1-1-2016

Continuity and Contradistinction: A Geography of Religion Study of the Ancient Near Eastern Storm-God Baal-Hadad, Jewish Elijah, Christian St. George, and Muslim Al-Khiḍr in the Eastern Mediterranean

Erica Ferg Muhaisen
University of Denver

Continuity and Contradistinction: A Geography of Religion Study of the Ancient Near Eastern Storm-God Baal-Hadad, Jewish Elijah, Christian St. George, and Muslim Al-Khiḍr in the Eastern Mediterranean

Abstract

For at least the past 800 years in the Eastern Mediterranean, communities of Muslims, Christians, and Jews have venerated three important figures: Christian St. George, Muslim al-Khiḍr, and Jewish Elijah. This is paradoxical, considering that common wisdom, and even religious studies discourse, suggests that Muslims, Christians, and Jews are distinct and separate, and particularly in the contentious Levant. Moreover, the figures there also share 'peculiar' characteristics: associations with rain, greenness, and fertility. One past study of this phenomenon argued that the figures' similarities arose from the fact that they were each a continuation of an important earlier regional religious figure: the Syrian Storm-God, Baal-Hadad. This study also considers the figure of Baal-Hadad, but not within a genealogical framework. Traditionally, each of the figures in this study has been investigated from what is known as a World Religions perspective - studied from within their particular religious traditions. This study critiques that perspective and proposes instead the approach of Geography of Religion, which it argues is a more efficacious framework for understanding the figures and the phenomenon. A fundamental precept of Geography of Religion theory is the notion that religions are always geographically contextualized - that is, they are always a product of both the time and place in which they emerge or exist. In this project, each of the figures' earliest and/or canonical religious texts, common images, and important geographical sites are investigated and compared for evidence within them of contemporaneous religious, political, and geographical influences, in order to produce a view of each of the figures from within their specific temporal and geographical contexts at the time when that text or image or site was created. This fruitful methodological approach demonstrates the enduring influence of geography upon a continuity of agricultural motifs which all four figures share; it illuminates a common pool of compelling figures, narratives, and motifs in the Near East; it argues for monotheism as a specific strand of religious thought that characterized Jews, Christians, and Muslims in contradistinction to one another and to the majority pagan traditions of the Near East; and it demonstrates that these religious traditions are distinct but not in fact separate, underscoring the significance of the phenomenon involving St. George, al-Khiḍr, and Elijah as a belonging to the authentic historical heritage of the Eastern Mediterranean, and to the region's shared religious practices.

Document Type
Dissertation

Degree Name
Ph.D.

Department
Religious Studies

First Advisor
Andrea L. Stanton, Ph.D.

Second Advisor
Nader Hashemi

Third Advisor

Albert Hernandez

Keywords

Ancient Near East, Eastern Mediterranean, Geography, Levant, Mediterranean, Saints

Subject Categories

History of Religion | Islamic World and Near East History | Religion

Publication Statement

CONTINUITY AND CONTRADISTINCTION:
A GEOGRAPHY OF RELIGION STUDY OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN
STORM-GOD BAAL-HADAD, JEWISH ELIJAH, CHRISTIAN ST. GEORGE, AND
MUSLIM AL-KHIḌR IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

_____

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of Arts and Humanities

University of Denver

_____

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

_____

by

Erica M. Muhaisen

June 2016

Advisor: Andrea L. Stanton

Author: Erica M. Muhaisen
Title: CONTINUITY AND CONTRADISTINCTION: A GEOGRAPHY OF RELIGION
STUDY OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN STORM-GOD BAAL-HADAD,
JEWISH ELIJAH, CHRISTIAN ST. GEORGE, AND MUSLIM AL-KHIḌR IN THE
EASTERN MEDITERANEAN
Advisor: Andrea L. Stanton
Degree Date: June 2016

ABSTRACT

For at least the past 800 years in the Eastern Mediterranean, communities of

Muslims, Christians, and Jews have venerated three important figures: Christian St.

George, Muslim al-Khiḍr, and Jewish Elijah. This is paradoxical, considering that

common wisdom, and even religious studies discourse, suggests that Muslims, Christians,

and Jews are distinct and separate, and particularly in the contentious Levant. Moreover,

the figures there also share 'peculiar' characteristics: associations with rain, greenness,

and fertility. One past study of this phenomenon argued that the figures' similarities arose

from the fact that they were each a continuation of an important earlier regional religious

figure: the Syrian Storm-God, Baal-Hadad. This study also considers the figure of Baal-

Hadad, but not within a genealogical framework. Traditionally, each of the figures in this

study has been investigated from what is known as a World Religions perspective –

studied from within their particular religious traditions. This study critiques that

perspective and proposes instead the approach of Geography of Religion, which it argues

is a more efficacious framework for understanding the figures and the phenomenon.

A fundamental precept of Geography of Religion theory is the notion that religions are

always geographically contextualized – that is, they are always a product of both

the time and place in which they emerge or exist. In this project, each of the figures'

earliest and/or canonical religious texts, common images, and important geographical

sites are investigated and compared for evidence within them of contemporaneous religious, political, and geographical influences, in order to produce a view of each of the figures from within their specific temporal and geographical contexts at the time when that text or image or site was created. This fruitful methodological approach demonstrates the enduring influence of geography upon a continuity of agricultural motifs which all four figures share; it illuminates a common pool of compelling figures, narratives, and motifs in the Near East; it argues for monotheism as a specific strand of religious thought that characterized Jews, Christians, and Muslims in contradistinction to one another and to the majority pagan traditions of the Near East; and it demonstrates that these religious traditions are distinct but not in fact separate, underscoring the significance of the phenomenon involving St. George, al-Khiḍr, and Elijah as a belonging to the authentic historical heritage of the Eastern Mediterranean, and to the region's shared religious practices.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Part One: Introduction

"Geography is far more important in the study of religions than is generally
appreciated. Religious beliefs and ideas, symbols and practice, are naturally
affected by the social and geographical conditions in which the theology is
elaborated." John Hinnels. Introduction to *the Routledge Companion to the Study
of Religion*. 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2010): 13.

In a quiet church in Palestine dedicated to Saint George, candles flicker as a small

party of vow-fulfilling Muslims passes through the vestibule and makes its way down the

central aisle of the church. They spread prayer rugs and give prayers of thanks to the

figure they have come there to venerate: St. George, whom Muslims refer to as *al-Khiḍr*,

(Ar. 'the Green [One]').[1] In the Eastern Mediterranean (those countries which line the

Eastern border of the Mediterranean Sea from Southern Anatolia to Egypt),[2] the Muslim

figure al-Khiḍr is in many ways identical to the Christian saint, George.[3] Many believe

---

[1] Al-Khiḍr is referenced in *tafsīr*/commentary to Q. 18:60-82. Sometimes al-Khiḍr will be referred to
simply as "Khiḍr."

[2] The terms Eastern Mediterranean and 'Levant' will be used interchangeably in this project. While the
term Eastern Mediterranean can sometimes include Greece or even Italy and Libya, it will not in this
project. Instead, 'Eastern Mediterranean' will be used interchangeably with 'Levant', but both terms will
be limited to the region of the Levant: those countries which line the Eastern border of the Mediterranean
Sea: Southern Turkey, Syria, Cyprus, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, and Egypt. This term can also include
Jordan, and it does so here. 'Levant' is etymologically French, but it generally corresponds with the term
(and with the countries referenced in) مشرق '*mashriq*', meaning "East," in Arabic.

[3] St. George is believed to have been martyred in c. 303 CE; commonly depicted atop a white horse, poised
to vanquish a dragon or serpent.

that St. George and al-Khiḍr come to the aid of anyone who calls upon their assistance, and people often claim to see or to interact with these figures in dreams and in waking life. St. George and al-Khiḍr are popularly considered among the most powerful and important religious figures for Christians and Muslims in the region. In terms of popularity, they are perhaps second only to the regionally beloved figure of Mary.[4]

Over the course of the past 1,400 years, the largest religious communities in the region are Muslim, Christian, and Jewish. In Eastern Mediterranean countries, a majority of the religious population is Muslim: From around 54%, in Lebanon, to 87%, in Syria, to 97.8%, in Turkey.[5] Within the Muslim-majority populations, Sunni Islam predominates, although, in Lebanon, 27% are Shi'a, 15%-30% in Turkey are Alevi, and in Syria, 12% are Alawite. Two or fewer percent of the population in Turkey is Christian; to 2-3% in Israel and Palestine; 3% in Jordan; 10% in Syria; 10% in Egypt; 40.5% in Lebanon, and 78%, in Cyprus.[6] Judaism can be found in small communities (less than 1% of the

---

[4] This statistic is drawn by the author. It is based upon the total number of regional Christian churches, as recorded by the ARPOA project at the University of Balamand, which are dedicated to the figure of Mary, and which outnumber regional Christian churches dedicated to any other figure or saint. The second-most-common church designation is to St. George. http://home.balamand.edu.lb/ARPOA.asp?id=12737 See also Victor Sauma, *Sur Les Pas des Saints au Liban,* for statistics on St. George churches in Lebanon. This statistic is further informally drawn from ethnographic research in the region, and is also based upon the prevalence of Mary icons, pictures, and souvenirs, which also outnumber those available for any other regional figure or saint. Icons, pictures, and souvenirs of St. George are also highly common, although, because this data is drawn from informal observation, it is difficult to be precise about the relative prevalence between regional figures and saints of icons, pictures, and souvenirs for sale.

[5] Unless otherwise noted, population statistics (general and religious) are drawn from the CIA World Factbook: https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/, and from the Pew Research Religion and Public Life Project: http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec/ These sources are imperfect, but are used here because they contain recent and continually updated demographic data.

[6] According to Laura Robson, "Recent Perspectives on Christianity in the Modern Arab World," the "major Christian branches in the Middle East are the Eastern Orthodox churches, which are especially prominent in Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, and Jordan; the Maronite church, based primarily in Lebanon; and the

population) in Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt; at around 14% in Palestine, and at

75% of the population in Israel. After Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, the most sizeable

religious community in the region are the Druze.[7] In Palestine, the Druze constitute less-

than-one percent of the population; in Israel, they make up about 1.6% of the population.

In Syria, Druze amount to about 3% of the population, and Lebanon, where their

community is largest, the Druze community comprises about 5.6% of the population. All

told, within the region of the Eastern Mediterranean, there are today around 190 million

Muslims, 15 million Christians, and 6.5 million Jews.[8] Within just the Levantine coastal

countries of Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Palestine (and including Cyprus and portions of

southern Turkey and of Egypt's Sinai peninsula), there are around 22 million Muslims, 6

million Jews, 5.7 million Christians, and one million Druze.

Back inside the church, the Muslims who venerate or engage in veneration

practices around al-Khiḍr and St. George do not consider their behavior abnormal or

contradictory to their identity as Muslims. Nor is that the judgment about these Muslims

by Christians who might simultaneously engage in similar veneration practices (although

the parish priest does complain that more Muslims than Christians seem to come).[9]

---

and the Coptic Church, found in Egypt. Smaller Catholic, Assyrian and Protestant communities are
scattered through the Levant, Iraq, and North Africa." History Compass, vol. 9, (April, 2011): p. 313.

[7] Druze prefer to call themselves "*Ahl al-Tawhīd*," "The People of Unity." "Druze" will be used in this
project because of the prevalence of this name in Western scholarship.

[8] Counting communities in Turkey, Syria, Cyprus, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, and Egypt.

[9] William Dalrymple, *From the Holy Mountain: A Journey among the Christians of the Middle East*. New
York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997, on the subject of modern Christian-Muslim veneration of al-Khiḍr
and St. George (pp. 338-44).

Indeed, St. George and al-Khiḍr – or, St. George-al-Khiḍr – is understood much more as a *regional* figure of power and assistance, accessible to and respected by all.[10]

This Muslim and Christian veneration of St. George and al-Khiḍr is not new: since at least 1200 CE, George and Khiḍr have shared similar iconography and, oftentimes, popular convergence of identity. Furthermore, St. George and al-Khiḍr also had a regional Jewish counterpart: Elijah. Until the mid-20th century, Eastern Mediterranean communities of Arabic-speaking Jews and Muslims jointly venerated Elijah (Ar., '*Iliyas*' or '*Elias*') and Khiḍr, often at common sites.[11] Al-Khiḍr is therefore popularly identified in the Eastern Mediterranean with both St. George and Elijah. Owing to the fact that Elijah and St. George, as we will see, are both known for their actions in defense of "true" faith, linkage is also popularly imputed between George and Elijah. Linkages between George and Elijah are, however, in the realm of similarity rather than that of identity, as has been the case between al-Khiḍr-St. George, and al-Khiḍr-Elijah. As a result of these convergences, up through the 20th century, joint regional communities of Jews, Christians, Muslims, and Druze came to venerate each of these figures at common sites throughout the region.[12] Among the region's religious

---

[10] As will be seen herein, the designation "all" is specific to the particular demographic makeup of the space under examination. In general, veneration of al-Khiḍr among the Druze is just as prevalent as it is among mainstream-Muslim communities.

[11] See Joseph Meri, *The Cult of Saints Among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria*. (Oxford: University Press, 2002). See also "Re-Appropriating Sacred Space: Medieval Jews and Muslims Seeking Elijah and al-Khadir." *Medieval Encounters*, 5, 3 (1999): 237-264.

[12] As will be discussed, 'common sites' can refer to sites that are jointly visited by multiple religious communities, and/or to sites specific to one of the religious figures that previously had been dedicated to another of the figures. Political influences during the 20th century have affected the joint veneration of these figures, especially the figure Elijah. Most notably, these political influences include the effects of instituting political borders between countries created after World War I, as well as the establishment of the

communities, these figures are popularly considered to be something akin to a shared regional inheritance.[13]

Outside of the Levant, Elijah, George, and Khiḍr are each very important within their textual and lived traditions as Jewish, Christian, and Muslim figures, respectively. Outside of the Levant, however, the figures are neither shared in the same way between their religious communities, nor do the figures regularly demonstrate the peculiar characteristics mentioned below. Outside of the region, the figures' identities are determined largely by the content of their traditional narratives.

Traditional Narratives of these Figures

The Jewish Prophet Elijah is a powerful figure in the Hebrew Bible (1 Kings 17-19, 21, and 2 Kings 1-2) whose prophetic role was to ensure correct community adherence to worship of the God YHWH. By virtue of his traditional inclusion at important Jewish rituals, such as circumcision ceremonies and the Passover Seder, Elijah has continued to fulfill this role.

St. George is believed by many Christian communities to have been an influential, early fourth-century CE Christian martyr. Communities within and beyond the Mediterranean revere St. George as a helper to those in need, and, by virtue of his legendary battle with a dragon, as a martial saint. He was eventually named the patron

---

state of Israel. Both of these political events had the effect of creating exclusive access for specific persons to formerly open-access sites.

[13] This was a common response during ethnographic research to questions about joint or shared practices around these figures.

saint of more than 30 cities and countries throughout the Christian-majority world, from England to Moscow.

Al-Khiḍr is a highly popular Muslim religious figure believed to have been an Islamic saint (or '*wali*'), Prophet, or holy person. Khiḍr is referenced in *tafsīr*/commentary to the Qur'ān as a teacher of Moses (18:60-82), is believed to come to the aid of those in need, and is revered by Muslim communities throughout the Muslim-majority world, particularly from Eastern Europe to Southeast Asia.

However, in the Levant – and only in the Levant – where these figures originated, they are not only shared and sometimes conflated, they also exhibit peculiar additional traits.[14] The figures have long been associated with rain, greenness, and fertility, with the ability to appear and disappear at-will, they can share local feast or celebration days of April 23 or May 6,[15] and they are often pictured similarly: mounted upon a white horse (or on foot), arm raised and brandishing a weapon, poised to slay a dragon through the mouth, or to strike the death-blow upon a human foe underfoot.

In keeping with the otherworldly characteristics listed above, Elijah, St. George, and al-Khiḍr each have been well studied and analyzed within their respective religious traditions. Interpreters are often uncomfortable about the figures' peculiar characteristics, which have for centuries remained the subjects of internal discussion and debate

---

[14] By 'originated', I mean where they first appeared in written texts and in lived religious traditions.

[15] Only in Turkey is this the feast date for the figure Elijah, where he is known as a conflation of both Khiḍr and Elijah in the name *Khizrilyas* (also spelled 'Chidrelles' in the 17th-century travel account of Antoine de Busque). Oya Pancaroglu, "The Itinerant Dragon-Slayer: Forging Paths of Image and Identity in Medieval Anatolia." *Gesta*, 43, 2 (2004): 151-164.

regarding the figures' religious statuses and significances.[16] The fact that the figures

share these characteristics and convergences *only* in the Levant, where the texts and

legends about Elijah, St. George, and al-Khiḍr originated, calls for further study of these

figures within their original context.

<div align="center">A Traditional Religious Studies Perspective</div>

From a traditional religious studies standpoint this phenomenon represents at least

two paradoxes. First, there is the paradox of the figures' peculiar and shared aspects in

the region of the Eastern Mediterranean: why do the figures display those peculiar

aspects only there, and why are those aspects sometimes shared between the

figures? Second, there is the paradox of communities of Jews, Christians, and Muslims

in the region, for at least the past 800 years, jointly venerating these figures. Common

wisdom, and even traditional religious studies discourse, tells us that Judaism,

Christianity, and Islam are distinct and separate religious traditions, and particularly in

the contentious Eastern Mediterranean. How is it then that these figures could be jointly

venerated by communities of Jews, Christians, and Muslims, and over such a long period

of time?

A traditional "World Religions" perspective remains prevalent within Religious

Studies textbooks and theoretical approaches.[17] This manner of organization and study

---

[16] For instance, in the case of al-Khiḍr, there has been significant internal debate over his spectacular disappearance and peculiar status as an immortal, and in the case of St. George, there has been significant internal debate over the historicity of St. George to the extent that in 1969, Pope Paul VI demoted the official feast day of St. George (already of waning official status) to an optional memorial.

[17] This perspective has been challenged but remains the predominant approach. See for instance Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). See also Talal Asad, "The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category."

focuses on discrete, comprehensive traditions, and normative beliefs and practices.[18] As

we will see, this is the theoretical framework within which most of the investigation into

the figures under examination in this dissertation has been undertaken. Because of that,

these figures have usually been studied from within their individual religious

traditions. This approach has tended to miss the figures' associations with one another,

and it has also tended to misunderstand as accretive and/or anomalous the figures'

"peculiar" aspects.[19]

Most of all, what this traditional World Religions approach misses is the way in

which locality informs religion. That is, it does not account for the intersection of time

and place that are always evident in the manifestation of a specific religious tradition. In

recent years, theorists have suggested that 'religion' is a meaningless category of

analysis, because religious traditions are so long-lasting and the elements which

constitute them tend to change so greatly over time that one cannot fruitfully speak of any

stable characteristics by which a 'religion' could be constituted.[20] Take, for example,

Christianity. The texts, doctrines, theologies, and lived customs that constituted

Christianity in third-century Syria are very different from those that constituted

---

[18] Kim Knott, "Geography of Religion," in *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*. 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2010): 478.

[19] See, for instance, Samantha Riches, *St. George: Hero, Martyr and Myth.* (Gloucestershire, UK: Sutton Publishing, 2000). Riches claims that St. George's association with the dragon is a "late-medieval accretion" to his narrative. This perspective represents a majority of opinion among modern St. George scholars, which I challenge in Chapter Five.

[20] Talal Asad, "The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category." See also Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*. While challenged by works such as these, World Religions remains the dominant paradigm in academic studies of religion.

Christianity in the 1930s in the American South. A traditional theory of World Religions cannot easily account for this complexity, because that particular theoretical perspective tends to view the elements that constitute a religion as part of a comprehensive, unchanging whole.

<center>A Geography of Religion Perspective</center>

However, theories associated with the field of Geography of Religion do represent a more promising approach – one which considers the ways in which locality informs religion. The field of Geography of Religion has evolved since the 1960s in various ways, but one of its most important contributions is the "contextualization of religion" that is evident in local, geographically oriented studies of religion.[21] Local studies of religion account for the intersection of time and place in analysis of specific religious traditions. That is, according to a Geography of Religion theoretical perspective, religions are inherently contextualized: prevailing political, social, religious, and physical-geography conditions evident within a particular locality are understood to influence the development and manifestation of that locality's religious traditions at any given point in time.

Returning to the case of third-century Syria, a World Religions approach might suggest that we understand the manifestation of Christianity as reflected in period-specific thinkers and texts. Within this approach, thinkers and texts are often contextualized, but those texts and thinkers tend also to be viewed tautologically, as signposts on the road of a comprehensive tradition whose final outcome is already

---

[21] Richard W. Stump, *The Geography of religion: Faith, Place and Space*. (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008): 177. See also Knott, 476-491.

<center>9</center>

known. Furthermore, analysis of a religious tradition within this theoretical framework, especially of that tradition in earlier time periods, has tended to be restricted to analysis of foundational religious texts. In the absence of other remains, studying texts is of course quite normal. The larger logical problem with the World Religions emphasis on texts is that often it is unjustifiably reasoned that if one understands the foundational texts of a tradition, one can thus claim to understand the tradition as a whole in all times and places.

A Geography of Religions approach, on the other hand, suggests that in examining Christianity in third-century Syria, one should consider the prevailing third-century political, social, religious, and physical-geographical conditions which combined to influence the tradition. That is, in which ways did those influences combine to affect that manifestation of Christianity in that time and place? In which ways were this tradition's customs, doctrines, and practices *lived out* in ways that were informed by the locality of third-century Syria? Moreover, how were this tradition's texts, narratives, symbols, and figures influenced by those of neighboring religious and cultural forces?

Using a Geographical Lens

Because religions and religious modes of being are informed by specific time and place,[22] this project will use the category of geography as a lens through which to view the phenomenon of Elijah, St. George, and al-Khiḍr in the Eastern Mediterranean. Geography – and by that I mean the geographical contextualization of religion – will be

---

[22] Maria Couroucli, "Introduction: Sharing Sacred Places – a Mediterranean Tradition," in *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean: Christians, Muslims, and Jews at Shrines and Sanctuaries*, Maria Couroucli and Dionigi Albera, Eds. (Indiana, University Press, 2012): 8.

considered herein an essential explanatory framework informing the development and manifestation of any religious tradition. Within this project, "geography" will specifically refer not only to the influence of physical geography, but also to the influence of physically and temporally proximate cultural, religious, and political forces.[23]

When we view Elijah, St. George, and al-Khiḍr through the lens of geography – a lens that is not restricted to inquiry from within a single religious tradition – several advantages emerge. First, use of a geographical lens allows us to view the figures in comparative perspective, both with respect to one another, and with respect to the individual figures themselves, over the course of time. Second, using the lens of geography allows us to investigate the figures' regional influences, be they political, social, religious, or physical-geographical. Third, a geographical investigation is not limited to a single time period. In different eras, the influences upon these figures have changed, as have the figures, themselves. Limiting this project by geography rather than by time allows us to see the fluidity of the influences at work behind the figures, as well as behind the figures' contextual alignments to one another. Finally, use of a geographical lens will help to resolve the apparent paradoxes regarding the figures' regional "peculiarities," as well as those involving joint Jewish-Christian-Muslim veneration of the figures. Ultimately, a geographical view of this phenomenon will help to illuminate why, outside of this region and shorn of its influences, these figures are not

---

[23] Use of the category of religion is also partly inspired by the work of Fernand Braudel; especially *The Mediterranean: And the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II.* 2 vols. Translated by Siân Reynolds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), original 1949.

conflated, nor are they shared between religious communities in the same way. It will help us to understand why, outside of the Eastern Mediterranean, the figures' identities are mainly aligned to the context of their canonical narratives.

Past Studies

Past studies of these figures, on the whole, have generally been performed by religiously committed insiders, whose work has tended to reinforce doctrinal tenets, and to downplay, dismiss, or ignore these figures' shared aspects and origins. Secular scholarship on these figures, individually and collectively, began in the late 19th century, largely in the vein of a World Religions theoretical framework. Notable academic studies of the specific figure of Elijah are generally broken into categories: Biblical, Cogan 1964, Bronner 1968; Talmudic, Lindbeck 2010; and folkloric, Segal 1935, Schram 1997. Notable academic studies of St. George include Budge 1930, Riches 2000, and Goode 2009. Academic studies of Khiḍr include Ocak 1985, Franke 2000, Ghanami 2000, and Talman 2014.

Academic studies of two or more of the figures have generally focused on two of the figures in comparison, such as St. George and Khiḍr in Hasluck 1929; Laird 1998, 2011; Dalrymple 1997; Bowman 2007; Wolper 2003, 2011; Elijah and Khiḍr in Augustinovic 1972; Meri 1999, 2002, or, in two instances, all three figures, in Canaan 1927; Ḥaddad 1969). In 1927, Taufik Canaan's study, *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine*, recorded and described the shrines that existed at that time in Palestine, and noted that, in many instances, shrines to Elijah, St. George, or Khiḍr were frequented by Jewish, Christian, and Muslim visitors at each, and that the names used for

the "saints" by visitors at each site were relatively interchangeable, i.e., Elijah/'*Ilyas*' and St. George being also called Khiḍr, and vice-versa.

In 1969, Hassan S. Ḥaddad argued that the similarities and linkages between Elijah, St. George, and al-Khiḍr deserved to be considered on a wider scale. Ḥaddad wrote a brief article entitled "'Georgic' Cults and Saints of the Levant," wherein he noted the similarities of Elijah, St. George, and Khiḍr among folk communities of Jews, Christians and Muslims in the Levant. Ḥaddad was the first to make the provocative but compelling statement that "the cults of these 'georgic' saints is a continuation, with variations, of the cults of the Baals of ancient Syria," referring to the millennia-long regionally dominant figure of the Syro-Canaanite Storm-God, Baal-Hadad, as well as to his regional syncretic variations.[24] Ḥaddad made this claim on several grounds: not only do Elijah, George, and Khiḍr often share elements of iconographical representation with the Storm-God Baal-Hadad ("vanquishing" posture), they are also popularly associated with the qualities for which Baal-Hadad had long been known: rain, greenness, fertility, fecundity, storms, lightning, thunder, the ability to appear at-will, and a commemoration day of April 23. Furthermore, as a native of the Levant, Ḥaddad was uniquely positioned

---

[24] Ḥaddad, H.S. "'Georgic' Cults and Saints of the Levant," Numen, Vol. 16, Fasc. 1, April, 1969, pp. 21-39. Also note that there is an inconvenient overlapping of names at work here. Hassan Ḥaddad (spelled with an aspirated Ḥ and two Ds) is the author of a work concerning the Syro-Canaanite Storm-God, Baal-Hadad (spelled with a non-aspirated H). Ḥaddad, from the *ḥdd* root, means to sharpen/delimit/demarcate, and *ḥadad* means 'blacksmith' (i.e., one who sharpens; see Hans Wehr, 187-188.), and is today a common surname among Christians in Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine. Etymologically, as we will see, the earliest meaning of Hadad (*hdd* root) was onomatopoeically related to thunder (see Chapter Three). While potential aural relations between *ḥdd* and *hdd*, as well as the cultural trails suggested by this etymology are interesting, the name similarity here is simply a coincidence.

to have been aware, as well, of the common practices surrounding these figures between local communities of Muslims, Christians, and Jews.

Assuming Ḥaddad's compelling claim about these figures' associations with the Storm-God Baal-Hadad, but largely bracketing Ḥaddad's questions of origins and genealogy, I propose instead to ask what can be learned about regional religion by observing this phenomenon; by observing the ways in which this process has worked. That is, in what ways does analyzing texts and lived traditions on the subject of the apparent similarities and claimed linkages between the figures Baal-Hadad, Elijah, St. George, and al-Khiḍr help to improve our understanding of the nature of religion in the Eastern Mediterranean?

Part Two: Methodology

In order properly to contextualize the phenomenon under investigation herein, the theoretical framework of this historical project is grounded in and limited by geography theory. Methodologically, this project also is undertaken in the illustrative comparative mode: that is, it uses comparison to develop larger theories and patterns.[25]

The choice of comparativism as a component methodological practice for this project is influenced by this being, at base, a comparative *phenomenon*. I will not be comparing these figures or their texts simply to demonstrate linkages. Instead, I will consider the linkages as the starting point, and will work from there to investigate the

---

[25] For a description of illustrative comparison, see David Frankfurter, "Comparison and the Study of Religions of Late Antiquity," in *Comparer en Histoire des Religions Antiques: Controverses et Propositions*. Claude Calame and Bruce Lincoln, Eds. Liège, Belgium: Presses Universitaires de Belgique, pp. 83-98 (especially p. 85).

figures and their texts on the basis of the ways in which their texts reflect their time, their political and physical-geography considerations, and the influence of temporally and physically proximate religious groups and ideas. Comparing four distinct figures makes for an ambitious project. However, it is intentionally ambitious, undertaken in order to highlight the importance and usefulness of geography as an analytical framework in Religious Studies.

<div align="center">Scope</div>

This dissertation is an historical, geographical, and literary comparative analysis of the figures Baal-Hadad, Elijah, Saint George, and al-Khiḍr. This project is inspired by the figures' centuries-long associations in Eastern Mediterranean popular religious practice, and is grounded in the assertion, fundamental to this project, that the development or manifestation of any religious tradition is in part informed by its geographical context. In the case of the figures under examination in this dissertation, the political, social, religious, and physical-geography conditions prevailing at the time of their texts' compositions are understood to have influenced both the development and manifestations of these figures.

This historical comparative analysis of the ways in which these figures have been developed is principally focused on written religious texts relating to Elijah, St. George, and al-Khiḍr that often are identified as canonical.[26] However, an understanding of these

---

[26] 'Canon' in this project will refer to a set of texts that have met a standard established by a community that sets them apart from other texts. Canon is conceptual - it exists in the mind of a person or group making a judgment about whether a text meets a certain standard. Communities also often imply by the term canon a "whole," or "closed" set of texts, although the canon is only "whole" or "closed" from the specific perspective of that community. 'Scripture' as will be used herein: scripture *functions* in certain ways or *does* certain things or is *used by* a community in certain ways. As Wilfred Cantwell Smith argues, "people make a text into scripture, or keep it scripture: by treating it in a certain way." Smith, Wilfred C.

figures is not limited to the content of the written religious texts that reference them.

Therefore, this dissertation also will examine what could be termed components of the

figures' popular-level manifestations: iconographical representations and geographical

locations (holy sites) commonly associated with them.[27]   Accordingly, historical analysis

of these figures will be undertaken on both the written and popular levels. That said, to

be clear, the figures in this study can only be said to 'exist' to the extent to which they

have been constructed by their canonical texts and popular images and sites, and to the

extent to which those texts and images and sites are *used* by the communities who

venerate them. This study will address only the former category, and suggestions for

current and future studies involving the latter can be found in Chapter Seven.

The popular-level iconographical representations and geographic locations

secondarily under examination in this project also will be considered "texts" which can

be read and analyzed in a manner similar to that which will be described for written

religious texts. Iconographical representations and holy places can be constructed at the

---

What is Scripture? A Comparative Approach (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Books, 2000). 'Scriptures' in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, as will be used herein: Obviously, this is a highly complex topic. What constitutes scripture is as varied as the communities making the judgment. However, for the purposes of this study, I will classify scriptures loosely, so as to be inclusive of many variations while still treating this subject (not indefensibly) in the aggregate: those texts which constitute for their community a "divine" message, as well as (often) lower-status texts which are related (commentary, exegesis) to the higher-status divine-message texts. 'Canons' in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, as will be used herein: a compendium (which of course varies by sect) of religious texts (often scriptural in nature) that have met a standard established by the community that sets them apart from other texts. For the purposes of my project: in the case of Judaism: the canon of the Hebrew Bible as is commonly attested by the end of the 2nd century CE, as well as Rabbinic and Talmudic writings associated with the Oral Torah. In the case of Christianity: the canon of the New Testament and the Old Testament as of Bishop Athanasius' 367 CE Easter Festal Letter, as well as hagiographical accounts of saints' lives. In the case of Islam: the canon of the Qur'ān as of the 650 CE "Uthmanic Codex," and certainly as of 850 CE Bukhari *tafsīr* usage, as well as the collections of *tafsīr* and *hadīth*.

[27] Iconographical representations can also be considered canonical.

popular level, by the communities from which and for which they are manifested, as can

be the case with written texts. However, written religious texts will be distinguished as

something fundamentally different from other popular-level constructions, in that written

religious texts tend to be *more* conservative and static, largely representing a certain point

or limited range in time. Most often, the point in time reflected is the time of their

creation.[28] In contrast, popular-level constructions incline toward more rapid shifts and

transformations.[29]

<div align="center">'Fishing from a Common Pool' Model</div>

Like religious traditions themselves, none of these figures has developed in a

vacuum. A close reading and comparison of the figures' canonical and popular texts for

the influence of temporally and physically proximate religious groups and ideas reveals

several associations between these figures. That is, elements within these texts

demonstrate reference or allusion to the religious traditional material of physically and

temporally nearby groups. This phenomenon is an example of the 'Fishing from a

Common Pool' model of religious interaction.[30]

---

[28] Obviously, copyists, editors, and redactors influence this process, but usually in a more marginal way when compared with the whole of the written text.

[29] Iconographical representations tend also to be generally stable over time, and, as noted above, can also be considered canonical. However, I will argue that changes still occur more rapidly in the medium of canonical iconographical representations than in the medium of canonical written religious texts.

[30] This model was inspired by Reuven Firestone's Qur'ānic-studies work investigating the evolution of the Abraham and Isaac narrative in Islamic exegetical sources. See *Journeys in Holy Lands: the Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis*. (New York, State University of New York Press, 1990). For further elaboration of the "Fishing From a Common Pool" model (including the origin of this name for the model), see also Andrew Bannister, *An Oral Formulaic Study of the Qur'ān*, (Lexington Books, 2014), p. 55.

The Near East is and always has been religiously diverse and pluralistic, and many different religious traditions have existed within this space. What we now call ancient Near Eastern, Biblicist, Greek, Roman, Gnostic, Zoroastrian, Islamic, and Druze religious practices have existed both simultaneously and successively in this region.[31] On the whole, the region of the Eastern Mediterranean can be characterized religiously by what can be said to have been – and to be – a rich diversity of religious beliefs and practices.

These diverse religious communities naturally interacted with one another over time, both during what now can be identified as these traditions' formative periods, as well as later, while new or rival groups were forming nearby. Older religious traditions existed alongside the formation of new communities, and all of these communities were impacted by groups and religious ideas on the region's periphery, as they likewise influenced periphery groups.[32]

Largely, these communities can be said to have been oral cultures, in which stories and social exchange took place primarily in an oral rather than a written manner. For the vast majority of these communities, of course, written religious texts usually became a part of their traditions. Written religious texts can be said also to have influenced the religious milieu, but the greatest medium of influence and exchange in this

---

[31] Certainly, many more religious traditions have also existed in the region. Specifying every religious group that has contributed to this pool is not necessary. What is essential to this argument, however, is the recognition that every religious group that has existed in or near this space has contributed to its religious milieu – and to its 'Common Pool' of oral and textual Near Eastern figures, narratives, and motifs.

[32] Hence, the designation of "Near East," rather than simply Eastern Mediterranean, as the category of this pool material.

environment was oral. Social and economic interactions between these communities often involved the exchange of and exposure to various religious ideas and narratives.[33]

One consequence of this exposure and exchange was the evolution of a common pool of religious traditional material.[34] What circulated in this pool is what I will call an oral and textual pool of Near Eastern figures, narratives, and motifs.[35] Groups made reference to this pool to appropriate compelling figures, narratives, and motifs that were of course naturally contemporaneous to that group's cultural milieu. Material was appropriated from the pool because doing so filled a need for that group, and, thus, appropriated pool material must have been compelling in some way.[36] As groups appropriated compelling pool material, they consciously or unconsciously imparted unique messages through the referenced figures, narratives, or motifs.[37] This transmission of unique messages can be said to have taken place in that each group's common-pool appropriations were naturally combined with and reflected internal issues, concerns, or changes taking place.[38]

This 'Fishing from a Common Pool' process resulted in related narratives and, thus, related figures, which exhibit elements of earlier religious material, as well as that

---

[33] Firestone, p. 6. See also Bannister, p. 55.

[34] Bannister, p. 56.

[35] Here I temporally and geographically expand both Firestone's original conception of this model, and Bannister's characterization of it.

[36] Firestone, p. 190.

[37] Firestone, p. 191.

[38] Firestone, p. 191. Firestone further notes that this process results in "unique" and original material, and material that thus avoids charges of wholesale "borrowing."

of the group's own contributions. These related texts and figures therefore can be said to manifest both influence and originality.[39]

The process had two effects: first, it contributed new figures, narratives, and motifs to the continuously compounded pool. Second, as materials regarding the new figure, narrative, or motif were incorporated into subsequent textual traditions, these texts and the information contained therein became more fixed. Eventually, as the textual and especially exegetical traditions of religious groups were themselves consolidated and incorporated, this process also entailed the creation of religious boundaries and exclusions around the new figure, narrative, or motif.[40]

In that way, the process resulted in related figures, narratives, and motifs that can be said to have been 'fished from a common pool', and, at the same time, to be functionally distinct – especially as the figures, narratives, and motifs became incorporated into the formation of religious boundaries and exclusions.

<div align="center">Thesis</div>

This dissertation argues that a Geography of Religion perspective offers a more productive framework than that of 'World Religions' for investigating the figures Baal-Hadad, Elijah, St. George, and al-Khiḍr in the Eastern Mediterranean. In accordance with Geography of Religion theory, this dissertation will argue that religions and by extension their texts and textual personae are always a product both of the time and the

---

[39] Bannister, p. 57.

[40] Sheldon R. Isenberg, "Review of Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis." *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Nov., 1993): 706-708.

place in which they originate or are manifested. Therefore, this project will demonstrate that the development of these figures partly has been informed by their geographical and temporal contexts. It does so through an historical analysis of each of the figures which demonstrates that elements within the canonical and popular texts relating to Baal-Hadad, Elijah, St. George, and al-Khiḍr can be traced to political, social, religious, and physical-geography conditions evident at the time of those texts' compositions. Specifically, the canonical and popular texts in this project display evidence of 1) the influence of temporally and physically proximate religious groups and ideas, 2) evidence of contemporary political conditions, and 3) evidence of the influence of physical geography.

In investigating texts for the influence of temporally and physically proximate religious groups and ideas, this dissertation further demonstrates that the texts under examination both drew from and contributed to a pool of oral and textual Near Eastern figures, narratives, and motifs. That is, the canonical and popular texts relating to each of these figures demonstrate reference to or appropriation of the religious traditional material of physically and temporally nearby groups (i.e., to that text's contemporary pool of oral and textual Near Eastern figures, narratives, and motifs).

Comparative Method

Canonical texts, popular-level iconographical representations, and physical-site locations associated with Baal-Hadad, Elijah, St. George, and al-Khiḍr will be read as texts and compared to examine the degree to which they display evidence of political, social, religious, and physical-geography conditions at the time of their creations.

This project is in part envisioned as a chance to get "behind" these figures and their texts to the Near Eastern pool from which they have been drawn. Like Van Gogh's haystacks, painted at various times of the day throughout the seasons of the year in order to study the light, what is being examined in this project is not only the figures themselves, but the pattern observable behind them, and what that pattern reveals about the nature of regional religion.[41] As we will see, geographically contextualizing and comparatively analyzing the texts, images, and sites of each of the figures in this study – Baal-Hadad, Elijah, George, and al-Khiḍr – yields information about the functioning of Near Eastern religious history in general, and about the theological distinctiveness of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, in particular.

Comparison is a fraught endeavor. The dangers of an uncareful comparison lie mostly in the errors of universalism (admitting no distinction or difference between items compared), reductionism (simplifying complex religious phenomena and perspectives to the extent that they are no longer accurate), and essentialism (admitting no distinction between members of a given group). Many theorists have raised concerns and offered suggestions for a responsible project of religious comparativism. Their primary critiques of comparativism are that it suppresses or conceals significant difference; is improperly employed as a methodology; can inaccurately represent the elements under comparison; and can lack scientific rigor, making claims unverifiable.[42]

---

[41] This Van Gogh reference in comparison is attributable to Wendy Doniger, *The Implied Spider: Politics and Theology in Myth*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999) p. 139.

[42] Jonathan Z. Smith 1990; Wendy Doniger 1998; Patton and Ray 2000; Idinopulos et. al. 2006.

Accordingly, the primary methodological model of this dissertation is a comparativism that 1) endeavors to examine both similarity and difference among the points of comparison; 2) analyzes specific and justifiable points of comparison: in this case (a) written canonical texts, (b) iconographic representations, and (c) sacred or holy-site locations related to Baal-Hadad, Elijah, St. George, and al-Khiḍr in the Eastern Mediterranean; and 3) demonstrates rigor in appropriately contextualizing – and thickly describing – each element of comparison.[43]

Comparison via a Third Term: the Pattern of Geographical Contextualization

Comparison most profitably takes place when the constituent elements are compared with respect to a third criterion of investigation.[44] In that way, 'X' is not simply compared with 'Y', but rather eX and Y – or, in this case, W, X, Y, and Z – are compared on the basis of a third measure of inquiry. This approach helps to focus the inquiry, to prevent the implication of unoriginal "borrowing," and most especially to reveal the differences and divergences between the elements compared. In this project, the "third term" of comparison is the pattern of geographical contextualization; that is, the degree to which the texts examined display evidence of 1) the influence of temporally and physically proximate religious groups and ideas, 2) evidence of contemporary political conditions, and 3) evidence of the influence of physical geography.

---

[43] On "thick description," see Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*. (New York: Basic Books/Perseus Books Group, 1973) pp. 3-30.

[44] See Jonathan Z. Smith, 1990, p. 99.

Furthermore, this project aligns with a school of thought, characterized by Wendy Doniger, that suggests that the most useful kind of comparison examines apparent similarities for the purpose of identifying not only similar elements, but to what degree those similar elements are different, and what that difference then reveals.[45] This project will therefore study not only the *pattern* observable behind these figures and their texts, but will examine the ways in which differences in the pattern reflect difference, uniqueness, and contingency in each of the figures. Moreover, those areas of divergence will be examined for what they reveal about specific religious traditions, as well as for what that data might suggest about the limits of geography and temporality.

It should also be noted that despite the equal focus of this project on the figures of Baal-Hadad, Elijah, St. George, and al-Khiḍr, in practice today, the most commonly venerated of the figures are St. George and al-Khiḍr among communities of Muslims and Christians in the Levant. This reflects regional demographics over the past 800 years, and in particular, turbulent 20th-century history (see Chapter Seven). As we will see, however, the figure of Elijah and the popular practices of Jewish communities are essential to an accurate understanding of this historical phenomenon, despite the fact that shared regional practices involving Jewish communities and the figure of Elijah are no longer as prevalent as they once were.

---

[45] Doniger, *The Implied Spider*, p. 139.

Elements of Comparison

As introduced briefly above, there are two different categories of "texts" related to the figures under examination in this project. The first category of texts in this project, and that of its principal focus, is canonical written religious texts.

Canonical written religious texts, as mentioned earlier, will be distinguished as something fundamentally different from the popular-level constructions. Canonical written texts tend to be *more* conservative and static than are popular or non-canonical texts, largely representing a certain point or a limited range in time. To use an archaeological metaphor, written religious texts could be understood as buried within a rich stratum of time and place.[46] While *meaning* within a religious text is always created by an interpreter, I suggest that reading a text *in situ* – within the context of its strata – in order to investigate the intersection of time and place reflected in its narratives, themes, and concerns, is something which, as in archaeology, can be unearthed in addition to being created.[47]

The canonical written religious texts under comparison in this dissertation are (1) *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle*, 2 vols., edited and translated from Ugaritic by Mark S. Smith and Wayne T. Prichard, New York: Brill, 2009; (2) 1 Kings 17-19, 21 and 2 Kings 1-2, translated from Hebrew in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, third edition, New Revised Standard Version, 2001; (3) Rabbinic and Talmudic stories and references related to the

---

[46] Bannister, p. 57.

[47] Data gleaned from reading a text *in situ* is of course also interpreted, but I would argue that the range of possible interpretations of this *in-situ* data is more limited than is the range of interpretations of "meaning" or "significance" in a text.

figure of Elijah; c. 200-1000 C.E.; (4) The *Acts of St. George*, translated from Syriac and Greek by E.W. Brooks in 1925, reprinted in Analecta Georgiana 8, Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006; and (5) The Qur'ān (18:60-82), translated from Arabic by A. J. Droge in *The Qur'ān: A New Annotated Translation*, Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2013.

Popular-level iconographic representations and geographic locations will also be considered "texts" which can be read and analyzed in a manner similar to that of written religious texts. Iconographical representations will include representations in various media of each of the figures (c. 2000 BCE to the present), and geographical locations will include Near Eastern sites at which one or more of the figures has been venerated (c. 2000 BCE to the present).[48] This project is also informed by field research undertaken throughout Lebanon in 2013.

Method of Textual Analysis

In undertaking an illustrative comparative mode, I will utilize the microscope/telescope method suggested in the work of Wendy Doniger.[49] Texts, images, and sites in this project are considered artifacts that reveal a great deal about the communities in which they were manifested and in which they functioned.

Each 'text' will be examined on two levels. The first is the "Microscope" level, which, in this case, will share several characteristics associated with the field of traditional historical criticism. Questions that will be asked at this level include a) How

---

[48] As mentioned earlier, twentieth- and twenty-first centuries CE visitors to these sites have tended to be primarily Christian and Muslim. For more on this subject, see Chapter Seven.

[49] See Wendy Doniger, *The Implied Spider*, pp. 7-26.

does this text reflect its contemporary culture? What is important, and what are political conditions and concerns? b) In what ways does this text reflect its contemporary pool? That is, how do motifs, figures, and narratives selected reflect the group's contemporary pool? c) In which ways does this text appropriate and incorporate compelling pool material? d) In which ways does this text display evidence of the influence of physical geography?

Second, each text will be examined on the "Telescope" level. At this level, texts will be analyzed for the ways in which various manifestations of the geographical-contextualization pattern represent difference, uniqueness, and contingency in the figures and in their respective religious traditions. Questions to be asked at this level include a) What does this text reveal about its specific religious tradition? and b) What does the figure represented in the text contribute back to its contemporary pool?

<div align="center">Historiographical Method</div>

With regard to historiographic method, this dissertation will take as its guide the *longue durée* geographical model of historical time proposed by Fernand Braudel in 1949.[50] In examining this historical phenomenon within the Eastern Mediterranean, this project will suggest that geographic time and linguistic time are two of the deepest and slowest-changing elements of time affecting human history in the Eastern Mediterranean.

At the lowest level, geography affects the climatological realities of life and agricultural production in the region. Although climate in the Eastern Mediterranean has occasionally changed since 7000 or 6000 BCE, in this project, climate in the region will

---

[50] Braudel, *The Mediterranean: And the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II.*

still be considered *generally* characterizable by three dry years out of every ten.[51] Furthermore, the climate – whatever its condition – will be described herein as a significant and determinative element of influence upon the region.[52]

Linguistic history will be suggested as a slightly faster-moving layer of time in this model. Historically, the Levant has been a region dominated by the Central and Northwest branches of the Semitic language family, save for the late fourth-century BCE introduction of Greek, and the introduction of Latin in the early centuries of the Common Era.[53] Finally, religious history will be suggested as a faster-changing level of history in this regional model, and political history will be suggested as the fastest-changing level of history in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Part Three: Significance

Conceptual Inspiration

My primary area of specialization is Islamic studies in the Eastern Mediterranean, and my linguistic training is in the areas of Arabic, Persian, Latin, Greek, and Syriac. I do not however read Ugaritic, Hebrew, or Aramaic, and have sought the linguistic assistance of specialists for texts involving these languages.

---

[51] Frick, Frank S. "Palestine, Climate of" in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 5 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 126. See also Eric Cline, *1177 BC: The Year Civilization Collapsed*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2014).

[52] Frick, quoting Amiran, D.H.K. "Land Use in Israel," in Land Use in Semi-Arid Mediterranean Climates. UNESCO International Geographic Union. Paris, 1964.

[53] Although the Romans politically dominated the Levant beginning in the mid-first-century BCE, and the Latin language came gradually into some use thereafter, it is not possible to give a simple date for the introduction of Latin in the region. Additionally, a majority of people continued to speak Greek and Aramaic even when Latin was in administrative use.

This project, as noted previously, has been conceptually inspired in part by the Islamic-studies project *Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Commentary in Islamic Exegesis*. I appreciated the way in which Firestone contextualized the evolution of Islamic traditions (in exegesis/*tafsīr*, and in *hadīth*), not as Muslim "borrowings" from Biblical traditions, but as unique and *original* works which, he showed, simultaneously displayed elements of Biblicist, Arab Traditional, Qur'ānic, and Islamic influences. Naturally, because Biblicist figures and narratives were a part of the Qur'ān's milieu – its common pool – these stories were referenced in a Qur'ānic, and, later, in an Islamic context – but in unique and original ways. Both Firestone's common pool model, and his description of the ways in which common pool material became "original" in a slowly emerged Islamic environment, seemed to me useful conceptual frameworks for considering the ways in which the texts that functioned to create Baal-Hadad, Elijah, St. George, and al-Khiḍr had each, themselves, drawn upon contemporary figures, narratives, and motifs, and contributed original figures back to the pool.

<div align="center">Significance</div>

This project contributes to the field of and theories within Geography of Religion. In so doing, it suggests the usefulness of 'geography' as a category of religious-studies investigation. It demonstrates the importance of understanding geographic and cultural context when studying a particular religious tradition, or when attempting to understand a regional religious issue. Indeed, the phenomenon of Elijah, Khiḍr, and St. George as a "shared" religious figure – in a region of the world often conceived of by outsiders on the basis of distinct religious boundaries – only becomes

clear when viewed through the lens of geography. Reading these figures in religious

isolation has long proven insufficient to observing a larger Levantine religious pattern.

This dissertation argues generally for increased physical-geographical analyses in

religious studies, demonstrating that religions cannot properly be understood in isolation

of their geographical and cultural contexts. This is particularly true in overdetermined

religious spaces like the Eastern Mediterranean, where several religious traditions have

influenced the cultural landscape. In turn, Islam in the Levant, which is today the

region's most populous religion, cannot be understood in isolation of its Eastern-

Mediterranean cultural contexts. A geographic lens, and, likewise, the specific

comparative model in this dissertation, could be also applied to regions that have long

histories of multi-cultural interactions, such as Eastern Europe and Spain. Implications

also exist for the present period in that this dissertation undermines in part the modern

"clash of civilizations" thesis, by demonstrating enduring similarities between religious

and civilizational traditions; i.e., in this case study, common cultural context often

supersedes religious-category identification.[54]

This project is significant as well because it demonstrates that the texts under

examination herein both reference and contribute to a continuously compounded pool of

Near Eastern figures, narratives, and motifs. This pool extends temporally beyond the

Abrahamic traditions and back into the religious culture of the ancient Near East.

---

[54] On the "clash of civilizations," see Samuel P. Huntington, "A Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs*, June 1, 1993.

Elements of ancient Near Eastern religious ideas thus still can be identified in modern Abrahamic religious practices.

This dissertation suggests that, like their texts, every religious tradition emerges at a highly contextualized moment in time. In that way, the origin of a religious tradition could be understood as similarly embedded in a geographic and temporal context. When we in academia study distinct "traditions," we tend to improperly understand both the context of a religion's origins and the contexts of its regional manifestations. A religious movement emerges much more in the religious milieu of earlier traditions than is often understood; that is, there are far fewer distinct "breaks" between traditions than is commonly thought.[55] It could be advisable therefore to study specific geographies in addition to time-period-specific specializations, and in addition to following a standard World Religions model of study.

This project was partly inspired by insights gleaned from the field of Qur'ānic studies; specifically, as noted above, the model of 'Fishing from a Common Pool.'[56] Usually, the direction of academic influence in the realm of theories and methods has moved from the more established fields of Biblical Studies to Islamic studies theories and methods. In contrast, this project uses insights gained from the field of Qur'ānic Studies to illuminate areas of Biblical, Christian, Judaic, and ancient Near Eastern studies fields.

---

[55] Firestone, p. 170.

[56] Bannister, p. 55. I have temporally and geographically expanded both Firestone's original conception of this model, and Bannister's characterization of it.

31

Finally, this project offers an opportunity to rethink the historical relations between Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, as well as between Eastern Mediterranean religious communities. This project suggests that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are not, conceptually and textually speaking, precisely "separate" religious traditions. Furthermore, it demonstrates that Jews, Christians, and Muslims are in many ways not "separate" in practice in the Eastern Mediterranean, either. This dissertation topic – particularly, its novel usage of a geographical lens through which to view the phenomenon – circumvents the kinds of political arguments that can traditionally impede discussion on the topic of relations between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In so doing, it illuminates a larger truth: humans in the Eastern Mediterranean have historically been tied by more – and for longer – on the basis of their shared geography and their common cultural experiences, than they have been separated by religious boundaries and changing political powers. Given current political conditions, it may be worthwhile to recall that there are elements of cultural commonality that connect people in the region to one another, to the land, and even across time. Furthermore, there are elements of cultural commonality, such as can be seen in the modern associations between St. George and al-Khiḍr among communities of Christians, Muslims, and Druze, which also bind religious traditions in the region.

This dissertation will be of interest to those in the fields of geography studies, Eastern Mediterranean or Levantine studies, religious studies, saints studies, Biblical studies, Islamic studies, and comparative religions.

Chapter Structure

   Chapter Two of this project will survey the region of the Eastern Mediterranean as a whole: geography, climate, and weather, as well as linguistic, religious, and political history, giving an impression of the region sans modern political borders and discrete historical periodization. Part One of this chapter surveys regional geography, and Part Two gives an overview of political history in the region, broken into time periods so as to give an impression of the political history of the region as a whole, and over time.

   Chapter Three focuses on the figure of the Storm-god Baal-Hadad, situating the analysis by discussing the ANE Storms-gods among whom Baal-Hadad emerged, and then focusing on Baal-Hadad, the Western Syrian and Coastal Canaanite Storm-God. This chapter examines Baal-Hadad's most important text, the Baal Cycle; his iconographical representation, the Baal Stele; and sites associated with Baal-Hadad - Baalbek and Mount Sapan. It demonstrates the ways in which Baal-Hadad was himself a product of his time, and highlights those elements of Baal-Hadad which were drawn from his contemporary common pool. This chapter examines as well the ways in which Baal-Hadad influenced the Greek cults of Zeus (e.g., Zeus-Baal) in the Levant, which gradually supplanted Baal worship, and highlights those narratives and motifs of Baal-Hadad that were also shared by the later figures of Elijah, St. George, and al-Khiḍr: associations with the defeat of a serpent or snake; stormy theophanic imagery, such as rain and storms and lightning; associations with Mt. Sapan and other high places; associations with fertility and fecundity and the seasonal cycle; and regular disappearance and return.

Chapter Four focuses on the figure of Elijah, situating the ancient Israelites and the biblical tradition as it emerged in the ancient Near East. In particular, special attention is paid to the ways in which the biblical tradition emerged from within a Canaanite religious environment that was dominated by Baal(-Hadad) worship. This chapter focuses on the biblical narrative of the prophet Elijah, whose narratives in 1 and 2 Kings involved the eradication of Baal worship in defense of the true god, Yahweh. This chapter then examines the ways in which Elijah remained an enormously popular and influential figure throughout the wider Near East from the second half of the first millennium, BCE and well into the first and second millennia CE, as reflected in images involving rabbinic Elijah and the Christian figure of St. Elias.

Chapter Five focuses on the figure of St. George by contextualizing the first-century CE emergence of Christianity from among communities of Jews and against the backdrop of Roman state paganism and the mixed religious milieu of the first centuries of the Common Era. This chapter analyzes the earliest hagiography of St. George, the Syriac-language *Acts of St. George,* demonstrating the contemporary religious and political forces of influence in the text; among them, the narratives and motifs of Elijah in presenting George in Elijah's role as a defender of true faith. The chapter then examines material evidence for the cult of St. George in the Eastern Mediterranean, focusing on the changing iconography of George.

Chapter six situates the emergence of the Qur'ān (and later Islam) within its late antique political and religious contexts, dominated by the contemporary Melkite, Jacobite, and Nestorian sects of Christianity, by rabbinic Jewish traditions and the

Talmudic texts produced in the academies at Babylonia, and by Arabian pagan traditions. This chapter then contextualizes the Khiḍr narrative (Q 18:60-82), a pericope known as 'Moses and the Servant', a wisdom literature story about the nature of God's mysterious justice, and it investigates as well the earliest exegetical (*tafsīr*) naming of the figure "Khiḍr" as the protagonist in narrative. The chapter examines al-Khiḍr in the Eastern Mediterranean, through Khiḍr's linkages in text and in popular belief with the figure of Elijah, and through his characteristics of greenness and fertility, which were similar to those of both Elijah and St. George in the region. Finally, this chapter begins to characterize shared practices around these figures in the Eastern Mediterranean, as communities of Christians, Muslims, and Jews there grew and evolved together from the seventh-eighth century onward.

Chapter Seven re-focuses the discussion on the shared practices between communities of Muslims, Christians, and Jews in the modern Eastern Mediterranean. It surveys conclusions revealed by the study about gradualism and continuity in regional religious history in general, and about the theological distinctiveness of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in particular.

But first, we turn to a regional investigation of the Eastern Mediterranean, in order to properly contextualize the geographic setting of the scene where our subject plays out.

CHAPTER TWO: LEVANTINE GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY

Part One: Geography

Geology

The collision of the African, Asian, and European continental plates millions of years ago formed the space for the Mediterranean, and in the process forced upward the complex of mountain ranges which line it. Gradually, the eastern and western ends of the Mediterranean joined, trapping the prehistoric Tethys Ocean for eons until it eventually evaporated, leaving behind a basin of limestone bedrock. Then suddenly, at some point nearly five million years ago, the Atlantic Ocean crashed through the Strait of Gibraltar in a spectacular waterfall that lasted 100 years, creating the modern Mediterranean Sea.[57]

Unique as a geographical region in being defined by a sea rather than by a continent, the only natural connection of the Mediterranean to the large oceans of the world is through the Strait of Gibraltar, which separates Africa and Europe by just nine miles at its narrowest point. The Mediterranean Sea and the mountainous continents that rise around it thus form a self-focused unit, which share not only weather patterns and climatic zones, but also a common geological and human history.

---

[57] Unless otherwise noted, geological information in this chapter is taken from J. Donald Hughes, *The Mediterranean: An Environmental History*. ABC-CLIO: 2005.

It is this common history which will be outlined in this chapter. Part One will examine the geological, climatic, and agricultural history of the Levant, and Part Two will give an overview of the political, religious, and linguistic history of the region. The historical backgrounds presented in this chapter will help facilitate arguments made in future chapters. Surveying such extensive change highlights those elements of continuity in history and culture, as well as those elements of lived experience which have been shared by peoples in the region over the past four thousand years.

Furthermore, not only does examining the phenomenon of Baal-Hadad, Elijah, George, and al-Khiḍr from a geographical perspective better illuminate it than does a traditional world religions approach, but part of the claim of this project is in the first place that the phenomenon has been poorly understood in part because the Eastern Mediterranean region in which the phenomenon plays out, and its history, are often conceived of as divided into discrete units with distinct borders. Such borders in cognition – political, temporal, religious – have tended to limit perception of the regional continuities through time. Indeed, a fundamental argument of this project is that there are far fewer breaks than commonly thought between compelling religious concepts among changing communities living in the Levant over time, and that it is these compelling religious concepts that have combined to create a common pool of religious traditional material in the region. One of the aims, therefore, of this chapter, is to give an impression of the Levant as a whole, and over time.

From its widest stretch spanning Gibraltar to Lebanon, the Mediterranean Sea extends 2,300 miles, and although its north-south dimensions vary greatly, its maximum

length of 680 miles stretches between modern-day Venice and Libya. The landlocked

nature of the Mediterranean Sea effectively isolates it from the tides of the great oceans

of the world, so that its tides are only the result of the effect of the moon and the sun on

the sea itself.

Because of the narrow entry and exit points through the Strait of incoming

Atlantic Ocean water and denser, heavier outflowing Mediterranean Sea, the temperature

of water in the Mediterranean is warmer and saltier than most seas, and thus can support

fewer species of marine life than can the larger oceans. The generally warm and arid

climate of the Mediterranean, along with the effects of regularly unimpeded sunshine,

combine to evaporate the Sea at a rate of about 57 inches annually. This process further

salinizes the Mediterranean, although annual rainfall, watershed from the Black Sea and

the Nile River, and incoming colder water from the Atlantic Ocean generally replenish

the lost water. Because regional climate and agriculture are affected by the

Mediterranean Sea, the fortunes of those who live around it are intertwined with that of

the sea itself.

Climate

About 12,000 years ago, the climate of the Mediterranean approached its current

conditions.[58] The Mediterranean climate is temperate and tropical, with two seasons:

cool and wet in the winter from October to April, and hot and dry in the summer, from

---

[58] Hughes, p. 4. As will be described, many instances of changes in weather, both naturally occurring and
human-caused, have taken place over the past several thousands of years. However, the larger
Mediterranean climatic pattern has remained generally stable since the end of the last Ice Age in
approximately 10,000 BCE.

May to September. During all seasons, temperatures are moderated by proximity to the

sea. The pattern of winds fluctuates from season to season and within different parts of

the Mediterranean. During winter, the jet stream, which guides areas of low pressure,

shifts into the Mediterranean. A series of low-pressure centers consequently form over

the relatively warm Mediterranean Sea and move eastward; depressions can also move in

from the Atlantic and become strengthened over the warmer Mediterranean Sea. As

these air masses absorb the moisture of the sea, they pour rain onto the sea and nearby

continents, and thus the preponderance of rainfall comes to the Mediterranean regions

during the winter season. Winter, in fact, can be very stormy, dangerously raising the

seas and threatening trade and transport.

Summer around the Mediterranean is hot and dry. Because most of the rain falls

during the winter, in the summer season many streams can be intermittent. Areas near

the sea can be humid and very hot, although the coastal mountains are often much cooler.

In the relatively arid Eastern Mediterranean, watercourses are highly seasonal,

and as much as 80 percent of their annual flow can be limited to the winter months. The

rainy season begins again in the Eastern Mediterranean in October or November, in the

form of heavy thunderstorms. Winter storms move eastward across the Mediterranean

Sea, reach the landmass at the northern part of the Eastern littoral (southern Anatolia

around Antioch, near modern-day Antayka, Turkey), and turn and move in a

southeasterly direction across the inland areas.[59] The western coastal mountains of the

---

[59] Frank S. Frick, "Palestine, Climate of" in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Vol. 5 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 126.

Levant attract most of the regional rainfall, creating an area of rain-shadow to the east.[60]

As in all areas of the Mediterranean, variation in precipitation from year to year in the

Eastern Mediterranean can be great. One year may bring twice the yearly average; the

next year, only half, and variation in precipitation between zones of the Mediterranean is

often substantial.[61]

About 70 percent of the average rainfall in the Levant falls between November

and March, and rainfall, influenced of course by altitude, latitude, and proximity to the

Mediterranean, is often unevenly distributed, decreasing sharply to the south and to the

east. In the extreme south, average yearly rainfall is less than 100 mm (4 inches); in the

extreme north, it can be as much as 1100 mm (43 inches).[62] Rainfall varies from season

to season and year to year, and precipitation is often concentrated in destructive storms.

In the Near East, a rainfall line (isohyet, on maps of the region) of at least 200 mm (8

inches) per year demarcates areas of arable land. Areas certain to be cultivable must fall

within the 400 mm (12 inches) isohyet. In the southern Levantine area of modern-day

Israel and Palestine, for instance, only about one third is cultivable.[63] Droughts are

---

[60] Moisture-laden winds move up the coastal mountains of the Levant, where they condense and precipitate before crossing, leaving a dry area on the lee side of the mountains.

[61] Hughes, p. 6.

[62] Carl Mehler, ed., *National Geographic Atlas of the Middle East*. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2003. See also Frank S. Frick, p. 122.

[63] http://www.weatheronline.co.uk/reports/climate/Israel-and-Palestine.htm

frequent in the Levant; in general, its climate is characterized by three dry years out of every ten.[64]

Geography of the Levant: Regions, Mountain Ranges, Rivers, and Flora

The area of the Levant is demarcated by its several geological barrier zones. To the north are the Taurus Mountain ranges, which transition to the different climatic and cultural zone of the Anatolian plateau. To the northeast, the Levant descends into the steppe grasslands of the area between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, known historically as Mesopotamia. To the east and to the south are the Syrian and Arabian deserts, distinguishing the Levant from the lower Tigris-Euphrates river system, as well as from the vast arid expanses of the Arabian Peninsula. To the southwest, the largely empty Sinai Peninsula separates the Levant from Egypt and the lower Nile. To the West, there is the Mediterranean Sea. These limits enclose an area about the size of Italy, which is today roughly coincident with the modern states of Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, and Jordan.[65] The entire region extends some 400 miles from north to south, and between 70 to 100 miles from west to east.

The Levant itself consists of three distinct north-south geographic zones. There is the coastal Levant, in the west, a zone of coastal mountains, in the center of the region, and an interior zone of plateaus and plains, in the east, which extend into the Syrian and

---

[64] Frank S. Frick, "Palestine, Climate of" in The Anchor Bible Dictionary. Vol. 5 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 126. Quoting Amiran, D.H.K. "Land Use in Israel," in Land Use in Semi-Arid Mediterranean Climates. UNESCO International Geographic Union. Paris, 1964.

[65] William Harris, *The Levant: A Fractured Mosaic*. Princeton, NJ: Marcus Wiener Publishers, 2003.

Arabian deserts. One of the reasons why the Levant never coalesced into a political unit was its geographic compartmentalization between zones: coastlands, uplands, and interior plains, all of which has no natural center. Travel between the zones, and even within them, has always been difficult. The coast, in the west, and the interior plains, in the east, are open to both the north and to the south, which made these areas invasion points from Anatolia and northern Mesopotamia, as well as from Egypt and from outsiders to the west. Moreover, the mountains, as a barrier to travel, hinder communication between the coast and the interior plains, thus exacerbating cultural differentiation between the Mediterranean ports and the inland cities.[66]

The mountains separating the coast from the interior are the principal physical feature of the Levant, comprising a north-south line of hills and mountains parallel to and immediately inland from the Mediterranean shoreline. These mountain ranges begin with the high Amanus Range (Nur Dağlari) of Cilicia, in the north, followed by the al-Nusayriya Mountains which line the Syrian coastline to the south.[67] South of there, the extensive Mount Lebanon range parallels the Lebanese coastline, a southern area of which juts to the northeast to form the Anti-Lebanon mountains, creating the Beka'a valley and the agricultural zone between them. Farther south is the Carmel Mountain range, dotting the Israeli coastline south of the city of Haifa; southeast of the Carmel

---

[66] Harris, p. 15.

[67] One mountain in particular of the Nur Dağlari is important to our study: known to modern-day inhabitants as Kılıç Dağı, in Turkish, and as جبل الأقرع *jebl al-aqra'* in Arabic, it was known as Mt. Hazzi to the ancient Near Eastern Hurrians and Hittites, as Mt. Saphon/Sapan to ancient Canaanite inhabitants, as Mt. Zaphon in the Hebrew Bible, Mt. Kassios, in Greek, and as Mt. Cassius in Latin. This mountain will figure prominently in our study.

Mountains lie the Palestinian or Judean highlands or "hill country," which extend southerly and grade slowly into the Negev Desert. To the east, and parallel to the Palestinian highlands, lie the Transjordan Hills, which extend all the way south to the Gulf of Aqaba, in the Red Sea. Between the Palestinian highlands and the Transjordan Hills lies the Jordan Rift Valley. Forced below sea level by the collision of the Arabian and Asian plates, the Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea created there by run-off constitutes the lowest physical place on the earth, at 1,300 feet below sea level.

Mount Lebanon is located at the geographical center of the Mediterranean mountain ranges, and two gaps punctuate these ranges of coastal mountains. The northernmost gap is named the Homs Gap, located at the political border between modern-day Lebanon and Syria along the Mediterranean coast, and extending eastward to the Syrian city of Homs. The southernmost gap is called the Galilee Gap and it extends from the Mediterranean Sea just north of the city of Haifa eastward to Lake Tiberius (the Sea of Galilee).

Among the three primary rivers of the Levant, the Orontes River in the north originates near Baalbek in the Beka'a Valley and flows for 355 miles northeast through Lebanon and Syria, then west and southwest into Turkey, exiting into the Mediterranean near Antakya (ancient Antioch). The Orontes River is also called locally in Turkish and in Arabic the '*Asi*, "rebel" River, because unlike any other regional river, it flows to the north rather than to the south. The Litani River also originates near Baalbek and flows 87 miles southwest through the Beka'a valley, turning due west and flowing sharply out of the Lebanese Mountains into the coastal plains and Mediterranean Sea at a location north

of the city of Tyre.[68] The Jordan River originates in tributaries in the Lebanon and Anti-

Lebanon mountain ranges and also in tributaries from the Golan of Syria and Israel.

These tributaries join in the Huma Valley, forming both the Jordan River and filling the

Sea of Galilee. The Jordan River flows 156 miles south from the Sea of Galilee through

the Jordan valley and along the Jordan rift, descending into the Dead Sea. Hundreds of

smaller – and often seasonal – rivers and tributaries flow westward from the coastal

mountain ranges along the folds of the coastal mountains. People living in the more arid

interior plains are watered by a few surface lakes, as well as smaller rivers such as the 43-

mile Yarmouk, an eastward-flowing tributary of the Jordan River that comprises part of

the modern border between Israel, Jordan, and Syria, and drains into the Hauran Plateau

in northern Jordan. In addition to direct rainfall, peoples in the Levant are watered by

underground aquifers. Aquifer fields in the Levant, used for drinking water and for

agriculture, primarily are shallow – close to the surface of the land – and are recharged by

area streams, rivers, and lakes, which are themselves affected by rainfall levels. [69]

---

[68] Historically, the Orontes has also been known as Τυφων "Typhon," by the Greeks, etymologically
related to the word "smoke," or "storm," and named after the fearsome, serpent-headed storm monster,
legendarily defeated by Zeus. In Latin, the Orontes River was known as the Draco, or "dragon" river. The
name of the Litani River is derived etymologically from the Semitic root L-T-N, corresponding, according
to many sources, to the mythical creature Lotan ("Leviathan"), in the Hebrew Bible, whom Yahweh
defeated. Historically, the Greek demon Typhon was also associated with the Hebrew Bible figure of
Lotan, as well as with the Babylonian Tiamaat, known, in part, as a monster of chaos, and defeated by the
Babylonian god Marduk. These associations serve simply to highlight the interconnected nature of regional
myths, and to point out historical linkages between these specific myths and regional rivers, which will be
discussed in coming chapters.

[69] For aquifer reserves, see Mehler, p. 72. See also Howard A. Cohen and Steven Plaut, "Quenching the
Levant's Thirst," Middle East Quarterly, vol. 2, no. 1, 1995, pp. 37-44. In the region, Syria's main water
sources are the Euphrates and Orontes Rivers; Jordan depends upon the Yarmouk and Jordan Rivers; Iraq
depends upon the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers; Lebanon's sources are the Litani and Orontes Rivers, as
well as several smaller rivers which flow westward from the coastal mountains; Israel depends upon water
from the Sea of Galilee and the Coastal and Mountain Aquifers; Palestine depends in the Mountain

The flora of the Mediterranean is remarkably similar around the east and west of the sea, as it was in North Africa, as well, before processes of desertification crept up to the sea.[70] Most plant life around the Mediterranean coastal and mountain areas is comprised of *maquis*, a dense scrub-vegetation that is hardy and drought-resistant. Maquis is made up of evergreen shrubs and trees, such as oak, pine, olive, and laurel, as well as *garigue*, a low, soft-leaved cover of bushes, bunchgrasses, and aromatic herbs like juniper, lavender, and sage, all of which grow well in the dry soil of the Mediterranean and which produce its characteristic scent.

Agriculture

The history of agriculture is inextricably related to the history of soil. The ideal type of agricultural soil, called loam, is made up of a mixture of clay, silt, and sand, and allows for free air circulation, good drainage, and easy access to plant nutrients, such as nitrogen, potassium, and phosphorus.[71] The character of a soil reflects topography, climate, and biology, as well as the local geology underneath the soil, which provides the raw materials from which soil is derived. The geology of a region controls the kind of soil produced, because as rocks break down, they decompose into particular types of soils. Granite decomposes into rocky soils, whereas basalt makes clay-rich soils.

Aquifer, which is located mostly underneath the West Bank, and Gaza depends upon the Coastal Aquifer. In the West Bank and Gaza, access to water is limited by the Israeli government, which motivates many people to sink unofficial wells into local aquifers.

[70] Solomon, Steven. *Water: The Epic Struggle for Wealth, Power, and Civilization*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2010, p. 17.

[71] David R. Montgomery, *Dirt: The Erosion of Civilizations*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007, pp. 15, 17-18.

Limestone, the bedrock of most of the Mediterranean basin, dissolves away, leaving behind rocky landscapes with thin soils and caves.[72]

The history of agriculture is also inextricably related to humans. Communities of humans spread out from East Africa through Western Asia, reaching the Levant around 100,000 years ago, and arriving at the Western end of the Mediterranean in Spain approximately 40,000 years ago. Paleolithic humans in the then-abundant ecosystems gathered plants, caught fish and crustaceans, and hunted mammals.

As humans adapted to the natural environment, the technology they created to do so became more complex and powerful through time. After the most recent Ice Age and during a time of warming climate, broadly speaking, from about 12,000 - 10,000 years ago, communities of humans in the Mediterranean basin began to adopt new methods of living within the natural environment. These methods involved the seasonal cultivation of food plants, like grain-bearing grasses, as well as bringing herd animals and their migrations under human direction. Groups of people in fertile areas along the Syrian hills and near the annually flooded lakes in the Nile Valley began to harvest wild grains between 14,500 and 13,000 years ago, and eventually to save and plant seeds from one season to the next.[73]

Once it was taken, that step of saving and planting seeds enabled the feeding of more people in the community, as well as the survival of larger, more sedentary

---

[72] Montgomery, p. 18.

[73] Hughes, p. 20.

populations in limited areas. Domestication of plants improved the dependability of the

food supply and enabled larger populations, but it also required a settled community to

care for crops. Along with agriculture came weaving, pottery making, and the fashioning

of lighter, more sophisticated stone tools and weapons, a well-attested characteristic of

the Neolithic period. The major early crops were barley, wheat, oats, rye, legumes, and

flax. Farmers selected seeds from the best plants after the harvest for planting in the

following year, enabling the growth of new varieties of crops.[74]

As important as was the domestication of plants to Neolithic people was the

domestication of animals. Sedentary farmers also began to keep tamed species, but the

early work of domestication was undertaken by migrant peoples who, rather than

following herds of grazing animals in order to hunt them, began gradually to protect

herds from predators and to control their annual movements. Most herders were not

nomadic wanderers, but practiced transhumance, the movement of herds to higher

mountains in summer, and lower areas in winter. Pastoralism developed first in the Near

East with goats and sheep, and later with cattle, pigs, and donkeys, because these animals

were adapted to land where grassland, brush, and forest interpenetrate.[75]

The regional population began to grow rapidly as the domestication of wheat and

legumes increased food production. By about 7,000 BCE small farming villages were

scattered throughout the Levant. The first farmers relied on rainfall to water their crops.

---

[74] Hughes, p. 20.

[75] Hughes, p. 21.

They were so successful that by about 5,000 BCE the human population occupied virtually the entire area of the Middle East suitable for dryland farming. This, in turn, increased pressure to extract more food from the land, and led to a major revolution in agricultural methods: irrigation.[76]

Water

The early, river-based irrigation civilizations, such as those in Mesopotamia and Egypt, became history's first great empires. Water was vitally important and life-giving: during those periods in history when the water flow was interrupted, either naturally or through human causes, crop production fell, surpluses dissipated, dynasties toppled, and starvation and anarchy threatened the entire social system.[77]

In fact, the way water resources presented themselves exerted a strong influence on the nature of the society's political system. Historically, irrigation cultures have been accompanied by centralized states with large bureaucracies. However, rain-fed farming could not produce the food surpluses, population densities, and grand civilizations that were enabled by irrigation.[78] It seems, therefore, that physical geography has impacted the Eastern Mediterranean region in another way: the Levant's lack of large, annually flooding rivers that could be harnessed for irrigation – and its extreme reliance on rainfall for agricultural needs – may also have impeded the political consolidation of the region.[79]

---

[76] Montgomery, p. 36.

[77] Solomon, p. 25.

[78] Solomon, pp. 21-22.

[79] Solomon, pp. 24-27.

Changes over Time to Land and Agricultural Practices

Changes in climate often resulted in changes to agriculture, but sometimes changes in agricultural practices also changed the natural environment. Erosion, a natural process essential for soil formation, can be also sped up dangerously – and sometimes swept away all together – by human practices such as deforestation, irrigation, and plowing.[80]

From antiquity, through the Middle Ages, and into the modern periods, agriculture was the basic economic activity of the Levant. In antiquity and the Middle Ages, agricultural production was dominated by the Mediterranean staple crops of grains, olives, and grapevines.[81] During the Middle Ages, over nine-tenths of all peoples in the Mediterranean lived on the land in an agricultural, rural setting, and new crops such as sugar cane, citrus fruits, melons, and strawberries were introduced.[82] Grazing animals – cattle, sheep, goats, and pigs – were important as food and clothing sources, and horses, mules, and donkeys were used for transportation and drafting. These animals grazed on fallow fields and enriched them with manure.

---

[80] Montgomery, p. 16. Erosion, which increases the amount of dirt that flows into nearby rivers, can also cause ports located near the mouths of rivers to silt over and to "move" inland, a common form of environmental change. An example of this can be seen in southern Mesopotamian cities, such as Uruk and Eridu. During the early Bronze Age, ca. 3300 BCE, these cities were located closer to the Persian Gulf, but because of the effects of silt deposition from the Euphrates and Tigris rivers caused by extensive irrigation, these former Mesopotamian cities are today located 150 miles inland from the Persian Gulf.

[81] Hughes, p. 66.

[82] Hughes, p. 61 and 68.

The most important raw material for the textile industry in the pre-modern era was wool, and sheep were among the greatest number of grazing animals. Demands for wool increased the sizes of flocks, increasing their impacts on forests and grasslands and contributing to soil depletion and erosion, because sheep are notoriously destructive of vegetative cover.[83] Timber was always in great demand for shipbuilding and other construction, heating, metallurgy, ceramic manufacture, and sugar refining. Because the shores and hills of the eastern Mediterranean largely had been exhausted or their timber resources by the older civilizations of Syria, Mesopotamia, and Egypt, wood had to be sought until the modern era from northern areas of costal Anatolia.[84]

In the Early Modern Period, beginning in the seventeenth century CE, agriculture continued to consist of the Mediterranean staples, but it was also supplemented by legumes, green vegetables, and root crops. New plants from the Americas also appeared, including maize, potatoes, and tomatoes, and crops from the east, including rice and cotton, began to be raised in the Ottoman Empire (1453-1923 CE) and in Egypt. In the Ottoman Empire, agricultural production beyond the level of subsistence was taxed by the state to finance military and bureaucratic endeavors, and wood, as a source of fuel for warmth, cooking, and smelting, remained the dominant source of energy.[85]

---

[83] Hughes, p. 70.

[84] Hughes, p. 71. Indeed, a landscape barren of trees is a characteristic of the modern Eastern Mediterranean. For instance, *jebel al-aqra'*, the name of the mountain mentioned above located in modern-day Turkey along the northern Levantine coast, means in Arabic the "'bald' or 'stark' mountain," and refers to the deforested state of the mountain.

[85] Hughes, p. 98.

During the Modern Period, beginning in the nineteenth century CE, changes to materials and processes spurred by the industrial revolution resulted in unprecedented impacts upon the natural environment. Mechanization – the use of metal machines driven by power generated from a heat source – of both trains and agricultural practices was a challenge throughout the Mediterranean, because of its soils and topography. However, changes to long-distance travel and trade brought by the steam engine began rapidly to transform Eastern Mediterranean trade and travel during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[86] Agricultural mechanization in the eastern Mediterranean made only minor inroads until the mid-twentieth century, until which time at least 80 percent of the population remained agrarian, producing crops such as grains, tobacco, rice, cotton, grapes, cereals, olive oil, sugar, oranges, and dates.[87]

Over the course of the twentieth century CE, changes to production methods and tools were extensive, and the effects of those changes were tremendous on populations and civic infrastructure. In 1800 CE, the population of Istanbul, the Levant's most populous city, was approximately 750,000, and had grown to 1.4 million by 1924 CE. In Beirut, the population in 1860 CE was 10,000, and by 1914 CE it ballooned to 150,000. Between 1917 and 1937 CE, Cairo grew from 800,000 to 1.3 million. Infrastructural resources also grew during the twentieth century, but improvements often kept pace

---

[86] Hughes, p. 125.

[87] Hughes, p. 117. Today, less-than-10% of the population, on average, in the Eastern Mediterranean is engaged in agricultural work. See Anthony O'Sullivan, Marie-Estelle Rey, and Jorge Galvez Mendez, "Opportunities and Challenges in the MENA Region," Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2011, pp. 21-22.

poorly with population growth. Water and sewage systems, gas, electricity and telephone

services, buses, tramways, and motor traffic increased in the Eastern Mediterranean

during the 1920s and 1930s CE.[88]

Large-scale mass production of agriculture began in the eastern Mediterranean

after World War II, further speeding population growth, and raising the levels of animal

waste and pesticides in regional rivers and seas. Enormous human-driven changes to the

land of the Levant during the twentieth century CE have caused the emergence of several

environmental problems, particularly during the past fifty years: among them, water

pollution and low reserve, air pollution, detrimental mass agricultural practices,

desertification of arable land, loss of biodiversity among plant and animal species, and

potential food shortages.[89] Human-driven damage to natural systems during the Modern

Period has thus been greater than that of previous times.[90]

<center>Conclusion</center>

Geological history in the Eastern Mediterranean is one of change: changes to land

and to climate that have been the results both of natural and human processes. However,

until very recently – the mid-twentieth century CE – among the most stable and

continuous human economic and sustenance activities in this region was agriculture and

farming. One of the more fundamental changes to patterns of lived human experience,

---

[88] Hughes, pp. 114-115.

[89] Hughes pp. 138-178.

[90] Hughes, p. 134.

<center>52</center>

therefore, to have taken place in the Levant during the past few thousand years was that of twentieth-century CE mechanization and mass agriculture, which have enabled a majority of inhabitants no longer to be primarily engaged in agricultural work.

Another continuity evident from this examination is that of long-term regional dependence upon rainfall for agricultural needs. Because the Levant is arid and lacks proper rivers with which to irrigate crops, or which predictably flood and deposit soil-enriching silt, agricultural peoples in this region for most of its inhabited history primarily have relied upon rainfall, which also feeds rivers and aquifers, for their farming needs.[91] Of course, all early human agricultural communities needed rain and water to survive, but in the arid environment of the Levant – a region frequently in drought – the essential need for rain has long been acute. The pervasiveness of this regional need for rain has affected groups of humans living in the Levant throughout history, regardless, of course, of political, religious, or linguistic affiliations.[92]

Part Two: Near Eastern Political, Religious, and Linguistic History

As the only land bridge between the continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa, the Levant has been well traveled by peoples and empires throughout history. Primarily due to an interrupted geography which impeded political consolidation, but also because the

---

[91] Still today, agricultural use accounts for some 70% of regional water usage. See Cohen and Plaut, p. 34.

[92] Since the mid-20th century, peoples throughout the Levant have devised technological solutions to address the essential need for water from rainfall in an arid region, through programs such as direct aquifer extraction, the creation of reservoirs and dams, and plants for seawater desalinization and reclamation of waste water. However, due to mismanagement and overuse, all water sources are endangered, and even programs such as these do not eliminate the continuing regional need for water from rainfall and aquifers. Such programs can serve, as well, to exacerbate political tensions over scarce water resources between regional inhabitants. See Cohen and Plaut, pp. 37-44.

Levant lacked great rivers for irrigation (and thus administration), it never coalesced as a single political unit. On occasion, it was ruled from within by an internal ruler or dynasty, but for the vast majority of its history, the region of the Levant has been subsumed by larger powers.

By and large, the centralized, irrigated empires – and their historical successors – to the east and southwest of the Levant have at various times exchanged control of all or parts of the Levant. Historically speaking, even when areas of the Levant were not under the direct control of surrounding superpowers, they tended nonetheless to be politically and culturally influenced by nearby neighbors: Mesopotamia and Persia influenced the eastern interior plains; Anatolia and northern Mesopotamia influenced the north; outsiders from the west influenced the coastal areas; and Egypt influenced the southern lowland areas.

Part Two of this chapter is designed to give an overview of the ways in which human history in the Levant has overlaid regional geography. This section will allow us to identify the political, religious, and linguistic influences necessary to our understanding of the common pool of religious traditional material from which the figures Baal-Hadad, Elijah, George, and al-Khiḍr drew, and to which they contributed. In so doing, this section will also serve to highlight continuities of lived experience for regional inhabitants, as well as linguistic and religious continuities and linkages between and among changing political eras.

This section is divided into time periods, so as to give an historical impression of the region as a whole, and over time. Religious and linguistic history, which are of

course not independent entities but constantly formed by, formative of, and inextricable from politics, are woven into the first part of this section, which imparts a comprehensive overview of regional political history. Summaries of political history, religious history, and linguistic history follow at the end of the section. Certain eras – the late Bronze Age in particular – receive more focus than other eras, and this is in part because of an argument that this period represents a useful example of the larger pattern of historical interconnections between human communities over time in the region, as well as of the transmission within the Levant of political and religious ideas. As mentioned earlier and as will be argued throughout this project, there have been far fewer breaks than commonly thought between compelling religious concepts among changing communities living in the Levant over time. It is in the Bronze Age, in fact, where the story of Baal-Hadad, Elijah, George, and al-Khiḍr should begin.

<div align="center">10,000 – 1,600 BCE:</div>

<div align="center">Neolithic, Copper Age, and Early and Middle Bronze Age Political Formations</div>

As early as the 10th millennium BCE, there were independent human settlements in the Levant. By 7,000 BCE agricultural villages had begun to spread throughout the Levant and greater Near East, and around the middle of the 6th millennium BCE, there is evidence of the Mesopotamian Halaf culture in the Levant. Given that human communities at the time were small and unorganized beyond the village level, it is remarkable that pottery styles of the Halaf culture, originally from an area near the Zagros Mountains in modern-day Iran, could have spread all the way to the Mediterranean coast in 5500 BCE. However, this kind of extended transmission, just as

<div align="center">55</div>

with that of the Mesopotamian Ubaid culture during the next millennium, is emblematic

of later cultural diffusion patterns, as well.[93]

Throughout the early Bronze Age (EBA; 3300-1800 BCE), small villages began

to consolidate and to grow in size, leading to the formation of the first cities in

Mesopotamia in approximately 4500 BCE. To facilitate trade and accounting practices,

but also as an independent means of communication, writing began to develop in the

Sumerian culture of southern Mesopotamia and simultaneously in Egypt in around 3100

BCE.[94] Writing practices, using a system of wedge-shaped marks called cuneiform

imprinted into wet clay, began thereafter to spread throughout the Near East.

During the EBA, the Levant was rarely dominated by foreign empires. Cities

were the centers of small states which incorporated the surrounding countryside where

villagers farmed. Texts from the city of Ebla in northwest Syria from later periods

identify several of these city-states by name, including Ugarit and Byblos on the

Levantine coast.[95]

However, one early Mesopotamian dynasty, the Akkadians, during the 24th

century, formed a political centralization lasting about a century which included sections

of the northern Levant. This was notable because it was the first time in the history of the

---

[93] Marc Van de Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East ca. 3000-323 BC*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, pp. 14-15.

[94] Glassner, Jean-Jacques, *The Invention of Cuneiform*, 2009. Trans. and ed., Zainab Bahrani and Marc Van de Mieroop. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003. In Egypt, the writing system was not cuneiform but hieroglyphic.

[95] Mieroop, p. 52.

region – albeit only for a short while – when an outside power gained political control over it. A brief period of fragmentation in power followed after the Akkadian dynasty disintegrated, and subsequent Mesopotamian dynastic lines did not extend far enough to the west to control the Levant.[96]

Throughout the middle Bronze Age (MBA; 1800-1600 BCE), the whole of the Near East was comprised of numerous states spread over the landscape from Iran to the Mediterranean coast. Estimates of regional cities' populations are difficult to deduce, but records from Ugarit, for example, suggest that an urban population of 6,000 to 8,000 was supported by a rural population of 20,000 - 25,000 spread over 150 villages.[97] The rulers of these states formed shifting alliances and turned against one another as they vied among themselves for power. Particularly strong rulers were able to extend their political control over a wide geographical area. The Assyrian ruler Shamsi-Adad unified northern Mesopotamia in around 1800 BCE; Hammurabi unified Babylonia ca. 1792 BCE; and Hattusili I consolidated power in Central Anatolia at around the same time. Soon after their founders' deaths, these states disintegrated, but nevertheless these individuals had laid the foundations for territorial states which would later emerge in these areas in subsequent centuries.[98]

---

[96] Mieroop, p. 71.

[97] Mieroop, p. 159.

[98] Mieroop, p. 99.

By 1590 BCE, the Near East looked very different politically from what it had

been generations earlier. A system of flourishing states that had ruled by courts in close

contact with one another and spread from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf largely

had been wiped out.[99] The lack of centralized power led to a discontinuation of

administrative and scribal practices, and thus there are no extant written remains from a

Dark-Age of approximately 1590-1500 BCE. However, changes were taking place: the

Kassites – long a local group in Babylon – took over control of Babylonia, and the

Hurrians, who may have been responsible for the innovation of the horse and chariot –

took control of northern Syria and Mesopotamia. Furthermore, extensive technological

changes in seafaring took place during this period, and trading increased greatly

throughout the Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean.[100]

<div align="center">1550 – 1200 BCE: Late Bronze Age</div>

The late second millennium, also known as the Late Bronze Age (LBA), was one

of internationalized trade, and of extensive contacts between the great powers of the day.

During this era, the Near East became integrated in an international system that involved

the entire region from western Iran to the Aegean Sea, and from Anatolia in the north to

Nubia in the south. Located between these greater powers, the collection of smaller

states in the Syro-Palestinian area owed allegiance between shifting powerful neighbors,

and were often used as proxies in their competition.[101] The great powers of the day were

---

[99] Mieroop, p. 115.

[100] Mieroop, p. 117.

[101] Mieroop, p. 121.

Kassite Babylonia, Hittite Anatolia, Egypt, the Myceneans in the Aegean west, and, in northern Mesopotamia and Syria, first the Mittani state (which had conquered the Hurrians), followed, in the mid-fourteenth century BCE by Assyria.

The small Syro-Palestinian states were always dependent upon these greater powers, and these small states surrounding single cities, such as Jerusalem, Byblos, Damascus, Ugarit, and Aleppo, intermittently traded and competed with one another. The constant skirmishes between these small states required all to devote substantial resources to their militaries, and the army consequently took on a great role in the Levant.[102] Archives at Amarna in Egypt, ca. 1350 BCE; at Ugarit in Syria, ca. late 1200s-early 1100s BCE; and at Hattusa, in Anatolia, during the 1300s-1100s BCE, attest to the many types of networks – diplomatic, commercial, communication – in existence in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean region during the LBA, and allow us to understand the extent of the interconnected world during that era.[103]

During the LBA, competition between the great states over the smaller Syro-Palestinian city-states ensured that the Syro-Palestinian states were not fully integrated within the territory of a single superior neighbor. Instead, they existed as separate and inferior political entities, as attested by correspondence located in the Amarna archives. The level of integration of the smaller Syro-Palestinian city states depended upon both

---

[102] Mieroop, p. 136.

[103] Eric H. Cline, *1177 B.C: The Year Civilization Collapsed*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014, p. 174.

the proximity of the superior power's political center, as well as the policies of particular

rulers. These small Levantine city-states had to yield to the political and military

conditions of the time, and to switch allegiance between the Hittites, the Mittani, and the

Egyptians, as their regional political fortunes changed.[104] Of the great powers, the Hittite

and the Egyptian cultures exercised the most direct control over and influence upon the

Syro-Palestinian city states during the LBA. The Hittites' political control of the

northern Levantine states was more direct, c. 1350-1200 BCE, whereas that of Egypt was

more remote, though longer lasting, from approximately 1550-1200 BCE for the south.[105]

In most eras between 1550 and 1200 BCE, the border in the Levant between the

Egyptians and the Hittites was at Qadesh, in modern-day Syria, near the headwaters of

the Orontes River.

Seaborne trade was extensive throughout the Eastern Mediterranean during this

period; in most eras, cities acted as hubs within this system. Ugarit, located on the Syrian

coast of the northern Levant (and which will figure prominently in this study), is a perfect

example of such a hub. Settled at various times since at least 6000 BCE, Ugarit had its

own dynasty and during the LBA was a vassal first to Egypt, and then to Hattusa, the

capital city of the Hittites, after 1350 BCE. Located at a crossroads of trade routes

between Central Anatolia, Mesopotamia, and Egypt, Ugarit also had a good sea harbor.

Trade was most likely undertaken by private entrepreneurs both from within and without

the city, and Ugarit was also a site of manufacturing for bronze production, as well as of

---

[104] Mieroop, p. 157.

[105] Mieroop, p. 126

the highly popular and rare purple dye obtained from crushed local mollusk shells. Texts

dating mainly from the thirteenth and twelfth centuries BCE and composed in all of the

regional languages of the day – Babylonian, Ugaritic, Hittite, Hurrian, and Cypro-

Minoan, among others – were found in the city's royal archive and houses, and document

regional contacts along the Mediterranean and inland cities.[106] Also located at Ugarit

were temples dedicated to the Storm-God Baal-Hadad – the Baal-Hadad of this study – as

well as to the god Dagon, a grain- or fertility-god known in some Babylonian, Ugaritic,

and, later, Hebrew texts, as well as in texts found in Mesopotamian cities such as Mari

and Ebla.

As a major city in the Levant, Ugarit was a center of Canaanite religion, and

several important Canaanite religious texts were found there as well. These texts include

the Baal Cycle of stories relating to Baal-Hadad, regionally an enormously popular and

powerful god throughout the Bronze and Iron Ages, which describe Baal's defeat of the

forces of chaos and his rise to kingship of the gods.[107] It is clear from these and other

texts that Canaanite peoples worshipped a pantheon of deities, among whom El and Baal

figured prominently.[108] Other than in the later Hebrew Bible, these works are the only

extant remnants of ancient Near Eastern literature from the Syro-Palestinian area, also

known as Canaan. Together with other material remains, the literature at Ugarit provides

---

[106] Cline, p. 104 re: dating of texts.

[107] Mieroop, p. 158.

[108] Cline, p. 103.

the most extensive record of what is often called Canaanite culture, comprised of the literary and religious traditions of western Syria and the Levant throughout the whole of the second millennium BCE, as well as much of the first millennium BCE.[109]

In addition to warfare, competition, and marital interconnection between the dynastic houses of the LBA great powers, trade and exchange were the hallmarks of the LBA period. While most exchange of international goods was limited to elite levels, a general awareness of other people and cultures must have been raised by the presence of foreign goods everywhere.[110] Interconnection was so extensive at this period that what has been called an "international" style developed in several of the arts of the time. What comprised high culture in various states of the time was a mixture of local traditions and foreign influences.[111] One letter found at Ugarit from Pharaoh Merneptah of Egypt to the King of Ugarit dating from the early 1200s BCE referred to the Ugaritic king's request that Egypt send a sculptor to Ugarit so that a statue of Pharaoh Merneptah may be erected in the city, in front of the temple to Baal.[112] Though the request was refused (and fulfilled instead with a long list of Egyptian luxury goods sent by boat to Ugarit), this correspondence offers a useful example of the internationalized cultural and artistic influences of the period, as well as the small-state political maneuvering required of the Syro-Palestinian buffer polities.

---

[109] Mieroop, p. 158.

[110] Mieroop, p. 135.

[111] Mieroop, p. 138.

[112] Cline, p. 107-108.

Evidence of trade during the interconnected era of the LBA points to extended contacts between Egypt, the Near East, and the Aegean, and innovations and ideas certainly were transported along with objects.[113] This kind of transmission of ideas undoubtedly took place not only at the upper levels of society, but also at the inns and bars of the ports and cities along the trade routes in Greece, Egypt, and the Eastern Mediterranean. These types of exchanges may perhaps have contributed to cultural influences spreading between the Near East, Egypt, and even across the Aegean at the time.[114] Furthermore, the influence was not uni-directional from great to small states. Both Hurrian and Mesopotamian literature and myths are found in a number of literary texts translated into Hittite, for example, and Canaanite mythology from the smaller Syro-Palestinian city states was also imported into Hittite literature from the Syro-Palestinian areas that the Hittites had conquered.[115]

This LBA international system began to collapse soon after 1200 BCE. Massive attacks or destructions of cities – among them Ugarit – in the Aegean, Anatolia, along the Eastern Mediterranean coast and Egypt, and even into inland Mesopotamia by the migrating "Sea Peoples" have been the standard explanation for the collapse of political power during this period. However, it is far from clear who or what was responsible for

---

[113] This transmission through trade of ideas is of course not unlike similar transmissions throughout world history.

[114] Cline argues that "...Such an exchange could possibly explain the similarities between the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and Homer's later *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and between the Hittite *Myth of Kumarbi* and Hesiod's later *Theogony*." p. 59.

[115] Mieroop, p. 153.

the massive changes which took place; furthermore, migrating peoples from this period

may have been as much regional victims as aggressors.[116] Furthermore, the multitude of

different peoples involved, as well as the evidence of locally-produced Mycenaean

pottery by groups settling in the Eastern Mediterranean, point to multiple waves of

outside migration, in 1207, the 1190s, and 1177 BCE, rather than one single

"invasion."[117]

Evidence now suggests that regional climate change, including and exacerbated

by a drop in the surface temperature of the Mediterranean Sea sometime before 1190

BCE, led to less precipitation and therefore to a regional drought, which brought about

long-term and widespread famine. Pollen retrieved in recent studies from alluvial

deposits around the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean suggests that drier climatic

conditions occurred in the Mediterranean belt of Syria from the late 13th/early 12th

centuries BCE through the 9th century BCE.[118]

Many texts of the period from 1250 BCE and later mention hunger and need for

grain, throughout Anatolia, to the Aegean, and the Levantine coastal cities.[119] In

addition, archaeoseismological evidence indicates intermittent earthquakes lasting

approximately 50 years throughout the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean regions, from

---

[116] The "Sea Peoples," originally considered a single political group, are now considered not to have been associated except through circumstance, and to have been made up of at least six different groups. Cline, p. 138.

[117] Cline, p. 112.

[118] Cline, pp. 145-147. Including the studies of Keneweski, Drake, Finklestein, Langgut.

[119] Cline, pp. 143-145.

1225 until around 1175 BCE.[120] Probably, a regional combination of earthquakes, as

well as climate change, leading to a drier climate from the 1200s-850 BCE, and

accompanied by drought and famine lasting 100-300 years, led to regional migrations of

people. These fluid disturbances destabilized the region and led to expansion and conflict

within and among outside and internal groups of peoples.[121] What can be said with

certainty about this era is that the great civilizations that had existed in 1225 BCE in the

Aegean and ancient Near East had begun to vanish by 1177 BCE, and were almost

completely gone by 1130 BCE.

<div align="center">1200 – 539 BCE: Iron Age</div>

The Near East in 1200 looked entirely different from 1000 BCE, and after the

collapse of the LBA, a new world had emerged: the Hittites and Egyptians no longer

controlled Syria and Canaan in the Levant; instead, the Phoenicians, Philistines, and

Hebrews/Israelites emerged as local political powers. The Neo-Assyrians, in

Mesopotamia, and the Neo-Hittites, in southeastern Anatolia – each of which retained

linguistic, cultural, and religious ties with earlier empires of the same name – emerged

during this period, as well.[122] Hebrew Bible references to the Hittites or to the Assyrians

refer to these Iron Age peoples.[123]

---

[120] Cline, p. 141.

[121] Cline, pp. 140-147.

[122] Cline, pp. 173-174.

[123] Cline, p. 34.

After the collapse of the internationalized world of the LBA, and on the basis of limited textual and material remains, very little is known about the centuries from 1100-900 BCE. Even still, important technological, social, and political changes were taking place; among them, the increased use of the linear alphabet. During the eleventh and tenth centuries, the alphabet became the sole system of writing in the region, in large part because it was easier to learn than previous cuneiform systems, consisting of fewer characters, and because it rendered written language as it was naturally spoken. During the ninth century, Hebrew and Aramaic were also written using this alphabet, and the script spread as well upon the growth of Aramaic as a spoken language throughout the Near East. This alphabet would likewise come to influence the Greek alphabet, ca. 800 BCE (the Greeks called their letters 'Phoenician'), and, hence, all related western alphabetic systems of writing.[124]

Additionally, domestication of the camel during this period enabled increased overland trade through the deserts of Syria and Arabia, linking Mesopotamia, the Levant, and the Arabian Peninsula. Another major change of this period involves the metallurgical use of iron. Up until 1200 BCE, bronze, an alloy of copper and tin, had been the most commonly produced metal in the region. However, bronze production required an international trade system, because no one area of the Near East had access to both copper and tin. After the collapse of LBA trade, several places in the Eastern Mediterranean were cut-off from outside raw materials, and thus turned to a new metal,

---

[124] Mieroop, p. 190.

66

iron, as a substitute. Iron ore was readily available throughout the Near East, and during

the eleventh and tenth centuries BCE, it was discovered that when iron was combined

with charcoal in the furnace during the smelting process, it produced the very hard metal

now called steel.[125] Political powers – such as the Neo-Assyrians – who included steel

weapons in their arsenals were therefore better equipped to expand and conquer.[126]

During this period, an almost complete restructuring of society took place over most of

the Near East. Many urban residents turned to a pastoralism, and some previously semi-

nomadic peoples established and gained political power in cities.[127]

On the basis of archaeological evidence in the forms of pottery, architecture, and

other aspects of material culture, as well as textual evidence from inscriptions, the

Phoenicians, Philistines, and Hebrews-Israelites were present in Canaan as small but

identifiable groups as early as the early 1200s BCE. After the collapse of the larger

regional powers and during the first millennium BCE Iron Age, the cultural complexes of

the Phoenicians, Hebrews, and Philistines rose up amid and in many ways continued the

legacy of Canaanite civilization, religion, and culture. The Phoenician and Philistine

city-states were located along the coastal Levant, and groups of Hebrews were located in

the hill country of the southern Levant.[128] These small states existed nearby a larger

---

[125] Mieroop, p. 192.

[126] Mieroop, p. 192.

[127] Mieroop, p. 192.

[128] "Hebrew" is often identified with the groups of people called "*habiru*," meaning "vagabond" or
"robber," so named by the city-dwelling inhabitants of states of the Near East of this period. The term
refers to people who, because of intolerable socio-economic conditions, including requirements of large
tributes made to the cities which became unpayable debts, abandoned their communities and became a

affiliation of newcomer Aramean states located in Syria in the interior, and which

gradually came to form the most powerful collection of states throughout Syria.[129]

The Hebrews eventually consolidated into a kingdom ca. 1000, which split in 929

BCE into two smaller kingdoms – one called Israel, in the north, and the other called

Judah, in the south, located around the cities of Samaria and Jerusalem, respectively. The

Philistine city-state was located along the southern coast of the Levant, within the five

cities centers of Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath, Ekron, and Ashdod. Phoenician cities were

located farther up the Levantine coast, at centers such as Tyre, Sidon, and Byblos. The

Neo-Hittite states in this period controlled the Levantine coast in the far north at ports

such as al-Mina, near the ruins of Ugarit, and were located throughout Southern Anatolia

and northwestern Syria.[130] In the east, three states already known during the second

millennium continued to be important in the early first: Assyria, Babylonia, and Elam. In

the ninth century, Assyria began to dominate in military terms, and it slowly began to

spread out and encompass not only the Babylonian and Elamite states, but also west, to

the Neo-Hittites and the Aramean states in the late eighth century BCE.[131]

The Assyrian empire came to be the most powerful state of the Near East during

the first three centuries of the first millennium BCE. When the neo-Assyrians came to

---

semi-nomadic group who lived in inaccessible areas in the mountains. The term "habiru" is generic and refers not to an ethnic or tribal group, but a social one, comprised of people who had fled their communities. Mieroop, p. 160.

[129] Mieroop, p. 205.

[130] Mieroop, p. 206.

[131] Mieroop, p. 205, 206.

control Syria in the eighth century BCE, they demanded large amounts of tribute but left the Phoenician city states independent, largely because Phoenician trade could supply them with the goods they wanted without having to manage a far-flung trade infrastructure.[132] The Phoenicians were thus able to preserve second-millennium traditions into the first millennium, and the two states of the Hebrews also continued to adhere to Canaanite traditions.[133] The Biblical text, most of which is written from a Judean point of view, portrays the rulers of the northern kingdom of Israel as in much closer contact to their neighbors than were those of Judah, and they were as well more open to Canaanite cults like those of Baal and El.[134] Despite the variety in designations of the states of this period, the idea that power in them was held by a king, with the support of a local god, was preeminent. The pictorial arts of this period regularly display an enthroned king making an offering to a god/s.[135]

The history of the entire western Levant was eventually dominated by its relationship to Assyria, which, from the ninth century on, conquered territories throughout the Levant with great regularity.[136] In 738 BCE, the Assyrians demanded tribute from the vassal kingdom of Israel, but in 722 BCE the Assyrians conquered and

---

[132] Mieroop, p. 207

[133] "Gods, myths, and cultic practices attested in the Ugaritic texts, for example, found their way into the Biblical account, most likely because in certain localities they survived into the first millennium." Mieroop, p. 209.

[134] Mieroop, p. 210.

[135] Mieroop, p. 211.

[136] Mieroop, p. 212.

subsumed the kingdom of Israel, deporting most of the population to Syria and western Iran, and making the region into a province.[137] Deportation was a common tactic of the Assyrians, and estimates of 4.5 million people throughout the Near East were deported during the three centuries of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. One result of these deportations was a great mixing of populations throughout the Near East, including the spread of the Aramean peoples and their language and alphabetic script.[138] From 745 to 612 BCE, Assyria dominated nearly the whole of the Near East, and Egypt, at times, as well.

The Southern Hebrew kingdom of Judah became a vassal of the Assyrians in 733 BCE, but was not incorporated into their provincial system like Israel had been, because the Assyrians retained Judah and other vassal states to the south and east in order to create a buffer between themselves and the Egyptians, a practice also common to the great powers of the late Bronze Age.[139] In 640 BCE Assyria was at the height of its power and controlled a vast area of land from western Iran to Egypt, having eliminated most opposition. However, by 612 BCE Assyria was overthrown when a combined force of Babylonians and Medes sacked Nineveh, the Assyrian capital. Babylonia then took over the Assyrian territories in Mesopotamia, Syria, and Palestine, and the Medes took those in the Zagros Mountains, western Iran, and Anatolia. Together, both forces set about destroying the cities of Assyria in revenge.[140] In 597 BCE, the local king of Judah

---

[137] Mieroop, pp. 234- 235.

[138] Mieroop, pp. 219-220.

[139] Mieroop, p. 236.

[140] Mieroop, p. 250.

was removed by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II, and a large part of the elite Judahite population was deported to Babylonia. The new king of Judah rebelled, and, after a siege, the capital Jerusalem was destroyed in 587/586 BCE, when more were deported.[141] Nebuchadnezzar II also annexed other previously independent states along the Levantine coast, such as Tyre, perhaps in a bid to attack Egypt, but this plan was not realized.[142]

<div align="center">539 – 332 BCE: Persian Period</div>

By 559 BCE, Cyrus (the 'Great') had become the leader of the Persians and defeated the Medes by 550 BCE. In 539 BCE, Cyrus entered Babylonia from the Zagros Mountains. After a major battle undertaken and won by the Persians near the confluence of the Diyala and Tigris rivers, Babylon fell on October 12, 539 BCE. By defeating the Babylonians, the Persians – and Cyrus' Achaemenid Empire – gained all of the territory of the vast Babylonian empire, a large swath of territory across the Near East that had been created by the expansions of the Assyrians in the previous century. Through further consolidations, the Persians thus came to control an empire that stretched nearly from India to the Mediterranean, being halted in the west only by Greece during the 5th century BCE.

Despite intermittent local rebellions, the Persians administered a largely stable and relatively peaceful empire for the next 200 years, enabling the expansion of irrigation and agriculture, as well as the reestablishment and growth of international trade. The

---

[141] Mieroop, p. 259.

[142] Mieroop, p. 259.

earlier Assyrian and Babylonian policies of deportation to the center of the empire had

resulted in cities such as Babylon becoming multi-ethnic, with a confluence of peoples

from Syria-Palestine, Phoenicia, Elam, Persian, Media, and Ionia living there. Unlike in

the Assyrian empire, however, where imperial strategy had been to make all people

Assyrians once conquered, rulers of the Persian Empire acknowledged the multiplicity of

peoples governed.[143] The Persian Achaemenid also embraced a variety of languages and

scripts –monumental inscriptions of this era were always multilingual – although they

chose Aramaic as the administrative lingua franca of the empire.[144]   Respect for local

traditions was a characteristic of Persian governance, and the Persian Empire

administered by provinces, called satrapies, which were connected to the capital by a

system of royal roads. Zoroastrianism, in various early forms, was a major religion of the

empire, and Zoroastrian concepts and fire temples were spread throughout the region,

although no particular religious affiliation for subjects of the empire was mandated.

     Conquered peoples were allowed to live where they wished within the empire,

and there was no known systematic eradication of local traditions, as had been the case

under pervious empires. Some who had been deported from Jerusalem returned after 539

BCE and rebuilt the temple there, which was completed by 515 BCE. The late 6th

century BCE, following the Babylonian exile, is also the period during which many of the

books of the Hebrew Bible were redacted into final form.[145] In the southern Levant, the

---

[143] Mieroop, p. 274.

[144] Mieroop, p. 276.

[145] Mieroop, p. 210.

Jewish religious tradition that had evolved from earlier Hebrew traditions was growing in strength and consolidating. Under the Persian Empire, the cities of the Levant were relatively stable for the next 200 years.

<center>332-63 BCE: Greek Period</center>

In 336 BCE, Alexander (the 'Great') of Macedon, a polity located to the north of Greece, became king of Macedonia. After consolidating control of the Greek states, Alexander marched into Anatolia and began a ten-year campaign of conquest, steadily annexing the satrapies of the Persian Empire. Alexander defeated the Persian king Darius III in 332 BCE, initiating Macedonian and Greek control of the Levant, although most people probably saw little difference between the Persian Empire and the new Greek rulers. Alexander appealed to local political and religious elites to be accepted as the new king, just as the Persians before him had done. He promoted local cults, built ziggurats, and married Roxane, a local Persian princess. Alexander set up his capital at Babylon in 324 BCE, and largely adopted the ceremonial customs of the Persians.

After Alexander's death in Babylon in 323 BCE, his generals divided the empire, with Selucus taking large parts of the Near East, including Iran, Mesopotamia, Syria, and the Levant south to the coastal city of Tyre. The dynastic line of the General Ptolemy came to control Egypt and the southern Levant up to the city of Damascus. After 100 years, by around the middle of the third century BCE, Persian dynastic and political control of the east was reasserted under the Parthian Dynasty (227 BCE - 224 CE), and the frontier zone between the Selucids in the Levant and the Parthians in Persia was established at the Euphrates River, where it would largely remain for the next 800 years,

<center>73</center>

during the Greek, Roman, and Byzantine eras. Control of the Levant after Alexander's death remained split at the Tyre-Damascus line until the Selucids defeated the Ptolemies at the Battle of Panium, in Paneas (modern-day Banyas, Israel), in 198 BCE. From 198 BCE, the Selucids controlled the entirety of the Levant, north and south, up to the Euphrates-River border with the Parthians.

Greek control of the Levant introduced in some respects Hellenized cultural, religious, and political practices, although life in many ways for peoples in the Levant remained the same as it always had. The Persian system of governance, which had itself been an amalgam of earlier traditions, continued under Greek rule: satrapies and local political arrangements continued, kings used local cults and their rituals to further political interests, and many Persian administrative practices survived. Although in some instances Greek replaced Aramaic as a language of administration, Aramaic remained the widely spoken language of the population. Greek myths and cults were introduced to the region, and these mixed with local cults and traditions.[146] New Greek political offices developed, and Greek buildings appeared in old cities; in some cases, new cities were founded on Greek models. However, all of these changes were of course gradual, and local populations in the Levant experienced these changes slowly.[147]

---

[146] For instance, during the Greek era, shrines to "Zeus-Baal" were established (Several refs:). Of course, because the Greek figure Zeus may himself have been influenced by earlier Greek contacts with Near Eastern communities and the figure of the Storm-God Baal-Hadad, joint shrines to "Zeus-Baal" (independent figures perhaps by this point in time) were probably not an innovative combination. Greek mythical figures such as Kassiopeia, or Kassiodora/Kassiodorus, began to appear in this era as well. Both names are formed with reference to the mythical mountain called by the Greeks Mt. "Kassios," which is located on the northern Levantine coast just north of Ugarit, and was called in local languages mount "Saphon," or "Sapon," from the Semitic root *spn* - see p. 7 and Chapter Three.

[147] Mieroop, p. 280.

In the southern Levantine area of Palestine, divisions gradually grew up among the local population with respect to Greek rule. For the most part, local populations largely had been left alone to follow their own religious traditions, although an unusual intervention from the Seleucid king Antiochus Epiphanes IV during the second century BCE elicited a military and political response from local competing groups. Divisions in local religious life among the Jews who lived in southern Palestine had developed in response to the issue of Seleucid control. From 167-164 BCE, internal divisions reached a level of civil unrest between competing groups, and the Selucids intervened. However, rather than limiting intervention to the political, Antiochus Epiphanes IV took control himself of the Temple in Jerusalem, intervening on behalf of pro-Seleucid local groups. In an aberration from most of Seleucid history in the region, Epiphanes also invaded upon local religious life, outlawing Jewish religious practices in the temple of Jerusalem and instituting a Greek cult in the temple. This caused a wider local revolt, known in Jewish and Greek sources as the Maccabean Revolt, and reportedly named after the family which led it.

After the Maccabean Revolt, which resulted in Jewish reassertion of authority over the temple in Jerusalem, the Selucids regained political control of the northern and southern Levant. However, disintegration and disunity among them led to the Selucids establishing the Hasmoneans – a family name from Judea and which had been associated with the Maccabean Revolt – as a vassal dynasty in the southern Levant, a situation which would persist until around 110 BCE. In the northern Levant, local figurehead and vassal rulers continued to rule as they had done throughout the Greek period. After 110

BCE, collapse of the Seleucid dynasty enabled direct Hasmonean dynastic control of parts of the southern Levant when the Hasmoneans created alliances with the nearby Idumeans, Samaritans, Galileans, and Itureans. This lasted until until 63 BCE, when internal discord among these polities prompted one local leader to invite the Roman general Pompey temporarily to annex the area, which had become known as Iudea after the Hasmoneans during the early part of Roman administration. Soon after Pompey did so, Roman control of the Levant and Near East became permanent, and the Hasmonean dynasty ended in 37 BCE, marking an end to Jewish political autonomy in the southern Levant for the next two thousand years. Pompey's annexation for Rome of the entire Levant and large parts of the Near East up to the Euphrates River initiated a period of Roman political control in the Levant that would continue for most of the next six hundred years.

<center>Common Era</center>

<center>63 BCE – 636 CE: Roman and Byzantine Periods</center>

Political history in the Levant for the past 2,000 years has been characterized by two long-lived empires at the beginning and end of this time period: Roman and Ottoman.[148] Comprising a combined period of some 600 years, the Roman and later Byzantine empires were the longest-term political rulers of the Levant in the Common Era; indeed, over the past 4,000 years. The second-longest-lasting empire to control the Levant, and perhaps the most influential political power to arise from within the region

---

[148] Harris, p. 27.

during the modern period, has been the Ottoman Empire, which controlled this territory for some 400 years, from 1516-1923 CE.

Like many rulers before them, the Romans also divided the Levant into administrative districts for ease of governance. Other than the Jewish revolts during the first and second centuries CE, at which time the Romans destroyed the second temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE, and, after 130 CE, made Jerusalem into a Roman city called *Aelia Capitolina*, Roman attentions were directed toward the Parthian dynasty in Persia, on their eastern border at the Euphrates River. After the Parthians were overthrown by the Sasanians, this Roman-Persian rivalry continued for the next 400 years, through the middle of the 7th century CE.

After the Jewish Bar Kokhba revolts of 132-135 CE, the Roman provincial system in the Levant was redrawn: the southern Levantine Roman province that had been called Iudea was combined with the northern Levantine province of Syria and renamed Syria Palaestina, which, together with the wider regional provinces of Isauria, Cilicia, Cyprus, Euphratensis, Mesopotamia, Osroene, and Arabia Petraea, constituted the Roman Near East. During this period, the Romans inserted Roman polytheistic religion – itself tied strongly to Greek religious concepts – into regional religious traditions and practices, in the form of state and private cults, and in the form of extensive monumental construction. Like those of the Greeks, previously, Roman religious practices and figures in the region blended with those of local peoples.[149] Roman control of the western

---

[149] An example of this can be seen in the Roman practice of state cults to Jupiter, Roman sky God, who was himself the Roman version of the earlier Greek sky God, Zeus. In many instances, local temples once dedicated to Baal-Hadad became dedicated during the Greek and Roman periods to Zeus and/or

Mediterranean, Eastern Mediterranean, and North Africa was extensive in this period, and the Eastern Mediterranean provinces were part of a larger, Mediterranean-wide Roman political organization. Especially important, for agricultural purposes, to the Romans were the provinces in Syria and Egypt, considered the "bread basket" of the Roman Empire.

Byzantine Era

This system of organization remained largely in place until 395 CE, when the Roman Empire divided into Western and Eastern halves for a final time. Christian religion had begun to emerge out of Second Temple Jewish religious practice in Palestine during the first half of the first century CE, and before the temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed by the Romans. Demographically, the large territory of Syria Palaestina, covering the region of the Levant, consisted of several different groups. Phoenicians, Greeks, and Romans lived in the north of the Levant and practiced a combination of older Phoenician religion, often mixed with Greek and Roman cults and mythology, as we have seen. A mixture of Assyrians and Arameans populated the internal zones of Syria and Mesopotamia, and nomadic Arabs, such as the Nabateans, lived in the Syrian Desert and in the south. In the southwest and southern Levant, Jews, Samaritans, and Greco-Roman communities lived alongside one another, although the Jewish population in the south

---

subsequently to Jupiter, and Jupiter was often combined with already-extant local cults to Baal, such as Iuppiter Dolichenus. "Jupiter [from] Doliche," or Jupiter Dolichenus, was a combination of Roman Jupiter and Baal from the shrine at Doliche, a city along the Syrian coast. Another example of this practice was the cult to Iuppiter Heliopolitanus, sometimes called Iuppiter Baal, a deity considered to have been a combination of Jupiter and Baal at the shrine of Baalbek (a shrine to Jupiter Heliopolitanus – itself likely on the spot of a much older shrine to Baal-Hadad – was also created during this period in Damascus, and the site of which was later transformed into the Christian Basilica of John the Baptist, and later still the Damascus Great Mosque of the Umayyad Empire).

declined in the mid-second century CE, spreading Judaism into other areas of the Near East and Mediterranean regions. As Christian religious groups began to spread and grow in the region over the first few centuries of the common era, these merged and interacted with regional religious groups already established, just as had Jewish religious groups before them.

After the 395 CE split in the Roman empire, and the ascendency of the Byzantine Empire in the east headquartered at the city of Byzantium/Constantinople (founded in 330 CE), the Levant was no longer organized along Roman provincial lines. The Byzantine Empire, like its predecessor, was occupied militarily by border skirmishes and larger territorial battles with the Sasanians in Persia, and occupied internally by sectarian Christian religious strife, as the empire transitioned from being religiously characterized by Roman polytheism to Orthodox and non-Orthodox forms of Christianity. Control of the Levant remained in Byzantine hands until it was lost briefly to the Sasanians in 610 CE, but regained again in 627 CE. However, Byzantine control of the Levant and most of the western Near East would end permanently after August 636 CE, when Muslim Arab armies from the Arabian Peninsula unexpectedly defeated Byzantine forces at the Battle of Yarmouk, near the borders between the modern-day countries of Syria, Jordan, and Israel. From 636 CE, the Levant was politically controlled by a succession of Muslim empires.

<div align="center">636 CE – Present: Islamic Era</div>

Initially, none of the Muslim states dominated the region of the Levant for longer than a century. The religious tradition that would come to be known as Islam had

developed in the Arabian Peninsula during the seventh century CE among communities of traditional Arabian polytheists, Melkite, Jacobite, and Nestorian Christians, and rabbinic Jews.[150] After early Muslim leaders consolidated power inside the Arabian Peninsula, they emerged under the religious banner of a rapidly forming Islamic religious tradition and quickly defeated the regional superpowers: the Byzantine and the Sasanian Empires, threadbare from centuries of mutual strife and internal disorder. By displacing Byzantine and Sasanian political control over much of the Near East, the Arab Muslim armies immediately controlled a wide swath of territory from Persia to the Mediterranean – an expanse of land that had originally been enabled by Neo-Assyrian territorial conquests from over one millennium earlier.

The early Rashidun Caliphate period lasted until 661 CE, at which point the Umayyad empire began under Mu'awiyah I, who moved the Umayyad and Islamic capital to Damascus. The Umayyad period of rule, from 661-750 CE, corresponds with one of the few moments in Levantine history when the region (and beyond) was ruled from within the Levant. After defeating the Umayyads in 750 CE, the Abbasids moved their capital to Baghdad, and the region of the Levant again became a secondary player in regional history. During this period, a vast majority of the inhabitants of the Levant were Christians of various sectarian affiliations, although Islam slowly began to spread

---

[150] See also Gabriel Reynolds, *The Emergence of Islam: Classical Traditions in Contemporary Perspective*, Fortress Press, 2012; Emran El-Badawi, *The Qur'an and the Aramaic Gospel Traditions*. London: Routledge, 2013; Sydney Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the 'People of the Book' in the Language of Islam*. Princeton: University Press, 2013; Aziz al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity: Allah and His People*. Cambridge: University Press, 2014; Fred Donner, *Muḥammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*. Belknap Press, 2012. Note that the Arabian Christians and Jews of course were Arabic speakers, despite and/or in addition to the ecclesiastical languages of their traditions.

throughout the region over the next 300 years. Abbasid rule in the Levant was short-lived, as well; by the mid-9th century, central Abbasid control was nominal, and regional Muslim dynasties had emerged throughout the far-flung Abbasid Empire. Between 860 and 905 CE the Tulunid Dynasty controlled most of the Levant; the Ilkhashidids ruled from 930-969 CE, and they were displaced in the region by the Egyptian Fatimid dynasty from 969-1071 CE. Between 1071 and 1098 CE, the Turkish Seljuk dynasty controlled the Levant, but an unexpected outside force upended Seljuk control in 1098 CE.

Western Christian Crusaders (mostly Franks), intent on retaking control of the Holy Land for western Christians, entered the Cilician Mountains in Turkey in 1098 CE. Having deftly been turned by the Roman Papacy from internal competition to focus upon a common foreign enemy, the Crusaders were motivated as much by religious zeal as by potential financial reward. Heedless of ties to Orthodox Christians and unable or unwilling to distinguish, in most cases, between regional Christians, Jews, and Muslims in the Levant, Crusader forces steadily took control of Levantine cities and fortifications, culminating, in July 1099 CE, with the capture of Jerusalem.[151] Over the next one hundred years, Crusader communities established themselves as regional rulers, building western Christian churches and integrating, to some extent, with the local Levantine population. In 1187 CE Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi, a commander of Zengid Muslim forces, retook Jerusalem from the Crusaders. Over the next fifty years, the Ayyubid dynasty started by Salah al-Din ruled in the Levant until 1250 CE.

---

[151] Passage from Crusader Chronicle regarding the destruction of Jerusalem and the Crusaders' inability to distinguish between inhabitants.

In 1250 CE, the Mamluks – formerly a slave class of the Ayyubids – conquered the Ayyubids, initiating a long-term Mamluk period of control of the Levant for the next 250 years. During this period, the Mamluks established extensive trade contacts with the Venetians in the west, and controlled most Mediterranean trade routes. Mamluk regional control was supplanted by that of the Ottoman Empire, an enormously powerful and long-lived Muslim empire, which ruled over the Levant and much of the Near East (by this point predominantly Muslim) from 1516-1923 CE.

The Ottomans ruled using administrative and provincial partitions of territory by now common to the Levant. At its height in the mid-seventeenth century CE, the Ottoman Empire ruled over territory from the Euphrates River through the Eastern Mediterranean, North Africa, and southeastern Europe, much as had the Roman Empire centuries before.[152] By the beginning of the 19th century CE, however, the political and military balance of power around the Mediterranean had shifted. Western European powers had begun to control trade along the shipping routes, and to establish colonies in Ottoman territories. National uprisings during the 19th century CE in southeastern Europe weakened the Ottoman Empire and substantially reduced its size. When the Ottomans allied with Germany during World War I (1914-1918 CE), they, along with the other Axis powers, were defeated and suffered territorial annexations as a result.

After the Paris Peace Conference of 1918 CE, western political powers, including Great Britain, France, Russia, and the United States, redrew the political borders of the

---

[152] Just as the Mediterranean Sea earlier had been called a "Roman Lake," during the Islamic era it became known as a "Muslim Lake."

Near East. Since the discovery of oil in southwestern Persia in 1908 CE, as well as the

transition of the British Naval Fleet from coal to oil power in 1912 CE, the Near East in

the early twentieth century had become of particular strategic interest to the west.[153]

Designating their governments the status of protectorates over local governments in this

area, the French administered the regions of Syria and Lebanon, while the British

established a monarchies in the newly created states of Iraq and Transjordan, and

administered the region of Palestine.

These areas had existed as administrative units within the Ottoman Empire, but in

imposing a new political map upon the region, western powers poorly accounted for the

multi-religious, multi-ethnic, and multi-sectarian demographics of the Levant and wider

Near East – to say nothing of western disinterest in how the region had for centuries been

politically managed. Long a mosaic of peoples located literally in a crossroads of history,

the region traditionally was administratively organized around cities or regions, and

religiously governed by local communities.[154] However, during the first half of the

twentieth century CE, western political powers overlaid upon the Near East a system of

modern western nation-states, in spite of these areas being ill-suited to a nation-state

model.[155] Political borders between these states during the twentieth century CE thus

---

[153] Even before the Paris Peace Conference in 1918 CE, plans for reapportionment of territory in the Near East were outlined in the British-French Sykes-Picot Treaty of 1916 CE.

[154] Emblematic of both the mosaic-like nature of human communities in the Levant as well as their religious administration for at least the past thousand years, all long-established regional cities, such as Aleppo, Tripoli, Homs, Beirut, Damascus, Acre, Baghdad, Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Cairo, contained traditional Jewish, Christian, and Muslim quarters.

[155] The nation-state model traditionally has been successful in areas less politically, demographically, and religiously divergent. Furthermore, this model encourages single-party rule, which largely has been

also began to impede long-established movements of peoples and goods in the region. As we will see in Chapter Seven, the political upheavals of the twentieth century CE, as well as an impediment of national borders upon traditional movements of peoples, has substantially affected traditional Levantine practices among local communities of Muslims, Christians, and Jews regarding the figures al-Khiḍr, St. George, and Elijah.

The European colonial period ended in the 1940s, at which point the region of the Levant was left roughly with its current composition: Turkey in the former Anatolian heartland, Syria and Lebanon in the northern Levant and former northern Mesopotamian areas, Israel-Palestine and Jordan in the southern Levant, Jordan and Iraq in the former southern Mesopotamian areas, and Egypt at Sinai.[156]

Summary: Levantine Political History

ca. 6000 BCE Regional settlements

ca. 3000 Coastal cities

ca. 2334-2250 Akkadians (Sargon I – Syrian coast)

ca. 2000 Canaanites / Syro-Palestinian city-states

ca. 1550-1350 Egypt northern and southern Levant

ca. 1350-1100 Hittites northern Levant, border with Egypt at Qadesh

---

unresponsive to the needs of a majority of people in the Levant. See also Rami Khouri, "Why Aren't Arab States More Like Individuals?" *The Daily Star Lebanon*, September 10, 2014.

[156] Lebanon, an area of western political interest since the 1830s CE, was granted independence in 1943 CE; Syria in 1946 CE; monarchies were established in Egypt in 1922 CE, in Turkey in 1923 CE, in Saudi Arabia and Iraq in 1932 CE, and in Transjordan in 1946 CE. Also, while European colonial rule ended in the 1940s, Colonialism did not. Westerners installed authoritarian puppet rulers as they left, and the legacy of authoritarianism among governments in the region caused substantial upheaval during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries CE, eliciting several internal political responses: some Islamic, some pan-Arab, and some following western political models.

ca. 1100- Arameans interior; Philistines southern coast; Phoenicians northern coast; Hebrews hill country

ca. 1000-929 Hebrew Kingdoms; thereafter Israel in north 929-722 and Judah in the south 929-586

911-612 Neo-Assyrians

612-539 Neo-Babylonians

539-332 Persians

332-323 Greeks

312--63 Selucids

312-198 Ptolemies

140-37 Hasmoneans

63 BCE-395 CE Romans

395-610; 627-636 Byzantines

610-627 Persians

636-661 Rashidun Caliphate

661-750 Umayyads

750-978 Abbasids

860-905 Tulunids

930-969 Ilkhashidids

978-1071 Fatimids

1071-1098 Seljuks

1098-1187 Frankish Crusader Kingdoms

1187-1250 Ayyubids

1250-1516 Mamluks

1516-1923 Ottomans

1920-1940s French, British protectorates

1940s- Syria, Lebanon, Israel-Palestine, Jordan, Iraq

Summary: Levantine Religious History

Religious concepts do not exist in a vacuum, gradually contacting similarly pristine religious ideas. Indeed, it is a premise of this project that religious ideas are inseparable from other regional, political, and temporal influences – including the influences of nearby religious groups – but it nonetheless seems useful in this section to delineate with broad brushstrokes the particular periods of regional *emergence* of certain religious complexes, in order demonstrate a very general historical pattern against which this project is set. As the foregoing discussion of political history makes clear, from approximately 2000 BCE (and before), the Levant could be characterized primarily by Canaanite as well as other ancient Near Eastern religious traditions. Beginning in approximately 1000 BCE Hebrew traditions began to emerge out of Canaanite religion; these grew and consolidated into what we now call Judaism during 7th and 6th centuries BCE. In the mid-sixth century BCE, under Achaemenid rule, Zoroastrian religious ideas appeared in the region, as did Greek religious concepts in the mid-fourth century BCE, and Roman in the mid-first century BCE. Christian traditions, particularly what come to be termed Orthodox, emerged in the Levant during the mid-first century CE, as did Jewish Rabbinic traditions. Islamic religious traditions emerged in the Levant in the mid-

86

seventh century CE; Islamic sectarian traditions such as the Druze and Alawiyah in the 11th century CE; western Christian traditions appeared during the 11th and subsequent centuries CE, Protestantism appeared there beginning in the 19th century CE.[157]

Summary: Levantine Linguistic History

Noting that this characterization is broadly drawn and that linguistic traditions are also inextricably related to politics, one observes that major regional languages of the Levant have come from the Semitic language family. Akkadian was the first administrative lingua franca of the Near East; northwest Semitic languages such as Aramaic, Canaanite, Ugaritic, and Hebrew emerged and dominated in the Levant later, after the 12th century BCE. During the Persian Era in the sixth century BCE, Aramaic became the general regional language of administration, and this was matched by spoken varieties of Aramaic; the Syriac dialect of Aramaic emerged in the first century of the Common Era. Aramaic remained a primary spoken language of the Levant for over a thousand years until well into the 10th century CE. From the mid-fourth century BCE Greek became a language of administration and was spoken in limited communities (Greek remains the primary language of the Greek southern half of the island of Cyprus); in the early centuries of the Common Era, Latin became an administrative language and in some instances supplanted Greek, although Latin was not widely spoken. Instead, Arabic gradually displaced spoken dialects of Aramaic after the 7th century CE. The major spoken language of the Levant and the wider Near East through the modern period

---

[157] On Protestantism in the Middle East, see Ussama Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East*. Cornell, NY: University Press, 2009.

has been Arabic (and, since the 11th century CE, Turkic languages in the north of the Levant), although modern-state formations such as that of Israel in 1948 have introduced Modern Hebrew as a major regional spoken language.

<center>Conclusion: Rates of Change</center>

This discussion of enormous historical changes in the Levant – geological, climatic, political, religious, and linguistic – provides a background for future chapters by allowing us to identify significant influences which have come to bear upon the region and upon the peoples who have lived there. But the foregoing discussion also serves to highlight those elements of regional history which in fact have been the least-changing. Contrary, perhaps, to common wisdom, the slowest-changing elements of regional Levantine history observable from the discussion above have been geological – changes to the physical features of the Levant – and linguistic. A slightly faster-changing level of history has been religious, while climatic and political histories, in that order of ascending speed, have been the fastest-changing elements of Levantine history.

Discerning rates of change among regional influences also allows us to identify *continuities* of lived experience for regional inhabitants, and to identify those continuities across space and time. Among those continuities is an agricultural economic base through the mid-twentieth-century CE that was accompanied nonetheless by frequent drought conditions, a series of long-term regional linguistic continuities and linkages, and, as coming chapters also will show, continuities among certain compelling religious concepts and traditions which were themselves continually affected by changing political circumstances. Such compelling religious concepts combined to create a common pool

<center>88</center>

of religious traditional material in the Levant, from which the figures Baal-Hadad, Elijah, St. George, and al-Khiḍr have drawn, and to which they have contributed. We examine first the Storm-God, Baal-Hadad.

CHAPTER THREE: THE STORM-GOD BAAL-HADAD

Part One: Introduction

One morning in February of 1928, Syrian farmer Mahmoud Mella az-Zir was plowing land along the eastern Mediterranean coast, about a kilometer inland from the bay which is today called in Arabic *Minet el-Beida* (the 'White Harbor'). As his plow cut through the soil, its steel tip ran into a heavy stone just underneath the surface. Mahmoud went over to examine the obstruction, and discovered a stone slab. Removing the soil above, he slowly raised the slab to discover underneath a subterranean passageway which led downward into an ancient tomb. Inside the tomb, Mahmoud discovered several objects, which he sold to an antiquities dealer. Soon, the local authorities were notified of the find at Minet al-Beida, and shortly thereafter, a French-Protectorate archaeological team was dispatched to the site. It soon became clear that what Mahmoud Mella az-Zir had uncovered that spring day was not only a tomb, but an entrance to the necropolis of Ugarit, one of the ancient world's most important lost Mediterranean cities. The textual and material discoveries that were eventually drawn out of the soil at Ugarit have come ultimately to shine a valuable light upon both the ancient world, and the Biblical text.[158]

---

[158] For more on the discovery of Ugarit and its impact, see Mark S. Smith, *Untold Stories: The Bible and Ugaritic Studies in the Twentieth Century* (Peabody, MA: Hedrickson Publishers, 2001). See also Peter C. Craigie, *Ugarit and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Erdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 7-25. For a firsthand account of early discoveries, see C. F. Schaffer's "The Discovery of Ugarit," in *Hands*

The textual and material remains at Ugarit represent our most comprehensive

source of Canaanite religion and culture outside of the Hebrew Bible.[159] Canaanite

religion, consisting of the cultural and religious traditions of western Syria and the Levant

beginning in at least the second millennium BCE, did not disappear in the late Bronze

Age or even the Iron Age, contrary to both common wisdom and claims made in the

Hebrew Bible.[160] Instead, as we will see, elements Canaanite religion lived on long into

the first millennium BCE, influencing subsequent regional religious traditions well into

the first centuries of the Common Era.

In the remains of the city of Ugarit, the temples of Baal and Dagan (a deity often

called Baal's father, and, as we will see, an important and older northern Mesopotamian

Storm-God in his own right), dominated the city.[161] Second in size only to the great

palace, the Baal and Dagan temples required a large number of priestly and support staff,

and worship in these temples most likely functioned as a kind of state religion.[162] As

demonstrated in Chapter Two, agricultural peoples in the Levant have long relied upon

precipitation from the sky to provide sufficient water for crop growth, and accordingly

---

on the Past, ed. C.W. Ceram (New York: Knopf, 1966), 301-6. Note that archaeological work at this site is ongoing.

[159] See also Chapter Two of the present work, pp. 27-29.

[160] The Biblical perspective is that of the dominance of the religious viewpoints espoused; as we will see, especially in chapter four, the opposite was the case.

[161] Margurite Yon, *The City of Ugarit at Tell Ras Shamra* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 16. Based upon the archaeological finds at Ras Shamra-Ugarit, estimates of the dates of construction of the Temples of Baal and Dagan are during the end of the MBA or at the beginning of the LBA (c. 17-15th centuries BCE).

[162] Craigie, *Ugarit*, 35-36.

"one of the central themes in native religion [in Ugarit and greater Canaan] was the desire for the god Baal to provide adequate rain so that the crops might flourish and the harvest be adequate."[163]

The figure of the Storm-god was a vital component of ancient Near Eastern religions, and not simply at Ugarit. The motif of the Storm-god is well attested throughout the ancient Near East.[164] For millennia, the terror of the storm, with its howling winds, lashing rain, and bolts of lightning, constituted either a theophany itself, or the basis for a description of theophany.[165] But the Storm-god was not important only because of the storm. As a religious figure, the Storm-god came in many places to represent a fusion of concepts surrounding both the storm and fertility. Eventually, in the evolutionary processes of most groups, the Storm-god evolved within the mythical realm as the presider over a pantheon of gods, and within cultic and historical settings as a fearless warrior, as the provider of sustenance for society, and as the preserver of all life.

---

[163] Ibid., 28.

[164] Alberto R. W. Green, *The Storm-God in the Ancient Near East* [Biblical and Judaic Studies from the University of California San Diego, edited by William Henry Propp, vol. 8.] (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 2. Note that this text is widely considered the most authoritative and recent – not to mention only – comprehensive study of the figure of the Storm-god throughout the ANE. As such, we will adopt here many of the perspectives in this text.

[165] Eric Nels Ortlund, *Theophany and Chaoskampf: The Interpretation of Theophanic Imagery in the Baal Epic, Isaiah, and the Twelve*, Gorgias Ugaritic Studies 5 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010), 267. Ortlund notes that the theophanic imagery which attends and describes Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible is largely mythic (referring to regional myths involving a defeat of chaos, themselves likely influenced by meteorological phenomena) rather than metaphorical (a "contrived, figurative relation between two unrelated entities"). See also Alberto R. W. Green, who argues that to a certain degree, the Storm-god concept evolved into the foundation for modern conceptions of God (Green, *The Storm-God*, 1).

Among these broad-level similarities, however, the Storm-god was understood within different cultural settings in different ways. Regional Storm-gods, in the same manner as the figures in this study, were themselves geographically contextualized; that is, situated within a complex of various natural and historical processes. Furthermore, the actual functions of a particular Storm-god cannot be properly understood unless that Storm-god is examined within its specific geographical and ecological environment. Indeed, the major factors of difference in manifestation, appearance, and powers between Storm-gods in the ancient Near East is attributable to the geography of the region in which that Storm-god has evolved.[166]

In order to understand the context in which Baal-Hadad emerged in Syria and coastal Canaan, we briefly examine first the older and contemporary Storm-gods of four major regions within the ancient Near Eastern world: southern Mesopotamia, northern Mesopotamia and Syria, Anatolia, and Western Syria and Coastal Canaan. Then, we begin the major work of this chapter, the geographical contextualization the figure Baal-Hadad. First, we will examine the Baal Cycle of texts unearthed in excavations at Ugarit, which is arguably the most important and influential text related to Baal-Hadad. We examine next an important iconographical representation of Baal-Hadad, known as the Baal Stele, which was also uncovered at Ugarit. Finally, we will investigate an important site and cult location dedicated to Baal-Hadad for millennia: Baalbek, in modern-day

---

[166] Green, *Storm-God*, 6. See also "In the cultural and religious evolutions of any region, certain inherent geographical and climatological factors contribute substantially to the local conception of a deity" (ibid., 9). Green further notes that the varied forms and functions of the various semi-divine attendants constitute a key element of difference between manifestations of the Storm-god in different regions (ibid., 2).

Lebanon. Throughout this chapter, we will also note the ways in which Baal-Hadad remained compelling and relevant within Levantine culture throughout the first millennium BCE and into the first half of the first millennium CE – long after the destruction of Ugarit – by observing both Greek and Roman sites which were dedicated to Zeus-Baal and to Jupiter, respectively, and who were figures who functioned locally as the Greek and Roman equivalents of Baal-Hadad. As we will see, beginning in the 4th century BCE, regional cults to Zeus and Jupiter gradually began to supplant those to Baal-Hadad.

<div align="center">The Storm-God in the Ancient Near East</div>

Southern Mesopotamia

Late in the fourth millennium BCE in southern Mesopotamia, the climate changed noticeably. Where the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers had carried more water and flooded large areas of southern Mesopotamia, the climate suddenly became drier and cooler. Sea levels dropped and water receded from the land, which caused the population of the region to become significantly denser.[167]

Human settlements in this region relied entirely upon the life of the rivers in order to grow crops, and devised systems of canals, dikes, and walling to use the rivers and to protect against their destructive floods. In this section of Mesopotamia, where the rivers

---

[167] Ibid., 10-11, quoting W. Nützel, "The Climatic Changes of Mesopotamia and Bordering Areas," *Sumer* 32 (1976) 11-20; Butzer, "Environmental Change in the Near East and Human Impact on the Land," 123-124. On population density see T.C. Young, "Population Densities and Early Mesopotamian Origins," in *Man, Settlement, and Urbanism* (ed. P. Ucko; London: Duckworth, 1972), 827-842; and H. J. Nisen, *Early History of the Ancient Near East*, 58-59.

came closest together before diverging, rain rarely fell. The natural state of the

southernmost areas of Mesopotamia was a wide area of dried mud flats, some stagnant

pools, and red swamps. In summer windstorms blew sand across the plains; when in the

spring the rain did come and the rivers flooded, it was presaged by fierce lightning and

thunderstorms. The terrible display of power and force in the storm, with its loud thunder

and dark clouds stretching across the horizon, but also its life-giving capacity in relation

to water, crop growth, and human survival, cannot be underestimated – this most

powerful of natural phenomena was identified as the "Storm-god," and associated with a

variety of names and figures in different areas.[168]

The earliest textual evidence of a Storm-god referred to by name comes to us

from Sumerian sources, during the protoliterate period of southern Mesopotamia. This

Storm-god was called EN-LIL, 'Lord Storm'.[169] Enlil functioned within the Sumero-

Babylonian milieu as the archetype of the ancient Near Eastern Storm-god, with his

characteristics of awesome power and gentle beneficence.[170] Acclaimed master of all the

elements and the ruler of all between heaven and earth, he was referred to by titles such

as "Lord of the Air, the Wind, and the Storm," and "The Great Mountain," and Mountain

of Wind."[171]

---

[168] Green, *Storm-God*, 12-13.

[169] The earliest attestation of the name Enlil appears in the pictographic texts from Jemdet Nasr during the Early Dynastic II Period, ca. 2900 BCE. Green, *Storm-God*, 34, quoting S. Langdon, "Jemdet Nasr," *Oxford Cuneiform Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923), 317.

[170] For Enlil as unpredictable and complex, beneficent and hostile, see Green *Storm-God*, 36-37.

[171] Green, *Storm-God*, 35-36, these conceptions of the Storm-god appear in literary sources reaching back as early as about 2360 BCE, during the end of the Early Dynastic III and beginning of the Akkadian Period.

Written sources from the Akkadian through the Old Babylonian Periods referred either to a specific Storm-god by name, or used the Sumerian ideogram ^dIM, whose first value is 'wind', as a universal designation for the Storm-god. After Enlil, Storm-gods referred to by name were Enlil's sons Ninurta/Ningirsu, and Iškur. Within the Sumero-Babylonian milieu, the Storm-gods Enlil, Ningirsu/Ninurta, and Iškur came to be associated with and iconographically represented by a roaring bull, a rampant roaring lion, a giant, spread-eagled lion-headed bird, and a benign dragon.[172]

Enlil was perceived anthropomorphically as the supreme force in the universe, and he operated within a pantheon of other deities, in accordance with laws similar to those of human society.[173] There is no extant Sumerian mythical source that references the rise to power of the Storm-god as the supreme deity within the pantheon. However, his position at the head of the pantheon is not disputed – no other deity was endowed with such sweeping characteristics as the Storm-god's power and magnificence, nor was another god so manifestly powerful, as the regenerative effect of his association with water and crop growth was vividly evident.[174]

---

[172] Green, *Storm-God*, 13. Green also notes that the early iconographical evidence depicting Storm-gods in the Sumero-Babylonian milieu comes primarily from seals, royal inscriptions, and statues, and that iconographic, nonhuman, and symbolic representations of the Storm-god from the Ubaid, Uruk, or Jemdet Nasr Periods are at best only conjectural. Green references also C.R. Curtiss, *The Lion, the Eagle, the Man and the Bull in Mesopotamian Glyptic* (2 vols; Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University, 1974), 633-34.

[173] Green, *Storm-God*, 36-37.

[174] Ibid., 281.

Northern Mesopotamia and Syria

In the Middle and Upper Euphrates-Tigris regions, influential Storm-gods were Dagan, Adad, and Ilumer, a god who was primarily associated with violent wind and dust storms. Northern Mesopotamia, with its reliance on rain-agriculture as a primary source of subsistence and survival, had a climate which followed a cyclical rainy pattern. Differences in the ecological and topographical features between hilly northern Mesopotamia, and flat southern Mesopotamia, are key to our understanding the different modes of thought concerning regional Storm-gods. Peoples in the north, dependent on the whims of the weather, resorted to cultic rituals to obtain moisture from the skies. Peoples in the south depended primarily on the whims of the rivers – and their characteristic seasonal floods – to provide them with water which they diverted and controlled to irrigate fields.[175]

Dagan, a Storm-god in the Middle and Upper Mesopotamian regions, emerged in third- and second-millennium BCE literature from Mari in Syria as primarily a fertilizing god of rain, and, eventually, the violent god of thunderstorms.[176] In literature from the Akkadian through the Old Babylonian Periods, the Storm-god Adad, who had been textually paired in earlier eras with Enlil's son, Iškur, was a deity of thunder, lightning, wind, and rain. Earlier mythical and historical texts from the Akkadian sources focused on Adad's gentle and beneficent nature as the king who waters the fields, but sources

---

[175] Ibid., 11-12; see also 282-283.

[176] Green, *Storm-God*, 283. Note also that in Hebrew and Ugaritic the root *dgn* denotes 'grain' as well as the god Dagan, indicating that people associated Dagan's rains with the growth of crops.

from the Old Babylonian Period onward portray Adad as a violent god of destruction who

caused the land to tremble.[177]

Anatolia

In contrast to the Mesopotamian region, characterizations of the Storm-god in

Anatolia emphasized terrestrial and chthonic associations, notwithstanding the textual

designation ᵈIM. This Anatolian god first appeared in zoomorphic form in prehistoric

sources as a bull, and continued as such through the late-third to early-second-millennium

BCE historical and mythical sources. In subsequent appearances in human form, he was

often depicted in association with a bull. The geology and topography of Anatolia are

quite different from that of the Mesopotamian regions, and this may have produced a

very different conception of the Storm-god.[178]

Geologically, Asia Minor is comprised of a high central tableland of ancient rock

about three thousand feet above sea level, delimited on the north by the Pontus

Mountains, and on the south by the Taurus Mountains. The central Anatolian plateau,

where most Anatolian cultures were centered, is covered by karst, a porous limestone

formation. This region receives reasonable annual rainfall, the heaviest coming during

the spring months. The impressive display of the thunderstorm had an impact on the

religious conceptions of the indigenous inhabitants of ancient Anatolia, but less so, it

seems, than in Mesopotamia.[179]

---

[177] Ibid., 283.

[178] Ibid., *Storm-God*, 283.

[179] Ibid., 89-92.

Water seeps through porous karst as through a sponge. Vegetation cover holds water, but without plants, the water filters through and disappears into the rock below. Huge lakes can form underground; in other areas, systems of channels have developed, where rivers may flow for many miles underground before emerging fully formed above ground. There are characteristic springs which appear at the foot of cliffs, thermal springs which emerge from underground pools, and water sometimes gushes out of the hillsides.[180] Because precipitation is quickly absorbed into the limestone and collected invisibly underground, the effect of the rain upon the terrain is minimized. One living thousands of years ago in Anatolia might have expected the water supply in valleys to increase after a downpour, or the water supply of springs, which, in Karst regions, are the main providers of water rather than rivers, to have shown an increase in volume after rainfall, but in areas of extensive underground drainage this did not always occur.

Another important feature of limestone landscape is the development of huge holes and caves in the ground, the entrances to which can be ominous and convey an experience of entering into the underworld. The physical features of the Anatolian environment, as well as the seemingly limited effects of rainfall as a water source, contributed to a particularly chthonic conception of the divine world by Anatolians.[181]

---

[180] Green, *Storm-God*, 92, referencing R. Brinkmann, *The Geology of Turkey* (Amsterdam: American Elsevier, 1976), 105-106.

[181] Green, *Storm-God*, 92-93.

Western Syria and Coastal Canaan

During the third and second millennia, Adad was a dominant deity in the Middle and Upper Euphrates and Syrian regions. Dagan likely had been the primary Storm-god of the region even before the first mention of his name in the third millennium BCE, but he was gradually replaced in the region by his "son," Adad, who assumed all the important titles of his father.[182] Adad, a Semitic deity and not a member of the Sumerian pantheon, was the earliest deity identified with the devastating regional storms. His name, *hdd*, quite likely is derived from the Semitic root that means 'to demolish with violence, with a vehement noise', 'the sound of rain falling from the sky', and 'thunder', all of which aptly describe the function of a Storm-god within a rain-agriculture setting.[183]

As the figure of Adad/Hadad moved to the west, he, like all Storm-gods, exercised a dominant political as well as religious influence over the rulers of this vast region. By the start of the middle Bronze Age (1800-1600 BCE), Adad/Hadad was identified with the Hurro-Hittite Storm-god Teshub in cult centers such as the city of Aleppo, Syria. Hadad became regarded as the deity par excellence of the entire region, and his role both as a fierce warrior and a beneficent provider and protector is well

---

[182] Ibid., 169.

[183] Ibid., 166-169, quoting E. M. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (New York: Ungar, 1955-56), 2882. See also the entry for *hdd*, Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, ed. J. Milton Cowan, 4th ed. (Ithaca, NY: Spoken Language Services, Inc., with permission of Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, Germany, 1994), 1197.

attested in his cult's remarkable diffusion and popularity throughout Syria and the surrounding countries.

Hadad was designated by many names and given various titles in Western Syria. Among them, his title as *Baal*, 'Lord', which emphasized his prime position among both men and gods, was eventually used in conjunction with Hadad or even in place of it, and in subsequent centuries Baal became this deity's proper name throughout the Levant.[184] Interestingly, in modern Arabic, *b'l* / بعل also means 'lord'; it can refer as well to the Western Semitic Storm-god, Baal-Hadad, and it furthermore means "land or plants thriving on a natural water supply."[185]

The Syro-Canaanite Storm-god Baal-Hadad is geographically and conceptually related to the other great Storm-gods of Mesopotamia and the Anatolian Plateau. However, local geographical, ecological, cultural, and political realities dictated what the primary denominators for sustenance and survival would be in a given region. These in turn constituted the historical and ideological framework within which a specific symbol of the storm theophany was conceived by the region's inhabitants. Southern Mesopotamians practiced agriculture along the lower courses of the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers by means of irrigation; Anatolians relied on ground water. The peoples of northwestern Mesopotamia practiced rain-agriculture, as was the case in Syria proper.[186]

---

[184] Green, *Storm-God*, 173-75.

[185] Wehr, *Arabic-English Dictionary*, 82. Note also here that *ba'lī* / بعلى means "*unirrigated* land or plants" (emphasis mine).

[186] Green, *Storm-God*, 165.

However, western Syria and coastal Canaan, geographically and culturally related in different ways to Anatolia, Mesopotamia, and Egypt, demonstrated elements of and influence from all three regions.[187] Baal-Hadad was perceived in the arid Levant as hot-tempered, fickle, and even bellicose, galloping across the sky in his dark and ominous storm-clouds, either showering beneficence on his beloved people, or punishing them or their enemies by visiting destructive drought and famine upon them. Though general cult centers existed for Baal-Hadad throughout the Levant, he was also not confined to a particular city.[188] Baal-Hadad was the Storm-god par excellence throughout the Levant from the late Bronze Age and well into the first millennium BCE.[189]

Yahweh

In contrast to the other supreme gods of the ancient Near East, Yahweh does not seem to have been originally a Storm-god or fertility god. Yahweh emerged in northern Arabian geological and cultural contexts as a warrior god, and his mythical and historical texts in the Hebrew Bible focus on his leading followers around the southern regions of Canaan and Transjordan and eventually settling with them on both sides of the Jordan River during the two centuries spanning the LBA and Iron Ages.[190]

---

[187] Ibid., 154, 156, and 159. See also Chapter Two of the present work, 21.

[188] Throughout the second half of the second millennium BCE and the first millennium BCE, Baal-Hadad was often named the patron deity of particular cities, inspiring local epithets of Baal-Hadad that linked him with those cities (e.g. Baal of Tyre, Baal of Aleppo). These names do not refer to separate deities, but should instead be considered manifestations of Baal-Hadad as associated with a particular locality. See Hassan S. Ḥaddad, "Baal-Hadad: A Study of the Syrian Storm-God" (PhD Diss, University of Chicago, 1960), 46.

[189] Greene, *Storm-God*, 165-66.

[190] Ibid., 285. See also Deut 33:2, where Yahweh is described as having "come from Sinai," and is associated with the regions of Seir (identified with biblical Edom, the region southeast of the Dead Sea

The Hebrew Bible, and the figures within it, including Yahweh and Elijah (as we will see in Chapter Four), as well as the living Hebrews and followers of Yahweh, emerged within a Canaanite cultural, religious, and agricultural environment. In that Canaanite environment, Baal-Hadad and his fertilizing showers were the dominant religious and economic forces. Therefore, Yahweh largely would have become a viable deity to the Canaanite-Yahwists to the degree to which he came to resemble compelling aspects of Baal-Hadad. Those most compelling aspects of Baal-Hadad included his theophoric storms, powers of fertility, and powers over the rain. Within the Canaanite agricultural environment, therefore, "Hebrew poetic, prosaic, and historical sources therefore attributed to Yahweh most of the mythical characteristics of Baal, in the process using identical mythical and cultic language attributed to the Syrian Storm-god."[191]

Geographical Contextualization

As we will see, the Syro-Canaanite Storm-god Baal-Hadad, like all of the figures in this study, was a product of the geographical, religious, and political influences of his time, situated within a specific complex of natural and historical processes. To wit, we will now examine important original texts, images, and geographical sites associated with the Storm-god Baal-Hadad, in order to investigate for evidence of Baal-Hadad's common pool of compelling figures, narratives, and motifs, and for evidence of the contemporary

---

where the Arabian Peninsula meets the continent of Asia and forms the Jordan Rift Valley) and with Mt. Paran, which most commentators locate somewhere within the Sinai Peninsula.

[191] Green, *Storm-God*, 285. For mythical characteristics of Baal attributed to Yahweh, such as riding on the clouds and thundering with a mighty voice, see also Deut 33:26, and Psa 68:4, 68:33, and 104:3.

political, religious, and geographical influences that will help us to geographically contextualize Baal-Hadad.

Part Two: Storm-God Baal-Hadad Text – The Baal Cycle

The Baal Cycle can of course be investigated for contemporary religious, political, and geographical influences in numerous ways. Here, we will make due with but a few examples, and from which we draw important thematic categories. These examples of contemporary religious, political, and geographical influences upon the Baal Cycle have been selected from among many possibilities because of their importance for our study: the following thematic categories we will draw (the defeat of a sea serpent or snake; the stormy theophanic imagery of Baal-Hadad; the protection or destruction of Baal-Hadad; the association with Mt. Sapan and other high places; Baal-Hadad's association with seasonal fertility and fecundity; and the regular disappearance and return of Baal-Hadad) will comprise motifs upon which the other figures in our study also will draw.

The Baal Cycle, so named because it is comprised of a series of related textual narratives concerning Baal, was excavated at Ugarit (modern-day Tell Ras Shamra) between 1930 and 1933 CE. Consisting of 3,000 verses written over 6 tablets and traditionally divided into three sections, the Baal Cycle chronicles Baal-Hadad's rise to kingship among the pantheon of Canaanite gods.[192]

---

[192] See Mark S. Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle Volume I: Introduction with Text, Translation and Commentary of KTU 1.1-1.2* [Supplements to Vestus Testamentum , vol. 55.] (Leiden: Brill, 1994) 1-20. See also Mark S. Smith, and Wayne T. Pitard, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle Volume II: Introduction with Text, Translation and Commentary of KTU/CAT 1.3-1.4* [Supplements to Vestus Testamentum , vol. 114.] (Leiden: Brill, 2009) 9-10. Smith and Pitard argue that the three major episodes of the Baal Cycle are

The tablets were excavated from what has been called the "library of the High Priest," located between the two temples to Baal and to Dagan on the acropolis. The tablets are moderately well preserved, although the narrative is far from complete and is fragmentary or completely missing in several areas. The original length of the cycle is unknown, although the tablets remaining comprise 1,830 lines. Estimates for the original text run as high as 5,000 lines, in part because the cycle shows signs of multiple stages, which may suggest a long period for the development of the cycle.[193]

Dating of the extant Baal Cycle tablets depends upon the attribution of their scribe. Traditionally credited to the scribe Ilimalku (or Ilimilku), whose name is recorded in the colophon at the end of *CAT* 1.6 VI, the tablets have generally been dated to the middle of the fourteenth century BCE. Because of the clear consistency of the scribal

---

divided as follows: 1) the conflict between Baal and Yamm, which ends at Baal's victory banquet in *CAT* 1.3 I, or at the cessation of hostilities in 1.3 II; 2) the quest for Baal's palace (1.3 III - 1.4 VII); and 3) the conflict between Baal and Mot (1.4 VIII - 1.6 VI). Because these sections do not correspond to the beginnings or ends of the tablets, Smith and Pitard argue strongly for considering the tablets as an organic whole. The authors note as well that there is disagreement within the field of Ugaritic studies about whether tablets 1 and 2 (*CAT* 1.1 and 1.2) represent multiple versions of the same story, but that there is little doubt that the conflict between Baal and Yamm detailed in those tablets was a major part of the Baal Cycle, particularly if one agrees with their argument that the episode of conflict between Baal and Yamm is not concluded until tablet 3 (*CAT* 1.3 I or II). Note also that the ancient name of the Baal Cycle is unknown, but the modern name "Baal Cycle" is derived from the superscription to *CAT* 1.6 I 1, "*lb'l*," 'concerning Baal." Smith, *Baal Cycle Vol. I,* xxii, 3n**.**

[193] Mark S. Smith, "The Baal Cycle," in *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry* [Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Ancient World Series, edited by Simon B. Parker, vol. 9.] (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature Scholars Press, 1997), 81. See also Smith, *Baal Cycle Vol. I*, 29-60, "According to many scholars, the Baal Cycle enjoyed a long oral history prior to its commitment to writing. The dates proposed for the terminus a quo of the Baal Cycle range from the third millennium down to the middle of the second millennium" (ibid., 29) on the basis of contemporary political records and cultural influences, and linguistic evidence. See also Green, who argues that "the theological conceptions of the Ugaritic pantheon and the nature and function of Baal in particular were probably well established as early as the third millennium BCE," (Green*, Storm-God*, 176.)

hand throughout the tablets, it is believed that Ilimalku produced the entire series of excavated tablets.

The primary evidence for dating the tablet to the mid-fourteenth century BCE lies in the fact that the same scribe's name – Ilimalku – appears on two Akkadian legal tablets dating from that time. However, the name 'Ilimalku' may have been common in Ugarit, and there is no solid evidence that those two scribes were the same person. Furthermore, a discovery of a new Ilimalku Ugaritic text in the early-twelfth-century destruction layer of the house of Urtenu (a prominent official in the court of King Niqmaddu IV, who reigned in the late 13th century BCE) seems to point to a later date for the scribe, which is an opinion shared by many connected to the archaeological Mission de Ras Shamra. Thus, the tablets date to sometime between the mid-fourteenth and early 12th centuries BCE; approximately 1350-1190/85 BCE, during a time that included both Egyptian and Hittite direct and indirect political control of Ugarit.[194] When Ugarit was destroyed in the early twelfth century BCE, it was never again inhabited, marking an end to a settlement site that had lasted some 6,000 years.[195]

The Baal Cycle is traditionally divided into three major episodes: (1) the conflict between Baal and Yamm, whose name means 'Sea' or 'River' (*CAT* 1.1-1.3 I or II); (2) Baal's palace-quest (*CAT* 1.3 III-1.4 VII); and (3) the conflict between Baal and Mot,

---

[194] Smith, *Baal Cycle Vol. II*, 7-8.

[195] Yon, *City of Ugarit*, 22. For reasons behind the city's demise, see also Chapter Two of the present work, 30-32.

whose name means 'death' (*CAT* 1.4 III-1.6 VI).[196] First, we will review a summary of

the narrative before examining the episodes individually for religious, political, and

geographical contexts.

<div align="center">Summary of the Baal Cycle</div>

The Baal Cycle presents a vivid story of the establishment of the kingship of Baal.

Baal's struggle for kingship with other powerful gods throughout each of the three

episodes is set amidst a royal society of various deities and their abodes, each of which

represent various aspects of the world known to cultures of the ancient Near East, and

especially to the peoples of Ugarit. "Through Baal's struggles for power, the Baal Cycle

interrelates humanity, nature, and divinity, and thereby yields an integrated political

vision of chaos, life, and death." [197]

The opening of the first tablet is not preserved, but the remains we have begin

with El, the father-god of the cosmos, in conversation about plans to attack Baal with

Yamm, the god of the sea, whose name *ymm* means 'sea' and who is interchangeably

called *nhr*, meaning 'river'.[198] Next all of the gods are summoned to El's feast, at which

El proclaims his support for Yamm. El then gives his messengers a message to deliver to

---

[196] Smith, *Baal Cycle Vol. II*, 9. See also chap. 3, n. 35.

[197] Smith, *Baal Cycle Vol. I*, xxiv-xxv. Quote from xxv.

[198] That Yamm, the god of the sea, is also referred to as 'river' may indicate that there was less contemporary distinction between the concepts of a 'sea' and of a 'river' than there is in a modern sense. Note also that in this synopsis I am summarizing Mark S. Smith's translation of the Baal Cycle in *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle Vols. 1 and 2* for the episodes on tablets *CAT* 1.1-1.4, as well as from Smith's chapter titled "The Baal Cycle" in *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry*, for the episodes encompassing tablets *CAT* 1.5-1.6.

Anat, a goddess usually understood as Baal's sister, which may describe the impending

construction of a palace for Yamm and perhaps the planned destruction of Baal.

The second tablet begins with lines that have not been preserved, but the narrative

continues with Kothar the craftsman's response to El's messengers, and his journey again

to speak with El, whereupon Kothar prostrates himself in front of the king of deities.

Kothar is told to build Yamm-Nahr an extensive palace, and then the remaining lines are

too broken to translate. The gods Shapshu and Athtar converse about El's favor in the

remaining lines of Column I, and Column II opens with Baal's messengers delivering a

message to Yamm vowing Yamm's destruction for having risen against Baal. Yamm

then sends his messengers to decree to El's council that they should give up Baal, son of

Dagan, that Yamm may seize Baal's gold. Yamm's messengers approach the council

feast where the gods are present, including Baal and El.

When the assembled council recognizes Yamm's messengers approaching, they

lower their heads in deference. Baal rebukes them by asking why they defer to Yamm's

messengers, and declares that he will himself answer Yamm's messengers. Yamm's

messengers arrive at the feast and, as instructed by Yamm, they do not bow at the feet of

El, and instead they recite their instructions to El and to the assembled gods: give up

Baal, son of Dagan, that Yamm may humble Baal and possess his gold. El responds to

the messengers that Baal is Yamm's slave and will bring tribute to him. Baal is angered

and hits Yamm's messengers with a striker; Anat seizes Baal's right and the goddess

Athtart his left, demanding to know why he struck the messengers. Baal speaks directly

to the messengers and says, "I myself say to Yamm, your lord, your master, Judge River, hear the word of the Annihilator Hadad … bow down."[199]

Only a few words of Column III are preserved, but it appears from those remaining that the column may have described a declaration of battle by either Yamm or Baal or both, sent via messengers. Column IV describes the first conflict between Yamm and Baal, whereupon the goddess Astarte proclaims Baal's demise. Kothar-wa-Hasis then speaks to Baal, encouraging him to defeat Yamm and assume his eternal kingship. In assistance, Kothar makes a weapon for Baal, calling it '*Yagarrish*', 'he may drive', which Kothar declares that Baal can use to drive Yamm from his throne. The weapon leaps from Baal's hand like a raptor, striking the torso of Prince Yamm, who does not fall. Kothar makes another weapon, which he calls '*Ayyamarri*', 'he may expel all', which he declares that Baal can use to expel Yamm-nahar from his throne and dominion. This weapon leaps from Baal's hand like a raptor and strikes Yamm between the eyes. Yamm collapses to the earth, dead, and Baal dismembers him, destroying Yamm-nahar.

The goddess Astarte instructs Baal to "scatter, O Cloudrider" (*rkb 'rpt*, or 'Cloudrider', is a common epithet for Baal), and Baal goes out and scatters Yamm's remains. At that point other deities recount Baal's victory and proclaim Baal's kingship: "Yamm is dead!" "Baal reigns!" and the third tablet begins with what Smith and Pitard argue is the final scene of the first episode: Baal's great victory feast of sumptuous food, wine, music, singing, at which Baal's daughters, 'Pidray,' meaning 'Light,' and 'Tallay,' meaning 'Rain,' are present.

---

[199] *CAT* 1.2 II 45-47.

Episode two details the construction of Baal's palace – the marker of his kingship and dominion over all other gods. It begins on *CAT* 1.3 II with Anat's preparations for and undertaking of several battles: she a beautiful and scented adolescent maiden who is nonetheless a vicious and bloodthirsty warrior covered in the gore of her vanquished. After her battles, she returns to her house and washes/purifies herself, and applies cosmetics, taking out the harp and the lyre and singing songs to Baal and his daughters.

Baal then instructs his messengers to deliver a message to Anat, before whom they are to prostrate themselves:

> "For a message I have, and I will tell you, a word, and I will recount to you, the word of tree and the whisper of stone, the converse of Heaven with Hell, of Deeps with Stars, I understand the lighting which the Heavens do not know, the word people do not know, and earth's masses not understand. Come and I will reveal it in the Midst of my mountain, Divine Sapan, in the holy mount of my heritage, in the beautiful hill of my might."[200]

When Baal's agriculturally named messengers Gapn 'Field' and Ugar 'Vine' arrive at Anat's abode, she mistakes their visit for a warning that an enemy has arisen against Baal; Anat shakes in fear and warns her visitors about the many enemies she has fought or destroyed, such as 'Desire, the Beloved of El'; 'Rebel, the Calf of El'; 'Fire, the Dog of El'; and 'Flame, the Daughter of El'. Included in this category of enemies, she names Yamm, whom she describes both as *tnn* 'Tunnan' or 'Tinnīn', and as *ltn* 'Twisty Serpent', the "potentate with seven heads."[201] Gapn and Ugar assure her that there is no

---

[200] CAT 1.3 III 20-31.

[201] The Semitic *tnn* root refers to a dragon, and meteorologically (in modern Arabic) to the phenomenon of a waterspout (or cyclone). Note also that the figures *tnn* and *ltn* appear in the Biblical text. See Isaiah 27:1, where *ltn*, often rendered in English as 'Leviathan', is described as the 'fleeing' 'serpent' (or 'snake'),

threat to Baal, and they impart their message and invitation to come to Mt. Sapan to see

Baal. Anat journeys there and Baal laments to Anat that he has no house like the other

gods; that he needs a palace to complete his kingship. He expresses his wish to Anat that

she ask El for permission for Baal to build a palace, and Anat assures him that she will do

so and El will heed her request, lest she beat him up.

Anat journeys to El's abode where she is not received by El, having to speak with

him from an outer chamber. The lines following are too damaged to interpret, but it

appears that Anat did not succeed in her quest, because in the following scene, Anat

returns to Mt. Sapan and Baal proceeds with a second plan, to enlist the help of Athirat

(also pronounced Asherah), the mother of the gods and the wife of El, to convince El that

Baal should have a palace.

Baal then sends messengers to Kothar-wa-Hasis to complain about his lack of a

palace and to request that Kothar fashion gifts for Athirat. Kothar creates several

elaborate household items of silver and gold, and Baal and Anat go together to Athirat to

deliver the gifts. They find Athirat engaged in domestic duties along the seashore, and

when she spots Baal and Anat, she immediately becomes frightened, thinking they have

---

and as the 'twisted' (or 'coiled') 'serpent' (or 'snake'). *tnn* 'dragon' is in this Biblical passage identified
with *ltn*/Leviathan, and described as "the dragon [or monster] that is in the sea." The whole passage reads,
"In that day, the Lord [lit. 'Yahweh'], with his severe sword, great and strong, will punish *ltn* ('Leviathan')
the fleeing serpent/snake, *ltn* ('Leviathan') the twisted serpent/snake, and he will kill the *tnn* ('dragon') that
is in the sea." Cf. Psalm 74:13, "You split the sea by your strength; you broke the heads of the *tanānīn*
('dragons') on the waters," and Revelation 13:1, "Then I stood on the sand of the sea, and I saw a beast
rising up out of the sea; having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a
blasphemous name." Note that in Revelation 13:1, the 'beast of the sea' is described as having 'seven
heads', as is *ltn*/*tnn* in the Baal Cycle. The commonalities between these texts appear to be instances of
employing pervasive Levantine and ancient Near Eastern motifs involving the defeat of a sea dragon or
serpent. These motifs are employed in multiple ways not only in the Biblical text but also in the Baal Cycle
itself, where both Baal (*CAT* 1.2 IV 1-27 and *CAT* 1.5 I 1-4) and Anat (*CAT* 1.3 III 38-42) are described as
having battled a figure associated with these motifs.

come to make war. Noticing the gleam of silver and gold, however, she realizes they

have brought her gifts and rejoices in them. Baal and Anat plead their request to Lady

Athirat of the Sea over a banquet, and although the following lines are damaged, Lady

Athirat apparently agrees, as the narrative next moves to her servants preparing for travel

to El.

Appearing before El Athirat entreats the father of the Gods that "Our king is

mightiest Baal, our ruler, with none above him… [but] Baal has no house like the gods."

El relents and grants her request; delighted, Lady Athirat then responds that El is so very

wise, because "now Baal may enrich with his rain, may he enrich with rich water in a

downpour. And may he give his voice [thunder] in the clouds, may he flash to the earth

lightning."[202]

Anat rejoices to deliver the news to Baal, who begins preparations for the building

of his palace. He gathers the finest materials of silver, gold, and ore, and sends for

Kothar-wa-Hasis to quickly create for him a large and magnificent palace. Kothar

suggests installing a window in the place but Baal refuses, and Kothar responds that Baal

will relent on the issue of the window. Kothar creates an extravagant palace of gold fired

by wood from Lebanon cedar, and Baal, referred to in this section as 'Hadd', rejoices by

preparing a grandiose divine banquet for the assembly gods.

Baal then embarks on a victory tour of sorts, where he is receives the obeisance of

cities and towns across the wide region. At this point in the narrative, Baal is truly

enthroned, among both the gods and humanity. Shortly afterward Baal reverses his

---

[202] *CAT* 1.4 IV 43 – *CAT* 1.4 V 9.

decision against the window, instructing Kothar to open a window in the place. Kothar

opens the window, a "break in the clouds," and Baal gives vent to his voice. He thunders

far and wide, the earth shakes, and the enemies of Baal hide. Baal sees that he is the lord

of east and west, and he sits enthroned in his house with a cedar spear in his right hand.

Baal notes that none can challenge him, but in a move that will prove portentous, he

sends a delegation far away, to the underworld of the god 'Mot', 'death'.

Although Baal declares that he alone reigns over the gods and men and "satisfies

the multitudes of the Earth," instructing his messengers to inform Mot of his

enthronement, Mot responds that he, Death, is hungry and has an appetite like the lion in

the wild, and that he will tear Baal apart, consume him; that Baal will descend into Mot's

gullet. He dares Baal to invite him, and promises that he will consume Baal, for not even

the god who satisfies the multitudes of the Earth and who defeated "Litan, [*ltn*] the

Fleeing Serpent, annihilated the Twisty Serpent, the Potentate with Seven Heads," can

escape death.[203]

Although frightened, Baal surrenders to Mot. Baal travels to Mot's underworld,

described as a 'pit', a land of filth, and a low throne upon which Mot sits. Baal declares

himself Mot's servant forever, and Mot rejoices. Baal visits and feasts with the divine

council one final time, and he is then commanded to descend into 'hell' (into the earth),

and to "take your clouds, your winds, your bolts, your rains with you."[204] Ball acquiesces

---

[203] *CAT* 1.5 I 1-8. See also above, n. 43 for Biblical and other contemporary references to the motif of a sea serpent/dragon/monster referred to as *ltn* or *tnn*, pervasive throughout the Levant and ancient Near East.

[204] *CAT* 1.5 V 1-26.

but is first allowed to make love with a heifer "in a field of Death's realm," and she conceives and bears a boy.[205]

Baal, having been found fallen dead to earth, is announced as dead and mourned and lamented by El, father of the gods, who cuts himself, covers his head in dirt, and wears sackcloth. El cries, "Baal is dead! What of the peoples? The son of Dagan! What of the multitudes?"[206] Anat also mourns greatly for Baal, and wonders what will become of the peoples now that Baal, son of Dagan, is dead.

Anat descends into the underworld and with the help of the goddess Shapash 'Divine Lamp," or 'sun', to search for Baal. Anat locates Baal and loads his body onto her back. She carries Baal to the summit of Mt. Sapan, and buries him in a divine pit in the Earth. She slaughters buffalo, oxen, sheep, deer, mountain goats, and donkeys as offerings for mighty Baal, and then she, El, and Athirat discuss possible successors to Baal from among the gods. However, none of the possible successors matches up: one is too weak to run like Baal or handle the lance as he does, and another is too slight – when he sits on mighty Baal's throne, his feet do not reach the footstool, and his head does not reach the top.

Anat mourns and longs for Baal, and in her rage at Mot she grabs him by the hem of his garment and orders him to return her brother. Mot brags about devouring Baal, and

---

[205] *CAT* 1.5 V 17-19; it is useful to recall that Baal was often portrayed with and understood *as* a bull.

[206] *CAT* 1.5 VI 23-25. We see here a clear reference to the seasonal patterns and the summer, when Baal is "dead" and the rains do not come.

in her grief Anat seizes Mot, splits him with a sword, winnows him through a sieve, burns him with a fire, grinds him in a millstone and sows him in a field.[207]

El has a glorious dream that portends Baal's return, where "if Mightiest Baal lives … Let the heavens rain oil, the wadis run with honey, then I will know that Mightiest Baal lives, the Prince, Lord of the Earth, is alive."[208] El laments to Anat that the furrows of the fields are parched, and wonders where is Mighty Baal, that he might restore the ploughed land. Anat enlists the help of the goddess Shapash, 'Divine Lamp' or 'sun' to look for Baal, at which quest she is presumably successful, because Baal is returned to the land of life, seizes and defeats all pretenders to his throne, and resumes his dominion over the Earth. The narrative next turns perhaps to a description of a seven-year period of agricultural prosperity, wherein Mot then complains to Baal that he has been filled with shame. Baal and Mot then engage in an epic battle for supremacy, and they both fall, indicating perhaps that neither ultimately triumphs, and that the cycle between "life," and "death," as represented by them, is everlasting.

Analysis of Influential Motifs from Episode One: Baal vs. Yamm

Like all literature, the Baal Cycle also emerged out of cultural experience. Influenced by the religious, political, and geographical contexts in which it was composed, this text is replete with indications of the types of influences to which it was

---

[207] This episode at *CAT* 1.6 II 33-37 is also widely believed to reference seasonal and agricultural patterns, as Anat treats Mot as grain being harvested. See below.

[208] *CAT* 1.6 III 1-21.

subject.[209] As Smith and Pitard point out, in addition to political, religious, and social

elements which can be read in the text, the Baal Cycle also displays direct evidence of

"language relationships with royal land grants, lamentations, curses, diplomatic

correspondences, hymns, magical incantations, legal terminology, numerical sayings, and

certainly other genres lost to modern readers."[210] Additionally, its authors display a

profound sense of reverence for the divine, which they portray as deep and unknowable.

Amid such a rich contextual backdrop, we will focus here on the three major episodes of

the cycle, Baal vs. Yamm, Baal Enthroned on Mt. Sapan, and Baal vs. Mot, as well as on

particular themes which emerge from these episodes, such as the defeat of a serpent or

snake, stormy theophanic imagery, associations with Mt. Sapan and other high places,

associations with fertility, fecundity, and the seasonal cycle, and regular disappearance

and return. These themes will comprise motifs upon which the other figures in our study

also will draw.

Common-pool Motif of Defeat of a Sea Serpent/Snake

The Baal Cycle depicts a royal society, involving various deities and the natural

realms over which those deities held power, in a manner that reflects aspects of both the

political and natural worlds known in the culture of ancient Ugarit.[211] But as we have

seen above, the cycle itself – and/or elements from it – are likely far older than the 14th-

---

[209] Smith, *Baal Cycle Vol. II*, 5 and 56.

[210] Smith, *Baal Cycle Vol. II*, 56.

[211] *Smith, Baal Cycle, Vol. I*, xxiv.

to 12th-century BCE version of the myth excavated at Ugarit. Among those older elements is the narrative of Baal's defeat of Yamm, whose name means 'Sea', and who is also called '*nhr*', 'River', a narrative which is linked with both older and later cosmogonic stories of defeat of the "Sea," and of order overcoming primordial chaos.

In pitting a divine hero against a cosmic enemy to achieve order over chaos, the Baal Cycle enshrines older ancient Near Eastern motifs and references to cosmogony. The character of Baal's enemy, Yamm, and Baal's ensuing cosmic authority after Yamm's defeat, are central elements of this compelling cosmogonic myth, which has many counterparts in ancient Near Eastern creation and nature myths. Among the most prominent of those counterparts is the narrative of the Mesopotamian creator god Ea's defeat of Apsu, the primordial cosmic waters, which itself anticipates a later Babylonian narrative of the god Marduk defeating the serpent Tiamaat in the Enuma Elish.[212] Not a strictly cosmogonic text, however, because it does not include narratives that describe the creation of the cosmos, the Baal Cycle merely *employs* these antecedent compelling cosmogonic battle narratives, but in order to highlight thereby the specific powers of Baal.[213]

In identifying Yamm with the contemporary ancient Near Eastern monstrous figures *tnn* 'serpent' and *ltn* (in a Biblical register, 'Leviathan'), the Baal Cycle makes references stretching back at least as far as the late third millennium, as suggested by a

---

[212] Norman C. Habel, *Yahweh Versus Baal: A Conflict of Religious Cultures* (New York: Brookman Associates, 1964), 53. See also above, 43n.

[213] Smith, *Baal Cycle Vol. 1*, 101.

Tell Asmar seal depicting battle between a warrior figure and a seven-headed dragon.[214]

This narrative was evidently powerful and compelling over a wide area. In Greek

tradition, as we will see, the sky-god Zeus battled the serpent-god Typhon, and in Hittite

mythology, the Storm-god Teshub (who was identified in several Hittite-Levantine

boundary locales with the Storm-god Hadad) defeated the monster Ullikumi, who rose

out of the sea.[215] It is quite likely, in fact, that a very old ancient Near Eastern narrative

of a Storm-god's battle against the cosmic sea was widely known and utilized by peoples

throughout the region long before dynasties at Ugarit, Mari, and Babylon recorded these

myths in their extant traditions involving the gods Baal-Hadad and Marduk.[216]

Similar narratives and imagery within myths such as the Western Semitic story

known as "Astarte and the Sea," or sometimes, "Astarte and the Tribute of the Sea," and

in the Hittite "Song of Ullikumi" may also have come to influence later Greek mythology

---

[214] Ibid., 346. See also 43n. above.

[215] Smith, *Baal Cycle Vol. I*, 101. For more on Anatolian Teshub as identified with Syrian Hadad, see Green, *Storm God in ANE*, 170. For more on the Storm-gods of Anatolia, see Ḥaddad, "Study of Syrian Storm-God," 33-36, "Storm Gods of Anatolia." Ḥaddad notes, as does Green, that there was a natural degree of affinity between Anatolian and Syrian glyptic and textual representations of the Storm-God, owning in large part to the natural geographic continuum that extends from southeastern Anatolia into northern Syrian, and along the coastal sweep of the northern and eastern Mediterranean littoral (see Green, *Storm God in ANE*, 153-156, esp. 156; thoughts involving a geographical continuum along the Mediterranean littoral are my own, and are shared by Robin Lane Fox, *Travelling Heroes*.). These Anatolian and Syrian affinities often involve the use of the figure of the bull in representation of or with the Storm-god; the bull was the figure most commonly associated with the Anatolian Storm-god (see p. 8-9 above, and Green, *Storm God in ANE*, 283). Ḥaddad also notes that material evidence for the Storm-god in Anatolia generally does not exist for the time period before the beginning of the second millennium; Cappadocian cylinder seal impressions from that period show the Storm-god with both his lightning and his animal attribute, the bull. Little is known about the Storm-god in the pre-Hittite age of Anatolia other than a few names, such as 'Taru', the name in Hattic, 'Tarhunt/a', in Luwian, and which was probably also the Hittite hieroglyphic reading; the Hurrian (and Hittite) name Teshub was apparently the best-known and most widely used designation for the Anatolian Storm-god (Ḥaddad, "Study of Syrian Storm-God," 34).

[216] Smith, *Baal Cycle Vol. I*, 113; see also 224n.

involving Perseus and Andromeda. In the story of "Astarte and the Sea," an extremely

fragmentary version for which is recorded in an Egyptian New Kingdom text, the rule of

the creator is challenged by Yamm, who demands the tribute due to an overlord. The

Egyptian harvest goddess, Rennenutet, brings Yamm treasure, but it is not enough.

Rennenutet sends a bird messenger to the house of Astarte (a Semitic goddess also known

to us in the Baal Cycle) to wake the goddess and tell her to bring tribute to Yamm.

Astarte weeps at the message, but goes to the shore to sing and dance to attract the sea

monster (this passage clearly finds a reflection in a similar passage from the Hittite myth

"Song of Ullikumi," whereupon the goddess Sauska went to the seashore sing and attract

the Sea in order to confront the divine challenger). Yamm then tells Astarte he wants her

for his bride, and threatens to flood the entire earth if he does not get what he wants.

When Yamm returns to collect his treasure, he is challenged by Seth, the Egyptian Storm-

god often equated with Baal-Hadad. [217] The remainder of the text is damaged, but

because Baal in the Baal Cycle defeated the sea monster Yamm, it would not be unlikely

if this text also ended in Seth defeating Yamm, and in claiming Astarte as his prize. [218]

---

[217] Ḥaddad, "Study of Syrian Storm-God," 36-38. Ḥaddad notes that Seth of Egypt and the Hittite Storm-god were equated in a treaty between Egypt and the Hittites (e.g. references to "Seth of Heaven," "Seth of Hatti," and "Seth of Aleppo"). He notes also that the Hyksos, an Egyptian dynasty of Semitic origin who ruled Egypt during the 17th and 16th centuries BCE, favored Seth, known as the Egyptian god of the storm and desert, with whom they equated their chief deity, the Storm-god. Syrian Baal was frequently mentioned in Egyptian sources by the name of 'Seth', especially from the end of the 18th Dynasty (14th century BCE); Seth was understood to be the god of the heavens, mountain tops, and thunder. The cult of Seth in Egypt was especially strong during the 19th and 20th dynasties (13th to 11th centuries BCE), as evidenced by Pharaohs named Set and Seti, after the god.

[218] Smith, *Baal Cycle Vol*. I, 23-24. For further argument that the motif of a hero rescuing a princess from a sea monster found in "Astarte and the Sea" underlies the myth of Perseus and Andromeda, see D. B. Redford*, Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton: University Press, 1992), 45-47; and D. B. Redford, "The Sea and the Goddess," in *Studies in Egyptology Presented to Miriam Lichtheim*, vol. II ed. S. Israelit-Goll (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1990), 824-35. See also chap. 5 below.

Meteorological and Theophanic Imagery of Baal-Hadad

The ubiquitous motif of a Storm-god defeating the sea may also draw upon meteorological imagery, such as the natural weather conditions prevailing along the Levantine coast; specifically, the rainstorm moving eastward across the Mediterranean Sea and onto land. Such meteorological imagery can also be referenced in Mesopotamian, Biblical, and Greek literature, as ancient peoples everywhere created stories to explain otherwise incomprehensible natural phenomena, such as storms, rain, wind, lightning, natural gasses arising from the earth, earthquakes, and volcanoes.[219] In *Travelling Heroes*, Robin Lane Fox notes that "From Zancle to Timnath-serah, from the Bay of Naples to Sodom, eighth-century [Greek-speaking Euboan] men explained oddities they found in the landscape by inventing 'just-so' stories." Fox notes also that Greek μύθοι 'muthoi', or 'tales' also rely on community notions of a distant, more splendid past, which, for 8th-century Greeks, may have been reflected in tales and stories that originated in late Bronze-Age Mycenaean culture.[220]

In modern Arabic traditions lasting through at least the twentieth century CE, the 'tannīn' (from the Semitic *tnn*) is still understood to be a mighty serpentine monster, and it refers to the meteorological phenomenon of a water spout, as well. This natural phenomenon can appear over the sea off the Syrian coast in winter, appearing like a black

---

[219] See Robin Lane Fox, *Travelling Heroes: In the Epic Age of Homer* (New York: Vantage Books, 2010), 243, "In the Near East, just as in Greece, landscapes were interpreted through myths."

[220] Fox, *Travelling Heroes*, 351-354. For stories about myths or tales that rely on community notions of a distant, more splendid past (for 8th-century Greeks, this may have been reflected in tales and stories that originated in late Bronze-Age Mycenaean culture) see ibid., 33-34.

snake arising from the sea and reaching to the clouds. Arabic literature preserved from

the 10th century CE relates a tradition, popular at that time, that 'tanānīn' ('dragons')

originate as black wind on the bottom of the sea, come to the surface, and reach the

clouds in the form of cyclones (a.k.a., water spouts). According to this text, people

believed tanānīn to be black snakes whose destructive power continued until "cloud

angels" forced them out of the sea, and placed them in the land of 'Yajuj and Majuj',

where the cloud angels bombarded them with hail (see Fig. 3).[221] Theophanic

descriptions of the divine in many ancient Near Eastern cultures very often took the form

of natural phenomena related to the storm, and thus it would be unsurprising if myths

involving the Storm-god deities had some basis in meteorological realities.[222]

Baal's theophany in the storm was a revelation of his powers of control over the

heavens and the waters of the earth, by which he rendered the earth fertile. Baal's self-

disclosure was associated with rain, winds, fire, storms, lightning, clouds, and mountain

tops. Baal was often described as the "Rider of the Clouds," which were the chariot by

---

[221] Ḥaddad, "Study of Syrian Storm-God," 126-127, quoting a 10th-century work by Murūj al-Dhahab Mas'udi. Ḥaddad notes that this same story may be reflected in a Hittite-era bas-relief from the Gate of Lions in Malatya from the 12th or 11th century BCE, depicting two gods attacking a coiling serpent; most agree that this image represents the narrative of the Storm-god defeating the Hittite snake Illuyanka (see Fig. 3). The details of this image seem also similar to Mas'udi's legend involving tanānīn being bombarded by hail. (Ibid., 130-132). For more about the Hittite myths of Illuyanka, see also ibid., 118-121. See also Oya Pancaroğlu, "The Itinerant Dragon-Slayer: Forging Paths of Image and Identity in Medieval Anatolia," *Gesta* 43, no. 2 (2004): 151-164. Note also that "Yajuj and Majuj" in Islamic traditions equates with the biblical land of "Gog and Magog," and reference to this location in Arabic and Islamic idiom generally implies a land "in the east" or "to the north."

[222] See also Ortlund, *Theophany and Chaoskampf*, 8n.

which he thundered across the sky.[223] These theophanic descriptions are important for us

to note because they become important motifs which inform the common pool from

which the other figures in our study will draw.

Kingship: Protection or Destruction

At the heart of the cycle is the literary and religious narrative of Baal's kingship;

his rise to power and dominion over the other gods, over the humans of the Earth, and

over the forces of nature – particularly, over the waters. By this means, Baal ruled not

only the gods but the earthly realm as well, and he showed his beneficence – or his wrath

– upon those whom he choose.

In the cycle, Baal was portrayed both as a great warrior and a representation of

war and destruction, but also as beneficent helper to those whom he favored.

Contemporary political rulers of the time therefore attempted to place themselves in

Baal's favor by means of rituals and offerings, constructing temples, invoking his name

in treaties, and naming themselves and their houses after the deity.[224]

But the theme of Baal's kingship, which provided either protection or destruction,

was attained in the Baal Cycle not simply through the actions of Baal alone; he was

helped greatly by his allies, such as the craftsman of the gods, Kothar-wa-Hasis, who

provided Baal's weapons, and by Anat, always ready to do battle on behalf of Baal

---

[223] Habel, *Yahweh Versus Baal*, 73-76. Note that the title "Cloudrider" is also applied to Yahweh (Psalm 68:4), as well as to Zeus, "*kelainephēs*," "the one in a black cloud" (Iliad 2:412, 6:267, 15:46, 21:520), (Smith, *Baal Cycle Vol. I*, 123 9n.)

[224] Green, *Storm-God*, 195.

against greater enemies. This kind of power dynamics may also reflect the political

situation of Ugarit, a coastal buffer state existing for centuries amidst and between the

more powerful empires of the Hittites and Egyptians. Certainly, the theme in the Baal

Cycle of the great gods communicating by means of messengers, and regularly

interacting amid or with the threat of battle, may reflect in the narrative the political

realities of the day.

Analysis of Influential Motifs from Episode Two: Baal Enthroned on Mt. Saphon

Baal's traditional home, the place where his palace is built, and even the meeting

location of the conflicts between Baal and his major enemies, is the divine mountain

known as *ṣpn*, Mt. Sapan. In Hittite, this influential mountain is known as Mt. Hazzi, in

Akkadian as *ba'liṣapûna*, in the Hebrew Bible as Mt. Zaphon, in Greek as Mt. Kasios, in

Latin as Mt. Casius, in Arabic as جبل الاقرع *jebel al-aqra'*, and in Turkish as *Kiliç Daği*.[225]

Baal battles Yamm at Mt. Sapan (*CAT* 1.1 I 4-5) and Mot there as well (*CAT* 1.6 VI 12-

13), and this mountain is also the site of other divine battles involving a Storm-god. The

Hurrian and Hittite myth of the Storm-god and Ullikumi takes place at Mt. Hazzi, and

Zeus fights Typhon and other monsters on Mt. Kasios, as well.[226]

Here we see evidence not only of a long-term common pool of religious material

involving the motif of a Storm-god's conflict at Mt. Sapan, but evidence of the influence

---

[225] Smith, *Baal Cycle Vol. I*, 122-23. See also above, Chap. 2, 11n. Note that in the Hebrew Bible,
'Zaphon', as a location, is so influential as to also mean simply 'north'; see Ezekiel 47:17.

[226] Smith, *Baal Cycle, Vol. I*, 123, referencing Apollodorus, Bibl. I, 5, 3.7f; cf. *Iliad* 2:78f.; Hesiod,
Theogony, 820f.

of geography, as well. At over 6,000 feet in height, this preeminent mountain is the highest peak on the northern section of the Levantine coast. As such, it creates a meteorological zone which attracts the clouds around it and which thus receives the heaviest annual rainfall in the region – over fifty-seven inches – making Mt. Sapan, which literally towers over all other places, a fitting home for the regional Storm-god.[227]

Greek and Roman Associations with Baal-Hadad and Mt. Sapan

Robin Lane Fox notes as well that 8th-century Euboan Greeks who established a community north of Mt. Sapan in the region of Iskenderun/Alexandretta (modern-day Hatay, Turkey), saw their own Mt. Olympus in Mt. Sapan (which they called Mt. Kasios, after 'Mt. Hazzi', the Hurro-Hittite name for the mountain). In that way, Mt. Kasios functioned as a kind of "Olympus of the Near East."[228] Moreover, it was an informal Greek and Roman convention not to ascribe stories involving similar-seeming myths and landscapes to a "new" or "foreign" god, but to associate them with their own gods and myths.[229] Indeed, such 8th-century Greek attribution may not have been in any way

---

[227] Smith, *Baal Cycle Vol. I*, 123. For the reference to rainfall amounts, see N. Hunt, "Mount Saphon in Myth and Fact" in *Phoenicia in the Bible; Proceedings of the Conference held at the University of Leuven on the 15th and 16th of March 1990*, E. Lipiński, ed (Leuven: Departement Oriëntalistiek/Utigeverji Peeters), 103-105. See also Ḥaddad, "Study of Syrian Storm-God," chapter three, "The Holy Mountain," 86-104, and Robin Lane Fox, *Travelling Heroes*, chapter fifteen, "A Travelling Mountain," 242-258.

[228] Fox, *Travelling Heroes*, 246. See also Jona Lendering, "Seleucia-in-Pieria," www.livius.org/place/seleucia-in-pieria for later additional associations between Mt. Kasios and Mt. Olympus, as well as 75n, below.

[229] Ibid., 280. See also Fox's description of Thessalonian Greek officers of Alexander the Great who reported during their 4th-century BCE visit to Armenia that they had discovered Armenian monuments which had been built in honor of the Greek hero, Jason. However, recent investigations have explained these 'Jason memorials' by the local word for the holy places sited on hill-tops, which western Iranians had long called '*ayezana*'. To "imaginative Greek ears, these *ay-ez-ana* sounded just like 'Jasonia', especially when so much else [such as the Armenians' style of dress] had appeared to derive from Jason's visit" (ibid.,

artificial – earlier Mycenaean-era Greek contacts during the LBA with the Hittite and Canaanite communities around Mt. Sapan would have made both Mt. Sapan and the Storm-god who lived there familiar to later Greeks through the medium of myth. Mycenaean-era Greek contact with the Hittite and Canaanite communities around Mt. Sapan

> left its mark on Greek stories about the gods which then lived on for the next three or four hundred years, passed on by word of mouth. These half-remembered tales were then greatly confirmed when [Euboan] Greeks returned and settled once again on the Levantine coast at al-Mina beside Mt. Hazzi. … We should think of an initial Bronze Age encounter, confirmed by Greeks from Euboea when they established a firm presence on the north side of Mt. Hazzi [in the 8th century BCE]. … After all, the mountain was still the same potent and dominating force in people's lives. ... When tremendous thunder rolled off the mountain, the lightning flashed and the sea began to swell off al-Mina's beach, any Greek would wish to know the divinities of the place. They would ask their neighbors and … learn of the stories which the landscape and songs "of the sea" and "of kingship" on Mt. Hazzi had kept alive.[230]

Greeks at settlements in the region north of Mt. Sapan during the 8th century BCE and afterward built shrines to "Zeus Kasios" on the mountain, as Zeus the Greek sky god shared many elements in common with the Storm-god Baal-Hadad. Indeed, Greek myths involving the figure of Zeus may have been influenced during the Mycenaean-era by contacts with the Levant and with the regionally dominant figure there of the Storm-god.[231] 'Zeus Kasios' was a Greek equivalent to Baal-Sapan on the mountain, and was venerated at shrines there and at high places throughout the region for hundreds of years.

176, quoting P. Bernard, "Les Origines thessaliennes de l'Arménie vues par deux historiens thessaliens de la génération d'Alexandre," in P. Briant (ed.), *Topoi supplément*, 1:131-216.).

[230] Fox, *Travelling Heroes*, 266-67. See also Ibid., 33-34, and above, 63n.

[231] Ibid., 266.

In ca. 301 BCE Seleucus I Nicator, a successor to Alexander, founded the cities of Seleucia on the coast and Antioch on the inland plain.[232] Upon founding the cities, Seleucus sacrificed to Zeus on Mt. Kasios, and had local coins struck at Seleucia representing Zeus and his thunderbolt. First-century CE Roman historian Appian of Alexandria wrote that when Seleucus set about the build the city, "a portent of thunder preceded the foundation, for which reason he [Seleucus] consecrated thunder as a divinity of the place … the inhabitants worship thunder and sing its praises to this day."[233] Later Greek chronicler Johannes Malalas of Antioch also recorded that before founding the city of Seleucia, Seleucus had made a sacrifice to Zeus on Mt. Kasios, and that he did so on the 23rd of April.[234] Indeed, Roman emperors in the centuries afterward, such as Trajan, who visited in 114-115 CE, and Julian, who visited in 363 CE, also made offerings and improved shrines to Zeus Kasios on the summit of Mt. Sapan, at sites which had

---

[232] Seleucia, originally called Seleucia-Pieria, was founded by Seleucus I Nicator as a port and harbor for the inland city of Antioch, which was named in honor of Seleucus' father, Antiochus. These Macedonian Greeks named the Bay of Seleucus (Bay of Antioch) "Seleucia-Pieria," because it reminded them of the landscape of the region of Pieria, a district in their Macedonian homeland, which also consisted of a region between the sea and a mountain range; specifically, that of Mt. Olympus. Antioch, the city further inland for which Seleucia functioned as a port, had a population that consisted of Macedonian colonists, Greeks from the existing surrounding villages, and numerous native Syrians; among them many Jews. Antioch remained the capital of the successive Seleucid kings, and, after 64 BCE, Pompey made Antioch the capital of the new Roman province of Syria. Accordingly, Antioch benefitted for centuries from the favors of many Greek and Roman rulers and their allies. For more, see Jona Lendering, "Seleucia-in-Pieria." As we will see in Ch. 5, Antioch, along with Alexandria, another Macedonian Greek city founded as a result of Alexander's regional conquests, also became an important center of Christianity. Antioch suffered from devastating earthquakes in 184 BCE, 37 CE, and 115 CE.

[233] Appian, *Syrian Wars*, 58.

[234] Ḥaddad, "Study of Syrian Storm-God," 54-56. Ḥaddad quotes on p. 56 Malalas from his *Chronicles*, Bk. VIII (Transl. Spinka and Downey, Chicago, 1940, p. 13). Ḥaddad notes as well that April 23 is still celebrated throughout the Levant as St. George's day; furthermore, this celebration date is also observed among regional Muslim communities for the figure al-Khiḍr. For more on Seleucus' sacrifice to Zeus at Mt. Kasios, see also Fox, *Travelling Heroes*, 246-247.

originally been dedicated to Baal-Hadad.[235] Greek Mt. Kasios and Roman Mt. Casius

functioned, indeed, as an epicenter of more than a thousand years of "pagan Greek

worship in the Levant," continuing the importance of this mountain and its myths well

into the first centuries of the Common Era, and alongside the gradual evolution of Bronze

and Iron Age Hittite, Neo-Hittite, and Canaanite communities in the region.[236]

Analysis of Influential Motifs from Episode Three, Baal vs. Mot:

Disappearance and Return and the Seasonal Cycle

The episode of Baal's conflict with Mot has clear seasonal agricultural overtones

and appears to have been employed in part to explain that the kingship of Baal was

limited; i.e., limited to the seasons during which Baal seemed evident and effective – fall,

winter, and spring, when the rains fell and the lands became green – and that when he

was absent and apparently ineffective, summer, when it is dry and hot and the rains do

not fall (to say nothing of the regular experience of drought common to the Levant,

during which time Baal must have seemed painfully callous and/or powerless).[237]

During this episode, the dramatic attempt of Anat to rescue Baal in the

underworld, and her harvest treatment of Mot, 'death' display evidence both of the

common pool of compelling religious narratives circulating in the ancient Near East, and

the influence of climate and geography. In the first instance, the passage involving

---

[235] Fox, *Travelling Heroes*, 246-250.

[236] Ibid., 250.

[237] See above, Chapter 2, for information about regional weather patterns.

Anat's search for Baal in the underworld strongly echoes the Mesopotamian saga of Tammuz and Inanna. The traditions about both Baal and Tammuz are similar in their deaths and perhaps as well in their returns to life; both Baal and Tammuz are related – in different ways – to agricultural fertility; and their divine consorts, Anat and Inanna, respectively, both mourn and search for them in the underworld.[238] In the second instance, Anat's extreme grief-driven harvest treatment of Mot, wherein she splits him with a sword, winnows him through a sieve, burns him with a fire, grinds him in a millstone and sows him in a field, precedes Baal's return to life as evidenced in the return of agricultural life to the world of the living, and her "harvest" act, itself, originates in the realm of agriculture.[239]

Finally, another influential theme about Baal which emerges from this episode of the Baal Cycle is related both to Anat's harvest treatment of Mot and Baal's seasonal return, is that of Baal's regular disappearance and return. Intimately connected with the cycles of the seasons and with regular regional droughts, Baal may have seemed to disappear, but people understood that he was not dead. Baal was engaged in a cycle of regular return, during which time he would make is return known in the autumnal thunder that resounded around the peaks of Mt. Sapan, and when he would shower beneficence in the seasons afterward upon the world of the living.

---

[238] Smith, *Baal Cycle Vol. I*, 18. Smith notes here as well that Baal's combat with Mot reflects elements of the narrative of warrior combat evident between Gilgamesh and Enkidu in the Epic of Gilgamesh.

[239] *CAT* 1.6 II 33-37.

The Importance of Rain in All Three Episodes of the Baal Cycle

The centrality of rain to the life and economy of people at Ugarit is foundational in the portrayal of Baal in the cycle. Smith and Pitard argue that each of the three primary episodes in the Baal Cycle appear to come to a climax with the appearance of Baal's rains and related theophoric powers. For instance, in the first episode, the weapons used by Baal against Yamm in *CAT* 1.2 IV represent lightning, which is often an accompaniment to rains. In the second episode, Baal's thunderous theophany from the open window in his palace conclude Baal's enthronement scene, and likely refers to the return of the rainy season in fall. Finally, in the third episode involving Baal and Mot, Baal's return to life was connected to the return of his rains after a long period of dryness (*CAT* 1.6 III 4-7), which was connected both with Anat's harvest activity involving Mot, and also again with the return of the rains in fall. Smith and Pitard argue that this threefold rain-imagery was deliberate, and intended to reinforce the portrayal of a triumphant Baal sending his life-giving rains.[240] Such a portrayal of Baal would well suit a region where rainfall represented the primary source of water for life and agriculture.

The Baal Cycle as a Source of Numerous Compelling Levantine Religious Motifs

Because the Baal Cycle – itself impacted, as we have seen, by physically and temporally nearby religious, political, and geographical influences – exemplifies major elements of religious belief among the Canaanites of the Levant, it should also be understood as expressing "the heart of West Semitic religion from which Israelite religion

---

[240] Smith, *Baal Cycle Vol. II*, 57.

largely developed."[241] The original god of Israel may have been El (perhaps before this god merged among ancient Israelites with Yahweh, the god from the south), the deities Baal and Athirat/Asherah, likely among others, were worshipped and condemned in ancient Israel as recorded in the Hebrew Bible (see 1 and 2 Kings and Chapter Four, below), and the depictions of Yahweh as an enthroned king, or as a stormy god in theophanic description, resemble depictions both of El and of Baal, respectively, in the Baal Cycle.[242]

Many of the narratives and motifs of the West Semitic religious milieu that are found in the Baal Cycle passed into ancient Israelite culture as described in the Hebrew Bible. These were then passed into the New Testament and into other Jewish works of the Second Temple period. Such compelling figures, narratives, and motifs in turn survived in Christian writings and in rabbinical works of the Common Era, and even into the text of the Qur'ān and subsequent regional religious texts.[243] Many compelling motifs in the Baal Cycle enjoyed a long history well after the destruction of the city of Ugarit, and it can confidently be claimed that the early forms of many formative religious

---

[241] Smith, *Baal Cycle Vol. I*, xxvi. Israelite religion of course also had other sources of influence, such as religious beliefs and motifs representing southern religious influences (Arabian and Egyptian among them), but the West Semitic religious literature must certainly be counted among them in importance.

[242] El is often the name used for God in the Hebrew Bible, especially in the older and poetic texts. See, among other references, Deut 33:2, 33:26 and Psa 68:4, 68:33, and 104:3.

[243] Smith, *The Baal Cycle Vol. I*, xxvi-xxvii. Claims involving Common Era texts of Christians, Rabbinical texts, the Qur'an, and other regional religious texts are my own as will be advanced in this project, but these claims arguably ought not violate the spirit of Smith's assertions.

concepts in Western civilization and in the Near Eastern religious traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam may be found in the Baal Cycle.[244]

Part Three: Storm-God Baal-Hadad Image: The Baal Stele

The Baal Stele, also known as "Baal of the Lightning," arguably has been among the most important items excavated at Ugarit (see Fig. 4). It was found on May 28, 1932 CE, located at a depth of .65 m (2.1 feet) underneath the surface, overturned and at an incline, among a pile of large blocks and within a sanctuary situated next to the grand temple. The stele itself was carved out of a single block of white limestone which may have been quarried near the site of Ras Shamra. The stele measures 1.42 m tall (4.8 feet [.791 inches]), .5 m (1.64 feet) wide at the base, .47 m (1.54 feet) wide at the upper part, and .28 m (.92 feet) thick. Owing both to the weight of the stele, at 1,000 k (2,204 lbs.), and to its excellent state of conservation, excavators believed that the Baal Stele had not been moved after the destruction of the city, and that originally it had been erected very near where it was uncovered in 1932 CE.[245]

---

[244] Smith, "The Baal Cycle," 85-86. Claims involving Islam are my own, but, again, perhaps not unjustifiable in the spirit of Smith's comments. Among the aims of this chapter has been to highlight that the Baal Cycle was itself a product of the religious, political, and geographical influences of its time. Therefore, while figures, narratives, and motifs from the cycle can be argued to be among the strongest direct influences upon subsequent regional religious traditions, the Baal Cycle should not be understood as a prototype in the sense of being an *original*, because, as a text that was influenced by the figures, narratives, and motifs of its own time, it too was equally subject to the same processes of influence, and the same persistent compelling Levantine needs, as were those texts of subsequent religious traditions.

[245] Claude F. Schaeffer, "La Stèle du 'Ba'al au Foudre' de Ras-Shamra (Musée du Louvre)," *Monuments et Mémoires* 34, (1934):1-2. [1-18] This article, written by the head of operations at Ras Shamra during the initial seasons of excavation, remains the most authoritative article about the Baal Stele. The stele is today located in La Musée du Louvre, in Paris.

On the face of the stele, in bas-relief (more precisely, in champlevé), a standing

Baal-Hadad is represented, striding forward while wearing a horned helmet-crown, and

brandishing in his raised right hand a mace, while in his left hand he holds a vertical

lance (this lance is sometimes interpreted as lightning, as a stalk of grain, or as both

simultaneously), its tip pointed toward the ground. In the field behind Baal, between the

lance and the left advancing leg of the divinity, stands on a pedestal or altar a small

person dressed in a long tunic (this figure is most commonly thought to be a king of

Ugarit in priestly dress).

The forward movement of Baal is rendered skillfully, and Baal looks powerful,

elegant, and full of life. The stele is clearly reminiscent of Egyptian style and

composition; the artist of this stele seems to have been formed by the school of Egyptian

art, in that the stele keeps tightly to the traditional compositional formulas of head and

body-below-the-waist in profile view; chest in ¾ view.[246] The composition of this stele is

clearly patterned after Pharaonic images of power and dominance; in particular, the

posture of the figure of the deity in the Baal Stele is nearly identical to the "smiting"

posture on the palette of Egyptian Pharaoh Narmer, first Pharaoh of unified Egypt, and

---

[246] While it was the conclusion of excavator Claude Schaeffer that the stele artist had been trained in the
Egyptian style and that the limestone block for the stele could have come from a quarry near Ras Shamra, it
is not clear whether this artist actually was Egyptian or simply had been trained in that style, or even where
in fact the stele originally was created (e.g., Ugarit, Egypt, or another locale). Recall that in the early 1200s
BCE the Pharaoh Merneptah responded to a letter from the king of Ugarit about the king's request to send a
sculptor from Egypt so that the king may erect a statue of Pharaoh Merneptah in front of the temple to Baal
(Cline, *1177 BC*, 107-108; see also Chapter Two of the present work, p. 29), so we know that at least in
some contemporary instances in Ugarit, sculptors were requisitioned from afar.

founder of the First Egyptian Dynasty in the end of the 4th millennium BCE (ca. 3000 BCE), (see Fig. 5).

Based upon its find-spot and elements of Baal's dress, hairstyle, and beard, the stele has been dated to sometime between the 15th and 13th centuries BCE.[247] Ugarit was under the direct political control of Egypt ca. 1400-1350 BCE, and then under the control of the Hittite Empire ca. 1350-1200 BCE; however as we have seen, both cultures over a long span of time influenced Ugaritic culture, and several material remains excavated from Ugarit consisted of Egyptian objects with hieroglyphic inscriptions from the middle Bronze Age (1800-1600 BCE).[248]

The composition of the Baal Stele demonstrates evidence of Egyptian political influence in that it employs a widespread and influential image of power and domination using Pharaonic registers. However, it is also an excellent example of the functioning of a common pool of ancient Near Eastern figures, narratives, and motifs in practice: the Baal Stele utilizes an influential Egyptian motif of power (or perhaps it was simply an *ubiquitous* motif of power, as sharp distinctions such as 'Egyptian' and 'Levantine' may reflect modern perspectives more than contemporary ones) to represent Baal-Hadad, the Levantine Storm-god, but it does so in a way that reflects a Levantine geographical and cultural environment.

---

[247] Schaeffer, "Baal Stèle," 18.

[248] Yon, *City of Ugarit*, 16.

Among the Levantine elements of the Baal Stele are Baal's horned helmet-crown, which also references Baal *as* a bull, as well as his visage, hairstyle, beard, and short tunic, each of which represents a unique Syrian style different from that of the Narmer Palette, for instance.[249] Baal's weapons are also different: whereas Narmer wields a mace in his right hand and subdues an enemy in his left, Baal strikes with a mace in his right hand, but his left holds a lance/lightning bolt/stalk of wheat in the left. Most commentators agree that the lightning-bolt lance is Baal's signature weapon, and that its appearance is accompanied by conceptions of agricultural fertility. Most further agree that this image represents Baal as understood from his narratives of kingship and defeat of enemies (such as Yamm) in the Baal Cycle, using the weapons that had been created for him for the task.[250]

Another aspect unique to both the Baal Cycle and the Levant as depicted on this stele is that of its geographical elements: Baal stands upon four mountains (many feel this represents Mt. Sapan and its four lower peaks which can be seen from Ugarit), as well as upon a representation of the sea, indicating that Baal is lord of the mountain and has dominion over the waters.[251] Finally, the Baal Stele is different from that of the Narmer Palette in terms of its background: the Palette details a victorious battle and many other Egyptian elements, whereas in the Baal Stele, the only figure in the background is likely

---

[249] Schaeffer, "Baal Stèle," 3-7.

[250] Schaeffer, "Baal Stèle," 8-9.

[251] Ibid., 10.

that of an Ugaritic King, dressed in long priestly robes, indicating the figure's veneration of Baal, and perhaps also implying (or invoking) Baal's protection and/or divine approval.[252]

The Baal Stele is a marvelous example of the common pool in practice, in that it appropriates a compelling contemporary motif but does so in a way that reflects its own Levantine perspective. In employing Egyptian motifs and images of power – to say nothing of a potential Egyptian commission for the work – the artist of this stele (and its patron/s) may also have intended to reflect both political influences and the exigencies of small-state political maneuvering, which were common to the coastal buffer state of Ugarit. Finally, this stele demonstrates the importance Baal-Hadad and his narratives within Levantine cultures, as well as geographical influences in the forms of continual regional needs involving rain for agriculture.

Part Four: The Storm-God Baal-Hadad Site – Baalbek

Finally, we will examine in this chapter an important geographical site long associated with the Storm-god Baal-Hadad: Baalbek, located in what is today modern Lebanon. Baalbek lies in the Bekaʿa Valley, long a fertile region and known during periods of Roman rule as a granary or "bread basket" of the Roman Empire.[253] The site of Baalbek is a natural center of the upper part of the Bekaʿa Valley, as it is located at the

---

[252] Ibid., 11.

[253] Ragette Friedrich, *Baalbek* (Park Ridge, NJ: Noyes Press, 1980), 13. Friedrich notes that the Bekaʿa (Ar., بقاء 'stagnant' or 'lingering') Valley was named for the stagnant waters that collected there before the valley was drained and irrigated. In Latin this region was known as Coele-Syria ('hollow' Syria) for its location between two mountain ranges.

highest level of the land at the watershed between the sources of two important regional

rivers, the Orontes (or al-'Asi) and the Litani (or Leontes) Rivers, and on the main

ancient transportation road that runs parallel to the coast along the eastern side of the

coastal ranges. In addition to its logistical importance, this site is symbolically important,

as well, as it links Baalbek with Mt. Sapan via the Orontes River, and thus combines both

the mythic and the geographical in its physical location. The name of the sanctuary of

Baalkbek is unmistakably related to Baal, the figure for whom the site was originally

built, the Western Semitic Storm-God. The name 'Baalbek' most likely means "Baal of

the Beka'a," or "Lord of the Beka'a." Long the site of a shrine to Baal-Hadad, the site

perhaps served as a religious center of the Beka'a, as excavations at the Roman-era great

court of Jupiter there have revealed a tell which provides evidence of human life at the

site going back at least to the early Bronze Age (ca. 2900-2300 BCE).[254]

The ruined Roman-era site one sees there presently was called Heliopolis and

dedicated to the Roman god Jupiter Heliopolitanus, himself the equivalent of Greek Zeus

Heliopolitanus, who, as we have seen, was regionally identified with Baal-Hadad (see

Fig. 6). Note that the representation of Jupiter Heliopolitanus includes elements which

are considered both related to Baal, such as the attendant bulls and the now-broken but

originally raised right-arm posture of the figure, as well as the left arm, which likely held

a bolt of lightning, and that it includes elements which are considered Greek, Roman, and

---

[254] Fridrich, *Baalbek*, 16.

Egyptian, as well.[255] Near the shrine to Jupiter Heliopolitanus, there were as well

slightly-less-grand sanctuaries dedicated at the site to the Roman goddess Venus and to

the god Bacchus.[256] The site was not completed until the 4th century CE, during which

time religious focus at Heliopolis and within the Roman Empire as a whole had begun to

swing between traditional Hellenistic paganism and various forms of Christianity.

During the reign of Theodosius (379-395 CE), a basilica to St. Peter was erected in the

place of the main altar, and the site seems to have been little used during the 5th and 6th

centuries CE. Under Arab rule beginning in the 8th century CE the site again became

known as Baalbek, the local Semitic-language name for the site.[257]

---

[255] The statute to Jupiter Heliopolitanus that was located in the sanctuary of Jupiter is now gone, but we know of its description from the fifth-century writer Macrobius, who called the god "Zeus Heliopolitanus," and who described the statue as made of gold, beardless, holding in his right raised hand a whip, like a charioteer, and in his left a thunderbolt with ears of corn. The best-preserved representation of Jupiter Heliopolitanus is from Baalbek and now located in the Louvre Museum in Paris. *Iovi Optimo Maximo Heliopolitano*, 'Jupiter the Most High and the Great of Heliopolis' is depicted wearing a huge *calathos*, a symbol of divinity, on his head, and displays a winged sun disc on his chest, which is a possible reference to the Egyptian god of Heliopolis. His hairstyle, visage, and dress are Roman in character, and he is clad in seven reliefs representing the seven planets of Roman astrology: Helios the sun god, Selene the moon goddess, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, and Saturn. Ragette, *Baalbek*, 20-21 (see Fig. 6).

[256] Lina Murr Nehme, *Phoenician Baalbek: Visiting the Temples of Roman Epoch* (Beirut: Aleph et Taw, 2011), 7-9. Nehme notes that the Roman 'Temple of Bacchus' at Baalbek was superimposed upon that of the Greek goddess Atargatis. Atargatis was regionally known as the consort of Hadad and she probably represented a local fusion of the older Bronze-Age goddesses Asherah (/Athirat), Anat, and Astarte. Nehme notes as well that the Roman 'Temple of Venus', the third and smallest temple at the site, was likely imposed upon an older temple dedicated locally to the Greek figure Adonis. Later Latin inscriptions referred to the deity inside this third temple as 'Mercury', but Nehme and other archaeologists argue that it would not be logical for the Roman god Mercury to have been a part of a local triad comprising Baal and Atargatis at a time when the Greek figure "Adonis, on the contrary, had the most temples built in Phoenicia [i.e., Syria and coastal Canaan], after Baal and Atargatis." Soon after its completion, the 'Temple of Venus' became a Christian church dedicated to St. Barbara, which it remained through the 19th century (ibid., 71.).

[257] Ragette, *Baalbek*, 72.

Location and Situation of Baalbek: Compelling Geography

The site and environs of Baalbek, the preeminent shrine to the Syrian Storm-god located in the fertile Bekaʿa valley, is rife with both geographical and religious influences. Intentionally built at the watershed between two of the most important rivers in the region, the site and temples at Baalbek literally and figuratively sit both *above* the rivers and at their source, representing perhaps the dominance of the Storm-god over these rivers (see Fig. 7). To the south flows the Litani River, a name which should be familiar to us now from the Semitic *ltn* root ('Lotan', or as in the biblical 'Leviathan'); its name likely derives from the regional sea monster of the same name. To the north flows the Orontes River, also known as the Draco 'dragon' or Typhon River; this name of the river is associated with the Greek serpent monster Typhon, who was himself a Greek monster related, as we will see below, to the figure of Yamm.

In ancient conceptions, and because of their shape (as viewed from above, or from a distance) rivers were associated with snakes or serpents; perhaps in the sense of being more "just-so" explanations of the landscape from long ago.[258] There also seems to have been little distinction in West Semitic terminology between a "river" and a "sea." Frequently referred to by both words (consider the name of the antagonist Yamm-nahar in the Baal Cycle above), and owing to the fact that rivers always flow into a sea or larger body of water, it would perhaps be natural to conceptualize these terms in very similar ways.

---

[258] See above, 62n.

138

What we see in the example of Baalbek is a site whose geography either inspired or reinforced religious concepts relating to the compelling narratives of Baal-Hadad, particularly concerning Baal's dominion over Yamm-nahar (a foe long identified among many cultures with both the Orontes and Litani Rivers) and over the other waters by which he fertilized the earth. We see as well in Baalbek a site whose geography is literally and symbolically linked via the Orontes River to the location of Mt. Sapan on the Levantine coast. The home of the Storm-god, and a site unequalled in importance to the god, Mt. Sapan sits within five miles of the mouth of the Orontes River, which empties just to the north of Mt. Sapan, and which is visible from its slopes.

As we saw above regarding Mt. Sapan, several regional cultures have considered this influential mountain to be the home of a Storm-god, and one who defeated a sea monster to attain kingship. Furthermore, interactions between Greek-speaking peoples and the peoples and locations of the Levant have taken place for millennia, both before and after the late Bronze-Age destructions. As Greek political control of the region grew following the conquests of Alexander the Great in the 4th century BCE, naturally the Greek names both for this influential mountain, and for the river which was visible winding its way to the sea just to the north, became these features' prominent names.

Greek tales of a vicious battle between Zeus and Typhon, whereupon Zeus flung Typhon to the earth and the snake had burrowed into it to escape him, leaving behind the imprint of his writhing shape, became associated with the geography of Mt. Sapan and

the river, about which similar Semitic myths were already told.[259] During subsequent

(and long-lasting) Roman rule, both the name of the Storm-god and the name of the sea

monster were Romanized to Jupiter (the Roman equivalent of Zeus) and to Draco

('dragon' for Typhon), respectively.

Physically dominant over the landscape to such an extent that its height influences

the weather patterns coming eastward from the Mediterranean, the commanding position

of Mt. Sapan, manifestly the home of the Storm-god and often simply conflated with

Baal-Hadad, over all surrounding life and other physical features would have been

obvious. Mt. Sapan was linked through myth with the Orontes River, which is itself

physically linked to the site of Baalbek. Intentionally constructed by ancient people at a

site that sits above both of the rivers called Typhon and Litani – long regional names for

the serpent god who was defeated by Baal-Hadad – the site of Baalbek linked both the

---

[259] Hesiod, *Theogony*, 820f; cf. *Iliad* 2:78f. See also above, 61n. See also Fox, *Travelling Heroes*, 39-40, 288-89, 291, and 298. In Hesiod's *Theogony*, Zeus was said to have flung Typhon to the ground and to have trapped him below Mt. Etna. Note that Fox's argument is that while communities of travelling Greeks long "saw" the location of *a* battle between Zeus and Typhon at geographically appropriate sites around the Mediterranean, including the site of Mt. Sapan/Kasios, Homerian *textual* references to the Zeus-Typhon battle location referenced in the *Iliad* refer to a location other than Mt. Sapan; specifically, Fox identifies that textual location with the Bay of Naples, in Italy, with its thundering Mt. Vesuvius located next to the sea (ibid., 39-40, 317). Mt. Vesuvius is of course one of Europe's three largest active volcanoes, and is therefore geographically similar in many respects to Mt. Etna, Europe's largest active volcano, located in modern-day Sicily. In just the same way that Mt. Sapan functioned for Greek-speaking communities as a "Mt. Olympus of the Near East" (see 71n and 75n, above), the similar geography of Mt. Sapan and the Orontes River with that of Mt. Vesuvius and the Bay of Naples naturally invoked for Greek-speaking travelers the same myth involving the battle of Zeus and Typhon (ibid., 246, 266, and 298). When writer Gertrude Bell visited the same Bay of Antioch, near Mt. Sapan (which, in 1906, she referred to as the "Bay of Seleucia" and "Mt. Cassius"), she herself noted the exact same geographical similarities: "The Bay of Seleucia is not unlike the Bay of Naples and scarcely less beautiful… The Orontes River flows through sand and silt further to the south and the view is closed by a steep range of hills, culminating at the southern point in the lovely peak of Mount Cassius which takes the place of Vesuvius in the landscape" (Ibid., 113, quoting Gertrude Bell, "Notes on a Journey Through Cilicia and Lycaonia, Part II," (*Rev. Arch.*, 1906) 7-36.) See also the discussions above of Greek and Roman associations with Baal-Hadad of the gods Zeus and Jupiter, as well as the local associations of Zeus and Jupiter with Mt. Sapan/Kasios/Cassius pp. 34-37.

mythic and the geographical in its physical location, and underscored the dominance of

Baal-Hadad over both his foes and the region's waters (see Fig. 7).

Part Five: Conclusion – Baal-Hadad and the Common Pool

This chapter dedicated to geographically contextualizing the regional Storm-God

Baal Hadad has demonstrated that, as we will see regarding the other figures in this

study, Baal-Hadad was himself influenced by contemporary religious, political, and

geographical forces. As a figure, he was a product of the common pool of his time, and

we have seen evidence of the common pool process in texts, images, and sites dedicated

to Baal-Hadad. We have seen evidence regarding religious influences from physically

and temporally proximate groups, such as the Mesopotamian myths of Marduk and

Tiamaat, and of other influential and cosmogonic stories involving the narrative of a

Storm-god overcoming a sea monster and defeating the forces of chaos.

In these same tales, and in the contemporary iconographical representation of the

Baal Stele, we also have seen evidence of political influences of the day, such as that of

the Egyptian pharaonic motif of power and dominion employed in the stele. Itself a

monument to the political setting of Ugarit as a small state amid the larger, more

powerful empires of the Hittites and the Egyptians of the second millennium BCE, the

Baal Stele represents as much about the Western Semitic narrative of Baal Hadad as

depicted in the Baal Cycle as it does about regional politics of the Late Bronze Age.

Finally, we have seen in all three sources – textual, iconographical, and

geographical sites – evidence of the influence of physical geography. The geological and

meteorological setting of the Levant – and especially in the north, in the case of the

Storm-god Baal-Hadad – with its dramatic mountains, storms, rivers, and valleys, naturally influenced the religious concepts of people who lived there. From Baalbek, situated at the center of the sources of two important regional rivers, to Mt. Sapan, dominating both land and sea and rising dramatically from the water over a mile into the air, affecting regional weather patterns and representing the local epicenter of rainfall, these sites speak to the profound impact of the natural environment upon religious concepts. Whether these geographical influences were the impetus behind the narratives regarding Baal-Hadad, however, or merely used as corroborating evidence by people to confirm those narratives – or, perhaps, both, in an ongoing process – is impossible to determine.

Baal-Hadad is thus a figure who was formed in part by contemporary religious, political, and geographical influences, and who drew upon a common pool of compelling Near Eastern figures, narratives, and motifs. But Baal-Hadad was also a unique and separate figure, who, just as with the other figures in this study, contributed – through his texts, images, and geographical sites – back to the common pool a unique and separate figure who arguably can be said to be "original," and without equivalent. Therefore, following the comparative methodological model in this study, we now need to ask what the unique figure of Baal-Hadad reveals about the specific religious environment – Western Semitic Canaanite religion – from which he emerged, as well as what the figure of Baal-Hadad contributed back to a regional common pool of figures, narratives, and motifs.

Contribution of Baal-Hadad to the Levantine Common Pool

What we see reflected by Baal-Hadad is a Canaanite religious environment in which water from rainfall was essential to both agricultural and human life, where gods and goddesses ruled the natural environment and helped to explain its perplexingly beautiful and callously harsh phenomena, and where the sagas of human life and political power were intertwined with the favor or disfavor of the Storm-god – the most powerful deity in the region.

It is difficult to overestimate the influence of Baal-Hadad upon the religious traditions of regional groups thereafter. Baal-Hadad, as we have seen, did not disappear as a regional influence after the destruction of the LBA world and cities such as Ugarit, but continued on much as before amid the Canaanite agricultural cultures of the Iron Age and throughout the first millennium BCE, lasting even into the first centuries of the Common Era as his cult gradually was subsumed by the cults to Zeus in the Levant.[260]

---

[260] As we have seen, Baal-Hadad was worshipped at sites across the Levant throughout the first millennium, and these sites continued in syncretic manner during a periods of Greek and Roman rule into the first centuries of the Common Era (although whether Greek and Roman shrines to Zeus and to Jupiter, respectively, were strictly *syncretic* in function, or whether [and how long] they existed alongside local Semitic shrines to Baal-Hadad, is unknown). Either way, narratives and sites originally dedicated to Baal-Hadad continued on for over six hundred years after Alexander the Great under regional Greek and Roman rule. See also the example of the Nabatean shrine complex at Khirbet et-Tannur, which was in regular use from the second century BCE until being destroyed by earthquake in 363 CE, and was "dedicated to a storm god [variously identified as both Hadad and as a Nabatean deity named Qōs, and reflecting elements of the attributes of the supreme deities of the surrounding cultures, such as Zeus and the Egyptian god Serapis pp. 69, 196 and 225] and his female consort, identified with Atargatis, who ensured good crops and herds in an agricultural area through the provision of rain, water, fertility, and good fortune, helped by the heavenly bodies." Judith S. McKenzie, ed., *The Nabatean Temple at Khirbet et-Tannur, Jordan: Volume 1 – Architecture and Religion* (Boston, MA: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2013), 231. Khirbet et-Tannur is important for this study as a site because it demonstrates the continuation (in a cultural sense) of the figure Baal-Hadad and of the continuing importance among regional inhabitants (in this case, the southern Levant) of the figure of a Storm-god who was associated with rain, water, fertility, and good fortune. This site also demonstrates the continuation of Edomite and other older Iron-Age ritual burnt-offerings cult practice into the Common Era, long after they were presumed to have ended. Finally, the site of Khirbet et-Tannur is important to this study because the figures of the god and goddess consort at

Furthermore, compelling motifs associated with Baal-Hadad, such as the defeat of a serpent or snake; smiting or vanquishing a foe; stormy theophanic imagery involving rain and storms and riding the clouds; associations with Mt. Sapan and other mountains and high places; associations with fertility, fecundity, and the seasonal cycle; and regular disappearance and return; are also motifs that we see in the common pool of figures, narratives, and motifs upon which the other figures in our study draw. As we will see, Elijah, St. George, and al-Khiḍr each come to be associated with these motifs as well. The persistence of these motifs demonstrates their enduring impact (as well as the enduring needs of people that are reflected in those motifs) upon those living in the region over a very long period of time.

Moving to Elijah

As we have seen, one of the motifs intrinsic to Baal-Hadad – association with mountains such as Mt. Sapan and other high places – was the motivation behind hundreds of shrines to Baal-Hadad which were built on mountains and high places throughout the region. Indeed, one of Baal's common epithets during the first millennium BCE was "Baal Zubal," "Prince Baal," who was 'Lord of the High Places'. Hebrew Bible writers, who, as we will see, disdained the figure of Baal-Hadad and local shrines of the 'high places', condemned "Baal Zubal," or "Baal Zebul," in Hebrew, by making a pun on this

---

Khirbet et-Tannur themselves demonstrate geographical contextualization, being drawn in part from a contemporary pool of compelling religious figures (Hadad and Zeus among them), and being affected by the political and geographical circumstances of the southern Levant during the first centuries of the common era.

title with the cleverly rhyming insult "Baal Zebhubh," meaning "Lord of the Flies."[261]

As we will see in Chapter Four, when we examine the figure of Elijah, a primary mission

of the Prophet Elijah as depicted in the first-millennium-era Books of Kings of the

Hebrew Bible was to eradicate Baal worship – viewed as false when compared with that

of the *true* Lord, Yahweh – from the environs of Israelite religion and political life in the

southern Levant.

---

[261] Anglicized as "Baʿal Zebub" (from "Baal-Zebul," which is a play on both "Baal Zubal," "Prince Baal," and "Baal Zebhubh," "Baal of the Flies") by Hebrew Bible writers in 2 Kings 1:2, 1:6, and 1:16, this name became "Beelzebub" in the New Testament as a name for the devil (see MT 10:25, 12:24, 12:27; MK 3:22, and LK 11:15 and 11:19). "Beelzebub," or "Beealzebub," or the "Lord of the Flies," has persisted for approximately the past 2,500 years as a name for the devil in Western Christian cultural imagination.

CHAPTER FOUR: ELIJAH

Part One: Introduction

When [King] Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, 'Is it you, you [bringer of trouble in the form of drought upon] Israel?' He answered, 'I have not troubled Israel; but you have, and your father's house, because you have forsaken the commandments of YHWH [Yahweh] and followed the Baals. Now therefore have all Israel assemble for me at Mount Carmel, with the four hundred fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at [Queen] Jezebel's table'. So Ahab sent to all the Israelites, and assembled the prophets at Mount Carmel. Elijah then came near to all the people, and said, 'How long will you go hopping between two different opinions? If YHWH is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him'. The people did not answer him in a word. Then Elijah said to the people, 'I, even I only, am left a prophet of YHWH; but Baal's prophets number four hundred fifty. Let two bulls be given to us; let them choose one bull for themselves, cut it in pieces, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it. Then you call on the name of your god and I will call on the name of YHWH; the god who answers by fire is indeed God'. All the people answered, 'Well spoken!" … So [the Prophets of Baal] took the bull that was given them, prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning until noon, crying, 'O Baal, answer us!' But there was no voice, and no answer. They hopped about the altar they had made. At noon Elijah mocked them, saying 'Cry louder! Surely he is a god; either he is meditating, or he has wandered away, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened.' Then they cried aloud and, as was their custom, they cut themselves with swords and lances until the blood gushed out over them. As midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the [evening meal], but there was no voice, no answer, and no response. Then Elijah said to all of the people 'Come closer to me'; and all the people came closer to him. First he repaired the altar of YHWH that had been thrown down; Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of YHWH came, saying, 'Israel shall be your name'; with the stones he built an altar in the name of YHWH. Then he made a trench around the altar, large enough for two [measures] of seed. Next he put the wood in order, cut the bull in pieces, and laid it on the wood. He said, 'Fill four jars with water and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood'. Then he said, 'Do it a second time'; and they did it a second time. Again he said, 'Do it a third time';

and they did it a third time, so that water ran all around the altar, and filled the trench also with water. At the time of the offering of the [evening meal], the prophet Elijah came near and said, 'O YHWH, god of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are god in Israel, that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your bidding. Answer me, O YHWH, answer me, so that this people may know that you, O YHWH, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back'. Then the fire of YHWH fell and consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the dust, and even licked up the water that was in the trench. When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, 'YHWH indeed is God; YHWH indeed is God'. Elijah said to them, 'Seize the prophets of Baal; do not let one of them escape.' They the seized them, and Elijah brought them down to the Wadi Kishon, and killed them there. 1 Kings 18:17-40. Mordechai Cogan, *1 Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible Series, William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Friedman, eds., Vol. 10 (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 33-34.

The iconic contest on Mount Carmel between the prophet Elijah and the prophets of Baal is arguably among the more memorable narratives in the Hebrew Bible. Indeed, because the Hebrew Bible can in part be characterized by its account of struggle to expurgate the "heathen" deities of the ancient world, as well as by its account of struggle to promote the exclusive worship of the god YHWH (Yahweh), Elijah's contest on Mt. Carmel is emblematic of a greater project of the Hebrew Bible.[262] What the Elijah contest-narrative example further demonstrates is that the Elijah episode, and the Hebrew Bible, more generally – contrary to its internal ideology involving a narrative of the regional dominance of Yahweh – takes place in an environment of *multiple* gods, and one where Baal-Hadad was the most prominent.[263]

---

[262] Leah Bronner, *The Stories of Elijah and Elisha: As Polemics Against Baal Worship*, Pretoria Oriental Series, A. Van Selms, ed. Vol. VI (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968), 1.

[263] John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 265, David Clines and Philip Davies, eds., (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield University Press, 2000), 70.

As mentioned above in Chapter Three, Yahweh was in many respects presented in the Hebrew Bible as an alternative to the regionally dominant god Baal, in that Yahweh was regularly depicted within the text as imbued with certain compelling qualities and powers that were already associated in the Levant with Baal-Hadad, such as Baal's stormy theophanic language, and the motif of a conflict with a sea serpent or dragon, and Mt. Saphon/Zaphon.[264] Unlike Baal-Hadad, however, and unlike other ancient Near Eastern narratives involving other gods, for that matter, Yahweh was presented in the Hebrew Bible as a god who acts within and controls *human* history, albeit clearly from a later vantage point on the historical timeline.[265] That is, a major distinguishing feature of Yahweh as compared to other gods of the time is his presentation by Hebrew Bible authors as taking an interest in a particular people – a people who agree to hold him – Yahweh – above all other gods.

However, this people often fell short of its task, betraying Yahweh by repeatedly worshipping other gods. According to the narrative, that dereliction led to Yahweh's punishment of his people, and to their suffering and ultimately repentance, upon which time Yahweh saved them by commissioning a righteous leader from among them to lead them to triumph against their current adversaries. A basic sequence involving human history which runs throughout the Hebrew Bible is "covenant, promise, apostasy,

---

[264] Green, *The Storm God*, XX. See also above, Ch. 3, p. XX. See also Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 91-106.

[265] This evaluation is representative of most historical accounts within the Hebrew Bible, which are largely theological interpretations of events developed centuries after the events described. See Israel Finklestein and Neil Asher Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of its Sacred Texts*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 120.

repentance, and redemption," and thus although the historical narratives in the Hebrew Bible are presented as accounts of actual history, in reality the main thrust of the message is largely a didactic lesson in theology: having gods other than Yahweh leads to destruction.[266]

Within the Hebrew Bible narrative, Yahweh was assisted in his aims by his prophets, such as Elijah, whose general mission was to warn of impending destruction to those people who do not worship Yahweh in the correct manner, as well as to portend good fortune to those who *do* properly worship Yahweh in the proper manner and place. Because of his zealous mission to eradicate regional Baal worship, Elijah was among the most striking prophets in the Hebrew Bible. As we will see, Elijah was intentionally portrayed by authors as similar to the figure Moses, who was arguably the original and most important prophet in the Hebrew Bible who advocated for the correct and exclusive worship of Yahweh. As we will further see in this chapter, however, as a result of his Hebrew Bible narratives, the figure of Elijah also became associatively linked with important regional motifs of Baal-Hadad, such as control of the rain, and disappearance into the stormy sky via a celestial chariot.

Within the Hebrew Bible, *Yahweh* was of course the figure who was presented by authors as an actual divine alternative to Baal-Hadad; Elijah's powers were possible only through the power and action of the god Yahweh. However, as we will see, Elijah's fight against Baal worship was so intimate that, in demonstrating the futility of Baal worship,

---

[266] Ibid., 121-22. This message is moreover emblematic of the larger aim of the final forms of the books which comprise the Deuteronomistic History.

Elijah himself was narratively imbued with compelling motifs and characteristics – such as the ability to control the weather in the forms of rain and drought – that already had been associated with Baal-Hadad within wider Levantine culture.

Elijah: Geographical Contextualization

In order to contextualize Elijah, this chapter will begin with an overview of both the Hebrew Bible and specifically the Book of Kings in which the Elijah Cycle appears (as does the Cycle of narratives of Elijah's assistant, Elisha). The major work of the chapter begins next in an analysis of the Elijah narratives in the Book of Kings.[267] Because the Elijah narratives became the canonical source-narratives within Judaism involving the prophet Elijah, they can thus be considered, from the perspective of later history, the format in which the prophet Elijah "emerged." We will investigate the Elijah narratives within the Hebrew Bible text for evidence of contemporaneous religious, political, and geographical influences. This investigation allows us to contextualize the setting of Elijah's emergence in order to see what it takes from the common pool, what it reflects about Elijah's religious tradition, and what it contributes back to the common pool. Following the model of this project, we will then investigate common images of Elijah. Interestingly, this leads us into a discussion of the later Christian Saint Elias, with whom there are of course many images associated, and which have been derived from the narratives of the Hebrew Bible account, as well.

---

[267] The English translation of these books that will be used herein is based on the Masoretic Text (MT), and primarily made by Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor See Cogan, *1 Kings*. See also Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings: A New Translation with Translation and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible Series, William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Friedman, eds., Vol. 10 (New York: Doubleday, 1988).

We will investigate as well an important geographical site associated with Elijah: Mount Carmel, on the coast of the southern Levant in modern-day Israel, the purported location of Elijah's contest with the prophets of Baal, and where cult sites dedicated not only to Elijah, but also Baal-Hadad, long existed. We will use the information derived from the geographical-contextualization analysis of Elijah texts, images (and lack thereof), and sites to investigate both what that data reflects about the religious tradition of Judaism, and what the figure Elijah contributed back to a regional common pool of compelling figures, narratives, and motifs.

Finally, this chapter will end with an overview of Rabbinic- and Christian-era Elijah, as Elijah remained an enormously popular figure long into the first and second millennia in the Near East, and even up to the present day. This chapter will demonstrate that the figure of Elijah emerged in an environment that was dominated by Baal worship, and that, as a figure representing a religious tradition that came to understand itself in part in contradistinction to other ancient Near Eastern religious traditions, Elijah represented a challenge to Baal from a competing religious perspective. Furthermore, this chapter will underscore the ways in which Baal and other Canaanite deities continued, well into the early centuries of the Common Era, to be a part of religious life for regional inhabitants throughout the Greek and Roman periods, existing alongside Jewish – and later Christian – notions of the popular figure Elijah, as well.

Part Two: The Hebrew Bible Tradition in Context

The Hebrew Bible is a collection of legend, law, poetry, prophecy, philosophy, and history, mostly composed in Hebrew and Aramaic, and consisting of textual and oral

151

traditions that originated throughout the Levant and ancient Near East at various times during the first millennium CE, all stitched together as the result of long processes of collection, writing, editing, copying, and revising. The Hebrew Bible is the central scripture of the religious tradition known as Judaism, and as such it also forms the first part of the Christian canon. The Hebrew Bible or التورة *al-taurat* has likewise been adopted as the earliest scripture of the Qur'ān's scriptural tradition, and thus the Hebrew Bible has exercised an enormous textual influence upon the religious traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.[268]

<center>The Narrative of the Hebrew Bible</center>

At the heart of the Hebrew Bible is a tale that describes the history of the people called Israel, and their continuing relationship with God (a god who was earliest named 'El' in the text). The narrative begins with human creation and continues through the fate of a single family – that of Abraham, whom God chose as progenitor of the people who would come to follow God's commands. Abraham's descendants, the patriarchs, lived in the land of Canaan where Abraham had been called from Ur, but eventually left there to seek shelter in Egypt during a time of great famine. The people of Israel became enslaved in Egypt, however, and the god of Israel then selected Moses as an intermediary

---

[268] Finkelstein and Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed*, 6. Furthermore, the Hebrew and Christian Bibles are directly and indirectly most frequently referenced within the Qur'ān as a conjoined scriptural tradition under the term '*al-kitab*', 'the book' or 'the scripture', which is understood, where not abrogated by the Qur'ān, as forming the scriptural foundation of a tradition which also includes the Qur'ān (the Qur'ān is considered, of course, within the text, to be the *complete* ''book' of truth', in contradistinction to the Hebrew and Christian Bibles). See Q. 3:3-4. While Qur'ānic reference to the Hebrew or Christian bibles is made most frequently by reference to the term '*al-kitab*', on a couple of occasions, the Hebrew Bible and Christian Bible are mentioned directly by the respective titles '*al-taurat*' (the Torah) and '*al-injil*' (the Gospel(s)).

<center>152</center>

to liberate the people from Egypt, and in order to reveal thereby the god of Israel's awesome power against the pharaoh of Egypt, who was at that time the most powerful human ruler on earth. In a memorable sequence of events, the God of Israel led his people out of Egypt and into the wilderness of Sinai, where God revealed his true identity to his followers as YHWH, Yahweh. At Sinai, and through Moses, Yahweh then gave the people a code of law with which properly to guide their lives and community, the foundation of which was the command to worship no god other than Yahweh.

The Hebrew Bible then narrated the next several centuries of the history of Abraham's descendants, through the narratives of the conquest of Canaan and the establishment of a kingdom under King David and of a central temple dedicated to Yahweh at Jerusalem under David's son, Solomon. Soon after the death of Solomon, however, Hebrew Bible recounted that the ten northern tribes seceded from the united monarchy and forced the creation of two rival kingdoms: Israel, in the north, and Judah, in the south.

For the next two hundred years, the rulers and people of Israel – of Yahweh – lived in two separate kingdoms and repeatedly lapsed into idolatry and the lure of foreign gods. Eventually, Yahweh sent outside invaders, such as the Arameans of Syria, to punish the idolatrous and unfaithful people of the northern kingdom of Israel (presented by later Hebrew Bible authors as irretrievably sinful); ultimately, using the mighty Assyrian Empire, Yahweh destroyed the northern kingdom and exiled its inhabitants, and about one century later, Yahweh sent the Babylonian Empire to destroy and exile the southern kingdom of Judah.

While in exile, the tale of the Hebrew Bible narrative recounted both the suffering and repentance of the people, and Yahweh's eventual salvation of his people under the liberating auspices of the Persian Empire. Henceforth, some of the people of Yahweh's community returned from exile to Jerusalem and dedicated themselves to the reconstruction of the Temple. This Jerusalem-based, post-exile community became zealously dedicated to the worship of Yahweh alone, and became committed to the precise fulfillment of the regulations as outlined in the sacred texts.[269]

The Structure of the Hebrew Bible in Jewish Tradition

The Hebrew Bible itself consists of thirty-nine books traditionally divided into three main parts: the Torah, the Prophets (neviim), and the Writings (khetuvim), and is also known by the acronym *Tanakh*, which describes its parts. The Torah, alternatively known as the first five books of Moses, or the Pentateuch, in Greek, is comprised of the books Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Generally speaking, these books narrate the history of the people of Israel from the creation of the world through Moses' farewell to the Israelite community at Sinai.

The division known as the Prophets is divided into two main groups of scriptures: the Former Prophets, Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings, which narrate the story of the people of Israel from their conquest of Canaan, through their defeat and exile by the Assyrian and Babylonian empires. The Latter Prophets includes the oracles,

---

[269] This overview of the central narrative of the Hebrew Bible was adapted from Finkelstein and Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed*, 8-10.

social teachings and messianic expectations of inspired peoples living from the mid-eighth century BCE through the end of the fifth century BCE.

The division known as the Writings is a collection of homilies, poems, prayers, proverbs, and psalms that represent the most powerful emotional expressions of the Israelite community. These writings are the products of an ongoing process of composition that lasted hundreds of years, with a few originating from the late monarchic period and destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE, and most coming from the Persian and Hellenistic periods, from the fifth to the second centuries BCE.[270]

The main historical works of the Hebrew Bible are located in the Torah or 'Pentateuch', and in the Former Prophets, which narrate the history of the people from origin through the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple. Biblical scholars generally agree that the first four books of the Pentateuch are not a seamless composition but a mosaic of different sources – usually identified as J (promoting the god Yahweh and concerned with the territory around Judah), E (promoting the god El – pl. Elohim – and concerned with the territory and tribes of the north), and P (meaning 'Priestly' and referring to those passages which deal with ritual matters). Each of these sources was written under different historical circumstances and to promote different viewpoints. However, the final book, Deuteronomy, is a different case altogether. Its terminology is distinctive and unique from the J, E, and P sources, and "contains an uncompromising condemnation of worship of other gods, a new view of God as completely transcendent, and the absolute

---

[270] This overview of the structure of the Hebrew Bible has been adapted from Finkelstein and Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed*, 5-7.

prohibition of the sacrificial worship of the god of Israel in any place but the Temple in Jerusalem."[271]

The impact of the book of Deuteronomy upon the thrust of the Hebrew Bible was significant. Bible scholars since the mid-twentieth century CE have recognized that the language, theological message, and connected narrative of the books subsequent to Deuteronomy – Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings – indicate that the books were clearly linked, and thus these seven books have come to be known as the Deuteronomistic History (DH). The DH narrates the history of the people of Israel from the conquest through exile, and the theological thrust of this history expresses the ideology of a religious movement that originated – according to the text itself – in Judah in the seventh century BCE, and particularly during the reign of reformist King Josiah.[272] Because the DH narrates the bulk of the historical-ideological core of the Hebrew Bible, it can be said therefore also to express the main didactic themes of the Hebrew Bible: among the most prominent of the DH is that having gods other than Yahweh leads to destruction. Accordingly, Yahweh must be worshipped exclusively, and in the proper manner.[273] A great amount of evidence within the text, therefore, belies claims made therein about the dominance of Yahweh over 'foreign' gods: indeed, there would not be a

---

[271] Finkelstein and Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed*, 13.

[272] Ibid., *The Bible Unearthed*, 13-14. See also the account of Josiah's reforms in 2 Kings 22:1 – 23:30.

[273] See also Bronner, *The Stories of Elijah and Elisha*, 1. Lev 26: 1-46 offers a good example of this Hebrew Bible perspective.

need in the first place for the command to worship Yahweh exclusively were Yahweh's

contemporary dominance already the case.

<div align="center">Canaanite Deities in the Hebrew Bible</div>

Several Canaanite deities appear in the Hebrew Bible; some, as we will see, more

prominently than others.[274] The gods El; Athirat/Asherah; Baal-Hadad; Dagon; Astarte;

Anat; astral deities, such as the sun, moon, and Venus; and deities of the underworld,

Mot, Resheph, Molech, and the Rephaim – gods and goddesses known to us from the

Ugaritic texts – form a narrative backdrop against which Israelite religion developed.

El

As opposed to Yahweh, referred to in the Hebrew Bible as a god from the south

(Deut 33:2), El in the Hebrew Bible was frequently associated with people and places in

the north.[275] The god named El in the Hebrew Bible was referred to by several of the

titles known already for the older Canaanite El from the Ugaritic texts, such as El-

Shaddai ('god of the field'), El-Olam ('god of the world'), El-Bethel ('god of the house

of El'), and El-Elyon ('god most high').[276] 'El', in Hebrew, as in Ugaritic – also a

northwest Semitic language – eventually simply became the grammatical basis of the

---

[274] Many other gods appear in the text as well, such as the Mesopotamian god Tammuz (Ezek 8:14), but unfortunately there is not space here to examine references to all contemporary divinities in the text. For an interesting discussion involving the translation of Levantine Tammuz worship into Greek culture in the form of the figure Adonis (so named, according to this argument, because Greek-speakers heard and misunderstood the cry of "Adonai!" 'my lord!' as the *name* for the seasonally disappearing god Tammuz, thus calling him in Greek 'Adonis'), see Fox, *Travelling Heroes*, 227-242.

[275] Deut 33:2; see also Chapter Three, 12-13.

[276] Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 16.

word within that language for 'god'. As we saw in Chapter Three, Canaanite El sat at the head of the Ugaritic pantheon. Eventually, in a long and complicated historical process attested in the Hebrew Bible text, El and Yahweh – originally separate deities, both powerful and important among Israelite communities – became equated.[277] As the supreme deity of the Hebrew Bible, Yahweh became likewise represented in the text as sharing several traits with the venerable El; among them, Yahweh as an aged god (Job 36:26), Yahweh as wise (Gen 3:5), Yahweh as creator (Ps 102:25), and Yahweh as seated at the head of a heavenly court or pantheon (Ps 89:6-7).

Athirat/Asherah

Athirat of the Ugaritic texts, whom we saw in Chapter Three as the wife or consort of the supreme god, El, also appears in the Hebrew Bible, where her name is usually transliterated 'Asherah'. There are 41 references to Asherah in the text, and a remarkable incidence of Asherah's cult referenced throughout the DH. Scholarly consensus is that Asherah, like her Canaanite counterpart, probably functioned among early Israelite communities as a consort of the supreme god Yahweh, although this role is not retained in the text.[278] Asherah was most frequently referenced by name as an abominated foreign god, or by reference to 'Asherah poles' wooden objects linked to her cult. Asherah was the most frequently referenced foreign god other than Baal, with whom she was frequently paired in the text. The common pairing of Asherah with Baal in

---

[277] Ibid., *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 17. For traits of El appropriated by Yahweh, see ibid. 17-24.

[278] Ibid., 59-60.

the DH (such as in the Elijah contest on Mt. Carmel) may have been a way of discrediting

the Asherah cults, for perhaps no god, from the perspective of the Hebrew Bible authors,

was as reviled as was the god Baal.

Baal

> When reading the Old Testament it becomes clear that it was the Baal cult which provided the greatest and most enduring threat to the development of exclusive Yahweh worship within ancient Israel. The fact that the Israelites were settled among the Canaanites, for whom the worship of Baal was so important, and that Palestine is a land utterly dependent for its fertility upon the rain, which was held to be Baal's special realm of influence, accounts for the tempting nature of this cult as well as the strength of Old Testament polemic against it.[279]
> Baal-Hadad, as we saw in Chapter Three, was the primary deity of the Levant

during the second and first millennia BCE. Baal worship was so ubiquitous that peoples

in particular localities associated manifestations of Baal with individual cities and

mountains areas, such as Baal of Tyre, Baal of Aleppo, Baal of Ugarit, Baal Saphon, etc.

Baal also became known regionally by particular titles, such as Baal-Shamem (Baal of

the Heavens), in addition to Baal-Hadad (Baal of Thunder/the Storm). All of these titles

for Baal, or, as in case of the Hebrew Bible narrative, the reference to 'Baals' in the

plural, should be thought of as referring back to the dominant deity in the region, the

Canaanite god of Storms and therefore of plant, animal, and human fertility and

fecundity), Baal-Hadad.[280]

---

[279] Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 70. For an archaeological understanding of Israelite history as emerging naturally from within Canaanite culture, over and against textual claims of conquest and settlement, see also Finklestein and Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed*, 97-122.

[280] Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 68.

The name Baal is found fifty-eight times in the Hebrew Bible, and a reference to 'Baals' nineteen times. All refer to the god Hadad, and most references were associated with particular place-name manifestations of the deity, such as Baal-Gad, Baal-Hamon, Baal-Hazor, Baal-Hermon, Baal-Peor, Baal-Tamar, Baal-Zephon (a cult location in Egypt and which was modeled on Saphon, the mountain location in Syria), among very many others. The text even mentions a 'Baal-Berith' 'Baal of the Covenant', who was a Canaanite god with a temple at Shechem mentioned Judg 9:4, and Judg 8:33.[281]

Many human names in the Hebrew Bible also were associated with the epithet Baal, such as Jerub-Baal, Ethbaal, and even names which conflate Yahweh and Baal, including Bealiah (2 Chron 12:6, one of David's warriors), and Yehobaal, a name found on a 7th-century seal. The names Bealiah and Yehobaal seem to mean respectively 'Baal is Yahweh' and 'Yahweh is Baal'; indeed, that Yahweh was at some point in time equated by people with Baal is clearly referenced by the entire context of Hosea 2.[282]

Baal worship in the Levant throughout first millennium BCE was tenacious. Such is the power of the Biblical narrative, however, that we have come to understand the people called Israel as a people associated exclusively with the worship of the god Yahweh, and specifically with the doctrine of monotheism. Indeed, common wisdom suggests that the ancient Israelites were dedicated entirely to Yahweh as early as the time of the Exodus narrative, which, according to internal textual dating, took place in around

---

[281] Ibid., *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 68-69.

[282] Ibid., *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 72. The seal reference comes from N. Avigad, 'Hebrew Seals and Sealings and their Significance for Biblical Research', in J.A. Emerton (ed.), *Congress Volume*, Jerusalem 1986 (VTSup, 40; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988), 7-16 (8-9).

1250 BCE. To the contrary, however, as the Hebrew Bible text itself demonstrates, Baal worship remained common – indeed, dominant – throughout the First-Temple period and into the Second-Temple period, and the concept of monolatry (the worship of only one god in an environment where other gods are recognized as well) – let alone monotheism (the doctrine that there is only one god) – took a very long time to develop.

Moreover, Baal worship – to say nothing of the worship of other deities – remained *commonplace* during the first millennium, even within the Jerusalem Temple itself. According to the DH, the temple in Jerusalem purportedly had been dedicated solely to Yahweh by King Solomon, and then again re-dedicated to Yahweh by the seventh-century Judahite king, Hezekiah. To the contrary, however, we see in the Hebrew Bible account of the puritanical religious reform movement of Judahite king Josiah, ca. 639-609 BCE, vivid evidence of the extent of Baal worship within Jerusalem and its Temple and throughout the surrounding countryside.

Josiah was praised in the Hebrew Bible even more highly than had been King David before him, in having been described, "He did what was right in the sight of [Yahweh] and walked in all the way of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right or to the left" (2 Kings 22:1-2; Cf. 2 Kings 23:25). After having been informed that the high priest of the Jerusalem Temple, Hilkiah, had uncovered a 'lost' document within the Temple, called the Book of the Law (widely considered by scholars to be a precursor document to the reformist book Deuteronomy), Josiah and his subjects embarked upon

161

the making of a public covenant before Yahweh to worship Yahweh alone and to keep

the commandments of Yahweh as written in the Book of the Law (2 Kings 22:3-23:3).[283]

As a concomitant part of the rededication of the Jerusalem Temple to Yahweh,

Josiah commanded Hilkiah and all of the priests to bring *out* of the Temple "all the

vessels made for Baal, for Asherah, and for all the host of heaven [i.e., other gods],"

burning them outside of Jerusalem (2 Kings 23:4). He deposed the idolatrous priests of

the cities of Judah who previously had been ordered by Judahite kings to "make offerings

to Baal, to the sun, the moon, the constellations, and all the host of the heavens [i.e., other

gods]. He brought out the image of Asherah from the house of the LORD [that is, the

Temple of Yahweh at Jerusalem]," then burned it outside of Jerusalem, beat it to dust,

and threw the dust upon the graves of the 'common people' (2 Kings 23:5). Indeed, the

list of 'idolatrous' practices King Josiah outlawed during his day, such as mediums,

wizards, *teraphim* [household gods], idols, fertility cults, multiple gods, and all of the

altars to Baal on the "high places" which had been established throughout the land, is

quite extensive (2 kings 23:6-25).

But even Josiah's extensive reforms were not enough. Immediately upon the

death of Josiah, Josiah's successor was recorded by the biblical text as having "done what

was evil in the sight of YHWH, just as all his ancestors had done," (2 Kings 23:37).

---

[283] Covenant or oath ceremonies to specific *rulers* were not uncommon in the 7th-century BCE ANE, but Josiah's covenant ceremony to a specific god, Yahweh (and the Yahweh-covenant ceremonies referenced in the Hebrew Bible as attributable to Kings Solomon and Hezekiah), may have been unique in the ANE. See Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings: A New Translation with Translation and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible Series, William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Friedman, eds., Vol. 10 (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 296-7.

Indeed, the four successive kings following Josiah were recorded as having returned to the previous idolatrous ways, indicating that even from the perspective of the Hebrew Bible, Baal worship (and the worship of gods other than Yahweh) continued to dominate the region as late as the sixth century BCE.

Moreover, Baal worship continued in the region for longer even than that. It remained so popular, in fact, that Selucid ruler Antiochus Ephiphanes IV incited the riots called today "Maccabean" when in 168 BCE he rededicated the Jerusalem Temple to Zeus Olympios, who, as we have seen, was a regional Hellenistic form of Baal.[284]

Astarte and Anat

Astarte, a consort of Baal-Hadad in the Ugaritic texts, was attested in the Hebrew Bible under the scribal distortion "Ashtoreth" or "Ashtaroth," meaning 'abomination' or 'shame' (1 Kings 11:5). Astarte became a popular regional goddess during the first millennium BCE throughout the Mediterranean, at cult locations such as Tyre, Sidon, Carthage, Cyprus, Italy, Malta, Spain, and Greece. Anat, a fellow goddess-consort of Baal familiar to us from the Baal Cycle, was also mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, although indirectly, through place-name associations, such as Beth Anot (Josh 15:59) and Beth Anat, among others. Throughout the wider culture of the first millennium BCE, Astarte figured more prominently within the region as the wife or consort of Baal than did Anat. However, a Syrian goddess called Atargatis – herself a conflation of Canaanite Astarte and Anat – became popular in Syria during the Hellenistic and Roman periods,

---

[284] Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 71. The reference was to Baal-Shamem, Baal of the Heavens. See also Chapter Three above for more on Greek and Roman cults to Baal-Zeus.

and Atargatis was the goddess known most prominently as Hadad's consort into the Common Era.[285]

The Fates of Canaanite Deities in the Hebrew Bible and within Regional History

As we have seen in the Hebrew Bible text, the prevalence of worship of other deities among ancient Israelite and Judahite communities was quite frequent during pre-exilic history. Even the admonitions made in Ezra and Nehemiah of the *post-exile* Jewish communities to "keep apart" – with varying levels of success – from the local populations, would seem to indicate that the local religious environment continued on much as it had previously.[286]

Indeed, regional peoples continued to worship the Canaanite deities – oftentimes in Hellenistic form – throughout the final centuries of the first millennium BCE and into the early centuries of the Common Era. Even within the texts of Jewish – and later Christian – communities, Canaanite deities left a kind of "afterglow"; particularly, as we will see in Jewish and Christian Common-Era texts involving the figure of Baal, in the realm of the demonic or apocalyptic.

In conclusion, what this analysis of the Hebrew Bible text and the Canaanite gods and goddesses of the Levant has highlighted for us are the twin distinctive features of the Hebrew Bible: an argument for monolatry in an environment of multiple gods, and for

---

[285] Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 128-131. Note also that Atargatis was the Syrian goddess mostly likely worshipped at the so-called 'Temple of Bacchus' at Baalbek, alongside her consort Baal-Hadad (see above, Chapter Three).

[286] Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 232.

monolatry involving the god of the people of Israel – Yahweh – who acts in human history.[287] Both of these features are prominently displayed in the Books of Kings, where our Elijah narratives are located.

Part Three: Elijah Text: The Elijah (and Elisha) Cycles in the Book of Kings

Introduction: The Book of Kings

The Books of Kings, as the setting for the Elijah Cycle, can be understood as a narrative ideological history of Israel during its monarchical period, from the reign of King David through the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 586 BCE and the beginning of the Babylonian exile. The text tells us that because of King David's dedication to Yahweh, he was able to establish a "united" kingdom, but that David's territory quickly became separated into competing northern and southern kingdoms, in part through the apostasy of other gods as introduced by his son Solomon's marriages to foreign wives (1 Kings 11-13). Over the next few centuries, and due to the repeatedly idolatrous behavior of Israelites and Judahites, Yahweh used the Assyrian and Babylonian empires to destroy both kingdoms (2 Kings 17-25).

Like the other books of the Hebrew Bible, the Books of Kings are the result of long processes of collecting, editing, writing, and revising both historical documents and oral traditions like the Elijah and Elisha cycles. Clear moments in composition and editing of the Books of Kings are identifiable as early as the reigns of Hezekiah (727-698

---

[287] Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 233.

BCE) and Josiah (639-609 BCE), and final revisions were made to these books after the exile of 586 BCE.[288]

The Books of Kings can be thought of as literature that is narrative, historiographical, and didactic. The plot of Kings can be summarized as the attempt that Israel makes (or, more often, fails to make) under its monarchy to live as the people of God [i.e., Yahweh] in Canaan, the 'promised' land, and how that god deals with their successes and failures. The Books of Kings are also books of historiographical literature, in that they tell a political history. However, that political history is told in order to reveal thereby the religious failure of the peoples of the northern and southern kingdoms: as a result of their apostasy to Yahweh, these people lost their national autonomy and became the lowly exiles of brutal empires.

Finally, the Books of Kings are didactic literature, in that they seek to teach several lessons, all of which are related to the single idea that the worship of gods other than Yahweh leads to destruction. First, *Yahweh* is God (and the other gods are not); as such, Yahweh controls both nature, and history. Second, Yahweh demands exclusive worship; as such, both the content of his worship and place of his worship are of essential importance. Third, because Yahweh defines true faith, he also judges and punishes wrongdoers. However, because Yahweh is merciful to those who worship him, he has as yet left open to the wretched exiles a path of redemption through the descendants of the

---

[288] This introduction is drawn from the introduction to Kings in Michael D. Coogan, ed. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha*. 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 487-489.

house of David in the southern Kingdom of Judah, whom Yahweh had favored, provided, of course, that those descendants emulate David's example and worship Yahweh alone.

<div align="center">The Elijah and Elisha Cycles</div>

Among the more memorable prophets in the Hebrew Bible who embodies the message that the worship of Gods other than Yahweh leads to destruction is the striking figure of Elijah. Renowned for his illustrious exploits, the major unifying theme that ties together Elijah's individual episodes in the Books of Kings is Elijah's defiant opposition to Baal worship.[289]

The Elijah and Elisha cycles, located at 1 Kings 17-19, 21, and 2 Kings 1-8, most probably originate in oral stories that were later incorporated into the written Books of Kings. Although the stories as they appear now are the products of a long period of development, many of the episodes have retained both a short anecdotal form and specific morphological and lexical features, particularly in quoted speech, that suggest a Northern dialect of ancient Hebrew, and thus bear markings of original orality.[290] Incorporated into the Books of Kings by Biblical authors and set in the 9th century BCE during the reigns of the infamous and idolatrous King Ahab and Queen Jezebel of the Omri dynasty in the northern kingdom of Israel, Elijah's mission – and that of his successor, Elisha – was the defiant opposition of Baal worship, and a campaign for the exclusive worship of Yahweh.

---

[289] Cogan, *1 Kings*, 430.

[290] Ibid., *1 Kings*, 92.

In 1 Kings 17 we first encounter Elijah in the Hebrew Bible text. He is
introduced as Elijah the Tishbite, a resident of Gilead,[291] and by his very name, אליהו
'eli-yahu' ('my god is Yahweh'), we know that he is operating in a multi-god
environment. Furthermore, we see in the figure of Elijah an example of that multi-god
environment in practice, as Elijah's name effectively blends both 'El' and 'Yahweh'.
Theophoric names were not uncommon for figures in the Hebrew Bible; prior to the
accounts of the monarchical period, theophoric names including the name 'El' were
frequent, whereas explicitly Yahwistic names from that time seem to have been rare.[292]
In the Book of Kings, personal names involving the god Yahweh are common;
particularly for the kings of the southern Kingdom of Judah.

As we saw above, personal names involving the name Baal were also prevalent in
the world recounted by the Books of Kings, and so these theophoric names also reflect a
cultural pattern of the day: an environment characterized by the worship of multiple
deities. Therefore, the theophoric names recorded in the Hebrew Bible text can be said
conceptually to function as relational antonyms: they represent concepts that make sense
primarily in the presence of opposing ideas; in this instance, they are names that make
sense in the presence of opposing gods. Elijah's very name, 'my god is YHWH' signals

---

[291] We are told that Elijah is a *tšbi*, although it is unclear what location is referenced by that term, and an outsider who is residing in Gilead, located east of the Jordan River, in modern-day Jordan. No place-name has yet been identified with *tšb*.

[292] Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 16-17.

a strong argument about the supremacy of Yahweh in opposition other contemporary gods, and among whom Baal was the region's most prominent.

Baal worship did not dominate the environment of Kings without reason. As we saw above in Chapters Two and Three, the worship of Baal was so important to the inhabitants of the region because it is a land – particularly in the dry southern Levant and the environs described in the Hebrew Bible – which is utterly dependent for its fertility upon the rain. Without sufficient rain, crops perished in drought and people starved and died. Because rain, fertility, and fecundity were believed to be within Baal's particular realm of influence, Baal was the primary god for most people. Yahweh, as a competing god, would have been viable as an alternative to Baal to regional peoples to the extent to which Yahweh came to resemble those most compelling aspects of Baal-Hadad, such as his control of nature, and particularly of rain.

Throughout the Hebrew Bible, Yahweh was depicted as revealing himself at particular times in a theophany of storm and extreme meteorological manifestations. Moreover, a major a theme running throughout the Books of Kings was that only Yahweh, the *true* god of nature, could perform the powers attributed to Baal-Hadad. In the Books of Kings, and through the narrative of the prophet Elijah, Yahweh was revealed as the god who controlled specific occurrences of both drought and rain, and did so not only to punish the idolatrous Israelites and Judahites, but also to demonstrate that worshipping Yahweh the to the exclusion of all other gods resulted in plenty and abundance.[293]

---

[293] Cf. Lev 26.

However, as we will see below, Elijah himself became an enormously compelling

figure within the subsequent religious traditions of the Hebrew Bible, and within wider

regional culture, both because of his iconic role as a defender of *true* faith – epitomized

by his quintessential defeat of the prophets of Baal – and because Elijah became linked,

through his narratives, to some of the compelling powers associated with Baal-Hadad,

such as the ability to control rain and drought, and his vivid translation into heaven via a

celestial storm and chariot (albeit all only made possible through the power of Yahweh).

First, we briefly review the six Elijah narratives in the Hebrew Bible, and then examine

them for the religious, political, and geographical themes that emerge, in order to see

Elijah's contemporary common pool, what Elijah as a figure reflects about his tradition,

and what the figure of Elijah contributed back to the common pool.

(1) Elijah and the Great Drought (1 Kings 17:1-24)

> Elijah's struggle with the Omride house of the northern kingdom of Israel –
> particularly with the derided biblical figures of King Ahab and his Queen, Jezebel
> –primarily concerns Elijah's fight to rid the northern royal house of its idolatries.
> The account opens abruptly, with the prophet of Yahweh, Elijah, introduced as
> having announced to King Ahab that, "by the life of Yahweh, God of Israel,
> whom I serve, there will be no dew or rain these years, except by my word"
> (17:1). After causing (through Yahweh) a drought throughout the land – and a
> drought which was laid partly in punishment for the idolatry of Ahab's house –
> Yahweh informed Elijah that he needed to leave and hide from the powerful Ahab
> in the Wadi Cherith, east of the Jordan River. Despite the existence of drought
> throughout the land and having sought refuge in a desert, Yahweh miraculously
> fed Elijah through ravens both bread and meat in both the morning and evening
> (extravagant plenty for drought conditions). After a while, the wadi dried up
> because of the drought, and Yahweh then told Elijah to go to Zarephath of Sidon
> (outside of the territory of Israel and into Canaanite territory), and to stay with
> and be fed by a widow living there. Elijah met the widow (who, as a widow,
> would have been within the poorest and lowest social class of the time) gathering
> sticks near the entrance of the town, and called to her to bring him water and
> bread. The widow responded that she had only a small amount of oil and flour

170

remaining, and that she was in fact engaged in gathering firewood to bake one last bit of bread for herself and her son before they starved to death. Elijah proclaimed that if she would feed themselves and him as he asked, Yahweh would see to it that her stores of oil and flour not give out until such time as Yahweh again returned rain to the land. The widow did as Elijah bid her and baked him bread and gave him water, and her oil and flour stores did not fail. Sometime afterward, the widow's son "had no breath left in him" (17:17) because he had apparently died of starvation brought on by the drought. The widow railed against Elijah for having been part of the cause of her son's death, and Elijah responded for her to give him her son. Elijah took the boy upstairs to the room in which Elijah had been staying, performed a miraculous posture over the child, and prayed to Yahweh to "let the child's life return to its body" (17:21). Yahweh heard Elijah's call, and the child's life returned to his body. Elijah then returned the boy to his mother, and the widow proclaimed that Elijah was indeed a "man of God, and the word of YHWH in your mouth is true" (17:23).

(2) Contest on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:1-46)

The contest on Mount Carmel is arguably the most iconic of Elijah's narratives. Set three years into the drought which Elijah had proclaimed, when famine had become severe, and the land and people were starving, Yahweh announced to Elijah that Elijah should present himself to King Ahab, "so that I [YHWH] may give rain on the face of the earth" (18:1). Ahab spoke with his servant, Obadiah (who secretly feared Yahweh and who had previously saved 100 prophets of Yahweh during Queen Jezebel's murderous campaign against them by hiding them in a cave), and Ahab said to Obadiah, "come, let us go through the land to all of the springs of water and to all the wadis. Perhaps we shall find some grass to keep the horses and mules alive…" (18:5). They split up to search, and Elijah came upon Obadiah while the latter was alone. Obadiah greeted Elijah respectfully and Elijah informed him to announce to Ahab that he had arrived. Obadiah revealed his mortal fear of telling Ahab, because Ahab had long searched fruitlessly for Elijah in all of the surrounding kingdoms, and because Obadiah was afraid that Elijah might disappear, "the spirit of YHWH will carry you to somewhere I do not know" (18:12), and Ahab would then kill Obadiah in anger. Elijah promised not to leave, Obadiah announced Elijah to Ahab, and Ahab went to meet Elijah. Upon seeing Elijah, Ahab asked him whether it really was he, Elijah, the troubler of Israel. Elijah responded that *he* was not the troubler of Israel; Ahab and the entire Omride royal line were responsible for the drought, by virtue of having abandoned Yahweh's commands, and having followed the Baals. Accordingly, Elijah asked Ahab to gather the entire community of the northern kingdom at Mount Carmel, including the "four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah who eat at Jezebel's table" (18:19). Once on Mt. Carmel and in order to set the dramatic scene before the contest,

Elijah pointedly asked the assembly: how long will you go on wavering between two opinions? If Yahweh is god, follow Yahweh. If Baal, follow Baal. Tellingly, the people remained silent. This sets up the contest scene: Elijah and the prophets of Baal will each set up an altar, cut up a bull (an exalted sacrificial animal), but not set fire to the offering, as was the usual custom. Instead, each side would call upon their god to answer them by fire, and the god who answered would be considered God. The prophets of Baal called upon Baal repeatedly, but nothing happened; eventually, Elijah mocked them and Baal. They, and Baal himself, had proven futile. Now Elijah's turn, Elijah set up the altar and placed the offering, and then asked the assembly to pour water upon the offering and altar several times (thus increasing the coming miracle). Elijah called once upon Yahweh, and asked him to "let it be known today that you are God in Israel…" (18:36). Yahweh answered immediately with fire which descended from the sky and consumed not only the offering and all parts of the altar, but the water as well. The assembly then fell to the ground proclaiming that Yahweh is God. Elijah ordered the assembly to seize the prophets of Baal; all were taken down into the Wadi Kishon and he slaughtered them there. Elijah then informed Ahab that roaring rain was coming, and that he should therefore go eat and drink. Elijah went up to the top of Mount Carmel, got into a miraculous prayer position, apparently praying for rain, and told his attendant to go up and look out to the sea. The attendant went, but reported back that he saw nothing. This happened seven times, but on the seventh time, the servant returned with the report that there was a "cloud as small as a man's hand rising from the sea" (18:44). Elijah told his attendant to report to Ahab that Ahab should immediately hitch his chariot, lest his return be thwarted by the rain. The skies grew dark with clouds and wind, and there was a heavy rain. Elijah was inspired by the spirit of Yahweh, and ran in front of Ahab's chariot all the long way back to the Jezreel Valley.

(3) Journey to Mount Horeb (1 Kings 19:1-21)

Ahab told Jezebel about how Elijah had killed the prophets of Baal by the sword, and Jezebel vowed to do all that and more to Elijah in revenge. Elijah fled for his life to Beer-sheba in the southernmost reaches of Judah, journeying alone a day even beyond there into the steppe. Exhausted, Elijah sat under a broom tree and prayed for Yahweh to take his life. An angel came to Elijah with a cake of bread and flask of water, bidding him to eat and regain strength. The angel brought food a second time, and Elijah walked by the strength of that food for forty days and forty nights to the mountain of God, Horeb.[294] On Mt. Horeb, Elijah went into a

---

[294] Mt. Horeb, also called Mt. Sinai, was also the mountain location of the prophet Moses' previous theophanic meetings with Yahweh, both the episode of the burning bush (Exod 3:1), and in relaying to Moses the covenant law Exod (31:18). Thus Mount Horeb, in Sinai, known as the mountain of Yahweh, is in part why Yahweh was identified as a god from the south.

cave and spent the night. The word of Yahweh came to him, asking him what he was doing. Elijah repeated his complaint of having been persecuted for having been most zealous for Yahweh, despite the Israelites' abandonment of their covenant with Yahweh and destruction of his altars. Yahweh told Elijah to go out and stand on the mountain before Yahweh, where Yahweh would appear to Elijah as a theophany of storm: wind, earthquakes, and fire, and informing Elijah that while Yahweh was associated with each of those phenomena, he was not *in* them. Elijah covered his face in front of the divine and went to the cave's entrance. There, Yahweh told Elijah to go toward the wilderness of Damascus, where he was to go and anoint Hazael as king over Aram, and to anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel, and to anoint Elisha son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah as prophet in Elijah's place. Yahweh then swore the destruction of many through the fulfillment of his plan (which was to destroy entirely the house of Jeroboam I, ca. 931-909 BCE, and the entire northern kingdom, Jeroboam's having introduced and first committed apostasy, see 1 Kings 14), and declared "I will leave seven thousand in Israel, every knee that has not bent to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him" (19:18). Elijah left to find Elisha, who was planting in his fields with twelve teams of oxen. Elijah went to Elisha and threw his cloak over him; Elisha understood that Elijah was bidding him to come with him, said goodbye to his family, slaughtered one yoke of oxen and used the wood of the harnesses for a bonfire with which to boil the meat, and give it to the people. Then Elisha rose and followed Elijah and became his servant.

(4) Naboth's Vineyard (1 Kings 21:1-29)

Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard in Jezreel next to the palace of Ahab, king of Samaria, and Ahab wanted it for his own. He told Ahab that he would either give Naboth a better vineyard in its place, or the value of it in silver. Naboth refused, saying, "Far be it from me by YHWH that I should sell my ancestral inheritance to you" (21:3). Incensed, Ahab returned home and retreated to his room to sulk. Upon learning that the cause of Ahab's distress was Naboth's refusal to sell Ahab his vineyard, Jezebel told Ahab not to be upset, because she had hatched an underhanded scheme. Jezebel wrote, in Ahab's name, to the elders of Naboth's town and told them to proclaim a fast (a sign that the town had fallen out of grace)[295] and to seat Naboth at the head of the assembly there. She then plotted to have two corrupt men publically accuse Naboth of having "cursed God and king" (21:10, fitting the theme of a fast-worthy transgression), which would thus inspire the assembly to stone Naboth to death. Jezebel's plan was successfully carried out, and she happily announced to Ahab that he could take possession of Naboth's vineyard because Naboth was dead. At the same time, the word of Yahweh came to Elijah: go up to meet Ahab in Samaria, who had taken possession of Naboth's vineyard, and tell him that "Thus said YHWH: in the place where the dogs licked

---

[295] Cogan, *1 Kings*, 479.

the blood of Naboth, the dogs shall lick your blood, even yours!" (21:19). Elijah found Ahab and reported to him Yahweh's decree, telling Ahab that Yahweh that "because you have given yourself over to doing what displeases YHWH… causing Israel to sin)," Yahweh would destroy Ahab's line just as he had the House of Jeroboam and the house of Baasha (21:20-22). Furthermore, Yahweh vowed to punish Jezebel for her role in the plot, and decreed that dogs would devour her. Yahweh decreed that "there was no one like Ahab who had given himself over to doing what displeased YHWH, whom Jezebel his wife instigated. He acted abominably by following the idols, just as the Amorites had done, whom YHWH had dispossessed before the Israelites" (19:25). Upon hearing the news, Ahab tore his garments and fasted in shame. Yahweh was moved by this act of repentant piety, and informed Elijah that thus Yahweh would not bring disaster upon the house of Ahab in Ahab's own days, but in those of his son.

(5) Elijah and Ahaziah (2 Kings 1:2-18)

Ahaziah, son of Ahab, succeeded to the throne of the northern kingdom (Ahab had been killed in battle by the army of Aram-Damascus under Ben-Hadad at Ramoth-Gilead; his death and burial were described in 1 Kings 22:1-38, and dogs had licked his blood just as Yahweh had decreed). It happened that Ahaziah fell through the lattice in the upper chamber of his palace at Samaria, and was injured. Accordingly, he sent messengers to go see Baal-zebub, god of Ekron, in order to inquire of him whether Ahaziah would recover from his injuries. An angel of Yahweh then spoke to Elijah the Tishbite, and told Elijah to meet Ahaziah's messengers and ask them, "'Is it for lack of a god in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron?' Therefore, thus says YHWH, 'You shall not leave the bed you are upon, for you shall certainly die!'" (1:3-4). Returning early to Ahaziah, the messengers relayed Elijah's message. Ahaziah asked after the appearance of the man who had met them and they replied that the man was "'a hairy man, girt with a leather belt around his waist'. And [Ahaziah] then said, 'It is Elijah the Tishbite'" (1:7-8). So, Ahaziah sent a delegation of fifty of his military company to meet Elijah. The officer climbed up the hilltop where Elijah had been sitting, and said to him, "O Man of God, the king orders, 'Come down!'" But Elijah replied and spoke to the officer of fifty, 'And if I am a man of God, let fire descend from heaven and consume you and your company of fifty.' Whereupon fire descended from heaven and consumed him and his company of fifty" (1:9-10). Ahaziah sent up another officer and company of fifty, and again Elijah replied that if he was indeed a man of God, let fire descend from heaven and consume the man and his company, whereupon an awesome fire descended from heaven and consumed them all. A third officer and fifty were sent up to Elijah, and this wise officer begged for his and his company's lives, "Indeed, fire descended from heaven and consumed the first two officers of fifty and their companies, so now value my life" (1:14). The angel of Yahweh then spoke to

Elijah and told him not be afraid of this third man, and to go down and speak with the king. Upon meeting with Ahaziah, Elijah said, "'Thus says YHWH, 'Since you sent messengers to inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron, as if there were no god in Israel to consult his word, therefore, you shall not leave the bed you are upon, for you shall certainly die,'" and so Ahaziah died in accordance with Yahweh's word, and was succeeded by his brother, Jehoram.

(6) Translation into Heaven and the Succession of Elisha (2 Kings 2:1-18)

This narrative represents Elijah's final episode in the Hebrew Bible. It opens with the phrase, "now when YHWH was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a storm," Elijah and Elisha were headed to Beth-el from Gilgal; thence to Jericho, and thence to the Jordan River. Thrice Elijah bade Elisha stay where he was, and thrice Elisha refused to leave his master's side. Upon arriving at the Jordan River, where Elijah and Elisha could see fifty Sons of the Prophets watching them from the opposite riverbank, Elijah took his mantle, rolled it up, struck the waters, and the river parted in two (2:8). As they crossed to dry land, Elijah asked Elisha what he could do for Elisha "'before I am taken from you'" (2:9). Elisha responded that he wished "'a double share of your spirit would belong to me'," [i.e., a son's inheritance] and Elijah replied portentously that "'if you see me being taken from you, you will have it; and if not, it will not be'" (2:10). As they continued on walking and talking, "fiery chariots with fiery horses appeared and separated them one from the other, and Elijah went up to heaven in the storm. All the while, Elisha looked on and kept shouting, 'My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!' And he saw [Elijah] no more. Then he took hold of his garments and rent them in two" (2:11-12). Afterward, Elisha picked up Elijah's mantle, which had fallen from Elijah as he was taken up to heaven in the storm, and went back and stood by the bank of the Jordan. Using Elijah's mantle, as he made to strike the waters, Elisha asked, "Where, indeed, is YHWH, God of Elijah?' When he struck the waters, they parted in two, and Elisha crossed over" (2:14). On the other side, the Sons of the Prophets who were at Jericho saw Elisha, and they said "'Elijah's spirit has come to rest upon Elisha.' So they went to meet him and bowed down to the ground before him" (2:15). Thinking that perhaps "YHWH's wind has carried [Elijah] and thrown him against one of the mountains or into one of the ravines," the fifty Sons of the Prophets offered to search for Elijah. Elisha was pressed into accepting their offer, and the fifty men searched for three days and were unable to find Elijah anywhere. Reporting their failure to Elisha, who had been staying in Jericho, Elisha replied, "Didn't I tell you, 'do not go'?" (2:18).

175

Religious, Political, and Geographical Contexts of the Narratives

The overarching message within the Elijah narratives above is that the worship of gods other than Yahweh leads to destruction, whereas the worship of Yahweh, to the exclusion of all other gods, leads to plenty and abundance. Elijah in the Hebrew Bible is accordingly a prophet of Yahweh who operates both in opposition to regional Baal worship, and in the service of Yahweh's mission of dominance. In this section, we will examine some major themes that emerge from the contemporary religious, political, and geographical contexts evident in the Elijah narratives.

Religious Context

Yahweh is God

Clearly the message about Yahweh that emerges from the narratives is that Yahweh is the *true* god in the region, despite the prevalence of Baal worship and the multiple-gods environment in which the Elijah narratives unfolded. Unlike the limited abilities of those other gods, however, Yahweh emerges in these narratives as a god not only of nature, but also a god of powerful miracles, and even as the god of human history, as well. In each of the six Elijah narratives except the Vineyard narrative, Yahweh controls natural geological and climatological phenomena, such as rain (and drought), storms, wind, earthquakes, fire, and lightning.

Yahweh was also capable of miraculous acts: in the Widow and Journey to Horeb narratives, Yahweh clearly has the power of miraculously feeding Elijah and others, and of bringing a boy back to life. In Yahweh's commission to Elijah on Mt. Horeb in the Horeb narrative, we see Yahweh's aims to strike blows not only at Baal worship in the

176

region, but also Yahweh's plans to use the Israelite Jehu and the Aramean king Ben-hadad to decimate the idolatrous northern dynasties, as well. In the Vineyard narrative, we see Yahweh's chilling vow to destroy Ahab and Jezebel, and their lineage after them.

On the whole, we see Yahweh depicted in these narratives as so powerful that he was dominant even within Baal's own territory. In the narrative of the Widow, Elijah performed Yahweh's miracles in the widow's town of Zerephath, a Canaanite/Phoenician town. In the Baal narrative, we see Yahweh and Elijah defeat Baal and his prophets on Mount Carmel, which, as we will see, was all the more significant because Carmel was long considered Baal's mountain. And finally, in the Ahaziah narrative, we see Yahweh, through Elijah, intercept and disabuse the messengers heading to consult 'Baal-zebub' in the Canaanite city of Ekron.

Yahweh Punishes those who Transgress His Law

The category of those who transgress Yahweh's law is largely consonant in the Hebrew Bible with those who do not worship Yahweh exclusively. In the Widow narrative and our very introduction to the figure of Elijah, the drought Elijah caused was punishment from Yahweh for the north because of the previous apostasies of northern kings. That drought situation continued into the Baal narrative, where the context was its third crushing year.

Punishment of those who transgress Yahweh's law by not worshipping Yahweh exclusively was also a theme of the Baal narrative, when Elijah and the assembled crowd slaughtered the priests of Baal in punishment from Yahweh. In the Horeb narrative, Yahweh's commission to Elijah was geared to punish and destroy both the house of

177

Jeroboam (and all subsequent northern kings), as well as all those who had ever knelt to or kissed Baal. Some of the greatest vitriol, however, was reserved for King Ahab and Queen Jezebel in the Vineyard narrative.

In this episode we see the full depravity of Ahab and Jezebel on display. Willing to commit or, in the case of Ahab, to sanction murder in order unlawfully to obtain property, Yahweh vowed the destruction of Ahab and Jezebel as much for committing these sins against the law as for having given over to idolatry (1 Kings 21:25-26). Jezebel had been a reviled figure throughout the Elijah narratives, but we see her in the Naboth narrative as the authors had intended: not only as an instigator of idolatry, but as beyond the pale of the law. Indeed, Jezebel's very name in the Hebrew text – איזבל, ay-zbl, "where is the prince?" may indicate her very idolatrous nature, as this was apparently a contemporary call of Baal's distraught human subjects while Baal was in the underworld.[296]

Through the Vineyard narrative, the message of the narrator is clear: Yahweh punishes those who transgress his law, as well as those who do not worship him exclusively. However, for those who demonstrate true repentance and remorse, such as

---

[296] Jo Ann Hackett, "Jezebel," in The Oxford Guide to People and Places of the Bible, eds. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 78-79. Hackett also notes that 'Jezebel' later becomes an insulting epithet for a woman, and is also used in Rev 2:20 for a prophet of whom the author apparently disapproves. Cf. Bronner, *The Stories of Elijah and Elisha*, who argues that, conversely, Jezebel's name may have been aimed to mock her: איזבל, 'ay-zbl', might have been intentionally shortened version of אביזבל, 'abi-zbl', meaning of the Sidonian princess, 'my father is a prince'. 'אי' is a negation that occurs in Phoenician inscriptions, however, and 'זבל' in both Hebrew and Ugaritic can mean 'dominion and rule'. Thus, Jezebel's name as recorded in the Hebrew Bible, איזבל, 'ay-zbl', could also have been an intentional distortion of the name of Ahab's Queen from Sidon: 'not-dominion/not-rule'; i.e., 'not-queen', 9-11.

even the irredeemable figure of Ahab, as at the end of this narrative, Yahweh can be merciful.

In the Ahaziah narrative, we see the unravelling of the house of Ahab as the delayed punishment foreordained by Yahweh. Ahaziah ruled for only two years before dying of an accident at the palace. However, from the perspective of the narrator, Ahaziah's real transgression was his act of seeking assistance from a god other than Yahweh; in this case, Ahaziah sent messengers to inquire about his fate from the god "Baal-zebub," of Ekron. Clearly identifiable as the Canaanite deity Baal-Hadad both by his name and by the town where his shrine was located, this narrative demonstrates that Ahaziah considered Baal attractive-enough a deity to have compelled Ahaziah to send messengers from Samaria, where several shrines and prophets to Yahweh were already located, in order to consult Baal at a shrine within a neighboring Philistine city. This act incensed Yahweh, who foreordained Ahaziah's death forthwith, in punishment.

Within this account, narrators referred to Baal as "Baal-zebub." As we saw above, Baal was frequently referenced in Ugaritic texts as '*zbl b'l arṣ*'; 'prince Baal of the land'. Thus scholarly consensus on this issue is that Baal-zebul, 'Baal the prince,' a contemporary epithet for Baal, was deliberately distorted by narrator(s) of Kings into the polemical name, "Baal-zebub" (Heb. בעל זבוב, *Baal-zĕbûb*) meaning 'Baal' or 'lord' 'of the

flies'.[297] This is not unlike distortions of the name '*bōšet*', 'shame' for Baal, and 'Ashtoreth' (with the vowels of *bōšet*) for Astarte.[298]

Finally, in the Ahaziah narrative, Yahweh relented and did not send down "fire from heaven" upon the third officer and his company, but only because that officer had fallen on his knees before Elijah and had acknowledged what Yahweh's power had wrought upon the first two companies of soldiers (2 Kings 1:13-15). Again, narrators show us in this example that sincere acknowledgement of Yahweh as the most powerful god results in Yahweh's favor, and the opposite results of course in death and destruction.

Worship of Yahweh Alone Results in Yahweh's Favor upon the Believer

This is particularly significant because it is a clear message in every one of the Elijah narratives. In the Widow narrative, the woman was rewarded for her faith in Yahweh – as demonstrated by her initial acquiescence to Elijah's requests – with the miracles of her oil and flour stores not failing, and of her son being brought back to life. In the Baal narrative, the people were rewarded with heavy rains and an end to the

---

[297] Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 80. See also Cogan, *II Kings*, 25.

[298] Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 80. Day further points out that, later on, the name Baal-zebul was attested in New Testament sources, as well. In Mt 10:25, 12:24 and 12:27; Mk 3:22; and Lk 11:15, 18-19, 'Beelzebul' was used as the name of the 'Prince of Demons'; i.e., Satan. The original Greek reading of this name in almost all extant manuscripts was Βεελζεβούλ. The reading 'Beelzebub' is found later in the Vulgate and Peshiṭta, and, Day argues, was apparently an attempt to make the NT demonic name agree with the name of the god of Ekron, Baal-zebub, in 2 Kings 1:2. Furthermore, it is perhaps unsurprising that the name Baal-zebul had become by the time of New Testament usage a name for the 'Prince of the Demons' (cf. *zbl* as 'prince'), because "the name of the leading god [Baal], when abominated, naturally became transformed [Beelzebul] into that of the leading demon, [Satan]" (ibid., 80). The idea that pagan gods are demons is also found in Deut 32:17; Ps 105:37; Bar. 4:7; and Ps 95:5 (in the Septuagint), as well as in 1 Cor 10:20 and Rev 9:20 of the New Testament. The 'Prince of Demons' usages in the books of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, moreover, attests to at least one 1st-century C.E. meaning of this name involving the god Baal, and would perhaps have been quite appropriate in an environment in which the "pagan" god Baal/Zeus remained popular among surrounding populations (see ibid., 232).

drought for their unambiguous faith in Yahweh as demonstrated at the end of the contest

between Elijah and the Prophets of Baal. Elijah was himself favored by Yahweh as

demonstrated by Yahweh's protection and care evident throughout the narratives, such as

Yahweh miraculously feeding Elijah in the Widow narrative through birds and a humble

widow (both unlikely contemporary sources of food), and through an angel in the Horeb

narrative. In the Vineyard narrative, as we saw above, Ahab was favored (but not

forgiven) for his sincere repentance by Yahweh's vow to postpone his destruction of

Ahab's house until the time of Ahab's son, and in the Ahaziah narrative, the life of the

third (and wise) soldier was spared by Yahweh in reward for that soldier's clear

acknowledgement of Yahweh's supremacy. Finally, Elisha's service to Yahweh was in

the Chariot narrative clearly rewarded in Elisha's having seen Elijah's departure, and thus

in Elisha's succession to Elijah in his acquisition of Elijah's office (i.e., his mantle).

Themes Regarding Elijah

Elijah's Mission is Defiant Opposition to Baal Worship

The theme that links Elijah's overarching mission in all of the narratives is defiant

opposition to Baal worship undertaken in defense of the true God, Yahweh. Among

other examples, this theme is evident in the widow narrative as Elijah worked miracles in

Baal's territory; in the Baal narrative as Elijah literally worked in defense of Yahweh

against Baal's prophets; in Yahweh's commission to Elijah in the Horeb narrative; in the

Vineyard and Ahaziah narratives as Elijah condemned the Baal-worshiping Ahab and his

family; and in the Chariot narrative as Elijah was succeeded by Elisha and thus was

Elijah's mission continued.

In defiantly opposing Baal worship, however, Elijah also became associated with certain supernatural events, such as ceasing and causing the rains.[299] Furthermore, Elijah's disappearance into the sky via Yahweh's fiery chariot in the storm sparked tales of Elijah's immortality. This event underscored for later readers or hearers the miraculous nature of Elijah himself (having been spectacularly translated into heaven), and specifically did not say that Elijah was dead; just "taken away" (2 Kings 2:9) up to heaven in a storm (2:1; 2:11), by Yahweh (2:1). Even the Sons of the Prophets, who witnessed the event from the other side of the river, did not believe that Elijah was dead, and sent a search party for him (2:16-18). This disappearance came to have enormous theological implications, as we will see, upon the figure of Elijah as "always present" and perennially available to guide the community in the proper fulfillment of the law.

Elijah is Like Moses

Throughout the Horeb and Chariot narratives, the author of these tales has intentionally imbued Elijah with motifs and narratives related to Moses from the Hebrew Bible.[300] Himself the quintessential representation of both polemic against idolatry, and the exclusive and proper worship of Yahweh, it is fitting that the narrator of this passage would intentionally weave into the Elijah narratives rich allusions to the towering figure

---

[299] This may have resulted in Elijah being perceived in popular culture as himself associated with rain and storms, such as the popular regional folktale which suggests that thunder is caused by Elijah riding around the heavens in his chariot (REF – Ḥaddad?).

[300] Cogan, *1 Kings*, 456.

of Moses.[301] In addition to the similarity of their missions on behalf of Yahweh,

allusions to Moses in Elijah's narratives can be found in Elijah's journey of forty days

and forty nights to reach the mountain of god (1 Kings 19:8), where Moses had spent

"forty days and forty nights" receiving the Law (Exod 24:18).[302] Similarly, on Mt. Horeb,

Elijah stayed in a cave there (1 Kings 19:8) and was bidden to come out as Yahweh

passed by, just as Moses had stood "in the crevice of a rock" for a similar theophanic

appearance of Yahweh on Mt. Sinai (Exod 33:22). Elijah covered his face with his cloak

(1 Kings 19:13) in front of Yahweh's theophany (1 Kings 19:11), just as Moses had hid

his own face at the burning bush (Exod 3:6), both of which reactions were not uncommon

responses in the ancient Near East when meeting the divine. Even Yahweh's appearance

at Sinai in thunder and fire was echoed in Elijah's theophanic experience of the divine (1

Kings 19:11-12). Finally, when we meet the figure of Elisha in the Horeb narrative, we

see another similarity with Moses; the presence of a faithful servant who becomes his

successor. Joshua son of Nun was a servant of Moses for years before being appointed

Moses' successor (Exod 33:11, Num 11:28, Josh 1:1).[303]

In the Chariot narrative, Elijah used his rolled-up mantle; i.e., his office and status

as Prophet in the service of Yahweh, to part the Jordan River much as Moses had parted

the sea (Exod 14:21). Also in this narrative, Elisha succeeded Elijah, just as Joshua son

---

[301] Although, the anti-idolatrous nature of Moses himself is not without question. See Amy L. Balogh, *Circumcising the Mouth of Moses*, forthcoming, for an interesting discussion of Moses as intentionally portrayed within the Hebrew Bible as himself analogous to an idol.

[302] For more on the association in the Hebrew Bible of Mt. Horeb with Mt. Sinai, see 32n. above.

[303] Cogan, *1 Kings*, 455.

of Nun had succeeded Moses (Josh 1:1-9). However, unlike Moses, Elijah in the Chariot narrative did not die. Moses had died and was buried, albeit under fairly mysterious circumstances (Deut 34:5-6), whereas Elijah was taken up into the sky in a storm in Yahweh's fiery chariot. Utilizing this image, Elijah's followers invested him with the quality of eternal life; a quality that surpassed even Moses. This produced enormous interest in Elijah in the centuries afterward, as we saw above, as Elijah became associated both with the defense of true faith and with the quality of being immortal.[304]

Elisha is Elijah's Rightful Successor

After having assumed Elijah's mantle – literally, Elijah's prophetic office – in the Chariot narrative, Elisha, as Elijah's rightful successor, went on in 2 Kings both to fulfill prophesies made by Elijah and to engage in prophecies and miracles in a manner already patterned in the narrative by Elijah, such as miracles involving water, oil, flour, a woman, and the revivification of her dead son. Elisha was also associated in his narratives with motifs involving Mount Carmel (2 Kings 2:25 and 4:25) and famine; as opposed to Elijah, however, Elisha *did* die (2 Kings 13:20), and in fact his bones produced the miracle of bringing a dead body back to life and standing on its feet (2 Kings 13:21).

Elijah's commission at Mt. Horeb by Yahweh was ultimately fulfilled by Elisha: Elisha anointed Jehu in 2 Kings 9:1-13 and met with Hazael in Damascus in 2 Kings 8: 8-15 in order to forecast Hazael's rise to the Aramean throne. Even though it was Elisha who fulfilled these prophecies of Yahweh, their fulfillment had been set in motion by Elijah, who had appointed Elisha as his servant. In that way, Elijah's mission was

---

[304] Cogan, *II Kings*, 33-35. Esp. p. 33.

ultimately a success. However, it seems that whatever victory could be claimed for Yahweh by the Elijah and Elisha narratives was limited: according to the accounts in Kings and as we have seen above, Baal worship continued in both the north and south long after the prophetic missions of Elijah and Elisha and through the destruction of both kingdoms.

<div align="center">Political Context</div>

Various Political Powers of the Day

These narratives also demonstrate evidence of contemporary political, military, and legal contexts. In these accounts, we see the political and military machinations of the northern kingdom of Israel, the southern kingdom of Judah, of Canaanites, Phoenicians, Philistines, Arameans, and Assyrians (not to mention the contemporary Babylonians and Egyptians within the larger accounts of 1 and 2 Kings, as well). We see evidence of the wars between Israel and Aram-Damascus under Ben-hadad at Ramoth-Gilead (1Kings 22:1-38) and in the fact that Ahaziah succeeded his father Ahab in the Ahaziah narrative. However, we also see in the narratives evidence that interactions between these contemporary kingdoms were not always bellicose: the account of Ahaziah's messengers sent to consult the god Baal at the shrine in Ekron, while presented in the narrative as abominable, did not seem to have been anomalous. Also, we see fairly free movement for both Elijah and Elisha throughout Israel and Judah in the Horeb and Chariot narratives. This perhaps indicates that interactions between peoples of various kingdoms were not uncommon, and perhaps even that contemporary peoples were more integrated than is generally presumed.

Legal System in the Northern Kingdom of Israel

In the Vineyard narrative, we can see the legal workings of the northern kingdom. The operation of the judicial system in ancient Israel is evident in the norms of criminal trials (1 Kings 21:11-13), biblical-era property transfer rights (1 Kings 21: 15-16), and even inheritance laws (1 Kings 21:3).

Geographical Context

In the Elijah narratives, we see plentiful evidence of the contemporary geographical context, as well. The dominant picture that emerges from these narratives is one of an agricultural society where drought was not uncommon, and where mountain-tops were prominent religious spaces.

Natural Phenomena

In the Widow and Baal narratives, we see the clear context of drought. Droughts of three years in length are not uncommon for the region, and we see the setting of a severe, three-year-long drought in the case of the Baal narrative.[305] Also in the Baal narrative, we see both rain and storms and their necessity to life. Upon Elijah's successful contest with the prophets of Baal – and especially upon the assembled community's declaration that *Yahweh* was the true God – Elijah ascended to the near-summit of Mt. Carmel to pray for rain. His unnamed assistant at that time went up to the summit to finally see a small cloud rising from the sea, which led to dark skies, and heavy rains. We also see the stormy theophany of Yahweh in both the Horeb and Chariot

---

[305] See Chapter One above.

narratives. Finally, in the Baal and Ahaziah narratives, we see lightning, as well: Elijah calls down "fire" from the sky in both cases: in the former, this lightning consumed the offering and even the entire altar; in the Ahaziah narrative, fire engulfed two separate companies of fifty officers each. These "fire from heaven" narratives underscored Yahweh as a celestial god who could wield lightning at-will upon his foes.[306]

Agricultural Setting

The severe drought of both the Widow and Baal narratives highlights the contemporary agricultural setting: the miracle of the widow's flour stores not failing was all the greater in a drought context, as was the precious water used to drench the altar in the Baal narrative. In the Horeb narrative, Elijah found Elisha engaged in plowing his fields with several teams of oxen. While Elisha's oxen indicated his wealth, farming and agricultural life would have been the most common economic activity for all class levels, and remained thus in the region through the 20th century C.E. In the Vineyard narrative, Ahab coveted Naboth's vineyard for his own vegetable garden and perhaps not without good reason: the Jezreel Valley near Carmel was long known for its rich and fertile agricultural land.

---

[306] Despite differences in language (i.e., several modern languages differentiate between fire and lightning as conceptually distinct), most scholars agree that 'fire from heaven' referred to lightning. Given that lightning reaches temperatures of around 53,000 degrees Fahrenheit and is several times hotter even than a large bonfire, which reaches temperatures of around 3,000 degrees Fahrenheit, and given that a lightning strike can set alight that which it hits, it is easy to see how one might naturally have presumed that lightning was 'fire', sent from the sky.

High Places

High places figure prominently in both the Elijah narratives and in the Hebrew Bible more generally, as the locations for shrines or as the places where God is found. In the Baal narrative, Mt. Carmel is the setting for Elijah's contest, and, as we will see below, Elijah's victory was made all the more prominent by the fact that Mt. Carmel was Baal's mountain. In the Horeb narrative, Mt. Horeb/Mt. Sinai are the setting of the story and the place where Yahweh addressed both Moses and, later, Elijah. In the Ahaziah narrative, Ahaziah's soldiers found Elijah sitting on a hilltop, which is the area from which Elijah called down fire/lightning from the sky (just as he did from Mt. Carmel in the Baal narrative). Finally, in the Chariot narrative, Elijah disappeared "into the heavens"; that is, high into the stormy sky in Yahweh's fiery chariot.

Elijah Texts Conclusion

We see in the themes above regarding the Elijah (and Elisha) narratives in the Books of Kings two main strands of religious influences. First, the narratives take place in an environment of multiple gods; and, thus, of what we might think of today as multiple religious traditions – in particular, the narratives take place in an environment that is largely dominated by Canaanite religious figures and practices, and among which worship of the god Baal was prevalent. Second, one repeatedly encounters the theological message that is emblematic of both the religious reform movements of the 7th century BCE under Judahite kings Hezekiah and Josiah, and of the DH itself: having gods other than Yahweh leads to destruction.

Destruction, from the historical perspective of these textual narratives, took the form of particular aggressive and expansionist political powers of the day, such as the Arameans, Assyrians, Babylonians, Egyptians, and Canaanites, of whom one sees ample evidence within the Books of Kings generally and the Elijah narratives specifically. However, the books of the DH were composed, compiled, edited and revised over a long span of time, with decisive moments of composition taking place during the reformist reign of Josiah in 639-609 BCE, and during and after the exile in 586 BCE. Because the events of the Elijah and Elisha narratives, in particular, were set in the 9th-century BCE northern kingdom of Israel, the narratives cannot be said to be accurate and contemporary representations of historical reality, as is claimed within them. Rather, these histories are theological arguments written at a later point in time and primarily from a southern perspective, to explain why the northern and southern kingdoms had been destroyed: the Israelites and Judahites had sinned against Yahweh by revering other gods and by following the statues of the nations, whom YHWH had dispossessed before the Israelites (2 Kings 17:7-8) …

> and made offerings there, at all the high places, as the nations whom YHWH exiled before them; and did evil things, angering YHWH, and worshipped idols, about which YHWH had said to them, 'Do not do this thing!' YHWH even warned Israel and Judah by every prophet and seer, 'Turn back from your evil ways and keep my commands and statutes, in accord with all the Law which I commanded your ancestors, and which I sent to you through my servants, the prophets'. But they did not listen. … they went after emptiness and became empty themselves, and after the fashion of the neighboring nations which YHWH had commanded them not to imitate. They abandoned all the commands of YHWH their God; they made themselves molten images – two calves; they made a pole of Asherah; they bowed down to all the heavenly host [i.e., several gods]; they worshipped Baal, they passed their sons and their daughters through fire; they practiced divination and sorcery; they gave themselves up to doing what was displeasing to YHWH, making him

189

angry. YHWH was very angry with Israel, and he removed them from his sight; only the tribe of Judah was left. But even Judah did not keep the commands of YHWH, their God; they followed the statutes practiced by the Israelites. Thus YHWH spurned all the seed of Israel; he afflicted them by handing them over to plunderers, until he rid himself of them" (2 Kings 17:7-20). Then, describing the fall of Jerusalem and Judah, "[Judahite King Zedekiah] did what was displeasing to YHWH, just as Jehoiakim [his predecessor] had done. Because of YHWH's wrath did [the Babylonian Empire siege and destroy Jerusalem], until he had rid himself of them" (2 Kings 24:19-20).

Thus, the theological argument that developed, worshipping gods other than Yahweh leads to destruction, was part of a theological reform movement designed in part to differentiate the followers of Yahweh from other nearby peoples (Cf. Exod 33:16). From the perspective of the DH, other nearby peoples seem not to have been religiously distinguishable from one other, which explained, perhaps, their indiscriminate destruction. Therefore, an exclusive devotion to Yahweh alone, and to the nature and place of Yahweh's worship, were centrally important to the religious reforms of Josiah and the wider DH. [307] Such was certainly the focus of the Jewish community which developed in Jerusalem in the new Persian province of Yehud following the period of exile,

> "one of the main functions of the priestly elite in post-exilic Jerusalem – beyond the conduct of the renewed sacrifices and purification rituals – was the continuing production of literature and scripture to bind the community together and determine its norms against the peoples all around."[308]

---

[307] See Finklestein and Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed*, 246-250, for an argument about the 8th- and 7th-century BCE religious reform movements in the kingdom of Judah following the destruction of the northern kingdom. See also Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 274-288, and Bruce Halpern and D. Vanderhooft, "The Editions of Kings in the 7th-6th Centuries B.C.E." *Hebrew Union College Annual* 62: 179-244.

[308] Finklestein and Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed*, 310.

Part Four: Rabbinic-Era, Christian-Tradition, and Islamic-Tradition Elijah

Rabbinic-era Elijah, and Elijah in the Christian and Islamic traditions, comes to be understood in ways that are both drawn from and different to the Elijah of the Hebrew Bible. In general, in later Jewish traditions, Elijah became known as an enigmatic figure who helps to ensure that the law is properly being followed and thus to help to keep the Jewish community on a straight path. Because of Elijah's wondrous translation by fiery chariot into the storm, Elijah has been thought of as one of the very few figures in the tradition who did not die. Enoch, in Gen 5:24, was the only other figure in the Hebrew Bible to have been "taken by God," and thus stories of his immortality abounded as well, but Elijah is the only Biblical personality of whom it was said intriguingly that he "ascended to heaven in a storm."[309] Because of that, Elijah developed a reputation in all subsequent communities as a figure who was effectively immortal, and, as such, appears and disappears at-will.

In the Hebrew Bible, Elijah's final appearance is in the book of 2 Chronicles 21:12-15, where a letter, sent in Elijah's name and addressed to King Jehoram of Judah (851-843 BCE), announced that Jehoram has led the people of Judah astray in the same manner in which the people of Israel were led astray, and predicts for Jehoram a painful death. In the Hebrew Bible, 2 Chronicles in the Jewish tradition is traditionally counted among the final four books of the Tanakh. However, in the Septuagint (LXX), a Greek translation of the Tanakh/Hebrew Bible undertaken in Alexandria during the Ptolemaic period between the fourth and second centuries BCE, and named after the purported

---

[309] Cogan, *1 Kings*, 34-35.

"seventy" scholars who worked on the project, the books of the Hebrew Bible were arranged to end with the twelve 'Latter Prophets'. Thus, in the LXX, and in subsequent Christian biblical traditions, the final book of the Hebrew Bible or "Old Testament" is the book of Malachi, and is also where, from the perspective of the LXX and subsequent Christian traditions, the final reference to the Elijah is located. In Malachi 4:1-6, an immanent day of reckoning is described, when all of the "arrogant and evildoers will be stubble'' but for those who revere Yahweh, "the sun of righteousness shall rise." Admonishing his followers, Yahweh says,

> "Remember the teaching of my servant Moses, and the statutes and ordinances that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of YHWH comes. He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents, so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse" (Malachi 4:4-6).

Accordingly, Elijah takes on for later Jewish and Christian communities the role of harbinger of the messiah and of the eschaton (the end of days).

Elijah's Role in Rabbinic Judaism

Elijah is an enigmatic and popular figure in Judaism. From his account in the Hebrew Bible, he was known as a zealous and uncompromising prophet for the proper worship of Yahweh. However, Elijah's role in later Judaism came mostly from his character in rabbinic literature, including in the Talmud and folklore.[310] Rabbinic Elijah is partly angelic and partly human; mysterious, and not resembling the Hebrew Bible Elijah. He can connect humankind to God, serving as a supernatural mediator. He

---

[310] Kristen H. Lindbeck, *Elijah and the Rabbis: Story and Theology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), ix.

teaches wisdom, rabbinic values, and ethical standards; he gives advice, and often comes

unpredictably, without warning, to address problems. Because Elijah did not die in the

Hebrew Bible, like an ordinary mortal, but was taken up into the storm, later Rabbis

considered Elijah free to travel throughout the world, between heaven and earth, and

appearing to people at-will. [311] The traditions of Rabbinic Elijah derived from oral story-

telling and midrash, and as such they allow us to compare Elijah with other mediators

between God and humanity in both Judaism and other traditions of the same era. Jews

and non-Jews naturally shared stories even though they may not have shared technical

law or scriptural interpretation. "Traditions of supernatural mediators, whether gods,

saints, or angels, entertained and inspired the interacting oral cultures of antiquity,"

which sounds a great deal like the manner in which we have described here the

functioning of a common pool process. Accordingly, Elijah in the Rabbinic era seems to

acquire traits that resemble the contemporary Greek god, Hermes, and may suggest a

kind of "competitive cultural borrowing" that was common in antiquity.[312]

Elijah's roles within the Babylonian Talmud can be divided into four main areas:

as a teacher of rabbinic wisdom, as an ethical model, as a rescuer in times of trouble, and

as a mediator of heavenly wisdom. Stories involving Elijah in medieval and later periods

tend to portray Elijah as affirming faith in God's mysterious justice. Elijah in the Jewish

traditions of the middle ages and after became "probably the most popular hero of Jewish

---

[311] Ibid., ix-xii.

[312] Ibid., xvi.

folklore,"[313] fulfilling the role of overseeing every circumcision ceremony and playing a role in every Passover Seder dinner. Enigmatic as later Elijah may be, in his tasks involving the circumcision ceremonies and Seder meal, we see Elijah as continuing to fulfill an important role that we saw of him in the Hebrew Bible: ensuring correct community adherence to the law.

Elijah in Christianity

Within early Christian tradition, and due primarily to the role of Elijah as understood through the book of Malachi as a harbinger of the Messiah and of the eschaton, both Jesus Christ and John the Baptist were associated with Elijah in the New Testament (NT) text. John the Baptist, in particular, was depicted as looking and living as wild as Elijah, and also of performing his ministry in the areas around the Jordan River, which was the location of Elijah's translation in 2 Kings (Mk 1:6 and Mt 3:4). The New Testament records Elijah and Moses as being at the transfiguration of Jesus in Mk 15:53-56 and in Mt 27:46-49; in this case, theological opinion has tended to consist of the idea that because of the roles of Moses as the protector of the law and of Elijah as the protector of Messiah, and especially because of the references made to Moses and Elijah in Malachai 4:4-6, Elijah and Moses would thus have been present at the transfiguration of Jesus in order to verify Jesus as the proper Messiah. In this way, Elijah remained an important and hugely compelling figure within early Christian traditions of the Common Era.

---

[313] Ibid., 146.

Finally, the figure Elijah proved useful in some instances of converting Slavic

pagan tribes to Christianity. Particularly influential in a Slavic setting, and by virtue of

Elijah's having bested the prophets of Baal, controlled the rain, and been translated into

the sky in a fiery chariot in a storm, Christian proselytizers identified Elijah with various

pagan sky and storm gods. Elijah and Perun, the Slavic god of storms, became difficult

to separate in Russian tradition; Russian peasants prayed to Elijah for rain and associated

Elijah with the qualities for which Perun had been known – mostly because of the

tenacity of the Perun cult, involving the god of thunder and storms – and, thus, the

Christian "saint," Elijah, who could call down fire from heaven, became a usefully

analogous figure to that of Perun.[314]

Elijah in Islam

The identity of Elijah within Islamic traditions – particularly, within the Qur'ān –

is taken primarily from the Hebrew Bible accounts of Elijah.

> And indeed, Elias was from among the messengers, when he said to his people,
> 'Will you not fear [Allāh]? Do you call upon Baal and leave the best of creators –
> Allāh, your lord, and the lord of your first fathers? And they denied him, so they
> indeed will be brought [for punishment], except the chosen servants of Allāh. And
> we left for him [favorable mention] among the later generations, "Peace be upon
> Elias." Indeed, we thus reward the doers of good. Indeed, he was among our
> believing servants" (Q. 37:123-132; see also 6:85).

Thus, in Islamic traditions, and, particularly, within Qur'ānic conceptions,

Elijah functions much as his role within the Hebrew Bible: as a zealous prophet against

Baal worship and for the worship of God (named in the Qur'ān 'Allāh'; i.e., the [one and

---

[314] Cherry Gilchrist, *Russian Magic: Living Folk Traditions of an Enchanted Landscape* (Quest Books, 2009) 82. See also Mike Dixon-Kennedy, ed., "Perun," *Encyclopedia of Russian and Slavic Myth and Legend* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1998), 218.

only] God, and derived etymologically from the Semitic root for god, 'el'). It should be noted, however, that despite this clear biblical role for Elijah as outlined in the Qur'ān, Common-Era tales involving the popular figure of Elijah that were beloved among Christian and Jewish communities likewise were popular in sixth-seventh century Arabia.

Part Five: Elijah Image: Judaic Traditions and Christian Saint Elias

Following the methodological model of this project, we turn now to an analysis of common images of Elijah. Images of Elijah in the Judaic tradition are somewhat rare, but not at all unknown. The circumscription of images relating to Elijah is the result of a tradition of aniconism which gradually developed in Israelite and later Jewish tradition.[315] Stemming from the Second Commandment of the Law which Yahweh revealed to Moses at Mt. Sinai/Horeb, "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or on the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I YHWH am a jealous God…" (Deut. 5:8-9), this command can be seen naturally to arise from the first law, "I am YHWH your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before [or besides] me" (Deut. 5:7; see also Exod 20:1-5, the Hebrew text of which differs slightly).

---

[315] Ryan Bonfiglio, "Images and the Image-Ban in the Hebrew Bible and Israelite Religion," *Oxford Biblical Studies Online*, notes, drawing in part upon the work of Tryggve N.D. Mettinger, *No Graven Image: Israelite Aniconism in its Ancient Near Eastern Context*, (Eisenbrauns, 2013 [1995]) "thus, rather than reflecting a general aversion to figurative imagery, Israelite aniconism is best understood as a strategy of replacement in which certain visual depictions of the deity [iconic depictions; those that were intended to capture or copy a deity's appearance in naturalistic manner, anthropomorphic or otherwise] are prohibited and/or destroyed in favor of rival iconographies [iconographies that were aniconic]" … thus, although a tradition of aniconism gradually developed, "religion in ancient Israel was routinely expressed and mediated through images and visual culture."

It seems that from the Biblical perspective, especially that of the DH, the use or existence of idols easily could be incorporated into (or could be representative of) the worship of other gods, thus blurring the lines dangerously between the contemporary cult of Yahweh and the cults of other gods, such as Baal (see 1 Kings 12:25-32 and Hosea 2). The classic formulation of this image ban likely emerged during or after the exilic period. Thus, in keeping with Deuteronomistic religious reforms that distinguish followers of Yahweh from the followers of surrounding gods, the followers of Yahweh were strictly admonished against the creation of idols: representations or likenesses, carvings or engravings, molten images or statutes cast from metal, copies, patterns, likenesses, or similitudes of Yahweh or of any other deity. This tradition of figural aniconism with respect to the representation of deity(ies) affected as well the appropriateness of figural images within some later traditions of Judaism.

Images of Elijah among Jewish communities are not by any means unknown, however, and in some eras, they have been quite commonplace. Evidence from the third-century community at the synagogue at Dura-Europos, located in modern-day Syria near the Euphrates River and along what was then the Roman-Parthian border, demonstrates several images of Elijah that have been drawn from the Hebrew Bible narrative. Paintings illustrating scenes from Elijah's mission line the walls of the synagogue, including The Failure of the Sacrifice to Baal, on the south wall (see Fig. 8), Elijah multiplying the Widow's Oil and Meal (south wall), Elijah Reviving the Widow's Son (west wall), and

197

the Sacrifice of Elijah on Mount Carmel (south wall), which is drawn in comparison with the unsuccessful sacrifice to Baal.[316]

Note in Fig. 8 the small priest hiding underneath the altar to Baal and the snake which bites and kills that priest, all of which are elements from an apocryphal tale about this narrative which developed in the first few centuries of the Common Era. Note as well the somber priests of Baal, whose sacrifice has failed. One final interesting element of this image can be seen in the dress of the priests of Baal, which is patterned on the dress of third-century CE Syrians rather than that of 9th-century Israelites. All of these painting elements demonstrate common pool processes in action: reference to compelling contemporary narratives in a way that reflects the culture, temporal context, and needs of the group doing the referencing.

Saint Elias

The Prophet Elijah, a kind of second Moses in the Hebrew Bible and the defender of "true" religion against idol worship, became as we saw above an important New Testament figure within the Christian scriptural tradition as well. Elijah, written and pronounced in Aramaic, Greek, Latin, and Arabic as 'Iliyas' or 'Elias' or 'Elia', is often called, as a Christian saint, مار الياس 'Mar' Elias, or Ἅγιος Ηλίας, 'Hagios' Elias ('saint' Elias). Elijah's feast day in both Eastern and Western Christian traditions is July 20. This may have been related to an agricultural date for a festival involving Elijah rather

---

[316] See these images and analysis of them in Bezalel Narkiss, "'Living the Dead Became': The Prophet Elijah as a Holy Image in Early Jewish Art," in *Byzantine East, Latin West: Art-Historical Studies in Honor of Kurt Weitzmann*, Christopher Moss and Katherine Kiefer, eds. (Department of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University: Princeton University Press, 1995) 75-80.

than recalling a death/birthdate (as in the case of most Christian saints' festivals), as Elijah did not die, but was instead translated into heaven.

The earliest iconographical representations of Elijah in the Christian tradition involved his depiction as a Prophet who defended the Law; in this portrayal, Elijah holds a scroll representing his role (see Fig. 9). This has remained a popular motif of Elijah (see Fig. 10), although a majority of subsequent depictions and icons of Saint Elias began to emphasize his many associations with miracles; in particular, his having been fed in the desert by ravens (see Fig. 11), his defeat of the Prophets of Baal (see Figs. 12 and 13), and his miraculous disappearance (see Fig. 14). Almost all iconographical representations of Elijah emphasize the important feature of his mantle and his wild and ascetic appearance.

Political influences evident in the images of Saint Elias exist primarily within the realm of and implications surrounding the depiction of Elijah with particular attendants (see Fig. 10). Geographical influences often are evident in the inclusion of particular geographical features in the background, which tend to reflect 1) compelling geographical features from the Hebrew Bible story, 2) the geography of the artist, or 3) the geography of the location for which the image is displayed. Interestingly, and irrespective of the time of production, iconographical representations of Saint Elias tend to reflect religious influences drawn primarily from Elijah's role in the Hebrew Bible or directly from elements of his narratives therein. This is perhaps explained by the fact that images of Elijah depict him long after the time when his canonical identity had already been established.

199

Part Six: Elijah Site – Mount Carmel

'Mount Carmel' is made up of a coastal range of mountains and hills which runs for about 24 miles southeast from the Mediterranean Sea at the modern city of Haifa (see Fig. 15). Composed primarily of hard limestone which formed about fifty-five million years ago, this range runs between 5-8 miles wide throughout and is pocketed by several caves.[317] The designation "Mount Carmel" can refer to the entire range, to a twelve-mile northwest section of the range, or, often, simply to the headland at the northwest end of the range.

This headland is called Mt. Carmel, جبل الكرمل, Jebel Carmel, in Arabic, or مار الياس جبل, Mount Saint Elias. Appearing as a sharply pointed cape or promontory along an otherwise smooth coastline that extends all the way south to Egypt (see Fig. 15), this headland has been both a navigation point for mariners and the site traditionally associated with Elijah's contest against the prophets of Baal. The Carmel Range physically splits the territory to the north and south of it, and although a narrow beach runs along the seashore, international traffic for millennia usually stayed to the north of the range, crossing into or out from the interior plains via passes near Yokneam and Megiddo, with access to the sea north of Carmel. This geographical divide caused by the Carmel Mountains also caused a natural boundary or border region; indeed, in the setting of the Books of Kings, Mount Carmel formed the southern border of the kingdom of Tyre (see Fig. 15), and was thus often considered a part of Phoenician or Canaanite territory.

---

[317] Much of the background information in this section is drawn from Henry O. Thompson, "Mount Carmel," in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 3, ed. by David Noel Friedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 874-875.

The word 'Karm' in Hebrew means 'garden', 'vineyard', or 'orchard', and Karm-el means 'El's Vineyard' / 'god's vineyard'. The name likely reflects the fertile environs of Mt. Carmel, which catch the westerly breezes and moisture from the sea. Forests grow in the area, and olives, grains, and vineyards have long been cultivated there.

The caves of Carmel became famous in a biblical setting as the hideouts for thieves and bandits, but these caves were the site of some of the first human and humanoid habitation in the region as well.[318] Material cultural remains in the caves include artistic products like animal-head tool handles and beads dating from 150,000-10,000 BCE. Recent archaeological excavations NAME at the site have returned evidence so far of human settlements dating from the Iron Age, although the paucity of these may indicate either that settlement was not encouraged at that point, or that the denser forests and maquis may have impeded human settlement. Excavations at the site have also returned coins dating from the time of Constantine through the late Roman Era, the Byzantine period, and Umayyad, 'Abbasid and Mamluk rule.[319]

The religious significance of Mt. Carmel as a high place in the Canaanite fashion, and one located along the sea coast, is well attested in extra-biblical sources. Mt. Carmel appears as '*Roš Qadeš*', 'Holy Head' in the records of Egyptian Pharaoh Thutmose III (1490-1436 BCE). Assyrian sources from the 9th century BCE, confirm that Carmel was a sacred mountain, and dedicated to Baal. These sources indicate not only the religious

---

[318] Footnote from ABD article.

[319] Shimon Dar, *Rural Settlements on Mount Carmel in Antiquity*, (Oxford, UK: Archaeopress Archaeology, 2014) 158-163; 174.

significance of the mountain, but also help to explain the choice of this site by biblical writers (or by those who first circulated the oral Elijah and Elisha tales which were associated with the mountain in 1 Kings 18 and 2 Kings 2:25 and 4:25) as the site of the famous contest between Elijah and the 450 prophets of Baal. As the extra-biblical evidence attests, Elijah's defeat of the Baal and his prophets was all the more impressive because it took place *on Baal's own ground*.[320]

Despite the drama of the Hebrew Bible contest, however, the text itself tells us that Baal worship continued at high places throughout the area, as did the worship of Yahweh and other gods in addition. Nonetheless, the site afterward also became strongly associated with the figure of Elijah; hence one name for Mt. Carmel also became Mt. Saint Elias. In the twelfth century CE, a Roman Catholic monastery and "Carmelite" religious order were founded and later rebuilt on the site of the purported battle, and the area became known as well within Arabic and Islamic tradition as *al-maharrakah*, the 'site of burning,' referring to the fire Yahweh sent to consume the altar and offering. All the same, Baal worship itself continued on the site of Mount Carmel into the first centuries of the Common Era, as associated with Greek and Roman presence in the region.

In 1952, M. Avi-Yonah found in the Carmelite monastery on Mount Carmel a marble fragment dating from the early 3rd century CE in the shape of the toes and fore-part of a right foot of a plinth (see Fig. 16). Using the size of the toes as an estimate, he suggested that the figure would have been twice life-size. The plinth under the sole of

---

[320] Thompson, "Mount Carmel," 875, italics mine.

the right foot was inscribed in two lines of Greek, reading: "(Dedicated) to Heliopolitan [Zeus], (god of) Carmel (by) Gaius Iulius Eutychas, colonist (of) Caesarea." That god of Carmel had been identified at least as early as the second century CE, and probably earlier, with Zeus Heliopolitanus (or Iupiter Heliopolitanus in the Roman tradition).

One of the best-known gods of antiquity, and for whom there remain scores of figural representations and hundreds of inscriptions over the whole of the former Roman Empire, Zeus/Iupiter Heliopolitanius was identified throughout the Hellenic and Romanized Near East with Hadad (as at the site of Baalbek; see Chapter Three). Macrobius Ambrosius Theodosius, a Roman philosopher and writer living in around the year 400 CE and best known under simply the title "Macrobius," wrote of the emperor Trajan having consulted an oracle of Zeus at the Baalbek sanctuary, "for god, whom they reverence the highest and the greatest, they have given the name of Hadad."[321] Of course, Adad/Hadad was the local Syrian name for Baal, the Storm-God. Thus did the veneration of Baal at Mount Carmel continue long into the first centuries of the Common Era. Avi-Yonah claims that it was a wave of pagan religiosity, coinciding with the regional popularity of the mostly-finished temples at Baalbek, which had moved a wealthy patrician of Caesarea to erect a statue to his ancestral god.[322] As Christianity became popular in the region during the first several centuries of the Common Era, the

---

[321] Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, 1, 23, 10, "deo enim, quem summum maximumque venerantur, *Adad* nomen dederunt," italics mine.

[322] M. Avi-Yonah, "Mount Carmel and the God of Baalbek," 119 and 124. The name 'Gaius Iulius' indicated that the patron's Roman citizenship had extended to the time of the Iulio-Claudian dynasty or even back to the time of Augustus; hence Avi-Yonah's description of the patron.

veneration of Canaanite and Hellenized Syrian gods and goddesses began to wane. In the mid-twentieth century CE, all that remained of the once double-life-sized statue of Hadad/Zeus on Mount Carmel was a fragment of his foot, then stored in the mountain's Christian monastery dedicated to Elijah.

Part Seven: Elijah and the Common Pool

What Elijah Texts, Images, and Sites Reflect about Ancient Israelite Tradition

What we see *reflected* in the figure of Elijah is a religious environment that was dominated by multiple gods and goddesses, mostly Canaanite, and Baal-Hadad the preeminent among them. This was because Baal-Hadad, the regional god of storms, long remained preeminent in a religious environment in which water from rainfall remained essential to human agricultural life.

What we see *represented* by the figure Elijah, however, is an example of a main theme running throughout the Hebrew Bible: Yahweh is the supreme god; there are no other gods before Yahweh. Therefore, worship of gods other than Yahweh leads to destruction. Because Yahweh is the supreme god, Yahweh does not act like other gods; he is jealous and his followers must act in specific ways in specific places around him. They must also be zealously dedicated to Yahweh, who will reward them. This kind of behavior was modeled in prophets like Elijah (and, of course, Moses). Pious human worshippers of Yahweh, we learn from the example of Elijah in the Hebrew Bible, should in fact be *like* Elijah: single-minded and uncompromising in their dedication to Yahweh/YHWH.

The tradition we see revealed by the figure Elijah is a tradition that is single-minded and exclusivist about its desire to distinguish itself from among other groups. It reflects the perspective of a small kingdom(s) and minority religious tradition attempting to exist and to thrive among the larger and more powerful players in the region. As such, the religious tradition revealed in the Hebrew text and revealed by the Prophet Elijah is single-minded and exclusivist about its desire to differentiate itself from other groups; in part, because the narratives took place in an environment of mixture and of heterogeneous peoples.

Amid all of the upheaval of the regional history of the Israelites and the Judahites over and against the larger powers of the day, as the faithful become Jews and their religious tradition became "Judaism" through the late-first millennium BCE, the Hebrew Bible texts became the anchoring and central element of Jewish narrative history.[323] Thus, for all subsequent traditions which come to associate with the Hebrew Bible, such as Christianity and Islam, the texts of this tradition come to have an enormously formative impact on the narratives and figures within Christianity and Islam, as well. As Elijah in the Hebrew Bible became canonized in text, the compelling figure of the prophet Elijah became a fixture of regional culture, in general, and within those later traditions, such as Christianity and Islam, which emerged out of the textual tradition of the Hebrew Bible.

---

[323] Finklestein and Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed*, 301, 316-17.

What the Figure Elijah Contributes to the Common Pool

Compelling Figures, Narratives, and Motifs from the Common Pool

First, Baal-Hadad is of course a figure with whom Elijah is forever associatively

linked, both positively, and conceptually, in the sense of functioning as a relational

antonym to Baal-Hadad. Second, Elijah is associated with the narrative and motif of

defeating and vanquishing a foe.[324] Finally, in his quest to eradicate Baal worship, Elijah

became associatively linked with the power to control rain, storms, and lightning.

Associated with his mysterious disappearance and translation into the heavens, Elijah

also became linked with the motifs of disappearance and return, as well as with being a

celestial chariot-rider who causes the sound of thunder.

What Elijah Contributes back to the Common Pool

Compelling new elements associated with Elijah and which he contributed back

to the common pool include Elijah's role as a defender par excellence – of course

alongside Moses – of "true" religion against idolatry and paganism. Elijah became

associated with several compelling motifs, as well: miracle stories around drought, being

fed by widows and ravens, ensuring unfailing flower and oil flask stocks, the bringing

back to life of a child, the iconic contest on Mount Carmel with Baal, with fire/lightning

and the killing of "false" prophets; associations with Mount Sinai/Horeb (again like

Moses); with the maligned figures of Jezebel and Ahab and the false god Baal-zebub,

---

[324] Note: Later-developed "vanquishing" posture in the iconography of St. Elias may also reflect the
influence and popularity of regional depictions of Ss. Theodore, Demetrius, and George as much as it does
the Biblical narrative.

with fire from the sky which can descend and consume foes; with fiery chariots of god, and being taken up into the heavens in a fiery storm.

Part Eight: Conclusion

As we have seen, Elijah, the zealous and memorable Hebrew Bible prophet of Yahweh, is emblematic of a larger project of the Hebrew Bible: the move to distinguish between "true" and "false" gods, and the differentiation between followers of Yahweh, and followers of any other god. Later text-based religious traditions, such as Christianity and Islam, which continued within the lineage of the Hebrew Bible, also participate in the legacy of this exclusivity project, which we will see in Chapters Five and Six. For that reason, Elijah has remained enormously important within the subsequent religious traditions of Christianity and Islam as a figure who defends *true* faith. Furthermore, as we will see, an understanding of the figure of Elijah is essential to a proper historical understanding of the wider phenomenon involving St. George and al-Khiḍr, as well. This is despite the fact that, due long-term changing demographical factors in the region, and in particular to several modern political factors, Elijah in the Levant from a contemporary perspective is not as prevalent a figure there as he once was.

Moving to the Figure of Saint George

Elijah, as we have seen, remained an enormously influential figure within the religious and popular culture of the Eastern Mediterranean; in particular, among peasant and agricultural communities, because of his associations with rain and storms. As we will see in Chapter Five, several compelling motifs and narratives of Elijah from the Hebrew Bible – in particular, the narratives of Elijah as the impassioned eradicator of

207

false worship, and as a miracle-worker for a widow and her son – were also intentionally

employed in the hagiography of Saint George. In the earliest hagiographical account of

the life of Saint George, we see direct allusions to Elijah: Saint George, following the

model of Elijah from the Hebrew Bible, was depicted as the defender of 'true' religion –

that is, *Christianity* – against the many pagan gods of the Roman world.

CHAPTER FIVE: ST. GEORGE

Part One: Introduction and Historical Backgrounds of Christianity

> One should not forget that when one is dealing with, or researching, beginnings, particularly those of religions, one is faced with fundamental ideas, or themes, which stem from the prevailing culture. Pierre Canivet, "In the Context of the Mediterranean Civilizations: Judaic, Greek, Roman and Asian" in *Christianity: A History in the Middle East*, Middle East Council of Churches Studies and Research Program, Habib Badr, Souad Slim, and Joseph Abou Nohra, eds., (Beirut, Lebanon: Middle East Council of Churches, 2005), 47.

In 332 BCE, Alexander (the Great) conquered much of the Near East. The culture he brought with him, and that which remained behind him through his generals and their successive Ptolemaic and Seleucid kingdoms, is known today as 'Hellenism'. This legacy of Greek and Roman culture influenced and in many cases gradually blended with local Near Eastern cultural and religious traditions. Indeed, two of the region's most important cities founded after Alexander's conquests were Antioch, near coastal Syria, along the Orontes River near Mount Kasios, and Alexandria, a port city along the Egyptian coast near the western tributary branches of the Nile River.[325] Together with Rome, these cities later came to form the centers of political and cultural life in the Roman Empire. Within the first few centuries of the Common Era, they joined Jerusalem, as the preeminent Christian cities of the East. One primary legacy of Hellenism, therefore, was that this backdrop constituted the political and cultural milieu out of which Christianity formed.

---

[325] For more on the city of Antioch, see above, Chapter Three, "The Storm-God Baal-Hadad", p. 36, 75n.

Accordingly, Christian figures, like St. George, were naturally a product of multiple contemporary influences, which we will see in this chapter. Textually, St. George was intimately related to the towering biblical figure of Elijah, who offered the model of a victorious fight between true and false gods. In legend and eventually in image, as we will see, St. George and the communities who venerated him came to identify in him several features that also had been associated with the Storm-God Baal-Hadad and with Levantine Zeus, such as a feast day on April 23, storms, lightning, fecundity, and the image and narrative of the vanquishing of a serpent, dragon, or human foe, albeit in Roman-era dress and equestrian setting. In a gradual and non-linear manner, these motifs also came to be applied to St. George, who evolved over several centuries into the figure known and beloved throughout the Mediterranean today.

This chapter gives an overview of the historical and religious background of the rise of Christianity, of which St. George was a product. It then examines St. George's earliest text: the Syriac-language *Acts of Saint George*, ca. 600 CE, which formed the basis for all subsequent hagiographical accounts of St. George, and which is our earliest-known and most-complete witness to the original Greek narrative (ca. 450 CE). The chapter then examines the early Christian iconographical tradition as it arose and distinguished itself from pagan iconographical practices, in order to situate the iconographical representations of St. George. This section investigates how George's imagery changed over time, and what those changes reveal. Throughout these analyses, the textual and iconographical sources are analyzed for contemporary religious, political,

and geographical evidence that will help us to contextualize St. George's emergence and evolution in the Near East.

The Development of Christianity from Judaism

Exilic and post-Exilic Jewish communities from the second half of the first millennium BCE were spread around the Mediterranean basin, with centers in Jerusalem, Galilee, Babylon, and eventually Alexandria, Antioch, and Rome. A majority of those in Jewish communities lived in the Levant and among what we might understand as a diverse religious milieu. By the time of Jesus of Nazareth, Jewish population centers in the Eastern Mediterranean – Jerusalem, Galilee, Antioch, Syria, and Alexandria – had

> "been under 'Greek' influence for over 300 years, so one can with complete justification designate all Judaism of the first and second century after Christ as 'Hellenistic'; i.e., stamped in various ways by the transmission of Hellenistic civilization and by the conflict involved."[326]

Thus, after the 4th century BCE, Jewish communities had adopted some Greek practices and customs of 'Hellenism', while preserving various forms of "Jewishness."[327]

Roman political and military control succeeded Hellenistic sovereignty over the region in 63 BCE, after the Roman general Pompey captured Jerusalem. Caesarea became the capital of the Roman province Judaea from 6 to 41 CE, when local government was entrusted to the non-Jewish Idumaeans of the region, which served to aggravate tensions already existing since the time of the mid-second century

---

[326] Martin Hengel, "The Beginning of Christianity as a Jewish-Messianic and Universalistic Movement," in *The Beginnings of Christianity: A Collection of Articles*, Jack Pastor and Menachem Mor, Eds., (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi Press, 2005), 87.

[327] Canivet, "Context of the Mediterranean Civilizations," 51.

'Maccabean' revolts. As Roman political control grew during the last half of the first century BCE, even sharper distinctions in "Jewish" identity and practice were provoked.

By the time of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth early in the first century CE, and certainly by the time of the Roman-Jewish wars of 70 CE, there were many divisions within "Judaism," including major groups known as Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, Zealots, and Sicarians. Connected generally through their uses of the books of the Hebrew Bible, and, in various ways, through beliefs, practices and ethnic communities, Jewish communities of the first century CE used a variety of languages in religious practice, including Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, depending upon the group.[328] What we now consider the religion of "Judaism" was thus neither defined nor unified during the first century CE. Jewish communities, moreover, existed within in among the mixed religious impulses of the day, at the time when a subset of one of those Jewish communities began to adopt particular practices and beliefs in remembrance of a contentious rabbi from the region of Galilee.

The earliest Jewish followers of Jesus of Nazareth did not distinguish themselves from the majority of Jews of the day. The career and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth had harmonized with a messianic religious and political strand long evident in Jewish thought since the internal upheavals initiated by the 4th century BCE Macedonian conquests, and the earliest followers of Jesus primarily had in him hopes of messianic deliverance, rather than those of religious reform. Martin Hengel argues that the conflict between the

---

[328] Canivet, "Context of the Mediterranean Civilizations," 51-53.

messianic Jewish movement and the majority Jewish groups of the first century CE who did not join this movement involved disputes not over the central religious concerns of Judaism (theological belief, hope, and practice), but "the relation between messianic redemption and the traditional validity of the Temple and Torah."[329]

The primary religious setting for the earliest followers of Christ was thus the various forms of Judaism of the day. As such, it is important to recall that early "Christians" were indistinguishable as a Jewish sect during the first century CE. In Acts 24:5, during the description of the trial of Paul, Tertullus, the rhetorical prosecutor from Jerusalem chosen by the high priest Ananias, spoke of the Jewish "sect/heresy of the Nazarenes," "τε τῆς τῶν Ναζωραίων αἵρέσεος"; 'Nazarenes' being an appellation derived from Jesus' origins in the town of Nazareth. Additionally, contemporary first-century CE Roman historians such as Pliny the Younger and Publius Tacitus referred to the beliefs of early Christians as a "*superstito*" which had begun in Judaea, thus indicating the movement's Jewish origins.[330]

Indeed, many scholars argue that, because of the "overwhelmingly Jewish substratum in the earliest Christian texts," and the fact that a vast majority of New Testament authors were Jewish Christians, most of the books of the Christian New Testament should be considered among the most important sources for *Judaism* of the

---

[329] Hengel, "The Beginning of Christianity as a Jewish-Messianic and Universalistic Movement," 94.

[330] Ibid., 91.

first century, along with, of course, the writings of Josephus, Philo, the Qumran Library, and the early rabbinic tradition.[331]

Gradually, however, this group did come to see itself as something different from a majority of Jews of the day. "Without separating itself from 'Judaism', either by form of worship or by creed, this community would nonetheless adopt certain new practices, reported by Acts 2:42 and 4:32, including rituals, communal meal, prayers, and communal living.[332]

As early as the first century CE, there were, in at least some places, such as the early community in Antioch (Acts 11:26), Christians who called themselves as such and who were recognizable as not-Jews. At this early date, and even into the 4th century CE, it is not possible to speak of "…Christianity and Judaism as fully formed, bounded, and separate entities and identities," but it does seem that there were "at least some Christians who were not Jews, and, of course, many Jews who were not Christians."[333] Indeed, Daniel Boyarin cogently argues that the processes of Christian distinction of "Christianity" as something that was *not* Judaism, as evidenced in the aims of heresiological writers beginning in the 2nd century CE, created both Christianity, and, to an extent, Judaism.

---

[331] Ibid., 88-90. See also *Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Writings of a Controversial Rabbi* (2014).

[332] Canivet, "Context of the Mediterranean Civilizations," 54.

[333] Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 6-7.

Boyarin's thesis is that Christian heresiologists, beginning in the mid-second century and lasting throughout the ante-Nicene period – and, in response, their Jewish counterparts, the rabbis of the Tannaitic period – "named [one another] 'Judaizers' or '*minīm*', respectively, and attempted to declare their beliefs and practices, their very identities, as out of bounds."[334] As a result, the diverging beliefs and practices of groups of Jews and Christians of the second and third centuries became transformed into the "religions" of Judaism and Christianity through discourses of orthodoxy and heresy, and that is a perspective as well that is adopted in this project.[335]

A secondary component of Boyarin's argument about the discursive formation of Christianity and Judaism, however, is that while Christianity was created as a "religion" through this distinction process, Judaism was not. In Boyarin's view, Christianity became a "religion" consisting of beliefs and practices, defined by Orthodoxy(ies), which one could choose to hold, whereas Judaism cannot be considered a religion in the same manner, because the rabbinical tradition ultimately determined that holding heterodox views in Judaism cannot make one an outsider.

---

[334] Ibid., 2.

[335] Boyarin also notes, following the work of Robert A. Markus (who was himself partially following FIRST NAME Momigliamo), that such Christian discursive practices also helped to construct "paganism," because, as a varied group of cults and observances, "'paganism' never constituted a single coherent religious movement analogous to either Christianity or Judaism. It only existed in the minds and in the speech habits of late fourth-century Christians." Robert A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 28. This project adopts as well the perspective that discursive practices of the second, third, and fourth centuries CE contributed to constructing "Paganism" as a religious formation.

215

While that theological formulation very well may be the case within Jewish community membership following the seventh century CE, the terms of Boyarin's argument that anticipate such a conclusion will not be adopted in this project. "Judaism," as a tradition, may have been constructed in part through the heresiological dialogues of Christian and rabbinic writers of the second, third, and fourth centuries CE, but Boyarin presumes that Jewish belief and practice did not itself emerge from an earlier religious framework in the Levant; namely, a framework that was Canaanite (as well as Egyptian, Sinaitic, and Arabian) in orientation, as we saw in Chapter Three.

Boyarin describes Judaism of the first century CE as an "ethnicity," or "cultural tradition" which was associated with a specific locality and related to itself in a "fleshly" manner, but Boyarin perhaps begins his analysis of the construction of Judaism and Jewish identity at too late a date. As we have seen in Chapter Four, "Elijah," Israelite – and thus Jewish – religious identity and practice was itself constructed through the discourses that surrounded the creation, compellation, redaction, and editing of the Hebrew Bible.

An "orthodoxy/heresy" text of the highest order, the Hebrew Bible reveals that Israelite religious identity was neither given, nor ethnic, nor associated with only one place, nor genetic, but, within an environment of variegated religious practices, came into being in contradistinction to practices and peoples which were constructed as heretical within the text. As Jewish communities of the post-Exilic, Persian, and Hellenistic eras continued the production and maintenance of the Hebrew scriptures, and simultaneously reaffirmed their identities around these scriptures, one could share Boyarin's assessments

of the nature of "Judaism" by the time of the first century CE. However, the perspective within this project is that Jewish religion and identity came into being first through the heresiological discourses of the Hebrew Bible, and that Christian and rabbinic heresiological writings of the second and third centuries CE distinguished between and thus began to construct Christianity as a separate "religion" from Judaism, and simultaneously to articulate Judaism in a different way; i.e., in contradistinction to Christianity.

General Religion in the Levant in the First Centuries of the Common Era

Most people of the region in this era – indeed, in most eras before the modern period – were in general less religiously distinct from one another than we tend today to presume or to project upon them. Indeed, accounts of what we might call religious evidence in the first centuries of the Common Era and throughout the first millennium evince less religiously sharp-cut identities among people, and more indistinction and overlap.[336]

A vast majority of peoples living in the first few centuries of the Common Era seem to have been less concerned with orthodoxy or orthopraxy, and more interested in which gods and practices were effective. Within the Levant there existed a religious mix of various forms of Judaism, various forms of Christianity, various forms of Gnosticism, Greek and Eastern mystery cults, magic, astrology, pagan polythesims, stories of divine

---

[336] For firsthand accounts from the period, see Ramsay MacMullen and Eugene N. Lane, Eds., *Paganism and Christianity 100-425: A Sourcebook* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992). See also A. D. Lee, *Pagans and Christians in Late Antiquity: A Sourcebook* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

men ('θεῖοι ἄνδρες') and their miraculous deeds, and popular Hellenic philosophy, amid much more.[337]

Most people of the time seem to have been fluent in a kind of "religious Koine," a common religious language of the period, to use Martin Hengel's term.[338] Beliefs and practices that accompanied the average person throughout the day, not just on special festivals or anniversaries, involved the more peripheral, unofficial parts of religion: magic and superstition. Established religion, on the other hand, was separate and accompanied by official shrines and representatives, but "a most important characteristic, shared by both the official and the unofficial, was the considerable degree of homogeneity of belief that developed over time, at least among the urbanized population."[339]

One account of religious conversion dating from the first third of the fourth century CE, around the time of Constantine, demonstrates the high degree of intermingling of beliefs to be found. It involved a conversion account of a prominent Jew named Josephus from Tiberias and Scythopolis in the Roman province of Syria-Palaestina (Judaea).

> "Among the actors in the account are Christians [Arian and non-Arian], some of whose religion is non-Christian, Jews, some of whose religion is non-Jewish (being both Pagan and Christian), still a third category of person belonging to the great majority of the population who are neither Christian nor Jew even at this

---

[337] Hengel, "The Beginning of Christianity as a Jewish-Messianic and Universalistic Movement," 86.

[338] Ibid., 87.

[339] *MacMullen and Lane, Paganism and Christianity, 100-425*, 1.

time and in this region – and finally, a substratum which all three groups might plainly call superstition."[340]

The author of the account, Epiphanius (d. 403 in Cyprus, where he had been made bishop), wrote his *Panarion* (*Adversus haereses*), in which he argued against various Christian "heresies" of the day, and one of the stories he recounted was the conversion of the prominent Jew Josephus. The account is memorable because it

> "shows the intermingling in the cities that was so noteworthy: non-Christian festivals are attended by people of every religious persuasion, quite openly, while on the other hand non-Christians are aware of Christianity especially as a healing power, and may invoke it on that account. The selection also contains material on magic, especially as it was practiced among the Jews."[341]

Thus, while this chapter, and the project, more generally, makes reference to communities and identities that are 'Jewish', 'Christian', 'Pagan', etc., it will be understood throughout that religious categorization was blurred rather than rigid for most laypeople in the region, for most periods in history, up to the 20th century CE.

Zeus/Jupiter

Zeus (Roman version, Jupiter), whom we have seen in the preceding chapters, was the most frequently revered religious god or figure in the Levant during the Greek and Roman eras.[342] Since the time of the first Greek settlements in the region, Zeus also

---

[340] Ibid.

[341] Ibid., 2. See also the translation of Epiphanius' account, *Panarion*, 30.4-12, in J. P. Migne, *Patrologia graeca* (Paris: Garnier, 1857-91), 41, col. 109ff., translation by MacMullen and Lane PAGE NUMBERS.

[342] Ramsay MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981), 1-7. This statistic is drawn from the frequency of mentions in Latin and Greek epigraphic inscriptions. Zeus, among Greeks, and Jupiter, among Romans, both considered the supreme deity, were invoked at least 2.5 times as often as any other deity. Note that the exception to the dominance of Jupiter among Roman provinces was in the African provinces. Ibid., 5.

had been associated with – and may in part have been derived from – the figure of Baal-Hadad, the Levantine Storm-God.[343] Thus it is that cults and shrines to Zeus-Baal, or to Zeus-Hadad, or to simply to Zeus or Jupiter of a particular locale in the Levant, came to subsume Baal worship in the region and to remain popular and even dominant throughout the first centuries of the Common Era. Sometimes, cults simply to Baal remained, known from the Roman writer Marcus Minucius Felix's list of gods and goddesses: Felix listed "Ba'al" as the god "among the Chaldeans," as late as the second-third century CE.[344]

One shrine dedicated to "Zeus Baetocaece" (in Syria) lasted for some 500 years, from ca. 293-261 BCE to 260 CE, and an altar in Dura-Europos, dating to the early third century CE, has been found inscribed in Greek and dedicated "To the ancestral God, Zeus Betylos, of those by the Orontes [River], Diphilanos, soldier of the Legion IV Scythica Antoniniana, has offered [this altar] in fulfillment of a prayer."[345]

Of course, it is debatable to what extent earlier Canaanite beliefs about Baal-Hadad remained a part of local Greek and Roman cults to Zeus and to Jupiter. Ramsay MacMullen argues that the kind of worship that changed 'labels' was "in fact very little changed from their form as it had been before Greek or Roman conquest."[346] Fergus Millar, on the other hand, contends that it is difficult to say whether

---

[343] MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire*, 43-45. See also Chapter Three above, 33-37.

[344] Ibid, p. 4, referencing Marcus Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 6.1, ca. 160-250 CE.

[345] Fergus Millar, *The Roman Near East, 31 BC – AD 377*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 1-2. For more on the altar at Dura-Europos dedicated to "Zeus Betylos," see ibid., 532.

[346] MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire*, 4.

"rural temples [and altars] built in classical forms, whose known worshippers used Greek when they put up inscriptions, did or did not embody older local traditions and forms of belief… [however] it must nonetheless be significant that such hypothetical older traditions could now be expressed in Greek forms."[347]

Indeed, it is the position of this project that such longevity of 'expression' reflects a continuity of regional needs and beliefs.

Languages

Because Aramaic was the language of administration that had been associated with the Persian Empire and with the era of Persian political domination over much of the Near East (ca. 550-332 BCE), Aramaic gradually became the common language of the general population throughout the Levant. After Alexander, Greek also became a language used in commerce and by the Greek and erudite populations; thus, many among the regional population learned to understand Greek.[348] Some Jewish communities also began to read and to use the scriptures of the Hebrew Bible in Greek, while others continued to read them in Hebrew. The Letters of Paul and all of the Gospels in the New Testament were written in Greek, thus indicating the degree of contemporary Hellenistic intercultural penetration.[349] Into the first centuries of the Common Era, Latin also became a language in use in the region, and Syriac, a first-century CE Syrian dialect of Aramaic, "was the only language which emerged [from the region] for the first time in

---

[347] Fergus Millar, *The Roman Near East,* 274. For more on the shrine/cult to Zeus Baetocaece, see pp. 270-274. See also *MacMullen and Lane, Paganism and Christianity 100-425*, 43-45. MacMullen and Lane also include the text of a first-century "Hymn to Zeus," pp. 62-63. .

[348] Canivet, "Context of the Mediterranean Civilizations," 53.

[349] Ibid., 51.

this period, developed as a vehicle for literature, both pagan and Christian, and has remained a Christian language to this day."[350]

<p style="text-align:center;">The Rise of Christianity and Development of the New Testament</p>

Early Christian Communities

As we saw above, the earliest "Christians" did not separate from Jewish worship or practice, but they did begin to distinguish themselves by adopting certain new practices and rituals (Acts 2:42 and 4:32). An early Christian community began to develop in Jerusalem following the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth, but that community was curtailed when Jerusalem fell to the Roman army in 70 CE. With the loss of the community at Jerusalem, the growing Christian community at Antioch became preeminent in the region.

Early Christian communities met at house churches at least once per week; in the beginning, on the Sabbath, but eventually on Sunday. The liturgy presented at these meetings was similar to that of the synagogue, including prayer, reading of scriptures, a sermon, chants, but also with invocations of the 'Holy Spirit'. These assemblies would conclude with a common meal, including ceremonies of breaking bread and blessing the cup, similar to the events recounted of the Last Supper. Little by little, eucharistic theology developed including these elements and those outlined in the *Didache*,

---

[350] Fergus Millar, *The Roman Near East*, 521. The written language of Syriac first appeared in Edessa in the first century CE.

'Teaching', a text composed at the end of the first century CE in Syria which addressed ethics, rituals, such as baptism and a eucharistic meal, and church organization.[351]

Over the course of approximately the second through fourth centuries CE in the region, Christianity touched all social classes. The last group of elite Romans, both pagan and Christian, was born in the late fourth century CE into a "world in which most people believed that the pagan religious order of the past few millennia would continue indefinitely."[352] Indeed, the world of the fourth century CE was "full of gods, temples, churches, and synagogues, whether fully functioning, recycled, looted, vandalized, or abandoned."[353] As late as the late fourth century CE, long after the council at Nicaea, elite pagan Romans remained "oblivious to the establishment by Constantine's sons of the formal Christian domination of what was becoming a formally Christian empire."[354]

Development of the Christian New Testament

The twenty-seven books of the Christian New Testament detail the life and ministry of Jesus "Christ," as well as the teachings of Christianity (through the letters of Paul to early churches), and the history of the apostolic followers of Jesus. A final book, Revelation, consists of a series of apocalyptic prophesies involving the ultimate success of Christianity, the return and final battles involving Jesus, and the destruction of the

---

[351] Canivet, "Context of the Mediterranean Civilizations," 60.

[352] Edward J. Watts, *The Final Pagan Generation: Transformation of the Classical Heritage*, (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015), ??

[353] Ibid., Chapter One.

[354] Ibid., Chapter Three.

world. Like the books that comprise the Hebrew Bible canon (not established until the first centuries of the Common Era), it took several centuries (and many omissions) to establish the "canon" of the twenty-seven books of the Christian Bible.

Early Christian communities gathered in house churches to read the scriptures, but different communities used different scriptures. As early as the time of Eusebius (ca. 263-339 CE), it was clear that debates over the canon had not been resolved, as they would remain, even within proto-orthodox circles, some two hundred years after the last of the books of the New Testament had been produced. Eusebius categorized a list of books that were 'recognized', 'disputed', and 'spurious.'[355]

Eusebius' list, and its ambiguities, continued in practice after him. The most famous of the lists of accepted New Testament canonical scriptures, and that which became the standard among most subsequent Christian communities, was that of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, in his 39th Festal Letter from Alexandria in 367 CE. In it, Athanasius listed the twenty-seven books of the Christian scriptures which are usually considered canonical today.   Athanasius was probably also the first to use the term canon κανών for reference to a closed body of sacred scripture. Even so,

> "there was never a time in either the fourth or fifth centuries when the whole church adopted as scripture all of the 27 books of the NT and those books alone… many Christians continued in practice to reject parts of the greater church's canon long after there was a general recognition of it."[356]

---

[355] Bart D. Ehrman, *After the New Testament: A Reader in Early Christianity*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[356] Lee M. McDonald, *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon*, Revised and Expanded Edition (Peabody, MA: Henrickson Publishers, 1995). Notes also Tatian, Diatessaron, Syriac communities. References someone else at the end, get that. Reference also the Reformation books indicate that this was still not a "closed" debate.

Christianity, as we have seen, did not "triumph" after the Council of Nicaea, which is a common but erroneous way of characterizing Christian history. Rather, the growth of multiple Christian communities and orthodoxies was gradual, not given. As late as the sixth century CE, the 'pagan' population of the Levant remained numerous.[357]

Martyrs and Martyrdom in Christianity

The Roman Empire was on the whole quite tolerant in matters of religion, as any large empire must be. Multiple religious groups and orientations existed relatively freely alongside Roman state religion. Until the middle of the third century CE, persecutions against Christians and Jews remained sporadic, and it was often the lifestyle of Christians that brought on pagan hostility. From a Roman state perspective, Christians were not objectionable because of their beliefs and practices, but because of their claims that some gods were false, for which Christians were often called 'atheists'.[358]

A first well-documented persecution targeted Christians at Bithynia in Asia Minor in 112 CE. From the authorities' point of view, these persecutions could be explained because Christians "refused to render to the [Roman state] gods, to whom the Empire supposedly owed its prosperity."[359] Pliny the Younger, then-governor of the Province, wrote to Emperor Trajan about his concerns over his actions toward the Christians at Bithynia, and their correspondence established a sort of effective jurisprudence which

---

[357] Maraval, "Christianity in the Middle East in the Second and Third Centuries," 80.

[358] Canivet, "Context of the Mediterranean Civilizations," 80.

[359] Ibid., 81.

225

would be applied in the legal actions against Christians until the time of Emperor Decius in 250 CE. The general practice was to condemn Christians who identified themselves as such – and, usually, only the clergy: bishops, priests, and deacons – but not to prosecute them unless they were officially denounced by non-anonymous accusers. Also, they commonly pardoned those who agreed to sacrifice to the gods.[360]

Various martyrdoms took place during the second and third centuries, throughout Asia Minor, in Alexandria, and in Syria-Palestine. These, however, were sporadic, limited in nature, and seemed to follow the legal framework established in the Pliny-Trajan correspondence. Under Emperor Decius (249-251 CE), the persecution of Christians took a new turn, because, in that case, prosecution was instigated by imperial edict. The edict, requiring all inhabitants of the empire to express their piety or devotion to the gods by participating in a sacrifice and praying for the salvation of the empire, was intended to induce a public demonstration of loyalty, and was not at first directly primarily against Christians. Persecution of Christians became the reality during this campaign, however, causing dread and creating numerous martyrs among the Christian communities of the empire.

The most memorable – and final – persecution of Christians was inaugurated by the Emperor Diocletian in 303 CE. It outlined the destruction of churches and scriptures, and the forfeiture of all honorary titular posts and privileges of upper-class Christians, the imprisonment of heads of churches, and the compulsion, upon pain of physical threat, for

---

[360] Ibid., p. 80.

all to make a sacrifice.[361] In the eastern part of the Empire (i.e., the Eastern

Mediterranean), the persecution was particularly violent and long-lasting; most Christian

'martyrs' came ultimately from this campaign of persecutions. Constantine's Toleration

Edict in March 313 CE put an end to official Roman persecution of the Christian

population, and, although various additional "martyrdoms" of Christians took place

thereafter, it was not in an official Roman capacity.

The experience of martyrdom, however, had left its mark upon Christianity:

imitation of the suffering and death of Jesus had already informed Christian perspectives,

and was reinforced by a long and visceral history of martyrdom among Christians.

Furthermore, in many cases, martyrdom bolstered the Christian community: not all

Christians were targeted or had to be martyred in order to benefit from the prestige and

notoriety of martyrdom, and martyrdom provided a kind of authenticity of religious belief

which proved attractive to many converts: many observers were persuaded by the

veracity of a faith for which one was willing to die. Finally, martyrdom left another

enduring legacy among the Christian world: sainthood. While early saints in Christianity

came from many venues, by far the most common and established path to sainthood and

to the veneration of one's earthly remains was martyrdom.[362] Along with the legacy of

martyrdom, the religious and political background of the rise of Christianity in the

---

[361] Ibid., 83.

[362] See also Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

Eastern Mediterranean formed the environment in which the figure of St. George the

μεγαλομάρτυρ 'great martyr' arose in the early fourth century CE.

Introduction to St. George and his Cult

The fantastical and beloved figure of St. George is often placed into a category of

saints termed 'Byzantine warrior saints'. These figures, as the name indicates, were

saints, who originated in the eastern part of the Roman Empire, and who also were

warriors. This category of saint was first investigated by Hippolyte Delehaye in 1909 in

Les légendes grecques des saints militaires. George, the 'exemplar' warrior saint, was

classified by Delehaye in the category of *état-major*, or major warrior saints. Along with

Ss. Theodore Tiron and Theodore Stratelates, Demetrius, Procopius, and Mercurius, St.

George was long considered preeminent among the warrior saints, and his cult remains

outstanding even until this day.[363]

Byzantine 'warrior saints' were hardly distinguishable from other martyrs, and

most were said to have been executed during the final campaign of Imperial persecutions

(ca. 303-313 CE), for refusing to renounce their Christian faith.[364] For that reason, Saint

George should in the first instance be studied from within the general category of

martyrs, whose basic characteristics he shared.

The essential characteristic of a martyr was his or her witness of faith and

perseverance unto death; accordingly, Eusebius began to popularize the term "athlete"

---

[363] Christopher Walter, *Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art and Tradition*, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003), 1, 109.

[364] Ibid, 4, 22-23.

"ἄθλητής" to this act of endurance.[365] The *Acts* of martyrs, when they have survived, have tended historically to be accurate accounts of the time. Unfortunately, this is not the case for the *Acts* of the warrior saints such as George, which are deemed instead to belong to the realm of epic hagiographical literature.[366]

A second characteristic of saints – one of the more compelling, in terms of cult generation and promulgation – was that of the intercessory power attributed to saints for the benefit the living. This doctrine, which developed alongside a contemporaneous cult of relics, was formulated by Origen (d. 254 CE), who anchored this belief in a passage from II Maccabees (15:11-16). As the practice of invoking saints as intercessors grew (certainly, this type of belief had contemporary parallels and antecedents among other religious communities) the Christian doctrine of intercession became more fully developed by Gregory of Nyssa (d. 394) in his *Encomium* of Saint Theodore Tiron. "Saints were believed to be able to perform all sorts of services for men," and "the office of warrior saints would become more particularly that of protection against the inroads of demons and human enemies."[367]

Despite our dearth of historical evidence for the person of St. George – indeed, this lack of evidence has been cited throughout history by those who began, as early as

---

[365] Ibid, 25.

[366] Ibid., 18.

[367] Ibid., 28-29.

229

the sixth century CE, to claim St. George as a spurious saint– George undeniably became a popular figure, with an enormously influential cult, from an early date.

Etymological Origins of the Name 'George'

George's name is another of his interesting aspects, and one that ties his cult closely to nature. The name George, "Γεωργιός" (georgios), comes from the Greek word "γεωργός," (georgós), meaning farmer, or, more precisely, one who cultivated the land. Γεωργός, "farmer," is composed of two parts, "γε," meaning "earth," and "εργον," meaning work, labor, or toil. Thus, the name Γεωργιός is related to γεωργια (georgia), agriculture. While there are ample references to γεωργοι (georgoi) "farmers" in Greek and Latin literature, γεωργός was not used in early literature as a proper name, but only as the noun for a category of person who cultivated the land.[368] The name Γεωργιός, "George," only became a proper name in the fifth and sixth centuries CE, after the name had been popularized by the Christian figure of Saint 'George'.[369]

Oftentimes the name of a saint corresponded not to their "original" proper name, but to their function or mission. For instance, the name of 'Peter' from St. Peter comes from the Greek word for rock, "πέτρα" "*pétra*." In Matthew 16:18, Jesus is reported to

---

[368] Greek authors such as Xenophon, Menander, and Aristotle, among many others, referenced *γεωργοι* as a category of persons who cultivated the land, and Virgil's Latin *Georgica* described the contemporary smallholder farming economy in upper Italy. See Robin Osborne and Dominic Rathbone, "Farmers," in *Brill's New Pauly*. Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider, eds. Brill Online, 2015.

[369] Hassan S. Ḥaddad, "'Georgic' Cults and Saints of the Levant," *Numen*, vol. 16, Fasc. 1: 1969, 24.

have said, "I say to you that you are Peter ('Πέτρος'), and upon this rock ('πέτρα'), I will build my church."[370]

Another example of this phenomenon, in a slightly different formulation, comes from St. Lucy. The English name 'Lucy' is derived from the Latin name "Lucia." "Lucia," as a proper name, shares a Latin root, *lucis*, with the word for light, "lux." Both 'Lucia' and 'lux' are related to the verb *lucere*, 'to be visible'. Lucia was reported to have been martyred in 304 CE in Syracuse as a result of Emperor Diocletian's final campaign, and later medieval accounts of her legend began to recount that "Lucy's" eyes also were gouged out as a torture prior to her death. Accordingly, St. Lucy became during the medieval era a saint of "vision," perhaps due to medieval creative word-association with her name. Lucy was often depicted in later iconography as holding her eyes, and remains known as the patron saint of the blind or those with vision problems.

St. "George" seems to be a similar case, given that the name George did not emerge as a proper name in the Eastern Mediterranean until the fifth or sixth century CE, after the cult of St. George had already become popular. St. 'George', Γεωργιός, thus may have been the name given to the cult of the figure who was venerated by agricultural communities. Such explanation certainly aligns with the agricultural traits for which George is also known, such as associations with fertility, fecundity, and rain.

---

[370] Matt. 16:18: "κἀγὼ δέ σοι λέγω ὅτι σὺ εἶ Πέτρος, καὶ ἐπὶ ταύτῃ τῇ πέτρᾳ οἰκοδομήσω μου τὴν ἐκκλησίαν…".

Ḥaddad also cited a compelling inscription from Athens which contained an invocation to "Zeus Georgos," "Zeus the Farmer/land cultivator."[371] 'Zeus Georgos' was an epithet for Zeus as worshipped in Athens, where he was known as a god of farmland and of crops.[372] Ḥaddad (the author) thus links Zeus Georgos with the cult of St. George,

> "One can surmise that, in urban centers such as Antioch, it was applied to the Baal or Zeus worshipped in the shrines of the countryside by the peasantry, possibly called *Zeus Georgeus* or *Belus Georgeus*…This Baal or Zeus of the country folks is almost certain to be the origin of St. George."

While such a claim for the origins of George's cult is intriguing, it is unsupported by evidence other than the linguistic affinity between the name 'george' and the "Zeus Georgos" epithet applied to Zeus in Athens, and thus remains unsubstantiated.

The Cult of St. George

Most hagiographers thus have based their arguments about the authenticity of St. George not upon the historical evidence for his life, of which there is none, but upon the ample evidence of his cult, dated to the early 6th century CE.

The earliest-recorded and longest-continuing sanctuary to St. George was located at Lydda (Diospolis) in Palestine (modern-day Lod, Israel), and built around his purported remains. In about 530 CE, the pilgrim Theodosius recorded that "In Diospolis,

---

[371] Ḥaddad, "Georgic Cults," 24, says the invocation of Zeus Georgos was made "in connection with the sacrifice of the 20th of the month of Maimekterion." Ḥaddad cites the "Georgos" article in Pauly-Wissowa, *Real-Encyclopädie der klassichen Altertumswissenschaft*, 1953.

[372] Stella Georgoudi, "Sacrificing to the Gods: Ancient Evidence and Modern Interpretations," in *The Gods of Ancient Greece: Identities and Transformations*, Edinburgh Levantis Studies 5, Jan N. Bremmer and Andrew Erskine, eds. (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 104, 42 n., referencing Franciszek Sokolowski, *Lois sacrées des cités grecques* (Paris: De Boccard, 1969), no. 52, 12-15 (Athens).

where the martyr Saint George is; there his body is and many miracles are worked."[373] In

this early period, as we will see, George was not quite as popular, regionally, as was St.

Theodore Tiron, although the cult of St. George had spread rapidly to Constantinople,

where at least nine churches were dedicated to him.

Besides the sanctuary at Lydda, there was also a church outside of Jerusalem that

was dedicated to St. George and may have been constructed as early as the late fourth

century CE.[374] The Porta San Sebastiano in Rome was put under the protection of St.

George by Belisarius in 527 CE, and George's ubiquitous relics reached as far west as

southern France, where Gregory of Tours (538-594 CE) possessed one as well.[375]

Finally, a church at Ezra (Zorava) in Syria dating from 514-515 CE and apparently still in

use during the nineteenth century CE, was, founded, according to its inscription, upon

relics of St. George, who "appeared to [the church's patron] not in sleep but in reality."

Built apparently upon the site of a destroyed pagan temple, which were of course still

common in Syria in the sixth century CE, the beginning of its inscription – a fitting

tribute, as we will see, to St. George – reads, "A house of God has replaced the dwelling

of demons. The light of salvation has shone in a place which darkness previously

---

[373] "In Diospolim, ubi sanctus Georgius martyrizatus est; ibi et corpus eius est et multa miracula fiunt," Christopher Walter, *Warrior Saints*, 112, referencing Pierre Maraval, Ed., *Récits des premiers pèlerins chrétiens en Proche-Orient*, (Paris, 1996). Walter further notes that while Christian pilgrimage accounts of the area from the period after Theodosius include references to St. George's sanctuary there, Saint Jerome (347-420 CE), son of Eusebius, in his *Letter* no. 106, mentions Lydda but not George, which may indicate an earliest possible date for the construction of this shrine as sometime between 420 and 530 CE.

[374] Ibid., 113, also citing Maraval, *Récits des premiers pèlerins chrétiens en Proche-Orient*.

[375] Christopher Walter, *Warrior Saints*, 113, also citing Gregory's *Liber in gloria martyrum*, PL 71, 792-93.

233

covered. Where sacrifices were made to idols, there now are choirs of angels. Where God was provoked, now God is appeased."[376]

The several fantastical stories which surround the *Acts* of St. George, as we will see, have multiple sources of influence, some of which can be identified. The story of St. George recounts his origin as a Roman citizen of material wealth and military importance from Cappadocia, and states that, during the terrifying persecutions of the emperor 'Dadianus' (later authors refer instead to Diocletian ca. 284-305 CE), George presented himself willingly to testify to his belief in the Christian god and to be martyred, in order to oppose the false gods of the Emperor, and to convince others to believe in the Christian God.

Part Two: Saint George Text: *Acts of Saint George*

History of the Text

The *Acts of St. George* was originally written in Greek in the early fifth century CE, and may have originated in the region of Cappadocia in Asia Minor under a milieu of various influences; among them, Persian, Greek, and Christian.[377] The oldest form of the fifth-century CE Greek text survives today in fragments, which are preserved in Vienna.[378] The Syriac version of the *Acts* was translated from the Greek around the

---

[376] Ibid., 114, citing H. Leclerq, 'Ezra' (*DACL* 5), 1052-1056, and H.C. Butler, *Early Churches in Syria*, E. Baldwin Smith, ed., (reprinted in Amsterdam 1969), 122.

[377] N. Thierry book; description of Cappadocia under Persian influence.

[378] This introduction is generally adapted from George Anton Kiraz, *The Acts of St. George and the Story of his Father*, (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2009). The earliest Greek fragments were edited by Krumbacher and Erhard, 1911.

middle of the fifth century CE, a few decades after the original Greek manuscript was composed.[379] The oldest-surviving mostly complete copy of the *Acts*, and that which will be used in this project, is a Syriac manuscript, written around the year 600 CE, preserved at the British Library, Add. 17205, and written in the Estrangelo script of Syriac, the earliest Syriac liturgical script.[380]

This Syriac manuscript, Brit. Mus. Add. 17205, is missing ½ a leaf at the beginning, 2 leaves after folio (f.) 26, nine or ten leaves after f. 27, and a leaf after f. 28. F. 23-26 are torn at the top, and f. 28 is torn at the bottom.[381] The English translation used here, unless otherwise indicated, comes from E. W. Brooks' 1925 publication.[382] Brooks supplied the content from the leaves missing in Add. 17205 with that from an 11th century Syriac Sertā-script manuscript, Brit. Mus. Add. 14734, which preserved substantially the same text of the earlier Syriac version, Add. 17205.[383]

Summary of the Text

The appended summary has been broken into arbitrary episodes that are inspired by the headings from Kiraz' text, but which are not original to either the Syriac text or to

---

[379] Ibid., 2.

[380] Ibid., 2, quoting W. Wright, *Catalogue of the Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum*, Part 3, p. 1087 (London: 1872, reprinted in Piscataway, NJ in 2002).

[381] E. W. Brooks, *Acts of Saint George*, Analecta Georgiana vol. 8, George Anton Kiraz, Series Ed. (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006, originally published in *Le Muséon*, vol. 38, 1925), 2 (orig., 68).

[382] Ibid.

[383] Ibid.; see also Kiraz, *The Acts of St. George and the Story of his Father*, 2.

Brooks' translation. Where indicated by quotation marks, the text is faithful to Brooks'
(or my own) translation (see Appendix 1).

Textual Analysis: Competitive Religious Environment

Mixed Religious Milieu

The *Acts* depicts the mixed religious context of the day. We see the presence of
Christians, Roman state paganism, and even sorcery and magic. King Dadianus refers to
George as a "sorcerer" in both the Magnetius episode and in the episode of George's final
martyrdom. Through King Dadianus' derisory tone, it is clear that sorcery and magic are
false, but also that "sorcerers" who could produce magical feats were a part of the
religious paradigm of the day.

Roman State Paganism

State paganism was a dominant religious tradition within the Roman Empire, and
was based upon the concept that a multitude of gods ruled over the celestial and
meteorological phenomena, and over the human realm. As such, these gods needed to be
recognized and honored through the regular act of sacrifice. From the statements of King
Dadianus, we see that the god Apollo was the sun god who "stretched out the heavens,"
and Heracles "laid the foundations of the earth," and Serapion and Posidon "restrained
the sea such that it should not pass its limit." In addition to Apollo and Heracles, against
whom, says King Dadianus in the first episode where he tortured George, no other gods
can compare, "among females [gods] great is Artemis the goddess of the Ephesians."

We learn furthermore that the gods were worshipped in temple(s) (ναός), and that
these gods demanded regular indebted acknowledgement in the form of sacrifice.

236

However, as we saw in Dadianus' speech in the initial episode where George confronted Dadianus, the gods would forgive a person for the transgression of ignoring the duty to sacrifice, provided that person eventually made amends through a sacrificial offering.

Roman Views of Christianity

Through this glimpse into Roman state paganism in the text, we can also see reflected in the text contemporary Roman views of Christianity. In the Tranquillinus Miracle episode and in the section where George is asked to sacrifice to the gods, we see that Romans referred to Christians of the day as a "race (γένος) of Galilaeans," reiterating the contention that Christians were a sect originally from Judaea, and underscoring their Jewish origins.

Second, we learn from an analysis of this text that Roman state perspective derided Christian beliefs as absurd. Rather than worshipping the gods, who were plainly worthy because of their celestial power to have "made the things that are seen," the Christians worshipped a god who, in Christians' own estimation, was born of a human woman, "Mary," and whom the Jews – a nearly powerless people within the empire – had "scourged with rods and hung upon a tree."

Imperial Christianity: Trinitarianism and the Biblical Tradition

We see also in the text a reflection of the author's(s') contemporary Christianity, one that was colored by the debates of the day and which espoused a particular perspective that could be called post-Nicene. Two main strands of Christian thought in particular, involving the nature of God and the biblical tradition of Christians, are evident here.

237

Trinitarianism

Within this text, the Christian God is clearly identified as the same god of the biblical (Hebrew) Scriptures. In the section where George feigned acquiescence in sacrificing to the gods, he referenced Psalm 22:20 as he cried, "Thou, Lord, be not far from me, *El, El*, remain for my help." Jesus in the first confrontation episode called Gabriel the "angel of *my covenant*" (διαθήκη), and declared that George's brave actions would convince people to "confess me and believe that I am the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Israel;" i.e., the biblical God.

However, in a manner quite different from that described of God in the Hebrew Scriptures, God in the Christian conception revealed by this narrative is Trinitarian in nature. George declared to King Dadianus upon presenting himself that he worshipped "one true God, with his Son and his Holy Spirit, one Trinity and one Godhead without division." Jesus was furthermore referred to in the text as both "the living God," and God "in the flesh," which aligned with a contemporary Imperial Christian position regarding Jesus following the Council of Nicaea: Jesus was *homoousios*, (ὁμοούσιος) or "of the same being" with God the Father, and, thus, both fully human and fully divine.[384] In example, Jesus in the narrative later breathed into George's face the "Holy Spirit," in

---

[384] Christianity can be said to take on an 'imperial' character after the time when certain disputed theological positions within the wider community of Christians received imperial acknowledgement as veracious, and other theological positions did not. An early example is the disputed theological position concerning the homoousian nature of Jesus, the "son" of God, to God the "father," which became the official imperial position after the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE.

order to revive George, and thus demonstrating God's divine and human nature in the person of Jesus.

Biblical Tradition

In order to underscore religious positions in the narrative, or to biblically substantiate certain claims, the *Acts* employs several references to both Hebrew Bible and New Testament texts. From the Hebrew Bible are references to Psalms 42:5 and 22:20, Jerimiah 10:11 and Genesis 18:3, and from the New Testament are references to Matthew 26:23, Luke 23:46, John 10:16 and Acts 9:18 and 6:15. This selection of texts from the New Testament aligns with a post-Athanasian composition of "accepted" scriptures and further situates the *Acts* within a particular period of time. Indeed, both the Christological and Trinitarian beliefs reflected in this text, as well as the frequent references to canonical Christian scriptures, contextualize this text within an Imperial Christian tradition post-fourth century CE.[385]

General Themes

The overarching message of this text is that the god of the Christians is *God*. George performed several miracles in order to convince people of the power and veracity of the Christian god, including miraculously enduring excruciating tortures and performing astounding feats. All of the miracles adhered to a clear theme: the Christian god is the true God, because he is the most powerful, controlling both life and death. The Christian God can bring the dead to life – thus recalling a Christian notion of resurrection – and can, likewise, destroy his enemies. Accordingly, beyond that central message,

---

[385] See above, 60n.

there are two others related, and which likewise recall the Elijah narrative from the Hebrew Bible: the worship of other gods leads to destruction, and worship of the Christian God leads to God's favor upon the believer.

The Worship of Other Gods Leads to Destruction

The Acts presents other gods as not only false, but as idols and demons who intend to lead people astray. In the episode where George feigned sacrificing to the gods in order to confront the 'demon' inside of the Apollo idol, George demanded of him, "Wherefore lead you men astray from the fear of the living God?" "By the hell of fire that is prepared for me," replied the demon, "if I had been able, I would have ruined you also, and would have led you astray and not spared."

The destructive result of worshipping these 'demons' is on display in the episode where St. George revived two hundred people from a state of dust in the rock coffin: when George questioned Yubla, recently resuscitated from dust in the coffin, George asked Yubla, "Did you worship Christ, or Apollo?" and Yubla's answers was,

> "We for our part did not known Christ, but worshipped idols. And when we died angels carried us and brought us to a river of fire, and there we were till today, so that not even on the first day of the week [i.e., Sunday, the Christian day of worship] had we relaxation, because we had not been wont to observe the first day with the with the fear of the living God."

Worship of the Christian God Leads to God's Favor on the Believer

George was referred to as the "bondman," or servant, of the Christian God six times in the text. Thus, when we see George saved repeatedly or favored by God in some way, we understand the clear message: God favors those who confess that the Christian God *alone* is the true God. In the Queen Alexandra episode, this message was also clear.

While Alexandra was being tortured, she cried, "Have mercy on me, my Lord, because I sinned against thee, the hope of the Christians." In the next scene, when George arrived, she called to him, "O athlete (ἀθλητής) of Christ, give me the mark of baptism, that I too may enter Christ's mansion." George replied," Fear not, queen Alexandra, nor be afraid in the matter of baptism; for you may be baptized and cleaned in your blood." Just before being martyred, Alexandra called aloud, "Our Lord Jesus Christ, see that I am now leaving my palace for thy name's sake, and I did not shut my doors; and thou also, my Lord, shut not the door in the face of thine handmaid." In response, the text tells us, Alexandra received from the Christian God the crown of martyrdom.

Alexandra's anxiety around baptism, as well as that of Yubla, the resuscitated man from among the rock-coffin dead, further demonstrate that receiving the Christian ritual of baptism – and, thus, indicating the supremacy of the Christian god – resulted in everlasting life in God's favor. Afterlife in God's favor was described as "the country of delights," and the extreme opposite of "the burning abyss" that, Yubla declared, was the fate of all those who do not possess "the mark of our Lord's baptism."

A final means by which, in the text, worship of the Christian god lead to favor upon the believer, was through the intercession of Christian saints. In Pasicrates' introduction to the George narrative, he declared, "In the power of our Lord Jesus Christ we begin to write the martyrdom of the illustrious George and of Antoninus the General and of Alexandra the Queen who were martyred and crowned (*their prayer be with us.* Amen!)" George verified this power just before his own final martyrdom, in his lengthy prayer and request to God that all those who remember, mention, or make an oblation to

George shall be free from torture, fear, terrifying dreams, dangerous lawsuits, heat, hail, physical ailments, demons, and even their own sins. Thus, when one recalls the Christian saints, one will be rewarded by the Christian god.

King Dadianus as Serpent and April 23: Motifs Related to Baal-Hadad

King Dadianus as Serpent

St. George, as we will see, became well known for the valorous act of vanquishing a dragon. In the extant iconography, however, George seems not to have been associated with this motif before the 6th century CE, at the earliest. In the *Acts*, the earliest text associated with George, we also do not read an account of George vanquishing a dragon. However, an interesting parallel component in the narrative is located early on. King Dadianus was introduced in the text as George's chief opponent: a bloodthirsty tyrant who was responsible, along with Satan, for a cruel campaign of torture upon Christians. Referred to as "the asp-serpent Dadianus the king," Dadianus threatened explicit tortures upon those "rebellious men who are acting contrary to the worship of the gods." This call challenged George, who confronted and ultimately defeated Dadianus.

In the Syriac version of the Acts, the word translated as 'asp-serpent' "ܚܘܝܐ," "ḥuwwā," most nearly means "serpent" or "snake." However, the original Greek text read "δράκων," "dragon," and thus it seems that the terms 'serpent', 'snake', and 'dragon' had some overlap between Greek and Syriac, just as the Ugaritic and Hebrew

terms "*ltn*" "snake," and "*tnn*" "dragon," had overlap in the registers of the Baal Cycle and in the Hebrew Bible.[386]

In the *Acts*, we thus witness an allegorical slaying of the 'dragon' or 'serpent', when George, the *Acts'* protagonist, ultimately defeated the antagonist King Dadianus. In naming Dadianus as the 'asp-serpent', the author of the *Acts* explicitly employed a popular regional motif earlier associated with Baal-Hadad.

April 23

Moreover, the Acts recounts that St. George "was crowned [i.e., martyred] on the twenty-third of the month of Nisan [April]." This established George's feast day, as saints were celebrated on the day they had been martyred. Perhaps as a consequence both of this information in the *Acts* and of Georgic cultic practice – it is, of course, impossible to say which – April 23 eventually became the feast day of St. George in both the Eastern and Western Church calendars.

As we saw above, in Chapter Three, Seleucus Nicator I, successor to Alexander, apparently dedicated the city of Antioch in 301 BCE to Zeus-Kasios in his sacrifice to the deity on Mt. Kasios on April 23.[387] However, this account comes to us from Johannes Malalas, an Antiochene Greek chronicler who lived long afterward, during the first part of the 6th century, CE. Malalas was writing about an event that had first been recorded by the Roman historian Tacitus, in the first century, CE, and Malalas apparently supplied the

---

[386] See Chapter Three above, p. 21 and 44n.

[387] See Chapter Three, pp. 36-37 and associated footnotes.

date of April 23. Whatever the historical veracity of Malalas' claim about Seleucus I, by the 6th century CE in the region, April 23 evidently had become a date associated with both the god Zeus, and with the cult of St. George, as well.

Whatever the reason behind the author's assignation of these serpent/dragon and April 23 motifs in the *Acts* – whether the motif of defeating a serpent or dragon, and the date of April 23rd, were employed in the *Acts* because they would resonate among wider culture, or because elements of the George cult had already been associated by that date with the cults of Zeus-Baal – the application in the *Acts* of the serpent/dragon motif and that of April 23 helps us to better understand the ways in which the cult of St. George developed.

Queen Alexandra

Tales about St. George also became later associated with the narrative of George saving a princess from the dragon. In those narratives, St. George saved a princess – sometimes named Alexandra – and this heroic act either inspired her father the king to convert his entire kingdom to Christianity, and/or George married the princess.[388] In the *Acts*, Alexandra, who was the wife of King Dadianus, was not physically saved by St. George, but was instead inspired by George's example and mission to convert to Christianity and face martyrdom herself.[389] This may represent a spiritual "saving," but it

---

[388] See Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, 2 vols., William Granger Ryan, transl. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 238-242.

[389] See Kiraz, p.

was the same rescue enjoyed by the General Antoninus, who does not appear in later versions of the George narrative.

George's Contest was not between Religions, but between Gods

George, we see clearly in the text, is the 'bondman' or servant/slave of Christ. In the service of Christ, George promotes the true God of the Christians in the face of the false pagan gods. Indeed, George's mission is intended to convince people that only the Lord God Jesus Christ is God. When they are convinced, we see in several of the episodes, it leads people to believe.

It is important to note that, throughout the narrative, people are led to "believe" or to "confess" that George's god – the god of the Christians – was the true god, and not that the "tenets of Christianity" were correct above those of all others. Thus we see that this was a contest not between conceptions of "religions," but between gods. The king asked Yubla, "Did you worship Christ, or Apollo?" And when George spoke with the widow, he asked her "Of what religion are you?" and her answer was "of that of Apollo." Among other potential observations, this indicates that contemporary peoples characterized their "religious" identity in terms of which God they followed rather than which "religion" they followed. It also reflects a contemporary historical reality; one in which the tenets of Christianity(ies) were still in the process of being constructed.

Certainly, throughout at least the first six centuries of the Common Era, the bulky theological apparatus of Christian doctrines, theologies, and rituals, variously defined, were still coming into being. Later Christians would come to identify themselves more

245

with particular sectarian theologies[390] than they would by which "god" they followed, but at the time when the *Acts* was written and the time to which it referred, Christian religious identification was different – and related to its own historical religious environment involving a contest between multiple gods.

<p style="text-align:center">Themes Regarding St. George</p>

Who was St. George?

George in the Acts came from a Cappadocian family, served as a tribune in the army of Emperor Diocletian, was wealthy, fair, and young. After seeing "Christ being insulted, and demons being praised before him," George distributed his earthly belongings to others – communalism being a common practice among early Christians – and readily announced himself as a Christian to King Dadianus, despite the physical tortures to which he would be subjected and of which he was frightened. George's identity as a Christian, which, as we have seen, aligned with an Imperial or Nicene position, was strongly colored by his declaration that he was the 'bondman' of Christ; the second person of the Godhead.

Upon being questioned by King Dadianus about his identity, George replied, "As to my first name, I am a Christian. But, if you inquire as among men, I am called George (γεωργός)." This reply is interesting, as the author of the Acts seems to convey the idea that "George" was anonymous; a 'Christian' martyr. However, if one were to inquire "as among men," he was known, among them, as "George." As we saw earlier, this detail in

---

[390] See below in Chapter Six.

the *Acts* may be further evidence that 'George's' name functioned less as a proper name than that it was associated with his identity as a figure with agricultural cult.

Furthermore, we learn in this text that George can eradicate demons. In the episode where George pretended to sacrifice to the gods, George "struck the ground with his foot, and a great chasm was laid bare; and the holy George said to [the demon who inhabited the Apollo icon]: 'Foul demon, go down into this abyss, until the day of your torment'. And [then George] sealed the place, and it was not known." Moreover, we learn in George's final petition to God before martyrdom that prayer to George can protect one from demons. "Lord God," prayed George,

> "bestow on me this favor that, whoever shall make mention of George or make an oblation and remember this day of his contest (ἀγών), there shall not be in his house one that is leprous, nor shall a stammerer and a blind man be born into it, no one that is palsied and one that is blind, nor one that is driven by a demon."

These attributes of George in the text indicate not only that George had the ability to eradicate demons, but also that there seems to have been some overlap between the contemporary concepts of illness and physical maladies and 'being driven by a demon'.[391]

Finally, we learn in the *Acts* that, because of the miracles God worked through George, George exhibited some traits of divine contact, himself. In the widow episode, after George's prayer had healed her son, George appeared to her with a "face

---

[391] Likewise, an account from the fourth century CE records the contemporary belief that "madness" was caused by demons. See Epiphanius' account in his *Panarion* of the Jew, Josephus, who drove a demon from a madman by sprinkling water over the man upon which Josephus had made the sign of the cross.

247

(πρόσωπον) bright like sun"[392] This type of description in the ancient Near East and

within the biblical tradition was common for identifying those who had contact with the

divine.[393] In Exodus 34, after Moses spoke with and received the Commandments from

Yahweh on Mt. Sinai, the skin of Moses' face was described as having "shone" so

brightly that Moses was forced to veil his face (Exod 34:35).[394]

<div align="center">In Defense of the True God: a Christian Conception of God</div>

The mission of Elijah in the Hebrew Bible was defiant opposition to Baal worship

in defense of the true God, Yahweh. Similarly, the mission of St. George in the *Acts* was

a religious contest against the false gods of the Roman Empire in defense of the true God,

Jesus Christ. As we have seen, the earliest followers of Jesus were Jews, although a

separate Christian identity, built around the nature of Jesus Christ, gradually began to

emerge from within and among these followers. Similarly, the Christian conception of

God seems to have widened the nature of God as represented by the Hebrew scriptural

tradition. Indeed, by the time of the *Acts*, Jesus was considered by Christians not only to

have been a man from Judaea, but to be the second person of the Godhead and God's

embodied "son" – and, at the same time, the same as the God of the Hebrew Bible.[395]

---

[392] Another recension of the *Acts*, CDMV, has "face *as of an angel*." Cf. Acts 6:15.

[393] In both later Zoroastrian and Christian traditions, the 'shining face' from ancient Near Eastern traditions which indicated divine contact may have become represented in the form of a halo.

[394] A "shining" or "bright" face was likewise associated with divine contact in neo-Babylonian culture as well. See Balogh, *Circumcising the Mouth of Moses*.

[395] For more on the evolution of Jesus from the status of human to divine, see Bart D. Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee*, (New York: HarperOne, 2015).

Whatever the apparent Christian widening or clarification of the nature of the God, George, in the *Acts*, was clearly depicted as defending the *true* God, just as Elijah had done before him in the Hebrew Bible account.

George is Like Elijah

Additionally, in order patently to highlight George's association with Elijah, George was also purposely depicted as sharing several elements from Elijah's own narrative; namely, being engaged in an explicit religious contest, lodging with a widow, performing miracles for her involving sustenance, and healing that same widow's son.

George Engaged in a Religious Contest

In addition to the overarching context of the *Acts* as a religious contest narrative, George engaged in the text in several smaller direct contests, as well. Among them, in the episode where George confronted Dadianus for a second time, and after being relieved through the holy water of Michael the archangel of the pains of the iron shoes nailed to his feet, George posed the following confrontation to King Dadianus:

> Tell me, King: which seems to you the worthier by comparison, Simon the chief of apostles, or Posidon the chief of the brigands (ληστής)? Samuel the chosen prophet, or Actaeon the madman? Moses who led the people forty years, and gave manna to the children of Israel, N q ṭ ['Antaeus'] and Heracles the profligates? Tell me which of these you choose, the sagacity of the martyrs and the love of the confessors, or the striving of the possessed persons or the hostility of the priests? Mary who gave birth to God in our manhood, or Jezebel the slayer of God's prophets?[396] But I see that your gods are mad persons[397] in whom there is no profit.

---

[396] Cf. 1 Kings 18:4; recension M has 'Artemis the slayer of her lover.'

[397] Recension DMV has 'demons'.

In this way, among other examples, George was presented, like Elijah, as being involved in a direct confrontation and religious contest. Whereas Elijah's direct religious contest occurred in the Hebrew Bible account on Mt. Carmel (1 Kings 18), the *Acts* depicted George as engaged in several direct contests, such as in the episode of his challenge to and defeat of the 'demon' in the Apollo icon.

Lodged with a Widow and Performing Miracles

George was also portrayed as very similar to Elijah in having been forced to lodge with a widow. In the *Acts*, Dadianus devised lodging with a lowly widow as a way to humiliate George, but, like Elijah, George used this awkward social situation as a way to increase the value of his miracles there.[398] As had Elijah in his narrative, George first asked the woman for bread. When she replied that she had none and George learned that she was "of the [religion] of Apollo," George replied, "That is why you have no bread in your house." This is also like the Elijah narrative, in that the woman in Elijah narrative had no flour as a result of the famine that had been caused by Yahweh (through Elijah) in punishment for Baal worship in the north, which was the location of her town.

The woman in the George narrative then left to get George bread from a neighbor's house, and George produced two miracles: first, by simply leaning against it, he turned a pillar in the house into a living tree that sprang leaves and branches fifteen cubits (approx. 22.5 feet) above the widow's house. Second, Michael the archangel appeared to George and gave him "food from heaven" (cf. the ravens and the angel Gabriel feeding Elijah 'food from heaven'), which refreshed George and made him

---

[398] I Kings Anchor Bible Dictionary REF.

happy. When the widow returned to her home and saw the huge living tree and the table covered with delicacies, she fell before the saint in fear and exclaimed, "The God of the Christians has come to me in the body." George replied that he was "not the God of the Christians as you think, but I am a bondman of Jesus Christ."

Healing the Widow's Son

The woman then begged George to heal her son, who was deaf, blind, and withered. If George could do that, she said, in return, "I also will believe on your God." George invoked the "Lord Jesus Christ to heal thee," breathed into the boy's face, and he was cured of blindness. Later in the narrative, George caused the boy to hear and to walk, even to the extent that the boy became to George a "minister of speech." Like the widow in the Elijah narrative, who, after Elijah had revived her son from death, had proclaimed that Elijah was indeed a "man of God, and the word of YHWH in your mouth is true" (1 Kings 17:23), the widow in George's Acts was moved to believe in the veracity of the Christian God after her own son was miraculously healed.

George Can Call Fire and Lightning from the Sky

Finally, George can call down lightning from the sky which causes miraculous things, much as Elijah was described in the Books of Kings. George's prayers brought lightning which struck the fourteen wooden seats and caused them to become living trees again, and his lightning resurrected 200 people who had turned to dust in the rock coffin. Thus, we learn that George's God (and, by extension, George himself) has the power of life, whether agricultural or human.

In the final scene, George called down fire from heaven to devour the seventy

kings, and to cause thereby "everyone to believe in the living God." George prayed,

> "'Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of all the ages, send the fire which thou sent in the
> days of Elijah the prophet, and it devoured the captain of fifty and the fifty who
> were with him [2 Kings 1: 9-10], and let it devour the kings who believed not in
> the signs which they saw done through me.' And the same hour lightning came
> down from heaven like fire, and devoured the seventy kings, and not one of them
> escaped."

Thus, we learn that George's god – and, by extension, even George himself, like

Elijah – also has the power of death.

<div align="center">Political Themes</div>

Roman Religious Campaign against Christians

The text contains several references to its contemporary political environment.

The context of the narrative is plainly a religious campaign on the part of the Roman state

undertaken against Christians in the empire. The account closed with the line, "The

martyrdom of the illustrious George and those with him who were martyred and crowned

in the days of Dadianus the king is ended." As we saw above, two explicit campaigns

against the Christians in general – not simply targeting the clergy or the prosperity of the

Roman state – took place in the third and fourth centuries, under the emperors Decius (r.

249-251 CE) and Diocletian (r. 284-305 CE). Of the two, Diocletian's was the longer,

and most sources date George's martyrdom to the early 4th century, during Diocletian's

campaign against the Christians. The *Acts* names this king "Dadianus," and suggests that

he was the king of the Persians, although later versions of the Acts record the name of the persecuting king as Diocletian.[399]

Imperial Persecution was a Threat to the Christian Community

We see also from this text that contemporary Christians were afraid for their community's survival, reminding us that while we know the outcome of the persecutions and of Constantine's Toleration Edict just a few short years later, the perspective of contemporary Christians – and even of the *Acts* itself – was that the Christian community might indeed be "stamped out," as Satan suggested in the opening of the narrative. During the miracle episode when St. George revived the bodies of those in the rock coffin, George prayed to God to complete the miracle of their resurrection. "Lord, look on thy people, and on the flock of thine inheritance, which thou redeemedst through thy beloved Son our Lord Jesus Christ, *suffer it not to be scattered by the hands of unjust men…*"

Christian Valorization of the Martyrdom Experience

Because torture was a potential experience for Christians, we also see in the text a message of valorization of martyrdom and praise for martyrs. Thus, George and Queen Alexandra both vocalize their fear of torture, and George inspires himself by recalling several times the tortures endured by Jesus. Martyrs in the text were referred to as 'athletes' or 'combatants' (ἀθλητής), and their brutal contest (ἀγών) led to the "crown" of martyrdom.

---

[399] Both Kiraz and Brooks have this. Also, N. Thierry book; description of Cappadocia under Persian influence.

Christians Acted in Defiance of Roman Law

The text demonstrates furthermore a Roman legal perspective on the punishments:

Christians were choosing to refuse the order to sacrifice – willfully ignoring Roman law –

and thus those Christians' punishment was not persecution but prosecution. Indeed, it

was hoped that the gruesome death endured by martyrs might guide other Christians to

the light. In the episode of George's final martyrdom, king Dadianus announced,

> "As for George the Christian initiate who would not sacrifice to Apollo, after all
> these tortures, I give a sentence against him of death. Know therefore, all ye
> kings, that this man *chose* death for himself; who for the long space of seven
> years refused to sacrifice to the gods. But from this time I give order that he be
> beheaded by the sword, and fear be aroused so that no man commit any
> presumptuous act against the gods."

Indeed, in the episode where King Dadianus put Queen Alexandra to death, he

announced to all, "Here therefore, all ye kings, because I am innocent of her blood." That

is, Queen Alexandra was put to death because she chose to commit offenses against the

gods, not because Dadianus himself persecuted her.

<div align="center">Geographical Themes</div>

In the *Acts*, there are two types of geographical references: Agricultural and

meteorological.

Agricultural Phenomena

In the Acts, several of George's miracles have agricultural and meteorological

aspects. In the miracle where George resuscitates the people from the rock coffin and is

asked by them for baptism, George was refused his request for water, and so he struck his foot against the ground, and a spring gushed forth.[400]

George in the Acts furthermore regularly performed miracles that involved turning dead wood into living, flourishing trees. In the Magnetius episode, George's prayers called down lightning which struck the fourteen king's seats and caused them to take root and grow into full trees – some fruit-bearing and some not, depending on which type of tree the wood had originally come from. In the Widow narrative, George's touch caused a pillar in the home to turn back into a living tree fifteen cubits tall.

Meteorological Phenomena

The *Acts* includes direct references to weather phenomena. The raging campaign against the Christians was described as a tempestuous winter storm, "When the Churches of Christ were standing, winter storms were roused by the kings in every country, and with threats they seized the preachers of truth, and brought them to worship fiends, and forced them to sacrifice." This is a notable reference because it reflects an Eastern Mediterranean meteorological environment in which the *Acts* was composed of severe winter storms.

The *Acts* moreover includes stormy theophanic imagery. Jesus Christ appeared and "there was a great fear, so that the mountains were shaken; and darkness was spread

---

[400] Note also that there is a similar motif employed of the baby Ishmael in the traditional Islamic story of Hajar and Ishmael in Mecca, and of the origin of the Zamzam well located there. Hajar could not at first find water for them to survive, but in versions of the story, the baby's foot kicked the ground and there a spring miraculously welled up. This is referenced not to claim linkages between these traditions, of course, but merely to point out that this may have been a compelling contemporaneous motif.

over the earth and a cloud of fire, and the likeness of a chariot of fire; and our Lord Jesus appeared above the chariot…" God in the final martyrdom episode, in response to George's last prayer, replied and spoke to George "from a cloud." Finally, George's prayer, the means by which he caused his miracles, created disturbances in the air, as well as earthquakes, and, of course, lightning. These references demonstrate a continuing understanding of God as associated with storms and meteorological imagery.

St. George Text Conclusion

George, in the *Acts*, was depicted as engaged in a contest much like that of Elijah from the Hebrew Bible: George represented the "true" god in face of the false Roman gods. Thus, the *Acts*, to a certain extent, is a heresiological text, in that it constructed categories of true and false gods, and that it did so at a time of competitive religious environment. Accordingly, the *Acts* also reflects a great deal about both Roman state paganism and about contemporary Christians regarding Christology, the nature of the Christian God, and the nature of Christian religious identity.

In performing similar miracles and being associated with specific narratives, such as with the widow and her son, George was clearly patterned for his audience on the Elijah narratives from the Hebrew Bible account. Elijah was at that time in the region a compelling biblical figure upon which to draw for narratives and motifs regarding a contest between competing gods. In employing these similar motifs and narratives of Elijah, the author of the *Acts* thus intended George appear a good deal like Elijah, but in a clear Roman and Christian context. At the same time, motifs such as defeating a dragon and the agricultural date of April 23 were also intentionally employed in the text.

256

Accordingly, we see in the *Acts* the resonance of the biblical Elijah stories among regional Christian communities at that time, as well as the resonance of regional dragon and agricultural motifs, as applied to a figure of Christian orientation.

Part Three: St. George Icons

Antecedents and Development of the St. George Icon Tradition

Demons, in antiquity, were believed to be supernatural beings who could exercise their powers for the good or ill of humans, but who did so most often for evil purposes. In order to placate and/or repel demons, amulets, on which written characters and symbols were inscribed, could be worn or used by a human subject to thwart demons' evil intentions.[401] Apotropaic amulets, which long existed throughout the Mediterranean, were condemned in the first centuries of the Common Era by Christian writers and councils. Canon 36 of the Council of Laodicea in the late fourth century decreed that Christian priests and clerics could not be "magicians, enchanters, or astrologers," and the contemporary *Apostolic Constitutions* refused admission to baptism to those who made amulets (περιάμμαατα).[402]

Despite that, communities of both Christians and Jews regularly used amulets, and eventually Christian amulets began officially to supplant "pagan" amulets for use among the Christian community. Cappadocian Church Father Gregory Nazianzus wrote that the Trinity was "the great and good *phylacterion*" (amulet or charm as a safeguard

---

[401] Walter, *Warrior Saints*, 33-38.

[402] Ibid., citing *Constitutiones apostolicae* 8 32, PG 1, 1128-33.

257

against danger), and Gregory of Nyssa's sister Macrina wore an iron cross, described as a phylacterion, as well as a ring with a fragment of the wood from Christ's cross.[403]

The Jewish cult of Solomon was popular among Jews, Christians, and pagans throughout the first centuries of the Common Era, perhaps even as late as the 7th century CE. Solomon was said to have had both medical knowledge and power over demons, concepts which were closely related in the classical world. In the first century CE, Josephus wrote about Solomon's God-granted knowledge of the art used against demons and incantations which relieve illnesses, and the ca. third century CE *Testament of Solomon*, a Judaeo-Christian apocryphal text, reported that the archangel Michael had given Solomon a seal ring which he could use to exercise power over demons, listing the names of demons who were responsible for specific maladies.[404]

This regional cult of Solomon gave rise to a popular amulet-type of Solomon, on which one face has incised a figure in armor on horseback. He holds a spear which is pointed downwards towards a prostrate naked female figure with long hair (see Fig. 17). Solomon is identified by the legend "ΣΟΛΟΜΩΝ," and the obverse side says "ΣΦΡΑΓΙΣ ΘΕΟΥ," "seal of god." The female demon is evidently Obyzouth, listed in the *Testament of Solomon* as known to strangle newborn babies at birth. Christopher Walters argues that this was the original iconographical type, called "Holy Riders," from which derived

---

[403] Ibid., citing *Life of St. Macrina* (*Bibliographica hagiographica graeca*, 1012), P. Maraval, ed. (Paris, 1971), 240; PG 45, 989. Note also that 'phylactery' continues to refer, in Judaism, to small black leather cubes worn during weekday morning prayers strapped to the head and left arm by orthodox male Jews and containing verses from Deuteronomy and Exodus. Among Christians, 'phylactery' continues to refer to a receptacle which contains a holy relic.

[404] Ibid., referencing the "Testament of Solomon," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigraphia*, BHG, 944-987.

that of warrior saints killing a dragon, obnoxious beast or a persecutor," but notes that such type also has antecedents in both classical and Egyptian art.[405]

In Christian iconography, argues Walters, protective Holy Riders progressively assumed the identity of warrior saints, such as Ss. George and Theodore, which will be the perspective adopted here as well. However, this project will argue that the iconographical type of the Holy Rider who kills a dragon, beast, or human persecutor is a prime example of a long-lived compelling motif from the Near Eastern common pool: one which, in being associated with the narrative of the defeat of a dragon or serpent, also had ties to the narrative of Baal-Hadad.

Development of Christian Iconography

In addition to pictorial and written amulets, people living early in the Common Era also used images of the gods as protectors in their personal and home shrines.[406] Despite apparent image prohibitions in the Hebrew Scriptures, a ban on images was not universally observed by Jewish communities, as reflected in the frescoes at the synagogue at Dura Europos, in Syria.[407]

Like their pagan – and some Jewish – contemporaries, Christian communities also used images in religious practice, a trait that was reported in the fourth century by Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea in Palestine: "I have examined images of his apostles Paul

---

[405] Ibid., 36-38.

[406] See Roman Household Shrines book. See also Thomas F. Matthews, *Byzantium: From Antiquity to the Renaissance*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Incorporated: 1998), 45.

[407] Kurt Weitzmann, *Studies in the Arts at Sinai: Essays by Kurt W. Weitzmann*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 19.

and Peter, and indeed of Christ himself, preserved in color paintings; which is understandable, since the ancients used to honor saviors freely in this way following their pagan custom." A few images of the "saviors" honored in pagan homes during the first two centuries of the Common Era have survived, and this practice seems to have informed the Christian icon tradition.[408]

One example of such an image is the icon of *Suchos and Isis*, ca. 200 CE, discovered in a house in Fayum, Egypt (see Fig. 18). The gods, heads ringed by halos, sit in a cushioned double throne, holding the symbols of their fertility, and gaze directly at the viewer. The frame of the icon was equipped with a sliding lid, allowing the viewer to activate or to conceal the divine presence if the gaze became too intense.[409]

Domestic worship of the gods involved not only worship of fertility gods who could ensure the health and growth of the family, but also the private worship of military gods, who could protect one in this life and the next. Heron was a popular military god venerated in Syria, and a wood-panel image of him with an anonymous military god from ca. 200 CE confirms his protective status (see Fig. 19).

Both figures, with haloes like rings of fire around their heads, are dressed as soldiers, and Heron, on the right, carries a spear and displays a frightening gorgon's head on his curiass. The companion military god wields a double-headed axe and a spear with a cobra wound around it, and a small female figure in the bottom left corner may

---

[408] Walters, *Warrior Saints*, 21. See also Matthews, *Byzantium*, 43-48.

[409] Matthews, *Byzantium*, 46.

represent the owner of the icon.[410] The figures in this image do not enact a story, but instead are posed statically, to engage the viewer through their gaze.[411]

Early Christian icons continued in the traditions of pagan images and imperial Roman artworks. An icon of Christ and St. Menas, from the ruined St. Apollo monastery at Bawît, Egypt, shows Christ and St. Menas in a posture and with features quite similar to those of the pagan iconography above from Syria and Egypt (see Fig. 20). The squat, full-body figures stand in front of a background that perhaps indicated the Nile landscape, engaging the viewer with their exaggerated eyes and gaze.[412] The Christ figure holds a copy of the Gospels, and St. Menas carries a scroll that perhaps represented the order of his monastery. The date of this icon is disputed, but most likely originated between the 6th and 8th centuries CE.[413]

Other early icons exhibited elements of Roman portraiture painting, such as the 6th century icon of St. Peter, located at St. Catherine's monastery in Sinai (see Fig. 21). Peter is dressed and posed like a classical orator in the half-length format of Roman portraits, while exhibiting the symbols of his Christian apostolic identity, including keys and the cross of martyrdom. Matthews argues that the Byzantine icon tradition which ultimately developed represented a fusion of the pagan icon genre with Roman secular

---

[410] Ibid.

[411] Ibid., 47.

[412] See Matthews, *Byzantium*, 48.

[413] The Musée du Louvre, Paris, where the icon resides, dates it to the 8th century, while Matthews dates it to the 6th century, 48.

portraiture, in part to distinguish the Christian iconographic tradition from that of pagan iconography.[414]

<p style="text-align:center">George Icons</p>

These contemporary iconographical influences were brought to bear upon the early images of St. George, himself a figure of multiple influences. St. George, as Christopher Walter argues, "had all the characteristics of a warrior saint, but also readily assimilated those of other saints and deities who were receiving cult in the regions where devotion to him developed."[415] Thus, argues Walters, St. George ought not be understood as a reincarnation of pre-Christian divinities with which he shares characteristics (among them, Walters suggests, Tammuz, Adonis, Mithra, and Horus, who, on horseback, speared a crocodile representation of the god Setekh), but argues instead that "osmosis" led ultimately to St. George "replacing them in folklore and popular devotion."[416] What Walters calls 'osmosis' this project understands as an absorption and application of compelling motifs from the contemporary common pool. Among those motifs – applied to other warrior saints as well, such as St. Theodore Tiron – was that of the holy rider who vanquished a human or dragon foe, as we will see.

An ecclesiastical tradition of painted Christian icons began probably in the 4th century, after the advent of Constantine's Toleration Edict and the imperial Council at

---

[414] Matthews, *Byzantium*, 49-51.

[415] Walters, *Warrior Saints*, 109.

[416] Ibid., 123.

Nicaea.[417] Produced sporadically in the 4th century, the number of Christian icons increased during the 5th century, and by the "sixth century the cult of images was firmly established."[418] While few icons remain from the sixth century, and none from earlier centuries, there is textual evidence of Christian icons, both from the fourth-century writings of Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea in Palestine (see above), and from a ca. 600 CE text, *Life of Theodore of Sykeon*, written by Theodore's disciple, George. In the text, Theodore was described as a great devotee of St. George, whom George had saved from an illness at age 14, by torturing and banishing the demon who had caused Theodore's malady.[419] Furthermore, the *Life of Theodore* mentions two instances of contemporary icon usage: first, the icons of Ss. Cosmas and Damian, which hung above Theodore's bed; second, Theodore's grandmother, Elpidia, to whom St. George had once appeared. Elpidia's vision was of a young man, 'exceedingly handsome with shining clothes and curly hair gleaming like gold.' Elpidia had no difficulty in identifying the vision as St. George, 'for he closely resembled his portrait.'[420] Thus, we see that an iconographical tradition of St. George existed at least as early as the sixth century, and perhaps earlier.

---

[417] Ibid., 266-267.

[418] Kurt Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Icons. Volume One: From the Sixth to the Tenth Century*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976) 5, quoting E. Kitzinger, "The Cult of Images in the Age Before Iconoclasm," D.O.P. VIII, 1954, 83ff.

[419] Walters, *Warrior Saints*, 115-116. Referencing *Vie de Théodore de Sykeon* (Bibliographica hagiographica graeca, 1748), ed. A. J. Festugière, Brussles, Belgium, 1970), § 120, Greek text, pp. 96-97, translation pp. 100-101.

[420] *Vie de Theodore*, § 32, p. 29 of the Greek text; pp. 31-32 of the translation.

The earliest extant icon of St. George is most likely the icon of the *Enthroned Virgin between Soldier Saints* at the St. Catherine Monastery at Sinai (see Fig. 22). Founded by decree of the Byzantine Emperor Justinian I (r. 527-565 CE) on the locally purported site in Sinai of Moses' encounter with the burning bush, the monastery benefitted from several centuries of imperial patronage. The icon collection at St. Catherine's is remarkable not only because it has been in existence since the time of Justinian, but also because it contains early icons from the periods before and during the tumultuous periods in Byzantine ecclesiastical history known as Iconoclasm, or Εἰκονοομαχία, a series of conflicts between 726-842 CE over the acceptability of icon usage in Christian practice, during which time most Byzantine icons were destroyed. Owing to its remote location, far from Constantinople, icons within the monastery were spared, and continued to be produced.

The *Enthroned Virgin between Soldier Saints* icon dates from the sixth century, and displays the Virgin wearing Byzantine royal purple tunic and shoes, seated on a throne and flanked by two unnamed soldier saints, whom most scholars identify as St. Theodore, on the left, and St. George, on the right (see Fig. 22).[421] George in this icon is depicted, like Theodore, in the ceremonial garb of the imperial guard. He is young and

---

[421] Because the saints are unnamed, Walters identifies only Theodore Tiron and not George in this painting, arguing that George could also be St. Demetrius. However, he does note that an 18th-century icon in the National Art Gallery of Sofia, Bulgaria, there is an icon of Theodore and George on horseback with exactly the same features, Walters, *Warrior Saints*, 124. Weitzmann, however, identifies the saints as Theodore and George on the basis of George's boyish, golden features and on the basis of the frequency of other named icons which combine Theodore and George, especially in consideration of the fact that Theodore is either not or infrequently paired with Demetrius. Most scholars also identify the saint on the right as George. Weitzmann, *Monastery of St. Catherine*, 18-20.

handsome, with blonde curly hair, wearing a light grey tunic with dark purple borders and roundels over the shoulder and knee. Over George's right shoulder, his lavender chlamys is held together by a bow fibula – as is the chlamys of his companion, St. Theodore – a feature that dates the icon to the sixth century CE. Both George and Theodore carry crosses of martyrdom and gaze widely at the viewer.[422]

Another icon of George, also dating from the sixth century, was uncovered at the ruined North Church in the Monastery of St. Apollo in Bawît, Egypt. In this icon, George was represented full-length, beardless, and with curled blonde hair in a circle around his head, wearing a curiass underneath his chlamys, and with a sword girded to his left side. In Chapel 18, there was also an icon of St. George, in bust form, with similar features and accompanied by an identifying inscription.[423]

What we see from these early icons of St. George is that he was identified, at least as early as the sixth century CE, as a youthful military saint, features which certainly align with his description in the fifth-century CE text of the *Acts*. Another narrative feature with which St. George is early identified in iconography is his combat with a dragon or serpent.

Nicole Thierry dates to the sixth-seventh century an iconographical representation of St. George vanquishing a dragon at the St. George rupestrian (cave) church in Zindanönü, Cappadocia, although the state of preservation of the Zindanönü icons is

---

[422] Weitzmann, *Monastery of St. Catherine*, 19.

[423] Walters, *Byzantine Warrior Saints*, 124. Quoting J. Clédat, "Les fouilles exécutées à Baouît," in *Memoires de l'Institute d'Archéologie Orientale du Caire*, 12, 1904, pp. lxii-lxiii, 91.

quite poor (see Fig. 23).[424] There is, however, a series of terracotta icons, recovered in

1985 from outside the walls of a fortress known as Viničko Kale, near the town of

Vinica, Macedonia, on which George is identified by name and depicted as killing a

dragon (see Fig. 24). On this icon, St. George stands to the right of St. Christopher,

holding up his shield with his right hand. Both saints spear a serpent with a human head,

and though neither saint wears military uniform, both have military attributes. Because

the text is inscribed in Latin, Walters dates this icon to a time when the region was still

under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of Rome; i.e., sometime before Leo III brought the

region under the jurisdiction of Constantinople in 733 CE.[425]

Other Dragon-Slayers

Among the Viničko Kale Terracottas was also an icon of St. Theodore spearing

the dragon, with the inscription "Theodorus Draco." Theodore was associated in text as

early as 754 CE with the legend of slaying a dragon, which was centuries earlier than the

textual evidence of George slaying a dragon.[426] Theodore was also depicted in a 9th-10th

century icon at St. Catherine's Monastery in Sinai as vanquishing a dragon, alongside

George, who was represented in the same posture, but vanquishing a human foe rather

than a dragon (see Fig. 25). Theodore and George were also twice depicted as together

---

[424] Nicole Thierry, *Haut Moyen-Âge en Cappadoce: Les Églises de la Région de Çavuşin*, Vol. 2 (Paris: Librarie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1994), photograph of icon pl. 156 a; drawing rendered on p. 302. Cf Walters, who dates this icon to the latter half of the sixth century, *Warrior Saints*, 121.

[425] Walters, *Warrior Saints*, 125.

[426] Walters, *Warrior Saints*, 47-53. Theodores *Passion* is located in *Bibliographica hagiograhica graeca* with *Auctarium*, 1764. The earliest manuscript copy of the *Passion* dates from a 9th-century manuscript, although the text dates itself to 754 CE.

slaying two serpents twisted around a tree on two churches in Cappadocia (see Fig. 26),

from the Yilani Kılıse "Snake Church," ca. 11th century, a painting that is apparently

stylistically similar to a seventh-century painting from the Mavrucan 3 church). Walters

notes that this composition "recalls in both style and iconography early Oriental models";

compare this icon from Cappadocia with the Anatolian image of the Hittite Storm-God

defeating the serpent Illuyanka (see Fig. 3) regarding iconographical coincidences in the

depiction of the serpents.[427] Thus, both Ss. George and Theodore were associated with

the killing of a dragon, but Walters suggests that this association was both earlier and

more widespread for Theodore than it was for George, who eventually began to supplant

or be conflated with Theodore in this role.

     Walters is doubtless correct that, of the two saints, George ultimately became the

more popular and more frequently associated with the legend of slaying dragon,

especially in later centuries. However, both George and Theodore were iconographically

associated from an early date with the dragon, and, if the dating of the George icon at the

St. George Church in Zindanönü, Cappadocia is correct, the earliest witness to this legend

in iconography is George, not Theodore. In any event, the issue of dating is moot, as

iconographical representations of riders on horseback spearing a fallen enemy or dragon

long predate both St. George and St. Theodore: see the Solomon Holy Rider amulet (see

Fig. 17), and the first- to second-century carving of Roman trooper Sextus Valerius

Genalis spearing a fallen enemy (see Fig. 27). Instead, this iconographical composition

should be understood as a compelling motif from the common pool; an ubiquitous image

---

[427] Ibid., 125, 99n.

267

of power employed in different circumstances, like that of the smiting posture which

figures in both the Egyptian Narmer Palette (see Fig. 5) the Baal Stele (see Fig. 4).

Rescue of a Princess

Another textual and iconographical legend for which St. George is known is the

rescue of a princess from the dragon. While this has become the modern legend and

image for which St. George is known, the textual narrative of George rescuing a princess

currently has not been found before that of a Georgian manuscript dating from the 11th

century CE.[428] This princess-rescue legend was greatly popularized through the

publication in 13th-century Italy of Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda Aurea*,[429] a collection

of hagiographies which, in the West, remain paradigmatic today. The earliest-extant

iconographical type of this princess-rescue legend also comes from Georgia, at Pavnisi,

dated ca. 1158 CE.

Walters notes the similarities between the legend of George rescuing a princess

from a dragon and the earlier Perseus and Andromeda myths,

> "Perseus rescued Andromeda from a sea monster at Joppa, which is close to
> Lydda [the location of an early shrine to St. George at Diospolis], although it was
> not at Lydda that the apocryphal account of the rescue originated. Moreover, since
> the gap in time is so great and since there is no literary *filière* between the two
> prodigies, a direct connection between them is hard to establish."[430]

---

[428] This Georgian manuscript is located in the Patriarchal Library, Jerusalem, Cod. 2, ca. 11th century.

[429] See de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, 2 vols., William Granger Ryan, transl. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

[430] Walters, *Warrior Saints*, 121-122.

This project, however, argues that the similarities in the princess-rescue-from-a-sea-monster stories between the St. George legend and that of Perseus and Andromeda can be explained by the adoption of this compelling motif from the common pool. Indeed, as we saw in Chapter Three, the Perseus-Andromeda myth may itself have linkages, through the common pool, to the earlier regional tale of Astarte and the Sea.[431] Moreover, the *Acts* also involves a queen – Alexandra – who is not saved physically by St. George, but is saved spiritually through his mission. Thus we see that while the earliest-extant text of George rescuing the princess dates to the 11th century, associations between George and a queen are not without antecedents in even his earliest text.

Warrior Saints as Protectors

By virtue of their military qualities, warrior saints imparted an important protective status for those who venerated and invoked them.[432] In his *De Sancto Theodoro*, from the late fourth century, Gregory of Nyssa attributed to St. Theodore Tiron "protection from demons, curing maladies, and occasionally saving lives."[433] Saving lives took place in a number of ways – protection from demons and the curing of maladies foremost among them – but military saints were also were believed to provide assistance in battle, to triumph over unjust rulers, and to rescue those in need.

Assistance in Battle

---

[431] See above, Chapter Three, p. 30, 61n.

[432] Cf. the protective qualities of pagan military gods, above, and Fig. 18

[433] Walters, Warrior Saints, 118, quoting Gregory of Nyssa, *De Sancto Theodoro* (*Bibliographica hagiographica graeca*), J. P. Cavarnos, ed., *Gregory of Nyssa, Sermons* II, 1, (Leiden/New York: 1990).

Among the warrior saints, George was known to intervene most frequently in battle. He was said to have intervened in a battle to save the life of Domnitziolus, nephew of the Byzantine Emperor Phocas (602-610 CE), and there is a *Canon* composed by George Skylitzes in which George's aid was requested to help the Imperial army variously to gain victory over the Scythians, Persians, and barbarians.[434] George did not only help the Byzantines, however, as he was invoked by both Serbian kings, and adopted by the English and French Crusaders during their 11th and 12th-century campaigns in the Levant. In 1348, English King Edward III put his Order of the Garter under the banner of St. George, thus establishing George as the patron saint of England and displacing thereby Ss. Paul and Peter.[435]

Triumph Over Unjust Rulers

Like St. George, fellow warrior saint Demetrius eventually became associated with the narrative of defeating an unjust ruler. St. Demetrius was believed to have successfully defended the city of Thessaloniki in the early 13th century from the Bulgarian king Ivan Kalojan, just as "Ss. George Sergius, Theodore, and Mercurius were reputed in their time to have disposed of other persecutors and enemies."[436] St. George's

---

[434] Ibid., 133. See also S. Pètridés, "Deux canons inédits de Georges Skylitzes," in *Vizantijskij Vremmenik* 10, 1903.

[435] Walter, *Warrior Saints*, 132-134. See also P. Deschamps, "La légende de S. Georges et les combats de croisés dans les pientures murals du Moyen Age," *Monuments et Memoires*, (Fondation E. Piot, 44, 1950): 109-123, plates 12-15.

[436] Walter, *Warrior Saints*, 93.

principal adversary in legend was the Emperor Diocletian, who is often identified as the human foe depicted in George iconography place of the dragon (see also Fig. 25).[437]

Rescue: Pillion Rider

George's interventions to rescue people were also associated with his military status. One interesting iconographical association with St. George is that of the pillion rider, the small figure who accompanied not only George but also sometimes Theodore and Demetrius in iconographical representation. Earliest associated with the icon of the rescue of the Youth of Mytilene, ca. 1250 CE, who was said to have been a captive of Saracens (Muslims) on the island of Crete and to have been rescued in the very act of offering drink to his captors, the youth was carried back to his family in Mitilini across the Aegean sea by St. George (see Fig. 28).

This iconographical theme involving St. George became more frequent in the Eastern Mediterranean and Asia Minor after Turkish conquests and into the Ottoman Era. During these time periods, the youth was depicted as a Christian servant in the court of the Sultan, but this motif was often employed as a component of the George icon in any region where Christians were a minority of the population, such as in Greece and Eastern Europe.[438]

However, the iconographical type involving a pillion rider was not original to either St. George or to warrior saints in general. Existing already in Sassanian art, it depicted Sassanian king Bahram V (r. 420-438), who was challenged to feats of archery

---

[437] Ibid., 129.

[438] Ibid., 130.

271

by his favorite young lyre player, the slave girl Azadeh (see Fig. 29). In this instance, we see another example of the common pool in action, in the compelling regional motif of the young-captive pillion rider being applied to the iconographical narratives of warrior saints, who were known as protectors. This protective iconographical motif was especially apropos of St. George, the martyr-warrior saint who had defeated a pagan tyrant, vanquished a dragon, rescued a princess, and ultimately became the most popular saint in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Part Four: Conclusion: St. George and the Common Pool

What St. George Texts, Images, and Sites Reflect about Christian Tradition

What we see reflected in the figure of George is a mixed religious environment that was both cooperative and competitive. We see communities of Jews, Christians, pagans, Jewish-Christians, and various categorizations between these. The religious environment of the first several centuries of the Common Era was dominated by general belief in demons, saints, magic, and icons, alongside growing cadres of "orthodoxies" in religious organization, all of which we can see reflected in St. George texts and iconography.

What the figure of St. George – himself, as we have seen, comprised of multiple religious influences – represents about early Christianity is a religious movement identified with biblical tradition and simultaneously differentiating from Jewish identity and practices. We see in early Christianity a religious tradition that, like that of Judaism and by virtue of its association with the biblical tradition and Hebrew Scriptures, is differentiated from the pagan polytheistic traditions of the Hellenized world. From the

Acts, we can glean an emerging Christian conception of God as the same as the biblical

God, but with an expanded or clarified description: Trinitarian in nature, and, in

accordance with a contemporary Imperial Christian position regarding Jesus following

the Council of Nicaea, incorporating Jesus as the second person of the Trinity; at once

human and divine, in separate measure.

<div align="center">St. George and the Common Pool</div>

Compelling Figures, Narratives, and Motifs from the Common Pool

In the Acts, we see St. George as clearly associated with Elijah from the biblical

tradition. George, like Elijah, was depicted as a religious contest figure par excellence

who represented the "true" god in face of the false gods – in George's case, the false gods

were Roman. In performing similar miracles and being associated with specific

narratives, such as with the widow and her son, George in the *Acts* was clearly patterned

for his audience on the Elijah narratives from the Hebrew Bible account.

We also see the figure of George as employing other motifs from the common

pool; motifs which were associated with agriculture, rain, and Baal-Hadad. George's

very name probably reflected his status as a cult figure for agricultural communities, as

did his feast date of April 23, recorded in the *Acts*, shared by local cults of Baal-Zeus, and

observed by Christian communities in the Levant since the early centuries of the

Common Era.

An important motif from the common pool which became associated early on

with St. George was that of the Holy Rider who defeated a human foe, dragon, or serpent.

Employed by numerous Roman, pagan, Jewish, and Christian figures, this ubiquitous

<div align="center">273</div>

motif of power was applied to the figure of St. George not only in iconography, but also in text: in the *Acts*, George's author deliberately named George's antagonist a "serpent," or "dragon," positioning St. George, who was ultimately victorious, as vanquishing a literary dragon, as well. Significantly, therefore, not only the earliest iconographical evidence, from the 6th-8th centuries CE, but also the textual evidence of the *Acts*, from the mid-fifth century CE, demonstrate that George was from his earliest-extant evidence associated with the vanquishing of a dragon. Therefore, association with a dragon appears to be an original element of the figure of St. George, and related to motifs native to his Eastern place of origin, rather than being, as is often claimed, a "western medieval accretion" to the legend of St. George.[439]

What the Figure of St. George Contributes to the Common Pool

St. George became known in the common pool as a brave and faithful Christian martyr who endured numerous evils and ultimately triumphed in the religious contest against false gods. As such, St. George became forever afterward associated by people with the figure of Elijah, who, to their minds, had also represented the true God.

George became known as a powerful protector who could rescue princesses and captives of all kinds; a great savior who also could vanquish both demons and dragons.[440]

---

[439] Samantha Riches, *St. George: Hero, Martyr and Myth* (Sutton Publishing Company, 1997) XX.

[440] Even into the early 20th century in the Levant, "mad" persons were chained to the churches of St. George, because it was believed that madness was caused by demons, who were expurgated by St. George. Lindner reference: Theophilius Waldmeier, *Autobiography*, "The legend tells us that St. George killed the dragon and that the dragon was a demon and in consequence of this the people believe that St. George is also able to subdue and cast out demons. Therefore the monks of St. George [of Jerusalem] have a few small cells appropriated to the majdaneen. In these cells the insane are half or quite naked, with heavy iron chains round their necks, running through a hold in the wall of the cells into the Church of St. George, where they are fastened round a stone pillar," 2275-2276.

'Green' George was furthermore a powerful agricultural figure, associated regionally with lightning, storms, rain, and crops.

Conclusion

A popular, powerful figure, St. George became over the succeeding centuries the most ubiquitous saint in the Eastern Mediterranean, and the saint most readily identified with the defeat of a dragon. Even under Islamic rule, beginning in the seventh-eighth century CE, George remained a popular and venerated figure. During the Ottoman era in the Levant, beginning in 1517 CE, Christian church building was often curtailed, except in the case of churches dedicated to St. George. Muslims in the Levant, as we will see, greatly respected St. George, and came to identify him with the Qur'ānic figure al-Khiḍr.[441]

Partly because of the regional popularity of St. George among Christian communities, and partly because of Ottoman support for him, today, more churches, shrines, and monasteries are dedicated to St. George than to any other saint, and are second only to the universally beloved figure of Mary.[442] St. George sites in the Levant are located either at churches which display George icons, or at sites throughout Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Palestine, where George is reputed to have lived, worked miracles, or to have defeated the dragon. Interestingly, those numerous sites throughout the region

---

[441] Fieldwork interview with Greek Orthodox bishop (at Balamand University).

[442] ARPOA stats, *Sur les Pas des Saints au Liban* reference, and reference to Chapter One. Note that Muslims also revere Mary, whom they call *Maryam*.

purported to be the location of George's battle with the dragon are often associated with rivers, caves, and subterranean water.[443]

Moving to the Figure of al-Khiḍr

In the 600s and 700s CE, when the figure al-Khiḍr emerged in Qur'ānic and exegetical sources, St. George was a contemporaneous figure. During that time period, however, as we have seen, St. George was a popular figure, but not as differentiated from other saints and gods as he would become during later centuries in the Levant. Furthermore, his cult locations were established at religious sites in the Eastern Mediterranean far from the Arabian Peninsula, where the Qur'ān emerged.[444]

When al-Khiḍr emerged in text during the seventh century in Arabia, it was amid a late antique religious environment. The biblical tradition, and extra-biblical lore, as we will see – along with the more memorable biblical figures, like Elijah – comprised the bulk of the late antique religious environment within which the Qur'ān and its narratives and figures developed. Interestingly, the earliest textual associations to al-Khiḍr and another figure in early Islamic literature of both *tafsīr* and *hadīth* were to the biblical figure of Elijah.

---

[443] Lebanese woman article; fieldwork.

[444] See the various locations of shrines to St. George listed in John Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims: Before the Crusades* (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips Ltd., 1977).

CHAPTER SIX: AL-KHIḌR

Part One: Introduction and the Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity

The late antique period in the Near East, ca. 200-750 CE, spanned an enormous

series of transformations in regional political and social organization.[445] Generally

considered the active transition period between the classical Roman era and the rise of

classical Islam, the late antique era included the division of the Roman Empire into

western and eastern halves, the political demise of the west and the ascendency of the

eastern portion of the Empire – which now we designate 'Byzantium', but they did not –

the growth and division of Christianities around the Mediterranean, and the proliferation

of numerous other apocalyptic and prophetic religious movements within and among the

contemporaneous extended Byzantine and Sasanian empires.

The Byzantine Emperor Justinian I (482-565 CE) could be considered perhaps the

late antique figure *par excellence*, as his shadow falls long over the histories of both east

and west. Justinian's legacy (r. 527-565 CE) includes the commission of still-extant

monumental ecclesiastical buildings and works of art, the formal theological divisions of

eastern Christianity, a revision of the Roman law code into the *Corpus Juris Civilis*,

which remains to this day the basis of many western legal systems, and the ambitious re-

---

[445] The temporal designation 'late antique' and the development of this field is attributed to the pioneering work of Peter Brown. See *The World of Late Antiquity: AD 150-750*, History of European Civilization Library Series (Harcourt Publishers, 1971). This era is temporally construed in various ways for different purposes; in this project, the late antique period will be considered ca. 200-750 CE.

extension of the empire, for a time, to the Atlantic Ocean. Considered alternatively the "last Roman" and the "first Byzantine," it is all the more astonishing to recall that the Byzantine Emperor Justinian was a contemporary of the prophet Muḥammad ibn 'abd Allāh, the founding figure of the religious tradition of Islam.

Traditional Muslim accounts of Muḥammad date his birth to the year 570 CE, five years after the death of Justinian.[446] This proximity in time is illustrative of a larger point which will be highlighted throughout this chapter: the emergence of the Qur'ān and of the religious tradition of Islam, often depicted as a distinct break from and at variance with the political, religious, and social history of the Near East, arose instead as a movement in natural congruity with the social and intellectual currents of the late antique world.

In this chapter, we will examine the figure of al-Khiḍr, الخضر, known in Muslim tradition from the wisdom-literature narrative with which he is associated in the Qur'ān (Q 18:60-82), through his later naming in *tafsīr* 'exegesis'. Al- Khiḍr, a legendary figure whose name in Arabic means approximately 'the Green [One]', has come to be

---

[446] There is discrepancy within and among scholars and traditionalists about this date, as there are no extant records to corroborate Muḥammad's birth. In a majority of traditional accounts – which disagree as to the year of his birth by as many as 85 years – Muḥammad's birth was usually associated with the memorable year known as the 'Year of the Elephant' *al-'ām al-fīl* . According to an account in which the Ethiopian Christian General Abraha used an army including elephant(s) for an expedition into the Ḥijāz, the date of 570 CE for the *'ām al-fīl* / Year of the Elephant was derived by beginning with the date traditionally associated with the start of Qur'ānic revelations, ca. 610 CE, and subtracting forty years, because of the traditional accounts that Muḥammad was age forty when he began receiving revelation (note as well that the culturally mature age of 'forty' may be kerygmatic rather than historically accurate). Some scholars, such as Lawrence Conrad, using Byzantine textual evidence outside of Islamic tradition, argue for a date of the *'ām al-fīl* closer to 552 CE. Evidence such as this, and the dating of Qur'ān fragments recently uncovered, may result in a revision for the traditional date of approximately 570 CE for the birth of Muḥammad, but because 570 CE currently remains in the scholarly mainstream, it will be employed in this project, as well. See Lawrence I. Conrad, "Abraha and Muḥammad: Some Observations Apropos of Chronology and Literary 'topoi' in the Early Arabic Historical Tradition," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, *University of London* (Vol. 50, No. 2, 1987), 225-240.

understood in Islamic tradition as the wise, esoteric figure who taught Moses. This in

turn has led over subsequent centuries to Khiḍr's associations with the mystical Muslim

traditions of Sufism, which is built around esoteric knowledge and the sort of disciple-

master teaching relationship displayed in Q 18:60-82. Khiḍr became associated in early

Islamic literature with the biblical figure of Elijah, and, since at least the eleventh century

CE, has been popularly associated with both of the figures Elijah and St. George in the

Eastern Mediterranean.[447]

By examining al-Khiḍr's earliest reference in text (both in the Qur'ān and in

exegetical *tafsīr* literature), we will begin to geographically contextualize the Islamic

figure of al-Khiḍr. Unlike the texts of Elijah and of St. George, however, the narrative in

the Qur'ān linked to al-Khiḍr does not purport to be an historical account of events, but

rather is an instance of wisdom literature, making it an account that is both outside of

time and applicable in all times.[448] After contextualizing the Khiḍr narrative, we will

then compare it with a similar medieval rabbinical *al-faraj* or 'consolation' literature

narrative, involving nearly the same frame story, but with Elijah in the place of al-Khiḍr

as the wise teacher. In this section, we will investigate both how these stories have

influenced one another, as well as how they have influenced subsequent textual

associations between al-Khiḍr and Elijah. Finally, we will examine important images

associated with al-Khiḍr, as well as what differences in those images – meditated by

---

[447] See Hugh Talman, *Where the Two Seas Meet: al-Khiḍr in Sufi Traditions*., 2014. For a comprehensive literary investigation of al-Khiḍr, see also Patrick Franke, *Begegnung mit Khiḍr*. 2000.

[448] Talman, *Where the Two Seas Meet*, XX.

geographical place of origin – indicate. But first, this chapter will give an historical

introduction to the late antique social, religious, and political environment from within

which the Qur'ān and its figures and narratives arose.

Arabian Environs

Our account begins in the Arabian Peninsula, the location where the religious

tradition of Islam has its earliest roots. Historically it has been difficult to define the

location of Arabia and the Arabs, for not least of which reason is that the Arab

population, which originated within the center and north of the peninsula, was

traditionally nomadic. Nomadism is probably the basis of the Arabic word 'Arab', عرب,

as, from its earliest historical appearances in both biblical and Assyrian texts, the term

refers to peoples of the Arabian and Syrian deserts who migrate seasonally with their

animal flocks.[449] The term 'Arabia' in this project will thus refer both to the Arabian

Peninsula surrounded by the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, [450] and also to the desert

regions on the dry side of the 200 mm (8 inches) isohyet in Mesopotamia and in the east

of modern-day Syria, Jordan, and Iraq (see Fig. 1).[451] Arabia is thus a land mass of

---

[449] Robert Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs: From the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam*. New York: Routledge, 2001, 8. See also Jeremiah 3:2 and Isaiah 13:19-20 and Assyrian king Sargon (r. 721-705 BCE), who wrote of "the Arabs who live far away in the desert and who know neither overseers nor officials," see D.D. Luckenbill, *Ancient records of Assyria and Babylonia*, 2 vols (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1927).

[450] See Gordon Darnell Newby, *A History of the Jews of Arabia: From Ancient Times to Their Eclipse under Islam*, Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1988, 7-8.

[451] Several cities with what were likely originally Arab populations developed in this region from the period 300 BCE-100 CE, such as at Petra, Palmyra, Hatra, and Harran. Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs*, XX. In general, what is meant in this project by the term 'Arabia' equates to those portions of the Near East that are located to the east and to the south of the Levant and the 'Fertile Crescent,' and west of Iran.

nearly 1.5 million square miles; slightly larger than India or Europe – encompassing a substantial area of the Near East.[452]

Arabian Geography

Arabian geography can be divided into four distinct regions: a central high plateau area comprised of hard, rocky desert, surrounded by a series of three relatively softer and sometimes sand deserts. Starting in the north is the Syrian Desert, located between Mesopotamia and the Levant. South of there is the Nafuḍ Desert in the northern section of the Arabian Peninsula proper; below is the *Rub' al-Khalī,* the 'empty quarter', a large desert spread over most of the central-southern portion of the ax-blade of the peninsula.

The eastern section of the Peninsula contains no rivers but has been able to support sedentary populations and cities for several thousand years thanks to its considerable groundwater reserves. This region runs the length of the eastern peninsula along the Persian or Arabian Gulf, through to the modern country of Oman. Because of its proximity to the larger Bronze Age cultures in southern Mesopotamia and Iran, and owing to its location between these lands and the copper mines of Oman, the eastern part of the peninsula, particularly the island of Bahrain and its surrounding mainland territory – called then Dilmun – were well known, and prospered or suffered along with the fortunes of these larger territories.[453]

---

[452] Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs*, 3-4.

[453] Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs*, 13-16.

The southern portion of the Arabian Peninsula, roughly coincident with modern Yemen, was known to Roman-era geographers as 'Arabia Felix', "fortunate Arabia." Because of its geographical location, it receives monsoonal rains, making this the only large verdant area of the Arabian Peninsula. The southwest is able both to sustain agriculture, and, due to its flora –similar to that of eastern Africa, where the bushes which produce frankincense and myrrh grow – the south became during the first millennia BCE and CE the location of powerful kingdoms, such as Saba/"Sheba" and Ḥimyar, enriched through trade. Despite being surrounded by water, the only suitable port for docking along the coast of the peninsula is located at Aden (in modern-day Yemen),[454] bestowing the south a further advantage in trade: both the overland and water trade routes passed through the south.

A mountain range runs the length of the western portion of the peninsula, and reaches its highest point in the south. The west is thus mountainous, especially toward the southwest, and generally inhospitable, save for areas with groundwater reserves and in some cases oases which have supported fixed communities, such as at Ṭāʿif, Mecca, Yathrib/Medīna, Khaybār, and Taymāʾ.

Owing to the geographical diversity of the peninsula and the *natura maligna* nature of its desert environments, the regions and peoples of the peninsula were largely separated early in history, although gradually they began to integrate beginning in the

---

[454] Newby, *Jews of Arabia*, 9.

first millennium BCE. Eventually, the nomadic population from the west and especially the center/north, known as Arabs, began to dominate the peninsula.[455]

Arabian Trade

Despite its largely inhospitable environs, the Arabian Peninsula is located between what historically were the larger, richer, and politically better-organized regions of India, Mesopotamia, Africa, and the Mediterranean. For most overland trade, and all seaborne trade, Arabia – mostly around the perimeter, but also on occasion through the deserts in the center – had to be engaged. This was of course true as well for military transport; there is an account of the Assyrian king Esarhaddon in 671 BCE thanking an Arab king for his assistance with camels and water skins in moving his army.[456]

Prized for its trade in and production of myrrh, frankincense, and other aromatics, but also as an essential station along the lucrative highway of silk trade, Arabia and its peoples were thus part of the part of the wider ambit of the Near Eastern world. While academic portrayals of the religious history of the Near East often present the religious and political cultures of the Near East as segmented and discrete, in fact, gods, stories, and what we might think of now as religious notions traveled freely wherever peoples came into contact. Trade routes ought thus to be thought of as currents of religious thought and contact as much as of material goods, and can help us to visualize the connected nature of Near Eastern religious communities (see Fig. 30)

---

[455] Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs*, 8.

[456] Ibid., 1.

Arabian Religious Communities

Both trade and the remoteness of the Arabian Peninsula were attractive to regional

religious communities. This was particularly so for Christian communities after the

Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE, when Arabia became an appealing location for

sectarian missionizing. Located between the competing Byzantine and Sasanian

Christian communities, Arabia represented expansionist potential for bishoprics.[457]

Arabian Polytheism

What we know of internal Arabian religious life (outside of later Islamic historical

accounts) comes to us primarily from the tens of thousands of rock inscriptions found

throughout the peninsula.[458] As we will see, there existed communities of Jews in Arabia

since the first millennium BCE. However, until about the 4th century CE, most

inhabitants were polytheists. We know the names of many of their gods because the most

common form of Arabian inscription was to invoke the gods in some way, usually

petitioning the gods or thanking them.[459] For the most part, the gods seem in some

instances to have been associated with specific geographical regions, and sometimes, as

in the case of the popular goddess Allāt, to have been known and venerated throughout

---

[457] Newby, *Jews of Arabia*, 9, quoting Aziz Suryal Atiya, *History of Eastern Christianity* (Notre Name, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), and Irfan Shahid, "Pre-Islamic Arabia," in *Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 1, *The Central Islamic Lands* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 3-29.

[458] Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs*, 8.

[459] Ibid., 139.

the Arabian Peninsula and in places around the northern Syrian Desert, at locations like

Palmyra and Nabataea.[460]

In the western portion of the Peninsula, specifically in the region of the Ḥijāz, the

location of the city of Mecca, deities in addition to Allāt seem to have been of local

importance; namely, al-ʿUzzā and Manāt (Q 16:16, 19:80, 22:72), named by Arab

antiquarians, and who, likewise, had been worshipped throughout the Syrian desert

regions from at least half a millennium earlier.[461] In general, in Arabian paganism, astral

deities such as the sun, moon, and Venus, among others, were worshipped. The Arabian

gods, who often were the same as the pagan gods and goddesses of the wider Near East in

late antiquity,[462] seem to have represented those forces which were important to people,

but beyond their control, such as rain, fertility, health, love, and death.[463]

A particular feature of Arabian religious ritual and worship was that the gods

were worshipped at local shrines, called *āḥrām* (sg., *ḥaram*). These *āḥrām* consisted of a

definitively bound and marked sacred area with a shrine at the center. Usually, a single

family or tribe served as the caretaker of the shrine, and within the territory of the *ḥaram*,

violence was forbidden, making this a sacred space for all visitors to honor gods or to

---

[460] Aziz al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity: Allāh and His People* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 173.

[461] Ibid., 173. See also Ibn al-Kalbī, *al-Aṣnām*, as well as Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Muḥabbar*, 315 ff., and the list of Ibn Ḥazam, *Juhara*, 491 ff.

[462] al-Azmeh, *Emergence of Islam*. This point is indeed among al-Azmeh's more prominent demonstrated claims.

[463] Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs*, 139.

conduct business. Like the Arabian cities of Ṭā'if and Ṣan'ā', the city of Mecca, the

traditional birthplace of Muḥammad, was just such a demarcated sanctuary city (and

remains so to this day), with the shrine of the Ka'ba at its center.[464]

Arabian Monotheism

Jewish communities in the Arabian Peninsula were attested as early as the second

half of the first millennium, BCE, especially in the northwest and in the south of the

Arabian Peninsula. By the first centuries of the Common Era, there were fairly large

Jewish communities in southern Arabia, particularly in the Ḥimyār region, where a

Jewish king, Yūsuf Dhu Nawās, ruled during the early sixth century.[465]

By at least the third century CE, Christian communities had begun to be

established in Arabia.[466] Indeed, during the fifth century and especially the sixth century,

it became a matter of policy within the Roman/Byzantine empire to encourage conversion

to Christianity in the Arabian Peninsula and in the Horn of Africa.[467] After the Council

of Chalcedon in 451, sectarian Christian communities began to compete in Arabia for

new territories and converts. Thus, by the sixth century, Christian communities were

---

[464] Indeed, the name 'Mecca', known in Greek- and Roman-era maps mentioned by Ptolemy as 'Macoraba', may originate in the Semitic roots *qrb* (related to the term '*qurbān*', sacrifice, and reflecting the fact that animal sacrifice was also a part of Meccan ritual practice), and the *krb* root, via the Ethiopic place-noun *mekrâb*, meaning a 'temple' or 'synagogue'. See Gordon Newby, *Jews of Arabia*, 13 and n. 18 (attributed also to Newby's colleague J. Vanderkam). Animal sacrifice remains a component of Islamic religious practice as associated with the *Ḥajj* rituals near the Ka'ba during the *'īd al-āḍha* festival.

[465] Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs*, 146-147.

[466] Emran Iqbal El-Badawi, *The Qur'ān and the Aramaic Gospel Traditions*, Routledge Studies in the Qur'ān, vol. 13 (New York: Routledge, 2013), XX.

[467] Nicholas de Lange, "Jews in the Age of Justinian," *in The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, ed. Michael Maas (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 411.

present throughout the peninsula.[468] Indeed, at least with respect to south Arabian inscriptions,

> …the speed and finality of the change in the religious phraseology in south Arabian inscriptions in the fourth century AD certainly suggests a revolution in the religious outlook of the ruling elite. References to the pagan deities of the ancient tradition disappeared almost completely in favor of mention of the one unique God, referred to as 'the Merciful' or simply as 'God' and usually qualified as 'Lord of Heaven" or 'Lord of Heaven and Earth'.[469]

That being said of the religious outlook of the ruling elite in the south following the fourth century CE, sizeable communities of those whose religious orientation was polytheistic in nature continued to exist throughout the Arabian Peninsula, which was not, of course, unlike the general religious situation of the greater Near East at that time. Traditional accounts of early Islamic history, written during the first two centuries after the death of Muḥammad, emphasize the presence of polytheist communities in Muḥammad's Arabian environment over and above contemporary Jewish or Christian communities. Given the legacy of those traditional accounts in shaping perceptions of the Arabian past, western scholars of Islam as well long accepted the validity of a primarily polytheistic orientation to Arabian religious composition in the sixth and seventh centuries, but that has begun to change in light of new research and perspectives.[470]

---

[468] Hoyland, *Jews in Arabia*, 146.

[469] Ibid., 146-147.

[470] Since the late 1970s in academic Islamic and Qur'ānic studies circles, this paradigm has begun to change. For more recent influential examples, see the work of Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and Its Biblical Subtext*, Routledge Studies in the Qur'ān, vol. 10, edited by Andrew Rippin (New York: Routledge, 2010).

Given the abundant textual and material evidence for Arabian Jewish and Christian communities, as well as the documentary evidence for these communities from sources outside of the peninsula – to say nothing of the extensive evidence for the presence of these communities from within text of the Qur'ān itself, as we will see – we likewise ought not presume the Arabian Peninsula religiously to have been substantially different in composition from other areas within the late antique Near East.[471] By the seventh century, communities of Jews and Christians (among, of course, many other religious groups) were established throughout the Mediterranean, Africa, the Near East, and central Asia, as they were in Arabia. Therefore, we briefly review next the status of majority religious communities in the Near East as they appeared in the early seventh century, as this environment formed the religious milieu within which the Qur'ān and its narratives and figures took shape.

Religious Currents in the Late Antique Near East

Throughout the late antique period, the major political powers of the Near East were the Roman-Byzantine Empire, to the west of the Euphrates River, and the Sasanian Empire, to the east. All other regional polities – and their religious communities – fell within these two orbits. The Byzantines and Sasanians competed not only for territory, but for the control and taxation of luxury trade goods – silk, spices, and aromatics – which kept their interests intertwined with the Arabian Peninsula. Between the fourth

---

[471] Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in the Near East*: *Allāh and His People*. Al-Azmeh convincingly argues among other things that the polytheist religious composition of the community from which Muslims and Islam formed was not unlike the polytheism of wider Near Eastern communities of the time.

and seventh centuries CE, the Byzantines and Sasanians were at war with one another seven times.[472]

<center>Christian Sectarianism and the Byzantine Empire</center>

As we saw in Chapter Five, the Roman-Byzantine Empire became Christian in its imperial religious orientation throughout the fourth century CE, establishing Christianity as the official religion of the Empire toward the end of the century, and convening as well several church councils intended to develop an orthodox theology. Orthodoxy in Christianity thus was proclaimed through councils that declared specific theological doctrines to be correct and others to be heretical. Theological debates about the precise nature of Jesus (called Christology) evolved along with developments in orthodoxy.

Early mainline Christology was marked by belief in the humanity of Jesus, as apostolic Christianity focused upon the first three *Gospels* and the teachings of Paul. Alongside that belief, however, as we began to see in Chapter Five, a second foundation of mainline Christology was developing; one which began to assert the divinity of Jesus. This Christology was inspired by the *Gospel of John*, with its language about the 'Word' (a divine reality distinct from God the 'Father' in the Christian Trinity) becoming flesh, and, by as early as the 180s CE, Christians (and/or Jewish-Christians) who believed that Jesus was only a human were labeled heretics. However, this theology of the 'incarnation' raised vexing questions which theologians in subsequent centuries

---

[472] Fred Donner, "The Background to Islam," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, ed. Michael Maas (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 513.

<center>289</center>

attempted to answer in different ways; namely, just how was the divine 'Word' united with or incarnated with the human person of Jesus?[473]

The Council of Nicaea in 325 CE established the precedent of declaring that the 'Word' was absolutely and completely divine; of one substance (consubstantial, ὁμοούσιος) with God the Father. The outcome of Nicaea was reaffirmed later at the Council of Constantinople in 381, and, thereafter, mainline Christology became inseparable from a belief in the 'Word's' complete divinity. Subsequently, debate developed over the precise nature of and titles for Mary, the mother of Jesus.

In the first third of the fifth century, the Bishop Nestorius of Constantinople objected to the use of a specific title that had developed for Mary – Θεοτόκος, "Theotokos," 'God-bearer' – as he felt it imperiled heretically the human nature of Mary. Nestorius preferred instead the title Ξριστόκος, "Christokos," 'Christ-bearer," as this seemed a more appropriate title. The Council of Ephesus in 431 CE affirmed as orthodox the title for Mary of Theotokos, however, and eventually Nestorius was excommunicated, initiating the first of many sectarian divisions within Christianity (sectarianism being possible once an imperial orthodox position had become associated with particular theological positions). Nestorius and his followers developed their Church where they had been offered refuge in Sasanian Persia, far from the reach of those in Byzantium who

---

[473] Patrick T. R, Gray, "The legacy of Chalcedon: Christological Problems and their Significance," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian* ed. Michael Maas (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 216-217.

enforced an imperial orthodox position. Pejoratively termed by outsiders the 'Nestorian'

church, members of this confession referred to it instead as the Church of the East.

Christological questions of exactly how were joined the divine and human natures

of Jesus still festered, however. The main debates involved the questions of whether the

divine and human natures of Jesus were dyophysite (two natures; and, if so, how those

two natures were separated or combined), or, whether the divine and human aspects of

Jesus were monophysite (one nature). In 451 CE, Emperor Marican called the Council of

Chalcedon to produce a theological statement that would end all uncertainty and dispute;

it declared that Christ was "recognized in two natures," but balanced that position with

the assertion that Christ was also "in one person and hypostasis."[474]

The "of two natures" formulation was a theological calamity for the bishops of

Syria and Egypt, who felt that this formulation violated irretrievably the earlier position

of Nicaea, which had clearly decreed that Christ was "of one substance" with the

Father.[475] The Council of Chalcedon in 451 thus had the effect of establishing a second

sectarian division from imperial Christianity: the churches of Antioch (Syria) and of

Alexandria (Egypt) rejected the Chalcedonian formulation and promulgated their own.

In the Antiochene and Alexandrian formulations, Christ was considered to have

two natures, but which existed mixed in one nature or hypostasis – i.e., ὁμοούσιος

(homoousious) with the Father (echoing the formulation of Nicaea). These sects are

called Oriental (i.e., eastern) Orthodoxies (i.e., theological positions are determined by

---

[474] Ibid., 222.

[475] Ibid.

councils), and are often mistakenly termed "monophysite" traditions. In fact, these churches effectively accepted the 'dyophysite' – human and divine – natures of Jesus, but believed that these aspects existed in Jesus in only *one* mixed human-divine nature or hypostasis. For this reason, the correct theological designation with respect to the Oriental Orthodoxies, and the classification by which they identify themselves, is "miaphysite." These miaphysite churches also became known as the Syrian Orthodox and Coptic Orthodox churches. In the late antique period, these churches often were called 'Jacobite', after the miaphysite theological position followed Jacob Baradaeus, Bishop of Edessa in Syria from 543 until his death in 578.

The Council of Chalcedon also had the effect of reaffirming an imperial orthodox theological position that was sanctioned by the Byzantine emperor. The 'Orthodox' view (that which could be imperially enforced) was the belief articulated at Chalcedon; i.e., the dyophysite nature of Jesus Christ: an understanding that *two* natures, or hypostases – human and divine – were *separately* related in Jesus Christ. Churches that adhered to this theological position are called Eastern Orthodox, or Greek Orthodox, reflecting the language of imperial Christianity. These imperial orthodox churches became known in the late antique period as 'Melkite', i.e., 'belonging to the king' from the Syriac *malkāyā*, 'royalists'.

Thus, after the council of Chalcedon in 451 CE, and by the sixth-seventh century, the Christians of the Near East comprised several well-defined communities, each with its own theological interpretations. The Byzantine or imperial orthodox 'Melkite' Christians, whose liturgical language was Greek and sometimes Christian Palestinian

Aramaic (CPA), or Syriac,[476] predominated in Anatolia, the Balkans, Greece, Palestine, and urban centers where imperial authority was strong. In Syria, Egypt, and Armenia, especially in non-urban areas, the 'Jacobite' miaphysite churches, whose liturgical language was Syriac, were predominant. In Persia and east of the Euphrates River, 'Nestorian' monophysite churches, whose liturgical language was Syriac, prevailed. The Christians who figured prominently in the Qur'ān, as we will see, and which literally surrounded and entered into the Arabian Peninsula, were thus 'Chalcedonian' Melkites, and 'non-Chalcedonian' Jacobites and Nestorians.

<div align="center">Sasanian Empire and Zoroastrianism</div>

To the east of the Euphrates River lie the Sasanian Empire (224-651 CE), which extended eastward to Afghanistan and Central Asia and had its capital at Ctesiphon (near modern-day Baghdad). The primary language of many within this large empire was Middle Persian (called پهلوی, 'Pahlavi') and alongside Zoroastrianism, several religious communities existed within the empire.

Large communities of Jews had existed in Persia since the 586 BCE Babylonian Exile (see Chapter Four). Indeed, it was in Persia, along the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers, where the Jewish academies were located, and the Babylonian Talmud compiled ca. 600 CE. In addition, there were substantial communities of Christians, both Syrian miaphysites and so-called Nestorians; the seat of the Nestorian (or Church of the East)

---

[476] Greek, CPA, and Syriac were the liturgical languages of Byzantine Orthodox churches from the fourth century; in the eighth and ninth centuries, following the establishment of Muslim political control in the Eastern Mediterranean, Arabic also became a liturgical language of some Byzantine Orthodox churches. Arabic-language Orthodox churches became identified as such by titles such as 'Rūm Orthodox [Rūm meaning 'Roman', i.e., Byzantine].

patriarch was at Ctesiphon. In addition to numerous smaller religious communities, there were also a substantial number of Buddhists in the eastern portion of the empire.

The largest religious tradition, however, and that which took on an imperial character in being identified with the Sasanian state, was Zoroastrianism. Zoroastrianism, named for its founding prophet, Zoroaster (زردشت *zardosht*), was a dualistic faith that conceived of the universe as the seat of a cosmic battle between the forces of good, epitomized by the god Ahura Mazda, and the forces of evil, epitomized by the god Ahrimān. The forces of good were symbolized by light – especially fire – and those of evil were symbolized by darkness. Zoroastrian rites involved both the sun, and fire temples, in which fires were kept continually burning by priests. Several Zoroastrian ideas were absorbed into Jewish belief and doctrine (and thus into later Christianity and Islam), and also spread independently westward. Among the most prominent was the notion of 'dualism' (especially heaven and hell, good versus evil, and light versus dark).[477]

Asceticism and Apocalypticism

One characteristic feature of the late antique religious environment in general was an inclination toward asceticism. Christian hermits living in the Egyptian deserts emulated the ascetic lifestyle they believed Jesus had promoted, and monastic communities originated during the 3rd century in Egypt. Monasteries were established

---

[477] Emran Iqbal El-Badawi, *The Qur'ān and the Aramaic Gospel Traditions*, 55 (CHECK #).

throughout the Near East during the 4th -6th centuries; in particular, at Mar Saba, in

Palestine, St. Simeon, in Syria, and Quartmin, in Mesopotamia.

Often, a famous hermit was the basis for the establishment of a monastic

community, such as the stylite ('pillar saint'; i.e., an ascetic who long stands atop a pillar

or column), Simeon, in Syria. Frequently, famous ascetics around the Near East were

visited by common people, in the hope that thereby they might attain some of the holy

individual's sanctity. In general, a broader ascetic movement in Christianity during the

fourth to sixth centuries "saw the articulation of a range of popular religious practices,

including pilgrimages, processions, the worship of saints' shrines and relics, and the

veneration of icons," which were practices that afforded laypersons tangible contact with

the sacred.[478]

Another characterization of late antique religious communities was a growing

sense of a coming 'apocalypse', i.e., predictions of the approaching cataclysmic end of

the world. Apocalyptic traditions often involved notions of morality, catastrophic

destruction, and an ensuing era when the righteous (variously defined) would be

rewarded.[479]

---

[478] Donner, *Muḥammad and the Believers*, 14. See also Peter Brown, "Holy Men," in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, Vol. XIV, Late Antiquity: Empire and Successors A.D. 425-600, edited by Averil Cameron, Bryan Ward-Perkins, and Michael Whitby (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 781-810.

[479] Ibid., 14-15.

Prophetic Traditions and Piety

Prophetic traditions – the social and religious lifestyle of "abiding by the teachings, ethics, and law of a divinely inspired or sanctioned leader," could be considered the salient religious phenomenon of the Near East from at least the Bronze Age.[480] Indeed, the multiple-religions environment and sectarianism of the Near East might best be understood as competing religious movements with one primary element in common: that of prophetic traditions.

Similar to, although not synonymous with, the growing mood of asceticism in the late antique Near East was the growth in religious movements involving pietistic orientations and practices. This can be see most directly in the reinterpretation of classical civic organization brought about through Christian governmental agents:

> Bishops replaced councilors in caring for the welfare of a city's inhabitants, churches and shrines overtook theatres and temples as the centres of communal life, monks and ascetics became the new heroes of the people, hagiographies and miracle stories dislodged secular writings as the most popular choice of literature, and icons and crosses triumphed as symbols of divine protection.[481]

Holy Books

The late antique period also can be characterized by the compellation of and codification of holy books. Between the second and fifth centuries CE, authoritative Latin, Syriac, and other versions of the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament were

---

[480] El-Badawi, *The Qur'ān and the Aramaic Gospel Traditions*, 50-51. This phenomenon has continued into the early-modern and modern periods.

[481] Robert G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of the Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam*, Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam, vol. 13, (Princeton, NJ: The Darwin Press, Inc., 1997), 15.

undertaken. During the Sasanian period, the books of the *Avesta*, the Zoroastrian

scripture, were compiled in written form, as was the *Zand*, the commentary on the *Avesta*.

From the fifth through seventh centuries, the Palestinian (*Yerushalami*) and Babylonian

(*Bavli*) Talmuds, representing the two main centers of rabbinic scholarship in Palestine

and Mesopotamia, respectively, were completed.[482] Extensive commentaries on the

materials gathered in the *Mishnah* (ca. 200 CE), the first authoritative compilation of the

law and lore of the rabbis, the Talmuds were the preeminent legalistic texts for Near

Eastern and Mediterranean Jewish communities.[483] Religious confessions in the late

antique Near East thus came to be defined "as much as anything by the fact that they had

their own codified holy books."[484]

The Qur'ān: A Late Antique Religious Text

The Qur'ān consists of just over 6000 verses of 'recitation' (Q 75:17-18) of divine

revelations written in Arabic, and mostly composed in *sāj*, the rhymed prose style

characteristic of early Arabic poets (Q 68:41-42). Traditional Islamic history and

mainstream scholarship date the period of revelation from 610-632 CE, and the

codification of an official codex of the Qur'ān to the tenure of the Caliph 'Uthman, ca.

650 CE.[485] These dates may be revised in the near future, but for now they remain

---

[482] Donner, "The Background to Islam," 521.

[483] Nicholas de Lange, "Jews in the Age of Justinian," 402-405.

[484] Donner, "The Background to Islam," 521.

[485] The traditional dates for the Qur'ān and for the codification of the Qur'ān are disputed within and among scholars and traditionalists. In particular, recently uncovered early Qur'ānic fragments, known as the *Ṣan'ā'* palimpsest and the Birmingham leaves, have been carbon-dated to substantially earlier than the traditional dates of compilation and codification. The Ṣan'ā' palimpsest has been dated to 543-643 and

mainstream and it will be the perspective of this project as well that the Qur'ān reached

its codified form in the second half of the seventh century, CE.[486]

Academic study of the Bible is in general more developed than of the Qur'ān.[487]

Sustained scholarship that has challenged the received narratives of Islamic tradition, and

recent carbon-dating analyses of early Qur'ān fragments, are resulting in revisions and

additions to academic knowledge of the Qur'ān. The perspective of this chapter,

therefore, is informed by scholarship in the tradition of the International Qur'ānic Studies

Association, and aligns with the research and perspectives of Gabriel Said Reynolds, Fred

Donner, Sidney Griffith, and Emran El-Badawi, among others.

In the following sections, we will discuss Jews and Christians in the Qur'ān, as

well as the Bible in the Qur'ān. We will also discuss features specific to the Qur'ān, such

as its critiques of the Trinity and its own distinctive prophetology – exemplified by

Muḥammad but embodied as well in the Qur'ānic figures of Abraham and of Moses –

and how that prophetology accords with Qur'ānic notions of God. This information is

important for an accurate understanding of the Qur'ān in its late antique environment, as

---

433-599 (Lyon); 568-664 (Oxford); 539-669 (Zurich), 426-633 (Kiel); and the Birmingham leaves have been dated to 568-645. See also Behnam Sadeghi and Uwe Bergmann, "The Codex of a Companion of the Prophet and the Qur'ān of the Prophet," (*Arabica* 57, 4, 2010), 343-436; and Behnam Sadeghi and Mohsen Goudarzi, "Ṣanʿā' 1 and the Origins of the Qur'ān," (*Der Islam* 87, 1-2, 2012), 1-129. See also above, 2n.

[486] Regarding the mainstream scholarly character of these dates, see Fred Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origin: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*, Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam, vol. 14 (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1998). See also Sidney H. Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the 'People of the Book' in the Language of Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 209.

[487] For instance, a counterpart organization in academic Qur'ānic studies to the Society of Biblical Literature (est. 1890s?), the International Qur'ānic Studies Association, only began operating in 2011.

well as it being a framework for arguments that will be made shortly regarding the 'Khiḍr' narrative.

The Qur'ān is not arranged chronologically in the manner of biblical books, but consists rather of specific instances of revelation apparently compiled according to an external ordering scheme at a time after the instance of revelation. Several primary themes emerge from a reading of the Qur'ān. Above all, the Qur'ān imparts a message of strict monotheism, imploring its audience to recognize and be mindful of the Oneness of God (known as *tawhīd*). From this distinct central notion, most other themes in the Qur'ān derive,[488] such as piety, righteous living, charity, a notion of the 'book' as God's word and apparently in relationship with the scriptures of the Jews and Christians, and a belief in the 'last day', reflecting both distinct notions of apocalypticism, and the potential for divine mercy beforehand.

The audience addressed in the Qur'ān is clearly monotheistic. Additionally, a vast number of Qur'ānic revelations presume familiarity with biblical stories and lore. Furthermore, the Qur'ān infrequently addresses "Muslims" in its audience, referring instead to Muḥammad and his followers as "believers," *mu'minūn*. Both the words '*islām*' and '*muslim*' appear in the Qur'ān, but '*muslim*' occurs only 75 times, whereas '*mu'minūn*', believers, occurs nearly a thousand times.[489] Most scholars agree that, much

---

[488] Donner, *Muḥammad and the Believers*, 59.

[489] Fred Donner argues in *Muḥammad and the Believers* for a notion of a gradual "Muslim" identity formation from the general monotheist 'believer' that did not begin to formalize until the late seventh or early eighth century CE. For the reference involving frequency of occurrence of specific religious designations, see ibid., 57.

like Christianity and Judaism (or any religious tradition, for that matter), 'Islam' emerged as a distinct religious tradition only gradually. That is the perspective of this project, as well, as is the notion that, like the exclusivist biblical traditions of Judaism and Christianity, 'Islam' emerged in part in a process of contradistinction from the polytheistic religious practices which long characterized the Near East.

Christians and Jews in the Qur'ān

Perhaps the most fundamental evidence for the presence of Christians and Jews in the Qur'ān's audience is the knowledge it presumes on the part of its audience with respect to biblical narratives, figures, and lore. There are hardly any extended narratives or re-tellings of biblical stories; instead, there are allusions to narratives and to biblical characters. Sometimes, the Qur'ān comments on the characters or on the stories, or gives additional details or interpretations.[490] Indeed,

> the most basic thing one notices about the Qur'ān and its interface with the bible is the Islamic scripture's unspoken and pervasive confidence that its audience is thoroughly familiar with the stories of the biblical patriarchs and prophets, so familiar in fact that there is no need for even the most rudimentary form of introduction.[491]

The Qur'ān clearly presumes as well the presence of Arabic-speaking Jews in its audience. In the Qur'ān, this community are addressed about thirty times, by the reference 'Jews' ('*yahūdī*', '*yahūd*'), by the verbal form of 'those who profess Judaism',

---

[490] Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 24.

[491] Ibid., 57.

'*hādū*', and, when referencing the time of Moses or the revelation of the Torah, as 'Children of Israel', '*banū isrā'īl*'.[492]

There is evidence for Christians in the audience of the Qur'ān in at least four ways. First, the presence of non-Arabic vocabulary (mostly Syriac, as we will see) in the Qur'ān; second, the references made in the Qur'ān to contemporary extra-biblical Christian lore; third, the distinct criticism made of specific Christian doctrine and practice; particularly the notion of the Trinity, and, fourth, the direct reference to Christians, primarily as "*naṣārā*," Nazarenes.[493]

Furthermore, Islamic tradition records peoples from these communities as important within early Islamic history. The *sīrah* biographical literature as well as the *ḥadīth* literary tradition include accounts of Muḥammad's interactions with several important Jewish tribes in Yathrib/Medina and with local Christians, as well. Figures such as Waraqah ibn Nawfal (purported to be a learned Christian relative of Muḥammad's first wife, Khadija), and Sergius Baḥîrâ, a Syrian monk who was said to have seen Muḥammad as a child and noticed his special nature, figure prominently in Islamic tradition. In Qur'ānic reference, however, rather than referring directly to Jews or Christians, the Qur'ān refers instead to these communities as "[People] 'of the Book'," or "Scripture People," ('*ahl al-kitāb*') 54 times,[494] indicating not only the contemporary

---

[492] Ibid., 16.

[493] For more on the usage of this term, see Sidney Griffith, "*Al- Naṣārā* in the Qur'ān: A Hermeneutical Reflection," in *New Perspectives on the Qur'ān: The Qur'ān in its Historical Context 2*, edited by Gabriel Said Reynolds Routledge Studies in the Qur'ān, vol. 12, Andrew Rippin, series editor (New York: Routledge, 2012), 301-322.

[494] Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 29.

presence of these communities, but in particular the Qur'ānic perspective that Jews and Christians possessed authoritative scriptures.

Another form of evidence for the existence of these communities within the Qur'ānic milieu comes from later Islamic historical writing. In particular, Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Azraqī's *Akhbār Mecca*, which recalls the numerous Christian landmarks around Mecca and Medina, including the *masjid Maryam* (Mary's Church), the *mawqaf al-naṣārā* (Christian Station), and the icon of Mary said to have resided within the Ka'ba itself. Al-Azraqī' died in 865 CE, placing his life span long after the Qur'ānic period.[495] However, his account is nonetheless an important record of the contemporary 9th-century houses of Christian worship and architectural landmarks of Mecca and Medina, and it would seem unlikely that these Christian spaces newly were built in the historical heart of the Islamic world long after Islam had become an imperial power.

<div align="center">The Bible in the Qur'ān</div>

Bible as Qur'ānic Subtext

Judging by content, by far the most salient scriptures within the Qur'ān's milieu were the Hebrew Scriptures (Q 5:44) and rabbinic commentaries, as well as the Gospel traditions (5:47) and other New Testament books.[496] Extra-biblical lore, and so-called apocryphal books outside of the canons of Jews and Christians, also were important.

---

[495] Adapted from El-Badawi, *The Qur'ān and the Aramaic Gospel Traditions*, 58. See Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Azraqī, *Akhbār Mecca was mā jā' fīhā min al-āthār*, ed. 'Abd al-Malik b. Duhaysh (Mecca: maktabat al-'Asadī, 2003).

[496] El-Badawi, *The Qur'ān and the Aramaic Gospel Traditions*, 5.

Narratives and figures apparently external to the biblical tradition, such as from the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, may underlie portions of narratives in the Qur'ān,[497] however, the overwhelming religious subtext of the Qur'ān involves the canonical and extra-canonical biblical traditions of contemporary Jewish and Christian groups.

The Qur'ān also records several non-Arabic words, including those which have been shown to come ultimately from Akkadian, Ugaritic, Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac, Ethiopic, and possibly Greek.[498] In passages in the Qur'ān which reference religious terminology; in particular, with respect to Christian thought and practice, there are a high incidence of words of a Syriac and Ge'ez background.[499] Given the composition of Christian religious communities in Arabia – Syriac-speakers in the Syrian Desert regions and wherever Jacobite communities existed throughout the Peninsula, and Ethiopian/Abyssinian (Axumite) communities, who had been present in the south at Najrān since at least the early sixth century, and whose liturgical language was Ge'ez – these linguistic origins of religious terms are natural, especially where contemporary Christian theological issues are referenced in the Qur'ān. Furthermore, the Qur'ān's environment intersected primarily with Syriac-language Christian communities, rather

---

[497] See below.

[498] See Arthur Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary in the Qur'ān*. XXX Sidney Griffith furthermore points out that by the time of the Qur'ān, these words had simply become Arabic, see Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 18.

[499] Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 18.

than with Greek-language communities, which were largely limited to the urbanized

coastal areas of Syria and Palestine, such as at Antioch and Jerusalem.[500]

Overwhelmingly, however, foreign vocabulary in the Qur'ān has a Syriac origin –

in some estimates, by as much as 70% of the non-Arabic terminology.[501] Indeed, even

the term "Qur'ān," (Ar. 'recitation') may have been related early-on to the Syriac word

qeryānā, a 'lectionary', or portions of the bible to be read at a church service.[502] Recent

research has furthermore demonstrated the linkages between Qur'ānic language

narratives and Syriac-Christian narratives and concepts. An understanding of Syriac

literature helps illuminate Qur'ānic language concerning the Trinity, the nature of Jesus,

the narratives of Mary, the story of the Sleepers in the Cave (Q 18:9-26), the narrative of

Dhū al-Qarnayn (Q 18:83-98), the *hūr 'īn* 'heavenly beings' in Q 56:22, and even the

legal culture of the Qur'ān.[503] Indeed, "the probable background of the Christian biblical

lore, both canonical and apocryphal, that one can find echoed, alluded to, or evoked in

the Qur'ān … point to an Aramaic or Syriac provenance."[504] Even narratives from the

---

[500] El-Badawi, The Qur'ān and the Aramaic Gospel Traditions, 35. El-Badawi furthermore notes that monasteries in the Sinai Peninsula also fell within the ambit of Greek influence.

[501] Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 20-21

[502] El-Badawi, *The Qur'ān and the Aramaic Gospel Traditions*, 16, quoting William Graham, "The Earliest Meaning of Qur'ān," (*Die Welt des Islams*, 23-4, 1984), 1-28.

[503] See Gabriel Said Reynolds, ed., *The Qur'ān in its Historical Context*, Routledge Studies in the Qur'ān, vol. 8, Series Editor Andrew Rippin (New York: Routledge, 2008) and See Gabriel Said Reynolds, ed., *New Perspectives on the Qur'ān: The Qur'ān in its Historical Context 2*, Routledge Studies in the Qur'ān, vol. 8, Series Editor Andrew Rippin (New York: Routledge, 2011). Griffith, Mourad, Van Bladel, Kouriyhe, El-Badawi, Holger Zellentin.

[504] Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 26. Griffith furthermore argues that the metrically composed *mêmrê* genre of Syriac ecclesiastical practice (long metrical homiletic meditations on the significance of particular scriptural readings) may be a fruitful (and as-yet largely untapped) source of study regarding Qur'ānic

Hebrew Bible and the stories of the older biblical figures like Abraham, Joseph, and Moses, as they are referenced and presented in the Qur'ān, may have a Syriac-language background.[505]

This research indicating the presence in the Qur'ān of the bible and its related lore, and of contemporary Jewish and Christian communities and their theological orientations and debates, is so pervasive that Gabriel Said Reynolds has suggested that the Bible could even be understood as the "subtext" of the Qur'ān.[506] Sidney Griffith similarly characterizes one role of the Qur'ān as a "kind of biblical commentary in Arabic, reacting to the Bible," although he furthermore clarifies that "the Islamic scripture is certainly larger in scope and purpose than its interface with the Bible, albeit that its divine message is presented as continuous with the earlier scriptures."[507]

Given the level of pre-Islamic writing in Arabic, as well as the lack of any examples of surviving pre-Islamic Arabic literature,[508] the mainstream conclusion within

---

language and narratives. The *mêmrê* homilies were often enriched by non-biblical details from oral tradition or from apocryphal or even pseudepigraphical sources, sometimes kept in written form in texts in Syriac churches and monasteries, and sometimes widely circulated among Syriac churches. Ibid., 42-43.

[505] Griffith, The Bible in Arabic, 26. The Hebrew Bible stories may be mediated ultimately by the Syriac-language Peshitta (ca. 435 CE), the Old Testament and New Testament books in Syriac. The Peshitta was subsequently revised to bring the New Testament books in line with the Greek canon as observed by Athanasius, and reached its final form, known as the Harklean version or Syriac Bible, in ca. 616 CE. See El-Badawi, *The Qur'ān and the Aramaic Gospel Traditions*, 30-33.

[506] See Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and its Biblical Subtext*, Routledge Studies in the Qur'ān, vol. 10, Series Editor Andrew Rippin (New York: Routledge, 2010). See also Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 208.

[507] Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 56-57.

[508] There are a few early Arabic-language rock inscriptions which pre-date the Qur'ān and the religious tradition of Islam, but these do not together constitute evidence for a developed literary tradition. There are also examples of written Islamic poetry which, in oral form, are likely to pre-date the Qur'ān and the religious tradition of Islam, but we have no surviving copies of written texts of this genre from earlier periods and thus cannot conclude that, prior to the Qur'ān, there was a developed literary tradition of

the field of Qur'ānic studies is that the biblical and extra-biblical lore present in the

Qur'ān must have been spread orally in Arabic within the Arabian environment.[509]

Communities of Arabian Jews and Christians would have accessed their scriptures in

ecclesiastical or clerical contexts in liturgical language(s) (e.g., Syriac, Hebrew, Aramaic,

and possibly Greek), and perhaps in oral Arabic translation, as well.[510]

Considering the nature of Qur'ānic discussion of the bible and its religious

communities, the Qur'ān seems to refer as a part of its audience and environment to those

majority and "mainstream" communities of Jews and Christians such as were spread

throughout the greater Near East. "Judging by what the Islamic Scripture says about

[Jews] and their religious usages by way of acceptance or criticism, and by what it evokes

from their scripture traditions, [the Qur'ān] seems to have in mind Jews of the early

seventh century."[511] Among Christians, the biblical, apocryphal, and ecclesiastical lore

referenced in the Qur'ān "all had circulation in the so-called Melkite, Jacobite, and

Nestorian Christian communities of the day," which thus indicates that the Christian

scriptures and communities referenced in the Qur'ān reflected contemporary mainstream

Near Eastern Christian communities.[512]

---

written Arabic. Indeed, it is the conclusion of Sydney Griffith's study and of other scholars that the Qur'ān is the first Arabic book. See Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 53.

[509] Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 43.

[510] Griffith, 43.

[511] Griffith, 16.

[512] Griffith, 27. Thus, the biblical communities within the purview of the Qur'ān are not likely to have been members of other sects of Jewish, Christian, or so-called Jewish-Christian communities of the day, as is sometimes argued. Ibid., 208.

Qur'ānic Corrections: Critiques of the Christian Trinity

As recent investigations underscore, the Qur'ān does not simply reference biblical material haphazardly; rather, figures and narratives are recollected in an essentially reformatory manner, in order to present thereby an alternative or "corrected" position. "The Qur'ān means not to retell the biblical stories but to recall them and to recollect them within the corrective framework of its own discourse."[513]

In example, the Qur'ān is highly critical of the contemporary Christian notion of the Trinity, which it rejects unequivocally (Q 4:171, 5:72-78). The Qur'ān condemns in 5:73 the notion that 'God is the third of three', '*thālith thalāthatin*', a concept that was common in contemporary Syriac Christian homiletic texts in the adjectival form of '*tlîthāyâ*', meaning 'one of three', 'trinity', or 'triune'.[514] Indeed, in 5:75, the Qur'ān states, "The Messiah, son of Mary, was only a messenger. Messengers have passed away before him. His mother was a truthful woman. They both ate food. See how We [i.e., God] make clear to them the signs, then see how deluded they are." In this passage, the Qur'ān critiques not only the notion of the Trinity (i.e., through the assertion that the Messiah was actually a human messenger just like previous messengers), but also enters into Christian theological debates involving the nature of Mary. Explicitly referring to

---

[513] This point is made repeatedly in small-scale research, and is made in a more broad manner by both Sidney Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 71, as well as by Emran El-Badawi, "The Qur'ān, via the lingua franca of the Near East – Aramaic – selectively challenged or re-appropriated, and therefore took up the 'dogmatic articulation' of language and imagery coming from the Aramaic Gospel Traditions, in order to fit the idiom and religious temperament of a heterogeneous, sectarian Arabian audience," *The Qur'ān and the Aramaic Gospel Traditions*, 5.

[514] Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 34.

'the Messiah' as the 'son of Mary', '*ibn marīam*', the Qur'ān pointedly aligns with the contemporary Nestorian rejection of the title for Mary of 'theotokos', 'God-bearer', a term which Jacobite and Melkite doctrine embraced, in favor of the title 'Christokos', 'Christ-bearer', as this title emphasized the human nature of Mary.[515]

Qur'ānic Prophetology

As Sidney Griffith has astutely pointed out, what is notable about the biblical material in the Qur'ān is that it involves not so much the

> "Bible per se, as it [does] well-known accounts of the Bible's principal dramatis personae: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Miriam [Maryam/Mary], David, Solomon, even Job and Jonah, along with Zachariah, John the Baptist, Mary, and 'Jesus, son of Mary', just to mention the major personalities."[516]

Indeed, large sections of the Bible are never mentioned in the Qur'ān, such as the letters of Paul, which were of great interest to contemporary Christian communities. This seems to be because what is presented in the Qur'ān is a version of prophetical history that is unique to the Qur'ān itself.[517]

When the Prophets are recalled in the Qur'ān, they are rarely described in a detailed manner that quotes narratives of the Bible. Instead, the references in the Qur'ān are more akin to "paraphrases, allusions, and echoes," indicating that the Qur'ān's audience is expected to be familiar with the figure. Furthermore, the Qur'ān's selection

---

[515] Griffith, 33-35.

[516] Griffith, 54.

[517] OTHER ARTICLE ABOUT PROPHETS IN THE Q.

of references to prophets, patriarchs, and narratives from the Bible is not random, but

instead selected in accordance with the Qur'ān's distinctive prophetology.

> "It envisions a series of 'messengers' and 'prophets' sent by God to warn human
> communities, which 'messengers' and 'prophets' God protects from the
> machinations of their adversaries. The Qur'ān recalls only such biblical stories as
> fit the paradigm of its prophetology, and it edits the narratives where necessary to
> fit the pattern."[518]

Recollections of prophetical figures are presented in a manner that culminates in

the figure and prophetical career of Muḥammad, described as the "seal of the

prophets,"[519] '*khātama al-nabūn*' (Q 33:40); that is, the final prophet. As Griffith

describes it,

> the pattern is always the same: the prophet/messenger arises within his own
> people (he is 'their brother' *akhūhum* Q 26:106, 124, 142, 161), he delivers his
> message, is discredited by his audience but is vindicated by the divine pains and
> hurt visited upon his adversaries, the retelling of which becomes a 'sign' for those
> who will believe.[520]

Differences between Prophets in the Bible and Qur'ān

Prophets in the Hebrew Bible are expressly chosen and divinely inspired

individuals who enter into the salvation-historical narrative at specific times and places to

bear pietistic witness to notion that Yahweh is God, and to implore the community to

whom they have been sent to do the same and to live in strict accordance with the spirit

of Yahweh's revealed law.

---

[518] Griffith, 3.

[519] El-Badawi notes that the '*seal of the prophets*' terminology was also in use among Syriac Christian groups.

[520] Griffith, The Bible in Arabic, 70-71.

Prophets (both biblical and Qur'ānic) in the Qur'ān are the major figures of salvation history, and their role is to conduct God's unadulterated and unchanging messages to the community to whom they have been sent and of which they are a part. They face resistance from their communities (cf. Luke 4:24), members of whom also eventually distort the messages which have been brought to them, but God always supports the prophets' missions and vindicates them in their struggles.

Additionally, there are two distinct but overlapping categories of prophets in the Qur'ān, and for which exact parallels in the Bible do not exist. A prophet (*nābī*) is an individual sent by God to specific peoples to proclaim God's message, while a messenger (*rasūl*), a much more exclusive category of prophet, delivers to his people a divine revelation. The major messengers referenced in the Qur'ān (there are others) are Abraham, to whom was given/sent down the 'scrolls of Abraham' *ṣuḥuf ibrahīm* (Q 87:19),[521] Moses, to whom was given/sent down the Torah *at-tauwrat* (Q 53:36) David, to whom was sent the Psalms *zabūr* (Q 4:163), Jesus, to whom was sent the Gospels *al-injīl* (Q 57:27), and Muḥammad, the final prophet and messenger (Q 33:40) to whom was sent the Qur'ān, the final (and perfected) revelation (Q 42:7).

Abraham, Moses, and Muḥammad in the Quran vis-à-vis Strict Monotheism

The two most prominent prophets in the Qur'ān are Abraham and Moses. Abraham was extremely important in the Qur'ānic prophetic scheme because he (together with Ishmael) had constructed the *ka'ba*, the House of God, *al-bayt* (Q 2:127-128), but

---

[521] The 'scrolls of Abraham' it is unclear what text is referenced here.

primarily due to his role as the 'battler of idolatry' in defense of God/*Allāh*.[522] This

tradition about Abraham is not mentioned in the Bible, but comes from a popular third-

fifth century CE rabbinic *midrash* (*aggadic*/homiletic commentary) written in Aramaic

on the book of Genesis, and which expounded upon the details of Abraham's life.[523]

Like Abraham, Islamic tradition depicted Muḥammad as having destroyed the idols and

idolatry that existed during Muḥammad's own generation (this time the idols were in the

ka'ba), and having tried to bring people to faith in God, the author of the divine scriptures

(Q XX). Furthermore, the 'faith of Abraham' *millāt ibrahīm* as referenced in the Qur'ān

was associated with being neither a Jew nor a Christian but a *ḥanīf*, a pious religious

orientation identified both with pure monotheism (Q 3:67), with the prophet Abraham,

and "a state of being and a religion that coincide[d] with the message of Muḥammad."[524]

The prophet most often mentioned by name in the Qur'ān was Moses. Named

136 times, his life was described in detail and sometimes repeated in multiple *sūrahs*.[525]

The focal point of Moses' message and

> "his importance as a model for Muḥammad is clearly stated in the Moses section
> of *sūrah Ṭāhā* (Q 20:9-99): Moses said to Aaron and the Israelites after the
> incident with the golden calf (cf. Exod 32): 'your god (*īlāh*) is only God (*Allāh*),
> there is no other god (*īlāh*) than he, he comprehends everything in knowledge' (Q
> 20:98); and God said immediately to Muḥammad, 'Like this do We narrate to you

---

[522] Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 73. See also Roberto Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'ān and Muslim Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 23-27.

[523] See *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis*, 2 vols, translated by Harry Friedman and Maurice Simon (Soncino Press Ltd, 1992), and Jacob Neusner, *Confronting Creation: How Judaism Reads Genesis: An Anthology of Genesis Rabbah* (University of South Carolina Press, 1991).

[524] Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'ān*, 26.

[525] Tottoli, 32-35.

reports of what has gone before, and We have brought you a recollection (*dhikran*) from Us (Q 20:99)."[526]

From this passage we glean four important points: first, the Qur'ānic conception of God (*Allāh*) was identified clearly with the God of the Hebrew Scriptures. Second, the Qur'ānic conception of God as exemplified in this verse is similar to that echoed in the creedal statement of later Islam, "لا إله إلا الله," *lā ilāha ilā Allāh*, 'there is no god but God'. Third, God in the Qur'ānic perception was not just a god/deity (*īlāh*), but apparently identified by the specific name of *Allāh*;[527] thus, God in the Qur'ān has at least some Arabian association, even linguistic, albeit that God (*Allāh*) as presented in the Qur'ān was also synonymous with the God of Moses. Fourth, Moses, to whom was sent the Torah, finds a Qur'ānic counterpart in Muḥammad, who also was a messenger to whom a divine scripture was sent down.

---

[526] Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 77.

[527] 'Allāh' is sometimes thought to be a contraction of "*al-īlāh*," Cf. Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*, who argues that 'Allāh' is not a contraction of '*al-īlāh*', a morphology he considers implausible because "the addition of the definite article *al-* to *Lāh* or *Īlāh* would yield different but allophonic values [i.e., phonetic variants of the phoneme] for the medial vowel /a/," (*ibid*., 298). Rather, Al-Azmeh argues that 'Allāh' entered the Arabic language in the absolute form of 'Allāh' and, "as it entered the Arabic language, irrespective of its origin or etymology, is an independent proper noun of the *murtajal* class," which is the class of proper nouns that exist only as integral proper names. Al-Azmeh further notes that 'Allāh' could have been "afloat" in pre-Islamic Arabia "in jurative formulae [i.e., relating to an oath] and theophoric names, and possibly among some Christians to the north," although Al-Azmeh intentionally does not suggest how, noting that we lack any map of the geographical distribution of this name and its users. See *ibid*., 300-301. Al-Azmeh further suggests the attractiveness of the "distinctive vagueness" of 'Allāh' which may have inspired adoption by Muḥammad, see *ibid*., 301-306. On the Arabic (rather than Syriac) etymology of 'Allāh', see David Kiltz, "The Relationship between Arabic *Allāh* and Syriac *Allāhā*," *Der Islam* 88 (2012): 33-50.

The Torah was referred to by name in the Qur'ān eighteen times. More than twelve times, the Torah was referred to as "the scripture We brought Moses" (Q 2:53 and 2:87); twice, the Torah was called *al-furqān* (Q 2:53 and 21:48),

> "a term that is also used in reference to the Qur'ān itself (2:185 and 25:1) and is usually translated into English as 'criterion' or 'standard of judging' in the sense of something by means of which one distinguishes true from false, right from wrong… The term *al-furqān* occurs seven times in the Qur'ān, and it seems that it both echoes the Syriac term *purqānâ*, 'salvation', 'deliverance' (and possibly *puqdānâ*, 'command'), as well as reflecting an inner Arabic sense of 'separation', 'distinction'."[528]

In that way, Muḥammad was depicted in a manner parallel to Moses, who brought a divine scripture which 'distinguished', and to Abraham, who had battled idolatry and established some of the most important rituals and sites named in the Qur'ān. Thus, like Abraham and Moses before him, Muḥammad was presented in the Qur'ān as an exemplary prophet and messenger because he battled idolatry and polytheism, and Muḥammad did so in large part by bringing a 'distinguishing' or 'separating' text. In that sense, the Qur'ān can also be understood as heresiological text, in that it created standards of 'true' and 'false' worship. Above all, the Qur'ān promoted a standard of strict monotheism that was in contradistinction both to contemporary polytheistic practices and communities and to contemporary monotheistic communities and notions (such as the Christian conception of the Trinity) which were considered in the Qur'ān tepid monotheism. El-Badawi argues that the Qur'ān's 'strict monotheism' was "a type of

---

[528] Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 77-78 and 45n and 46n, referencing Daniel Madigan, "Criterion," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, edited by McAuliffe, vol. 1, p. 246; and Fred M. Donner, "Qur'ānic *Furqān*," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 52 (2007), 279-300. See also Uri Rubin, "On the Arabian Origins of the Qur'ān: The Case of *al-Furqān*," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 54 (2009), 421-433.

monotheism whose nature is anti-trinitarian, post-rabbinic, and apocalyptic,"[529] and that

characterization is the perspective of this project, as well.

Version of the Qur'ān Used in this Study

The Qur'ānic references in this study are taken from the standardized version of

the 1924 Cairo Codex (*muṣḥaf*). The Cairo *muṣḥaf* edition is linked to the specific

reading *qīra'* of the Qur'ān associated with 'Asim (c. 744 CE).[530] The translations herein

are drawn from the work of A. J. Droge, *The Qur'ān: A New Annotated Translation*,[531] or

are specified (by the use of italics) as my own.

Part Two: al-Khiḍr Text: *Q 18:60-82*

Introduction

The narrative with which later exegetes *mufassīrūn* identify the figure of al-Khiḍr

is located in the eighteenth *sūrah* of the Qur'ān, known as *Sūrat al-Kahf*, the 'Cave

sūrah/chapter'. The 'Khiḍr' narrative of Q 18:60-82 in the Qur'ān falls into a category of

narrative known generally as wisdom literature. It is a tale about the mysterious justice

of God, which is beyond the grasp of ordinary humans. In this account, Moses was

---

[529] El-Badawi, in *The Qur'ān and the Aramaic Gospel Traditions*, argues that the "fundamental literary strategy on the part of the Qur'ān to promote a vision of strict monotheism to a sectarian Arabian audience" was a literary strategy he terms "'dogmatic re-articulation,'" *ibid.*, 207, and that "strict monotheism," from a Qur'ānic perspective, was defined as "a type of monotheism whose nature is anti-trinitarian, post-rabbinic, and apocalyptic"; it "fundamentally rejects orthodox forms of Christian belief in God as well as the monopoly of Jewish clerics on matters of orthopraxy, and it demands urgent and austere obedience to the One true God before the coming end of the world," *ibid.*, 5.

[530] For more on the Qur'ānic readings (qīra'at) see Christopher Melchert, "Ibn Mujāhid and the Establishment of Seven Qur'ānic Readings," *Studia Islamica* 91 (2000): 5-22.

[531] Arthur J. Droge, *The Qur'ān: A New Annotated Translation* (Bristol, CT: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2013).

named as the seeker knowledge, and God's wise servant, from whom Moses sought knowledge, was identified in the Qur'ān by the anonymous title "one of our servants" *'abadan min 'abadna* (18:65). In that way, the account also falls into a category of narrative known as disciple-master didactic literature. As we will see, the 'servant' figure was earliest and most often identified in later exegetical literature *tafsīr* as "al-Khiḍr," 'the Green [One]', although other parallels for this figure have been suggested in scholarship; namely, the biblical prophet Elijah, the biblical figure Enoch, and the figure Utnapishtim from the *Epic of Gilgamesh*.[532]

The narrative of 18:60-82 in the Qur'ān is inadequately understood within the field of Qur'ānic studies.[533] The narrative has long been thought to draw upon varied sources and influences.[534] Adding to the confusion of potential meanings behind and origins of this narrative are the traditions of related Islamic literature in the forms of *tafsīr* commentary and *hadīth* recollections. These later Arabic sources generally were written one to two hundred (or more) years after the narratives of the Qur'ān were compiled, and in some cases these later explanatory sources function more as literary creations than they do as accurate witnesses to history.[535] Until very recently, scholarship on Qur'ānic

---

[532] See also A. J. Wensinck, "al-Khaḍir," Encyclopedia of Islam, 902-903.

[533] The narratives of the Sleepers and of Dhū al-Qarnayn have traditionally garnered more interest than 'Moses and the Servant'. But on that narrative see A.J. Wensinck, "al-Khadir," (above at n. XX); Haim Schwarzbaum, "The Jewish and Moslem Versions of Some Theodicy Legends (Aa-Th. 759)" (*Fabula* Vol. 3, No. 1, 1959, 119-169); Brannon Wheeler, "The Jewish Origins of Qur'ān 18:65-82? Reexamining Arent Jan Wensinck's Theory," (*Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 118, No. 2, 1998, 153-171).

[534] See Wensinck, "al-Khadir," 902-903.

[535] For information about the "storyteller" aspects of Mujāhid's early exegesis, see Claude Gilliot, "Mujāhid's Exegesis: Origins, Paths of Transmission and Development of a Meccan Exegetical Tradition in its Human, Spiritual and Theological Environment," in *Tafsīr and Islamic Intellectual History:*

passages has tended exclusively to rely upon the explanations of Arabic commentaries, despite the large gap in time between those commentaries and the Qur'ān. This is not to claim that the Arabic commentaries have no interpretive value; rather, it is to critique sole reliance upon them in attempting to discern the original meanings and references in Qur'ānic passages. The methodology of this project throughout has been to study the texts of each of these figures as "texts in their own historical context,"[536] to paraphrase Kevin Van Bladel on the topic, and this is an approach that, as we will see, helps to illuminate 'al-Khiḍr' in the narrative at 18:60-82, as well.

Accordingly, this analysis examines 18:60-82 by situating it within the context of the late antique world; from such a perspective, and in light of recent research involving contemporary religious and literary influences, several concepts within it begin to make sense. This project moreover argues that the 'Moses and the Servant' narrative can only properly be understood when it is viewed in the context of *sūrah* 18 as a whole.[537] Such an argument is not commonly made about passages from the Qur'ān, which is a text often viewed as disjointed, and usually analyzed in discrete segments. However, in keeping

---

Exploring the Boundaries of a Genre, edited by Andreas Görke and Johanna Pink, The Institute of Ismaili Studies Qur'ānic Studies Series, 12 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, 2014) 85-89.

[536] Kevin Van Bladel, "Alexander Legend in the Qur'ān," 195.

[537] Carl Ernst makes a similar case for understanding Sūrah 18 from a holistic linguistic and literary perspective, emphasizing the 'ring' composition of its verses and the integrated structure of its narratives. See Carl W. Ernst, *How to Read the Qur'ān: A New Guide, with Select Translations* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 120-138.

with a larger argument of this project, such compartmentalization of analysis misses important connections that could illuminate a more thorough understanding.

Therefore, this analysis of the Khiḍr text will make two main arguments: the first concerns the comprehensive nature of *Sūrat al-Kahf* and its uniform theological orientation; the second involves our suggestion here that the 'Moses and the Servant' narrative from this chapter may have had a parallel in contemporary late antique literature (and which may have included the figure of Elijah in the role of the 'servant'), on the following six grounds: first, the narrative's discordant and uncommon portrayal of Moses; second, on the basis that late antique texts underlie the other primary narratives in this *sūrah*; third, on the grounds that wisdom literature and tales with a disciple-master didactic orientation were common in late antique literature; fourth, on the evidence that the early Arabic exegetical tradition identified the narrative's figure of the 'servant' as "al-Khaḍir" and then equated al-Khiḍr with Elijah, a highly popular biblical figure in the late antique period; fifth, on the grounds that contemporary late antique literature was full of tales of Elijah as a wise teacher and guide; and, finally, sixth, on the basis that if indeed there had existed a contemporary text or tale involving Moses and Elijah with which the Qur'ān was in conversation, that too would not be incongruous with late antique literary topoi in which Moses and Elijah regularly were combined. Thus, this section will not claim to identify a contemporary Near Eastern text as the source of Q 18:60-82, but instead suggests, on the basis of the arguments outlined above and detailed below, that the existence of such a contemporary tale is at least not implausible.

317

Sūrat al-Kahf Q 18 in Late Antique Context

Sūrat al-Kahf is distinguished by its three primary narratives: the 'Men of the Cave' (18:9-26), 'Moses and the Servant', which is the narrative where Khiḍr was later identified in exegesis *tafsīr* as the 'Servant' (18:60-82), and 'Dhū al-Qarnayn', the narrative about a figure regularly identified as Alexander the Great (18:83-98). *Sūrat al-Kahf* is distinctive not only for these stories, but also because at least two of them, the 'Men of the Cave' narrative and that of 'Dhū al-Qarnayn', have antecedents in Syriac Christian literature, and the details of those narratives in the Qur'ān thus are illuminated by an understanding of the stories in conversation with their Syriac parallels. The 'Moses and the Servant' narrative is remarkable because, as we will see, it is the only such account of Moses in either the Qur'ān or in the Bible, although this narrative also is illuminated by understanding it within the contemporary genres of both wisdom literature and disciple-master didactic literature, common to both rabbinic and Christian traditions.

The short narratives and parables in the *sūrah* other than the three main narratives are comprised of exhortations to follow the divine guidance in the 'Book', *al-kitāb*, referring to the Qur'ān (18:1-3); anti-trinitarian polemic (18:3-8 and 110); encouragement to the prophet in his mission (18:27-29); warnings of a dire afterlife for those who disbelieve and of a paradise for those who believe (18:29-31 and 102-108); the parable of two men who shared abutting gardens: one man who was wealthy but impious, and the other man who was less fortunate in wealth and sons but truly pious, saying "what god pleases"; the garden of the former was buried in its own excess, and the audience was reminded that God is powerful over everything and that righteous deeds endure longer

and are better in reward than is the "splendor of this present life," such as wealth and sons (Q 18:32-46); warnings against idolatry and *Iblīs*[538] and the *jinn*[539] (Q 18:50-51); apocalyptic judgement scenes (Q 18:47-49, 52-53, 99-101); a warning about disbelief and its consequences (Q 18:54-59), and a brief notice that if the sea were ink for God's words of revelation, the sea would give out before the words of God (Q 18:109).

These narratives and parables which accompany the longer passages are not random or disjointed insertions, however: they make sense in the larger structure of the *sūrah*. Carl Ernst has noted that *Sūrat al-Kahf* follows a particular pattern, characteristic of "middle and later Meccan Suras."[540] The intentional symmetry between the opening and closing eight verses of the chapter exemplifies ring composition, in that specific verses in the introduction and the closing intentionally parallel one another, primarily around the themes of Qur'ānic revelation (18:1 and 18:109), apocalypticism (18:2, 8 and 18:102), anti-trinitarianism (18:4-5, 18:110), final judgement (18:103-108), and the Qur'ānic prophetology of Muḥammad (18:6 and 18:110).

Besides the parallelism of the introductory and closing sections, the remainder of the shorter narratives and parables in the chapter are located after the 'Men of the Cave'

---

[538] *Iblīs* is "related to the Greek word *diabolos* ('accuser', cf. Eng. 'devil'), through Syriac (*dīblūs* or *diyābūlūs*). In the Septuagint *diabolos* is sometimes used to translate 'Satan' (Heb. *sāṭān*, 'accuser'), and in the New Testament the word is used to designate the chief of forces of evil (e.g. Matthew 4:1)." *Iblīs* in the Qur'ān is sometimes described as originally an angel (Q 2:36) and sometimes described as one of the *jinn* (Q18:50). Droge, *The Qur'ān*, 5 and 44n. Additionally, 'Satan' *al-shayṭān* is referenced directly at 18:63.

[539] *Jinn* in the Qur'ān are an ambiguous category of otherworldly beings created by God from fire (Q 15:27 and 55:15), and who both serve God (Q 51:56) and lead people astray (Q 41:29). See Droge, *The Qur'ān*, 472-473.

[540] Ernst, *How to Read the Qur'ān*, 105-154.

passage and before the 'Moses and the Servant' passage, indicating that the narratives of *Sūrah* 18 were located in specific places for specific purposes, rather than randomly bundled together. In addition to these structural elements, the entire *sūrah* has a specific theological orientation as well, which we will see below.

The Men of the Cave Q 18:9-26

The narrative of the 'Men of the Cave' (Q 18:9-26) is usually identified with the Christian Syriac legend known as the 'Seven Sleepers of Ephesus'.[541] In that account, which first appeared in Syriac sources from the sixth century CE, the 'sleepers' were young men from Ephesus (in modern-day Turkey) who hid in a cave to avoid the persecutions of the notorious Roman Emperor Decius (r. 249-251 CE and see also Chapter Five, above). In the legend, they "fell asleep" in the cave for many years (i.e., God took their souls to heaven while their bodies remained in the cave).[542] They awoke during the reign of Emperor Theodosius II (408-450 CE), having remained there so long that the Empire and even the Emperor himself had become Christian. However, during the reign of Theodosius II, some Christians had begun to question the veracity of bodily resurrection, asserting instead that only the soul was resurrected. Learning of the men in the cave, the Emperor hastened to see them and they announced to the Emperor that they had been "awoken" in order to demonstrate the truth of resurrection.

---

[541] See also Droge, *The Qur'ān*, 185 and associated notes.

[542] Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Emergence of Islam: Classical Traditions in Contemporary Perspective* (Fortress Press, 2012), 131.

The Qur'ānic narrative counts the tale of the 'Companions of the Cave' among the marvels or signs *ayāt* of God. The men enter into the cave because, as the Qur'ān recounts, the young men were God-fearing and had rejected the notion that their people had taken gods other than God, so God instructed them to take refuge in the cave. There they remained for 309 years, until God "raised them up" *ba'aṯnāhum* in order that the people of the city would know that God's promise *wa'd Allāh* (concerning bodily resurrection)[543] was true, and that there was no doubt about the [coming of the Last] Hour (18:19-21).

Recent research into the Syriac sources of this story has helped to illuminate, among many other elements, one aspect of the Qur'ānic account that long troubled Islamic *mufassirūn*; namely, how it could be that the Qur'ānic story references a dog, ("and their dog (lay) stretched out (with) its front paws at the door (of the cave)" 18:18), when dogs were known in Islamic tradition to be unclean. As Gabriel Said Reynolds has demonstrated, the 'dog' referenced in the Qur'ān makes sense in the light of Syriac literature and Christian tradition regarding this tale.[544] In the Syriac homily *mêmrê* of Jacob of Serugh (d. 521 CE) on this subject, Serugh described the 'sleepers' as "a flock" and as "blessed lambs" over whom God left a "'watcher' to be the guardian of [the 'sleepers''] limbs."[545] Not only could the 'watcher' be interpreted as watch-dog or

---

[543] Droge, *The Qur'ān*, 185 and associated notes.

[544] Reynolds, *Emergence of Islam*," 131-133.

[545] See Sidney Griffith's translation in "Christian Lore and the Arabic Qur'ān: The 'Companions of the Cave' in Surat al-Kahf and in Syriac Christian Tradition," in *The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context*, edited by Gabriel Said Reynolds, Routledge Studies in the Qur'ān, series editor Andrew Rippin, vol. 8 (New York: Routledge, 2008), 128.

sheepdog according to the pastoral metaphor drawn by Serugh,[546] but, as the

contemporary pilgrimage account of the Christian visitor Theodosius shows, by the year

530 CE, the city of Ephesus had become famous for being the location of "the seven

sleeping brothers, and the dog 'Viricanus' at their feet."[547] The Qur'ān's account of the

Christian legend of the 'Seven Sleepers' demonstrates "the ways in which the Qur'ān on

the one hand removes the Christian frame of reference and on the other hand provides an

Islamic, Qur'ānic horizon within which the legend takes on a whole new hermeneutical

significance."[548]

Dhū al-Qarnayn Q 18:83-102

The main figure in the narrative of 'Dhū al-Qarnayn' is usually identified as the

Macedonian Alexander III (the 'Great', ca. 356-323 BCE).[549] Kevin van Bladel

(following the original work of both Theodor Nöldeke and G.J. Reinink) has

convincingly demonstrated that the Syriac text titled *Neṣḥānâ dîleh d-Aleksandrôs*, "The

Glorious Deeds of Alexander," ca. 630 CE, a manuscript uncovered by E.A. Wallis

Budge in 1889 along with the Syriac version of the *Alexander Romance* of Pseudo-

---

[546] Reynolds, *Emergence of Islam*, 133. Note that Griffith argues *against* the notion that the watchdog in the Qur'ānic account is a "conceptual 'Syriacism'," but does hold that "the watch dog with its paws spread on the cave's threshold" in the Qur'ān is in keeping with the pastoral metaphors evoked by Serugh. Griffith, "Christian Lore and the Arabic Qur'ān," 128.

[547] Reynolds, *Emergence of Islam*, 133, quoting Theodosius, *The Pilgrimage of Theodosius*, translated by J.H. Bernard (London: Palestine Pilgrims Text Society, 1893), 16.

[548] Griffith, "Christian Lore and the Arabic Qur'ān," 130.

[549] Dhū al-Qarnayn translates as "the two-horned [one]," and refers to depictions on contemporary regional coinage in which Alexander was depicted in profile, in the role of the Egyptian god Zeus-Ammon, wearing horns.

Callisthenes, and known in scholarship as the "Alexander Legend," is the source of the account of Dhū al-Qarnayn found at Q 18:83-102, of which the Qur'ānic version is essentially a retelling.[550]

Incorporating the research of G.J. Reinink, Van Bladel demonstrated that the Syriac *Alexander Legend* was written at the end of a long and difficult war between the Romans and the Persians (603-630), which turned out to be the last war between the Byzantine and Sasanian Empires. Most likely, the *Alexander Legend* was written in the year 630, the year in which the Emperor Heraclius had finally reversed the decade and more of Persian control over large parts of the Byzantine Empire, and the year in which Heraclius had also reportedly restored the relic of the True Cross to Jerusalem. Reinink and Van Bladel both argue that the *Alexander Legend* was an apocalypse, and a "piece of pro-Heraclian postwar propaganda," designed to reestablish Roman control over areas formerly under Persian control and to overcome the divisive Christological differences between Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian Christians in the empire, by equating the universally popular figure of Alexander with the Emperor Heraclius, and by ending the *Legend* with a "message of Byzantine Imperial eschatology: the prediction that one Byzantine emperor will soon establish a worldwide Christian rule which will be followed by the return of the Messiah."[551]

---

[550] See Kevin van Bladel, "The Alexander Legend in the Qur'ān 18:83-102," ," in *The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context*, edited by Gabriel Said Reynolds, Routledge Studies in the Qur'ān, series editor Andrew Rippin, vol. 8 (New York: Routledge, 2008), 175-203.

[551] Ibid., 184-185.

The events related in both the *Legend* and in Q 18:83-102 are given in precisely the same order, and almost every element in the Qur'ānic tale has a more detailed counterpart in the *Legend*. Thus, if not directly, then by means of oral transmission, "a Syriac text quite current and important in the last years of Muḥammad's life was adapted for twenty verses of the Qur'ān."[552]

However, unlike the *Legend*, the Qur'ānic account does not include a final prophecy that declared the Romans eventually would defeat the Persians and establish a worldwide Christian rule lasting until the return of the Messiah. Instead, the Qur'ānic account ends with a warning from Dhū al-Qarnayn that God's judgement is imminent (98-102). The Qur'ānic account thus adapts this popular contemporaneous tale[553] by emphasizing its own message: "the Qur'ānic account puts more emphasis on the coming end of things and God's judgement and, not surprisingly, does not mention any expectation of a universal Christian empire for the Romans."[554]

Late Antique References

In addition to the Syriac Christian tales of the *Seven Sleepers* and the *Alexander Legend* with which the Qur'ān is in conversation in the 'Men of the Cave' and the 'Dhū al-Qarnayn' narratives, there are several allusions in *sūrah* 18 to biblical passages and

---

[552] Ibid., 195; accounts of oral or direct transmission on ibid., 190.

[553] Ibid., 188. After its appearance in 630, the Legend was used by at least three more apocalypses, the *Song of Alexander*, attributed falsely to the Syriac Christian poet-theologian Jacob of Serugh and composed between 630-636; the Syriac apocalypse *De fine mundi*, attributed falsely to the Syriac Christian poet-theologian Ephrem and composed between 640-683; and the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodious*, composed around 692 and possibly in reaction to the building of the Muslim Dome of the Rock monument.

[554] Van Bladel, "Alexander Legend in the Qur'ān," 183.

communities that help to illuminate the Qur'ān's common pool. In addition to references

to contemporary forms of Christianity through anti-trinitarian polemic (Q 18:3-8 and

110), we see the presence of parables (Q 18:32-46), a popular genre of didactic narrative

throughout the late antique period and on specific display in the biblical sayings

attributed to Jesus.[555] We see also references to heaven *firdaus* (Q 18:107) and to hell

jahannam/'Gehenna' (100, 106) and 'the fire' *nār* (Q 18:29), echoing dualistic,

apocalyptic and eschatological beliefs current in biblical (particularly Christian) and

wider Near Eastern registers. Finally, we see reflected of the Qur'ān's common pool of

figures and motifs in this *sūrah* reference to the biblical figures 'Gog and Magog' (Q

18:94 cf. Ezekiel 38:2-3), to angels *malā'ikah* (Q 18:50), and, as an apocalyptic herald, a

reference to "a blast on the trumpet" (Q 18:99 cf. Matt 24:31, 1 Cor 15:52, and 1 Thess

4:16); a reference repeated frequently in the Qur'ān (Q 6:73, 20:102, 39:68, 69:13, 74:8,

and 78:18). There is also an episode in this *sūrah* in which God ordered the Angels to

prostrate before Adam (Q 18:50), which, while not a part of the account in the book of

Genesis, was a theme current in late antique Christian literature (cf. Heb 1:6, the *Life of*

Adam and Eve 12:1-16:1, and the *Book of the Cave of Treasures* (2:22-25).[556]

<div align="center">Moses and the Servant Q 18:60-82</div>

The narrative of 'Moses and the Servant' begins about halfway through the *sūrah*,

after the 'Men of the Cave' narrative and situated directly adjacent to the 'Dhū al-

---

[555] See Amy-Jill Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus: the Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi*, (HarperOne, 2014) for a recent examination of this narrative genre.

[556] Droge, *The Qur'ān*, 188 and 57n.

Qarnayn' narrative. It is twenty-three verses long, and because of its brief length, it will

be quoted here directly:

> (60) (Remember) when Moses said to his young man, 'I shall not give up until I reach the junction of the two seas, or (else) I shall go on for a long time.' (61) But when they reached the junction between them, they forgot their fish, (for) it took its way into the sea, slipping away/*tunneling*. (62) So when they had passed beyond (that place), he said to his young man, 'Bring us our morning meal. We have indeed become weary from this journey of ours'. (63) He said, 'Did you see when we took refuge at the rock? Surely I forgot the fish – none other than Satan made me forget to remember it – and took its way into the sea – an amazing thing!'(64) He said, 'That is what we were seeking!' So they returned, retracing their footsteps. (65) And they found a servant, one of Our servants to whom We had given mercy from Us, and whom We had taught knowledge from Us. (66) Moses said to him, 'Shall I follow you on (the condition) that you teach me some of what you have been taught (of) right (knowledge)?' (67) He said, 'Surely you will not be able (to have) patience with me. (68) How could you have patience for what you cannot encompass in (your) awareness of it'? (69) He said, 'You will find me, if God pleases, patient, and I shall not disobey you in any command.' (70) He said, 'If you follow (me), do not ask me about anything, until I mention it to you.' (71) So they both set out (and continued on) until, when they sailed in the ship, he made a hole in it. He said, "Have you made a hole in it in order to drown its passengers? You have indeed done a dreadful thing! (72) He said, 'Did I not say, "Surely you will not be able (to have) patience with me?"' (73) He said, 'Do not take me to task for what I forgot, and do not burden me (with) hardship in my affair.' (74) So they both set out (and continued on) until, when they met a young boy, he killed him. He said, "Have you killed an innocent person, other than (in retaliation) for a person? Certainly you have done a terrible thing!' (75) He said, 'Did I not say to you, "Surely you will not be able to have patience with me?"' (76) He said, 'If I ask you about anything after this, do not keep me as a companion. You have had enough excuses from me.' (77) So they both set out (and continued on) until, when they came to the people of a town, they asked its people for food, but they refused to offer them hospitality. They both found in it a wall on the verge of collapse, and he set it up. He said, 'If you had wished, you could indeed have taken a reward for that'. (78) He said, 'This is the parting between me and you. (Now) I shall inform you about the interpretation of what you were not able (to have) patience with. (79) As for the ship, it belonged to poor people working on the sea, and I wanted to damage it, (because) behind them (there) was a king seizing every ship by force. (80) As for the young boy, his parents were believers, and we feared that he would burden them both (with) insolent transgression and disbelief. (81) We wanted their Lord to give to them both in exchange (one) better than him in purity, and closer (to them) in affection.

326

(82) As for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys in the city, and underneath it was a treasure belonging to them both, (for) their father had been a righteous man. Your Lord wanted them both to reach their maturity, and bring forth their treasure as a mercy from your Lord. I did not do it on my (own) command. That is the interpretation (of) what you were not able (to have) patience with.

Overview

This account details the narrative of Moses seeking a specific location, the 'meeting of the two seas' *majmaʿ al-baḥrayn*, where Moses and his young servant boy *fatāhu* found there one of God's 'servants', upon whom God had bestowed divine mercy and knowledge *ʿabadan min ʿibadinā atināhu raḥmatan min ʿandanā wa ʿallamnāthu min ladunnā ʿilman*. Moses requested to be able to travel with this 'servant', in order that Moses might be able to learn some of the servant's divine knowledge. The servant reluctantly agreed, and took Moses (now alone) on a journey involving three outrageous and seemingly unjust actions. From the beginning, Moses could not quiet his objections, and after Moses' third outburst the Servant left, after having countenanced his actions as just. The Servant furthermore declared that he did not perform the actions of his own accord *wa ma faʿalatuhu ʿan amrī*, but, instead, the actions were God's own design.

Understanding Moses and the 'Servant'

Understanding the Qur'ānic narrative of 'Moses and the Servant' is challenging, particularly as no precise literary precedent for this tale has been identified. Exegetical and scholarly work on the narrative has thus interpreted it in various ways, from identifying it with the Alexander tales, to understanding it as a model for both disciple-master and esoteric knowledge. The latter interpretation has probably proven the most enduring for later Islamic tradition, and the enigmatic story has served as a model for

327

both mystical and Sufistic practice. While such is the predominant and authentic

interpretation of the tale for both Islamic tradition and Sufi orientation, I would like to

propose here another understanding of the passage as it concerns its late antique Qur'ānic

context.

Unusual Portrayal of Moses

As noted previously, the narrative of 18:60-82 is unique in its portrayal of Moses.

Moses, as we have seen above, was a central figure in the Qur'ān, mentioned far more

frequently than any other biblical prophet. The Qur'ānic narratives of Moses, taken in the

aggregate, presented Moses in a way similar to the biblical account, but with an added

importance: Moses was presented in the Qur'ān as the prophet-messenger exemplar who

defeated idolatry and delivered to his people God's words in the *taurat*; in that way, the

Qur'ānic Moses was the ideal model of prophethood for Muḥammad.

This careful and repetitive Qur'ānic depiction of Moses makes the account at

18:60-82 all the more noteworthy: in it, Moses in 18:60-82 was shown to be both lacking

in knowledge and impatient, neither of which are usual Qur'ānic descriptions of Moses.

Indeed, later exegetes worked to harmonize the account of Moses at 18:60-82 with his

more common Qur'ānic portrayal,[557] and subsequent works on the subjects of the Islamic

---

[557] The exegetical explanation drawn from the Sufyān ibn 'Uyayna ← Ibn 'Abbas ← Ubayy ibn Ka'b ← Muḥammad narration reported in the *tafsīr* collection of Ṭabarī (d. 922), explains that in response to a question from the Children of Israel, Moses had claimed to be the most learned of people, upon which God rebuked Moses for not having ascribed knowledge to God. In response, God told Moses that there was at the confluence of the two seas one of God's servants who possessed more knowledge than Moses. Moses asked God how he could meet this servant, and God then told Moses that the servant would turn up at the place where the [fish in a basket] is found to be missing. See Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, II, 592-597, and Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, XV, 271-291. See also G.H.A. Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Ḥadīth* (Boston: Brill, 2007), 568-572.

prophets have tended to include sub-sections for understanding the 'Moses and the Servant' narrative.[558]

Similar to the ways in which the Syriac narratives of the Seven Sleepers and the Alexander Legend have been shown above to be compelling late antique narratives that were taken up and recast by the Qur'ān, and considering as well the unusual formalistic elements in 60-82 regarding the Moses figure, I detail the possibility below that 18:65-82 could likewise have been drawn from a contemporary narrative of wisdom literature involving Moses, a narrative which was engaged in and recast by the Qur'ān. First we will discuss aspects of the tale which have late antique parallels, then formalistic elements of the narrative itself, followed by contemporary instances of wisdom and disciple-master didactic literature, and, finally, later Arabic literature involving Khiḍr.

Links to Alexander Stories and Cosmological Notions of the Late Antique Era

The opening verses of 18:60-82, specifically 60-65, have been shown both to draw on the Alexander narratives, and upon cosmological and paradisiacal beliefs current in late antiquity. Drawing on the fourth-fifth century Recension β of the Alexander Romance, on the Babylonian Talmud (*Tamīd* 32a-32b), and on the *Alexander Song* (ca. 630-636), Tommaso Tesei has demonstrated that elements from the first five verses of this narrative, specifically the memorable pericope of the escaping fish (vv. 61 and 63), can be traced to not only the *Alexander Song* but to cosmological and paradisiacal notions

---

[558] Suzanne Haneef, *A History of the Prophets of Islam*: *Derived from the Quran, Ahadīth and Commentaries, Vol. 2: Moses, Aaron, Joshua, Samuel, David, Solomon, Elijah, Elisha, Dhul-Kifl, Jonah, Zechariah, John, Jesus, Muḥammad*, Library of Islam (New York: University of New York Press, 1984), 157-189.

current in the late antique world.[559] Tesei showed that the fish-escape episode in 60-65 was related to the motif of the water or fountain of life from the earlier Alexander legends, in which a salted fish reanimated when it contacted the miraculous water. The motifs of the fish and of the water of life, Tesei argued, also were contemporary Christian symbols related to Christianity, baptism, and to the resurrection, which would explain why reference to the revivified fish pericope was omitted in the Talmudic accounts that otherwise followed the Alexander narrative.[560]

Tesei further demonstrated that the miraculous passage of the fish into the sea, marked in the Qur'ān by the Arabic adverbial term *saraban* (61), a tricky word that appears only once in this form in the text and is related by root *srb* to both *sarāb* ("mirage") in 24:39 and to *sarīb* ("to go forth or away"), can be understood as the accusative form of *sarab*, which means either "tunnel" or "subterranean excavation." *Saraban*, used in the passage to describe the means by which the fish "took its way into the sea," *fa-ttakhadha sabīlahu fī l-baḥr*, has accordingly been translated in various ways in the exegetical and scholarly literature in order to reconcile the "apparent discordance" between the meaning of the term *sarab* as "tunnel" or "subterranean passage," with the location of the sea to which it is linked.[561]

---

[559] Tommaso Tesei, "Cosmological Notions from Late Antiquity in Q 18:60-65" (*Journal of the American Oriental Society* Vol. 135, no. 1, 2015) 19-32.

[560] Ibid., 23.

[561] Tesei, "Cosmological Notions from Late Antiquity," 20.

However, Tesei demonstrated that Christian thought of the first centuries of the Common Era, as evidenced in the writings of the historian Philostorgius (d. ca. 439) and the prominent Syriac theologians Ephrem (d. ca. 373) and Narasi (d. 502), among many others, held that paradise was a physical space situated on the other side of the ocean encircling the earth, and that the four rivers which flowed from paradise (the Pishon, Gihon, Tigris, and Euphrates), passed under this ocean to reach the inhabited part of the world. This belief about the location and rivers of paradise stemmed from ancient Near Eastern cosmological notions, and was attested as well in the text in Genesis 2:10-14.

When viewed in light of cosmological and paradisiacal notions contemporary in the late antique world, the Qur'ānic references, through its engagement with elements of the Alexander stories, both to the wondrous revivification of the fish (63) and to its mysterious course *saraban* to the sea (61), make it highly likely that *saraban* in 18:61 "is meant to describe [a] subterranean passage under the sea that the fish takes once resurrected by the miraculous water of the paradisiacal rivers."[562] However, while the Qur'ān refers in 60-65 to tales and concepts current in the late antique world, such as the fish being revived in the water of life, it does not include overtly Christian elements such as those found in the *Alexander Song*. Instead, the narrative at 60-65 introduces a wisdom literature tale, which it presents from a distinctly Qur'ānic perspective.

---

[562] Ibid., 25.

Qur'ānic Language

The narrative of Moses and the Servant is introduced in the Qur'ān by the interjectory expression "*wa 'idh'*," *idh'* being a characteristic signal for the start of an exposition about a narrative or figure of biblical or extra-biblical lore.[563] This is significant because the interjection "*wa idh*" seems to have been used for narratives with which the Qur'ān's audience was presumably familiar, and which would be addressed from a Qur'ānic perspective.[564] Moreover, as we have seen demonstrated above by Tommaso Tesei, the beginning of the narrative (60-65) at 18:60-82 was drawn in part from literature and concepts current in the late antique world. Thus, from the start of this passage, we can identify a linguistic reference "*wa idh*," which apparently underscores the pre-extant nature of the following Moses narrative (60), as well as evidence of contemporaneous narratives from the late antique world already woven into the Moses and the Servant narrative (60-65). These elements together suggest that the Moses and the Servant narrative which followed may already have been familiar to the Qur'ān's audience.

Wisdom Literature

The narrative at 18:60-82 can be understood as a wisdom literature narrative, engaging the topic of God's mysterious justice. God's wisdom, the account clearly

---

[563] Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 61. Griffith argues that the term *'idh'* functions as a marker for a "…mode of narrative recall, utilizing a key term that recurs throughout the Qur'ān … the simple word 'when' (*idh*) impli[es] a preceding admonition 'to remember."

[564] Ibid, 54-96.

demonstrates, is unknowable to humans, who lack both the capacity and the patience *ṣabr* (a word mentioned seven times in 23 verses) to understand the divine plan. Later Islamic exegesis understands this narrative as more closely related to the topic of predestination *qadr*,[565] but in its late antique context, this account fits demonstrably into the genre of wisdom literature.

As Haim Schwarzbaum noted in his 1959 work on the theodicean components of 60-82, the disharmony between the concept of a God of justice and the evils that exist in a world where the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper "constitutes one of the most crucial and perplexing problems in the history of mankind."[566] Similar Near Eastern wisdom literature, such as the biblical book of Job or even the Akkadian *Dialogue about Human Misery*, ponder the question of why the righteous seem to suffer while the wicked prosper. The solution offered by these and similar narratives is that "a mortal is urged not to pry into God's unfathomable decrees and mysterious ways," because human capacity is too limited to understand the enigmatic ways – deep and inscrutable – of the divine.[567]

In a Talmudic account from the late antique era, Moses also was depicted as asking three things of God: first, he asked that the Divine Presence should rest upon Israel; second, he asked that the Divine Presence should not rest upon the idolaters; and,

---

[565] Halman, *Where the Two Seas Meet*, 31.

[566] Schwarzbaum, *Jewish and Moslem Theodicy Legends*, 119. Note that Schwarzbaum places the narrative of 18:60-82 into the Aarne Thompson folk-literature motif category of *759, known as the angel and the hermit.

[567] Schwarzbaum, *Jewish and Moslem Theodicy Legends*, 120.

third, he asked that God should show him the ways of the Holy One, and it was granted to him. "Moses said before Him [i.e., God]: Lord of the Universe, why is it that some righteous men prosper and others are in adversity, some wicked men prosper and others are in adversity?"[568] Thus we see that in rabbinic circles of the late antique world, not only was the popular question of theodicy engaged in various ways, but at least one contemporary narrative included the figure of Moses asking to understand God's mysterious ways.

Disciple-Master Didactic Narrative

The disciple-master narrative structure reflected in 18:60-82 was also a common literary form of the late antique world. One of the most popular and widespread Christian texts of the first few centuries of the Common Era was the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, the *Sayings of the [Desert] Fathers*, a collection of more than one thousand brief sayings of the monastic desert fathers, originating from Lower Egypt in the 330s to the 460s. Originally a Coptic oral tradition, the *Apophthegmata Patrum* was first written in Greek in the monasteries of Palestine during the late 400s. The *Sayings of the [Desert] Fathers*, sometimes short aphorisms, and sometimes a record of teaching episodes between younger monks and their elders, were extremely popular forms of parable and folk wisdom in late antiquity. As such, they were translated into several languages, including into Syriac during the early seventh century by Ânân Îshô under the title the *Paradise of the Fathers*.

---

[568] BT *Berakoth* 7a.

Rabbinic texts, especially as depicted in the Talmud, were also characterized by being didactic in nature. Consisting of stories involving the well-known rabbis and sages of the Common Era, Talmudic references often incorporated the motif of a disciple-master lesson. The Talmud in Babylonia was composed and redacted in Aramaic among the rabbinic academies along the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers during the first several centuries of the Common Era, and reached a final form in the early seventh century CE. Given the level of exchange and interaction between Jewish communities of the late antique era, one can adduce that Talmudic stories were widely shared, and with non-Jews.[569]

Recent research into the Babylonian Talmud has demonstrated the shared literary elements between the literatures of the Aramaic-language Talmud and the Christian monastic *Sayings*, especially as used in the Syriac churches of the Sasanian Empire.[570] These elements indicate sometimes-nonpolemical Jewish-Christian literary relations in late antique Persia, and furthermore remind us that popular late antique sources that appear to stem from "clear" 'Talmudic' or 'Syriac Christian' sources may themselves be related to other forms of contemporaneous religious literature.

The passage at 18:60-82 aligns with the genres of late antique wisdom literature and with the literary form of disciple-master instruction. We have no evidence of a

---

[569] Nicholas de Lange, "Jews/Justinian," XX.

[570] See Michal Bar-Asher Siegal, *Early Christian Monastic Literature and the Babylonian Talmud* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). See also a similar argument made by Kristen H. Lindbeck, *Elijah and the Rabbis*, xvi.

contemporary parallel wisdom literature narrative involving Moses, but we can infer that neither the wisdom-literature format, nor the figure of Moses as involved in disciple-master instruction – for instance, in Talmudic reference – would have been unfamiliar in a late antique Qur'ānic context.

Who Was the 'Servant'? Later Arabic Literature, Elijah, and the Alexander Tales

We certainly cannot answer the question of the 'servant's' identity from the text of the Qur'ān itself, and perhaps there was no original name for this servant. However, there are two later sources of evidence with respect to the servant figure which we can consult. First, we have the Arabic exegetical traditions, in which the 'servant' was later named and associated with other figures; second, we have the evidence of a later Jewish legend involving nearly the same narrative frame-story, but featuring different actors.[571]

This 'servant' was earliest named in Arabic exegetical literature in the *tafsīr* work of Mujāhid b. Jabr (d. ca. 722). Mujāhid's *tafsīr* is considered one of the earliest exegetical collections, traces of which, through the recension of al-Qāsim b. Nāfi' b. Abū Bazza, remain today only in references in the later *tafsīr* works of figures such as Ṭabarī (d. 922), and Ibn Abī Hatim al-Rāzī (d. 925).[572] In Mujāhid's *tafsīr*, the unnamed 'servant' in 18:65 was identified in the exegetical story attributed to Ubayy ibn Ka'b (see above, n. 113) by a reference to the figure "al-Khaḍir."[573] Meaning, as we have seen,

---

[571] The Jewish legend of Rabbi Joshua ben Levi and Elijah will be examined below.

[572] For a detailed explanation of the transmission of Mujāhid, see Gilliot, "Mujāhid's Exegesis," 64-112.

[573] See G.H.A. Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Ḥadīth*, who notes that "in the Qur'ān al-Khadir is nowhere mentioned by name. The subject of the verb is simply left unspecified, but in all the earliest exegetical works, beginning with that of Mujāhid, al-Khadir is mentioned here by name," *ibid.*, 571.

"the Green [One]," the reference to "al-Khaḍir" was earliest elaborated upon in the *tafsīr* of Muqātil (d. 767), who did not cite Mujāhid as his source.[574] Muqātil identified "al-Khaḍir" with *ilyasaʿ*, i.e. the biblical prophet 'Elisha', "who encompassed (*wasaʿa*) the knowledge of six heavens and six earths."[575]

What we learn from these Arabic commentaries is that approximately 100 years after the narrative's appearance in the Qurʾān (presuming the Qurʾān dates to a time around the early seventh century), the 'servant' in 18:60-82 was identified by Mujāhid through the opaque reference "al-Khadir," which may have been a name, a pseudonym, or perhaps reference to a particular figural aspect of an existing figure. In the *tafsīr* of Muqātil, from approximately fifty years after that of Mujāhid, "al-Khaḍir" was identified with the biblical prophet Elisha. Known for the characteristic of exegetical completeness, "regardless of how obvious the reference of a given pronoun might be, Muqātil is relentless in resolving it by means of some equation, paraphrase, or inserted vocative,"[576] Muqātil elaborated Mujāhid's identification of "al-Khaḍir" to identify the figure with the knowledgeable prophet "*ilyasaʿ*," 'Elisha'.

Later exegetes, however, changed the reference to "*ilīyas*," 'Elijah'. In Arabic, "*ilīyas*," 'Elijah', is homophonic with "*ilyasaʿ*," 'Elisha'. Additionally, from a biblical

---

[574] Muqātil generally did not refer to earlier exegetical sources, though he may have been aware of them.

[575] G.H.A. Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Ḥadīth*, 569; see also Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, vol. II, 594.

[576] See Nicolai Sinai, "The Qurʾānic Commentary of Muqātil b. Sulaymān and the Evolution of Early *Tafsīr* Literature, in *Tafsīr and Islamic Intellectual History: Exploring the Boundaries of a Genre*, edited by Andreas Görke and Johanna Pink, The Institute of Ismaili Studies Qurʾānic Studies Series, 12 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, 2014) 113-146.

perspective, the figures of Elijah and Elisha often are homologically crossed. Whatever the provenance of Muqātil's "al-Khadir" identification with "*ilyasaʿ*," 'Elisha' – a name which was, it should be recalled, employed by Muqātil to rhyme with and explain the 'servant's' 'wide' (*wasaʿa*) knowledge – "*ilīyas*," i.e., 'Elijah', became the figure most often associated by Qur'ānic exegetes and in other later Arabic literature with al-Khiḍr. As time passed, al-Khiḍr and *ilīyas*/Elijah were not identified as the *same*, as had been the case in the early commentary, but, rather, al-Khiḍr and Elijah increasingly were presented as distinct (though related) figures.[577]

In the early *aḥādīth* (pl. of *ḥadīth*), al-Khiḍr's etymological association with the color green was attributed to his ability to make the earth fertile: in a saying attributed to Muḥammad located in the classical *ḥadīth* and *tafsīr* collections of both Muslim and al-Ṭabarī, al-Khiḍr's name was explained "due to the fact that he [Khiḍr] sat on a white skin *jeld* and it became green.[578] "Both al-Nawawī and al-Diyārbakrī [authors of later *ḥadīth* collections] comment that the "skin" is symbolic of the earth, emphasizing al-Khiḍr's ability to make the earth fertile."[579]

---

[577] See al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa-l mulūk*, 415, who recorded that "Al-Khiḍr was the progeny of Persia while Elijah was an Israelite. The two meet every year during the annual festival (*mawsim*)." The theme of Elijah and al-Khiḍr meeting annually became popular in Arabic commentary, and, as Brannon Wheeler noted, this report may be the source for such traditions. See Brannon Wheeler, "Jewish Origins of Q 18:65-82?" 165 69n.

[578] Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifah, 1994), vol. 5, 135; see also al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān fi tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol 15, 168.

[579] See Abū Zakarīyā Yaḥyā al-Nawawī, *Tahdhīb al-asmā'*, ed. Wüstenfeld (Göttingen: London Society for the Publication of Oriental Texts, 1842-1847), vol. 1, 228; see also al-Diyārbakri, *Ta'rikh al-khamīs* (Cairo, 1283), vol. 1, 106. These references come from Wensinck, "al-Khaḍir," 905, and from Wheeler, "The Jewish Origins of Qur'ān 18:65-82?" 165.

Links between Alexander and al-Khiḍr in later Arabic Literature

Recognizing the references to the Alexander tales in the Moses and the Servant

narrative and in the Dhū al-Qarnayn narrative immediately following, the later Arabic

exegetical authors also created explanations that linked the figure al-Khiḍr with both the

figure of Alexander and with the Alexander narratives. In the influential commentary of

Ṭabarī (d. 922), al-Khiḍr drank the 'water of life' but Alexander did not, explaining both

al-Khiḍr's immortality and Alexander's early death.[580] These exegetical linkages

spawned subsequent and highly popular literature and works of art involving the figure

al-Khiḍr featured within the Alexander tales (see Fig. 29).[581] Thus, we see that al-Khiḍr

and Elijah (as distinct figures), became linked in the medieval Arabic commentaries on

three points: their great knowledge, their associations with fertility, and their immortality.

Elijah in Late Antique Literature

From the perspective of the late antique religious milieu of the sixth-seventh

century and the presence therein of rich literary traditions involving Elijah as a wise

teacher and guide, the exegetical identification with Elijah as the figure of the wise

'servant' from whom Moses sought knowledge is at least not inconceivable. Elijah

during the late antique period was a figure of considerable popularity among many

---

[580] al-Ṭabarī, Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr, *Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa al-mulūk*, translated by William M. Brinner (Albany: State University of New York, 1991), Vol. 3 of *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, 39 vols., edited by Ehsan Yar-Shatar.

[581] See Firdawsī, *Iskandarnāma*, a Persian Alexander tale from ca. 1000 CE which specifically writes al-Khiḍr into Alexander's journey. Among many other textual and artistic references, see also the miniature paintings which depict Alexander and al-Khiḍr together at the water of life. The 16th-century miniature painting collection associated with the Alexander tales in Niẓamī Ganjavī's *Khamsa* is a good example.

religious communities; Jews and Christians most prominent among them. Elijah was

associated not only with the biblical account in 1 and 2 Kings, but was known regionally

as a herald of last days (cf. Mal 4:5), as a legal authority, as a teacher of the wise, helper

to those in crisis, and a bringer of rain. Elijah during the Talmudic period became a

figure quite different from the Elijah of the bible, "He is partly angelic and partly human,

therefore he can connect humankind to God, serving as a supernatural mediator."[582]

Onlookers at the crucifixion wondered whether Elijah would come to rescue Jesus (Mk

15:35-36, Mt 27:46-49), indicating that Elijah already was understood by the time of

those Gospel narratives to be a helper who appeared to Jews in need.

Elijah in the Talmudic era was known most prominently as a teacher. Intensely

popular as a subject of Talmudic narratives, Elijah was frequently depicted in a category

of stories in which "a rabbi meets Elijah and asks a question… Elijah may teach or share

secret knowledge on a wide variety of subjects."[583] Similarly,

> "Elijah is an ideal teacher for the rabbis. Not only is he addressed as 'master and
> teacher', but he often acts as an ideal teacher, displaying patience and dispensing
> encouragement in ways that speak to the tensions between the disciples of the
> teachers and their earthly teachers."[584]

Finally, well-known and common associations in contemporary Christian

scripture and lore involved the presence together of Moses and Elijah. As we saw above

in Chapter Four, both Elijah and Moses became associated in the New Testament with

---

[582] Lindbeck, *Elijah and the Rabbis*, ix.

[583] Ibid., xix.

[584] Ibid, 207.

the coming of the Messiah. In the Gospel accounts, Moses and Elijah were depicted as appearing together with Jesus during his ministry at an event later referred to as the 'transfiguration' (Mk 9:4-8, Mt 17:3-8, Lk 9:30-33). Accordingly, in the tradition of Christian literature in the Near East, there was a notable precedent for the appearance together of Moses and Elijah, despite any apparent 'temporal' discrepancy between these figures.

<p style="text-align:center">Sūrah 18 and the Theological Message of the Qur'ān</p>

As we have seen in the cases of the Men of the Cave and the Dhū al-Qarnayn narratives, it seems reasonable to presume that any prospective source for the Moses and the Servant narrative would not have been repeated verbatim in the Qur'ānic account. Rather, like other narratives in the Qur'ān, the account or tale most likely would have been edited to align with the Qur'ān's own theological message.

We have no extant earlier sources that might help us to illuminate the narrative of Moses and the Servant at 18:60-82, but the argument of this section has been that a late antique literary precedent for the narrative (which may have included the figure of Elijah in the role of the 'servant') is at least plausible. We have made that argument on the basis of the narrative's discordant and uncommon portrayal of Moses; on the grounds that late antique texts underlie the other primary narratives in this *sūrah*; on the basis that wisdom literature and tales with a disciple-master didactic orientation were common in late antique literature; on the evidence of the early Arabic exegetical tradition's identification of the narrative's figure of the 'servant' as "al-Khaḍir," and the equation of al-Khiḍr with the figure of Elijah; on the basis that tales of Elijah as a wise teacher and

guide were plentiful in late antique literature; and on the basis that if indeed there had

existed a contemporary text or tale involving Moses and Elijah with which the Qur'ān

was in conversation, that too would align with late antique literary topoi in which Moses

and Elijah occasionally were combined.

Moreover, the overall contention of this section is that the meanings of this

narrative become clearer by examining the narrative as a text within its own historical

context, and by placing it within the larger theological arguments made in *sūrah* 18 and

the Qur'ān, more generally. When we examine *sūrah* 18 as a whole, we see that,

beginning with the parallel introductory and closing remarks (1-8 and 103-110), which

are largely anti-trinitarian, and which promote both the Qur'ān and the mission of the

prophet Muḥammad, through the parables highlighting God's coming judgement and

apocalypse (27-59), the *sūrah* is primarily addressing a Christian audience.

Furthermore, in contending with narratives known mainly from Syriac literature,

such as the 'Men of the Cave' narrative (9-26), and the references to contemporary

Alexander tales in 60-65 and the Dhū al-Qarnayn narratives (83-102), the Qur'ān is

engaging with compelling contemporary narratives in a manner that removes overt

Christian and Jewish (in the case of Talmudic sources) references, and re-appropriates

those narratives to align with its own theological messages. In *sūrah* 18, we can identify

above all a message of strict monotheism that is in keeping with a greater message of the

Qur'ān *vis-à-vis* its contemporary religious setting: the narratives therein promote a

vision of monotheism that is anti-trinitarian, anti-rabbinic, apocalyptic, and supported by

prophetic mission as exemplified in the prophet Muḥammad.

342

Part Three: al-Khiḍr Images and al-Khiḍr in the Eastern Mediterranean

Interestingly, the discussions above regarding the plausibility of inferring whether the 'Moses and the Servant' narrative in the Qur'ān could have been related to a contemporary late antique account involving Elijah is in many ways moot. Ultimately, the figures of al-Khiḍr and Elijah *did* become associated in both Islamic and Jewish textual sources, as well as by Muslims and Jews in popular religious practice.

A Medieval Jewish Tale of Rabbi Joshua ben Levi and the Strange Actions of Elijah

One interesting textual example is the Jewish legend of the Rabbi Joshua ben Levi and the strange actions of Elijah. Composed ca. 1000 CE, the tale of Rabbi Joshua and Elijah was first recorded in Arabic in the Jewish community at Kairaoun, Tunisia, as a part of the work *al-faraj ba'd al-shiddah* ("relief following adversity") composed by Rabbi Nissîm b. Ya'aqobh b. Shâhîn, best known under his Arabic title, Ibn Shāhīn.[585]

In this legend, which closely parallels the Moses and the Servant narrative in Q 18:65-82, Rabbi Joshua (a popular Talmudic figure who had lived and contributed to the Talmudic academies in Palestine during the third century CE), fasted and prayed and asked to see Elijah. A common motif in rabbinic stories was the request of the sages to

---

[585] The Arabic original was published by Julian Obermann, *Studies in Islam and Judaism: The Arabic Original of Ibn Shâhîn's Book of Comfort, known as the Ḥibbûr yaphê of r. Nissîm b. Ya'aqobh* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1933). An English translation can be found in William M. Brinner, *An Elegant Composition Concerning Relief after Adversity*: *by Nissim ben Jacob Ibn Shāhīn*, Yale Judaica Series, Vol. XX, edited by Leon Nemoy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

wish to meet Elijah,[586] and, over centuries of Talmudic lore, "Rabbi Joshua ben Levi was well known to be someone whom Elijah visited."[587]

In the tale, Rabbi Joshua met Elijah on the road (another common Jewish rabbinic motif), and R. Joshua asked to accompany Elijah on his journeys, in order to observe Elijah's wonders. Elijah agreed but warned R. Joshua that R. Joshua would not be able to endure Elijah's actions, and he, Elijah, likewise would not wish to explain his actions. R. Joshua promised not to burden Elijah with questions and Elijah agreed on the condition that once R. Joshua asked for an explanation, he, Elijah, would have to leave. After performing three seemingly unjust and otherwise inexplicable actions, the killing of a poor man's cow; the rebuilding of an unhospitable wealthy man's collapsed wall; and the wish "may God make all of you chiefs" to an inhospitable synagogue community, while making to a poor but generous community the wish "may God grant you only one chief," R. Joshua announced that he could be patient no longer, and asked Elijah to explain himself, after which time he, R. Joshua, would leave Elijah.

Before departing, Elijah explained that the poor man's wife was due to die that same day and Elijah had entreated God that the cow die in her stead; rebuilding the wall had caused a treasure underneath not to be discovered by the unworthy wealthy man; and

---

[586] Lindbeck, *Elijah and the Rabbis*.

[587] Ibid., 98. For more on Rabbi Joshua ben Levi, see Ronald L. Eisenberg, *Essential Figures in the Talmud* (Lanham, MD: Jason Aronson, a subsidiary of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2013), "Joshua ben Levi," 137-141.

a place with many chiefs is bound to be ruined, while a place with only one chief is

bound to prosper. Finally, Elijah charged R. Joshua with specific advice:

> "If you see a wicked man advancing and prospering, do not wonder at it, for it is
> to his ultimate disadvantage. Likewise, if you see a righteous man distressed or
> sorely tired, he is being delivered thereby from something worse. Refrain
> therefore from entertaining doubts in your heart about such things."[588]

Several studies have claimed this Jewish legend to be the precursor to the

Qur'ānic account at 18:65-82, despite the fact that no witness to the legend exists before

Ibn Shāhīn's version ca. 1000 CE.[589] Other studies have claimed alternatively that the

Jewish legend depends upon Q 18:65-82, substituting the well-known rabbinic figure of

Joshua b. Levi for Moses.[590] This study generally agrees with the latter proposition; i.e.,

that Ibn Shāhīn's narrative appears to have been influenced in places by 18:65-82.

However, this study sees no reason why, if some rabbinic or other text were uncovered

and demonstrated to antedate the Qur'ānic account – suggesting that account as a

potential source for both 18:65-82 and the Ibn Shāhīn text – it could not be the case that

the Ibn Shāhīn narrative, composed in ca. 1000 CE, might still have been influenced by

---

[588] Brinner translation, *Composition Concerning Relief after Adversity*, 13-17.

[589] See A.J. Wensinck, "El-Khiḍr," 902-903, following Julian Obermann, "Two Elijah Stories in Judaeo-Arabic Transmission," 399-400, and "Ein Werk agadisch-islamischen Synkretismus" (*Zeitschrift für Semitistik*, Vol. 5, 1927, 43-68), and Adolph Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrasch*, Vienna, 1873), Vol. 5, 133-35.

[590] Schwarzbaum, "The Jewish and Moslem Versions of Some Theodicy Legends," for reasons of language usage and parallel structure, saw the Jewish legend as dependent upon 18:65-82, and Brannon Wheeler, "The Jewish Origins of Qur'ān 18:65-82?" argued instead that while 18:65-82 was not dependent upon the Jewish legend, the Jewish legend might be dependent upon 18:65-82, not from the Qur'ān directly, but through the medium of Qur'ānic commentaries.

the narrative at 18:65-82, which was by Ibn Shāhīn's time a popular Islamic and Arabic narrative.[591]

<h2 style="text-align:center">Al-Khiḍr in Islamic Tradition</h2>

Al-Khiḍr is primarily known around the world through his identity in the Qur'ānic commentaries and later Islamic literature, including the *hadīth* traditions. His role is drawn both from the Qur'ānic account and from other sources with which he became related, such as the Persian Alexander tale the *Iskandarnāma*. In Muslim cultures around the world, al-Khiḍr is regarded as a popular folk and literary hero, renowned as a figure like Elijah in popular Jewish lore, and revered highly in Sufi and mystical traditions. Al-Khiḍr in Muslim tradition is counted among the other long-living Muslim figures Enoch (cf. Gen 5:24; Enoch is associated with and known as *Idrīs* in Islamic tradition; cf. Q 19:56 and 21:85), Elijah, and Jesus, and is furthermore associated with greenness, fertility, rain, knowledge and wisdom, and immortality (in part, through association with the Alexander tales and the water of life). On account of his immortality, al-Khiḍr is said, like Elijah, to be able to appear anywhere at any time.[592]

In most places throughout the Muslim world, al-Khiḍr is known and revered for the qualities above. Again, in most places throughout the Muslim world, al-Khiḍr is associated with his role and identity in Sufi and mystical traditions. Because of his

---

[591] Compelling narratives and texts often found expression among multiple religious communities in the Near East. See above, n. 126.

[592] See Halman, *Where the Two Seas Meet*, 2. This work focuses on al-Khiḍr in the Sufi traditions and is thus a good source for understanding al-Khiḍr as he developed in later Arabic commentary and literature.

Qur'ānic narrative, al-Khiḍr is known as both deeply wise and an ideal teacher; in Sufi

traditions, these qualities are highlighted, for which al-Khiḍr is considered an exemplar.

Likewise, in the saint/*walī*/*pīr* tradition as it is associated with Sufism, al-Khiḍr is

considered both a "saint" and a prophet, and shrines to Khiḍr abound.

As we saw above, in the late Medieval Islamic (and especially Persian) world, al-

Khiḍr was commonly depicted as a prophet (visage ringed by fire or not depicted);

commonly in his role as associated with the adventures of Alexander the Great[593] (see

Fig. 31) and in making the *ḥajj* annual pilgrimage or praying with Elijah (see Fig. 32).

Since the early modern period and in association with his majority role around the world,

al-Khiḍr is most commonly depicted as a wise, bearded old man; possessing great

knowledge and often on a journey (see Fig. 33). Images of this sort often portray Khiḍr

as riding upon and/or holding a fish, while on or nearby the water of life. This type of

imagery, popular in south Asian contexts, may also be related to depictions of a river god

and Vishnu.[594] In both the medieval and modern iconographical depictions, al-Khiḍr is

often depicted wearing green clothing or robes.

<div align="center">Al-Khiḍr in the Eastern Mediterranean</div>

Around the Mediterranean and in Turkey – especially in the countries of the

Eastern Mediterranean – popular understandings about and depictions of al-Khiḍr differ

from those of south and southeast Asian contexts. In the Eastern Mediterranean, al-Khiḍr

---

[593] See above, n. 137.

[594] Halman, *Where the Two Seas Meet*, 44 n. 59.

is still known as the wise servant from 18:60-82, but also he has long been identified there with both Elijah and with St. George.[595] In order to understand why this has been so, we need to understand al-Khiḍr in the Eastern Mediterranean in the context of regional political and religious history.

Eastern Mediterranean Political and Religious History

Early "Muslim"/Arabian armies spread out of the Arabian Peninsula and defeated the Byzantine armies at the Yarmouk River in 636 CE. Monastic correspondence confirms that early Arabian armies, referred to both in Greek and Syriac writings as "*muhājirūn*," (Syriac, "*Mhaggrayê*")[596] i.e., associated with a/'the' *hijra* ("migration"), took political and military control of Jerusalem in 637 CE, and were in control of Damascus by 640 CE.[597] As these early Arabian armies conquered territories in a gradually expanding pattern, their custom was not to destroy towns (there were, of course, exceptions), but to obtain the acquiescence of local leaders and to construct garrison *misr* towns nearby from which to oversee particular regions.[598]

As we have seen in preceding chapters, the Eastern Mediterranean had long been home to large Christian and Jewish communities. The "violent conquest" and "forced

---

[595] Written records of these correspondences go back to at least the 11th century CE. SOURCES.

[596] Abdul-Massih Saadi, "Nascent Islam in the Seventh Century Syriac Sources," in *The Qur'ān in its Historical Context*, edited by Gabriel Said Reynolds, Routledge Studies in the Qur'ān, vol. 8, Series Editor Andrew Rippin (New York: Routledge, 2008), 217-222.

[597] Donner, *Muḥammad and the Believers*, XX. Referencing correspondence of the Bishop Sophronius of Jerusalem from 638.

[598] Ibid., 136-140.

conversion" models of Arab and Islamic advancement have been shown to be spurious, there being scant written or archaeological evidence to support such claims.[599] Indeed, archaeological and textual evidence demonstrates instead that Christian and Jewish communities in the former-Byzantine areas continued on much as before.[600] Certainly, no Church or Synagogue records suggest that conversion to "Islam" was demanded of Christians or Jews by these armies; *muhājirūn* armies being at that nascent stage associated more greatly with general monotheism and with the scriptures and traditions of Jews and Christians than understanding themselves as possessed of a religious identity distinctly different from that of Christians and Jews to an extent which necessitated those other communities' "conversion."[601]

What our extant evidence suggests is that "most communities [in Syria, Palestine, Iraq, and Egypt] which already consisted of monotheists, were not destroyed or even seriously disrupted but merely underwent a change of masters [and tax collectors]."[602] Indeed, we have early Muslim accounts of prayer taking place in churches, which must therefore have been considered suitable prayer spaces, and records of churches still being built in former Byzantine areas in the century after conquest. "Islam," as a distinct religious tradition, thus emerged gradually in the Eastern Mediterranean (as it did

---

[599] Ref: Bulliet study on conversion, Donner.

[600] Donner, *Muḥammad and the Believers*, 115. Donner furthermore notes that Christian churches were still being built in the century after conquest and that early Muslim records indicate early Muslims worshipped at churches, sometimes in separate sections of the church. *Ibid*.

[601] Saadi, "Nascent Islam in Syriac Sources," 220. See also Donner, *Muḥammad and the Believers*, 114.

[602] Donner, *Muḥammad and the Believers*, 115.

everywhere),[603] and conversions to this new religious orientation from among the

Christian and Jewish populations came slowly, particularly initially.[604]

Popular Associations between al-Khiḍr, St. George, and Elijah

We lack records indicating exactly how popular associations between Muslim al-

Khiḍr and Elijah and St. George in the Eastern Mediterranean took place. This is perhaps

unsurprising, as records for such popular associations rarely exist. When we do begin to

encounter records of people discussing matters such as meeting al-Khiḍr or St. George or

Elijah in a dream and associating the figures together or with a particular common place

of worship, any formalized association between them has already taken place and is

presented by the writer as given.[605]

We might, however, surmise in a general way how such associations could have

taken place. As we have seen above, "Muslim" al-Khiḍr was associated early on in

Arabic textual tradition with the biblical figure of Elijah, a well-known and highly

popular figure throughout the Near East. In the Eastern Mediterranean, Elijah and

George were already related: as we have seen in Chapter Five, both were known as

figures who defended true religion, and known as well for their similar associations with

---

[603] This is Donner's argument in *Muḥammad and the Believers*. Donner and others suggest that an "Islamic" formal orientation and identity did not begin to crystalize until the 790s at the earliest. Most often this religious identity emergence is associated with the building of monumental architectural spaces (like the Dome of the Rock in 792 CE), and the issuance of coin types which can be seen to include indications within them of a separate religious identity emerging.

[604] Bulliet.

[605] Yusif Syria article dreams George Khiḍr. Fieldwork: Druze leader dedicated church to St. George al-Khiḍr.

greenness, fertility, and rain. Given that al-Khiḍr ('the Green [one]') came to be
understood in Islamic tradition as possessed of associations with greenness and fertility,
as well as other traits like those of Elijah, including immortality and the ability to appear
at-will and to help those in need, it is perhaps unsurprising that al-Khiḍr, Elijah, and
George – each with linkages in both scripture/text and with shared popular traits – came
to be associated among communities of Muslims, Christians, and Jews in the Eastern
Mediterranean, as these communities developed and evolved together from the seventh-
eighth century.

Al-Khiḍr as Linking Figure

Indeed, during the first several Islamic centuries, al-Khiḍr functioned as a kind of
transition or mediator figure among the changing communities of the Muslim-Byzantine
political frontier.[606] Ethel Sara Wolper has demonstrated that the very indistinctness of
al-Khiḍr, as well as his clear similarities with popular religious figures, allowed him to
function as a kind of bridge or transition figure for communities particularly in the
Byzantine-Islamic frontier zone. Churches once dedicated to St. George (and other
Christian figures) became associated as well with al-Khiḍr.

Wolper's research focuses primarily on the frontier zones around and within
Anatolia, and this is a particularly interesting area concerning the figures in this study.
Unlike most of the Eastern Mediterranean, a majority of the Anatolian Peninsula
remained under Byzantine political control and largely Christian in religious orientation

---

[606] Ethel Sara Wolper, "Changing Landscapes."

through most of the eleventh century CE. After the Battle of Manzikert in 1071 CE,

Turkish Muslim influence began to grow throughout Anatolia. Naturally, as had been the

case throughout the Christian Mediterranean, any sort of Islamization of Anatolia took

place only slowly, over the course of several centuries, and not without a concomitant

"Byzantinization" of Islam and Turkish society in Anatolia.[607] Describing processes of

conversion and transferal between Muslims and Christians in Anatolia, Vryonis wrote,

> "the best known equation of a Muslim with a Christian saint revolves about the
> figure of Khiḍr… the Turks worshipped St. George in the figure of Khidir Elias,
> and at Elvan Chelebi, east of Chorum, he was associated with St. Theodore. In
> both cases he has been identified with equestrian, military, dragon slayers."[608]

As we saw below in Chapter Five, Ss. George and Theodore both were associated

in the Eastern Mediterranean with the motif of mounted warrior saints who vanquished

dragons. Al-Khiḍr (primarily known, interestingly, in Anatolia as the composite of both

al-Khiḍr and Elijah, named Khiḍr-Ilīyas or Khiḍrilyas or Khizirilyas), who had already

been associated with the dragon-slaying figure of St. George in the Eastern

Mediterranean, naturally continued these associations with St. George in Anatolia.

Unlike al-Khiḍr in most other contexts, around the Mediterranean, and in other

places with large Christian and Muslim populations together, such as in Eastern Europe,

al-Khiḍr's image and identity align with the popular figure of St. George. Accordingly,

---

[607] See Speros Vryonis, Jr., *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the Process of Islamization from the Eleventh through the Fifteenth Century*, Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, UCLA series (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1971) 444.

[608] Ibid., 485.

images of Khiḍr are identical to those of St. George; indeed, George and al-Khiḍr are often understood in fact to be the same figure, or perhaps to refer to different aspects of the same figure (see Fig. 34). Moreover, since at least the time of extant records from the 1200s CE, Elijah-Khiḍr and George-Khiḍr have been understood to be the *same* figure, which has thus linked all three figures together in practice among Muslims, Jews, and Christians in the Eastern Mediterranean.[609] These associations, invaluable witnesses to the history of religious communities in the region, lasted between communities of regional Jews, Christians, and Muslims through the twentieth century CE, and continue today among communities of Christians and Muslims.[610]

Al-Khiḍr Sites in the Eastern Mediterranean

Numerous sites are dedicated to al-Khiḍr throughout the Eastern Mediterranean. Monuments of central importance such as the Dome of the Rock, the Masjid al-Aqsa', and the Damascus Mosque all include smaller structures and/or spaces within them dedicated to al-Khiḍr. In addition to these conspicuous sites, several mosques throughout the region are dedicated to *Sayyidnā al-Khiḍr*, ('*sayyid*' being a Muslim honorific title used for prophets) and profuse smaller shrines are dedicated to *Sayyidnā al-Khiḍr*, as well, primarily in mountain and rural areas.

---

[609] Cite the 1929 book about Palestine; Yusif book on medieval Syria.

[610] Various twentieth-century factors, including the new regional political borders drawn after World War I and the establishment of the state of Israel, have led to the uprooting of traditional long-term Jewish communities in the region and the cessation of religious practices involving communities of Jews, Muslims, and Christians together. On these associations between modern communities of Muslims and Christians, see for instance the name of the current Christian Bishop of the Greek Orthodox Church for the region of Mount Lebanon, Bishop George Khodor (fieldwork story).

Additionally, of course, Christian churches and shrines dedicated to St. George can also be considered shrines to al-Khiḍr among Muslims,[611] especially in smaller regional churches; i.e., this practice is not common in cathedrals dedicated to St. George, for instance. Sometimes, churches or other sites once dedicated to St. George or to Elijah became mosques dedicated to al-Khiḍr.[612] In other instances, a mosque to al-Khiḍr can be built next to a church dedicated to St. George.

Recalling Ottoman partiality for the Christian figure of St. George – a fondness that existed because of the associations throughout the Levant and Anatolia between al-Khiḍr and St. George – one finds today more churches in the Levant dedicated to St. George than to any other figure (save to Mary, which is also due to Muslim and Ottoman fondness for the figure of Mary, who is known in Muslim tradition as *Sittnā Maryam*).[613]

Part Four: Conclusion: al-Khiḍr and the Common Pool

What al-Khiḍr Texts, Images, and Sites Reflect about Islamic Tradition

What we see reflected in the figure of al-Khiḍr depends upon when and where we are looking. When we examine the Qur'ān and the narrative at 18:60-82, we see a religious text situated within the religious communities, political currents, and apocalyptic orientation of the wider late antique world. This text reflects a pious and

---

[611] It should of course be noted that the names 'George' and 'Khiḍr' can be used interchangeably among and between Muslims and Christians, so one is careful not to put too fine a point on name usage between Christian and Muslim communities.

[612] See, for instance, the al-Khiḍr mosque in Beirut, Lebanon. Constructed over and expanding a smaller, domed church or shrine dedicated originally to St. George, the al-Khiḍr mosque was constructed during the nineteenth century.

[613] ARPOA; Sauma, *Sur les Pas des Saints au Liban*, 480. Also ref. in Ch. 1.

monotheistically oriented community. The theological orientation of this monotheism is strongly aligned to the biblical One God, albeit from within an Arabian linguistic orientation (whether this linguistic framework included as well 'Arabian' religious components – whatever those would be – is debatable). This community's understanding of the One God categorically rejected the contemporary Christian Trinitarian conception of God, aligning instead with a solemn and direct vision of undivided monotheism.[614]

Specifically regarding the figure of the Qur'ānic 'servant', we see reflected in him a community engaged in contemporary discussions and debates involving the age-old question of theodicy, as well as the mysterious ways of God's justice. Depicted as unknowable by Moses, even the most advanced of humans in the Qur'ān, the Khiḍr narrative at 18:60-82 imparts the all-knowing, all-powerful nature of God as both unquestionable and absolute, as well as the human necessity for faith and patience in this God.

When we examine the Arabic commentaries and medieval literary tradition, we see reflected in the figure of al-Khiḍr an expanding religious tradition incorporating into the wider Near Eastern world and defining the boundaries and components of Islamic religious identity and practice. When we examine al-Khiḍr images and sites around the world, we see reflected the influence of geography and culture. Al-Khiḍr images and sites among Sufi traditions and especially in south and central Asia reflect an Islamic religious tradition embedded within and responding to an Asian and Indian cultural

---

[614] This vision of monotheism could be characterized as similar to the perspective advocated by biblical figures like Moses and Elijah.

context. Al-Khiḍr images and sites in the Eastern Mediterranean reflect an Islamic religious tradition embedded within and responding to a Christian and Jewish religious and cultural context.

<div align="center">Al-Khiḍr and the Common Pool</div>

Compelling Figures, Narratives, and Motifs from the Common Pool

In the Qur'ānic narrative of 18:60-82, we encounter the genre of wisdom literature, popular throughout the Near Eastern world since the Middle Bronze Age. We see as well the towering biblical figure of Moses, fundamental to the biblical text and likewise that of the Qur'ān, albeit in a different depiction from that of the usual Moses paradigm in the Qur'ān. Among other factors, this distinct presentment of Moses could indicate that the narrative at 18:60-82 was related to a contemporary late antique tale involving Moses rather than it being a narrative unique to the Qur'ān, as it seems unlikely that an original narrative would deviate so markedly from the Qur'ān's own internal prophetic schema. We see as well in the narrative at 18:60-82 the presence of several late antique motifs and narratives, including widespread beliefs about the nature of paradise and the geological structure of the earth, popular tales about the journeys of Alexander, and regional motifs such as the fish and the water or fountain of life.

In the later Islamic figure of al-Khiḍr, developed primarily from the Qur'ānic commentaries and later Arabic literature (based of course upon the Qur'ānic narrative of 18:60-82), we see direct associations with the popular figure of Elijah, and with the motifs of greenness, immortality, and divine knowledge. In later commentaries, we see these motifs as connected as well with the popular figure of Alexander and his journeys.

In the Eastern Mediterranean, where al-Khiḍr became intimately identified with the Christian figure St. George and the Jewish figure of Elijah, we see al-Khiḍr as associated with the iconography and narrative of defeating a dragon, and with the motifs of rain, greenness, and fertility that were so prevalent in the region.

What the Figure of al-Khiḍr Contributes to the Common Pool

Al-Khiḍr became known as a popular folk and literary hero, the Green Prophet and enigmatic teacher who inspired Sufi and mystical traditions. Khiḍr was associated with the fabulous adventures of Alexander and with the water of life, imbuing to him the qualities of immortality and esoteric knowledge. Al-Khiḍr was renowned as a helper to those in need who could travel great distances quickly, much like the marvelous Elijah and the miraculous St. George. And also like Elijah and George, al-Khiḍr became known as a powerful agricultural figure, associated with the vital attributes of greenness, fertility, and crop growth.

<div align="center">Conclusion</div>

Through this analysis of the figure al-Khiḍr, we can begin to see how Elijah, St. George, and al-Khiḍr became related in the Eastern Mediterranean, not only in text, but also in popular religious practice. In the final chapter, we will examine what our historical and textual investigations into the figures of Baal-Hadad, Elijah, St. George, and al-Khiḍr reflect about regional religious history.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS

On Aug. 19, 2015, the Israeli daily newspaper *Haaretz* featured a story about the Cave of Elijah the Prophet located on Mt. Carmel. Ancient inscriptions in the cave, the article warned, are in danger of being destroyed by unwitting modern visitors.[615] Today, the Cave of Elijah the Prophet receives visitors holding bar mitzvahs, as well as visits from local Jews, Muslims, and Druze who wish to pray in the cave of the illustrious Elijah. The cave itself has been extended and built-out from the mountain wall in rectangular brick structures that are covered inside with Jewish religious adornments, and divided in the approximate center to create Orthodox men's and women's sides.

Following appeals from local academics, the Holy Sites Authority has initiated a two-year plan to restore the cave. The use of the cave as a religious site likely dates to the late Bronze-early Iron Age, and inscriptions inside date to the Hellenistic period, revealing an interesting cross-section of history that has been outlined as well throughout this project. Analysis of the cave's inscriptions suggests that "Elijah's" Cave, as it has been known since the Byzantine era and from approximately the 4th-7th centuries CE, functioned before that as a Greek- and Roman-era shrine to the god Zeus on Mt. Carmel.

---

[615] Ran Shapira, "Ancient Inscriptions in Elijah the Prophet's Cave are in Danger," *Haaretz*, Aug. 19, 2015.

Before that, researchers believe that the cave functioned as a shrine to Baal [of] Carmel.[616]

According to analysis of the cave's inscriptions undertaken since 1966 by Asher Ovadiah, there are 180 Greek inscriptions, dating from the fourth century BCE to the third century CE, one Latin inscription, two Arabic inscriptions, and 44 Hebrew inscriptions, with some Hebrew inscriptions dating to the region's Byzantine period, and most of them dating to the 18th and 19th centuries, ostensibly left by Jews living nearby in Acre.

Though written at different times and directed toward different figures (different though related figures, as we have seen), the inscriptions are remarkably similar in nature – dedications to family and friends, pleas for divine healing, and wishes for success in particular endeavors. One Greek inscription was left by a man called Elios, apparently an official living in Acre during the second or first centuries BCE, who wrote, "This place should be favorable to my son Kyrillos, who will not be affected by fever anymore."[617]

As we saw above in Chapter Three, Mt. Carmel, like other prominent high places throughout the Levant, was long associated with the Storm-God Baal-Hadad. The account of Elijah in the Hebrew Bible at 1 Kings 18 set the iconic contest between Elijah, the prophet of Yahweh, and the 450 'prophets of Baal' on Mt. Carmel, making Elijah's spectacular victory there all the more prominent: it took place on Baal's own mountain. Baal worship on the mountain was gradually subsumed during the Hellenistic era by

---

[616] Ibid. See also Chapter Three, Elijah, pp. 52-56. Regional titles for Baal refer to the god Baal-Hadad.

[617] Ibid.

worship of Zeus (Heliopolitanus), a Greek god who, in the Levant, as we have seen

above, was intimately related to the god Baal-Hadad in the region. One wall of the Cave

of Elijah bears the carving of a man – covered today by the picture of a rabbi – which

researchers think may have been related to Zeus, or perhaps to Baal, as Ovadiah

contends. Additionally, the foot of a third-century CE statue dedicated to Zeus

Heliopolitanus was found nearby in 1952 at the Carmelite monastery dedicated to

Elijah,[618] offering further evidence of the site as associated during the Greek and Roman

eras with the god Zeus.

Beginning in the fifth century CE, as Christian and Jewish communities in the

Eastern Mediterranean began to surpass the populations of regional Hellenized pagan

communities, Christian and Jewish visitors to the cave transformed it into a site dedicated

to Elijah. Among local Jewish communities of the Mt. Carmel/Acre region, of course,

the cave site may have been associated with Elijah from as early as the middle of the first

millennium, BCE, but the earliest extant inscriptions inside the cave from Jewish visitors

date to the 4th-6th centuries CE. One carving in the northeast corner of the cave displays

an equilateral Christian cross inscribed by a circle, and another displays two seven-

stemmed menorahs; all three carvings date from the Byzantine period. From that time

on, the site has been associated with Elijah rather than with Zeus or Baal, as legend

surrounding the cave suggests that this is the cave where Elijah stayed the night before

---

[618] See above, Chapter Three, pp. 54-46; see also M. Avi-Yonah, "Mount Carmel and the God of Baalbek."

his legendary battle. Successive regional communities of Muslims and Druze likewise came over the following centuries to visit and experience Elijah's cave.

Nearby, in the West Bank village of Arṭās in the region of Bethlehem, local communities of Palestinian Christians and Muslims gather annually in April for an agricultural 'lettuce' festival. At the gathering, the Muslim and Christian children of the community stage an re-enactment of the 'dragon' terrorizing local villagers (this dragon destroys their homes and pushes the villagers off their land); the dragon is ultimately vanquished in combat by the valiant 'St. George-al-Khiḍr', who restores people to their homes and land, and who is praised as well for his powers involving rain and crop growth. The reenactment thus interweaves modern themes of displacement and occupation reflective of twentieth-century political history with long-term regional narratives involving the legendary defeat of a dragon and with the ability to control rain and make crops flourish, all of which have long been associated with this native hero, who is for the community at one and the same time both St. George and al-Khiḍr.[619]

On April 23 and May 6, the dates of the St. George festivals in the Western and Eastern churches, respectively, communities of Christians and Muslims of every sect gather to celebrate and pay respect to the universally beloved figure St. George-al-Khiḍr. These celebrations take place all around the Eastern Mediterranean, from sites in Turkey,

---

[619] For a video of this reenactment, see the YouTube link at http://www.leicester-holyland.org.uk/George_Children_art.htm. See the narrative from the 3:50 minute-mark for references to St. George-al-Khiḍr's associations with rain and crop growth and his ability to cause the thunder by galloping across the sky. Note that this video was produced at least in part for ecumenical purposes in association with an organization in the UK.

to villages along the Nile Delta in Egypt,[620] to mountain villages scattered throughout Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Israel, and around Jordan. These celebrations are especially highlighted in sites such as at the St. George church in al-Khodr village in Bethlehem, where St. George's mother was said to have been born.[621] That is likewise the case at the St. George church in Lod, Israel (a town previously known as Lydda, and before that as Diospolis), where St. George's relics are said to reside, and which, as we saw in Chapter Five, has been a shrine to St. George since at least the sixth century CE.

These examples of modern festivals and veneration practices involving the figures of Elijah, St. George, and al-Khiḍr in the Eastern Mediterranean return our discussion to the phenomenon that originally inspired this study. In the introductory chapter, we suggested that the manner in which these figures traditionally had been studied – i.e., from a 'World Religions' perspective in which each figure is studied as a product of their particular religious traditions – is inadequate as a methodology in that it can be tautological and anachronistic, in that it effectively presumes religious traditions ever exist in a vacuum, independent of outside influences, and in that it fails to account for an understanding of the associations between these figures in regional popular practice.

Instead, we proposed to investigate each of the figures (including Baal-Hadad, earlier suggested in scholarship to be the ultimate 'source' of the figures Elijah, St.

---

[620] See Helen Gibson, "St. George the Ubiquitous" (*Aramco World*, vol. 22, no. 6, 1971: 4-7) for reference to the Egyptian village of Mit Damsis. Note that these practices are not limited to the Delta region, but take place throughout Egypt and the wider Levant.

[621] For a video featuring Christian and Muslim interaction around the figure of St. George-al-Khiḍr (not in a holiday setting), see the video entitled "St. George's Church," by Journeyman Pictures (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BwVo910B3bk)

George, and al-Khiḍr) from the perspective of Geography of Religion theory, which suggests that religions and by extension their texts and textual personae are always a product of both the time and the place in which they originate or are manifested. In this model, texts and religious traditions do not exist in a vacuum, but naturally are influenced by contemporary religious, political, and geographical forces. In so doing, we suggested that such an historical methodology might also shed light on regional religious history.

Accordingly, we followed a methodology throughout this project of geographically contextualizing and historically analyzing each of these figures, by examining evidence of contemporary religious, political, and geographical forces in their texts, in order to locate each of the figures in the context out of which their texts originated. In this concluding chapter, we will examine what this methodology has revealed about the figures, and about their respective religious traditions, as these factors come to comprise religious history in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The Legacy of Geography

An understanding of regional geography is essential for a proper understanding not only of these figures, but of motifs that remain relevant and compelling in Levantine culture from the Copper Age to the present time. Three main features in particular continually combine to affect geography in the Eastern Mediterranean: first, geological structures, such as mountains, which, among other things, affect the courses of rivers, and the region's bedrock of limestone, which affects the quality of regional soils as well as topography; second, the composition of regional water resources – in particular, the acute

363

reliance upon rainfall for water; and third, the climatological weather patterns of the Mediterranean Sea region, which govern seasonal wind flows and precipitation patterns.

In general, as we saw in Chapter Two, the Eastern Mediterranean is arid, with rainfall totals decreasing from north to south and west to east with drought being a regular climatological condition. Despite that, much of the Levant falls within the 400 mm (12 inches) isohyet, and most of the region generally receives therefore sufficient annual rainfall to enable the cultivation of rain-fed agriculture. Moreover, because of the location of the Levant as the western arc of the 'Fertile Crescent' in which regional agricultural practices were spread, agriculture has long been practiced in the Eastern Mediterranean, as well. Indeed, the region primarily can be characterized by an agricultural economic base *through the mid-twentieth century CE*. Thus, when we study the Levant, we are confronted with an agriculturally oriented location that is simultaneously arid, and in which water from rainfall has always constituted the main source of water for crop growth and for the success or failure of its human populations.

Accordingly, our study of the figures Baal-Hadad, Elijah, St. George, and al-Khiḍr reveals the considerable and long-term influence of geography upon regional human religious orientation. The Syro-Canaanite deity Baal-Hadad was a Storm-god, whose very name meant 'lord of the storm', characterized by regional geographical and climatological patterns that included thunder and rain in the winter, Baal's disappearance in the summer, and his cyclical return in the fall. Baal-Hadad, as the dispenser of rain and the purveyor of agricultural bounty, was the dominant religious entity in the region from at least the Middle Bronze Age. As the manifestation of regional weather patterns,

364

Baal-Hadad was understood as a powerful but capricious deity who thundered across the sky and showered beneficence – or cruelty – upon his human subjects, but who, properly supplicated, also might be called upon to help those in need. Baal remained dominant in regional culture through to the start of the Common Era, although his cult gradually began to be subsumed/supplanted by Zeus (and then Jupiter), who represented similar climatological characteristics, from the 4th century BCE.

Elijah, the righteous prophet of Yahweh, whose very name means 'my god is YHWH', bore the message that Yahweh – not Baal – was the true lord in the region. Despite evidence throughout the text of the Hebrew Bible which indicates that Baal-Hadad had indeed remained the god of choice among most people in the region, Elijah's prophetic mission was to promote the message that it was *Yahweh* who controlled everything, including the rain, and not the 'false' god Baal. In service of Elijah's mission on behalf of Yahweh, Elijah performed several memorable miracles, including stopping and starting the rain (and thus initiating an oppressive three-year drought), calling 'fire' (i.e., lightning) from the sky, extending a widow's oil and flour supplies (thus demonstrating Yahweh's control over food supply in a manner similar to that of the god Baal), and disappearing miraculously in divine a chariot flown into the sky. All of Elijah's abilities in these matters ultimately were made possible only through the power of Yahweh, as the text makes clear; nevertheless, Elijah became associated afterward in culture with several of the motifs of Baal which were important in regional culture: associations with rain, storms, lightning, thunder (via celestial chariot), crop growth, disappearance and return, and the ability to help those in need.

St. George, 'γεοργός' the 'farmer' saint, was associated as well with several of these essential regional motifs, such as associations with rain, storms, fertility, crop growth, disappearance and return, and the ability to help those in need. Through pointed narratival associations in the *Acts of St. George* with the regionally popular account of Elijah from the Hebrew Bible, who had defended the 'true' god Yahweh in the face of the 'false' god Baal, George likewise came to be known as a righteous defender of 'true' faith. Although it is impossible now to determine, it seems that the cult of St. George developed an early agricultural basis that was independent of any agricultural qualities associated with Elijah (although, those agricultural qualities in St. George were perhaps confirmed among his cult through narratival associations with Elijah). Whatever the origin of the agricultural qualities of St. George as articulated through his cult, St. George became associated regionally with the motifs of greenness, fertility, rain, storms, crop growth, and with an agricultural festival date of April 23 – a date which also was associated with Zeus-Baal – from at least the sixth century CE. Like his fellow warrior saints Theodore and Demetrius, George became associated as well in at least the sixth-eighth century with the pictorial motif of vanquishing a dragon or serpent, which also may have invited conceptual associations with the agricultural qualities of a Storm-god.

Al-Khiḍr, 'the Green [One]', through his name, through his associations in text with the regionally popular and agriculturally oriented figure of Elijah, and, following the seventh-eighth century, through his popular associations among Christian communities with St. George (also a revered figure with known agricultural associations), al-Khiḍr was associated as well in the Eastern Mediterranean with the compelling regional motifs

of rain, storms, greenness, fertility, crop growth, disappearance and return, and being a helper to those in need who was able to travel great distances and to appear at any time. Likewise, Khiḍr's associations in the Eastern Mediterranean with St. George and the pictorial motif of vanquishing a dragon may have reinforced and/or confirmed cultural agricultural qualities.

Sites in this study were likewise influenced by regional geography. As moisture-laden winds move up the coastal mountains of the Levant, they condense and precipitate before crossing the mountains, effectively creating a verdant area to the west and the center of the coastal mountain ranges, and a rain shadow to the east and south. Additionally, the higher the altitude of a given mountain along the coast, the greater its attraction of both cloud formations and precipitation. To peoples in the ancient Levant, this geographical and climatological situation indicated that a Storm-God was linked with high mountain spaces. Indeed, as we saw in Chapter Three above, Mt. Sapan (/Kasios/Cassius/Jebel aqraʿ), the highest mountain along the Levantine coast, was believed to be the home of the Storm-God Baal-Hadad, and Mt. Carmel, to the south – likewise a high mountain along the southern coast of the Levant – was also associated with shrines to Baal. The Hebrew Bible is replete with damning references to those who venerated the "high places," as this was a common religious practice among many mountains and high places in the Levant, but despite that, even exclusivist biblical figures such as Elijah eventually became associated with high places and mountains, as were shrines to St. George and to al-Khiḍr as well.

367

These associations with greenness, rain, fertility, storms, high places, and the abilities to disappear and return, and to help those in need do not indicate that Elijah, George, and Khiḍr are "continuations" of the Storm-God Baal-Hadad, as was earlier postulated by Hassan S. Ḥaddad.[622] Rather, these associations indicate instead the continuing indispensability of these agricultural *motifs* in a geographical region that has long been dominated by agricultural activity while being simultaneously dependent upon water from rainfall, characterized by aridity, and regularly blighted by drought. Geographical considerations have driven these motifs, not the figure of the Storm-God. Identifying regional geography as the propelling influence behind these agricultural motifs, rather than attributing these shared motifs to genealogical or inherited associations between figures, is a key contribution of this study.

Overview

It is challenging (and problematic) to write about the figures in this study in the aggregate. That is because these figures exist only to the extent to which they have been constructed by their texts and images, and to the extent to which those texts and images are utilized by the communities who venerate the figures, all of which are comprised of innumerably nuanced factors. To characterize in writing any of these 'figures' in the aggregate, or the 'relationships' between them is to characterize abstractions, which is nearly impossible to do in an unerring manner. Accordingly, we attempt here merely a

---

[622] While it seems from this study that Ḥaddad may not have accurately characterized the influences shared between these figures, he should be credited for having been the first to highlight the associations between and among Elijah, St. George, al-Khiḍr, and the Storm-God Baal-Hadad in the Levant.

brief overview sketch of what our more detailed study of texts, images, and sites has suggested in individual chapters above about the historical relationships between these figures and their communities, in order to impart an historical impression of this phenomenon in the Eastern Mediterranean over time.

Baal-Hadad, long known through narratives such as those recorded in the Baal Cycle, dominated the religious orientation of the Levant since at least the middle Bronze Age (1800-1600 BCE). Elijah, a prophet of the competing god Yahweh, appeared in the Hebrew Bible in opposition to Baal worship. In opposing Baal, Deuteronomistic authors imbued Elijah with qualities similar to those of Baal, although they specified that such abilities were only made possible through the power of Yahweh, who was the *true* God. Specific theological distinctions in Elijah's role as described in the Hebrew Bible seem to have been blurred among later regional communities, among whom Elijah gradually came to embody many of the agricultural and meteorological motifs which were important within regional culture, and which also had been associated with Baal-Hadad.

One of the more interesting facets of this study is that it highlights the legacy of the popular figure of Elijah in the Levant and within the wider Near East. An enormously popular biblical figure throughout the latter half of the first millennium BCE, Elijah in rabbinic tradition assumed an even greater cultural role well into the first and second millennia CE. As we have seen, several elements of Elijah's Hebrew Bible narrative influenced the depiction of St. George in the *Acts of St. George*, and the Qur'ānic figure of the 'servant' may have been related as well to late antique tales involving Elijah. Regardless, the 'servant', named 'al-Khiḍr' in the earliest Arabic

exegetical tradition, became associated soon afterward in Arabic literature with the highly

popular figure of Elijah. While one may not think so today, given the state of this

phenomenon in the Levant and the preponderance of veneration for St. George and al-

Khiḍr (which for political and historical reasons has been largely dispossessed of the

Jewish figure of Elijah – if not of the Christian saint Elias, as we will see below), without

a thorough understanding of the key figure of Elijah, this phenomenon would make little

historical sense.

Iconographical associations between these figures also reflect interesting

continuities and interconnections. The composition of the Baal Stele, patterned on long-

enduring Egyptian motifs of power and smiting, likely depicted the narrative of Baal's

dominance over the sea *yamm*, which in text was represented by the serpent *ltn*.

Surviving imagery of Elijah from the first few centuries of the Common Era indicates

that he was depicted at that time in association with his narrative from the Hebrew Bible

– a tradition which continued in Christian iconographical practices involving 'saint'

Elias. St. George was earliest represented as a youthful standing warrior saint or martyr,

and extant evidence indicates that sometime between the 6th-8th centuries CE he was

associated as well with the pictorial motif of a holy rider who vanquished a human or

dragon foe (a battle motif which, among other potential meanings, likely echoed the

regional narrative of a legendary defeat of a sea serpent or dragon). Al-Khiḍr in the

Eastern Mediterranean, already associated in text with the figure of Elijah (who was,

from a contemporary cultural perspective, 'similar' in many ways to the figure of St.

George), became iconographically associated at some point after the eighth century CE in

the Levant with the pictorial motif of St. George as a dragon-slayer, and with the associated meanings and implications of that motif, as well.

Again, given the myriad nuanced factors that combine to 'create' these figures, as well as the enormous span of time between the periods of these figures' emergences, evolutions, and current manifestations today, it is challenging to write about them in the aggregate and from an overview perspective. Still, it remains important to juxtapose past and present, not to argue for simplistic correspondences, but in order to help explain why these present practices persist despite political and societal conditions that differ so greatly from the periods of the figures' emergences. As these figures became embedded in the culture of the Eastern Mediterranean, they have endured because of their geographical relevance, their religious significances, and because of the power of cultural persistence. Cultural persistence perseveres as a force because of cultural applicability, which is driven by the combined dynamic factors of geographical relevance and religious significances, and because of the self-reinforcing legacy of its own congruity over time.

What these Figures' Texts Reveal about their Respective Religious Traditions and about Near Eastern Monotheism

Our geographical contextualization of each of the figures in this study has served to demonstrate the uniqueness and specificity of each of the figures at the temporal moment in which they are presented in text. As we saw in Chapter Three, our textual analysis of the Baal Cycle demonstrated that the figure of Baal-Hadad, rather than functioning as an original "source" for the other figures in our study, was, 'himself', influenced by contemporary religious, political, and geographical forces. The Baal Cycle

narratives were influenced by contemporary religious narratives, such as the

Mesopotamian myths of Marduk and Tiamaat, and other cosmogonic stories involving

the narrative of a Storm-god overcoming a sea monster and defeating the forces of chaos.

What the Baal Cycle and the figure of Baal-Hadad therein reflected about contemporary

Western Semitic Canaanite religion was a religious environment in which water from

rainfall was essential to both agricultural and human life, where gods and goddesses ruled

the natural environment and helped to explain its phenomena, and where the events of

human life and political power were intertwined with the favor or disfavor of the Storm-

god, who was unmistakably the most powerful deity in the region.

Chapter Four demonstrated that the narrative of Elijah in the Hebrew Bible

reflected a religious environment that was dominated by multiple gods and goddesses,

mostly Canaanite; Baal-Hadad the most prominent among them. Baal's dominance

among the Canaanites and among the Israelites and Judahites as described in the Hebrew

Bible was due to his preeminence over religious life in which water from rainfall

remained essential to human agricultural life.

Elijah, a prophet of Yahweh, exemplified a main theme prevalent throughout the

Hebrew Bible: Yahweh is the supreme God (not Baal), and before whom there are no

other gods. Therefore, worship of gods other than Yahweh led to destruction. Because

Yahweh was the supreme god, Yahweh also did not act like other gods; he was jealous

and required that his followers must worship him exclusively and do so by behaving in

specific ways in specific places. Zealous dedication to Yahweh, as conveyed in the text,

led to Yahweh's favor. Human worshippers of Yahweh, as portrayed by the narrative of

Elijah in the text, should in fact behave like Elijah: single-minded and uncompromising in dedication to Yahweh.

The religious tradition of the Hebrew Bible revealed by the figure therein of Elijah was a tradition that was thus markedly exclusivist about its desire to distinguish itself from among other groups. This reflects, among other things, the perspective of a small kingdom(s) and minority religious tradition attempting to exist and to thrive among the larger and more powerful contemporary political powers in the region. The religious tradition revealed by the narrative of the prophet Elijah in the Hebrew Bible reflects a determined desire to differentiate from other groups – groups which were destined to be destroyed. The Hebrew Bible narratives are unique because they evince the desire to distinguish followers of Yahweh from followers of all other gods in an environment of mixture and of heterogeneous peoples.

The *Acts of St. George* reflected in the figure of St. George a mixed religious environment that was mainly competitive, as we saw in Chapter Five. The text reflected a contemporary environment of Jews, Christians, pagans, Jewish-Christians, and various categorizations between these. The religious environment of the first several centuries (and probably longer) of the Common Era in the Levant was dominated by general belief in demons, saints, magic, and icons, alongside growing corps of "orthodoxies" in religious organization, all of which we saw reflected in St. George texts and iconography.

St. George, a figure of multiple influences, reflected about early Christianity a religious movement identified with biblical tradition and simultaneously differentiating from Jewish identity and practices. Moreover, early Christianity as reflected in the text

373

was a religious tradition that, like that of Judaism and by virtue of its association with the monotheistic biblical tradition and Hebrew Scriptures, was differentiated as well from the pagan polytheistic traditions of the Hellenized world. The *Acts* also reveals an emerging Christian conception of God as the same as the biblical God, but with an expanded or clarified description: Trinitarian in nature, and according with a contemporary imperial Christian position regarding Jesus following the Council of Nicaea: incorporating Jesus as the second person of the Trinity, who was considered at once human and divine, in separate measure.

In Chapter Six, we saw that the narrative in the Qur'ān identified with the figure of al-Khiḍr reflects a religious text situated within the religious communities, political currents, and apocalyptic religious orientation of the wider late antique world. These religious communities were most prominently Melkite, Jacobite, and Nestorian Christians, rabbinic Jews, and pagan Arab polytheists of the sixth and seventh centuries. The Khiḍr narrative in the Qur'ān reflected a pious religious community which was strictly monotheistic in its theological orientation (if not yet, perhaps, 'Muslim'). This theological perception of God strongly aligned to the biblical One God, rejecting contemporary Christian Trinitarian conceptions of God and aligned directly with a unitary notion of monotheism.

This synopsis of our geographical contextualization of each of the figures in this study serves to demonstrate the uniqueness and specificity of each of the figures at the temporal moment in which they emerged in text. It also helps us broadly to understand the ways in which the figures of Baal-Hadad, Elijah, St. George, and al-Khiḍr both drew

from and contributed to a common pool of compelling Near Eastern figures, narratives, and motifs.

<div align="center">Contradistinction in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam</div>

In addition to the influence of geography upon Eastern Mediterranean religious thought as demonstrated in this study, and in addition to distinctive features of these figures' respective religious traditions as reflected in their texts, this study also illuminates an interesting perspective on monotheism within these traditions. Specifically, it suggests monotheism as a specific strand of religious thought that contradistinctively characterizes Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in the Near East.

As we saw in Chapter Three, the Storm-God Baal-Hadad, as the manifestation of meteorological phenomena and the source therefore of human survival or destruction, was the preeminent deity in the Levant since at least the middle Bronze Age. A primary theological argument of the Hebrew Bible concerned the contention that it was Yahweh/YHWH who was the true God, and no other gods besides. The developing religious tradition reflected in the Hebrew Bible can be characterized by a determined effort to differentiate from other groups of heterogeneous peoples and multiple gods; Baal-Hadad most prominent among them. The religious tradition of the Hebrew Bible and thus of later Judaism was developed in intentional contradistinction to contemporary peoples, differentiating exclusivist followers of Yahweh from the followers of all other gods, and the Hebrew Bible can in part be understood therefore as a heresiological text, in that it elucidated categories of 'true' and 'false' gods.

By first century of the Common Era, YHWH had become among communities of Jews synonymous simply with 'God' (the only). As early Christian communities differentiated from contemporary Jewish communities, a 'Christian' theological conception of God began to emerge, as we have seen above in Chapter Five, one which was aligned with a notion of the God of the Bible but which was also expanded to elucidate God as Trinitarian in nature. The second 'person' of the Godhead gradually came to be understood as Jesus the 'son' of God, consubstantial with God the 'father'. Notions of rulership and being a 'son' of God were common in the first century CE, and this concept apparently resonated as well among contemporary Christian communities.[623] In the *Acts*, 'true' and 'false' gods also were delimited, indicating the heresiological nature of this text regarding a developing notion of Christian identity, as well as the development of a Christian conception of God that was formulated in contradistinction to multiple contemporary religious communities.

Notions of exactly how the human and divine natures of Jesus were conjoined motivated deep divisions among early Christian communities. These divided communities of Christians and their labyrinthine theological conceptions of God were unequivocally rejected in the Qur'ānic conception of God, which aligned instead with a vision of undivided monotheism akin to that reflected in the Hebrew Bible. Because the Qur'ān created standards for 'true' and 'false' worship, it too could be characterized as a heresiological text.

---

[623] See Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee*.

This brief overview of monotheism here as reflected in these figures' texts (outlined in more detail in each of the chapters above) is highlighted in the aggregate in order to indicate an interesting implication about monotheism as reflected in this study of the figures' texts: monotheism, as a specific strand of religious thought, in part and in different ways distinguished communities of Jews, Christians, and Muslims in contradistinction both to one another and in contradistinction to the largely pagan traditions which long characterized the religious orientation of the Near East.

Furthermore, recalling the apparently Sinaitic/northern Arabian origins of the Israelite god Yahweh[624] enables one to examine the development of monotheism in its wider Near Eastern context (i.e., not exclusively Levantine). While it is not at all the claim of this project that YHWH was a monotheistic god in 'essence', this study suggests that we might broaden our analysis of monotheism into the wider Near East, beyond the traditional setting of Levantine biblical history, in order to account for the influences upon YHWH of a Sinaitic and northern Arabian cultural context. Eventually combined with other regional gods, such as the Canaanite El, and perceived in a monotheistic manner as reflected in the Hebrew Bible, the Sinaitic and Arabian origins of YHWH invite a wider cultural setting for the development of monotheism.

---

[624] Ref. al-Azmeh, Mark S. Smith, other study.

Baal-Hadad, Elijah, St. George and al-Khiḍr as a Case Study

for Eastern Mediterranean Religious History

Linkages and similarities between these figures have long been identified by the communities who venerate them. Similarities between the figures have largely revolved around shared regional motifs, such as greenness, fertility, rain, storms, disappearance and return, the ability to appear at-will, and to help those in need. These motifs, as we saw above, are in the main related to regional geographical needs and considerations.

Linkages between these figures in text and image likewise have associated them. Elijah and St. George are known and beloved in the Eastern Mediterranean for the trait of being defenders of true religion over and against false gods. Al-Khiḍr and Elijah are associated especially in Islamic religious texts, and al-Khiḍr and St. George share iconographical representation in the Levant. These similarities and linkages have joined al-Khiḍr, Elijah, and St. George in popular practice among local communities of Jews, Christians, and Muslims for at least the past 800 years in the Levant.[625]

These figures have been joined in popular practice among communities of Jews, Christians and Muslims in the Eastern Mediterranean because these communities – and their respective religious traditions and figures – evolved there together. As we saw at the outset of this study, the characteristics shared by Elijah, St. George, and al-Khiḍr in the Eastern Mediterranean long have been considered 'peculiar' when these figures are studied solely as products of their respective religious traditions. When we study Elijah, St. George, and al-Khiḍr as *regional* religious figures, however, and study their texts in

---

[625] Yusif reference Syria (intro p. 4).

the context of contemporary religious, political, and geographical influences, their

linkages and associations in text, image, and popular practice become clearer, and their

shared agricultural motifs do not appear at all peculiar.

This common geographical and cultural environment explains as well why the

figures are not shared in the same way outside of the Levant. Shorn of long-term

associations in community practice and in iconography, Elijah, St. George, and al-Khiḍr

are known among their respective religious communities around the world mainly

through their canonical texts. These texts usually are interpreted in tradition-specific

ways which reinforce internal theological principals and religious identities, leaving no

'natural' reason on the basis of these texts to understand Elijah, St. George, and al-Khiḍr

as anything other than discrete figures of their respective religious communities.

Furthermore, these religious communities spread around the world are usually

less joined than are religious communities in the Eastern Mediterranean. As the historical

locus of these religious communities as they developed, indigenous communities of Jews,

Christians, and Muslims in the Levant evolved together and accustomed members of

these communities to one another's figures and practices.

<div align="center">Shared Religious Practices</div>

As an effect of this regional history and the mix therein of habituated (and

textually related) religious communities, shared or mixed sanctuaries developed and

became a normalized feature of Levantine religious life.[626] Individuals in the Eastern

---

[626] See the excellent anthologies of Margaret Cormack, ed., *Muslims and Others in Sacred Space* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013) and Dionigi Albera and Maria Couroucli, eds., *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean: Christians, Muslims, and Jews at Shrines and Sanctuaries*, New Anthropologies of

Mediterranean thus commonly understood (and understand) themselves as members of one particular religious community, but seldom as inhabiting only one social group.[627] Most manage multiple affiliations, one of the more prominent among those multiple affiliations being a sense of shared regional identities.[628]

Most often in the Eastern Mediterranean, Muslims visit Christian and Jewish shrines, rather than Christians or Jews visiting Muslim shrines. Likewise, it has been rare for Jews and Christians to visit one another's shrines.[629] This pattern reflects the religious historical pattern we have seen outlined in this project: communities of Jews and Christians in the region came to identify themselves in part in contradistinction to one another and to subsequent religious communities, and early 'Muslim'/*mu'minūn* communities in the Eastern Mediterranean were tied more strongly to biblical textual traditions than they were to an understanding of themselves as possessed of a religious orientation exceedingly different from that of biblical communities of Christians and Jews.

As an 'Islamic' religious orientation and identity began to emerge and become distinguishable in the seventh-eighth centuries, communities of Christians and Jews were

---

Europe series, edited by Matti Bunzl and Michael Herzfeld (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012).

[627] See Peter Gottschalk, "Introduction," in *Muslims and Others in Sacred Space*, 12.

[628] Such characterization is echoed by Gottschalk, *ibid*, and echoes as well the author's own research experience in the Eastern Mediterranean. See also references to this phenomenon referenced in the article by Rami G. Khouri, "Why Aren't Arab States More like Individuals?" in *The Daily Star Lebanon*, Sept. 10, 2014.

[629] See Maria Couroucli, "Sharing Sacred Places – A Mediterranean Tradition," in *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean: Christians, Muslims, and Jews at Shrines and Sanctuaries*, 4 and 8.

likewise viewed as members of a related and wider Muslim religious tradition. Thus, Muslim practices of visiting Christian and Jewish shrines, and of associating with Christian and Jewish figures, such as in the examples of St. George-al-Khiḍr and Elijah-Khiḍr (or Khiḍr-Elijah, in the case of Anatolia), were not unusual, nor did they remain so. Accordingly, this study suggests that Islam and Muslims in the Eastern Mediterranean cannot be understood in isolation of their Eastern Mediterranean cultural context.

Finally, this study has demonstrated both "high" or "official" textual linkages between these figures, in addition to the kind of "low" or popular religious linkages often associated with rural shrines and shared religious practices in the Eastern Mediterranean.[630] Usage herein of the terms 'high' and 'low' does not imply their acceptance on the part of the present writer; rather, these examples are employed merely to demonstrate that the textual linkages and popular associations between Elijah, St. George, and al-Khiḍr exist on multiple levels (both at the level of textual traditions and at the level of regional popular interaction), and thus indicate perhaps a greater regional importance for these associations than is usually the case among more limited and localized rural practices.[631]

---

[630] Couroucli, "Sharing Sacred Spaces," 6, who notes that "locality and marginality are two common characteristics of mixed religious practices."

[631] It should be noted of course that clergy and clerical members of these religious traditions most often do not encourage mixed practices.

What this Study Omits and Suggestions for Further Research

As noted above, the figures in this study exist only to the extent to which they have been constructed by their texts and images, and to the extent to which those texts and images are utilized by the communities who venerate them. This study has addressed only the former. Future studies, therefore, could fruitfully focus on the ways in which these figures are manifested among and between their respective religious communities, and several worthwhile modern studies have already been undertaken on this topic in both a modern setting (twentieth century and later)[632] and in historical settings.[633] As suggestions for further research, we offer here some preliminary thoughts on the influence of specific political forces which have affected the construal of these figures' relationships between regional religious communities.

From some point after the seventh-eighth centuries CE, linkages between all three of these figures among regional Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities had become normalized and authentic, as these figures were understood by their communities to be *regional* figures, shared by all inhabitants.[634] Mixed religious practices of course cannot be characterized by an unchanging model: "they are symbolically and practically complex activities, and their variations can be traced to political, demographic, and social

---

[632] See in particular Lance D. Laird, "Boundaries and Baraka: Christians, Muslims, and a Palestinian Saint," in *Muslims and Others in Sacred Space*, 40-73, and Glenn Bowman, "Identification and Identity Formations around Shared Shrines in West Bank Palestine an Western Macedonia," in *Sharing Sacred Spaces*, 10-28.

[633] See Ethel Sara Wolper, "Khiḍr and the Politics of Place: Creating Landscapes of Continuity," *in Muslims and Others in Sacred Space*, 147-163. This study mainly concerns Ottoman-era associations.

[634] Ref. Yousif study.

conditions prevailing at the time of observation."[635] Moreover, although people can have

multiple social affiliations,

> "particular circumstances prompt particular identities to become more prominent
> at particular times. Hence, shared processions and festivals in the eleventh-
> century Mediterranean might blur religious boundaries during times of health
> crisis yet sharpen in times of political upheaval."[636]

Accordingly, this study likewise suggests that regional religious practices

involving Elijah, St. George, and al-Khiḍr as among Jewish, Christian, and Muslim

communities were normalized under most political conditions, but unsettled during times

of upheaval, and primarily as upheaval was generated by outsiders. Potential areas for

interesting research lie in an examination of the period of the 11th-12th-century CE

Crusades, during which time Frankish Crusaders appropriated as their own the warlike

and popular figure of St. George they encountered in the Levant. Oblivious to the

importance of St. George among multiple local religious communities, Levantine

Muslims became targets of outsider Crusaders and "their" favored saint.[637]

Another interesting area for research could involve the categorization and

separation of local religious communities in the Eastern Mediterranean by European

---

[635] Couroucli, "Sharing Sacred Spaces," 5.

[636] Gottschalk, "Introduction," 13.

[637] See the Chronicle of the First Crusade *History of Antioch*, which recounts the apparition of warrior
saints George, Theodore, and Demetrius (George is in the account the most beloved of them) to Crusaders
at the sieges of Antioch and of Jerusalem. These saints' appearances apparently motivated the Crusaders to
victory. See also Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, 2 vols., William
Granger Ryan, transl. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), which recounts the legend that
once the Crusaders had laid siege to Jerusalem, "they did not dare mount the scaling ladders in the face of
the Saracens' resistance; but Saint George appeared to them wearing white armor marked with the red
cross, and made them understand that they could follow him up the walls in safety and the city would be
theirs. Thus reassured, the army took the city and slaughtered the Saracens," *ibid.*, 242.

Colonial administrators during the 19th and 20th centuries, which created legalistic communal boundaries and divisions where previously they had not been present in the same manner.[638] An additional area for potential research could involve a number of events during the turbulent 20th century, during which time new political borders were drawn, nation-states with specific religious populations were established (and in many cases, transplanted), and the political state of modern Israel was founded, largely uprooting and displacing traditional Jewish communities and their shared religious practices from locations around the Eastern Mediterranean.[639]

Continuity and Gradualism

In addition to considerations of the influence of geography upon regional religious thought, and of the distinctions in respective religious traditions reflected by these figures, this study of the ways in which these figures have been constructed in texts and images argues above all for an understanding of continuity and gradualism in the formation of these religious traditions, over and against traditionalist portrayals of sudden and dramatic change.[640]

Founding-origins perspectives of these religious communities claim uniqueness, distinctiveness, and 'completeness' of their respective religious traditions, and often

---

[638] Footnote about the Ottoman millet system, which distinguished between indigenous religious communities in a manner different from that of colonial administrators.

[639] This served also to displace and disrupt as well traditional Christian and Muslim communities and their shared practices within the Israeli state. See Glenn Bowman's work on Khiḍr-St. George in the Occupied Territories.

[640] I am indebted for this language to Paul R. Powers, "Review of Muḥammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam" (*History of Religions*, Vol. 52, no. 3, 2013: 306-308).

present these religious traditions in such a manner as to suggest that they were "born nearly fully formed."[641]

In contrast, however, this study has demonstrated the marked indistinctiveness and gradual historical formations of each of these religious traditions. Moreover, through the study of Baal in the Baal Cycle, Elijah in the Hebrew Bible, St. George in the *Acts of St. George*, and al-Khiḍr in the Qur'ān, this study has shown that each of these traditions emerged only gradually from its contemporary religious environment, and largely in continuity with contemporary prevailing religious notions.

This suggests two prominent observations. First, we in religious studies would seem to misunderstand or mischaracterize religious traditions when we consider them as 'beginning' with founding figures and early texts. In reality, it took centuries and usually some form of political control to create the orthodox(ies) by which these traditions are later characterized. Moreover, the founding figures and early texts of a tradition are in actuality a product more of their contemporary religious contexts than they are of the religious tradition that develops after them. In that way, we might consider the texts in this study as sources of information as much about the figures themselves as they are texts in evidence of previous religious traditions.[642]

Therefore, the Baal Cycle might be considered a document in evidence of the religious context of late Bronze Age Syria-Palestine as much as it is a document in

---

[641] *Ibid.*, 306.

[642] I am indebted to Sidney H. Griffith for this language, which I have adapted. See *The Bible in Arabic*, 55.

evidence of Baalic history; the Hebrew Bible might be considered a document in evidence of the religious environment of Iron-Age Canaan as much as it is a document in evidence of Israelite or Jewish history; the *Acts of St. George* might be considered as a document in evidence of the mixed pagan-Christian-Jewish regional religious environment of the 4th-6th centuries as much as it is a document in evidence of Georgic history; and the Qur'ān might be considered as a document in evidence of contemporary Arabian pagan, Jewish, and Christian communities as much it is a document in evidence of Muslim history.[643]

A second observation enabled by the evidence of continuity and gradualism in the formation of these traditions as reflected in the figures' texts would suggest that members of modern 'fundamentalist' religious orientations (fundamentalist in the sense of attempting to recreate communities which 'go back' to a religious orientation reflected in founding figures and early texts), among communities of Jews and Christians, or members of 'salafist', religious traditions, in the case of modern Sunni Muslims, anachronistically mischaracterize their early religious traditions as more distinctive than the historical record bears. Indeed, were members of these types of religious orientations able to 'go back' to their traditions' earliest periods, they would likely find a religious environment very different from what they imagined.

---

[643] Ibid. Griffith argues "In other words, the chapter approaches the Qur'ān as a document in evidence of the history of Jews and Christians in Arabia, along with their scriptures and traditions, rather than as a document in Islamic history," 55.

What this Study Suggests About How to Understand Religion

in the Eastern Mediterranean

Past studies of these figures, as we have seen, have not properly understood these figures or their relationships because they have been undertaken from a World Religions perspective, in which religious traditions are treated as discrete units of study. Indeed, an image generated by this traditional epistemological approach might suggest that each of the religious traditions in the Eastern Mediterranean – Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Druze most prominent among them from a modern demographical perspective – could be understood as individual containers of data which can be searched independently for information before (and if) moving to other individualized containers of data. Indeed, repeatedly this study has critiqued the limits of temporal, political, religious, topographical, and linguistic distinctions which characterize traditional academic and epistemological approaches to study in the Eastern Mediterranean.

On the contrary, as this study has demonstrated, these religious traditions have never existed in a vacuum but rather have always existed in relationship with contemporary forces of religious, political, and geographical influence. Texts, images and sites function as artifacts which reveal a great deal about the societies in which they were produced. Accordingly, this study suggests that texts, communities, and figures from these traditions in the Eastern Mediterranean cannot be taken at face-value (i.e., as theologically articulated through their respective religious communities), and must be situated within the world in which they unfolded in order properly to be understood. Along that line of inquiry, this study highlights the importance of Geography of Religions

theoretical frameworks for examining religious traditions in general, and in particular in the Eastern Mediterranean, where religious traditions are embedded within temporal strata which reflect rich and multifaceted religious, political, and geographical influences.

Finally, this study underscores the importance of cultural context in religious studies. Indeed, the phenomenon of local communities of Jews, Christians and Muslims venerating Elijah, St. George, and al-Khiḍr in the Eastern Mediterranean for at least the past 800 years is inextricable from the cultural context of the Eastern Mediterranean. Accordingly, analyses of the figures and their relationships are unworkable absent an understanding of this phenomenon as situated within the context of Eastern Mediterranean culture and religious history.

It is important here to reiterate that this study has juxtaposed past and present not in order to claim overly simplified congruities, but in order to help explain why these present practices persist despite political and societal conditions that differ so greatly from the periods of the figures' emergences. As figures that are deeply seated in the culture of the Eastern Mediterranean, they have endured because of the geographical relevance of their shared motifs, because of their religious significances between and among their respective religious communities, and because of the self-reinforcing legacy of successful cultural persistence.

Modern Implications

At the outset of this study, we suggested that the phenomenon of communities of Jews, Christians, and Muslims venerating common figures was paradoxical and noteworthy, given that 'common wisdom', and even epistemological notions

388

promulgated within the academic study of religion suggest that Jews and Christians and Muslims inhabit distinct and separate religious categories, and especially so in the contentious Eastern Mediterranean.

Characterizing the Eastern Mediterranean as 'contentious' reflects turbulent 19th and 20th century political history in the region, which has been marked by colonialist interventions, by the establishment of nation-state borders where previously none had existed, by a legacy of authoritarian rulers, and by a reordering of traditional society and communities following World War I, which served in part to disrupt traditional religious practices involving communities of Muslims, Christians, and Jews. It should be borne in mind, however, that the considerable political changes of the twentieth century have overlaid a regional culture which has long reflected a shared and stable religious history among communities of Jews, Christians, and Muslims in the Levant.

Tensions between modern political considerations and long-term cultural influences lie at the heart of many internal conflicts throughout the contemporary Eastern Mediterranean.[644] As the exigencies of 20th- and 21st-century political history in the region unfold, the Eastern Mediterranean is often characterized by divisions and distinctions between its "discrete" religious communities, which is both accurate and misleading. It should not be forgotten that despite these tensions, significant areas cultural overlap and commonality remain.

---

[644] See the conundrums outlined by Rami G. Khouri, "Why Aren't Arab States More like Individuals?" in *The Daily Star Lebanon*, Sept. 10, 2014.

Furthermore, while one may rightly look to the Eastern Mediterranean today and identify distinct religious communities – comprised mainly of Muslims, Christians, and Jews – as we have seen in this project, the religious traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are not, textually or historically speaking, separate. Thus, this study argues for an understanding of Jews, Christians, and Muslims in the Eastern Mediterranean as distinct but not separate in their local context.

Although an historical record of distinct-but-not-separate religious traditions in the Eastern Mediterranean is echoed in regional cultural traditions, members of religious communities today can be affected as well by unsettled political conditions and buffeted by the austerity of essentialist political and religious movements which emphasize distinction and divergence.[645] None of these religious communities, however, is benefited by an incomplete or partial understanding of their shared regional histories.

This study demonstrates the enduring legacy of geography among peoples living in the region, and suggests that humans living in the Eastern Mediterranean have been connected by more – and for longer – on the basis of their shared geography than they have been separated by religious boundaries or changing political powers. Above all, however, this study contends that the phenomenon of al-Khiḍr, St. George, and Elijah belongs to the historical heritage of Eastern Mediterranean. Moreover, this phenomenon

---

[645] See Sami Zubaida, *Islam, the People and the State: Political ideas and Movements in the Middle East* (New York: I.B. Taurus, 2009). See in particular chapter five, "Components of Popular Culture in the Middle East," 99-120.

reveals a great deal about the social and symbolic organization of traditional religious communities in the region.

     Religious practices involving the figures of al-Khiḍr, St. George, and Elijah are an important part of common cultural heritage.[646] Today, for various political reasons, these practices are usually participated in by communities of Christians and Muslims, and concern mainly the figures of St. George and al-Khiḍr, and sometimes St. Elias.[647] As a salient part of cultural heritage, it is important to remember that individuals who engage in shared practices around these figures are not engaging in practices which are in any way aberrant or abnormal, as these kinds of shared religious practices recently have been characterized.[648] On the contrary, exclusivist religious practices promoted by members of modern essentialist religious orientations could be considered historically aberrant. Instead, shared practices involving the figures of St. George, al-Khiḍr, and Elijah – widely believed to be "everyone's inheritance"[649] as indeed these regional figures are – are authentic both to the history of these religious traditions, and to regional historical religious practice, as well.

---

[646] See similar practices as outlined by Couroucli, *Sharing Sacred Spaces*, 5.

[647] For practices involving local communities of Christians and Muslims around the figure of St. Elias, see Bowman, "Identification and Identity Formations around Shared Shrines in West Bank Palestine and Western Macedonia," in *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean*, 10-28.

[648] See Zubaida, *Islam, the People and the State*, 117-118.

[649] This was a phrase I often heard repeated by members of various religious communities during fieldwork in the Eastern Mediterranean.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Albera, Dionigi and Maria Couroucli, eds. *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean: Christians, Muslims, and Jews at Shrines and Sanctuaries*. New Anthropologies of Europe, edited by Matti Bunzl and Michael Herzfeld. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012.

Alexander, Paul J. *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*. Edited and with an Introduction by Dorothy deF. Abrahamse. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985.

Alouf, Michel M. *Baalbek*. 19th ed., 8th English ed. Beirut, Lebanon: American Press, 1949.

Amiran, D.H.K. "Land Use in Israel," in *Land Use in Semi-Arid Mediterranean Climates*. UNESCO International Geographic Union. Paris, 1964.

Attwater, Donald. *The Christian Churches of the East, vol. 1: Churches in Communion with Rome.* Religion and Culture Series, edited by Joseph Husslein. Milwaukee, WI: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1946.

——— . *The Christian Churches of the East, vol. 2: Churches Not in Communion with Rome.* Religion and Culture Series, edited by Joseph Husslein. Milwaukee, WI: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1947.

'Awadi, al- Mahmoud. *Kitāb al-ziyārāt bi-dimashq*. Edited by Salāh al-din al-Manjad. Damascus, 1956.

Ando, Clifford, Ed. *Roman Religion*. Edinburgh: University Press, 2003.

Antoniadou, Sophia and Pace, Anthony, eds. *Mediterranean Crossroads*. Athens: Pierides Foundation, 2007.

Augustinovič, A. *'El-Khadr' and the Prophet Elijah*. Translated by Eugene Hoade. Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1972.

Avi-Yonah, M. "Mount Carmel and the God of Baalbek." *Israel Exploration Journal* 2, no. 2 (1952): 118-124.

——— . "Historical Outline: History and Description of Antiquities and Historical Sites." In *Steimatzky's Guides: Syria and the Lebanon.* Jerusalem and Beirut: Steimatzky's Publishing Co., 1942.

al-Azmeh, Aziz. *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity: Allāh and His People*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

El-Badawi, Emran Iqbal. *The Qur'ān and the Aramaic Gospel Traditions*. Routledge Studies in the Qur'ān 13. New York: Routledge, 2013.

Badr, Habib, Suad Slim and Joseph Abou Nohra, eds. *Christianity: A History in the Middle East*. Beirut, Lebanon: Middle East Council of Churches, 2005.

Bannister, Andrew G. *An Oral-Formulaic Study of the Qur'an*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014.

Bauer, Walter. *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, second German Edition, with added appendices by Georg Stucker. Translated by a team from the Philadelphia Seminar on Christian Origins, edited by Robert A. Kraft and Gerhard Krodel. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1971.

Bernstein, Marc S. *Stories of Joseph: Narrative Migrations between Judaism and Islam*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2006.

Bladel, Kevin van. "The Alexander Legend in the Qur'ān 18:83-102." In *The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context*, edited by Gabriel Said Reynolds, Routledge Studies in the Qur'ān 8, series editor Andrew Rippin, 175-203. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Blömer, Michael, Achim Lichtenberger, and Rubina Raja. *Religious Identities in the Levant from Alexander to Muhammed: Continuity and Change*. Contextualizing the Sacred 4, Elizabeth Frood and Rubina Raja, editors. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2015.

Braudel, Fernand. *The Mediterranean: And the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*. 2 vols. Translated by Siân Reynolds. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

Brock, Sebastian. *The Bible in the Syriac Tradition*, 2nd revised edition. Gorgias Handbooks 7. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006.

Bronner, Leah. *The Stories of Elijah and Elisha: As Polemics Against Baal Worship*. Pretoria Oriental Series 6, edited by A. Van Selms. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968.

Brooks, E.W. *The Acts of Saint George*. Analecta Georgiana 8. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006 [orig. ed. Published in Le Muséon, 1925, vol. 38].

Bowerstock, G. W., Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar, eds. *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999.

Bowman, Glenn. "Processus Identitaires Autour de Quelques Sanctuaires Partagés en Palestine et en Macédoine" in *Religions Traversées; Lieux Saints Partagés Entre Chrétiens, Musulmans et Juifs en Mediterranée*. Etudes Méditerranéennes, edited by Dionigi Albera & Maria Couroucli. Arles: Actes Sud, 2009.

––– . "Nationalising and Denationalising the Sacred: Shrines and Shifting Identities in the Israeli-Occupied Territories (in Arabic)." *Chronos: Revue d'Histoire de l'Université de Balamand* 16 (2007): 151-210.

Boyarin, Daniel. *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.

Brotton, Jerry. "St. George Between East and West," in *Re-orienting the Renaissance: Cultural Exchanges with the East*. Edited by Gerald MacLean. New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2005.

Brown, Peter. *The Cult of the Saints*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.

––– . "Holy Man." In *The Cambridge Ancient History, vol. XIV Late Antiquity: Empire and Successors A.D. 425-600*, edited by Averil Cameron, Bryan Ward-Perkins and Michael Whitby, 781-810. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Brubaker, Leslie, and John Haldon. *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era (ca. 680-850): The Sources*. Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs 7, edited by Anthony Bryer and John Haldon. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2001.

Budge, E. A. Wallis. *George of Lydda, the patron saint of England; a study of the Cultus of St. George in Ethiopia*. London, Luzac & Co., 1930.

––– . *The History of Alexander the Great: Being the Syriac Version of the Pseudo Callisthenes, Edited from Five Manuscripts, with an English Translation and Notes*. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2003 [original edition published by Cambridge University Press, 1889].

Burckhardt, John Lewis. *Travels in Syria and the Holy Land*. Charleston, SC: BiblioBazaar, 2008.

Canaan, Taufik. *Mohammadan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine*. London: Luzac & Co., 1927.

Canivet, Pierre. "Christianity in the 1st Century: In the Context of Mediterranean Civilizations: Judaic, Greek, Roman and Asian." In *Christianity: A History in the Middle East*, edited by Habib Badr, Suad Slim and Joseph Abou Nohra, 47-66. Beirut, Lebanon: Middle East Council of Churches, 2005.

Caquot, André and Sznycer, Maurice. *Ugaritic Religion*. Iconography of Religions, Section XV: Mesopotamia and the Near East, Fascicle Eight. Edited by Th. P. van Baaren, L. P. van den Bosch, L. Leertouwer, F. Leemhuis, and H. Buning. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980.

C. De Moor, Johannes *An Anthology of Religious Texts from Ugarit*. Religious Texts in Translation Series NISABA 16. Edited by M. S. H. G. Heerma Van Voss, J. Knappert, R. P. Kramers, B. A. Van Proosdij, J. D. H. Waardenburg, R. A. M. Van Zantwijk. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987.

Chaillot, Christine. *Rôle des Images et Vénération des Icônes dans Les Églises Orthodoxes Orientales*. Genève: Dialogue Entre Orthodoxes, 1993.

——— . *The Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch and All the East: A Brief Introduction to its Life and Spirituality*. Geneva: Inter-Orthodox Dialogue, 1998.

Cheyette, Frederic. "The Mediterranean Climate." In *A Companion to Mediterranean History*. Edited by Peregrine Horden and Sharon Kinoshita. Wiley Blackwell Companions to World History 2, 11-25. Sussex, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2014.

Chuvin, Pierre. *A Chronicle of the Last Pagans*. Revealing Antiquity Series, edited by G.W. Bowerstock. Translated by B.A. Archer. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990.

Cleave, Richard. *The Holy Land Satellite Atlas: Student Map Manual Illustrated Supplement Volume 1*. Bangkok, Thailand: Rohr Productions, Ltd., 1994.

Cline, Eric. *1177 B.C.: The Year Civilization Collapsed*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014.

Cogan, Mordechai. *1 Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. The Anchor Bible, vol. 10. New York: Doubleday, 2000.

Cogan, Mordechai and Tadmor, Hayim. *II Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 11. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1988.

Cohen, Howard A. and Plaut, Steven. "Quenching the Levant's Thirst." *The Middle East Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (1995): 37-44.

Cohen, Shaye J. D. *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 2nd ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2006.

Coogan, Michael D., ed. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, New Revised Standard Version*, 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Coogan, Michael David, ed. and trans. *Stories from Ancient Canaan*. Louisville, KY: The Westminster Press, 1978.

Conrad, Lawrence I. "The Arabs." In *The Cambridge Ancient History, vol. XIV Late Antiquity: Empire and Successors A.D. 425-600*, edited by Averil Cameron, Bryan Ward-Perkins and Michael Whitby, 678-700. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Cook, Arthur Bernard. *Zeus: A Study in Ancient Religion, Volume I: Zeus God of the Bright Sky*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914.

Corbon, Jean. "The Churches of the Middle East: Their Origins and Identity, from their Roots in the Past to their Openness to the Present." In *Christian Communities in the Arab Middle East*, edited by Andrea Pacini, 92-110. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Cormack, Margaret, ed. *Muslims and Others in Sacred Space*. AAR Religion, Culture, and History 16, edited by Jacob N. Kinnard. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Cowan, J.M. *Arabic-English Dictionary: The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*. 4th ed. Ithaca, NY: Spoken Language Services, Inc., 1994.

Cragg, Kenneth. *The Arab Christian: A History in the Middle East*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991.

Cross, Frank Moore. *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997.

Dalrypmle, Willliam. *From the Holy Mountain: A Journey Among the Christians of the Middle East*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997.

Dar, Shimon. *Rural Settlements on Mount Carmel in Antiquity*. Oxford: Archaeopress Archaeology, 2014.

Day, John. *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series, vol. 265. Edited by David J. A. Clines and Philip R. Davies. Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000.

De Gaury, Lieut.-Colonel Gerald, M.C. "St. George of England and the Middle East." *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society* 32 (1945).

Delehaye, Hippolyte. *The Legends of the Saints*. London: G. Chapman, 1962.

Doniger, Wendy. *The Implied Spider: Politics and Theology in Myth*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.

Donner, Fred M. *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010.

––– . "The Background to Islam." In *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, edited by Michael Maas, 510-534. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Droge, A. J. *The Qur'ān: A New Annotated Translation*. Comparative Islamic Studies, edited by Brannon Wheeler. Sheffield, UK: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2013.

Ducellier, Alain. "Autocracy and Religion in Byzantium, in the 4t and 5th Centuries." In *Christianity: A History in the Middle East*, edited by Habib Badr, Suad Slim and Joseph Abou Nohra, 93-120. Beirut, Lebanon: Middle East Council of Churches, 2005.

Eberhard, Otto. "El-Chadr = der Heilige Elias = Ritter St. George. Ein Schulbeispiel palastinensischer Religionsmenagerei." *Das Altertum* 2 (1956): 82-89.

Ehrman, Bart D. *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee*. New York: HarperOne, 2014.

––– . *After the New Testament: A Reader in Early Christianity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Eisenberg, Ronald L. *Essential Figures in the Talmud*. Plymouth, UK: Jason Aronson, 2013.

Engels, David, and Peter van Nuffelen. *Religion and Competition in Antiquity*. Brussels: Latomus, 2014.

Ernst, Carl W. *How to Read the Qur'ān: A New Guide, with Select Translations*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011.

Ess, Margarete van. *Heliopolis Baalbek: 1898-1998 Rediscovering the Ruins*. 2nd ed. Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, 2001.

Finkelstein, Israel. *The Forgotten Kingdom: The Archaeology and History of Northern Israel*. Society of Biblical Literature Ancient Near East Monographs, vol. 5, edited by Ehud Ben Zvi and Roxana Flammini. Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013.

Finkelstein, Israel and Silberman, Neil Asher. *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts*. New York: Touchstone, 2002.

Firestone, Reuven. *Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1990.

Fox, Robin Lane. *Traveling Heroes: In the Epic Age of Homer*. New York: Vintage Books, 2008.

––– . *Pagans and Christians*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1986.

Franke, Patrick. *Begegnung mit Khiḍr : Quellenstudien zum Imaginären im Traditionellen Islam*. Beirut: In Kommission bei Franz Steiner Verlag Stuttgart, 2000.

Frick, Frank S. "Palestine, Climate of" in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* vol. 5. New York: Doubleday, 1992, 126.

Ghanamī, al-Sayyid Salāmah. *Sayyidunā al-Khiḍr*. Cairo: Dār al-Aḥmadī, 2000.

Gibson, John C.L. *Canaanite Myths and Legends*. New York: T&T Clark Ltd, 2004.

Gilliot, Claude. "Mujāhid's Exegesis: Origins, Paths of Transmission and Development of a Meccan Exegetical Tradition in its Human, Spiritual and Theological Environment." In *Tafsīr and Islamic Intellectual History: Exploring the Bounds of a Genre*. Edited by Andreas Görke and Johanna Pink. The Institute of Ismaili Studies Qur'anic Studies Series 12, edited by Omar Alí-de-Unzaga, 63-112. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Ginzberg, Louis. *The Legends of the Jews*, vol. 4 Bible Times and Characters from Joshua to Esther. Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1968.

Glassner, Jean-Jacques. *The Invention of Cuneiform: Writing in Sumer*. Translated by Zainab Bahrani and Marc Van de Mieroop. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.

Görke, Andreas, and Johanna Pink, eds. *Tafsīr and Islamic Intellectual History: Exploring the Bounds of a Genre*. The Institute of Ismaili Studies Qur'anic Studies Series 12, edited by Omar Alí-de-Unzaga. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Goldziher, Ignaz, "On the Veneration of the Dead in Paganism and Islam." In *Muslim Studies* (Muhammedanische Studien). Vol. I. Translated by C.R. Barber and S.M. Stern. New Brunswick, NJ: Aldine Transaction, 2006.

——— . "Veneration of Saints in Islam." In *Muslim Studies* (Muhammedanische Studien). Vol II. Translated by C.R. Barber and S.M. Stern. London: Allan & Unwin, 1971.

Goode, Jonathan. *The Cult of St. George in Medieval England*. Suffolk, UK: The Boydell Press, 2009.

Gottschalk, Peter. *Beyond Hindu and Muslim: Multiple Identity in Narratives from a Village in India*. Oxford: University Press, 2000.

Grant, Robert M. *Gods and the One God*. Library of Early Christianity, edited by Wayne T. Meeks. Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1986.

Gray, Patrick T.R. "The Legacy of Chalcedon." In *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, edited by Michael Maas, 215-283. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Greatrex, Geoffrey. "Byzantium and the East in the Sixth Century." In *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, edited by Michael Maas, 477-509. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Greene, Alberto R.W. *The Storm-God in the Ancient Near East*. Biblical and Judaic Studies from the University of California, San Diego 8. Edited by William Henry Propp. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003.

Grehan, James. *Twilight of the Saints: Everyday Religion in Ottoman Syria and Palestine*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Griffith, Sydney H. "al-Nasārā in the Qur'ān: a Hermeneutical Reflection." In *New Perspectives on the Qur'ān: The Qur'ān in its Historical Context 2*, edited by Gabriel Said Reynolds. Routledge Studies in the Qur'ān 12, edited by Andrew Rippin, 301-322. New York, Routledge: 2011.

––– . "Christian Lore and the Arabic Qur'ān: The 'Companions of the Cave' in *Sūrat al-Kahf* and in Syriac Christian Tradition." In *The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context*, edited by Gabriel Said Reynolds. Routledge Studies in the Qur'ān 8, edited by Andrew Rippin, 109-138. New York: Routledge, 2008.

––– . *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the "People of the Book" in the Language of Islam*. Jews, Christians, and Muslims from the Ancient to the Modern World 20, edited by Michael Cook, William Chester Jordan, and Peter Schäfer. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013.

Habel, Norman C. *Yahweh Versus Baal: A Conflict of Religious Cultures*. New York: Bookman Associates, 1964.

Ḥaddad, Hassan S. "Baal-Hadad: A Study of the Syrian Storm-God." PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1960.

––– . "'Georgic' Cults and Saints of the Levant." *Numen* 16, no. 1 (1969): 21-39.

Halman, Hugh Talat. *Where the Two Seas Meet: The Qur'ānic Story of al-Khiḍr and Moses in Sufi Commentaries as a Model of Spiritual Guidance*. Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2013.

Haneef, Suzanne. *A History of the Prophets of Islam: Derived from the Quran, Ahadīth and Commentaries*, vol. 2. Chicago, IL: Library of Islam, 2002.

Harris, William. *The Levant: A Fractured Mosaic*. Princeton Series on the Middle East, edited by Bernard Lewis and András Hámori. Princeton, NJ: Markus Weiner Publishers, 2003.

Harris, W.V., ed. *Rethinking the Mediterranean*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Harvey, Susan Ashbrook. "To Whom Did Jacob Preach?" In *Jacob of Sarugh and His Times: Studies in Sixth-Century Syriac Christianity*. Edited by George Anton Kiraz, 115-. Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies 8. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010.

Hasluck, F.W. *Christianity and Islam Under the Sultans* 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929.

Hawting, G. R. *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: From Polemic to History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Hinnels, John. Introduction to the *Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2010.

Horden, Peregrine, and Nicholas Purcell. *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, Ltd., 2000.

Horden, Peregrine, and Sharon Kinoshita, eds. *A Companion to Mediterranean History*. Wiley Blackwell Companions to World History 20. Sussex, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2014.

Hoyland, Robert G. *Arabia and the Arabs: From the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam*. New York: Routledge, 2001.

——— . *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam*. Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam 13. Princeton, NJ: The Darwin Press, Inc., 1997.

——— . "Jews of the Hijaz in the Qur'ān." *In New Perspectives on the Qur'ān: The Qur'ān in its Historical Context 2*. Routledge Studies in the Qur'ān 12, edited by Andrew Rippin. New York, Routledge: 2011.

Hunt, Joel H. *A Primer on Ugaritic: Language, Culture, and Literature*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Hughes, Donald J. *The Mediterranean: An Environmental History*. Nature and Human Societies Series, edited by Mark R. Stoll. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2005.

Huntington, Samuel P. "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993): 22-49.

Ibn al-Qalansi. *The Damascus Chronicle of the Crusades: Extracted and Translated from the Chronicle of Ibn al-Qalansi* Edited and translated by H.A.R. Gibb. London: Luzac & Co., 1932.

Ibn Kathir, Isma'il bin 'Umar. *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiā': laqad kana fi qiṣaṣihim iIbrah li-uli al-albab*. Abu al-Khayr, 'Ali 'And al-Hamid, Ed. Beirut: Dar al-Khayr, 1997.

Idinopulos, Thomas A., and Wilson, Brian C., and Hanges, James C., eds. *Comparing Religions: Possibilities and Perils?* Boston: Brill, 2006.

Jabr, al-Imām Mujāhīd ibn. *Tafsīr al-Imām Mujāhīd ibn Jabr: al-mutawaffá sanat 102 H*. Muhammad abd al-Salām Abu al-Nīl. Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-Islāmī al-Ḥadīthah, 1989.

Jacobus, de Voragine. *The Golden Legend* 2 vols. Translated by William Granger Ryan. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.

Juynboll, G.H.A. *Encyclopedia of Canonical Ḥadīth*. Leiden: Brill, 2007.

Kapelrud, Arvid S. *Baal in the Ras Shamra Texts*. Copenhagen, Denmark: G. E. C. Gad, 1952.

Kennedy, Hugh. "Syria, Palestine and Mesopotamia." In *The Cambridge Ancient History, vol. XIV Late Antiquity: Empire and Successors A.D. 425-600*, edited by Averil Cameron, Bryan Ward-Perkins and Michael Whitby, 588-637. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Kiltz, David. "The Relationship between Arabic *Allāh* and Syriac *Allāhā*." *Der Islam* 88 (2012): 33-50.

Kiraz, George Anton. *The Acts of Saint George and the Story of His Father*. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2009.

—— , ed. *Jacob of Sarugh and His Times: Studies in Sixth-Century Syriac Christianity*. Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies 8. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010.

Kitzinger, Ernst. *Byzantine Art in the Making: Main Lines of Stylistic Development in Mediterranean Art 3rd – 7th Century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977.

Korpel, Marjo C.A., and Johannes C. de Moor. *Adam, Eve, and the Devil: A New Beginning*. Hebrew Bible Monographs 65, edited by David J.A. Clines, and J. Cheryl Exum. Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014.

Laird, Lance D. "Martyrs, Heroes and Saints: Shared Symbols of Muslims and Christians in Contemporary Palestinian Society." PhD diss., Harvard Divinity School, 1998. In ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, http://proquest.umi.com (accessed June 2, 2011).

⸺ . "Boundaries and *Baraka*: Christians, Muslims, and a Palestinian Saint." In *Muslims and Others in Sacred Space*. Edited by Margaret Cormack. American Academy of Religion Religion, Culture, and History Series 16, edited by Jacob N. Kinnard, 40-73. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Lange, Nicholas de. "Jews in the Age of Justinian." In *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, edited by Michael Maas, 401-426. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Lemaire, André, and Halpern, Baruch, eds. *The Books of Kings: Sources, Composition, Historiography and Reception*. Supplements to Vestus Testamentum, vol. 129, edited by Craig A. Evans and Peter W. Flint. Leiden: Brill, 2010.

Le Strange, Guy. *Palestine Under the Moslems: A Description of Syria and the Holy Land from A.D. 650 to 1500*. Beirut: Khayats, 1965.

Lee, A. D. *Pagans and Christians in Late Antiquity: A Sourcebook*. New York: Routledge, 2000.

Levine, Amy-Jill. *Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi*. New York: HarperOne, 2014.

Lieu, Judith, John North and Tessa Rajak, eds. *The Jews Among Pagans and Christian in the Roman Empire*. London: Routledge, 1992.

Lindbeck, Kristen. *Elijah and the Rabbis: Story and Theology*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.

Lindsay, James E. *Daily Life in the Medieval Islamic World*. Greenwood Press 'Daily Life Through History' Series. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2005.

Loosely, Emma. "Peter, Paul, and James of Jerusalem: The Doctrinal and Political Evolution of the Eastern and Oriental Churches." In *Eastern Christianity in the Modern Middle East*, edited by Anthony O'Mahoney and Emma Loosely, 1-12. Culture and Civilization in the Middle East 20, edited by Ian Richard Netton. New York: Routledge, 2010.

Maas, Michael, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

MacMullen, Ramsay. *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997.

⸺ . *Paganism in the Roman Empire*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981.

MacMullen, Ramsay, and Eugene N. Lane, eds. *Paganism and Christianity 100-425 C.E.: A Sourcebook*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992.

Maraval, Pierre. "Christianity in the Middle East, in the 2nd and 3rd Centuries." In *Christianity: A History in the Middle East*, edited by Habib Badr, Suad Slim and Joseph Abou Nohra, 73-92. Beirut, Lebanon: Middle East Council of Churches, 2005.

Matar, Nabil, ed. and trans. *In the Lands of the Christians: Arabic Travel Writing in the Seventeenth Century*. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Mathews, Thomas F. *Byzantium: From Antiquity to the Renaissance*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1998.

McAuliffe, Jane Dammen. *Qurʾānic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

McCullough, Stewart W. *A Short History of Syriac Christianity to the Rise of Islam*. Scholars Press General Series 4. Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982.

McDonald, Lee M. *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon*, Revised and Expanded Edition. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995.

McDonald, Lee Martin and James A. Sanders, eds. *The Canon Debate*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002.

McKenzie, Judith S. *The Nabataean Temple at Khirbet et-Tannur, Jordan: Volume 1 – Architecture and Religion Final Report on Nelson Glueck's 1937 Excavation*. Boston, MA: American Schools of Oriental Research in collaboration with Manar al-Athar, University of Oxford, 2013.

McNeill, J.R. *The Mountains of the Mediterranean World: An Environmental History*. Studies in Environment and History, edited by Donald Worster and Alfred W. Crosby. Cambridge: University Press, 1992.

Melchert, Christopher. "Ibn Mujāhid and the Establishment of Seven Qurʾānic Readings." *Studia Islamica* 91 (2000): 5-22.

Metzger, Bruce M. and Coogan, Michael D., eds. *The Oxford Guide to People & Places of the Bible*. Oxford: University Press, 2001.

Meredith, Anthony. *The Cappadocians*. Cresswood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995.

Meri, Josef W. *The Cult of Saints Among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria*. Oxford Oriental Monographs. Oxford: University Press, 2002.

⸻ , trans. A Lonely Wayfarer's Guide to Pilgrimage: 'Alī ibn Bakr al-Harawī's Kitāb al-ishārāt ilā maʿrifat al-ziyārāt. Princeton, NJ: The Darwin Press, Inc., 2004.

⸻ , "Re-Appropriating Sacred Space: Medieval Jews and Muslims Seeking Elijah and al-Khaḍir." *Medieval Encounters* 5, no. 3 (1999): 237-264.

Mieroop, Marc van de. *A History of the Ancient Near East, ca. 3000-323 BC*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004.

⸻ . *Cuneiform Texts and the Writing of History*. Approaching the Ancient World, edited by Richard Stoneman. London and New York: Routledge, 1999.

Millar, Fergus. *The Roman Near East 31 BC – AD 337*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Montgomery, David R. *Dirt: The Erosion of Civilizations*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007.

Moss, Christopher and Katherine Kiefer, eds. *Byzantine East, Latin West: Art-Historical Studies in Honor of Kurt Weitzmann*. Princeton, NJ: Department of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University, 1995.

Mulroy, Kevin, Editor-in-Chief. *National Geographic Atlas of the Middle East*. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2003.

Nehme, Lina Murr. *Phoenician Baalbek: Visiting the Temples of Roman Epoch*, 2nd English Edition. Translated by Alfred Murr. Beirut, Lebanon: Beirut, Aleph et Taw, 2011.

Newby, Gordon Darnell. *A History of the Jews of Arabia: From Ancient Times to Their Eclipse Under Islam*. Studies in Comparative Religion 8, edited by Frederick M. Denny. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1988.

Nicholson, Helen J. *Chronicle of the Third Crusade: A Translation of the Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001.

Nissim ben Jacob Ibn Shāhīn. *An Elegant Composition concerning Relief after Adversity*. Translated and with Introduction and notes by William M. Brinner. Yale Judaica Series 20, edited by Leon Nemoy. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977.

Noegel, Scott B., and Brannon M. Wheeler. *Historical Dictionary of Prophets in Islam and Judaism*. Historical Dictionaries of Religions, Philosophies, and Movements 43, edited by Jon Woronoff. Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2002.

Noegel, Scott, Joel Walker, and Brannon Wheeler, eds. *Prayer, Magic, and the Stars in the Ancient and Late Antique World*. Magic in History Series 8. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003.

Obermann, Julian. "Two Elijah Stories in Judeo-Arabic Transmission." In *Hebrew Union College Annual Volume XXIII Part I*, 387-404. Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College, 1950.

Obermann, Julian. *Ugaritic Mythology: A Study of its Leading Motifs*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1948.

Ocak, Ahmet Yaşar. *İslâm-türk inançlarında hızır yahut hızır-ilyas kültü*. Ankara: Türk Kültürünü Araştırma Enstitüsü, 1985.

Omar, Irfan. "Khiḍr in the Islamic Tradition." *The Muslim World* 73, no. 3-4 (1993).

Onasch, Konrad, and Annemarie Schnieper. *Icons: The Fascination and the Reality*. Translated by Daniel G. Conklin. New York: Riverside Book Company, Inc., 1997.

Ortlund, Eric Nels. *Theophany and Chaoskampf: The Interpretation of Theophanic Imagery in the Baal Epic, Isaiah, and the Twelve*. Gorgias Ugaritic Studies 5. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010.

Ovadiah, Asher, and Pierri, Rosario. *Elijah's Cave on Mount Carmel and its Inscriptions*. Oxford: Archaeopress Archaeology, 2015.

Pancaroglu, Oya. "The Itinerant Dragon-Slayer: Forging paths of Image and Identity in Medieval Anatolia." *Gesta*, 43, no. 2 (2004): 151-164.

Parker, Simon B, ed. *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry*. Writings from the Ancient World Series, Society of Biblical Literature, Vol. 9. Edited by Simon B. Parker. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, Society of Biblical Literature, 1997.

Pacini, Andrea, ed. *Christian Communities in the Arab Middle East: The Challenge of the Future*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998.

Pardee, Dennis. *Ritual and Cult at Ugarit*. Writings from the Ancient World Series, Society of Biblical Literature, vol. 10, edited by Simon B. Parker. Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002.

Pastor, Jack, and Menachem Mor, eds. *The Beginnings of Christianity: A Collection of Articles*. Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi Press, 2005.

Patton, Kimberly C. and Benjamin C. Ray, Eds. *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

Peters, F.E., ed. *The Arabs and Arabia and on the Eve of Islam*. The Foundation of the Classical Islamic World 3, edited by Lawrence I. Conrad. Brookfield, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1999.

Playne, Beatrice. *St. George for Ethiopia*. London: Constable Publishers, 1954.

Pritchard, James B., ed. *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures*. Forward by Daniel E. Fleming. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011.

Qleibo, Ali H. *Before the Mountains Disappear: An Ethnographic Chronicle of the Modern Palestinians*. Kornesh EL Nil: Al Ahram Press, 1992.

Ragette, Friedrich. *Baalbek*. Park Ridge, NJ: Noyes Press, 1980.

Redford, Donald B. *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992.

Reeves, John C., ed. *Bible and Qur'ān: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality*. Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series 24, edited by Christopher R. Matthews. Leiden: Brill, 2004.

Renard, John. "Khaḍir/Khiḍr." In *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, vol. 2. Jane Dammen MacAuliffe, General Editor, 81-84. Leiden: Brill, 2003.

Reynolds, Gabriel Said. *The Emergence of Islam: Classical Traditions in Contemporary Perspective*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012.

⸻ . *The Qur'ān and Its Biblical Subtext*. Routledge Studies in the Qur'ān 10, edited by Andrew Rippin. New York: Routledge, 2010.

⸻ , ed. *The Qur'ān in its Historical Context*. Routledge Studies in the Qur'ān 8, edited by Andrew Rippin. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Reynolds, Gabriels Said, ed. *New Perspectives on the Qur'ān: The Qur'ān in its Historical Context 2*. Routledge Studies in the Qur'ān 12, edited by Andrew Rippin. New York, Routledge: 2011.

Riches, Samantha. *St. George: Hero, Martyr and Myth*. Gloucestershire, UK: Sutton Publishing, 2000.

Robson, Laura. "Recent Perspectives on Arabic Communities in the Modern Arab World." *History Compass* 9, 4 (2011): 312-325.

Rofé, Alexander. "Classification of the Prophetical Stories." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 89, no. 4 (1970): 427-440.

Saadi, Abdul-Massih. "Nascent Islam in the Seventh Century Syriac Sources." In *The Qur'ān in its Historical Context*. Edited by Gabriel Said Reynolds. Routledge Studies in the Qur'ān 8, edited by Andrew Rippin 217-222. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Sarug, Jacob. *Jacob of Sarug's Homilies on Elijah*. Translated and Introduced by Stephen A. Kaufman. Texts from Christian Late Antiquity, vol. 18, edited by George A. Kiraz. The Metrical Homilies of Mar Jacob of Sarugh, Fasc. 9-13, edited by Sebastian P. Brock and George A. Kiraz. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2009.

Sauma, Victor. *Sur les Pas des Saints au Liban*, 2 vols. Beirut: FMA, 1994.

The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection, translated and with a forward by Benedicta Ward, SLG. Cistercian Studies Series 59. Trappist, KY: Cistercian Publications, 1975.

Schaeffer, Claude F. A. "Les fouilles de Minet-el-Beida et de Ras-Shamra: Quatrième campagne (printemps 1932). Rapport sommaire." *Syria* 14, no. 2 (1933), 93-127.

——— . "La stele du "Ba'al au foudre" de Ras-Shamra (Musée du Louvre)." *Monuments et mémoires* 34, no. 1-2 (1934): 1-18.

Schlumberger, Gustave. "Amulettes Byzantins Anciens: Destinés a Combattre les Maléfices et Maladies." *Revue des Études Grecques* 5 (1892): 73-93.

Schöck, Cornelia. "Moses." In *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, vol. 3. Jane Dammen MacAuliffe, General Editor, 419-426. Leiden: Brill, 2003.

Schram, Peninnah. *Tales of Elijah the Prophet*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1997.

Segal, Samuel Michael. *Elijah: A Study in Jewish Folklore*. New York: Behrman's Jewish Book House, 1935.

Sendler, Egon. *The Icon: Image of the Invisible*. Redondo Beach, CA: Oakwood Publications, 1988.

Siegal, Michael Bar-Asher. *Early Christian Monastic Literature and the Babylonian Talmud*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Sinai, Nicolai. "The Qur'anic Commentary of Muqātil b. Sulaymān and the Evolution of Early Tafsīr Literature." In *Tafsīr and Islamic Intellectual History: Exploring the Bounds of a Genre*. Edited by Andreas Görke and Johanna Pink. The Institute of Ismaili Studies Qur'anic Studies Series 12, edited by Omar Alí-de-Unzaga, 113-146. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

[Sinleqqiunninni]. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. Translated and introduced by Maureen Gallery Kovacs. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1985.

Solomon, Steven. *Water: The Epic Struggle for Wealth, Power, and Civilization*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010.

Sokolowski, Franciszek. *Lois Sacrées des Cités Grecques*. Ecole Française d' Athèns: Trauvaux et Mémoires des Anciens Membres Étrangers de l'École et de Divers Savants 11. Paris: Éditions E. De Boccard, 1962.

Sopher, David Edward. *Geography of Religions*. Foundations of Cultural Geography Series, edited by Philip L. Wagner. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1967.

Smith, Mark S. *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle: Volume I, Introduction with Text, Translation and Commentary of KTU 1.1-1.2*. Supplements to Vetus Testamentum, vol. 55. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994.

⸻ . *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts*. Oxford: University Press, 2001.

⸻ . Untold Stories: *The Bible and Ugaritic Studies in the Twentieth Century*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2001.

⸻ . *God in Translation: Deities in Cross-Cultural Discourse in the Biblical World*. Forschungen zum Alten Testament, no. 57, edited by Bernd Janowski, Mark S. Smith, and Hermann Spieckermann. Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2008.

Smith, Mark S., and Pritchard, Wayne T. *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle: Volume II: Introduction with Text, Translation and Commentary of KTU/CAT 1.3-1.4*. Supplements to Vestus Testamentum, vol. 114. Leiden: Brill, 2009.

Smith, Jonathan Z. *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.

Snyder, Graydon F. *Ante Pacem: Archaeological Evidence of Church Life Before Constantine*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003.

Stark, Rodney. *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries*. New York: Harper Collins, 1996.

Stump, Roger W. *The Geography of Religion: Faith, Place, and Space*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008.

Sulaymān, Muqātil bin. *Tafsīr Muqātil b. Sulaymān*. Cairo: al-Haya al-Misriyya al-'Amma li-al-Kitab, 1979.

Tamari, Salim. *Mountain Against the Sea: Essays on Palestinian Society and Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009.

Tesei, Tommaso. "Some Cosmological Notions from Late Antiquity in Q 18:60-65: The Qur'ān in Light of Its Cultural Context." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 135 no. 1 (2015): 19-32.

Thierry, Nicole. *Haut Moyen-Âge en Cappadoce: Les Églises de la Région de Çavuşin*, tome II. Institute Français d'Archaéologie du Proche-Orient, Bibliothèque Archaéologique et Historique 102. Paris: Librarie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1994.

——— . "De la Datation des Églises de Cappadoce." *Byzantinsche Zeitschrift* 88, no. 2 (1995): 419-455.

Thierry, Nicole, and Michel Teirry. *Nouvelles Églises Rupestres de Cappadoce: Région du Hasan Daği*. Paris: Librarie Klincksieck, 1963.

Tottoli, Roberto. *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'an and Muslim Literature*. Routledge Studies in the Qur'ān 3, edited by Andrew Rippin. New York: Routledge, 2002.

——— . "Elijah." In *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, vol. 1. Jane Dammen MacAuliffe, General Editor, 12-13. Leiden: Brill, 2003.

Vorderstrasse, Tasha, and Tanya Treptow, eds. *A Cosmopolitan City: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Old Cairo*. Oriental Institute Museum Publications 38. Chicago, IL: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2015.

Vyronis, Speros Jr. *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the Process of Islamization from the Eleventh through the Fifteenth Century*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1971.

Walter, Christopher. "Saint Theodore and the Dragon." In *Through a Glass Brightly: Studies in Byzantine and Medieval Art and Archaeology Presented to David Buckton*, edited by Chris Entwistle, 95-106. Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2003.

——— . *The Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art and Tradition*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003.

Wansbrough, John. *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History*. School of Oriental and African Studies University of London, London Oriental Series 34, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978.

Watts, Edward J. *The Final Pagan Generation: Transformation of the Classical Heritage*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015.

Weitzmann, Kurt W. *Studies in the Arts at Sinai: Essays by Kurt Weitzmann*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982.

⸺ . *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai, The Icons, Volume One: From the Sixth to the Tenth Century*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976.

Weitzmann, Kurt. *The Icon: Holy Images – Sixth to Fourteenth Century*. New York: George Braziller, 1978.

Wheeler, Brannon M. *Moses in the Quran and Islamic Exegesis*. RoutledgeCurzon Studies in the Qur'ān 4, edited by Andrew Rippin. New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002.

⸺ . "The Jewish Origins of Qur'ān 18:65-82? Reexamining the Arent Jan Wensinck's Theory." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 118, no. 2 (1998): 153-171.

Wilkinson, John. *Jerusalem Pilgrims Before the Crusades*. Warminster, UK: Aris & Phillips, Ltd., 1977.

Wolper, Ethel Sara. "Khiḍr and the Changing Frontiers of the Medieval World." *Medieval Encounters: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Culture in Confluence and Dialogue* 17 (2011): 120-146.

⸺ . *Cities and Saints: Sufism and the Transformation of Urban Space in Medieval Anatolia*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003.

Wyatt, N. *Religious Texts from Ugarit*. Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002.

Yon, Marguerite. *The City of Ugarit: At Tell Ras Shamra*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006.

Zellentin, Holger Michael. *The Qur'ān's Legal Culture: The Didascalia Apostolorum as a Point of Departure*. Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2013.

Zijl, Peter J van. *Baal: A Study of Texts in Connexion with Baal in the Ugaritic Epics*. Verlag Butzon & Bercker Kevelar, 1972.

Zubaida, Sami. *Islam, the People, and the State: Political Ideas and Movements in the Middle East*. New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009.
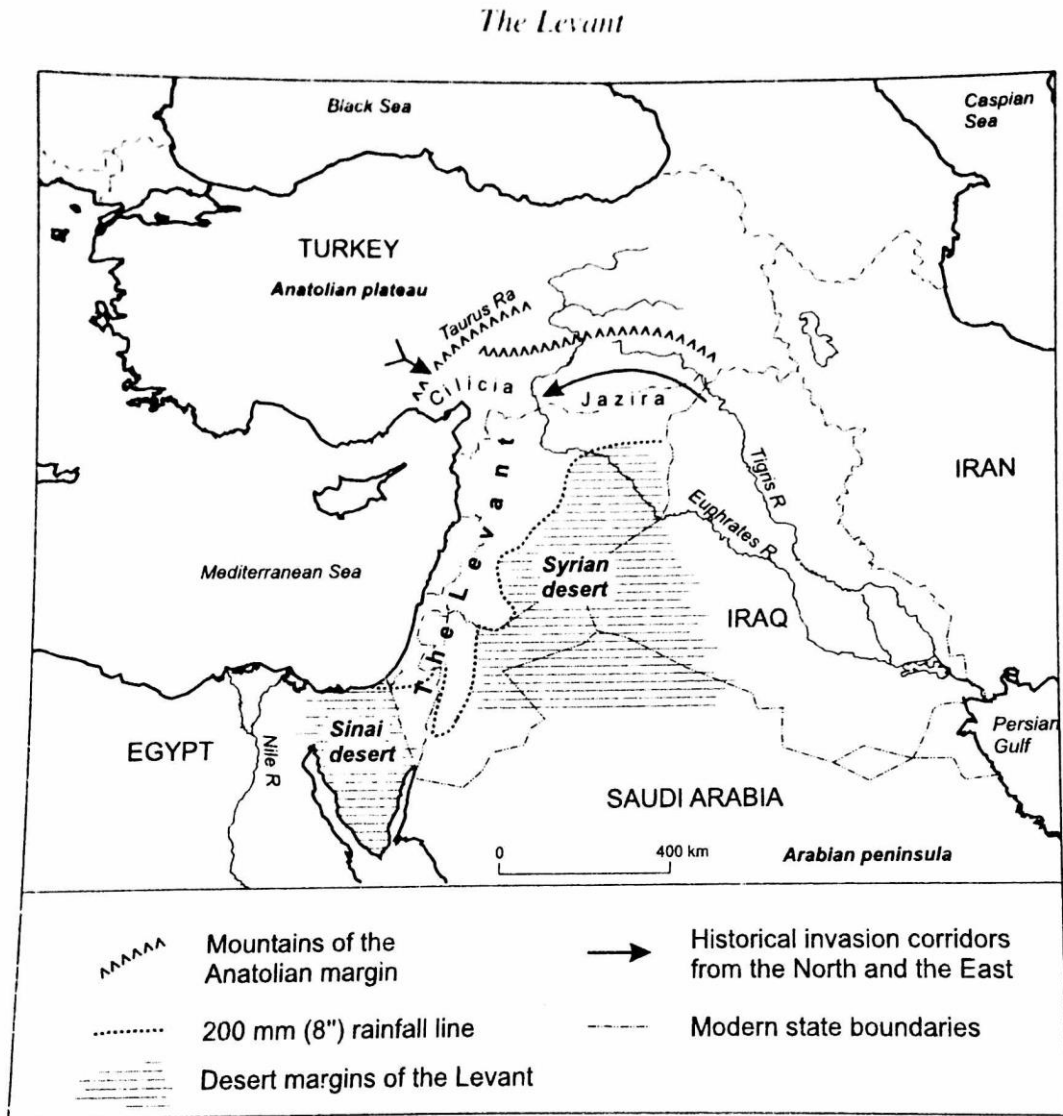
The Levant

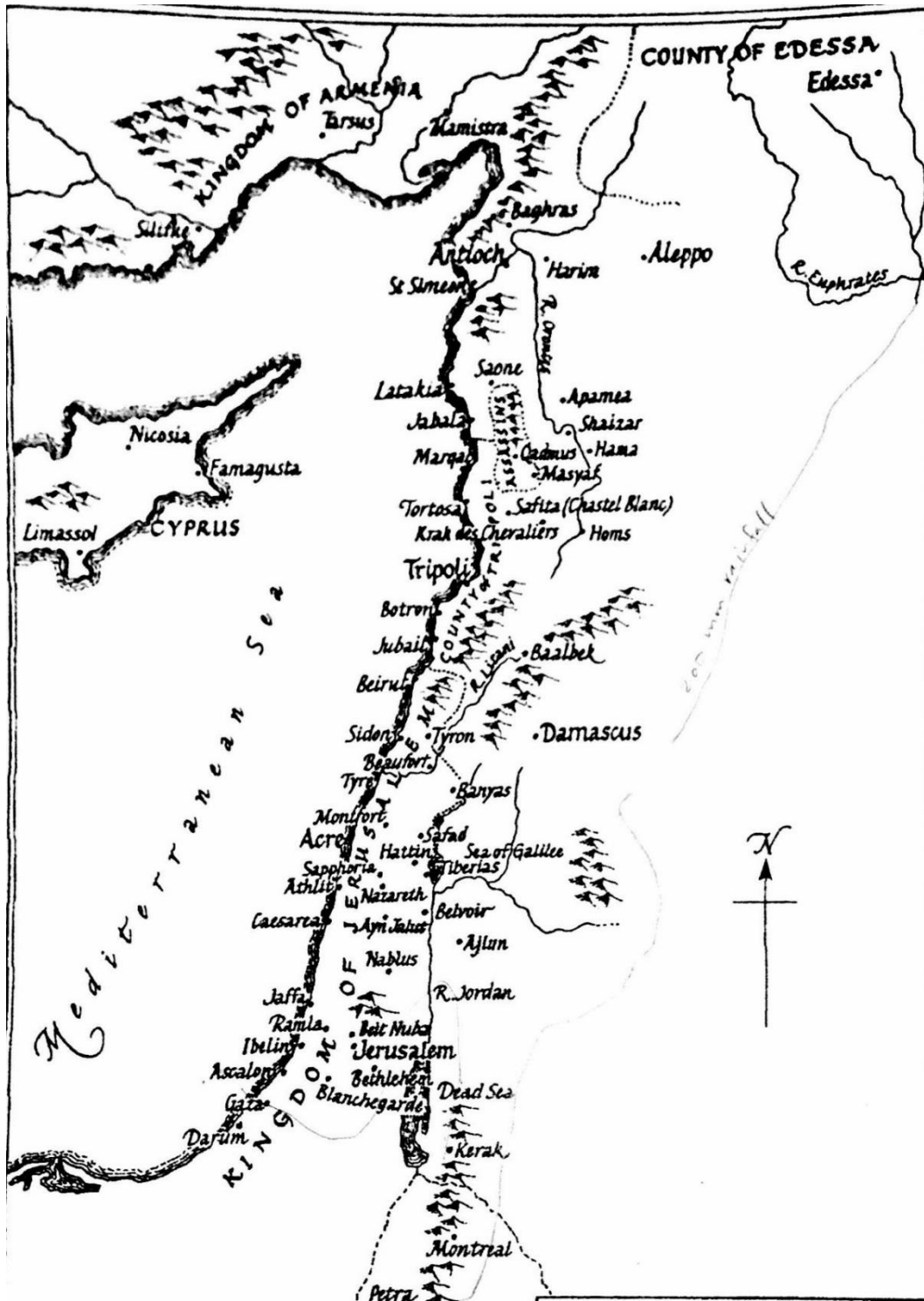Fig. 1. Physical Geography of the Levant.

Fig. 2 Cities of the Levant.

Fig. 3 Hittite Storm-God and the sea monster Illuyanka.

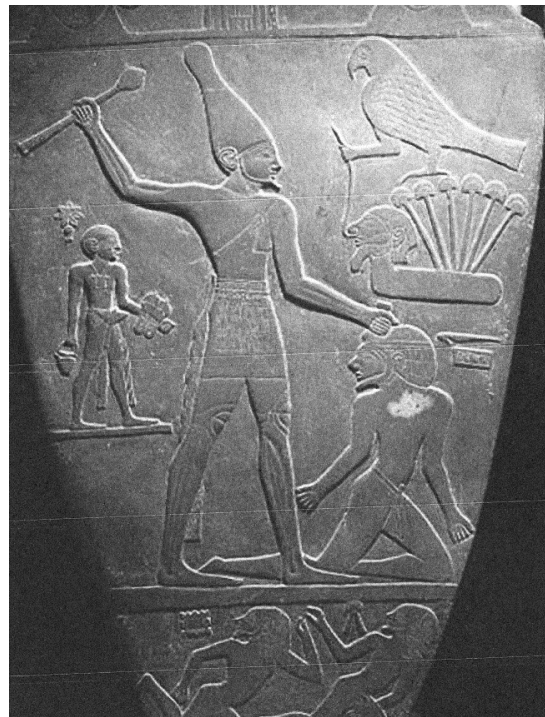Fig. 4 Baal Stele, Ugarit.

Fig. 5 Narmer Palette

Fig. 6 Bronze statue of Jupiter Heliopolitanus, 38.4 cm, Musée du Louvre
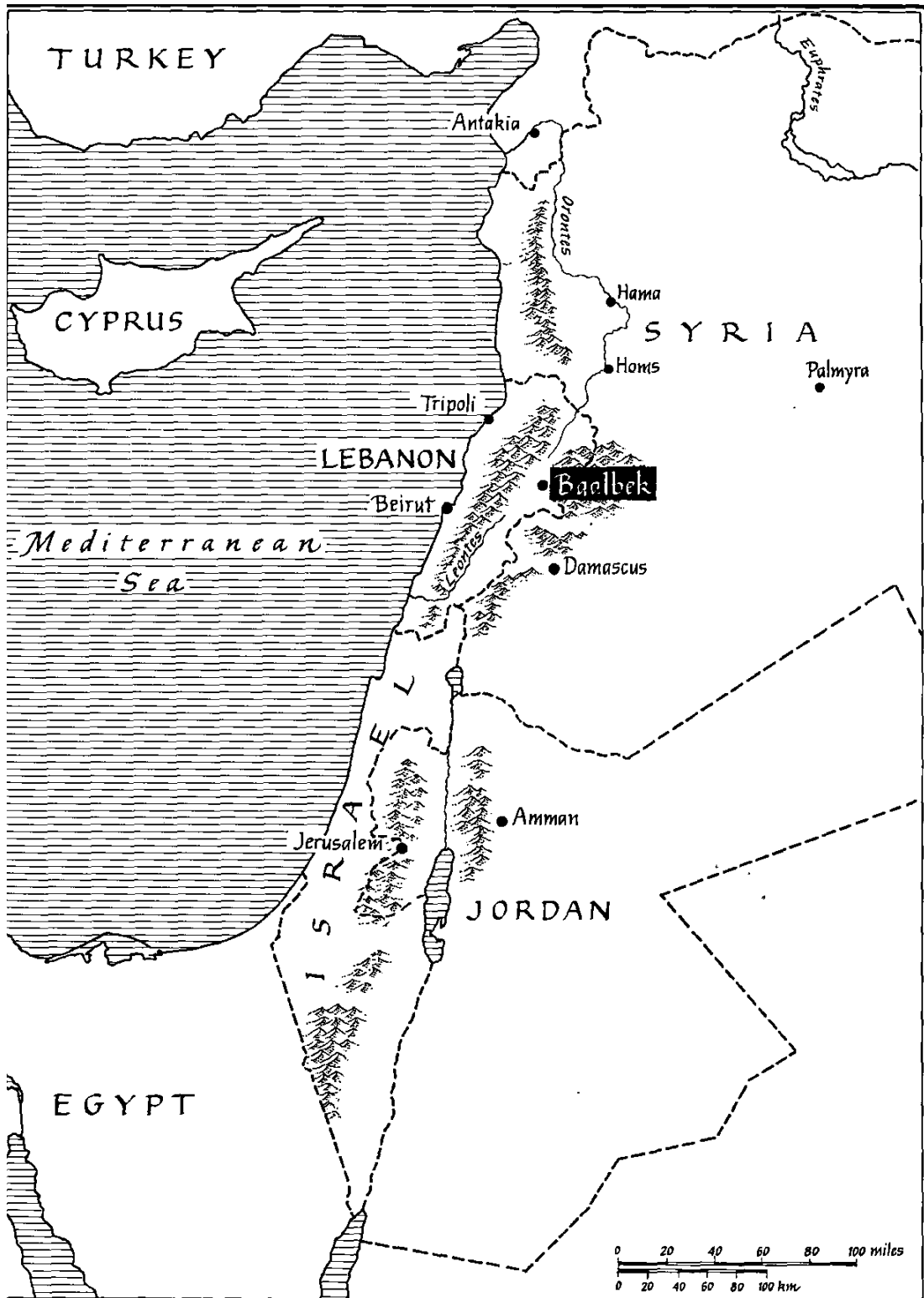
Fig. 7 Map of Baalbek. Ragette, *Baalbek*, 12.

Fig. 8 The Failure of the Sacrifice to Baal
Wall painting, Dura-Europos Synagogue, south wall, Dura-Europos, Syria

Fig. 9 Prophet Elia, encaustic icon, Saint Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai. 7th cen. CE
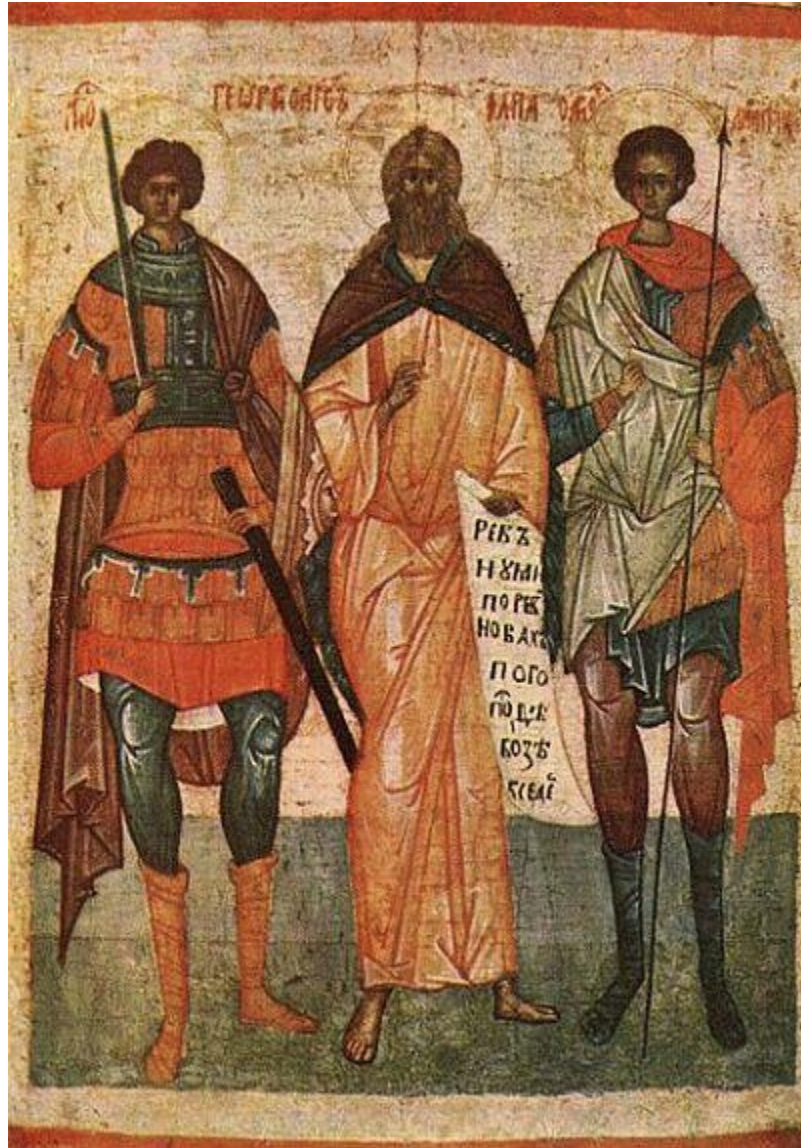
Fig. 10 Saints George, Elias, and Demetrius. Novgorod Icon, 15th cen. CE.
Private collection of Pavel Korin
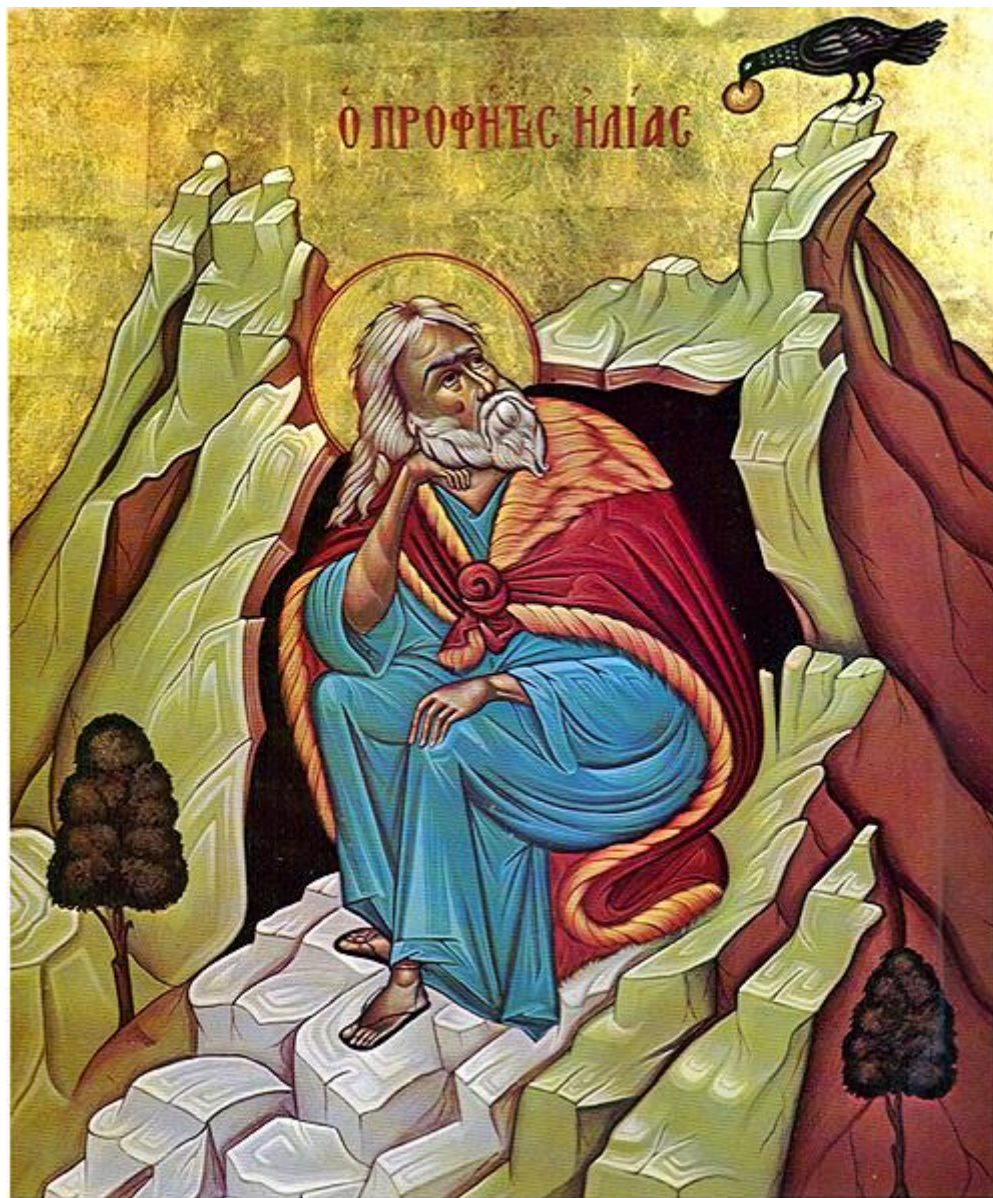
Fig. 11 Saint Elias, modern icon.

Fig. 12 Statue of Elijah at the Elias Monastery, Mt. Carmel, Israel.

Fig. 13 Icon of Prophet Elijah Slaying the Prophets of Baal, icon tempera on wood,
Greek Orthodox Monastery of Mar Elias Shuwaya, Metn, Lebanon.
Painted by Bishop Parthenos of Tripoli, 1765 CE.

Fig. 14 Icon with the Ascension of the Prophet Elias and scenes from his life from the church of Saint Elias in Ano Korakiana on Corfu. 17th century CE.
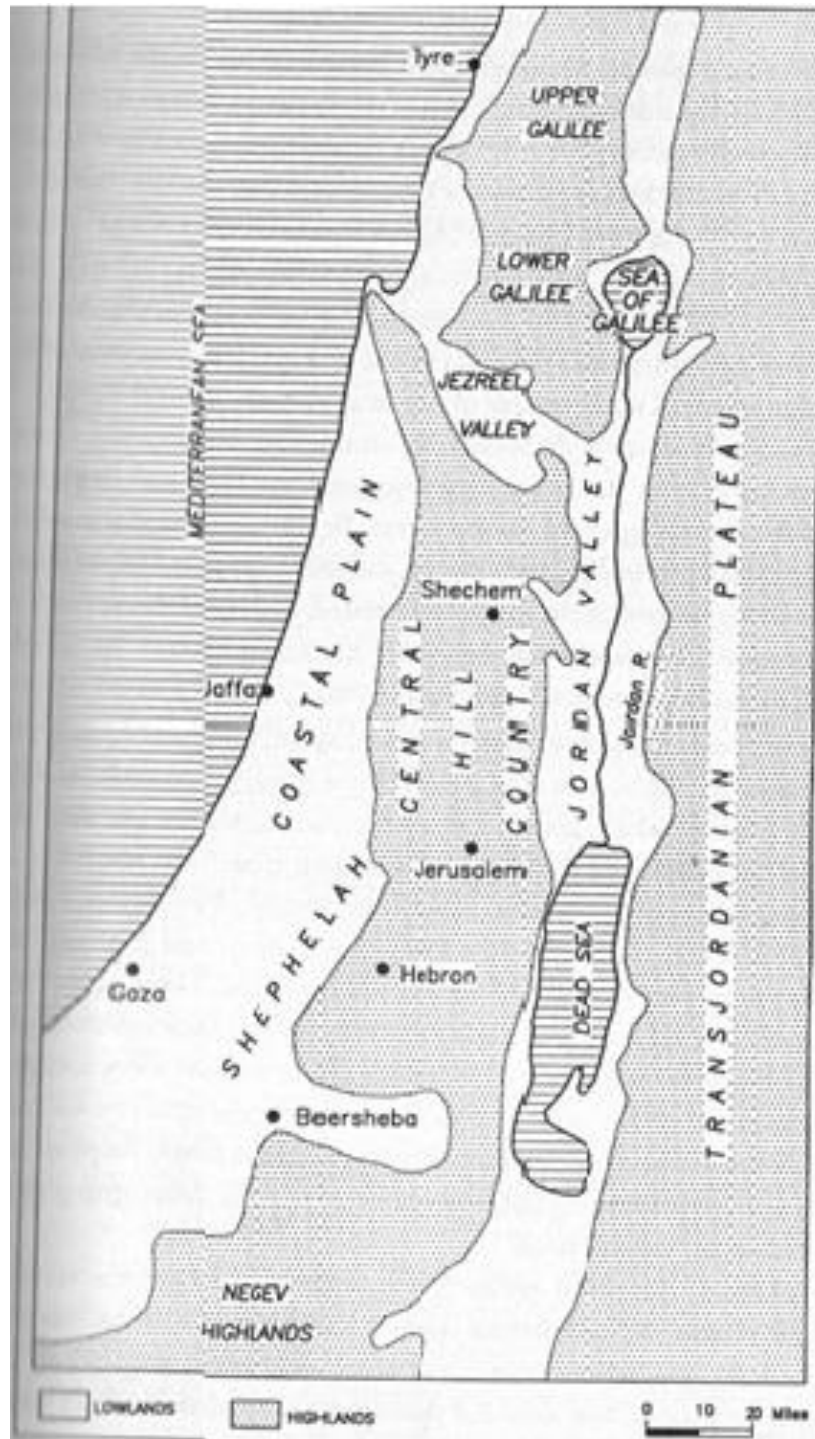
Fig. 15 Geographical Zones of Ancient Israel.

PLATE 8

A: Front view.

Carmel inscription.

Fig. 16 Marble Fragment of front right foot, Zeus Heliopolitan
Mar Elias Monastery, Mount Carmel.

Fig. 17 *Solomon Spearing Ozybouth*, Benaki Museum, Athens, ca. 3rd-4th century, CE.

Fig. 18 *Suchos and Isis*. Fayum, Egypt, ca. 200 CE.
Tempera on gypsum over wooden panels held together by a frame.
(This icon was destroyed during World War II).

Fig. 19, *Heron and Anonymous Military God*, ca. 200 CE. Tempera on board.
Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels, Belgium.

Fig. 20 *Christ and St. Menas*, tempera on board, ca. 6ᵗʰ-8ᵗʰ century, CE.
Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Fig. 21 *St. Peter*, Encaustic on board, ca. 6th century.
Monastery of St. Catherine, Mount Sinai.

Fig. 22 Virgin Enthroned between Soldier Saints (Theodore and George). Encaustic on wood panel, sixth century CE. Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt.
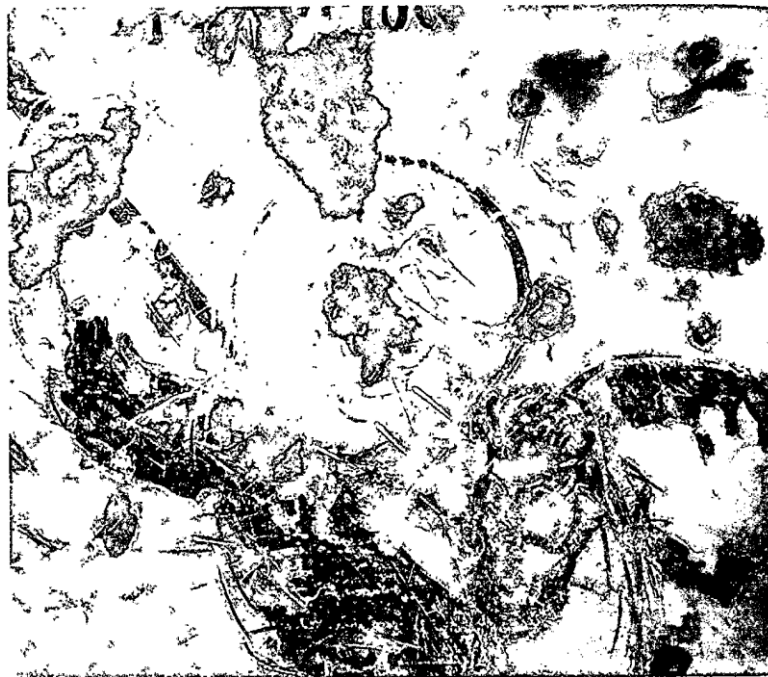
Fig. 23 St. George Icon from the St. George Church in Zindanönü,
Cappadocia, Turkey, ca. 6th-7th century CE

(The icon is drawn above in Nicole Thierry, *Haut Moyen-Âge en Cappadoce: Les Églises de la Région de Çavuşin*, Vol. 2 (Paris: Librarie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1994), photograph of icon pl. 156 a; drawing rendered on p. 302).

Fig. 24 St. Christopher and St. George Spear a Serpent, Terracotta, before 733 CE. Ruins outside the walls of the Vinička Kale fortress, Vinica, Macedonia.

Fig. 25 Left and right sides of *Triptych with Ascension, St. Theodore and St. George*, 9th-10th centuries CE, Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt.

Fig. 26 *St. Theodore and St. George*, 11th century CE,
Yilani Kılıse, Cappadocia, Turkey.

Fig. 27 *Sextus Valerius Genialis*, Limestone tombstone, ca. 1st-2nd century CE.
Corinium Museum, UK.

437

Fig. 28 *Icon with St. George and the Youth of Mytilene*, Tempera on pine board, ca. 1250 CE, Levant. British Museum.

Fig. 29 *Plate with a Hunting Scene from the Tale of Bahram Gur and Azadeh*, Silver, mercury gilding, 5th century CE. Metropolitan Museum, New York.

Fig. 30 Map of Near Eastern Trade Routes
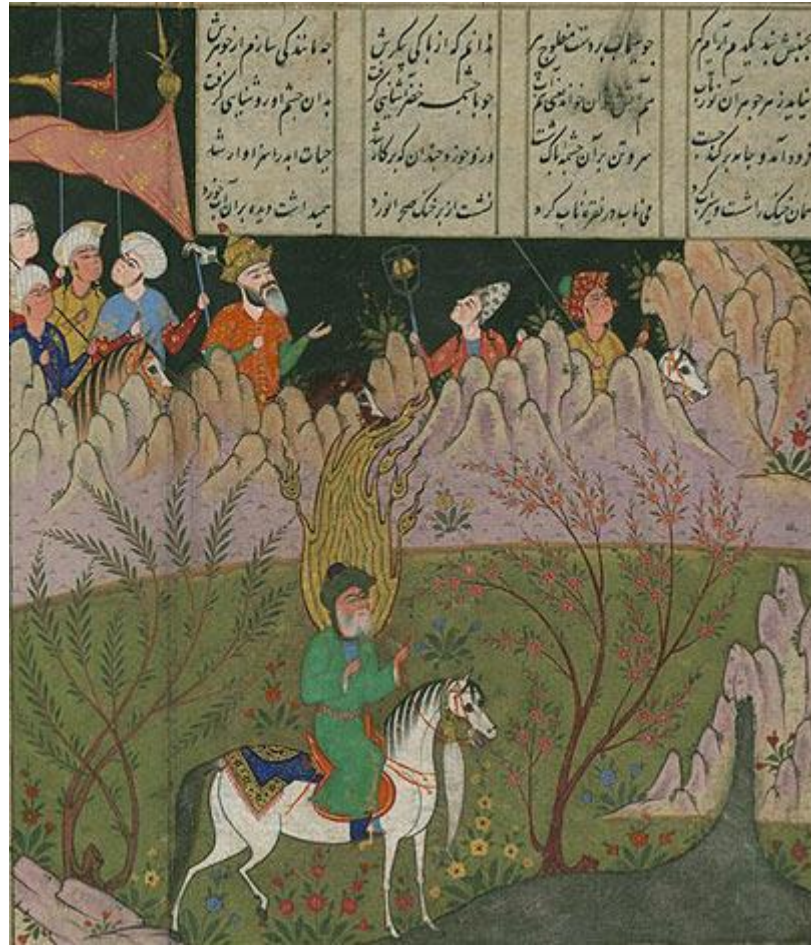(Focused on the Western Arabian Peninsula)

Fig. 31 *Al-Khiḍr and Alexander at the Fountain of Life*. Persian miniature painting from the manuscript of Nizami Ganjavi, ca. 16th century CE.

Fig. 32, *Al-Khiḍr and Elijah Praying Together*, ca. 16th century CE.
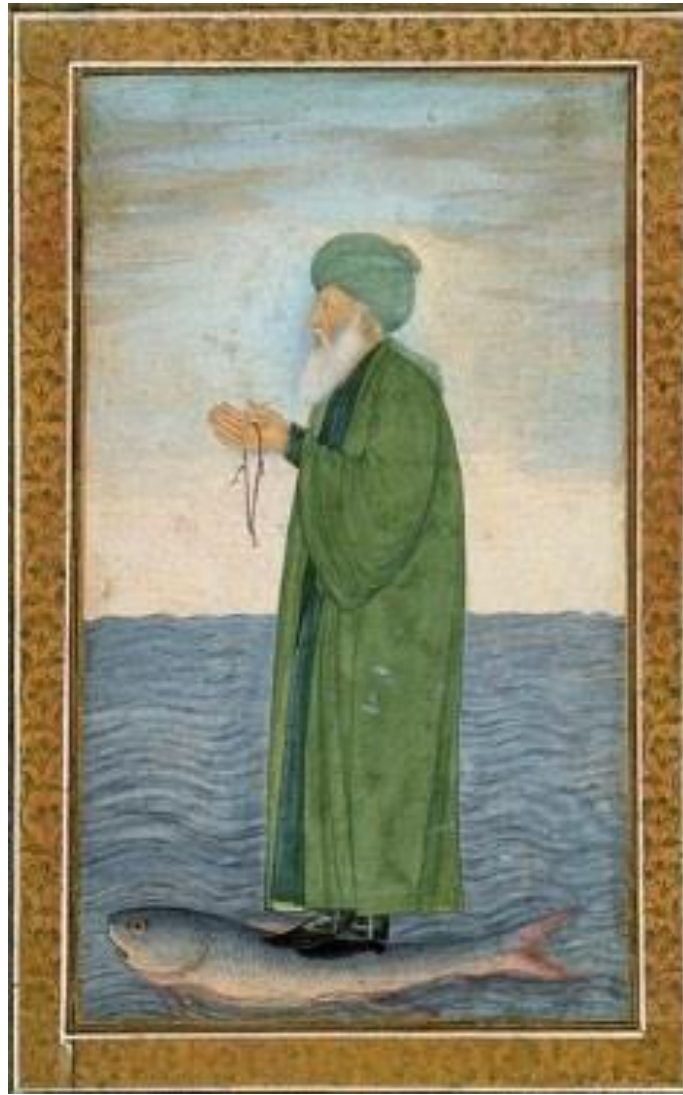Persian miniature, illuminated manuscript of Stories of the Prophets.

Fig. 33 *Muslim Sage al-Khizr*, watercolor on paper, mid-17th century, CE, India. Mughal-era manuscript miniature, Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Fig. 34 *Typical Image of al-Khiḍr in the Eastern Mediterranean.*

APPENDIX B: THE ACTS OF ST. GEORGE

Introduction
In the power of our Lord Jesus Christ we begin to write the martyrdom of the illustrious George and of Antonius the General and of Alexandra the Queen who were martyred and crowned (their prayer be with us. Amen!)

King Dadianus
When the churches of Christ were standing, winter storms were roused by the kings in every country, and with threats they seized the preachers of truth, and brought them to worship fiends, and forced them to sacrifice. At that time Satan instigated the king of the Persians whose name was Dadianus (and he had four evil counsellors his associates); and, having seated himself upon his judgement-seat (βῆμα), he wrote letters running thus. "Since a report has reached us, and has penetrated to our ears that the peoples are worshipping him whom Mary bore, and not worshipping Apollo and Heracles, but hum whom the Jews scourged with rods and fastened to a tree, therefore I have written to your high mightinesses, in order that we may stamp out the thing that has happened." When the letters had been sent to all the kings in all the world, many kings and peoples set out and came to him, so that even his capital city was not large enough to hold them.
On the next day the king seated himself upon his judgement-seat, and ordered all the instruments of torture to be set before them, frying-pans and bronze cauldrons and sharp points, and elaborate fetters, and irons, and instruments to cut out tongues, and forcipes to pull out teeth, and hooks to bend the neck, and spits with tortures of every kind. And, when they had brought them before him, the asp-serpent Dadianus the king began to say: "If so be I find rebellious men who are acting contrary to the worship of the gods, I will destroy the towers of their bodies, and strip off the skin of their heads, and extract their brain while they are alive, and tear out the pupils of their eyes, and cut away their feet from their anklebones, and saw asunder the soles of their feet, and extract their bowels, and what remains I will throw to the dogs." And, while everyone was standing in astonishment, then those who were intending to be martyred greatly trembled and shrank at the sight of the tortures (for everyone was anxiously thinking to remove from himself the burden of the pains), so that for three months none dared to say "I am a Christian," except

George Confronts Dadianus
this minister[/servant] of righteousness whose light shone between the height and the depth, who came from a Cappadocian family, and served in his rank as a tribune (τριβοῦνος) and, when he had finished his time of service in that rank, after amassing much gold, betook himself to Dadianus the king in order to serve as a count (κόμης). And, when he saw that Christ was being insulted and demons were being praised before him, he distributed all that he possessed, gold or silver,

445

and gave it to the poor and needy; and, having stripped himself of his clothes, he stood before he king, crying and saying "I am a Christian, but your threats, king, are idle, and name not those who are gods; but let gods who did not make heaven and earth perish from the earth [Jer. X, 11]. For I worship one true God, with his Son and his Holy Spirit, one Trinity and one Godhead without division." The king looked at him and said to him, "You have deceived[/insulted] me, proud George, haste therefore to entreat the gods, who know how to forgive an offense in those that transgress. Come up therefore and sacrifice to them; and know that Apollo stretched out the heavens and Heracles laid the foundations of the earth, and Serapion and Posidon they it was who restrained the sea that it should not pass its limit. But Christ of whom you speak the Jews scourged with rods, and hung upon a tree. But who made any of the things that are seen?" Looking at him [George], Magnetius the general (στρατηλάτης) said to him: "From what city do you come, and whence came you hither, and what is your name?" The blessed man said to him: "As to my first name, I am a Christian. But, if you inquire as among men, I am called George." After these things the king said to him: "Come up and sacrifice, lest you die an evil death." George answered and said to him: "Get thee behind me, Satan. Thou art an offense to me." [Matt 26:23].

Dadianus Tortures George

Then the king ordered him to be hung on a piece of wood, and scraped. And, when the king saw that his limbs had been loosened and his blood was running down upon the ground, he ordered them to take him down and thrown him on his belly. And he ordered a wheel to be made like a saw, and long nails to be fixed to it like meat-forks, and that there should be wedges at its sides, and spits around it like a catapult (?). This resolved, and the structure of it was completed like the work of a craftsman; above it looked like a sword and below it shone like knives. And he ordered them to place the saint on top of the wheel. When the blessed man came to that place, and saw the wheel prepared, he thought to himself, and was seized with a great trembling saying, "I shall never escape from these inflictions." And again he repented in his mind, and said "Why, my soul, have you had these thoughts? Consider the lot that has come to you, and know that Christ your Lord was hanged between two robbers." Then the vigorous combatant (ἀθλητής) ran with joy and mounted the wheel, saying: "Christ, in thy hands I place my self" [Luke 23:46]. And he was cruelly caught among the teeth of the wheel, and among the spits, and his limbs were cut into ten pieces. And Dadianus the king lifted up his voice, and the king of Egypt, and king Traquillinus, with Magnetius the general, saying, "You know, peoples, that there are no other gods besides Apollo and Heracles and among females great is Artemis the goddess of the Ephesians [Acts, 19:34]. Where then is George's god whom the Jews tortured? Wherefore did he not come and rescue his friend from my hands?" Then the king ordered them to throw the blessed man into an unused pit; and they placed a great stone over the mouth of the pit. Now it was suppertime and at the tenth hour there

was great fear, so that the mountains were shaken; and darkness was spread over the earth and a cloud of fire, and the likeness of a chariot of fire; and our Lord Jesus appeared above the chariot, and suddenly a company of angels by the mouth of the pit. And our Lord said to Gabriel: "To thee I say, angel of my covenant (διαθήκη), go down into this pit and bring up thence for me my bondman George; because he said 'I shall not escape from these tortures', that they many confess me and believe that I am the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Israel." And, when he came up from the pit, our Lord took him by the hand, and said to him: "This is the hand that fashioned the first man" [biblical reference?]. That it is which resuscitated thee." And he breathed into his face and filled him with the Holy Spirit. And our Savior gave him a greeting, and said to him: "Go and put Dadianus the king and all the kings his fellows to shame, and utter thereupon a cry of praise. And our Lord ascended to heaven and all his angels.

George Confronts Dadianus Again
Then the blessed George went and sought for the kings and found them in the idols' house. And he stood before the king, and said to him: Know you me, king Dadianus? The king looked at him and said to him "Who are you?" The blessed man said to him: "I for my part am George who was cut on the wheel. Wherefore did you insult Christ and say 'He cannot save you from my hands? Lo! You see that it was he who brought me to life from among the dead." And the king looked at him and said "It is himself." Magnetius said "It is very like him." The saint said: "I myself am in truth George whom you shut in the pit." And Antoninus the general on seeing that George had come to life and risen from among the dead believed on God himself and all his troops (τάξις). And, when king Dadianus saw that many people had believed on God, the king ordered them to be put to death in a desert place outside the city; and they divided them into ten companies; and they completed their martyrdom with a good confession. But as to the holy George the king ordered him to go to prison, 'until I consider how to destroy him and make havoc of his fair boyhood'. Then Satan put it into the king's heart, and he made an iron shoe, and put it on the saint's feet, and nailed them inside it; and the nails, because they were long, penetrated and extended above the soles of his feet, and the blood was flowing cruelly; and, since he was unable to bear the shoe, he entered the city at a slow walk. But the impious man when he saw him laughed and said to him: "What is it, George? Why are you not running? Recognize the lot that has fallen to you." Then the blessed man said: "'Why art thou agitated, my soul' [Ps 42:6] and why art thou grieved? Know that Christ thy Lord was stretched upon a tree." And again the blessed man prayed and said: "Lord my God, leave me not nor depart from me." And the same hour Michael the archangel appeared to him carrying some dew in his closed hand and sprinkling it on his feet; and suffered no more from the pains. And, having come and stood before the king: "Tell me the names of your gods since you said to me that Apollo stretched out the heaven, and Heracles planted the earth firmly, and Athena diffused the

447

sunlight; but they made none of the things that are seen. Know therefore that it is not the gods who made creation, but they are futile images. But I have many sheep to choose from this flock, and to bring into the fold of our Lord and our God [John 10:16]. But, since you have told me the names of your gods, I also will tell you the names of the just men. Tell me, King; which seems to you the worthier by comparison, Simon the chief of apostles, or Posidon the chief of brigands (ληστής)? Samuel the chosen prophet, or Actaeon the madman? Moses who led the people forty years, and gave manna to the children of Israel, or N q ṭ ['Antaeus'] and Heracles the profligates? Tell me which of these you choose, the sagacity of the martyrs and the love of the confessors, or the striving of the possessed persons or the hostility of the priests? Mary who gave birth to God in our manhood, or Jezebel the slayer of God's prophets? [1 Kings 18:4; M has 'Artemis the slayer of her lover'.] But I see that your gods are mad persons [DMV has 'demons'] in whom there is no profit." Then the unjust king ordered him to be beaten with thongs; and the blessed man was beaten until all his body was torn to pieces.

Magnetius Asks for a Miracle

But, after he had been beaten, Magnetius said to him: "I ask a sign of you. If you show it to me, I will believe on your God. Lo! There are here fourteen kings' seats, and each seat has in it planks of wood, some of fruit-bearing trees, and some of trees that do not bear fruit. If you pray and they are broken up again, and those that are of trees that do not bear fruit bloom and stand up without fruit, and those that are of fruit-bearing trees give fruit, I will believe on your God." The blessed George says to him: "Not for your sake will I do this, but for the sake of the bystanders I will pray before God." And he knelt and prayed so that the air (ἀήρ) was disturbed and the earth trembled, and there was a great terror, and terrific lightnings appeared on the earth, and upon the fourteen seats; and the planks were broken up and the trees took root; and those that were fruit-trees showed themselves with fruit, and those that were without fruit showed themselves without fruit. And, when king Dadianus saw it, he said: "Great art though, god Apollo, who showest thy power even in dry wood. Nay, by my lord the sun and the seventy-two gods, you shall not escape from my hands, O George." And he ordered that he should go to prison 'until I contrive of a method of putting him to death'.

Traquillinus Asks for a Second Miracle

King Traquillinus says to him: I also wish to ask George for a certain sign. And they sent and he fetched him from the prison and set him before him. And the king said to him: "We have here a coffin hewn out of rock, and the age of the persons buried in it no man knows. If then your prayer is heard, pray that these corpses may rise, and we will believe on your God." George says to them: "Bring these bones up for me here." And, when the king had gone and opened that coffin,

and they found no bone solid in it, since they had become dust from the lapse of time, George says to them, "Collect that dust and bring it here." And the blessed man, having taken that dust, set it before the Lord; and he looked to heaven and prayed and said: "Lord All-holder, who are not dissolved [DMV "passest not away and"], clad in victory, eternal Light, Lord of all, to thee I call, Maker, Good Hope Jesus Christ King of kings, grant me this request that I may show the devisers of evil things Dadianus the king and the seventy kings who are with him that thou only the Lord God, who weighedst the mountains in a scale, and settest the weight of the hills in a balance, and driedst the Sea of Papyrus [Sc. The Red Sea], which men could not dam, and formedst created things by thy nod, and madest the ages by thy grace, now also, Lord, look on thy people, and on the flock of thine inheritance, which thou redeemedst through thy beloved Son our Lord Jesus Christ, suffer it not to be scattered by the hands of unjust men, because thou carest for all thy created things for ever and ever Amen and Amen!" And, when he had finished his prayer and said 'Amen!', there was a violent disturbance of the air (ἀήρ), and flashes of terrific lightning were seen, and shone upon the whole of the place in which that dust lay, and souls of men and of women and of children rose, two hundred bodies. And, when the king and his associates saw the thing that had happened, and that which had actually been done, then one of the kings called to one of those who had risen from among the dead, and asked him and said to him: "What is your name?" And he that had been resuscitated said to him: "Yubla." The king says to him: "How long is it that you have been dead?" Yubla says: Two hundred years more or less we have been in *Sheol*." The king says to him: "Did you worship Christ, or Apollo?" Yubla says to him: "We for our part did not know Christ, but worshipped idols. And when we died angels carried and brought us to a river of fire, and there we were till today, so that not even on the first day of the week had we relaxation, because we had not been wont to observe the first day with the fear of the living God." Then afterwards those who had been resuscitated looked at the holy George, and cried with a loud voice and said to him: "We beseech you, sir, bondman of our Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us, since we were lying in great misery. Give us the mark of our Lord Jesus Christ, since we were resuscitated through your prayers and came up out of that bitter distress; and now, sir, help our souls and give us the mark of our Lord's baptism, that we may not again see that burning abyss." The blessed man, seeing that they had believed with their whole heart, asked for water, and no one gave it him; and he struck that place with his foot; and much water came out from it; and he baptized them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. And, when he has finished his prayer, he said to them: "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ you go to the Paradise of God." And no one saw them again from that hour. Then king Dadianus said to his fellow-kings: "Did I not tell you that this man is a sorcerer? And he has raised an appearance of fiends before us, saying 'I have raised the dead'. But for my part I know how I will put an end to this race (γένος) of Galilaeans."

George and the Widow

And he commanded the ministers of iniquity, "Seek for me a poor widow woman, and confine this man in her house, in order to disgrace him, that he may be a laughing-stock to those who know him, and to those who love him, when he is imprisoned there, until I devise a method of putting him to death." And, when the illustrious man had gone to that widow's dwelling, he said to her: "Give me bread to eat since I am hungry." That woman says to him: "I have no bread in my house." The holy George says to her: "Of what religion are you?" She says to him: "Of that of Apollo." The blessed man answered and said to her: "That is why you have no bread in your house." Then that woman formed in her heart the plan of going out to one of her neighbors and asking for bread and setting it before this man. And, when she had gone out to ask, the illustrious George stood up in prayer, and leaned upon a pillar that was in the house, and at the same moment the tree brought forth and produced leaves and branches, and it rose to a height of fifteen cubits above the roof. And Michael appeared to him, giving him food from heaven; and he ate, and refreshed himself and became joyful. And, when that woman came to her house, and saw that that tree had sent forth shoots and sprouted, and the table covered with delicacies, she fell down before the saint's feet from her fear crying and saying: "The God of the Christians has come to me in the body." But the holy George took hold of her and raised her up and said to her: "Rise, woman, I am not the God of the Christians as you think, but I am a bondman of Jesus Christ." That woman says to him: "Sir, if I have found favor in your eyes [Gen. 18:3], let your handmaid speak before you. Lo! There is a boy in my house who is deaf and blind and withered. If then, sir, my son is healed by your prayer, I also will believe on your God." The blessed man says to her, "Bring him here to me." And, when she had brought him to him, he said, "Boy, our Lord Jesus Christ heal thee." And he breathed into his face, and there fell from his eyes as it were scales (Acts 9:18); and the same hour he saw. His mother says: "Sir, let him hear with his ears and walk with his feet." The saint says to her: "Keep him for me till I shall call him for the work that will be required by me; and he shall hear with his ears and walk with his feet and come to me, and he shall to me a minister of speech." And that woman was silent and dared not answer him another word, because his face (πρόσωπον) was bright like the sun [Acts 6:15; CDMV 'as of an angel'; common description of the divine in the ANE world].

St. George is asked to Sacrifice to the Gods

And the next day king Dadianus rose up and the seventy kings who were with him, and they saw that that tree where George was lodging had grown and was looking out fifteen cubits above the roof; and they all marveled, and they say: "The Galilean lodged there." And then he sent after him, and brought him to the palace. And, when he came, he was singing and saying: "Thou, Lord, be not far from me. *El, El*, remain for my help" [Ps 22:20]. And, when he came in before the

450

king, Magnetius said to Dadinanus the king: "This race (γένος) of Christians is stubborn. Let us rather cajole this man by blandishment, and by soft words, that he may come to do our will and that he may recognize what is right." And the king began to entreat the saint, and say to him: "By the sun our god and the victory of all the gods, if you listen to me, George, I will give you much property and make you second in my kingdom. Come up therefore and sacrifice; and after my death I will make you sit on my throne, putting on the crown of my kingdom." The saint says to him: "Now you have spoken well. But wherefore said you not these things to me before? For now you have been torturing me seven years; and where shall I go and seek the ill useage of all this time?" The king says to the saint: "Forgive me this offense; since I am as your father; and know that you shall surely reign after me." The illustrious man says to him: "Where are your gods? I will sacrifice to them." When the king heard this announcement, he rejoiced with very great joy; and he ordered a crier to go up and stand in a high place, and cry and say: "Come near and see the Galilaean initiate, who lo! Today will come to the sacrifice of the gods." But, when that widow woman heard the voice of the crier, she suddenly picked up her son, and ran to the illustrious man crying with a loud voice saying: "O George, who gave to the blind the power of seeing and to the lame also the power of walking, and cleanse the lepers and cast out demons, and heal the sick, are you even now coming to sacrifice to the vain Apollo?" but, the holy George looked at her, and she trembled with a great trembling and he said to her: "Put your son down out of your arms." And, when she had put her son down, the blessed man said to him: "Rise, boy, and come to me, and you shall be to me a minister of speech." And the same hour he rose and ran to him and made obeisance to him. The saint says to him before all the people: "To you I say, boy, go into this temple (ναός) and say to Apollo: 'Come out at once for the bondman of our Lord Jesus Christ is standing outside and waiting for you." And, when that boy came into the temple, he said to that idol: "To you I say, dumb idol and vain chattel, come out thence quickly for the bondman of God Most High is standing outside and waiting for you." And the demon who lived in that image cried and said thus: "Out upon thee, Nazarene, since thou hast drawn all men to thee, and hast now sent thy bondman George against me." The blessed many says to that demon: "Are you the god of the pagans?"; the demon who lived in that image cried and said to him: The god of the pagans I am not, but one of the captains of the hosts of the enemy." The holy George says: "Wherefore lead you man astray from the fear of the living God?" That demon said: "By the hell of fire that is prepared for me, if I had been able, I would have ruined you also, and would have led you astray and not spared." George, says to him: "Come see your place"; and he struck the ground with his foot, and a great chasm was laid bare; and the holy George said to him: "Foul demon, go down into this abyss, until the day of your torment." And he sealed that place, and it was not known. And he ran and went to into the temple and overthrew the idols of Zeus and Heracles; and he cried with a loud voice and said: "Away with you, dead idols, for I indeed am the bondman of

451

Jesus Christ who is God over all" [the actual destruction of the idols is omitted]. When the priests of sin saw what the illustrious man had done, they arrested him and put him in bonds and brought him before the king: and they told the king what he had done to their gods. And the king said: "Did you not promise me to sacrifice to Apollo?"; the illustrious man says: "To me gods who deceive are no gods. Bring them to me here; and by the boast of the Christians I will not leave one of them till the evening that I will not break to pieces." The king says: "Did you not promise me to sacrifice to Apollo?" George says a second time: "Bring them to me here; and I for my part will sacrifice to them before you." The king says: "I for my part heard that you buried them in the abyss of Sheol alive; and now wherefore do you wheedle me?" And, when the king saw that he was mocking him, he ordered that he should go to prison 'till I consider by what death to put an end to him'.

Queen Alexandra

And, when the king came into his palace, he repeated to the queen all that he had done in prison. And the queen said to him: "O king, keep your hands off the bondman of the living God, and let him go where he wishes." The king says to her: "Be not deceived, queen Alexandra, nor be enticed into the error of the Christians; since they will not be able to escape from my hands until they worship my gods." The queen says: "Foul-smelling man and shedder of blood, most unrighteous of all man, if you seek to eat blood and flesh, receive your portion with that of your father Satan." Then the king ordered that she should be hanged on the wood and they should scrape her. But she while being scraped looked to heaven and said: "Have mercy on me, my Lord, because I sinned against thee, the hope of the Christians." And the king ordered George to come. And when he came and the queen saw him she cried and said: "O combatant (ἀθλητής) of Christ, give me the mark of baptism, that I too may enter Christ's mansion." George says to her: "Fear not, queen Alexandra, nor be afraid in the matter of baptism; for you may be baptized and cleaned in your blood." Then again the abominable man ordered them to take the blessed woman down from the stake, and flog her with new cords until her flesh should be torn by the flowing of her blood.

The next day the king sat on his judgement-seat and wrote in the book of the kingdom thus. "Hear me, kings of the earth, and multitude of people who surround me. Alexandra the queen, who deserted the gods and believed on him whom the Jews crucified in Jerusalem [rest of sentence missing]. Here therefore, all ye kings, because I am innocent of her blood." The same hour the abominable man commanded, and her sentence (ἀπόφασις) was given. And, while they were bringing the blessed woman out of her palace, and she was going along the street to be crowned for Christ's sake, she stood in the midst of the road, and cried with a loud voice and said: "Our Lord Jesus Christ, see that I am now leaving my palace for thy name's sake, and I did not shut my doors; and thou also, my Lord,

452

shut not the door in the face of thine handmaid." And she bowed her neck and was crowned, in the month of Nisan [April] on the eight of it (may her memory be for a blessing Amen!).

The Martyrdom of St. George

After these things the king called George and said to him: "Lo! You led the queen also astray, to destroy her out of this life. But now know that I will not endure your sorcery; but now also I grant your own petition [/sentence]." And the king lifted up his voice before all the peoples and said: "As for George the Christian initiate who would not sacrifice to Apollo, after all these tortures, I give a sentence (ἀπόφασις) against him of death. Know therefore, all ye kings, that this man chose death for himself; who for the long space of seven years refused to sacrifice to the gods. But from this time I give order that he be beheaded by the sword, and fear be aroused so that no man commit any presumptuous act against the gods." And, while they were holding the saint, the king ordered that he should go outside the city to the place where Alexandra the queen was crowned. Then the saint requested those who were leading him and said: "I pray you, my brethren, give me a little space to pray to God, for whose sake I am being sacrificed today, and to ask grace of him for myself, and for all sinners who are like me." These Romans say to him: "Pray as you wish." Then the blessed man looked to heaven; and he knelt and said thus: "Lord God, hear me because many are standing and seeking to take my body, and my body and bones are not sufficient for all the world, Lord God, grant me this petition that whoever shall be in torture or in fear or have a terrifying dream and remember my name shall have what is good, and evil hateful visions shall depart from him. Lord God, grant to my name and to my bones that everyone who shall be engaged in a dangerous lawsuit and remembers me shall come out of his suit without danger and without harm. Lord my God, grant me this favor, that when clouds are gathered together and men remember me in that country there shall not be there burning heat or hail. Lord God, bestow on me this favor that, whoever shall make mention of George or make an oblation and remember the day of his contest (ἀγών), there shall not be in his house one that is leprous, nor shall a stammerer and a blind man be born in it, nor one that is palsied and one that is blind, nor one that is driven by a demon; and mention not their sins, because thou art a merciful God, and remember that they are flesh and blood and have mercy on them for my name's sake." And the Lord spoke with him from a cloud, saying to him: "Come now, George, good and strenuous soldier [2 Tim 2:3], to the paradise of rest. Come rest from thy labor in the country of delights. But as to the favor that you asked of me, by myself I swear to thee that everyone who shall be in much distress and remembers my name and thine shall be delivered from all his distresses, and I will not mention their sins; for I am a God of the penitent." And, after the voice that spoke with him ceased, the holy George prayed again, and said: "Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of all the ages, send the fire which thou sentest in the days of Elijah the prophet, and it devoured the

453

captain of fifty and the fifty who were with him, and let it devour the kings who believed not in the signs which they saw done through me." And the same hour lightning came down from heaven like fire, and devoured the seventy kings, and not one of them escaped. But the blessed man looked to heaven, and made the seal of Christ on his face, and he was crowned by the sword, making a good confession. And in that same great contest (ἀγών) many perished, men and women without number from the terror of the lightning; and everyone believed in the living God. And the illustrious George the bondman of Christ was crowned on the twenty-third of the month of Nisan [April], on the preparation at the seventh hour.

Ending

And I Pasicrates, a bondman of the same Mar George, was attached to my lord, and wrote all these things from beginning to end.

The martyrdom of the illustrious George and those with him who were martyred and crowned in the days of Dadianus the king is ended.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and always, for ever and ever. Amen!