining a place in the welcoming community.

15. The Topos of the Woman Who Brings Death

The woman brings life since she alone can give birth. The name of the alewife, Šidurī, who advises Gilgameš to find himself a wife and sire progeny, is telling (*Gilg.* 10.ii.14′-iii.1–14; George 2003, 1: 278). Her name means, "She is my rampart." The woman is a man's rampart against death and oblivion. She offers a man a life-saving option in achieving continuity and a semblance of immortality through the progeny he can sire with her. Within this particular worldview, a man needs a woman to achieve a form of immortality. However, the woman can also be an agent of death. Penelope is one such wife. On the one hand, she gave birth to Telemachus, securing the continuity of Odysseus' line, and on the other hand, her role in the *Odyssey* brings about the final

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carnage. She is the direct cause of the deaths of the 108 suitors and the twelve female slave servants.

Odysseus was born to Anticleia, whose name means "anti-fame," a noblewoman, but was nursed by Eurycleia, "broad fame," a lower-class female servant. When he returns home to Ithaca, plotting to kill all of Penelope's suitors, Odysseus enters his house disguised as a beggar. Eurycleia washes his feet and recognizes him by a scar just above his knee. In his youth, he was injured by the tusk of a wild boar while hunting with his grandfather Autolycus on the forest-clad Mount Parnassos. With an outburst of violence, he asserts his authority over her. Gripping her by the throat, he says, "Nanny, d'ye want to destroy me? . . . silence! Not another soul must know. Or . . . I will not spare even you, my nurse, when I kill the other women in this house" (*Odyssey* 19.467; Rouse 1937: 222). The particular explicit literary style mentioning Odysseus' internal dialogue in Book 19, in which he remembers all the details of how he incurred this scar, and when his wet nurse recognizes her master, was contrasted by Auerbach (1953; Bodi 2002: 465–73) with the more concise Hebrew style in Genesis 22, described as "fraught with background." By not revealing his secret, Eurycleia acts the same way as Penelope, his wife. She also informs Odysseus of his servant female slaves who have been unfaithful to Penelope during his absence, by becoming the bed partners of Penelope's suitors. Among them was Melantho, whose name means "the dark one."

His son, Telemachus, hangs the twelve female slave servants whom Eurycleia identifies. In this aspect, Penelope is the woman who brings death, the catalyst in the assassination, just like Abishag the Shunammite, who is the cause of Adonijah's execution by David's son Solomon. Eurycleia is included in the final murderous action, which is not the case with Penelope, who is spared the sight of the carnage. Eurycleia acts as a buffer for Penelope. She gives provisions and supplies to Telemachus from the storehouse before he leaves for Sparta to seek news about Odysseus. She takes an oath not to tell Penelope he has left until twelve days have passed; Telemachus does not want his mother to be any more worried than she already is.

Blenkinsopp (1966: 52–6) detects in the Bathsheba story a motif of the woman who brings two deaths (her husband Uriah and her newborn baby) and observes that this is a common motif in ancient literature. Gunn (1976: 222) points out that Bathsheba is not the only woman who brings death in the story of King David. The two sons of Rizpah, Saul's concubine, along with the five sons of Michal (2 Sam 21:1 MT), were executed, hence seven deaths, a symbolic number to expiate the outrage committed by Saul of breaking a supposed covenant with the Gibeonites. The rape of David's daughter Tamar leads to the death of Amnon (the claimant) and Absalom (the protector); finally, David's last woman, Abishag, is the occasion of the deaths of Adonijah and Joab. In the David story, the number of deaths varies from two to seven. Our analysis confirms David Gunn's conclusion that the material is built around a traditional folk motif and literary topos shared by the Hebrew Bible and the Homeric Epic.

The second parallel with Abishag is Penelope's position as the manager of Odysseus' household during his twenty-year-long absence. Abishag, too, is the administrator (*sōkenet*) of King David's household and his nurse. The appointment of Abishag as the

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administrator of David's household appears as a cunning political move of the pro-Solomon party that secured his succession *in extremis*.

The *Odyssey* is permeated by an undercurrent of death: The unheroic death of Agamemnon killed by his wife's lover, the dismay of death expressed by Achilles, the lurid horror of Hades itself, the culmination of the epic in the brutal death of the suitors, and their grim shades in the underworld described in the last Book 24, known as the second Nekyia. On his visit to Hades, the diviner Teiresias had announced to Odysseus his death, hanging over his days to come, reminding him of the limited nature of all human joy and happiness. For the early Greeks, humanity is essentially linked with mortality. Likewise, the story of the Hebrew culture hero, David, ends with the impotent king on his deathbed, giving his final instructions to his son Solomon.

16. Conclusion

The juxtaposition of the four women of Odysseus with those of David has provided numerous overlapping features and fruitful insights. Both epic heroes require the help of women to advance in their lives and careers. In both cases, weakness or failure occurs precisely because of their impulsive, heroic temperament—a traditional theme. Women provide sound and salutary advice. In 1 Samuel 25, Abigail restrains David's murderous rage "to save David from catching a blot on his escutcheon" and prevents the triggering the vendetta of the clan of Caleb against his tribe of Judah (Gordon 1980: 46). Similarly, to escape Poseidon's relentless vengeance, Odysseus is told that he must perform certain cultic rites for Poseidon upon returning to Ithaca; this prescription implies that reconciliation with the gods is the means of achieving "the way home."

Much of the dramatic tension of the later books of the *Odyssey* derives from the hero's slow and deliberate resumption of various social roles—husband, father, king, son, householder, judge, master—while simultaneously facing successive and demanding tests of self-restraint. King David, in his interaction with his four wives, goes through a similar process of self-awareness and personal growth. Absolute self-reliance and self-sufficiency brought disaster to their earlier careers.

The role of women in both epic compositions may be epitomized in the Hebrew expression used in Gen 2:18, where the woman, next to a man, is described as *ʿēzer kĕnegdô* "a helpmate like himself." One Midrash found in *Genesis Rabbah* 17.3, and adopted by Rashi when commenting on this verse, explains the expression in the following way: "If he [the man] is worthy, she will be a helpmate (*ʿzr*). If he is not worthy, she will be against him (*kngdw*), to fight him." Penelope is a Greek example of an*ʿēzer kĕnegdô*. The wife of the man famous for his cunning is herself a cunning woman, for in respect to *mētis*, she does not fall short of Odysseus. During his absence, she makes the suitors believe that before choosing another husband, she must finish the shroud for her father-in-law, Laertes (Lowenstam 2000: 333–48). By undoing her day's work every night, she was buying time and obtaining an additional opportunity for her husband to return to Ithaca. This convergence between the spouses is the reason for Odysseus' successful return home, contrary to Agamemnon, whose wife,

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Clytemnestra, assassinates him. Penelope is truly Odysseus' "partner in charge," co-manager of their house and domain. By her "cunning intelligence" (*mētis*), her profit-gaining scheme (*kerdos*) of secret, false speech, her trick (*dolos*) of weaving, her ruse to test him for their secret sign (*sēma*), that of Odysseus' ingenious and cunning set-up of their marital bed, Penelope can function as the architect of his identity and hers and ensure the continuity of their marriage union (Bergren 1993: 9).

The closing Book 24 contrasts Penelope with Clytemnestra (*Odyssey* 24.191–202):

> Fortunate child of Laërtes, Odysseus of many devices, great indeed was the virtue (*megalēi aretēi*) the wife you won was endowed with! Such was the excellent wisdom (*agathai phrenes*) in faultless Penelope's spirit, noble Ikários' daughter! How well she remembered Odysseus, that same man she had wedded! And so the renown of her virtue (*aretē*) never will die: about constant Penelope will the immortals make for the people on earth a delightful song in her honor. Not thus, those evil deeds Tyndáreos' daughter [Clytemnestra] concocted (*mēsato*), killing the husband to whom she was wedded; and hers will be a loathsome song among mankind, and evil repute does she bring on all of the female sex, even on one whose acts are of virtue. (Merrill 2002: 397)

Contrary to Clytemnestra, who destroyed her house with the evil deeds she concocted (*mēsato* comes from *mēdomai* "to meditate, contrive," related to Medea's name) by cheating on her husband, Agamemnon, and premeditating his assassination, Penelope is blameless because her wits are good (*agathai phrenes*). However, Clytemnestra's act casts a shadow on all women, even on virtuous ones, like Penelope herself. This ambiguity toward Penelope, however, should be placed in dialectic tension with her being referred to twice as a virtuous woman. Her virtue (*aretē*) is "a quality attributed to no other female in Homeric Epic" (Bergren 1993: 9). Since we are dealing with literary topoi common to the literature of the different cultures of the Mediterranean shoreline, it is possible to better understand and interpret some features of women in the *Odyssey* considering what is known from the Hebrew narratives about David's wives. Perceived from a Hebrew perspective, Penelope appears as a Greek example of a "strong woman" (*'ēšet ḥayil*) from Proverbs 31. She is an ideal type of woman, praised for her virtue and moral excellence. A comparative analysis makes it possible for modern readers to become attuned to meanings obscured through time and confused by misreading customs that became lost to the transmitters of these ancient traditions.

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4

A Brief Account of the History of Mari

1. Introduction

Besides exploring the cultural and literary connections between the Hebrew Bible and the Homeric Epic, this study aims to demonstrate that a distinct cultural, linguistic, religious, and literary continuity exists between the Old Babylonian Amorites, later supplanted by the Arameans, and ancient Hebrews, who acknowledge Aramean ancestry (Deut 26:5). The Arameans would represent the interface between the Amorites and the Hebrews. Several literary topoi found in the Mari correspondence have echoes in Hebrew classical literature. The Akkadian texts from Mari employ Amorite terms that can be elucidated from Aramaic and Hebrew, but not from Akkadian used in central Mesopotamia. The native language of the Amorite tribes is closely related to the family from which the Hebrew of the Hebrew Bible sprang, which the linguists termed the Northwest Semitic group of languages. Moreover, the main source of contextual material for the study of David's wives, as well as the matrimonial habits of ancient nomads in the process of becoming sedentary, is found in the documents from the Mari Royal Archives (Muntingh 1973: 50–70). A great number of cuneiform texts from the eighteenth-century BCE archaeological site of Mari, found on the right bank of the Euphrates in Northern Syria, are related to the last Mari tribal chieftain, the Amorite warlord Zimrī-Līm. The correspondence from his court reflects the life, wars, and loves of the Sim'alite or northern Amorite tribes, who turned sedentary and followed matrimonial practices akin to those of the first Hebrew tribal leaders: Saul, David, and Solomon (see Chapter 2). It is, therefore, necessary to say a few words about the discovery and the importance of these documents. The history of the city and palace of Mari, and the texts found in them, provide the background against which the discussion, literary topoi, and parallels described in the following chapters should be set and understood. Some of the elements mentioned here will be analyzed further in greater detail in the following chapters.

The Mari royal palace in Northern Syria, located in the Middle Euphrates, in a city situated approximately ten miles north of the Iraqi border, represents an outstanding archaeological site, a veritable treasure trove. Since its discovery and excavation in 1933 by the French archaeologist André Parrot, it has provided the largest collection of ancient Near Eastern statues and figurines ever found, hence its importance for iconographic studies. Moreover, the Mari royal palace is the largest ever unearthed in ancient Mesopotamia, with about 300 rooms on the ground floor and as many on the upper floor

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before King Ḫammurabi of Babylon destroyed it in 1762 BCE (Margueron 2000: 885; 1997: 413; 2000: 885; 2014). Furthermore, the palace exhibits exceptional color mural paintings in a surprisingly good state of conservation. The site is of extraordinary importance for ancient Near Eastern epigraphy, providing Assyriologists with more than 22,000 cuneiform tablets dating from the eighteenth-century BCE, as well as from the third-millennium BCE (Kupper 1989, 7: 383–90; Guichard 1997, 3: 419–21). Less than half of the Mari tablets have been deciphered so far, published by four generations of scholars working on these documents (Charpin 2019a: 1–49). Among the first epigraphers was the Belgian Assyriologist, Georges Dossin. He was accompanied by François Thureau-Dangin, Jean Bottéro, and Maurice Birot from France, and by the next generation of Assyriologists, such as Jean-Marie Durand and Dominique Charpin, with their team at the Collège de France. They have produced a series of thematic studies grouping tablets topically. Since the beginning of the first translations of the Mari tablets in 1936, the published material represents 9,000 of the total number of tablets found. Even if one considers the technological progress with the ever-improving computer-based decipherment of cuneiform tablets, there will still be at least half a century of additional research and publications on Mari documents. Due to its large number of texts, Mari will continue to be one of the most productive sites of the ancient Near East. The vast Mari correspondence covers the entire Near East: from Hazor in northern Palestine to Anšan in Iran, and from Tilmun in the Persian Gulf to Hittite Hattuša in Anatolia (Fleming 2004b: 6–12). The Mari Royal Archives are undoubtedly one of the most important collections of cuneiform texts discovered in Northern Syria, not only in terms of their number but also in terms of the wealth and diversity of information they provide. They cover the period between ca. 1810 and 1762 BCE (Durand 1997a: 25–40, LAPO 16).

Recent excavations continue to unearth thousands of new tablets from the earlier Šakkanakku period of Mari, when the city was ruled by military governors. Such a rich harvest is partly due to the exceptional duration of the excavations. The archaeologists who worked the longest on the site of Mari, first André Parrot from the Louvre Museum and then Jean-Claude Margueron, led approximately forty archaeological campaigns in sixty years, a unique achievement in an increasingly war-ridden region (Heintz, Bodi, and Millot 1990, 1–7). Since 2005, with the ten-year-long interruption due to the war in Syria, Mari excavations continued with Pascal Butterlin. The data collected are rich and multiple, opening new avenues of research in history, archaeology, art history, comparative Semitic philology, and ancient Near Eastern religion. The cuneiform tablets—mostly administrative texts and international diplomatic correspondence dated to the early second-millennium BCE—have helped reconstruct the political history of the period (Charpin and Ziegler 2003). There is also a literary composition called the *Epic of Zimrī-Līm* (Guichard 2014a). The Mari tablets from the royal archive are important for the history of the third- and second-millennium BCE. They shed light on the social history of Amorite tribes, women, artisans involved in specialized activities such as metallurgy, wheel-making, dyeing, and pottery, city governors, administrators, and palace constituents. Furthermore, the texts provided biblical scholars with abundant comparative material for nomadic vocabulary and religious phenomena such as prophecy. There are about fifty Mari texts with prophetic content (see Chapter 5).

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2. The Archaeological Discovery of Mari

In August 1933, a group of Syrian peasants was about to bury one of their dead. The hill rising in the Syrian steppe, chosen as a burial site for one of their kin, is called Tell Ḫarīrī in Arabic. It is located 6.8 miles north-northwest of Abu-Kemal, a town on the Syrian side of the Syro-Iraqi border (Margueron 1992, 4: 525–29; Durand 1992, 4: 529–36; Pardee and Glass 1984: 88–99). While digging a hole in the ground, they unearthed a Sumerian-type statue. It was a headless statue of the god Šamaš bearing the following votive inscription, "Yasmaḫ-Addu, governor of Enlil (*š*[*a-k*]*i-in* ^{d}*En-líl*), son of Samsī-Addu" (Thureau-Dangin 1937: 135). They brought their discovery to the attention of Lieutenant E. Cabane, stationed in the French garrison at Abu-Kemal, who relayed the information to Paris (Parrot 1974: 11–15, 20, 106). At that time, Syria was a French protectorate. The most spectacular finds fall into three categories: a great number of cuneiform tablets, monumental palace architecture, and numerous statuettes and sculptures. The first soundings of the site began in December 1933 by André Parrot under the auspices of the Louvre Museum. A month later, in January 1934, Parrot opened a new trench on the tell, unearthing a temple dedicated to the goddess Ištar. It consisted of four superposed buildings from various periods, the latest belonging to the time of the First Dynasty of Babylon. At the same time, he found a small statue with an inscription bearing the name of "Iš$_{x}$-gi-Mari, king of Mari," allowing him to identify the site as one of the cities mentioned in the Sumerian royal list as the capital of the tenth Dynasty after the Flood, known by the ancient name of Mari. During the second archaeological campaign, Parrot discovered a sprawling royal palace dating from the beginning of the second-millennium BCE. It occupied the acropolis, or summit of the mound, and contained more than three hundred rooms on the ground floor and as many on the upper floor, which collapsed when the palace was burnt. What was left of the ground floor, however, was in an exceptional state of preservation. Some walls were still four to six meters tall and filled with debris left by Ḫammurabi of Babylon, who burned the city in 1762 BCE. Paradoxically, owing to the violent destruction of the Mari palace and the sudden filling of the remains with debris, what was left of the wall paintings was extremely well-preserved for almost four millennia until the rediscovery of the site by modern archaeologists. Surveys conducted in 1980 located canals, several of which supported small-scale agriculture designed to guarantee the subsistence of the local population. The most important canal, however, was on the left bank; it was connected to the Ḫabur river and flowed into the Euphrates just short of the natural lock at Baghouz. About 74 miles or 120 kilometers long, with a width of 11 meters for its entire length, it seems to have been used for navigation. It was designed to facilitate the fluvial and commercial links between the Mesopotamian plain and the foothills of the Taurus Mountains (Margueron 1997, 3: 413). The rise of Mari amid the Syrian Desert, where rainfall agriculture is impossible due to insufficient precipitation, was explained as the need felt by the political authorities to have a city as a control center for river traffic and perhaps for caravan travel as well. The payment of taxes would have assured steady revenues, which explains Mari's wealth at certain periods.

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Until the outbreak of WWII, Parrot conducted six additional archaeological campaigns, which allowed him to unearth the Mari royal palace, identify the temples within the "sacred quarter" of the city, and bring to light the "Temple with Lions."

The initial archaeological work was facilitated by the fact that in pre-WWII times, Syria was part of the French administrative mandate. After the political independence of Syria, Parrot was able to conduct four additional archaeological campaigns between 1951 and 1954. Altogether, he conducted fifteen campaigns in the post-war period, excavating older strata, reaching remains from the time of the Dynasty of Akkad and the pre-Sargonic period. Parrot also unearthed the temples of Ištarat and Ninni-zaza, which delivered a sizable collection of statuettes. The work on the tell was interrupted between 1955 and 1959 in the wake of the Suez conflict and resumed some years later. After André Parrot, who excavated from 1933 to 1974, Jean-Claude Margueron continued directing the excavations at Mari from 1979 to 2004. From 1998 to 2002, Margueron entrusted the newly discovered 2,500 tablets from the period of the Šakkanakku military governors (third-millennium BCE) to Antoine Cavigneaux (2019: 23–37; Cavigneaux and Colonna d'Istria 2009: 51–67; Colonna d'Istria 2014: 167–201). These earlier discarded tablets were used to pave city streets. From 2005 to the present, Pascal Butterlin has continued the French archaeological mission in Mari with interruptions due to the protracted war in Syria. To avoid the destruction of the tablets by ISIS, they were transferred from Deir ez-Zor to Damascus.

3. How to Explain the Rise of the City of Mari in a Desert Area?

Mari is located in a desert area where the conditions for agriculture were insufficient to sustain a relatively large population. Therefore, according to Daniel Snell (2007: 118), "A mystery remains why some cities thrived where they did, especially Mari on the Middle Euphrates, which demanded extensive irrigation to be agriculturally productive."

Margueron (2014: 25–33) describes three phases in Mari's long existence. The first is City I (ca. 2950–2650 BCE). Very little is known about this phase. City II (ca. 2555–2222 BCE), was rebuilt following a possible period of abandonment between 2650 and 2555 BCE. It is the archaeologically better-preserved phase. Palace, temples, and dwellings show traces of destruction by fire, associated with the invasion of the city by the kings of the Dynasty of Akkad, either Sargon the Great (2334–2279 BCE) or Narām-Sîn (2254–2218 BCE). City III (ca. 2200–1760 BCE) was rebuilt during the rule of the *šakkanakku* military governors. A couple of thousand tablets from this period were found. The final phase of Mari's existence was under the rule of two Amorite clans, the Addu and the Līm dynasties, who fought for supremacy. The majority of cuneiform tablets come from this final stage (Knott 2016: 36–43).

Mari rose to existence in Sumerian times at the beginning of the third-millennium BCE in the wake of the widespread urbanization of the Mesopotamian valley and its outskirts. The settlement of semi-nomadic Amorite tribes in that city, the Benjaminite Addu and the Sim'alite Līm clans, for which we have the majority of the written

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documentation, occurred a millennium later. It happened at the time when the Amorites, probably affected by a protracted drought, left the coastal Levantine regions of the West and settled deeper inland and in the East, occupying the entire Mesopotamian valley. They reorganized the administration of newly occupied territories by adopting to varying degrees the ancient traditions that preceded them, adapting them to their specific social structure and needs. The city of Mari is a perfect example of the way these nomads became sedentary by assuming the mold of the ancient urban civilization of their predecessors without relinquishing their nomadic origins, social structure, and traditional religious practices. The Mari Amorite tribes provide a historical precedent and analogy for what happened some centuries later with some of the Hebrew semi-nomadic tribes who settled in the land of Canaan, a well-urbanized Levantine geographical area.

According to Margueron, the former director of the archaeological missions to both Mari and Emar, the city of Mari is a result of a political decision to build a checkpoint, to tax, and derive economic profit from a rich network of exchange (Margueron 1995: 18). The city was built in a desert area, ill-suited for agriculture, away from other settlements and the great population zones of the Ḫabur river plain, Mesopotamia, and western and Northern Syria. Combining the theories of Margueron and Amiet, the founding of the city of Mari, dated ca. 2950 BCE, can be explained as a fruit of a double dialectic: between caravan routes of exchange and fluvial transportation, as well as the dialectic relationship between nomads and sedentary populations. First, the city is a direct result of the dialectic tension created by the existence of major routes of exchange and communication. The meeting of exchange routes, like transportation along fluvial axes and caravan routes where humans travel and carry various goods, favors the birth of cities, as shown in ancient Mesopotamia, Northern Syria, and as recently as medieval Europe. Indeed, a similar dialectic was at work in founding some major cities, economic and intellectual hubs at the heart of Europe in medieval times. Owing to the presence of the navigable Rhine River with its fluvial transport and international trade, strong links developed connecting Basel, in Switzerland, Strasbourg (Strass-burg, literally "road-city") in France, Cologne in Germany, with Rotterdam, in the Netherlands, on the Atlantic coast. The two parameters, roads and cities, nomadic and sedentary lifestyles, stand in a dialectic relationship. This is particularly well illustrated with the example of the creation of the ancient city of Mari on the Euphrates.

The second dialectic feature that contributed to the founding of Mari is the relationship between sedentary and nomadic populations (Porter 2012: 25). While some Sumerian political authority was probably responsible for the founding of Mari at the beginning of the third millennium BCE, one should not exclude the role of the semi-nomadic tribes becoming sedentary and settling in and around the newly founded city, taking part in the network of long-distance exchange generated by the Sumerian demand for metals, minerals, and other commodities. The first population at Mari was involved in transforming copper ore, as attested by the numerous melting pits the archeologists unearthed within the perimeter of the ancient city of Mari. The copper ore was brought from the north, in Anatolia, owing to the fluvial transport that reached Mari. After being locally transformed into various utensils and arms, it

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was dispatched to the south, carried by boats, along the Euphrates River, or elsewhere in caravans. The founders of the city and its first semi-nomadic inhabitants remained in solidarity with their close kin, the nomadic, and transhumant herdsmen. The double circular walls around Mari, called *Kranzhügel* in German, resemble the traditional circular nomadic camps where donkeys and herds were protected within the outer circle of tents. About two thousand years later, in the tenth century BCE, the Aramean city of Sam'al, in modern Zincirli, Turkey, likewise adopted a circular form around a central citadel. Sam'al's first wall is 170 meters from the center or 340 meters in circumference, while the second wall is 320 meters from the center with 640 meters in circumference (Von Luschan 1911; Amiet 2010: 12 fig. 2). When northern Aramean tribes became sedentary, some of their dynasties, like Panammu and Kilamuwa, reigned over a population, the minority of which became sedentary, and a majority remained nomadic (Amiet 2010: 13). In the citadel, the palace called *bīt ḫilani*, with its characteristic portico with one to three columns, continued, adapted, and enriched the architectural tradition from the second millennium BCE. Such buildings are found at Tell Tayinat, at Zincirli, at Sakjegözü, and perhaps at Carchemish. They are not found in Hittite architecture. Their prototype is found in North Syria. An antecedent is found in the palace of Niqmepa of Alalakh in the fourteenth-century BCE, which in turn, can be explained as a remodeling of an older type of building, represented by Yarim-Līm's palace, at Tell Atchana (Alalakh) (Frankfort 1970: 247; 282–3 fig. 329; and 286).

In the case of the circular city of Mari, the inner wall was 650 meters from the center, and covered 1,300 meters in circumference, while the outer wall was 950 meters from the center, and covered 1,900 meters in circumference. Since the city was built about 2 kilometers away from the ancient waterbed of the Euphrates, a river known for annual flooding, Margueron suggests that the purpose of circular walls was to deflect flood waters and mitigate the destructive effects of flooding (Margueron 2013: 49). While this may have been one of the considerations of its architects, it seems that the traditional circular form of nomadic camps has also played a role in the choice of the circular shape of the city, as exemplified in the case of ancient Sam'al (modern Zincirli) in Asia Minor. Moreover, at Mari, the archaeologists have unearthed several circular terracotta house models, buried beneath the ground, hence invisible. They were thought to reflect an ideal type, representing the dwellings in their religious and domestic functions (Muller-Margueron and Weygand 2007: 135–66). Even when they become sedentary and adapt to an urban lifestyle, the former Amorite tribes retain the idea of an original nomadic circular camp as a lasting ideal.

The subsequent archaeological vicissitudes of Mari point to repeated crises of the sedentary mode of life. About three centuries after its founding, Mari was abandoned, and its population reverted to a nomadic lifestyle. From the middle of the third millennium, until the eighteenth century, Mari experienced new periodical settlement, desertion, and resettlement, leading to its violent destruction at the time of Zimrī-Līm, under the assault of King Ḫammurabi of Babylon.

The main incentive for the early urbanization of Mesopotamia was the imperious necessity for certain indispensable goods. Beginning with the Obeid era (4400–3500

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BCE), the critical lack of wood and stone in Mesopotamia made it necessary to obtain these resources from the northern regions and transport them to the south, using the southward flow of the two main rivers of the Mesopotamian valley. Moreover, around 3000 BCE, the rising need for metal ore was acutely felt. The steady increase of commercial exchange along the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers, as main routes of transportation, and the network of highways favored the early development of Mesopotamian civilization.

From the earliest times, the Euphrates was the main route of intense trade activity. This 2780-kilometer-long river originates in the mountains of eastern Anatolia. For about 650 kilometers, it flows through Syria, connecting the Anatolian, Syrian, and Mesopotamian worlds, securing a bond between the seas and oceans of south-east Asia and the Mediterranean.

This fundamental artery in the economic life of Mesopotamia carried vessels weighing up to 40 tons, sailing from Northern Syria down to Sumer in the south. The boats were hauled along the river up to the Ḫabur valley, Assyria, or Northern Syria. The Euphrates was crucial in reducing the cost and the duration of transportation. Unfortunately, specific texts are rare and do not permit establishing a precise overview of the transportation activities along the river. Some references, nevertheless, give us glimpses of this intensive river activity, as, for example, when the Sumerian King Gudea of Lagash (ca. 2200 BCE) mentions the wood of Amanus and Lebanon that he had brought for the construction of the temple to his god. Gudea Cylinders A and B are the longest literary Sumerian compositions from third millennium Mesopotamia. They represent a hymn concerning the rebuilding of the Eninnu temple complex at Lagash. Gudea had wood brought from various places in the ancient Near East for the building of the temple. The account is found in his Cylinders A and B, written to commemorate Gudea's building and dedication of the new Eninnu temple for the god Nin-girsu, "Lord of Girsu," the patron deity of Lagash. He brought logs from the cedar mountain range in Northern Syria, along the upper Mediterranean coast (Cyl. A xv.19–25). The parallel passage in (Stat. B v.28) refers to this specifically as the Amanus mountains (Edzard 1997: 33). Solomon obtained cedar logs from the same region through Hiram, the Phoenician king of Tyre (1 Kgs 5:20[Eng. 6], 2 Sam 5:11–12 and 7:2), and both Gudea and Hiram floated them to their destination in the form of rafts "being like majestic snakes floating on water, from the cedar mountain range, cedar rafts" (Cyl. A xv.19-xvi.1 and 1 Kgs 5:23[Eng. 9]) (Averbeck 2003: 425 n. 37; Hurowitz 1992: 205; Oppenheim 1969: 268).

The amplitude of this exchange in the early epoch can be evaluated only through indirect methods. When the inhabitants of Uruk had built the "Limestone temple" at the end of the fourth millennium, they had to transport about 6,000 linear meters of beams, some of which were 12 to 14 meters long. Such a large quantity of timber could not be found in Sumer. It had to be brought from afar, and only the water route made such massive transportation possible. The location of the city of Uruk in southern Mesopotamia indicates that timber was shipped along the Euphrates River.

Mari, in Northern Syria, owes its notoriety to the voluminous written documentation that survived due to the sudden and brutal destruction of the city in 1762 BCE. The

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great royal palace, with its archives containing about 22,000 cuneiform tablets unearthed so far. The palace of the military governors, called *šakkanakkū*, and the temple with lions emerge above the preserved level because they were quickly filled with debris following a devastating fire. The Mari archives were preserved by an exceptional stroke of luck and were created during a period of relative poverty that prevailed in this region in terms of available means and resources, probable consequences of the previous protracted drought (Durand 2003–2004: 829).

The city was built in the form of a large circle, akin to a nomadic camp, with a diameter of 1,900 meters. Mari stood in a particularly arid part of Syria where the yearly rainfall averages only 150 mm. It is thus impossible to practice agriculture under natural conditions since the minimum required rainfall for agriculture is 250 mm. Irrigation is, therefore, an absolute necessity if one wants to practice agriculture. This explains the presence of an ancient canal from an extinct waterbed of the Euphrates situated 2.5 kilometers to the north of the city, and running through Mari before rejoining another, more southern, meandering of the river. The canal has a constant gauge or width of 11 meters, securing the city's water supply and permitting boats to enter the city port. The network of irrigation canals was designed to maintain the subsistence of the population. Nevertheless, the rise of Mari cannot be explained as an original agricultural colony.

An important feature that historians and economists of the ancient Near East point out is that Mari lies between great economic centers—Syria in the north, the region around the river Ḫabur, a confluent of the Euphrates, and Babylonia to the south along the Euphrates River axis. Moreover, Mari is located in the vicinity of a major network of routes, such as the northern route bordering the Taurus mountains. Mari is a place of passage for the commercial exchange between Northern Syria, where the Palestinian, Mediterranean, and Anatolian routes intersect, the Ḫabur area, especially when the 120-kilometers-long Ḫabur canal was dug, and Mesopotamia, where the routes from Iran, Elam, and the Persian Gulf meet (Beitzel 1992: 35–57). Mari became an important trading center in the early second millennium BCE, on the upper Euphrates, developing as a control point for river and caravan traffic, and as a center for metallurgy, producing bronze objects for export. The city took part in long-distance trade with supplies (copper and tin) being brought from the Anatolian highlands, stimulating population growth, attracting Amorite nomads, who interacted with the sedentary Akkadian population, contributing to the economic viability of Mari.

This strategic position allows Mari to take part in commerce both as a partner and as an intermediary. By exercising close control over the ships that went along the Euphrates, it was possible to impose heavy taxes. The study of texts found in the Mari royal archives shows that this generated the wealth and power of Mari. The political goals of the governors (*šakkanakkū*) were to maintain the river transportation, as well as the points of confluence, under their direct control to prevent other powers from gaining a foothold in this strategic area.

It was probably in the twenty-ninth- or twenty-eighth-century BCE that Mari was founded by a political authority who wanted to profit from the propitious configuration of the valley around the confluence of the Ḫabur and the Euphrates Rivers and the

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presence of a natural lock, a cliff narrowing at the level of Baghuz/Abu Kemal. It was probably at that moment that the great canal uniting the Ḫabur and the Euphrates below Mari was built on the left bank. Most of the time, the canal follows the contours of the valley. Occasionally, it enters and crosses a cliff, and that is where it was first identified under the name Nahr Dawrin. The reasons for the construction of such an installation are obvious and can be explained in a period of intense commercial activity. It made transportation faster by shortening the itinerary from about 160 to 120 kilometers. It offered the possibility of maintaining sufficient water in the canal during a drought. It bypassed the numerous meanderings of the Euphrates, which, in the hauling up of a ship, necessitated a change of board side at every half loop. As pointed out by Margueron (1991: 87), "The construction of this canal shortened the distance between the Khabur and Baghouz by 4 or 5 days for a return trip by river if one bases the trip on a towing process of about 10 km per day (120 km instead of 160, thus twelve days instead of sixteen). In fact, because the [canal] course was nearly straight and devoid of twists and turns, the economy of time was certainly very high . . ." In other words, such an installation allowed the carrying out of exchange all year long and not only during certain periods of the year. However, a canal of this importance necessitated permanent maintenance and constant surveillance.

The power of Mari in the third millennium BCE can be explained only if a highly developed Syria existed at the northern end of the river, and if an intensive commercial exchange was carried out along the Euphrates River down to southern Mesopotamia. The role played by the Euphrates is essential because the river serves as the connecting link between regions that are geographically and economically different, yet complementary. The city of Mari could exist only because of the very intensive flow of exchange between these complementary regions.

When the Amorite semi-nomads settled in Mari and other Mesopotamian cities and became sedentary, they nevertheless preserved a highly developed conscience and sense of tribal belonging. This was probably due to religious reasons to ensure the continuity of ancestor worship (*kispū*-rituals) (Birot 1980: 139; Tsukimoto 1985).

4. The Amorite Semi-Nomads Settling in Mari

The archaeologist Harvey Weiss (2016: 62) pointed out conclusive evidence of a colossal and protracted drought that affected Northern Syria by the end of the third millennium BCE. The drought lasted more than two centuries and is the most probable cause of the Amorite migration from the coastal regions of the Mediterranean in the direction of the more fertile and irrigated central Mesopotamia (Sallaberger 2007: 417–56). Pierre Amiet (2002: 97–102) offers a somewhat different explanation for the great Semitic migrations of the Amorites who settled in Mari, Babylon, and elsewhere, as well as the Arameans in the first millennium BCE, who settled at Guzana, Sam'al, Tell Tayinat. He argues for the recurrent crises of the urban way of life. This deterioration, or as he puts it, the "senescence of urban civilization," is reflected in the archaeology of Mari and elsewhere in Syria by recurrent periods when populations

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abandoned their cities. During such periods of crisis, the population would revert to nomadism, which in turn would be followed by a return to sedentary life. Similar alternations between sedentary and nomadic periods are attested in Elamite and Persian Iran in the east as well as in Bāb edh-Dhrāʾ in the west, on the eastern side of the Dead Sea in the Ancient Bronze Age (Amiet 2010: 5–19). Instead of viewing Mari as a supposed Sumerian colony, it might be more appropriate to speak of contacts between the local sedentary and nomadic Amorite populations and acculturation of the latter to urban life (Butterlin 2004: 158). The Old Babylonian Mari letters reveal the great diversity of semi-nomadic Amorite tribes that cohabited with the urban Akkadians: The Simʾalite warlord Zimrī-Līm, the last ruler of Mari, as well as King Ḫammurabi of Babylon, who is a descendant of Benjaminite Amorites (Finkelstein 1966: 95–118). The situation is comparable to the kings of Assyria referring to their ancestors who "lived in tents" (Charpin and Durand 1986: 150, 159). As pointed out by Michalowski (1983: 240), the genealogy of the Hammurabi Dynasty and the related list of Samsī-Addu's ancestors embedded in the Assyrian King List refer to their Amorite tribal ancestry to affirm royal legitimacy over tribal groups as well. Other Mesopotamian kings also proclaimed their link with some aspects of "Amorite ideology," providing a form of "genealogical charter" for the legitimization of their kingship. It was not enough to be king; one also had to claim descent from the proper lineage within the Amorite tribes. Thus, Zabaya and Abi-sarē of Larsa, as well as Sîn-gāmil of Diniktum, are described in royal inscriptions as *rabiān amurrim* (MAR.TU) "Amorite chieftains or sheikhs." The title of Sîn-gāmil of the city of Diniktum is found on a "baked well- or cistern brick," indicating the possibility that he might have built wells for the herdsmen (Stol 1976: 87–88). Abi-sarē is also found as the name of a Sutean warlord in Mari letters who, with 2000 Sutean warriors, raided herds and led razzias in the steppe (*nawûm*) of the land of Qaṭna (ARM 5 23:6; Durand 1998: 507, LAPO 17 745). Similar to Ḫammurabi of Babylon, the first king of the Old Babylonian dynasty of Uruk, Sîn-kāšid, claimed as one of his titles the designation (lugal *am-na-nu-um*), "King of the Amnanum (tribe)" (Edzard 1957: 106), while Sîn-gāmil bears the title "King of Uruk and of the Amnanum (tribe)," (Sollberger and Kupper 1971: 232–33), also mentioned as one of the Benjaminite tribes in Mari texts (Chapter 5. Section 7). The titles of the rulers of Mari are similar. On a cylinder-seal impression, a daughter of Yaḫdun-Līm (1810–1794 BCE) presents her father as "the king of Mari and of the land of the Simʾalites" (lugal *ma-ri*$^{[ki]}$ *ù ma-at* dumu *si-im-*[*a-al*]), (Charpin and Durand 1986: 152). It means that his rule covered not only the cities along the Euphrates whose inhabitants recognized him as king, but also extended over all the territories where the Simʾalite tribes practiced transhumance with their herds. Moreover, instead of postulating successive waves of Semitic nomadic tribes settling in the Mesopotamian plain, it is more appropriate to speak of contacts and acculturation, with differing modes of interaction with population groups that consisted of a variety of elements, some settled, some in various nomadic patterns, some newly arrived, and some that have lived in the area for generations (Michalowski 1983: 244).

Concerning the Mari royal palace, Zimrī-Līm, who was more accustomed to the warrior's life living under tents in the Syrian steppe, seems to have contented himself

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with reparations and some maintenance of the existing structure. He probably inherited the large wall color painting on the south wall in Court nº 106 to the right of the doorway leading to the throne room suite nº 64, from either his father, Yaḫdun-Līm (ca. 1810–1794 BCE, so Margueron 1990: 114–25), or Samsī-Addu (ca. 1792–1782 BCE, so Moortgat 1964: 68–74; 1969: 69–74; 82; and Pierre-Muller 1990: 530). Zimrī-Līm is no longer credited as the executioner of this exceptional work of art. Both suggestions are problematic from a political point of view, since they presuppose that one of the warlords did not practice *damnatio memoriae* in respect to the representation of his predecessor, Samsī-Addu did not destroy the image of his predecessor, Yaḫdun-Līm, and Zimrī-Līm, the image of Samsī-Addu. The so-called "investiture" painting can now be seen in the Louvre Museum. It is unique in its state of preservation and richness of imagery. The painting is a symmetrical composition delineated by an interior frieze of running spirals, symbols of abundant water. The visual elements include the flowing vase with spirals of living water bursting from it, depicted with fish swimming downstream and upstream, probably representing the Euphrates and Tigris, the ring and rod in Ištar's hand, mythical griffins or quadrupeds, the mound rendered with "mountain scale" pattern, the protective Lama goddess with raised hands behind the king, and goddess Ištar before the king, with her distinctive attributes, the lion, the scimitar and the maces emanating from her shoulders (Ataç 2018: 30–49).

Because of the large tax on cattle that Zimrī-Līm received, the Court nº 131 was transformed into something of a zoo. Despite the three hundred rooms on the ground floor and as many on the upper floor, the Mari palace was not large enough for Zimrī-Līm's entourage. The 515 women listed on the broken tablet of Zimrī-Līm's harem, implying an even larger number of women (estimated to have been around 560), did not have enough space in the palace (Ziegler 1999a). Because of the promiscuity among the female population on account of the apparent exiguity of the palace, when one of the women became sick, it was imperative to have her quarantined to prevent contamination. Three Mari letters attest to the first medical measures taken to prevent the spread of contamination (ARM 10 14; 10 129; 10 130 Durand 2000: 345–47, LAPO 18 1163–65). The palace appears to have been poorly ventilated, and its inhabitants suffered from mosquito bites and swarms of other insects due to the proximity of the canal. When Zimrī-Līm settled in the Mari palace, the building was run down and in need of repairs. Durand (2004–2005: 564) suggests that once Zimrī-Līm had consolidated his power, he left the cumbersome, stuffy palace and settled in a nearby village made out of well-aired tents to which he was accustomed. The palace archives dealing with Zimrī-Līm's harem are interrupted in the second half of the sixth year of his reign, suggesting that he no longer lived in the Mari palace. To a certain degree, the situation at Mari at the time of Zimrī-Līm was comparable to that of Versailles after the death of Louis XIV. While the palace remained the symbol of power, life in it was far from comfortable. It was used for official political receptions. The Mari cuneiform tablet (A.186) with the request of the king of Ugarit to visit the Mari palace was traditionally interpreted as an indication of the prestige of the imposing structure, attracting faraway visitors. A new study of the text, however, has shown that the king of Ugarit simply requested

Bodi_9781666979138_C004.indd 129 7/13/2026 3:09:40 PM

authorization from his suzerain to send a messenger to Mari (Durand 2000: 510, LAPO 18 1272). As is often the case with nomadic, warrior kings, Zimrī-Līm didn't need to be present in Mari to rule over his realm.

By the end of his reign, when the military situation on the outskirts of the realm had become dangerous, the queen and the royal children returned to dwell in the Mari palace. Their installation necessitated important works of refurbishing and reparation. The rest of Zimrī-Līm's harem, however, was installed outside the palace, probably on the left bank, where in the time of Zimrī-Līm's predecessor Yasmaḫ-Addu, "the king's village" (*kapar šarrim*) was located. Here again, it was probably a village made out of tents, akin to Bedouin temporary, mobile villages.

Another feature of nomadic life that comes into play is the literary topos analyzed above (Chapter 2. Section 4). The semi-nomadic tribal leaders considered it less honorable to remain seated (*wašābum* in Akkadian and *yāšab* in Hebrew, as in 2 Sam 11:1) in the palace or under one's tent instead of leading one's army into battle. This ideology is part of traditional nomadic life and is in direct opposition to the city dweller's sedentary lifestyle. It survived as a social, political, and moral demand weighing on the tribal leader.

The Amorite tribal chieftain and warlord Samsī-Addu I (1792–1782 BCE) had a profound impact on subsequent Assyrian kings and royal ideology. He was the first to use the title *šarrum* "king," and develop the royal titulary used by subsequent Assyrian kings of the Middle- and Neo-Assyrian periods (Garelli 1990: 97–102; Lamrichs 1995: 389). However, in the case of Amorite rulers, the use of the Akkadian term *šarrum* "king" is fluid, and in the majority of cases it designates simply a "tribal chieftain," or "sheikh." The situation is similar in Aramaic. In the ninth-century BCE Tell-Fekherye bilingual, Assyrian-Aramaic inscription, the governor of Guzana is designated with the Sumerograms GAR.KUR=*šākin māti* (in lines 8, 9, and 19) in the Assyrian cuneiform text, rendered in the Aramaic part with the term *mlk* "king" in lines 6, 7, 13. This is comparable to the Hebrew use of *melek* "king" for Saul and David, the first kings of Israel, who were probably nothing more than tribal chieftains. These semi-nomadic Amorite, Aramean, and Hebrew rulers should not be confused with medieval European notions of monarchies.

Scholars of ancient Near Eastern history, sociology, and anthropology used to oppose notions of "nomadic" and "sedentary" existence, pastoralists and agriculturalists, mainly for theoretical reasons. The existence of a "dimorphic society" was postulated, contrasting two types of society, which were economically complementary (Rowton 1976a: 13–20; 1976b: 219–58; 1977: 181–98). Pastoralists provided meat and animal products to the sedentary populations and received agricultural or craft products such as cereals and utensils in return. However, nomads are archaeologically invisible, providing meager physical traces (Schwartz 1995: 250–51). It is more appropriate to describe the existence of a dialectic polarity between the sedentary and nomadic populations, which formed a "polymorphous" society. The latter term would be closer to historical reality, taking into account all the possible locations along the sedentary-nomadic continuum (Lemche 1985; 2013: 77–94). To a certain degree, it would also correspond to the historical situation of ancient Israel (Finkelstein and

Bodi_9781666979138_C004.indd 130 7/13/2026 3:09:40 PM

Perevolotsky 1980: 67–88; Finkelstein 1988; 1991: 34–50). The ancient Hebrews appear as nomadic pastoralists organized into tribes, who claim descent from a common ancestor.

From Sumerian times, the cohabitation of nomadic and urban populations was perceived as a necessity and a mutual need (Porter 2012: 60). The Sumerian myth, *The Marriage of Martu* describes the uncouth characteristics of the nomad god Martu/du, enumerated as a warning to his intended bride, the city-dwelling goddess Adĝarkidu. She goes ahead with the marriage anyway—an illustration of the mutual dependence of the nomadic and sedentary populations despite their differences. The nomads are described as aggressive and identified as animals: "Lo, their hands are destructive, (their) features are those of [monkeys] (line 127)." They commit sacrilegious acts: "They are those who eat the taboo [of] Nanna, [they have] no reverence (line 128)." ". . . He knows not submission; he eats uncooked meat; in his lifetime has no house; when he dies he is not interred (lines 135–138)." Her girlfriend tries to dissuade her from marrying such a savage and barbarian (Charpin 2015a: 31–46): "My girlfriend—why would you marry Martu! (line 139)." But the young woman is undeterred: "Adĝarkidu answers her friend: 'I will indeed marry Martu'" (lines 140–141, Klein 1997: 116; Durand 2005–2006: 605, offers a somewhat different interpretation of this myth).

The Mari texts provide extensive documentation for the nomadic populations that occupied a large territory between the Euphrates and the Tigris Rivers. The population in this broad region seems to have been of semi-nomadic origin, and in the time of Mari, either still living as nomads or having for a while abandoned the nomadic lifestyle by settling in a city like Mari. These nomads were called (Ḫanū) "Haneans" and their land (Ḫana) (Durand 2001–2002: 742). In this study, I refer to them as "the Ḫanū semi-nomads." The term *ḫanûm* should not be understood as an ethnic term designating a particular tribe (*pace* Anbar); rather, it stands for a certain mode of living meaning "those who dwell under tents." They come from the steppe and the country, not from the city, have an ideal of outdoor life and a pronounced taste for war; they worship Baetyls or standing stones and shun anthropomorphic representations of the divinity (Durand 2004–2005: 844).

Originally, they came from the West, along the coastal region bordering the Mediterranean Sea, called "the bitter land," meaning "the land by the sea," In later times, the Babylonian texts use the term *marratum* to designate the Mediterranean as "the Bitter (one)," a term derived from the common Semitic root *√mrr* "to be bitter." The Sumerians borrowed the term and wrote it MAR-TU, which might have been either a retroversion from Akkadian, or the way they pronounced it, or even the minimalist writing of this regional name. The inhabitants of this region were called MAR-TU or *Amurru* based on the same root, from which the Assyriologists have coined the gentilic term "Amorites."

There may be a link with the biblical reference to bitter waters *mārâ* found in Num 33:8, meaning brackish water inappropriate for drinking: "They were unable to drink the waters from Marâ for they were bitter" (*wĕlō' yākĕlû lištōt mayim mimmārâ kî mārîm hēm*; Exod 15:23). Geographically, the homeland of the Amurrū stretched along the Mediterranean coast and included the area south of Ugarit and

Bodi_9781666979138_C004.indd 131 7/13/2026 3:09:40 PM

as far south as Byblos. South of Amurrum, the texts mention the city of Yariḫ, close to the ruins of Rāḫiṣum. The latter corresponds to Ruḫizzi of Amarna texts, located near Qidšu, east of the Anti-Lebanon, a mountain range stretching in the north from the Homs Plain to Mt. Hermon in the south, on the territory of the latter Israel (Moran 1992: 391). They are all located in the land of Canaan (*ki-na-aḫ-num* [A.3552] Durand 1998: 29, LAPO 17 456) from which the Benjaminite Yariḫū tribe came (Durand 1993: 46).

The population of the kingdom of Mari is estimated to have been around 50,000 people. About 2,000 people lived in the Terqa district (50 kilometers north of Mari), where the great temple of the god Dagan, the principal divinity of that region, was located, while Zimrī-Līm's army had about 3,500 men (Durand 2003–2004: 826).

The major division among the Ḫanū semi-nomads is based on the geography of their habitat: those living in the north or *binū sim'āl*, or "sons of (the land on) the left" or Bensim'alites, and those living in the south or *binū yamīna*, "sons of (the land on) the right" or Benjaminites. The name of the Aramaic kingdom of Sam'al, known both in the cuneiform texts and in Aramaic inscriptions from Zincirli (in modern Turkey), means the northern kingdom corresponding to the Hebrew word *śĕm'ōl* "north." This geographic division into two major groups is found among Arab medieval genealogists who also classified the 6,000 tribes and clans into two groups: those from the south, or the Yemenites, descendants of Qahtān, and those from the north, or the Ismaelites, descendants of ʿAdnān. The surprise of the Mari texts is that this basic geographic division among tribes living in that part of the world was present and recognized already at the beginning of the second millennium BCE (Finkelstein 1966: 117). In this geographic division, the sun is in the East (*aqdamatum*) "before," and the West is "behind" (*aḫaratum*), the North is on the left-hand (*sim'al*), and the South on the right-hand (*yamina*), as reflected in the modern name of Yemen.

The northern Amorite tribes, or Bensim'alites, who came from the region of the upper Baliḫ river and from the northwest of the upper Jazireh region, from which they might have been expelled, settled in the Syrian Desert, creating a political entity around three main centers: Mari, Ṣuprum, and Terqa, known in modern Arabic as Tell Ḥarīrī, Tell Abu Hassan, and Tell ʿAšara (Buccellati 1988: 43–61). Along the Euphrates, they found small Benjaminite settlements ruled by local chieftains. At least three of them, located upstream from Mari, are well known from the texts: Samānum, Tuttul (=Tell Bi'a), and Abattum (=Tell Thadayin). The Bensim'alites gained the upper hand and strove to extend their domination as far as their old habitat in the upper Jazireh.

Sometime later, on the banks of the Tigris River, a major political and military power was established by tribes that were expelled from the land of Akkad in central Mesopotamia. As their power grew, they invaded the western regions as far as the banks of the Euphrates. The Bensim'alites, and some of their Benjaminite allies who lived in this territory, lost ground. The Realm of Upper Mesopotamia unified the lands around the upper Tigris and Middle Euphrates regions. It was characterized by a centralized government, with the expulsion of older ruling families and chieftains, and the installation of administrators who, through marriage alliances, became part

Bodi_9781666979138_C004.indd 132 7/13/2026 3:09:40 PM

of the new ruling family. Samsī-Addu I, the ruler of the Realm of Upper Mesopotamia, chose Šubat-Enlil, modern Tell Leilān, as the seat of his centralized power. Samsī-Addu's two sons received different territories to administer. One was appointed to Mari in the west and another to Ekallātum in the east, with lands around the Tigris River. For the latter, additional lands were conquered along the course of the Tigris as far as Nineveh and the valley east of the Tigris up to the Zagros mountains. These Amorite chieftains established for the first time what, in subsequent centuries, would become the territory occupied by Assyrians and their cities: Aššur, Nineveh (Mossul), Arbela, and Ekallātum.

After the death of Samsī-Addu, the Bensim'alites and the Benjaminites launched military campaigns aimed at regaining their lost territories. His two sons and successors, Yasmaḫ-Addu in Mari and Išme-Dagan in Ekallātum, could not resist the double assault of the nomadic invaders who came from Karkemiš in the northwest. The conquerors redistributed the urban centers of the Middle Euphrates region with the adjoining lands. After the downfall of the Realm of Upper Mesopotamia, the upper Jazireh saw the restoration of former chieftains with their ruling families. A showdown occurred between the Bensim'alites and the Benjaminites for control of the lands at the heart of the Mari territory. The Bensim'alites, with Zimrī-Līm, gained the upper hand. He became the sovereign owner of all the lands to whom the obligatory military service was due (*dekūtum*), together with corvée-type of work and taxes on herds (*laqtum*) and cereals (*šibšum*). There was a further obligation to participate in the religious service offered to the ancestors of Mari's ruler in the *kispum* ritual (see Chapter 8. Section 8).

Amiet (2005: 18–19) detects a historical pattern in the way nomadic tribes coming from the west settle and adopt the urban culture of their new land. This pattern applies to the settlement of both the Amorites in the second millennium BCE and the Aramean tribes in the first millennium BCE. The MAR.TU nomads, stemming from the coastal regions in the west, left the distant Levant and took over the Ur Empire after its downfall. King Sîn-Kašid (1865 BCE), who belonged to the Amnānum Amorite tribes, settled in Uruk, where he had a palace built in the purest Mesopotamian tradition (Kupper 1957: 31, 49). He proclaimed himself king of this prestigious city and its urban population, not omitting to call himself king of the Amnānum, belonging to the Benjaminite Amorite tribes, thereby affirming his tribal legitimacy as well (Michalowski 1983: 246). Amorite tribal rulers, firmly entrenched in the outlying reaches of ancient western Asia from Aleppo in the northwest, were also dividing the thrones of Babylonia proper by the late nineteenth-century BCE. Hammurabi was the sixth in a line of kings whose reigns had passed from father to son since 1894 BCE. His dynasty claimed a common ancestry with the Amorite kings of Assyria of the southern, Benjaminite tribes (Van De Mieroop 2005: 2–3; Charpin 2012: 78 and 200). In northern Mesopotamia, Mari, Šubat-Enlil, and Ekallātum were settled by Amorite rulers from the Addu and Līm clans. Zimrī-Līm settled in Mari, proclaimed himself king of that city and of the Akkadian population, but did not forget his Amorite tribal origins. He was reminded by a Mari official to show deference to both populations (Durand 1997: 236, LAPO 16).

Bodi_9781666979138_C004.indd 133 7/13/2026 3:09:40 PM

5. The History and Dates of the Main Amorite Rulers at Mari

For a presentation of the political history of Mari and of its warlords with dates, I follow (Charpin and Ziegler 2003; Fleming 2004b). The earliest reference to Mari is found in a Sumerian inscription of King Eannatum of Lagash (middle of the third millennium BCE), who boasts of having conquered Mari. King Sargon the Great of Akkad (2334–2279 BCE) was the next king who left a record of having conquered Mari (Bretschneider, Van Vyve, and Jans 2009: 5–28). During the Third Dynasty of Ur, Mari was ruled by the *šakkanakkū* or military governors under the patronage of the kings of Ur (Durand 1985: 171). The construction of the Mari palace is attributed to the *šakkanakkū*, and the same family of governors reigned in Mari for almost three and a half centuries, from 2266 to 1920 BCE. In light of the exceptionally long reign of these governors, the reign of the Amorite warlords Samsī-Addu and Zimrī Līm, which lasted less than two decades each, seems modest. A prince of Mari, Išbi-Erra (2017–1985 BCE), who had brought the city-state of Isin under his domination, contributed to the downfall of the Dynasty of Ur and founded the first dynasty of Isin.

The publication of texts found in Ešnunna in *MARI* 5 shows that the dynasty of Samsī-Addu and the Dynasty of Yaḫdun-Līm, though the former were southerners and the latter northerners, shared the same religious outlook. They have the same religious metaphors, venerate the same gods, have the same objects of worship, and share the same worldview based on the operation of divine retribution (LAPO 18, Durand 2000: 74).

Here are the names and dates of the kings from the two Amorite dynasties that ruled at Mari at the beginning of the second millennium BCE (so-called middle chronology):

Ilā-Kabkabū[1]	ca. 1836	(Addu)
Yaggid-Līm		(Līm)
Yaḫdun-Līm	ca. 1810–1794	(Līm)
Sūmū-Yamam	ca. 1793–1792	(Līm)
Samsī-Addu I	ca. 1792–1782	(Addu)
Yasmaḫ-Addu	1782–1775	(Addu)
Zimrī-Līm	1775–1762	(Līm)
Ḫammu-rabi conquered Mari in 1762 BCE (Goddeeris 2002: 138–46).		

[1] The name Ilā-Kabkabū means "the Star (that is, the king) is god (powerful)" (Streck 2000: 313).

Bodi_9781666979138_C004.indd 134 7/13/2026 3:09:40 PM

Although Zimrī-Līm was Hammurabi's ally, their alliance was fragile. "It was based on a shared interest in removing still other kings from the political scene, and it only loosely peppered the fact that Babylon and Mari were also competitors and suspicious of one another" (Van De Mieroop 2005: 64). When Hammurabi sacked Mari, he eliminated a northern neighbor, an economic competitor, and coincidentally terminated the archives that detailed his actions and previous collaboration.

Little is known of Yaggid-Līm, the father of Yaḫdun-Līm and grandfather of Zimrī-Līm. Yaggid-Līm's name means "The clan has shown itself well" (Streck 2000: 190 § 2.87; Huffmon 1965: 179; Gelb 1980: 19, 299).

While Sūmū-Yamam expelled his father Yaḫdun-Līm, he nevertheless proved to be an ephemeral successor; he was assassinated during a palace conspiracy (ca. 1798), after which Mari fell into Samsī-Addu's hands. The latter was a native either of Terqa (so J. Sasson) or of Akkad (so D. Charpin) and had managed to occupy the throne of Aššur (Anbar 1973: 1–33). This Amorite warlord identified himself with pastoralist ancestors whom he called Ḫaneans from "*Ḫana* (tent-dwelling semi-nomads) *yarrādum*," which might designate semi-nomads who "came down" to the Euphrates Valley (Fleming 2004b: 10; Durand and Guichard 1997: 64).

The legitimate heir to the throne, Zimrī-Līm, escaped, finding refuge probably in Aleppo in the kingdom of Yamḫad. Initially, the name Zimrī-Līm was thought to mean "(The god) Līm is my strength," (Thureau-Dangin 1936: 170). However, in the texts, Līm is never preceded by the determinative (^{d} = diĝir) referring to "divinity." Therefore, it should be understood to mean, "My strength is the clan/tribe/people." Dhorme (1951: 760) derived it correctly from Akkadian *līmum* (B) "thousand" (*CAD* L: 197), corresponding to Hebrew *lĕʾōm* "multitude, people," and related to a West Semitic *liʾmu* (C) "family, clan," Ugaritic (*lʾim*) (*CAD* L: 198; Malamat 1998a: 165 "clan"; Streck 2000: 102 "tribe"). Yaḫdun-Līm's son, Zimrī-Līm, took advantage of the power vacuum after Samsī-Addu's death and assembled a coalition against this king's sons, Išme-Dagan and Yasmaḫ-Addu of Mari. The latter was betrayed by the chief diviner Asqudum and an important family from Terqa (La'um and his son Sammētar). The protracted struggle, requiring several military campaigns, ended in the escape of Yasmaḫ-Addu from Mari, leaving his numerous wives. Yasmaḫ-Addu's harem remained in the Mari royal palace and was incorporated into Zimrī-Līm's harem (Charpin and Durand 1985: 323). One finds a comparable situation in the Hebrew domain. When David fled from Jerusalem during Absalom's revolt, the latter inherited King David's concubines who remained in the city, and slept with them (2 Sam 16:22), indicating the change of ruler. To possess the former king's wives and concubines is a symbol of power and control over him. With the help of the army of Ešnunna, the king of Aleppo, and of his own mercenaries, Zimrī-Līm reconquered his father's throne in 1775 BCE. However, his reign lasted no more than thirteen years (Anbar 1979a: 108). Ḫammu-rabi (1792–1750) of Babylon burned Mari in 1762 BCE. Whether Zimrī-Līm survived the sack of Mari is

Bodi_9781666979138_C004.indd 135 7/13/2026 3:09:40 PM

unknown. He might have sought refuge in Aleppo, the city that sheltered him some thirteen years before.

6. The Epic of Zimrī-Līm and the Auspicious Time for Military Action

Since this study frequently refers to the Homeric Epic, it might be useful to show a possible link between the Old Babylonian Amorite epic and the classical Greek one around the topos of the auspicious time for decisive action. The Amorite warlord Zimrī-Līm describes how he recovered rule over territories he had lost, recaptured the city of Mari, and regained the throne of his ancestors. The launching of a military campaign was intimately bound to the divine decision and approval, as expressed in the phrase "the appointed time arrived" (*ḫadanam kašādum*). It implies that Zimrī-Līm probably used divination to identify the most auspicious time for the launching of his military campaign. In their study of Zimrī-Līm's rise to power and the way he recovered the city of his ancestors, Charpin and Durand (1985: 325; 1997: 21 n.16) identified several fragments which had been neglected by previous editors on account of their poor state of conservation. They attested to the existence of a heroic epic about the career of this Amorite warlord and tribal chieftain. These various texts have been collected, transliterated, and published by Guichard (2014a) as the *Epic of Zimrī-Līm*. After Zimrī-Līm succeeded in breaking the power of the opposing Addu dynasty and reconquering the throne of Mari, this achievement must have prompted his contemporaries to compose an epic poem celebrating his military exploits. The poetry contained in this Epic is more an expression of lyrical enthusiasm, occasionally bordering on "Bedouin braggadocio." Nevertheless, it is not devoid of historical interest on account of the various toponyms mentioned in the description of Zimrī-Līm's successful military campaigns. Moreover, the Epic expresses the Amorite warlord ideology of the intrepid tribal chieftain who marches in front of his troops, leading them to victory. After recovering the throne of his ancestors, Zimrī-Līm inspired Mari bards to compose an epic in his honor. Wasserman (2015: 53) points out that personal names outside of the main protagonist, king, or hero are not frequent in Akkadian epics. One can compare the abundance of names in the Homeric Epics, *Iliad*, and *Odyssey*, with the relative dearth of names in the *Gilgameš Epic*, the accounts of the deeds of King Sargon the Great, and the *Legend of Narām-Sîn*. Therefore, he identifies the name of Ašmad, the chief shepherd (*merʿûm*) of Zimrī-Līm, as the potential author of the *Epic of Zimrī-Līm*. Ašmad is mentioned as the king's confidant, a wise advisor who convinces the warlord to dare attack the land of Subartu, which leads to him winning the war (lines ii 35–46). A parallel to the conversation between Ašmad and Zimrī-Līm is the dialogue between Enkidu and Gilgameš in the *Gilgameš Epic*, in which he encourages the weary and worried hero to continue on his way to the Cedar Forest and to embrace his victorious destiny. According to Sasson (2015: 33

Bodi_9781666979138_C004.indd 136 7/13/2026 3:09:40 PM

n.37), however, Ašmad might have been just the person who sponsored the creation of the *Zimrī-Līm Epic*.

The following lines, in particular, are pertinent in the present context:

> *The Epic of Zimrī-Līm* iii. 7–18:[2] Until the king's auspicious time arrived (*adi ša ikšudu ḫadān-šu šarri*) and he subdued Idamaraṣ to kneel at his feet, he drank water from waterskins; ranked with the privates, he knows all the hardships; his/their sallying forth is like (that of) great hunters. Like a wild ass (chewing) straw in the steppe, his men ate raw meat; They took heart, trusting in strength. Zimrī-Līm marches before like a banner; turning around, he gives heart to the one lacking courage. Be strong! Penetrate (the enemy country)! For the enemy to witness your mettle. (Guichard 2014a: 19–20; Sasson 2015: 34)

This passage from *The Zimrī-Līm Epic* provides the *Sitz im Leben* of the Amorite warlord ideology. It comes from the Amorite heroic age, when the exploits of a famous warlord were praised in a poetic form. The text extols the hardships of the military campaign and the outdoor life of the warriors, shared by their tribal chieftain, Zimrī-Līm. One finds the motif of drinking water from water skins as found in the "Warriors' Manifesto" in the ninth-century BCE Babylonian *Erra Epic*, (1 58). "However sweet fine beer, it cannot compare with water from a waterskin" (*šikar našpi duššupi ul ubbalu mê nādi*). There also occurs a paradigmatic feature of the Amorite rough wildlife, already epitomized in the Sumerian poetic composition of the *Marriage of Martu*. There, the Amorite semi-nomads are depicted as coarse, eating raw meat. The song praises Zimrī-Līm as a true tribal leader who is giving an example to his troops, sharing the difficult outdoor life of his soldiers (line 10), leading them in their battles, and marching in front of them like a trailblazing banner (line 15). The region called Idamaraṣ means "The Difficult Side." It designates a chain of mountains that bar access to the plain and are difficult to penetrate, found in the north-west Jazireh region. This entire territory north of the left bank of the Euphrates attests to about twelve cities ruled by local sheikhs, where power was not centralized and more dispersed (Durand 1997a: 49–51, LAPO 16).

Elsewhere, it is stated that Zimrī-Līm is continually displaying himself, battling among the soldiers in the first line, climbing up the battering rams, attacking the cities, and constantly exposing himself to danger (ARM 26 238; Guichard 1999: 29 n.27). Zimrī-Līm's behavior conforms to and epitomizes the Amorite warlord ideology. He is risking his life for his people and is therefore worthy of their trust and apt to be their leader. Some centuries later, the Hebrew warlord and tribal chieftain, King David, was challenged by his son Absalom. Instead of leading his armies to war as a trailblazer, fighting in the first ranks

[2] (Guichard 2014a: 19–20) (7) *adi ša ikšudu ḫadān-šu* lugal (8) *u ida-maraṣ ukanniš aššēpē-šu* (9) *mê nādātim ištanatti* (10) *esik itti redî kalumma iššuš* (11) *rabbû bayyārū waṣuššu* (12) *kīma sirramim pē ṣērum* (13) *šīram īkulū mutū-šu* (14) *libbam iršû dananam uṣbū* (15) *zimrī-līm kīma šurinim ippāna illak* (16) *isḫur ana lā lē'îm inaddin lbbam* (17) *dinnāma iterrubā* (18) *išdīkunu immar nakrum.* (Marello 1992: 122 n.9)

Bodi_9781666979138_C004.indd 137 7/13/2026 3:09:40 PM

with his soldiers, David preferred to stay in Jerusalem, live in the shade, eat, drink, and share his couch with the wife of one of his officers, thereby disqualifying himself as a tribal leader (2 Samuel 11–12; Bodi 2010a; Chapter 2. Section 4).

The statement in line 7, "until the king's appointed time arrived" (*adi ša ikšudu ḫadān-šu šarri* lugal), is a stock phrase in Akkadian literature that expresses another feature of the ancient Near Eastern ideology: the auspicious time for action. In the case of Zimrī-Līm, to be assured of success in his military campaign, he had to wait for the divinely appointed time. This specific moment for launching the military campaign was usually obtained through extispicy, consulting sheep's entrails or liver (hepatoscopy), looking for omens (*têrtum*), and using various divinatory techniques like interpreting the flight of the birds (ornithomancy). Moreover, the syntax of the phrase is typical of one of the ways the genitival chain or *status constructus* is expressed in Akkadian. For example, the phrase *ša wardim uzun-šu*, literally "of the slave, his ear," meaning "the slave's ear," offers a similar syntactical pattern of the so-called periphrastic genitive construction (Bodi 2001: 79 n.5 § 28). According to Akkadian grammatical rules, after the prepositions *adi* or *ištu*, the noun that follows should be placed in the genitive (Buccellati 1972: 1–29). The scribe of the Mari tablet used a Sumerogram (lugal) "king," which in this case should be rendered as genitive (*šarri*) "king's, of the king." However, the various translators persist in translating (lugal) in the nominative (*šarrum*).[3] Furthermore, one finds similar syntactical constructions where the genitive is used: "(Until) the right moment occurred and doors opened themselves in front of me" (YOS 1 45 I 28, *a-da-an-nu ikšud-am-ma uptattâti bābāti*, Nbn.); "(When) prince Marduk had made his abode in Assyria for 21 years, the time was up, the fixed day arrived, and the anger of the king of the gods became appeased" (VAB 4 270 No 8 I 27, *rubû Marduk* 21 *šanāti qereb Aššur irtame šubassu imlû ūmê ikšuda adannu inūḫma uzzašu ša šar ilāni*, Nbn) (*CAD* A/1: 99).

These two examples stem from Neo-Babylonian texts from the time of Nebuchadnezzar. To clinch the issue, however, one would have to find a corresponding Old Babylonian example.

Moreover, the expression *ḫadānam kašādum* appears a second time in the *Zimrī-Līm Epic*, lines iv. 6–4:[4] "As soon as the king's appointed time arrived (*ištu šarri ikšudu ḫadān-šu*), he entered before Nanammir. In the temple E-kisika, he offered his sacrifice, amid Terqa, the beloved of Dagan (*narāmat Dagān*), life, abundance, and strength, from Dagan he requested," (Guichard 2014a: 23–24).

In principle, every military campaign presupposed divine approval since no expedition could have been launched without preliminary oracular interrogation, consultation, and divine endorsement. In ARM 26 197: 22–24, Zimrī-Līm's daughter,

[3] (Guichard 2014a: 19 and 23) "Jusqu'à ce que le roi eût atteint son but. Une fois que le roi eut atteint son but," Guichard follows Marello's translation for the first occurrence (Marello 1992: 121), "Jusqu'à ce que le roi eût atteint son objectif," and Durand for the second occurrence (Durand 1988: 475), "Une fois que le roi eut atteint son but." Sasson follows Guichard (Sasson 2015: 34–35) "Till the king achieves his goal, Once the king achieves his goal."

[4] (6) [*i*]*štu* lugal *ikšudu ḫadān-šu* (7) *īrub maḫar nunamnir* (8) *ina ekisiqqa niqīšu iqqi* (9) *qereb terqa narāmat Dagān* (10) *balāṭam ḫegallam ù da-na-na-am* (11) *itti Dagān zimrī-līm īriš.*

Bodi_9781666979138_C004.indd 138 7/13/2026 3:09:40 PM

Inib-šina, reminds her father: "Without oracular consultation (that is, authorization), do not enter into the city" (*balum têrtim, ana libbi ālim*, *la terru*[*b*]). To do otherwise might be perilous and spell defeat.

The *Legend of Narām-Sîn* narrates the military defeats after the Old Akkadian king went into battle despite unfavorable omens. He went to war without divine approval, disregarding inauspicious omens. The Narām-Sîn story communicates an important didactic message and warning, "that kings who carry out projects in the face of unfavourable omens are doomed to catastrophe" (Foster 2005: 348).

The storm god Addu of Aleppo gives the following instruction to Zimrī-Līm in A. 1968, 12′–17′: "When you (are about to) sally forth to a military campaign, do not sally forth without oracular consultation. (Only) when I am favorable in my oracle, you may sally forth; if it is not so, do not go out of the gate" (Durand 2002: 135, no 38).[5] The tribal god Dagan, king of the gods and omnipresent in the Middle Euphrates region (Feliu 2003: 147–54), takes sides with the city of Mari against Tišpak, the god of the enemy forces from the city of Ešnunna. Dagan announces Tišpak's demise, telling him that his day is over: Dagan to Tišpak, he said the following: "Since twice x-*dí*? you governed the country, now your day has arrived, your day like Ekallātum's you will encounter" (ARM 26/1 196: 5′–10′, Durand 1988: 394).[6]

Here, the motif of the fateful day is used, where *ut-ka ittalk-am* may be parsed as a G-stem or a Gt-stem perfect 3ms "it has gone" which, with—*am* ventive, means "it has come." In Ezek 7:10, the day of judgment on the city of Jerusalem is announced similarly, "The day is here! It has come!" (*hinnēh hayyôm hinnēh bāʾâ*; Bodi 2009a: 419 and 470). The Akkadian and Hebrew expressions "Your Day has arrived" refer to a divinely appointed, fateful day of doom and judgment.

While declining the term "apocalyptic" as the genre of this Mari letter, Sasson (1982: 164), nevertheless, sees it as a precursor of the apocalyptic genre, well-developed in Neo-Babylonian and biblical texts. "We can note that this type of religious symbolism, in which the cosmos and the polis are linked in their fate, in which the past, present and future lack delineation, and in which, ultimately, the fate of total communities—if not the mankind—becomes involved, belongs to particular manifestations of apocalypticizing literatures."

K. van der Toorn (1998: 3–4) suggests seeing here a prophetic role-play. His interpretation clarifies how the dialogue between the statues of the gods was mimed through the intermediary of one or more prophets. His explanation suggests a specific socio-cultural and religious context for this text, but does not invalidate the apocalyptic symbolism of this Mari text with prophetic-apocalyptic content (Bodi 2010b: 13–36; 2015b: 207; Neujahr 2012 omits Mari evidence).

In the 1400 BCE Inscription of Idrimi, the latter spends seven years with the ʿ*apiru* warriors from Alalaḫ. Having made oracular consultations of a bird's flight

[5] (No 38: 12′–17′): *i-nu-ma gi-ir-ra-am tu-u*[*ṣ-ṣú-ú*] [*b*]*a-lum te-er-tim la t*[*u*]-*u*[*ṣ-ṣí*] [*i*]*-nu-ma a-na-ku i-na te-*[*e*]*r-ti-i*[*a*] [*a*]*z-za-*[*z*]*u gi-ir-ra-am ta-ṣí* [*š*]*um-ma* [*la k*]*i-a-am-ma ba-ba-am* [*la*] *tu-*[*u*]*ṣ-ṣí*.

[6] (5′) *a-na* [d]tišpak [d]*da-gan ki-a-am* (6′) *iq-bi um-ma-mi iš-tu* ŠI-na x-*dí*? (7′) *ma-a-tam te-bi-il i-na-an-n*[*a*] (8′) *ú-ut-ka it-ta-al-kam* (9′) *ú-ut-ka ki-ma é-kál-la-tim*[ki] (10′) *ta-ma-ḫa-ar.*

Bodi_9781666979138_C004.indd 139 7/13/2026 3:09:40 PM

(ornithomancy) and sheep's *exta*, or entrails (extispicy), he discovers that after seven years of adversity, the storm god Addu has finally become favorable toward him. The auspicious moment has arrived for him to reconquer the throne of his ancestors. With the help of his warriors and other ʿ*apiru*, mercenaries, he succeeds in conquering the city of Alalaḫ (Greenstein 1995, 4: 2425; Lauinger 2024: 211–12). One finds corresponding Hittite divinatory techniques in Asia Minor. The ritual and divinatory use of birds is attested in the various cultures of the Syro-Palestinian area from the end of the third millennium to the first millennium BCE (Ebla, Mari, Alalaḫ, Emar, Ugarit, and the Hebrews; Minunno 2013: 125). The search for the auspicious moment for taking action was most probably transmitted to the ancient Greeks from Syria to Asia Minor, with the Hittites serving as intermediaries.

7. The Auspicious Moment and the Concept of *kairos* in Classical Greek Literature

The Achaean military campaign against Troy was also associated with the determination of the auspicious time by a diviner. In the *Iliad*, the Homeric bards speak of Calchas as the one who "led the ships of the Achaeans into the land of Ilium through that seercraft (*mantosunē*) that Phoebus Apollo had given him" (*Iliad* 1.71–72). Interpreting an omen of a snake, blood-red on its neck, devouring eight little birds, young sparrows, and their mother, Calchas at Aulis predicts that the Achaeans will capture Troy after nine years of siege (*Iliad* 2.303–317) Collins (2002: 23–24), calls it "oiônomanteia" from the Greek word οἰωνίζομαι [*oiōnizomai*] "to divine through omens." Calchas played a crucial role in events such as the sacrifice of Iphigenia, the daughter of Agamemnon (Euripides, *Iphigenia in Aulis*), the ransom of captive Chryseis, the daughter of Apollo's priest Chryses, to end the plague the god Apollo sent to punish the Achaeans for the sacrilege, decimating their troops (*Iliad* 1.69–100; 2.299–332). He participated in the elaboration of the Achaean war strategy (*Iliad* 7.72–176). Agamemnon reproaches Calchas, saying, "Seer of evil things: never yet have you told me anything good. Always the evil things are dear to your heart to prophecy" (*Iliad* 1.106). One is reminded of Jehoshaphat's negative opinion of the prophet Micah, son of Imlah, "I hate him because he never prophesied anything good about me, but evil" (1 Kgs 22:8).

Calchas assumed a significant role in the events surrounding the Trojan War. He was known for his ability to interpret animal omens and signs by observing the flight of birds (ornithomancy) and to foresee the future. Ornithomancy (*iṣṣūrāt bārūti* "the birds of divination") finds its precursors in Mesopotamia, reaching Greece through northern Syria, the Hurrians, and Hittites (Maul 2003–05: 81–2; Durand 1997b: 273; Jankovič 2004). While the specific act of Calchas performing extispicy is not mentioned in the *Iliad*, it is consistent with the practices of diviners in Ancient Greece. Since he was consulted before the war, it may be safely assumed that the examination of entrails was also part of his divinatory panoply. In the *Odyssey* 21.145, one of Penelope's suitors is said to be Leiodes θυοσκόος. The term *thuoskoos* means "the one who examines the sacrifices" (Chantraine 1999: 449). In the *Iliad* 24.221 (οἳ μάντιές εἰσι θυοσκόοι), King

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Priam of Troy associates both words *mantis* and *thuoskoos* to designate "a sacrifice diviner" or "a seer that divines through sacrifice." Moreover, in the *Odyssey* 22.321, Odysseus accuses Leiodes, the haruspex, of having used his prayers and divination to hinder his return to Ithaca, to steal his wife from him, and sire sons with her. Ignoring his supplications, Odysseus cuts off his head. However, according to West (1997: 46), the *thuoskoos* mentioned in *Iliad* 24.221 and *Odyssey* 21.145, 22.318–323 inspected smoke from a sacrifice, not signs on the liver.

Toward the end of the sixth century BCE, the procedure of examining the entrails is illustrated on Attic vases (Johnston 2008: 125). Pausanias 6.2.5 (second-century CE) mentions kids, lambs, and calves sacrificed for the practice of extispicy. Concerning the Roman world, Cicero (43 BCE–106 CE) said that "nearly everyone used entrails in divination" (*Divination* 1.10).

According to the fifth-century military leader, Xenophon, the Greeks used diviners before battles (Xenophon, *Anabasis* 5.6.29; 6.4–5). Iamid Tisamenus "won five battles" for the Spartans through his divinatory skills. His grandson Agias, who was also a *mantis*, used his gifts to help the Spartan military and political leader Lysander capture the Athenian fleet at the Battle of Aegospotami in 405 BCE, forcing Athens to capitulate (Herodotus, *Histories* 9.33.1; Pausanias 3.11.6–8). Divination was essential at the first stage of battle, as described by Thucydides 6.69.2, "and then the *manteis* brought forth the customary sacrificial animals." The battle could be delayed until the readings of the entrails were propitious (Johnston 2008: 116).

Monique Trédé (1992) wrote her Sorbonne PhD dissertation on the Greek concept of *Kairos*, or auspicious time for action. She has analyzed the occurrences of the term in the earliest Greek literature since Hesiod and Homer from the eighth-century BCE, and in texts as late as the third-century BCE. Trédé established that the earliest usage of the Greek term *kairos* is not temporal but spatial, and has nothing to do with time. "So, in all the cases mentioned so far, whether archery, strategy, politics, or medicine, *kairios, kairos,* or *epikairos* refer to a 'critical,' 'decisive' point that was defined spatially before being defined temporally (Trédé 1992: 41). Therefore, Delling's statement that "In the spatial sense the word [Kairos] is rare," is less than accurate (Delling 1966: 455; Barr 1969b: 35).

Between the eighth and sixth centuries BCE, in Homer's *Iliad* (4.183–187; 8.80–85; 8.326; 9.339), the *Odyssey*, and Hesiod, the term *kairos* stands for a target or mark on the body of the adversary in a single combat where one should strike to inflict a mortal wound. Different passages in the *Iliad* describing battles identify particular spots on the warrior's body where protective armor does not cover them. The term *kairos* stands for that critical spot where the warrior can be mortally wounded. In the *Iliad* Book 8, the Achaeans are being overwhelmed by the Trojans. Nestor, the champion of the Achaeans, is still standing, but Alexander, Helen's companion, strikes Nestor's horse at a precise spot where the horse's mane emerges from the head. It is considered the weakest spot on the animal's body, and the horse falls. In the fifth-century BCE, Thucydides uses the term *kairos* in a new way. For him, *kairos* becomes the critical moment in time and politics where all kinds of political reversals are possible, when former allies can become enemies (*Thuc.* I 43,2; VI 85,1). In Plato's *Politics* 270 A 6, one

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finds the same usage, where *kairos* stands for the critical moment in time when the universe can change and adopt a course inverse to the previous one. For Plato, the man who does not recognize the *kairos* and who shrinks from seizing the favorable occasion (*kairon lambanein*) is a tragic person who destroys his existence (*The Republic* II, 370b). From the fifth century onward, the term *kairos* developed the usual meaning we give to this term: To recognize the critical situation in life, know that it demands a decision, and what kind of decision, to train oneself to identify as such the decisive point in one's life and to act accordingly. One finds this meaning in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1.4, and later among Stoic philosophers. In the classical Greek tragedies, comments are found about time (mostly *chronos*) and how its subversive action could be foreseen or not. In Aeschylus, the events could be foreseen, while in Sophocles, oracles often foretell not what will take place, but when (de Romilly 1968: 6; 16; 141).

Furthermore, the ancient Greeks developed a religious veneration of the divinized Kairos, who was later numbered among the gods and to whom a religious hymn of praise was composed. There is one written attestation of the cult associated with this god; an altar to god Kairos stood at the entrance of the stadium at Olympia (Pausanias 5.14.9). The cult of Kairos was widespread in the third-century BCE. The statue of Kairos represented a young, naked ephebe with winged feet like Hermes, the messenger of the gods. His distinctive attribute was a striking hairstyle, a long lock over his forehead with short hair behind. Kairos had the character of decision-making, since the lock of hair indicated that one must seize the favorable opportunity by the forelock (Delling 1966: 457).

The Akkadian term for favorable time is variously transcribed with *adānu, adiānu, edannu, idānu, ḫadannu, ḫadiānu, ḫidānu* (*CAD* A/1: 96). It stands for "appointed, fateful time" and occasionally, "favorable time." The notion of auspicious or favorable time is particularly frequent in texts from Neo-Babylonian times as a key term in extispicy and divination relating to the determination of the *adannu*, "auspicious time," as shown by Ulla Koch (2005). The goal of the various divinatory practices is to determine the most appropriate time for launching a military campaign or undertaking a project.

The well-known Classical Greek concept of *kairos*, or favorable time, is expressed with the proverbial sayings "to recognize the favorable time" (*kairon gnōthi*, Diels II, 216, 10) and "to seize the favorable occasion" (*kairon lambanein*). The most probable precursor of the Greek concept of *kairos* should be sought in Mesopotamian divinatory techniques and texts. The concept reached the Greeks through Asia Minor and the use of common divinatory practices.

However, since the Akkadian term for "favorable, auspicious time" (*ḫadānu*) already appears in the *Zimrī Līm Epic* of the Amorite warlord, the concept would be present in the Northwest Semitic domain since Old Babylonian times.

The *Epic of Zimrī-Līm* states that the Amorite king launched his military campaign "by the orders of the god Dagan" (iii.30), and that he "saw his sign by a prophet" (*īmur-ma itta-šu āpilam*), (iii.35), implying recourse to divinatory techniques to determine the "auspicious time" (*ḫadānu*) for it.

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5

The Amorite and Hebrew Tribes

Analogies, Parallels, and Contrasts

1. Introduction

Adopting Sasson's (2019: 16) evaluation of Mari's importance for biblical studies, one can point out that Mari documentation remains a treasure trove not to be used to authenticate the Hebrew past but to illustrate practices, customs, modes of thinking "*Denkform*," interacting, and conventional ways in making treaties that were perpetuated across centuries, even when many of the intermediaries remain lost to us. Since the purpose of biblical narratives was primarily theological and not historical, one must look for the historical background of Hebrew customs and rites among their literate neighbors and precursors who were geographically, linguistically, and culturally related. Among these, the North-Syrian Amorite semi-nomadic tribes, who have employed scribes and writing in Akkadian since Old Babylonian times, or the chronologically closer texts from Emar (Fleming 1995:139–47) and Ugarit (Smith 2014), should have their place of honor. Moreover, biblical books are notoriously difficult to date due to the multilayered redactional activity of the scribes and the copyists who produced them. The Hebrew literary traditions did not emerge *ex nihilo*. They are products of a long, ancient Near Eastern "stream of tradition" of themes, motifs, topoi, and expressions (Van De Mieroop 2016: 30). First, the Amorites provide a major source for the study of the early stages of that stream of tradition. Second, Mari offers historical analogies between the Amorite tribes and the Hebrew ones. Third, due to the conservatism of the semi-nomadic lifestyle, rites, customs, and practices, the data culled from Mari texts can provide what the Germans call "*Lokalkolorit*," a Northwest Semitic cultural, linguistic, religious, sociological, and historical context as a background in which later Hebrew tribal and literary traditions can be better understood and explained. The comparative–contrastive method provides pertinent results when the geographical, linguistic, and historical continuity is taken into account.

The tablets from the Mari Royal Archives, together with those discovered at Ebla, 55 km (34 miles) south of Aleppo, in 1964, dating from the third millennium BCE, radically changed our understanding of the importance of Northern Syria as a major cultural hub between Egypt and central Mesopotamia. Scholars no longer speak of two cradles of civilization, Egypt and Mesopotamia, but of three, considering the major

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role played by Northern Syria (Durand 2004: 112). The latter represents a watershed and a vector of transmission of Mesopotamian literary, cultural, and religious traditions to the Hurro-Hittites in Anatolia and the Ionian Greeks along the coast of modern-day Turkey. Two recently published cuneiform tablets with a bilingual Amorite–Akkadian text significantly increased our knowledge of Amorite (George and Krebernik 2022: 113–66). Being a distinct Northwest Semitic language, Amorite shows considerable similarities with Aramaic and Hebrew (Bodi 2014a: 235–36; Streck 2000). The terms such as MAR.TU and *Amurrum*, "the Westerners," not only reflect outsiders' perspectives on the Amorite semi-nomads. They also stand for their self-perception as Amorites when their rulers took over Mesopotamia. Zabāya of the city of Larsa describes himself as "the leader of the Amorites" (*ra-bí-an* MAR.TU), (RIME 4.2.4.1.2), as do many military leaders before it became a title for Babylonian generals (Stol 2004: 805; Reculeau 2017: 612). Another famous Amorite king, Ḫammurabi of Babylon (1792–1750 BCE), was the sixth in a line of long-lived kings whose reigns had passed from father to son since 1894 BCE. His dynasty claimed common ancestry with the Amorite kings of Assyria of the Benjaminite tribe (Finkelstein 1966: 95–118; Charpin 2012: 78). Moreover, an inscribed brick from Ḫammurabi of Babylon attests to the way he wanted to be perceived as "King of the totality of the land of Amurru (lugal.da.ga.na kur mar.tu), king of Sumer and Akkad." Such an inscription calls attention to the presence of Amorites among the population of the city of Babylon in the Old Babylonian period (Kupper 1957: 178).

2. The Importance of the Amorites for Biblical and Comparative Studies

Considering the accumulated insights, knowledge, new understanding of the Mari texts, and the establishment of their precise chronology achieved by the Paris "Mari team" around Jean-Marie Durand and Dominique Charpin, the biblical scholars can ignore the study of Mari documents only at their own peril. As Aaron Burke (2021: xiv) put it, "The Mari letters alone are a formidable corpus, and more formidable still because of the threat posed to our intellectual assumptions by yet more unpublished documents from this corpus that remain to be studied."

The Mari tablets were written during a relatively short period of roughly fifty years, from 1810 to 1762 BCE, reflecting the reign of two Amorite dynasties over Mari, the Addu, and the Līm tribal chieftains. They are, nevertheless, of exceptional importance since they cover a great variety of subjects such as economic texts, 100 letters of feminine correspondence, about fifty letters with prophetic content, numerous political contracts and alliances, and reports of military campaigns, all containing a wealth of geographical and onomastic data. Moreover, they stem from the entire ancient Near East (except Egypt), although before burning the city, King Ḫammurabi's scribes literally "skimmed" the Mari archives, carrying away whatever they considered of political importance, or texts revealing Zimrī-Līm's wrongdoings. The image one acquires from the Mari Royal Archives is that the Amorite warlords were at the hub of

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international politics and alliances. This should relativize the pessimism of some scholars about the paucity of data on the Amorites since they were implicated in a vast international correspondence. Moreover, in light of Mari data, the traditional differentiation between peripheral and central Mesopotamian Akkadian is now obsolete. At the time of Yaḫdun-Līm (ca. 1810–1794 BCE), there occurred a "reform of writing" where Mari scribes adopted the Akkadian system of writing from Ešnunna (Wasserman and Bloch 2023: 333). The latter, at that time, exercised a political predominance in the ancient Near East and occupied the valley of the Euphrates almost to the very gates of Mari. Yaḫdun-Līm's scribes relinquished the local dialectal idiosyncrasies and embraced the "Akkadian *koine*" from Ešnunna, facilitating more efficient international correspondence.

3. The Phenomenon of Prophecy

The study of Mari documents was decisive in making a paradigm shift in the understanding of biblical prophecy. They attest to the existence of the phenomenon of prophecy in the Northwest Semitic domain and can be seen as precursors of the Hebrew prophets for almost a millennium. The fifty Mari documents with prophetic content are useful for comparison with biblical prophecies (ARM 26 I/1, Durand 1988; 1994). They contain prophecies and premonitory dreams (Durand 2000: 74–90, LAPO 18). Three publications with English translations of these fifty Mari letters are available (Roberts 2002: 157–254; Heimpel 2003; Nissinen 2003). The prophetic domain has been extensively researched (Abarrio 2025: 1-2q; Charpin 2015b: 11–58), I will, therefore, limit myself to two areas where comparative studies are still a desideratum.

There exists a well-defined genre of biblical prophetic texts called "Oracles against the Nations." Isaiah (13–23) contains a significant collection of such oracles. These chapters include prophecies against Babylon, Assyria, Philistia, Moab, Damascus, Cush, Egypt, Edom, Arabia, and Tyre. Jeremiah (46–51) covers judgments against Egypt, Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Kedar, Hazor, Elam, and Babylon. Ezekiel (25–32) contains prophecies directed against Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Sidon, and Egypt. Amos (1–2) begins with a series of oracles against the nations, including Aram (Damascus), Philistines (Gaza), Phoenicians (Tyre), Edom, Ammon, Moab, and Judah (Hutton 2014: 85). A relatively recent book dealing with this topic from a biblical perspective does not mention the Mari oracles against the nations (Mein, Kim, and Holt 2015). In his time, Barstad (2006: 25) lamented, saying that it is regrettable that Mari oracles against the nations have played an insignificant part in discussions about comparable Hebrew prophecies. Several Mari "Oracles against the Nations" are available for a comparative study: Against the Benjaminites (ARM 26 I/1 195; 200; 201; 215; 216; 230; 233); against Išme-Dagan (ARM 26/1 207 who belonged to the Benjaminite clan); against the city of Ešnunna (ARM 26 I/1 196 [against Tišpak, the patron god of Ešnunna]; 197; 199; 204; 205); against Elam (ARM 26 I/1 192; 208; 288); against Babylon (ARM 26 26 I/1 209; 210; against Hammurabi, King of Babylon

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212 [A.3217]).[1] In Isa 46:1–2, one reads of an oracle against Marduk (Bēl), the patron god of Babylon, and Nēbô. The latter was the son of Marduk. Written ^{d}Nabium, from the Semitic root *√nbî,* meaning "the herald, the one who announces," or "the one called." He was identified with Tišpak, the god of Ešnunna, and appears as the first part of the theophorous name of Nebuchadnezzar. He was the chief god of the Neo-Babylonian dynasty. The worship of Nabû is attested already in the twenty-fourth-century BCE in Ebla, and his cult reached Babylonia with the arrival of the Amorite semi-nomads. He was worshiped by the Arameans at Elephantine and became identified with Apollo in the Greco-Roman times.

The Amorite sheikh and warlord, Zimrī-Līm, who belonged to the northern Sim'alite tribes, spent most of his reign leading military campaigns, fighting numerous battles to ensure his rule over rebellious tribes (ARM 28 16:27–30; Guichard 1999: 28). War was a permanent reality for him, and a series of oracles relate to the numerous enemies he had to fight. The chapter on Zimrī-Līm's wars is the longest that could be written about his reign. Like the Yahweh war battles of the Hebrew tribes, the war was a sacred enterprise. Humans may fight, but the battle's outcome is decided by the gods. Just like Zimrī-Līm, the Hebrew tribal warlord, David was accompanied by an army of mercenaries, disenfranchised landowners, and disgruntled soldiers in his accession to power. The classic analysis of Zimrī-Līm's rise to power and way to the throne of his Sim'alite ancestors is the study of Charpin and Durand (1986: 141–83; Heimpel 2003: 37–163).

In Gerhard von Rad's (1991) form-critical study of the *Holy War in Ancient Israel*, to be read in dialogue with Weippert's comparative study of the "Yahweh War" (1997: 71), the former pointed out the presence of the so-called *Ermutigungsorakel* literally, "Encouragement oracle," or, an "Exhortation not to fear," expressed with the Hebrew formula, (*'al-tîrā'*) "fear not," having its functional equivalent in Akkadian (*lā tapallaḫ*). He also identified the *Übergabeformel* or the "Promise of handing over the enemy" into the hands of the Hebrew tribes, in Hebrew (*nātan bĕyad*), and Akkadian (*malûm ana qāti*) "to fill the hand" (with the enemy). Mari texts with prophetic content attest to the use of such oracles in a war context with similar Akkadian formulations. Before a confrontation with King Ḫammurabi of Babylon, the ruler of Mari was reassured by a female prophetess (*aššat awīlim* "wife of a man") predicting the ruin (*ḫalāqu*) of the former with the words *lā išḫar √ḫâšum* "do not be anxious" (ARM 13 114:13 = 26/1 21, Heintz 2015: 29–53; Bodi 2016: 797). However, the opposite occurred; Ḫammurabi burned Mari to the ground in 1762 BCE. Moreover, Weippert showed the presence of the same "fear not" (*lā tapallaḫ*) phraseology in Neo-Assyrian prophecies, confirming the literary stream of tradition lasting over a millennium (Weippert 1997 and 2014: 159–206; Nissinen 2019: 200). The inscription of Zakkur, Aramaic king of Hamath and Lu'ash, written around 800 BCE, depicts the Lord of Heaven (*bʿlšmyn*) as the deity of Hamath and the patron god of the king (*KAI* 202 A. 3.11.13 B 23; Röllig 1999: 150). The occasion for the inscription was the attack by a coalition of north Syrian and Anatolian

[1] Ešnunna corresponds to present-day Tell Asmar in the Diyala River basin, about 80 kilometers (50 miles) NE of Baghdad. The site of Babylon is located about 320 kilometers (200 miles) south of present-day Baghdad.

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kings united against him. In A.13, Baʿal Shamayin reassures him: "Do not fear!" (*ʾl tzḥl*) (Ross 1970: 3). In Num 21:34, Yahweh says to Moses, "Do not fear him (Amorite Og, king of Bashan, east of Jordan), for I have given him into your hand." This battle account was probably taken from an earlier *Book of the Wars of Yahweh* (*seper milḥamôt yhwh*, Num 21:14). The *Übergabeformel* is particularly frequent in Saul's and David's tribal wars (1 Sam 14:12; 17:46–47; 23:4; 30:23; 2 Sam 5:19), presumably from the tenth-century BCE. The wording is not always identical and is occasionally more of a dynamic equivalent. In the stream of tradition, each culture, Amorite, Assyrian, Aramaic, or Hebrew, adapts and appropriates the topos in its own way. The obvious conclusion would be that what some consider the hallmark for identifying late postexilic Deuteronomistic redaction is simply a common ancient Near Eastern topos using the same phraseology from Old Babylonian to Neo-Assyrian times and down to Hebrew texts. The so-called "Yahweh Wars" are part of a long, ancient Near Eastern stream of tradition and a conventional way of writing battle accounts (Bodi 2019: 443–69). The practice of oracular consultation before battle, however, has its roots in the actual preparation for military campaigns. This would provide its major *Sitz im Leben* or socio-cultural origin. In the context of the "Yahweh War" terminology, one should include the textual and iconographic motif of the "divine net" with which the divinity captures and punishes the enemy or the perjurer. Here again, the Mari texts (LAPO 18 933; 939; 1203; Durand 2000) with the expression "to throw a net" (*ana šakān kamāri/šēti*) anticipate the Hebrew usage of the motif (Ezek 12:13; 17:20; 19:8.9; 32:3 *pāraš rešet* "to throw a net"), confirming numerous similarities not only in form but also in content (Bodi 1991a: 161–82). In an oracle against King Ḫammurabi of Babylon, an *apīlum*-prophet of Dagan of Tuttul revealed, "O Babylon, what do you keep doing? I will gather you to the net (*ana pugim*) and the lance (**ù *ša-ka-ri-im*). The houses of the 7 conspirators and their wealth, I will hand over (*ana qātim*) to Zimri-Lim.¬" (ARM 26/1 209: 8–13). Durand identifies (**ša-ka-ri-im*) with *šukurrum* "lance," or *šakarū* "cutlass," a typical Amorite short, broad, slightly curved sword (Durand 1988: 439). An Old Babylonian text attests to the real presence of the net as a weapon of divine punishment on occasions of swearing oaths, creating an almost physical awareness of the danger in case of perjury (BM.96998, lines 39 and 49, Veenhof 2003: 325). The lance (*ḥănît*) is mentioned as Yahweh's weapon in Hab 3:11 and Ps 35:3, and the net (*rešet*) in Lam 1:13, Ezek 12:13; 17:20 (against Jerusalem), and 32:3 against Egypt (Barstad 2006: 31). Furthermore, the "divine weapon" that could be a wooden lance, iron spear, mace, or ax with which the divinity subjugates the chaos, conquers the sea, or crushes the rebellion was placed into the ruler's hand at the occasion of enthronement as a symbol of his victorious rule (Durand 1993: 41–61; Wyatt 1998: 833–82). Mari texts with prophetic content provide a case of doubly failed prophecy (ARM 26/1 194: 41–43) "[A]s soon as you (Zimrī-Līm) capture the city (of Ḫammurabi, king of Kurdā), you shall declare a liberation (*andurārum*) so that your kingship lasts forever (*šarrūt-ka dāriat*)." However, the historical reality was different since Zimrī-Līm did not capture the city of Kurdā, and his rule remained limited, thirteen years altogether. In comparison with Ḫammurabi of Babylon, who built an empire, Zimrī-Līm was a minor player who disappeared after Ḫammurabi destroyed Mari. Zimrī-Līm's first duty after capturing

Kurdā would have been to declare a generalized release of the slaves, making it an apt precedent for the events described in Jeremiah 34. King Zedekiah released the slaves, proclaiming a (*dĕrôr* "liberation") before the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon in 588/7 BCE. Several Mari oracles (ARM 26/1 n^{os} 21, 194, 209, 212) provide Old Babylonian examples to Carroll's (1979) collection of failed prophecies in the Hebrew Bible. They illustrate the phenomenon of cognitive dissonance in both the Mari and Hebrew prophetic traditions.

A Mari letter with prophetic content (A. 1968 lines 1′–6′) relates the message of the storm god Adad from Aleppo to the last ruler of Mari, Zimrī-Līm (Bodi 2014c: 417). The god Adad's influence sweeps beyond the city of Aleppo in Northern Syria since he claims to have given the rule over the city of Mari on the Middle Euphrates to the Amorite sheikh who reveres him. This feature is comparable to the Hebrew god, Yahweh, who assimilated some features of a storm god (Ps 29 and Hab 3), and whose rule extends beyond the city of Jerusalem. In Ezekiel 1 and 10, Yahweh's reassuring presence and glory (*kābôd*) accompany his exiled people in Babylonia. Success in ruling or recovering the lost reign depends on the ruler's relationship with and faithfulness to the gods Nergal in Mari (ARM 1 3) and Adad of Aleppo (A. 1968), respectively. Nergal and Addu manage the territories beyond the range of a single city and give power and rule only to those who uphold their cause. Nissinen (2017a) further expanded the field of comparative studies by collecting pertinent Greek prophetic texts for links with prophecies from the Semitic world. With extensive lists of Greek prophecies from Delphi and Dodona, the oldest Hellenic oracles, he has provided a valuable tool for comparative study from a phenomenological point of view. The study of specific features, points of contact, similarities, and contrasts must still be carried out in light of the phenomenology of religious practices. An example of the heuristic value of the phenomenological method is found in Weinfeld's study of divine warfare (1983: 121–47), contrasted to the traditional comparative method on war accounts by Lawson Younger Jr. (1990).

4. The Migrating Amorite Semi-Nomadic Tribes

While in the twenty-fourth-century BCE, Eblaite sources refer to a "king (LUGAL) of Mar-tu^{ki}," the specific reason why the Amorites began migrating to the southeast of Mesopotamia in the twenty-first-century BCE still eludes us. Climatic changes provoking periods of famine for these nomadic transhumant tribes and their flocks seem a plausible explanation since drought, famine, infertility, and starvation were frequent phenomena in Northern Syria and the land of Canaan (Sallaberger 2007: 417–56; Weiss 2016: 62–63). In the Hebrew Bible, Abraham moves to Egypt due to a famine in Canaan (Gen 12:10)

The Neo-Sumerian scribes of the kings of the Ur III Dynasty perceived the lifestyle of the Amorites as uncouth and barbarian (Charpin 2015a: 31–46). They judged them from the point of view of the sedentary population, saying that the Amorites grew no cereals, ate raw meat, and did not bury their dead. The Sumerians buried their dead

Bodi_9781666979138_C005.indd 148 7/13/2026 3:16:18 PM

underneath their clay-built habitations, while the Amorites, tent-dwellers, buried their dead in the steppe. To stave off Amorite penetration, the Sumerian King Šulgi (2094–2047 BCE) built a wall or fortress between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, called *Muriq-Tidnim*, "Tidnum-Nomad-Repeller."[2] The term Tidnum, written GÌR.GÌR, is perhaps derived from *ditānu/didānu,*[3] which is another designation for the Amorite semi-nomads. While avoiding direct military confrontation with the last king of Ur, Ibbī-Sîn (2028–2004 BCE), the Amorites severed communications between the cities, provoking the disorganization of the realm and eventually succeeding in taking over one city after another. Išbī-Erra wrote the following to his overlord Ibbī-Sîn: "Reports that hostile Amorites (Mar-tu) had entered the plains were heard, and all the grain, 144,000 kor (that had been bought) was brought into Isin. Now, the Amorites (Mar-tu) in their entirety have entered the heart of the country and have taken the great fortresses one by one" (Jacobsen 1953: 40).

Some of these *homines novi* ended up being incorporated into the ruling Sumerian families by marriage ties (Steinkeller 1991: 21). As reflected in the Sumerian composition *The Marriage of Martu*, by marrying the daughter of a Sumerian City king, the Amorite Martu became adopted and acculturated to the urban society (Klein 1997: 99–116, Römer 1989: 319–34). The Amorites became the high-ranking officers in the armies of various Mesopotamian kingdoms, where they were called *šāpir Amurrî* (ugula mar.tu), "commander of the Amorites," or *rabi Amurrî* (gal mar.tu), "chief of the Amorites." These titles continued even when the units they commanded were no longer comprised of Amorites (Wasserman and Bloch 2023: 9).

At the beginning of the twentieth-century BCE, several Amorite dynasties began the process of acculturation as rulers of major Mesopotamian and Syrian cities: Larsa, Kiš, Isin, Uruk, Ur, Babylon, Umma, Ešnunna, Ekallātum, Ḫalab (=Aleppo), Mari, Qaṭnā. Buccellati (1966: 241, and 302–21) identifies ^{KUR}MAR.TU with Djebel Bišri in northeastern Syria (between Der ez-Zor, Raqqa, and Homs) and points out the mention of Amorite names in various cities in Mesopotamia. The Amorite onomastic is so abundant that it was possible to deduce elements of the Amorite language and grammar from the names (Gelb 1980).

Amiet (2005: 18–19) pointed out a historical pattern in the way nomadic tribes coming from the northwest parts of Syria settled and adopted the urban culture of their new land. In northern Mesopotamia, the cities of Mari, Šubat-Enlil, and Ekallātum were settled by Amorite rulers from the Addu and Līm clans. Zimrī-Līm settled in Mari and proclaimed himself king of that city and the urban population called "Akkadians" but did not forget his Amorite tribal origins (Charpin and Durand 1986: 157). This is how we should understand the words a Mari official addressed to his lord. Zimrī-Līm: "You are the king of the Ḫanean-(semi-nomads), but moreover, you are, in the second place, also the king of the Akkadians; my lord ought not to ride a horse; it

[2] *CAD* R: 268 *Mu-ri-iq-Ti-id-ni-im* "Which Keeps Away the Tidnum (People)," name of a fortification (MAD 3 231f.), from the root *rêqu, ruāqu* which in the D-stem means, "to keep something away."

[3] *CAD* D: 165. The word *di-ta-nu* explained as "Sutean" in *Malku-Šarru* I 235, where it is preceded by *dašnu*, explained as "Amorite"; It probably refers to the gentilic Tidanum and Tidnum (Kupper 1957: 156; Hrůša 2010), which occurs in West Semitic personal names as Samsu-ditāna.

Bodi_9781666979138_C005.indd 149 7/13/2026 3:16:18 PM

is on a *nūbalum* and mules (*kudānū*) that my lord should ride to honor his capital city (ARM 6 76:20–24)" (Charpin 1993: 170 n.36).[4]

The term *nūbalum* is a deverbal noun derived from *wabālum* "to carry." It is a wooden object since the term is preceded by the determinative (ĝeš "wood") and stands for a chair carried by porters or a litter (Groneberg 1990: 161–80; Durand 1997a: 236 LAPO 16). Wasserman and Bloch (2023: 59) translate it with "palanquin," a wooden box carried by four bearers.

As a connoisseur of the semi-nomadic, local traditional values and symbols of the Hebrew tribes, David ordered Zadok, the priest, and Nathan, the prophet, to make Solomon ride on King David's she-donkey "make my son Solomon ride on my she-donkey" (*wĕhirkabtem ʾet-šĕlōmō bĕnî ʿal-happirdâ ʾăšer-lî*, 1 Kgs 1:33). The mule is a hybrid animal and proverbially sterile; therefore, translating *pirdâ* as she-donkey is preferable. In the context of dynastic succession, where having progeny is essential, one avoids riding an animal that symbolizes sterility in ancient Near Eastern curses (Bodi 2021a: 135–60). Riding on his father's donkey was a public demonstration that the younger son, Solomon, and not the older Adonijah, was chosen as David's legitimate successor. In his attempt to become king, Adonijah identified himself with the urban elite, while Solomon, under David's guidance, rode on the traditional semi-nomadic royal symbol, the donkey. Solomon was proclaimed king riding on a she-donkey, in opposition to Adonijah, who paraded with horses. In the Mari letters, the donkey appears as a royal animal and as a symbol of peace. It has a close relationship with the semi-nomadic royalty of Amorite origin (Lafont 2000: 216). The donkey is likewise the paramount symbol of royalty in the Hebrew tradition.

David also commands Zadok and Nathan to "anoint" Solomon as the new tribal chief in v. 34: (*ûmāšaḥ ʾōtô*). The practice of anointing the tribal chieftains is a common feature among the Amorites. In one Mari letter (ARM 28 147), Zimrī-Līm's vassal, Ili-Eštar, mentions "anointing" and "oil" used for the rite of anointing. "Another matter, my father wrote to me about the anointing-*kudūtum*. My father knows that oil (ì = *šamnu*) is a cause of worry. Now, Qarnī-Līm anointed me with oil (*pašāšum*)" (Kupper 1998: 210).[5]

As pointed out by Stephanie Dalley (1993: 22), anointing with oil accompanied oath taking. Loyalty oaths sworn by vassals to Esarhaddon, king of Assyria in the seventh-century BCE, make this clear: "Just as oil enters your flesh, so may they (i.e., the gods) cause this oath to enter your flesh." (SAA 2 nº 6, Parpola and Watanabe 1988: 56 § 94, lines 622–23). If they broke the oaths, they would activate the curses for perjury. In this case, the anointing makes the oath binding. In Mesopotamia, the anointing of the king's head served to protect his person from evil attacks.

A late Old Babylonian royal ritual in Sumerian with occasional Akkadian translations attests to the anointing of the king's head, where the act serves to protect the king from harm: "(1) This oil may become sacred, may become pure, may become

4 [*šum-ma*] lugal ḫa-na^{meš} *at-ta* [*ù š*]*a-ni-iš* lugal *ak-ka-di-im at-ta* [*be-lí*] *i-na* anše-kur-ra-ḫá *la i-ra-ka-ab* [*i-na*] ^{giš}*nu-ba-lim ù* anše-ḫá *ku-da-ni-ma* [*be-l*]*í li-ir-ka-am-ma qa-qa-ad šar-ru-ti-šu*.

5 (5′) *ša-ni-tam aš-šum ki-du-ti*[*m*] *a-bi iš-*[*pu-ra-am*] (6′) *a-bi i-de*$_4$ *ki-ma* ì *ma-ar-ṣú* (7′) *i-na-an-am qar-ni-l*[*i*]*-im ip-šu-š*[*a*]*-an-ni*.

Bodi_9781666979138_C005.indd 150 7/13/2026 3:16:18 PM

shining. (2) Enlil <. . .> (3) he has placed it on the king on his head. (4) The evil tongues [may go away]" (Van Dijk 1957: 243–44). The ritual relates the anointing, bathing, and clothing of a king with a linen garment, shoes, and a golden crown.

The act of anointing the king is attested in Ebla, Amorite, Hittite, Amarna (EA 51:6), Hebrew traditions (1 Sam 10:1 on Saul; 1 Sam 16:13 on David; 1 Kgs 1:34,39 on Solomon; 2 Kgs 11:12 on Joash), and in Mesopotamia. Being somewhat rare, Sophie Démare-Lafont (1975: 473–50; 1998: 161–81) tends to exclude Mesopotamian evidence (Yakubovich 2005: 124; Hoffner 1995: 108–14).

Using the same royal symbolic significance of the donkey, the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9 announces the coming of the Messiah in the following terms: "Your king comes to you triumphant and victorious, humble (*ʿny* = *ʿānî*) and riding on a donkey (*rōkēb ʿal-ḥamôr*), on a colt, the foal of a she-donkey (*wĕʿal ʿayir ben-ʾăt̄ōnôt*). I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the (war) horse from Jerusalem (*rekeb mĕʾepĕraîm wĕsûs*)."

In this prophecy, the donkey symbolizes peace, while the horse stands for war and, more generally, refers to foreign oppressors: Assyrians, Egyptians, and Greeks. This association of the donkey with peace is present already among the eighteenth-century BCE Amorites, who sacrifice a donkey in their peace treaties. Two Mari tablets designate the animal sacrificed in a peace treaty as "killing the donkey of peace" (*ḫayaram ša salimim qaṭālum*): "I went to Ašlakka and they fetched for me a puppy-dog (*mērānum*) and a goat (*ḫazzam*) for the donkey-foal killing (covenant ritual) among the tribesmen and Idamaraṣ. But I respected my lord; indeed, I did not give permission for the puppy-dog or goat. Instead, I myself had (them) slaughter a foal, a young of a she-ass, and in this way established peace between the nomads and Idamaraṣ" (ARM 2 37:6–14; Sasson 2015: 145).[6]

The donkey of peace is mentioned in other Mari letters: (ARM 26/1, 39:13–15): "Swear to me an oath by the gods, so that I may kill the donkey of peace with Muti-Abal."[7] (A.1098, lines 21–23): "Write to the 'fathers' (that is, the elders) of Idamaraṣ and Aduna-Addu so that they may come to me, kill the donkey of peace and speak right with them."[8] Both terms "to kill a donkey" (*ḫayaram qaṭālum*) are Amoritisms and are not used in Akkadian of central Mesopotamia. Amorite *ḫayarum* is to be equated etymologically with Ugaritic *ʿr* (=*ʿēru*) and Hebrew *ʿayir* "donkey foal," while *qaṭālum* corresponds to Hebrew *qaṭāl* "to kill" (Held 1970: 35), with no dissimilation of emphatic consonants contrary to the Geers law (1945: 65) present in Akkadian.

A Ugaritic ritual text (RS 1.002; Pardee 2000: 228) describes a rite performed to ensure social justice and righteousness (*mšr* "rectitude") among the various inhabitants

[6] www.archibab.fr (bibliography), ARM 2 37: (6) *al-li-ik-ma a-na ḫa-a-ri-im qa-ṭá-li-im* (7) *bi-ri-it* ḪA.NA.^{MEŠ} *ù i-da-ma-ra-aṣ* (8) *me-ra-na-am ù ḫa-az-za-am iš-šu-ni-im-ma* (9) *be-lí ap-la-aḫ-ma-a me-ra-na-am* (10) *ù ḫa-az-za-am ú-ul ad-di-in* (11) [*ḫa*]*-a-ra-am* DUMU *a-ta-ni-im* (T.12) [*a*]*-na-ku ú-ša-aq-ṭi-il* (13) *sa-li-ma-am bi-ri-it* ḪA.NA.^{MEŠ} (14) *ù i-da-ma-ra-aṣ aš-ku-*[*u*]*n.*

[7] (Durand 1988: 174–75), ARM 26/1, n° 39, lines 13–15: (13) ([*ni-iš*] dingir-meš *za-ak-ra-ni*[*-im*] (14) *ù* anše *ḫa-a-ra-a*[*m*] *ša sa-li-m*[*i-im*] (15) *bi-ri-it mu-t*[*e*]*-ba-al lu-u*[*q-ṭú-ul*]).

[8] (Charpin 1994: 188), (lines 21–23), (21) *ù a-na a*[*b*]*-bé-e ì-da-ma-ra-aṣ*^{ki} *u* [*a-du-na*]-^{d}IM *šu-pu-ur-ma* (22) *a-na ṣe-ri-ka li-*[*i*]*l-li-ku-nim-ma* (23) *ḫa-a-ra-am ša sa-lì-mì-im qú-tu-ul-ma it-ti-šu-nu i-ša-ri-iš du-b*[*u*]*-ub.*

Bodi_9781666979138_C005.indd 151 7/13/2026 3:16:18 PM

of Ugarit and mentions the slaughter of a donkey foal *ʿr* =*ʿēru*. Ugarit continues the ancient Amorite custom of killing a donkey when concluding an alliance. One Mari letter A.2094 (=LAPO 17 728; Durand 1998: 476) states, "Let me be cursed if [I had forgotten] our donkey of Ugarit that in the presence of Addu of Alep [we had killed]."

After the Amorites, the Aramean tribes who lived in roughly the same geographical area continued the same pattern of settlement. Upon becoming partially sedentary, the Aramean tribal chieftains built palaces in Guzana (Tell Halaf), Samʾal (Zinjirli), and Tell Tayinat. The Aramean kingdom of Bīt Gabbāri, with its capital Samʾal, also called *Yʾdy* (Yāday) from an older Luwian name, was conquered around 920 BCE by a king named Gabbar. His name (*gbr*) "hero" refers to a military rank in the Aramean troops and reflects the military seizure of Samʾal by the person of Gabbar as the dynastic founder (Niehr 2013: 186). In the same vein, the Hebrew tribal chieftain, David, conquered a Jebusite citadel and gave it his name: The City of David (2 Sam 5:9; 1 Kgs 11:27; 2 Chron 32:20; Neh 3:15–16). His son and successor, Solomon, appealed for technical assistance from Phoenician builders and adopted the cultural heritage of Canaanite urban civilization. The Hebrew semi-nomads lacked the technical know-how of their long-settled urban neighbors.

The Old Babylonian Mari letters reveal the great diversity of semi-nomadic Amorite tribes that cohabited with the urban Akkadians: The Simʾalite warlord Zimrī-Līm, the last ruler of Mari, as well as King Ḫammurabi of the city and urban population of Babylon, who is also descendant of Benjaminite Amorites. The situation is comparable to the kings of Assyria, who refer to their ancestors who "lived in tents."

The migratory movement of semi-nomadic populations is not only in the direction of northwest to southeast but also from northeast to west, as proposed by Buccellati (1990: 229–35). Therefore, the Benjaminites should not be attached to a single geographic region. His theoretical reconstruction of the migrations of semi-nomadic populations in the mid-second millennium BCE starts from the collapse of the Syro-Mesopotamian world and the Middle-Euphrates urban centers around Terqa and Ḫana in the sixteenth -century BCE. The mention of the displaced, fleeing persons called *ʿapirū* and *munnabtūtu* in the texts would reflect this social and economic upheaval (Buccellati 1977: 145–47; Rowton 1976a: 13–20).

5. The Conglomerate of the Amorite Tribes

The Mari texts provide extensive data on the nomadic populations, indicating that they occupied a large territory in Northern Syria and Mesopotamia between the Euphrates and the Tigris rivers. The Amorites originated in the Syrian steppe, and from there, the first wave of Amorite tribes, the Benjaminites and Simʾalites, settled in urban areas. In the second wave, the Suteans would have followed suit.

Anbar (1991: 77–89) sees the Ḫaneans, Benjaminites, Bensimʾalites, and the Suteans as designations for four different tribal conglomerates belonging to the Amorites. He follows, with some modifications, the perspective of his teacher, Kupper (1957: 73–74; 138–39). Anbar (1968: 228) compared the way the names of the Ishmaelites, Midianites

Bodi_9781666979138_C005.indd 152 7/13/2026 3:16:18 PM

(and Medan) were employed concerning the tribes that brought Joseph to Egypt (Gen 37:18–36; 39:1) with the permutation of the name Benjaminites being also referred to as Ḫaneans in the same Mari letter (ARM 2 53; Durand 1998: 448, LAPO 17 702). However, Kupper and Anbar failed to realize that "Ḫanean" was a generic term encompassing the Benjaminite and Bensim'alite Amorite tribes. More recent research, however, perceives these tribes differently. First, the Suteans should probably not be included as belonging to the Amorite tribes. Second, Charpin and Durand (1986: 141–83) take the term Ḫaneans as a generic designation for the semi-nomadic Amorite populations, themselves subdivided into two main groups: the Benjaminites or southerners and the Bensim'alites or the northerners. This understanding differs from previous studies, where the Hanaeans, Benjaminites, and Bensim'alites were considered distinct groups. Charpin (1992: 26–27) quotes a Mari letter written by Sammētar, governor of Terqa, that explicitly lists the "Ḫanean" clan of Niḫad as Bensim'alite: "Another thing: Urānum and the elders of Dabiš came to me and said, 'By extraction (*ištu ṣītim*) we are part of Yaḫurrā, but we are not Yarrādum. We have no nomadic clan (*ḫibrum*) or chieftain (*kadûm*) on the steppe. We are Yaḫurrā by birth, but we want to join the Bensim'alites (counted) among the Niḫadū. Let us kill the donkey! (*hayari i niqṭul*)'" (A.981: 32–40; Durand 1992: 117–18).

This example adds to those of Amorite clans known as both "Ḫanaean" and Benjaminites and confirms the common membership of Benjaminites and Bensim'alites to the populations designated by the generic appellation of "Ḫanean." Through the Amorite covenant rite of "killing a treaty-donkey" (*ḫayāram qaṭālum*), a Benjaminite tribe could become part of a Bensim'alite one. There are twenty-five occurrences of the rite of "killing the treaty-donkey" (*ḫayaram qaṭālum*) in Mari texts (Lafont 2001: 263–66, and 271), and twenty-two occurrences of "touching the throat" (*lipit napišti*), which is another Amorite rite when making a treaty.

6. The Bensim'alite or Northern Tribes

The jewel of the Mari documentation is the spectrum of West Semitic semi-nomadic tribes it reveals, ranging from the fully nomadic to those in the process of becoming sedentary. For example, one Mari letter (ARM 8 11) mentions the division of the Benê Awin clan into two groups, the already sedentary ones, who settled and dwelt in the city of Appan (*wašbût Appan*) (line 5), and the nomads (*ḫibrum ša nawêm*) "those transhumant in the steppe" (line 21). Moreover, the scribes of the Mari texts frequently used societal concepts foreign to contemporary Mesopotamian society. Having no linguistic equivalents for these in standard Akkadian, they were occasionally obliged to use West Semitic loanwords familiar to us from Hebrew. Streck (2000: 82–123, § 1.95, and § 1.86) lists ninety-three Amorite words for which Hebrew cognates can be established. This transhumant lifestyle of semi-nomads could still be observed in the 1930s when some Arab tribes were living like ancient Amorites, confirming the conservatism of this mode of existence. In his time, Henri Charles (1939: ix), who lived with the local population in Syria in 1936, produced an ethno-sociological study

Bodi_9781666979138_C005.indd 153 7/13/2026 3:16:18 PM

describing about twenty sheep-breeding Arabic tribes living along the Middle Euphrates, around Deir ez-Zor and Al-Bukamal. During the winter, they were nomads and pastoralists, while in the summer, they were sedentary and agriculturalists. The cultivation of the land in that semi-desertic steppe was based primarily on irrigation, as in the time of Mari, and Charles calls them "irrigators." It is unfortunate that in his study of the Sinai Bedouins, the anthropologist Clinton Bailey (2018) did not refer to the customs and rites of the ancient Amorite tribes. The Bedouin lifestyle displays considerable conservatism due to the similar need for adaptation to a semi-desertic habitat, providing limited resources (Von Oppenheim 1983).

The term Yamīna is always written syllabically *ya-mi-na*, while the first element is written with the Sumerogram DUMU "son." There are three possibilities to read this Sumerogram: (1) in Akkadian as *mārum* "son," found in ARM 11 3:20 (*ma-ar*); (2) in Amorite *bini* as found in a personal name in ARM 22 328 iii.16 (*bi-ni-ya-mi-na*); (3) or simply *Yamina* as in ^{1}[ú*y*]*a-mi-na* (ARM 21 339:7) (Anbar 1991: 83 n.324). However, *yamīna* is a West Semitic and Amorite term for "right hand, south" and is not used in Akkadian. It is improbable that the name of an Amorite southern tribe should be pronounced half in Akkadian (*mār*) and half in Amorite (*yamīna*). Therefore, DUMU should also be read *binū* in Amorite and not *māru*, both meaning "son." Moreover, the designation *binū yamīna* is part of the stream of tradition of designating tribes from the south, among Mari Amorites, the Hebrews, and the medieval Arabic tribes, without postulating any genetic connection between them.

The Bensim'alite tribes (*līmum*) were composed of the Yabasa clan or *gāyum* "those dwelling on dry land" and the Ašarugāyu clan, presumably meaning "those dwelling in watery regions." However, this semi-nomadic cultural level was abandoned once the newcomers gained a foothold in settled lands. This is well attested by the hostile policies of Amorite dynasts at Mari toward troublesome nomads in their own kingdom.

7. The Benjaminite or Southern Tribes

The Benjaminite and Bensim'alites tribes were structured in very different ways. The Benjaminites comprised a conglomerate of five tribes (in Akkadian *līmum* or *li'mum*) (Fleming 2004c: 199–212): the Yaḫrurū, the Yariḫū, the Amnān, the Rabbiyūm (Astour 1978: 1–12), and the Uprapū tribes, which are somewhat better known (Kupper 1957: 47–81). They were under the command of a tribal chief called *šarrum* "king," in Old Babylonian but better designated by the West Semitic *mulkum* or *milkum* (Durand 1998: 417–511, LAPO 17). His role was to lead the tribes to another part of their lands annually. He was accompanied by a person designated by the term *mer'ūm*, which is a causative participle form derived from the root √*r'î* "to pasture." This title designates the one who leads to the pasture, comparable to *Yhwh rō'î*, "The Lord is my shepherd" in Ps 23:1. Major political decisions, like making wars and alliances, were the responsibility of the *šarrum*. At the same time, the *mer'ūm* supervised the herds and was responsible for finding the best route for transhumance. Each clan (in Akkadian *gāyum*) was led and commanded by a *sugāgum* (from the root √*sgg* "to be great") who

Bodi_9781666979138_C005.indd 154 7/13/2026 3:16:18 PM

had the prerogatives of a village chief or administrator. Marti (2008: 1) translates *sugāgum* as "traditional chief." A convenient rendering for *sugāgum* would be "mayor," the latter being etymologically derived from the Latin *maior*, "the great one" or "the major." The specific Mari term *sugāgum* may be considered an equivalent of *rabiānum* in the Akkadian used in central and southern Mesopotamia.

The geographic territory that those tribes occupied was different. The Amorite Benjaminites were found in the west: Amurru, Qaṭnā, and Yamḫad, while the Bensim'alites were settled in the east: Aḫ-Purratim (=Banks of the Euphrates) and in Idamaraṣ in the Ḫabur triangle (Lafont 2001: 224 n.43).

Astour (1959: 8) relates the name of the city of Jericho to one of the Amorite tribes of the Binū-Yamīna. According to the rules of Hebrew phonetics, the name of Jericho was originally Yariḥû, which is identical to Yariḫū, the name of an Amorite tribe. Astour relates the latter to the name of the moon god, *Eraḫ*, derived from an original *yeraḫ*. In the Mari texts, the Benjaminite tribes would attend the sanctuary of the moon god in the city of Ḫarrān to conclude an alliance. The Hebrew patriarchs are also associated with the same city. Astour's hypothesis is now confirmed by the phenomenon of the so-called "mirror toponymy" related to the travels and settlement of Amorite tribes (Durand 1992: 109–10). The same phenomenon is found among pre-Hellenic Greeks. The Ionian Greeks were originally found along the Mediterranean coast of Asia Minor, modern Turkey. Later, the appellation "Ionian" was applied to a group of islands found at the entrance to the Adriatic Sea. Such phenomena are explained by population migration.

The city of Yariḫ, from which originated the Benjaminite Amorite tribe of Yariḫāyu, was found in the Beqaʿa valley as a ruin in the land of Canaan (A.3552:8) and as *ya-ri-iḫ*^{ki} in a Mari census (M.7872.i). It has a further mirror toponymy in the biblical name of Jericho, *Yeriḥô* of the Canaanites, about 25 km south of Jerusalem, across the Jordan River. Jericho, often called the "oldest city in the world," was in existence at the time of Mari. It is significant that the Hebrews, when forced to leave Judah during the deportation by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BCE, also practiced the phenomenon of "mirror toponymy" by calling a city in Babylonia: āl-Yahudu "The City of Judah" (Joannès and Lemaire 1999: 17–34).

Fleming (1998: 62; 2004a: 219; 2004b: 199) attempted to compare the division between the Amorite Benjaminites and Bensim'alite tribes with the Hebrew Benjaminite and Ephraim tribes. The Egyptian execration texts from the eighteenth-century BCE mention rulers who bore Amorite names in the city of Jerusalem, 25 kilometers northwest of Jericho: "The ruler of Jerusalem, Yaqar-ʿAmmu; The ruler of Jerusalem, Seti-ʿAnu" (Ritner 2003, COS 1: 51). The pagan origin of Jerusalem's original population was well known in the sixth-century BCE. Ezekiel (16:3 and 45) mentions Jerusalem's foreign parents: "Your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite." Reviewing Amorite archaeological data for the land of Canaan, Kenyon (1966: 14 fig. 5) mentions tombs and copper or bronze daggers found at Tell es-Sultan, the site of ancient Jericho. Another archaeologist, Burke (2015: 357–73), describes the shared material culture as the "Amorite *koiné*" when referring to warrior burials, family crypts, subfloor infant jars, or pot burials found in the Levant. The city of Jericho shares some elements of this

Bodi_9781666979138_C005.indd 155 7/13/2026 3:16:18 PM

material "Amorite *koine*," as well as the literary topos of the seven-day siege and the *ḥerem*-ban (Stern 2020: 67; Monroe 2007: 318–41). The Hebrew traditions share some common features in the practice of war and its religious, cultic, and ritual aspects with the Mari Amorites. The biblical description of the taking of Jericho is more of a literary-liturgical text than a record of a historical event. The seven-day siege reflects the ritual time. Moreover, Josh 6:17, 18, 21 lays stress on the *ḥerem*-ban and the curse, both well attested in Mari. The divine warfare with the seven-day siege of Jericho reflects another similar Amorite and Ugaritic topos. The seven-day siege is attested in Mari letters (ARM 1 131:14–16; 26 405:3) and once with a capture on the eighth day (ARM 1 135:11–13), while the thirteenth-century Ugaritic Kirtu legend has two complementary seven-day sieges (KTU 1.14 iii 2–20; iv 44–v 15) (Fleming 1999: 223–28 [Mari]; 221–23 [Ugarit]).

The following Mari text, written by Tebi-gerrešu to Zimrī-Līm (ARM 26 216: 5–12), is pertinent both for the use of the term (*nabûm*), a cognate of Hebrew (*nābiʾ*) "prophet," and for the mention of a period of seven days while performing ablutions for purification: "On that day, after I reached Ašmad, I gathered the 'prophets' (^{lú}*nabîˀ*^{meš}) of the Ḫanean-(semi-nomads) and had (them take) omens (*têrtam*) for the well-being of my lord. I said, (find out) whether my lord will enter the city safely upon performing his ablutions as he stays 7 days beyond the city walls" (Sasson 2015: 278; Nissinen 2003: 50; Huehnergard 1999: 88–93). Here, the semi-nomadic prophets (^{lú}*nabîˀ*^{meš}) act as diviners, taking omens.

According to Num 31:19, anyone who has killed a person or has touched a corpse must stay outside the camp for seven days for purification. In the story of Miriam's leprosy (probably skin desquamation), "she was shut up outside the camp seven days" (Num 12:15). The ordination rite of Aaron and his sons lasts seven days (Lev 8:33–35) (Klingbeil 1997: 500–13). The term (^{lú}*nabûm*) is attached to two personal names on a legal document from Terqa (Rouault 2011: 55–56), written in the style of an earlier period of the *šakkanakku*-governors of the region (nineteenth-century BCE). It provides the oldest attestation of the term so far. It confirms that the most commonly used Hebrew word for a prophet was already well established in the Amorite semi-nomadic culture since the beginning of the second millennium BCE (Charpin 2013: 77).

The practice of bribery is common in the accounts of the Amorites, Suteans, and Hebrews. The following cases are examples of analogous behavior common to unscrupulous individuals. In a Mari letter edited by Ziegler (2004: 95–109), Samsī-Addu writes to his son Yasmaḫ-Addu, who ruled in Mari, telling him to bribe two Sutean warlords named Gāʾidānum and Ilī-epuḫ and make them loot a caravan that the king of Babylon sent to Yamḫad (Aleppo) and Karkemiš. The plan was to attack the caravan in the springtime while on its way back to Babylon. The warlords are promised to be given a hefty reward of 5,000 sheep each and would be attributed a (*niḫlatum*, lines 31–33). Here, the term *niḫlatum* stands for payment. In ARM 3 36 (LAPO 17 704), however, Amorite *niḫlatum* means inheritance corresponding to Hebrew *naḥalâ*. A man by the name of Ṣura-Ḫammu, standing at the great gate of Terqa, publicly accuses the governor Kibrī-Dagan, son of Sammētar of Terqa, of having appropriated for himself the entire *niḫlatum* of the city. It would be a case of embezzlement of public funds.

Bodi_9781666979138_C005.indd 156 7/13/2026 3:16:18 PM

The two men who testified against Naboth (1 Kgs 21:4–16) were probably bribed, allowing King Ahab to despoil him of his property (*nahălâ ʾăbōtay*) "inheritance of my fathers" (1 Kgs 21:3; Guillaume 2015: 167). Samuel's sons abused their office by taking bribes (*šōḫad*, 1 Sam 8:3). The Philistine lords bribed Delilah to entrap Samson in Judg 16:5, 18, offering her "silver" (*kesep*). The prophet Isaiah accuses Jerusalem's leaders of chasing bribes (Isa 1:2–23).

In ARM 26/1 199:41–51, there is mention of a prophetess who is to be paid for her oracle of admonition. Sammētar, governor of Terqa, reports to Zimrī-Līm a prophetic warning by a *qammatum*-prophetess in the service of the god Dagan of Terqa: "'Beneath straw runs water. To make peace, they (Ešnunna) are constantly writing you and sending you their gods, but in their hearts, they devise an entirely different 'wind.' The king must not commit himself (to a treaty) without consulting God.' She requested, and I gave her a *laḫarum*-garment and an *erratum*-broach" (Sasson 2015: 284). The payment for prophets also appears in the Hebrew Bible (1 Sam 9:8; 1 Kgs 14:3; 2 Kgs 5:5).

8. The Aḫlamu, the Suteans, and the Arameans

As argued elsewhere, several Aramaic tribes evolved from the conglomerate of some of the Amorite tribes (Bodi 2014b: 283–312). Zadok suggested that certain eastern members of the Amorite dialect cluster, which were spoken in the Jazireh and on the fringe of the Syrian desert, were the ancestors of the Aramaic language. In Zadok's words (1993: 312): "A comparison of the Mari corpus with the material from MB Emar reveals a remarkable linguistic and cultural continuity. My working hypothesis is that certain eastern members of the Amorite dialect cluster, which were spoken in the Jazireh and on the fringe of the Syrian desert, were the ancestors of Aramaic."

Historically, Northern Syria has been the traditional habitat of the various Amorite tribes since Old Babylonian times. The nucleus of some of the later Aramean tribes seems to have evolved from the previous conglomerate of the Amorite ones. The Amorites and the Arameans occupied Northern Syria and Mesopotamia and thrived in the same geographical area. Being a distinct Northwest Semitic language, Amorite shows considerable similarities with Aramaic and Hebrew. Subsequent research tends to confirm the likelihood of Zadok's hypothesis.

According to Gelb (1961: 28 n. 5), from a strictly historical point of view, the first reference to the Arameans is to be found in the inscriptions of the Assyrian King Tiglath-Pileser I (1114–1076 BCE), who pursued Aramean tribes (*aḫlamû aramāyya*) as far as Karkemiš and the borders of Lebanon. He boasts of having crossed the Euphrates twenty-eight times in his battles against them:[9] "I have crossed the Euphrates 28 times, twice in one year, in pursuit of the Aḫlamû-Arameans. I brought about their defeat from the city of Tadmar of the land of Amurru, Anat of the land of Suḫu, as far

[9] RIMA 2, [text A.0.87.1]: 23, lines 46–47; [A.0.87.2]: 23, line [28]; [A.0.87.3]: 37–38, lines 29–35; [A.0.87.4]: 43, lines 34–36.

Bodi_9781666979138_C005.indd 157 7/13/2026 3:16:18 PM

as the city Rapiqu of Karduniaš. I bought their booty (and) possessions to my city Aššur" (Grayson 1991: 43).[10]

In the royal inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser I, the term "Aḫlamû" is always qualified by "Aramean." In Old Babylonian, the gentilic afformative *-āyyu* in *aramāyya* "Arameans" is used for the first time in Mari, prompting von Soden to suggest that it might be of Northwest Semitic origin (GAG § 56p; Schniedewind 2002: 279 n.7). Moreover, the term Aḫlamu occurs frequently in eighteenth-century BCE Mari oil receipts for Zimrī-Līm's table, where twenty-eight references mention a palace officer named Aḫlamu.[11] At the same time, in the Old Babylonian period, the term Aḫlamû also appears as a designation for the Amorite tribes. In a passage stemming from the time of Ḫammurabi of Babylon, one finds the following statement: "Zimrī-ḫammu and Yasim-addašunu took command of the sons of Zimrī-yidda, those bound to them by oath as well as the Aḫlamite troops, and they laid waste the land" (van Soldt 1993: 54–5).[12]

The term Aḫlamû was later used to designate some Aramaic tribes. It is, therefore, plausible that the Old Babylonian Amorite Aḫlamites evolved into later Aḫlamû Arameans. The opposite is found in the use of the term Sutū, which appears later as a personal name, although it usually stands for nomadic clans of the Suteans. According to Herles (2007: 337), the term Aḫlamû is an appellative meaning "nomads."

A fourteenth-century BCE Amarna letter (EA 200:8,10) addressed to the Pharaoh informs him that the Babylonian caravans from Karduniaš were attacked by the Aḫlamû Aramean tribes (Moran 1992: 277). A robbery of Babylonian caravans by groups of nomads called Aḫlamû is probably described in this fragmentary letter. In EA 16:38, 40, the Assyrian King, Aššur-uballiṭ I (1363–1328 BCE), writes to the Pharaoh telling him that the Suteans, another nomadic tribe, have pursued and kidnapped his messengers (Na'aman 1988: 181 n. 14). As pointed out by Lawson Younger Jr. (2016: 87), the terms Aḫlamû and Amurrû are at least occasionally used as synonyms for the same people and designate the same descent groups. Kupper (1957: 93 and 114) identified a series of West Semitic but non-Akkadian and non-Amorite personal names among the various Sutean tribes, tracing their raids in Old Babylonian Mari, Middle Babylonian Amarna letters, and in the first millennium BCE Babylonian texts from Suḫu down to the Neo-Assyrian kings. He also mentions the probable occurrence of Arameans in the thirteenth-century BCE Ugaritic texts: *bn.army* (RS 15.37), and the name of a witness, *Armeya* (RS 16.178). Heimpel (2003: 27) also argued for a rapprochement between the Suteans and the Arameans based on some linguistic data, such as the use of the term *bar* for "son," and *madinatum* "city, territory" in ARM 26 483. Some of the later Aramean tribes probably evolved from the earlier second millennium BCE Suteans. The earliest use of the term *rabannātu* "sheikhs" occurs in the *Tamītu* texts (lines 6 and 33), dating from 1000 to 900 BCE (Lambert 2007: 69) and referring to the Sutean warlords. "This

[10] ([A.0.87.4], RIMA 2, 43:35–36) 28-*šu arki* ^{kur}*Aḫlamê* ^{kur}*Ar-ma-a-ia*^{meš} *i*^{d}*Puratta* MU 1^{kám} *šinīšu lū ētebir ištu* ^{uru}*Tadmar ša* ^{kur}*Amurri* ^{uru}*Anat ša* ^{kur}*Suḫi u adi* ^{uru}*Rapiqi ša* ^{kur}*Karduniaš dabdâšunu lū aškun šallassunu maršīssunu ana ālī-ya Aššur ubla*.

[11] ARM 9 54:2; 58:2 and texts n^{os} 75, 78, 144; ARM 11 and 12; ARM 16/1 (Birot, Kupper and Rouault 1979: 54; Jean 1950: 63; Moscati 1959: 303).

[12] (30) ^{m}*Zi-im-ri-ḫa-am-mu ù Ia-si-im-ad-da-šu-nu* (31) *pa-ni* DUMU^{meš} *Zi-im-ri-e-ed-da* DUMU^{meš} *ni-iš* DIĠIR-*šu-nu ù* ERIM *Aḫ-la-mi-i iṣ-ba-tu-nim-ma matam uš-ta-ad-du-ú* (*AbB* 13, 60:30–32).

Bodi_9781666979138_C005.indd 158 7/13/2026 3:16:18 PM

is significant because the term is derived from the Aramaic word *rb*(') and thus may imply that this group of Sutû had Aramean affinities" (Lawson Younger Jr. 2016: 94). The term Suteans (*sūtum*) may have meant "Southerner" (Streck 2000: 165). It was probably a Mesopotamian exonym for the inhabitants of the Syrian desert. Ziegler and Reculeau (2014: 209, and www.archibab) list all the references to Suteans in Mari texts. Although some Suteans had Amorite names, onomastics alone might not be enough to make them Amorites.

One legal text from the Middle Assyrian period (KAJ 39:7) found at Qalat Sherqat (Assur) refers to a trading journey as a KASKAL É ^{lú}*Su-ti-e* "Journey (to) the House of the Suteans." The term (É=*bītu*) "house" used in this text might be a fourteenth-century BCE precursor of what would later become common among the Aramean tribal states like Bīt Adini, Bīt Agusi, and Bīt Yakin. It corresponds to the way the ninth-century BCE Aramaic Tel Dan stele mentions the Davidic dynasty (*bytdwd*) ruling over the tribe of Judah.

Buccellati (1966: 333) sees several later Aramean tribes as issuing from the general designation MAR.TU Amorites: Aḫlamū, ʾAram Ṣôbāʾ (2 Sam 10: 6; Ps 60:2); ʾAram Bêt-Rĕḥôb (2 Sam 10:6); ʾAram Ṣôbāʾ û Bêt-Rĕḥôb (2 Sam 10:8). The latter were Aramean kingdoms from the tenth-century BCE against whom both Saul and David led military campaigns (Buccellati 1967: 143–45). ʾAram Ṣôbāʾ was located south of Hamath and contiguous to Damascus, while ʾAram Bêt-Rĕḥôb was in the south of the Lebanese Beqāʿ Valley. The first kingdom would be east of Beirut, while the second would be east of Tyre (Aharoni 1979: 295).

9. The Aramean Ancestors of the Hebrews

Buccellati is inclined to view the patriarchal migrations of Jacob in light of the mid-second millennium migrant movements. Jacob travels to Paddan Aram in Genesis 28 in the land of the "sons of the East" (29:1), where he meets Laban's shepherds who come from Harran (29:4), reflecting similar semi-nomadic patterns of behavior and travel. He postulates structural and socio-political links between Amorite and later biblical traditions: "There is a historical reality, connected with the movements of the Amorites known from Mesopotamian sources, so I see the patriarchal tradition as a reflection of an ideological manifesto of the conquest of the steppe by the agropastoralists of the Middle Euphrates" (Buccellati 2024: 24).

Building on Buccellati's study of the *ʿapiru* "social outcasts" and *munnabtūtu* "persons seeking political asylum," Millard (1980: 153–55) connects the latter term with Hebrew *ʾōbēd* in Deut 26:5, "A wandering Aramean was my father" (*ʾarammî ʾōbēd ʾābî*). The Akkadian term *munnabtu* is derived from *abātu* (B) (*CAD* A/1: 45), which in the N-stem means "to flee." Sennacherib's annals (704–703 BCE) mention the "the fugitive Arameans, the runaways" (*aramē ḫalqū munnabtū*; Grayson and Novotny 2014: 198, RINAP 3/2, nº 147, Obv. 8). Sargon II (709–705 BCE) calls them "robbers" (*mār ḫabbāti*) from another Akkadian term, *ḫabātu* (A), "to rob, plunder," in the statement "the Arameans, a plundering race" (^{lú}*aramē mār ḫabbāti*; Millard 1980: 154).

Both descriptions and terms suit Jacob's career, who first robbed his brother Esau of primogeniture, prompting him to flee from the land of Canaan, then plundered his father-in-law, Laban, and had to flee again from Paddan Aram. The way an Israelite could hear the statement in Deut 26:5 would be, while his ancestor was a fleeing run-away, a political refugee, and a social misfit, he, the descendant, was a settled individual, cultivating his own land as a citizen of an established nation.

Moreover, echoes of droughts and famines are prominent in the Hebrew patriarchal narratives as a major cause of migration. Jenzen (1994: 59–75) suggests understanding the term *ʾōbēd* (Deut 26:5) in the sense of "perishing" and translates the verse with, "A starving Syrian was my sire" (cf. Lipiński 1989: 23–47).

Both Abraham's servant and Jacob travel to Aram-naharaim (Gen 24:10), the name for Syria during the later Iron Age (*ʾăram nahărayîm*, Judg 3:8; Deut 23:4; 1 Chron 19:6; Ps 60:2). The second part of the name recalls *Nhryn* of sixteenth-century BCE Egyptian texts and the *Na-aḫ-ri-ma*^{ki} of fourteenth-century BCE Amarna texts. In Paddan Aram (*paddan ʾăram,* Gen 25:20; 28:2, 5, 6, 7; 31:18; 33:18; 35:9, 26; *paddan* alone in Gen 46:15), the first part is usually taken as an equivalent of Akkadian *paddānu*, *padānu*, a synonym of *ḫarrānu* "way, road," while *śĕdê ʾăram* in Hos 12:13 suggests a connection with Arabic *saddānu* and a meaning "field of Aram." Rebekah and her brother Laban are said to be Arameans (Gen 25:20; 28:5; 31:20, 24), as well as Laban's daughters, Rachel and Leah (Lawson Younger Jr. 2016: 199–222; Levin 2017: 39–52).

Other scholars have also attempted to place the Hebrew ancestors among the Aramean tribes in Northern Syria. The city of Harran was located on the Baliḫ River, while Abraham's ancestors in Gen 11:20–26, Serug, Nahor, and Terah, are place names in the Baliḫ valley (Dion 1992: 53–73). In the desert area south of Sindjar, where, at the time of the Mari Bensimʾalite tribes, their mobile camps (*maḫanum*) were located, one finds an Aramaic tribe that bears the name of Sarugū, which corresponds to the name of one of the Hebrew ancestors (Durand 2003–2004: 851). In Gen 12:1, Abram leaves his extended family, called *bêt ʾāb* "father's house," in Hebrew, which is also a basic family unit of Amorite nomads, in Akkadian called *bīt abi* (Scharbert 1982: 213–37).

To a certain degree, the Arameans can be considered as the interface between the Amorites and the Hebrews. In Persian times, when Aramaic was used as the principal language of communication between different peoples of the Persian Empire, it also served as an interface with Greek. The currency of Aramaic as the *koinē* language under the Persian rule was one major vector of transmission from one ethnic group to another. The Greek historian Herodotus visited Egypt ca. 450 BCE. Coming from Halicarnassus, Bodrum in modern Turkey, on the fringes of the Achaemenid Empire, he could at least get by conversationally in Aramaic, a skill that probably helped him in his travels (Schmitt 1992: 30). His reference to "Assyrian letters" (Ἀσσύρια γράμματα in *Histories* 4.87, 1.2) could refer to Aramaic. One finds a similar Talmudic and Demotic usage where a reference to "Assyrian letters" implies Aramaic. The Talmud refers to Aramaic when describing the development of Hebrew square characters (*ktb mrwbʿ*) from the original Aramaic called (*ktb ʾšwry*) "the Assyrian script" (*Tosefta Sanh.* IV.7; *b. Sanh.* 21b; *y. Meg.* I.74b; cf. *y. Sotah* VII.21b *ʾšwryt* "Assyrian"). In the *Demotic Chronicle* (rev. c.14) concerning Darius' legislation in Egypt, it is stated that a

Bodi_9781666979138_C005.indd 160 7/13/2026 3:16:19 PM

copy of this law codification was written on papyrus in the "Assyrian script" (*sḫ* | *šr*), that is, Aramaic, and "in letter writing" (*sḫ š.t*), that is, Demotic (Tavernier 2017: 385).

10. The Second Millennium BCE Pattern in Gaining Power

The way David gained power over the Hebrew tribes is comparable to Zimrī-Līm's career in eighteenth-century BCE Mari (Bodi 2013: 24–59). The latter, a Bensim'alite Amorite chieftain and warlord belonging to the Līm clan, gained power over Mari and its region, seizing it away from the opposing Addu clan, descendants of King Samsī-Addu I, belonging to the Benjaminite tribes (Bodi 2014a: 190–226). David's accession to power is comparable to the pattern of seizing power in the ancient Near East. Various dramatic circumstances forced princes, entire families, and sometimes entire communities to leave their homelands, seeking refuge abroad. After a period of waiting and preparation, with the help of mercenary warriors, they would regain their lost power: Zimrī-Līm of Mari himself (eighteenth-century BCE), Samsī-Ēraḫ (eighteenth-century BCE) who was Zimrī-Līm's vassal and *condottiere* (Guichard 2011:29–93); Idrimi of Alalakh (fourteenth-century BCE); the *'apirū* in the Amarna texts dealing with the warlord ʿAbdi-Aširta of Amurru (fourteenth-century BCE). In the tenth-century BCE, David lived as a "*condottiere*" leading a troop of 600 mercenaries, *'apirū* warriors, and disenfranchised peasants. He eventually gained power as the warlord and chieftain of the Hebrew tribes. Guichard points out that the number of *'apirū* mercenaries attested in the Mari texts varies from 40 to 400. When King Samsī-Addu's Realm of Upper Mesopotamia collapsed, one text mentions a troop of 2,000 *'apirū* mercenaries, probably attracted by the possibility of significant loot at his former capital Šubat-Enlil (Tell Leilān; LAPO 19 491 [ARM 2 131]; Guichard 2011: 37). Greenstein's (2015: 17–35) study of the "Fugitive Hero Narrative Pattern" identifies a period of the "dark years" of the hero's waiting for the auspicious moment, consulting omens and oracles, gathering troops, leading to his ultimate goal of seizing power, or recovering his lost domain. A similar pattern has already been suggested by the English historian Arnold Toynbee. In his *Study of History*, Toynbee developed a theory of a recurrent pattern of "withdrawal and return" in the careers of leaders and the trajectories of peoples. After a setback, great leaders and nations withdraw, gather strength, and after a while come back to play a major role on the stage of history (McGuire 1956: 323). This is probably one of the lasting contributions of Toynbee's often problematic speculations.

11. Two Dynastic Houses Pitted Against Each Other and the Outworking of Divine Retribution

Since Leonard Rost (1982), scholars have divided David's career into "The Story of David's Rise" and the story of the "Succession to the Throne," supposedly produced by a hypothetical "Solomonic Enlightenment" of the tenth-century BCE United Monarchy.

Bodi_9781666979138_C005.indd 161 7/13/2026 3:16:19 PM

However, increased characterization of these narratives as royal propaganda and apology has eliminated their description as historical reports (Dietrich and Neumann 1995: 169; Dietrich 2012: 52, 198). Therefore, Vermeylen (1999: 53; 2000) has suggested interpreting these narratives as dealing with the House of Saul pitted against the House of David. This manner of seeing the traditional material has a striking historical analogy in the conflict between the two Amorite clans, the House of Addu of the Benjaminite tribes against the Sima'lite House of Līm, in their fight for control over Mari and the surrounding territories. Their protracted conflict spanned three generations and generated the historico-theological elaboration of the outworking of divine retribution (Bodi 2014d: 411–27).

The Mari text ARM 1 3 (Sasson 2015: 238; Durand 2000: 72–74, LAPO 18 931) is a letter sent by Yasmaḫ-Addu to the god Nergal. It reflects the phenomenon of so-called "divine correspondence" (Bodi 2008b: 245–58; Pongratz-Leisten 1999: 202–9). Sumerian "prayer letters" are considered precursors to the practice of addressing letters to gods (Hallo 1968: 75–89). The practice of "divine correspondence" is attested in Hittite, Egyptian, and Hebrew sources (2 Kgs 19:14// Isa 37:24). This Mari letter to the god Nergal provides insights into the Amorite view of history in the eighteenth-century BCE Mari. It traces the power struggle between two Amorite clans, the Benjaminite Addu clan pitted against the Bensim'alite Līm clan. In this text, the ruler of Mari, Yasmaḫ-Addu, recapitulates the historical events related to the protracted conflict between two reigning dynasties, spanning three generations: the members of the Līm clan (Yagid-Līm, Yaḫdun-Līm [1810–1794 BCE], Sūmū-Yamam [1793–1792 BCE], Zimrī-Līm [1775–1762 BCE]) against the Addu clan (Ilā-Kabkabū [ca. 1836 BCE], Samsī-Addu [1792–1782 BCE], Yasmaḫ-Addu [1782–1775]). One phrase in the text states the guilty behavior from one generation to the next: ARM I 3:6′, "Sūmū-Yamam continued to act exactly like his father Yaḫdun-Līm and with his hands did outrageous/improper things."[13] Akkadian uses the idiomatic expression "to continue to act according to the hand of his father" or "in the same way as his father" (*qātam ša abī-šū-ma irṭub iteppuš-am*).[14] The corresponding Hebrew expression is to walk in the ways of one's father. In 1 Sam 8:3, 5, the sons of the old prophet Samuel are said not to have walked in their father's ways (*wĕlō' hālĕkû bānāyw bidĕrākāw*). In the so-called Deuteronomistic evaluation of Israelite kings, this phrase corresponds to the statement "he walked in the way of his father, or of Jeroboam." 1 Kgs 22:52, Ahaziah, son of Ahab "walked in the way of his father, in the way of his mother, and in the way of Jeroboam" (*wayyēlek bĕderek'ābîw*); 2 Kgs 21:21, Amon, son of Manasseh "walked in all the way in which his father walked" (*wayyēlek bĕkol-haderek 'ăšer hālak 'ābîw*); 1 Kgs 15:3 (Abiam in Jerusalem); 15:26 (Nadab in Samaria); 15:34, 16:2 (Basha in Samaria); 16:19 (Zimri of Samaria); 16:31 (Omri in Samaria); 22:43 (Jehoshaphat in Jerusalem).

[13] *Sūmū-Yamam qātam* [*š*]*a abī-*[*š*]*ū-ma* (7′) *Yaḫdun-Līm irṭ*[*u*]*b i*[*t*]*eppuša-am* (8′) *u lā šināti ina qātī-š*[*u īpuš*]*-ma.*

[14] *Rat/ṭābu CAD* R: 217, "to proceed to do something, to begin an activity" (OA, Mari, Rimah, Boğazköy.); Von Soden, *AHw*: 963, connects it with Hebrew *rdp* "to pursue"; *qātu CAD* Q: 193, nº 8. "in idiomatic uses" nº 9 "in adverbial uses" meaning "the same way." Here, meaning "the same way as his father"; *lā šināti CAD* Š/3: 40, "improper actions or words, falsehoods."

Bodi_9781666979138_C005.indd 162 7/13/2026 3:16:19 PM

In this letter, Yasmaḫ-Addu draws lessons from the past conflicts between the two Amorite clans and elaborates on a particular philosophy of history. The ruler is assured divine blessing, success, and lasting reign if he respects the alliances he concluded, shuns cultic sins and sacrilegious acts, and obeys divine will. Though tendentious, writing an *apologia pro domo*, probably whitewashing the acts of his father's house, Yasmaḫ-Addu derives from this general ideology of the operation of divine retribution the explanation of why the previous rulers from the Līm clan lost Mari and why his own Addu clan obtained to rule over the city and the realm on the banks of the Euphrates. Here, one gains an insight into an early form of a similar ideology that permeates the later Hebrew historiography. The latter depicts all the rulers of Judah and Israel according to the same schematic pattern, starting with the House of Saul pitted against the House of David.

The end of the power struggle between these two clans is reflected in a letter with prophetic content relating the message of the god Adad from Aleppo to the last ruler of Mari, Zimrī-Līm (A. 1968; Durand 2002: 113; 1993: 44; Nissinen 2003: 21; Sasson 2015: 280 "A bogus prophecy"). The god Adad's influence stretches beyond the city of Aleppo in Northern Syria since he claims to have given the rule over Mari to the warlord who reveres him. Here, Adad does not correspond to a Baal attached to a single city and is more like Yahweh. These Mari documents represent a veritable philosophy of history with an ideology based on the operation of divine retribution. The view of history as the outworking of retributive justice is common to all the major cultures of the Mediterranean seashore. It is found in Mesopotamia in several epochs (from the *Legend of Narām Sîn* to the *Poem of Erra*), in the Hurrian-Hittite text concerning the fall of Ebla, in Egypt, in Greece, and in the Hebrew historiographic tradition. The Mari evidence coming from the Northwest Semitic domain to which the Hebrews also belonged could, therefore, be considered as one of the precursors of the theologico-historiographic genre, anticipating the one attributed to the redactor of the Deuteronomistic historiography (DtrH) at least a millennium earlier. This hermeneutical principle is a common ancient Near Eastern way of interpreting history and represents a stream of tradition that the Hebrews share with their surrounding world (Bodi 2010a: 195–200).

The gods Addu and Nergal revoked the kingship of Yahdun-Līm, Sūmū-Yamam (Līm clan), and Yasmaḫ-Addu (Addu clan), while Yahweh revoked the rule of Saul and his clan and later that of Solomon, descendant from the Davidic clan (Malamat 1998b: 231–35). After the murder of Uriah the Hittite to abduct his wife Bathsheba, David too is a victim of retribution (Bodi 2010a: 192–211). Both at Mari and among the Hebrew rulers, the divinity remains supreme and revokes the kingship from the ruler, disregarding preference for a single reigning clan.

12. Three Methods of Eliminating Unwanted Persons Among the Amorites and the Hebrews

Mari documents provide data on three methods used to get rid of an undesirable person without incurring bloodguilt or the disapproval of public opinion. These three methods are also found in the Hebrew traditions: a) throwing a person into a pit in the

Bodi_9781666979138_C005.indd 163 7/13/2026 3:16:19 PM

steppe; b) or a cistern in a city; c) selling the person to the nomadic tribes traveling through the desert (Bodi 2017: 133–43).

One Mari text reports Zimrī-Līm's order to his official to make a troublemaker disappear in a pit located either in the open field or within the city and let him stay there until he dies. The important element in the letter is specified with the use of internal *inclusio* as the injunction begins and ends with the same terms "this man" (ARM 13 107: 11–16; Sasson 2015: 229): "This man (*awīlam*(LÚ) *šâtu*) [. . .] if there is a secret pit (*ḫurrum*) in the open field (*ina eqlim*), or within the city (*ina libbi alim*), get rid of that man (*awīlam*(LÚ) *šâtu*)" (Durand 2000: 244, LAPO 18 1069). The Amorite ruler enumerates two possibilities: a secret pit in the steppe or a similar pit in the city. Genesis 37 relates the murderous scheme of Jacob's sons toward their younger brother Joseph, whom they threw into a pit in the open field. Following the advice of Ruben, Joseph's oldest brother, "They took his clothes and threw him into a pit or a cistern (*bwr*) which was empty, there was no water in it" (v. 24). Rashbam (1085–1158), the grandson of Rashi, from Troyes, France, as well as Nahmanides (1194–1270), a rabbi from Catalonia, Spain, comment concerning the pit in the desert saying that no one passes there, so he will die in any case, without them committing murder (Cohen 1981: 233). The second method is found in Jeremiah 38. The prophet was calling for surrender to the Babylonians, who were besieging Jerusalem. King Zedekiah complied with the request of the anti-Babylonian party to throw Jeremiah into a pit. They wanted to silence him, implying that his message was demoralizing the Judean fighters. Within the city of Jerusalem, an empty cistern (*bwr*) was found (Jer 38:6). "So they took Jeremiah and cast him into the cistern (*bôr*) of Malchiah, the king's son, which was in the court of the guard, letting Jeremiah down by ropes." The text adds that there was no water in the cistern (v. 6). The incident happened while the city was besieged and about to fall into the hands of the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar II in 588/87 BCE. In all cases, the persons deciding to execute someone in this manner try to preserve their reputation, avoid incurring bloodguilt, and do not want to provoke the anger of public opinion. In the Mari letter and Jeremiah 38, one could describe this procedure as a kind of "execution for reasons of State," a person must disappear without incriminating and bringing bloodguilt on those who wield power. According to Lam 4:13, the shedding of the "blood of the righteous" seems sufficient in and of itself to lead to the nation's downfall (Shepherd 2023: 13). A third procedure for getting rid of an unwanted person is selling the troublemaker to a nomadic tribe. When Zimrī-Līm wanted to get rid of some persons definitely, he proposed selling them to the Sutean marauding tribes: "One should sell these people to the far-away Suteans, to the Yaḫmameans or the Almuteans, or to 'the desert' [E-AB^{ki}], a place from where no information will come to their country" (ARM 14 78 = LAPO 18 929, Durand 2000: 66; 2007: 71–72). The Yaḫmameans and the Almuteans belonged to the Sutean conglomerate of tribes. The E-AB^{ki} can be read as ⌜*ia*⌝-*ab*^{ki} and interpreted as the word for "desert," etymologically related to Arabic *yab* or *yabāb*. To be sold to the Sutean tribes meant to assume a completely different lifestyle with no hope of redemption. Something similar happened to Joseph, who was sold to some traveling nomadic tribes, either Midianites or Ishmaelites (Gen 37: 27–28). The confusion about the exact name of the tribe comes from oral tradition and collective memory.

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13. Amorite Treaties and Hebrew Covenants

Charpin's (2019a) comprehensive study of Amorite treaties and international diplomacy has brought new and important information on covenant terminology and practices of the semi-nomadic tribes in Northern Syria. Heintz (2019: 113–45) has tried to show the pertinence of the new data for biblical studies on the covenant. Instead of pinpointing to what century biblical texts referring to covenants should be assigned, it might be more profitable to approach the topic phenomenologically. It means comparing specific covenantal rites and practices across ancient Near Eastern texts and regions. This approach could help in discovering covenant terminology in biblical texts that were not necessarily perceived as references to covenant making. The covenantal manner of thinking, "*Denkform*," cuts across the Hebrew Bible, forming its backbone. There are rites, practices, expressions, and allusions reflecting the consciousness of a covenant relationship between Yahweh and the Israelites.

Mari and Northern Syria produced several texts attesting to political alliances between rulers. The Amorite terminology resembles that found in Hebrew. The Mari expression "with one's whole heart" used in treaty formulations corresponds to the Hebrew one in Deut 6:5. It implies ethical aspects with the obligation of honesty, expressing the requirement for undivided sincerity. The latter is expressed in Mari and Tell Leilān treaties with the stereotypical, Old Babylonian formula *ina/ša libbim gamrim* "from the whole/undivided heart" (A.96: 13′ and M.6435+: 27; Charpin 2019b: 259–60). The expression also appears in the *Šĕmaʿ Isrāʾēl* in Deut 6:4–9 "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart (*bĕkol lēb/lēbāb*)." It occurs in 2 Kgs 23:1–4, where King Josiah in 627 BCE concludes an alliance with Yahweh in the name of his people. The expression has a new, specifically Northwest Semitic context within the covenant vocabulary and ideology. The Hebrew expression would be rooted in the Northwest Semitic tradition and not in exilic Babylonian Akkadian.

The procedure related to covenant making in Old Babylonian times, as attested in Mari, Ešnuna, Ekallātum, and Babylon, was carried out with two types of rites: 1) the rite of killing a treaty-donkey in face-to-face agreement, when both parties were present, and 2) the rite of touching the throat in long-distance agreement. In the first case, the place where the alliance would be concluded was chosen, and the terms of the treaty were determined before the rite was performed. The blood of the sacrificed animal was shed at the same time as the oath was pronounced. It served as a metaphor for the fate that awaits the one who breaks his oath and commits perjury. The parties drink from a cup and exchange gifts. For example, in ARM 26/2 404, Yasim-El, Zimrī-Līm's envoy to vassal states in the upper Ḫabur Valley, reports to his king in a long letter of about 100 lines. Those involved are Atamrum of the town of Andarig and Asqur-Addu of Karana, who were both Zimrī-Līm's vassals. The vassals are making a pro-Mari coalition, acknowledging Zimrī-Līm as their suzerain. The text mentions eight times the act of "killing a treaty-donkey" (Lafont 2001: 265, 273–71).

> Once they agreed on their particulars, establishing terms for treaty making (*riksātim irkusū* "tied the ties"), the donkey-foal was killed (*hayārum iqqaṭil*). They

Bodi_9781666979138_C005.indd 165 7/13/2026 3:16:19 PM

> made each other take oaths by the god and set out to drink. Once they kissed *igrušū* (from *garāšum*)? (so Charpin) or carved (the meat, so Sasson) and drank their cup, they exchanged gifts between themselves, Asqur-Addu broke camp toward his land (to Karana), and Atamrum did the same into Andariq proper. (ARM 26/2 404:60–65; Charpin 2019b: 58; Sasson 2015: 94)

In ARM 2 37 and 22 404 (seven times), the rite of "killing the donkey-foal" (*ḫayāram qaṭālum*), a young dog, and a bird calls to mind the Hebrew rite described in Gen 15:9, 10, 17, mentioning a heifer, a female goat, and a ram cut in two, as well as a turtledove and a heifer (Jer 34:18, *kārat ʿēgel*).

The treaty between King Ṣilli-Sîn of Ešnunna and King Ḫammurabi of Babylon was meant to end a war between them. The scribes first drafted a small tablet (*ṭuppum ṣeḫrum*) before elaborating all the points on a larger tablet (Charpin 2019b: 97–98; ARM 26/2 372: 3–20). The first, small tablet would be sent to Ešnunna. The king would accept the stipulation by swearing with a symbolic gesture. The latter, called *lipit napištim,* "touching of the throat," indicates the acceptance of the treaty, implying a self-maledictory oath. Ḫammurabi of Babylon would do the same. This was done when the treaty was concluded at a distance, and the two protagonists made an alliance while unable to meet at the same place.

The initial step would then be followed by the redaction of a second, "large tablet" (*ṭuppum rabûm*) with the final text of the treaty. This would be sworn before the gods who guarantee the treaty, *nīš ilī zakārum* "to make an oath/by the life of the gods," and with the invocation of curses. This large tablet is also called *ṭuppi nīš ilī,* "the tablet by the life of the gods." The protagonists would exchange a larger "edict tablet" (*ṣimdatum*) and conclude a binding alliance (*riksum*). One of the metaphors for making a covenant is *ṣamdātam ṣamādum*, meaning "to bind in a yoke" (Charpin 2019b: 65). It symbolically compares the protagonists to two oxen being paired together under the same yoke and going in the same direction. It corresponds to Hebrew *ṣāmād* "to bind, to join," *ṣemed* "couple, a yoke of oxen," in Nifal "to be attached to." The use of this specific terminology helps us discover a covenant the Israelites made with a Canaanite fertility and chthonic divinity in Numbers 25.

> While Israel was staying at Shittim, the people began to have sexual relations with the women of Moab (*liznôt*). These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods (*lĕzibḥê ʾĕlōhêhen*), and the people ate and bowed down to their gods (*wayyištaḥăwû*). Thus Israel yoked (*wayyiṣṣamed*) itself to the Baal of Peor, and Yahweh's anger was kindled against Israel. (. . .) And Moses said to the elders of Israel, "Each of you shall kill any of your people who have yoked themselves (*hanniṣmādîm*) to the Baal of Peor" (Num 25:1–5); They yoked themselves (*wayyiṣṣāmĕdû*) also to Baal-Peor, and ate sacrifices offered to the dead (*zibḥê metîm*) (Ps 106:28).

Making an alliance implicates one's life as illustrated by an Old Babylonian cylinder seal (Charpin, 2019b: 59) depicting the symbolic gesture of "touching the throat" (*lipit napištim*). It corresponds to the Hebrew *nepeš*, meaning "throat," "the one who

Bodi_9781666979138_C005.indd 166 7/13/2026 3:16:19 PM

breathes," "soul," "life." symbolizing the life at stake in a covenant ritual, either positively in the commitment of the two protagonists, leading to life, or negatively in the case of perjury, leading to death.

The treaty terminology is stereotypical and formulaic. The relationship between two rulers of equal status is presented as "brothers," or between the suzerain and the vassal as that of a father and son; disloyalty is assimilated to "sin"; the threat of judgment is included, as well as a retrospective Prologue.

The mention of two covenant tablets at Mari is partially echoed in Deut 4:13, where it is said that Moses wrote the Decalogue on "two stone tablets." A so-called "Covenant Stele" from Ugarit dating from the fourteenth- to thirteenth-century BCE (now in the Aleppo Museum, in Syria) depicts an oath-taking ceremony between the king of Ugarit wearing a bonnet and a Syrian king. They have two treaty tablets each (Yon 1991, fig. 7 and 15a RS 7.114).

14. The Blood Rite of the Covenant—Smearing the Throat with the Blood of the Sacrificed Animal

The blood of the sacrificed animal was shed at the same time as the oath was pronounced. This simultaneity called attention to the fate awaiting the one who would break the oath and commit perjury. Here, the blood assumes double duty: On the one hand, it establishes assumed family relations, generating the typical covenant terminology of "father, son, and brother." On the other hand, it signifies a curse and imprecation on oneself, indicating that the one who commits perjury and breaks the covenant should be killed in the manner of the sacrificed animal. Similar data come from Tell Leilān, Ugarit, and Qatna (Altman 2012; Morrow 2022).

Exodus 24:4–8 describes a Hebrew covenant between the people and Yahweh. An altar was built at the foot of the mountain, twelve pillars were set, burnt offerings were made, and oxen were sacrificed. Moses sprinkled half of the blood against the altar (v. 7); and the other half over the people: "Moses took the blood and dashed it on the people, and said, 'See the blood of the covenant (*dam-habbĕrît*) that Yahweh has made with you in accordance with all these words." (v. 8). This blood rite in covenant making may recall an earlier one in Exod 12:13 where the blood of a one-year-old male lamb was smeared on the doorposts and the lintel of the houses. "The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt." The blood rite in Exodus 12 designates all the slaves who decided to join in the exit from Egypt as members of the same family. At the foot of the Sinai, in Exodus 24, Moses gives the same rite a more solemn version by sprinkling the people with the blood of the sacrificed oxen (Démare-Lafont 2020: 391).

In the Hebrew domain, the swearing of an oath with the symbolic gesture of touching the throat is illustrated by iconographic evidence stemming from Jerusalem. During the excavations near the traditional Temple area at the "Western Wall Plaza," in 2018, a docket was found, a round clay-impressed seal, attesting to the covenantal mode of thinking in seventh-century BCE Jerusalem. The paleographic inscription

Bodi_9781666979138_C005.indd 167 7/13/2026 3:16:19 PM

mentions: *lśrʿr* "Belonging (*l*) to the governor (*śr*) of the city (ʿ*r*)," referring to the highest position in the city, the official ruling over the locality as appointed by the central authority. According to the epigraphic and iconographic study of the artifact, the scene probably depicts a loyalty oath of the governor to the king. "Such scenes are often understood as expressions of alliance under divine aegis" (Ornan, Weksler-Bdolah, and Sass 2019: 69).

The symbolic action related to "the tablet of the touching of the throat" (*ṭuppi lipit napišti*) is also reflected in the Babylonian Creation Epic (*Enūma eliš* 6 98): "They [the gods] swore by water and oil, and touched the(ir) throats" (*ina mê u šamni itmū ulappitū napšāti,* Lambert 2013: 116–17). It provides the context for Hos 12:2, "They make a treaty (*bĕrît yikrōtû*) with Egypt, and oil is carried [*šemen yûbāl*] to Egypt." It implies that a vase with oil for the conclusion of an alliance was sent from Samaria to Egypt.

The breaking of an alliance is expressed by throwing a turd or defecating in a cup in a Mari text. This act of mockery and derision is reminiscent of the prophet Ezekiel's use of a scatological term, *gillûlîm*, with which he mocks Babylonian gods and idols. The term *gillûlîm* is best rendered with the German word "*Scheißgötter*" or "shit-gods" (Bodi 2022: 97–127; see Chapter 6).

A Mari letter (ARM 122 [A. 221]:34–44), sent by Huzīrī, one of Zimrī-Līm's vassals who ruled in the region of Qaṭṭunan, located north of Mari, mentions the symbolic act of defecation. Huzīrī asks Zimrī-Līm to write to Kabiya, the king of Kaḫat, so that a nobleman named Akīn-Amar may be imprisoned for treason and breaking a treaty. He states that Akīn-Amar once enjoyed the honor of having a seat in front of his suzerain after concluding an alliance with Zimrī-Līm. Akīn-Amar initially drank a cup (*kāsum*) with Zimrī-Līm, a symbolic gesture in the act of making an alliance. However, he later broke the covenant by "defecating in the cup in which he drank."

> Another matter: Why doesn't my lord write to Kaḫat concerning Akīn-Amar? Sir, is Akīn-Amar just my enemy? Isn't he also my lord's enemy? Why does he enjoy peace with my lord? Once he had a seat before my lord. He drank a cup (*kāsum*) and lifted it. My lord counted him among his nobles, dressed him in a vestment, and gave him a *ḫubutum*-wig. Yet turning around, he dropped excrement in the cup in which he drank (*ina kāsim ša ištu zê-šu izzi*). He became an enemy of my lord. (Guichard 1994: 238; Sasson 2015: 268)[15]

Akīn-Amar initially drank a cup with Zimrī-Līm, which is a symbolic action in an actual ritual concluding an alliance between the suzerain and his vassal (Durand 1982: 88 n.1). The act of defecation in the cup represents a symbolic gesture signifying the opposite; it is an act of rebellion, indicating that the vassal is breaking the alliance he previously concluded with his suzerain: "This passage is very instructive for the study

[15] (34) *ù ša-ni-tam am-*ᵀ*mi*ᵀ*-ni*[*m*] *be-lí a-na Ka-ḫa-at*ᵏⁱ (35) *aš-šum* ᵐ*A-ki-in-A-mar la-a i-ša-ap-pa-ra-am* (36) lú *A-ki-in-A-mar na-ak-ri-*ᵀ*ma*ᵀ*-a* (37) *ú-ul na-ka-ar be-lí-ia-a š*[*u*]*-ú am-mi-nim* (38) *i-na na-ka-ar be-lí-ia š*[*u*]*-ú am-mi-nim* (40) *i-na sa-li-ma-a*[*t*] *be-lí-ia* ᵀ*wa-šiᵀ-ib* (39) 1-*šu* lú *šu-ú ma-ḫa-ar be-*[*lí*]*-ia ú-ši-ib-ma* (40) *ù ka-sa-am* iš$_7$*-ti ù iš-šu-ma be-lí* (41) *it-ti* lú-meš *im-nu-šu* túg *ú-la-ab-bi-sú*! (42) ù ᵗᵘᵍ*ḫu-bu-ur-tam iš-ku-un-šu ù i-tu-ur-ma* (43) *i-na ka-si-im ša* iš$_7$*-tu-ú ze-e-šu iz-zi* (44) [*ù i*]*t-ti be-lí-ia ik-ki-ir*.

Bodi_9781666979138_C005.indd 168 7/13/2026 3:16:19 PM

of symbolic gestures. First of all, one learns that when a vassal visited his sovereign, the latter gave him a goblet from which he was invited to drink. Returning to his residence, the vassal took this goblet and retained it as a testimony of the favors that his 'father' had shown him. One also sees the use that could be made of it should one wish to signify the intention of revolting" (Charpin 1990b: 81).

The symbolic gesture negates the curse that usually accompanies the conclusion of an alliance consecrated by ceremonial drinking of wine or beer (*asakka akālu*; Charpin 2010: 41). Either defecating into a cup or dropping excrement into a cup would be an act of desecration and breaking up of an alliance.

The term *gillûlîm,* "dung gods," is the favorite term in the book of Ezekiel to designate "idols" (Bodi 1993: 481–500). It is an outrageous scatological metaphor that Ezekiel uses in the Babylonian Exile to deride the local gods and idols. Elsewhere, I have analyzed the long stream of tradition of ritual defecation from a Sumerian proverb, at Mari in Old Babylonian times to the Ishtar festival in Neo-Babylonian times in Babylon, among the Hittites, and as late as the fifth-century BCE Athenian comedies of Aristophanes, offering excrement to Zeus and urine to his messenger, Hermes (Bodi 2022: 97–128. Chapter 6). Scatological references and outrageous pranks serve to deride and subvert the established rule and criticize the abuses of religion. It is an offensive way of mocking something where excess is intentional. In a similar derogatory way, the book of Ezekiel uses the term *gillûlîm*, "shit-gods," to designate idols and idolatry. The Mari text is particularly *à propos* since it combines the breaking of a treaty with a scatological prank. Likewise, Ezekiel combines the accusation against his compatriots of having abandoned the covenant and uses a contemptuous scatological term to deride any Babylonian alternative to the God of their ancestors, whom they have betrayed.

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Bodi_9781666979138_C005.indd 170 7/13/2026 3:16:19 PM

6

Acts of Derision in the Stream of Tradition

Mockery and Scatological Pranks from Sumer to Athens

1. Introduction

This chapter explores the concept of the "Stream of Tradition" through specific acts of derision from second millennium Mesopotamia, Northern Syria (Mari), Hittites in Anatolia, and down to the fifth-century BCE comedies in Athens. The Old Babylonian character called *aluzinnu* was a kind of entertainer, whose typical way of grabbing the attention of his public was to create paradoxical, shocking situations and to perform scatological pranks. Being present for two millennia, and having reached the cultures of the Mediterranean shoreline, the tradition of public derision of prominent people and institutions continued and spread to various cities in the Rhineland region at the heart of Europe, associated with the proverbial jester "*Eulenspiegel*," in the thirteenth-century CE. Today, the practice of pranks and derision is still attested in Catalonia in Spain, Southern France, and Naples, Italy, in the tradition of the "*caganer*," where notorious public figures are derided during festivals. In the stream of tradition on jesters, in Akkadian called *aluzinnu*, and in Greek ἀλαζών [*alazōn*] "buffoon, bullshit artist," performing scatological acts as attested in a Sumerian proverb, the Ištar Festival in Old Babylonian Mari, in Neo-Babylonian times in Mesopotamia, and among the Hittites in Anatolia. Associating warriors with excrement and urine is found in the *Iliad* and Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions and serves to mock, deride, and belittle them. It appears as late as the fifth-century BCE Athenian comedies of Aristophanes, offering excrement to Zeus and urine to Hermes, the messenger of the gods. Scatological jokes and outrageous pranks serve to deride and subvert the established rules and abuses of rulers, priests, and religion. It is an outrageous way of deriding persons who wield power, the rich and the high social class, certain professionals like priests, physicians, or cooks, and their practices, where excess is intentional and programmatic. Similarly, the Book of Ezekiel uses the term *gillûlîm*, "shit-gods," to deride and designate idols and idolatry. This term, also rendered as "dung gods," is the favorite term in Ezekiel to designate "idols," where it is used thirty-nine times out of a total of forty-eight times in the Hebrew Bible. I attempt to show that the choice of this unusual term was based on acts of ritual defecation as part of various ceremonies described in the ancient Near Eastern texts. References to acts of defecation, ritual, and otherwise are examined in various texts, starting with a Neo-Babylonian Akkadian text dealing with practices related to the

Bodi_9781666979138_C006.indd 171 7/13/2026 3:22:29 PM

carnival-like Ištar festival that took place during Ezekiel's Babylonian exile. In the Mari Old-Babylonian text, the act of defecation is associated with the breaking of an alliance, hence its pertinence for Ezekiel, who accuses his compatriots of having broken the covenant, triggering the Exile. Scholars are divided about the way these texts should be understood. Should they be taken as metaphors, symbolic gestures, or actual rituals? One has first to determine the meaning of the act of ritual defecation and then trace the transformation of its original meaning and its reutilization as a metaphor in the stream of tradition.

The examples I have chosen to illustrate the stream of tradition are related to the use of scatological pranks, jokes, and intentionally provocative and outrageous ritual acts. These are so unusual, outlandish, and specific that the idea of the transmission of a very old tradition from Sumerian times down to fifth-century BCE Athens seems highly probable.

2. Ritual Defecation in the Babylonian Ištar Festival

Ritual defecation is mentioned in the so-called "Love Lyrics," or texts related to the liturgy and celebration associated with the perennial Ištar festival. In Mesopotamia, the festival in honor of this major goddess spanned two millennia, from Old Babylonian to Hellenistic times. The texts are fragmentary, and it is not always easy to make sense of who is speaking and fully grasp the action that is taking place. They have been dated to after 1000 BCE (Lambert 1959b: 7). As a probable "*Sitz im Kultus*" or setting in a cultic practice for the fragments he translated, Lambert suggested a public New Year festival in the month of Nisannu (March–April) taking place in Babylon. According to Linssen (2004: 68 and 120), Ištar's cultic personnel, called *assinnū*, participate in a procession on the fifteen Simānu (May–June), and *kurgarrû* on the sixteen of Simānu in Hellenistic Babylon. Lambert identified thirteen more Assyrian and Babylonian fragments, with two pieces of a related Ritual Tablet, showing that all the pieces belonged to a single corpus and that the paragraphs were for recitation during Ištar's rituals in Babylon. Pointing out the unusual descriptions found in these ritual texts, he expressed his puzzlement as to their correct understanding: "Imagery of the boldest kind is commonplace, and the eroticism is the most explicit for ancient Mesopotamia. Parallels are hard to find [ ] How should we take it? As actual record merely, as jest, as innuendo, or as something else" (Lambert 1975: 99 and 104).

The text describes the following public action: "The *kurgarrû* will squat down in front of the Ḫursagkalamma. He will groan, strain himself! He will then stand up and sing, "Let me contemplate the great Kiš (referring to the result of his laborious effort), let me look at lofty Babylon."[1]

[1] (12) *ana tar-ṣa Ḫur-saĝ-kalam-ma* ^{lú}*kur-gar-ru ina kin-ṣi-šú ik-kam-mi-iṣ-ma* (13) *te-nin-di inaddi*^{di} *in-ḫi in-na-ḫu i-te-bi-ma Kiš*^{ki} *ra-ba-a lu-mur* (14) *Bābili*(E)^{ki} *šá-qa-a lud-gul-ma i-za-am-mur* (B iii 12–14; Edzard 1987a: 57). The term *kamāṣu* (*CAD* K: 120b *kamāsu* B) means "to squat down, to kneel," *tēnintu* "weeping, whining," *inḫī* from the root *anāḫu* I, "to make an effort, to strain oneself."

My translation follows Edzard's rendering. The latter pointed out the defecation aspect reflected in these lines and offered the following comments, "One may be accused of a fecal fantasy [since . . .] the 'Love Lyrics' are neither very sweet nor very lyrical" (Edzard 1987a: 58). Nevertheless, the designation "Love Lyrics" is appropriate, since the texts celebrate Ištar, the goddess of love, and are associated with orgies and excesses of various kinds. The liturgical texts related to the Ištar festival speak of breaking wind, mention the smell of armpits, and make explicit scatological references: "I sent [you?], my girlfriend, to Kār-bēl-mātāti; why did you break wind (*taṣrutī-ma*) and become embarrassed? Why did you make the wagon of her lord a.[.] smell?" (*ṣarātum* "to fart.") (Group II, B, lines 10–12), and *šá su-ḫa-ti ni-pi-is-su* "the smell of armpits" (Group IV, line 17) (Lambert 1975: 120 and 122).

It took some time for scholars to realize that these texts were describing public acts of derision by the paid personnel performing in public during the Ištar festival.

The role-play of the *kurgarrû* in this context is best explained as a provocative act of derision and public ridicule. The city of Kiš was identified with a group of tells located on an ancient abandoned riverbed of the Euphrates, some fifteen kilometers east of Babylon. The city was an agglomeration composed of Kiš together with Ḫur-saĝ-kalam-ma "Mountain of the Land (of Sumer)," dedicated to the goddess Ištar (Edzard 1987b: 12–13).

3. The Etymology of *kurgarrû* and *pilpilû*

There are several classes of cultic personnel associated with the goddess Ištar, that bear significant names and perform scatological pranks as part of the celebrations related to her festival. These are the *kurgarrû* and the *pilpilû*. In light of modern gender studies, scholars are trying to determine whether they were homosexual, bisexual, or intersex beings; hermaphrodites, transvestites, castrates, male prostitutes, or simply cult performers (Groneberg 1986: 33 n. 54; *CAD* K: 558; Lambert 1992: 151; Peled 2015: 751; 2016a: 158; 2016b: 132–44 *kalû*; 155–202 *assinnu*, *kurgarrû*; 267–70 *pilpilû*; Svärd and Nissinen 2018: 373–411). The meanings of these two names are revealing. According to Edzard (1987a: 58 n. 6), the Akkadian term *kurgarrû* is etymologically derived from Sumerian (kur-gar-ra), where the term (kur) means "a heap, a pile, a mound," while (gar) corresponds to the Akkadian verb *šakānu* "to place, to put." The term means "the one who places little heaps," implying little heaps of excrement. The tablet from the so-called "Love Lyrics" would, therefore, describe the cultic act of defecation that the *kurgarrû* performs as part of his enactment during the Ištar festival. The above text would illustrate why the *kurgarrû* bears such a peculiar name.

The other member of Ištar's cultic personnel is called *pilpilû*. This term, too, comes from Sumerian (pi-li-pi-li), meaning "he who makes wee-wee," or "he who is constantly peeing." These terms seem to imply that during the Ištar festivals, the *kurgarrû* and the *pilpilû* were defecating and urinating in front of Ḫursagkalamma, Ištar's temple in Kiš. They were performing public acts of desecration of the sacred temple area. Edzard's etymology of (kur-gar-ra) was endorsed by Glassner (1992: 61): "The name (kur.gar.ra),

Bodi_9781666979138_C006.indd 173 7/13/2026 3:22:29 PM

probably meaning 'who makes little piles,' like (pi.li.pi.li), 'who never stops peeing,' seems to allude, in an imaginary way, to beings who have not yet reached maturity and who, because they escape the constraining norms of society, can get by in transitory situations."

However, Cooper (1993: 92 n. 70) declined Edzard's and Glassner's interpretations. Nevertheless, the strongest argument in support of Edzard's etymology of the term (kur-gar-ra) is its association with (pi-li-pi-li) "he who makes wee-wee" in an Old Babylonian Proto-Lú lexical list (MSL 12 42:279–80). The term might have acquired different meanings over the course of centuries, but as suggested by Glassner, originally it could have belonged to the world of childhood, either designating young, immature beings or mimicking uninhibited child-like behavior like defecating and urinating in public. In the context of the permissive Ištar festival, a regression to childlike behavior would have been tolerated.

The ninth-century BCE *Erra Epic* describes some other ritual activities performed by the *kurgarrû* and the *assinnū* during the Ištar festival:

> As for Uruk, the dwelling of Anu and Ištar, the city of *kezrētu*-women, joyful lasses (*šamḫātū*), and courtesans (*ḫarimtū*), from whom Ištar took away the husbands and whom she delivered into the[ir]/yo[our] hands; Male Suteans (and) female Suteans, (who) shout *yarurūt*[*u*]!, rose up (in/against) Eanna; the *kurgarrû*, and the *assinnū*, whose masculinity Ištar has turned to fem[ininity] to make the people reverent; the carriers of dagger, carriers of razor, scalpel and flin[t-blade], who regularly infringe on a taboo (*ītakkalū a*[*sakka*]) to delight the heart of Ištar (*Erra* 4 52–59; Cagni 1969: 110; Bodi 1991: 52–68; Peled 2014: 288).

The expression *asakka akālu*, translated as "to infringe on a taboo," is frequent in documents from Mari and Terqa. When buying a field and making a contract, or concluding an alliance, the contracting parties would eat "bread," or "plants" (ninda, sar + *akālu*), drink "wine," or "beer" (geštin, kaš + *šatû*), and anoint themselves with "oil" (ì + *pašāšu, lapātu*). In this manner, they would materialize the curse if one of the jurors broke the oath, denounced the contract, committed perjury, or broke the alliance (Charpin 1996: 91–92). In an Old Babylonian legal contract, after the purchase of a field, the contracting parties bearing Amorite names, concluded the real estate transaction with a meal where they "ate bread, drank beer, and anointed themselves with oil" (M.10556, lines 22–24, *akala*/ninda *tikulū*, *šikara*/ kaš *ištû*, *u šamna*/ì *tiltaptū*). The contract was made in the house of an *aluzinnu* ("clown," or "jester") named Erra-dalīlī, meaning, "Erra is my praise" (line 26; Durand 1982: 82). The name may be related to biblical Dalilah (see Chapter 9. Section 5). The *aluzinnu* are well attested at Mari intervening in the palace as entertainers, subordinate to the chief musician. In the lexical list-Lú, they are described as *ēpiš namūtim* "jokers, mockers." They wear boots (ARM 22 324 iii:20 ^{kuš}*me-še-en* MUL *ša a-lu-zi-ni*) and hats (sagšu). Since they also appear with bear-tamers, they may be described as showmen. Like other musicians, they owned a house and had to provide for their family. The lexical list Igituh equates the *aluzinnum* with *sābi'um* "tavern keeper" (Ziegler 2007: 277–78). The *alizinnu* in question might have been a well-known entertainer and tavern keeper

Bodi_9781666979138_C006.indd 174 7/13/2026 3:22:29 PM

in the area. The lines of the contract related to a real-estate transaction correspond to ARM 8 13:11′–14′ "they ate from (the same) platter, drank from (the same) cup, and anointed each other with oil (*karam ikulū kāsam ištû ù šamnam iptašū*)" (Durand 1982: 86; Sasson 2015: 232). The term *karam* is a hapax, while *kāsum* means "cup" and corresponds to Hebrew *kôs*.

In the *Erra Epic*, the *kurgarrû* and the *assinnu* are characterized by the expression *ītakkalū asakka* ("they constantly infringe on a taboo"), which is a Gtn-stem preterite 3mpl from *akālum*, literally "to eat." This iterative verbal form indicates that they repeatedly and regularly transgress the taboo. The terms *kurgarrû* and the *assinnu* designate members of the temple personnel, most often mentioned in connection with Ištar. They were performing games, plays, dances with daggers, and music as part of the ritual of the great festivals, and were dressed in distinctive garments. The *kezrētu*-women wear a particular hairdo and have a special relationship with the goddess Ištar. One clay terracotta now in the Louvre Museum depicts a man playing the lute and a woman with a special hairdo, playing tambourine, and copulating at the same time (Charpin 2017: 154 fig. 5–3). Similar kinds of erotic games are found both in the Hittite and Greek texts associated with feasts in honor of fertility goddesses (see Chapter 6. Section 8).

In the Sumerian version of *Inanna's Descent to the Netherworld*, the god Enki creates the kur-gar-ra from the dirt under his nails, associating this creature with filth. Together with the gala-tur-ra "little or junior gala," they rescue the goddess from the realm of the dead. The Akkadian version differs considerably. In the Ninivite version of *Ištar's Descent*, Ea, the god of wisdom, creates Aṣûšunāmir, an *assinnu* who is also called *kulu'u* in another version of this myth found in Assur. The creature is a victim of Ereškigal's curse. Being sexually undifferentiated, it can cross boundaries and descend to the Netherworld, fetch Ištar's corpse, and bring her back among the living, allowing sexual reproduction to resume on earth. Maul suggests that the *kurgarrû* and *assinnu* were perceived as neither completely male nor female, appearing as transsexual transvestites, wearing make-up made out of a stone called *kurgarrānu*. He quotes the *Myth of Lugale* where it is said that this make-up was capable of putting men in an ecstatic state of trance. They were able to navigate between the living and the dead and inspire fear (*šupluḫu*) in the population (*Erra Epic* 4 56) on account of their magical powers and capacity to inflict harm (Maul 1992: 163 n.37). He compares their powers to those of shamans. The latter are perceived as persons who can enter into contact with the dead and access their power through lamentations and trance.

4. Scatology in a Sumerian Proverb

The excessive behavior of various members of Ištar's cultic personnel described in the *Erra Epic* might be reflected in the sarcastic Sumerian proverb (SP 2.100) mentioning the defecation of Ištar's *kalû* priest: "A lamentation priest (gala/*kalû*) wiped his anus and said, "I must not stir up that which belongs to the Queen of Heaven (i.e., Inanna/Ištar), my lady" (gala-e bìd-da-ni ḫa-ba-an-da-zé-er èm ga-ša-an-an-na ga-ša-an-mu ba-ra-zi-dè-en-e-še, Alster 1997a, vol. 1: 65, vol. 2: 371; Yalçin 2016: 126–28).

Bodi_9781666979138_C006.indd 175 7/13/2026 3:22:29 PM

Alster interprets it as a case of "Wellerism," a well-known quotation followed by a facetious sequel in which Ištar's lamentation singer displays his own ludicrous character and excessive behavior by the pompous statements he makes in the most inappropriate situations. Since Sumerian times, there were sarcastic voices deriding the excesses of the goddesses' cultic personnel during the Inanna/Ištar carnival, who tended to give a preposterous significance even to the act of defecating and wiping one's *derrière*. The proverb that associates the gala/*kalû* lamentation singer with defecation raises the possibility that the Hebrew term *gillûlîm* may contain yet another wordplay on the name of Ištar's cult personnel. I suggested the possible wordplays on *gallû* "demons" and *gallulu* "to commit a crime" when speaking of idol worship (Bodi 1993: 484–88). The interaction of Ezekiel and his epigones who redacted the book with Mesopotamian religious and literary culture, has now become a well-accepted feature of Ezekiel's studies (Bodi 2018: 1–32). There were different classes of lamentation priests: ^{LÚ}GALA *gullubu* "shaven *kalû*-lamentation priest" probably belonging to the regular temple personnel and the ^{LÚ}GALA *lā gullubu* "non-shaven" independent of the temple (Linssen 2004: 17 n.109). It is probably the latter that was associated with ritual defecation on specific festivals when such behavior would be tolerated. In the majority of human societies, the result of defecation provokes disgust, and despite what Talmudic references affirm concerning the worship of Baal Pe'or, no culture or religion worships its gods with excrement.[2] This is why defecation during festivals stands for disrespect, intentional mockery, and derision pushed to the extreme.

5. Scatological Pranks as Mockery and Derision of Religion and Establishment

The identification of the dung heap made by the *kurgarrû* with "Babylon, which is highly built" may be interpreted as an act of mockery and derision—a reversal of values, which was allowed and encouraged during the Ištar festival. With phrases such as "Let me contemplate the great Kiš (*Kiš rabâ lūmur*)," and "Let me look at lofty Babylon (*Bābili šaqâ ludgul*)," the *kurgarrû* are probably quoting lines or incipits from songs in honor of the king's building accomplishments. On the roof of his terrace, King Nebuchadnezzar boasts, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built?" (Dan. 4:30), which could also be taken as an echo of such songs praising royal architectural achievements. During the liturgy of the New Year's celebration in Babylon, the following lines from *Enūma eliš* 6 57–58, were sung (Marduk's order to the Anunnaki): "Build Babylon, the task you have sought. Let bricks for it be moulded and raise the shrine!" (Lambert 2013: 133). Rumor (2017: 188) points out that the *aluzinnu*-jester appears in cultic ceremonies and in connection with "builders" serving in public labor.

[2] The second-century CE *Mishnah Sanhedrin* 7:6 mentions the following ritual action, "the one who uncovers himself (= defecates) before Baʿal Peʿor" (פוער לבעל עצמו הפוער) [*hpwʿr ʿṣmw lbʿl pʿwr*]–this is how one performs an act of service to it." For other references in the Talmud, see (Bodi 2022: 118–23). With such stories of cultic defecation, the rabbis in the Talmud are systematically deriding and mocking pagan idol worship.

Bodi_9781666979138_C006.indd 176 7/13/2026 3:22:29 PM

According to Rivkah Harris, the so-called "Jester" or *aluzinnu* texts suggest that during the carnival-like Ištar festival, the *kurgarrû* and *assinnū*, together with other participants like *pilpilû* and *kalû*, were making pranks, scatological wordplays, jokes, and bawdy speech to lampoon the goddess of war and love. "The 'improper speech' of the text suggests that scatological jokes were part of the entertainment" (Harris 1991: 275). One such "Jester or Trickster Text" starts with the opening line, "My city, Babylon the holy, mountain of *ṣurru*-glaze (*a-li* ká.diĝir.ra kù *ša-du-ú ša ṣur-ri*)" (Kilmer 1991: 10). The line refers to the tallest building in the city, the ziggurat of Babylon (Bodi 2021d: 176).

For the people who visited the city of Babylon, the impression of being at the *axis mundi* came from seeing the seven-story ziggurat called E-temen-an-ki, "House of the foundation of heaven and earth." In the Babylonian Creation Epic, *Enūma eliš*, the temple complex, the ziggurat, and the adjacent temple, Esagil, are given a central cosmic position and paramount importance. In the city of Babylon, its ziggurat and temple, the universe holds together as around a mast (Maul 1997: 115). This is expressed by yet another name given to it: (é.dim.an.ki) "House, the mast of heaven and earth" (Glassner 2002: 32). Such theological and ideological elaborations by learned scribes and pretensions of prestige blown out of proportion were bound to provoke derision and sarcasm in some parts of the population. The annual Ištar festival was an occasion to criticize and deride the religious establishment and the learned priestly elite. The revelry, drinking, and unbridled licentiousness associated with the Ištar cult tolerated all kinds of excesses, and even public defecation as an act of mockery.

The link with the *aluzinnu*-Texts provides a clue to understanding the meaning of such acts of defecation in public. In lexical Lú-lists, the *aluzinnu* appears in immediate association with words meaning "slanderer" (*dabbibu, ākil karṣi*), "farter" (*ṣāritu*), "defecator" (*naššiḫu*), and (*tēṣû*) "liable to diarrhea" (VAT 9717, Foster 1974:74). Since one of his characteristics is that he is absurdly boastful, these terms should probably be taken metaphorically to designate a "blow-hard, windbag, bull-shitter" applied to jeerers, jesters, clowns, and outrageous critics of social and religious norms. They make fun of dignified persons such as incantation priests (*āšipu*) by impersonating them and producing preposterous ritual prescriptions.

Staubli (2019: 131, Fig. 1a–b) makes a convincing rapprochement between the *kurgarrû* and the naked figures found on Old Babylonian terracotta plaques, crouching, defecating, playing an instrument, and flanked by a barking dog and a pig smelling or eating the *kurgarrû*'s feces. In Mesopotamia, since the earliest times, pigs and dogs were associated with impurity and perceived in an unfavorable light in the collective urban imagery (Parayre 2000: 169, and fig. 31). Among the Hittites, if the utensils and the food offerings for the gods were soiled by pigs due to the negligence of the cultic personnel, the guilty servants were punished, by having to eat excrement and drink urine (Bonneterre 2021: 280). In the Egyptian Book of the Dead, scatophagy is an abomination (*bwt*) as well as drinking urine: "My abomination is my abomination: I will not eat dung, I will not drink urine (nor) walk upside down" (Spell 53a S1 in Allen 1974: 52). The Hebrew Bible relates how Sennacherib sent an envoy of the Assyrian army, Rabshakeh, to taunt and mock King Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem,

Bodi_9781666979138_C006.indd 177 7/13/2026 3:22:29 PM

doomed to eat their own dung (צאת/חרא) and drink their own urine (מים רגלי /שין) (2 Kgs 18:27). Since Hezekiah relied on Egyptian military help (v. 21), the taunt of the Assyrian envoy is all the more poignant: Putting political trust in Egypt is tantamount to committing abominable acts.

6. Mockery of Elite's Haute Cuisine, Exorcists' Recipe, and Quack Medicine

Gastronomy in Babylonia was a "court" or "palace" science. Literacy is a prerequisite for the development of any *haute cuisine* since it is a focal element in the transmission of technical knowledge within a palace *élite*. Bottéro (1995: 153) analyzed the recipes' collections of Mesopotamian cuisine written down by Babylonian "chefs." The Mari tablets mention the *bīt māyalī*, "The House of Beds." The expression would have been enigmatic if it didn't recall the Near Eastern boardrooms with benches furnished with carpets and cushions. Some had double usage as an audience room where various issues of local politics, economy, and taxes were discussed, and as a banqueting room where servants brought food to people gathered there. In antiquity, people ate while reclining on beds. Behind the word *dīvān*, Arabic *dīwān* hides the Old Persian word *dipi-* "inscription, document" combining writing and eating while reclining. Transmitted through the Elamite, it goes back to Akkadian *ṭuppu*, Sumerian (dub) meaning "writing tablet,"[3] (Bonneterre 2021: 20). Writing is necessary to preserve the recipes of elaborate foods served at banquets, the ritualized protocols for the meals of gods and the grandees of this world, and also to deride and mock the elaborate food of the rich and powerful. While Bottéro (1995) published three tablets with thirty recipes, Bonneterre (2021: 341) mentions a corpus of thirty documents in the Yale collection. Judging from the Mari documentation, these recipes were written down by scribes specialized in writing down palace beverages and "*textes de bouche*" (Bottéro 1995: 153), serving as amanuenses for the "chefs."

Haute cuisine is associated with the rich and high social class. It inevitably became the focus of mockery by professional jesters who combined it with their sarcastic denunciation of society's ills and wrongdoings. As convincingly demonstrated by Lucio Milano (2004: 243–56), the *aluzinnu* texts provide a mocking and trenchant satire of both the sophisticated food and the traditional "medical" decoctions and preparations by the *āšipu* priests and exorcists. Combining the worlds of medicine, magic, and gastronomy, the jester or buffoon (*aluzinnu*), acting as a practicing exorcist, *āšipu,* or quack doctor, describes his own appearance and performances. The diet prescriptions listed in the form of menology (what should be eaten each month) parody hemerological literature (texts identifying lucky and

[3] https://iranicaonline.org/articles/divan. Cf. Italian *dogana*, French "*douane*," meaning "customs office," derived from *dīvān*. The word "banquet," which entered English from fifteenth-century French, is also derived from the term "banc" meaning "bench."

Bodi_9781666979138_C006.indd 178 7/13/2026 3:22:29 PM

unlucky days of the month). The derision found in the *aluzinnu* texts plays with the normative value of gastronomical recipes, as well as with the normative value of ritual practices of the exorcist and the diviners. In a text, Landsberger (1951: 110) designates as "*Teufelsküche*" or "the devil's cuisine," the *aluzinnu* jester assumes the role of the *āšipu* exorcist, mocking the skills of the conjurer and the *asû* "physician," describing a ritual of exorcism which could provoke death or serious food poisoning of the patient. After a gap, one finds a list of scatological recipes suggested by the *aluzinnu*, who mocks the drugs sold and employed by professional healers. These are part of the so-called, *Dreckapotheke* or "filth pharmacy," using ingredients that are disgusting in the fake recipes, containing feces and blood (Geller 2010: 53). The sections where the *aluzinnu* mocks the *āšipu* and his use of fecal matter as *materia medica* are presented in a dialogical form, with obvious reference to well-known examples of Mesopotamian "wisdom" literature. What is supposed to increase the comic and outrageous quality of the "gastronomic" passages, even more than the "wisdom" echoes, is the adoption of the stylistic pattern of hemerologies and astrological calendars, a more advanced text genre in Mesopotamia. Here are two excerpts from an *aluzinnu* scatological recipe containing "onager's dung" (*kabūt serrēmi*), "dog's excrement" (*zê kalbi*), and "bluebottle turd" (*zê lamṣati*) (Milano 2004: 252–53):

(10) The month of Kislimu (November/December): What is your diet?
(11) You shall dine on onager dung in bitter garlic
(12) and emmer wheat chaff in sour milk.[4]

(16) The month of Šabaṭu (January/February): What is your diet?
(17) You shall dine on the aromatized buttocks of a male donkey
(18) filled with dog turds and bluebottle turds.[5]

The satire mocks both the medical prescriptions and the *haute cuisine*. The (*CAD* K: 29) quotes a text with the medical use of *kabūt imēri* "donkey's dung," but decides that it must have probably referred to a stone. These satirical recipes would rather confirm the use of dung as medicine. Moreover, in the classical Greco-Roman world, including the famous Galen (129–216 CE) from Pergamon in Asia Minor, the official medicine made therapeutic use of excrement, urine, and other substances that modern medicine regards as inadvisable (Harris 2020: 1–23). Despite this, modern medical research on the microbiome reverts to the ingestion of excrement taken from people with healthy guts for the restoration of the intestinal microbiome. However, while the *materia medica* remained the same, the Babylonian medicine used excrement for a different purpose. The origin of the Greek *Dreckapotheke* should be sought in Mesopotamia as part of the medical stream of tradition. These *aluzinnu*

[4] (10) ^{itu}*kislimu mi-nu-ú ú-kul-ta-ka* (11) *ka-bu-ut serrēmi*(ANŠE.EDIN.NA) *ina a-za-an-ni* (12) *ù ilti*(IN.NU.RI) *šá kunāši*(ZÍZ.AN.NA) *ina ki-sim-mi ta-pat-tan CAD* K: 421, *kabūt sirrimi ina azanni u ilta ša kunāši in kisimmi tapattan* "eat wild donkey's dung with bitter garlic and emmer wheat chaff with spoiled milk."

[5] (16) ^{itu}*šabāṭu mi-nu-ú ú-kul-ta-ka* (17) *šá-pu-uḫ-ri šu-uḫ-ḫu šá imēri*(ANŠE) *zi-ka-ri* (18) *ze-e kalbi*(UR.GIR$_7$) *ze-e lam-ṣa-a-ti tu-ma*(*-al*)*-la-ma ta-pat-tan*

Bodi_9781666979138_C006.indd 179 7/13/2026 3:22:29 PM

texts, with their trenchant critique of society and the practices of the dominating class, require highly competent scribes cognizant of a variety of Mesopotamian literary genres. The authors of these satirical, mocking, and outrageous texts represent the precursors of classical Greek satirists, like the comedies of Aristophanes in fifth-century BCE Athens.

7. References to Defecation in Old Babylonian Mari Texts

The Ištar festival at Mari at the nearby Dēr sanctuary was among the most important ones, to which most of the surrounding kings and vassals were invited to attend. Musicians, different performers, and animal tamers held a central place. The *kalû* sung the balag ending with an eršemma. What is relevant to our topic is the mention that in the Mari protocol for Ištar's festival, after the wrestling and the entertainers finished their performance, "the solid and liquid excrements should be removed" (*tabīšātum ikkabbišā*) (Durand and Guichard 1997: 52 n. 207, text nº 2 iii:27). The Akkadian term *tabāštānum* is derived from *ba'āšum* "what stinks." In *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi* II.107, the ill person describes his condition, "I would wallow in my excrement like a sheep" (*ubtallil kī immeri ina tabāštānīya*) (*BWL* 44: 107; Oshima 2014: 263; Lenzi 2023: 76). The *Ludlul Commentary* explains the meaning of the *tabāštānum* by juxtaposing three terms *tabāštānu: zû šinātum* = "excrement": "feces," and "urine." The Mari protocol for Ištar's festival confirms that some acts of defecation accompanied the festivities. It underscores the role of Northern Syria and the Amorites in the stream of tradition that reached the Anatolian Hittites, who performed a similar festival.

Another Mari text describes the symbolic act of "Defecating in a Cup" (ARM 2 122 [A. 221]:34–44). (see Chapter 5. Section 14). Zimrī-Līm's vassal, Akīn-Amar, initially drank a cup (*kāsum*) with Zimrī-Līm, a symbolic act of concluding an alliance. A series of texts mentions drinking from a cup in the context of concluding an alliance (Durand 1982: 86–86 and 88 n. 1). However, he later broke that alliance by "defecating in the cup in which he drank."

The act of defecation in the cup or dropping an excrement in the goblet is a symbolic gesture signifying an act of rebellion and mockery, indicating that the vassal is breaking the alliance he previously concluded with his suzerain (Charpin 1990a: 81). The symbolic act of throwing a turd in the cup negates the curse (*asakka akālu*) that usually accompanies the concluding of an alliance consecrated by ceremonial drinking of wine or beer (Charpin 2010: 41–42). Either defecating into a cup or dropping excrement into a cup would be an act of desecration and breaking up an alliance.

Another way of viewing this text is to see it simply as a metaphorical expression or a figure of speech that one vassal uses in his letter to incriminate another vassal in the eyes of their common suzerain. If we take the reference to "defecating in a cup" as hyperbole, it would show that in the ancient Near East, scatological metaphors signal derision, and this may also be the case in interpreting the term *gillûlîm* in Ezekiel and the Hebrew Bible.

Bodi_9781666979138_C006.indd 180 7/13/2026 3:22:29 PM

8. The Stream of Tradition—From Mesopotamia to the Hittites and the Greeks

The term (^{LÚ}ALAM.ZÚ$_9$) or (^{LÚ}ALAN.ZÚ$_9$), since the cuneiform sign nº 358 can be read either ALAN or ALAM, which appears in Hittite texts, is explained as "Sumerianizations" of Akkadian *aluzinnu*—jester (Weeden 2011: 142). Several deviant writings serve to designate these unusual *aluzinnu* characters. They wear costumes, make spinning movements, crouch naked in a pond before having beer poured on their backs, then stepping out of the pond and blowing horns, fighting each other, before being chased off at the signal from the king. They are also described as scooping wine (Weeden 2011: 144).

In Boğazköy, the *aluzinnu* belonged to the personnel of the temple or of the palace, and played a role in religious festivals. His activities were to recite, declaim, dance, sing, play musical instruments, and participate in some sort of theatrical representations (Rumor 2017: 195, 1997). As in Mari and Babylonia, the *aluzinnu* does not appear to have been an independent peripatetic mime-actor, but rather, was financially dependent on the palace and the temple.

Several specialists in Greek classical texts convincingly argued for a connection between the Mesopotamian *aluzinnu* and the Greek ἀλαζών "braggart, boaster, buffoon, bullshit artist," and the abstract noun ἀλαζονεία "boastfulness," by the interface of the Hittites (West 1994: 2 n. 8; MacDowell 1990: 287–92; Griffith and Marks 2011: 24). The tradition would have been transmitted from Mesopotamia, more specifically from Northern Syria (ALAN.ZÚ, *aluzinnu,* "the one who knows the form, appearance" [ALAN=*lānum*], meaning "an imitator"), to the Hittites (^{LÚ}ALAN.ZÚ$_9$) and Ionian Greeks in Asia Minor. The latter celebrated the Iambos festival in honor of Demeter, the goddess of agriculture, fertility, harvest, and prosperity, and Dionysus, a vegetation god linked to the New Year festival. Vine was the special plant of Dionysus, and the god was celebrated with drunken revelry. Ünal (1994: 215) describes the *aluzinnu* in the following way: "He disguises himself like a woman or a king, thus holding kings as well as religious persons up to public ridicule; he is an 'Imitator' and 'Persiflator,' that is, satirizer. He deals with tamed bears, billy goats and appears as a tightrope-walker (*Seiltänzer*) and a glutton (*Vielfrass*); he sits on chamber pots and lets off farts."

D'Agostino (2012: 89–99) pointed out the link between the *aluzinnu* juggler and the bear-tamer (u$_4$-da-tuš) in Mesopotamia, already in Ur III texts from the end of the third millennium BCE. The lexical lists give two Sumerograms (alan.zú) and (u$_4$-da-tuš) for Akkadian *aluzinnu* (*CAD* A/1: 392). They provide royal and public entertainment and are rewarded for their services.

M. West (1994: 1–5) adduces a series of examples from Archilochus (680–645 BCE),[6] a Greek poet from Paros, an island not far from Izmir and Bodrum in

[6] Archilochus quotes the famous proverb about "The bitch (who) in her haste gave birth to blind puppies" (*kalbatum ina šutēpurī-ša ḫuppudūtim ūlid*), already found in eighteenth-century BCE Mari, in Northern Syria (ARM 1 5:10–13) (Moran 2002: 87–99).

Bodi_9781666979138_C006.indd 181 7/13/2026 3:22:29 PM

modern-day Turkey, describing the excesses of the Ionian Iambos festival, akin to Ištar's festival (Soden and Oelsner 1991: 339). Revelry, ritual copulation, and bawdy behavior of the daughters of Lykambes, offering themselves to a series of men, are performed in the temenos of Hera, the goddess of marriage, motherhood, and family, to scoff, mock, and ridicule the goddess and her temple.

Something similar was already found in Mesopotamia, where Ištar displays a dual character. On the one hand, she is the goddess who protects marriage, supervising and blessing human lovemaking. On the other hand, during the Ištar festival, her female servants are allowed to indulge in group sex. In *Atraḫasīs Epic* 1, 299–304, she protects marriage. The first tablet of the *Atraḫasīs Epic* relates the institution of the nuptial night with the newly created human race, where the goddess Ištar plays her role in favoring human reproduction: "In [. . .] when the bed is laid, let wife and her husband choose each other. At the time of being man and wife, they should heed Ishtar in the marriage chamber. For nine days, let there be rejoicing. Let them call Ishtar Ishara" (Foster 2005: 238; Bodi 2021b: 24).

As noted by Foster, these lines may refer to the consummation of marriage and the nine days to a wedding ceremony with attendant festivities. At the same time, during the Ištar carnivalistic festival, an Old Babylonian bawdy and burlesque song graphically describes a threesome between a female named Ištar, not the goddess, but one of her female servants, written without the determinative (^{d}), with two young men. With an unequivocal call, the female servant of Ištar invites the city boys: "Place (it) (*šuknā*), guys in the pretty vulva" (*šuknā eṭlūtum ana ḫurdati damiqtimma*) (Wasserman 2016: 37). The encounter then expands into a massive sexual tryst with 120 young men in town. (HS 1879, lines 12–14) "After I obey (the two of you) you gather around me the young men of your city and let's go to the shadow of the wall"; (lines 16–17) "Sixty and another sixty (young men) satisfy themselves again and again in her vagina. The young men are exhausted but Ištar is not exhausted" (Hurowitz 1995: 546). The young woman is not a prostitute, since no price is mentioned. It is a free offer of sex by one of Ištar's female servants to the young men in town during the Ištar festival. The burlesque and preposterous aspect of the song, with exaggerated numbers of male participants, is found in the mocking attitude of the young woman named Ištar, who is asking for more sex, having exhausted all the young men in town. The background of this song could be a cultic setting or some temple festival akin to a Mardi Gras (Hurowitz 1995: 558).

Elements of these rites persist and continue with the *galli*, the priests of Cybele and Attis, from Phrygia in Asia Minor to Roman times (Roscoe 1996: 195). From the scatological pranks originally associated with the religious sphere in Northern Syria, Mesopotamia, and among the Hittites, in classical Athens, scatological humor around feces, flatus, and urine entered the comedies, such as *Wealth, Peace, Birds*, of the playwright Aristophanes (445–385 BCE) and other classical authors. "The Athenians in particular may have been accustomed to the representation of the god Wealth as the young and beautiful son of Demeter" (Rosenbecker 2015: 80). Political speech of Athenian leaders is compared with flatulence. In *Wealth*, line 1184, people throng to temples only when they need to defecate, which provokes the complaint of the temple priest on the Acropolis in Athens: ". . . but now there is not the smallest victim, not one of

Bodi_9781666979138_C006.indd 182 7/13/2026 3:22:30 PM

the faithful in the temple, but thousands who come there to take a crap."[7] The scatological reference is part of the playwright's sarcasm at the expense of the corrupt religious officials. The proxy of Zeus Soter is offered a share of the feces left behind by the just folk of Athens, offering the corrupt gods and the priests who benefit from their malfeasance, the substance that they have metaphorically force-fed to decent mortals. Hermes, the messenger of the gods, is offered to drink urine. Scatology continued to be used in denouncing political, religious, and social abuses in several Greek plays (Tordoff 2011: 167; Edwards 1991: 157). Rumor (2017: 204–206) enumerates a series of parallels between the symbolic acts or mockeries of Akkadian *aluzinnu* and the similar disobliging usage of the term ἀλαζών in various classical Greek plays and compositions deriding scholars, sophists, politicians, quack doctors, "cooks from hell," oracle sellers, and diviners.

9. Ridiculing Warriors with Excrement and Urine

Referring to excrements in the service of ridicule is already found in the eighth-century BCE classical Greek epic. Associating a warrior with excrement serves to deride him. The term ὄνθος, found in the Homeric Epic (*Iliad* 23.775, 777), designates animal excrement, dung, and may originally have been a non-Greek word (*-nth-*) (*LSJ* 1996: 1231, *onthos, ho*, "dung of animals," and 979, where *kopros* refers to human and animal excrements). The passage in the *Iliad* describes a competition, a foot race between Odysseus and Ajax for the first prize, a Phoenician wine-mixing crater. The race is supervised by the Greek hero, Achilles. Odysseus prays to his patron goddess, Athena, who makes Ajax slip over the dung of several bulls that Achilles had sacrificed in honor of Patroclus, his fallen companion. In a humorous scene, full of derision for the loser, the warrior Ajax falls headfirst into the slippery mass of excrement while his mouth and nostrils are filled with animal dung ὄνθος (*Iliad* 23.775–780). While Odysseus wins, Ajax is utterly ridiculed.

A similar means of mocking and ridiculing one's enemy is found in the Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions. It is part of the rhetoric of war mockery. The following description is found in Sennacherib's account of the Battle of Halule (691 BCE) (George 2013: 41–42). The latter is a town on the Tigris, perhaps near modern Samarra. It should be seen as a way to humiliate and deride his adversaries, the Babylonian-Elamite coalition. Instead of looking for a description of the physiological state of frightened and vanquished enemy soldiers (*pace* Weissert 1997: 198 n. 53), or speaking of "crass naturalism" (Oppenheim 1977: 254), it is more probable that Sennacherib is jeering and taunting his defeated enemy. The passage describes his cowardly and scared enemies fleeing and, at the same time, urinating and defecating in their chariots: "While their hearts were fluttering like a pursued fledgling dove, (and while) they were passing hot urine and defecating in their chariots, I dispatched my horse-drawn chariots to chase them."[8]

[7] https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/.

[8] *kī ša atmi summati kuššudi itarrakū libbūšun šīnātešun uṣarrapū qereb narkabātīšunu umaššerūni zûšun ana radādīšunu narkabāt sīsîya uma"ir arkīšun* (*Chicago Prism* vi.29–33; Grayson and Novotny 2012: 184, RINAP 3/1).

Bodi_9781666979138_C006.indd 183 7/13/2026 3:22:30 PM

Additional disdain is expressed in the mention of horse-drawn chariots, not charioteers. Sennacherib's chariots are capable of handling such a task of chasing runaway enemies without human guidance (Weissert 1997: 197 n. 44).[9] However, the Babylonian Chronicle (1 iii.16–18) provides a different point of view concerning Sennacherib's campaigns, indicating that the Assyrians suffered defeat and had to retreat. Therefore, according to Grayson (1965: 342), Sennacherib's account is a "prodigious falsehood," part of Assyrian propaganda and falsification of history, akin to Ramses II's falsified account of the outcome of the Battle of Qadesh (Laato 1995: 203–5). For Brinkman (1973: 93), if the Battle of Halule was an initial blow for the Assyrians, the setback was short-lived since Sennacherib besieged Babylon in 690 and ended up destroying it in 689 BCE (Pongratz-Leisten 2015: 306).

10. Ezekiel's Scatological Term for the Pagan Gods and Idols as *gillûlîm* "Scheißgötter"

The celebration of the Ištar festival continued into Ezekiel's exilic times and beyond. The Ištar carnival was celebrated as late as the Hellenistic times. One text (BRM I, 99:37–39), mentions several members of Ištar's cultic personnel such as the *kurgarrû*, *assinnu,* and the lamentation singers *kalû* who are paid six silver shekels for the first day of the procession (Hibbert 1984: 95). "The procession possibly took place during the so-called 'Love-Lyrics Ritual' of Ištar of Babylon in her temple Eturkalamma" (Linssen 2004: 69). This feature is important for biblical studies and in particular for the mention of idolatrous practices as the worship of "dung-gods" *gillûlîm* by Ezekiel. This prophet lived and exercised his activity near Nippur and used the term *gillûlîm* regarding such scatological practices which he observed in Babylonian exile (Bodi 1993: 481–510; 2022: 97–128). Gruber (1995: 656) dates the emergence of the term somewhat earlier, in the time between Josiah's reform in 622 and the destruction of the Temple in 587/6 BCE. However, it seems that Ezekiel coined the term, *gillûlîm*, usually rendered as "dung," or "excrement," and used it as his favorite word for designating idols and idol-worship. He employs this term thirty-nine out of the forty-eight times that it occurs in the entire Hebrew Bible.

Concerning the etymology of the term *gillûlîm*, instead of postulating two different roots √*gl/gll* (*gāl*) "to be round"/"heap of stones," and √*gl/gll* (*gēl*) (construct plural, *gelĕlê*) "excrement," and to relate the latter to the term *gillûlîm*, it seems more appropriate to see here a single root √*gl/gll* with two possible meanings which belong, however, to the same semantic field. The basic meaning of "being round" is a feature applicable to pebbles, stones, boulders, rollers, and other materials out of which idols and statues were made. As pointed out by Stager (1985: 13), "Later we are informed that the Temple 'is being rebuilt with *'eben gĕlāl* (not 'huge, or dressed stones' as in many translations, but literally 'stones of rolling,' or 'round stones' . . .)" (Williamson 1990: 83–88). The

[9] (*CAD* Ṣ: 103b), *šīnātešun uṣarrapū* "they passed hot urine;" (*CAD* Z: 150), *umaššerūni zûšun* "voided their excrement."

Bodi_9781666979138_C006.indd 184 7/13/2026 3:22:30 PM

derived and metaphorical meaning would be "excrement," stemming from the fact that fecal matter of human or animal origin manifests the feature of rotundity. Ezekiel particularly exploits this derived meaning when he designates pagan gods as "dung-gods." While commenting on a proverb in the Babylonian Talmud (*b. Baba Qama* 92b), "When hungry, a dog is ready to swallow even his [own] excrements (*gll*)," in the Rabbinic Bible *Miqra'ôt Gĕdolôt*, Rashi (1040–1105) suggested that the term *gll* could also refer to "stones." This underlines the difficulty in understanding which one of the two possible meanings this root may have. Ezekiel's favorite word for "idols," *gillûlîm*, has clear scatological connotations. Through assonance, the term *gillûlîm* echoes another Hebrew term, *gĕlēl*, which means "excrement" and with which it is etymologically related.

The link between the unusual Hebrew word *gillûlîm* and the term for excrement (*gll*) was already noted by a medieval rabbinic commentator, Ibn Ezra (1089–1164). He explained the term *gillûlîm* in Lev 26:30 (*gillûlêkem*) regarding 1 Kgs 14:10, "*gillûlêkem* is related to the word *galal* 'dung.'" It bears on Ezek 4:12 "human excrements" *bĕgelĕlê ṣē'at hā'ādām* (*ṣē'at* from the root √*yāṣā'* "to go out"), literally, "excrements that come out of humans," and Ezek 4:15 "human excrements" *gelĕlê hā'ādām* (Kopf 1958: 177; In Akk. *AHw*: 270 *ezû*(*m*) I "to defecate," and *zû* "excrement," maybe from the root √*yz'*? cf. Heb. *yṣ'*). According to Ibn Ezra, the term represents an outrageous and denigrating way of designating pagan idols as dung, dirt, filth, and refuse.[10] The term *gillûlîm* would, therefore, be a particularly derogatory expression. In modern times, this explanation has been reiterated by Wolff (1969: 397), who suggested that the Hebrew term *gillûlîm* should best be translated with "*Scheißgötter*," or "shit-gods." It is an outrageous scatological metaphor to designate pagan gods and idols. Wolff attributes the term *gillûlîm* to Ezekiel as the first prophet who coined it and does not see it as a product of the priestly circles or Ezekiel's epigones, as suggested by Zimmerli. Likewise, the prophet Elijah, in his contest with the 450 prophets of Baal atop Mt. Carmel, mocked them (*wayhattēl bāhem*), asking whether Baal was not responding to their sacrifice because he may be "defecating/urinating" (*kî śîaḥ wĕkî śîg lô*), or gone aside to the privy to defecate (1 Kgs 18:27). The two key terms form a hendiadys, using *śîaḥ* and *śîg* to express one idea. Targum Jonathan renders *śîg* with *'štdp, 'štdyp*, euphemism for "eased himself." Rashi (1145–1105) concurs that Baal's side trip is for the purpose of defecating. Hebrew *śîaḥ* has a series of cognates that confirm this meaning: Arabic *šḫḫ* "to urinate, to defecate"; Soqotri *śḥḥ* "to urinate", Ethiopian Harari *šäḥat* "urine" (Rendsburg 1988: 415). When Jehu attempted to eliminate Baal worship in Samaria, he turned the temple of Baal into a latrine, a way to show utter contempt and derision for Baal worship. 2 Kgs 10:27 "And they demolished the pillar of Baal, and demolished the House of Baal, and made it a latrine to this day" (kĕtib: *mḫr'wt* "dung heap," qĕre: *mwṣ'wt* "latrine," with LXX and medieval commentaries).

[10] Ibn Ezra's commentary, found in most Rabbinic Bibles, is available online: https://www.sefaria.org/Ibn_Ezra_on_Leviticus.26.30.4?lang=bi. Cf. Ezek 4:12 (Yahweh to Ezekiel) "And you shall eat it as a barley cake, baking it in their sight on human excrements *bĕgelĕlê ṣē'at hā'ādām*" (*ṣē'at* from the root *yāṣā'* "to go out").

Bodi_9781666979138_C006.indd 185 7/13/2026 3:22:30 PM

The repulsive episode for the prophet who was asked to cook his food with "excrements that come out of humans" (*bĕgelĕlê ṣē'at hā'ādām*) Ezekiel (4:12) might serve as a redactional clue to understand the similar-sounding and frequently occurring term *gillûlîm* in the rest of the book. In the choice of such an outrageous term, Ezekiel seems to be extrapolating from an element of ritual defecation in connection with the Ištar festival that was still regularly celebrated in the Babylonian exile in his time, in the sixth-century BCE. He elaborates on a virulent attack against idolatry, which he identifies as an act of polluting oneself with excrements (*gillûlîm*). In light of the Old Babylonian Mari text quoted above, stating that Zimrī-Līm's vassal "defecated in the cup in which he drank," or "dropped a turd into the cup," as an expression of breaking up an alliance, the biblical denunciation of idolatry as the worship of "dung gods" retains some of that original meaning of breaking a covenant and utter desacralization. The term *gillûlîm* in Ezekiel is, therefore, used as a metaphor and a term of mockery. It attests to the transformation of an originally cultic act of defecation into a powerful metaphor in the service of an extremely spiteful polemic. Another prophet makes a scatological reference to an act of utter desecration of the priests, underlining the opposition between dirt and purity. In Malachi 2:3, the prophet, in the name of Yahweh, mocks and threatens the priests for improper conduct, making them ritually impure by throwing excrement on them, "I will strew excrement (*pereš*) upon your faces, the excrement (*pereš*) of your festal sacrifices."

Staubli (2017: 457) established a list of Hebrew words associated with disgust, dividing them into two categories: those reflecting a sapiential or ethical "code," expressing moral disgust, and those belonging to a priestly ethnic "code." He would place the term *gillûlîm* in the latter as part of the rhetoric of disgust, expressing repugnance toward idols and idolatry.

11. The Scatological Pranks in Medieval and Modern Times

Given the universal disgust elicited by excrement, the act of defecation in public became a means of protesting against social norms, to deride the establishment or religious and political powers often perceived as oppressive, rigid, stifling, or ridiculous. The medieval prankster, Till Eulenspiegel, often depicted with an owl (Eulen) and a mirror (Spiegel), has his background in Middle Low German tradition and folklore (ca. 1350 CE). He plays outrageous pranks in the public squares of cities of his time, exposing the vices of his contemporaries. He defecates in public, or makes objects out of excrement, as pranks with which to shock people and deride the druggist, a cleric, a shoemaker, a barber who, in the Middle Ages, was performing basic surgical intervention (Staubli 2019: 136). Starting from the Mesopotamian and Hittite *aluzinnu* "comedians, clowns, jugglers," Blocher (1992: 92–95) attempted to describe the role of outsider and marginalized groups of female and male transvestite dancers and jugglers from ancient Near Eastern antiquity down to medieval times.

In the Catalan part of Southern France (Perpignan), in Catalonia in Spain (Barcelona), as well as in Naples, Italy, a tradition is perpetuated of fabricating the

Bodi_9781666979138_C006.indd 186 7/13/2026 3:22:30 PM

"caganer" around the time of Christmas. These are small figurines, "santons" representing a prominent political person with bare behind crouching and defecating. The figurines are added to the other traditional baked-clay or porcelain Nativity figurines in the crib. By representing celebrities and authority figures with their pants down, the caganer serves as a leveling device to bring the mighty down. It is a way to poke fun, deride powerful people, remind them that there are no sacred cows, and not to take anything or anyone too seriously. The French language still uses the term "*encaguer*," meaning "to mock, to deride," derived from Occitan and Provançal "cacare," meaning "to defecate."[11]

[11] Two journalists used the word "s'en caguer" to make it as close as possible to "s'en moquer" in their article in *Les Jours* in 2020 to mock the "studious vacations" of the French president, https://lesjours.fr/obsessions/in-bed-with-emmanuel-macron/ep44-macron-vacances-bregancon/

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7

The Dating of the Legendary Homer

Homer is a legendary figure and not a historical one. The appellation "Homer" stands for the anthropomorphization of oral traditions. He is more an eponym than a name, a generic appellation for a fictional author (Morenz 2019: 234 n. 3).

The discussion among classicists about whether Homer wrote the Homeric Epic corresponds to a similar discussion among Assyriologists about whether Enheduana, the daughter of King Sargon the Great (ca. 2334–2279 BCE), the founder of the Empire of Akkad, represents the most ancient known female author. She was the en-priestess of the moon god Nanna/Su'en in the city of Ur. According to Aage Westenholz (1999: 76), Enheduana "is the first real author, in the modern sense of that word, known to world history."[1] Up to six compositions are attributed to her: *Inanna and Ebiḫ*, a collection of *Temple Hymns*, two hymns to Nanna/Su'en, and two hymns to Inanna, *Ninmešarra* "the Exaltation of Innana," and *Inninšagurra* "the Great-Harted Lady" (Glassner 2009: 223; Rubio 2009: 27). However, numerous incongruities call for skepticism (Lion 2011: 96; Zgoll 2015: 339–50). First, there are chronological incongruities. In the hymn in honor of Ekišnugal and Nanna, a terrace of the Ur ziggurat is mentioned (in line 113: É-temen-ní-gur_4), which was built several centuries after Enheduana's death. Second, analyzing the language and the style of the Inanna hymn *Inninšagurra* (ETCSL 4.07.4), Civil (1980: 226), recognizes a composition dating from the Old Babylonian period, either the nineteenth- or eighteenth-century BCE. Third, no composition traditionally attributed to her appears on a single tablet that could be dated prior to 1800 BCE. Fourth, the poem *Innana* B *nin me šara*, meaning "mistress of all numinous means of power," instead of staking a claim to authorship, stresses a claim for priesthood: the creators of ritual songs are gods, and Enheduana is only allowed to create such a song when she acts as a priestess embodying a deity (Zgoll 2024: 153). There can be little doubt that Enheduana started being regarded as an author in a tradition centuries after her death. "This is a case of traditional authorship, not historical" (Rubio 2009: 28). It is, therefore, safer to assume that the tradition used Enheduana's figure as a generic name, probably anticipating a similar procedure as in the case of Greek Homer a millennium later. Gina Konstantopoulos (2021: 64) describes the three lives of Enheduana: first as a real-life woman and priestess around 2300 BCE, second as a traditional author some five centuries later, and third as a modern reinvention, mostly in non-Assyriological circles, when she replaced Sappho as the "first female poet."

[1] Repeated with an almost identical title by Michael Linden (2026), https://www.telepolis.de/article/Encheduanna-Die-erste-Autorin-der-Weltgeschichte-11155930.html

Bodi_9781666979138_C007.indd 189 7/14/2026 10:32:04 PM

1. Homer—Not a Historical Figure

The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are marked by Homeric impersonality. As pointed out by the Harvard Homeric scholar, Gregory Nagy (1999: 296 § 9 n.2, § 10), it is impossible to determine the degree to which the final form of the *Odyssey* may be ascribed to tradition, to a series of poets, to a *hòm-éros* "he who fits [the song] together" or to redactors who unified the epic. The name Ὅμηρος [*Hóm-ēros*] would be a compound built from the Indo-European elements **som* ("together"), which becomes **hom-* in classical Greek with the same meaning, and **ə*$_2$*r-* ("to fit, to join") corresponding to classical Greek **ar-* "to adjust" as in ἀραρίσκω [*ar-ar-ískō*] "to adjust." The term *eirō*, "to string together," could go back to the same root. Nagy reconstructs the earliest Greek forms in the following manner: **homo-ar-os*, becoming **hom-āros*. In classical Greek, one finds (ὁμοῦ) "together" (*LSJ* 1996: 1228) and (εἴρω) "to fasten together in rows, string, to string together" (mostly in compounds) (*LSJ* 1996: 491). Already in antiquity, the term "Homeric" was more a reference to a genre than to an author (Deroy 1976: 428).

According to Herodotus (*Histories* 2.53), Homer lived some 400 years before his time, that is, about 830, or 850 BCE. That would place Homer about sixty years before the first somewhat fictional Olympiad (776 BCE) (Osborn 2009: 133). This date is about 100 years higher than the date commonly used today for the composition of the Homeric Epic, now placed in the later part of the eighth-century BCE. However, Herodotus' years do not correspond to modern-day reckoning, and this is the origin of his error. At the beginning of Herodotus' *Histories* 1.32, the Athenian lawgiver Solon, one of the seven sages of ancient Greece, points out to King Croesus of Lydia, who reigned from 585 to 546 BCE, that if a person lives to be seventy years old, they will experience 26,250 days. By Herodotus' reckoning, the length of a year is 375 days, which does not correspond to modern computation.

It is generally accepted that the two epic poems from ancient Greece, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, began to be written in the last decade of the eighth-century BCE. Martin West (2011: 392 and 389) argues that the composition of the Homeric Epic could most likely be placed in the period between 750 and 600 BCE. He, too, defends the view that Homer was not the name of a historical poet but was generated from an ancient word comparable to what the Welsh call an eisteddfod, an assembly of the people with poetic contests. Janko's (1982: 228–31) relative chronology suggests 750–725 BCE for the *Iliad* and 743–713 BCE for the *Odyssey*. Despite a traditional author's name, Homer, already in antiquity, there was a dispute about when he lived, where he came from, and whether he was responsible for the composition of the Homeric Epic (Burkert 1992: 101). Today, most scholars view the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as the outcome of more complex and haphazard processes, not related to a single author.

The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are such different kinds of poems that some have argued that a female poet composed the latter. The *Iliad* is a tragedy of heroic passion set against a background of a legendary and quasi-historical saga about the bitter war between the Achaeans and the Trojans to liberate the Spartan queen, Helen. The *Odyssey* is the story of the warrior's return home, describing a process of maturation,

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acquiring wisdom and self-knowledge through trials, travels, and encounters with key female figures, Circe, Calypso, Nausicaa, and Penelope, and his triumph over adversity in a world of folktale (Bodi 2021d: 213–68).

As pointed out by Quinn (2024: 161–62): "The version of the *Iliad* that has survived down to our own day was finalised around 700 BCE: while it mentions temples and cult statues, which first appeared in Greece in the late eighth century, there are no signs of later cultural innovations or artistic developments. The obvious explanation for this halt to the process of oral recomposition is that the adoption of the alphabet meant that this version of the story was finally written down."

The so-called "Nestor's Cup," (*Iliad* 11. 630–35) with an inscription dating to 740–720 BCE, found on the island of Ischia, near Naples, bears one of the earliest attestations of the Greek alphabetic script. The text may allude to the famous cup of Nestor, which also features in the *Iliad* (Graziosi 2016: 41 fig. 8).

In 528 BCE, Hipparchus, son of Pisistratus, a member of the ruling family at Athens and patron of the arts, established regular recitations of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* at the great city festival celebrated every four years, the great Panathenaic games (Ps.-Plato, *Hipparchus* 228B; Cicero, *De Oratore* 3.137). The games comprised both athletic and artistic competitions of bards or rhapsodists with a pan-Hellenic performance of epic poetry. The so-called "Pisistratean recension" would come a century or more after the first Homeric poems came into existence (West 2011: 389). The arts were under the patronage of aristocratic sponsors or city rulers. The pan-Hellenic festival, like the Panathenaia at Athens, served as the formal setting, established by law, of seasonally recurring performances of the Homeric *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (Nagy 1992: 39). Beginning with the sixth-century BCE, classical Greek vases regularly depict iconographic representations of various scenes from the *Iliad* (Lowenstam 1992: 165–98). Key episodes from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were well-known to the point of becoming common cultural and artistic references. In the fifth-century BCE, Herodotus quotes lines from the *Iliad* (6.200) and the *Odyssey* (4.227; 5.354), meaning that it has become a well-established literary reference work (*Histories* 2.216). Moreover, Herodotus discusses from what poet the Homeric Epic took these lines, implying that Homer did not author them (*Histories* 2.217).

2. The Greek Homeric Poetry—A Product of Oral-formulaic Epithets

In the course of Homeric studies, scholars have developed an elaborate analytical methodology that was usefully applied both to biblical and ancient Near Eastern studies (Culley 2000: 47–8; Janko 1998: 1–12). The fundamental study on the "Homeric oral-formulaic epithets" by the American scholar, Milman Parry, in his Sorbonne PhD dissertation, *L'Épithète traditionelle dans Homère* (1928), which his son, Adam Parry, translated into English in 1987, showed that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were originally composed using stock poetic formulas before they were put in written form. In this, he followed the position of his mentor, Antoine Meillet (1866–1936),

Bodi_9781666979138_C007.indd 191 7/14/2026 10:32:04 PM

professor of historical and diachronic linguistics at the Collège de France since 1906, and president of the jury when Parry defended his dissertation in 1924 at the Sorbonne. A Slovenian Slavicist, Matija Murko (1861–1952), a visiting professor at the Sorbonne at that time, advised Perry to undertake anthropological field studies to bolster his hypothesis. Following this advice, between 1930 and his premature death in 1935,[2] Milman Parry, together with his student Albert Lord, went to the Balkans (mainly to Bosnia, Herzegovina, and Montenegro) to gather raw field data, making recordings of the illiterate South Slavic epic bards. In the meantime, Matija Murko published his studies of the "*srpsko-hrvatske narodne epike,*" that is, "Serbo-Croatian folk epics" (1951, 2 vols.). Using the traditional one-string musical instrument called "gusle" to accompany their long recitations, these illiterate Balkan "guslars" or singing bards were able to memorize and recite by heart a 1,500-line-long heroic epic about the Battle of Kosovo against the Turks that took place in 1389 (Lord 2001: xii, 10). Parry's original phonograph recordings on aluminum disks are now housed at Harvard University Library. A vital aspect of what is commonly called the "Parry-Lord theory" is linguistics, as represented primarily by Antoine Meillet.

The Homeric bard sang before an audience. His subject matter was traditional, and his language was no less so. The songs of the Homeric Epic were intended to be recited. They were based on ancient oral semi-improvisations, composed and transmitted by bards using systematized formulaic phrasing characteristic of traditional oral poetry. "By asserting that 'Homeric language is entirely formulaic,' the linguist Meillet inevitably shocked the delicate sensibilities of humanists who felt that such a position slighted the genius of the Artist" (de Lamberterie 2001: 413). Parry-Lord's theory sees the formulaic poetic language as an integral system in its own right. It echoes Meillet's understanding of language as an integrated system where every component has its place. The work of the bards consisted of adapting traditional formulas to particular contexts. The formulas were not only necessary for storytellers, who made up their epic songs as they went along but also expected by listeners, for whom such formulas made the stories easier to follow. As expressed by Milman Parry's biographer, "The literary critic sees repetition, stereotype, and cliché as unwelcome or worse. But for on-the-fly oral composition, they were virtually essential, *characteristic* of it, understood and expected by audience and performers alike. For Parry, they were the clue to how the epic poems had been made (. . .) Parry never solved the Homeric Question: he demonstrated that it was irrelevant" (Kanigel 2021: 17–18).

From the earliest period, scholars recognized that there was something particular and uncanny about the style of Homeric Epic. The language was notoriously repetitive, using "formulas" as verbal building blocks of archaic Greek poetry. The "formulaic" style of the poems means that they rely heavily on the use not only of stock epithets and repeated groups of verses but also on a multitude of fixed phrases that are employed time and again to express a similar idea in a related part of the verse. Epithets were attached to all the main characters: "swift-footed Achilles" occurs 33x (times) in the

[2] Milman Parry had a habit of traveling carrying a gun. According to his wife, the only direct witness of his demise, as he was packing his suitcase in their hotel room in Los Angeles, the gun went off and killed him.

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Iliad; "much-suffering Odysseus" 37x in the *Odyssey*; "rosy-fingered Dawn"; "owl-eyed Athena"; "sweetly-smiling Aphrodite"; "life-giving earth"; "dark-prowed ships"; "he fell with a thud and his armor rattled about him" (Reece 2014: 613). These are all poetic epithets that help preserve the metric integrity of the poems. Moreover, similarly to the phenomenon found in earlier Sumerian, Akkadian, and Ugaritic epics (Whitaker 1981: 207–19; Kenn Aitken 1989: 1–16, and 17–38), entire speeches were repeated almost verbatim: Agamemnon's promise of reward to Achilles in *Iliad* 9.122–57 and again in 9.264–99. Entire scenes were stereotypical, with close verbal and structural similarities. Odysseus is called "divine Odysseus," "many-counseled Odysseus," or "much-enduring divine Odysseus," simply following the amount of material to be fitted into the constraint of the dactylic hexameter (six-foot) verse. A ship is described as "black, hollow, dark-prowed, or symmetrical," not to distinguish this particular ship from others but solely with the demands of the rhythmical context. The stereotypical noun-epithet combination "winged words" (ἔπεα πτερόεντα), embedded within a whole verse formula, occurs 124 times in the Homeric Epic, distributed evenly over the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (61x and 63x). About twenty-five variations of the formula occur in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, making this one of the most complex and flexible formulaic systems in Homer. It must have evolved over several generations of bards well before the time of Homer. This is confirmed in the relative regard or disregard for the force of digamma in the word (Ϝ)έπεα. In thirty-two occurrences of the formula, the digamma is metrically necessary, while in twelve occurrences it is metrically prohibited. "This confirms that the formulaic system began evolving before Homer" (Reece 2009: 62). The formula "winged words" retained a formal function, meaning simply that a direct speech by one of the characters in the epic was to follow, that is, "and he said." Such a complex system could not be the invention of a single poet but must have gradually evolved in a long poetic tradition that needed both the extension and the economy for functional reasons. It depended on these fixed phrase units because of its oral nature, in which memory, practice, and improvisation replace the deliberate, self-correcting, word-by-word progress of the pen-and-paper composer. The Homeric bards could draw upon a rich inherited tradition of songs that provided them with the very words, epithets, formulas, and type-scenes that were building blocks of epic verse. This quaint system has one notable advantage: it makes the task of the bard practicable. The use of fixed formulas, which were the common property of all bards, gives him time to arrange in his mind the next line (Chadwick 2005: 181). The Homeric Epic verses did not reflect the language of a specific place or time but an anachronistic and artificial idiom largely conditioned by exigencies of the hexameter.

Parry's theory profoundly affected the traditional "Homeric Question," which tried to determine whether these two epic works were composed by a single or by more than one poet. The "Homeric Question" dealt with a series of issues: who was Homer, if there was a Homer? When and where did he live? Did one bard produce both epics, or was there a different poet for each? Was there in each case a succession of poets, a group of poets, or redactors? After Parry, the Homeric Question lost its pertinence.

Nagy's explanation concerning the composition of the Homeric Epic could be supported with comparative material from the way the Neo-Babylonian *Erra Epic* was

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put together. The latter describes the events related to the fall and restoration of Babylon. It faithfully follows the notion of destruction followed by renewal, the *chaîne opératoire* laid out in *Enūma eliš*, in which Marduk kills Tiāmat to create the cosmos out of her corpse (Pongratz-Leisten 2015: 319). According to Bottéro (1989: 720), this sequence can be historically associated with the Suteans (Sutû), the southern marauding tribes linked with the Arameans who invaded and destroyed a series of Mesopotamian cities (Sippar *Erra* 4 50; Uruk 4 52–62; Dûr-Kurigalzu called Parsā in 4 63, and Dēr 4 65–74), including Babylon (4 1–9). These repeated invasions occurred between 1150 BCE (providing the *terminus post quem* for the *Erra Epic*) and the time when King Nabû-appal-iddina, "the avenger of the Sutû," broke their power and became "divinely appointed to rebuild Akkad" (that is, Babylon), around 850 BCE (Lambert 1957–58: 400). Hallo places it a century later in the "early eleventh-century" BCE (1957–71: 717; 1966: 23; Bodi 1991a: 55). Since numerous intertextual references to other epics and myths including a great number of references to *Erra Epic* occur in Sennacherib's account of the Battle of Halule (691 BCE), this date can be taken as the *terminus ante quem* for the composition of the *Erra Epic*.[3]

The text of the *Erra Epic* is attested on forty-six tablets and fragments found at Assur (14), Nineveh (13), Sultantepe (3), Babylon (1 or possibly 3), Ur (1), making it the third most popular composition in the first millennium BCE after *Enūma eliš* and *Gilgameš Epic*. The earliest tablets are Neo-Assyrian, but the poem is originally Babylonian and older. The Neo-Assyrian tablets (KAR 168) from Assur and (1B 212) in their colophons state that they have been checked according to the originals from Babylon (Wisnom 2020: 159).

However, the fifth tablet of the *Erra Epic* reveals the name of a scribe, Kabti-ilāni-Marduk, meaning, "Marduk, the most honored of the gods," claiming that "Kabti-ilāni-Marduk, the son of Dābibi, (was) the one who put together its tablet" (*kāṣir kammī-šu Kabti-ilāni-Marduk mār Dābibi*), literally, "the one who strung together its tablet(s)" (*Erra* 5 42). As pointed out by Glassner (2009: 220): "The strangely redundant title of *kāṣir kammi*, which is translated as 'composer of the work' or 'author,' actually means 'compiler,' the suffix pronoun *-šu* referring not to a man but to the god, in this case the god Išum." The G-stem active participle *kāṣir* is derived from the verb *kaṣāru* "to tie, to bind together, to join, to collect," and also with the meaning "to compose a text" (*CAD* K: 257, and 259). Akkadian *kāṣir* corresponds to Greek *hòm-éros* "the one who fits [the song] together," as explained above. The term *kammu* appears in Assurbanipal's boast of being able to read Akkadian and Sumerian cuneiform script: "I have read the artfully/cunningly written text in Sumerian, obscure Akkadian" (*aštasi kammu naklu ša Šumeru ṣullulu Akkadu*). As pointed out by Dalley (2003: 404), the ending of the *Erra Epic* is unusual, for the scribe's Dābibi clan represents a family first attested around 765 BCE and associated with high temple office in both Babylon and Uruk.

[3] *Chicago Prism* v 18–19, referring to *Erra* 1 67; 1 75; 1 85 (Grayson and Novotny 2012: 181, RINAP 3/1); the same leonine imagery is applied to Sennacherib and to one of Erra's weapons, *Chicago Prism* v 67a-69b and *Erra* 1 34; in the Sennacherib's account of the Battle of Halule, both *Chicago Prism* vi 3–5, and *Erra Epic* 4 34–35, employ the highly poetic term *umunnû* for "bloodbath"; for additional references and comparisons, see (Pongratz-Leisten 2015: 312, 316–19).

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The *Erra Epic* incorporates material from much older compositions such as the Old Babylonian *Anzû Myth*, *Atraḫasīs Epic*, and the canonical *Gilgameš Epic,* dating from ca. 1200 BCE. In the *Erra Epic*, Marduk makes several references to the Flood (*abūbu* in *Erra* 1 132, 140, 145) and the "former sin" (*Erra* 5 6, *ḫīṭi maḫrî* and *Gilg.* 11 185 *ḫīṭû*), giving it a new apocalyptic vision of global cosmic disruption (Bodi 2015d: 76–8). Despite these numerous undisputable borrowings, the scribe, Kabti-ilāni-Marduk claims that the entire Erra poem was the product of a divine revelation which he received in a single night dream: (*Erra* 5 43–4) "In the night he (Išum?) revealed it to him, and in the morning when he recited (it), he did not skip a single (line). Nor a single line did he add to it" (Bodi 1991a: 56–7; Foster 1991: 19–21). This claim does not mean that he authored the *Erra Epic.* Rather, it is a well-attested ancient Near Eastern topos of claiming authenticity and legitimization for a literary work. "Obviously this is not authorship in the modern sense of the term, since the individual claiming responsibility for the poem's composition explicitly denies originality but attributes his material to divine revelation" (Taylor 2017: 4 n.24; 247). *Erra* 5 43–45 should be placed in the same category as the claim of a revelatory dream before the building of a sanctuary (the *Himmelsszene* in *Gudea Cylinders* A and B, Exod 25:9; Num 8:4 [Hurowitz 1992: 35]), and Quran *Surah al-Qadr* 97:1–5, "Indeed, we (that is, Allah) sent the Quran down during the Night of Power (*qadr*) . . . The angels and the Spirit [Gabriel] descend therein by permission of their Lord." As pointed out by Oppenheim (1956: 193 and 225), "Whether it be in the field of fine arts or in that of literature (cf. presently), the creativeness of the Near Eastern artist derives its authenticity and legitimation only from the fact that his opus reflects faithfully its prototype in heaven which was revealed to him either in a dream or through a specific divine intervention."

Similarly, the eighth-century BCE Hesiod, who prefaced his *Theogony* with the "Hymn to the Muses," thanks and celebrates these deities as the source and ultimate author of his art: the (Muses) "breathed the voice in my mouth" (Sternberg 1987: 77). Moreover, and the fact is well known that all knowledge in Mesopotamia is born of a revelation that usually takes the form of a dream. To this idea of revelation, the Mesopotamians add another, that of a path of inquiry, such as Gilgameš's journey that leads him "along the very long path from which the sun emerges," or the descent during which an Assyrian prince makes a brief sojourn in the underworld (Livingstone 1989: 68–76, SAA 3 nº 32).

Ὅμηρος [*Hóm-ēros*] would refer to the putting together of the Homeric poems, while the *Erra Epic* would have been "put together" (*kamāṣu*) from creatively incorporated elements culled from different previous Akkadian epics.

Cuneiform tablets of the *Erra Epic* were found at Sultantepe, modern Turkey (Bodi 1991a: 52 n. 2). The relative geographic proximity of Sultantepe to the Ionian Greeks along the western coast of Asia Minor increases the probability that the bards responsible for the Homeric Epic inherited the traditional theme of divine inspiration from their Near Eastern colleagues. The *Erra Epic* mentions the oral delivery of the poem by singing: "A singer, or musician, who chants it" (*nāru ša iṣarraḫu*) (*Erra* 5 53). Moreover, *Erra* 5 60 indicates that the epic was to be heard (*lišmāma*) (Bodi 1991a: 58).

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The poems in the *Iliad* and the *Erra Epic* are products of a long stream of tradition and speak of war, destruction, and plagues. They offer a philosophical-theological explanation of war by relating it to direct divine intervention. Ilaria Calini (2024) made a comparative study of the Babylonian *Erra Epic* and the eighth-century BCE classical Greek composition, Hesiod's didactic poem, *Works and Days*. Both works start from a crisis that arises in a society with a concomitant traumatic experience, transforming it into a literary masterpiece. In both works, the poets integrate the various aspects of the destruction of society, the world, institutions, and the breakdown of family and societal values into the narrative logic of a poetic composition. A similar pattern is reflected in the Book of Ezekiel, associated with a prophet exiled in Babylonia, who describes the destruction and the final promised renewal of Jerusalem (Bodi 1991a: 183).

The earliest known iconographic rendition of the Trojan Horse is found on a Mykonos vase, now at the Archaeological Museum on the island of Mykonos (Inv. 2240). It dates from 670 BCE and attests to an early iconographic use of motifs found in the *Iliad*.[4] The use of baskets to hide warriors or a wooden horse in a stratagem to penetrate a city and conquer it is a literary motif already present in the fourteenth-century BCE Egyptian account of the *Taking of Joppa* (see Chapter 7. Section 6).

In the subsequent centuries, athletic and artistic competitions of music and poetry were organized on the Peloponnese and several Aegean islands, providing festive occasions for bards and rhapsodists to travel and engage in artistic contests. The performances of the Homeric Epic could last several days and were carried out by a series of bards during the Pythian games in honor of Apollo in Delphi, as well as in Corinth and Nemea. The Ionian bards from the eastern islands with Greek settlements along the coast of Asia Minor played an essential role in the transmission of ancient Near Eastern epic traditions that reached the pre-Hellenic Greeks through the Hittites. The legendary birthplace of Homer is the island of Chios, not far from the Troad in Asia Minor. The island had a famous school of rhapsodists (Nagy 1992: 19).

3. The Hurro-Hittite Influence on the Homeric Epic

Mary Bachvarova (2014: 301) and Monika Schuol (2002: 331–62) argue for the fourteenth-century BCE influence of the Hurro-Hittite *Song of Release* about the destruction of the city of Ebla on some major themes, motifs, and narrative patterns found in the *Iliad*. The text on cuneiform tablets (KBo 32. 12 and 14) found in 1983 at Ḫattuša (Boğazköy) was presented in a bilingual format, with the Hurrian original in columns (i) and (iv) and the Hittite translation in columns (ii) and (iii). The script was dated to ca. 1400 BCE. The Hurrian composition was probably brought to Ḫattuša in the Middle Hittite period (ca. 1500–1400 BCE) when it was translated from Hurrian into Hittite. The Hurrian version was somewhat older, perhaps around 1600 BCE (Neu 1996: 3–7; Wilhelm 2018: 82).

[4] https://www.flickr.com/photos/travellingrunes/2949254926/ and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Mykonos_vase.jpg

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The *Song of Release* tells of the destruction of the North Syrian town of Ebla (modern Tell Mardikh, 50 km SW of Aleppo). The Hurrian storm god, Tešub, decreed the fall of the city of Ebla because the members of its assembly, against the advice of their King Meki, refused to release the captives, the enslaved people of the town of Ikinkalis, who were in the service of the assembly members. Ebla was conquered in ca. 1600 BCE by the Old Hittite King Hattušili I or Mursili I (Klengel 1992: 82). The song provides a *post-eventum* justification for the conquest when the Hittites were conducting military campaigns in North Syria and had occupied both Ebla and Ikinkalis. The plot has similarities to that of the *Iliad*, in which the city of Troy is destroyed because of the failure to return the captive Queen Helen to Mycenaean Sparta.

In the *Iliad*, the role of Tešub is assumed by the goddess Athena, the daughter of Zeus. The latter was the Greek god of the sky and thunder. In the *Iliad* 6.297–310, Athena appears as the main divinity of the city of Troy. Her temple is located on the top of the "city's acropolis" (line 297, ἐν πόλει ἄκρῃ). Queen Hecuba, the wife of King Priam, king of Troy, leads a procession of noble women to entreat the goddess Athena to save Troy. She carries the most exquisite veil made by the Sidonian female slaves. The bard points out that during the same voyage, when Paris, son of Priam, abducted Helen of Sparta, he also raided the Phoenician coast and brought female slaves from Sidon back to Troy as captives. Once the procession reached the acropolis and the temple, the priestess of Athena, Theano, placed the veil on Athena's knees and implored the statue of the goddess: "Mighty Athena, protectress of the city" (*Iliad* 6.305: 'πότνι' Ἀθηναίη ἐρυσίπτολι). Athena is explicitly designated as (ἐρυσίπτολις) the one "protecting the city." She is supposed to be the "shield" of the city of Troy against the Achaean invaders. Theano promises to sacrifice twelve heifers to Athena if she delivers Troy from the Achaean warriors. But the goddess Athena answers "No" to her supplication, refusing her gift of the elaborate veil and the promise of heifers. On the battlefield, the goddess Athena unwaveringly continues to support the Achaeans. As in the case of Tešub in Ebla, Athena in Troy forsakes the city she was supposed to protect, delivering it to destruction. In both cases, the issue is the release of the captives. While the procession of women continues imploring the goddess Athena for deliverance, the bard specifies that "Argive Helen sat amid her female slaves (Ἀργείη δ' Ἑλένη μετ' ἄρα δμῳῇσι γυναιξὶν ἥστο) and appointed to them their renowned handiwork" (*Iliad* 6.323–324). The Greek term δμωή (*dmōē*) designates "a female slave taken in war" (*LSJ* 1996: 441). Helen is surrounded by the Sidonian female slaves. This conjunction implies that Helen, too, is a captive, in need of being released from captivity. Her release takes place only when the city of Troy is destroyed.

Moreover, before the start of the war, the Trojan assembly, swayed by the bribes from Paris, had refused to return Helen to a Greek embassy (*Iliad* 3.204–224; 11.122–142). The central issue of the conflict between the Achaeans and the Trojans is highlighted by the use of the poetic device of *inclusio*. The opening scenes of the *Iliad* give the motivation for Achilles' refusal to continue fighting against the Trojans, retelling in a nutshell the same narrative plot, with the request to return a highly valued female captive, Chryseis (meaning "of golden color," with reference to her

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hair). Her father was a priest of the god Apollo, worshiped at the local sanctuary on the island of Chryse. However, King Agamemnon, the leader of the Achaean armada, refuses to give Chryseis back, which angers the god Apollo. The archer god, Apollo, shoots arrows into the Achaean camp, spreading a plague that decimates the Greeks and their horses (*Iliad* 1.45–52). Apollo's action reflects a stream of tradition going back to the Luwian war god Iyarri (*bēl qašti*), the "god of the bow" who spreads plague in the enemy camp with his arrows (Haas 1989: 28; Gessel 1998). The gods Apollo, Iyarri, Rešep, and Nergal act in a similar way. The equivalence of Rešep and Nergal is attested in Ugaritic texts (Xella 1988: 49). Rešep is designated as "the lord of the arrow" in (KTU 1.82:3 *bʿl.ḥ*[*ẓ*].*ršp*, del Olmo Lete 2014: 111). To stave off the plague, Achilles agrees to give up his captive female slave, Briseis, to compensate Agamemnon, who, in exchange, complies to give back his concubine, Chryseis, to her father. The *Iliad* forms an *inclusio* with the same literary topos: It begins with the release of the captive female Chryseis, daughter of the priest of Apollo in Book 1, and ends with the release of Helen, queen of Sparta, in Book 24. The refusal to liberate the captive females or slaves brings about the ruin of the captors: First, the Achaeans are decimated by the plague, and in the end, the Trojans, whose city is burned and sacked. The use of the *inclusio* underlines the key element in the *Iliad*'s plot: The release of the captives. The presence of a similar topos should be explored in the Hebrew Exodus narrative (Chapters 14 and 15): The divine plagues (Exod 7–11) break the Pharaoh's resistance, forcing him to release the Hebrew slaves who want to worship their god Yahweh in the desert. Finding similar narrative patterns and motifs in Hittite, classical Greek, and Hebrew stories would indicate the existence of a definite stream of tradition shared by several cultures of the Mediterranean shoreline. The Hebrew scribes of the Exodus story adapted and acculturated to their purpose a common literary motif (sending a plague to release the captives), a typical feature of the stream of tradition (Wilhelm 1996: 17–30).

There are other common motifs between the *Song of Release* and the *Iliad*. The praise of Zazalla, the best speaker in the assembly in the Hittite *Song of Release*, matches descriptions of eloquent speakers in the *Iliad*, such as Thoas (*Iliad* 13.213–235; 15.286–299), leader of the forty-ship Aetolian contingent described as excelling both in fighting and in speaking, as well as Diomedes, an excellent fighter and orator (*Iliad* 9.54–56). Here again, one can identify a stream of traditional narrative plots and characters.

The title of the Hurro-Hittite *Song of Release* is a literal translation of the designation SIR_3 *parā tarnumar*, found in the colophons of several of the tablets (Neu 1996: 7). The Sumerogram SIR_3 means "song, hymn," or "epic," and is used in Sumerian, Akkadian, and Hittite texts. The Hittite *parā tarnumar* corresponds to Hurrian *kirenzi*, both terms meaning "release, deliverance, emancipation" from debt, slavery, or captivity (Hoffner 1998: 66; Holm 2013: 70 n. 119). The composition designated as "song" implies that it was most probably transmitted with a musical accompaniment. One of the colophons indicates that at some point in its history, the composition was performed by a ^{LÚ}NAR, a male singer, or a bard (KBo 32.13, 66) (Bachvarova 2005: 132).

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4. Vectors of Transmission of the Stream of Tradition

What were the vectors of transmission of the stream of tradition? Musical instruments are often mentioned in Hittite texts, which confirms the presence of songs. The term for the cult functionary ^{LÚ}*ḫalliyariš* derived from the Hurrian root *√ḫal-* "sing" (cf. Hurrian *ḫalmi* "song"), indicates that early Hittite contact with the musical culture of Syro-Mesopotamia was mediated by the Hurrians (Bachvarova 2016a: 162 and 223). The singers of tales played a major role in transmitting, translating, acculturating, and disseminating epic songs.

Itinerant healers were another vector of transmission. Incantations accompanied by various musical instruments have been transmitted in different languages since the Fara period. Sumerian, Akkadian, Subaro-Hurrian, and Elamite are all used in Old Babylonian incantations (Krispijn 2010: 181). Moreover, athletic competitions such as foot races, wrestling, boxing, and throwing stones were typical of Hittite festivals, as well as chanting, singing, dancing, and playing of the lyre and other instruments.

Sickness, being a universal phenomenon throughout the ages, healing incantations were also a major vector of transmission. The two Sumerian versions of Adapa found on Old Babylonian tablets from Tell Haddad/Meturan were used as healing incantations against the ravages provoked by the South Wind (*Sūtu*) affecting the fertility of the land, leading to death by famine. The Sumerian name of the main protagonist, A-da-ba, designated an occupation in pre-Sargonic Lagaš, probably a musical profession, qualified as (nar-me) "musicians." This connection would be further confirmed with the existence of a musical genre (a-da-ab) (Cavigneaux 2014: 36). A-da-ba was also a personal name in the Ur III period.

In its structure, introduction, and conclusion, the Sumerian version of Adapa is related to literary and exorcistic traditions. It represents a prototype of incantations transformed into an identity narrative. It was used as the founding myth in the teaching of exorcism, allowing the students and scribes to become acquainted with the meaning, importance, and potentially destructive and healing powers of the exorcistic practices and accompanying incantations. The fourteenth-century BCE Amarna version of Adapa, found in Egypt, left out the long introduction and the final incantation of the Sumerian versions. It was used as a school text for teaching Akkadian to students of cuneiform in Egypt, familiarizing them with the Mesopotamian literary world and tradition (Milstein 2015: 31; Izreʾel 2001). The ancient reputation of Adapa as a sage and expert healer contributed to the international fame and spread of this composition.

Moreover, athletic competitions such as foot races, wrestling, boxing, and stone throwing were typical of Hittite festivals, as well as chanting, singing, dancing, lyre playing, and the use of other instruments (Badali 1991).[5] The existence of a Mesopotamian-Anatolian interface has become a well-accepted feature in comparative studies. Bachvarova (2016b: 52–3) places the nucleus of the story about the fall of Troy,

[5] The first chariot mechanic in Greek myths, Myrtilos (Μυρτίλος), has a Hittite name and comes to Greece from the east, that is, Asia Minor, with Pelops, accompanied by Phrygian emigrants (West 1988: 153 n.14).

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which later developed into "Homer," that is, the poetic tradition that shaped the storyline of the *Iliad*, between 1160 and 1050 BCE. She sees the Homeric Epic as a product of the competitive and collaborative process of Ionian bards in Asia Minor. The *Iliad* would have originated in a festival setting in which bards and rhapsodists competed by performing in succession, separate and different episodes of the epic. According to Bachvarova's theory (2018: 151), that would have taken place in pre-eighth-century BCE Troad, a region in North-West Asia Minor surrounding ancient Troy. The musical instruments in the Greco-Lydian world continue to have connections with Mesopotamia in later Assyrian times (Franklin 2008: 191–201).

The transfer, translation, and adaptation of elements from the Hurro-Hittite *Song of Release* to the Homeric Epic can be compared to the relationship between the Hurro-Hittite composition known as *Kingship in Heaven* (KUB 33.120 Hoffner 1998: 42 § 14) and Hesiod's *Theogony*. In the Hittite myth, the god of heaven, Anu, is vanquished by castration performed by Kumarbi, who "bit his knees," a euphemism for genitals. It corresponds to what Kronos does in the Greek myth, who castrates his father, Uranus, the primordial god of the sky, using a sickle. Furthermore, Kumarbi "swallows the manhood of Anu" and becomes pregnant with three gods, while in the Greek myth, Kronos swallows his children, including the weather god Zeus. The sequence of such unusual, violent actions leaves no doubt that the texts are intimately related, although the Hittite story is earlier by some 500 years. Reverting to a Freudian father-castration motif as a "reflex of unconscious human desires" (Dodds 1966: 61 n.103) is not convincing. The crucial role of the stream of tradition through such vectors of transmission as bards singing and sharing cosmogonic epic songs cannot be denied (Burkert 1987: 18).

Another vector of transmission is collective memory regarding a locality (Halbwachs 1980: 128). After the Titans' defeat, the weather god Zeus battles Typhoeus/Typhon, who challenges his reign (*Iliad* 2.783; Hesiod, *Theogony* 304). In the *Song of Ullikummi* (KUB 33.96; Hoffner 1998: 60 § 32), the place where the gods gather and do battle is on Mt. Hazzi in the same general region as Mt. Cassius in Cilicia (a mountain on the border between Turkey and Syria). It is the same mountain where Zeus fights Typhoeus, according to Apollodorus 1 (41) 6.3.7. The mountain becomes the locality where the Hittite, Hurrian, Ugaritic (Ṣapānu), and Greek collective memory meet around a particular territorial space or religious geography associated with a mountain range (Burkert 1987: 20). The mention of Ṣapānu, Mt. Hazzi, and Mt. Cassius appears as a common reference to a divine mountain (Koch 1993: 185; Rahmouni 2023: 83 n.2).

However, the stream of tradition was not one-directional, from Northern Syria to the Hurro-Hittites and Ionian Greeks. The influence also went from the Hurro-Hittites to the Syrians as exemplified in the narrative plot of the Aramaic story of Aḥiqar with the topos of the ungrateful apprentice (Oettinger 1992: 3–22). Together with the fragments of the Hurro-Hittite *Song of Release*, two tablets (KBo 32.12 and 14) were found with a relatively well-preserved series of parables, each making the same point: The "ungrateful apprentice" will be punished. The parables probably served the purpose of grammatical instruction in Hurrian (von Dassow 2023: 281). The parables are about greedy animals, such as a roe deer, a dog, or a pig, or ungrateful

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built objects, such as a copper cup or a tower. They turn on their benefactors or creators, insult and curse them, and are themselves then cursed in return and destroyed. The theme of these parables is ingratitude and rebellion against those whom one owes everything. After each parable, the narrator is careful to explain that the characters represent ungrateful humans, a son, an apprentice, or an administrator raised to a lofty position (Bachvarova 2016a: 113 and 129). The parables, with their animal characters and overt moral lessons, resemble Aḥiqar's as well as Aesop's animal fables in Aramaic and Greek, respectively. This feature is significant since the Aḥiqar story and proverbs are a product of bilingual *sēpirū* scribes who concocted his name, wrote a fictional and romanticized story, and adapted and strung together a series of proverbs from a long stream of ancient Near Eastern sapiential tradition. Such trained *sēpiru* scribes would have access to the traditional scribal curriculum (Bodi 2027).

On the one hand, the transmission of Syro-Mesopotamian myths to the Hittites was probably done orally by the bards. On the other hand, it was also done in written form by the scribes. As pointed out by Beckman (2013: 208; 1983: 97), "Hittite cuneiform scribal culture was originally borrowed from the centers of Syro-Mesopotamia, and Hittite bureaucrats were kept abreast of the latest intellectual developments there through the residencies of *Gastprofessoren* from Assyria and Babylonia. One of these visitors, Anu-šar-ilāni, established a line of scribes active for over two centuries at the Hittite capital."

It is, therefore, unlikely to admit the continuity of Syro-Mesopotamian influence on the development of the Hittite cuneiform writing, myths, music, and rituals, and to refuse a similar development between Hurro-Hittite traditions and proto-Hellenic ones along the Ionian settlements in Asia Minor (Puhvel 1983: 217–27). The Hurro-Hittites emerge as a major interface in the transmission of the stream of tradition between Syro-Mesopotamia and classical Greece.

The Homeric Epic enumerates a series of agents of transmission in the *Odyssey* 17.382–5, in the reply that the loyal swineherd Eumaeus directed toward the uncouth Antinous: "For who goes visiting elsewhere so as to call in another stranger, unless they be *dēmioergoí*, either a prophet, or a healer of sickness, or a skilled workman, or inspired singer, one who can give delight by his singing? These are the men who all over the endless earth are invited" (Gordon 1965: 38; Sasson 1972: 276). The term *dēmioergoí* means "those who work for the people," and refers to skilled craftsmen and members of the guilds.

Both Greek and Semitic sources agree that the Aegean and the Levant trafficked in slaves. In the *Odyssey*, one finds tales of kidnapping by Phoenicians, while in the Hebrew Bible, ships from Javan/Ionians trafficked in humans as well as metal (Ezek 27:13; Joel 3:6). The idea of Greeks as chattel in Semitic hands could not have been welcome to traditional European classicists. Ancient mythology in the stories involving Danaos, Kadmos, and Europa supports the pattern of racial intermarriage, presenting an unwelcome phenomenon of miscegenation for the traditional "Aryan" model (Morris 1989: 43, 50). Bilingual offspring might have provided both a means and the necessity for spreading literacy from one language group to another.

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The Hittite society was multilingual. The languages used reflect Late Bronze Age Anatolia: Hittite, Hattic, Luwian, Palaic, Hurrian, and some other unknown languages, such as Taggurka attested in one ritual song (Rutherford 2020: 44). In line with recent studies, the Hurrians are not defined as an ethnic unity but as a conglomerate of tribes.

Kizzuwatna, a geographical region between Mesopotamia and Anatolia, played a major role as an interface in the transmission of traditional epic and mythological material. The region was multilingual and produced bilingual Hurro-Hittite scribes, singers, and bards. Kizzuwatna is a Southern Anatolian region with a mixed cultural zone comprising Hurrian, North Syrian, and Luwian Anatolian elements. Beginning roughly around the reigns of Arnuwanda and Tudḫaliya III (first half of the fourteenth century), the Kizzuwatnean tradition was enthusiastically imported into the archives and temples of the Hittite capital Hattuša. According to Campbell (2016: 295–306), there is, however, some detectable Hurrian influence in Hattuša from as early as the reign of Tudḫaliya I/II (fifteenth-century BCE). The cuneiform documents allow Hittitologists to elaborate a precise chronological timeline and mechanics of the importation of Kizzuwatnean religious culture into Hattuša (Trameri 2025: 480–513).

The Homeric Epic is a product of a long stream of cultural, legal, and literary traditions connecting Northern Syria, Hurro-Hittites, and Ionian Greeks in Asia Minor. Among different vectors of transmission were the bards and entertainers as singers of tales at royal courts, public celebrations, and festivals, who shared and transmitted some common themes, motifs, and topoi as part of their artistic *répertoire*.

Maritime navigation, land travel and trade, and the exchange of trained musicians and rhapsodes between rulers could have been vectors of transmission, facilitating the spreading and swapping of common topoi and "mythologems." The latter refers to the smallest significant units of a myth as basic common elements of several myths. The Homeric term for a poet is *aoidos*, "singer." The *Odyssey* describes two such singer-poets in some detail: Phemius, the court singer in Odysseus' palace in Ithaca (*Odyssey*, Books 1 and 22), and Demodocus (Books 8 and 13), who lived on Scheria, the island of the Phaeacians. The latter sang both for the king and his nobles in Alcinous's palace and for the assembled public gathered to watch the athletic games held in honor of Odysseus. In the *Odyssey*, Demodocus is described as a blind singer, which by analogy inspired the legend of Homer as a blind bard (Chadwick 2005: 183; Sternberg 1987: 67). Homer's legendary blindness is a topos. Paradoxically, being blind makes him a more insightful bard since he can see into the heart of his heroes and describe their motives. There are both iconographic and literary examples of the blind singer topos. An Egyptian fresco in Thebes, dating from the eighteenth Dynasty of the New Kingdom (1550–1292 BCE), depicts a blind harp player (Morenz 2019: 235–26). His eyes are closed, he plays the harp while his mouth is open, indicating that he is singing while playing the instrument (Shedid and Seidel 1991: 22 Fig. 10 [in color], cf. 47 and 49). An unpublished fragment from Mari (5577+) mentions three musicians, two of whom are blind (Ziegler 2007: 21). The "chief or senior musician" (nar-gal=*nargallum*) of King Samsī-Addu, Ibbi-Ilabrat offered Ilšu-Ibbīšu (a musically trained slave) with a group of his young female musicians to his son Yasmaḫ-Addu (M.7734; Ziegler 2007: 10). The Sumerian term (nar) comprised both functions, that of playing a musical instrument and singing

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(Gelb 1975: 59). Musicians and their bands were sent from one court to another. Mari texts attest that they were well treated, offered gifts, and well remunerated; their presence and entertainment were particularly appreciated at the palace.

In a letter to his son, Samsī-Addu cites the bad example of one of the previous rulers at Mari from the Līm clan: "Yaḫdun-Līm loved his female musicians (munus-nar-meš-š[*u*] *i-ra-am-ma*) so much that he made his spouses, Gabētum and the one from Yamḫad, live outside (the palace)" (Durand 2000: 175; LAPO 18 1011). Such behavior, due to the king's infatuation with and passion for his female musicians, was considered scandalous. It also highlights the power that female musicians held at the courts of Amorite sheikhs. One blind female musician is mentioned as a member of Zimrī-Līm's harem (Ziegler 1999a: 76). Blind singers and musicians seem to have been particularly appreciated. In Mari, however, there are also indications that musicians were deliberately mutilated. We know that young boys and girls, apprentice musicians, could be blinded, apparently to develop their tactile and auditory senses, with the idea of further enhancing their musical abilities: "Moreover, concerning the untrained children in the service of Ilšu-ibbīšu, my lord wrote to me in these words: I have spoken to you concerning making [their] eyes 'sleep.' Why didn't you make their eyes 'sleep'? Immediately, their eyes were made to 'sleep.' I have entrusted [them] to the service of Ilšu-ibbīšu in good health" (ARM 26/2 297: 14–24; Ziegler 2007: 23). Apparently, the operation of blinding the young girls and boys, music apprentices, was carried out as planned. Persons who were born blind or became blind after a sickness might have earned their livelihood by becoming musicians and singers. The Sumerian composition, *Enki and Ninmaḫ*, lines 62–5, depicts blindness as a typical professional defect of singers and musicians. In the poem, the gods Enki and Ninmaḫ engage in a creation contest. Ninmaḫ creates human beings with defects, and Enki tries to find a place for them in society: "The second, she made into a man who could see though blind. Enki, seeing the man who could see though blind, decreed his fate, gave him the art of song, named him chief [musician] of the *ušumgal*-lyre before the king" (Kramer and Maier 1989: 34). The Sumerian expression used to describe the blind man is striking: (ĝeš-nu$_{11}$ gi$_4$-gi$_4$ lu$_2$ u$_6$-e) means "the one who turns back the light, a man who sees." As explained by Shehata (2009: 37), this phrase represents a poetic expression for blindness. The expression "to turn the light back" illustrates, in a poetic formulation, the fact that light cannot enter the eye of the blind but is instead reflected backward. The Sumerian (lu$_2$ u$_6$-e) "a man who sees" contrasts with the first statement and refers to the "inner qualities" of the blind person: despite his blindness, the man is still described as "seeing," which should be interpreted as a metaphorical assessment of his particular intellectual abilities. Since Sumerian times, the blind bard has been perceived as a particularly gifted individual who could see inner, hidden things that those with eyes could not see.

Gelb (1975: 60) adduces a comparative anthropological example from African Baganda, a Bantu ethnic clan from Uganda, where the bard was intentionally blinded so "that he might not look upon the court ladies or fall in love with them." The Mari letter mentioned above gives the opposite example, where an Amorite sheikh fell passionately in love with his female musicians.

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5. The Hurro-Hittite "Song of Release" and Mari *andurāru* "Release"

Neu (1996: 11) explores the possible historical connection of the *Song of Release* with the memory of an event associated with King Hattušili I. In the mid-sixteenth century, after conquering the North Syrian city of Ḫaḫḫu, Hattušili released the slaves. In the Akkadian version of Hattušili's autobiography, the Hittite king affirms, *i-na ša-pal ša-me-e* AMA.AR.GI$_4$-*šu-nu aš-tá-kán* "Under the sky I have established the liberation (of slaves)" (KBo 10 1 Rs 1). The Hurrian leitmotif *kirenzi* "release" corresponds to Hittite *parā tarnumar*, Sumerian AMA.AR.GI$_4$, "return to the mother," that is, to the anterior free condition, and Akkadian *andurāru* (Charpin 1987: 37). The term is known in Hebrew as *dĕrôr* (Lev 25:10, Deut 15 [liberation of slaves] and 26; Jer 34:8, 15, 17 [liberation of slaves in the time of Jeremiah, ca. 588 BCE]) (Otto 1998: 125–60). In the Hurrian habitat in North Syria, Hattušili was perceived as a liberator of slaves, generating an initial Hurrian composition. It prompted the later, fourteenth-century Hittite translation and version of the *Song of Release*. These epic compositions were loosely based on a historical substratum and sung by Hittite bards as *res gestae*, events of olden times, celebrating the heroic deeds of the dead king, probably during festivals, or to entertain the royal dynasty and the nobles at banquets.

The Hurro-Hittite *Song of Release* establishes a connection with the well-known North Syrian and Mesopotamian institution of *andurāru*, "release, liberation" (Otto 2001: 524–31). In the Old Babylonian *Atraḫasīs Epic*, the term appears in the passage dealing with the creation of humankind (*Atra.* 1 243). After the revolt of the Igigi gods, who refused to carry on the corvée work of digging irrigation canals, the divine assembly decreed that humans should be created to carry out the heavy work associated with the maintenance of irrigation canals, the bloodline of Mesopotamian agriculture and economy. The goddess Mami, having mixed clay with the blood of a slaughtered god ^{d}Wê and having created seven human (*awīlu*) couples, declares the establishment of an *andurārum* or the "return to the anterior condition." It implies a return to the initial stage when the junior Igigi gods were not forced to do the corvée work imposed by the senior gods, the Anunnaki.

> You ordered me the task and I have completed (it)!
> You have slaughtered the god, along with his spirit (*ṭēmīšu*).
> I have done away with your heavy forced labor,
> I have imposed your drudgery on man.
> You have bestowed(?) clamor (*rigma*) upon humankind.
> (*taštaḫda rigma ana awīlūti*)
> I have released the yoke, I have established a restoration
> (to the original state) (*andurāra aškun*)
> (*Atra.* 1 237–43, Lambert-Millard 1969: 59–61; Foster 2005: 237).

There is another link between *Atraḫasīs* and the Homeric Epic, indicating the presence of the stream of tradition. The division of the cosmos by lot into three domains (*Atra.*

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1 11–15)—the sky for Anu, the earth for [Enlil?], and the sea to Enki—corresponds nearly verbatim to the Homeric partition of divine rule between Zeus, Hades, and Poseidon in the *Iliad* 15.187–93 (Morris 1997: 602).

One Mari text with prophetic content (ARM 26/1 194:32–46 [A.4260]), mentioning the proclamation of *andurārum*-liberation, offers another element of comparison to the *Song of Release* and the situation described in Jeremiah 34. The *āpilum*-prophet of the god Šamaš announces to the Amorite warlord Zimrī-Līm that after conquering the city of Kurdā, he should proclaim an *andurārum*-liberation, akin to what the Hittite King Hattušili would do a century and a half later. The god demands it. The historical reality, however, was different since Zimrī-Līm did not attack the sheikh Ḫammurabi of Kurdā. Therefore, this *andurārū* should be placed in the category of a liberation proclaimed by a ruler at the beginning of his reign, a practice frequently attested by Mesopotamian rulers. Had Zimrī-Līm conquered Ḫammurabi of Kurdā, his first duty once he assumed the rule over this city would have been to proclaim a generalized liberation *andurārum*. The victory would have been given to him by Šamaš under this condition (Durand 1988: 417–19; Charpin 1990a: 253–70). The proclamation of an *andurārum*-liberation is a pan-Amorite phenomenon that the Amorite warlords and rulers share with their Mesopotamian counterparts. Durand aptly renders the term *andurārum* with "le retour à la case départ" or "back to square one" (LAPO 18, Durand 2000: 256).

Another Mari text conveys the *andurārum* liberation using a synonymous expression. It deals with the situation of great famine, where grain was sold to people at interest, provoking excessive debt among the affected population. The acute crisis prompted the warlord Yasmaḫ-Addu, king of Mari, to issue an *ad hoc* "Edict of Release," in Akkadian *šipṭam nadānum* "to give or issue an edict," Heb. *śîm mišpaṭ* (ARM 4 16; Durand 2000: 220, LAPO 18 1049). The situation is comparable to the crisis that Nehemiah had to resolve in his role as a Persian governor in Jerusalem. In the Book of Nehemiah 5, he had to proclaim the liberation of debts and of enslaved Judeans submitted to indentured labor to repay them (Bodi 2009a: 83–100). The presence of the same literary topos in a biblical book describing Jerusalem in Achaemenid times is probable if one takes into account the long stream of tradition on the liberation of slaves and captives, spanning two millennia from Mari, Hittites, Homeric Epic, to the Hebrew literature redacted in Persian times.

The *andurāru* release is further attested in Middle Babylonian times in documents from a variety of sites and cultures such as Terqa, Nuzi, and Hurrian Arrapḫa (Kirkuk). One tablet juxtaposes the two: *ina arki šūdûti ina arki andurāri* "after the royal edict (*šūdûtu*), after the release-*andurāru*" (HSS 9 102). According to Brigitte Lion (1999: 320), this means that the proclamation of an *andurāru* could take the form of a royal edict of the *šūdûtu* type, while not all the royal *šūdûtu*-edicts were necessarily the *andurāru* releases. The institution of *andurārum*-release spans both the second and the first millennium BCE. It is attested in Old Babylonian times in central Mesopotamia as well as in Northern Syria among the Amorites. It endures in Middle Babylonian times in Nuzi and trans-Tigris areas and continues in Neo-Assyrian times as well (Villard 2007: 107–24; von Dassow 2011: 205–24). It is further elaborated in the Hebrew

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literary tradition under a Hebrew cognate (*dĕrôr*) (Lev 25, Deut 15, Jer 34, but also Neh 5 and Exod 14–15 even if the term does not appear). In the stream of tradition, the redactors of the biblical texts adopted the Akkadian (*andurāru*), giving the Hebrew (*dĕrôr*) motif a significant theological overhaul. A common ancient Near Eastern topos was adapted to a specific theological message of liberation from slavery. In the idealized practice of *dĕrôr*, which is neither a utopian law nor an impracticable fantasy, in the land of Israel, slavery should be an exception and not a rule (Kaplan 2019: 183–203).

In the wake of West's (1997: xi) and Burkert's (1992; 2004) convincing arguments for literary links between the Homeric Epic and a considerable number of themes and motifs from the *Gilgameš*, *Atraḫasīs Epics*, and *Enūma eliš*, scholars are discussing whether to view the Greek epics as a continuation of an ancient Near Eastern genre (Haubold 2002: 2). This, however, is perceived as a provocation by classicists who still hold to some version of the so-called "Greek miracle." However, even Greek myths cannot be assumed to have arisen spontaneously from uncontaminated "origins" (Burkert 1987: 11). The purpose of this chapter is not to deny the "conceptual autonomy" ("*Eigenbegrifflichkeit*") of the ancient Greek world. Its goal is more modest as I attempt to point out some vectors of transmission of the Syro-Mesopotamian and Hittite topoi and poetic elements through a stream of tradition to the proto-Hellenic Greeks, as reflected in the Homeric Epic lore. The task seems so vast that any breakthrough in this field would require a close collaboration of several specialists in the respective disciplines.

6. The Trojan Horse and the Egyptian Story of the Taking of Joppa

A Ramesside historical romance recounts the capture of the Levantine town of Joppa by an Egyptian military force through stealth and deception. The tale is set in the time of Thutmosis III (1468–1436 BCE), one of the most active military monarchs in ancient Egyptian history. There is another fragmentary Ramesside story about Thutmosis III's military activity in Syria (*Rṯnw* Retjenu) (Botti 1955: 64). Thutmosis III of the eighteenth Dynasty had probably secured the vassalage of the Prince of Joppa during his initial military campaign into Syria-Palestine when he went as far north as Karkemish. Subsequently, Joppa, corresponding to modern Haifa in Israel, rebels against Egyptian domination. In the story, the Pharaoh is referred to as Mn-ḫpr-Rʿ [Men-kheper-Re]. Yet he is portrayed as being back in Egypt while the sly stratagem and cunning of Djehuty, a prominent Egyptian general and garrison commander under Thutmosis III, is extolled. Djehuty is an identifiable historical figure. He bears the titles of "king's scribe," "overseer of troops *iwʿyt*" (that is, general), and "overseer of the northern foreign countries" in contemporary Egyptian records. Seventeen archaeological objects dispersed in various museums in Europe and America are associated with him. They stem from his tomb in Saqqara, excavated in 1824 (Lilyquist 1988: 57, "Appendix A"; Reeves 1993: 260).

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The text makes internal claims for its dating, setting itself within the reign of Thutmosis III. However, the language and style of the text, and the papyrus on which it was written, confirm a later date of composition at the time of Ramses II (1290–1224 BCE), some two centuries after the setting of the events described. The tale, found in hieratic script on the verso of Papyrus Harris 500, is currently housed at the British Museum (EA 10060; Gardiner 1932: 82a–85; Davies 2003: 15–18). The story represents a "legendary account describing the taking of Joppa employing soldiers who hid in 200 baskets that were carried into the city on a ruse—a story which doubtless contains a historical kernel about the conquest of the town and its conversion into an Egyptian base" (Aharoni 1979: 154). It describes the triumph of a New Kingdom Egyptian force over the town of Joppa, a port on the East Mediterranean coast, during the mid-fifteenth-century BCE. The victory was not achieved by military assault in battle but by a wily stratagem invented by the Egyptian commander, Djehuty. It consists of a crafty scheme, a false surrender by the Egyptians who concealed warriors in baskets with tops covered with what were supposedly the spoils of war, offered as a tribute to the inhabitants of Joppa. The ruler of the city of Joppa rebelled against Thutmosis III by casting off his vassalage, which he most likely pledged when the Pharaoh passed by Joppa during his first campaign in Syria-Palestine. Joppa is mentioned in the Karnak lists of Thutmosis III's first campaign as *ja-pu*, 62 *j-p-*<*w*> of conquered Canaanite cities (Helck 1979: 122 and 312; Aharoni 1979: 161). In the eyes of the Egyptians, the Ruler of Joppa was legally a rebel, denoted with (*ḫrw* "fallen one"). The act of rebellion was punished by the severest measures, such as subjugation and deportation of the inhabitants of the palace. The Rebel of Joppa and Djehuty, commander of an Egyptian military detachment, held a parley, probably in Djehuty's camp. For security reasons, the Rebel of Joppa brought along the *maryannu* warriors with horses and chariots, as protection and support during the negotiations. From original charioteers, the *maryannu* evolved to become a distinct social class enjoying a privileged status. The *maryannu* elite charioteers represented the highest in the military guilds, occurring frequently in documents from Boğazköy and were prominent in Mitanni, Northern Syria, Ugarit, and Canaan (Wilhelm 1987–90: 419; Watson and Wyatt 1999: 464). The cost of assembling a chariot unit, equipping the charioteers, and training them and their horses was always very high. Chariots were running through the land of Canaan in Amarna times. Tušratta, king of Mitanni (1358–1335 BCE), writes to the Pharaoh Amenophis III (ca. 1348 BCE), "I herewith send you 1 chariot, 2 horses, 1 male attendant, 1 female attendant, from the booty from the land of Hatti" (EA 17:36–38). Rib-Hadda of Byblos writes to the Pharaoh saying, "So give me 30 pairs of horses along with chariots. I have *charioteers* [:] *mar-ia-nu-ma*, but I do not have a horse to march against the enemies of the king" (EA 107:42, Moran 1992: 42 and 181). The *maryannu* were of Indo-Aryan origin, associated with the Hurrian movement into Syro-Palestine, the term meaning "noble chariot-warrior." It is an Indo-European loanword related to the Vedic *márya*, "man, hero, youth" (O'Callagan 1950/51: 302; Rainey 1959: 19; Redford 1992: 136 from Sanskrit *maurya* "young man"). According to von Dassow (2008: 86, 96), *márya* "(young) man," with the Hurrian derivational suffix *–nni*, means "man," but being a loanword, derived from an exotic language, it functions as a

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technical term denoting a special category of man. It was applied to members of society who were characterized by high status, proximity to the local ruler, and associated with war chariots. However, von Dassow (2022: 476) repudiates the myth of the Aryans who rode horse-drawn chariots to supremacy over the Orient and founded Mittani.

The Alalaḫ tablets (20 kilometers NW of Antakya—historic Antioch—now Turkey's Hatay Province), dating from the fifteenth-century BCE, mention the *maryannu* who owned chariots (*ša narkabti*), and those who did not have chariots (*narkabta lā išū*) (Reviv 1972: 219). A text from the royal archives of Ugarit, among the "tablets of chariots of the city of Uškani" (*ṭuppi markabtī* $^{\text{āl}}$*Uškani*), associates the chariots with the *maryannu*. It lists localities in the kingdom of Ugarit with names of people and the number of chariots they owned: "three (chariots) of the *maryannu* from Ari," and "two (chariots) of the *maryannu* from Mārapa" (PRU 3, 12.34 + 12.43, Rv 11.24, 30. Nougayrol 1955: 192). The *maryannu* chariot warriors wore a *širyôn*, a special cuirass of scales mentioned in Egyptian, Akkadian, Hittite, Ugaritic, and Hebrew texts. The term comes from Hurrian *šaryan*(*n*)*u*, and Goliath wore such heavy armor of scales (*širyôn qaśqaśśîm*), 1 Sam 17:5; (de Vaux 1967: 485) (see Chapter 1. Section 3.1).

At this point, Djehuty deploys his first stratagem designed to incapacitate the formidable *maryannu* chariot-warrior force. He orders food and wine to be served to the tired troops, and soon they are no longer a problem, having been reduced to drunkenness. Having cleared his way, Djehuty opens his second stratagem by pretending to desert the Pharaoh's army together with his family, to join his opponent and settle in Joppa in the service of the local kinglet. Having thus led the Ruler of Joppa to believe that he has succeeded, Djehuty suggests that the grooms should unharness the horses. He remarks on their exhaustion, stating that without fodder, the animals would be easily surpassed in fighting value by any of his foot soldiers. This move paralyzes the enemy's chariotry completely, allowing Djehuty to seize the horses. Here follows another trick based on elaborate wordplay. "Now [when the Rebel of Jo]pa said to Djehuty, 'It is my wish to see the great baton of King Menheperre, l.p.h. (=life, power, health). [There is a woman here] by the name of Tiutnofre. By the *Ka* of King Menkheperre, l.p.h., she shall be yours today [if you be so] kind to bring it < to > me,' he acquiesced and brought the baton of King Menkheperre, l.[p.h., concealed in] his apron" (Wente 2003: 73).

Presumably, the Pharaoh's baton or mace accompanied the division of the army under Djehuty's command, symbolizing the king's presence in a military campaign in which he did not take part. When a subordinate reports the completion of the instructions for the seizure, the Ruler of Joppa misunderstands. He assumes that the subject of this report, which leads to his deception (*ʿwn*), is a baton or, rather, a "mace of King Men-kheper-Re" (*ʿwn*[*t*] *n Mn-ḫpr-Rʿ*) instead of "seizure for King Men-kheper-Re." The Ruler of Joppa asks to be shown the Pharaoh's marvelous "mace" (*ʿwn*). Djehuty gives a fictitious order to have the royal mace brought while he pulls a club from under his cloak, and bludgeons the Ruler of Joppa, making him prostrate with one blow. The Rebel of Joppa realized that what he thought to be a "mace" (*ʿwn*) was a deceit (*ʿwn*) leading to the seizure (*ʿwn*) of his city for the Pharaoh. The triple play on the word (*ʿwn*), obvious to any Egyptian, is the focal point of this part of the story.

Bodi_9781666979138_C007.indd 208 7/14/2026 10:32:05 PM

Having subdued the rebellious ruler, Djehuty devises a third stratagem directed against the defenders and inhabitants of the town of Joppa. Two hundred heavily armed soldiers are concealed in baskets, together with fetters to be used to enslave the inhabitants of Joppa. The baskets were sealed and transported by 300 other soldiers, who were probably unarmed, to lull suspicion. The driver of the chariot of the Ruler of Joppa is selected to lead the cargo into fortified Joppa. "Probably this charioteer had driven the Prince of Joppa out to the parley and was waiting outside the Egyptian camp" (Wilson 1969: 22 n. 9). He performs his task without suspicion after he is instructed to inform the wife of the Ruler of Joppa of the "surrender" of the Egyptian commander Djehuty. In good faith, he leads the procession to the city whose fortification gates are opened upon his report. After the baskets are moved within the walls of the town, the Egyptian soldiers abandon their disguises, open the sealed baskets, climb out, capture, and manacle the inhabitants of Joppa. The prisoners are sent back as shackled slaves to serve the Pharaoh in Egypt (Davies 2003: 1–3). The trick with the soldiers of the attacking force concealed in baskets carried and smuggled into the Joppa citadel is reminiscent of the capture of Troy. The parallels with the story of the Homeric Trojan Horse are immediately evident, as are those with the tale of "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves" from the *Alf Layla wa-Layla* (Arabian Nights) (Goedicke 1968: 219–33). The story of the Trojan Horse is not directly narrated in the *Iliad* but is referred to in *Odyssey* 4.271–89 (Menelaus describes it to Telemachus), 8.492–520 (the bard Demodocus narrates it in his song), and 11.523–32 (Odysseus reminds his fallen companions in Hades of their exploit). The horses play an important role both in the *Taking of Joppa* and in the story of the Trojan Horse. In the Egyptian tale, it was of primordial importance to put out of action the most important force of the Rebel of Joppa, his *maryannu* warriors, with chariots and horses. Once this main force was disabled, Djehuty could concentrate on concealing his own warriors in baskets and bringing them into the city of Joppa. In the Homeric Epic, the wooden horse is present as part of the trick that made it possible to stealthily introduce Achaean warriors within the walls of Troy.

The Egyptian warriors concealed in baskets correspond to the Achaean warriors hidden in the Trojan Horse. The idea of introducing warriors within a fortified city by concealing them inside a container is found in both tales. The tale of *The Taking of Joppa* probably provided the bards of the Homeric tale with the topos of a military stratagem of taking a city with concealed warriors. They creatively adapted it by transforming 200 baskets into a single wooden horse to better suit the local conditions of Ilion's, where horses were preeminent.

One should also point out the offer of a beautiful woman to General Djehuty if he lets the Ruler of Joppa see the Pharaoh's baton. Her name is Tiutnofre, meaning "The beautiful one is yours." The presence of a beautiful woman in the Egyptian story recalls Helen, the queen of Sparta, who shares with Tiutnofre the legendary beauty.

Goedicke (1968: 232) pointed out several elements found in the Egyptian tale of *The Taking of Joppa* that are found in the taking of Troy. The story depicts Djehuty as a cunning and versatile schemer comparable only to Odysseus in his resourcefulness. Not only is his craft demonstrated, but also the foolishness of his opponent. For an

Bodi_9781666979138_C007.indd 209 7/14/2026 10:32:05 PM

Egyptian listener, the punning on "mace" (*ʿwn*) and "deceit" (*ʿwn*) leading to "seizure" (*ʿwn*) must have given great amusement and satisfaction. The fêting of the enemies to incapacitate them by drunkenness has its parallel in Odysseus' encounter with the Cyclops Polyphemus, the son of the god Poseidon. Odysseus made him drunk with strong Greek wine. Feeling jovial, Polyphemus asks Odysseus his name. The latter replies that his name is "Nobody" (*Odyssey* 9.410). As soon as Polyphemus collapses from intoxication, Odysseus and a select group of men drive the red-hot staff into his eye, blinding him. Polyphemus wakes with a shriek. His neighbors, who came to see what was wrong, left as soon as he called out, "Nobody is killing me!" (*Odyssey* 9.455). Odysseus's word trick proved successful. The concealed transport of Odysseus' crew also occurs in the story of Polyphemus, although with different objectives. Odysseus ties his companions under the Cyclops' sheep, allowing them to escape from the cave, unseen by the blind Polyphemus.

It would not be surprising to find earlier material in the Homeric Epic. Several elements found in the *Iliad* predate the traditional setting of the Trojan War in 1250 BCE, perhaps by as much as several centuries. These include the warrior Ajax and his Tower Shield (*Iliad* 7.219–20; 11.485; 17.128), a shield type which has been replaced long before the thirteenth-century BCE, as well as various heroes using "silver-studded" swords (ξίφος ἀργυρόηλον [*xiphos arguroēlon*], *Iliad* 2.45; 3.361; 7.303–4), an expensive type of weapon which had also gone out of use long before. Moreover, Idomeneus, Meriones, and Odysseus may also be earlier figures incorporated into this epic (Cline 1997: 197).

7. The Egyptian Topos of the Pharaoh Shooting Arrows at Copper Oxhide Ingots and Odysseus' Test of the Bow in Odyssey Book 21

In the *Odyssey* Book 21, there is an Egyptian literary and iconographic topos that seems to have found its way into the scene of the contest for Odysseus's bow, to which Penelope submits the 108 suitors. They all fail the test while Odysseus remains the only one strong enough to string the bow and shoot the arrow straight through the twelve shafts of axes in a row. The technical aspects of the scene, the Greek expression "to pierce the iron" (διοϊστεύσειν τε σιδήρου [*dioisteusein te sidēriou*]), make little sense, are highly controversial, and strongly suggest the presence of some folktale, legendary, and traditional features of the story. However, the scene is central in revealing Odysseus' true identity as the king and true ruler of Ithaca and has a strong symbolic charge.

7.1. The Topos of the Pharaoh Shooting Arrows at Copper Oxhide Ingots

The topos has a long history in Egypt and Syria-Palestine during the Late Bronze Age. From the beginning, the topos had fairy-tale features as part of the propaganda in the

Bodi_9781666979138_C007.indd 210 7/14/2026 10:32:05 PM

service of Pharaoh's exceptional strength, military ability, and exaggerated claims of accomplishment. The chronological and geographic spread of the topos is important, making it probable that it reached the Ionian bards through Syria and Anatolia. One finds frequent iconographic representations of the Pharaoh shooting with a bow at a target represented by an "oxhide" copper ingot. The arrows are depicted as piercing through the ingot, indicating the king's uncommon strength and power.

The Armant stele of Thutmosis III (ca. 1479–1425 BCE) was discovered in the temple of the god of war Montu at Armant, near Thebes. It describes the Pharaoh's Asiatic campaigns, which he led for twenty years, almost every year. The following text describes his first Asiatic campaign in ca. 1468 BCE.

> When he fired (arrows) at a metal ingot. Every shaft was split like marsh papyrus. Subsequently, he placed an example of it in the temple of Amun, (it) being a target of hammered copper three fingers thick (ca. 56 millimeters or over 2 inches), his arrow in it, it having passed through it, he causing three palms (ca. 225 millimeters or 9 inches) to come out of the back in order to cause his followers to pray for the strength of his arms in valor and victory (Hoffmeier *COS* 2.2C, 2003: 18).

The following example attests to the existence of both the textual and iconographic topoi. The latter is attested since the time of Amenhotep/Amenophis II (ca. 1425–1400 BCE), the son of Thutmosis III from the eighteenth Dynasty. This Pharaoh is well known for his soldierly prowess and depictions of military achievements on temple walls, such as his famous scene of the chariot battle. Amenhotep II is represented on a stela at Karnak Temple, riding on a horse-drawn chariot, stringing a bow, and with his arrows piercing through an oxhide ingot target depicted on the relief (Giménez 2017: 111 fig. 1). The long inscription on the Great Sphinx Stela of Amenhotep II at Giza describes in detail the Pharaoh's exceptional strength: "He found erected for him four targets of Asiatic copper, of one palm in thickness, twenty cubits separated each pole (with oxhide copper target) from the following one" (Varille 1942: 35).[6] The four targets of copper oxhide ingots covered a distance of about forty meters. The text also states that nobody could string the Pharaoh's bow; he alone possessed the necessary strength. Moreover, according to the inscription, the targeted copper ingots were of foreign, Asiatic provenance. The analysis of the chemical composition of the only single fragment of an oxhide ingot found in Egypt, in Qantir Pi-Ramesses in the northeastern Delta, established that it was made with copper from the Apliki mines in central Cyprus (Alashiya) (Pusch 1995: 121–32). Ingots represent imports stemming from the Eastern Mediterranean. They were cast in the shape of an oxhide for easier transportation and the smith's convenience. In addition, other Egyptian texts carved on temples list huge numbers of copper ingots coming from Alashiya in the time of Ramesses II or brought by Thutmosis III after his victory in the land of Retjenu (Canaan), or already during the twelve Dynasty under Amenemhet II (1929–1895 BCE) (Redford 1992: 79; Graziadio 2014: 5–25). The main supplier of copper was Cyprus (Alashiya), the mines in Anatolia

[6] The text continues with an exaggeratedly laudatory account of the Pharaoh's accomplishments. As an oarsman wielding an oar of twenty cubits long, he was the equal of 200 men, rowing six times as far as they could without stopping.

Bodi_9781666979138_C007.indd 211 7/14/2026 10:32:05 PM

(Ergani), the Arabah Valley (Timna, Punom), and Oman (Magan) (Singer 2011: 9, 64, 80). Huge quantities of copper were exported to Egypt in the fourteenth-century BCE, as attested in the Amarna letters. As shown by the ingot trove in the two shipwrecks at Cape Gelidonya and Uluburn (Cline 2014: 75), dating from the fourteenth-century BCE, oxhide copper ingots were often transported by maritime trade. A text from Ugarit mentions a ship from Alashiya moored in the town of Atalig with a cargo of fifteen talents of co[pper] and other metal utensils (KTU 4.390). Boats transported goods and sailors, facilitating the exchange of stories and songs along the Mediterranean shoreline that ended up being incorporated into the epic songs of several cultures.

Considering the foreign, Asiatic origin of the oxhide ingots, Giménez (2017: 115) goes beyond Varille's interpretation of the topos, praising Pharaoh's athletic skills and exceptional strength. He suggests that it implies the victory of Egypt over its enemies and, by extension, the victory of order over chaos.

Amenhotep II's mummy was discovered in the Valley of the Kings, in the tomb (KV35).

The topos is further attested in the tomb (KV58) of another ruler of the eighteenth Dynasty, discovered in the Valley of the Kings. Pharaoh Ay's reign is estimated to have lasted from around 1325 to 1321 BCE. His tomb contained rich burial goods as evidence of his royal status. Among these, a gold foil fragment was found that could have decorated a quiver. It showed Pharaoh Ay on a chariot, shooting arrows at an oxhide ingot standing on a pole. Four arrows pierced the ingot (Giménez 2017: 116 fig. 2). Two Asiatic captives are tied to the pole on which the oxhide ingot is fixed. It emphasizes the function of the target as a symbol of the foreign element, linking the ingot to its Asian provenance.

The Egyptian topos was adopted and followed by the subsequent Pharaohs of the nineteenth Dynasty. Geographically, it is found further north in the land of Retjenu (Syria-Palestine) in Beth-Shean, dating from the Late Bronze Age. The excavated seal depicts Ramesses II (1279–1213 BCE) standing and shooting at an oxhide ingot target on a pole and piercing it with three arrows (Giménez 2017: 117 fig. 3). Two prisoners are attached to the pole underneath the ingot target. Ramesses II is best known for his Battle of Qadesh (modern Tell Nebi Mend in Syria), along the Orontes River, a significant military confrontation between the Egyptian forces and the Hittite Empire led by Muwatalli II. Ramesses II led battles in the Amurru territory in Syria when he moved through the Eleutheros Valley to assault the Syrian city of Dapur, "a town of the Hittites in the territory of Tunip in the land of Naharin (i.e., Syria)" (Redford 1992: 186). The scene of the siege of Dapur on the Ramesseum walls is important as it shows the iconographic modification of the original oxhide ingot into a banner. At the left of the scene, Ramesses II is on a chariot shooting arrows at the city of Dapur at the right end, over which a banner pierced by three arrows is displayed. The banner does not have the oxhide shape but shows the three elements that characterize Amenhotep II, Ay, and Ramesses II scenes: the king shooting arrows, the foreign object pierced by the arrows, and the enemy under the pierced object (Giménez 2017: 117 fig. 4; Redford 1992: 187 Pl. 18). The iconographic topos conveys the idea of a victorious Pharaoh vanquishing his enemies.

Bodi_9781666979138_C007.indd 212 7/14/2026 10:32:05 PM

This literary topos is found in Mesopotamia, both in epics and battle reports. In the account of his Battle of Halule (691 BCE), between the Assyrian army and the Babylonian-Elamite coalition, King Sennacherib states: "In my anger, I rode quickly in my exalted battle chariot, which lays enemies low. I took in my hand the mighty bow that Aššur (*qaštu dannatu ša Aššur*) had granted to me, (and) I grasped in my hand an arrow (*šiltāḫu*) that pierces the throat (*pāriʾ napšāti*)" (*Chicago Prism* v 69b-73; Grayson and Novotny 2012: 183, RINAP 3/1). The account echoes the Babylonian creation epic (*Enūma eliš* 4 30–31), "They gave him (Marduk) an unrivalled weapon which overwhelms the enemy (saying): 'Go and pierce Tiamat's throat' (*napšatuš puruʾma*)." The expression appears in the god's ceremonial temple name: "Marduk-Is-the-Piercer-of-Enemies'-Throats (*Marduk pāriʾ napišti ayābī*)," (CT 51 178.2′–3′; George 1993: 57). "The rare expression *napišta parāʾu* is common to both Sennacherib's account of the Battle of Halule and *Enūma Eliš*, and both texts emphasize the divine endowment of the weapon" (Pongratz-Leisten 2015: 316; Weissert 1997: 194). Elsewhere, in Sennacherib's battle account, the *uṣṣu*-arrow is used to pierce the corpses of the enemy. The same arrow is used to pierce the walls of Babylon in the *Erra Epic*, where the walls stand as a synecdoche for Babylon's inhabitants. Being pierced by the arrow leads them to cry out in pain: "I (Sennacherib) shot the troops of the enemy with *uṣṣu*-arrows (and) *mulmullu*-arrows, and pierced all their corpses like . . ." It corresponds to (*Erra* 4 6), "As to the (city wall) Imgur-Enlil, you have struck it with (your) arrows (*uṣṣu)* that it says 'Woe my heart'."

The topos of piercing the copper oxhide, the enemies, the walls of the besieged city, and Tiāmat's throat as a symbol of overcoming the chaos can be traced in literature and iconography from Egypt to Syria-Palestine, Mesopotamia, and finally in the Homeric Epic.

7.2. Odysseus' Test of the Composite Bow in *Odyssey* Book 21

The 434 lines on the composite or Asiatic bow of Odysseus in the *Odyssey* Book 21 are arranged in a concentric ring. Book 21 represents the high point of the epic, while the following three books may be seen as the epilogue. Odysseus wins the contest of the bow and identifies himself before the 108 suitors, whom he executes with the remaining arrows. The focus of this section of the poem is on the only person capable of stringing the composite bow and shooting the arrow straight through the shaft of twelve axes, leading to the recognition of Odysseus. The climax of the epic comes at the stunning moment when Odysseus strings the bow and plucks it. The bow "sang beautifully as a swallow" (*Odyssey* 21.411), which is interpreted as a good omen from Zeus, predicting the contest's victorious outcome for Odysseus. This competition plays a pivotal role in the epic and showcases Odysseus' unparalleled strength, skill, and resourcefulness, even twenty years after he left Ithaca, as if the passing of time did not affect his body strength or eyesight. Similar exaggerations are found about the Pharaoh's exceptional strength in the Egyptian texts quoted above. This magic is due to the benevolent protection of the patron deity, in the case of Odysseus, of the goddess Athena.

Bodi_9781666979138_C007.indd 213 7/14/2026 10:32:05 PM

Exceptional strength of the hero's arm, drawing the bow, and piercing his enemies are all part of the royal rhetoric.

The questions of how the test of the bow took place, what exactly was meant to be done, the disposition of the axes, whether single or double-headed axes were used, and whether the contest took place inside or outside the μέγαρον or the feast hall continue generating a steady flow of articles. Still, no agreement has been reached among scholars on how, if at all, the contest was performed. Fernández-Galiano (1992: 131–47) analyzed the numerous oddities in this poem, reviewing all pertinent opinions. He points out the probable presence of several bards and redactors responsible for multiple interpolations in an attempt to make sense of the competition with the bow.

Penelope mentions the contest of stringing Odysseus' bow already in *Odyssey* 19.570–581. She describes the way her husband used to play with his bow by positioning himself "far off" (πολλὸν ἄνευθε) from the axes. This remark about the distance confirms that Odysseus uses a composite bow. He made no case for the unavoidable gravitational fall of the arrow at a longer distance. The classicists affirm that it is absurdly impossible to pass an arrow straight through twelve holes in the axes aligned in a row if one is not close enough to the first one in the row. However, data on the use of the composite bow from Old Babylonian Mari could bring some corrections. In a letter (ARM I 69 + M. 7538), the old father Samsī-Addu (1792–1782 BCE) counsels his inexperienced, younger son Yasmaḫ-Addu, whom he placed to rule over Mari. He advises him on how to conduct a military confrontation: "not approaching (beyond) a certain distance" (line 22′: *a-na* a-šà 5 šu-ši *lā ṭeḫêm*). The verb *ṭeḫûm* means "to approach, to be(come) near." The Sumerograms (a-šà) correspond to *eqlum*, "field" as a measure of distance, and (šu-ši) to 1/24 of a cubit. The distance corresponds to less than 300 cubits or 150 meters (Charpin and Durand 1985: 314 n. 96). Samsī-Addu gives the precise distance between the two armies before the attack, less than 300 cubits. This is necessary to keep beyond the reach of enemy arrows, indicating that a composite bow, well-known and used in Mari, could kill a person at that distance. It implies that the speed of an arrow coming from a composite bow was high, making its trajectory straight, allowing the arrow to hit hard, pierce any defensive armor, and kill a person at a distance of 150 yards. It was the distance one had to maintain to remain on the safe side.

In Book 21, Penelope brings the bow of Odysseus and submits the 108 suitors to the test of the bow, promising to become the wife of the one who wins the contest. She declares: "And the one who takes the bow in his hands, strings it with the greatest ease, and sends an arrow clean through all the twelve axes (διοϊστεύσῃ πελέκεων δυοκαίδεκα πάντων), shall be the one I go away with" (*Odyssey* 21.75–79).

Her two maidservants carry the twelve axes in a single chest (ὄγκιον) (*Odyssey* 21.61, 66). Telemachus digs a long trench for all of them and rakes up some earth around the axes to maintain them aligned and straight (*Odyssey* 21.120–122). Odysseus's famous bow is an extraordinary one, previously owned by the legendary Eurytus, known for his archery skills. It's a bow of exceptional quality and strength, and probably quite expensive (*Od*yssey 21.32). It has a huge size (*Odyssey* 21.74, 405, 409) and is comparable to the

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bow of Pandarus in the *Iliad* 4.109. In the *Iliad* 5.97, Pandarus' bow is described as a κομπύλα τόξα "curved bow," and in 4.124 it is said when at the limit of the draw to be κυκλοτερές "bent into a hoop," a strain that only a composite bow could sustain without snapping. The contest takes place during the feast of the god Apollo, the archer par excellence (*Odyssey* 20.276–278, 22.7). Odysseus carried it with him in Ithaca for hunting (*Odyssey* 21.41) but did not use it in the siege of Troy (*Odyssey* 21.38–40). Neglected, it waited twenty years for his return. He has to examine it closely in case the horn has been worm-eaten (*Odyssey* 21.393–5). Telemachus tries in vain to string the bow; next, the suitors attempt it, again without success. Odysseus, who is disguised as a beggar, in due course strings the bow and performs the shot without difficulty. Without even leaving his seat (*Odyssey* 21.420), he alone succeeds in shooting the arrow straight through all the shafts of the twelve axes (*Odyssey* 21.420–423). After which, he used the rest of the arrows to kill the 108 suitors. The suitors would doubtless have picked up the axes to fight, had the weapons been equipped with handles. The double-headed axes are probably meant. This axe was already common in Minoan Crete (Fernández-Galiano 1992: 142). The double-headed axe (πέλεκυς) was used by Odysseus when Calypso gave it to him to build his raft before leaving her island in *Odyssey* 5.235: "She gave him a great axe of bronze, well fitted for his hands, sharpened on both sides" (δῶκέν οἱ πέλεκυν μέγαν, ἄρμενον ἐν παλάμῃσι, χάλκεον, ἀμφοτέρωθεν ἀκαχμένον). In the *Iliad* 23.851, 858, 883, the term ἡμιπέλεκκον denotes a single-headed axe, where the prefix ἡμι- means "half."

Iconographic evidence shows archers crouching down to shoot, and both Achilles, with his wound in the heel, and Diomedes (*Iliad* 11.377) are shot in the foot by Paris. When unstrung, the composite bow assumes a double curve. The term κομπύλα "curve" is applied to Odysseus' bow in *Odyssey* 21.359, 362, and to a similar one used by his companions in 11.156. The *Iliad* applies it to the bows of warriors with oriental connections, Paris, Pandarus, Dolon, Teucer, and Artemis (*Iliad* 21.502). The composite or Asiatic bow has appeared in Mesopotamia since the Dynasty of Akkad, ca. twenty-fourth-century BCE (Haas 1989: 27–41). On Narām-Sîn's victory stele (2254–2218 BCE), now in the Louvre Museum, the king is depicted holding a composite bow and an arrow.

The lexical list ur_5-ra = *ḫubullu* with three columns, in Sumerian, Hittite, and Akkadian (MSL 6, tablet VII A; Landsberger 1958: 109), gives half a dozen names for different types of bows and arrows. One finds the mention of the composite bow (ĝeš illuru = *tilpānum*). The quality and specificity of the composite bow are indicated by its land of origin: Hurrian, Mitanian, from Hanigalbat, Akkadian (*qaštu akkāditu*), from Anšan (*qaštu anšanītu*), from the Cimmerians (*qaštu gimmirītu*) (Haas 1989: 37; Salonen 1966: 33 and 147).

The Hurro-Hittites might have served as the interface in the stream of tradition concerning the bow contest that is mentioned in the Homeric Epic. A fragmentary Hittite epic composition about the Hurrian hero Gurp-aranzaḫ, dating from the first half of the second millennium BCE, resembles the bow competition in *Odyssey* 21. After a successful hunting expedition, where he shot a leopard and a bear, the Hurrian hero Gurp-aranzaḫ (the latter refers to the Tigris region) goes to the Babylonian city of

Bodi_9781666979138_C007.indd 215 7/14/2026 10:32:05 PM

Akkad with his father-in-law Impakru. A banquet is prepared, and after everybody has enjoyed food and drink, a bow (ĝeš pan) competition is organized, and a tower is set up to serve as a target. As an excellent shooter, Gurp-aranzaḫ ends as the victor of the bow contest. He is the best among all the assembled nobles, sixty kings, and seventy heroes. After the context, Gurp-aranzaḫ goes to a bed chamber. As a special honor, the chamber is sprinkled with aromatic oils, and the path is covered with rugs. Taking a step, he gets into bed. His wife fixed another day when she would join him in bed. She, too, like him, bears a Hurrian name, Tati-zuli (CTH 362; KBo 26.106; Haas 1989: 38–9; Güterbock 1938: 83–9).[7]

The Minoan Crete, which was the meeting place of immigrants, artisans, languages, merchants, bards, and influences from Egypt and Anatolia, knew the composite bow. A Cretan bronze relief depicts a huntsman carrying his game on his shoulders accompanied by a youth holding the composite bow and a knife (Lorimer 1950: 278, 289; Pl. XXI.1; 279 fig. 35). A Late Bronze Age relief from Knossos depicts three archers on the left side shooting against a horse-drawn chariot with an archer holding a bow (Pl. XI.3).

The oldest mention of the island of Crete comes from Old Babylonian Mari texts, (Guichard 1999: 165). When Zimrī-Līm visited the port of Ugarit in 1765 BCE, he met some officials of the Cretan merchant marine and gave them about five kilograms of tin. The Cretan interpreter received a generous remuneration. Mari tablets attest to a series of objects of Cretan origin, mostly goldsmith products. The Amorites knew the composite bow. Among eighteenth-century BCE Amorites at Mari, one finds two types of bow: The composite bow (ĝeš illuru = *tilpānum*) and the simple bow (ĝeš pan = *qaštum*). At Mari, the composite bow is likely to be qualified as a *sāḫirtum* "(the bow) that goes backward"; in other words, once unbent, the way it has been built makes it take up the opposite position than the one it had when the string is stretched between its two ends. This particular technique of bow construction increases its ability to strike far and hard (Durand 1983: 336–40; LAPO 17 1998: 390). The Assyrian Dictionary (*CAD* T: 414) renders such a composite bow, qualified with *sāḫirtum*, as "turned bows," e.g., "one mina of tallow (i.udu) for four 'turned' (or 'turning') bows (*ana* 4 ĝeš.ru.ḫi.a *saḫirātim*)" (ARM 21 139:2). Moreover, Mari texts mention the material that went into the manufacture of the composite bow, where the (*tilpānu*) is made out of sinews (*gīdum*) and glue ($še.gin_7$), and curved in fire and hot water: "One mina and six shekels of tendons (*šer'ānu*) for the sinews of the composite bows (*ana gīdi ša* ĝeš.ru.ḫi.a *saḫirātim*)" (ARM 23 207:2). Instructions are given how to bend a composite bow: "The 'turning' bows (ĝeš.ru.ḫi.a *saḫirātim*), which they make, they should bend in the fire (*ina išātim*) [. . .] and in hot water ([*ina mê*] *emmūt*[*im*])" (ARM 18 21:7). In Mari delivery lists, the composite bow appears together with boots and specific clothing, indicating that this weapon was part of the equipment of special soldiers (Groneberg 1987: 116). The production of such a sophisticated weapon could take five to ten years because of the extended periods of drying. The artisan had to achieve a compact, well-glued mix of animal keratin from horn with wood, giving the

[7] https://www.hethport.uni-wuerzburg.de/CTH 362.1 with a German translation.

Bodi_9781666979138_C007.indd 216 7/14/2026 10:32:05 PM

bow exceptional elasticity. The price for the composite bow would correspond to that of several oxen and horses (Haas 1989: 35–6). Pointing out the Lexical lists that establish a correspondence between the terms ĝeš.ru/illuru "composite bow" and Eblaite *ma-da-um* (related to Hebrew *yrh*, Ugaritic *yry*, Old South Arabic *wrw*, Ethiopic *warawa* "to throw" an arrow), the parallelism with Hebrew *mṭh*, Ugaritic *mṭ* "rod," and comparisons with Akkadian *šabbiṭu*, and Hebrew *šbṭ* "club" (Isa 10:5), Groneberg (1988: 72) argues that the composite bow could have been perceived as a "numinous magical object" ("*Numinose Zauber-Gegenstand*").

In the thirteenth-century BCE Ugaritic *Aqhat Epic*, one also finds the enumeration of the material used for the making of the composite bow: "The mightiest ash-trees from Lebanon, the strongest sinews (*gdm*) from the wild bulls, the hardest horns (*qrnt*) from the mountain goats, the toughest tendons (*mtnm*) from the hocks of a bull, the sharpest reeds from the great marsh (for arrows), give to Kothar-and-Hasis, let him construct a bow (*qšt*) for Anat" (KTU 1.17 vi.20–24, Wyatt 2006: 272; Margalit 1989: 151).

Held (1965: 402–03) made a philological comparison between the description of the materials that went into the composite bow in the Old Babylonian *Anzu Epic* and the one described in the Ugaritic *Aqhat Epic*: Akkadian *qanû api* "reeds/arrows from the marsh" = Ugararitic *bǧlil qnm* "reeds from the thicket" (for arrows); Akkadian *mummu qaštu* (ĝeš pan) *ana qišātīki* "(return) frame of the bow to your forests" = Ugararitic *ṯqbm blbnn* "trees from Lebanon"; Akkadian *šir'ānū immeri* "tendons of sheep" = Ugaritic *gdm brumm* "sinews of wild bulls," and Ugaritic *mtnm bʿqbt ṯr* "tendons from the hocks of bulls" (followed by Moran 1988: 26). This textual overlapping indicates that the Mesopotamian technology and knowhow in the production of the composite bow reached Ugarit on the Mediterranean coast and from there could have spread to Crete and proto-Hellenic Greeks. The following example would confirm this route of transmission in the spread of technical knowledge.

At Ugarit, Kothar-and-Hasis (*kṯr-w-ḫss*, "Skillful-and-Wise") was the divine craftsman, the god of technology, corresponding to Greek Hephaistos. In the Ugaritic "pantheon" texts, as well as in the polyglot vocabularies, *kṯr*/*ku-ša-ru* is identified with the Mesopotamian Enki/Ea, associated with wisdom (Pardee 1999: 490). He is the one who builds the bow for the eponymous hero Aqhat. In the Homeric Epic (*Iliad* 18.478–608), Hephaistos fashions the armor for the Achaean hero Achilles much as Kothar fashions the bow for Aqhat. Following Brown (1995: 332) and West (1997: 56), Carolina López-Ruiz (2022: 358) elaborated on the connection between Ugaritic Kothar and the Greek island of Kythera, the first major island south of the Peloponnese, mentioned in *Odyssey* 9.81 (Κύθηρα). Aphrodite, the goddess of seafarers associated with the "foam" (ἀφρός [*aphros*]) and the waves of the sea, the wife of Hephaistos, is related to cultic centers on several islands (Cythera and Cyprus). In *Theogony* 197–199, Hesiod calls her *Kythereia* (from the island of Κύθηρα) and *Kyprogeneia* (born in Cyprus). Aphrodite, as Hephaistos' wife, is known only in the *Odyssey* 8.266–322. During the Phaeacian games held in honor of Odysseus, the bard Demodocus sings about the adulterous affair between Ares, the god of war, and Aphrodite, the goddess of love. When Ares goes "to the house of the famous Hephaistos, eager for the love of

Bodi_9781666979138_C007.indd 217 7/14/2026 10:32:05 PM

fair-crowned Kythereia," the lovers caught in *flagrante delicto* become imprisoned in "forged bonds" by the smithing god Hephaistos. Herodotus attributes to the Phoenicians the building of a temple to Aphrodite on the island of Κύθηρα [Kythera]. He posits that the cult of Aphrodite came to Greece from Syria via Cyprus: "for even the temple on Cyprus originated there (that is, from Syria). As for the one on Kythera, it was Phoenicians who founded it, who came from the same land of Syria." (*Histories* 1.105). In West's opinion (1997: 57), Hesiod's Aphrodite *Kythereia* designates the female partner of the Ugaritic god Kothar, the fertility goddesses *Kōṯarātu* associated with marriage and conception (López-Ruiz 2022: 368). One should recognize the importance of harbor sanctuaries as major meeting points between cultures and vectors of transmission of the stream of tradition. The Greek Aphrodite was identified with the Semitic Ashtarte-Asherah-*ʾṯrt* in their roles as mother goddesses and maritime protectors (López-Ruiz 2021: 187). The cult of Asherah-*ʾṯrt* has connections with the sea. Her full title is *rbt ʾṯrt ym* "Great (Lady) Athirat of the Sea" (Hadley 2000: 40, with references). She also has a servant called *dgy,* which could be rendered as "fisherman." Philo of Byblos (64–141 CE), who wrote in Greek, describes Tyre as the city of "*Astarte megiste*," or "great Astarte," which is a calque of Phoenician *rbt* "great (lady)" (Bonnet 2013: 215). Phoenician sailors and merchants from Tyre reached the Greek island of Cythera. Having successfully crossed the Mediterranean, they thanked their goddess Ashtarte for the safe passage by building her a sanctuary. For the local Hellenic population, the sanctuary became associated with Aphrodite, another maritime goddess.

Because of the double-curved shape of the composite bow, stringing it required special skill and great strength in the archer. When they go into detail, the descriptions of the Homeric bards point to the Asiatic composite bow, which was foreign to Greece proper, suggesting an incomplete understanding of the poet's part.

> The most detailed passage is the description of Pandarus' bow in *Iliad* IV 105ff. It is made from the horns of a wild goat, sixteen hands across, "which a horn-craftsman has worked over and fitted together, smoothing off the whole job and putting on a tip of gold." Neither here nor in the description of Odysseus' great bow (also made of horn) in *Odyssey* XXI, does Homer show awareness that a composite bow was not solid horn, but was made by letting strips of horn into a groove on the inner side of a wooden bow-stave, while dry sinew was molded on to the outside (Snodgrass 1999: 39).

He repeats the assessment that Hilda Lorimer (1950: 290) made, "Homer's account of his bow (4.105ff.) has a spacious appearance of detailed precision which does not survive examination." Furthermore, according to Burkert (2001: 74; 79), the entire contest gives the impression of being somewhat foreign to the Homeric bards, with the exact procedure of the bow and the axes not fully understood. The bards responsible for the poem in *Odyssey* 21 would have inherited an older orally transmitted tradition influenced by the Egyptian royal topos of the Pharaohs shooting the arrows and piercing the copper ingot. When the transition between the Late Bronze Age and the Iron Age occurred, it was difficult to imagine an arrow piercing an iron metal plate or axe.

Bodi_9781666979138_C007.indd 218 7/14/2026 10:32:05 PM

Therefore, in the course of the stream of tradition, the bards adapted the competition to the conditions of their time, and instead of copper ingots, they mentioned "iron" (σιδήριον) as the predominant metal in use. However, the repeated phrases about "piercing the iron" (διοϊστεύσειν τε σιδήρου) (*Odyssey* 19.587; 21.97, 114, 127, 328) still echo the original tradition that was no longer understood (Morris 1989a: 46).

The Egyptian royal topos could have reached the Ionian Greeks through the Hurrians and the Hittites, who also seem to have provided the knowledge of the composite bow to Egypt. The thirteenth-century BCE Ugaritic *Aqhat Epic*, enumerating the details for the construction of a composite bow, may have provided some elements for Odysseus's bow. The presence of a composite bow in the *Odyssey* indicates foreign influence, as this type of bow is not native to the Greeks. The iconographic representation on a seal of Ramesses II found at Canaanite Beth-Shean also implies the possible visual transmission of the topos. The latter merits some consideration since a double-headed axe resembles an oxhide copper ingot. The Mediterranean maritime trade of copper oxhide ingots connecting Crete, Asia Minor, Ugarit, and Egypt could have contributed to the spread of the stream of tradition of the Egyptian royal topos.

7.3. Masculine-Feminine Symbols in Ugaritic, Hebrew, Hittite, and Greek Texts

The contest with bow and arrows for the hand of a woman in *Odyssey* 21 carries symbolic meaning. The bow is the symbol of masculinity and virility. The bow and the spindle, standing for male and female gender, are common to the ancient Near East and Greece and are part of the same stream of tradition.

In the Ugaritic *Aqhat Epic*, Aqhat's birth is attributed to Baal's petitioning the god El on Danel's behalf for a royal heir. The young man's accession to adulthood is signified in the story by the gift his father Danel makes to him of a legendary composite bow, accompanied by advice to guide his conduct as a huntsman (Husser 2013: 101). The acquisition of the bow is tangible evidence of Aqhat's "manhood" as an "expert warrior" (*mhr*) and "food provider" (*ṣd*) as a hunter. Anat, characterized as *batulatu* "Virgin," used over fifty times and reserved uniquely for her in Ugaritic texts, resolves to murder Aqhat to obtain his hunting bow. Anat's longing (*ṭṣb*) for Aqhat's bow (*qšt*) has blatant sexual associations (Paul 2005: 306 n. 40). The bow can be a phallic signifier in ancient Near Eastern literature and art (Asante 2017: 61). Aqhat has denied her the bow partially because bows and hunting belong to men, not women (KTU 1.17 vi:39–40 1.18 iv). The objects symbolizing masculine and feminine domains associated with the "bow" for men and "loom and distaff" with women provide a striking parallel to Aqhat's rejoinder to Anat as found in the *Odyssey* 21.350–54. Before the competition with Odysseus's bow, which Penelope imposed on her 108 suitors, Telemachus tells his mother to retire to her chamber, this contest not being appropriate for her to watch: "But go back to your room and devote more care to your own work, weaving and spinning, the loom (*histos*) and the distaff (*ēlakatē*), bidding your handmaids busy themselves with their labor; the men will attend to the

Bodi_9781666979138_C007.indd 219 7/14/2026 10:32:05 PM

bow (*tokson*) now, all of them (*tokson d'andressi melēsei pasi*). I above all, since mine is the rule of the house" (Merrill 2002: 366).

Whereas in (*Enūma eliš* 4 35, 36, 38), Marduk defeats Tiamat with his bow, in a cultic commentary, he pierces her with his penis (*ušāru*), equating "bow" with "penis" (Parpola 1997: xci n. 114, SAA 9). In Northern Syria, one finds a Sumerian birth incantation found at Ebla where gender-specific symbolic objects are associated with the female and male child: "If it is female, spindle (and) needle may she (the mid-wife) bring out (munus bí-me-a bala tab ḫé-ta-è); If it is male, throwing stick (and) weapon may she bring out (nita bí-me-a illar tukul ḫé-ta-[è])" (Cunningham 1997: 33). The Sumerian dictionary (ePSD) points out that either (ĝeš illar) or simply (illar) may designate a "bow," which might be more appropriate than "throwing stick." The spindle, usually (ĝeš bal), is here also written without the determinative. This Ebla incantation provides one of the earliest examples of a gender-specific topos.

In the Hebrew Bible, Job recalls better days when he enjoyed "fresh vigor" and "his bow (*qšt*) ever new in his hand" (Job 29:20; Paul 2005: 306). In his present sickness, referring to his previous better times with his bow implies that he has become impotent and is losing his virility. The wisdom sayings of Ben Sira castigate the wanton woman who will squat before any tent peg, that is, waiting for any man who would like to pick her up and open her quiver to his arrow. "As a thirsty traveler with an eager mouth drinks from any water he finds (a metaphor for illicit relations), so she sits down before every tent peg and opens her quiver for every arrow" (Sir 26:12). In Ps 127:4–5, arrows stand for the sons of one's youth: "Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the sons of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them" (Brettler 2017: 217). The Sumerian word for "quiver" (mar-uru$_5$) is a metaphor for "vagina" (Wiggermann 2010: 410).

In the ancient Near East, an impotent man or a barren woman might undergo a ritual to restore their sexuality and reproductive powers. Such rituals would involve the use of symbols for masculinity or femininity. The symbols for virile manhood were the bow and arrow, and those of womanhood were the spindle and distaff. It seems plausible, therefore, that the task set before Penelope's suitors of stringing and drawing Odysseus' powerful bow was not only a test of their physical strength but also symbolized their ability to sire further children with her.

Similar symbolism is found in the Hebrew and Hittite texts. The spindle (*pelek* and *kîšôr*) is referred to in Prov 31:19. In 2 Sam 3:29, David curses his General Joab and his male descendants, dooming them to the loss of their virility, aggressiveness, and warrior powers by becoming those "who hold the spindle (*maḥăzîq bappelek*)." This is a stereotypical curse in the ancient Near East. *The Ritual and Prayer to Ištar of Nineveh* (KBo 2.9+ I 25–30; CTH 716) is designed to destroy the aggressive, virile power and military capability of the enemy troops. In the prayer to Ištar, one asks to "take from (their) men masculinity, prowess, robust health, swords(?), battle-axes, bows, arrows, and dagger(s)! And bring them to Hatti! Place in their hands the spindle and mirror of a woman! Dress them as women!" (Hoffner 1966: 321). These are stereotypical pronouncements, like the Hittite self-imprecatory oath, where inversion is invoked if a treaty oath is broken: "Whoever breaks these oaths . . . let these oaths change him from man to a woman! Let him change his troops into women . . . Let them break the bows,

Bodi_9781666979138_C007.indd 220 7/14/2026 10:32:05 PM

arrows, (and) weapons in their hands and let them put in their hands distaff and mirror" (Washington 1998: 197).

For a king, the capacity to string the bow stands for his hero status and competence to rule. King Assurbanipal states in his royal inscriptions: "I hold the bow (and) let fly the arrow, as an appropriate symbol of my heroism ([*ta*]*mḫāk tilpānu uṣu ušapraš simat qurrādūti*)" (VAB 256 i 21; *CAD* T: 415). The bow of the warrior is the extension of himself. As the warrior's basic tool, the bow becomes his "extra-somatic body part" (Smith 2014: 133). In *Histories* 3.30, Herodotus mentions the jealousy of Cambyses II (ca. 530–522 BCE), son of Cyrus the Great, toward his younger brother Smerdis (S. West 2003: 421 n. 23). The latter was the only one who succeeded in stringing the Ethiopian bow for the space of two fingers, while Cambyses failed the test. Prompted by an ominous dream, Cambyses ordered the assassination of his brother, fearing that the latter would take the throne away from him and be the sole ruler of the Persian Empire. Herodotus' legendary report expresses the symbolism of the bow: the one who succeeds in stringing the bow will potentially become the supreme ruler. Indeed, Cambyses' reign did not last long.

8. The Semitic Origin of the Greek Alphabet

Translating written texts by multilingual scribes was another major vector of transmission. Before the Greeks adopted alphabetic script, the Aegean world already knew and practiced four types of writing in the Bronze Age: Cretan hieroglyphic pictograms (e.g., the Phaistos disk), Linear A, Linear B, and Cypro-Minoan script (Driessen 1992: 5–6, with the number of tablets found). Except for Linear B, deciphered by the cumulative efforts of Emmett Bennett, Alice Kober, Michael Ventris, and John Chadwick in 1952, the other three scripts cannot be considered deciphered (Chadwick 1960: 1–4). The decipherment of Linear B firmly established Mycenaean as the earliest documented variety of Greek (Horrocks 2010: 10). The Mycenaean Greek of Knossos (Crete) and Pylos (on the Peloponnese) was immediately recognized to have stronger affinities with Arcadian and Cypriot than any other classical dialect, inviting a discussion of dialect geography (Scarborough 2023: 15).

Archaeologists excavating at the site of Tiryns, a city on mainland Greece, which served as a place of external trade for the region, have found evidence of a specific group of Cypriots living on the Peloponnese during the late thirteenth-century BCE. The finds indicate a special commercial relationship between Tiryns and the island of Cyprus during this period (metalworking, protective bronze armor, ceramics, or faience). At this time, various Mycenaean transport clay containers used for shipping wine, olive oil, and other commodities were marked with Cypro-Minoan signs before they were fired in a kiln (Cline 2014: 88). International trade, accounting, and exchange along the Mediterranean seashore favored the transmission of writing and the spread of literacy.

Already in the mid-second millennium BCE, the Mycenaean Greeks knew Linear A and B, which they borrowed from the Minoans and used for accounting in

Bodi_9781666979138_C007.indd 221 7/14/2026 10:32:05 PM

commercial transactions (Demand 2006: 62–73). About 80 percent of the clay vessels found in the Minoan harbor town of Kommos, on Crete, stem from Mycenae (Tomlinson, Rutter, and Hoffman 2010: 191). In Malia on the island of Crete, the hieroglyphic script and Linear A coexisted at the same time (Farnoux 1992: 204). Without floundering in the chimera of the Homeric-Mycenaean royal system, scholars note that to capture the sense of a Mycenaean term concerning social hierarchy, one often has recourse to Homeric Greek (Carlier 1984: 4). The title *wa-na-ka* attested on tablets from Cnossos, Pylos, and Thebes, corresponds to ancient Greek Ϝάναξ (*wanax*) "tribal leader, lord" (see Driessen 1992: 20; Horrocks 1997: 197, for other terms).[8] A comparison of visual images with poetic themes, motifs, formulas, and episodes makes the miniature frescoes found at Akrotiri, on the island of Thera (Santorini), and elsewhere, an early and important document in the prehistory of the Greek epic tradition and the evolution of the narrative art (Morris 1989b: 511–35). It would confirm that some poems or parts of poems in the Homeric Epic drew their poetic prehistory both from Asia Minor as "Ionian epic" (West 1988: 151) with probable Hurro-Hittite influence as well as from the Mycenaean poetic tradition, depending on where the bards who composed or performed the rhapsody came from.

The remains of three Late Bronze Age shipwrecks were discovered in the Mediterranean Sea: at Gelidonya (in 1960), Uluburun (from 1984 to 1994), both off the Turkish coast, and the most recent one off the coast of northern Israel (2024). Uluburun's chief cargo was metal, copper, and tin ingots, the main items linking Greece and the Levant, while less numerous were gold scarabs and vessels, luxury materials such as ivory, cobalt (blue glass), lapis lazuli, and containers of cosmetic and medicinal substances. Such trinkets correspond to the ἀθύρματα "knick-knacks" which Homer's Phoenicians brought to Greece (*Odyssey* 15.415–416). But Levantine trade with the Aegean involved an even more important cargo: human talent such as artisans, artists, merchants, and musicians, all important vectors of transmission (Morris 1989a: 42).

Using the findings from the first two shipwrecks, scholars assumed that commerce in the Late Bronze Age was accomplished by safely flitting from port to port, hugging the coastline within eye contact with the shore. The last shipwrecked cargo was discovered in 2024, about fifty-six miles off the coast of northern Israel. It was the first time to find a shipwreck at such a great distance from the coast with no line of sight to any land. It suggests a seagoing exchange conducted out of Syria and Canaan to southern Cyprus, Crete, and other Greek islands. Two clay jars known as Canaanite amphorae, designated to hold, among other things, honey, olive oil, and resin from the *Pistacia atlantica* tree, indicate that the merchant vessel sank sometime between 1400 and 1300 BCE. Such resin was used to preserve wine and, in Egypt, as incense and as a varnish on the funerary equipment of the New Kingdom era. The first two were found relatively close to the Turkish coast and were accessible using standard diving gear.

The fourteenth-century BCE in the Eastern Mediterranean was a dynamic period of international trade. Along the coast of the Levant were the great Canaanite

[8] The *digamma* is the sixth letter of the early Greek alphabet (Ϝ) pronounced as "w." This semivowel became obsolete before the classical period.

Bodi_9781666979138_C007.indd 222 7/14/2026 10:32:05 PM

commercial centers, which dispensed strategic and utilitarian raw materials and manufactured goods to the Aegean region and beyond. Chief exports were copper and tin, which, when mixed, would make bronze to manufacture stronger farming tools that increased agricultural yield and produce arms and armor to equip entire armies.

The Cape Gelidonya shipwreck (ca. 1200 BCE) revealed the remains of a ship that was on a modest trading venture, involved in local coastal cabotage, or opportunistic trade, where goods and services were purchased and sold at ports for quick profit. It marked trading routes between the Levant, Cyprus, and places in the eastern Aegean Sea. Preserved cargo included almost a ton of metal, mostly in the form of thirty-four flat, four-handled oxhide ingots of nearly pure copper, averaging twenty-five kilograms in weight (Bass 2010: 800). The ingots came from the Solea region in Cyprus. The sixty-odd pan-balance weights were based on Near Eastern standards such as the *qedet*, *nesef*, and *shekel*. These discoveries led to the conclusion that the ship was probably Syrian, Canaanite, or Proto-Phoenician. The frequent mention of Phoenician mariners and metalworkers in the *Odyssey* was usually dated to the eighth-century BCE. It was believed that these famous Semitic seafarers did not become active until the later Iron Age. However, the Gelidonya shipwreck alters that picture, making this type of trade probable by the Late Bronze Age (Bass 1997: 71).

The Uluburun shipwreck began to be excavated in 1984 near Bodrum, Turkey, dating from the fourteenth-century BCE. Although the nationality of the ship is unknown, it has been deduced that it was traveling from the Eastern Mediterranean westward when it sank. Roughly, it was used to trade between Egypt and Mycenae. The ship represented long-distance interregional elite exchange. Besides huge amounts of oxhide-shaped ingots of copper, tin, and a variety of luxury items for trade, it also revealed a wooden diptych found in the sediment of one of the large pithoi (KW 252). This discovery has obvious importance for the use of literacy in the Bronze Age in connection with international trade. The diptych consists of two rectangular wooden leaves, 6.2 cm wide by 9.5 cm high, joined by a three-piece, cylindrical ivory hinge (Bass, Pulak, Collon, and Weinstein 1989: 10, fig. 19). The wooden writing boards found in the Uluburun shipwreck are five centuries earlier than the first ones found in excavations in Mesopotamia. The earliest previously known writing tablets made out of more luxurious ivory or out of wood date from Neo-Assyrian times. They were found at Nimrud (Kalḫu), dating from the late eighth-century BCE, and were preserved in silt below the water level in a well in Aššur-naṣir-pal's palace (Mallowan 1954: 98; Wiseman 1955: 3). On the walnut Nimrud diptych, traces of beeswax bearing cuneiform inscriptions were preserved. Analysis of the beeswax showed it to be mixed with about 25 percent orpiment (orange-yellow arsenic sulfide). This may explain why an amphora of orpiment was found on the Uluburun cargo ship. The addition of mineral fillers is said to improve the quality of the wax as a writing medium. One may deduce that the Uluburun wooden diptych was similarly covered with beeswax and was used for inventorying the transported goods. The wooden writing boards are frequently mentioned in Hittite texts, e.g., "the wood scribe of the army" (^{LÚ}DUB.SAR. ĜEŠ. KARAŠ) (Van den Hout 2010: 262). Waal (2011: 21) argues for the existence of

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two scribal traditions in Hittite Anatolia: a hieroglyphic tradition of wooden writing boards used for private daily and economic records, and Hittite cuneiform tablets reserved for palace administration. The quantity of orpiment on the Uluburun ship, therefore, suggested that more writing tablets were on board (Bass 1997: 91).

9. The Topos of the Writing Board—Sargon, Bellerophōn, and Uriah the Hittite

The Greek term (δέλτος) for the "writing board, document" is of Semitic origin as confirmed by Ugaritic, Hebrew (Jer 36:23 *delet*), and Phoenician cognates (*DNWSI* 1995 1: 250). It might have originated from the thirteenth-century BCE Ugaritic term *dlt* mentioned on an exercise tablet (KTU 5.7). Virolleaud's idea (1951: 24) of an exercise tablet is preferable to Bordreuil's argument (2006: 279) that Ugaritic *dlt* means "palace door." The latter is expressed specifically with *dlt bt* (KTU 6.66; Tropper 2000: 570 "Torbereich des Palastes"). It appears in Hebrew in the sixth-century BCE Lachish ostracon 4.3 *ktbty ʿl hdlt* "I have written on a writing board" (KAI 194.3), as well as in Phoenician *dlt* (bronze) "tablet" (KAI 43.12). In Akkadian, there is another term for "writing board" (*lēʾu*) infilled with wax, also found in Hebrew (*luăḥ*) (Isa 30:8 to inscribe a prophecy // *seper*, Pr 3:3; 7:3; Jer 17:1 metaphor "tablet of the heart" *luaḥ libbām*) (Burkert 1992: 30). Rosén (1979:16–17) points out that Akkadian nouns *daltum* "closure, door" is frequently employed together with the verb *edēlum* "to close, to lock" as a *figura etymologica* "to close up firmly" found in *Gilg.* 10 i 15, 20, 33: "When the tavern-keeper saw him (Gilgameš), she locked her door, she locked her gate, she shot the bolts – what did you see that you have locked your door, locked your gate, shot the bolts (*ēmuršuma sābītu e-te-dil* [*dalassa*] *bābša e-te-dil-ma e-te-dil* [*sikkūrī*] . . . *minâ tāmuri* [*ša te-di-li dalakti*] *bābki te-di-l*[*i te-di-li sikkū*]*rī*)" (*CAD* E: 25).

One may deduce that the term (δέλτος) initially stood for a diptych used for sending correspondence, also called *sēper* "book, missive" (related to Akkadian *šapārum* "to send"). The diptych could be folded, closed, and locked. The sending of a closed letter is the main motif of the oldest Greek account relating to the personal use of writing associated with Bellerophōn's episode in the *Iliad*. The Uluburun wooden diptych demonstrates that Homer's mention of Bellerophōn carrying inscribed folded tablets in the *Iliad* 6.169 (γράψας ἐν πίνακι πτυκτῷ "writing on folded tablets") was not anachronistic, but was well in use centuries before Homeric times. Two additional features connect this reference to a stream of tradition stemming from the ancient Near East.

First, the passage reflects a literary topos found in the Sumerian *Sargon Legend*. The young Bellerophōn refuses the adulterous advances of Proitos's wife, Anteia. He is slandered by her (as Joseph in Gen 39:7–20) and sent away carrying the letter with his death sentence. King Proitos from Argos on the Peloponnese, prompted by his duplicitous wife, sends him away to Lycia in Asia Minor, handing him folded tablets with a message asking his father-in-law to kill Bellerophōn for the supposed outrage

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(*Iliad* 6.156–70).[9] In the *Sumerian Sargon Legend*, the future founder of the Dynasty of Akkad, Sargon the Great, appears as the chief cupbearer of Ur-Zababa, king of Kish. The cupbearer was a high official supervising food and drink for the king and his court. Inanna herself has been close at hand since Sargon's birth and has been leading his destiny. She appears to him in a terrifying dream, in which she covers him with blood. This action saves his life since a person polluted by blood is not allowed to enter the sacred ground. In the first attempt at his life, Sargon was sent to meet the royal smith who received the king's order to kill him. Because of this issue of blood pollution, he met him outside, in front of the temple workshop (Foster 2016: 4). However, according to (ETCSL c.2.1.4. *Sargon and Ur-Zababa*), in the dream, it is Ur-Zababa who drowns in blood. When Sargon tells the king this premonitory dream, Ur-Zababa understands that his cupbearer will kill him. Fearing for his rule, Ur-Zababa plans to eliminate Sargon. In the second attempt at his life, he sends him away as a courier with a message to Lugal-zagesi, king of Uruk, to execute Sargon: "In those days, writing on clay certainly existed, but enveloping tablets did not exist. King Ur-Zababa, for Sargon, creature of the gods, with writing on a clay—a thing which would cause his own death–he dispatched it to Lugal-zagesi in Uruk" (*Sargon Legend*, lines 53–56), (Alster 1987: 171; Cooper and Heimpel 1983: 67–82; Foster 2016: 266).

The intention was to let Lugal-zagesi kill Sargon so that Ur-Zababa did not have to shed his blood. The procedure corresponds to the one used by King David to eliminate Uriah the Hittite in 2 Sam 11:14–21 (Bodi 2010a: 66–7). Sargon was clever enough to break the envelope, read the fateful letter, and escape death. The end of the *Sumerian Sargon Legend* is missing. Until the missing part is found, one has to rely on folklore parallels to reconstruct the plot. Sargon might have changed the meaning of the letter—like Prince Hamlet of Denmark, who was dispatched to the king of England with a letter instructing the king to put Hamlet to death—and Lugal-zagesi probably killed someone else instead of Sargon (Alster 1990: 70). Afanasjeva's interpretation is similar. The Akkadian gloss *ṭuppa išṭur-šu ša šumūt ramānī-šu* means that "he writes about the one to be killed" (the bearer), "What is meant is not Ur-zababa, as Cooper and Heimpel understand it, but Sargon himself" (Afanasjeva 1987: 243).

One may speak of the existence of a topos in a definite stream of tradition connecting Sumerian, Hebrew, Greek, and European literary compositions: Sargon, Uriah, Bellerophōn, and Hamlet. Furthermore, Sargon's premonitory dream, which comes to pass, was compared with Joseph's premonitory dreams. Cooper (1985: 38) attempted to explain the similarity of the tale when the contact between people cannot be proven historically by suggesting the existence of folkloristic "building blocks" in ancient Near Eastern literature. First, in the *Sumerian Sargon Legend*, Inanna repeatedly shields her protégé, herself remaining invisible but sparing Sargon's life from those who want to kill him. This feature corresponds to the action of the goddess Aphrodite, who protects Paris from being killed by Menelaos on the battlefield during their single combat. She remains invisible while she hides him behind a thick cloud from the sight of the

[9] The *Iliad* 6.200–202, makes Bellerophōn live, toward the end of his life, in the Aleian Plain, in Lowland Cilicia, located in Asia Minor, the old homeland of the Danaans-Danunians.

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surrounding warriors and brings him to the bedchamber where Helen waits for him (*Iliad* 6.380–382). Such similarities are more than just folkloristic building blocks. They could be explained as the result of the dialectic interplay between the *Traditionsgeschichte* and *Überlieferungsgeschichte*, where Mesopotamian bards transmitted elements of their rich repertoire of epic poetry to the North Syrian, Hurrian, Hittite, and pre-Hellenic rhapsodes.

Second, the name Bellerophōn is not Greek. It has been explained as being of a Semitic coinage, reflecting the theophoric *Bʿl-rpʿn* [*Beʿel Rāphôn*] "Baal the healer," from the root (רפא) (Astour 1967: 226–27; Frei 1993: 39–65). For *Bʿl*, pronounced as *Be´el*, one may compare EA 37:26 *Be-el-ša-*[*am-ma*]. Moreover, a name formation in *–n* from the root √*rpʾ* is attested in West Semitic, the Ugaritic personal name *Rpan*, in Akkadian transcription ^{m}*Rap-a-na* (RS 16.363:11´), and Phoenician pronounced **Rophʾôn*. There are comparable Ugaritic divine names ending in *–n* like *Lṯpn, Škmn*, and personal names like *Ubln, B´ln, Brqn, Ḫrpn, Ktmn*, or like Hebrew names *Naḥšôn, Šimšôn*. The double lambda or geminated consonants are frequent in the Greek rendering of Semitic names. In Gen 14:2 (בלע) becomes Βαλλά, Akkadian *Iapu*, Hebrew יפו, appears with a geminated *p* in Greek, Ιοππα. According to Cline (1997: 197), Bellerophōn in the *Iliad* 6.178–240 is a Greek hero who is almost certainly of pre-Trojan date.

Concerning the term *rpʾ* "to heal," one may mention the notion of divinized ancestors as great figures of bygone days who could act as healers and were celebrated in epic songs, influencing the Greeks' depiction of their heroes from the distant past. Hesiod's Ages of Man myth, told in the *Works and Days* 109, uses the term *meropes*, referring to men of the bygone past. The *meropes anthrōpoi* (in plural) are part of the race from the initial golden age, hence powerful and probably of gigantic size. The legendary Danel in the Aqhat Epic (KTU 1.17) is called *mt rpʾi* "man of healing," and the Greek and Ugaritic expressions seem to correspond (Wyatt 2006: 250). The word comes from West Semitic *měrappê* "healer," related to the Ugaritic *rapaʾūma* and Hebrew *rĕpāʾîm* "divine ancestors." They represent heroic royal ancestors, counselors, and healers in the West Semitic imagination in the Late Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age (Annus 1999: 13–30; Bachvarova 2016a: 285). Meropis is the second name of the Greek island of Cos, the birthplace of the legendary Greek physician and expert in healing arts, Hippocrates. The island is located 24 kilometers from Bodrum, Turkey, in Anatolia, and was famous for its temple Asclepieion, of the healing god. Merops is the oldest mythical king of Cos (Astour 1967: 245). The word *Meropi*(*o*)*s* occurs already on a Mycenaean tablet as a personal name, *Marapijo* (KN Dd 1296B). The Phoenician inscriptions of Tabnit (KAI 13.8) and the inscription of Eshmunazor, king of Sidon (KAI 14.8), refer to the departed as *rpʾm*. A Punic inscription from the first-century CE establishes a correspondence between *lʾl*[*nm*] *ʾrʾpʾm* and Latin *D*(*is*) *M*(*anibus*) *Sac*(*rum*) "sacred divine manes" (KAI 117.1). The divinized ancestors, departed members of the royal house, can provide advice when consulted with appropriate divinatory techniques, and can heal and protect their descendants. The Hebrew term *marpēʾ* "healing cure, remedy" is related to the therapeutic effect of wise words, or counsel (Prov 4:2–22; 15:4).

Bodi_9781666979138_C007.indd 226 7/14/2026 10:32:05 PM

The gigantic King Og, who was the "last of the Rephaim" (Deut 3:11; Jos 12:4), and recorded in the lost Book of the Wars of Yahweh (*seper milḥamôt Yhwh*), is paralleled both by "Rp'u, King of Eternity" (*rp'u mlk ʿlm*, RS 24.252) in Ugarit, and by the legendary founder of Boeotia, gigantic King Ogygos, survivor of the Flood. Both kings are depicted as enemies of Yahweh and Zeus, respectively (Ps 135:11; Num 21:33–35). Both Og of Bashan and Rp'u, King of Eternity, lived in Ashtheroth and Edrei (KTU 1.108, 2–3; Noegel 1998: 414–15). This last example confirms the existence of legendary, epic material shared by various cultures of the Mediterranean seashore. Maritime navigation, land travel and trade, and the exchange of trained musicians and rhapsodes between rulers could have been vectors of transmission, facilitating the spreading of common topoi and "mythologems," the smallest significant units of a myth as basic common elements of several myths.

10. The "Megiddo Homer"

The purpose of the following section is to show that the two basic motifs or topoi: "love and war" as elaborated in the Homeric Epic, the *Iliad*, are already present in Levantine iconography, on the Late Bronze Palestinian ivory plaque. Liebowitz (1980: 165) points out that the artist who incised the Megiddo ivory reduced the theme to two critical episodes: the concluding military cycle and the feast scene after the victory. The well-known ivory plaque from Megiddo, dating from the thirteenth- to twelfth-century BCE, displays the two motifs around a central figure, a lyre-holding singer. The ivory plaque attributes the central role to a singer, who separates the right scene from the left. It can be seen as an iconographic expression of the key elements elaborated in the Homeric Epic, the *Iliad*: the military exploit for the love of a woman recounted in a song for the feasting elite. What follows is based on the description of the ivory plaque by Keel and Uehlinger (1998: 62–3, Pl. 65), and its interpretation by the Egyptologist Morenz (2019: 237–38). Originally, the ivory plaque could have been used to decorate a royal throne. It was found in the treasury room of the Megiddo palace, Stratum VIIA (Loud 1939: 1, ca. 1350 BCE).

The ivory iconographic representation depicts altogether ten human figures, divided into two main scenes. The figure standing in the chariot on the right corresponds to the king seated on the throne on the left, implying that the same person was depicted in two different roles. The right side of the ivory plaque shows a war scene with a victorious king standing in his chariot, returning from battle (Loud 1939 Pl. 4, 2a and 2b). He is driving before him two captured prisoners, who are bound and walk naked before the horses. The winged solar disk above the horses reminds one that the victorious king fought the battle under the aegis of a deity. The winged solar disk originated in Egypt and spread to the Levant, Assyria, and Anatolia as a sacred royal symbol (Parayre 1990: 269). The single-armed soldier, who marches to the left in front of the prisoners, stands for many soldiers, in a *pars pro toto* representation. The soldier holds a spear and a round shield. The latter was not introduced into the Levant until

Bodi_9781666979138_C007.indd 227 7/14/2026 10:32:05 PM

the fourteenth century (Yadin 1963: 65, 83, 184). The three plants depict the battlefield and correspond to the Egyptian hieroglyph (Morenz 2019: 239).

The left side of this ivory plaque is separated by the central position of a figure holding a lyre and singing, indicated by his slightly open mouth. Morenz (2019: 242, fig. 5) compares the Megiddo singer with another one depicted as a graffito in Wadi el-Hol in Egypt, with an open mouth and a head tilted backwards, indicating that the person is singing. In this iconographic representation, the lyre-holding singer on the Megiddo ivory functions as a central hinge uniting the two scenes. The singer has longer hair than the other men depicted, but shorter than the hair of the princess serving the king. The somewhat longer hair of the epic singer stands for the power, inspiration, and sacrality of the singer, immortalizing the military exploit for posterity (Morenz 2019: 238). Since the singer is without a beard, contrary to all other male figures, it is safe to deduce that the bard is a female.

In opposition to the exterior world of war in the steppe or the field, depicted on the right side of the ivory plaque, stands the inner world of the royal palace on the left side, dominated by a peaceful scene of domestic felicity with a feast. The ruler of Megiddo, probably the king, is seated on a cherub throne. A princess stands in front of the king, handing him a lotus blossom and serving him with a towel. The two doves, one under the king's cherub throne and another behind it, function as iconographic representations of love, doves being the totem bird of the goddess of love, Inanna/Ištar in Mesopotamia and Aphrodite among the Greeks. A series of cultic vessels with dove motifs has been unearthed at Beth-Shean, dating from the thirteenth-century BCE and associated with Astarte, the Canaanite goddess of love (Keel and Winter 1977: 41, 50). The king holds a bowl similar to the ones that servants, standing to the left of the scene, are refilling from a large mixing vessel, probably a wine krater. The combination of these figures points to a banquet. There are two cups shaped like animal heads of a gazelle and a lion located on a stand above the mixing vessel. A drinking cup shaped like a lion's head had been found at Tel Zeror (Keel and Uehlinger 1998: pl. 66c). In another incised ivory plaque coming from Tell el-Farʿah in the south, three women in a row are represented. One woman fills the bowl of the king and hands him a lotus blossom. Behind her, a naked female dancer is depicted, and in the background, behind the dancer, a third woman is playing a flute (Keel and Uehlinger 1998: pl. 68a). "A reason for the apparent introduction of the cycle of military and feast themes for intricate compositions of Palestinian ivories in the Amarna period is not hard to find. The letters from Tell el-Amarna testify that the period was characterized by incessant warfare. Military and feast scenes were thus appropriate reflections of the prevailing situation" (Liebowitz 1980: 169).

In light of this iconographic composition and within the horizon of an anthropological poetics, we are reminded of Homer's *Iliad*, where love and war are central themes of the epic. Both are conveyed through the lyre player on the ivory plaque (Morenz 2019: 239). Megiddo ivory is associated with feast poetry, which thrived in the Late Bronze Age at the royal palace at Megiddo. Heroic epic and victory songs were part of court poetry. The iconography provides the *Sitz im Leben* both for the Levant and the Greek worlds. The lyre-singers were praising the military exploits

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and glorifying the heroic accomplishments of kings as part of court entertainment for rulers and their elite.

From a poetic perspective, the role of the lyre player, a kind of "Megiddo Homer," is particularly pertinent. Based on the context, we can imagine the bard as a singer of love and war. Moreover, the figure of the lyre player has a long tradition in the Levant (Morenz 2019: 240 n. 27).

11. The Probability of the Mycenaean Oral Poetry

To the question of whether the Mycenaeans knew oral poetry, scholars answer in the affirmative. The iconographic studies of Mycenaean-painted frescoes and ivory support the idea that the Minoans and Mycenaeans knew a form of epic poetry. The depictions of musicians on frescoes, as well as the discovery of musical instruments, flutes, and wooden and ivory lyres in Minoan and Mycenaean tombs, confirm the significance of music in these early Greek societies. As is well known, bards singing epic poetry accompanied their long recitations with the sound of a lyre or some other musical instrument. The iconography representing musicians would, therefore, argue in favor of epic poetry sung or declaimed in Mycenaean society (Driessen 1992: 32; Morris 1989b: 511).

After the middle of the second millennium BCE, the Mycenaean Greeks became masters of Crete, the center of Minoan culture and civilization, which had already developed exchanges with Egypt and the Levant. With the various musical instruments, they may have assimilated something from Minoan songs and epic narratives about gods reflecting Eastern traditions (West 1995: 33).

However, both Minoan-Mycenaean writing systems, Linear A and B, are syllabic. The date for the adoption of alphabetic writing by the Greeks is still a controversial issue among classicists, while the Semitic background of the Greek alphabet is generally agreed upon. Already Herodotus stated that the Phoenicians brought the knowledge of writing to the Greeks, who adopted their letters to which they added vowels (*Histories* 5.58). The prevalent opinion is that the alphabet was introduced in Greece shortly before the eighth-century BCE. However, a series of scholars argue for the probability of an earlier date. Ugarit has yielded the oldest examples of *abecedaria*, written in alphabetic cuneiform, showing that the *alpha-beta-gamma* order of the Greek alphabet followed the *aleph-bet-gimmel* sequence already established in the thirteenth-century BCE. The ʿIzbet-Ṣarṭah left-to-right *abecedarium* was written in linear script and dates from the twelfth-century BCE. A Greek *abecedarium* was found in Eretria, Euboea, Phrygia, and elsewhere (Janko 2015: 7 n. 46 and 18–20).[10] Through Mediterranean commercial exchange, the proto-Hellenic populations were in contact with their

[10] Aramaic inscriptions of King Hazael of Damascus on two pieces of equine bronze armor, dated by Levantine chronology to ca. 830 BCE, were found at the temple of Apollo at Eretria and at the Haraeum on the island of Samos. These reached Greece as late eighth-century dedications (Janko 2015: 12). The storm god Hadad, identified with Zeus by the Greeks, is considered as having given the victory and booty to Hazael as may be read on a horse's forehead ornament and a horse's blinker.

Bodi_9781666979138_C007.indd 229 7/14/2026 10:32:06 PM

literate neighbors already in the second half of the second millennium BCE. A thirteenth-century BCE West Semitic ivory rod with a cuneiform inscription (not necessarily Ugaritic) was found at Tyrins, on the Peloponnese. It contains numbers and a personal name. Being an object used in commercial transactions, it implies that the Mycenaean merchants could read it (Puech 2012: 330). There are several reasons to view the Proto-Canaanite writing as the probable source of the Greek alphabet, which might have been adopted already around the eleventh-century BCE.

> If one assumes a late transmission, that is, in or after the 9th century BC, it implies that Greeks ignored certain accomplishments of the Phoenicians, such as a fixed direction of writing and standardized letters, but instead turned it into a more primitive script without fixed direction of writing or standardization of letters, hence supposedly coincidentally mimicking the situation in the Proto-Canaanite phase. When the Greeks finally did fix the writing order, it was in the complete opposite direction of that in use by the Phoenicians (Waal 2018: 103).

Waal convincingly argues for an earlier date in the adoption of the Semitic alphabet by the Greeks. The earliest Greek inscriptions were written boustrophedon, in a bi-directional fashion, a manner of writing which is well-attested in West Semitic inscriptions. Moreover, archaic Greek inscriptions show both types of word dividers (a vertical stroke and three dots placed vertically) attested in the early West Semitic inscriptions, as well as a variety of letters and alphabets. The Lachish ewer from the thirteenth-century BCE has word dividers consisting of three vertically placed dots, like the eighth-century BCE Nestor's cup found at Pithekoussai, Ischia, in a Greek colony in Italy.[11] Nestor's cup, the Dipylon inscription from Athens, and the Acesander cup from Methone in central Macedonia, all contain poetic verses in hexameters, indicating a specific use of the Greek script. Furthermore, *Strabo* 6.8 mentions the practice of recording the names of Olympic winners from 776 BCE onward (Waal 2018:102). To these, one should add the archaic Greek inscriptions from Lefkandi; the three-line verse inscription other than the hexameter from Eretria in Euboea, dating to 775–750 BCE, as well as from two places on the fringes of the Greek-speaking world, Gordion in Phrygia and Gabii near Rome (825–770 BCE) (Janko 2015: 23). The *Iliad* was written in hexametric epos, and dactylic hexameter and some form of verbal stereotyping are already found in Linear B. Ruijgh (1998: 658) argues for the invention of the Greek alphabet around 1000 BCE. Puech (1986: 162) has adopted a more balanced view, arguing that the Semitic alphabet was adopted by some Greeks in the eighth century, while in other parts of the Aegean, it was adopted in the twelfth and eleventh centuries BCE.

The Homeric Epic shows borrowing from earlier traditions. When Odysseus sails away from Circe's island in Book 12, she tells him he must avoid the Clashing Rocks on either side of the cliffs that keep crushing ships that try to pass between them. Circe says that the only ship that ever got safely past them was the *Argo*. The Argonaut Jason

[11] The earliest Aramaic bilingual inscription from Tell Fekherye (ca. 850 BCE) in Northern Syria uses two vertical dots, sometimes three, as word dividers (*COS* 2.34, Millard 2003: 153).

Bodi_9781666979138_C007.indd 230 7/14/2026 10:32:06 PM

sailed homeward in it, having stolen the Golden Fleece. The story of the Argonauts was the only one in which the Clashing Rocks (*Symplegades*) were previously mentioned. One can deduce that the bards responsible for the *Odyssey* were borrowing this motif from an earlier story. This is comparable to the borrowing, creative adaptation, and insertion of the Old Babylonian *Atraḫasīs* flood story (tablets 1 and 2), constituting the eleventh tablet of the canonical *Epic of Gilgameš* (ca. 1200 BCE). Other adventures in the Homeric Epic also have parallels in the voyage of the Argonauts. It is, therefore, plausible that the bards responsible for the Homeric Epic borrowed them, too, from the same lost poem about *Argo*'s voyage (West 2011: 387). Homeric Epic reflects the Heroic Age intruding into the eighth-century BCE composition.

The growth of poetic traditions found in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* followed a gradual development from an original oral stage that might have begun in the tenth-century BCE, in the form of short, separate narratives or songs, respectively. They were progressively written down some centuries later, when the Greek script was sufficiently developed and generalized. For the Homeric Epic, the period of compiling originally oral songs into a written form and a larger composition began at the end of the eighth century and lasted probably until the sixth-century BCE.

12. Homeric Greek and Biblical Hebrew as Artificial Languages

One can draw parallels between the development of the Homeric Epic and the biblical corpus. Both domains show similar growth, literary issues, and mixing of dialects. "The language of Homeric poetry is a system that integrates and thus preserves the following dialects: dominant Ionic integrated with recessive Aeolic integrated with residual Mycenaean" (Nagy 2011: 149; Horrocks 1987: 269–94). Moreover, even in the late classical and early Hellenistic periods, down to about 150 BCE, the text of the Homeric poems was still unstable. Quotations by older writers and the oldest fragments of manuscripts of Homer show that there were a lot of minor variations among texts in circulation, not seriously affecting the sense, but with differences in wording, the substitution of one phrase with another, and occasionally additional verses of an inorganic nature (Nagy 1999: 296–300). The hybrid nature of the Homeric language, mixed use of the Aeolian particle κεν and the Ionian ἄν, the observance of the *digamma* without being indicated with the letter (Ϝ), is seen as the outcome of a long development in Ionian as well as Aeolian dialects, both reflected in the Homeric Epic (Teodorsson 2006: 169; Nagy 1995: 163–79).

> The material world described in the Homeric poems seems closely parallel to the linguistic world. Just as there are Bronze Age linguistic phenomena, which have been continued because they perform a useful function, and perhaps because their archaic overtones are seen by the poet and the audience as part of what an epic poem should contain, so also objects are described which are almost certainly relics of the Bronze Age, and were not to be found in the eighth century BCE. Such

Bodi_9781666979138_C007.indd 231 7/14/2026 10:32:06 PM

> things as the silver-riveted sword (*Iliad* 2.45), boars' tusk helmet (*Iliad* 10.261–65), and "shield like a tower" (*Iliad* 7.219; 11.485; 17.128 always carried by Aias), all seem to go back to the Mycenaean world, if not before (Osborn 2009: 175).

The rhythmic form of Homeric verses, using a succession of long and short syllables, of a rather cumbersome type for the Greek language, makes it probable that the language went back to pre-Hellenic times. The systematic use of stereotypical formulas presupposes a well-developed technique that has existed for a long time. The Homeric language consists of a mixture borrowed from all dialects, in particular Aeolic and Ionian, with the exclusion of the Doric, which might be intentional (Miller 2014). Since the Doric invasion destroyed the ancient civilization of Mycenae or of the "Achaeans," to use words in the Doric dialect would be a subversion of the heroic spirit of the Homeric Epic. "In this sense, it is true to affirm that the Homeric language was never spoken and that it is an artificial language" (Robert 1949: 4). According to older explanations, the Homeric Epic arose in the regions where various dialects constitutive of the Aeolic and Ionian were spoken, reflecting a *Kunstsprache* (Meister 1921: 235).[12] Recent positions continue to maintain that Homeric Epic reflects an artificial, and artistically elaborated poetic language, which, due to metrical constraints of epic hexameter, employs both Aeolian and Ionian words (Nagy 2011: 133–79; Van Beek 2022: 255). An example is πεμπώβολα "having five prongs" (*Iliad* 1.462) showing πέμπε "five," to be contrasted with Ionic πέντε "five." Nagy speaks of the "Aeolic default," which he defines in the following way: "In Homeric diction, if an Ionic form is available to fit into a metrical position that is already occupied by an Aeolic form, then the Aeolic form is replaced by the corresponding Ionic form, but the Aeolic form is preserved wherever no metrically equivalent Ionic form is available. Homeric diction defaults to Aeolic forms when it has no metrically equivalent forms in Ionic" (Nagy 2011: 135, 143).

The comparable situation with northern and southern dialects reflected in the biblical Hebrew made Ullendorff (1971: 245) ask the provocative question of whether the Hebrew of the Masoretic text ever existed: "There is little discernible development in the Masoretic pronunciation of Hebrew, and the vocalism applied to the consonants makes Deborah talk in very much the same manner as Qoheleth or Daniel or Esther almost a thousand years later. It is clear, therefore, that this language is the result of a good deal of subsequent doctoring, of leveling and compromise, resulting in a hybrid language rather than a proper κοινή."

Nevertheless, the linguistic principle of dialect geography, manifest in all languages, applies both to Homeric Greek and biblical Hebrew, and scholars are able to identify the remains of specific dialects. In Hebrew, one can recognize a series of words, as well as grammatical and phonological features that stem from northern Israel, the so-called Israelian Hebrew (Rendsburg 2003: 5–35).

[12] Aeolic stands for a dialectic grouping that includes the Lesbian, the Thessalian, and the Boeotian dialects attested in the first millennium BCE. They were spoken in Asia Minor [Smyrna, Pergamum, and the islands of Lesbos and Tenedos], as well as in mainland Greece, in Thessaly and Boeotia [Thebes], and the region of Troy (Nagy 2011: 133–34). The same applies to the Ionian dialect [islands of Chios, and Samos; cities where Ephesus, and Miletus are located] and Euboea [Chalkis], (Horrocks 2010: 10–41).

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8

To Make Oneself a Name in the Ancient Near East, Hebrew Bible, and Greek Antiquity

1. Introduction

The notion of making oneself a name is closely associated with the human concern with death and the quest for immortality. It stems from a profound human desire not to be forgotten and to leave a lasting mark on one's life and passage on earth. How to make the remembrance of oneself survive beyond death? What can you do in order not to have your name fall into oblivion after death? The fear of death is related to the fear of being erased from the memory of the living. The *Sitz im Leben* or social setting of the idea of making oneself a name would, therefore, be associated with human concern with death and the quest for immortality. In his book on the *Topography of Remembrance*, Jonker (1995) starts with the analysis of the desire for immortality and shows different strategies employed to avoid being forgotten, perceived as being tantamount to complete disappearance.

Worthington (2011: 406) points out that in the *Epic of Gilgameš*, only after Enkidu's death does Gilgameš start to address him by name, suggesting, "that Gilgameš's utterance of Enkidu's name is prompted by the belief that perpetuating his or her name somehow keeps an individual alive." This is confirmed by the opening lines of the Babylonian Creation Epic *Enūma eliš* (1 1–2), which shows that naming something equals bringing it into existence: "When on high the heaven had not been named, Firm ground below had not been called by name (*enūma eliš lā nabû šamāmū šapliš ammatum šuma lā zakrat*)" (Speiser 1969a: 60). The meaning of this *incipit* was made explicit in Lambert's translation (2013: 50–51), "When the heavens above did not exist and earth had not come into being."

The chapter presents the evidence culled from Mesopotamian literature and contrasted with some corresponding biblical responses to the same issue, showing how it is both similar and different from the one found in Akkadian literature. The human preoccupation with this issue is as old as the beginning of writing epic literature, that is, from the end of the third and beginning of the second millennium BCE. The Mesopotamian civilization placed it in the center of its reflection, as attested in the *Epic of Gilgameš*. This Akkadian epic offers several answers to the question of how to make oneself a name and prevent disappearing into oblivion: a) By undertaking monumental building projects; b) By leaving a written record of

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one's military and other exploits for posterity; c) By acquiring a progeny that would perpetuate one's memory. In the Hebrew Bible, reference is made to the construction of the city and the Tower of Babel, where the builders want to "make themselves a name" in Gen 11:4. This statement is in a dialectic tension with the Call of Abram, described in the following chapter, Gen 12:2, where God offers to make him a great name. The topic is further traced in an Old Babylonian Mari letter in which the Amorite warlord, King Samsī-Addu, admonishes his younger son, Yasmaḫ-Addu, to make himself a lasting name through a military victory like his older brother, Išme-Dagan. This feature is compared to Joab, the commander of King David's army, admonishing his overlord, David, to acquire military glory by conquering the city of Rabbat-Ammon in Transjordan and having his name attached to this great victory, as found in 2 Samuel 11–12.

The most complete study on the topic of making oneself a name has been provided by Karen Radner. In line with the work of the dean of "cultural memory studies," the Egyptologist Jan Assmann (1992), Radner sees her research as a contribution to the study of "thanatology in Mesopotamia" (Radner 2006: 1; Charpin 2008: 162).

Here, I will present evidence on this topic culled from Mesopotamian literature, adduce some corresponding biblical responses to the same issue, and show how it is similar and in what way it differs from those found in Akkadian literature.

2. Making Oneself a Name Through Monumental Building Projects (*Gilg.* 1.i 18–19//11 323–324)

In the *Gilgameš Epic*, the idea of making himself a lasting reputation is expressed with the double reference to the main hero erecting the monumental walls of his city of Uruk. The scribe used the device of secondary inclusion in the composition of the "canonical" version of the *Gilgameš Epic*. The beginning of the *Gilgameš Epic* 1.i 18–19 corresponds to its end in Tablet 11 323–324, after the scribe secondarily interpolated the Flood story that forms the greater part of Tablet 11. An Assyrian catalog attributes the redaction of the canonical version of the *Gilgameš Epic* to a priest and exorcist whose name was Sîn-lēqī-unninni meaning, "O god Sîn, accept my supplication" (Lambert 1962: 66). He lived in Uruk (Warka) biblical Erech (Gen 10:10; Ezra 4:9), around 1200 BCE when the canonical version of the epic was composed (Beaulieu 2000: 1–16). Tablet 11 of the *Gilgameš Epic*, describing the Deluge, was taken from the older *Atraḫāsis Epic* dating from the eighteenth century BCE. By using the stylistic device of inclusion, the end of the newly inserted Tablet 11, dealing with the Flood, was made to correspond to the beginning of the story in Tablet I. The passerby is invited to observe the monumental walls of Uruk, inspect the foundation terrace, and examine the brickwork both at the beginning and at the end of the canonical version of the *Gilgameš Epic*:

Bodi_9781666979138_C008.indd 234 7/13/2026 3:55:23 PM

Go up on the wall of Uruk and walk around
(*Gilg.* 1.i 18 *elīma ina muḫḫi dūri ša uruk itallak*)
Survey the foundation platform, inspect the brickwork!
(*Gilg.* 1.i 19 *temēnnu ḫīṭma libitta ṣubbû*)
The beginning in *Gilgameš* Tablet I corresponds to the Epic's end in *Gilgameš* Tablet 11:
Go up, Ur-šanabi, on the wall of Uruk and walk around,
(*Gilg.* 11 323 *elīma ur-šanabi ina muḫḫi dūri ša uruk itallak*)
Survey the foundation platform, inspect the brickwork!
(*Gilg.* 11 324 *temēnna ḫīṭīma libitta ṣubbî*) (George 2003, vol. 1: 539, and 725).

The inclusion has a double function. On the one hand, it indicates the beginning and the new ending of the *Gilgameš Epic* after the insertion of the Flood story. On the other hand, it points out one of the ways to achieve lasting fame through the accomplishment of monumental building projects. The 1200 BCE version of the *Gilgameš Epic* begins and ends with a reminder of what is left of the hero's exploits: the monumental walls of the city of Uruk, which he erected; they stand as a testimony to his lasting building achievements. The association of the monumental walls of Uruk with King Gilgameš must have been part of the Mesopotamian collective memory since the beginning of the second millennium BCE. An Old Babylonian royal inscription from Uruk already mentions Gilgameš as the builder of the walls of Uruk: "Anam, chief of the army of Uruk, son of Ilān-šemeā, who restored the wall of Uruk, the ancient work of divine Gilgameš" (Frayne 1990: 474–75; RIME 4, Anam 4:1–8). King Anam (ca. 1821–1817) was one of the last rulers of Uruk. The following lines of his inscription state that he "constructed the wall in baked bricks." When the *Gilgameš Epic* 1.i.20 invites the passer-by "to see if its brickwork is not kiln-fired brick," it is an example of artistic license. The bricks from the Proto-Dynastic times when King Gilgameš lived were made out of unbaked bricks (Tournay and Shaffer 1994: 41g.). In epic literature, artistry and poetic embellishment prime over historical facts.

3. Making Oneself a Name by Leaving a Written Record of One's Exploits for Posterity

Another manner of making the memory of one's name survive and ensure that one is remembered by posterity is indicated at the beginning of the *Gilgameš Epic*: To leave a written record on a stone stele called *narû* (*Gilg.* 1.i 10), or on a tablet made out of lapis lazuli (*Gilg.* 1.i 27) and stored in a tablet-box *tupšennu* (*Gilg.* 1.i 24). This written record immortalizes his "Herculean works," exploits, travels, and hardships, the Mesopotamian culture hero par excellence endured: "[He] (Gilgamesh) set down on a stele all [his] labours. [Find] the tablet-box of cedar, [release] its clasps of bronze! [Open] the lid of

Bodi_9781666979138_C008.indd 235 7/13/2026 3:55:23 PM

its secret, [lift] up the tablet of lapis lazuli and read out, all the misfortunes, all that Gilgameš went through!" (George 2003, vol. 1: 538–39).[1]

Tablets made out of lapis lazuli were found among foundation deposits in Uruk together with foundation pegs, cones, and clay nails. The "clasps of bronze" served to close the tablet-box *ṭupšennu* containing the foundation tablet (Ellis 1968: 48, 145, 187 figs. 1–12). The *ṭupšennu* box had a cover or lid. In the Old Babylonian *Kutha Legend of Narām-Sîn*, it is mentioned as a container for the stone tablet (*narû*) which the king stores for posterity (Gurney 1955: 93). "Thus the impression is deliberately created that the whole epic was written down in antiquity by Gilgamesh himself, just as the *Narām-Sîn Legend* purports to have been written down by Narām-Sîn" (Walker 1981: 194).

To a certain degree, this feature is comparable to the poetic narration of his voyages by Odysseus himself in *Odyssey* Book 11. When he introduces the disguised Odysseus into his palace, his swineherd Eumaeus also compares his storytelling skill to that of a bard (*Odyssey* 17.518–21). Odysseus is not creating imperishable "fame" (*kleos*) by fighting, but rather by recreating it by retelling in the first person his multiple exploits in a long bard-like narrative (Segal 1983: 26).

Another manner for ancient Mesopotamian rulers to perpetuate their memory, beginning with the Sumerian King Šulgi (2094–2047 BCE), was to write hymns in their honor, a prerogative that up to that time had been reserved only for gods. Invocation of the names of the gods was a regular part of their cult and rituals in Mesopotamia. In the Hebrew Bible, one finds the expression *hizkir šēm* "to invoke the name," referring to the worship of Yahweh by invoking his name (Exod 20:24) (Childs 1962: 12–14).

Writing royal annals and chronicles by Assyrian and Babylonian kings could be seen as another manner of ensuring the lasting memory of their wars, conquests, exploits, and achievements (Grayson 1975; Glassner 2004).

On the Black Stone of Lord Aberdeen, the Neo-Assyrian King Esarhaddon (680–669 BCE) left two rows of four pictorial symbols called "astroglyphs" with a cuneiform inscription. It describes the rebuilding of the city of Babylon with its temple Esagil (É-saĝ-íl "House whose Top is High"; George 1993: 139 nº 967) for the god Marduk after both were destroyed by his father, Sennacherib (704–681 BCE). An almost identical sequence of symbols is found on several terracotta prisms, also bearing inscriptions by Esarhaddon (Leichty 2011: 240–42). Several of the signs are also known to represent Mesopotamian constellations such as the lion, the bull, and the plow. On the inscription, King Esarhaddon states, "I depicted hieroglyphs/astroglyphs (*lumāšē*), representing the writing of my name (i.e., the likeness corresponding to the writing of my name *tamšil šiṭir šumīya*)," (RINAP 4, Esarhaddon 104.vii 11–12; Leichty 2011: 200). The signs are reminiscent of constellations and divine symbols and, therefore, link Esarhaddon with

[1] *Gilg.* 1.i 10 [*šá-k*]*in i-na* ^{na4}*narê*(na.rú.a) *ka-lu ma-na-aḫ-ti* (I.i 24) [*a-mur*?] ^{ĝeš}*tup-šen-na šá* ^{ĝeš}*erēni*(erin) (I.i 25) [*pu-uṭ-ṭe*]*r*? *ḫar-gal-li-šu šá sippari*(zabar) (I.i 26) [*pi-te-m*]*a*? *bāba*(ká) *šá ni-ṣir-ti-šú* (I.i 27) [*i-š*]*i*?*-ma ṭup-pi* ^{na4}*uqnî*(za.gin) *ši-tas-si* (I.i 28) [*mim-m*]*u-ú* ^{d}*Giš-gim-maš ittallaku*(DU.DU)^{ku} *ka-lu mar-ṣa-a-ti*. The verbal form *ittallak* is a Gtn preterite 3ms expressing iterative, habitual, continual, and many times repeated action. The line could also be rendered with "The hardships Gilgamesh repeatedly went through" (Bodi 2001, 146, § 80; § 87).

Bodi_9781666979138_C008.indd 236 7/13/2026 3:55:23 PM

the divine world of the gods (Roaf and Zgoll 2001: 292). The term (*lumāšē*) stands both for astroglyphs and constellations. Esarhaddon states that he wrote it on foundation stones. In this manner, he had the double assurance of perpetuating his name and achieving a semblance of immortality, as a famous builder and with his name written in the stars, among the gods (Zgoll 2003: 3; Zgoll and Roaf 2002: 7–15).

4. Making Oneself a Name Through Heroic Acts

Both in the Sumerian version of the composition entitled, *Bilgames and the Cedar Forest*, also known as *Bilgames and Huwawa* A, lines 5 and 31 (Edzard 1990: 165–203; 1993) and the Akkadian *Gilgameš Epic* in the Old Babylonian Yale tablet, one finds the expression, "I want to establish a name for myself" associated with an exploit (Zgoll 2003: 4). What makes Gilgameš run is his will to establish a name for himself, a lasting reputation, and enduring glory. Posterity will remember his name on account of his exploits, killing the monster Huwawa and cutting down the tall cedar trees. In the Sumerian version, Gilgameš saw corpses floating down the river, making him aware of the grim destiny awaiting him. He exclaims, "I want to enter the mountain, I want to establish my name" (kur-ra ga-an-ku$_4$ mu-ĝu$_{10}$ ĝa-gar), where the term (mu) stands for "name," (-ĝu$_{10}$) "my," and (ĝa-gar) "I will establish" (Fleming and Milstein 2010: 75–77). According to André Finet (1983: 146 n.2), the praise of Gilgameš's courage in this Sumerian poem later became a proverb, "I want to enter the mountain, I want to establish my name," expressing one's determination to achieve fame. It could be understood as the earliest example of what the Vienna psychoanalyst, Alfred Adler (1999: 70–74), called the "Masculine Protest," a tendency attributed to both men and women to compensate for feelings of inadequacy by exaggerated, overt aggressive behavior. From a feeling of inferiority, one strives for superiority.

The Akkadian version is found in the Old Babylonian Yale tablet (Jastrow and Clay 1920: 90–91; George 2003, 1: 201). Facing death, Gilgameš plans to establish his name through a memorable exploit. (Yale *Gilg*. iv.159–160) "I will set my hand, (that is, let me start work), and chop down cedar! [A name that] is eternal I will establish forever!" ([*qātī l*]*uškun-ma [lu-u]k -˹sú˺-um-am erēnam* [*šuma ša*] *dārû anāku luštakna*). The *lu-* asseverative is elided to the verbal forms and serves to express attainable wishes (Huehnegard 1983: 572), while the enclitic *–ma* makes the declaration emphatic. The affirmation is repeated in both versions, in Smerian and Akkadian. In the same Akkadian version, some lines earlier, Gilgameš tells his friend Enkidu, before the confrontation with Huwawa, "If I should fall, let me make my name, Gilgameš joined battle with the ferocious Huwawa" (OB Yale Tablet iv.149–150; Abusch 2015: 133). Both by killing the guardian of the cedar forest, Huwawa, and cutting down the cedar trees, Gilgameš would acquire glory as an intrepid warrior and achiever of exploits. It expresses a major aspect of the Mesopotamian worldview. "For it is the accomplishment of great acts of valor that is the highest achievement of life and one that serves as the basis of lasting fame, fame in the form of stories of one's great deeds that are told and retold by future generations" (Abusch 2015: 133).

Bodi_9781666979138_C008.indd 237 7/13/2026 3:55:23 PM

5. The Tower of Babel (Genesis 11) and the Call of Abram (Genesis 12): The Biblical Perspective on Making Oneself a Name

The immediate context of the biblical story of Babel in Gen 11:1–9 is that of two genealogies. The one preceding it deals with the three sons of Noah: Japheth, Ham, and Shem-*šēm* (Gen 10:1–32), while the other following it lists the genealogy of Shem-*šēm* (Gen 11:10–26). In the nomadic perspective of the tribes that stem from a single eponymous ancestor, the last verse of Gen 10:32 presumes that from Noah's three sons, all nations "spread abroad on the earth after the flood." The Tower of Babel story in Genesis 11 comes across as a human attempt to stop the original spread of humanity and settlement over all the earth by taking a different direction toward increased urban concentration.

Ever since Gunkel's analysis, in 1910, Gen 11:1–9 was perceived as composed of two originally independent redactions: The Tower Story about the building of a ziggurat, or temple tower, and the Babel Story, about the building of the city (Gunkel 1997: 94). Further refinement of the historical-critical method identified other successive redactional stages of this story (Uehlinger 1990; differently Hendel 1993: 787). The passage, however, shows none of the hallmarks of a composite text: contradictions, doublets, or other narrative inconsistencies. This simple source-critical observation would militate against Gunkel's analysis (Baden 2009: 209). Nevertheless, some successive redactional interventions are still detectable. Whatever the original form of the narrative, the catchword that served to combine the building of the city with the erection of the tower together with the preceding and the following genealogies is the sevenfold repetition of the term *šm*, as either "name" (*šēm*) or "there" (*šām*) (vv. 2, 4, 7, 8, 9 [3x]). It echoes the name of Shem-*šēm*, the eponymous ancestor of the Semites, mentioned in both surrounding genealogies. The use of the term *šm* is probably a late redactional device that combines several disparate elements, genealogies with narratives, and calls the attention of the reader to the migration of the Semitic tribes and ancestors of the Hebrews. The catchword *šēm* could also be a reminder of the intervention of *haš-Šēm*, "the Name," a Hebrew synonym for God.

5.1. One Language—And Making Oneself a Name: A Deceptive Harmony and a Metaphor of Oppression

The Babel story makes a connection between being on the same side, or of the same mind, participating in the common building project, and making oneself a name. (Gen 11:1) ". . .the whole earth was of one side *śāpâ* (that is, language) and of one speech." and v. 4, "Then they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the skies, and let us make a name for ourselves. . ." Together, these verses signify an imperialistic, hegemonic dominance.

The Hebrew term *śāpâ* means "lip, brim, edge, bank, side," as in 1 Kgs 7:26 "the brim of a cup" (*śāpâ-kôs*). The usual Hebrew term for "language" is *lāšôn*, corresponding

Bodi_9781666979138_C008.indd 238 7/13/2026 3:55:23 PM

to Akkadian *lišānu* as in *lišānu akkadītu*"Akkadian language." Both Hebrew (*lāšôn*) and Akkadian (*lišānu*) are used in the anatomic and linguistic senses of "tongue" and "language." The Hebrew term *lāšôn* is used two verses before Genesis 11, in Gen 10:30, where the division of various Semitic languages issued from the ancestor Shem is already acknowledged and explicitly stated, "These are the Semites according to their languages" (*'ēlleh bĕnê šēm . . . lilĕšōnōtām*). Therefore, the use of a different and unusual term, *śāpâ*, in this context is highly significant. It shows first that either Gen 11:1–9 or Gen 10:30–31 was secondarily inserted at this place by the final redactors without completely smoothing out the immediate context, confirming the gradual growth of the biblical texts through successive redactors. Second, the term *śāpâ* does not mean "language" but "lip, side," that is, "(being of the same) side." Therefore, the issue is not linguistic but hegemonic, about a superior political power imposing its command and despotism. One should bear this in mind to understand the rabbinic interpretation of Gen 11:1–9 mentioned later.

The use of the Hebrew term *śāpâ* seems to point to a specific Mesopotamian ideological background. The "Sargon Chronicle," dating from Neo-Babylonian times, starts with the description of the reign of Sargon the Great (in Akkadian *Šarru-kēn*, 2334–2279 BCE), king of the city of Agade and founder of the first empire in the ancient Near East. Before Sargon the Great, the political organization in Mesopotamia was dominated by several individual city-states. Sargon the Great was the first to introduce the political structure of an empire, conquering and uniting several previously independent city-states (Foster 2016: 21). He first defeated Lugalzagesi, king of Uruk, and conquered Umma, Lagash, and Ur, enabling him to rule all of Sumer to the headwaters of the Persian Gulf. Being the first to have done that, he incarnates hegemony and imperialism. He became a reference point in the Mesopotamian collective memory. He conquered the cities and territories in the East and the West, and "he made its mouth be one" (*pî-šu ana ištēn ukīn*), meaning that he established a centralized administration and political government (Glassner 2004: 268; Speiser 1969a: 266). The expression is still used more than a millennium later. In their royal inscriptions, the Assyrian kings, Tukulti-Ninurta (1243–1207 BCE), and Tiglath-Pileser I (1114–1076 BCE) similarly affirm of "having imposed one mouth (*pâ ištēn ušaškin-šunūti*)" over their vanquished enemies (Liverani 2017: 162). Three more attestations are found under King Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 BCE) (Liverani 2017: 162–63). The same literary topos reappears in Sargon II's (721–705 BCE) Fort Sargon (Dūr-Šarrukīn) cylinder inscription. Sargon II refers to the deportees that he employed as a labor force in his monumental building projects, like the Fort-Sargon:

> Subjects from the four corners of the world, of different tongues, of untranslatable speech, inhabitants of mountains and plains, but all subjects of the light of the gods, the lord of totality, whom I had deported by order of my lord Aššur and by the power of my scepter, I imposed one command (*pâ ištēn ušaškin*) over them and I settled them. I assigned Assyrians to them as scribes and supervisors, and they were able to teach them fear of god and the king (*palāḫ ili u šarri*) (Liverani 2017: 160; Boyd 2017: 88).

Bodi_9781666979138_C008.indd 239 7/13/2026 3:55:23 PM

The Akkadian literary topos was discontinued after Sargon II but was used in the Hebrew stream of tradition to criticize both the Assyrian and Babylonian hegemony, imperialism, colonialism, and centralization of political power in the story of the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1–9). Both the Greek classical authors and biblical redactors confused Nineveh and Babylon (Dalley 1993: 45–58; 2008: 25–33). Such features reflect the adaptation and modification of historical data in the course of the stream of tradition. As pointed out by Boyd (2017: 87), the biblical story is not about language. Rather, it offers a theological reflection on where political authority lies, particularly in the realm of the city and temple-building. It is, therefore, probable that the unusual Hebrew formulation reflects a well-known Akkadian idiom designating a centralized, totalitarian, and imperialistic type of government. The story of the Tower of Babel is the story of the first Babylonian "*Reich*" (LaCoque 2010: 115). Right from the opening verse, this biblical passage presents itself as a critique of such imperialistic regimes that thrived throughout Mesopotamian history. With the destruction of Samaria in 722 BCE by the Assyrian imperial power and of Jerusalem in 587 BCE by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar II, the Israelites had direct experience of Assyrian and Babylonian imperialism. As pointed out by Jacques Derrida (1991: 10), "In seeking to make a 'name for themselves,' to establish at the same time a universal tongue and a unique genealogy, the Semites want to bring the world to reason, and this reason could signify simultaneously a colonial violence since they would thus universalize (their idiom) and a peaceful transparency of the human community."

God's intervention by confusing languages interrupts the colonial violence of political imperialism and totalitarian monolithic government. The imposed single language is a powerful symbol of oppression by a centralized, despotic government. In the long run, life itself provokes the implosion of an oppressive hegemonic regime and goes beyond the imposed frame. The probable subject of the biblical story of Babel refers to the ziggurat at Babylon, bearing a very telling name (é.temen.an.ki), "the house of the foundation of heaven and earth." The ziggurat was also the seat of Marduk, the patron god of Babylon "Seat of Bēl at é.temen.an.ki" and the creator of the world according to the Babylonian *Creation Epic Enūma eliš* (George 2005/2006: 77). The project of building a huge tower (ziggurat) as an expression of human hubristic illusions had definite religious implications: humans attempting to reach and influence the divine realm. It is, therefore, thwarted by Yahweh, the sole creator of heaven and earth, according to the Hebrew tradition. In the Babel story, God is opposed to a human grandiose building project associated with making oneself a name. The story ends with the humans dispersing themselves and abandoning their hubris-filled building project.

The biblical Tower of Babel story contains the paradox aptly captured in the Latin dictum: *ex malo bonum*, "out of bad, good may come." Though it provokes divine displeasure and intervention, in the final analysis, God's punishment is beneficial and therapeutic for humans, the opposite of vengeance. The rabbinic interpretation of this text is exemplified in Ibn Ezra's (1089–1164) statement in the Rabbinic Bible (*Miqra'ôt gĕdolôt*), "God scattered the people for their own benefit," following the initial plan to fill the earth, the whole of it (Gen 1:28) and not just one region. Another rabbinic

Bodi_9781666979138_C008.indd 240 7/13/2026 3:55:23 PM

commentator, Abravanel (1437–1508), follows Ibn Ezra's comment, saying that a punishment may concomitantly be a blessing (LaCoque 2010: 90).

5.2. Genesis 12 and the Call of Abram: God Offers to Make His Name Great

A sixteenth-century Rabbi Maharal of Prague (1512–1609) suggested that all major biblical themes could be seen as standing in a dialectic opposition or dynamic polarity. For example, the beginning of the world with its creation stands in a dialectic tension with the end of the world, light with darkness, life and death, blessing and curse, itinerant existence of constant traveling and living on the road as opposed to dwelling in a city, permanently bound to a single place, the nomad versus the sedentary. The biblical texts do not present issues in a one-sided way. While some texts affirm one point of view, other texts, however, give a contrary and sometimes a contradictory statement. One reason for this is that biblical texts reflect real-life situations, and life is rarely unilateral and uniform. A one-sided mental or conceptual worldview that perceives things in a black-and-white pattern does not render justice to reality. The truth is often in between, or what the Maharal of Prague termed "the middle (*'emṣaʿ*)" (Neher 1991: 60). The dialectic approach was developed already in Greek antiquity. The fifth-century BCE Greek philosopher, Socrates, taught that through dialogue, discussion, and exchange of different points of view, one could achieve a more precise grasp of things and reach a truer understanding of issues. Both Socrates and his disciple Plato promoted dialectics as the method par excellence in the search for truth. Maharal of Prague adopted the dialectic method from his predecessor, Maimonides (1138–1204), who in his turn adopted it through the works of Aristotle, a student of Plato.

This manner of seeing biblical texts can apply to the narrative of Abram's call in Genesis 12. The patriarch was called to leave the city of Haran in northern Mesopotamia and to adopt a nomadic lifestyle. The sedentary became a traveler and a nomad. He lived his entire existence between these two polarities: the city and the road. Moreover, the decision in Gen 11:4, "Let's make ourselves a name," stands in dialectic polarity with God's promise to Abram, "I will make your name great" in Gen 12:2.

The two great metaphors that biblical texts elaborate in a dialectic polarity are the nomadic life, taking the road, adopting travel and migration, as opposed to the sedentary life, associated with the promise of a new city (*polis*), the symbol of an ideal government (politics). The perfect rule over the human community is epitomized by the image of God's presence in the new temple in a city no longer called Jerusalem but (*Yahweh šāmmâ*), "The Lord is there" (Ezek 48:35). The Bible begins with Abram, the city dweller who was called to become a nomad, and ends with the last great exilic prophet Ezekiel, where the last eight chapters of the book describe the new city and the new Temple (Ezek 40–48; Bodi 2009a: 499).

The expression "and they settled there" (*way-yēšĕbû šām*) in Gen 11:2 is significant as it contrasts the initial nomadic migration of moving from camp to camp with the installation of the population in a single place. This point is important in light of Abram's move in the following chapter, where he does the opposite; from a well-settled

Bodi_9781666979138_C008.indd 241 7/13/2026 3:55:23 PM

inhabitant of a city, he will become an uprooted migrant (Gen 12:1–8). In Genesis 11, the human community is in search of false security. Migrant existence is synonymous with danger and unpredictability. The term *šām* "there," repeatedly used in Gen 11:2, 7, 8, 9, stands in alliteration with *šēm* "name" in Gen 11:4, 9, and may stand as an expression of the human search for glory, which often turns into hubris and unbridled ambition. The midrashic interpretation sees danger lurking in the act of settling down. "Rabbi Isaac used to say, whenever you encounter the word *yāšab* 'to settle, dwell, sit,' there the adversary (Satan) plays its role" (Neher 1969). One of the motives of the city-and-tower builders of Babel was to prevent dispersion. The biblical perspective expressed initially in the Creation story and after the Flood was that humans should be "fruitful and multiply, abound on the earth and multiply in it" (Gen 1:28 and 9:1,7), meaning that they were meant to spread all over the globe, furthering linguistic, territorial, cultural, and national diversities. The issue is not the problem of overpopulation, reflecting modern Malthusian theories. Rather, the issue is that the Earth is spacious and humans are few. In creating diversity, humanity would fulfill its purpose on this earth. The building project was a deliberate attempt to impose another agenda that would interfere with the unfolding of the original one, instead of diversity, favoring uniformity.

The traditional documentary hypothesis, exemplified by the scholarly tetragram: J-E-D-P (Yahwistic-Elohistic-Deuteronomistic-Priestly sources) attributes the injunction to be fertile and multiply in Gen 1:28 to the P source, while the same injunction in Gen 9:1,7 to the J source. I follow the modern literary-critical theory that postulates the existence of only the P and D independent sources, considering J and E as mere redactional additions (Schmid 2023; Dozeman and Schmid 2006). In the view propounded here, Gen 11:1–9 reflects several redactional layers and additions where various redactors complete each other, producing a relatively unified text (Dozeman, Schmid, and Schwartz 2011).

In Gen 12:2, God says to Abram, "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you (*waʾabārekĕkā*), and make your name great (*weʾăgaddĕlâ šemekā*) so that you will be a blessing (*bĕrākā*)." In the two verses of the Call of Abram (Gen 12:2–3), the terms "bless" and "blessing" are repeated five times. This keyword points out the specific biblical perspective on the way a person can acquire a name. The pursuit of a great name is not primary. It is seen as a byproduct of being a blessing to others. Abram was called to become a channel, a conduit of blessings for all nations. In so doing, God will make his name great.

In Akkadian, the term *šumu* refers to more than a "name," and embraces the sense of "reputation," "identity," and "male posterity/son" (Schultz 1932: 899). There is an inseparable unity between the name and the one who bears it (Radner 2006: 15–66). The same situation may apply to the Hebrew term *šēm* "name" in this context: God's promise to Abraham of making his name great implies both giving him a great reputation and a great progeny. Both are perceived as blessings. The abundant progeny is implied by the opening statement in this verse, "I will make of you a great nation." Furthermore, the Hebrew expression may be placed in the context of similar Akkadian expressions of "uttering the name greatly." The Akkadian expression *šumam zakârum*,

Bodi_9781666979138_C008.indd 242 7/13/2026 3:55:23 PM

"to mention (someone's) name; to think of someone, that is, to remember (someone)," has received a thorough study by Kraus (1971: 97–112). He analyzed a series of examples culled from Akkadian literature where *šumam zakârum* means, "to pronounce (someone's) name" or to elicit a favorable response from the one hearing it. This action aims to obtain favor for the person whose name is mentioned. An Old Babylonian letter, written by Rîm-Sîn II to a certain Amurrum-tillatî, offers a parallel to Gen 12:2 with a similar syntagm: "to mention (someone's) name greatly (*šumam rabiš zakāram*)"; (AbB 13 53:17–19): "Come with me for an audience and I will mention your name greatly (*alkam-ma ittīya nanmer šumka rab*[*i*]*š azakkar*)," meaning "I will recommend you." The editor of these Old Babylonian letters translated it with "I will elevate you to high rank" (Van Soldt 1993: 46–47). The expression may also mean mentioning one's name favorably in front of another person, a sheikh, or a king. Thus, in an Old Babylonian Mari letter, Yarîm-Addu writes to the secretary of the warlord Zimrī-Līm, the influential Šu-nuḫra-halû, asking him for a recommendation: (ARM 26/1 374: 22–23): "May my father mention my name favorably (*abī šumī ana dami*-[*iq-tim*] *lizkur*)," (Charpin 2008: 165). Kraus (1971: 105) pointed out that in a great number of languages the terms for "to think," "*Denken*," and "to speak, utter," "*Sprechen*," "to suggest, to mean," "*Meinen*," and "to say," "*Sagen*," belong to a related semantic field: "*Wähnen*"-"*Erwähnen*" "to imagine - to mention," Latin *memini—mentio* (and *mentiri*), West and South Semitic *ḏkr/zkr/skr,* Akkadian *zakārum* (*CAD* Z: 16, *zakāru* A).

Moreover, the Akkadian verb *zakārum*, meaning "to say, speak, name, mention, call attention to, and remember," as well as the noun, a verbal abstract *zikru* "utterance, what was mentioned," have some bearing on our understanding of the well-known Hebrew expression "male and female (*zākār wĕnĕqēwâ*)," (Gen 1:27). The reference to Akkadian *šumam zakārum* "to remember the name by mentioning it" and Arabic *ḏakar*, "remembrance," clarifies the Hebrew link with the verb *zākar* "to remember" (*BDB*: 269). The progeny remembers the deceased ancestor. As stated in Gen 1:26–27: "And God said, 'Let us make man (*ʿādām*) in our image (*bĕṣalmēnû*) after our likeness (*kidmûtēnû*).' (. . .) So God created the human being (*hāʾādām*) in his own image (*bĕṣalmô*), in the image of God (*bĕṣelem ʾĕlōhîm*) created he him; male (*zākār*) and female (*ûnĕkēbâ*) created he them. (. . .) In the image of God (*bĕṣelem ʾĕlōhîm*), he made man (Gen 9:6). (. . .) Male (*zākār*) and female (*ûnĕkēbâ*) he created them. . ." (Gen 5:3).

Hebrew (*zākār*) "male" and the verb (*zākar*) "to remember" are related to Arabic (*ḏakar*), a word which signifies the male of all creatures, and is also used in the sense of "mention," "memory," and "male member, penis." In a medical text written by a sixteenth-century Arabic physician, Cheikh Nefzaoui, for the *Bey* (governor) of Tunis, he explained that when a man had an accident to his penis, whether it has been amputated, or has become weak, and can, consequently, no longer fulfill his conjugal duties, they say of him: "the member of such a one is dead." "It means that the remembrance of him will be lost, and his generation will be cut off at the root. When he dies, they will say, 'His member has been cut off,' meaning, 'His memory is departed from the world.'" (Nefzaoui 1999: 106).

The Arabic term *ḏakara* means "to remember, to bear in mind, to recall, recollect," with the initial phoneme (*ḏa*ʾ/*ḏal*); *ḏakar* "male," "penis" (Wehr 1976: 310). This rich semantic field

Bodi_9781666979138_C008.indd 243 7/13/2026 3:55:23 PM

of the West and South Semitic *ḏkr/zkr/skr,* as well as Akkadian *zakārum*, helps to understand the connection between "to say, to mention, to remember," with procreation and progeny.

6. Making Oneself a Name Through Progeny that Can Perpetuate One's Memory (*Gilg.* OB X.ii.14′ - iii.1–14 and Qoheleth 9:7–10)

In the Old Babylonian version of the *Epic of Gilgameš*, the tavern-keeper Šiduri indicates to the despondent hero of the epic one of the simplest ways to acquire immortality by finding a wife and raising a progeny. In this perspective, the survival of the individual's name does not differ from one's reproduction.

Gilgameš's quest for immortality takes him to the ends of the earth via the twin mountains, Mount Māšu, where the sun Šamaš goes into the Netherworld and comes out of it every day. He essentially followed the path of the sun (Ataç 2004: 68). In his long, harrowing journey, at the very end of the inhabited and civilized world, reaching the shores of the waters of death, Gilgameš reaches a tavern. There, he meets the alewife Šiduri and receives a wise and decisive piece of advice from her. Her name might be an example of the so-called programmatic name (*ein Redender Name*) since *ši-dūrī* means "she is my rampart, my fortress" (Tournay and Shaffer 1994: 201 n.e.). Her equipment reflects her work as an ale woman, since she is surrounded by jar-holders or pot stands and a vat for fermenting beer (*Gilg.* 10.i 3). Moreover, Šiduri is veiled, as are married women in ancient Mesopotamia (Van der Toorn 1995: 327–40; Démare-Lafont 2008: 235–53). That the advice comes from a woman is highly significant since only a woman is a child-bearing human being. She is the projection into the myth of a historical and socially well-established ancient Mesopotamian tavern-keeper. She is there to give information to the travelers on which direction to take. She is necessary for the plot in the *Epic of Gilgameš*, and she is there to provide the hero with vital information. Moreover, folklore and fairy tales do not always follow strict logical thinking. In the *Gilgameš Epic*, Šiduri has the function of the "traffic light" at a major crossroad in Gilgameš's desperate quest for immortality. She points the way and provides one of the answers: immortality and preservation of one's name through progeny. Gilgameš meets the alewife Šiduri after having gone through the garden of the gods and the gates of Mount Māšu, guarded by a couple of scorpions. In the ancient Near East, scorpions are symbols of womanhood and fertility and are often depicted on cylinder seals belonging to women, like the seal of a queen of Sennacherib (Lassen 2020: 37 fig. 3.24). Their appearance has some bearing on Gilgameš at this final stage of his peregrinations (Zernecke 2008: 110). It is after the description of the garden of marvels, with trees bearing jewels and precious stones instead of fruits, that he encounters Šiduri. The hero asks her how to get across the waters of death. He has reached the extreme limit, the legendary waters of death mentioned in Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Greek mythologies.

Gilgameš explains to her the reason for his wretchedness, restlessness, and apathy, relating the story of how deeply Enkidu's death had affected him. He describes to her

Bodi_9781666979138_C008.indd 244 7/13/2026 3:55:23 PM

his wanderings, searching for an answer to death waiting for him as well (OB 10.ii.1′–11′; cf. SB 10 47–71). The fact that he has traveled so far as to reach the alewife only reaffirms his desire and quest to escape death (OB 10.ii.12′–14′).

Šiduri's message to Gilgameš is to enjoy the mortal life he was given as his destiny preordained by the immortal gods. His days on earth should be spent eating, being merry, enjoying his wife, and taking care of his child. Though Gilgameš is described as being two-thirds divine and one-third human, he is nevertheless mortal. However, he can achieve immortality through his progeny.

OB 10.ii 14′ - iii 1–14
ii 14′The ale-wife spoke to him, to Gilgameš:
iii 1"O Gilgameš, where are you wandering?
2 You cannot find the life you seek:
3 When the gods created humankind,
4 for humankind, they established death,
5 life they kept for themselves.
6 You, Gilgameš, may your belly be full,
7 keep enjoying yourself, day and night!
8 Every day make merry,
9 dance and play day and night!
10 Let your clothes be clean!
11 Let your head be washed, may you be bathed in water!
12 Gaze on the little one who holds your hand!
13 Let a wife enjoy your repeated embrace!
14 Such is the destiny [of humankind].[2]

As noted by Abusch (2015: 134), "This passage has been virtually eliminated from the later versions, but may represent the very message of our Old Babylonian version." Note the use of the verb *ṣubbû(m)* Assyrian *ṣabbum* meaning "to observe, check, look at, stare," at the building, or the child and the relationship it establishes between the beginning of the Epic and its end, forming an inclusion between the terms *ṣubbû* and *ḫitu* "survey (the foundation), inspect (the brick-work)" (*Gilg.* 1.i 18–19 // 11 324). The verbs used in the inclusion establish a parallel between the exploits of building the monumental walls of Uruk and having a child. Both goals are worthy to be closely observed and contemplated, and both permit one's name to be perpetuated. The use of the same verbs connects the act of looking at one's progeny with the act of examining and watching the walls and foundation works. Both have a foundational importance in a man's life.

[2] (ii 14′) *sa-bi-tum a-na ša-a-šum iz-za-qar-am a-na* ^{d}ĜEŠ (iii 1) ^{d}ĜEŠ *e-eš ta-da-a-al* (2) 2 *ba-la-ṭám ta-sa-aḫ-ḫu-ru la tu-ut-ta* (3) *i-nu-ma ilū*(diĝir)^{meš} *ib-nu-ú a-wi-lu-tam* (4) *mu-tam iš-ku-nu a-na a-wi-lu-tim* (5) *ba-la-ṭám i-na qá-ti-šu-nu iṣ-ṣa-ab-tu* (6) 6 *at-ta* ^{d}ĜEŠ *lu ma-li ka-ra-aš-ka* (7) *ur-ri ù mu-ši ḫi-ta-ad-dú at-ta* (8) u_4*-mi-ša-am šu-ku-un ḫi-du-tam* (9) *ur-ri ù mu-ši su-ur ù me-li-il* (10) *lu ub-bu-bu ṣú-ba*!(KU)-*tu-ka* (11) *qá-qá-ad-ka lu me-si me-e lu ra-am-ka-ta* (12) *ṣú-ub-bi ṣe-eḫ-ra-am ṣa-bi-tu qá-ti-ka* (13) *mar-ḫi-tum li-iḫ-ta-*⌜*ad-da-a-am*⌝ *i-na su-ni-*⌜*ka*⌝ (14) *an-na-ma ši-i*[*m-ti a-wi-lu-tim*?] (George 2003, 1: 278–279). I follow A. George's translation while adapting it to inclusive language.

Bodi_9781666979138_C008.indd 245 7/13/2026 3:55:23 PM

7. The Advice of the Biblical Qoheleth 9:7–10

A similar realistic advice in respect to an unending quest for wisdom is espoused by the Hebrew literary tradition as found in Qoheleth 9:7–10.

> Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for your works were already approved by God. Let your clothes always be freshly washed, and let your head lack no ointment. See/contemplate life with the woman whom you love all the days of the life of your vanity which he has given you under the sun—all the days of your vanity, for that is your portion (*ḥēleq*) in this life and in your labor which you take under the sun. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work, nor reasoning, nor learning, nor wisdom in Sheol (that is, the Netherworld) where you are going.

Verse 9 is particularly important. Instead of translating "enjoy life" in Qoh 9:9, as it is usually done, the verse literally says, "See life with a woman whom you love" (*rĕʾēh ḥayyîm ʿim-ʾiššâ ʾăšer-ʾāhabtā*). It could mean, "pay attention to life with a woman you love," and "life" could imply "progeny." The phrase could be understood in the sense, "envisage having progeny with a woman whom you love." Moreover, the fact that the term *ʾiššâ* "woman" has no article raises the question whether Qoheleth here has in view one's wife or any woman. Schoors (2004: 332) argues that Qoheleth shows a late stage of the Hebrew language undergoing Aramaic influence with numerous anarthrous terms (that is, without a definite article). He points out that in Phoenician, *ešet*, even without an article, means "wife."

The verse says more than enjoying sensual pleasure with a woman. The verb "see" with "life" means "consider, choose, envisage, desire" life with the woman whom you love, where "life" refers to creating life with her. It expresses the same idea as expressed in Prov 5:18, "Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth," where the emphasis is on having the blessing of progeny. As Targum has it, "your fountain shall be blessed," that is, with numerous offspring, which in the Semitic world was reckoned as a blessing par excellence. Moreover, the expression "the youthful wife" in Prov 5:18 is a reference to the one who can bear children.

The term (*ḥēleq*) is used in Qoheleth for the portion God allotted to humans. This brings Qoheleth in line with Old Babylonian thinking of a destiny allotted to humans by the gods as expressed in the above Gilgameš passage. The similarity is all the more remarkable given the context of human fateful mortality (Bodi 2015a: 1–19). Both works, the *Gilgameš Epic* and Qoheleth, refuse utter pessimism when facing death and recognize a certain value to the joys of life. Zimmerli (1962: 226), however, taught that both Gilgameš and Qoheleth reflect an attitude of resignation, true happiness being inaccessible to mortals since they are bound to die. However, when both the words of Šiduri and Qoheleth are seen in the light of the advice to have progeny, the passage counsels more than a superficial *carpe diem* attitude. As pointed out by Abusch (2015: 91), the *carpe diem* interpretation distorts the meaning of Šiduri's advice. Rather, it is a prescription for healing, leading the mourner away from the desert of grief back to life. Moreover, in the Hebrew perspective, the *carpe diem*'s hedonistic philosophy is decried by the prophet Isaiah (22:13) in his oracle of doom against Jerusalem: "Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die."

Bodi_9781666979138_C008.indd 246 7/13/2026 3:55:23 PM

It seems probable that the *Epic of Gilgameš* exercised some ideological influence on this passage in Qoheleth, supported by the fact that the same worldview is expressed more concisely in another verse, "A man has no better thing under the sun than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry" (Qoh 8:15). While the Book of Qoheleth shows numerous links with classical Greek literature, this statement shows its rootedness in the Semitic background (de Savignac 1978: 318–23). The sequence of six details is identical in the two texts (Samet 2015: 378). While van der Toorn (2001: 503–14) is cautious about this supposed influence, the probable link between the *Gilgameš Epic* and Qoheleth should be explained in light of the stream of tradition. The *Gilgameš Epic* served in the training of scribes in the land of Canaan in the Amarna age, probably transmitted to them through Ugarit (George 2007: 238–48), as confirmed by the Megiddo Gilgameš fragment (Horowitz, Oshima and Sanders 2006: 18). The Megiddo Gilgameš fragment "is likely to be a descendant of the Old Babylonian recension" (George 2003, 1: 343). It confirms the written and oral transmission of traditions (*Traditionsgeschichte*) and (*Überlieferungsgeschite*) reflecting this worldview through the *Gilgameš Epic* copied by the Canaanite scribes who were the literate precursors of the Hebrews. Moreover, the concern with having descendants is probably the most widespread and lasting preoccupation in all the ancient Near Eastern cultures. Both the *Gilgameš Epic* and the biblical texts assign primordial value to procreation as a means of perpetuating one's name and ensuring the continuation of the human community.

8. Having Progeny as a Warranty for the Preservation of One's Name

In the ancient Near East, one major reason for having progeny was to ensure a peaceful afterlife for the deceased parent. Without the specific funerary rites in the cult of the dead that were incumbent on the descendant of the deceased, there was a danger of not finding rest and becoming an *eṭēmmu* (Sumerian, gidìm) or a wandering and restless ghost that came back to trouble their kin. The incantation texts summarize the forms of neglect that may have led a ghost to wander and haunt the living. They indirectly provide a list of the essential ritual services given by the *pāqidu*, "the one who looks after and cares for the deceased." These seem to have included "making funerary offerings" (*kispa kasāpu*), "pouring water" (*mê naqû*), and "calling the name" (*šuma zakāru*): "Whether you be the ghost of one unburied, or whether you be the ghost who has none to take care of him, or whether you be a ghost who has none to make him a funerary offering, or whether you be a ghost who has none to pour out water for him, or whether you be a ghost who has none to call his name" (Bayliss 1973: 116).[3]

[3] (CT 16, 10 v 5–14) (Sumerian) gidìm lú.ki.nu.túm.ma hé.me.en gidìm lú.sag.èn.tar nu.tuk.a hé.me.en gidìm lú.ki.sè.ga nu.tuk.a hé.me.en gidìm lú.a.dé.a nu.tuk.a hé.me.en [gidìm] lú.mu.pàd.da nu.tuk.a hé.me.en (Akkadian) *lu-u e-ṭím-mu la qeb-rù* KI.MIN (=*at-tú*) *lu-u e-ṭím-mu šá pa-qi-da la i-šú-ú* KI.MIN *lu-u e-ṭím-mu šá ka-sip ki-is-pi la i-šú-ú* KI.MIN *lu-u e-ṭím-mu šá na-aq me-e la i-šú-ú* KI.MIN *lu-u e-ṭím-mu šá za-kir*$_8$ *šu-me la i-šú-ú* KI.MIN.

Bodi_9781666979138_C008.indd 247 7/13/2026 3:55:23 PM

Descendants played a critical role in perpetuating the memory of their deceased parents. The filial duties included the performance of memorial rites where the names of the parents were invoked.

This belief system was shared by almost all cultures of the ancient Near East, and is attested in Mesopotamia, at Mari in Northern Syria, in Ugarit on the Levantine coast, in Asia Minor, among the Hebrews, and in Egypt. In the Northwest Semitic domain, at Old Babylonian Mari, the *kispum* funerary rituals were celebrated for the kings by the royal family and for the chthonian *malikū*, probably the spirits of the dead providing counsel (Bottéro 1980: 38). One Mari text specifies that the funerary offering (*kispum*) consisting of a sacrificed sheep (*immērum*) was presented to the divine statues (*lamassātum*) of Kings Sargon the Great and Narām-Sîn in the "Hall of the Throne" (*ina bīt kussi*) of the Mari Royal Palace (Mari 12803; Birot 1980: 143). The text dates probably from the time of the warlord Samsī-Addu, who strived to link his Amorite dynasty and his Realm of Upper Mesopotamia with the famous kings of the earlier Dynasty of Akkad. Strict hierarchy had to be respected in sharing the "food." The choicest morcels (*rēš šīrim*) of the sacrificed sheep were first given to god Šamaš, who is the judge over the ghosts of the dead (*eṭēmmū*), then to the divinized statues of Kings Sargon the Great and Narām-Sîn, and finally to Samsī-Addu's fallen warriors, the *yaradū* Ḫaneans and Numḫeans. The bulk of Samsī-Addu's troops were warriors from these Amorite tribes. This text confirms the existence of a form of fallen heroes worship among North Syrian Amorites in Old Babylonian times. One Mari text (ARM 26/1 221) describes the funerary meal (*kispum*) for the ghost (*eṭēmmu*) of King Yaḫdun-Lim (Charpin 2015b: 23). Another text (ARM 26/1 220) includes the (*pagrû*) rituals for the dead. This reference anticipates similar rituals for the dead Hebrew kings. The Hebrew expression (*pigrê malkêhem*) in Ezek 43:7, 9, probably refers to the funerary offerings for the spirits of the deceased kings of the Davidic dynasty in Jerusalem (Bodi 1991b: 87–101).

A thirteenth-century BCE Ugaritic text describes how the son would "set up the stele of his father's god/spirit, in the sanctuary, the monument of his ancestor" (*nṣb.skn. ilibh.b.qdš. ztr.ʿmh*, KTU 1.17 I 26–27). The care for the dead was subsumed under the category of *kispum* funerary rituals, performed by the son designated as *zākir šumim* "the one who invokes the name" of the deceased ancestor (Jonker 1995: 187). The association of the noun *kispum* with the verb *kasāpum*, "to break, to morcel," suggests that the funerary rites implied sharing food with the deceased represented as a stele, a statuette, or an effigy before which food would be placed, or libations poured (Tsukimoto 1985: 36).

The eighth-century BCE Kuttamuwa stele with an Aramaic inscription found at Zincirli, in Anatolia, attests to the postmortem existence of "his *nbš* (Hebrew *npš* "soul") that is in this stele." His postmortem identity is reified in the (*nbš*) through ritual actions that include breaking bread with the dead (Suriano 2014: 390). Suriano links this text with Hos 9:4–5, where "the bread of mourning (*leḥem ʾônîm*)" is "for their defunct soul" (*lĕnepešām*), and therefore inappropriate for Yahweh's sanctuary.

Egypt also shared the same religious worldview. The inscription found on the tomb of Petosiris, High Priest of Thoth, in Hermopolis, dating from the fourth century BCE, shares a similar attitude of respect for the dead kin. Here, the very act of pronouncing

Bodi_9781666979138_C008.indd 248 7/13/2026 3:55:23 PM

the name of the dead revives him: "I built this tomb in this necropolis, beside the great souls who are there, in order that my father's name be pronounced, and that of my elder brother; a man is revived when his name is pronounced!" (Lichtheim 1980: 45–46; Wright 2011: 135 n. 8).

To inflict an ultimate outrage on the vanquished enemy, Assurbanipal mentions how he intentionally opened the tombs of Elamite kings, removing their remains to Assur: "I inflicted restlessness on their ghosts. I deprived them of funerary offerings and libations of water (*eṭēmmē-šunu lā ṣalālu emēd kispi nāq mê uzammē-šunūti*)" (*CAD* E: 141 and 342; *CAD* N/1: 337).

The invocation of the name (*šumu*) of the deceased appears to have been an important part of the regular cultic celebrations. The emphasis placed on the name may be compared with the frequently attested desire of kings at all periods for their names to be preserved in writing. In the Epilogue of his "Codex," King Ḫammurabi curses the one who would dare to alter his name and his ordinances, "(May the goddess Nintu) deprive him of an heir, and give him no offspring (literally, does not give him a name); may she not allow a human seed/child to be born among his people (*aplam līṭeršuma šumam ay ušaršīšu ina qerbit nišīšu zēr awīlūtim ay ibni*)" (CH li 40–49; Roth 1997: 139; Finet 1983: 146 n.2). This royal means of preservation of the personal name after death by having it written on a stele was rarely available to private persons although some would have it written on a cylinder seal. Before the Late Babylonian period and the development of the widespread use of ancestral family names, there is reason to suppose that invocation in the funerary cult was the only means available to the majority of people to perpetuate their names after death. The recurring use of *šumu* in expressions of the hopes invested in offspring, especially in personal names, omens, curses, and blessings, suggests that the need for someone to invoke the name (the *pāqidu*) to keep the name of the individual alive after his death may have been an important element in the desire for offspring.

9. Making Oneself a Name in a Military Context: A Mari Letter and the David Story

The Amorite warlord and tribal chieftain Samsī-Addu (ca. 1792–1782) was a remarkable king and conqueror who wanted his two sons to follow his example as a warlord, recruiting their help in managing his vast Realm of Upper Mesopotamia. King Samsī-Addu had two sons, Yasmaḫ-Addu and Išme-Dagan, who are well-known thanks to the Mari correspondence and the word letter he exchanged with them.

In a letter that Samsī-Addu writes to his younger son, Yasmaḫ-Addu, who reigns in Mari, the father describes in detail yet another military exploit of his older son, Išme-Dagan. The father is proud of his son's military success, extoling his military and manly courage, and wants his younger son to follow his example. He cannot help but decry his younger son, Yasmaḫ-Addu's slothful existence of dallying with his women and concubines, a behavior not worthy of an Amorite warlord. After their father's death, it was the older son, Išme-Dagan, who inherited the throne of Assyria.

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When Yasmaḫ-Addu appears in the Mari documentation, he seems to be still a very young man (Durand 2003–2004: 840). The father, Samsī-Addu, is reticent to give him additional lands. Both his father and his brother, Išme-Dagan, send him letters full of reproof, telling him that he is not able to receive further territories since he is mismanaging his realm. Yasmaḫ-Addu refuses to assume a life that behooves an adult and spends his time in luxury and banquets that accompany opulent religious celebrations, making expenditures far beyond his means. His laidback and slothful lifestyle is epitomized in the following letter, where he is reproached for "lying among women," pursuing a soft life of pleasure instead of striving for military glory. Yasmaḫ-Addu's main companions are not his warriors but his wives and concubines. Instead of going out on military campaigns like his older brother, Išme-Dagan, who marches at the head of his troops, Yasmaḫ-Addu does not care for the glory of having a great name as a famous warrior and tribal leader. In this respect, Yasmaḫ-Addu resembles David in 2 Samuel 11–12, who stayed in Jerusalem, sleeping with the wife of one of his officers, instead of leading his army against Rabat-Ammon. Yasmaḫ-Addu is exhorted to abandon his dissolute and unbecoming life and effectively participate in the empire-building undertaken by his father, Samsī-Addu, and his older brother Išme-Dagan.

> (1) To Yasmaḫ-Addu say: thus, Samsī-Addu, your father. (5) When an army gathered in the city of Qabrā, I sent Išme-Dagan with an army to the land of Aḫazum, and I, myself, went to the City (Ekallātum). And when the army (10) gathered in Qabrā, the land of Aḫazum heard of the gathering of the army in Qabrā; it decided to bring together the troops of all that country (15), and the Turukkeans who were with them joined together. In the city of Ikkallum, which is in the land of Aḫazum, against Išme-Dagan, they were positioned.
>
> (20′) Išme-Dagan took a position against that city. Not approaching (beyond) a certain distance (less than 300 cubits), the troops of all that country together with the Turukkeans who are with them (25′) who gathered against Išme-Dagan [to do] battle, the weapons [they lifted] [……]. The main force of that land and the Turukkeans (30′) who gathered together with them, he captured (*lakādum*). Not a single man escaped, and that day he seized the entire land of Aḫazum. This defeat is great for the (enemy) land.
>
> (35′) Rejoice! Your brother, here, inflicts a defeat (to the enemy), and you, there, remain lying among women. Now, therefore, when you march on to Qaṭna with the army, (40′) may you be a man! (*lū awīlāt*) Just as your brother made himself a great name, you, too, in the Qaṭna campaign, make yourself a great name!' (40′) *lū awīlāt kīma aḫū-ka šumam rabêm ištaknu u atta ina ḫarrān Qaṭanim šumam rabê*[*m*] *ši-i*[*t-k*]*a***-an** (ARM I 69 + M. 7538).[4]

[4] (Dossin 1950: 130–31; Charpin and Durand 1985: 313; Durand 1998: 24, LAPO 17 452)

Bodi_9781666979138_C008.indd 250 7/13/2026 3:55:23 PM

The first thirty lines of this tablet offer a detailed description of the military strategy Išme-Dagan used to defeat his enemies. They contain a lot of repetitions and undue insistence on things already said. The old father, Samsī-Addu seems to have adopted an overtly overbearing attitude toward his younger, militarily inexperienced son Yasmaḫ-Addu by giving him a basic military lesson on how to lead a battle.

The Akkadian text contains some striking similarities with the biblical text describing David's campaign against Rabat-Ammon in Transjordan (2 Sam 11:1 and 2 Sam 12:26–31) (Bodi 2010a: 114–23). The admonitions that are found in the closing lines of Samsī-Addu's letter to his son Yasmaḫ-Addu are Old Babylonian Amorite precursors of two almost identical ideological points of view found in the David story.

1. King Samsī-Addu's admonition to his son Yasmaḫ-Addu to establish himself a great name (*šumam rabêm šakānum* lines 41′-43′) in the pending military campaign, reflects a similar ideology of military honor and fame as found in the admonition General Joab makes to his commander in chief, the Hebrew warlord, and tribal leader David in 2 Sam 12:28: "Now, then, gather the rest of the people together, and encamp (*waḥănēh*) against the city, and capture it (*wĕlākdāh*); lest I capture (*pen-'elkōd*) the city, and it be called by my name (*wĕniqrā' šĕmî ʿālêhā*)." The goal of the warlord's existence and his military campaigns is to make himself a great name and leave for posterity the memory of his conquests and exploits. Both the Amorite ruler Yasmaḫ-Addu and King David are admonished by a third party, Samsī-Addu and Joab, respectively, to rise to the occasion and honor the ideology of warlords. The message of Samsī-Addu to Yasmaḫ-Addu is clear: True glory, manhood, and virility are not manifest with one's exploits with women but on the battlefield!
2. In line 40′, Samsī-Addu enjoins his son: "Now, therefore, when you march on to Qaṭna with the army, may you be a man (*lū awīlāt*)!" The context of the expression "be a man" related to the military campaign makes it clear that Samsī-Addu exhorts his younger son Yasmaḫ-Addu to behave in a virile, military manner as a true warlord at the head of the army he is about to lead against the city of Qaṭna.

David's last words to his son Solomon contain a comparable admonition: "Show yourself a man (*wāḥāyîtā lĕ'îš*)!" (1 Kgs 2:2). He summons his son to establish a strong-handed political regime. In the following verses, David enjoins him to execute both his General Joab and Shimai, and thus settle, on his behalf, an old feud. A strong political regime implies not shrinking from committing political assassinations.

10. The Greek *Kleos* as Fame and Renown

The Greek "Heroic ideal," central to ancient Greek values, is embodied in the character of Achilles. In the *Iliad*, a warrior's glory (κλέος [*kleos*]), fame, and renown are more important than life itself, as Achilles' choice makes clear. Heroic deeds lead to everlasting glory (Alexander 2010: 192). While life may be brief, the pursuit of fame and glory can lead to a long-lasting name and enduring legacy. Achilles faces a choice between living a

Bodi_9781666979138_C008.indd 251 7/13/2026 3:55:23 PM

long, unremarkable life or achieving everlasting fame and glory through heroic deeds and military exploits in the Trojan War. He ultimately chooses the latter, demonstrating the Greek belief that honor and fame are paramount, even at the cost of one's life. The *Iliad* extols early heroic death, for renown never grows old. The concept of "fame" (*kleos*) refers to the glory and lasting name that comes from acts of valor and heroic accomplishments, where honor, bravery, and reputation were highly esteemed. *Kleos* expresses human desire for significance. Achilles embodies this ideal, as his exploits in the Trojan War grant him eternal glory, making his name remembered from generation to generation. In the society depicted in the Homeric Epic based on a shame and honor culture, esteem depends on how one is viewed and talked of by one's peers, fame (*kleos*) is fundamental as a measure of one's value to others and oneself (Segal 1983: 22). A hero or usually a bard may sing of the (*klea andrōn*) "glorious deeds of men," as Achilles in *Iliad* 11.189 or the bard Demodocus in *Odyssey* 8.73. This (*klea andrōn*) is the most noble and preferred subject of epic poetry. This imperishable fame as one of the eternal elements of the world is "heard" among men, lives in the mouths of the bards, and is diffused by their epic songs. It acquires an objective existence in the lives of societies and their traditions.

Etymologically, (*kléos*) should have meant simply "that which is heard" (from *klúō* "hear"). The poet hears the (*kléos*) recited to him by the Muses (*Odyssey* 2.486). The invoking of the Muse providing divine inspiration at the start of Greek epic is the tag of the poet's own performance (*Iliad* 1.1): "Sing, O goddess [Muse] the anger [*mēnis*] of Achilles," and (*Odyssey* 1.1): "Tell me, O Muse, of that many-sided hero [Odysseus the *polytropos*] who traveled far and wide" (Nagy 1999: 16). The Muse is the one inspiring the bard. Being the daughter of Zeus and Memory (*Mnémosyne*), the Muse knows "what is, what was, and what will be" (Hesiod, *Theogony*, 38). In the epic, the poet is not the creator but only the performer of the songs. The reference to divine inspiration is conventional and represents a traditional theme (Kirk 2001: 51).

Both Abusch (2015: 123) and, more recently, Clarke (2019) pointed out that ancient Near Eastern influences are particularly evident in the Achilles stories and that a significant number of parallels exist between Gilgameš and Achilles. The motif of *kleos*, as establishing a name and eternal fame, plays a role in the *Gilgameš Epic*. It is found in Gilgameš's exhortation to his companion Enkidu before the battle with Huwawa: "Forget death and [seek] life! (. . .) [He who] went first protected his person, let him bring the companion to safety! It is they who have established a name (*šuma ištaknū*) [for] future [time!]" (*Gilg*. 4 245–248; George 2003, 1: 600).

Something similar to the classical Greek heroic ideal was found in the Neo-Assyrian letter addressed to King Assurbanipal (668-627 BCE) by an army commander. The officer Bēl-ibni and his troops found themselves in a hopeless situation. Since the enemy far outnumbered them, they were certain of death. According to Bēl-ibni, his soldiers assured themselves: "If we die, we will do so with an excellent name" (*kī nummutu ina šumim* [MU] *babbanî nimūt;* ABL 620 = K 680, Rs. 4–5, De Vaan 1995: 266). As pointed out by Wright (2011: 138), "Their identity would survive their death inasmuch as the manner in which they died produced an 'excellent'—and thus enduring—name."

Bodi_9781666979138_C008.indd 252 7/13/2026 3:55:23 PM

Part of the Sumerian poem *Bilgames, Enkidu, and the Netherworld* was translated into Akkadian and appended to the *Epic of Gilgameš* as Tablet 12 in the last, Neo-Assyrian version of the epic. At some point Gilgameš asks, "Have you seen the one who fell in battle?" and Enkidu responds, "I have seen him. His father and mother hold him in high honor (*rēšu našû* an idiomatic expression meaning, "lift up his head"), and his wife mourns his death" (*Gilg.* 12.vi.148–149; Foster 2019: 141 [line 344]). The Twelfth tablet was added at a time when the Assyrian Empire was engaged in numerous wars. It reflects the religious and cultural perspectives of the time, regarding life, death, and the afterlife. It extols the heroic ethos. In it, Gilgameš assumes the cultic role as judge of the Netherworld (Abusch 2015: 122).

The seventh-century BCE Spartan poet Tyrtaeus wrote the "Spartan Creed," expressing Sparta's military ideology. The citizen-soldier who dies in battle acquires the immortal glory that the city (*polis*), his parents, and posterity award him: "His shining glory (*kleos*) is never forgotten, his name (*onoma*) is remembered, and he becomes immortal, though he lies under the ground" (Lattimore 1960: 15).

Significantly, the story of the Trojan Horse is not directly narrated in the *Iliad* but is referred to in *Odyssey* 4.271–89 (Menelaus describes it to Telemachus), 8.492–520 (the bard Demodocus narrates it in his song), and 11.523–32 (Odysseus reminds his fallen companions in Hades of their exploit). Odysseus secures the victory of the Achaeans over Troy by cunning and deceit. The Greek culture hero par excellence, Odysseus, did not acquire a lasting name as an exceptional warrior but as a genial trickster. Cunning and craftiness are archaic forms of wisdom and were taught by observing and imitating the behavior of some crafty animals in their hunting techniques, such as the fox on the ground, the octopus in the sea, or the shifting, versatile, *polutropos* or *poikilos* trickster among humans like Odysseus (Bodi 2021a: 303–26; Détienne and Vernant 1991: 27–54).

11. Conclusion

The above analysis has first revealed several ways in which one could make oneself a name in the ancient Near East. The *Epic of Gilgameš* suggests that this could be achieved: a) By undertaking monumental building projects; b) By leaving a written record of one's exploits for posterity; c) By acquiring a progeny that would perpetuate one's memory. In the ancient Near East, one reason for siring progeny was to ensure a peaceful afterlife for the deceased parents. Deprived of the funerary rites in the cult of the dead that were incumbent on the descendants of the deceased, there was a danger for the deceased of becoming an *eṭēmmu*—a revenant or restless ghost that comes back to trouble their kin, without finding rest.

In the Hebrew Bible, the reference to making oneself a name is made in connection with the construction of the city and the Tower of Babel where the builders want to "make themselves a name" in Gen 11:4. This statement is seen as being in a dialectic tension with the Call of Abram, where God offers to make him a great name in Gen 12:2. In the Call of Abram, the root "bless" and "blessing" is repeated five times. This

Bodi_9781666979138_C008.indd 253 7/13/2026 3:55:23 PM

keyword spells out the biblical perspective on the way a person can acquire a famous name. The pursuit of a great name is secondary, while being a blessing is primary. Abram is called to become a channel, a conduit of blessings for all nations. In so doing, God promises to make his name great. This may be seen as the biblical manner of deconstructing the ancient Near Eastern idea of making oneself a great name.

An Old Babylonian Mari letter shows another way of acquiring a great name by a great military victory. The Amorite warlord Samsī-Addu admonishes his younger son Yasmaḫ-Addu to make himself a name through a military victory like his older brother Išme-Dagan. This feature is comparable to General Joab admonishing David to acquire military glory by conquering the city of Rabbat-Ammon and having his name attached to this great victory (2 Samuel 11–12). However, the secondary inclusion that connects the military campaign against Rabbat-Ammon in 2 Sam 11:1 + 12:26–31, and the story of David and Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11, might be seen as another instance of deconstructing the notion of making oneself a name. The victory in war, as reflected in the Rabbat-Ammon episode in 2 Sam 12:26–31, is placed after David's repentance. In this late redactional presentation of events, victory in war is subsumed to repentance and made dependent on the right relationship with the patron God.

Both Yasmaḫ-Addu and David are admonished by a third party, Samsī-Addu and Joab, respectively, to rise to the occasion and honor the ideology of warlords and army leaders: to make themselves a name. This is a major ancient Near Eastern motif found also in the *Gilgameš Epic*, which offers several answers to the question of how to make oneself a name.

In the enumeration of King David's warriors in 2 Samuel 23, one finds descriptions of how various persons acquired their fame. They "made names" for themselves through valorous acts and martial prowess (2 Sam 23:20–23; Wright 2011: 149).

Both ancient Near Eastern and biblical texts (Gilgameš and Qoheleth) emphasize the need for acquiring a progeny that would perpetuate one's memory.

Bodi_9781666979138_C008.indd 254 7/13/2026 3:55:23 PM

9

The Stories of King David and His Wives as a Hebrew Version of the Advice to a Prince

1. Introduction

The stories of King David's interaction with his four wives, Michal, Abigail, Bathsheba, and Abishag, could be seen as a Hebrew version of the particular genre called *Advice to a Prince*, also known in German as "*Fürstenspiegel*" or "Mirror for Princes." Due to the protracted period in the writing of biblical literature, one must pay attention to the gradual growth of such a composition as the Hebrew *Advice to a Prince*, its probable dating, and how it was incorporated into the final form of the post-exilic Deuteronomistic Historiography (DtrH). Elsewhere, I have given a more detailed comparative treatment of this genre (Bodi 2021a: 269–302). Here, it will suffice to give some of its key features.

The *Advice to a Prince* is a genre that spans several millennia. Such compositions are found in Mesopotamia and the Homeric Epic in classical Greece. They are attested in Persian times with the *Cyropaedia*. Xenophon (431–354 BCE) was initially a Greek mercenary fighting for the Persians, who later became a historian. His *Cyropaedia* represents a historical-novel-cum-*Fürstenspiegel*, or the guide to statesmanship dealing with the education of the Persian King Cyrus. There are further examples in Roman times with Seneca's *De Clementia*, which is a hortatory essay preserved in fragments, written in 55–56 CE by Seneca the Younger, intended for the education of the Emperor Nero. The work establishes a contrast between the good ruler and the tyrant, and an evaluation of the relationship between the ruler and his subjects. It inspired later Byzantine and Medieval texts. However, François Fénélon (1997), the preceptor of the royal son of King Louis XIV, followed the Homeric *Odyssey* when he published in 1699 his *Advice to a Prince* entitled *The Adventures of Telemachus*.

During the three millennia that the genre has existed and the variety of languages and cultures in which it developed, the genre inevitably evolved and changed its literary structure and presentation. Already in the second and first millennium BCE, the emphasis in such works could differ. One could speak of three main topics dealt with in the *Advice to a Prince*: (1) Hunting as preparation for statesmanship, as in the *Gilgameš Epic*. (2) Warning the future ruler about abuse of power and the preservation of the economic benefits of some cities, as in the Babylonian *Advice to a Prince.* (3) Educating the ruler on how to develop self-control and appropriate behavior as

Bodi_9781666979138_C009.indd 255 7/14/2026 9:38:14 PM

exemplified in the *Odyssey*. In the Greek version of *Advice to a Prince*, the conspicuous feature would be Odysseus's interaction with four women: Circe, Calypso, Nausicaa, and Penelope. It is in this last category that one should place the Hebrew version of the *Advice to a Prince*, dealing with King David and his four wives: Michal, Abigail, Bathsheba, and Abishag.

The basic didactic aim of the *Advice to a Prince*, offering guidance on human affairs and the political purpose of advising the ruler or future king on how to govern and acquire skills in managing public affairs, always remained. Throughout the centuries, the words, emphasis, and format changed, but the function remained the same. The Hebrew version of *Advice to a Prince*, with the story of David's interaction with his four wives, resembles Odysseus's maturation process with his four women. Therefore, the emphasis will be on the classical Greek *Advice to a Prince* as found in the Homeric Epic.

2. *The Gilgameš Epic* as an *Advice to a Prince*

In his search for earlier Old Babylonian versions of the *Epic of Gilgameš*, Abusch (2015: 172) proposes an initial composition intended for the education of a prince. A series of major motifs and striking scenes appear in the epic that fall in line with such a purpose. Initially, the king tyrannizes his population of the city of Uruk with brutality, immaturity, and insensitivity, instead of acting as their leader, shepherd, protector, and benefactor, hence the need for the ruler to acquire and develop self-control. This feature will be developed particularly in the Babylonian *Fürstenspiegel–Advice to a Prince*, where the ruler is warned not to tax and exploit the cities of Nippur, Sippar, and Babylon. Moreover, there are a series of important women figures in the *Gilgameš Epic*: Šamḫat, the courtesan, Šiduri, the tavern keeper and an avatar of Ištar, the goddess of love and war, and Utnapištim's wife in the Flood Tablet (*Gilg*. 11), added around 1200 BCE (Ackerman 2019: 215–25). The mother of Gilgameš occupies a prominent role in the Epic. The women figures in the story exercise a civilizing role on both protagonists of the *Gilgameš Epic*. The hunters bring the courtesan Šamḫat to seduce and tame the wild man, Enkidu. First, she separates him from his life in the steppe with animals and then helps him acculturate and transition to urban life. Following an epic love-tryst with the courtesan lasting "seven days and seven nights" in the Old Babylonian version and "six days and seven nights" in the Standard Babylonian version, Enkidu tries to run with his herd, but he is left behind. He is no longer an animal, and his former animal companions sense his profound transformation. As the bard put it: "He now has wisdom, broad understanding." Šamḫat teaches him both human sexuality and, after another week-long session of epic lovemaking (George 2018: 10–21), she shows him how to behave as a civilized human being: to have a clean body, to dress and not walk around naked, and how to eat and drink city food, bread, and beer. Although a liminal character socially, the courtesan plays a pivotal role in Enkidu's maturation and transformation. She is the mediator who helps him transition from animal to human, from a wild man living in the steppe, to an acculturated urban dweller who is ready to integrate into the city of Uruk, ruled by a king.

Bodi_9781666979138_C009.indd 256 7/14/2026 9:38:14 PM

Gilgameš's brutality and callousness are reflected in the corvée-work he imposed on the male population, and sexually abusing the women of Uruk with the exercise of the *droit du seigneur* in Tablet 1.[1] As pointed out by Steinkeller (2018: 161–62, 170–73), "There cannot be any doubt (. . .) that the *pukku* and *mekkû* formed some kind of a percussion instrument or noise maker, which Gilgameš used to mobilize the men of Uruk for corvée-work, and probably also to keep them working." Such attitudes exemplify what may be characteristic of royal princes or young rulers (in 1 Kgs 12:8 Solomon's successor, Roboam, follows the advice of the young men to increase the corvée-work), leading to major shortcomings and disastrous failures in kings. One may compare the story of David's son, the young Prince Amnon, raping his half-sister Tamar in 2 Samuel 13, as well as mature King David raping and abducting Bathsheba in 1 Samuel 11–12. While Abusch explains the importance of Gilgameš's mother in the Epic as originally dealing with a prince and not with a king, one could also view it as an expression of the important role of the mother of the king, attested throughout the ancient Near East and comparable to the role of Bathsheba in 1 Kgs 1–2 (Bodi 2021a: 161–212).

Assyriologists agree in viewing the *Epic of Gilgameš* as a form of *Advice to a Prince*. According to Simo Parpola (1993a: 192–95), the *Epic of Gilgameš* could have been a story of initiation or a kind of *Bildungsroman* ("novel of education," Moran 2019: 207), tracing the story of Gilgameš's education and progress to maturity. Parpola suggests viewing the *Epic of Gilgameš* as an account of intellectual growth from animal passions, through spiritual awakening, and culminating in the acquisition of superior esoteric knowledge. To a certain degree, Jacobsen's view (1976: 2019) is similar, stating that, "the Gilgamesh Epic is a story about growing up" (Similarly, Vanstiphout 1990: 46–79 and George 2019: 225–37). Moreover, it has been recognized that the *Epic of Gilgameš* has some bearing on the female characters in the *Odyssey*. The love goddess Ištar served as a model for both Circe and Calypso. Šamḫat, the courtesan, and Utnapištim's wife are human females, while Ištar is a goddess, and Šiduri is also a divine being since her name is preceded by the divine determinative (^{d}), which stands for DIĜIR "divine being" in Sumerian. In the *Odyssey*, Circe and Calypso are minor nature goddesses, while Nausicaa and Penelope are human females.

3. The Babylonian *Advice to a Prince*

The motif of the oppression of the population of the city of Uruk found in the *Gilgameš Epic* is elaborated further in another composition, which warns the king not to oppress the populations of three Mesopotamian cities. The Neo-Babylonian composition, dubbed by modern scholars *Babylonischer Fürstenspiegel*, or *Babylonian Advice to a Prince* (Hurowitz 1998: 39–53; Cole 1996: 273) gives the ancient Near Eastern perspective on how a good king should rule, act, and behave. Despite its small size of only 60 lines, it provides insights into the Babylonian ideals of kingship and just rule.

[1] In medieval times, one of the seigniorial abuses also called *droit de cuissage* "the right of the thighs," in English known as "the right of the first night," entitling the lord to deflower the bride.

The range of behavior described in this composition spans the breadth of statecraft, from improper judicial actions and bribery to the imposition of corvée-work on inhabitants of three privileged Mesopotamian cities. The text defends the rights of three major Babylonian cities, Nippur, Sippar, and Babylon. Lambert (*BWL* 1962: 111) surmised that the composition originated in Babylon and should be dated between 1000 and 700 BCE.

The many admonitions found in the *Babylonian Advice to a Prince* relating to the preservation of justice by the leaders of society, oppression of the population by the king, and the threat of divine sanctions, prompted several parallels with the Hebrew texts. Weinfeld (1977: 195) compared it with the biblical "Law of the King' (Deut 17:15–19), against setting a foreigner as a king, multiplying horses, silver, gold, wives, and returning to the forced labor and slavery in Egypt. It was further compared to the "Instruction of Lemuel" (Prov 31:1–9), since the *Advice to a Prince* is illustrative of the same concern to equip a king for his tasks by providing guidance on morality, politics, and protocol (McKane 1977: 407). As described in Prov 31:1–9, the excesses of private life, with carousing and drinking, may lead to the negligence of maintaining a just rule over the king's subjects and prevent the latter "to judge righteously and maintain the rights of the poor and needy" (v. 9).

Kaplan (2012: 630 and 639) referred specifically to the *Babylonian Advice to a Prince* and attributed 1 Sam 8:11–18 (*mišpaṭ hammelek* justice of the king) to this literary genre. He sees Samuel passage as having its origin in the broader context of ancient Mediterranean, ancient Greek, and Near Eastern social, religious, and political practices of constraining the excesses of monarchic power. Prominent among these means of constraint are literary compositions written to advise a king on appropriate behavior, designed to emphasize the proper role of a king in society.

The opening lines of the *Babylonian Advice to a Prince* are exemplary of the content of the rest of the composition. They caution a king against divine retribution, which will overtake him should he oppress his subjects. The comparison with the Hebrew Bible is to the point since the Hebrew *Advice to a Prince* follows the same principle of divine retribution that was adopted and further systematically developed in the so-called Deuteronomistic Historiography.

4. The Odyssey as an *Advice to a Prince*

Significantly, the *Odyssey* does not begin with Odysseus sailing to Ithaca after the Trojan War but with his young son, Telemachus, in search of his father and of his own identity as a man. The first four books of the Homeric Epic, the *Odyssey*, dating from the end of the eighth-century BCE, are known to classical scholars as the "*Telemacheia*," dealing with the young prince's quest for information about his father, Odysseus, who did not return after the sack of Troy. This quest is combined with his journey toward manhood. In the latter sense, the first four Books of the *Odyssey* are very much a coming-of-age story. Odysseus first appears in the story in *Odyssey* Book Five. When Odysseus left for the Trojan War, he placed Mentor in charge of his son. Disguised as Mentor,

Bodi_9781666979138_C009.indd 258 7/14/2026 9:38:14 PM

the goddess Athena encouraged Telemachus to stand up against the 108 suitors who besieged his mother, Penelope, in Ithaca and go abroad to the city of Pylos on the Peloponnese to find out what happened to his father. Athena, as Mentor, is aware that Telemachus must quickly become a man and a warrior to fight for his rights and defend his domain and possessions from being despoiled. When Odysseus returned to Ithaca, Athena appeared briefly in the form of Mentor again at Odysseus' palace.

The *Odyssey* describes the world of Greek noble men and women. By displaying the rules of behavior of the aristocratic class, it erects their stories as a model to follow. The work is perceived as having an educational purpose, highlighting the virtues the nobles should develop and practice.

> For all the centuries of the so-called Hellenistic Middle Ages, the *aidoi* and *rhapsodoi*, singing the deeds of their ancestors, fulfilled not only a recreational function but an important pedagogical one as well. They taught the Greeks what to feel and think, what they should be, and how they should behave. As men learned from the *epos* to adapt themselves to the model of the hero, so women listening to the poets learned what sort of behavior they should adopt and what they should avoid. (Cantarella 1987: 25)

Indeed, the Homeric Epic served as the "Bible" of the ancient Greeks. Moreover, within the *Odyssey*, Richard Martin (1984: 33 and 38) has identified a passage which represents a stereotypical Greek understanding of the *Advice to a Prince*, which he calls "Instruction of Princes." Hesiod's poem *Theogony* 79–83, dating from ca. 700 BCE, contains lines that concern the Muse's gifts to the kings. The same formulas are used in Odysseus' reply to the inhospitable taunt by the Phaeacian youth Eurylaos, explaining how a true prince behaves (*Odyssey* 8.166–177). Odysseus upbraids Eurylaos because the young man has spoken with a lack of respect (*aidōs*). Being without knowledge when and how to speak, he displayed dishonorable behavior (*Odyssey* 8.166). Three elements occur in both works that are closely similar in phrasing. They comprise, first, the theme of faultless speaking ability (*asphaleōs agoreuei* in *Odyssey* 8.171; *Theogony* 86) and, second, that of "honey-sweet respect" (*aidōi meilikhiē* in *Odyssey* 8.172; *Theogony* 92), describing the speaker's behavior and the audience's reaction. The third element is dramatic context, which generates the "looking on" motif, of "looking on one as a god" as the person speaks, displaying the divine-like wisdom (*Odyssey* 8.173 and *Theogony* 85, 91). The classical Greek measured, timely, and wise counsel is found already in the Semitic world. For both the Mesopotamian sage par excellence, Adapa, and the Hebrew wisest man, Ahitophel, it is said that their counsel was "like the word of god." (2 Sam 16:23).

In the *Myth of Adapa*, of which a tablet was found in fourteenth-century BCE Amarna as a school text, the word of the sage (*apkallu*) Adapa is equated with the word of the god Anu: [*q*]*abīssu kīma qibīt* ^{d}[DIŠ=*Anu*] "His speech was like the speech of Anu" (Adapa fragment A.2′; Izre'el 2001: 9–11). Adapa is "exceedingly wise" (*atra ḫasīs*, A.7′). Similarly, the biblical tradition in 2 Sam 16:23 equates the advice of David's wise counselor, Ahitophel, "as if one consulted the oracle of God" (*ka'ăšer iš'al biděbar ha'ĕlohîm*).

Bodi_9781666979138_C009.indd 259 7/14/2026 9:38:14 PM

The Assyrian Queen Naqīʾa/Zakūtu, mother of King Esarhaddon (680–669 BCE), who, like biblical Abigail, had remarkable economic resources and a large staff (Melville 1999: 105–12), and was even able to build a palace for her son at Nineveh, is credited with exceptional wisdom. In a letter addressed to Esarhaddon, the chief exorcist of the court, writes that, "the mother of the king is as able as (the sage) Adapa" (SAA 10 244; Parpola 1993a: 14).[2] In a reply to Queen Naqīʾa quarry, a letter states that Naqīʾa's word is like the word of god: "[The verdict of the mother of the king, my lord], is as final as that of the gods. What you bless is blessed; what you curse is cursed,"[3] (SAA 10 17; Parpola 1993a: 194; Svärd 2015: 510)

In the Abigail episode in 1 Samuel 25, the providential intervention of the wise woman Abigail helped prevent bloodshed. The chapter emphasizes the need for a would-be ruler to exercise self-control, something that King David lacked as exemplified in the Bathsheba affair (2 Sam 11–12), leading to the assassination of Uriah the Hittite.

The *Odyssey* uses an extensive vocabulary of terms to describe proper behavior as viewed by individuals and the society involved (Fuqua 1991: 49–58). In the Homeric and Hesiodic texts, the term *aidōs* and other terms derived from this root imply a sense of shame and awareness of the demands of society on the individual to perform. *Aidos* refers to reverence for certain social conventions, manifest in virtuous, truthful, and proper verbal and noble behavior. It can be a speech that elicits respect and admiration. The prince who lacks this quality speaks "crooked words" in harming his betters. For example, an oath "harms" humans when someone breaks it or swears falsely (*Theogony* 231). Moreover, the term *aidōs* is closely related to *nemesis*, "retribution." When the divinities called *Aidōs* and *Nemesis* "Shame" and "Retribution" leave the world of the mortals, their absence provokes the ruin of human society (Turpin 1980: 354). The noun *nemesis* is related to the verb *nemein*, "to divide, to distribute, to assign." It means assigning to people and situations their correct due and maintaining the due order of things (Scott 1980: 13–35).

The noun *aidōs* can mean, "reverence," "respect," and "shame." The related verb *aideisthai* appears in the *Iliad* in the context of the battlefield, where *aretē*-standards of excellence in fighting and virtue of courage are expected, prompting the warriors to fight bravely. On two occasions, the phrase used to spur the men on to battle is simply, "*Aidōs*, Argives" (*Iliad* 5.787; 15.502). It is used here as a battle cry. *Aidōs* before one's comrades in battle leads one to rally and not shamefully run away. The fear of shame at what people may say about one's actions is used by King Agamemnon, the leader of the Achaean armada, to encourage the Danaeans to fight: "Dear friends, be men (*aneres este*); . . . spur each other with shame (*allēlous t'aideiste*). Of men who have shame (*aidōn*) more are saved than are slain, but from them that flee comes neither glory nor any avail" *(Iliad* 5.529–530). Likewise, Nestor appeals to shame "in the sight of other men," as well as asking the warriors to remember their wives and children, their property and their parents, whether living or dead. "Dear friends, be

[2] (SAA 10.244 r.7–9: MUNUS.AMA-LUGAL [*k*]*i-i a-da-pi* [*t*]*a-la-'i-i*).

[3] (SAA 10.17 r.1–5 [*ki*]- *i ša* DIĜIR.MEŠ *ga-mir* [*b*]*é-et ta-kar-ri-bi-ni ka-ri-ib* É *ta-na-zi-ri-ni na-zi-ir*). The term *nazāru* means "to curse."

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men (*aneres este*), let shame (*aidōn*) be in your hearts of other men. . ." (*Iliad* 5.661–663; Williams 1993: 79). Similar lines in the *Iliad* serve to teach battle strategy. If a warrior breaks the ranks and runs away, he not only incurs shame by losing his reputation, but also has no means of defense left. It teaches the *aretē* standards, the dominant social code of behavior. Eric Dodds (1966: 18) defines *aidōs* as "respect for public opinion." This feature is equally present among the Old Babylonian Amorites as well as in the Hebrew Bible. The warlord Zimrī-Līm heeds the public opinion when he orders an undercover execution of a troublemaker (ARM 13 107; see Chapter 5. Section 12). The latter should be thrown into a pit in the field or in the city and left there to die so that the public reputation of the tribal leader, Zimrī-Līm, may not be tainted. Kupper (1964: 80) points out the unusual procedure adopted in ARM 13 107, suggesting that this manner was used to prevent hostile reactions from the population and to avoid the risks of offending "public opinion." In the seventh-century BCE, King Zedekiah used the same approach in silencing the prophet Jeremiah by throwing him in an empty cistern in Jerusalem (Jer 38:6–13). Following Reuben's advice, the sons of Jacob attempted to get rid of their brother Joseph by throwing him into a pit without incurring the shameful reputation of fratricide (Gen 37:20–24; Bodi 2017: 133–34).

The injunction "to be a man" is part of the common Mediterranean "honor and shame ideology" (Peristiany 1976; Olyan 1996: 201–18; Lemos 2006: 225–41). It spells out a code of honor for the valorous warrior and prince. In Northern Syria, it appears already in Old Babylonian Amorite society. The great warlord Samsī-Addu I (1792–1782 BCE) who conquered and established the Realm of Upper Mesopotamia, writes to his son Yasmaḫ-Addu (1782–1775 BCE), who rules over Mari on the Euphrates and dallies with his numerous wives and concubines instead of fighting: "Now, therefore, when you march on to Qaṭna with the army, may you be a man (*lū awīlāt*)!" (ARM I 69 + M.7538, line 40′ Akkadian *awīlum* "man").

David's last words to his young son Solomon contain a similar admonition: "I go by the way of all the earth. Be strong and be a man" (*wĕhāyîtā lĕ'îš*)! (1 Kgs 2:2). He summons Solomon to rule as a worthy heir of his famous warrior father and ensure an honorable and strong rule. It is immediately followed by the injunction to execute David's general Joab and Shimai and expunge the offense they inflicted on him. This feature is comparable to the bloodbath that Odysseus and his son Telemachus carry on expunging the offense the suitors inflicted on the royal house of Ithaca. For a Greek prince, being a man means defending the honor of his house.

One particular feature that the Homeric Epic shares with the Hebrew *Advice to a Prince* is the place it allots to noble women. Both cultures and literary traditions share a keen interest in women, probably because they reflect a time when women held important and leading roles in society. Penelope, who administers Odysseus' household, shares several features with Abigail and Abishag.

The Greek respect for noble women is expressed strikingly in the way Odysseus responds to Penelope, where he compares her to a blameless and honorable king. It requires a king (or a queen) to know one. The passage offers a description of the ideal king:

> Lady, among men here on the measureless earth there is no one who would abuse you, for truly your glory has reached the broad heaven, much like that of a blameless king who, fearing the gods, holds sway as the lord over men both many and might in valor, one who justly upholds good laws; and the rich black earth brings forth both barley and wheat, and with fruit are the trees heavy-laden, so do his flocks bear young without fail, and the sea provides fish, all coming from his good rule, and the people beneath him prosper. (*Odyssey* 19.107–114; Merrill 2002: 331)

Penelope and the ruler of Ithaca are here blended into one. The passage transforms both Odysseus and Penelope into an idealized royal couple. In the above lines, the Queen Penelope, a clever woman, the king's proper wife, is herself portrayed like a good king (Martin 1984: 48).

5. Samson and the Four Women in His Life—The Demise of the Tragic Hero

A comparison can be made between the Hebrew *Advice to a Prince* based on King David and his four wives, with Samson and his four women (Mobley 2005: 182). The story of Samson seems to have been elaborated as a counterpart to that of David and his four wives, offering a striking contrast. Samson is the paragon of the Hebrew tragic hero and serves as the paradigm of the behavior not to follow. In both cases, the hero's character is revealed through his interaction with women. Moreover, although they are originally Hebrew literary compositions, both narratives contain elements found in classical Greek sources. Samson's magic locks remind one of the golden hair of King Pterelaus, conferring him immortality, or of Nisus, king of Megara in ancient Greece, whose strength resided in his golden locks. The motif of bees hiving in a lion's carcass is found in Greek and not in Semitic sources (Margalith 1986: 232 and 227). Numerous parallels were drawn between Samson and the Greek hero Heracles (Margalith 1987: 63–70; Mobley 2006: 7–12). The original Hebrew tribes being a "mixed multitude," Samson's Danite tribe is seen as having some ties with the Denyen mentioned by Rameses III, commemorating his victory over them in Medinet Habu and the Danaans/Danaeans of the *Iliad* 1.42, where they are found among the Achaeans (Margalith 1994: 115–24). It would account for Samson's apparent cultural closeness to the Philistines, who are of proto-Hellenic stock. The Philistines gave their name to "Palestine," already mentioned in the fifth-century BCE (Herodotus, *Histories* 2.104). The hair magic being foreign to Hebrew culture, critical scholarship assumes that he was depicted as a (*nāzir*) to turn him into a Hebrew superman. Samson's foxes (Judg 15: 4–6) have a parallel with the story of the first-century BCE Roman poet Ovid, *Fausti* (4:679–712) of a boy who tied straw to a fox's tail, ignited the straw, and turned the fox loose in a field (Mobley 2006: 11). One has to assume a common stream of tradition going back to an earlier oral or literary motif, maybe the story of the Danite wild man?

Bodi_9781666979138_C009.indd 262 7/14/2026 9:38:14 PM

5.1. Samson as a Tragic Hero

Samson shares a tragic side with the Greek hero Achilles. Samson is a typical tragic hero who was destined to save Israel from the Philistines. Instead, he ends his life bound, blinded, and grinding at the mill in a Philistine prison in Gaza. In a final suicidal act, in his prayer, he asks God, "Let me die with the Philistines" (Judg 16:30). In his suicide, he kills more Philistines (3000) than he killed during his lifetime (1030).

The story of Samson in Judges 13–16 follows an elaborate structure with considerable narrative coherence, reflecting stylistic and thematic unity using anticipation and repetition. The Samson cycle reflects poetic narrative characteristics (Kim 1993: 299). It is organized around his relationship with four women. As pointed out by Mobley (2006: 86), "In every episode of Judges 13–16 Samson is impelled to action by female characters." 1) His mother, the wife of Menoah, is the central character in his birth story (Judg 13). 2) The woman from Timnah. In Judg 14:1, Samson marries a Philistine woman in Timnah. 3) The woman from Gaza. In Judg 16:1, Samson goes into a prostitute's house in Gaza; 4) In Judg 16:4, Samson falls in love with Delilah, a woman from the Sorek Valley. Twice, the women ignite, directly or indirectly his vendetta.

The divine messenger visits Menoah's barren wife twice. Samson's miraculous birth is due to a supernatural intervention, typical of many heroes in the Hebrew Bible and the ancient Near Eastern legends (Judg 13: 3, 7). It is comparable to the births of Moses (Exod 2:1–10), Samuel (1 Sam 1), Sargon the Great (Foster 2016: 268), Cyrus the Great (Herodotus, *Histories* 1.107–109; Briant 2002: 15). Her name is not given, apart from being presented as Menoah's wife. This feature is highly significant. It presents Samson as an integral part of and as an extension of his unnamed mother. In the story of David and Bathsheba, the first baby that died about a week after its birth is not given a name. In this way, its birth is directly linked to David's guilty behavior. Samson's mother is prescribed a special prenatal diet (Judg 13: 4–5, 7, 14). Samson is a Nazirite, consecrated from the start, not merely from birth but from conception in her "womb" (*habbeṭen*; Judg 13: 5, 7). Samson refers to his mother at the moment when he reveals his secret to his lover, Delilah, in Judg 16:17. He tells her that his hair has never been cut because he has been a (*nāzir*) from his mother's womb.

In the three episodes that follow (Judg 14:1–15:20; 16:1–3; 16:4–31), Samson shows no progress with a conspicuous absence of maturation. He keeps repeating the same mistakes and reveals his secrets to the Philistine women with whom he becomes involved. There is no visible evolution in his attitude. As if he were suffering from the repetition syndrome, he learns no lesson, gains no insight, and keeps falling into the same trap. He appears as an angry hero devoid of self-control who succumbs to his impulses, reveals his secrets to women who betray him (Judg 14:17; 16:17), and when cornered, prays asking God to help him out (Judg 15:18; 16:28; Mobley 2005: 184). He displays a tragic hero's excessive energy, uncontrollable violence like Achilles in the *Iliad*, overconfidence, bravado, transgression, forgetting human proverbial frailty, leading to self-harm.

Samson goes down (*yārad*) from Dan to the Philistine village of Timnah (Judg 14:1), where he sees (*rā'â*) a Philistine woman. Out of his amorous wanderlust in

Bodi_9781666979138_C009.indd 263 7/14/2026 9:38:14 PM

Timnah, he announces to his parents that he wants to marry her. Samson is a destructive character. His wedding feast with the Philistine wife from Timnah turns into a disaster. It sets in motion a violent chain reaction or reprisals, leaving in its wake thirty stripped corpses outside of Ashkelon, scorched grain fields and orchards outside Timnah, 1000 dead Philistines at Lehi, 300 charred foxes, and one dead lion (Mobley 2005: 187). The Timnite woman foreshadows the Delilah episode in which another woman extracts a secret from him. Samson's anger is explosive. He bursts the bonds linking him to his consecrated (bound) state as a (*nāzir*) as well as the bonds the Philistines put on him when they try to catch him. He remains incontinent and blurts secrets.

Samson's second adventure is the briefest, described in only three verses (Judg 16:1–3). The same pattern repeats itself. He goes to Gaza, sees (*raʾâ*) a prostitute and "enters her" (*wayyābōʾ ʾēlêyhā*). The verb (*bāʾ*) means "enter," "come," but also euphemistically "cohabit." The Philistines wait in ambush, respecting an ancient Near Eastern taboo and custom known as the "sacredness of sleep" that also occurs in the story of David and Michal (Bodi 2021b: 19–36) (Chapter 3. Section 8). Samson sneaks up on them, uproots the city gate, and carries it away to Hebron, a distance of 20 miles, displaying his Herculean strength. The prostitute stands as a symbol of the religious straying of the Israelites. It illustrates Samson's disregard for his special Nazirite consecrated condition. In the episode with the Gaza prostitute, Samson topples a city structure. He will do so again in the third episode in Judg 16:30 (Mobley 2005: 191).

The third woman bears the name Delilah, in contrast to the first two, who remain nameless. Delilah is the one who brought the Hebrew tragic hero down, hence the importance of mentioning her name. According to Burney's (1970: 407) explanation of her name, Delilah would be a hypocoristic form of Dālilat-Aštart, "the one who praises DN (the love goddess)" (cf. Akkadian *dalālu* A "to praise, to glorify"). One finds theophoric names such as Adallal-Sîn "I praise (the moon god) Sîn" (*CAD* D: 47), and Erra-dalīlī, at Mari, meaning, "Erra is my praise" (Durand 1982: 81–82). It should not be confused with another root √(ʾ)*alālu* "to praise, sing a joyful song" in Mari spelled with (*ḫ*), as in Hitlal-Erra "Praise Erra!"[4] Mobley (2006: 89 n. 14) cites a series of other explanations of Delilah's name.

The fact that the Philistines pay her for revealing to them Samson's secret (Judg 16:5, 18) makes it probable that she, too, was a prostitute. Delilah is acutely venal. She sells her lover for silver (*kesep*). Elsewhere, I have explained the association of berserker warriors with prostitutes after battle (Bodi 2013b: 91–95). This technique was known and used in Celtic, Greco-Roman, and medieval times. To divert the murderous rage

[4] Kouwenberg (2010: 524 n. 45) reads the name *It-làl* ^{d}*Dagan* (ARM 19 212) deriving it from the root (ʾ)*alālu* III which in the Gt-stem means "to sing a joyful song," and translates it as a Gt imperative, "Jubilate! Dagan." Streck (2003: 41, 65), sees here an Amorite name parsing it as a Gt imperative Hitlal-Dagan "Praise Dagan!" and adds another case of an imperative *at-la-li Ištar* "Sing joyfully Ištar!" The cuneiform signs in Jestin's reading *á-làl* (1952: 201, 52 r1) are ID-LÀL-^{d}Da-gan. The sign n^{o} 334 (*MEA*) can be read either (*á*) or (*id/it*), which explains (*CAD* D: 47), *id-làl*. However, if we follow the *CAD* and read here the verb *dalālum* "to praise, to glorify," in the G-stem, the thematic vowel should be (a/u) *idallal*/*idlul*, which poses a problem with the grammatical analysis (GAG § 87b).

Bodi_9781666979138_C009.indd 264 7/14/2026 9:38:14 PM

of the warriors after battle, they were offered prostitutes to calm them down before allowing them to reintegrate into the community. Both Samson and David in the Abigail story (1 Sam 25:22 and 34) share a similar murderous rage.

Samson and Delilah play four rounds of a game, and three times he gives her a false answer. He is hubristically overconfident in his strength and not very bright. He should have progressed in his understanding of the game Delilah was playing with him. She systematically betrays him, and her treachery is a form of negative didactics. Samson is either blindly in love with her, forgiving her dishonesty, or is remaining an unteachable brute, unable to learn from his errors. In the fourth round of the game, he tells her the truth and mentions his mother: "A razor has never touched my head for I have been consecrated (*nāzir*) from my mother's womb" (Judg 16:17). Samson is a man who cannot avoid making slips, and such deviations from proper behavior are characteristic of a young person. In Timnah, it is explicitly stated that he is feasting with young men (*baḥûrîm*; Judg 14:10). The Hebrew and Greek tragic hero is characterized by his youth and early death (Lemardelé 2005: 269).

The story of Samson and the four women in his career teaches using negative didactics. It shares the retribution principle as in the story of King David's wives. The rabbinic comment on Samson's tragic ending expresses the outworking of retributive justice. It was at Gaza that he "followed the desire of his eyes," and it was there that the Philistines gouged out his eyes (*b. Sotah* 9b). Another example of retributive justice is found in the reference to Samson grinding at the mill in a Philistine prison in Gaza. Samson's grinding in prison (Judg 16:21 *ṭôḥēn*) and captive youths compelled to grind (Lam 5:13 *ṭĕḥôn*) were understood by St. Jerome, as well as by the rabbis, in this sexual sense. (Pope 1965: 202). The Mishnah applies the "measure for measure" principle known in Hebrew as (*middâ kĕneged middâ*).

The Samson narrative uses a pun between (*śḥq*), its allomorph (*ṣḥq*), both meaning "to laugh, to play," and (*šḥq*), which means "to crush." The pun expresses the irony and ultimate reversal of the situation at the moment of his death, as if it were "Samson's last laugh." The Philistines gathered to rejoice and celebrate the victory of their god Dagon "who has given Samson into their hand" (Judg 16:23). "And when their hearts were merry, they said, 'Call Samson, and let him entertain us, (that is, make us laugh *śḥq*, v. 25). So they called Samson out of prison, and he performed (*ṣḥq*) for them." (. . .) "Now the house was full of men and women, all the lords of the Philistines were there, and on the roof there were 3000 men and women, who looked on while Samson was performing (*śḥq*)," (that is, "crushing" *šḥq*)." The pun is based on unvocalized text, which makes no difference between these two Hebrew roots. "While the Philistines thought they were summoning Samson for their entertainment, they were ushering in their brutal death as he crushed them under the collapsing temple" (Halton 2009: 64). As already encountered in the Story of Taking Joppa (Chapter 7. Section 6), the Hebrew reader will capture the subtle irony contained in Samson's final hour.

Samson's erotic adventures fit the theme of the foreign woman who brings shame, deception, and death, a theme found in Hebrew wisdom circles. Therefore, Samson's story corresponds to a wisdom didactic product (Soggin 1981: 237). A series of studies was published under the title "Samson: Hero or Fool?" (Eynikel and Nicklas 2014),

Bodi_9781666979138_C009.indd 265 7/14/2026 9:38:14 PM

which perfectly captures the impression Samson makes on the reader. The character assassination wrought by the redactors of the Samson cycle, depicting him as a fool, was probably intentional to teach a specific didactic point: Learn from the mistakes of others. Moreover, the story about Samson could have been incorporated into the Deuteronomistic Historiography, probably in the post-exilic period around the time of Ezra-Nehemiah, when the issue of mixed marriages was actively fought as a threat to the existence of the Judean community.

5.2. The Wrath of David, Samson, and Achilles

David's wrath and murderous rage are manifest in his dealings with Nabal. The narrative in 1 Samuel 25 is about how David obtained one of his wives, Abigail, but also serves a far more important function in the sense that it constitutes a decisive stage in depicting David's psychological make-up. David is a hot-blooded, impulsive individual, too quick to shed blood. Apparently overcome by a murderous rage, David has a propensity "to go berserk."

In 1 Sam 25:22, he literally says, "God do so to the enemies of David and more so, if by morning I leave so much as the one who urinates against the wall (*mštyn bqyr*) who belongs to him." David repeats the same phrase in v. 34. He uses a well-known, roundabout way in swearing solemnly, "God do so to the enemies of David," meaning, "God do so to David." If he does not succeed in killing Nabal and his household by spite, David is bent on turning his murderous rage against himself. Apparently, this rage can become so self-destructive that even the use of a periphrasis is preferable.

The expression "the one who urinates against the wall" (*mštyn bqyr*) is taken to designate all the male descendants of Nabal's household down to his farm dog. As Rashi pointed out, in the Rabbinic Bible, "(*mštyn bqyr*) [means] even a dog whose manner is to urinate against the wall," explaining the term *mštyn* in the usual manner. The same interpretation is suggested by Radaq and by Isaiah of Trani. In modern Israeli Hebrew, the word *mištānâ* designates a public toilet or "*urinoir*."

The expression (*mštyn bqyr*) occurs several times in the Hebrew Bible (1 Kgs 14:10; 16:11; 21:21; 2 Kgs 9:8), referring to the complete extermination of the royal house. All the male members of the reigning dynasties of Jeroboam, Ahab, and Baasha are killed (Talmon and Fields 1989: 94). It is a coded expression epitomizing the violent termination of a king's rule in a *coup d'ětat* with a complete annihilation of all the descendants, potential successors to the throne. Following this intertextual lead, Caquot and de Robert (1994: 310 n. 19) suggested that David was bent on exterminating even the little boy of Nabal's household who had not yet learned how to cover his feet and was still urinating against the wall (cf. 1 Sam 24:4).

The KJV rendered the expression in the following manner: "any that pisseth against the wall." McCarter (1980: 398) followed this literal translation with his rendering: "of all he has who piss against the wall." His comment is to the point: "The verb has become vulgar in modern English, but perhaps a vulgarism is appropriate on David's lips in his present state of mind." For Gray (1976: 337), the expression "is a typical example of the direct, graphic, uninhibited speech of the Israelite peasant." The idiom is pejorative

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even in biblical Hebrew. To say that a man pisses against the wall is another way of saying that he is a dog. The term *kalbu* "dog" is used as a term of abuse in eighteenth-century BCE Mari letters, "Even though they may be royal sons, what are they? Dogs!" (ARM 1 27:28; Durand 1997a: 499, LAPO 16 370). Moreover, it also has connections with the fact that Nabal was from the tribe of *Kaleb*, meaning "dog." In 1 Samuel 25, Nabal and David throw slurs at each other and at their respective clans, attesting to a deeply ingrained hostility between them, spanning several generations. Endemic animosity between clans is an additional link between the behavior of Amorite semi-nomadic clans and the Hebrew ones. Boiling with anger, David loses control of decent speech and gives vent to his murderous rage.

McCarter (2008: 78–91) analyzed two Ugaritic texts dealing with divine rage and altered states of warrior gods. The first text is (KTU 1.3, II 3), also known as "Anat's Bloodbath," and the second is "Baʿl's victory over the Sea," (KTU 1,2 I 38–41), showing how Baʿl goes berserk and attacks the messengers of Yamm, meaning "Sea." Baʿl losing his temper is described as the god becoming sick with anger: *ʾappa ʾaniša zabūlu baʿlu* "Then Prince Baʿl became sick, unwell" (KTU 1,2 I 38). Though the messengers have come on a diplomatic mission, in rage and out of control, Baʿl attacks them to the point that he has to be restrained by Athirat and Anat. In "Anat's Bloodbath," the goddess "makes war in the valley, between two cities, her knees are plunged in the blood of heroes, her thighs in the gore of warriors" (KTU 1.3 II 6–7, 13–15). Other lines of the myth describe Anat's altered state, where she is having hallucinations, slaughtering, and cackling maniacally. Anat thinks she is fighting real-life warriors, but in fact, she is fighting chairs that in her imagination look like warriors. In other words, she is "tilting at windmills," like Don Quixote in the novel by Cervantes, who is fighting the windmills that he imagines to be giants, "Her behavior is consistent with what today might be described as acute stress disorder, with its sensations of intense horror in response to the extreme emotions of warfare" (McCarter 2008: 84).

Being *ʾnš* "sick" or "unwell" is a Ugaritic metaphoric expression designating unpredictable and dangerous behavior when gods are "not themselves," until their rage is appeased, and they return to a state of normalcy. The cognates of the Ugaritic term, however, may explain this mythological elaboration. The Ugaritic term *ʾnš* corresponds to Akkadian *nīšu* "man," as well as to Hebrew *ʾĕnôš* "man," in the sense "weak, feeble, mortal creature" as implied in Ps 8:5 "What is man (*ʾĕnôš*) that you are mindful of him, mortal (*ben-ʾādām*) that you care for him?" Just like the Homeric Epic, the bards of the Ugaritic songs project on their gods the behavior observed on human warriors. In other words, when Ugaritic gods occasionally behave like men, or human warriors, they go berserk. These episodes from Baʿl and Anat would be the earliest mythological descriptions of the ravages inflicted on warriors by the so-called "combat stress" and PTSD.

Some years ago, Winton Thomas (1935–36: 162) had suggested interpreting Samson's murderous rage as an example of a warrior "boiling with anger," which strangely resembles the warrior's "berserk" phenomenon.

In Judg 16:20, Samson, who, after a killing spree, fell asleep on the knees of a Philistine prostitute, awakes at the threat of the Philistines saying, "I will go out as at other times, and shake myself free" (from bonds) (*wĕʿinnāʿēr*). The verb *nāʿar*, in the

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Nif'al conjugation, means "to shake" (oneself). Winton Thomas pointed out that the translation "shake myself" was unsatisfactory. It follows the LXX, *ektinachthēsomai*, and the Vulgate *me excutiam*. Nothing is said, however, of his having been bound on this occasion, and it is not recorded elsewhere that he "shook himself." He suggested, therefore, to translate this verb with "I will show myself angry," or "I will boil with anger." He took the clue from the Syriac rendering in the Peshiṭṭo version (*'štnd bhwn*) "I will punish them," where the suffix *bhwn* refers to the Philistines. Likewise, the Aramaic version in the Targum Jonathan has (*'itgabbar*) "I will prevail," from the root *√gābar* which in the Hithpa'el means "be uppermost, prevail, to be strong." (Jastrow 1975: 208). Winton Thomas was right in suggesting that the Hebrew root *√nā'ar* used in the Nif'al should be connected with the Arabic root *√nġr* meaning "to boil, be in violent commotion, be very angry," (Lane 1968: 8, 2815). In Judg 14:19, on a previous occasion, when Samson had smitten the Philistines, "his anger was kindled" (*way-yiḥar 'apô*). Samson was able to accomplish his feats in a state of boiling anger akin to the behavior of the berserk warriors.

One should probably recognize here the state of extreme anger of a warrior who went amok. His murderous anger was uncontrollable and wrought havoc in Philistine ranks. Moreover, after his murderous exploits, Samson associates with prostitutes, something which resembles the presence of "lewd women" in the Latin (Ceasar's *Gallic War*) and Celtic texts about the hero Cúchulainn, dating from the first-century BCE, whose role was to calm down the uncontrollable rage of the warriors through sex and make them sociable again (Bodi 2013a: 86–89; Dumézil 1970: 134).

The Homeric Epic also sings of the warrior's rage. Achilles's rage is the main theme of the *Iliad*. The first two lines of the *Iliad* 1.1–2 read: "Sing, Goddess, of the rage of Peleus' son Achilles, the accursed rage that brought great suffering to the Achaeans." (Armstrong 1993: 62). The *Iliad* is a poem of passion, its subject springing from the first word "wrath." Achilles' consuming rage (*mēnis* "lasting rage") is at times an asset in the combat against the Trojans, but at other times the warrior becomes a danger for his own troops since he cannot be cooled. Zeus himself took note of Achilles' rage and sent the gods to restrain him so that he would not go on to sack Troy himself, seeming to show that Achilles' unhinged rage could defy fate. When he executes his tragic decision, he is convinced that he is completely justified. When Agamemnon threatens to rob him of his spoils and take away his female slave, Briseis, a seething Achilles pledges that he will withdraw from battle, letting the Achaeans be defeated (*Iliad* 1.239–244). He will never accept an apology or compensation (Armstrong 1993: 259). During a skirmish between the Achaeans and Trojans, Apollo encourages the latter by reassuring them that Achilles is still away, brooding beside his ships (*Iliad* 4.512–513). For Hellenistic philosophers, Achilles represents the violent man, enslaved to his passions, in contrast to Odysseus, who incarnates the sensible, resourceful person. Ajax, another Greek hero, dies insane, having massacred the sheep destined to feed the Achaean troops, and realizing his error, commits suicide (Grimal 1999: 8 and 24). Achilles knows that he may choose between a short, glorious life leading to lasting fame and a drawn-out, humdrum, long existence (*Iliad* 9.410–416). When his horse Xanthus prophesies his passing, he expresses awareness of his destiny (*Iliad*

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19.420–423). The topos is similar to Balaam's talking donkey in (Num 22: 28–30). Similarly to Samson, he expresses a wish to die (*Iliad* 18.98) and vows to accept death at the bidding of Zeus and the immortal gods (*Iliad* 18.115).

Achilles, like Samson, has a miraculous birth, having a divine mother (*Iliad* 1.7). He is a powerful King of the Myrmidons, commanding fifty ships (*Iliad* 2.681–685). His epithets mark him as a great leader of men: shepherd of his people (16.2), breaker of battles (16.146), chief of heroes (18.56), sacker of cities (21.550). The greatness of the tragic hero is reflected in the language he uses, which is highly rhetorical. At times, the tragic hero experiences *anagnorisis* (Aristotle, *Poetics* 11.4–7), the realization that his action has brought about a disaster (Ball 1967: 54). Achilles' recognition is sudden when Antilochus informs him of Patroclus' death, he smears himself with ashes, tears out his hair, and grovels in the dirt with grief (*Iliad* 18.22–27). He realizes that his withdrawal has resulted in the death of his best friend. His world turns into chaos. From that moment on, Achilles is obsessed with revenge and grief. Similar to Samson's final suicide when he killed 3000 Philistines, death is a release from the burdens of life and the committed tragic errors. Like Samson, Achilles appears irresponsible, childish, even foolish. When Agamemnon comes to take away his female slave, Briseis, like a child throwing a tantrum, Achilles shouts that he never wanted to come to Troy; he complains that greedy and unworthy Agamemnon always gets the choicest war spoils; and he threatens to return home (*Iliad* 1.152–171). Agamemnon laughs in his face, telling the cry-baby to go home and behave himself (*Iliad* 1.173–181). As soon as Agamemnon takes away Briseis, tears stream down Achilles' cheeks, and he cries for his divine mother, asking her for help (Ball 1967: 54). When Agamemnon offers him the return of Briseis and gifts, Achilles refuses to change his attitude (*Iliad* 9.344). When Patroclus asks to borrow his armor, Achilles reminds him why he still doesn't want to fight (*Iliad* 16.56–62). Achilles' tragic flaw is hubris, which he shares with Samson and David.

6. The Dating of the Hebrew *Advice to a Prince*

The initially orally transmitted stories (*Überlieferungsgeschichte*) of David's wives, Michal, Abigail, Bathsheba, and Abishag, dating from the tenth-century BCE, were gradually and independently written down (*Traditionsgeschichte*) around 850 BCE. A gap of 150 years between the emergence of orally transmitted stories about David's wives and their written forms allows for the Hebrew language to develop and establish wider use of the Hebrew script (Rollston 2018: 462). Among these four women in David's career, the earliest one that was written down was probably the story of Queen Michal, in view of her political importance. She was the daughter of the first tribal chieftain, Saul, and the first wife of David. Her story linked the first two rulers of the Hebrew tribes. The narratives on Abigail, Bathsheba, and Abishag were added to form a unified whole, serving as an instructional and pedagogical narrative known as the *Advice to a Prince* at King Hezekiah's court (716–687 BCE), probably by the end of the eighth-century BCE. Schniedewind places the beginning of biblical literature at

Hezekiah's court (2005: 64–90). The royal court at Jerusalem, with Davidic descendants, would be doubly interested and highly motivated in sponsoring scribes charged with the preservation of the stories of King David's wives. The poetic narratives dealt with the founder of the Davidic dynasty and preserved the memory of the ancestral royal ladies.

In the Josianic era (640–609 BCE), during the first redaction of the Deuteronomistic Historiography (DtrH), other passages like 1 Sam 17, the David and Goliath story, 1 Sam 24 and 26 (against regicide), as well as 1 Sam 8:11–18 (against royal abuse of power) might have been added to the *Advice to a Prince*. The redactors of the (DtrH) used the Hebrew version of the *Advice to a Prince* with the story of David's wives, a pre-Deuteronomistic composition, and incorporated it into their historiographic work. After further editing, it was subsequently incorporated and integrated into the second redaction of the Deuteronomistic Historiography, dating from the post-exilic and Persian times (Person 2002; Nelson 2005: 319–37). The story of Samson could have been written down at that time with the didactic purpose of providing a striking contrast: the tragic hero and the behavior not to follow.

The so-called "Michal Tradition," once probably a unified whole, was split into six different fragments, all placed at key moments of David's career. Something comparable is found in the composition of Homer's *Odyssey*. When Odysseus sails away from Circe's island, she tells him he must avoid the Clashing Rocks, two great cliffs on either side of the strait that keep smashing ships that try to pass between them. She says that the only ship that ever got safely past them was the *Argo*, as Jason sailed himself homeward in it with the Golden Fleece (*Odyssey* 12.68–72). In other words, the story of the Argonauts was the only one in which the Clashing Rocks had previously appeared. The redactor of the *Odyssey* was borrowing them from there (West 2011: 387). Another author points out a dozen references to Hesiod's *Theogony*, from which entire lines, themes, and motifs were taken and incorporated in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* (Ballabriga 1990: 16–29).

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Conclusion

In the nineteenth century, classicists held to a distorted view of the "Greek miracle," believing that the splendid culture of the ancient Greeks emerged from a genius of its own, owing practically nothing to its neighbors. This idealistic legacy was misleading for subsequent research. The continuous discovery, deciphering, and study of Akkadian, Hittite, Hurrian, and Ugaritic cuneiform tablets, and a better understanding of the history of the peoples along the Mediterranean shoreline and in Kizzuwatna, the buffer region between Mesopotamia and Anatolia, brought about a more balanced view of the considerable cultural and religious interconnections between these ancient cultures. The increased knowledge of the historical and religious past of the Northwest Semitic geographical area also affected the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible, as scholars no longer defended its *sui generis* nature and uniqueness. As shown in the discussion above, the idea of a "revelation in a single night," as in the *Erra Epic*, is a literary topos used to lend authority and legitimacy to a composition. It does not mean, however, that a specifically Hebrew perspective on a shared issue does not exist. The specificity has only become harder to find and define. "Civilisational thinking promotes a notion of extensive shared cultures (. . .) the historical reality is that distinctiveness emerges on a smaller and more humane scale, exploiting resources from elsewhere" (Quinn 2024: 79).

The comparative approach has revealed the probable existence of a literary and poetic composition known as the *Advice to a Prince* common to several cultures: The *Gilgameš Epic* in Mesopotamia, the *Odyssey* in classical Greece and the Hebrew tradition around King David and his wives, and to a smaller degree, in the story of the Hebrew tragic hero, Samson, and his four women, which seems to follow the same pattern. All three compositions have a didactic purpose. They deal with culture heroes and with the ruling, aristocratic class whose process of maturation is displayed as a model to be imitated, and errors to be avoided. The epic descriptions of the heroic individuals, with their values, exploits, and achievements, and tragic, hubristic failures, are presented as models for educational purposes, to follow or eschew. The mimetic nature of desire, with the emancipative character of imitation, makes humans capable of adaptation, giving them the possibility of learning everything they need to know in order to participate in their own culture. The latter is not invented; rather, it is copied and adopted through imitation (Girard 2017: 41).

The *Iliad* of the Homeric Epic glorifies the heroic tradition and offers a dual vision of heroism and its tragic limits. In it, Achilles extols the short life and glorious death in battle that establishes his name, securing him an eternal fame. In a single combat, he defeats Hector, the main hero of the Trojans. According to one collective memory tradition, David, the Hebrew culture hero par excellence, begins his career as an intrepid young warrior whose military feat became legendary by defeating the Philistine

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giant, Goliath, in a single combat (Isser 2003: 80–83). The ancient Hebrews, too, share in the heroic tradition common to most of the peoples and cultures of the Mediterranean shoreline (Mobley 2005 and 2006; Smith 2014). Acquiring fame through martial prowess is shared by the Hebrew Bible, the Mesopotamian tradition as reflected in the *Epic of Gilgameš*, and the Homeric Epic with Achilles in the *Iliad*. However, although necessary, martial valor is not enough. The Hebrew tragic hero, Samson, ends his life in what amounts to a sacrificial suicide, killing more Philistines than while he was alive (Judg 16:30). He is an example of an individual who failed in his mission as a judge in Israel. Both Saul and David continued the battle against the Philistines, with the difference that David came out alive and victorious. In his interaction with four women, Samson does not evolve, learn, or grow. The essence of death is to interrupt and prevent life from thriving. The hero is associated with mortality, a short life, and a killing spree. By contrast, women stand for the perpetuation and continuity of life. They alone, being able to procreate, stand as agents of a form of immortality as epitomized in Šidurī's advice to Gilgameš to find himself a wife, have progeny, and in this manner achieve a form of immortality. She is either an avatar of the goddess of fertility, Ištar, or operates under her aegis. Her name means, "She is my rampart," indicating a man's rampart against oblivion. In the *Odyssey*, both goddesses Circe and Calypso, also patterned on Mesopotamian Ištar, offered immortality to Odysseus. As pointed out by Glassner (2002: 162), the feminine sex serves as a powerful metaphor of the mediation between the outside and the inside, the wild and the civilized, between a social status and another one; it plays the role of a catalyst of change and transformation. Being able to generate life through procreation, women offer continuity and a form of immortality. This would explain the fundamental role of women in the stories of Odysseus and David. Female characters also play a key role in the *Epic of Gilgameš*. One must develop noble virtues necessary for community life that are diametrically opposite to the predatory ones. Both the Homeric Epic and the Hebrew Bible deal with the necessity of the valorous warrior to tame his predatory and killer instincts and develop self-control, maturity, and a more altruistic attitude toward life. The hero must take care of the larger community, his estate, household, and family. This maturation process is described in the *Odyssey* through the hero's interaction with several women. The Greek culture hero requires a ten-year-long return journey and an encounter with Circe, Calypso, and Nausicaa, before he can rejoin his wife, Penelope. In the Hebrew version of the *Advice to a Prince*, each stage of King David's life trajectory is exemplified with his encounter with a woman: Michal, Abigail, Bathsheba, and Abishag.

Throughout the *Odyssey*, the values that center on the family, on the pre-eminent virtue of hospitality, as with the Phaeacians, and the competent administration of one's domain and kingdom are in striking contrast with the heroic values of the *Iliad*. What threatens these domestic values is the ideal of military glory and honor as man's noblest goal—the individualistic quest for eternal fame in battle at the price of an early death (Lord 1954: 420).

The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are such different kinds of poems that some have argued that a female poet or bard composed the latter. The so-called "Megiddo Homer" (Chapter 7. Section 10) depicted on the ivory plaque is a female lyre-singer attesting to

Bodi_9781666979138_C010.indd 272 7/13/2026 4:04:49 PM

the key role played by female bards in transmitting heroic songs. In contrast with the silence on Odysseus' personal relationships in the *Iliad*, they are abundantly revealed in the *Odyssey*. A striking feature is that so many of them are with women. The *Iliad* is a tragedy of heroic passion set against a background of a legendary and quasi-historical saga about the bitter war between the Achaeans and the Trojans to liberate the abducted and captive Spartan Queen Helen. The *Odyssey* is the story of the warrior's return home, describing a process of maturation, acquiring wisdom and self-knowledge through trials, travels, and encounters with key female figures, Circe, Calypso, Nausicaa, and Penelope, and his triumph over adversity in a world of folktale. Interactions with women are pivotal to the fate of Odysseus. The Homeric Epic does not hesitate at times to present women as more perceptive than men. Arete is cleverer than Alcinous, Helen than Menelaus, and Clytemnestra smarter than the insensitive Agamemnon. The last relationship echoes the one between quick-witted Abigail and her brutish husband Nabal (1 Sam 25).

Culture is not invented *ex nihilo*; it is developed through mimesis. A child becomes socialized by imitating the behavior of the people around them. Moreover, it is possible to differentiate between mimesis and conscious imitation. The widely spread phenomenon of "Diplomatic Brides" and elaborate matrimonial politics attested throughout the ancient Near East, from Egypt to the Hittites and Mesopotamia, and on a smaller scale among the Hebrew royalty (Niemann 2006: 225–38; Bodi 2021a: 165–82) would fall into the category of conscious imitation. The issue encountered in this research is whether composing the Hebrew *Advice to a Prince* falls into the category of conscious imitation.

However, instead of postulating intertextuality between the analyzed epic traditions, it is more appropriate to see the outworking of the stream of tradition, allowing for adaptations, translations, and modifications of the common traditional material. The most probable period when the Hebrew *Advice to a Prince* was composed would be the court of King Hezekiah in Jerusalem, to educate young Davidic princes on the example of the founder of their dynasty.

The retribution principle is omnipresent in the Homeric Epic, the *Iliad,* and in the *Odyssey*, with the final carnage of the 108 suitors in Book 24. The initial feud between Agamemnon, the leader of the Acheans, over a concubine he took from Achilles made him regret the dispute he initiated (*Iliad* 2.375–378). Nestor intervenes as a mediator and proposes that Achilles be conciliated and offered compensation. Agamemnon agrees, accepting the fact that he has erred. The burden he carries and admits to Nestor is symbolized in the word "Disaster" (*Atē*), capitalized as a demon that affects humankind (*Iliad* 19.91–94). *Atē* destroys both wits and fortunes, she infatuates and ruins (Havelock 1978: 125).

Achilles is advised by his tutor, Phoenix, to stop his stubborn refusal and accept making concessions to Agamemnon, saying: "If a man is gracious to the maids of Zeus as they draw near, they greatly prosper him, and as he prays they listen; if a man refuses and stubbornly says "No," then do they, even they go to Kronian Zeus and supplicate that Disaster (*Atē*) goes in that man's company, that he be disabled and payback (*apotisē*)" (*Iliad* 9.508–510).

Bodi_9781666979138_C010.indd 273 7/13/2026 4:04:49 PM

The demon goddess (*Atē*) "Disaster" is capable of "disabling" (*bleptō*) a person, expressed by a term denoting the effects of being crippled or blinded physically or psychologically. Her power is formidable among the gods and men. She is eloquently described as the penalty that will inflict itself until a man "pays back" (*apotisēi*) (Havelock 1978: 207).

The retribution principle was a well-established worldview in Mesopotamian literature (*The Legend of Narām-Sîn*, *Erra Epic*) and was adopted by the Hurro-Hittites in Asia Minor as reflected in the fourteenth-century *Song of Release*. The gods doling out retribution seems to be a common worldview shared by all the major cultures of the Mediterranean shoreline. A series of type-scenes (tropes) and common literary motifs (topoi) were transmitted to the pre-Hellenic Greeks through the Hittite predecessors. As pointed out by Bachvarova (2005: 132), concerning the bilingual Hurro-Hittite *Song of Release*, whose central theme is divine retribution: "*The Song of Release* can thus shed new light on how the themes, plot lines, motifs, and formulae of courtly epic could have been translated and transmitted from the larger Near East to Greek-speakers, providing us with an example of how the wider Near Eastern epic tradition was transported across linguistic barriers and adapted to the particular interests of a new milieu." The city of Troy was sacked and destroyed as a consequence of divine retribution. Just like the god Tešub, who gives up the city of Ebla to destruction, the tutelary divinity of the city of Troy, Athena, refuses the sacrifices and supplications of the Trojans and sides with their enemies, the Achaeans, against her own city.

In the Hebrew Bible, the retribution principle has become the backbone of the so-called Deuteronomistic Historiography elaborated in Persian times from the sixth-century BCE onward. Yahweh delivers Jerusalem to destruction and its people to the Babylonian Exile. The first occurrence of the retribution principle, however, is found in the earlier *Advice to a Prince*, composed at the end of the eighth-century BCE, describing the story of King David and his four wives.

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Bodi_9781666979138_Bibliography.indd 324 7/14/2026 10:34:22 PM

Index of Subjects

ʿAbdi-Aširta 21, 161
ʿAbdi-Ḫebat 11, 22
Abigail 2, 27, 43, 44, 61, 105, 116
Abimelech 67
Abishag 2, 43, 44, 68, 69, 115
Abraham's call 241, 254
Absalom 54
Achaean 19
Achilles 5, 15, 17, 27, 28, 35, 36, 39, 65, 215, 217, 252, 263, 266, 268
Achish 19
Adonijah 50
Advice to a Prince 255
Aeetes 82
Aegisthus 107
Aegyptos 52
Aeneas 20
Aeolic dialect 231, 232 n.12
Agamemnon 5, 26, 27, 35, 116, 269
Ahitophel 54
Aḥiqar 41
Aḫlamu 157, 158
Ajax 5, 14, 17, 26, 27, 28, 183
Alalaḫ 12, 21, 124
Alcinous 41
allegiance "with the whole heart" 165
Altinoös 107
Ama-duga 9
Amarna 10
Amenophis II (Amenhotep) 23, 211
Amenophis III 11, 207
Amenophis IV (Akhenaten) 11, 20
Amorites 127, 131, 144
Amoritisms 8
Amphimedon 35
anagnorisis 269
Anat 217, 219, 267
ancestor worship (*kispū*-ritual) 127, 248
Anchises 20
anointing 150–1
Anticleia 115
Antinous 40
Aphrodite 14, 20, 34, 193, 217, 218, 225, 228
Apollo 31, 76, 107, 108, 140, 146, 196, 198, 215, 229, 268
Aqhat 217, 219
Arameans 119, 157
Ares 31
Arete 81, 97, 98, 99, 101, 102, 273
Argo 230, 231
Aristophanes 28
Armant stele 211
armor of scales 15, 16
Arnuwanda 41
Artabanus 28
Artemisia 36–8
artisan, chariot mechanic 199 n.5, 217, 222
asceticism 97
Ashdod 12, 20
Ashkelon 263
Ashtaroth 18
Ashtarte-Asherah 218
Ashurnasirpal II 239
Ašlakkā 54
Ašmad 136
assinnū 174, 175
Aššur 7, 135
Assurbanipal 19, 38, 45, 101, 221
Assyrian King List 7
Assyrian letters 160
astroglyphs 236
Athena 197
Atossa 31
auspicious time 136, 138
Autolycus "lone wolf" 75
Ay (Pharaoh) 211
Azazel 77

Balasî 45
Barak 31, 34
Bathsheba 2, 43, 44, 72, 88, 115
Battle of Halule 183, 194, 213

Bodi_9781666979138_Subject_Index.indd 325 7/14/2026 9:58:06 PM

Battle of Kadesh 15
"Be a Man!" injunction 5, 10, 11, 20, 24, 29, 30
Belial 59
Bellerophōn 28, 224, 226
beloved 79
Benjaminites 16, 122, 128, 132, 153, 154
berserker 264, 266
Beth-Shean 20, 22, 212
betrothal type-scene 99
Bilgames 144
bilingual offspring of slaves 201
bitch-eyed (κυνώπιδος) 74
blind bard 202, 203
blind musicians at Mari 202, 203
bloodguilt 77
blood rites 167
boars' tusk helmet 232
bow as phallic symbol 219, 220
bow contest 210, 213, 218
breaking a covenant 180, 186
bribery 156, 157
Briseis 27, 198, 268, 269
bronze dagger 51
"buffoon, bullshit artist" (ἀλαζών) 171, 181

Calypso 1, 2, 48, 91
Carpe diem 246
Circe 1, 2, 28, 48, 82
Cherethites 19
childbirth 25, 49
Chryseis 197
Circe 1, 2, 28, 48, 82
circular walls (*Kranzhügel*) 124
Cleonymos 28
Clytemnestra 35, 107, 117, 273
colonialism 240
composite bow 214, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219
condottiere 21
copper ingots 211, 223
corvée-work 257
courtesan 111
covenants 165
Cretan hieroglyphic pictograms 221, 222
Crete (Keftiu) 19, 37, 215, 216, 217, 219, 221, 222, 229
cunning intelligence (*mētis*) 84
Cypro-Minoan script 221
Cyprus (Alashiya) 39, 211, 217, 218, 221, 222, 233
Cythera 217, 218

Damasithymus 37
Dām-ḫurāṣim 9
Danaids 52–3
Danaans/Danaeans 262
Danaos 52, 53
Dardanians 20
David 21, 29, 44, 47, 50, 70, 266
Deborah 31, 103
Delilah 264
Demodocus 41, 202, 209, 217, 252, 253
Diomedes 27, 35, 215
diplomatic marriages 43
dividing the cosmos by casting a lot 204
divination 140
divine revelation, inspiration 195, 252
divorce procedure 51
Djehuty 206
dogs (eaten by dogs) 15
donkey of peace or treaty-donkey 151, 152, 166
donkey (royal symbol) 150, 151
Doppelgänger 71, 90, 91
Doric dialect 232
double-headed axes 213
doves 228
dropping excrement in a cup 168, 180
drought 127
drug 28, 77

Ebla 7
Edict of liberation (*anduārum*) 147, 148, 204, 205
Ekallātum 6, 7
Ekron 12, 18, 19
Elephantine marriage contract 51
Elhanan 13
Elijah 185
eliminating unwanted persons 163
Enheduana 187
Enkidu 14, 18, 65, 89, 112, 113
erotic aspects of war 35, 36
Esarhaddon 19, 45, 101, 236
Eṣḥor 51
Eulenspiegel 186

Bodi_9781666979138_Subject_Index.indd 326 7/14/2026 9:58:06 PM

Eumaeus 40
Eurycleia 115
Eve 111

fame, renown (*kleos*) 251, 253
fateful day 139
female administrator (*sōkenet*) 68, 69, 103, 115
female author of the *Odyssey* 72
female bard 228
female scribes 45
"filth pharmacy" (*Dreckapotheke*) 179
foxes 262, 264
funerary offerings (*pagrû*) 248

Gath (Tell eṣ-Ṣâfī) 13, 19
Gazru (Gezer) 11
Gelidonya 222, 223
Gilgameš 14, 15, 17, 27, 39, 65, 89
Ginti-kirmil (Gath-Carmel) 11, 13
Gittite 19
Goliath 13, 18, 48
greaves of bronze 16
Gudea of Lagash 125

Hades 86, 87, 89
hair locks 262
Hamlet 225
Ḫammī-ištamar 63
Ḫammurabi of Babylon 120, 128, 144
Haneans 131, 135, 153
harem 129
Hatshepsut 48
Hattušiliš III 18
Ḫāya-Sūmû 46, 50
healers 40, 199, 226
Heber the Kenite 32
Hector 14, 15, 18, 24, 27, 35, 36
Hecuba 197
hegemony 240
Helen 14, 27, 74, 105, 209, 273
helmet 16
Hephaistos 217, 218
Hera 52, 73
ḥerem-ban 156
heroic tradition 272
Heroic women 5
having progeny 246

Hezekiah 19, 45, 70, 177
Hipparchus, son of Pisistratus 191
Hiram 125
Homer as a generic name 189, 190
Homer Ὅμηρος [*Hóm-ēros*] "to fit together" 190, 195
Homeric question 3, 192, 193
honor 76, 261
hospitality customs 74, 96, 97, 107, 109, 111
House of David 73, 162
House of Saul 73, 162
hubris 53
Huwawa 15
hybridization of Akkadian 8

Iāmāni 20
Iaunaya 78
Ibâl-Addu 44, 54, 61
Icarios 47
Idomeneus 58
Idrimi 21, 161
Ikkallum 67
Ilān-ṣurā 46, 50
imperialism 240
incest 99
"infringing on a taboo" (*asakka akālu*) 174, 180
inheritance 104
Inib-šarri 44, 54, 61
the "investiture" painting at Mari 129
Io 52
Ionian Iambos festival 182
Ionians 78
Ionic dialect 231, 232 n.12
Isaac 45
Ishmaelites 152, 164
Išme-Dagan 6, 7, 9, 17
Ištar 27, 37, 85, 129, 228, 247
Ištar festival 172, 173, 174
Iyarri 198

Jacob 48, 160
Jael 5, 31, 32, 34, 38
Jedidiah 79
Jehu 185
Jeremiah 164
Jericho 155–6
Jerusalem 11, 21, 45, 155

Bodi_9781666979138_Subject_Index.indd 327 7/14/2026 9:58:06 PM

Jesse 62
jester, clown (*aluzinnu*) 171, 174, 177, 181
Joab 29, 63, 67
Jonathan 65, 101, 114
Joppa 11, 206
Joseph 164, 224

Kabti-ilāni-Marduk 194
Kairos 140, 142
King (*šarrum*, *mulkum*) 154
Kirûm 44, 46–50
Kizzuwatna 40, 41, 202
Kothar-and-Hasis 217
Kozbi 33
kurgarrû 173, 175, 177

Laban 160
Lab'ayu 20, 22
Laertes 75, 103, 117
Laestrygonians 71
lance, spear 147
Laodamas 101
Leah 48, 160
Lebanon 14
Libbi-āli-šarrat 45
like-mindedness 100, 105, 106
Linear A 221, 222, 229
Linear B 78, 221, 229, 230
lion metaphor 39, 96
loom and distaff 219
love 79, 81, 82, 85, 92, 93, 94, 100, 101
love-making 10, 34, 111–12

Mari (Tell Ḥarīrī) 7, 119
maryannu charioteers 207
maryannu warriors 15
Medea 25, 82, 87
"Megiddo Homer" 227, 229, 272
Menelaus 14, 27, 91, 225
Menoah 263
mercenaries 19
Merab 44, 46, 91
miasma pollution 77
Michal 2, 43, 44, 46, 47, 49, 52, 115, 269
Midianites 152, 164
military raunchy metaphors 64, 65
Milki-'ili 11
Miptaḥyah 51

Moabite 62
mockery in war 183
mocking quack doctors 179, 183
mocking the establishment 186
Moly drug 83, 84
Mount Carmel 185
Mount Cassius 200
Mount Hazzi 200
Mount Ṣapānu 200
mutilating genitals 108
Muwatalliš 18
Mykonos vase with the Trojan Horse 196

Nabal 44, 55, 107, 109
Naḥal Elah (Wādi es-Sant) 13, 19, 21
Naḥur 57
Name (making oneself a name) 7, 9, 237, 242, 249, 251, 252, 253
Narām-Sîn 7, 122, 139, 248
narû stele 235, 236
Nausicaa 1, 2, 94
navel (*omphalos*) 93
Nergal 85, 198
Nestor 26, 35
Nestor's Cup 191, 230
net 147
Netherworld 12
Nimrud 223
Nuzi 15, 17

Odysseus 1, 17, 28, 35, 74, 75
Og (king) 227
Ogygia 93
Olisseus 76
Oracles against the nations 145, 146
oral-formulaic epithets 191, 193
orpiment 223
Othryoneus 58
Outis, "nobody" 76
oxhide ingot target 211, 212

Padi 19
Panathenaia 191
paradisiacal island 93
Paris 14, 18, 34, 36, 105
pasture chief (*mer'ûm*) 55, 154
Patoclus 65
Pelasgos 52

Bodi_9781666979138_Subject_Index.indd 328 7/14/2026 9:58:06 PM

Pelethites 19
Penelope 1, 2, 35, 103, 114, 116, 117
Penelope's bed 104
periphrasis 59
pharmakis 81
pharmakon 28, 77
Phemius 41, 202
Philistines 20, 29
Phoenicians 78, 125, 145, 152, 183, 197, 201, 222, 223, 224, 226, 229, 230, 246, 218
pilpilû 173
plague (epidemic) 76–7, 129, 140, 198
poetic licence 235
Polyphemus 71, 210
polytropos 75–6, 105
Priam 58
prophesying horse 268
prophet (*nabûm*) 156
"PTSD" 267
"put together" (*kamāṣu*) 195

Qaṭna 9, 10
Qilti (Keilah) 12, 19, 21, 22

Rabbat-Ammon 63, 67
Rachel 48, 160
Raḥab 111
Ramesses II 15, 48, 212
Ramesses III 261
rape 33
razzia 78
Rebecca 45, 160
Rehoboam 20
Rešep 198
Retjenu (*Ṛtnw*) 16
retribution, revenge (*tisis*) 80, 265, 273, 274
Rizpah 115
Ruth 62

sacredness of sleep 94, 264
Šakkanakku 120, 122, 127, 134
Šamḫat 111, 256
Samsī-Addu 6, 7, 47, 63, 66, 129, 130, 133, 248
Samsī-Ēraḫ 161
Samson 43, 94, 157, 262
Sappho 36
Sargon II 20, 159, 239
Sargon the Great 108, 122, 225, 239, 248
Saul 21, 47, 50, 58, 70
scapegoat 77
scatological humor 182
scatological recipes 179
scatology 175
scribes 201
Sebetti 24
Sennacherib 19, 159, 213
Senwosret I 16
Šērū'a-ēṭirat 45
shame 26–7, 34, 63, 76, 77, 98, 260
Shechem 22
Shephelah 12, 21
shield like a tower 232
Shimei 29
"shit-gods" (*gillûlîm*) 168, 184, 185
Shoshenq (Shishak) 20
Šibtu 16
Sidonian female slaves 197
Šiduri 90, 114, 244, 256
silver-riveted sword 232
Sim'alites 16, 55, 122, 132, 153
Šimātum 44, 46, 50
singers 40, 199, 202
Single combat 13
Sisera 5, 32, 33, 34
skilled craftsmen 40
Solomon 29, 30, 50
Song of Deborah 31
Song of Release 3, 41, 196
Song of the Sea 31
Sparta 25
Spartan Creed 253
spindle 219, 220
Stream of tradition 2, 38–9
Šubat-Enlil (Tell Leilān) 7
suicide 52–4
Šulgi 149, 236
Šušarra (Tell Shemshara) 7
Suteans 128, 157, 158, 159, 194
Šuwardata 22
sycamore 12

tablet-box (*ṭupšennu*) 236
taboo 34
Tagi 11
Tamar 77, 115

Teiresias 86, 89
Telemachus 28, 74, 81, 115, 258
Tell Brak 7
Tell el-Dibʿa (Avaris) 19
Terqa (Tell ʾAshara) 7, 8
Tešub 197
Thargelia 77
Theoclymenos 107
Thetis 36
Thutmosis III 13, 20, 48, 206, 211
Tiglath-Pileser I 25, 157, 239
Timnah 263, 264, 265
touching of the throat 166, 167, 168
Tower of Babel 238
treaty tablets, "small" and "large" 166
Trojan Horse 206, 209
Trojan War 1
Tudḫaliya I/II 41
Tudḫaliya III 41
Tukulti-Ninurta I 38, 239
Turukkeans 66, 67

Uluburun 222, 223
ungrateful apprentice 41, 200
Uriah the Hittite 64, 67, 68, 72, 225
Uruk walls 235, 245

Vectors of transmission 40
veil 59–60
Via Maris 11

"walking in the way of one's father" 162
warlord ideology 6, 7
wax 223
wedding present (*terḫatum*) 57
wise word as the word of god 259, 250
Witch of Endor 89
Woman at the window 33
woman of valor (*ʾēšet ḥayîl*) 105
womanizing 6, 14, 30, 68, 250
wooden writing boards (diptych) 223
wordplays, puns 208, 210, 265
wrath 266, 267, 268
wrestling 17
writing board 223

Xerxes I 28, 36

Yaḫdun-Līm 9, 47, 129, 134
Yahweh War 31, 146, 147
Yamṣûm 47, 50
Yasmaḫ-Addu 6, 7, 9, 30, 63, 121, 134, 162, 163
Yauneans 78, 79
yāwān 78

Zagros 14
Zakura-abum 44, 54, 61
Zalluḫan 55
Zeus 36, 52
ziggurat 177
Zimri 33
Zimrī-Līm 17, 48, 134, 135, 161
Zincirli 124

Bodi_9781666979138_Subject_Index.indd 330 7/14/2026 9:58:06 PM

Index of References

Hebrew Bible/Old Testament

Genesis
1:26-27 243
1:28 240, 242
2:18 116
2:23 111
2:10-14 91
5:3 243
9:1 242
9:6 243
9:7 242
10:1-32 238
10:2 78
10:10 234
10:30 239
10:32 238
11:1-9 238, 239, 240
11:2 238, 241, 242
11:4 234, 238, 241, 242, 253
11:7 238, 242
11:8 238, 242
11:9 238, 242
11:10-26 238
11:20-26 160
12:1 160
12:1-8 242
12:2 241, 242, 243, 253
12:10 148
12:11-12 21, 234
14:2 226
15:9 166
15:10 166
15:17 166
21:1 159
24 45
24:10-61 99
25:20 160
28:2-7 160
29 48
29:1-20 99
29:4 159
31:18 160
31:20 160
31:24 160
33:18 160
35:9 160
35:26 160
37:18-36 153
37:20-24 261
37:27-28 164
39:1 153
39:7-20 224
46:15 160

Exodus
2:1-10 263
7-11 198
12:13 167
14 31, 198
15 198
15:1b-18 31
15:3 31
15:23 131
24:4-8 167
25:9 195

Leviticus
8:33-35 156
18:6 100
18:17 100
18:19 100
25:10 204
26:30 185

Numbers
8:4 195
12:15 156
21:14 147
21:33-35 227

21:34
22:
25:1-5
31:19
33:8

Deuteronomy
2:35
3:11
4:13
6:5
6:4-9
15
17:15
17:15-19
21:1-4
23:3
23:4
26
26:5
31:32

Joshua
1:6
1:9
1:18
5:20-21
6:17
6:18
6:21
8:21
12:4
15:44

Judges
1:8
1:12
3:8
4
4:3
4:4
4:9
4:17
4:18
4:19
4:20
4:21
4:22

147
28-30 269
166
156
131

67
227
167
165
165
204
62
258
51
62
160
204
119, 159
30

30
30
30
31
156
156
156
67
226
21

67
67
160
5, 31, 34, 35, 38
34
103
34
32
32
32
34
33, 34
34

5
5:2
5:9
5:26
5:27
5:30
13-16
13
13:3
13:4-5
13:7
13:14
14:1
14:4-31
14:10
14:17
14:19
15:4-6
15:18
16:1
16:1-3
16:4
16:5
16:17
16:18
16:20
16:21
16:23-30
16:30
21:14
21:21-22

1 Samuel
1
4:9
6:4
6:16
6:18
8:3
8:11-18
9:8
10:1
13:14
14:12
16:9
16:13
17
17:4-7

5, 31, 34, 35, 38
36
36
32
32, 33
33
263
263
263
263
263
263
263
263
265
263
268
262
263
263
263, 264
263
157, 264
263
157, 263, 264
267
265
54, 265
263, 264, 272
96
96

263
6, 29
19
19
19
157
258, 270
157
151
79
147
62
151
100, 270
13, 18

17:5 15, 16, 208
17:6 16
17:7 16
17:12 62
17:23 18
17:25 48
17:38 16
17:44 15
17:45 16
17:46-47 147
17:51 18
18:1 101
18:8-10 94
18:17-19 48
18:25 57
18:20-28 58, 98, 101
18:26 62
19:10-18 47, 94
20:16 59
21:11-16 19
21:8-10 18
21:19 13
22:2 21
22:3-4 62
23:1-14 21
23:4 147
24 270
25 44, 54, 56, 103, 105, 107, 116, 260
25:1 55
25:3 107, 109
25:6 110
25:7 109, 110
25:10 62
25:16 109, 110
25:20 27
25:21 109, 110
25:22 59, 265, 266
25:25 59
25:28 110
25:33 59
25:34 265, 266
25:37-39 56
25:39 56
25:42 98
26 270
29 19
27:2 21
30:9 21
30:23 147
31:10 18, 20

2 Samuel
3:3 61
3:29 220
5:9 152
5:11-12 125
5:19 147
6:16-23 100
6:20-23 49
6:23 44
7:2 125
8:18 19 n.4
10:6 159
10:8 159
10:11-12 6, 62, 79, 80, 102, 138, 260
11:1 63, 251, 254
11:2 72
11:3 72
11:5 88
11:11 64
11:14-21 225
11:20-21 67
11:27 72, 89
12:9-12 79
12:14 59
12:22-23 90
12:26-31 251, 253
12:27-28 30, 251
12:27-29 67
13 77
15:18 19
16:22 135
16:23 259
17:23 54
20:7 19 n.4
20:23 19 n.4
23:20-23 254
28:3-25 89
31:3-4 54

1 Kings
1-2 44
1:1-4 98

1:2 69, 261
1:4 69
1:33 19 n.4, 150
1:34 150, 151
1:39 151
1:44 19 n.4
2:2 5, 6, 30, 251
2:39-40 19
3:1 30
3:7 30
5:20 [Eng. 6] 125
5:23 [Eng. 9] 125
7:26 238
9:15-17 12
10:27 12
11:3 14
11:27 152
12:8 257
14:3 157
14:10 185, 266
14:25 20
15:3 162
15:26 162
15:34 162
16:2 162
16:11 266
16:19 162
16:31 162
18:27 185
21:1 115
21:3 157
21:4-16 157
21:19 15
21:21 162, 266
22:8 140
22:43 162
22:52 162

2 Kings
5:5 157
9:8 266
9:36 15
11:12 151
18:27 177
19:14 162
23:1-4 165

1 Chronicles
2:15 62
18:17 19 n.4
19:6 160
27:28 12

2 Chronicles
32:20 152

Ezra
4:9 234

Nehemiah
3:15-16 152
5 206

Job
29:20 220

Psalms
8:5 267
23:1 154
29 148
35:3 147
60:2 159, 160
106:28 166
127:4-5 220
139:8 12
135:11 27

Proverbs
3:3 224
4:2-22 226
5:18 246
7:3 224
7:10 32
15:4 226
31 117
31:1-9 258
31:10 105
31:19 220

Ecclesiastes/Qoheleth
8:15 247
9:7-10 244, 246
9:9 246

Bodi_9781666979138_References_Index.indd 334 7/14/2026 10:23:27 PM

Song of Songs
1:7 101
3:1-4 101

Lamentations
1:13 147
4:13 164
5:13 265

Isaiah
1:2-23 157
6:5 77
8:22 [Eng.9:1] 11
10:5 217
10:27 185
13 145
22:13 246
30:8 224
37:24 162
46:1-2 146

Jeremiah
3:13 110
17:1 224
34 148
34:8 204
34:15 204
34:17 204
34:18 166
36:23 224
38:6 164
38:6-13 261
46-51 145

Ezekiel
4:12 185, 186
4:15 185
7:10 139
12:13 147
17:20 147
16:3 155
16:45 155
22:10 100
25 145
27:13 201
32:3 147
43:7 248
47:9 248
48:35 241

Daniel
4:30 176

Amos
1-2 145
5:12 110
5:13 110
6:10 79
7:14 12
9:2-3 12

Hosea
8:1 110
9:4-5 248
12:12 168
12:13 160

Joel
3:9 201

Habakkuk
3 148
3:11 147

Zechariah
9:9 151

Malachi
2:3 186

Aramaic Inscriptions
KAI 202 146

Hebrew Inscriptions
KAI 194.3 224

Phoenician Inscriptions
KAI 13.8 226
KAI 14.8 226
KAI 43.12 224
KAI 117.1 226

Qumran
War Scroll 18

Bodi_9781666979138_References_Index.indd 335 7/14/2026 10:23:27 PM

Rabbinic Literature
Babylonian Talmud
b. Naz. 23b 32
b. Hor. 10b 32
b. Niddah 55b 33
b. Baba Qama 92b 185
b. Sanh. 21b 160
b. Sanh. 107[a] 66
b. Sotah 9b 265
b. Yebam. 63[a] 111
b. Yebam. 72b 55, 62
b. Yebam. 103[a] 32

Jerusalem Talmud
y. Meg. I.74b 160
y. Sanh. 2.3 27, 55, 61, 62
y. Sotah VII.21b 160

Genesis Rabbah 17.3 116

Midr. Shemuel 23.11 27

Mishnah Sanh. 7:6 176 n.2

Tosefta Sanh. IV.7 160

Yalqut Meʿam Loʿez 68

Ben Sira
26:12 220

New Testament
1 Corinthians
13:7 81
13:13 81

Quran
Surah al-Qadr 97:1-5 195

Classical Literature

Aeschylus
The Persians
345 31
495-502 31

Suppliants
29-30 52
250-253 52
426 53
624 53
707-709 53

Apollodorus
1 (41) 6.3.7 200

Aristophanes
Lysistrata 671 38
Wasps 19 28
Wealth 1184 182

Aristotle
Nicomachean Ethics
1.4 142
Poetics
11.4-7 269
13.5 54

Cicero
Divination
1.10 141

Euripides
Iphig. in Aulis 130
Medea 25

Herodotus
Histories
1.32 190
1.105 218
1.107-109 263
2.53 190
2.104 262
2.216 191
2.217 191
3.30 221
4.87.1.2 160
7.11.1 28
7.89 36
7.99 36, 37
8.68-69 36, 37
8.87-88 36, 37
8.93 38
9.33.1 140
101-103 36
11.107.1 28

Bodi_9781666979138_References_Index.indd 336 7/14/2026 10:23:27 PM

Hesiod
Theogony 3, 39, 195
38 252
79-83 259
85 259
86 259
91 259
92 259
197-199 217
231 260
304 200
375 36
994 36
1011-1116 87

Works and Days 196
109-200 4, 226
519 36
522 36

Hymn to Aphrodite 20 n.6

Iliad
1.1 252, 268
1.7 269
1.42 262
1.45-52 198, 231
1.69-100 140
1.71-72 140
1.106 140
1.139 27
1.152-171 269
1.173-181 269
1.188-214 27
1.190 84
1.225 27
1.239-244 268
1.244 15
1.314 76
1.462 232
1.412 15
2.45 210
2.173-5 74
2.232 36
2.299-332 140
2.303-317 140
2.375-378 273
2.681-685 269
2.783 200
2.819 20
2.846-847 78
3.16 18
3.69 18
3.180 74
3.361 210
3.445 36
3.371 36
4.109 215
4.124 215
4.183-187 141
4.237 36
4.512-513 268
5.97 215
5.143 35
5.529 26
5.529-530 260
5.661-663 261
5.787 260
5.858 36
6.112-114 24, 26
6.156-170 224
6.161 36
6.169 224
6.178-240 226
6.446 75
6.200 191
3.204-224 197
6.200-202 224 n.9
6.297-310 197
6.305 197
6.323-324 197
6.380-382 225
7.72-176 140
7.95-100 27
7.219 231
7.219-220 210
7.235 27, 67
7.303-304 210
8.80-85 141
8.160-165 27
8.174 26
8.326 141
9.344 269
9.54-56 198
9.64 35
9.122-157 193

Bodi_9781666979138_References_Index.indd 337 7/14/2026 10:23:27 PM

9.264-299 193
9.339 141
9.410-416 268
9.498 73
9.508-510 273
10.261-265 231
11.122-142 197
11.189 252
11.267-272 26
11.287 26
11.377 215
11.385 36
11.485 210, 231
11.630-635 191
13.213-235 198
13.381-382 58
13.553 36
13.685 78
14.406 36
15.187-93 205
15.286-299 198
15.487 26
15.502 260
15.561 26
15.661 26
15.665 26
15.734 26
16.2 269
16.56-62 269
16.146 269
16.270 26
17.49 36
17.128 210, 231
17.142 36
17.185 26
18.22-27 269
18.56 269
18.98 269
18.115 269
18.316-322 39
18.396 74
18.432 36
18.478-608 217
19.91-94 273
19.420-423 269
20.215 20
20.376 18
20.429 35
21.470 85
21.502 215
21.550 269
22.126 35
22.321 36
22.373 36
23.327 36
23: 700-739 17
23.710 17
23.724-725 17
23.775 183
23.775-780 183
23.777 183
23.851 215
23.858 215
23.883 215
24.221 140, 141
24.764 74

Odyssey
1.1 35, 41, 202, 252
1.15 93
1.50 93
1.62 75
1.335 98
1.216 74
2.486 252
3 14
3.9 14
3.86-94 14
4 91
4.14-15 92
4.105 218
4.139-146 74
4.144 74
4.227 191
4.271-289 209, 253
4.555-560 91
4.724-726 105
4.791-793 96, 105
5.32 93
5.57-74 93
5.70-71 91
5.73-74 93
5.130 92
5.151-158 92
5.152-153 92
5.194 93

5.203-224 92
5.235 215
5.340 75
5.354 191
5.423 75
5.432 75
5.487 97
5.528-535 103
6-8 81, 98
6.15-40 98
6.90 96
6.100 98
6.126-30 97
6.129 108
6.130-136 96
6.139-140 99
6.178-185 100
6.218-222 100
6.243-246 100
6.344 74
6.351-353 105
6.814-816 105
7 14
7.19-78 98
7.44-45 99
7.167-171 101
7.311-314 100
8 41, 202
8.73 252
8.123-151 101
8.166-177 259
8.171 259
8.172 259
8.173 259
8.215-222 102
8.266-322 217
8.448 88, 95
8.452 95
8.457 95
8.492-520 209, 253
9-12 91
9.15 86
9.32 88
9.37 86
9.39-52 78
9.81 217
9.410 210
9.455 210
9.500-505 102
9.504 103
10.46-49 86, 100
10.100-137 89
10.103-115 97
10.133-574 83
10.136 87
10.138 87
10.189-197 87
10.190-192 87
10.210-211 83
10.227 83
10.235 88
10.276 88
10.276-306 83
10.284-291 28
10.299-301 84
10.301 28
10.304 84
10.314-344 85
10.321 84
10.330 35, 84
10.340-344 84
10.341 28
10.350-351 82
10.394 88
10.467-468 88
10.504-540 88
10.563 88
10.571 88
11 77, 87
11.20-50 89
11.156 215
11.523-532 209, 253
12.4 87
12.18-20 88
12.25-27 88
12.33-34 88
12.37-141 88
12.68-72 270
12.143-144 88
13 41, 202
13.330-336 106
13.769 14
10.395-96 84
14.230 78
14.246-257 78
15.415-416 222

15.522 103
16.261 15
17.345 107
17.375 107
17.382-385 40, 201
17.404 107
17.426-441 78
17.463-464 107
17.495 107
17.518-21 236
18.67 108
18.97 108
18.184 98
18.206-213 98
18.256 106
19 106
19.108-109 106
19.107-114 262
19.129 106
19.137 35
19.275 75
19.410 75
19.406-409 75
19.467 115
19.570-581 214
19.587 219
20.276-278 215
20.287 107
20.299 107
21 218
21.32 214
21.38-40 215
21.41 215
21.61 213
21.66 108
21.74 214
21.75-79 214
21.97 219
21.114 219
21.120-122 214
21.127 219
21.145 140, 141, 210
21.328 219
21.350-354 219
21.359 215
21.362 215
21.393-295 215
21.405 214
21.409 214
21.411 213
21.420 215
21.420-423 215
22 14, 41, 202
22.7 215
22.16 36
22.318-323 141
22.321 141
22.335-336 15
22.474-479 108
23.218-21 102
24.29 17
24.128 35
24.141 35
24.191-202 117
24.196 35
24.200-201 35
24.289 75
24.508-509 28

Pausanias
3.11.6-8 141
3.28.2 73
5.14.9 142
6.2.5 141
8.22.2 73
9.2.7 73

Philostratus
Apollonius of Tyana 77

Plato
Politics 270 A 6 141
The Republic II.370b 142

Plutarch
Life of Lycurgus 27.2-3 25

Pseudo-Demosthenes
59.118-122 81

Thucydides
1.5 78
I 43.2 141
VI 85.1 141

Bodi_9781666979138_References_Index.indd 340 7/14/2026 10:23:27 PM

Virgil
Aeneid 20 n.6

Xenophon
Anabasis
5.6.29 141
6.4-5 141
Cyropaedia 255

Ceasar
Gallic War 268

Ovid
Fausti 4:679-712 262

Seneca
De Clementia 255

Sumerian and Akkadian Texts
AbB 13 53:17-19 243

Adapa 109, 110
Fragment A.2′ 259
Fragment A.7′ 259
Fragment B.29′-32′ 110

Amarna
EA 16:38 158
EA 16:40 158
EA 17:36-38 207
EA 37:26 226
EA 51:6 151
EA 200:8 158
EA 200:10 158
EA 244:25-33 23
EA 245 23
EA 250:2-8 21
EA 250:12-14 23
EA 250:42-46 23
EA 252-254 20
EA 253:18-20 23
EA 254:38-46 21
EA 255:15 23
EA 256:8 23
EA 256:13 23
EA 263:6-14 11
EA 264:16-17 12
EA 268-72 12
EA 279-280 21
EA 280:9-15 22
EA 289:18-19 19
EA 289:18-24 11, 20, 22
EA 289:26 5, 10, 24
EA 290 21
EA 292-293 12
EA 297-300 12
EA 378 12

Atraḫasīs Epic 4, 53
1-2 231
1 11-15 205
1 237-43 204
1 243 204
1 299-304 182

BM.96998
39 147
49 147

Codex Hammurabi
CH li 40-49 249

Gilgameš Epic 14, 39, 76, 92, 112
1.i 10 235
1.i 18-19 234, 235, 245
1.i 24 235
1.i 27 235
2 110
2 ii 45-54 112
2 94 15
(OB III) iv.159-160 237
6 46-76 27
8 59-62 39
10 90
10.i 3 244
10.i 15 224
10.i 20 224
10.1 33 224
10.ii.1′-11′ 245
10.ii.12′-14′ 245
10.ii.14′-iii.1-14 114, 244, 245
11 4, 234
11 185 195

Bodi_9781666979138_References_Index.indd 341 7/14/2026 10:23:27 PM

11 323-324 234, 235, 245
12 89, 253
12 85-87 89
12.vi.148-149 253
Standard Babylonian Version
1 188-194 112
1 ii 54 113
10 47-71 245

Bilgames and Enkidu 14, 253
Bilgames and Huwawa
A 5.31 237

Enūma eliš 4, 13
1 1-2 233
4 26 17
4 30-31 213
4 35 220
4 36 220
4 38 220
6 57-58 176
6 98 168

Erra Epic 4, 63, 163, 274
1 19 64
1 34 194 n.3
1 49 24
1 58 137
1 67 194 n.3
1 75 194 n.3
1 85 194 n.3
1 132 195
1 140 195
1 145 195
4 1-9 194
4 6 213
4 34-35 194 n.3
4 50 194
4 52-59 174
4 52-68 37, 175, 194
4 63 194
4 65-74 194
5 6 195
5 42 194
5 43-44 195
5 53 195
5 60 195

Gudea Cylinders
Cyl. A xv.19-25 125
Cyl. A xv.19-xvi.1 125

Enki and Ninmaḫ 62-65 203

Inanna and Enki 110

Inanna's/Ištar's Descent 86, 109, 110, 175
5 87 n.4

Ludlul bēl nēmeqi 12
II.107 180

Nergal and Ereškigal
83 85

Mari Texts
A.96:13′ 165
A.186 129
A.981:32-40 153
A.1146 63
A.1146:13-63 63
A.1146:34 64
A.1146:35-37 65
A.1968 1′-6′ 148, 163
A.1968 12′-17′ 139
A.1168:20′-25′ 47
A.1098:21-23 151
A.2094 152
A.3552 132
A.3552:8 154
M.6435+ 165
M.7734 202
M.7872.i 154
M.10556:22-24 174
ARM 1 3 148, 162
ARM 1 27:28 267
ARM 1 69+M.7538 6, 9, 10, 66, 214, 250, 261
ARM 1 69:22′ 67
ARM 1 131:14-16 156
ARM 1 135:11-13 156
ARM 2 37:6-14 151, 166

Bodi_9781666979138_References_Index.indd 342 7/14/2026 10:23:27 PM

ARM 2 53 153
ARM 2 112 54 n.6
ARM 2 113 54 n.6, 59
ARM 2 113:8 59
ARM 2 113:28-31 59
ARM 2 131 161
ARM 2 122:34-44 168, 180
ARM 3 36 156
ARM 4 16 205
ARM 5 23:6 128
ARM 6 76:20-24 150
ARM 8 11 153
ARM 8 13:11′-14′ 174
ARM 10 5:3 49
ARM 10 14 129
ARM 10 26:10-13 99
ARM 10 32:15′ 50
ARM 10 33:8′-13′ 49, 50
ARM 10 33:5 50
ARM 10 33:18 50, 51
ARM 10 34 49
ARM 10 73 54 n.6, 58
ARM 10 74 54 n.6, 60
ARM 10 75 54 n.6, 57, 58
ARM 10 76 54 n.6, 59
ARM 10 77 54 n.6, 61
ARM 10 78 54 n.6
ARM 10 79 54 n.6, 56, 57
ARM 10 94 48
ARM 10 94:3-7 49
ARM 10 113 49
ARM 10 129 129
ARM 10 130 129
ARM 11 3:20 154
ARM 13 107:11-16 164, 261
ARM 13 114:13 146
ARM 14 78 164
ARM 18 21:7 216
ARM 19 212 264 n.4
ARM 21 139:2 216
ARM 21 339:7 154
ARM 21 379 55
ARM 22 324 iii:20 174
ARM 22 328 iii.16 154
ARM 22 404 166
ARM 23 207:2 216
ARM 25 485 55
ARM 26 21 146, 148
ARM 26 39:13-15 151
ARM 26 192 145
ARM 26 194: 41-43 147, 148, 205
ARM 26 195 145
ARM 26 196:5′-10′ 139, 145
ARM 26 197:22-24 138, 145
ARM 26 199 145
ARM 26 199:41-51 157
ARM 26 200 145
ARM 26 201 145
ARM 26 204 50, 145
ARM 26 205 145
ARM 26 207 13, 145
ARM 26 207:2 216
ARM 26 207:3-4 16
ARM 26 207:13-17 17
ARM 26 207:28-29 17
ARM 26 207:30 17
ARM 26 207:45 17
ARM 26 208 145
ARM 26 209 145, 148
ARM 26 209:8-13 147
ARM 26 210 145
ARM 26 212 146, 148
ARM 26 215 145
ARM 26 216 145
ARM 26 216:5-12 156
ARM 26 220 248
ARM 26 221 248
ARM 26 230 145
ARM 26 233 145
ARM 26 374:22-23 243
ARM 26 238 137
ARM 26 288 145
ARM 26 315 50
ARM 26/2 297:14-24 203
ARM 26/2 372:3-20 166
ARM 26 404:60-65 165, 166
ARM 26 405:3 156
ARM 26 483 158
ARM 28 16:27-30 47, 146
ARM 28 67 60
ARM 28 68 60
ARM 28 79 56
ARM 28 147 150
ARM 31 59 55
ARM 38 53 56

Bodi_9781666979138_References_Index.indd 343 7/14/2026 10:23:27 PM

LAPO 16 36 63
LAPO 16 370 267
LAPO 17 452 250
LAPO 17 456 132
LAPO 17 702 153
LAPO 17 704 156
LAPO 17 728 152
LAPO 17 745 128
LAPO 18 929 164
LAPO 18 931 162
LAPO 18 933 147
LAPO 18 939 147
LAPO 18 1011 203
LAPO 18 1049 205
LAPO 18 1069 164
LAPO 18 1144 17
LAPO 18 1163 129
LAPO 18 1164 129
LAPO 18 1165 129
LAPO 18 1203 147
LAPO 18 1221 49
LAPO 18 1222 49
LAPO 18 1230 50, 51
LAPO 18 1242 54 n.6, 60
LAPO 18 1243 54 n.6, 59
LAPO 18 1244 54 n.6, 59
LAPO 18 1245 54 n.6, 55
LAPO 18 1246 54 n.6, 57
LAPO 18 1247 54 n.6, 57, 58
LAPO 18 1248 54 n.6
LAPO 18 1249 54 n.6, 58
LAPO 18 1250 54 n.6
LAPO 18 1272 130
LAPO 19 491 161

Epic of Zimrī-Līm 120
ii.22-23 65
ii.35-46 136
iii.7-18 137
iii.30 142
iii.35 142
iv.6-4 138

Legend of Narām Sîn 163, 236, 274

Lexical Lists
Igituh 174
Proto-Lú MSL 12
42:279-80 174
Lú-list VAT 9717 177
MSL 6, VII A 215

Marriage of Martu 108, 114, 137, 149
127-128 131
135-138 131
140-141 131

Myth of Lugale 175

Nergal and Ereškigal 110

Nuzi Texts
HSS 9 102 205

Pārum Hymn to Ištar
HS 1879: 12-17 181

Sargon Legend 224
53-56 225
55-57 108
Sargon and Ur-Zababa 225

Sumerian Proverbs
SP 2.100 175

Ugaritic Texts
KTU 1 2 I 38-41 267
KTU 1.3 II 3 267
KTU 1.3 II 6-7 267
KTU 1.3 II 13-15 267
KTU 1.14 iii 2-20 156
KTU 1.14 iv 44-v 15 156
KTU 1.17 vi 20-24 217, 226
KTU 1.17 vi:39-40 1.18 iv 219
KTU 1.17 I 26-27 248
KTU 1.82:3 198
KTU 1.108, 2-3 226
KTU 4.390 212
KTU 5.7 224
KTU 6.66 224
PRU 3,12.34+12.43, Rv 11.24,30 208
RS 1.002 151
RS 7.114 167

Bodi_9781666979138_References_Index.indd 344 7/14/2026 10:23:27 PM

RS 15.37 158
RS 16.178 158
RS 16.363:11′ 226
RS 24.252 226
RS 34.129 69

Egyptian Texts
Book of the Dead 177
Coptos Decree 6 59
Demotic Chronicle
rev. c.14 160
Papyrus Harris 500 207
Story of Sinuhe 13, 16, 21
Taking of Joppa 15, 196, 209

Middle-Assyrian Texts
RIMA 2 [A.0.87.1]
23:46-47 158 n.9
RIMA 2 [A.0.87.2]
23:[28] 158 n.9
RIMA 2 [A.0.87.3]
37-38:29-35 158 n.9
RIMA 2 [A.0.87.4]
43:34-36 158 n.9, 159 n.10

Neo-Babylonian Texts
Love Lyrics
B iii 12-14 171 n.1
II B 10-12 173
IV 17 173

Neo-Assyrian Texts
ABL 620=K 680, Rs. 4-5 252
Chicago Prism v 18-19
194 n.3
Chicago Prism v 67a-69b
194 n.3
Chicago Prism v 69b-73 213
Chicago Prism vi 3-5
194 n.3
Esarhaddon 104.vii 11–12 236
SAA 2 6:266-268 101
SAA 2 6:428 33
SAA 2 6:622-23 150
SAA 3 32 195
SAA 16 23:3 45
SAA 10 39 r. 8-9 45
SAA 10 17 260
SAA 10 244 260
SAA 19 n. 25:3 78
SAA 19 n. 26:14′-15′ 78, 79
VAB 4 270 No 8 I 27 138
VAB 256 i 21 221
YOS 1 45 I 28 138

Hittite Texts
Apology of Hattušiliš 13
II 31-47 18
II 34-36 18
II 46-47 18

Illuyanka 39

Song of Release
KBo 10 1 Rs 1 204
KBo 32.12 41, 196, 200
KBo 32.13 198
KBo 32.14 41, 196
KBo 32.66 198

Bow contest
CTH 362 216
KBo 26.106 216

Kingship in Heaven
KUB 33.120 200

Prayer to Ištar of Nineveh
KBo 2.9+ I 25-30 220
CTH 716 220

Song of Ullikummi
KUB 33.96 200

Aramaic Inscriptions
Tell-Fekherye
(Aramaic) 5, 7, 13 130
(Assyrian) 8, 9, 19 130

KAI
202 A. 3 146
202 A.11 146
202 A.13 146, 147
202 B 23 146

Bodi_9781666979138_References_Index.indd 345 7/14/2026 10:23:27 PM

Index of Authors

Aallen, T.G. 177, 275
Abrahamson, E. 81, 275
Abusch, T. 90, 237, 246, 252, 253, 256, 275
Ackerman, S. 34, 65, 98, 114, 256, 275
Ackroyd, P. 88, 275
Adamthwaite, M.R. 23, 275
Afanasjeva, V.K. 225, 275
Aharoni, Y. 13, 159, 207, 275
Aitken, K.T. 193, 275
Alexander, C. 251, 275
Allan, W. 75, 275
Allen, N. 97, 275
Alster, B. 108, 175, 225, 276
Alter, R. 54, 94, 99, 109, 276
Altman A. 167, 276
Amiet, P. 124, 127, 128, 133, 149, 276
Anbar, M. 59, 135, 152, 154, 276
Anderson, W.S. 91, 92, 94, 276
Annus, A. 226, 276
Armstrong, J.I. 268, 276
Asante, J. 113, 219, 276
Aschkenasy, N. 33, 34, 276
Assmann, J. 234, 276
Astour, M. 154, 155, 226, 278
Ataç, M.-A. 4, 129, 244, 276
Auerbach, E. 115, 277
Auffarth, C. 97, 277
Austin, N. 75, 103, 277
Avigad, N. 69, 277

Bachvarova, M. 3, 4, 39, 40, 41, 196, 198, 199, 200, 201, 226, 274, 277
Badali, E. 199, 277
Baden, J.S. 238, 277
Bailey, C. 34, 154, 277
Bailly, A. 82, 277
Ball, R. 269, 277
Ballabriga, A. 270, 277
Barr, J. 59, 109, 141, 277
Barstad, H.M. 145, 147, 277
Bass, G.F. 223, 224, 277, 278
Bassi, K. 24, 26, 27, 28, 29, 278
Batto, B.F. 55, 278
Baylis, M. 247, 278
Beaulieu, P.-A. 234, 278
Beckman, G. 40, 201, 278
Beitzel, B.J. 126, 278
Ben-Dor, E.S. 20, 278
Bergren, A. 117, 278
Berlin, A. 44, 278
Beye C. R. 2, 278
Bietak, M. 19, 278
Birot, M. 127, 248, 278
Blenkinsopp, J. 115, 279
Bloch, Y. 2, 145, 149, 150, 321
Blocher, F. 186, 279
Blok, J. 36, 279
Bodi, D. 6, 10, 12, 15, 21, 24, 27, 38, 41, 43, 44, 45, 47, 48, 53, 55, 57, 62, 68, 70, 72, 74, 79, 85, 87, 90, 94, 98, 99, 101, 111, 102, 103, 108, 115, 120, 138, 139, 144, 146, 147, 148, 150, 157, 161, 163, 164, 168, 169, 174, 176, 177, 181, 184, 190, 194, 195, 196, 201, 205, 236 n.1, 241, 246, 248, 251, 253, 257, 261, 264, 268, 272, 279, 296
Bolmarcich, S. 100, 281
Bonnet, C. 218, 261
Bonneterre, D. 177, 178, 281
Bordreuil, P. 224, 281
Bottéro, J. 86, 114, 178, 194, 248, 281
Botti, G. 206, 281
Bouvier, D. 96, 281
Bowra, C.M. 31, 281
Boyd, S.L. 239, 240
Brenner, A. 31, 281
Brettler, M. 29, 220, 282
Briant, P. 253, 282
Brinkman, J.A. 184, 282
Brown, C.S. 103, 282
Brown, J. P. 16, 217, 282

Buccellati, G. 132, 137, 149, 152, 159, 282
Burke, A. 22, 144, 155, 282
Burkert, W. 3, 78, 200, 206, 218, 224, 282
Burney, C. 264, 282
Butler, S. 72, 282
Butterlin, P. 128, 282
Byre, C.S. 103, 283

Cagni, L. 174, 283
Calini, I. 196, 283
Campbell, S.R.M. 41, 202, 283
Cantarella, E. 70, 259, 283
Caquot, A. 266, 283
Carlier, P. 222, 283
Carp, T. 89, 283
Carroll, R.P. 148, 283
Cassin, H. 111, 283
Cavigneaux, A. 122, 199, 283
Chadwick, J. 193, 202, 221, 283
Chantraine, P. 25, 140, 283
Charles, H. 153, 283
Charpin, D. 7, 9, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 55, 58, 66,114, 120, 128, 129, 131, 133, 134, 135, 136, 144, 145, 148, 149, 150, 151 n.8, 153, 156, 165, 166, 169, 174, 175, 180, 204, 205, 214, 234, 243, 248, 250, 283, 284
Chavalas, M. 7, 284
Childs, B.S. 236, 285
Chul, P. 145, 306
Clarke, M. 3, 65, 252, 285
Clay, A.T. 237, 299
Cline, E.H. 210, 221, 226, 285
Cogan, M. 29, 68, 285
Cohen, A. 164, 285
Cohen, B. 73, 285
Cohen, L. 30, 285
Cole, S.W. 257, 285
Collins, B.J. 89, 285
Collins, D. 140, 285
Collon, D. 223, 278
Colonna d'Istria, L. 122, 283, 285
Cooper, J.S. 33, 113, 174, 225, 285
Courtieu, G. 76, 286
Crane, G. 27, 85, 286
Culley, R.C. 191, 286
Cunningham, G. 220, 286

D'Agostino, F. 181, 286
Dalley, S. 150, 194, 240, 286
Davies, S.P. 207, 209, 286
Davies, T.H. 39, 286
De Jong, I. 105, 286
de Lamberterie, C. 192, 286
de Robert, P. 266, 283
de Romilly, J. 92, 142, 286
de Savignac, J. 247, 286
De Vaan, J.M.C.T 252, 286
De Vaux, R. 14, 17, 208, 287
del Olmo Lete, G. 198, 286
Delcourt, M. 104, 286
Delling, G. 141, 142, 286
Demand, N. H. 221, 286
Démare-Lafont, S. 59, 151, 167, 244, 287
Deroy, L. 190, 286
Derrida, J. 240, 286
Desző, T. 18, 286
Détienne, M. 84, 253, 287
DeVries, 68, 287
Dhorme, E. 135, 287
Dietrich, W. 79, 162, 287
Dimock, G.E. 75, 287
Dion, P.-E. 160, 287
Dodds, E.R. 200, 261, 287
Doherty, L. 73, 95, 287
Donner, H. 13, 287
Dossin, G. 9, 10, 46, 54 n.6, 66, 250 n.4, 287
Dozeman, T.D. 242, 287, 288
Driessen, J. 221, 222, 229, 288
Dumézil, G. 268, 288
Durand, J.-M. 8, 9, 46, 49, 50, 55, 60, 63, 66, 120, 121, 126, 128, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 139, 140, 144, 145, 146, 147, 149, 153, 160, 162, 163, 168, 174, 175, 180, 205, 213, 250 n.4, 264, 284, 288

Ebbott, M. 72, 289
Edmunds, L. 75, 80, 289
Edwards, A.T. 183, 289
Edzard, D.O. 125, 128, 172, n.1, 173, 237, 289
Eidem, J. 7, 319
Ellis, R.S. 236, 289
Emlyn-Jones, C. 105, 289
Erickson, E. 93, 289
Exum, J.C. 95, 289

Farber-Flügge, G. 110, 290
Farnoux, A. 222, 290
Farron, S. 74, 290
Feldman, M. H. 8, 290
Feliu, L. 139, 290
Felson-Rubin, N. 100, 290
Fénélon, F. 255, 290
Ferenczi, S. 93, 290
Fernández-Galiano, M. 214, 215, 290
Fields, W.W. 266, 318
Finet, A. 46, 54 n. 6, 113, 131, 237, 249, 287, 290
Finkelstein, I. 22, 131, 290
Finkelstein, J.J. 51, 128, 132, 144, 290
Flacilière, R. 25, 290
Fleming, D.E. 14, 120, 133, 135, 143, 154, 155, 156, 237, 290, 291
Foley, H. 105, 106, 291
Forsyth, N. 99, 291
Foster, B.R. 85, 139, 177, 182, 195, 204, 225, 239, 253, 263, 291
Foster, J.L. 16, 291
Frame, D. 92, 291
Frame G. 20, 291
Franken, H.J. 18, 291
Frankfort, H. 17, 291
Frayne, D.R. 235, 292
Fredricksmeyer, H.C. 102, 292
Frei, P. 226, 292
Frolov, S. 17, 18, 33
Fuqua, C. 260, 292

Gadd, C.J. 89, 292
Gardiner, A.H. 207, 292
Garelli, P. 130, 292
Garfinkel, Y. 69, 292
Garsiel, M. 13, 62, 109, 292
Garvie, A.F. 52, 292
Geers, F.W. 151, 292
Gelb, I.J. 135, 149, 157, 203, 292
Geller, M.J. 51, 179, 292
George A.R. 8, 15, 85, 89, 111, 112, 113 n.5, 114, 183, 213, 235, 236, 237, 240, 244, 245 n.2, 247, 252, 256, 257, 292, 293
Gessel, van Ben, H.L. 198, 293
Giménez, J. 211, 212, 293
Girard, R. 77, 106, 113, 271, 293
Glass, T.J. 121, 310
Glassner, J.-J. 110, 112, 173, 177, 189, 194, 236, 239, 272, 293
Glück, J.J. 48, 293
Goddeeris, A. 134, 293
Goedicke, H. 16, 209, 294
Gordon, C.H. 17, 40, 201, 294
Gordon R.P. 19 n.4, 116, 294
Grabbe L.F. 13, 20, 294
Graf, F. 73, 294
Gray, J. 30, 266, 294
Grayson, A.K. 19, 38, 78, 108, 158, 159, 183 n.8, 184, 194, 213, 236, 294
Graziadio, G. 211,294
Graziosi, B. 191, 294
Greenstein E. 21, 62, 140, 161, 294
Gresseth, G. K. 91, 294
Griffith, D.R. 181, 294
Grimal, P. 47, 94, 104, 268, 294
Groneberg, B. 85, 150, 173, 216, 217, 294
Gross, N.P. 96, 295
Grube, G.M.A. 73, 295
Gruber, M.I. 184, 295
Guichard, M. 47, 55, 120, 135, 136, 137, 138, 146, 161, 168, 189, 288, 295
Gunkel, H. 238, 295
Gunn, D.M. 115, 295
Gurney, O.R. 111, 236, 295
Güterbock, H.-G. 216, 295

Haas, V. 198, 215, 216, 295
Hadley, J.D. 218, 296
Halbwachs, M. 200, 296
Hallo, W.W. 162, 194, 296
Halperin, D.M. 114, 296
Halpern, B. 44, 79, 296, 303
Halton, C. 265, 296
Harris, R. 177, 296
Harris, R.S. 54, 296
Harris, W.V. 179, 296
Haubold J. 3, 4, 206, 296
Havelock, E.A. 53, 273, 274, 296
Heimpel, W. 46, 50, 51, 145, 146, 158, 225, 285, 296
Heintz, J.-G. 120, 146, 165, 296
Helck, W. 207, 296
Held, M. 151, 217, 297
Heltzer, M. 15, 297

Bodi_9781666979138_Author_Index.indd 348 7/14/2026 9:59:10 PM

Hendel, R.S. 238, 297
Henderson, J. 28, 297
Herles, M. 158, 297
Hibbert, P.M. 184, 297
Hirvonen, K. 103, 297
Hoffman, S.M.A. 222, 318
Hoffmeier, J. 13, 15, 23, 211, 297
Hoffner, H.A. Jr. 15, 16, 18, 89, 151, 198, 200, 220, 297
Holm, T. 198, 297
Holt, E. 145, 306
Holtsmark, E. 95, 297
Hornblower, S. 38, 297
Horowitz, W. 23, 247, 297, 298
Horrocks, G.F. 221, 222, 231, 232 n.12, 298
Hrůša, I. 149 n.3, 298
Huffmon, H. 135, 298
Huehnergard, J. 156, 237, 298
Hurowitz, V.A. 125, 182, 257, 298
Husser, J.-M. 219, 298
Hutton, J. 145, 298

Isser, S. 14, 18, 272, 298
Izre'el, S. 199, 259, 298

Jacobsen, T. 113, 149, 257, 298
Janko, R. 191, 229, 230, 298
Jankovič, B. 140, 299
Jastrow, M. 237, 268, 299
Jenzen, G.I. 160, 299
Jestin, R. 264 n.4, 299
Joannès, F. 50, 155, 284, 299
Johnston, I. 26, 27, 299
Johnston, S.I. 141, 299
Jonker, G. 233, 248, 299
Jouon, F. 53, 299

Kanigel, R. 192, 299
Kaplan, J. 206, 258, 299
Karakantza, E.D. 96, 299
Keel, O. 227, 228, 299
Kelen, H. 79, 299
Kenyon, K. 155, 299
Kilmer, A.D. 32, 110, 113, 177, 299
Kim, J. 263, 299
Kim, K.H. 145, 306
Kirk, J.S. 252, 300
Kitchen, K.A. 20, 300
Klein, J. 114, 131, 149, 300
Klein, R.C. 33, 300
Klengel, H. 197, 300
Klingbeil, G.A. 156, 300
Knapp, A. 18, 300
Knierim, R. 110, 300
Knoppers, G.N. 62, 300
Knott, E. 122, 300
Knudtzon, J.A. 20, 300
Koch, K. 77, 200, 300
Koch, U. 142, 300
Koch-Westenholz, U. 111, 113, 322
Konstantopoulos, G. 24, 37, 189, 300
Kopf, L. 185, 300
Kouwenberg, N.J.C. 264 n.4, 300
Kramer, S.N. 86, 114, 203, 281, 300
Kraus, F. 243, 301
Krebernik, M. 8, 144, 293
Krispijn, T.J.H. 40, 199, 301
Kuhrt, A. 78, 301
Kunz-Lübke, A. 16, 301
Kupper, J.-R. 120, 128, 133, 144, 149 n.3, 150, 152, 154, 158, 261, 301, 316

Lackenbacher, S. 50, 284
LaCoque, A. 240, 241, 301
Lafont, B. 46, 50, 150, 153, 155, 165, 284, 301
Lambert, G.W. 17, 25, 158, 168, 172, 173, 194, 204, 233, 258, 301, 302
Lamrichs, R. 130, 302
Lanczkowski, G. 16, 302
Landsberger, B. 113, 179, 215, 302
Lane, E.W. 268, 302
Lanfranchi, G.B. 79, 302
Lanoue, G. 114, 302
Lassen, A.W. 244, 302
Lattimore, R. 253, 302
Lauinger, J. 8, 11, 13, 20, 21, 140, 302
Lawee, E. 112, 302
Lawson, Younger K. Jr. 148, 159, 160, 302
Leichty, E. 19, 236, 303
Lemaire, A. 155, 299
Lemche, N.P. 130, 303
Lemos, T.M. 57, 261, 303
Lenzi, A. 180, 303
Leuchter, M. 31, 303
Levenson, J.D. 44, 303
Levin, Y. 19, 160, 303

Lewis, C.S. 71, 303
Lewy, J. 7, 303
Lichtenstein, M.H. 31, 303
Lichtheim, M. 16, 239, 303
Liebowitz, J.A. 227, 228, 303
Lilyquist, C. 206, 303
Linssen, M.J.H. 172, 176, 184, 303
Lion, B. 189, 205, 304
Lipiński, E. 160, 304
Liverani, M. 20, 239, 304
Livingstone, A. 45, 304
Londsdale, S.H. 96, 304
Loney, A.C. 80, 304
López-Ruiz, C. 3, 4, 217, 218, 304
Loraux, N. 25, 26, 304
Lord, A.B. 70, 71, 192, 304
Lord, G. de F. 92, 102, 272, 304
Lorimer, H.L. 216, 218, 304
Loud, G. 227, 304
Louden, B. 73, 83, 91, 93, 99, 304
Lowenstam, S. 83, 116, 191, 305
Luukko, M. 45, 78, 305

MacDowell, D.M. 181, 305
Maeir, A.M. 13, 305
Maier, J. 203, 300
Malamat, A. 135, 163, 305
Mallowan, M.E.L. 223, 305
Margalit, B. 217, 305
Margalith, O. 262, 305
Margueron, J.-C. 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 127, 129, 305
Marks, R.B. 181, 294
Marquart, P. 105, 306
Marrello, P. 63, 137 n.2, 305
Marti, L. 154, 306
Martin, R. 259, 262, 306
Maul, S.M. 140, 175, 177, 306
Mazar, A. 20, 306
McCarter, K.P. Jr. 21, 266, 267, 306
McGuire, M.R.P. 161, 306
McKane, W. 258, 306
McKenzie, S. 105, 306
Meier, S.A. 45, 306
Mein, A. 145, 306
Meister, K. 231, 306
Melville, S.C. 260, 306
Mendel-Geberovich, A. 69, 292
Merrill, R. 117, 219, 262, 306
Michalowski, P. 128, 133, 306
Milano, L. 178, 179, 306
Millard, A.R. 159, 204, 230 n.11, 302, 306
Miller, G.D. 232, 306
Miller, M. 81, 306
Millot, L. 120, 296
Milstein, S. 14, 199, 237, 291, 307
Minunno, G. 140, 307
Mitchell, T.R. 19, 307
Mobley, G. 111, 262, 263, 264, 272, 307
Mongomery, J.A. 29, 307
Monroe, L.A.S. 156, 307
Monsacré, H. 14, 26, 27, 28, 35, 58, 98, 307
Moortgat, A. 129, 307
Moran, W. L. 20, 21, 93, 113, 132, 181 n.6, 217, 257, 307
Morenz, L.D. 13, 16, 189, 202, 227, 228, 229, 307
Morris, S.P. 201, 205, 219, 222, 229, 308
Morrow, W.S. 167, 308
Mourad, A.-L. 19, 308
Muller-Margueron, B. 124, 308
Munson, R.V. 37, 308
Muntingh, L.M. 119, 308
Murko, M. 192, 308

Na'aman, N. 12, 21, 158, 308
Nagy, G. 190, 191, 196, 231, 232, 252, 308
Naveh, J. 19, 308
Nefzaoui, C. 243, 308
Neher, A. 241, 242, 308
Nelson, R. 270, 309
Neu, E. 196, 198, 204, 309
Neujahr, M. 139, 309
Neumann, E. 94, 309
Neumann, T. 162, 287
Nickel, R. 108, 309
Niehr, H. 152, 309
Niemann, H.M. 43, 272, 309
Niemeier, W.-D. 20, 309
Nissinen, M. 1, 145, 146, 148, 156, 163, 173, 309, 318
Noegel, S. B. 227, 309
North, R. 106, 309
Nougayrol, J. 208, 309

Bodi_9781666979138_Author_Index.indd 350 7/14/2026 9:59:10 PM

Novotni, J. 19, 78, 108, 159, 183 n.8, 194, 213, 294
Nutkowicz, H. 51, 309

O'Callaghan, R.T. 207, 309
Oelsner, J. 182, 320
Oettinger, N. 200, 309
Olyan, S.M. 261, 309
O'Nolan, K. 72, 309
Oppenheim, L.A. 34, 38, 125, 183, 195, 310
Ornan, T. 168, 310
Osborn, R. 190, 231, 310
Oshima, T. 108, 180, 247, 276, 298, 310
Otto, E. 204, 310

Parayre, D. 177, 227, 310
Pardee, D. 121, 151, 217, 310
Parkinson, R.B. 16, 310
Parpola, S. 14, 33, 45, 85, 100, 150, 220, 257, 260, 310
Parrot, A. 121, 310
Parry A. 70, 191, 311
Parry, M. 70, 191, 311
Paul, S.M. 219, 311
Peled, I. 173, 174, 311
Peleg, Y. 65, 311
Perevolotsky, A. 131, 290
Peristiany, J.G. 76, 261, 311
Person, R.F. 270, 311
Pirenne-Delforge, V. 72, 218, 281, 311
Pironti, G. 72, 311
Pitt-Rivers, J. 76, 97, 107, 109, 110, 311
Podlecki, A.J. 52, 105, 311
Pomeroy, S.B. 81, 311
Pongratz-Leisten, B. 8, 162, 184, 194 n.3, 213, 311
Pope, M. 68, 265, 312
Porter, A. 123, 131, 312
Puech, E. 230, 312
Puhvel, J. 40, 201, 312
Pulak, C. 223, 278
Pusch, E.B. 211, 312

Quinn, J. 3, 191, 271, 312

Radner, K. 78, 79, 234, 242, 312
Rahmouni, A. 200, 312
Rainey, A. 12, 20, 207, 312
Rank, O. 90, 312
Reculeau, H. 144, 159, 312, 324
Redford, D.B. 207, 211, 212, 319
Reece, S. 99, 193, 313
Reeves, N. 206, 313
Reis, P.T. 31, 34, 313
Rendsburg, G. 185, 232, 313
Reviv, H. 15, 208, 313
Roaf, M. 237, 313, 323
Robert, F. 232, 313
Roberts, J.J.M. 145, 313
Robson, E. 39, 313
Röllig, W. 146, 313
Rollinger, R. 3, 65, 78, 313
Rollstone, C. 70, 269, 313
Römer, W.H.P. 55, 149, 313
Roscoe, W. 182, 313
Rose, M. 73, 313
Rosén, H.B. 224, 313
Rosenbecker, K. 182, 313
Ross, J. 147, 313
Rost, L. 73, 161, 313
Roth, M. 249, 313
Rouault, O. 156, 314
Rouse, W.H.D. 115, 314
Rowton, M.B. 130, 152, 314
Rubio, G. 14, 189, 314
Rumor, M. 176, 181, 183, 314
Rutter, J.B. 222, 318
Rutherford, I. 4, 40, 77, 89, 202, 314
Ruyer, R. 72, 314

Said, S. 103, 314
Sallaberger, A. 127, 148, 314
Salonen, A. 215, 314
Samet, N. 247, 314
Sanders, S. 247, 298
Sapir, E. 16, 314
Sass, B. 69, 168, 277, 310
Sasson, J.M. 17, 40, 45, 46, 49, 55, 99, 136, 137, 139, 143, 156, 157, 162, 163, 168, 175, 201, 314
Scarborough, M. 221, 315
Scharbert, J. 160, 315
Schmid, K. 242, 287, 288, 315
Schmitt, R. 160, 315

Schniedewind, W.M. 70, 158, 270, 315
Schoors, A. 246, 315
Schulman, A.R. 43, 315
Schultz, W. 242, 315
Schunck, K.-D. 21, 315
Schuol, M. 196, 315
Schwartz, B. 287
Schwartz, G.M. 130, 315
Scott, M. 260, 315
Scully, S. 87, 315
Sebillote Cuchet, V. 36, 38, 315
Segal, C. 35, 75, 82 n.1, 83, 84, 85, 87, 88, 103, 106, 236, 252, 314
Seidel, M. 202, 316
Shaffer, A. 235, 244, 318
Shapiro, A.H. 96, 316
Shedid, A.G. 202, 316
Shehata, D. 203, 316
Shepherd, D.J. 77, 164, 316
Sherratt, S. 99, 316
Sicherl, M. 53, 316
Simon, U. 64, 316
Singer, I. 212, 316
Smith, M. 14, 17, 65, 143, 221, 272, 316
Smoes, E. 14, 24, 25, 28, 29, 316
Snell, D. 122, 316
Snodgrass, A.M. 218, 316
Soggin, A.J. 265, 316
Sollberger, E. 128, 316
Sommerstein, A.H. 53, 316
Sourvinou-Inwood, C. 85, 316
Spatz, L. 31, 53, 316
Speiser E.A. 15, 233, 239, 316
Stager, L.E. 184, 316
Stamm, J.J. 78, 317
Stanford, W.B. 76, 82, 83, 86, 317
Staublie, T. 177, 186, 317
Steinkeller, P. 149, 257, 317
Steinsaltz, A. 111, 317
Stern, P.D. 156, 317
Sternberg, M. 75, 195, 202, 317
Stillman, L. 10, 317
Stockhammer, P.W. 8, 317
Stol, M. 25, 144, 317
Straßburger, N. 89, 317
Streck, M. P. 9, 135, 153, 159, 264 n.4, 317
Suriano, M.J. 248, 317
Svärd, S. 173, 260, 318
Svenbro, J. 36, 318

Tadmor, H. 10, 318
Talmon, S. 266, 318
Tamber-Rosenau, C. 33, 318
Tavernier, J. 161, 318
Taylor, K. 195, 318
Teodorsson, S.-T. 231, 318
Thompson, W.E. 52, 318
Thureau-Dangin, F. 8, 121, 135, 318
Tiemeyer, L.-S. 65, 101, 114, 318
Tomlinson, J.E. 222, 318
Tordoff, R.L.S. 183, 318
Tournay, R. 235, 244, 318
Trameri, A. 41, 202, 318
Trédé, M. 141, 318
Tropper, J. 89, 224, 318
Tsukimoto, A. 127, 248, 318
Turkeltaub, D. 105, 318
Turner, C. 53, 319
Turpin, J.-C. 260, 319

Uehlinger, C. 227, 228, 238, 299, 319
Ullendorff, E. 232, 319
Ünal, A. 1 81, 319

Vacek, A. 78, 79, 312
Van Beek, L.C. 232, 319
Van Buylaere, G. 45, 305
Van De Mieroop, M. 38, 133, 135, 143, 319
Van den Hout, T.P.J. 223, 319
Van der Toorn, K. 59, 139, 244, 247, 319
Van Dijk, J. 151, 319
Van Soldt, W. 69, 243, 319
Vanstiphout, H.L.J. 257, 319
Varille, A. 211, 319
Veenhof, K.R. 7, 51, 147, 319
Veenker, R.A. 85, 319
Verheij, M.J.O. 107,319
Vermeule E. 27, 35, 36, 319
Vermeylen, J. 73, 162, 319
Vernant, J.-P. 84, 253, 287
Vidal-Naquet, P. 95, 103, 320
Villard, P. 7, 205, 320
Virolleaud, C. 224, 320
Vita, J.-P. 8, 320

Bodi_9781666979138_Author_Index.indd 352 7/14/2026 9:59:10 PM

von Dassow, E. 200, 205, 207, 208, 320
von Erffa, C.E. 99, 320
Von Luschan, F. 124, 320
Von Oppenheim, M.F. 154, 320
Von Rad, G. 146, 320
Von Soden, W. 182, 320
Von Willamowitz-Möllendorff, U. 48, 91, 320

Waal, W. 70, 223, 230, 321
Walker, C.B. 236, 321
Washington, H.C. 220, 321
Wasserman, N. 136, 145, 149, 150, 182, 321
Watanabe, K. 33, 100, 150, 310
Watson, W.G.E. 207, 321
Weeden, M. 181, 321
Wehr, H. 243, 321
Weinfeld, M. 148, 258, 321
Weinstein, J. 223, 278
Weippert, M. 31, 146, 321
Weiss, H. 7, 127, 148, 321
Weissert, E. 183, 184, 213, 321
Weksler-Bdolah, S. 168, 310
Wente, E.F. 208, 321
West, M. 3, 24, 70, 83, 84, 85, 87, 141, 181, 190, 191, 199 n.5, 206, 217, 218, 222, 229, 231, 270, 321
West, S. 221, 322
Westenholtz, A. 111, 113,189, 322
Westbrook, R. 51, 57, 101, 322
Weygand, I. 124, 308
Whittaker, H. 97, 322
Whitaker, R. E. 193, 322
Wiggermann, F.A.M. 220, 322
Wilhelm, G. 196, 198, 207, 322
Williams, B.A.O. 261, 322
Williamson, H.G.M. 184, 322
Wilson, E. 100, 105, 322
Wilson, J.A. 209, 322
Winter, I. J. 18, 33, 322
Winter, U. 228, 299
Winton Thomas, D. 59, 266, 322
Wiseman, D. 100, 223, 322
Wisnom, S. 194, 323
Wolff, H.-W. 185, 323
Worthington, M. 233, 323
Wright, A. 17, 18
Wright, J. 68, 249, 252, 254, 323
Wyatt, N. 79, 147, 207, 217, 226, 321, 323

Xella, P. 198, 323

Yadin, A. 16, 17, 323
Yadin, Y. 227, 323
Yakubovich, I. 151, 323
Yalçin, S. 175, 323
Yaron, R. 59, 323
Yee, G.A. 72, 323
Yoder, T.R. 10, 11, 13, 20, 21, 302
Yon, M. 167, 323

Zadok, R. 157, 323
Zerba, M. 92, 323
Zernecke, A.E. 244, 323
Zgoll, A. 189, 237, 313, 323
Ziegler, N. 7, 45, 46, 52, 55, 58, 59, 114, 120, 129, 134, 156, 159, 174, 202, 203, 284, 323, 324
Zimmerli, W. 246, 324
Zorn, J.R. 15, 324

Bodi_9781666979138_Author_Index.indd 353 7/14/2026 9:59:10 PM

Bodi_9781666979138_Author_Index.indd 354 7/14/2026 9:59:10 PM