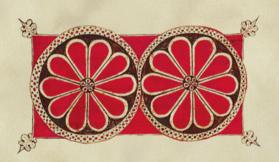*Hollow Men, Strange Women*

RIDDLES, CODES AND OTHERNESS
IN THE BOOK OF JUDGES

ROBIN BAKER

BRILL

Hollow Men, Strange Women

Biblical Interpretation Series

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The Goddess Ishtar with a Worshipper (Neo-Assyrian Cylinder Seal, ca 700 BC, BM 89769).
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Hollow Men, Strange Women

Riddles, Codes and Otherness in the Book of Judges

By

Robin Baker

Remember us – if at all – not as lost
Violent souls, but only
As the hollow men
The stuffed men.

T.S. ELIOT, *The Hollow Men*, 1925

ולא יראו פני ריקם

EXODUS 34:20b

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In memory of my father, William John David Baker (1916–1971)

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Contents

Preface

The book of Judges is about judges who do not appear to judge,[1] a community which ceases to be a community, who choose gods which are not gods, in a land that is ostensibly theirs but which they cannot fully possess. It is an account of people who gradually but inexorably become 'hollow',[2] bankrupt of direction, conscience and humanity, and strange to each other, of 'men bitter of soul' (Judg. 18:25). Judges is a bridge of nothing that spans two somethings – theocracy (or hierocracy) and monarchy. It is the dark night, ending in nightmare, between two days. It tells of stark liminality politically, morally, spiritually and physically.

Judges maintains its ability to fascinate: this monograph is but the latest in a long list of studies on the book. Each year seems to bring a new commentary on it, not to mention numerous learned papers and monographs.[3] It continues to occupy a prominent place in the thinking both of scholars of the historical-critical school and of literary critics concerned with narrative in the Hebrew Bible. Those coming to explore it in the second decade of the third millennium are privileged in the wealth of insights that their predecessors have provided. Given this body of material, one may reasonably question whether yet another book on the subject is called for. My answer is qualified, and predictable: only if one has something new and constructive to say.

Judges is a book of extraordinary colour, complexity and depth. While gratefully acknowledging and drawing on the findings of a host of commentators, my exploration of the work concentrates on aspects of the book which, to my knowledge, have not been treated in detail elsewhere. What I conclude has been largely lacking in the analysis of Judges is, first, adequate consideration of the wider context of the thought and practice of the ancient Near East.[4]

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1 Compare S.R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, 8th edn (rev.), Edinburgh: Clark, 1909, p. 160: 'The Book of Judges derives its name from the heroes whose exploits form the subject of its central and principal part'.

2 The followers of both Abimelech and Jephthah are termed אנשים ריקים *'ănāšîm rêqîm* 'hollow/empty men' (Judg. 9:4; 11:3). In BDB (p. 938), the phrase is translated as 'worthless fellows'. C.F. Burney rejects this, asserting that *rêq* in this context denotes 'a lack of the qualities which command success in the leading of a regular life' (*The Book of Judges*, London: Rivingtons, 1918, p. 308).

3 A century ago, in the preface to his *The Book of Judges*, Burney remarked that 'Judges is not a book which has suffered from neglect on the part of scholars in the past'.

4 Burney's commentary and Philippe Guillaume's *Waiting for Josiah: The Judges* (London: Clark, 2004) are rare exceptions. Moshe Yitzhaki's citation-analysis of scholarly publications

The environment in which Israel was seeking to establish its presence at the time of the 'Conquest' was already conspicuous for the immense age and yet vibrancy of its culture. The great literary works of Mesopotamia provided the models for serious writing in the Near East of the first half of the first millennium BC, the period in which Judges was composed, and a time when Judah was under Mesopotamian control. To overlook this influence is a mistake.[5] Second, insufficient attention has been given to the remarkable correlation between the language employed in the book and the theological concerns that lie at its heart. Through his flexing and manipulation of language, the writer has succeeded in creating a mood in the composition that befits a people not quite at home, aliens in their new environment, yet increasingly alienated from their ancestral God and their past. Third, the rhetorical architecture of Judges is generally misunderstood. The structure is essential for deciphering the message and context of the work. Fourth, and perhaps most important of all in the light of the history of the Jewish people and the resilience of Jewish culture, Judges has important things to say about otherness. The millennia-old question of assimilation versus differentiation that has, often violently, confronted every generation of Jews since at least the destruction of the twin kingdoms is foreshadowed in remarkable ways in Judges.[6] I submit that the theme of otherness is at the root of the book and that its exploration is not only invited by the writer of Judges, but urgently pressed upon the reader. And, finally, what kind of history does the book of Judges

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in the period between 1920 and 1980 demonstrates the surprisingly modest degree of cross-fertilization between biblical studies and research in the ancient Near East ('The Relationship between Biblical Studies and Ancient Near Eastern Studies', *ZAW* 99/2 [1987], pp. 232–48 [240–45]). Although the past twenty-five years have witnessed a rapidly growing inclination on the part of biblical scholars to recognize the importance of the Neo-Assyrian period in the development of Hebrew literary textuality (David Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 304), this has not resulted hitherto in a detailed critical reappraisal of the book of Judges in the light of Mesopotamian, and especially Neo-Assyrian, sources. The methodology and conclusions of Guillaume's monograph, which comes closest to holding this objective, are very different from those offered here.

5   Somewhat analogous is Daniel Bodi's contention regarding the book of Ezekiel: 'Just as ordinary political cartoons of our day are meaningless without the knowledge of their background, so, we suggest, the themes and motifs of the Book of Ezekiel lose their point unless interpreted in the light of contemporary literature, religious beliefs and practices' (*The Book of Ezekiel and the Poem of Erra*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991, p. 13).

6   Daniel Meijers, 'The Structural Analysis of the Jewish Calendar and its Political Implications', *Anthropos* 82, 4/6 (1987), pp. 603–10 (609). Lux Alptraum offers a trenchant appraisal: 'We [Jews] are, and always will be, the other' (Opinion piece, *Guardian*, 4 December 2015).

provide, how does it relate to other books of biblical narrative widely held to be historiography, and what are the implications of this for the Deuteronomistic History thesis? Within this, I posit a hypothesis for the timing of, and motivation for, the book's composition. My treatment of these matters is new. I do not claim that the interpretations I provide are superior to others. A work as richly textured as Judges admits and encourages a great variety of readings.

Unlike many monographs concerned with Judges, the present book does not attempt sequentially to work through, and comment upon, the episodes contained in its twenty-one chapters. Rather, it is organized thematically. Although each of the pericopes in Judges has something to disclose concerning the themes I have identified, a non-linear structure offers a more straightforward – and, I hope, exhilarating – means of accessing it. Accordingly, Chapter 1 summarizes the problematics of Judges and outlines the principal exegetical approaches to the book, noting their deficiencies. It then begins to advance the case for a different hermeneutical model, namely, one that understands Judges as a carefully constructed composition of prophetic intent, layered with esoteric meanings for sacred purposes, created in the shadow of the Neo-Assyrian cultural domination of the Hebrew-speaking area. The exposition of this model provides the monograph's primary focus. Central to the encoding technique used by the writer of Judges are riddles and a parable. Their function in signalling its esoteric character and providing keys to its interpretation is analysed.

Chapter 2 investigates the lexical coding in the book: its peculiar and baffling application of key words, and the way these distort semantic boundaries. It probes the meaning of the ubiquitous employment of doublets, an idiosyncrasy frequently noted in the commentaries, and of 3+1 constructions which are widely found in Judges but have, hitherto, attracted sparse scholarly comment. In addition, attention is given to the significance of the writer's mirroring techniques, which both reflect and distort. In Chapter 3 another aspect of boundaries – the treatment of physical space and how it is connected with the subject of otherness – is explored. Chapter 4 looks at the symbolism of the work's rhetorical architecture and offers a hypothesis on why Judges is structured as it is. These four Chapters comprise the first half of the monograph. They are concerned with the internal dynamics of Judges; the remaining Chapters look at Judges in its wider historical and cultural context, and, set against this backdrop, its writer's purpose in composing it.

Chapter 5 examines the cultic and cultural environment in Judah in the late Neo-Assyrian period. The book's narrative and structure are examined in the light of prominent elements of Neo-Assyrian culture. In this and the following Chapter, several of the Mesopotamian literary works most widely known in the

early seventh century BC are compared with characters and episodes in Judges, an exercise that reveals significant and surprising correspondences. The meaning of the numbers that the author deploys in the narrative – a perennially perplexing topic for commentators – is compared with Assyrian practice. Chapter 7 is concerned with the author's motive for writing the book, the conditions in which he composed it, the period of its composition, and its intended audience. Jotham's parable in particular, and the tale of Abimelech in general, offer valuable insights into these questions and are closely studied. The Chapter concludes with an evaluation of Judges as a work of historical record in the context of contemporary historiographical practice. The Epilogue Chapter appraises the validity of including Judges in a putative Deuteronomistic History.

My use of the term 'the writer of Judges' requires explanation. No one at this distance and in the absence of unequivocal information on the precise timing and conditions in which the composition was produced, can know with certainty whether Judges is the creation of one writer or a group of writers, and to what extent his/their work was concerned with writing the Settlement story of the tribes of Israel as opposed to editing existing material on the subject, whether written or oral. Manifestly, tales from the time of the judges found in the book were in circulation in the twin kingdoms, as demonstrated by Hosea's reference to the outrage at Gibeah, Joab's to the fate of Abimelech at the tower of Thebez, and possibly Isaiah's to the breaking of Midian's power (Hos. 9:9, 10:9; 2 Sam. 11:21; Isa. 9:4).[7] The Song of Deborah (Judg. 5) presents an apparently archaic form of Hebrew compared with the rest of Judges. For this reason, scholars maintain that it was pre-existing and incorporated into the book at the time of the work's composition. However, its difference serves to emphasize the linguistic and stylistic uniformity of the rest of book, and chapter 5 is, consequently, possibly the exception that proves the rule that Judges is on the whole not the work of an editor, but the product of a single writer.[8] Jeffrey Tigay's description of the Akkadian version of the Gilgamesh epic could, I believe, apply to Judges: 'The original episodes were modified by certain deliberate changes that cemented them together in the service of a particular theme that the epic develops. The plan of the integrated epic thus testifies to the working of a single artistic mind, and the work of this person is

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7   Daniel I. Block, *The New American Commentary 6: Judges, Ruth*, Nashville TN: B&H, 1999, p. 27. On the date of Psalm 83, with its reference to the defeat of Jabin and Sisera, see Chapter 6.

8   Compare D.W. Gooding, 'The Composition of the Book of Judges', *Eretz-Israel*, 1982, pp. 70–79 (70).

so creative that he deserves to be considered an *author*, rather than an editor or compiler'.[9]

As a rule, the translations of cited Hebrew and Greek biblical texts are my own. Where this is not the case, I have referenced the source translation.

As well as citing lines from T.S. Eliot's *The Hollow Men* and John Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, I have used epigraphically quotations from the Los Angeles rock group, the Doors. This is not entirely quixotic, and certainly not random. There is something about the feverish quest of the late 1960s rock culture to fracture established boundaries, not least religious boundaries, in a fog of destructive hedonism that comports well with the mood of Judges. Few typified this phenomenon more dramatically than the Doors' front man, Jim Morrison, as his poetry, and early death, reflect. In the autobiographical notes he penned for Elektra records, Morrison described his creative motivation in terms that could fit the intent of the author of Judges writing two and a half millennia earlier: 'I am interested in anything about revolt, disorder, chaos – especially activity that seems to have no meaning. [...] Rather than starting inside, I start outside – reach the mental through the physical'.[10] 'I hope [my work] will leave them puzzled'.[11]

In writing this monograph I have benefited greatly from the guidance, criticism and support given by friends and colleagues. I am particularly indebted to Robert Pynsent and Simo Parpola who in different, but equally indispensable, ways helped shape it. Howard Page-Clark kindly read the draft manuscript and made many valuable suggestions for improving it. Diana Barsham, Joy Carter, Rachel Forrester-Jones, Keith Lamdin, Tapio Markkanen, and James Steven made important contributions at points in the book's evolution for which I am grateful. I am, of course, wholly responsible for its defects and errors. I wish to thank Liesbeth Hugenholtz, Maaike Langerak and Suzanne Mekking at Brill for their help and advice throughout the publication process, the Trustees of the British Museum for permission to reproduce the images used in this book, and J.B. Metzler Verlag and Brill for allowing me to incorporate two maps from *Historischer Atlas der antiken Welt*, Stuttgart: Metzler, 2007/*Brill's Historical Atlas of the Ancient World*, Leiden, 2010. I selected these maps because they

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9   *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982, p. 42. For a like assessment, see *Istoriya drevnego vostoka. Chast' pervaya: Mesopotamiya*, ed. by I.M. D'yakonov, Moscow: Nauka, 1983, p. 472. Daniel Block (*Judges*, p. 49) reaches a similar conclusion concerning Judges.

10   Quoted in Stephen Davis, *Jim Morrison: Life, Death, Legend*, New York: Gotham Books, 2005, p. 154.

11   *Doors Interviews 1968* [www. accessed 30 December 2014].

reflect the human geography at the time Judges was written. It was this environment, rather than a landscape of the Settlement era conceptualized five hundred years later by the author of Judges, that provided the concrete geographical context of its composition.

Finally, it is with immense love and an enormous awareness of debt that I dedicate this book to the memory of my father, born a century ago. It was the example of his deep love for the Scriptures that has led, through 'all the changes and chances of this mortal life', to its composition. Its subject, the book of Judges is, after all, an account of the children's relationship with the fathers' God.

List of Maps and Illustrations

Abbreviations

AfO	*Archiv für Orientforschung*
AMGG	*Ancient Mesopotamian Gods and Goddesses*, Oracc and the UK Higher Education Academy
ANET	James B. Pritchard (ed.), *The Ancient Near East: A New Anthology of Texts and Pictures*, vol. 2, Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975
AOAT	*Alter Orient und Altes Testament*
ARAB	D.D. Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, 2 vols, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1926–27
AV	Authorized King James Version
BASOR	*Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
BDB	*A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. by Francis Brown, S.R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906
BhH	Bo Reicke and L. Rost (eds), *Biblisch-historisches Handwörter-buch*, 3 vols, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964
Borger, Asarh.	Riekele Borger, *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons, Königs von Assyrien* (AfO Beiheft 9), Graz, 1956
BSOAS	*Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*
CAD	*The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, 21 vols, Chicago, 1956–2011
CBJ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
DANE	*Dictionary of the Ancient Near East*, ed. by Piotr Bienkowski and Alan Millard, London: British Museum Press, 2000
DDD	*Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, ed. by Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking and Pieter van der Horst, Leiden: Brill, 1995
DH	Deuteronomistic History
Dtr	Deuteronomic Historian
HB	Hebrew Bible
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JCS	*Journal of Cuneiform Studies*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*

LAS	Simo Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars to the Kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal*, 2 vols (= AOAT 5/1–2), Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1970 and 1983
LXX	Septuagint
LXX A	Septuagint Codex Alexandrinus
LXX B	Septuagint Codex Vaticanus
MT	Masoretic text
OHCC	*The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture*, ed. by Karen Radner and Eleanor Robson, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011
OrNS	*Orientalia, Nova Series*
PNA	*The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire*, 3 vols, ed. by Heather D. Baker and Karen Radner, Helsinki: Foundation for Finnish Assyriological Research, 1998–2011
RA	*Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale*
RI&J	Gary N. Knoppers and J. Gordon McConville (eds), *Reconsidering Israel and Judah: Recent Studies on the Deuteronomistic History*, Winona Lake IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000
RLA	*Reallexikon der Assyriologie und vorderasiatischen Archäologie*
SAA	*State Archives of Assyria*
SAAB	*State Archives of Assyria Bulletin*
SAACT	*State Archives of Assyria Cuneiform Texts*
SAALT	*State Archives of Assyria Literary Texts*
SAAS	*State Archives of Assyria Studies*
SMC	Standard Mesopotamian Calendar
Studies Landsberger	*Studies in Honor of Benno Landsberger on His Seventy-Fifth Birthday*, ed. by Hans Güterbock and Thorkild Jacobsen, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
ZA	*Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archäologie*
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

Maps with Gazetteer

The gazetteer reconciles the transliteration from Hebrew of place-names on the maps reproduced here[1] with the more usual English forms that I have employed in the book:

ʿAzza	Gaza
Bəʾer šebaʿ	Beer-sheba
Bẹt Ẹl	Bethel
Bẹt Šəȧn	Beth-shean
Dammeśeq	Damascus
Har ʿEbal	Mount Ebal
Har ʾEphrayim	Mount Ephraim/Hill Country of Ephraim
Har Gərizim	Mount Gerizim
Har Tȧbor	Mount Tabor
Ḥȧṣor	Hazor
ha-Yardẹn	River Jordan
Lȧkiš	Lachish
Məgiddo	Megiddo
Qedeš	Kedesh
Ṣor	Tyre
Šəkem	Shechem
Šoməron	Samaria
Yȧm ha-Melaḥ	Salt (Dead) Sea
Yəriḥo	Jericho
Yərušȧlayim	Jerusalem

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1 *Historischer Atlas der antiken Welt*, Stuttgart: Metzler, 2007/*Brill's Historical Atlas of the Ancient World: New Pauly*, Leiden: Brill, 2010, pp. 45, 53.

MAP 1   *The Kingdom of Judah and its Environs (722–587/86 BC).*

Mesopotamia and neighbouring regions (c. 710–661 BC)

1. Rusaḫinili Qilbanikai Toprakkale
2. Teišebai URU Karmir-blur
3. Rusai URU.TUR Bastam Kefkalesi
4. Ḫaldei- URU Zuquni Kefkalesi
5. Rusaḫinili Eiduru̯kai Ayanis

Legend

- Assyrian territory (at 710 BC, Map A, 660 BC, Map B), areas of expansion
- *677* Assyrian conquest (date)
- *709/676* Under transitory Assyrian rule (date of acquisition/date of loss)
- **Jadnana** Sometime Assyrian tributary
- ⊗ ☒ Destroyed settlement/Structure (some with dates), battle
- *Arwada* Assyrian vassal
- → Assyrian campaigns

- Historical coastline/River course
- Altitudes over 1000 m, Marshland

0 100 200 300 400 500 km

- Realm of kings of Kuš, c. 707–671 BC (25th Dynasty, Map A)
- Realm of kings of Saïs from c. 664 BC (26th Dynasty, Map A)
- Realm of kings of Saïs (at 664 BC), areas of expansion (Map B)
- Probable eastern frontier of Phrygia in the reign of Mita of Muška (Map A)

- ■ Ceremonial buildings and grounds of Rusa II and III
- **Puqudu** Sometime ally of Elam
- **C S** Sphere of action of the Cimmerians/ Scythians (Map A)
- → Impetus of Cimmerian attacks (Map B)
- — 'Great Military Road'
- ■ ○ Capital/administrative centre, city

Kundlua	Assyrian or Urartian name
Gordion	Greek name
Bastam	Modern name
Andia	Country/People
Tabāl	Territory/Mountain
	Disintegrating kingdoms

MAP 2   *Mesopotamia and Neighbouring Regions (ca 710–661 BC).*

Introduction: 'A Spoil of Divers Colours on Both Sides'

Back in those days everything was simpler, and more confused[1]

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For the majority of commentators on the Hebrew Bible, the book of Judges is a problematic work.[2] Marc Zvi Brettler holds that 'no other biblical "historical" text has a similar constellation of difficulties'.[3] It is considered by many in the historical school as a pastiche, not a unified composition;[4] a pastiche of myths and historical tales that have little stylistic unity apart from a geographical and, possibly artificial, temporal context within an overall composite work of 'Deuteronomic history'.[5] Barnabas Lindars stated the position plainly: 'It has long been agreed that Judges is a collection of traditions of tribal exploits,

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1 James Douglas Morrison, *The American Night: The Writings of Jim Morrison*, London: Viking, 1991, p. 55.

2 'The literary problems of the books of Joshua and Judges are so numerous and complex that no comprehensive view of the present state of scholarly discussion can be attempted here' (John Van Seters, *In Search of History*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983, p. 322).

3 'The Book of Judges: Literature as Politics', *JBL* 108 (1989), pp. 395–418 (397).

4 Lillian R. Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*, Sheffield: Almond Press, 1988, p. 11.

5 Some regard even the existence of a system of tribes to which the 'sons of Israel' belonged, a notion central to the Judges narrative, as anachronistic, an invention of the monarchical period (Barnabas Lindars, 'The Israelite Tribes in Judges', in *Studies in the Historical Books of the Old Testament*, ed. by J.A. Emerton, Leiden: Brill, 1979, pp. 95–112 [112]). John Bright contends that Israel at the time of Judges was neither racially homogeneous, nor did it constitute a nation, but, rather, it was a confederation of clans held together by a shared adherence to a covenant with Yahweh (*A History of Israel*, rev. edn, London: SCM Press, 1972, p. 158).

worked over[6] with a new introduction by the Deuteronomic historian, and it is he who has imposed upon the book its pan-Israelite interpretation'.[7]

In the view of such commentators, this 'working over' of Judges, carried out centuries after the period the book recounts, suffers from considerable unevenness. This is evident, not least, in the infelicitous mixing of language that presents forms dating perhaps from the period of the Judges themselves (ca 1200–1000)[8] to the sixth century BC, or even later.[9] Such analyses conclude that Judges combines uncomfortably the original narrative of the records of the major with those of the minor judges,[10] together with disparate episodes, like those of Abimelech and, possibly, Jephthah and Samson.[11] The book's final section (chapters 17–21) has been widely viewed as a 'supplement' and 'late addition',[12] or 'an appendix on various themes'.[13] Van Seters asserts that these

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6   Using a phrase borrowed in the Judges context from Otto Eissfeld (*The Old Testament*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1966, p. 267).

7   'Tribes', p. 96.

8   E.C. Rust notes the consensus among exegetes that the Song of Deborah is contemporary with the battle against Sisera (*Judges, Ruth, Samuel*, London: SCM Press, 1961, p. 12). Among those sharing his view are George F. Moore, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Judges*, Edinburgh: Clark, 1895, p. 132; P.C. Craigie, 'The Song of Deborah and the Epic of Tukulti-Ninurta', *JBL* 88 (1969), pp. 253–65 (253–54); Mark S. Smith, 'Warfare Song as Warrior Ritual', in *Warfare, Ritual, and Symbol in Biblical and Modern Contexts*, ed. by Brad E. Kelle, Frank Ames, and Jacob Wright, Atlanta GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014, pp. 165–86 (167); Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Book of Judges*, London: Routledge, 2002, pp. 62–68; Jo Ann Hackett, ' "There was no king in Israel": The Era of the Judges', in *The Oxford History of the Biblical World*, ed. by Michael D. Coogan, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 132–64 (158, 161); Guillaume, *Waiting*, p. 261.

9   Compare Mieke Bal, *Murder and Difference*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988, p. 1. On the debate concerning the age of the Song of Deborah, see Jack M. Sasson, ' "A Breeder or Two for Each Leader" ', *Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honour of J. Cheryl Exum*, ed. by David Clines and Ellen van Wolde, Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012, pp. 333–354 (335–38).

10   Hackett, 'Judges', pp. 138–39; John Gray, *The Century Bible – New Edition: Joshua, Judges and Ruth*, London: Nelson, 1967, p. 5. Gray considers the material on Shamgar and Samson likely to be later accretions (op. cit., pp. 208–09). 'Outside the deuteronomistic scheme in Judges, and somewhat in tension with it, are the so-called minor judges. These are secondary and should not be allowed to confuse the pattern' (Van Seters, *In Search*, p. 345).

11   J. Alberto Soggin, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2nd rev. edn, London: SCM Press, 1980, p. 178; Carr, *Formation*, pp. 479–80.

12   David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 120.

13   J. Alberto Soggin, *Judges: A Commentary*, London: SCM Press, 1981, p. 261. The same term is employed by Driver, *Introduction* (p. 160), and Gray, *Joshua, Judges* (p. 239), who understands chapters 17–18 as 'a redactional appendix'.

chapters 'stand outside Dtr's work as later additions. They interrupt the continuity of the work from the time of Samson to the story of Samuel in 1 Samuel 1–7'.[14] Moreover, 'even within Judg. 19–21 different traditions are to be discerned, which have not successfully been harmonized in the present form of the text'.[15] Hardly less problematic for such commentators are the first two sections of Judges, conventionally divided into 1:1–2:5 and 2:6–3:6, which appear, on the one hand, to be contradictory and, on the other, repetitive. Characteristically, scholars with a source-critical approach conclude that they reflect different sources, with the majority of 2:6–3:6 representing the work of Dtr and providing the natural continuation of Joshua 23,[16] while Judges 1:1–2:5 is recognized 'by all scholars'[17] as 'without question [. . .] a later insertion'[18] that incorporates into the book's introduction fragments of mythic material.[19] The book of

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14   *In Search*, p. 345.

15   A.D.H. Mayes, *Israel in the Period of the Judges*, London: SCM Press, 1974, p. 42. In his *Judges* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), Mayes further states: 'Judg. 17–21, like the prologue in Judg. 1:1–2:5, disrupt the continuity of the deuteronomistic history' (p. 15). Significantly for my exploration of the influences at work in the composition of Judges, the final portion of the Gilgamesh epic, Tablet XII, is described in similar terms by some scholars: '[it is] a mechanical addition [. . .] which has no organic connection with the rest of the epic' (Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness*, New Haven CT and London: Yale University Press, 1976, pp. 215, 229); 'an inorganic appendage [that] appears as an appendix to the epic' (Tigay, *Gilgamesh*, pp. 27, 105); Tablet XII 'breaks the formal completeness of the Epic, which had come full circle between the survey of Uruk in Tablet I and the same survey at the end of Tablet XI' (Maureen Gallery Kovacs, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1989, p. 116). For the contrary view, see Bendt Alster, 'The Paradigmatic Character of Mesopotamian Heroes', *RA* 68 (1974), pp. 49–60 (55–58); Simo Parpola, 'The Assyrian Tree of Life', *JNES* 52 (1993), pp. 161–208. We will compare the structures of *Gilgamesh* and Judges more closely in Chapter 5.

16   Barry G. Webb, *The Book of Judges: An Integrated Reading*, Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987, p. 241 n. 97: 'Most commentators simply treat 2.6ff. as a "second", "Deuteronomic", or "proper" introduction to the book/period'.

17   Van Seters, *In Search*, p. 338.

18   Rudolf Smend, 'The Law and the Nations', in *RI&J*, pp. 95–110 (108–109). Unconvinced by a solely binary division of Judg. 1:1–3:6, Smend rejects the integrity of some of the verses within the section conventionally attributed to Dtr, viz., Judg. 2:17 – 'no quarrel about the secondary nature of this verse is possible' (106), and 3:1–6 which he describes as 'confused and, as all previous efforts show, very difficult for the literary critic to untangle' (107).

19   Gray (*Joshua, Judges*, p. 255) describes Judges 1.1–2.5 as 'secondary to the first edition of the Deuteronomic history'. See as representative examples of such approaches, Burney, *Judges*, pp. 1, 52; Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*, Sheffield: JSOT, 1981, p. 8; H.W. Herzberg, *Die Bücher Josua, Richter, Ruth*, 4th edn, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969, pp. 147–62; Mayes, *Israel*, p. 35; also John Gray, *The New Century Bible Commentary: Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1986, pp. 188–89. Smend

Numbers is also considered to have two introductions, derived from different source traditions; more famously, so too does Genesis in its two treatments of the creation of humanity. Mary Douglas, in arguing that the two introductions in Numbers (1:1–46; 1:47–54) reflect the artful intent of its author, states that the existence of two prologues is characteristic of literary compositions of the sixth and fifth centuries BC.[20]

Martin Noth's analysis of the structure of Judges overall leads him to argue that the boundaries of the work, as found in the Bible, represent a major error of editing. For him, Judges should extend well into the first book of Samuel and incorporate the story of Samuel, as the last exponent of the Israelite 'charismatic champion' type.[21] Among the many objections that can be raised against this hypothesis, such as those advanced by Gray and Brettler,[22] is the fact that Samuel did not succeed in delivering Israel from the aggression/domination of the alien power. As such, compared with, for example, Othniel or Deborah, his judgeship was a failure, a distinction he shares with Samson alone. It is hardly the tenor of the Samuel series, however, to convey the idea that he failed in his vocation. Moreover, in contrast to the 'heroes' of Judges, Samuel is presented as functioning in a judicial capacity, continuing in this role even after the appointment of a king (1 Sam. 7:15).[23]

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The question of boundaries is thematically central to the Judges narrative: the book concerns life in a liminal space, in the marches of geography, his-

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considers the author of Judges 1 the nomistic editor, 'DtrN', of whom he states 'narrative consistency was obviously not a major concern of his […] but rather saturating the material with his theological conceptions was' ('The Law', p. 110). Alexander Rofé goes further, dismissing not only Judg. 1.1–3.6 and chapters 17–21 because they 'do not mention either judge or saviour', but also the 'fictitious story about the Judahite judge Othniel' (3:7–11) ('Ephraimite versus Deuteronomistic History', in *Storia e Tradizioni di Israele*, ed. by D. Garrone and F. Israel, Brescia: Paideia, 1991, pp. 221–35 [224]).

20   *In the Wilderness*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 127.

21   *Deuteronomistic History*, pp. 5–6.

22   Gray, *Joshua, Judges*, pp. 203–04; Brettler, 'Literature', pp. 398–99.

23   Compare David Jobling, 'What, If Anything, Is 1 Samuel?', *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 7/1 (1993), pp. 17–31 (24–25). Jobling misses the point that none of the heroes in Judges resembles the model of judgeship displayed by Samuel when he asserts that 'we focus on the present ending of Judges, with the suggestion that judgeship was a failure, and forget its apparent rehabilitation in the figure of Samuel (1 Samuel 7)'.

tory and identity.[24] Not only does its temporal setting mark a transition – the period from Late Bronze to Iron Age[25] – the book takes as its subject the transition of the Israelites from nomadic to settled existence and the beginnings of statehood.[26] According to the biblical narrative, their experience of independent leadership had hitherto been limited to Moses and Joshua. Before these men, they had been a wholly subject community in a foreign land under a linguistically and culturally alien overlord. Moses had led them to the desert, the epitome of a transitional space. The forty years in a featureless, borderless wilderness was intended for them as the place of unpatterning, 'till the desert had absorbed their sins, till a new generation had been produced and had taken the place of the sinning generation, a new generation that could be led into the promised land, which was also "the land cut off"'.[27] This successor generation was called upon to do something unparalleled in the history of its people: to fix and preserve clear geographical frontiers of national and tribal habitation in line with the territories nominally allotted to them by Moses and Joshua.[28] On the spiritual plane, in the new environment this generation's charge was to establish and defend the boundaries of the cult of Yahweh – the world's first documented experiment in cultic exclusivity – in a neighbourhood rich in alluring and, in most respects, less exacting alternatives.[29] This charge is well

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24   Yuriah Kim, 'Postcolonial Criticism: Who is the Other in the Book of Judges?', in Gale Yee (ed.), *Judges and Method*, 2nd edn, Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 2007, pp. 161–82 (172). Compare Burney, *Judges*, p. vi: 'The Book of Judges occupies a position on the borderland between history and legend'.

25   Lawson G. Stone, 'Eglon's Belly and Ehud's Blade', *JBL* 128 (2009), pp. 649–663 (656). Compare Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, 2 vols, London: Folio Society, 1996, pp. 600–01.

26   Susanne Gillmayr-Bucher, *Erzählte Welten im Richterbuch*, Leiden: Brill, 2012, p. 2.

27   Franz Steiner, *Taboo*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967, p. 62.

28   Jo Ann Hackett ('Judges', p. 147) observes that the Egyptians, at the end of the thirteenth century BC, considered the Israelites a people without clear geographical boundaries.

29   Compare H.H. Rowley, *Worship in Ancient Israel*, London: SPCK, 1967, p. 46. The interconnectedness of identity with otherness is self-evident. It should be stressed, though rarely is, that it was purely the otherness of their religious practice that marked the Israelites, who were linguistically and racially hardly distinguishable from the Canaanites, as different, as exceptional (Richard Coggins, *Introducing the Old Testament*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 63; Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1973, p. 81; *The Making of the Old Testament*, ed. by Enid B. Mellor, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972, p. 21; Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God*, 2nd edn, Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2002, pp. 19–21). The Bible itself claims a close shared ancestry for the Israelites, Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites and Midianites; even the Amalekites figure in this conception (see Baruch Halpern, 'The State of Israelite History', in *RI&J*, pp. 540–65 [561]; Kim, 'Other', p. 172).

summed up in the prescript to Aaron: 'Make a separation between the holy and the unholy and between the unclean and the pure' (Lev. 10:10). In other words, the vocation of Israel in the Judges period was to create in the new land a pattern of sharp definition, in both the exoteric and the esoteric spheres. Both kinds of frontiers were menaced by the existence of Canaanites, Amorites and Philistines.[30] The essential tension in the mission was the requirement to possess, i.e., naturalize, the foreign land and its material culture, while not being contaminated by its alien religious beliefs and practices.[31] The prescription given by Moses and Joshua is that the best, in fact the only, form of defence is attack since 'all margins are dangerous. If they are pulled this way or that the shape of fundamental experience is altered. Any structure of ideas is vulnerable at its margins'.[32]

S.R. Driver noted: 'Topographical distinctions are always carefully observed by the Hebrew writers. Let the reader study, with this point of view in his mind, the history of Samson'.[33] Indeed, throughout Judges the attention given to geography is generally acute and in marked contrast to the handling of historicity.[34] Space appears more important than time in the narrative.[35] As we shall see, geography both structures the work and exposes its meaning. In addition, the landscape of Palestine serves as a means to adumbrate the thematic unity between 'the days when the judges judged' (Ruth 1:1) and the time and circumstances in which the writer told their story. When there is a lack of specificity or some blurring in the geographical description, there appears to be an underlying rationale for it.

An instance of this is offered in the account of Ehud's second journey to Eglon, the Moabite king, in the 'City of Palm Trees' (3:19–28). We are told that 'He himself turned from the quarries that were by Gilgal' (AV v. 19), to set about his fateful mission, and later, after his assassination of Eglon, that he 'passed beyond the quarries and escaped' (v. 26). The word here translated 'quarries', *pᵊsîlîm*, is consistently rendered 'graven images' or 'carved images' elsewhere in the AV.[36] Indeed, the singular form of the noun occurs extensively in Judges 17

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30   Note Douglas's remark: 'Strict monotheism cannot be appreciated fully without its setting of a minority facing all the political external and internal difficulties of an enclave' (*Wilderness*, pp. 33–34).

31   Kim, 'Other', p. 177.

32   Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966, p. 145.

33   S.R. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text and the Topography of the Books of Samuel*, 2nd edn, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913, p. 60.

34   Trent C. Butler, *Word Biblical Commentary 8: Judges*, Nashville TN: Nelson, 2009, p. lxxi.

35   Hackett, 'Judges', pp. 138–39.

36   A number of translations do, in fact, treat it in Judges 3 as 'idols' or 'the place of idols'.

and 18 where there is no doubt that it connotes a 'graven image', as expressly forbidden in Mosaic Law (for example, Exod. 20:4; Lev. 26:1). There is, however, no archaeological evidence or historical record either of quarries, of a locality named Pesilim, or of any specific reference to a collection of idols in the vicinity of Jericho and Gilgal.[37] It is possible, of course, that such a place existed. Notwithstanding, this account readily appears to offer a sub-text. The oppression of the Israelites by the Moabites was occasioned by the former 'again doing what was wicked in the sight of Yahweh' (3:12). At the core of their recurrent evil-doing was idol-worship.[38] The verbs employed in the Ehud story concerned with his movement relative to Pesilim are instructive. The first, as he sets out on his liberation assignment, is *šûb*, the most common definition of which is 'to return, turn back'. But it also carries the sense of 'repent, turn back from evil'.[39] The second, as he goes to rally the sons of Israel to revolution, having rendered the Moabite oppressors leaderless, is *ʿābar* which, as well as denoting 'to cross', 'to pass [by]', also means 'to transgress'.[40] Taking the spiritually dimensioned meanings of these verbs, we find that Ehud's mission of liberation began when 'he repented of the idols', and that he was equipped to lead Israel once 'he had transgressed [against] the idols'.[41] It is this two-stage process of Yahwistic zeal towards the idols in Israel's midst – first repentance, and second attack – that is presented frequently in the Bible as the only appropriate response to the existence of false gods, not least in the account of Gideon's destruction of the altar of Baʿal (Judg. 6). These are indeed the antidotes to 'going after and serving other gods', the recurring biblical motif of apostasy (*mᵉšûbāh*). Thus, we see in the Ehud story, narratological purpose overriding an otherwise strict treatment of geography by an apparent geographical designation exploited artfully to convey an underlying message.[42]

As I argue below, part of the function of the Ehud cycle, and the reason for its positioning early in the Judges narrative, is to provide clues for the book's

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37 For a discussion of this question, see Block, *Judges*, pp. 163, 165.

38 'In the Book of Judges […] when the judge dies, […] the people begin to worship idols'. (Alice L. Laffey, *Wives, Harlots and Concubines*, London: SPCK, 1988, p. 73).

39 BDB, p. 997. On the use of the verb *šûb* in Deuteronomy and the Former Prophets, see Hans Walter Wolff, 'The Kerygma of the Deuteronomistic Historical Work', in *RI&J*, pp. 62–78 (70–78).

40 BDB, p. 717. Indeed, it is employed in this sense in the preceding chapter: 'because they transgressed my covenant' (2:20). As I discuss in Chapter 2, the transgression of boundaries is salient in the Ehud cycle.

41 *ʿābar* takes the simple direct object to express both the object of 'crossing, passing by' and that of 'transgressing against'. Compare Num. 22:18.

42 Compare Robert H. O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, Leiden: Brill, 1996, p. 100.

interpretation. It is not accidental that the story contains the word 'key', liter-
ally 'opener', and stresses the locking and unlocking of doors.[43] A number of
the words found in it recur with amplified or artfully altered meanings later in
the book. Nor is it coincidental that at the heart of the tale lies a fatal misinter-
pretation of 'the secret word', 'the message from God' delivered by a man with a
'two-mouthed' (i.e., two-edged) sword (3:19–25), a sword with which he 'opens'
Eglon. In short, while there is no doubting the use of humour in this narrative,
as in others in the book,[44] its essential purpose is more profound than a veiled
attack on the Benjamites and/or monarchy, 'a literary cartoon', a scatological
comedy deployed to sustain an Israelite audience's interest, or a satire, laced
with homosexual allusion, on a gullible king at the hands of an unscrupulous
bandit.[45]

   In contrast to the instability of the boundaries described in Judges, the
book displays no epistemological or literary disarray in its central theme. The
book describes the steady decline of 'the sons of Israel' from evidently united,
Yahweh-worshipping, divinely-inspired, potential conquerors of the promised
land to a motley collection of reprobates lacking unifying purpose and a clear
theology and ethical code, alienated from the God of their fathers, and at the
mercy of their enemies. It is a story of spiritual disintegration, social collapse
and catastrophic military failure relieved only by the Yahweh-directed inter-
ventions of heroic figures like Ehud. Judges 19–21 provides in the dismembered
concubine a grisly metaphor for the complete atomization of Israelite society
as well as evidence of its moral and spiritual depravity. Similarly, the book's
concluding verse leaves the reader in no doubt concerning the extent of the
alienation of Israelite society from the laws of God and the ordered cult of
Yahweh on the one hand, and social cohesion on the other: 'In those days, there

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43   For an enlightening technical description of Eglon's lock and key, see Jack Sasson,
     'Ethnically Cultured Interpretations', in Gershon Galil, Mark Geller and Alan Millard
     (eds), *Homeland and Exile*, Leiden: Brill, 2009, pp. 571–95 (583–84).

44   The use of humour in sacred texts is a feature of Mesopotamian literature also (Sarah Iles
     Johnson [ed.], *Religions of the Ancient World*, Cambridge MA: Belknap Press, 2004, p. 582).

45   Butler, *Judges*, pp. lxxviii; 69–71; Block, *Judges*, p. 156; Geoffrey P. Miller, 'Verbal Feud in
     the Hebrew Bible', *JNES* 55 (1996), pp. 105–117 (113–17); Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical
     Narrative*, New York: Basic Books, 1981, pp. 38–41; Barry G. Webb, *The Book of Judges*, Grand
     Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2012, pp. 165–67; Susan Niditch, *Judges: A Commentary*, Louisville
     KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008, pp. 6, 57–58; Soggin, *Judges*, pp. 55–56. Note Jack
     Sasson's critique: 'By treating Ehud as satire rather than, say, a narrative with potential
     humorous touches, recent commentators have in effect created a new perception of the
     story that conflates ancient Israel's reaction to it with that of their own' ('Interpretations',
     p. 591).

was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes' (21:25). In a word, it is a nightmare story.

For the cause of Israel's malaise one need not look far. Judges makes clear, as evident, for example, in the Eglon episode, that it was a direct result of its abandonment of Yahweh and it squandering the benefits of his support by compulsively choosing alternative cults. The deleterious consequences of this behaviour had been laid out for Israel in the law of Moses and rehearsed by Joshua.

3

Amplifying my brief statement in the Preface, I argue in this and subsequent chapters that Judges is the creation of an author who, while he drew on different sources in composing his manuscript, had a clear understanding of his task and displays uncommon skill in effecting it.[46] It is, therefore, an integrated work with a defined purpose rather than 'a collection of stories that are only loosely connected to one another'.[47] My assessment of Judges contrasts with that of scholars like Dietrich and Naumann who contend that such works were 'hardly assembled deliberately but are the result of a multistage textual growth'.[48] The fact that the Judges writer does not observe post-Enlightenment conventions of composition and is not principally concerned with the furnishing of historiography reflects the practice of his time. He displays the best traditions of literary composition existing in the ancient Near East. The result is a piece of literature of rare technical complexity which is belied by the, for the most part, uncomplicated, muscular Hebrew prose it uses to convey its message, and its

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46   Compare O'Connell, *Rhetoric*, p. 27.

47   J. Cheryl Exum, 'Feminist Criticism: Whose Interests are Being Served?', in Yee (ed.), *Judges*, pp. 65–89 (70).

48   Walter Dietrich and Thomas Naumann, 'The David-Saul Narrative', in *RI&J*, pp. 276–318 (288). And further: 'Here and there one gets the feeling that the "literary analysis" and "close reading" methods of interpretation are skating on the thin ice of a superficial text, frozen relatively randomly and unevenly in the course of the processes of recording and canonization' (291). Compare Webb (*Integrated*, p. 76): 'The book of Judges as a whole is […] a coherent literary work with thematic focus on the one hand and richness of meaning on the other'. Gooding ('Composition', p. 77) goes further in arguing that Judges is 'the work of one mind which saw the significance of the history recorded in the sources, perceived the trends it exhibited and carefully selected and positioned each piece of source material so that the symmetrical structure of the whole would make these trends apparent to the reader'.

apparently haphazard construction. This combination of superficially simple message, untaxing prose style and seemingly inelegant structure have been the major factors that have misled scholars in their evaluation of the book.[49] Actually, the nature of the language generally provides a smooth texture for the work though it is, as we noted in the Ehud story, far more semantically loaded than it might at first appear. Moreover, there is remarkable sophistication in the play with language. To give a flavour of this: in chapters 15 and 16 we encounter Samson's brief victory ditty (15:16) which finds a rejoinder in the Philistines' song of praise to their god (16:23–24). Crenshaw has drawn attention to the use of rhyme (or, at least, homeoteleuton) in the latter. His principal point is, however, that the contrast in the songs deftly underscores Samson's egoism and isolation from his God and his people compared to the attitude of his enemies.[50] But, I suggest, this is only part of the message concealed in the contrasting use made by the two parties of the victory song. Rhyme is not a feature of biblical Hebrew poetry,[51] and certainly not found elsewhere in direct quotations in the Samson cycle. The Philistines' song employs homeoteleuton of a kind one finds in Greek and Latin poetry. The writer of Judges is capturing the tonality of Philistine (Indo-European) versification and thus makes a subtle point regarding their alien origin. That this contrast is achieved through the medium of Hebrew further marks the author's literary mastery.[52]

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49 Douglas's comment on the treatment of Numbers by the majority of scholars is equally apposite for the majority approach to Judges: 'Unfamiliar genres of literature are only too apt to be dismissed as clumsy, primitive, or wanting in coherence. It is a paradox that the more highly structured a text is, the more it is likely to be condemned by latecoming outsiders as defective' (*Wilderness*, p. 91). Or articulated more bluntly: 'why must it be thought axiomatic that the OT books were put together by men of one-track minds incapable of embracing more than one theme?' (Gooding, 'Composition', p. 71).

50 James Crenshaw, *Samson: A Secret Betrayed*, London: SPCK, 1979, pp. 36–37.

51 'The whole idea of rhyme in the Bible was dismissed [by T. Edwards in 1755] as "evidently fantastical," and rightly so' (James Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry*, New Haven CT and London: Yale University Press, 1981, p. 250; compare Frank M. Cross and D.N. Freedman, *Studies in Ancient Yahwistic Poetry*, Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1997, p. 7). The Hebrew Bible's characteristic use of *parallelismus membrorum*, witnessed not least in Samson's riddle, has been exquisitely described as 'thought rhyme' (G.W. Anderson, 'Characteristics of Hebrew Poetry', in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, pp. 1523–28). Elaborate rhyme techniques were used for literary purposes in other Semitic languages of the late second millennium-early first millennium BC, as evidenced in *The Babylonian Theodicy* (Takayoshi Oshima, *The Babylonian Theodicy*, Winona Lake IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013, pp. xiii–xiv, l).

52 The majority of scholarly opinion favours an Aegean provenance for the Philistines, and an Indo-European tongue akin to Mycenaean Greek (the language of the Linear B

There is, likewise, nothing remotely chaotic in its construction as a growing number of exegetes agree.[53] An instance of such a conclusion is found in D.F. Murray's commentary on Judges 4:4–22:

> Such a narrative positively demands the controlling intelligence of an author. The weaving of a web of such complex interrelationships and subtle nuances can hardly have resulted merely from the haphazard conglomeration of disparate traditionary units, or the constant overlayings of centuries of folk narration. [...] It follows that the narrator has an essentially literary rather than historical or quasi-historical interest. [...] While such a view [that 4:4–22 is 'some kind of historical report'] is understandable enough in the light of 18th and 19th century preoccupation with the historical, [...] it is nonetheless misconceived and can lead to conclusions that are grotesque in their inappropriateness.[54]

Judges, then, conveys its message by means of a collection of apparently simple stories which close reading soon discovers are tightly dovetailed into one another.[55] The majority of scholars who argue for an evaluation of the book similar to Murray's, explore the linear development of the work, as it moves from episode to episode, and how these correlate to one another.[56] My focus

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inscriptions – Antonis Thavoris, *A Historical Outline of the Greek Language*, Thessaloniki: Institute of Balkan Studies, 1984, p. 4) for their original language. See, for example, W.F. Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine*, rev. edn, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1956, p. 113; Donald Harden, *The Phoenicians*, rev. edn, London: Thames and Hudson, 1963, p. 50; K.L. Noll, *Canaan and Israel in Antiquity*, London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001, pp. 148–49; Hackett, 'Judges', p. 153; Avraham Faust, 'Pottery and Society in Iron Age Philistia', *BASOR* 373 (2015), pp. 167–98 (170, 184–85); *DANE* (pp. 228–29, 258), where it is stated that 'excavators at Philistine sites often recover distinctive Mycenaean IIIC-style pottery and cultic objects and architectural remains with close parallels in the Aegean. A newly discovered inscription from Ekron lists five local kings, two of whose names are non-Semitic'. 'Although *the Philistines intermarried with the local population* and their distinctive pottery motifs had largely disappeared after c. 1000 BC, a Philistine identity was still noted as late as the Persian period' (emphasis added).

53   See Butler, *Judges*, p. lvii.

54   'Narrative Structure and Technique in the Deborah-Barak Story', in *Studies*, ed. by Emerton, pp. 155–89 (184).

55   This feature is reminiscent of the literary approach in *Gilgamesh* VI.22–79.

56   Note J.G. McConville's observation: 'Redaction-criticism in the OT should pay more attention to the context of a text in the book in question as a whole' ('1 Kings 8:46–53', *VT* 42 [1992], pp. 67–79 [78]). In the case of Judges, the following are examples of persuasive structural analysis of the overall composition: Gooding, 'Composition'; K. Lawson

goes beyond this by considering the elements of the work's rhetorical super-
structure overlooked by linear analysis. The Western convention of inter-
preting a literary work's meaning through linear sequence does not take into
account the different approach to composition that existed in the ancient Near
East in the first millennium BC.[57] Douglas's observations on repetitions and
digressions playing an essential role in the book of Numbers, and reflecting
ancient literary practice, are apposite to Judges.[58]

But this provides only part of the key to interpreting Judges. It is necessary
also to consider how individual episodes contain discrete layers of meaning
to communicate a consistent message in different, intricate, and, at its heart,
esoteric ways.[59] Judges is, if you will, a book scored with a vivid array of har-
monized but melodically separate instrumental parts playing simultane-
ously and, for the most part, subtly. To appreciate the richness of the book,
therefore, requires the ability to read its text vertically.[60] Some of the distinct
melodies, such as the sun motif discussed below, would have been immedi-
ately recognizable to an ancient readership conversant in the beliefs and lore
of Mesopotamia and its culturally susceptible hinterland of Syro-Palestine.[61]

Younger Jr., *Judges and Ruth*, NIV Application Commentary, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan,
2002; Block, *Judges*.

57   J.J. Finkelstein, 'Mesopotamian Historiography', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical
Society* 107 (1963), pp. 461–72 (461).

58   *Wilderness*, p. 101. Jobling makes an engaging case for the benefits of 'reading backwards'
in the Former Prophets ('1 Samuel'). On non-linear narrative technique and the artful use
of repetition in Neo-Assyrian sculpture, see Zainab Bahrani, 'The King's Head', *Iraq* 66
(2004), pp. 115–19 (116).

59   Compare: 'Judges exhibits an enigmatic complexity; so much transpires on different levels
that multiple interpretations are inevitable' (J. Cheryl Exum, 'The Centre Cannot Hold',
CBJ 52 [1990], 410–31 [410]). For a similar appraisal of Judges, see Yairah Amit, *The Book
of Judges*, Leiden: Brill, 1999, pp. 12–13. Multi-layering as a literary technique is encoun-
tered in Neo-Assyrian compositions (Hayim Tadmor, B. Landsberger, S. Parpola, 'The Sin
of Sargon and Sennacherib's Last Will', [http://www.helsinki.fi/science/saa/3.1%2001%20
Tadmor,%20Landsberger%20&%20Parpola.pdf, p. 51; accessed 18 December 2015]).

60   This use of 'vertical reading' is different from Herzberg and Smend's employment of the
term to denote simultaneous analysis of the various redactional strata they perceive in
the text (Herzberg, *Bücher*, p. 15; Smend, 'The Law', p. 98). Rather, it resembles the notion
found also in Kabbalistic literature that ultimate truth is concealed beneath several strata
of meaning: 'In one of the finest parables in the Zohar, the Torah is dressed in four, or
perhaps even five, levels of meaning that must be penetrated by the perfect student of
the Torah in order to reveal its ultimate layer, the Kabbalistic meaning' (Moshe Idel,
Kabbalah, New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1988, p. 227).

61   P.R.S. Moorey, *Idols of the People*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 25.

It was, after all, these beliefs that provided the Israelites with the compelling alternative to Yahwism. It is no coincidence that the first oppressor of Israel to be vanquished in the book, viz., Cushan-rishathaim ('Cushan of Double Wickedness'), is king of Mesopotamia, a statement difficult to accept as history, but potent symbolically (3:8).[62] Such associations have been lost in two and a half millennia intellectually dominated, in the West at least, by Graeco-Roman perspectives.[63] Others are as poignant today as they would have been to the original readers, none more so than its extensive treatment of the theme of 'otherness' which runs throughout the work.[64]

Judges is unique in the Hebrew Bible in the range of literary devices it deploys: song, riddle, parable, aphorism, even a tongue twister and a password. Given the author's literary facility it comes as a surprise that the book, at no point, resolves. As Lillian Klein puts it, 'the book of Judges does not resolve; it dissolves in disorder'.[65] It would, however, be incorrect to assume this is a case of poor editing. The book has a well-defined departure point: the death of Joshua. The clear definition of the opening symbolizes the integrity of the Israelites' relationship to Yahweh at the time. No less suggestive of the state of

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62   *BDB*, p. 74. Its importance is underscored by the rare use of rhyme: in Hebrew the king's name rhymes with that of his kingdom (Brettler, *Judges*, p. 27). Josephus described him as 'king of the Assyrians' (*Antiquities* v. chap. 3). See A. Malamat, 'Cushan Rishathaim', *JNES* 13 (1954), pp. 231–42, for an attempt to identify Othniel's foe with a Syrian usurper of the throne of Egypt. Compare Brettler's more convincing stance ('Literature', pp. 404–05). For the Mesopotamians of the first millennium BC, Syro-Palestine was *Eber-nāri*, '(the land) beyond the river', i.e., the Euphrates (J. Leo Oppenheim, 'Essay on Overland Trade in the First Millennium BC', *JCS* 21 [1967], pp. 236–54 [240]; J.J. Finkelstein, 'Mesopotamia', *JNES* 21 [1962], pp. 73–92 [74]; Ran Zadok, *The Pre-Hellenistic Israelite Anthroponymy and Prosopography*, Leuven: Peeters, 1988, p. 90). Biblical Hebrew has an exact cognate of this phrase, *'ēber hannāhār*, which occurs in Josh. 24:14–15. There, naturally, it has the mirror-image signification, and, as we will examine in Chapter 5, is used in the context of the worship by Israelites of Mesopotamian gods. On the evolution of the designation of the land between the rivers in Akkadian and Hebrew, see J.J. Finkelstein, 'Subartu and Subarians in Old Babylonian Sources', *JCS* 9 (1955), pp. 1–7 (7); idem, 'Mesopotamia', pp. 82–88.

63   See Simo Parpola, 'The Mesopotamian Soul of Western Culture', *Bulletin of the Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies* 35, 2000, pp. 29–34 for a reappraisal of the originality of the Graeco-Roman cultural impact on the West. Compare Marc Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2004, p. 214.

64   The portrayal of otherness in Judges is, as we will explore in Chapter 3, considerably more nuanced than the rather crude characterisation that Kim describes, viz., 'the representation of the Other as the villain' ('Other', pp. 172–80).

65   *Triumph*, p. 190.

this relationship by the end of the book is its conclusion: it does not so much end as leach away in the fragmentation expressed by 'every man did what was right in his own eyes'. This is in fact modelled in the description of the Israelites at the book's conclusion: 'And the sons of Israel departed thence at that time, every man to his tribe and to his family' (21:24).[66] Far from reflecting a lapse by the author, the differentiated treatment of the opening and closing structures obliquely informs the reader that when Israel is in a sound relationship with Yahweh boundaries are firm; when it is not, they become viscous.[67] Trent Butler describes a similar phenomenon in the way in which Judges 1 charts Israel's deteriorating military performance: 'The broken narrative structure, repetitive content [...] reveals a literary artistry that suits form to content and uses formal breakdown to alert the reader to national breakdown'.[68]

Fundamental, then, to my understanding of Judges is the conviction that it is not intended to be read as 'objective reality' and that attempts to do so can only disappoint or lead to improbable hermeneutical contortions.[69] Its writer took pains (and, I suspect, delight) in creating a work that employs distortion or, better, refracted reality to present the episodes it contains.[70] Indeed, the treatment of language in Judges as something viscous recalls the Freudian concept *Entstellung* coined to explain the nature of the narration of the dream.[71] As Samuel Weber advises, the meaning of *Entstellung* can be fathomed only when set alongside that of *Darstellung*.

> The dream only comes to be in and through a process of narration that Freud significantly labels not *Darstellung* (presentation), but *Entstellung*: distortion, dislocation, disfigurement. If such distorted articulation can be 'true' to the dream, it is only because the latter is already a process of distortion, *Entstellung*. The distance that separates narration from nar-

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66   In a pairing characteristic of the book, this echoes their behaviour on the death of Abimelech (9:55).

67   Compare Jan Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, Louisville ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999, pp. 76–77.

68   *Judges*, p. 18.

69   Mieke Bal rejects the notion of objective realism for the entire biblical corpus; I content myself with rejecting it for the book of Judges (*Lethal Love*, Bloomington in: Indiana University Press, 1987, pp. 3, 4).

70   Some of the great works of Mesopotamian literature also employ distortion, for example *Nergal and Ereshkigal*.

71   It is noteworthy that in the Hebrew Bible, outside Genesis and Daniel, narration of the content of dreams is very rarely encountered. In the corpus from the beginning of Exodus to the end of Kings, it occurs only twice: in Judges (7:13) and 1 Kings (3:5).

rated, like that which separates spectator from spectacle, is not an empty interval, not the space of *Darstellung* but of *Entstellung*. It is, in short, a space on the move.[72]

Just as *Entstellung*-narration does not present (it distorts and destabilizes, and conveys an inability or, perhaps, unwillingness, to respect conventional semantic limits) so Judges subverts linear narrative technique.[73] One means by which it does so is scrambling chronological sequencing,[74] and projecting the same event from different viewpoints, without making explicit the changed perspective.[75] The differentiated treatment of the battle against Sisera presents an excellent example. The effect of this can be dramatic – and disconcerting.[76] Klein makes a case for the use of this technique to explain the problematic relationship between the opening two chapters: 'The book of Judges is worthy of notice, for its point of view *shifts* between Israel and Yahweh [...].

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72   Samuel Weber, *Legend of Freud*, expanded edn, Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2000, pp. 53–54, 102; see also Simon Morgan Wortham, *Samuel Weber*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003, p. 91.

73   In the oneiromantic collection known as 'The Assyrian Dream-Book', the Akkadians recognized the dream's potential to invert conventional meaning to produce its mirror-image (A. Leo Oppenheim, 'The Interpretations of Dreams in the Ancient Near East', *Transactions of the American Philological Society* 46/3 [1956], pp. 179–373 [266, 269, 283]).

74   This feature is by no means unique to Judges in the Hebrew Bible, and is generally employed to emphasise an event's importance through placing it earlier in the text than is chronologically justified. It is widely attested in Neo-Assyrian writing also: for example, Sennacherib's inscriptions (Mordechai Cogan, 'Cross-Examining the Assyrian Witnesses to Sennacherib's Third Campaign', in *Sennacherib at the Gates of Jerusalem*, ed. by Isaac Kalimi and Seth Richardson, Leiden: Brill, 2014, pp. 51–74 [63, 66]).

75   Gillmayr-Bucher (*Richterbuch*, pp. 17–19, et passim), using a theoretical framework derived from the work of Marie Laure Ryan and Carola Surkamp on narrative theory, provides an analysis of the 'multi-perspectives' evinced in the Judges text.

76   Chaucer touches on this theme In the Wife of Bath's Prologue, with reference to Aesop's fable of the statue depicting Heracles slaying the lion:

    Who peyntede the leon, tel me who?
    By god! if wommen hadde writen stories,
    As clerkes han withinne hire oratories,
    They wolde han writen of men moore wikkednesse
    Than al the mark of adam may redresse.

See Anne Hudson, 'Which Wyche?', in *Texts and the Repression of Medieval Heresy*, ed. by Caterina Bruschi and Peter Biller, Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2003, pp. 231–37, for an illuminating exploration of differing perspectives in the accounts of the heresy trial of Richard Wyche.

Chapter 2 opens with a flashback. This striking temporal shift alerts the reader to possible structural significance – and indeed the point of view shifts again, from Israel's to Yahweh's. [...] Taken together, these passages introduce opposing perspectives'.[77]

Robert Polzin presses this notion further in his formalist treatment of the distinctive contribution of the book's 'first introduction' relative to its 'second introduction'. Accepting that the historical critical explanation of their relationship is of a text 'whose segments have not been editorially unified very successfully', he argues that there is a number of 'shifts in perspective on the psychological, spatio-temporal, and phraseological planes of the text':

> The entire first section [...], from 1:1–2:5 is narrated from a psychological point of view *external* to the characters of the story. The narrator displays himself here as one who has no special knowledge about the internal processes [...] of any of the characters of the story, God included. What we are told is what any onlooker could have experienced, known, or surmised were he present [...]. The narration in 1:1–2:5 is of a synchronic narrator while that of 2:6–3:6 belongs to a panchronic narrator.[78]

In similar vein, 'type scenes', which are an important characteristic of biblical narrative, are subjected to deconstruction in Judges.[79] The artful subversion of language reaches even further than the manipulation of time, psychological space and literary convention, however. It extends to the bending of grammatical gender,[80] and to the very essence of lexical signification through the

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77   *Triumph*, p. 13. See Bal, *Lethal Love*, p. 118, on the biblical practice of providing factually contradictory but hermeneutically complementary accounts of a single event, and Alter, *Narrative*, pp. 142–43. Characteristic of exponents of the historical-critical approach, Driver accounts for the 'frequent changes' in the '*point of view*' and the imperfect harmonization of the details in Judges by inferring that the redactor embedded existing text into the narrative (*Introduction*, p. 165).

78   *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, New York: Seabury Press, 1980, pp. 146–56. As I shall go on to describe, Klein and Polzin's analyses of the relationship between the first two chapters, while interesting and persuasive up to a point, fail to take account of the rhetorical architecture of the book as a whole.

79   Alter, *Narrative*, pp. 51, 61. Klein (*Triumph*, p. 133) observes that in the Samson series all six type-scenes defined by Alter in his seminal work on the subject either make an appearance or are demonstrably suppressed.

80   I.M. Diakonoff notes that all Semito-Hamitic languages evince two grammatical genders (*Semito-Hamitic Languages*, Moscow: Nauka, 1965, pp. 55–56), and that 'if in the Indo-European system of languages the difference between the masculine and feminine genders is difficult to explain semantically, then in the Semitic languages the difference

alienation of the Sausseurian signifier from its signified.[81] The writer indulges in what we might term 'semantic syncretism' where words attract elements of the meanings of others that dislocate their own. There is no better example of this than the author's peculiar use of the word 'judge' (*šōpēṭ*), a topic to which we shall return in the next chapter.[82]

In his analysis of the contrast between the predicates used initially to characterize the main actors in the Deborah cycle and how they in fact behave, Polzin observes that 'the phraseological composition of the [Deborah] story intensifies the reader's feeling that the story is all about how things are not what they seem'.[83] In summary, Judges is as far from reflecting objective reality as Francis Bacon's 'Screaming Pope' series is from faithfully reproducing Velázquez's celebrated portrait of Innocent X.

Nor was it conceived of as a chronicle of Israel's early history, and therefore was never intended to slot comfortably into a continuous historical narrative in the portion of the Bible classified as the Former Prophets, as argued by commentators persuaded by the DH thesis. For such scholars, the books Joshua-Kings comprise a single 'literary genre' of history.[84] Neither is it 'history

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appears fairly clear: to the feminine gender (marker: *-t, -at*) belong in addition to nouns designating entities of the female sex, nouns which convey the sense of the individual [as opposed to the collective], diminutives, often nouns denoting objects which in their character are socially passive (objects of activity), abstract concepts (good, fear)' (*Yazyki drevney peredney Azii*, Moscow: Nauka, 1967, pp. 210–11). Given this claim – although it is guilty of some over-simplification – the dislocation of grammatical gender in a biblical Hebrew text is all the more striking, as we shall see.

81   This is a characteristic device of the riddle (see Claudia V. Camp and Carole R. Fontaine, 'The Words of the Wise and Their Riddles', in *Text and Tradition*, ed. by Susan Niditch, Atlanta GA: Scholars Press, 1990, pp. 127–51 [144–45]).

82   A different but related device found in the Hebrew Bible is the attribution of words to the 'wrong' subject. Mieke Bal (*Lethal Love*, p. 83), using the example 'There is a son born to Naomi' (Ruth 4:17), points out that it is 'a word "inadvertently" attributed to a woman [but] "normally" reserved for the father'. 'Using words in an "unnatural" way, assigning them to the "wrong" subjects, is bringing the indexical bond between the word and the group that "naturally" possesses it to the fore'. One needs to exercise caution, however, with such assertions: the classical Hebrew corpus is not extensive enough to be able to define categorically in most cases what was the 'natural' semantic range of lexemes in the language at the time. But *šōpēṭ* occurs frequently enough in the corpus to permit certainty. Unnatural applications of words are a technique encountered widely in Mesopotamian literature where they act as codes within the text.

83   *Moses*, p. 163.

84   Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972, p. 7.

as commentary on the Word of God',[85] what H.W. Herzberg memorably termed *gepredigte Geschichte* ('preached history').[86] Attempts to treat it as historiography – for example Van Seters's assessment of Judges 1: 'In its variety of style and use of literary genres, in the range of its sources, and in its use of editorial comment, the work represents a rather advanced historiography'[87] – miss the point. Wellhausen's description of the Elohistic portion of the Pentateuch is germane to the relationship of Judges to history-writing: 'It is historical only in form; the history serves merely as a framework on which to arrange the [...] material, or as a mask to disguise it'.[88]

The historicity of Judges is deliberately compromised through the use of refraction in bending and disturbing surface meaning as well as flat contradiction – thus voiding historical value – both within the Judges text itself (for example, the differing accounts of the same battle against the Canaanites related in chapters 4 and 5)[89] and beyond it, to other parts of the Former Prophets. Examples are the contrasting reports of the timing and mode of the Israelites' destruction of Hazor provided by Joshua 11, on the one hand,[90] and by Judges 4 on the other;[91] the aetiology that connects the minor judge Jair with Havvoth-Jair in Judges 10:4 which conflicts with that given in Deuteronomy 3:14 (encountered also in Numbers 32:40–41); the identity of Adoni-zedek in Joshua with Adoni-bezek in Judges despite the marked

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85   Gray, *Joshua, Judges*, p. 8.

86   *Bücher*, p. 162. Robertson Smith's observation, made 130 years ago, that 'the Old Testament does not furnish a history of Israel' aptly applies to the book of Judges (W. Robertson Smith, Preface to Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, p. vii).

87   *In Search*, pp. 338–339.

88   Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, p. 7.

89   For a spirited but unsuccessful attempt to deal with the 'discrepancies' between the two accounts, see Gray, *Joshua, Judges*, pp. 217–20. As Jan Fokkelman observes, the Deborah episode resembles the account of the Israelites' crossing of the sea in Exod. 14–15 in providing 'a sort of duet between prose and poetry' (*Reading*, p. 155). Sasson makes the point that in ancient Near Eastern royal panegyrics there was little interest in harmonizing different accounts of the same event ("Breeder", p. 338).

90   Wenham remarks that in the account of the conquest in the book of Joshua, the destruction of Hazor was particularly significant because it was the only leading northern city to be destroyed by fire (Gordon J. Wenham, 'The Deuteronomic Theology of the Book of Joshua', in *RI&J*, pp. 194–203 [198]).

91   In line with his nineteenth-century predecessors, Gray contends that Judges is a more reliable historical record than Joshua. He describes Judges as a whole as providing 'the real historical sources of the settlement [of the promised land]', and giving the 'impression of sober history' (*Joshua, Judges*, pp. 19, 210–11). Van Seters considers the book of Joshua's account of the campaign against Hazor and the northern coalition entirely deuteronomistic, detecting within it few, if any, later interpolations (*In Search*, p. 329).

differences in the respective accounts (Josh. 10:1–3; Judg. 1:5–7);[92] and, most significantly of all, a picture of the Conquest in Judges at variance in its scope and the nature of its organization with that given in the first half of Joshua.[93] The standard interpretation of such open contradiction, for instance that given by Weinfeld or Rust,[94] that such lapses are the result of mixing different sources and their subsequent sloppy redaction, is unconvincing,[95] and particularly jarring in a context where the Dtr is presented as careful in the treatment of sources.[96] I will examine how Judges deals with history in chapter 7.

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In Judges, linguistically, then, no less than territorially, we confront boundaries on the move. That this is intentional, and elaborately planned, is beyond doubt. But why? Contrary to the opinion of many of the scholars who approach

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92   Herzberg, *Bücher*, pp. 149–50; J. Maxwell Miller and Gene Tucker, *The Book of Joshua*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1974, p. 83.

93   Burney, *Judges*, p. xxxv. See Niditch, *Judges*, p. 42, for other discrepancies.

94   Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, p. 14, n. 3; Rust, *Judges*, p. 12.

95   A fairly early example of this kind of interpretation is found in Driver, *Introduction*. The author, commenting on the 'impossible' chronology presented in Judges, asserted: 'It is substantially a construction of the compiler who had no clear view of the history of the period' (p. 161). He is right in his assertion that the chronology given in Judges lacks historical value, though, I venture, he is right for the wrong reason. The manipulation of chronology for rhetorical purposes is not limited to Judges in the Hebrew Bible: see Thomas Römer, 'Deuteronomy in Search of Origins', in *RI&J*, pp. 112–38 (119–20).

96   Rust (*Judges*, p. 12) speaks of the Deuteronomists' 'skilful weaving' of different source material. Wolff, citing Noth's analysis in support, contends that the Deuteronomic compiler 'used the greatest care' in selecting and organizing his materials and the resultant work 'assimilates both literary traditions and facts which were experienced directly, and, in the process, achieves an astonishingly unified design' ('Kerygma', pp. 65, 63). Such broad-brush judgements avoid the difficulty of explaining apparent incompatibilities in the accounts. Not all commentators, however, sidestep the problem. Contrast the following statements in Gray, *Joshua, Judges*: 'The Deuteronomic compiler's careful selection and presentation of his sources' (p. 5) with his statement that, on occasion, 'the Deuteronomic principles' could be violated where a genuine old tradition was 'too well established to be suppressed' (p. 237), and that Judg. 1:1–36 'is an indication of how freely the Deuteronomic compiler drafted his introductory summary' (p. 245). Dietrich takes this notion considerably further with the assertion, admittedly concerning 'Samuel's authors', that in writing a deuteronomistic history of Israel, 'they reworked diverse source materials, which in some cases ran directly counter to their own interests' (Dietrich and Naumann, 'David-Saul', in *Reconsidering Israel*, p. 292). Compare Noth, *Deuteronomistic History*, p. 96.

the text with the tools of literary criticism, I submit that the creative techniques used, notwithstanding their boldness as literary devices, were no more designed to show off literary mastery than to furnish reliable historiography. Much more lies behind this configuration of language than someone indulging a genius for composition and ironic comment. In a book where the subject of establishing and defending firm frontiers is central, the manipulation of language consciously to subvert established boundaries of meaning is laden with significance, a significance which I contend is theological.[97] At the heart of the drama in Judges is the relationship between its two principal actors – the 'sons of Israel' and Yahweh.[98] The book charts how that relationship is emptied of meaning as they are progressively alienated from one another. In other words, the writer's voiding of the linguistic conventions has a purpose: to model through language the nature and changing dynamics of that relationship, as we have already noted in the differentiated approach used in composing the beginning of the book and its end. Milton's perception that the Samson cycle was, above all, intended to be educative,[99] is true of the intent of the entire work.

It is not fortuitous that the subject of Samson's riddle, the young lion slain, 'the eater'/'the strong', is literally hollowed out and, subsequently, becomes the producer of something alien to itself. And its product, honey, forms an inclusio encompassing the episode of Samson's marriage with the marking of his journey with his parents to arrange the wedding and then of the conclusion of the nuptials[100] when the Philistines put an end to Samson's riddling with the rhetorical question 'What is sweeter than honey, and what is stronger than a lion?' (14:5–20). Honey proceeds from the carcass of the lion, and provokes death: Samson's murder of thirty Philistines in revenge for the wedding guests' eliciting the meaning of his riddle from his bride.

In his extended discussion of the ontology of viscosity, Jean-Paul Sartre terms viscous substances, such as honey, pitch, etc., 'aberrant fluids' that change constantly, but don't change, that have the 'suspicious character' of a substance

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97   Compare Brettler's position that Judges is neither a work of history nor of literature, but of politics (*Judges*, p. 116).

98   Webb, *Integrated*, p. 209.

99   Mary Ann Radzinowicz, *Toward Samson Agonistes: the Growth of Milton's Mind*, Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978, p. 55.

100 For Lévi-Strauss, honey, 'a seductive but often toxic food', resembles 'the mythic figure of the seducer' (Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Origin of Table Manners*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990, p. 256).

'between two states' that suggest destruction and creation simultaneously.[101] This understanding of the aberrant nature of honey[102] makes the substance entirely consistent metaphorically with the scene of a buzzing hive in a dead animal,[103] the life of Samson, and the nation-building of Israel at the time of the Judges, namely something between two states, an entity involved in self-destruction simultaneously with self-creation. Fundamentally, viscosity implies constantly distorting neat patterns and firm boundaries in a way that leaves residue, a characteristic it shares with leaven. It therefore comes as no surprise that in Leviticus honey and leaven are listed together as substances explicitly prohibited in 'offerings of Yahweh made by fire' (Lev. 2:11).[104] Honey, then, provides a remarkably fine metaphor for the entire Judges story.

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101   J.-P. Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, Paris: Gallimard, 1943, pp. 696–704. One need only visualize Samson, having reached into the lion's rotting carcass and scraped out the honey in 'his hands, continuing on his way, eating' (14:9) to appreciate Sartre's argument. And to express just how great the dislocation from Samson's Nazirite state this act represented, the writer of Judges uses for Samson's hands the word *kappâw* 'his hands/paws', found also in Lev. 11:27 where uniquely it is applied to animals: 'And whatsoever goes upon *his paws*, among any kind of animal that goes on all four, those are unclean to you: whoever touches their carcass shall be unclean until the evening'. This provides, perhaps, an indication that the author of Judges was familiar with the Exodus-Numbers corpus which his treatment of the milk and honey topos also suggests (see below), as well as displaying again, with the selection of a single word pregnant with association, the extraordinary subtlety and economy of his composition. Indeed, the association extends even further: the word *kappôth* is also used for the fronds of the palm tree (Lev. 23:40), the tree of Deborah (Judg. 4:5). The 'extreme economy' with which crucial events are narrated' in Judges is another feature the book shares with the Gilgamesh epic (see Jonathan Z. Smith, 'Wisdom's Place', in *Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys*, ed. by John J. Collins and Michael Fishbane, Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 1995, pp. 3–13 [11]).

102   Lévi-Strauss, too, understands honey as a liminal substance for 'it is on the borderline of both food and poison' (*Table Manners*, p. 66).

103   Compare Eccl. 9:4: 'For whoever is joined with the living there is hope; surely better a live dog than a dead lion'.

104   Quite the contrary obtains in Mesopotamian cult (Hilda Ransome, *The Sacred Bee in Ancient Times*, New York: Dover Publications, 2004, p. 68). There honey (Akkadian *dišpu*, cognate with Hebrew *dᵊbāš*, 'honey'), whether from the bee (the 'honey-fly' [B. Landsberger, *Die Fauna des alten Mesopotamien*, Leipzig: Hirzel, 1934, p. 132], as it is also in Egyptian) or the syrup of dates (see Christopher Walker and Michael Dick, *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia*, Helsinki: University of Helsinki Press, 2001, p. 14), is used extensively in ritual (*CAD* D, 1959, pp. 161–63). For most of Mesopotamia, bee-honey was an imported luxury; the first reference to apiculture in the Mid-Euphrates region dates from the eighth century BC (F.A.M. Wiggermann, 'Agriculture and Civilization', in *OHCC*, pp. 663–89 [668]; Barbara Böck, 'Sourcing, Organizing and Administering Medicinal

The inclusio formed by 'honey' in the Samson narrative recalls the much more extensive inclusio role that this lexeme plays in the phrase 'a land flowing with milk and honey', the metonym for all that is good in Yahweh's promise of the land of Canaan to the Israelites.[105] The phrase appears first at the beginning of the Exodus story with the commissioning of Moses at the burning bush (Exod. 3:8), and is found in Joshua 5:6 precisely at the point when the Israelites at last reach their destination.[106] This verse furnishes its only occurrence in the Former Prophets. Surprisingly, there is no reference in Joshua or Judges, when the people of Israel are settled in Canaan, to their benefiting from its milk and honey.

Milk fares no better than honey in Judges: the word is encountered only in connection with Jael's murder of Sisera. Far from representing human kindness, in Judges it is the drink of lethal deceit. Jael uses milk to allay any suspicion Sisera may have harboured of her trustworthiness: 'He asked water, and she gave him milk' (5:25; 4:19). Her bloody deed oozes ambiguity in the Judges presentation: celebrated in the Song of Deborah as a saving intervention for Israel, it was inescapably a treacherous act against an ally, scandalously violating the code of hospitality. Moreover, as we shall see in the deployment of the sun motif in Judges, there is nothing coincidental about the positioning of the milk and honey episodes in the composition. The Song of Deborah and the Samson story are carefully juxtaposed in the sequential narrative of the judges to signal its mid- and end-points within the overall rhetorical architecture of the book. Indeed, their relationship appears to be underscored

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Ingredients', in OHCC, pp. 690–707 [697], and Joan Oates, *Babylon*, rev. edn, London: Thames and Hudson, 1986, p. 195). There is nothing unusual however about importing high-value products for liturgical use as the employment of frankincense in Israelite cult or cedar wood in that of Mesopotamia demonstrates. *Dišpu* is found in rituals connected with 'food for the table of the gods', the breaking of sorcery spells (Morris Jastrow, *Aspects of Religious Belief and Practice in Babylonia and Assyria*, New York and London: Putnam, 1911, p. 305), and in the 'opening of the mouth' ceremony which enabled a cult image to function as a god (Walker and Dick, *Induction*, p. 14). In keeping with its 'suspicious character', honey played an important role in the *ab/pum* festival for departed souls where it was given as sustenance/offerings for the dead (Mark E. Cohen, *The Cultic Calendars of the Ancient Near East*, Bethesda MD: CDL Press, 1993, p. 260). The relationship between this and honey's connection with death in the Samson story is possibly more than coincidental. Moreover, in Egypt honey was used to preserve cadavers (Ransome, *Bee*, pp. 29–30).

105   Honey does not 'flow', at least not in its natural state. This phrase serves in fact to draw attention to its 'suspicious character'.

106   Indeed, 'a land flowing with milk and honey' provides a leitmotiv in Exod., Lev., Num. and Deut.

through the linguistic connection between the producers of the honey in the lion-host, 'a congregation of bees' (14:8), and Deborah. *dᵊbôrāh* is the Hebrew word for 'bee'; it occurs only once in Judges with this meaning. However, it is found frequently in chapters 4 and 5 to denote the name of the female judge/prophetess.[107] Pertinently, in Egyptian mythology, bees were considered tears from the right eye of Horus, which was thought of both as the sun,[108] and as honey.[109] It was also a symbol of kingship.[110] Horus himself was an important solar deity in the Egyptian pantheon.[111]

Given the author's treatment of milk and honey in Judges, one begins to suspect that he was aware of its inclusio function within the Exodus-Joshua corpus.[112] As we have seen, it is, moreover, wholly in character that he should

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107   In common with others, I am not persuaded by Richard Hess's proposed etymology of her name: 'The name Deborah probably stems from a root (DBR) meaning to lead or pursue, also preserved in Debir, the name of a Biblical town in Judah near Hebron (Joshua 10:3). [...] Deborah may be a shortened form of a name that included the name of a deity, which in the case of "Deborah," was omitted. Thus the name may have originally meant "(God) leads"' ('The Name Game', *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Nov/Dec 2004, pp. 38–41 [39]). One only need think of the name Melissa in Greek to recognize that there is nothing extraordinary about naming a daughter after a bee. Compare Burney, *Judges*, p. 85. The idea that the bee, because it possesses the gift of foreknowing, is an oracular messenger is well established in Greek mythology (for references see Marguerite Rigoglioso, *The Cult of Divine Birth in Ancient Greece*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, pp. 158–59, 192–95).

108   Richard H. Wilkinson, *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt*, London: Thames and Hudson, 2003, pp. 200–01. On the incidence of Eye of Horus amulets in Judahite burials from the thirteenth to the seventh century BC, see Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992, pp. 83–85.

109   Ransome, *Bee*, p. 33.

110   Oates, *Babylon*, p. 137, Pl. 92.

111   E.A. Wallis Budge, *Egyptian Religion*, London: Arkana, 1987, p. 107; Rosalie David, *Religion and Magic in Ancient Egypt*, London: Penguin, 2002, p. 91. The identification/blending of Horus and the sun god Rā is *inter alia* encountered in beliefs concerning the 'right eye' (see Ransome, *Bee*, p. 33).

112   The possibility that the writer of Judges was familiar with the contents of the Hexateuch has significant implications for the widely held scholarly view regarding the relative timing of the completion of the books from Exodus to Judges. The present form of the Pentateuch is generally considered to date from no earlier than the sixth century BC and possibly later (Halpern, 'State', p. 545). However, as Tony Cartledge observes, ascribing a late date even to the priestly writer looks increasingly less assured (*Vows in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992, p. 39). Furthermore, he points out the correspondence between the Israelites' vow (Num. 21:2) and that of Jephthah (Judg. 11:30–31) (*Vows*, pp. 178–79), although the former may represent a very old source (Martin Noth, *Das vierte Buch Mose: Numeri*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht,

subject to refraction the quintessential symbol of future promise to underline the message of his work:[113] in the period between Joshua and Samuel, things were not as they were planned to be, they were other. The subtext is clear: the land flowing with milk and honey has been defiled; both products have become harbingers, not of promise and life, but of betrayal and death; fruitfulness gives way to corruption, nightmare comes in place of dream.[114]

A related example of the writer's technique is given by his deployment of the phrase 'in the eyes of' [*bᵊ'ênê*]. As in English, this common expression in

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1966, p. 135). Compare Robert O'Connell's position that Numbers was composed before Judges (*Rhetoric*). On this question more generally, see Konrad Schmid, 'The Emergence and Disappearance of the Separation between Pentateuch and Deuteronomistic History in Biblical Studies', in *Pentateuch, Hexateuch or Enneateuch*, ed. by Thomas Dozeman, Thomas Römer and idem, Atlanta GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011, pp. 11–24.

113   In Num. 16:13–14 we are given an inkling of the distortion to come in the rebellious Reubenites' perverse claim that Egypt was 'a land flowing with milk and honey'. A further curious link exists between the Reubenites' diatribe against Moses and the Samson story. Only in Num. 16:14 and Judg. 16:21 is the *Pi'ēl* form of the verb *nqr* encountered with reference to digging out eyes. As I understand the Reubenites' point, they use the verb metaphorically to accuse Moses of hoodwinking the Israelites with the 'land flowing with milk and honey' promise. Samson's hoodwinking by Delilah led to the literal digging out of his eyes.

114   Moreover, he may be making an oblique reference to Canaanite cultic practice. Driver relates that the Phoenicians honoured standing stones (*maṣṣēbôth*) with libations of milk and honey (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 3rd edn, Edinburgh: Clark, 1901, p. 204). Milk and honey are among the gifts that the Sumerian deity Enlil offers for his bride Ninlil (Miguel Civil, 'Enlil and Ninlil', *JAOS* 103 [1983], pp. 43–66 [46]) and they feature together as erotic metaphors in the important Sumerian composition 'The Courtship of Inanna and Dumuzi'. The goddess Inanna-Ishtar sings of Dumuzi-Tammuz, her shepherd-king suitor, as 'my lord, the honey-man of the gods, he is the one my womb loves best'. Her song continues 'Make your milk sweet and thick, my bridegroom. I will drink your fresh milk […] Let the milk of the goat flow in my sheepfold. Fill my holy churn with honey cheese' (Diane Wolkstein and Samuel Noah Kramer, *Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth*, London: Rider, 1984, pp. 38–39; see also *ANET*, pp. 202–03). They figure too as erotic metaphors in Canticles 4:11 and 5:1. The lubricious surface meaning of Samson's riddle has been noted by several scholars (for example, Herzberg, *Bücher*, p. 230; Gray, *Joshua, Judges*, pp. 350–51; Crenshaw, *Samson*, pp. 114–15; Niditch, *Judges*, p. 157; compare Lévi-Strauss, *Table Manners*, p. 412); the sexual undercurrent in the Jael-Sisera encounter has received less comment from modern authors. However, there are exceptions, e.g., Niditch, *Judges*, pp. 6, 81; Exum, 'Whose Interests', p. 72; Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, rev. and updated edn, New York: Basic Books, 2012, pp. 50–57; see also Butler, *Judges*, pp. 105–106. In ancient Jewish treatments this idea is much in evidence (Bal, *Murder*, p. 103; David M. Gunn, *Judges*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2005, pp. 56–57).

the Hebrew Bible has a somewhat ambiguous meaning: both 'in the sight of', that is, the result of a physiological process, and 'in the opinion of', a judgmental conclusion. It can have a sensual, even a lascivious, connotation. In Judges it first appears in the second opening section, chapter 2, and until chapter 14 is used exclusively of Yahweh, usually to introduce the recurrence of Israelite apostasy: 'Israel did evil in the eyes of Yahweh' or 'again did evil in the eyes of Yahweh'. In fact it is the leitmotiv which characterizes the first half of the book. Its role there is to chart the downward spiral of idolatry/foreign oppression/the emergence of the next delivering judge, followed by the next circuit of idolatry, etc. (2:11; 3:7; 3:12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1).[115] In fact, there are, significantly, seven occasions when Israel is reported to 'do evil in the sight of Yahweh', each case more heinous than that which preceded it (2:19).[116] Indeed, one could almost précis the entire Judges story with the sentence 'And God saw that it was bad'. But in Judges 14 the application of the phrase undergoes a crucial change: from that point it is used only of human beings. The transition event is Samson's attraction to a Philistine woman, later his bride (14:3, 7). The end result of his finding Philistine women 'right in my eyes' was the brutal loss of his eyes at the hands of the Philistines. In the Judges narrative, the darkness that replaces Samson's sight signals what is happening in the Israelites' spiritual and moral outlook. Thereafter the phrase is used thrice: once in connection with the invitation directed to the men of Gibeah by the old man to rape his virgin daughter and the Levite's concubine, 'rape them and do to them whatever is good in your eyes' (19:24), and twice in the leitmotiv that characterizes the final two sections of the book, introducing the first episode, and concluding the second, and thereby the entire book: 'each man did what was right in his eyes' (17:6; 21:25).[117] The shift signalled by the change in possessor of the eyes is complete. The message of Judges is that in the first part of the book Yahweh's perspective, which by definition was holy and 'right', provided the abiding ethical standard for Israel, even in its periodic states of apostasy. By the time of Samson's maturity, however, Israel had replaced concern for Yahweh and his standards with a wholly individualistic, self-serving and depraved worldview, which itself is a reflection of the spiritual darkness and literal and metaphorical

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115   Compare Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, p. 339.

116   Susanne Gillmayr-Bucher, 'Framework and Discourse in the Book of Judges', *JBL* 128 (2009), pp. 687–702 (691). We shall explore the significance of the seven stages of Israel's descent in Chapter 5.

117   In the so-called 'Pessimistic Literature' that emerged in Egypt in the First Intermediate Period (2181–1991 BC), an era marked by social and political turbulence, the phrase 'each man's heart is for himself' occurs (David, *Religion*, p. 140).

death that characterize the final portions of the book.[118] It is not adventitious that the final judge is blinded in the episode that precedes the first occurrence of 'each man did what was right in his own eyes'. As I shall discuss below, the judges serve as proxies for their nation, as captured by Milton in his treatment of Samson as 'mirror of our fickle state'.[119] By this stage, the Israelites were no more capable of seeing 'right' than were the images they worshipped.

This highly nuanced literary technique reinforces other more direct means that the author harnesses to mark the Samson section as the juncture at which Israel had lost all connection with Yahweh. Uniquely, the raising up of this judge to challenge his people's oppressors is not preceded by their cry to God for deliverance. Indeed, from the words of the 'men of Judah' to Samson it is clear that, for that tribe at least, Philistine hegemony was an accepted part of life: 'Don't you know that the Philistines are rulers over us?' (15:11). In the context of the book's preceding episodes, this demonstrates a wholesale shift in attitude. Polzin notes in the exchange between the Philistines and the Judahites regarding Samson that the Judahites use, in their conversation with Samson, precisely the phrase that the Philistines employed with them. The Philistines announce that 'to bind Samson we have come up' (15:10); the Judahites state: 'to bind you, we have come down' (15:12).[120] One might add that by now the merging of the Israelites with the nations round about is so advanced that they appear not only to speak the same language, but to parrot the same phrases.

Bᵊʿênê is far from the sole case of a word used chiastically in Judges to mark subtly an important shift in focus or a change of mood. A far less extensive, but no less elegant, example of structural chiasmus to highlight a transition in focus at a pivotal point in the narrative is seen in the deployment of the verb *ʿāzaz* 'to prevail', specifically in the phrase 'and his hand prevailed against'. It occurs twice in the book. On the first occasion it describes the victory of the first judge, Othniel, against Israel's foe, the king of Mesopotamia (3:10); on the second, at precisely the midway point in the account of the major judges, it reports the success of the Israelites' marauding enemies, the Midianites, against them (6:2).

A variant of such structural chiasmus is provided by the verb *tānāh*, a word found only in Judges where it too occurs twice, also in the first and second halves of the cycle of major judges. It is the meaning of the word which is inverted on the second occasion, to create a semantic mirror-image of itself. *Tānāh* appears first in the Song of Deborah – 'there let them *remember* (i.e.,

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118   Compare Exum, 'Centre', p. 431.

119   *Samson Agonistes*, l. 164.

120   *Moses*, p. 188.

celebrate) the righteous acts of Yahweh' (5:11) – and then, in the aftermath of Jephthah's sacrifice of his only child to fulfil his vow to Yahweh, 'the daughters of Israel went annually to *remember* (mourn) Jephthah's daughter' (11:40).[121] This semantic inversion likewise serves to underline Israel's tragic decline, as well as illustrating again the author's technique of cross-referencing within the text to provide implicit commentary on, or interpretation of, the meaning of the events. In the disorientating environment portrayed in the book this navigational instrument plays an important role.

Perhaps as pregnant in the scheme of the book as the use of *bᵃ'ênê*, though certainly less obvious, is the correlation between the two occurrences of the verb *ḥāzaq* in its *Pi'ēl* form, 'to cause to be strong, to make firm, to empower', encountered in Judges. Yahweh is the subject of both. The first citation is found early in the major-judge cycle: 'And the sons of Israel again did evil in the eyes of Yahweh, and Yahweh caused Eglon, king of Moab, to be strong against Israel because they did evil in the eyes of Yahweh' (3:12).[122] The second comes at the end of the cycle. Indeed, it constitutes the final exchange between Yahweh and a judge whom he appointed: 'And Samson cried to Yahweh saying "My Lord Yahweh, please remember me, and please cause me to be strong/firm just this one time, O God, that I might take revenge for one of my two eyes upon the Philistines"' (16:28).[123] Initially, this appears to be a movement in the opposite direction from those chiasmi we have looked at, namely, at the beginning of the book Yahweh helps Israel's oppressor against his people, then, on its second appearance, helps Israel's judge against their oppressors. This impression, however, overlooks the much more significant role this causative verb plays in the compositional plan which, in the process, highlights, once again, the importance of the Ehud and Samson sections to the overall interpretation of the book. It is used of Eglon to convey that Moab was a weak power before Yahweh's decision to strengthen it against Israel, in contrast to the mighty Mesopotamia, the preceding oppressor. In the blinded and betrayed Samson, the judge-type, portrayed up to this point in the narrative as an awe-inspiring, Yahweh-empowered hero, is reduced to a figure so helpless that he has to be led by the hand. But in strengthening him 'just this one time', Yahweh not only

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121   The *LXX* and *Vulgate* use different lexemes to convey the two meanings.

122   Note how Yahweh's act is encased within its cause: the double mention of Israel's evil doing.

123   Samson's gnomic reference to 'one of my two eyes' is not found in the *LXX* or *Vulgate* which have 'both my eyes'. The tautological Hebrew construction he uses – the numeral two with the dual – expresses 'a certain emphasis' (*Gesenius's Hebrew Grammar*, ed. by E. Kautzsch, 2nd rev. English edn, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1910, p. 246).

creates 'an occasion against' the Philistines and humiliates their gods, he also draws to a conclusion the failed experiment in leadership represented by the judges[124] and buries it under a pile of rubble. What Yahweh began in chapter 3 by enabling foreign kings to oppress Israel, and then 'raising up' deliverers to defeat them in Yahweh's name (3:9, 15), he concludes in chapter 16 by empowering the disgraced final judge to die with dignity by taking his tormentors down into the ground with him. In each case, the stimulus for Yahweh's action is Israel's refusal to obey him, demonstrated finally and spectacularly through the life of Samson himself, as well as by the conduct of the tribe of Judah in handing over God's final chosen judge to the uncircumcised enemy. Nevertheless, at the end of the experiment, as at its beginning, the reader can have no doubt that it is Yahweh who is in control.

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The employment in Judges of chiasmus to signal change represents a technique well attested in Mesopotamian texts, and it provides a reminder that Judges was produced in an exceptionally sophisticated cultural environment.[125] Its writer, having provided his readers with the *terminus post quem* for the composition of the book – the destruction of the northern kingdom by the Assyrians in 722 BC (18:30)[126] – thereby firmly sets the wider cultural context of its composition in the great literary traditions of Mesopotamia.[127] The rise of Neo-Assyria, followed by Neo-Babylon, as the political, military and intellectual super-power of the Near East region in which Judges was written brought in its wake even greater Israelite exposure to the sumptuous cultural and cultic

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124   Gillmayr-Bucher, 'Framework', p. 700.

125   Brettler, *Judges*, p. 16.

126   Block, *Judges*, p. 66. Younger (*Judges/Ruth*, p. 23) is mistaken that this verse could equally apply to the Babylonians' destruction of Judah. The reference is to the Assyrians taking the northern kingdom into captivity; see Smith, *Early History*, pp. 43–44.

127   Mordechai Cogan, 'Into Exile', in Coogan (ed.), *History of the Biblical World*, pp. 242–75 (242–43). 'How deeply the shock of the rule of Assyria must have shattered the traditional world of meaning in Judah. How little reliance there must have been during that historic hour on everything that the highest institutions of society had taken for granted before. And what courage [the Dtr] must have had, on the one hand to hold fast to Israel's one God YHWH at the heart of his tradition, and on the other to take immense liberties with the facts of history' (Norbert Lohfink, 'Which Oracle Granted Perdurability to the Davidides?', in *RI&J*, pp. 421–43 [443]).

life of Mesopotamian civilization.[128] Ezekiel leaves no doubt as to the readiness with which the inhabitants of both Israel and Judah imbibed it (23:2–17).[129] Stephanie Dalley describes the literature of Mesopotamia and the extent of its penetration thus:

> Many stylistic techniques may be outlined […] Punning and word play are revelled in,[130] and sometimes they are crucial to the plot; at other times they are highly esoteric and would only have been appreciated by expert scribes. Alliteration, rhetorical questions, chiasmus, inclusio, similes; verb pairs with contrasting tenses; a build-up of tension through repetition with slight variation; fixed epithets and formulaic lines such as still delight children throughout the world: all these devices enliven the Akkadian text. […] Akkadian myths and epics were universally known during antiquity, and they were not restricted to the Akkadian language. Some were definitely told in Sumerian, Hittite, Hurrian, and Hebrew.[131]

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128 Hazor was connected to the Mesopotamian road network from at least the Old Babylonian period (William Hallo, 'The Road to Emar', *JCS* 18 [1964], pp. 57–88 [87]). Excavations in Hazor, Megiddo, Gezer, Taanach and Shechem reveal a cuneiform literary tradition in Canaanite cities dating from the Middle Bronze Age. Cuneiform documents from Hazor include Old Babylonian mantic, lexical and legal texts (Hayim Tadmor, 'A Lexicographical Text from Hazor', *Israel Exploration Journal* 27 [1977], pp. 98–102 [101–02]). Furthermore, at the start of the first millennium BC, 'the entire west from southern Anatolia to the Egyptian border has to be seen as a multicultural zone where people with many different backgrounds interacted closely, mixing languages, cultures, and devotion to various gods' (Van De Mieroop, *History*, p. 214). The cosmopolitan character of Neo-Assyria is well attested (Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, 'ABL 1285 and the Hebrew Bible', *SAAB* VII/1 [1993], pp. 9–17 [10]; Karen Radner, 'The Assyrian King and His Scholars', in *Of God(s), Trees*, ed. by Luukko et al., pp. 221–38 [238]).

129 Precisely as Ezekiel portrays, the Mesopotamian cultural impact on Syro-Palestine in the Neo-Assyrian period supplemented the strong, existing Egyptian influence. 'The Assyrian Empire and Phoenicia replaced Egypt and the Mycenaean and Minoan empires as the major sources of influence in Syrian art […] Egyptianizing motifs introduced through Phoenicia were combined with stylistic and iconographic details taken from the art of Assyria' (*The Metropolitan Museum of Art: Egypt and the Ancient Near East*, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1987, p. 94). Moreover, in Esarhaddon's reign in particular, Egyptian styles and motifs are evident in Assyrian royal art (Irving Finkel, Julian Reade, 'Assyrian Hieroglyphics', *ZA* 86 [1996], pp. 244–68 [245–46]).

130 See Hildegard and Julius Lewy, 'The God Nusku', *OrNS* 17 (1948), pp. 146–59 (154, n. 2). Wordplay was an important feature of Ancient Egyptian texts likewise (Siegfried Herrmann, 'The Royal Novella in Egypt and Israel', in *RI&J*, pp. 493–515 [510, n. 62]).

131 *Myths from Mesopotamia*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989, pp. xvii–xviii.

As Dalley goes on to explain, the spread of this literature was facilitated by the extensive network of trade routes and trading posts throughout the Near East and by the status of Akkadian as the language of diplomacy in the region for a thousand years from the mid-second millennium BC. Scribes from Egypt to Anatolia, and from Canaan to Iran, mastered Akkadian in large part by studying Mesopotamian literary texts.

This, then, was the literary environment in which the writer of Judges conceived and composed his book. Mesopotamian literary creations set the standards for serious writing and 'placed a premium on saying things in conventional ways'.[132] Their themes provided the models for subject matter. *Gilgamesh* and other popular Mesopotamian epics possess carefully designed and elegantly framed structures, once one accepts that the literary conventions of the second and first millennia BC are different from those of Western literature. *Gilgamesh* tablets dating from the last half of the second millennium have been found over a wide geographical area in the Near East. Indeed, an Akkadian tablet with a fragment of the epic was found in Megiddo. Its age predates the Israelite conquest of the territory.[133] It is inconceivable, given its importance and ubiquity, that the literary elite among the Hebrews, or those of any of the surrounding peoples, were not familiar with the Gilgamesh epic and the literary conventions it exhibits.[134] The Nergal and Ereshkigal myth features in the Amarna letters of ca 1400 BC. Burney concludes that the scribe who copied the text was a Western Semite.[135]

It is also clear that these epics were not considered purely works of literature, but were believed to possess sacred properties.[136] In the prologue to

132   Tigay, *Gilgamesh*, p. 162.

133   *RLA* 8 1/2 (1993), p. 13.

134   On the evidence that the major Mesopotamian literary creations, such as *Gilgamesh*, have been found in virtually all centres of scribal activity, scholars conclude that a fairly uniform school curriculum operated throughout Mesopotamia (Nicole Brisch, 'Changing Images of Kingship in Sumerian Literature', in *OHCC*, pp. 706–24 [712]).

135   *Judges*, pp. 256–58; Stephen Herbert Langdon, *The Mythology of All Races: Semitic*, vol. 5, Boston MA: Marshall Jones, 1931, p. 163.

136   Eckhart Frahm, 'Nabû-zuqup-kēnu, das Gilgameš Epos und der Tod Sargons II', *JCS* 51 (1999), pp. 73–90 (73–74). From the ninth to the second century BC, Mesopotamian scribes were temple officials (W.G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, Winona Lake IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996, p. 14). These 'transcribers and editors' thus understood their role in religious terms, in protecting the cultic heritage. Erica Reiner and H.G. Güterbock conjecture that the original recorders of Babylonian literary texts were not scribes but magicians and exorcists ('The Great Hymn to Ishtar and its Two Versions from Bogazköy', *JCS* 21 [1967], pp. 255–66 [257]).

Gilgamesh, emphasis is given to seeing, knowing, wisdom, secrets and hidden things, rather than the expected focus on the heroic exploits of its hero.[137] Extracts from the myth *Erra and Ishum*, which takes as its subject Nergal-Erra, were used as apotropaic inscriptions on amulets.[138] In fact, the myth ends with Erra's proclamation that 'In the house where this tablet is placed, even if Erra becomes angry and the Sebitti storm, the sword of judgment shall not come near him'.[139] Connected with this is the fact that a major element of recognized literary practice of the ancient Near East in the first half of the first millennium BC is the use of text for transmitting esoteric knowledge:

> The Gilgamesh epic and Mesopotamian myths in general were heavily coded texts involving a hidden level of understanding, towards which the reader was guided by means of various esoteric clues (intertextual allusions, puns, riddles, double entendres, ambiguous spellings, and enigmatic words and expressions) interspersed in the text. These clues were meant to be recognized and understood by readers intelligent and educated enough to do so, while escaping the ignorant and the fool, and unravelling textual secrets was considered tantamount to highest wisdom.[140]

There is sound reasoning behind the practice of concealing essential truths beneath texts that appear simple. In Mesopotamia a belief deeply held in scholarly circles was that sacred knowledge in the wrong hands presented a grave danger. This reflected more than a predictable wish of religious scholars to maintain their status within the circle of the royal house and the temples. Their belief system was founded on the need to preserve at all costs the good favour of the gods. The abuse of sacred knowledge would lead to its disruption

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137   Tigay, *Gilgamesh*, p. 143.

138   Peter Machinist, 'Rest and Violence in the Poem of Erra', *JAOS* 103 (1983), pp. 221–26 (226). Indeed, the text *KAR* 169 represents the entire five-tablet series of *Erra and Ishum* copied onto a single tablet. Erica Reiner infers that this was done for apotropaic reasons ('Plague Amulets and House Blessings', *JNES* 19 [1960], pp. 148–55 [150–52]). The Assyrians ascribed similar performative properties to their visual art (Bahrani, 'King's Head', p. 118).

139   Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, rev. edn, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 282, 312. Bodi dates the original composition to the period between 1050 and 750 BC and argues that the writer of the book of Ezekiel was familiar with *Erra and Ishum* and, through the borrowing and adaptation of some of its themes, emulated it (*Ezekiel*, pp. 13, 54–55).

140   Simo Parpola, 'Mount Niṣir and the Foundations of the Assyrian Church', in *From Source to History*, ed. by Salvatore Gaspa et al., Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2014, pp. 469–84 (470–71).

with potentially disastrous consequences for sovereign and state. Scholars took an oath of loyalty to the king which seems to have bound them from divulging arcane knowledge to those who had not followed the rigorous process of instruction in this material. 'In order to avoid misuse of the sacred knowledge, the "Scriptures" had to be kept away from the eyes of the wider public [...] the colophons labelling these texts as [...] "secret, taboo" [...] were meant to limit access to these Scriptures. [...] These colophons normally begin with the fixed instruction [...] "May the learned show (this only) to the learned; the unlearned shall/should not see (it)". This standardized phrase is followed by *niṣirtu* or *pirištu* "secret, restriction"'.[141] 'The exclusivity of the scholars' knowledge, not to be disclosed to "the one who does not know," demarcates that body of knowledge, including divination, incantations and magic, from other fields'.[142] Diviners were described as those who 'guard the secrets of god and king'.[143]

That similar ideas were also rooted in the Israelite approach to sacred writing is well attested in the Hebrew Bible. Indeed, as the following shows, this notion was a feature of Israelite/Jewish spirituality at least from the time of King Uzziah (776–739 BC) until the first century AD:

> His disciples said to him 'Why do you speak to them in parables?' He answered 'To you is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. [...] Therefore, I speak to them in parables that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not hear and understand. The prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled in them which says "Hearing, hear, but you will not understand, and seeing, you will see but not take in"' (Matt. 13:10–14)

In Isaiah, the oracle quoted by Jesus continues thus: 'Make the heart of this people fat, and make their eyes heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with

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141 Oshima, *Theodicy*, pp. xliii–xliv. Tukulti-Ninurta I's seizure of divinatory tablets from Babylonia illustrates the Assyrian belief in the strategic advantage bestowed by esoteric knowledge (W.G. Lambert, 'Three Unpublished Fragments of the Tukulti-Ninurta Epic', *AfO* 18 [1957–58], pp. 38–51 [44–45]).

142 Francesca Rochberg, *In the Path of the Moon*, Leiden: Brill, 2010, pp. 241, 219.

143 *CAD* Š/2, 1992, p. 86. See also Ivan Starr, *Queries to the Sun God*, Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1990, p. XXVI. The secrets of the king, falling into the wrong hands, represented a comparable but different threat to that of offending the gods (Seth Richardson, 'On Seeing and Believing', in *Divination and Interpretation of Signs in the Ancient World*, ed. by Amar Annus, Chicago: University of Chicago, 2010, pp. 225–66 [251–55]).

their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert and be healed' (Isa. 6:10).[144]

In the sentence that concludes Judges, 'In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes', we have an example of this operating in its simplest form, that is, with two layers of meaning. Superficially, it is a statement of social observation, devoid of value judgment. However, underneath the surface meaning, the writer is saying something else, and on this the commentators agree. Where they disagree is in what the underlying message is, generating a continuing debate whether it reveals the writer as pro- or anti-monarchy.[145] I conclude, however, that he is making not a political, but a theological, point. The behaviour of the tribes of Israel in this period transgressed the command in Deuteronomy 12:8–10 to Israel concerning how they should live when they enter Canaan: 'You shall not do [...] every man whatever is right in his own eyes [...] when you go over the Jordan, and dwell in the land that Yahweh your God gives you'. At the root of Israel's contravention of this command, as of all the others, is its rejection of Yahweh as sovereign.

Important tools for obscuring divine truth from those unworthy or unwilling to receive it are the parable and the *ḥîdāh*, 'the dark saying', the enigmatic utterance. *Ḥîdôth* are the tests the Queen of Sheba used to ascertain the authenticity of Solomon's famed wisdom. Tellingly, we read 'there was no matter concealed from the king' (1 Kgs 10:1, 3): Solomon could decode the essence of the *ḥîdôth*, hidden beneath their surface words. Yahweh is quoted as contrasting the clarity with which he speaks to Moses with the *ḥîdôth* he uses with others (Num. 12:8).[146] The psalmist declares 'I will open my mouth in a parable; I will pour out *ḥîdôth* from the past' (Ps. 78:2). Ezekiel is commanded 'to put forth a *ḥîdāh* and speak a parable to the house of Israel' (17:2). Nowhere in the Hebrew Bible, however, is *ḥîdāh* encountered more frequently

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144   This approach to revealing/concealing sacred knowledge and for similar reasons was a feature of the oracle at Delphi (Plutarch, *Moralia*, vol. v, London: Heinemann, 1936, p. 333).

145   Arthur E. Cundall and Leon Morris, *Judges, Ruth*, London: Tyndale Press, 1968, pp. 36–37; 212–13. O'Connell is in no doubt: he calls it a 'monarchist refrain' (*Rhetoric*, p. 6).

146   In Assyrian religious understanding there is a parallel to this dichotomous conception of divine revelation: 'Assyrian sources [...] distinguish between visions and dreams received by seers (*šabrû*] and oracles spoken by prophets (*raggimu*). While male gods, too, could be seen in visions and dreams, only Ištar and other goddesses speak from the mouth of the prophet' (Simo Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1997, p. xxxv; see also Martti Nissinen, *References to Prophecy in Neo-Assyrian Sources*, Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1998, p. 10).

than in Judges, and specifically in the Samson cycle. It is the word there translated 'riddle'. The use of riddles is witnessed in Mesopotamia from the mid-third millennium BC.[147] Frequently, in Mesopotamian usage they possess a contest and/or an esoteric function.[148]

While Samson's riddle appears on the surface an example of contest literature,[149] its role within the book as a whole is more profound. As I shall go on to substantiate, in creating Judges, the author had two principal objectives. The first was the transmission of esoteric knowledge to those who would bring to the text a spirit of enquiring reverence. The second was the protection of this knowledge from abuse by individuals whose interest in the material was profane and/or dangerous.[150] The apparent simplicity of the language of Judges, which perfectly complements the lively colouring of the tales of the judges, and the book's use of distortion were intended by the writer as a cloak for communicating a more important message. Judges was not written solely or mainly as an account of the history of the Israelites in the period between the Settlement and the advent of Samuel and the monarchy. Even less was its primary purpose a celebration of the adventures of a series of 'judges'. Such readings are possible, indeed are the immediately obvious interpretations, but, in the writer's schema, are intended only to be superficial. It cannot be emphasized enough that the book of Judges was written first and foremost with sacred intent. Simo Parpola's description of esoteric knowledge in Mesopotamia comports with such a reading of Judges: 'In Mesopotamia, the visible and invisible worlds were connected with each other through a complex system of symbols, images, metaphors, allegories and mental associations. Unravelling this symbolic code opens the way to the very core of Mesopotamian culture, the world of ideas hidden behind its conventional and alien surface'.[151]

Consequently, to facilitate the understanding of Judges by the intended readership, and specifically to address the tension between the use of *Entstellung*, on the one hand, and didactic and sacred purpose, on the other,

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147   R.D. Biggs, 'Pre-Sargonic Riddles from Lagash', *JNES* 32 (1973), pp. 26–33. In these riddles, the identities of Sumerian cities are presented as riddles.

148   Samuel Noah Kramer, *The Sumerians*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963, p. 236. Simo Parpola, 'The Esoteric Meaning of the Name of Gilgamesh', *Intellectual Life of the Ancient Near East*, ed. by Jiři Prosecký, Prague, 1998, pp. 315–329 (324). On Babylonian contest literature, see Lambert, *Literature*, pp. 150–51.

149   This aspect is well explored in Susan Niditch, 'Samson as Culture Hero, Trickster, and Bandit', *CBJ* 54 (1990), pp. 608–24 (618–19).

150   The thinking behind this twin ambition is illustrated in the proverb 'It is the glory of God to conceal a matter: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter' (Prov. 25:2).

151   'Mesopotamian Soul', p. 30.

its writer supplies hermeneutical tools. Placed prominently in the text are the riddles which rely on the layering of meaning, and explicitly invite vertical reading,[152] and parable, which, as the word's etymology indicates, sets meaning in horizontal relations. Indeed, Samson, in his response to the Philistines' announcement of his riddle's meaning, witnesses that a *ḥîdāh*'s essence is buried beneath the surface appearance conveyed by the words: 'Had you not ploughed (*ḥāraš*) with my heifer, you would not have found my riddle' (14:18).[153] Juxtaposed on either side of the literal centre-point of Judges which, as calculated by the Masoretes according to verse-count, falls at the beginning of the Jephthah pericope (viz., 10:7),[154] in the adjacent cycles are the book's central parable (Jotham's on the trees [9:8–15]),[155] and central riddle (Samson's on strength-sweetness [14:14–18]), thereby reinforcing through the composition's rhetorical architecture their importance to the text as a whole.[156] They play a

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152 'The riddle or enigma hides as much as it reveals, alluding to the truth rather than telling it' (Guy G. Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom*, 2nd edn, Leiden: Brill, 2005, p. 11). Stroumsa defines riddles as 'a basically ambivalent truth' that operates at different levels of understanding (p. 12). Crenshaw (*Samson*, pp. 99–100) likewise points to the ability of riddles to convey meaning on different levels simultaneously. The surface meaning is not the ultimate meaning. The riddle is intended to deceive; it is an instrument of illusion. Stroumsa quotes Plutarch's citation of Heraclitus regarding the utterances of the Delphic Apollo who 'neither tells nor conceals, but indicates' (p. 11) (compare Joseph Eddy Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle*, Oakland CA: University of California Press, 1979, p. 238).

153 *Ḥarāṣu*, the Akkadian cognate of *ḥāraš* (CAD H, 1956, pp. 92–95), sheds light on the richness of its function here. *Ḥarāṣu* takes as its primary meaning 'cutting down', 'cutting deep' whence it developed the significations, as in Hebrew and Phoenician, 'to plough' and 'to engrave'. From this, the Akkadian word developed the secondary meaning 'to make clear'. Understanding 'if you hadn't ploughed with my heifer' as a sexual metaphor has long been a commonplace of biblical exegesis as well as popular lore (see Gordon Williams, *A Dictionary of Sexual Language and Imagery in Shakespearean and Stuart Literature*, London: Athlone Press, 1994, pp. 1058–59, e.g., 'no Pamper'd Jesuites with our Heifers plough' [1689]). But Samson means 'cut deep below the surface' and, thus, bring to light. On the connection between the plough and the Mesopotamian sun god, Shamash/Utu, see H. Frankfort, *Stratified Cylinder Seals*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955, pp. 36, 41. And still the wordplay is not exhausted: the Hebrew near-homophone *ḥereš* conveys both 'silent' and 'secret', and 'magician' (BDB, pp. 360–61) (see Chapter 6).

154 This method of calculation, because it is based on the number of verses, which represents a later arrangement of the text, can only provide an approximate identification of the midpoint. To approach precision, either a character- or a word-count is necessary.

155 Yair Zakovitch, *"For Three . . . and for Four"*, vol. 2, Jerusalem: Makor, 1979, p. xvi. Compare Webb (*Judges*, p. 274), who considers Jotham's parable 'just a means to an end'.

156 On the elaborate pun that links Samson's riddle with the Hebrew term for 'parable', see Camp and Fontaine, 'Words', p. 132.

literary symbolic role with respect to the text's structural core akin to the architectural symbolic function of the pillars Jachin and Boaz that kept the entrance to the Solomonic temple, 'which stood to represent to the world at large that which was unseen within the building',[157] or, even more pertinently, to the sculpted representations of *apkallu*, the mythological sages placed at Assyrian royal doorways to guard against ingress by forces of chaos and destruction.[158] The *apkallu*, who 'ensure the correct functioning of the plans of heaven and earth', imparted 'secret lore'[159] and divine knowledge to the king.[160] Not only is the beginning of chapter 10 the physical midpoint of the book of Judges, it also states in greater detail than elsewhere the fundamental source of tension between its two principal actors, Yahweh and the Israelites, by listing the seven objects of their apostasy.[161] It, therefore, can be seen on both counts as symbolizing the composition's very essence.[162] The prominent positioning of this riddle and parable[163] in relation to it, as well as indicating that Judges is to be understood overall as a *ḥîdāh*, and its story a parabolic reflection of the religious, moral and political environment in which the writer produced the work, emphasizes the hermeneutic function of riddles and parables for the composition. Accordingly, they act as a gateway to protected knowledge

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157   Carol Meyers, 'Jachin and Boaz in Religious and Political Perspective', *CBJ* 45 (1983), pp. 167–78 (171–74); also Rowley, *Worship*, p. 81.

158   F.A.M. Wiggermann, *Mesopotamian Protective Spirits*, Groningen: Styx, 1992, pp. 65–66; Barbara Nevling Porter, 'Sacred Trees, Date Palms', *JNES* 52, pp. 129–39 (137); Benjamin Foster, 'Wisdom and the Gods in Ancient Mesopotamia', *OrNS* 43 (1974), pp. 344–54 (349–50). The placing of images of semi-divine guardians to flank the doorways or beneath the thresholds of palaces and temples was a long-established Mesopotamian magical practice.

159   *CAD* A/1, 1968, pp. 171, 173; Erica Reiner, 'The Etiological Myth of the "Seven Sages"', *OrNS* 30 (1961), pp. 1–11 (4); Parpola, 'Tree', p. 165; compare Foster, 'Wisdom', pp. 345–46.

160   Mehmet-Ali Ataç, *The Mythology of Kingship in Neo-Assyrian Art*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 169.

161   'The sons of Israel did evil again in the eyes of Yahweh, and served Ba'alim, and Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Sidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the sons of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines, and forsook Yahweh and did not serve him. And Yahweh's anger burned against Israel and he sold them into the hands of the Philistines and into the hands of the sons of Ammon (10:6–7).

162   An analogous arrangement is found in the Neo-Assyrian oracle collection known as 'the Covenant Tablet of Assur'. In a series of five oracles, the third is ascribed to Assur himself, and represents the essence of the Covenant Tablet of Assur. It is flanked by four oracles attributed to Ishtar of Arbela (Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, pp. XIX, LXXXI, 22–27).

163   Moore deems it 'the most striking example of this kind of apologue in the Old Testament' (*Judges*, p. 73).

for those worthy to do so, and as a barrier to the unworthy enquirer, precisely parallel in literary terms to the magical function of the *apkallu* and the representations of other protective spirits in Assyrian gate/doorway architecture.[164]

Into the category of arcane knowledge also comes the one dream narrated in Judges: the Midianite warrior's. Although its divinatory role is evident, one may question how it fulfils an esoteric function given that this parabolic dream is explicitly interpreted in the account. The clue is in the deployment of an 'enigmatic word' in the text: 'When Gideon heard the telling of the dream, and the interpretation (*šibrô*) thereof, [...] he worshipped' (7:15). This is the single instance of this word, which normally signifies 'breaking, fracture, crushing', connoting 'interpretation, elucidation' in biblical Hebrew.[165] It appears a good metaphor for laying bare hidden knowledge, as in the English 'code-breaking'.[166] It is curious, therefore, that it is not found elsewhere with this meaning. In fact, it has another association, as Burney observes.[167] *Šibrô* bears a close phonological resemblance to the Assyrian term noted above, *šabrû*, 'interpreter of dreams', a lexical connection which would have been evident to contemporary Hebrew readers of Judges versed in Assyrian and Babylonian religious practice.[168] The introduction of *šibrô* into the narrative in the context of dream interpretation immediately points the intended readership to the esoteric aspects of Mesopotamian cult,[169] and provides yet another reminder of the esoteric essence of Judges and its employment of *Entstellung*.[170] Related to this

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164   The Babylonian King Nabonidus's mother entrusted his safekeeping to *lamassu* on either side of his person (C.J. Gadd, 'The Harran Inscriptions of Nabonidus', *Anatolian Studies* 8 [1958], pp. 35–92 [55]). Assyrian King Esarhaddon attributed the guardians' magical powers to the nature of their stone (Erica Reiner, *Astral Magic in Babylonia*, Philadelphia: Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 85/4, 1995, p. 119). Hebrew writers ascribed such performative power to the divine word: 'when you sleep it shall keep you' (Prov. 6:20–23).

165   *BDB*, p. 991.

166   Niditch, *Judges*, p. 96.

167   *Judges*, pp. xvi, 214.

168   *CAD* Š/1, 1989, p. 15; F.M. Fales and G.B. Lanfranchi, 'The Impact of Oracular Material on the Political Utterances and Political Action in the Royal Inscriptions of the Sargonid Dynasty', in Jean-Georges Heintz (ed.), *Oracles et prophéties dans l'Antiquité*, Strasbourg: de Bocard, 1997, pp. 99–114 (104, 109); Nissinen, *References*, p. 56.

169   Compare the words of the god Ea in the Gilgamesh epic: 'It was not I who revealed the secret of the Great Gods, I (only) made a dream to appear to Atrahasis, and (thus) he heard the secret of the gods' (Kovacs, *Gilgamesh*, p. 103).

170   Oppenheim observes that the barley-cake is a symbol 'taken from everyday life; its size, however, and its actions are distorted in true dream-fashion' ('Dreams', pp. 210–11).

is the author's use of textual cross-reference to provide guidance in interpretation, mentioned above.

In Samson's exchanges with Delilah on the source of his strength, he misleads her three times, imparting the secret only on the fourth occasion. The 3+1 pattern evinced here is an important feature of the Judges narrative and is treated in Chapter 2.[171] Significantly for the current discussion however, the information Samson provides in each explanation becomes progressively closer to the sacred knowledge itself,[172] precisely as if, faced with Delilah's relentless pursuit of truth, he is unpeeling successive layers of meaning (16:6–18). More generally, the theme of concealed knowledge and its stewardship, given vivid expression in Samson's ḥîdāh, lies at the heart of this section. The angel refuses to reveal his identity or name to Samson's parents, since it is 'beyond your ability to comprehend' (13:18);[173] the mother does not disclose to her husband Samson's mission to deliver Israel (13:5–7); neither the mother nor the angel vouchsafes to Manoah the prohibition regarding a razor being used on Samson's head (13:7, 14);[174] Yahweh does not divulge to any of them that through Samson's marriage he is 'seeking an occasion against the Philistines' (14:4). The text pointedly informs us that Samson discloses neither the killing of the young lion (14:6), nor the source of the honey (14:9), nor the meaning of his riddle to his parents (14:16); 'and 'his strength was not known' (16:9). But the destruction both of the Philistines and of Samson proceeds from his inability through 'knowing' Philistine women to keep secret knowledge secret: first the meaning of his riddle, then the source of his power. We are left in no doubt

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171   Robert Alter, 'Samson without Folklore', in *Text and Tradition*, ed. by Niditch, pp. 47–56 [47, 50]; Zakovitch, *"For Three"*, pp. xv–xvi. Whether this pattern is best represented as 3+1 or 4–1 depends on the case in question. What is common to them all, however, is that one member of the quadripartite set is aberrant and undermines the coherence and cohesion of the set as a whole. To simplify matters, I use 3+1 in all cases. Zakovitch, surveying the use of this pattern across the Hebrew Bible, defines it as 'the pattern of "three-four" (three plus one) [in which] the three first components in the literary unit repeat or represent three equal elements and they usually do not have particular significance in changing from component to component. A sharp modification occurs in the fourth component that brings the climax of the unit into focus' (*"For Three"*, p. ii).

172   Niditch, 'Samson', pp. 615–16; Alter, 'Samson', p. 53.

173   BDB, p. 811.

174   Alter, 'Samson', p. 55.

of the spiritual consequences that the release of esoteric knowledge to the
wrong people has. As in Mesopotamian belief when the patron god of a city
was offended by its citizens he departed his temple and left his city to its fate,[175]
so Yahweh abandoned Samson. Moreover, Samson's abuse of sacred knowl-
edge meant that whatever spiritual understanding he had was forfeited:[176] he
'did not *know* that Yahweh had left him' (16:20).

It follows from the conclusion that the author of Judges subverted historiog-
raphy for theological ends and was far more concerned with the transmission
of esoteric knowledge than he has generally been credited for, that the present
study is compelled to question the validity, at least in so far as it applies to
Judges, of the Deuteronomistic History thesis. With its roots in the nineteenth
century, it acquired more or less canonical form in Noth's work dating from
the Second World War in which he posited a single exilic editor for the entire

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175   Jacobsen, *Treasures*, p. 164; Anne Löhnert, 'Manipulating the Gods', OHCC, pp. 402–17
      (409); Mordechai Cogan, 'Sennacherib and the Angry Gods of Babylon and Israel', *Israel
      Exploration Journal* 59 (2009), pp. 164–74 (166). An example is the moon god Sin's aban-
      donment of his city, Harran: 'In the sixteenth year of Nabopolassar, king of Babylon, Sin,
      king of the gods, with his city and his temple was angry and went up to heaven – the
      city and the people that (were) in it went to ruin' (*Nabonidus H₁, B*, in Gadd, 'Harran',
      p. 47). See also Samuel N. Kramer, *Lamentation over the Destruction of Ur*, Chicago:
      Chicago University Press, 1940; Borger, *Asarh.*, p. 14; ARAB 2, pp. 245, 255, texts 649, 662;
      Lambert, 'Fragments', pp. 43–45.

176   Compare the instructions to initiates of the ecstatic cult of Ishtar: "[…] Guard the word
      and secrets of Ištar! Should you leak out the word of Ištar, you shall not live, and should
      you not guard her secrets, you shall not prosper. May Ištar guard your mouth and tongue!"
      Note also the name of the temple of Zarpanitu (Ištar of Babylon) in Assur […] "House
      of the secrets of heaven and earth"' (Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, p. xcv, n. 132; see also
      A. Leo Oppenheim, 'Analysis of an Assyrian Ritual (Kar 139)', *History of Religions* 5 [1966],
      pp. 250–65 [252]). The colophon to the text TuL 27 found in Assur contains the following:
      'The initiate may show it to the initiate. The uninitiated may not see it. Secret of the gods:
      he commits a grave sin (who reveals it)' (Walker and Dick, *Induction*, p. 245). Compare
      Samson Agonistes ll. 497–501:
          But I Gods counsel have not kept, his holy secret.
          Presumptuously have publish'd, impiously,
          Weakly at least, and shamefully: A sin
          That Gentiles in thir Parables condemn.
          To thir abyss and horrid pains confin'd.
      Milton is most likely referring to the Greek myth of Tantalus who revealed the secrets of
      the gods and was, consequently, tormented in the Underworld.

corpus of Joshua through Kings.[177] The present book's Epilogue is concerned with this question.[178]

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177   Knoppers in *RI&J*, p. 1. Compare Driver, *Introduction*, pp. 163–64.

178   On the history of this thesis, see Schmid, 'Emergence', pp. 11–16. It is noteworthy that even so doughty a defender of the thesis as Frank Cross admits that 'fresh attempts to examine the history of the deuteronomistic tradition, while casting much light on the deuteronomistic corpus, leave many embarrassing contradictions and unsolved problems' (*Canaanite Myth*, p. 278). More recent assessments of the subject echo this pessimism. Note, for example, Gary Knoppers's introductory comments to the edited volume cited above: 'Within the past decade an increasing number of scholars have called into question a number of central tenets and assumptions of the Deuteronomistic History hypothesis. For these scholars, the hypothesis itself, and not just particular aspects of it, needs to be completely revised or rejected altogether' (p. 3). Specifically with reference to Judges, which Guillaume terms 'one of the weakest points of the Nothian fortress' (*Waiting*, p. 1), Gooding provides an acute analysis of the inadequacy of attempts to reconcile the thesis with the text of the book ('Composition', p. 70).

'O Mirror of Our Fickle State': Riddles, Words and Other Instruments of Illusion

Ich glaube aber nicht, daß der Herrgott ein schwacher Linkshänder ist[1]

ושפטים יהלל

JOB 12:17B

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The discussion in Chapter 1 of our author's concern to protect the essence of his book from superficial or ill-intentioned readers, while concomitantly providing the keys to unlock it to those for whom the work was intended, brings us to a more detailed consideration of the methods he uses to achieve this.

I mentioned Polzin's observation concerning the Deborah cycle that 'the story is all about how things are not what they seem'. This conclusion applies far beyond the Deborah section; it has currency throughout the book. We do not need to search long for examples to support it. At the end of the last chapter, we considered the motif of concealed knowledge in the Samson account. Indeed, the writer typically distorts the theme of what is known/not known in that account, leaving us puzzled about what we actually do know. Immediately following the episode in which the Judahites say to Samson, 'don't you *know* that the Philistines rule over us?' (15:10), we encounter the sentence 'And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines for twenty years' (15:20). In fact, we are told twice that 'he judged Israel for twenty years', this phrase providing the final comment on Samson in the Hebrew Bible (15:20; 16:31). In an environment where Israel was ruled by the Philistines how could Samson 'judge Israel' and, if he did, what was the nature of this activity?

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1 Wolfgang Pauli, quoted in K. von Meyenn, *Wolfgang Pauli, Wissenschaftlicher Briefwechsel*, IV-A: 1957, Berlin: Springer, 2005, p. 82.

> That [Samson] judged Israel for twenty years we are indeed informed by
> the sacred writer, but of the judgments which he delivered in his judicial
> character not one has been recorded, and if the tenor of his pronounce-
> ments can be inferred from the nature of his acts, we may be allowed to
> doubt whether he particularly adorned the bench of justice. [...] Instead
> of a dull list of legal decisions, we are treated to an amusing, if not very
> edifying, narrative of his adventures in love and in war, or rather in
> filibustering [...] Even on these predatory expeditions (for he had no
> scruple about relieving his victims of their clothes and probably of their
> purses) the idea of delivering his nation from servitude was to all appear-
> ance the last thing that would have occurred to him.[2]

James Frazer's levity makes the point well: the author of Judges goes to con-
siderable lengths in the Samson story to distance its hero from any notion of
the exercise of legal judgment. His statement that Samson 'judged Israel' is
completely different from the recorded actions of the man he describes. Not
only is Samson shown to lack the temperament and interest to deliver sound
judgment, but Jephthah, his immediate predecessor among the major judges,
who 'judged Israel six years' (12:7), displays a striking lack of competence for
the role. His injudicious words lead to his sacrifice of his only child, his daugh-
ter. His diplomatic enterprise to persuade the sons of Ammon not to invade
Israelite territory is hopelessly compromised when in his rambling résumé of
the history of Israel's conquest he muddles his facts, offensively confusing the
principal god of the Ammonites with that of the Moabites (11:24).[3] No more
successful was he in salving the Ephraimites' *amour propre*, thus igniting one
of the Israelite civil wars described in Judges (12:1–6).[4] In this he is contrasted
with the leader who precedes him, Gideon, by whose tact an almost identical
challenge is resolved peaceably (8:1–3). But Gideon, in his treatment of the
cities of Succoth and Penuel, is shown to have little regard for judicial pro-
cess (8:7–9, 15–17), as discussed below. None of the other three 'major judges',
Othniel, Ehud and Deborah, is portrayed in a way that casts light on his/her

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2   James G. Frazer, *Folklore in the Old Testament*, abridged edn, London: Macmillan, 1923, p. 269.

3   Brettler, 'Literature', p. 406; Kim, 'Other', p. 176; *contra* Moore (*Judges*, p. 283), Boling (Robert
    G. Boling, *Judges*, New York: Doubleday, 1975, p. 207), and Cartledge, (*Vows*, pp. 176–77, 184,
    198). Compare Van Seters's position that this portion of the Jephthah story is a device on the
    part of Dtr to rehearse the exodus and conquest narratives and to integrate the account of
    Jephthah into this history (*In Search*, p. 345).

4   This notwithstanding, Robert Boling considers him the best judge since Othniel (*Judges*,
    p. 214). Cheryl Exum's verdict is nearer the mark: 'Jephthah is the worst of the lot' ('Centre',
    p. 410).

aptitude for legal deliberation. In fact, none of the major or minor 'judges' delivers a recorded judgment, nor, with the arguable exception of Deborah,[5] is presented in the process of judging.[6]

The Pentateuch provides two accounts of Moses appointing *špṭîm* / judges from among the Israelites. The first occurs in Exodus, the second in Deuteronomy.[7] It is clear that these men functioned as magistrates.[8] In Exodus, 'they judged the people at all times. The difficult cases they referred to Moses but every simple case they judged themselves'. The qualities required for appointment were that they should be capable, god-fearing, 'men of truth and hating covetousness' (Exod. 18:13–27). In other words, precisely what one would expect of a judge in such a community. In the Deuteronomy account, Moses rehearses the commission he gave to these men: 'And I charged your judges at that time "Hear [the cases] between your brothers, and judge righteously between every man and his brother and the alien. Treat no one differently; you shall hear the [cases of the] small as well as the great. You shall not be intimidated by man for the judgment is God's. The case that is too difficult for you, bring to me and I will hear it"' (Deut. 1:16–17).[9] In Joshua, while there are no examples of men sitting in judgment in the congregation of Israel, it is clear that the role of judge is a formal office within the society, together with elders, priests, and officials (8:33; 23:2; 24:1). In 1 Samuel, Samuel is shown operating as a circuit judge. He establishes his sons as judges

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5 Bal, *Murder*, p. 52; Gale Yee, 'Introduction: Why Judges?', in eadem (ed.), *Judges*, pp. 1–18. The idea that Deborah acted as a judge was questioned by Jewish exegetes and rejected by Maimonides (Naftali Kraus, *Bírák és próféták*, Budapest: Wesley János Kiadó, 2006, p. 37), a position supported by Roland de Vaux (*The Early History of Israel*, 2 vols, London: Darton, Longman, Todd, 1978, p. 762).

6 Despite their treatment as 'major judges' in the commentaries, for example Soggin, *Introduction*, p. 17; de Vaux, *Early History*, pp. 755, 772, 860–61, Ehud and Gideon are not described as such in Judges, but, with Shamgar, as 'deliverers/saviours'. Othniel, Tola and Samson are characterized as both 'deliverer/saviour' and 'judge'. See Exum, 'Centre', p. 412.

7 Weinfeld lists three occasions in the Pentateuch concerned with Moses' appointment of men to ease his leadership burden (*Deuteronomy*, pp. 244–45). However, the remaining occasion – in Numbers 11 – makes no mention of these individuals being *špṭîm* or undertaking a judicial role. It is notable that it is this text alone that focuses on the charismatic calling of God, the feature which many commentators have defined as the hallmark of the *špṭîm* found in Judges.

8 Nili Sacher Fox, *In the Service of the King*, Cincinnati OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 2000, p. 165.

9 Also Deut. 16:18–19. As far as can be determined from the limited information extant, this justice system based on subsidiarity resembles that which operated under the (Neo-) Assyrian king (see J.N. Postgate, '"Princeps Iudex" in Assyria', *RA* 74/2 [1980], pp. 180–82).

and they were *špṭîm* in Beer-sheba. But they discredited the judicial office in that they were covetousness, 'took bribes, and perverted judgment' (1 Sam. 7:15–8:3).[10] Judges are quintessentially the upholders of law and order in the community; none of the *špṭîm* in Judges is depicted in this function.

The meaning of *špṭîm* encountered in Judges has understandably generated a great deal of scholarly analysis. The treatment ranges from the perfunctory – 'It is well known that the concepts judge (שופט) and saviour (מושיע) are identical in meaning in the Old Testament, and there is no need to dwell on the subject'[11] – via the contrived – 'they were administrators and leaders in peacetime and war'[12] – to the inventive, for example that of J. Alberto Soggin, borrowing heavily from Richter. Their views represent the uneasy consensus of the majority:

> The 'major' judges were described especially by Dtr, for reasons which escape us at present, with derivatives of the root *špṭ*; but this might be connected with the fact that *šōpēṭ* and similar titles were in use in the West Semitic world (Phoenicia) for the highest magistrates at this time. The 'major' judges are often presented by the texts as charismatics (cf. Judg. 3.10; 6.34; 8.3; 11.29; 13.25; 14.6, 19; 15.14): the 'spirit of Yahweh' came upon them. This shows that in biblical historiography their power came to be seen as an exceptional measure, reserved for periods of extreme danger and thus justified by the state of emergency. At least in the view of the texts, this led to a centralization of power, albeit purely temporary and provisional, to the detriment of the traditional independence of the tribes of Israel. For these reasons [. . .] I have used the institution of dictatorship in the Roman republic as a comparison.[13]

In his development of this hypothesis, Van Seters inadvertently exposes its flaws:

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10   Fox, *Service*, p. 164.

11   Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, p. 120 n. 1. This is particularly disappointing in view of Moshe Weinfeld's illuminating research on the subject presented in the same volume (pp. 244–45).

12   Hackett, 'Judges', p. 143. It is difficult to conceive of a less apt descriptor of the major judges, and Samson in particular, than 'administrator'.

13   *Judges*, p. 3; W. Richter, *Die Bearbeitung des 'Retterbuches' in der deuteronomistischen Epoche*, Bonner Biblische Beiträge 21, Bonn, 1964. De Vaux extends this line of inquiry with etymological analysis of Ugaritic and Mari material, but with no greater success (*Early History*, pp. 766–73).

Dtr created the period of the judges out of his collection of hero stories by suggesting that during this time, between Israel's entrance into the land and the rise of the monarchy, a succession of magistrates ruled the people. Dtr was familiar with a type of magistrate known as a "judge" (*šōpēṭ*), who was more than the one who presided in a court of law. During periods of interregnums some of the Phoenician cities had apparently been governed by a nonhereditary officeholder with this title. The application of such an institution to premonarchic Israel may be both anachronistic and artificial, since it presupposes a highly unified state, but it was Dtr's way of trying to come to terms with a little-known period of Israel's history. On the other hand, he makes no effort to create any real uniformity among the rather broad diversity of persons who were thought to fill the ranks of judges of this period, apart from the fact that they act in some way to deliver the people from their enemies – and even this needs qualification in some cases.[14]

Even if we disregard the fact that this explanation does not address the difficulty that the judges of Judges do not seem to judge or act as magistrates, it is hardly adequate. It asks us to accept that Dtr took a term which has a clear meaning elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, not least in the adjacent books of Deuteronomy, Joshua and Samuel,[15] and changed its signification to reflect a usage which 'apparently' occurred in Phoenician at certain times because it suggested to him a non-monarchical form of government in a unified state. And his reason for selecting this creative solution was that he had little idea how Israel was organized during the period of the judges. Furthermore, he had so negligible an interest in the nature of his subjects that he expended no effort in framing them into a coherent group that might provide some consistency for this altered application of *šōpēṭ*.[16]

   Given the evidence, one can scarcely disagree with Noth: 'there is no demonstrable or even plausible meaning for the word "judge" which could apply to these heroes as we know them'.[17] There is, then, a chasm between the meaning

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14   *In Search*, pp. 345–46.

15   It is notable that the terms in which the 'judge' role is described in Deut. 1 are particularly at odds with the use of *špṭ* in Judges. This fact has significance for the DH thesis in which Judges is viewed as an organic development of the worldview of Deuteronomy.

16   No more compelling is Hackett's description of the meaning of the Judges application of *špṭ* as 'some sort of governing' ('Judges', p. 143).

17   *Deuteronomistic History*, p. 43; also Bal, *Murder*, p. 52. That said, most recent treatments subscribe to the position of Weinfeld, Soggin et al., e.g., Block, *Judges*, pp. 21–25; Hackett, 'Judges', pp. 141–43; Fox, *Service*, p. 164; Younger, *Judges/Ruth*, p. 21.

of 'judge' as it is used in Judges[18] and its signification elsewhere.[19] In Judges, the book which more than any other takes *šptîm* as a major subject, the Hebrew root *špt* has had its normal semantic boundaries comprehensively displaced, precisely as occurs in a riddle where 'the relationship of sign to referent is [...] "asymmetrical".[20]

It is germane that Judges, in contrast, for example, to the books of Joshua and Samuel, shows no evidence whatever of the proper administration of justice; indeed, increasing lawlessness becomes a feature of the narrative from chapter 8. Murder and theft go unpunished. By the end of the book, violent abduction is officially sanctioned (21:16–23).[21] The safeguards to prevent false witness in the law of Moses (Num. 35:30; Deut. 17:6; 19:15) are spectacularly ignored in the case of Gibeah, against which Israel launches a civil war on the word of one witness whom the author reveals to be of dubious integrity (the Levite whose concubine had been raped), without seeking to verify his account (20:4–8).[22] In the book of Ruth, which opens with the words 'In the days when the judges were judging', judgment is delivered at the city gate not by a judge, but by elders assembled for the purpose (Ruth 1:1; 4:1–11).

The idea of the charismatic saviour, which Weinfeld asserts is synonymous with judge, initially promises to offer a better descriptor of the major judges.[23] But it, too, fares badly with Samson who, as Burney remarks, provides no deliverance or even relief from Philistine oppression.[24] This is curious. As noted, Samson is one of the few characters in the book to whom the role of both judge

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18 In 2 Kgs 23:22 and Ruth 1:1, this meaning of *šptîm* is also found. In both cases, however, the term is used to refer to time (viz., the period between Joshua and the monarchy) rather than to define function. Susan Niditch holds a different view and understands it in these contexts 'to demarcate [...] a particular form of polity' (*Judges*, p. 2).

19 '[The king's] governmental function is described [in 1 Kgs 3:9] as a *špt* which not only refers to royal verdicts but stands representatively for all governmental activity (see Isa 11:3[–4])' (Herrmann, 'Novella', p. 503).

20 Camp and Fontaine, 'Words', p. 144.

21 The writer leaves no doubt about his view of the action: he uses the verb *gāzal* 'to seize violently, rob' to describe it. Laffey (*Wives*, pp. 80–81) claims that the text legitimates the taking of women by force. Nothing could be further from its meaning.

22 Younger, *Judges/Ruth*, p. 370. Geoffrey Miller, unusually among commentators, views the nameless Levite sympathetically but offers no comment on the Levite's distorted account of the happenings at Gibeah ('Verbal Feud', pp. 110–11). In the MT, the writer of Judges leaves open the question who actually killed the concubine: the mob through its abuse or the Levite out of disgust. In the LXX, it is the men of Gibeah who are the murderers.

23 This is a stance with which Boling (*Judges*, p. 26) takes issue.

24 *Judges*, p. xxxvi.

and deliverer is ascribed, and yet in his deeds he is neither. More curious still is the fact that the narrative bestows on him more of the symbols of judgeship than on any of his predecessors. The Semitic root *šmš* 'sun' of his name Samson links him to the Mesopotamian solar deity, Shamash, who also is god of judgment.[25] The association of the sun with justice derives from its constancy, the order it brings to life, and its ability to expose and banish darkness.[26] Another connection with Shamash, whose sacred number is twenty,[27] is that the judgeship of Samson, alone among the judges, lasted twenty years. Twenty is also a number associated with the Assyrian kings,[28] as confirmed by the logographic spelling of the word 'king' with the sign (MAN, 20),[29] whose appointment Shamash oversaw.[30] The title *šamši* is associated with the sun

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25   The *–ôn* ending of the name may represent a diminutive, 'little sun', as proposed by several exegetes (for instance, Block, *Judges*, p. 40; Guillaume, *Waiting*, p. 169; Zadok, *Anthroponymy*, p. 16; see Crenshaw, *Samson*, pp. 15–16), or it may constitute a nominal formative suffix which creates denominal adjectives, to give the meaning 'sun-like' (see *Gesenius*, pp. 238–40). The Assyrian *šaššāniš* (*<šamšāniš*) 'like the sun' (*CAD* Š/2, 1992, p. 173) is a cognate term, and the modern Syriac dialect of Aramaic evinces a cognate in the adjective-forming suffix *–an* (K.G. Tsereteli, *Siriyskiy yazyk*, Moscow: Nauka, 1979, p. 46). See also Stone, 'Eglon's Belly', pp. 655–56. Note that the Assyrianized West-Semitic name *Šamšānu* is attested in the late Neo-Assyrian period (*PNA*, p. 1224).

26   A similar set of associations applies to the Egyptian god Rā.

27   'Šamaš, the 20th is your splendid day!'; 'celebrate the twentieth day festival for Šamaš' (*CAD* E, 1958, p. 367); 'On the twentieth day [Šamaš] you exult with mirth and joy' (Lambert, *Literature*, p. 137); Bruno Meissner, *Babylonien und Assyrien* II, Heidelberg: Winters Universitätbuchhandlung, 1926, p. 21; Jastrow, *Aspects*, p. 115; René Labat, 'Jeux numériques dans l'idéographie susienne', in *Studies Landsberger*, pp. 257–60 [258]; Richard L. Litke, *A Reconstruction of the Assyro-Babylonian God Lists*, New Haven CT: Yale Babylonian Collection, 1998, p. 128; Ruth Horry, 'Utu/Šamaš (god)', *AMGG*, 2013 [http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/amgg/listofdeities/utu/ accessed 18 December 2015]). The practice of assigning numbers to signify the names of gods arose in the Middle Assyrian period (Pirjo Lapinkivi, *The Neo-Assyrian Myth of Ištar's Descent and Resurrection*, Helsinki: University of Helsinki Press, 2010, p. 36).

28   'The sun is the star of the king' (R.C. Thompson, *The Reports of the Magicians and Astrologers of Nineveh and Babylon*, vol. 2, London: Luzac, 1900, p. 60, Report 176); Jeffrey Cooley, '"I Want to Dim the Brilliance of Šulpae!"', *Iraq* 70 (2008), pp. 179–88 (186).

29   *LAS II*, p. 130.

30   Among the many examples: 'You (Šamaš) enthrone the high priest, you enthrone the king'; 'you, Šamaš, give sceptre and throne to the king'; 'what Šamaš has not granted to any king among earlier kings'. The establishment of the king on the throne is not always attributed to Shamash (for example, Ishtar and Anu, and especially Enlil/Ellil, are also cited as responsible), but the association of the king with the solar deity is particularly strong in both Assyrian and Babylonian traditions. For the Assyrians, Shamash was an

disk icon and used to denote both human and divine kingship.[31] Moreover, Samson is the representative judge of Dan, a tribal name which means 'judge',[32] and perversely may represent the fulfilment of Jacob's prophecy 'Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel' (Gen. 49:16). As a caricature of judgeship, which in Israel, as in Mesopotamia, was customarily conducted at the city gate, Samson dislodges the gates of Gaza and carries them 'to the top of the hill that faces Hebron'. This was a west-east journey conducted by night that recalls the sun's own through the netherworld (16:3).[33] The sun-like judge of Dan is the antithesis of law and order, juridical integrity and kingly virtue. He, who often operates in the dark, is himself confined to the darkness of blindness, a punishment, incidentally, conventionally inflicted by Shamash,[34] and his story marks the darkest point in the narrative of the judge-heroes.

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expression of the divine sovereign Assur 'who gives earthly kings their power and insignia' (Knut Tallqvist, *Akkadische Götterepitheta*, Helsinki: Societas Orientalis Fennica, 1938, p. 266). The late Neo-Assyrian king, Assurbanipal, attributes the power to nominate kings to Assur and Ishtar (Arthur Carl Piepkorn, *Historical Prism Inscriptions of Ashurbanipal I*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933, pp. 88–89, 99). Note the Old Akkadian name The-King-Is-Like-The-Sun-God; 'I have heard the message of the king, my lord, and my sun god'; 'the king being of divine substance, the Sun god of his subjects' (*CAD* Š/2, 1992, pp. 82–98; A.R. George and F.N.H. Al-Rawi, 'Tablets from the Sippar Library. VII. Three Wisdom Texts', *Iraq* 60 [1998], pp. 187–206 [195]); '(Nebuchadnezzar) Sun god [^{d}*Šamaš*] of his land, who makes his people flourish' (*CAD* Š/1, 1989, p. 290). Tiglath-pileser III, in 728 BC, describes his dominion as stretching 'from the horizon to the heights of heaven' (Hayim Tadmor, 'World Dominion', in *Landscapes* I, ed. by L. Milano et al., Padova: Sargon srl, 1999, pp. 55–62 [57]); see also M.-J. Seux, *Épithètes royales akkadiennes et sumeriennes*, Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1967, pp. 112, 283–84.

31 Stephanie Dalley, 'The God Ṣalmu and the Winged Disk', *Iraq* 48 (1986), pp. 85–101 (98–99)

32 In Assyrian texts, Shamash is frequently referred to as *bēl dīni*, 'lord of judgment', an epithet particularly applied to him; the precise equivalent in Hebrew is *ba'al dîn* (Parpola, 'Tree', p. 178). See also Burney, *Judges*, p. 392.

33 Ibid., pp. 377, 406–07.

34 *Vassal Treaty of Esarhaddon with Humbaresh* (ll. 422–24): 'May [Shamash] remove your eyesight. Walk about in darkness' [http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/saao/saao2/P336598 accessed 18 December 2015]; Paul Lawrence, *The Books of Moses Revisited*, Eugene OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011, p. 54; Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, p. 119. In the *Hymn to Shamash*, which may date from the Old Babylonian era, and was widely copied in Neo-Assyrian times, we find that Shamash 'give[s] the unscrupulous judge experience of fetters' (Lambert, *Literature*, pp. 122, 133).

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Samson's birth and naming raise similar questions to those posed by the peculiar use of *špṭîm*, and specifically confront the reader with the realization that, even at its outset, in this segment things are certainly not what they seem. The prophetic announcement, accompanied by a theophany, of the birth and divine mission of a child to a childless couple is rare in the Hebrew Bible and, apparently, of the greatest moment. Outside Genesis, it happens only once: with Samson. But Samson, of all the 'major judges', was the least successful in his calling since he alone did not succeed in vanquishing Israel's oppressor. His mother is depicted as seemingly Yahweh-fearing and, in contrast to his father, spiritually perceptive.[35] Yet this woman gives her Nazirite son a name rich in association with a solar cult.[36] Gray remarks that 'it is difficult to disassociate the Samson-cycle from the cult-legend of the shrine of Beth-shemesh ('the Shrine of the Sun'), 2 ½ miles SSE. of Zorah, Samson's reputed home'.[37] In a book in which personal names are relatively rarely supplied, the meanings of those which are given are frequently significant. Veneration of the sun is explicitly prohibited in Deuteronomy (4:19), and we learn from 2 Kings that the kings of Judah (Manasseh and Amon) introduced a solar cult into the Jerusalem temple complete with horses and chariots dedicated to the sun deity. This cult was distinct from those respectively of Ba'al, the moon, the planets and all the host of heaven also practised under royal patronage in Judah (2 Kgs 21:3–5, 21; 23:5, 11).[38] The attitude of Yahwists towards sun-worship is illustrated by Ezekiel's account of being transported in a vision to the Jerusalem temple before its destruction by the Babylonians. There he witnesses four abominable cults being practised. The greatest abomination of all,

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35   Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Days of Christ*, Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1976, p. 140.

36   Veijola claims that among Israelites until the ninth century BC it was the mothers who named the children ('Solomon: Bathsheba's Firstborn', in *RI&J*, pp. 340–57 [344]; see also de Vaux, *Early History*, p. 234).

37   *Joshua, Judges*, pp. 234–35.

38   André Lemaire, 'Toward a Redactional History of the Book of Kings', in *RI&J*, pp. 446–61 (454). Glen Taylor makes an imaginative case for attributing the existence of these trappings of solar worship to a cult of Yahweh as sun god practised by every king of Judah up to Josiah. Central to his argument is the tenet that the Dtr systematically censored the Former Prophets to expunge all but oblique references to this practice, together with others conventionally associated with Ba'alism (*Yahweh and the Sun*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993, pp. 176–77). As we shall examine, evidence from Judges renders this unsupportable.

greater even than the women weeping for the Mesopotamian god Tammuz-Dumuzi, is 'at the door of the temple [...], between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men, with their backs towards Yahweh's temple, and their faces towards the east: and they worshipped the sun towards the east' (8:3–16).

The mother's choice of name for her son is an unambiguous reflection that, by the time of Samson's birth, the dislocation from Yahwism had progressed so far in Israel that even a woman who received, uniquely in Yahweh's recorded dealings with his people, two angelic visitations and a miraculous conception, was adulterated by syncretism. But there the unambiguity ends. The book's appetite for subverting boundaries is displayed again with reference to the name. In Hebrew the grammatical gender of *šemeš* 'sun' is unstable, an instability witnessed in Judges itself: in 5:31, the word is masculine, in 19:14, feminine. A.B. Davidson states that feminine is its usual gender.[39] In addition, the Canaanite solar deity, Shapash, as revealed in Ugaritic texts, was female.[40] She acted as the messenger of the gods, as she was able to travel between the world of light and that of darkness,[41] a journey which, in a different context, Samson also undertook. Thus, Samson, whose masculinity is stressed by the narrative, bears a name which suggests not only religious, but also gender, ambivalence.[42] While this does not amount to gender-bending, it reinforces the serious questions which the Samson narrative has already provoked concerning the identities, characters and motives of its main actors. Gender dislocation is, however, found elsewhere in Judges.

In the pithy seven words with which the author introduces us to Deborah, we learn *inter alia* that she is 'the wife of Lappidoth' (4:4).[43] *lappîd* is a masculine noun meaning 'torch; lamp; lightning flash' that appears several times

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39   *Hebrew Syntax*, 3rd edn, Edinburgh: Clark, 1901, p. 16; see also *Gesenius*, p. 392.

40   André Caquot, 'La divinité solaire ougaritique', *Syria* 36, Fasc. 1/2 (1959), 90–101 (90).

41   Ibid., pp. 94–95.

42   In *Samson Agonistes* (l. 410), Milton has Samson rue his 'foul effeminacy'. Niditch interprets the Philistines' shaving, enslaving and public humiliation of Samson as symbolizing castration or womanization ('Samson', p. 617).

43   The Codex Vaticanus understands Lappidoth as a toponym, viz. '[Deborah was] a woman from Lappidoth' (Niditch, *Judges*, p. 62). This is a rare interpretation of the passage, not supported by the Old Latin version, the Vulgate, or the Jewish authorities (Kraus, *Bírák*, pp. 37–39). Straining the Hebrew text, Niditch translates the phrase as 'a woman of fire was she' (op. cit., p. 60; Bal [*Murder*, p. 57] has 'woman of flames', compare Gunn, *Judges*, p. 63). Sasson claims that the word shows Deborah to be a pyromancer, a diviner of flames ('Breeder', p. 342). That such a form of divination is not found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible undermines the claim. Note, on this point more generally, William Hallo's

in Judges, often in the plural. It invariably takes the regular masculine plural suffix –*îm* (7:16, 20; 15:4–5),[44] except, that is, in the name of Deborah's husband. Here, uniquely in the biblical Hebrew corpus, this noun is found with the feminine plural ending –*ôth*.[45] Parpola's remarks on the Gilgamesh epic are pertinent: 'Very few individuals who are mentioned by name appear in the epic, and many of these names, written in an unusual way, involved hidden meanings to be discovered through meditation and exegetical analysis'.[46] Lappidoth's name is indeed enigmatic, the purpose of which we will consider in the next chapter when we examine the role of Deborah in Judges. Suffice it for now to observe that this bright spark is eclipsed, to the point of invisibility, by his luminous wife.[47]

The mirror-image of the gender-bending inherent in Lappidoth's name occurs in that of the woman whom Deborah praises. The word Jael, *yāʿēl*, a name found also in a thirteenth-century Ugaritic text,[48] is indisputably a masculine noun. It is the normal term for 'ibex, mountain goat'.[49] She is in fact one of only four women named in Judges. This select group comprises two apparent Israelites, Achsah and Deborah, who are linked to reticent men – Othniel and Baraq respectively – and two apparent foreigners, Jael and Delilah,[50] who both

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comments in his 'Akkadian Apocalypses', *Israel Exploration Journal* 16 (1966), pp. 231–42 (231–32). Besides, the explanation does not deal with the gender form of *lappidôth*.

44   See *BDB*, p. 542, and Soggin, *Judges*, p. 64.

45   The difficulty this form raises for exegetes is illustrated by Boling (*Judges*, p. 95), Block (*Judges*, p. 192) and Webb (*Integrated*, p. 167) who judge it an abstract plural, though it fits poorly with the standard examples of this feature (see *Gesenius*, pp. 397–98). Moore remarks that in the Hebrew Bible men's names with feminine suffixes are not rare, though he cites only Naboth in support (*Judges*, p. 114).

46   'Niṣir', p. 5.

47   The Midrash and a number of commentators subsequently have suggested that Lappidoth and Baraq, whose name means 'lightning', are identical (see Kraus, *Bírák*, p. 38; Gunn, *Judges*, p. 55). Burney rightly considers this 'a precarious suggestion' (*Judges*, p. 85). That the terms from which their names are derived have a close semantic connection, however, is illustrated by their juxtaposition in Ezek. 1:13 – 'the appearance of lamps (*lappidîm*) [. . .] and out of the fire went forth lightning (*bārāq*)' – and Nah. 2:4 (*HB* 2:5): 'Their appearance is as *lappîdîm*, and like lightning (*bᵊrāqîm*) they will run'.

48   Hess, 'Name', p. 40.

49   *BhH* 2, p. 792; S.R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 160. Kraus, *Bírák*, p. 44. Biblical Hebrew possesses a feminine counterpart, *yaʿᵃlāh*, used figuratively of a wife: Prov. 5:19.

50   The ethnic identities of Jael and Delilah are not given. There is only a strong presumption that they are a Kenite and a Philistine respectively (Burney, *Judges*, p. 377; Klein, *Triumph*, p. 227). The ethnic identity of Achsah is not straightforward either, but for other reasons. She is a Calebite: on the one hand, staunchly of the tribe of Judah, on the other,

lure men to their deaths through sleep.[51] Jael gives Sisera milk and tucks him in. The potent phrase 'between her feet/legs he bowed, he fell, he lay' (5:27)[52] has clear birthing, as well as sexual, connotations.[53] Delilah makes Samson sleep 'between her knees' prior to his fateful shearing (16:19 [*LXX*]).[54] Both women abuse the heads of their victims.[55] Delilah is presented as a socially and geographically liminal figure, without husband, father or family, and living in the Vale of Sorek, the marches between the Philistines and Israelites.[56] Jael likewise is liminal. She belongs to a minority ethnic group, the Kenites, attached to Judah,[57] but from whom she and her husband have separated, moving far to the north, where they have formed an alliance with Israel's foe, Jabin. She dwells in a tent, apparently alone, close to a battleground between Israel and its enemies.[58] As Webb observes, the artful conjunction of Jael and Delilah is

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her paternal grandfather is a Kenizzite (Num. 14:24). We can detect in their ethnicity, then, a 3+1 pattern, with Deborah as the only unquestionable Israelite among them. The 3+1 pattern articulates further with this quartet of named women: Achsah, Deborah and Jael are married; Delilah is not; the gender status of Achsah, Deborah and Delilah seems clear; in Jael it is suspect.

51   The kind of sleep that Sisera experiences is precisely that which God gave to Adam when he created the woman from his rib (*tardēmāh*) (Gen. 2:21).

52   No less powerful is the taut prose version of this event given in 4:21b which likewise uses a verb-triplet: 'And he fell fast asleep, and he was exhausted, and he died'. For the association of sleep with death in classical literature beginning with *Gilgamesh*, see Alexander Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels*, 2nd edn, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1949, p. 9; Tigay, *Gilgamesh*, p. 5; JoAnn Scurlock, 'Ghosts in the Ancient Near East', *Hebrew Union College Annual* 68 (1997), pp. 77–96 (81).

53   Compare Deut. 28:57: 'and her afterbirth which issues from between her legs' – here the identical expression is used (*mib-*)*bên raglêhā*. See Bal, *Murder*, p. 106. On the sexual nuance in the story, see chapter 1.

54   To provide an idea of the scale of the travesty committed by Samson, his hair was polled on/between the knees of his treacherous lover, while the law of the Nazirite vow requires that 'the Nazirite will shave the head of his separation at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation' (Num. 6:12). Samson's despising of his birth-right recalls one of the other characters in the Hebrew Bible renowned for his hair: Esau (Gen. 25:29–34). The connection between the two men's stories is not exhausted with this. The loss of blessing from both involved deception by a trusted woman, hair and blindness (Gen. 27).

55   For the idea of 'head' *rō'š* representing authority over, see Deut. 1:13–15, as well as Judg. 11:8–9. Typical of the picture Judges paints of life spinning increasingly out of control, in the first case it is the enemy of Israel, in the second its champion, who is destroyed.

56   Klein, *Triumph*, p. 119; Burney, *Judges*, pp. 340–41; Webb, *Judges*, p. 398.

57   Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, p. 339.

58   The location of Jael's tent in 'the plain of Zaanaim, which is by Kedesh' (4:11) has generated much scholarly debate resulting in different candidates (see Butler, *Judges*, pp. 100–103;

reflected too in the play of language: 'Delilah's fastening (*tqʻ*) Samson's hair with a pin (*ytr*) (16.14) recalls Jael's striking (*tqʻ*) the tent-peg (*ytr*) into Sisera's temple (4.21)'.[59] In fact, in the Septuagint, the correlation is even stronger since Delilah drives the pin through Samson's hair into the wall just as Jael nails the peg through Sisera's head into the ground. Similarly, the verb *ṣānaḥ* ('to descend') provides a lexical connection between Jael and Achsah, the only two individuals in the Bible with whom it is found (1:14; 4:21; Josh. 15:18.).[60]

On the basis of this description, there would appear to be incongruity between the protagonist's maternal/seductive, if murderous, conduct[61] and the masculine gender of her name. In Jael, however, the writer has presented with great consistency a sexually[62] and morally ambiguous figure. Her androgyny finds expression in her murder weapons of choice: a '*workman's* hammer' in her right hand, a tent peg, a symbol of domestic security (or, perhaps, of the penis) in the left (5:26).[63] Although the undomesticated mountain goat has a husband, he is not in evidence despite a battle raging near his wife's tent, and his name, Heber, is as shadowy as his character. It means 'company, association'.[64] He whose name suggests companionship is conspicuous by his absence. Most striking of all, Jael is addressed by Sisera first decorously with the appropriate feminine form of the imperative when he asks for water,

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Boling's proposal that places it north-west of Hazor is the least credible [*Judges*, pp. 92, 100]). What is clear is that it was located within running distance of the battlefield. See Chapter 6 below.

59 *Integrated*, p. 164.

60 Boling, *Judges*, p. 98.

61 Exum, 'Whose Interests', pp. 71–72.

62 Ken Stone, 'Gender Criticism', in Yee (ed.), *Judges*, pp. 183–201 (195–96).

63 Compare Kugel, *Biblical Poetry*, p. 43, n. 119. Jael's murder weapon raises the subject of unusual killing implements featured in Judges. They become increasingly unorthodox as the book progresses: Ehud's homemade two-edged sword (made of metal), Shamgar's ox-goad (made of wood and iron – see *Illustrated World of the Bible Library*, ed. by B. Mazar et al., vol. 2, "The Former Prophets", New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960, p. 79), Jael's tent peg (and hammer) (metal or wood; Burney [*Judges*, p. 113] surmises that both were of wood), and Samson's jawbone of an ass. In a 3+1 pattern, one of them, the Nazirite Samson's, is ritually defiling.

64 It also means 'a spell' cast possibly by tying magic knots, a form of witchcraft particularly associated with Mesopotamia (*BDB*, p. 288 – see Deut. 18:11; Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 225). For the use of magic knots in Babylonian and Assyrian anti-witchcraft ritual, see Tablet IV of *Maqlû* in *Die assyrische Beschwörungssammlung Maqlû*, ed. by Gerhard Meier, AfO Beiheft 2, Berlin, 1937, and S.H. Hooke, *Babylonian and Assyrian Religion*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1953, p. 115.

and then abruptly with a masculine form when he instructs her to guard the entrance to the tent (4:19–20).[65]

Jael is, therefore, a character who faces two ways. She is the slayer of Israel's enemy (who, it should not be forgotten, was her husband's ally), and yet executes her saving act by violating Israel's law: 'The Bible classes together defilement of corpses, idolatry and all lies, deceits, false witness and bloodshed. They are all taboos of the Lord. When the taboos are observed, the people are pure, the land is pure, they are separated to the Lord in peace and prosperity'.[66] With the exception of idolatry, Jael is shown to transgress each of these taboos.[67] As her name advertises, she does not recognize boundaries. Such a person ultimately represents a threat to Israel's mission and therefore its future.

Her role in the architecture of the book is important. Not only does she reinforce the link, noted in chapter 1, between the Deborah and the Samson sections, she symbolizes a profound change in the mood and direction of the composition. From this point the essential ambiguity of the Jael-type takes over from the righteous certainty of the Deborah-type in the principal characters, and the use of *Entstellung* intensifies,[68] marking the growing ambivalence of Yahweh's dealings with Israel. All the major figures that follow her are conspicuous by their unwillingness or inability to respect boundaries of acceptable conduct and religious integrity. The uncontrolled, unpredictable mountain goat replaces the sweetness-giving bee, the purity of the delivering judge-prophetess who speaks the words of Yahweh morphs into a character who defies his laws, uses lies as a weapon, is probably not an Israelite, has a dubious marriage, and whose female gender is blurred. Jael is, in short, 'androgynous, marginal, ambiguous'.[69] It is evident that she, the duplicitous assassin, the faux-mother, is actually the distorted mirror-image of Deborah, 'a mother in Israel'. Deborah is found at the centre of Israel in social status and geographical location (4:4–5), Jael lives at its margins.[70] Deborah's husband's name carries a feminine ending; Jael's is masculine; both husbands are inexplicably absent although their wives are in perilous situations, and

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65   Compare Murray, 'Narrative Structure', p. 183, n. 49, and Burney, *Judges*, p. 91.

66   Douglas, *Wilderness*, p. 152.

67   Some rabbinical commentators navigate this dilemma by inferring that Sisera had raped Jael (Kraus, *Bírák*, p. 48; Gunn, *Judges*, p. 56).

68   As we shall see, 5:31 is the great turning point in the rhetorical architecture of the series of major judges.

69   From Rivkah Harris's description of the goddess Ishtar ('Inanna-Ishtar as Paradox and a Coincidence of Opposites', *History of Religions* 30 [1991], pp. 261–78 [265]).

70   Note Deborah's blessing upon her: 'Blessed shall she be among women *in the tent*' (5:24).

the names of both men are manifestly ill-suited to their hollow roles in the narrative. Fokkelman notes that 'Judges 4 is an ingenious construction about two men from opposing camps, who both cut a foolish figure with two strong women. The position of heroine falls to Deborah and Jael. They complement each other, as Deborah figures only in the first half, Jael only in the second'.[71] In fact, in her Song, Deborah is structurally bounded by references to Jael. The wife of Heber is present not only at the end of the account, but at the beginning also, where the reference to her introduces the description of the dire condition of Israel before 'I, Deborah, arose': 'in the days of Jael, the highways were unoccupied' (5:6–7).[72] Just as Deborah is enclosed by Jael in her Song's structure, so Jael's identity is bound within Deborah's *ḥîdāh* as its secret. When Deborah prophesies to Baraq that 'Yahweh will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman' (4:9), like the reader, Baraq must have assumed that the woman would be Deborah. If so, he was wrong. It is because of the refusal of Baraq, Yahweh's chosen hero, to obey unconditionally the divine command as delivered by the prophetess that Jael becomes the killer of Sisera. Baraq's equivocation opened the door of Israel's Settlement story to the ambiguous individuals who will thereafter occupy the spotlight of the book. But was it Jael or Deborah who was the true deliverer of Israel from the Canaanite oppression? 'One womb, two wombs for the head of a man',[73] the graphic phrase of the only *bona fide* mother in the cycle, Sisera's, supplies the answer: Deborah and Jael are in a sense the right and left hands, wholly interconnected but clearly distinct, that effect his downfall.[74]

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71   *Reading*, p. 86.

72   This mention of Jael at the beginning of the Song of Deborah has caused difficulties for the commentaries. Some conclude that whoever this person was, 'he' was not Sisera's murderer (Soggin, *Judges*, p. 85; Herzberg, *Bücher*, p. 178; Burney, *Judges*, p. 114; compare Bal, *Murder*, p. 32). Moore, while stating that this Jael 'can be no other than the heroine celebrated in v. 24ff.; not an otherwise unknown judge of the same name' is perplexed by how 'the period before the rise of Deborah can be called the days of Jael when the deed that made her famous was only the last act in the deliverance which Deborah had already achieved' (*Judges*, pp. 142–43). Cross, too, considers the Jael at the beginning of the Song the wife of Heber but, following Mazar, fancifully attributes to her and her husband a priestly function (*Canaanite Myth*, p. 201).

73   A literal translation of 5:30. The same word 'womb'/*rḥm*, used in a like context to mean women as sexual spoils, is found in the Moabite inscription of Mesha‘ (l. 17) dating from the ninth century BC (Driver, *Samuel*, pp. lxxxv–lxxxvi; Gray, *Joshua, Judges*, p. 293).

74   The Deborah/Jael combination recalls the Indian goddess, Kali: 'The temple [erected to the Cosmic Mother] displayed the divinity in her two aspects simultaneously, the terrible and the benign. Her four arms exhibited the symbols of her universal power: the upper

From two women in a sense morphing into one,[75] we are taken, in the next cycle, to the first of two men with two names: Gideon-Jerubbaal. As his story unfolds, this dual naming can be seen increasingly to reflect the ambiguity of the character, to the point where some commentators conclude that the two names refer to two unrelated individuals from different traditions who have been spliced in the Deuteronomistic editing process.[76] The development in the composition from the clarity represented by Deborah to the ambivalence of Jael is amplified considerably in the portrayal of the hero from Manasseh. His two names, and his dual legacies prefigured by them, throw light on the unfolding plot of Judges. Gideon means 'hacker, one who cuts off/down', a name derived from the verb *gādaʿ*. On name grounds, he seemed well suited to undertake his first divine mission: demolishing his father's altar to Baʿal and chopping down its associated Asherah pole.[77] Equally appropriate, given his name, is the battle cry of his troops: 'The sword of Yahweh, and of Gideon!'. Apart from its association with Gideon's name, the verb *gādaʿ* is attested only once in Judges, in 21:6. Ominously, it is found there in Israel's lament over the destruction of the tribe of Benjamin: 'There is one tribe cut off from Israel this day'. The bloody disintegration of Israelite tribal unity that culminates in the near annihilation of Benjamin has its roots in Gideon's conduct while leader of the tribes. He was the first Israelite to shed Israelite blood, in his vengeful slaughter of the men of Penuel and scourging of the leaders of Succoth. Although their response to his request for assistance was itself curmudgeonly, betraying their lack of sympathy with Yahweh's mission, his retaliation was disproportionate (8:13–17).[78] Gideon, who hacked down the altar of Baʿal in Ophrah – a cult centre of no more than local significance – at the beginning of his mission, ends it by establishing an idolatrous ephod in Ophrah which enjoys nationwide attraction: 'all Israel went there whoring after it' (8:27). His attack on Baʿal led to his receiving the sobriquet Jerubbaal, translated in the text as 'let Baʿal contend'. Notwithstanding, one might by now suspect that, in Judges, even a term that is provided with a gloss might signify something other

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left arm brandishing a bloody sabre, the lower gripping by the hair a severed human head; the upper right was lifted in the "fear not" gesture, the lower extended in the bestowal of boons [...] She was Cosmic Power, the totality of the universe, the harmonization of all the pairs of opposites, combining wonderfully the terror of absolute destruction with an impersonal yet motherly reassurance' (Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2nd edn, 1968, p. 115).

75   Exum, 'Whose Interests', p. 72.

76   Noth, *Deuteronomistic History*, p. 119; Boling, *Judges*, p. 170.

77   Note the use of the verb *gdʿ* in 2 Chr. (14:3 [HB 14:2]; 31:1) to describe cutting down Asherah poles.

78   Webb, *Judges*, pp. 255–61.

than what is stated. Such a suspicion is justified and adds to the ambiguity surrounding its recipient: it could equally well be translated 'Ba'al *will* contend'.[79] Is the bestowal of this cognomen therefore a confident challenge to an impotent Ba'al, or an assertion that the Canaanite god will counter-attack through the bearer of the name?

The verb *rîb*, 'to strive, contend', which is the first element in the compound 'Jerubbaal', possesses the nuance 'to conduct a case at law', e.g., 'Yahweh took his stand to plead [*rîb*], and is standing to judge [*dîn*] the peoples' (Isa. 3:13). Such an interpretation of the meaning of *rîb* in the present context, as proposed by Niditch,[80] comports well with ancient Near Eastern notions of the divine environment, as revealed in Ugaritic and Mesopotamian texts.[81] In such a scenario, Ba'al would seek satisfaction at a hearing before the other gods against those who defiled his cultus. If this is an accurate reading of the flavour of *rîb* here, it is one of the many ironies of Judges that, in the sole reference to a (quasi-)legal procedure in the work, the case concerns a hero – Gideon – whom the writer does not associate with the root *špṭ*.

However it was achieved, we discover that Ba'al did indeed contend successfully: 'as soon as Gideon was dead the sons of Israel turned again, and went whoring after Ba'alim, and made Ba'al-berith their god' (8:32–33).[82] The plural form, Ba'alim, is applied loosely to suggest adherence to local manifestations of the Ba'al cult.[83] From among them, the Israelites selected one, 'Ba'al of the Covenant' (Ba'al-berith), as the object of the national cultus, thus, in another case of chiasmus, breaking the covenant of Yahweh through Ba'al of the Covenant. Judges 9:4 and 9:46 suggest that Shechem was the centre of the worship of Ba'al-berith/'Ēl-berith.[84] It is symptomatic of Jerubbaal's legacy that

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79   Ibid., pp. 236–37; Block, *Judges*, pp. 270–71.

80   *Judges*, p. 91.

81   'In much of the Standard Babylonian Akkadian and late Sumerian prayer and incantation tradition, experiences originally unrelated to law or the law court are perceived through, moulded by and integrated into a view of reality generalized from the legal sphere and are expressed in images drawn from that sphere [...]. Where the gods were asked originally only for magical assistance, the entreaty now becomes a lawsuit and the gods become judges' (I. Tzvi Abusch, *Babylonian Witchcraft Literature*, Atlanta GA: Scholars Press, 1987, pp. 127–28).

82   Compare Leon J. Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, rev. and enlarged edn, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1986, p. 182.

83   C.F. Burney, *Notes on the Hebrew Text of the Books of Kings*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1903, p. 222.

84   Citing a Hurrian hymn to 'Ēl, Cross notes the epithets *'Ēl bᵊrīt* and *'Ēl dān*: God of the Covenant, and 'Ēl the Judge (*Canaanite Myth*, p. 39).

the city where Joshua took Israel for covenant ceremonies (Josh. 8:30–34; 24)[85] and whose connections with Yahweh's dealings with Israel extend back to Abraham and Jacob who both worshipped him there, should become the site of Baʿal's restoration/retaliation. Through the consequences of Jerubbaal's sin, Baʿal-worship was not only reinforced in Israel, it replaced Yahwism even at one of its most significant sites.[86]

In Gideon-Jerubbaal's two names, then, we are given early indications not so much of two irreconcilable personalities active in one individual, 'the very "mixed" character he has turned out to be',[87] but of what proved to be the two most momentous long-term repercussions of his leadership of Israel: the hacking apart of the people of Israel into warring factions, and the upsurge of idolatrous cults, whether home-grown or imported, among them.

The bestowal of two names on the hero of this cycle alerts us to another characteristic of the Gideon/Abimelech section: its use of sets of pairs. Younger notes this feature: 'This "propensity for pairs" may help to explain the preponderance of what has been dubbed "doublets" in the Gideon cycle. [...] Gideon faces the pairs of Oreb and Zeeb (killed together on the west side of the Jordan) and Zebah and Zalmunna (killed together on the east side of the Jordan). Other pairs or doublets include: two altar and offering scenes, two names for the hero [...], two different sizes of military force, two battles with surprise attacks, two tests of God by fleece and dew, two attacks on a town on which severe reprisals are executed, and so on. The Gideon/Abimelech cycle is also conveyed in two climaxes (although non-parallel): the account of Gideon (6:1–8:32) and the account of Abimelech (8:33–9:57)'.[88] Younger argues that the 'propensity for pairs' is an idiosyncrasy of the book's central sections, viz., the Deborah and Gideon/Abimelech sections. He provides no explanation for it.[89] In fact, this feature is one of the book's most characteristic traits throughout,[90] and this is manifest from the outset. The composition commences by recounting how two tribes, Judah and Simeon (not one, as instructed by Yahweh), embark on a military campaign, against a pair of enemies, the Canaanites and

85   Butler, *Judges*, p. 196.

86   Burney's contention (*Judges*, p. 266) that, because Shechem was a Canaanite city in peaceful coexistence with Israel, 8:33–35 does not indicate that Israelites defected to Baʿal is not supported by the text.

87   Webb, *Judges*, p. 267.

88   *Judges/Ruth*, pp. 39–40.

89   Rust (*Judges*, p. 12), highlighting the doubling in the Gideon section, attributes it to the use of two sources melded together by the Deuteronomists. He mistakenly considers Oreb and Zeeb to be kings of Midian.

90   Amit, *Judges*, pp. 54–55.

the Perizzites.[91] The first detail given about the campaign concerns the paired items of hands and feet or, more precisely, thumbs and big toes, whose owners are also in a binary relationship: Adoni-bezek and the seventy kings whom he had vanquished (1:1–7). The book ends, as we have noted, by repeating a phrase that occurred once before, which also refers to paired body parts: 'every man did what was right in his own eyes' (17:6; 21:25). Moreover, this phrase forms an inclusio around the so-called coda section of the work, chapters 17–21, which subdivides into two parts, chapters 17–18 and 19–21. That binary sets carry immense meaning for Judges, therefore, cannot be doubted. What that meaning is, I shall discuss below.

Younger's mention of other pairs of names found in the Gideon section, those of the Midianites Oreb and Zeeb,[92] and Zebah and Zalmunna,[93] does not, however, exhaust significant names given in the section. One of the preoccupations

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91   The text gives no support to the claim that Simeon was added as an afterthought (Hackett, 'Judges', p. 161). The pairing is integral to the meaning of the section and the work overall.

92   The deployment of the names Oreb and Zeeb may be evidence that the writer of Judges was proficient in Assyrian. In Hebrew they denote 'raven' and 'wolf' respectively. The commentaries not unreasonably claim that they probably reflect clan totems (e.g., Burney, *Judges*, pp. 225–26; less persuasive is Block's explanation that 'they contribute to the image of the enemy's character and conduct in war' [*Judges*, p. 284]). Be that as it may, the conjunction of wolf and raven is not a natural one. In Assyrian, however, the cognate forms *āribu* and *zību* do constitute an obvious pair, meaning 'raven, crow' and 'vulture'. They are used together in omen texts, e.g., 'if (when the exorcist is on the way to a patient's house) a vulture passes to his right' (between a section on ominous falcons and one on ravens) (*CAD* Z, 1961, p. 106). Significantly in the present context, *zību* is 'the bird of Nabû', the god of writing and wisdom (Foster, 'Wisdom', p. 348), and a deity especially favoured by the Neo-Assyrian kings Esarhaddon (Galo W. Vera Chamaza, *Die Omnipotenz Aššurs*, Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2002, pp. 207–10) and Assurbanipal (Johanna Tudeau, 'Nabu (god)', *AMGG* [http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/amgg/listofdeities/nabu/ accessed 21 December 2014]). If this supposition is correct, contemporary Hebrew-Assyrian bilingual readers of Judges doubtless enjoyed the cross-cultural pun and ominous allusion. In fact, the bilingual wordplay on Oreb and Zeeb may extend yet further: in Akkadian *erēbu* and *ezēbu* mean 'to go/come in' and 'to leave, abandon' respectively, and would succinctly encapsulate the Isaianic and Judges prophetic understanding of the inevitable fate of the Assyrian incomers in the region, to which the story of the eponymous Midianite invaders provides graphic illustration. Akkadian texts demonstrate that the similarity between *aribu* and the root *erēbu* provided a fertile resource for punning in the language (Oppenheim, *Dreams*, p. 272; Finkel, Reade, 'Assyrian Hieroglyphics', p. 247). Hays posits that a knowledge of Akkadian underlay First Isaiah (Christopher B. Hays, *Death in the Iron Age II and in First Isaiah*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011, p. 25).

93   In Phinehas's battle with the Midianites, there were five kings (Num. 31:8). By the time of the conflict with Gideon, they have apparently been reduced to two tribes.

of Judges is kingship and, in the Israelite context, who has a legitimate claim to be king. Not only is the fact that there was no king in Israel stressed on four occasions but, in contrast to Israel's oppressors, all of whom with the exception of the Philistines are led by kings, during the period described in the work Israel is not ruled by a hereditary monarchy. How close it came to instituting a monarchy, however, is once again a subject concerning which the writer chooses to disorientate the reader, and the point where he does so is in the Gideon/Abimelech cycle. Having executed the Midianite kings, and taken the ornaments that were on their camels' necks, Gideon is invited by the jubilant Israelites, in a 3+1 figure, to 'rule over us, you, and your son, and your son's son also'. Gideon offers the correct response for a Yahwist: 'I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you; Yahweh shall rule over you' (8:23).[94]

If the story ended here, Gideon's posthumous reputation which, as the account develops, becomes a subject highlighted in its own right, would be more positive and, despite his two names, relatively unambiguous. However, immediately the writer disturbs this impression by adding that Gideon exploits his popularity to make an unusual request: 'Give me, each one of you, the ear-rings of your prey'. The weight of gold in this haul is 1700 shekels, and with it Gideon produces the idolatrous ephod.[95] The parallel with Aaron's manufacture of Israel's first collective idol is direct: '"Make us gods which shall go before us" [...] and Aaron said to them "Break off the golden earrings which are in the ears of your wives [...] and bring them to me" [...] and [he] made it a molten calf' (Exod. 32:1–6).[96] Although this implies that Gideon may have arrogated to himself the role of national priest, it is not immediately evident that his act is connected with kingship. That is not until one recalls that the first ruler of the northern kingdom, Jeroboam, who also had the opportunity to strengthen his people's allegiance to Yahweh, chose to make golden calves in Bethel and

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94   A parallel statement is made by Jephthah regarding Yahweh as judge: 'May Yahweh the Judge judge this day' (11:27), thus juxtaposing across the book's centre point another fundamental doublet in the book: judgeship and kingship. What is at issue in both statements is Yahweh's role and status in Israel. This is, in fact, the only case of the noun *šōpēṭ* in the book, apart from in the introduction (Boling, *Judges*, p. 5). There, in 2:16–18, it refers to the judges as a group. In contrast to the meaning of the root *špṭ* applied to human referents in Judges, in its application to Yahweh it possesses the juridical signification that it carries elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.

95   Julius Bewer submits that it may have been an idol covered with god ('The Composition of Judges', *The American Journal of Semitic Languages* 39 [1913], pp. 261–83 [264]). If so, in the light of the report of gold-covered images given in Hooke, *Religion* (p. 102), and the amount of gold needed for them, Gideon's ephod would have been immense.

96   Herzberg, *Bücher*, p. 198.

Dan on the Aaronite model in the belief that by creating an idolatrous cult with himself at its centre, he would secure his dynasty (1 Kgs 12:26–30). To underscore the connection, the author of Judges introduces a name laden with meaning that adds to the gathering doubt surrounding Gideon's integrity and motive. The name is Abimelech, Gideon's son by his Shechemite concubine,[97] and the report of his birth follows on the heels of the account of the ephod (8:31). In contrast to the custom of maternal-naming, the text avers that this child was named by his father. Abimelech means 'my father is king'. To our eyes, this may appear more blatant a disclosure than it actually is. As we have seen, the writer's intention is generally not to provide semantic certainty, but rather to create ripples across the surface of meaning, distortions that provoke his readers to seek deeper significance in the text. The name is, in fact, a double entendre. In West-Semitic tradition, the term ʾab 'father' (or ʾaḥ 'brother') found in personal names refers to the divinity.[98] The act of giving the child a name that indicates a close personal connection with the deity – 'father' in this case – was intended to win the god's favour for the owner. Examples of the appellative use of ʾabî 'my father' are Abinoam, 'my father is delight', the name of Baraq's father, and Abiezer 'my father is help', the designation of the clan of Manassites to which Gideon's family belonged. Abimelech, in his speech to the Shechemites, indicates that his father's legitimate sons had assumed, or at least intended to assume, the kingship of Israel (9:2). If Gideon's goal was to establish a ruling dynasty, however, ironically it was Abimelech who, through his bloody bid for the throne, not only destroyed the plan, but debased his father's name and posterity.

Before dealing with the other man with two names, Micaiah-Micah, it is worth taking account of how the meanings of the names of Israel's leaders progress through the chapters of Judges. In a book where names frequently impart information about the individual or his/her role in the plot, the semiotics of its heroes' names provide clues for interpreting the narrative. The work begins with mention of Joshua (1:1; 2:7–10). In Numbers 13:16, Moses gave him this cognomen in place of his original name, Hosea, at the point where he sends him with the other eleven men to reconnoitre the promised land. The difference in meaning between the names is significant. Hosea means 'salvation, deliverance'; Joshua is a theophoric name based on the same verb root: 'Yahweh is salvation'.[99] Thus, Joshua is a Yahwistic appellation. Between the

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97   On the difficulty in assigning a precise signification to *pîlegeš*, frequently translated 'concubine', see Stone, 'Gender', p. 193.

98   Moore, *Judges*, p. 235.

99   *BDB*, pp. 221, 448.

death of Joshua and the emergence of the next national leader, Othniel, the Israelites 'served Ba'alim and forsook the God of their fathers' (2:11–12). This act precipitated the descending spiral of apostasy, oppression and appealing to Yahweh that, as I have already suggested, provides the thematic backbone for the cycle of the major judges. By the time Othniel judges the Israelites there is, then, already a distance in their relationship with Yahweh and this is signalled in the name of this leader. It does not carry the sacred Yahweh-element, but the less committal *ʾēl* 'god' affix, that is found equally in names borne by surrounding peoples.[100]

The meaning of the name of the next national leader, Ehud, is unclear. It may denote 'majesty' and is arguably theophoric.[101] Butler suggests 'where is the power/glory?'.[102] As Israel's relations with Yahweh deteriorate in its pursuit of other gods, the names of the heroes presented in Judges follow a concomitant course: from an animal name, Deborah, the bee that dies in autumn, to names based on verbs – Gideon, Jerubbaal with its ambiguous relationship to a Canaanite deity, and Jephthah, 'he/it will open' – to the sun-like Danite, Samson. After Deborah, all the names may refer in some degree to proscribed divinities.

This movement in the names is precisely what one would expect in the circumstances of the growing rupture between Israel and Yahweh.[103] But the author yet again surprises. The next name he introduces is theophoric, indeed classically Yahwistic: Micaiah, with its hypocoristic Micah, 'who is like Yahweh?'.[104] One explanation for why the writer chooses here to highlight a

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100   This element is encountered, for instance, in some Midianite names (Eldaah [Gen. 25:4]) and also in Phoenician names (Elhanan), although among the Phoenicians and Canaanites generally there was a preference for *ba'al* rather than *ʾēl* as the theophoric affix, as in Jerubbaal. Zadok interprets 'otnî-el as 'God/ʾĒl is my strength'. This name appears to have been current in the Neo-Assyrian period, as it is found in a contemporary document in the Assyrian form Ḫu-ut-ni-ìl, which, according to Zadok, represents a borrowing from West-Semitic (*Anthroponymy*, p. 54). Compare *PNA*, p. 483.

101   Zadok, *Anthroponymy*, p. 16. Zadok estimates that forty per cent of the Israelite names of the Settlement period may have been theophoric.

102   *Judges*, p. 69.

103   This is not to suggest, however, that Yahwistic names disappeared in Israel after Joshua, simply that the names of the Israel's leaders symbolically chart the decline in the nation's relationship with Yahweh. The degree of syncretism that occurred in practice is illustrated in Joash ('Yahweh is strong'), Gideon's father, who was a priest of Ba'al.

104   The Judges character and the eighth-century-BC literary prophet are both referred to using the name's full form, Micaiah, and its hypocoristic variant, Micah (Zadok, *Anthroponymy*, p. 9).

Yahwistic name is that this portion of Judges refers to an earlier period. The coda sections are plainly not fixed in time, nor do they observe chronological sequencing in the way witnessed in the major part of the work that covers the accounts of the judges. Of all the tribes, the Danites were the least successful in securing their allotted territory in the wake of Joshua's death. Consequently, a pressing incentive existed for them to seek land elsewhere early in the era described in Judges (1:34). Furthermore, the other named individual introduced in the Micah episode also possesses a Yahwistic name. Displaying a keen sense of timing as well as typical understatement, the writer withholds the identity of the young Levite from Bethehem-judah until the penultimate verse of the Micah section.[105] He is none other than Jonathan, son of Gershom, son of Moses (18:30).[106] It is impossible that Moses' grandson would still be alive at the time of Samson's death, let alone a 'young man'. Indeed, the Micah story serves as a clear-cut illustration of what transpired in Israel's cultic life immediately after the generation of Joshua and Gershom died out: 'There arose another generation after them which did not know Yahweh nor the works which he had done for Israel' (2:10). The question when the Danites' northern migration occurred has important implications for the meaning of the book as a whole and will be discussed in the next chapter. Suffice it for now to state that, regardless, the freight of irony borne by the name Micaiah-Micah in the composition is immense. Both the giver of the name, Micah's nameless mother, its bearer, and the grandson of Moses are shown to have a fatally flawed understanding of Yahwism as prescribed by Moses. Micah's mother, who blesses her thieving son using the name of Yahweh, offers silver for the production of idols (though she reneges on the amount pledged), and Micah believes that, in possessing the idols in his 'house of gods' and an authentic Levite as his domestic priest, Yahweh will bless him. It is revealing that it is not Jonathan's illustrious forebear that impresses Micah, simply his tribal credentials.[107] Jonathan, a name meaning 'given by Yahweh', is depicted as an unprincipled, self-seeking drifter

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105   Robert O'Connell (*Rhetoric*, pp. 6–7) observes that this withholding of information is a rhetorical tool aimed at compelling the reader to reassess what has gone before in the light of the new information. The withholding of a character's identity until later in their tale is a device found in *Gilgamesh* (A.R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic* I, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 498).

106   Some HB manuscripts and LXX B give his grandfather's name as Manasseh. For the argument in favour of Moses, the reading accepted by Gesenius (p. 31), see *BhH* 2, p. 553; Herzberg, *Bücher*, p. 243; Kraus, *Bírák*, p. 79; compare *Barhebraeus' Scholia on the Old Testament Part I*, ed. by Martin Sprengling and William Creighton Graham, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931, p. 297.

107   Rowley, *Worship*, pp. 61–63.

with none of his grandfather's sanctity or numinosity. He does, nevertheless, display a talent for vacuous utterance which, one senses, had surely to be a marketable skill in the spiritually hollow environment of Judges. Responding to the Danite spies' request for oracular guidance 'whether the way in which we shall go will be prosperous', he replies: 'Go in peace: the way in which you go is before Yahweh' (18:5–6).[108] And, as perhaps the most potent message in Judges about the corruption of the Mosaic legacy in Israel after Joshua's death, we learn that Moses' descendants served the idolatrous cult at Dan from its foundation until they were taken away in the Assyrian captivity (18:30).

3

The reference to Moses in the Micah episode leads to the next example of a word subjected to semantic syncretism. The word is *ṭôb*, a very common and important lexeme in the Hebrew Bible where it spans a similarly broad semantic range as its English counterpart, denoting ethical good as opposed to evil, good as beautiful, prosperous, desirable, and excellent.[109] It is the adjective repeatedly employed by Moses in Deuteronomy to describe the promised land, 'a good land'. In fact, it first occurs in this context in Moses' initial encounter with Yahweh, at the burning bush, at the point when the phrase 'a land flowing with milk and honey' is also first used: 'I am come down [...] to bring them up [...] to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey' (Exod. 3:8).[110] It is also the term that describes the perfection of God's creation: 'And God saw that it was good' (Gen. 1:4–31).

One is at once alerted to the possibility that in Judges such a quintessentially positive word may offer an example of semantic boundaries on the move when its distribution in the book is analysed. It is absent from the first seven chapters, and then from Judges 8, immediately after Gideon crosses into Transjordan (7:25–8:3),[111] it occurs frequently and is found in each of the

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108   Compare Moore, *Judges*, p. 399; Bewer, 'Composition', p. 273.

109   *BDB*, pp. 373–75.

110   See also Deut. 3:25; 4:21–22; 6:18; 8:7, 10, et passim.

111   The exchange with the Ephraimites, which provides the first occurrence of *ṭôb* in Judges, takes place in Transjordan (Block, *Judges*, p. 284). Tellingly, it is found in an aphorism: 'Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim "more good" than the vintage of Abiezer?' (8:2). The verb formed from *ṭôb, yāṭab* 'to be good, well, pleasing', is likewise found only in the latter part of the book, in fact only in the coda sections, and always with a sense of irony or foreboding (17:13; 18:20; 19:6, 9, 22).

ensuing sections, including the two concluding tales. Webb cogently argues that Gideon's west-east crossing of the Jordan triggers a change in his behaviour and in the place of Yahweh in his actions:

> There is no indication of any involvement by Yahweh, and the holy war motifs [...] so prominent in the first movement are entirely lacking here (contrast 8.11–12 with 7.21–22). [...] From the moment he crossed the Jordan he has acted more and more like a king. [...] In crossing the Jordan he has already exceeded his own commission and begun to move towards the kind of rule which is now offered to him [...] Exodus motifs are less conspicuous in this second movement but are present nonetheless and serve to accentuate the changed perspective in which Gideon is viewed. Gideon and his followers are in the 'wilderness' and are 'faint'. [...] But no heavenly provision sustains them. The self-assertive and vindictive Gideon of this movement contrasts nicely with the meek Moses of the exodus traditions.[112]

In fact, Gideon's vengeful foray across the Jordan is a turning point, not only in his relationship with Yahweh, but in the mood of the book overall, exacerbating the deleterious change evident in Jael. From this juncture, Israel can be seen to have lost its moral compass, and the usage of *ṭôb* marks this. What triggers the change is not simply that Yahweh is no longer central to Gideon's agenda (or to that of anyone who follows him), but that for the first time in Judges, Israelite blood is shed unjustly, in Gideon's punishment of Succoth and Penuel, by fellow Israelites. The spilling of innocent blood in the land was held by Moses to be a particularly grave transgression against Yahweh and constituted a gross defilement of the land itself, and, by extension, an injury to the holiness of its people: 'you shall not pollute the land where you are going, for it is blood that pollutes the land, and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed in it except by the blood of him shed it. Do not defile the land therefore which you will inhabit, in the midst of which I dwell, for I am Yahweh who dwells in the midst of the sons of Israel' (Num. 35:33–34).[113] Elaborate provision was made in the law through the establishment of cities of refuge on both sides of the Jordan to prevent this sin being committed.[114] The exigency is

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112　*Integrated*, pp. 151–53.

113　See William Robertson Smith, *Lectures on Religion of the Semites*, 3rd edn, New York: Macmillan, 1927, p. 429.

114　Deut.19:1–13; also the rite of the heifer in Deut. 21:1–9. It was a sin particularly associated with King Manasseh (2 Kgs 21:16; 24:4).

plain: by defiling the land with innocent blood, Israel would render it unclean and therefore uninhabitable to Yahweh.[115] And, in the theology of Judges, the loss of God is connected inalienably with the loss of 'good' as a moral concept. What Gideon began in Succoth and Penuel at the periphery of Israel against victims who had provoked him, Abimelech exacerbated dramatically in the heartland of covenantal Israelite territory through the brutal assassination of Gideon's seventy legitimate sons, all of whom were innocent of wrongdoing.[116] This is followed by his destruction of Shechem,[117] Jephthah's sacrifice of his own child and slaughter of the Ephraimites, the rape and murder of the concubine at Gibeah, the near annihilation of the tribe of Benjamin, and the massacre of the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead. From chapter 8, blood-pollution becomes a major theme of the book for good reason. As a result of its perpetration, the land of Israel can no longer be a 'good land', nor a fit dwelling place for a holy God.

The deployment of *ṭôb* after the events in Transjordan exposes the moral disfigurement of Israel through the loss of any ethical dimension of the word's meaning. It describes Gideon's contribution to Israel which, as we have seen, is ironic. *ṭôb* is cited by Abimelech as the reason why the Shechemites should support him in his plan to murder his brothers and institute a monarchy. It is found in Jotham's parable in the fig tree's explanation for its refusal to reign over the other trees: 'should I forsake [...] my good fruit to go and wave about over you?'. The Israelites beseech Yahweh to do whatever 'seems good to you', but just 'deliver us this day'. Jephthah challenges the Ammonite king, 'are you "more good" than Balak?' (the king of Moab who hired Balaam against Israel). It is the argument the Timnite deploys to allay Samson's ire over the transfer of his wife to another man: 'is not her younger sister "more good" than she? Take her!' It defines the Philistines' spirits after singing their song celebrating victory over Samson and carousing at the festival of Dagon. In an ironic twist to Moses, Joshua and Caleb's use of *ṭôb* to describe the promised land, the Danite spies refer to Laish, the land which was not promised, as 'very good'. With echoes of Abimelech's comprehension of the word, they base their proposition to Jonathan to join them on his sense of self-interest: 'Is it "more good" for you to be priest to the house of one man, or [...] a tribe and a clan in Israel?'.

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115 'Uncleanness is shunned [...] because it is hateful to the god, and therefore not to be tolerated in his sanctuary, worshippers or land' (Robertson Smith, *Religion*, p. 446).

116 A point reinforced by the portrayal of Jether, the firstborn among them (8:20).

117 As Brettler states, the idea advanced by a number of commentators that Abimelech, in his massacre of the Shechemites, was killing non-Israelites is not implied by the text ('Literature', p. 406).

Not only did Moses not succeed in entering the 'good land', but his grandson, in response to the changed definition of 'good', chose to leave it and strike north with six hundred men 'bitter of soul'. Most tellingly of all, it is found in the offer of the old man to the baying mob of Gibeah: 'Here is my daughter, a virgin, and his concubine [...]. Rape them and do to them what seems good in your eyes' (8:35; 9:2, 11; 10:15; 11:25; 15:2; 16:25; 18:9, 19; 19:24). This, the word's final occurrence in the book, displays the complete corruption of its meaning: by now good and evil, beauty and vileness have been entirely distorted. Its use at Gibeah, then, represents the nadir of the lexeme's semantic corruption and parallels Israel's moral disfigurement. The fact that *ṭôb* appears no more suggests that this is the meaning associated with the word for the remainder of the work, a conclusion borne out by the nation condoning the slaughter and mass rape at Jabesh-gilead and the mass rape at Shiloh, the two episodes that conclude the work.[118]

There is a further context in which *ṭôb* appears in Judges, as a toponym, 'the Land of Tob'. It is the place to which Jephthah repairs with his hollow men when he is hounded out of Gilead (11:3, 5). The Land of Tob is arguably mentioned elsewhere in the Bible (2 Sam. 10:6–8). This notwithstanding, its use in this context illustrates well the distorted world of Judges, as Alter's comment on the passage highlights: '[Jephthah] gathers around him a band of desperadoes in the land of Tob, which, however real a geographic designation, also means "good" and thus participates in another turn of irony, the land of good being the badlands'.[119]

The writer's selection of *ṭôb* for the distortion to which he subjects its meaning is neither trivial nor arbitrary. A definition of 'good' is fundamental to the proper working of any society. The question what *ṭôb* means for Israel lies at the heart of its story both before and during the Settlement era, and ties the final part of Judges to its first two chapters in which Joshua and Caleb appear. When Moses sent the twelve tribal representatives to spy out Canaan, they returned with a mixed account of what they saw. The majority, while confirming that it was a land flowing with milk and honey, complained that the obstacles to conquest were insuperable. Pointedly, they did not use the term 'good' to describe what they found. Joshua and Caleb, the party's two dissenting members, asserted: 'The land [...] is an exceedingly good land. If Yahweh delights in us, he will bring us into this land, and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey. Only don't rebel against Yahweh'. The Israelites' threefold

118   Compare Klein, *Triumph*, p. 189.
119   'Introduction', *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. by idem and Frank Kermode, London: Fontana, 1989, p. 19.

response to the report was to cry 'Is it not "more good" for us to return to Egypt?', to begin a revolt against Moses, and to prepare to stone Joshua and Caleb. Only Yahweh's intervention prevents the insurrection, and it is at this moment that Yahweh makes the fateful vow that none of the congregation aged twenty and above would enter the promised land except Joshua and Caleb. To effect it, he sentences the Israelites to forty years' wandering in the wilderness 'until your carcasses be wasted in the wilderness' (Num. 13; 14:1–3);[120] or, as the psalmist's treatment of 'the day of provocation' has it, 'They are a people who err in their hearts, who have not known my ways, to whom I swore in my anger that they would not enter into my rest' (Ps. 95:8, 10–11). Symbolically and spiritually, Gideon, in his leadership of Israel, took the people back to the wilderness, away from Yahweh, away from the good land, away from the concept 'good'. It is apposite that, in the first act of unjust bloodletting recorded in Israel, the instruments Gideon uses to punish the seventy-seven leaders of Succoth (8:7, 16),[121] as the reader is twice informed, are 'thorns from the wilderness'.[122] Tellingly, the rest which the land enjoyed in periods following the judges' victories does not outlive Gideon and is never again experienced.[123]

By pulling this single word *ṭôb* from its semantic roots and transplanting it elsewhere, the author exposes the soul of the Israelites, as dramatically as Samson, in his treatment of Gaza's gates, laid open the sleeping city. By the time of Gideon's death the Israelites had become no different in their appreciation of the blessing and plan of Yahweh than their forebears who were condemned never to enter the land. Their idea of morality had become so distorted that their response to the elementally important question what is 'good' no longer resembled that of a civilized society.

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120   Once again, the writer's implicit referencing to detail within Numbers indicates that that Numbers existed when he composed Judges.

121   Note that there are also seventy-seven named or designated kings in Judges: Cushan-rishathaim, Eglon, Jabin, Zebah, Zalmunna, Abimelech, the king of Ammon, plus the seventy kings under Adoni-bezek's table.

122   This reference has an echo in Jotham's parable of the thorn-bush that accepts the kingship of the trees.

123   Exum, 'Centre', p. 425. In a 3+1 pattern, 'the land had rest forty years' after the victories of Othniel, Deborah, and Gideon, and 'the land had rest eighty years' following that of Ehud, indicating again the importance of the Ehud section. In the variable 3+1 geometry of Judges, it is only of Gideon that the text explicitly states that the 'rest' did not extend beyond the hero's lifetime (3:11, 30; 5:31; 8:28).

4

The final word to be explored in this chapter is *'iṭṭēr*, an adjective found only in Judges.[124] By way of introduction to the topic, one notes that Judges is the only book in the Bible in which left-handedness is mentioned and, predictably, it is mentioned twice (3:15; 20:16). The initial reference is to Ehud, possibly the first left-handed person specifically recorded as such in history.[125] The second reference is to the seven hundred left-handed Benjamite slingers who are deployed against the other tribes in the civil war that follows the outrage at Gibeah. Chris McManus, a specialist in handedness, observes that the proportion of left-handers to right-handers has been constant for 5000 years, with between eight and twelve per cent of the population belonging to the former category.[126] That one of the twelve heroes and minor judges is left-handed, a statistical result of 8.33 per cent, matches the eight to twelve per cent range quoted by McManus. That one of the tribes may have a predisposition to left-handedness also seems plausible since, according to McManus, it runs in families, very probably because the feature is genetically determined.[127] Given, then, how relatively common left-handedness is in human beings throughout history, it at first seems curious that left-handers are not mentioned elsewhere in the Bible or, for that matter, more often in ancient Near Eastern texts. However, in Israelite belief, the right hand (and right side), was pure, the left impure. The sanctity of the right side is illustrated in the rituals of consecration of the Aaronid priests: 'Moses took of the blood [of the ram of consecration] and put it upon the tip of Aaron's right ear, and upon the thumb of his right hand, and upon the great toe of his right foot', a procedure he repeats on Aaron's sons (Lev. 8:22–24, a rite which Yahweh had instructed him to perform in Exod. 29:20). A similar rite of sanctification attends the leper-cleansing ceremony, a disease of symbolic, as well as actual, uncleanness. In this ritual, the text stresses the use of the priest's right finger for sprinkling the blood and also the oil which, likewise, is placed on the tip of the supplicant's right ear, thumb and big toe (Lev. 14:14–28). The pre-eminence of the right hand over the left is attested in Jacob's blessing of Ephraim over Manasseh, Joseph's firstborn, and Joseph's reaction to his father's

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124   *'āṭar*, a verb from the same root, occurs in Ps. 69:16.

125   Chris McManus, *Right Hand, Left Hand*, London: Phoenix, 2003, pp. 221–22.

126   Ibid., pp. 229–31.

127   Ibid., p. 172. That said, there is more likelihood of two left-handed parents having a right-handed child than a left-handed one. But more left-handed children are born to left-handers than to right-handers. See also Niditch, *Judges*, p. 204.

act (Gen. 48:13–20). It is seen too in the name Benjamin itself, 'son of the right hand', that Jacob called the son born to his favourite wife, Rachel, who died in the childbirth, in place of the name she gave him, *Ben-ʾônî* 'son of my sorrow' (Gen. 35:18). In Kabbalistic teaching, the right is associated with 'above' and 'in': 'This is apparent, for example, in the precept to eat – the mouth is situated "above" and one takes the food "in" – with one's right hand and to clean oneself "below" – which has to do with taking "out" – with the left hand. When dressing, one first puts on the right-hand part of the garment; when undressing, one first takes off the left-hand part. A corpse is laid out with the left hand. Right is associated with life and left with death, with *gevurah*, with restriction and strength, thereby with man's "judgment," and as a result with his death'.[128]

The sanctity and pre-eminence of the right hand is similarly a feature of Mesopotamian belief. The Near-Eastern custom prohibiting the use of the left hand for eating is ancient. The Antagal (a Sumerian-Akkadian glossary) states 'C 240 ff.: "pure hand" […] "right hand" […] "bad hand, taboo hand" […] "left hand"'.[129] This conception is evident in omen texts also: the Akkadians, like other peoples in antiquity, considered the right side to be positive, the left negative. For example, in hepatoscopy, 'a particular sign on the right side of the gall bladder, or on one of the ducts or lobes, or on one of the appendices to the upper lobe, was interpreted as referring to Babylonia or Assyria, to the king, or to his army, or to his household, or to the country in general; while the same sign on the left side referred to the enemy. A good sign on the right side was, therefore, favourable to the inquirer; as was also a bad sign on the left […]. On the other hand, a good sign on the left side or a bad sign on the right side was just as distinctly unfavourable'.[130]

It was an interpretative principle also in astral observation, the ominous flight of birds[131] and libanomancy.[132] The right/left opposition played a part

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128   Meijers, 'Calendar', p. 605.

129   Civil, 'Enlil and Ninlil', pp. 47, 66; see also M.J. Geller, 'Taboo in Mesopotamia', *JCS* 42 (1990), pp. 105–117 (109); Joan Goodnick Westenholz, 'A Forgotten Lovesong', in *Language, Literature*, pp. 415–25 (423–25); Francesca Rochberg, *The Heavenly Writing*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 57.

130   Jastrow, *Aspects*, pp. 170–71; see also Ann K. Guinan, 'Left/Right Symbolism in Mesopotamian Divination', *SAAB* X/1 (1996), pp. 5–10; Starr, *Queries*, pp. 262, 277; Rochberg, *Heavenly Writing*, pp. 57–58.

131   Erica Reiner, 'Fortune-Telling in Mesopotamia', *JNES* 19 (1960), pp. 23–35 (28–29). Such ominous beliefs were characteristic of the Greeks too, at least as far back as Homer: 'a bird flew near them on their left side – an eagle with a dove in its talons. On this Amphinomus said "My friends, this plot of ours […] will not succeed"' (*The Odyssey* 20).

132   Irving Finkel, 'A New Piece of Libanomancy', *AfO* 29/30 (1983/84), pp. 50–55 (51–52).

in sacrificial ritual that may be compared with Levitical rites, for example: 'For that bull you should perform the rite of the washing of the mouth. With a pipe of sweet-smelling reed you should whisper the incantation "Great bull, exalted bull, treading the holy herbage", into his right ear, and in the same way, into his left ear, the incantation: "O bull, spawn of Zu!"' (the bull is then sacrificed).[133] Moreover, it had a symbolic role in magic.[134]

The sanctity of the right hand is evident in the representations of *apkallu* and other mythical beings conducting purification rites. McManus's remarks on one such work from the palace of Assurnasirpal II in Kalḫu merit reflection. In it, two such beings are portrayed purifying the sacred tree with liquid from vessels they hold: 'Overall, the picture looks symmetrical [...]. However, ignoring a mass of tiny asymmetries [...] that merely reflect inexactness in the drawing, there is also one very big asymmetry: both figures use their right hand to hold the purifier, and their left to hold the bucket. [...] Technically, it would have been easier for the artist to draw [a symmetrical] picture, and so presumably there were strong reasons – aesthetic, symbolic, and representational – for the additional effort put into drawing [this] picture'.[135] Plainly, the reason was that only the right hand of the beings could be assigned to the act of ritual purification.[136] Assyrian sculptors were quite prepared to depart from the representation of true likeness in order to achieve the right visual effect.[137] In the case of this sacred tree image,[138] theological exigencies overrode an aesthetic delight in symmetry.[139] Finally, it is germane that, in contrast to the Benjamite slingers, their Assyrian counterparts portrayed in the stone

133   Hooke, *Religion*, pp. 83–84, 121. See also Walker and Dick, *Cult Image*, p. 65.

134   Daniel Schwemer, 'Witchcraft and War', *Iraq* 69 (2007), pp. 29–42 (40).

135   *Right Hand*, pp. 388–89.

136   Wiggermann (*Spirits*, p. 61) notes that in glyptic representations of gods, goddesses and mythical sages portrayed in the act of greeting, invariably the right hand is used; see also O.R. Gurney, 'The Tale of the Poor Man of Nippur', *Anatolian Studies* 6 (1956), pp. 145–64 (159).

137   For instance, the colossal statues of the *lamassu* commissioned respectively by Assurnasirpal II and Sargon II have five legs 'so that when viewed from the front it stands firm, while when viewed from the side it appears to be striding forward to combat evil' [www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/ accessed 22 December 2014].

138   Margaret Huxley, 'The Gates and Guardians in Sennacherib's Addition to the Temple of Assur', *Iraq* 62 (2000), pp. 109–37 (129–31).

139   Borger, *Asarh.*, p. 14; compare Pauline Albenda, 'The "Queen of the Night" Plaque', *JAOS* 125 (2005), pp. 171–90 (175).

panel from Sennacherib's South-West Palace in Nineveh, that depicts the siege of Lachish in Judah in 701 BC, are right-handed.[140]

Given this weight of evidence, the question why uniquely in Judges one of the heroes and a considerable number of his kinsmen are presented as left-handed is significant beyond doubt for the interpretation of the work.[141] The first and most obvious answer is that, because all the left-handers are Benjamites, this represents a pun on the tribal name. It is of course ironic that the proclivity for left-handedness should occur among the descendants of 'Son of the Right Hand', as commentators have remarked.[142] However, since irony was merely a vehicle for the Judges author, not an end in itself, this provides an insufficient explanation.

This takes us back to the word *'iṭṭēr*. *'iṭṭēr yad-yᵉmînô* is how the text conveys the handedness of Ehud and the slingers. It defines left-handedness only with reference to the right hand, 'his right hand was bound/restricted'. In its vocalization, the term *'iṭṭēr* resembles others denoting physical disabilities, e.g., blind, deaf, dumb, lame,[143] and moral defect.[144] On this basis, some scholars have understood Ehud to have had a 'physical abnormality', in that his right hand was impaired.[145] A variant of this idea is that, for military reasons, the right hands of Ehud and the other left-handers had been artificially restricted

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140   David Ussishkin, 'The "Lachish Reliefs" and the City of Lachish', *Israel Exploration Journal* 30 (1980), pp. 174–95 (179, 184, 186). That said, Rawlinson reproduced the image of an apparently left-handed Assyrian slinger from the time of Assurbanipal (George Rawlinson, *The Five Great Monarchies*, vol. 1, 2nd edn, New York: Dodd, Mead, 1870, p. 440). One suspects this to be, like the Kalḫu spearman discussed by David Oates ('The Excavations at Nimrud (Kalḫu) 1962', *Iraq* 25 [1963], pp. 6–37 [15]), a mistake of the copyist, which Oates describes as a 'mirror-image distortion'.

141   Its significance may be portended in Josh. 13–18 by the fact that, in the tribal borders stated there, while the boundaries of Benjamin's southern and northern neighbours, Judah and Ephraim respectively, are charted from east to west (as is the case in most of the tribal land allocations), naturally following the path of the sun and the Israelites' own conquest route, on its southern frontier Benjamin's run in the opposite direction (J. Alberto Soggin, *Joshua: A Commentary*, London: SCM Press, 1972, pp. 171–2), as though drawn left-handedly. This curiosity in a sense places Benjamin in mirror-image to Judah, a fateful juxtaposition that is played out in the conflict between the houses of Saul and David.

142   Soggin, *Judges*, p. 55; Klein, *Triumph*, p. 37; Brettler, 'Literature', p. 403; Webb, *Judges*, p. 168.

143   Burney, *Judges*, pp. 69–70. Note the incidence of variants of *'iṭṭēr* as a Hebrew personal name in the late sixth century BC. The anthroponymic use of words denoting defects is attested in earlier texts in Semitic languages (Zadok, *Anthroponymy*, pp. 101, 290).

144   *'iqqēš* 'twisted, perverted'.

145   Soggin, *Judges*, p. 50; Webb, *Integrated*, p. 245; idem, *Judges*, p. 167.

to train them to fight left-handedly.[146] While left-handed swordsmen do enjoy a tactical advantage, the Benjamite warriors were not swordsmen but slingers, a form of combat in which left-handedness would offer no particular benefit.[147] In fact, what the text conveys is that Ehud's right hand operated normally. He was able to forge a sword, a skilled undertaking that would require bimanual functionality (3:16). Furthermore, the tribute he offered the king would hardly have been accepted if he had proffered it with the left hand.[148] The unimpaired use of both hands would be needed by expert slingers also.

The Septuagint navigates the uncomfortable connotations of 'iṭṭēr by translating it 'ambidextrous', literally 'both hands were right hands'. This accords with the description of Benjamite recruits to David's cause in a curious passage in Chronicles, 'They could use both the right hand and the left in hurling stones and shooting arrows' (1 Chr. 12:1–2). These mighty warriors were, then, 'sons of the right hand' plus. But this is not the meaning of 'iṭṭēr. As Boling puts it, what this word expresses is something 'peculiar and unnatural'.[149] It conveys imperfection; there is stigma in being 'iṭṭēr. Ehud, therefore, represents a minority, a minority distinguished by using the impure left hand for pure right-handed functions. Ehud's handedness is a departure from what is the acceptable. To accentuate the sense of walking defilement that Ehud embodies, in his assassination of the oppressor he is contaminated by Eglon's excrement.[150] So that the connection between the excrement and Ehud is not missed, the Hebrew reads 'and out came the faeces and out came Ehud' (3:22–23).

Thus, in the pivotal Ehud cycle, while giving no intimation that in the character of Ehud himself there was deviance or ambivalence towards Yahwism,[151] the writer, by confronting us with taboos connected with the human body – left hand, faeces – makes a point about purity and defilement, about the transgression of boundaries.[152] The use of 'iṭṭēr in Judges transgresses the boundaries

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146   Gray, *Joshua, Judges*, p. 263; Block, *Judges*, p. 161; Sasson, 'Interpretations', p. 574.

147   McManus, *Right Hand*, pp. 280–82.

148   Compare the remarks of Civil and Lambert on the god Nusku's left-handed giving in Civil, 'Enlil and Ninlil', pp. 46, 66.

149   *Judges*, p. 86.

150   This assumes that the great majority of translations and commentaries are correct for the difficult phrase at the end of 3:22. See Butler, *Judges*, p. 54, for a synopsis of the translations.

151   Abraham Malamat observes that Ehud was the son of a noble Benjamite family (Gen. 46:21; 1 Chr. 8:3, 7), which was still distinguished in David's time (2 Sam. 16:5) ('Charismatic Leadership in the Book of Judges', in *Magnalia Dei*, ed. by Frank Moore Cross, Werner Lemke, and Patrick Miller, Jr., New York: Doubleday, 1976, pp. 152–68 [162]).

152   See Douglas, *Purity*, p. 138.

of its literal meaning of a physical disability to signify something about the people it describes and the society they represent. They are aberrant to the intended order. The otherness of the hero from Benjamin and the insinuation of impurity that seems to accompany his tribal identity by the inversion of the right-handedness of the tribal designation for the left-handedness of his actions and by the faecal contamination that is an unanticipated by-product of his act of heroism, are ominous. They presage the conduct of the Benjamites at Gibeah, the perversity of the tribe as a whole in condoning their depravity, and the events that follow that decision. But while Ehud is a Benjamite, he leads Israel, he represents Israel. Three times in just two verses, Ehud is described as 'in front of' the Israelites, or they as 'behind him' (3:27–28). And this is a people who had already transgressed what was good in Yahweh's sight, defiling themselves by crossing into the cultic sphere of 'the nations round about' and, concomitantly, conjoining with them sexually (3:6), and they would do so again, according to *LXX B*, even while Ehud was still alive (4:1).

Predictably, with the author's propensity for layering meaning, the left-handedness of the sons of the right hand leads in other complementary directions. First, it raises the question, if the Benjamites were not 'sons of the right hand', what sons were they? The answer must be connected to their forefather's original name, given by his mother in her birth/death pangs, *Ben-ʾônî* ('son of my sorrow'), and this realization opens the critically important subject of the place and interrelationship of the twelve tribes in Judges. Herzberg makes the easily overlooked point that, although the composition has been known as 'the book of Judges' from its earliest recorded citation by Philo,[153] it is exclusively the book's central section from 3:7 to 16:31 that features the judges. What in fact unifies the book is not the personalities and exploits of these figures but the theme of the tribes of Israel.[154] In this respect, Judges bears a clear resemblance to the book of Numbers and the second half of Genesis (chapters 28–50) with its account of Jacob's adventures and those of his twelve sons which reaches a climax in Jacob's valedictory blessing of them.[155] The writer of Judges is concerned to tell their Settlement story.[156]

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153   See Webb, *Judges*, pp. 4–8.

154   *Bücher*, p. 141.

155   Compare Douglas, *Wilderness*, pp. 140–49.

156   On the genesis of the tribes, I can do no better than to quote Rowley: 'I must leave aside the question of how far all the tribes may be thought to have sprung from Jacob, or how far they should be thought of as tribes of diverse origin that came into a single confederation. In the Bible we see them only as they recognized common bonds and belonged more or less closely to one another' (*Worship*, p. 4).

In the birth order of Jacob's sons, Judah was fourth, Dan fifth. Judah's birth was the spark that ignited Rachel's smouldering jealousy and resentment of her sister, and co-wife, Leah, whose sibling rivalry for their husband's love and seed shapes much of the ensuing story of the sons of Israel. It was this birth, the impulse for sacred thanksgiving in Leah – '"Now will I praise Yahweh"; therefore she called his name Judah' – that led Rachel to propose to Jacob that her servant, Bilhah, act as her surrogate womb. The reader does not learn how much persuasion Jacob required to copulate with Bilhah, but the fruit of their union was Dan, the first of his four concubine sons. His name, with its association with judgment, was bestowed on him by Rachel in the ominous utterance 'God has judged me, and *also* has listened to my voice and has given me a son' (Gen. 29:35–30:6). Dan was, then, Rachel's retaliation because of her sister's baby, the judgment of God pitted against the praise of Yahweh. Dan's juxtaposition with the tribe of Judah is itself a salient topic in Judges, as we shall examine. Rachel later gives birth to Joseph, and then, on account of her theft of her father's household idols, is cursed by her husband unwittingly: '"With whomever you find your gods, let him not live [. . .]," for Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them' (Gen. 31:32). The next scene in which Rachel plays a central part is that of Benjamin's birth and her death, and Benjamin is the last child born to Jacob. God had indeed judged.

The coda sections of Judges are concerned principally with the sins of the two tribes with which Rachel's involvement in child-bearing begins and ends: Dan's establishment of an idolatrous cult in the city of Dan, and Benjamin's gross turpitude in Gibeah. The word ʾāven 'trouble, sorrow; idolatrous wickedness' from which ʾônî is derived, is applied by Hosea to the cult of the calf idols practised in Bethel and Dan.[157] Thus, through the left-handed Benjamites the events of Judges are referenced back to the biblical beginnings of the tribes, and their story offers an implicit comment on the inexorable slide of the sons of Israel in Yahweh's sight from 'sons of the right hand' to 'sons of my sorrow' that is the focus of the book and the later history of the dual monarchy.

The mirror-image relationship of Jael and Deborah has already been noted. The author of Judges displays an interest in mirror-images. In ancient Near-Eastern belief, 'an important dogma [is] the complementarity of the celestial and mundane realms, the latter being conceived of as the mirror-image of the

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157 Moreover, probably because of the idolatry there, the toponym Beth-Aven, 'House of Trouble', which Hosea quotes in a passage that also includes reference to the sin at Gibeah, is generally held to denote Bethel (Hos. 10:5–10); *BDB*, p. 20; *BhH* 1, p. 228. See Butler's perceptive reflections on Bethel and the significance of the triangulation of Benjamin, Ephraim and Dan (*Judges*, pp. lxxiii–ix).

former'.[158] Mirror-imaging is a major feature of Mesopotamian plastic and literary creations, not least because of its 'reflective magic' potential.[159] Mirrors operate 'at the palpable border between truth and knowledge'.[160] They invert the symmetrical and, in cases where the mirror is impure, distort the true likeness of the subject.[161] Ehud's story gives an early clue to this. Eglon and his entourage were unprepared for Ehud's sword because, in truth, the assassin was the mirror-image of the man they knew him to be.[162] As a consequence of this disruption of the symmetrical, this inversion of the expected, Eglon, the beefy king whom Yahweh himself had 'firmed up' against Israel, was eviscerated by Ehud's 'two-mouthed' sword, reduced thereby to another of the book's hollow men. It is precisely 'the junction between truth and knowledge [that provides] the mobility of which revolutions arise'.[163] Ehud's handedness is the physiological counterpart of the literary figure of chiasmus which, as I have remarked, is a much-favoured device of the author,[164] and Eglon's fate is a warning to the reader that, in this work, expecting invariably to find symmetry in meaning, what Lacan terms the 'anticipated image', will have unfortunate consequences.

5

In Chapter 1, I submitted that the riddles in the Samson cycle and Jotham's parable have a hermeneutic function for Judges. Furthermore, I claimed that the book is to be understood overall as a *ḥîdāh*, a claim that appears to resemble a

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158   Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, p. XL; note also p. C.

159   Simonetta Ponchia and Mikko Luukko, *The Standard Babylonian Myth of Nergal and Ereškigal*, Winona Lake IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013, pp. 40, 49–51.

160   Jacques Lacan, 'The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire', in Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, New York and London: Norton, 2006, pp. 671–702 (674–75).

161   For a Mesopotamian example, take the artful projection of ambiguity between the divine sisters Ishtar and Ereshkigal that is a leitmotiv common to three major Mesopotamian myths, *Gilgamesh*, *Ishtar's Descent*, and *Nergal and Ereshkigal*. This mirror-imaging possesses a relationship to the magical production of a double as a substitute, a concept itself connected to the bearing of twins, with its attendant astral associations in Mesopotamian astronomy/astrology (Ponchia and Luukko, *Nergal*, pp. 44, 56; 49–50).

162   As Barhebraeus (*Scholia*, p. 279) has it, Ehud was one who 'uses his left hand as his right hand'.

163   Lacan, 'Subversion', p. 679.

164   A further chiastic inversion in this episode is that the one word uttered by Eglon is 'silence!' (3:19) (Kim, 'Other', p. 174).

position adopted by Trent Butler. However, if I understand his point, it is that Judges contains many unclear or apparently contradictory elements which demand painstaking analysis: 'Riddles in every area of scholarship face a commentator who begins the study and exposition of the book. Commentary readers are invited to join in the detective work as we seek to solve these riddles'.[165] Butler makes no link between the *ḥîdôth* presented in the book and their role in deciphering the book's meaning. Central to my understanding of Judges, however, is that the work is an esoteric text that is presented in the form of a *ḥîdāh* in order to protect its esoteric meaning from those for whom it is not intended, while at the same time providing access to those for whom it is. The Samson section is the most appropriate for foregrounding the *ḥîdôth*, as central to the Samson story is the revelation of Yahweh as the one who imparts to chosen individuals sacred truth with which to guide their conduct, while forbidding the disclosure of this truth to those who would abuse it: 'and [the secret of] his strength was not known' (16:9). In this foregrounding, the author is not only indicating the importance of the *ḥîdāh* figure for the book's interpretation, but specifically supplying vital keys to unlock its contents. It turns out that the keys provided by the *ḥîdôth* also fit the lock of the esoteric doors located in the Ehud/Eglon tale.

Like the two doors of Eglon's ill-fated chamber, the *ḥîdāh* that Samson puts to the Philistines has a two-part structure: 'Out of the eater came food, out of the strong came sweetness'. Moreover, the verb he employs, *yāṣā'*, typically given twice, is the same as that, also given twice, used to report Eglon's excretion and Ehud's exit. This provides a clue that the esoteric meaning of the *ḥîdāh* is much darker than either the bucolic or sexually loaded image that it appears to evoke. Just as the Eglon story is read by a number of commentators as an excursus in ribald humour, so the surface meaning of Samson's *ḥîdāh* was intended to blend with the bawdy mood of Samson's nuptials,[166] and thus mislead the guests.[167] Moreover, even the correct answers to the *ḥîdāh*, 'lion' and 'honey', are liable to be understood superficially and the full import of the 'dark saying' missed. Conventionally, lions epitomize strength and honey sweetness.[168] But in Judges the conventional does not hold. Here the lion and

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165   *Judges*, pp. xxxvi–ix.

166   'It is not difficult to infer from the ubiquity of these wine craters and beer jugs that the Philistines were mighty carousers' (Albright, *Archaeology*, p. 115). See also Brettler, 'Literature', p. 407.

167   The *ḥîdāh* thus combines linguistic and contextual ambiguity (see Camp and Fontaine, 'Words', p. 137).

168   Ibid., p. 146.

the honey have the same semantic value as that represented symbolically by a left-handed son of the right hand.[169] Both the answers to the *ḥîdāh* reflect the inversion of conventional meaning. This asymmetry is indicated structurally in the *ḥîdāh* with which the Philistines reply: 'What is sweeter than honey, what is stronger than a lion?' (14:14, 18),[170] reversing Samson's order. And the meaning of their rhetorical question is itself inverted. Something was obviously stronger than a lion to succeed in slaying it, and how can a substance produced in death, in a rotting carcass, be the superlative for sweetness? In the Hebrew Bible death is associated with bitterness, 'surely the bitterness of death is past' (1 Sam. 15:32).[171] In Judges, the lion becomes an object of weakness – 'he rent him as he would rend a kid' – and the honey, which was intended in Yahweh's plan for Israel to be a metonym for all that was good about the 'good land' is only encountered in Israel's immediate post-Conquest story in a corrupt environment, as an agent of defilement (14:6, 8). The point is underlined by the events immediately following the Philistines' reply. In a further, macabre, mirror-image arrangement, Samson now clothes the triumphant wedding guests in the garments of their thirty murdered compatriots, which he has stripped from their corpses, exactly as he had fed his parents honey from the animal carcass.[172] In addition, Samson's *ḥîdāh* raises another preoccupation of the book: the recognition and preservation of boundaries. The normal confines of a lion's body do not incorporate a swarm of bees.[173]

Thus, concealed in the *ḥîdôth*, through the inversion of conventional meanings, the writer has provided a *mise en abyme* for the Judges central story of the progressive sullying by Yahweh's people of all that is sacred, admirable or desirable, and their confusion and destruction of boundaries, precisely as is expressed in his treatment of the lexeme *ṭôb*. That the trope of the wholesale inversion of the positive to the negative by Yahweh's people had currency in Judah at the turn of the seventh century BC is attested in Isaiah: 'Woe to those

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169   Compare Lévi-Strauss: 'In myths which take honey as their theme, the regression from culture to nature often makes use of devices of a metalinguistic order; confusion between the signifier and the signified, the word and the thing, the figurative meaning and the literal meaning' (*Table Manners*, p. 78).

170   Crenshaw, *Samson*, pp. 111–12.

171   Compare Ezek. 27:30–32; Eccl. 7:26. The lexical root *mrr* 'bitter' only once occurs in Judges – fittingly, to describe the Danites (18:25).

172   In the *Vassal Treaty of Esarhaddon with Humbaresh*, one of the curses requires the aberration of the beneficent meaning of honey to one linked with death/murder, similar to its treatment in the Samson story: 'just as honey is sweet, so may the blood of your women, your sons and your daughters be sweet in your mouth' (ll. 568–69).

173   For the bee as subject of a Mesopotamian riddle, see George and Al-Rawi, 'Tablets', p. 206.

who call evil good, and good evil, that replace light with darkness, and darkness with light, who replace the sweet with the bitter, and the bitter with the sweet' (Isa. 5:20).

Yet, at another level, the message concealed in the two *ḥîdôth* affirms the sovereignty of Yahweh in human affairs. The lion was rent as though it had been a kid only because Yahweh's spirit rushed upon Samson for 'there was nothing in his hand' (14:6). The creation of something sustaining in place of death recalls Yahweh's miraculous intervention at Marah ('bitter'), the site of the Israelites' first dissension against Moses in the wilderness, immediately following the crossing of the sea. The cause of their disquiet was that the water there was undrinkable. 'Yahweh showed him a tree, which when he had cast it into the waters, the waters were made sweet' (Exod. 15:22–26). The ultimate answer, then, to the Philistines' rhetorical riposte 'What is sweeter than honey, what is stronger than a lion?' is Yahweh, the God of Israel.[174] Thus, the *ḥîdôth* speak of Israel's contumacy and Yahweh's sovereignty; their contrapuntal relationship supplies the book's dramatic tension and main plot.

It is not only in their treatment of lexical semantics that the *ḥîdôth* offer keys to the interpretation of Judges. They do so also through their syntactic architecture. As noted already, Samson's *ḥîdāh* has a two-part structure. The *ḥîdāh* with which the Philistines reply, while only addressing the second part of Samson's riddle, and consequently possessing half its length, is similarly a doublet. Samson's *ḥîdāh* comprises four elements, the Philistines' rejoinder only two. Riddles do not need to be dyadic; for example, those from Sumer referenced in chapter 1 comprise four equal parts.[175] Furthermore, in contrast to the Lagash riddles which each require one answer, viz., the name of the city in question, Samson's *ḥîdāh* demands two, the lion and the honey. The following riddle, also from Sumer, is composed of two parts but needs only one answer: '"He whose eyes are not open enters it, he whose eyes are (wide) open comes out of it". [Answer:] It's a school'.[176]

Samson's doublet reflects the book's delight in duplication. Not only does it highlight the 1+1 pairings that abound in the work, but the construction of his *ḥîdāh* based on four elements alerts the reader that a 2+2 arrangement is also significant. The Philistines' use of chiasmi within a 1+1 structure points to the importance of mirror-imaging for the composition. Some examples will elucidate this further. First, instances of 2+2: Judges describes two couples where both the man and woman are named and active – Othniel and Achsah

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174   Compare Ps. 19:9–11.

175   Biggs, 'Riddles'.

176   Kramer, *Sumerians*, p. 236.

+ Samson and Delilah. These couples are in a chiastic relationship.[177] Likewise, there is a chiasmus in the next pair where both man and woman are named but the man is inactive: Deborah and Lappidoth + Jael and Heber. A variant is witnessed in the two couples where only the man is named but both parties are active: Manoah and wife + Samson and the Timnite. There are two marriages in the book, one organized by the bride's father, the other by the groom's: Othniel and Achsah + Samson and the Timnite. Shamgar is cited in two different contexts; so too is Jael (3:31, 5:6; 4:18, 5:6).[178]

Striking instances of chiasmus are found in some 1+1 arrangements: two daughters ask their fathers for something – Caleb's daughter requests a water-source to sustain life, Jephthah's daughter time to prepare for death. Two women, both nameless, are associated with Jephthah: his virgin daughter and his harlot mother. Two groups of Israelites are referred to as pᵊlîṭê 'fugitives' (the sole occurrences of this noun in Judges) in successive verses. In the first case, it forms the basis of the Ephraimites' taunt concerning the Gileadites; in the second, it describes the Ephraimites' plight after losing the battle against Jephthah (12:4, 5). Two prophets appear in the book, a named woman (Deborah) and an unnamed man. Two celebrations occur in vineyards: one involves Israelite girls rejoicing in Yahweh, the other features Canaanite men who rejoice in Ba'al (9:26–28; 21:19–21). Two people die with their hands on the architecture of the building: a man, Samson, in supernatural might, a woman, the Levite's concubine, in abject weakness. Most significant of all, two oaths by Yahweh are quoted: 'I have brought you into the land which I swore to your fathers and I said "I will never break my covenant with you"', and 'Everywhere they went Yahweh's hand opposed them for evil […] even as Yahweh had sworn to them' (2:1, 15).

These chiastic pairings highlight asymmetry.[179] Symmetry is also an important concept in Judges, as betokened structurally in Samson's ḥîdāh. Accordingly, many pairings likewise offer synonymous parallelism:[180] major judges and minor judges; episodes concerned with the judges and others in which they do not feature; two wayfaring Levites; Caleb bestowing the upper

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177   Younger, *Judges/Ruth*, pp. 68, 106.
178   This is an instance of two individuals from two different parts of the book converging in a third.
179   Bal identifies in Judges a narrative of the dissymmetry of power distribution in its society and its asymmetric expression through the murder of women by men, men by men, and men by women (*Death and Dissymmetry*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988, pp. 1, 17).
180   Compare Fokkelman, *Reading*, pp. 116–17.

and lower springs on his daughter; two sons giving their mothers something: Samson, honey; Micah, the silver he stole from her (it is symptomatic that, by that stage in the book, neither gift costs the donor anything and both are defiled). On occasion, synonymous parallelism is employed to create an inclusio to define an entire episode, as seen with honey and Samson's wedding. The Levite's concubine stays at her father's house in Bethlehem-judah for four months, the same period of time that the defenders of her murderers spend in hiding at the Rock Rimmon after their rout (19:2; 20:47, 21:13).[181] More frequent is the instrumental use of symmetrical pairings to reinforce connections between two episodes that might appear disparate and whose linking is significant. For instance, both the Samson and the Micah series are introduced by pivotal episodes involving their respective mothers. In addition, 1100 'silvers' are stolen by Micah from his mother in chapter 17; Delilah is given 1100 'silvers' by each of the five lords of the Philistines for betraying Samson in chapter 16 (17:2; 16:5).[182] The five Philistine lords who bring silver to the house of Delilah in exchange for the Danite are mirrored in the five Danite spies who take silver from the house of Micah to create a Danite cult that resembles Philistine religious practice more than Yahwistic. Moreover, the financial information provided by these two Danite episodes offers another example of the intra-textual commentary that is a feature of the book. The information that 200 'silvers' were all that was required for Micah's idol creation which, presumably, was sufficiently impressive for the Danites to use it as the centre of their tribal cult, and that the annual remuneration Jonathan received from Micah was ten 'silvers' plus board and lodging and one change of clothing (17:4, 10), reveals how fabulously wealthy Delilah became, literally overnight, when 'the lords of the Philistines [...] brought the silver in their hands' (16:18).[183]

The examples of 2+2 and, particularly, 1+1 symmetric and asymmetric parallels can be multiplied many times over. They contribute to the achievement of a systematic unity in a composition that initially appears chaotic. But more intriguing even than their structural function is their symbolic role in augmenting the message carried by the unfolding story of Judges. The seemingly almost obsessive creation of doublets is a ubiquitous reminder that Judges is

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181   Here time is the instrument in the inclusio, as opposed to place as seen in Ophrah in the Gideon cycle (Webb, *Integrated*, p. 147), and Zorah in Samson's.

182   Brettler, *Judges*, p. 81.

183   It is, incidentally, hardly conceivable that Delilah, now rich and fêted as the vanquisher of Philistia's enemy, who succeeded where a thousand warriors failed, was not present at the festival of Dagon to celebrate the victory over Samson, and therefore among the victims of his final onslaught against the Philistines.

essentially concerned with two, and only two, actors, Yahweh and the sons of Israel as constituted through the tribes. The 1+1 symmetrical arrangements remind the reader of the potential for harmony in their relationship. The asymmetric suggest their actual mutual alienation. The 2+2 pattern is a variant form that symbolizes the place of the major judge in the dialectic. This is illustrated in Samson's *ḥîdāh* which comprises four elements, but is in fact binary. The judge has, it transpires, no independent role in the narrative beyond mirroring Yahweh to Israel (and the surrounding nations), and Israel to Yahweh: Yahweh + judge} {judge + Israel. Parpola claims that the image of the sacred tree in Assyrian royal sculptures symbolizes both the king as the 'perfect man' and the divine order that he upheld.[184] This accords with how the major judges function in the book, with the judge as the reflection both of Yahweh as perceived by the Israelites, and of the Israelites as evaluated by Yahweh.[185] Gideon's response to the angel of Yahweh encapsulates the problem in the relationship from both sides, Israel as faithless, Yahweh as invisible and absent: 'if Yahweh is with us, [. . .] where are all his miracles that our fathers told us about? [. . .] But now Yahweh has abandoned us to the grasp of Midian' (6:13). In this sense, the *špṭîm* are centrally concerned with judgment as they act as the intermediary between the two parties and are instrumental in the formation of the judgments made by each regarding the other. The foibles of the nation are exposed through the judge.[186] Inversely, the power and purpose of Yahweh are refracted through the judge, but in an increasingly distorted way,[187] as the defects in the relationship between God and people intensify, recalling the nature of how Yahweh reveals himself: 'With the faithful, you act faithfully, with the man of integrity, you show integrity, with the pure, you are pure, but with the perverse

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184   'Tree', p. 168. See Chapter 7 below.

185   Compare Rowley's description of a prophet of Yahweh as 'not only the man who brought the word of God to man. He was also the spokesman of man to God' (*Worship*, p. 169).

186   The hypothesis I am advancing for the major judges has similarities with Edward Greenstein's for the Samson cycle, 'What appears to be Samson is the people of Israel; what appears as the Naziriteship of Samson is the Israelite covenant' ('The Riddle of Samson', *Prooftexts* 1/3 [1981], pp. 237–60 [247]), and Klein's for the judges overall: 'I propose the protagonist of the book of Judges is the people – the potential nation – of Israel, each judge symbolizing an aspect of Israel [. . .]. On this basis, each of the judges may be seen as a symbol of Israel; furthermore, each serves to reveal a new aspect of the people's relationship to Yahweh' (*Triumph*, pp. 17–18).

187   Compare Plutarch's comments on the oracular style at Delphi: '[the god] is not willing to keep the truth unrevealed, but he caused the manifestation of it to be deflected, like a ray of light, in the medium of poetry, where it submits to many reflections' (*Moralia* V, p. 333).

you distort yourself' (Ps. 18:25–26/2 Sam. 22:26–27).[188] Even the judge's tribal affiliation is harnessed to cast light on the state of the bilateral relationship, as the Ehud story indicated, a subject to which, in the context of otherness, we return in the next chapter.

This increasing distortion of image is paralleled in the diverse ways speech is manipulated through the book, developing from the deliberate double meanings of Ehud's words to Eglon, via the blatant deceit of Jael, whose only recorded utterance to Sisera is 'turn in, my lord, turn in to me, fear not' (4:18), to the parable of Jotham with its symbolic imagery, through the terrified Ephraimites' mendacious denial of their tribal identity and Jephthah's shibboleth test (12:6), to Samson's ḥîdāh and Jonathan's vacuous oracular pronouncement. All these show language used as a weapon. And in the most obvious case in which words are doggedly applied to their literal meaning, namely Jephthah's vow,[189] they simply expose how the social and moral context that gives words definition has been mutilated to the grotesque extent that Jephthah feels obliged to carry out a forbidden cultic act of child sacrifice[190] for which his adversaries, the Ammonites, were particularly infamous.[191] By the end of the book, words have become so debased, so hollow of meaning, as illustrated by ṭôb, that a new 'language' is required that is universally comprehensible in Israel, consonant with the depravity to which it has sunk. Such a language is provided by the concubine's body parts. It alone succeeds in communicating to 'all […] the congregation as one man from Dan to Beer-sheba' (19:29–20:1). It is notable that in each of these cases, the opaque communication presages or, perhaps, engenders violent death.

6

In Chapter 1, I submitted that, sharing the role of guardian of the esoteric essence of Judges with the ḥîdôth, is Jotham's parable, notably about trees and kingship, and this is signified by their respective positions, *apkallu*-like, on either side of the book's literal and metaphorical centre. Noth argues

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188 That this conception of Yahweh was long established in Israelite belief finds support in Cross and Freedman's conjecture that this 'old gnomic couplet' may originate from the era of the judges or early monarchy ('A Royal Song of Thanksgiving', *JBL* 72 [1953], pp. 15–34 [21]).

189 Cartledge, *Vows*, p. 30.

190 Rowley, *Worship*, p. 65.

191 For a contrary view, see Hays, *Death*, p. 180.

that 'At all the important points in the course of the [Deuteronomistic] history, Dtr. brings forward the leading personages with a speech, long or short, which looks forward and backward in an attempt to interpret the course of events'. The fact that Noth finds no set-piece oration in Judges constitutes a major plank of his argument that the book should extend into 1 Samuel in order to incorporate Samuel's address to all Israel (1 Sam. 12).[192] But Judges does contain an important speech at a momentous point in Israel's history, delivered by the sole remaining legitimate son of Israel's leader in a location of immense significance. It is Jotham's declamation following the murder of his brothers by Abimelech. These murders were the first recorded Israelite unlawful shedding of Israelite blood in the promised land, and, thus, at this point, through this deed, the land was defiled.[193] It is characteristic that the set-piece speech 'which looks forward and backward in an attempt to interpret the course of events' offered in Judges should incorporate a parable rather than, as in the examples Noth cites, homilies 'with the relevant practical conclusions about what people should do'.[194]

The pivotal nature of the episode is also emphasized by its geographical setting, in Shechem, midway between mounts Gerizim and Ebal, the places of blessing and cursing respectively (Deut. 27). Jotham stands upon Gerizim to deliver his speech to the 'baals of Shechem'.[195] As a Manassite, he is standing on the mountain to which his tribe was allocated to stand; besides, he has no reason to suggest that he himself is cursed.[196] But his parable and the impreca-

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192   *Deuteronomistic History*, p. 5.

193   The fratricide recalls the Bible's first murder, by Cain of Abel, 'the voice of whose blood', declared Yahweh, 'cries to me from the ground' (Gen. 4:8–10).

194   *Deuteronomistic History*, p. 5. Gray detects the hand of 'the compiler' in the addition of the parable to Jotham's protest (*Joshua, Judges*, p. 229). Compare Block, *Judges*, pp. 316–17.

195   Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, p. 176. The men of Shechem are almost always referred to as the 'baals of Shechem' in Judges (in contrast, Thebez's baals are distinguished from its 'men'). The male citizens of only two other cities are referred to as 'baals' in Joshua and Judges: Jericho, before its conquest by the Israelites (Josh. 24:11), and Gibeah when the Levite's concubine was raped. This is no coincidence. Ba'al-worship is a feature of Shechem and Canaanite Jericho. Referring to the men of Gibeah as baals implies the usual link between religious deviance and moral delinquency without explicitly stating their cultic practices (see S. David Sperling, 'Joshua 24 Re-examined', in *RI&J*, pp. 240–58 [249]). Wolfgang Bluedorn describes the Abimelech narrative as 'Baalist' in that it is the adherence to Baalism by everyone involved once Jotham leaves the scene and the disastrous consequences for them of this course that provides the plot (*Yahweh versus Baalism*, London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001, p. 229).

196   Compare ibid., pp. 210–12.

tions that accompany it are rooted in the curses of Ebal, the mountain he faces as he delivers them: 'cursed is he who dishonours his father or mother'; 'cursed is he who distorts the justice due [. . .] the orphan';[197] 'cursed is he who accepts a bribe to strike down an innocent person'; curses which apply respectively to Abimelech, the Shechemites, and the 'hollow and feckless men' bribed with the seventy pieces of silver.[198] The final curse of Ebal covers them all: 'Cursed is he who does not establish the words of this law by doing them' (Deut. 27:12, 16, 19, 25, 26).[199]

The importance of Jotham's address, with the parable as its centre piece, is, then, endorsed by the timing, location and reason for its delivery, not to mention its position in the architecture of the book. The writer is inviting his intended readers to ponder its meaning carefully. As in the *ḥîdôth*, so in the parable the esoteric meaning is concealed/conveyed within both its structure and the words used. The treatment of the words is examined in Chapter 7 and will clarify why the need for coding existed. It is the structure of the parable that has most to add to the present chapter. What is immediately evident is that, in contrast to the *ḥîdôth*, the parable, although it consists of four parts, is unbalanced. Its first three parts, that describe the trees' approaches to the olive, fig and vine, and their replies, are carefully aligned with each other, repeating many of the same phrases and exhibiting a similar rhythm. The subject of the first part, the olive tree, is a masculine noun, those of the second and third parts are feminine, and the fourth plant is masculine, thus producing an ABB'A' pattern and implying that the writer is simply creating a 2+2 chiasmus.[200] But, although the final quarter begins in similar fashion to those preceding it, it quickly deviates from it so that on every level of analysis this part stands in opposition to the others. Its subject, the thorn (*ʾāṭād*), 'a quick-burning fuel [. . .] the low thorn-scrub which, though it may rise to the height of a tree, affords

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197   Note that Jotham's Yahwistic name ('Yahweh is perfect') with vocalic metathesis becomes 'orphan'.

198   This places the value of the life of each of Gideon's seventy sons at one 'silver'.

199   'A context is required in which the whole people, and through them their God, could adopt the imperative tone towards individuals, and impose on them the absolute prohibitions, or threats of a curse or of death which we find. We have no need to invent such a context, for it is provided in the tradition itself [. . .]. A particularly clear instance is the setting of the curses in Deut. xxvii.: this list is presented as being delivered orally by the levitical priests to the whole people, assembled in the great natural amphitheatre between Ebal and Gerizim in the Vale of Shechem; the people take each curse upon themselves with a cry of "Amen"' (Albrecht Alt, *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1966, pp. 125–26).

200   For an analysis of the syllabic structure of the parable, see Boling, *Judges*, pp. 172–73.

a meagre shade and is fruitless',[201] accepts the offer of sovereignty rejected by the other, inherently valuable, trees and proceeds to state the bizarre terms of its acceptance. Thus, the parable has a 3+1 structure. To draw further attention to this construction, the parable is immediately followed by a conditional sentence containing three protases and then, after an extended parenthetic statement, a fourth, summary, protasis is introduced as a *Wiederaufnahme* (9:16–19).[202] Related too, perhaps, is the fact that, in his first assault against the Shechemites, Abimelech divides his forces into four companies, whereas in the second, he organizes them into three (9:34, 43).[203] The primary difference between the structure of the parable and those presented in the *ḥîdôth* is that, while the latter signify balance, however imperfect, deformed even, the 3+1 arrangement emphasizes its disruption.

The 3+1 structure was a trope of Mesopotamian literature.[204] It is met frequently in Sumerian texts, for example in *Inanna's Descent*[205] and *Edin-na ú-sag-gá*, and in Akkadian compositions ranging from *Gilgamesh*,[206] through Neo-Assyrian learned epistolary material – 'People pass by my house: the mighty on palanquins, the assistants in carts, (even) the juniors on mules, (and) I on my feet!'[207] – and a dream sequence in the poem *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*,[208] to the anti-witchcraft text, *Maqlû*, which richly exploits the form's potential in a complex pattern: 'Netherworld, netherworld, yes netherworld, Gilgamesh is the enforcer of your oath, Whatever you have done, I know, whatever I do, you do not know, Whatever my witches do, there will be no one to overlook, undo,

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201   Gray, *Joshua, Judges*, p. 319.

202   See Tigay, *Gilgamesh*, p. 75, for examples of *Wiederaufnahmen* in Mesopotamian literature, including Esarhaddon's vassal/succession treaties.

203   Polzin remarks that in the Abimelech tale Gaal asks three rhetorical questions and Zebul one, in rhetorical response (*Moses*, pp. 173–74).

204   Hurowitz, 'ABL 1285', pp. 16–17. It is strongly represented in Canaanite literature also (Zakovitch, "*For Three*", pp. iii, xviii).

205   A.R. George, 'Observations on a Passage of "Inanna's Descent"', *JCS* 37 (1985), pp. 109–13 (110–11) where three thematically linked lines are enclosed in a line that is virtually repeated. See, in the same myth, Ereshkigal's three rhetorical questions followed by an imperative (Lapinkivi, *Myth*, p. 55).

206   'To the rising of the sun ... To the setting of the sun ... To the setting of the sun ... They caused to go out' (Kovacs, *Gilgamesh*, p. 77); 'My friend, the swift mule, the wild ass of the mountain, the panther of the plain' (Jacobsen, *Treasures*, p. 203).

207   Simo Parpola, 'The Forlorn Scholar', in Rochberg-Halton (ed.), *Language, Literature*, pp. 257–78 (265, 272); Hurowitz, 'ABL 1285', p. 16.

208   Oppenheim, *Dreams*, p. 217.

release'.[209] Arguably, its most dramatic use is in necromancy attested in first-millennium-BC Babylonian texts: after repeating a set incantation three times, the necromancer can then 'see' and speak with the ghost.[210]

In Judges, it appears frequently. In general, the oppositions that it describes are significant, often portentous. We have encountered this already in Samson's responses to Delilah concerning the secret of his strength and the period of time that the land had rest. Other examples are the statement and three imperatives that launch the civil war against Benjamin: 'Everyone who saw [a part of the concubine's corpse] said "such a thing has not happened nor been seen from the day that the sons of Israel came up from the land of Egypt until this day. Consider it, take advice, and pronounce"' (19:30).[211] Moreover, the 3+1 pattern encompasses the exchanges between the Levite and his father-in-law: three times the latter succeeds in delaying their departure (twice on the fourth day, once on the fifth), but on the fourth occasion he fails, triggering the catastrophic consequences that provide the subject of the remainder of the book (19:5–10).[212] Related to this, four different pairs of doors (*daltôth*) are featured in Judges. Three lead directly to an encounter with death – for Eglon, Jephthah's daughter and the Levite's concubine – the fourth, the doors of Gaza, are carried by Samson to the hill facing Hebron (3:23–25; 11:31; 16:3; 19:22, 27). Four times the predicate *zānāh* 'to commit fornication, to whore' is used in the book. Only once does it apply to an individual, namely, the Levite's concubine. Elsewhere it describes Israel's adherence to other cults (2:17; 8:27, 33; 19:2).

3+1 defines the pattern of angelic apparitions in Israel. The angel of Yahweh is revealed to all the people at Bochim which leads to national repentance and sacrifice to Yahweh in Joshua's presence; thereafter he appears to Gideon and to Samson's parents (twice), none of whom fully grasps who he is until he ascends in the flames of what has become a sacrifice (2:1–5; 6:11–22; 13:3, 9–21). There are 3+1 occasions on which Israel weeps: once, in repentance,

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209   Tzvi Abusch, 'Ascent to the Stars in a Mesopotamian Ritual', in *Death*, ed. by Collins and Fishbane, pp. 15–39 (19).

210   Irving L. Finkel, 'Necromancy in Ancient Mesopotamia', *AfO* 29 (1983), pp. 1–17 (5, 10). There is a general tendency for incantations to comprise threefold repetition; see, as examples, Walker and Dick, *Cult Image*, p. 53; Reiner, *Astral Magic*, p. 103.

211   It is notable that the standard phrase 'the day that *Yahweh* brought the sons of Israel up' etc. has dropped out of their discourse.

212   Brettler comments that here 'the typical three-four pattern [viz., combined to create seven] which pervades the Bible is broken and is displaced by a (non-existent) four-five "pattern" which suggests that the story depicts a world upside down' ('Literature', p. 410). The 4–5 pattern is, indeed, non-existent, but 3+1 is in place precisely to show a world upside down.

at Bochim, and thereafter in despair, first at their failure to destroy Benjamin and then at their success in the venture (2:4; 20:23, 26; 21:2). It also frames the appearance in Judges of heroic figures encountered in books dealing with Israel's earlier story: Phinehas, who, intriguingly, is introduced only in chapter 20 and then in a curiously passive role compared with Joshua, Caleb and Othniel who each play an active part at the beginning of the composition.[213] By tribal affiliation they represent Levi, Ephraim and Judah respectively (1:12–20; 2:6–9; 3:9–11; 20:28).

As will already be evident, while the importance of the 3+1 structure is highlighted through Jotham's address, it is in the final portion of the book that it is most frequently and poignantly arrayed. This story (together with the Abimelech episode) provides elucidation of 3+1 through the pattern's application to a set of narrated events, thus complementing its esoteric disclosure in the parable. The last and, perhaps, most consequential 3+1 application relates to the tribes that have a named role in these three chapters. They comprise three secular tribes, Benjamin, Ephraim, Judah, plus Levi. With these tribes the book concludes. It can be no accident that they go on to define the entire future course of Israel's political and religious history.

This leads to the question what is the meaning of 3+1? The answer begins from the significance of four. In the Hebrew Bible it conveys a sense of completeness. The importance of the four cardinal points is evident *inter alia* in their use in the placement of the tribes around the tabernacle in Numbers.[214] There are 'four winds from the four quarters of heaven' (Jer. 49:36); four rivers flowed from the Garden of Paradise (Gen. 2:10); there are four living beings in Ezekiel's vision of the throne of God, and they move as one (Ezek. 1, 10).[215] The name of Yahweh, the *Tetragrammaton*, comprises four indivisible elements.

In Mesopotamian cosmic geography, too, four equal components make up the stable whole: the king is 'ruler over the four quarters of the world'; 'I, Assurbanipal, [. . .], king of the universe, king of Assyria, king of the four quarters'.[216] A mid-third-millennium tablet from Fara presents a schematic map of the world: 'Surrounding Enlil and Nippur are four copies of the cuneiform sign for "(irrigated) field". [. . .] The four fields take their water from four streams surrounding the settled world, which the languages of Mesopotamia

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213   Phinehas is, as a grandson of Aaron, a contemporary of Jonathan, the grandson of Moses. This buttresses the argument that the book's two final parts sit outside the strict chronological sequencing displayed in the accounts of the judges.

214   Douglas, Wilderness, pp. 176–77.

215   See *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2008 for further examples [www accessed 1 November 2014].

216   *CAD* Š/2, 1992, p. 79; *ARAB* 2, p. 321, text 835.

define by naming its borders: the 'Four-Corners-and-Sides' in Sumerian, and the 'Four-Banks' in Akkadian. The map does not specify it, but texts and other images inform us about what existed across the streams in the emptiness beyond civilization: wild animals, primeval monsters, demons, drifting souls, and nomads – the other and the enemy'. Likewise, the four winds and the four compass points equate to 'the four lands' of Akkad, Elam, Amurru and Subartu.[217] There are four stations of the sun in the annual cycle: two solstices and two equinoxes, all of which were marked by the Mesopotamians. Shamash enters and leaves through four cosmic doors.[218] To this might be added the sacred symbolism in the name of the city of Arbela, meaning '(city) Number Four God',[219] the main centre of the veneration of Ishtar as 'queen of (the divine) decrees', and of her prophetic cult, during the Neo-Assyrian period.[220] Its kings visited her temple there before embarking on major military campaigns.[221]

Arbela has a cognate in the original name of Hebron, Kiriath-Arba, 'literally "the city of (the) four"'.[222] For the Israelites, and indeed adherents of the Abrahamic faiths in general, it too enjoyed/enjoys holy status. The story of its capture by Caleb and Judah followed by Othniel's taking of Debir/Kiriath-sepher is recounted in Joshua and Judges, using similar terms. However, whereas in Joshua the place-name is said to derive from Arba the ancestor of the Anakim, Judges is silent on its aetiology (Josh. 14:15; 15:13–19; Judg. 1:10–15, 20). Both versions, however, state that Caleb dispossessed the three sons of Anak through the conquest. It is perhaps not by chance that embedded in this report of the seizure of the 'city of four', there is a 3+1 pattern: Caleb versus the three heroes. This conjecture gains weight from the fact that the toponym

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217   Abraham Malamat, *Mari and the Early Israelite Experience*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 67; Rochberg, *Path*, pp. 46–47; C.J. Gadd, 'Omens Expressed in Numbers', *JCS* 21 (1967), pp. 52–63 (56).

218   Huxley, 'Gates', p. 124.

219   Burney, *Judges*, p. 43: 'Here it is beyond doubt that the numeral Four is employed as a divine name or title'. Note the 3+1 construction involving Arbela in Urad-Gula's letter (Hurowitz, 'ABL 1285', p. 16). On Arbela, see Karen Radner, 'The Assur-Nineveh-Arbela Triangle', in Peter Miglus and Simone Mühl (eds), *Between the Cultures*, Heidelberg: Heidelberger Orientverlag, 2011, pp. 321–29.

220   *ARAB* 2, e.g., texts 829, 835, 858, 861. See also Harris, 'Inanna-Ishtar', p. 270; Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, pp. LXXI, IL; *Encyclopaedia Iranica*: 'Arbela' [www. accessed 30 December 2014].

221   Fales and Lanfranchi, 'Impact', p. 104.

222   Butler, *Judges*, p. 22; Burney, *Judges*, p. 43. Block has no explanation for the meaning of 'City of Four' (*Judges,* pp. 92–93). Compare Niditch, *Judges*, p. 40.

Hebron itself is found four times in Judges and readily reduces to a 3+1 configuration: three times it occurs in chapter 1 in the account of Caleb's possession of it, and once in chapter 16 in the context of Samson's transplantation of the doors of Gaza. This event is located within another 3+1 construction. The interrelationship is even more layered. Gaza is also found four times. In its first occurrence it is enclosed within references to Hebron. In its final two appearances the inverse occurs: it now binds the reference to Hebron. Thus, Gaza is positioned in the text as the mirror-image of Hebron throughout within its own 3+1 arrangement. Three times it is encountered in close connection with Hebron; once it stands outside this (Hebron: 1:10 (x2), 1:20. 16:3; Gaza: 1:18, 6:4, 16:3, 16:21).

Four, then, represents both for the Mesopotamians and for the Israelites completeness, and this completeness supplies the stability of order. There is an immoveable quality about four based in the equilibrium it symbolizes, and therein lies its perfection. Where the quadripartite unit is mutated through one member of the set not conforming to, or breaking away from, the pattern that defines the whole, placing that member in opposition to the others, the inevitable result is instability through the destruction of order.[223] In Assyria, the principal role of the king was to uphold order. The same obtained for the pharaohs who were responsible for the preservation of *ma'at* (order and equilibrium).[224] It is, in all societies that conform to a legal code, the primary duty of the judge to protect and preserve the established order. The prevalence of 3+1 in the book provides an oblique commentary on Israel's sustained attack on the divine order through its progressive failure to conform to Yahweh's laws, illustrated not least in the increasingly reprobate conduct of its judges, and its unquenchable desire to emulate the worst aspects of the surrounding nations.[225]

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223   In the myths surrounding the most powerful deities in the Sumerian pantheon, harmony and stability are threatened by the rivalry between Ninhursaga and Ea-Enki who, with Anu and Enlil, occupy the preeminent positions. It is evident that one of them does not readily conform to this particular set (Jacobsen, *Treasures*, pp. 103–114; S.N. Kramer, 'Enki and His Inferiority Complex', *OrNS* 39 (1970), pp. 103–10).

224   David, *Religion*, pp. 2, 89.

225   The use of 3+1 in necromancy is a variation on the theme of breaking down the existing order. Threefold incantation works to reconfigure magically the reality; the fourth utterance activates, or at least takes place in, the new psychic environment. Compare Barthel Hrouda's comments on the incantation accompanying the sacrifice of a goat-kid to Ereshkigal in Arndt Haller, *Die Gräber und Grüfte von Assur*, Berlin: Mann, 1954, p. 184. It may be that the 3+1 literary arrangement ultimately derives from incantation rites, with the fourth utterance signalling altered state. There is a parallel in the account of Utnapishtim's release of three birds in sequence at the end of the flood in *Gilgamesh*

The Abimelech story furnishes the ideal host for inserting the 3+1 code. Its subject, the institution of a monarchy based on the comprehensive overturning of the rule of law, the worship of Ba'al and the resulting disintegration of social cohesion provides a graphic illustration of the effect of 3+1 in practice. In addition, as Polzin remarks, this part of Judges is divorced from any direct reference to Yahweh, in contrast to those that precede and follow it. From this he deduces that 'Israel is now so much like the remaining nations that surround them that the names of any one of these nations could be substituted in the story wherever Israel is mentioned, and the story would remain entirely intelligible'.[226] Actually, Abimelech is presented in a worse light.[227] The two Midianite kings speak with one voice and exhibit noble courage in the face of death, Sisera's mother in her cherishing of her son possesses the humanity absent in Abimelech, and even the Canaanite ruler, Adoni-bezek, displays a tragic dignity. While Israel's mission was to conquer the land for the cult of Yahweh, in the Abimelech episode this vocation has been entirely displaced by

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(XI.146–55; see also Heidel, *Gilgamesh*, p. 253). Their despatch is followed by the release of all the creatures in the boat. The significance of the five instances of 3+1 presented in the words of Agur in Proverbs 30, aphorisms which, we are told, were collected at the time of Hezekiah (Prov. 25:1), approximates more closely to this conception than the 'destruction of the established order' meaning it suggests in Judges. In each case, the fourth component indicates either an altered state or represents an item that, in various ways, is materially different from but complementary to its set. Superficially, these quadripartite collections seem to form harmonious units. On closer reading, however, the fourth element is subversive. The first specimen given – those entities that are never satisfied and therefore constantly seek a changed state – comes closest to the signification of 3+1 in Judges: the fourth member, fire, is an agent of destruction of the established order. Zakovitch perceptively observes that in a number of places in the Hebrew Bible, including Judg. 16:15, in sequences that evince a 3+1 pattern, the number three is explicitly mentioned and four is not. He infers that this 'proves that the important integer in the pattern is the number three which is the number of completeness and that the integer four is *only* the number beyond it' (emphasis added) (*"For Three"*, pp. iii, xxii). As the biblical evidence cited above attests, four also can convey the quality of completeness. Indeed, Amos's oracle cluster in which the phrase 'for three transgressions, and for four' introduces each oracle demonstrates that 'four' can signify emphatic completeness (Am. 1:3–2:16). What Delilah's explicit reference to 'three' intimates is not the completeness of Samson's mendacious replies but rather that his fourth answer will engender a fundamental change of state that will in turn unleash destruction.

226 *Moses*, p. 174.

227 Exactly as Ezekiel describes Jerusalem at the turn of the sixth century BC: 'she has changed my judgments into wickedness more than the nations, and my statutes more than the countries round about' (5:5–7).

Ba'al worship. The ubiquity of Ba'alism is accentuated through the chapter by repeated reference to the inhabitants as 'baals'. Gideon is known only as Jerubbaal, and Yahweh only as Elohim.[228] The inference to be drawn is that Yahweh's distancing of himself is connected with the blood-pollution of the land, the grievousness of which is emphasized again in 9:24. In fact, Yahweh-Elohim's only explicit involvement is through the agency of an 'evil spirit' that he dispatches to destabilize the relationship between the baals of Shechem and their king. The meaning is plain: just as the aberrant member of the set of trees was an unreasoning and destructive force against the order and productivity represented by the other three, so the 3+1 pattern encoded through the book symbolizes the dangerous, escalating assault on divine order through the worship of other gods and the concomitant rejection of Yahweh's statutes. As Bluedorn remarks, in Judges Ba'al acts as a metonym for all other illicit gods.[229] Furthermore, the Abimelech section is introduced by a 3+1 set of illicit religious practices: 'whoring after the ephod', 'whoring after the ba'alîm', making Ba'al-berith their god, and 'not remembering Yahweh their God' (8:27–35).

Thus, the 3+1 pattern is a more extreme form of the asymmetry found in 1+1 and 2+2 chiastic oppositions. However, while the binary sets of the ḥîdôth draw attention to the bilateral relationship between Israel and its God, the 3+1 configuration has a different, though complementary, role. It indicates that the repercussions of Israel's apostasy and contumacy are cosmic, for they challenge the essence of the divine order and the equilibrium of settled existence. This is seen in the ramifications of the 3+1 exchange between Samson and Delilah regarding his secret and, more prosaically, but with even greater destructive effect, of that between the Levite and his father-in-law in Bethlehem-judah. 3+1, the pattern that the writer employs for classifying eccentric murder implements, takes us to the doors of death. The ḥîdôth cast oblique light on the Yahweh-Israel relationship; the 3+1 figure exposes the consequences of its breakdown as exemplified in the Abimelech episode: Yahweh removing himself, an evil spirit doing his work, lawlessness, mutual destruction of all the conspirators/idolaters, utter desolation, in a framework of retributive judgment (9:56–57). It is a dystopian world that spawns certainly the most bizarre character found in a book not lacking such: the vacuous, drunken Gaal the son of Ebed ('Loathing the son of Slave') (9:26–41).[230] In the circumstances of

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228 Younger, *Judges/Ruth*, p. 40. Bluedorn observes that this is the consequence of the Israelites' forgetting Yahweh (Judg. 8:34) (*Yahweh*, p. 201).

229 Ibid., p. 183.

230 Block, *Judges*, p. 326; Butler, *Judges*, pp. 245–46. Gaal also employs a 3+1 construction based on *mî* 'who': 3 x 'who' + 1 x 'I' (9:28–29). In a further indication that the writer

Judah's situation in the seventh century BC, such a set of images must surely have had great resonance.

Thus, through the codes of 1+1, 2+2, 3+1, and the multiple asymmetries that the writer creates between the words he uses and the meanings he assigns them (a characteristic technique of the riddler), Judges is a study in the opposition between symmetry and asymmetry. The significance of this for the book's underpinning theology is summed up in the following extract from McManus's book:[231] 'Just as left and right have their associations, their myriad indirect references, so also, like all other binary oppositions, do the concepts of symmetry and asymmetry. [...] A table best represents them:

TABLE 1   *Concepts associated with symmetry and asymmetry*

Symmetry	Asymmetry
rest	motion
binding	loosening
order	arbitrariness
law	accident
formal rigidity	life, play
constraint	freedom

The contrast between Yahweh's purpose for his people, rooted in the symmetry he represents, and Israel's irrepressible aspiration for an existence grounded in all that asymmetry offers provides the ontological landscape of Judges which the composition's structures and lexical pyrotechnics portray.[232]

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of Judges was conversant in Assyrian, there is a probable bilingual pun on the name of Abimelech's local commander in Shechem, Zebul. In Hebrew the name connotes 'a prince' (Block, *Judges*, p. 326), that is, one laden with honour. In Akkadian, however, forms of *zabālu* signify someone laden with a heavy burden, and a corvée worker (*CAD* Z, 1961, pp. 1–3), thus developing the 'son of a slave' motif. Furthermore, in the LXX rendering of Gaal's seditious rant, he refers to Zebul as Abimelech's 'slave' (9:28). He who is elevated in the court of Abimelech is, by any normal standard, merely a drudge.

231   *Right Hand*, p. 391.

232   Alter nicely defines this contrast as 'a tension between God's will, His providential guidance, and human freedom, the refractory nature of man' (*Narrative*, p. 33).

Not Quite at Home: Geography and Otherness

Let me tell you about heartache and the loss of God. Wandering, wandering in hopeless night[1]

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The subject of the four cardinal points brings us back to the treatment of geography in Judges. We have noted that the attention given to it is acute. This is witnessed not only in the careful handling of topographical distinctions, which indicates that the writer was familiar with the landscape of Cisjordan as he composed the work,[2] but also in the directional sweep of the narrative. The representation of the tribes at the beginning of book, as they set about claiming their allocated holdings, moves broadly from the south to the north,[3] beginning with Judah and concluding with the northern tribes of Zebulun, Asher, Naphtali and Dan,[4] the one tribe that failed to secure more than a foothold in its intended territory.[5] The Danite allocation was, of course, to the west of Judah and Benjamin, and therefore a southern district. But, as a result of their failure, they seized a possession in the extreme north, beyond the allotted

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1   Morrison, *American Night*, p. 127.

2   Driver, *Deuteronomy*, pp. xlii–xliii.

3   Concerning the northward gravitation of geo-political power at the time of the Settlement, and then subsequently in the period of the divided monarchy, Alt observes: 'The balance of political power, which two centuries previously had shifted from Egypt to Philistia, was now advancing in the same geographical direction towards the interior of Palestine, from the plains into the mountains, and thus from the regions of the ancient and more or less exhausted Canaanite culture into the area peopled by the young nations out of the desert. [. . .] The same historical movement from south to north can be traced even further; from Thebes through the city of Rameses in the Nile Delta to Philistia, and from Jerusalem through Damascus to Nineveh and Babylon' (*Essays*, p. 220).

4   Gillmayr-Bucher (*Richterbuch*, p. 52) interprets the south-north progression rather to relate to the list of indigenous peoples who remained in the land.

5   One might say that 'Judah went up' and Dan gave up.

borders of the promised land. As Brettler remarks, 'from the editor's perspective [and, one could add, that of his contemporary readers], [Dan] is in the far north'.[6] In fact, Judges provides the first occurrence in the Bible of the thereafter frequent merism for the Israelite nation, 'from Dan to Beer-sheba', the cities marking its northern and southern extremities (20:1).[7]

The argument for the migration of the Danites, which is reported in Judges 18, taking place early in the period covered by the book, and certainly substantially before the Samson episodes, has already been mentioned. A considerable body of scholarly opinion supports the idea.[8] Burney advances a number of arguments for it. The first is that, in the report of the tribal allocations in Joshua, Dan is already identified with its northern home (Josh. 19:40–48). Secondly, the reference to Dan as seafarers in the Song of Deborah comports better with a northern location, from which they would enjoy contact with the Phoenicians, than in the south, contained on the west by the Philistines.[9] Indeed, the geographical area mentioned in the Samson cycle is so modest that the Danites could scarcely have sustained themselves as a tribe in such a space in the period up to the time of Samson, and why only then would they seek an alternative? Finally, Burney refers to Jonathan and the fact that, if he was the grandson of Moses, the establishment of the city of Dan must have occurred very early.[10] Gray observes that, in the introduction to the Samson story, Manoah is described as of the clan/family of Dan, whereas the Danites refer to themselves in chapter 18 as a tribe [šēbeṭ] and clan/family in Israel,[11] implying that the movement of the main tribe away from the south had occurred before Samson's birth. These arguments can be supplemented with others. It would suit the context of the narrative that Manoah was a member of a remnant of Danites who were true to Yahwism and thus faithfully attempting to live in their allotted territory rather than joining the bulk of the tribe, who had migrated north and succumbed to idolatry. On such a premise, it is, therefore, precisely because of their faithfulness to Yahweh that Manoah and his wife were granted the angelic appearances and Samson's miraculous conception.

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6   'Literature', p. 404.

7   It is symptomatic of the relationship between Yahweh and his people presented in Judges that whereas the direction of his actions is northward, the Israelites define the country in mirror-image, south from Dan.

8   Gray, *Joshua, Judges*, p. 342; Malamat, 'Charismatic Leadership', p. 154; Crenshaw, *Samson*, p. 63; Soggin, *Judges*, pp. 226–27; Block, *Judges*, p. 233.

9   For the contrary view, see Boling, *Judges*, p. 112, and Niditch, *Judges*, p. 183.

10   *Judges*, pp. 31, 142–43, 339–41, 417.

11   *Joshua, Judges*, p. 342. Judg. 13:2; 18:19. On the kinship terms used, see Naomi Steinberg, 'Social-Scientific Criticism', in Yee (ed.), *Judges*, pp. 46–64 (53).

The place where the Spirit of Yahweh first moved upon Samson was Mahaneh-Dan 'the camp of Dan'; according to Judg. 18:12, however, it only received this name, which it retains 'to this day', when the six hundred Danites began their migration. *Ergo*, Samson's story is later than theirs (13:25).[12] To this may be added that, because the Danites had abandoned the area, it is Judahites that Samson encounters, not members of his own tribe. Finally, in the tribal prophecies attributed to Moses in Deuteronomy, Dan is not found in the south-west, but 'is a lion's whelp that shall leap from Bashan' (Deut. 33:22). The case for the early migration of the Danites to the city of Dan in Judges is, therefore, compelling.

The south-north tribal progression that frames the book's initial chapter is echoed in the sequence of the major judges, beginning with Othniel, the representative of Judah, and ending with the Danite Samson, a correlation on which some commentaries remark, though generally without questioning why.[13] Leaving aside the south-western locale of the Samson cycle, which will be explored in a subsequent chapter, the principal reason that this connection is not made more often is that most modern commentators, on the basis of their interpretation of Judges 5:15, consider Deborah an Issacharite.[14] The position of 'the palm tree of Deborah, between Ramah and Bethel in Mount Ephraim' under which she dwelt (4:5), conveys, however, that she is possibly a Benjamite, or, more likely, an Ephraimite.[15] While according to the divisions given by Joshua, Ramah belongs to the patrimony of Benjamin, the ownership

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12   Compare Klein's explanation (*Triumph*, p. 157).

13   Webb, *Integrated*, p. 118; Malamat, 'Charismatic Leadership', p. 152; Younger, *Judges/Ruth*, pp. 30, 34; Hackett, 'Judges', pp. 138–39. Exceptions are Brettler who ascribes it to a polemic against northern political leadership, based on the declining standards observed in the characters of the judges after Ehud ('Literature', pp. 405–07; idem, *Judges*, p. 111) and O'Connell (*Rhetoric*, p. 2). Many exegetes, however, see no geographical pattern in the locations of the major judges, e.g., Driver (*Introduction*, p. 167), and Butler (*Judges*, pp. lix–lx), who contrasts the east-west orientation of the book of Joshua with the, in his opinion, geographically amorphous schema of the judges.

14   For example, Driver, *Introduction*, p. 171; Herzberg, *Bücher*, p. 174; Gray, *Joshua, Judges*, p. 286; Klein, *Triumph*, p. 101. Some commentaries hold the precarious view, given the application of *špṭ* to Deborah, that Baraq was actually the judge (Burney, *Judges*, p. 290; Eissfeld, *Introduction*, 258; Driver, *Introduction*, p. 167; idem, *Samuel*, pp. 92–93; Webb, *Judges*, p. 34). Soggin understands both Deborah and Baraq to be major judges (*Introduction*, p. 176).

15   Block, *Judges*, p. 192; Hackett, 'Judges', p. 139. Gray navigates the discrepancy between his reading of Judg. 5:15 and Deborah's home with the customary appeal to two traditions (*Joshua, Judges*, p. 286).

of Bethel and its environs is ambiguous (Josh. 16:1–9; 18:11–13, 22),[16] and it was the 'house of Joseph' that took the city (Judg. 1:22–25). Judges 7:24 strongly implies that the inhabitants of Mount Ephraim were largely Ephraimites. In addition, the aetiology of the tribal name of Ephraim, evincing 'fruitfulness' (Gen. 41:52), matches the 'mother in Israel' motif, the 'bee' by a palm tree.[17] Using the image of a tree, Jacob's blessing upon Joseph developed the theme of fruitfulness particularly with reference to female fertility: 'Joseph is a fruitful bough [...] the Almighty who shall bless you [...] with blessings of the breasts and the womb [...]' (Gen. 49:22–26). Regardless of tribal affiliation, what cannot be in doubt is that Deborah is at once geographically central and yet liminal: she is located in the centre of the land, but on the border between the northern and southern tribes, therefore of what would become the two kingdoms, spatially as well as chronologically placed between Ehud and Gideon. It is these facts that the Judges author is anxious to stress. 'Of which tribe was Deborah? We do not know for sure. There are some who, on the basis of the textual environment assert that she was from the tribe of Naphtali [note: not Issachar], like Baraq, her partner in leadership and, according to the Midrash her husband, while, according to another view, on the basis of the Peshat, she came from the tribe of Ephraim'.[18]

An important difference between the approach to the tribes in Judges 1 and the siting of the major judges is that, in the latter, the movement sweeps in

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16   Martin Noth, *The Old Testament World*, London: Black, 1966, p. 72.

17   For the fertility symbolism of the date palm in Mesopotamian thought and religion, see, for example, Jacobsen, *Treasures*, pp. 26, 33–36. It possessed similar connotations in Egyptian cult (David, *Religion*, p. 285). Part of the basis for this association is that the date palm is dioecious, i.e., there are male and female trees. No doubt, the fertility and statuesque beauty of the palm inspired its use as a female name in biblical Hebrew, Tamar (see Ct. 7:7–8). It was particularly associated in the Neo-Assyrian mind with both Ishtar and the king (Simo Parpola, 'Globalization of Religion', in *Melammu: The Ancient World in an Age of Globalization*, ed. by Markham Geller, Berlin: Edition Open Access, 2014, pp. 15–27 [23]; *Assyrian Prophecies*, p. xcv). In Egyptian beliefs, likewise, it connoted meaning beyond pure fertility, symbolizing long life. The notches on its trunk depicted years (Manfred Lurker, *Routledge Dictionary of Gods and Goddesses, Devils and Demons*, London: Routledge, 1987, p. 72). Often it is represented with the shen rings of eternity at its base. 'In Herodian times the preparation of the incense [for temple rites] was a kind of privilege retained in the family of Abtinas [...]. They were particularly credited with knowing how to cause the smoke of the incense-offering to rise in the form of the stem of a date-tree' [*Jewish Encyclopaedia 1906*, www.JewishEncyclopaedia.com. 'Incense' accessed 19 December 2015]. In Judaism, the date palm is a symbol of redemption and resurrection (Simon Schama, *The Story of the Jews*, New York: HarperCollins, 2013, p. 170).

18   Kraus, *Bírák*, p. 38.

a north-easterly arc from Judah, through Benjamin (Ehud), the hill country of Ephraim (Deborah), Manasseh (Gideon), to Transjordan (the Gileadite, Jephthah),[19] and thence to Dan.

The emphasis that the writer affords the south-north axis in the first chapter of the book and then repeats in the progress of the major judges must prompt the question of its significance. Ezekiel proclaims to Jerusalem 'Your big sister is Samaria. She and her daughters are those who dwell to your left. Your little sister who dwells to your right is Sodom and her daughters' (16:46). Plainly, here the right and left are to be interpreted geographically. Samaria lies to the north of Jerusalem, Sodom to the south. Their respective left and right positions can only make sense if Jerusalem is understood to face east, and this introduces the subject of the spatial orientation of the Israelites, one on which the Hebrew language is very revealing, as Malamat explains:

> In archaic biblical contexts, in poetic passages but occasionally also in prose, [east and west] appear as *qedem*, 'fore', and *ʾāḥōr*, 'hind', respectively – indications of true *orient*ation. The early Israelite *ergo* faced east. In keeping with this, south and north were referred to as *yāmīn*, 'right', and *śəmōʾl*, 'left', respectively. Indeed, all four of these archaic designations

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19   With Jephthah, an analogous uncertainty exists over tribal designation to that encountered with Deborah. Throughout he is called a Gileadite. Some commentators, who hold that Gileadite and Gadite are synonymous, consider that this may indicate that he was a Gadite (see, for instance, Burney, *Judges*, pp. 142, 290; Malamat, 'Charismatic Leadership', p. 154; Block, *Judges*, p. 233; Sasson, 'Breeder', p. 349). Opposing this view are others such as Klein (*Triumph*, p. 82), and Lindars, who argues that Gilead is a purely geographical term ('Tribes', pp. 97, 99. See also *BhH* 1, p. 571). Webb understands Gilead as the territory of Gad plus part of Transjordanian Manasseh (*Judges*, p. 213). But Gilead is also a person: he is listed as the grandson of Manasseh (Num. 26:29; see Butler, *Judges*, pp. 148–49), and the Gileadites being a clan within the Josephite tribes may be the basis of the enigmatic Ephraimite taunt recorded in Judges 12:4. Nevertheless, there are arguments in favour of Gilead meaning Gad in Judges. It certainly seems to carry this connotation in the Song of Deborah since Reuben and Machir (Manasseh), the two other Transjordanian tribes, are listed separately (5:14–17; regarding Machir's association with Transjordan, see Burney, *Judges*, pp. 134–35; for a contrary view, Lindars, 'Tribes', p. 105; Soggin, *Joshua*, p. 159). There is obvious parallelism in Jephthah's illegitimate birth and membership of a concubine tribe, and the irony of Jephthah being hounded out of town because of his illegitimacy by the descendants of a concubine seems a characteristic flourish of the writer. Again, as with Deborah, it is the certainties that should engage us, not the speculation. And what is assured is that Jephthah is the major judge who comes from Transjordan and, thus, represents the north-east in their number. A possible explanation for the reticence regarding his tribal affiliation is advanced in Chapter 7.

are to be found in a single passage in Job (23:8–9): 'Behold, I go *forw*ard (*qedem*, that is, east), but he is not there; and *back*ward (*ʾāḥōr*, that is, west), but I cannot perceive him; on the *left* hand (*śəmōʾl*, that is, north) I seek him, but I cannot behold him; I turn to the *right* hand (*yāmīn*, that is, south), but I cannot see him.' [...] The Hebrew words *qedem* and *ʾāḥōr*, are not only spatially applied but are used temporally. *Qedem* has a dual meaning just as does the English word 'before', while *ʾāḥōr*, spatially 'behind' is also temporal 'after', or 'future'. *Qedem*, meaning past, is so common in Biblical Hebrew that no examples are necessary. The temporal aspect of *ʾāḥōr* [:] [...] its reference to 'future' can be seen in Proverbs 31:25: 'Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come' (RSV; Hebrew *yōm ʾaḥarōn* [...]). In summary, the ancient concept of the flow of time is, outwardly, the very opposite of the modern, western, one, in which we look forward into the future and walk into it, while the past remains behind us. [...] The Mariotes and the early Israelites – and probably the ancient Semites in general[20] – regarded the past as revealed and spread out before them, while the future lay behind them, unseen and unknown. Thus, they progressed backwards into the future. It is like a rower in a boat who faces the stern and rows 'backwards' through the water [...].[21]

Additional examples will further corroborate this crucial matter: 'Are you not from everlasting, Yahweh?' (i.e., *miqqedem* 'from the past/east');[22] 'and afterwards (*ʾaḥarê* 'behind, west') it shall be inhabited as in the days of old' (*qedem* 'of the past/in front/east'); from Judges itself, 'it is west of (*ʾaḥarê* 'at the back of')

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20   It appears that the Sumerians had a northern orientation and that this was adopted by the Babylonians and Assyrians (Huxley, 'Gates', pp. 113–15). Note the orientation of the great Enlil ziggurat-temple in Nippur (Thorkild Jacobsen, 'Notes on Ekur', *Eretz-Israel* [1990], pp. 40–47 [41, 44]). Compare Hildegard Lewy, 'Ištar-Ṣad and the Bow Star', in *Studies Landsberger*, pp. 273–81 (277, n. 41), who claims that when they offered prayers to the gods of the night sky, the Assyrians faced west.

21   *Mari*, pp. 67–69. This simile recalls the imagery for the passage of time used by that formidable scholar of Hebrew, Jerome: 'Every day we are dying, every day we change; and yet we think ourselves eternal. [...] and, *as the boat cuts through the waves, with every splash of water on the prow, the span of our lives is lessened*' (emphasis added) (Jerome Ep. lx. 19, *Epistolae*, ed. by I. Hilberg, CSEL [Vienna, 1912], quoted in Philip Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority, and the Church in the Age of Jerome and Cassian*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978, pp. 99–100).

22   Soggin notes that, in the rabbinical era, *miqqedem* (Josh. 7:2) was generally understood temporally rather than spatially (*Joshua*, p. 99).

Kiriath-jearim' (Judg. 18:12; Hab. 1:12; Jer. 46:26). The verb 'to confront, meet', drawing on the sense of 'to move in the direction that one is facing' is formed from *qedem*, e.g., 'The snares of death confront me' (Ps. 18:6). The *Piʿēl* form of the verb suggests 'to forestall', that is, 'to place beforehand'.[23] Regarding the north/left, south/right associations: 'to the left/north of Damascus'; 'then the border ran right/south' (Gen. 14:15; Josh. 17:7).

It is apparent, however, that such a worldview is based on the perceived movement of the sun,[24] and therefore one might expect to find these ideas represented more widely than solely among Semitic peoples. This expectation is borne out. The Indo-European peoples, too, originated north of the Tropic of Cancer and therefore, if they faced the sunrise, the sun's course through the rest of the day was always on their right-hand side. A number of Indo-European languages, in which the words for 'south' and 'right' are partly interchangeable, reflect this experience.[25]

There are two further signifiers of cardinal points in biblical Hebrew that deserve mention. The first is *ʿal-pᵊnê*, literally 'to the face of', but often for, by now clear, reasons it has the meaning 'east of'.[26] The second is a common term for 'west' *yām*, the usual word for 'sea'. *Yām* often denotes the Mediterranean which marked Israel's western border in the tribal allocations. Although there is geographical logic in the word for '(Mediterranean) sea' signifying 'west',[27] the designation incorporates a metaphysical dimension: with an eastern orientation, it is, as stated in Deuteronomy 'the sea of behind' (*hayyām ʾaḥᵃrōn*) (Deut. 11:24), and, therefore, the future. In short, it is *hayyām haggādôl*,[28] 'the great sea' of unknowing.

23　　*BDB*, pp. 869–70.

24　　Wayne Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, Winona Lake IN: Eisenbrauns, 1998, p. 33.

25　　McManus, *Right Hand*, pp. 24–25. A related phenomenon in northern languages is the association of the south with light and the north with darkness. In Hungarian, for example, the words for 'south' and 'noon' on the one hand, and 'north' and 'night' on the other, are etymologically identical (*A magyar nyelv történeti etimológiai szótára* 1, ed. by Loránd Benkő, Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1967, pp. 606–607, 798–99).

26　　Driver, *Samuel*, p. 123; Burney, *Judges*, p. 377. Compare *BDB* (p. 818) which states 'of localities, *in front of* mostly (but not always) = *east of*'.

27　　Noth, *Old Testament World*, p. 61.

28　　'The Great Sea' is a frequent term for the Mediterranean in Joshua and Ezekiel. 'Great Sea' (*tâmtu rabītu*) was also a designation given to the Mediterranean in Akkadian (*CAD* T, 2006, p. 154; Abraham Malamat, 'Campaigns to the Mediterranean by Iahdunlim and Other Rulers', in *Studies Landsberger*, pp. 356–73 [371]). On the attribution of mystical qualities to the Mediterranean, see Malamat, *Mari*, pp. 107–12. Compare *RLA* 8 1/2, p. 5.

In her study of the book of Numbers, Douglas writes of 'the steady centre' in the patriarchal stories which she places in the territory between Hebron and the Negev.[29] The Judges author leaves no doubt as to the steady centre of his book. It is 'the hill country of Ephraim', and specifically the southern part of the mountain ridge north to Mount Gerizim and Shechem.[30] In fact, he even supplies its beginning and end points, described, consistent with the geographical dynamic used elsewhere in the work, in a south-north direction, and gives the central axis between them. Typically, though, he withholds this precision until the final seven verses of the book: 'the highway that goes up from Bethel to Shechem' (21:19). Apart from the Othniel, Jephthah and Samson stories, the role of which is to mark peripheries, every major cycle, including the first two chapters and the book's concluding two stories, are set in part in the hill country of Ephraim on either side of this corridor.[31] Furthermore, usually 'the hill country of Ephraim' explicitly features at the beginning and/or end of the section.[32] This is the case even when the focus of the tale is elsewhere and including mention of the area seems more or less redundant, as in the Deborah episode. Judges commences with reference to the death of Joshua who is buried in the hill country of Ephraim; the events at Shiloh, also located on the mountain, conclude the book (2:9; 21:19–23). Israel's first king, Abimelech, is appointed at Shechem and it is, for a period, the centre of the national cult of Ba'al-berith. Assuming that the Septuagint is correct and Bochim is Bethel,[33] or at least very near it, each of the Israelites' 3+1 weepings occurs on Mount

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29   *Wilderness*, p. 97.

30   'The southern half attains, in its northern part near Shechem, an elevation of 2604 feet (Mount Gerizim). The northern half commences near Shechem with Mount Ebal' ([*Jewish Encyclopaedia*, 1906: www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/5794-ephraim-mountain-of accessed 18 December 2015]; *BhH* 1, p. 420). Archaeological findings indicate that this was the centre of initial Israelite settlement in Palestine (Hackett, 'Judges', p. 161).

31   The distance from Bethel to Shechem is approximately 21 miles/34 kms.

32   Even the Jephthah series begins and concludes with references to the Ephraimite territory (Judg. 10:9, 12:1–6; see Burney, *Judges*, pp. 318–19). At the end of the cycle, the men of Ephraim are explicitly said to 'pass north' to confront Jephthah (Herzberg, *Bücher*, p. 213; Niditch, *Judges*, p. 251). Burney remarks on the topographical impossibility of this (*Judges*, p. 326). Consequently, following LXX A, a number of commentaries treat the word for 'north' as a place name (for example, Block, *Judges*, p. 379; Butler, *Judges*, p. 276). However, while unpromising topographically, the Ephraimites' northward journey is entirely consistent symbolically with the preoccupations of the book since they cannot meet their end south of their homes (see below).

33   Webb, *Integrated*, p. 105; Soggin, *Judges*, p. 30; Gray, *Joshua, Judges*, p. 231; see also Niditch, *Judges*, p. 47.

Ephraim (2:4; 20:23, 26; 21:2). The Ark of the Covenant was located at Bethel and Deborah's palm was close by. Micah's idol cult that transfers to Dan was first established in the hill country of Ephraim (17:1; 18:2; 20:27). The first 'minor judge' and deliverer, Tola, an Issacharite, operated from there, as did Abdon, the last in the series (10:1; 12:13–15).[34] The writer is, in fact, more concerned to supply the minor judges' geographical identifiers than their tribal affiliations, and these describe an arc that moves north-eastwards from Mount Ephraim to Gilead (Jair),[35] and Galilee (Ibzan),[36] then west to Zebulun (Elon) and finally south back to Mount Ephraim. The failure of the Levite's party to reach the hill country before nightfall led to the events at Gibeah (where they were hosted by a native of Mount Ephraim). It supplies the setting for the Levite's dismembering of the concubine and is the place from which he despatches her parts to the twelve tribes. The notion implied in this act that Mount Ephraim is the hub with spokes radiating from it to all the corners of the country is reinforced in the book's penultimate verse: 'And the sons of Israel departed [from Shiloh] at that time, every man to his tribe and to his family' (21:24).

Yet, actually, the concubine's story illustrates the tension between the 'steady-centre' nature of the hill country of Ephraim in the composition and the book's south-north dynamic, for she whose body is distributed from Ephraim is herself from the south, from Bethlehem of the tribe of Judah, and most of her body must have been sent north of where she began life. The journeys of the two wayfaring Levites display the same tension. Jonathan's route rehearses the far-south to far-north direction of the chapter 1 account of the tribes' varied success in occupying their intended territories and, therefore, approximates that of the major judges. The second Levite, on the other hand, ends where he began: in the hill country of Ephraim.[37] Even chapter 1, however, deftly manages to incorporate a circular routing with the south-north direction of its treatment of the tribes. Using the failure of the Danites to overcome Amorite opposition as the link, the focus switches from the northern tribes of Israel via Josephite lands in the centre-west to 'the Ascent of the Scorpions', a location on Judah's south-east frontier (1:34–36). It is a remarkable feature

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34   Burney locates Abdon's base of Pirathon six miles/9 kms south-west of Shechem (*Judges*, p. 335).

35   Klein remarks that the geographical opposition between Tola and Jair operated on an east-west axis (i.e., either side of the Jordan) as well as on the south-north axis (*Triumph*, p. 82).

36   This accepts the majority view that the Bethlehem of Ibzan is the Zebulunite city of that name mentioned in Joshua 19:15. See Soggin, *Judges*, p. 192; *BhH* 1, p. 234.

37   Klein, *Triumph*, p. 161.

of Judges that all the main episodes either end where they began,[38] or to the north of their starting point, as graphically demonstrated by the concubine's body.[39] The tribal muster against Gibeah that occurs at Bethel disbands in Shiloh. Its position north of Bethel is emphasized in the text (21:19). In other words, no Israelites conclude their parts in the narrative south of the point where they are introduced into it.[40] This is such a fundamental principle for the author that it is the Judahites who lead the assault against Gibeah (20:18),[41] and a point is made of Samson being returned to his birthplace posthumously from beneath the rubble and bodies at Gaza, which lies considerably to the south of where his tale begins (16:31). The circularity of Samson's journey in life and death is perhaps prefigured in his grinding toil in the Gaza prison.[42]

In a work as concerned with the treatment of space as Judges is, this information regarding the spatial orientation and geographical centre of the book provides valuable tools for its interpretation. Before applying this information to the analysis, however, it is necessary to examine another crucial concern of the book, otherness.

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38   Gideon, Jephthah, Samson, Micah, the Levite, and all the minor judges. According to the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (vol. 7, 2nd edn, ed. by Fred Skolnik, Michael Berenbaum et al., Farmington Hills MI: Thomson Gale, 2007, p. 587), Gideon's journey from Ophrah in pursuit of the Midianites extends far to the south-east. See also Burney, *Judges*, pp. 220–24, who posits that Ophrah was near Shechem. Nevertheless, his life ends where it began. Ehud certainly goes north to Mount Ephraim from Jericho, roughly retracing the journey of Yahweh's angel in Judg. 2:1, but the site of his battle with the Moabites at the Jordan fords is not revealed (3:27–28). Nor is the precise location of Gilgal known beyond it lying east of Jericho (Block, *Judges*, p. 111). Miller and Tucker maintain that it lay due east (*Joshua*, p. 194). The likelihood is that the battle took place near Jericho where, one imagines, Eglon's forces were assembled. The balance of probability suggests that Ehud's final recorded journey was cyclical, as was his first (3:15–26). We may infer from the fact that, as Jericho is at the northern limit of Benjamite territory (Josh. 18:12), he probably did not retire north of the site of his exploits.

39   Joshua, Deborah, Jael and Heber, Abimelech (see Webb, *Judges*, pp. 291–92 on the location of Thebez), Jonathan and the Danites. Taking into consideration Pentateuchal material, Joshua and Caleb were probably born in Egypt and thus both died far to the north of where their stories begin. Phinehas certainly and, in all likelihood, Othniel were born in the wilderness and therefore also came from south of where the Judges account of them ends.

40   Delilah probably went to Gaza from the Vale of Sorek and died there, but that is not stated (see Chapter 2).

41   Judah's vanguard role in the battle also points to the relationship of the final part of Judges with the book's first section (see Chapter 4).

42   Bal, *Lethal Love*, p. 62.

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Whereas the south-north progression of the major judge episodes is not universally favoured by exegetes, the proposition that the sequence of major judges from Othniel to Samson traces a waning in adherence to Yahweh's statutes and standards enjoys broad consensus. This decline reflects the descending spiral of apostasy and contumacy in the people of Israel.[43] Furthermore, Susan Niditch observes that the major judges, or at least all but Othniel, are 'marginal within their own social structures: Jephthah is an illegitimate son of a harlot, Deborah a woman, and Ehud a left-handed man. While the latter two may seem less obvious examples of marginality, the symbolism of left-handedness is marked in the OT [...]. Women are in many ways permanently marginal in Israelite culture, safely fenced off by rules of uncleanness and by their usual roles in the private, domestic realm. In a world defined by male criteria, they are the constant other. A woman warrior leader, such as Deborah, is indeed a rarity in Israel, a character who underscores the special boundary nature of judges'.[44] Turning her attention to Samson, Niditch goes on to remark 'The tales of Samson are about remaining marginal'.[45] Younger amplifies this: 'Gideon, Jephthah, Samson come from less than acceptable backgrounds. Gideon's father has made a Baal altar and an Asherah pole in Gideon's home town. Jephthah is the son of a prostitute. Samson is from the renegade tribe of Dan'.[46]

The characterisation of these three figures as 'marginal', however, understates who they are and what they represent. They are distinctly 'other', and each more so than his predecessor. Put differently, their characters and conduct as revealed in Judges do not place them on the fuzzy frontier of conformity/ nonconformity on which Deborah, Ehud and, I will argue, Othniel are positioned, but firmly place them on the other side of the line.[47] Besides the traits listed by Younger, Gideon, Jephthah and Samson have additional markers of otherness. Gideon is the least in his family, a family poor in the tribe that is

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43   Younger, *Judges/Ruth*, p. 30.

44   'Samson', p. 623.

45   Ibid., p. 620.

46   *Judges/Ruth*, p. 38.

47   Gunn, *Judges*, p. 129. It is unlikely to be fortuitous that the arrangement of the major judges into two groups of three reflects that of the twenty-four-hour day into six watches, three of daylight, three of night, a Mesopotamian system adopted by the Israelites (Hermann Hunger and David Pingree, *Astral Sciences in Mesopotamia*, Leiden: Brill, 1999, p. 16). Note the reconstructed Assyro-Babylonian incantation, 'O Night, terror of the evening, O you three watches of the night' (Schwemer, 'Witchcraft', p. 37).

least of the two sons of Joseph (6:15).[48] While this is a product of his birth, as is Ehud's handedness or Deborah's gender, he has a foible for which he alone is responsible. The descriptions of him and his surroundings are liberally laced with references to fear and trembling.[49] He is first introduced into the narrative skulking in a winepress, in order that his threshing of wheat be concealed from the Midianites, and he carries out his initial divine assignment of destroying the Ba'al altar and Asherah 'by night rather than by day, because he feared his father's household and the men of the town' (6:11, 27). Indeed, Yahweh makes a concession to the hero's fearful nature – 'If you are afraid to go down, go down with Purah your servant'– an offer Gideon accepts with alacrity (7:10–11). Such pusillanimity surely ranks as a negative quality in a patriarchal, militaristic society. To this are added his profaning the land by shedding Israelite blood, reinvigorating idolatry among his people, and indulging in a *modus vivendi* that is royal in all but name.

Jephthah's parentage led to his being ostracized, but from this he develops an existence as an outlaw, surrounding himself with 'hollow men'. Whatever legal code operated in Gilead did not apply in the Land of Tob. The Ephraimites' taunt, if it reveals nothing else, shows that the Gileadites were viewed with contempt by at least some groups in Cisjordan. In the company of the remarkably fecund judges who enclose his story, Gideon (70 sons), Jair the Gileadite (30 sons), and Ibzan (30 sons and 30 daughters) (8:30; 10:4; 12:8–9), Jephthah, the father of but one daughter, who meets her death at his hand, a virgin, presents a tragic figure.[50] Finally, he is responsible for shedding more Israelite blood than any other individual in Judges, including Abimelech.

Samson is the ultimate 'other'. Within the cultic sphere he is separated for life because of his Nazirite status (which he then proceeds comprehensively to betray).[51] He is a sojourner/alien (*gēr*) in the borderlands between Israel and

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48   Deut. 33:17: 'Those are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and those are the thousands of Manasseh'. Malamat, 'Charismatic Leadership', p. 160; Klein, *Triumph*, p. 115.

49   Klein observes that the location of Gideon's camp beside the spring of Ḥªrod (literally 'the eye of trembling') (7.1) 'recalls the fearful aspect of Gideon' (*Triumph*, p. 56).

50   Webb notes that the only judges said to have daughters are Jephthah and Ibzan whose plenitude contrasts with Jephthah's limitedness (*Integrated*, p. 160).

51   Even posthumously Samson is theologically disruptive, especially for the Nazirite vow of which he is the first named representative: 'The *Mishnah* [distinguishes] between an ordinary "perpetual Nazirite" and a "Samson-Nazirite". Both were "for life", but the former was allowed occasionally to shorten his hair, after which he brought the three sacrifices. He could also be defiled by the dead, in which case he had to undergo the prescribed purification. But as Samson had not been allowed under any circumstances to poll his hair, and as he evidently had come into contact with death without undergoing any

the Philistines.[52] He is a loner motivated by revenge, but apparently more at home with enemy women and in the 'other' environment of enemy territory, an enemy markedly more culturally alien than any of Israel's other neighbours,[53] infamous for un-circumcision and pork-eating,[54] than among his own people (14:3). He is sexually compromised, not least with a prostitute. His fascination with Delilah leads him to flirt with magic, or at least to toy with her under-standing of it, through 'his progressively richer inventions of magical binding materials'.[55] His willingness to entertain her importuning him on 'how you can be bound in order to afflict you' suggests that they were involved in deviant sexual activity,[56] a perception given weight by the verb translated 'afflict, hum-ble' (*'innāh*) also signifying 'rape'.[57] It offers the most likely explanation why he

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ceremonial, so the Samson-Nazirite might neither shorten his hair, nor could he be defiled by the dead. [...] The distinction was no doubt merely made to meet an exegeti-cal necessity to the Jews – that of vindicating the conduct of Samson' (Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple*, London: Clarke, 1959, pp. 372–73). Compare Cartledge, *Vows*, p. 19.

52   Klein, *Triumph*, p. 157.

53   Faust states that the Philistines did not assimilate but preserved their separate identity in the Iron Age period. He argues persuasively that Philistine drinking-feasting events were a development of the Mycenaean symposium, which was predominantly a male activity, and were a means to reinforce a Philistine sense of identity and emphasize their otherness from neighbouring peoples ('Philistia', pp. 168, 176–179). If so, the *mišteh* ('feast, occasion for drinking' [*BDB*, p. 1059]) held by Samson, 'for such the young men did' (Judg. 14:10), with its predominantly Philistine guest list in a Philistine environment, may suggest an (intended) rite of passage to a new ethnic, as well as marital, identity more than a celebration of his difference. Faust ('Philistia', p. 189) argues that, as Iron Age I pro-gressed, considerable numbers of the local non-Philistine population adopted Philistine identity. The Judges statement that such events were no longer held accords with archae-ological evidence which demonstrates that this Philistine male-dominated form of feast-ing disappeared in early Iron Age II (ibid., pp. 187–88, 190).

54   Niditch, *Judges*, p. 144; Faust, 'Philistia', pp. 184–85. Faust conjectures that pork may have been a staple of the feasts and this acted to exclude neighbouring Semitic groups, for whom pork consumption was ritually proscribed (p. 189).

55   Alter, 'Samson', p. 55; Younger, *Judges/Ruth*, p. 319; Webb, *Judges*, p. 403.

56   Among the many treatments of this subject, see, for example, *Women's Bible Commentary*, 3rd edn, ed. by Carol A. Newsom et al., Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012, pp. 122–23; T.J. Wray, *Good Girls, Bad Girls*, Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008, pp. 60–62; Lori Rowlett, 'Violent Femmes and S/M: Queering Samson and Delilah', in *Queer Commentary and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. by Ken Stone, Cleveland OH: Pilgrim Press, 2001, pp. 106–15. Rowlett envisages the exchanges between Samson and Delilah happen-ing against a backdrop of 'S/M role-play' (p. 106).

57   Gray, *Joshua, Judges*, p. 378; Exum, 'Centre', p. 428; Bal, *Lethal Love*, pp. 51–52. For an alter-native view, see Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, p. 286.

was not alert to her seemingly obvious plot, particularly as he had experienced a similar ploy from a Philistine woman in the context of his riddle. Finally, as a consequence, he becomes quintessentially 'other' through disability (blindness) and social status (a prisoner sentenced to slave-labour, and a clown for the masses), and ends his life as the centre piece of a pagan festival in a pagan temple in a foreign land.[58]

With the representation of all the major judges, the author is making a point about otherness. The only similarity between them, apart from a greater or lesser affiliation to Yahwism, and violent action against Israel's enemies, is that they do not fit the expected model of an Israelite leader, any more than the use of *šōpēṭ* in Judges corresponds to its application elsewhere in the Bible. It is their difference from the anticipated, not their resemblance to it, that confronts the reader. This is seen clearly in the way Deborah is introduced. To highlight the play of the language I offer a literal translation: 'Deborah (name with a feminine ending)/ woman/ prophetess/ wife [of]/ Lappidoth (feminine ending)/ she/ judged (feminine ending)/ ....' (4:4). In each of these seven words, even unexpectedly in the gender marker of her husband's name, the female is emphasized.[59]

As noted, the degree of otherness exhibited by the six major judges intensifies as they proceed chronologically one after another. It is generally maintained in the literature that Othniel embodies the impeccable ideal from which the others increasingly diverge. That the image of the model judge as portrayed in him may be interpreted as unexciting is illustrated in Wellhausen's opinion of him: 'What is said of him is quite void of contents, and is made up merely of the schematic devices of the redactor [...] so as to make the series open with

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58 'Those holding office in the explicit part of the structure tend to be credited with consciously controlled powers, in contrast to those whose role is less explicit and who tend to be credited with unconscious, uncontrollable powers, menacing those in better defined positions. [...] If anything goes wrong, if they feel resentment or grief, then their double loyalties and their ambiguous status in the structure where they are concerned makes them appear as a danger to those belonging fully in it. It is the existence of any angry person in an interstitial position which is dangerous' (Douglas, *Purity*, p. 123). These remarks are apposite for Samson, but also for his two predecessors, who despite attaining rank within their fractured society, were sensitive to the knowledge that their positions were untenable by virtue of their being the interface between Israel and its alienated God. Their grossest and most dangerous actions are their attempts to deal with this predicament (compare Younger, *Judges/Ruth*, p. 42). See Malamat, 'Charismatic Leadership', p. 160.

59 This renders the contrasting treatment of Jael all the more striking.

a man of Judah'.[60] For Wellhausen, then, Othniel is the true hollow man of
Judges. Webb, though approaching him more sympathetically, also finds him
flat and colourless: '[He] is the embodiment of an institution; all the key words
applied to judgeship in chapter 2 are applied to Othniel here, and his career
conforms to the paradigm given there'.[61]

    In fact, Othniel is not the paragon,[62] and, perversely, Wellhausen's com-
ment identifies why. If 'the redactor' had simply been concerned to open the
series with a Judahite, he would have selected someone with a stronger claim
to descent from Judah. Although Othniel, like Caleb, his uncle and father-in-
law, is presented as an exemplary member of the Judahites in Judges and else-
where, Caleb's father/Othniel's grandfather, as noted above, was a Kenizzite, a
descendant of Esau's grandson, Kenaz (Num. 32:12).[63] Their lineage therefore
derives from Esau, not Jacob (Gen. 36:11, 15, 42; Num. 32:12; Josh. 14:14).[64] To
advertise their ancestry, the name of Othniel's father, Caleb's youngest brother,
is also Kenaz, and this fact is rehearsed in both episodes in Judges that fea-
ture Othniel. Wherever the hero's name is given, it is accompanied by the
patronymic ben-Kenaz (1:13, 3:9, 11). Not content with this, the author high-
lights Othniel's ethnic difference in two further ways. The first is through the
endogamous marriage that the Othniel-Achsah union represents. Secondly,
following the episode concerning Caleb, Othniel and Achsah, the focus moves
immediately to another ethnic minority nestled within Judah, the Kenites
(1:16).[65] Othniel is, therefore, presented as 'other' by dint of his ethnicity.[66] That
the first major judge is not a literal 'son of Israel' makes a wry comment on the
spiritual state of the nation when he was raised up by Yahweh as its deliverer,
a sentiment reflected also in Yahweh's assessment of Caleb: 'he has an *other*
spirit and has followed me fully' (Num. 14:24).

    Thus, all the major judges manifest qualities that make them 'other' com-
pared with what is expected as standard, beginning with ethnic otherness,
through the social-physiological otherness of left-handedness, gender, the psy-
chological and cultic otherness of Gideon, illegitimacy/lawlessness, and finally

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60   Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, p. 232. Soggin holds a similar opinion (*Judges*, p. 46).

61   *Integrated*, p. 127. Brettler (*Judges*, p. 4) likewise considers Othniel the model judge.

62   Gillmayr-Bucher, 'Framework', p. 687.

63   Soggin, *Joshua*, p. 170; Noth, *Deuteronomistic History*, p. 103; Gillmayr-Bucher, *Richterbuch*,
      p. 47. Alt is emphatic that the Calebites were not originally members of an Israelite tribe
      (*Essays*, p. 53).

64   *BhH* 2, p. 940.

65   Compare Herzberg, *Bücher*, p. 149.

66   Danna Nolan Fewell, 'Deconstructive Criticism', in Yee (ed.), *Judges*, pp. 115–37 (131).

the religious otherness of the Nazirite. With each of them, it is precisely their otherness on which their story hinges. This is the case even with Othniel, when his cycle is seen to incorporate chapter 1 as well as chapter 3. Ehud's handedness provides his tale's dénouement just as surely as Deborah's is captured in 'Yahweh shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman'. The angel's greeting to Gideon 'Yahweh is with you, you mighty man of valour' states the two themes that structure his cycle and reveal his otherness: the place of Yahweh in his life and his understanding of himself. Jephthah's experience as outlaw by birth and by design set the context for his act of child sacrifice.[67] His memory of taunts and threats due to his illegitimacy help explain his ferocious reaction to the Ephraimites. Samson's response to his pre-natal dedication to Yahweh animates his story. The treatment of the subject of otherness is not limited to the major judge series, however. It is a leitmotiv of the entire book.

Linguistic otherness, one form of difference not manifested by any of the judges, is brought into the narrative through the variation in the pronunciation of *š*,[68] which marks the Ephraimites out for slaughter at the fords of the Jordan.[69] It is a commonplace of dialectology that dialect differences provide synchronically the means to observe diachronic development in language.[70] In like fashion, the word shibboleth and the bloody use to which it is put offer a

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67 As illegitimate, Jephthah was without legal rights (Gray, *Joshua, Judges*, p. 332).

68 *š* generally exhibits stability in the Semitic languages from the Akkadian ancient stage through to the middle stages of Hebrew and Aramaic (Diakonoff, *Semito-Hamitic Languages*, pp. 26–27; idem, *Semito-khamitskiye yazyki: Opyt klassifikatsii*, Moscow: KomKniga, 2010, p. 24). However, at a dialect level the situation is more complex. Proto-Semitic (and Babylonian) *š* was pronounced *s* in Assyrian. Conversely, the Assyrians pronounced Proto-Semitic/Babylonian *s* as *š* (Paul V. Mankowski, *Akkadian Loanwords in Biblical Hebrew*, Winona Lake IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000, p. 156). Note Speiser's contention that the phonetic opposition at the Jordan was not between *š* and *s*, but between *š* and **ṯ* (E.A. Speiser, 'The Shibboleth Incident', *BASOR* 85 [1942], pp. 10–13). From a dialectological perspective, his analysis, while intriguing, is unduly prescriptive. More importantly, it overlooks the episode's literary purpose and allegorical role in the narrative, which here is concerned to stress the Ephraimites' otherness. See Chapter 6.

69 A variant of the shibboleth test occurred in the Sicilian Vespers episode of 1282. The mob in Palermo stormed the Dominican and Franciscan houses and forced the friars to pronounce *ciciri*, a word impossible for the French to reproduce. Those unsuccessful were murdered (Steven Runciman, *The Sicilian Vespers*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960, p. 237).

70 For the references, see Robin Baker, *The Development of the Komi Case System*, Helsinki: Suomalais-Ugrilainen Seura, 1985, p. 2. On shibboleth *per se*, see Ian Young, 'The Style of the Gezer Calendar and Some "Archaic Biblical Hebrew" Passages', *VT* 42 (1992), pp. 362–75 (371).

synchronic symbol of the diachronic disintegration of Israel. This episode is a reminder that as the composition progresses, and Israel's spiritual and moral decline deepens, the consequences of being 'other' can be lethal.

What earlier was standard, which in this case equates with 'good', becomes 'other', and 'other', that is, what was previously unacceptable, becomes the convention. Through the sequence of episodes in the book we observe this transformation apparently diachronically, culminating in the coda sections in which it reaches its nadir. The wholesale transgression of the hospitality code evident in Gibeah, first in the unwillingness to grant shelter to the travellers, and then in the assault on the house (19:15, 22, 25), has its roots in Jael's despatch of Sisera. The sexual incontinence of the men of Gibeah and the rape which they commit may have their antecedents in Samson's sexual practices with Delilah. Micah's sincere belief that by creating an idol and possessing a domestic priest he would be assured of Yahweh's blessing is a natural development of Gideon's production of the ephod. The status deviance seen in Jonathan, the Levite youth, becoming 'father' first to Micah and his family – in fact, he is described as both 'father' and 'son' to Micah – then to a whole tribe (17:10–11; 18:19), is foreshadowed in the baals of Shechem making Abimelech king, and subsequently in their putting 'trust' in the ridiculous Gaal (9:6, 26). Jephthah's outlaw lifestyle and Samson's robbery of the clothes of the murdered Ashqelonites presage the purloining in the Micah episode. Micah steals his mother's money and, in a characteristic doublet, a related theft is carried out by the Danites who share Micah's belief that possessing the idols and the priest will bring benefit, and this conviction justifies robbery (though it is doubtful that they thought their actions needed justification).

The Levite's fateful rejection of his servant's suggestion that they lodge in Jerusalem on the grounds that it is 'a city of foreigners who are not of the sons of Israel' (19:12), and therefore the protection of the code of hospitality might not be guaranteed, throws into relief the question 'what/who is other?' and where the frontiers are in this disfigured society.

Here, too, the characterisation of the major judges has perspectives to offer. Despite all the verbal trappings of womanhood that the narrative lavishes on Deborah, she does not, actually, conform to the model of a married woman, at least not one in that society. She is presented without children, her husband invisible, and, rather than running a home, she is found outwith the domestic sphere, sitting beneath a palm tree with 'the sons of Israel coming up to her'. Seen in this light, she has more in common with prostitutes than with a 'mother in Israel'.[71] Harris's observation concerning Ishtar is apposite:

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71   Compare J.J. Finkelstein, 'Sex Offences in Sumerian Laws', *JAOS* 86 (1966), pp. 355–72 (363).

'The goddess's roles of prostitute and warrior place her outside of the female domestic domain'.[72] Deborah's characterisation is of a piece with Gideon's, exposed in the dissonance between Zebah and Zalmunna's description of him and his brothers as 'resembling the children of a king' (8:18), and their prior representation as a family 'poor in Manasseh'. In the hall of mirrors that is the book of Judges, even in their otherness, the heroes are not necessarily who they seem; they can be other than 'other'.[73]

Actually, the writer provides, through Samson's four responses to Delilah, a succinct commentary on the subject of otherness and how it evolves in the book. In doing so, he uses the technique of slightly varying repetition characteristic of Mesopotamian literature and the Hebrew Bible.[74] Samson does not reply directly to her questions about the source of his strength, but addresses his answers to the ontological consequences of revealing his secret. On the first two occasions he says that if x is done, he will become 'an *other* person'. On her third attempt, this part of his answer is void. On the fourth, when he exposes 'all his heart', he declares that if he is shaved, he will become as '*every* person' (16:7, 11, 13, 17).[75] The portentous significance of Samson's responses is signalled by their 3+1 construction (three times he mentions consequences, once he does not). Applied to the story of Israel as relayed in Judges, Samson's first two replies reflect the Israelites dealing, in the early part of the composition, with the lure of otherness as expressed through 'other gods', albeit unsuccessfully. In the third stage of the Judges story, what is 'other' is no longer a question that admits a clear answer since boundaries are entirely blurred. In the final stage, otherness had been naturalized in Israel to the extent that 'the other' now equates completely to 'the all', with every man doing what is right in his own eyes, and Israel dwelling unequivocally and unashamedly on the wrong side of the line.

To understand 'other' requires a prior definition of self, expressed by means of clear boundaries. Yahweh sets the standard for this in Judges. It is Yahweh alone who determines the definitions, beginning with a definition of who he is, since all other definitions derive from his being. Just as he sets the territorial frontiers of the land and the tribal allocations of which it is made up, and the

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72   Harris, 'Inanna-Ishtar', p. 268.

73   Tamar ('palm tree') too sat 'openly by the way side', in her guise as a prostitute. She likewise was other than 'other' (Gen. 38:14–22).

74   Dalley, *Myths*, pp. xvii–xviii; Robert P. Gordon, 'David's Rise and Saul's Demise', in *RI&J*, pp. 319–39 (327); Alter, *Narrative*, pp. 20, 176.

75   Compare Gregory Mobley, 'The Wild Man in the Bible and the Ancient Near East', *JBL* 116 (1997), pp. 217–33 (229).

laws, statutes and cultic practices that should operate within it, so he specifies the numinous environment. He defines himself as 'Yahweh the God of Israel, it is I who brought you up from Egypt and I brought you out of the house of bondage. I delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and the hand of all who oppressed you, and I drove them out before you and gave you their land. And I said to you, "I am Yahweh your God. Do not revere the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are dwelling". But you did not heed my voice' (6:8–10). His self-definition, like Samson's riddle, is a two-part structure comprising four elements: first, his identity consisting of a. his ineffable name, and b. his status as Israel's ancestral deity; and second, the empirical evidence for his ontological claim: c. Israel's deliverance from Egypt and all oppressors, and d. the grant to it of the land of Canaan. On the grounds of who he is, he requires their worship and obedience; on the basis of how his status as ancestral deity has translated into victorious, beneficent action on their behalf, he expects their service and loyalty. In defining himself, he also defines Israel: they are the people whose god is Yahweh and whose divinely-appointed land is Canaan. With the blessing of having this god and this land come responsibilities which he then briefly summarizes. As the Philistines' rejoinder to Samson's riddle has two elements, so too does Yahweh's summary: the religious boundaries were set; you have not adhered to them.

Israel's transgression of the boundaries did not take them to some neutral cultic space. Immediately following the death of Joshua and those of his generation, 'the sons of Israel served the Ba'als and abandoned Yahweh, the God of their fathers, […] and they went after *other* gods from among the gods of the peoples round about them' (2:11–12). And again: 'Yahweh raised up judges and they saved them from the hand of their oppressors. But they did not heed their judges, for they went whoring after *other* gods and bowed down to them' (2:17).

These two complementary analyses, set in the book's introduction, of the spiritual problem lying at the heart of the Judges story are significant. First, they show that the Israelites' response to the judges is identical to their response to their God: they 'did not heed' them. This suggests that, in the writer's conception, the judges are Yahweh's representatives,[76] indeed his hypostases. Second, the analyses articulate the essence of the otherness question. By the act of

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76   The notion that the leader's position derives from and represents the patron god of the community is very old in the ancient Near East. It is attested in the Sumerian Early Dynastic III period and was undoubtedly established considerably earlier (Van De Mieroop, *History*, pp. 45–47).

taking 'other' gods as their gods, the Israelites render Yahweh 'other',[77] and the positions of Yahweh and the other gods are therefore reversed. To represent this diagrammatically, let us say – taking the symbolic values of right and left – that before Israel's apostasy, Yahweh stood on the right, the other gods on the left and Israel in the middle. Now, as a result of it, Yahweh is on the left and the other gods on the right. In other words, the mirror-image has occurred because of the Israelites' irresistible attraction to asymmetry.[78]

The statements in Judges repeat many of the words with which the first commandment is framed: 'I am Yahweh your God who brought you up from the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. You will have no *other* gods than me' (Exod. 20:3). Since Yahweh is a jealous God, he can only either be 'your God' or be the 'other' God. The fact that Israel prostituted themselves with other deities following the death of Joshua, not only created the otherness of Yahweh, it also meant that his representatives had to embody variation from the anticipated model, that is, be 'other'. And because with each revolution of the cycle of apostasy, Israel's distance from Yahweh increased, so his representatives' divergence from the standard became greater. A simple comparison of Othniel and Samson displays the extent of the mutation of the model that takes place during the period covered by the major judges.[79] Simultaneously, as we have seen, the judges are also reflectors of the condition of the Israelites. They are of their people exactly as they are of Yahweh. This dynamic not only

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77   'As the angel in Judges 2 observes, the issue *is* YHWH – the difference between being an Israelite and a Canaanite is the difference between serving YHWH and serving other gods' (Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative*, p. 163).

78   Yahweh's mirror-image relationship to the 'other gods' has a counterpart in his people's relationship to him. Malamat (*Mari*, p. 79) observes that the Israelites were intended to be 'a holy people', the 'sort of mirror image' of a people condemned to be victims of ḥērem. Yet, as a consequence of their choosing other gods, victims of ḥērem is what they became (Jer. 25:9–11).

79   The chiastic relationship between the judge from Judah and his counterpart from Dan who frame the major judge section, operates at a number of levels. Thus, Othniel is a non-Israelite attached to the Israelites, and Samson, an Israelite attached to non-Israelites. There is a lion connection between them – Judah in Jacob's prophecy (Gen. 49:9), Dan in Moses' (Deut. 33:22), in both of which the same term is used. Samson kills the lion; the men of Judah hand Samson over to his (supposed) death. As observed in Chapter 2, Samson has a resemblance to Esau, Othniel's ancestor. They both practised exogamy (Gen. 26:34–35; 27:46; 28:8–9), whereas Othniel, in his determination to win his cousin Achsah's hand, resembles Jacob, Samson's forebear, in his labours for his cousin Rachel's. Younger comments: 'Othniel's wife was his incentive to drive out the Gentiles, Samson's wives were his incentive to live among, rather than drive out, the Philistines' (*Judges/Ruth*, p. 73; also Gooding, 'Composition', p. 73).

creates a vicious circle in Israel's fortunes, it also inevitably distorts the image of Yahweh that the Israelites perceive. The sovereign God who sends Judah to victory in Chapter 1 does not seem like the same God who sends the same tribe to defeat in Chapter 20. The Yahweh who apparently is behind Samson's marriage to the Timnite, because 'he sought an occasion against the Philistines', does not look like the Yahweh who made Israel's intermarriage with neighbouring peoples grounds for its condemnation. As noted above, 'with the perverse [Yahweh] distorts himself'. Jephthah's perception of Yahweh was so warped that he believed that giving his daughter as a holocaust was not only acceptable to the deity, but was also a divine requirement on the strength of his vow.

This has additional dimensions. On each occasion that Israel made Yahweh 'other' through their choosing to go after 'other gods', he sold them into the hands of 'others'. The background to the book is the mission to claim, that is, naturalize, what is 'other', namely the land itself. A central irony is that the disowning of Yahweh by the avowal of indigenous deities undermines the Israelites' right to the land. The legitimacy of their claim is founded on Yahweh being Israel's national god, a point asserted by Jephthah to the Ammonites (11:21–24). Moreover, behind the stories of increasingly unconventional individuals, the major judges, acting in the name of an increasingly alienated god, is the progressive atomization of 'the sons of Israel' with the creation of individual cults (Gideon's ephod, Abimelech and the Shechem baals' worship of Ba'al-berith, Micah and the Danites' graven image and home-grown priest) and internecine conflict. The two are inexorably linked in the narrative.

The connection is actually three-way. Here as elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, the worship of other gods is associated with sexual impropriety. The cross-referencing device we have already noted in Judges is exemplified in this context by the evident connection between Gideon's apostasy and his sexual behaviour:[80] 'Gideon made it into an ephod […] and all Israel whored after it, and it became a trap for Gideon and his house […] Now Gideon had many wives, and his concubine who was in Shechem bore him a son' (8:27, 30–31). The association of adherence to 'other gods' with sexual excess is not an abstract metaphor in the context of Canaan in the era of the judges,[81] or,

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80   A further poignant example is that the Levite spends four days in his father-in-law's house, the same period that the daughters of Israel annually mourn for another victim of Israel's moral disintegration, Jephthah's daughter (11:40; 19:8). The span of turpitude between the religious sacrifice of a virgin daughter of a harlot's son and the gang rape and murder of a Levite's concubine offers a sense of the immensity of Israel's deviance.

81   In a major treatment of the theme of otherness presented in Deuteronomy, an asymmetric consequence of going 'after *other gods*' (Deut. 28:14) is sexual: 'you will betroth a wife

indeed, in the period in which the book was written. The Asherah cultus that appears strongly in the Gideon section was a Canaanite fertility cult represented by carved wooden poles,[82] normally positioned under trees, alongside altars to Ba'al,[83] and by clay images of the naked goddess.[84] The latter images had extensive circulation in Israel from the time of the Conquest and seem to have served as household idols.[85] Sacred prostitution was a prominent feature of Asherah's cult.[86] Of the gods of the peoples listed in the centre of the book that attracted Israelite devotion, so far as they are known, many possessed a fertility aspect which also included sacred prostitution.[87] The end of the Gideon cycle is the juncture at which the spiritual and human manifestations of prostitution intersect. Up to this point, the root *znh* 'whore' is applied exclusively in a spiritual sense. Thereafter, it is used only of women, and the theme of whores and concubines, in one form or other, runs through the rest of the composition. Prostitution, both spiritual and physical, is another aspect of otherness explored in Judges. 'Other woman' is the term the Gileadites coin with reference to Jephthah's mother. She, Abimelech's mother, Samson's Gazan prostitute, and the Levite's concubine represent the 'other' kind within the 'other' gender.[88]

The momentum produced by the dynamic of alienation deriving from the Israelites' choice of other gods led inexorably to the intermediaries between

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and *another* man will penetrate her' (v. 30). The development of the theme continues: [and all the nations shall say] 'they went and served *other* gods and worshipped them [...] and Yahweh cast them out of their land [...] into *another* land' (29:26, 28).

82   John Day, 'Asherah in the Hebrew Bible and Northwest Semitic Literature', *JBL* 105 (1986), pp. 385–408 (392, 403).

83   Burney, *Notes*, pp. 190–91.

84   Moorey, *Idols*, p. 47.

85   Raphael Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess*, 3rd enlarged edn, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990, pp. 39, 45. Albright associates these ubiquitous images with Astarte (*Archaeology*, pp. 104, 106).

86   Day, 'Asherah', pp. 389, 406. Ashratu, the Babylonian version of Asherah, possesses the epithet 'lady of voluptuousness' (*DANE*, p. 34). Asherah in its Hebrew use refers to both the goddess and her associated cult object made from wood (Arvid Kapelrud, *The Violent Goddess*, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1969, pp. 11–12). On temple prostitutes in Israel, see Burney, *Notes*, p. 193.

87   Patai, *Goddess*, pp. 45, 57; Noll, *Canaan*, p. 247; Gray, *Joshua, Judges*, pp. 257, 329; Klein, *Triumph*, p. 32.

88   To this might be added, the book's account of Samson and the Danites, the first concubine tribe.

them and their ancestral divinity becoming ever more isolated from both.[89]
Jephthah judged Israel for just six years; his line died with him. His burial place
is not considered worth identifying (12:7). He was, it seems, unmourned. On
each of these counts, he is compared unfavourably with the minor judges who
precede and succeed him in the narrative. Having betrayed his sacred voca-
tion, Samson, himself betrayed both by his nation and the woman he loved,
dies alone. Indeed, Samson's story is a study in betrayal. By definition, if the
distance between the intermediaries and the poles has grown to the extent
that those in the middle are isolated, then the isolation of the poles from each
other is extreme. And so it is. At the end of the book Yahweh is so alienated
from his people gathered at Bethel that, as they survey the appalling destruc-
tion that has befallen the nation, they perceive him as the cause: 'and the peo-
ple were sorry for Benjamin because Yahweh had made a breach in the tribes
of Israel' (21:15). They then nonchalantly use his festival as an occasion for the
violent abduction and rape of the maidens of Shiloh (21:19–23).[90]

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Shiloh, as a reference to the hill country of Ephraim, brings the focus back
to the geographical preoccupations of Judges and prompts the question what
is the connection between otherness and geography? There can be no doubt by
now that both possess fundamental significance for the book. Specifically how
does the south-north development of the major judges relate to the subject
of otherness? There is a correlation between the symbolic meanings of right
and left in a society with an eastward orientation, and the northward prog-
ress of the narrative. Although Othniel is 'other' in the context of the model
Israelite leader, necessarily so since he is raised up as a judge only after Israel
had worshipped other gods and begun to intermarry with the populations
whose deities they were (3:5–7), his ethnicity is presented as the least marked
form of otherness among the major judges. Moreover, Othniel is three times
from the south/right: as an Edomite,[91] as a Judahite, and as someone almost
certainly born in the wilderness. In the northward configuration of the tribes,

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89   All the judges are strangely friendless. The author makes no attempt to portray recipro-
      cated emotional attachment between any of them and anyone else, including Othniel/
      Achsah and Deborah/Baraq.

90   It is likely, in view of the timing of the grape harvest, that the feast in question was that of
      Ingathering (Rowley, *Worship*, pp. 89–90).

91   Guillaume, *Waiting*, p. 104.

next comes Ehud, a true 'son of the right hand', though socially and ritually marked by his left-handedness, and so on to Samson, the ultimate statement of otherness, symbolically located at the extreme left of the geographical continuum. Thus, as the judges move north, they move left, and their expression of otherness increases qualitatively. Jonathan's life journey, with its consistent northward progression, conveys the same message. In Bethlehem-judah, he is spiritually unremarkable, presumably neutral. His journey north to the hill country of Ephraim implicates him in Micah's idol cult. His further northward peregrination as the Danites' 'father and priest' makes him central to the twin abominations of establishing the tribal cult based on Micah's idols and the massacre of the Laishites, a community who, the writer seems to imply, in their security, peacefulness and total separation from surrounding peoples, and in the fruitfulness of their land, was a model of what Israel should have been in Canaan (18:7, 10, 27–28).[92] The unjustified conquest and settlement of a city beyond the borders of the promised land provides a spatial metaphor that shows that the judges through Samson, the tribes through the Danites, and the Mushite priesthood through Jonathan,[93] have transgressed the boundaries to the extent that they now stand wholly outside the divine plan and provision.[94]

This treatment, by focusing on the progression between the right/south and left/north extremities, considers the cosmic geography of Judges in absolute terms, with each step northward leading to a more flawed reality. The fact that no one among the Israelite characters in the work is allowed to end south of where his/her tale begins is, in the spatial symbolism, one of the most subtle of the damning indictments of Israel post-Conquest found in Judges. That some of the actors end where they began introduces the second of the two treatments of space that the book provides. It is characteristic that Judges employs two. The second approach deals with it in relative terms, and this is captured in the text by the circular journeys and the centrality of the hill country of Ephraim in the narrative. Just as the author withheld the information on

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92   'A people secure, and a land wide in *two hands* ("in both directions" [*BDB*, p. 390]) where there is no want of anything that in on the earth'.

93   On this topic see Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, pp. 151–61; Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, pp. 195–215; Rowley, *Worship*, p. 96. Daringly, Rust (*Judges*, p 63) suggests that the point of the story, and of Jonathan's role in it, is to buttress Dan's claim to this northern territory.

94   Gillmayr-Bucher observes that four cities were renamed in the Conquest: Kiriath-Arba becomes Hebron, Kiriath-sepher Debir, and Luz Bethel in chapter 1; in chapter 18, Laish becomes Dan (*Richterbuch*, p. 32). The 3+1 pattern confirms the portentous import of the Danites' act. Even Laish/Dan is embraced within the ambit of Samson's *ḥîdāh*: Laish means 'lion' (Burney, *Judges*, p. 427). This lion is also killed by Danites, to become for them a land of [milk and] honey that flows from the death of its people.

the coordinates of his story's steady centre until its end, so it is only in 20:27 that he alerts the reader to the existence and site of the Ark of the Covenant in Bethel in immediately post-Conquest Israel, little more than a stone's throw from Deborah's palm tree. As both Numbers and 1 Samuel make clear, the Ark provided the location of the physical manifestation of Yahweh on earth. Joshua, on occupying the land, sites the tabernacle of the congregation, which contained the Ark, on Mount Ephraim, at Shiloh (Josh. 18:1). It is also found there in 1 Samuel before it is taken into battle against the Philistines. Micah's image is set up in Dan when the tabernacle is at Shiloh (1 Sam. 4:4; Judg. 18:31).[95] But at some point in the Judges period it was brought to Bethel in the presence of Phinehas, the high priest.[96] The journey was not long: Shiloh lies but eight miles/twelve kilometres to the north, almost at the midpoint of the route between Bethel and Shechem. It is because of the Ark that the hill country of Ephraim constitutes the steady centre: it is where Yahweh dwelt. The tabernacle's entrance was toward the sunrise, as was the case with the Jerusalem temple too. Yahweh faced east, like his people,[97] but unlike a solar deity, with which some scholars seek to identify him.[98]

The position of the tabernacle on Mount Ephraim thus supplies a clear picture of the relative cosmic geography underlying Judges enabling us to understand what lay to Yahweh's right hand and what to his left, in terms of both the tribal configuration and the locations of the judges. Othniel, Ehud and Deborah are situated to his right hand. Gideon, Jephthah and, symbolically, Samson, to his left, as well as Jael and all the minor judges. We have already seen that a profound change in the mood and direction of the composition occurs in the morphing of Deborah into Jael; the spatial factors give this additional emphasis. It is a striking feature of Judges that no one, from the point that Jael betrays the code of hospitality, is exonerated in the book (with the possible exception of the inhabitants of Laish who explicitly stand outside the depraved world of Canaanites, Amorites and Israelites). This is entirely explicable by reference to the cosmic coordinates involved. Being south of Bethel/Shiloh places the individual at the right-hand of Yahweh, the place of

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95   Boling, *Judges*, p. 22.

96   Burney, *Judges*, p. 37; Block, *Judges*, p. 561; Butler, *Judges*, p. 467.

97   On the substantial archaeological evidence for the predominantly eastern orientation of Israelite houses, temples and royal buildings, see Avraham Faust, 'Doorway Orientation, Settlement Planning and Cosmology', *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 20 (2001), pp. 129–55.

98   To approach his dwelling therefore implied turning one's back on the past and reverently advancing towards the future.

mercy and blessing;[99] to its north, at his left hand, lies the place of retribution.[100] That such a notion is consistent with the cosmic geography of the Hebrew Bible is demonstrated by the position of Shechem, which Gray describes as 'the first central sanctuary of the sacral confederacy in Palestine',[101] and the site of Joshua's great assembly of the tribes, with respect to Gerizim and Ebal, the mountains of blessing and cursing. With an eastern orientation, the former lies to the right, the latter to the left. As observed in Chapter 2, Deborah and Jael symbolize the right and left hands.[102] Until Jael's deed, Yahweh is revealed in his right-hand aspect; after it he is, as it were, 'bound in the right hand'. This is yet another reason, perhaps the most important reason, why Ehud is described not as 'left-handed', but as 'bound in the right hand'. The sons of Israel's contumacy and idolatry restricted Yahweh's blessing upon them. A pair of instances shows this occurring within a single story. Not only is the transition depicted in the Deborah-Jael cycle, but also in Jonathan's progress. It is when he passes Yahweh's dwelling place as he moves north that his slide into apostasy begins. Yet, in a characteristic twist, while the Ark provides the 'steady centre' aspect of Yahweh, firmly located on Mount Ephraim, the Song of Deborah tells of the other dimension, that Yahweh himself moved northwards to do cosmic battle

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99   Note *CAD* I/J, 1960, p. 122.

100 Note Simo Parpola's comments on the Sacred Tree: 'The left side of the Tree (considered inauspicious, severe and negative) represented God's judicious and retributive aspects' ('The Assyrian Cabinet', in M. Dietrich and O. Loretz (eds), *Vom Alten Orient zum Alten Testament*, Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1995, pp. 379–401 [380]). In the Sephirotic tree of Kabbalistic teaching, the right hand was called the Pillar of Mercy and the left, the Pillar of Judgment or Severity and had the designation *gᵉbûrāh* in Hebrew (Parpola, 'Tree', pp. 172, 176). *gᵉbûrāh* is the final word of Deborah's Song in the verse that concludes the account of the first three judges (5:31) (see Chapter 5). 'Left is not normally a favourable direction, in Mesopotamia as elsewhere' (George, *Gilgamesh*, p. 481). Compare the imagery of the goddess Kali noted in chapter 2.

101 *Joshua, Judges*, p. 20; see also Alt, *Essays*, pp. 130–31, 193; Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, p. 156; Sperling, 'Joshua 24', p. 258; Hans-Joachim Kraus, 'Gilgal', in *RI&J*, pp. 163–78 (173–78).

102 The Babylonian omen series *Šumma ālu*, within an epistemology that perceives 'right' as positive and 'left' as negative, treats the world of somnolence as the ominous mirror-image of wakefulness. Thus, laughter in sleep portends sorrow, sleeping on one's right side, misfortune (Guinan, 'Left/Right', pp. 9–10). Judges stresses the association of Deborah with wakefulness ('Awake, awake, Deborah, awake, awake, utter a song!' [5:12]), and Jael with sleep (4:18–19, 21). On sleep's connection with death in Mesopotamian thinking, see Chapter 2.

in Israel: 'Yahweh, when you went out of Seir, when you strode forth from the field of Edom'.[103]

Having explored the geography of the setting of Judges and its meaning, we now turn our attention to the geography of the book itself. Its architecture predictably also has two forms, one of which likewise reveals substantive change at the end of the Deborah cycle, with Judges 5:31 presented as the turning point.

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103   In Mesopotamian belief, the divinity controlling the south wind was a god of battle. The south wind augured ill (*ANET*, pp. 123, 127, 129; Lapinkivi, *Myth*, p. 86).

'Let Me Feel the Pillars on Which the House Stands': The Role and Symbolism of the Book's Rhetorical Architecture

1

In Chapter 1 I made the claim that Judges possesses discrete layers of meaning. In Chapter 3 we observed, in the book's treatment of otherness, an example of one such stratum, where a crucial theological concern of the author has been injected through the entire composition, a result achieved not least by harnessing spatial concepts to explicate and intensify theological meaning. The use of geography in the book is, moreover, an example of the application of the literary techniques and esoteric codes that were discussed in Chapter 2, through the employment of paired oppositions, as represented in this case by south/north and right/left, and through the symbolic significance of the four cardinal points.

Chapter 1 also drew attention to the scholarly unease that exists concerning the structure of Judges, particularly the relationship of the 'two introductions' with each other and with the rest of the book, as well as the concerns over the final five chapters and their connection to the accounts of the major judges that precede them. The present chapter offers an analysis of the rhetorical architecture of Judges that provides further evidence that the structure as we have received it is not the product of a series of fortuitous editorial interventions compounded by scribal carelessness, but rather represents a carefully planned and skilfully executed creation.[1] It is axiomatic in a book as concerned with the definition of boundaries as Judges is, that great attention would be paid to the creation of the work's structure. Consistent with the book's intent and the circumstances in which it was written, however, its architecture is framed in a way that conceals its contours and, therefore, their meaning from immediate view. The design of the composition itself contains a salient theological message, and also introduces a further preoccupation of the author, the existential threat to the spiritual, and therefore material, wellbeing of Israel

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1 In this I am at one with O'Connell (*Rhetoric*). However, my use of 'rhetorical' differs somewhat from his definition of rhetoric as 'ideological purpose or agenda' (p. 1). I employ it in the sense of the writer's approach to his compositional task.

posed by Mesopotamian cult and culture as transmitted through Assyrian hegemony. This layer of the book forms the subject of Chapters 5 to 7 and will, consequently, only be touched on in the present chapter.

One of the difficulties that Judges presents is in its handling of time, as exemplified in the temporal relationship between the Danites' migration to Laish and the Samson story. In her analysis of the book of Numbers, Mary Douglas posits that the book 'has used a number of literary devices based on parallelism to make one event become the lens of seeing another for putting events of different periods into the same perspective. Its literary techniques […] annihilate time and deepen the theological reference'.[2] The annihilation of time, or rather the suspension of temporal sequence, to deepen theological reference is a device employed in the final two episodes of Judges and, in the 'two introductions' also, where the appearance that its episodes are dictated by the ordered passage of time is superficial, as we shall now explore.

The treatment of geography in Judges casts light on its approach to temporal relations also. Just as the reader is asked to understand that Samson exists spatially on two planes, one, his symbolic place to the north of his predecessor judges where he was literally non-existent; the other, the literal location of the hero's exploits in the borderlands of Judah and Philistia (which also contains a symbolic aspect, as we shall see), so time likewise is conceived of in two forms. The first is as literal chronological sequence; the second, as being semantically, not temporally, consecutive. The latter applies to the sequencing of one block of episodes after another, not generally to the progress of the narrative within each block where chronological order normally applies. The place of the Micah-Danite account in the composition affords an excellent example of a pericope in a purely semantically consecutive relationship to contiguous stories. In terms of the crucial message of the book that the conduct of the sons of Israel worsens as the book progresses, the tale of the production of the idol and the institution of a renegade priesthood to service it appears to fall naturally between the Samson story and the events concerning Benjamin which mark the nadir of Israel's spiritual decline in the period addressed by the work. It is, therefore, convincingly the penultimate station on a linear spiritual journey of ignominy. Its relationship with the Samson portion is demonstrated, as already noted, by the numerous cross-references between them, an observation that holds also for its connection with the major section that follows it. Yet, at the same time, for all the reasons listed in Chapter 3, the events it describes do not occur chronologically after the account of the Danite hero, but much earlier in the Settlement 'history'. It is not with the passage of time

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2   *Wilderness*, p. 39.

that the writer is concerned in the introductory and concluding sections of the book,[3] but with the condition of national contumacy and spiritual dereliction that enshrouds the entire era. The evils that the Micah-Danite tale portrays of morbidity in the families and tribes of Israel, home-grown idolatry and corrupt priests are to be understood as endemic to the period that follows the death of Joshua's generation, seeds of national destruction that swirl around in the atmosphere of Israel in the promised land. Even the obliteration of Laish and the establishment of the city of Dan, an event which could have been reported within a chronological framework wider than solely the Micah-Danite section, is described instead outside any temporal reference, as a potent symbol of the ubiquitous transgression of frontiers that lay at the root of Israel's malaise. In this respect, the section stands in sharp contrast to the narrative's handling of the major judge and minor judge episodes which are presented as ordered chronologically, though apparently running in parallel with each other. As I shall discuss, the nature of the chronology attributed to the minor judges is not as it first appears.

Noth perceived 'the cyclical nature of the course of history in the "judges" period',[4] which he contrasted with how 'history' is recorded elsewhere in the Former Prophets. Given the cyclical treatment of space in the work, one might expect Noth to be correct regarding time. In fact, as Gooding states, Judges does not deal with time cyclically *sensu stricto*,[5] unless the description of a vortex of destruction is what is meant by cyclical. It is, in other words, no more cyclical than the descriptions of the kings of Israel and Judah, likewise framed with a standard set of words: 'and X did evil in the sight of Yahweh…' (e.g., 1 Kgs 22:52). The narrative either progresses along a temporal continuum in which the condition of Israel worsens with each episode, or along a continuum that exists outside the linear passage of time but which conveys the same message of progressive national disfigurement and decay. The flexible handling of temporal relations constitutes one of the major objections to claims for the book as historiography.

Because of their contiguity and shared features, the Micah-Danite and Samson sections provide a good basis for comparing and contrasting the representation of time in the work. The book's final story adopts the same temporal approach as the penultimate. The writer implies this by applying the identical

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3   Cundall observes that 'Frequently in the Old Testament […] connection of subject-matter takes precedence over chronological sequence' (*Judges*, p. 183).

4   *Deuteronomistic History*, p. 6.

5   'The pattern [is not] simply cyclical: at every turn of the wheel Israel [becomes] worse than they ever have been before' ('Composition', p. 72).

temporal marker to it as to the Micah-Danite narrative, 'in those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did what was right in his own eyes' (17:6; 21:25). The temporally vague but spiritually loaded phrase that 'they placed [at Dan] the graven image that Micah made all the days that the house of God was at Shiloh' reveals that the events in the two final sections were not exactly contemporaneous, and those at Gibeah may even have preceded the Danite migration.[6] Regardless, the appearance in the concluding story of a member of Jonathan's generation, Phinehas, grandson of Aaron, suggests that they both occurred relatively early. The place of the two final portions of the book is, thus, determined by their semantic content not by chronological considerations,[7] and the few temporal clues that the author supplies simply confirm this.

Encountering Phinehas and Jonathan at the end of the composition connects the reader back to its beginning, to the time of Joshua and the elders who outlived him. In Chapter 1, in the discussion of the problems that the so-called two introductions create for exegetes of differing persuasions, I outlined some of the hypotheses that have been advanced to account for their interrelationship. Many of the difficulties disappear, however, if the assumption that they are organized chronologically is dismissed. In reality, they offer only one firm temporal point, the death and burial of Joshua. This appears to occur twice, once in the book's opening verse, and once in 2:8. However, it is only in the latter that it is actually fixed in time since the first verse mentions it without specifying how much time had elapsed between Joshua's death and the events then recounted. The linear treatment of time in chapter 1 of Judges is an illusion, as a comparison between the parallel passages in the book of Joshua dealing with the conquest of Hebron and Debir exposes.[8] In Joshua, Caleb and Othniel possess the cities before Joshua's death, not after it. The events that occur subsequent to his death in Chapter 1 of Judges probably occupy only the initial nine verses and describe Israel's seeking Yahweh (the only time in Judges when this is not triggered by a disaster befalling the Israelites of which they are the cause) and its unity of purpose in carrying out Yahweh's plan, resulting in Judah-Simeon's attack on Bezek, the torching of Jerusalem, and Judah's sundry battles/skirmishes with the Canaanites. The bulk of chapter 1 and the first eight verses of chapter 2 give a précis of the fortunes of the tribes while Joshua is alive, echoing the information given in the second half of the eponymous book. It is only with Yahweh's delivery of the sons of Israel into the hands of the king of Mesopotamia that chronologically sequential time begins in Judges

6   Cundall, *Judges*, p. 183.

7   Webb, *Judges*, p. 35.

8   Butler, *Judges*, p. 23.

and it is thereafter observed up to the burial of Samson.[9] Until the advent of the king of Mesopotamia, the narrative is concerned with two questions, the first of which is furnishing a description of Israel's moral condition, not least how the Israelites conform to Yahweh's plan for them. Accordingly, Caleb and Othniel are presented as models. The narrative then provides an assessment of Israel's spiritual state, where the same model function is provided by Joshua and the elders who survived him. The first chapter focuses on the first question; the second is the subject of the text between chapter 2:1 and 3:6. These accounts are considered in more detail below. The view widely accepted by scholars for more than a century is that the 'first introduction' spans 1:1 to 2:5, and the second runs from 2:6 to 3:6.[10] For reasons presented below, I consider that the Masoretes were correct to begin the second of the two sections at 2:1, a conclusion also reached by Butler.[11]

The point at issue here is that, despite appearances to the contrary, the initial sections do not conform to a sequential treatment of time. Indeed, in contrast even to the final two parts of Judges, they do not invariably conform to it intra-episodically either, leading Noth to describe chapter 1 as 'fragmentary throughout'.[12] However, when chapters 1:1–3:6 of Judges are read as a unified account through eyes alert to the semantically consecutive/chronologically non-sequential development of the narrative, rather than as a double introduction produced by different writers, or even by the same writer applying differing literary approaches, their relationship becomes clear. The words of the angel to the sons of Israel, enunciated at Bochim in the presence of Joshua, induced sincere, collective remorse. The verses between this scene and the report of Joshua's death and burial show that the period that spans the Bochim repentance and the demise of the elders who survived Joshua, a cohort that included Caleb, represented the apex of the Israelites' relationship with

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9   Malamat, 'Charismatic Leadership', p. 155; Webb, *Integrated*, p. 175.

10   As noted in Chapter 1, within this broad schema different exegetes identify further sub-divisions: Driver, *Introduction*, pp. 163, 165; Eissfeld, *Introduction*, p. 257; Noth, *Deuteronomistic History*, pp. 9, 103; Herzberg, *Bücher*, pp. 147–48, 163; Boling, *Judges*, pp. 50, 71, 77–80; Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, p. 12; Soggin, *Judges*, pp. 36, 46–47; Gray, *Joshua, Judges*, p. 255; Fokkelman, *Reading*, p. 69; Webb, *Integrated*, pp. 102–03, 118, 123; Younger, *Judges/Ruth*, pp. 62, 73; Polzin, *Moses*, p. 156; Yee, 'Introduction', p. 4; O'Connell, *Rhetoric*, p. 11.

11   *Judges*, pp. 10–11.

12   *Deuteronomistic History*, p. 103. Lindars goes further, describing it as 'a pastiche of old material, mostly derived from Joshua, [that] was added by the final editor to smooth the transition from one book to the other. But it does include some items not found in Joshua, so that a debt to other sources cannot be excluded' ('Tribes', p. 101).

Yahweh. It is this, then, that sets the context for the first section of chapter 1 beginning 'Now after the death of Joshua, the sons of Israel asked Yahweh […]'. The spiritual strength and national unity discovered by Israel at Bochim are here seen applied in practice in the Israelites' seeking Yahweh's direction concerning how best to perform his will in possessing the land he promised their fathers, without needing to be guided, let alone cajoled, by a charismatic intermediary. This collective purpose and wholeness are underscored by the question they put to Yahweh: 'Who shall go up first *for us* against the Canaanites?'. A comparison of the reports of the events immediately following the deaths of other Israelite military leaders in the book provides a further commentary on Israel's dramatic, but consistent, slide from spiritual wholeness and communal cohesion: 'Othniel ben-Kenaz died and the sons of Israel did evil'; 'as soon as Gideon was dead, the sons of Israel turned again, and went whoring after the Ba'als'; 'when the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, they went each to his own place' (3:11–12; 8:33; 9:55).[13] The contrast between the 'for us' (*lānû*) of the opening verse of Judges and the temporal marker that encloses the final two sections 'in those days […] every man did what was right in his own eyes' underscores again the extent of the atomization of the society and concomitant alienation from God that takes place in the course of the book.[14] It is to show Israel's passage from the zenith to the nadir of its journey that Judges begins and ends where it does. The same point is conveyed through the subtle contrast in wording between the work's penultimate verse describing the action of the sons of Israel immediately after they had encouraged the Benjamites to profane Yahweh's festival by the abduction and rape of the Shiloh maidens, with the account of what they did in the wake of the repentance and sacrifice at Bochim.[15] After the Shiloh episode we read 'they departed from there, every man to his inheritance'; whereas after Bochim, 'when Joshua dismissed the people, the sons of Israel went every man to his inheritance *to possess the land*' (21:24; 2:6). The writer is, then, far less interested in providing a chronologically sequential account of Israel from its entry into the land under Joshua than in charting its catastrophic transition from the height of its post-Bochim promise which he recounts in the initial verses of his book to the depths of its tragic reality evident at Shiloh, and this alone determines his work's beginning and conclusion. Seen in this light, the non-linear handling of time in the opening

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13   Israel's deleterious spiritual condition and fragmented state are so advanced by the time of Jephthah that his and Samson's deaths have no effect whatever on Israel's conduct.

14   Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative*, pp. 120–21.

15   Butler, *Judges*, pp. 467–68.

and closing sections is entirely justified by, and consistent with, the theological intent of the author.[16]

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To have such a clear differentiation in the handling of temporal relations between the initial and final parts of the book, on the one hand, and the central section, on the other, is undoubtedly meaningful. Before exploring its meaning, however, it is important to look more closely at the balanced relationship between the introductory and coda sections. They exhibit close correspondences as Younger observes: 'The first introduction (A) is concerned with *foreign* wars of subjugation with the *ḥērem* being applied. In its counterpart, the second conclusion (Á) narrates *domestic* wars with the *ḥērem* being applied. The second introduction (B) relates the difficulties Israel had with *foreign* religious idols of the Canaanites. Its counterpart, the first conclusion (Ɓ), describes the difficulties that Israel had with its own *domestic* idols'.[17]

Let us begin by examining the correspondences between the second and penultimate sections. The angel's prophecy of divine judgment against Israel commences by referring to the Israelites' deliverance from captivity in Egypt. The Micah-Danite cycle concludes with mention of the 'day of the captivity of the land', that is, the Assyrian conquest of the northern kingdom and the deportation of its inhabitants in 722 BC (2:1; 18:30). These two references embrace the entire history of the twelve tribes as a composite group, and, as such, that of 'the sons of Israel' (as opposed to solely Judah and the Jews). The messenger chides Israel for not breaking down the altars of the Canaanites; the final verse of the Micah-Danite section reports the Danites setting up the graven image (2:2; 18:31). Chapter 2 records the burial of Joshua on Mount Ephraim. This is where Yahweh's chosen deliverer and champion ends his career, having himself, like the angel, and like the people, come up from Gilgal. Micah's idolatrous cult begins in Mount Ephraim and ends in Dan.[18] A prophetic messenger from Yahweh opens the second section, a renegade priest/Levite concludes the

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16 '[Hebrew] history is written in order to display the religious philosophy of the history. Now, this being the view of history, the prophet's eye might see more and other things in it than the ordinary eye. He always saw God in it […], and he might see the end in the beginning in a way not understood even by the original actors' (A.B. Davidson, *Biblical and Historical Essays*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1902, pp. 315–16).

17 *Judges/Ruth*, p. 30. See also Exum, 'Centre', pp. 413, 425.

18 Klein, *Triumph*, p. 30.

penultimate. In both sections, the figure of Moses looms large implicitly and, in their concluding verses, explicitly (3:4; 18:30), reminding the reader again of the disfigurement that affects everyone as a result of Israel's corrosive sin. Moreover, assuming Bochim and Bethel are synonymous, the angelic prophet delivers his message at one location that will be a centre of Jeroboam's cult of the golden calf, and Jonathan conducts his priestly ministrations at the other, the new city of Dan (1 Kgs 12:28–30; 2 Kgs 10:29; compare Am. 3:14). The writer of Kings ascribes the events of 722 BC, above all, to Yahweh's retribution against the northern kingdom on account of its adherence to the idolatrous twin cults of Bethel and Dan. The relationship between the two sections is also betrayed by the appearance of specific words and phrases that they share. Micah repeats the word *māh* 'what' three times in rapid succession in his apoplectic reply to the Danites' threatening question 'what's up with you?'.[19] The cause of his rage is that 'you have taken away my gods *which I have made/done*'. The Danites respond by warning Micah not to let 'your voice be heard among us'. Yahweh complains through the angel, '*You have not heard my voice; what is this you have done/made?*' (18:23–25; 2:2).

The tight correlation between the second and penultimate parts of the book is, therefore, purposeful. Both, as stated above, are concerned with Israel's spiritual condition and both exhibit a certain timelessness since they are not bound within the chronological framework that runs from 3:7 to 16:31. In the cosmic geography of Judges, the corridor running from Bethel to Shechem, the 'steady centre', is the spatial equivalent of the book's central portion. Younger's insight that, while the earlier section sees the spiritual corruption emanating from foreign sources, the latter presents it as home-grown, sheds further light on why chronological sequence is suspended in the introductory and concluding portions of the book. As the Gideon series shows, both kinds of spiritual contamination existed simultaneously in Israel for at least some of the period covered by the book. There is therefore not a chronologically linear development of cultic delinquency at issue here, viz., that foreign is superseded by native. Rather, what is shown in the Micah tale is that, because of the corruption of Yahwism through syncretic contamination from the religious mores of the surrounding peoples, the Israelites could no longer discern the difference between acceptable and unacceptable praxis, just as they could no longer perceive the nature of Yahweh. They, therefore, on a spiritual plane shared Samson's blindness, and for a similar reason: through dalliance with the foreign, they disregarded and

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19   This 3+1 arrangement, like that of the cities with changed names, warns of the profound significance for Israel of the idol and its transfer to Dan. Compare Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, London: SCM Press, 1967, p. 25.

devalued their own spiritual inheritance. Because of its insidiousness, the con-
tamination of Yahwism presented an even greater danger for the sons of Israel
than the attraction of alien religious beliefs and practices since the presence
of authentic Yahwism at least offered an alternative to apostasy. With its cor-
ruption, even Yahwists were liable to find themselves on the wrong side of the
line in the eyes of Israel's God. This condition is the fourth stage of otherness,
as revealed through Samson's responses to Delilah's question, whereas what is
found in the second section of the book relates to the first and second stages.

Thus, the book's second part and chapters 17 and 18 take cult as their theme:
pure worship of Yahweh versus idol worship. Commentators, as Younger's
example shows, frequently observe that the book's first and final sections
also are linked in a ring structure, seen not least in Judah's vanguard role in
the respective campaigns to conquer the land and to attack the Benjamites.
However, whereas Younger interprets the connection as being war, and the
application of the *ḥērem*, against the autochthonous peoples of Canaan as
opposed to civil war and its use there, I submit that it extends much further. It
primarily addresses the moral comportment of the tribes of Israel as defined
by adherence to Yahweh's laws and ordinances, particularly as expressed
in their dealings with one another.[20] The initial chapter presents six ethical
themes which will then be developed throughout the book and reach their
dénouement in the final section. In a paired arrangement of 3+3, recalling the
configuration of the major judges, the first triad of ethical questions is intro-
duced through foreigners, the final triad is raised exclusively through Israelites.
From whichever source, the importance of these themes is underlined by the
book's architecture in that they encircle the entirety of the account, acting as
thematic inclusios.

The three moral questions presented by foreigners in chapter 1 receive their
final and most negative treatment in the Gibeah/Shiloh tale. The first is that of
retribution, specifically, what is just retribution? Adoni-bezek's brief episode
explores this topic,[21] in a way that emphasizes the mirror-image aspect of ret-
ribution. In the final story it plays a fundamental role, as seen in the Israelites'
response to the events at Gibeah, to the fugitive Benjamites, and to the popula-
tion of Jabesh-gilead. The second moral question concerns betrayal. The man
of Luz betrays his city (Bethel) in exchange for his and his family's survival.
Unlike Rahab in similar circumstances (Josh. 6:25), his action is not informed

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20   Dennis Olson defines the two rings as 'social fragmentation' and 'religious deterioration'
      ('The Book of Judges', in Leander Keck and David Petersen (eds), *The New Interpreter's
      Bible*, vol. 2, Nashville TN: Abingdon, 1998, p. 863).

21   Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative*, pp. 161–62.

by faith in Yahweh's power and a wish to participate in his plan. On the contrary, he goes on to re-create the city his perfidy had destroyed. The concubine betrays the Levite at the beginning of the section, he betrays her to the men of Gibeah, and the elders of Israel betray the maidens of Shiloh (and through them its entire population) (1:24–26; 19:2, 25; 21:16–22). The third matter is also introduced through the exchange between the man of Luz and the Josephite spies. It concerns when/if it can be justified morally to do deals. The man of Ephraim tried to do a deal with the Gibeah mob based on offering his virgin daughter and the concubine in exchange for the Levite. In the first chapter, Caleb offers a deal: his daughter's hand in marriage as reward to the warrior who would conquer Kiriath-sepher (1:12–15).[22]

This example brings the discussion to the matters that are introduced in chapter 1 through Israelites. The first concerns the position of women in a healthy Yahwistic society. Or, put differently, how best to deal with an inherent social and biological asymmetry in a religious environment that prizes symmetry. Achsah cuts an intriguing figure in the composition. On the one hand, though consistent with betrothal practice in the law of Moses, she is given as a reward, on the other, as noted above, unlike all other Israelite women with the exception of Deborah, her name is stated. Caleb makes a point of referring to her as 'Achsah, my daughter'. To this distinction must be added her characterisation, as presented through her request of her father for a water source, as strong, determined and empowered.[23] The text indicates that she is more forceful than her twice-heroic husband (1:12–15).[24] The contrast with the position occupied by women in the final chapters could not be more pronounced. The virgin daughter in Gibeah and the concubine are offered for rape, not marriage.[25] Despite her pivotal role in the narrative, the concubine is anonymous. Her body is exposed throughout Israel, but her name is unstated. Indeed, she is only referred to as a 'woman' (*ʾiššāh*) after her rape (19:26). A woman's dismembered corpse provides the call to arms, the living bodies of the four hundred virgins of Jabesh-gilead, whose families have just been slaughtered by their compatriots through the application of *ḥērem*, supply the earnest of the armistice. These, however, are not sufficient, so more innocent young women – those Ephraimites in the act of celebrating Yahweh's festival – are also provided. Thus, as a result of the sexual assault on one woman by a

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22   Ibid., p. 161.

23   Niditch, *Judges*, p. 41; Webb, *Integrated*, p. 119; idem, *Judges*, p. 104.

24   Ibid., p. 101. The LXX and Vulgate offer a different reading (Niditch, *Judges*, p. 23), but in both variants Achsah obtains what she wants.

25   Block, *Judges*, pp. 96–97.

Benjamite mob, their kinsmen are licensed to rape six hundred more.[26] The book that begins with a marriage framed in Yahweh's service concludes with six hundred 'marriages' wrought in cold-blooded murder and gross sacrilege. The message is clear: a healthy society demands a sound relationship between the sexes, based on mutual respect and the rule of law. For the writer, infidelity to Yahweh and the abusive treatment of women are related symptoms of a sick society.

The Caleb-Achsah episode also introduces the subject of vows and, specifically, what characterizes the right kind of vow. Similar to retribution, vows act as mirrors. They reflect back, in their fulfilment, the purity or impurity of original motive, and in non-fulfilment, the untrustworthiness of the vow-maker. For a composition intensely concerned with mirror-images, they too have an unveiling function in the book. Caleb promised Achsah to the hero of Kiriath-sepher to encourage the carrying out of Yahweh's will. The massed tribes at the end of the book make two vows: to put to death anyone who does not heed the muster against Benjamin and, secondly, not to wed their daughters to Benjamites (21:1, 5). Neither vow is prescribed, or even inspired, by an adherence to Yahweh's plan, purpose or laws. Both, however, like Jephthah's, are held to be absolutely binding, in evident contrast to other vows made by Israel to follow Yahweh. In the contorted logic that operates in apostate Israel, the former vow provides a creative solution to the problem engendered by the rash pronouncement of the latter one. The fact that the solution furnished by the abduction of the girls of Jabesh-gilead was only partial, however, produces a further, and even more twisted application of logic. The 'snatching' of maidens from families who fulfilled the muster is sanctioned on the basis that, because permission to grant their daughters' 'hands' to the Benjamites would not be sought, no vow would be violated. *Ergo*, their kidnap and rape could be justified morally.[27]

The last question introduced in chapter 1 that is subjected to its final review in the closing section of the book is the critical matter of what constitutes a cohesive society within a tribal structure.[28] We remember that the tribal unity witnessed in the book's opening verses was a product of the tribes' collective response to the angel's message at Bochim, encapsulated in the single Hebrew word *lānû* 'for us', featured in the question that the sons of Israel submit to

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26   The six hundred Benjamite fugitives 'took wives according to their number' (21:23); Yee, 'Introduction', p. 3.

27   Block, *Judges*, pp. 581–82; Webb, *Judges*, pp. 506–08.

28   Connected to this is the question of monarchical government raised in chapter 1 by the presence of Adoni-bezek's seventy hostage kings. I discuss kingship below.

Yahweh. A grotesquely distorted caricature of this united nation gathers and asks a similar question of Yahweh,[29] receives a like answer 'Judah shall go up first', but with a markedly different result (20:18–21).[30] The assembly convenes in response to the concubine's body parts: 'and all the sons of Israel went out and the assembly gathered as one man from Dan to Beer-sheba and the land of Gilead to Yahweh at Mizpeh' (20:1). Except that this is patently not so: the entire tribe of Benjamin was absent, so too were the men of Jabesh-gilead. Assuming that Benjamin was one of the recipients of the concubine's members, her body remained metaphorically disassembled at the assembly that she symbolically brought together. Moreover, the 'unity' that Israel achieves results only in further destruction of the nation, through the massacre at Jabesh-gilead, and further alienation from Yahweh: 'and the people regretted [what had befallen] Benjamin because Yahweh had made a rupture in the tribes of Israel'. The semblance of cohesion quickly dissolves. The book ends with the violent disruption of Yahweh's festival, the Benjamites dragging away the Ephraimite virgins, and each of the now hugely reduced number of sons of Israel returning where he came from.

By juxtaposing the first chapter and the work's final portion, the author supplies an implicit commentary on what Israel needed to do to achieve a sound and just society based on the law of Moses within the tribal structure, and the consequences for the nation of not doing it. Other critical topics, however, are raised in chapter 1 and treated in the Gibeah-Shiloh tale. One is kingship which emerges first in the Adoni-bezek narrative and is used to conclude the book. Another, which could only have been related in the minds of his contemporary readership to kingship, is Jerusalem. And a third is Bethel. While the latter, as we have seen, represents the geographical centre of the composition and receives frequent mention, Jerusalem is encountered only in the opening and closing sections. In chapter 1 it appears twice: in the context of Adoni-bezek, and in the Benjamites' failure to drive out its Jebusite inhabitants with the result that it is a racially mixed city. It is the first of many cities listed as a compromised conquest. In the final tale, it occurs in the account of the journey of the Levite's party from Bethlehem-judah as a place ostensibly inhospitable to Israelites (1:7–8, 21; 19:10–12). The writer's apparent reticence about focusing on Jerusalem more strongly in the narrative is intriguing given its undoubted relevance to his readers then and since. He seems to leave it suspended to allow them to form their own opinions on the subject, following the Levite's lead. But, as so often in this book, the appearance is not the reality. Together with

kingship it plays a salient role in Judges, a role that is concealed, as we shall explore later in this chapter. Connected to them is Bethlehem-judah which first appears in the narrative in Jonathan's tale, but then marks the departure point for each of the closing sections' fateful journeys.

The four sections of the beginning and the end of the book that stand outside the confines of linear time are united also by an utterance ascribed to Yahweh in each. The oracle for Judah to 'go up first' against the enemy in the first and final sections has been considered above. So too have Yahweh's words proclaimed by his angel in chapter 2. Parallel with the almost identical oracle resulting in divergent outcomes at the two poles of the book, the angel's prophetic message at Bochim is entirely inverted in Jonathan's caricature pronouncement: 'Go in peace: the way you are going is before Yahweh'.[31]

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What is clear from the above is that the four parts with which the work begins and ends form a ring composition. In this respect the structure of Judges bears a resemblance to that of Numbers, as described by Mary Douglas.[32] Or, phrased another way, if the book of Judges were folded over on itself, there is a thematic match between each introductory section and its corresponding concluding section. This identification of ring compositions in the Hebrew Bible is by no means exceptional. Gary Knoppers finds an elaborate structure of seven rings in 1 Kings 8.[33] As regards Judges, Cheryl Exum demonstrates the employment of this device in chapter 13.[34] Mesopotamian influence is detected here also: the Erra and Ishum myth possesses a ring structure.[35]

Douglas states that such structures depend on analogies between a and a^1 which, taken together, convey a more profound meaning than either could alone.[36] In the context of Judges, the relationship of a and a^1 can be represented as image and mirror-image, since it is clear that the a^1 'story' is a highly

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31 Webb interprets inversion in Judges as a satirical device (*Judges*, p. 453). That caricature and burlesque were tropes of Mesopotamian literature has been maintained by some scholars (see Lambert, *Literature*, pp. 139–42).

32 *Wilderness*, pp. 116–50.

33 'Prayer and Propaganda', in *RI&J*, pp. 370–96 (375).

34 J. Cheryl Exum 'Promise and Fulfilment', *JBL* 99 (1980), pp. 43–59.

35 F. Al-Rawi and J.A. Black, 'The Second Tablet of "Išum and Erra"', *Iraq* 51 (1989), pp. 111–22 (111).

36 *Wilderness*, p. xxiv.

asymmetric reflection of the original, in almost every case grotesquely so, and its deeper meaning can only be understood by comparing it with the original. Douglas goes on to observe that 'The convention of ring composition allows for the last section to overlap and interlock with the first. [...] In this literary convention, for the end to come round to the beginning, there has to be a mid-point, the tropic, the turn'.[37] In Chapter 1 we discussed the literal midpoint of Judges that, according to the verse-count of the Masoretes, is located early in chapter 10. It is also the moment in the narrative when the writer provides the fullest enumeration of foreign gods whose cults the Israelites practised, and then relates that Yahweh's retributive response was to sell Israel 'into the hands of the Philistines and [...] the sons of Ammon'. We noted there that this information is central to the concerns of the book. The forsaking of Yahweh for the gods of these adjacent peoples and his retribution constitute the funda-mental causes of Israel's malaise through the period described in Judges. Both the Ammonites and Philistines, who in different ways stood for particularly heinous defiling practices, appear on both sides of the divide. The Ammonites were allied with Eglon and reappear as Jephthah's adversaries. Shamgar's com-bat was against the Philistines, as was Samson's. In the course of that consider-ation of the book's midpoint, we observed that it is flanked by the two crucially important instruments for interpreting the text, viz., Jotham's parable and the *ḥîdôth* of Samson's wedding. Just as significantly, the minor judges are aligned likewise. If we were to follow the conclusion of many commentators and include Shamgar in the list of minor judges, the six would be balanced equally by it. Even without his inclusion, two + three minor judges folded over on each other across this 'tropic' offers a strong argument in support of its significance for the composition's rhetorical architecture. In addition, the first half of the book includes three prophetic messengers who speak to the nation (with a declining degree of success): the angel at Bochim, Deborah and the unnamed prophet during the Midianite oppression (6:8–10). They are balanced in the second half of the book by three priests, Jonathan, Phinehas and the unnamed Levite. The complementary roles of priest and prophet in ancient Israel were essential to the functioning of Yahwism, with the priest serving the cult and acting to sustain the perpetual relationship between Israel and its God, and the prophet providing specific oracular direction. But as Israel's apostasy waxed greater, so the authentic prophetic voice became increasingly one of dissent against the corrupt establishment represented by the royal house and the compromised priesthood. What is striking in Judges is that prophets are not found in the latter half of the book, and priests are absent from the earlier.

37   Op. cit., p. 117.

The inference to be drawn is, naturally, not that there was nothing in the second half that could have prompted Yahweh's censure, but rather that he considered further prophetic admonition futile in an environment characterized by chronic disobedience, idolatry and endemic distortion. In like vein, the three priestly figures cannot be viewed as 'establishment' figures since Israel's worsening fragmentation and anarchy negated any semblance of 'establishment' in the society. But, in different ways, they are all presented as marginal either through serving an alternative cult (Jonathan), apparently associating with no cult (the anonymous Levite), or being inactive (Phinehas), a particularly startling portrayal given the heroic role ascribed to him in Numbers. This depiction of the priesthood as, at worst, hostile to, and, at best, unengaged in the prosecution of Yahweh's cult will be considered further in the next chapter.

In view of the evident 'fold' that occurs early in chapter 10, then, we ought to be able to posit a neatly aligned structure where what is presented in the first half of the book is reflected in a refracted form in the second, analogous to that advanced by Douglas for Numbers. This hypothesis is plainly defensible for the introductory and concluding sections. It is satisfactory for the minor judges, and supported by the juxtapositions respectively of parable and *ḥîdôth*, and prophets and priests. Nevertheless, it quickly runs into an insuperable objection: the place of the major judges in the equation. We have already observed that the juncture where their series turns is at the end of the Deborah cycle. The progression from the third major judge to the fourth, Gideon, already foreshadowed in Deborah-Jael morphing, and indicated in the shift of location within the story between a site immediately south of Bethel to areas to its north, is the transition point, the place where Israel, as reflected in its judges, traverses the line. In fact, the book operates not with one structure, but characteristically, and in contrast to Numbers, with two. It is of great moment for the composition that the series of accounts of the judges are presented in strict chronological order, with each judge carefully delineated in time (and space) from his/her predecessor and successor.[38] It is equally essential that those parts of the book not incorporated in this linear progression of six Yahweh-appointed figures are understood to stand outside sequential time.

The correspondences between Othniel and Samson display a relationship within the ring composition of the major judge series analogous to the correlations between the first chapter and the Gibeah-Shiloh segment.[39] As the

38   Compare Bright, *History*, p. 171.

39   Younger, *Judges/Ruth*, p. 38.

character of Deborah merges into Jael, so Gideon's mutates into Abimelech.[40] In contrast to the rest of the major judge series, the Deborah and Gideon sections are conspicuous by the number of named participants that they feature, twenty in total.[41] The abundance of named individuals and the dramatic climax of Deborah's Song at the turn of this structure recalls Douglas's observation regarding Numbers: 'The mid-point of the book has been superbly celebrated with high drama and a comprehensive cast'.[42] The high drama of Deborah's anthropomorphic reference to the sun finds an echo in the solar signification of twenty, the sum of the 'cast'. Jephthah provides the distorted mirror-image of Ehud.[43] Both use control of the fords of the Jordan strategically,[44] the one against Israel's oppressors, the other against its own people. Their correspondence goes to the essence of their respective stories: the account of Ehud's assassination of Eglon, the 'calf', is rich in double entendres suggesting sacrifice.[45] In Hebrew the blade *lahab* with which Ehud stabs Eglon is synonymous with the term for 'flame';[46] in Jephthah a real human sacrifice occurs as a holocaust.[47] In the former, the murder is of Israel's oppressor; in the latter, a Yahweh-fearing innocent is subjected to a strictly prohibited act which is entirely self-destructive on the perpetrator's part. Jephthah follows the sacrifice of his child with the slaughter of his kinsmen. The verb used for their

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40   Compare Malamat, 'Charismatic Leadership', pp. 162–64. Bluedorn (*Yahweh*, p. 265) asserts that the Gideon and Abimelech sections should be viewed as a single narrative.

41   Deborah, Lappidoth, Baraq, Sisera, Jabin, Shamgar, Jael, Heber; Gideon, Joash, Purah, Jether, Oreb, Zeeb, Zebah and Zalmunna + Abimelech, Jotham, Gaal and Zebul. In a book that provides personal names sparingly, their profusion in these two stories is remarkable and plainly advertises their relationship. The principal difference between them is that, whereas in the Gideon narrative all the named individuals are seen to perform a role, in the Deborah tale, half of the named characters are absent from the action: Shamgar, Lappidoth, Heber and Jabin. In the case of the final three, the fact of their absence plays a significant role in the narrative. By contrast, the Samson pericope, which has many individual characters in active roles, furnishes only two names apart from the hero's, Manoah and Delilah. The tally for the other portions between 3:7 and 16:31 are Othniel (two), Ehud (two), Shamgar (one), minor judges (one each), Jephthah (one, or two if Gilead is included).

42   *Wilderness*, p. 135.

43   Gooding, 'Composition', p. 73.

44   Polzin, *Moses*, p. 180.

45   Webb, *Judges*, pp. 165–66. Compare Lev. 3:16: 'all the fat is Yahweh's'.

46   Gray, *Joshua, Judges*, p. 264; Butler, *Judges*, pp. 70–71. In Judg. 13:20 it is used of the flames of a sacrifice. Samson refers to his bride as an *'eglāh*. She meets her end by fire.

47   On the question whether Jephthah initially intended a human sacrifice as the fulfilment of his vow, see Cartledge's analysis of the scholarly literature (*Vows*, pp. 179–83).

killing, *šāḥaṭ*, found in Judges only here, is the technical term for sacrificial slaughter of animals.[48]

Analysis of the two structures that frame the book, the two pillars on which it stands, presented in the following table, illustrates that, although separate, they are tightly coordinated with each other to create a unified narrative. The structural information displayed in the table reinforces other means by which the two structures are seen to be harmonized. The list of tribes seeking to conquer their allotted territories in chapter 1 begins with Judah, the most successful in this endeavour, and concludes with Dan, the least effective. The sequence of major judges begins with the representative of Judah, the best judge, and concludes with the representative of Dan, the least successful in unifying his tribe or Israel around his leadership, or in delivering Israel. The table undermines Boling's claim for form criticism 'ably demonstrat[ing] that it was the beginning and end of major segments that experienced the most vicissitudes, as the tradition was taken up in successive editions in order to keep the record theologically relevant'.[49]

A book as concerned with the establishment and defence of clear boundaries as Judges, will, by definition, carefully construct the intersections within and between the structures. This is precisely what we encounter. Structure A begins with action taken following the death of the book's first hero; structure B ends with action taken following the death of its last hero. The chiasmus works the other way, too. Structure A concludes with Israel doing what was right in its own eyes; B commences with Israel doing what was evil in Yahweh's eyes. One refers to the presence of a Mesopotamian king, the other, the absence of an Israelite king. It is not solely between the diametric opposites, however, that A and B are correlated. B2, dividing across the fold between the end of Deborah's pericope and the commencement of Gideon's, bears a clear resemblance in its first part to A1, and in its second to A2. In turn, A2 with its mention of Yahweh selling Israel into the hands of a specific enemy correlates with B1. The subject of B3 had literally been sold into the hands of the Philistines (A2).

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48   *BDB*, p. 1006.

49   *Judges*, p. 78. Brettler's conclusion that the lacuna of Judg. 6:7–10 attested in *4QJUDGᵃ*, which he dates to 50–25 BC, offers 'incontrovertible evidence that the book of Judges went through a number of recensions' (*Judges*, pp. 41–42) is hardly incontrovertible. The segment in question is found in all other Hebrew, as well as LXX, manuscripts. Indeed, the Qumran material for Judges, albeit very limited, gives little reason to posit a complex history of text transmission (Martin Abegg, Jr., Peter Flint and Eugene Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible Translated for the First Time into English*, New York: HarperCollins, 1999, pp. 208–11).

THE BOOK OF JUDGES	Beginning (1)	Midpoint (2)	End (3)
Structure A – Whole-book series. Non-chronological ordering.	*1.1* Now after the death of Joshua, it happened that the sons of Israel asked Yahweh 'Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites to fight them?'	*10:6* And the sons of Israel did evil in the eyes of Yahweh and served Baʻals and Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Sidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the sons of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines, and abandoned Yahweh and did not serve him. *10:7* And the anger of Yahweh burned against Israel and he sold them into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the sons of Ammon.	*21:25* In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes.
Structure B – Major judge series. Chronological ordering.	*3:7* And the sons of Israel did evil in the eyes of Yahweh, and forgot Yahweh their God and served the Baʻals and Asherah. *3:8* Therefore the anger of Yahweh burned against Israel and he sold them into the hand of Cushan-rishathaim, king of Mesopotamia, and the sons of Israel served C-r 8 years.	*5:31* So let all your enemies perish [like these Canaanites] O Yahweh, but let them that love him be as the sun when he goes forth as a hero/in his strength. And the land had rest 40 years. *6:1* And the sons of Israel did evil in the eyes of Yahweh and Yahweh delivered them into the hand of Midian 7 years.	*16:31* Then his brothers and all his father's house came down and took him, and brought him up, and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the burial ground of Manoah his father. And he judged Israel 20 years.

Reference was made in Chapter 1 to the chiasmus in the deployment of the verb signifying to prevail between B1 and B2 (used of Othniel and the Midianites respectively). B1, B2 and B3 are connected by temporal references: the citing of 8, 40/7, and 20 years respectively.[50] In view of the explicit, and unexpected, emphasis given to the sun at the midpoint of B, it is noteworthy that B1, B2 and B3 appears to chart the solar progress from sunrise to sunset. Cushan-rishathaim was the most easterly of Israel's enemies to be mentioned in Judges. In the northern hemisphere, the sun is at its strongest in the south.[51] Samson was buried at the western extremity of Israel's territory. Just as temporal relations are presented in two interlocking forms in Judges, so also are spatial. Against the south-north movement that runs through the narrative, there is a circular dynamic. Hitherto, we have considered this only in terms of cyclical movement. In fact, the cycles are simply elaborated expressions of an underlying concern with the solar circuit. Commentators who perceive in Judges an east-west movement are correct only in part, and are missing the reason behind it.[52] As Deborah indicates in the climax of her song, placed for emphasis at the precise point where Structure B turns, 'the sun as hero' is an essential motif in the composition. This important question will be examined more fully in Chapters 5 and 7.

Thus, Judges possesses two parallel temporal structures that operate separately and, yet, are entirely integrated with each other.[53] The writer's conspicuous interest in introducing paired forms throughout his composition provides an explanation for the meticulous care he took to design its dual frame. Nevertheless, this does not exhaust the contribution that the construction provides. To recapitulate, when taken as a whole, the book is divided into three thematic parts. The opening segment is concerned, as is the closing segment,

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50   The numbering in Judges also presents a paired opposition. Round numbers are used for most of the major judges (Jephthah is the exception), whereas precise figures are supplied for Israel's oppressors and the minor judges. 5:31/6:1 ingeniously succeeds in reflecting both the precise figure series exemplified in the eight years of B1 with the rounded series represented in B3.

51   The verb *yāṣā'* 'to go out' which we have met in connection with Ehud and Samson's riddle, here used of the sun, could arguably connote its rising, as understood by several translations, *inter alia LXX A*. However, in the anthropomorphic context of 5:31, with the emphasis on the sun as hero, it seems rather to signify 'sallying forth' into battle, another of the verb's meanings (*BDB*, pp. 423–24), and the one conveyed in *LXX B*'s choice of *exodos* to translate it. In Gen. 19:23, *yāṣā'* is also found with *šemeš* and appears to indicate, not the point of sunrise, but the sun standing 'over the land', paralleling Judg. 5:31.

52   Younger, *Judges/Ruth*, p. 34.

53   This literary construct has a 'human' reflection in the characterisation of Deborah-Jael.

with moral conduct as demonstrated chiefly through the Israelites' dealings with one another gauged against the standard of Yahweh's statutes. The initial segment raises the moral questions, the final segment describes their dénouement. The second and penultimate segments address the Israelites' spiritual condition.[54] These four segments, which are arranged in a ring-cycle, operate outside time. The only fixed temporal point within them is the death of Joshua which had, in fact, already been reported in the eponymous book (24:29–30). Between them, arranged in linear time, lie the stories of the major judges.

This literary construction recalls the tripartite design of the tent of meeting.[55] The initial space – the court – was open to the community of Israel, its openness symbolized by its being literally uncovered and illuminated naturally by the heavenly bodies. Though exposed to the sky, it was shut off from the world by the surrounding screen. There was only one entry point, through the entrance curtain. The fact of its enclosure symbolized that the community who assembled there were separated from all other peoples. It provided the place where they were expected to gather together, in their tribal groupings, as one people, united and set apart, to love and serve their God, and keep his statutes in their dealings with all other members of their community. The court's furniture comprised the brazen altar for sanctifying the entire nation, and the laver to prepare the priests by ritual washing to enter Yahweh's presence on behalf of themselves and the people. The court was, therefore, the space where human relations are paramount as exposed in the natural light of mundane transaction. Next came the Holy Place where the relationship with Yahweh provided the focus. It was enclosed beneath four layers of covering and illuminated artificially by the menorah, which stood on its south side. Opposite was placed the table of the bread of the presence on which the twelve 'cakes', symbolizing the twelve tribes, were arranged in two rows. The Holy Place was dedicated to the offering of incense to Yahweh on the altar of incense that stood before the veil that separated the final compartment of the tent, the Holy of Holies (Exod. 26:31–37). The Law emphasizes the sanctity of the incense, the oil for the menorah and the bread of the presence (Exod. 30:34–38; Lev. 24:2–8). The priesthood had access to the Holy Place to serve the cult, but

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54   Gale Yee observes that the penultimate and final sections are concerned respectively with cultic chaos and moral chaos ('Ideological Criticism', in eadem, *Judges*, pp. 138–60 (149, 152). See also O'Connell, *Rhetoric*, p. 4.

55   The hotly debated question whether the tent actually existed or was merely a retrojection of the Temple into the wilderness story is irrelevant to a discussion of Israelite belief in the mid-first millennium BC (see Rowley, *Worship*, p. 51).

the high priest alone could enter the Holy of Holies, Yahweh's terrestrial dwelling place, and only once a year, to make atonement (Lev. 16:2). The only furniture in the inner sanctum was the Ark of the Covenant containing the stone tablets of the Decalogue,[56] the golden vessel holding the manna, and the staff of the tribe of Levi held by Aaron. Placed on the Ark was Yahweh's seat, 'the propitiatory', the place of the covering of sin, overlooked by the two cherubim. Yahweh told Moses that it is from here 'I will reveal myself to you and speak to you all that I am commanding you to the sons of Israel' (Exod. 25:22).

In the schema that I am submitting, this third part of the tent of meeting, the site of Yahweh's presence, has its narratological analogue in Judges in the linear portion of the book that runs from 3:7 to 16:31. The argument for this is that the each of the six major judges represents a revelation of Yahweh, they constitute his hypostases, as postulated in Chapter 3. While the other sections possess a timeless quality, the third obeys strict chronological order because each of the judges, during the period that he/she is called by Yahweh to be the vehicle for his divine power in Israel's affairs, is uniquely his representative. Just as Israel was commanded to hear that Yahweh is 'one God', so his hypostasis must, at any point in the story, be only one.[57] The court corresponds to the opening and closing segments of the book, the Holy Place to the second and penultimate segments with their focus on the cult. The typology of the tent of meeting is apposite for the book in other respects too. The concealed interior is enclosed within layers recalling the esoteric strata of the composition. Symbolizing the order that derives from the combination of four elements in harmonious relations, the four complementary layers of the tent of meeting's covering lend security and stability to the structure and the items that it contains. The topmost layer, the animal skins,[58] provides impermeability. There can be no accidental or gratuitous intrusion into this edifice. The fact that this external cover is intended to be 'rough and raw and confronting'[59] belies the variety and increasing refinement of the successive layers, culminating in the exquisite 'curtain of fine linen', not to mention the numinous

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56   The Decalogue encapsulates the concerns of Judges, viz., who is legitimately the subject of Israelite worship and how the Israelites should behave with one other (Rowley, *Worship*, p. 41).

57   Compare Malamat, 'Charismatic Leadership', p. 155.

58   It is unknown what animal provided this skin. It is possibly the hide of a dugong (*BDB*, p. 1065), or another 'large aquatic mammal' (*NIV* Exod. 35:7). What is more certain is that *taḥaš* was used for making sandals (Ezek. 16:10) and, of the four materials that covered the tent of meeting, it was the least processed.

59   From Webb's description of Judges (*Judges*, p. xvii).

contents of the interior. The upper layer in particular serves to discourage those who would abuse sacred knowledge from proceeding further. As in the *ḥîdôth*, so with the tent: when all the layers are stripped away, what is revealed is the pure essence of Yahweh, the God of Israel. Moreover, just as the book is framed by the juxtaposition of the tribes of Judah and Dan,[60] so the tent was literally framed by a Judahite and a Danite. 'Bezaleel [...] of the tribe of Judah made all that Yahweh commanded Moses, and with him was Aholiab [...] of the tribe of Dan' (Exod. 28:22–23). Judges is a book that begins with the praise of Yahweh and ends with the judgment of God.

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The supposition that the writer drew on the design of the tent of meeting to structure his oeuvre is consistent with the sacred intent with which he approached its composition and places the various elements which comprise it in a defined framework. Furthermore, it increases the significance that the Ark's presence commands in the plot.[61] Ostensibly, it occupies a small part in the text. In reality, it is formally present everywhere, determining and shaping the narrative framework, itself a symbol of the writer's acknowledgement of the presence of Yahweh in his literary endeavour. This enhanced role for the Ark in Judges redirects our attention to the cosmic geography defined by its position at Bethel, and to the further implications of this for the book's esoteric message. Its location, precisely on the border of the northern and southern kingdoms, as opposed to Shiloh to its north, is highly significant. To its left are the territories that would become the secessionist kingdom of Israel, under Jeroboam, comprising ten tribes with its original capital at Shechem, the site where the last king of the united tribes, Rehoboam, like its first, Abimelech,

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60   The juxtaposition is seen in the chapter 1 account of the tribal order in occupying the land, refracted asymmetrically in the final section, in the account of the muster of the tribes from Dan to Beer-sheba. It is evident in the sequence of major judges, and in the last judge's engagement with the Judahites. It is apparent also in Jonathan's momentous journey from Bethlehem-judah to Dan.

61   In this, I assume that the Ark of the Covenant was not standing in the open air at Bethel but kept within the tent of meeting (*contra* Rowley, *Worship*, p. 81). To be otherwise would expose it to sacrilege as well as the elements. Moreover, why would the tent not be with the Ark in the cultic centre of the nation? Boling makes the curious statement that 'the Ark had for years moved back and forth from the field to the throne room of the Tabernacle, Yahweh's less portable palace' (*Judges*, p. 22). Portability was the point of the tent's design.

was installed (1 Kgs 12:1–25). The northern kingdom was obliterated by the Assyrians, its inhabitants deported in two waves in 732 and 722 BC,[62] and new settlers brought in from elsewhere in the Assyrian dominions, not least the heartland of Mesopotamia itself (2 Kgs 17:24, 30). As the writer discloses, Judges was composed in the wake of these developments, perhaps within living memory. In this cosmic conception, to the right of the Ark was Judah, now a small, beleaguered kingdom with its capital at Jerusalem, and a ruling dynasty who traced their roots to Bethlehem-judah. The left hand of retribution had befallen the northern polity. The southern state was still the beneficiary of Yahweh's right hand of favour.[63] On that basis, Judges could be interpreted by contemporary readers as encouraging. The sombre hues and distorted lines that pervade the text indicate at once, however, that its purpose is not to provide a sense of security, but of peril. This is confirmed allegorically by the book's two final segments, in each of which a northward journey is featured that begins in Bethlehem-judah and has catastrophic consequences for the nation of Israel. The first is that of the Levite Jonathan. The result of his migration north is the establishment of a cult abhorrent to Yahweh which, in one form or other, continues until the Assyrian destruction, and is a major determinant of Yahweh's judgment against the northern kingdom executed by the Assyrians.[64] The second is that of the anonymous Levite and his Bethlehemite concubine. His journey ends in the hill country of Ephraim, hers, dispersed throughout the nation. His treatment of her body resembles the prophetically symbolic action of Ahijah when he announced to Jeroboam Yahweh's decision to punish Solomon's idolatry by rending ten of the tribes from the house of David and appointing Jeroboam as their ruler. He tore a garment into twelve pieces and gave ten of them to Jeroboam (1 Kgs 11:29–36). By the time Judges was composed, those ten were scattered through the Assyrian empire. The one for Judah remained intact. The allegorical message of the stories is, however, that even journeys that begin at Bethlehem-judah can end on the wrong side of Yahweh's judgment. It is significant that the fateful events that led to the

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62   Karen Radner, 'Israel, the "House of Omri"', *Assyrian empire builders*, University College London, 2012 [http://www.ucl.ac.uk/sargon/essentials/countries/israel/ accessed 18 December 2015]; Martin Noth, *The History of Israel*, 2nd edn, London: SCM Press, 1960, pp. 260–62.

63   For the astrological expression of this in Judges, see the next chapter.

64   Perhaps to underscore the connection, in the reference to Micah's production of the idolatrous image with which the Jonathan episode ends (18:31), the writer employs a Hebrew phrase with a direct Akkadian equivalent: *ṣalam epēšum* 'to make an image' (e.g., *e-piš ṣalam ilišu* 'he made an image of his god [Assur]' *CAD* E, 1958, p. 200). Compare Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings* (*Anchor Bible*), New York: Doubleday, 1988, pp. 211–12.

destruction recounted in the last segment of Judges took place not in the territory of the future northern kingdom, but rather in Gibeah, a little to the north of Jerusalem, very close to Bethel but in the southern realm.

To press further the allegorical aspect of the final section, the verb *zānāh* 'to fornicate, play the whore' (19:2) is applied only to the nation of Israel and the concubine.[65] Its use to connote Israel/Judah's infidelity to Yahweh is a standard biblical trope. The Levite, to whom she is attached, enters the narrative in the hill country of Ephraim, the location of God's presence, to which, eventually, he returns. Namelessness in Judges is not invariably an indication of insignificance, but the opposite, as the angel who appears to Samson's parents informs them (13:18). The Levite goes to Bethlehem-judah to seek her out and eventually succeeds in disengaging her from her father's house. But they depart too late, and do not reach his home before light fails. As a consequence, they decide to lodge en route. The text stresses that it is at Jerusalem that the day ended. The Levite dismisses the idea of Jerusalem for their stay because it is 'an alien city and they are not of the sons of Israel'. The pair are rejected by the Gibeahites as recipients of hospitality, except on the most carnal level. The Levite returns to his place, and, the concubine destroyed, he cuts her into twelve pieces, and then disperses them 'to all the borders of Israel'. As a parable depicting how the Israelites treated their God and their nation and Yahweh's response, it may not be fanciful, particularly given the writer's portrayal of Yahweh, by this stage in the book, as conspicuously distorted, coupled with the reality of the ten tribes' diffusion to all the borders of the empire. This is not to suggest that Gibeah and the civil war were merely a fable. They were a watchword for wickedness even in Hosea's time (mid-eighth century BC [Hos. 10:9]). It seems, however, that the writer may have recast the familiar story and charged it with allegorical allusions that would have been recognizable to his Judean audience. The allegory would have possessed greatest resonance in Manasseh's reign. At that time, night was falling on Jerusalem/Judah. It had become alien through its enthusiastic reception of foreign cult and culture.[66] Its king and priests, judges and officials 'lusted after' the Assyrians. Such religious practices went hand in hand with the oppression and extortion of their compatriots, as described by the prophet Micah in an earlier reign. Manasseh had 'filled Jerusalem from one end to the other with innocent blood' (2 Kgs 21:16), rendering it unfit for the

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65   Webb remarks that 'the MT is suspect, since no exact parallel to the construction *znh 'l* is attested elsewhere' (*Judges*, p. 455). It is possible that this 'enigmatic expression' serves to indicate the allegory. Compare Block, *Judges*, pp. 522–23.

66   Compare Wenham, 'Deuteronomic Theology', p. 203. See Chapters 5 and 7 below.

habitation of Yahweh. The nightmare of the final two episodes of Judges would have seemed particularly redolent in early seventh-century Judah.

The fact that Judges positions the Ark, and therefore Yahweh's earthly presence,[67] not in Shiloh but precisely on the border of the northern and southern kingdoms, supplies a key for dating the work. Using the information the writer provides regarding the cosmic geography, the northern kingdom has received its punishment, delivered by the Assyrians, as instruments of God's left hand of judgment. Judah is still the recipient of Yahweh's merciful right hand. The only period in which this situation obtains is between 722 and 597 BC when the first Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem and the subsequent deportation of approximately ten thousand leading citizens of Judean society took place.[68] This indicates that the book is a product of that 125-year interval and was written in Judah, probably in Jerusalem. As I have suggested above and will go on to substantiate, within that time-frame, the reign of Manasseh matches best the composition's message and mood.

The position advanced by Brettler[69] and O'Connell[70] that Judges presents an apology for Judah[71] and castigates the northern leadership lacks support in the text. All the tribes are shown to be equally complicit in the conduct that precipitates the disaster narrated in the book and all, ultimately, equally unsuccessful in fulfilling their calling. The view propounded in some commentaries that the book presents the Ephraimites in a particularly negative light not least because of the truculence and greed that they display in the Gideon and Jephthah episodes,[72] is surely mitigated to some degree by Joshua's membership of that tribe, and their being the victims in two of the most pathetic scenes in a book not lacking pathos: the terrified Ephraimites denying their tribal identity at the Jordan fords, and the 'snatching' of the Ephraimite girls in the act of praising Yahweh in Shiloh. Moreover, it is the Judahites who hand the last Yahweh-appointed judge and saviour, the Danite Samson, 'bound fast with two new ropes' over to Israel's enemies, the Philistines (15:13). One thousand

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67   Rowley, *Worship*, p. 55.

68   In the post-exilic period, superficially a comparable situation obtains. However, if Judges is a product of that time, one would expect to find more Aramaicisms in its language, the book's approach to kingship and the Davidic house would probably be more positive, and there would be no need for a coded attack on Mesopotamian divinities (see below).

69   'Literature'.

70   *Rhetoric*.

71   Niditch, *Judges*, p. 42; Yairah Amit, 'Review of Robert O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges, Jewish Quarterly Review* 88 (1998), pp. 275–79 (277–78); Pauline Hodgetts, 'Review of Robert O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges', VT* 47 (1997), pp. 134–37 (136).

72   Block, *Judges*, pp. 102–03, 286; Younger, *Judges/Ruth*, pp. 271–73; Butler, *Judges*, pp. 217, 472.

Philistines are arrayed against Samson with three thousand Judahites in atten-
dance. The Judahites, we can reasonably assume, watched to see what trans-
pired. None of them rallies in his support, despite the overwhelming odds in
their favour. Even when it is clear that this is a miraculous battle, they do not
come in on Yahweh's side (15:9–17). Had they done so, Israel's early history
might have been different. If anything, Judah's behaviour is more execrable
than that of Meroz and its inhabitants who were 'cursed bitterly' by the angel
because 'they did not come to the help of Yahweh against the heroes' (5:23).

This juxtaposition of Judah and Dan in the final judge section raises again
the subject of the tribes of Israel. As noted in Chapter 2, the theme that uni-
fies the book is the tribes, a point emphasized through its opening and closing
references to the deliverance from Egypt and the destruction of the ten tribes
respectively that embrace the entire existence of the twelve tribes. Each of the
twelve tribes (thirteen with Levi) is mentioned at least once in Judges, the main
listings occurring in the initial section of Structure A, which considers only the
Cisjordanian tribes, and at the midpoint of Structure B (the Song of Deborah)
which cites those in Transjordan and in the centre and north of Cisjordan.[73]
In other words, Judah, Simeon (and Levi) are not included in Deborah's list.
Although all the tribes are involved in the final section, it is only the three
tribes remaining in the land after the destruction of the northern kingdom,
viz., Judah, Benjamin and Levi, who are named. Like all his compatriots in the
nation of Judah, the author of Judges was confronted with the politico-theo-
logical question, in the light of Yahweh's judgment on the ten tribes, who are
now the heirs of the divine promises made to the patriarchs? The remnant
represented by the southern kingdom or all the sons of Israel, including those
scattered to the north and east, far outside the borders of the promise? And
what of those who had managed to remain in the land and intermarried with
the immigrants, and those who had sought shelter in Judah? When Yahweh
in his fury against the Israelites due to the golden calf episode proposed to
obliterate them and to create a new chosen people from the lineage of Moses,
the latter advanced two arguments to dissuade him. The first was that it would
give the Egyptians satisfaction, and the second was that, to destroy the sons of
Israel and create a great nation from Moses, would break the covenant with
Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Exod. 32:9–14).[74] This is moot: Moses was a descen-
dant of the three patriarchs and therefore their line would continue. But what
lies behind Moses' contention is that it is the descendants of the twelve sons

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73   In this context, it is striking that Deborah's own tribal affiliation is not provided.

74   The conduct of Moses' grandson as depicted in Judges offers a reflection on the likelihood
      that such an intervention would have provided the solution to apostasy.

of Jacob who are the legitimate beneficiaries of the Abrahamic covenant. On this basis, and in the thinking of the writer of Judges, Israel was now and would be for all time the sum of the twelve tribes. Moreover, just as Israel's degradation stretched from Dan to Beer-sheba by the end of Judges, the course on which the southern kingdom was set as he wrote the book gave no grounds for attributing a qualitative ethical or religious difference between Judah and the ten tribes.

Douglas comments that, at the time when Numbers was composed, the question who were the legitimate heirs to the covenantal promises was a critical political and theological issue. Numbers presents an Ephraimite (Joshua) and the representative of Judah (Caleb) as the heroes of the wilderness period. Moreover, the Ephraimite is Yahweh's choice as Moses' successor.[75] By the same token, it cannot be a coincidence that it is with these two heroes that the Judges account begins, and for the same reason. The author is making two points to his truncated nation regarding the tribes. The first is a statement to it that the course which it is pursuing can only lead to the same fate that the northern kingdom suffered, that undiscriminating reliance on the promises to the Bethlehemite House of David would leave Judah as vulnerable as Samson when he did not understand that Yahweh had departed from him. The second is that a narrow view of Yahweh's chosen people that redefined its membership to include only those ethnically Judean was wrong theologically, morally and eschatologically, a point reinforced by the highlighting in chapter 1 of that tribe's conspicuous racial heterogeneity.

The stories told in Judges are a way-station on the journey that leads from Jacob's defining prophecy concerning his sons – '*All these* are the twelve tribes of Israel: and this is what their father spoke to them, and blessed them, everyone according to his blessing he blessed them' (Gen. 49:28) – via the magnificent verse with which Exodus begins ('These are the names of the sons of Israel which came into Egypt; every man and his household that came with Jacob'). Judges is steeped in a culture that celebrates the unity of the tribes through the typology of the cult with the twelve cakes of the presence, the twelve stones 'according to their names, like the engravings of a signet, every one with its name according to the twelve tribes', set in clusters of three in four rows on the breastplate of the high priest, the names likewise inscribed on the two onyx stones, six on each, that provided the shoulder clasps of the high priest's ephod, 'that they should be a *reminder* to the sons of Israel' (Exod. 39:1–14). The journey continues through the wilderness wanderings with the twelve tribes stationed in clusters of three at the four cardinal points around the

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75   *Wilderness*, p. 36.

tent of meeting, to the distribution of their allotted territories, and from there to the botched, misshapen attempts at their conquest and the concomitant national alienation from Yahweh that forms the plot of his book. Thence the path leads to the creation of a monarchy and the consequent civil war between the royal houses of Saul and David, to the rending of the tribes apart as a result of Solomon's apostasy, and, finally, in the purview of the author, to the two deportations of the northern tribes carried out by the Assyrians. Judges is immersed in Israel's story, a story about 'all these [...] the twelve tribes', which it seeks to describe and explain.[76] It sets its centre of gravity not in Judah but in the northern kingdom. This is a book that deeply grieves what has befallen the tribes,[77] and, exactly as Ezekiel does (37:15–28; 47:13–48:35), sees Israel's destiny only as consisting of the twelve. But in the aftermath of the catastrophe of the northern Israelites' dispersal and the settling of its land by alien populations, how is a member of the twelve tribes now to be defined? The answer supplied by Ezekiel is explicit: 'the sojourners that sojourn among you, who bear sons among you, they shall be to you as native sons among the sons of Israel; they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel; [...] in whatever tribe the sojourner sojourns, there shall you give him his inheritance' (47:22–23). This same answer is given implicitly by Judges (and, for that matter, Numbers).[78] In the opening chapter that sets the framework for Israel's moral conduct in the promised land, not only are two Edomites, Caleb and Othniel, presented as outstanding representatives of the tribe of Judah, but the narrative goes on to describe the loose integration of another non-Israelite minority, the Kenites, who traced their lineage to Moses' father-in-law, within Judah also. The theology of Judges is inclusive towards all who adhere to Yahwism.

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76   Smend's claim that the sole connection between Judges and the Tetrateuch is made by the Judges editor's first chapter overlooks the point of the book and its place within the Hebrew canon ('The Law', p. 109). One need seek no further than the reframing of the Genesis and Exodus stories in Judges, e.g., Sodom and Gibeah (Burney [*Judges*, pp. 443–45] has drawn attention to the shared phraseology between them; Miller, 'Verbal Feud', pp. 110–12; Block, *Judges*, pp. 533–34; for a contrary view, see Niditch, *Judges*, pp. 192–93), and Moses and Gideon (Webb, *Integrated*, pp. 148–53), to understand that Judges is imbued with the tetrateuchal traditions.

77   Compare 2 Chr. 30:9, according to which, at the beginning of Hezekiah's reign at least, he and his subjects hoped that the deported Israelites would return. Conceivably, the experience of Sennacherib's deportation of Judeans extinguished this hope in Jerusalem. On the basis of Assyrian documents, Cogan ('Exile', p. 256) states that within a few generations the deported population of the northern kingdom had lost their distinctive cultural identity.

78   Douglas, *Wilderness*, pp. 36–39.

Structure B begins and Structure A ends with a reference to kings. Moreover, kings figure in the first chapter, too. That these references are given such prominence within the compositional architecture signals that the subject of kingship is important, a supposition supported by the substantial role it plays in the Gideon-Abimelech pericope, and by the fact that there are seven plus seventy named or designated kings in the book. Mention has also been made of the considerable scholarly debate concerning the position of Judges regarding monarchy. Those who see in the work a pro-monarchical bias generally infer it from the 'in those days there was no king in Israel, every man did what was right in his own eyes' locution, and the prominence that it receives in framing the final sections. Their argument is that it was because of the absence of monarchy that Israel reached its dire pass.[79] Others, citing the Gideon-Abimelech example, understand Judges to be damning of the institution of kingship.[80] In my view, the work's structure offers the clue, and, given that it is a question concerned with the proper functioning of the community, chapter 1 is the place to turn to. A1 begins by stating the high point of the book in terms of Israel's spiritual and moral condition. It not only has no king, it has no leader. The tribes are working together under Yahweh's direction. In other words, Yahweh is universally recognized as sovereign and they are carrying out his command. This arrangement is also articulated by Gideon: 'I will not rule over you, […] Yahweh will rule over you'. In contrast, the representation of human kingship presented in chapter 1 is of seventy maimed men whose political impotence and self-serving motives are graphically portrayed in their scrabbling around under a tormentor's table vying with each other for scraps of food (1:7). In the context of a small vassal state among many in the Assyrian empire, this image

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79   Cundall, *Judges*, pp. 212–13; Yee, 'Introduction', p. 3; see Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, pp. 169–71; Webb, *Integrated*, p. 265; Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative,* p. 121. Rofé perceives the Deuteronomistic editor as pro-monarchy, pro-Judah, but an anti-monarchic influence, which he attributes to an earlier 'Ephraimite school of history', at work in the bulk of Josh. 24 – 1 Sam. 12, 'deleting as we do Judges 1:1–3:11' ('Ephraimite', pp. 465–74).

80   Niditch, *Judges*, p. 103. Compare Amit, 'Review of O'Connell, *Rhetoric*', p. 278; Hodgetts, 'Review of O'Connell, *Rhetoric*', p. 137. Hackett ('Judges', p. 143) finds a pro-monarchic editor in the coda sections, and an anti-monarchist influence on the end of the Gideon story. Soggin believes both stances to be present in the final section, reflecting different traditions (*Judges*, pp. 300–01); likewise Stone, 'Gender', pp. 198–99. Yairah Amit (*Judges*, pp. 114–17) interprets Judges as simultaneously both pro- and anti-monarchy. She does not ascribe this to different textual traditions, but to a theological exigency perceived by the writer.

must have been especially resonant for the book's readers in Judah.[81] These are the contrasting representations of kingship offered in Structure A. In Structure B, the approach is different but no less revealing. B1 opens with the reference to the king of Mesopotamia to whom 'the sons of Israel were in service/ bondage'. It is no accident that in the sequence of major judges, the representative of Judah is juxtaposed with the king of Mesopotamia.

In short, I find nothing in the book that gives comfort to the pro-monarchic position.[82] Kingship as exercised by human beings is unrelentingly portrayed as a debased and alien form of government, precisely as averred in one of the other crucial hermeneutical aids supplied in the book, Jotham's parable. The position is best summarized in the olive tree's response to the offer of the crown: 'Should I cease from my fatness (*LXX* "quality"), by which through me they honour God and man, to come and wave around over the trees?' (9:9).[83] None of the seventy-seven exemplars introduced in the work inspires confidence in the institution. As in the parable and the example of Abimelech, not to mention the example of Gaal ben-Ebed, the overall message of Judges is that only those who have nothing of worth to contribute to society would be attracted to the throne and, having ascended it, they would merely posture, at best. This attitude towards kingship could only stem from a negative experience of its practice. But this experience, though wrought in a political context, produced in the writer a characteristically theological response. For him sovereignty belongs to Yahweh. He alone is worthy and able to exercise it. This discussion points us to the next chapter that looks at the relationship of Judges to Assyrian power and the Mesopotamian cult it propagated. Before turning there, however, it remains to consider the place of the minor judges in the narrative, a group not without monarchical affectation.

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The first point to be made concerning the minor judges is that it is almost predictable in a work that is comprehensively structured on the basis of paired relationships, that the major judges would be counterpoised by a complementary group. And so they are, by the minor judges, another collection of individuals who are said to 'judge Israel'. The second introductory observation is,

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81   See Borger, *Asarh.*, pp. 60–61, for a vignette of Manasseh's Judah as a constituent of Esarhaddon's empire.

82   Compare Niditch, *Judges*, pp. 180–82.

83   See Chapter 7 below.

considering how little space the accounts of them occupy in the book – thirteen verses, or fourteen if Shamgar is included – they have attracted a surprising quantity of scholarly attention. Indeed, Alt discerned in 'the strange fragment of tradition' that they represent a vestige of the authentic form of government in pre-monarchical Israel. He went so far as to find a parallel between it and a form of administration practised in Iceland in the twelfth century AD.[84] For a time, this hypothesis enjoyed favour with scholars, Noth among them.[85] A considerable plank of Alt's argument is that, whereas the time periods mentioned in connection with the major judges are rounded, those attributed to the other group have 'a completely unartificial appearance'. Leaving aside the liberties that Alt took with the text in reaching his conclusion, the unartificial appearance is an illusion. Although the years attributed to them taken individually are unrounded,[86] taken together, they amount to seventy which is as round and as significant a number as one finds in the composition. The other curiosity is that, in each of the two blocks of minor judges that fall on either side of the Jephthah series and the book's midpoint, the minor judge concerning whose activities the least amount of information is given is the one who holds the role for the longest period, namely, Tola and Elon.

Other commentators have perceived in the combination of the major and minor judges an attempt on the author's part to provide coverage of all twelve tribes,[87] or, failing that, at least to produce a symbolic twelve.[88] But the quarry is elusive: the lists of whom to include in each category produced by the different exegetes do not tally. As regards the tribal affiliations of the five/ six minor judges, only two are definitively given, and they are the two about whom least information is otherwise supplied. Tola was a man of Issachar; Elon a Zebulonite. Jair was a Gileadite, Abdon a Pirathonite, and Ibzan simply lived in Bethlehem. The text is much more concerned to render their geographical locations than to assign them to tribes. That said, there is a good

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84   *Essays*, p. 102.

85   *Deuteronomistic History*, p. 42.

86   Tola: 23 years; Jair: 22 years; Ibzan: 7 years; Elon: 10 years; Abdon: 8 years. Shamgar is not included in Alt's schema and, besides, a specific length of time is not ascribed to him.

87   Burney, *Judges*, pp. 289–90.

88   Gray states the position thus: 'The passages on the "minor judges" do not conform to the general editorial plan of the Book of Judges in that they are not associated with a spectacular act of deliverance [...]. Hence it is suggested that they have been included simply to supplement the number of the "great judges" to the conventional number of twelve, thus possibly to make the judges as representative as possible of all elements in Israel' (*Joshua, Judges*, p. 327; also Driver, *Introduction*, p. 165; Eissfeld, *Introduction*, p. 258; Soggin, *Introduction*, p. 176; Block, *Judges*, p. 172; Webb, *Judges*, p. 34).

deal that links the five formally and nothing that connects them with Shamgar except that the latter is said 'to have saved Israel' and Tola 'arose to save Israel'.[89] As the text informs us that Tola 'arose after Abimelech to save Israel', it is not certain that the enemy was an external foe. Conceivably, he arose to save Israel from further internecine consequences of Abimelech's brief ascendancy. With Shamgar, as with the major judges, there is no doubt regarding the identity of his adversary: it is the Philistines. The rhetorical architecture is helpful in implying where Shamgar belongs. His position in Structure B, placed between the second and the third judge,[90] is directly aligned across the fold with that of Abimelech, located between the fourth and the penultimate judge.[91] And as Abimelech is mentioned in the Gideon segment that precedes his story, so Shamgar is referred to in the Deborah section that follows his story. To imply further the relationship between them, Shamgar is the son of Anath, the name of the Canaanite goddess of love and war,[92] Abimelech the son of a concubine and a warlord. Shamgar's name suggests the divinity of his mother, Abimelech's name the kingship, or divinity, of his father. The imbalance between the lengths of their episodes in the narrative (fifty-seven verses to one) resembles the ratio between the accounts of the judgeships of Othniel and Samson, and is therefore unremarkable. Thus, Shamgar belongs to Structure B, whereas the five minor judges are aligned with A.

Younger argues that not only is Shamgar a minor judge, but no difference exists between the 'official' roles of the minor and major judges. The former are simply 'noncyclical'. He bases his argument on the fact that the description of Jephthah's judgeship bears some resemblance to the way the minor judges are described and, conversely, the statement that Tola arose to deliver Israel is reminiscent of the major judges. He identifies a one-two-three pattern in the accounts of the minor judges.[93] The one-two-three pattern is seductive, although the case for it falls down if there is no essential difference in the official role of the two categories of judge. More substantially, while the closure of

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89   Amit (*Judges*, pp. 39–40) well describes the classification difficulties that the figure of Shamgar creates for commentators.

90   Exum notes that in some LXX manuscripts the Shamgar tale is placed after 16:31 ('Centre', p. 412). This is evidence that his tale was not considered to fit neatly with either the major or minor judges. The same obtains for Abimelech whom Klein places among the former. Furthermore, she cites Jephthah and even Samson as minor judges (*Triumph*, pp. 81, 83).

91   Compare Soggin, *Introduction*, p. 176.

92   Jonas C. Greenfield, 'The Hebrew Bible and Canaanite Literature', in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. by Alter and Kermode, p. 549; Gray, *Joshua, Judges*, p. 257; Bal, *Murder*, p. 32. Note Patai, *Goddess*, p. 61.

93   *Judges/Ruth*, p. 43.

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the Jephthah section corresponds to, but is not identical to, the formula used for the minor judges,[94] in no other respect is Jephthah's tale formally similar to their brief notices. In addition, no other major judge shares these formal resemblances. The match between the treatment of Jephthah and the minor judges led Noth to see in the former the key to understanding the evolution of the book as a whole: 'The "minor judges" come immediately before and after the Jephthah story: Judg. 10–12 is obviously based on the stories of "minor judges" as Dtr. knew it [...] but the account of Jephthah has been excessively swollen by the heroic material already extant and so we lose the sense of a cohesive series of "minor judges" [...] Now it was this conjunction of two traditions in the figure of Jephthah which caused Dtr. to call the heroes of the great legends "judges" as well'.[95]

The immediate weakness in this proposition and Younger's is that they do not consider what the author actually writes about the minor judges.[96] Soggin presents the problem plainly: 'The ground on which the identification [of the minor judges] with the judges in the strictest sense of the word was made was already very weak: in fact the texts do not attribute any functions to these people, either in courts of law or elsewhere, whereas they are clearly interested in the duration of the period during which they exercised their functions and in certain distinctive characteristics, usually picturesque'.[97] The minor judges appear in the narrative after the tipping point in the plot at the junction of 5:31/6:1. Consequently, one should not expect them to provide respite from the inexorable decline of the nation and in its relationship with its God. They do not disappoint one: none of the five figures offers relief. Tola, who is presented as the most promising of the group only 'arose to deliver Israel'; whether he achieved anything is not revealed. The remainder are memorable for their 'distinctive characteristics'. One function appears to be that they caricature features of the three final judges either by exaggerating a detail of the latters' lives or by providing an exaggerated contrast to it. By this means they offer an oblique comment on the major judge whom they precede or follow,[98] a comment that the writer wishes us to note. In the provision of the locations of the minor judges' burial places which forms one of the unifying features of the group, they echo the information given about Gideon and Samson,

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94   See Malamat, 'Charismatic Leadership', p. 152.

95   *Deuteronomic History*, p. 43.

96   Guillaume (*Waiting*, p. 20) states that the minor judges 'do little apart from judging, although what is meant by judging remains completely unexplained'.

97   *Judges*, pp. 196–98.

98   Webb, *Integrated*, p. 160.

and thus draw attention to the lack of specificity furnished on this count for Jephthah. The whiff of corruption that is attached to Gideon and made explicit in the relationship of Abimelech and the baals of Shechem, is suggested in the extravagance characteristic of a petty ruler surrounding Jair, Ibzan and Abdon. Jair is a Gileadite anticipating Jephthah, the judge who immediately follows him. They both possess verbal sentence names that employ an imperfect verb:[99] Jair's name means 'he will enlighten', Jephthah's 'he will open'. Jair stands in sharp contrast to him in fertility (30 sons to one daughter), longevity (twenty-two years judging Israel as against six), and posterity (thirty cities in Gilead named after him) (10:2–4). We have already considered the disparity between Jephthah having one daughter who dies a virgin and Ibzan's thirty daughters for whom Ibzan arranges marriages. No less striking is his relationship to the next major judge, Samson. Ibzan pursues a policy of exogamy for his daughters and his thirty sons. It is not clear whether this exogamy was with the neighbouring nations. That is certainly a strong possibility as otherwise it would be barely noteworthy (12:8–9).[100] This is a feature which is central to the Samson tale. The sterility of Samson's parents and his own lack of descendants contrast even more strongly with Abdon's forty sons and thirty grandsons (12:14–15).

Klein observes that Tola is defined by his forebears (his father's and grandfather's names are provided), and Jair by his progeny.[101] In this respect, Tola echoes the situation with Abimelech, whose father's and grandfather's names are also given, while Jair's notice alerts us to the significance of Jephthah's offspring for the plot. Elon, the Zebulonite, who comes between the fecund Ibzan and Abdon and therefore is not adjacent to a major figure in the narrative, emerges as the hollowest in a book of hollow men. No information is given about his life except that he judged Israel for ten years. The minor judges do not only serve to offer oblique commentary on the major judges, but also on each other. As they progress, their features are exaggerated outrageously: the second has thirty sons riding thirty male ass colts,[102] the third has thirty sons and thirty daughters who, with their spouses, total one hundred and twenty, the fifth has forty sons and thirty grandsons all riding male ass colts. Jair, whose entry in the list launches this absurd parade, is indeed enlightening. The vignette regarding him, which introduces the mention of the male ass colts *ʿᵃyārîm*, is in fact

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99   Zadok notes that the use of the imperfect in personal names is an ancient feature (*Anthroponymy*, p. 16).

100   For a different interpretation, see Gray, *Joshua, Judges*, p. 341; Lindars, 'Tribes', p. 97.

101   *Triumph*, p. 82.

102   *ʿayīr* is an animal used for riding rather than as a beast of burden. It was highly prized and was associated with the rich and eminent (Soggin, *Judges*, p. 196; Burney, *Judges*, p. 292).

an exquisite pun on his name *yāʾîr* that relies for its full effect on the term for cities *ʿārîm* together with *ʿªyārîm*,[103] punctuated by the repetition three times of *šªlōšîm* 'thirty'. The combination produces a tongue twister that, taken no further, would provide an amusing diversion. In the circumstances of Judges post-Gideon, the author's intention, however, is not that a smile should linger long on his readers' lips. This apparently innocent wordplay is the harbinger of something profoundly sinister, the word whose correct pronunciation, in the following section, makes a lethal difference, the tongue twister specifically prepared by the Gileadites for the fleeing Ephraimites, *šibboleth*. The connection is reinforced by the six-fold replication of the phone *š* in the Jair tongue twister.

Although the minor judges have a useful commentary function on the three judges who have crossed the line, their role is wider, and for this reason they have been placed in Structure A, not B. They are conspicuously divorced from any reference to Yahweh[104] or, indeed, any function beyond the ostentatious display of their wealth and fecundity. They offer, in a setting other than that of the major judges and the large-scale concluding episodes, a cameo of the godlessness, corruption, self-seeking and hollowness endemic in Israel after 5:31. Their geographical positioning, describing an arc always north of Bethel, makes the same point. Klein notes that Tola, as a man of Issachar living on Mount Ephraim, is not found where he should be,[105] a further indication of the ability of physical location in Judges to symbolize social and spiritual dislocation. In his hollowness, Elon provides a sad testimony on the deterioration of Zebulun, a tribe which earned Deborah's exuberant praise for risking their lives in Yahweh's battle (5:18). Their combined chronology that amounts to seventy years associates them symbolically with the seventy sons of Gideon who seem to have harboured royal pretensions, and with the seventy kings under Adoni-bezek's table. It is evident that, in Judges, seventy is associated with kingship.[106] The minor judges' contribution to society appears to offer no more worth than that of the maimed and captive kings. In their own setting, they are equally self-interested. In short, their primary roles in the narrative are to serve as mirrors for the final three major judges and the corrupt society in which the minor judges appear to thrive, and to lampoon royal pretension. Beneath the mirror-reflection, they are all as hollow as Elon.

Jair does further service for the author, however. The threefold repetition of thirty is not only an essential element in the tongue twister, it also alludes

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103   Soggin, *Judges*, p. 196; Klein, *Triumph*, p. 82.
104   Exum, 'Centre', p. 421.
105   *Triumph*, p. 82.
106   Burney, *Notes*, p. 302.

to Mesopotamian cult. Thirty is the mystic number of the lunar deity Sin,[107] a god who enjoyed renewed popularity in the Neo-Assyrian period. Sin 'illuminates darkness', is *Gott der Lichtfülle*, 'light of heaven and earth', and shares with Shamash a role as judge.[108] As well as symbolizing 'understanding' by enlightenment,[109] he is associated with fertility.[110] These qualities find echoes in the most salient features of Jair supplied in his concise description: 'And Jair ['he enlightens/will enlighten'] arose [...] and judged Israel [...] and he had thirty sons'. This correspondence between the Gileadite minor judge and Sin resembles that between the Danite major judge and Shamash, and their temporal coordinates are appropriately aligned. In the Mesopotamian conception, shared by the Israelites,[111] the moon precedes the sun, the twenty-four hour period beginning with the moon's rising, and so Jair comes before Samson in the narrative.[112] The Jair/Sin association leads us directly to consider the place of Mesopotamian cult and culture in Judges.

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107   Meissner, *Babylonien* II, p. 19; Labat, 'Jeux numériques', p. 258; George, *Gilgamesh*, p. 150; Adam Stone, 'Nanna/Suen/Sin (god)', AMGG, 2013 [http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/ amgg/listofdeities/nannasuen/ accessed 28 December 2015]. One of Sin's epithets is 'God of the thirty days' (Tallqvist, *Götterepitheta*, p. 443).

108   Ibid., pp. 443, 447; Reiner, *Astral Magic*, p. 137; Kramer, *Sumerians*, p. 210.

109   Jastrow, *Aspects*, p. 115; Parpola, 'Tree', pp. 177–78, 182.

110   Tallqvist, *Götterepitheta*, p. 447; Stone, 'Nanna/Suen/Sin (god)'.

111   C. Philipp E. Nothaft, *Medieval Latin Christian Texts on the Jewish Calendar*, Leiden: Brill, 2014, p. 27.

112   Theophilus G. Pinches, *The Religion of Babylonia and Assyria*, London: Constable, 1906, p. 66; Gray, *Joshua, Judges*, p. 352.

The Tangled Roots of Deborah's Tree: Mesopotamia, Egypt and the Soul of Judges

> There are things you know about, and things you don't, the known and the unknown, and in between are the doors[1]

> He built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of Yahweh's house
>
> 2 KGS 21:5

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In the foregoing we considered how the book as a whole serves as a riddle that conceals its esoteric meanings, and analysed clues it provides to decipher these. Alongside the formulation of the work as a riddle is the writer's parabolic application of its subject, the Israelites' Settlement story, to depict the conditions in which it was composed. From the information the text supplies, I submitted that it was written during the 125-year period between the destruction of the northern kingdom and the first phase of the southern kingdom's exile to Babylon. Within this time, the interval which appears most closely to fit the mood and message of the book is the reign of Manasseh during which Judah was a loyal vassal of Assyria.[2] In this and the subsequent two chapters,

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1   Ray Manzarek quoted in *Newsweek*, 6 November 1967, 'This Way to the Egress', p. 101; Melissa Ursula Dawn Goldsmith, 'Criticism Lighting His Fire: Perspectives on Jim Morrison' (unpublished master's thesis, Louisiana State University, 2007), p. 1.

2   Hermann Spieckermann, *Juda unter Assur in der Sargonidenzeit*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982, p. 165. The latter part of Ahaz's reign, who ruled from 735 to 715 BC, viz., after 722–721, might conceivably provide the setting for the composition of Judges since Judah became an Assyrian vassal under his aegis. Militating against this, however, are, first, the relative brevity of the period in which it could have been written (less than a decade), second, the fact that Judah's vassal arrangements with the Assyrians before Hezekiah's rebellion seem to have been far less exacting than during Manasseh's reign (see below) and, finally, the biblical account of the latter matches more closely the tenor and messages of Judges.

we examine the evidence for this proposal. In doing so, we shall discover yet a further layer of content running through the work, namely the author's adaptation of Mesopotamian material to reinforce his message.

> Among the remains of the royal palace of Samaria, destroyed by the Assyrians in 721 BC, more than two hundred pieces of ivory [...] have been discovered. [...] [One] fragment [...] is a representation of a not very well-known god, Hah, the god of Unbounded Time – a fact remarkable in itself; for one would rather have expected to find, in Israel at any rate, a better known Egyptian god. In each hand the seated god holds a palm tree, the symbol of years, to which is attached an ankh symbol (= life). [...] The clusters of palm leaves on the upper rim evince Phoenician influence. Above the head of the god these are interspersed with the rays of the solar disc.[3]

This information prompts two observations. The first is that, in the sad irony of history, what is left of the tribes for whom time ran out is a representation of the god of unlimited time, one of those deities in whom they trusted. The second is that in the context of late-eighth-century-BC Israel and Judah, Assyria did not constitute the sole foreign cultural-religious influence on Yahweh's chosen people. Egyptian and Phoenician/Canaanite/Amorite cults continued to attract devotion.[4] This cultic cocktail is described in Joshua 24 at the great assembly that Joshua convened at Shechem: 'Put away the gods that your fathers served on the other side of the river [Euphrates], and in Egypt, and serve Yahweh. But if it is undesirable to you to serve Yahweh, choose today whom you will serve, whether the gods that your fathers served on the other side of the river [Euphrates], or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living' (24:14–15). Ezekiel takes up the subject of the Israelites' worship of Egyptian deities during their sojourn in Egypt (20:6–10),[5] and describes the continuing attraction of Egyptian cult, now supplemented by an ardent

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3   Jan H. Negenmann, *New Atlas of the Bible*, London: Collins, 1969, p. 78.

4   'The hold that these cults demanded, and exercised, on the populations that subscribed to them was intense. Their observance was not a luxury, but a requirement' (Kapelrud, *Violent Goddess*, p. 9). On Egyptian- and Canaanite-inspired amulets and figurines in Judahite tombs, see Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial*, pp. 83–101. The deep-rooted Egyptian influence on Palestine was reinforced, paradoxically, by Esarhaddon's successful invasion of Egypt (671 BC). In its wake, Assyria was swept by 'Egyptomania' (Radner, 'Assyrian King', p. 226), building, arguably, on older foundations of Egyptian influence on Assyrian kings (Marian Feldman, 'Nineveh to Thebes and Back', *Iraq* 66 [2004], pp. 141–50 [149–50]).

5   See Sperling, 'Joshua 24 Re-examined', pp. 244, 250.

adherence to Assyrian beliefs and practices in the northern and southern kingdoms:

> Samaria is Aholah, and Jerusalem Aholibah. And Aholah played the whore when she was mine, lusting after her paramours, pouring out her lust on the Assyrians who were close by […] She played the whore, fornicating with all the select men of Assyria, lusting after all of them, and she defiled herself with their idols. Neither did she abandon her whoredoms brought from Egypt. […] Therefore I handed her over to her paramours, into the hand of the Assyrians […] and they took her sons and daughters, and they slew her with the sword, and she became a watchword among women for they executed judgment on her. And her sister Aholibah was more corrupt in her lust than she, and in her whoredoms also more than her sister, and she lusted after the Assyrians who were nearby […] (23:4–5, 7–12).

That Ezekiel's description of the religious environment pervading Samaria in its last days is not fanciful finds support from Hah's image in its ruins. His knowledge of the religious conditions in Judah was first-hand. Reference has already been made to his observation of the worship of the solar deity and the Mesopotamian divinity Tammuz in Yahweh's temple in Jerusalem. His message is unequivocal: the twin kingdoms venerated Assyrian deities. There seems no reason to doubt his account.[6]

A difference of opinion exists among scholars who reject Noth's hypothesis that Judges is a fruit of the Babylonian exile, with or without significant post-exilic modifications,[7] concerning when exactly during the final years of the southern kingdom it was composed.[8] Some maintain that at least in part it

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6 Note the blend of Assyrian and Egyptian iconography in the seal of the Judean city governor under Hezekiah (Robert Deutsch, 'A Hoard of Fifty Clay Bullae from the Time of Hezekiah', in idem [ed.], *Shlomo: Studies*, Tel Aviv: Archaeological Centre Publication, 2003, pp. 45–98 [57–58]). Glenn Markoe observes that the periods of greatest Egyptian cultural influence on Phoenicia-Palestine in the Late Bronze-Iron Age era were the fourteenth, eighth–late seventh, and the late sixth–fifth centuries BC ('The Emergence of Phoenician Art', *BASOR* 279 [1990], pp. 13–26 [17–18, 23]).

7 Brettler, *Judges*, pp. 32, 84; Yee, 'Introduction', p. 8.

8 Butler, *Judges*, pp. lxxii–lxxiv. Butler's conclusion, shared in the main by O'Connell (*Rhetoric*, pp. 307–28), that it was compiled during the civil war between the houses of Saul and David ignores many valuable indicators: *inter alia*, the importance of the north-south divide in Judges and the book's reference to the captivity of the northern kingdom. As fundamentally, the threat to Yahwism in Judah posed by the population adhering to other gods, which

is a product of the reign of Josiah, a period in which expression of Yahwistic zeal was encouraged.[9] Opposed to this is the view that it was written during the rule of his grandfather Manasseh when the opposite conditions obtained.[10] If Judges had been composed wholly or partly in the Josianic era, one might expect it to evince a positive tone. The converse is the case. The work gives no hint that it was written in an environment of hope, far less of celebration. It offers no grounds to conclude that a momentous spiritual awakening coupled with relative political independence had taken place in Judah and that the book is one of its expressions. There is no indication that the northern territories had again been joined with Judah under a Davidic monarch.[11] The emphasis on a single place of worship given in Deuteronomy and realized in Josiah's reform[12] has, as we have seen, no echo in Judges. A means of probing the Josianic-era proposition is to analyse the attitude evinced in the book to the human actor in the covenant renewal, the king. We have seen that its view of monarchy is unremittingly hostile. This is surely at odds with a creative environment in which the king is said to have had no peer before or after in his fervour for Yahweh (2 Kgs 23:25). The composition's evaluation of Judah resembles Ezekiel's: Aholah is destroyed; Aholibah has learnt nothing from her fate.

If, however, Judges was produced in the era of Manasseh (697–642 BC), who had the longest reign of any king of Judah, and was written to protest against/counter the importation and patronage of Mesopotamian cultic beliefs, images and practices in Jerusalem,[13] augmenting an existing climate of polytheism expressed in the veneration of Egyptian and Canaanite deities,

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provides the dominant theme of Judges, was strongly evident only from the late eighth century BC (Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. xlvi). The same objections hold for Cundall's conjecture that it is a product of the unified kingdom (*Judges*, p. 213). Guillaume (*Waiting*, pp. 74–75) envisages a 'book of saviours' written in Samaria in 720 BC as the precursor of Judges.

9 Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, pp. 278–89; Boling, *Judges*, pp. 29–38; Yee, 'Dismembered', in eadem (ed.), *Judges*, pp. 144–46, 157; see also Webb, *Judges*, p. 22.

10 Block, *Judges*, pp. 66–67. It is noteworthy that Manasseh is introduced in the Kings and Chronicles accounts with reference to the period of Joshua and Judges: 'He did that which was evil in Yahweh's sight, according to the abominations of the peoples whom Yahweh dispossessed from before the sons of Israel' (2 Kgs 21:2; 2 Chr. 33:2). Bal (*Murder*, p. 1) avers that most scholarly opinion places the composition of Judges in the seventh century BC.

11 Bright, *History*, pp. 316–18.

12 Noth, *Israel*, pp. 275–76.

13 Cogan, 'Exile', p. 254. As Rowley (*Worship*, pp. 96, 106) observes, Jerusalem in the reign of Manasseh could not have suggested itself as the sole sanctuary; under Josiah the opposite obtained.

this layer of the content would require systematic encryption. According to the biblical account, Manasseh was notorious for cold-blooded murder, and he operated in a wider political environment in which almost no one was above suspicion of treason. An obligation in King Esarhaddon's (680–669 BC) treaties was that any treasonable plan or action against the king or the crown prince was to be reported to the latter. '[This] produced informers in such numbers as to make them an omnipresent royal eye and ear seeing and hearing everything. [...] The system of "king's eyes and ears" created a veritable secret intelligence service which effectively contributed to suppressing insurrections and conspiracies against the royal house'.[14] This espionage service would have been active in Manasseh's Judah,[15] both against him on behalf of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal,[16] and on his behalf against subversive elements hostile to his pro-Assyrian policies.[17] The Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon (VTE) are comprehensive in defining possible sources of sedition: 'If you hear any evil, improper, ugly word which is not seemly nor good to Assurbanipal, the great crown prince designate, son of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, your lord, either from the mouth of his enemy or from the mouth of his ally, or from the mouth of his brothers or [...] his family, members of his father's line, or from the mouth of your brothers, your sons, your daughters, or from the mouth of a prophet, an ecstatic, an inquirer of oracles, or from the mouth of any human being at all, you shall not conceal it but come and report it to Assurbanipal'.[18]

It is striking that, whereas prophets active during the reigns of the kings of Judah before and after Manasseh left records of their oracles in the Bible,

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14   Simo Parpola, 'A Letter from Šamaš-šumu-ukīn to Esarhaddon', *Iraq* 34/1 (1972), pp. 21–34 (30–31).

15   Spieckermann, *Juda*, p. 309; Starr, *Queries*, pp. LVIII–LIX; A.L. Oppenheim, 'The Eyes of the Lord', *JAOS* 88 (1968), pp. 173–80 (174).

16   Note Esarhaddon's bloody purge of his magnates recorded in the Babylonian Chronicle 1 iv.29 (*Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, ed. by A.K. Grayson, Winona Lake IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000, p. 86).

17   Compare Ezek. 22:9.

18   *VTE with Humbaresh* (ll. 108–21); [http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/saao/saao2/P336598 accessed 18 December 2015]. This requirement of vassalage contradicts Cogan's assertion that Assyria did not interfere in the internal affairs of its vassals ('Exile', p. 243). On the role of the treaties in defining the practical relationship between the king and his subjects, see Simonetta Ponchia, 'Administrators and Administrated in Neo-Assyrian Times', in *Organization, Representation, and Symbols of Power in the Ancient Near East*, ed. by Gernot Wilhelm, Winona Lake IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012, pp. 213–24 (215).

no prophecy preserved in the canon explicitly[19] originates from his time,[20] although his reign spanned approximately half a century between periods of intense and profound prophetic activity.[21] Moreover, according to 2 Kings, his reign marked the tipping point in Yahweh's dealings with Judah,[22] and Yahweh's prophets were active at the time in condemning his excesses (2 Kgs 21:10–16; 23:26).[23] It is also remarkable that this period in Hebrew history has left no explicit oracular records when it was precisely the time in which a florescence of prophetic activity took place in Assyria.[24] Esarhaddon reports in his first year as monarch (681–80 BC) that prophecies were 'continually' being delivered to him.[25] The Assyrian king viewed prophets and oracular priests in the empire as particularly dangerous potential threats.[26] No prophet could operate legitimately outside the control of the king.[27] The absence of contemporary prophetic records in Judah thus provides circumstantial evidence corroborating the 2 Kings claim regarding Manasseh's suppression of Yahwism. One may deduce that Manasseh shared his overlord's anxiety about the

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19   Among the scholars who posit that Deuteronomy may have been composed early in Manasseh's reign are Driver, *Introduction*, p. 87; idem, *Deuteronomy*, pp. xlvi–lv; Rowley, *Worship*, pp. 96–97; Noth, *Israel*, pp. 272, 275.

20   Before: Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah; after: Zephaniah, Nahum, Jeremiah, Ezekiel. C.C. Torrey claims tendentiously that the book of Ezekiel purports to have been written during Manasseh's reign but was in fact composed in the late third century BC (*Pseudo-Ezekiel and the Original Prophecy*, New York: Ktav, 1970).

21   John Gray, *I & II Kings*, 3rd rev. edn, London: SCM Press, 1977, p. 709.

22   Bright, *History*, p. 313.

23   Francesca Stavrakopoulou ascribes this lacuna to her thesis that later censorship excluded additional material relating to Manasseh from the biblical canon (*King Manasseh and Child Sacrifice*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004, p. 112).

24   Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, pp. XLIV, XLVIII.

25   Borger, *Asarh.*, p. 2.

26   Esarhaddon knew this well: he owed his acquisition of the throne in part to the support of prophets in rallying the populace to his cause (Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, pp. XLIII–XLIV, LXVIII, CII). Compare Radner, 'Assyrian King', p. 235; Nissinen, *References*, p. 121. Evidence from Esarhaddon's reign shows prophecy used against him. Nissinen (*References*, pp. 161, 166) is surely correct in claiming that any written prophecy invidious to the Assyrian king would have been summarily destroyed. Jeremiah gives an account of the role of Judean prophets in sedition against Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 29).

27   Nissinen, *References*, pp. 164–66; Seth L. Sanders, *The Invention of Hebrew*, Urbana IL: University of Illinois Press, 2011, p. 144. That this control was a feature of early monarchic Israel is indicated by 1 Chr. 25:2: '[they] prophesied under the control/direction of the king', suggesting that it was not only in Assyria that the prophets were expected to endorse the established royal order.

potential of prophets to undermine the existing order, and that the written records of the prophecies were systematically destroyed in the persecution.[28] If the contemporary messages of Judean prophets survive, they must do so only in encoded form.[29]

Formally, the book of Judges is precisely an encrypted work. Furthermore, despite its anecdotal and haphazard surface appearance, it was incorporated in the prophetic canon by Jewish divines.[30] Careful study of its contents reveals a text that is intricately fashioned and that delivers a theologically consistent message. The question is, then, do we detect in the text evidence of a polemic, couched in prophetic terms, that addresses and condemns Assyria, its power and cult, and the vassal king who is its instrument, that is sufficiently penetrable to serve its purpose, but not so explicit that it would trigger violent reprisals from the king or his overlord? There are, I suggest, in addition to those intimations discussed in Chapter 4, immediately apparent clues to the answer: at the end of Structure B, it is the men of Judah who, not only accept, but actively support alien rule and oppose Yahweh's champion (15:10–13). Moreover, I have already remarked that, at the beginning of Structure B, the Judahite hero in the book is called upon to rise up against and vanquish the king of Mesopotamia.[31] I wrote in Chapter 1 that the subject of Samson's riddle, the young lion slain, 'the eater'/'the strong', is literally hollowed out and becomes the producer of something alien to itself. In Jacob's prophecy, Judah is envisaged as a lion, in the three stages of maturing, with mastery over its prey (Gen. 49:9). The writer of Judges inverts this metaphor in the Samson tale, with the lion itself now the prey and the food that comes from it defiled. It is only when Samson's lion is a rotting carcass that the term ʾaryēh ('lion'), the word found twice in

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28   The destruction in England of virtually all Wyclif's writings after they were declared heretical provides a parallel.

29   Compare Driver (*Deuteronomy*, p. li): 'It is only by conjecture that we can either picture to ourselves the condition to which the prophetical party was reduced by the persecuting measures of Manasseh, or imagine the steps which they may have taken for the purpose of arresting, if possible, the downward movement of the nation'.

30   The distinction between the Former and Later Prophets was established only in the eighth century AD (Mellor [ed.], *Making*, p. 113).

31   Malamat observes that there is no repetition in the tribal affiliation of the major judges. He is on less sure ground with his assertion that the type of enemy fought never recurs. But his statements hold in the case of the king of Mesopotamia and the Judahite champion ('Charismatic Leadership', p. 153). One might add that Isaiah refers to the king of Assyria as Yahweh's 'hired razor' against Judah that will shave off the entirety of the hair and beard (Isa. 7:20).

Jacob's oracle, is applied to it, also twice (14:8, 9).[32] Manasseh's kingdom could be perceived as a place in which Judah is preyed upon, hollow of goodness and strength, a producer only of uncleanness. Representative of this state of affairs is the Jerusalem temple now given over to imported Assyrian cult objects and practices.[33] Furthermore, the honey intended as a metonym of Yahweh's promise fulfilled is now fit for nothing except oblations to the defiling gods of Assyria.[34]

<h2 style="text-align:center">2</h2>

There is convincing evidence demonstrating the close relationship between the structure and contents of parts of Deuteronomy and the VTE. Its stipulations would have applied to Judah in Manasseh's time.[35] Weinfeld argues that the influence of the language of Assyrian royal inscriptions and records is evident in the terminology and phraseology of Deuteronomy and the Former Prophets;[36] Peter Machinist claims the same for Isaiah.[37] Carr identifies the Neo-Assyrian period as the 'origin point' for literary prophecy in the Bible,[38] and Hurowitz points to similarities between biblical and Neo-Assyrian epistolary and wisdom literature.[39] Indeed, Carr submits that converging evidence suggests that it was in the shadow of Neo-Assyrian hegemony that Judah's scribal system and literature developed.[40] It is surprising, then, that there has not been greater recognition of the effect of Assyrian hegemony on Judah

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32   The Philistines employ the related, but not identical, term *'ǎrî* (14:18).

33   Indeed, Isaiah refers to the Assyrian army that is coming to engulf Judah as 'the bee (*dᵉbôrāh*) that is in the land of Assyria' (7:18). The writer of Judges may well have been familiar with this oracle.

34   With an inversion worthy of the Judges author, the Neo-Assyrian mystical text, the 'Rites of Egašankalamma', provides the metaphor 'Honey is the pus of the kidnapped god', apparently referring to Tammuz (Alasdair Livingstone, *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea*, Winona Lake IN: Eisenbrauns, 1989, p. 98).

35   Carr, *Formation*, p. 309. Weinfeld's magisterial treatment of the subject is found in his *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School* (pp. 83–156). He develops the insights of Borger and Wiseman. Carr goes as far as to describe the authors of Deut. 13 and 28 as Neo-Assyrian scribes (*Formation*, p. 479).

36   *Deuteronomy*, pp. 50–51.

37   'Assyria and its Image in the First Isaiah', *JAOS* 103 (1983), pp. 719–37 (723 et passim).

38   *Formation*, p. 489.

39   'ABL 1285'.

40   *Formation*, p. 304. See also Guillaume, *Waiting*, p. 261.

during Manasseh's long rule[41] which coincided with the reigns of three Assyrian kings, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal.[42] Possibly, this is due to a belief that the Assyrians did not impose the cults of their divinities on subordinated territories.[43] Parpola comments as follows:

> There is […] an essential difference between the Neo-Assyrian Empire and its predecessors that accounts for the 8th–7th-century expansion – namely, the strategy of systematic, economic, cultural, and ethnic integration introduced by Tiglath-pileser III in 745 BCE […] aimed at expanding the core area by systematically reducing semi-independent vassal countries to Assyrian provinces directly controlled by the central government. The reducing of a country to a province was carried out according to a standardized procedure involving the utter destruction of the vassal's urban centers; massive deportations;[44] rebuilding the capital in Assyrian style; the installation of an Assyrian governor; the construction of Assyrian garrisons and forts; the imposition of a uniform taxation and conscription system, imperial standards and measures, cults. […] Cogan […] believes that "Assyria imposed no religious obligations upon its vassals." This is contradicted by Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty […], in which the vassals are sworn to accept Aššur as their god and the future king as their (only) lord […] "A golden (statue) bearing the image of the great gods my lords and my royal image I fashioned. In the palace of Gaza I set it up and counted it among the gods of their land," and [note] the image of Ištar placed in Hadattu/Arslan Tash along with the king's own image. Similar references to royal images set up in strategic places […] throughout the Empire, not only in the provinces but in the vassal states as well, can be found throughout Assyrian royal inscriptions and royal

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41   Moorey (*Idols*, p. 50) remarks on the sudden and radical impact of Assyrian culture on Judah.

42   'The closeness of Jewish and Mesopotamian cosmologies is […] in no way surprising, considering the geographical proximity and manifold contacts of the two cultures. The entire Levant had since the third millennium BCE been under Mesopotamian cultural influence. Israel and Judah were Assyrian provinces or dependencies for more than a hundred years, with their elites in constant contact with Assyria' (Parpola, 'Globalization', p. 25).

43   Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, p. 272; Roy Gane, 'The Role of Assyria in the Ancient Near East during the Reign of Manasseh', *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 35 (1997), pp. 21–32 (30–31); Guillaume, *Waiting*, p. 65; Sperling, 'Joshua 24 Re-examined', p. 245.

44   Compare D.J. Wiseman, 'A Fragmentary Inscription of Tiglath-Pileser III from Nimrud', *Iraq* 18 (1956), pp. 117–29 (119).

correspondence. [...] The inhabitants of the new province became Assyrian citizens; its economy was completely reorganized in line with Assyrian commercial interests; and the seat of the governor, a copy of the imperial court in miniature, became a channel through which Assyrian culture was systematically spread to the country.[45]

A prism produced by Sargon II attests to the application of these policies to the northern kingdom:

> In the strength of the great gods, my lords, I clashed with them. [2]7,380 people with [their] chariots and the gods their trust, I counted 200 chariots (as) [my] royal muster, I mustered from among them. The rest of them I caused to take their dwelling in the midst of Assyria. The city of Samaria I restored and greater than before I caused it to become. People of lands conquered by my two hands I brought within it. My officer as prefect over them I placed, and together with the people of Assyria I counted them.[46]

Sargon's accounts of his victories over the Median cities of Karalla and Kishesim describe the deportation of the citizens, the restoration of temples, and the placing of the symbols of Assur, Sin, Shamash, Adad, and Ishtar in them.[47] It was to this region that at least some of the Israelites appear to have been deported.[48]

These references apply, of course, to territories that the Assyrians subjugated militarily. Such policies were executed when the vassal conspired against his overlord. As regards those states that offered no resistance to Assyrian power and in which the vassal was faithful and compliant, the more brutal

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45   Simo Parpola, 'Assyria's Expansion in the 8th and 7th Centuries and Its Long-Term Repercussions in the West', in *Symbiosis, Symbolism, and the Power of the Past*, ed. by William Dever and Seymour Gitin, Winona Lake IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003, pp. 99–111 (100–101). Spieckermann rebuts Cogan's claim in similar terms (*Juda*, pp. 307, 313, 319–62); see also Machinist, 'Assyria', p. 731; A. Kirk Grayson, 'Akkadian Treaties of the Seventh Century BC', *JCS* 39 (1987), pp. 127–60 (131); Black and Green, *Gods*, pp. 213–14.

46   C.J. Gadd, 'Inscribed Prisms of Sargon II from Nimrud', *Iraq* 16 (1954), pp. 173–201 (180–81); Bob Becking, *From David to Gedaliah*, Fribourg: Academic Press, 2007, p. 84.

47   Nadav Na'aman and Ran Zadok, 'Sargon II's Deportation to Israel and Philistia', *JCS* 40 (1988), pp. 36–46 (39).

48   I.M. D'yakonov, *Istoriya Midii*, 2nd enlarged edn, St Petersburg: St Petersburg State University, 2008, p. 225.

measures were not taken.[49] Loyalty could, however, be demonstrated through the acceptance of Assyrian culture, expressed first and foremost through the adoption of Assyrian gods. Furthermore, Assyrian kings had a duty to place the yoke of the god Assur on foreign kings and lands,[50] just as it was a royal duty to extend the limits of the territory under Assur's lordship, to 'Assyrianize' the earth.[51] The treaty obligations were laid not only upon the present vassal ruler, but also upon 'his sons, his grandsons, with all [his subjects], the men in his hands young and old, as many as there are from sunrise to sunset'. Annually, or possibly even bi-annually in the 'new-year' months,[52] the vassal rulers were required to attend the Council of the Nations, an assembly convened by the Assyrian king in his capital. In the light of the Assyrian ruling philosophy, these events, although they had the practical objectives of delivering tribute and discussing policy within the empire,[53] took place in a cultic context of adoration of Assyria's deities at important points in the astrological calendar, namely, the equinoxes.[54] At the equinoctial assembly, which witnessed the cultic re-enactment of Epic of Creation story with the king as the earthly

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49 J.A. Brinkman, 'Sennacherib's Babylonian Problem: An Interpretation', *JCS* 25 (1973), pp. 89–95 (90).

50 Esarhaddon stated 'I submitted them to the yoke of Assur my lord' (Borger, *Asarh*, p. 87, text 57.15). '[Aššur] is often mentioned in passages describing the expansion of Assyrian rule' (G. van Driel, *The Cult of Aššur*, Assen: van Gorcum, 1969, p. 190).

51 See Assurbanipal's coronation hymn ll. 2–3 (Livingstone, *Court Poetry*, p. 26); Tadmor, 'World Dominion', p. 55; Erica Ehrenberg, '*Dieu et Mon Droit*', in *Religion and Power*, ed. by Nicole Brisch, Chicago: University of Chicago, 2008, pp. 103–32 (104); Simo Parpola, 'Neo-Assyrian Treaties from the Royal Archives of Nineveh', *JCS* 39 (1987), pp. 161–89 (161); Shalom M. Paul, 'Deutero-Isaiah and Cuneiform Royal Inscriptions', *JAOS* 88 (1968), pp. 180–86 (186).

52 In the Neo-Assyrian period, the seventh month was also celebrated as 'the beginning of the year' and the akītu-house festival was held in both 'New Year' months (Parpola, 'Assyrian Cabinet', note. 45; Raija Mattila, 'Balancing the Accounts of the Royal New Year's Reception', *SAAB* IV/I [1990], pp. 7–22 [16]; *RLA* 9 [2001], p. 294; George, *Gilgamesh*, pp. 457–58). On the akītu-house festival, see *Dictionnaire de la civilisation mésopotamienne*, ed. by Francis Joannès, Paris: Laffont, 2001, pp. 20–22.

53 William R. Gallagher, *Sennacherib's Campaign to Judah*, Leiden: Brill, 1999, p. 83; note David Oates, 'The Excavations at Nimrud (Kalḫu) 1961', *Iraq* 24 (1962), pp. 1–25 (24).

54 'The Mesopotamians were affected by […] the cycle between the equinoxes, a period when the sun and moon vied with each other for time in the sky. The ancient Hebrews recognized the significance of this cycle, referring to the equinoxes, [as] the times when the year turns […]. The Israelite incorporation of this six-month "year" can further be detected in the duration and timing of the festival of the first month, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the festival of the seventh month, the Feast of Ingathering. This

representation of Assur,[55] oaths of allegiance to the king and the royal house, sworn on a winged disk, a symbol of the solar deity, were renewed annually.[56] The treaties themselves were composed and sworn as determined by astrological divination.[57] The potential for cultural transfer in these circumstances was enormous,[58] particularly within a shared religious mentality that held that the conquerors' god was *ipso facto* the most powerful deity.[59] Holloway's conclusion that there is no evidence for the observance of the cult of Assur outside the borders of Assyria[60] is contradicted by Esarhaddon's account of his dealings with the humbled king of Shubria.[61] The Shubrian appeals for mercy in order that he might live to 'proclaim the fame of the god Assur (and) praise [Esarhaddon's] heroism'. He continues: 'May the one who is neglectful of the god Assur, *king of the gods* [emphasis added] […] learn from my example […]. I committed a great sin against the god Assur'.[62] The prophecy of Assur

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concept of the six-month equinox appears to have been a major factor in the establishment of the cultic calendar throughout the Near East' (Cohen, *Cultic Calendars*, pp. 6–7).

55   W.G. Lambert, 'The Great Battle of the Mesopotamian Religious Year', *Iraq* 25 (1963), pp. 189–90.

56   Huxley, 'Gates', p. 128; Dalley, 'Ṣalmu', p. 85. Steven Holloway (*Aššur is King*, Leiden: Brill, 2002, pp. 166–68) suggests that the oaths were sworn beside the ensigns of the gods.

57   D.J. Wiseman, 'The Vassal-Treaties of Esarhaddon', *Iraq* XX (1958), pp. i-99 (3); Mikko Luukko, 'The Administrative Roles of the "Chief Scribe" and the "Palace Scribe" in the Neo-Assyrian Period', *SAAB* XVI (2007), pp. 227–56 (241, 251).

58   The cultural exchange was not invariably one-way. Karen Radner ('Assyrian King') cites evidence of the Neo-Assyrian practice of expropriating specialists, including cultic experts, from conquered states.

59   Craigie, 'Song', p. 261; Noth, *Israel*, p. 255. The Assyrian policy of taking their defeated enemies' divine images reinforced this. For Mesopotamians, once the cult image had been inducted, whatever ill befell it was considered to have happened to the god (George, 'Observations', pp. 112–13). Thus, the Assyrians left conquered areas godless and, consequently, helpless (Holloway, *Religion*, pp. 195–96). The native gods were effectively Assyrian hostages. The displacement could only have promoted the adoption of Assyrian gods by the subjugated peoples. Given the Neo-Assyrian kings' unfeigned religious fervour and conviction of their vocation as terrestrial representatives of Assur and the gods, it is scarcely credible that they were passive in cultic matters in the territories they subjected to 'Assur's yoke'. Moreover, as Ezekiel's testimony shows regarding Israel and Judah, in some conquered communities there was an enthusiasm to adopt Assyrian deities.

60   *Religion*, pp. 177, 200.

61   On Esarhaddon's campaign in Shubria, a territory located in the environs of Lake Van, see *The Cambridge Ancient History* III Pt. 2, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 129–30.

62   Erle Leichty, *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria (680–669 BC)*, Winona Lake IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011, pp. 81–82, text 33. Referring to an individual named Aššur-

delivered to Esarhaddon calls for the peoples to worship the god: 'I slaughtered your enemies and filled the river with their blood. Let them see and praise me, knowing that I am Aššur, lord of the gods'.[63]

Assyrianization was reinforced by taking the children of royal houses and noble families to the Assyrian capital as hostages.[64] Not only did this act to deter treasonous machinations by vassal rulers and their entourages, it was also thought to ensure that the next generation of leaders in the subject nations would be pro-Assyrian. To achieve this, these boys were educated in the Assyrian worldview which, naturally, included state theology and Mesopotamian literature.[65] It is probable, given their ubiquity in the Assyrian

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aplu-iddina ('Assur has given an heir'), Postgate suggests that he may have been a Urartian ruler who had accepted Assyrian suzerainty and, to underscore it, took an Assyrian name ('Assyrian Texts and Fragments', *Iraq* 35 [1973], pp. 13–36 [36]), a name that venerates Assur. On the case of Hānānu of Gaza, see Holloway, *Religion*, pp. 214–15; on that of Gyges, king of Lydia, see Nissinen, *References*, pp. 57–58. John Day ('Asherah', pp. 395–96) is one of a number of scholars who consider that the seventh-century-BC Aramaic-Phoenician plaque found in Syria refers to a covenant between the population and the god Assur, who heads 'all the gods and the mighty of the circle of all the holy ones'.

63 Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, pp. 24–25.

64 Stefan Zawadzki, 'Hostages in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions', in K. Van Lerberghe and A. Schoors (eds), *Immigration and Emigration within the Ancient Near East*, Leuven: Peeters, 1995, pp. 449–458 (456–57); Nissinen, *References*, p. 137. Carr (*Formation*, p. 305) posits that, in addition to bringing the scions of leading families to the Assyrian capital, the Sargonids may have pursued a policy of sending educators to the various parts of the empire. This education was aimed at teaching subject peoples how to behave towards the Assyrian king and his gods (see also Shalom Paul, 'Sargon's Administrative Diction in II Kings 17:27', *JBL* 88 [1969], pp. 73–74; Stephanie Dalley, 'Foreign Chariotry', *Iraq* 47 [1985], pp. 31–48 [35]).

65 Parpola, 'Letter from Šamaš-šumu-ukīn', p. 33: 'The only contemporary text mentioning [Sulāyu] is *ABL 447*, an account of school activities, reading and copying of literary texts in a Ninevite palace. All students mentioned in this text have Babylonian (Chaldean) names. Another noticeable feature in the text is that at least some of the students seem to have been schooled by compulsion. Thus we read in Obv. 8–13 of the text, "Ninurta-gimillī, the son of the *šandabakku* (of Nippur) has completed the series (and) has been put in irons. [. . .]" The next section (Obv. 14–19) reads "Kudurru (and) Kunāyu have completed (the series) 'Evil Demons'". [. . .] Kudurru is here nearly certainly the son of Šamaš-ibni (the Chaldean sheikh of Bīt Dakūri) who was deported to Assyria in 675 BC. To this list of "compelled" students our letter adds Sulāyu who is said to be "kept" in the Armoury of Nineveh "by order of the king". Why were these Babylonian youths, of whom at least Ninurta-gimillī and Kudurru were of noble blood, kept and taught in the Assyrian capital? I believe [. . .] that they were above all taught "the Assyrian way of life" and were later on to enter into the king's service as loyal officials in their native country'.

curriculum, that the works these hostages studied included the Gilgamesh epic, the *Hymn to Shamash*, the Epic of Creation/*Enūma Eliš*, the Erra (and Ishum) myth,[66] *Maqlû*, the anti-witchcraft text,[67] and *Nergal and Ereshkigal*.[68] Cultural transfer also occurred through the conscription of troops from the vassal and conquered areas. There is firm evidence that soldiers from Samaria served in Sargon II's army and, since this policy continued into the reign of Assurbanipal,[69] it may be that Judean deportees also participated in the Neo-Assyrian military.[70] Assurbanipal states that Manasseh and his forces were involved in his first campaign against Egypt.[71] Warfare for the Assyrians was a sacred undertaking in which their gods were centrally involved.[72] Unsurprisingly, Assyrian cultural influence pervaded trade and commerce in Palestine. Using evidence from a legal document found at Gezer, Cogan observes that, during the period of Neo-Assyrian hegemony, business agreements in Israel and Judah were based on Assyrian legal practice. Indeed, the owner of the field that forms the subject of the transaction was a Judean named Netanyahu whose seal displays Mesopotamian lunar imagery.[73]

Manasseh's position vis-à-vis Assyrian power was delicate. His father, Hezekiah, with whom, for a decade, he may have been co-regent,[74] rebelled against Sennacherib in 701 with the result that Judah was devastated by the latter's armies and 'all the walled cities taken' (2 Kgs 18:13).[75] Hezekiah succeeded,

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66   This work was particularly widely copied in the first millennium BC. More copies of it have been discovered than even copies of *Gilgamesh* (Machinist, 'Rest', p. 221).

67   Lambert, *Literature*, p. 122.

68   Ponchia and Luukko, *Nergal*, p. xxxv. Scholars consider that many of the most widely read Akkadian texts acquired a relatively standardized form in the final half or quarter of the second millennium BC (Tigay, *Gilgamesh*, p. 131; W.G. Lambert, 'Ancestors, Authors, and Canonicity', *JCS* 11 [1957], pp. 1–14 [7]; Reiner and Güterbock, 'Hymn', p. 256).

69   Dalley, 'Foreign Chariotry', pp. 31, 38–39, 48. On foreign soldiers in the Neo-Assyrian army, see Nicholas Postgate, 'The Invisible Hierarchy', in idem, *The Land of Assur & the Yoke of Assur*, Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2007, pp. 331–60 (351).

70   Spieckermann, *Juda*, p. 315.

71   *ARAB* 2, pp. 340–41, text 876.

72   See below. It is thought that the Assyrian army was organized into units supported by the temples of different Assyrian deities whose ensigns they carried (Jeremy Black and Anthony Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia*, London: British Museum Press, 1992, p. 169).

73   'Exile', pp. 254, 257.

74   Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1965, pp. 156–61; Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, p. 266; Gray, *Kings*, p. 706.

75   Sennacherib claims 'forty-six strong, walled cities were taken' in Judah and '200,150 people great and small' were deported to Assyria, and Hezekiah was 'shut up in Jerusalem like

however, in maintaining Judah as an independent, albeit severely truncated, state and preserving Jerusalem. Both the biblical and the Assyrian reports of the assault on Judah are cast in religious terms, with each of the adversaries claiming the supremacy of his god(s).[76] That the campaign against Judah was considered particularly important by the new Assyrian king is attested, not only by the unusually lengthy list of booty he records in his annals,[77] but also by his making the capture and destruction of Lachish the subject of the commemorative panels in a prominently sited state room in his palace.[78]

Manasseh determined not to pursue his father's policy and submitted to Assyrian dominion, as confirmed by extant Assyrian sources.[79] Sennacherib appears to have been appeased. Sennacherib's murder by his sons in 681 BC (2 Kgs 18:7–19:37; Isa. 36–37)[80] led to another son, Esarhaddon, whose appointment as crown prince had set in motion the assassination, becoming king.[81]

Lemaire remarks that the worship of the hosts of heaven which is associated with Manasseh and Amon is not mentioned in connection with earlier kings

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a caged bird' (David Daniel Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924, pp. 32–34); Ernst Ludwig Ehrlich, *A Concise History of Israel from the Earliest Times to the Destruction of the Temple in AD 70*, London: Darton, Longman, Todd, 1962, p. 61. Sennacherib's statement finds an echo in Isa. 1:4–9: 'your land is destroyed, your cities burned with fire, [...] the daughter of Zion is left like a shack in a vineyard' (Childs, *Isaiah*, p. 22). For analysis of Sennacherib's claim, see Cogan, 'Cross-Examining', pp. 67–68.

76   Luckenbill, *Sennacherib*, pp. 85–86. The knotty question of whether the biblical account of Sennacherib's campaign against Judah refers to one episode or two lies beyond the scope of the present work. Bright (*History*, pp. 298–309) and Childs (*Isaiah*, pp. 11–19) set out the arguments from opposing standpoints. Cogan ('Cross-Examining', pp. 73–74) supplements those of the latter. For a digest of the debate, see Gallagher, *Sennacherib's Campaign*, pp. 8–9.

77   Cogan, 'Cross-Examining', p. 69.

78   David Ussishkin, 'Lachish', pp. 176–77, 189; idem, 'Sennacherib's Campaign to Judah', in *Sennacherib at the Gates*, ed. by Kalimi and Richardson, pp. 75–103 (85–89, 102).

79   The two firm references derive from the reigns of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal. They have been tentatively dated respectively to a point between 677 and 669, and to 667/666 BC (Gane, 'Role', pp. 22, 26). As Gane remarks, these demonstrate that 'Judah was treated as a firmly controlled vassal state rather than a more independent satellite, which it was during Hezekiah's reign before [...] 701'. See also Noth, *Israel*, pp. 264, 269.

80   Borger, *Asarh.*, p. 42; Simo Parpola, 'The Murderer of Sennacherib', in Bendt Alster (ed.), *Death in Mesopotamia*, Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1980, pp. 171–81 (175).

81   Sarah C. Melville, 'Zakutu (Naqi'a)', in *The Encyclopaedia of Ancient History*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2013, p. 7162.

of Judah.[82] Other scholars contend on the basis of 2 Kings 23:12 that it was introduced by Ahaz, Manasseh's grandfather, under Assyrian pressure.[83] Ahaz's adoption of these gods may have simply been expedient. Bright implies that this king was not overburdened with personal convictions beyond a concern to maintain his position.[84] Be that as it may, as John McKay remarks, prior to Assyrian suzerainty, there is no biblical reference to the Israelites worshipping the hosts of heaven.[85] Given the central position that astral deities occupied in Mesopotamian religion, as I shall discuss below, the proposal that Israelite astral cults developed under Assyrian influence is persuasive.[86] Whatever Ahaz's beliefs, the zeal of his grandson for polytheism, including Assyrian deities, is difficult to doubt.[87] The terse statement that Manasseh 'worshipped all

82   'Toward', p. 454.

83   Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. xlvi; C.F. Keil, *The Books of the Kings*, 2nd edn, Edinburgh: Clark, 1877, p. 486; Gray, *Kings*, p. 648; Bright, *History*, pp. 276–77, 288.

84   *History*, pp. 276–77, 290–91, 312.

85   *Religion in Judah under the Assyrians 732–609 BC*, London: SCM Press, 1973, p. 74.

86   Burney (*Notes*, pp. 254, 353). According to the *DDD*, p. 1446, the absence of solar allusions in Hebrew personal names indicates that, in contrast to the situation in Egypt and Mesopotamia, the worship of the sun was not widespread in Israel prior to Assyrian hegemony, and is likely, therefore, to have been introduced only then.

87   Though it is doubted by several scholars: Gane claims 'Manasseh's lack of independent action does not imply that his personal inclinations were "pro-Assyrian"' ('Role', p. 32). Cogan and Tadmor find 'nothing Mesopotamian about the astral cults' venerated by Manasseh, despite noting elsewhere that the word for 'planets' employed in 2 Kgs 23:5 (*mazzālôth*) is borrowed from Akkadian (*manzaltu*), and that the use of horses in the solar cult may reflect Assyrian influence (*II Kings*, pp. 266, 286, 288; see also Burney, *Notes*, p. 358; Spieckermann, *Juda*, pp. 271–72; Mankowski, *Loanwords*, p. 86). The fact that Manasseh was buried in 'the garden' or 'enclosure of his house', which Gray (*Kings*, p. 710) suggests would be found in the palace complex (see also Heidel, *Gilgamesh*, pp. 166–67; Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial*, pp. 118–19), may owe something to the Neo-Assyrian custom according to which kings were buried in their palace (Seth Richardson, 'An Assyrian Garden of Ancestors', *SAAB* XIII [1999–2001], pp. 145–215 [168–70]; Tadmor, Landsberger, Parpola, 'Sin', pp. 28–29; compare Isa. 14:18). The burial was undoubtedly arranged by his son and successor, Amon, who shared his father's polytheism (2 Kgs 21:18–21). This innovation in burial practice may therefore suggest that Manasseh genuinely adhered to Assyrian beliefs to the end of his life, rather than the site of his grave indicating opprobrium towards him (Hays, *Death*, p. 159; Francesca Stavrakopoulou, 'Exploring the Garden of Uzza', *Biblica* 87/1 [2006], pp. 1–21 [3, 21]). Compare Klaas Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, Kevelaer: Butzon and Bercker, 1986, p. 250. As Stavrakopoulou comments, 'It would appear that [Manasseh and Amon were] accorded an historically honourable burial, wholly befitting an ancient Near Eastern monarch' (p. 21).

the host of heaven and served them' (2 Kgs 21:3) echoes an essential feature of Neo-Assyrian theology.[88] A letter dated to the era of Esarhaddon-Assurbanipal refers to the king's command that burnt offerings be made before 'Jupiter, Venus, Saturn, Mercury, Mars, Sin, Shamash, Bel-matati, Sirius, Antares, Belet-balaṭi, the Pleiades, and Ishum'.[89] Moreover, not only had astrology become the preeminent divinatory method in the course of the Neo-Assyrian era,[90] but also the Assyrian king's main astrologer, 'the chief scribe', acted as his premier adviser.[91] The celestial manifestation of the gods through the stars and planets was central to Mesopotamian theological understanding as demonstrated by the cuneiform determinative used to denote a god (an eight-pointed star, the symbol of Venus) and the interchangeability of astral names and those of the gods whose manifestations they are,[92] not to mention the ubiquitous employment of astral symbols on artefacts of a sacred or legal nature in place of anthropomorphic representations of the gods.[93] A number of divinities in

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88   In his influential work, 'Das deuteronomische Grundgesetz' (in *Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie* 27 [1923], Gütersloh, pp. 347–466), Theodor Oestreicher argues that an Ishtar cult, an Assur cult and a Shamash cult were introduced at that time into the Jerusalem temple (pp. 387–402).

89   Steven W. Cole and Peter Machinist (eds), *Letters from Priests to the Kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal*, Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1998, p. 63, text 72. They note that during the reign of these two kings, prodigious quantities of sheep and oxen were given as burnt offerings to the planets, Sun, Moon, stars, and constellations (p. XVI).

90   Fales and Lanfranchi, 'Impact', pp. 103, 108; Nissinen, *References*, p. 32. On its unique and pertinent advantages over other divinatory methods, see Stefan Maul, 'Divination Culture and the Handling of the Future', in Gwendolyn Leick (ed.), *The Babylonian World*, New York: Routledge, 2007, pp. 361–72 (364–65). Furthermore, the other major divinatory method, extispicy, required a celestial actor, Shamash, for its interpretation. On extispicy, see Ivan Starr, 'Chapters 1 and 2 of the bārûtu', *SAAB* 6/1 (1992), pp. 45–53; idem, *Queries*. On its continuing importance in Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian praxis and its use to confirm astrological and other divinatory interpretations, see Reiner, *Astral Magic*, pp. 74–77; Starr, *Queries*, pp. XXXII–XXXV.

91   Luukko, 'Administrative Roles', pp. 229–30, 232, 250–52; *LAS II*, p. xiv.

92   See, as detailed examples, the interchangeability of references to Mars and Nergal, Venus and Ishtar (Hermann Hunger, *Astrological Reports to Assyrian Kings*, Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1992, p. 72, text 114 and pp. 259–60, text 461), and the Goat Star and Gula, goddess of healing (Reiner, *Astral Magic*, pp. 4–6; 53–55, 129).

93   For example, the stela of Assurnasirpal II in the Kalḫu palace depicts the king holding out his right hand, 'with forefinger outstretched [. . .], as a gesture of respect and supplication towards the symbols of five gods. The helmet decorated with horns represents the supreme god, Assur; the winged disc [. . .] stands for Shamash; the crescent within a full circle, is the emblem of [. . .] Sin; the undulating line or fork is the thunderbolt of the storm god, Adad; and a star, the planet Venus, signifies Ishtar [. . .]. The king wears a row of

the Mesopotamian pantheon have astral manifestations, and the principal 'hosts of heaven' comprise Assur in his solar aspect, Shamash, Sin, and 'the five planetary deities, Venus-Ishtar, Jupiter-Marduk,[94] Mercury-Nabu, Saturn [possibly Ningirsu-Ninurta but, given Ninurta's identification with Sirius, probably Adad],[95] and Mars-Nergal'.[96]

In the Creation Epic (V.1), Marduk '"fashioned the stations for the great gods" (positioned the stars that correspond to them)'.[97] In the VTE (ll. 13–15), Esarhaddon names the celestial witnesses to the treaty as Jupiter, Venus, Saturn, Mercury, Mars and Sirius, known as 'the Arrow Star'.[98] Elsewhere he makes a Babylonian population swear allegiance by the 'seven planets of the sky'.[99] Among the astral deities that Manasseh introduced into Yahweh's house,[100]

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similar symbols on his chest' (Julian Reade, *Assyrian Sculpture*, London: British Museum Publications, 1983, p. 15). See also Irene Winter, 'When/What is a Portrait', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 153 (2009), pp. 254–70.

94   Livingstone, *Court Poetry*, p. 9.

95   On the identification of Ningirsu with Ninurta, see *RLA* 9, pp. 368–73; G.E. Kurtik, *Zvezdnoye nebo drevney Mesopotamii*, St Petersburg: Aletheia, 2007, pp. 136, 377; Simo Parpola, 'Mesopotamian Precursors of the Hymn of the Pearl', in R.M. Whiting (ed.), *Melammu Symposia II*, Helsinki, 2001, pp. 181–93 (185); Lambert, *Literature*, p. 4. While Kurtik confirms the identification of Saturn with Ninurta, he observes that this god's astral relationships are complex since he is equally associated with Mercury and Sirius (*Zvezdnoye nebo*, pp. 243–50, 389, 543, 551). Parpola states that Saturn was considered a manifestation of the storm god, Adad ('Assyrian Cabinet'). On Adad's popularity with late Assyrian kings, see Kathryn Stevens, 'Iškur/Adad (god)', *AMGG*, 2013 [http://oracc. museum.upenn.edu/amgg/listofdeities/ikur/accessed 28 December 2015]. For the gods particularly favoured by Sennacherib at the time Manasseh ascended to the throne, see Tadmor, Landsberger, Parpola, 'Sin', p. 26.

96   Huxley, 'Gates', p. 113; Reiner, *Astral Magic*, p. 60; Al-Rawi and Black, '"Išum and Erra"', p. 112. In addition to Mars, Nergal is identified with certain stars and constellations (Kurtik, *Zvezdnoye nebo*, pp. 371–74; Cooley, 'Šulpae', p. 180). His consort, Ereshkigal, is also associated with Mars (*Zvezdnoye nebo*, p. 138). Mars is the star of judgment of the fate of the dead (Langdon, *Semitic*, p. 147).

97   *CAD* M/1, 1977, p. 238.

98   Reiner, *Astral Magic*, pp. 18–19, *pace* Lewy, 'Ištar-Ṣâd', who argues that Sirius is the Bow Star and is a hypostasis of Ishtar. VTE invokes the gods in a threefold formula: their celestial aspect, their names, and their city affiliations (*VTE with Humbaresh* [ll. 13–40]). On the relationship between cities and patron deities, see W.G. Lambert, 'The God Aššur', *Iraq* 45 (1982), pp. 82–86 (83–84).

99   Grayson, 'Treaties', p. 137.

100   Rowley plausibly proposes that the repairs to the Temple commissioned by Josiah were occasioned by the need to remove the symbols of Assyrian suzerainty (*Worship*, p. 107).

ILLUSTRATION 1   *Stela of Assurnasirpal II showing the king venerating the gods in their astral manifestations.*

we may expect an important place to have been given to these 'great gods',[101] together with the veneration of Ba'al and Asherah. According to 2 Kings, especially honour was afforded to the solar cult, conceivably represented by Assur, the divine king, and Shamash.[102] Many scholars consider that Ishtar was the subject of the Queen of Heaven cult that was well established in Judah at the end of the seventh century (Jer. 7:18; 44:17–26).[103] Consistent with the biblical account of Manasseh worshipping '*all* the host of heaven', however, generally it is the stars of the night sky, *en masse*, that are invoked in Babylonian and Assyrian rites, rather than specific stars and planets.[104] The adoration of the 'hosts of heaven', together with the Ba'als, the Asherah, and the two molten calves, also characterized the cultic practices of the northern kingdom under Assyrian hegemony (2 Kgs 17:16).

The Bible presents Manasseh engaged in divinatory practices in addition to astrology and necromancy.[105] While the specific Hebrew terms defy precise translation, the message is clear: he employed numerous divinatory means to inform his actions. In this he resembled contemporary Assyrian kings who made extensive use of a range of divinatory methods not only to determine major decisions, but also for discerning the plans of enemies and the loyalty

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Note also Gerhard von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, London: SCM Press, 1966, p. 27; Frank M. Cross and David Noel Freedman, 'Josiah's Revolt against Assyria', *JNES* 12 (1953), pp. 56–58 (57).

101　See, for example, Assurbanipal's inscription listing these deities, together with Nusku, as 'the great gods' (Piepkorn, *Inscriptions*, p. 51).

102　Oestreicher argues that Shamash is Assur's solar aspect (*Grundgesetz*, pp. 399–401). See also Wolfgang Heimpel, 'The Sun at Night and the Doors of Heaven', *JCS* 38 (1986), pp. 127–51 (137), and Chapter 7 below for Assur as a solar deity in Neo-Assyrian theology. A theological innovation of Sennacherib was the replacement of Marduk by Assur as 'High God of the Land' and as the central figure in the *Enūma Eliš* narrative (Lambert, 'Battle', p. 189).

103　Jastrow, *Aspects*, p. 314; *DDD*, pp. 1533–34; Moorey, *Idols*, p. 50. 'Queen of Heaven' is an epithet of Ishtar-Inanna (Wolkstein and Kramer, *Inanna*, p. 55; Jacobsen, *Treasures*, p. 138). Susan Ackerman, while adducing evidence that connects the practice of baking cakes for the Queen of Heaven with the cult of Ishtar, and, perceptively, linking this activity with the rite of weeping for Tammuz, concludes that Jeremiah's 'Queen of Heaven' is a syncretistic goddess combining aspects of Ishtar and Astarte ('"And the Women Knead Dough"', in Peggy Day [ed.], *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 2006, pp. 109–22 [116–17]).

104　Reiner, *Astral Magic*, p. 24; eadem, 'Fortune-Telling', pp. 26, 28; Schwemer, 'Witchcraft', p. 34. See Chapter 6.

105　Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, p. 267; Spieckermann, *Juda*, p. 306.

of officials and vassals.[106] Omens were understood as signs from the gods; the majority were unprovoked, some resulted from specific petitions.[107] With the appropriate sympathetic magic, ill-portended events could be averted.[108] The biblical accusation of witchcraft made against Manasseh may, at least in part, refer to his practising apotropaic magic (2 Chr. 33:6).[109] It is evident, however, from texts concerned with waging warfare, that, in the case of magic rites conducted by the Assyrian (or Babylonian) king against a known foreign enemy, any discrimination between benefic magic and sorcery is blurred. True, there is an assumption that the magic rituals performed by the king were in response to malevolent spells already directed by the enemy against him and his country. Accordingly, the rituals that he conducted could be considered defensive not offensive, in this sense resembling *Maqlû* and similar rites of reflective magic. Nevertheless, since in most cases he would have had no certain knowledge that witchcraft had been practised against him, and as the enemy

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106 The Sargonid kings showed an even greater involvement in, and reliance on, divination than did their predecessors (Giovanni Lanfranchi, 'Ideological Implications of the Problem of Royal Responsibility', *Eretz-Israel* [2003], pp. 100–110 [105]; Cynthia Jean, 'Divination and Oracles at the Neo-Assyrian Palace', in Annus [ed.], *Divination*, pp. 267–75 [271]; Sarah Melville, *The Role of Naqia/Zakutu in Sargonid Politics*, Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 1999, pp. 80–81).

107 Respectively, the *omina oblativa* and *omina impetrativa* of antiquity. A Judges example of the former is the Midianite's dream, and, of the latter, the fleece omens requested by Gideon (7:15; 6:36–40). That neither variety was strictly prohibited in late eighth-century Yahwism is shown by Isaiah urging Ahaz to request a terrestrial or celestial omen to confirm Judah's impending deliverance from the Syrian-Samarian threat. The irony of Ahaz's pious response is magnificent (Isa. 7:11–14). Isaiah contrasts his own ominous role as Yahweh's agent with his compatriots' preference for necromantic divination (8:18–19).

108 Hunger and Pingree, *Astral Sciences*, p. 5; Reiner, *Astral Magic*, pp. 82–83; Maul, 'Divination', p. 364; *CAD* N/1, 1980, pp. 224–25.

109 However, the root used, *kšp*, is that associated with malefic magic in both Hebrew and Assyrian (*BDB*, p. 506; *CAD* K, 1971, pp. 454–56). It is employed by Nahum (3:4) to characterize the religious life of Nineveh, regardless of the fact that *kišpū* was outlawed in Mesopotamia (C.H.W. Johns, *Babylonian and Assyrian Laws*, New York: Shribner, 1904, p. 55, for its treatment under the Hammurabi Code; and as a capital offence in the Assyrian Legal Code, G.R. Driver and J.C. Miles, *The Assyrian Laws*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935, pp. 415–17: Law A47; Abusch, 'Ascent', p. 134; Black and Green, *Gods*, p. 186). Hebrew *ʾššp*, whose Assyrian cognate *āšipu* designates experts in benefic magic (Reiner, *Astral Magic*, pp. 46–47; *LAS II*, p. xiv), occurs only in texts describing the Neo-Babylonian court (Dan. 1:20; 2:2). Apropos Nahum's invective, in Anatolia Ishtar of Nineveh was principally revered as goddess of magic (Gary Beckman, 'Ištar of Nineveh Reconsidered', *JCS* 50 [1998], pp. 1–10 [6]). For the grey area between legal *āšipūtu* and sorcery, see Schwemer, 'Witchcraft', p. 30.

to be hexed was named, the distinction seems casuistic.[110] Given this, it is unsurprising that mid-first-millennium Yahwistic writers regarded any form of magic ritual outside mainstream Yahwistic rites as sorcery.

There is no record that Manasseh's course was opposed by the priesthood; quite the opposite impression is given.[111] The accounts in 2 Kings strongly imply that all parts of Judean society accepted the king's idolatrous programme (as indicated in Ezekiel also), and that priests practised cult on the high places (2 Kgs 21:9–17; 23:8–9).[112] This corresponds with the negative portrayal of the priesthood in Judges. Thereafter, polytheism in Judah is a topic frequently met both in the narrative accounts and in the prophets. In Jeremiah, 'the temptation to worship "other gods" is the pressing danger of the age'.[113]

The mention of Ishtar and Nergal points to another important ingredient in the mix. As confirmed by the Sargon prism, when the Assyrians deported the ten tribes, they replaced them in the northern kingdom, now merely a province of the empire, with populations from elsewhere. According to 2 Kings, among them were people from Cuthah and Babylon (2 Kgs 17:24). Sargonic inscriptions confirm that populations were deported from the Babylonian temple cities of Babylon, Nippur and Borsippa following the campaigns against them in 710–709 BC.[114] There is evidence that, in addition, Arab deportees were settled in the area around Bethel. Na'aman and Zadok conjecture that the other sources of the incoming populations mentioned in the 2 Kings account, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim, were located in the border area of Babylonia and Elam.[115] Becking dates any deportation to the new province of Samarina to the final decade of the eighth century.[116] Cuthah and Babylon were celebrated in Mesopotamia and beyond as major centres of Nergal[117] and Ishtar (and Marduk) respectively.[118] Indeed, 2 Kings states that the 'men of Cuth' instituted

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110   Ibid., pp. 31–35.

111   Keil, *Kings*, pp. 468–69; Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, p. 267.

112   McKay, *Religion*, p. 69.

113   Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. xlvi.

114   Extant records indicate that the deportation of inhabitants of Cuthah took place in Sennacherib's reign (*DDD*, pp. 1171–72).

115   'Deportation', pp. 44–46.

116   Bob Becking, *The Fall of Samaria*, Leiden: Brill, 1992, pp. 95–97. Ezra (4:2) records that a (further?) settlement of deportees to Samarina was carried out by Esarhaddon.

117   Édouard Dhorme, *La Religion assyro-babylonienne*, Paris: Lecoffre, 1910, p. 76.

118   One of Nergal's epithets was 'King of Cuthah' (S. Langdon, *Babylonian Menologies and the Semitic Calendar*, London: Oxford University Press, 1935, p. 121); one of Ishtar's was 'Lady of Babylon' (*bēlet Bābili*) (Tallqvist, *Götterepitheta*, pp. 390, 332; Cole and Machinist, *Letters*, p. 132) whose temple in Babylon, E-tur-kalamma, provided the main focus of Ishtar-

the cult of Nergal in Samaria.[119] Like Sin, Nergal enjoyed great popularity in the late Neo-Assyrian period.[120] These developments could only have exercised a profound influence on the religious environment in which Judah now found itself. Prior to this, Mesopotamian gods, although recognized, were essentially extrinsic to the cultic landscape of Palestine. Now, through the immigrant populations, they became a prominent part of the local religious domain, merely a day's journey from Jerusalem.[121] In this context, 'the gods of the peoples round about' now included the major Mesopotamian deities. The southern kingdom's exposure to them was, thus, enormously increased, first, because of the proximity of their cults post-722 BC, and, second, due to Manasseh's receptive policies towards Assyria and the Assyrian kings' determination to promote them throughout their realm.[122]

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Given these factors, if Judges was written in this period, we might expect to find the gods that featured particularly prominently reflected in the text. In Chapter 4, we discussed the allusion to the lunar deity. We now turn to consider the solar motif in Judges. Disregarding toponyms, the sun is mentioned five times: once in a personalized form, in Deborah's Song, the first reference to it, which marks the turning point of the account of the major judges, and twice each with respect to its coming up and going down. In the Hebrew Bible, Judges is unusual in its use of two words for sun, the standard term, *šemeš*, and a word otherwise found only in Job 9:7 (and a derivative form in Jeremiah) and in toponyms, *ḥeres*.[123] Leaving aside the anthropomorphic representation in the Song, the solar terms are organized in paired oppositions, occurring in

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worship in the city. In addition, Babylon boasted other temples dedicated to aspects of Ishtar's divinity (see A.R. George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts*, Leuven: Peeters, 1992, p. 307). A further epithet of the goddess is 'the Lady who owns *ibratu*-shrines'. Ishtar's cult possessed one hundred and eighty such wayside shrines or chapels in Babylon (D.J. Wiseman, 'The Goddess Lama at Ur', *Iraq* 22 [1960], pp. 166–71 [171]).

119   Cuthah was also a cult centre of Ereshkigal (Ponchia and Luukko, *Nergal*, p. lxxvi).

120   Ibid., pp. xliv–lv; Noth, *Israel*, p. 269.

121   Indeed, a Neo-Assyrian land-sale contract found at Gezer names a certain Nergal-šarru-uṣur (a very common Neo-Assyrian name) as witness (*DDD*, p. 1172; *PNA*, p. 954).

122   Lambert states that the belief was widely held in Mesopotamia that divine anger and retributive action would result from negligence towards a god's cult (*Literature*, p. 14).

123   Compare Robert Stieglitz, 'The Hebrew Names for the Seven Planets', *JNES* 40 (1981), pp. 135–37.

alternating order.[124] *ḥeres* is used with the major judges: in the Samson seg-
ment, where tellingly it is encountered in the centre of the riddle episode, and
in the Gideon section. *šemeš* is deployed only with the non-judges: Abimelech,
and the Levite and concubine. No less noteworthy is the fact that the refer-
ences taken across the sequence of four reveal the sun's passage through
the day.

8:13 *ḥeres*	9:33 *šemeš*	14:18 *ḥeres*	19:14 *šemeš*
'Before the sun was up'[a]	'As soon as the sun is up'	'Before the sun went down'	'And the sun went down'

a   In most translations, including *LXX*, and commentaries, *ḥeres* is treated here as a toponym.
    The Vulgate, however, gives *ante solis ortum*. The AV and the Luther Bible likewise interpret
    it as a solar reference. Furthermore, it would be in character for our writer to furnish a dou-
    blet in treating this rare word.

It will readily be seen that all these references, while balanced on either side
of the midpoint of Structure A, occur in the second half of Structure B, spe-
cifically after Gideon's fateful crossing of the Jordan. It is no surprise, then,
that, in each case, far from celebrating the sun as a positive force, it receives
a negative connotation. On each occasion it is mentioned, the sun is the har-
binger of violent death. In a 3+1 pattern, in the first three instances, revenge
provokes the deaths;[125] in the final case unprovoked depravity is the cause.
Moreover, in each occurrence, the act that immediately follows the solar refer-
ence is pivotal to the plot. It represents a point of fundamental transition in
each story, a moment when sin is born; the remainder of the episode relates
its consequences.[126] The 2+2 lexical oppositions recall the four cardinal points
in the earth's rotation of the sun: two equinoxes, two solstices. The first two
mentions in Judges signal the sun gaining strength: 'before the sun was up'
and 'as soon as the sun is up', conceivably reflecting the vernal equinox and
the summer solstice. The last two point to it losing strength: 'before the sun
went down', 'and the sun went down upon them', i.e., the autumn equinox and

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124   The alternating order is unbroken even when the solar reference in 5:31 is included, since
      Deborah employs *šemeš*.
125   Younger identifies revenge as a major motif in the accounts of the final three judges
      (*Judges/Ruth*, p. 38).
126   This applies too, of course, to its occurrence in 5:31, where it signals paradigmatic change.

the winter solstice.[127] The use of *ḥeres* carries an imperfective notion (whether waxing or waning), *šemeš* represents the completed state. In the verse in Job in which *ḥeres* occurs, the sense is of incompletion, actually negation: '[God] commands the sun and it does not rise'. In Judges, *ḥeres* is anterior to the *šemeš* reference with which it is paired.

There can be little doubt that this arrangement is artful but, as it stands, seems to imply nothing about the solar deities, apart from the sense that the sun represents a negative force. In fact, both terms strongly resemble the names of solar gods, one Assyrian, the other Egyptian. We have already noted the connection between the Hebrew *šemeš* and Shamash. In an unpointed script, the words were orthographically identical. The term *ḥeres* possesses a similar resemblance to the Egyptian falcon-headed deity, Horus. Horus was originally the god of the sky and kingship, and the planets were believed to be his manifestations. However, as the cult of the solar god, Rā, gained importance, so Horus, as noted in Chapter 1, acquired a solar aspect. Soggin remarks, with regard to the name of the district allocated to Joshua, that 'Timnath-heres is identical with Timnath-serah (Josh. 19.50; 24.30). […] in favour of *ḥeres* is the fact that we also have the same reading in [Judg.] 1.35, i.e. Horus; in that case the metathesis in this text could have taken place deliberately, with the aim of removing the reference to a pagan divinity'.[128] This combination of the solar deities of Assyria and Egypt in the Judges narrative perfectly reflects the tenor of Ezekiel 23 and Joshua 24:14–15 cited above. In the Israelite experience, adoration of Horus was anterior to the worship of Mesopotamian Shamash. Moreover, both Horus and Shamash have responsibility for kings in the systems to which they belong.[129] In addition, Horus has a mission of vengeance because of the murder of his father, Osiris, by Seth, and is god and principal judge of the Underworld.[130] Fittingly, *ḥeres* is used in two of the three applications where revenge is the motive.

We noted that Structure B appears to trace the solar circuit. The series of the six major judges beginning with the rise of Othniel, which we associated

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127 Compare Lévi-Strauss, *Table Manners*, p. 223.

128 Soggin, *Judges*, p. 39; see also Burney, *Judges*, pp. 32, 232, 365; Zadok, *Anthroponymy*, p. 11; Taylor, *Yahweh*, pp. 96–97.

129 'Ideologically, […] the god-born god-chosen Assyrian king corresponds to the Egyptian pharaoh (considered the incarnation of Horus)' (Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, p. XLII). Taylor (*Yahweh*, pp. 50–55, 260–61) submits that the symbols on the Judean *lmlk* ('the king's)-inscribed jug-handles, dated to the reign of Hezekiah, attest the association of Horus of Edfu with the king in Judah. On the symbolic association of kingship and the sun in the Eye of Horus image, see Chapter 1.

130 David, *Religion*, p. 95.

with east, reaches its midpoint, as we have seen, in the final verse of the Song of Deborah, the third major judge, with its startling reference to the sun as hero: '"Let them that love [Yahweh] be as the sun when he goes forth in his might [/in his heroism/as hero]"[131] (south). The end of the series comes with the burial of the Nazirite whose name recalls the sun, first under the rubble of Dagon's temple in Gaza, the most (south-) westerly city in the promised land. In this light, it is clear why in Structure B, Samson had to be located in the west rather than in the north with his kinsmen: the writer is concerned to empha-size that Samson's life, death and burial intimate the sun losing strength. His story ends with the following: 'And [they] buried [Samson] between Zorah and Eshtaol in the burying-place of Manoah his father, and he judged Israel twenty years'.[132] These solar coordinates suggest that the sunrise occurs with Othniel, who came from the east into Canaan, and it attains its midday height, the point of its 'strength',[133] in the Deborah tale, a supposition supported by the location of Deborah's palm tree. On an east-west axis between the Jordan and the Mediterranean, it occupies the midpoint (as it does on the south-north axis). With the death and burial of Samson, the sun reaches its tired end. Taken as the east-south-west progress of the sun through the day, we are led to believe that 5:31 really is the point when the sun is at its strength. But once again the writer has projected an illusion. Everything we know of the way the major judge series is structured demonstrates that 5:31 does not mark the pin-nacle of Israel's Settlement story, but the tipping point of the bad outweighing the good. The sun is a false hero. The highest point came at the beginning, in the judgeship of Othniel, and each transition to a new judge, via a strength-ened expression of Israel's apostasy and renewed foreign oppression, reveals a decline. What the six major judges represent in solar terms, then, is the waning of the sun from the summer to the winter solstice. The end of the Deborah

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131   The word translated 'might' *gᵉbûrāh* is related to the Hebrew *gibbôr* which, *inter alia*, has the sense of 'hero' (*Gesenius*, p. 400; *BDB*, pp. 149–50). It has an exact equivalent in Assyrian *qarrādu*, the standard epithet of Shamash (though it is also applied to other gods includ-ing Ishtar [see below], Ninurta-Ningirsu and Nergal [*CAD* Q, 1982, pp. 312–13]); 'I praise the hero [Shamash], the brilliant light of the sky' (*CAD* N/1, 1980, p. 348); see Parpola, 'Tree', p. 178.

132   The name Manoah, which *prima facie* appears to sit uneasily with the personality of its owner, and is consequently seen as ironic by some commentators, is, at the end of the Samson cycle, revealed as felicitous. It means 'place of rest', the most significant provi-sion that Manoah made for his son (*BDB*, p. 629; compare Tigay, *Gilgamesh*, p. 230). Gray, however, seeks to link it with the name of the forebear of the clan of Manahathites (*New Century Judges*, p. 324).

133   Heimpel, 'Sun', p. 137.

section-commencement of the Gideon section (i.e., the tropic of 5:31/6:1), therefore, marks the autumn equinox,[134] which was located in the constellation of the Scales (Libra).[135] From this point, the balance tips, and the heroes wane, not in physical might or military prowess, but in godliness. In a word, they reflect more darkness than light. In the Gideon segment, the alternation of day and night, light and darkness, receives particular weight in the narrative, as indeed it does in Samson's. What this represents is simply the celestial expression of the cosmic geographical aspects of the Deborah-Gideon transition discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. For the Mesopotamians, and the ancient Near Eastern peoples who adopted their system, the equinoxes and solstices carried enormous actual and symbolic importance.[136] Whereas the spring equinox signalled creation and renewal in Mesopotamian belief, the autumn equinox communicated its antithesis, a journey through decay and death to the Underworld, illustrated by the Scales as the symbol of judgment.[137] The fact that a mere eleven verses before Deborah's solar reference the author unexpectedly introduces a sidereal motif was, conceivably, intended to alert the reader to the astrological dimension of the text.[138]

This prompts us to look at the major judge series alongside the Standard Mesopotamian Calendar (SMC). The SMC, *mutatis mutandis*,[139] remains in

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134   Huxley conjectures that because in the annual cycle, Shamash's 'Secret Place/Exaltation' occurred in the vernal equinox, his point of weakness was the autumn equinox ('Gates', p. 137). If she is correct, our writer has, in 5:31, once again reversed the 'anticipated image', introducing the weak left hand, as it were, where the right hand of strength is advertised. Given that the Scales were known as the 'star of truth' (Kurtik, *Zvezdnoye nebo*, p. 153), this would be particularly ironic.

135   The Scales were the star of Shamash, literally 'the house of Shamash' (Reiner, *Astral Magic*, p. 141; also pp. 4, 10; Kurtik, *Zvezdnoye nebo*, p. 604).

136   Huxley, 'Gates', p. 116.

137   Ibid., p. 132; Langdon, *Menologies*, p. 99. One of the names given to the constellation is *dīnum*, 'judicial decision, sentence' (Kurtik, *Zvezdnoye nebo*, p. 107). The Kabbalistic understanding of *gᵊbûrāh* is of judgment and death (see Chapter 2), and thus equates to the esoteric meaning of Judg. 5:31.

138   Douglas states that the structure of Numbers parallels the structure of the year, remarking that it is appropriate in a theological work for the structure of creation to be intimated (*Wilderness*, pp. 115–16). Moreover, It is characteristic of our author to allude to the cultic context in which he was writing – one in which the hosts of heaven were worshipped in Yahweh's temple and divination widely practised – by inserting astrological allusions in his narrative.

139   The changes have been substantial. For details, see Nothaft, *Jewish Calendar*, pp. 20–33. However, the coordinates on which the Jewish calendar in use today is based refer to a meridian in Babylonia, as in the SMC.

use in Judaism today; it was the calendrical system applied throughout the Assyrian empire and its vassal territories.[140] The aligning of 5:31/6:1 with the equinoctial point places the female judge menologically in the month dedicated to, and associated with, Ishtar, the only female divinity identified with a month.[141] Jastrow states: 'The sixth month – marking the division of the year into two halves – is connected with the goddess Ishtar'.[142] In other words, in the SMC, Ishtar's month falls in sixth position out of twelve,[143] commensurate with Deborah's place in the series of major judges as third of six.[144] Deborah, who proclaims the sun as 'hero', is the sole female judge-hero in the book; Ishtar among Mesopotamian goddesses possesses the epithet 'hero': 'there is one woman, a hero' (in a text referring to Ishtar).[145] She is also a judge.[146] Craigie observes the similarity between Deborah singing in battle and Ishtar's musical role in warfare reflected in the Tukulti-Ninurta epic: 'Ishtar smote her lyre which drove their warriors mad'.[147] As Deborah is introduced by seven feminine descriptors, so Ishtar 'who is the sum of all that is female', 'lays claim to seven names'.[148] The analogies between the two are manifold, as the image displayed in the Neo-Assyrian cylinder seal, BM 89769, approximately contemporary with Manasseh's reign (and which provides the present book's

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140   Some scholars hold that the Israelites were exposed to the Mesopotamian calendrical convention only during the Babylonian exile (see James Schneer, *The Jewish Calendar and the Torah*, [the author], 2013, p. 19). This underplays the need that existed for a standardized hemerological system throughout the Neo-Assyrian empire as a prerequisite for its efficient functioning.

141   Cohen, *Cultic Calendars*, pp. 323–24.

142   *Aspects*, p. 237; Cohen, *Cultic Calendars*, pp. 10, 322; Langdon, *Menologies*, pp. 126–29.

143   The sixth month, Ululu, is termed by Assurbanipal '(the month of greatest effectiveness) of the goddesses' (Piepkorn, *Inscriptions*, p. 65); by Nabonidus, 'the month of the work of goddesses' (Reiner, *Astral Magic*, p. 76).

144   Apropos, in terms of the Gilgamesh epic, Ishtar figures most strongly in Tablet VI. That a relationship exists between the twelve tablets of the epic and the months of the year has long been observed (Jastrow, *Aspects*, p. 238). The division of *Gilgamesh* into twelve tablets is one of its few features that were universally observed in its transmission in the Neo-Assyrian-Neo-Babylonian period (Tigay, *Gilgamesh*, p. 138).

145   *CAD* Q, 1982, p. 313.

146   'May the great, wise judge Ishtar exclude him' (M.J. Geller, 'A Middle Assyrian Tablet of Utukkū Lemnūtu', *Iraq* 42 [1980], pp. 23–51 [23, 32, 34, 39]). She is praised as 'you [who] render final judgment and decision' (Reiner and Güterbock, 'Hymn', p. 259).

147   'Song', p. 260. On Ishtar and music-making, see the 'Hymn to the City of Arbela' ll. 12–16 (Livingstone, *Court Poetry*, p. 22).

148   Tallqvist, *Götterepitheta*, pp. 331, 334.

frontispiece) witnesses. Like Ishtar, Deborah is found under a sacred palm.[149] In fact, Deborah's association with the palm may have been more symbolic than real, since 'a palm tree at that altitude may be growing metaphorically'.[150] The position of Deborah's palm tree at the Axis Mundi, the intersection of the south-north, east-west, and earth-heaven axes, recalls the description of Ishtar-Inanna:[151] 'You are known by your heaven-like height, you are known by your earth-like breadth'.[152] Like Deborah metaphorically, Ishtar is accompanied by mountain goats/a *jael* that faces in two directions.[153] Deborah is directing military operations; Ishtar is attired for battle, equipped with bow, arrows, and sword.[154] The portrayal of Ishtar having mastery over the recumbent lion,[155] an animal which, in one text, is termed 'the dog of Ishtar',[156] recalls the other occurrence of *dᵊbôrāh* in Judges: as the bee swarm that dominates the lion. As mentioned above, Ishtar as 'goddess of destiny and omens' was particularly

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149　Jacobsen claims that Ishtar's Sumerian name, Inanna (from Ninanna(k)), originally conveyed 'Lady of the Date Clusters' (*Treasures*, p. 36); Porter, 'Sacred Trees', p. 138. In a Neo-Assyrian hymn, she is 'the goddess of the palm tree' (Pauline Albenda, 'Assyrian Sacred Trees in the Brooklyn Museum', *Iraq*, pp. 123–33 [132]). See also Stephanie Dalley, 'Nineveh, Babylon and the Hanging Gardens', *Iraq* 56 (1994), pp. 45–58 (52). The cylinder seal shows the palm with abundant dates.

150　Boling, *Judges*, p. 91.

151　In Assurbanipal's 'Hymn to Ishtar of Nineveh', the king invokes her as 'O palm tree' (Livingstone, *Court Poetry*, p. 18). Parpola (*Assyrian Prophecies*, p. xxxiv) states that a symbol of Ishtar is a stylized date palm growing on a rock (also p. xcv). Geller considers that the following, from an incantation text, likewise refers to the goddess: 'The mighty date palm with heroic strength, stands in the furrow of a pure place, its might reaching to heaven' ('Tablet', pp. 35, 40).

152　*ANET*, pp. 130–31.

153　Hrouda remarks that the image of a goat-like animal before a palm is an ancient motif. He maintains that it symbolizes the Inanna and Dumuzi myth (Addendum to Haller, *Gräber*, p. 184).

154　A *šabrû* relayed to Assurbanipal a dream he received in which 'Ishtar dwelling in Arbela entered, and right and left she bore quivers; she held a bow in her hand; she unsheathed a sharp sword for battle' (Piepkorn, *Inscriptions*, p. 67).

155　*Dictionnaire de la civilisation mésopotamienne*, p. 474. In Kalḫu, Ishtar's image was mounted on a lion statue (Cole and Machinist, *Letters*, p. 54, text 59). Although the animal on which she is shown standing in BM 89769 may, perhaps, be a panther, Ishtar is represented with lions from the third millennium (Nanette B. Rodney, 'Ishtar, the Lady of Battle' [www accessed 28 December 2015]; Albenda, 'Plaque', pp. 179–80; Livingstone, *Court Poetry*, p. 22. Note the Late-Agade-period cylinder seal of Ishtar, bristling with weapons, seated on a lion throne in Frankfort, *Cylinder Seals*, seal 674.

156　*CAD* N/2, 1980, p. 194.

associated with prophetic utterance;[157] Deborah is the sole named prophet in Judges. Deborah directs the battle from the height of Mount Tabor (4:6–14); Ishtar dwells 'on the peaks of the bright mountains'.[158] The parallels are so close, it is as if the writer of Judges modelled major elements of the Deborah story on Ishtar's contemporary iconography.[159] He did not need to look far to find it: as we have noted, the cult of Ishtar in its astral aspect was very probably present in the Jerusalem temple during the reigns of Manasseh and Amon. Moreover, it was strongly in evidence nearby in Samaria too through the incoming population from Babylonia.[160] Like the *dᵊbôrāh*, Ishtar is often depicted with wings.[161]

Before exploring the meaning of the author's paralleling of Yahweh's female champion with Mesopotamia's premier goddess, it will be useful to consider the implications of the SMC playing a role in the structuring of Judges, and indeed the wider matter of correspondences between Israelite heroes and prohibited Mesopotamian deities. The first question that it prompts is whether the association of Deborah with the sixth month has analogues in the correlation of other major judges with specific months.[162] This is not straightforward. The interrelationship of Mesopotamian gods is highly complex. Over

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157 Tallqvist, *Götterepitheta*, p. 336; Martti Nissinen, 'Prophecy and Omen Divination', in *Divination*, ed. by Annus, pp. 341–51 (344); Réka Esztári and Ádám Vér, 'Próféizmus az Újasszír Birodalom korában', *Axis* II/1 (2013), pp. 7–32 (9).

158 Lapinkivi, *Myth*, p. 40.

159 As with several of the most prominent Mesopotamian gods, the main features of Ishtar's iconography remained remarkably constant for well over a millennium, until ca 550 BC (Dominique Collon, *The Queen of the Night*, London: British Museum Press, 2005, p. 43). Compare the Neo-Assyrian cylinder seal representation of the goddess with the beautiful fresco in the royal palace at Mari (André Parrot, 'Les peintures du palais de Mari', *Syria* 18 [1937], pp. 325–54 [335–42; Pl. XXXIX]), painted a thousand years before, in which she stands upon a lion, fully armed. In the background is an abundantly fruiting date palm.

160 In addition, the existence of the settlement of Beth-arbel in the northern kingdom, mentioned by Hosea (10:14), suggests an incoming population from Arbela (Burney, *Judges*, p. 43). Besides, the worship of Ishtar in the south-eastern Mediterranean region had traditions dating to at least 1600 BC (Kapelrud, *Violent Goddess*, p. 24).

161 Lapinkivi, *Myth*, p. 38; note Briggs Buchanan, 'An Extraordinary Seal Impression of the Third Dynasty of Ur', *JNES* 31 (1972), pp. 96–101 (100).

162 It is perhaps significant that astrologically the sixth month is associated, through the Raven star, with the storm god Adad whose iconic symbol, the lightning bolt, is *bārāq* in Hebrew, recalling the name of Deborah's companion in the battle (Reiner, *Astral Magic*, pp. 78–79; Stevens, 'Iškur/Adad'; Kurtik, *Zvezdnoye nebo*, pp. 557–60, 720; Dominique Collon, *First Impressions*, London: British Museum Publications, 1987, pp. 133–34, 172–75; Edith Porada, 'On the Origins of "Aquarius"', in Rochberg-Halton (ed.), *Language, Literature*, pp. 279–91 [280]).

time, gods superseded one another, or acquired others' attributes and/or epithets.[163] This difficulty is compounded by the Neo-Assyrian practice of using different names for the months from those established in the SMC, out of the hostility towards the Babylonians evinced particularly by Sennacherib.[164]

Where there appears to be considerable certainty is in the association of the ninth month with the chthonic god, Nergal. 'According to Assyrian Astrolabe B the month of Kissilimu was known as the month of Nergal'.[165] The cult of Nergal, as the divinity represented by one of the most important hosts of heaven (Mars) in the Mesopotamian astrological framework, as well as the object of the especial devotion of the incoming population from Cuthah to Samaria, was, therefore, prevalent in the environment of Judah in the time of Manasseh and Amon. For all these reasons, this god invites investigation through the lens of Judges.

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In a framework in which Deborah, as the third major judge, is aligned with the sixth month that concludes with the autumn equinox, Samson, the sixth major judge would be aligned with the ninth month, the month of Nergal, ending with the winter solstice. We have seen, however, that Samson, by dint of his name and the mystic signification of the number twenty with which he is associated, would appear to have a connection with Shamash rather than with Nergal.[166] Apparent links between Shamash and Samson have attracted extensive discussion in the exegetical literature on Samson for more than a century. Some proposals are more convincing than others.[167] One which, to my knowledge, is not found elsewhere is the visual resemblance between the implements they wield. In Mesopotamian iconography, Shamash 'often brandishes his distinctive pruning saw, which has an arc-shaped blade with jagged

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163 Jacobsen, *Treasures*, p. 234; Lambert, *Literature*, p. 4; Jastrow, *Aspects*, p. 237; Cohen, *Cultic Calendars*, p. 9; Joan Goodnick Westenholtz, 'Tamar, *Qĕdēšā, Qadištu*', *Harvard Theological Review* 82 (1989), pp. 245–65 (251).

164 Cohen, *Cultic Calendars*, p. 298.

165 Ibid., pp. 333–34.

166 Moreover, Samson's enemies are associated with thirty: thirty wedding guests, who give rise to a triplet of thirty: thirty items of clothing and thirty murdered Ashqelonites (compare Brettler, *Judges*, p. 50). In Assyrian terms, this image suggests a conflict of day versus night.

167 Moore, *Judges*, p. 365; Burney, *Judges*, pp. 392–408; Gray, *Joshua, Judges*, pp. 234–35; Crenshaw, *Samson*, pp. 15–16.

teeth; this he uses to cut his way through the mountains, and, metaphorically, to cut decisions in his court of law'.[168] Samson's only reported weapon is an ass's jawbone. The similarity between the two instruments is illustrated by the Greek myth, according to which the invention of the saw by Talos was a result of him experimenting with the jawbone of a serpent as a cutting tool.[169]

These parallels with Shamash could suggest that Samson's identification with him is sufficiently robust that no countervailing claim for a Samson-Nergal connection need be entertained. This would be acceptable were it not for three facts. The first is that it would misunderstand Samson's function vis-à-vis Shamash. Precisely as intended also in the treatment of *šemeš* in the text, the role is, through asymmetric caricature, to expose his cult as specious. The order and rule allegedly brought by Shamash are, his near namesake reveals, in reality disorder and anarchy; the light he offers is, actually, darkness; his power to blind is spurious: he himself is blind.[170] Shamash, as appointer of Assyrian kings, is not a life-giver but a death-bringer. Just as the sun proves to be a false hero in the Deborah narrative, so the characterisation of the judge of Dan provides a mordant critique of 'hero Shamash'. He is hollow. The second fact is that Nergal is an aspect of Shamash,[171] actually, his negative aspect, that is, he represents the sun's destructive power,[172] as well as the setting sun.[173] The third is that it turns out that the correspondence between Nergal and Samson is at least as close as that between Ishtar and Deborah. This is unsurprising: the writer appears concerned to project the most negative and destructive associations on the solar cult.

Before considering the similarities between Nergal and Samson, one must not forget that, as is general in the Hebrew Bible, the Judges writer eschews the use of the more fantastic tropes of mythical literature, like, for example, ogres,

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168   *DANE*, p. 264. See also Frankfort, *Cylinder Seals*, pp. 36, 40–41; Collon, *First Impressions*, pp. 166–67; Black and Green, *Gods*, pp. 183–84; *CAD* Š/2, 1992, p. 175; Buchanan, 'Seal', p. 101. In judicial proceedings, the saw of Shamash was used for swearing in witnesses (Dalley, 'Ṣalmu', p. 92).

169   Graves, *Greek Myths*, p. 290. Guillaume (*Waiting*, p. 184) notes a resemblance between the jawbone and a representation of Ninurta's sickle sword.

170   Compare Ps. 115:4–5: 'Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths but do not speak. They have eyes but do not see'.

171   Tallqvist, *Götterepitheta*, p. 389.

172   'In Cuthah [the sun deity] was known as Nergal, in Larsa and Sippar as […] Shamash' (Jastrow, *Aspects*, p. 106); *Mesopotamiya*, ed. by D'yakonov, p. 281; Yuri Stoyanov, *The Other God*, New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2000, p. 44.

173   Kurtik, *Zvezdnoye nebo*, p. 372.

monsters, demonic *Mischwesen*, and wayward gods and goddesses.[174] That said, his composition draws strongly on Mesopotamian topoi; most prominently those of, on the one hand, heroes divinely raised up and empowered to combat fierce enemies, and, on the other, a nation abandoned to destruction by its god due to its failure to provide him with devotion. To square the circle between the borrowing characteristic of an author schooled in Mesopotamian literary traditions,[175] and a theologically motivated dismissal of the conventional stylization of some of the subject matter, he dresses these beings in a more 'natural', almost mundane, guise. By doing so, he re-tells essentially the same stories in a way that makes them superficially appear distinct, as we shall observe particularly in his adaptation of parts of *Gilgamesh*.

The Assyrian Astrolabe B reads: 'The month *Kissilimu*, an abundant yield will be heaped up, the mighty hero, Nergal, who has risen from the netherworld, the over-whelming weapon of the two gods, the month of the hero, the noble Nergal'. Cohen adds that in this month in late first millennium BC Uruk the Brazier Festival was celebrated widely in the temples of the gods.[176] Four features shared by Samson are already evident from this brief quotation from Astrolabe B. First, Nergal is a hero used as a divine weapon against heaven's foes. Like Samson, Nergal's principal attribute is physical might,[177] and they are both designated judge. In a tablet recording Assurbanipal's restoration of Nergal's temple in Cuthah, the god is praised as the 'perfect hero, strongest among the gods, [...] king of battle, lord of strength and force'.[178] The second is that Samson is not only recorded as going into the earth accompanied by his victims, but is also the one who comes up from the place of death (albeit to be buried elsewhere). To this must be added that the extreme west, as stated

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174   Mellor (ed.), *Making*, pp. 8, 46–47; compare Paul Kriwaczek, *Babylon*, London: Atlantic Books, 2010, p. 113.

175   These were traditions in which 'writers drew extensively upon [...] topoi, motifs, groups of lines, and episodes, which had their original settings in other compositions' (Tigay, *Gilgamesh*, p. 162). Conformity with the traditions lent credibility to literary creations. The culture of recapitulating existing forms led directly to the use of parallelism as a literary device, a device richly exploited in Judges. On the veneration that traditional forms were accorded in Neo-Assyria, see Richardson, 'On Seeing', p. 237.

176   Symptomatic of the difficulties in matching Babylonian calendrical practice with Assyrian, it is possible that in Assyria, in some periods, the Brazier Festival was held in the following month (Cohen, *Cultic Calendars*, p. 335).

177   'King of Might' (Tallqvist, *Götterepitheta*, p. 390). Esarhaddon describes Nergal as 'the almighty, [...] the Enlil of the vast underworld' (Leichty, *Esarhaddon*, p. 104, text 48.10).

178   Ponchia and Luukko, *Nergal*, p. liv.

above, marked the domain of Nergal (and Ereshkigal);[179] Nergal is called 'king of the entrance to the Underworld'.[180] The third is the reference to the 'abundant yield heaped up'. In Samson's joyous victory song, based on a pun that exploits the homophony in Hebrew between the term for 'ass' and 'heap' (*ḥᵃmôr*) for its effect, he exults with the words 'a heap, two heaps, with an ass's jawbone I slew a thousand men' (15:16). Whatever the nature of the abundant yield in Astrolabe B, Nergal's customary harvest-heap resembles Samson's for he is 'the god of inflicted death'.[181] Moreover, unexpectedly, Nergal also possessed a joyful aspect.[182] Finally, Nergal's month ushers in the darkest period in the year, and the fires lit at the Brazier Festival celebrate this.[183] Alter describes Samson as:

> associated with a verbal and imagistic motif of fire [...]. The various cords that fail to bind him are likened to flax dissolving in fire when he snaps them with his strength (Judg. 15:14). The thirty Philistine men threaten his first wife with death by fire if she does not obtain for them the answer to Samson's riddle (Judg. 14:15). When Samson is discarded as a husband by the action of his first father-in-law, he responds by tying torches to the tails of foxes and setting the Philistine fields on fire (Judg. 15:4–5). The immediate reaction of the Philistines is to make a roaring bonfire out of the household of Samson's recent wife [...] By the time we get to the captive Samson bringing down the temple of Dagon [...], though there is no actual fire in this climactic scene, fire has become a metonymic image of Samson himself: a blind, uncontrolled force, leaving

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179   His planetary manifestation, Mars, 'makes decisions for the West' (Borger, *Asarh.*, p. 2). Mars is the star of the Westland (Hunger, *Reports*, p. 219, text 383). Already in the late-third-millennium Gudea cylinders (Cylinder A XXV–XXVI), the association between the West and the Underworld is reflected. Of the six gates he creates for the temple, the only gate that faces west is named 'Façade towards the City, the Dread Place' (Wolfgang Heimpel, 'The Gates of Eninnu', *JCS* 48 [1996], pp. 17–29 [24–25]).

180   Tallqvist, *Götterepitheta*, p. 391.

181   *RLA* 9, p. 221; Yağmur Heffron, 'Nergal (god)', *AMGG*, 2013 [http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/amgg/listofdeities/nergal/accessed 28 December 2015]. In a Sumerian royal hymn, Nergal is invoked to 'pile up [the king's] malefactors in heaps' (Ponchia and Luukko, *Nergal*, p. xxiv).

182   In Babylon there was even a street called 'Nergal of Joy' (ibid., pp. xvii, li). Note the Neo-Assyrian personal name Nergal-kuzub-ilāni, 'Nergal is the most attractive of the gods' (*PNA*, p. 949).

183   Langdon (*Menologies*, p. 37) describes the festival's main features as the carrying of torches and lights, and the offering of sacrifices to chthonic gods.

a terrible swath of destruction behind it, finally consuming itself together with whatever stands in its way.[184]

Nergal as the destructive aspect of the solar deity is seen in the sun's power to burn up crops and lay landscapes waste, causing famine and pestilence. Nergal is, in fact, a good example of a composite god as he absorbed the deity, Erra, 'originally seemingly an Akkadian god of "scorched earth," raids and riots', into his existing role as god of war and sudden death and ruler of the realm of the dead.[185] Nergal/Erra is synonymous with sexual potency, was perceived as the divine trickster, possessing the epithets 'King of Tricks' (*Lugal-galamma*), 'cunning in tricks' (*uzun nikilti*),[186] and is linked with the fox – ' the fox that comes out howling is Nergal'[187] – not least astronomically.[188] He is 'the lord who prowls by night'.[189] In the Erra myth, Erra claims 'I shall cut off the garment from a man's body [...]. I shall make the young man go down into the earth unshrouded. [...] When I am enraged, I devastate people'. Of the god it is said, 'Warrior Erra [...] you have put to death the man who sinned against you, you have put to death the man who did not sin against you'.[190]

When these details of Nergal/Erra are compared with the Samson tale, the correspondence between the two characters is plain. Samson's libido requires no comment. Niditch defines him as 'a trickster hero',[191] an aspect of his character she finds demonstrated particularly in his riddles and his treatment of the gates of Gaza.[192] Samson's scorched-earth attack on the Philistines' wheat fields,[193] vineyards and olive groves is effected through foxes. Indeed, in his

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184   *Narrative*, pp. 94–95.

185   Jacobsen, *Treasures*, p. 237; also Dalley, *Myths*, rev. edn, p. 282.

186   Simo Parpola (personal communication).

187   From the 'Rites of Egašankalamma' l. 37 (Livingstone, *Court Poetry*, p. 97). Note also E. Douglas Van Buren, 'Mesopotamian Fauna in the Light of the Monuments', *AfO* 11 (1936–37), pp. 1–37 (18).

188   Parpola, 'Tree', p. 180; Dalley, *Myths*, rev. edn, p. 295; Kurtik, *Zvezdnoye nebo*, pp. 239–41.

189   Dalley, *Myths*, rev. edn, p. 285.

190   Ibid., pp. 299, 307.

191   Gillmayr-Bucher, borrowing the term from Bakhtin, sees him as a 'carnival king' ('Framework', p. 700).

192   Niditch, 'Samson as Culture Hero, Trickster', p. 609; see also Gunn, *Judges*, pp. 229–30; Melissa A. Jackson, *Comedy and Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 122.

193   Langdon (*Menologies*, pp. 120–21) notes that on the 17th of Tammuz, following the wheat harvest, there was a torchlight procession culminating in the king making an offering to Nergal.

retributive schemes against them he appears vulpine in his cunning. His asso-
ciation with fire complements his connection with darkness noted above. Of
all the judges, he most readily suggests the darkness of the winter solstice.[194]
His murder of the thirty innocent Ashqelonites and the theft of their garments
is a topos from the Erra myth. Likewise, his penchant for spending time in
bed with his Timnite bride and, later, Delilah recall Erra's preference, as the
poem begins, for making love with his wife and sleeping rather than execut-
ing his divine role of devastating enemies.[195] The consequence of Erra failing
to carry out his duties in this way invited attacks on his land, a land which
he was responsible to protect.[196] Machinist contends that a thematic interplay
between destruction and rest is central to the Erra myth and it is expressed
principally through the counterpoint of Erra and his vizier Ishum.[197] An analo-
gous dynamic is seen in the Samson section through the interaction between
its hero and Manoah who, in addition to possessing a name that means 'place
of rest', seeks to dissuade Samson from involvement with the Philistines (14:3),
an involvement that goes on to generate the cycle of destruction.[198]

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194   On this basis, the author may have furnished an elaborate bicultural pun. The Philistines
        credited their god Dagon with Samson's capture (16:23). Formerly, exegetes believed Dagon
        to be a fish-god because of the similarity between his name, *Dāgôn*, and the Hebrew term
        for fish *dāg* (*BhH* 1, p. 311). Indeed, morphologically Dagon's name seems to bear the same
        relationship to 'fish' as Samson's does to 'sun'. The Mesopotamian protective deities, the
        'Fish-Men', were, according to Huxley, the sun's attendants and gate-guardians at the time
        of the winter solstice ('Gates', pp. 123, 126–28). To compound the possible cross-referenc-
        ing between Samson, Nergal and Dagon-Dagan (Noth, *Old Testament World*, pp. 293, 295),
        as noted, Nergal is called 'the Enlil of the netherworld' (Tallqvist, *Götterepitheta*, p. 390; on
        the relationship between Nergal and Enlil, see Ponchia and Luukku, *Nergal*, p. xvi). Enlil
        is identified with Dagan (Litke, *God Lists*, p. 42; W.G. Lambert, 'Enmeduranki and Related
        Matters', *JCS* 21 [1967], pp. 126–38 [131]; Parpola, 'Precursors', p. 186). Finally, Dagan appears
        as an Underworld judge with Nergal in an Assyrian poem (Black and Green, *Gods*, p. 56).
195   *Erra and Ishum* ll. 15–20; Tigay, *Gilgamesh*, p. 213. Compare Mobley, 'Wild Man', pp. 225–26.
196   Machinist, 'Rest', pp. 222, 225.
197   Ibid., pp. 223–25.
198   Their contrapuntal relationship is also evident in their respective invocations of Yahweh
        found in the cycle's opening and closing sections. Whereas Manoah entreats 'the Lord'
        regarding preparation for a future event – the birth of the promised child (13:8) – Samson's
        final invocation concerns the settling of an old score – his blinding (16:28). The third
        entreaty in the tale, which comes between them, balances the two. It is Samson's petition
        for divine provision of water; a present exigency (15:18). All three, in different ways, have
        as their subject Samson being miraculously brought to life: 'and he came to life' (15:19).

The Philistines describe Samson as 'the *waster* of our country, who *wasted* our slain' (16:24).[199] One also encounters the root *ḥrb* used here, in the series of words that signify dryness, drought, and, in Job 30:30, fever.[200] The Akkadian cognate *ḫarābu* means 'to lay waste' and its related form *ḫuribtu* conveys 'desert, uninhabited place'.[201] In Mesopotamian thought, it was from such locations that sicknesses (brought by demons under Nergal's control) came,[202] and among Nergal's epithets is 'King of the Wasteland'.[203] To the Mesopotamian mind, the wilderness and the Underworld are synonymous from a mythological perspective.[204] The description used by the Philistines for Samson could apply unchanged to Nergal, the divinity responsible for the wasting effects of war, plague and famine.[205] Finally, just as Nergal denotes the setting sun, so Samson marks the setting of Yahweh's series of heroes through his death at the western extremity of the promised land.

The correspondences between Samson and Nergal-Erra are, therefore, so close and numerous to preclude the possibility of coincidence. As noted above, the Erra myth was widely copied in the Neo-Assyrian period,[206] and would certainly have been known to a writer as familiar with Mesopotamian literary compositions as the author of Judges. In his treatment of another widespread Mesopotamian myth, *Nergal and Ereshkigal*, we find further

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199   Compare the following from the VTE: 'May Nergal, the warrior among the gods, […] plant carnage and pestilence among you' (*ANET*, p. 64).

200   Indeed, it is found with this sense in the Samson segment itself: 'If they bind me with seven new (or moist) cords that were never *dried*, then shall I be weak/sick' (16:7). In Isa. 37:11, 18, 25/2 Kgs 19:12, 17, 24, it is used to describe the 'wasting' effected by Assyrian kings on enemy lands and by their 'drying up' rivers supplying besieged cities.

201   *CAD* H, 1956, pp. 87, 251.

202   Cohen, *Cultic Calendars*, p. 6; Tallqvist, *Götterepitheta*, p. 395. According to an incantation, demons throw disease 'from house to house like fire' (Geller, 'Tablet', p. 36).

203   Tallqvist, *Götterepitheta*, p. 390.

204   Wiggermann, 'Agriculture', p. 678.

205   *Ḥereb*, literally 'waster', is the Hebrew for 'sword'. The sword, actually the lion scimitar, was both a symbol and an enduring epithet of Nergal (*RLA* 9, p. 225; Ponchia and Luukko, *Nergal*, pp. xxiii, xxvi, xxix, xxxii–xxxiii, xlii). In the VTE, Nergal is invoked 'to extinguish your life with his merciless sword' (ll. 455–56 [http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/saao/saao2/P336598 accessed 28 December 2015]). The use of *ḥrb* in the Samson narrative might be another instance of an elaborate bilingual, bicultural pun. The name of the god is frequently given logographically as ᵈU.GUR ('Destroy!') (e.g., Leichty, *Esarhaddon*, pp. 13, 47, texts 1.i.59; 6.i.5 et passim), and refers to Nergal's sword (*RLA* 9, p. 220). In an Old Babylonian cylinder seal representation of Nergal, his scimitar strongly resembles an ass's jawbone (Black and Green, *Gods*, p. 19).

206   See also Cooley, 'Šulpae', p. 179.

alignment between the god and the Samson tale. Nergal's libidinous repu-
tation derives in no small part from this myth.[207] The relationship between
Nergal and the Queen of the Underworld, Ereshkigal,[208] raises the question
whether, given Samson's resemblance to Nergal, his inamoratas might bear a
relationship to Ereshkigal.[209] To both the Timnite and Delilah, Samson travels
downwards. Indeed, his first recorded action is 'going down' to Timnah (14:1;
16:4). It is also striking that Samson spends seven days with the Timnite and
then leaves Philistia to 'go up to his father's house' (14:19). After seven days
and nights of passion with Ereshkigal, Nergal ascended 'to Anu [his] father'.[210]
The place-name Timnah derives from *mānāh* 'to count, reckon'; the site of the
riddle contest, Timnah serves as a place of reckoning.[211] Just as Nergal returned
to Ereshkigal in Erkallu, the city of the dead, on a more permanent basis, so
Samson, in the Delilah episode, went down again to Philistia from which
he would not depart alive.[212] We noted in Chapter 1 that the word 'honey'
provides an inclusio around the episode of Samson's wedding. There is another
lexeme that bears the same function: *gᵊdî*, 'goat-kid'. Samson rends the roaring
lion as though it were a kid on his way to arrange the nuptials; after their abrupt
end and his enraged departure from his wife, he returns to make amends with

207   Dalley, *Myths*, rev. edn, p. 177.

208   See George, *Gilgamesh*, p. 490.

209   Gray supposes a connection between Delilah and Ishtar (*Joshua, Judges*, p. 357).

210   *Nergal and Ereshkigal* ll. 245–61 (Ponchia and Luukko, *Nergal*, p. 28). Samson's way to the
       Timnite is barred by a lion which he must despatch. Huxley posits that the chief gate-
       keeper of the Underworld, Biddu(/Nedu) was a lion demon, the *ugallu*, associated with
       Shamash ('Gates', pp. 128–33). Frankfort (*Cylinder Seals*, p. 46, seal 906) tentatively iden-
       tifies the two gods accompanied by the *ugallu* in an Old Babylonian seal as Nergal and
       Ereshkigal (note also seal 907). On the *ugallu*, figurines of which were concealed in door-
       ways in the Neo-Assyrian period to provide magic protection, see Anthony Green, 'Neo-
       Assyrian Apotropaic Figures', *Iraq* 45 (1983), pp. 87–96 (90–91, 95).

211   Compare Isa. 65:12 'I will reckon you (itself a pun on the god of fate, *Mᵊnî*, cited in the pre-
       vious verse [*BDB*, p. 584]) to the sword'. Note also the reckoning of Belshazzar (Aramaic
       mᵊnēʾ) as one found wanting (Dan. 5:25–26), and Assyrian *manû*, e.g., 'when there is
       counting in heaven and the netherworld' (*CAD* M/1, 1971, p. 221).

212   Samson's complex relationship with the grave mirrors Nergal's with the Underworld.
       On the one hand, Nergal becomes its permanent lord; on the other, he remains for part of
       the year a celestial deity (see below). Samson dies and is buried under the rubble of Gaza
       and the corpses of his victims. But he is raised from his place of death and returned to his
       place of origin to be buried in the tomb of his father.

the gift of a *gᵊdî* (14:6; 15:1). In Neo-Assyrian texts, the prescribed sacrifice to placate Ereshkigal for those subject to her ire is a goat-kid.[213]

Commentators, comparing lexical material from other languages, have advanced a number of suggestions for the meaning of Delilah's name. None is persuasive. The idea proposed by both Klein and Webb that, through near-homophony, *dᵊlîlāh* has a connection with the Hebrew term *lâlāh* 'night' is more convincing, not least because this word is used four times in rapid succession in the two verses that precede the first citation of her name (16:2–3).[214] Aurally, it is difficult to miss the correspondence. Moreover, hers is a 'Hebrew-sounding name'.[215] Klein remarks that as a result of his involvement with Delilah, Samson 'becomes both physically and figuratively a captive of night in blindness'.[216] This proposal, however, does not account for the initial syllable of her name. Again, 16:2 may provide a clue: ויקם בחצי הלילה ויאחז בדלתות (h*lylāh* – b*dltôth* 'and he arose at mid*night* and he laid hold of the *doors*'),[217] viz., to mean 'door or gate of night'.[218] The poetic term *dāl* for 'door' exists in biblical Hebrew (Ps. 141:3), alongside its much more common cognate *deleth*. Employing this form, 'door of night' would appear as *dl lylh*, Delilah as *dlylh*.[219] The notion that the name Delilah is to be understood as 'door of night' gains credence when the role played by seven in Judges is analysed. I have already mentioned the seven cultic alternatives to Yahweh to which the Israelites adhered, and the seven stages of the resultant descending spiral of apostasy marked by the phrase 'Israel did what was evil in Yahweh's sight'. Uniquely in

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213   Haller, *Gräber*, p. 184; Ponchia and Luukko, *Nergal*, p. lxxxvii. On the ritual 'A substitute for the goddess Ereshkigal', in which a virgin kid is killed and buried as surrogate for someone gravely ill, see *LAS I*, pp. 110–11, text 140. This ritual was carried out on behalf of Esarhaddon for the sick Assurbanipal (see *LAS II*, p. 127, for commentary).

214   Its use shows a 2+2 arrangement. Twice it is found in the phrase 'all night' when the Philistines provide the subject, and twice as 'half of the night', that is, midnight, with Samson as subject. This is significant: Samson is active at the midpoint of darkness. Applied to the annual solar cycle, this is the winter solstice.

215   Webb, *Judges*, p. 399.

216   Klein, *Triumph*, p. 119; Webb, *Judges*, p. 398. Both list definitions offered by other scholars for the meaning of 'Delilah'; see also Butler, *Judges*, p. 249.

217   Note the Sumerian hymn: 'O Nergal, mighty one, […] that comes by night, for whom the bolted doors open of themselves' (Langdon, *Menologies*, p. 138).

218   For doors as a sexual metaphor, see Miller, 'Verbal Feud', p. 111. This is a sense well attested in Akkadian, too, where *bābu* can refer to vagina or anus (*CAD* B, 1965, p. 24).

219   'Breaking names into their component parts in search of esoteric meanings hidden behind them was an interpretive technique widely practised in ancient Mesopotamia' (Parpola, 'Esoteric Meaning', p. 319).

7 causes of Israel's apostasy (given at Judg. 10:6)	7 stages of Israel doing evil in Yahweh's sight[a]	7 × door(s) *deleth* (6 pl., 1 sg.)	7 × gate *šaʿar* (sg.)
Baʿals	2:11	3:23	9:35
Ashtaroth	3:7	3:24	9:40
Gods of Syria[b]	3:12	3:25	9:44
Gods of Sidon[c]	4:1	11:31	16:2
Gods of Moab[d]	6:1	16:3 'the doors'	16:3 'of the gate'
Gods of the sons of Ammon	10:6	19:22 sg.	18:16
Gods of the Philistines[e]	13:1	19:27	18:17

a   It is not obvious why Fokkelman (*Reading*, p. 137) considers it a six-stage journey. Amit (*Judges*, pp. 44–45), on the other hand, identifies what she describes as the 'seven cycles' of transgression. The verses she cites differ from those listed here in one respect: she does not include 2:11 but, instead, gives 8:33–35. Moreover, she extends the sevenfold pattern to punishment cycles and to the number of major judges. She achieves the latter by including Tola in the group.

b   The Syro-Canaanite deity Reshep is identified with Nergal (*RLA* 9, p. 218; Hays, *Death*, p. 126). Like Nergal, he brought pestilence, and was associated with fire, the sun and the netherworld. He was worshipped in Syria from the third millennium BC, and was popular with the Aramaeans and the Phoenicians in the first millennium BC (*DANE*, p. 241). He was honoured in Beth-shemesh and Gaza, cities relevant to the Samson story, as well as in Canaanite Shechem (M. Dahood and G. Pettinato, 'Ugaritic *ršp gn*', *OrNS* 46 [1977], pp. 230–32 [231]).

c   In the Hebrew Bible, as in Homer, 'Sidonian' was used generically for the Phoenicians as a whole (Noth, *Israel*, p. 242; *BhH* 3, p. 1784; Cogan, 'Cross-Examining', pp. 59–60; Hackett, 'Judges', p. 155; Robin Lane Fox, *Travelling Heroes in the Epic Age of Homer*, New York: Vintage Books, 2010, p. 45 et passim). Note that the name of the patron deity of Tyre, Melqart, is a translation of the Sumerian Erakal/Nergal (Dalley, *Myths*, rev. edn, pp. 164, 177).

d   On Chemosh-Kemosh as a war-god, see McKay, *Religion*, p. 55.

e   The Philistines were renowned for divination (Isa. 2:6).

the Bible, in Judges the term 'door, gate of a city' (*deleth*/*daltôth*)[220] and the semantically related word *šaʿar* 'gate' (in the singular)[221] are each employed seven times.[222]

220   *BDB*, pp. 194–95.

221   There are two further citations of the noun *šaʿar*. However, in contrast to those listed, both bear the plural marker, both are unspecific in terms of location, and both occur in the Song of Deborah (5:8; 5:11). In the *Descent of Ishtar* and Nergal's descent to Erkallu, each of the gates through which they pass is a single gate.

222   Where all the columns converge is in the Samson story. The final items in the first two columns are connected respectively with Samson's death and birth. The third and fourth columns intersect in only one place – Samson's nocturnal transportation of the gates of Gaza

In the account both of Nergal's descent to the Underworld to confront Ereshkigal,[223] and of Ishtar thither, they pass through seven gates.[224] To reach the place of the dead they had to pass through the gate Ganzir. Ganzir is a Sumerian form rendered *bāb erṣeti* 'door of the Earth' in Akkadian.[225] Delilah's name is mentioned six times (as is Jael's). If the initial gate to the Underworld stood in the daylight – it appears as the 'Gate of Sunset'[226] – six were gates of night. In an Old Akkadian text, Ereshkigal is called 'lady of the place of sunset'.[227]

These features begin to suggest an association between Delilah and the realm of the dead. This impression is reinforced when the information the writer furnishes about Delilah is compared with our knowledge of the six

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to Hebron (16:3). Nergal appears to have possessed an apotropaic function with respect to gates. See also Georges Dossin, 'Prières aux "dieux de la nuit" (AO 6797)', *RA* 32 (1935), pp. 179–87 (180–81); Foster, 'Wisdom', p. 345. Nergal's astral manifestation, Mars, boasted 'seven names' including 'the Fox' (Ponchia and Luukko, *Nergal*, pp. xliii, xlvii, lxvi, lxxxii; Hunger and Pingree, *Astral Sciences*, p. 22; Cooley, 'Šulpae', p. 184).

223 In *Nergal and Ereshkigal*, each gate/gatekeeper to the netherworld has its own name (Dalley, *Myths*, rev. edn, pp. 170, 177; Ponchia and Luukko, *Nergal*, pp. 27, 50–52).

224 In Assyrian, *bābu* has the same fundamental meanings as *deleth*, i.e., 'opening, doorway, door, gate, entrance' (*CAD* B, 1965, p. 14). It can signify 'a cosmic locality' (p. 22) that includes the entrance to the Underworld ('Just as the dead cannot come back to life [lit. pass through the gate of life]' [p. 25]). Moreover, *deleth*'s Akkadian cognate, *daltu*, is used of the seven doors of the netherworld (*CAD* D, 1959, p. 55). One form of writing Nergal's name 'may recall the image of the door [...] (*daltu*)' (Ponchia and Luukko, *Nergal*, p. lxvi; *RLA* 9, p. 222).

225 A.R. George, 'Sennacherib and the Tablet of Destinies', *Iraq* 48 (1986), pp. 133–46 (136). On Ganzir, see Horowitz, *Geography*, pp. 269–70; *CAD* G, 1956, p. 43.

226 '[He set his min]d toward the "Gate of Sunset" ... eternal Nergal' (Horowitz, *Geography*, p. 280; see also Shalom M. Paul, 'The Gates of the Netherworld', in *A Woman of Valor*, ed. by Wayne Horowitz et al., Madrid: CSIC, 2010, pp. 163–70 [165]. For more direct references in the Hebrew Bible to the gates to the Underworld, see Paul, 'Gates', pp. 163–64). See also Ponchia and Luukko, *Nergal*, pp. 35, 47–48, regarding the sale of land at the gate of the Underworld and the existence of 'the outer gate'. Lapinkivi (*Myth*, pp. 43–44), observing that the distance between Ganzir and the depths of the netherworld is substantial, places the former at the 'border of the two worlds', and notes that the original gate Ganzir may have been in Uruk. The Mesopotamians employed the same terms for the earth and the Underworld (Horowitz, *Geography*, p. 268). It is therefore unsurprising that they did not have a uniform conception of the entrance to the Underworld. It is variously represented as reached by gates, stairways, pits, and/or watercourses, flowing or even dry. Scurlock considers that these operated sequentially ('Ghosts', p. 80), though this seems unlikely given their number. See Chapter 6.

227 Nikita Artemov, 'The Elusive Beyond', in Catherine Mittelmayer and Sabine Ecklin (eds), *Altorientalische Studien*, Fribourg: Academic Press, 2003, pp. 1–30 (21).

other significant females in the book. Whereas all of them are found either solely or partly out of doors (viz., Achsah, Deborah, Jael, Jephthah's daughter, Samson's mother, the Levite's concubine), and those who spend some time inside are linked with inflicted death,[228] Delilah is located only in a room, a room that is situated in the western marches of Israelite territory.[229] This place induces sleep in her victim, and contains concealed enemies. The fact that the Philistine(s) can hide in this chamber without detection implies its darkness (16:9, 12, 19). The account of Samson's blinding indicates that it took place in Delilah's room (16:21). Ereshkigal's habitation is known widely as 'the dark house, [...] where those who enter are deprived of light, [...] they see no light, they dwell in darkness'.[230] The negative association of indoors found in Judges is an aspect of the author's broader philosophy in which cities are perceived as places of evil.[231]

The similarities between Samson and Delilah/the Timnite and Nergal and Ereshkigal argue that the writer of Judges appropriated and reworked this Mesopotamian composition as part of his overall treatment of Samson as an expression of Nergal. In rendering it, however, the author subjects it to his customary techniques of doubling and mirror-imaging. The part of Ereshkigal is taken consecutively by two women, one of whom is killed by burning,[232] the other, almost certainly, goes down into the earth with Samson.[233] In the original, Nergal is made bald,[234] has an affliction of the eyes, and sits handicapped *before* his final encounter with the goddess.[235] When he meets her, it is she

228   It is difficult to make a case for Sisera's mother being a significant character in the composition. However, it is notable that she, who is only shown inside looking out, also has a connection with inflicted death.

229   Ereshkigal contrasts with Ishtar in that, while the latter is dynamic (Lapinkivi, *Myth*, p. 35), Ereshkigal is static (*DDD*, p. 852). She is confined to her realm.

230   Horowitz, *Geography*, p. 289; Dalley, *Myths*, rev. edn, p. 155; note Tigay, *Gilgamesh*, p. 126.

231   Miller, 'Verbal Feud', p. 112; compare Mobley, 'Wild Man', pp. 231–32. Our writer's position is the antithesis of that obtaining in Mesopotamia (and Egypt), and probably for similar reasons: these believed cities to be the residence of the gods (George, *Gilgamesh*, p. 466), and rural areas to be less closely associated with the gods (Richardson, 'On Seeing', pp. 250–51). The Philistines, too, were essentially city-dwellers (Faust, 'Philistia', p. 168).

232   Death by fire was the most common form of punishment for convicted witches in Mesopotamia. The Torah, on the other hand, prescribes stoning for witches and necromancers (Lev. 20:27).

233   While Nergal is god of inflicted death, Ereshkigal is goddess of death as unavoidable Fate (*RLA* 9, p. 221). Samson inflicted death on himself; the two women were unable to escape it.

234   Guillaume (*Waiting*, p. 196) notes this parallel between Samson and Nergal.

235   *Nergal and Ereshkigal* ll. 343–49 (Ponchia and Luukko, *Nergal*, pp. xciv, 28, 30, 56).

who falls in love, it is her hair that is seized, and it is he who overcomes her.[236] Furthermore, it is she who divulges the divine secret, 'the tablet containing all wisdom'.[237] As a result of her offering him the co-regency of Erkallu,[238] he agrees to abandon heaven and reside in the Underworld. Indeed, the inversion goes to the core of the myth's essence: Nergal's marriage to Ereshkigal yields cosmic equilibrium. Samson's relationship with the two women in Philistia, on the other hand, provides the dramatic confirmation of the failure of the major judges to establish order and provide lasting deliverance for Israel.

Ponchia and Luukko point to the importance of the theme of substitution in *Nergal and Ereshkigal*.[239] It is equally central to the Samson cycle, as indeed it is to many myths: a Philistine bride not an Israelite, thirty Ashqelonites murdered for thirty wedding guests, the substitution of the best man as husband, the offer of the younger sister as substitute bride, the Philistines' pledge not to attack the Judahites in return for Samson. As in the Mesopotamian myth, substitution is indissolubly connected to the idea of retaliation. Samson's bride is threatened with death unless she explains the riddle. She and her family are killed in response to Samson's actions. The plot of the Samson tale is developed within a descending spiral of retributive action. Both Samson and the Philistines justify their deeds as retaliatory: 'to do to him as he has done to us'; 'as they have done to me, so I have done to them' (15:10, 11). Indeed, so fundamental is substitution/retaliation to the episode that the Judahites introduce this exchange by asking Samson, who has consistently attacked only Philistine targets, 'what is this you are doing to us?'. Samson implores Yahweh to substitute his human weakness with divine strength so that Samson can substitute Philistine dead for his eye. The treatment of this theme in the Samson portion is simply an articulation of the Israelites' substituting other gods for Yahweh, and Yahweh's retribution.

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236   Jacobsen, *Treasures*, p. 229; *Mesopotamiya*, ed. by D'yakonov, p. 473; Dalley, *Myths*, rev. edn, p. 174.

237   *CAD* N/2, 1980, p. 160.

238   Dalley notes that Nergal's name could also be pronounced Erakal, the 'lord of Erkalla (the Great City)'. From this word the name Heracles is derived (Dalley, *Myths*, rev. edn, p. 325; W.F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, London: Athlone Press, 1968, pp. 211–12). The connection between Heracles and Samson was recognized by the Church Fathers (Alter, 'Samson', p. 47; see also Burney, *Judges*, pp. 335–36; Crenshaw, *Samson*, p. 16; Graves, *Greek Myths*, pp. 413–14; 514).

239   *Nergal*, pp. xv–xvii; 45. The importance of this subject is already evident in the opening scenes in which Anu's messenger Kakka substitutes for his master and Namtar substitutes for Ereshkigal (ll. 1–75; *Nergal*, pp. 23–24; xciv in the Amarna edition).

Closely related to the substitution motif in *Nergal and Ereshkigal* is the topos of disguise, false identity and distortion. 'Nergal conceals his identity both to keep his power and save his life'.[240] Until Samson's avowal of the source of his might, he too conceals his Nazirite identity in order to retain his power and save his life. His countrymen, lovers and enemies all appear ignorant of his divine calling. Delilah readily believes the allusion that his strength is derived from magic, and displays no suspicion that consecration to Israel's God was its source.

The disruption that the figure of Samson causes theologically for Judaism has been mentioned; the same obtains for Christianity where he has long been treated as a typological representation of Jesus.[241] Nergal poses a somewhat analogous difficulty for Neo-Assyrian theology. According to Ponchia and Luukko, the Nergal and Ereshkigal myth constitutes an attempt to explain 'how the young god and hero, who has been identified with the characteristics of infernal and dead gods, including his marriage with Ereškigal, can still ascend to heaven and keep his status as a heavenly god'.[242] Even more fundamentally, and appositely for Judges, the myth seeks to explain the divine nature: 'If in *Enūma eliš* stars are defined as [*sic*] image of the gods, in *Nergal and Ereškigal* the aspect of god, seemingly changing as it is, reveals the problem between divine essence and appearance'.[243] Through his portrayal of the major judges culminating in Samson, our writer directly examines this question. It is conceivable, given the cultural milieu in which he worked, that the Neo-Assyrian theological discourse provided a backdrop to his exploration.

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There is, then, a distinct parallel between the characteristics of Samson and the Mesopotamian deity Nergal. While, to some extent, this could be due to both drawing on mythical themes common to many cultures, it is the detail and variety of the correspondences between Samson and Nergal that indicate that the associations are not fortuitous. This conclusion, in turn, corroborates the thesis suggested by the placing of Deborah to correspond to Ishtar's calendrical position, that, in his ordering and treatment of the major judges, the

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240   Ibid., pp. 45, 53–54.

241   Gunn, *Judges*, pp. 177–80.

242   'Your seat is noble in heaven, elevated your position, great are you in the netherworld, equal you do not have' (Ponchia and Luukko, *Nergal*, pp. xviii, lxvii)

243   Ibid., p. xix.

writer refers obliquely to the SMC. Before probing the relationship with the SMC in more detail, however, we should consider the connection between Judges and the other widespread and important Mesopotamian myth to which the seven doors/seven gates of the book alludes, viz., 'the Descent of Ishtar to the Underworld', particularly given the association between Ishtar of Arbela and the original name of Hebron. Through mapping the seven stages of Israel doing evil in Yahweh's sight against the seven gates through which Ishtar passes in her descent into the netherworld, and, the removal of an item of her apparel at each, symbolic of her progressive loss of authority,[244] we are given further insight into the meaning of Judges. The writer, by providing the clues of the seven doors/gates in his text, harnesses this Mesopotamian myth as an apologue that, in refracted form, relates Israel's Settlement journey from heavenly promise to the reality of darkness, impotence and death, itself a parable, as we have noted, on the descent of the tribes of Israel in the late monarchical period through idolatry and bondage to looming destruction.[245] The first item Ishtar loses is her 'great crown'. As a result of Israel's initial round of apostasy in the book, the sovereignty of Yahweh, so conspicuous as it opens, is rejected. The great crown of Yahweh's benevolent kingship is removed, and kingship thereafter is either bastardized, as in Gideon/Abimelech, or replaced by anarchy. Consequently, Israel's divinely-given sovereign authority over its foes is withdrawn with the result that 'they could no longer stand before their enemies' (2:14). The next item Ishtar forfeits concerns the ears – her earrings. After the second stage of Israelite contumacy, Yahweh provides judges and prophets between himself and his people since they appear no longer capable of hearing him without intermediaries.[246]

The seventh garment removed from Ishtar, the garment of dignity, leaves her naked.[247] The state of destitution to which she is reduced takes her to the object of her perverse quest, the depths of the Underworld, symbolized by her sister, Ereshkigal, herself naked.[248] In the Sumerian version of the myth, at each of the seven stages Inanna-Ishtar is deprived of her 'divine powers' (the

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244   Lapinkivi, *Myth*, p. 56.

245   Parpola notes the highly allegorical nature of the Descent myth (*Assyrian Prophecies*, p. XXXII).

246   The writer does not reveal how Yahweh's response to the Israelites' entreaty for deliverance from the Ammonites is conveyed at this mid-point in Structure A (Judg. 10:10–14); compare Cartledge, *Vows*, p. 175.

247   Lapinkivi, *Myth*, p. 60.

248   Collon, *Queen*, p. 44.

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Sumerian word *me* is used).[249] In the Judges schema, the final door is reached at the beginning of the Samson cycle and results in Israel being oppressed by an alien overlord for forty years, a period as long as Israel spent in the wilderness. For the first time, the oppression does not engender a plea to Yahweh for deliverance. Much of Samson's nocturnal activity was performed naked, and we can infer that Samson was taken unclothed from Delilah's bed to be blinded and enslaved, and was kept naked as was customary.[250] His degradation is reprised in the fate of the Levite's concubine and the maidens of Jabesh-gilead and Shiloh with which the work ends.[251] Ishtar's condition in the Underworld as a piece of rotting meat hanging on a hook for three days is an apt metaphor for Samson's state in Gaza,[252] and is paralleled literally in the concubine whose body is hung on the donkey and then chopped up.[253] As each gate shuts behind the goddess, the darkness increases; so too with Israel's spiritual descent into apostasy and idolatry, as given dramatic expression through Samson. He, who for much of the time operates in the night, is blinded, and ends his life under a pile of monumental rubble and maimed corpses, twice deprived of light. As we have seen, it is in the Samson section that all four of the sevens under discussion converge. Immediately before the second articulation of Israel doing evil in Yahweh's sight, the writer states that the sons of Israel were intermarrying with the surrounding nations and serving their gods (3:5–6). The ultimate fruit of this behaviour is seen in Samson's experience with Delilah, and Israel's metaphorically with Ereshkigal.[254]

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249 Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, p. xci.

250 It was normal practice in Neo-Assyria to strip male prisoners to underline their humiliation and abject submission (*RLA* 9, p. 65; Isa. 20:3–4). One of Assurbanipal's inscriptions reads 'They came to me in Nineveh crawling naked on their bellies' (*CAD* M/2, p. 22). See also Ataç, *Mythology*, p. 3; Porter, *Trees*, p. 75; Pauline Albenda, 'An Assyrian Relief Depicting a Nude Captive', *JNES* 29 (1970), pp. 145–50 (146–47). A Megiddo ivory plaque indicates that it was also customary in Judges-era Canaan (Gordon Loud, *The Megiddo Ivories*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939, Plate 4).

251 The stripping of Ishtar is a metaphor for her violation (Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, pp. xxxi–xxxii).

252 *Mesopotamiya*, ed. by D'yakonov, p. 308; Samuel Noah Kramer, 'Death and Nether World', *Iraq* 22 (1960), pp. 59–68 (67); Lapinkivi, *Myth*, pp. 68, 86.

253 In the Akkadian version of the myth, Ishtar's body becomes a water-skin (Lapinkivi, *Myth*, p. 83), which on journeys the pack animal would carry.

254 'The lips of an alien woman flow with honey […], but her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a sword with mouths; her feet descend to death, her steps lay hold of the Underworld. […] At the end you groan when your flesh and body are consumed, and say "how I hated discipline"' (Prov. 5:3–5, 11–12; the same text, incidentally, in which the feminine form of *jael* is given).

In the *Descent of Ishtar*, this is only half the story. Through the intervention of divine supporters, the goddess is released from the city of no-return and follows the reverse process, receiving back all the items/*me*-s taken from her. The writer of Judges, however, offers no such optimism in his allusion to the myth.[255] The final deliverer has destroyed himself. Yahweh sends no one to take his place. While the goddess regretted her decision to undertake her descent, there is no analogous awakening on the part of the sons of Israel. The scenes that follow Samson's are enacted in the darkness and depravity beyond the seventh gate. It is a landscape so distorted it resembles the Underworld itself, a world 'devoid of real substance',[256] a land of hollow men.

The consideration of the gates and doors of Judges cannot be concluded without examining the meaning of Samson's apparently purposeless nocturnal carriage of the gates of Gaza uphill for some sixty kilometres to Hebron,[257] arguably the most symbolically loaded scene in the entire composition.[258] Its portentous importance is underscored by the convergence within this brief notice of three 3+1 constructions. It is the last act of Samson as a free and sighted man. Apart from his suicidal revenge, it is the final act of a judge in Israel against its oppressors. As noted in Chapter 2, the author is concerned to indicate a relationship between Gaza and Hebron. We have already observed that Samson's west-east journey by night emulates that of the sun through the Underworld, and the fact that it begins at the place of the setting sun corroborates the observation. But this does not account for the choice of Hebron as the destination, a city with a fourfold status: a possession of Caleb, in the tribal

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255   If Parpola (*Assyrian Prophecies*, pp. XXXII–XXXIV) and Lapinkivi (*Myth*, pp. 38–41) are right to state that the *Descent of Ishtar* is an allegorical text related to a mystery cult in which the devotee achieved mystical union with the goddess through the shedding of the self, a necessary precondition for spiritual resurrection, the author of Judges does not treat it as such. The degradation which Israel undergoes in the seven stages of its descent does not prove a means to spiritual rejuvenation but is presented as a natural outworking of its rebellion. Similarly, the nadir it reaches does not act as a catalyst for spiritual renewal. This is consistent with the writer's theological approach. Any reference to Assyrian cult, as to any of the alternative cults followed by the Israelites, is only to be understood in condemnatory terms.

256   Jacobsen, *Treasures*, p. 52.

257   Old Babylonian material indicates that 25–30 kms was the average distance achieved on foot in a day in the ancient Near East (Hallo, 'Road', pp. 63, 66).

258   While most commentaries shed little light on the meaning of Samson's act, e.g., Burney, *Judges*, pp. 376–77, Herzberg, *Bücher*, p. 233; Cundall, *Judges*, pp. 174–75, Block, *Judges*, pp. 449–51, Webb, *Judges*, pp. 394–95, Niditch sees it as a statement against the civilization that, in her view, the Philistines epitomize ('Samson', pp. 614–15).

area of Judah, a Levitical city awarded as patrimony to the sons of Aaron,[259] and a city of refuge (Josh. 14:14–15; 21:9–13).[260]

The gates are set up east of Hebron/ʿal-pᵊnê ḥebrôn,[261] literally, 'in Hebron's face'.[262] The text makes clear that, not only are they complete with posts, the gates are barred.[263] The work of God in conquering territory in Canaan for Israel, which started so powerfully in Hebron in the Judges account,[264] had come to a dead end. The judge who had seized them was shortly, like a gate, to be bound in bronze, in the enclosed space of blindness in which death offered the only open door.[265] Israel had shut its gate on Yahweh and was no longer calling on him.[266]

I remarked in Chapter 2 that every mention of doors in Judges except this one is connected directly with death. But it too has a deathly aspect. Hebron is the site of the first space in the promised land 'acquired' by the Hebrews, by the patriarch Abraham; but it is a place for the dead, a site for burial, indeed the burial of the first 'mother in Israel'. The acquisition was transacted at the

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259   Not so in Deuteronomy, however; see Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. xxxix; M. Weinfeld, 'On "Demythologization and Secularization" in Deuteronomy', *Israel Exploration Journal* 23 (1973), pp. 230–33 (233).

260   Its fourfold status has the additional dimensions, as observed, of being mentioned four times in Judges and of being originally the city of the four.

261   Soggin, *Judges*, p. 253. In Akkadian, 'the eastern gate' is *bāb ṣīt Šamši*, 'door of the sun rise' (*CAD* B, 1965, p. 19), which offers an attractive counterpoint to 'door of night/gate of sunset', especially as Samson transplanted the gate of Gaza from the west to become Hebron's eastern gate, before descending himself through the 'gate of the land of no return'. Faust demonstrates that, as a rule, the eastern gate provided the most important access to Israelite cities; indeed, often the only access. Generally, gates were not placed in western walls ('Doorway', pp. 137–38). As the Philistines do not appear to have shared this cosmological aversion to west-facing entrances (op. cit., p. 147), it is conceivable that the Gaza gate that Samson uprooted was the western gate.

262   This compound preposition's spatial meaning can carry a nuance of defiance (*BDB*, p. 818).

263   'The underworld gates [...] were identical in structure to city gates on the earth's surface. These gates consisted of many gate parts including doors, doorframes, bolts, locks and keys' (Horowitz, *Geography*, p. 359).

264   Jerusalem is the first 'capture' recorded in Judges, but the Israelites were unable to hold it (Judg. 1:21; 2 Sam. 5:6–8).

265   Horowitz suggests that 'climbing the mountain', an expression found in *The Death of Gilgamesh*, is a euphemism for dying (*Geography*, p. 361).

266   We saw in Chapter 4 that, due to the way time is treated in Judges, with the exception of Samson's final episode with Delilah and Gaza, this act concludes the writer's chronological account of the era.

gate of the city.[267] The Gaza gate vignette links back to the beginning of Judges: Hebron's gates being breached by Judah and Caleb, an association that in turn connects Samson with Yahweh's first judge, Othniel, who undoubtedly took part in the battle. In this sense Samson's act encloses Structure B which began with Othniel. In the same campaign that secured Hebron, Gaza was taken by Judah, the first tribe to 'go up' against Yahweh's enemies (1:18). It is Judah that immediately before the gates of Gaza incident 'goes down' on behalf of Yahweh's enemies against his champion. Hebron was Judah's main city in the Judges period,[268] and was later famed as the capital of the original kingdom of Judah and the location where the reign of the Davidic house began (2 Sam. 2:2–4),[269] and where the united monarchy was established (2 Sam. 5:3–5). The symbolism of Samson's act in the context of Manasseh's reign would have been profound, recalling the writer's treatment of Bethlehem-judah.[270] Because of the actions of the current Davidic ruler in venerating the gods of the surrounding nations, compounded by the collusion of the Aaronid priesthood, not only does the act of siting the gate of sunset to the east of Hebron signify spatially that the land of Judah lies in darkness[271] but, temporally, that the entire history of Israel from its first patriarchal foothold in the land to the time of writing is thrown under a deathly pall.[272] The action carries the immense load of

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267 'Sarah died in Kiriath-Arba; that is Hebron in the land of Canaan: and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah […]. And Abraham stood up from before his dead, and spoke to the sons of Heth saying, "I am a foreigner and a sojourner with you: let me have a burial place with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight" […] [the land was transferred] to Abraham for a possession […], before all that went in at the gate of their city' (Gen. 23:2–4, 18).

268 Younger, *Judges/Ruth*, p. 379.

269 David reigned in Hebron for seven and a half years (seven, according to 1 Chr. 29:27).

270 The fact that the traditions concerning the selection of the tribe of Judah for blessing, and the choice of David and Solomon to reign, all exhibit a 3+1 pattern may possibly have influenced our writer in his use of this pattern widely in his book to convey minacious developments. Thus, Reuben, Simeon and Levi are cursed by their father (Douglas, *Wilderness*, p. 182), and the fourth son is blessed. David's older brothers, Eliab, Abinadab and Shimeah, are passed over for kingship. The three princes of the blood who had precedence over Solomon to succeed David – Amnon, Absalom and Abijah – fail to secure the throne (Zakovitch, *"For Three"*, p. vi).

271 In the Erra myth, Nergal exclaims 'in heaven I am a bull, in the netherworld I am a lion' (*RLA* 9, p. 223), suggesting again, perhaps, the inversion of the lion typology applied to apostate Judah.

272 Notwithstanding this spiritual significance, it may have an even more immediate political symbolism also (compare Guillaume, *Waiting*, pp. 186–87). As a consequence of Hezekiah's rebellion against Assyria, swathes of the southern kingdom were apportioned to the Philistine city states, Ashdod, Ekron and Gaza, to secure their loyalty (Luckenbill,

prophetic meaning[273] that we are led to expect from the concatenation of the trio of 3+1 constructions: symbolically, the gates of Gaza-Ganzir are re-sited to enclose the southern kingdom. For the author, the widely-cited trope (found in *Gilgamesh* Tablet VI, *Descent of Ishtar* and *Nergal and Ereshkigal*) that the dead will outnumber and consume the living[274] has become the reality of life for a Yahwist in Manasseh's realm, both literally in the murder of Yahweh's believers,[275] and metaphorically in the imposition by hollow men of the cults

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      Sennacherib, p. 33; Noth, *Israel*, pp. 268–69). Most loyal among them was Gaza (Hayim Tadmor, 'Philistia under Assyrian Rule', *The Biblical Archaeologist* 29 [1966], pp. 86–102 [91, 101]; Karen Radner & Silvie Zamazalová, 'Gaza, Ashdod and the other Philistine kingdoms', *Assyrian empire builders*, University College London, 2013 [http://www.ucl.ac.uk/sargon/essentials/countries/philistines/ accessed 28 December 2015]; Na'aman and Ran, 'Deportations', p. 37). Although these territories were probably returned to Judah later in Manasseh's reign as a reward for fealty as indicated by 2 Chr. 33:14 (Ehrlich, *Concise History*, p. 63), it is probable that, at least in the early part of his rule, Gaza possessed Hebron which lies directly to its east. Hebron was almost certainly captured by Sennacherib and may have been damaged in the process (Ussishkin, 'Sennacherib's Campaign', p. 100).

273   The association between Hebron and Arbela, given its status as the centre of Assyrian prophetic activity, may not be fortuitous in this respect either.

274   Dalley, *Myths*, rev. edn, pp. 160–61.

275   Stavrakopoulou discounts 'the majority of accusations' levelled against Manasseh as 'historically unreliable given their function as ideological polemic' and claims that 'it is reasonable to assert that the biblical Manasseh bears little resemblance to the Manasseh of history' (*Manasseh*, pp. 111–12, 121). While there is no denying the ideological nature of the accounts of Manasseh, the Kings approach to him reveals no greater or lesser ideological bias than its treatment of other kings of the northern and southern kingdoms. If 'ideological polemic' material has to be discounted as evidence, a considerable proportion of the textual resources of the ancient Near East would be precluded from consideration, such as much of the Assyrian and Egyptian royal inscription corpus (see A. Kirk Grayson, 'Assyria and Babylonia', *OrNS* 49 [1980], pp. 140–94 [170–71, 176, 180]; Sarah Melville, 'Neo-Assyrian Royal Women and Male Identity', *JAOS* 124 [2004], pp. 37–57 [37]; Nissinen, *References*, p. 16; Cogan, 'Exile', p. 244; Dominique Charpin, *Lire et écrire à Babylone*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2008, pp. 243–46). J.A. Brinkman complains of the 'selectivity, distortions and fabrications' that characterize Esarhaddon's official records ('Through a Glass Darkly', *JAOS* 103 [1983], pp. 35–42 [36]). Rather, in reaching a judgment, this material has to be weighed carefully against other sources of knowledge and evaluated for its consistency internally and externally. The meagre extra-biblical information extant on Manasseh, including the archaeological findings that confirm no military attacks on Jerusalem during his reign (Stavrakopoulou, *Manasseh*, p. 106), indicates that he remained a faithful vassal of Assyria, consonant with the Kings account (Guillaume, *Waiting*, p. 88). As the above consideration has sought to show, Manasseh's behaviour described in Kings comports with the Neo-Assyrian context in which he is placed. Moreover, there had to

of lifeless idols. An alternative conjecture that Samson's act of transfiguring the gates of sunset into gates of dawn by taking them east, to the highest point in southern Palestine, the place of sunrise for the locations featured in his series,[276] actually carries a positive message is belied by the fact that the gates remain barred. The intention is not to suggest illumination but to stress its exclusion. The gates would, in fact, cast a shadow over Hebron and westward at sunrise. It is noteworthy in this regard that among Nergal's epithets is 'king who causes

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be a reason why Manasseh was perceived as the most heinous of kings for a Yahwist. The introduction of Mesopotamian and Canaanite gods into the temple of Yahweh and the shedding of innocent blood would provide such a rationale (compare the treatment of Manasseh in 2 Kings with the description of Babylonian kings who neglected the cult of Marduk given in the Babylonian Historical Epics [Grayson, 'Assyria', pp. 186–87]). Ezekiel, writing in the aftermath of Jerusalem's destruction by the Babylonians, specifically attributes idolatry and blood-guilt as the causes for the removal of the sons of Israel from the land (36:18–19). As already noted, the idolatry explicitly included veneration of Assyrian deities. A more substantial challenge to the Kings depiction of Manasseh is offered in the Chronicles account of the king (2 Chr. 33). While charging him with similar cultic travesties, it relates that Manasseh incurred the wrath of the Assyrians and was taken in fetters to Babylon where he turned to Yahweh. On being reinstated on his throne, he removed the cult objects from the Temple and remained a faithful Yahwist. The Chronicler cites 'the writings of the words of the seers' as his source. Apostasy was reintroduced, briefly, by Amon. There is no suggestion in Chronicles that Manasseh was the cause of Yahweh's final judgment on Jerusalem and Judah. There is little to corroborate this version of events. It is scarcely credible that Manasseh, having provoked the Assyrians, would, on his rehabilitation by the Assyrian king, remove their gods from Jerusalem. The building projects, some of which apparently of a military nature, that the Chronicler mentions Manasseh undertaking, and which find some archaeological support, are more plausible in a context of faithful vassalage than of defiance of the overlord (*pace* Gane, 'Role', p. 30). Manasseh's burial place (which is confirmed in Chronicles) may indicate, as stated above, his continuing adherence to Assyrian practices. Certainly, its literary function appears to be to differentiate him and Amon from their forefathers. Other explicit and implicit references in the Hebrew Bible – in Zephaniah, Jeremiah (especially 15:4) and Ezekiel (see Bright, pp. 321, 334) – to his reign give no hint that his relations with Assurbanipal soured and/or that he became an ardent Yahwist. The existence of Manasseh's altars in the two courts of the Temple at the time of Josiah (2 Kgs 23:12) likewise argues against the Chronicles record. For balanced appraisals of the Kings and Chronicles accounts, see S.R. Driver, 'Hebrew Authority', in *Authority and Archaeology Sacred and Profane*, ed. by David G. Hogarth, 2nd edn, London: Murray, 1899, pp. 3–152 (114–15); William Schniedewind, 'The Source Citations of Manasseh', *VT* 41/4 (1991), pp. 450–61. Note also Dominic Rudman, 'A Note on the Personal Name Amon', *Biblica* 81 (2000), pp. 403–05.

276   For the counterpoint between the two in Mesopotamian thought, as standing on opposite horizons, see George, *Gilgamesh*, pp. 492–93; Heimpel, 'Sun', pp. 134, 137.

sunset'.[277] Furthermore, in Mesopotamian belief, Nergal spent the '180 days from the summer solstice to the winter solstice' in the Underworld.[278] Thus, the account of Samson's journey to Hebron, to a readership conversant in the Nergal cult, would conceivably be seen as the symbolic consignment of the period spanned by the six major judges, beginning in the vicinity of Hebron with Othniel, to darkness, and that Samson provides an overarching commentary on the series analogous to the function played by Nergal for the six months beginning from the summer solstice. This overarching role is likewise indicated by the convergence in his section of the four sets of seven. Samson, at the end of his journey through darkness, 'was lifted and taken up' whither his existence began (16:31); Nergal, immediately following the winter solstice returned from the Underworld to his father's abode.[279]

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The association of Deborah and Samson with the characters of Ishtar and Nergal is corroborated by their respective positions in the menology of the SMC, and specifically the autumn equinox and winter solstice. I repeat, any attempt to allocate other judges to specific months would be fraught. Even such a seemingly straightforward identification as that of Tammuz with the fourth month which bears his name is not assured. Jastrow attributes the month to Ninib (that is, Ninurta).[280] Furthermore, the Tammuz/Ishtar rites were celebrated at the time of the New Year (months XII–I).[281] In addition to the lack of menological clarity connected with Tammuz, the reason is, conceivably, that Othniel is still too close to the Yahwistic ideal to be aligned with a pagan demi-god of fertility. Given the importance of the Tammuz myth in the cultic environment of contemporary Judah, as confirmed by Ezekiel, it would be strange from what we know of our writer if he ignored it. As will be clear in Chapter 6, he does deal with it, but in a different context.

While attributing other judges to the SMC does not result in the alignments exemplified by Deborah and Samson, further associations with the calendar are helpful. The first, which concerns the end of the fifth month, *Abu*, will also

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277   Tallqvist, *Götterepitheta*, pp. 390–91.
278   Ibid., p. 394. One text reads 'On the eighteenth of Tammuz Nergal goes down to the netherworld, on the twenty-eighth of Kislim he comes up' (*RLA* 9, p. 221).
279   Ponchia and Luukko, *Nergal*, p. lxxx.
280   *Aspects*, p. 237; Litke, *God Lists*, p. 21.
281   *RLA* 9, p. 293.

be explored in the next chapter. The second relates to the significance of the seventh day within the cultic calendar, and specifically to the seventh day of the seventh month, *Tašrītu*. The seventh day was generally considered inauspicious in Mesopotamian tradition. According to first-millennium Assyrian hemerology tablets, more warnings apply to the seventh day of the seventh month, the *sebūt sebîm*, than to any other day.[282] Plainly, the author of Judges chooses to ascribe a corresponding meaning to seven in the book as demonstrated in the above table and by the fact noted in Chapter 2 that the composition features seven named or designated kings plus the seventy under Adoni-bezek's table. In the context of a series that sees Deborah aligned to the sixth month and the equinoctial point occurring at the 'tropic' between her segment and Gideon's, the seventh day of the seventh month falls squarely in the latter. This is concordant with the disastrous consequences of Gideon's judgeship for Israel: the first defilement of the land by the shedding of blood unjustly, the reinvigoration of idolatry, and the beginnings of autocratic rule. As we have seen, it is their combination reworked in King Manasseh that Kings cites as the cause of Yahweh's final expulsion of his people from the land. In this context, the mention of seven years in the structurally pivotal opening verse of the Gideon account, in connection with the oppression of Israel, followed later in the chapter by a further reference to seven years (the age of the sacrificial bull) may be significant (6:1, 25). Certainly, if one takes the Gideon and Abimelech cycle as a single series, the number of sevens or its multiples found in it is unrivalled elsewhere in the work.[283]

Although the SMC is exploited principally to indicate the solstitial and equinoctial significance of the major judge series, there is a related construct that the writer harnesses consistently to structure that portion of the book. It is the Gilgamesh epic. Indeed, given the status the epic enjoyed and its ubiquity in the ancient Near East,[284] coupled with the apparent background and creative approach of the Judges author, it would be remarkable if it were not referred to extensively in his work.[285] I noted that Ishtar's position as the goddess of the sixth month is reflected in *Gilgamesh* inasmuch as the sixth tablet focuses

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282   Cohen, *Cultic Calendars*, p. 391.

283   The cycle boasts ten in total. Seventy is used seven times, seventy-seven once, and seven twice. If nothing else, these data corroborate the hypothesis that the writer employs seven/seventy to betoken kingship.

284   Tigay, *Gilgamesh*, p. 10.

285   Scholars have long highlighted similarities between Samson and Gilgamesh, and Enkidu also (Alter, 'Samson', p. 47; Gray, *Joshua, Judges*, pp. 349, 357–58; Burney, *Judges*, pp. 358, 379, 391, 395–407).

particularly on her dealings with the hero. The ninth tablet is not concerned with Nergal *per se*, but with Gilgamesh following the 'Path of the Sun' in darkness.[286] It is surmised that this route may be that taken by the sun during the night;[287] if so, there is a connection with Nergal. The difficulty is that the sun's nocturnal circuit goes from west to east, while the text states that Gilgamesh embarks on the road from Mount Mashu where the sun rises.[288] What is certain is the version of the composition known to the writer of Judges contained the apparent contradiction. And he exploits it. Immediately following the account of Samson tracing the sun's west-east nocturnal journey and planting the gates of Gaza on the hill opposite Hebron, the place of sunrise, we read 'and after this he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek and her name was Delilah' (16:3–4). From Hebron, the hero spends what remains of his life making his way from the mountain of sunrise via the valley of Sorek through 'the door of night' to the place of sunset at sea-level,[289] an odyssey symbolically conterminous with Gilgamesh's, conducted in complete darkness, first spiritual and then also physical. The deduction made by most commentators that 'the Path of the Sun' in Gilgamesh refers to an extensive subterranean tunnel which the sun traverses,[290] matches the symbolism of Samson's journey, complete with the sexual and netherworldly connotations offered in the tunnel metaphor. Gilgamesh's travel ends at the sea shore; Samson's predictably at a *city* by the coast. But the Judges' treatment contains the characteristic inversion: whereas Gilgamesh's motive was the quest for immortality, Samson's was love for a foreign woman,[291] and whereas Gilgamesh emerged 'before the sun'

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286   Compare Alster, 'Paradigmatic Character', pp. 52–53.

287   Kovacs, *Gilgamesh*, p. 77; Jacobsen, *Treasures*, p. 204.

288   For the 'inconsistencies' in Tablet IX, see George, *Gilgamesh*, pp. 494–97.

289   Abusch ('Ascent', p. 38) remarks that travel to the Underworld may follow an east-west axis or be vertical, with a mountain or the grave as the portal between it and earth and heaven. In the hymn *Šu-ilišu A*, Nergal is linked both with 'the place where sunlight disappears' and with 'the place where daylight breaks', the west and the east. However, it is in the former that Utu (Shamash) places Nergal's throne (Artemov, 'Beyond', p. 23).

290   Huxley, 'Gates', p. 125; see George, *Gilgamesh*, p. 494 for other references. Huxley calculates the length of the tunnel to be 120 kms. Intriguingly, this equates exactly with the distance covered in Samson's journey from Gaza to Hebron and back.

291   An aspect of the solar motif that further links Deborah, through her song, and Samson is the use of the verb *'āhab* 'love'. Typically, it is used of two subjects: the 'sun-like' one and those who love Yahweh being as 'the sun going out in his heroism'.

in brilliant light to pursue eternal life, Samson's last recorded words urge that 'my soul die with the Philistines'.[292]

Following the first part of Tablet VI in which Gilgamesh rejects Ishtar's amorous advances, we encounter the Bull of Heaven episode which has parallels in the Gideon section. Anu's warning that releasing the Bull of Heaven would result in seven years' famine for Uruk[293] is echoed in the seven-year famine in Israel because the Midianites consumed 'the produce of the earth as far as when you enter Gaza and left no sustenance'.[294] By the same token, Gilgamesh and Enkidu's insolent challenge to the gods in slaying the Bull and then hurling its haunch in Ishtar's face[295] are reworked in Gideon's destruction of the Baʿal altar and his use of the Asherah pole (the Canaanite analogue of an image of Ishtar in her association with the sacred tree)[296] as the firewood for the sacrifice of the seven-year-old bullock. As the Mesopotamian heroes make an offering of the Bull to Shamash, their divine patron, in defiance of Anu, so Gideon offers the bullock to Yahweh in defiance of Baʿal. Gilgamesh's modelling of the cultic image from the Bull and the consolidation of his rule in Uruk[297] are reflected in Gideon being offered the throne of Israel and his creation of the idolatrous ephod from the Midianite spoil. The writer, in adapting the Gilgamesh episode, also presents mirror-image aspects not only in that Ishtar and Gideon take their respective father's bull, but of the moral. Gideon did what was right in obedience to heaven; Gilgamesh and Enkidu did what was wrong in disobedience to heaven.

Enkidu's portentous dream of the gods' determining his death with which Tablet VII opens and the curses he pronounces in response seem to be implied in Jotham's parable and imprecations of death and destruction for Abimelech

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292   That Samson's hair began to grow abundantly as soon as it was shaved and that Yahweh answered his final invocation suggest that Samson, too, may, in the end, have reached a place of (numinous) light. The fact that the writer gives grounds for this interpretation in his treatment of his wayward hero raises for Yahwism a theological question analogous to that posed by Nergal for the Mesopotamian system that I noted above.

293   Kovacs, *Gilgamesh*, p. 54; note Frankfort, *Cylinder Seals*, p. 43.

294   A literal translation of Judg. 6:4.

295   Kovacs, *Gilgamesh*, p. 55.

296   Oestreicher, 'Grundgesetz', pp. 388–89; Day, 'Asherah', pp. 403–04; Gray, *Joshua, Judges*, p. 300; Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, pp. XC, XCV; Taylor, *Yahweh*, p. 29. The 'nude fertility aspect [of Ishtar] became popular in Syria where she was also variously equated with Astarte, Anath, Asherah and Ashtaroth in West Semitic and Canaanite religion' (Collon, *First Impressions*, pp. 167–70). Hays notes with respect to Asherah poles the interchangeability of gods and their symbols (*Death*, p. 173).

297   George, *Gilgamesh*, pp. 477–78; Kovacs, *Gilgamesh*, p. 56.

and Shechem, especially as trees figure prominently in both.[298] The evil spirit
that God sends to effect this may be a recasting of the being whom A.R. George
terms 'an angel of death' that, in Enkidu's second dream, bears him off to the
Underworld.[299] The lamentation scene with which Tablet VIII begins and
Gilgamesh's establishment of a civic mourning ceremony in Uruk for Enkidu
have a correspondence in the annual lamentation carried out by the daughters
of Israel for Jephthah's daughter, particularly as the former would also have
been principally a female rite.[300] Both die as a result of exultation following a
battle, but again the relationship is asymmetrical: the male exults in the divine
defeat, the female in the divine victory. The inversion goes further: Enkidu
curses the harlot who introduced him to city life by means of coitus; the girl
bewails 'up and down upon the mountains' that she will die a virgin (11:37–40).[301]

A further parallel between the two compositions is found in the Humbaba
cycle (Tablets II–V), which, in the Judges schema, equates with the Ehud sec-
tion, thus providing a running parallel between the major judge series from
Ehud to Samson and the epic from Tablets II to IX. Given our author's view of
cities as places of evil and danger, it is unsurprising that whereas the monster
Humbaba's haunt is a rural location renowned for its trees, the Cedar Forest,[302]
the monstrous tyrant Eglon's arboreal abode is urban, 'the City of Palm Trees'.
From the Judges perspective, the two sites are also geographically asymmetri-
cal: the former in the north-west,[303] the latter in the south-east. Both kinds of
tree were significant for Mesopotamian and Yahwistic cult.[304] Commissioned

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298   Kovacs, *Gilgamesh*, pp. 60–61.

299   George, *Gilgamesh*, p. 481. This is the section preserved in the Middle Babylonian frag-
         ment of the epic unearthed at Megiddo (Tigay, *Gilgamesh*, pp. 123–28).

300   Lapinkivi, *Myth*, pp. 70–75.

301   Kovacs, *Gilgamesh*, pp. 62–63, 69–71.

302   On the Cedar Forest, see *Beyond Babylon*, ed. by Joan Aruz, Kim Benzel, and Jean Evans,
         New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008, p. 51.

303   In the Sumerian version, it is situated at the place of sunrise, but in the Akkadian version
         it is found in or near Lebanon, in the northwest (Tigay, *Gilgamesh*, pp. 76–78).

304   For example, 'The date palm releases me' [from the effects of witchcraft] (*Maqlû*, ed.
         by Meier, p. 8: Tablet I.22,); 'O date palm, [...] as a purifier of the body, suitable for the
         (offering) table' (Geller, 'Assyrian Tablet', p. 35); '[Shamash], in the seer's bowl with the
         cedar-wood appurtenance [you] enlighten the dream priests and interpret dreams' (from
         the *Hymn to Shamash* [Lambert, *Literature*, p. 129]; cedar is a tree sacred to the gods
         [*CAD* E, 1958, p. 275]; see also Erica Reiner, *Šurpu*, Osnabrück: Biblio Verlag, 1970, p. 46, et
         passim). Their magical properties are also illustrated in the way they are used with the
         statues in the Babylonian New Year rites (Langdon, *Semitic*, p. 316; *CAD* E, 1958, p. 276).
         In the Pentateuch, cedar is a ritual purifying agent (as in Mesopotamian religion), the

by the elders of Uruk, Gilgamesh undertakes the mission 'to eradicate from the land something baneful';[305] entrusted by the sons of Israel with the tribute, Ehud departs for Eglon's court with the same intent (3:15). Both journeys are preceded by the forging of weapons (3:16).[306] Whereas the expedition against Humbaba, who is Enlil's creature, is undertaken by two heroes, that against Eglon, Yahweh's creature, is prosecuted by one hero in two stages. The most striking feature of Eglon in a book exceedingly sparing of physical descriptions is his gut.[307] An important motif in the Humbaba tale concerns his gut. In his speech against Gilgamesh and Enkidu he asserts 'You are so very small. . . [even if I] were to kill (?) you, would I satisfy my stomach?'.[308] A broken fragment of Tablet v describes Gilgamesh and Enkidu 'pulling out [Humbaba's] entrails'.[309] Humbaba's visage was widely discussed in Mesopotamian texts,[310] not least in ominous material.[311] The depiction in an Old Babylonian clay mask from Sippar of his face as a gut seems to support the connection between these two victims of grisly assassinations.[312]

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palm is used in worship (Lev. 14:4–6, 49–52; 23:40; Num. 19:6). Both figure prominently in Solomon's temple (1 Kgs. 6–7). See Chapter 7 below.

305   Kovacs, *Gilgamesh*, pp. 25–26; Smith, 'Wisdom's Place', p. 7.

306   Kovacs, *Gilgamesh*, p. 20.

307   The claim made by some commentators, Josephus among them, that *bārî* ('fat', BDB, p. 185) signifies 'handsome' or 'imposing' (Sasson, 'Interpretations', p. 575; Stone, 'Eglon's Belly', pp. 650–52) is not endorsed by its other occurrences in the HB (though does find support in LXX; Barhebraeus [*Scholia*, p. 279] interprets its rendering of the word as 'very urbane'. He, however, offers 'most ingenuous' for *bārî*). While its biblical Hebrew use points to a signification that is relative rather than absolute, the term is consistently used to convey fatness. In addition, with typical humour and appetite for creating doublets, the writer concludes the episode by characterizing all the Moabite warriors as 'stout' (using the root *šmn* which, Sasson allows, conveys human corpulence) to reprise Eglon's most striking characteristic (3:29) (Webb, *Judges*, pp. 166–67). Block's position on the question is the antithesis of Sasson's (*Judges*, p. 170).

308   Dalley, *Myths*, rev. edn, p. 72.

309   Ibid., p. 76.

310   Humbaba's physical appearance is described differently in divergent versions of the epic (see examples in Tigay, *Gilgamesh*, pp. 32–33); but they all agree that it was monstrous (George, *Gilgamesh*, p. 266).

311   Ibid., pp. 145–47.

312   Dalley, *Myths*, rev. edn, p. 323. 'A cuneiform inscription on the back of this clay mask suggests that the intestines might be found in the shape of Huwawa's face in this mask. [. . .] The mask is formed of coiled intestines represented by one continuous line. Such an omen would mean "revolution"' [www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights accessed

ILLUSTRATION 2   *Humbaba mask from Sippar.*
                   © TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

Just as Eglon's fat began to envelop Ehud's blade and, one imagines, its bearer, Gilgamesh suffers the nightmare that Humbaba's body will engulf him. When they slay the ogre, 'plenty fell on the mountain'.[313]

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13 December 2014]. Ehud's act against Eglon meant precisely revolution. See also Langdon, *Semitic*, pp. 254–55.

313   George, *Gilgamesh*, p. 611.

One of the puzzles regarding the Humbaba tale is how Gilgamesh was able to breach his defences which appear to have possessed a magical force.[314] In an Old Babylonian Sumerian text,[315] Gilgamesh enters the ogre's presence using a ruse. The hero brings him gifts and, as a result, Humbaba withdraws his protective aura which then provides the opportunity for his murder by stabbing.[316] In the Eglon story, the protection is, naturally, not supplied by magic, but by the royal bodyguard. When Gilgamesh returns to the king's court, having already delivered the gift of tribute, and bearing the promise of a second gift, 'a secret thing for you, O king', Eglon grants him access across his threshold and then dismisses his courtiers. Moreover, when he rises from his throne to receive 'the thing from God', consequently relaxing his regal 'sheen', Ehud seizes his chance and stabs him. As in *Gilgamesh*, so in Judges, the final scene of this tale takes place at a river (3:28–29).[317]

Thus, the writer of Judges made extensive use of prominent and widespread expressions of Mesopotamian cult and culture to structure, animate and colour his creation. This literary approach is consistent with the picture that we have been assembling of him as someone thoroughly conversant with the best literary models of the time, namely those of Neo-Assyria. In the next chapter, we will explore his treatment of other important Mesopotamian works.

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314   Jacobsen, *Treasures*, p. 200; Tigay, *Gilgamesh*, pp. 94–95. In an Old Babylonian Akkadian text he is said to possess a 'sevenfold terrifying halo' (op. cit., pp. 68, 283; see also George, *Gilgamesh*, p. 261).

315   A standard version of *Gilgamesh* did not exist. The text circulated in different recensions with different wording (Rochberg, *Path*, p. 66; Lambert, 'Ancestors', p. 9).

316   Maria deJong Ellis, 'Gilgamesh' Approach to Huwawa', *AfO* 28 (1981/1982), pp. 123–31.

317   George, *Gilgamesh*, p. 470.

'This Broken Jaw of Our Lost Kingdoms': Death and Cosmic Warfare

My companion casts evil spells, but I break them[1]

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1

In Chapter 5 a further distinctive literary layer in Judges was exposed: its use of elements from Egyptian and, especially, Mesopotamian sources. The integration of features of the Gilgamesh epic and other well-known myths into the narrative of the major judges augments aspects of the SMC, and the related solar motif, employed in the book. Overall, the writer draws liberally on the millennia-old 'common pool of [Mesopotamian] cosmic symbolism' in his composition.[2] The material is carefully worked into the text. Paradoxically but predictably, these 'borrowings' are invariably used to reinforce the composition's hostile explicit theological message regarding idolatrous cults and the disastrous consequences for Israel in abandoning the worship of Yahweh to pursue them.[3] Even those sources that, in the original, arguably possess a positive resolution, for example, *Descent of Ishtar*, *Nergal and Ereshkigal* and *Gilgamesh*, are handled in a way in which their residue in Judges is ultimately negative. The narrative concerning Enkidu's mortal punishment is of particular avail to our author. Death is a dominant theme in the works he selected,[4]

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1 Incantation from *Maqlû* (IX.74).

2 Huxley, 'Gates', p. 136.

3 Adaptation of a literary source by Hebrew biblical writers does not *ipso facto* imply acceptance of its message or purpose, as demonstrated, for example, by the probable use of a drinking ditty as the model for Isaiah's 'Song of the Vine' (5:1–7) (Rowley, *Worship*, pp. 170, 203).

4 In adapting Sumerian material on *Gilgamesh*, the Old Babylonian writer/editor of the epic substantially developed, and gave a central focus to, the subject of death (Tigay, *Gilgamesh*, p. 54; Heidel, *Gilgamesh*, pp. 10–11).

and his twelvefold citation of the number six hundred[5] and its multiples[6] in the narrative in contexts of inflicted death underlines the importance of the death motif in his composition.[7] As Bal states, 'The Book of Judges is about death. […] There is death in all forms, each violent'.[8] The appropriation of material concerned with death and the Underworld makes sense in a context in which the death of the twelve tribes as a geographically contiguous entity was already a reality. This twelvefold articulation of death is given graphic metaphorical expression in the distribution of the twelve parts of the concubine's cadaver. Moreover, the Israelite possession of the land, now realized only through the idolatrous kingdom of Judah, was in terminal decline.[9] As discussed in Chapter 5, the portentous episode involving the transplantation of the Gaza gates symbolizes the writer's conviction that contemporary Judah resembled the netherworld far more than the heaven-ordained promised land. The book's prophetic burden is its intimation of the inevitability of the southern kingdom's demise.

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5   3:31; 18:11, 16, 17; 20:47. In addition, as noted in Chapter 4, the total number of maidens abducted and raped by the Benjamites was six hundred (21:23).

6   8:10 (two instances: 120,000 of Zebah and Zalmunna's forces killed in the first battle; the remainder, 15,000, in the second); 12:6; 16:27; 20:25, 44; 21:10.

7   Far from being 'a good traditional ballpark figure', as Brettler (*Judges*, p. 25) claims, this number is pregnant for the book. The 'six hundred' in Mesopotamian belief from Old Babylonian times referred to the Annunaki gods who were held to be gods of the Underworld. In mystical text Kar 307, Bel is said to have 'shut up the six hundred Anunnaki in the lower [earth]' (Livingstone, *Court Poetry*, p. 100). Their collective name could be written as a logogram: ᵈ600, with ᵈ as the conventional transliteration of the cuneiform divine determinative. This logogram (GÍŠ.U) to denote the Annunaki is employed by Esarhaddon (Borger, *Asarh.*, p. 79) and seen repeatedly in Assurbanipal's acrostic hymn to Marduk and Zarpanitu (*Court Poetry*, pp. 6–10). See also Burkhart Kienast, 'Igigū und Anunnakkū nach akkadischen Quellen', in *Studies Landsberger*, pp. 141–58 (142–43); Horowitz, *Geography*, pp. 18, 272, 286, 348; *CAD* N/2, 1980, p. 178; Hays, *Death*, p. 52; Ponchia and Luukku, *Nergal*, p. lxv; Walker and Dick, *Cult Image*, pp. 185–86; A. Falkenstein, 'Die Annunin in der sumerische Überlieferung', in *Studies Landsberger*, pp. 127–40 (130); Nicole Brisch, 'Anunna (Anunnaku, Anunnaki) (a group of gods)', *AMGG*, 2012 [http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/amgg/listofdeities/anunna/ accessed 27 December 2015].

8   *Death*, p. 1.

9   Given the writer's interest in the theme of death, it cannot be fortuitous that the book (like the Book of Joshua) begins with the phrase 'And after [the] death […]'. The two words with which the Vulgate opens highlight this: '*Post mortem* […]'. The use of a work's incipit to provide its title was standard in antiquity (Cross and Freedman, *Yahwistic Poetry*, p. 31), and derived from Mesopotamian practice, e.g., *Enūma Eliš*. It is conceivable, therefore, that the original title of Judges was, in fact, ויהי אחרי מות יהושע 'and it was after [the] death of Joshua'. Compare, for example, the Hebrew title of Exodus: 'Names'. If nothing else, we can be confident that the author selected the book's first words with extraordinary care.

The association of 'judges' with death and the Underworld is direct in both Mesopotamian and Egyptian beliefs.[10] Hays argues that in Judah in the Neo-Assyrian period, the dead and their powers were the subject of heightened interest.[11] Once again, it is evident that the epoch that the book describes functions as an extended parable for the circumstances in which it was composed, and the substantial incorporation of Mesopotamian motifs into it restate a different facet of these circumstances, namely Judah's deadly exposure to Assyrian ideology and its Mesopotamian cultic hinterland.

One of the remarkable but generally unremarked features of Judges is that, in contrast to all her counterparts among major and minor judges, there is no report of Deborah's death. The demise and burial of such faceless figures as Tola and Elon are dutifully recorded, but Deborah, whose story fills two chapters, receives no obituary. Instead, her section ends with her solar reference. From what we know of the book's creator, this is neither an oversight nor sexist.[12] Rather, his aim is to prompt his readers to examine Deborah's connection with death, a prompt which is, perhaps, underlined by the location of her namesakes in a carcass.[13] Moreover, chapter 4 begins with the report of a death: 'The sons of Israel again did evil in Yahweh's sight, and Ehud was dead'.

We noted in Chapter 1 that Judges contains two parallel accounts of a single event, the battle with the Canaanites led by Sisera, and that the accounts diverge in significant respects. This divergence is not simply the consequence of their employment of different stylistic registers; they are not consonant in important details of the conflict,[14] particularly the identity of the combatants.[15] Chapter 4 describes a battle between Naphtali and Zebulun and

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10   Shamash, Nergal, Sin and Gilgamesh are judges of the Underworld (Samuel Noah Kramer, *Two Elegies on a Pushkin Museum Tablet*, Moscow: Oriental Literature Publishing House, 1960, pp. 50, 61, 64; *Mesopotamiya*, ed. by D'yakonov, p. 281; *CAD* E, 1958, p. 398; Huxley, 'Gates', p. 130; Heimpel, 'Sun', pp. 127, 146–50; Tigay, *Gilgamesh*, pp. 14, 106–07, 152). Shamash is described in a first-millennium-BC text as 'judge of heaven and the underworld [...] You carry those from Above down to Below, those from Below up to Above' (Finkel, 'Necromancy', p. 11). Nergal is 'lord of the verdict' (Reiner, *Šurpu*, pp. 29, 57; Tallqvist, *Götterepitheta*, p. 394). One specialist on the *Maqlû* corpus has observed that in it 'the god functions more as a warlord than as a civilian judge' (Tzvi Abusch, 'Divine Judges on Earth and in Heaven', in *The Divine Courtroom in Comparative Perspective*, ed. by Ari Mermelstein and Shalom Holz, Leiden: Brill, 2015, pp. 6–24 [8]), which is an apt description of the major judges in the eponymous book.

11   *Death*, p. 145; Scurlock, 'Ghosts', p. 78.

12   Niditch considers that the author of Judges 'identifies with the female' (*Judges*, p. 41).

13   Ransome cites the widespread belief that bees are produced from dead carcasses, a belief whose origins she locates in Egypt (*Sacred Bee*, p. 116).

14   Bal, *Murder*, p. 2.

15   See, for example, Mayes, *Israel*, pp. 88–89; Herzberg, *Bücher*, pp. 173–75; Soggin, *Judges*, pp. 69–70.

Israel's Canaanite enemies, culminating in the 'death' of Sisera and the reduc-tion of Hazor. Chapter 5 reports a cosmic battle in which Ephraim, Machir-Manasseh, Benjamin and Issachar, six tribes in all, and the kings of Canaan also participate that ends in the eradication of Israel's enemy. Given the control the author exercises over the language he uses, the reader must question why the imagery of cosmic conflict is deployed in chapter 5,[16] and what/whom it is that Yahweh is fighting – surely not only a force of nine hundred iron chari-ots manned by Canaanites led by a local commander serving an absent king?[17]

The first iteration of the episode resembles that found frequently in the narrative books of the Hebrew Bible, not least Judges: Yahweh's people face impossible odds against a human foe but, thanks to the intervention of their God, they triumph and their chief adversaries are killed. The reprise presents a different picture: not only was Yahweh engaged in cosmic warfare, but the ene-mies whom he faced were forbidding to the point that a locality was roundly cursed for not coming 'to Yahweh's aid against the *heroes*' (5:23). The similarity of Deborah's Song to the Song of the Sea, noted in Chapter 1, is formal not sub-stantive. In Yahweh's engagement against Pharaoh's hosts, the foe is portrayed as formidable, but entirely sublunary. Yahweh did not expect support, nor need it. But for his battle against these Canaanites, in which the divine advent was accompanied by earthquake, mountains melting, and prodigious rainfall, even sidereal powers and the torrent Kishon were enlisted.[18] It is noteworthy that Deborah's description of the conflict begins with a reference to the stars, then to the river, and finally to the sun as hero. What is evident is that whoever Sisera was and whatever he represented, he was no ordinary warlord and this was no ordinary conflict. Burney notes the fact that, in the Song, Sisera has kingly status. 'His mother, [...] is attended by princesses; and, if the emenda-tion which is adopted in the last clause of v. 30 may be regarded as correct, it is stated that he will bring back with him "two dyed embroideries for the neck of *the queen*," i.e. for his mother or wife'.[19]

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16 Bal (*Murder*, pp. 46–47) concludes that the author is here highlighting the difference between the technologically advanced Canaanites and the Israelites who are still in touch with nature.

17 This is not to minimize the magnitude of the chariot force. Against a solely human adver-sary, it would have been awe-inspiring (Gray, *New Century Judges*, p. 254). For images of Canaanite chariotry in action in a period approximate to that of Deborah's story, see Loud, *Megiddo Ivories*, Plates 32–33.

18 Without regard to the text's content and context, Taylor (*Yahweh*, p. 34) adduces the men-tion of the stars in the Song as evidence for Yahwism as an astral cult.

19 Burney, *Judges*, pp. 78–79. *Šarru*, the Akkadian cognate of the Hebrew *śar* 'captain, gen-eral' used to describe Sisera's position (4:2, 7), denotes 'king'. See the bilingual pun on the two words in Isa. 10:8. Note Machinist's remarks ('Assyria', pp. 734–35). Compare the

The absence of a record of Deborah's death places her in contrast to her adversaries. The violent end of Jabin and the Canaanite kings in his northern alliance, all killed by Joshua, is reported in Josh. 11:1–13 and 12:9–24, together with Hazor's destruction by fire. Indeed, their deaths are stressed in these verses. Furthermore, in the Song no one is said actually to die: Sisera is 'violently destroyed' (*šādûd*)[20] and Yahweh's enemies 'are exterminated' (5:27, 31).[21] With the exception of Sisera, then, all the adversaries mentioned had been killed, according to the Joshua account, considerably before Deborah's time. In the two versions of Deborah and Baraq's engagement with the Canaanites, the reader is confronted with different, apparently contradictory, realities. In the prose rendering, the Canaanite troops, finding their iron chariots useless, fall before the sword and not one is left alive, and Sisera dies at Jael's hand. In the poem, there is no mention of enemy soldiery or materiel, simply Sisera, who is destroyed, and the kings/heroes who are eradicated.[22] Only Jabin appears to span the two: in the verse that bridges the chapters, he is reported as 'cut off'.[23] These are not irreconcilable versions of a military episode, however, but complementary accounts of a divine intervention related from different perspectives to form two distinct layers of narration.[24] To convey this, the writer, in what, to my mind, is his most audacious application of Mesopotamian material in his work, borrows substantially from the Babylonian anti-witchcraft corpus, *Maqlû*. Abusch posits that, although an earlier version of the ritual may have existed in Middle Assyrian times, the form known to us dates from the first half of the first millennium BC. Its importance is evident from the fact that the *Maqlû* ceremony forms the subject of a letter written by the exorcist Nabû-nādin-šumi to Esarhaddon in August 670 BC. For the ceremony, the main participants are the exorcist, who is also its convener, and the patient, who

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       comments on booty made by Esarhaddon's mother (Melville, *Role*, p. 40) with Sisera's mother's remarks.

20   *BDB*, p. 994; Gray's translation is 'devastated' (*New Century Judges*, p. 280).

21   *BDB*, p. 1.

22   'The prancing of the horses of the mighty ones' (5:22) could, in the context of the cosmic warfare, apply to either the Canaanite kings or Yahweh's celestial host.

23   The *Hiphîl* form of the verb *kārat*, in Judges only found here, occurs in Leviticus with Yahweh as subject to stipulate the punishment for those who eat blood, those who sacrifice their children to Molech and those who practise necromancy (Lev. 17:10; 20:3–6). It is encountered, too, in the En-dor witch's account of Saul's purging of necromancy in Israel (1 Sam. 28:9).

24   O'Connell, *Rhetoric*, p. 102.

could be the king.[25] The danger posed by ghosts,[26] witches, and the demons that they could summon,[27] preoccupied Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian society.[28] The spiritual means to combat them, together with a general concern for the propitiation of the dead[29] and their 'safe conjuration' for divinatory purposes were characteristic anxieties of this culture.[30] That these were also widespread in Israel and Judah is clear: 'Even in the sometimes heavily edited text of the Hebrew Bible, it is quite possible to discern a society that, as a matter of course, worshipped chthonic gods, cared for its dead, practiced necromancy, knew very well about the religions and mythologies of its neighbours, and was often inclined to try them out'.[31]

The need for *Maqlû*, which comprises approximately one hundred incantations, was rooted in the Mesopotamian belief that the dead could move between earth and the Underworld so long as their skeletal remains were left intact.[32] There was a specific time in the year when, it was believed, this movement of ghosts between the two realms particularly occurred.[33] Among the baleful dangers that this transit posed was that the spirits travelling from the Underworld included witches whose release enabled them to devastate the living by sorcery. The infernal onslaught against the established order was compounded by living witches exploiting the actual and spiritual darkness

25 Abusch, 'Divine Judges', p. 7; idem, 'Mesopotamian Anti-Witchcraft Literature', *JNES* 33 (1974), pp. 251–62 (259).

26 Lapinkivi, *Myth*, pp. 37, 46.

27 See, for instance, *Maqlû* V 64–71; Langdon, *Semitic*, p. 162.

28 For example, from a Neo-Babylonian text: 'I am writing to the king, my lord, concerning the many witches that are around' (*CAD* K, 1971, p. 291). Ghosts were a perennial concern of the Neo-Assyrian royal house (Richardson, 'Assyrian Garden', p. 191; also Noth, *Old Testament World*, p. 293; Parpola, *LAS II*, p. xxi; Johnson [ed.], *Religions*, p. 477). Frahm ('Nabû-zuqup-kēnu', pp. 82–84) submits that Sennacherib's decision to reconstruct Nineveh to become the seat of the royal court was influenced by the fear that the ghost of his unburied father was haunting the palace in Sargon's capital, Dūr Šarrukīn.

29 Heidel, *Gilgamesh*, pp. 152–53; 156–57; F. Thureau-Dangin, 'Rituels et amulets contre Labartu', *RA* XVIII (1921), pp. 161–98 (187–88); J.A. Scurlock, 'KAR 267//BMS 53: A Ghostly Light on *bīt rimki*?', *JAOS* 108 (1988), pp. 203–09 (207).

30 Finkel, 'Necromancy'; *CAD* E, 1958, pp. 397–401; *CAD* M/2, 1977, p. 265. The texts attest female necromancers.

31 Hays, *Death*, p. 134. See also Malamat, *Mari*, pp. 103–105; Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial*, pp. 109–32.

32 Abusch, 'Ascent', p. 17. The 1 Sam. 28 account of Samuel's shade making just such a journey suggests that similar beliefs obtained among Israelites in the first half of the first millennium BC.

33 Abusch, 'Ascent', p. 18.

of the time in question to bewitch those whom they wished to harm. *Maqlû* was conducted in order to eradicate all witches, both living and dead. 'Dead witches were unearthed and held captive; live witches were killed. All witches were then utterly destroyed'.[34] By this means, witches were exorcised from the cosmos, including the Underworld. This 'all souls' day', therefore, represented for those opposed to sorcery at once a threat and an opportunity: the threat of malevolent magic performed against them on a cosmic scale, combined with the opportunity to combat psychically and thereby eradicate the witches, both living and dead. The means to do so were provided by the *Maqlû* incantations and rites.

The time with which this danger was associated was the end of the fifth month, Abu.[35] *Maqlû* was recited at the end of the month Abu, at the point when the moon disappeared. It was believed that it was at such times that the threat from malevolent spiritual forces was greatest.[36] Comparing this point in the year with the alignment of the major judges vis-à-vis the SMC, the end of Abu equates to the period between Ehud's death and the first reference to Deborah, who, as we have seen, is associated menologically with the sixth month. It is the period which Deborah terms 'the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, the days of Jael', the time in which 'Yahweh had sold them into the hand of Jabin, king of Canaan who reigned in Hazor, and the captain of his army, Sisera, who dwelt in Harosheth-haggoyim', and that he grievously oppressed the sons of Israel for twenty years, as a result of which they cried to Yahweh (4:2–3). It was plainly a period of national darkness and despair. Moreover, the Bible particularly identifies the autochthonous peoples of Canaan, as well as the Mesopotamians, with necromantic practice (Deut. 18:9–14; 2 Kgs 21:11).[37] Canaanite texts corroborate this, revealing a flourishing cult of the dead, and suggest a royal necromantic cult.[38] 'The funerary ritual KTU 1.161 [=RS 34.126] summons dead kings to join a group called the *rapi'uma*, probably the shades of ancestral heroes and kings',[39] and with other texts indicates that the group

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34   Ibid. In an Old Babylonian inscription, the king pronounces the curse that Nergal will not receive the malefactor's dead (Georges Dossin, 'L'inscription de fondation de Iaḫdun-Lim', *Syria* 32 [1955], pp. 1–32 [17]).

35   Scurlock, 'Ghosts', pp. 90–91.

36   Cohen, *Cultic Calendars*, p 321; Abusch, *Babylonian Witchcraft*, p. 4. The twenty-ninth of every month is the time when 'the spirits of the dead are mustered' (*CAD* E, 1958, p. 398; Reiner, *Astral Magic*, p. 133). But the interlunium in Abu was particularly ill-omened.

37   Driver, *Deuteronomy*, pp. 225–27. The cultic practices connected with necromancy condemned in Deut. 18 are echoed in the actions of Manasseh (2 Kgs 21:6).

38   Hays, *Death*, p. 132; Stavrakopoulou, 'Exploring', p. 13.

39   Johnson (ed.), *Religions*, p. 480. See also Hays, *Death*, pp. 107–08. KTU 1.161 dates from approximately the period of the judges (late thirteenth century BC) (Malamat, *Mari*, p. 100).

of Rephaim includes all deceased kings.[40] Deborah's Song likewise starts with a call to kings and princes, specifically for them to take note of Yahweh's omnipotence (5:3). Shamgar's metaphorical association with the dead is implied not only by the number of his victims – six hundred – but also by the reference to Anath. Spronk connects the Annunaki with the deified royal ancestors of Canaanite cult who had so-called 'Anath-goddesses',[41] their deified queens, as consorts, and were believed annually to rise from the Underworld in the company of Ba'al at the New Year festival.[42]

The cosmic battle that Deborah describes begins with the kings of Canaan launching an attack 'at the waters of Megiddo'. This is the mirror-image of the event narrated in the prose account where it is Baraq's forces who initiate the action (5:19; 4:14–15).[43] In the Song, the first combatants mentioned on Israel's side are the stars which fought from their courses. *Maqlû* begins with the petitioner calling on the gods of the night sky, the stars,[44] to render judgment against the witch who was oppressing him and to demonstrate their favourable verdict by providing an omen. Abusch suggests that the petitioner expected this omen to take the form of a sign connected with the movement or configuration of the stars in their paths or courses.[45] In other words, both Deborah's account and the Babylonian magical text begin with reference to the beneficent intervention of the stars in a cosmic struggle against a powerful and baneful foe manifested by irregular movement with respect to their courses.[46]

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40   *DDD*, pp. 1307–15. Note the symbolism of apotheosis on the tomb of King Ahiram of Byblos (Glenn Markoe and Patrick McGovern, 'A Nation of Artisans', *Archaeology* 43 [1990], pp. 31–35 [35]). Even more pertinently, a Megiddo ivory discussed by Markoe and which dates to the period of the battle against Sisera (the second half of the twelfth century BC), likewise displays the symbols of royal or hero apotheosis ('Emergence', pp. 18–22). On the etymological identity of the terms *rapi'uma* and Rephaim, see Malamat, *Mari*, p. 103, n. 120.

41   Compare P.C. Craigie, 'A Reconsideration of Shamgar Ben Anath', *JBL* 91 (1972), pp. 239–40 (239).

42   Spronk, *Afterlife*, pp. 183, 194–95, 235. The belief that kings were deified on death was widespread in the ancient Near East, though nowhere did it reach the level of elaboration witnessed in Egypt (Hays, *Death*, pp. 77–78). On the popular alphabetic association of the 'ox-goad' with *ʾēl* (אל) 'god', see, for example, Nahum HaLevi, *The Color of Prophecy*, Jerusalem: Gefen, 2012, p. 50; Nick Farrell, *Making Talismans*, St Paul MN: Llewellyn, 2001, pp. 46–47.

43   Burney, *Judges*, p. 79.

44   Abusch, 'Ascent', pp. 21, 27; Huxley, 'Gates', p. 117.

45   'Divine Judges', pp. 23–24.

46   The term for courses, *mᵉsillāh*, denotes a 'raised highway', 'a much frequented road' (Gray, *Joshua, Judges*, p. 386). It is the word that describes the Bethel-Shechem thoroughfare that plays such a key role in the spatial configuration of Judges. 'The term "path" (or "road")

The second cosmic ally that the prophetess cites is the 'Torrent Kishon'. This toponym is derived from the verb *qûš* 'to lay a snare'. Its role in the fray is twofold: first, to snare the enemy by stemming their progress and, second, to destroy their forces by purging them away.[47] Deborah describes this water course in a curious way, as 'the wadi of the *qᵉdûmîm*'. *qᵉdûmîm* is a hapax legomenon in Hebrew, derived from the radical *qdm* which we considered in Chapter 3. It is widely understood as an attributive adjective qualifying wadi as 'the *ancient* river'.[48] However, as it carries a plural ending, this is implausible. It is better translated 'the wadi of the ones who had been before, the former ones'.[49] In *Maqlû*, having addressed the celestial divinities, the supplicant turns to Bēlet-ṣēri, Ereshkigal's recorder,[50] in the Underworld, with an allusion to a water crossing: 'I have enclosed the ford, I have enclosed the quay, I have enclosed (therein) the witchcraft of all lands'.[51] This reference among others shows that the speaker understood the entrance to the Underworld to lie on or by a cosmic bank.[52] Preserved models of boats corroborate textual evidence that, in Mesopotamian belief, one of the ways to/from the Underworld was by water,[53] 'a river separating the realm of the dead'.[54] Accordingly, the Assyrian word here translated 'ford', *nēberu*, when used in a terrestrial context invariably

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[for stars] was appropriate because earth's rotation makes it seem that the stars, like the sun, rise from the eastern horizon and move steadily westward, eventually setting over the western horizon' (Huxley, 'Gates', p. 112). The Babylonian and Assyrian belief in the protective power of stars against sorcery is frequently encountered in the texts (Reiner, *Astral Magic*, p. 13).

47   The Vulgate has *torrens Cison traxit cadavera eorum*. Kishon was also the location where Elijah slaughtered the prophets of Ba'al (1 Kgs 18:40).

48   Cross and Freedman (*Yahwistic Poetry*, p. 10), together with some commentators, interpret the phrase as a miscopying of *qiddᵉmām* 'confronted them'.

49   In the Ugaritic text cited above, *qdm* bears the signification that I am ascribing to it in Judges 5. It denotes the ghosts of heroes – r*api'ūma qadimuma* (*rp'mym qdmym*) (Brian Schmidt, 'Afterlife Beliefs', *Near Eastern Archaeology* 63 [2000], pp. 236–39 [238]).

50   Knut Tallqvist, *Sumerisch-akkadische Namen der Totenwelt*, Helsinki: Societas Orientalis Fennica, 1934, p. 11.

51   Abusch, 'Ascent', p. 23. Hoffmann and Caldwell render the passage 'I have barred the river crossing, I have barred the harbour' (*Maqlû: Translation from the edition and translation into German of Gerhard Meier (1937)*, by Marie-Hélène Hoffmann and Ross G.R. Caldwell, 1995 [www.accessed 13 January 2016]).

52   Abusch, 'Ascent', p. 34.

53   Johnson (ed.), *Religions*, p. 478. An apotropaic rite to deal with an attack by the ghost of one's father and mother prescribes the construction of a sailing boat which is then filled with provisions for them (*CAD* E, 1958, p. 398).

54   Ponchia and Luukku, *Nergal*, p. 47.

refers to a water course, while metaphorically it signifies the point of death, viz., 'crossing place'.[55] This, then, parallels the notion of Kishon conveyed in the Song as the river of the former ones, that is, the dead,[56] that acts to prevent the enemy's advance who are attempting to cross it. The second element of Kishon's role in the Song, its purging effect, is treated later in *Maqlû* – in Tablet VII (106–137), where, through incantation and the efficacy of Ea, god of magic and fresh water, spring water is invoked to eliminate the evil.[57]

The final section of *Maqlû*, with its incantation 'I await you, my lord Shamash',[58] took place as the sun rises. The advent of the sun god delivers the plaintiff from the effects of sorcery. Daniel Schwemer describes *Maqlû*'s closing ceremony thus: 'the ritual ended with the patient identifying himself with his own reflection in a bowl of pure water shimmering in the morning light: "You are my reflection...You are mine, and I am yours. May nobody know you, may no evil approach you!"'.[59] The address to Shamash finds its parallel in Deborah's reference to the sun with which the poem concludes.

The appeals to the gods of the sky, the netherworld and Shamash in *Maqlû* are thus reworked in the Song, maintaining the same sequencing, with particular emphasis given to the stars, river and sun in the cosmic clash against the kings/heroes opposing Yahweh. Yahweh's theophany, at the commencement of the Song, highlights earth, heavens, and water. It, therefore, becomes evident that the conflict against the Canaanites is, in the mind of the author, taking place on two levels. In a context in which the Canaanite kings/heroes, consigned to the Underworld through a violent death inflicted by Joshua, now arise as spectres in order to attack Yahweh and his people, the ensuing battle is fought on a metaphysical plane. Alongside this, a physical conflict takes place, which sees Canaanite soldiery and chariots engaged against the Israelites. In

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55   *CAD* N/2, 1980, pp. 145–47. Note the fords were the location of the massacre of the Ephraimites. *Nēberu* also refers to Jupiter (W.G. Lambert, 'Two Texts from the Early Part of the Reign of Ashurbanipal', *AfO* 18 [1957–58], pp. 382–87 [387]; Hunger, *Reports*, p. 184, text 383).

56   In Mesopotamian belief, the river to the Underworld was known as the Ḫubur (Tallqvist, *Namen*, pp. 33–34; Horowitz, *Geography*, p. 356; Heidel, *Gilgamesh*, p. 172). The deified river is perceived, like the Annunaki, Gilgamesh, Tammuz and the ancestors, as an appropriate recipient of incantations and promised praise for aid against forces of evil (Cartledge, *Vows*, p. 84).

57   Abusch, *Babylonian Witchcraft*, p. 34. The notion of the cosmic river receiving/absorbing evil is also found in apotropaic texts known as *namburbi*. On the *namburbi*, see Finkel, 'Necromancy', p. 7; Horowitz, *Geography*, p. 354.

58   Tablet VIII.1, *Maqlû*, ed. by Meier, p. 53.

59   'Magic Rituals', in *OHCC*, pp. 418–42 (433–34).

both, Sisera leads the enemies of Yahweh; in both Yahweh is victor. Underlying *Maqlû* is the belief that the witch operates in two forms, as a human being and as a spirit. The means to deal with these forms, though complementary, are different.[60] The two treatments of the battle echo this and are consistent with the cultural context of the time of the book's composition.[61] It is a truism that, for the Assyrians (and other peoples of the ancient Near East), the physical and supernatural realms were much more closely connected (and the latter just as real) than we perceive them to be.[62] Assyrian kings ascribed the decision to undertake military campaigns to the gods.[63] Religious rituals accompanied and emboldened Assyrian troops, their gods visually participated in the warfare through standards bearing their images mounted on chariots involved in the fray,[64] and magicians specialized in invoking the gods petitioned them before and during combat to devastate the enemy. There is evidence that during campaigns the king made offerings to Ishtar, Nergal and Shamash on portable altars, and a hymn was sung before Nergal's ensign.[65] He and Ereshkigal were believed to participate on the battlefield.[66] In addition to haruspices, prophets may have been present in the royal entourage on campaigns.[67]

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60   Tzvi Abusch, *Mesopotamian Witchcraft*, Leiden: Brill, 2002, p. 20.

61   Compare Bahrani, 'King's Head', p. 118. See Richardson, 'Assyrian Garden', pp. 145, 154, et passim, on evidence for a royal ancestor cult in Neo-Assyria. This practice had deep Mesopotamian roots: on the late Old Babylonian royal concern to appease the ghosts of their predecessor kings, their families and warriors, see W.G. Lambert, 'Another Look at Hammurabi's Ancestors', *JCS* 22 (1968), pp. 1–2.

62   Grayson, 'Assyria', p. 191; Ann Weaver, 'The "Sin of Sargon" and Esarhaddon's Reconception of Sennacherib', *Iraq* 66 (2004), pp. 61–66 (62). See 1 Kgs 20:23–30 and 2 Kgs 6:8–23 for biblical examples.

63   Schwemer, 'Witchcraft', p. 29.

64   The chariots charging the enemy depicted on the stone panel from Assurnasirpal II's palace in Kalḫu (Austen Henry Layard, *The Monuments of Nineveh*, London: Murray, 1849, plate 27) may contain the standards of Nergal and Adad (see Livingstone, *Court Poetry*, pp. 42–43).

65   Andreas Fuchs, 'Assyria at War', in OHCC, pp. 380–401 (386). Dalley remarks that, in the Assyrian New Year Festival, it was not the king who was transported in Assur's chariot, but symbols of the god's cosmic weapons (*Myths*, rev. edn, pp. ix–x). Nergal's name can be written as 'divine standard' (Ponchia and Luukko, *Nergal*, pp. xli–xlii). On the wall panels in Sennacherib's palace portraying the king's victory over Lachish, his camp is shown. In one part of it, two priests are performing a ceremony with sacrificial meat at an altar. An incense burner stands nearby. This panel also shows two chariots bearing divine standards (Reade, *Assyrian Sculpture*, p. 49).

66   Ponchia and Luukko, *Nergal*, pp. lxx–lxxi.

67   Nissinen, *References*, p. 65.

In developing this dual conception of the event, the writer not only draws on Assyro-Babylonian ritual, but also succeeds in melding this source with Canaanite cosmology, with its belief in the deification and continuing life of dead kings, which furnishes the surface story. He, consequently, achieves a result that resonates authentically with the traditions of the Settlement era while reflecting the contemporary cultic environment of Judah,[68] within a framework that explores the topic of death.[69] In both periods, Yahweh's people had 'chosen new gods' (5:8). The subject of the cult of the dead to a seventh-century readership in Judah was not a marginal, still less a hypothetical, matter. As noted above, necromancy continued in the demi-monde of Israelite cultic belief and practice alongside more orthodox Yahwism.[70]

While the writer of Judges abstracted from *Maqlû* to frame the poem, there is evidence that his understanding of a netherworldly dimension in the campaign against Sisera and Jabin was not original, or at least not unique. The battle is cited in Psalm 83:9–10,[71] a composition which Malamat believes may date to the era of the judges.[72] The psalm invokes Yahweh to fight against Israel's enemies: Edom, Ishmaelites, Moab, Ammonites, Philistines, the inhabitants of Tyre, and significantly, Assyria: 'Assur also has joined with them, to give strength to the sons of Lot' (v. 8). If this piece dates to the end of the second millennium, Block correctly deduces that the Assyrian reference relates to Tiglath-pileser I (1114–1076),[73] who was the first Assyrian king to reach the Mediterranean.[74] Whether it alludes to that period or to the consolidation of Neo-Assyrian power in the Levant, its treatment of the conflict with the

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68   He conceivably achieved an analogous melding of immediately post-Judges-era and contemporary imagery in his portrayal of Deborah. Asherah's iconography recalls Ishtar's. In the late-tenth-century-BC cult stand at Taanach, precisely in the vicinity of the battle against Sisera, a goddess, most likely Asherah, is depicted with a sacred tree accompanied by two mountain goats, and flanked by lions. 'Lion lady' is one of her epithets. (Taylor, *Yahweh*, pp. 28–29). The description of Deborah resembles the imagery of Ishtar exemplified in the seal BM 89769 more closely however. Whereas Ishtar is dressed for war and is receiving cult under a palm tree from a devotee, Asherah is naked, and the stylized (Asherah) tree does not suggest a palm.

69   Malamat (*Mari*, pp. 100–104) posits a West-Semitic (Amorite) origin for Ugaritic, Mari and Assyrian rites concerned with propitiating dead kings. Hays concludes that the proposition that deceased kings were considered gods in Ugarit is proven (*Death*, p. 115).

70   Ibid., p. 142; Frazer, *Folklore*, p. 295.

71   Brettler (*Judges*, p. 74) understands the psalm's treatment of the battle as an 'alternative suggestion'.

72   A. Malamat, 'The Period of the Judges', in *Judges: World History of the Jewish People* 3, ed. by B. Mazar, Tel-Aviv: Massada, 1971, p. 134.

73   *Judges*, p. 27.

74   Oates, *Babylon*, p. 106.

Canaanites is remarkable: 'Do to them as to the Midianites, as to Sisera, as to Jabin at the torrent Kishon, who were destroyed at En-dor;[75] they became ordure for the earth'. En-dor is mentioned, apart from this, only twice in the Bible: in Joshua 17:11–12 where it is assigned to Manasseh from Issachar and Asher, and was a city from which the Canaanites could not be driven out, and in 1 Sam. 28 concerning Saul's visit there seeking necromantic divination. Its fame, or rather infamy, derives, of course, from the second of these occurrences; the survival of its Canaanite population may, however, account for it being a redoubt of necromancy.[76] It was not only the place where the necromancer was active, but the site of the portal from which shades passed from the Underworld to the domain of the living: 'I see gods coming up from the earth', authentically reflecting in this application to Samuel the Canaanite belief in the deification of kings and heroes. En-dor's name, 'the Spring or Well of Generation', in a language that defines the past in terms of 'generations',[77] is suggestive of an ancestor cult.[78] In addition, in this text, Jabin receives the same fate as Sisera, and that fate was not being killed, slain, or any of the other terms the psalmist possessed to convey inflicted death, but rather destruction. Remarkable also is the fact that their cadavers 'became ordure (*dōmen*) for the earth'.[79] *dōmen* is used 'always of corpses, lying on the ground as offal'.[80] A description of this happening is furnished by the case of Jezebel, who, significantly, was notorious for her sorcery (2 Kgs 9:22, 35–37).[81] In the Hebrew

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75   The psalmist, therefore, locates the destruction site, namely, Jael's tent (assuming a broad correspondence between his account and Judges), at En-dor. The battle took place some fifteen kms away, at Taanach. This is a plausible distance for Sisera to cover on foot after the rout.

76   Its attribution to the patrimony of Manasseh is intriguing in view of the infamous association of the king of that name with necromancy.

77   Compare Eccl. 1:4. Biblical Hebrew, like Sumerian and Akkadian, has no word for 'history' (Grayson, 'Assyria', pp. 193–94).

78   In Mesopotamian belief, the act of digging a well or a pit carried inherent risks of encountering Underworld forces (Tallqvist, *Namen*, p. 3; Heidel, *Gilgamesh*, p. 170; Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, p. 267). Protection was provided in part by making libations of water to the ghosts of one's family (Scurlock, 'Ghosts', p. 92; Tigay, *Gilgamesh*, p. 152; Richardson, 'Assyrian Garden', pp. 179–80; Grayson, 'Treaties', p. 153). Assurbanipal records 'I have instituted offerings and poured water for the kings who lived before me' (*ARAB* 2, p. 377, text 984). For an analysis of the evidence for ancestor cults in Israel and Judah, see Hays, *Death*, pp. 174–75; note Stavrakopoulou, 'Exploring', pp. 9–10.

79   Many translations, following *LXX*, treat this as a simile; it is not.

80   *BDB*, p. 199.

81   Noth (*Israel*, p. 242) and Cartledge (*Vows*, p. 125) are among scholars who claim that the Ba'al whose cult Jezebel propagated in Israel was the Tyrian Melqart, a deity, as noted above, identified with Nergal.

Bible, this is the most execrable fate that can befall a person,[82] a conviction shared in Mesopotamia also.[83] It is the prescription given in Mesopotamian texts for the human remains of sorcerers in order to prevent them entering the Underworld and, thus, potentially returning to the earth.[84] Old Babylonian incantations call on Nergal not to include the witch's ghost among the ghosts of the Underworld and on another chthonic deity, Ningishzida,[85] not to provide water to drink.[86] We discover, then, also in the psalm a possible association between the conflict with Sisera and Jabin and necromancy and sorcery as practised in Canaan and Mesopotamia,[87] as well as the entreaty that the Assyrians be destroyed in like manner.[88]

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82 See Hays, *Death*, p. 161, for a rank-order listing of 'burial types'. Tellingly, it is the fate that Judges describes for the Levite's concubine.

83 In a Sumerian text, it appears to form a curse uttered by a son upon the murderer of his father: 'the man who killed you [. . .] his bones [let no] one [bury?]' (Kramer, *Two Elegies*, p. 61). See also Heidel, *Gilgamesh*, pp. 155–56; Scurlock, 'Ghosts', p. 93; *CAD* E, 1958, p. 399; Richardson, 'Assyrian Garden', pp. 176, 181; Oppenheim, 'Dreams', p. 283. Assurbanipal exhumed the bodies of the Elamite kings and took them to Assur. He describes his motive: 'I inflicted restlessness on their ghosts. I deprived them of funerary offerings and pourers of water' (Miranda Bayliss, 'The Cult of Dead Kin in Assyria and Babylonia', *Iraq* 35 [1973], pp. 115–25 [117]).

84 Abusch, 'Ascent', p. 30. *Maqlû* VIII.85–89. That Sargon II's body was not buried in his house and may have experienced a similar end was widely held to indicate that he was guilty of egregious sin (Livingstone, *Court Poetry*, pp. 77–79; Tadmor, Landsberger, Parpola, 'Sin', pp. 4, 9, 28–29; Brinkman, 'Sennacherib', p. 91).

85 On Ningishzida see *RLA* 9, pp. 368–73; Frankfort, *Cylinder Seals*, pp. 36, 42.

86 Abusch, *Mesopotamian Witchcraft*, p. 67; see also Bayliss, 'Cult', pp. 116–17. Sisera's request for water went unfulfilled, as a result of Jael's ruse.

87 Johnson (ed.), *Religions*, p. 149; Nahum (3:4) identifies Neo-Assyria with witchcraft and spiritual harlotry: 'the beautiful, alluring whore and mistress of witchcraft [Nineveh] sells peoples [into bondage] through her whoredoms, and clans through her sorcery'. Shamash appears to have been the divine patron of necromancy which was a source of divinatory information in the Neo-Assyrian period (Hays, *Death*, pp. 54, 146; Finkel, 'Necromancy', p. 11; Scurlock, 'Ghosts', p. 82), as in earlier periods of Mesopotamian history. Its practice is referred to in *Gilgamesh* Tablet XII.73–87, a text that describes Enkidu being raised as a shade from the Underworld at Gilgamesh's behest (George, *Gilgamesh*, pp. 529, 733).

88 The fact that Yahweh is petitioned to mete out to Assyria the fate he delivered upon Sisera and Jabin may indicate that the psalm dates from a time roughly contemporary with the writing of Judges, especially since it echoes the supplication that concludes Deborah's Song, 'May all your enemies be exterminated thus' (5:31). This notion gains weight from the knowledge that at least some of the peoples listed profited from Sennacherib's treatment of Judah (Gane, 'Role of Assyria', p. 29; Cogan, 'Cross-Examining', p. 61; idem, 'Exile', p. 249). Micah, active at the time of the Neo-Assyrian domination of the region, proclaims 'Now many nations are gathered against you, and they are saying "let her be defiled, let

The parallels between Judges 5 and *Maqlû* are not exhausted by the correspondences observed so far. *Maqlû* illuminates aspects of Deborah's oration whose meanings have hitherto been obscure. As there are two participants in the ceremony, so also in the Song: Deborah, who assumes the priestly function, and Baraq who takes the role of ritual actor and does as he is instructed.[89] It is this character who, in *Maqlû*, is the patient, captured by the witch's spell. Joining in the rites and pronouncing the incantations are the means to free him. In the ritual it was crucial that the two parties remained awake; likewise in the poem wakefulness is stressed: 'Awake, awake Deborah, awake, awake, and utter a song; arise Baraq,[90] and take captive your captivity, son of Abinoam' (5:12).[91] Abusch's comments concerning the perils at the end of Abu are germane: 'going to sleep during this night – when the dead, particularly the dead witches, are present among the living – constitutes a very real danger, [...] for asleep, one is at the mercy of malevolent forces'.[92]

The condition of Israel under Canaanite domination in the period before she arose portrayed by Deborah is of a land strangely becalmed: the roads are abandoned, travellers use 'crooked paths'; the peasantry has 'ceased' (and, presumably, the economy reliant on them has collapsed) (5:7–8). This scene has

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our eyes look upon Zion"' (4:11). The foreign nations excoriated by Amos (1–2) are identical to those enumerated in the Psalm with the exception that the Ishmaelites and Amalekites of the latter are replaced by the Syrians in the former. Furthermore, at the time of Tiglath-pileser I, the Assyrians did not constitute a direct threat to the Israelites or Yahwism. For other arguments in favour of dating the psalm to the Neo-Assyrian period, see Machinist, 'Assyria', pp. 720–21. More generally, the dating of biblical texts to the premonarchic period is not favoured by modern scholarship (Smith, 'Warfare', pp. 165–66).

89   Compare Richardson, 'Assyrian Garden', p. 189.

90   *qûm* means *arise* 'specifically after lying down (sleep, sickness, mourning, etc.)' (*BDB*, p. 877).

91   The Syriac version reads 'lead captive those who would take you captive' (Gray, *New Century Judges*, p. 271).

92   Abusch, 'Ascent', p. 27. Deborah's exhortation may contain a further bi-cultural allusion. The Mesopotamian deity Nusku is a god of fire and light, and he is invoked in *Maqlû* (Tablets I and II) as a nocturnal divine judge. He is associated with the torch (*Maqlû* I.122–25, ed. by Meier, pp. 11–12); *Šurpu* App. 30–35 [Reiner, *Šurpu*, p. 53]). Elsewhere, it is stated 'The torch is your sign of authority'. In other words, he is identified with *lappid*. But he is also associated with wakefulness and, for this reason, the cockerel, as well as the lamp, is his symbol (*RLA* 9, p. 631). In *Maqlû*, Nusku is invoked early in the ritual; Deborah, 'woman of Lappidoth', urges wakefulness early in the Song. Moreover, Nusku is god of the interlunium period of preternatural peril (Kurtik, *Zvezdnoye nebo*, pp. 400–401), 'the evil day; [...] let your (Nusku's) day of wrath catch (the sorceresses)' (*CAD* B, 1965, p. 299), *pace* Hildegard and Julius Lewy, 'Nusku', pp. 152–53.

a markedly different atmosphere from its counterpart in the Gideon section with the locust-like devastation of the land by the Midianites and their allies. Then the villages and towns still functioned, and work continued, albeit in fear and with constant plundering. Tablet III of *Maqlû* begins as follows: 'The witch, who goes on the roads, who invades the houses, who walks in the alleys, who hunts over the square; [...] she saw the man and took away his strength, she saw the girl and took away her step. The witch saw me, she followed me, with her magick she hindered my gait'.[93] The contrast presented in Tablet VII (153–58), once dawn has broken and the exorcism has been effected, is palpable: 'doors are opened, the traveller has passed through the gate, the messenger has taken to the road [...], now I am freed by the light of the rising sun'.[94]

Sisera is an outsider. Attempts to find a Hurrian or Indo-European etymology for his name have been inconclusive. What is uncontested is that it is not Semitic,[95] and therefore neither Canaanite nor Amorite.[96] Sisera made his centre Harosheth-haggoyim, a place name that, unusually, is repeated three times in a few verses (4:2, 13, 16).[97] The meaning of Harosheth for the majority of commentaries is uncertain. De Vaux and Niditch favour a link with the near-homophone meaning 'wooded height',[98] the former translating it 'the wooded region of the nations'.[99] As the location of the settlement is unknown, it is impossible to establish whether this offers a plausible interpretation. The root *ḥrš*, which we have already encountered in connection with Samson's riddle, signifies *inter alia* 'to practise magic', and possesses a close and frequently attested cognate in Aramaic with this meaning. The root is found in

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93   Hoffmann and Caldwell. It may be, however, that the Judg. 5:6–7 description merely recasts a conventional Mesopotamian trope. See, for example, Sargon II's account of the condition of Babylon before he conquered it (Gadd, 'Inscribed Prisms', p. 193). Langdon (*Menologies*, p. 84) notes that even leaving one's gates on the 29th day of any month was considered inauspicious.

94   Hoffmann and Caldwell. Road-travel without fear or obstruction, understood as a blessing of the gods, is already a trope of Sumerian literature (Samuel Noah Kramer, 'Lamentation over the Destruction of Nippur', *Eretz-Israel* [1969], pp. 89–93 [93]).

95   *BDB*, p. 696; Hess, 'Name Game', p. 40; Albright, *Yahweh*, p. 218; Mayes, *Judges*, pp. 74–75; de Vaux, *Early History*, p. 792. In *Israel* (p. 94), Mayes ascribes Philistine ethnicity to him, though without evidence.

96   Wolfram von Soden, *Grundriss der akkadischen Grammatik*, Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1952, p. 1.

97   Threefold repetition is, as noted in Chapter 2, typical of incantations.

98   This interpretation is pregnant with Ba'al and Asherah associations since it was precisely in high places crowned with trees that their cults were practised (Frazer, *Folklore*, p. 337).

99   De Vaux, *Early History*, p. 792; Niditch, *Judges*, p. 64.

Isaiah 3:3: *ḥᵃkam ḥᵃrāšîm* 'skilled in magic arts or drugs'.[100] The feminine form, Harosh*eth*, may reflect grammatical concord with the ellipted feminine noun *ʿîr* 'city'.[101] The use of the verb *ḥrš* in Proverbs with the sense of 'to devise, purpose evil or, on one occasion, good (Prov. 14:22) for someone' comes close to the meaning of casting a spell. Indeed, the list of 'six things which Yahweh hates, yes seven which are an abomination to him' given in Proverbs 6:16–19 could all be applied in a magical context to the activities of the witch in *Maqlû*. Thus, 'Magic [City] of the Peoples', the epicentre of Sisera's activities, comports with the notion of Israel under his dominion becoming a bewitched environment. It fits also with him as the leader of the (dead) kings of Canaan released from the netherworld on all souls' day to fight a cosmic battle against Yahweh, his hosts, and the human forces who came to his help, mustered by Deborah. In such a presentation, the manner of Sisera's death, fastening his head to the ground, so that he is unable to move either to the netherworld or to remain in the land of the living, may be significant.[102] The prose version and the poem agree in representing Sisera as a flesh-and-blood mortal. The nuance lent by the *Maqlû* references is that he called up, commanded and directed otherworldly forces against his enemies, precisely as the Assyrian king sought to do through his magicians. On this reasoning Deborah's Song presents Yahweh destroying and judging living and undead forces of evil and thereby releasing the Israelites from both physical and spiritual oppression.

Another hermeneutical conundrum posed by the poem is the references it makes to the northern tribes who do not participate in the battle. These are couched in unusual language with opaque illusions. What unifies them is that they are all linked in different ways to water courses. This is not immediately evident because most translations give 'divisions' or 'clans' for *pᵊlaggôth* in the account dealing with Reuben (5:15).[103] That it has an aquatic derivation is evidenced in its masculine variant *peleg* 'channel, canal'. Indeed, *pᵊlaggôth* bears the meaning 'streams' in its only other attestation (Job 20:17). It derives from

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100   *BDB*, p. 361; RSV: 'skilful magician'.

101   Compare the treatment of Tyre/*ṣôr* in Ezek. 27:3. See *Gesenius* (pp. 391–92) on the wider question of assigning feminine gender to town names, usually without explicit morphological marking. Note Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative*, p. 161.

102   Abusch posits that a traditional approach to neutralizing a witch was to attack her in a way that both ensured her death and obstructed her from reaching the netherworld (*Mesopotamian Witchcraft*, p. 67). Certainly, the damage to Sisera's skull would ensure that it could not be used as a means for necromantic communication. On the use of skulls in Mesopotamian necromancy, see Finkel, 'Necromancy', pp. 5, 9, 13–15.

103   *BDB*, p. 811. *The Hebrew Names Version*, however, offers 'by the water courses of Re'uven there were great resolves of heart'.

the verb *pālag* 'split, divide'. With the other communities, the link with water-ways is more obvious, though this has not made interpretation any easier for traditional exegesis: Gilead remained over the Jordan; Dan sojourned in ships; Asher dwelt on the sea shore, 'at the landing place'.[104] The poem appears to contrast the cosmic shore on which the six tribes fought for Yahweh with the mundane water courses where the non-participants sought security.[105]

Our writer's adaptation of the *Maqlû* corpus for structuring and developing aspects of the poem raises a question that has been with us since the beginning of this book: does the distinct linguistic register of the Song largely reflect ancient material or, alternatively, artfully reproduce the highly stylized, archaic language of ritual and the exorcist?[106] The degree of influence that this Babylonian ritual text, which was so popular in the Neo-Assyrian era, has exercised on the Song indicates that, while some of the words and phrases employed may have been drawn from one or more antique sources, overall it is a highly stylized creation by the author that reproduces the idiom of cultic hymn and incantation.[107] By this literary device, as well as 'quoting' a widespread genre, he makes more dramatic the contrast in the two dimensions of the battle against the Canaanites, dimensions that, as we have seen, would have been readily understood by a contemporary audience, and again manages simultaneously to evince a sense of the distant past and allude to present practices.

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104   *BDB*, p. 830.

105   Compare Gray, *New Century Judges*, p. 274.

106   The weakness in proving that the Song is ancient is demonstrated in Craigie, 'Song', p. 254. Simo Parpola observes that *Maqlû*, like almost all first-millennium Akkadian incantations, prayers and literary texts, is written in an archaizing and notably stylized language, marked by frequent use of orthographic mimation (e.g., *-lum*, *-num*, *-tum*, *-nim*, *-rim*, *-tim*) and rare words, and stylistic devices like unusual word order, heaping of synonyms, *parallelismus membrorum*, antithesis, alliteration, and assonance (personal communication). Craigie ('Song', p. 265) contrasts the stylistic employment of repetition in the Song with its absence in the Mid-Assyrian Tukulti-Ninurta Epic. See also Abusch, *Babylonian Witchcraft*, p. 22; Tigay, *Gilgamesh*, p. 93.

107   Note the Old Babylonian 'hymnic-epic dialect', an archaizing idiom used to lend authority to the works composed in it (Richardson, 'On Seeing', p. 240). Richardson's comment on such compositions – 'the preservation of such a miscellany of archaic forms in mixed-style points toward the deliberacy of an archaizing purpose' – could apply to Deborah's Song. Compared to other Neo-Assyrian kings, Esarhaddon's inscriptions show a greater use of archaic forms (I.M. Diakonoff, 'A Babylonian Political Pamphlet from about 700 BC', in *Studies Landsberger*, pp. 343–49 [345]; Finkel, Reade, 'Assyrian Hieroglyphics', pp. 256, 259).

Nonetheless, it would be uncharacteristic of our writer if he did not, to some extent, subvert the anticipated. And so it proves. In Assyrian praxis, the exorcist (*āšipu*) was male, his adversary, the witch, generally female.[108] Furthermore, in *Maqlû* v (82–88), in keeping with Mesopotamian notions of demons coming as/on the south wind,[109] the patient proclaims 'Whoever you are, o witch, who like the Southwind [...] has formed clouds against me and stood over me. I rise up against you like the shearer of the heavens, the Northwind. [...] I scatter your witchcraft that you have piled up against me night and day'.[110] Sisera was based in the north; those in the story who came from the south were two women, Deborah and Jael.[111] This inversion plays a satirical role,[112] and also demonstrates the author's accomplished grasp of the *Maqlû* material. Essentially, it is a ritual of reflective magic. We have already encountered this operating literally in the exorcism reaching its climax as the patient looks at his reflection in the water illuminated by the sun's rays. But, more fundamentally still, the rites and incantations are concerned, by means of 'mirror-ritual',[113] with reflecting back on the witch the evil she has sought to visit upon the patient.[114] In this way, the latter is healed and the former neutralized and annihilated.[115] The concept of mirror-imaging that lies at the core of *Maqlû* is axiomatic in Judges, as we have discussed. It can be no surprise, then, that our

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108   Abusch, *Mesopotamian Witchcraft*, p. 66; Schwemer, 'Magic Rituals', p. 433; Black and Green, *Gods*, p. 186.

109   Cohen, *Cultic Calendars*, p. 6.

110   Translation by Abusch ('Ascent', p. 32).

111   In like vein, the name of Jael's spouse, Heber, as noted above, can denote 'a spell', possibly effected through the tying of magic knots. In *Maqlû*, this form of sorcery is much in evidence; in particular, in Tablet IV.108–14 (*Maqlû*, ed. by Meier, p. 32).

112   See Lapinkivi (*Myth*, p. 86) on the south wind as female and demonical. As noted in Chapter 3, Yahweh, too, came to the battle from the south, striding forth from Edom, and quaking the earth as he approaches. As, in Mesopotamian belief, earthquakes involved the unsettling of the equilibrium between the world of the living and the netherworld, they were associated with Ereshkigal (Ponchia and Luukko, *Nergal*, p. lxxxviii). They portended revolution against the existing order (Hunger, *Reports*, p. 273, text 495), not least – appositely in the Judges 5 context – the death of a king (Maul, 'Divination', p. 365). Accordingly, significant seismic activity necessitated apotropaic rituals (Luukko, 'Administrative Roles', p. 239). Some scholars consider that Yahweh was god of the Kenites before his adoption by Israel (Rowley, *Worship*, pp. 42–47).

113   Becking, *From David*, p. 81.

114   Stanley Walters, 'The Sorceress and Her Apprentice', *JCS* 23 (1970), pp. 27–38 (27).

115   Reflective magic is found in Egyptian magical praxis also (Dan'el Kahn, 'Taharqa, King of Kush, and the Assyrians', *Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities* 31 [2004], pp. 109–28 [115, 127]).

writer was attracted to this material and wanted to exploit its potential for his message, in a way that he did not, for example, with *Maqlû's* sister text, *Šurpu*, which shows no influence on his composition.[116] Furthermore, the reworking of *Maqlû* to provide a vehicle for the exaltation of Yahweh would have possessed especial poignancy in an environment where necromancy and sorcery were patronized and practised by the king.

2

The mention of Deborah/Jael brings the discussion back to the topic of Deborah's relationship with Ishtar which we began to explore in the previous chapter. Deborah's unexpected sidereal pronouncement takes us into the referential sphere of Ishtar whose epithets include 'Ishtar of the Stars',[117] 'Goddess of Stars' and 'Queen of Heaven and the Stars'.[118] Deborah introduces herself in terms which again approximate to descriptions of the goddess: 'I arose a mother in Israel. They chose new gods. Then was war at the gates; was there a shield or a spear seen among forty thousand in Israel?'. Ishtar, one of the new gods chosen in the period of the book's composition, is extolled as 'lady of battle, without whom hostility and peace exist not in the land, and a weapon is not forged'.[119]

What becomes clear, though, as we compare Deborah and Ishtar is that, despite her alignment with the SMC and Ishtar's iconography, Deborah does not fully capture the complexity of the goddess's character. For a more complete representation, the figure of Jael is needed. Such a variable-geometric approach to characterisation is, in fact, entirely consonant with that standardly applied to Ishtar herself. This unusually complex divinity was perceived as both distinct from and incorporating other goddesses.[120] Deborah, similarly, is presented as both separate from, and melded with, Jael. As examined in Chapter 2, central to the interpretation of the major judges is the understanding that the character of Deborah morphs into that of Jael as the story proceeds, and this is corroborated by both the architecture of the book as a

116   See Reiner, *Šurpu*, pp. 2–3, and Lapinkivi, *Myth*, p. 66, on the relationship between the two rituals.

117   *Ištar-kakkabī* (Reiner, *Astral Magic*, p. 23).

118   *Šarrat šamāmi u kakkabē* (Tallqvist, *Götterepitheta*, pp. 333, 336).

119   Gadd, 'Harran Inscriptions', p. 59.

120   Just as Ishtar not only has lions as her symbol, she herself is called 'lioness' (Jacobsen, *Treasures*, p. 136; Harris, 'Inanna-Ishtar', p. 272).

whole and the geography of the Deborah section. Deborah/Jael thus becomes a composite character comprising fundamental oppositions who serves to mirror the essential change taking place in Israel.[121] In a word, Jael is Deborah's sinful aspect.[122] Axiomatic to the Mesopotamian conception of Inanna-Ishtar likewise is the belief that she embodied elemental oppositions,[123] what Harris terms a 'coincidence of opposites', 'order and disorder, structure and antistructure'.[124] An indication of this is supplied by the text quoted above; without her, 'hostility and peace do not exist', and, quintessentially, by her role as goddess of war and love in all its forms.[125] Deborah commands the Israelite insurgency but she is not found with blood on her hands. She is 'a mother in Israel' but displays no traits of motherhood. She sits under a palm tree as a harlot would, but the sons of Israel come to her solely for judgment. Jael contrasts with/completes Deborah in all three respects. Her hands are drenched in Sisera's blood with whom she spoke in terms which were alternately maternal and meretricious.[126] Ishtar's maternal aspect is frequently revealed in her care for Mesopotamian kings, especially Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal.[127] Her sexual appetite is a leitmotiv of Mesopotamian myth and ritual, as seen in our consideration of the milk and honey trope; she was the patron deity of prostitutes.[128] She was notoriously blood-thirsty: 'Inanna, you pile up heads like dust, you sow heads like seeds'.[129] Reference has been made to Jael's androgyny. The fact that Deborah operated in the otherwise male role of 'judge' shows her also subverting gender stereotypes. Androgyny was frequently associated with

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121   Exum ('Whose Interests', p. 72) states: 'The nurturing mother and the dangerous mother are one and the same (thus my title "Deborah/Jael")'.

122   Compare Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, p. xxxviii; Lapinkivi, *Myth*, pp. 48–49.

123   Dhorme, *Religion*, p. 85.

124   'Inanna-Ishtar', p. 263.

125   Jastrow, *Aspects*, pp. 124–42.

126   See Alter, 'Samson', p. 52, for the sexual connotation of the preposition *'el* which Jael uses in her invitation: 'Turn, my lord, turn in *to* me' (4:18). Compare also Isa. 8:3: 'I came *to* (*'el*) the prophetess and she conceived'. See Brettler, *Judges*, p. 45. Moreover, the phrase 'and Jael went out [to meet Sisera]' may also be erotically loaded – see Finkelstein, 'Sex Offences', p. 363. Compare Carr (*Formation*, p. 157) on the combined Jael-Deborah features of Judith.

127   In a prophecy to Esarhaddon, Ishtar proclaims 'I was [your] excellent wet nurse' (*CAD* M/2, 1977, p. 266). Assurbanipal, in his hymn to Ishtar of Nineveh and Ishtar of Arbela proclaims 'I knew no father or mother; I grew up in the lap of my goddesses' (Livingstone, *Court Poetry*, p. 12).

128   Westenholtz, 'Tamar', pp. 252, 262; Finkelstein, 'Sex Offences', p. 362.

129   Harris, 'Inanna-Ishtar', p. 268. Sargon II, in a hymn to her, exclaims that her 'play is battle' (Livingstone, *Court Poetry*, p. 13).

Ishtar.[130] As goddess of both the morning and the evening star, originally wor-
shipped as female and male divinities,[131] she transcended gender boundaries.[132]
She is, on occasion, referred to and portrayed as bearded.[133] 'Her androgyny
also manifests itself ritually in the transvestism of her cultic personnel. The
awesome power of the goddess shows itself in the shattering of the human
boundary between the sexes. "She [changes] the right side (male) into the left
side (female), she [changes] the left side into the right side, she [turns] a man
into a woman, she [turns] a woman into a man".[134] The reversal in stereotypi-
cal roles in the Deborah-Baraq relationship alludes to such a dynamic. We find,
then, in the figure of Deborah a reflection of Ishtar, a reflection that gains
yet greater depth when combined with the portrayal of Jael.[135] In this regard,
I would point out that the number of references to these two women in Judges
totals fifteen, Ishtar's sacred number.[136] As noted above, Jael, like Delilah, has
six citations;[137] Deborah has nine.

There is a much more speculative literary connection between Deborah's
tale and a Mesopotamian source than that witnessed in the case of *Maqlû*.
The tentative nature of the derivation is not because the match with Deborah
and Jael is remote but rather that the text in question is known only from Old
Babylonian copies and no direct references to it have yet been discovered in
first-millennium sources.[138] Such a caveat would obviously preclude it from

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130   The identity of some prophets of Ishtar shows a similar grammatical tension to that seen
       in Lappidoth. The determinative used with their names is feminine while other linguistic
       indicators of their gender are masculine (Lapinkivi, *Myth*, p. 74).

131   *DANE*, p. 156; Reiner, *Astral Magic*, p. 6, 23–24.

132   See Wolkstein's comments on the Sumerian hymns to Inanna in eadem and Kramer,
       Inanna, p. 172. Lewy ('Ištar-Ṣad', p. 273) regards Ishtar as the prototypically bi-sexual deity.

133   *CAD* Z, 1961, p. 126; Reiner, *Astral Magic*, pp. 5–6; Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, p. LXXXIX;
       Livingstone, *Court Poetry*, p. 18; Esztári and Vér, 'Próféizmus', p. 13.

134   Harris, 'Inanna-Ishtar', pp. 270, 276; Wolkstein and Kramer, *Inanna*, pp. 97, 99, 171.

135   Astrologically, the 'Goat' star, although principally connected with Gula, is also associ-
       ated with Inanna-Ishtar/Venus from at least the Ur III period (Kurtik, *Zvezdnoye nebo*,
       pp. 590–94; Hunger, *Reports*, p. 103, text 175).

136   Meissner, *Babylonien* II, p. 28; Labat, 'Jeux numériques', p. 258; Kurtik, *Zvezdnoye nebo*,
       p. 401. A written form of her name is $^d15$ (Lapinkivi, *Myth*, p. 36; Yağmur Heffron,
       'Inana/Ištar (goddess)', *AMGG*, 2013 [http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/amgg/listofdeities/
       inanaitar/accessed 28 December 2015]). For examples, see Cole and Machinist, *Letters*,
       text 56 (p. 52), et passim.

137   Delilah stands in a mirror-image relationship with Jael. Niditch (*Judges*, p. 168) calls her
       'the Philistines' Jael'.

138   'There is every reason to believe that this myth was extant, well known, and read and stud-
       ied in the first millennium, at least in scholarly circles. Note that new editions of many

consideration were it not that its correspondence to the presentation of Deborah and Jael seems too close to be adventitious. It is, therefore, hesitantly submitted for consideration. The work in question is the Sumerian myth *Enki and the New World Order* in which Inanna compares her situation with that of her sisters, particularly of her sister Ninmug. Inanna complains of her lack of *me*-s. 'The holy Ninmug, has taken for herself the golden chisel (and) the silver hammer (?), has become the met[al worker] (?) of the Land, the [born] king, who dons the enduring diadem, the born lord who puts crown on head, you have placed [in her hand] [...]. I, holy Inanna, where are my prerogatives?'[139] Kramer paraphrases Enki's reply: 'Enki tries to pacify her by pointing out that she actually does have quite a number of special insignia and prerogatives – "the crook, staff, and wand of shepherdship"; oracular responses in regard to war and battle; the weaving and fashioning of garments; the power to destroy the "indestructible" and make the "imperishable" perish'.[140]

With a flexibility typical of the creative approach to the pantheon displayed in Mesopotamian writings, the writer of Judges (arguably) deconstructs the Deborah/Jael composite reflection of Ishtar-Inanna back into their component parts precisely as, in this myth, Ishtar-Inanna, as the composite goddess,[141] is deconstructed to vivify other female deities, 'her sisters'.[142] Of particular note is the apparent correspondence between Jael and Ninmug who features in the list of Assyrian gods from the Middle Assyrian period and remained in it into the Neo-Assyrian period.[143] Scholars consider that the Kenites were metalworkers,[144] and Jael is found wielding the workman's hammer.[145] The name Ninmug, which was borrowed in Assyrian direct from Sumerian, means 'lady of the chisel' and the goddess is presented using a chisel and hammer. She is the metal- and wood-worker of the land, she is goddess of crafts,[146] and

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Sumerian literary texts, incantations and penitential psalms with interlinear Akkadian translation were prepared in the Sargonid period, so the Sumerian literary corpus must still have been largely accessible to court scholars at that time' (Simo Parpola, personal communication).

139   Kramer, *Sumerians*, pp. 182–83.

140   Ibid., p. 174.

141   Beckman, 'Ištar', pp. 4–5.

142   The plural form of her name signifies 'goddesses' (Oates, *Babylon*, pp. 172–73; *DDD*, p. 848; Nissinen, *References*, p. 14; see, for example, 'Hymn to the City of Arbela' l. 21 [Livingstone, *Court Poetry*, p. 22]).

143   Litke, *God Lists*, p. 201.

144   Burney, *Judges*, p. 14; *BhH*, 2, p. 939.

145   In Tablet vi.20 of *Maqlû*, the sorceress is a goldsmith, in Tablet iv.128, 'a metalworker'.

146   *RLA* 9, p. 471.

she places the crown on the heads of kings. In a macabre sense, Jael combined these attributes in her 'crowning' of Sisera. The other meaning of her name is 'lady of the vulva',[147] underlining that she is but an aspect of Ishtar.[148] This name constitutes a play on words, compounding the Sumerian *mú-* 'to give birth, create, form, shape' – with *múg* – 'female genitals, vagina', itself a fusion of *mu*/'female' and *ig*/'door, entrance'.[149] We read: 'And Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said to him, "Turn, my lord, turn in to me". [. . .] And again he said to her, "Stand in the door of the tent"' (4:18, 20); 'between her legs he bowed' (5:27). Ninmug is, moreover, a goddess of birth.[150] Jael's identity as bringer of death also accords with the description of Ninmug who is connected with death. Her name is once esoterically written *dga-ša-an-ug5-ga* 'lady of the dead', and once *dga-ša-an-ma-ug5-ga* 'lady of the land of the dead'.[151]

So much for the Ninmug-Jael correlation. Between Inanna's *me*-s, as revealed in the myth, and Deborah's attributes, there are also apparent associations: 'oracular responses in regard to war and battle', and the power, as Yahweh's representative in a cosmic battle, to 'destroy the indestructible'. Moreover, Deborah exults, in keeping with one who 'holds the crook, staff, and wand of shepherdship', that 'Yahweh gave me dominion over the heroes' (5:13). The 3+1 account of woven and embroidered fabrics that she provides in her Song (5:30)[152] seems to echo in its subject and detail the rendering of one of Inanna's *me*-s preserved in the myth: 'you twist the straight thread. . . you straighten the twi[sted] thread, you have fashioned garments, you wear garments, you have

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147   Tallqvist, *Götterepitheta*, p. 415; Jacobsen, *Treasures*, p. 109.

148   Her identification with Ishtar is underscored on the one hand by Ninmug's portrayal in an Old Babylonian cylinder seal as a warrior standing on a recumbent lion (Collon, *First Impressions*, pp. 166–67), and, on the other, by votive offerings to Ishtar of vulva figurines (*RLA* 9, p. 49). Julian Reade suggests that virtually all Assyrian representations of a naked woman are probably depictions of a manifestation of Ishtar ('The Ishtar Temple at Nineveh', *Iraq* 67 [2005], pp. 347–90 [347]).

149   John A. Halloran, *Sumerian Lexicon*, version 3.0, p. 26 [*www.sumerian.org/sumerian.pdf* accessed 26 December 2015].

150   *RLA* 9, pp. 471, 473. See Chapter 2 above on the birthing connotations of the Jael-Sisera encounter.

151   Ibid., p. 472. For a reflection on the Mistress of Life being also the Lady of Death, see Moorey, *Idols*, pp. 5–6.

152   Note Bal, *Murder*, pp. 64–83. This 3+1 construction too portends the violent death of its subject. Bal (op. cit., p. 134) contrasts Sisera's mother's lack of psychic awareness with Deborah's foreknowledge.

woven *mug*-cloth, you have threaded the spindle, in your. . . you have dyed (?) the many coloured . . . thread'.[153]

The correspondences between the figure of Ishtar and the representation of Deborah/Jael provided in Judges show them to approximate in their richness to those that connect Samson with Nergal. The writer plainly went to considerable lengths to allude to these gods in his work through identifying them with major judges. Before addressing the question why he did so, which provides a focus of Chapter 7, there is another important Mesopotamian myth that appears to find expression in Judges: that of Tammuz. It is to this we now turn.

3

The association of Tammuz with death and the prevalence of his cult in Judah would have made his myth an irresistible subject to our writer, and it is precisely the deathly dimension that he draws upon. He does so through the Jephthah section. Theodor Gaster claims a correspondence between the Tammuz cult and the annual mourning for Jephthah's daughter, perceiving in that account a fertility aspect.[154] Be that as it may, there is, in the shibboleth episode, what I take to be a veiled reference to Tammuz, an association also identified by Klein who proposes a connection between Tammuz, Jephthah's cutting down/harvesting of the Ephraimites whose tribal identity was exposed through their inability to enunciate 'shibboleth', and the sacrifice of his daughter.[155] Shibboleth has two meanings. The first is 'ear of grain', a signification borne also by its cognates, Ugaritic *šblt* and Akkadian *šubultu* ('ear of barley'),[156] itself a fertility symbol.[157] The second is 'stream of water'.[158] Conceptually, the two meanings appear unrelated, though they may both derive from the notion of 'rising', or, conversely, of 'hanging down'.[159] Klein remarks that there is in biblical Hebrew no shortage of lexemes with initial [š], so the reason why an unusual word was selected as the password has to be significant. In fact, both

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153   Kramer, *Sumerians*, p. 183. Compare Austen Henry Layard, *Nineveh and its Remains*, London: Murray, 1867, pp. 100–01.

154   *Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament*, New York: Harper & Row, 1969, pp. 431–32; Soggin, *Judges*, pp. 216–17; Guillaume, *Waiting*, pp. 147–50.

155   *Triumph*, p. 97.

156   Kugel, *Biblical Poetry*, p. 27; *CAD* Š/3, 1992, p. 186.

157   Dhorme, *Religion*, p. 81; Black and Green, *Gods*, p. 81.

158   *Illustrated World* 2, ed. by Mazar, p. 97.

159   Speiser, 'Shibboleth', p. 12.

meanings of shibboleth appear to reflect Tammuz. He is 'the embodiment of the power in the grain'.[160] Indeed, he is depicted with stalks of grain growing from his shoulders.[161] The association, noted above, of Ephraim with fertility, is shared by Tammuz.[162] One of Tammuz's epithets is 'offspring of the house'.[163] In Judges the term 'House of Joseph' (a name which itself implies the idea of offspring), applies exclusively to Ephraim (1:22, 35).[164] Tammuz tries to avoid destruction by changing his identity, but even so, is caught and killed by his demonic enemies.[165] The parallel with the Ephraimites' denial of their tribal identity is plain. The second meaning of 'shibboleth', 'stream of water', as well as finding an association in the Jordan fords where the Ephraimites are slaughtered, also alludes to an episode of Tammuz's attempt to escape his fate in which he essays to ford a stream but it carries him off to his death.[166] Just as he is called upon to rise from the earth with the sprouting of the new season's vegetation, so he is invoked to rise from the river.[167] In a lament, Tammuz combines these two concepts: 'I am not the grass, may not grow up (again) for her, I am not the waters, may not rise up (again) for her'.[168]

It seems probable, then, that the Judges author couched the episode of the slaughter of the Ephraimites at the Jordan fords in the mise en scène of the Tammuz myth. His choice is revealing of both the meaning and the context of his creation. In the writings of prophets active before and after the deportation of the northern tribes, the tribal designation Ephraim serves as a metonym for the northern kingdom.[169] Hosea proclaims 'Ephraim [...] shall not return into the land of Egypt, but the Assyrian shall be his king' (Hos. 11:3, 5).[170] Isaiah

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160   Cohen, *Cultic Calendars*, pp. 6, 263. See also Langdon, *Menologies*, p. 120.

161   F.A.M. Wiggermann, 'The Image of Dumuzi', in *Gazing on the Deep*, ed. by Jeffrey Stackert et al., Bethesda MD: CDL Press, 2010, pp. 327–50 (336, 347–48).

162   Jacobsen, *Treasures*, p. 26; Cohen, *Cultic Calendars*, p. 263.

163   Langdon, *Semitic*, p. 347; the place of the dead is *Bît Tammuz* 'house of Tammuz', also known as *Ort der Aufrührer* (Tallqvist, *Namen*, pp. 34–35; Horowitz, *Geography*, p. 294), which may recall the Ephraimites' attitude to the two successive judges, Gideon and Jephthah.

164   Gray, *New Century Judges*, p. 240.

165   Wolkstein and Kramer, *Inanna*, p. 81; Ponchia and Luukku, *Nergal*, p. 60.

166   Jacobsen, *Treasures*, p. 51.

167   Langdon, *Semitic*, p. 348.

168   Jacobsen, *Treasures*, p. 66.

169   Compare Brettler, *Judges*, p. 113.

170   In this context, the fact that the Ephraimites were displaying the Hebrew equivalent of an Assyrian dialect feature (see Chapter 3) may be a further Assyrian linguistic reference introduced by the writer.

prophesies 'in sixty-five years Ephraim will be broken, no longer a people. And the head of Ephraim is Samaria', and refers to 'the day Ephraim departed from Judah' (Isa. 7:8–9, 17). Its metonymic function is summed up in Ezekiel in the narrative of the two sticks (Ezek. 37:16, 19). Through the sins of Israel, the northern kingdom, Ephraim, had been destroyed and its people 'kidnapped' and taken to the furthest reaches of the Assyrian empire, an event to which the author probably alludes in his book's closing scene in its narration of the violent abduction of young Ephraimite women. Tammuz was 'the kidnapped god'.[171] The writer's grief at the loss of his kin and the reasons for it animate his work. Among the major literary works of Mesopotamia, none rivalled the Tammuz myth in pathos.[172] The massacre of the Ephraimites in the civil war prosecuted by Jephthah marked a decisive moment in the blood-pollution of the land. It also signalled that the integrity of Israel as one people comprising twelve tribes united in the worship of one God no longer commanded respect or appreciation. It presaged the violent division of the sons of Israel on tribal lines, and ultimately the destruction of the conception of the sons of Israel as a living entity *per se*. The Judges author, unlike Isaiah and Ezekiel (Isa. 11:11; Ezek. 36:11; 37:21–25), did not foresee a coming together again of Judah and Ephraim and their respective tribal associates.[173] The cut-down *šibbᵒlîm* at the river did not contain the promise of rising again and, therefore, in his schema would not re-emerge with new vigour later. As we have witnessed in his recasting of other Mesopotamian myths, the writer does not entertain in his adaptations any positive outcome that they may possess. The same applies here. In his hands, it is solely a tale of tragic, unnecessary death, not a necessary step on the path to triumphant resurrection, nor an allegory on fertility.[174] The tally of Ephraimites slain, forty-two thousand, suggests a further netherworld allusion. As we have seen, 'the six hundred' referred to the Underworld gods in the Neo-Assyrian cosmology. The sum of murdered Ephraimites, whose tribal designation is synonymous with the northern kingdom and its detested kings, equals six hundred multiplied by seventy, the symbolic number of kingship in

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171   From the 'Rites of Egašankalamma' l. 9 (Livingstone, *Court Poetry*, pp. xxx, 98).

172   'The cult of the dying god Tammuz had been throughout the long history of Sumer, Accad, and Babylonia the one which held the greatest attraction for all men' (Langdon, *Semitic*, p. 325).

173   His position is that characterized by Ezekiel as 'our hope has perished; we are cut away from ourselves' (Ezek. 37:11).

174   The *šubultu* was the symbol of the goddess Shala whose astral name was the Furrow (i.e., Virgo). She was consort of Adad (Stevens, 'Iškur/Adad'), and was associated with wrath (Kurtik, *Zvezdnoye nebo*, pp. 27–29).

Judges.[175] Adapting the Tammuz myth in a way that eschews its regenerative aspect but stresses the finality of death would have been a dramatic statement to a society well versed in its meaning.

Contextually, the Jephthah section has clear echoes of the situation in Judah under Manasseh. Manasseh made his son 'pass through the fire' as Jephthah did his daughter. Like Jephthah, Manasseh 'shed innocent blood copiously' (2 Kgs 21:6, 16).[176] Like Jephthah, Manasseh surrounded himself with hollow men, devoid of principle, sanctity and compassion. There is no other point in Judah's history as relayed in the Hebrew Bible when the sins catalogued in Judges were committed with the alacrity and on the scale that they were during Manasseh's reign. There is likewise no other extended period when the attraction of Mesopotamian divinities, cultic practices and myths enjoyed the currency and patronage that they received from Manasseh and his court. *Ergo*, the author's systematic insertion of a layer through his book that reworks a range of the most prominent Mesopotamian motifs to produce a trenchant commentary on the culture that produced them.

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175   A comparable treatment of a multiple of six hundred is offered by the toll of Philistine victims whom Samson took with him into the earth: six hundred from each of the cities comprising their pentapolis ('all the lords of the Philistines were there' [16:27]) total three thousand. Nergal is designated 'overseer of the six hundreds' (Ponchia and Luukko, *Nergal*, p. lxv). 'At [Nergal's] terrifying gaze, all the Annuna roll in the dust' (Falkenstein, *Annunin*, p. 137). What gaze could be more terrifying than that of someone whose eyes have been gouged out, intent on revenge?

176   Gray, *Kings*, pp. 707–09.

Past as Parable, History as Honey: Judges as Historiography

> God, thou great symmetry, who put a biting lust in me from whence my sorrows spring[1]

> The strife with me hath end; all the contest is now twixt God and Dagon[2]

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1

In the previous chapters I have made the case for dating the writing of Judges to the reign of Manasseh and locating its composition in Judah, probably in Jerusalem. The combination of foreign domination, widespread internal apostasy and savage violation of the legal code that is presented in Judges as the defining feature of the Settlement era characterizes Manasseh's reign uniquely among rulers of Judah described in Kings.

On each of its many levels, it is the author's theology that shapes his sources and determines the resultant content. His theology, in keeping with that maintained by uncompromising Yahwists of the eighth and seventh centuries, was informed by the belief that Yahweh's nature, purpose and plans are imparted through prophetic revelation. Accordingly, he conceived the role of his work first and foremost as prophetic.[3] In contrast to the composition's remarkable technical complexity, the oracular message it intimates is signally

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1 Anna Wickham, 'Envoi', in *Selected Poems, With an Introduction by David Garnett*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1971, p. 48.

2 Milton, *Samson Agonistes*.

3 I use this term as defined by Nissinen ('Prophecy', p. 345): 'Just as extispicy reports are not to be seen as predictions in the first place but rather as divine judgments, prophecy is not primarily foretelling the future (even though it can be predictive) but proclaiming the divine will'. In the context of the exercise of kingship, 'divination [in which he includes prophecy] was the medium through which the king was kept informed of his location within the divinely sanctioned order of the […] origin and legitimacy of his rule'. See further Hallo, 'Apocalypses', pp. 233–34.

uncomplicated: by rejecting Yahweh for the worship of the gods of neighbouring peoples and by blood pollution of the land, Israel had ceased to exist, its people carried off to die in the quintessentially 'defiled land', Assyria (Am. 7:17), and Judah, for like reasons, would follow it to violent, ignominious destruction. This message accords with the prophetic statements that Kings records for the time of, and concerning, Manasseh:

> Because Manasseh king of Judah has done these abominations and done more evil than the Amorites who were before him and has caused Judah to sin with his idols [...] I am bringing such evil upon Jerusalem and Judah that, whoever hears it, both his ears will tingle. I will stretch over Jerusalem the measure of Samaria and the plummet of the house of Ahab. I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down. I will forsake what remains of my inheritance and deliver them into the hands of their enemies (2 Kgs 21:10–15).[4]

In the prophecies ascribed to that era there is no suggestion of redemption. Indeed, Kings states that Manasseh's actions, notably 'filling Jerusalem with innocent blood', could not be pardoned by Yahweh (2 Kgs 24:4). In offering no prospect of remission, both Judges and the Kings prophetic material have a different emphasis from the messages of the great prophetic voices who would shortly follow, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, as well as of Isaiah and Micah who preceded.[5] They, while equal in their condemnation of Judah and Israel's sins, proclaimed hope in Yahweh's dispensation of a new creation which included Davidic dynastic rule.[6] Nevertheless, the theology of Judges is consonant with these prophets in affirming the sovereignty of Yahweh over the affairs of earth. Just as Isaiah proclaimed that mighty Assyria was merely an instrument of Israel's God, and Jeremiah (and Habakkuk) asserted a like position regarding Babylon, so all those nations who plunder and oppress Israel in Judges are shown to be raised up by Yahweh in response to his people's actions against

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4   See also 23:26–27; 24:2–4. Cogan and Tadmor (*II Kings*, p. 269) observe that the metaphor of wiping and turning over the dish signifies the wiping out of the population of Jerusalem and Yahweh having had his fill of them. Cogan ('Exile', p. 246) remarks that referring to the fate of the northern kingdom as an object lesson for the south was a feature of the Yahwistic discourse of Hezekiah's reign.

5   They are divergent too from the message of a prophet from before all of them, Hosea, with its anticipation of a new covenant. But Hosea may have shared our writer's rejection of human kingship (Hos. 9:15, 13:10–11). Cogan ('Exile', pp. 246–47) suggests that it was during Hezekiah's reign that Hosea's prophecies were brought to Jerusalem by Israelites escaping from the Assyrians.

6   Note Sanders, *Invention*, p. 152, however.

him, and the oppressors are subsequently vanquished solely thanks to his intervention.[7] As I argued above, there are in Judges but two essential actors, Yahweh and the sons of Israel.

Unlike the prophecies recorded in Kings, the prophetic burden of Judges is not stated explicitly, but refracted in multiple forms through the composition. And this brings us to the second striking feature of the work: its use of *Entstellung* and semantic displacement within a presentation of the book overall as a *ḥîdāh*, an enigma, a 'dark saying', and its projection of the past as a parable for the time of writing.[8] The author's approach to the subject is not due just to a desire to evoke a sense of nightmare, however apposite for the period it describes and the time it was written; nor is it only to display through literary means the deteriorating, mutating dynamic in the relationship between the sons of Israel and Yahweh. Opacity was required in the circumstances that encouraged violent persecution of Yahwists, particularly of those engaged in a prophetic mission. For this reason, Judges was conceived and executed as an encrypted prophecy that takes as its object the people of Judah who chose to accept the other gods and the transgression of covenant law promoted by their rulers. The Levitical priesthood which had generally proved malleable to Manasseh's policies is likewise repudiated along with the office of human kingship itself. The use of history, allegory, and fable in the Soviet literature and film of the Stalin period demonstrates that at times of murderous persecution, this approach offers the obvious relatively safe mode open to a writer to convey a message of dissent,[9] 'hidden in full view' (in Zainab Bahrani's felicitous phrase).[10]

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7 Machinist ('Assyria', p. 736) observes that the origins of this topos are to be found in Isaianic theology. Texts from the reigns of Nabopolassar and Nabonidus attest that the Babylonians viewed Sennacherib's destruction of their city and his resultant punishment in analogous terms (Pamela Gerardi, 'Declaring War in Mesopotamia', *AfO* 33 [1986], pp. 30–38 [31–32]; J.J. Roberts, 'Myth versus History', *CBQ* 38 [1976], pp. 1–13 [9–10]).

8 The past-as-parable element is evident in the writer's treatment of the Asherah poles: among those censured in the Bible for erecting and venerating them are the Israelites of the Settlement period (Judg. 3:7), the Israelites of the Northern Kingdom prior to their deportation (2 Kgs 17:10, 16), and Manasseh. Among the individuals who are commended for destroying them are Gideon (Judg. 6:25–30) and Hezekiah (2 Kgs 18:4) (Day, 'Asherah', p. 404). The fact that these objects probably resembled stylized trees (ibid., p. 406; Moorey, *Idols*, p. 47) may imply a connection with the imagery of Jotham's parable.

9 For example, Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*, Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible* trilogy, and Chukovsky's *Big Bad Cockroach*. On the last, see Karen L. Ryan, *Stalin in Russian Satire 1917–1991*, Madison WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009, pp. 51–58.

10 'King's Head', p. 116.

For a *modus scribendi* with which to impart encrypted information, the writer was richly served by Mesopotamian models and these he exploits. Not only does he draw on the techniques of these sources for his oeuvre, but he also uses many of their themes, adapting them to suit his purpose. Among the multiplicity of themes offered by this material he particularly focuses on two: death – the reasons for which we have analysed – and the sun.

The points made above are all, I hope, corroborated by the evidence and argumentation presented in the foregoing chapters. But a number of important questions remain concerning our author and his opus. The first is what information about him is evident in the text beyond his Yahwism? The second is what was his purpose in producing it, given the considerable risks involved? And the third, what is the significance of the theme of the sun? Related to this is the question why the two Mesopotamian deities Ishtar and Nergal are alluded to so frequently in the work, whereas, for example, Marduk is not, though he equally shares a celestial manifestation. Finally, for whom, in the first instance, was our author writing?

2

It is clear that he was steeped in the literary culture of Neo-Assyria. His writing reveals a comprehension of the contents and meaning of several of the Mesopotamian works that, to our knowledge, were among the most studied in the Assyrian empire in the early seventh century BC, which goes far beyond superficial familiarity. He understood their esoteric import. His composition also suggests a command of the Assyrian language that was sufficiently assured to enable him to introduce complex bilingual puns into the text. It is unlikely that such an extensive grasp of Assyrian culture and language was acquired in Judah where the communication between the two nations was, in large measure, mediated through Aramaic and Hebrew (2 Kgs 18:26/Isa. 36:11).[11]

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11 Gray (*Kings*, p. 688) observes that Hezekiah's 'spreading out' of the 'letter' from Sennacherib (2 Kgs 19:14) indicates that it was probably written on papyrus or vellum and composed in Aramaic. Compare Parpola, 'Treaties', p. 162. At least from the time of Tiglath-pileser III, the Assyrians maintained parallel records in Aramaic (A.R. Millard, 'Assyrians and Arameans', *Iraq* 45 [1983], pp. 101–08 [101, 107]; see also idem, 'Some Aramaic Epigraphs', *Iraq* 34 [1972], pp. 131–37 [133]). Note the extispicy query whether Esarhaddon should send an Aramaean scribe with his envoy to the Medes (Starr, *Queries*, p. 65). Parpola states that Assyria had long been a bilingual society in Assyrian and Aramaic (*The Correspondence of Sargon II, Part I*, ed. by Simo Parpola, Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1987, p. xv). Cogan and Tadmor (*II Kings*, pp. 210–11) contend, however,

The Bible gives no indication that, even in Manasseh's reign, Assyrian was systematically studied by the educated elite in Jerusalem.[12] In any case, after Sargon II's death, Aramaic began to supersede it as the principal medium of administration in the empire.[13]

As discussed in Chapter 5, the Sargonids pursued a policy of taking hostages, often children, from royal and other high-born families in territories that they subdued.[14] This measure was effected normally only in the wake of the Assyrians discovering treachery. The hostages were exposed to a programme of indoctrination in Assyrian cult and culture. The practice is well documented for Sennacherib's reign.[15] Radner proposes that, in that king's campaign in Palestine in 701 BC, he took high-ranking Egyptians as hostages to Nineveh.[16] Sennacherib's inscriptions recounting his reduction of Judah and investment of Jerusalem in the same campaign witness that, in addition to a mass deportation of citizenry to Assyria, he also removed members of Hezekiah's household to Nineveh: he lists 'his daughters, harem, and his male and female musicians'.[17] Customarily, such lists were not exhaustive. We may assume that, given Hezekiah's act of insurrection,[18] Sennacherib took male hostages from the upper echelons of Judean society too.[19] It is also conceivable that as Manasseh, over time, demonstrated his loyalty, not only were the partitioned territories restored, but some or all of the hostages were returned to their homeland to support the implementation of the king's pro-Assyria policies. The evidence of Judges may, therefore, indicate that, among those taken to Nineveh in 701 BC, was the person who would return to compose that book during Manasseh's reign. If so, he would be an approximate contemporary of Esarhaddon who

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that by the late seventh century BC, Akkadian, as well as Aramaic, terminology had an influence on scribes in Judah.

12   Machinist, 'Assyria', pp. 732–33. Compare Childs, *Isaiah*, p. 115.

13   Bright, *History*, p. 313; Collon, *First Impressions*, p. 77. On the occurrence of Aramaic even in Neo-Assyrian royal extispicy queries, see Starr, *Queries*, p. 174.

14   Zawadzki, 'Hostages', pp. 451, 457; Millard, 'Assyrians', p. 104.

15   Karen Radner, 'After Eltekeh', in *Stories of Long Ago*, ed. by Heather Baker et al., Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 2012, pp. 471–80 (473–474); Tadmor, 'Philistia', p. 98; Borger, *Asarh.*, p. 53.

16   'After Eltekeh', pp. 475–77.

17   Luckenbill, *Sennacherib*, p. 34. Compare Piepkorn, *Inscriptions*, p. 43, and Zawadzki, 'Hostages', p. 456, on the status of royal hostages.

18   Noth, *Israel*, pp. 265–69.

19   Cogan (Cross-Examining', p. 71) interprets Sennacherib's statement as Hezekiah's court was exiled.

was probably born in the penultimate decade of the eighth century.[20] It is clear
from Neo-Assyria's dismal record of sustaining the loyalty of its conquered ter-
ritories, despite the enforced ideological education of members of their elites,
the dire strictures of the vassal treaties, and the ferocious reprisals often exe-
cuted against those who were disloyal,[21] that not all the hostages genuinely
embraced the 'Assyrian way'. Radner cites the example of the Egyptian ruler
Psammetikh as one who ultimately rejected it.[22] If my hypothesis is sound, the
author of Judges was another.

For a hostage to withstand the power and radiance of Assyrian culture for
reasons beyond solely a diehard nationalism or driving, opportunistic politi-
cal ambition would require a bedrock of beliefs inimical to those presented in
Nineveh. The Bible, in the story of Daniel and his three companions, depicts in
a comparable Mesopotamian milieu such a dialectic. If our writer was a hos-
tage in Assyria, he would have taken with him direct experience of Hezekiah's
stand against Sennacherib, the resulting devastation of the country in areas
outside Jerusalem and/or the city's investment.[23] He may have been exposed
to the literary environment of Hezekiah's Jerusalem in which the study of rid-
dles and aphorisms particularly flourished.[24] He would almost certainly have
encountered the prophetic ministries of Isaiah and Micah. With, or perhaps
thanks to, them, he was convinced that destruction would befall Jerusalem and
Judah because of the rejection of Yahweh by its rulers and its people and the
conduct demanded by his laws (Mic. 3:12).[25] Judges in its treatment of Israel's
oppressors echoes Isaiah's understanding of the place of Assyria in Yahweh's
plan. As we began to note in Chapter 5 in the references to Assyria as a bee
and a razor hired against Judah and shall encounter further below, elements of

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20   *LAS II*, p. 231. Melville (*Role*, p. 13) estimates that Esarhaddon was born between 713
       and 711.

21   See, for example, the representation of Hezekiah's retainers being staked out for flay-
       ing at Lachish by Sennacherib's soldiers in BM 124908–9 (Albenda, 'Assyrian Relief',
       p. 149; Pl. 4), and Esarhaddon's treatment of the king of Sidon and his ally whom he had
       beheaded and then, having tied their heads around the necks of their nobles, 'to display
       the might of Assur, my lord, to the people', made them process through the streets of
       Nineveh amid much merriment and music-making (Borger, *Asarh.*, p. 50). On the ferocity
       of the Assyrian assault on Ephraimite Gezer in 734 BC, see William Dever, 'Solomonic and
       Assyrian Period "Palaces" at Gezer', *Israel Exploration Journal* 35 (1985), pp. 217–30 (226).

22   'After Eltekeh', p. 477. The mention of Egypt recalls the most illustrious case of an Israelite
       repudiating the education and upbringing provided at an alien court: Moses.

23   Ussishkin, 'Sennacherib's Campaign'.

24   Cogan, 'Exile', p. 246.

25   Bright, *History*, pp. 293–94.

Isaiah's imagery are adopted in Judges in its parabolic representation of Judah's military and ideological subjugation to Assyria. Whoever its author was, at some stage he became a confirmed Yahwist, concerned, like Isaiah and Micah, far more with personal obedience to the God of Israel and ethical conduct prescribed by the Law than with ceremonial acts in a cultic setting (Mic. 6:6–8).[26] As we have considered, these are guiding principles of his theology. I will discuss below that the apparent clues he provides indicate that he possessed not only a detailed knowledge of Neo-Assyrian cult and culture but of its political life also. His stance may signify, too, that, while a member of the educated elite, he was neither a member of the royal family nor of the priesthood, though this assumption disregards the possibility that he was prepared to disown his status in faithfulness to his anti-monarchic, anti-sacerdotal theology.

3

Our writer's conviction that Judah would experience a like judgment to that visited by Yahweh upon Samaria and for identical reasons suggested Israel's Settlement story as a suitable parabolic vehicle for his message. The annihilation of the northern kingdom provided the partial end of the national journey that began with the angelic proclamation in Bochim-Bethel at the beginning of the Settlement era (2:1–3). The epic journey's completion, however, would only be realized in the destruction of the southern kingdom. In recording the nightmare of the first stage of that journey, he points implicitly to its concluding stage. This is one reason why mirror-imaging features so prominently as a rhetorical device in Judges. By means of this device, the author insistently reminds the reader that the surface story of his book has a mirror reflection. The clarity with which Judges opens and the opacity with which it ends are inverted in the context of the prophetic message. The varied history of the Israelites in the land was heading inexorably towards a stark dénouement. The device was doubly apposite since, in reversing Hezekiah's reforms, Manasseh presented the inverse of normative Yahwism as the prescribed religion. The right had become the left; the left, the right, precisely as reflected in the book's otherness theme which I explored in Chapter 3.

Judges indicates, as discussed in Chapter 4, that what I termed the fourth stage of otherness, viz., the adulteration of canonical Yahwism, represented a greater danger to the relationship between Israel's people and their God than

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26   Cogan, 'Exile', pp. 247–48. Note, however, that Carr (*Formation*, p. 318) places Micah 4–7 in the exilic period or later.

even outright apostasy. This is a condition that Bright identifies specifically with Manasseh's reign, claiming that at that time 'the nature of primitive Yahwism had been so widely forgotten, and rites incompatible with it so long practiced, that in many minds the essential distinction between Yahweh and the pagan gods had been obscured. It was possible for such people to practice these rites alongside the cult of Yahweh without awareness that they were turning from the national faith'.[27] Because of the peculiar features of Assur which make him unlike other major deities from Mesopotamia and distinguish him from his predecessors as supreme god (Anu, Enlil, Marduk),[28] he comes considerably closer conceptually to the Hebrew Yahweh than do the Sumero-Babylonian deities worshipped by the Assyrians. Consequently, the risk of syncretism presented by his cult was more insidious for Israel/Judah.[29]

Just as, by the closing stages of the Judges account, Yahweh is depicted as having given up on Israel, so the writer perceives no value in using his book to issue a call to national repentance. Instead he provides the theological explanation why Samaria's end came as it did, and why Judah's fate is likewise sealed. He is possessed of the sensibility cited in Chapter 1 with respect to Isaiah's calling: 'And he said "Go and speak to this people "Hear of course, but do not understand [. . .]". Then I said "Lord, how long?" And he replied "Until the cities have crashed into ruins without inhabitant and the houses have no inhabitants [. . .]"' (Isa. 6:8–12). Consonant with the prophetic practice of the period, an important oracular responsibility was to announce unavoidable impending judgment and to supply the divine reasoning behind it – in Nissinen's terms, 'proclaiming the divine will'. In Judges the fateful transgressions that inevitably provoke Yahweh's retribution are described in terms that would have resonated

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27 *History*, p. 312.

28 His identity and imagery are more opaque – for instance, he does not possess a sacred number; he lacks the family connections typical of the Sumero-Babylonian divinities (those he has are manifestly late additions), and he is not primarily associated with either natural phenomena or emotional states (Lambert, 'Aššur', pp. 82–84, 86). Sennacherib's theological reforms, aimed in part at replacing Marduk, rendered Assur, on one hand, more like a Sumero-Babylonian deity (ibid., p. 85), but, on the other, by equating him with the primeval god Ansar (a theological innovation that occurred in Sargon II's reign) lent him an eternal, universal character (Johnson [ed.], *Religions*, pp. 170, 532, 536; Black and Green, *Gods*, pp. 37–38; Vera Chamaza, *Omnipotenz*, pp. 149–54). The important question of the degree to which Neo-Assyrian theology was essentially monotheistic lies outside the scope of this study. On Sennacherib's introduction of new rites concerning divine statues, see Cole and Machinist, *Letters*, p. 104, text 135. Reade maintains that Sennacherib's approach to religion was driven purely by political calculation ('Ishtar', p. 380).

29 Compare Lapinkivi, *Myth*, p. 52.

directly with Judean reflections on the events in the northern kingdom and their own experience under Manasseh.

This interpretation only goes so far, however, in accounting for the content of Judges. It does not explain the extensive intrusion of Mesopotamian motifs in the work. At the most basic level, the writer wanted to demonstrate that the gods of Neo-Assyria could not, on any grounds, be considered legitimate recipients of cult from Yahweh's people. The parallels, to which he alludes, between them and Ba'al and Asherah (who, in any case, continued to play a role in Manasseh's pantheon), and Dagon,[30] demonstrate their limitations compared to Yahweh's omnipotence. *Ergo*, the presence of their cults in the land was folly and a sin. But it is incontrovertible that, theologically and experientially, in the context of Manasseh's reign, our writer would have faced three substantial rational objections to the case he was adumbrating. The first was the belief widely held in Judah that the Temple in Jerusalem guaranteed the city's inviolability which was considered to have been proven by the Assyrians' decision to lift the siege against Hezekiah.[31] This objection was, of course, faced also by Micah (3:11–12), Jeremiah (7:4),[32] and Ezekiel (4–5). Whereas the three prophets countered it directly, the writer of Judges intimated it by minimizing the significance of Jerusalem in Yahweh's dispensation of the promised land and by presenting Bethel as the site of Yahweh's earthly presence in the past.[33] To readers well aware of the recent fate of Bethel, which, like contemporary Jerusalem, had become a centre of idol worship, the message would have been clear.[34] The second and third objections were of a different order. The former relates to our writer's implicit condemnation of Manasseh; the latter to any vilification of Assyria.

Having been burdened with onerous tribute payments, effectively disarmed and with its army destroyed,[35] its cities wasted,[36] a large number of its population deported, its lands partitioned and transferred to other states, and its relative independence threatened by Assyrian garrisons in the vicinity,[37] the kingdom that Manasseh inherited faced an enormous political, social and

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30   See Brettler, *Judges*, p. 57. For Dagon-Dagan's connection with the cult of Assur in Neo-Assyrian times, see Cole and Machinist, *Letters*, p. 17.

31   Bright, *History*, pp. 294, 332.

32   See Rowley, *Worship*, p. 257.

33   Moreover, the Ark of the Covenant did not provide the failsafe against enemy attack that an earlier generation of Israelites confidently expected (1 Sam. 4:3–11).

34   Compare Am. 7:13: 'But in Bethel do not prophesy anymore for it is the king's sanctuary and the capital'.

35   Cogan, 'Cross-Examining', pp. 57, 68, 71.

36   Ussishkin, 'Sennacherib's Campaign', pp. 98–102.

37   Spieckermann, *Juda*, p. 308.

economic crisis,[38] possibly the worst in its history to that point.[39] One need not be an apologist for Manasseh to acknowledge that, in this situation, his strategic options were severely limited. Indeed, one could construct a compelling case that the king's duty to his country was to establish a relationship with the suzerain that secured a measure of peace to facilitate economic reconstruction and provided the opportunity for recovering the forfeited territories plus, ideally, the deported citizens.[40] The fact of Assyrian hegemony made recognition of Assur and the suppression of resistance to Assyrian power unavoidable.[41] Thus, one could argue, it was Realpolitik, not a personal polytheistic fanaticism and unconstrained bloodlust that required he implement the policies for which is reign is infamous. Furthermore, taking a leaf from the book of Sennacherib's 'chief cupbearer' (*rab šāqê*) (2 Kgs 18:22–25),[42] a persuasive theological case could be constructed to exonerate the king's conduct by stating that Hezekiah's brand of Yahwism had brought nothing but disaster.[43] And had not Isaiah himself urged submission to the Assyrians whom Yahweh had raised up against his people (7:17–25; 10:1–6)?[44] If the circumstances at the beginning of Manasseh's reign permitted such a defence of the king, those at its end could only gild the lily. Archaeological evidence and the testimony of the Chronicler combine to suggest that it brought comparative peace and evident prosperity to the southern kingdom (2 Chr. 33:14). Manasseh had the long life (sixty-seven years) that Yahweh grants to the righteous (Ps. 21:4; 91:16; Prov. 3:2, 16). Indeed, Kings relates that Yahweh's promise to his forefather, Solomon, was 'If you will walk in my ways [...], then I will extend your days' (1 Kgs 3:11–16).[45] Appraised thus, Manasseh should be feted as one of Judah's greatest kings, not its vilest.

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38 Robert Pfeiffer, 'Three Assyriological Footnotes to the Old Testament', *JBL* 47 (1926), pp. 184–87 (185–86); Gane, 'Role', pp. 28, 32.

39 Von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, p. 25; Yigal Levin, 'How did Rabshakeh Know the Language of Judah?', in S. Yona et al. (eds), *Marbeh Ḥokmah*, Winona Lake IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015, pp. 323–37 (323–24).

40 Rudman, 'Note', pp. 403–04.

41 In swearing the VTE, 'the vassals are instructed to serve Assur as if he was their own god' (Wiseman, 'Vassal-Treaties', p. 25).

42 Ussishkin, 'Sennacherib's Campaign', p. 94; Alan Millard, *The Eponyms of the Assyrian Empire 910–612 BC*, Helsinki: University of Helsinki Press, 1994, p. 8.

43 Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, p. 273; Levin, 'Rabshakeh', p 335.

44 Ibid., pp. 335–36; Bright, *History*, pp. 292–93; Gallagher, *Sennacherib's Campaign*, pp. 74, 85–86.

45 Note the name of Sargon's southern wall at Dūr Šarrukīn 'Assur makes long the reign of the King, its builder, and protects his army' (*ARAB* 2, p. 65, text 121; *CAD* Š/2, 1992, pp. 84, 87). See also Heidel, *Gilgamesh*, pp. 140–41.

This evaluation ignores, however, an aspect of Manasseh's conduct which Kings is anxious to stress, namely the intensity and sheer excess of his deeds. While the nominal adoption of Assur was unavoidable for Manasseh, as it would have been for his father, he did not settle for the minimum acceptable: he introduced the cult of the 'great gods' of Assyria in their celestial aspects into Yahweh's temple and 'he worshipped and served them'. He was under no compulsion on the strength of his vassal oath to establish the cults of Ba'al and Asherah, to restore the high places, or to 'make his son pass through the fire'.[46] His fervent enthusiasm for divination, including necromancy,[47] and magic,[48] was likewise not imposed by his political circumstances. The same can be said of the scale of his violent persecution of his opponents. Yet all of these he did. The message of Kings is that Manasseh was a passionate adherent of polytheism and the 'Assyrian way'[49] who corrupted his people 'to do more evil than the peoples whom Yahweh destroyed before the sons of Israel' (2 Kgs 21:9), and a ruthless tyrant who brooked no opposition.

While the narrative in Kings is explicit in its denunciation of Manasseh and in making the charge that the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem was a direct result of his deeds, the approach in Judges is decidedly more oblique. Its writer is concerned to describe the behaviour that represents the cause of the northern kingdom's obliteration and of Judah's impending catastrophe. He places the blame, not on an individual, but on the sons of Israel at large.[50] That said, we noted in Chapter 6 similarities between the portrayal of Jephthah and the record of Manasseh. To an even greater degree this is true of the depiction of Gideon. First, he is presented as of the Manasseh tribe, the only person

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46   On the cult of Molech, with its human sacrifice and necromantic elements, see Stoyanov, *Other God*, p. 44.

47   Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, p. 267.

48   An enthusiasm which he shared with his overlord, Esarhaddon (see below). Dalley cites the 'repulsive rituals of sympathetic magic' that abound in Esarhaddon's vassal treaties ('Ṣalmu', p. 101). Following his successful invasion of Egypt, Esarhaddon took Egyptian magicians into his entourage (Radner, 'Assyrian King', pp. 224–26; Oppenheim, 'Dreams', p. 238).

49   Rudman ('Note') makes an attractive case for the name Amon of Manasseh's son and heir being bestowed on the child in celebration of Assurbanipal's victory over Thebes in 663 BC, a battle in which Judah may have participated as an Assyrian vassal. The Hebrew name of the Egyptian city is *Nō' 'āmôn*.

50   The Judges author is an excellent example of an exponent of what Seth Sanders calls 'a negative political theology' (*Invention*, pp. 152–54) in which it is not the king or the priesthood, but the people who are central to the realization of the covenantal relationship with Yahweh expressed by adherence to his law.

explicitly connected with that name in Judges (6:15).[51] The sobriquet 'Ba'al will contend' is apposite for Manasseh ben Hezekiah who, in reaction to his father's purge of the high places, championed the resurgence of Ba'al worship (2 Kgs 21:3; 2 Chr. 33:3). The apparent benefits of Gideon's judgeship – the alleviation of the economic blight suffered by Israel because of its oppressors, the recovery of territory overrun by the enemy, and the outcome that 'the country was in peace for forty years' (8:28) – were but the deceptive lull before much greater disasters. 'He made an ephod, and put it in his city, and all Israel went there whoring after it, which became a snare to Gideon and his dynasty' (8:27) is a statement that, *mutatis mutandis*, could be applied to Manasseh. Gideon's shedding of innocent blood prefigures Manasseh's crime.[52] Most telling of all, it is with Manasseh's accession, just as in the transition to Gideon, that the balance between good and evil, light and darkness tips decisively, when Judah, following the northern kingdom, moves from enjoyment of Yahweh's mercy to exposure to his certain judgment, despite all appearances to the contrary.

4

Gideon's relationship to kingship is presented in Judges as equivocal. But there is no ambivalence with respect to his son from his Shechemite concubine in this regard. Abimelech was 'made king' in Shechem and 'ruled over Israel for three years'.[53] This notice brings us back to a topic that has been suspended since Chapter 2: the esoteric meaning of Jotham's parable. This in turn raises the

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51   The writer considers it so important that Gideon alone should be associated with Manasseh that Jair, who, we know from Num. 32:41 and 1 Kgs 4:13, is 'the son of Manasseh', is introduced in Judges by his geographical, rather than tribal, designation (10:4) (Herzberg, *Bücher*, p. 210; Burney, *Notes*, p. 45; idem, *Judges*, p. 289). As noted in Chapter 3, Jephthah, too, may have been a Manassite, but this is not stated.

52   It is remarkable that, in contrast to their respective sons, both Gideon and Manasseh reached a 'good old age' and died peacefully. This may indicate that either Judges was written after the death of Amon, or was subject to minor editorial modification at that time, or this shared feature is merely a coincidence. For the reasons given in Chapter 5 and others that I offer below, there is no substantial argument for attributing the work's composition to Josiah's reign by which time Assyrian power was rapidly wearing out towards oblivion (Machinist, 'Assyria', p. 722; Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, pp. 291, 298–99).

53   Just as Ba'al serves as a metonym for all illicit gods, so Shechem, the site of Rehoboam's coronation, in the Abimelech pericope signifies Israel (Bluedorn, *Yahweh*, pp. 198, 225–26, 232), or rather what remains of Israel, namely Judah/Jerusalem. Note the similarity in the phraseology of Judg. 9:6 and 1 Kgs 12:1. Compare Alt, *Essays*, p. 178; Block, *Judges*, p. 322.

third of the reasonable objections to the stance our writer adopted: the 'might is right' argument which, in the context of early seventh-century-BC Judah, patently applied to the superpower of the age, Sargonid Assyria. The supreme god of Assyria, Assur, 'lord of lords', 'king of the gods', 'father of the gods',[54] 'the great lord, [king] of the Igigi and Annuna(ki), creator (begetter) of all things, [. . .], lord of the lands',[55] had demonstrated his matchless authority and might in establishing his people, the Assyrians, as the dominant power, with their king ruling an empire unsurpassed in scale and wealth.[56] Indeed, the name of their country, itself derived directly from their ancient cult centre to the eponymous god, was *māt Aššur* ('land of [the god] Assur').[57] In mentioning Assyria, one simultaneously referred to its chief deity.[58] While the modalities of the relationship between the god and his king defy precise definition,[59] it is unarguable that the latter was recognized as Assur's vice-regent and (chief) priest on earth.[60] In Assurbanipal's coronation hymn, the relationship is described as 'Aššur is king! Assurbanipal is the [representative] of Aššur, the creation of his hands'.[61] As Jerrold Cooper remarks, 'Neo-Babylonian monarchs, who portray themselves as humble servants of the gods, would be very unlikely to consider self-deification, [whereas] the resistance of the Neo-Assyrian kings who styled themselves both visually and in writing as mighty warriors and deputies of the gods is more difficult to comprehend'.[62]

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54   Borger, *Asarh.*, pp. 11–12, 43, 46.

55   *ARAB* 2, p. 100, text 180.

56   Noth, *Israel*, p. 292.

57   Johnson (ed.), *Religions*, p. 170; Livingstone, *Court Poetry*, p. XVII.

58   An oracle from Esarhaddon's reign demonstrates how symbiotic the relationship between heaven and Assyria was held to be. Ishtar is reported to proclaim 'I will put Assyria in order, I will put the kingdom of heaven in order' (Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, p. 18).

59   'The idea of "state" is too much connected with the person of the king – though there is the possibility that in Assyria the god Aššur was the real king – for us to assume that he was only a go-between' (van Driel, *Aššur*, p. 174). See also Irene Winter, 'Touched by the Gods', in *Religion and Power*, ed. by Brisch, pp. 75–101 (83–88).

60   Seux, *Épithètes*, p. 112; Meissner, *Babylonien* I, pp. 63–64; Borger, *Asarh.*, p. 97. On the king's position in the religious hierarchy, see Vera Chamaza, *Omnipotenz*, p. 502.

61   Livingstone, *Court Poetry*, p. 26.

62   'Divine Kingship in Mesopotamia', in *Religion and Power*, ed. by Brisch, pp. 261–65 (263); also Ehrenberg, 'Dieu', p. 105. For the arguments for and against the divine status of Neo-Assyrian kings as expressed through their 'royal images', see respectively Cole and Machinist, *Letters*, pp. xiii–xv, and Holloway, *Religion*, pp. 178–93/Vera Chamaza, *Omnipotenz*, pp. 203–07. It is revealing that the Assyrians, unlike the Babylonians, viewed their kings as comprising a single unbroken line (Grayson, 'Assyria', pp. 179, 192).

    To make his case, the Judges writer needed to confront the argument that the political and military supremacy of the Sargonids proved Assur's sovereignty over the earth. In other words, he had to rebut the contention that Assur, not Yahweh, was 'Father, Maker and Creator; Lord, Prince, and King; the Autocrat of boundless authority',[63] the personification of kingly dominion, Lord of heaven, earth and the netherworld.[64] In the context of Manasseh's Judah, particularly in the eyes of someone who had been exposed at length to the centre of Assyrian power and who rejected the doctrine of human kingship over Yahweh's people, the ruler of Judah, though roundly condemned for his apostasy, had become, of his own volition, no more than an impotent placeman of a greater authority.[65] The real challenger to Yahweh was Assur,[66] given corporeal expression by the Assyrian sovereign.[67] The prophets who spoke before Manasseh's reign gave a transparent response to the challenge: Yahweh would humiliate and destroy Assyria and thereby expose its king as inconsequential and its idols as trumpery (Mic. 5:5–6; Hos. 11:11; particularly Isa. 10:5–19).[68] This course was not open to the prophet of Judges. Instead, he encoded his rebuttal in his composition, most fully in his treatment of the Abimelech story, and especially through the pivotal Jotham parable.

    The parable's most striking characteristic is that trees are its subject. The use of the tree as a symbol of kingship is well attested in the ancient Near East.[69] In a Neo-Assyrian letter written by a court scholar at the time of Manasseh, the Assyrian king is compared to a flourishing tree that provides sanctuary

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63   Tallqvist, *Götterepitheta*, p. 266.

64   Vera Chamaza, *Omnipotenz*, pp. 134–35, 150, 240.

65   'We submitted to Egypt and Assyria just to get enough bread. […] Servants have ruled over us' (Lam. 5:6, 8).

66   Compare, McKay, *Religion*, p. 59.

67   Note the images of Sennacherib standing in adoration before an anthropomorphic representation of Assur in Rodney, 'Ishtar', p. 215. Revealingly, the king is depicted of similar stature to the king of the gods. The same obtains for the depiction of Sargon II with a deity thought to be Assur (Winter, 'Touched', pp. 86, 92). In an iconographic tradition in which relative size can be an indicator of power (Oates, 'Nimrud (Kalḫu) 1962', p. 14), this makes an important statement (compare, for example, the scale of kneeling captives relative to the king in Esarhaddon's Zincirli stele [*RLA* 9, p. 260; Barbara Nevling Porter, *Trees, Kings, and Politics*, Fribourg: Academic Press, 2003, p. 75 and Pl. 28]).

68   See Gallagher, *Sennacherib's Campaign*, pp. 75–87. Childs (*Isaiah*, pp. 61–66) advances arguments for excluding Isa. 10:20–34 from this oracle.

69   Stavrakopoulou, 'Exploring', p. 17.

to his people.[70] The extraordinary number of sacred tree motifs presented in the panels of Assurnasirpal's palace at Kalḫu – with ninety-six in one room alone[71] – underscores the strong association between kingship and trees. I quote Parpola:

> Irene Winter has convincingly demonstrated that the famous relief showing the king flanking the Tree under the winged disc (Slab B-23) corresponds to the epithet "vice-regent of Aššur" in the accompanying inscription. Clearly, the Tree here represents the divine world order maintained by the king as the representative of the god Aššur embodied in the winged disc hovering above the Tree. Secondly, […] the king takes the place of the Tree between the winged genies. […] In such scenes the king is portrayed as the human personification of the Tree. Thus if the Tree represented the divine world order, then the king himself represented that order in man, in other words, a true image of God, the Perfect Man. If this reasoning is correct, it follows that the Tree had a dual function in Assyrian imperial art. Basically, it symbolized the divine world order maintained by the Assyrian king, but inversely it could also be projected upon the king to portray him as the Perfect Man. This interpretation accounts for the prominence of the Tree as an imperial symbol because it not only provided a legitimation for Assyria's rule over the world, but it also justified the king's position as the absolute ruler of the empire.[72]

Thus, the tree is indisputably identified with kingship in Neo-Assyria,[73] and specifically with the relationship between the Assyrian king, his sovereign deity, Assur, and the peoples he rules on Assur's authority.[74] In Jotham's apologue the equation of the tree to kingship is direct. In the Hebrew Bible, while the

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70   Parpola, 'Tree', p. 167, i.e., 'May [the king's] countenance flourish and extend protection over me' (*CAD* Š/1, 1989, p. 289).

71   Richardson, 'Assyrian Garden', pp. 147–48; Porter, *Trees*, p. 11.

72   'Tree', p. 167.

73   Richardson, 'Assyrian Garden', pp. 159–63.

74   Ibid., pp. 164–65; Stavrakopoulou, 'Exploring', p. 17; Porter, 'Sacred Trees', p. 139. Note the motif of the sacred tree flanked by images of the king under the winged disc on Assurbanipal's garment (Eleanor Guralnick, 'Neo-Assyrian Patterned Fabrics', *Iraq* 66 [2004], pp. 221–32 [229–31]). This is a uniquely Assyrian motif (Parpola, 'Tree', p. 165, n. 24). Laura Battini argues that Sargon's newly built capital likewise had a symbolic cosmic function, in demonstrating the divine perfection mediated through the king ('Un exemple de propagande néo-assyrienne', *Contributi e materiali de archeologia orientale* 6 [1996], pp. 215–34 [226]).

ILLUSTRATION 3 *Panel from the throne room of Assurnasirpal II (ca 865–860 BC).*
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tree often symbolizes a king, nowhere does it explicitly represent an Israelite king, whether actual or ideal. It is either associated with the people of Yahweh collectively,[75] or, where it refers to a potentate, he is foreign (for example, Ezek. 28; 31:2–18, Dan. 4:10–33). *Ergo*, the parable is located in the Mesopotamian referential domain, not the Israelite. In no Mesopotamian environment was it so pronounced a symbol of kingship as in Assyria.[76] Moreover, there is a characteristic twist. It is the trees themselves, rather than, for instance, the creatures that dwell in their shade, that desire a tree to rule over them. The parable therefore concerns the appointment of a king above kings, not simply a king. As discussed in Chapter 2, none of the trees that was intrinsically valuable considered the office of king of trees attractive or even worthwhile. In fact, the employment of a Perfect verb form in their responses signals astonishment at even being asked.[77]

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75   Num. 24:6–7; Ps. 92:12–13 (HB 13–14); Jer. 22:7 (cedars referring to Jerusalem); Ezek. 17:3–24, where the king and nobles of Judah represent the summit of the tree. That which grows from the stem of Jesse (Isa. 11:1) is, conspicuously, not a tree.

76   Porter, 'Sacred Trees', pp. 137–38; eadem, *Trees*, p. 19; Collon, *First Impressions*, pp. 75–80; Parpola, 'Tree', pp. 161–64.

77   S.R. Driver, *A Treatise on the Use of the Hebrew Tenses*, 3rd edn, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892, p. 24.

The second notable feature of the apologue is the type of tree that is cited. In the graphic and literary representations of trees as symbols of kingship and the kings' relationship with the divine, at least in the Neo-Assyrian period, they tend to be either the palm,[78] often in highly stylized form,[79] or towering conifers.[80] The palm and the conifer are combined in the imagery associated especially but not exclusively,[81] with Assurnasirpal's garments[82] and palace, particularly the sacred tree tended by the *apkallu* who clasp pine cones.[83] But none of the four trees that are potential candidates for supreme

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78   Note Richardson, 'Assyrian Garden', pp. 162–63, and the incantation text: 'O date palm, [...] as a wrapping for office, suitable for the kingship' (Geller, 'Tablet', p. 35).

79   Porter, 'Sacred Trees', pp. 133, 138; Simo Parpola, 'Sons of God – The Ideology of Assyrian Kingship', *Archaeology Odissy Archives*, December 1999 [http://www.gatewaystobabylon .com/introduction/sonsofgod.htm accessed 17 September 2013].

80   'The king (is the one) who goes down to the garden and cuts a cedar (slip)' (incipit to a song [*CAD* E, 1958, p. 275]). Due to the cedar's divine properties, majestic proportions, and exotic location, campaigning to the forests of Lebanon and ceremonially felling trees became a statement of the Assyrian kings' might (Malamat, 'Campaigns'; André Parrot, Review of A. Malamat, 'Campaigns to the Mediterranean', *Syria* 45 [1968], pp. 164–65; Tadmor, World Dominion', p. 56). By doing so, they imitated the archetypal king, Gilgamesh ('We have cut down a lofty cedar whose top abutted the heavens' [George, *Gilgamesh*, pp. 612–15]), whose interest in the venture was to immortalize his name (Tigay, *Gilgamesh*, pp. 76–77) out of vainglorious and competitive motives (Mobley, 'Wild Man', p. 221). Sennacherib describes how 'Assur and Ishtar, who loved my priesthood, and have called me by name, showed me how to bring out the mighty cedar logs [which] had become enormously tall' (Luckenbill, *Sennacherib*, p. 107). Isaiah seizes the metaphor of cedar-felling to characterize this king's hubris and folly: 'Through your servants you have scorned the Lord saying "With my many chariots I have ascended to the summit of the mountains, to the sides of Lebanon, and I will fell its high cedars, and its choice junipers"' (Isa. 37:24a; 2 Kgs 19:23a).

81   See, for instance, the Middle-Assyrian ivory pyx excavated in Assur. Haller (*Gräber*, p. 135) dates it to Tukulti-Ninurta I's reign. It shows a double-symmetry with two conifers – Haller surmises that they may be cedars – that alternate with two date palms. The conifers are flanked by ibexes (Haller considers them gazelles) grazing on the flowers that grow from the roots of each conifer. In the throne room of Fort Shalmaneser in Kalḫu, the outermost register of a decorative panel shows kneeling ibexes alternating with palmettes (Oates, 'Nimrud (Kalḫu) 1962', p. 31).

82   Guralnick, 'Fabrics', p. 221.

83   Porter ('Sacred Trees', and, less emphatically, 'Noseless in Nimrud', in *Of God(s), Trees*, ed. by Luukko et al., pp. 201–20 [212]) is not the first to posit that the items held in the right hands of the *apkallu* are male flowers of the date palm and the *apkallu* are engaged in a symbolic act of fertilizing the trees. However, the items bear considerably less resemblance to palm flowers than they do to the cones of *pinus brutia*, the only conifer

power conforms to this convention. On the contrary, the olive, fig and vine 'are the staple products of Palestine, upon which its agricultural wealth and prosperity mainly depend'.[84] Collectively they symbolize the fruitful and well-functioning agrarian society that Israel in the Judges period under Yahweh's kingship was intended to be.[85] The fig and vine are emblematic of the security and prosperity that just rule confers on the nation (Mic. 4:4–7; 1 Kgs 4:25).[86] The association of the olive with important ceremonial rituals obtained throughout the ancient Near East,[87] and this gives logic to it being approached first. Indeed, the parable begins 'Once upon a time, the trees came to *anoint* a king over them'; hence, the participation of the olive was doubly essential.

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indigenous to Iraq (G.W. Chapman, 'Forestry in Iraq', *Unasylva* 2/5 [http://www.fao.org/documents/en/detail/19778/ accessed 26 December 2015]). Compare the photographs in Porter, 'Sacred Trees', pp. 135–36; also Albenda, 'Sacred Trees', pp. 127, 129. See Richardson, 'Assyrian Garden', pp. 157–58, for other arguments against the fertilization proposal. Many scholars agree that the objects clasped by the sacred guardians are tree cones used as 'purifiers' (Wiggermann, *Protective Spirits*, p. 67; Parpola, 'Tree', pp. 162, 164, 190; Black and Green, *Gods*, p. 46; Anthony Green, 'A Note on the Assyrian "Goat-Fish", "Fish-Man" and "Fish-Woman"', *Iraq* 48 [1986], pp. 25–30 [28]; note Reiner, *Šurpu* VIII.41, p. 41). In *Maqlû* the pine cone is invoked, together with the date palm, to bring psychic release (l.21–24, ed. by Meier, p. 8). The efficacious properties of the date palm and the pine cone are there given respectively as the former's ability to catch the breeze and the latter's abundant seed. Note the alternation of palm frond and pine cone on the five-branched plant held by an *apkallu* in one of Assurnasirpal's panels (Joachim Marzahn, *Könige am Tigris*, Mainz: von Zabern, 2004, p. 74). In the Erra myth, the same aspects of the trees are again juxtaposed: 'Woe to Babylon, which I made as lofty as a date-palm's crown, but the wind shrivelled it; woe to Babylon, which I filled with seeds like a pine-cone, but whose abundance I did not bring to fruition' (Dalley, *Myths*, rev. edn, p. 304). It is evident, then, that it is in the context of magic ritual that these two plants are routinely combined, and that it is the conjunction of the *trunk and fronds* of the date palm and the *cone* of the pine that is highlighted, precisely as in Assurnasirpal's reliefs (see also Green, 'Note', p. 28).

84   Burney, *Judges*, p. 273; also Herzberg, *Bücher*, p. 205.

85   Sennacherib's war artists certainly associated them with Judah: vines, fig trees and, possibly, stylized olive trees appear in the background of the Lachish panels (Ussishkin, 'Lachish', p. 193). Younger (*Judges/Ruth*, p. 222) underestimates the writer in claiming that the identity of the three trees is not important.

86   In the Kings account of the *rab šāqê*'s speech to Jerusalem the metaphor is reworked to offer a beguiling but sinister invitation to surrender and submit to deportation (2 Kgs 18:31). The fig-tree motif is strongly represented in glazed panels and bronze work at Sargon II's palace (Finkel, Reade, 'Assyrian Hieroglyphics', pp. 247–49, 251, 253). In Nah. 2:2, the Assyrians are depicted as despoiling the vine branches of Israel, a text intended both literally and metaphorically.

87   Gray, *Joshua, Judges*, p. 319; *BhH* 2, pp. 1336–37; CAD Š/1, 1989, p. 326.

But the olive has none of it and declares pointedly that its vocation is to provide the oil wherewith men glorify God,[88] making no reference to kings.

In a Neo-Assyrian context, these three trees were associated with royal gardens. In the extensive gardens that Sennacherib established in Nineveh in 694 BC, he planted 'the vine, every fruit tree, the olive and aromatics'.[89] These gardens must have been an extraordinary sight against their semi-desert setting.[90] According to Dalley and Foster, they were, in fact, antiquity's most celebrated gardens, the so-called 'Hanging Gardens of Babylon'.[91] Sennacherib's pride in them is manifest. He records 'Oil of the fruit tree [the olive] and products of the gardens (more than these trees bore in their native habitats) I brought in abundance to Assur, the great lord, the gods and goddesses who dwell in Assyria'.[92] The gardens were an assertion of the king's power and renown,[93] and served a propaganda function in displaying exotic plants brought from the empire's furthest reaches, thereby demonstrating its scale and the monarch's omnipotence.[94] In this sense, its trees were a visual metaphor for the kings under the Assyrian sovereign's rule.[95]

Gallagher submits that the forest and fruitful field found in Isaiah 10:17–18, which, the prophet announces, Yahweh's fire will consume, may allude to Sennacherib's gardens.[96] Whether or not this is so, if the Judges writer was taken to Nineveh as a hostage in 701, he would have witnessed the construction of the gardens and possibly their finished state. So too, of course, did his putative contemporary, Esarhaddon, who styled himself 'the great and mighty king, King of the Universe,[97] King of Assyria, Viceroy of Babylon, King of Sumer and

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88 Judg. 9:9, following *LXX B*. The *MT* reads 'they glorify God/s and men'. See the textual emendation proposed by Burney (*Judges*, p. 273). In Mesopotamian cult, olive oil was used to clean the images of the gods (*Maqlû* VII.32, ed. by Meier, p. 47).

89 *CAD* Š/1, 1989, p. 289.

90 Hildegard Lewy, 'Nitokris-Naqî'a', *JNES* 11 (1952), pp. 264–86 (268). For a bas-relief that probably depicts the gardens, see Dalley, 'Nineveh', p. 51.

91 Dalley, 'Nineveh', pp. 45 et passim; Karen Pollinger Foster, 'The Hanging Gardens of Nineveh', *Iraq* 66 (2004), pp. 207–20.

92 Luckenbill, *Sennacherib*, p. 116.

93 Foster, 'Hanging Gardens', pp. 213–14.

94 David Stronach, 'The Garden as a Political Statement', *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 4 (1990), pp. 171–80 (171–74); Porter, 'Sacred Trees', p. 139; Stavrakopoulou, 'Exploring', p. 6.

95 Assurbanipal's coronation hymn calls on the gods to grant him 'leadership over [all other] kings' (Livingstone, *Court Poetry*, p. 27).

96 *Sennacherib's Campaign*, pp. 86–87.

97 This epithet of the Assyrian ruler was first adopted by Tukulti-Ninurta I in the thirteenth century (Parpola, 'Tree', p. 168).

Akkad, King of Karduniash [the Kassite name for Babylonia] – all of it – King of the kings of Egypt, Patros and Kush [...], the exalted "Dragon" (absolute monarch), beloved of Assur, Shamash, Nabu and Marduk, king of kings [...], the almighty prince who holds kings on a leash'.[98] During Manasseh's era, Esarhaddon, his father, and his son were, in their sequence, the tree that ruled all other trees, or, as Jotham put it, 'waved around' (*nûaʿ*) over them.[99]

While commentators are divided on the nuance conveyed here by the verb *nûaʿ*, there is unanimity that the ultimate choice of king and the terms of his acceptance can only reflect negatively on kingship. The tree that takes the position is neither majestic nor offers anything that Israel needs for sustaining everyday life or its cultus – quite the opposite. Cundall remarks that the thorn-bush 'was a positive menace to the farmer who had to wage continual war against its encroachments. Its carpet-like growth was an especial menace in the heat of summer when scrub fires, fanned by the wind, could travel at incredible speeds along the tinder of dried brambles'.[100] The thorn-bush, who, in its reference to being anointed, plainly delights in the trappings of kingship,[101] demands the other trees' good faith. Evidence of bad faith will be punished violently. In effect, the thorn is setting the terms of the vassal treaty which it is

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98   Borger, *Asarh.*, pp. 96–97.

99   The verb *nûaʿ* conjures up a ridiculous figure (Gray, *Joshua, Judges*, p. 319; Block, *Judges*, p. 318), and signifies the inherent impotence of kings who, despite the illusion of might, are ultimately at the mercy of other forces (*pace* Cundall, *Judges*, p. 129, and *Moore, Judges*, p. 247, who understand the context to denote authority, presumably on the model of 'holding sway'. In fact, its use in non-causative forms in the Hebrew Bible generally conveys not an agent, but a victim of powers beyond his/her control. Compare Burney, *Judges*, pp. 273–74; *BDB*, p. 631). Boling (*Judges*, p. 173) interprets it as a metaphor for a nodding king. The use of *nûaʿ* in the apologue appears to be an instance of our writer borrowing imagery from Isaiah. In Isa. 7:2, in the account of events leading to Ahaz's fateful decision to involve Assyria in Judah's affairs rather than trust in Yahweh, the king's 'heart and his people's hearts were shaken (*nûaʿ*) as the trees of the forest in the face of the wind' by the prospect of a Syrian-Samarian attack (compare Tadmor, 'Philistia', p. 88; McKay, *Religion*, pp. 5, 70, in which the author offers differing positions). Its other arboreal biblical reference also relates to Assyria. It occurs in Nahum's oracle of Nineveh's destruction: 'all your fortresses are like fig trees with first-ripe fruit. When shaken, they fall into the eater's mouth' (3:12). As a description of a puppet manipulated by external forces, *nûaʿ* serves well. With this one word, the Judges writer succeeds in scorning the pretensions of the Assyrian rulers for whom the tree was a predominant symbol.

100   Cundall, *Judges*, p. 129.

101   Butler, *Judges*, p. 241.

imposing.[102] In return, its subjects are offered protection in its shade. Indeed, they are commanded to take refuge there. As Block comments, 'the image of trees "seeking cover" beneath a bramble is absurd, not only for reasons of size, but also because buckthorn offer neither shade nor cover: they have thorns'.[103] Moreover, when trees are overshadowed they either become deformed or die. The word *ṣēl* has a close cognate in Assyrian, *ṣillu*.[104] In both languages, its primary meaning is 'shadow, shade'. By extension, it is a standard Assyrian term to signify the protection or aegis of the gods and the king,[105] an application attested also in Hebrew.[106] In Assyrian to receive gifts 'in the shadow of the king' denotes especial honour.[107] The message of the parable is clear: a vassal relationship with this king of kings can bring only constriction, pain and destruction. The adoption of a thorn-bush as king provides a telling comment on the condition of the 'divine world order', precisely as expressed by other means in Judges. That the parable is a veiled reference to the king of Assyria finds additional weight in three other associations.[108] The first is that the thorn-bush sequence appears to rehearse Isaiah's prophecy, mentioned above, concerning the Assyrian king, whom he describes in a series of metaphors relating either to implements used for cutting trees (the axe and the saw) or that are fashioned from trees once cut (the rod and the staff). He continues: 'The Light of Israel shall be for a fire and his Holy One for a flame, and it will

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102   In Esarhaddon's words: 'Do not sin against your treaty and annihilate yourselves, do not turn your land over to destruction and your people to deportation. May this matter which is acceptable to god and mankind, be acceptable to you too' (*VTE* ll. 293–97).

103   *Judges*, p. 318; Moore, *Judges*, p. 248. On the thorny properties of the plant, see Younger, *Judges/Ruth*, p. 223.

104   *BDB*, p. 853.

105   *CAD* Ṣ, 1962, pp. 189–92; Richardson, 'Assyrian Garden', p. 161. An umbrella was a Mesopotamian royal symbol (Meissner, *Babylonien* I, p. 72; Younger, *Judges/Ruth*, p. 223).

106   Isaiah puns on these two meanings in his description of 'the shade of Egypt' (30:2–7).

107   Melville, *Role*, p. 76.

108   Gaster (*Myth*, p. 423), in a discussion of Jotham's apologue, notes the existence in Mesopotamian wisdom literature of the fable of the argument between two trees, the tamarisk and the palm, as to which is more valuable to humans. For the text and its analysis, see Yoram Cohen, *Wisdom from the Late Bronze Age*, Atlanta GA: Society of Bible Literature, 2013, pp. 177–98. Cohen (p. 76) mentions that Ahiqar, reputed to have been Esarhaddon's chief scholar, who perhaps also served Sennacherib, told the story of a similar contest between the pomegranate and the bramble (on Ahiqar, see also Jonas Greenfield, 'Studies in Aramaic Lexicography I', *JAOS 82* [1962], pp. 290–99 [292–93]). It may be that one or both of these fables provided the inspiration for the parable of Shechem (Guillaume, *Waiting*, pp. 61–63). Herzberg (*Bücher*, p. 206) draws a connection between Jotham's apologue and Isaiah's 'Song of the Vine'.

burn and devour his thorns and his briers in one day, and it shall consume the glory of his forest and of his fruitful field, both soul and body [...] and the rest of the trees of his forest shall be few' (Isa. 10:15–19).[109] The second is that Jotham's thorn-bush threatens that if his subjects are found guilty of bad faith, the fire that will proceed from him will devour the cedars of Lebanon. These forests never belonged to Israel's territory (9:15b),[110] but, obviously, were part of Neo-Assyria's. Given the symbolic importance for Assyrian kings that power over Lebanon's cedars publicly represented, this threat provides a satirical comment on their characteristic vainglorious pronouncements.[111] In the single extant inscription in which Esarhaddon mentions Manasseh, he boasts how he made his western vassal kings, Manasseh among them, fell conifers in Lebanon and 'drag them to Nineveh in pain and tribulation' for his building projects.[112] Finally, in Assyrian but not, as far as we know, Classical Hebrew, ṣillu ('shadow, shade') has a near-homophone in ṣillû. Its meaning is 'thorn'.[113] Assuming that this is not fortuitous, our writer does not restrict his wordplay to Hebrew or even straightforward Hebrew-Assyrian, but extends it to a Hebrew pun on an Assyrian lexeme which is itself punned on another.[114]

The foregoing offers arguments why Jotham's parable, together with Samson's ḥîdôth, represent the essential hermeneutical aids that the writer supplies to interpret his work's esoteric content. To summarize, the ḥîdôth and the parable signal that the composition is to be understood at different levels as both. The central importance of the parable is, first, that it reveals the significance of

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109   Moreover, the oracle recorded in Isa. 7:20–25 predicts that, as a result of the Assyrian invasion of the promised land, areas formerly rich in vines will be overrun by thorn-bushes.

110   Most commentators consider this reference an editorial addition because it appears incongruous, not least geographically (see Block, *Judges*, p. 316). Compare Bluedorn, *Yahweh*, p. 215.

111   Sanders (*Invention*, pp. 149–52) observes the deliberate inversion of Neo-Assyrian royal texts in the oracles of First Isaiah. Carr (*Formation*, p. 317) identifies a number of instances of the satirical inversion of Neo-Assyrian genres and motifs in the Hebrew Bible against their creators and argues that the portions in question were composed in the Neo-Assyrian period.

112   Borger, *Asarh.*, pp. 60–61.

113   *CAD* Ṣ, 1962, p. 193. Nahum (1:10) likens the Assyrians to 'entangled thorns' that, in Yahweh's vengeance, will be 'consumed as completely dry stubble'.

114   As he does not indulge his literary virtuosity gratuitously, this must cast light on at least some of his intended readership. There is a further putative Assyrian-on-Assyrian pun in the presentation of the thorn-bush: ṣillu also refers to 'a ghost/shade' (note the term for necromancer, *mušēl ṣilli* 'doorkeeper of shades' [*CAD* M/2, 1977, p. 265; Richardson, 'Assyrian Garden', p. 196]).

3+1 for the book's interpretation, which is then augmented through the unfolding of the Abimelech account. Secondly, it divulges the identity of the greatest human threat to Judah's well-being that the nation faces: the Assyrian king. He is portrayed as inherently defective and wholly destructive. This veiled claim is likewise developed through the remainder of the Abimelech section. Just as, in this story, for Baʿal, read any defiling deity, and for Shechem, read Judah/Jerusalem, so for 'thorn-bush' read Abimelech,[115] for Abimelech read the king of Assyria,[116] for Zebul, whose name conveys 'prince' in Hebrew but 'drudge' to an Assyrian, read Manasseh, and for Israel read Assyria,[117] by which, at the time of writing, the sons of Israel had already been either physically absorbed or, at least, cultically corrupted as Ezekiel reminds us.[118] Association with its king, and the gods that he represents, through the complicity of the godless leaders/baals of Jerusalem, will result in the greatest catastrophe ever to befall the people of the southern kingdom. Under his shadow, Judah has become deformed and will surely die. Jotham's curse that came upon both Abimelech and the men of Shechem (9:56–57) is refracted by the author onto the Assyrian king and Judah respectively: their relationship will lead to their mutual destruction. In the development of the theme through the Abimelech story, I submit that, in addition, it may be the case that Abimelech's characterisation points to a particular Assyrian king. If so, this could, in turn, indicate the time of the book's composition.

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115   Trees continue to figure prominently as the Abimelech portion unfolds. Before launching his insurrection against Abimelech, Gaal and his brothers are making merry in a vineyard (9:27). Abimelech and his forces cut branches from trees which they deploy, in accord with the thorn's threat, to incinerate the thousand inhabitants of the Tower of Shechem (9:48–49). And it was at the oak by the stone pillar at Shechem that Abimelech's kingship begins (9:6; see Niditch, *Judges*, p. 112), when, the text implies, he is anointed with olive oil (9:15). The combination of tree and stone, both ultimately presented as instruments for delivering death, runs through the Abimelech narrative. He meets his end seeking to ignite the wooden door of the tower of Thebez only to receive a mortal wound from a stone, recalling his murder of his brothers 'on one stone'.

116   Bluedorn posits that one interpretation of the meaning of Abimelech's name is that he is a divinely elected king, 'or even a divine king himself' (*Yahweh*, pp. 191–92).

117   'Israel' appears only twice in the Abimelech pericope (9:22, 55). In the first case it refers to the realm where he was *śār-šarru*, in the second to the disintegration of the kingdom on his violent death. This was the destiny Judah's prophets foretold for the Assyrian king and his kingdom.

118   Cogan, 'Exile', p. 254. In addition, both Isaiah and Zephaniah rail against the popularity of foreign fashions in Judah (Isa. 3:18–24; Zeph. 1:8).

Bluedorn perceptively observes that Abimelech's reign is introduced in the narrative in the manner employed elsewhere for Israel's enemies, not its leaders, namely, the period of their tyranny is stated at the beginning of the section; thus: 'and Abimelech ruled for three years over Israel' (9:22). Using this device, maintains Bluedorn, the author alludes to Abimelech's rule as a period of oppression and to him as Israel's foe.[119] As all the oppressors who are described in this way are foreign, we are left to puzzle what the text is implying regarding the new king's ethnicity. Jotham's description of him to the Shechemites only compounds the puzzlement since he contrasts Gideon's legitimate sons 'with 'the son of his servant-girl [...] because he is *your* brother' (9:18).[120] Jotham's words not only cast a shadow on Abimelech's social status, but also call into question his paternity. Although the reader knows that Abimelech was Gideon's son and that he named the infant, Jotham wishes to undermine the legitimacy of any claim to the kingship of Israel that Abimelech might be held to possess by blurring his identity.[121] This is Jotham's aim but what is the writer's? It is not for nothing that scholars are divided on the question whether the Shechemites in Judges 9 were Israelites or Canaanites.[122] In the Abimelech pericope, ethnic identity is conspicuously blurred.[123] The author projects the ambiguity to stress the confusion surrounding Israelite identity in the context of Assyrian hegemony, noted above.[124] The section provides a further treatment of the 'what is other?' question we considered in Chapter 3.

The second feature of the commencement of Abimelech's rule which is peculiar is the verb deployed to describe it. The establishment of Abimelech as king is emphasized in the text, with a threefold repetition of *mlk*, the radical that denotes 'king': literally 'they went and kinged king *My father is King* (Abi*melech*)' (9:6), perhaps intended to echo in a bizarre and distorted way Isaiah's Trisagion (Isa. 6:3). However, once appointed, Abimelech does not *mālak* ('reign as king') or even *māšal* ('rule, have dominion'), which is the verb

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119   *Yahweh*, p. 232.

120   Ibid., pp. 189, 226.

121   Compare Steinberg, 'Criticism', p. 60.

122   Herzberg, *Bücher*, p. 203. Moore (*Judges*, p. 235) was an early subscriber to the view that Abimelech's mother was Canaanite.

123   Ethnic mixing may have been a feature of this city post-Settlement. The Bible records no attack on it in the Settlement period, a position substantiated by archaeological findings (Charles Pfeiffer [ed.], *The Biblical World*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker, 1966, p. 522; Avraham Negev [ed.], *Archaeological Encyclopedia of the Holy Land*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972, p. 287). It may therefore have had a mixed population at the time of Abimelech.

124   Compare Kim, 'Other', p. 179.

he used in his proposal to the Shechemites – 'is it better that seventy rule over you, or one?' – but *śārar* ('exert authority as a prince') (9:22). Commentators have perceived this as a ploy of the writer to shed doubt on Abimelech's power in the role, that somehow he was a subordinate.[125] Had the author wished to diminish the regal nature of Abimelech's position, it is curious that he should stress it in 9:6. I suggest rather that this is a further pun on the Hebrew *śar* 'prince'-Assyrian *šarru* 'king' connection that, as noted in Chapter 6, Isaiah exploited in Isaiah 10:8 in the passage on Sennacherib.[126] In other words, our writer is underscoring Abimelech's role as cipher for the *šarru*, the Assyrian king, as he does also through the bilingual pun on the name of Abimelech's local lieutenant, Zebul.

Thirdly, to an extent not found elsewhere in Judges, the Gideon-Abimelech corpus is concerned with genealogy. In fact, the tree motif is first introduced tangentially through the progressive revelation of a family tree – Gideon's. His father and his brothers, and even fleetingly his mother, appear in the narrative (6:11, 30–32; 8:18–20), within an explicit tribal-clan framework, viz., Manasseh and Abiezer. His sons play a role in the unfolding story, with the names and something of the characters of the eldest and youngest described (8:20; 9:5–21),[127] culminating in the advent of Abimelech whose tale transposes the family-tree theme to a new level. To a degree in excess of his father, he is initially defined by means of his blood relationships,[128] and these are uncommonly complex. The importance of this to the ensuing story has been signalled through his name which, of course, refers to kinship. He is Gideon's son, the son of Gideon's Shechemite concubine, the half-brother of Gideon's seventy legitimate sons, including the fugitive Jotham, and a blood-relation of various citizens of Shechem through his mother, namely 'her brothers', and 'her father's house'.[129] Brotherhood is the leitmotiv of the first part of the segment (as indeed it is of the beginning of Judges – 1:3). Thus, so successfully do his Shechemite kinsmen present his suit to 'all the baals of Shechem', that they accept him as 'our brother'. Whatever benefits might accrue to Gideon's sons because of their

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125 Block, *Judges*, p. 322; Butler, *Judges*, 243; Bluedorn, *Yahweh*, p. 231. Webb (*Judges*, p. 280), noting that the verb occurs in Judges only here, considers it to imply that Abimelech functioned more as a warlord than a king.

126 Sanders, *Invention*, p. 150. Given the Assyrian pronunciation of *š* as *s*, the aural resemblance was possibly even greater than the written forms indicate.

127 Compare Stone, 'Gender', pp. 187–88.

128 Steinberg, 'Criticism', p. 60.

129 Ibid., p. 58.

father's position and prestige, the concubine's offspring, their brother, was not in line to enjoy them.[130] Gideon 'had many wives' and Abimelech's mother did not count among them. This and, one suspects, a smouldering resentment motivated his pre-emptive move against his brothers. In fact, Abimelech in his approach to his Shechemite relatives defines himself in terms of his dissociation from Gideon's sons. In the process, he dissociates himself from his father also, though evidently it is his father's renown that makes Abimelech a contender for kingship:[131] 'Is it better for you that *all* the sons of Jerubbaal, who are seventy in number, rule over you or that one rules over you? Remember I am your bone and your flesh' (9:1–3). Initially, this seems curious, but the reason for it is betrayed in the name with which he refers to Gideon: 'Jerubbaal'. For the baals of Shechem, Gideon's desecration of the Ba'al shrine in Ophrah, whence his sobriquet, was a deed of unforgiveable sacrilege. Later in the story, Gaal bases his appeal to them on the inverse proposition: 'Who is Abimelech? […] Is he not the son of Jerubbaal?' (9:28).[132]

This introduction to the central character in the Abimelech section seems to highlight certain features. The first is that his father is the pre-eminent figure in the land but, in order that Abimelech realize his political ambitions, he must distance himself from his father. He himself has no *prima facie* right to succeed Gideon as leader of Israel owing to his mother's status – concubine compounded, perhaps, by her ethnicity. In these circumstances, to achieve his quest to rule, he must use her connections to help him dispose of his brothers who possess the more compelling credentials for succession. His reign begins with a prophetic utterance (delivered by Jotham).

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130   Stone, 'Gender', p. 194.

131   Steinberg, 'Criticism', p. 56.

132   Brotherhood is echoed in the Gaal episode. He too has brothers. In the satirical representation of the king of Assyria as Abimelech, and Judah as Shechem, Gaal is the Egyptian king, repeatedly portrayed by Isaiah and seventh-century prophets as promising much but delivering nothing, apart from further violent retribution from the overlord (Ehrlich, *Concise History*, pp. 59–61; Bright, *History*, p. 292). The Shechemites 'trusted in him', and his hollow promise of deliverance from Abimelech's yoke (9:29). The *rab šāqê* declares: 'You trust in the staff of this broken reed, on Egypt. If someone leans on it, it will go into his hand and cut it. So is Pharaoh, king of Egypt to all that trust in him' (Isa. 36:6). Their trust in Gaal, who managed to escape from the retributive battle he provoked, led to their massacre and the utter destruction of their city. Just as Gaal has brothers, so the Egyptian king in the first part of the seventh century had 'brother' kings (see Esarhaddon's inscription above; also Borger, *Asarh.*, pp. 98–99; Cogan, 'Exile', p. 251).

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Of the three Assyrian sovereigns who coincided with Manasseh, the one who best matches this set of characteristics is Esarhaddon, and the match may be sufficiently close to be more than adventitious despite Esarhaddon's reign occupying the shortest period of concurrency with Manasseh's, due to its relative brevity overall. In order to probe this hypothesis, a brief excursus on the Sargonid dynasty is required, with particular attention paid to its third member, Esarhaddon. Its founder, Sargon II, seized the throne, and the legitimacy of his rule is dubious.[133] As already noted, the manner of Sargon's death and non-burial, probably in Cappadocia,[134] spawned the belief that he was guilty of egregious sin. His son and successor, Sennacherib, died at the hand of his own son and, for the Babylonians and Judahites at least, this was nothing other than divine retribution for his destruction of their countries.[135] Esarhaddon came to the throne only after winning a civil war against his brothers. The legitimacy of his accession is questioned by some scholars,[136] and his reign was plagued by illness and fear of conspiracy.[137] Despite the immense care he took to organize an orderly succession on his death,[138] reflected in his vassal treaties,[139] to Assurbanipal, the latter faced a rebellion from his elder brother, whom Esarhaddon had installed as King of Babylon.[140] This resulted in a long and bloody civil war which ended with Assurbanipal's 'harsh imprisonment' and execution of his brother.[141] This dynasty, which took Assyria to the pinnacle of its power (and then to its destruction), was thus vulnerable to the

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133   Finkel, Reade, 'Assyrian Hieroglyphics', p. 263; Leichty, *Esarhaddon*, p. 1. His reign began with widespread challenges to his rule (Radner, 'Triangle', p. 325).

134   Grant Frame, 'A "New" Cylinder Inscription of Sargon II of Assyria from Melid', in *God(s), Trees,* ed. by Luukko et al., pp. 65–82 (68).

135   Cogan, 'Sennacherib'; Parpola, 'Murderer', p. 171; Grant Frame, 'Babylon', *The Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies Journal* 3 (2008), pp. 21–31 (26–28).

136   Fales and Lanfranchi, 'Impact', p. 108; Grayson, 'Treaties', p. 132.

137   Starr, *Queries*, pp. 148–85.

138   Grayson, 'Treaties', p. 132; Porter, *Trees*, pp. 70–71; Melville, *Role*, p. 79.

139   M.E.W. Mallowan, Foreword to Wiseman, 'Vassal-Treaties', pp. i–ii. Wiseman (ibid., pp. 3–4) affirms that Manasseh, like every other vassal, would have been present at Assurbanipal's appointment as crown prince in 672, the occasion when the VTES were sworn; Nissinen, *References*, p. 158.

140   Leichty, *Esarhaddon*, p. 2.

141   Livingstone, *Court Poetry*, pp. 110–12.

charge from every quarter of the empire that it was neither divinely appointed, nor divinely supported.[142]

Esarhaddon was in fact defined from the outset by his fraternal status for his name means 'The God Assur has given a brother' and conveys that he was not originally destined to be king.[143] Sennacherib's crown prince, Aššur-nādin-šumi ('the God Assur is giver of a name'), 'my first-born son (whom I) raised on my (own) knee',[144] was installed by him as King of Babylon in 694, where Sennacherib had faced a series of attempted coups from Babylonian and Chaldean pretenders. An Elamite army with the support of the local population attacked and took Aššur-nādin-šumi prisoner.[145] Sennacherib pursued them and it appears that the Elamites put Aššur-nādin-šumi to death. In his rage, Sennacherib razed Babylon in 689 with a great slaughter, sacked and desecrated its temples including the famous Marduk temple, the Esagila, removed the Marduk statue to Nineveh (or, perhaps, destroyed it), and obliterated the images of other gods.[146]

Sennacherib did not rush to appoint a new heir-apparent. However, in approximately 683 BC Esarhaddon was chosen,[147] to the surprise, and chagrin, of his older brothers.[148] Arda-Mulišši, who was probably Sennacherib's second eldest son and enjoyed some support in Assyria, expected to succeed his

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142 Fales and Lanfranchi, 'Impact', pp. 112–14; Lanfranchi, 'Ideological', p. 105.

143 Compare the name of Esarhaddon's son and intended heir, ᵈAššur-bāni-apli, 'The god Assur is creator of an heir' (J.J. Stamm, *Die akkadische Namengebung*, Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1939, p. 217). There is evidence that on his appointment as crown prince, Esarhaddon received a new name, ᵈAššur-etel-ilāni-mukīn-apli, 'The god Assur, prince of the gods, is the confirmer of an heir' (Leichty, *Esarhaddon*, p. 2).

144 A. Kirk Grayson and Jamie Novotny, *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib 1*, Winona Lake IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012, p. 178, text 22.iii 72.

145 Luckenbill, *Sennacherib*, pp. 158–59; Brinkman, 'Sennacherib' p. 92; Geoffrey Neate, 'A Fragment from Kish with the Name of Aššur-nādin-šumi', *Iraq* 33 (1971), pp. 54–56.

146 Brinkman, 'Sennacherib', pp. 94, 95. For twenty-one years Babylon was without gods (Dalley, 'Nineveh', pp. 49–50). The destruction of divine statues and images was a particularly extreme measure by the usual standards of violent Assyrian conquest. For a digest of Sennacherib's dealings with Babylon, see Frame, 'Babylon', pp. 26–28; Diakonoff, 'Babylonian Pamphlet', p. 346. Compare Hezekiah's words relayed in Isa. 37:19: 'the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations [...] and have cast their gods into the fire'. Holloway (*Religion*, pp. 118–122), while recognizing that the victors' destruction of cult statues was a long-standing Mesopotamian practice, questions Frame's view that Sennacherib destroyed the supreme image of Marduk.

147 Melville, 'Zakutu', p. 7162.

148 Borger, *Asarh.*, p. 40.

father.[149] The opposition to Esarhaddon grew to the extent that Sennacherib exiled him to a western province of the empire.[150] Arda-Mulišši, with the collusion of his brother, then assassinated his father.[151] While this act was undoubtedly a bid to secure the throne, it is likely that Arda-Mulišši presented it as divinely directed retribution on the king who had defiled the temples and desecrated the images of Marduk and other deities, such as Ishtar,[152] with cult centres in Babylon, the heartland of Mesopotamian religious tradition.[153] Given the renown and respect that Babylonian culture enjoyed among Assyrian elites,[154] Sennacherib's action in laying it waste must have created misgivings in Assyria.[155] For a society with an essentially cyclical view of history,[156] the fact that Sennacherib experienced the same fate as his predecessor Tukulti-Ninurta I after he too sacked and desecrated Babylon,[157] would have buttressed Arda-Mulišši's justification of the patricide. He and his brother took power in Nineveh and launched a challenge to Esarhaddon's position that triggered the civil war.[158]

A decisive factor in Esarhaddon's successful campaign against his brothers was his mother, Naqī'a, a concubine (*Palastfrau*) of Sennacherib. Naqī'a proved to be formidable in championing her son's cause and remained at the centre of Assyrian political life until the early years of Assurbanipal's reign.[159] Not only

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149   Melville, *Role*, p. 91; Nissinen, *References*, pp. 17–18.

150   Borger, *Asarh.*, p. 42; Melville, *Role*, pp. 23–25; Nissinen, *References*, p. 92.

151   Ibid., p. 19; Parpola, 'Murderer', p. 175.

152   The identity of the image with the deity it represented was a tenet of Mesopotamian belief (George, 'Observations', p. 113; Bahrani, 'King's Head', p. 118). Its destruction was tantamount to putting the god to death (Lapinkivi, *Myth*, p. 57; Moorey, *Idols*, pp. 30–31).

153   Cogan, 'Sennacherib', p. 168; Dalley, 'Nineveh', p. 54.

154   Brinkman, 'Sennacherib', pp. 90, 94–95; Grayson, 'Assyria', p. 162; Livingstone, *Court Poetry*, p. XXVIII; Oates, *Babylon*, pp. 95–96, 110.

155   See Frame, 'Babylon'. The Babylonian chronicler's description of Babylon's condition following its destruction bears a resemblance to that which our author uses of Israel in Judges: 'In the eighth year in which there was no king in Babylonia, on the third day of Tammuz the gods of Uruk went from Elam to Uruk' (*Babylonian Chronicle* 1 iii.28 [ed. by Grayson, p. 81; Brinkman, 'Sennacherib', p. 95]). Time + 'there was no king' + in + place + time + action: 'In those days there was no king in Israel, and in those days the tribe of Dan was seeking an inheritance' (18:1).

156   Hallo, *Apocalypses*, pp. 240–42.

157   Grayson, *Chronicles*, p. 176; Oates, *Babylon*, pp. 95–96.

158   Luckenbill, *Sennacherib*, pp. 161–62.

159   *RLA* 9, p. 165. Indeed, she organized the succession to Assurbanipal, her 'favourite grandson', on Esarhaddon's death (Parpola, 'Treaties', pp. 166–70; Melville, *Role*, pp. 85–90).

was Esarhaddon's mother a concubine,[160] in strict terms rendering him out of the line of succession,[161] but she bears a Syro-Canaanite name.[162] Among the proposals regarding Naqī'a's ethnicity, she has been variously presented as Aramaean, Babylonian, Israelite,[163] and Canaanite.[164] Bob Becking concludes that it is impossible to determine whether Naqī'a was originally Israelite;[165] the same obtains for a putative Canaanite origin. What is clear is that, given the combination of her status and ethnicity, she was not an obvious queen mother.[166] Notwithstanding, unusually in a culture that rarely depicts royal

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160 Sarah Melville argues that Naqī'a was never Sennacherib's consort ('Royal Women', pp. 45–46, 48; see also eadem, *Role*, pp. 21–23, 29). The Assyrian usage of MÍ.É.GAL, 'woman of the palace', presents an analogous difficulty to that found in assigning a precise definition to the Hebrew term *pîlegeš* 'concubine' that I noted in Chapter 2 (see Melville, 'Royal Women', pp. 43–52; compare Simo Parpola, 'The Neo-Assyrian Word for "Queen"', *SAAB* 2 [1988], pp. 73–76). André Parrot and Jean Nougayrol consider that she came from a servile or 'mixed' background ('Asarhaddon et Naqi'a sur un bronze du Louvre', *Syria* 33 [1956], pp. 147–60 [158]).

161 Being the son of a 'house slave' was a charge that Nabopolassar levelled at Sennacherib (Frame, 'Babylon', p. 28).

162 In Assyria she took the name Zakūtu, which is the Assyrian translation of Naqī'a. Her sister's name also is West-Semitic: ᶠAD-ra-mi = Abi-rāmi (Knut Tallqvist, *Assyrian Personal Names*, Helsinki: *Acta Societatis Scientiarum Fennicae* XLIII, 1914, pp. 5, 167; Becking, *Fall*, p. 92; Melville, *Role*, pp. 14–16).

163 Sargon II had a concubine who, on the basis of her name (Atalia) may have been Israelite/Judahite (Melville, 'Royal Women', p. 45; eadem, *Role*, p. 14), a proposal challenged by Younger ('Yahweh at Ashkelon and Caleḥ?', *VT* 52 [2002], pp. 207–18 [216–18]). Sennacherib had a prominent courtier who was Samarian (Dalley, 'Foreign Chariotry', pp. 47–48). Levin ('Rabshakeh', pp. 333–337) maintains that the *rab šāqê* was an Israelite deportee who had prospered in the service of the Assyrian king and knew from experience the consequences of opposing Assyria. See also Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, p. 230. Erle Leichty goes so far as to propose that the House of Sargon II was itself West-Semitic ('Esarhaddon's Exile', in *Studies Presented to Robert D. Biggs*, ed. by Martha Roth et al., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007, pp. 189–91 [190]).

164 Like Nissinen (*References*, p. 18), the British Museum website states that she was Aramaean. With equal confidence, the Louvre website declares her Babylonian, a view advocated by Lewy ('Nitokris-Naqî'a', p. 273), and robustly countered by Brinkman ('Glass', p. 36).

165 *Fall*, p. 92. See also Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, p. CII. Parrot and Nougayrol are inclined to the view that she was Aramean, possibly born in Babylon, but maintaining strong ties with her ancestral homeland which they surmise was Harran ('Asarhaddon', p. 158). Leichty posits Harran as her place of origin and the likely location of Esarhaddon's exile ('Esarhaddon's Exile', pp. 190–91).

166 Compare Melville, 'Royal Women', p. 47.

women,[167] she appears with Esarhaddon in a bronze relief commemorating her son's reconstruction of Babylon.[168] This underscores her importance as 'the only person [Esarhaddon] could trust implicitly'.[169] Furthermore, statues of her were produced at the king's, or perhaps her own, command, to be sited publicly in the empire.[170]

In the period of Esarhaddon's exile, a celestial omen was seen that predicted both the assassination of the king, which occurred shortly after, and the victorious accession of the crown prince who would go on to restore the temples of the great gods in Babylon.[171] This information was conveyed to Naqî'a who ensured it was communicated widely through the empire.[172] This was apparently effected, at least in part, by 'a massive prophetic movement' convinced of Esarhaddon's divine destiny to be king.[173] Knowledge of the heavenly portents validated by influential religious figures rallied sufficient numbers to Esarhaddon's cause to defeat his brothers who fled to Armenia. Those members of their families who were not so fortunate Esarhaddon executed.[174]

Esarhaddon's coronation was likewise accompanied by favourable astrological omens[175] and prophetic utterance.[176] The fulfilment of the omens, coupled with chronic ill health, instilled in Esarhaddon a reliance on divination, in

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167   Parrot and Nougayrol, 'Asarhaddon', p. 159.

168   'Esarhaddon is holding a staff or weapon in his left hand, [...] while Nakija has a mirror. Both are making the same ritual gesture with their right hands, lifting what seems to be a flower bud or little stick to their noses, as a sign of prayer or humility before the gods who – if we refer to the historical context – are angry and must be appeased' [Patricia Kalensky http://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/plaque-king-esarhaddon-and-queen-mother-nakija accessed 7 January 2016]. See also André Parrot, *Assur*, Munich: Beck, 1961, p. 118, illustration 133.

169   Melville, 'Zakutu', p. 7162.

170   Cole and Machinist, *Letters*, pp. 159–60, text 188. Naqî'a is the only woman in the Neo-Assyrian era known to have had her image placed in a temple (Melville, *Role*, p. 52), and the only woman in the extant Assyrian prophetic corpus to whom a prophet delivered an oracle (Fales and Lanfranchi, 'Impact', p. 102).

171   Parpola, 'Murderer', pp. 179–80, 182.

172   On Naqî'a's contact with prophets and other influential religious figures during Esarhaddon's exile, see Nissinen, *References*, pp. 23, 92.

173   Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, pp. XLIII–XLV. That Esarhaddon, unlike his elder brothers, was born after Sargon's usurpation of the Assyrian throne, and therefore spent his entire childhood as a royal prince in the care of Ishtar, probably reinforced his credentials in the eyes of the religious leaders to be Sennacherib's successor (ibid., p. CII).

174   Borger, *Asarh.*, p. 45; Melville, *Role*, p. 28.

175   Borger, *Asarh.*, pp. 2, 45.

176   Nissinen, *References*, pp. 94–95.

which he had some expertise,[177] and a desire for divinatory guidance that were exceptional even by the standards of Assyrian monarchs.[178] Parpola writes of his 'peculiar psychosomatic disposition'.[179] Fales attributes his attitude to divination to 'the interaction between the irresolute and suspicious temper of that king and the political difficulties of his reign, which started after a civil war,[180] and experienced strong internal opposition and open revolt'.[181] Despite, or possibly because of, the king's unremitting patronage of divination, the atmosphere at Esarhaddon's court, among diviners at least, was not a happy one: '[there is] unmistakeably manifested in the general mental disposition that permeates and tinges the entire correspondence [a] humbleness and servile fear towards the monarch, and arrogance, contempt, and hatred towards colleagues and other persons felt as a potential threat to one's position'.[182]

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177   Jean, 'Divination', pp. 270, 274; Fales and Lanfranchi, 'Impact', p. 111; Starr, *Queries*, pp. XXXIII–XXXIV.

178   Even with due allowance made for the degree of serendipity in textual discovery, Esarhaddon's reign was plainly a period in which divination including prophecy received unprecedented royal attention: 'Among the thousands of tablets belonging to [the Nineveh] archive are letters and letter-like messages (called Reports) sent to the Assyrian kings by experts in divination, specifically in celestial divination. [...] Almost all the preserved tablets were written during the reigns of Esarhaddon (679 to 668) and Assurbanipal (667 to 626); practically no letters were found to be dated later than 647, and the majority comes from the time between 677 and 665' (Hunger and Pingree, *Astral Sciences*, pp. 23–24). See also *LAS II*, pp. xii-xiv; Radner, 'Assyrian King', pp. 221–22; Nissinen, *References*, pp. 4, 171–72; Cole and Machinist, *Letters*, p. xvii.

179   *LAS II*, p. xii.

180   Esarhaddon's experience of exile and mortal danger together with a sickly constitution could hardly not have been formative. Diakonoff considers that a late Assyrian royal psalm records Esarhaddon's *ipsissima verba*, reflecting his thoughts at the time of his exile on his situation and on Sennacherib's sacrilege in destroying Babylon: 'I have been cursed (turning) into a slave, and (still) the religious negligence of my father stays in the balance; the foe and the witch I have met, (and) I fall saying: "(This has come) over me!" I am estranged from my own city, (and) my enemies surround my father's house' ('Babylonian Pamphlet', p. 344). Livingstone maintains that this text should rather be attributed to Assurbanipal (*Court Poetry*, p. XXVI). If so, it offers a new insight into Esarhaddon and his relationship with his heir.

181   Fales and Lanfranchi, 'Impact', p. 101. Leichty notes that 'Esarhaddon suffered from anxiety and insecurity and frequently pleaded with the gods to tell him what sins he had committed [...]. He was also a little paranoid because of the murder of his father and his shaky and frightening ascent to the throne. At least once while he was king he sensed an impending rebellion and reacted by purging his nobles' (*Esarhaddon*, p. 2); see also Melville, *Role*, p. 91; *LAS II*, pp. 238–43; Starr, *Queries*, p. LXIII.

182   *LAS II*, p. xviii.

It is difficult to overstate the religious fervour and expectations that accompanied Esarhaddon's extraordinary rise to power, in a manner unprecedented in Assyrian history.[183] The content of the portent that ushered Esarhaddon to the throne also placed on him the responsibility, on which his personal well-being explicitly depended, to restore the temples of the great gods through rebuilding Babylon.[184] This oracle determined the two greatest foreign policy preoccupations of his reign: his relations with Babylonia and with Egypt. In order to carry out the hugely costly construction project in Babylon, Esarhaddon had to access enormous new wealth. The fabled treasures of Egypt were the obvious source.[185] Besides, he had another pressing incentive for waging war against Egypt: it had taken advantage of the political chaos in Assyria to pursue its perennial objective of extending its influence in Palestine and Phoenicia at Mesopotamia's expense.[186] Some scholars consider that effective control of Southern Philistia was lost by the Assyrians in the final years of Sennacherib's reign.[187] Moreover, the conquest of Egypt was explicitly a necessary step towards universal dominion which was his royal duty to Assur.[188] These three factors meant that Esarhaddon was extensively involved in Palestine[189] to which he brought his army at least four times in his reign.[190] On the final campaign, he died unexpectedly en route.[191]

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I submit that Judges was written against this background. For a Yahwist writing during the reign of Manasseh, especially one who, probably, had witnessed first-hand Sennacherib's brutality and blasphemous destruction of Judah,[192] the murderer of this king was none other than the agent of Yahweh

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183   Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, p. XLIV.

184   Nissinen, *References*, p. 42.

185   Melville, *Role*, pp. 79–81.

186   Kahn, 'Taharqa', pp. 111–12.

187   Ibid., pp. 110, 122.

188   Finkel, Reade, 'Assyrian Hieroglyphics', p. 261. Note Esarhaddon's inscription: "to attack, to plunder, to extend the borders of Assyria, the gods empowered me' (Borger, *Asarh.*, p. 98).

189   Gane, 'Role', p. 32. Note the haruspices' enquiries of Shamash regarding Esarhaddon's campaigning in Palestine (Starr, *Queries*, pp. 94–107).

190   On the difficulty of dating events in Esarhaddon's reign, see Kahn, 'Taharqa', p. 119, n. 15.

191   *Babylonian Chronicle* 1 iv.30–32 (ed. by Grayson, p. 86); Parpola, 'Treaties', p. 168.

192   Sennacherib's reign caused great upheaval in the empire. Not only was this seen in the religious sphere with his promotion of the cult of Assur, but politically and socially also.

who had promised 'to cause him to fall by the sword in his own land' (Isa. 37:6–7).[193] The accession of a successor who repudiated this act and whose zeal for idolatry and divination, combined with a fervour to extend the 'yoke of Assur', was unprecedented in Israel's experience of Assyria,[194] could only have been viewed in the gravest terms by the writer. This would be intensified if he had lived in Nineveh and knew at first-hand what Esarhaddon stood for and something of his disposition. The realization that this passion for idolatry and divination was emulated with equal ardour by his Judean vassal would have compounded his profound anxiety and hostility towards the Assyrian. If this is a reasonable reading of our writer's outlook, then it may not be fanciful to perceive in the Gideon-Abimelech section a satirical 'chronicle' of these events. Naturally, in the environment of persecution in which the work was composed, the writer could only allude to powerful living individuals through the artifice of presenting 'historical' characters onto whom their identities are projected. Correspondences would have to be refracted to disguise, superficially at least, the dangerous subject matter, while leaving sufficient points of evident similarity that associations could be inferred by the intended readership.

No other Assyrian king effected deportations on the scale carried out by Sennacherib. According to his inscriptions, he deported up to half a million people, the majority of them to Nineveh to provide labour for his construction projects (Radner, 'Triangle', p. 327; see also Levin, 'Rabshakeh', p. 333). For a contemporary pictorial representation of the forced labour involved in building Sennacherib's palace, see Archibald Paterson, *Assyrian Sculptures: Palace of Sinacherib*, The Hague: Nijhoff, 1912/13, Plates 33–34.

193   Dalley argues persuasively that for a brief period, from Sennacherib's destruction of Babylon until his death, the king's identity theft of Babylon's cult may have extended to Nineveh being styled 'Babylon' and him becoming king of Babylon ('Nineveh', pp. 49–50, 57). If so, then, conceivably, the oracle concerning the death of the 'king of Babylon' in Isa. 14:4–24 refers to Sennacherib rather than to Sargon II, as maintained by Machinist ('Assyria', pp. 721, 736), Cogan ('Exile', p. 249), and Carr (*Formation*, pp. 323–24). The reference to the juniper trees and the cedars of Lebanon rejoicing in his end correspond with the oracle in Isa. 10 concerning Sennacherib (Gray, *Kings*, p. 690). Heidel observes that although the king of Babylon's burial was abject, he was at least buried (*Gilgamesh*, pp. 174–75). On the re-presentation of the historical Sennacherib as Sargon II in Esarhaddon's reign, see Weaver, 'Sin', p. 65. Van De Mieroop defines Sennacherib's extensive remodelling of Nineveh as the mirror-image of his destruction of Babylon ('A Tale of Two Cities', *Iraq* 66 [2004], pp. 1–5 [4]). The Babylonians appear to have perpetrated an identity theft analogous to that of which Sennacherib is suspected. Babylon and Esagila respectively appropriated the mythology of Eridu, held by the Sumerians to be the world's first city, and of Ea's temple, its centre piece (A.R. George, 'Marduk and the Cult of the Gods of Nippur at Babylon', *OrNS* 66 [1997], pp. 65–70 [68]).

194   Johnson (ed.), *Religions*, p. 171; Weaver, 'Sin', p. 64.

To effect this, the author appears to use devices he employed elsewhere in the narrative, namely, mirror-imaging, the confusing of single and double characters, and ascribing to one participant an act that properly belongs to another. In this sense, the entire book operates as a resource for interpreting the satire. The aim was to create a text in which it is impossible to *prove*, at any remove, that the story caricatures Esarhaddon (and Sennacherib). If a guiding principle of the method is plausible deniability, demonstrability is, by the same token, impossible. Notwithstanding, there seem to be sufficient common threads, and among them some that seem too direct to be coincidental, to make the satire hypothesis worth investigation.

Contrary to Israelite convention but consistent with the practice of Assyrian kings, it is Gideon who names his son. Gideon scourged the leaders of Succoth with thorns and briers, and 'with them he taught them', and pulled down the tower of Penuel, just as Sennacherib flayed Hezekiah's retainers in Lachish, and presumably other Judean cities that had refused to surrender, and demolished their walls (8:16–17). Gideon defiled the sanctuary of Ba'al and destroyed the Asherah poles in Ophrah; Sennacherib defiled the sanctuary of Bēl(-Marduk) – the Esagila – and destroyed divine images, including Ishtar's, in Babylon. Sennacherib is presented in Isaiah and in his own inscriptions felling trees; Gideon's name is 'hewer'. As Sennacherib blasphemed against the living God, so Gideon made the gold ephod which 'became a snare to him and his house'. The Deuteronomic law places a curse on 'any man who makes any graven or molten image' and enjoins family members to commit to death any relative who entices them to serve other gods (Deut. 27:15; 13:6–11). While Gideon's image was not, apparently, a representation of another deity, it promoted a cultic environment in which the Ba'al and Asherah cults could flourish. Under this legal code, Gideon would surely have been guilty of a capital offence, as Sennacherib was for his blasphemy against Yahweh.[195] Gideon's sons, however, were no more robust in resisting their father's slide into apostasy than the first-born among them was in delivering the coup de grâce to the Midianite kings (8:20–21). In the Gideon tale, it is not the father, therefore, who is slain by his sons, but the concubine-son who murders all his father's issue (whose number, seventy, points to the centrality of the kingship theme in the episode), bar one who flees. This sets the background to Abimelech's rise to power. In the account of it there are similarities with Esarhaddon's story: the concubine-son's main challenger, the legitimate son(s), escapes but his half-brother murders his/

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195   This assumes that, typically, our writer has the figure of Gideon perform double duty, providing a cryptic characterisation of Sennacherib as well as of Manasseh, just as, inversely, Manasseh is reflected in Jephthah in addition to Gideon.

their family members; the West-Semitic concubine mother's connections supply the armed force required to secure the throne;[196] and the concubine-son must, for political reasons, distance himself from his father's cultic devastations. The enthronement is accompanied by prophetic utterance. With a characteristic inversion, it is the legitimate son who is the defender of the father's posthumous reputation, and Jotham's prophecy is an imprecation against, not a validation of, the new king.

If this hypothesis has validity, it would indicate that Judges was composed after the death of Sennacherib in 681, by which time Manasseh was already firmly on the throne of the southern kingdom, any period of co-regency with Hezekiah long since ended. This is an important consideration: Judges was not written before Manasseh had corrupted Judah's cultic life and shed prodigious quantities of innocent blood. If Esarhaddon is the subject of the satire, it is likely that it was composed while he was still king, since there would be little reason to write it if its target no longer constituted a bane. The repercussions of Esarhaddon's savage treatment of Sidon, which resulted in its complete destruction and the building of a new city – Kār-Esarhaddon – at some distance from the existing site, with a largely non-Phoenician population,[197] and of other cities of the kingdom of Sidon were certainly felt in Judah.[198] It may be that this event, which took place in 677, provides the background for the account of Abimelech's destruction of Shechem. Both involved the massacre of a Ba'al-worshipping West-Semitic population who had proved treacherous, and the obliteration of their city. Moreover, in both cases the attacks came after their respective assailants had reigned for three years. Plainly, though, Esarhaddon did not die shortly after. On the other hand, there was no reason to extend Abimelech's story beyond his destruction of the Shechemites. The moral of the tale is that such rulers are cursed, and Yahweh will punish them with violent death. The nature of the demise of Sargon and Sennacherib, who

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196   If Leichty's thesis is sound that Esarhaddon was exiled to his mother's people, and from there, with their support, launched his bid for the throne, Abimelech's resemblance to Esarhaddon is enhanced.

197   Leichty, *Esarhaddon* p. 28, 2.i.35; Frederick Carl Eiselen, *Sidon*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1907, pp. 53–56.

198   Leichty, *Esarhaddon*, p. 48, text 6.ii.26–37; Edward Lipiński, *Itineraria Phoenicia*, Leuven: Peeters, 2004, pp. 17–37. The reduction of Sidon, like the successful invasion of Egypt, is reflected in Esarhaddon's propaganda as a turning point in his control over the West (Porter, *Trees*, pp. 70–76). On the basis of Esarhaddon's inscription (Leichty, *Esarhaddon*, p. 28, text 2.i.30–34), it is probable that Manasseh and Judean labourers were involved in the new city's construction. Tadmor ('Philistia', p. 97) notes that Esarhaddon's policies towards Philistia and Phoenicia were more aggressive than his father's had been.

had respectively scattered the tribes of Israel to the extremity of the empire and ravaged Judah, provided abundant confirmation to the writer of Judges and his Yahwist contemporaries that Yahweh would requite with an ignoble end the Assyrian overlords who had imposed on the Israelites of the north and south untold suffering and had contributed to the corruption of their cultic life. Nahum's 'burden of Nineveh' articulates this conviction: 'God is jealous, Yahweh takes revenge [...]. Yahweh takes revenge on his foes, and maintains it against his enemies' (1:2). Combining all the factors places the completion of Judges in the 670s, and probably between 677 and 670 BC. The tentative status of this statement need hardly be stressed.

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Whoever the Assyrian king was on whom Abimelech is modelled, he would have seen himself, and been considered in his nation, as 'the sun(god) of all the people'.[199] While the identification of Esarhaddon with the sun is especially common,[200] it was in the degree to which he associated himself with this image, rather than his employing it, that made him exceptional. This leads us to the subject of the sun, so thematically important in Judges. We considered in Chapter 5 how, in this book, it always has a sinister connotation. As the text traces its movement from sunrise to sunset, it is in the Abimelech section that it is presented as 'risen', precisely at the point Abimelech launches his attack on Shechem (9:33), further corroborating the equation of Abimelech to the king of Assyria. Nevertheless, the latter's claim to a solar identity was vicarious. It was a consequence of his role as Assur's representative on earth.[201] Esarhaddon was described as 'the perfect likeness of the god'.[202] The Judges writer's intention was not simply to explode the claim of the Neo-Assyrian kings (or any king) to be divine avatars, but to demonstrate the vacuity of the

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199   Seux, *Épithètes*, pp. 283–84; Winter, 'Touched', p. 84.

200   'From sunrise to sunset there is no king equal to him; he shines as brilliantly as the sun'. Note also '[Esarhaddon] was a tool in the hand of God – a true incarnation of Ninurta, the "avenger of his father", "shining like the sun" after his victory' (Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, pp. 23, XLIII–XLIV). He describes himself as 'King of the Earth, King of Assyria, Prefect of Enlil, Priest of Assur, the Sun of all peoples' (Borger, *Asarh.*, p. 80).

201   Note the image of Esarhaddon in the upper register of the famous 'Black Stone' (British Museum WA 91027) which shows the king bare-headed before a divine crown – Assur's symbol – and a large and a smaller sacred tree (*RLA* 9, p. 260). On interpretations of the iconography, see Porter, *Trees*, pp. 39–46; Finkel, Reade, 'Assyrian Hieroglyphics'.

202   Winter, 'Touched', p. 85; eadem, 'Portrait', p. 269.

divine order they represented, centred on Assur. This is not the place to exam-
ine the complex question of the mystical dynamics of the Assyrian pantheon
and the related topic of the precise signification of the winged disk, which have
generated substantial scholarly comment.[203] Suffice to say that behind the sun
motif stands Assur, who 'combines all divine functions'.[204] This is sometimes
explicit in the imagery, as for example when he is represented in the winged
disk doing battle with his bow.[205] Particularly revealing is the representa-
tion of Assur in the panel above the door to the antechamber of the throne
room in Fort Shalmaneser in which he is situated in a winged disk above two
portrayals of the king (Shalmaneser III) which are presented in approximate
mirror-image.[206] The differences between the dress of Assur and the kings are
noteworthy: they all wear green robes and target wristbands, but they have dif-
ferent ear-rings. The kings' are arrow-shaped whereas the deity's has the form
of a Maltese cross, a symbol conventionally identified with the sun god. While
the kings' robes are green, outlined in yellow, and with yellow accoutrements
which probably represent gold jewellery, not only is Assur's green robe out-
lined in yellow, but he wears a yellow helmet, and belt. The kings' headwear
is characteristic of that worn by Assyrian kings of the period; Assur's indicates
his divinity. The feathers of the disk are yellow and yellow lines radiate from
the disk's invisible core.[207] Given these features, it does not seem farfetched
to discern in the scene the disk as a solar emblem,[208] and the panel overall as
a representation of the relationship between the king of the gods in his solar
aspect, his appointed king who is his vice-regent on earth, and the sun as a
symbol of kingship. This scene, with its configuration of Assur in a winged
disk above the figures of kings, strongly resembles the image on the bas-relief
panel behind the throne of Assurnasirpal II, Shalmaneser's father, reproduced
above. In that case, however, the winged disk hovers over a sacred tree that

203 See as representative examples Ehrenberg, 'Dieu', pp. 111–12; Dalley, 'Ṣalmu'; Parpola, 'Tree',
       pp. 185–87.

204 Vera Chamaza, *Omnipotenz*, p. 143.

205 See Parrot, *Assur*, p. 227, illustration 282; W.G. Lambert, 'Trees, Snakes and Gods in
       Ancient Syria and Anatolia', *BSOAS* 48 (1985), pp. 435–51 (439). Note Dhorme's comment
       that, because of the militaristic nature of the Assyrian state, its patron god was perceived
       as a warrior-god (Religion, p. 102).

206 Oates, 'Nimrud (Kalḫu) 1962', p. 31.

207 J.E. Reade, 'A Glazed Brick Tile from Nimrud', *Iraq* 25 (1962), pp. 38–47 (43–44; Pl. IX).

208 The Neo-Assyrian cylinder seal in the Louvre collection (AO 1510) portrays Assur and
       Ishtar in procession. Both gods are armed and transported by dragons. Ishtar's eight-
       pointed star symbol stands above her image; the winged disk is placed correspondingly
       above Assur's.

divides the confronted king-figures, and they in turn are flanked by two cone-carrying *apkallu*.[209] At other times, Shamash, 'the radiance of Assur',[210] is Assur's expression.[211] Assur's domination of the pantheon gained even greater emphasis as a result of Sennacherib's theological reforms.[212] Spieckermann proposes that the horses and chariots dedicated to the solar deity that Josiah removed from Yahweh's temple were connected to the cult of Assur.[213] His conclusion finds support in the fact that, in the Assur temple in Assur, teams of white horses were dedicated to the god and pulled his chariot.[214]

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209   Reade, 'Tile', p. 44.

210   Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, p. LXXXI.

211   Oestreicher, 'Grundgesetz', pp. 399–401. Note the late Neo-Assyrian personal name Gabbu-ilani-Aššur – 'Assur is the totality of all gods' (Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, p. LXXXI). Black and Green (*Gods*, pp. 37–38) confirm the Assur cult's propensity to appropriate the images and attributes of other deities, including those of the sun god. In the late Neo-Assyrian period, Assur is termed the 'creator' of Shamash (and Ishtar) (Vera Chamaza, *Omnipotenz*, pp. 147, 234). On the fluid relationship between Assur and Shamash in Neo-Assyrian iconography of solar identity of the mid-eighth to the early seventh century BC, see Walter Andrae, *Das wiedererstandene Assur*, 2nd edn, Munich: Beck, 1977, pp. 77–80 (Figures 54–56); Lambert, 'Trees', p. 439. An analogous acquisition of Shamash's identity by Marduk seems to have occurred in Babylonia, where Marduk had the epithet 'the sun god of the gods', and 'Shamash' became simply the designation of aspects of Marduk (ibid.). Moreover, Shamash, despite his prominence in Mesopotamian religion, was only ever a second-order divinity (Lambert, *Literature*, p. 121; idem, 'Studies in Marduk', *BSOAS* 47 [1984], pp. 1–9 [3]). On the relationship of Shamash and Assur to the king, see Assurbanipal's coronation hymn ll. 1–2 (Livingstone, *Court Poetry*, pp. 26; XXIII).

212   *RLA* 9, p. 296; Tadmor, Landsberger, Parpola, 'Sin', pp. 29–30; Dalley, 'Nineveh', p. 49; Livingstone, *Court Poetry*, p. XVII. Sennacherib attributed to Assur the keepership of the Seal of Destinies. As such, Assur was held to determine the destinies of all gods and humans alike. Esarhaddon's vassal treaties were sealed with the Seal of Assur of the City Hall and the Seal of Destinies (George, 'Sennacherib', pp. 138–44. See Wiseman, 'Vassal-Treaties', p. 15, for the Seal's wording). In Sennacherib's reign, Assur became '*deus summus omnipotens*, *creator absolutus*' (Vera Chamaza, *Omnipotenz*, p. 240). Esarhaddon's inscription regarding his benefaction towards the Assur temple shows that, notwithstanding his reestablishment of the Marduk cult, the theology concerning Assur introduced by his father was not changed (Borger, *Asarh.*, p. 87; Vera Chamaza, *Omnipotenz*, p. 237). Indeed, the cult of Assur reached its zenith during the reign of these kings (ibid., p. 503).

213   *Juda*, pp. 254–56.

214   Cole and Machinist, *Letters*, pp. xviii, xxiv. We read in text 104.11 (p. 84) that five horses were sent to make up the 'deficit of the teams of Assur'. See also Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, p. 288. The need for horses and chariots in a sacred setting was, at least in part, for the celebratory transportation of divine images as, for example, in their New-Year processions to the akītu house.

In his disquisition on religion in Judah under Assyrian rule, McKay advances a wide-ranging challenge to the proposition that Manasseh's astral cults were inspired by Assyrian theology and that his patronage of the worship of the host of heaven indicates the introduction of the images and worship of Assyrian deities into Yahweh's temple. Some of McKay's most important arguments, such as his doubt that Assur was ever held to possess a solar aspect,[215] have been treated in the foregoing. There are two, however, that have not been addressed directly and, as they represent major planks of his thesis, call for a response. The first is his claim that the Assyrian worship of Shamash normally occurred inside the god's temple.[216] Consequently, he contends, the rites practised by the men whom Ezekiel observed worshipping the sun in the court of the Jerusalem temple, and Manasseh's solar cult, could not derive from Mesopotamian influence since they took place in the open. This reveals a limited appreciation of the literature on solar worship in Assyria. As we have seen, the adoration of all the host of heaven, including the sun deity, was conducted, depending on the circumstances, in a variety of environments, some of them open-air, for instance, the battlefield and the *Maqlû* rituals, including the welcoming of the dawn. This is implicit, in fact, in the Assyrian conception of the great gods as, simultaneously, both astral bodies and numinous beings.

The second of the arguments is that the chariots of the sun which Manasseh fashioned could not have been related to the Assyrian solar cult, but rather to Canaanite practice antecedent to Assyrian hegemony, since a quotidian journey across the heavens by the sun god in a chariot was not a feature of Mesopotamian belief. He avers that 'Apart from the written evidence of Greece and Zinjirli [Syria], ancient literature from outside Israel appears to be devoid of an explicit Sun-chariot mythology'. While conceding that a text of Nabonidus mentions Shamash's divine chariot-driver, Bunene, he discounts it because it was produced after the Neo-Assyrian period.[217] It is implausible, however, that the Neo-Babylonians would have invented Bunene or the nature of his service to Shamash *ex nihilo*. And so it proves: Bunene is attested from Old Babylonian times.[218] Moreover, there is ample textual evidence for the use of a chariot drawn by mules for Shamash's celestial travel produced before the Neo-Babylonian era, for instance: 'You [Shamash] have hitched up your

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215   *Religion*, p. 16.

216   Ibid.

217   Ibid., pp. 32–35. The text is Nabonidus Text 6, found in Stephen Langdon (ed.), *Die neu-babylonischen Königsinschriften*, Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1912, p. 261.

218   Oppenheim, *Dreams*, p. 232; Dossin, 'L'inscription', p. 17.

mules which are raring to go/gallop';[219] 'You [Shamash] harness your mules which rage in their gallop [...] stand by me on account of the evil (connected with) an eclipse of the moon'.[220] Meissner states that Shamash undertook the journey 'in a chariot driven by Bunene and pulled by mules of fire'. In addition to citing the Nabonidus text for the role of Bunene, he refers to material found in Assurbanipal's Nineveh library.[221] That Shamash's chariot was harnessed to mules, not horses, appears to confirm the myth's ancient origin.[222] The Sumerians had understood a connection between the gods and chariots. In their conception, the divine chariots had a celestial aspect in addition to their terrestrial role of transporting the images of the gods. Indeed, an early second-millennium tablet states that the donkey-drawn chariot of Enlil, who, as I noted, was a predecessor of Assur as lord of the pantheon, 'joined heaven and earth'.[223]

As I remarked in Chapter 5, the Samson pericope debunks the cult of Shamash and, therefore by extension, of Assur. The god is intimated to be bankrupt of good and of power; he is a contradiction of all that he is believed to stand for. However, Judges presents a more direct challenge to Assur *per se*. Margaret Huxley, in her perspicacious analysis of the cosmic coding of Sennacherib's addition to Assur's temple, argues persuasively that the orientation and layout of the extension demonstrate that the Neo-Assyrians understood Assur's celestial throne to be in the far north. The cosmological reasoning for this was that the north functioned as the 'head', the south as the 'foot'. The king of the gods, consonant with the ideology of kingship, must be situated at the head.[224] I observed in Chapter 3 that Yahweh, in contrast, is presented in

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219   *CAD* Š/3, 1992, p. 131.

220   Jørgen Laessøe, *Studies on the Assyrian Ritual and Series Bît rimki*, Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1955, p. 64.

221   Meissner, *Babylonien* 2, p. 20; also Leonard King, *Babylonian Magic and Sorcery*, London: Luzac, 1896, pp. V–VI, 125.

222   Horse-drawn chariots are first witnessed in Mesopotamia in the Old Babylonian period (P.R.S. Moorey, 'Pictorial Evidence for the History of Horse-Riding', *Iraq* 32 [1970], pp. 36–50 [44–49]; see also Mary Aiken Littauer, 'The Figured Evidence for a Small Pony in the Ancient Near East', *Iraq* 33 [1971], pp. 24–30; W. Heimpel, 'Towards an Understanding of the Term *sikkum*', *RA* 88 [1994], pp. 5–31 [10–11, 14, 29]; Oates, *Babylon*, pp. 64–65, 87, 90).

223   Miguel Civil, 'Išme-Dagan and Enlil's Chariot', *JAOS* 88 (1968), pp. 3–14 (3–4, especially n. 13).

224   Huxley, 'Gates', pp. 112–17. The map of the northern section of the city of Assur provided in Haller, *Gräber*, corroborates Huxley's arguments. Assur's temple is situated at the most northerly point within the city walls close to the Tigris, on the city's north-east edge. The old and new royal palaces also stand at the northernmost extent of the city immediately

Deborah's Song as coming from the south, and he comes to do cosmic battle against Israel's enemies who are based in the north. In Chapter 6, I identified these enemies as spiritual as well as mortal. The numerical marker given to the adversary whom Yahweh engaged, Jabin, is twenty – 'he grievously oppressed Israel for twenty years' – the number of the solar deity, and, by association, the regents of Assyria under his sovereignty. This king, whose throne was situated in the far north of the land, was invisible in the battle but represented by his *śar/šarru* on the battlefield. His name means 'one who has/gives understanding'. In recounting his building of the Assur-temple addition, Sennacherib relates that he used the 'cleverness with which Assur endowed me'.[225] As noted in Chapter 6, Jabin was destroyed by being 'cut off'. This is the predicate form that Nahum chooses to describe what Yahweh will do to Assyria's idols (see below). I noted also in Chapter 3 that the movement in Judges, expressed both in the account of the tribes and of the major judges is south-north, recognizing that, in the latters' case, it describes a north-easterly arc. In the context of taking possession of the land from the idolatrous nations that controlled it, and in vanquishing Israel's enemies, the thrust is against the north, the quarter from which Assyria is said to come (Isa. 14:31).[226] Moreover, the north-easterly arc charted by the major judges reverses the solar cycle.[227] This confrontation of the sun or, rather, the deity it emblematizes and the power that derived its authority to oppress from its symbols, lies at the core of Judges.[228] Through the many-layered compositional technique that its author employs, in which deeds, episodes, and characters can, and frequently do, as in the finest exemplars of Mesopotamian literature, serve to convey a variety of meanings, at this, the heart of the book's esoteric signification, we come to the crux of the dialectic. The writer of Judges exploited prodigiously the treasures of Mesopotamian literature that he encountered through his familiarity with Neo-Assyria to compose his book. He did so because he knew them to be unsurpassed models of literary quality, and ideal for his esoteric purpose. But this explains only

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inside the walls, but because the latter run in a south-westerly direction, the palaces lie to the south of the Assur temple and the god's akītu house which is some distance beyond the walls. Revealingly, the akītu house is located on the same latitude as the Assur temple.

225   Luckenbill, *Sennacherib*, p. 145. Assyrian kings frequently claimed to be endowed with wisdom equal to that of the *apkallu* (Reiner, 'Etiological Myth', p. 7).

226   Childs, *Isaiah*, pp. 59–61. Indeed, looked at from the perspective of Babylonia, too, Assyria was the north.

227   Horowitz, *Geography*, p. 196.

228   Given the relationship between Assur's temple and Dagon-Dagan noted above, Samson's wasting of the latter's temple and celebrants can be read as a metaphor for the impending destruction of Assur's cult and people.

part of his motivation. Just as important, they gave him the literary means to raise a mirror to the Assyrian king, his religion, and the hateful and iniquitous regime they upheld,[229] and to expose their spiritual and moral bankruptcy.[230] By doing so, he turned against the Assyrians, in a quasi-'reflective magic' sense, their own power. By stripping these great literary creations of any rejuvenating or redemptive aspect, let alone numinous power, and presenting them solely as chronicles of decline and death, he harnesses them to presage the doom, not only of his own nation that had eagerly imbibed the worst features of this culture, but of the source culture itself.

In contrast, driving through his book, in its structure, in the unfolding of its plot, and in the configuration of its characters, is the energy of Yahweh, surging to counter and destroy the cult of Assur and the empire that his followers founded in his name.[231] While Judges bears a dire message concerning Israel's relationship with its God, the author is emphatic in his contention that Yahweh reigns and will conquer all his enemies, however unassailable they appear, to effect his plans. In his confidence in the destruction of Assyria's king and his gods, he is indistinguishable from Nahum: 'Yahweh has commanded concerning you: no longer will your name be perpetuated. I will *cut off* the graven and the molten image from the house of your gods, I will prepare your grave, for you are worthless/cursed' (1:14).

This brings us to the question why Ishtar and Nergal figure prominently in the characterisation of Deborah/Jael and Samson. These two ancient Mesopotamian gods share a number of characteristics that are strongly apposite to the environment in which Judges was written and to the message it articulates. They are divinities of battle that serve to emphasize and carry the motif of violent destruction running through the book. With one associated with death, the other the epitome of life's inherent conflicts, and both

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229   On the long-lasting hatred that the Neo-Assyrian kings inspired in their subject populations, see Porter, 'Noseless', pp. 218–20. The Assyrians were notorious, even by Mesopotamian standards, for wanton cruelty (Finkelstein, 'Sex Offences', pp. 357, 372; Oates, *Babylon*, p. 106).

230   Sanders, *Invention*, p. 150. Guillaume (*Waiting*, p. 128) sees Judges as a metaphoric representation of the Neo-Assyrian period but understands it as giving a positive assessment of the benefits of Neo-Assyrian dominion for Samaria, and that Jotham's apologue may constitute a tribute to Assyrian rule (p. 70). If life was as positive under Neo-Assyrian hegemony as he believes, one questions why its kings' reigns were plagued by insurrection and rebellion across the empire, and why, specifically, Hezekiah attempted to liberate Judah from its power.

231   Machinist ('Assyria', pp. 734–35) makes an analogous point concerning the treatment in Isaiah of the boasts of the Neo-Assyrian kings.

embodying the bewildering contradictions of existence,[232] they offer a vehicle for the projection of these universal themes in the Judges narrative. Moreover, they share the distinction of possessing a profusion of epithets which in themselves provide an extraordinarily rich insight into Mesopotamian ideology and cult.[233] Thematically, therefore, they help to anchor the work in a recognizably Mesopotamian literary tradition which, in turn, provides the keys to access its esoteric meanings. Expressions of their cults were long venerated in Palestine-Phoenicia, and much more recently both had been established in the Jerusalem temple, in their astral manifestations and, possibly, in Ishtar's case, as Queen of Heaven, and in Samarina through the incoming Mesopotamian deportees. Accordingly, they underscore the very present cultic challenge Yahwism faced. The composition's message, though, is that even such apparent influential beings/concepts are no more worthy of veneration than the judges the book depicts. They are all contained within Yahweh's omnipotence and, unlike him, are ephemeral. It is noteworthy how the reference, at the mid-point of Structure B, to Yahweh striding into battle, Othniel, Ehud, and Deborah having already been described, and Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson still to come, recalls Sennacherib's presentation of Assur setting forth to vanquish Tiamat, the force of chaos, in which he lists a number of gods who march in front of Assur and a number of gods who march in his wake.[234] As this imagery refers to the New-Year re-enactment of the *Enūma Eliš*, it would have been very familiar, from the time of Sennacherib, to the elite of Judah and, if Spieckermann's conclusion regarding the role of the chariots and horses of the sun in Jerusalem is valid, more widely in that society.[235] Judges is a treatise on how Yahweh is the authentic vanquisher of the forces of chaos, forces manifested in the Settlement period in Israel's oppression, itself a consequence of its choice of the asymmetry of disorder over the harmony of God's law, and present at the time of composition in the identical symbiosis of endemic apostasy and oppression.

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232 Ataç (*Mythology*, p. 193) comments that Nergal embodied the opposites of Underworld deity and god of light. On Ishtar, see Dhorme, *Religion*, p. 85.

233 'Nergal is a god of many names, matched in this respect only by Inanna/Ishtar. The Old Babylonian God Lists contain about 50 of them, *An = Anum* about twice as many' (*RLA* 9, p. 216).

234 Dalley, *Myths*, rev. edn, p. 275; Luckenbill, *Sennacherib*, pp. 142–43.

235 Fancifully, in my view, Guillaume posits an annual procession of an image of Yahweh in his role as Baʿal-berith in Samaria that resembled the Mesopotamian New-Year ritual (*Waiting*, p. 65).

8

For whom did he write his book? In the first instance, he wrote it simply to record Yahweh's dealings with the momentous epoch through which he was living and as a reflection on Yahweh's acts towards a time long before that offered, in his view, parallels too close to be ignored.[236] But he also wrote it for others like himself trying to comprehend the appalling depths to which their people had sunk, individuals who were overawed by the might of Assyria, had been exposed to the splendours of its culture, and lamented the long shadow Assyrian power had cast over everything that they believed and held dear.[237] The book's message to this group is that, while they needed to prepare for the worst, they needed no less to perceive in the worst the essential truth of Yahweh's omnipotence, and, in that knowledge, find solace and direction. His sovereignty over the destinies of his people, and of all peoples, provides the one, and, to the writer, overwhelmingly, positive message of the book.[238] Precisely as in the previous century his predecessor, Amos, had offered no hope to Israel – 'the end has come upon my people Israel' (8:2) – so our writer extends none to Judah as a nation. Nevertheless, implicit in the narrative, hope is extended to every 'son of Israel'; a hope which affirms that by serving Yahweh exclusively and observing his law, his goodness will be experienced. Yahweh had sworn to the fathers that he would be faithful to his covenant, and therefore to their descendants. Judah would be obliterated as Ephraim had been, but Yahweh would not abandon his covenantal promise to the fathers. Thus, in its essential message, the book embraces and reconciles for its readers the two seemingly contradictory oaths of Yahweh that it presents (2:1, 15). And, as Sanders cogently argues, in that society 'to read in Hebrew was always also to publish. The root *qr'* entailed at once proclamation and circulation – the process never ended with the mere private absorption of written data. It is this ideology that gives written Hebrew prophecy its highest stakes'.[239]

In this study we have observed the writer's use of the past as a parable for the present. This gives an indication of his attitude to historiography.

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236 'The writers of the history were prophetic men, who wrote with the same principles that animated the prophets, and for the same ends as they pursued. All Hebrew history […] is written from one point of view […]. God rules the history; it is He that makes history; and this is at once the explanation of it, and the reason for recording it. It is not written for the sake of the mere events, but for the sake of their meaning' (Davidson, *Essays*, p. 315).

237 Compare Yee, 'Introduction', p. 11.

238 Compare *DDD*, pp. 1190–91.

239 *Invention*, p. 147.

As Davidson remarks, the authors of the Hebrew Bible are animated by a concern to offer an analysis of the meaning of events that accords with the theology that informs their lives and work. He goes on to state: 'The conception of what the history meant is born, and the *idea* is creative, and instinctively fashions a perfect body for itself. That the early history of Israel is a perfectly accurate record of bare facts need not be supposed'.[240]

There is, predictably, a connection between our writer's understanding of his task and the dialectic of the past contained in Mesopotamian material. This is evident, first, in the cyclical perspective that fundamentally they both entertain. In the Judges case, this perspective is manifest in the expectation of Judah's demise because it had emulated the northern kingdom's sins, and of divine judgment to befall the Assyrian king, as it had his father and grandfather, for comparable blasphemy and pride. More generally, Löhnert observes that Mesopotamian records narrate the past either from a purely theological perspective in which events are eclipsed by a theological commentary, or as a combination of concrete happenings and their theological explication.[241] The scattered references to events in the Settlement era elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible corroborate what is demonstrated by the Judges text, namely, that its treatment of past events corresponds to the second of these methods.[242] In other words, the evidence indicates that the presentation of the past in the work, not to mention its reflections on the present, has a stronger historical underpinning than scholars accept who view the writings of the Former Prophets as *Geschichtsfiktion* ('fictional history')[243] or national aetiology.[244] This conclusion is, nevertheless, far removed from the position of the commentators quoted in my introductory chapter who consider Judges a work of 'sober history', and accords with Brettler's definition of the historiography of Judges: it is 'a narrative that presents a past'.[245]

The Mesopotamians were renowned for their diligence in recording events.[246] Much of the importance that they afforded this exercise springs

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240 *Essays*, pp. 317, 319; see also Mellor (ed.), *Making*, pp. 113–14; Burney, *Judges*, p. xxxiv.

241 'Manipulating', pp. 409–10.

242 Compare Grayson, 'Assyria', p. 191; Finkelstein, 'Historiography', pp. 466, 469; Charpin, *Lire*, p. 245.

243 Gillmayr-Bucher, *Richterbuch*, p. 2; compare Guillaume, *Waiting*, p. 261.

244 Knoppers, 'Introduction', in *RI&J*, p. 15.

245 *Judges*, p. 9. Compare Kim, 'Other', pp. 170–71. This approach to the recording of events is also a feature of the Egyptian king lists and the description of Egypt's First Intermediate Period in the 'Pessimistic Literature' (David, *Religion*, pp. 24–25, 142).

246 Oates, *Babylon*, p. 18; Maul, 'Divination', pp. 361–63, 366.

from an intense interest in the meaning of the events,[247] exactly as Davidson argues for the Hebrew authors. What caused them and what, in turn, did they cause – what Finkelstein terms their 'exemplification value'.[248] This is axiomatic to the study and reporting of omens, whether from the exta of animals or astral movements.[249] Through them the will of the gods was communicated, and interpreting it would secure the stability of the realm on which, in turn, countless lives depended.[250] In the Neo-Assyrian court, astrologers appear to have referred to celestial observations and commentaries of their Babylonian predecessors going back over four hundred years,[251] and the methodology followed by the haruspex changed remarkably little over the millennium separating the Old Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian periods.[252] Despite the complexity of the theoretical models that these scholars constructed,[253] their aim resembled our author's: 'to become conversant with the divine knowledge and judgment',[254] and to convey that understanding to others who should know it.

There is, though, an inherent complication in this conception writ large through the episodes of Judges that is not found in the observatory arts of Neo-Assyria. It is the inexorable gravitation of God's people towards anything other than what he offers. I have noted the interplay of the symmetrical and the asymmetrical in its language and imagery throughout the work, and the correlation between concepts associated with symmetry with Yahweh's desire for his people, and, conversely, Israel's predilection for those connected with asymmetry. This dichotomy is salient in the author's approach to his task. To quote McManus: 'Barrow and Silk suggest that a perfectly symmetric and regular world would also be a world that is without history, a world that is timeless,

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247   Grayson, 'Assyria', p. 175; Finkelstein, 'Historiography', p. 463. Brinkman ('Glass', p. 41) notes that the Mesopotamians were more interested in asking, and answering, the question 'why?' than 'how?'. Of all the Assyrian kings, it is probably Esarhaddon who displayed the greatest personal involvement in seeking to understand the numinous meaning of events (ibid., p. 37).

248   'Historiography', p. 466.

249   Nissinen, 'Prophecy', p. 343; Richardson, 'On Seeing', p. 232.

250   Hunger, *Reports*, pp. xiii–xiv; Maul, 'Divination', p. 364. Note the frustration of the Assyrian court astrologer faced with celestial omens on which the reference works were silent (*LAS I*, pp. 9–11; Starr, *Queries*, p. XXXII).

251   Hunger and Pingree, *Astral Sciences*, p. 23.

252   Starr, *Queries*, p. XXXVI. The extispicy reports confirm that omen interpretations produced by the haruspices drew on long-established guidance.

253   Finkelstein, 'Historiography', p. 464; Hallo, 'Apocalypses', p. 242.

254   Nissinen, 'Prophecy', p. 345.

as is perfectly seen in that epitome of symmetry, the crystal, which, despite its profound and elegant geometries, tells us nothing about itself. When, however, a crystal has a defect, an irregularity, an imperfection in its structure, then the crystal also tells us of its past. With asymmetry comes history'.[255]

The writing of human history is inevitably an account of, and an exercise in, imperfection. History is asymmetric, eternity symmetric. The Mesopotamians, no less than the Egyptians, delighted in symmetrical images and the exquisitely balanced life they intimate, as their glyptic art richly attests.[256] But because of the distinction between right and left derived from their perceived associations with good and bad, pure and impure, symmetry had frequently to be sacrificed to take account of this opposition, as Assurnasirpal's bas-reliefs demonstrate.[257] Judges records the imperfections of God's people; it appears less engaged in portraying the perfection of God.[258] This is misleading. The book presents Yahweh's light as increasingly distorted through the refracting pollution of Israel's sin, a process personified in the judges. Outwith this cloud, however, the source remains crystal-pure.[259] And the composition's structure reaffirms the narrative's message. Some exegetes have identified, concealed behind its apparent, exasperating asymmetry, an elegant symmetry, as I examined in Chapter 4. Form and substance combine in the text to assert that even when everything on the surface appears to lack meaning and be out of control,

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255   *Right Hand*, p. 390. It is not fortuitous that the canopy of Yahweh's eternal dwelling is likened to 'awesome crystal' (*qeraḥ* – normally 'ice', *BDB*, p. 901). *LXX* has *ōs orasis krystallou*, 'as the semblance of crystal' (Ezek. 1:22).

256   Pauline Albenda, 'Symmetry in the Art of the Assyrian Empire', in Dominique Charpin and Francis Joannès (eds), *La circulation des biens, des personnes et des idées*, Paris: Editions Reserche sur les Civilisations, 1992, pp. 297–309; on the symmetry of Assurnasirpal's sacred tree reliefs, see Albenda, 'Sacred Trees', pp. 127–28, 131–32.

257   Compare the strictly symmetrical figures in the upper register of Figure 3 in Albenda, 'Symmetry' (p. 301) with those in the lower, whose strict symmetry is compromised because of the right-pure/left-impure opposition.

258   The perfection of God, for our writer, must not be imaged and can hardly be imagined. Being ineffable, it defies description. Attempts to describe it risk being banal. Aware of the danger, he deals with the subject tangentially by means of the structure and by judicious contrast.

259   Edmund Hill's comment on Augustine is pertinent: 'For him God remains outside or beyond history and even his historical revelation of himself is so mediated by created agents that it in no way renders the invisible one visible or the unchanging one changeable' (*Augustine's The Trinity*, New York: New City Press, 1991, p. 104).

Yahweh is in control, it is he who keeps the Seal of Destinies. Divine symmetry will replace human asymmetry, eternity will swallow up history.

Again Samson's *ḥîdāh* supplies the apposite metaphor. The writer's motivation to write his 'history' is symbolized by honey: 'The viscous [...] gives a set of keys to decipher all human acts [...] the origin of the ugly things of life [...] and, at the same time, the beauties'.[260]

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260   Sartre, *L'Être*, p. 704.

Epilogue: Judges and the Deuteronomist

1

In Chapter 1 we considered the Deuteronomistic History thesis as the explanation for when, in what circumstances, and for what purpose Judges was composed. Although it has lost some of its appeal in the past two decades, the thesis continues to 'form the cultural horizon' of a substantial number of scholarly assessments of the work.[1] Through the analysis of the text in the chapters that followed, the inadequacy of the thesis both as framed by Noth, and as variously modified by those who developed his insights, for interpreting the book is evident. Our exploration shows that the Judges author was not principally concerned with the writing of a history of the Settlement period. This is demonstrated in manifold ways through the composition. It is evident, for example, in the treatment of chronologies, where it is the numbers' symbolic value rather than strict temporal significance that is the determinant. We have observed the suspension of chronological sequencing in the interests of theological objectives, and the voiding of historical value through purposeful contradiction. Any resemblance to the approach to historical narration offered in Samuel and Kings, if one exists, is superficial, as Noth himself recognized in deeming Judges to furnish a 'cyclical' account in contradistinction to what he detected in the other books. The parabolic application of a period of Israel's distant past to convey the theological imperatives of the era in which the work was composed further undermines the thesis that Judges constitutes one component of an edited oeuvre of historiography. The clues it gives to the circumstances of its composition preclude an exilic or post-exilic date for its production.

The notion that Judges is a work that has been subjected to a chain of interventions by diverse editors at different times and with disparate agendas does not bear scrutiny in the light of its carefully articulated rhetorical architecture and the intricately worked features that are sustained through the composition, such as the solar motif, the liberal and complex use of doublets, and the particular meaning it confers on 3+1 constructions and series of sevens.

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1 Philippe Guillaume, 'Review of Susanne Gillmayr-Bucher, *Erzählte Welten im Richterbuch*', *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 13 (2013) [http://dx.doi.org/10.5508/jhs.2013.v13.r15 accessed 26 December 2015].

The literary layering found in Judges is an essential feature of the composition that serves its esoteric content, and reflects, not the stratified remains of a sequence of uncoordinated redactions, but a consummate grasp of contemporary literary practice.[2]

The range of literary devices harnessed in Judges, and the key hermeneutical roles that some of them, viz., *ḥîdôth* and parable, play are not characteristic of the narrative books of the Hebrew Bible. In its selection and development of themes, Judges shows no greater affinity to the Joshua-Kings corpus than to Genesis, Exodus and Numbers.[3] Its handling of, *inter alia*, the 'milk and honey' motif and the word *ṭôb* indicates a familiarity with their employment in the Pentateuch. Its peculiar use of *špṭ*, a radical afforded great attention in the book, contrasts particularly with its application in Deuteronomy and through the figure of Samuel.[4]

The extent of the adoption and systematic adaptation of Mesopotamian myths, rites and other features that derive from that culture, such as the SMC, to structure and animate the composition is striking. Even the relationship of Deuteronomy to Neo-Assyrian documents – the vassal treaties – pales in comparison with the exploitation of Mesopotamian material in Judges. So far as scholarship has explored hitherto, no other biblical book possesses an equivalent multi-faceted relationship with expressions of Mesopotamian culture.

All these arguments against an assignment of Judges to a putative Deuteronomistic History corpus are substantiated by the evidence marshalled in the foregoing chapters, exposing the inability of the thesis, however cast, to account for the features of Judges. However, in my treatment of the Deuteronomistic History thesis heretofore, I dealt with its main tenets. What has been lacking is an examination of the detailed case that has been made for it, comparing that with the facts of Judges. The literature on the subject is as voluminous as it is heterogeneous. Consequently, synthesis does not offer a meaningful way to achieve this aim. A more promising avenue is presented by considering the case made for the thesis by two of its eminent exponents, J. Alberto Soggin and Moshe Weinfeld, whose positions are broadly consonant and reflect those of many scholars. Soggin contends that 'Judges and Kings, have been edited in such a way that *time after time* an early episode or an early notice has been inserted into a context which clearly displays the *lexical and*

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2   This conclusion accords with those reached by O'Connell (*Rhetoric*) and Gillmayr-Bucher (*Richterbuch*) from different analytical perspectives.

3   Compare Wenham, 'Deuteronomistic Theology', p. 204.

4   *Pace* P. Kyle McCarter, Jr. ('The Apology of David', in *RI&J*, pp. 260–75 [263]).

ideological features of the fifth book of the Pentateuch' (emphasis added).[5]
Weinfeld likewise identifies shared linguistic expression and theological prin-
ciples as the Dtr's hallmarks:

> Only those recurrent phrases that express the essence of the theology of
> Deuteronomy can be considered 'deuteronomic'. The most outstanding
> feature of the deuteronomic style is its use of rhetoric. This is true of all
> forms of deuteronomic writing. In [...] Deuteronomy itself the rhetorical
> style is manifest. [...] The deuteronomic editor of Joshua-Kings makes
> similar use of oration to unfold the principle of divine retribution act-
> ing in Israelite history. [...] The function of these speeches is to empha-
> size the role of the divine factor in Israelite history, in other words to
> furnish the ideological grounds of theodicy. [...] An examination of the
> linguistic and ideological fabric of the deuteronomic movement shows
> that its development progressed from Deuteronomy through deutero-
> nomic historiography to the prose sermons in the book of Jeremiah.[6]

Weinfeld, in explaining his inclusion of an 'Appendix on Deuteronomic
Phraseology',[7] states that it is 'a vital part of the work, since *style is the only
objective criterion for determining whether a biblical passage is deuteronomic or
not*' (emphasis added).[8] On this basis, it should be straightforward to discover
the degree to which Judges conforms to the features that Weinfeld and other
advocates of the thesis claim for it. His study of the phraseology comprises
ten thematically organized sections of varying lengths that represent the basic
theological tenets of the DH thesis. The phrases cited express these theo-
logical tenets. In some cases, the main section is divided into sub-headings,
for instance, Section 1 is concerned with 'The struggle against idolatry', and
is subdivided into A. 'Warnings against foreign worship'; B. 'The polemic
against idolatry'.

In the table below the sections are listed together with any subdivisions
(column α), the number of their main component phrases (column β), plus the
number of alternative phrases or sub-phrases within the group (column γ):[9]

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5   *Introduction*, p. 161.

6   Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, pp. 1, 3–4.

7   Ibid., pp. 320–65.

8   Ibid., p. vii.

9   Minor variants of a phrase are listed as, for example, 5a, where 5 presents the archetypal
    phrase. In §5 there are many of these, with, for example, ten variants on the theme of 'statutes

§	Tenets of the DH Thesis, according to Weinfeld	α	β	γ
1	The Struggle against Idolatry	A,B	25	3
2	Centralization of Worship – the Chosen Place and the Name Theology	–	10	1
3	Exodus, Covenant and Election	–	24	2
4	The Monotheistic Creed	–	7	0
5	Observance of the Law and Loyalty to the Covenant	A,B	37	20
6	Inheritance of the Land	–	17	2
7	Retribution and Material Motivation	–	24	8
8	Fulfilment of Prophecy	A,(B)[a]	28	3
9	The Davidic Dynasty	–	10	0
10	Rhetoric and Parenetic Phraseology	–	21	1

a   The B section is concerned with 'Clichés characteristic of the Jeremian Sermons' and therefore can be discounted from this analysis. That reduces the number of considerable phrases listed in §8 to twelve.

When the data from Judges provided by Weinfeld are mapped against this schema, the following pattern emerges:

§	Judges references	Unique to Judg.	Any non-deuteronomic reference cited by Weinfeld
1	2:12, 19; [10:13];[a] 2:11, 13, 3:7, 10:6, 10; 2:12*; 2:19; 2:12; 'there is no Judg. reference in "the polemic against idolatry"'	*	0
2	–		
3	6:8 but 'its origin is perhaps Elohistic'; 2:7 (= Josh. 24:31, with a variant in Judg. 2:10)		(6:8:) Exod. 13:3; 14; 20:2; Mic. 6:4
4	–		

and judgments' alone. Naturally, this schema considerably extends the reach of putative deuteronomic phraseology.

§	Judges references	Unique to Judg.	Any non-deuteronomic reference cited by Weinfeld
5	2:22; 2:17, 3:4; 2:17; 2:19; 2:20; 2:12; and the series 'to do that which is evil in Yahweh's eyes': 2:11, 3:7, 12, 4:1, 6:1, 10:6, 13:1 (also found in Num. 32:13; Isa. 65:12, 66:4).		(2:22:) Similar phrasing found in Hos. 14:10; Ps. 81:14; Zech. 3:7. (2:17, 3:4:) similar phrasing found in Neh. 9:16, 29 and Jer. 35:14, 18 'in the more neutral sense' (2:17:) Exod. 32:8; Mal. 2:8. (2:19:) Isa. 1:4; Jer. 6:28; Ezek. 16:47; 2 Chr. 26:16, 27:2. 'In pre-deuteronomic sources: Exod. 32:7; Hos. 9:9, 13:9 (2:12:) cf. Isa. 65:3; Hos. 12:15; Ezek. 8:17, 16:26'
6	2:21, 23 (uniquely with *mahēr* in this context*), 3:1	*	They have a resonance in JE and P (pp. 342–43).
7	2:23		
8	–		
9	–		
10	(a 'cf.' reference to Judg. 20:13)		

a 'The phrase is already attested in pre-deuteronomic literature, and especially in the Elohistic source: Deut. 31:20; Josh. 24:2, 16; Judg. 10:13' (p. 320).

Taking Weinfeld's analysis of the salient features of the thesis, what is clear from the above table is that in Judges:

1. With the exception of the 'evil in Yahweh's eyes' series, which, in any case, is encountered in texts outside the deuteronomic corpus, putative deuteronomic phraseology is found only in 2:7–3:7 and 10:6, 10 (and, very arguably, 6:8). Our analysis of the 'evil in Yahweh's eyes' series in chapters 1 and 5 demonstrated that this phrase is integral to the structure of Judges rather than representing a parenthetic element introduced by a Deuteronomic editor (see Guillaume, *Waiting*, pp. 22–23). Moreover, the

frequency with which it occurs outside the 2:7–3:7 segment underscores the sparsity of other forms of alleged deuteronomic terminology elsewhere. In total, they appear in fewer than twenty verses. To put this in perspective, the name 'Samson' alone occurs in twice the number of verses that putatively display deuteronomic forms in the book, confirming, on the basis of Weinfeld's analysis at least, how overblown Soggin's claim is regarding the vocabulary of Judges.

2. Of the ten theological concerns of the deuteronomic school, Judges gives place to only five, in one case – §7 – with merely one reference. It shows no interest, at least in terms of identifiable phraseology, in Centralization of Worship, the Monotheistic Creed, Fulfilment of Prophecy, and the Davidic Dynasty. In fact, the position adopted by Judges is inimical to the 'chosen place/name theology' and the Davidic monarchy. It offers no evidence of the rhetoric and parenetic phraseology that Weinfeld considers a defining trait.[10]

3. It is in the 'struggle against idolatry' and 'observance of the Law and loyalty to the Covenant' that, in Weinfeld's analysis, Judges betrays notable evidence of standard deuteronomic phraseology. These topics acquired enhanced significance in the exceptional circumstances of Manasseh's rule and are central to the message of Judges, so much so that they are used to frame its structure. That a mode of discourse developed at the time among Yahwists to deal with the subjects is probable.[11] It is noteworthy that these topics attract the most citations in the Joshua-Kings material, and, likewise, constitute fundamental concerns of the Hebrew literary prophets of the late eighth and seventh centuries BC.

4. In several cases cited for Judges, there are non-deuteronomic analogue phrases found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. When this number is combined with the two phrases that Judges shares with Deuteronomy that have cognate idioms in Akkadian, הלך אחרי אלהים אחרים (2:12, 19) and עבד הבעל\הבעלים ועשתרות\האשרות (2:11, 13; 3:7; 10:6, 10),[12] and may be assumed to indicate Neo-Assyrian influence on Hebrew theological parlance, the total constitutes more than half the citations.

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10   As I noted, the set-piece speech topos of other narrative books is present in Judges, though in typically refracted form: Jotham's speech from Gerizim eschews any mention of the 'divine factor in Israelite history'.

11   If those scholars are right who postulate a date early in Manasseh's reign for the composition of Deuteronomy, one would expect to find its theology and idiom reflected in Judges. In this case, what is remarkable is that indications of direct influence are so limited.

12   Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, p. 320.

This consideration of the detailed evidence produced in favour of the Deuteronomistic History thesis confirms the findings of the preceding chapters. The theology espoused and prosecuted in Judges is somewhat closer to the preoccupations of First Isaiah, Micah and Amos than to Deuteronomic ideology. By the same token, in its phraseology and 'style', Judges offers no better a fit with Weinfeld's Deuteronomic template.

2

It is true that Judges, in common with many other narrative and prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible, is concerned with theodicy. In its case, it is the circumstances of the destruction of the northern kingdom and the deportation of its people, coupled with the southern kingdom's appetite to emulate its sin that inform the work, an appetite that, in the writer's conception, must result in a like fate. His objective is to state the repercussions of the irrepressible contumacy of Yahweh's people colliding with Yahweh's will. In his portrayal of the barren, disfigured human and cultic landscape that concludes the book, he does not pretend to describe the chronological end of the period between wilderness and the beginnings of monarchy. Rather, he depicts the results of the collision in their timeless inevitability: a strange and hollowed world in which Yahweh's presence has receded, and with it has gone all that is good, worthwhile and fulfilling. It is a place of the thorn-bush, not the fruit tree, of the rotting lion in a vineyard that is ritually forbidden and consigned to fire. Perhaps, then, his greatest accomplishment is not that he composed a work remarkable in its literary virtuosity, that has enriched the human experience with character portrayals so profound and haunting that they have inspired masterpieces of literature, music and the visual arts, or even that, in spite of its dark idiosyncrasy, his composition was recognized by Hebrew divines as a sacred, prophetic text. Rather, it may just be that his crowning achievement stands in meeting a metaphysical challenge that, *Nergal and Ereshkigal* has shown us, fascinated, and defeated, the best Mesopotamian minds. He succeeds, by his treatment of 'activity that seems to have no meaning', in revealing an unchanging God in the simulacrum of change.

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