MAGICAL RHETORIC AND ANTI-WITCHCRAFT MOTIFS IN JEREMIAH: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS WITH THE MESOPOTAMIAN *MAQLÛ* RITUAL

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Abstract

Academic studies have investigated the rhetoric of Jeremiah from nearly every angle, yet despite meaningful progress, a notable lacuna remains: the ritualized rhetoric embedded in Jeremiah's oracles of doom, particularly its connections to Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft rituals, has received insufficient attention. This oversight persists amid a surge of interest in ritual references within ancient Near Eastern treaty-making, notably in Deuteronomy Studies. This dissertation addresses this lacuna by examining the book's "magical rhetoric," which, I argue, is discernible within Jeremiah's canonical framework. In an effort to elucidate how this rhetoric functions within Jeremiah's oracles, this study draws heavily on comparative analysis and weaves together linguistic analysis, form-critical and genre-based approaches, and theological interpretation to assess the influence of Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft traditions—particularly the first-millennium BCE Assyro-Babylonian *Maqlû* ceremony—on Jeremiah's oracles of doom. The analysis focuses on selected pericopes from Jeremiah 1–25 that emphasize curse motifs, bringing them into conversation with *Maqlû*. Building on this methodological foundation, I propose that the authors of Jeremiah intentionally employed magical rhetoric in response to the socio-political upheavals of their time and did so by infusing Jeremiah's oracles with ritual and incantatory dimensions. This combination of prophetic and incantatory language addressed and interacted with diverse audiences—spiritual and communal—on symbolic and spiritual levels, reflecting the redactor's use of ritualized magical rhetoric in the oracles of doom to depict Judah as fatefully ensnared in the deceptions of false prophets and corrupt religious and royal authorities. These imprecations, functioning as divine responses to covenantal breaches, draw heavily on the curses of Deuteronomy 28 (cf. Mastnjak 2016) to convey divine judgment while preserving a hallmark of the book of Jeremiah: the prospect of Israel's redemption. This study thus reconceptualizes Jeremiah's prophecy as not only a socio-religious commentary on Judah's decline in the 6th century BCE but also a performative and symbolic enactment of divine intent through magical rhetoric. Additionally, and perhaps tangentially, this dissertation situates itself within ongoing scholarly discussions on Deuteronomic theology in the prophetic corpus. By analyzing parallels between Jeremiah's curses and Deuteronomy 28, it traces how Jeremiah reinterpreted earlier legal and covenantal traditions and wove them into a broader prophetic narrative of Israel's fate, in the wake of the destruction of the first temple.

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List of Abbreviations

ÄAT	Ägypten und Altes Testament
ADT	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
AJEC	Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity
AJSL	*American Journal of Semitic Languages*
AMD	Ancient Magic and Divination
Ant.	Antiquities (Josephus)
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AOTC	Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
Biblica	*Biblica (Pontifical Biblical Institute)*
BIS	Biblical Interpretation Series
BR	*Biblical Research*
BSOAS	*Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CAD	Chicago Assyrian Dictionary
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CDL	CDL Press
CMAwR	Corpus of Mesopotamian Anti-Witchcraft Rituals
CTH	Catalogue des Textes Hittites
DSD	*Dead Sea Discoveries*
DSS	Dead Sea Scrolls
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FAT 2	Forschungen zum Alten Testament, Second Series
HALOT	The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament
HAR	*Hebrew Annual Review*
HBM	Hebrew Bible Monographs
HSS	Harvard Semitic Studies
Henoch	*Henoch: Journal of the History of Religions*
IVP	InterVarsity Press
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JHS	*Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
JSPSS	Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series
JSQ	*Jewish Studies Quarterly*
KTU^3	Keilschrifttexte aus Ugarit
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
PALMA	Papers on Archaeology of the Leiden Museum of Antiquities

RGRW	Religions in the Graeco-Roman World
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBL Press	Society of Biblical Literature Press
SHBC	Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary
STT	The Sultantepe Tablets I and II.
TDOT	Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament
TSAJ	Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum Supplements
WAW	Writings from the Ancient World
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

All abbreviations adhere to *The SBL Handbook of Style, Second Edition*. Quotations from the Hebrew Bible are sourced from *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. Unless otherwise specified, *NJPS* is used for all translations of the Hebrew texts.

INTRODUCTION

1. The Problem

Though scholars have scrutinized the rhetoric of the book of Jeremiah from just about every angle, one glaring gap persists: The ritualistic and incantatory language that threads through its oracles of doom.[1] This literary style—full of wordplays, metaphors, and allusions, what I call "magical rhetoric"—is crucial for grasping Jeremiah's role as what Heschel terms a "prophet of wrath."[2] More than that, it is key to understanding the bigger theological picture, the one that gives us the Jeremiah we know: A man "constantly exposed to the situation of God, and tirelessly attentive to the mood of the people, offering boldly the call, the challenge, and the warning, attempting to unravel the knots in the relationship between God and Israel."[3] This is, Heschel argues, the prophet's affliction "under the rod of His wrath."[4]

Jeremiah's language, however, does more than confront—it conjures. His "magical rhetoric" infuses his oracles with a ritualistic depth, mixing prophecy and incantation to shape a powerful theopolitical narrative.[5] This rhetoric refers to a specialized form of persuasive discourse that draws on ritual formulas, divine appellations, and figurative ritual language derived from or

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[1] Fishbane 1971.
[2] Heschel 1962: 106.
[3] Heschel 1962: 139.
[4] Heschel 1962: 139.
[5] As will become clearer throughout this study, our understanding of Jeremiah's rhetoric requires us to recognize that, as Lundbom points out, defying academic expectations and conventions, the book's discourse does not conform to traditional form-critical models but instead adheres to the principles of ancient Hebrew rhetoric, which makes frequent use of *inclusio*. Lundbom defines *inclusio* in the context of the book of Jeremiah as "repeated or balanced vocabulary or else a clear return of thought that brings about closure" (Lundbom 1997: XXXV–XXXVI). Through *inclusio*, the narrative "returns the audience to the point of beginning" (Lundbom 1997: XXXVI) often employing chiastic structures to establish boundaries and coherence. While form criticism allows us to identify discrete genres such as lawsuits, prophetic calls, or judgment oracles—I discuss this aspect more in detail in Chapters I and II—the book of Jeremiah seems to defy these conventions in its creative blending of genres for rhetorical impact (see my discussion in the subsection titled "Genre Intertextuality and Hermeneutical Challenges in Jeremiah" in the methodology in Chapter II). I think it is important to clarify at the outset of this research that the so-called "magical rhetoric" I have identified in a series of oracles of doom, especially in the first major division of the book (chapters 1–25), represents only *one* dimension of Jeremiah's complex rhetorical strategy. Far from a monolithic approach, the rhetorical complexity of the book of Jeremiah underscores its layered ideological message.

reminiscent of ritual-magical conventions to reinforce its authoritative edge and challenge existing socio-religious power structures. The concept of "magical rhetoric," which I explore more in the Methodology chapter, provides a crucial framework for understanding Jeremiah's prophetic language.

A notable instance of this rhetoric appears in the threefold invocation "land, land, land" (ארץ ארץ ארץ) in Jer 22:29. This call is set within Jeremiah's prophecy about Jehoiachin, Jehoiakim's young son, who briefly ruled at just eighteen years old. His reign lasted a mere three months, cut short by his surrender to the Babylonians during their siege of Jerusalem. This passage is often interpreted as an imploring incantation,[6] which lacks recognizable parallels within the biblical text, rendering its interpretation particularly challenging. Whether or not the ancient author meant for this passage to be seen as magical speech, two aspects stand out: first, the word "land" is repeated three times; second, the broader theological context of Jeremiah 22 with its scathing oracles of judgement against the kings of Judah suggests theurgic implications.[7] This oracle, as Milgrom describes, involves a כרת penalty, which implies human execution and divine eradication of a lineage, along with the loss of any afterlife (see Jer 22:24-30). These two rhetorical elements alone hint at a possible theurgic backdrop for this ominous oracle.[8] At a broader level, grasping the magical aspects of the language in Jeremiah—understanding the "puns and *Wortspielen*" of the magical words "found in omens and oracles," which, as Fishbane notes,[9] "typify the rhythm and force of incantations"—could provide fresh insights into the prophet's strong critique of false prophecy and its impact on Israel's relationship with God. This understanding might also highlight key theological themes in the

[6] Wezler and Hammerschmidt 1986: 467.
[7] Stulman 2005: 2011. The term "theurgic" in this context warrants further clarification. In her 2012 work *Invoking Angels: Theurgic Ideas and Practices, Thirteenth to Sixteenth Centuries*, Fanger explains that the Greek word *theurgy*, meaning "god work," was used in late antiquity philosophical texts in contrast to *theology*, or "god speech." Without going into the broader discourse on the term's usage, I refer readers to her analysis for a more comprehensive treatment, I wish to highlight in this parenthetical note an aspect of her discussion that is more pertinent to ours as Fanger points out that "Even in its original late antique context, the term 'theurgy' suffered from much the same kind of problematic construction as the word 'magic,' and the two words have always had somewhat overlapping semantic fields." In this analysis, I use the terms *theurgy* and *theurgic* in the way most modern scholars do, following Fanger's suggestion to treat them "very loosely as a rough and ready synonym for magic." I avoid imbuing these terms with more restrictive theological meanings, which, as Fanger observes, may refer to a "special branch of magic." See Fanger 2012: 15-16.
[8] See "The Penalty of 'Karet'" in excursus 36 in Milgrom 1990: 405-408.
[9] Fishbane 1971: 164.

book, including the complex issues of estrangement and reconciliation between God and the people of Israel.[10]

Aside from a 2022 study by Lewis that explores the parallels between Jeremiah's rhetoric and Assyro-Babylonian incantatory language,[11] the noticeable lack of comprehensive analyses of Jeremiah magical rhetorical features is especially felt within comparative frameworks. When used judiciously, these approaches may prove very fruitful. An example of a recent and successful comparative analysis is offered by Cranz's study of biblical priestly rituals of atonement and purification with their Assyro-Babylonian analogs, which she pursued in her 2017 volume *Atonement and Purification*.[12] In this research, she laid out a methodological strategy aimed at offering, in her words, "a contextual comparison of phenomena as they appear in different cultures […]."[13] Cranz employed a comparative methodological framework that integrates both a "contrastive" and "typological" perspective, the former to elucidate the distinctions between the sources, biblical and Mesopotamian, and the latter to facilitate cross-cultural comparisons between civilizations that, while historically disconnected, may have experienced some level of intellectual exchange, as she posits in the case of Levantine and Mesopotamian interactions. Cranz's comparative analysis not only examines rhetorical features similar to those found in the book of Jeremiah but also provides a framework that can be applied to explore them. Her investigation into the intellectual exchanges between Levantine and Mesopotamian cultures, coupled with an intertextual analysis of biblical texts alongside Mesopotamian literature, reveals a nuanced understanding of their similarities, differences, and possible influences. Along similar methodological foundations—detailed further in the Methodology chapter—my study analyzes the magico-rhetorical elements in Jeremiah and does so through a cross-cultural literary comparison with Levantine, Neo-Assyrian, and Neo-

[10] Stulman 2011: 48-52.
[11] Cf. Lewis 2022: 341-571. Tangentially, also Carver touches on aspects of magic associated with prophecy in his comparative analysis between Jeremianic and Mesopotamian material; 2023: 267–287.
[12] Cranz 2017. See also the most compelling contributions in this area of comparative studies emerged in past and recent scholarship: Fishbane 1971; Lewis 2006: 341-50; Hays 2011; Feder 2015: 1-26; Cranz 2016: 404–418; Cranz 2017; Ramos 2021; and Damsma 2021: 404-301; Hundley 2022: 1-41.
[13] Cranz 2017: 13.

Babylonian epigraphic sources, with a particular focus on the *Maqlû* series, the foremost Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft ritual from the first millennium BCE.[14]

Given the complexities of Jeremiah's rhetoric—exemplified by the prophet's speeches, which, as Lundbom observes, are "not controlled by fixed genre structures, i.e., letter, lawsuit, hymn, lament, judgment speech" [15]—this study adopts a multifaceted methodology to explore the "diachronic literary resonances" present in the texts analyzed herein.[16] These texts include passages from Jeremiah (1:7; 2:20; 7:13; 8:14; 9:15; 20:10; 22:18–19; 23:15; 25:15–18; 27–28) alongside comparative sources such as *Maqlû* I 61, I, ll. 56–57, I 103–104, sections from Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty (EST), and Ugaritic sources (i.e., KTU³ 1.169). The analysis focuses on literary topoi, thematic motifs, and specialized lexemes, employing a diverse array of methodologies, including socio-historical linguistic analysis, form-critical and genre-analytical approaches, and theological interpretation.

To illustrate the interaction between Jeremiah and Mesopotamian ritual-magical discourses, we can turn to the juridical framework of Assyro-Babylonian anti-witchcraft rituals,[17] which offers important parallels within Jeremiah, providing a comparative framework for interpreting the prophet's rhetorical techniques.

If we look at the already mentioned threefold invocation in Jer 22:29 ארץ ארץ ארץ and its potential parallel in the exorcist's invocation in *Maqlû* I, l. 37 "Netherworld, netherworld, yea netherworld" (*erṣetu erṣetu erṣetum-ma*),[18] we notice that in both cases, the repetition of the

[14] For the two most authoritative English-language critical editions of the *Maqlû* ritual, see Abusch 2015 and Schwemer 2017.

[15] It suffices to mention here Lundbom's 1997 masterful volume (see p. 147).

[16] See the Methodology chapter for a definition of the concept of diachronic literary resonances.

[17] On the legal context of *Maqlû*, see Abusch 2002: 1–34 (esp. 22–32). As for "lawcourt scenes" the book of Jeremiah, Newsom observes that, apart from the book of Job, there is only one other instance in which the concept of a plaintiff in a legal dispute with God appears, and this is Jer 12:1 in which Jeremiah explicitly employs legal language to position himself as the plaintiff and casts God in the role of the accused. See Newsom 2014: 246-259 (esp. 246).

[18] In the 1950s, Herrmann posited an intertextual relationship Jer 22:29 *Maqlû* (I, 37). This observation echoed Duhm's earlier assertion (1901) regarding the presence of incantatory expressions in Jeremiah. In *Maqlû* I, l. 37, the tripartite phrase appears within an incantation aimed at summoning the Sumerian epic hero Gilgamesh during the Neo-Assyrian anti-witchcraft ritual. McKane, in his critical exegetical commentary (1986) on the book of Jeremiah, supported Herrmann's conclusion, noting that Jeremiah frequently utilizes tripartite expressions in its oracles of doom (cf. Jer 7:4, which employs a similar rhetorical device) and suggesting a magico-ritual background for these expressions. As Craigie and others noted, "Repetitions are rather common in MT, but a threefold repetition is rare and probably intended as a striking emphasis." See Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard 1991: 322. In his

same word three times, a rhetorical device known as *epizeuxis*—aimed at emphasis—serves as a summons to witness in a legal hearing. This *epizeuxis* in Jeremiah also carries magical connotations thanks to its thematic contextualization.[19] Although an anti-witchcraft extended incantation, *Maqlû* uses terminology with dual religious and legal significance, particularly evident in the first tablet (*Maqlû* I, ll. 73-121), which describes adjudicatory proceedings against the witch in the divine courtroom.[20] The similarities between both texts, already noted by Abusch, allow us to explore their respective forensic motifs through their employment of shared rhetorical devices (*epizeuxis*) and settings. Holtz further emphasizes the legalistic aspects of the Jeremiah narrative, suggesting that biblical prophets play a dual function: as summoners in a court of justice, notifying the people of divine action instituted against them, and as intercessors repeating God's words as a summons to the people/defendant.[21] This function parallels that of the exorcist in *Maqlû*, who mediates between gods and men, performing ritual gestures and proclaiming the sacred words of the god Asalluḫi/Marduk during the exorcistic rite against witches. The judicial theme will be elaborated on later in this study, and the interested reader should refer to Chapters IV and V for a comprehensive exposition of the findings of this research. As demonstrated above, the concept of magical rhetoric provides a crucial framework for understanding the prophetic language of Jeremiah and, by examining specific examples, we can better appreciate how Jeremiah's discourse interacts with and draws upon Mesopotamian ritual-magical traditions.

analysis of the poetic use of language in Mesopotamian incantations, Veldhuis highlights the threefold introduction of the female demon *Lamaštu* in one incantation. This incantation, he explains, is embedded within a sophisticated linguistic framework characterized by both parallels and contrasts, especially evident in its syntactic structures that feature parallelism and rhyme (p. 42). Veldhuis further argues that the ritual context of an incantation significantly influences its poetic impact, noting that "The incantation text is only one element of a more complex magic ritual." See Veldhuis highlights the rhetorical role of literary devices such as parallelism, similes, chiasm, rhyme, and wordplay in incantations (p. 45). See Veldhuis 1999: 42 and 45.

[19] The repetition of the same word three times in this passage follows the central theme of the previous oracle of judgment against the king of Judah Jehoiachin (597-? BCE). Before Abusch, McKane made such a connection. See McKane 1986: 548.

[20] Abusch: 2014: 6-24.

[21] Holtz 2011: 29.

2. The Limitations

The hopes and goals I expressed thus far for this research do not obscure its many methodological challenges and limitations. Firstly, the assumption of "Mesopotamian influence" on biblical texts requires careful substantiation; although this study provides supporting evidence to underpin its exegetical interpretations of the texts, the nature and extent of this influence remain subjects of ongoing scholarly debate. Secondly, the significant chronological gap between the Jeremianic tradition (early sixth through the second century BCE) and the Mesopotamian sources (from the early tenth to the late seventh centuries BCE, including revisions of the *Maqlû* text) presents a hermeneutical challenge that we cannot resolve within the scope of this study. This temporal distance necessitates cautious interpretation and acknowledgment of potential historical or cultural anachronisms, such as failing to distinguish between features of Classical Biblical Hebrew (CBH) and Late Biblical Hebrew (LBH) in the linguistic analysis, a feature of the book's language thoroughly investigated by Hornkohl in his 2014 study *Ancient Hebrew Periodization and the Language of the Book of Jeremiah: The Case for a Sixth-Century Date of Composition*.[22] Thirdly, there is a risk of falling into what Sandmel famously called "parallelomania," which he framed as an overreliance on linguistic and thematic parallels between corpora that can lead to overstating the significance of similarities between Jeremiah and Mesopotamian texts.[23] To safeguard against facile equivalences, while taking Sandmel's judicious advice to heart "about exaggerations about the parallels and about source and derivation,"[24] my study employs a contextual analytical approach that weighs both convergences and divergences and situates them in their respective cultural and literary milieus. This translates, for example, into understanding historical-critical valences of ostensibly identical *termini technici* like the noun כשף, which is the Hebrew cognate of the Akkadian *kaššāpu* and Ugaritic *kšp*. Each of these terms must be understood within its historical ethnographic setting before being compared. Additionally, the concept of "magical rhetoric" requires an even more precise definition than the one supplied above to avoid ambiguity and facilitate clear analysis. In this context, Chapter III provides further guidance.

[22] Hornkohl 2014.
[23] Sandmel 1962: 1-13.
[24] Sandmel 1962: 1.

Finally, while specific examples are provided, expanding the range of textual evidence could further strengthen my argument. But, once again, the limited canvas size of this dissertation requires careful consideration of what to include, which explains why I focus my research on the literary resonances that I find most compelling and indicate new trajectories within active dialogues in Jeremiah Studies.

3. The Analysis

The following section outlines the dissertation's structure, introducing the principal themes and procedural frameworks employed in each chapter of this research. Chapter I introduces the textual and cultural contexts of the book of Jeremiah and *Maqlû* ritual, examining the history, structure, and socio-historical setting of Jeremiah alongside the legal and ritual framework of *Maqlû*. Chapter II develops a methodological framework for identifying intertextual resonances, using rhetorical, sociolinguistic, and form-critical approaches to uncover how Jeremiah's prophetic oracles engage with Mesopotamian magical traditions. Chapter III traces the intersection of magic and prophecy, looking at the evolving debates and the integration of magical elements in prophetic texts. Chapter IV draws thematic parallels between the portrayal of false prophets in Jeremiah and witches in the *Maqlû* ritual, arguing that both texts use similar motifs of oaths and curses to uphold social and divine order. Chapters V and VI, the core of the dissertation, engage in detailed lexical and thematic analyses, highlighting how Jeremiah's prophetic language aligns with magical terminology and rituals, such as the exorcist's commission and the use of curses, and exploring the theological implications of these parallels. The dissertation concludes with a discussion of the theological and rhetorical implications of these intertextual connections, suggesting that the author of Jeremiah may have intentionally drawn on Mesopotamian magical traditions to frame Yahweh's prophetic role and the divine-human relationship in new ways.

4. Preliminary Findings

Below, I offer a more detailed summary of each chapter, highlighting some of the key arguments. For a fuller understanding of the dissertation's findings in Chapters V and VI, however, I encourage readers to refer to the dissertation's concluding section.

Chapter I: The Book of Jeremiah and the Maqlû Ritual

Chapter I offers an overview of both the book of Jeremiah and the *Maqlû* ritual through an analysis of their specific textual and cultural contexts. It first looks at Jeremiah's textual history and structure, delving into its macro-organization, rhetorical strategies, and layers of literary development. The discussion in this chapter engages with recent debates on the evolution of the Jeremianic tradition; it particularly looks at the difficult and fraught relationship between the Masoretic Text (MT) and the Septuagint (LXX), as well as the two key Qumran textual witnesses. The chapter also places the book of Jeremiah within its historical context via a two-pronged assessment: exploring the socio-cultural dynamics of the late pre-exilic, exilic, and early post-exilic periods. It addresses text-critical and hermeneutical questions surrounding the manuscript tradition and the processes of the book's formation and transmission. The second section shifts focus to the *Maqlû* ritual. Here, the discussion provides an overview of the ceremony's legal and judicial framework, one in which witches—often depicted as female demonic figures—pose a threat to cosmic order. In so doing, this chapter sets the stage for our understanding of the complex literary and interpretive challenges of the book of Jeremiah. We can think in this case of the role of mantic and magic discourse in the composition and adaptation of the text within the prophetic literary tradition.

Chapter II: Methodology

Chapter II presents an integrated methodological framework for examining the allusions of Jeremiah to the Mesopotamian incantation literature. This chapter elaborates on the rhetorical-critical and audience-oriented exegesis, which facilitates the analysis of Jeremiah's oracles, identifies the intended audience, and scrutinizes the rhetorical strategies put in place in the quasi-performative utterances of the prophet. It also employs cross-cultural literary comparison to discern allusions (and intertextual markers), motifs, and specialized terminology in Jeremiah and Mesopotamian magical texts. This section also introduces us to sociolinguistic analysis and form-critical approaches to investigate the rhetorical function of specific linguistic registers within the text and its historical context while also identifying and comparing genre

markers and literary typologies between Jeremiah and Mesopotamian texts. As part of a broader intertextual approach that discusses how Jeremiah's text alludes to, adapts, and absorbs into its rhetoric (through cultural integration?) elements from Mesopotamian magical traditions, this chapter also expounds on the use of historical-philological analysis and theological-rhetorical exegesis, especially in the dissertation conclusion. These methods help to explain how the lexical-semantic networks between Jeremiah's metaphorical constructs and imagery and that of Mesopotamian magical texts inform the book's theological message, particularly concerning Yahweh's covenant theology and framing of the divine-human relationship with Israel.[25]

Chapter III: Deconstructing Ideological Biases and Theological Assumptions in Biblical Narratives

Chapter III explores the intersection of magic and prophecy in the book of Jeremiah, tracing the shifting debates and the historical resistance to magical readings of biblical texts. It begins by examining Deuteronomy's critique of magic, illustrating how *foreign* magical traditions shaped Israelite practices and influenced biblical prohibitions.[26] The discussion then expands to

[25] I use "theology" to refer specifically to the religious ideas and linguistic expressions articulated by the Deuteronomic redactors of the book of Jeremiah. This understanding aligns with Mastnjak's 2016 study, which, in my opinion, convincingly demonstrates the DtrJ redactors' profound dependence on Deuteronomic tradition. Brueggemann also engages theology in connection with the book of Deuteronomy, describing it as an "uncompromising theology of blessing and curse" (Brueggemann 2007: 138) in his seminal 2007 volume, *The Theology of the Book of Jeremiah*. Notably, Brueggemann appears to eschew the term "ideology" in discussions of Judah's royal elites, opting instead for the designation "royal theology" to underscore the "voices of Israelite hope" embedded within the text. He thus underscores his view that Jeremianic discourse is fundamentally religious and, therefore, theological in nature. Similarly, Seitz employs the concept of theology to explore the conflicting religious (political) and diasporic dimensions emerging from the book of Jeremiah. For reference, see Brueggemann 2007 and Christopher R. Seitz, *Theology in Conflict: Reactions to the Exile in the Book of Jeremiah* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989). I also mention a "Mesopotamian theology" on pages 77 and 263. The term "theology," particularly in its application to ritual texts—as I demonstrate in my analysis of the *Maqlû* ceremony—better aligns with the focus of my dissertation than "ideology." This is because "theology" is more specifically concerned with religious ideas, whereas "ideology" encompasses a broader spectrum of social and political concepts that, in the context of my research, may be viewed as outside the primary scope. In both cases, whether I use theology or ideology in the context of my sources, the issue of potential "anachronisms," imposing contemporary frameworks to ancient texts, remains important to consider.

[26] While this problem will be explored in greater detail in Chapter III, I would like to briefly highlight here that the Deuteronomic perspective on rituals departing from traditional Yahwistic practices viewed them as not only "foreign" intended as "alien to" that tradition, but also as genuinely "foreign" to Israelite religious culture. The book of Jeremiah, which closely reflects the Deuteronomic tradition, underscores this notion of foreignness in

cover the evolution of magical interpretations within biblical scholarship, including a thorough exploration of the word "magic" and its changing connotations over time. The chapter places particular emphasis on how prophetic language in Jeremiah has been interpreted in relation to ancient magical practices, drawing on the work of scholars such as Hutton, Schmidt, Fishbane, and Adcock, who suggest that prophecy and magic share common features, especially in their use of language, to shape reality. This section also explores how magical elements have been integrated into the prophetic tradition, sparking renewed interest in the complex relationship between the two.

Chapter IV: The Enemy Within: Witches and False Prophets as Symbolic Universal Enemies in Mesopotamian and Biblical Tradition

Chapter IV begins with an examination of the Babylonian *Maqlû* ritual and looks at Abusch's theory, according to which witches in Mesopotamian society were perceived as dangerous disruptors of both social and cosmic order, a view that the author argues evolved in Assyrian thought to depict them as semi-demonic beings. The central argument I make in this chapter is that Abusch's hypothesized conceptual shift resonates with the portrayal of false prophets (and other enemies) in the book of Jeremiah, who are similarly condemned for undermining societal stability and divine harmony. Quite correctly in my view, Abusch further ties these notions to the *māmītu* oath, a social pact that imposed severe penalties for betrayal, echoing Jeremiah's harsh critiques of idolatry and apostasy. Both Mesopotamian and Israelite cultures utilized the "public enemy" paradigm to address concerns of rebellion and enforcing loyalty through oaths and curses to preserve both social cohesion and divine authority. As shown in this chapter, the influence of Neo-Assyrian legal traditions on Israelite views of loyalty and punishment is particularly evident in the structural and thematic parallels between Assyrian treaties and biblical laws, both of which stressed loyalty and retribution for betrayal. These shared elements underscore the crucial role that oaths and curses played in ensuring societal stability, with false

Israelite culture, particularly through its polemics against the foreign ("exotic") cult of the "Queen of Heaven." This cult found a cultural space within Israelite religious practices as attested in Jeremiah 7:18 and 44:17-25.

prophets in Jeremiah cast as subversive elements threatening the integrity of the divine covenant.

Chapters V and VI, which constitute the core of this research, reflect current trends in biblical studies, particularly in comparative ancient Near Eastern studies. Both chapters combine close textual analysis with broader socio-historical contextualization to situate Jeremiah's prophetic role and message within its ancient cultural setting. These two chapters are organized into thematic clusters. This approach allows for a flexible and iterative process of identifying patterns and themes within the literary data set. In this chapter, I have woven together a diverse range of methodological strategies—diachronic comparative analysis, inner-biblical exegesis, rhetorical criticism, historical linguistics, and semantic field theory—to support my exegetical examination of the Jeremiah pericopes.

Chapter V: Themes of Divine Courtroom Drama in the Book of Jeremiah and Maqlû

Introduction

Chapter V presents three studies exploring diverse aspects of Jeremiah's magico-rhetorical discourse. The first study examines the many-sided nature of Jeremiah's prophetic commission by comparing Yahweh's directive in Jer 1:7b with the exorcist's commission in the first tablet of *Maqlû*. While inner-biblical exegesis proves inadequate in elucidating the parallel verbal sequence "to go," "to send," "to speak," and "to command" in Jeremiah 7, comparative analysis with the Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft ritual series reveals significant thematic correspondences, suggesting a potential intertextual relationship. This analysis demonstrates that Jeremiah's call narrative transcends the conventional prophetic role as divine intercessor, incorporating a performative, quasi-magical dimension more characteristic of a Mesopotamian *āšipu*-exorcist. This expansive understanding of Jeremiah's prophetic vocation imbues the text with layers of ritual significance.

The exegetical significance of Jer 1:7 becomes even more pronounced when considered alongside the verbal sequence in Jer 7:13b: "to speak," "not to listen," "to call," "not to answer." This sequence demonstrates structural and semantic parallels at the clause level with *Maqlû* I, lines 56–57. The Mesopotamian text, rather similarly, juxtaposes these verbal pairs

antithetically—speak/listen, call/answer—to depict the ritual practitioner, the *āšipu*, petitioning the goddess *Bēlet-ṣēri*. In Jeremiah 7:13b, these thematic elements appear recontextualized within the framework of Yahwistic theology, presenting a more humanized and empathetic image of Yahweh. Here, Yahweh is portrayed as a lover striving to restore the covenantal or marital bond once shared with Israel. The intertextual resonance between these texts suggests an intentional rhetorical strategy by the biblical author to situate Yahweh's actions within a ritual-magical context, one that would have resonated with his/her audience. In Chapter V, I delve further into the comparative analysis by investigating the lexical-semantic interplay between Biblical Hebrew and other Northwest Semitic languages. This includes a close examination of technical magical lexemes within biblical and extra-biblical contexts with the analysis of the lexical-semantic parallel between the term דבה in the phrase דבת רבים ("the slander of many," Jer 20:10) and Mesopotamian apotropaic formulas. This analysis appears in the essay titled "'The Whispering of Many': On the Demonization of Jeremiah by His Opponents in Jer 20:10," which is an excerpt from an article I co-authored with Professor Carl S. Ehrlich (York University, Canada), forthcoming in *The Cambridge Handbook of Historical Biblical Exegesis*, edited by Stanley E. Porter and David Fuller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). This linguistic parallel affords us a fresh exegetical understanding of the passage when considering the slanderous accusations leveled against Jeremiah by his adversaries. The study explores this correlation further by looking at the broader context of the Proto-Semitic lexeme **dbb*, which features prominently in Ugaritic incantations designed to counteract malevolent magic.

Chapter VI: Themes of Divine Judgment, Purification, and Universal Enmity in Mesopotamian and Biblical Traditions

The multi-level approach that combines different methodologies continues in Chapter VI as mentioned above, through lexical-semantic investigations of figurative language, along with thematic analyses of specialized Jeremianic motifs that find parallels in the Mesopotamian magic tradition. The first theme addressed in this chapter centers on the image of the cursed drink, a motif previously alluded to in Jeremiah 25 with the mention of the poisonous drink God gives to the Israelites. Utilizing lexical-semantic analysis, the opening section focuses on the

expression “poisonous water” (מי-ראש) in Jer 8:14. This phrase appears three times in Jeremiah (8:14, 9:15, and 23:15), consistently in execratory contexts, and the comparative literary analysis reveals that מי-ראש may function similarly to the Akkadian phrase *mê kaššāpūti* (“bewitched water”) found in Assyrian anti-witchcraft rituals. In these rituals, administering a poisonous drink symbolized the lifting of a curse, as the sorcerous potion given to the wrongdoer was believed to return the evil they had intended for their victim. This analysis sheds new light on a well-known yet complex biblical trope, particularly for its potential cross-reference to extra-biblical magical traditions. Viewed through a redaction-critical lens, this Assyrian motif seems to reverberate within the book of Jeremiah as a means of articulating a theological critique of false prophecy.

In this chapter, the discussion shifts to a comparative analysis of the thematic and lexical links identified between Jeremiah and *Maqlû*. The section titled “He Shall Be Buried with the Burial of a Donkey,” currently under revision for resubmission to the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, explores the complex motif of the non-burial of King Jehoiakim in Jer 22:18-19. Building on Mansen’s study, *The Unremembered Dead*, which investigates the non-burial motif in the Hebrew Bible within its ancient Near Eastern context, I apply comparative literary and cultural-historical approaches, suggesting that the most persuasive interpretive clues for this enigmatic incident in Jeremiah are found once again in *Maqlû*, specifically in a section describing the execution and non-burial of guilty witches, which involves their banishment into the wilderness. I argue in this essay that the author of Jer 22:18-19 repurposed this literary motif to portray Jehoiakim as a social enemy and to emphasize, contextually, his perpetual exile from the Israelite community. This multi-pronged methodological approach facilitates a more comprehensive analysis of Jer 22:18-19, providing a fresh lens through which to view this fascinating episode.

The motif of cursing through ingestion of liquids is reprised in the controversial depiction of the cup of divine retribution in Jer 25:15-18 and 27-28, which has frequently sparked intense theological debates. I analyze this pericope in the essay titled “Drink, Be Drunk and Vomit, Fall and Rise No More,” which I recently published in the *Journal for the Study of the Old*

Testament.[27] While intra-biblical analyses have led to different interpretations of its meaning, my comparative literary analysis reveals that the setting of the Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft tradition offers compelling insights. Among other texts, in this analysis, I examine a 7th-century BCE Assyrian incantation prayer included in a purification ritual for the patient's social reintegration. This text attributes the patient's vomiting and staggering to a poisoned drink and diagnoses his curse as the result of the wrath of his gods. As I show in this section (Jer 25:15-18 and 27-28) may have used the Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft trope of cursing through drinking to complete Yahweh's destruction of Judah. The author of Jeremiah may have used this metaphorical imagery to depict Yahweh as an exorcist: by counter-cursing the leaders of Judah, Yahweh forces them to drink the same poisonous substance they had poured out on the nation through their apostasy.

Chapter VI concludes with a lexical-semantic analysis of the Hebrew word קלה ("to burn") found in the so-called "letter to the exiles" in Jer 29:22, which may reference once more the Mesopotamian *Maqlû* ritual. Through an integrated exegetical approach combining differing methodologies, I propose that the employment of this rare verb in the book of Jeremiah functions to characterize false prophets within the rhetorical framework of the "public enemy" paradigm. This interpretation is further supported by intertextual comparison with *Maqlû*. The conclusions in Chapter VII bring the dissertation to a close, offering concluding remarks on the lexical-semantic features of the book of Jeremiah, its literary and rhetorical structures, and theological motifs along with their development within the Jeremiah prophetic corpus.

5. The Significance

Previous scholarship has extensively explored Jeremiah's historical context and literary features, not least the expansive volume edited by Stulman and Silver, *The Oxford Handbook of Jeremiah* (2021).[28] Yet the specific connections to Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft rituals have remained largely unexplored, except for rare forays into the role of ritual in ancient Near Eastern treaty-making, which has increasingly become a promising focus of scholarly gaze in

[27] Conti 2024: 3-22.
[28] Stulman and Silver 2021.

recent years. Melissa Ramos's 2021 volume *Ritual in Deuteronomy* comes to mind in this case.[29] In this research, she adopts a broader comparative synchronic approach vis-à-vis Mesopotamian sources, examining Deuteronomy's ritual covenants and curses by drawing on perspectives from religious studies and anthropology. With the examination of the intertextual and interdiscursive relationships between Jeremiah and the Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft texts, my research achieves two goals: it sheds new light on the composition and rhetoric of Jeremiah, while also offering fresh insights into the broader cultural exchanges between Judahite and Mesopotamian traditions. Furthermore, this study has implications for our understanding of the development of monotheism in ancient Israel and the ways biblical authors engaged with and transformed surrounding cultural practices. As such, it contributes to ongoing discussions about the formation of the Hebrew Bible and the complex interplay between Israelite religion and its ancient Near Eastern context.

[29] Ramos 2021.

CHAPTER I

The Book of Jeremiah and the *Maqlû* Ritual

As outlined in the introduction, this dissertation investigates the rhetorical and linguistic connections between the book of Jeremiah and the cursing rhetoric of the Mesopotamian *Maqlû* ritual, using a framework I term magical rhetoric, which I elaborate on in Chapter II's methodological discussion. Given the aims of this research, it is essential to engage with the compositional and developmental processes of both texts for several key reasons. One of the research's inherent limitations is the historical and textual distance between the *Maqlû* corpus and the book of Jeremiah, as well as their distinct trajectories of textual evolution. The *Maqlû* ritual expanded over time from a shorter composition into a more elaborate and complex liturgical sequence. In its present form, *Maqlû* consists of eight tablets, containing nearly one hundred incantations (I–VIII), as well as a ritual tablet, which provides ritual instructions for each incantation. Similarly, the book of Jeremiah underwent significant redaction and expansion, resulting in a text that reflects multiple layers of historical and theological development. Accounting for these processes is critical to distinguishing genuine connections from later additions or interpolations in each text. The cultural and religious significance of these works demands attention: The *Maqlû* ritual held an influential role within a broader textual and ritualistic framework, in contrast, the prophecies of Jeremiah held significant religious and political weight in sixth-century Judah—and likely within the Babylonian diaspora—as they engaged with themes of divine judgment and covenantal fidelity. We need to understand the rhetorical strategies employed in these texts within the specific cultural contexts in which they emerged, which includes considering their intended audiences, as they shaped the dynamics that influenced their rhetorical goals. The *Maqlû* ritual was performed primarily for elite male clients to counteract perceived witchcraft. As Abusch argues, female practitioners of magic tended to be demonized vis-à-vis their male counterparts working for the palace. The book of Jeremiah, by contrast, addresses a broader spectrum of religious enemies, including priests, false prophets, and potentially the general populace, reflecting the authors'

diverse social and religious concerns. As a final methodological note, I would like to highlight that both texts exhibit structural and thematic elements—such as ritual actions, themes of divine judgment, and symbolic representations—that uniquely shape their linguistic features within the context of their compositional processes. This presentation provides for us an invaluable lens through which we can discern meaningful parallels between the corpora but also distinctions, which offer insights into how each text employs rhetoric to fulfill its cultural objectives.

In this chapter I wish to provide for the reader a two-pronged overview of the two major sources that I will explore in this dissertation: the book of Jeremiah and the *Maqlû* ritual. Accordingly, I will first focus on the textual history and structure of the book of Jeremiah, and I will do so through an exploration of what I have identified as the key scholarly debates about its manuscript tradition in light of the evolving nature of its textual configuration, which we will see is particularly complex. In the second half of the chapter, I will pivot to an exploration of the *Maqlû* ritual and will especially highlight the aspects that concern its fictional legal and judicial framework, which is an imagined literary space where witches—often depicted as demonic female figures—emerge as the most powerful threat to the fabric of cosmic order as it was envisioned in the ancient Mesopotamian culture of the first millennium BCE. The opening section titled "Textual History and Structure of the Book of Jeremiah" explores the Jeremiah textual tradition and addresses the central debates about its manuscript history. I offer below a somewhat wide-ranging outline of recent interpretative developments in the Jeremiah field. As it will be apparent, I will pay special attention to the ongoing discussion about the evolution of the textual tradition of the book with regard to differences and similarities that scholars have identified between the presumed *Vorlage* of the Septuagint, the Qumranic witnesses, and the Masoretic version of the text of Jeremiah.

In the second section, titled "The Historical and Cultural Context of the Book of Jeremiah," I will provide an overview of the historical circumstances of the book, situating the text within the broader context of the Eastern Mediterranean and Mesopotamia during the late 7th and early 6th centuries BCE, which were crucial years in the history of the ancient Near East as a whole. In this section I also explore the central theological debates revolving around the figure

of the prophet Jeremiah and his Judahite community during the final years of the Judean monarchy and the end of the Davidic line, which sets in motion the traumatic experience of the Judahite exile and diaspora in Babylonia. This sea of change is set against the backdrop of geopolitical tensions between Babylonian and Egyptian powers.

The final section of this chapter, titled "The *Maqlû* Ritual," looks at the *Maqlû* ritual—the most complete, longest, and complex Assyro-Babylonian anti-witchcraft ceremony of the first millennium BCE—designed to counteract malevolent sorcery through a series of approximately one hundred seemingly unconnected incantations and rituals unfolding in three stages: the judgment and banishment of the witch, fumigation to protect the afflicted individual, complete with a dawn cleansing ritual that purges the victim and symbolically rebounds harm onto the witch, the curse's originator. As we will see, the ritual follows a distinctly judicial framework, with incantations that cast the proceedings as a courtroom drama. On this theatrical stage, the witch stands accused, detained, and sentenced. At the helm is the *āšipu*, a Mesopotamian ritual expert, whose invocations summon divine forces to drive out the agents of witchcraft away from the community of the afflicted. Often cast as demonic and typically female, the witch emerges in *Maqlû* as an antisocial, chaotic figure, a threat to the cosmic harmony willed by the gods. As we will see, this portrayal leans into a gendered stereotype, where the female witch's malevolent magic inflicts suffering from the shadows, deepening the cultural association of women with sorcery in ancient Mesopotamian society.

Overview of the book of Jeremiah

1.1 Textual History and Structure of the Book of Jeremiah

Students of the book of Jeremiah are likely familiar with its two primary ancient versions: The Greek Septuagint (LXX) and the Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT), with the Septuagint version that is famously shorter than the Masoretic by about one-sixth to one-eighth. Rofé highlights that "The Church fathers Origenes and Hieronymous had already perceived that the Greek translation (LXX) of the book of Jeremiah is shorter than the accepted Hebrew text (MT)."[1] Rofé

[1] Rofé 2021: 114.

further notes that the brevity of the Greek version cannot simply be chalked up to the translator's choices. Instead, he points to external evidence suggesting that the translator was likely working from a shorter source text, an assumed *Vorlage*, as indicated by findings from the Qumran caves, specifically the manuscripts 4QJer^{b} and 4QJer^{d}.

Core Questions of Textual Relationship

The longstanding debate surrounding these two versions boils down to one core question: What is their relationship? Is the shorter Greek version older than the longer Hebrew one? If so, why? What caused the Hebrew version to grow while the Greek version stayed relatively stable? And how does the hypothesized Hebrew *Vorlage* of the Greek text connect to the Qumran discoveries? Most contemporary scholars, particularly Tov and Stipp, lean toward a theory of gradual development. They argue that the Masoretic text grew through layers of elaboration and expansion on a shorter version, which, they suggest, preserves the older "strata" of the text. A more "I beg to differ" understanding of this relationship is provided by Rofé who notes that "the formation of the biblical books is a complex process. At times biblical works were expanded, at times abridged,"[2] adding that "There is no lack of abridgments in ancient Near Eastern literature."[3]

Structural and Linguistic Disparities

Offering further insight into how these differences shape our understanding of the Jeremiah tradition and building on this understanding of textual variations, Stipp explores the structural and linguistic disparities between the Greek and Masoretic texts. While he acknowledges the significant differences in length between the Greek version of Jeremiah (JerG) and the Masoretic Text (JerMT), he pays close attention to the differences in their structures, with regard, in particular, to the placement of the Oracles against the Nations (OAN). These oracles are nestled in the middle of the book in JerG, between Jeremiah 25:13 and 15 according to the received Masoretic order. JerMT, on the other hand, places the OAN toward the end, covering

[2] Rofé 2021: 115.
[3] Rofé 2021: 115.

chapters 46-51. Additionally, JerMT presents several "pluses," or extra content, that famously do not have corresponding passages in the Greek text, further emphasizing the textual variations between the two versions.

The Nature of Textual Changes according to Stipp

The Masoretic "pluses" are marked by a distinctive style, featuring phrases that reflect the book's unique "Deutero-Jeremianic" formulaic language. These additions often repeat passages found elsewhere in the text, including a variety of names, patronymics, titles, and expletives.[4] Tov observes that the shorter length of JerG compared to JerMT can be attributed to a more concise Hebrew text. This is evident in the relatively literal translation style used in JerG whenever the two texts align, indicating that the translator likely did not set out to shorten the Hebrew source they had available.[5] Ulrich described these expansions in JerMT as being dispersed throughout the text, with their insertion following a method that involves the reorganization of pre-existing material along with additions. This process does not represent a comprehensive harmonization but rather a gradual and consistent minimal "explicitation," clarification, and similar modifications.[6] To account for the discrepancies in length and content between JerG and JerMT, scholars have debated whether the JerG translator intentionally omitted portions of his *Vorlage*, deeming the additional material redundant, or if he was working from an earlier edition of the text than that used for the JerMT. The discovery of two notable fragments at Qumran, 4Q71 and 4Q72[a], which were published by Janzen in 1973 and contain passages from Jer 9:22–10:21 and 43:2–10, respectively, offers formulations that closely resemble the JerG version. As Stipp observes, "These discoveries have clarified at least this much: the deviations in JerG* do not usually go back to the translator, but were found already in his *Vorlage*."[7] At the terminological level, without engaging with Tov's distinction between editions—which implies a chronological precedence and a special status that cannot be substantiated—Stipp defines the textual type represented by JerG, its *Vorlage*, and the

[4] Stipp 2021: 103.
[5] Tov 1985: 363).
[6] Ulrich 1999: 69.
[7] Stipp 2021: 94.

aforementioned Qumran fragments as JerAlT (or "Alexandrian book of Jeremiah," according to Stipp), consistent with Tov's understanding. Like others, he locates JerG's origins in the Egyptian diaspora, particularly centered in Alexandria, though not exclusively, as evidenced by the Qumran findings. Stipp, therefore, appears to move away from Tov's nomenclature, which designates the JerG text and the related Qumran fragments as the "short version" or Edition I, in contrast to the "long version" or Edition II, represented by the MT version.[8] Stipp pushes back against the notion of an "original text" for the book of Jeremiah, arguing that the concept of an Urtext does not hold up given the text's complex developmental history. For him, what he labels as JerAlT must not be intended as the book's first edition.

It should be noted that the difference in length between the two textual traditions does not conclusively prove that JerG came before JerMT. Stipp argues that the earlier authors of the Hebrew textual tradition might have intentionally condensed the text. According to Stipp, internal textual differences between the two versions strongly indicate that the JerMT text continued to evolve beyond the Greek translation and its *Vorlage*. For instance, certain additions in JerMT appear to be inconsistent with their contexts, suggesting they were inserted later. However, Stipp considers the strongest evidence of the predominantly secondary nature of the Masoretic *Sondergut* (or "special material" in the text) to be found in the pre-Masoretic idiolect. As he elaborates: "the particular makeup of the *Sondergut* results neither from accidental nor systematic concision, the corpus in general must have resulted from *Fortschreibung* (scribal expansions upon prior literary material), appended by a small number of editors whose idiolect (individual style) it represents."[9] Stipp argues persuasively for prioritizing the JerAlT arrangement, emphasizing that while JerMT could have developed from JerAlT, the reverse is unlikely. His reasoning centers on the placement of the oracles against the nations (OANs). In JerAlT, attested by both the Septuagint (JerG) and Qumran fragments, these oracles appear in the book's center. By contrast, JerMT rearranges them, using Jeremiah 25:9-26 as a structural hinge to organize the subsequent sections: Judah and Jerusalem's growing crisis (chapters 26–45), followed by the oracles against foreign nations.[10]

[8] Stipp 2021: 96-97; Tov 1985: 364.
[9] Stipp 2021: 98.
[10] Stipp 2021: 100-102.

Rofé's Editorial Perspective

While Stipp offers persuasive arguments regarding the relationship between the JerG and JerMT textual traditions, Rofé offers a nuanced perspective that highlights the complexity of their editorial choices. He emphasizes that the variations between the two editions are not merely the result of linear development but reflect a range of editorial decisions that can lead to different outcomes for the texts. As he articulates, "At times, the longer text is primary, while the shorter submits a curtailment; elsewhere, the shorter text was the first and the longer one represents an expansion thereof."[11] This suggests that the dynamics of textual transmission involve more than just the evolution of one version from another; they also include a rich interplay of copying errors, literary enhancements, and the influences of theological or sociopolitical motivations. Rofé's observation that "a cozy solution would be obtained, if we found one single explanation to all the divergences between the two texts" underlines the challenges inherent in establishing a definitive lineage for the textual variations.[12]

Divergent Theories on Translation

Tov pushes back against Rofé's position, arguing, "The LXX is a translation, and the translator may have shortened his parent text and changed the sequence of translation units, in which case the LXX has no bearing on a deviating Hebrew Vorlage."[13] He further points out that, given the relatively literal style of the Greek Jeremiah, it is unlikely the translator would have made extensive cuts or significant shifts in the text's structure. He backs up his thesis by citing Fischer, who also attributes the differences in JerG from JerMT—particularly the shorter passages—to the translator's creative license. Tov asserts that "this translator freely shortened the text and changed the sequence of its chapters (in chapter 25), while the text of MT remains preferable."[14] Rofé, on the other hand, argues that the complexities of the Greek version arise

[11] Rofé 2021: 128.
[12] Rofé 2021: 128.
[13] Tov 2021: 129.
[14] Tov 2021: 133.

from the translator's use of a shorter *Vorlage*, his tendency to abbreviate and rearrange, and even occasional errors. If, as Rofé suggests, the LXX translator took liberties to add or cut sections from a larger *Vorlage*—possibly like the MT we have today—how do we then explain the parallel brevity seen in the Qumran texts, which show comparable omissions and perhaps even ideological motivations? This similarity suggests the two editions may have emerged in proximity, given their shared material.

Tov's Two-Layer Theory

Tov, leaning away from the standard "two-edition" view, proposes "a more neutral term, the 'two-layer theory,' even though the present author continues to believe in the assumption of two different editions." As Tov points out, "as the LXX occasionally presents a longer text than MT, the latter could not have been based on LXX-Jer but on a very similar text. There were probably several intervening stages between the texts now known from LXX-Jer and MT-Jer."[15] For him, the two editions likely developed in the same geographic area as they share, as it were, a genetic link. Essentially, Tov's view of Jeremiah's editions as "layers" seems a reinterpretation of Mowinckel's source analysis.[16] Mowinckel breaks down Jeremiah's text as a tapestry woven from distinct literary layers. He identifies the prophet's original words as "stratum A," layered with a biographical "stratum B," and later additions in a Deuteronomistic style. He also suggests a possible Deuteronomistic reviser, whom he calls "C." Tov sees the first layer, edition I, as "the end product of several stages of redaction," reflected in the common data of the LXX and MT.

Tov sheds light on the subjective nature of the changes—both omissions and additions—found in the different versions of Jeremiah by drawing a distinction between two types of scribes: scribe-authors and scribe-copyists. He argues that "the former type of scribes took great liberty with the text and added and deleted small and large elements (verses, small and medium-sized segments), some of them of an editorial nature."[17] These scribe-authors are described as exegetes who "were full participants in the creation of the literary composition."

[15] Tov 2021: 134.
[16] Mowinckel 1914.
[17] Tov 2021: 138.

The active role of scribe-authors in shaping the text through creative liberties in Tov's understanding finds further elucidation in McKane's explanation of such textual fluidity that allows for continuous reinterpretation and expansion of the Jeremianic narrative. Following an axiomatic principle according to which poetry generates prose and prose, in turn, generates additional prose, McKane uses the notion of a "rolling corpus" to try to make sense of the textual inconsistencies of the Jeremianic narrative. He explains the "rolling corpus" as an exegetical exposition or commentary that "is triggered by a verse or a few verses of a pre-existing text."[18] For the author, this editorial *modus operandi* is at the base of the expansion of the Jeremianic text. The expansion of the text, however, should not be ascribed to the hand of the prophet Jeremiah but should be attributed to the work of traditionists who contributed to the growth of the Jeremianic corpus over a long period of time. In contrast to the work of a scribe-author, Tov views the scribe-copyist as someone whose primary role is to replicate the text as accurately as possible, occasionally making minor adjustments and adding a few exegetical notes along the way.

Tov quite efficiently breaks down the interventions in edition II into two main categories in his analysis. The first group that focuses on editorial aspects comprises various changes: the addition of headings to prophecies, repetitive sections, new verses and details, and even instances of free rewriting. The second group on exegetical aspects includes clarifications and harmonizing additions, such as, for example, personal names and contextual enhancements, as well as amplified formulas. Tov notes that while both types of scribes could have contributed to the exegetical interventions, the editorial changes were likely the work of a scribe-author. As Tov succinctly puts it, "Edition II thus inserted many major and minor changes, both in the editing and rearranging of the material and in its clarification."[19] While Tov's analysis highlights the roles of various types of scribes in shaping the textual history of Jeremiah, Hornkohl's examination of the linguistic features suggests that these editorial choices reflect a broader evolutionary process in the Hebrew language, positioning Jeremiah as a key link between earlier and later biblical Hebrew forms.[20]

[18] McKane 1986: lxxxi.
[19] Tov 2021: 139.
[20] Hornkohl 2021.

Linguistic Evolution in Jeremiah

In his essay, "The Development of Hebrew and the Book of Jeremiah," Hornkohl shifts the focus to the nuanced layers of textual origin and evolution. He notes that the Hebrew found in Jeremiah bears a closer resemblance to Classical Biblical Hebrew (CBH) from the Torah, the Former Prophets, and many traditional Latter Prophets, rather than the Late Biblical Hebrew (LBH) typical of major post-Restoration texts. He highlights that "there are unmistakable typological developments that can be interpreted as indications that Jeremiah affords a window (or windows) onto Hebrew that may be thought of as transitional between CBH proper and LBH."[21] According to him, "from the perspective of CBH as the majority chronolect and LBH as its post-classical successor,"[22] Jeremiah's linguistic profile represents an early intermediate developmental stage. Hornkohl further emphasizes that "the combined evidence of regular and accumulated sporadic late features in the book represents a noticeable departure from CBH, while, however, still lacking the aforementioned features and concentrations distinctive of LBH."[23] In the end, he argues that Jeremiah's language reveals ties to the Hebrew seen in well-known post-Restoration texts, while still leaning towards more traditional alternatives.

Schaper's Notion of Textualization

Hornkohl's exploration of the linguistic evolution in Jeremiah provides insight into the text's development from Classical to Late Biblical Hebrew, while also inviting a deeper investigation into how this language transformation relates to the broader processes of textualization and the preservation of prophetic tradition. In his fascinating essay "Textualization and the Book of Jeremiah," Schaper notes that "processes of textualization entail processes of reading in the sense that (written) texts are (fully) constituted not merely by processes of writing, but also by processes of reading (at least in the case of cultures that, like ancient Israel, use a consonantal alphabet and therefore rely on what is effectively a phonetically deficient notation system)."[24]

[21] Hornkohl 2021: 181.
[22] Hornkohl 2021: 181.
[23] Hornkohl 2021: 182.
[24] Schaper 2021: 146.

The author also points out that "texts" are "objects" and, as such, they are "conceptualized as part of a tradition of reading and interpreting" and that they "can give rise to ritualized or otherwise significant uses of the text-object."[25]

Speech Acts and Tradition

Schaper contends that the textualization of the book of Jeremiah involves the creation of ritualized written "speech-acts" and that the objective of textualization is to preserve tradition. When discussing the textualization of speech acts in the book of Jeremiah as a means of "objectifying" tradition—thereby creating a written text that serves as an object within ritual activities and contributes to communal meaning-making—Schaper's argument could be enriched by incorporating Fohrer's perspective on the importance of textualized speech acts.[26]

The Magical Essence of Textualization: The Case of Jeremiah 36

According to Fohrer, prophetic speech acts are not merely textualized for preservation and performance but are also written down to "immortalize" the inherent magical content.[27] In other words, written speech acts, as opposed to oral utterances, retain and even enhance their magical effect. Fohrer suggests that in written records and transmission, a lingering sense of magic persists. A prime example of textualization can be found in Jeremiah 36, which recounts the dark episode of King Jehoiakim burning the scroll containing Jeremiah's prophecies. Unable to enter the temple himself, Jeremiah has his words recorded so Baruch can deliver them, armed with a written document to convey the message accurately. Everything changes, however, when Jehoiakim destroys the scroll. While the original scroll's purpose had already been served, Jeremiah ordered it to be rewritten, even though the new scroll could no longer be read. It is at this juncture, as Fohrer points out, that the king's act of destruction can be seen as an attempt to *neutralize* the scroll's ominous warnings and diminish its power. The act of rewriting, in response, ensures that Jeremiah's utterances maintain their potency, with the threat they embody remaining intact.

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[25] Schaper 2021: 146.
[26] Fohrer 1966: 25-47.
[27] Schaper 2021: 147.

1.2 The Deuteronomic Editorial Layer

While Schaper's exploration of textualization highlights the ritual significance of prophetic speech acts, it also lays the groundwork for examining how the distinct linguistic features of the book of Jeremiah, particularly its Deuteronomic style, further shape its theological interpretations in the context of Judah's impending doom. Hyatt has once noted that in order to find Jeremiah's true voice, it is necessary to identify and discount the deuteronomic editorial layer that conceals the book's original form.[28] He suggests that the book of Jeremiah contains several layers influenced by Deuteronomic thought. Similar to Hyatt, Hermann also believes there was a significant Deuteronomic editorial hand involved in shaping this prophetic text.[29] He suggests that the Deuteronomic nature of the Jeremianic text likely emerged in Judah during the exile, as the Deuteronomists turned to Jeremiah's oracles to bolster the credibility and authority of their message.[30] Thiel dives into the prose sections of Jeremiah, labeling them as "Deuteronomistic" and linking them to the editor behind the book's first major section, Jeremiah 1-25. He argues that the book took shape through a lengthy process of editorial evolution, suggesting a significant Deuteronomistic overhaul. However, he also acknowledges that later, post-Deuteronomistic edits played a role in shaping the final version we see today.[31] Nicholson, like many scholars before him, tackles the challenge of pinpointing the genuine utterances of Jeremiah within the prophetic book's prose and poetry. He argues that the prose reflects the theological perspectives of the Deuteronomistic communities in exile and posits that this text serves as a repository of a Deuteronomistic homiletic tradition that has shaped the interpretation of Jeremiah's message and ministry. The goal was to address the concerns of Jewish exiles in Babylon.

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[28] Hyatt 1985: 113-127.
[29] Herrmann 1977: 166.
[30] The book of Jeremiah is not the story of the man Jeremiah but rather a book of reckoning with the past, a call to repentance, a document of hope for Israel. Hermann believes that the first chapter of the book of Jeremiah possesses a heterogeneity of images that cannot be considered the fruit of the reflection of a single group of traditionists, nor should it be considered a literary creation of the prophet. See Herrmann 1977: 172.
[31] Thiel 1973 and 1981.

The Deuteronomistic Interpretation of Catastrophe

A key aim of this Deuteronomistic interpretation is to make sense of the catastrophic events of 587. Nicholson argues against the notion that the text was penned by various authors or editors; instead, he believes it was shaped by a group of traditionists who sought to bring Jeremiah's prophetic messages into contemporary relevance by reworking them for new contexts and challenges. He posits that their intention was not merely to preserve Jeremiah's words but to reinterpret them, effectively creating something fresh. After identifying several key themes related to legal issues—such as prophetic warnings to Israel, the nation's rejection of those messages, and the resulting judgment (as seen in Jer 7; 25; 26; 29; 35; 36; 44)—Nicholson concludes that the book's Deuteronomistic essence is highlighted by its emphasis on the centrality of the law. In keeping with the deuteronomic tradition, the prophet emerges as a voice for God, championing the law at the heart of the message. This emphasis on the law not only sheds light on the calamity of 587 BCE but also serves as a rallying cry for the exiles to adhere to its tenets. Nicholson argues that the core message of Jeremiah aligns with deuteronomic theology, offering hope for those willing to repent and follow the law. Throughout the book, many key themes reveal a distinctly deuteronomic theological perspective.[32] Weippert argues that the prose found in the speeches of Jeremiah stands apart from that in Deuteronomy and the associated Deuteronomistic historical texts. By drawing comparisons, she seeks to highlight a distinct style unique to Jeremiah, contending that the supposed similarities between these prose forms crumble under scrutiny. She further posits that the originality of Jeremiah's prose is also evident in the book's poetic segments.[33]

Critique of Weippert's Theories

McKane dismisses Weippert's theory that a single compiler crafted both the prose and poetic parts of Jeremiah, arguing instead that "another explanation must be preferred."[34] McKane takes aim at Weippert's approach, criticizing her penchant for drawing overly fine

[32] Nicholson 1971. See also Nicholson 2008.
[33] Helga Weippert, *Die Prosareden des Jeremiabuches* (Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, 132; Berlin-New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1973).
[34] McKane 1986: xlii

distinctions between word meanings in an attempt to show that Jeremiah's prose stands apart from its presumed deuteronomic roots. He argues that even if we could pinpoint the subtle lexical differences between the Jeremianic and deuteronomic texts, it would not be enough to conclusively establish that Jeremiah's prose evolved independently of the deuteronomic-Deuteronomistic tradition.[35] Echoing Weippert, McKane acknowledges the notable lexical similarities between the prose of Jeremiah and that of the Deuteronomic-Deuteronomistic texts. However, he cautions against jumping to the conclusion that they were penned by the same authors. The fact that the prose of these two corpora uses similar words but with different nuances could simply indicate that "the prose of the book of Jeremiah is influenced by the *corpus* of which it is part and serves the special characteristics and interests of that *corpus*."[36]

The Concept of a "Rolling Corpus"

In developing his idea of a "rolling corpus," McKane draws on key concepts from Thiel's textual analysis of Jeremiah, specifically the "kernel idea" and the "reservoir idea." Thiel employs the kernel to pinpoint the prophet Jeremiah's original words that can be found within the deuteronomic redaction of the text. In contrast, McKane applies this notion to highlight the secondary interpretations, expansions, and thematic elaborations that emerge in various Jeremianic passages. For McKane, "the identification of a kernel is to be regarded as an attempt to elucidate the character of the extant text and to show how it developed."[37] Similarly, he employs the idea of the reservoir, a methodology yet again taken from Thiel, to show how the Jeremianic prose reuses vocabulary drawn from the poetic sections of the book as if they were a "reservoir" for the construction of its prose narrative.[38]

Holladay challenges the idea that the relationship between the book of Jeremiah and Deuteronomy can be understood solely through their shared phrases, arguing that this comparison can be misleading. He cautions, "Conclusions on the direction of borrowing can

[35] McKane 1986: xlv.
[36] McKane 1986: xlvi.
[37] McKane 1986: liv.
[38] McKane 1986: liii-lxii.

hardly be made from phraseology parallels that occur often." Instead, Holladay advocates for examining "restricted unusual diction" that appears infrequently in both the Deuteronomic and Jeremianic texts. By following this methodological approach, he concludes that "Jrm drew on Proto-Deuteronomy, and exilic redactors of Deuteronomy sometimes drew on Jrm's words."[39]

In his thorough examination of the phraseology in Deuteronomy, the Deuteronomistic history, and the book of Jeremiah, Stipp argues that the prose style found in Jeremiah is distinctively its own. Notably, Stipp was among the first to identify the Deuteronomic and Deuteronomistic phrases within Jeremiah as examples of a "Deutero-Jeremianic" style unique to this text.[40] He notes that this style is not just confined to the prose parts of the prophetic text; it also spills over into the so-called self-reports and narrative sections concerning Jeremiah.[41] Stipp argues that a systematic examination of the theological context surrounding the Deutero-Jeremianic passages is essential for comparing the theological themes in the book of Jeremiah with those in the texts of Deuteronomistic history. He notes that a Jeremianic passage can only be deemed to exhibit Deuteronomistic traits if it aligns with key ideas and judgments found in these historical texts. These shared concepts include, for instance, "the harsh verdict on the end of Judah due to worshipping other deities, the idea of exile as divine punishment, the centralization of the cult in Jerusalem, and the disapproval of other sanctuaries."[42]

A Distinctive Jeremianic Style and the Pro-Golah Perspective in Jeremiah

Echoing Stipp's view, Maier acknowledges the presence of a distinctive Jeremianic style within the book of Jeremiah. She argues that this unique style, inherent to the prophetic text, can be linked to a familiar set of formulaic phrases crafted in prose "that is easy to reproduce and in fact has been partly reproduced in several stages of the book's development including the pre-Masoretic extensions."[43] In this vein, Maier appears to endorse the rolling corpus concept put forth by McKane. Echoing McKane, Maier asserts that "the Deutero-Jeremianic

[39] Holladay 1989: 53.
[40] Stipp 1998: 2.
[41] Cf. Stipp 2015: 261–97.
[42] Maier 2016: 106.
[43] Maier 2016: 122.

prose often takes up terms and phrases from poetic passages; it seems clear that it is a literary style originating from an exilic reworking of extant Jeremianic tradition."[44] Together with Stipp, Maier contends that the ideology found in the Deutero-Jeremianic sections is not tied to a single school of thought but rather emerges from a tradition woven throughout the book of Jeremiah. Specifically, Maier identifies a cluster of texts in the book's first major division, chapters 1-25, that reflect a distinctly pro-*Golah* viewpoint, aimed at serving the needs of the Babylonian community. This perspective paints the prophet Jeremiah "as a lobbyist for the pro-Babylonian policy." However, she adds that "a systematic pro-*Golah* redaction in the book seems hard to establish."[45]

Mastnjak's Argument for Deutero-Jeremianic Redaction

Mastnjak has recently contended that "multiple lines of evidence contribute to the identification of DtrJ (i.e. "Deutero-Jeremianic") redaction."[46] Mastnjak argues that the interplay of genre, language, and themes, along with the connections between this distinctive style and other sections of the prophetic text, bolsters the idea that the book of Jeremiah underwent one or more revisions that could be termed "Deuteronomic." He posits the existence of a Jeremianic tradition that predates the Deuteronomic edits of Jeremiah, noting that this early tradition is especially evident in the poetic oracles and narratives surrounding Jeremiah. However, he remains uncertain whether this pre-Deuteronomic poetic material originated from a single source or if it represents various, differing traditions about the prophet.

Mastnjak points out that the pre-Deuteronomic poetic elements of Jeremiah appear in the oracles of chapters 2-23 and 30-31, as well as in the oracles against the nations (OAN) from chapters 46-51. However, the question of how these written poetic oracles relate to the presumed oral revelations of the prophet Jeremiah remains a sticky point in biblical scholarship on this prophetic text. Mastnjak argues that even if we could link these Jeremianic oracles back to the historical prophet, determining how faithfully they capture his *ipsissima verba* would still

[44] Maier 2016: 122.
[45] Maier 2016: 123.
[46] Mastnjak 2016: 26.

pose a significant challenge. Additionally, Mastnjak highlights that Stipp's recent analysis disputes the idea that Jeremiah's oracles were originally disjointed. Stipp contends that these oracles feature unique linguistic traits that go beyond mere stylistic patterns, incorporating rhetorical devices that are characteristic of the Deuteronomic layers of the Jeremianic text.[47] In his examination of the Jeremianic references to Deuteronomy, Mastnjak makes a clear distinction between the language linked to the Deutero-Jeremianic layer and the genuine allusions to Deuteronomy. He underscores that simply referencing the Deuteronomic text "does not by itself constitute sufficient evidence for the DtrJ affiliation of a passage."[48]

It is important to unpack this point because what might seem like a mere allusion between two texts could actually stem from a deliberate tweak by the ancient compiler of the Jeremianic material in the Deuteronomic style. As Mastnjak notes, the authors behind the DtrJ layers were clearly invested in the Deuteronomic book right from the start. For example, the phrase לא תלכון אחרי אלהים, "you shall not go after gods," appears in Deuteronomy as a stereotypical reference to apostasy, and the Jeremianic text employs it accordingly in its own narrative. But so, too, do Judges and Kings.

The Influence of Deuteronomy on Jeremiah

Mastnjak appears to align with the views of Craigie and others, who identify Deuteronomic vocabulary and stylistic elements in the book's first major prose segment (Jer 7:1-8:3). They argue that the Deuteronomic language found in these speeches and discourses, characterized by a distinctively Jeremianic style, can be understood through the lens of classical Hebrew prose as it existed in the late seventh and early sixth centuries BCE. They suggest that "that style, in turn, may well have been influenced in part by Josiah's religious reformation and the significant role of Deuteronomy."[49] He adds, that "the similarity to D-language may also reflect the commonality of interest and subject matter between Jeremiah and the Deuteronomic traditions; although the two traditions differ in focus and emphasis, there is a commonality of

[47] Mastnjak 2016: 28.
[48] Mastnjak 2016: 29.
[49] Craigie, Kelley, Paige, and Drinkard 1991: 118.

interest in the temple, the land, the law, and other matters."[50] Some Jeremianic references to Deuteronomy can be viewed as intentional tweaks to the deuteronomic style by the compiler, while others may be seen as genuine, direct allusions. As Mastnjak notes, "it is possible that some instances of Deuteronomistic phraseology in Jeremiah are analyzable as true allusions to Deuteronomy."[51] A genuine allusion can only be confirmed through a cumulative assessment, relying on a series of clues that indicate literary influence. As he puts it, the Jeremianic reference to Deut 24:14 in Jer 3:1 "involves a unique constellation of lexical features that unites these passages as well as the presence of further associations and an interpretive process that characterize true allusions."[52]

A key question surrounding the connection between the book of Jeremiah and Deuteronomy is how much authority the latter held over the former, particularly in terms of how Jeremiah regarded it as an authoritative source. Mastnjak notes that before canonical boundaries were established, the interplay between these texts likely hinged more on authority than on a strict canon. "If authority is the willingness of an audience to trust and obey a speaker,"[53] Mastnjak points out that the question we must ask ourselves is whether this authority could be transferred through the allusive relationship with another, later text. Mastnjak argues that the authority of Deuteronomy, or at least of the single source that precedes the composition of the Pentateuch, which he calls "D,"[54] changed significantly during the editorial period between the compilation of the pre-Deutero-Jeremianic (pre-DtrJ) and the Deutero-Jeremianic (DtrJ) layers. Mastnjak writes: "The pre-DtrJ layers of tradition allude to D as a prestigious text, a classic but not an authority. It is in the DtrJ layer of tradition that D emerges with the full force of a religious authority. DtrJ accepts D's central claim to divine origin and continually draws on that authority in support of its own claims."[55]

The Role of Deuteronomic Curses in the Judgment of Judah

[50] Craigie, Kelley, Paige, and Drinkard 1991: 118.
[51] Mastnjak 2016: 29.
[52] Mastnjak 2016: 29.
[53] Mastnjak 2016: 33.
[54] Mastnjak 2016: 30.
[55] Mastnjak 2016: 33.

Mastnjak's analysis of "credible" references to Deuteronomy in Jeremiah reveals that prophetic revelation is the most frequently highlighted theme in these allusions. Notably, the curses from Deuteronomy 28 emerge as the most quoted passages throughout Jeremiah. He argues that "DtrJ alluded to D's curses extensively to explain the fall of Judah in 587 as due to the violation of D's covenant."[56] Indeed, fourteen passages in Jeremiah share both lexical and thematic connections to Deuteronomy 28 (Jer 5:15-17; 7:33; 9:15; 15:34; 16:4; 16:13; 19:7-9; 24:9; 28:14; 29:5-7; 29:78; 32:47; 34:17-20; 42:16). For instance, the repeated references in Jeremiah to Deut 28:25-26 do not suggest that "these curses have lost their connection to their context in Deut 28 and become merely stereotyped language." Instead, they indicate that the ancient editor of the Deutero-Jeremianic layer cleverly repurposed these Deuteronomic curses to effectively depict the calamity that struck Judah in 587 BCE.[57]

Mastnjak further notes that "These passages attest the fact that DtrJ considered the judgment on Judah to be an enacting of the D-curses of Deut 28. It is instructive that in some of these texts, the cited curse comes in response to a specific violation of the D-law code."[58] He points out that the selection of these Deuteronomic maledictions indicates that the ancient compiler of Jeremiah was primarily concerned with depicting divine judgment against Judah. This viewpoint is crucial for understanding how Jeremiah repurposes curses related to military defeat and the exposure of corpses, particularly in light of Judah's catastrophic fall to Babylon in 582. Nicholson echoes this sentiment, arguing that the ancient Deuteronomic authors, who crafted the Jeremiah text amid the Babylonian invasion, had two key goals in mind while chronicling their nation's history. The first was to clarify why Israel, God's chosen people, faced such dire consequences at the hands of their own deity, following the destruction of the Northern Kingdom in 722 and the Southern Kingdom in 587. The second objective was to instill hope even when Israel's bond with God seemed fractured. To address the first concern, these authors asserted that Israel's suffering was directly tied to the people's abandonment of God in favor of foreign idols. As for the second issue, the Deuteronomic authors maintained that the

[56] Mastnjak 2016: 34.
[57] Mastnjak 2016: 115.
[58] Mastnjak 2016: 115.

path to restoring their original relationship with God lay in fostering hope and embracing penance.[59]

The Utilization of Deuteronomy 28 in Jeremiah's Poetic Prose

An example may help shed light on how and why the compiler of Jeremiah utilized Deuteronomy 28. In Jer 7:33, references are made solely to Deut 28:26. This verse is nestled within a broader literary segment spanning 7:29-8:3. Blending poetry and prose, this unit opens with a poignant lament directed at daughter Zion.[60] The expression "Shear your locks and cast them away" (v. 29) symbolizes mourning as the dirge laments the death of Israel. In verses 30 and 31, the text lists the sins committed by Israel, providing a rationale for the ensuing divine punishment: "They have set up their abominations in the House [i.e., the Jerusalem Temple]." The prose parts centering on the idolatrous behavior of Israel also focusses on a crime that the text alleges the Israelites had perpetrated continuously in the Valley of Ben-hinnom,[61] in "the high place of Topheth" (במות התפת; 7:31, "you have built the shrines of Topheth in the Valley of Ben-hinnom to burn their sons and daughters in fire").

Our understanding of what went on at a Topheth—a site for child sacrifice—comes largely from indirect clues in archaeology and close readings of biblical texts. The Bible depicts the ritual sacrifice of children in the Topheth to "Moloch" (or "Molech," למלך), a practice condemned by King Josiah in 622 BCE (see 2 Kgs 23:10; cf. 2 Kgs 21:6). The term "Moloch" only appears a handful of times in the Hebrew Bible, with eight occurrences, including five in Leviticus (18:21; 20:2-5), two in Kings (1 Kgs 11:7, where it is probably confused with Milcom of the Ammonites; and 2 Kgs 23:10), and one in Jeremiah (32:35). Eissfeldt proposes that "Moloch" (מלך) might actually originate as a common noun, linguistically related to the Punic term *molk/mulk*.[62] This was a technical term associated with a child sacrifice rite, documented in both the archaeological record and inscriptions—especially in stelae uncovered in burial sites at Carthage and other locations. Historical sources back up this grim practice: ancient writers

[59] Nicholson 1973: 12-13.
[60] Stulman suggests this association on the basis of the 2nd f. s. form of the imperative verb גזז, "to shear" in v. 29. See Stulman 2005: 95.
[61] Also known as Gehenna or Gehinnom, a historically and theologically significant location near Jerusalem.
[62] Eissfeldt 1935.

from classical and early Christian periods refer to a child sacrifice cult, especially during wartime crises, that took place in Phoenicia and at Carthage.[63] However, some argue that these accounts could be exaggerations or even fabricated accusations aimed at amplifying Israel's religious failings. For the biblical author, however, this graphic portrayal of child sacrifice serves a specific purpose. It drives home the severity of Israel's idolatry, painting idol worship as a heinous and unforgivable offense. From a literary standpoint, this unflinching rhetoric of condemnation does not just describe godlessness—it weaponizes the horror of child sacrifice to make idol worship utterly repugnant to the reader. Adding to the shocking revelations of these verses are the graphic details concerning the treatment of the bodies of the dead Israelites who are described as being devoured by wild animals in the same valley where they used to perform the abhorrent rituals described by the text ("The carcasses of this people shall be food for the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth, with none to frighten them off," והיתה נבלת העם הזה למאכל לעוף השמים ולבהמת הארץ ואין מחריד, Jer 7:33). The image of city's streets and plazas once bursting with joy and mirth is replaced by a terrifying vision of death and destruction that leaves behind a land in ruin ("And I will silence in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem the sound of mirth and gladness, the voice of bridegroom and bride. For the whole land shall fall to ruin," Jer 7:34). The Valley of Ben-hinnom is fittingly renamed the "valley of slaughter." This "language of desecration" abounds in the book of Jeremiah, but in all instances of which I am aware, the text seems to quote from Deut 28:26 directly (cf. Jer 7:33, 12:9, 15:3-4, 16:4, 34:17, 20).[64] In Jer 7:33, the gruesome image of the bodies of the Israelites being fed to wild animals taps into the rich execratory language of Deuteronomy 28. Jeremiah 7:33 reads as follows:

Table 1

Element	Description	Action in Text	Hebrew (Text)
The carcasses of this people	Refers to the corpses of the people of Judah, who have faced divine judgment	Left unburied and exposed	נִבְלַ֥ת הָעָ֖ם

[63] See van der Toorn, Becking, and van der Horst 1999: 582 for the relevant bibliography.
[64] Mastnjak 2016: 101, 104, 107, 108 and see also 115.

Element	Description	Action in Text	Hebrew (Text)
Birds of the sky	Scavenging birds representing natural agents of defilement and disrespect	Consume the corpses	לְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם
Beasts of the earth	Wild animals symbolizing further degradation	Consume the corpses	וּלְבֶהֱמַת הָאָרֶץ
With none to frighten them off	Indicates no one will be left to protect or honor the dead	Absence of protection/respect	וְאֵין מַחֲרִיד

This terse oracle of doom has a devastating punch: that of an unconditional curse, one that aims to uproot and cast away malevolent forces to banish evil entirely.[65] At this point, we must ask: Is this curse-like oracle original to Jer 7:33, or is it borrowing language from elsewhere? The best way to find out is by comparing its vocabulary to similar verses in the Bible. As Mastnjak observes, a mere Jeremianic allusion to the Deuteronomic text by itself is not sufficient to decide whether Jeremiah directly reuses Deuteronomy. In order for us to establish a real allusion to Deuteronomy, we need to prove that the author of Jeremiah purposefully reworked specific lexical and thematic elements unique to a particular passage in Deuteronomy, supported by contextual cues that corroborate the link. The mere similarity of language between texts is not enough proof of an allusion. It is the case in fact that such similarity could just as easily be a coincidence or an instance of the author using common phrasing. However, when these lexical echoes come alongside other markers—such as a repeating syntactic pattern that mirrors an earlier text—the chances of intentional borrowing increase. Many scholars agree that in Jer 7:33, the curse of Deut 28:26 is directly quoted.[66]

Table 2

Passage	Hebrew Text	English Translation	Actions
Deut 28:26	והיתה נבלתך למאכל לכל־עוף השמים	Your carcasses shall become food for all the birds of the sky and all	- **Corpses exposed** (indicates death and lack of burial) - **Consumed by birds and**

[65] Kitz 2014: 75-77.

[66] Holladay 1986: 270, McKane 1986: 179-180, Stulman 2005: 96, Allen 2008: 103, Mastnjak 2016: 106-107.

Passage	Hebrew Text	English Translation	Actions
	ולבהמת הארץ ואין מחריד	the beasts of the earth, with none to frighten them off.	**beasts** (indicating dishonor) - **No one to frighten them off** (signifying abandonment)
Jer 7:33	והיתה נבלת העם הזה למאכל לעוף השמים ולבהמת הארץ ואין מחריד	The carcasses of this people shall be food for the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth, with none to frighten them off.	- **Corpses exposed** (again suggesting death and lack of burial) - **Consumed by birds and beasts** (again showing dishonor and desecration) - **No one to frighten them off** (again implying abandonment and hopelessness)

The similarity between these two verses is rather conspicuous. In both, the pairing of scavenging animals is identical, with "bird of the air" consistently placed before "animal of the earth" (לעוף השמים ולבהמת הארץ). Additionally, both texts employ the term "corpse" (נבלה) in a construct form. Pairing "bird of the air" (עוף השמים) with variations of "animal of the earth" (בהמת הארץ) is a familiar motif in biblical literature, often serving as a merism to represent all living creatures.[67] Sometimes one of the pairs appears alone, especially in connection with the desecration of the body of the defeated enemy. In these contexts, the term כלבים ("dogs," pl. of כלב) often replaced that of בהמת הארץ ("animal of the earth"), which stands in opposition to the more common term עוף השמים ("bird of the sky").[68] For example, in 1 Kgs 21:24, the prophet Elijah curses the Israelite king Ahab and his wife, Queen Jezebel, using a vocabulary analogous to that of Deut 28:26 and MT-Jer 7:33. The text reads:

[67] Examples of merism in the Hebrew Bible can be found in Gen 1:30; 2:19; 9:2; 2 Sam 21:10; Ps 104:12; Eccl 10:20; Isa 18:6; Jer 4:25; 15:3; Ezek 31:6, 13; 32:4; Hos 2:20. See Crouch 2014: 133.
[68] Crouch 2014: 133.

Table 3

Passage	Text	Translation
1 Kgs 21:24	המת לאחאב בעיר יאכלו הכלבים והמת בשדה יאכלו עוף השמים	All of Ahab's line who die in the town shall be devoured by dogs, and all who die in the open country shall be devoured by the birds of the sky.

Curses of Non-Burial in Ancient Texts

In the ancient Near East, a burial ceremony was seen as the rightful close to a well-lived life. For the virtuous, proper mourning rites ensured a smooth journey to the afterlife. Given this belief, denying someone a proper burial was viewed as a profound dishonor.[69] The fear of being denied a proper burial runs deep across ancient Near Eastern literature. Two classic examples of curses involving non-burial and body desecration appear in the Babylonian anti-witchcraft incantation *Maqlû* and the Assyrian King Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty (EST), a seventh-century BCE loyalty oath for subordinate kings. In *Maqlû*, a witch's body is condemned to destruction by the purging flames of the Mesopotamian god Girra, and, in its final incantations, directed to be left as carrion for eagles, vultures, and dogs (Maqlû VIII 123-127). Similarly, Esarhaddon's treaty curses violators with desecration, condemning their bodies to be devoured by dogs and pigs (EST §56, 481-484).

In the "Aqhat epic," from Ugarit (modern Ras Shamra, on the coast of northern Syria) the story's hero, Dan'el, curses the birds of the air so that they may no longer disturb the spoils of his son, Aqhat. A curse from the text reads: "May Ba'lu break the wings of the hawks, may Ba'lu break their pinions, If they fly over the grave of my son, if they do him harm as he sleeps," *knp . nšrm b'l . yṯbr . b'l . yṯbr . diy hmt . hm . t'pn . 'l . qbr . bny tšḫṭ{.}nn . b šnth* (KTU³ 1.19:42–45; COS 1.103:148–51). This curse follows a scene in which Dan'el recovers the remains of Aqhat from the innards of these birds. The desire to be able to grieve over his child's mortal remains is expressed in poetic form: "So that I may weep, so that I may bury him, so that I may put (him)

[69] Mansen 2018.

in a grave (with) the gods of the earth," *ab[[p]]ky . w . aqbrnh ašt . b ḫrt . ilm . art* (KTU³ 1.19:5–6; COS 1.103 ii 105–iii 145).[70]

The Language of Desecration

In short, although the image of carrion animals devouring corpses was a nearly universal theme in the ancient Near East,[71] it is likely that Jer 7:33 borrowed its language directly from Deut 28:26. As Mastnjak points out, the shared use of the term מחריד in both Jer 7:33 and Deut 28:26—along with other key phrases—rules out the possibility that Jeremiah drew its wording from any source other than Deuteronomy. Mastnjak further suggests that tracing the origins of this motif would likely lead back to Mesopotamian covenantal literature, with Jer 7:33 echoing Deut 28:26, which itself may have drawn from EST §41, where this vivid image also appears.[72]

Further strengthening this point, Steymans draws attention to the similarity in both language and theme between the curses in Deut 28:26 and those in EST §41. He points out that these kinds of formulations appear in the incantation collection *Maqlû* and in descriptions of war by Assyrian kings, reflecting a background rooted in Assyrian warfare: „Ähnliche Formulierungen kommen in der Beschwörungssammlung Maqlû und in Kriegsbeschreibungen assyrischer Könige vor. Derartige Fluchmotive besitzen also einen Hintergrund in konkreten Erfahrungen der Opfer assyrischer Kriegführung."[73]

Distinguishing Deutero-Jeremianic and Deuteronomistic Layers in Jeremiah: Maier's Perspective

Wrapping up the discussion on the deuteronomic layer in Jeremiah, Maier argues that the label "Deutero-Jeremianic" should apply exclusively to the prose sections developed by successive redactors and editors of Jeremiah. She contends that these Deutero-Jeremianic texts reflect a shared set of conventional phrases, expanded over time, including the pre-Masoretic additions. She insists that the term "Deuteronomistic" should be reserved for passages in

[70] Crouch 2014: 111.
[71] Carly Crouch points out that "Conceptually...Deut 28:26 resides firmly in a common ancient Near Eastern framework of beliefs about the dead and the afterlife," see Crouch 2014: 111.
[72] Mastnjak 2016: 107.
[73] Steymans 1995: 96-97.

Jeremiah that align ideologically with the Deuteronomistic History. For Maier, the Deutero-Jeremianic prose represents a distinctive literary style—a "reworking of extant Jeremianic tradition" shaped by the exilic context.[74] The ideological shifts within the Deutero-Jeremianic layers suggest that more than one author had a hand in shaping what we now call the "Book of Jeremiah." As she points out, while some prose sections in Jeremiah's text showcase a clear Deutero-Jeremianic style, pinning Judah's downfall squarely on the policies of its kings, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, others lean on the Deuteronomistic History's framework to make sense of the exile. Maier argues that "These texts may be assigned to an exilic Deuteronomistic redaction, which probably also produced a first edition of the book (chapters 1–25*) in Judah."[75]

On the basis of what was said above, we can reasonably assume that the author—or authors—DtrJ of the Jeremiah text tapped into themes and language from the Deuteronomic tradition, and in doing so reshaped them to fit their own narrative cast within a new prophetic framework.[76] Most importantly for our discussion, Mastnjak's analysis reveals that the compilers of Jeremiah leveraged Deuteronomy's authority not just to assert that Judah's downfall in 587 BCE was a direct result of its apostasy, but also to indicate that the destruction of Judah and its people resulted from the activation of the curses found in Deuteronomy 28. At the heart of the first major section of Jeremiah (chapters 1-25) lies Yahweh's curse against Judah, a claim firmly anchored in the authority of Deuteronomy.

1.3 The Historical and Cultural Context of the Book of Jeremiah

The book of Jeremiah presents a theological view that binds Judah's social, religious, and political predicaments to the state of the land itself.[77] The prophet laments that the land is grieving and fading away, worn down by the people's wrongdoings and the divine judgment that looms ahead. In Jeremiah 12:4, the land is shown in decline: the grass in the fields, the

[74] Maier 2016: 122.
[75] Maier 2016: 123.
[76] Mastnjak understands DtrJ as Deuteronomistic redaction of Jeremiah as separate from earlier Jeremianic traditions.
[77] On the tradition of the land as Israel's inheritance (cf. Exod 3:8), see Marchadour, Neuhaus, and Martini 2007: 21-25.

animals, and even the birds are withering and dying because of the inhabitants' wickedness (cf. also Jer 23:10 and 15).[78] The connection between the spiritual and physical realms highlights the deep impact political instability has on the nation's religious life. The prophet's message ties the nation's spiritual condition to its political and social chaos, suggesting that the latter results directly from the former. For instance, Jeremiah 5:19 explicitly links these aspects, stating that God's punishment of his people is because they abandoned him to worship foreign gods in the land he gave them. Due to their sins, they will serve foreigners in a land that is not their own (see also Jer 9:11-13 and 16:10-13). Jeremiah delivers God's warning at the temple gate in Jer 7:1-15, urging repentance. In Jeremiah 7:9, God condemns the people for crimes like robbery, murder, adultery, and false oaths, while in Jer 7:6, he also condemns the oppression of vulnerable members of society, specifically the stranger, orphan, and widow. Outlining collectively a comprehensive catalog of morally reprehensible offenses, these pronouncements emphasize both ethical and social dimensions of wrongdoing. Failure to heed God's directives leads to temple destruction and exile. In light of this, Jeremiah's language, which we will see draws from the magical traditions of the ancient Near East, particularly Mesopotamia, must be understood within the internal socio-political dynamics of the Kingdom of Judah. This involves understanding the ideas and beliefs that lend Jeremiah's prophetic words their rhetorical power and significance.

The Connection Between Spiritual and Political Realities

A substantial portion of the book of Jeremiah directly addresses the precarious political landscape in Judah during the late seventh and early sixth centuries BCE (cf. Jer 7:1-15, Jer 21:1-14, Jer 22:1-9, Jer 25:1-14). During this period, the kingdom confronted external threats from the waning Assyrian empire and the burgeoning power of Babylon. At the same time, Judah was rocked by internal power struggles as different political factions vied for control and influence. Jeremiah's prophetic ministry and message were deeply shaped by these turbulent political conditions. Crouch explains that this long period of turmoil "posed serious theological

[78] Wessels points out that while Jer 23:10 does not directly call out the prophets—instead referring to unnamed adulterers—the surrounding verses (Jer 23:9-15) make it clear they are the ones in the spotlight. Prophets held significant influence, closely tied to the official ranks of Judah's ruling elite. Wessels 2020: 317.

challenges to the received status quo, and it is to these concerns that the traditions of Jeremiah are primarily directed."[79] Jeremiah's fervent prophetic response can be partly attributed to the tumultuous era he lived in, marked by both theological and political crises.

The Prophet Jeremiah: Historical Reality or Theological Fiction?

Opinions on the existence of a prophet named Jeremiah, often considered the figure behind the earliest narratives of the book, vary widely based on how researchers perceive the historical accuracy of the text. Some scholars view it as credible historical information, while others dismiss it as theological fiction. For instance, both Holladay[80] and Lundbom[81] argue in favor of the historical reliability of the Jeremianic text. Hyatt takes a more nuanced approach, suggesting that there may indeed have been a historical Jeremiah and that the original oracles attributed to him exist, but he believes these have been obscured by extensive editorial interventions that have compromised the text's original integrity. Hyatt posits that Jeremiah began his public ministry about a decade after Josiah's reforms, asserting that Jeremiah's apparent lack of endorsement for the king's religious reforms stems from conflicting Deuteronomic ideologies present in the text. He advocates for identifying and removing these editorial layers to reveal Jeremiah's genuine voice and restore the original organization of the text.[82]

On the other hand, Carroll questions the historical authenticity of Jeremiah, proposing that the text is a deliberate construction of Deuteronomic fiction. This implies that the prophet's persona is more of a literary invention than a historical representation.[83] Viewing the text through a theological lens, Brueggemann contends that the thematic core of Jeremiah aligns neatly with the covenantal theology of the Deuteronomic tradition.[84] He hints at a connection between the prophet's historical identity and a particular group closely tied to influential figures in Jerusalem. As Brueggemann notes, the prophet Jeremiah might have been "fully

[79] Crouch 2021: 25
[80] Holladay 1986 and 1989.
[81] Lundbom 1999.
[82] Hyatt 1985: 113-127.
[83] Carroll 1981 and 1986.
[84] Brueggemann 1987: 13–29.

resonant with what became of the Deuteronomic tradition."[85] Consequently, he argues that Jeremiah's later "portrayal" should not be seen as a mere ideological distortion. He adds that "Jeremiah fit rather easily into the perceptual field of the covenantal theology espoused by the Deuteronomic traditionists,"[86] implying that the prophet was part of a small group in Jerusalem that openly criticized the practices of the urban elite. Nonetheless, Brueggemann also expresses some reservations about this proposed connection.[87] This ongoing debate about the historical existence of a prophet named Jeremiah underscores the complex challenges involved in unraveling the historical issues presented in the book of Jeremiah.

The Context of Jeremiah's Ministry During Josiah's Reign

During the late seventh century BCE, the Levantine region experienced numerous sieges by the rapidly expanding Babylonian empire. The Babylonians, motivated by their aim to incorporate the lands that were formerly under Assyrian rule, methodically pursued their expansionist goals throughout the region.[88] The Egyptian state, on the other hand, was determined to secure access to the lucrative international trade routes of the southern Levantine region. Forshaw observes that Egypt's motivations for establishing its rule in the region of Syria-Palestine were probably driven by two main factors: "From a commercial viewpoint, control of the Mediterranean ports and access to the cedar and fir trees from Lebanon would have been important."[89] As he emphasizes, "Strategically, with the demise of Assyrian power and the increasing peril posed by the rise of the Babylonian Empire, there was now a need to create a buffer zone to prevent the Babylonians from directly threatening Egypt."[90] Crouch notes that in the intense struggle between these two regional powers, "the

[85] Brueggemann 2007: 28.
[86] Brueggemann 2007: 28.
[87] Brueggemann 2007: 28.
[88] In the late seventh century BCE, the mighty Assyrian Empire crumbled under the rising power of the Babylonian kingdom, which dealt critical blows that reshaped the balance of power across the ancient Near East. In a swift turn of events, the cities of Ashur and Nineveh fell in 614 and 612 BCE, respectively, as the Medes joined forces with the Babylonians to bring Assyria's dominance to a dramatic end. See Frehm 2017: 241. In the sixth century BCE, the Babylonian empire gained control over the region of Judah, which had previously been ruled by Assyria, and expanded its territory.
[89] Forshaw 2019: [e-book].
[90] See Forshaw 2019. [online version]. Egypt had a steady and vested interest in the Levant's markets, consistently trading goods like gold, timber, olive oil, wine, and high-end luxury items. This enduring economic partnership kept the trade routes alive and lucrative on both ends. See Xekalaki 2021: 3938-3948.

Levantine kingdoms sought to judge the likely outcome of an ongoing power struggle between two parties who appeared evenly matched." She further explains that a series of volatile and divided allegiances played a crucial role in the demise of Judah.[91]

Jeremiah's prophetic narrative begins with the assertion in the book's superscription that the divine word first came to him during the reign of King Josiah of Judah, reappeared during the reign of Jehoiakim, and persisted until the destruction of Jerusalem under Zedekiah (Jer 1:2-3). Notably absent in the superscription are Jehoiachin, whose three-month reign ended in 597 BCE, following his father's rebellion against the Babylonians, and Gedaliah, the native governor appointed by the Babylonians after Jerusalem's destruction in 586 BCE. As Crouch observes, "The omission of Gedaliah effects the illusion that the prophetic word ceased with the fall of the city, despite the book's inclusion of material that describes Jeremiah conveying such words after 586 BCE (MT Jeremiah 39–45 [LXX Jeremiah 46–51])."[92] She adds that the superscription of the book directs the reader's attention to Babylonia, the place of exile for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, effectively sidelining the ongoing events in their homeland. This shift in focus implies that the primary concern in evaluating the work should be the fate of those who have been displaced from their native land.[93]

Before returning to this point, it is essential to note that despite being mentioned in the book superscription, Jeremiah largely lacks any significant portrayal of Josiah.[94] Jeremiah contains scant material addressing the significant transformations linked to his governance. The omission of this important king is peculiar considering, as Crouch highlights,[95] that Jeremiah's prophetic activity began in 627 BCE, placing him in a kingdom under Josiah's rule for nearly two decades. The absence of any mention of Josiah's reign, especially his renowned religious reform—documented in 2 Kgs 22-23 and 2 Chr 34-35, which sought to purify Yahweh's worship and eradicate idolatrous practices in Judah—is noteworthy.[96] This absence is perhaps indirectly addressed through the pervasive use of Deuteronomistic language and theology in parts of the

[91] Crouch 2021: 27.
[92] Crouch 2021: 29.
[93] Crouch 2021: 29.
[94] The only explicit mention of his rule may be found in Jer 3:6. See Crouch 2020: 594–609.
[95] Crouch 2021: 30.
[96] Sweeney 1996: 569-583.

Jeremiah traditions, suggesting an interest in or at least sympathy for Josiah's reformative efforts. As Crouch notes, while the precise involvement of a historical Jeremiah during Josiah's reign remains uncertain, it is undeniable that the political and religious transformations initiated under King Josiah significantly shaped the context to which much of the Jeremiah traditions respond.[97] To Crouch, Josiah's death symbolizes the collapse of nationalistic aspirations rooted in a renewed commitment to exclusive Yahwism. His purported assassination at Megiddo (2 Kgs 23:29-30) or death resulting from a mortal wound in battle (2 Chron 35:20-24) represented a defiant stance against the Assyrian Empire, which sought to maintain its control over the Levant with Egyptian support.[98]

Frost contends that the "general conspiracy of silence" surrounding the death of Josiah arises from an inability to provide a satisfactory theological explanation for this event. He thinks that Josiah's death represented a critical rupture for the Old Testament's conception of divinely guided history. As Frost further observes, "The silence which followed the death of Josiah was not merely the embarrassed silence of the prophets who had previously encouraged him to go to Megiddo; [...] no, the silence following the death of Josiah which is so profound is the silence of the historiographers."[99] According to Frost, "Israel had invented history writing by accepting a premise: Yahweh is at work in the events of time achieving his will." However, as he notes, the tragedy at Megiddo starkly contradicted this belief, precipitating the fall of Jerusalem and the subsequent captivity of the people. This calamity fundamentally undermined the foundational premise of Israelite historiography.[100]

The Aftermath of Josiah's Death and Jehoiakim's Reign

[97] Crouch 2021: 30.

[98] Josiah met his end at the hands of Pharaoh Neco II during the Battle of Megiddo, where the Judean king tried to block the Egyptian ruler's march toward Syria to support Babylon against Assyria (see 2 Chr 35:22-25; 2 Kgs 23:29). According to Mitchell, the Chronicler casts Josiah as a kind of savior for Judah. Though his death on the battlefield might seem like a tragic waste, the Chronicler portrays it as a peaceful passing. Josiah, continuing Hezekiah's legacy, dies in שלום—at peace, in Jerusalem. According to Mitchell, "The Chronicler's depiction of Josiah was not simply an interpretive expansion of the account in 2 Kgs 23; it was a rewriting of the account. This rewriting, in conjunction with the Chronicler's rewriting of Josiah's Passover, radically changes the depiction." See Mitchell 2006: 434-435.

[99] Frost 1968: 381.

[100] Frost 1968: 381-382.

With Josiah's death in 609 BCE, Judah's fate as a sovereign kingdom began to unravel, especially when we consider the subsequent installation of Jehoiakim, Josiah's son, by the Egyptian king Necho (2 Kgs 23:34). Jehoiakim's reign was characterized by his unwillingness to submit to a new foreign ruler, further exacerbating Judah's decline:[101] "Jehoiakim's inability to commit to an imperial overlord would ultimately trigger the first of two devastating invasions of the kingdom. As Crouch points out, "Though placed on the throne by the power of the Egyptians, *Nabû-kudurri-uṣur*'s [i.e., Nebuchadnezzar's] success at Carchemish in 605 BC provided ample incentive to change the kingdom's loyalties."[102] The installation of Jehoiakim as the ruler of Judah is pivotal to understanding the dynamics between Jeremiah and the Jerusalem elite (see Jeremiah 36 [43]). The Jeremianic tradition interprets the military and political ascent of the Babylonians as indicative of Judah's disobedience and unfaithfulness to Yahweh. In this context, Crouch argues that this rise underscores the broader narrative of divine retribution and the prophetic call for repentance and adds that "Jeremiah 36 [43] in particular appears intent on emphasizing the extent and thoroughgoing character of the population's guilt; although its direct focus is on Jehoiakim's rejection of the prophetic word..."[103] According to Crouch, Jehoiakim's political decisions, particularly his reversal of loyalty from Nebuchadnezzar to Egypt following the 601 BCE stalemate between Egyptian and Babylonian forces at Egypt's border, irrevocably set the kingdom on a path of decline. This pivotal shift marked the beginning of a trajectory from which the kingdom would never recover.[104]

The Consequences of Political Decisions

The deportation of Jehoiachin to Babylon and the subsequent installation of Zedekiah in Jerusalem hold profound symbolic significance in Jeremiah as these events not only represent the contrasting claims of the deportees and the non-deportees but also, as Crouch explains, demonstrate "...the extent to which the Jeremiah traditions advocate submission to a foreign

[101] Crouch 2021: 31.
[102] Crouch 2021: 32.
[103] Crouch 2021: 32.
[104] Crouch 2021: 32.

power. Repeatedly, the prophet is shown imploring Zedekiah to submit to Babylonian authority in order to save himself, his house, and his kingdom (Jer 38:17 [45:17]; cf. 27:12–15 [34:12–15]).”[105] From Jeremiah’s perspective, Zedekiah’s rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar, contrary to the prophet’s explicit advice, constituted not only a rejection of Nebuchadnezzar’s sovereignty but also of Yahweh. Consequently, Jeremiah’s prophetic message can be seen as distinctly anti-Egyptian. As Marzouk explains, Jeremiah depicts Egypt negatively, not only due to Judah’s political alliance with Egypt before the Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem but also because the Judeans who remained in the land after the invasion sought refuge in Egypt. Marzouk argues that “Jeremiah and his scribal circle see these two manifestations of the Judean relation with Egypt as rebellion against Yhwh,”[106] adding that, from a theological perspective, the Jeremiah tradition viewed Egypt as luring the Judeans away from their obedience to Yahweh. Marzouk observes that within this context, “the memory of the exodus from Egypt ought to be replaced by a new exodus from Babylon [...] the connections between the oracles against the Judean diaspora in Egypt and the oracles against Egypt show not only the weakness of Egypt as a reliable place of refuge, but the text’s preferential treatment of those exiled to Babylon.”[107]

The Complex Political Landscape of Judah

The historical overview in this section paints a broad picture of the complex political scene in Judah during the late seventh and early sixth centuries BCE. Nestled between the powerful Babylonian and Egyptian empires, the small kingdom of Judah faced a turbulent backdrop filled with rival political factions. These groups, including various prophetic voices, offered differing political and diplomatic strategies, swinging between support for Egypt and Babylon. In this charged atmosphere, Jeremiah stands out as a key figure promoting an anti-Egyptian stance, firmly arguing for Judah’s submission to Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon. This theological perspective is woven throughout Jeremiah’s messages, condemning any pro-Egyptian sentiment that surfaces in public discussions or prophetic declarations aimed at the people of Judah.

[105] Crouch 2021: 35.
[106] Marzouk 2021: 76.
[107] Marzouk 2021: 75-76.

Overview of the *Maqlû* Ritual

2.1 The *Maqlû* Ritual

In his 2002 landmark study *Mesopotamian Witchcraft*, Abusch laid out his translation and interpretation of *Maqlû* as follows: "The incantations and rituals of *Maqlû* are directed against witches and witchcraft, and it is the longest and most important Mesopotamian text concerned with combating witchcraft."[108] Abusch highlights that *Maqlû* was far from being just a random collection of incantations; it was actually a significant single Assyrian ceremony designed to combat witchcraft and was so important that it was "even the subject of a letter written by the exorcist *Nabû-nādin-šumi* to King Esarhaddon in early August 670 B.C.E."[109] It was conducted late at night toward the end of the month of *Abu* (the fifth month of the Babylonian calendar, corresponding to the Assyrian month *Ḫibur*).[110] As Abusch points out, this timing was significant, as it fell "at a time when spirits were thought to move back and forth between the netherworld and this world." Abusch later clarified that the ceremony's opening lines, addressed to both the gods of the night sky and those of the underworld, create a distinctly cosmic backdrop, blending astral and chthonic elements. As he puts it, "the introduction is directed to the nighttime sky and its gods and to the netherworld and its gods,"[111] setting the stage for a universal ritual; one that spans the heavens and the underworld.

2.2 Structure of the Ritual: Three Main Phases

Abusch interprets the ritual as divided into three main sections spread across the eight cuneiform tablets that make up the text.

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[108] Abusch 2002: 15.
[109] See *SAA* 10 274. Published in Parpola 1993. "Statue of Gilgameš (*ABL* 0056)." In *SAA Online* 2019.
[110] The Babylonian calendar comprised twelve lunar months: *Nisannu, Ayyāru, Simānu, Duʾūzu, Abu, Ulūlu, Tašrītu, Araḫšamnu, Kissilīmu, Ṭebētu/Kanūnu, Šabāṭu* and *Addaru*. See Bloch 2012.
[111] Abusch 2002: 219.

Phase 1: Judgment and Banishing the Witch (Tablets I-V). The first section, comprising tablets I-V, involves invoking the gods of the night and focuses on judging, executing, and banishing the witch.

Phase 2: Fumigation and Protection of the Patient (Tablets VI 1 - VII 57). The second section, tablets VI 1-VII 57, continues the nightly ceremony, shifting to the patient's (or victim of witchcraft) bedroom. At this stage, Abusch explains, "One imagines the patient focusing on, or anticipating, the experiences of sleep. The primary rite is fumigation …"[112] He suggests that "the main purpose of fumigation is to counteract and disperse attacks of witchcraft imagined as a dream that comes in the form of smoke, a cloud, or the like."[113]

Phase 3: Dawn and Cleansing (Tablets VII 58 - VIII). Finally, the third section, tablets VII 58-VIII, takes place at dawn, centering on a washing ritual. Here, the patient repeatedly washes over a figure of the witch, symbolically cleansing himself of the night's malevolent experiences and effectively turning the spell back on the witch, causing the evil forces she elicited to strike her instead.[114]

2.3 Legal and Social Framework of the *Maqlû* Ceremony

Abusch emphasizes that the ceremonial addresses in *Maqlû* operate within a social and legal framework, describing them as "clothed in a legal guise, and the ceremony constitutes some form of judgment and execution."[115] The ceremony starts with a series of invocations that frame it as a courtroom drama: with introductory invocations, witches are formally accused and detained, or as Abusch describes, "prior to and in anticipation of their subsequent judgment and execution in the following sections of the work."[116] Here, the patient calls upon the gods of the night sky, seeking their backing for a guilty verdict against the witch who stands accused of

[112] Abusch 2002: 16.
[113] Abusch 2002: 16.
[114] Abusch 2002: 16.
[115] Abusch 2002: 220.
[116] Abusch 2002: 220.

wrongfully attacking him. At this preliminary stage, the gods provide the patient with a favorable hearing, laying the groundwork for justice to be served.

Abusch describes a scene where the speaker calls on the powers of the underworld to seal a powerful oath. As he explains, "He invokes the gods of the netherworld to assist him in enforcing the *māmītu*, 'oath,' and in maintaining control over the witches in what is both a magical and legal conflict."[117] This is not any ordinary pledge; it is a supernatural showdown, with the speaker summoning forces of nature to act as witnesses and back him up against the witches. Ultimately, the goal, as Abusch puts it, is "to recall, invoke, and impose a divinely sanctioned oath and curse and to secure the imprisonment of the witches preliminary to their judgment by Nusku and execution by Girra in I 73ff."[118]

2.4 The Witch as an Enemy of Cosmic Order

As for the enemy of the speaker in this ceremony, the witch, Abusch tells us that she is not an "ordinary witch" but has "demonic quality." This evil being must not be allowed "to make the rounds of heaven and the netherworld together with the stars but must be sent off to the steppe where she will be a formless wind."[119] The casting off of the witch reveals thus the primary objective of the ritual which is "to purge and protect the patient from the fearful experiences of the night and to assure him that they would not recur."[120] Thus, the work aims "to protect the victim, to disperse witchcraft, and to expel the witch from the organized community of the cosmos, a community made up of both the heavens and the netherworld."[121]

2.5 The *Āšipu*: Ritual Practitioners and Divine Intermediaries

Standing shoulder-to-shoulder with the patient or ritual speaker, the *āšipu*—also known as the exorcist or magician—plays a key role in these ancient healing ceremonies. This practitioner, whose title shares roots with *šiptu* or "incantation," would handle supernatural

[117] Abusch 2002: 220.
[118] Abusch 2002: 220.
[119] Abusch 2002: 290.
[120] Abusch 2002: 290.
[121] Abusch 2002: 290.

forces, including demons, and as Abusch points out, "may be regarded as a member of the clergy or, at least, of the temple personnel."[122] Oral rituals, which would include both incantations and prayers, were central to the exorcist's toolkit. The *āšipu* would legitimize the ritual by invoking divine powers, stating the ritual's aim, and setting the actions into motion. Incantations and prayers could take many forms: "addresses to beneficent natural forces and ceremonial objects or to the evil itself, which would be expelled, chased away, or even destroyed."[123] In ancient Mesopotamian lore, the witch cuts a dark and ominous figure, wielding a kind of magic designed to harm, as Abusch explains: "witches are illegitimate practitioners of magic."[124] These witches are seen in the sources as "antisocial and as motivated by malice and evil intent."[125]

2.6 Gendered Stereotypes: The Female Witch in Mesopotamian Culture

Although both men and women could be labeled as witches, the archetype leans strongly female. In ancient Babylonia and Assyria, anti-witchcraft incantations often pinned the blame for curses and dark magic on both men and women. Though men and women could be accused of being either a *kaššāpu* ("warlock") or a *kaššāptu* ("witch") and labeled as *bēl dabābi* ("male adversary") or *bēlet dabābi* ("female adversary"), the texts reveal a clear bias. Time and again, it is the female witch—the *kaššāptu*—who takes center stage as the unnamed culprit in these anti-witchcraft incantations. Abusch and Schwemer draw attention to the fact that, in ancient Mesopotamian society, the formal practice of magic and healing—known as *āšipūtu*—was exclusively a male dominated domain. Yet, they also observe that at "a lower and more private social level," women took on significant roles in preparing remedies, caring for the sick, and aiding in childbirth. According to them, these tasks likely "provided a ready background for the formation of gender polarization and the creation of the stereotype of the female witch."[126]

[122] Abusch 2002: 5.
[123] Abusch 2002: 6.
[124] Abusch 2002: 7.
[125] Abusch 2002: 7.
[126] Abusch and Schwemer 2011: 5.

Operating from the shadows, the witch inflicts suffering through indirect means. She might, for instance, "steal objects that have been in contact with and represent her victim," using these items to channel harm. A malevolent act could involve fashioning a likeness of her target and contorting its limbs, causing her victim to suffer "agony and debilitating disease."[127] She's also known to bury figurines in secret spots or even leave them as food for animals—all steps in her spellcasting arsenal. And her arsenal includes ominous portents, as she is said to send out curses and bad omens that foreshadow disaster. As Abusch notes, "Such confrontations are perceived as bringing about harm and are interpreted as signs that result in evil."[128]

[127] Abusch 2002: 7
[128] Abusch 2002: 7.

CHAPTER II

Methodology

1. Reconceptualizing Prophetic Discourse: The Role of Magical Rhetoric in Jeremiah

As discussed in the introduction, this dissertation seeks to fill a notable gap in the scholarship on Jeremiah by exploring what I refer to as the "magical rhetoric" of the text. The pervasive theurgic atmosphere created by this rhetoric adds a ritualistic dimension to Jeremiah's prophetic discourse, one that has largely gone unexamined in academic discussions, save for sporadic references in specialized studies. This oversight persists despite the crucial role this rhetoric plays in enhancing our understanding of Jeremiah's intricate theology.

In the introduction, I have defined magical rhetoric as a form of persuasive language that employs ritualistic vernacular to shape religious, political, or social power dynamics described within the Jeremiah narrative.[1] To refine this concept further, we can understand magic rhetoric as a form of "specialized" rhetorical and semantic density, where a single word, phrase, expression, or entire passage can carry multiple layers of meaning or connotations linked to ritual-magical language. The result is a complex network of meanings that is deeply dependent on its context, including narrative structure, themes, and motifs.

It should be emphasized that the concept of magical rhetoric is not new. Donavin has recently examined the notion of "magical rhetoric" through an analysis of John Gower's *Confessio Amantis* (1901),[2] where, in recounting the "Tale of Ulysses and Telegonus" (Book 6), Gower describes Ulysses as "a great rhetorician" and "a great magician."[3] This juxtaposition of rhetoric and magic closely parallels Fohrer's earlier work in the 1960s, which similarly explored the intersection of speech and magic within the context of biblical prophecy.[4] Donavin highlights that Gower, through allusions to the pseudo-Aristotelian *Secretum Secretorum* and *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum*, as well as Latin translations and commentaries on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, constructs a syncretic discipline that has the power to captivate audiences

[1] I examine these political dynamics in the overview of the book of Jeremiah in Chapter I.
[2] Gower 1901.
[3] Donavin 2020: 1-41.
[4] Fohrer 1967: 242-64.

through persuasive speech that makes use of incantatory language.[5] The primary function of incantations, as Gower suggests, is to "mesmerize" the audience. This is achieved particularly through rhetorical devices like repetition and anaphora, being especially effective.[6] As Donavin aptly puts it: "*repetitiones* that adorn important insights cast a verbal magic with a W/word that was already redolent with creative power."[7]

The exploration of magical rhetoric in Gower's work not only reinforces the historical intersection between rhetoric and magic but also invites us to consider how the power of speech transcends mere persuasion, extending into realms where words wield profound influence. This dynamic is vividly illustrated in the renowned Sumerian tale of "Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta," where the written word, when uttered, instills fear in the king due to its numinous force, leading to the Lord of Aratta's submission to Enmerkar (ll. 535-540).[8] Words carry a form of magical potency, particularly within the context of prophecy, where speech is understood not as a human construct but as a divine pronouncement.[9] This understanding of the inherent power of language lays the groundwork for my concept of "magical rhetoric," which builds on established ideas in rhetorical studies and literary criticism by introducing three key innovations. First, it emphasizes the distinctive role of ritualistic vernacular, which highlights particular language patterns and structures employed to evoke magical effects within prophetic discourse. Second, it advances the notion of specialized rhetorical and semantic density, which creates a layered and context-dependent network of meanings—particularly in oracles of judgment. Finally, it explores how these rhetorical strategies can influence and shape religious, political, and social power dynamics in times of political tension and uncertainty like the ones described in the book of Jeremiah.

[5] Donavin 2020: 20.
[6] Veldhuis highlights the rhetorical role of literary devices such as parallelism, similes, chiasm, rhyme, and wordplay in incantations. See Veldhuis 1999: 35-48.
[7] Donavin 2020: 34.
[8] Vanstiphout 2004.
[9] Fohrer 1967: 40.

Rhetorical Analysis and Magical Language in Jeremiah: A Comparative Study

To offer a clear and empirically assessable example of how this particular form of rhetorical analysis is applicable to our text, especially when combined with other analytical methodologies, we can examine the tripartite invocation found in Jeremiah 22:29: "land, land, land" (ארץ ארץ ארץ), a topic already addressed in the introduction.[10] When we compare this expression, unique in the biblical corpus, to its ostensible parallel in the exorcist's invocation in *Maqlû* I, l. 37 "Netherworld, netherworld, yea netherworld" (*erṣetu erṣetu erṣetum-ma*), we can start by analyzing it through a rhetorical lens and understand it as an *epizeuxis*, which is a figure of speech in which one or more words are repeated immediately after one another for emphasis, but we can also identify in it a theurgic content that ties it to the ritual realm of word repetition—here is when "magical rhetorical" analysis swoops in. The repetition of identical words in succession is indeed a feature of magical ritualistic language in anthropology. This practice, often referred to as "mantra" or "incantation," serves to enhance the potency of the spoken words and is believed to invoke supernatural effects, a kind of *abracadabra*. When we start seeing such repetitions occurring more than once in the text of Jeremiah, not in isolation but in contexts that are associated with cursing language, the possibility that the tripartite expression is more than a simple rhetorical device used for emphasis increases. In his 2002 essay "The Poetics of the Magical Charm," Versnel points out that incantations tend to have stereotyped and recurrent formal characteristics, including forms of rhyme, alliteration, parallelization by opposites, but especially repetition, which he calls "a fixed technique in both religious and magical expressions, and the instruction to repeat a word or formula two or especially three times is rife."[11]

Before circling back to Jer 22:29, let us look at the well-known Jeremianic tripartite repetition in Jer 7:4, היכל יהוה היכל יהוה היכל יהוה ("the temple of Yahweh, the temple of Yahweh, the temple of Yahweh"). This repetition is commonly understood as part of a religious polemic emphasizing the Judean's false sense of security. However, the polemical force of this passage hinges on it being perceived by the people as a kind of magic formula. Jeremiah here

[10] Chapters IV and V dive deeper into specific passages in the book of Jeremiah, analyzing them using a combination of integrated methodologies.
[11] Versnel 2002: 131.

does not criticize the magic formula itself, which he recognizes as commonly used among the people, but criticizes its abuse, discarding it as mere false belief (דברי השקר). Remarkably, the Septuagint (LXX) consistently reduces such tripartite expressions, which instead mark the Masoretic text of Jeremiah (in Jer 22:29 and 7:4), to a double repetition. Although no comprehensive study has focused on this phenomenon in the Greek translation, this reduction of rhetorical epizeuxis may indicate an effort to "de-magify" the text by intentionally removing or reducing its magical elements. The presence of such repetitions in Jeremiah, which manifest also in the form of chiastic structures, as in the case of the antithetical juxtaposition in contrasting verbal pairs (speak/listen, call/answer) in Jer 7:13 and its exact parallel in *Maqlû* I 56-57 (see discussion in Chapter IV), are indicative of deliberate choices made by the text author who uses incantatory-ritual rhetoric to shape his theological message.

I have already noted this requisite, but it bears repeating: a comprehensive examination of the complexities of the passages discussed above necessitates the integration of multiple methodological approaches. In the case at hand, this begins with comparative and intertextual analyses of the tripartite repetition in Jeremiah 22 and the analogous structure found in *Maqlû*. Additionally, the rhetorical examination of epizeuxis (repetition for emphasis) in Jer 22:29 must be combined with a form-critical evaluation of the recurring patterns and structures (tripartite repetitions) within the text. These identifications must be further illuminated through textual-critical analysis, specifically by comparing the treatment of tripartite expressions in the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint (LXX). This programmatic outline underscores that the complexity of Jeremiah's rhetoric extends far beyond its surface literary style, delving into deeper layers of meaning that have profound theological repercussions for our understanding of the text.

Conceptualizing Literary Resonance: One-Way Influences from Mesopotamia to Jeremiah

The analysis of magical rhetoric serves as a valuable tool for uncovering hidden nuances within the text's rich figurative language. In their effort to make sense of the apparent literary relationship between the book of Jeremiah and Mesopotamian theurgic tradition, the literary approaches in this dissertation concentrate also on the idea of "diachronic literary resonance,"

Calderbank interprets this concept as a bidirectional or even multidirectional interaction between sources. In her 2021 essay, "Reading for Resonance," she draws on a metaphor from the realm of physics to explain her understanding of resonance, describing it as "the amplificative effect when the frequency of a stimulus matches or nearly matches the natural frequency of a system." This metaphor functions on two levels in her analysis. First, it illustrates how elements within a biblical text *resonate* with one another, reinforcing themes and details within the immediate textual context. Second, it underscores the *intertextual links* between the text and external traditions, situating both within a broader interpretive framework.[12]

Calderbank's bi- or multidirectional approach is not applicable to our analysis, as her concept of resonance suggests a *mutual awareness* and *engagement* between two or more literary traditions. In our case, it is the Jeremiah tradition that alludes to the Mesopotamian tradition, rather than the other way around. The question of whether this literary "pollination" occurred in Judah or within the Babylonian diaspora is a complex issue that falls outside the scope of this study. Therefore, I conceptualize literary "resonance" as a form of echo—representing a *one-way flow* of information or influence, akin to Echo's unrequited love for Narcissus in Ovid's masterpiece.

The Case for Intentional Allusion: On the Relationship Between Jeremiah and Mesopotamian Magic Traditions

Some commentators might find the parallels between these texts potentially overstated and too speculative. While this issue is acknowledged in the "Limitations" section of this dissertation, as my analyses demonstrate in Chapters V and VI, the frequency, specificity, and recurring patterns of allusion between the Jeremiah and Mesopotamian magic tradition suggest more than mere coincidence or simple borrowing.[13] The use of uncommon terminology fitting into identical thematic categories further supports this view. These correspondences indicate to me an *intentional* allusive relationship between the two corpora and, potentially, reflect the prophet's adaptation or reinterpretation of Mesopotamian literary and religious traditions cast

[12] Calderbank 2021: 123–54.
[13] Sommer 1998: 5 and 35.

within an Israelite theological framework. Further research is needed to fully articulate the nature and extent of this connection.

EXCURSUS: Insights from Schultz, Eichhorn, and Talmon on the Problem with Inner-Biblical Quotations

In light of the potential limitations of this study, it is essential to explore how the identification of intentional allusions may interact with the complexities involved in analyzing inner-biblical quotations. Schultz's critique of the quotation-transmission processes in biblical prophetic literature underscores this point, as he argues that inner-biblical quotations arise from shared traditions rather than direct literary dependence. In his important 1999 study of quotation in biblical prophetic books entitled *The Search for Quotation: Verbal Parallels in the Prophets*,[14] Schultz addresses the problem of the quotation-transmission process by adding to Sommer's argument. Schultz posits that the "cumulative argument" operates under the assumption that the most accurate or exclusive approach to explaining linguistic parallels lies in determining the source of the quotation. Schultz aligns with Rudolph's view that the issue of inner-biblical quotations transcends mere literary dependence, emphasizing instead a connection rooted in a shared tradition. He further notes that, if Rudolph's assertion holds true, the prophets sharing a particular parallel may derive from a common tradition rather than directly from one another. Consequently, meticulous comparisons of parallel passages illuminate not the influence of one prophet on another but rather how each has adapted and integrated a specific tradition into their respective messages.[15]

Eichhorn, for his part, recognized the crucial role of inner-biblical quotations in higher and lower criticism highlighting their function in revealing that many known errors in the text are the result of textual transmission. Eichhorn further noted that each parallel passage calls for an individualized strategy that considers the unique historical and literary context of that specific excerpt. Expanding on Eichhorn's insights, Schultz argues that the criteria for evaluating these inner-biblical quotations should be drawn from the individual characteristics of each passage.

[14] Schultz 1999.
[15] Schultz 1999: 71.

Schultz, like Eichhorn, stresses the need for a careful examination of parallel texts to determine whether the repetition is the work of the same or a different author and whether the reading changes are intentional or just a felicitous coincidence.[16]

Schultz also hammers home a point that is worth considering for our discussion, namely, the need to determine which passage is the original, which is a pivotal step in establishing the trajectory of the textual connection. Schultz rightly notes how this is not an easy task because "in one parallel the more forceful, more natural, superior reading may be the original, in another it may be the correction. Thus the text critic must be satisfied with probabilities or even possibilities rather than certainties." Schultz also observes that variations between parallel passages within the same tradition, such as prophetic passages, are frequently best explained as the result of errors in oral transmission.[17]

Talmon extensively studied similar types of parallel passages (which he refers to as "synonymous readings") in different texts along with their variant by comparing the readings found in the Qumran biblical manuscripts with those in the MT and LXX. He noted that parallel passages showcasing variations were the result of the substitution of interchangeable and synonymous words and phrases. He further observed that these variations almost invariably do not compromise the integrity of the verse's structure, meaning, or rhythmic flow and, for this reason, he suggests that we must refrain from dismissing them as mere scribal errors, especially when there is no evidence of intentional or systematic tampering to be found.[18] To explain the differences found in parallel passages, Talmon further notes that "The stylistic inversion of synonymous words is now shown to constitute the differentiating factor between two textual variants of the same verse.[19] According to Talmon, the use of chiasm, which involves inverting synonymous elements, serves a dual purpose. It not only signifies the repetition of a statement in a reversed way, as seen in examples like Isa 40:21 // Isa 48:8, but also serves as a marker for internal biblical quotations.

[16] Schultz 1999: 73.
[17] Schultz 1999: 73.
[18] Talmon 1961: 336.
[19] Talmon 1961: 340.

Schultz offers a number of limitations to Talmon's approach to the notion of "synonymous readings." He argues that it could be potentially "futile and misdirected" to determine which reading is "superior" if synonymous readings have been produced and preserved *intentionally*, adding that "Talmon's uncovering of this type of intentional variation should alert one to the likelihood of many other kinds of intentional, purposeful alterations. Accordingly, the exactness of linguistic correspondence may be a faulty criterion for determining what is or is not a quotation."[20] Schultz wraps up his critique by suggesting that our excessive focus on identifying citations and tracing borrowing patterns might have distracted us from exploring other valuable ways to analyze the data. Schultz wishes to establish that "common historical circumstances, a common message, and a common rhetorical heritage may explain satisfactorily most of these similarities in wording. Simply being a prophet was sufficient cause for quoting one's predecessors."[21]

While Schultz presents several thought-provoking insights, it is not without merit to question the notion of "superior" reading within intentionally produced synonymous readings. Even when a "superior" reading is intentionally preserved and reproduced in a different text, it is reasonable to assume that it stays true to its original context. However, *that* context inevitably differs from the source that reproduces it and draws inspiration from it. This raises an important question: What was the original context of the synonymous reading? Understanding this context is key to grasping how it influences the text, which mirrors certain elements of its language.

It might be prudent to take a balanced approach that integrates several critical insights from the previous discussion. First, we should consider Eichhorn's emphasis on a personalized strategy to the analysis of parallel passages. Second, Schultz's observation that variations within the same tradition often result from errors in oral transmission deserves attention. Third, Talmon's argument about the intentionality of the tradition, which maintains "synonymous readings" as an intentional feature, must be taken into account. Finally, Schultz's observation deepens this middle-ground approach, revealing how the shared language in similar biblical

[20] Talmon 1961: 77.
[21] Talmon 1961: 81.

prophetic narratives often reflects common historical contexts, unified messages, and a shared rhetorical tradition.

2. Genre Intertextuality and Hermeneutical Challenges in Jeremiah

This exegetical study has faced additional substantial hermeneutical challenges at the intersection of genre intertextuality and form-critical analyses, which may ultimately prove to be intractable. When disparate genres intersect within a text, there is a potential for "genre bending," a phenomenon well-known in the form criticism of biblical texts.[22] Genre-bending occurs when a text intentionally intertwines and/or overturns the established conventions of its literary category. The result of this literary choice is usually a hybrid, innovative text. The point of bending genres is to upend the readers' assumptions by mixing up various literary forms. In Jeremiah, for example, the author very often subverts standard prophetic conventions by mixing things together. The end result is an engrossing plot twist. Imagine a mystery novel that reveals its culprit in the opening chapters, Jeremiah does so in chapter one (cf. Jer 1:14-16), or a tragedy that ends with unexpected joy; this is what happens after Jeremiah 31 (cf. Jer 31:7).

The texts I analyze in this dissertation (see introduction above) present a diverse array of pericopes illustrating a variety of literary genres, each fulfilling distinct rhetorical functions. The interpretation of these genres and their literary roles becomes more difficult when they are removed from their original *Sitz im Leben* and incorporated into new narrative frameworks. For example, the inclusion of a funeral dirge within an oracle of judgment presents unique exegetical difficulties.[23] While a funeral dirge typically functions as an integral element in mourning rituals, with the cultic setting providing the most appropriate context, prophetic literature does not inherently align with specific liturgical practices, although, as we will see in this analysis, it may.

[22] Attridge 2002: 3-21.
[23] Cf. Jeremiah 23:1-4, see the interjection הוֹי "woe" at the beginning of verse 1.

The *Maqlû* Ritual: Syncretism and Legalism in Mesopotamian Witchcraft Practices

This dissertation draws heavily upon *Maqlû* (Akkadian for "Burning"), a key exemplar showcasing the ritual practices prevalent in ancient Mesopotamia for combating witchcraft. As a ritual composition, *Maqlû* exhibits syncretic genre features, incorporating elements from diverse literary forms, including theophanic invocations, lamentations, petitionary prayers, and apotropaic incantations. Moreover, it encompasses a unique legalistic vernacular and framework, intricately woven into a unified magical ceremony, reminiscent of the covenant lawsuit genre found in prophetic literature. The ritual's efficacy and its accompanying principles were thought to afford apotropaic protection against *kišpū*, a concept that might be loosely construed as "witchcraft" in comparative religious studies. In the historical-cultural context of ancient Mesopotamia, it was widely believed that witchcraft and curses originated from human behavior, especially when societal prohibitions or "taboos" (Akk. *māmītu*) were violated.[24]

Textual Complexity and Rhetorical Intersections in Jeremiah and the Maqlû Series

The book of Jeremiah and the *Maqlû* series share a comparable level of textual complexity within their respective literary traditions. While each serves a unique role within the broader literary genre, Jeremiah, especially, showcases a rich assortment of pericopes that blend both poetry and prose. This diverse literary landscape in Jeremiah arises from two key factors: Its lengthy history of redaction and its varied rhetorical aims, which encompass apologetic, theological, historiographical, and instructional elements. Multiple tradents likely contributed to various sections of the book of Jeremiah, quite possibly over different periods and geographical locations. Consequently, before attaining its present canonical form, the book went through editorial changes. The confusing literary saga of Jeremiah serves as an instructive exemplification of the challenges in deciphering the intricate editorial lineage of the book. The Masoretic Text represents a distinct, fully preserved Hebrew tradition, potentially incorporating extensions or alterations from an original *Vorlage*. The alternate and shorter rendition of it is

[24] Abusch 2002: 1-34.

according to many interpreters the Greek version of the book (known as the Septuagint).[25] The Greek translation of this narrative, originally written in Hebrew, possesses a complex transmission history, intertwining with various versions that might have been already in circulation during the third and second centuries BCE.[26] The book of Jeremiah consists of an eclectic mix of genres and its narrative appears to transition seamlessly between poetic oracles and extensive prose accounts that intricately depict the journey of Jeremiah. Interwoven within the fabric of the book's narrative are poignant autobiographical reflections that portray the prophet's profound existential anguish, as he grapples with the weighty role of being a conduit between God and the Israelites. For instance, Allen argues that the "bombardment of genres" in Jeremiah 1 paints Jeremiah as a prophet specially equipped for the impending crisis, "empowered to be Yahweh's plenipotentiary, despite the controversy he was to stir up among his contemporaries."[27] Many autobiographical passages offer a glimpse into the prophet's inner turmoil and the challenges he faces as a divine messenger. In keeping with Lundbom's astute observation, the autobiographical narratives, commonly referred to as "confessions," bear a noticeable resemblance to the heartfelt laments found within the Psalter.[28]

Another notable characteristic of Jeremiah's rhetoric is the inclusion of oracles that fall within the genre of prophecies of doom and omens. The prophetic genre enjoyed widespread prevalence across the ancient Near East. Prophecies and omens have long served as channels for future predictions, offering glimpses into the divine perspective on specific events. According to some scholars, biblical prophecy should not be hastily equated with Mesopotamian prophecy or divination, as it is believed to be a distinct form of religious poetry. While the prevailing notion associates Mesopotamian and Levantine prophecies with a similar framework, this perspective draws attention to the complex nature of biblical prophecy. As Geller highlights, divination does not possess *inherent* magical qualities. There is in fact no correlation between the gods' boundless power and their capacity to communicate through

[25] Tov considers the short *Vorlage* of the Greek translation (LXX) to be the original first edition, while he views the Masoretic text as a later extended version of the same original *Vorlage*. See Tov 1981; rev. ed. 1997 [1998]: 145–67, 430.
[26] Shead 2018: 255.
[27] Allen 2008: 33.
[28] Lundbom 2013: 75-76.

signs. Divination serves as a method for interpreting and predicting various future events. Yet, omens play a crucial role in shaping human behavior, pushing individuals to align with divine intentions. Geller argues that magic has a rightful place within the realm of divination, thanks to the conditional nature of omens, often framed as "if x, then y may occur." He posits that any ominous prediction calls for the intervention of magic to prevent a negative outcome. In ancient Mesopotamia, this need was addressed through the *Namburbî* ritual, a series of spells designed specifically to counteract foreboding forecasts.[29] I argue that the overlap between prophetic messages and their theurgic elements is where oracular discourse meets incantatory rhetoric, effectively blurring the lines between different forms of communication. This fusion results in a cohesive rhetorical framework that brings together various genres—such as divination, anti-demonic spells, and laments—ultimately creating new literary constructs.

The *Maqlû* ritual also underwent substantial editorial reworking over an extended period,[30] gaining quasi-canonical status in ancient Assyria and Babylonia and commanding exegetical interest from generations of Mesopotamian scribes. According to Abusch, the redaction history of *Maqlû* can be traced back to the first millennium BCE, evolving from earlier, more concise recensions. *Maqlû* is part of a diverse corpus dedicated to the identification and treatment of afflictions attributed to malevolent spiritual entities. Another significant text for our understanding of Mesopotamian magical praxis comes from the *Šurpu* series, which also dates to the first millennium BCE and addresses issues of ritual impurity and divine disfavor. In their diverse array of subject matter, the incantation series *Maqlû* and *Šurpu* engage in what might be termed proto-psychological care in modern parlance. These texts explore various manifestations of spiritual and psychological distress through a range of apotropaic formulae and imprecations. The subjects encompass a spectrum of conditions, including paranoid ideation and phobias related to perceived adversaries (e.g., a malevolent practitioner of magic, a demon, or a restless spirit) or an unidentified force capable of causing harm, such as witchcraft, calumny, or the "evil eye." Somatic and psychosomatic symptoms such as insomnia, sexual dysfunction, and compulsive behaviors are documented, and certain Mesopotamian

[29] Geller 2015: 27-32.
[30] Abusch 2011: 11–41.

texts include incantations aimed at alleviating these conditions. The *Maqlû* and *Šurpu* incantations served as apotropaic measures against such impalpable anxieties, functioning as a form of ritual therapy in Assyrian society.

Cross-Cultural Transmission of Mesopotamian Magical Traditions in Biblical Literature

One last point to highlight in our discussion is the notable chronological gap between these two literary traditions. Although we have touched on this issue earlier, it deserves more attention, especially when exploring how Mesopotamian traditions may have impacted biblical literature in ways that go beyond simple thematic or linguistic parallels. Examining these cross-cultural exchanges prompts us to investigate how Mesopotamian incantation practices might have influenced nearby traditions, particularly in terms of how and why ritual knowledge was transmitted. In his 2015 article "*Contextualizing Tradition: Magic, Literacy and Domestic Life in Old Assyrian Kanesh,"*[31] Barjamovic observes that the incantation tablets we find on archaeological excavations often represent uncommon physical traces of the work of ritual specialists, who performed most of their tasks without the use of writing. Through an analysis of texts from Kaneš, the author demonstrates that incantation tablets were not always and necessarily the result of a tradition transmitted via master copies, and that the written preservation of "tradition" was not the primary concern of those who committed magic formulas to writing. Incantation tablets were often produced in writing to facilitate memory or transformed into talismanic form to obtain desired direct magical effects; in addition to being used as instructional tools to teach writing and transmit tradition.[32] Barjamovic thus argues that incantations were always first transmitted orally, while occasionally being taught through the written medium. As with much ancient literature, Barjamovic notes that we do not know the authors of the incantations that circulated—they were part of an oral tradition that was handed down from generation to generation—but we *do* know that incantations were known and recited by everyone. Looking at the case of Kaneš, Barjamovic believes that the spatial distribution of incantation tablets in the settlement of the lower town of Kültepe suggests that

[31] Barjamovic 2015: 48-86.
[32] Barjamovic 2015: 54.

incantation tablets were part of common objects of everyday life, and thus we should refrain from establishing artificial dichotomies between "folksy or erudite," and "oral or written"[33]

Biblical Narratives vis-a-vis Mesopotamian Literary Traditions: The Case of the Enuma Elish and Genesis

The investigation of Mesopotamian ritual practices and their modes of transmission provides a useful framework for examining how these traditions may have influenced neighboring cultures, including Israelite literature. Such cross-cultural engagements are evident in specific biblical texts that echo Mesopotamian literary traditions, often with adaptations or recontextualizations of core themes. A notable example of biblical references to Mesopotamian literary traditions can be found in the Babylonian creation epic, the *Enuma Elish*, which is echoed in Genesis 1–2.4. Frahm highlights that the Genesis narrative is "...the most famous and influential creation story of all, and while it lacks overt parallels with *Enuma Elish*, there are still several striking similarities between the two texts." Despite their many differences, the two accounts share a number of overlapping elements. Frahm points out that "...the sheer quantity of correspondences (some of which are exact on the lexical level) makes it hard to deny the likelihood of some genetic relationship between the two accounts." He argues that the "priestly author" behind Genesis essentially crafted a "counter-story" to the Babylonian epic, "aimed at thoroughly demythologizing it and implicitly criticizing some of its central tenets." However, a significant question remains regarding how these influences were transmitted, as we lack clarity on when Genesis was written or whether its author had direct access to the original *Enuma Elish* or a later version. Frahm speculates that "Genesis 1 might have been composed in Babylon during the time of the 'Babylonian exile' [...] but since the epic was apparently known outside Babylonia as well, the biblical author could also have encountered it elsewhere and at some later point." The cultural porosity between the Levant and Mesopotamia is further emphasized by other literary models. As Frahm notes, "The story of Adam and Eve may draw on *Gilgamesh* and *Adapa* (which might also have influenced the 'Enoch episode' in Genesis 5); the

[33] Barjamovic 2015: 73-74.

Cain and Abel story on the Theogony of *Dunnu*; the genealogies in Genesis 5 on the 'Dynastic Chronicle' or some similar text; the short tale of the Nephilim on motifs from *Gilgamesh*; and the biblical Flood story on the Babylonian Flood narrative as it is known from *Atra-hasis* and *Gilgamesh*."[34]

Mesopotamian Magical Traditions in the Levantine Context

While the Genesis narrative exemplifies a literary response to Mesopotamian mythological themes, the interaction between these cultures extended beyond creation stories to encompass various forms of magical traditions, demonstrating a broader scope of cultural exchange in the ancient Near East. Textual evidence of *Maqlû* is nonexistent in the Levantine corpus, with only fragmentary allusions discernible.[35] Nevertheless, it is apparent that Ugaritic scribes, for example, engaged in a process of literary borrowing and adaptation, integrating a diverse array of Mesopotamian magical traditions into their own cultural milieu. Even though this interaction may have taken place in the second millennium BCE, the evidence suggests that there was already a significant degree of cultural "osmosis" happening slowly over time between the two largest regions of the ancient Near East (Levant and Mesopotamia) well before the text of Jeremiah came into play. Ugaritic sources indicate that the cultural impact of Mesopotamia led to the establishment of standardized magical beliefs and ritual practices.[36]

This ongoing cultural exchange exemplifies how Mesopotamian magical traditions permeated not only Levantine but also broader Near Eastern religious practices. Additionally, the persistence and adaptation of these incantations to changing religious contexts religious across different regions underscore the influence of Mesopotamian ritualistic frameworks on local belief systems far beyond their place of origin. To fully understand the extensive geographical dissemination of these texts and concepts, one may consider, for example, the invocations aimed at a malevolent demon known as *Sāmānu* in the Egyptian magical *Papyrus Leiden* I 343 + 345. These Ramesside period incantations (19th-20th dynasty) drew on well-known bilingual Sumerian and Akkadian spells, remedies, lexical lists, and astronomical

[34] Frahm 2024: 158-160.
[35] Schwemer 2017: [page number].
[36] del Olmo Lete: 2014.

diaries.[37] Their geographical spread and lasting literary appeal attest to the remarkable impact of their theological authority. Copies of magical texts on *āšipūtu*,[38] for example, are known from a collection in the private library of an exorcist family in early Hellenistic Uruk. Surviving copies of this type were produced by learned individuals in Babylonia as late as the second century BCE. We find excerpts of *āšipūtu* incantations in a group of texts written in Akkadian and Sumerian cuneiform on one side and transliterated into Greek characters on the other, known as *Graeco-Babyloniaca.* Late Aramaic, Mandaic magical texts, and the Babylonian Talmud include traces of Babylonian magic and religious wisdom.[39]

This intricate backdrop of cultural interaction and almost synaptic transmission and dissemination, to borrow terminology from the neurosciences, which goes back to the second millennium BCE in the Levant, is further enriched by recent investigations into the mechanisms through which Judean scribes may have engaged with and integrated aspects of the Mesopotamian magical tradition into their literary framework. As highlighted by Ramos in her 2021 study titled *Ritual in Deuteronomy* that explores the symbolic dimension of the ceremonial covenant and curses in the book of Deuteronomy, the presence of incantatory texts adds another layer of complexity to the question of transmission.[40] As it is highly improbable that Judean scribes had copies of *Maqlû* and *Šurpu* at their disposal, Ramos proposes that a potential approach to consider is the oral transmission of linguistic elements derived from the Mesopotamian magical tradition. Ramos suggests that oral performance and aural reception may have contributed to transmit the formal features of ritual oath practice, such as curse themes and combinations. She is also of the opinion that the trading of magical artifacts may have contributed to the spread of rituals and formulaic *specialized* magical language.[41]

In the same study, Ramos draws attention to "a striking parallel sequence of curses" when comparing parts of the *Šurpu* Tablets (specifically, Tablets II and III) with Deuteronomy 27.[42] She clarifies, though, that "this analysis examined only one small segment of the lengthy incantation

[37] Beck 2018: 14 and 16.
[38] A corpus of exorcistic texts, CAD 1.2:435-436.
[39] Schwemer 2019: 65.
[40] Ramos 2021: [e-book].
[41] Ramos 2021: [e-book].
[42] Ramos 2021: [e-book].

series,"[43] but adds that a "more broad-ranging exploration" reveals a clear thematic connection between the curses in these ancient incantations and those found in Deuteronomy 27–28. The similarities between *Maqlû*, *Šurpu*, and Deuteronomy 28 lack the kind of parallel in syntax and vocabulary found in other ancient Near Eastern texts, like those from Sefire, Bukan, and Tell Fekheriye. Still, as with the connections noted between Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty (STE) and Deuteronomy 28, a case for some level of direct or indirect borrowing by the author of Deuteronomy remains strong. Ramos clarifies that the curses in the biblical text are "clearly not a translation of the incantation curses, nor do the similarities suggest any sort of direct literary dependence."[44] She emphasizes that, unlike the striking syntactic and lexical parallels found in ancient Near Eastern inscriptions like Sefire, Bukan, and Tell Fekheriye, the similarities between *Maqlû*, *Šurpu*, and Deuteronomy 28 are less pronounced. However, as with the parallels noted between the Succession Treaty of Esarhaddon (STE) and Deuteronomy 28, it remains plausible that the author of Deuteronomy directly or indirectly drew upon the STE. Ramos argues that the broad thematic parallels seen across various categories *do suggest* a shared linguistic reservoir of misfortunes and calamities within both incantation and treaty oath traditions, spanning a wide geographical range. As she puts it, "While one might postulate that most cultures would find the common themes presented as anticipated disasters in the ancient Near East, the themes are nonetheless specific enough to warrant a hypothesis of a shared cultural heritage of curses that was drawn upon for compilation of ritual oath performances and texts, whether incantations or treaties."[45] While the curses in *Maqlû*, *Šurpu*, and Deuteronomy 28 might lack the tight syntactical and lexical matches seen in other ancient Near Eastern texts, they still highlight the deep cultural exchanges that shaped religious and ritual life in the region. The strong links between Mesopotamian magic traditions and Judean texts tell a vivid story of cultural cross-pollination that left a lasting mark on ancient religious practices.

[43] Ramos 2021: [e-book].
[44] Ramos 2021: [e-book].
[45] Ramos 2021: [e-book].

CHAPTER III

Deconstructing Ideological Biases and Religious Assumptions Surrounding Magic in Biblical Narratives

Key Areas of Inquiry in this Chapter

Given the wide range of subjects addressed in this chapter, I would like to offer for the reader an outline of its most significant sections. My objective is to provide a path to understanding more clearly how each part contributes to the overall exploration of magic in biblical texts, with a particular focus on its articulation in the book of Jeremiah. The following sections illustrate a progression from general to specific, beginning with Deuteronomy's critique of magic and advancing through contemporary historical and scholarly perspectives to guide the reader. This chapter probes several key areas of inquiry: first, the historical bias against magical interpretations; second, the enigmatic relationship between prophecy and magic; and third, the ongoing discourse surrounding these topics, which remains relevant today.

Beginning with the very first section of this chapter, titled "Deuteronomy's Critique of Magic: Context and Implications," we will explore the often-overlooked impact of foreign ritual-magical traditions on Israelite society and will see how Deuteronomic prohibitions paint a sharper picture of the biblical condemnation of these practices. The discussion in this section will segue into a second one titled "The View of Magic in Past and Contemporary Biblical Interpretation," where we will broaden our canvas to see how ideas about magic have evolved across different philosophical, theological, and historical landscapes through the centuries. This long overview acts as a springboard for a more in-depth look at the diverse interpretations of magical phenomena in the Hebrew Bible in the section "The Legacy of Magical Language: Implications for Modern Understanding," which sets the stage for further exploration of the myriad ways in which magical practices have been received, studied, and debated in more recent years.

In the section "Magic and the Book of Jeremiah: A Scholarly Exploration," we explore the evolving conversation around the presence of magic in the book of Jeremiah, a topic, which, as we will see, has long been overshadowed by a historical bias against theurgic interpretations of biblical narratives. Early critics, like the first-century CE Christian theologian Jerome, bleakly dismissed any magical readings, particularly Origen's interpretation of the divine cup of wrath in Jeremiah 25 as a restorative, even potentially healing potion, meant to save, and not to condemn Israel. However, recent scholarship has begun to acknowledge the overlap between magic and prophecy. Scholars like Hutton and Schmidt have argued that magical and prophetic language share a common goal: Manipulating reality through the spoken word. Figures such as Duhm and Fohrer have supported the idea that Jeremiah's prophetic speech could be viewed as a form of magical language, while still maintaining a distinct connection to the divine authority that wills it. Work by scholars like Fishbane and Adcock has further illuminated the relationship between prophetic language and ancient magical traditions. Fishbane's study of magical terminology reveals the ways in which the language of magic served both as a form of divine petition and a precursor to prophetic actions. Adcock's analysis of the evolution of Jer 10:11 across various manuscript traditions shows how magical elements, like incantations, were added or reinterpreted over time, suggesting a dynamic interaction between prophecy and magic. The recent work of Joosten and Baker, alongside earlier studies, illustrates an increasing interest in the ritualistic aspects of Jeremiah's language, igniting renewed discussions about its ties to ancient magical practices.

What Was the Hebrew Bible's Stance on Magic and Foreign Rituals?

As Dolansky puts it in her 2008 volume titled *Biblical Perspectives on the Relationship Between Magic and Religion*: "A common approach to the issue of magic in the Hebrew Bible is to state that part of the uniqueness of Israelite religion lies in its prohibition of magic."[1] Dolansky's observation underscores a paradox in academic circles: while Israelite religion seemingly defines itself, in part, through the prohibition of magical practices, the Torah's repeated injunctions against sorcery, divination, and necromancy reveal these practices as a

[1] Dolansky 2008: 37. See also Klutz 2004 and Jacobus and De Hemmer Gudme 2013.

persistent undercurrent in the fabric of ancient Israelite society. Various forms of בשף ("sorcery"), קסם ("divination"), and אוב ("necromancy") are explicitly prohibited in the Torah (cf. Exod 22:17, Lev 19:26, Lev 20:27, Deut 18:10-11); yet their very prohibition suggests their prevalence within ancient Israelite society. Fierce biblical denunciations were not just a loud and impassioned rhetorical strategy; they almost always reflected the common reality of a particular transgression within the speaker's social context. While these passages illuminate the position of official religious institutions toward magic, they also suggest that attitudes toward magical activities were carved, as it is always the case, by cultural contexts over time. But they were also shaped by the discernment and discretion of individual biblical authors.[2] Hundley, for instance, contends that the priestly texts in Leviticus, particularly those in Lev 1–16, delineate rituals that were authorized, and therefore, would not be seen as magical.[3] As he explains, the goal was to convince the audience of the authority, preeminence, and ultimate jurisdiction of the priestly system.[4] He goes on to observe that "In line with the Priestly rhetoric, any alternative ritual becomes illegitimate and, perhaps more tellingly for the people, less effective. P not only guarantees the effectiveness of the ritual system by placing the legislation in the mouth of God, it also suggests that atonement, divine forgiveness, and divine cleansing are vital and can be received in no other way."[5] One way in which the priestly system exerted its direct control and authority, Hundley explains, was by "promoting its system while ignoring alternatives."[6] As the author argues, "… Leviticus 10 implies that anything not commanded is illegitimate and faces divine censure."[7]

Framing magical practices perceived as illegitimate as "other" or foreign was yet another strategy for eliminating competition and centralizing power in the hands of a few religious interest groups. The perception of foreignness associated with some of the biblical practices that biblical authors condemned is further highlighted by the language used to describe these activities, which reveals the significant influence of Assyro-Babylonian and Egyptian ritual-

[2] Grabbe 1995.
[3] Hundley 2022: 1-41.
[4] Hundley 2022: 15.
[5] Hundley 2022: 16.
[6] Hundley 2022: 17.
[7] Hundley 2022: 17.

magical traditions on ancient Israelite society and religion.[8] If you wanted to say something about magic, you had to use terminology derived from Mesopotamia. This notion is not confined to earlier centuries but echoes in later philosophical thought. For example, the Syrian Neoplatonic philosopher Iamblichus (3rd/4th century CE) in his work *De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum*, in his discussion on the intrinsic power of foreign divine names, acknowledges the primacy of Mesopotamian and Egyptian ritual-magic language even in his days. He says:

> […] But "why, of meaningful names, do we prefer the barbarian to our own?" For this, again, there is a mystical reason. For, since the gods have shown that the entire dialect of the sacred peoples such as the Assyrians and the Egyptians is appropriate for religious ceremonies, for this reason we must understand that our communication with the gods should be in an appropriate tongue. Also, such a mode of speech is the first and the most ancient […].[9]

The enduring influence of Mesopotamian magic is not surprising, given its deep historical roots and widespread practice. Wasserman recently pointed out that magical texts and incantations can be traced back to as early as the third millennium BCE, showing up in both southern Mesopotamia and Ebla in modern day Syria and that "In the second millennium incantations of various sorts are the commonest literary genre, quantitatively amounting to almost half the entire corpus of literary composition of the period (286 incantations out of a total of around 614 texts)." He, therefore, highlights that we are "clearly justified to speak here about a substantial written magical tradition in Ancient Mesopotamia."[10] A contemporary example of *lingua franca* can be found on the technology and digital communication field, where English has emerged as global common language, and this has led to a proliferation of English loanwords in languages worldwide.

1. Deuteronomy's Critique of Magic: Context and Implications

Deuteronomy 18:9 is nationalistic in intent; it is a nation-building text. It wants to set God's people apart from the rest of the world, and so the language emphasizes the "otherness" of the abhorrent (תּוֹעֵבָה) religious and magic practices of the other nations around Israel: "When you

[8] Goldstein 2013: 9-18.
[9] Clarke, Dillon, and Hershbell 2003: 297.
[10] Wasserman 2014: 48.

enter the land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not learn to imitate the abhorrent practices of those nations." Deuteronomy 18:11-12 delivers a stinging condemnation of organized divination and other controversial practices, including necromancy, which the text unequivocally brands as wicked actions denounced by God: "[11]one who casts spells, or one who consults ghosts or familiar spirits, or one who inquires of the dead. / [12]For anyone who does such things is abhorrent to the Lord, and it is because of these abhorrent things that the Lord your God is dispossessing them before you." This important criticism in Deuteronomy not only affects how we understand divination in the text, but it also has tremendous impacts on how the Jewish tradition would later understand magic. Rabbinic discussions in the Babylonian Talmud, where the interpretation of Deut 18:10-11 plays a central role in classifying and contextualizing magical practices is a case in point. The Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 67b ff. has been seen as "the most sustained discourse in Rabbinic literature concerning illicit practitioners and their activities."[11] The Rabbinic approach to classifying magic cannot be divorced from the central deuteronomic prohibition. Seidel observes that, "It is this Deuteronomic classification which externalizes 'magic' and all its ritual varieties as a foreign implant. In Babylonian Talmud Tractate Sanhedrin, the discussion of magic and magicians does not simply evolve from quandaries found in the biblical proscriptions but takes on a hermeneutic life of its own."[12] However, despite this robust Rabbinic discourse grounded in the Deuteronomic prohibition, which, as Seidel points out is seen as "foreign implant" (cf. Deut 18:9, "you shall not learn to imitate the abhorrent practices of those nations"), inconsistencies within the biblical texts themselves hint at a more subtle perspective on magical practices that may have depended on context, raising the suspicion that the permissibility of these practices may have been contingent upon factors such as place, practitioner, and purpose.[13]

The Deuteronomic prohibition against foreign magical practices, while emphatic in its nationalistic and theological polemic, opens a broader conversation about the regulation, rather than outright rejection, of supernatural activities in ancient Israel—a tension that becomes clearer when considering Dolansky's analysis of biblical vocabulary and legal texts. In

[11] Seidel 2015: 148.
[12] Seidel 2015: 148.
[13] Wenzel 2013: 83–84.

her analysis of the "legalistic" vernacular in Deuteronomy (and Leviticus), Dolansky discusses various magical practices and practitioners among Israel and its neighbors and keenly observes that

> [...] it would seem that prohibitions against magic and divination in legal materials are concerned with specific activities that are: a) not performed by qualified personnel (prophets in the case of the Law Code, and priests in the Holiness Code); and/or b) seek assistance or information from supernatural entities or powers outside of Yahweh.

Dolansky observes that the text does not condemn the performance of supernatural activities outright, or, as she describes it, "the acquisition of information from metaphysical realms." Instead, she contends that "magic and divination, as categories in the modern sense, are not prohibited in the Hebrew Bible." Rather, Deuteronomy 18 (alongside Leviticus 19–20) appears to regulate access to such practices, restricting their exercise to "qualified individuals within the Israelite community."[14]

Moving from Dolansky's exploration of the Deuteronomic regulation of supernatural practices, Schmitt's analysis takes a different tack, steering the discussion away from cultural and theological frameworks toward the sociopolitical dimensions of these activities and their interplay with institutional authority in pre-exilic Israel. According to Schmitt, the enumeration of prohibited practices in Deuteronomy 18 was not intended to challenge the pre-exilic religious customs. Certain activities, indeed, were also performed by the official diviners during that period and held significant importance in establishing the legitimacy of royal authority in the pre-exilic era. In a significant shift, Deuteronomy 18's authors aimed to push aside certain religious practices that strayed from those approved by the temple authority. They crafted the text with selective and often ambiguous language to silence dissenting voices on social, political, and religious matters.[15]

In the book of Deuteronomy, the prohibition of magic seems to have been implemented to control and exclude individuals or factions that were perceived to be aligned with asocial or potentially anti-social practices.[16] According to Johnston, the concept of "magic" often carries a

[14] Dolansky 2008: 46-47.
[15] Schmitt 2014: 122-23.
[16] Iles Johnston 2004: 50–54.

sense of social disgrace and is frequently used to label individuals or groups perceived as "other" by those making the accusations. Deuteronomy 18:20, which condemns a prophet who "presumes to speak in My [i.e., God's] name an oracle that I did not command him to utter, or who speaks in the name of other gods," seeks to regulate prophetic speech, aligning it with Deuteronomistic ideology. In biblical texts, the focus was not on outright prohibition of magic, but rather on specific forms of magic that deviated from the prevailing ideology or cultural norms of the time. This focused emphasis reveals how these texts use the denunciation of sorcery as a powerful tool, effectively singling out individuals or entities for exclusion.[17] The moral debate surrounding magic, which determined its permissibility based on religious affiliations, is apparent in the Qumran context. Ironically, while sectarian beliefs often condemned magic, it was frequently practiced and tolerated behind the scenes. This tension is illustrated in the final section of the Temple Scroll (11QT^{a} LX 16–21), which includes a revised version of Deut 18:10-11, reiterating the biblical prohibition against sorcery. Within the context of prophetic and priestly traditions, there existed a prohibition against engaging in ritual practices of foreign origin. As Schmidt underscores, in the early manifestations of Yahwism, there were indications of the practice of soothsaying, sorcery, divining, and charming, which were closely associated with cultic activities. However, these practices eventually came into conflict with the Deuteronomic, idealized vision of the biblical past during the exilic and post-exilic periods. Schmidt contends in his sophisticated investigation that the perspective offered in Deuteronomy 18 is only one of many viewpoints on magic within the rich biblical tradition. The book of Deuteronomy's implicit rejection of magic draws attention to the importance of magical practices in the social context of ancient Israel. His analysis demonstrates that the list of forbidden magical professions in Deut 18:9-11 is a reinterpretation that occurred within the Deuteronomic context, rather than a cohabitation with existing Yahwistic practices. In an effort to marginalize non-conforming beliefs within the dominant theological framework, the Deuteronomist used the designation "Canaanites" to refer to such diverse ideologies, as

[17] Yadin 1983: 3: pl. 75 and Enochic tradition. See Milik 1976, pls. I–XXIV, and García Martínez and Tigchelaar 1999, vol. 1: 398–429. Exorcism and divination were not merely tolerated but were actively consented to and practiced and were frequently employed as spiritual weapons against human enemies.

indicated by Deut 18:9–11.[18] While the book of Deuteronomy tends to portray magic—a wide range of ritual acts outlawed by the central authority of the Jerusalem temple—as an undesirable and illegal activity, we should be accepting of the fact that magical practices most likely thrived in ancient Israel.

Magical Practices in the Biblical Narrative

If, as we have seen, Deuteronomy explores the tension between magical practices and worshiping Yahweh in the temple, other biblical texts depict instances where magic is portrayed as legitimate, authoritative, and widely practiced.[19] We should note that certain biblical authors refrain from explicitly condemning ritual-magic practices. When we look at the various actions of prophets and priests that might be construed as having magical qualities, we realize rather quickly that biblical prohibitions on magic are not absolute, but target individuals lacking the requisite knowledge and divine authorization, thus necessitating the intervention of designated intermediaries authorized to perform such functions. In the context of official worship, the episode in Num 5:11-31, commonly known as the "test for an unfaithful wife," sheds light on the acceptance, and perhaps even promotion, of certain magical practices. In this ritual, a priest takes on the responsibility of addressing the concerns of a man who has doubts about his wife's faithfulness. In this age-old tradition, the wife partakes in a mixture of sacred water infused with dissolved ink from a written curse, along with dust collected from the floor of the tabernacle. The focus is not on the romantic partner, but rather on the woman who is suspected of infidelity. While she is portrayed as the "passive partner" in the sexual encounter, she is also characterized as engaging in self-defilement. The text indicates that she has not been "caught" (והוא לא נתפשה) nor has she been forced, since the verb תָּפַשׂ used in Deut 22:28 denotes sexual assault. Due to the absence of witnesses, it is not feasible to bring her to court. The text suggests that the man's sense of jealousy is warranted, despite the lack of concrete evidence. The wife in question has indeed engaged in actions considered morally impure. The priest conducts a series of ritualistic actions upon the woman, regardless of her guilt or

[18] Schmidt 2002: 242-59.
[19] Nissinen 2020: 55–60.

innocence. These include presenting her "meal offering of jealousy" (barley flour without oil or frankincense), uncovering her head, and forcing her to accept an oath. In this oath, she agrees that her culpability or innocence will be determined through the use of water. The priest then inscribes the oath, containing God's name, onto a scroll, which is subsequently erased using water mixed with dust from the Tabernacle. Finally, the woman must consume this mixture.

The bitter water will curse her if she's guilty, causing her womb to miscarry. Her belly will swell, marking her as accursed among her people. If she is innocent, she will be unharmed and remain capable of bearing children, unlike the guilty woman. The husband is not held responsible for any wrongdoing in both cases. He will not face any repercussions for wasting the priest's time, humiliating his wife, or blaspheming, even if his accusations are proven false. The book of Ezekiel offers a notable illustration of the continued presence of magical elements within the biblical tradition. Here, the prophet embarks on an intense act of communion with the deity, consuming the very essence of "the words of God" ("[…] feed your stomach and fill your belly with this scroll […]," Ezek 3:3) by ingesting the tangible document that houses them. The contrasting nature of the ordeal potion in Numbers and the ingestion of the divine word in Ezekiel merits attention. While Numbers 5:18-19, 23-24, 27 describes a potion imbued with "bitterness, used in a ritual context, Ezekiel's experience with the divine scroll is characterized by sweetness ("I ate it [the divine scroll], and it tasted as sweet as honey to me," Ezek 3:3). This variation in the sensory qualities attributed to ritual substances across biblical texts indicates a complex interplay of symbolic and ritual traditions in ancient Israelite religious practice, indicating a broader ritual landscape than previously thought; one that reveals different strands of tradition and theologies within the biblical corpus.

Biblical texts also give us insight into how much ancient Israel participated in international magical practices, especially the ones originating from Mesopotamia and Egypt. The Hebrew lexical conventions show unambiguous indications of foreign origins through semantic connections. Prominent characters in the biblical stories gain importance as powerful "magicians," particularly in their ability to interpret dreams. This is especially evident in the stories of Joseph and Daniel (Dan 1:20). A famous account in Exod 7:8-13 (also referenced in Exod 4:1-5) chronicles a magical confrontation between Moses, Aaron, and the magicians of

Pharaoh. In biblical texts, the magicians of the pharaohs are commonly denoted by Hebrew חרטם (חרטמי מצרים "magicians of Egypt," see Gen 41:8; 24 and Exod 7:11; חרטמים "magicians," see Exod 8:3, 14, 15; 9:11), a borrowed and shortened version of the Egyptian title "chief lector priest" (*ḫ-ry-ḥ3b.t ḥry-tp*, lit., "one who carries the festival scroll"). The Hebrew Bible serves as a repository for an extensive assortment of diverse terminologies employed to designate individuals practicing the art of magic. These designations encompass a wide range of terms, further adding to the complexity and intricacy of the matter: "man of God" (Heb. איש האלהים: e.g., 1 Kgs 17:18, 24; 2 Kgs 5:20; 8:7-8), "exorcist" (Heb. אַשָּׁף: Dan 1:20; 2:2; Aram. אשף: Dan 2:10; 4:4; Akk. *āšipu*), "one who binds a spell" (Heb. חֹבֵר חָבֶר: Deut 18:11; cf. Isa 47:9; Ps 58:6), and "enchanters (of snakes)" (Heb. מלחשים: Ps 58:6; cf. Ug. *mlḥš*).[20]

Participation in International Magical Practices

While the role and standing of magical practices varied widely—from accepted to outlawed—the language of magic shows a remarkable uniformity across different cultures. The prevalence of specific formulaic structures and rhetorical devices in magical texts points to a fundamental commonality in how language was understood to engage with supernatural forces. This continuity in linguistic expression endured despite considerable variations in theological frameworks, ritual practices, and societal attitudes toward magic. This linguistic continuity is further evidenced in the realm of divination and religious roles. Several types of mantic roles found in Mesopotamian literature, such as those of the seer (ראה), prophet (נביא), visionary (חזה), or priest (כהן), exist in biblical literature as well. Sweek observes that in his well-known disputations before Ahab and Jehoshaphat in 1 Kgs 22, Micaiah's familiarity with the conventions of the Near Eastern divination technique and language is immediately apparent.[21] Sweek refers to a quasi-technical terminology with references to biblical divination practices. He highlights, for example, the use of the verb דרש ("to inquire") in 1 Kgs 22:5, 8, the prophetic phrase "word of the Lord" (22:19), the representation of the deity seated in his divine council (22:19), and the divinatory inquiry worded as a binary question (22:6).

[20] Yamauchi and Wilson 2017: 203.
[21] Sweek 2002: 51.

The Role of Prophetic Discourse and Symbolism

The prophetic corpus illustrates better than any other biblical text, perhaps even more efficiently than Leviticus, the persistent impact of the magical discourse and symbolism that is rooted in the Mesopotamian tradition and shows how biblical prophecies blend theology with ritual and magical themes. This interweaving of traditions reflects a social and religious environment that crossed cultural boundaries. A case in point is offered by Jer 19:11. In a prophetic vision, God instructs the prophet to obtain a clay vessel and take it to the valley of Ben Hinnom, near the Potsherd Gate, a major city gate on the southern edge of pre-exilic Jerusalem. This chosen location serves as the backdrop for the solemn proclamation of Israel's imminent downfall. It is here that Jeremiah receives the following powerful divine message that compels him to shatter a vessel made of clay: "Thus said the Lord of Hosts: 'So will I smash this people and this city, as one smashes a potter's vessel, which can never be mended. And they shall bury in Tophet until no room is left for burying'" (Jer 19:11). The motivation behind this divine order lies in God's intention to bring about the downfall of the sinful city of Jerusalem, transforming it into a defiled location akin to the infamous Tophet. According to tradition, the Tophet was a site where the abhorrent act of offering children as sacrifices to the gods Baal and Molech took place (Isa 30:33; Jer 19:6, 11:14).[22] According to Thompson, the act of the prophet breaking the clay pot in Jeremiah 19 should be understood as a symbolic gesture rather than a manifestation of magic thinking.[23] He states succinctly, "If Israel's remote ancestors ever practiced magic, the practice had long been rejected."[24] Nevertheless, Thompson acknowledges that the symbolism is grounded in the realm of magical representation. According to Niditch's review of Thompson's commentary on Jeremiah, the origins of these actions can be traced to the practice of divination in the ancient Near East.[25] The Assyrians, Hittites, and Arameans were known to engage in these apotropaic rituals to safeguard against diseases and counteract

[22] Berlin and Brettler 2014: 965.
[23] Fretheim and Brueggemann reach the same conclusion. See Fretheim 2002: 284; Brueggemann 1998: 177; Stulman 2011: 193.
[24] Thompson 1980: 451.
[25] She notes that Thompson appears to consider these traits as overly "primitive" for the spiritual logic of the prophet. See Niditch 1982: 602–4.

curses. The Assyrians and Babylonians integrated the use of pottery-smashing symbolism as a crucial component within their rituals aimed at combating witchcraft.[26] Kitz explains that Mesopotamian exorcists used these rituals to eradicate evil by "cursing curses with curses."[27] The story of the breaking of the clay jar in Jeremiah 19 serves as a notable illustration of the presence of magic practices and language in biblical narratives. This story, whether interpreted symbolically or not, is just one example among many within the book that references the magical elements. As we move from this vast, vibrant landscape stretching out before us of magical elements in Jeremiah and start reflecting on the broader hermeneutical challenges we face in understanding their role in the biblical texts, it becomes clear that although such material has a certain importance in the prophetic tradition, the full understanding of its significance requires careful consideration of the historical and theological context on our part.

Hermeneutical Challenges of Magical Elements in Biblical Texts

Magico-ritualistic elements in biblical texts present a tricky puzzle for interpretation. While the Deuteronomic ban on magic (Deut 18:10-14; cf. also Lev 19:26-28, 20:27; Num 22:17; 2 Kgs 21:6; Isa 47:9) reflects a narrow view at odds with a rich spiritual reality (consider the snake incident and its possible Egyptian ties in Num 21:4-9),[28] we must also acknowledge that ancient Israel not only knew about magical practices but also valued the specialized vocabulary of Mesopotamian magic traditions (see discussion on p. 79 in the section titled "Magical Practices in the Biblical Narrative"). If anything, this inconsistency in representation shows the intense influence of Mesopotamia on the southern Levant. Magic frequently eludes critical attention in biblical interpretation, often concealed beneath layers of theological discourse, yet it subtly persists just beneath the surface. To understand the conversations surrounding this topic, it is important to acknowledge that magic has long been a contentious issue, with Greek, Christian, and Jewish scholars treating it with skepticism for centuries. With this foundation established,

[26] See CMAwR vol. 1, text 7.6.6: *Ritual against the bēl dabābi* (memorandum version ms. F) in Abusch and Schwemer 2011: 48–49.
[27] Kitz 2014: 332.
[28] Yamauchi and Wilson 2016: 203.

we can delve into how the Bible's cautions regarding magic have influenced contemporary perceptions of this practice as depicted in scripture.

2. The View of Magic in Past and Contemporary Biblical Interpretation

The perception that the Hebrew Bible incorporates literary elements (i.e., anti-witchcraft and divine healing motifs, curses etc.) derived from a shared magical tradition among ancient Near Eastern cultures has often been misinterpreted by both ancient Jewish and Christian exegetes, as well as by contemporary religious scholars and theologians. Untangling the complex factors that contribute to the prevailing negative views of magic within biblical interpretation proves to be a tricky task. It is apparent that a single explanation for this bias is elusive, as multiple influences converge to shape this widespread sentiment.

Philosophical Perspectives: Differentiating Magic from Religion

In his 2019 essay "Ancient Magic in a New Key," Frankfurter observes that the boundaries of ritual—often seen as ambiguous or illegitimate—shift over time, adapting to new ideologies and emerging groups, but also occur across regions, changing from village community to village community, even as the language describing the rituals stays the same. He believes that an authentic emic approach to magic in the ancient world "would eschew the comparison-based, thematic association of words like *mageia* and Hebrew *khesheph* and Latin *maleficium* and instead remain only in the particular historical-cultural world that perpetually tests and applies, enlarges and diminishes such nomenclature in context." In defending a more ethically grounded approach, which calls for interpreting ancient magic within its historical and ethnographic context, much like an anthropologist would, he acknowledges that this method is not without its challenges: "But then we are merely in that world we were supposed to study, with nothing particular to focus on." Eventually, as he says, "So, circularity notwithstanding, it is defensible to describe a cross-cultural notion of an illegitimate or ambivalent sphere of ritual."[29]

[29] Frankfurter 2019: 5-6.

Frankfurter's observations about the blurred lines between ritual and magic, along with his call for an insider's perspective, remind us of the indigenous dimensions of the concept and the need for us to root its understanding on historical-cultural grounds, which are always specific. Frankfurter's viewpoint sets the stage for understanding how magic was gradually sidelined and eventually separated from religion—a shift sparked by early thinkers and cemented by Hellenistic philosophy.

Any understanding of the role of the figure of the false prophet in the biblical texts must begin by privileging *emic* perspectives—such as Josephus' accounts, which reflect first-century Jewish and Greco-Roman insider views—while also considering *etic* narratives, like Greco-Roman cultural frameworks that shaped Jewish contexts. For now, I would set aside modern anthropological considerations and theories about magic and would rather focus on what this term meant in an antique setting, particularly among Greeks and Romans, whose ideological biases (e.g., magic as subversive or supernatural) influenced both emic perceptions and later theological and academic discourses. I believe that if we take this approach, we are effectively grounding our analysis in a sounder historical context before integrating contemporary etic insights.

Greek-Roman Theological Critiques and Philosophical Developments on Magic

In this section, I juxtapose the ideas of ancient authors such as Apuleius, Iamblichus, Augustine, Plato, and Philo. Rather than following a strict timeline, I wish to highlight here how magical thought evolved and how it was critiqued theologically. I believe that this approach allows for a more nuanced exploration of the thematic development of magic's role in ancient philosophical and religious discourse. As I show below, the progressive delegitimization of magic begins with its early conceptualization in the Hellenistic period. Apuleius' writings, particularly his exploration of the magus and the magical power of language, serve as a foundational point for the development of magic as a concept. Iamblichus' views on divine language and his analysis of magical names and words gradually associate magic with a certain mystical potency. As the passage moves through Augustine's theological critique and Plato's social commentary, the connection between magic and language becomes increasingly framed

in opposition to divine will, furthering the separation between acceptable religious practice and superstition. Augustine emphasizes the demonic nature of magical language, reinforcing its moral and theological dangers. Plato, on the other hand, presents magic as a form of social poisoning, with its deceptive power threatening to corrupt the human psyche and societal norms. Philo's analysis, which introduces the distinction between "authentic" and "counterfeit" magic, complements these views by positioning magic as both a potential force for enlightenment and a tool for deception. In this framework, the thematic links between the authors' interpretations of magic serve to highlight shifts in both philosophical and religious attitudes toward the practice. By placing these authors together in a non-chronological manner, the passage underscores the evolving nature of magical thought and its theological implications across different cultural and intellectual contexts.

The progressive delegitimization of magic and its separation from the sphere of religion can be traced to early attempts at theorizing this concept.[30] At first, this idea was pushed to the edges of Hellenistic philosophy, where magic, which was first talked about in the writings of Apuleius (2nd century CE), became a major topic of interest. This process of differentiation reflects broader cultural and intellectual shifts in the ancient Mediterranean world, as religious and philosophical traditions sought to define themselves in opposition to practices that were seen as superstitious or immoral. In *Apology*, the Roman author goes into great detail about the idea of magic and gives three different explanations of the enigmatic word *magus*. The first pair of definitions recognize the etymology of the term as originating from Persia and establish its

[30] The term "magic" traces its etymological roots to the Greek word μαγικός (Latin: *magicus*), which in turn derives from the Greek μάγος. In antiquity, μάγος or *Μάγους* referred to a priestly class in Persia distinguished by their mastery of diverse fields, including astrology, divination, medicine, sacrifice, science, and sorcery. This association is notably documented by the historian Herodotus in his *Histories* (7.37; cf. Yamauchi and Wilson 2016: 201), which presents us with an image of these Persian priests as quasi prophets or diviners who interpret the heavenly signs: As it was setting out, the sun left his place in the heaven and was invisible, although the sky was without clouds and very clear, and the day turned into night. When Xerxes saw and took note of that, he was concerned and asked the Magi what the vision might signify. They declared to him that the god was showing the Greeks the abandonment of their cities; for the sun (they said) was the prophet of the Greeks, as the moon was their own. Xerxes rejoiced exceedingly to hear that and continued on his march (Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. A. D. Godley, 4 vols., LCL [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920–1925]). For the ancient Greeks, as a reflection of their emic perspective, the magical practices of Persian priests, which they viewed as esoteric and ungodly, were rooted in "superstition" (Schwemer 2011: 419). This long-held prejudice is evident in various biblical interpretations, from the patristic and medieval Christian tradition to rabbinic interpretation.

association with local religious authorities. In a third definition, Apuleius portrays the *magus* as an individual endowed with the ability to comprehend the divine language and effectively channel its potency through intricate incantations.[31]

The Role of Names: Magical Significance in Ancient Texts

In its simplest form, Apuleius tells us, magic operates most efficiently through language, using powerful words and phrases called *contamina*, which are similar to spells.[32] According to Rohrbacher-Sticker,[33] the significance of names holds a crucial role in various magical traditions, regardless of their origins. They are used to communicate with particular individuals during magic ceremonies or in incantations. These names can be used as spell words because they have a special power that makes the magic effective. Some of these names might change into enigmatic formulations that make strange, foreign, and unrecognizable sounds that hold hidden meaning. In his *De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum* ("On the Mysteries of the Egyptians"), Iamblichus explores the significance and purpose of the names of the gods, particularly those that appear peculiar and strange. He considers the possible functions behind the unusual nature of these names. Foreign names are commonly found in Greek and Hebrew magical texts. In Greek texts, names considered "foreign" may occasionally be of Hebrew origin, whereas in Hebrew texts, names considered "foreign" frequently have Greek roots. According to Iamblichus, the specific magical power associated with these names is intrinsic to the forms bestowed upon them by the gods. Any translation into another language would diminish their power, while any modification would be considered as an act of sacrilege. The essential strangeness of these names imbues them with magical potency, thereby necessitating the utmost reverence for even the most minute modifications.[34]

Magic and the Divine Will: Augustine's Theological Critique

The connection between magic and the inherent power of magical words is already apparent in the texts of Apuleius and Iamblichus. We can now observe how this association has

[31] Graf 2001: 93–94.
[32] Graf 2001: 94.
[33] Rohrbacher-Sticker 1996: 24–46.
[34] Rohrbacher-Sticker 1996: 24-26.

gradually come to be linked with the concept of magic language being both powerful and in opposition to the divine will. In the second volume of his *De doctrina Christiana* ("On Christian Doctrine"), church father and theologian Augustine of Hippo (354–430 CE) introduces the idea that magic can harness the power of the gods and utilize it for ends that are not in accordance with their will. Augustine posited in his examination of "pagan superstition," which he distinguishes from "religion" and identifies with idol worship,[35] that there exists a common language between humans and demons, who are considered to be the minions of Satan. According to Augustine, humans employ the signs and symbols associated with these malevolent entities in order to ensnare their fellow humans.[36] This demonic language, which is exclusive to magic, is based on "alien words" (e.g., strange, uncanny words) or *voces magicae* imbued with magical power. For Augustine, Christians must not succumb to superstition or consort with demons. They are prohibited from speaking a language that is inherently unlawful and based on deception.

Plato's Social Commentary: Magic as Poison

Plato (428/427-348/347 BCE), like Augustine, condemned magic in the *Laws*, but unlike Augustine, he viewed it as a form of social poisoning as opposed to a superstitious and immoral practice.[37] For Plato, offenses can be categorized into two distinct types: those pertaining to the use of toxic substances and those associated with the employment of harmful poisonous speech, specifically evil incantations. According to the Greek author, the second type of magic poisoning is deemed to be the most pernicious. In a psychological context, the act of speech is employed to persuade individuals through fear, particularly when it comes to the manipulation of magical forces. Plato posited that the formidable power of the gods remains elusive to

[35] In the second book of *De doctrina Christiana*, Augustine articulates what Bailey describes as "the most important and enduring Christian definition of superstition." Augustine defines superstition as "anything instituted by men having to do with crafting or worshipping idols, or worshipping a created thing or any part of a created thing as if it were a god, or consultations and pacts concerning prognostications agreed on and entered into with demons." This expansive characterization enables Augustine to categorize as superstitious a wide range of ritual practices, including those performed by soothsayers, augurs, and other practitioners of magic, particularly when such acts involve the use of amulets or healing rites. See Bailey 2013: 20.

[36] Graf 2002: 95-96.

[37] Plato, *Laws*, trans. R. G. Bury, LCL 192 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926).

humanity, primarily due to an inherent incongruity between the gods' intrinsic benevolence and our malevolent intentions. However, certain individuals may attempt to convince others of their possession of such a capability and exploit it for personal gain. For the author of *Laws*, the allure of magic lies in its capacity to persuade the gullible that certain religious practitioners possess extraordinary powers, beyond the reach of ordinary human beings. Plato suggests that while practitioner of magic do not possess an innate incapacity to manipulate the divine realm for nefarious intentions, their deceptive rituals and enchantments have nonetheless the potential to influence the human psyche. Plato construes magic as a cultural psychological phenomenon, which he saw as a societal concern.

Philo's Analysis: Authentic vs. Counterfeit Magic

Philo of Alexandria, a prominent Jewish philosopher and influential political figure in the Julio-Claudian era (31 BCE-68 CE), embraced the idea of symbolically equating poison with magic. Philo, like his predecessor Plato, was very methodical in his analysis of the subject of social poisoning. In alignment with the biblical directive found in Exod 22:17 ("You will not suffer a witch to live"), Philo draws a parallel between individuals practicing sorcery and those engaging in the act of poisoning: "For there are others, the worst of villains, (. . .) the sorcerers and poisoners, who (. . .) think out (. . .) devices to harm their neighbors. And therefore he (Moses) ordered that poisoners, male or female, should (. . .) perish as soon as they are detected" (*Spec*. 3.93–94).[38] Philo believed that there are two types of magic: "authentic" and "counterfeit." The first type is good, as it offers insight into natural events and is praised by common people and kings, especially Persian ones. The second type is evil and can be characterized as a distortion of this art. In line with the Platonic concept of magic as a tool for deceit, Philo asserts that the practice of counterfeit magic is an act of deception:

> ...pursued by charlatan mendicants and parasites and the basest of the women and slave population, who make it their profession to deal in purifications and disenchantments and promise with some sort of charms and incantations to turn men's love into deadly enmity and their hatred into profound affection. The simplest and most innocent natures are

[38] Kottek 2011: 248–249.

> deceived by the bait till at last the worst misfortunes come upon them and thereby the wide membership which unites great companies.[39]

Like Philo's characterization of counterfeit magic as a deceptive practice perpetuated by unscrupulous individuals, the book of Jeremiah also highlights the theme of deception through the figure of false prophets, whose betrayal of divine trust leads to dire consequences for Israel.

Josephus and the Challenge of False Prophets

In the book of Jeremiah, the primary adversaries of God are the false prophets and corrupt priests, whose true identities as agents of deceit God lays bare. Yahweh disavows their legitimacy and condemns their actions, and, in this context, the cursing of Israel emerges as a direct consequence of their abandonment of the divine covenant. The theme of "abandonment of the divine covenant" is central in the book of Jeremiah and in much academic reflection in subsequent literature. Acting as the primary instigators of deception, they lead the people of Judah astray, eroding the covenantal bond between Yahweh and his chosen nation. Consequently, their failure to uphold divine law sets the stage for widespread moral decline, as the inhabitants of Judah follow their misguided teachings into idolatry and covenantal infidelity. The book of Jeremiah tells us that the inhabitants of Judah have transgressed the covenant with Yahweh (Jer 11:10) and have become defiled through apostasy. They have heeded the false oracles of illegitimate prophets (Jer 14:14) and engaged in the worship of foreign deities (cf. Jer 7:16-20; 44:15-19, 25). Moreover, they have committed acts of deceit (Jer 5:27), distorted the Torah (Jer 6:19; 8:8-9), and neglected their social responsibilities towards the marginalized (Jer 5:28; 7:5), while maintaining only a superficial adherence to cultic obligations (Jer 7:4). As a result, the people not only abandon Yahweh for foreign gods but also internalize the false oracles and distortions of the Torah propagated by their leaders, committing acts of deceit and neglecting their obligations to the marginalized. Jeremiah argues that idolatry is intrinsically deceptive, as it inevitably gives rise to other moral wrongs, most notably exemplified in the

[39] Philo, *Spec. Laws* 3.108–109 (trans. F. H. Colson; LCL 320:538–39).

breach of the covenant. This cycle of deceit and covenant infraction establishes a self-perpetuating pattern of disobedience and divine disfavor.[40]

Similarly, the notion of deception and false representation extends beyond Jeremiah's critique of corrupt religious leaders, finding resonance in the writings of Flavius Josephus, a Jewish historian who lived in the first century CE (around 37-100 CE) during the Roman occupation of Judea,[41] who characterizes magicians as mere impostors masquerading under the guise of legitimate authority. In the twentieth chapter of his *Antiquities*, the Jewish author, who wrote in Greek language, tells the story of a certain Theudas, a charismatic individual ostensibly endowed with magical abilities (referred to as γόης in Greek). This enigmatic figure apparently employed his eloquence to cunningly sway and mislead the masses, ultimately persuading them that he could split a river at will and give them easy way through it. [42] In his analysis of magic, Josephus draws upon the teachings of Deuteronomy 18 in an effort to discern between true and false prophecies, fraudulent practices, and genuine divine inspiration. According to Deuteronomy 18, the verification of a prophetic proclamation is contingent upon its realization, serving as the benchmark for its authenticity. In other words, the veracity of a prophecy hinges upon its fulfillment; should a prophecy fail to come to pass as foretold, it would be deemed false as it would lack divine inspiration. Deuteronomy 18:15–22 indicates that the future prophet "like Moses" (v. 15) cannot fully assume Moses' prophetic mantle—delivering covenantal statutes and ordinances—without clarifying what legitimate prophecy and divination are. The pericope's focal point revolves around this crucial distinction: The differentiation between divine oracles proclaimed by a divinely appointed prophet and spurious predictions devoid of authentic spiritual substance, as uttered by illegitimate prophetic claimants. Deuteronomy 18:20-22 offers a "verification criterion" that explains this distinction:

> [20]But any prophet who presumes to speak in My name an oracle that I did not command him to utter, or who speaks in the name of other gods—that prophet shall die." [21]And should you ask yourselves, "How can we know that the oracle was not spoken by the Lord?"— [22]if the prophet

[40] Overholt 1970: [page number].
[41] Regarding the connection between magic and poison, Josephus observes: "Poison, whether deadly or of those designed for other injurious ends, let no Israelite possess. If one be caught with it in his keeping, let him die, undergoing the fate that he would have inflicted on the intended victims of the drug" (*Ant*. 4. 279).
[42] Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, trans. Louis H. Feldman, LCL 490 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965).

> speaks in the name of the Lord and the oracle does not come true, that oracle was not spoken by the Lord; the prophet has uttered it presumptuously: do not stand in dread of him. (Deut 18:20-22)

These verses make it clear that any prophet lacking a divine mandate must be put to death ("that prophet shall die," v. 20), while the one sent by God is to proclaim his word, and the people are required to heed the message ("him [the Moses-like prophet] you shall heed," v. 15). Verse 21 anticipates the obvious question: How can one tell the difference between a true prophet who speaks God's word and one who speaks falsehoods? Deuteronomy's answer is rather straightforward: The prophet whose words come true is truly God's prophet, while the one whose words fail to come to pass is a false prophet.[43] Obviously, true prophecies can only be identified *ex eventu*.

This emphasis on the fulfillment of prophetic predictions as a marker of divine authenticity not only resonates within the biblical framework but also echoes in the critical perspective of Josephus, who draws sharp distinctions between true and false prophets in his historical accounts. In his writings, Josephus draws several discerning lines of demarcation when discussing prophets (προφῆται),[44] who are legitimate messengers of the divine, and false prophets (ψευδοπροφήτης), who are impostors.[45] In a scathing critique, the ancient Jewish author negatively judges the activities of false prophets. In a world where anyone could claim to be the carrier of God's word, their purported messages, lacking divine inspiration, would inevitably yield nothing but anguish and hardship. In an exemplary demonstration of his

[43] Crenshaw and other scholars have pointed out that the Hebrew Bible does not provide a clear way to tell true prophecies from false ones. Instead, it is the context that determines whether a prophetic message is genuine and legitimate. See Crenshaw 1971. Parenthetically, Fishbane notes that an examination of diverse strata within biblical literature corroborates the pervasive nature of the fundamental theological-ideological preoccupation of biblical oracles; one that centered on the imperative fulfillment of prophetic predictions as genuinely sanctioned by Yahweh (Deut 18:22a). As he notes, "[…] it is possible to isolate an established cluster of technical terms which gave direct expression to a belief in the inherent and dynamistic power of YHWH's דבר, or prophetic word (oracle), delivered by his messengers. It is said, for example, that this word 'comes' (stem: בוא) to fulfilment (cf. Deut 18:22a; Josh 21:43, 23:14; Judg 13:12, 17; 1 Sam 9:6; Jer 15:15; Hab 2:3), 'comes to pass' (stem: היה; cf. Deut 18:22a) […]" See Fishbane 1985: 468.

[44] Josephus used this term almost exclusively in reference to figures of the past. See Gray 1993: 23.

[45] As De Jong explains, the Septuagint translators of Jeremiah and Zechariah used the phrase οἱ ψευδοπροφῆται ("false prophets") to distinguish "true prophets" like Jeremiah from those prophets who deceived the populace. See De Jong 2012: 29 note 90.

negative idea of false prophecy, Josephus recounts the devastating conflagration that consumed the Jerusalem temple at the hands of Titus' Roman forces in the year 70 CE:

> Thus, it was that the wretched people were deluded at that time by charlatans and pretended messengers of the deity. While they neither heeded nor believed in the manifest portents that foretold the coming desolation, but, as if thunderstruck and bereft of eyes and mind, disregarded the plain warnings of God.[46] (*War* 6.288–91)

This episode describes the heart-breaking account of the last fraught hours alive of six thousand Jews who tragically lost their lives under the collapsing portico of the temple of Jerusalem, when it was razed to the ground by Roman soldiers. According to Josephus, the victims of this tragedy fell under the influence of a deceitful prophet who convinced them to seek shelter within the Temple, assuring them that their God would come to their rescue through the manifestation of extraordinary signs (*War* 6, 283-286).

Josephus's perception of false prophecy can be attributed to his engagement with the book of Jeremiah, which itself relied on Deuteronomy 18's verification criterion (see above).[47] Few texts explore the theological implications of immoral behavior as thoroughly as Jeremiah does. This prophetic work focuses on the actions of specific prophets who, despite lacking Yahweh's divine mandate, promised deliverance and peace against the tumultuous backdrop of warfare. Josephus, much like Jeremiah, dismisses the assertions made by these prophets and perceives them for their true nature as evil seducers (i.e., "the prophets as deceivers of the people") who attempt to harm the masses (cf. Jer 23:9).[48]

3. The Legacy of Magical Language: Implications for Modern Understanding

As mentioned earlier, Augustine stands out in his condemnation of magical language, linking it to the occult and warning of its dangers due to its association with demonic forces. However, other thinkers like Plato, along with Jewish philosophers Philo and Josephus, also describe

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[46] Josephus, *Jewish War* 4–7, trans. H. St. J. Thackeray, LCL 210 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928), 459–61.

[47] Josephus's engagement with the book of Jeremiah was thorough as he wove together elements from both the poetic and prose sections of the prophetic text. See Ferda 2013: 166 and Avioz 2018: 384.

[48] See Avioz 2018: 389-90. As De Jong explains, prophets are commonly presented as deceivers of the people. However, the figure addressing them is not a prophet (נביא), but rather the genuine spokesman of Yahweh's word. See De Jong 2012: 26.

magic and its linguistic tricks as fundamentally deceptive. This brand of hocus-pocus relies on incantations designed to bewilder the gullible, filled with nonsensical jargon that lacks any true divine power. For these writers, the wisdom of God is far beyond human understanding, especially for those frauds who try to pass themselves off as true messengers of divine intent.

Since Augustine's theoretical formulations, the Christian tradition has perpetuated the belief that malevolent practitioner of magic or sorcerers possess the ability to harness the powers of devils.[49] This belief also claimed that these malevolent entities were, in fact, the deities worshipped by ancient pagan civilizations. In his *The Irresistible Fairy Tale*, Zipes notes that "...the 'great accomplishment' of Christianity was its transformation of goddesses, sorceresses, and fairies into demonic and malevolent figures, whether real or fictitious."[50] This negative perception of magic and the supernatural was shared by Jewish doctrine, which preserved it in its tradition.[51] According to ancient Jewish teachings, as documented, for example, in the Book of Watchers and the Revelation of Enoch, there existed a belief among Jewish teachers that individuals, including malevolent practitioner of magic and humans in general, had the potential to tap into the powers possessed by fallen angels.[52] Our contemporary understanding of magic

[49] Throughout my dissertation, I use the terms "malevolent practitioner of magic," "sorcerer," "witch" and "warlock" for the most part interchangeably, following the emic perspectives of the texts under analysis and I highlight nuances in the perception of the terms when necessary. As I show in my analyses, the sources consistently depict these evil practitioners of magic in a negative light, aligning them with illicit and harmful activities, as seen from the perspective of these texts' authors. While "sorcerer," as opposed to "witch" and "warlock," is often employed in academic discourse as a neutral descriptor devoid of moral judgment—for example Dolansky seems to use the terms "sorcerer," "witch," and "magician" as mostly synonyms in her volume on biblical magic (2008: 7 and 24)—my usage reflects the characterization prevalent in biblical and Mesopotamian texts, where such figures are portrayed as archetypal agents of malevolence. I wish to further emphasize that, while I recognize that the terms sorcerer, witch, and magician are employed in biblical scholarship to delineate various aspects of magical practices, each carrying distinct connotations and implications, the semantic boundaries that separate their definitions, cultural contexts, and the moral judgments in both biblical and Mesopotamian texts are difficult to define precisely. For this reason, while the in-depth study of their evolution and meanings is an undeniably compelling topic, one that has already been tackled and examined by, for instance, Fishbane 1971, Jeffers 1996, Abusch 1989, Evans 2014, Damsma 2021, for the purposes of this dissertation and given the limited scope of my project, the extent of these differences cannot be fully addressed here. This, however, remains a promising area for further investigation in the future of my research.

[50] Zipes 2012: 77.

[51] Schmidt 2002: 104. See also Graf 2002: 96.

[52] Versluis argues that Jewish and Christian magical traditions developed a form of "complex monotheism," characterized by a theological reliance on intermediary beings such as angels or devils to achieve various goals. As he notes, "It is no accident that later forms of Christian magic rely upon angels with Hebrew names and roots; the various Christian angelic names have their origins almost totally in Jewish magical traditions." See Versluis 2007: 48.

may be significantly shaped by the pejorative connotations ascribed to it in ancient Greek, Christian, and Jewish theological and philosophical discourse. The conceptual frameworks and terminologies employed by these traditions to categorize and critique magical practices have likely influenced modern academic approaches to magic in religious contexts. This inherited perspective potentially obscures the complex sociocultural dynamics and belief systems that informed magical practices in their original historical settings.

Evolving Perspectives on Magic and Religion: From Theological Condemnation to Anthropological Reassessment

Until the middle of the eighteenth century, the lion's share of research on magic as a religious phenomenon was done by Jewish and Christian scholars. These erudite individuals approached their research with interpretive frameworks deeply influenced by their respective beliefs. This negative view of magic, in general, can be traced back to a hostility toward beliefs that were considered morally questionable or theologically unsound.[53] Early medieval church members were often opposed to magic.[54] The term "magic" had a long history of condemnation, rendering it inappropriate for the religious practices that they aimed to legitimize.

The Historical Framing of Magic in Early Religious Thought

Given these factors, the term came to be used solely for rituals associated with dubious intentions, performed by unqualified individuals or executed in unseemly ways. As a result, magic was classified according to the goals behind it. Augustine notes that both magicians and devout Christians exhibit similar abilities, but he stresses that the key difference lies in their methods and intentions. In his analysis, Kieckhefer points out that the Christian rituals we see in

[53] Kieckhefer 2014: 140.

[54] The question of how magic was perceived within the religious culture of medieval Europe is quite complex and extends beyond the scope of this discussion. To learn more about the subject, see Kieckhefer's 2000 comprehensive examination of medieval magic in his Magic in the Middle Ages (pp. 176-201).

the historical record closely mirror the structure and purpose of ancient non-Christian practices.[55]

The Intersection of Scientific Naturalism and Religious Sentiment during the Victoria Era

In the realm of theological/scientific discourse, the perception of magic as an antithesis to religion, steeped in irrationality and "superstition,"[56] progressively permeated intellectual circles, especially during the Victorian era. In the late 19th-century Victorian Britain, two distinct and contrasting schools of thought emerged, strolling in parallel. In their quest for harmony, they endeavored to reconcile the burgeoning scientific naturalism with the enduring belief in magic. The naturalists aimed to foster a society grounded in scientific principles while seeking to eliminate all religious convictions. Religious instruction, conversely, found its roots in the enigmatic realm of religious spirituality, deeply entrenched in time-honored ancient traditions that resist easy dismissal. The convergence of these divergent ideologies gave rise to a prevailing disillusionment perceivable in both Christian thought and scientific discourse. Scientific naturalism has effectively addressed the question about the existence of magic by incorporating it within the framework of the evolutionary process.[57] Numerous intellectuals espoused the notion that magic constituted a pivotal phase in the evolutionary trajectory of the human psyche, spanning from primitive instincts to refined societal progress. Until a few years ago, biblical research predominantly aligned with these post-illuministic beliefs that placed reason at the center of the scientific endeavor, pushing aside the time-worn theological

[55] As the author notes, "It does not seem frivolous to argue here that what looks like magic and sounds like magic must surely be magic." See Kieckhefer 2014: 141.

[56] In contrast to rationalism—particularly its opposition to superstition—Victorian attitudes toward supernatural ideas underwent significant shifts in how they were recorded and discussed. Bartels observes that for certain segments of nineteenth-century English society, particularly the educated middle and upper classes, folklore was dismissed as mere superstition, a perspective viewed as incompatible with notions of social and intellectual progress. Nevertheless, superstition retained its status as a source of "essential knowledge" for other members of Victorian society. Much of this folk belief was deeply practical, focused on averting or combating misfortune. As Bartels explains, "diabolic folklore was concerned with prevention and might take the form of simple, habitual actions, such as always keeping a 'small coin' in any container used to hold money to ensure that the Devil did not bring poverty upon the owner." See Bartels 2021: 76 and 93.

[57] Butler 2011: 99.

hermeneutical approaches to religious texts that dealt with magic and magic language as part and parcel of the human religious experience.[58]

In recent scholarship, biblical studies have increasingly recognized the presence of magical elements within scriptural texts. However, until approximately two decades ago, these motifs were often considered incongruous with the broader biblical tradition. This perceived incongruity, in relation to a predominantly Yahwistic religious tradition viewed as authoritative and theologically comprehensive, highlights the hermeneutical challenge that has persisted in biblical theological discourse for centuries. One interpretive approach suggests that magical elements in scripture represent vestiges of Canaanite religious traditions, gradually assimilated into biblical concepts. Conversely, another perspective posits that magical notions within the Bible were influenced by Mesopotamian magical practices but ultimately rejected by the biblical authors.

The Judeo-Christian theological framework has shaped both traditional and modern views on magic, reinforcing the belief that magic practitioners engage with the divine through pacts with demonic forces. This view gained renewed traction in the late nineteenth century, coinciding with a revival of interest in Platonic philosophy.[59] As paradoxical as it may sound, Plato conversely argues that magic has no connection to the divine realm or demonic forces. According to the ancient Greek philosopher, the realm of magic cannot engage with or exert influence over the divine domain. In Plato's view, magic is an unethical means of deceiving individuals through psychological manipulation and the exploitation of their anxieties.

Anthropological Foundations of Magic and its Evolutionary Context

During the nineteenth century, as anthropological studies gained prominence, scholars began to recognize the pervasive nature of magic across diverse religious institutions, beliefs, and traditions. This realization has since become a focal point in the field. From the perspective of Edward B. Tylor (1832–1917), magic can be classified as a "pseudo-science" due to its

[58] Simpson, Elliott-Binns, and Lock 1919: lvi.
[59] Pinch 2010: 52-54.

association with a cause-and-effect relationship between the magical act and the intended outcome.[60] In what can be deemed a remarkable scholarly achievement, Tylor's perspective on magic as a comprehensive framework of thinking stands out prominently. James George Frazer (1854–1941), a historian and classicist, elaborated and reformed Tylor's presuppositions in the early twentieth century.[61] Frazer perceives magic as a cognitive framework and contextualizes it within the evolutionary trajectory of human societies.[62] Frazer classifies magic beliefs and rituals into two categories, homeopathic and contagious, according to the cause-effect dynamic proposed by Tylor.[63] In the realm of homeopathic magic, practitioners skillfully emulate the intended outcome, while in that of contagious magic, a contrasting approach is employed. Here, the magician deftly wields objects that have come into contact with the very person or entity they seek to influence. According to Frazer, both magical activities can be classified as "primitive."[64] Frazer's contributions to the field of anthropological studies on magic are widely recognized and celebrated. His pioneering work has laid the foundation for understanding the intricate relationship between magic and religious practices.[65] Inarguably, a dogmatic perspective on magic persevered in his theoretical framework, wherein magic seemingly failed to meet the criteria set by both scientific and religious norms.

Biblical Scholarship and the Reexamination of Magic in Scripture

In today's biblical scholarship, the cultural insights from Gerhard von Rad's groundbreaking research on the Mosaic movement, or Yahwism, are more relevant than ever. Von Rad argued that Yahwism, as a dynamic religious movement, stood in stark opposition to what he viewed as the rigid, mechanistic nature of magical practices. Recently, Jeffers has stepped in with a thoughtful critique of some of von Rad's views on the role of magic in ancient Israel. However, she aligns with von Rad on key points, noting the decreasing significance of magic in Israelite

[60] Tylor 1871: 121-122.
[61] Frazer 2009.
[62] Jarvie 2012: 366. See also Czachesz 2018: 187.
[63] Greenwood 2009: 46-50ff.
[64] Jeffers 1996: 4-6.
[65] Birx 2010: 775.

religious life compared to its central role in Assyrian and Babylonian societies. Interestingly, Jeffers suggests that both cultures might have had similar understandings of magic.[66]

Recently, there has been a concerted push to break free from the lingering rationalist mindset that has dominated discussions around magic in the Bible for years. Scholars are now striving to establish a middle ground that sees magic and traditional religious beliefs as not just at odds but as complementary forces that interact and collaborate across various social and cultural contexts. In *The Hebrew Bible and Environmental Ethics*, Joerstad argues against the generally accepted view that the Bible systematically marginalizes and downplays the importance of magical knowledge. As she explains, this idea is frequently held without substantial textual evidence to support it.[67] In highlighting the antiquated and misguided nature of this perspective on magic, Joerstad cites the tale of Cain and Abel, the offspring of Adam and Eve. In Genesis 4, we read that the ground (הָאֲדָמָה) "takes" (לקח), or literally absorbs Abel's blood, seemingly becoming an accomplice in Cain's heinous act of killing his own brother. Just as Abel's blood vociferously appealed to God from the earth (Gen 4:10), the biblical figure of Job, known for his righteousness, expresses a fervent desire for his blood to persistently beseech God even in the aftermath of his demise, while simultaneously yearning for just retribution (Job 16:18): "Earth, do not cover my blood; / Let there be no resting place for my outcry!" The blood that is consumed by the ground represents buried blood that cannot vocalize its anguish. The analysis of the narrative of Genesis 4 suggests that the involvement of the ground in "absorbing" Abel's blood, as indicated by the Hebrew verb "to take" (לקח), which typically conveys intentional taking or giving, assumes an active role within the story. Nevertheless, upon examining modern interpretations of this verse, we find a tendency to diminish the import of the ground in the narrative of Genesis 4, resulting in a contrasting perception.

Westermann's interpretation of this episode provides a relevant illustration, as it tends to diminish the significance of the ground in the Genesis 4 narrative. Westermann suggests that

[66] Jeffers 1996: 8.
[67] Joerstad 2019: 60-61.

the ground's actions can be seen as a manifestation of Canaanite magical beliefs and myths, implying a connection between the two.[68] According to Westermann, the magical elements present in the text, [69] such as the ground actively participating in Cain's crime, are no longer operational. The incorporation of these magic elements into God's discourse with Cain can be perceived as a form of neutralization. In her rebuttal of this argument, Joerstad notes that another version of the text described the ground in anthropomorphic language, depicting its jaws as being open, seemingly ready to consume the victim's blood. Joerstad has come forward to challenge Westermann's argument regarding the deliberate concealment of the magical aspect in the passage, which grants the ground an active role, in the earlier version of the text compiled or edited in Genesis 4. As Joerstad observes, the editor of the text had the option to exclude any mentions of the ground if desired. In her analysis, she also highlights the nature of Hittite chthonic deities, illustrating their involvement in prophylactic rituals, where the consumption of sacrificial blood played a significant role.[70] This religious tradition corroborates Westermann's initial hypothesis that Gen 4:10-12 echoes earlier magic lore.[71] The ground deity plays a significant role in these rituals, comparable to the description in Genesis 4.[72]

This parenthetic example drawn from Joerstad's analysis of Genesis 4 anticipates the broader discussion we will make in the following section, in which we will examine the gradual and consistent recognition of magic as an integral part of Israelite religious culture, reflected in the biblical tradition, which, rather than concealing it, exalts it to the point of presenting it, frequently, as a dangerous activity, at least as perceived by some religious circles, such as, as we discussed above, the Deuteronomic ones.

Recent scholarship in the anthropology of religion has led to a reexamination of the relationship between magic and religion. Scholars are progressively departing from earlier skepticism about categorizing magical practices within religious frameworks.[73] As the field of anthropology has progressed beyond its initial theoretical presuppositions, the focus has

[68] Westermann and Scullion 1984: 306.
[69] […] "we are [...] in the realm of magic." See Westermann and Scullion 1984: 61.
[70] Schwemer, "The Blood-Soaked Earth and the Blood God," (Forthcoming).
[71] Feder 2011: 211-215.
[72] Westermann and Scullion 1984: 61-62.
[73] Schwemer 2015: 18.

increasingly shifted toward the cultural and linguistic facets of societal analysis. This methodological shift in anthropology has found resonance in ancient Near Eastern studies, where scholars have increasingly recognized the need to situate magical and religious practices within their broader cultural contexts. Recent scholarship in ancient Near Eastern studies has increasingly emphasized the importance of examining the *Sitz im Leben* of ancient societies. This approach seeks to elucidate the socio-cultural contexts and dynamics of specific communities as reflected in extant textual evidence.[74]

Academic perspectives on the sociocultural significance of magic have undergone considerable reassessment in recent decades. Some researchers posit that magical practices represent a transitional stage within the broader religious framework, from which more formalized cultic expressions emerge and develop. Conversely, other scholars question the centrality of magic to social and communal structures, particularly within the context of ancient Israelite society.[75] This perspective suggests a distinction between magic and religion, as if there were an impassable divide between these two cultural phenomena. Recent inquiries have raised doubts about this longstanding differentiation, proposing that religion and magic are intricately connected to the extent that the boundaries between these two realms become somewhat blurred. A more nuanced interpretation suggests that religion and magic can be viewed as different manifestations of the same religious phenomenon. Nissinen notes that "Many biblical scholars today have no difficulties in seeing magic and magic rituals as an essential part of the ancient Israelite religious practice rather than signs of external influence," and adds that "Magic and religion are, thus, not seen as contrasting features in the religion encountered on the pages of the Hebrew Bible; rather, magic is seen as another form of religious practice."[76]

Recent developments in the field have underscored the importance of incorporating a certain level of flexibility when categorizing indigenous religious beliefs. According to Hoffman,

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[74] In "Form Criticism in Dialogue with Other Criticisms," Kim observes that "A text is not only a literature but also a portrait of life: setting in life (*Sitz im Leben*)." See Kim 2003: 92.
[75] Still in the 1960s, in his edition of the Pentateuch and Haftorahs, Hertz would say that Exod 22:17 was so stringent regarding witchcraft in ancient Israel, "Not because there was any reality of witchcraft, but because it was a negation of the unity of God and an abominable form of idolatry." See Hertz 1960: 313.
[76] Nissinen 2020: 49.

the term “magic” must be considered a misnomer as it often carries a negative connotation, despite its rightful place as a subset within the realm of religious experience. Researchers have long engaged in a spirited discourse surrounding the notion of magic, with its utility as a valuable tool for evaluating religious convictions gradually garnering recognition.[77] Challenging the notion that magic and religion were separate but interconnected realms, this concise examination reveals the artificial distinctions scholars often draw between these two concepts, particularly in the historical setting of ancient Israel. Biblical texts demonstrate that the ancient Israelites, much like their neighbors, had a strong interest in magical practices and actively practiced them.

Magic and Monotheism: Reevaluating Biblical Exceptionalism Through Archaeology and Textual Evidence

Scholars have often brushed aside the role of magic in biblical texts, perhaps influenced by the widespread belief that ancient Israel’s religious practices were uniquely exceptional, distancing them from the more commonplace rituals of surrounding cultures.[78] There has been a growing trend toward promoting a more nuanced understanding of the exceptionalism associated with Israel’s monotheism in recent years, such that it has altered our perception of this issue. In 1994, Albertz distinguished between “family piety” and “state” (specifically temple) religion based on a comprehensive examination of the archaeological data.[79] More recently, Dever engaged in a thoughtful examination of the archaeological findings pertaining to various forms of magic. He posited that these findings should be considered as a corrective measure to the information conveyed in passages like Deuteronomy 18. As previously mentioned, Deuteronomy 18 establishes prohibitions against various magical practices prevalent during the pre-exilic, monarchical era. These practices include fortune-telling and witchcraft. Nevertheless, the prohibition stated in the text and the archaeological findings imply that these magical practices were prevalent among the general population. However, they were considered incompatible with the “official” Yahwism that Deuteronomy promotes.

[77] Hoffman 2001: 179-194.
[78] Dever 2005: 126.
[79] Perdue 2010.

Archaeological findings provide strong evidence suggesting that the religious practices commonly referred to as "folk religion" or "folk piety" (i.e., evidence of religious practice by everyday people in the archaeological record), as described by Dever and other scholars, were significantly shaped by the incorporation of magical elements. Dever provides an in-depth examination of biblical references to various forms of magic, including but not limited to demonology and exorcism, divination, oracles, soothsaying, witchcraft, and dream interpretation. The author cites over twelve scriptural passages that discuss these "magical types." He contends that awareness of magic in ancient Israel dates to the pre-exilic, monarchical period, rooted in a shared cosmological framework common to Israel and its neighbors in the ancient Near East.

Archaeological Insights on Magic and "Folk Religion"

As archaeology reveals, religion as a broad concept encompasses magic.[80] Numerous engraved pottery vessels discovered in Israel were likely utilized in rituals involving "sympathetic or imitative magic." People used in these magical ceremonies objects or images that resembled or were suggestive of the object or person intended to be affected. Additionally, some archaeological discoveries in Israel imply that artifacts played a role in what we may describe as magical ceremonies, given the relationship between the object and the written word as a vector of divine action. For instance, the enigmatic lettering קדש ("holy") engraved on an eighth-century BCE bowl from Beersheba may have had a specific meaning in the context of magical rites. Similarly, in the Kuntillet ʿAjrud's fortress-shrine, a large, engraved jar from the seventh century BCE bears a blessing that reads "May Yahweh bless you and keep you and be with you."[81] Someone placed the object as a votive on the sanctuary's threshold. It may have served as a "stand-in" for the worshipper. Furthermore, the finding of an inscribed silver amulet from a seventh/sixth-century BCE Jerusalem tomb in Ketef Hinnom, near the Kidron Valley, demonstrates more clearly that the artifact served a magical-apotropaic function

[80] In his work *Religion as Magical Ideology*, Talmont-Kaminski challenges the view that magic and religion are indistinguishable. He argues that while magic is a cognitive by-product, religion is a pro-social "exaptation" of this cognitive by-product. See Talmont-Kaminski 2013 [e-book].
[81] Meshel 2012.

to ward off evil." Inside the amulet was an undamaged Hebrew inscription containing a variant of Moses' well-known "priestly blessing" found in Num 6:24–26. According to many interpreters, a woman wore the amulet of Ketef Hinnom around her neck as a prized personal treasure. However, as Dever points out, people wore it primarily to ward off evil, rendering this a decidedly "magical" item. Amulets are by definition "magical symbols," as they brought good luck. Dever reports that "We actually have hundreds of Iron Age amulets, mostly from Judean tombs, but again few biblical scholars have paid any attention to them," but also clarifies that "The most common ones found in tombs are Egyptian: 'Eye-of-Horus' plaques; figurines of deities, especially Bes, guardian of the dead; and other faience (that is, glazed earthenware) items. "[82] In ancient Israel, they were frequently used and buried with the deceased as their most valuable items.

The Deuteronomic Critique of Magic

Some magical rituals have coexisted with "official" Yahwism since at least the monarchical period. According to Nissinen, magic was permitted in both the narrative and prescriptive texts of the Hebrew Bible. Numerous symbolic performances recounted in biblical scriptures (e.g., healing, exorcism, rain, resuscitation, etc.) may be characterized as magical.[83] In contrast, practices like "sorcery"—understood as the malevolent manipulation of supernatural forces, often targeting individuals—were strictly prohibited when carried out by unauthorized practitioners, as perceived from the writer's emic perspective, and were punishable by death.[84] Regardless of the book or tradition in question, the Scriptures either prohibit or at least appear to restrict the practice of sorcery. According to Exod 22:17 and Lev 19:26, witchcraft was a polluting practice that grieved God. Pollution from it would spread across the offender's neighborhood, into his home, and even throughout the town. Any contamination of this magnitude may harm the entire population, and God's wrath would always be collective, in the form of famine, pestilence, or war defeat. Society had to expel the guilty to avoid divine punishment. All members of the community were morally and religiously required to report

[82] Dever 2005: 133.
[83] Nissinen 2020: 55.
[84] Nissinen 2020: 60-65.

witchcraft cases to the authorities. Following the execution of the sentence, people would perform purification rituals.[85]

Magic and Pollution: Legal and Religious Boundaries

The charge of practicing a magic profession that contributes to pollution is thus at the heart of the legal distinctions between lawful and illegitimate religious activity. For instance, the Hebrew term כשף ("malevolent practitioner of magic," Piel stem, "conjuring," "practicing magic," "witchcraft") never applies to legitimate prophets of Yahweh. It is, however, reserved for prophets who proclaim themselves as such despite having no divine mandate and so being illegitimate. Ultimately, the biblical polemics against false prophets are against witchcraft.[86] In this sense, magic refers to the use of divine power to cause harm to another. A classic illustration of this is found in Ezek 13:18-21, when the "daughters of Israel," i.e., folk women healers and ritual specialists, misuse the name of Yahweh to perform sorcery. Their objective is to utilize God's name as a magical tool to enlist him in a ritual against an adversary to harm or seriously injure him.[87] To dig deeper into the subject of magic, it is worth noting that the distinction between legal and illegal magical practices is a matter of continual discernment on the part of political and religious elites. These power brokers used the term "magic" disingenuously to discredit practices that were not directly under their control or did not conform to their religious worldview or cultural-political goals. Schmitt closes his extensive research of the subject by arguing that the biblical terminology used to identify magical practices functioned as a reference point for social and ethical boundaries. Schmitt contends the dominant elites, predominantly Deuteronomistic and priestly, claimed magic "technical" language to label and demonize any ritual practice that did not form in the Temple.[88] For instance, the noun כשף, which is the Hebrew cognate of the Akkadian *kaššāpu* and Ugaritic *kšp* (KTU³ 1.169:9), was likely a label. This term referred to any magic activities (Deut

[85] Westbrook 2003: 76.
[86] In his unpublished 1971 doctoral dissertation "Studies in Biblical Magic," Fishbane illuminates the typological similarities between polemics against false prophets and witches. He argues that both groups are portrayed as antisocial elements, with the ruling class establishing social order by rejecting them. See Fishbane 1971: 35.
[87] Schmitt 2014: 5-6.
[88] Schmitt 2014: 2–3.

18:9-22; Jer 27:9; Mal 3:5) that religious practitioners engaged in outside the regulatory reach of the Temple's authority (Deut 18:9-22; Jer 27:9; Mal 3:5). Witchcraft was an unorthodox, forbidden practice compared to the Yahwistic norms established by the Temple's priestly circles.

When viewed from this perspective, we see more clearly that the terminology used to describe the practice of magic in the Bible serves primarily as a means of juridical demarcation between permissible and unlawful, in other words, between that which is holy and what is harmful and impure. As mentioned, the theological orientation of many biblical texts, especially prophetic ones, stigmatized magic for reasons that depended on the needs of those in power at the time a text was written or edited. We find in this terminology not only the yardstick of value judgment that users attached to it but the source of the broader devaluation of magic. For example, among the pejorative terms associated with witchcraft is the expression אֹרְרֵי-יוֹם ("the one who curses the day") in Job 3:8, which may refer to sorcerers who summon the powers of chaos to curse the day of birth.[89] A further designation of a sorcerer comes from the expression אִישׁ לָשׁוֹן ("slanderer") in Ps 140:12, most likely referring to an expert of spellcasting.[90] The same can be said of חֻבַּם חֲרָשִׁים in Isa 3:3, which refers to a "witchcraft specialist," analogous likely to the Ugaritic *ḥrš*. The term אַשָּׁף is instead directly related to בשף, which is found only in the book of Daniel (Dan 1:20; Dan 2:2:2; Dan 2:10; Dan 2:27; Dan 4:4) and is parallel to חַרְטֹם ("divinatory priest"). The Hebrew word אַשָּׁף is a loanword from the Akkadian *āšipu*, which specifically refers to Mesopotamian exorcists and experts in anti-witchcraft rituals (HALOT 1, s.v. "אשף" and CAD 1.2:431–35).

Schmitt explains that to understand the process of demonization of some ritual practices that were considered magical, we must look once again at the so-called "prophet law" of Deut 18:9-22. This law limits the autonomy of the prophets of the future.[91] As Otto points out, the prophet law best expresses the clash over the authority of prophecy that occurred in the exilic period between the priestly and prophetic circles. For Schmitt, as for Otto, the prophet law of

[89] Frenschkowski 2019: 21
[90] Forti 2015: 84.
[91] Mastnjak 2016: 57.

Deut 18:9-22 reflects the vision of the Deuteronomist exiles for whom the destruction of the first temple, and the institutions associated with it, including the sacrifices and prophylactic rituals, brought to a screeching halt the practices carried out by the temple prophets and the official religious personnel. For the Deuteronomists, such dramatic events represented a divine delegitimization. This position is most apparent in the dispute between Jeremiah and Hananiah, the temple prophet in Jeremiah 28. Jeremiah's contentions, which may be considered Deuteronomic, challenge Hananiah's prophetic authority, as the false prophet speaks for the temple.

Magic and Religion in Historical Context

As an inseparable component of the religious experience, the notion of magic should not be divorced from religion, but rather seen as intertwined with it. As we have discussed, throughout history, the correlation between magical practices and the realm of the irrational has laid the foundation for a more expansive discrediting of the very notion of magic. The bias against magical practices was predominantly influenced by Greek philosophical speculation, particularly by Plato. From a Jewish perspective, figures like Philo and Josephus also contributed to this prejudiced view, linking magic and its rituals to the manipulative tactics employed by unscrupulous individuals who utilized their persuasive abilities to deceive the masses. The stigmatization of magic, as observed, can also be traced back to the biblical tradition, particularly within Deuteronomistic circles. These circles seemingly sought to discredit specific magical practices for political reasons, strategically promoting the centralization of worship and rituals in Jerusalem. By positioning Temple specialists in the capital of Judah as the focal point of the connection between God and the Israelites, these circles aimed to consolidate power and influence. Levinson observes that, for example, "The Deuteronomic proscription of local cultic activity and restriction of cultic action to the central sphere entailed the obligation to revise essentially the entire apparatus of cultic rituals and institutions that governed local cultic activity."[92] The architects of Deuteronomy not only reformed cultic practices but also overhauled public institutions, including the judiciary and the traditional role of the monarch as

[92] Levinson 2002: 5.

the supreme civil and judicial authority in Israelite society. This transformation was pushed by the drive towards centralization. Levinson highlights a paradoxical outcome of this centralization effort: It ultimately led to a diminution of royal power, as the Temple's authority came to eclipse that of the king. This perhaps unintended consequence underscores the far-reaching implications of Deuteronomy's reforms on the socio-political landscape of ancient Israel.

While the centralization efforts described by Levinson redefined the authority structures within ancient Israel, they also set the stage for a complex theological inner-biblical dialogue about magic, revealing that biblical texts did not uniformly reject magical practices. Both the prophetic (Deut 18:9-14) and the priestly sources denounce magical practices as morally reprehensible and unlawful acts (Lev 19:26). However, this condemnation was not always definitive. Magic emerged as a contentious issue among different theological schools, leading to distinctions between permissible and forbidden practices based on specific socio-cultural circumstances.

In short, from ancient times to the medieval period, magic was condemned as a deceptive practice performed by charlatans, magicians, and malevolent practitioner of magic. This enduring prejudice against magic has persisted and has inevitably weaved its way through scholarly discourse on its association with religion. Since the late 19th century, anthropology and archaeology, however, have uncovered tantalizing glimpses into the enigmatic prevalence of magic in ancient Israel. As we have seen, these findings, especially archaeological ones, challenged the long-held notion that magic was merely an extraneous religious dimension, distinct from official religious practices.

This lengthy digression on the purportedly disruptive relationship between magic and religion, particularly in the context of Israelite religion, is intended to debunk lingering prejudices associated with magic in the context of biblical and, particularly, prophetic language and serves as an introduction to the analysis of biblical magical language, often of Mesopotamian derivation, that continues to garner significant academic interest, as evidenced by the growing number of contemporary investigations. Research has succeeded in recent

years to highlight the rather complex relationship ancient Israel seems to have had with magic and its related performative functions, demonstrating how magic language (themes, technical terminology, and incantation-like imagery) imbued biblical discourse and contributed to shape the vitriolic polemics against illegitimate practitioners of magic and false prophets, presented as spreaders of specious hopes among the gullible populace.[93] In the following analysis, we will outline the evolution of research into the Israelite magical tradition in this ambit of academic religious inquiry.

4. Magic and the Book of Jeremiah: A Scholarly Exploration

Historical Bias Against Magic

The prevailing bias against magic, rooted in historical tendencies to distinguish it from legitimate religious practice—reflected, for example, in Enlightenment rationalism, the Protestant theological influences, or modern anthropological frameworks, but also in historical-critical approaches—has significantly shaped our understanding of the book of Jeremiah. Although recent research—such as "the ritual turn" in biblical studies—has begun to address this bias, its implications for understanding the book's language (e.g., terms like שקר or קסם in Jeremiah 14:14), themes (e.g., the prophetic role versus illegitimate prophets), and socio-religious context (e.g., competitive ritual practices in Judah) remain underexplored.

The identification of ritual-magical rhetoric and motifs within the biblical corpus is not a new development; it has faced theological opposition since late antiquity. Jerome, in his fifth-century commentary on Jeremiah, notably rebukes Origen for his treatment of such elements in the prophetic text. In no uncertain terms, Jerome denounces Origen as a "perverse interpreter" of Scripture for his unconventional interpretation of the cursing image of God's cup of wrath in Jeremiah 25.[94] Origen interprets the offering of the sacred drink to Israel as a restorative act, reinstating the nation to its previous state of ritual purity. In his interpretation, the divine presentation of this purifying drink, akin to a magical potion, has salvific implications. This

[93] Arena 2020: 66.
[94] See Jerome, *Commentary on Jeremiah*. Translated by Graves, 2011: 154; cf. Origen *Princ*. 2.10.6.

stands in contrast to Jerome's subsequent punishing interpretation.[95] In contemporary biblical scholarship, Origen's interpretation has been recognized as resonating with ancient Near Eastern healing-magical paradigms. These paradigms often attributed physical and mental ailments to the harmful effects of curses, necessitating protective countermeasures. How does the presentation of the sacred drink to Israel serve as a catalyst for redemption and the restoration of Israel's inherent purity? Origen's interpretation of the cursing significance of God's cup of wrath in Jeremiah 25 shows the rich cultural and literary depth of Jeremiah's prophetic message. There has been a long-standing tension between magical and non-magical interpretations of prophetic texts. This tension provides an important background for our examination of magical elements in Jeremiah.

Magic Language and Prophetic Discourse

When discussing the language of magic, it is worth remembering that the spoken word and magic symbols do more than just denote and designate: They are seen as having real power and can effect tangible changes in reality.[96] Anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski argues that those who use magical language regard it as a figurative language endowed with the ability to alter reality when repeated.[97] Biblical prophetic rhetoric suggests that there may in fact be a symbolic correlation between the prophetic word and magical signs as both categories of speech appear to be imbued with divine power. In a recent analysis, Hutton has revealed a fundamental link between judgment oracles and the practice of casting curses and has also shown the complicated relationship between prophetic speech and magic. As Hutton emphasizes, magical formulations were thought to manipulate the fabric of reality by harnessing the inherent power contained within the spoken word.[98] Alter has recently recognized that even biblical parallelism exhibits "... an emphatic, balanced, and elevated kind

[95] *Ex quo utique intellegitur quod furor uindictae dei ad purgationem proficiat animarum* - "From which it must be understood that the fury of the vengeance of God advances the purification of souls." Cf. Origen *Princ*. 2.10.6.
[96] According to Cassirer, every magical worldview assumes a direct relationship between a sign and the power it emanates. See Cassirer 1925 [1955]: 24.
[97] Malinowski 1965: 238.
[98] Hutton 1996: 247-60.

of discourse, perhaps ultimately rooted in a magical conception of language as potent performance."[99]

Academic analyses of biblical prophecy acknowledge the nuanced overlap between oracular and magical languages, a relationship that has sparked extensive discussion among theologians and scholars for centuries. For instance, in his *Apologia*, the Roman novelist and philosopher Apuleius (ca. 125–after 170 CE) identifies magic as synonymous with divination. He references a narrative recounted by the Roman philosopher Varro (116–27 BCE) regarding the inhabitants of Tralles, who employed magic to foresee the outcome of the Mithridatic War. Apuleius illustrates this connection through the tale of a young man who saw the future by observing Mercury's reflection in water (Apuleius, Apologia; LCL 534: 108-109).

In the book of Jeremiah, one can see a notable interaction between magical and prophetic discourse. Duhm, in his important 1901 commentary, suggested that the Aramaic formula in Jer 10:11, possibly a later addition by a scribe or editor, might function as an apotropaic incantation or anti-magic spell. The fact that this "incantation formula" (*Beschwörungsformel*), as Duhm argues, was "received from some authority" (*von irgend einer Autorität empfangen*) to whom they appealed, rather than being invented by the copyists or editors of the text,[100] is attractive as it points, as early as a century ago, at the possible import of magical traditions. Duhm's remark lacks elaboration; however, it can be inferred that the authority he references was likely important and influential enough that listeners would easily recognize it when they heard it spoken aloud. Schmidt recently proposed that the book of Jeremiah contains a magical literary style. In his 2013 commentary, he suggests that the threefold repetition of הֵיכַל יְהוָה in Jer 7:4 might be seen not merely as a rebuke of the people's infidelity, but as an incantatory formula. This interpretation is supported by similar threefold repetitions throughout the book (cf. Jer 7:4; 22:29; and the twofold repetition in Jer 23:25), which appear to have ritual significance.[101]

[99] Alter 2011: 9.

[100] Duhm 1901: 101-102.

[101] See Schmidt 2013: 179. Stipp observes that threefold repetitions of words or construct compounds occur exclusively in the Masoretic Text of Jeremiah, while only double repetitions appear in the Septuagint version. See Stipp 2015: 116.

Fohrer's Analysis of Prophetic Language and Magic

Fohrer's 1966 study entitled „Prophetie und Magie" hypothesized a close interconnection between prophetic and magical utterances.[102] According to Fohrer, a formal correlation exists between prophetic symbols and acts of magic. The emergence of this connection can be attributed to the integration of themes and magical terminology into the prophetic discourse, which were then assimilated and reinterpreted with new significance. A case in point is that of Num 20:8 in which Moses uses his staff to bring forth water from a rock while simultaneously reciting a divine command (ודברתם אל־הסלע). Considering that prophetic words do not possess a direct influence on the fabric of reality, as magic purports to do,[103] it seems inappropriate to classify them as legitimate incantations. Nevertheless, as Fohrer observes, prophetic words were believed to possess a magical energy akin to incantations, even though only God possesses the ability to unleash their inherent power (Deut 18:21; Hos 12:11). However, as Fohrer suggests, there is a magical aspect in the prophetic word that "lingers on," both in the written word and its related tradition.

In Fohrer's analysis, the motivation behind the creation and dissemination of prophetic messages stemmed from the conviction that the potency of speech could be preserved and potentially amplified through the medium of writing. According to the author, the act of uttering the prophetic word was believed to activate its intrinsic divine power. This divine word would be occasionally written down to preserve its efficacy. Fohrer's analysis begins by examining the narrative concerning Jeremiah's scroll in Jeremiah 36. This account portrays Baruch, Jeremiah's scribe, being directed by the prophet to meticulously transcribe all of Jeremiah's spoken words. It is important to note that the purpose of this recording is not solely for the preservation of these utterances for future generations, but rather to actively influence and resonate with the contemporary audience. In a riveting tale, Baruch finds himself entrusted

[102] Fohrer 1966: 25-47. See also Hutton 1995: 247-260. In the ancient Near Eastern context, Nissinen distinguishes between divination and magic in purpose and performance. His argument centers on differences in agency. He explains that the Greek diviner's role primarily involves receiving and facilitating divine will, while the magician's agency focuses on the practical application of this knowledge. Nissinen contrasts the magician's proactive, goal-oriented approach with the diviner's more receptive role. Despite these functional and performative differences, he suggests that the same individual could fulfill both roles. See Nissinen 2017: 14.
[103] Nissinen 2017: 13.

with the solemn duty of delivering Jeremiah's prophetic message to the hated Israelite ruler, King Jehoiakim (609–598 BCE; cf. 2 Kgs 23:34–24:7; 2 Chron 36:5–8). However, the monarch's fury is ignited upon hearing the unfavorable prophecy contained within the sacred scroll, leading him to make the fateful decision to consign it to flames (Jer 36:23).[104] In this scenario, Fohrer argues that the objective behind the destruction of the Jeremianic scroll is to nullify and diminish the potency of its prophetic warnings of impending catastrophe. Fohrer further notes that the subsequent re-writing of the scroll (Jer 36:32) serves to ensure the continued validity of Jeremiah's words and the preservation of their unaltered admonition. The author argues that the intrinsic potency of the prophetic word is activated or made efficacious through subsequent readings or recitations. This is primarily due to the fact that the pronouncements of the prophets were transcribed shortly after their oral delivery, as the spoken word must be documented promptly in order to uphold its powerful nature (Jer 36:27).

Fohrer asserts that the prophetic word holds immense significance as it is believed to originate from Yahweh himself. This divine word is not only spoken but also executed in accordance with the will of Yahweh. The potency of the prophetic word lies not in any magical forces, but rather in its role as a declaration of a celestial endeavor that demands realization and validation.[105] In his analysis, Fohrer establishes a distinct boundary between prophetic speech and magic language, while also identifying a connection between these two realms of oral communication. This aspect prompts us to delve deeper into this subject. How might we explore the intricate interplay between the prophetic word and the realm of magic, where a dialectical or interrupted relationship seems to unfold?

Early Forays: Fishbane's Examination of Magical Terminology

Current research has made significant strides in this area since Fohrer's early efforts to clarify aspects of magic tradition found in biblical prophetic writings. In 1971, Fishbane wrote about the nature of certain biblical metaphors and sought to recover their "living reality," or

[104] Deken recently proposed that the Judean king's symbolic act of cutting up and burning the prophetic scroll represents Judah's disregard for divine communication and their tendency towards idolatry. See Deken 2017: 630-652.

[105] Shead recently expressed a similar opinion in Shead 2013: 62, 122, and 231.

original meaning, in magical practices and incantations.[106] Fishbane is particularly interested in comprehending the structure, form, and internal developments of biblical language in connection with magic. This interest extends to examining how this structure and/or process is apparent within the biblical text itself, as well as how it can be better understood through comparative analogy.

Fishbane's primary focus is the examination of magical terminology, i.e., terms and contexts, its development, and related phenomena. The objective is to identify potential parallel lines of development and transformation in both biblical literature and Mesopotamian incantations. Fishbane seeks to demonstrate the presence of parallel forms between the two ancient bodies of literature and, in certain instances, the existence of specific literary genres within the Bible.[107] Fishbane's goal is to restore, whenever feasible, the magical foundation of the biblical language.[108]

In this thought-provoking analysis, Fishbane engages in a comprehensive breakdown of Kaufmann's conceptual framework about magic, critically evaluating its accuracy and lack of clarity within the domain of biblical rhetoric. He posits that Kaufmann's insightful perspective on the demarcation between magic and religion calls for an in-depth grasp of the dichotomy between incantation and magic praxis.[109] Kaufmann, in line with Frazer's approach, conceptualizes magic as an aggressive and coercive mode, with Kaufmann interpreting this coercion as exerted over a "metadivine" realm. According to the perspective of the eminent biblical scholar,[110] religion can be understood as a state of submission and supplication, wherein the focus lies on the autonomy and preeminence of God. Fishbane argues that Kaufmann's analysis lacks adequate consideration of the significant role played by the *petitive* and obstructive language of magic. He highlights that it is precisely these elements that become apparent through the examination of Mesopotamian magical series like *Maqlû* or *Šurpu*.

[106] Fishbane 1971.
[107] Fishbane 1971: 40.
[108] Fishbane 1971: 41.
[109] Fishbane 1971: 25.
[110] For a recent academic tribute to the life and work of biblical scholar, historian, and Jewish thinker Yehezkel Kaufmann (1889–1963), see Jindo, Sommer, and Staubli 2017.

Fishbane emphasizes the fact that even in Tallquist's introduction to the first edition of the *Maqlû* series, it was observed that numerous incantations exhibited remarkable similarities with psalms in terms of their address, language, and structure. Fishbane notes that these ancient recitations aimed to elicit the deity's favor and encourage their active participation. These biblical and Mesopotamian documents consistently maintain their supplicating and petitionary nature.[111] Fishbane clarifies that the presence of a metadivine realm is not primarily characterized by coercion, but rather by the invocation of a protector deity, which held significance in both ancient Israel and Mesopotamia.[112] Fishbane's assertiveness on this point is worth noting. He believes that the presence of a monotheistic belief system does not inherently exclude the practice of incantations. Furthermore, it is important to note that incantations do not necessarily imply an exertion of control over the deity or a reliance on a metadivine realm.[113]

Fishbane is also interested in investigating Kaufmann's idea of biblical prophecy. For Kaufmann, the symbolic actions performed by the prophets can be seen as *remnants* of ancient pagan and magical practices. The concept of "vestiges" of archaic pagan beliefs (see discussion on von Rad above),[114] draws on the historical negative representation of magic. According to Kaufmann, the survivals of magic practices undergo a transformation in biblical literature. In this transformation, the action or sign no longer possesses an inherent effectiveness but rather serves as a vehicle for the manifestation of Yahweh's will through the prophet's involvement. According to Kaufmann, the original magical element is effectively *silenced* within biblical rhetoric. Kaufmann sees the "pagan magician" as a wise man who can connect with and manipulate impersonal sources of power. On the other hand, he views the biblical prophet as a

[111] Fishbane highlights Dalglisch's use of typologies to demonstrate the presence of Mesopotamian incantation-prayer elements in Psalm 51. This analysis does not support the notion that the recitation of Psalm 51 was coercive or that it undermines the independent agency of YHWH. See Fishbane, *Studies in Biblical Magic*, 27.
[112] Fishbane 1971: 27.
[113] Fishbane 1971: 27-28.
[114] Albright's influential work, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan: A Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths*, emphasizes the declining influence of the Canaanite religion. Albright's examination posits the superiority of the Israelite religion over its Canaanite counterpart. He argues that ancient Israelite religion underwent a deliberate process of "archaic demythologizing," eliminating or modifying pagan elements to eradicate overtly non-Yahwistic ideas See Albright 1968: 159. For a more in-depth discussion of this issue, see also Dykstra and Myers 2011: 67.

"man of God" who acts as a representative or intermediary of the divine will. The division between legitimate prophecy and pagan magic is less clear-cut for Fishbane. Fishbane clarifies that the dichotomy observed in biblical texts and Mesopotamian magical literature relates to the distinction between appropriate and inappropriate means of requesting divine intervention.[115]

The legitimacy of oracles in Israel hinged upon the benevolence and omnipotence of Yahweh. The biblical prophet, in his self-perception, did not assume the role of a "creator" of reality. Instead, he saw himself as a conduit through which *a reality*, ordained by the divine entity Yahweh, was conveyed. His purpose was to deliver messages and warnings on behalf of Yahweh, thereby revealing a future reality that needed to be acknowledged and embraced. Symbolic actions also fall under the same principle. The biblical prophet employed the divine name "Yahweh" as a protector and observer of his instructions to the masses. In a similar vein, in ancient Mesopotamia, magical symbolic actions were thought to hold significant efficacy, as they were believed to be under the watchful supervision of powerful deities.[116]

Fishbane argues that the absence of coercion in the metadivine realm is evident in the ability of legitimate magic to supersede the spells of lesser powers. For Fishbane, this is evidence that it is not just about what is being done, but rather about who is doing it and with whose support. Fishbane believes that for us to fully understand and address the presence of magic in Israel, we need to adjust Kaufmann's perspective. This will enable us to delve into the core of biblical polemics, both from within and outside, against magic.[117]

Establishing the Relationship Between Jeremiah's Language and Magic

We have observed that as early as the beginning of the last century with Duhm, and by the middle of it with Fohrer, these authors had already identified magical elements in the rhetoric of the book of Jeremiah. Whether these magical elements were considered truly operative in the text by its authors and audience remains a question that cannot be demonstrated in the

[115] Fishbane 1971: 28.
[116] Fishbane 1971: 29.
[117] Fishbane 1971: 30.

context of this research, we are interested, however, in pointing out that as early as the 1970s, beginning with Fishbane's investigations, the relationship between Jeremiah's prophetic language and magic began to establish itself in academic debates.

Following Fishbane's initial explorations into magical rhetoric in biblical prophecy, the scholarship on the book of Jeremiah experienced a prolonged period of apparent lack of engagement in this area. This trend was prevalent in both North American and European academic circles. The minimalist tendencies (cf. Copenhagen School) prevalent in biblical studies from the early 1990s to the late 2000s may have contributed to this phenomenon, in their not wanting to read too much into the text. As a consequence of the challenges to the historical reliability of the Bible and the nature of ancient Israel, analyses of ritualistic and theurgic content in numerous biblical texts, also in light of anthropological data, remained largely neglected until the early 2010s.

The publication of works by Joosten (2014) and Baker (2019) have led to renewed interest in this subfield. These studies use diverse methodologies, including philological analysis, intertextual comparisons, and historical-contextual approaches. Both authors embed their linguistic and intertextual analyses within broader historical and cultural frameworks. Joosten highlights the Jewish-Aramaic usage of the verb גער ("to rebuke," "exorcise") and its evolution in religious traditions, while Baker explores how the texts of Jeremiah reflect responses to cultural and theological crises. Baker's analysis of the term מבליגיתי in Jer 8:18 offers a new interpretation by linking it to the Akkadian term *balaggu* (a musical instrument and a type of lament), suggesting that the prophet may have drawn from Mesopotamian lamentation traditions to express divine abandonment. Examining the rhetorical and historical dimensions of the Jeremiah theological message, while often utilizing comparative and literary-critical tools, Fishbane (1971) and Adcock (2019) nicely tie the methodological array of approaches discussed in this section.

In his analysis of the "counter-cosmic" motif in Jeremiah and Job, Fishbane compares the biblical creation narratives with ancient Near Eastern (specifically Mesopotamian) ritual texts to identify patterns of cosmogonic reversal, arguing that Jeremiah and Job employ language

traditionally associated with magical incantations to undo the order of creation. He also analyzes how creation language is used in Jer 4:23-26 and Job 3:1-13. He shows that these texts use cosmic imagery to express a more sophisticated understanding of chaos and divine power. Similarly, Adcock's study on Jer 10:1-16 looks at intertextuality by tracing the development of the Aramaic gibe in Jer 10:11 (בדנה תאמרון להום אלהיא די־שמיא וארקא לא עבדו יאבדו מארעא ומן־ תחות שמיא אלה) across multiple textual traditions, including the Septuagint (LXX), the Qumran manuscripts, and the proto-Masoretic Text. He finds that the original polemic against idolatry changed into a magical incantation over time. Like Fishbane, Adcock uses textual criticism to follow the development of Jer 10:1-16 through its editorial history. He retraces how the Aramaic phrase in Jer 10:11 was edited and reinterpreted in different manuscript traditions (e.g., the LXX, Qumran, proto-MT). By examining the scribal processes, he shows how this verse transformed from a polemical gibe to a magical incantation aimed at dispelling demons. Both authors include aspects of form criticism in their analyses of the texts.

Joosten, 2014: The Exorcistic Lexicon: Analyzing the Verb גער in the Book of Jeremiah and Its Magical Implications

In a fascinating investigation entitled "The Verb גער 'to Exorcize' in Qumran Aramaic and Beyond" conducted in 2014 by Joosten,[118] the scholar attempts to understand the intricacies of incantatory language by looking into the presence of a specialized or technical lexicon in biblical prophecy. He begins his analysis by referencing the *Genesis Apocryphon* (1Q20 20:28-29), where the Hebrew verb גער, meaning "to rebuke," is used to describe the act of expelling an impure spirit. Joosten observes that this same usage reappears in subsequent magical amulets. Expanding on previous research in this field, Joosten suggests that the verb גער developed its specific meaning of "exorcise" due to its frequent usage in exorcisms, as seen in Zech 3:2.[119] Joosten clarifies that the usage of the verb גער is delocutive (cf. the formula, "to say, 'May the Lord rebuke you'"). As the author argues, as also evidenced by Ugaritic mythological texts, the

[118] Joosten 2014: 347-55.

[119] Cranz recently delved into the topic of Zechariah's curse vision (Zech 5:1-4), exploring its magical elements in relation to ancient Near Eastern, Levantine, and biblical curse traditions. In a thought-provoking analysis, Cranz posits that the prophetic author skillfully incorporated historical curse traditions to mold his conception of God's involvement in an envisioned utopian future, wherein the unrighteous would be held accountable through divine retribution. See Cranz 2016: 404-418.

ancient Semitic inscriptions do not clearly indicate that meaning of the verb גער is "to exorcise." Rather, the verb seems to acquire this meaning in later Jewish tradition, which stems, in turn, from a religious tradition deeply rooted in biblical texts. The potential borrowing of the term "to exorcise" from non-Jewish Aramaic speakers in later periods notwithstanding, its etymology as a delocutive is undeniably associated with Jewish communities. Joosten effectively underscores the challenge of ascertaining the extent of awareness possessed by the author of the *Genesis Apocryphon* and its initial readership regarding the contextual background of the verb's usage. For Joosten, the use of the Aramaic dialect in the *Genesis Apocryphon* provides strong evidence of its substantial incorporation of Jewish beliefs and practices, presumably over an extended duration. Of notable significance to our discussion is the observation that this verb is similarly employed in the book of Jeremiah. The verb גער holds significant recognition within the context of biblical Hebrew. Typically, it conveys the semantic connotation of "rebuke." Certain uses of rebuke can be considered prototypical, such as a paternal figure admonishing their child or an authoritative figure reproaching an individual who has encroached upon their jurisdiction.

The verb גער is found in chapter 29:27 of the book of Jeremiah, in a section known as "the letter to the exiles." Chapter 29 is a lengthy prose composition primarily composed of correspondence exchanged between Jerusalem and Babylon. According to Thompson,[120] there are at least four letters in this chapter: one is from Jeremiah to the exiles (vv. 1-15, 21-23), another is from Shemaiah in Babylon to Zephaniah (vv. 25-28), a third is from Jeremiah to Shemaiah (v. 24), and finally, a second letter is addressed to the exiles (vv. 31-32). The letter from Shemaiah is read in verses 26-29. Here, a certain Zedekiah is introduced as the new overseeing priest of the temple, replacing the previous priest, Jehoiada. One of the overseer's responsibilities was to apprehend and confine individuals deemed as "madmen" and "self-proclaimed prophets." As Holladay points out, the word "rebuke" in Jer 29:27 emphasizes

[120] Thompson 1980: 544.

"more than a casual tongue-lashing: it is often used with Yahweh as subject in the context of his battle with the forces of chaos."[121]

According to Joosten, the verb גער is frequently employed in religious poetry to denote God's actions. For instance, in Ps 119:21, God is depicted as rebuking the ungodly, while in Isa 17:13 and Ps 9:6, God's rebuke is directed towards the nations.[122] The less conventional applications may align more closely with the fundamental connotation of the Semitic root *gʿr*, denoting actions such as vocalizing loudly, generating a high-volume sound, or exhaling forcefully. The aforementioned significance is documented in various Semitic languages. According to Joosten, the verb employed in Nah 1:4 and comparable passages suggests an action akin to the release of a war cry with the intention of suffocating the adversary.[123] The conventional interpretation for the semantic connotation "to exorcise, expel a demon" typically posits that it arises as a result of a semantic expansion from the meaning "rebuke," or alternatively, from the more rudimentary meaning "shout (in battle, etc.)." For Joosten, the act of rebuking or vocally confronting an evil spirit result in its expulsion from the individual it has afflicted. The author argues that the English term "to rebuke" inadequately conveys the intended meaning, as it refers to a verbal act that possesses significant power akin to curses, incantations, imprecations, and exorcism formulas.[124]

The use of unique magical terminology, as exemplified by the Hebrew verb גער, demonstrates the extraordinary evocative power of biblical rhetoric, but also its ability to obscure or diminish the magic connotations of a particular word or phrase, depending on the text's context. This argument pertains to the usage and repetition of Semitic terminology, such as the verb גער, but it also encompasses the utilization of Mesopotamian terms and themes, as indicated by the next investigation, which showcases the literary versatility of Jeremiah's rhetoric. Transitioning from Joosten's exploration of the verb גָּעַר ("to rebuke") and its implications for exorcistic language in the book of Jeremiah, we can continue with Baker's study

[121] Holladay 1989: 147.
[122] Joosten 2014: 350.
[123] Joosten 2014: 351.
[124] Joosten 2014: 351.

that further illuminates the interplay of linguistic and cultural influences in the prophetic text by examining the unique expression מבליגיתי in Jer 8:18-23.

Baker, 2019: "Balag" Lamentations and the Dynamics of Divine Abandonment: Reinterpreting Jeremiah 8:18–23 through Mesopotamian Lenses

In a 2019 study entitled "Jeremiah and the Balag-Lament? Jeremiah 8:18–23 Reconsidered," Baker showcases the remarkable versatility of the language of book of Jeremiah with its incorporation of various generical functions (see our discussion on "genre-bending" in Methodology chapter) and literary traditions. The analysis conducted on the hapax legomenon מבליגיתי in Jer 8:18, while not directly linked to magic or incantatory language, demonstrates the way in which "The passage reflects an approach to the composition of a sacred text—a priestly lamentation—endowed with 'multi-layered wisdom' that has been profoundly affected by Assyro-Babylonian culture."[125] Jeremiah 8:18-23 is widely recognized for the prophet's profound introspection regarding the predicament of Judah in light of divine retribution and in this poignant funeral lament, the prophet bemoans the dire political and moral predicament that has befallen the land of Judah: [19] Hark! The outcry of my poor people / From the land far and wide: /[20] "Harvest is past, / Summer is gone, / But we have not been saved." / [21] Because my people is shattered I am shattered; / I am dejected, seized by desolation. / [22] Is there no balm in Gilead? / Can no physician be found? (Jer 8:19–22.) Suffering with his people, Jeremiah expresses sincere compassion: "When in grief I would seek comfort, / My heart is sick within me," Jer 8:18. The term מבליגיתי lies at the core of Baker's investigation. This term initiates a lament and as mentioned, is a hapax legomenon, which makes it open to interpretation. Nicholson has characterized the term מבליגיתי as "unintelligible." Given the inherent characteristics of the text, any endeavor to translate it is contingent upon speculation or revision. The disagreement in interpreting the meaning of מבליגיתי has led to identifying the root **blg* ("bright," "flash," "smile"), which is only attested in its Hiphil form. According to Baker's analysis, this proposed solution appears to be in direct contradiction with the context of the passage. Consequently, it has led to the sprouting of often imaginative interpretations. Considering the enigmatic nature of this term's meaning, an alternative resolution to the

[125] Baker 2019: 603.

interpretive puzzle presented in the passage may be sought in another setting. According to Baker, the significance of this hapax in Jer 8:18 cannot be overstated when it comes to comprehending the pericope. If the biblical evidence alone fails to adequately address the *crux interpretum*, additional evidence from outside the Bible may offer alternative perspectives. The etymology of the Akkadian root **blg* serves as a notable illustration. The root finds its relevance in liturgical narratives that revolve around the departure of a deity from the main temple and the city. The central motif of this liturgy seems to align with the primary theme discussed in Jer 8:18–23. In a stirring funeral lament, the narrative focuses on Israel's misguided conviction, potentially influenced by sacred liturgy, that Yahweh's unwavering safeguarding of his people and perpetual presence within the Jerusalem temple remain unassailable. The implicit theological implications in the Jeremianic passage challenge the inviolability of the temple and other assumptions about liturgy and this sentiment is reflected in Jeremiah 7 and 9-10, where Yahweh proclaims his intention to replicate upon the temple and Judah the same fate that befell Shiloh. Considering their idolatrous practices and the desecration of the temple, Jerusalem, and Judah, it is prophesied in Jer 7:14 that they will be forsaken by him.

Baker emphasizes two important points regarding this passage: First, this Jeremianic pericope pertains to the forsaking of the Jerusalem temple by Yahweh. Second, it highlights the people's obliviousness to this significant event. Following Brueggemann, the author delves into the questions raised by the people, which revolve around the presence of Yahweh and the precise moment when divine intervention will come to their aid. Baker highlights that these queries are deeply intertwined with the liturgical practices of the people and influenced by a mistaken belief that, regardless of any transgressions committed, the temple and Jerusalem are impervious to harm. By pointing at the deep significance of the term מבליגיתי that initiates the passage in Jer 8:18, Baker looks at the literary tradition of Mesopotamia and identifies the Akkadian noun *balaggu*, a loan word from the Sumerian lexeme balag, as a possible lead in interpreting the term מבליגיתי. The Akkadian term *balaggu* comprises a dual meaning, referring to both a musical instrument and a form of lamentation, a mournful singing likely associated with dirges. Baker suggests that the occurrence of the Jeremianic hapax in Jer 8:18, may have originated as a loanword from the Akkadian language. This borrowing potentially served as a

linguistic resource for the Jeremianic composer that enabled the formation of the new term מבליגיתי and in this case Baker also offers a compelling comparison with the *balag*-lamentation genre, which held significant importance in the religious practices of the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian cultures. He explains that certain "balags" were copied for centuries. Several works were composed or revised during the first millennium BCE in response to the existing developments of that time. The *balag* genre, known for its importance in lamentation, remained a fruitful expression until the end of the first millennium. *Balag* laments were originally crafted as priestly performances designed to convey repentance for defiling the sacred sanctuary of a deity. The utilization of these laments was subsequently expanded to include expressions of remorse for any deliberate or unintentional violation committed against a divine entity, of such gravity as to result in the abandoning of their sacred abode and city.[126] Baker posits that the term *balag* in Jer 8:18-23 is intentionally encoded.[127] The author explains that this occurrence should not be deemed as unexpected or bewildering. The utilization of encryption in colophons within cuneiform literature from the mid-first millennium was a common practice. These colophons often provided a summary of the text's subject matter. Similarly, acrostics were employed to encode the rubrics of certain hymns and prayers, serving a comparable summarizing purpose.

The observation holds true for the acrostic[128] found in Jeremiah 8:18, as it effectively captures the core message of the entire passage. Baker stresses that Babylon is the designated location where the people of Judah will be compelled to worship deities foreign to their own (Jer 16:13), along with the associated rituals.[129] Following Holladay, Baker suggests that Jeremiah possessed the ability to employ a diverse range of vocabulary that was suitable for the particular type of discourse being used. There is no question that the prominent involvement of *balags* in the priestly rituals during the Late Assyrian, Neo- and Late Babylonian periods

[126] Baker 2019: 593-594.
[127] Baker 2019: 599.
[128] As Baker suggests, beneath the surface of Jeremiah 8:18, "we discover the word *balag* in encrypted form. The second letters of the six words that constitute the verse form the acrostic (termed a mesostich by Noegel) ובל גלב, 'the *balag* lamentation of his heart.'" See Baker 2019: 599.
[129] Baker 2019: 600.

indicates that the genre and the term *balag*(*gu*) were well-known to Jewish priestly writers and editors of that time.[130]

Baker's insightful analysis sheds light on the universalistic message apparent in the book of Jeremiah. He highlights the text's remarkable receptiveness to diverse literary genres, including those originating from non-biblical literary corpuses. In his 2014 study titled *Akkadian Loanwords*, Mankowski illustrates the meaningful implementation of Akkadian terms in the book of Jeremiah. According to his estimation, the Jeremianic text comprises a total of fifteen occurrences, in contrast to the seventeen instances found in the entire book of Isaiah, eleven in Ezekiel, and twelve in the Psalter.[131] In the following study, Fishbane further underscores Jeremiah's engagement with ancient literary motifs. He examines the counter-cosmic motif in Jer 4:23-26 and its parallels in Job; the shared themes of cosmic reversal and magical incantation pervade both prophetic texts.

Fishbane, 1971: The Counter-Cosmic Motif in Jeremiah and Job

The degree to which the Jeremianic text demonstrates openness to a wide array of themes, genres, and imagery originating from Mesopotamia is further underscored by aforementioned investigation conducted by Fishbane in 1971, entitled "Jeremiah IV 23-26 and Job III 3-13: A Recovered Use of the Creation Pattern."[132] In this analysis, Fishbane examines the motif of the reversal of the cosmic acts of creation as described in Genesis 1-2:4a. This motif can also be found in Jer 4:23-26 and Job 3:3-13. The author observes that in the cases of Jeremiah and Job, the essential order of the acts of creation is depicted as chaotic doom through synthetic parallelism. He observes that there are no actions or words more imbued with power than those of creation. He believes that in these two texts, the deliberate use of words for malevolent and disorderly intentions can only be effective by its very nature. In fact, Fishbane explores the theme of reversing acts of creation in these texts, which is part of a long tradition

[130] Baker 2019: 602.
[131] Mankowski 2000: 173–74, 224. See also Winitzer 2014: 165–66.
[132] Fishbane 1971: 151–67.

of ”counter-cosmic incantations.”[133] In Job 3:1-13, there is a notable correlation with the sequential undoing of the cosmic events depicted in Gen 1-2:4a. This section of Job can be interpreted as a component of the curse narrative surrounding the day of his birth (v. 1). Job intertwines various incantations, expressing an unyielding and deep desire for death, that includes both himself and the entirety of creation. Fishbane explains that Job recites his incantation in an attempt to rid himself of the underlying cause of his current situation. Therefore, when considered collectively, these verses reveal the concealed aspect of the acts of creation. They embody their magical dissimilation and dissolution. The author observes that in Akkadian literature, cosmologies were frequently employed as an introduction to magical incantations and the subsequent actions that followed. The magician-priest aims to ensure that this act, which was originally established by the creator god as part of his Cosmic Order, will possess the same power and effectiveness as the original event. Citing another example, Fishbane points out that the ritual for restoring the temple employed a creation narrative to protect against the malevolent forces of demons. This narrative asserted the power and authority of the gods during and after the temple’s restoration. Therefore, the magical acts are effective due to their imitation in form and their analogy in time and space with the archetypal pattern. As cosmogonic acts were the initial significant acts of “white” magic, their recitation quickly transformed into a magical event. The true meaning and emotional impact of Job’s incantation can only be fully grasped when viewed from this standpoint.[134] According to Fishbane, both Jer 4:23-26 and Job 3:1-13 contain cosmogonic patterns that resemble those found in ancient magical rituals. As mentioned, these literary patterns are used to create a counter-cosmic incantation. Regarding the potential existence of magical and incantatory formulas in the book of Jeremiah, we have already mentioned Duhm’s suggestion from the early 1900s about the peculiar Aramaic formula found in Jer 10:11. A recent analysis of this formula has revealed new elements that are suggestive of a magical milieu and thus support Duhm’s early understanding of the text.

[133] Fishbane 1971: 153.
[134] Fishbane 1971: 158.

Adcock, 2019: Mockery and Incantation - The Evolution of the Aramaic Gibe in Jeremiah 10:1-16

Adcock's 2019 study entitled "Does Jeremiah Dispel Diaspora Demons?" focuses on the hymn found in Jer 10:1-16, directing his attention towards the Aramaic gibe in Jer 10:11: בדנה תאמרון להום אלהיא די־שמיא וארקא לא עבדו יאבדו מארעא ומן־תחות שמיא אלה.[135] Adcock's analysis suggests that the editing processes employed in Jer 10:11-16, as observed in the LXX of Jeremiah, Qumran manuscripts (specifically 4Q70 [4QJera] and 4Q71), and the proto-Masoretic Text, indicate that the Aramaic mockery in Jer 10:11 was originally a provocative war taunt directed sarcastically by various nations (10:10) towards Zion's engagement in idolatry (e.g., 10:19-25 and 7:1-4). Adcock supposes that the gibe went through a process of scribal revision that in turn led to a reinterpretation of the Aramaic expression in the Greek rendition of Jeremiah, as well as in 4Q71 and proto-Masoretic sources. He also raises a fair point when he argues that the primary emphasis of the hymn in Jer 10:1-16 lies in its original context, which for Adcock highlights the unmatched creative power of Yahweh and the emptiness of idol worship. The original Aramaic gibe contrasted these two distinct realities and verse 10:11 serves as a symbol of the nation's defiance towards Zion's religious practices. These nations, Adcock claims, mockingly surround and attack the sacred site, de facto undermining its importance. With time, things changed. For Adcock, while the Aramaic phrase in Jer 10:11 initially emerged as part of a polemic aimed at denouncing idolatry, over time, it underwent a transformation and came to be used as a catchy jingle recited during the diaspora. Adcock's interpretation is twofold: It might have potentially fulfilled the role of an incantation aimed at warding off demonic forces within the context of preventive religious rituals, or it could have served as a written directive in the style of the prophet Jeremiah. Already in 1901 Duhm interpreted Jeremiah's Aramaic text as an incantation intended to ward off malevolent supernatural entities. Adcock's reasoning behind this interpretation stems from the significance attributed to the Aramaic phrase in Jer-LXX 10:1-18, which he reads as strategically inserted in the Greek version immediately preceding an apotropaic hymn in 10:12-16. Through linguistic transformation, the original Aramaic phrase found in the proto-Masoretic Text version, which

[135] Adcock 2019: 402. James Seth Adcock's 2017 comprehensive analysis of the topic.

initially served as an enemy taunt directed towards Zion and formed a crucial component of a battle hymn, underwent a significant reinterpretation in the Septuagint (LXX). In this presumed alternate rendition, our text, possibly repurposed as a potent anti-idol incantation further illuminates the significance of the Qumran discoveries on our understanding of demonology's evolution during the Second Temple period. During this era, pagan idols became more and more associated with malevolent entities and several Qumran texts illuminate the scribal practice of incorporating biblical citations into incantations and apotropaic material. Manuscripts such as 4Q286-287, 4Q560, 8Q5, and 11Q11 provide substantial evidence of this phenomenon, while texts like 4Q510-511, 4Q444, 6Q18, 1QHa, and 11Q5 further corroborate this practice. Following Adcock's analysis, the transformation of the initial Aramaic war taunt in Jer 10:11 into a malevolent invocation should be understood within the context of broader textual modifications to verses 10:1-18. During subsequent scribal revisions, Jer 10:1-18 underwent modifications that aligned with prevailing understandings of the Aramaic taunt. Scholars have noted a significant evolution in the Aramaic formula of Jer 10:11 during the Second Temple period.

Contextualizing Prophetic Discourse in the Ancient Near East

While studies on magical language in Jeremiah are still in their early stages, such research has progressed further in relation to other biblical texts, where we not only see a clear reliance on Mesopotamian literary prototypes but also a deliberate theological engagement with Mesopotamian sources to define the relationship between God and his people. In this section, we see the various methodological lenses, including intertextual, textual-critical, and etymological analyses, with which contemporary scholarship has sought to assess the relationship between biblical magical rhetoric and Mesopotamian ritual incantatory language. We begin with a comparative perspective with the 1927 study of Nicolsky that compares Psalms 58 and 59 with Mesopotamian incantations. The author identifies parallels in poetic language and motifs and argues that these psalms incorporate magical formulas reflective of Mesopotamian incantatory traditions.

Nicolsky, 1927: Intersections of Biblical Psalms and Mesopotamian Incantatory Traditions

Early in the twentieth century, Nicolsky drew parallels between a series of biblical psalms and the Mesopotamian incantatory tradition in terms of language and motifs reused in his thought-provoking study entitled *Spuren magischer Formeln in den Psalmen*.[136] In his analysis of Psalm 58, for example, he concluded that its poetic language borrowed magic formulas, which he believed were originally accompanied by actions such as pouring water, cutting herbs, and melting wax. Nicolsky believed that the original editor of this psalm may have attempted to adapt popular formulas through his editing, despite the extensive reworking that may have obscured the psalm's original meaning. Significantly, Nicolsky draws an analogy between the psalm formulaic language and Babylonian incantations which, he thought, carry legalistic terminology in their introduction of the conception of the fight against magic effects, presenting them within the context of an imaginary legal dispute.[137] In a similar vein, Nicolsky interprets Psalm 59 as a prayer of protection against treachery and attacks by nocturnal demons. Nicolsky explains that the psalm opens with a prayer to Yahweh, describing the enemies—sorcerers and demons—in verses 1-9. He then argues that verse 10 contains the invocation, which seeks to ensure the prayer's effectiveness and divine intervention. Despite the editorial history of the psalm, which may have altered its original meaning, as in the case of Psalm 58, Nicolsky interprets the language of this psalm as the product of official magical literature in which the description of malevolent spirits is conveyed in a way reminiscent of comparable Babylonian incantations.[138] Torczyner's following investigation is a linguistic analysis of a seventh-century BCE incantation. He analyzes the language to identify its function as a protective incantation against night demons. His work sheds light on the linguistic features of incantations.

Torczyner, 1947: A Protective Incantation Against Night Demons

In his 1947 article entitled "A Hebrew Incantation Against Night Demons from Biblical Times," Torczyner analyzed an ostensible seventh-century BCE incantation discovered at Arslan-

[136] Nicolsky 1927.
[137] Nicolsky 1927: 41
[138] Nicolsky 1927: 66-67.

Tash in upper Syria.[139] According to Torczyner, all the linguistic forms found in the inscription "are pure biblical Hebrew."[140] He interprets this inscription as a protective incantation against the malevolent female demons of darkness who suffocate men while they sleep. These demons were particularly feared during the night of the wedding. Torczyner points out that these malevolent beings were also known as עיפתה, and there is a mention of incantations used against these עיפתה-demons in Job 10:22. Several divine beings are called upon to combat these "stranglers," including *Ssm*, the son of *Pdrsh*, the deity *Ḥorōn*, and *Sz*. Torczyner thought that the incantation, written in a poetic style, may be a translation of an Aramaic original.

Torczyner's identification of incantatory language within a Syrian inscription foreshadows a subsequent surge in investigation into magical language in the Bible. A few years after Torczyner's study, Key's analysis delved into the complex interplay between prophetic and divine utterances, offering valuable insights into the crucial role of magic in the prophetic calling. Key's examination of prophetic language demonstrates how intertextuality operates within the Hebrew Bible, particularly how prophetic utterances echo and build upon previous divine mandates, revealing the layered meanings within the text.

Key, 1967: Key's Examination of Prophetic Language and Magical Power in Isaiah

Key analyzes the prophetic mandate bestowed upon Isaiah shortly after his summons, as depicted in Isa 6:1-8 in his 1967 article "The Magical Background of Isaiah 6:9-13."[141]
Key highlights the implications embedded within the verses, suggesting that Israel finds itself unable to evade the impending catastrophe prophesied by the divine word. If the prophetic word is predetermined, one may question the purpose of prophecy if its recipients cannot alter its outcome. In response to this crucial issue, Key acknowledges that Isaiah's prophetic message represents the expiration of the opportunity for repentance, leaving no room for any remedial actions. God chooses the prophet to carry out his divine judgment. The prophet, as the one who ensures the fulfillment of his word, puts it into action. Key argues that the character of

[139] Torczyner 1947: 18-29.
[140] Torczyner 1947: 28.
[141] Key 1967: 198- 204.

prophecy in the Hebrew Bible manifests in two distinct ways: Through the performance of magical actions and the utilization of words imbued with magical power. In light of this, the author notes that the Bible's words hold great power, particularly in the areas of cursing and blessing. The power of a word in conditional curses, like oaths, lies in its ability to invoke a curse when the person who made the promise breaks the agreement. The same can be said for the blessing. In the Hebrew Bible, God's word possesses this creative or destructive power. Key points out that a prophet speaks powerful words from God that are just as effective as if God spoke to them himself.[142] Key builds upon Frazer's investigation into the concept of magic, asserting that persuasion is the fundamental element of magic. According to the author, the magician does not have control over the magical power that comes from its source. Instead, the magician directs the power toward the desired outcome. Essentially, the magician obeys the commands of the source of their power. As Key points out, the prophet can be seen as a "partner" of Yahweh in certain aspects. Through magical abilities, the prophet can fulfill Yahweh's plans, such as bringing rain, causing plagues, determining the outcome of wars, and exerting influence over nature and history.[143] Yahweh, as the heavenly ruler of Israel, is responsible for dispensing justice, as Proverbs affirms: "Magic is on the lips of the king, he cannot err in judgment" (Prov 16:10). Below, Cathcart's linguistic analysis of Micah's critique of false prophets and their reliance on incantatory language segues into Watson's intertextual expansion on the parallels between Mesopotamian incantations and Hosea's rhetoric. On the other hand, Becking draws on anthropological data regarding Mesopotamian rituals to understand the cultural context of the Elisha and the Shunammite woman story, illustrating how ancient Near Eastern influences pervade many biblical narratives.

Cathcart, 1978: Micah's Critique - Incantations and the Role of False-Prophets

Another analysis of an incantation formula appears in a 1978 study entitled "Micah 5,4-5 and Semitic Incantations" by Cathcart, which suggests that the passage in Mic 5:4-5 shares similarities with protective incantations against evil.[144] Supporting Van der Woude's hypothesis,

[142] Key 1967: 202.
[143] Key 1967: 202-203.
[144] Cathcart 1978: 38-48.

he interprets these verses as the utterances of pseudo-prophets who no longer rely on their theology but instead resort to forming alliances based on magic practices to protect themselves from external threats. Micah, in a scathing critique, condemns these prophets not only for their corrupt practices but also for their unwavering dependence on divination and magic. Micah artfully presents their words in the guise of an incantation, as indicated in 5:4-5. Cathcart also suggests that Micah might have witnessed these false prophets in the temple, engaging in a ritualistic act while reciting incantations to invoke protection against their enemies.

Watson, 1984: Mesopotamian Influences in Hosea's Rhetoric

Continuing on the course charted by these early studies, Watson identifies literary similarities between certain Mesopotamian incantations and specific elements of Hosea's rhetoric in his 1984 article entitled "Reflexes of Akkadian Incantations in Hosea."[145] As a first point of comparison, Watson notes that the biblical and Mesopotamian traditions exhibit a notable abundance of similes, with a considerable overlap in their use. Many of these similes bear marked resemblances, if not outright identical formulations. In Hosea's poetic expressions, some similes emerge, harmoniously intermingling with the variety of figurative language found within the Mesopotamian incantation series. The Akkadian spells considered in Watson's analysis include the *Lipšur* litanies, which provide some seventeen different similes; the *Šurpu* collection, also seventeen; and the dingir.šà.dib.da series, which offers eleven. For Watson, the second point of comparison pertains to other similarities, which are exemplified by the lexical sequences, as in the case of "swearing, lying, killing, stealing, adultery and murder" in Hos 4:2, which are matched in an almost identical list in *Šurpu* II: 33-49. In verses 33-36, the text delves into the subject of disdain towards deities and familial bonds. The thematic similes in the Hosea passage exhibit similar characteristics, as observed in the instances where "bound" can only mean "unresolved," indicating that the negative effect of sin remains. Watson explains that the probability of this explanation is heightened when one recognizes that two crucial elements of Mesopotamian incantation texts— unidentified transgression and unresolved wrongdoing—coexist within a single couplet in the book of Hosea. Hosea 13 exhibits elements

[145] Watson 1984: 242–47. See also Geller 1980: 181–192.

that are similar to these incantations. Additionally, it is worth mentioning that there are other similarities between various sections of Hosea and the discussed incantation texts. Watson maintains that Hos 13:12 holds significance when examined through the lens of Mesopotamian beliefs and ritual practices.

During the 1990s, there was an increase in the number of assessments regarding the presence of magic language and themes in biblical texts. These analyses were characterized by their incorporation of anthropological and archaeological insights, allowing for a more comprehensive examination of the available data. In her 1996 publication titled *Magic and Divination in Ancient Palestine and Syria*,[146] Jeffers provides a comprehensive examination of divination and magic, drawing insights from the careful study of ancient texts originating from Palestine and Syria. The primary focus of her research lies within the Hebrew Bible, supplemented by the Ugaritic corpus, providing a valuable contribution to the field.

Becking, 1996: Elisha and the Shunammite Woman - Mesopotamian Influences on Biblical Transformation Rituals

The analysis of the magical content of biblical texts has never been limited to prophetic rhetoric alone but has also covered the so-called "historical" sections of the Bible as in the case of the following study. In an article published in 1996, titled "Magic in II Reg 4:31-37 with a Remark on the History of Yahwism,"[147] Becking offers a fresh interpretation of the narrative depicting the encounter between Elisha and the Shunammite woman, as recounted in 2 Kgs 4:8-37. Becking's analysis sheds light on this biblical account by examining it through the lens of the Mesopotamian incantation tradition. According to Becking, the primary thematic focus of the passage in 2 Kgs 4:8-37 is the overcoming of infertility, with the narrative depicting a transformation as the woman is granted the gift of a living child. The author posits that the biblical narrator's portrayal of this transformation reflects a belief in a "pre-orthodox" form of Yahwism. In the biblical passage, it is not Elisha who assumes the role of rescuer for the son of the Shunammite woman, but rather it is Yahweh who intervenes and saves him from death.

[146] Jeffers 1996.
[147] Becking 1996: 34-54. See from the same author, also Becking 1990: 59-79.

The implied act of Yahweh is posited by the narrator as the underlying cause of this transformative restoration to life. Becking goes on to examining in detail the ritual act as depicted in 2 Kgs 4:31-37. In a remarkable display of connection and empathy, Elisha gently aligns various parts of his own body with the corresponding parts of the young boy. On a narrative level, these ritual actions mirror the prayer to Yahweh. According to Becking, while there are no known similar rituals mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, the religious practices of the ancient Near Eastern appear to provide thought-provoking parallels instead.[148] The religious backdrop of Mesopotamian ritual practices includes references to the transfer of malevolent or demonic power. From a comparative perspective, Becking examines the ritual act carried out by Elisha on the deceased son of the woman from Shunem in light of Mesopotamian incantatory material, proposing that the ritual act is meant to elicit a magical setting. The prophet utilizes impersonal divine forces in order to restore life to the son of the woman and the magical ritual performed by Elisha exhibits characteristics akin to a "mirror ritual." The inscriptions from Mesopotamia suggest that it is possible that disease may arise from situations in which a demon makes contact with the human body. The concept of "mirror ritual" or "counter ritual" pertains to a practice wherein the individual administering treatment to an ailing person employs identical methods to produce an opposing, often positive effect to dispel any malevolence. The cause of the son's illness in 2 Kgs 4 is left unresolved by the narrator. Based on the religious context surrounding Elisha's acts of healing, it can be inferred that the author suggests a potential association between the illnesses and demonic possession.[149] According to Becking, the ancient Deuteronomistic editor had a different interpretation of the ritual act performed by Elisha on the son of the Shunammite woman. The editor included it as part of a larger literary work, but in doing so, failed to acknowledge its magical aspect, which is potentially rooted in the Mesopotamian incantatory practice.[150]

In the following analyses, Bowen compares the prophetic utterances of women in Ezek 13:17-23 with Mesopotamian incantations, identifying similarities in structure and thematic elements, and arguing that Ezekiel's portrayal of female prophets draws upon Mesopotamian

[148] Becking 1996: 37.
[149] Becking 1996: 47-48.
[150] Becking 1996: 52.

linguistic patterns related to witchcraft. On the other hand, Abusch explores the thematic connections between Isaiah and the *Maqlû* ritual and sees similarities between the exorcist's role in *Maqlû* and Isaiah's prophetic investiture, suggesting that both utilize a similar literary framework to convey their messages. Kotzé pursues a linguistic analysis of Job 15:12 which he interprets it as an indirect reference to the evil eye, which he then connects with accusations of witchcraft and examines the broader implications for understanding magical practices in ancient Israel.

Bowen, 1999: Witchcraft and Prophecy - Female Voices in Ezekiel and Mesopotamian Incantations

As we have seen, the comparative analysis of biblical and extra-biblical sources reveals not so "silenced" aspects of the language that may be related to the magic sphere and, in most instances, may have reflected the socio-cultural context of the original author of the biblical text. Becking's analysis has revealed ritualistic similarities between the Mesopotamian and biblical incantatory traditions, however, it should be noted that the presence of a magical cultural tradition in biblical texts is not limited to ritualistic actions similar to those of ancient Israel's neighbors but also seems to manifest itself through direct thematic and linguistic allusions to it, especially to the anti-witchcraft Mesopotamian tradition, as the following studies by Bowen and Abusch show. In a 1999 thought-provoking analysis titled "The Daughters of Your People: Female Prophets in Ezekiel 13:17-23," Bowen sheds light on the notion that the prophetic utterances of women in the oracle of Ezek 13:17-23 draw upon a repertoire of Mesopotamian linguistic patterns found in various incantations targeting unlawful practitioners of magic. Bowen's exploration offers a comparative lens through which to examine these "false" prophecies. In her analysis, she draws a parallel between the structure of Ezekiel's prophecy and the *Maqlû* ritual, suggesting that both share a similar literary framework. Furthermore, she argues that the inclusion of generic language related to countering witchcraft aims to portray the female prophets as "witches" and Ezekiel as an "exorcist."[151]

[151] Bowen 1999: 417-433. See more recently, Evans 2014: 72.

Abusch, 2002: Isaiah and Maqlû - Prophetic Authority and Mesopotamian Exorcism

While Bowen identifies plausible parallels between Ezekiel and *Maqlû*, in a similar vein, Abusch explores in his comparative analysis the thematic connections between Isaiah and *Maqlû* within a larger investigation into the subject of Mesopotamian sorcery and the magical series that counteract it. Abusch highlighted the strong connection between magic and the prophetic word in a chapter titled "The Socio-Religious Framework of the Babylonian Witchcraft Ceremony *Maqlû* (Part II)" in his 2002 volume *Mesopotamian Witchcraft*.[152] Abusch briefly discusses the notable thematic and linguistic similarities between the exorcist's role in *Maqlû*, which is, as mentioned above, a lengthy anti-witchcraft ritual from the first millennium BCE, and the investiture of the prophet Isaiah as described in Isa 6:6-9. According to the author, the speaker's purpose in *Maqlû* is to evoke and ensure adherence to the social compact, a type of pledge known as *māmītu* in the text. The initial incantation of the ceremony was aimed at the sky, targeting the witches who were still alive. On the contrary, the second one dealt with the realm of the dead and its connection to deceased witches. In the text, the exorcist establishes communication and interacts with the gods from both cosmic regions during his journey between them. The exorcist ascends to a house's rooftop to summon the night sky during the initial stage of the anti-witchcraft ritual. He envisions himself in Zabban, a mystical city situated between the heavens and the netherworld, a liminal imagined space where the sun and the stars emerge and disappear. The exorcist is a commoner. He is not a priest or a prophet, but he is endowed with the ability to journey to the netherworld as a divine messenger. There, he meets with the goddess *Bēlet-ṣēri*, who serves as the scribe of the netherworld. In order to access the netherworld, he must first embrace his "astral self," which means becoming a part of the celestial beings, the heavenly entourage of the Mesopotamian gods Anu and his spouse Antu. As Abusch notes, "only then can he serve as their emissary."[153] Lines 52-53 of the first cuneiform tablet particularly merit our attention since the exorcist recites a formula that is familiar to many of the readers of the book of Isaiah: "Anu and Antu have sent me saying, 'Whom shall I send to *Bēlet-ṣēri*?'" According to Abusch's interpretation, these lines of the

[152] Abusch 2002.
[153] Abusch 2002: *257.*

text indicate that the exorcist endeavors to undergo divine purification prior to approaching the gods. After being cleansed, he is granted admission into the presence of Anu and Antu, the sky gods. They appoint him as their messenger, granting him the necessary authority and assistance to proceed to *Bēlet-ṣēri*. Abusch highlights that the role of the exorcist in this section of the Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft ritual is similar to that of the prophet Isaiah. In fact, before he can enter the heavenly court and serve as the Lord's envoy, Isaiah must undergo a process of purification, as evidenced by this passage from the prophetic book that seems to echo almost verbatim the formula recited by the exorcist in *Maqlû*:[154] 7He touched it to my lips and declared, / "Now that this has touched your lips, / Your guilt shall depart / And your sin be purged away." / 8Then I heard the voice of my Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me" (Isa 6:7-8).[155] The presence of this suggestive image in Isaiah's prophecy implies that the author of the biblical text may have had knowledge of the Mesopotamian magical tradition and its formular language, indirectly revealing its widespread popularity and potential authority.[156] The significant impact of the Mesopotamian magical tradition on the biblical language may be even more apparent in the Book of Job, as demonstrated by the analysis that follows.

Kotzé, 2007: Linguistic-Cognitive Insights into the Evil Eye and Witchcraft

In an article published in 2007 titled "Magic and Metaphor: An Interpretation of Eliphaz' Accusation in Job 15:12,"[157] Kotzé discusses the linguistic-cognitive interpretation of the locution רזמון עיניך found in Job 15:12. In the fifteenth chapter of the eponymous book, Eliphaz eloquently enumerates a variety of reasons for the unfortunate circumstances that have befallen Job and vv. 12 and 13 allude to Job's profound resentment towards God. Kotzé posits that the aforementioned phrase functions as an indirect allusion to the evil eye. Eliphaz's insinuation suggests that he is accusing Job of practicing witchcraft. In ancient Israel, the evil

[154] Abusch 2002: *258.*
[155] Tallqvist also made this connection, claiming a linguistic relation between Isa 6:6-9 and *Maqlû* I 50-60. For Tallqvist, the Mesopotamian exorcist asserts his association with the supreme gods using words similar to those used by the prophet Isaiah to present himself as Yahweh's envoy to Israel Isa 6:8. See Tallqvist 1895: 120–21.
[156] Goldstein 2013.
[157] Kotze 2007: 152-57.

eye was closely associated with malevolent magical practices such as sorcery aimed at damaging an invidual. Eliphaz is thus accusing Job of being among the ranks of magicians who provoke the anger of God. According to this interpretive hypothesis, Kotzé proposes that Eliphaz, by accusing Job of witchcraft, associates him with these evildoers who deserve divine punishment. In his retort, Job declares to be a victim of incantation rather than a wielder of dark sorcery. In addition, the author highlights the similarity between the prayers for safeguarding against the adversary's magical assaults and the entreaties for their annihilation found within the Psalms; these parallels can be observed in the incantations employed by priests in ancient Mesopotamia, aimed at shielding the innocent from malevolent incantations. Kotzé posits that the idiom רזמון עיניך found in Job 15:12 serves as a conceptual metaphor for the evil eye, which is a potent and destructive magical instrument within the realm of witchcraft.

In the following study, Lenzi employs an anthropological approach in comparing invocations in Akkadian prayers and biblical laments and suggests a shared ritualistic context between the two traditions. In a similar vein, Goldstein conducts a literary analysis of specific biblical passages in light of Akkadian literature, while Avalos examines Nebuchadnezzar's transformation in Daniel 4 by referencing Mesopotamian incantations, arguing that these texts provide context for understanding the narrative's themes of punishment and divine retribution.

Lenzi, 2010: Comparative Invocations in Mesopotamian and Biblical Prayer - Anthropological Perspectives

Lenzi's 2010 study titled "Invoking the God: Interpreting Invocations in Mesopotamian Prayers and Biblical Laments of the Individual" offers a comparative analysis between Biblical and Akkadian prayers, providing a more "anthropologically grounded" explanation for each type of invocation for the purpose of comparison.[158] Lenzi draws attention to the resemblance between the invocation of the individual in Biblical laments and the invocation found in Akkadian "dingir.šà.dib.ba" prayers for the appeasement of a personal god's anger. This observation sheds light on the shared cultural and linguistic influences between these two

[158] Lenzi 2010: 303–315.

ancient Near Eastern traditions. According to Lenzi, the brevity of the invocations found in both Hebrew laments of the individual and Akkadian ”dingir.šà.dib.ba” prayers can be attributed to the presence of a more intimate connection between the supplicant and the invoked deity, as compared to the *Šuillas*. This interpretation offers additional evidence to support the idea of perceiving a personal dimension of the deity as depicted in the individual laments found in the Book of Psalms. Lenzi highlights the significance of the study as an exemplification of a methodological paradigm that holds promise for future comparative research.[159]

Goldstein, 2013: Intertextual Magic - Akkadian Literature's Insights into Hebrew Bible Passages

In his "Notes on the Presence of Magic within the Hebrew Bible in Light of Akkadian Literature" published in 2013,[160] Goldstein brightens our understanding of biblical texts through Akkadian insights with a three-pronged textual evaluation. He first explores Isaiah 14:29 that he interprets as a metaphor mashup, mixed with Neo-Assyrian prophecies laced with magic. Similarly, the challenging passage in Isa 2:18-19 is clarified by drawing upon Akkadian literature, suggesting an underlying magical formula within the passage that was effective in driving out demons. Goldstein's analysis finally demonstrates that Psalm 91 replicates a well-known magic formula found in Akkadian sources. Goldstein reinforces existing scholarship by asserting that a thorough understanding of the growing body of biblical texts on magic thrives through comparative study with extra-biblical sources, especially those rooted in the fertile Mesopotamian tradition.

Avalos, 2014: Nebuchadnezzar's Transformation - Mesopotamian Incantations and Biblical Parallels

In his 2014 article titled "Nebuchadnezzar's Affliction: New Mesopotamian Parallels for Daniel 4,"[161] Avalos contributes to the interpretive debate surrounding Nebuchadnezzar's comedic affliction that challenges the king's pride as described in Daniel. Here, he expands

[159] Lenzi 2010: 304.
[160] Goldstein 2013: 9-18.
[161] Avalos 2014: 497–507.

upon the analyses of Henze and Hays and posits that Nebuchadnezzar's ailment aligns with the archetype of the uncivilized man, much like Enkidu in the Epic of Gilgamesh. Most importantly for our discussion, Hays highlights demonic themes, contending that the prayer genre widespread in Mesopotamia can shed light on the understanding of Daniel 4. According to Avalos, the Mesopotamian magical-medical *dingir.šà.dib.ba* incantations offer strong proof that a divine hex can result in a regression to a primitive state of existence, which supports the arguments put forth by both authors. Avalos believes that these incantations serve as evidence that being transformed into a beastly creature could be one of the punishments that the gods might inflict upon someone for their audacity and desecration of the temple .[162] In accordance with this, the scholar observes that in the Hebrew Bible, one of the main reasons for Nebuchadnezzar's transformation into a beastly state is his utterance of insolent and arrogant words.[163] Avalos emphasizes the importance of the dingir.šà.dib.ba incantations in helping scholars identify preexisting literary patterns that already incorporated many important elements found in Daniel 4. He provides several examples, one of which is the association between bestial punishment and the desecration of a temple, which is already described in the ancient incantations of dingir.šà.dib.ba. According to Avalos, it is crucial for current theories to consider pre-existing combinations when determining whether a tradition in the Daniel text is independent or added.[164]

The following studies conclude this long review with research done through different theoretical lenses. In the first study, Cranz investigates ritual elements in Zechariah's visions, suggesting that the prophetic author incorporated Assyrian-Babylonian ritual practices to redefine traditional roles in a way that supports his theological message. For his part, McAffee analyzes the use of the term לחשׁ ("whisper") in Isaiah 26, linking it to snake charmers and magical incantations, arguing that this connection helps illuminate the prophet's critique of cultural practices associated with witchcraft. Cooley employs a comparative approach to examine Isa 7:10-17, aligning it with Babylonian and Assyrian divinatory practices. By comparing the biblical text with historical accounts of soothsayers, Cooley argues for a contextual

[162] Avalos 2014: 503.
[163] Avalos 2014: 504.
[164] Avalos 2014: 507.

understanding of the Isaiah passage as a reflection of existing divination methods. This methodological approach challenges traditional literary-historical analyses by providing a socio-historical lens through which to understand the text's development and significance. Kitz navigates a fresh path, analyzing the terms *rābiṣu* and *rōbēṣ* with a focus on their etymological ties to Akkadian ritual language. Diving into thematic inquiry, she seeks to understand how demons and evil were conceptualized in ancient Near Eastern cultures and contrasts the existence of subordinate supernatural beings in the Hebrew Bible with their portrayal as manifestations of divine judgment, emphasizing how ancient cultures uniquely perceived forces, whether malevolent or benevolent. In the final study, Vreugdenhil uses a cognitive-linguistic method to explore Psalm 91, also analyzed by Goldstein (2013), focusing on how specific words and phrases trigger mental pictures linked to danger and fear. Through concepts like profile, base, and cognitive domain, Vreugdenhil explores the psalm's language to reveal its protective and magical resonances against demonic threats. Vreugdenhil draws connections between Psalm 91 and other ancient Near Eastern sources, including amulets and texts from the Dead Sea Scrolls and does so through intertextual exploration.

Cranz, 2015: Ritual Dynamics in Zechariah's Vision - Assyrian-Babylonian Influences on Prophetic Message

Similarly, in her 2015 study titled "Ritual Elements in Zechariah's Vision of the Woman in the Ephah," Cranz argues that the presence of Assyrian-Babylonian ritual elements in Zechariah 5:5-11 reflects the prophetic author's intentional effort to weave references to these practices into his broader framework. The ancient compiler attempted to redefine the traditional roles of the participants involved in the ritual, namely the performers and the audience. This was accomplished through the utilization of exorcistic rhetoric, to reinforce Zechariah's message of divine redemption and unconditional forgiveness.[165]

McAffee, 2016: Ugaritic Echoes in Isaiah 26:13-19: Rephaim, Rituals, and Religious Polemics

[165] Cranz 2015: 586–98. See also from the same author, 2016: 404-418.

In his 2016 study, "Rephaim, Whisperers, and the Dead in Isaiah 26:13–19: A Ugaritic Parallel," McAffee explores the historical and cultural context of Isaiah 26.[166] Taking his cue from the enigmatic references to life and death in Isa 26:13-19, he wonders if the Ugaritic textual tradition concerning the *Rapaʾūma*, which other scholars regard as deified and immortalized royal ancestors, can shed light on the occurrence of the word רפאים ("ghosts," "shadows," "spirits") in Isa 26:14. McAffee's study seeks to interpret Isa 26:13-19 in light of our current understanding of Ugaritic *Rapaʾūma* since their appearance in mythical and ritual literature. McAffee believes that Isaiah 26's allusion to רפאים is part of a religious polemic within Yahwism. He contends that "Isa 26 serves as a polemic against a popularized variety of Yahwism that apparently shared notions about the Rephaim resembling aspects known from their earlier counterparts attested at Ugarit."[167] McAffee explains that the Ugaritic funerary ritual performed by religious specialists for recently departed rulers was designed to commemorate their entrance into the company of *rpum/rpim*,[168] but also acted as a divine supplication for the protection of the city of Ugarit. The author argues that Isaiah 26:13-19 serves as a prophetic critique of widespread Israelite beliefs that mirrored Ugaritic traditions, where deceased kings were elevated to a near-divine status. As McAffee observes, verse 14 may be an attempt to demythologize this Rephaim tradition, to which popular religious culture ascribed various powers, by offering, in verse 19, a vision of afterlife that fits within the Yahwistic cosmology.[169] This analysis demonstrates the enduring echoes of Ugaritic ritual elements woven into the fabric of Isaiah's prophetic tradition and shows the prophetic tradition's familiarity with the "technical" magical language of the Levantine incantatory past. For example, McAffee observes that the Hebrew term לחש (HALOT 2, s.v. "לחש"; "whisper," "charm") in the idiom צוק לחש ("pour out a whisper") in Isa 26:16 refers to a magical incantation. By considering how the term לחש is used elsewhere in the Bible, he argues that the context in which it appears, for example, in Ps 58:5-6 is unmistakably associated with snake-

[166] McAffee 2016: 77-94.
[167] McAffee 2016: 85.
[168] This term is associated not only with deities but also with kings and the underworld in Ugaritic texts and is commonly rendered as "shades" or "ghosts;" even if this choice of translation is still much debated and thus requires caution.
[169] McAffee 2016: 87.

charms. According to McAffee, the psalm compares the wicked to the deadly snakes of skilled charmers.[170] As he points out, scriptural evidence indicates that the term לחש has a lasting association with snake charms. This connection dates to the second millennium BCE. In Ugaritic ritual literature (KTU³ 1.100) and mythological narratives, the term לחש is associated with deadly snakes. For instance, the Ugaritic root *lḫšt* appears in Baal's address to the Goddess Anat, in which he proclaims his ability to decipher mysteries in the so-called Baal Cycle (KTU³ 1.3:20-25). McAffee thinks that by elucidating the entire connotations and associations of the Hebrew root לחש with snake charming,[171] God's chastisement of the Israelites in Isa 26:16 becomes more transparent. The people have transgressed and become troubled by allowing snake-charmers to entice them. As McAffee's analysis demonstrates, the Isaiah 26 author drew elements from the biblical magic tradition to weave his prophetic polemic against an ideology akin to the *Rapaʾūma* of Ugarit that swept over Judah. In both Ugaritic and biblical traditions, the term לחש was employed in incantatory formulas that were closely associated with the practice of snake charming. Targeted investigations into the presence of technical magical language, such as that relating to the designation of evil beings linked to cursing and maledictions, seem to have borne much fruit, as we have seen in this analysis of Ugaritic *rpums* and the Hebrew verb לחש related to witchcraft, and as Kitz's following study of the evocative Hebrew word רבץ also shows.

Kitz, 2016: Demons in Ancient Near Eastern Thought - Rābiṣu and Rōbēṣ in the Hebrew Bible

In a fascinating article from 2016 titled "Demons in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East,"[172] Kitz explores the topic of demons in the Hebrew Bible by analyzing a lesser-known Akkadian supernatural entity called *rābiṣu*. This root of this entity's word is connected to the Hebrew term רבץ (*rōbēṣ*) found in Gen 4:7, which some interpret as referring to a demon. Kitz observes that scholars have assumed the existence of demons in Israelite religion due to this etymological connection. If the term *rābiṣu* denotes a malevolent entity in the Akkadian

[170] McAffee 2016: 89.
[171] McAffee 2016: 89.
[172] Kitz 2016: 447–464.

language, then it follows that *rōbēṣ* must signify a malevolent entity in biblical Hebrew.[173] In her analysis, Kitz proposes that the notion of evil, when ascribed to a biblical divine being, should be understood in terms of its intended purpose rather than its moral implications. In the ancient Near East, the existence of subordinate and inherently evil supernatural beings, commonly referred to as demons, was not acknowledged. Texts reveal that these supernatural entities were manifestations of divine judgments, transmitted to the human realm in the form of events. The ethical essence of the designated responsibilities of these entities, referred to as רוחות (as mentioned in 1 Kgs 22:19 and Job 4:9b), can be classified as either malevolent or benevolent. According to Kitz, ancient Near Eastern cultures lacked a concept of evil analogous to what we conceptualize and distinguish today when we speak of demonic and angelic functions. Building on Cooley's recent article, we now explore thematic inquiry, with the discussion highlighting the ongoing comparison between Mesopotamian magical tradition and prophetic literature, once more centering on the book of Isaiah.

Cooley, 2020: Divination and Lunar Eclipses in Isaiah 7:10-17 - Mesopotamian Influences on Judah

In this article, called "Divinatory Process in Judah,"[174] Cooley argues that Isaiah 7:10-17 reflects divinatory practices tied to interpreting a significant lunar eclipse, resembling techniques used by Babylonian and Assyrian soothsayers. These practices are documented in their correspondence with the seventh-century BCE Assyrian king Esarhaddon. Challenging the prevailing view rooted in literary-historical analysis, Cooley proposes an alternative explanation for the textual expansion observed in Isa 7:10–17, arguing that it can be attributed to deliberate engagement in divinatory practices. In wrapping up this compilation of studies on magic in the Bible and its associated language elements, I would like to draw attention to Vreugdenhil's recent investigation into Psalm 91. This research serves as yet another testament to the importance of contributing to this sphere of biblical hermeneutics.

Vreugdenhil, 2020: "Psalm 91 and Demonic Threats - A Cognitive-Linguistic Approach to Magical Imagery

[173] Kitz 2016: 463.
[174] Cooley 2020: 26-46.

In his 2020 book titled *Psalm 91 and Demonic Menace*,[175] Vreugdenhil explores the connection between Psalm 91 and its association with the magical realm. The psalm was originally intended to address the concerns of those who feared demonic threats.[176] Extensive research has been conducted on the use of this psalm as protection against demons, covering a wide range of sources, including the Dead Sea Scrolls, as well as amulets and contexts related to warding off evil. Vreugdenhil explains how the psalm's message reflects its magical significance even in its original context. Applying the cognitive-linguistic model to explore the theme of threat in Psalm 91, Vreugdenhil conducts a meticulous analysis of the primary terms and phrases that symbolize danger within the psalmic text. These include references to images such as a "fowler's net," a "magic word," a "terror of the night," and a "lion." In his analysis, the scholar utilizes ancient Near Eastern sources to draw comparisons with the text of Psalms 91. Through cognitive-linguistic categories such as profile, base, cognitive domain, and prototypical scenario, he examines the content of Psalms 91 to attain a comprehensive understanding of the mental imagery associated with every term or phrase within the conceptual realm of ancient Israel. Vreugdenhil further highlights how the author's choice of terms, verbs, and imagery, along with the mental images and associations they evoke, provide solid evidence for interpreting Psalm 91 in a demonological context related to witchcraft and magic.[177]

[175] Vreugdenhil 2020. See also See Smoak 2011: 75-92. Smoak's article examines various Phoenician and Punic inscribed amulets and compares them to the language used in several psalms that beseech Yahweh for protection against evil or other forms of danger. He argues that the protective formulae written on amulets, which share similarities with the language used in certain psalms, suggest that the psalms contain more traces of apotropaic formulae than previously acknowledged.
[176] Vreugdenhil 2020: 401.
[177] Vreugdenhil 2020: 407.

CHAPTER IV

The Enemy Within: Witches and False Prophets as Symbolic Universal Enemies in Mesopotamian and Biblical Tradition

In this chapter, I explore the symbolic parallels between the Mesopotamian witch and the false prophet in the book of Jeremiah. As I explain below, both figures share a role as archetypal "public enemies:" the Mesopotamian witch as an enemy of the Assyrian empire, following Abusch's theory of witchcraft as Assyria's national concern, and the figure of the false prophet as an adversary of Yahweh in biblical tradition, and especially so in the book of Jeremiah. As we discussed in Chapter I, Abusch's analysis of the *Maqlû* ritual shows that witches in Mesopotamian society were viewed as destabilizing forces, evolving in Assyrian thought from magic practitioners into semi-demonic figures who subvert cosmic and social order. They could be anyone, from any country and trade. As the *Maqlû* incantations show, they could be Sutean snake-charmers, or even Hanigalbatean metal workers (*Maqlû* IV, 127, 129, 132, 134) and their influence on society was perceived as dangerous. Similarly, Jeremiah condemns false prophets who undermine social cohesion by spreading deceit and claiming false authority. The book of Deuteronomy provides the background for Jeremiah's condemnations as it states that "any prophet who presumes to speak in My name an oracle that I did not command him to utter, or who speaks in the name of other gods—that prophet shall die," echoing the command in Exod 22:17. Both Mesopotamian texts and Jeremiah employ the "public enemy" trope, framing witches and false prophets alike as subversive agents against divine and social order.

In both traditions, Mesopotamian and biblical social/national order is regulated by divinely sanctioned agreements. Abusch further connects this idea to the *māmītu* oath—a societal pact in Mesopotamia that bound members to divine order, imposing strict consequences on violators, including exhumation for the buried deceased. Abusch's understanding of this phenomenon sheds light on the Assyrian view of witches and oath-breakers as existential threats. Curses enforced these oaths, acting as divine and legal deterrents against both internal and external rebellion. In Jeremiah, the concept of rebellion against divine authority and order

takes the form of denunciations of idolatry and apostasy, portraying these as acts of treason against Israel's divine king: Yahweh.

As I contend in this study, such thematic parallels suggest that both Mesopotamian and Israelite cultures used the "public enemy" archetype to address fears of rebellion and stress loyalty to divine and social order. For instance, both Neo-Assyrian loyalty oaths and Deuteronomy's stance on apostasy emphasize severe consequences for betrayal. Mastnjak's 2016 important study titled *Deuteronomy and the Emergence of Textual Authority in Jeremiah*, discussed in Chapter I, demonstrates Jeremiah's strong reliance on Deuteronomy's authority. As Levinson notes, Deut 13:9 closely aligns with Neo-Assyrian practices—particularly Esarhaddon's succession treaty—which required unconditional loyalty to the king, punishing violations by summary execution.

The practical function of Assyrian loyalty oaths, or *adê* agreements as they were known in Akkadian, was to uphold contractual stability by enforcing allegiance between two parties and suppressing dissent with conditional curses. In her seminal work, *Cursed Are You!* on ancient Near Eastern cursing, Kitz explains that swearing an oath in Assyria entailed binding oneself to a "conditional curse" that remained dormant until triggered by a breach, thereby neutralizing immediate threats to the ruler. She further observes that Neo-Assyrian treaties employed curses to secure vassals' compliance with their obligations. These curses, she argues, echoed maledictions from Mesopotamian incantation text series such as *Šurpu* and *Maqlû*. This rhetorical overlap between curses in treaties and incantation anti-witchcraft texts reflects a belief that societal order relied on divine authority. Betrayal triggered ceremonial curses as evidenced in the shared elements of ritual enactment in these texts.

Levinson observes that, much like in times of martial law, both Assyrian and biblical traditions connect loyalty to the survival of the state, viewing betrayal as a grave offense warranting capital punishment to preserve divine or political order. This idea of enforcing loyalty through the threat of retribution is also evident in Israelite practices. As I explore below, many scholars suggest that Israel might have drawn on Assyrian principles to develop a theological framework expressing her unwavering devotion to Yahweh. Both Mesopotamian and Israelite cultures, as reflected in the biblical tradition, employed oath-curses as

mechanisms to ensure loyalty. In official documents, this rhetoric served as a powerful tool to suppress rebellion and uphold stability, leveraging the threat of harsh consequences for those who dared to dissent. The cultural exchange between Assyria and Israel is further evidenced in the structural and linguistic parallels between Deuteronomy and Assyrian treaties, showcasing Assyrian notions of loyalty embedded in Israelite law.

In Assyrian ideology, oath-curses were central to defining loyalty and enmity, with societal stability upheld by a rigid moral code. The concept of *nakrūtu*, or "enmity," cast societal transgressors—especially vassal kings who breached treaties—as incarnations of evil. A case in point is provided by royal texts that use stereotyped, morally degraded terms to describe enmity and sharply contrast it with the Assyrian king's *šarrūtu*, or "kingship," which is a divine mandate to maintain order. This loyalty-versus-betrayal paradigm is mirrored in Jeremiah, where Judah's false prophets are compared to destabilizing figures, like Assyrian witches or oath-breakers, who disrupt unity by violating the divine covenant. Through curses, both Assyrian and Israelite traditions emphasize that allegiance to divine and societal hierarchy was essential for cosmic and social order, with betrayal viewed as a grievous offense demanding severe reprisal. Let us begin by examining the image of the witch in Assyrian culture, where she is portrayed as an internal enemy of the state, according to Abusch's recent theory, which argues that there is "a relationship or similarity between the description of witches in *Maqlû* and that of enemies in the Neo-Assyrian inscriptions."

The Witch as an Internal and External Threat

In a 2002 article titled "The Socio-Religious Framework of the Babylonian Witchcraft Ceremony Maqlû," Abusch has come forward with an astute proposal suggesting that witches in the Mesopotamian magical-incantatory tradition, like those in the *Maqlû* ceremony, symbolized both the internal and external enemies of the Neo-Assyrian empire. He argued that the witch transformed over time into a quintessential enemy. As ancient Mesopotamians shifted her away from her original magic context, they re-conceived her as a semi-demonic figure capable of undermining the Assyrian state's stability.

Parallels in the Book of Jeremiah

Expanding on Abusch's persuasive theory, we can see that his concept of the "universal enemy of the state" can be extended to various contexts, including the book of Jeremiah. The universalistic portrayal of God's wrath against nations in Jeremiah seems to echo with Assyrian anti-witchcraft rhetoric, revealing several thematic parallels between Mesopotamian and biblical traditions. I argue that the Mesopotamian witch, depicted as a disruptive, anti-social figure who spreads falsehoods and divides communities, mirrors the false prophet in the book of Jeremiah in which this figure emerges as a malevolent character who polarizes society and harms others by deceitfully claiming divine authority. To understand how this idea plays out, we need to take a step back and return to the concept of the witch in ancient Mesopotamia.

The Maqlû Ceremony: Battling the Public Enemy

As mentioned above, during the first millennium BCE, the *Maqlû* ceremony held a pivotal role in Assyrian-Babylonian culture, serving as a foundational ritual to battle against witches. As Abusch highlighted in his research, the *Maqlû* text effectively encapsulates a ceremonial approach to warding off witchcraft.

[1] Essentially, *Maqlû* aimed to eliminate witches, ensuring they would not persist beyond death. The ceremony's objective was clear: To prevent witches from finding refuge in the afterlife by neutralizing them at their source. It is important, however, not to equate Mesopotamian witches with the classic European image we have of this figure. Instead, we should rather understand this phenomenon within the framework of the "public enemy" paradigm—an archetype that casts witches as collective threats to society's well-being.

In much the same way, the Jeremiah tradition links false prophecy with subversion, casting false prophets as deceitful adversaries who mislead the faithful and undermine God's authority.[2] Both in ancient Mesopotamian magic texts and the book of Jeremiah, this "public

[1] Abusch, 2002: 1.

[2] Throughout history, figures deemed controversial, or subversive have faced persistent stigmatization, a legacy evident in the well-known warning from Matthew 7:15: "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's

enemy" narrative creates a sense of imminent danger around these figures.[3] For the Jeremiah tradition, this trope helps to amplify an atmosphere of fear and mistrust, intensified through the prophet's warnings and oracles.

The Politics of Marginalization and the Public Enemy Paradigm

Understanding this issue through the lens of the public enemy paradigm elucidates the complex interplay of power dynamics, moral panics, and the politics of marginalization that underpin such constructions of perceived threats to social order. The process of "othering" witches plays a major role in *Maqlû* as in the text these enigmatic figures sometimes take the shape of living human enemies, but at other times appear in demonic, even cosmic, form. Abusch proposes a parallel between the Assyrian vassals who broke the rules and the *Maqlû* witches: both defy societal norms and the cosmic order that governs the living and the dead. As Abusch underscores, witches pose a threat to and subvert the cosmic social structure. In this context, witches face a fate akin to Assyrian vassals guilty of sacrilege, met with total annihilation. Most notably, Abusch suggests that in *Maqlû*, witches are symbolically and eternally exiled from the empire—which is like being banished from the universe.

The Māmītu-Oath: Binding Society to Divine Order

Ultimately, he contends that these witches symbolize the internal and external enemies of the Neo-Assyrian empire. Abusch explains that witches, like all members of society, were subject to the *māmītu*-oath. He suggests a link between Neo-Assyrian treaty forms and the *Maqlû* text, arguing that these reflect the empire's ideology and practices, where societal members engaged in covenants and took on responsibilities. Violators of political or social agreements—whether living or deceased—would be punished. Abusch notes that every breach of treaty resulted in punishment, with more severe crimes leading to the execution and physical obliteration of offenders. Assyrian law went to extreme lengths to ensure that both the living

clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves." According to Cothenet, this admonition was already in use during Jesus' ministry, serving as a pointed critique of the Zealots. See Cothenet 1972: 300-30.

[3] Cf. Jer 6:11-13; 11:20.

and the dead were held accountable. This included the practice of exhuming and destroying the bodies of those who had managed to escape justice by dying before they could be captured.

The Curse of Broken Oaths

When examining Mesopotamian attitudes towards witchcraft, it becomes evident that they interpreted the actions of malicious figures—often depicted as witches—as a *political rebellion* against the established divine order. This divine order was maintained through the *māmītu* oath, binding all members of society. *Māmītu* is an oath, and as with all oaths, it addresses the divine realm. Such an oath takes on the connotation of "treaty" or "agreement." Kitz argues that it represents a formalized agreement between two parties that articulates its stipulated punishments in curses.[4] Westbrook argues that transgressing *māmītu*-oath is the most egregious violation against the gods. Like blasphemy, sacrilege, and apostasy, such a breach is a kind of disobedience and a direct attack on divine interests.[5] According to Abusch, *māmītu* serves as the cornerstone of a social compact designed to prevent hostile behaviors that lead to social disruption. He argues that all members of Mesopotamian society were expected to adhere to *māmītu*, being bound by the god-established laws of social order. *Māmītu* prohibited antisocial or rebellious activities, and any violation of its precepts was considered akin to witchcraft by the Assyro-Babylonians.

EXCURSUS: The Role of Curses in the Ancient Near East

In the ancient Near East, curses served mainly as a defensive tool against perceived evils. People in these societies often attributed life's hardships and suffering to the effects of witchcraft or to consequences stemming from moral failings,[6] and would attribute misfortune to the cunning schemes of malevolent actors beyond the individual's control.[7] Conversely, personal actions were often seen as the root of one's suffering. While the anguish attributed to

[4] Kitz 2014: 33-34. Kitz notes that the term *māmītu* is generally characterized as feminine and functions as agent of an offended deity who attacks and overwhelms the faithless on divine instruction. In a passage in *Šurpu* (Reiner 1958: 36, Tablet 7, ll. 3-4) *māmītu* is described as "descending" ("*urda*") from the sky. The heavenly origin of *māmītu* is additionally supported by another Mesopotamian text according to which *māmītu* is the "daughter" of the sky god and comes down from heaven (See Smith 1875, plate 19, Tablet 1, obv., ll. 3-4.).
[5] Westbrook 2003: 76.
[6] Abusch 1999: 92-93.
[7] Abusch 1999: 92-93.

witchcraft cast the individual as helpless, trapped by ruthless external forces, sin brought a different lens—one of guilt and personal agency, highlighting the individual's role in jeopardizing divine protection. Curses, embedded within a larger belief system, were designed to maintain social order by aligning with divine forces, according to Kitz. In ancient societies, she notes, these curses played a critical role in reinforcing societal norms and expectations.

> "Curses were used proactively and reactively. They were principally protective. They dispelled malevolent forces and kept enemies at bay. But they were also the cause of misfortune, illness, depression, and just about anything else that undermined a comfortable, well-balanced life. Every member of society used them, from slave to king, from young to old, from men and women to the deities themselves. They crossed cultural lines and required little or no explanation, for curses were the source of great evil. In other words, curses were universal."[8]

In the ancient Near East, curses often took shape through formal oath-taking. These "oaths-self-curses," sometimes delivered verbally and sometimes recorded in writing, held both religious significance and legal weight,[9] and played a key role in regulating social interactions and ensuring cooperation within communities, but they also served as a means of addressing misfortune and illness. Curses, widespread in these cultures, called upon divine judgment to inflict harm on individuals or social forces deemed threatening. Kitz explains that maledictions could be either *conditional* or *unconditional*. The first functioned as safeguards against external dangers while the second were used to reject, condemn, or expel hostile forces. The former represented "latent violence," while the latter embodied "active violence."[10] Oaths were inherently conditional curses, invoking a deity to punish the violator if the terms of the agreement were breached. In contrast, unconditional maledictions operated in an entirely different way.

Unconditional maledictions, unlike their conditional counterparts, were straightforward curses that lacked the "if/then" clauses seen in conditional forms. These simple curses called upon the divine to inflict harm on the intended target without offering any preconditions. For instance, an eighth- or seventh-century Neo-Assyrian incantation from Nineveh invokes Girra,

[8] Kitz 2014: 3.
[9] A lawsuit was contingent upon the violation of an agreement. Cf. Kitz 2014: 33 and 63.
[10] Kitz 2014: 3.

the Mesopotamian god of fire and light—patron of metalworkers—[11]asking him to deliver judgment on behalf of the god Šamaš, as part of a purification ritual aimed at countering witchcraft.[12] The curse is worded as follows:

112 B rev. 41 *⌈šu-nu⌋ li-iq-tu-ma ana-ku lu-um-id* ^{d}*⌈gíra⌋ qa-mu-u liq-mì-šú-nu-t[i]*
113 B rev. 42 *⌈a-na⌋ kur-nu-gi$_4$-a li-še-ri-is-su-nu-⌈ti a-na⌋* GIDIM *a-ra-le-e*
114 B rev. 43 *li-ru-šú-nu-ti um-mu mu-un-gu ⌈zu⌋-tú ⌈si⌋-li-iʾ-tú ši-ḫat* UZU.MEŠ[13]

(112) May Girra, the burner, burn the[m], (113) may he send them down to the Land of No Return, (114) may he lead them (113) to a ghost of the netherworld!

In this instance, a trio of precative verbs (*liqmīšunūti*, *lišērissunūti*, and *līrūšunūti*) conveys the speaker's desire. He calls on the deity to strike back at his wrongdoers, returning upon them the same witchcraft they used against him. Lacking the formal structure of a contract, unconditional curses deliver a direct blow, presenting harm not as a possibility but as a certainty. The hostile tone is amplified by the immediacy of the precative verbs, underscoring the urgency and intensity of the speaker's petition.[14]

By adhering to the terms of the agreement, the individual would shield themselves from the consequences of its breach. In the case of unconditional curses, the main purpose of the maledictions was to drive away a hostile force and redirect it, either onto a person or an object.[15] The Akkadian incantation series *Maqlû* and *Šurpu* both utilized powerful, unconditional curses designed to neutralize threatening forces considered harmful to the community. As we will explore further, the *Maqlû* rituals were aimed at undoing the harmful effects caused by both human and supernatural enemies, while *Šurpu* focused on mitigating the damaging outcomes of curses tied to specific conditions (*māmītu*).[16]

[11] Foster 2005: 660-663.
[12] Abusch and Schwemer 2011: 256.
[13] Abusch and Schwemer 2011: 266, Text 8.2 ll. 112-114.
[14] Kitz 2014: 76.
[15] Kitz 2014: 75. Another common, and ancient, anathema is what Hillers and Kitz dub a "simile curse" (Hillers 1964: 18-26 and Kitz 2014: 82-84). This malediction is framed as a figure of speech and depend on a comparison.[15] Simile curses, unlike metaphors, are straightforward in their comparison, thanks to grammatical cues that signal "like" or "as," making the analogy unmistakable. These curses stand out with a reliably consistent structure in ancient texts, often employing the form "just as…so," to forge a connection between two or more seemingly unrelated elements. (Kitz 2014: 82).
[16] Kitz 2014: 77.

The latent violence embedded in a conditional curse is evidenced by the condition that the sentence puts in place in the agreement. In such instances, the sworn party is protected by the negative effects of the malediction as long as he or she abides to the terms of the agreement. Ultimately, the function of maledictions is to prevent the negative consequences of a violation and the unlashing of the ominous power contained in the 'then' part of the contract. Kitz points out that conditional curses bound and restrained.[17] They were used "to maintain mutually recognized circumstances and are a staple feature of many contracts and treaties."[18]

A conditional curse could be either imposed by a second party, who had authority over a subordinate individual, or self-imposed by the subordinate at the behest of a superior.[19] Traditionally, it was the king, or any other community leader, who could impose a conditional curse on the oath-taker or persuade him to curse himself.[20] As conditional sentences, these oath/curses were characterized by a *protasis*, which was usually introduced by the particle 'if,' containing the stipulations of the agreement, and an *apodosis*, the 'then' portion of the agreement, listing the maledictions which would have been activated by the violation of the oath.[21] The Akkadian term *māmītu* reveals the Janus-like quality of these contracts, embodying both "oath" and "curse" simultaneously, its meaning shifting with the context in which it appears. Kitz explains that

> "[…] a *māmītu* as a conditional curse can presume a contractual alliance. This means that both parties are aware of the terms and have either willingly or unwillingly agreed to them. Under these circumstances, *māmītu* acquires the sense of 'treaty' or 'agreement' and primarily reflects a known arrangement between two parties […]."[22]

Ancient sources across Sumerian, Akkadian, Hittite, and Hebrew cultures reveal a shared understanding of curses as a mechanism to enforce oaths, wielded in at least three distinct ways. First, in an act both violent and self-directed, a subordinate might invoke a curse upon themselves should they break their word. Second, figures of high social standing could impose a

[17] Kitz 2014: 94
[18] Kitz 2014: 94.
[19] Kitz 2014: 79.
[20] Kitz 2014: 121.
[21] Kitz 2014: 79. Kitz emphasizes that "Conditional maledictions are generally, although not exclusively, characterized by the use of conditional sentences in which the protasis describes a negative behavior that is 'protected' by the punishment recounted in the apodosis" (Kitz 2014: 94).
[22] Kitz 2014: 33-34.

conditional curse, forcing the oath-taker to damn themselves—sometimes even channeling the curse directly into the subordinate's body if they breached the agreement.[23] Finally, a king or other authority might channel the curse into objects, direct lethal harm to the subordinate, or even project it onto future generations, thereby aiming to erase the individual's memory entirely.[24]

The Victim's Struggle and the Balance of Power

In Mesopotamian incantations the dynamic between a witch (or warlock) and her victim emerges as a fierce battle for control. For example, in *Maqlû*, the afflicted turn to protective ceremonies to ward off harmful magic, seeking not just relief but a complete reversal, sending the curse back to its origin. The goal is to tip the scales of power. Doing so allows the victim to reclaim their strength over the tormentor. As noted above, *Maqlû* stands apart for its dramatic portrayal of this power struggle, bringing the victim and the witch face-to-face in a celestial courtroom where accusations fly over spells cast in the dark. Justice here is swift, with the witch often condemned to immediate punishment or exile. Schwemer draws a clear parallel: The powerless victim, he suggests, reflects the precarious position of a threatened monarch on the brink of being usurped and cast out.[25] *Maqlû* metaphorically frames witchcraft as a form of rebellion (*bārtu*). Its disruptive and deleterious impact, akin to a military insurrection, is particularly apparent in *Maqlû* II 146, in which the witch is explicitly described as "the doer of rebellion who is seeking change" (*ēpiš bārti tēnânâ*), which serves to denounce witchcraft as a subversive act that challenges the divinely ordained order.[26]

[23] Kitz 2014: 123. Cf. VTE, lines 560-562 and lines 622-624. Kitz points out that "Through the act of eating, drinking, and anointing, a previously articulated malediction would enter the body of the subordinate. Once performed, the underling literally becomes a potential malediction. He has eaten the curse in the bread. He has drunk the curse in the wine. He wears the curse in his flesh after the oil penetrates his skin. He is a walking latent 'curse.' These acts in particular would also serve to underscore the irrevocability of the malediction. Once consumed or rubbed into the skin, the curse could not be removed" (Kitz 2014: 125).
[24] Kitz 2014: 132.
[25] Schwemer 2010: 311-339; 311.
[26] Schwemer 2010: 311.

1. Parallels in Mesopotamian and Biblical Narratives

Biblical texts, particularly Deuteronomy, tackle themes of divine power and covenantal loyalty with striking parallels to Assyrian literature. In Deuteronomy, for instance, the authors invoke the charged motif of "conspiracy against the king," as a kind of rhetorical stratagem to cast any defiance of God's divinely sanctioned authority as a precursor to societal breakdown. In Deuteronomy 13, breaking the covenant is more than a personal transgression—it is a sheer betrayal, one which is framed as apostasy; a betrayal that is tantamount to treason; an act that severs the bonds of trust and duty through deceit. Apostasy here is not just about worshipping gods other than Yahweh but an act of deliberate defiance; a profound ingratitude toward God. In Deut 13:5 we read that those who "counsel rebellion" (בי דבר-סרה) against Yahweh, i.e., prophets and dream interpreters (חלם החלום), face execution (יומת) for their subversive actions and their betrayal is not merely religious misconduct but a fundamental breach of allegiance to Yahweh, the supreme divine king.[27]

Deuteronomy 13:1-5 illustrates a scenario in which apostates position themselves as rivals to God's authority, presenting their own vision as a substitute for divine rule. In this context, strict fidelity to God's covenant cannot coexist with those who promote opposing beliefs. As Brueggemann observes, "the maintenance of singular loyalty to Yahweh depends upon and justifies harsh treatment of such seductive advocates."[28] In both Deuteronomy 13 and the book of Jeremiah, the denunciation of idolatry is fierce and unyielding. Jeremiah draws on Deuteronomy's legal principles to censure false prophets, likening them to perjurers in a court of law. Deuteronomy's analogy between betraying Yahweh and plotting against a king also finds echoes in Mesopotamian literature, such as Esarhaddon's succession treaty. This theme of conspiracy, with deceptive prophets and their accomplices, reverberates throughout Jeremiah. In one vivid example, God curses those who break the covenant in Jeremiah 11, warning the prophet of internal adversaries within Israel conspiring to promote apostasy: "Both the house

[27] See discussion above.
[28] Brueggemann 2001: 150.

of Israel and the house of Judah have broken the covenant I made with their ancestors" (Jer 11:10).

The "Knot" as a Symbol of Conspiracy in Jeremiah

The references to Mesopotamian royal and execratory traditions woven into the Jeremiah text suggest that its ancient compiler intended to depict Israel's apostasy as a malevolent defiance of God's will, rather than an opportunistic betrayal. The text employs several linguistic elements that suggest Israel's actions are not mere coincidences but deliberate and subtly antagonistic towards God. In Jer 11:9, a conspiracy, קשר, is said to have arisen among the people of Judah. It is important to note that קֶשֶׁר ("conspiracy") in biblical Hebrew is literally a "knot" because it comes from the verb קָשַׁר, which means "to bind," "to league together."[29] In Assyrian anti-witchcraft rites, the term "knot" often serves as the focal point for conspiracy-related concerns. In various Akkadian rituals aimed at countering curses, the intended effect of the ritual verbs is to untie what the ancient Assyrians and Babylonians referred to as a *kiṣru*, which is a "knot." In anti-witchcraft practices, the afflicted individual typically believes that a *kiṣru*, described as a malevolent device, has been crafted by a witch to harm them. In the *Maqlû* text, these malevolent plots are referred to as "knots." In *Maqlû*, the exorcist recites an incantation aimed at unraveling these "knots" (*kiṣru*) formed by the witch's "wicked words" (*našparātūki ša lemutti*, vii, 109). *Maqlû* VII, 107-08 reads as follows: "Your (the witch's) tightly knotted knots, / Your evil manipulations, your hostile machinations" (*kiṣrīki kuṣṣurūti / epšētīki lemnēti upšāšêki ayyābūti*). It is worth noting here that in *Maqlû* V, 91 the term "knot" (*kiṣru*) is in parallelism with the term "scheme" (*kiṣir takṣurāni ki*[*pid takpudāni*] - "The knot that you have knotted against me, the pl[ot that you have plotted against me]"). In the book of Jeremiah, Yahweh accuses Israel not only of rebelling against his authority but also of plotting (קָשַׁר) against him—a serious accusation likening their actions to a dark conspiracy, akin to sorcery or *kiṣru*, as understood by the compiler.

[29] HALOT 3, s.v. "קשר"; see also Holladay 1986:354. Cf. Josh 2:18 and 21, Deut 6:8 and 11:18.

2. Oath-Breakers, Apostasy, and Treason in Deuteronomy and Jeremiah

Loyalty and the Consequences of Betrayal in Neo-Assyria

Levinson contends that Deut 13:9 reflects Neo-Assyrian practices against conspiracies targeting the king. In Assyrian treaties, like Esarhaddon's succession treaty, absolute loyalty to the ruler meant forsaking all other allegiances; traitors faced execution without trial. These documents aimed to maintain internal stability by identifying and eliminating dissent, ensuring unwavering loyalty to the king. As Kitz notes, swearing an oath means agreeing to its terms; breaching them triggers a latent curse and she points out loyalty oaths are "conditional curses," binding one to potential consequences. Violating an oath not only defies law but activates a self-imposed curse. In essence, breaking an oath unleashes its inherent consequences.

The Deuteronomic Response to Apostasy

Levinson suggests that Deut 13:9 (English 10) mirrors standard Neo-Assyrian practices for dealing with conspiracies against the king.[30] In Neo-Assyrian treaties and loyalty oaths, like Esarhaddon's succession treaty, absolute loyalty to the king demanded "the sacrifice of all other loyalties."[31] Those who conspired against the king were executed.[32] Levinson points out that the nature of these documents and the historical context of their creation allowed for the execution of oath violators without a trial. These treaties were designed not only to identify and

[30] Aejmelaneus disagrees with Levinson's argument concerning the originality of the MT reading of Deut 13:10 over its LXX variant. Cf. Aejmelaeus 2004: 1-22.

[31] Levinson 2003: 89–152.

[32] Without going further into the author's analysis of the passage—for a more detailed discussion, I refer the reader to Levinson 2008 and 2002—it suffices to say that the use of the Hebrew verb הרג ("to slay," "to kill"), which appears only once in Deuteronomy, and for this reason has often caused calls for its emendation (Dion argues that the mention of the verb הרג in Deut 13:10 represents a corruption of the original Hebrew version, see his "Deuteronomy 13," 154) finds its closest semantical equivalent in the Akkadian verb *dâku* (Assyrian *duʾāku*), which means "to kill," "murder" and "execute" (CAD 3:35-37; Levinson 2008: 191 n. 58, and Levinson 2002: 132-33). A further clue strengthens the hypothesis of the dependence of Deut 13 on literary models drawn from Neo-Assyrian loyalty oaths. The word מ/בקרבך ("in your midst") found in Deut 13:1 (Eng. 2), 5 (6), 11 (12), 13 (14), 14 (15) parallels Akkadian *ina birtūkunu*, which also appears in treaty documents, as for example the *Zakutu Treaty*: "If you hear and know that there are men instigating armed rebellion or fomenting conspiracy *in your midst*..." (l. 20). See Melville 1999: 87-89. Cf. also Parpola 1987: 166-67.

report traitors but also to maintain internal stability in Assyria by eliminating sedition and ensuring loyalty to the ruler.

3. Parallels between Neo-Assyrian Loyalty Oaths and Deuteronomy's Treatment of Idolatry

When someone takes an oath, they commit to its terms. But breaking that oath does not just break the law—it also triggers, as we have discussed, a curse built into the vow itself. The *adê* agreements of Esarhaddon[33] and his son Ashurbanipal offer a clear example of how Neo-Assyrian loyalty oaths worked. These agreements aimed to manage international relations through the use of conditional curses.[34] A notable instance of such a conditional curse can be found in the Esarhaddon Succession Treaty,[35] specifically in §25, lines 283 and 286-87.

> [283]This *adê*-agreement which Esarhaddon, king of Assyria [286]has made binding, has made common cause with you, [287](and) has made you swear *a conditional curse* (Akk. *tamītu*; transl. Kitz 2014: 122).[36]

Kitz argues that curses, like those we find in this Assyrian vassal treaty, functioned as mechanisms aimed at ensuring the downfall of wrongdoers, namely those who violated covenantal obligations.[37] Covenantal betrayal in these texts is an act warranting severe punishment, with offenders—when caught in *flagrante delicto*—facing immediate repercussions to restore socio-political stability.[38] In the Assyrian context, the execution of traitors was thought to be a necessary measure to reestablish (divine) order; this reflects for us a cultural and political emphasis on loyalty to the sovereign. We have reasons to believe that Israel, under Assyrian influence, adopted similar principles, adapting them to its own covenantal framework centered on fidelity to Yahweh. I am not sure if we can speak of theological reorientation in the case of Israel but political crises were interpreted in the Bible as

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[33] circa 681-669 BCE.
[34] Kitz 2014: 96.
[35] For the original composite edition with copies of most of the fragments, see Wiseman 1958: 1–99 + plates, while for the most recent composite edition see Parpola and Watanabe 1988: 6.
[36] *EST* §25 ll. 283, 287-287: [283]*a-de-e an-nu-ti ša*$_2$ ^{m}*aš-šur*—PAB—AŠ MAN KUR—*aš-šur*.KI... / [286]*...u*$_2$*-dan-nin-u-ni is-si-ku-nu* / [287]*iš-*^{r}*kun-u*$^{\neg}$*-ni ta-me-tu*$_2$ *u*$_2$*-tam-mu-ka-nu-ni*. See *SAA* 2.
[37] For a discussion of this passage, see Kitz 2014: 201.
[38] Levinson 2008: 192.

breaches of divine covenant, where disloyalty to Yahweh—often manifested as apostasy—demanded a response akin to that of treason in a political treaty and such theological framing justified the execution of apostates as a means of maintaining covenantal purity and divine favor. Levinson elaborates on the legal basis for these types of executions and draws a compelling analogy with military law, as he notes that, "In the crisis created by a state of war, failure to obey an order from a superior is immediately punishable by summary execution."[39] As he understands it, covenantal disloyalty in Israel, i.e, disobedience to Yahweh, the divine sovereign, is tantamount to treason in a wartime context, however, this interpretation must be tempered by considering the diversity of legal and theological traditions within ancient Israel, as well as the potential for later Deuteronomistic redaction to emphasize such punitive measures in response to the Babylonian exile.[40] Both biblical and post-biblical evidence supports the notion that summary execution of apostates was considered the appropriate response to a religious crisis.[41]

EXCURSUS: Assyrian Influence on Judah

The question of direct Assyrian influence on the Kingdom of Judah during the first half of the first millennium BCE remains unresolved. Scholars struggle to pinpoint a clear cultural

[39] Levinson 2008: 192.

[40] Levinson's hypothesis seems also supported by Flynn who, in a recent study, established two distinct stages of Yahweh's kingship in ancient Israel. The first, recognizable in Exod 15:1-18, Deut 33: 5, Num 23:21 and Ps 29, "presents a warrior king with a limited kingship similar to Canaanite kingships like Baal's..." While the latter, discernible above all in Pss 93, 95-99, presents a universal creator and an absolute king whose seat is in Jerusalem. Flynn believes that "In response to Neo-Assyrian imperialism, made tangible in the foreign policy of Tiglath-pileser III, Judahite scribes changed YHWH's kingship with a theologically motivated response, from one stage of kingship to the next" (Flynn 2014: 178).

[41] Levinson 2008: 193. There are several biblical stories that vividly illustrate this reality. Consider, for example, the incident of the "golden calf," where Moses tests the people's loyalty to Yahweh (Exod 32:26). Another example is the Israelites' apostasy at Baal Peor (Num 25:5). Additionally, the story of Mattathias in 1 Maccabees 2 is worth mentioning. In this account, Mattathias cold-bloodedly kills a fellow Jew who attempts to offer sacrifices in worship of the king. Mattathias' actions align with the instructions given by the ancient legislator in Deuteronomy 13. Levinson notes in this regard that Deut 13 requires "the same readiness to kill as a litmus test of religious zeal and loyalty." See Levinson 2008: 193. In his analysis of the peculiar judicial articulation of the so-called "lynch law," according to Levinson's characterization of this law (Levinson 2008: 148), in Deut 13:9 (Eng. 10), Otto's interpretation of the passage aligns closely with Levinson's. Like Levinson, Otto proposes that the ancient deuteronomic legislator might have drawn upon the language used in Assyrian vassal treaties to establish the legal basis for treason laws. Within the Assyrian legal framework, these laws were designed to empower loyal subjects who were eager to report acts of disloyalty.

conduit—whether through language, visual arts, trade, or deportations—by which Assyria might have exerted influence over its Levantine territories. However, it seems illogical to assume that Judah remained unaffected by Assyria altogether. Most discussions on this topic begin with the basic premise that Mesopotamian culture impacted the Levant for centuries, directly or indirectly. As Hays notes, "The fact that the Bible shows influence by Mesopotamian literature and culture is one of the cornerstones of critical biblical scholarship, and new studies emerge regularly that argue this in new and varied ways."[42] For instance, much scholarship on Deuteronomy 28 draws attention to the structural and thematic similarities between biblical curses and Neo-Assyrian treatises. Mendenhall's research on the Hittite treaties, with their parallels to biblical covenant literature, demonstrated the interconnectedness of ancient Near Eastern traditions.[43] McCarthy's work, examining treaties from the Hittites, Mesopotamia, Syria, and Israel, identifies a common set of elements in these legal documents.[44] Similarly, Frankena's studies on the Esarhaddon Succession Treaty (EST) emphasize the lexical similarities between Assyrian and biblical treaty terminology.[45] Frankena's work revealed not only the close legal and structural connections between Assyrian and biblical texts, but also highlighted the thematic and lexical parallels between Deut 28:20-57 and EST §47:414ff. Weinfeld, drawing on Frankena's findings, was among the first to argue that Assyrian treaties influenced biblical law.[46] Steymans later expanded on this idea, suggesting a literary dependency between the curses in Deut 28:20-44 and the EST.[47]

While some scholars challenge the notion of direct literary influence, pointing to the limited evidence of cuneiform inscriptions in ancient Palestine, others argue that Judah's scribes may have had access to Assyrian cuneiform texts.[48] Rejecting this overly cautious stance, scholars like Levinson assert that the strong thematic and formal correspondence between portions of the STE and Deuteronomy 28 cannot be easily dismissed, suggesting an influence that goes

[42] Hays 2015: 23.
[43] Mendenhall 1954: 52.
[44] McCarthy 1963.
[45] Frankena 1965: 122-154.
[46] Weinfeld 1992: 59-157.
[47] Steymans 1995: 284-312.
[48] Holloway 2007: 205-08; Morrow 2005: 204-214.

beyond literary borrowing.[49] Ramos further contends that those rejecting direct literary borrowing fail to provide a satisfying alternative explanation for these parallels.[50]

Linguistic studies have also enriched the discussion. Mankowski's research on Akkadian loanwords in Biblical Hebrew sheds light on the cultural connotations these terms carry, deepening our understanding of Assyria's direct influence on Israel.[51] Scholars such as Victor Hurowitz have expanded on these ideas, exploring the impact of Mesopotamian writings on biblical texts.[52] The absence of cuneiform documentation in Judah during the eighth and seventh centuries may suggest a shift in Assyria's methods of governance in the region. Tadmor's 1982 observations, based on documentary evidence, pointed to the growing prominence of Aramaic in Neo-Assyrian administrative documents. Parpola's analysis of Neo-Assyrian letters from provincial governors reveals a marked decline in the use of Akkadian in favor of Aramaic between the eighth and seventh centuries. He argues that, starting with Esarhaddon's reign, provincial governors began using Aramaic and papyrus or parchment in their correspondence with the central administration.[53] This shift likely influenced the political correspondence between Judah and Assyria, suggesting that communications during this period were often conducted in Aramaic.[54]

Neo-Assyrian Treaty's Influence on Deuteronomy's Structure

The Neo-Assyrian legal tradition provides a cautionary tale for those conspiring against the king, particularly evident in the various versions of Esarhaddon's loyalty oath or succession treaty (EST). The loyalty oath *adê* was a cornerstone of the Assyrian system, a tool that allowed the kings to tighten their grip on vassal states while maintaining stability within the empire. As Lauinger notes, "the oath allowed for military protection of the lesser king, but also offered the possibility to expand his influence while preserving local autonomy."[55] These loyalty oaths,

[49] Levinson, 2010: 340.
[50] Ramos 2015: 23
[51] Mankowski 2000.
[52] Hurowitz 2013: 93-106.
[53] Parpola 1981: 123.
[54] Morrow 2005: 208.
[55] Lauinger 2012: 87. Lauinger further describes the *adê* "[…] as a duty or obligatory behavior that was transformed and projected into the divine realm so that it became a destiny, and I consider the method of transformation to be

particularly during the reign of the Sargonid king Esarhaddon, are referenced in various royal inscriptions, letters, and oracles from his time.[56] It is known that numerous copies of the loyalty oath were archived in the library of Nineveh, though a group of tablets was discovered at Nimrud. These tablets focus on Esarhaddon's succession and the oath of loyalty sworn in 672 BCE to support the rise of his son, Ashurbanipal, to the Assyrian throne after his father's death.[57]

This focus on loyalty and succession in the Neo-Assyrian context finds parallels in the biblical tradition, where the principles of loyalty and the identification of traitors are also central. Otto argues that the legal standards governing moral conduct, particularly concerning the principle of unconditional loyalty to God in Deut 13:1-5 (Eng. 2-6) and 6-9 (7-10), hinge on the obligation outlined in EST §10 to report treason. He contends that the reverse order of high-treason instigators in Deut 13:1-5 (Eng. 2-6) and 6-9 (7-10) stands out prominently as a biblical reference to a Neo-Assyrian text. In EST §10, the positioning of these instigators is meticulously structured around their proximity to King-elect Ashurbanipal: it commences with the king's most immediate rivals (§10:11ff.), proceeds to his closest relatives (§10:113-115a and §10:115b and 116a), and concludes with mention of prophets, ecstatics, diviners (§10:116b and 117), and all others (§10:118). This logical sequence forms the basis of the categorization.[58] Simply put, according to EST, the threat of high treason may come first from the king's enemies, then from his family, which is presented as the king's most immediate threat, and *only subsequently* from the prophets and the people.[59] Deuteronomy 6:7-10 and 13:2-6 (Eng. 1-5)

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twofold: First, the sealing of the *tuppi adê* with Aššur's seals that changed an ordinary clay tablet into a Tablet of Destinies; and second, the subordinate party's oath that established such subordination to be his destiny just as the gods' oath established their subordination to Marduk in the passage from *Enūma eliš* quoted above" (Lauinger 2013: 114-115).

[56] Watanabe, Reade, and Parpola 1988.

[57] Lauinger 2012: 87.

[58] Otto 1999: 58.

[59] Crouch notes that the threat of the insurrection from an entire city in Deut 13:13-19, while being of particular importance, is absent in Assyrian loyalty oaths and in EST, which, in a generic way, speak of the threat coming from the seditious activity of common human beings ("from the mouth of any human being," EST §10, 118), see Crouch 2014). Conversely, this theme of insurrection by an entire city appears in a series of Aramaic inscriptions known as the Sefire treaties, written in the mid-eighth century at a site 15 miles southeast of Aleppo in Syria (Fitzmyer 1995). These documents represent the historical record of the treaty made by an Aramean ruler named Mati'el ben 'Atar-sumki, the king of the city of Arpad—annexed to the Assyrian Empire by Tiglath-Pileser III in 740—with an unknown Mesopotamian ruler, Bar-Ga'yah, king of the city of KTK. One of the copies of such treaties that deal with

interpret the Assyrian pattern in EST §10 theologically, suggesting that the most significant challenge to Yahweh's authority arises from individuals who, due to their proximity to God, such as prophets or religious leaders, claim a "special relationship" with Yahweh.[60]

Interpretation of High Treason Threats and Theological Loyalty in The Hebrew Bible

Otto contends that the directive in Deut 13:8 (Eng. 9) and following, commanding not to heed the words of a traitor, finds its basis in a regulation found within the legal corpus of EST aimed at suppressing palace uprisings ("you must not listen to him nor let him go away," §18).[61] The Deuteronomic injunction prohibits individuals from assenting to or hiding the actions of apostates לא־תאבה לו ולא תשמע אליו...ולא־תכסה עליו, "do not assent or give heed to him...and do not conceal him," Deut 13:9), instead mandating their execution—a principle Otto suggests parallels the ethos of EST. This principle further mandates that oath-takers do not conceal the seditious activities of traitors (*tupazzarāni lā…*, "you shall not conceal it," meaning conceal an "evil, improper, ugly word" §10:119-121). In Deut 13, the condemnation of apostasy culminates with the execution of the inciter in v. 9 (Eng. 10) (בי הרג תהרגנו, "but take his life"), effectively legitimatizing summary execution for the purpose of averting a rebellion against God. In a

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the case of an entire city guilty of killing their sovereign reads: "you must come and avenge my blood … If it is a city, you must strike it with a sword" (את תאתה ותקם דמי...והן קריה הא נכה תכוה בחרב; Sef III 11–13). In the same text, the instructions for the destruction of an offending city are followed by a list of potential offenders: "one of my brothers or one of my slaves or [one] of my officials or one of the people who are under my control" (חד אחי הא או חד עבדי או [חד] פקדי או חד עמא זי בידי; Sef III 13). This list, along with other lists of potential traitors, recalls the list of inciters of Deut 13, in fact, as Crouch points out, the Sefire document seems to anticipate "the innumerable directions from which loyalty to YHWH might face challenge" (Crouch 2014: 121). Rejecting both Otto's and Levinson's analyses, Crouch argues that "the apostasy laws" of Deut 13 do not draw their legal framework directly from the Neo-Assyrian treaty tradition but converse with a broader variety of ancient Near Eastern judicial traditions. This fact suggests that the affinities of Deut 13 with the Assyrian traditions "reflect little more than their place in a more widely known common tradition" (Crouch 2014: 123).

[60] Otto 2006: 59.

[61] Crouch suggests that the often-recurring motif of the exclusivity of commitments in loyalty oaths is not a special feature of the Neo-Assyrian documents alone, nor does it reflect a legal specificity of the deuteronomic text. On the contrary, it is typical of the broader ancient Near Eastern loyalty-oath genre, where the motif of the exclusivity of commitments articulated the reciprocal and specific responsibilities of the treaty partners during periods of institutional and political crisis. One of the distinctive characteristics of this central motif is the commitment of the oath's signatory to report political treason, denouncing any seditious behavior or verbal expressions of disloyalty. Crouch notes that, far from being a feature of the Assyrian texts alone, the warning against sedition, though with some variation, appears, for example, in all the Hittite treaty series. The author mentions the case of Arnuwanda I's treaty with the men of Ismerika in which the Hittite king requires the treaty's addressees to report anyone who "speaks an evil word before you" (Beckman 1999: 1 A obv. 21'-24'). On similarities between Deut 13 and Ismerika see also Berman 2011: 25-44).

similar fashion, Esarhaddon's loyalty oath stipulates that the traitor ought to be killed if he or she conspires actively against the King-elect Ashurbanipal and tries to initiate an insurrection (EST §12, 138 "If you are able to seize them and put them to death ..."). Both the texts of Deuteronomy and Esarhaddon's succession treaty demonstrate that the implementation of capital punishment for those who violate the oaths is a reactive and drastic measure intended to suppress sedition.

4. The Vow of Allegiance in Neo-Assyrian and Deuteronomic Texts

Assurbanipal's Oath of Allegiance (EST §57: 500-506)

The vow of allegiance to Ashurbanipal in EST §57: 500-506, by which the ancient signatory swore to report any subversive activity to the king (*dabāb surrāti lā kēnāte ša ina muhhi Aššur-bani-apli*, "[...] *treacherous*, *disloyal talk against* Assurbanipal, [...]"), finds a stringent parallel in the formula of loyalty to God in Deut 13:5 (Eng. 6) ("As for that prophet or dream-diviner, he shall be put to death; *for he spoke rebellion against* [כי דבר סרה על] the Lord your God").[62]

Otto emphasizes that the vow of allegiance to Assurbanipal in EST §57 should be viewed as the focal point of Esarhaddon's *adê*-agreements.[63] By swearing this vow, the individual taking the oath understood that breaking any of its rules would invoke a self-imposed curse. Similarly, in Deut 13:5 (Eng. 6), the recipient knows that true devotion to God necessitates publicly denouncing and executing apostates. Failure to act in accordance with this command is considered "to do evil in the eyes of the Lord" (עשה הרע בעיני יהוה).[64] Otto takes it a step further by suggesting that the prophet who incites to apostasy in Deut 13 and, leading others to commit religious high treason, becomes a false witness ("Falschzeugnis," literally "false testimony" in German) in the horizon of the Judean procedural law ("Der zum religiösen Hochverrat anstiftende Prophet wird im Horizont des judäischen Prozeßrechts zum Lügenzeugen [...]").[65] This implies that if the prophet commits religious treason, a crime punishable by death under the Covenant Code (Exod 22:20), he could face execution under

[62] Otto 2006: 60.
[63] Otto 2006: 60.
[64] Cf. a similar expression in Jer 7:30, "the people of Judah have done evil in My sight," עשו בני יהודה הרע בעיני.
[65] Otto 2006: 61.

Judean law as well. Judean law reinterprets in theologically terms the concept of Assyrian political treason.

Marriage and Adultery as Metaphors for Apostasy in Deuteronomy

As Otto observes, the incitement to apostasy in Deut 13:2 (Eng. 3) "Let us follow and worship other gods" (נלכה אחרי אלהים אחרים), takes up the metaphorical language of the Judean "marriage law" concerning adultery (Deut 24:1-4).[66] Naturally, these kinds of metaphors are not found only in Deuteronomy but illustrate the hierarchical component of the relationship between God and Israel. The breaking of the covenant with God, especially in the prophetic texts, is often depicted through the image of the ungratefulness and disloyalty of the woman/people who is accused by her husband/Yahweh of adultery/apostasy.[67]

Deuteronomy 13 also incorporates the technical terminology with which the Assyrian *adê* articulated the formula of devotion to the king, which used the intimate image of spousal affection (EST §18, 207-208 ["one who loves his lord"]; §24, 266-268 ["You shall love Assurbanipal, ..., like yourselves"]). The motive of love (Akk. *râmu*) was used in ancient Near Eastern contracts to indicate political loyalty and in this way, it is used in EST.[68] In this perspective, the Assyrian metaphor of "the love for the king" is theologically reformulated in "the love for God" in Deut 13. As a consequence of this parallelism, the disloyalty toward the Assyrian king, which is punished with the death of the oath-breaker, in Deuteronomy is reinterpreted from the perspective of Judean marriage law, which mandates the death penalty for the adulterer (Lev 20:10; cf. Exod 20:14).

Deuteronomy 13 as an Adaptation of Assyrian Loyalty Traditions

[66] On the prohibition of polygamy to a former spouse, which prohibits the restoration of a marriage after an intervening marriage, see Hugenberger 1994: 77-81.
[67] Cf., for instance, Jer 3:8, 9 on Israel's infidelity expressed through the metaphorical image of the adulteress. See Stulman 2005: 54-56. For a more in-depth discussion on the topic of the marital relationship used as a metaphor for the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel in the prophetic texts, see Hugenberger 1994: 280–338; Abma 1999: 230. See also, Rom-Shiloni 2015: 153-74.
[68] Otto 2006: 53.

Based on the above considerations, Otto seems to suggest that the basic text of Deut 13:2-10 (Eng. 3-11) is in effect an adaptation of EST §10 to which the ancient author added further elements drawn from EST §§12, 18, (29), 57. While the direct connection between EST and Deuteronomy 13 remains a hotly debated issue,[69] Otto argues that Deuteronomy 13 seems out of place within the legal framework of Deuteronomy. Specifically, it is positioned between the primary law outlined in Deut 12:13-27 and the laws concerning social privileges in Deut 14:22-15:23.[70]

5. Jeremiah and Deuteronomy: Legal Perspectives on Apostasy

Jeremiah's Use of Deuteronomy as a Legal Reference

In order to understand Jeremiah's legal perspective on apostasy, we must keep in mind this underlying premise. As we have previously noted, an increasing body of research indicates that Jeremiah considered Deuteronomy to be the primary and authoritative source for all legal matters pertaining to covenant violations.[71] In his close reading of the book of Jeremiah, Mastnjak has shown that the book of Deuteronomy "served as a source for multiple layers of Jeremianic tradition and demonstrated the discernibly different perspectives on D embedded in

[69] Crouch 2014 questions the dependence of Deut 13 on the tradition of the Neo-Assyrian oath of loyalty. By reviewing the studies of Pakkala (Pakkala 2006, Koch 2008: 151–68, and Zehnder 2009: 511–35), who reject the argument in favor of an allusion of Deut 13 on EST, Crouch concludes that the "textual study of the similarities between Deuteronomy and other ancient Near Eastern texts shows that it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to demonstrate that a specifically Assyrian tradition was the source of and referent for the Deuteronomy material, as well as how problematic it is to suggest that Deuteronomy's use of these generalized concepts would have evoked only Assyrian precedents" (Crouch 2014*:* 124). Although the author acknowledges that the treaty style adopted by the Deut 13 clearly reflects "wider ancient Near Eastern treaty, loyalty oath, and curse traditions," she objects to the idea that specific Assyrian ideas or concepts can be recognized in Deut 13 (and Deut 28), see Crouch, *Israel and the Assyrians*, 124. In his analysis of the deuteronomic curses, Weinfeld already noted that "The deuteronomic authors also incorporated in their work maledictions like those customarily included in the treaties" and such maledictions "are to be found mostly in the deuteronomic prophetic orations in the book of Kings and Jeremiah." Weinfeld also noted that the curses that appear in the Assyrian treatises are often drawn from non-legal documents such as epic literature, incantation texts, and boundary stones. In this perspective, while the curses found in the prophetic deuteronomic orations are not necessarily drawn from Assyrian treaties, we must still consider that these curses "come into effect as a punishment for breaking the covenant." It is thus not unreasonable to suppose that they conform "with the sanctions of the covenant and were therefore formulated intentionally in the manner of treaty courses" (Weinfeld 1972: 129-130).

[70] For further discussion on this issue, see Otto 2006: 57-64.

[71] Stulman 2005: 54-55, Allen 2008: 240, Brueggemann 2007: 20-27, Hibbard 2011: 339-358.

them."[72] Mastnjak's identification of thirty-three references to Deuteronomy in Jeremiah implies that whoever authored the book—be it the historical Jeremiah or the compiler of his prophecies—engaged with Deuteronomy *dynamically*. This interaction involved not only challenging its legal principles but also, and here is the kicker, innovating the book's historical and religious claims. Jeremiah's transformative approach to incorporating Deuteronomy sought to elevate his prophetic status to a level comparable to Moses, thereby asserting his authority on par with that of Moses in Deuteronomy. As Mastnjak notes, "DtrJ transformed texts in D that originally asserted the exclusive and final authority of Moses into language that supported the continuing authority of the post-Mosaic prophets."[73]

6. Parallels Between Neo-Assyrian Texts and Deuteronomy in Jeremiah's Prophecies: The *Adê*'s Influence on Deuteronomic and Jeremianic Thought

Drawing from previous analyses of how apostasy evolved in biblical texts both historically and ideologically, several key observations can be confirmed. Jeremiah's legal viewpoint probably matched Deuteronomy rather closely. However, the question of whether specific models in Deuteronomy were influenced by Neo-Assyrian prototypes remains unsettled. Nevertheless, it is clear that there are common literary elements between Deuteronomy and Neo-Assyrian texts, particularly in how they portray the consequences of disloyalty to the king.[74] The curse as a consequence of apostasy understood as disloyalty towards the king is

[72] Mastnjak 2016: 226.

[73] Mastnjak 2016: 226. Review the discussion on Mastnjak's understanding of DtrJ on page 41.

[74] Levinson 2002: 134. The ancient Assyrians made deportation and resettling of peoples one of their most common practices. Addressing the theme of Assyrian reconstruction of the conquered territories in the ninth and eighth centuries BCE, Ahlström emphasizes how the Assyrians imparted their customs and laws, both civil and cultic, to the deported. The overseers, *akli*, ensured cultural continuity through the teaching of the "Assyrian way of life," which consisted of obeying ("revere") to the Assyrian gods and the king. The phrase *palāḫ ili u šarri* encapsulates this idea. Two Kings 17:24-26 tell how the Assyrian king resettled ethnically diverse peoples from the various corners of Assyria's immense empire—from Babylon, Cuthah, Arvad, Hamath, and Sepharvaim—into the territory of Samaria. This continuous resettling of peoples in some areas led to the disappearance of traditional local customs. Certainly polemical, 2 Kgs 17:32-33 lament this reality, representing the north of Israel as a region humiliated and bereft of its original people and customs; a place where it was difficult to find a native priest who could properly officiate the cult of Yahweh. The ancient writer, therefore, grieves over the gradual transformation of Israel into a territory stripped of its cultural and historical roots. Yahweh's sending off lions to kill the Israelites who forgot how to worship him in 2 Kgs 17:25-26 illustrates this sense of abandonment and frustration on the part of a nation suffering under the Assyrian yoke. See Ahlström 1993: 676-79.

splendidly articulated in EST. The *adê* agreements of Esarhaddon must be understood with his rise to power in Assyria. The events surrounding Esarhaddon's ascension likely influenced the formulation of loyalty oaths attributed to him. Furthermore, Esarhaddon's personal history, particularly his triumph over family rivals following his father Sennacherib's death (704–681 BCE), is often cited as the backdrop for the stringent measures against conspiratorial activities detailed in EST. As was mentioned above, one of EST's essential obligations mandates its signatories to report "any evil…word" (*abutu lā ṭābtu*," EST, §10, 108-10) directly to the "crown prince designated," Ashurbanipal:

> If you hear (*tašammāni*) any evil (*lā ṭābtu*), improper (*lā deʾiqtu*), ugly (*lā banītu*) word (*abutu*) which is not seemly nor good to Assurbanipal, the great crown prince designate, son of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, your lord, either from the mouth of his enemy or from the mouth of his ally, or from the mouth of his brothers or from the mouth of his uncles, his cousins, his family, members of his father's line, or from the mouth of your brothers, your sons, your daughters, or from the mouth of a prophet, an ecstatic, an inquirer of oracles, or from the mouth of any human being at all, you shall not conceal it but come and report it to Assurbanipal, the great crown prince designate, son of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria. (EST §10 108-122)

The list of plotters against the enthronement of crown prince Ashurbanipal include not only the king's closest relatives but also court religious officials like prophets (*raggimu*, lit. "shouters," §10, 116), ecstatics (*mahhû*, §10, 117), and seers or oneiromancers (*mār šāʾili*, lit. "son of the dream," dream interpreter), §10, 117). In EST, the "evil word" is synonymous to any word or action that could endanger the life of Ashurbanipal and his succession to the throne. Based on this idea, the "evil word" refers to any action or utterance that breach the *adê*, which is a solemn pledge of loyalty. Indeed, a conspiracy has the potential to undermine the authority of a monarch (§6, 74) and incite a rebellion (§9, 107 and §16, *bārtu*) against the rightful ruler. The expectation of the *adê* is that its signatories keep the terms of the oath. Any violation of the *adê* is, therefore, construed as a *sin* ("Guard this treaty. Do not sin against your treaty," §25, 292 *uṣra mā ina libbi adêkunu lā tahaṭṭia*).[75] According to Levinson's earlier analysis, the authors of Deuteronomy integrated elements from Neo-Assyrian practices, possibly as a

[75] The Akkadian verb *ḫaṭû* (CAD 6:156-58, "to make a mistake," "to commit an offense," "to sin") is connected to the word *ḫiṭītu* (CAD 6:208-209, "sin," "cultic mistake").

response to Assyrian dominance, although their exact motives elude us. This adaptation enabled them to transfer the consequences of disloyalty from the Assyrian king to Yahweh.[76] Jeremiah likely drew from the legal principles in Deuteronomy when he condemned the deceptive actions of the false prophets, indirectly referencing similar models.

Jeremiah's Transformation of Treason and Apostasy

In Jeremiah 14:14 (and elsewhere in Jeremiah), the theme of reporting treason, intertwined with the broader conspiracy against the king (cf. EST §10), undergoes a profound transformation. Here, Yahweh strongly condemns the deceitful actions of false prophets, accusing them of lacking authenticity. Otto also sees this connection when he observes that the juxtaposition of "prophet" and "dream-diviner" in Deut 13:2 has its counterpart in Jer 14:14 (and 23:25) in which a message based on dreams is devalued to a "lie."[77] Like Mastnjak,[78] Otto is convinced that there are many thematic and linguistic connections between Deuteronomy 13 and Jeremiah.[79] Among these, it is worth mentioning that Jer 23:30-32 predicts the execution of the false prophet according to Deut 13:6 (cf. Jer 28:16ff.). While Otto recognizes that there is a reception of the Deuteronomic text in the tradition of Jeremiah, he seems unsure about its theological implications. It is important to highlight that Jeremiah uses specific criteria to identify false prophets, whereas Deuteronomy 13:2-6 seems to focus exclusively on the criterion set forth by the first commandment of the Decalogue.[80]

7. The שקר of the False Prophets

As I elaborate further, the denunciation of the "lie" (HALOT 4, s.v. "שקר") spread by the false prophets, as Jeremiah frames it, points to their misleading assurances and unauthorized

[76] Levinson 2002: 134.
[77] Otto 2006: 50.
[78] Fischer regards the book of Deuteronomy as the main source of the book of Jeremiah. He suggests that the link to Deut 18 (discussed above) shows that the book of Jeremiah "deliberately chooses the image of Moses as prophet from there for its portrayal of Jeremiah, and takes the 'law of the prophet' as an aid in the discernment of prophecy [...] Moreover, Jer quotes Deuteronomy very often: main focal points are the former and the latter frame, among them especially Deut 4–5 and 31–32, with Deut 28 being the peak in the intensity of the link." See Fischer 2018: 50.
[79] Otto 2006: 55.
[80] Otto 2006: 51.

predictions. They are framed as unauthorized because they do not meet the verification criteria outlined in Deut 18:22. Such denunciation highlights Yahweh's wrath and righteous anger against actions that defy his divine authority. In a way evocative of Esarhaddon's denunciation of the *abutu lā ṭābtu*, or "evil word," which in the EST setting drives politically motivated accusations of defection, subversion, or treason, Jeremiah's condemnation of שקר exposes the false prophet's deceptive preaching. According to the constitutional authority of Deuteronomy, these messages constitute an act of disloyalty and a rejection of God, ultimately amounting to the grave offense of apostasy. Deuteronomy 13 discusses apostasy as leading people into disloyal behavior and political sedition. Both in Deuteronomy and Jeremiah, the שקר leads to a breach of the covenant, a breach of faith, which is, in other words, the violation of the first commandment of the Decalogue.[81]

The Hebrew Term שקר

The Hebrew term שקר is predominantly found in legal contexts within the Bible, specifically in covenantal literature. The term in question refers to the violation of a mutually agreed arrangement between parties. It is used technically to denote the breach of a covenant.[82] As such, the term carried a "judicial meaning." Moreover, in related literature, this term consistently carries the same meaning, where the root *šqr* is used to denote a breach of trust, an act of rebellion, and a transgression. An Assyrian document from the time of King Esarhaddon offers a captivating look at the political dynamics of the era, while also revealing the cunning schemes of the king's brothers as they plotted to overthrow his rule. The document shows a use of language by King Esarhaddon rather innovative as he employed an Akkadian term with known etymological ties to the Hebrew word שקר to denote the deceitful actions he condemned.

The Legal and Political Dimensions of שקר

[81] Levinson 2002: 134.
[82] Klopfenstein 1997: 1399–1405; 1399–1400 and Klopfenstein 1964.

This document, which is found within a series of inscriptions on hexagonal clay prisms known as Nineveh A, depict the king's great contempt for his brothers' elaborate scheme, seeking to obstruct his legitimate accession to the Assyrian throne after their father, Sennacherib, passed away. Believed to have been composed around 673-672 BCE, it features an account by the Assyrian monarch recounting his journey to power. Additionally, a biographical statement included at the beginning of the inscription asserts that the king faced persecution (*riddu*) and envy (*qinû*) from his brothers, who defamed him in an effort to impede his ascension to the throne. According to Esarhaddon, his siblings engaged in the dissemination of malevolent rumors (*lišān lemuttim*), slander (*karṣi*), and deceit (*tašgirti*) with the intention of estranging him from the royal court.[83] The triconsonantal root of the word *tašgirti* (CAD 18:286) is *š-g-r* (cf. *šugguru*, CAD17.3:198), which is a cognate of Hebrew שקר and is used by Esarhaddon to denote treachery.

In the protasis of an Aramaic document from the eighth-century BCE, in one of the curses of the vassal treaty stipulated between "Bar-Ga'yah, King of KTK" and "Mati'el ben 'Atar-sumki, King of Arpad," Bar-ga'yah adjures Mati'el not to swear falsely in the agreement.[84] The text uses the Aramaic word/verb *šqr* (cognate of Hebrew שקר) to convey this meaning: "Now, if Mati'el son of 'Atar-sumki, Ki[ng of Arpad] should be false to [Var-Ga'ya] [h, King of KTK (*w-hn <u>yšqr</u> Mt'l br 'tr-smak m*[*lk 'rpd*] [*lBr-G'y*] [*h, mlk Ktk*], Sef. I, 87 6C, 3)."[85]

Falsehood in the Pentateuch and Psalms

Based on the examples provided, it appears that the word שקר and its cognates had a legal connotation, often used to describe particularly despicable behavior viewed as both treacherous and deceitful. In the Pentateuch and Psalms, the word שקר is almost always used in legal contexts to describe a series of criminal actions including, false witness, swearing falsely, or speaking falsely.[86] The word שקר is functional to the manifestation of justice because it

[83] Leichty 2011: 12.
[84] These treaties, apparently two copies of a single treaty (Sefire I and Sefire II, are known as the Sefire treaties.
[85] Kitchen and Lawrence 2012: 918-19. See also Fitzmyer 1961: 178-222.
[86] Pentateuch: Exod 20:16, Lev 5:22, 24, 19:12 and Deut 19:18. Psalter: 7:27, 31, 33, 35, 38, 52, 63, 69, 101, 109, 119, 120, 144.

seems to be used almost in opposition to the concept of "truth" (אמת), truth understood as the emanation of divine justice.[87]

שקר *and Apostasy in the Book of Jeremiah*

In the theological vocabulary of the book of Jeremiah, the word שקר generally retains the legal meaning it has in other biblical texts, but at times expands its semantic range, coming to describe a whole series of actions or statements that do not conform to reality and are therefore deceitful.[88] Curiously, in Jeremiah 1-25, the term שקר assumes a particularly harmful connotation as the term may actually denote the malevolent influence of individuals who undermine the social fabric of Judah by distorting the Mosaic law preserved in Deuteronomy.[89]

For the purpose of illustration, let us consider Jeremiah 14-15. The prophet in these chapters deeply reflects on his personal journey, his divine calling, and his responsibilities toward his people. The narrative explores Jeremiah's internal struggles and portrays Judah's final days before the impending Babylonian invasion. Judah is shown as a nation in distress, enduring both humiliation and suffering; the people of Judah have not only endured isolation but have also played a part in bringing it upon themselves and, by breaking the divine covenant, the Israelites now find themselves abandoned in the face of their enemies. The deceptive proclamation of "peace" (שלום) made by the false prophets is nothing more than a falsehood (שקר), an illusion (אליל) that conceals a much harsher reality (אמת).[90]

Falsehood and the Natural Order in Jeremiah

In the context of these two chapters, the word שקר seems to assume the meaning of prevarication, one that leads to the breaking of the social compact, which is predicated on justice and truth. Overholt observes that "'Falsehood' is characteristic of the split soul of the man who acts in this way. By virtue of its grounding in the common will and responsibility of the

[87] Overholt 1970: 87-88.
[88] Overholt 1970: 91. In Micaiah's throne vision in 1 Kgs 22:22, a spirit says that he will place a "lying spirit" (רוח שקר) in the mouth of all the prophets so that they may prophesy only falsehood, see Hamori 2010: 15.
[89] Overholt 1970: 101.
[90] Cf. Jer 14:14. See Overholt 1970: 101.

community, truth has the strength to maintain itself. But falsehood is without basis in this totality. It is 'hollow and rootless.'" [91] Sin and falsehood operate in violation of the principles that sustain Israel's wellbeing under the covenant. Here, Overholt emphasizes an essential aspect of Jeremiah's idea regarding falsehood: אמת, or truth, serves as the bedrock of society and the natural order, embodying the principles of the greater good. Conversely, שקר, or falsehood, stands in stark contrast to this virtue, representing its antithesis. Falsehood, being detached from reality, ultimately rejects it.[92] By deviating from reality, falsehood negates the divine covenant, thus eroding the fundamental principles of both the natural order and societal structure.

8. The Connection Between שקר and Treason

In the book of Jeremiah, the "false word" in the mouth of the prophets is falsehood (שקר), as it contradicts the "divine word," which represents God's אמת and is inherently aligned with the truth (אמת). To understand the meaning of God's word being אמת ("true"), consider the account of Elijah reviving the widow's deceased son in 1 Kgs 17. In verse 24, the widow states: "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord is truly in your mouth" (עתה זה ידעתי כי איש אלהים אתה ודבר־יהוה בפיך אמת). For obvious reasons, Jeremiah's word is אמת ("true") because it is *authorized* by God himself who places it in his mouth in Jer 1:9 ("Herewith I put My words into your mouth").

As we encounter in another biblical verse, the concept of falsehood (שקר) takes on a particularly pernicious connotation. In the vision of the prophet Micaiah son of Imlah in 1 Kgs 22:19-23, we read that a certain spirit (הרוח) of the heavenly council volunteers to persuade king Ahab by serving as a רוח שקר "lying spirit" in the mouth of the king's prophets to convince him to embark on a foolish confrontation against the Syrians to eventually die in the battle of Ramoth-Gilead. The text states that it is Yahweh himself who puts a "lying spirit in the mouth of

[91] Overholt 1970: 102.

[92] In Ps 38:19 (H 20), King David says "Many are they that hate me without cause (שקר)." The false witness of Exod 20:16 and Deut 19:18 involves a groundless accusation, not based on fact. See TWOT 2461a. Cf. Jer 7:28 אבדה האמונה "Truth has perished."

all these prophets" (נתן יהוה רוח שקר בפי כל נביאיך אלה). As the passages explain, this is because "the Lord has decreed disaster (רעה)..."[93]

9. Parallel with Assyrian Terminology and the Breaking of Covenants

Based on the previous discussion, I suggest that the Hebrew word שקר can sometimes serve a similar purpose as the phrase *abutu lā ṭābtu* in EST, indicating any act of disloyalty that can lead to treason. The symmetrical relationship between the word שקר or דבר השקר and the phrase *abutu lā ṭābtu*, prominently used in EST, could be shown by a recent study by Goldstein. In his analysis of 2 Kgs 17:9-11, Goldstein identifies two literary strata. The first, he believes, was composed during the Assyrian period, while the latter seems to be a later deuteronomic composition that reinterpreted the original text. In verses 9-11, Goldstein suggests the presence of two Akkadian idioms reformulated in these three Hebrew verses. He interprets the Hebrew phrase ויחפאו...דברים in verse 9 "as a loan from Akkadian *hepû* + *dibbu* = 'to break an agreement,'"[94] and reads the following expression דברים אשר לא כן, also in verse 9, as the rendering of Akkadian *dibbu ša lā kinnu* = "disloyal talk." Goldstein believes that "The former can be understood as a very early theological response to the destruction of Samaria and Assyrian imperial claims regarding its fall which utilizes Neo-Assyrian covenantal terminology to describe the relationship between the God of Israel and His people."[95]

He further suggests that the phrase ויעשו דברים רעים in verse 11 can be understood as a *calque* of an Akkadian idiom that appears, for example, in Esarhaddon's succession treaty: "You shall protect Assurbanipal…you shall not sin against him…nor revolt or do anything to him which is not good or proper (*epšu bārtu abutu lā ṭābtu lā de'iqtu teppašāniššūni*)" (ll. 62 ff).[96]

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[93] Discussing pre-exilic demonologies, Bennie H. Reynolds suggests that in ancient Israelite and (pre-exilic) Judahite religion Yahweh commanded individual figures described as demi-gods. He argues that "while some figures were benevolent and some were malevolent, Israelites conceived of them as functioning within a unified and organized cosmic moral program. In other words, both benevolent and malevolent functions served the same ends." Discussing 1 Kgs 22:19–23, Reynolds opines that "There is no suggestion that the demi-god is inherently malevolent, only that he can perform necessary malevolent roles in the service of YHWH." See Reynolds 2018: 27-28.

[94] For the text-critical discussion of the passages, see Goldstein 2013: 393.

[95] Goldstein 2013: 393.

[96] Parpola, Reade, Watanabe 1988: 31. Cf. also Goldstein 2013: 401 note 25.

Goldstein adds that "the minor change from the standard Deuteronomistic phraseology in v. 11 is not without significance, demanding an alternative understanding of the sentence. The phrase ויעשו דברים רעים signifying the opposite of making a covenant—דברים טובים—appears to refer to the Israelites' violation of their covenant with God."[97]

Goldstein uses this analysis of verse 11 to suggest that the most correct reading of the aforementioned expression דברים אשר לא כן in 2 Kgs 17:9 should be "treason," indicating the "breaking of the covenant."[98] As he notes, this "can be adduced from the fact that the clause דברים אשר לא כן על ה' אלהיהם closely corresponds to the Deuteronomistic phrase כי דבר סרה על ה' אלהיכם."[99] From this assumption, Goldstein, following a hypothesis by Weinfeld, suggests that the latter Deuteronomic expression "also appears to be an Akkadian *calque*, the rare Hebrew term סרה most likely being a loanword from the Akkadian *surrātu* ("lies, treason") and the phrase דבר סרה carries the same sense as does *dabab surrāte* ("to speak lies") in the Assyrian treaties, indicating the breaking of agreements/covenants."[100]

As the author notes, the terms *surrātu*, often linked to the phrase *lā kināt*u, together constitute a virtual hendiadys to indicate rebellious and disloyal intentions. The EST in this sense provides a more direct example of how these meanings are articulated in covenantal literature:

> Should we hear of instigation to armed rebellion, agitation of malicious whispers, evil, unseemly things (*amāt limmuti lā ṭābtu lā banītu*), or treacherous, disloyal talk (*dabāb surrāte lā kināte*) against Assurbanipal, the great crown prince designate...[101]

In addition, in an inscription from Harran, the Babylonian king Nabonidus says:

> The sons of Babylon, Borsippa…against his great divinity offended…they did wickedly. They knew not the wrath of the king of the gods/Nannar (= Sin), they forgot their duty (*parṣīšunu imšū'ima*), and they talk treason and lies (*idabbubū surrātu u lā kināt*u). Like a dog they devoured one another; fever and famine in the midst of them they caused to be. It diminished the people of the land...[102]

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[97] Goldstein 2013: 400-401.
[98] Goldstein 2013: 397.
[99] Goldstein 2013: 397.
[100] Goldstein 2013: 397-98. For the correspondence between Hebrew סרה and Akkadian *surrātu*, see Tawil 2010.
[101] Lines 499-503, in Parpola and Watanabe 1988.
[102] Gadd 1958: 57-59.

Goldstein concludes that the terms *surrātu* and *lā kināt*u clearly referred to what is regarded as criminal behavior and/or rebellion, "both דברים אשר לא כן and דבר סרה are best explained as Akkadian *calques* in biblical Hebrew."[103] In EST, the *abutu lā ṭābtu* indicates an insubordination to the established order; a going against morality and justice, the one established by the treaty. The *abutu lā ṭābtu* is a vile act committed by vile men and the Assyrian text rejects it in the strongest possible terms. In EST, the *adê* sustains itself provided that no *violation* ("sin") is committed among its signatories. In EST, Esarhaddon seems to be particularly concerned with the proliferation of the *abutu lā ṭābtu* among his subjects.[104] The text states repeatedly that any "surreptitious word" expressed behind Ashurbanipal's back can lead not only to the abjuration of the divinely sanctioned covenant, but also to revolt (*bārtu*) and, eventually, to social disintegration.[105] The *abutu lā ṭābtu* challenges the king's divine mandate and generates chaos. As such, the "evil word" is the gravest of the sins as it undermines the loyalty to the king, which is the founding principle of the oath. In the vow of allegiance to Ashurbanipal in EST §57: 500-502, the oath signatory must swear to report any subversive activity originating in "[...] [500]malicious whispers (*liḫšu*), [501]evil (*amat lemutti*), unseemly things (*lā ṭābtu lā banītu*), [502]or treacherous, disloyal talk (*dabāb surrāti u lā kēnāte*) against Assurbanipal [...]."[106] In this passage, the description of the subversive activity of the inciter to treason is characterized by the *terminus technicus* "*amat lemutti lā ṭābtu lā banītu*" (norm. of *a-mat* MÍ.ḪUL *la* DÙG.GA-tu *la ba-ni-tu*), which is found, for instance, in the Tell Taynat's copy of the treaty.[107]

Similarly, the Jeremiah author restricts the subversive activity of the false prophets through the use of the noun שקר, which qualifies their preaching as perjury (Jer 7:4 "deceptive words," דברי השקר and v. 8 "do not trust in lying words," אל-תבטחו לכם אל-דברי השקר). It is important to

[103] Goldstein 2013: 398.
[104] EST §5, 67; §6, 73; §9, 107; §10, 108; §16, 183; §31, 363.
[105] EST §16, 180-87: "You shall not, whether while on a guard duty [.....] or on a [day] of rest, while resid[ing] within the land or while entering a tax-collection point, set in your mind an unfavourable thought (*a-bu-tú la* DÙG.GA-*tú*) against Ashurbanipal, the great crown prince designate; you shall not revolt against him, nor make rebellion (*bar-tu*), nor do anything to him which is not good (*a-bu-tu la* DÙG.GA-*tú te-pa-šá-niš*-[*u-ni*])."
[106] Wiseman 1958: 65-67.
[107] Tablet vi 85 (501–502) ⌈*li-iḫ*⌉-[*šu ša*] *a-mat* HUL.⌈TIM⌉ / T vi 86 (502–503) ⌈*la* DÙG.GA⌉ ⌈*la*⌉ ⌈*ba*⌉-*ni-tú da-bab sur-ra*-⌈*a*⌉-*te*. See Lauinger 2012: 103-104.

emphasize that Jeremiah 1-25 itself, on several occasions, associates the שקר of the false prophets with the incitement to revolt (סרה). The text clearly connects this activity with a sort of destructive and harmful "propaganda" that disrupts the social cohesion by spreading lies. A case in point is Jer 28:15-16, where Jeremiah, on Yahweh's behalf, accuses Hananiah son of Azzur of preaching "lies" (שקר) that cause "rebellion" (סרה) among the people ("Listen, Hananiah! The Lord did not send you, and you have given this people lying assurances").[108] In the theological context of the book, סרה, which translates literally as rebellion, often indicates apostasy (דבר סרה, "to preach rebellion;" cf. Deut 13:5; Isa 1:5; 31:6; Jer 28:16; 29:32). As Goldstein suggests, if the Deuteronomy's phrase דבר סרה ("lies," "treason")—indicating the breaking of God's covenant—is, in fact, a *calque* of the Akkadian expression *dabab surrāte* ("to speak lies")—indicating the breaking of agreements/covenants—then the phrase דבר השקר, being circumscribed semantically to the breaking of God's covenant in Jeremiah, must be understood as a form of treachery that leads to apostasy. Disloyalty to the king may be regarded as an act of apostasy. In the context of Jeremiah, this can be understood as a forsaking of divine allegiance, particularly where it reflects the rejection of Yahwistic covenantal loyalty.

This connection between false prophecy and rebellion against the divine order naturally extends to the realm of divine punishment, where deities—acting as ultimate enforcers of oaths and covenants—play a central role in executing judgment. Kitz notes that in the ancient Near East "The deities always govern curses. They listen to the petition, they judge the circumstances, and they act if deemed appropriate."[109] This is also true in the Hebrew Bible. In Deut 28:22, it is Yahweh who initiates the affliction. In the social and political context of the ancient Near East, deities could also request assistance from the mortal realm to execute their punishments through a curse. Often the gods could enlist the assistance of animals, but sometimes they could also use human agents. As a Kitz explains, this is particularly evident in Neo-Assyrian legal documents, particularly in the *adê* agreements "For if they were ever to act

[108] Jer 28:15-16: [15]And the prophet Jeremiah said to the prophet Hananiah, "Listen, Hananiah! The Lord did not send you, and you have given this people lying (שָׁקֶר) assurances. [16]Assuredly, thus said the Lord: I am going to banish you from off the earth. This year you shall die, for you have urged disloyalty (סָרָה) to the Lord."
[109] Kitz 2014: 194.

against a disloyal vassal, they would only be doing so with the backing of the offended deities who managed the oath and its maledictions."[110]

10. The Role of Curses and Oaths in the Ancient Near East

Curses as Legal and Religious Instruments

In a recently published extensive monograph on the role of curses in the ancient Near East, Kitz underscores that "Curses petition the deities for rulings in a heavenly court. And frequently they are wrapped in legal terminology."[111] She adds that oaths "more frequently than not, envision the divine and earthly realms working in conjunction to execute the curse of a breached oath. In addition, oath violation carries not only religious repercussions but also legal ramifications."[112] In the ancient Near East, the notion of the oath cannot be separated from that of the curse because every oath petitions explicitly the deity to inflict harm on the oath taker.

Connections between Treaties and Incantation Texts

Recent studies focusing on the legalistic language of the Neo-Assyrian vassal treaties have noted lexical and thematic relationships between these documents and the Mesopotamian magical series. In his study on EST, Frankena highlighted the connections between the curses of Assyrian vassal treaties and the incantation rituals recorded in the Neo-Assyrian incantation series *Šurpu*.[113] Similarly, Ramos observed that "In treaties, the oral-ceremonial enactment serves to activate the curses that enforce the oath, while in incantations oral-ceremonial enactment serves to de-activate curses resulting from violated oaths." In this regard, she points out that "The incantation series *Maqlû* and *Šurpu*, in particular, demonstrate important commonalities with Iron Age treaty texts such as markers of oral performance, lengthy lists of curses and parallel ritual practices."[114] She further notes that thematic, terminological, and structural parallels between *Maqlû* and *Šurpu* and Deut 27-28 intimate that "propagation of

[110] Kitz 2014: 196.
[111] Kitz 2014: 4.
[112] Kitz 2014: 36-37.
[113] Frankena 1965: 138-139.
[114] Ramos 2015: 40.

curse formulae common to both incantations and treaties may have taken place by oral dissemination -- by the oral performance and aural reception of such texts by ritual practitioners and scribes."[115] This connection is drawn also by Westbrook who has recently suggested that while sorcery does not appear consistently in legal sources, the Mesopotamian legal systems suggest that there was a concern for its effects. Yet, as he explains, the laws of Ur-Namma, Hammurabi, the Middle Assyrian Laws and the Hittite Laws "all have one or more paragraphs dealing with diverse aspects of witchcraft." In many of these texts, witchcraft is considered a serious crime comparable to murder or adultery. In even more serious cases, when witchcraft was practiced by professional sorcerers, it became a matter of public concern "and could lead to repressive measures analogous to the treatment of polluting crimes like incest and bestiality."[116]

11. The Concept of the "Enemy" in Assyrian Ideology

The Role of Treaty Curses and Witchcraft Spells in Assyrian Society

Abusch's analysis of the links between Neo-Assyrian treaty curses and Assyrian anti-witchcraft spells, reinforces the assumption that these two literary traditions may have much in common.[117] In EST §12, 130-46, we read that all those who swore the *adê*-oath, but then conspired against Ashurbanipal to remove him from office or kill him (§12, 130),[118] would be put to death (§12, 138-46). This passage conceptualizes the betrayal and violation of the *adê*-oath as a "sin" that can only be washed away with the inciter's execution. Death as a device for the elimination of social and political enemies was not a solution adopted only in the vassal treaties but was also formulated in Neo-Assyrian anti-witchcraft incantation series such as *Maqlû*. In *Maqlû*'s incantations, the solution for the elimination of the witch, the social instigator par excellence, was either the removal from society or death.

The Trope of the "Public Enemy" in Assyrian Literature

[115] Ramos 2015: 44.
[116] Westbrook 2014: 290 and 300.
[117] Abusch 2002: 230-31 and 243-45.
[118] "If anyone should speak to you of rebellion (*sīhu*) and insurrection (*bārtu*) (with the purpose) of ki[lling], assassinating, and eliminating Assurbanipal" (EST §12, 130).

The literary and legal commonalities between the curses of the Neo-Assyrian treaties and the curses of the Neo-Assyrian magic series come as no surprise. The basic principle governing the social excommunication of those who commit criminal acts against the cohesion of Assyrian society or plot against individual citizens is the same. As we will see below in our discussion, the literary trope of the king's antagonist is part of a larger cultural setting rooted in the broader Mesopotamian conception of enmity (*nakrūtu*). Fales underlies that this conception is shared "among the collective authorship of annalistic texts."[119] All the king's enemies appearing in Akkadian texts are nothing more than individual manifestations of a larger and more unitary idea of enmity.[120] The fact that the political ideology of enmity (*nakrūtu*) appears in Assyrian texts that do not deal with political matters indicates that the ideology itself constituted the moral paradigm around which all the acts that contravened social and divine justice were judged. The rich repertoire of images and themes associated with the ideology of *nakrūtu* established the limits of the discussion about moral and immoral behavior.

Enmity as a Moral Paradigm in Assyrian Society

In Assyrian sources, the stereotypical image of the enemy gradually subsumes all the negative moral values of the Assyrian society. In Mesopotamian ideology, the concept of enmity (*nakrūtu*) depicts the enemy as the embodiment of evil, threatening the Assyrian kingship (*šarrūtu*), which on the other hand embodies the highest and most positive values of Assyrian society, values that emanate directly from the gods and are a manifestation of their divine order. The enemy is primarily characterized as one who breaks oaths, violates

[119] Fales 1982: 425-35; 425.

[120] As proactive performative acts, curse safeguarded individuals, communities, and kingdoms against enemies, whether tangible or metaphysical. Assyrian texts classify the antagonist under *nakrūtu*, meaning "enmity." This concept was articulated through an ideology of enmity, portraying enemies as submissive, disrespectful, or rebellious against the *šarru*, the king, who embodied supreme moral virtue. The king, in turn, represented *šarrūtu*, or "kingship," a lofty and virtuous ideal. As Fales notes, "enmity has a position in the system as a violation of the rule of common knowledge; thus, the individual cases of *nakrūtu* can only be the product of the decision and the choice to take the 'wrong path,' when a 'right path' is existent and visible to all. And, this being the case, only attitudes of hybris, lunacy, or downright wickedness may lead to this decision" (Fales 1982: 427). This ideology of enmity, formalized in Assyrian texts and treaties, was not unique to Assyria but prevalent across the ancient Near East from at least the mid-second millennium BCE. Ugaritic magical texts (e.g., KTU^3 1.82:20-30; see del Olmo Lete 2014: 127-28) and the "apostasy laws" in Deuteronomy 13:2-12 attest to its widespread adoption. I explore this theme further in the dissertation's conclusions.

agreements, and thus sins. In the nakrūtu framework, the enemy is one who does not fear the gods and does not uphold *šarrūtu* ("kingship"), thus failing to perform customary acts of submission.[121] As Fales shows, in Assyrian sources there are relevant keywords and verbal expressions that frame this literary Mesopotamian stereotype.[122] A case in point is exemplified by a letter preserved on two clay tablets addressed to the god Assur describing the Assyrian king Esarhaddon's campaign against the land Šubria in 673 BCE. In it, the ancient scribe recorded a vivid exchange of messages between the Assyrian king and the Šubrian king, Ik-Tešub.[123] This exchange occurs while the Assyrian army lays siege to Šubria, a mountainous region north of Assyria, and is getting ready to attack. The messages that Ik-Tešub sends to Esarhaddon are structured around three main themes that tellingly summarize the rigid stereotyped depiction of Assyrian *nakrūtu*. First, Ik-Tešub admits that both he and his own country have sinned; second, he declares himself a thief (*šarrāqākuma ina hīṭi aḥṭû*);[124] and, lastly, he puts blame for his sin on the shoulders of his court officials who he claims lied (*surrāti*) to him. As we read in the text:

> i20(I said) thus: 'The nobles, my advisors, *spoke unwholesome lies to me*. i21(Consequently) I committed a great sin against the god Aššur and (thus) *I did not listen to the word of the king*, my lord... (*emphasis mine*).[125]

Lanfranchi's reading of Ik-Tešub's justification of his sin sheds light on an aspect of Assyrian policies that deserve comment. He believes that, by shifting the blame for his sin on his nobles and advisors, the Šubrian king might have attempted to soften Esarhaddon's ire and eventual punishment. Unfortunately for him, Esarhaddon's response to Ik-Tešub's plea is harsh and inflexible. We learn from the letter that the foreign king's behavior was unacceptable because of the king's repeated violation of Assyrian royal etiquette. For instance, he had failed to comply with Esarhaddon's orders by not returning Assyrian fugitives and, most importantly, he had waged war against Assyria, which, from an Assyrian standpoint, was the most outrageous

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[121] Fales 1982: 428.
[122] Fales 1982: 428. Cf. also Lanfranchi 2003: 101.
[123] Lanfranchi 2003: 100.
[124] Tablet 2, K 2852 + K 9662, obv. col. i, 15.
[125] Leichty 2011: 82. Tablet 2 (K 2852 + K 9662), obv. col. i, 20-21: i 20 *um-ma ru-bé-e ma-li-ki-ia sur-ra-a-ti la šal-ma-a-ti id-bu-bu it-ti-ia/* i 21 *ḫi-iṭ-ṭu dan-nu a-na* ^{d}*aš-šur aḫ-ṭi-ma a-mat* LUGAL EN-*ia ul áš-me.*

of all offenses.[126] In fact, acts such as these had consequences and would be punished by the Assyrian king mercilessly. Additionally, the negative moral position of Ik-Tešub is further complicated by his cowardly behavior. Lanfranchi notes that "The king cannot deflect the consequences of his own faulty political and moral choices towards anyone other than himself. The king has the sole, final and total responsibility for his political behavior."[127]

Bound by a loyalty oath, the vassal king is personally responsible for his mistakes, also because his mistakes have a deleterious effect even for his subordinates. Assyrian policies prescribe an order of responsibilities that, coming down from the top of the hierarchy where the king is, affect all other political and social levels of the state. This chain of obligations is shared by all political subjects of the Assyrian state and if one of them sins, the others too will face a string of consequences. In the same letter to God, Esarhaddon's ire is directed not only at Ik-Tešub but also at all the Šubrians who exhibited a disloyal behavior and provoked the Assyrian king's wrath. In the text, Esarhaddon denounces the oath-breakers in stern terms:

> ii 1 [... *who did not] keep the oath of the god Aššur*, king of the gods, *who did not fear my lordship*, [...] ..., robbers, thieves, or those *who had sinned*, those who had shed blood, [... offi]cials, governors, overseers, leaders, (and) soldiers who fled to the land Šubria [...] thus I wrote to him, (saying): "Have a herald summon these people in your land and ii 5 [...] gather them and do not release a single man; [...] have them brought before the goddess Piriggal, the great lady, in the temple; [...] ... a message concerning the preservation of their lives [...] ... let them take the road to Assyria with my messenger" (*emphases mine*).[128]

Composed in the occasion of the ceremonies for the nomination of Ashurbanipal and Šamaš-šumukīn as heir-designate of Assyria and Babylon in 672 BCE, this letter lamps together in the general stereotype of the enemy various criminals (i.e., robbers, thieves, sinners, and murderers etc.) with members of the Šubrian elite (i.e., officials, governors, overseers, leaders, and soldiers).

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[126] Lanfranchi 2003: 101-102.

[127] Lanfranchi 2003: 102.

[128] Leichty 2011: 80. Tablet 1, K 7599, obv.?, col. ii, 1-8: ii 1 [... *la*] ⌜*na*⌝-*ṣir zik-ri* AN.ŠÁR LUGAL DINGIR.MEŠ *la pa-liḫ EN-ti-ia* ii 2 [...] *x ḫab-ba-tú šar-ra-qu lu šá ḫi-ṭu iḫ-ṭu-u da-mi it-bu-ku* ii 3 [... LÚ].⌜SAG?⌝ LÚ.NAM *ak-li šá-pi-ru re-du-u a-na KUR.šub-ri-a iḫ-li-qu* ii 4 [...] ⌜*an*⌝-*nu-u ki-i-am áš-pur-šu-ma* LÚ.MEŠ *an-nu-ti* LÚ.NÍMGIR *ina* KUR-*ka šul-si-ma* ii 5 [...]-⌜*ti*?⌝ *pu-uḫ-ḫi-ra-šú-nu-ti-ma eṭ-lu e-du la tu-maš-šar-ma* ii 6 [...] IGI ^{d}*pirig-gal* GAŠAN GAL-*ti* É.KUR *šu-uṣ-bit-su-nu-ti* ii 7 [...]-*ti ši-pir-tu šá bul-lu-ṭu ZI-tì-šú-nu* ii 8 [...] *x* BU *it-ti* LÚ.A KIN-*ia* URU.KASKAL KUR AN.ŠÁR.KI *li-iṣ-bat-<u?>-nim-*⌜*ma*⌝.

From the programmatic point of view of the Assyrian conquest, the enemy lands were those that would not submit to Assyria's divine mission to widen her borders and exercise authority over them.[129] In Assyrian terms, the breaking of a sacred oath and the display of an unsubmissive behavior are all severe signs of social dysfunction that threatened Assyrian *šarrūtu*. Any Assyrian reader would have recognized the "typical" keywords that framed the Assyrian notion of *nakrūtu*. As an unsubmissive (*lā pālihu*) oath-breaker (*lā nāṣiru*), the enemy was a sinner (*hīṭu*).[130]

In the same letter to the god Assur, Esarhaddon's vicarious divine power is expressed by his *našparat šarrūti*, "a message/directive of kingship or royal message," which, like a burning flame, is depicted as destroying Assyria's enemy (*ayyābu*):[131]

> i 1 He (*Ik-Tešub, the Šubrian king*) heard *my royal message, which burns my enemy like a flame*, and he doubled over at the hips; his heart stopped and *his knees trembled*. He tore off his royal garment and *clothed his body with sackcloth, the garment of a sinner*. *His appearance became miserable* and he became like a slave and counted himself among his servants. With entreaty, prayer, expressions of humility, kneeling against the wall of his city, he was bitterly crying 'woe,' beseeching my lordship with open hands, (and) saying 'Aḫulap!' again and again to the heroic Aššur, my lord, and *the praise of my heroism* (*emphases mine*).[132]

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[129] The Assyrian king had the divine mandate to conquer enemy lands and expand Assyrian dominance. Melville argues that the first duty of any Assyrian king "was to enact the gods' will on earth through conquest and just administration" (Melville 2016: 219). She also points out that "the king fulfilled the divine instructions obtained through divination by maintaining cults and temples, performing rituals, and by waging war. According to this system of thought, victory signaled the gods' approval, setbacks withdrawal of support. Thus, imbued with cosmic significance, war became – in the broadest sense – a ritualized activity, an 'ordalic procedure' through which the king and his army served the gods" (Melville 2016: 219). A royal inscription of the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser (III) illuminates this aspect. [add citation]**.** In the inscription we read as follows: 3 [...] *mu-diš eš-re-e-ti* 4 [*ša ana ... ru-up-pu*]-˹*uš*˺ *KUR aš-šur.KI sa-pan KUR KÚR.MEŠ-šú* 5 [*aš-šur EN-šú? ú-ma-ʾe-ru-šú ul-tu SAG MAN-ti-ia a-di x (x) /* (Tiglath-pileser III) ... "[...] the one who restores sanctuaries, [whom (5) (the god) Aššur, his lord, commissioned to ..., to wi]den (the borders of) Assyria, (and) to lay flat the land(s) of his enemies" (Tadmor and Yamada 2011: [page number]).

[130] Lanfranchi 2003: 101.

[131] It should be noted that Esarhaddon's use of the term *našpartu* is particularly significant in this context as it also appears in the locution *našparti ilāni u dIštar*, "messages of the gods and goddesses," in: ii 6 *šipir mahhê našparti ilāni u dIštar* ii 7 *kayyān usaddirūni ušarhiṣūni libbu;* "They [the gods] continually and regularly encouraged me with oracles through ecstatics, the message[s] of the gods and goddess[es];" Leichty 2011: 14, col. ii, 6 in a number of Esarhaddon's inscriptions that record the king's military campaigns and the construction of the armory at Nineveh. Esarhaddon's use of the word *našpartu* in reference to his royal messages emphasizes the king's intermediary role as steward of the gods.

[132] Leichty 2011: 81; Tablet 2 (K 2852 + K 9662), obv. col. I., 1-7: i 1 *šu-ú na-áš-par-ti* LUGAL-*ti-ia šá ki-ma nab-li i-qam-mu-u a-a-bi iš-me-ma* i 2 *qa-bal-šú im-qut-su-ma lìb-ba-šú ṣa-bit-ma i-tar-ru-ra iš-da-a-šú* i 3 *lu-bul-ti* MAN-*ti-šú iš-ḫu-uṭ-ma ba-šá-mu ṣu-bat* EN *ar-ni e-di-qa zu-mur-šú* i 4 *zi-mu-šú ú-lam-mì-in-ma re-e-šiš e-me-ma it-ti* ARAD.MEŠ-*šú im-nu-u ra-man-uš* i 5 *ina te-me-qí ṣu-ul-le-e la-ban ap-pi ka-mì-is e-li* BÀD URU-*šú* i 6 u_8-*a a-a ṣar-piš i-*

Overwhelmed by the awesome power of the Assyrian king, the adversary is left trembling on his knees, clothed in sackcloth, "the garment of a sinner."[133] In this passage, the evil actions of the unruly vassal are emphasized by the literary description of his contrition. He looks "miserable" (*zīmušu ulamminma*), he acts subserviently (*rēšiš ēmema*), and praises Esarhaddon's heroism (*tanittu qarrādūtiya*). In other words, the Assyrian foe succumbs to the heavenly order of Esarhaddon's *našparat šarrūti*. Esarhaddon's *šarrūtu* ("kingship") embodies the ultimate expression of the will of the gods.

The difference between the positive value of *šarrūtu* as opposed to the negative nature of *nakrūtu* is illustrated by another inscription found at Nineveh. This text records the building of the city's armory and numerous military campaigns of King Esarhaddon. Inscribed on seven clay hexagonal prisms, copies of this text were written in 673 and in 672 BCE. The inscription presents Esarhaddon's pillaging of Chaldea as a morally justified action. As the inscription claims, Šamaš-ibni, the ruler of Bīt-Dakkūri, is both an outlaw (*hābilum*), who did not respect (*lā pālihu*) "the oath of the lord of lords" (*zikrī bēl bēlī*), and a scoundrel (*isḫappu*), who was responsible for taking away "the fields of the citizens of Babylon and Borsippa."

> iii 62 I plundered the land Bīt-Dakkūri, which is in Chaldea, *an enemy of Babylon*. I captured Šamaš-ibni, its king, a rogue (and) *outlaw*, *who did not respect the oath of the lord of lords* (and) who took away fields of the citizens of Babylon iii 65 and Borsippa by force and turned (them) over to himself. Because I know the fear of the gods Bēl and Nabû, *I returned those fields and entrusted (them) to the citizens of Babylon and Borsippa*. I placed Nabû-šallim, the son of Balāssu, on his throne and he (now) pulls my yoke (*emphases mine*).[134]

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bak-ki-ma pe-ta-a up-na-a-šú ú-ṣal-la-a be-lu-ti i 7 *qur-di* ^{d}*aš-šur* EN-*ía u ta-nit-ti qar-ra-du-ti-ía iq-ṭa-nab-ba-a a-ḫu-lap*.

[133] See Nowicki 2015: 223 connects the king's gesture to a supplicant ceremony. Nowicki notes that "he (Ik-Tešub) had also torn off his garment, which may be understood as being part of the mourning ceremony. This kind of action clearly has funeral connotations, and this impression is strengthened by the wretched appearance of the king, as well as by the location of the event."

[134] Leichty 2011: 17; The master text is ex. 1, *BM* 121005 col. iii, 62-70, with occasional minor restorations from the other exemplars: iii 62 *áš-lul* KUR.É-^{m}*dak-ku-ri šá qé-reb KUR.kal-di a-a-ab* KÁ.DINGIR.RA.KI iii 63 *ak-mu* ^{md}*šá-maš-ib-ni* LUGAL-*šu is-ḫap-pu ḫa-bi-lum* iii 64 *la pa-li-ḫu zik-ri* EN EN.EN *šá* A.ŠÀ.MEŠ DUMU.MEŠ KÁ.DINGIR.ME iii 65 *ù bár-sipa.*KI *ina pa-rik-te it-ba-lu-u-ma* iii 66 *ú-ter-ru ra-ma-nu-uš áš-šú ana-ku pu-luḫ-ti* ^{d}EN u ^{d}AG iii 67 *i-du-ú* A.ŠÀ.MEŠ *šá-ti-na ú-ter-ma* iii 68 *pa-an* DUMU.MEŠ KÁ.DINGIR.RA.KI *u bár-sipa.KI ú-šad-gíl* iii 69 ^{md}MUATI-*šal-lim* DUMU ^{m}*ba-la-si* iii 70 *ina* GIŠ.GU.ZA-*šú ú-še-šib-ma i-šá-ṭa ab-šá-a-ni*.

By the same token, the Assyrian king Esarhaddon is presented as the one who redresses Šamaš-ibni's injustice and even acts in solidarity with the people of Babylon and Borsippa, returning to them the fields that their evil regent had taken away from them. Esarhaddon's "fear" of the gods Bēl and Nabû (*anāku puluḫti...īdû*) draws the line between good and evil behavior. Fales notes that the "appearance" of the enemy in the Assyrian inscription is characterized by the "ready-made" linguistic garb of *nakrūtu*. In these texts, and especially in royal inscriptions, single or multiples "enemies" show up on an imaginary theatrical stage already morally bankrupted. The Assyrian literary character of the *nakru*, the enemy, is usually a foreigner who errs because he either does not do what he is supposed to do or does not know what he needs to do.[135] He does not "fear" the gods. He does not pay his religious duties and does not submit to the Assyrian *šarrūtu*, symbolized by the Assyrian king, who is chosen by the gods to enforce it in the world.[136]

12. Conclusion

The Babylonian *Maqlû* ritual and Neo-Assyrian loyalty oaths illustrate a shared literary paradigm that portrays the "public enemy" as a force capable of destabilizing both societal and cosmic order. Abusch's research on *Maqlû* demonstrates that witches, once merely practitioners of magic, were increasingly seen as existential threats within Mesopotamian society, figures who embodied subversion and disorder. The purpose of this ritual was to permanently neutralize their influence, underscoring that these individuals posed a danger not only in life but also in death.

In a similar vein, Jeremiah condemns false prophets as threats to Israel's social stability, employing the same archetype of the public enemy. The narrative positions the community of Judah at a crucial juncture in its history, with the prophet's ministry profoundly influenced by the volatile political landscape of the era. The Jeremiah tradition forcefully condemns the corruption and disloyalty of Judah's leaders while urging the people to reject evil in order to

[135] 32 *ul i-di šér-ti* DINGIR *ul i-di en-nit* ^{d}EŠ$_4$ DAR / (32) "he does not know what is a crime against god, he does not know what is a sin against the goddess" (Reiner 1958: 13; Tablet II l. 32).
[136] Fales 1982: 427.

avert divine retribution. From the outset, the tension between divine justice, as seen in Jeremiah 2, and the anxieties of Judah's citizens (cf. Jer 9:21 and 30:5) is striking. Throughout the text, the author highlights Jeremiah's internal struggles through imagery drawn from anti-witchcraft traditions, adding thematic depth to the narrative. This portrayal of a public enemy, framed within anti-witchcraft rhetoric, fosters a confrontational dynamic between Judah's political factions and the false prophets, whose teachings adapted to the shifting political climate.

In the book of Jeremiah, the people of Judah are depicted as morally compromised, misled by charismatic leaders and deceptive prophets. While explicit references to magic are rare—Jer 27:9 being a notable exception—the narrative conveys a sense of the sinister world in which Jeremiah's adversaries operate. Among these opponents are key figures such as Shephatiah son of Mattan, Gedaliah son of Pashhur, Jucal son of Shelemiah, and Pashhur son of Malchiah (Jer 38:1-6). As members of the ruling elite, they vehemently oppose Jeremiah's prophetic calls for surrender to Babylon, which he views as essential to averting disaster. Crouch highlights that Jeremiah's effort to persuade Zedekiah to surrender to the Babylonians mirror the dynamic between the Israelites and Yahweh, as well as their relationship with Nebuchadnezzar. She stresses that "Judah's irreversible trek down the road to its demise was thus set in motion when Jehoiakim reneged on his oath of loyalty to *Nabû-kudurri-uṣur*, turning again toward Egypt after the stalemate between Egyptian and Babylonian forces on the border of Egypt in 601 BCE."[137] This rupture in loyalty and the subsequent downfall of Judah can be understood in the context of Israel's troubled relationship with the divine, as God calls on Jeremiah to urge Israel to repent and return to the Mosaic covenant. Yet, a troubling truth emerges: Israel has become trapped in a cycle of empty rituals, driven by superficial faith and a pitiful absence of genuine compassion. This behavior reflects the anti-witchcraft practices of ancient Mesopotamia, where turning away from the deity meant forsaking the very protection that could alleviate their troubles, thereby intensifying fears of divine punishment.

[137] Crouch, "The Historical Contexts," 33.

Both the *Maqlû* ceremony and Jeremiah's condemnations reflect a cultural strategy of amplifying fear towards subversive figures, positioning them as enemies of divine and social stability. Scholars highlight how Neo-Assyrian loyalty oaths and curses reinforced these ideas of loyalty and punishment in Assyrian and Israelite traditions. In the Assyrian context, oaths like the Esarhaddon Succession Treaty demanded absolute allegiance, with betrayal triggering a "conditional curse" leading to immediate retribution. This loyalty structure influenced Deuteronomy, where apostasy became tantamount to high treason against Yahweh, punishable by death. Parallels in legal language and ritual structure between these texts suggest that Israelite religious practices were shaped by Assyrian principles of divine allegiance and punishment. By invoking curses, these oaths underscored a moral framework where loyalty was enforced as essential to societal order, casting both witches and apostates as severe threats to divine and royal authority.

CHAPTER V

Themes of Divine Courtroom Drama in the Book of Jeremiah and *Maqlû*

Introduction

As we noted at the outset of this research in the methodological discussion, each study in this dissertation examines the magical rhetoric in the book of Jeremiah from various—and sometimes overlapping—angles. This integrative exegetical methodology, which incorporates cross-cultural literary comparison, form-critical and rhetorical-critical approaches, and intertextual analysis, allows us to explore selected pericopes in the book of Jeremiah from a diachronic and culturally contextualized perspective. This analysis draws on evidence from *Maqlû* and other Assyro-Babylonian anti-witchcraft texts to shed light on the cultural dynamics—the cultural milieu and rhetorical strategies—at play.

I would like to bring to the fore in this brief chapter introduction the thematic commonalities I have discerned between *Maqlû* and Jeremiah. Taken together, they form, I posit, the crux of Jeremiah's theological discourse and merit particular attention. I have worked through inner- and extra-biblical comparative exegesis to obtain a better understanding of the pericopes under consideration and, as the reader will see, before examining extra-biblical Mesopotamian sources, I conducted a systematic inner-biblical analysis of the passages. This methodological step was necessary to maintain balance and make sure that the thematic and rhetorical parallels identified within the Jeremiah corpus were not solely attributable to internal biblical intertextuality, as it is often the case. Doing so has allowed me to check for the potential presence of broader ancient Near Eastern literary and cultural influences on the prophetic text, shying away from anachronistic interpretations of the data, rather than limiting the scope to connections within the Hebrew Bible itself.

Also, I have sought to maintain a certain degree of hermeneutical objectivity, as far as possible prioritizing the text's meaning to avoid imposing my interpretive will on the sources in such a way as to let them "speak for themselves" through their contextual integrity. The ideological and rhetorical parallels highlighted should be viewed as inter- or even dis-

connected pieces of a larger puzzle—one that, in the case of Jeremiah, appears to suggest a discernible trajectory of thought and composition, albeit within the methodological and research limitations discussed in the Introduction and Chapter II.

This chapter's analysis highlights parallels that quite clearly evoke a courtroom drama, with divine judgment motifs and legal frameworks playing a central role in the book of Jeremiah and *Maqlû*. In *Maqlû*, the legal framework is explicit, apparent in the ritual's structured format and its use of specialized legal terminology. By contrast, Jeremiah's legal elements operate more subtly—and not so subtly (…ודברתי משפטי אותם על, "I will lay out my verdict against them" Jer 1:16), surfacing through the text's use of technical legal language and imagery.

As explored in Chapter I, in *Maqlû*, the divine court convenes as the gods adjudicate cases of witchcraft, judging witches for violations of societal and divine laws. Similarly, in Jeremiah, Yahweh assumes the dual role of judge and plaintiff, presiding over the trial of Judah's apostasy. Thematic parallels extend further: Jeremiah, as Yahweh's representative, functions as a summoner and vessel of divine judgment against Judah—roles reminiscent of the Mesopotamian exorcist, who mediates and enforces divine authority in anti-witchcraft rituals. What unites these two texts and sets the book of Jeremiah apart even within the broader biblical tradition, is the concept of "a breached social and religious contract" leading to the perpetrators' destruction. In Jeremiah, Judah's violation of the Mosaic covenant (Exodus 19–24 and its renewal in Deuteronomy) activates the curses of Deuteronomy 28, as discussed in Chapter III. In contrast, *Maqlû* links the transgression of the *māmītu* (a sacred oath) to the unleashing of punitive curses, consistent with Abusch's interpretation of *māmītu* as a latent curse, and central to Mesopotamian legal and ritual frameworks.

Both texts revolve around the figure of the social enemy, a theme previously explored in Chapter I and IV. In Jeremiah, the language of witchcraft is metaphorically deployed to condemn Israel's apostasy and false prophets, drawing on terminology reminiscent of Mesopotamian traditions. Meanwhile, *Maqlû* engages with literal accusations of witchcraft, seeking to eradicate it through ritual. Although distinct, witchcraft in ancient Mesopotamia was often conceptualized as a form of social and religious deviance, analogous to apostasy.

Both texts are framed by what I have defined in Chapter II as "magical rhetoric." In Jeremiah, incantation-like phrasing in the oracles of doom intentionally blurs the lines between prophecy and ritual. In *Maqlû*, however, these elements manifest more explicitly, with structured incantatory formulae directly invoking the gods to counteract malevolent magic. This parallel underscores how each text leverages ritualistic and legalistic language to address breaches of divine order.

Magical rhetoric in Jeremiah and *Maqlû* proves particularly effective in evoking vivid imagery of collective punishment and expulsion, portraying these acts as necessary purifications of the community or land. In the book of Jeremiah, Judah's exile is framed as divine retribution for covenantal betrayal—a fate mirrored in *Maqlû*, where witches are cursed and cast out, symbolizing the removal of existential threats to societal order. Central to both narratives is "the crime of deception:" in Jeremiah, false prophets and Judah's leaders are indicted for their breaches of trust and covenantal law, while in *Maqlû*, witches are accused of fabrications to alienate their victims from their protective gods and maliciously invoking curses against their community members.

Both texts explicitly highlight "the defilement of the land" that is caused by these transgressions, and both texts stress the moral and theological consequences of such actions. The eschatological undertones in each work amplify their themes of judgment and restoration: Jeremiah's denunciation of Judah's leaders and false prophets reverberates throughout Second Temple literature, while *Maqlû* envisions the battle against witchcraft as a cosmic struggle to restore harmonious divine order. From a comparative perspective, together, these texts present parallel frameworks of moral and communal renewal achieved through the eradication of deceit and impurity.

1. "But Go Wherever I Send You and Speak Whatever I Command You": Is Jer 1:7b an Allusion to *Maqlû* I 61?

The Multifunctional Nature of Jeremiah's Prophetic Mission

In the opening chapter of Jeremiah, the call narrative (Jer 1:4-10) presents a theophanic dialogue between Yahweh and his chosen messenger. This pericope depicts an intense auditory revelation in which the deity asserts his sovereign prerogative, declaring Jeremiah's prenatal

election to prophetic office.[1] The text thus establishes a divine-human encounter that serves as the foundation for Jeremiah's prophetic ministry and introduces key theological themes that permeate the subsequent narrative. From the moment of conception, God's chosen one is set apart, destined for a higher calling as a conduit of divine messages, a prophet whose voice shall resonate across the nations (Jer 1:5).[2] In the context of prophetic call narratives within the Hebrew Bible, Jeremiah's experience aligns with a recognized pattern of hesitation and self-doubt. The text presents Jeremiah as confronted with a numinous encounter that elicits a profound sense of inadequacy. His initial response to the divine summons is characterized by reluctance, specifically citing his youth as a potential impediment to fulfilling Yahweh's purposes (Jer 1:6).[3] This reaction echoes similar motifs found in other prophetic call narratives, suggesting a literary convention that emphasizes the prophet's humility and the overwhelming nature of the divine commission. Jeremiah finds himself confronted with his own professed inadequacy, only to be met with a resounding rejection from God, whose voice urges him to fully embrace the weighty burden that has been bestowed upon his young shoulders:

אל־תאמר נער אנכי כי על־כל־אשר אשלחך תלך ואת כל־אשר אצוך תדבר

[1] The auditory experience in this pericope contrasts with the vision reports in vv. 11-13, where the divine conversation shifts from being auditory to visual: "What do you see?"

[2] The ongoing debate surrounding the broadening of Jeremiah's prophetic call to the nations remains a topic of discussion even today. According to some critics, the text suggests that the terms "nations" refer to Judah and Israel. However, based on the timeline of the story, the Northern Kingdom of Israel ceased to exist as an independent state after the year 722 BCE. In contrast, some other scholars argue that the term "nations" should be interpreted as a universal invitation to prophesy. Jeremiah's prophetic activity is said to align well with a universalism that is fitting for the international context. In fact, Jeremiah's message is directed to a broader audience, including Assyria, Babylon, Judah, and Egypt. The contrast between Jeremiah's ego and Yahweh's demand in verse 6, as suggested by Lewin, implies that "Jeremiah is more than a passive vehicle for a one-way transmittal from heaven to earth; his own questioning, challenging ego is part of his qualification for the mediatorial office." Lewin 1985: 107.

[3] Jeremiah 1:5-6 refers to an important passage in the book of Exodus, where Moses, feeling unsure of himself, humbly declines God's offer to speak on His behalf due to his speech impediment ("But Moses said to the Lord, 'Please, O Lord, *I have never been a man of words* [לא איש דברים אנכי], either in times past or now that You have spoken to Your servant; I am slow of speech and slow of tongue,'" Exod 4:10). At first, God is unwilling to accept Moses's refusal (Exod 4:11), but soon thereafter he allows Aaron the Levite to speak in Moses's stead (Exod 4:14). In the text, Moses would continue to serve as a mediator and, even if he would not speak directly to the Egyptians or Israelites, he would still carry out his mission by "to putting God's words in Aaron's mouth," there is to let Aaron know God's will ("You shall speak to him *and put the words in his mouth* [ושמת את־הדברים בפיו]—I will be with you and with him as you speak, and tell both of you what to do," Exod 4:15).

> Do not say, "I am still a boy," / But go wherever I send you /And speak whatever I command you.[4] (Jer 1:7)

This chapter examines the prophetic figure of Jeremiah, offering a critical assessment of the biographical elements presented in the biblical narrative and explores the interplay between the prophet's personal experiences and his divine calling.[5] One can discern multiple roles ascribed to Jeremiah within the narrative framework. The text presents him as occupying several significant positions: a priestly function, as explicitly stated in Jer 1:1; a prophetic office with a divine mandate that transcends national boundaries, as indicated in Jer 1:5; a position of authority with royal implications, as suggested by the language in Jer 1:5, 8, and 10; and a prophetic figure in the Mosaic tradition, as evidenced by the intertextual connections between Jeremiah 1:9 and Deuteronomy 18:18. He also emerges as a warrior prophet who fights for his community in the company of Yahweh,[6] while simultaneously embodying the essence of the new Jerusalem (Jer 1:18)—a domain characterized by righteousness, where the divine word reigns supreme.[7] Recognizing these aspects of Jeremiah's prophetic ministry deepens our understanding of his vocation. However, it is clear that while these features are important, they do not fully capture the complexity of his prophetic role. The diverse functions Jeremiah assumes as a prophet demand closer examination of the nature and implications of his divine

[4] Verse 7 presents a set of four cola forming a single whole (tetracolon). I call here the first two lines of poetry 7a, and the second two lines of poetry 7b. Furthermore, I divide 7b, in 7bα and 7bβ, respectively:
a) And the Lord said to me:
a) Do not say, "I am still a boy,"
bα) But go wherever I send you
bβ) And speak whatever I command you.

[5] The first chapter of the book is widely regarded by numerous scholars as the programmatic preface that sets the tone for the entirety of the book. See for instance, Fischer 2016: 24.

[6] See primarily Smit 1998: 110. In the book of Jeremiah, the portrayal of the prophet's ministry takes on a distinct militaristic tone, as evident in Jer 1:18. Here, Jeremiah is likened to a formidable fortress, resilient in the face of relentless enemy assaults. As Fischer observes, "In Jer 1:18, God makes him 'a fortified city, an iron column, and bronze walls,' describing thus the prophet's role in replacing, in a better way, the ruined temple and city of Jerusalem." See Fischer 2018: 63. The metaphorical "walls" of the Prophet, crafted in bronze, stand in stark juxtaposition to the tangible walls of Jerusalem, which is under siege (cf. Jer 39: 8; 52:14). In a revealing juxtaposition, Jeremiah emerges as an unwavering symbol of strength, akin to an unyielding pillar of iron, while the bronze pillars of the Temple, as depicted in the Jeremianic narrative, face an imminent fate of being seized as plunder by the Babylonians (Jer 52:17). In line with Fischer's perspective, Nasuti also posits that Jeremiah is "a city whom God is with, in the way that God used to be with Jerusalem and its temple." See Nasuti 1986: 259, 263. Along with others, Finsterbusch argues that in Jer 1:18, "God made Jeremiah the 'True' Jerusalem." See Finsterbusch 2016: 63.

[7] Fischer 2016: 24.

calling. Given this complex scenario, it is imperative to redirect focus towards a specific segment of Jeremiah's prophetic commission, one that has often been overlooked in academic discourse and appears to allude to magical elements. The significance of elucidating this facet of Jeremiah's vocation and divine appointment is paramount, particularly for researchers examining the evolution of demonological concepts during the Second Temple era. In this analysis, I propose that the directive given by Yahweh to Jeremiah in Jer 1:7b, "... against all whom I send, you shall go, and all I command you, you shall speak" implicitly alludes to the commission of the exorcist in the first tablet of *Maqlû*.[8] It forms a significant part of a larger body of magical prayers, rituals, incantations, and medical remedies aimed at countering witchcraft.[9] The incantation-priest *āšipu* held the primary role in performing the ritual. He performed purification rituals in both people's homes and, more importantly, in the temples. Every year, he faithfully carried out the *Maqlû* ritual, an important ceremony that even the king himself took part in. The client or bewitched patient of the exorcist embraced the role of a ritual performer.

In the first tablet, the exorcist-*āšipu* willingly undertakes the responsibility of conducting the anti-witchcraft ceremony, bestowed upon him by *Asalluḫi/Marduk*, the divine figure linked to the practice of exorcism. In the text, the exorcist boldly declares his words, "I have been sent, and I will go; I have been commissioned, and I will speak," In light of the intertextual resonances observed, this analysis proposes a potential allusion to Jer 1:7b, which may serve to

[8] *Maqlû*, *Šurpu*, and Udug-ḫul constituted the canonical anti-witchcraft and anti-demon series of the first millennium BCE. For a discussion, see Wasserman 2014: 261.

[9] The Akkadian magical series were employed to counteract witchcraft by neutralizing its harmful effects. By doing so, these texts would protect and heal the victim of witchcraft by returning the evil intended for them back to the witch. The *Maqlû* text was studied in a comprehensive way by Abusch, to whom we owe much of our knowledge on it. Abusch explains that "The *Maqlû* ceremony was performed, principally at night, during a festival of the dead at the end of the month of Abu, a time of year when ghosts return from the netherworld. At that time, spirits move back and forth between the netherworld and this world, the living and the dead interact, and there can be judgments in this world by both heavenly and netherworld deities who have power over the dead. The purpose of the *Maqlû* ceremony is to judge, punish, and expel all witches" (Abusch 2002: 235). The importance of *Maqlû* in the Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft tradition is given by the references to it in the so-called Exorcist's Manual, which is one of the most important treatises on ancient Near Eastern magic. Frahm considers the Exorcist's Manual "the metatext par excellence on the Assyro-Babylonian art of *āšipūtu*." See Frahm 2018: 9. For an in-depth analysis of the *Maqlû* text, see Abusch 2015: ix. The reconstructed text of *Maqlû* comprises eight tablets, containing about a hundred incantations, and a ritual tablet, detailing the ritual actions associated with the appropriate incantations. See Abusch 1974: 251–62 (= Abusch 2002: 99–111). For a critical edition of *Maqlû*, see Abusch 2015.

elucidate the nuanced dimensions of Jeremiah's prophetic vocation. The hypothesis advanced here suggests that the Jeremianic author might have deliberately evoked elements from the Mesopotamian *Maqlû* tradition, thereby establishing a conceptual parallel between Jeremiah's prophetic office and the function of the Mesopotamian exorcist. Within this interpretive framework, both figures are portrayed as divinely commissioned agents, entrusted with the task of indictment, adjudication, and expulsion of malevolent forces, which in the Mesopotamian context are symbolically represented by witches as embodiments of societal evil.[10]

Analysis of Jer 1:7b and Maqlû I 61

Biblical passages often feature verbs like "go," "send," "speak," and "command" to portray divine missions. These verbs, when used alone or in combination, serve as effective conduits for the divine instructions bestowed upon the chosen prophet by God.[11] In the story of Gideon's calling, as recounted in Judge 6:11-17, the biblical leader receives a divine commission (verse 14) that sets him apart for a grander mission. Nevertheless, he humbly declines this heavenly summons, acknowledging his own limited experience and wisdom, echoing the sentiment expressed by Jeremiah in Jer 1:6.[12] The biblical hero gets his marching orders through two

[10] The ancient Mesopotamians believed that misfortune and illness were caused by the malicious words of wicked individuals, whom they commonly associated with witches. Abusch offers a comprehensive portrayal of the traditional Mesopotamian perspective on witches: "The witch, *kaššāpu* (m.) *kaššāptu* (f.), performs destructive magic. According to the standard view, witches are illegitimate practitioners of magic. Normally, they are regarded as antisocial and as motivated by malice and evil intent. Although lists of witches include both male and female forms, the witch is usually depicted as a woman. She is normally presented as one who uses forms of destructive magic to harm other human beings and whose purpose is essentially malevolent." See Abusch 2002: 7. In ancient Mesopotamia, it was common to refer to witches and warlocks as a pair; it is the *kaššāptu*, the witch, who was frequently addressed alone, whereas her partner, the male *kaššāpu*, only existed at her side (Schwemer 2014). Schwemer notes that the slander and the malevolent glances of the witches were widely feared in the ancient Near East; witches eyed their victims, slandered them before gods and men and uttered evil spells. They were seen as human beings who bound their magic to demonic forces against their victims. The organs of these evil actions could be personified, and the evil eye in particular, but also the evil tongue or mouth, while originally bound to a human or demonic agent, were considered to be demonic forces in their own right.

[11] Habel 1965: 297-323.

[12] In this sense, the first chapter of the book of Jeremiah is rich in intertextual references, as evidenced by a further allusion to the figure of Moses in Jer 1:6 where the prophet, on account of his youth, claims to be unfit for the prophetic mission that Yahweh entrusts to him. Jeremiah's objection recalls Moses's (Exod 3:11, 4:10, 6:12, and 7:1-2) and also Solomon's (1 Kgs 3:7) reaction to Yahweh's commission. In the book of Jeremiah, the presence of the emphatic first-person independent pronoun "I" contrasts Jeremiah's ego with Yahweh's demand (Habel 1965: 319).

"technical" verbs, namely הלך and שלח. These verbs beautifully express the divine authority and set the stage for the act of commissioning, functioning as heavenly roars that announce the divine orders and set the stage for the unfolding narrative.[13] Isaiah's prophetic commission likewise encompasses a parallel array of words. The verbs הלך and שלח appear in two queries, where God seeks insight from the celestial assembly: "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" (Isa 6:8) to bring his divine word to Israel.[14]

In a similar vein, Jer 1:7b employs the verbs הלך and שלח in the first colon (7bα) to convey Jeremiah's divine calling (כי על־כל־אשר אשלחך תלך, "…for against all whom I send you, you shall go"). However, in this case, the colon is conjoined with a second element (7bβ), thereby carrying out the act of commissioning (ואת כל־אשר אצוך תדבר, "and all I command you, you shall speak").[15] If the pairing of the verbs הלך and שלח mark the typical call-*Gattung*, the pairing of the verbs דבר and צוה in colon 7bβ is likely an allusion to Deut 18:18 (ונתתי דברי בפיו ודבר אליהם את כל־אשר אצונו; "I will put My words in his mouth and he will speak to them all that I command him"). When we look deeper into the thematic elements at play, the idea that the Jeremiah compiler drew inspiration from the biblical tradition to inform his language is especially thought-provoking. I would like to note here that divine calls in the Bible frequently adhere to similar narrative patterns.

[13] Habel notes that "By using the same call *Gattung* the prophets in question establish a specific link with the past history of Israel. Their own calls, it would seem, are viewed from the historical perspective of the commission of the ancient mediators of Israel" (Habel 1965: 316).

[14] On the divine court, cf. also 1 Kgs 22:19–23; Job 1– 2:2.

[15] In considering the authenticity of Jer 7bβ as an integral component of the original oracle, Lundbom asserts the importance of acknowledging the potential expansion of the call narrative. However, this compels us to establish a specific timeframe for the ultimate iteration during the middle or post-exilic era. Jeremiah and Baruch could have witnessed growth during their lifetime (36,32)." See Lundbom 1991: 206. Among the supporters of this hypothesis, there are also those who consider the phrase "and everything I command you, you shall speak" in verse 7 a secondary, later addition to the text and would confine Jeremiah's call to prophecy to verses 4-8. However, not all agree with this assessment, suggesting that the phrase is indeed part of the original oracle. As for the Greek translation of Jer 1:7b. The LXX translates word by word as it appears in the Masoretic version. For Jacoby, this fact suggests that the ancient translator used a Masoretic Hebrew *Vorlage* rather than a non-Masoretic one, contrary to what happens elsewhere in the first chapter. Most interestingly, the ancient translator chose to render the Hebrew imperfects (אשלחך תלך/אצוך תדבר) not with the Greek future, but with the subjunctive aorist. In essence, he chose the *casus eventualis* over against the *indefinitus* in order to express a precondition, which implied that the command of God could either be realized or not realized. See Jacoby 2016: 48.

The connections in theme and vocabulary between Jer 1:7b and Deuteronomy 18:18 are worth reflecting on. Indeed, many scholars contend the text in Jeremiah alludes to Deuteronomy, suggesting an intimate relationship between the prophetic callings of Jeremiah and Moses, giving a little nod to each other.[16] This hypothesis seems solid and is strengthened by a trail of sophisticated indicators. Consider how a) the arrangement of words in the Jeremiah passage mirrors that of its presumed Deuteronomic source, b) the passage consistently employs the same terminology as Deuteronomy, and c) it harmonizes thematically with it.[17] Such thematic connection is provided by Jeremiah's multiple allusions to the book of Deuteronomy,[18] particularly to Deut 28.[19] Jeremiah's fascination with Deuteronomy comes as

[16] The allusion of Jer 1:7-9 to the law of the prophet in Deut 18 is almost unanimously considered a case of literary borrowing. See Davidson 1964: 415; Thiel 1973: 658; Holladay 198: 35-36; Holladay 1989: 61-62; Weinfeld 1972: 359; Fischer 2011: 263; Leuchter 2006: 265-66; Rom-Shiloni 2009: 258-59 and 2012: 217 and 219. The phrase "to speak all that I command you" also appears in Exod 7:2 and 31:6 and, as Mastnjak points out, "by itself would not be enough to mark an allusion" (Mastnjak 2016: 52). Yet, the word דבר as the object of the verb נתן appears only in Jer 7:9, 5:14, Deut 18:18, and 30:1. When this is coupled with the locution "in your mouth" (בפיך) in נתתי דברי בפיך (Jer 1:9), the phrase as a whole almost certainly signals a literary borrowing. As Mastnjak notes, "The further combination with 'to speak all which I command [you/him],' is utterly unique to Jer 1:7-9 and Deut 18:18. These lexical and clause-level parallels, along with the shared theme of prophetic commission, present strong evidence for this being a true allusion" (Mastnjak 2016: 53). Also, for Fischer this is a clear reception of the divine promise in Deut 18:18. See Fischer 2016: 22). From a theological perspective, these Jeremianic allusions to Deut 18:18 are meant to equate Jeremiah with Moses, intimating the continuity of the Mosaic prophecy. To put words in someone's mouth is to give that person a message to pass on, cf. Exod 4:15 and 2 Sam 14:19. See Allen 2008: 27.

[17] The following comparison may serve as an illustration:

Deut 18:18b	Jer 1:7b	Jer 1:9b
ונתתי דברי בפיו ודבר אליהם את כל אשר אצונו	כי על כל אשר אשלחך תלך ואת כל אשר אצוך תדבר	ויאמר יהוה אלי הנה נתתי דברי בפיך
I will put My words in his mouth (18bα) and he will speak to them all that I command him (18bβ)	But go wherever I send you (7bα) And speak whatever I command you (7bβ)	and the Lord said to me: Herewith I put My words into your mouth.

[18] Mastnjak 2016.

[19] Fourteen Jeremianic passages exhibit lexical and thematic parallels to Deut 28 (Jer 5:15-17; 7:33; 9:15; 15:34; 16:4; 16:13; 19:7-9; 24:9; 28:14; 29:5-7; 29:78; 32:47; 34:17-20; 42:16), see Mastnjak 2016: 92. For example, the author points out that the repeated Jeremianic allusions to Deut 28:25-26 do not imply that "these curses have lost their connection to their context in Deut 28 and become merely stereotyped language." On the contrary, they show that the ancient compiler of the Deutero-Jeremianic layer reused the Dtn curses fruitfully to describe the judgment that befell Judah in 587 (Mastnjak 2016: 115). Mastnjak further notes that "These passages attest the fact that DtrJ considered the judgment on Judah to be an enacting of the D-curses of Deut 28. It is instructive that in some of these texts, the cited curse comes in response to a specific violation of the D-law code" (Mastnjak 2016: 115). He notes that the choice of these Deuteronomic maledictions shows that the interest of the ancient Jeremianic compiler lay on the divine judgment against Judah. Only in this perspective we can understand the Jeremianic reuse of the curses of military defeat and corpse exposure. The military defeat of Judah naturally refers

no surprise. In a comprehensive study of the book of Deuteronomy, Mastnjak examines what he refers to as "credible allusions" to Deuteronomy in the book of Jeremiah and does so through the identification of key patterns in their usage. He believes, for example, that prophetic revelation is a central theme in all the identified allusions, with the curse passages of Deuteronomy 28 that emerge as the most frequently quoted sections in Jeremiah. Based on Mastnjak's analysis, I find the theory according to which the author of Jeremiah strategically uses these allusions to Deuteronomy's curses to explain the catastrophic fall of Judah in 587 BCE, linking the kingdom's collapse to violations of the Mosaic covenant, particularly compelling.[20]

The book of Jeremiah and Deuteronomy share a multitude of connections, both in terms of vocabulary and themes. The motif of violating the divine covenant resulting in God's punishment is found in both Jeremiah and Deuteronomy, but it is not exclusive to these two books. This theme, as we said, is also attested in *Maqlû*, which explores it extensively. In addition to this thematic similarity, *Maqlû* and Jeremiah share the motif of final divine judgment, which in contrast does not occupy a central role in the book of Deuteronomy. In *Maqlû*, the punishment for witches implies that their fate has been sealed after a trial, leaving no room for redemption. The unique prohibition on divine intervention in the Book of Jeremiah suggests that the people of Judah have reached a point of irreparable corruption, and so, also in this case, there is no room for redemption.

The aforementioned parallel verbal sequence—"go," "send," "speak," "command"—is also attested in the commission of the exorcist in the initial tablet of the *Maqlû* ritual. This ceremony not only shares lexical elements but also exhibits thematic resonance with the inaugural chapter of the book of Jeremiah. In *Maqlû* I 61, the exorcist-*āšipu* is depicted as accepting his divine vocation with resolute commitment, meticulously executing his designated function through the application of the prescribed incantation: *šaprāku allak uʾʾurāku*

to the Babylonian destruction of 582. Deuteronomy 28 is contained in a larger section comprising the second speech of Moses (4:44-29:1) See Brueggemann 2011: 274.

[20] Mastnjak 2016: 34.

adabbu[*b*], "I have been sent, I will go, I have been commanded, I will speak."[21] In comparing the two texts, we observe a consistent pattern of lexical correspondences between Akkadian and Hebrew. The Akkadian verb *šapāru* ("to send") finds its interdialectal equivalent in the Hebrew שלח. Similarly, *alāku* (CAD 1.1:300ff.: "to go") corresponds to הלך, *uʾʾuru* (commissioned) in צוה, and *dabābu* (CAD 3:4-5: "to speak") to דבר. Notably, the sequential order of these verbs remains consistent across both texts. Furthermore, the divine command in each text follows a parallel structural pattern—"to be sent and to go, to be commanded and to speak"—suggesting a shared formulaic approach to expressing divine directives in these related Semitic languages. The analysis reveals that Jeremiah's call narrative, unique in the biblical corpus, finds its immediate parallels in extra-biblical material. It transcends the conventional aspect of the prophet as God's intercessor and incorporate in it a performative, quasi-magical dimension more akin to that of a Mesopotamian exorcist. This expanded understanding of Jeremiah's prophetic role highlights its ritual and rhetorical dimensions, positioning the text within the wider ancient Near Eastern religious context.

Table 4

***Maqlû* I 61**	**Jeremiah 1:7b**	**Translation**	**Action**
šaprāku	אשלחך	I have been sent / I send you	Sending שלח (*šlḥ*)
allak	תלך	I will go / you shall go	Going הלב (*hlk*)
uʾʾurāku	אצוך	I have been commanded / I command you	Commanding צוה (*ṣwh*)
adabbu[b]	תדבר	I will speak / you shall speak	Speaking דבר (*dbr*)

There is another subtle connection between Jeremiah and *Maqlû* that can be observed in the way Jeremiah uses the adverb על־כל־:

ויאמר יהוה אלי אל־תאמר נער אנכי כי **על־כל־**אשר אשלחך תלך ואת כל־אשר אצוך תדבר׃

[21] Schwemer explains that the commission theme in these verses should be associated with the exorcist and not with the patient who is, on the contrary, the subject behind most of the poetical first-person incantations. See Schwemer 2017: 8.

> And the Lord said to me: Do not say, "I am still a boy," But go wherever I send you And speak whatever I command you.

This adverb is repeated five times in the first chapter, serving as an introduction to Jeremiah's opposition (7, 14, 15, 16, 18). In Jer 1:7b, after the conjunction כי, which introduces either a causal ("for") or adversative ("but") clause,[22] the phrase על־כל־אשר אשלחך appears surprising to many scholars.[23] Holladay wonders whether the preposition על should be given an adversative or specifying meaning ("against," or "concerning"),[24] or it should be considered the equivalent of the preposition אל, "to, toward." The verb שלח typically does not pair up with the preposition על, except for its occurrence in Jer 26:15, where it introduces a conflict. Just as the preposition על in 26:15 signals a confrontation between Jeremiah and his adversaries, it is not far-fetched to imagine that its use in Jer 1:7b also signals the opposition that Jeremiah is destined to take on.[25] On the basis of this, we need to note that in the text of *Maqlû*, the Akkadian formulation *ana lēt X ... išpuranni*, "against X ... [Asalluḫi/Marduk] has sent me," uses the preposition "ana" ("against," CAD 1.2:100. Lit. used idiomatically, "against [*lētu*] the cheek, or side [of a person]") to indicate the opposition against which the exorcist is called to battle during the performance of the anti-witchcraft ritual. As mentioned earlier, the exorcist's opposition in *Maqlû* are the witches, as indicated by the phrase *ana lēt kaššāpīya u kaššāptīya Asalluḫi bēl āšipūti išpuranni* (*Maqlû* I 62), "Asalluḫi, lord of exorcism, has sent me against my warlock and witch." I propose to interpret the grammatical peculiarity שלח ... על־כל־ in Jer 1:7b as a possible calque of the Akkadian phrase *ana lēt X ... išpuranni* in the first tablet of the *Maqlû*.

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[22] McKane 1986: 8.

[23] Holladay 1986: 35. LXX translates the phrase כל־אשר as "everyone who," *Vulgata* (Latin Vulgate), Syriac, Targum and Peshitta, on the other hand, translate "everything which" (Holladay 1986: 35). See also McKane 1986: 7-9.

[24] Williams and Beckman 2007: 112-113.

[25] Lewin argues that the recurring pattern of five-fold repetition serves to highlight a central theme of opposition. This theme encompasses various conflicts, such as the struggle between the Northern enemy and the local inhabitants, the clash between God's judgment and the people's apostasy, and the tension between Jeremiah and the leaders and people of Judea. See Lewin 1985: 110.

Final considerations

When we examine Jer 1:7b and *Maqlû* I 61, we can observe the multiple similarities that connect these two texts. Not only do the words "go," "send," "speak," and "command" demonstrate lexical similarity and parallel structure in both texts, but what really catches the eye is the sizzling thematic connection between the first chapter of the book of Jeremiah and the first tablet of *Maqlû*. In the book of Jeremiah, Yahweh takes on the roles of both plaintiff and judge, putting on the robes of a divine lawyer and presiding over a divine court drama where the case against Judah unravels. The text employs a legalistic vernacular as a means to convey Yahweh's indictment against the people of Judah and the leaders in Jerusalem. This becomes apparent in Jer 1:16, where Yahweh declares his intention to bring a case against Judah due to her apostasy ("And I will argue My case against them / For their wickedness: / They have forsaken Me").[26] In this scenario, Jeremiah takes on the role of a summoner, tasked with the responsibility of bringing Judah, the defendant, to the court of justice. Yet, his role transcends mere obligation, for he assumes the divine responsibility of being the chosen vessel through which Yahweh's authentic message is conveyed. As demonstrated later in the narrative of Jeremiah, this message is portrayed as a word of truth that stands in opposition to the specious messages propagated by the false prophets.[27] Jeremiah takes on the weighty

[26] Cf. also Jer 2:9.

[27] In the book of Jeremiah, the term "false word" refers to the deceitful messages spoken by the illegitimate prophets. These messages are characterized by falsehood (שקר) as they directly oppose the "divine word," which represents truth (אמת). The divine word is inherently aligned with אמת and encompasses its entirety. To grasp the meaning of God's word being "true," consider, for instance, the account of Elijah reviving the widow's deceased son in 1 Kgs 17. In the twenty-fourth verse, the widow articulates: "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord is truly in your mouth" (עתה זה ידעתי כי איש אלהים אתה ודבר־יהוה בפיך אמת). For obvious reasons, Jeremiah's word is אמת ("true") because it is authorized by God himself who places it in his mouth in Jer 1:9 ("Herewith I put My words into your mouth"). As we read in another biblical passage, falsehood (שקר) assumes an even more baneful shade of meaning. In the vision of the prophet Micaiah son of Imlah in 1 Kgs 22:19-23, we read that a certain spirit (הרוח) of the heavenly council volunteers to persuade king Ahab by serving as a רוח שׁקר "lying spirit" in the mouth of the king's prophets to convince him to embark on a foolish confrontation against the Syrians to eventually die in the battle of Ramoth-Gilead. The text states that it is Yahweh himself who puts a "lying spirit in the mouth of all these prophets" (נתן יהוה רוח שקר בפי כל נביאיך אלה). As the passages explains, this is because "the Lord has decreed disaster (רעה)...". Discussing pre-exilic demonologies, Bennie H. Reynolds suggests that in ancient Israelite and (pre-exilic) Judahite religion Yahweh commanded individual figures described as demi-gods. He argues that "while some figures were benevolent and some were malevolent, Israelites conceived of them as functioning within a unified and organized cosmic moral program. In other words, both benevolent and malevolent functions served the same ends." Discussing 1 Kgs 22:19–23, Reynolds opines that "There is no suggestion that the demi-god is inherently malevolent, only that he can perform necessary malevolent roles in the service of YHWH." See Reynolds 2018: 27-28.

responsibility of carrying out Yahweh's divine retribution upon the kingdom of Judah. The book of Jeremiah vividly portrays the prophet's active role in executing the wrath of God, as explicitly depicted in Jer 25:17-18. In the story, the prophet is portrayed as giving a poisoned drink to the people of Judah, as a punishment orchestrated by Yahweh: "[17]So I took the cup (ואקח את־הכוס) from the hand of the Lord (מיד יהוה) and gave drink (ואשקה) to all the nations to whom the Lord had sent me: [18]Jerusalem and the towns of Judah, and its kings and officials, to make them a desolate ruin, an object of hissing and a curse (ולקללה)—as is now the case"[28] (cf. also Jer 1:18).

The first tablet of *Maqlû* transports us to the celestial realm, where the divine court gathers. In the Jeremiah text, Yahweh takes on the dual role of a judge, similar to what happens in *Maqlû* (where the heavenly gods act as divine judges), while also presenting himself as a victim of witchcraft. In *Maqlû*, a greater emphasis is placed on the legal framework than in the book of Jeremiah. The plaintiff uses a language filled with legal jargon to clarify its legal position in regards to the accused party: the witches. In *Maqlû* I 17, the plaintiff or witchcraft victim articulates his thoughts with utmost clarity:

> [13] Stand by me, O great gods, and give heed to my suit, [14] Judge my case and grant me an (oracular) decision! [15] I have made a figurine of my warlock and witch, [16] Of my sorcerer and the woman who instigates sorcery against me, [17] I set (it) at your feet and am now pleading my case: [18] Because she has performed evil against me and has constantly conjured up baseless charges against me.[29]

Aiding the plaintiff in this ritual drama is the exorcist (Akk. *āšipu*), the religious professional, who possesses the divine word, i.e., an incantation derived from the exorcist's emulation of the actions of *Asalluḫi*/Marduk, the Mesopotamian god associated with exorcism. The exorcist thus becomes the earthly vessel of this divine being. He has the power to neutralize the negative effects of the witch's wicked accusations and magic. It is hardly surprising that there are shared elements in the roles of biblical prophets and Mesopotamian exorcists. Indeed, Kitz emphasizes this literary overlap when analyzing the Balaam narrative in Num 22–24.

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[28] Cf. Ps 75:9 (Eng. 8): "There is a cup in the Lord's hand (כוס ביד־יהוה) / with foaming wine fully mixed; / from this He pours; / all the wicked of the earth drink (כל רשעי ארץ), / draining it to the very dregs," and Isa 51:17: "Rouse, rouse yourself! / Arise, O Jerusalem, / You who from the Lord's hand (מיד יהוה) / Have drunk the cup of His wrath (שתית ... את־כוס חמתו), / You who have drained to the dregs / The bowl, the cup of reeling!" (cf. also, Isa 51:22)

[29] 13 *izizzānim-ma ilū rabûtu šimâ dabābī* 14 *dīnī dīnā alaktī limdā* 15 *ēpuš ṣalam kaššāpīya u kaššāptīya* 16 *ša ēpišīya u muštēpištīya* 17 *aškun ina šaplīkunu-ma adabbub dīnī* 18 *aššu īpuša lemnēti ištē᾽â lā banâti*. See Abusch 2015.

> The unique relationship between Enki/Ea and Asalluḫi/Marduk empowers the *āšipu*, who functions as their messenger. Although expressed in a distinctly paradoxical way, the Bible likewise presumes Balaam had a special affinity with Yahweh. Like Enki/Ea's divine messenger Asalluḫi/Marduk, Yahweh puts the 'words' of the appropriate ritual prayer into Balaam's mouth.[30]

In light of contemporary scholarship, the presence of incantatory language in the book of Jeremiah may be subject to critical scrutiny. However, it is imperative to consider that magical terminology and practices were not peripheral but rather integral to ancient Israelite culture. This integration is evidenced by the Qumran scrolls' explicit condemnation of witchcraft, which reflects the prevalence of such practices during the Second Temple period. Moreover, it is plausible to posit that these elements were embedded in Israelite society even prior to this era. Thus, the potential incorporation of magical language in prophetic literature should be evaluated within this broader cultural and historical context.[31] In *Magic in The Dead Sea Scrolls*, Tigchelaar and Martínez explain that "within the Qumran community, the blanket condemnation of magic in the Old Testament and in the Enochic tradition, although theoretically sustained and even intensified, has already evolved into a practice in which at least two types of magic, exorcism and divination, were not only tolerated but actively used."[32]

The presence of Jeremianic quotations in the Qumran scrolls merits careful consideration beyond mere coincidence. The deliberate appropriation of anti-false prophecy rhetoric from the book of Jeremiah by the Qumran authors becomes particularly salient when examining passages that delineate the ideological conflict between divinely appointed prophets and the purportedly deceptive teachings of false prophets, pejoratively designated as "the spawn of Belial" (בני־בליעל).[33] Using an inflammatory rhetoric that recalls the one found in Qumran's *War Scroll* (*Milḥamah* 1QM [1Q33]; 4QM$^{a–f}$[4Q491–496])[34] and *Thanksgiving Scroll* (*Hodayot* 1QH^{a,b}

[30] Kitz 2014: 399.
[31] Alexander 1997: 318-37; Alexander 1999; Martínez 2002: 13-33; Eshel 2003: 395-415; Lange 2009: 35-48; Eshel and Harlow 2010: 531-33; Fröhlich 2010: 101-29.
[32] Tigchelaar and Martínez 2007: 130.
[33] Jassen 2014: 171-198. J. A. Emerton argues that contrary to what my interpreters think, the expression בליעל is probably not a word for Sheol, but most likely a reference to "destructiveness" or the like. For an analysis of the word בליעל, see Emerton 2013: 112.
[34] Duhaime 1995.

and 4QH),[35] both the Masoretic Text (MT) and the Septuagint (LXX) versions of the book of Jeremiah appear to foreshadow the eschatological theme found in this Qumranic apocalyptic literature. This theme dips into the eternal battle between good and evil, between, the do-gooders and the evildoers. As "The voice of one crying in the wilderness" (Isa 40:3), Jeremiah's denunciation of false prophecy lays the groundwork for the apocalyptic rhetoric used during the Second Temple period by different sectarian groups vying for political and religious power. The prophet Jeremiah, his persona, stands as a powerful symbol of righteousness, in stark contrast to the wickedness exemplified by the people of Judah, including their leaders, priests, and prophets (cf. Jer 1:18). Jeremiah's adept demonization of false prophecy may have later even provided a language for the religious and political delegitimization of the Pharisaic prophetic claims by the compilers of the Dead Sea Scrolls.[36]

In the New Testament, *Acts* 13:6 presents a culmination of the conflation between the figures of the false prophet and the sorcerer, a convergence that had been developing over centuries. This pericope describes the apostles' encounter with a Jewish individual of questionable repute in Paphos, a significant urban center situated on the southwestern coast of Cyprus. The text portrays this individual as "a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet, named Bar-Jesus." It seems as if the conflation of the false prophet archetype with that of a practitioner of maleficent sorcery represents the culmination of a protracted evolutionary process. This synthesis potentially finds its origins in the quasi-magical, anti-prophetic discourse evident in the Jeremianic corpus.

2. Yahweh's Exorcism of Judah: An Assyrian Anti-Witchcraft Motif in Jer 7:13?

Introduction

In Jer 7:1-15, the prophet articulates a forceful rebuke directed at the inhabitants of Judah. Despite receiving divine communications from Yahweh, they exhibit persistent recalcitrance. Verse 13b conveys a notable expression of divine exasperation, wherein God declares, "though I spoke to you persistently, you would not listen; and though I called to you, you would not

[35] Stegemann and Schuller 2009.
[36] Jassen 2014: 174-177.

respond." In the corpus of biblical literature, the juxtaposition of these antithetical four verbs is notably scarce. While a limited number of instances of inner-biblical allusion can be identified (cf. Jer 7:27; 35:17; Isa 65:12 = 66:4; 65:24), the occurrence of this specific verbal arrangement in contrasting pairs is otherwise absent from the extant texts. This paucity of examples suggests that such a construction, while not entirely unprecedented, remains an infrequent phenomenon within the biblical canon. The verbal sequence "speak, not listen, call, not answer" in Jer 7:13b exhibits a notable clause-level parallel with the first tablet of *Maqlû*. This latter text presents the same verbal antithetical juxtaposition in contrasting pairs (speak/listen, call/answer) to depicts the text's ritual performer, the exorcist, petitioning the goddess *Bēlet-ṣēri*. The exorcist's aim is to persuade the deity to disregard the supplication of accused witches, who seek divine assistance in their impending legal proceedings concerning alleged violations of the *māmītu*-social covenant.

Jeremiah 7:13b appears to draw upon similar thematic elements, albeit recontextualized within the framework of Yahwistic theology. I argue that this passage presents a nuanced portrayal of Yahweh's benevolent nature, emphasizing divine initiative in attempting to restore the covenant relationship with Israel. This stands in contrast to the *Maqlû* text, where the exorcist implores the deity to withhold assistance from the petitioners. The Jeremianic text further elaborates on this theme, noting that despite Yahweh's repeated attempts at communication, the Israelites remain unresponsive, echoing earlier prophetic admonitions. This juxtaposition of divine outreach and human indifference serves to underscore the theological message of the passage.

Jer 7:13b and Maqlû I 56-57

Jeremiah 7 brings the spotlight on the theme of the final judgment against Judah. It particularly highlights what is commonly known as the "Temple Sermon" in Jer 7:1-15. In a momentous sermon that reverberates with divine authority, the prophet Jeremiah channels the voice of God to deliver a direct proclamation to the people of Judah. In this section, Jeremiah,

standing “at the gate of the House of the Lord” (v.2), proclaims Judah’s apostasy (verses 8-12),[37] and announces the imminent judgment of its people (vv. 13-15).[38]

Jeremiah delivers a poignant condemnation of Judah in 7:13, lamenting the people’s stubborn refusal to heed Yahweh’s message. In the first person, Yahweh skillfully employs four sets of parallel clauses: “and though I spoke to you persistently, you would not listen; and though I called to you, you would not respond” (ואדבר אליכם השכם ודבר ולא שמעתם ואקרא אתכם ולא עניתם). In a thought-provoking analysis, Stulman highlights the divine reproach directed towards the inhabitants of Judah, as they are chastised for their lackluster devotion, which fails

[37] In the narrative of Jeremiah, the people of Judah have violated the divine covenant (Jer 11:10) and have become guilty of apostasy (Cf. Jer 7:16-20 and 44:15-19, 25). According to Levinson’s analysis of Deuteronomy 13, apostasy primarily involves the act of worshiping deities other than Yahweh through sacrificial rituals (Deut 13:3, 7, 14). See See Ackerman 2001: 35. Yet, as he shows, “Later theological redactors extended this original concern to require exclusive loyalty to Yahweh as the primary religious requirement (das Hauptgebot; Exod 34:14; 22:19; 23:13) and oriented it specifically on the text of the Decalogue.” See Levinson 2002: 113 note 87. For a discussion of the biblical material, see Hillers 1964 and Thompson 1964.

[38] In Jer 14:14, the passage accuses the people of Judah of being deceived by false prophets who make empty promises. De Jong explains that “Peaceful messages are attractive, but also deceptive. Therefore, people should wait and see whether the peace predicted really happens. If not, it was just another example of wishful thinking. Thus, Jeremiah claims authority for his own message of doom and warns the people of Judah against the message of peace delivered by Hananiah.” Jong 2012: 7. The people of Judah and the Jerusalem elite are also accused of lying (e.g. Jer 5:27) and perverting the divine law (e.g., Jer 6:19 and 8:8-9, see Blenkinsopp 2003: 9-12), abandoning the poor and the oppressed (Jer 5:28, 7:5), perfunctorily obeying to their religious duties (Jer 7:4).

to align with the ethical principles espoused in the Torah.[39] In verse 13, Yahweh laments that his earlier warnings have fallen on deaf ears.[40] The passage reads as follows:

> ועתה יען עשותכם את־כל־המעשים האלה נאם־יהוה ואדבר אליכם השכם ודבר ולא שמעתם ואקרא אתכם ולא עניתם:

> And now, because you do all these things—declares the Lord—and though I spoke to you persistently, you would not listen; and though I called to you, you would not respond— (Jer 7:13)

Here, the phrase "declares the Lord" (נאם-יהוה) is exclusive to the Masoretic Text (MT).[41] The Septuagint (LXX) omits this phrase along with the additional note "early and constantly" (השכם ודבר).[42] Hence, the verbs שכם (meaning "to start or rise early," HALOT 4, s.v. "שכם" and דבר (meaning "to speak," HALOT 1, s.v. "דבר") ought to be considered as subsequent insertions rather than inherent components of the sequence.[43] The sequence *speak, not listen, call, not answer* consists of four clauses that are paired in parallel. Holladay emphasizes that, apart from three passages in Deutero-Isaiah (Isa 65:12 // 66:4=[1QIsab 66:4]; 65:24=[1QIsab 65:24]), there is no instance in biblical literature where these four verbs are used together in parallel pairs.[44]

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[39] Stulman 2005: 86-87. From a theological standpoint, Jeremiah 7 might be interpreted as a direct critique of Judah's unwavering confidence in the Jerusalem temple. The preceding sections of the poetry (Jer 2-6) depict the distressing reality of Judah's position. However, this distress is now alleviated by more explanatory narrative prose. This prose sheds light on the societal repercussions of Judah's misguided worship practices and the misinterpretation of religious precepts (Stulman 2005: 90). According to Stulman, the book of Jeremiah "spells out the reasons for the dismantling of Judah's social system and hierarchical power arrangements – especially those associated with the temple" (Stulman 2005: 90). The temple establishment has been accused of merely paying lip service to the cause of justice, while the worshippers are said to have transformed their piety into a hollow liturgical performance. In a significant development, it appears that Yahweh's decision to withdraw from the temple suggests that the deity's presence within its sacred walls is dependent on Israel's unwavering adherence to the covenant's provisions. The emphasis placed on the cunning arrogance of the lying prophets (Jer 7:3) occupies a key position in understanding the significance of the repetitive formulation in verse 4. Here, the characteristic use of the phrase "deceptive words" (דברי השקר) refers in all probability to the false prophets' officious claims about Jerusalem's invulnerability. Overholt notes that, as elsewhere in Jeremiah, the locution "do not trust in lying words" (אל־תבטחו לכם אל־דברי השקר) is "a specific reference to a false confidence in slogans of security" (Overholt 1970: 68). Overholt is here in line with the general understanding of this expression. The people's threefold repetition of the phrase "the temple of the Lord" comes across as a mawkish "slogan" of security (McKane 1986: 161). The divine rebuke "Don't put your trust in illusions" focuses on the confidence of the false prophets who insist on flaunting a divine knowledge they do not have. The Jeremianic verse cleverly employs a sarcastic tone to mock the illogical rhetoric of the false prophets, who baselessly claim that the presence of God is exclusively tied to the temple of Jerusalem (Allen 2008: 96).

[40] Allen 2008: 97.

[41] Tov 2014: 370-71. See also Allen 2008: 94.

[42] Holladay 1986: 236.

[43] Thus, Holladay, Jeremiah, 248 and McKane who considers the verbs השכם ודבר an editorial expansion of the core oracle of Jer 7:1-15 (Jeremiah, 1: 164-65).

[44] Holladay 1986: 248.

Holladay has observed that the presence of these four verbs in parallel pairs in Isaiah 65 and 66 may have been influenced by Jer 7:13.[45] Similarly, Jer 7:27 and 35:17 display the sequence "speak, not listen, call, not answer," but also in this case, the sequence seems to depend on Jer 7:13.[46] The following comparison highlights the lexical and syntactic similarities between the verses:

Table 5

Biblical passage	**Translation**	**Verse**	**Action**
Isa 65:12 // 66:4 = (1QIsa^{b} 66:4)		Isa 65:12	
קראתי	I called		Calling
ולא עניתם	but you did not answer		No response
דברתי	I spoke		Speaking
לא שמעתם	but you did not listen		No listening
Isa 65:24 = (1QIsa^{b} 65:24)		Isa 65:24	
והיה טרם־יקראו	Before they call		Calling
ואני אענה	And I will answer		Response
עוד הם מדברים	While they are still speaking		Speaking
ואני אשמע	I will respond		Listening/Response
Jeremiah 7:13b		Jer 7:13b	
ואדבר אליכם	And I spoke to you		Speaking
השכם ודבר	early and constantly		
ולא שמעתם	But you have not listened		No listening
ואקרא אתכם	and then I called to you		Calling

[45] Holladay 1986: 248.

[46] Jer 7:27a: verse missing in G, prob. secondary intrusion modeled on Jer 7:13, see Holladay 1986: 258. Jer 35:17c: omit with G, the gloss is from Jer 7:13, see Holladay 1989: 245.

Biblical passage	Translation	Verse	Action
ולא עניתם	but you have not answered		No response

On a lexical and syntactic level, the three biblical verses use the same verbal sequence, to call (קרא), to answer (ענה), to speak (דבר) and to listen (שמע).[47] The sequence in Isaiah presents a fascinating twist by reversing the order of the words, setting it apart from the passage in Jeremiah. Without getting too caught up in the complex analysis of these passages, it suffices to say that, as most interpreters suggest, the author of Deutero-Isaiah incorporated language from Jer 7:13b,[48] effectively referencing an earlier verse from Jeremiah.[49] While the verbal sequence in Jer 7:13b is not be found in earlier or contemporary texts, it seems that the *Maqlû* offers a similar connection in terms of both language and theme. In the fourth incantation of the first tablet of *Maqlû*, which is part of the exorcist-*āšipu*'s commission, we come across the following passage:

Table 6

***Maqlû* I 56-57**	**Translation**	***Maqlû* I 58-59**	**Translation**
lilsâkima	When they call to you,	*lulsīkima*	When I call to you,
lā tappalīšināti	do not answer them,	*apulīnni*	answer me,
liqbânikkimma	When they speak to you,	*luqbâkkimma*	When I speak to you,
lā tašemmîšināti	do not listen to them	*šimînni yâši*	listen to me

Just as Jer 7:13b and Isa 65:12 = 66:4 and 65:24 demonstrate, we can observe the presence of four parallel pairs of clauses in this context as well. The arrangement of verbs in the verse bears a resemblance to those found in biblical passages. We have: "to call upon" (*šasû*), "to answer" (*apālu*), "to speak" (*qabû*) and "to listen to" (*šemû*).[50] In the first tablet of *Maqlû*, the exorcist embarks on a journey as he is entrusted with a divine mission by the gods Anu and

[47] In Jer 7:13b, we have two perfects (שמע and ענה) and two imperfects (דבר [Piel] and [Qal] קרא)
[48] Sommer 1998*:* 32-33. See also Paul 2012: 258, 330.
[49] Holladay 1986: 248.
[50] We have two precatives and two prohibitive and pronominal suffixes. For their grammatical function, see §16.2 and §16.3 in Huehnergard 1997.

Antu,[51] who forge a sacred bond with the exorcist. Their purpose is to combat the magic of the witches and counteract their malevolent words.[52] The scenario is set in a courtroom, where a witch stands on trial as the defendant. The *Maqlû*-exorcist carries out the ritual actions on behalf of the patient, or witchcraft victim, who is the plaintiff. The patient then pronounces the death verdict on the witch (*Maqlû* I 73–109).[53] In *Maqlû* I 56-57, the exorcist pleads with the goddess *Bēlet-ṣēri*, who serves as the divine scribe in Queen *Ereškigal*'s court, to ignore the witches' complaint and resist their pleas for assistance in the upcoming legal dispute. The witches beseech the divine authority to affirm their assertion of innocence regarding the alleged breach of the social contract or *māmītu*. As the verses flow, the exorcist appeals to the goddess to heed his plea, while deliberately ignoring the witches' request for assistance.[54]

With this information in mind, let us briefly return to the textual analysis of Jer 7:13b. Levinson's relatively recent volume explores how the compilers of Deuteronomy incorporated language and themes from various earlier sources, including both Israelite and cuneiform texts. He explains that the process of reworking Deuteronomy involved the use of specific scribal techniques, which are evident throughout the text. These techniques can assist us in identifying instances of textual reformulation. One of the tools that help us in identifying editorial activity is known as inverted quotation, or "Seidel's Law." Seidel[55] claims that a citation in the Hebrew Bible often reverses the elements of its source text, forming a chiasm by citing AB as BA.[56]

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[51] *Maqlû* I 52: *Anu u Antu išpurūʾinni* ("Anu and Antu have sent me, [saying:]," see Abusch, *The Witchcraft Series Maqlû*).

[52] Schwemer 2010: 324.

[53] Abusch 2014: 21. Schwemer 2010: 324. Abusch explains that "Each of the divisions of *Maqlû* now moves between two opposing cosmic poles: the first night division is oriented toward the heavenly (night) court of Anu and the netherworld court of Ereškigal; the second night division, toward the heavenly court of Enlil and the chthonic Ekur; and the third or new daytime division, toward the court of Shamash and his retinue in the morning sky and the subterranean abyss, the Apsu, of Ea and Asalluḫi," see Abusch 2014: 11.

[54] In lines 56-57, the exorcist implores the goddess to disregard the witches' plea for the annulment of the *māmītu*-social agreement, which would enable them to access the underworld. Instead, he beseeches *Bēlet-ṣēri* to attend to his entreaty, which is to confine the witches, uphold the prohibition imposed upon them, and disregard their request for its revocation. See Abusch 2002: 261.

[55] Seidel 1955: 149-172, 229-240, 272-280, 335-355. Reprinted in *Hiqrei Miqra* (Jerusalem: Rav Kook Institute, 1978), 1-97 (Hebrew). The use of chiasm, which involves the inversion of synonymous elements, can serve as a powerful tool to signify the repetition of an idea in a reversed manner, thereby highlighting the presence of an inner-biblical quotation. See also Schultz 1999: 76.

[56] Levinson 2002: 18-19.

Levinson notes that this chiastic or inverted citation was a well-known ancient Near Eastern scribal technique for signaling textual reuse.[57] Based on this understanding of chiastic citation, I argue that the Hebrew formula in Jer 7:13b is derived from *Maqlû* I 56-57. The formula follows the syntactical structure of the Akkadian formula but in reverse order. In a fascinating linguistic parallel, it is noteworthy that Isa 65:12 closely aligns with the Akkadian formula found in *Maqlû*. This resemblance can be attributed to the fact that Isa 65:12 directly quotes from Jer 7:13b, unbeknownst to the author that Jer 7:13b had, in fact, borrowed its language from *Maqlû* I 56-57. In order to visually demonstrate the correlation, I have juxtaposed the three excerpts in the following chart:

Table 7

Source	**Text**	**Translation**	**Action**
Original source	***Maqlû* I 56-57**	**Original word order**	
	lilsâkima	When they call to you	**Call**
	lā tappalīšināti	do not answer them	**Not answer**
	liqbânikkimma	When they speak to you	**Speak**
	lā tašemmîšināti	do not listen to them	**Not listen**
Source alluding to *Maqlû* I 56-57	**Jeremiah 7:13b**	**Inverted citation – "Seidel's Law"**	
	ואדבר אליכם	And I spoke to you	**Speak**
	ולא שמעתם	But you have not listened	**Not listen**
	ואקרא אליכם	and then I called to you	**Call**
	ולא עניתם	but you have not answered	**Not answer**

[57] Levinson 2009: 31.

Source	Text	Translation	Action
Source alluding to Jeremiah 7:13b	**Isaiah 65:12 = 66:4**	**Restauration of the original order of the *Maqlû* text after inverted citation**	
	קראתי	I called,	**Call**
	ולא ענתם	but you did not answer	**Not answer**
	דברתי	I spoke,	**Speak**
	ולא שמעתם	but you did not listen	**Not listen**

In essence, if we regard Seidel's Law as a reliable method for discerning editorial activity and textual reuse, one could argue that Jer 7:13b is a reversal of *Maqlû* I 56-57. The ancient compiler of the book of Jeremiah may have used a chiasm, a rhetorical device employing inverted citation, to indicate literary dependence. By quoting Jer 7:13b and inverting its text to indicate dependence, the author of Isa 65:12 may have, likely accidentally, restored the original word order of the Akkadian original source text.

There is a clear connection between the lengthy prose section in Jer 7:1-8:3, where Yahweh accuses, judges, and punishes Judah, and the first tablet of *Maqlû*. Despite their distinct approaches in conveying this idea, the connection between the two texts becomes apparent when viewed through the lens of courtroom trials. While the *Maqlû* ceremony takes place in a court of justice and concludes with the witches being judged and expelled from the community of the living, Jeremiah does not explicitly depict this setting. Holtz noted the presence of legalistic language and themes in biblical prophetic literature, and highlighted how our improved knowledge of the Akkadian legal corpus can offer further insight into the complexities of the biblical prophetic office. The use of legal jargon and metaphorical language, which portrays the biblical prophet as God's representative calling upon the involved parties in a lawsuit, helps us understand the recurring portrayal of this role. According to Holtz, biblical

prophets effectively convey God's accusation to the defendant by quoting his words and summoning them to stand trial.[58]

Like Holtz, Jindo argues that it is the duty of these heavenly messengers to notify the defendant about the legal proceedings (Jer 14–15).[59] Jindo's argument about the thematic structure of Jer 1-24 resembling a royal lawsuit is worth considering. Within this legal dispute, God assumes the role of the divine judge, presiding over the celestial assembly to bring forth charges against Judah and Jerusalem for their failure to uphold their covenant obligations.[60] Jeremiah's original ideological features include the prohibition against prophetic intercession, which was imposed as a result of divine judgment. In the book, God clearly prohibits Jeremiah from intervening on behalf of his guilty people (cf. Jer 7:16; 11:14; 14:11; 15:1). Westbrook has recently explored the correlations between the linguistic jargon employed in biblical legal disputes and Mesopotamian traditional legal practices. These connections become clear when looking at Akkadian petitions, hymns, and ritual incantations. As evidenced by the legal frameworks of Mesopotamia and the biblical prohibitions, the presence of sorcery and its associated consequences emerges as a significant preoccupation.[61]

Conclusion

The potential for intertextual allusion between literary works becomes more evident when we observe consistent thematic and linguistic parallels that transcend mere coincidence, suggesting a deliberate authorial intent to reference an earlier text.[62] In the case of Jeremiah

[58] The biblical prophets have the important task of both delivering God's charges to those who are accused and calling all parties to participate in the trial. The prophets have a remarkable ability to skillfully present accusations by quoting the very words of God, who acts as the plaintiff. However, it is important to mention that these summoners may choose not to explicitly state that God-the-judge has ordered them to engage in the argumentative discourse. See Holtz 2020: 31.

[59] A duality emerges in biblical prophecy as the prophet assumes a multifaceted role. Serving as a conduit between the divine council and Israel—and at times extending their reach to other nations—these messengers are commissioned by the heavenly court to relay crucial information. At the same time, the prophet acts as an advocate for Israel, standing before the very divine authority that sometimes accuses them—God himself. This grants the prophet a unique position as an empowered mediator with God and an active participant in the celestial courtroom. See Jindo 2014: 87.

[60] Jindo 2010: 151.

[61] Westbrook 2014: 290 and 300.

[62] Sommer 1998: 35.

7:13b and *Maqlû* I 56-57, there are several persuasive reasons to consider the possibility of intentional allusion. We can observe, for example, contextual similarities. Firstly, both passages are situated within broader sections that share analogous settings and objectives. Jeremiah 7:13 is embedded within a prophetic oracle of impending judgment (verses 1-15). The latter part of verse 13 functions as a divine lament, expressing Yahweh's grief over Israel's refusal to heed his warnings and reconcile with him. We also find several thematic parallels. Verse 13b portrays Yahweh's exasperation at Israel's unresponsiveness despite his persistent attempts at communication.[63] The text employs a formulaic structure, stating that Yahweh "spoke" but Israel "did not listen," and that he "called" without receiving an "answer." This formulation, unique in the Bible, bears resemblance to the opening tablet of the *Maqlû* ritual. We have also identified linguistic echoes. In the *Maqlû* text, the exorcist implores the goddess *Bēlet-ṣēri* to disregard the pleas of witches seeking her aid and to dismiss their arguments in the ceremony's fictional trial. The linguistic parallels between these passages are noteworthy, suggesting a potential intertextual relationship. As I suggest, this allusion may signal a deliberate appropriation of Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft motifs to emphasize Yahweh's role as Israel's divine protector and judge. Further comparative analysis of these texts within their respective cultural and literary contexts is necessary to fully evaluate the strength of this proposed intertextual connection.

Another significant factor in identifying an allusion lies in the presence of extensive legal vernacular within both the book of Jeremiah and *Maqlû*. Like an exorcist battling the power of witchcraft with incantations, Jeremiah does not simply speak for the people in the presence of the divine. He takes on the role of a prosecutor, fighting against sorcery and seeking justice. Jeremiah dons the mantle of an accuser, casting blame upon the people of Israel in the name of Yahweh. In this courtroom drama, Yahweh takes on the captivating role of both the judge and the plaintiff.[64]

[63] Allen 2008: 97.

[64] In the Hebrew Bible, Yahweh subsumes many roles. Jonathan Ben-Dov argues that "In the Hebrew Bible one deity performs the tasks of the entire pantheon: fertility, storm, love, war, nature, wisdom, creation, and revenge." See Ben-Dov 2006: 451.

The above examination reveals a third correlation, namely, the presence of clause-level lexical associations between *Maqlû* I 56-57 and Jer 7:13b. In both *Maqlû* and Jeremiah, the punishment suffered by evildoers is an inevitable consequence of their betrayal of a social contract. In Jeremiah, the agreement takes the form of the Mosaic covenant, whereas in *Maqlû*, it manifests as the *māmītu*. The recurring theme of forbidding prophetic intercession in Jeremiah parallels the prohibition of interceding for the guilty in *Maqlû* I 56-57.[65] Just as the witches portrayed in *Maqlû* abandon any hope of receiving divine mercy, the people of Judah are compelled to let go of their hopes for reconciliation with Yahweh. The legalistic framework of the book of Jeremiah, through its numerous allusions to the curses of Deut 28,[66] suggests that Israel's asking for mercy is no longer an option as she will bear the brunt of her violation of the Mosaic covenant.[67] In *Maqlû*, the witches face allegations of transgressing the *māmītu*, a sacred pact that binds every member of the community under divine approval.[68] The act of transgressing against the *māmītu* results in the activation of the curses that are inherent within it. The legal proceedings in *Maqlû*, dealing with those accused of witchcraft, reach their climax as these individuals face judgment and are ultimately cast out from society. Similarly, the "Jeremianic trial" carried out against the people of Judah and the ruling elite of Jerusalem ultimately leads to their eventual expulsion from their ancestral home. The Jeremiah compiler employs magic language and imagery to portray Israel's apostasy as a form of witchcraft. The exorcism of Judah by Jeremiah can be interpreted as a ritualistic expulsion of people from their homeland.

[65] "When they (*the witches*) call to you (*the goddess Bēlet-ṣēri*), do not answer them," / "When they speak to you, do not listen to them […]" See discussion above.
[66] Fourteen passages in Jeremiah contain close lexical and thematic parallels to Deut 28 (Jer 5:15-17; 7:33; 9:15; 15:34; 16:4; 16:13; 19:7-9; 24:9; 28:14; 29:5-7; 29:78; 32:47; 34:17-20; 42:16), See Mastnjak 2016: 93 ff.
[67] Kitz explains that in ancient Near Eastern culture, it was believed that a deity who was angered would unleash a series of curses upon their sinful worshippers. Accordingly, true divine anger "never allows for only one malediction. A deep seated fury is hot and vociferous. It naturally produces many curses" (Kitz 2014: 227). For instance, she asserts that the wording in Deut 29:26 provides evidence supporting the presence of Yahweh's invoked curses in Deuteronomy 28 ("So the Lord was incensed at that land and brought upon it all the curses recorded in this book"), Kitz 2014: 227.
[68] Abusch 2002: 253.

3. "The Whispering of Many": On the Demonization of Jeremiah by His Opponents in Jer 20:10

Introduction

Traditional biblical exegesis understands the Hebrew word דבה in the phrase דבת רבים in Jer 20:10 as a reference to the jeering whispers of Jeremiah's opponents. This exegesis has focused primarily on intra-biblical comparative data, overlooking the contribution of the Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft tradition. This tradition links the conjectured Hebrew verb *dbb II*, which is the basis of the word דבה, to the Akkadian verb *dabābu*. The noun *dabābu* in turn lies behind, for example, the phrase *bēl dabābi*, a malevolent Mesopotamian figure appearing mainly in legal texts. *Bēl dabābi* represents the stereotype of the opponent of a person in court. But it also overlaps with the image of the warlock in Assyro-Babylonian anti-witchcraft ceremonies revolving around social failure and degradation. The term דבה and its interdialectal Akkadian equivalent *dabābu* functioned as technical terms in the ancient Near Eastern magical tradition. The Semitic root **dbb* undergirding both of these words connotes the witch's slanderous speech in anti-witchcraft rituals. Comparative analysis of the root **dbb* sheds light on the meaning of the phrase דבת רבים in Jer 20:10. We will first examine the meaning of the word דבה in Jer 20:10 and in Ps 31:14 (Eng. 13), where we find the closest biblical parallel to the phrase דבת רבים. We will then see the connotations of the root **dbb* in an Ugaritic incantation against "black magic" (KTU³ 1.169). With this framework in hand, we will further examine the function of *bēl dabābi* in two Mesopotamian incantations ("A leather pouch against witchcraft" and "Evil tongues"). As I show in this analysis, the phrase דבת רבים in Jer 20:10 carries darker undertones than is generally recognized. In using the term דבה, the Jeremianic author may have tapped indirectly into the Assyro-Babylonian tradition of *bēl dabābi* to portray Jeremiah's opponents as demoniacal persecutors bent on destroying the prophet's career and character through what Brueggemann would call "a whisper campaign."[69] While comparative investigations have shown revelatory cases of biblical prophetic allusions to the Mesopotamian magical literary tradition, analogous research on the book of Jeremiah lags. The present analysis intends to be a small

[69] Brueggemann 1998: 182.

contribution on this subject, offering a more nuanced understanding of some elements of Jeremiah's rhetorical communication.

In ancient Mesopotamia, people believed that sorcerers could cast disease-causing curses[70] and force their victims to rebel against societal norms, thereby defying their gods.[71] The bewitched were drawn into an endless cycle of sorrow. The loss of status and physical health were the feared consequences of severing relations with the deity. Assyrians and Babylonians interpreted this disruption as a rupture in the human-divine relationship.[72]

The idea that human hatred could cause a rift in a person's relationship with the divine also recurs in the ancient Israelite religious tradition (see Jer 14:14 and Deut 13:5-9). Prophetic texts include a rich repertoire of allusive materials owing to their creative use of genre-based stylistic features. For instance, according to conventional biblical exegesis, the word דבה in the phrase דבת רבים (Jer 20:10) alludes to the slander heaped on Jeremiah by some of his enemies. Such exegetical studies have focused on intra-biblical comparative evidence, overlooking the potential contribution of the Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft ritual tradition. This tradition connects the conjectured Hebrew verbal root *dbb* II, from which the noun דבה derives, to the Akkadian verb *dabābu*, which appears, for example, in the compound epithet *bēl dabābi*, an opponent as found in legal texts.[73] This figure depicts a person's rival in business, public affairs, and the courtroom. In a trial setting, the *bēl dabābi* is an adversary who unjustly accuses a defendant. However, the evil function of this figure was not limited to the legal sphere. It played an important role also in Assyro-Babylonian anti-witchcraft ceremonies that involve social failure and degradation.[74] The character of the *bēl dabābi* in these ceremonies matches that of the witch or warlock.

Within the same Semitic language family, the Hebrew *dbb* II and its Akkadian cognate *dabābu* functioned as technical terms with a specialized meaning and application. In

[70] Abusch and Schwemer 2011: 6-7.
[71] Fales 2016: 13).
[72] Fales 2016: 13.
[73] CAD 3:3-4. See also Day 1988: 40.
[74] Abusch and Schwemer 2011 :5.

anti-witchcraft rituals, the Semitic root *_dbb_, which underlies both forms, frequently characterizes the witch's slanderous speech. The negative role of Akkadian *bēl dabābi* demonstrates this aspect. To examine the term דבה in Jeremiah 20:10 and the nature of Jeremiah's opponents, we will use a gender-based analysis that will enable us to capture the technical nuances of the root *_dbb_, beginning with defining the phrase דבת רבים in Jer 20:10 and Ps 31:14 (Eng. 13). The connotations of the Semitic root *_dbb_ in an Ugaritic incantation against "black magic" (KTU³ 1.169[75]) will be probed next, followed by an analysis of the role of *bēl dabābi* in two Mesopotamian spells ("A leather pouch against witchcraft"[76] and "Evil tongues"[77]).

A Conspiracy against Jeremiah

The word דבה appears only once in the book of Jeremiah (Jer 20:10) in one of the so-called "confessions of Jeremiah."[78] These are considered to be distinct individual laments interspersed among Jeremiah's other oracles.[79] Stulman believes that the theological redefinition of Judah's election as God's chosen people underpins the literary unity of Jeremiah 18-20. In this narrative setting, this conviction puts the prophetic word to the test.[80] Central in this setting is the word "conspiracy" (מחשבה, also translated as "plan" or "plot"). In Jer 18:11, Yahweh reveals his plan against Judah and the city of Jerusalem, while in Jer 18:18 the people conspire against Jeremiah.[81] This conspiracy against the prophet resurfaces in Jeremiah's lament in Jer 20:10.

As we discussed in Chapter 1, the divine commissioning of Jeremiah as a prophet (Jer 1:4-19) positions his prophetic ministry within one of the most tumultuous periods in Judah's history, marking the decline of the Davidic dynasty. This era coincided with the collapse of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, which had exerted varying degrees of dominance over Judah for

[75] del Olmo Lete 2012: 109-116.
[76] Text 8.22 in Abusch and Schwemer 2016: 172-173.
[77] Text 8.23 in Abusch and Schwemer 2016: 174-183.
[78] The "confessions" of Jeremiah are a set of solo speeches clustered in the book's first major division (i.e., Jer 11:18-12:6; 15:10-21; 17:14-18; 18:18-23; and 20:7-18). Jeremiah's loyalty as God's messenger reveals itself in them, as does his disillusionment with a lost nation that rejects God's message and persecutes his messenger. See Diamond 1987), and Lundbom 2010.
[79] Carroll 2004: 41-56.
[80] Stulman 2005: 181.
[81] Stulman 2005: 197.

approximately two centuries, culminating in its fall between 612 and 609 BCE due to the ascendance of the Neo-Babylonian Empire and subsequence established in Judah. Judah's rulers engaged in repeated acts of rebellion against Babylonian hegemony, prompting a more devastating Babylonian intervention in 586 BCE, which saw the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple, alongside the mass deportation of the Judahite population to Babylon, an event foreshadowed in Jeremiah 25:11-12 and corroborated by extrabiblical sources such as the Babylonian Chronicle. Against this historical backdrop. In Jeremiah's oracles, God gives his people the option to choose between blessing and punishment. Ensuring blessing requires her people's commitment to Torah observance. Because of the waning of this commitment, God exiles Israel from the land He promised to Abraham in Gen 12:1–2. A sense of estrangement runs through Jeremiah's "confessions." In the throes of an existential crisis, Jeremiah faults God for the trials and tribulations he suffers while surrounded by animosity. The lengthy prophetic lament in Jer 20:7-18 consists of two poetic prayers to God, namely Jer 20:7-13 and 14-18. Both of them capture the crux of Jeremiah's grievances. In the first prayer (Jer 20:7-13), Jeremiah laments an onslaught on his prophetic authority. We find in this prayer the conventional elements of the lament genre: an invocation (Jer 20:7a), a lament (Jer 20:7b-10), and a laconic petition in which the prophet invokes divine vengeance against his adversaries (Jer 20:13).

This lament reflects the character of the Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft ritual genre. Because ritual is a religious behavior rather than a literary form, different literary genres may freely reuse technical and metaphorical language. When Jeremiah states that he has become the "constant laughingstock" of his opponents and that "Everyone jeers at [him]" (Jer 20:7b), the prophet laments a form of "social death." His perceived social isolation ("I heard the whispers of the crowd" [דבת רבים], Jer 20:10) has psychosomatic implications (cf. Jer 4:19). This depiction evokes the language of Akkadian anti-witchcraft rituals, in which the bewitched individual expresses his or her bodily pain and sense of estrangement.[82] In the ancient Near East, illness was considered a form of divine abandonment that resulted from a curse.[83] When

[82] Cf. *Maqlû* I 6-7; 9-11 in Abusch 2015.
[83] Cf. *Maqlû* I 4-11 in Abusch 2015

the deity abandons the bewitched individual, he or she loses social and financial status and well-being.[84] As a consequence of God's abandonment in this oppressive environment (cf. Jer 15:18), Jeremiah rejects his divine assignment (Jer 20:9a). But this downward spiral traps him (Jer 20:9b).

Anti-witchcraft ceremonies make extensive use of legal imagery and terminology, with the motif of the dispute before the gods taking center stage. For example, in *Maqlû*,[85] the bewitched plays the role of the complainant who petitions the gods to adjudicate his case to exact revenge:[86] "Stand by me, O great gods, and give heed to my suit / Judge my case and grant me an (oracular) decision!" […] "May she (*the witch*) die, but I live" (*Maqlû* I, 13-14, 19).[87] Jeremiah speaks this language when he solicits God to smite his oppressors and judge his case: "O LORD of Hosts, You who test the righteous, / Who examine the heart and the mind, / Let me see Your retribution upon them, / For I lay my case before You" (Jer 20:12).

"The Whispering of Many" in Jer 20:10

Jeremiah 20:10 uses the word דבה in the phrase דבת רבים, which may be translated as "whispering of many" to describe the slanderous words of the prophet's enemies.[88] The term דבה, which occurs only nine times in the Hebrew Bible,[89] can mean "whisper," "slander,"[90], or "bad news"[91] (Gen 37:2), depending on the context. It can also denote a story maliciously uttered to hurt or misinform the Israelites, as in the case of the ambivalent report of Moses's scouts, whom he had sent to reconnoiter the land of Canaan (Num 13:32).[92] The word דבה, as a

[84] Stol observes that, for the Babylonians, sickness represented more than a mere physical ailment; it was often attributed to the intervention of divine forces. See Stol 1999: 57-68.
[85] For the seminal German translation of *Maqlû*, see Meier 1937. For the most recent English translations, see Abusch 2015.
[86] Westbrook 2006: 45-52.
[87] See also *Maqlû* VI 150-151: "May the gods of the watch, they who tear out the heart (and) sq[uee]ze together the kidneys, / Kill the w[it]ch so that I may live." See Abusch 2015.
[88] Holladay 1986: 555, McKane 1986: 478, Allen 2008: 231.
[89] Gen 37:2; Num 13:32, 14:36, 14:37; Jer 20:10; Ezek 36:3; Ps 31:13; Prov 10:18, 25:10.
[90] LXX and Vulg. read the lexeme *dibbâ* in Jer 20:10 as slander (LXX *psogon*) or abuse (Vulg. *Contumelias*), respectively. McKane contends that דבת רבים refers to intrigues, while Duhm, Rudolph, Weiser, and others view *dibbâ* as defamation (McKane 1986: 478).
[91] ויבא ... את־דבתם רעה — "he (*Joseph*) brought an evil report about them." See also Fuller's study, which indicates that "malevolent report" rather than "bad news" is a more accurate rendering of the expression. See Fuller 2016: 490.
[92] Num 13:28-29, 31-33; see Boorer 2016: 389 and Olson 2012: 79.

canard, comes within the semantic spectrum of slander and is hence regarded as such. For the author of Prov 10:18, slander (דבה) is a type of folly and is considered a sin. Indeed, the author tells us only a few verses later that the "fool" (בסיל) who spreads enmity is likewise a "guilty criminal" (*רשע,* lit. "wrongdoer"). The term דבה cannot thus be regarded as ordinary chatter in Proverbs 10 but rather as slander, which is a crime in and of itself.[93] The closest inner-biblical parallel to דבת רבים in Jer 20:10 is in Ps 31:14. The medieval Jewish biblical commentator, Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitsḥaqi, 1040-1105), thought that דבת רבים in Psalm 31 refers to people's whispering.[94] He did not, however, equate it with anything malevolent. Today, however, many scholars feel that the phrase דבת רבים in Ps 31:14 refers to a type of defamation intended not only to damage the psalmist's reputation but also to effect his physical removal.[95] The psalmist suffers as a result of his adversaries' plotting, knowing that only God can deliver him from his plight.[96]

Jeremiah's Persecutors in Jer 20:10

Like the poet of Psalm 31, Jeremiah fears his oppressors. Jeremiah 20:10 identifies these faceless tormentors with the word אנוש,[97] a collective term akin to the term אדם,[98] which denotes "humankind" or "human beings" in the biblical text. The author refers to these "people" as Jeremiah's "friends" (אנוש שלומי, lit., "[every] person of my peace").[99] This optimistic connotation contrasts with the following phrase: "are waiting for me to stumble" (Jer 20:10b), which implies that Jeremiah's false friends shame him publicly. They eagerly anticipate the prophet's making a mistake and exposing himself to their attacks: "Perhaps he can be trapped, and we can have control over him, and we will get our revenge on him" (my translation). They despise Jeremiah and smear him. The phrase דבת רבים in verse 10 implies the

[93] The word דבה in parallel with "hatred" (שנאה) and "falsehood" (שקר) in Prov 10:18 would indicate that falsehood is a feature of דבה, and its sense suggests "slander." See *TDOT* 3:72-79.
[94] Gruber 2003: 293.
[95] Goldingay 2006: 435.
[96] Ross 2011: 694.
[97] HALOT 1, s.v. "אנוש."
[98] HALOT 1, s.v. "אדם"*,* cf. LXX *andres* "man/human."
[99] I.e., "every familiar friend of mine." Cf. איש שלומי "my close friend," Ps 41:9. Holladay 1986: 548.

presence of even more disturbing undertones. Jeremiah's message sparks a "whisper campaign" against the prophet, as Brueggemann puts it.

Psalm 31 and Jer 20:7-18: A Comparison

Like the poet of Psalm 31, Jeremiah fears his oppressors. The psalmist describes himself as physically sick, mentally ill, or both. His foes intend to destroy him by making false allegations – and may even want to kill him. His expressions illustrate potentially fatal illnesses that force him to pray to God for assistance. Furthermore, their shared language is indicative of the lament genre to which they both belong. Potgieter notices an allusive connection between Ps 31:14a and Jer 20:10; the author of Psalm 31 may have borrowed from Jeremiah or vice versa.[100] Gosse, on the other hand, more confidently claims that Jer 20:10 draws on Ps 31:14.[101] Although we cannot determine which of the two is the source text, their thematic similarity makes an analysis of their content worthwhile.[102] There are as many as thirteen terms in Psalm 31 that describe the speaker's enemies,[103] who are characterized as "lying lips" (שפתי שקר, Ps 31:19) or, simply, "tongues" (לשנות, Ps 31:21). The psalmist is in bad company and surrounded by evil people. (Ps 31:18). Just like Jeremiah[104] and the bewitched person in *Maqlû*,[105] the psalmist has become a dreadful sight to those who know him,[106] one to be feared and shunned (cf. Ps 36:1).

In a recent article, Zernecke emphasized the supernatural nature of the psalmist's enemies, identifying many thematic similarities between Psalm 31 and an Assyro-Babylonian incantation

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[100] Potgieter 2012: 124.
[101] Gosse 2008: 176.
[102] According to Ross and others, Psalm 31's expressions are similar to those in Jeremiah and Lamentations. Ross points out that several scholars, including Kraus and Kirkpatrick, have suggested that Psalm 31 might have been written by Jeremiah. He goes on to say that the opposite may also be true. Earlier passages and phrases, such as those found in Psalm 31, may have been used by the author of Jer 20:10. See Ross 2011: 684.
[103] Just to mention a few: "enemy" (אויב, Ps 31:9), "my enemies" (אויבי, Ps 31:16), "my harassers" (צררי, Ps 31:12), "my persecutors" (ומרדפי, Ps 31:16), as enemies of God, namely "sinners" (רשעים, Ps 31:18), or "those who rely on empty folly" (השמרים הבלי־שוא, Ps 31:7). These enemies belong to the immediate social circle of the speaker. They are "my neighbors" (ולשכני, Ps 31:12) and "those who know me" (למידעי, Ps 31:12). Other terms include more neutral terminology, e.g., "many [people]" (רבים, Ps 31:14) and "people" (בני אדם, Ps 31:20).
[104] Jer 20:7.
[105] *Maqlû* I 7 in Abusch 2015.
[106] "I am ... a horror to my friends," Ps 31:12.

prayer against harmful magic.[107] These similarities include the speaker's close relationship with the god and the animosity of several unnamed "others," identified as "witches" and "demons" in the Mesopotamian incantation prayer (*Gebetsbeschwörung*). While there is no direct parallel between the two documents, the speaker's portrayal of the antagonists is remarkably similar since both texts immerse the speaker's enemies in a demonic, suffocating atmosphere.

The incantation prayer language, which emphasizes its emotional component, is appropriate for usage in the hymn, prayer, and lament genres, all of which were subject to adaptation.[108] Psalm 31's depiction of the adversary is comparable to the metaphorical language of the anti-witchcraft incantation, demonstrating the genre's transferability to other genre categories. As evidenced by specialized writing, ritual experts would integrate the adaptable technical terminology of ancient Near Eastern rituals and divinatory literature into other flexible literary forms.

The Meaning of the Word דבה *in Extra-Biblical Sources*

The Hebrew word דבה[109] (in דבת רבים) is likely related to the Akkadian word *dibbu*,[110] both sharing the root *dbb*. The Akkadian *dibbu* comes from the verb *dabābu*, which in magical-judicial contexts can mean "to speak," "to plead in court," "to protest," or "to devise a plot against someone."[111] The expression *dabāb surrāti (lit. "to speak lies"),* in the succession treaty of the Assyrian king Esarhaddon (681-669 BCE), reflects the latter meaning, as it can allude to the smears and mutterings of the king's courtiers.[112] The Akkadian *dabābu* may also mean "to induce someone to speak falsehoods" [113] or "plan evil acts."[114] In Babylonian legal literature, the compound epithet *bēl dabābi* ("opponent [in court]") reflects this notion as it denotes someone who vilifies his opponent.[115] The figure of *bēl dabābi* is so ingrained that we find it

[107] Zernecke 2019: 109-123.
[108] Sparks 2005: 147 and 117.
[109] HALOT 1, s.v. "דבה."
[110] See also Tawil 2009: 71. *Dibbu* A (CAD 3:132-134) "word," "talk," "report," "gossip," "rumor," "legal case," from the verb *dabābu* (CAD 3:4-13).
[111] Cf. *Maqlû* I 17 in Abusch 2015.
[112] SAA 2 6 502 (ca. 672 BCE) in Parpola and Watanabe 1988.
[113] *Šurpu* II 14: *ṣa-lip-ta ú-šad-bi-bu* "he has induced somebody to tell falsehoods." See Reiner 1958.
[114] CAD 3:13-14.
[115] CAD 3:3-4, *dabābu* in *bēl dabābi*.

translated word for word into Aramaic as *bʿl dbbʾ* with the same meaning: "plaintiff," "enemy."[116] *Bēl dabābi* stands for the stereotypical adversary in court.[117] Because of its adversarial nature in court proceedings, *bēl dabābi* was attached to anything negative, eventually converging into the stereotype of an enemy, i.e., someone who seeks in every way to destroy his rival. As Abusch explains, *bēl dabābi* appears in Assyrian magical texts dealing with paranoia, addressing themes of societal failure and degradation.[118] In some of them, *bēl dabābi* plays an evil agent who torments his victim with magical means.[119]

It is worth noting that the Akkadian verb *dabābu* has a long history of association with witchcraft, not only in Mesopotamia but also throughout the Levant. Mesopotamian and Ugaritic incantations all fit the pattern of the incantatory genre that employs identifiable technical language. The adversary (Akk. *bēl dabābi*), the sorcerer (Akk. *kaššāpu*), and the "foul-mouthed ones" (Ug. *dbbm*), who are devilish characters overlapping with sorcerers (Ug. *kšpm*) in several Ugaritic texts, are a case in point.[120] Del Olmo Lete asserts that *dabābu* is a part of the technical language of magic and spells and, therefore, falls within the semantic range of speech.[121]

An Ugaritic Compendium Incantation Tablet against Black Word Sorcery (KTU³ 1.169)

This assertion is supported by an invocation from an Ugaritic incantation tablet against malevolent magic.[122] This incantation's subject is an individual accused of witchcraft. Its content demonstrates a genuine commitment to protecting the king's subjects – in this case, a young man facing social scorn. Many expressions employed in such Ugaritic incantations are

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[116] Kaufman 1974: 42-43.
[117] Equivalent designations include *bēl dīni* ("lord of judgment"), *bēl amāti* ("litigant"), and *bēl lemutti* ("adversary"). See Abusch and Schwemer 2011: 5
[118] Abusch and Schwemer 2011: 5.
[119] Abusch and Schwemer 2011: 5.
[120] The lexeme *dbbm* ("foul-mouthed ones") in Ugaritic spells oftentimes stands in apposition to *kšpm* ("malevolent practitioners of magic)." Cf. *kšpm dbbm* in KTU³ 1.169:9 and *dbbm kšpm/kšpm dbbm* in KTU³ 1.178:9, 13. See del Olmo Lete 2014: 173.
[121] del Olmo Lete 2014: 183. The Ugaritic term *dbb*, cognate of Akkadian *dabābu* (both verb and noun), relates to the function of Akkadian *bēl dabābi*, "opponent/counterpart." This relationship speaks to the linguistic root's "technical," magical nature (CAD 3:3: *EN dabābi dābib*, "who brings a suit against"). Cf. also del Olmo Lete, *DULAT*, 261.
[122] del Olmo Lete 2012: 109-116.

translations of standardized Akkadian formulas, suggesting that Ugarit scribes viewed much of the Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft genre's technical terminology as normative.[123]

KTU³ 1.169:9-10, 14-15
Then also, [9]the (other) foul-mouthed sorcerers (*kšpm.dbbm*)
may *Ḥorānu* cast out,
[10]the conjurers and the expert lads!
….
[14]As for any (other) man (*lådm*), yes, let the blandisher of the rod
to the ground pierce (him) / to Hell drive (him) away!;
[15]as for any (other) son of man (*lbn.ådm*):
by an incurable illness (let him be) overcome![124]

If we look at the word *dbbm* (*dbb* + the plural ending *-m*) in line 9, we find that it most likely identifies the malevolent agents of magic responsible for the young man's predicament. The term identifies (evil) tongue-wagging speakers, i.e., sorcerers (note that the word *dbbm* in line 9 appears next to the term *kšpm*,[125] i.e., the Ugaritic cognate of Akkadian *kaššāpāti* [from *kaššāpu "sorcerer*"]). The persons accompanying the sorcerers are unnamed individuals, whom the text identifies through the generic terms *ådm* or *bn ådm* ("man/human" or "son of man/human being," ll. 14-15). These are the people who besmirch one's reputation.[126] The ability of these "foul-mouthed sorcerers" (*kšpm dbbm*) to curse through speech emerges in other Ugaritic incantations as well.[127] They would attack their victims using their "mouths" and "lips" to empower the curses of the individuals who accompanied them.[128] It is worth recalling

[123] For example, the opening words of the incantation, *ydy dbbm dġzr* "(Formulae of) banishment of foul-mouthed (sorcerers) of youth," parallels the Akkadian syntagma *ṭarad bēl dabābi* "Driving away the court adversary." See del Olmo Lete 2014: 168.
[124] del Olmo Lete 2014: 167.
[125] Both Ugaritic and ancient Hebrew were written as consonantal scripts with no vowel signs. The only exception in the case of Ugaritic was in the existence of three forms of the letter 'that indicated its accompaniment with the vowel *a*, *i*, or *u*. However, the situation in written Hebrew changed. The consonantal text of the Hebrew Bible was preserved in writing for centuries with just minor adjustments. Preexisting oral reading traditions began to be written down in the last quarter of the first millennium CE, with signs developed to indicate both vowels and accentuation. The Tiberian system, developed by scribes known as Masoretes who lived around Lake Tiberias (the Sea of Galilee), became the authoritative system during the Middle Ages. See Khan 2021.
[126] del Olmo Lete 2014: 171. Lete observes that, as in Mesopotamia, the evildoer, whether a witch or a warlock, may spread falsehoods to anger the gods.
[127] KTU³ 1.169:1, 9; 1.178:9, 11.
[128] del Olmo Lete 2014: 105.

here what we discussed above about the "lying lips" (שפתי שקר, Ps 31:19) and "tongues" (לשנות, Ps 31:21) of the speaker's oppressors in Psalm 31.

The demonic aura surrounding "any (other) son of man" (*lbn.ảdm*, line 15) and the sorcerers in the Ugaritic incantation against malevolent magic reveal more about the character of the speaker's oppressors in Psalm 31. They, too, are described as "sons of man" (בני אדם, Ps 31:20, cf. also אנוש, Jer 20:10), and their evil is highlighted by the fact that the psalmist refers to them as his "enemies" (Ps 31:9) and "persecutors" (Ps 31:16). The thematic overlap between these two texts illustrates, in turn, the nature of Jeremiah's enemies (Jer 20:10), who, much like the psalmist's enemies, torment Jeremiah to get rid of him.

Evil Tongues in Assyro-Babylonian Anti-Witchcraft Literature

These considerations contribute to certain assumptions about the character of the *bēl dabābi*, which in Mesopotamian culture intersects with sorcery. In the title of the instructions for the preparation of a leather medicine pouch against witchcraft preserved on a small fragment of a Middle Assyrian tablet from Aššur, for example, *bēl dabābi* and witchcraft appear side by side: "[*In order to] un[do ... of the* adv]ersa[ry] (and) witchcraft, ([... *bēl*] *dabā*[*bi*] *k*[*i*]*špī pa*[*šāri*?])."[129]

Similar texts reveal that the organs of speech — the mouth and tongue — are the primary tools of *bēl dabābi* and, more broadly, of Mesopotamian witches for cursing their victims. These features are most visible in a set of anti-witchcraft rituals and treatments to counter *bēl dabābi*'s magic. The most notable manuscript of such texts is a Neo-Babylonian tablet discovered at Ur. Two other fragmentary texts are on a late Babylonian tablet from Babylon and a Neo-Assyrian tablet from Nimrud. We read in one of these texts that the speaker fears the slanderous speech of his adversary: "[*I have twist]ed* your arms behind you *so that [you are] not [able] to sla[nder me* ...] (*ana lā dabā*[*bi ša dibbīya*? ...])."[130] On a similar tablet, the speaker laments the persecution of "evil tongues": "Tongues are persecuting me"; and because of

[129] Text 8 22:1′ in Abusch and Schwemer 2016: 172
[130] Text 8 23:4′ in Abusch and Schwemer 2016: 178.

them, "God, king, magnate and nobleman are angry with me…."[131] In another inscription, the bewitched individual strives to "prevail" over his adversary, returning witchcraft to its source while appealing for the sympathy of "god, king, magnate, and nobleman (and before) courtier and att[en]dant..."[132]

This rhetoric evokes the language of Jeremiah 20's lament. Jeremiah's corrupt friends are "malignant tongues" (Jer 18:18). They accuse him and taunt him (דבת רבים, lit. "the slanderous word of the [evil] crowd"). They hope he will blunder. While Jer 20:10 does not name these individuals, we know their identities from other Jeremianic verses. These individuals are morally damaged and behave as if cursed. They are referred to in the text as liars. According to Jer 9:2, "They bend their tongues like bows." "[3]...For every brother takes advantage, / Every friend is base in his dealings. / [4]One man cheats the other, / They will not speak truth; They have trained their tongues to speak falsely; / They wear themselves out working iniquity" (Jer 9:3-4). As Allen points out, sins related to speech exemplify Judah's moral bankruptcy.[133] Jer 9:7 highlights this idea: "Their tongue is a sharpened arrow, / They use their mouths to deceive. / One speaks to his fellow in friendship, / But lays an ambush for him in his heart."

While the term דבה has typically been translated as "slander" in Jer 20:10 and other biblical passages,[134] our analysis demonstrates that it contains a broader connotation that emphasizes its evil nature. As evidenced by the *Thanksgiving Hymns* in the Qumran corpus,[135] this term's negative overtone also emerges in the Jewish literature of the Second Temple period. Here, the Teacher of Righteousness, the putative author of a subset of the *Thanksgiving Hymns*, can say, "[10]Because of the iniquity of the wicked I have become [11]the target of slander on the lips (*dbh bšpt*) of violent men, the scoffers ground their teeth" (1QH[a] Col. X).[136]

Conclusion

[131] Text 8 23:9' in Abusch and Schwemer 2016: 178.
[132] Text 7 6 6:6 in Abusch and Schwemer 2011: 142: *rēma šuršê, lit. "to get mercy, compassion*."
[133] Allen 2008: 116.
[134] Cf. Gen 37:2; Num 13:32; 14:36; 14:37; Ps 31:13; Pro 10:18; 25:10; Jer 20:10; Ezek 36:3.
[135] Hughes 2006.
[136] Florentino García Martínez and Tigchelaar 1999. *Dibbâ* means "defamatory talk" in a sapiential-didactic work in 4Q412 (A): *ʿly*]*kh dbt dbwb*] "[against] you defamatory talk."

To summarize the discussion, we have demonstrated that דבת רבים can refer to a cursing crowd in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Ps 31:14; Jer 20:10). The term דבה can also refer to someone with ill intentions (e.g., Gen 37:2; Num 14:36-37), placing it in the semantic spectrum of falsehood and slander. We have also found that the conjectured Hebrew verbal root *dbb* II parallels the Akkadian verb *dabābu*. This latter technical verb refers to evildoers who revile and curse their opponents in the language of the genre of Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft incantations (see "Evil tongues"[137] and "The Ugaritic incantation against black magic"[138]). This technical quality of *dabābu* and *dbb* appears to be genre-specific and, as a result, has remained consistent across the centuries (cf. 1QH^a). As mentioned above, the nominal form of *dabābu* produces the Akkadian compound epithet *bēl dabābi*, the adversary in court and sorcerer in Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft literature.

Although incomplete, this genre analysis has sampled a few test cases to provide the reader with a rough understanding of the relationship between the technical terms *dabābu* / *dbb* II and the magical sphere. This aspect reminds us that examining a text's context or *Sitz-im-Leben* reveals how much of its verbal discourse only makes sense when subordinated to an overarching genre-based framework that explains it. One could argue that Jer 20:7-13, Psalm 31, and the Ugaritic and Mesopotamian incantation texts against malevolent magic all share their speakers' emotional language, which is typical of the prayer/incantation genre. Delusional imagery expresses the speaker's fear of social death and existential inadequacy, as well as the loss of his friendship with his god, as he believes he is the victim of a plot. His adversaries, who are often anonymous, use their mouths and tongues as weapons. The speaker often accuses God of being to blame for his misfortunes, as in both Psalm 31 and Jer 20:7-13. Despite this, he seeks divine assistance in combating his assailants. The tripartite format of the biblical poetic lament is nearly identical to the Mesopotamian incantatory prayer, consisting of an address/praise, prayer/lament, and thanksgiving. This resemblance is accentuated by the lament genre's adaptability, which absorbs and adapts wordplay, verbal forms, and specialized terminology from other literary genres.

[137] Text 8 23 in Abusch and Schwemer 2016: 174-183.
[138] KTU^3 1.169.

At this level of analysis, it is difficult to say with certainty if the speaker of Jer 20:7-13's lament employed magical imagery to demonize the prophet's enemies. The expression דבת רבים in Jer 20:10, on the other hand, suggests that this may have been the case. The Jeremianic author may have relied implicitly on the Assyro-Babylonian tradition of *bēl dabābi* in his effort to depict Jeremiah's enemies as demonic persecutors bent on undermining the prophet's career and character.[139] The phrase דבת רבים exposes the darkness that lurks within Jeremiah's friends while corroborating the famous Latin dictum *Nemo propheta in patria sua* ("No one is a prophet in his [own] country"). In this manner, a comparison between biblical and extrabiblical texts allows us to gain an added appreciation and understanding of the implications of a term, whose deeper meaning would have escaped our awareness before the discovery, decipherment, and translation of textual sources from the ancient Near East.

[139] Brueggemann 1998: 182.

CHAPTER VI
Themes of Divine Judgment, Purification, and Universal Enmity in Mesopotamian and Biblical Traditions

Introduction

The analysis we started in Chapter V continues here with a series of interconnected thematic links between the Mesopotamian ritual language and themes in Jeremiah. This section focuses on Jeremianic pericopes that address judgment, purification and hope, particularly in relation to the stigmatization of the illegitimate preaching of false prophets. As the following studies demonstrate, the book of Jeremiah appropriates and transforms specialized Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft rhetoric to dehumanize God's enemies; namely, the false prophets and the Jerusalem elite. This rhetorical strategy elevates Jeremiah as the sole legitimate prophet and authorized mediator of Yahweh's will.

More specifically, the dehumanization of Jeremiah's adversaries is analyzed through a possible comparison with the Mesopotamian conception of national enmity as embodied by the figure of the witch—a paradigmatic enemy representing a locus of ultimate opposition in a communal narrative. This archetype functions as a kind of theatrical mask, a trickster disruptor central to a national drama. In the context of Jeremiah, this role of ultimate antagonist is embodied by the Israelite king Jehoiakim, who is likened to a witch—the epitome of wickedness—and consequently condemned to a shameful burial (Jer 22:18–19). Both Jeremiah and *Maqlû* build on archetypal representations of opposition to divine and communal harmony. In ancient Mesopotamia, witches, as paradigmatic *nakru* ("enemy"), were perceived as anti-social disruptors whose malevolence threatened the community as whole. Similarly, in Jeremiah, the false prophets occupy this oppositional role, depicted as deceitful figures who lead Judah astray and provoke societal and divine alienation.

At the heart of Jeremiah's critique lies the critical issue of legitimate versus illegitimate mediation. Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft texts delineate a clear distinction between approved divination and illicit sorcery, while in Jeremiah, as in biblical prophecy more generally,

legitimate prophecy (divinely sanctioned) is contrasted with false prophecy, as seen in Jer 9:3–5 and Deut 18:10–12.

The evidence analyzed in this chapter's studies highlights the Jeremianic author's appropriation of Mesopotamian cursing themes. This is particularly evident in his use of the "curses-through-ingestion" motif, involving harm through cursed food, beverages, or the "drug of death," a prominent rhetorical strategy in Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft incantations and Akkadian treaty documents (e.g., *Maqlû*, loyalty oaths). The depiction of Yahweh's cup of wrath in Jer 25:15–28 draws likely indirectly on this tradition, presenting a symbolic poisonous beverage. The motif of ingesting harmful substances thus becomes a potent image of divine retribution. The notion of cursing via contact with a harmful substance is also evident in the symbolic use of spittle as an agent of affliction in both Mesopotamian and biblical traditions. For example, the Akkadian term *imtu* (spittle) is employed in witchcraft rituals to curse victims. This motif resonates with Yahweh's wrath (חמה), which Jeremiah metaphorically likens to venom or spittle, as seen in Jeremiah 25.

What seems even more interesting when examining common narrative trajectories in both texts is the idea of burning as purification or the cleansing of the evil entangled around the community. As is well known, the *Maqlû* ritual centers on fire as a purgative force for eliminating evil and restoring purity. This theme is vividly illustrated in the burning of the witch in effigy during the ritual, which is presented as a method of judgment. In *Maqlû*, the central verb denoting this action is Akkadian *qālû* ("to roast or incinerate (in fire)"). A similar idea emerges in Jeremiah through the use of the root קלה, a close cognate of Akkadian *qālû*, appearing solely in Jeremiah 29:22 in relation to the execution of false prophets, who are to be disposed of by a cleansing fire. The end goal of *Maqlû*, as elucidated in Chapter I, is to restore divine harmony and health to the afflicted community. In both Mesopotamian and biblical traditions, divine judgment frequently incorporates the potential for redemption or renewal. In *Maqlû*, this idea is conveyed through ritual acts of expelling curses or toxins, symbolizing healing and the overcoming of malevolent forces. In Jeremiah 25:27–28, the imagery of nations vomiting the contents of Yahweh's cup functions similarly, portraying divine wrath as a purging force paving the way for restoration (cf. Jeremiah 31).

1. The "Poisonous Water" (מי־ראש) in Jer 8:14 and the "Bewitched Water" (*mê kaššāpūti*) in *Maqlû* I 103-104: Witchcraft in the Book of Jeremiah

Introduction

Scholars hold different opinions regarding the translation of the Hebrew phrase מי־ראש. According to some, the phrase is a metaphorical representation of the toxic effects of snake venom. On the flip side, alternative interpretations suggest that it symbolizes a poisonous substance derived from the extraction of medicinal plants. Some other scholars argue that it functions as a metaphorical depiction of the immense anguish experienced by Israel and her land. The phrase מי־ראש is employed thrice in the book of Jeremiah (8:14, 9:15, and 23:15), consistently conveying a tone of condemnation and cursing. In modern English translations, the phrase מי־ראש is typically rendered as "poisonous water." The curse-like nature of the phrase in Num 5:11–31 in relation to the trial ordeal has been acknowledged in several studies. To date, there has been no academic investigation into its possible links with the Mesopotamian magic tradition. Indeed, the phrase "poisonous water" may carry connotations related to magic. As an illustration, the ancient Mesopotamians believed that curses could be transmitted to the intended recipient through the consumption of contaminated food or drink. I propose here that the Hebrew phrase מי־ראש may serve a comparable purpose to the Akkadian phrase *mê kaššāpūti* ("bewitched water") in Assyrian rituals employed against sorcery. The rituals involved the dispensation of a poisonous concoction, symbolizing the reversal of a malevolent spell. The potion was thought to inflict upon the wrongdoer the very harm they had intended for their victim. In the following analysis, we will explore the concept of curses being passed down through liquids and food in a collection of Assyrian texts. Building upon this motif, we will delve into its reutilization in the book of Jeremiah as a literary and ideological tool to denounce false prophecy, which the Jeremiah author depicted as a toxic substance that penetrates the entrails of Israel's body, causing her to distance herself from God.

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In the eighth chapter of the book of Jeremiah, we bear witness to the wayward inhabitants of the once glorious kingdom of Judah, their hearts heavy with trepidation as they brace themselves for the impending storm of divine retribution. They know that the wrath of Yahweh shall manifest itself through the merciless hands of the Babylonian army, an unstoppable force of doom and destruction. Amidst mounting apprehension, the Israelites seek refuge within the fortifications of Jerusalem, their hearts pounding with unease as they feverishly brace themselves for the imminent advent of the Babylonian forces, ominously positioned to lay siege upon the sacred city.

[1] In Jer 8:14, the people of Judah lament:

> Why are we sitting by?
> Let us gather into the fortified cities
> And meet our doom there.
> For the Lord our God has doomed us,
> He has made us drink a bitter draft,
> Because we sinned against the Lord

In this depiction, the visual representation of the toxic elixir bestowed upon the morally bankrupted people by Yahweh not only serves as a symbolic representation of divine retribution but also operates as an illustrative example of a traditional curse widespread in the

[1] Chapters 7–10 of the book of Jeremiah depict the tragic downfall of Judah, focusing particularly on the devastating destruction of the temple of Jerusalem (7:8–11). Stulman argues that the phrase "den of thieves" in Jeremiah 7:11, which characterizes the insincere compassion shown by the Israelite people and the Jerusalem establishment, would have resonated with the original audience of the text—namely, those living in the period immediately after the war, following the Babylonian destruction of the temple in 587 BCE (Stulman 2005: 91–92). The ascension of Zedekiah (597–587 BCE) as Judah's ruler marked a continued period of rebellion across the southern Levant and within Babylonia itself. Conflicts arose among factions favoring Egypt, Babylon, or independence, ultimately leading to a coalition against Babylon, which included Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, Sidon, and even Judah (Jer 27:1–3). Babylon swiftly crushed Judah's rebellion in 589 BCE. That year, Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem (2 Kgs 25:1), and by 587 BCE, the city's walls were breached, resulting in Zedekiah's removal from power. Following this, Gedaliah, a trusted official of the Babylonian monarchy and former chamberlain to Zedekiah, was appointed to govern the province of Judah. The administrative center was relocated to Mizpah, a town north of Jerusalem (Jer 40:11–12). Jeremiah's ministry appears to formally end with the assassination of Gedaliah and his followers by a faction of Judean rebels opposed to his leadership and the Babylonian presence in the region (2 Kgs 25:23–25; Jer 40:7–41:15). Concerned about the potential backlash from the Babylonians, many residents fled to Egypt after Gedaliah's assassination. Among the exiles were Jeremiah and Baruch (2 Kgs 25:26; Jer 42:1–43:7). Such devastation, the text emphasizes, results from Yahweh's divine judgment on the Kingdom of Judah (8:4–10:25).

ancient Near Eastern execratory tradition.[2] In this analysis, we will look at a lesser-explored facet of the lament found in Jer 8:14, specifically examining the phrase "poisonous water" (מי־ראֹש). This expression also appears in two additional passages within the book of Jeremiah (9:14, 23:15), where it alludes to a toxic mixture that Yahweh compels the inhabitants of Judah to consume. Many scholars have offered various interpretations of this phrase, as mentioned before.[3] Some suggest it may be a metaphor for a snake's venom,[4] or believe it to be a reference to the trial by ordeal in Num 5:11-31, where a presumed adulteress is coerced into drinking a magical substance to establish her innocence or guilt.[5] Others think it is a reference to the cup of God's wrath in Jer 25:15. Still, others take מי־ראֹש as a metaphor for "tears," as the word ראש suggests.[6] While some interpretations have successfully conveyed the essence of the

[2] In the ancient Near Eastern tradition, the transgression of an oath was believed to incur the wrath of the deities, resulting in their curse. Oaths and curses were commonly seen as two sides of the same coin. In the book of Jeremiah, the violation of the Mosaic covenant leads to the activation of the punishments described in Deuteronomy 28. According to Anderson, the book of Jeremiah depicts the downfall of Jerusalem as the consequence of the covenant curse being fulfilled, following the style of the book of Deuteronomy (specifically Deuteronomy 27-28). (Anderson 1998: 3). In line with the ancient Near Eastern oath tradition, violating the Mosaic covenant leads to the triggering of the built-in curses specified in Deuteronomy 28. Fischer believes that the book of Deuteronomy serves as the primary authoritative source for the book of Jeremiah. He analyzes the text in light of the legal framework established in Deuteronomy and proposes that the concept of prophetic "fulfillment," exemplified by the manifestation of the curses outlined in Deuteronomy 28, suggests that the Deuteronomic source takes precedence over the Jeremianic source (Fischer 2018: 51). The inescapable nature of Judah's sinful state leads to the imposition of divine curses upon Israel as a consequence of their failure to uphold the terms of their covenant. In the book of Isaiah, the consequences for neglecting divine justice are depicted through the invasion of Judah by the Assyrians in the years 702-701 BCE, notably the siege of Jerusalem. Conversely, in the book of Jeremiah, this divine retribution aligns with the Babylonian retaliation against Judah, ultimately resulting in the devastating destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in the years 587-586 BCE. See Liverani 2014: 191-199. This tragic event coincided with the ultimate demise of the Davidic dynasty. In ancient Judah, a profound shift occurred, one that carried significant implications for its population. The manifestation of divine curses unleashed upon the people, signifies the departure of Yahweh from the land. This departure, in turn, indicates the abandonment of his people, as indicated in Jer 12:7. In the sprawling narrative of the book of Jeremiah, one prevailing theme emerges: the irreversible nature of Judah's transgressions. This theme is particularly evident in the first part of the book (Jeremiah 1-25), where the prophet laments the nation's abandonment of their divine protector in favor of foreign deities (Cf. Jer 1:16). Like the compiler of the book of Isaiah, the writer of the book of Jeremiah also utilizes the metaphor of a divine lawsuit, likely to represent a violation of the covenant. On the theme of the prophetic lawsuit in the Bible, see Harvey 1962: 173–96; Wright, 1962: 26–67; Limburg 1969: 291–304; Nielsen 1979; de Roche 1983: 563–74; Daniels 1987: 339–60; Sweeney, Cotter, Walsh, and Franke 2000: 43-45; Jindo 2010: 62.

[3] For a review of the most important scholarly positions, see McKane 1980: 474-92 and Jindo 2010: 244-47.

[4] In *Targum*, see McKane 1980: 480.

[5] Duhm 1901: 91.

[6] The primary meaning of the word ראש in ancient Hebrew is, in fact, "head." See Dahood 1964: 393-412 and Craigie, Kelley, Drinkard 2018: 139.

phrase “poisonous water” as a curse, none have fully explored the significance of the curse through ingestion in Jeremiah’s theology.

When considering Yahweh’s curse upon Judah, the potential underlying meaning behind the term “poisonous water” reveals itself. This analysis suggests that the phrase מי־ראֹש in Jer 8:14, 9:14, and 23:15 shares similar meanings and functions with the Akkadian expression *mê kaššāpūti* found in Assyrian anti-witchcraft texts. This Akkadian locution denotes one of the methods by which sorceresses, frequently portrayed as evil entities in Mesopotamian culture, would inflict curses on their victims. This study aims to delve into the reception of this thematic element in the prophecies of Jeremiah and its subsequent integration into other prophetic texts found in the Bible.

Assyrian magical texts provide insights into the practice of cursing, wherein an individual with malicious intent could inflict harm upon their target through malevolent rituals. Additionally, these texts reveal that the malefactor could also transfer their curse to an unsuspecting victim by employing toxic substances, specifically by contaminating food or drinks.[7] Once consumed by the unsuspecting individual, the curse contained within the substance would assimilate into the victim’s body, thereby being transferred to them.

The Motif of the “Drug of Death” in Esarhaddon’s Succession Treaty

The motif was so widespread that it even made its way into Assyrian treaty literature. The succession treaty of Esarhaddon included an important provision that specifically addressed concerns regarding the vulnerability of his young son to a potential palace conspiracy aimed at

[7] In Disney’s 1937 film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the villainous queen Grimhilde undergoes a transformation into an elderly witch. During this scene, she is depicted dipping an apple into a cauldron as she recites a magical incantation. She says: “Dip the apple in the brew. Let the Sleeping Death seep through. Look! On the skin! The symbol of what lies within. Now, turn red, to tempt Snow White, to make her hunger for a bite.” From this image, we are transported to the subsequent scene where Snow White succumbs to the allure of the apple’s beauty and takes a bite, unwittingly consuming the curse concealed within. One important aspect to note in this scene is that the witch’s curse has the ability to be transmitted through the consumption of poisoned or bewitched substances, among other means. The ways in which the Disney sorceress casts a curse upon unfortunate Snow White bears resemblance to the way the witch curses her targets in the Mesopotamian tradition. See Abusch and Schwemer 2011: 6. Abusch notes that the ancient Mesopotamians believed that object intrusion, when a foreign poison magically enters the human body, was one of the main causes of illness, which they explained as the result of witchcraft. See Abusch 2002: 82.

removing the rightful heir to the Assyrian dynasty.[8] In Section 23, lines 259-265 of Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty (EST), there is a provision that explicitly warns against any actions intended to inflict harm upon the designated heir of the monarch. The passage denounces the act of administering a substance described as "drug of death" (*šam-mu šá mu-a-ti-šú*) through mixing it into drinks and food.[9] It is worth noting that the administration of this substance is explicitly associated with sorcery in the following line, line 264, which states, "nor practice witchcraft against him" (*kiš-pi te-ep-pa-šá-niš-šú-u-n*i).[10] The link between consuming a toxic substance and engaging in witchcraft is further emphasized in Assyrian anti-witchcraft texts. These texts offer evidence supporting the belief that witches were thought to have the power to transfer their spells to their targets using different methods, including ingestion of food and drinks, contact with bathwater, and application of ointments. Additionally, they can also inflict harm through oral or written curses.[11] Several anti-witchcraft rituals provide further insights into the Assyrians' understanding of the nefarious practices carried out by witches.[12] In the text group 7.8, 2 in CMAwR, the bewitched individual utters a sequence of standard phrases that provide contextual details regarding the case of witchcraft.[13] The patient states that a witch, whose identity he does not know, is tormenting him and seeks his life.[14] He characterizes the witch as someone who wields "evil words" (*amāt*

[8] Wiseman 1958: 1–99 + plates, while for the most recent composite edition see Parpola and Watanabe 1988.

[9] It is also interesting to note that in EST, the curse is incorporated into the oath, or rather it is a latent part of it and can be passed to the oath-taker through the use of ingestible substances. In the loyalty oath ceremony, lines 560-62 and 622-24 read: §72 o 560 KI.MIN KI.MIN *ki-i šá* NINDA-MEŠ *u* GEŠTIN-MEŠ *ina* ŠÀ-<*bi*> *ir-ri*-[*ku-nu*] *er-rab-u-ni* / o 561 [*ki-i ŋa-an-ni*]-*i ta-me-tú an-ni-tú ina* ŠÀ-*bi ir-ri*-[*ku-nu*] / o 562 *ir-ri šá* ⌜DUMU¹-[MEŠ-*ku-nu* DUMU].⌜MÍ¹-MEŠ-*ku-nu lu-še-ri-bu* – "Ditto, ditto;) just as bread and wine enter into the intestines, [so] may they (= the gods) make this oath (*tamītu*) enter into [your] intestines and into those of [your] so[ns] and your [daught]ers."

[10] 259 *la tu-tar-ra-a-ni-ni šum-ma at-tu-nu* 260 *a-na maš-šur*—DÙ—A DUMU—MAN GAL-*u šá* É—UŠ-*te 261* DUMU *maš-šur*—PAB—AŠ MAN KUR—*aš-šur* EN-*ku-nu* 262 *šam-mu šá mu-a-ti-šú tu-šá-kal-a-šú-u-ni* 263 *ta-šá-qi-a-šú-u-ni ta-pa-šá-šá-šu-u-ni* 264 *kiš-pi te-ep-pa-šá-niš-šú-u-ni* DINGIR.<MEŠ> *u* ^{d}IŠ.TAR 265 *is-si-šú tu-šá-az-na-a-ni* – Translation: (259) You shall not give Assurbanipal, the great crown prince designate, son of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, your lord, a deadly drug (lit. "the plant of his death") to eat or to drink, nor anoint him with it, nor practice witchcraft against him, nor make gods and goddesses angry with him. In the legendary tale, *Medea*, the witch, aids Jason, the legitimate heir of Iolcus, in reclaiming his kingdom that was wrongfully taken by his uncle Pelias. See Euripides, *Medea*, edited by Paul Moliken and Elizabeth Osborne (Prestwick House Inc, 2005), 64.

[11] CMAwR vol. 1, 6.

[12] CMAwR vol. 1, and Abusch, Schwemer, and Luukko 2016. See also Abusch 2015.

[13] CMAwR vol. 1, text 7.8, 2: k rev. // C_1 obv. I // t obv. 1'-8' // d // A_4 obv. I.

[14] As Abusch points out, in anti-witchcraft rituals, generally "the accuser does not know the identity of the culprit and cannot prosecute the evildoer in a regular court of law. Instead, the witch is tried in absentia and represented

marušti) and engages in malevolent magic (*ruḫê zērūti*) directed towards him. The line 7.8.2:26 serves as a particularly instructive example. In an unexpected twist, the affected party seeks justice from the witch by retaliating with the very toxic saliva that was employed to unleash a curse upon him.[15] The patient is described as coercing the sorceress to assume "spittle mixed with bile." In this scenario, the contaminated saliva acts as a prophylactic agent, effectively rebounding the curse back to the witch who originally intended it for her victim. In doing so, it renders the curse null and void, highlighting the interplay between intention and consequence.[16]

17' *ina pîša našât amāt marušti*
18' *šabšat ina qātīša ruḫê*[17] *zērūti*[18]
19' *malâ kirimmāša rimkī luʾ̓âti*(?)
…
22' *annītu mannu ša ilassuma arkīya*
23' *ultamaṣṣâ ana ṣabātīya*
24' *aṣbatki*[19] *ina nēmeqi ša Ea*
25' *aklāki ina upšāšê ša apkal ilī Marduk*
26' *ašqīki*[20] *imat martu*… (CMAwR 7.8.2:17-19, 22-26)

17 In her mouth she carries evil word(s), 18 hateful magic she holds gathered in her hands, 19 her arms are full of foul wash water.

[…]

22 Who is this (woman) who runs after me 23 (who) strives to seize me?

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in the trial by figurines. The speaker must appeal to an omniscient divine judge and executioner who is able to identify the culprit, locate him outside of the bounds of the settled community, and destroy him." Abusch, *The Anti-Witchcraft Series Maqlû*, 118-19.

[15] As mentioned above, the anti-witchcraft ritual helps the patient, assisted by the exorcist who presides over the ritual, to return to the witch her sorcery. Abusch speaks of "reverting" effect of witchcraft whereby the witches, or rather their images, were sunk in water to overturn and revert their witchcraft. This phase of the anti-witchcraft ritual was usually associated with water. The image of the sinking of the witches is shown in *Maqlû* III 123-27, where the speaker, the ritual agent, identifies a boat belonging to a witch and asserts that it will be turned over suggesting that, as Abusch points out, "just as the boat is turned over (or turned back) (124), so too may the witchcraft be overturned (or turned back) and go down (or go back) onto the witch's head and face (125-126); this is then followed finally by the wish that the witch's case be overturned (sa[apu, N), but that the speaker's case be victorious (127)." See Abusch 2002: 127.

[16] The talionic nature of the ritual is clear as the punishment exacts a penalty that corresponds in kind to the perpetrated crime: a cursed drink nullifies another. See also Schwemer 2010: 483.

[17] "magic."

[18] "hateful."

[19] G-Perfect: "I seized you."

[20] G-Perfect: "I gave you to drink."

24 I have seized you with the wisdom of Ea, 25 I have stopped you with the magical procedures of the sage of the gods, Marduk, 26 I have given you to drink spittle mixed with bile …

A Bitter Brew: Ingestion Curses in Mesopotamian Anti-Witchcraft Texts

The curse by ingestion emerges as a prevalent motif in *Maqlû*.[21] In this text, the ritual agent steps forward, presenting a catalogue of purported misdeeds inflicted upon him by the sorceress. The agent relays that these actions have taken a toll on his well-being and caused him to experience being socially excluded within his community.[22]

96 *ša ṣalmīya* ***ibnû***[23]
103 *aklī kaššāpūti* ***ušākilū'inni***[24]
104 *mê kaššāpūti* ***išqû'inni***[25]
(*Maqlû* I 96, 103-104)

(96) (Those) who have made my figurines [*the witches*] … (103) Fed me bewitched food, (104) Given me bewitched water to drink...

[21] This series of incantations comprises the most extensive anti-witchcraft "compendium" from the first millennium BCE and is part of a broader corpus of magical prayers, rituals, incantations, and medical prescriptions aimed at countering witchcraft. The primary purpose of these ceremonies was to combat witchcraft and its effects through a combination of protective rituals and incantations. The key figure in these rituals was the incantation-priest, or *āšipu*, who conducted purification ceremonies in private homes and, most prominently, in temples. Among these rituals was the annual prophylactic *Maqlû* ceremony, which involved the king. The exorcist's client or patient, typically a bewitched individual and sometimes the king himself, served as an active participant in the ritual. The *Maqlû*, *Šurpu*, and Udug-ḫul texts were considered foundational to Mesopotamian scribal knowledge. For further discussion, see Wasserman (2014: 261). These Akkadian magical series were used to counteract witchcraft by destroying its deleterious effects. By so doing, these texts would protect and cure the victim of witchcraft by returning to the witch the evil she had originally intended for him. The *Maqlû* text was studied in a comprehensive way by Abusch, to whom we owe much of our knowledge on it. Abusch explains that "The *Maqlû* ceremony was performed, principally at night, during a festival of the dead at the end of the month of Abu, a time of year when ghosts return from the netherworld. At that time, spirits move back and forth between the netherworld and this world, the living and the dead interact, and there can be judgments in this world by both heavenly and netherworld deities who have power over the dead. The purpose of the *Maqlû* ceremony is to judge, punish, and expel all witches" (Abusch 2002: 235. The importance of *Maqlû* in the Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft tradition is given by the references to it in the so-called Exorcist's Manual, which is one of the most important treatises on ancient Near Eastern magic. Frahm considers the Exorcist's Manual "the metatext par excellence on the Assyro-Babylonian art of *āšipūtu*." See Frahm 2018: 9. For an in-depth analysis of the *Maqlû* text, see Abusch 2015: ix. The reconstructed text of *Maqlû* comprises eight tablets, containing about a hundred incantations, and a ritual tablet, detailing the ritual actions associated with the appropriate incantations. See Abusch 1974: 251–62 (= Abusch 2002: 99–111). For a critical edition of *Maqlû*, see Abusch 2015.

[22] See Abusch's research examines how Akkadian prayers not only articulated but also contextualized the experience of illness in ancient Mesopotamia. See Abusch 1998: 57.

[23] G-Perfect: "they fashioned."

[24] Š-Durative: "they cause me to drink."

[25] G-Perfect: "they gave me bewitched water to drink."

Based on his testimony, the individual claims that the witch surreptitiously served him bewitched food and water. He ascribes his illness to the malevolent spell's influence. Having ingested contaminated substances, the curse has now seeped into his body, effectively becoming an integral part of his being.[26] The theme of the curse through ingestible substances is also known in the Hebrew Bible. In Jer 9:14(15), God curses the apostate Israelites by giving them bitter food (לענה) to eat and poisoned water (מי־ראש) to drink.

לכן כה־אמר יהוה צבאות אלהי ישראל הנני מאכילם[27] את־העם הזה לענה והשקיתים[28] מי־ראש

> Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I will feed this people with bitter food, and give them poisonous water to drink. (Jer 9:14[15])

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[26] In her analysis of the language used in ancient Assyrian treaties, Kitz describes the "curse by ingestion" as a type of conditional curses. This particular form of curse can be aptly described as a conditional malediction, wherein its potent effects are triggered solely upon the oath-taker's transgression of the sworn obligations. Every pledge carried an underlying hex and thus, it held religious significance. As Kitz explains, "Whether directly or indirectly, the oath always involved the divine world. Consequently, the violation of an oath was principally a religious offense and could be properly characterized as a 'sin'" (Kitz 2014: 33). Oaths and curses could be self-imposed by the speaker or imposed by another on a second party. Regardless of the situation in which it was put in place, the oath-curse had a true legal effect as it was designed to take preventative measures against future unwanted acts. This is one of the reasons why the oath-curse formula is particularly frequent in treaties (Quick 2018: 1-7), in dedicatory stela inscriptions such as the epilogue of the Code of Hammurabi and tomb inscriptions such as the sarcophagus of Aḥiram of Byblos (Kitz 2014: 79). As Kitz notes, "Through the act of eating, drinking, and anointing, a previously articulated malediction would enter the body of the subordinate. Once performed, the underling literally becomes a potential malediction. He has eaten the curse in the bread. He has drunk the curse in the wine. He wears the curse in his flesh after the oil penetrates his skin. He is a walking latent 'curse.' These acts in particular would also serve to underscore the irrevocability of the malediction. Once consumed or rubbed into the skin, the curse could not be removed" (Kitz 2014: 125). This idea is also present in the biblical text. For example, in Jer 25:17-18, the ancient Jeremianic compiler has the prophet Jeremiah administer a poisoned drink to the people of Judah, which God prepares for them. The text's author makes Jeremiah say: "[17]So I took the cup (ואקח את־הכוס) from the hand of the Lord (מיד יהוה) and gave drink (ואשקה) to all the nations to whom the Lord had sent me: [18]Jerusalem and the towns of Judah, and its kings and officials, to make them a desolate ruin, an object of hissing and a curse (ולקללה)—as is now the case." Cf. Ps 75:9 (Eng. 8): "There is a cup in the Lord's hand (בוס ביד־יהוה) / with foaming wine fully mixed; / from this He pours; / all the wicked of the earth drink (כל רשעי ארץ), / draining it to the very dregs," and Isa 51:17: "Rouse, rouse yourself! / Arise, O Jerusalem, / You who from the Lord's hand (מיד יהוה) / Have drunk the cup of His wrath (את־כוס חמתו ... שתית), / You who have drained to the dregs / The bowl, the cup of reeling!" (cf. also, Isa 51:22). Analyzing the metonymic content of this execratory tradition in the book of Jeremiah, Jeff Anderson argues that the Hebrew word קללה, "metonymically refers to the material misfortune itself. It is not an invocation of misfortune but the actual embodiment of that misfortune" (Anderson 1998: 7). Metonymically, the object of this formula becomes in effect the calamity itself. As Anderson points out, "In selected prose texts of Jeremiah, the people of Judah and Jerusalem are not just the recipients of the curse, but they actually become a curse incarnate" (Anderson 1998: 4). The people of Judah are not only cursed but also embody a curse as if being saturated by it. They become a tangible representation of evil, its very essence.

[27] Hiphil Participle cause to eat, feed with, followed by 2 accusative subjects mostly + resumptive pronoun "them" (the people).

[28] Hiphil Perfect "to cause to drink water."

The similarities between the Akkadian and biblical texts are hard to ignore. The key difference between the Jeremiah text and the anti-witchcraft *Maqlû* ritual lies in who is to blame for distributing the harmful substances. In *Maqlû*, it is the witch who administers to her victim the poisonous concoction in the guise of a drink, while the purpose of the ritual against witchcraft is to counteract and nullify this malevolent act. In a fascinating twist, the Jeremiah narrative reveals that it is God who curses the Israelites by offering them food and drink that prove to be harmful. The juxtaposition of the following two excerpts serves to illustrate the linguistic and thematic similarities that exist between the Akkadian and biblical literary traditions.

> *aklī kaššāpūti ušākilū'inni*
> (The witches) Fed me bewitched food
> *mê kaššāpūti išqû'inni*
> Given me bewitched water to drink...
>
> הנני מאכילם את־העם הזה לענה
> Behold, I (Yahweh) will feed this people with bitter food
> והשקיתים מי־ראש
> and give them poisonous water to drink…

In the Hebrew Bible, the term לענה is commonly rendered as "wormwood" and frequently employed as a metaphor to signify the corruption of justice.[29] However, it can also serve as a metaphorical symbol for idolatry, drawing an effective comparison between idol worship and the gradual deterioration of fruit (Deut 29:17-22).[30] In contrast, the term מי־ראש is frequently associated with the venom of the snake.[31] Consider the biblical passage in Deut 32:33, wherein the term ראש is employed in parallel with the term חמת: "their wine is the poison of serpents and the cruel venom of asps" (חמת תנינם יינם וראש פתנים אכזר) in reference to Sodom's and Gomorrah's moral corruption. It should be noted that the Akkadian interdialectal

[29] Cf. Am 5:7 and 6:12

[30] Commenting on this passage, Jindo notes that "Here, the idolaters and instigators of idolatry in Israel are portrayed as the 'root' that bears ראש 'poisonous draft' and לענה 'wormwood,' which will eventually lead the entire community of Israel to a Sodomic destruction. As seen in these examples, the motifs of ראש 'poisonous draft' and לענה 'wormwood' are part of the metaphorical concept SODOM IS A (CORRUPT) VINEYARD" (Jindo 2010: 245).

[31] McKane suggests that "*rô'š* is poison whose toxic virulence is indicated by comparing it with the venom of a snake." See McKane 1980: 480.

correspondent of the Hebrew word חמה, venom, is *imtu*,[32] which indicates the venomous spittle of the patient in his counter cursing incantation, as we have seen earlier, in CMAwR 7.8, 2.[33]

Conclusion

The function of the phrase מי־ראש is determined by how it is used in the imprecatory language of the text. Throughout the book of Jeremiah, Yahweh consistently utters curses upon the Israelites and urges them to partake in a specially prepared concoction designed to bring about their affliction.[34] By drawing a comparison between the phrases ראש פתנים and חמת תנינם in Deut 32:33, one can speculate that the expression מי־ראש in Jer 9:14 suggests the presence of a poisonous liquid substance. Jeremiah 25:17 also references the divine act of God's cursing, manifested through the use of a harmful substance. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the passage in question does not explicitly refer to מי־ראש ("bitter water"), but instead alludes to the cup of God's wrath, which may potentially contain it.

ואקח את־הכוס מיד יהוה ואשקה את־כל־הגוים אשר־שלחני יהוה אליהם

> So I took the cup from the Lord's hand, and made all the nations to whom the Lord sent me drink it. (Jer 25:17)

Other biblical prophetic writings refer to a particular cup linked to God's wrath. In Isa 51:22, the phrase בוס חמתי can be rendered with greater precision as "cup of my venom/spittle," and, here as well, the divine "saliva," referred to as חמה, is utilized in a similar fashion as observed in the Jeremiah passage, serving as a means to pronounce a curse upon Israel.

כה־אמר אדניך יהוה ואלהיך יריב עמו הנה לקחתי מידך את־כוס התרעלה את־קבעת בוס חמתי לא־תוסיפי לשתותה עוד

> Thus says your Lord, the Lord,
> your God who pleads the cause of his people:

[32] See Akk. *imtu*, AHw 379; CAD 7:192ff., and Hebrew חמת, HALOT 1, s.v. "חמת."

[33] See *imat marti*, "[poisonous] spittle mixed with bile," in CMAwR 7.8, 2. Abusch explains that "The equation $uš_{11}$ = *imtu* is well known from bilingual incantations, where it can refer to the evil spittle of witchcraft as well as to the life-giving spittle of *Ea* and *Asalluḫi* (see the attestations quoted in CAD 7:140). The phrase *imat marti* "(poisonous) spittle mixed with bile" is known from Uḫ V 5 ($uš_{11}$ zé = *i-mat mar-ti*), there referring to the evil demons of heaven and the netherworld (cf. also Uḫ XII 18)." See CMAwR vol. 1, 195.

[34] Commenting on the expression מי־ראש in Jer 23:15, Rudolph imagines Yahweh as a demonic deity who gives poisonous drink and food to guilty Judah (Rudolph 1968: 139).

> "Behold, I have taken from your hand the cup of staggering; the bowl of my wrath you shall drink no more. (Isa 51:22)

In conclusion, we have observed that the loyalty oath of Esarhaddon contains a set of clauses cautioning the oath-taker against causing harm to the king's successor by means of a toxic substance referred to as the "drug of death" within the text. Furthermore, the text illustrates the correlation between the administration of the substance and the realm of witchcraft. In the context of Mesopotamian magical rituals, it has been noted that individuals who partake in evil deeds, often identified as witches, possess the power to harm their victims through the consumption of cursed food or beverages, and also by employing their "saliva," which is referred to as *imtu* in Akkadian. It was found that the most efficacious means of counteracting the adverse effects of such malevolent magic involved the act of returning the same kind of spittle, first used to afflict the victim, to the witch. Likewise, the act of administering a toxic drug to a specifically targeted someone is a recurring motif of cursing seen within biblical literature. It has been observed that the biblical god not only administers the poisoned substance to his victims, the Israelites, but also applies his "spittle" onto them, as described in the account of the cup symbolizing Yahweh's wrath. The term חמה, the interdialectal equivalent of the Akkadian term *imtu*, denotes not just the venom of a snake, but also, in the context of anti-witchcraft beliefs, the medium of a curse cast by a witch.

Attempting to establish a correlation between the Mesopotamian witch and Yahweh would be a pointless endeavor, as their roles and functions cannot be harmonized. Yet, the existence of shared themes and language in our literature suggests a fascinating convergence. Could it be that the compiler of the book of Jeremiah purposefully weaved the theme of curses through consumption, drawing inspiration from the Mesopotamian magical traditions? Our analysis suggests that the compiler of the book of Jeremiah conveys his theological perspective on Yahweh's judgment by presenting Yahweh's curse upon Judah as a manifestation of malevolent magic.[35]

[35] Among the various books comprising the Bible, the book of Jeremiah stands out for its notable frequency of references pertaining to the transgression of Deuteronomy's legal precepts. Most prominently, the book presents the curses delineated in the book of Deuteronomy 28. The book of Deuteronomy outlines the consequences that will befall Israel if they fail to uphold the Mosaic covenant. These consequences are presented as divine curses. Mastnjak's recent study presents conclusive evidence that the Jeremiah text consistently adopts the perspective of

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The discourse on divine judgment conveyed through the metaphor of a cursed liquid needs to be contextualized in relation to the purportedly "bad teachers" within the Israelite community. Jeremiah's scathing and confrontational language towards the leaders of Jerusalem, false prophets, illegitimate interpreters of the law, and their followers is apparent right from the opening chapter of the book. This sets the tone for the rest of the narrative, creating a powerful and belligerent atmosphere. The prophet's profound dislike of these figures must be seen in the perspective of Jeremiah's theology, which reads the terrible events connected with the last years of existence of the kingdom of Judah to their bad faith and the spreading of false hopes among the gullible population. Among Jeremiah's bitterest enemies is the king of Judah Jehoiakim, "the burner of prophetic scrolls," whom the prophet regards as the epitome of extreme wickedness, a formidable and highly unsettling figure in light of his message. Jeremiah stigmatizes him to such an extent that he resorts to the Mesopotamian tradition of the witch to make him as least palatable as possible to his audience. As we shall see in the following analysis, the ancient author of Jeremiah 22 may have reused the ancient literary motif of non-burial to portray the Israelite king as an extremely wicked and malicious character, comparable to a witch, which in addition to embodying all of these negative qualities within the literary landscape of his era, also symbolized the ultimate enemies of the Assyrian empire.

2. "He shall be buried with the burial of a donkey": On the Dehumanizing Burial of Jehoiakim in Jer 22:18-19 and its Possible Connection to the Witch's Disposal in *Maqlû*

Introduction

The Israelite king Jehoiakim has long been viewed unfavorably in Jewish tradition. For example, the *Mishnah Torah* asserts unyieldingly that "One who commits transgressions high-

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the Deuteronomic legislator in its construction of a legal framework (Jer 2:9, לבן עד אריב אתכם נאם־יהוה, "I will bring charges against you, says Yahweh"). Such perspective includes the book's frequent allusion to the curses of Deut 28. An emblematic case is that of Jer 34:12-22 that harkens back to the Mosaic covenant (v. 13) to ground its manumission and debt release laws. In this long passage, the covenant violation is overtly presented as the breaching of the Dtn law (Jer 34:17 and 20), which provides for the unleashing of the curses of Deut 28:25-26. See Mastnjak 2016: 227.

handedly like Jehoiakim, whether his acts were against minor or against major commandments, he has no share in the World to Come" (3, 11).[36] In his commentary on the book of Jeremiah,[37] Rashi characterizes Jehoiakim as a malevolent individual, aligning with the prevailing depiction of him as a symbol of moral depravity. Jehoiakim, without a doubt, emerges as one of the most despised monarchs in biblical prophetic literature.[38] In stark contrast to his father Josiah,[39] Jehoiakim appears as a king whose actions diverge from the paradigmatic righteousness that Jeremiah so fervently admires. Jehoiakim is yet another king who "did evil in the eyes of the Lord" (ויעש הרע בעיני יהוה), according to the author of 2 Kgs 23:37. 2 Chronicles 36:5-8 tells us that Jehoiakim commits "abominations" (תעבתיו) against Yahweh. He is greedy and exploitative, sheds "innocent blood," and practices "oppression and violence" (Jer 22:17). He brazenly hurls the scroll that bears the weight of Jeremiah's prophetic utterances into the fire, as chronicled in Jer 36:23.[40]

When it comes to the tragic downfall of Jehoiakim, Jeremiah is our main source of information. The author of the book of Jeremiah does not simply have a distaste for this king but harbors an intense abhorrence towards him! Casting shadows and passing judgment with unparalleled expertise, he spares no punches. The most significant detail about him is that he died *dishonorably*, although the particulars of his death are obscured by a spectral haze. Jehoiakim does not "sleep with his ancestors" in the book of Jeremiah, as he did in 2 Kgs 24:6 ("Jehoiakim slept with his fathers"),[41] nor was he captured by Nebuchadnezzar and taken to Babylon, where he eventually died, as indicated in 2 Chr 36:5-8. The oracle of non-lament for

[36] Moses Maimonides and Abraham ben David, *Mishneh Torah: Yad Ha-Hazakah* (1926; repr., n.p.: Sefaria, n.d.), https://www.sefaria.org/Mishneh_Torah

[37] Rashi, *Commentary on the Pentateuch*, trans. H. Freedman (London: Soncino Press, 1949).

[38] Jehoiakim's given name in the Hebrew Bible is Eliakim, according to 2 Kgs 23:34 and 2 Chronicles 36:4.

[39] According to 1 Chr 3:15, Jehoiakim was Josiah's second-born son. See Freedman 2000.

[40] Please note the singular episode of magic practitioners burning scrolls containing magic spells in *Acts* 19:19. As Bruce notices, "Instances of public burning of literature (whether as an open repudiation of its contents or for security reasons) cf. Livy, *Hist*. 40.29 (of Numa's writings), Suet. Aug. 31.1 (of prophetic verses), Diog. Laert. *Vit. Philosoph*. 9.52 (of the works of Protagoras), Lucian, *Alexander* 4 7 (of the works of Epicurus). Twentieth-century instances may also occur to the reader's mind. Cf. also the burning of objects of luxury in fifteenth-century Florence as a result of Savonarola's preaching." See Bruce 1990: 412.

[41] Galil observes that the reference to Jehoiakim's death in 2 Kgs 24:6 of the Masoretic Text lacks the standard death and burial formula of the kings of Israel and Judah: (1) "RN lay with his father," and (2) "and was buried in..." The passage ending the kingdom of Jehoiakim lacks the second patterned component. The Septuagint, on the other hand, indicates that the king was buried in Uzzah's garden. See Galil 1996: 34, note 4.

Jehoiakim in Jer 22:18-19 suggests that the king will not be mourned with the customary wails of sorrowful lamentation. Instead, he will receive the burial of a donkey, a fate befitting the wretched and forsaken (cf. Josephus *Ant*. 10.6.3).

קבורת חמור יקבר סחוב והשלך מהלאה לשערי ירושלם

> He shall have the burial of an ass, / Dragged out and left lying / Outside the gates of Jerusalem. (Jer 22:19)

He shall be mercilessly dragged beyond the protective confines of Jerusalem's walls, abandoned to the untamed wilderness, where he shall lie unburied, at the mercy of ravenous beasts. In *Animal Metaphors*,[42] Foreman explains that the Israelites did not hold donkeys in high regard and would not bury them when they died. Their corpses would be left to decompose in the fields. Exposed to the elements, they would have vanished from existence.[43] According to Jer 36:30, Jehoiakim was laid to rest, exposed to the elements, outside the gates of Jerusalem in the wilderness ("and his own corpse shall be left exposed to the heat by day and the cold by night"), where no one would ever mourn or remember him. In essence, Jeremiah makes the king vanish from existence.

לכן כה־אמר יהוה אל־יהויקים בן־יאשיהו מלך יהודה לא־יספדו לו הוי אחי והוי אחות לא־יספדו לו הוי אדון והוי הדה

> Assuredly, thus said the Lord concerning Jehoiakim son of Josiah, king of Judah: They shall not mourn for him, / 'Ah, brother! Ah, sister!' / They shall not mourn for him, / 'Ah, lord! Ah, his majesty! (Jer 22:18)

In this chilling portrayal, the defilement of the remains of an Israelite king along with the eerie absence of mourning ceremonies suggest a form of *damnatio memoriae*, invoking a calculated effort to erase the collective memory of this monarch. The death of Jehoiakim has captivated scholars for generations, not simply due to his infamous reputation as one of many wicked kings in the Hebrew Bible, but rather because of the peculiar nature of his burial.

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[42] Foreman 2011: 111.

[43] As Foreman explains, in the ancient Near East, donkeys were used for transportation and as beasts of burden. This made donkeys valuable assets in the ancient world, yet the Bible portrays them in an unfavorable light. Judah's "lust" is compared to the genitalia of a donkey in Ezek 23:20. Isaiah 1:3 emphasizes the animal's stupidity, while Prov 26:3 describes its obstinacy. See Foreman 2011: 111.

The most recent and noteworthy interpretation of this peculiar occurrence was proposed by Mansen in *The Unremembered Dead*,[44] her comprehensive study of the motif of non-burial in the Hebrew Bible in its ancient Near Eastern context. Mansen's assessment of the non-burial motif sparks further conversation, considering the contrasting interpretations found in previous studies. In the following analysis, it is posited that *Maqlû* may offer insights into the enigmatic nature of this peculiar incident.[45] In this ritual, guilty witches were symbolically executed and left unburied in the wilderness. I suggest that the author of Jer 22:18-19 reused this literary motif to represent Jehoiakim as a social enemy and, by doing so, stress his permanent banishment from Israelite society. The reappraisal of Jer 22:18-19 offers a fresh lens through which to examine this incident, adding to the ongoing academic discourse surrounding the connection between biblical prophecy and Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft texts.

In order to delve into this analysis, we shall examine Mansen's perspective on the non-burial motif in the ancient Near East and Hebrew Bible, along with the contrasting interpretations surrounding Jehoiakim's burial as depicted in Jer 22:18-19. To gain insight into the Mesopotamian concept of the witch as an archetype of the ultimate enemy, we will dive into the intricacies of Mesopotamian witchcraft and explore the important function witches played in Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft literature. Lastly, we will look at the application of this stereotype in Jeremiah's indictment against Jehoiakim.

Mansen's Interpretation

In *The Unremembered Dead*, Mansen examines non-burial motifs in ancient Near Eastern literature, analyzing their literary roles in biblical and extra-biblical texts and arguing that denying burial significantly impacts the deceased's posthumous existence. She also underscores that proper burial preserves the memory of the deceased among living relatives while the absence of burial rituals prevents families from honoring the dead through traditional funeral practices. The practice of performing a formal burial ceremony also fulfilled the function of

[44] See Mansen 2018.

[45] The incantations and ritual instructions of *Maqlû* were transmitted in ancient Mesopotamia as a series of nine tablets. One tablet contained the instructions for the ritual, while the other eight tablets detailed the actions to be performed after reciting the specific incantations. All the incantations against witchcraft in *Maqlû* were composed in "Standard Babylonian."

ensuring entry into the netherworld—a domain symbolizing a connection with one's ancestors.[46] Further, Mansen contends that the deprivation of burial is a specific form of "postmortem abuse."[47] The non-burial of the deceased was equivalent to their disappearance into oblivion: a *damnatio memoriae*. However, this aspect had social implications as it highlighted an issue within the deceased individual's community. When the bond between God and his people would sever, divine wrath could strike not only individuals but entire communities.[48]

The portrayal of the relationship between Israel and God in the Hebrew Bible, specifically in prophetic texts, often assumes a contractual or treaty-like nature.[49] It is widely acknowledged among scholars that the perception of Israel's relationship with their God was heavily influenced by the ideological framework of ancient Near Eastern royal treaty-making. The motifs of non-burial and covenant violation are present in various genres of biblical literature, including priestly, deuteronomic, prophetic, liturgical, and wisdom texts. The concept of non-burial is a recurring theme that often portrays the intended repercussions of refusing burial, providing a deeper understanding of the necessity for a transformation in Israel's status. As Mansen suggests, the absence of a proper burial for Israel leads to a transformation in its role from being Yahweh's "chosen partner" to becoming a "vulnerable prey."[50] The Mosaic Covenant demands Israel to suffer the consequences of her transgressions, as evidenced by her public humiliation. Israel's act of disloyalty will result in one of the harshest punishments in the ancient world: non-burial and the resulting "undoing" of her identity.[51]

Unresolved Inconsistencies in Scholarship: Status Quaestionis

Due to unsolved inconsistencies in previous research, Mansen's interpretation of the non-burial theme invites further discussion. McKane interprets קבורת חמור יקבר in Jer 22:19 as

[46] Mansen 2018: 281.
[47] Mansen 2018: 3.
[48] Mansen 2018: 281.
[49] Extensive research has explored Deuteronomy's relationship with the ancient Near Eastern treaty genre. For recent studies, see, Lauinger 2019: 87–100; Steymans 2019: 101–132; Morrow 2019: 133–158; Pakkala 2019: 159–183.
[50] Mansen 2018: 274.
[51] Mansen 2018: 266.

indicating that Jehoiakim's remains are left "unburied" outside Jerusalem's gates. For McKane, the fact that the donkey is an unclean animal according to Lev 11:1-8 and Deut 14:3-8 has no bearing on the king's non-burial incident.[52] Holladay notes that while all human remains were buried in ancient Israel (Jer 8:1-3; 9:21), a person who is not buried is *cursed* (Deut 28:26).[53] Allen agrees that Jehoiakim's non-burial is dishonorable, noting that donkeys were not buried in ancient Israel.[54]

In his reading of Jer 22:18-19, Olyan contends that living or deceased kings may be dehumanized through rituals that "reclassify" them as "domesticated animals" to *degrade them*.[55] The author suggests that symbolic acts of divine judgment often result in a king's loss of status, a dynamic evident in Nebuchadnezzar's humbling in Daniel 4:1–37. Here, Nebuchadnezzar's dream and subsequent transformation into a beast-like state implies a form of what Olyan calls "ritual reclassification"—a kind of divinely ordained demotion from kingship to a state of abasement, which reflects, as he argues, a loss of royal authority and divine favor.[56]

In his *Treaty-Curse and the Old Testament Prophets*,[57] Hillers discusses the non-burial motif in the Bible and traces its origins to Mesopotamian curses.[58] A case in point is Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty (EST) in which we read that a person who breaks an oath will not receive a proper burial while their remains will be devoured by wild animals:

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[52] McKane 1986: 533.

[53] Bloch-Smith only briefly discusses Jehoiakim's burial in her 1992 monograph, but she does make some interesting remarks about biblical burial rituals and their meaning. See Bloch-Smith 1992: 110-112. As she notes, a proper burial required a קבר (Gen 23:4; Exod 14:11; Isa 22:16) or קבורה, according to the biblical texts (Gen 35:20; Deut 34:6; Isa 14:20). Jehoiakim discarded the body of the slain prophet Uriah (Jer 26:23) and the king's own fate (Jer 22:18-19) reveal specific social implications. According to the Bible, anyone who served Yahweh was granted burial. Those who sinned were denied burial or exhumation (Deut 28:25-26; 1 Kgs 13:22; 14:10-11; Jer 16:4). Certain sexual crimes were punished by burning the offenders (Gen 38:24; Lev 20:14, 21:9). However, most individuals were likely buried in family tombs, whereas kings were buried in their own capitals (Isa 22:16).

[54] Allen 2008: 251.

[55] The rhetorical reclassification as a domesticated animal was intended to denigrate the social enemy, the rebel, or any type of offender, be they, kings, or commoners. See Olyan 2014: 279.

[56] See Olyan 2014: 273.

[57] Hillers 2015: 97-189.

[58] More recently, Kruger has explored a similar connection, proposing that the various non-burial elements linked to the image described in Jer 22:19 can be traced back to a shared literary tradition prevalent in the ancient Near East. This tradition finds expression in curse catalogs and royal inscriptions. See Kruger 2018: 1-20.

§42 ... “may he fill the plain with your blood and feed your flesh to the eagle and the vulture” - o 426 ... *li-mal-li* EDIN UZU-ʳ*ku*¹-*nu* Á.MUŠEN *zi-i-bu* / o 427 *li-šá-kil*

§56 “... may the earth not receive your corpses but may your burial place be in the belly of a dog or a pig.” - o 483 ... *li-in-da-šá-ru* LÚ.ÚŠ-MEŠ-*ku-nu* KI.TIM / o 484 *a.a im-ḫur ina kar-ši* UR.KU ŠAḪ-MEŠ *lu naq-bar-ku-nu*

§47 “... may dogs and swine eat your flesh; may your ghost have nobody to take care of the pouring of libations to him.” - o 451 ... UZU-MEŠ-*ku-nu* UR.KU-MEŠ ŠAḪ-<MEŠ> *le-e-ku-lu* / o 452 *e-ṭím-ma-ku-nu pa-qi-du na-aq* A-MEŠ *a.a ir-ši* […]

Even more explicitly, the text says:

(481) “Before your very eyes may dogs and swine drag the *teats* of your young women and the *penises* of your young men to and fro in the squares of Assur; may the earth not receive your corpses but may your burial place be in the belly of a dog or a pig.” - o 481 TA IGI-*ku-nu a*.[*a*] *ip-pi-ṭir* si-si šá ar-da-te-ku-nu* / o 482 *mat-nat šá* LÚ.GURUŠ-MEŠ-*ku-nu ina ni-ṭil* IGI.2-*ku-nu* UR.KU ŠAḪ-MEŠ / o 483 *ina re-bit aš-šur li-in-da-šá-ru* LÚ.ÚŠ-MEŠ-*ku-nu* KI.TIM / o 484 *a.a im-ḫur ina kar-ši* UR.KU ŠAḪ-MEŠ *lu naq-bar-ku-nu*.[59]

Hillers suggests that the frequent occurrence of this rhetoric in the Hebrew Bible underscores the significant role that cursing played in ancient Near Eastern languages. For instance, in Deut 28:26, we come across the following passage: “Your carcasses shall become food for all the birds of the sky and all the beasts of the earth, with none to frighten them off” (והיתה נבלתך למאכל לכל־עוף השמים ולבהמת הארץ ואין מחריד). Similarly, in Jer 34:20, in the context of the breach of the covenant between the Israelites and God, we read: “Their carcasses shall become food for the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth” (ונתתי אותם ביד איביהם וביד מבקשי נפשם והיתה נבלתם למאכל לעוף השמים ולבהמת הארץ). In this passage, both the Jerusalem elite and people of Judah are accused of violating the Mosaic covenant and threatened with non-burial—the most common type of punishment in the ancient Near East.[60] Hillers and Lauinger point out that although Assyrian treaty literature commonly features these types of curses, the curse sections of these treaties often draw their language from Mesopotamian

[59] In another instance, Esarhaddon declares that he “let the vultures eat the unburied bodies of their [his enemies’] warriors” (*pa-gar qu-ra-di-šú-un ina la qe-bé-ri ú-šá-kil zi-i-bu*; Esarhaddon 1 v 6). Cf. Esarhaddon 1019 16, as enumerated in Leichty 2011.
[60] Hillers 2015: 170.

magic literature.[61] For example, the curse of non-burial is referenced in *Maqlû* IV 39-41 and VIII 123-127, among other places, in an anti-witchcraft incantation.

Be that as it may, there seems to be a consensus among scholars that the purpose behind Jehoiakim's lack of burial was to dehumanize and degrade the deceased king's body. Mansen presents the notion of *damnatio memoriae*, which involves the scourge of a sinful monarch's memory, by introducing the concept of post-mortem abuse.[62] The enigmatic disposal of Jehoiakim's remains outside the limits of Jerusalem's walls has left scholars puzzled, while the lack of customary funeral rites has sparked significant debate, with no viable resolutions currently in sight.

The significance of the execution of the witch in the Ancient Near East

Lauinger suggests that the ancient authors and editors responsible for composing treaty curses were quite versatile in their approach as they drew inspiration from various literary genres, showcasing their ability to adapt and incorporate different styles. Some curses in Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty bear resemblance to the curses recorded in Mesopotamian compendia of incantations known as *Šurpu* and *Maqlû*. Expanding upon Lauinger's insightful observation, if we accept the notion that non-burial curses are indeed an intrinsic component of the ancient Near Eastern magical tradition, it would be logical for us to start our discussion by delving into an analysis of the *Maqlû* ceremony. According to Abusch, the *Maqlû* ceremony was performed at the end of the month of Abu, during the festival of the dead. The ancient Mesopotamians believed that the ghosts of the departed would resurface and face divine judgment from heavenly and underworld deities. During the course of this special season,

[61] This aspect was noted by Lauinger recently in his 2016 volume (pp. 132-133): "I am not convinced that the best place to look for parallels is in texts that appear to us to be functionally similar. Some curses from Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty, for instance, find their closest parallels in the first-millennium Mesopotamian collection of incantations known as *Šurpu*, and Watanabe has discussed in detail a particular curse that finds parallels not just in *Šurpu* and another contemporaneous incantation collection, *Maqlû*, but also in a *kudurru* of the Babylonian king Marduk-apla-iddina I. See Watanabe 1987. It seems safe to say that the ancient authors and editors responsible for the texts anthologized in Kitchen and Lawrence, *Treaty, Law and Covenant in the Ancient Near East* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012) wore many hats."

[62] "...non-burial as the destruction of the victim's future identity (name, memory, position; Isa 14:18-20; 66:22)." Mansen 2018: 171.

individuals identified as living witches faced symbolic execution, while deceased witches would be subjected to imprisonment. Witches would thus be banished from their respective communities, expelled from the realm of existence, and deprived of a proper burial, all in an effort to thwart their ability to partake in the afterlife.[63] Furthermore, their remains would be figuratively burnt or fed to animals.[64]

As an illustration, *Maqlû*'s second tablet (118-23) contains an incantation directed at Girra in which the Mesopotamian god associated with fire and light is beseeched to render a judgment on behalf of the deities Sin and Shamash (106-7) and to punish the accused witches by burning them with fire (108ff.).[65] In line 123 of the incantation, Girra is invoked to remove the witches' resting place, thereby preventing them from reaching the netherworld.

> [122] *Girra ezzu gitmālu rašubbu* / [123] *ina Ekur ašar tallaktīka ē tušapšiḫšunūti adi surriš*
>
> ([122]) Raging Girra, perfect, awe inspiring, / ([123]) In the (netherworld) Ekur,[66] the place of your travel, speedily cause them not to have rest.[67]

As Abusch points out, "At the very least, this incantation indicates that the witch is not to be accorded a burial."[68] Abusch explains that the ghost of the guilty must not only be destroyed

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[63] Abusch 2002: 251-252 and 273.

[64] Abusch also notes that other than fed to the animals (and burned), the witches were also not accorded a burial. He parallels the treatment of the enemy in EST (or VTE) to that of the witches in *Maqlû* (Abusch 2002: 231-232; cf. Jer 15:3).

[65] In place of actual opponents, the speaker in the ritual uses effigies of the witches, who are tried *in absentia*.

[66] Ekur is a prison as well as a term for the underworld. See Jacobsen and Abusch 2002: 17, note 47.

[67] Abusch 2002: 231-232.

[68] The author explores this topic by stating that unburied individuals could become restless and troublesome ghosts, noting that *eṭemmu* is the most common Akkadian term for ghost. These ghosts were considered beings of a formless, chaotic realm, often associated with the steppe and winds, unregulated by the gods, and banished to this domain for eternity, where they frequently transformed into demons. See Jacobsen and Abusch 2002: 17. Schwemer challenges Abusch's interpretation of this passage, arguing that lines 119–120 contain no explicit references to graves or the underworld. Consequently, he contends that the mention of É-KUR in line 123 should not be understood as the underworld but as the primary Babylonian shrine and temple of Enlil, an appropriate residence for Girra, who is identified with Enlil's vizier Nuska in *Maqlû*. Schwemer interprets the passage as depicting the defeat of witches through imagery of social degradation, poverty, and resulting unrest. See Schwemer 2010: 321.
However, Schwemer's assertion that É-KUR is not linked to the underworld appears unsupported by sources, which consistently associate this structure with the underworld, often termed "the region of souls." The É-KUR, or "house of the mountain," was regarded as the domain of Nergal, known as *den-líl-kur-ra*, "the Enlil of the underworld." His URU.GAL, or "great city," was the shared afterlife for departed souls. For a detailed discussion of this topic, see Van der Sluijs 2011: 150.

but also kept from being integrated or reintegrated into the community in the afterlife.[69] This idea is made more explicit in *Maqlû* VIII 123-126:

> [123] [*Ere*]*škigal* <u>*ana erṣeti ay ušēr*[*idki*]</u> / [124] [*eli* (or: ana) *p*]*agrīki erû u zību linnadrū* / [125] [*q*]*ūlu ḫurbāšu limqutū elīki* / [126] *kalbu u kalbatu libaṣṣirūki* / [127] *kalbu u kalbatu libaṣṣirū šīrīki*
>
> ([123]) May [Ere]škigal <u>not permit [you (*the witch*) to go] down into the netherworld</u> / ([124]) May eagle and vulture prey [on] your corpse, / ([125]) May stupor (and) terror befall you, / ([126]) May dog and bitch tear you apart, / ([127]) May dog and bitch tear apart your flesh—

Since heaven and the netherworld are part of the same cosmological realm, forming a harmonious whole, wrongdoers find themselves excluded from both realms. The fate of the wrongdoer lies in nonexistence.[70] Simply, the community would forget about him. Indeed, a *damnatio memoriae*. The punishment inflicted upon witches in *Maqlû* is justified by the recognition that witchcraft was perceived as a profoundly harmful and socially destructive practice in the ancient Near East.[71] Witchcraft was the most harmful form of environmental pollution because, unlike other crimes where impurity was a byproduct,[72] witchcraft sought it out. This could be the reason why Deut 18:10-11 condemns magic (just like Jer 27:9) and equates it to an act of murder, as in the case of the sacrificial offering of children in the Tophet ritual:[73]

> [10]Let no one be found among you *who consigns his son or daughter to the fire*, or who is an augur, a soothsayer, a diviner, *a sorcerer*, [11]*one who casts spells, or one who consults ghosts or familiar spirits, or one who inquires of the dead*.

[69] According to the author, denial of burial was one of the harshest punishments in Mesopotamian society since it meant the offender had no place in the afterlife. See Abusch 2020: 88.
[70] In *Maqlû*, where the image of the witch is symbolically destroyed by fire, this aspect becomes obvious. In Akkadian, the term *Maqlû* itself means "burning." See Abusch 2020: 90-91.
[71] In the ancient Mesopotamian theological worldview, any act, attitude, or speech intended to harm another individual was seen as an act of witchcraft; envy and wickedness were seen as manifestations of witchcraft, with sorcery believed to transform these emotions into destructive powers. For Mesopotamians, magic was the root of all misfortunes, from economic collapse and marital breakdown to societal decline and physical decay and ritual experts condemned witches in prayers and incantations for perpetrating evil through witchcraft (cf. *Maqlû* I, 18). As Abusch notes, the witch as a figure endowed with demonic powers is rare in surviving texts; typically, witches and warlocks are portrayed as humans employing witchcraft techniques to cause harm (Abusch and Schwemer 2010, 3). By breaching *māmītu*, witches not only displayed hostility but also showed contempt for the divine order. Violating this sacred bond carried severe consequences, such as banishment from the community or even death.
[72] I.e., pact violation, sexual aberrations, adultery, or murder.
[73] See full discussion on this topic in Chapter IV.

A curious aspect of witchcraft's pollution is that it could only be cleansed by criminal prosecution.[74] In his examination of criminal law in the ancient Near East,[75] Westbrook argues that witchcraft is "a form of harm no less than homicide or wounding, for which redress can be claimed in the divine courts."[76] He emphasizes that the appropriate response to this kind of offense is death or exile, as well as purifying rituals. The primary focus of the Akkadian ritual *Maqlû* is around the theme of a witch undergoing a trial in a heavenly court.[77] Here, the speaker-plaintiff seeks to punish witches through legal means not only while they are alive but also after they die, by preventing them from entering the netherworld, the afterlife to which their souls aspire. The speaker-plaintiff executes the verdict at the end of the first tablet of *Maqlû* (I 135-143).[78] He sets fire to the witches' effigies, causing them to disintegrate and allowing the sun god and judge to light on them, dimming their glow.[79] At that moment, the Mesopotamian god *Asalluḫi*, the Mesopotamian god of exorcism, son of the god Ea, extinguishes their embers and subsequently "cuts off" (*parāsu*, l. 143) their evil emanations to make them disappear from existence:

> [139a] (([*ēpiš kiš*]*p*[*ī lemn*]*ū*⌜*ti ruḫê lā*⌝ *ṭābūti*)) / [139b] (([*ša ana lemutti*] *ikpudūn*[*i*] *yâši*)) / [140] *ḫūlā zūbā u itattukā* / [141] *quturkunu līttelli šamê* / [142] *laʾmīkunu liballi Šamši* / [143] *liprus ḫayyattakunu mār Ea mašmaššu* TU_6 ÉN

[74] Witchcraft is a form of harm that can result in physical ailments, some of which are fatal. It can be aimed at a person or a community of individuals. Through prayer, the affected individual may seek assistance from the gods or seek their judgment against the witch. He/she might utilize magic to neutralize magic, using, for example, amulets, apotropaic figurines, and the like, or rely on a specialist, an exorcist, to render magic ineffectual. Additionally, the affected individual may prosecute the offender of the crime in a human court.

[75] Westbrook 2003: 657-91.

[76] Westbrook 2009: 292.

[77] Holtz 2017: 140–48.

[78] *Maqlû*'s first invocation (I, 1-36) portrays a victim of witchcraft pleading with the gods to judge his case. See Westbrook, "Witchcraft *and the Law*," 290. The exact nature of the witch's transgression remains veiled in *Maqlû*, yet the words of the witchcraft victim reveal a certainty that she must have wielded her sorcery to inflict harm upon him (*ukaššipanni*, "she has bewitched me" *Maqlû* I, 4). The text indicates that the witch's word is frequently involved in these magical attacks (cf. the term *amātu and t*he use of the word "*ubburu*" in line 5 of the text). Abusch explains that in these texts, the witch makes verbal accusations against the victim, which may result in the victim's god becoming alienated, his social group excluded, and most crucially, his violation of the *māmītu* pledge (*Maqlû* I, 6-7). See Abusch 2015: 109).

[79] The cleansing fire's rays "consuming" the wrongdoer is also found in the Masoretic Text, both in Deut 21:21: "Thus you will burn up (ובערת) evil from your midst: all Israel will hear and be afraid," (The Septuagint reads "expel the wicked one" [*exareis ton ponēron*]) and Jer 7:20: "My wrath and My fury will be poured out upon this place, on man and on beast, on the trees of the field and the fruit of the soil. It shall burn (ובערה), with none to quench it."

([139a]) (([The doer of] ev[il witchcra]ft, not good spittle, / ([139b]) [Who] plotted [evil] against me myself.)) / ([140]) Melt, dissolve, drip ever away / ([141]) May your smoke rise ever heavenward, / ([142]) May the sun extinguish your embers, / ([143]) May Ea's son, the exorcist, cut off the terror ("panic") that emanates from you. TU_6 ÉN

In *Maqlû* II 148, the reference to the destruction of the witch and the warlock is even more explicit:

kaššāpu u kaššāptu (var.: kaššāpīya u kaššāptīya) liḫūlū lizūbū u littattukū

[148] So may my warlock and witch dissolve, melt, and drip ever away.

In some ways, the punishment meted out to the witch in the *Maqlû* ceremony parallels the biblical penalty of כרת, the "severing" carried out by Yahweh, a form of divine annihilation involving the sinner's death and the termination of his or her lineage.[80] The "cutting off" of the witch's "emanations," which frequently allude to her witchcraft in Mesopotamian rituals, may signal the end of her power, as well as her earthly and afterlife existence. In Akkadian incantations, the "cutting off" of the witch's emanations is expressed by the verb *parāsu*, which parallels the Hebrew verb כרת and means "to separate [divide] > differentiate > determine." Kutsch notes that like other Hebrew verbs, כרת develops from its basic meaning of "to cut," "to establish, determine, conclude."[81] More on this aspect, the use of *parāsu* concerning lineage extinction is shown in a curse in EST:

[o 437] *[d]be-lit*—DINGIR-MEŠ *[d]be-lit nab-ni-ti ta-lit-tu*[82] *ina* KUR-*ku-nu* / [o 438] *lip-ru-us ik-kil* ⌜TUR⌝.DIŠ *u la-ke-e* / [o 439] *ina* SILA *ri-bit li-za-⌜am⌝-[mi ta]-rit-ku-un*

(437) May Belet-ili, the lady of creation, cut off birth ("offspring") from your land; may she deprive your nurses of the cries of little children in the streets and squares.[83]

[80] For example, Milgrom sees the excision of the troublemaker from society and the afterlife is the most powerful tool for social redress. See full discussion in Chapter IV of this dissertation.
[81] See Abusch 2002: 128-129. Akk. *parāsu AHw* 831, as in 2 Cron 7:18 (cf. *LXX*, Syr.; for *dbr* Pi. 1 Kgs 9:5), probably also in Isa 57:8 (and in Phoen., *KAI* n. 27.10; *ANET* 658b), and especially in the expression ברית ... כרת. See Kutsch 1997: 818.
[82] The text SAA 10 226 (The King's Reign is Good; Petition for Urad-Gula [ABL 0002] from exorcists) seems to confirm that the verb *parāsu* associated with the word *tālittu* in the EST curse refers to the cutting off of progeny: [o 20] DUMU-MEŠ DUMU.MÍ-MEŠ *ú-šab-šu-ú ta-lit-tu* / [o 21] *áš-rat* "[o 20]; boys and girls are brought forth, the births / [o 21] thrive."
[83] Cf. SAA 02 006.

The significance of the execution of a witch in Mesopotamian incantations is, therefore, the obliteration of her very being, not just her evil power. To keep the witch from reaching the afterlife, she must be killed and left unburied, i.e., devoured by animals.

The Witch as the Universal Enemy

In Mesopotamian tradition, the witch is not only persecuted for her curses but also for violating a social pact through her evil activities. Abusch and Schwemer propose that in Mesopotamian culture, banishing a witch signifies expelling someone who threatens the community's internal order. Her expulsion is due to breaking a *māmītu*, a divinely sanctioned social pact. *Māmītu* is an oath that connects to the divine realm,[84] functioning as a formal agreement between two parties, similar to a treaty; it includes stipulated penalties that are formalized through curses.[85] According to Abusch, *māmītu* is the foundation of a social compact that staves off hostile and seditious behavior resulting in socially destructive events. As he argues, all members of Mesopotamian society were supposed to subscribe to *māmītu* and were tied to it by the god-established laws of social order. Assyro-Babylonians construed any breach of *māmītu* as a type of witchcraft.[86]

In lines 1-72 of the first *Maqlû* tablet, the exorcist appeals to the heavens and the netherworld to reaffirm the obligation to uphold the *māmītu* (l. 38) a binding contract for the entire community of the living and the dead and denounces the witches for breaking it. The formal judgment, beginning with ll. 73ff., aims at eradicating witches (ll. 110-121).[87] Abusch argues that the *Maqlû* witches are morally obligated to keep the *māmītu* and are punished for

[84] According to Scurlock, certain oaths in the ancient East had a self-enforcing nature. The oaths were essentially curses, as evidenced by the Akkadian term *māmītu*, which carries the dual meaning of "oath" and "curse." The scholar explains that the *māmītu* was a demonic force in and of itself, which could be destroyed only through ritual actions (cf. the *Šurpu* ritual). This required the witchcraft victim to perform a series of stripping actions, such as peeling onions and unraveling the thread. See Scurlock 2013. Both the Hebrew term אלה and the Akkadian term *māmītu* refer to curses that are appended to sworn statements. An instance of this is found in *Targum Jonathan*, where the word אלה is rendered as מומתא (*TgJ Zec 5:3*). See note 45 on p 44 in Cranz 2017.

[85] Kitz 2014: 33-34. Westbrook argues that transgressing the oath-*māmītu* is the most egregious violation against the gods. Like blasphemy, sacrilege, and apostasy, such a breach is a kind of disobedience and an attack on divine interests. See Westbrook 2003: 76.

[86] See Ramos 2021, section 2.4.1.

[87] See Jacobsen and Abusch 2002: 31.

rule infractions in the same way Assyrian vassals would.[88] As he says, "Like live vassals, live witches are killed, and their bodies are destroyed by being burned or by being fed to animals. Like dead vassals, the bones of witches who had died before being punished are removed from their graves and destroyed."[89] In the same way that rebellious Assyrian vassals would be completely banished from the empire, witches are destined not to enter the netherworld after death. Their expulsion from the afterlife must be absolute, and they must thus be banished from the universal cosmic community. Abusch suggests that "It may even be that the witches of *Maqlû* are meant to symbolize the internal and external enemies of the Neo-Assyrian Empire."[90] Being universal enemies of the Assyrian empire, witches' corpses are treated as those of criminals who have broken the law. They are not permitted to travel to the netherworld and are denied burial as they are cast out into the wilderness. What does it signify when a monarch is forbidden entry into the realm of the afterlife and abandoned amidst the barren expanse, bereft of the dignity of a befitting burial?

Use of the Theme in Jeremiah: Jehoiakim as Yahweh's Enemy and his Banishment from Israel's Community and Memory

The oracle concerning the demise of Jehoiakim in Jer 22:18-19 states that the king will not be grieved with the customary cries of lamentation, but rather will be buried like a donkey, dragged away, and left unburied beyond the walls of Jerusalem. Lundbom suggests that the oracle serves as an illustration of the ultimate judgment against Jehoiakim, who was indicted for breaking the Mosaic covenant in the previous oracle. The "woe" of judgment in verse 13 compensates for the "woe" of the lament that the king will not receive at his death.[91] I believe that the *damnatio memoriae* of Jehoiakim in Jer 22:18-19 operates on an ideological level less because of the non-burial itself than because of the underlying symbolism, which expresses the effort to "erase" the memory of this evil king. Jehoiakim, like the Mesopotamian witch, is a

[88] Disobedience threatens social and cosmic order. This concept of divine order predetermined by God can also be found in the Bible. Ezberger interprets חקים (plural) in Jer 31:36 as referring to the natural order. Jeremiah 31:36 is part of a passage (31:35-37) in which the permanence of heaven and earth maintains the continuity of the covenant between God and Israel. See Erzberger 2020: 168.
[89] See Jacobsen and Abusch 2002: 31.
[90] See Jacobsen and Abusch 2002: 31. See also Nowicki 2021: 22-31.
[91] Lundbom notes that "The judgmental 'woe' of v 13 makes up for the 'woes' of lament this king will not receive when he dies." See Lundbom 2004: 146.

breaker of the divine covenant and a murderer; hence, he should not be allowed to enjoy an afterlife.[92]

As we have seen in Chapter IV, in the biblical tradition, the murderer is banished from the community of the living but also from that of the dead. As we have seen, murder is a polluting crime,[93] but it is more harmful than other crimes since it "contaminates" society in the same way as the "blood of the innocent" does ("you must show him no pity. Thus, you will purge Israel of the blood of the innocent [דם־הנקי], and it will go well with you," Deut 19:13). There is no such thing as a "remedy" or purifying ceremony for this type of contamination. The contamination of the land caused by sin can be cleansed only through death or expulsion from the community.[94] This leads us back to the discussion of the biblical concept of כרת. As Abusch points out, the notion of כרת carries with it the implication of being banished from one's community (Num 15:30-31).[95] The Hiphil form of the verb כרת is commonly used to describe the execution and death of evildoers (Ps 101:8) and unlawful actions, such as necromancy (1 Sam 28:9).[96] Once more, when used in its Hiphil conjugation, this verb characterizes human deaths caused by divine intervention, as exemplified in 1 Kgs 14:10; 21:21, 2 Kgs 9:8, Isa 14:22, Jer 44:7-8; 47:4, and Mal 2:12. In these texts, the setting frequently involves violent death, death without proper burial, and/or death that results in alienation from the covenant community.[97]

Milgrom astutely points out that an alternative perspective on the כרת-penalty is that it may have been enforced posthumously upon the wrongdoer. In such a scenario, not only is the wrongdoer expelled from the community, but is also deprived of the opportunity to reunite with their ancestors in the afterlife due to the punishment of כרת.[98] Milgrom explains that the

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[92] Jer 22 does not include the verb *krt*, however Jer 44:11 uses it regarding the destruction of the Israelites.
[93] See full discussion on this subject in Chapter IV of this dissertation.
[94] See Frymer-Kensky 1983: 405.
[95] Abusch 2002: 69.
[96] Concern for collective responsibility is conveyed sometimes through the metaphor of pollution; necromancy is regarded as a polluting offense ("Do not turn to ghosts and do not inquire of familiar spirits, to be defiled by them (לטמאה בהם)," Lev 19:31), as does Molech worship (Ezek 20:26, 30-31), and idolatry (Ezek 14:11, 20:31).
[97] Mansen 2018: 125.
[98] Milgrom cites the biblical idiom אסף ... אל־ (Niph., "be gathered to one's (kin, fathers);" Num 20:24, 27:13, 31:2, which has analogs in Egypt and Mesopotamia. See Milgrom 1989: 405. Cf. Jer 8:2: "… and exposed to the sun, the

Bible posits three stages of death: 1) death, 2) be gathered to one's kin, and 3) interment. The second stage refers to a reunion with one's ancestors in Sheol, the place of the dead in biblical thought. Milgrom's understanding of the concept of ברת thus encompasses two different but related ideas, namely not bearing offspring in this life and not existing in the next.

Jeremiah 22 accuses Israel of violating the Mosaic covenant by worshipping other gods (Jer 22:9) and denounces Jehoiakim as a murderer (Jer 22:17; cf. Deut 19:13).[99] Since murder was viewed as a major source of pollution, biblical law mandated the murderer's death or bodily removal to remedy the contamination created by his actions. Jeremiah's condemnation of Jehoiakim's crimes reaffirms the idea that an intentional murderer like him cannot be protected by anyone or find refuge anywhere, including in the temple (Exod 21:14).[100] He is to live like a "shrub in the desert" ("Thus said the Lord: / Cursed is he who trusts in man / And turns his thoughts from the Lord. / He shall be *like a bush in the desert* [בערבה בערער]," Jer 17:5-6).[101]

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moon, and all the host of heaven which they loved and served and followed, to which they turned and bowed down. They shall not be gathered for reburial; they shall become dung upon the face of the earth." The punishment in Jer 8:2 is directed against those already dead (like witches?) and so deviates from that prescribed in Deut 17:2-7 by requiring disinterment and exposure rather than blood.

[99] "But your eyes and your mind are only / On ill-gotten gains, / On shedding the blood of the innocent (ועל דם־הנקי לשפוך), / On committing fraud and violence."

[100] According to Deist, the reference to Shiloh in verse 12 acts as a warning to Judah, as though to convey that even if the temple stands, the people may still be exiled from the land. See Deist 1993: 57-67.

[101] McKane 1986: 389, discusses the obscure term ערוער ("naked, stripped, juniper") in בערבה בערער ("a desert shrub," Jer 17:6). Jeremiah's portrayal of exiled Israel as destitute as a "shrub in the desert" evokes the Assyrian-Babylonian Maqlû's depiction of the witch's punishment. In an original, condensed version of the ceremony, Abusch reconstructs a series of actions, experiences, and attitudes that served as the ideological foundation for the Maqlû's anti-witchcraft ritual. As he notes, the ceremony would begin with the witch's image being hoisted to the sun god, who was then instructed to burn it. The convicted witch's judgment and exile to the steppe were envisioned metaphorically as a form of sympathetic magic in which the sun god mete out his punishment in absentia. Lacking social protection, the witch would be at the mercy of Girra, a manifestation of the Mesopotamian sun deity Šamaš (Abusch 2002: 159). As a form of divine punishment, ברת emphasizes the absence of social protection and the individual's isolation. This is especially the case when the individual is left to the whims of the wilderness, which is a manifestation of divine punishment's chaotic and destructive element. The Book of Jeremiah includes frequent references to the wilderness's malevolent aspect. In Jer 17:5-6, God punishes those who do not "obey God" and cease "to love him" ("whose hearts turn away from Yahweh"). He compares them to steppe dwellers (ושכן חררים במדבר), and certainly cursed people inhabit the *מדבר*, which is a cursed place in and of itself. Abusch argues that the wilderness (מדבר) represents "the non-social side of the divine, the divine in its chaotic and destructive form" (Abusch 2002: 69). According to Jer 7:34, Israel's pollution has transformed the ancestral estate (נחלה) into a cursed land, says Jer 7:34, "And I will silence in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem the sound of mirth and gladness, the voice of bridegroom and bride. For the whole land shall fall to ruin." - והשבתי | מערי יהודה ומחצות ירושלם קול ששון וקול שמחה קול חתן וקול כלה כי לחרבה תהיה הארץ.

Israel is cautioned by the law against polluting the land (Num 35:33). No ransom may be paid for a murderer's life (Num 35:31), and none may be given for a murderer's life for him to flee to the city of refuge (Num 35:32). Murder contaminates the soil, and only the murderer's blood can make amends (Num 35:33). According to Milgrom, one of the consequences of the כרת punishment—imposed in response to murder—is the prohibition of reuniting with one's ancestors in the afterlife, in addition to being deprived of descendants in this life. As we have seen, this notion is also essential to *Maqlû* and intersects with the witches' punishment. What can we learn from the thematic similarities between the punishment of Jehoiakim and the fate of the Mesopotamian witch, despite the absence of a direct connection between the two literary characters?

The first is *covenant violation*. Jehoiakim breached the Mosaic covenant and was accountable for one of society's most heinous crimes: murder. As we have seen, in the ancient Near East, witchcraft was viewed as a polluting crime on par with murder and, in some respects, much more harmful. In Mesopotamian incantations, the witch's sorcery entails a breach of the *māmītu* social compact; a breach that disrupts the cosmic order upon which her community depends.[102] The Mesopotamian witch, the Israelite king, and the entire Israelite people violated a divinely approved social compact.[103]

The second thematic parallel is that of the total *eradication of the social enemy*. The refusal to bury Jehoiakim and the lack of mourning rituals are indicative of a *damnatio memoriae* that is also a form of כרת, as כרת requires the criminal to be "cut off" or banished not only from the community of the living but also from that of the dead; the criminal will have no progeny. This

[102] While it would not be plausible to treat the two oath forms as similar in content and structure, it is nevertheless conceivable that some of the provisions of the Mosaic covenant and the *māmītu* were functionally comparable. Indeed, the goal of some of the provisions of these oaths was to bring about order in the creation, through a series of norms and regulations governing not only the proper social behavior (cf. EST §5: o 72, §32: o 376, §33: o 378-379, §35: o 397 and 399 // Deut 12-25, Deut 26:16-19), but also the retributive system, usually comprising curses (cf. EST §44: o 433 and §102: o 652 // Deut 28), which would be forced upon the oath violators. See Brueggemann 2001: 21-22.

[103] An interesting element of Jeremiah 22 is that it contains a possible indirect quote from *Maqlû*, as recognized by Abusch in 2002 (see page *235*). See discussion in the "Introduction."

idea is clearly illustrated in Ps 34:16, which ties the concept of ברת with God's total eradication of the memory of the wicked:

פני יהוה בעשי רע להכרית מארץ זכרם

The face of the Lord is set against evildoers, to erase their names from the earth.

Jeremiah's words against Jehoiakim in Jer 22:28–30 foretell the destruction that would befall Jeconiah (=Jehoiachin), his son, effectively suggesting that none of his progeny would ever sit on the throne of David. Jehoiakim and his son will simply be forgotten.[104] According to Milgrom, ברת need not be inflicted upon the sinner directly; it will befall his descendants.[105] In a similar way, anti-witchcraft rituals will extinguish or "cut off" the witch's "emissions" or "witchcraft" permanently, and she will no longer be able to travel to the netherworld once she has been sentenced.[106] She will disappear from existence (cf. *Maqlû* I 143 and II 148).[107]

A third thematic parallel is that of the *denial of burial*. Jehoiakim is denied a proper burial, and his remains are thrown outside the walls of Jerusalem, i.e., into a chaotic space existing outside the divine order maintained by the urban perimeter. The area outside the walls of Jerusalem is desolate. This is the region in which the king will continue to wander as a tormented soul. The Mesopotamian witch is banished from the community; she, too, is denied burial and is doomed to wander the wilderness as a malevolent ghost with no future access to the human community. Thus, the motif of non-burial is a literary weapon that renders a definitive verdict on the present, as well as the future, by barring access to the hereafter.[108] Robb suggests that non-burial is "ostensibly for people excised from moral communities, as

[104] Matthew (1:11–12) lists Jeconiah as one of Jesus' ancestors, which has prompted numerous Christian writers to attempt to comprehend the significance of the divine *damnatio memoriae* that deprived him of royal successors. For a discussion of this issue, see Adler 1997: 34.

[105] Milgrom suggests that ברת specifically refers to extirpation in the Torah. A case in point is provided by Ps 109:13: "May his posterity be cut off; may their names be blotted out in the next generation." As he points out, "This verse is significant because of its parallelism: It equates *karet* with extirpation, and it states explicitly that *karet* need not be carried out upon the sinner himself; it will befall his descendants." Milgrom 1989: 406.

[106] Micah 5:11 establishes the connection between witchcraft and ברת*:* [11] והכרתי כשפים מידך ומעוננים לא יִהיו־לך – "I will destroy *("cut off")* the sorcery you practice, And you shall have no more soothsayers."

[107] The fact that the witch in these rituals is never identified may be one reason why Babylonian incantations refer to "cutting off" the witch's evil emanations as opposed to her offspring. The identity of the witch is nearly often kept from the plaintiff in anti-witchcraft rituals. Cf. *Maqlû* I, 87.

[108] Mansen 2018: 52.

with witchcraft executions, heretics, suicides buried in unconsecrated ground, and so on."[109] Deprivation of burial, as Porter points out, serves to "sever the social relationship between [the dead] and the living, thus turning ancestors into rootless, and rancorous ghosts."[110] This is the time when the unremembered dead become undead memories.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Jehoiakim did not meet the same fate as the witches of Mesopotamia. However, I believe that the author of the book of Jeremiah deliberately portrayed Jehoiakim as a witch, symbolizing the embodiment of a universal enemy.[111] The author accomplishes this by integrating Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft motifs, portraying the witch not as a stereotypical old woman practicing dark magic, but rather as a theatrical mask, an artistic flourish expressing complete malevolence. This depiction underscores the significant menace that witches present to the collective welfare of an entire community. The author of Jer 22:19 desired to portray Jehoiakim as the evilest of Israel's evil kings, and the image of the Mesopotamian witch, the archetypal *nakru* (Akk., "enemy, foe" CAD 11.1:192) of the Assyrian empire, may have provided an irresistible literary antecedent for his portrayal of this scroll-burning, God-defying king.[112] The burial of Jehoiakim in Jer 22:19 remains a topic of significant interest and ongoing debate. While there is much more to be explored and discussed on this matter, I aim to offer some insights that may provoke thoughtful consideration.[113]

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[109] Robb 2008: 293.

[110] Porter 2002: 325.

[111] As Schniedewind recently noted, it is also crucial to emphasize the prophets' legitimizing function (cf. Neh 6:6-7), which is readily prominent early in the Biblical narrative. If this is indeed the Biblical view, then the context of Jeremiah 22 seems to indicate that Jehoiakim was deposed by Jeremiah, a court prophet who, in keeping with tradition, should have continued to legitimize him as king of Israel. See Schniedewind 2018: 207-217.

[112] Fales 1982: 425-435.

[113] In her feedback on my dissertation, Professor Leith offers an insightful dissenting view on the interpretation of Jehoiakim's dehumanizing burial in Jeremiah 22:18-19. While I argue that the narrative of this unsettling burial—or the threat of it—resonates with the motif of unburied corpses in the *Maqlû* ritual and broader Mesopotamian anti-demonic traditions, particularly as reflected in incantatory literature, Leith contends that Jehoiakim's burial represents "an elemental idea," one that transcends the confines of Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft literature. She asserts that this concept was shared across various cultures in the ancient Near East. Leith's point is well-founded, and I take it seriously. Indeed, instances of the trope of the unburied bodies in literature extend beyond the Levant and Mesopotamia, with notable examples in Greek tragedy, such as in Sophocles' *Antigone*. In this play, the body of Polyneices is left unburied as punishment for his betrayal of Thebes, a decree issued by Creon, the new ruler. Creon's edict sets the stage for the drama's central conflict, as Antigone defies his order in order to honor her

3. "Drink, be Drunk and Vomit, Fall and Rise no More": Understanding the Image of the Cup of God's Wrath in Jeremiah 25:27-28 in Light of The Mesopotamian Anti-Witchcraft Tradition

Introduction

Jeremiah 25:27–28 unveils a cataclysmic tableau, wherein God commands his chosen vessel, the prophet Jeremiah, to inebriate the leaders and populace of Judah with the

religious duty and bury her brother. In my essay, "'He shall be buried with the burial of a donkey': On the Dehumanizing Burial of Jehoiakim in Jer 22:18-19 and its Possible Connection to the Witch's Disposal in Maqlû," which appears as Chapter VI of my dissertation (currently under revision for resubmission to *JBL*), I engage with Mansen's 2018 volume on the non-burial motif in the Hebrew Bible. Mansen argues that Jehoiakim's lack of a proper burial constitutes a form of *damnatio memoriae*, interpreting it as a literary act of humiliation meant to shame the king. In her view, the burial of a donkey symbolizes this degradation, and the objective is primarily moral judgment (Mansen 2018: 169). However, I approach this motif from a different angle, one that connects it to the recurrent allusions to the *Maqlû* ritual that I identify in the Jeremianic passages discussed in my dissertation. The comparison I draw between Jehoiakim's non-burial, and the disposal of the Mesopotamian witch focuses on the shared fate these figures experience, particularly in their respective religious contexts. As Abusch outlines in his seminal 2002 volume on Mesopotamian magic, Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions describe the corpses of enemies left to decay in the wilderness, treated like animals, without the benefit of mourning rituals. This aspect of royal propaganda is fundamentally theological, underscoring the curse-like dimension of such actions, which is reflected in the incantatory language used in these texts. Both Lauinger (2016: 132-133) and Abusch (2002: 230-231) examine the association of cursing language in Assyrian inscriptions and vassal treaties, an essential element for understanding the broader implications of this motif. Lauinger, in particular, argues that the curses found in EST are directly borrowed from *Maqlû* and *Šurpu*. Abusch contends that in the *Maqlû* ritual, the ceremonial elimination of the witch unfolds in a deliberate sequence, wherein, following her conviction in the fictitious literary trial embedded within the ritual, she is intentionally left unburied. This, Abusch argues, underscores that "the injunction to feed the witch's body to animals is to be taken literally as the final destructive act of the ceremony" (Abusch 2002: 230). He further observes that "the feeding ritual parallels and perhaps reflects practices known from Neo-Assyrian inscriptions. Similar treatment is meted out by the Neo-Assyrian kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal to especially detested enemies [...]." More pointedly, Abusch asserts, "Such is the fate of enemies who have committed crimes against the empire. Note especially the threats in Esarhaddon's treaty curses against those who do not keep the terms of the treaty." Abusch's interpretation of the *Maqlû* ritual, which centers on the elimination of Assyria's supposed cosmic enemy—the witch (and it is of no consequence for my argument that the ancient Assyrians identified their universal internal enemy as a malevolent, unlawful female practitioner of magic)—parallels, in my view, the book of Jeremiah's depiction of the removal of the prophet's archenemy: Jehoiakim. More than a common motif in the ancient Near East, the king's lack of burial in Jeremiah 22:18-19 serves to underscore that Jehoiakim is not only an adversary of God and Jeremiah but also an enemy of the nation of Judah. This mirrors the role of the witch as the enemy of both the Assyrian king and the nation as a whole. The interested reader can follow a broader discussion on this aspect in the conclusion of my dissertation (pp. 291-294) in the section titled "The Paradigm of the Social Enemy: Jeremiah 22:18-19, Jeremiah 20:10, and Jeremiah 29:22."

intoxicating elixir of his divine wrath.[114] In the passage, Jeremiah receives instructions from God in the following way:

[27] ואמרת אליהם כה אמר יהוה צבאות אלהי ישראל שתו ושכרו וקיו ונפלו ולא תקומו מפני החרב אשר אנכי שלח ביניכם:
[28] והיה כי ימאנו לקחת־הכוס מידך לשתות ואמרת אליהם כה אמר יהוה צבאות שתו תשתו

> [27] Say to them: "Thus said the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel: Drink and get drunk and vomit; fall and never rise again, because of the sword that I send among you." [28] And if they refuse to take the cup from your hand and drink, say to them, "Thus said the Lord of Hosts: You must drink! (Jer 25:27-28)

Many intra-biblical analyses have yielded divergent interpretations of the passage's meaning. Some interpreters see this scene as emblematic of divine punishment.[115] Others feel the nation's intoxication makes it vulnerable to attack by its enemies.[116] The numerous readings show that there is more to this passage than meets the eye. The image of the cup of God's wrath in Jeremiah 25, which appears in both vv. 15-17 and 27-28, has never been compared to extra-biblical material. In this regard, Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft literature offers compelling connections with our text, which may help to illustrate its significance. For instance, an Assyrian incantation from the seventh century BCE links witchcraft to the wrath of one's personal god.[117] This incantation, which is part of a purification ritual for the patient's social reintegration, connects his bodily symptoms (e.g., vomiting and staggering) to a poisoned drink and attributes his curse to the wrath of his personal gods.

I propose that the image of the cup of God's wrath in Jer 25:15–17 and 27–28 was drawn from the traditional Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft trope of cursing through drinking in order to provide a climactic end to Yahweh's unmitigated devastation of Judah. Acting as an exorcist, Yahweh hands the leaders and people of Judah a cup brimming with his divine wrath. By doing so, Yahweh forces his people to expel their inner malice through an elixir symbolizing their transgressions. This study adds to the discussion on the connection between Mesopotamian

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[114] In the foreboding backdrop of Jeremiah 25, God fulfills the threats made against the unrepentant and unfaithful Israelites in the book's prologue. Stulman (2011: 223, 225) considers this chapter to be the "bookend" of the first half of the Book of Jeremiah based on its narrative structure. He believes that Jeremiah 1 and 25 function as an envelope "that holds the intervening chapters in check."
[115] Holladay and Hanson 1986: 673; McKane 1980: 487-92.
[116] Kaiser and Rata 2019: 171.
[117] Abusch and Schwemer 2011.

anti-witchcraft literature and biblical oracular rhetoric,[118] offering a new interpretation of a key image in Jeremiah 25, which is seen by many scholars as the framework for the first section of the book.

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The interpretation of the image of God's "cup of wrath" in Jer 25:15–17 and 27–28 has sparked a heated debate over which there has been no consensus to date. According to Stulman and Holladay, the cup of wrath mentioned in Jeremiah 25 serves as a symbolic representation of divine judgment.[119] McKane draws a parallel between this image and the test, often referred to as "trial by ordeal," described in Num 5:11-31,[120] which aimed to ascertain the fidelity of a wife in cases where her husband harbored suspicions of her engaging in adultery.[121] McKane makes it clear that the "trial by ordeal" model alone is not a satisfactory explanation for the "cup of wrath" passages in Jeremiah 25. This is because it fails to account for why the content of the cup is specifically wine. According to McKane, the cup of wine presented in Jeremiah 25 (MT-Jer 25:15 את כוס היין החמה; LXX, το ποτηριον του οινου του ακρατου) suggests a banquet of death. This means that to interpret the "cup of wrath" metaphor in Jeremiah, we would need to employ an anti-banquet motif, which McKane compares to the frightful inversion of the benevolent host and wholesome hospitality. The nations are gathered for a feast, but the wine that is served to them will not promote celebration but produce illness, insanity, and disaster.[122] Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard believe that the cup of God's wrath brims with a poisonous mixture of wine and חמה (Jer 25:15). The Hebrew word חמה might signify "anger" or "wrath," but can also allude to the poison of a snake in other biblical passages.[123]

[118] Comparative studies exploring the relationship between biblical prophetic rhetoric and Mesopotamian incantatory language have become increasingly popular over the years as the following titles demonstrate: See Fohrer (1966) on the relationship between biblical prophecy and magic; Key (1967) on the magical setting of Isa 6:9-13; Cathcart (1978) on the relationship between Mic 5:4-5 and the Semitic incantatory tradition; Bowen (1999) and Evans 2014 on Ezek 13:17-23; and Kotze (2007) on Job 15:12. On the Book of Jeremiah, see Adcock 2017.
[119] Stulman 2011: 227. Holladay and Hanson 1986: 673.
[120] Cf. Thompson 1980. See also the discussion of this passage in Numbers 5 in Fishbane 1971: 213-60.
[121] According to the ritual, the cup becomes a cursed chalice if the woman who drinks its content miscarries, therefore proving her unfaithfulness to her husband. See McKane's (1980: 474-92) thought-provoking analysis of this ritual in Numbers 5.
[122] See McKane (1980: 491-92).
[123] HALOT 1, s.v. "חמת"; see, for example, Deut 32:24, 33; Pss 58:5; 104:4(3).

The authors also note that the depiction of Judah as the "object of curse" in Jer 25:17-18 recalls covenant contexts in which the curse represents disobedience and transgression of the Mosaic covenant.[124]

The examination of intra-biblical contexts supports the most common interpretation of God's cup of wrath as a punishment for the violation of the mosaic covenant and consequently, the breaking of the relationship between God and Israel.[125] An illuminating occurrence of the metaphor of the cup of God's wrath in the Hebrew Bible, also connected to Israel's covenantal violation, occurs in Isa 51:17.[126] This passage is God's response to Isa 51:9's wake-up call. God implores Israel to cast aside its shackles of helplessness and embrace the resolute assurance that her strife shall cease to exist.[127] The oppressors who dare to inflict suffering upon Israel shall themselves bear the weight of their transgressions. In Isa 51:17, Israel is depicted as being vulnerable and lacking protection in the face of her adversaries.[128] The nation is roused from

[124] Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard 2018: 371.

[125] The correlation between the depiction of the cup of God's wrath and the breaking of a covenantal agreement is not unique to the Book of Jeremiah but is also found in many other biblical passages. Consider, for example, Ezekiel 23. This chapter describes the unfaithfulness of Yahweh's brides. The text refers to Samaria as Oholah and Jerusalem as Oholibah. Samaria is the older sister of Jerusalem. The two cities, symbolically referred to as "daughters of one mother," marry Yahweh and bore children for him. Oholibah represents the southern kingdom, which served as Yahweh's designated dwelling place in Jerusalem. In contrast, Oholah represents the northern monarchy and its associated religious sites. The poem employs a variety of political metaphors, with allegorical infidelity signifying the violation of political commitments, as exemplified by Samaria and Assyria's shattered alliance beginning in 842 BCE. Oholibah (Jerusalem) witnesses the sorrow of her sister Oholah as God delivers her to her executioners. Oholibah invites the Babylonians into her bed rather than repenting (vv. 11-35). Yahweh mobilizes the Babylonians and their Assyrian allies against Oholibah. She is ordered in verses 32-34 to drink from Oholah's cup, that is, to receive her punishment (cf. Jer 25:15-19; Hab 2:16). See Galambush 2001. In Ezek 23:31-34, we read: "[31] You walked in your sister's path; therefore I will put her cup into your hand. [32] Thus said the Lord God: You shall drink of your sister's cup, So deep and wide; It shall cause derision and scorn, It holds so much. [33] You shall be filled with drunkenness and woe. The cup of desolation and horror, The cup of your sister Samaria— [34] You shall drink it and drain it, And gnaw its shards; And you shall tear your breasts." Since Oholibah has imitated her sister's evil conduct, she will also perish. To accentuate this dismal climax, verses 31-34 evoke the "cup of woe." This image, according to Block, implies that the author of Ezekiel was familiar with Jer 25:15–29. Here, the cup is described as deep and wide, filled to the brim with "drunkenness and sorrow" (Ezek 23:33). This drink will so intoxicate Oholibah (שכרון ויגון תמלאי) that she will appear foolish to other nations, and perhaps even more tragically, the cup will transform for her into a "cup of horror and devastation" (כוס שמה ושממה), implying that her punishment will be harsh. See Block 1997: 754-55.

[126] Friesen 2009: 324 describes Isa 51:17-23 as "A stirring call to wake up from the listless repose brought on by suffering."

[127] Cf. Isa 40:2.

[128] Cf. also Isa 51:9.

her intoxicated slumber by a divine force, urging her to respond.[129] She has been rendered lethargic after imbibing a potent elixir that God has presumably poisoned. Despite the somber depiction of God's malevolent brew as a means of righteous retribution, the passage conveys a glimmer of hope steeping beneath its surface.

> Rouse, rouse yourself! Arise, O Jerusalem, You who from the Lord's hand Have drunk the cup of His wrath (את־כוס חמתו), You who have drained to the dregs the bowl, the cup of reeling (כוס התרעלה)! (Isa 51:17)

In this passage, two expressions stand out: "cup of His wrath" (את־כוס חמתו) and "cup of reeling" (כוס התרעלה). Both phrases conjure the connotation of a curse. The contents of the cup of God's wrath seem to imply the presence of a toxic substance both in Isaiah and Jeremiah. It is important to mention that the Hebrew term תרעלה, used in the phrase "the cup of reeling," could potentially mean "poison" when it is used in parallel with חמה, as suggested by Cohen,[130] and the Targum, which interprets the word to mean "cursing."[131]

אתרבא אתרבא קומי ירושלם דקבילת מן קדם יי ית בסא דחימתה ית פילי בסא דלוטא שתית אערית:

> Exalt yourself, exalt yourself, stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have accepted before the LORD the cup of his wrath, who have drunk to the dregs a bowl of the cup of cursing.[132] (*Targum*, Isa 51:17)

The phrase "cup of his (Yahweh's) wrath" (את־כוס חמתו) in Isa 51:17, on the other hand, employs the Hebrew word חמה, used also in the expression "Yahweh's wrath" (חמת־יהוה) to characterize God's anger in Isa 51:20. The Hebrew noun חמה (HALOT 1, s.v. "חמה") likely derives from the root יחם, "to be hot" or "to be burning," which may in turn relate to the root חמם, "to be hot or burning." The term חמה typically has three recurring connotations in the

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[129] See Oswalt 1998: 598-99.

[130] Cohen 2007: 283-84 points out that the exact meaning of the Hebrew term תרעלה (from רעל) remains uncertain. However, he suggests that the term likely denotes a type of poison, as indicated in Isa 51:17, 22, where תרעלה is used in parallel with חמה. Cohen also mentions the case of the word יין ("wine") in Ps 60:5 (יין תרעלה), which aligns appropriately with the meanings of חמה and מררה. However, the few other passages (Isa 3:19; Nah. 2.4; Hab 2:16 [read והרעל, as in 1Qp-Hab]; Zech 12:2) where this noun or its related verb appear again are not easily understood and do not provide any clues for identification. The scanty evidence suggests that the biblical term רעל cannot be traced back to the Aramaic word רעל ("to shake, tremble"), as some commentators suggest. This is due to the fact that its use is identical to that of two other biblical words for poison, חמה and מררה. See also Cohen (1975: 85).

[131] Goldingay and Payne 2006: 248-49.

[132] The "cup of cursing" (פילי בסא דלוטא; from לטא or לטי "to curse." See Chilton 1987.

Hebrew Bible: (a) "poison,"[133] (b) "heat (of wine)" or "burning wine,"[134] and (c) "excitement," "anger," "wrath."[135] The original meaning of the word "to be heated" (by poison, alcohol, or heat) in each of these contexts is apparent.

As mentioned earlier, in Jer 25:15a (repeated in Jer 25:27-28), God entrusts the prophet with a chalice containing a deadly substance, which he must deliver to the culpable in Judah and compel them to drink:

15 כי כה אמר יהוה אלהי ישראל אלי קח את־כוס היין החמה הזאת מידי והשקיתה אתו את־כל־הגוים אשר אנכי שלח אותך אליהם:
16 ושתו והתגעשו והתהללו מפני החרב אשר אנכי שלח בינתם:
17 ואקח את־הכוס מיד יהוה ואשקה את־כל־הגוים אשר־שלחני יהוה אליהם:
18 את־ירושלם ואת־ערי יהודה ואת־מלכיה את־שריה לתת אתם לחרבה לשמה לשרקה ולקללה כיום הזה:

15 For thus said the Lord, the God of Israel, to me: "Take from My hand this cup of wine—of wrath—and make all the nations to whom I send you drink of it. 16 Let them drink and retch and act crazy, because of the sword that I am sending among them." 17 So I took the cup from the hand of the Lord and gave drink to all the nations to whom the Lord had sent me: 18 Jerusalem and the towns of Judah, and its kings and officials to make them a desolate ruin, an object of hissing and a curse —as is now the case (Jer 25:15-18)

We can assume that this wine "of wrath" (היין החמה, v. 15) has been poisoned because God wants to make the people of Judah and its leaders an object of ridicule and cursing (v. 18). Holladay observes that the phrase את־כוס היין החמה ("cup of [the] wine—of [the] wrath") contains two definite articles, which makes it grammatically awkward and unsound. He suggests that the combination of יין and חמה cannot coexist without one of them being in the construct state. He proposes that either of the two terms should be considered as a gloss, with a preference for the term "wrath" as a possible inclusion.[136] Paleographic evidence indicates that the text has remained relatively stable over time, as this form dates back to at least the first half of the second century BCE at Qumran.[137] The Septuagint translates the sequence היין

[133] Cf. Deut 32:24, 33; Ps 58:5(4); 140:4(3); Job 6:4.
[134] Cf. Isa 27:4; Hos 7:5; Hab 2:15; Job 36:18.
[135] Cf. Isa 34:2; Jer 6:11; Prov 15:18, etc.
[136] See Holladay and Hanson 1986: 670.
[137] See Jer 25:8–15 in Ulrich 2010: 573.

החמה with τοῦ οἴνου τοῦ ἀκράτο, which reads as "undiluted wine."[138] McKane agrees with Holladay that this word sequence presents a grammatical difficulty and also agrees with Rudolph, who sees the word חמה as the addition in the passage.[139] Given the similarity between the phrase "cup of wine—of wrath" to a comparable expression in Isa 51:17 (כוס חמתו), one wonders if the supposed gloss in Jer 25:15 is the word יין, "wine," rather than חמה, "wrath."[140]

Despite the possibility of a gloss in the Masoretic Text of Jer 15:15, the connection between the Hebrew word חמה and poisonous substances remains strong, as demonstrated by other passages in Jeremiah and other biblical texts. The Hebrew word חמה retains the literary memory of its association with the notion of poison in numerous biblical and extra-biblical texts, as evidenced by the image of snakebite poison in Ugaritic incantations and witch's evil "spittle" in Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft rituals.

The word* חמה *as snake venom

In the Hebrew Bible, the representation of divine anger is frequently depicted as a liquid substance. For example, in the famous lament found in Job 21:20, the sufferer poignantly compares the anger of God (חמה) to a drink that is meant to be consumed (שתה). This interpretation is also substantiated by the Hebrew verbs employed in the Masoretic Text, which often suggest the visual of spilled liquid. God's חמה is often "poured forth"[141] like a fluid in numerous biblical texts[142] in which God's divine wrath spills over Israel's guilty people. Many biblical passages equate חמה with snake venom. For example, Deut 32:33 connects the idea of the wine produced by Israel's enemies to that of the venom of a snake.

> Their wine is the חמה of snakes, and the deadly poison of horned vipers.

[138] See Holladay and Hanson 1986: 670.
[139] Cf. See McKane 1986: 634.
[140] The notion of חמה as a drinkable substance also appears in Job. Cf. also Job 21:20 "and let him drink the wrath of Shaddai!" (ומחמת שדי ישתה).
[141] Cf. verbs נתך and שפך; cf. Ezek 20:13 for the latter verb.
[142] Including Jer 6:1; 42:18; and 44:6.

Craigie argues that Deut 32:33 relates to God's enemies, who play a role in the execution of divine judgment. Harkening back to the guilty cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, the biblical passage compares God's adversaries to a vineyard where evil is deeply rooted. The evil of Israel's adversaries served as a stark reminder that the divine selection was not conferred upon them because of their inherent virtue, but rather to emphasize the disgrace of Israel's wrongdoings.[143] The same Deuteronomic passage makes it clear that חמה is the venom of "things that crawl in the dust."[144]

Multiple psalms associate חמה with snake venom,[145] as, for example, Ps 58:4.[146] Tanner, for instance, contends that the wicked are depicted in this psalm not by their actions (as in vv. 1 and 2), but by the state of their hearts. It presents the evildoers as innately corrupt. As Tanner observes, they were never a part of the community of the covenant. Not only are they as dangerous as poisonous snakes, but they also refuse to listen to anyone (v. 5a).[147]

The book of Jeremiah overflows with references to God's חמה, described as a cursed fluid that spills upon the wicked inhabitants of Israel. In Jer 4:4,[148] God's חמה is portrayed as an untamed fury, a force that bursts forth (יצא) like a raging wildfire. In Jer 6:11, the Qal infinitive construct of the verb שפך suggests that God's wrath descends like a poisonous deluge upon the streets of Jerusalem.[149] The inhabitants of Jerusalem, in a state of frenzied desperation, can be seen laboriously scraping away the malevolent sludge that clings to the ancient thoroughfares of the city, forever tainted by the curse of Yahweh. In Jer 6:11a, the phrase מלאתי ("I am full with [Yahweh's wrath]") encapsulates the very core of Jeremiah's being. It paints a vivid portrait of his physical vessel, saturated to the brim with a tempestuous liquid wrath, poised to surge forth from his very lips, like a torrential outpouring of divine fury.[150] In Jer 7:20, we find a

[143] Craigie 1976: 325-26.
[144] זחלי עפר; Deut 32:24.
[145] Cf. Ps 140:3.
[146] The passage explicitly states: "Their חמה is like snake venom..."
[147] De Claissé-Walford, Jacobson, and LaNeel Tanner 2014: 495.
[148] Cf. also Jer 21:12.
[149] For biblical passages involving the construction with חמה ...שפך, see Isa 42:25; Ps 79:6; Lam 2:4; 4:11; Ezek 9.8; 14:19; 20:8; 20:13; 20:21; 20:33; 20:34; 22:22; 30:15; 36:18. Several texts from Qumran confirm the connection between the verb שפך and the concept of חמה. Cf. for instance, 4Q504 fragment 1-2R iii, 10: על כן שפכתה אלינו את חמתכה: "For that reason you have poured on us your rage." See Florentino García Martínez and Tigchelaar 1999: 1015.
[150] Jer 6:11b, "I am weary of holding it in."

comparable concept of a cursed substance being poured upon wrongdoers.[151] The Hebrew verb נתך is used to describe the act of God pouring out his חמה upon the people of Israel and their places of worship. In this instance, the image of a malevolent current, teeming with venomous potency, poised to engulf both individuals and buildings alike, akin to a dread-inducing torrent in the throes of a deluge, imparts the impending annihilation that looms over the Israelites. In Jer 21:5, the ancient author depicts three distinct human emotions as manifestations of God's fury. The first is אף ("nose"), a psychological state of frustration visible on the face,[152] the second is קצף ("anger," "wrath"), God's anger, frustration, and judgment,[153] and, finally, the third is חמה ("wrath," "fury"). The latter connotation of divine wrath will aid us in exploring the correlation between the notion of God's חמה and that of snake venom, thus returning us to the word's original meaning—the searing sensation caused by a snake's bite.

The characterization of חמה as snake venom can be traced back to at least the Bronze Age. Evil is depicted as a serpent in many Ugaritic anti-witchcraft incantations.[154] For example, an Ugaritic incantation against horses suffering snakebite associates the term *šmrr*,[155] "poisoning," with *ḥmt*, "snake venom," as part of a ritual to induce the removal of this toxic substance from the victim's body:

> [4] *mnt.nṯk.nḥš*. (for) an incantation against snakebite,
> *šmrr.nḥš* [5] *ʕqšr*. (against) the poisoning of the sloughing serpent!
> *lnh.mlḫš åbd*. – From/With it the charmer, the destruction,
> *lnh.ydy* [6] *ḥmt*. from/with it let him expel the venom!
> *hlm.yṯq.nḥš* Oh, yea/So forth, let him take up a serpent (KTU³ 1.100:4-6)

These few lines provide a formula in the form of a cliched prayer for the elimination of poison. It should be emphasized that the mention of "poison" (*ḥmt*) in Ugaritic spells is mostly related to the explicit mention of snakes (*bṯnm, bṯnt*).[156] In the Hebrew Bible, the association

[151] Cf. also Jer 10:25.
[152] The portrayal of the divine אף in this text evokes Lord Byron's lyrical words in his *The Vision of Judgment*: "His brow was like the deep when tempest-toss'd; / Fierce and unfathomable thoughts engraved / Eternal wrath on his immortal face, / And where he gazed a gloom pervaded space." Cf. Job 16:9: "His *wrath* has torn, and he has been hostile toward me; he gnashed at me with his teeth."
[153] Cf. Zech 1:2.
[154] KTU³ 1.82; 1.107; 1.178 and 1.100. del Olmo Lete (2014: 207). According to del Olmo Lete, the serpent was regarded as the original manifestation of evil in ancient Ugarit (KTU³ 1.5:1 e par.: *ltn bṯn brḥ*: *Lôtānu*/Leviathan). The image of the venomous serpent as a malevolent force is also present in Jer 8:17.
[155] del Olmo Lete and Sanmartín 2015.
[156] del Olmo Lete 2014: 121.

between חמה (Ugaritic *ḥmt*) and snake venom is further explored, albeit metaphorically, to depict Yahweh's wrath, which, as mentioned, is frequently portrayed as a liquid substance similar to spittle, a kind of a poisonous foam, a drool born from the mouth of an angry god.[157] In essence, חמה functions as a rhetorical device for conveying the idea of cursing.[158] The link between cursing and spitting in the realm of magic does not establish a far-fetched connection, particularly in ancient Mesopotamia, as evidenced by the Assyro-Babylonian incantations and the later texts in the Mandaic incantation bowls tradition, which are in some ways vestiges of the Assyro-Babylonian magic tradition.[159]

Several biblical texts make use of the figurative connection between snake venom and the falsehoods of those who lie. Just consider Ps 58:4 in which חמה is likened to "the speech of liars" (דברי כזב):

> [4] The wicked are defiant from birth; the liars (דברי כזב) go astray from the womb. [5] Their venom (חמת־למו) is like that of a snake (חמת־נחש), a deaf viper that stops its ears.

The power of the word as a weapon of cursing is documented in several Mesopotamian incantations against witchcraft. Specifically, the curse-inducing wagging tongue of the witch can be used as an example. It is worth noting that the Akkadian equivalent of the Hebrew term חמה is *imtu*. Abusch points out that the association between the Sumerian logogram *uš$_{11}$* and the Akkadian term *imtu* is frequently employed in multilingual incantations. In such contexts, this association can denote either the harmful spittle associated with witchcraft, or the life-sustaining saliva attributed to *Ea* and *Asalluḫi*.[160] In Assyrian incantations, the witch might curse

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[157] Cf. Ezek 14:19; Job 6:4; Ps 140:3; 58:4; especially in Jer 10:25; 42:18; 44:6.

[158] See Cohen 2007: 283-84.

[159] See Yamauchi 2005: 59. For an overview of the relationship between Mandaic incantation bowls and Mesopotamian magic, see Hunter 1998: 102.

[160] The word *imat marti "*(poisonous) spittle mixed with bile" appears in *Uḫ* V 5 (uš$_{11}$ zé = *i-mat mar-ti*) and refers to the evil demons of heaven (cf. also *Uḫ* XII 18). See Abusch and Schwemer 2011: 195 n. 26. It is important to mention that while the Mesopotamian understanding of saliva allows for it to be seen as both a curse and a generative means, depending on the context, this association does not seem to exist in biblical literature. In biblical texts, spittle is consistently interpreted as a form of rebuke. For example, Berlin, Brettler, and Fishbane (2004: 309) interpret the expression "If her father spat in her face" in Num 12:14 as "an act of rebuke that entails shame plus seven days of banishment. Usually the purpose of spitting is to shame someone [...]." Indeed, the idea of spitting is almost always associated with negative contexts of banishment and rebuke. In her analysis of the skin condition or injury due to a malediction called צרעת in Num 12:14, Kitz (2014: 147 n. 40 and 229) links the origin of the word to the Arabic/Old South Arabic root *ṣḍtʿ*, which carries the fundamental meanings of "humble" and

her victim with her poisonous spittle or *imtu*.[161] Notably, editorial variants among the *Maqlû* manuscripts indicate that the words *imtu* ("spittle") and *amātu* ("word") are used interchangeably when referring to the witch's cursing speech.

[21] *ēra qāmâki* (var.: *-ka*) *imatki* (var.: *amātki*; *-ka*) *liprus*
May the cornel, which burns you, cut off your venom (var.: your word).[162] (*Maqlû* III, 21)

As a venomous hatred erupting from her mouth, the relationship between the witch's speech and the ejection of her spit highlights the deep connection of this imagery with the notion of human anger and enmity. The Qumran texts also refer to a similar and harmful force by associating speech and venom in relation to the antisocial conduct of a member within the community. In 1QS VII, Col. VII, 2,[163] the word חמה is coupled with the word דבר to connote the angry speech (דבר בחמה "speak angrily") of a community member against a priest of the Qumran community.[164]

Additionally, there exist instances of Mesopotamian incantations wherein the malevolent spittle of the witch is combined with bile to create a toxic concoction employed for the purpose of transmitting the curse into the victim's body. A case in point is a comprehensive set of *Ušburruda* rituals that includes several Akkadian anti-witchcraft incantations. Multiple copies of a large collection of *Ušburruda* rituals were kept in the royal libraries of Nineveh. Most of these incantations were used in the production of amulets and medicines. In 7.8.2:26, the

"subjugate." This connection is made due to its association with cursing and physical violence. She proposes that the skin markings produced by the צרעת were a sign that the person had been "humiliated" and "subjugated" by an enraged Yahweh, either by being struck with fists or whipped with lashes. Kitz interprets the phrase נֶגַע צָרַעַת as meaning "the blow or mark of humiliation" and draws a parallel to the scenario of a disobedient slave who endures harsh punishment at the hands of an incensed master. This perspective, according to Kitz, sheds light on Yahweh's response to Moses in Num 12:14, where he explains why he would not immediately "heal" Miriam of צרעת: "If her father spat in her face, would she not bear her shame for seven days? Let her be shut out of camp for seven days, and then let her be readmitted." As Kitz observes, Yahweh explains Miriam's affliction using a talionic principle when Moses pleads her case: she will be humiliated in the same way she has humiliated me.

[161] For instance, due to the belief that saliva could be collected and used for witchcraft, Mesopotamia viewed spitting in public as a potentially dangerous behavior. Cf. Schwemer (2007: 90-1).

[162] Cf. also *Maqlû* III [14] *ina imtīša* (var.: *-šu*) *ip-ta-ra-as alaktu* - "With her venom, she has cut off (commercial) traffic."

[163] 1QS; 1QRule of the Community. See García Martínez and Tigchelaar 1999.

[164] García Martínez and Tigchelaar 1999: 86. The Thanksgiving Hymns (Hodayot) provides comparable evidence. In the *Ḥosar ha-Megillot ha-Genuzot*, a hymn compares the falsehoods of liars to the venom of snakes (1QHa, l. 21 בחמת תנינים). See Baumgarten and Mansoor 1956: 110.

bewitched individual curses the witch by replicating her witchcraft using his spittle or *imtu* mixed with bile (*martu*):

> *ašqīki imat martu*
> I have given you to drink spittle mixed with bile… (CMAwR vol. 1, text 7.8.2:26)[165]

In rituals against witchcraft, the bewitched person can undo the witch's curse by petitioning the gods to counter-curse the witch by spitting on her, therefore returning the favor. The ritual's retributive nature highlights the golden rule of Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft incantations: Curses can be reversed by returning them to their source.

> *kušud kaššāpta ina im<ti> pîka* ((*likšussi imti ša p*[*îka*]))
> Overwhelm the witch with the spittle of your mouth, ((may the spittle of [your] mo[uth] overwhelm her)). (CMAwR vol. 2, text 7.11.2:23)

Furthermore, Mesopotamian documents establish a link between witchcraft and the consumption of poisoned drinks and food. This connection emerges in legal documents such as, for example, Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty (EST), which also includes the theme of the anger of the gods. In EST §23, the section addressing the prohibition against killing the crown prince Assurbanipal states:

> (259) You shall not give Assurbanipal, the great crown prince designate, son of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, your lord, a deadly drug (*šammu ša muātīšu*) to eat or to drink (*tušakkalāšūni tašaqqiāšūni*), nor anoint him with it, nor practice witchcraft (*kišpu teppašāniššunni*) against him, nor make gods and goddesses angry with him.[166]

These examples are by no means exhaustive, but they demonstrate the presence of the recurring motif of cursing through drinking in Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft incantations. After identifying the trope, it is crucial to understand its theological significance. In "Witchcraft and the Anger of the Personal God,"[167]Abusch explains that in some texts, the witch angers the personal god of their victim not by making a false accusation against them, as is often the case,

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[165] Abusch and Schwemer 2011: 159.
[166] *EST*, §23 Prohibition against Killing Assurbanipal: o 259 *la tu-tar-ra-a-ni-ni šum-ma at-tu-nu* / o 260 *a-na maš-šur*—DÙ—A DUMU—MAN GAL-*u šá* É—UŠ-*te* / o 261 DUMU *maš-šur*—PAB—AŠ MAN KUR—*aš-šur* EN-*ku-nu* / o 262 *šam-mu šá mu-a-ti-šú tu-šá-kal-a-šú-u-ni* / o 263 *ta-šá-qi-a-šú-u-ni ta-pa-šá-šá-šu-u-ni* / o 264 *kiš-pi te-ep-pa-šá-niš-šú-u-ni* DINGIR.<MEŠ> *u* dIŠ.TAR / o 265 *is-si-šú tu-šá-az-na-a-ni*. See Parpola and Watanabe 1988.
[167] Abusch 2002: 92.

but by feeding the victim bewitched food and beverages.[168] How does feeding a victim bewitched food and drink challenge our understanding of the personal god's wrath in the context of witchcraft?

Anger of the gods

As Kitz aptly puts it, "When the deities depart, bad things happen. Every ancient Near Easterner knew this regardless of the time period or culture."[169] According to Abusch, witchcraft is considered to be the primary cause of the gods' anger and the resulting separation from the divine in Mesopotamian theology. Although the deity may appear passive in Mesopotamian incantations, it is ultimately the deity's prerogative to decide whether to become displeased with their protégé. The individual who falls victim to witchcraft experiences tangible repercussions as a result of the absence of divine safeguard. As consequence of his transgressions and the wrath he incurs from his deity, the bewitched individual becomes vulnerable to malevolent spiritual assaults.[170]

The theme of God's anger and abandonment of his people due to human transgression is a widely recognized motif in biblical prophetic literature.[171] This idea is expressed in Deut 31:17-18:

> [17] Then My anger will flare up against them, and I will abandon (עזב) them and hide My countenance from them. They shall be ready prey; and many evils and troubles shall befall them. And they shall say on that day, 'Surely it is because our God is not in our midst that these evils have befallen us.'" [18] Yet I will keep My countenance hidden on that day, because of all the evil they have done in turning to other gods.

[168] Cf. EST, ll. 262-265, 32, here the wrath of God is associated with the consumption of poisonous plants and the practice of witchcraft.
[169] Kitz 2014: 225.
[170] In many Mesopotamian incantations, the personal god either abandons his protégé, leaving him vulnerable to attack (passive punishment) or calls for the attack (active punishment) against him. Here, cosmic, and social order coexist. See Abusch 2002: 105. See the full discussion on divine anger and abandonment in Kitz 2014: 225-45.
[171] Cf. for example, 1 Sam 16:14 and Ps 71:11.

A similar idea is also found in Hos 9:12, in which Yahweh declares, "Woe to them indeed / When I turn away from them!"[172] Furthermore, the curses depicted in Deuteronomy 28 serve as a vivid portrayal of the severe consequences that divine anger can bring upon those who violate the divine covenant.[173] As Kitz observes, when divine protection is lifted, heavenly curses are unleashed without restriction.[174] Skin diseases may appear, misfortune occurs, and headaches may develop (Deut 28:22; see also Num 12:9-10). Deuteronomy 29:26 presents a poignant visual of God's activated curses: "So the Lord was incensed at that land and brought upon it all the curses recorded in this book." Another example of God's wrath and abandonment is provided by 1 Samuel 16:14 that describes the effects of divine anger. After Samuel anoints David, Saul's relationship with Yahweh worsens: "Now the spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord began to terrify him." As Kitz notes,

> The sequence is familiar. First, there is the removal of divine support. Once the desertion is complete, an evil spirit, operating with Yahweh's approval, is able to take over. Now Saul is menaced by רוח־רעה "evil spirit," that is, a mobilized divine curse. Poor Saul is doomed, for those without godly preservation are vulnerable to the vicissitudes of Yahweh's activated maledictions.[175]

In Jer 25:15-17 and 27-28, Jeremiah becomes Yahweh's spokesperson in accusing Israel (cf. Jer 1:9)—especially the elites of Jerusalem—and the executor of her sentence, which is transferring to them God's curse.[176] The cup of wrath is a potent symbol of divine anger, a raging tempest released upon the wayward Israelites. This divine anger manifests as a concoction of wine laced with venom (חמה), contained in a chalice crafted to inflict a curse on

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[172] Cf. Jer 12:07, "I have abandoned (עזב) My House, I have deserted My possession, / I have given over My dearly beloved / Into the hands of her enemies." See also, the motif of a deity abandoning the city or temple out of anger: Jer 8:19; 12:7.

[173] More than any other prophetic text, the Book of Jeremiah illustrates the dire consequences of breaching the Mosaic covenant. In his recent volume Mastnjak (2016: 34) demonstrates that Deuteronomy 28's covenant curses are the book's most frequently quoted section. Mastnjak argues that the Deuteronomistic redaction of Jeremiah, or DtrJ, as he calls it, extensively employs these curses as an explanatory framework for the downfall of Judah in the year 587 BCE. The crisis emerged due to a breach of the Mosaic covenant. The equation presented by DtrJ is depicted through the implication that the act of disregarding Mosaic laws inevitably leads to the initiation of Deuteronomic curses. See also Fischer 2020: 109.

[174] Kitz 2014: 227.

[175] Kitz 2014: 229.

[176] As Thompson (1980: 877) notes, in the Oracles Against the Nations (OAN) in Jeremiah 25, the first to receive divine judgment will be Yahweh's people in Jerusalem and the towns of Judah (cf. Jer 25:29).

those who consume its malevolent elixir.[177] This poisonous elixir will cause the Israelites to tremble and vomit, as if afflicted by a malevolent force.[178]

"He will vomit and then recover"

While this may be a plausible interpretation of the theological meaning conveyed in the text, it is still puzzling why God instructs Israel to vomit the poison after ingesting it, given that the purpose is to administer a curse in the form of a poisonous beverage that would harm those who drink it. The proposed solution to the problem is that God's curse (... לתת אתם לשרקה ולקללה "to make them (i.e., the leaders and people of Judah) [...] an object of hissing and a curse;" Jer 25:18), despite appearing as a retaliatory measure (Jer 16:18) in response to Israel's transgressions ("I have spoken to you persistently, but you would not listen," Jer 25:3; cf. also Jer 25:7), is intended to serve as a remedy for the self-inflicted suffering she has brought upon herself. From the perspective of the Jeremianic scribe, the original curse was cast upon the hapless citizens of Jerusalem by the nefarious elites and deceitful prophets (cf. Jer 1:16-18), who cunningly entangled the populace in a web of specious optimism and empty devotion (cf. 28:9-13), severing their sacred relationship with their God (cf. Jer 50:6). In Jeremiah 25, Yahweh implores Israel to expel the poisoning of false prophecy,[179] presented as deceitful speech, which

[177] Cf. Jer 25:15.

[178] In her analysis of Neo-Assyrian *adê* agreements, Kitz (2014: 122-23) argues that the ritual performance of these agreements entails the inclusion of conditional or self-imposed curses. When the subordinate individual partakes in the ritual acts of eating, drinking, and anointing, they effectively internalize the curse, which becomes deeply ingrained within their very essence.

[179] The moral corruption perpetrated by the false prophets in the Book of Jeremiah is often connected to the notion of שקר. The book of Jeremiah clearly associates falsehood with the worship of other gods, particularly Baal as mentioned in Jer 23:13-14. In my view, the accusations connected to שקר can be attributed to a type of moral corruption or social poisoning that occurs when the masses listen to the misleading sermons of false prophets. Epp-Tiessen (2012: 81) notes that "The book portrays such assurances as extremely dangerous because they distort reality, lead to complacency in the face of sin, and prevent repentance." The author also emphasizes that "The declaration of 23:14 that the prophets strengthen the hands of evildoers so that no one turns back from their wickedness is at the heart of the book of Jeremiah's critique of the false prophets." The deceitful path they choose to walk on is a distorted perspective, a שקר, which leads to a shortage of loyalty to Yahweh, ultimately resulting in catastrophe. According to Thomson (1980: 495), it appears that the term שקר is used as a code word for Baal, especially in chapter 23. Thomson believes that Jeremiah viewed the prophets of Samaria as socially harmful due to their misleading influence on Israel and their practice of prophesying in the name of Baal. The presence of false prophets led Israel astray from their complete devotion to Yahweh and his covenant. For the author, remaining loyal to Yahweh and clarifying the conditions of the covenant is the ultimate role of the "true prophet." From a similar perspective, Overholt (1970) interprets the term שקר in Jeremiah as a reproach aimed at prophets who engage in deceptive and misleading practices while carrying out their ministry. Jeremiah 23 clarifies that the

has insidiously caused a rupture in the human-divine relationship (cf. Jer 25:6-7). Consuming and succumbing to intoxication carries with it a sense of foreboding retribution (cf. Jer 25:15-18), as one would expect from a cursed concoction.[180] Now, to heal, it is necessary to expel the cursed substance from one's body, as is done in the case of snakebite, in which case it is essential to eject the toxic poison immediately. Mesopotamian medical/magical practice indicates in several spells that the bewitched person must vomit the cursed substance if the individual swallowed it through a drink poisoned by a witch.[181] Failure to expel a poisonous substance is a symptom of witchcraft in Mesopotamian magical literature. Consider the following incantation:

> (8.2:1) If a ma[n's h]air sta[nds on end, ...], [2] his lips *are seized*, [*his] e[ars buzz*], [3] his saliva runs, [...], [4] his cervical vertebrae hurt him, his ... *ca[use him pain*], [5] the muscles of his neck are stiff, his hands and fe[et] [6] feel numb and ma[ke him] suffer piercing pain, [7] <u>[he] keeps on retching, (but) he cannot vo[mit] (*lā iʾarru*)</u>, [8] [his body is] aff[licted with p]aralysis, [9] [hi]s [limbs] keep faltering, [10] [...] ... [...], [11]

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actions of the false prophets encourage evil rather than inspire repentance. There are several instances in the Book of Jeremiah where שקר refers to the worship of other gods (3:23; 10:14; 13:25-27; 16:19-20; 51:17). It seems apparent that the accusation of שקר in Jeremiah implies a connection between certain prophets and empty worship. The Book of Jeremiah is replete with mentions of the שקר ("falsehood," דברי השקר "illusions," see Jer 7:4) of the illegitimate prophets, namely those who have not been sent by God. Here are a few telling examples: Jer 5:31; 14:14; 20:6; 23:26; 23:26; 32; Jer 27:10; 14; 15; 16; Jer 29:9; 21. The term שקר plays a central role in the Jeremiah polemic against false prophets in a long section from chapter 23 to 29. The word is often used to describe bogus assurances of security and prosperity (27:10, 14, 15, 16; 28:15; 29:9, 21, 23, 31). In other parts of the book, the word שקר can refer to prayers for God's protection, which are sometimes conveyed by prophets (14:13-14; also see 6:13-14 = 8:10-11).

[180] The ingestion of God's poisoned wine and the resulting intoxication represent the sinful condition that requires judgment. See Jer 13:12-14, cf. Isa 19:14; 28:7-13. Peels (2007: 86) suggests that the wine contained in God's cup of wrath that Jeremiah presents to the nations symbolizes the judgment that he proclaims through his extensive collection of oracles of doom.

[181] Cf. "Prescriptions and drug lists for *ušburruda*" (*ušburrudû," "curse-releasing" ritual*). CMAwR vol. 1, text 7.10.3. (1:22) If a man's epigastrium gets ((more and more)) (filled with) phlegm, his epigastrium [23]causes him a burning pain, he has no desire to eat or drink, his flesh is 'poured out,' that man has been given witchcraft [24]to eat and drink. To undo (it): *ḫašû*-plant, *tullal*-plant (and) [25]*sikillu*-plant you pound together; you put (it) in beer (and) leave (it) out overnight under the star(s). [26]In the morning <u>you have him drink</u> (var.: he drinks) (it) on an empty stomach; <u>he will vomit and then recover</u> (*iʾarrū-ma iballuṭ*). See also, "Ušburruda against depression." CMAwR vol. 1: 7.7. (1:54): To cure him [58]you dry, crush (and) si[ft] [54]*lupine*, 'heals-a-thousand'-plant, ['heals-twenty'-plant], soap[wort], [55]*sikillu*-plant, *erkulla*-plant, *imbuʾ* [*tâmti*-mineral], 'apri[cot-turn]ip', [56][seed] of the *ḫuluppu*-tree, *ur*[nû-plant, *ḫa*]šû-plant, *šibbur*[*ratu*]-plant, [57]*nuḫurtu*-plant, [...], 'mar[sh]-apple,' [58][...] ... [...] ... [59][...] In the morning [60][you make] him [drink] (and) eat (it) on an empty stom[ach]. <u>You make him vomit *with a feather*</u>. Afterward[s] [61]*he drinks* roasted [...] in [g]rape juice. [62]You put [...]. On the (day of the) New Moon you bathe him; <u>then he will recover</u>.

he is slow to rise, to stand up and to speak, [12] (then) [witch]craft has been performed against [that man]: [13] he has been fed (bewitched) bread (and) been given (bewitched) beer to drink.[182]

Therefore, regurgitation is the antidote for the malevolent curse. Until he vomits the lethal substance, the cursed patient continues to stagger about as if possessed. This interpretation would be plausible were it not for the explicit correlation in Jer 25:27-28 between the curative act of expelling the poisonous substance and the Israelites' dreadful end by the sword. Why would God deem it fitting to mend the afflictions that plagued the Israelites, only to subsequently unleash upon them the merciless fury of the divine blade? How can we reconcile these two conflicting ideas? Some commentators view the sword and the cup as equally significant metaphors for describing judgment and hope in Jeremiah 25. Framing a cohesive and multifaceted metaphor, these two symbols may be intricately interconnected. Like a key to a long-forgotten lock, Jeremiah's words appear to possess an answer to this elusive riddle. Not all the inhabitants of Jerusalem are doomed, as the Israelites are not entirely without hope of reconciliation with their god. According to Jer 31:2, those who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness.[183] Those who went into exile will live[184] because they put their trust in Yahweh.[185] Indeed, Israel will not have to drink from the cup of God's חמה forever, according to Isa 51:22:

Thus said the Lord, your Lord, Your God who champions His people: Herewith I take from your hand The cup of reeling, The bowl, the cup of My wrath; You shall never drink it again.

Conclusion

I contend that the author of Jeremiah 25 employed the image of the cup symbolizing God's wrath (see vv. 15–17 and 27–28) in order to provide a tangible depiction of Yahweh's

[182] CMAwR vol. 1, text 8.2: [8.2:1] *šumma am*[*ēlu š*]*ārat muḫḫīšu iz*[*zâz* ...] / [8.2:2] *šaptāšu uṣṣabbatā uz*[*nāšu išaggumā*?] / [8.2:3] *ruʾussu illaka* ... [...] / [8.2:4] *kunuk kišādīšu umaḫḫassu piṭrūšu ik*[*kalūšu*?] / [8.2:5] *dâdānūšu šaggū qātāšu u šē*[*pāšu*] / [8.2:6] *ušammamāšu uzaqqat*[*āšu*] / [8.2:7] *libba*[*šu*] *ētenellâ lā iʾa*[*rru*] / [8.2:8] [*zumuršu ši*]*mmatu u*[*kāl*] / [8.2:9] [*minâtūš*]*u ittanašpakā /* [8.2:10] [...] ... [...] / [8.2:11] *ana tebê nazazzi dabābi mūq /* [8.2:12] [*amēlu šū ki*]*špī epšūšu-ma /* [8.2:13] [*ina akal*]*i šūkul ina šikari šaqi.* Fincke (2018) identified the Late Babylonian fragment BM 40633 (ms. d) as a duplication of CMAwR vol. 1, text 8.2 (see CMAwR, vol. 3, text A. 13).

[183] "Thus said the Lord: The people escaped from the sword, / Found favor in the wilderness; When Israel was marching homeward."

[184] Cf. Jer 38:2.

[185] Cf. Jer 39:18.

condemnation and eventual healing of Israel. The idea of divine anger is quite abstract, but when depicted as a poisonous beverage that seeps into the very core of the cursed individual, it takes on a visually alarming quality.[186] In order to achieve this rhetorical effect, the author of the text may have used the widely recognized literary motif of ingesting potentially harmful substances, drawing inspiration from both the Mesopotamian magical tradition and the Assyrian legal tradition of loyalty oaths.[187]

As mentioned above, the passage in Jer 25:27-28 symbolically presents a glimmer of hope as Yahweh urges the Israelites to expel the harmful mixture that they were compelled to swallow. In the context of magic, vomiting can be seen as the expulsion of internal toxicity, symbolizing the removal of a curse. The cup of God's wrath can be seen as a form of counter-curse that is incorporated into a symbolic exorcistic ritual. This ritual serves to cleanse the Israelites[188] and spares some of them from the sword. In this passage, it appears that God desires to release the Israelites from a malevolent scourge,[189] which was not imposed by

[186] The depiction of the oath/curse, or conditional self-curse, penetrating the oath-taker's innards is found, for example, in *EST* §72: (560) "(Ditto, ditto;) just as bread and wine enter into the intestines, [so] may they (= the gods) make this oath enter into [your] intestines and into those of [your] so[ns] and your [daught]ers." Kitz (2014: 125) notes that "Through the act of eating, drinking, and anointing, a previously articulated malediction would enter the body of the subordinate. once performed, the underling literally becomes a potential malediction. He has eaten the curse in the bread. He has drunk the curse in the wine. He wears the curse in his flesh after the oil penetrates his skin. He is a walking latent 'curse.' These acts in particular would also serve to underscore the irrevocability of the malediction." Similarly, omens are frequently portrayed as internalized in Neo-Assyrian texts, cf. STT 1.61: 15: *ina libbi immeri* / *tašaṭṭar šīrī* **– "… in** the heart of a sheep, / You write the omen-in-entrails." See Gurney and Finkelstein (1957). Cf. Jer 31:33: "But such is the covenant I will make with the House of Israel after these days—declares the Lord: I will put My Teaching into their inmost being and inscribe it upon their hearts (lit. 'in their inward parts and on their hearts'). Then I will be their God, and they shall be My people."

[187] In *EST*, some of the curses that conclude the *adê* agreement include ceremonial curses that require the subordinate to perform a series of actions. Among the various possible curses are those in which the monarch instructs the subordinate to eat, drink, or anoint himself, actions which are intended to symbolize a conditional self-curse. See Kitz 2014: 122-23.

[188] In her comprehensive study of ancient Near Eastern curses, Kitz (2014: 322) proposes that active maledictions could be neutralized by cursing them back. She notes that "the negative imprecations seek to remove an active curse from within the affected person's body. This feature suggests that one way the effects of an energized curse could be countermanded and, therefore, canceled was through the application of the principle that two negatives did indeed produce a positive. According to this rationale, heaping negative wishes on negative forces result in a beneficial outcome, that is, their negation and removal. ... Ultimately, the aspiration of negative maledictions is to curtail the active energy of curses by stopping their hostile effects from propagating and spreading further."

[189] We should note at the conclusion of this analysis that the cup of God's wrath had already been interpreted as a remedy for Israel's apostasy rather than a punishment centuries ago by Origen, a Christian theologian active in the early third century CE. It is also fascinating to note that this metaphorical image, just like today, already in the past, provoked passionate debate among scholars and theologians, so much so that Jerome, in his *Commentary on*

his divine will but rather by the deceitful schemes of false prophets.[190] Reading the book of Jeremiah, one gets the impression that the prophet's key concern throughout is the illicit and misleading rhetoric of the false prophets.[191] The function of false prophets bears certain similarities to that of the Assyrian witches, as both figures symbolize the universal enemies of the nation's god. Much like masks in a twisted puppet show, false prophets, akin to witches, embody wickedness, antisocial behavior, and degradation. As cynical messengers of false hopes, they spread falsehoods. In his 1971 unpublished doctoral dissertation, titled *Studies in Biblical Magic*, Fishbane stresses that "The polemic against false prophets and witches is typologically identical: in both cases, the common factor is that the practitioners are rejected as anti-social; and social right is determined by the class in power and the god espoused."[192] False prophets are a fictional enemy who act collectively as God's adversary. The book of Jeremiah

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Jeremiah, describes Origen as a "perverse interpreter." Origen explains in *First Principles* that the poisoned drink mentioned in Jeremiah 25 is meant to cleanse, not punish, the Israelites (Cf. Origen, *On First Principles* 2.10.6, trans. G. W. Butterworth [London: Peter Smith, 1973]). In contrast to Origen, Jerome interpreted the image as divine punishment: "A certain perverse interpreter takes this in a good sense, that this cup, like a cleansing potion, forces out of the body whatever choleric liquid, phlegm or noxious fluid is in the chest and restores the person to his former health. This interpreter also takes Jeremiah to stand for the Savior, since it was the Savior who gave this potion to all the nations, to whom he was sent, so that after they had set aside idolatry, they might devote themselves to the worship of God (*Ex quo utique intellegitur quod furor uindictae dei ad purgationem proficiat animarum* - "From which it must be understood that the fury of the vengeance of God advances the purification of souls." Cf. Origen *Princ*. 2.10.6.). But the following passage will show this to be contrary to the holy Scriptures. For it is not as a remedy, as he would like to think, but as a punishment that they are made to drink this unmixed cup." See Jerome *Commentary on Jeremiah*, (Hall et al. 2011: 154). Levering has pointed out recently that the interpretation of the cup of God's wrath in Jeremiah 25 as a redemptive image, rather than a punitive one, is in line with Origen's vision of God as the healer of his people, rather than the cause of their calamity. Levering explains that early Christian scholars believed that given God's righteous nature, he cannot experience wrath. From this perspective, Levering notes that Origen does not view God as the source of destruction. For Origen, individuals who are spiritual understand that "wrath and fury" (Rom. 2:8) do not originate from God. Origen compares God's punishment of sinners to the repercussions faced by individuals who ignore their doctor's advice and fall ill. As Origen indicates, if this individual had succumbed to a pestilential ailment, it would not be a reflection on the physician's skill, but rather on their own lack of self-control. However, the physician would deserve credit if the patient had followed the physician's instructions and thus preserved their health. For Levering's extensive discussion of the biblical concept of God's wrath, see Levering 2023: 268.

[190] See, for example, Jer 28:15 "And the prophet Jeremiah said to the prophet Hananiah, 'Listen, Hananiah! The Lord did not send you, and you have given this people lying assurances'" (lit. "you have made this people trust in a lie" - ואתה הבטחת את־העם הזה על־שקר).

[191] As Evans (2014: 57-84) points out, "According to the theology of Ezekiel's prophecy, the proper defense against magic and sorcery is not contravening magical incantations, but hearing and believing the word of YHWH...Both the false prophets in Ezekiel 13:1–16 and the daughters in verses 17–23 should be understood as presenting 'substitutes for true prophecy" (pp. 82-83).

[192] See also Fishbane 1971: 35.

holds them accountable for the downfall of Judah,[193] and the alienation of Jerusalem from God.[194] With Jeremiah 25, the first part of the book of Jeremiah reaches its chilling climax, as the guilty inhabitants of Judah (cf. Jer 9:3-5) and their corrupted leaders are consumed by the venomous tendrils of their own wickedness.

In this scenario, no literary device could have been more effective than the image of a poisonous concoction intermingled within a chilled libation of wine, presented in a resplendent chalice befitting royalty. God's cup of wrath visually symbolizes Israel's demise but also—and here is the cliffhanger—a possible new beginning, as seen in chapter 31 of the book.[195] While further research may continue to illuminate the importance of the cup of God's wrath as depicted in Jeremiah 25, my hypothesis aims to offer insights and, ideally, encourage deeper reflection on this fascinating Jeremianic literary image.

4. "May Yahweh make you like Zedekiah and Ahab whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire:" Does Jeremiah's 'Letter to the Exiles' make a reference to the Mesopotamian *Maqlû* ritual in Jer 29:22?

Setting the Stage

Readers of the book of Jeremiah will recognize a key theme in the arc of the prophetic story that centers on the truthfulness of the divine message versus the deceitful words of false prophets.[196] In a noteworthy section of the book in Jer 29:21-22, the prophet Jeremiah denounces the prophets Ahab son of Kolaiah, and Zedekiah son of Maaseiah as wolves in sheep's clothing, pretending to deliver the divine message (Jer 29:9). The prophet's condemnation is expressed with such severity that in Jer 29:22 he resorts to deliver upon the Judah community in Babylon a divine curse derived from their plight:

ולקח מהם קללה לכל גלות יהודה אשר בבבל לאמר ישמך יהוה כצדקיהו וכאחב אשר־קלם מלך־בבל באש׃

[193] Varughese (2008: 319) agrees with Stulman (2011) that the book of Jeremiah attributes the fall of Judah to false prophets, royal family members, and Jerusalem elites (cf. Jer 1:18).
[194] Cf. Jer 7:15, 29.
[195] Cf. Jer 31:1-2.
[196] Arena has recently proposed an alternative view, arguing that "prophetic conflicts in Jeremiah are literary creations produced by later redactors to strengthen Jeremiah's status of true prophet of Yhwh, as it appears clear in addressing the clash between Jeremiah and some of other prophets in the book: Passhur, Ahab, Zedekiah and Shemaiah." See Arena 2020: 187-200.

May God make you like Zedekiah and Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire!

How did ancient Israel and Mesopotamia navigate the complex and often conflicting ideas about what constituted lawful and illegitimate divination practices? Fishbane explores this subject in his 1971 unpublished dissertation entitled Studies in Biblical Magic, which anticipated current research trends on the correlation between Mesopotamian magic and biblical prophecy.[197] Fishbane observes that both Mesopotamian and Israelite laws (Exod 22:17) viewed sorcerers as social outcasts subject to capital punishment.[198] He argues that the biblical critique of magic distinguishes between forbidden and religiously acceptable actions. His main point revolves around the concepts of social authority and legitimacy. Priests and prophets are considered legitimate, but sorcerers and those who worship foreign gods are outlawed. In the Bible, true and false prophets are identified by their ability to speak in Yahweh's name and lead the Israelites in authorized or illicit worship. Because Yahweh is the only one with power, any act of disobedience is considered idolatry. Yahweh's authority is equivalent to that of a ruler.

Fishbane thinks that the polemic against false prophets and witches in ancient Israel and Mesopotamia is somewhat comparable when you look at it from a typological perspective. In both cultures, the practitioners are rejected as anti-social, and the determination of social right is based on the class that holds power, and the deity supported. For Fishbane the issue of witchcraft in the biblical text, which some commentators restrict to a moral perversion, requires a few adjustments. The Bible has a longstanding issue with sorcerers, as evidenced by numerous references to their harmful powers, such as in Ezekiel 13. The author further notes that the Psalms' list of adversaries is consistent with the inventories of enemies and sorcerers found in the Mesopotamian magical series.

To what extent did the Mesopotamian and Israelite magic traditions share commonalities, and how did these similarities come about? Was there a mutual exchange of ideas, or did one tradition exert a greater influence over the other? How might the Mesopotamian magic

[197] Fishbane 1971.

[198] The author highlights Kaufmann's theoretical framework on magic, making the case that in Mesopotamia, the ban on magic is directed towards the ultimate divine source of power, whereas in Israel, it is a moral prohibition that does not extend to demonic entities since no force can challenge Yahweh. According to Fishbane, the reason the Bible discourages magic isn't because it's pointless to try and make a powerful god do something, but rather because the god involved in the action is not Yahweh.

tradition have influenced the biblical prophetic and psalmodic traditions? Recent studies suggest a possible connection between the two, adding to the ongoing interest in Fishbane's proposal. The nature of the lines of contact between the two traditions remains an issue for debate, however, it is widely accepted that such connections do indeed exist. The issue of potential cross-cultural influences between Mesopotamia and the Levant remains a contentious topic among scholars who engage in comparative studies. However, it is crucial to tackle this issue using a common-sense approach, just like any other topic. Paraphrasing Agatha Christie, we may say that one coincidence is just a coincidence, two coincidences are a clue, three coincidences are a proof. When a biblical text consistently uses language and themes from a specific tradition, it makes sense to question why.

Looking at it with an open mind, I suggest that Jeremiah's curse in Jer 29:22 might allude to the Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft tradition linked to the *Maqlû* ceremony. The evidence backing up this claim is limited and not fully conclusive, but there is a specific term, a rare occurrence in Jeremiah—what brainy scholars call a *hapax legomenon*—that might possibly indicate a connection with our biblical passage.

In the following, I analyze select passages from the book of Jeremiah and *Maqlû*, focusing on their exegetical and theological aspects. The focus is on the Hebrew word קלה ("to burn"[199]) used in the curse against false prophets in Jer 29:22. The analysis shows that Jeremiah doesn't use this term haphazardly but instead seems to deliberately refer to the language used in the symbolic burning of Mesopotamian witches in *Maqlû*. The primary issue to think about is why the author of the ancient text chose this specific verb and what it means in the context of the curse against the two false prophets. Another crucial factor to consider is the cultural context of this term. The term appears to have a specific technical meaning in Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft literature, and it is important to consider how this cultural tradition may have influenced the way the biblical author repurposed it in the Jeremianic passage.

[199] HALOT 3, s.v. "קלה."

The Burning of the False Prophets in Jer 29:22

The term קלה is introduced in the book of Jeremiah in chapter 29, in the famous letter that Jeremiah sent to the Babylonian exiles.[200] The letter is ensconced within a protracted segment of prophetic denunciation in Jeremiah 27-29. These chapters present what we would call "an anti-prophetic manifesto." In the "letter to the Babylonian exiles" in Jeremiah 29, the Israelite community is encouraged to establish roots in Babylon (Jer 29:5), form new households (v. 6), and actively engage in the society to which they have been banished by God (v. 7). The eighth verse of the chapter marks the beginning of a divine warning against false prophets and their fraudulent message. God warns his people to be wary of those who deceive and encourages them to ignore their preaching. The message is clear: these individuals do not possess God's prophetic mandate (v. 9). After a series of additional warnings against false prophecy, chapter 29 cites the examples of Ahab son of Kolaiah and Zedekiah son of Maaseiah, who are accused of falsely prophesying in the name of God.[201] In the letter to the exiles, the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar is slated to execute these two prophets, whose gruesome fate is vividly depicted as being burned presumably alive:[202] "May God make you like Zedekiah and Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire!" (Jer 29:22; Cf. Daniel 3).[203]

What is the reason for their killing? According to Carroll, they are condemned for their deceitful words, but possibly, the Babylonians burned them because of their seditious prophecies. The Babylonian rulers were likely somewhat nervous about those under their rule, who they often relocated not just within their empire,[204] but also right in the heart of Babylon.[205] One might ask why the execution was by fire, why this method was chosen, and how the punishment becomes an everlasting curse. How does the Hebrew verb קלה, used to describe the physical elimination of the two prophets, shape our understanding of the event?

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[200] Verses 1-23; MT 29:1-23 = LXX 36:1-23. See Lundbom 2004: 344.
[201] According to the book of Jeremiah (29:8ff), individuals who prophesy lies, present false dreams, deceive the community, and falsely claim to have been sent by Yahweh are consistently charged with the same offenses.
[202] "[…] he shall put them to death before your eyes [...]" (Jer 29:21).
[203] Carroll highlights a clever wordplay in verses 21ff. of the Bible, specifically in the names "ben Kolaiah" (בן־קוליה), the term "curse" (קללה), and the phrase "roast them" (קלם). According to Fishbane, the name Ahab ben Kolaiah is a *nomen omen* as he is excoriated with a curse that is based upon his name and fate. See Fishbane 1971: 151-167.
[204] Ahn 2010: 143.
[205] Alstola 2019: 11.

The Verb קלה *in the Hebrew Bible and its Translations*

According to the first part of Jer 29:22, the community of Judah dwelling in Babylon will use a curse derived from the dreadful demise of these two prophets. Their fate involves being "roasted in the flames." In this instance, the Qal verb קלה, specifically the perfect tense, third person, masculine, singular form, denotes the action undertaken by the Babylonian monarch, who proceeded to "roast" the aforementioned prophets in flames. The original meaning of the Hebrew term קלה is mirrored in the LXX as ἀπετηγάνισεν ("fried"). The Clementine Vulgate and Targum Jonathan also maintain the original Hebrew sense of the word, translating it with Latin *frixit* (from *frīgō*, meaning "roast," "parch," "fried") and Aramaic קלי ("burnt up").[206]

The Hebrew Bible features the verb קלה a mere four times, with a single instance in Jer 29:22 and the remaining three in Lev 2:14, Jos 5:11, and Ps 38:7**.** Except for the passage in Jeremiah, where the verb describes actions carried out by individuals, all other instances of the term are used to describe the process of roasting grain that is meant to be offered to God. Milgrom suggests that Leviticus 2 enables all Israelites, haves and have-nots, to establish a relationship with God through cereal offering.[207] As noted by the author, a similar act of sacrifice was documented in ancient Mesopotamia, where offerings of grain were incinerated on makeshift altars.[208] The context of Leviticus is primarily ritual, which distinguishes it significantly from the Jeremianic passage, as one might expect.[209]

The verb קלה is also found in the book of Joshua (5:11),[210] situated within the larger narrative of the ark's passage across the Jordan River and arrival in the promised land, specifically towards Ebal and Gerizim, as described in Josh 3:1-8, 35. According to Dozeman, Yahweh takes center stage in this extensive portion of the text, driving the narrative forward by arranging the crossing at Shittim (3:5-6, 9), halting the Jordan's flow with the ark (3:14-17),

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[206] The Aramaic Midrashic translations of Jer 29:22 and Lev 2:14 preserve the verb קלא ("to roast"), as evidenced by both Targum Jonathan and Neophytes**.** *See Targum Jonathan* Jer 29:22: כצדקיה וכאחב דקלנון מלכא דבבל בנורא- "Like PN1 and PN2 whom the king of Babylon burnt up;" *Targum Neofiti* Lev 2:14: מהבהב קלי בנורא- "parched, *roasted in fire* [MT אביב קלוי באש]."

[207] Lev 2:14: "If you bring a meal offering of first fruits to the Lord, you shall bring new ears parched with fire (קָלְוִי בָּאֵשׁ), grits of the fresh grain, as your meal offering of first fruits."

[208] Milgrom argues that the grain burned in this passage is most likely barley. Milgrom 2004: 25-26.

[209] Milgrom 2004: 27.

[210] Josh 5:11: "On the day after the passover offering, on that very day, they ate of the produce of the country, unleavened bread and parched grain."

ordering the circumcision ceremony at Gilegal (5:2-9), and culminating with the performance of the rites in the land at Gilegal (5:2-12).[211] The Hebrew word "roasted" found in Josh 5:11, which is in the passive participle Qal stem, is substituted in the LXX with the Greek word νέα meaning "fresh."[212] Dozeman agrees with Van der Meer's conclusion that the recurrence of the phrases "unleavened bread" and "roasted grain" in the context of a Passover feast[213] cannot be a coincidence. This feast takes place at the threshold to the promised land[214] and is linked to the first consumption of the land's produce.[215] The term "roasted" can be interpreted as the commencement of Israel's settlement in the land that God promised to them.[216]

The final occurrence of the verb is in Psalm 38.[217] This song is a poignant expression of remorse, contrition, and the fear of divine retribution. The psalmist's suffering is viewed here as a form of divine punishment. In verses 3-8, the speaker provides a detailed account of his bodily illness, presented as a lack of "soundness" in verses 3 and 7.[218] The Psalmist current state is attributed to his own wrongdoing—a consequence of his sins, iniquities, and foolish actions. The phrase "my loins are full of burning" (בסלי מלאו נקלה) appears to suggest a condition of internal ailment, and importantly, the idea of the psalmist's inner burning is elucidated by the verb קלה. In this psalm, burning is interpreted as a source of inner anguish. Jeremiah's case is the only known instance where the verb is associated with the burning of people. As observed, the remaining instances pertain to grain.

What deeper implications can be drawn from the use of this term in the biblical text? The utilization of the verb קלה in Jer 29:22 could potentially have a metaphorical connotation. The tale of the two deceiving prophets who were "roasted" by the Babylonian king at the command of God can be interpreted as a sacrificial offering, akin to the "roasted grain" mentioned in

[211] Dozeman 2015: 300-301.
[212] Dozeman 2015: 271. Josh 5:11: "And they ate from the grain of the land, things unleavened and fresh." See Pietersma and Wright 2007.
[213] Josh 5:10b; Lev 23:4-5.
[214] Josh 3:5-Lev 23:10.
[215] Josh 5:11-12; Lev 23:10-14.
[216] Dozeman 2015: 300-301.
[217] Ps 38:8 (EB 7) "For my loins are full of burning, and there is no soundness in my flesh."
[218] Brueggemann and Bellinger 2014: 188.

Lev 2:14.[219] Does the narrative in Jer 29:22 relate to a propitiatory sacrifice or is there another interpretation to be considered? The idea of offering a human sacrifice to God would not quite fit in with the context. In Leviticus, there is mention of roasted grain being presented in a positive light, symbolizing blessings, and reconciliation. On the other hand, the reference in Jer 29:22 is seen as a form of condemnation. I struggle to imagine a way to appease someone by essentially cursing them. What can we understand from the way the Hebrew verb קלה is used in chapter 29? As we delve deeper into the topic, the occurrence of this peculiar verb in non-biblical documents suggests a magical context.[220]

The magical meaning of the Hebrew verb קלה is exemplified in another non-Talmudic Aramaic source, originating from a later period, which situates it within an anti-demonic context. The expulsion of demons is a common motif found in the ancient Mesopotamian magic bowls written in Syriac and Mandaic Aramaic. These documents depict demonic possession as a form of marriage and divorce. What's particularly fascinating is that the structure and language of the divorce theme are couched in a legal framework. It was believed that malevolent spirits could attach themselves to individuals or households.[221] The solution to a demonic possession lies in the use of divorce formulae inscribed on bowls, which are believed to effectively banish these demons. The comparison between demonic attachment and the permanence of marital relations is made in a metaphorical and somewhat lighthearted manner on these ritual objects. According to these documents, the optimal course of action for terminating this relationship is to pursue a legal separation. Merely uttering an appropriate incantation appears to be all that is required to legally sever ties with a demon.

An example of this is illustrated by the incantation bowl JBA 47 (MS 2053/258) commissioned by Undas son of Rašewandukh and Mahdukh daughter of Newandukh, his wife.

יוֹרְגְאָ שׁ[כובית שכו]בְּנִיתְ דְּ[נסבא] בנ[י]ן מן נש[יא **ק]לְיא**

[219] A notation made more than a century ago by Rev. Ingram Cobbin in the Domestic Bible suggests that the two men may have been offered in sacrifice. See Cobbin 1847: 816

[220] The book of Jeremiah contains numerous allusions to the book of Deuteronomy, and it is the latter that may hold the key to our passage in Deuteronomy 13:6, which reads: "As for that prophet or dream-diviner, he shall be put to death; for he urged disloyalty to the Lord your God—who freed you from the land of Egypt and who redeemed you from the house of bondage—to make you stray from the path that the Lord your God commanded you to follow. Thus you will sweep out (בער, "burn away") evil from your midst."

[221] An enlightening exploration of this subject matter can be found in Shaked 1999: 175.

יתה]ון ושתיא מן חלביה[י]ן ב[ת] טסת ליליתא סכורכי מן
מהדוך בת ניונדוך ולא תישתין מן [חל]בה ולא תלושין [יתיה
ב]דמכי

nomina barbara Ša[kobit the Sle]eper, who [takes / away] child[r]en from wom[en (and) ro]asts [the]m, / and drinks from the[i]r milk, daugh[ter of] the lilith / Ṭasat. Shut yourself away from Mahdukh daughter of / Newandukh, and do not drink from her [mil]k and / do not knead [it with] your blood.[222]

In the heart of this incantation lies a plea to safeguard *Mahdukh*, the wife of *Undas*, son of *Rašewandukh*, from the wrath of *Šakobit* the Sleeper, a malevolent child-snatching female demon.[223] According to the text, this demon can kidnap children from their mothers and immolate them, possibly as a form of sacrifice.[224] Of particular interest for our analysis is the specific use of the verb קלא ("to roast") that is employed in this magical context. According to Shaked and Bhayro, the act of inscribing texts onto bowls may have served as a means of beseeching divine intervention from higher entities, including God and his celestial beings, to address pressing human concerns, particularly health issues and sexual anxieties, which were commonly associated with malevolent spirits.[225] These incantation bowls likely preserve a traditional application of our verb. As early as the first millennium BCE, this verb was used in Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft incantations.

The Burning of the Witch in Mesopotamian Anti-Witchcraft Rituals

The Akkadian equivalent of the Hebrew verb קלה is *qālû*.[226] The verb *qālû* forms the Akkadian word *Maqlû*.[227] In the first millennium BCE, *Maqlû* was the name of the most important Assyro-Babylonian ritual against witchcraft.[228] According to the basic structure of the ritual, the bewitched individual who is on the brink of death is transitioned into a state of

[222] Divorce texts: Elisur Bagdana; JBA 47 (MS 2053/258):10. See Shaked, Ford, and Bhayro 2013.
[223] Jurgens 2021: 195.
[224] The comparison drawn to the European witch who kidnaps children to offer them as sacrifices to Satan is certainly revealing. See Bailey 2001: 981.
[225] Shaked, Ford, and Bhayro 2013: 7.
[226] "To burn," "roast," "refine;" AHw. 896a; CAD 13:69. Syr. *qəlā*; Mnd. QLA "to burn," "roast," "parch," or "consume by fire" (Drower-M. Dictionary 413a); Eth. *qalawa* (Dillmann Lex. 413) "to roast," or "burn."
[227] "Oven," "burning," and "combustion;" AHw. 607b; CAD 10.1:252. Cf. EgArm. מקלו "burned offering," "holocaust" (Jean-H. Dictionnaire 165; Hoftijzer-Jongeling Dictionary 679: also, Palm., with Greek parallel *0uoiav*); Arb. *qalā* (*qly* and *qlw*) "to fry," "bake," or "roast.'
[228] Abusch 2015.

vitality, purified, and released from the magic spell that had previously bound him. Usually, an evil spell is cast by an unknown sorceress. After the ritual, the sorcerer or sorceress, or maybe even both, ends up suffering the same fate they had planned for their victim, causing their witchcraft to backfire. In this ceremony, we can see an ethical principle at play that follows the "eye for an eye" idea, where the punishment matches the wrongdoing. In these incantations, the shift of power from the sorcerers to the patient is often depicted as a legal procedure that ultimately results in the patient's exoneration. The sorcerers are portrayed as having falsely accused the patient, leading to a wrongful accusation. In the *Maqlû* ritual,[229] the speaker typically alleges being attacked and seized by the witch in different parts of the body (ll. 32-36). In the presence of Girra, the Mesopotamian god of fire, the speaker presents two wood or wax figurines in a crossed position, symbolizing the witch. Not knowing the identity of the witch responsible for the curse, the speaker, while in the presence of a deity, declares his intention to incinerate the figurines with sulfur (ll. 70-71). During the ritual, the figurines symbolizing the witch are presented before the court of Nuska, the god of the protective lamp, embodied in a statue that is also present at the ceremony.[230]

The *Maqlû* incantations and other anti-witchcraft Mesopotamian rituals primarily involve the annihilation of the witch through their effigies. The motif of burning witches in *Maqlû* is a recurring theme found in almost all its incantations (I 73-IV 151), in various combinations and elaborations. The accused witch is destroyed during the ritual by invoking Girra, the god of fire following her conviction (II. 19-149). In these incantations, the angry fire is seen, experienced, and addressed as a judge and enforcer.[231] Notably significant in this context is the invocation of the Mesopotamian deities Šamaš, Ea, Asalluḫi, and Girra at the conclusion of the first part of *Maqlû*, as they are regarded as authoritative figures whose names are utilized to call upon the malevolent force to withdraw and relinquish its hold on her victim.[232]

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[229] Cf. *Maqlû* II, 19-75.

[230] As noted by Abusch, "This is not simply an act of sympathetic magic, for judgment in absentia and the use of images of the witch are enjoined on the victim also because of his ignorance of the identity of the culprit. Such ignorance is not surprising, since the alleged criminal is a witch. Because of his ignorance, the plaintiff can therefore not prosecute the evildoer in a regular court of law; instead he appeals to Nuska, who knows the actual identity of the witch, to decree the witch's destruction by fire." See Abusch 2020: 33.

[231] Abusch 2020: 20-21.

[232] Abusch 2020: 23.

The verb *qālû* is specifically linked to the act of burning the witch figurines in the text. In the following *Maqlû* incantation, the supplicant invokes the aid of the divine to vanquish the witch: *ÉN anašši dipāru ṣalmīšunu aqallu* **–** "Incantation. I am raising the torch and burning their figurines" (*Maqlû* I 135). In another *Maqlû* incantation, the supplicant engages in a symbolic act of burning witches using pure sulfur: *ina kibrīti elleti aqallīšunūti ašarrapšunūti* – "With pure sulphur, I am burning them, I am scorching them" (*Maqlû* II, 71). The aim of this incantation is clearly stated by the petitioner: *pušur kišpīšunu lemnūti* – "Release their evil witchcraft" (*Maqlû* Tablet II 73).

Another *Maqlû* incantation calls upon the god Girra to "scorch" both witch and warlock. The ultimate goal remains unchanged: To emerge victorious in the legal battle against the witches and eradicate them, thereby restoring the patient to their former, unblemished state.

ÉN Girra āriru mār Ani qardu
(105) Incantation. O blazing Girra, warlike son of Anu,
106 *ezzu aḫḫīšu attā*
(106) Indeed you are the fiercest among your brothers.
107 *ša kīma Sîn u Šamaš tadannu* (var.: tadinna) *dīnu*
(107) As you decide lawsuits in the stead of Sîn and Šamaš,
108 *dīnī dīni purussâya purus*
(108) Judge my case, hand down my verdict.
109 *qumi kaššāpī u kaššāptī*
(109) Burn my warlock and my witch,
110 *Girra qumu kaššāpī u kaššāptī*
(110) Girra, burn my warlock and my witch,
111 ***Girra quli kaššāpī u kaššāptī***
(111) Girra, scorch my warlock and my witch,
112 *Girra qumīšunūti*
(112) Girra, burn them,
113 ***Girra qulīšunū[t]i***
(113) Girra, scorch them,
114 *Girra kušussunūti*
(114) Girra, vanquish them (*Maqlû* II 105-114).

What Do These Sources Suggest?

We started our analysis by exploring how ancient Israel and Mesopotamia managed their intricate and often conflicting notions of legitimate and illegitimate divination practices. In light of this inquiry, we delved into Fishbane's analysis of this phenomenon as it pertains to the

legitimacy of prophetic communications. According to Fishbane, biblical false prophets pose a threat due to their harmful behavior, which has the potential to cause social unrest comparable to that of Mesopotamian witches. Fishbane's perspective aligns with Abusch's influential theory on witchcraft in Mesopotamia. According to Abusch, in Mesopotamian culture, the notion of "witchcraft" encompasses more than just magical rituals but primarily refers to malevolent actions involving the use of magic with the intent to cause harm and disruption.[233] Abusch explains that Mesopotamian witches are generally portrayed as anti-social, divisive, and disruptive. Through indirect contact, they can exercise control or cause harm to their victim. Notably, they can send ill omens foretelling misfortune.[234] In Mesopotamian mythology, witches have the power to cast evil spells by nurturing dark thoughts in their hearts. In Mesopotamian mythology, witches have the power to cast evil spells by nurturing dark thoughts in their hearts. It was widely believed that the illicit sorcery practiced by witches had the potential to inflict both corporal and psychological afflictions upon their intended victims.[235] The specialized term *qālû* indicates that burning was the prevailing method of punishment for witches in Mesopotamian anti-demonic literature.

The biblical theme of the illegitimacy of a prophetic message that lacks divine mandate revolves around the potential for division and disruption that results from such a fraudulent proclamation. Individuals purporting to possess divine revelations can sow discord and lead individuals astray from their relationship with God, much like the Mesopotamian witches, who employed sorcery to sever individuals from their guardian deities. Of particular interest for our analysis is the use of the verbs קלה cognate of Akkadian *qālû* ("roast"), which appears to symbolize the action of divine purifying fire in both the Israelite and Mesopotamian traditions.[236] This fire can manifest as the Mesopotamian god Girra or the Hebrew deity Yahweh in ancient Israel. As mentioned above, establishing a robust link between the two traditions proves challenging due to the scarcity of available information, yet this verb consistently appears in literary contexts involving magic, carrying a somewhat technical

[233] Abusch 2020: 159.
[234] Abusch 2020: 162.
[235] Abusch 2020: 162.
[236] Cf. the purging of the rebellious son by fire [בער] in Deut 21:21.

connotation. Due to spatial constraints, I have provided only a handful of instances showcasing the use of this verb within Mesopotamian incantations. Although there are numerous additional instances that could be cited, I believe this concise analysis may serve as a solid foundation for an in-depth investigation of the perplexing yet intriguing execution of the two false prophets in Jer 29:22.

Chapter VII: Conclusion

As demonstrated in the analyses of Chapters V and VI, a series of thematically interconnected resonances between the book of Jeremiah and the Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft tradition—particularly the *Maqlû* ritual—emerges through (a diachronic, intertextual, and culturally contextualized) comparison of the ritualistic-magical language employed in both texts. I defined this ritualistic language of witchcraft in Jeremiah as "magical rhetoric" in Chapter II in the methodological section of this dissertation and so I will not review the concept here. While the concept of magical rhetoric is not entirely original, I have refined and adapted it to demonstrate how Jeremiah integrates incantatory imagery to achieve specific rhetorical and theological effects. The framework of magical rhetoric establishes a conceptual bridge between the two texts, manifesting in distinct ways. In Jeremiah, prophetic oracles incorporate formulaic, incantation-like phrasing, blurring the boundaries between ritual, prophecy, and polemics. By contrast, *Maqlû* relies on highly structured and performative incantations to directly invoke divine intervention against witches. Both texts harness evocative imagery—including curses, expulsion, and purification—as a means of addressing perceived violations of divine order and communal integrity.

This research's findings illuminate a shared narrative trajectory in which Jeremiah and *Maqlû* construct what resembles a "divine courtroom drama," unfolding across distinct yet interrelated stages that might be categorized as judgment, purification, and ultimate restoration. From this interwoven narrative framework, we can discern four broad thematic trajectories:

1. Divine judgment conceptualized as a courtroom drama
2. The paradigm of the social enemy
3. Purification as mediated through curses
4. Eschatological renewal and restoration

While the analyses in this study examine only a limited selection of passages from Jeremiah and thus do not offer a comprehensive account of potential parallels between Jeremiah and *Maqlû*, I wish to highlight that most of the shared literary features emerge within the first

major section of the book, spanning chapters 1 to 25. At this stage of the research, I cannot definitively explain why these connections are concentrated in this portion of the text. However, a plausible hypothesis resonates with Stulman's characterization of this section as a "dismantling" treatise, aimed at deconstructing "Judah's preexilic tenets of faith and institutional life …"[1] As Stulman observes, "The first half of the prophetic drama (Jer 1-25) has successfully subverted conventional understandings of worship (7:1-15), conventional categories (11:1-13), and the tradition of Israel's election as God's chosen people (18:1-12)."[2] This opening section of Jeremiah's narrative is centered on dismantling—uprooting and pulling down, destroying and overthrowing, before re-building and planting, to use Jeremiah's words in Jer 1:10. Stulman further contends that this portion also delivers "… a mortal blow to any hope for the uninterrupted occupation of the land as well as for the continuation of monarchic structures (21:1-10)."[3]

If I were to further speculate on why references to the *Maqlû* ceremony—or, more broadly, Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft traditions—emerge more prominently in Jeremiah 1–25, it would likely be due to the thematic emphasis on Yahweh's abandonment of Judah following their apostasy. The people of Judah have violated the divine covenant (Jer 11:10) and become entangled in apostasy and its consequences. As previously discussed, Levinson's examination of Deuteronomy 13 sheds light on how apostasy is fundamentally linked to the practice of sacrificial worship of deities other than Yahweh (Deut 13:3, 7, 14). But he also illustrates that later theological redactors expanded this concern, emphasizing exclusive loyalty to Yahweh as the central religious mandate (Exod 34:14; 22:19; 23:13), situating this emphasis within the Decalogue as a covenantal cornerstone. The motif of Israel's apostasy aligns with the broader rhetoric of judgment and covenantal critique in these chapters, in contrast to the more conciliatory and restorative overtures of later sections, particularly Jeremiah 31.

Divine Judgment Conceptualized as a Courtroom Drama: Jeremiah 1:7 and Jeremiah 7:13

[1] Stulman 2005: 43.
[2] Stulman 2005: 228-229.
[3] Stulman 2005: 229.

What stands out as truly remarkable in both the Jeremianic corpus and the Mesopotamian ritual series *Maqlû* is their shared presentation of divine judgment through the framework of a courtroom drama. In *Maqlû*, this motif is more pronounced, as the entire collection of incantations has been deliberately structured this way by its Mesopotamian editors over a prolonged period. By contrast, in Jeremiah, this overarching theme appears fragmentary and episodic, yet its presence is unmistakable and has, as we have seen, been the focus of sustained scholarly inquiry. Given the centrality of this motif, I would like to offer some reflections on the theological and rhetorical implications of the evidence in Jeremiah 1:7 and 7:13, particularly as it relates to the conceptualization of divine judgment as a juridical drama.

In *Maqlû*, the divine court is explicitly depicted as adjudicating cases of witchcraft, while the book of Jeremiah integrates courtroom imagery to portray Yahweh's pronouncements of judgment against Judah. Stulman characterizes Jeremiah 1 as "Jeremiah's inaugural encounter with Yahweh as the [coming of the word of the Lord]…," noting that "In this prophetic drama, the synergy of message and messenger generates the dynamic word of Yahweh."[4] Yahweh takes legal action against the people of Judah and Jerusalem (Jer 1:16, "And I will argue My case against them" - ודברתי משפטי אותם) due to their inability to fulfill their covenant responsibilities as announced in the opening chapter of the book. In the vision reports in vv. 11-19, Yahweh announces the descent of powerful enemies upon Jerusalem but their attack, Stulman clarifies, "will be no mere geopolitical incursion but a divine offensive against a nation in revolt." Jeremiah's most formidable enemies, however, arise not from outside but from within the kingdom of Judah. In Stulman's words, "The established social and religious hierarchy—the power brokers of the state—will wage combat against him (1:17-19)."[5] Building on the concept of a legal court case, scholar Jindo similarly shows that Yahweh's accusations against his people in Jeremiah 2–3 employ the structure and rhetoric of ancient Near Eastern legal proceedings. Many chapters in Jeremiah invoke a setting that seems to transcend the earthly realm, likely drawing on the imagery of a celestial courtroom. Consider, for example, the dramatic words of

[4] Stulman 2005: 43.
[5] Stulman 2005: 43.

Jeremiah 2:12: "Be appalled, O heavens, at this; / Be horrified, utterly dazed! /—Says the Lord," which appear directed to the members of the heavenly court.[6]

As mentioned elsewhere in this dissertation, Holtz observes that biblical prophets frequently embody a dual role in their function. On the one hand, they are entrusted with summoning the parties to a covenantal trial before the divine court.[7] On the other hand, they act as messengers of God's condemnation, delivering divinely inspired indictments by quoting the words revealed to them.[8] As I have argued in the analysis of Jeremiah 1:7 in Chapter V, within this legalistic framework, the text of Jeremiah portrays the prophet as analogous to a Mesopotamian exorcist, functioning as both a mediator and enforcer of divine authority. It is at this critical juncture that, I contend, the two texts converge ideologically, as the Jeremiah redactor seeks to portray the prophet not as an ordinary biblical "messenger of God" but as a distinct mediating agent. As the narrative unfolds, it becomes evident that Jeremiah is unlike any prophet before him: He is unable to intercede for his guilty people—Judah's first significant blow. Instead, Jeremiah is commissioned not to "spare" Israel from judgment but to "execute" it. His mission aligns with the fulfillment of the covenantal curses threatened in Deuteronomy 28, reflecting the consequences of oath-breaking and the violation of the Mosaic covenant.

The redactor's choice to put the Mesopotamian *āšipu*-exorcist's words in Jeremiah's mouth adds an exorcistic dimension to his prophetic role. In Mesopotamian tradition, the exorcist occupied a distinctive role, charged with performing rituals of expulsion (of wrongdoers) while also advocating for the plaintiff—an individual afflicted by the demonic powers of witchcraft. Moreover, the exorcist sought to emulate the deeds of *Asalluḫi*/Marduk, the divine exemplar of exorcism. When we think of this aspect, we are reminded of the fact that God places his divine

[6] For שמים (lit. "heavens") for "heavenly beings," cf., e.g., Jer 14:22 (הבלי הגוים "false gods [lit. vanities] of the nations"// שמים "heavenly beings"); Ps 89:6 (שמים "heavenly beings"// קהל קדשים "the assembly of holy ones"). For an analysis of this passage, see Jindo 2010: 103-04 and note 85. As Kitz explains, "Curses petition the deities for rulings in a heavenly court. And frequently they are wrapped in legal terminology" (Kitz 2014: 4). She highlights how oaths in the ancient Near East relied on both divine and human cooperation to enforce penalties for violations. Breaking an oath, she notes, carried weighty implications—not just religious but legal as well (Kitz 2014: 36–37). The connection between oaths and curses was clear: every oath explicitly summoned a deity to punish the oath-taker if they failed to uphold their word.

[7] Holtz 2011: 29.

[8] Often God acts as both plaintiff and judge.

words in Jeremiah's mouth ("The Lord put out His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me: Herewith I put My words into your mouth;" Jer 1:9), just like *Asalluḫi*/Marduk does with the exorcist in *Maqlû* before the performance of the purification ritual.[9] With meticulous precision, the exorcist would recite sacred incantations to counteract the malevolent spells plaguing the afflicted person or community as a result of the witch's curse. In the first tablet of *Maqlû*, the exorcist, recognizing his divine mandate, employs a formulaic declaration of his commission: "I have been sent, I will go, I have been commanded, I will speak, against my warlock and witch, Asalluḫi, lord of exorcism, has sent me" (*Maqlû* I 61–62). As explored in Chapter V, the resemblance between this formula and the commission described in *Jeremiah* 1:7b ("But go wherever I send you / And speak whatever I command you") suggests a deliberate Jeremianic allusion to the opening tablet of *Maqlû*.

But why frame Jeremiah in this way? My argument is grounded in a paradoxical premise: Jeremiah is called to pronounce judgment on Judah, yet—and here lies the paradox—his role is not to destroy Israel but ultimately to restore her. This ideological alignment reflects the underlying purpose of Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft rituals, particularly the *Maqlû* text: to restore the individual or community by purging evil from within. Whether this evil is embodied in witches, the ubiquitous adversaries in Assyrian cosmology, or false prophets, the universal enemies of Yahweh, is secondary. For the redactor of Jeremiah, the ultimate goal remains the same: the eradication of evil to facilitate communal restoration and renewal.

What lies at the heart of both traditions is the concept of a breach of sacred covenants—embodied by the Mosaic covenant in *Jeremiah* and the māmītu oath in *Maqlû*, continuing the reenactment of courtroom drama. Such a breach precipitates divine curses in both narratives and demands purification. In the Introduction to this dissertation (and also in the methodological section in Chapter II), I briefly discussed the tripartite invocation marked by the repetition of the term "land/earth" in Jer 22:29 and its potential connection to a similar invocation in the opening tablet of *Maqlû*. The invocation of heaven and earth as witnesses is a

[9] Interestingly, God places his words in Isaiah's mouth in Isaiah 51:16 and Isaiah 59:21, with Isaiah 6:8 providing context for Isaiah's prophetic commissioning.

recurrent motif in both Assyro-Babylonian and biblical legal traditions, serving to lend gravity and divine authority to legal proceedings and covenantal agreements. In biblical literature, this motif is particularly prominent in Deuteronomy, where Moses calls upon heaven and earth to bear witness to Israel's eventual breach of the covenant.[10] This appeal to cosmic entities as witnesses was a standard feature of the divine lawsuit (ריב-pattern) found in biblical texts, including in Jeremiah. Like the Isaiah compiler, also the Jeremianic writer employs the metaphor of the divine lawsuit (ריב),[11] probably appearing first in Hosea (4:1-3),[12] to indicate a breach of the covenant. While a detailed analysis of the pericope in Jer 22:29 is beyond the scope of this dissertation, I wish to briefly reference it here, as it contributes to the courtroom drama atmosphere that the book of Jeremiah seeks to evoke.

When discussing the diabolical characteristics of the witch in *Maqlû*, Abusch noted that the repeated invocation *erṣetu erṣetu erṣetumma* ("Netherworld, netherworld, yea netherworld") in *Maqlû* I 37 is reminiscent of Jer 22:29 (ארץ ארץ ארץ), where the prophet calls upon the personified land as a witness in a legal proceeding. Although the precise nature of the *Maqlû* invocation of the netherworld remains ambiguous, it is clear that it is tightly linked to the legal framework that structures the opening tablet of the *Maqlû* ceremony. The juridical underpinnings of the text become especially evident in *Maqlû* I 73–121, where a series of legal proceedings unfold in a celestial courtroom, with the accused witch standing trial. The portrayal of vigilante or mob justice in this context suggests that the accuser, who is the bewitched individual and thus the wronged party, anticipates that the divine court will condemn the witch to death, assuming that the court is already aware of her guilt, in line with Abusch's interpretation of this section. The mere accusation by the victim is considered sufficient to condemn the witch, rendering further evidentiary proceedings unnecessary.

The expectation of divine judgment without the need for evidentiary hearings in *Maqlû* resonates with similar motifs in the book of Jeremiah, especially regarding the inevitability of

[10] Davidson 2010: 45-84.
[11] On the theme of the prophetic lawsuit in the Bible, see Harvey 1962: 173–96; Wright 1962: 26–67; Limburg 1979; de Roche 1983: 563–74; Daniels 1987: 339–60; Sweeney, Cotter, Walsh and Franke 2000: 43-45; Jindo 2010: 62.
[12] Gruber 2017: 186-193.

judgment for the guilty. In Chapter V, our analysis of Jeremiah 7:13 brings to light a possible indirect allusion to *Maqlû* I 56-57. We have seen that in Jeremiah 7, and especially in verse 13, the recurring theme of forbidding prophetic intercession echoes the prohibition against interceding for the guilty witches in *Maqlû* I 56-57. The people of Judah are forced to relinquish their hopes for reconciliation with Yahweh, just as the witches in *Maqlû* abandon any hope of divine mercy. The legalistic framework of the book of Jeremiah, as patchy as it may be, with its numerous allusions to the curses in Deuteronomy 28 (see discussion on Mastnjak's analysis of such allusions in Chapter I), implies that Israel's appeal for mercy is no longer a possibility but, instead, she must face the consequences of her breach of the Mosaic covenant. The theological consequences of covenantal violation in Jeremiah resonate strongly with the ritualized implications of *māmītu* transgression in *Maqlû* as both depict violations as offenses that disrupt divine order and necessitate retributive justice. In *Maqlû*, the witches find themselves entangled in accusations of transgressing the divine *māmītu*-oath, which acts as a vital social agreement, established by the gods, that binds all individuals in the community to preserve and nurture social status quo.[13] The individual who betrays their oath commits a crime that strikes at the heart of the social fabric, disrupting the harmony the community relies on. Given that *māmītu* is ultimately a conditional curse that the oath-taker places upon themselves, it is crucial to highlight that, as Kitz points out, the ultimate aim of any curse is the downfall of the wrongdoer: "It is only the means of how it is to be achieved that differs," as she observes.[14] Just as the witches' transgression of the *māmītu*-oath disrupts the social fabric and results in a curse aimed at their downfall, so too does the violation of the Mosaic covenant in Jeremiah bring about Yahweh's curse with dire consequences for the people of Judah.

In the book of Jeremiah, those who break the Mosaic covenant face dreadful consequences, such as being driven out of the land or facing death. As seen in Jer 14:11-12, the ultimate consequence of God's indictment against the influential leaders of Jerusalem and the inhabitants of Judah is refusal to allow prophetic intercession. This prohibition stems directly from Judah's wrongdoing,[15] and cannot be reversed because it is intertwined with the breach of

[13] Abusch, *The Anti-Witchcraft Series Maqlû*, 112.
[14] Kitz 2014: 201.
[15] Cf. Gods indictment for evil in Jer 2:20-28. See Craigie, et al., *Jeremiah 1-25*, 37.

the Mosaic covenant. In the book of Jeremiah, the breach of the Mosaic covenant signals the collapse of the relationship between God and Israel. The rupture not only legitimizes the curses imposed on the people as just punishment for their transgressions but also assumes a tangible dimension by defiling the sacred land—God's נחלה—thereby disqualifying them from their divine inheritance. As a consequence, they are expelled from their homeland and sent into exile. This breakdown of the relationship between God and Israel forms the backdrop for a broader understanding of divine judgment and purification.

The Paradigm of the Social Enemy: Jeremiah 22:18-19, Jeremiah 20:10, and Jeremiah 29:22

From a narrative vantage point, divine courtroom dramas often portray the defendant as a villainous or trickster figure—an archetype marked by deception, manipulation, or malevolent intent. The primary role of this figure is to accuse, challenge, or obstruct the divine will, frequently seeking to undermine the moral or cosmic order within both the divine and earthly realms. This trickster motif, as a disruptive force, finds an impactful parallel in Assyrian ideological constructs. Abusch contends that the Assyrians equated the trickster with the witch, representing Assyria's implacable adversary. Fales further examined the concept of *nakrūtu*, or "enmity," in Assyrian culture in his seminal 1982 article.[16] While I have engaged briefly with Fales' analysis in this dissertation, his work deserves a more thorough examination, which falls outside the scope of this project. For reference, Lanfranchi has expanded this analysis on the portrayal of the Assyrian enemy, which I find particularly valuable. Nevertheless, certain aspects of Fales' discussion warrant attention here, as they shed light on how both Mesopotamian and biblical traditions conceptualize the archetypal enemy figure.[17] Fales characterizes the enemy as a bearer of a "theatrical mask," integral to the "eternally revolving

[16] While some provisional historical conclusions can be drawn from an analysis of *nakrūtu* in royal Assyrian inscriptions, it appears that under the Sargonid dynasty, the historical "profile" of the *nakru* largely aligned with that of a conniving, senseless, and evil figure—characterized by deceit, rebellion, and malice. See Fales 1982: 431. Fales believes that perhaps Assyria's "heaps of words" on to his enemies was a reflection of her waning coercive power in many regions of her vast empire, which progressively eroded during the Sargonid period.

[17] Fales observes that a thorough evaluation of specific ideological motifs in the conception of Assyrian *nakrūtu* requires not only an examination of their occurrence, frequency, and stylistic use in Assyrian sources but also a distinction between such motifs and the "ideological biases that the Assyrian kingship conception 'fed into' the texts." See Fales 1982: 430.

mechanism of *nakrus* and *šarrus* confronting themselves on a 'stage.'"[18] These two polarized figures—*nakru* and *šarru*—are locked in perpetual opposition, their conflict evocative of "the Crusaders with the Infidels in the Sicilian theatre of puppets." According to Fales, the ideology of *nakrūtu* functions as the foundational basis for a moral framework through which events and actions are evaluated and interpreted. In this dynamic interplay, the *šarru* embodies the values of goodness, while the *nakru* personifies its antithesis—"the dark side of the moon," with all its complex ambiguities and nuances.[19]

Both Jeremiah and *Maqlû* construct a "public enemy" paradigm (as discussed in Chapter III) to advance their narrative representations of threats to communal and divine order. This rhetorical strategy serves to evoke moral panic and to "other" those perceived as subversive agents within their respective socioreligious contexts. As noted by Abusch, Assyrian witches are conceptually aligned with Assyrian vassals who violate the *adê* covenant, thus transgressing societal norms and disrupting the cosmic order that governs both the living and the dead. Similarly, in our analyses, we have observed how Jeremiah appropriates what we may call the "ritual discourse of witchcraft" to depict false prophets and the Jerusalem elite as metaphorical representations of witches. Again, theatrical masks in a grand religious drama. These figures, like the Assyrian disruptors in *Maqlû*, embody deceit, betrayal, and defiance of divine authority. Both traditions dehumanize these figures to legitimize their expulsion or punishment, thus framing them as emblems of broader struggles against societal and theological heterodoxy.

This theatrical archetype of the villain serves as a lens through which we can understand how the divine judgment scene in the book of Jeremiah and the ritualized exorcism in *Maqlû* both engage with the notion of societal disruption.[20] In both literary traditions, this trickster figure exerts a consistently negative influence, functioning as a social antagonist to the ritual speaker. In *Maqlû*, the focus is on the individual's fractured relationship with their tutelary deity, while in Israel, the ruptured covenantal relationship between the people and God is a consequence of the deceptive hope propagated by the false prophets. Our analysis of several Jeremianic pericopes offers a fragmentary yet unmistakable insight into the identity of

[18] Fales, 1982: 425.
[19] Fales, 1982: 426.
[20] "Exorcism" understood as "excision" of the guilty.

Jeremiah's adversaries. While false prophets are undoubtedly central to Jeremiah's denunciations, the text seems to address a wider array of opponents. In Chapter V, my examination of Jeremiah 20:10 reveals that the prophet's unnamed enemies, who "whisper" and "surround" him, are portrayed as more than mere social foes. The Jeremianic author appears intent on depicting them as malevolent, even quasi-demonic figures, a suggestion reinforced by the employment of the technical term דבה that appears in the phrase דבת רבים, which, as we have seen, often features in Mesopotamian and Levantine incantations.

Our analysis also demonstrates that Jeremiah's most prominent adversaries—Israel's kings, particularly Jehoiakim, as illustrated in Jeremiah 22:18-19, and the false prophets Zedekiah and Ahab, whom he condemns in his letter to the exiles in Jeremiah 29:22—ultimately emerge as foes of Yahweh. They are thus positioned within the framework of the "social enemy." Jehoiakim's act of burning Jeremiah's scrolls, which the prophet then instructs Baruch, his scribe, to rewrite, marks his resistance to divine will, as conveyed through Jeremiah's written words. In the courtroom drama of the prophetic narrative, Jehoiakim stands as one of God's adversarial figures, and God, in the role of plaintiff, administers one of the most severe punishments imaginable: the denial of proper burial. As we have explored in the analysis of Jeremiah 22:18-19 in Chapter VI, Jehoiakim's dishonorable demise aligns not only with the fate of the witch in the *Maqlû* ritual but also with the punishment of the oath-breaker in Assyrian treaties. These violators of divine will—whether treacherous rulers, maleficent practitioners, or apostates—are condemned to the absence of burial and, even more ominously, to the obliteration of their memory within the community: a form of metaphysical excision.

The final and perhaps most evocative allusion to a ritual-magical context in the book of Jeremiah is found in Jeremiah 29:22, where the false prophets Zedekiah and Ahab are cursed with a threat of "roasting" in fire. What is particularly noteworthy about this pericope, beyond yet another reference to Jeremiah's adversaries in the narrative, is the occurrence of the technical term קלה, which bears significant semantic and thematic parallels to the Akkadian verb *qalû*, around which the entire *Maqlû* ritual centers and from which the ritual derives its name: "burning." Notably, this verb is not used elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible to describe the burning of individuals, making its application in this instance especially compelling. The

suggestion that the redactor of Jeremiah may have been intentionally drawing a parallel with the execution of the witch in *Maqlû* is both plausible and stimulating.

Purification as Mediated through Curses: Jeremiah 8:14 and Jeremiah 25:27-28

At the heart of the courtroom drama in the book of Jeremiah lies the question of Israel's culpability. Wright observes that in Jer 30:12-15, the redactor explicitly states that "Israel's sin has produced a terrible national sickness [...]," a condition that manifests in visible wounds upon their bodies. However, Wright emphasizes that this tragedy is ultimately self-inflicted through their persistent transgressions. As he succinctly concludes: "Their guilt has made punishment necessary and unavoidable. The End."[21] Readers of the book of Jeremiah know that Judah's suffering in the narrative is inextricably bound to the people's apostasy, a condition that is intensified by the misleading proclamations of illegitimate leaders.[22] The text frames this guilt as akin to bloodguilt, the most egregious of transgressions,[23] especially because it pollutes the land—Israel's sacred inheritance—and necessitates its purification.

Jeremiah addresses the impurity resulting from Israel's guilt through curses, but as noted previously, these curses are not simply punitive. Rather, they serve a *redemptive function*: To heal and restore Israel's fractured relationship with God. Wright observes that the message in Jeremiah 30 is not about the end of Israel, but rather its renewal and hope. As the author explains, "[...] in the most astonishing *non sequitur*, God intervenes in verses 16-17 and simply

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[21] Wright, Christopher J. H. *The Message of Jeremiah*. BST. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014, 307.

[22] According to Allen, Jer 7:1-10 identifies both nominal Yahweh worship and pagan worship as causes of the disaster, implying that Israel's transgressions stem from a shallow faith centered solely on the temple and flagrant worship of foreign cults. Jeremiah 7:30-31 adds to the mix of blame the shocking behavior of Judah's inhabitants. They began by putting pagan cults in the Temple, thereby polluting its sanctity, and ended by erecting the Topheth shrines in the valley of Ben Hinnom, wherein God accuses Israel of sacrificing her children to the god Molech: "And they have built the shrines of Topheth in the Valley of Ben-hinnom to burn their sons and daughters in fire—which I never commanded, which never came to My mind." The dystopian picture of the valley of Ben Hinnom renamed the valley of Slaughter (Jer 7:32), is based on the Topheth tradition. This tradition encompasses practices such as the sacrificial burning of children ("child sacrifice"), death, apostasy, and the worship of both Baal and Yahweh. Yahweh accuses Israel of "defiling" (לטמאו) the temple (Jer 7:30) and "defiling" the land (ותטמאו את־ארצי, Jer 2:7) elsewhere in the text.

[23] Cf. Jer 7:8-9: "[8] See, you are relying on illusions that are of no avail. / [9] Will you steal and murder and commit adultery and swear falsely, and sacrifice to Baal, and follow other gods whom you have not experienced [...]" and Jer 7:31 "And they have built the shrines of Topheth in the Valley of Ben-hinnom to burn their sons and daughters in fire—which I never commanded, which never came to My mind [...]."

announces that he will inflict reciprocal suffering on those who had so demolished Israel, and will heal and restore the wounded victims of their violence." As Wright puts it, "God will cure the incurable. No explanation is given. God simply promises this reversal as his own will and decision—the grace of God in speech and act, as surprising as it is sovereign."[24] Wright presents a strong argument to underscore the shifts that occur in Jeremiah's narrative following its logical break in chapter 25. Restoration in Israel is depicted in subsequent chapters, emphasizing that Gods act of "planting," or replanting, can only take place after "uprooting."

As I argue in this dissertation, the Jeremiah compiler employs ritualized rhetoric in its oracles of doom to portray sinful Judah ensnared by false prophets and corrupt interpreters of the law. Central to this rhetoric is the frequent use of imprecations. In Chapters V and VI, we explored the motif of ingesting harmful substances as a potent metaphor for divine retribution. The shared themes and language analyzed in the pericopes of Jer 8:14 and 25:27-28 indicate an intentional intertextual engagement with Mesopotamian sources. The integration of motifs involving cursing through ingestion highlights a theological framework in which Yahweh's judgment against Judah is portrayed as an act of malevolent magic to underscore the gravity of divine retribution. The phrase מי־ראש in Jer 8:14 is interpreted within the broader imprecatory lexicon of Jeremiah as referring to a metaphorical poison that seeps through the organs of the victim of witchcraft. We encounter analogous imagery in EST, which potentially curses the oath-breaker with the following maledictions:

> (560) (Ditto, ditto;) just as bread and wine enter into [your] intestines, [so] may they (= the gods) ma ke this oath enter into [your] intestines and into those of [your] so[ns] and your [daught]ers.

This motif reappears in Jeremiah 25:17, where the "cup of Yahweh's wrath" functions as a symbolic vessel of divine affliction, although its precise contents remain ambiguous. Comparable imagery emerges in Isaiah 51:22, where the expression בוס חמתי ("cup of my venom/spittle") suggests a parallel between Yahweh's curse and the application of "venom" or "saliva" as a medium of judgment. Parallels to such imagery can be observed in Neo-Assyrian loyalty oaths, such as Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty, which incorporate curses involving toxic

[24] Wright 2014: 307.

substances—like the "drug of death"—and associate them with the mechanics of witchcraft and ritual manipulation. In Mesopotamian rituals, witches were believed to inflict harm through cursed food, drink, or saliva (*imtu* in Akkadian; CAD 7:139-141), while countermeasures often involved symbolic acts of reversal. These motifs find resonance in the biblical depiction of Yahweh administering toxic curses, including חמה ("venom"), a term that semantically converges with *imtu*, reinforcing the portrayal of divine judgment as both judicial and performative.

Curses are thus an expression of Yahweh's "last stand" against sinful Israel and land pollution is the outcome of her guilt. From an inner-biblical perspective, the maledictions contained in the book of Jeremiah can be interpreted as realizations of the curses of Deuteronomy 28. This, however, is not the end of the story. From a theological standpoint, they also represent an opportunity for Israel. In Jeremiah, Israel's guilt is not merely a theological issue, but one that reflects a deeper, symbolic rejection of the forces that have corrupted both the people and the land. Jeremiah 7 is an example of this mindset, and its author recognizes Israel's pollution (טמא) as a crime: "For the people of Judah have done what displeases Me—declares the Lord. They have set up their abominations in the House bearing My name, to defile it" (לטמאו[...]שמו שקוציהם, Jer 7:30). Jeremiah's language in 7:30, "the people of Judah have done evil in My sight" (עשו בני יהודה הרע בעיני), is, of course, evocative of Deut 13:5 (Eng. 6), where unwavering devotion to God entails denouncing and executing apostates. Failing to do so constitutes "doing evil in the eyes of the Lord" (עשה הרע בעיני יהוה). The symbolic use of "spittle" as an agent of affliction extends this notion of harmful substances, further linking the purification of the land to ritual acts of cursing, both within the Mesopotamian and biblical traditions.

The biblical treatment of impurity, particularly in relation to the defilement of the land, finds its origins in ancient Near Eastern norms surrounding social offenses such as apostasy, murder, and witchcraft. These acts were perceived not merely as moral failings but as transgressions that profoundly defile the land, necessitating divine retribution. Accordingly, Israel's guilt is framed not only as a theological problem but as a socio-cosmic crisis, rooted in

an ancient conceptualization of the land as both a sacred inheritance and a microcosm of the divine order. This perspective illuminates the severity of Israel's guilt from Yahweh's vantage point and provides a framework for understanding the broader socio-religious implications of impurity.

A helpful comparison emerges with *Maqlû*, where similar notions of land defilement and divine retribution arise in response to social offenses. In both Jeremiah and *Maqlû*, transgressions represent violations of the divinely ordained social order. Various offenses contribute to social pollution, though some are more egregious and demand the ultimate penalty of the perpetrator's physical death. For instance, murder often leads to the execution or banishment of the offender. As Frymer-Kensky observes, the practice of "expulsion" functions as a direct means of addressing land defilement. As she explains, "The progressive pollution of the people by these deeds is thus like the most catastrophic pollution, that is, the pollution of the land" (cf. Jer 2:7; Num 35:33; Ezek 36:17-18).[25] This aligns with broader ancient Near Eastern practices, wherein acts of disobedience—particularly apostasy, oath-breaking, and witchcraft—were regarded as contaminating the land and eliciting divine judgment. Ancient Near Eastern societies envisioned divine retribution not only as targeting the offender but also as extending to their family, household, or entire community, as Westbrook suggests. To avert such calamity, punitive measures like execution or exile were implemented as safeguards against divine vengeance.[26]

Eschatological Renewal and Restoration: Jeremiah 25:27-28

While bloodshed is highly polluting, other sorts of pollution were once deemed as destructive as murder due to their potential to contaminate an entire community. As we shall see below, nothing pollutes more than an act whose sole purpose is to create social impurity, and witchcraft was historically seen as one of the most destructive of all unclean activities. Witchcraft was the most harmful form of environmental pollution because,[27] unlike other

[25] Frymer-Kensky 1983: 405.
[26] Westbrook 2003: 76. I have been exploring these themes in a separate manuscript that I am preparing to submit for publication.
[27] Westbrook 2009: 300.

types of wrongdoing where impurity was a byproduct of the crime (i.e., pact violation, sexual aberrations, adultery, or murder), *witchcraft sought impurity*.[28] This explains why Deuteronomy (18:10-11) condemns magic (as does Jer 27:9) and compares it to the practice of sacrificing sons or daughters "to the fire" in the Topheth ritual: "[10]Let no one be found among you *who consigns his son or daughter to the fire*, or who is an augur, a soothsayer, a diviner, *a sorcerer*, [11]*one who casts spells, or one who consults ghosts or familiar spirits, or one who inquires of the dead*."[29]

A fascinating aspect of witchcraft's pollution is that it could only be cleansed by criminal prosecution. The ancient Near Eastern conceptualization of witchcraft was relatively straightforward: Witchcraft is a form of harm that can result in physical ailments, some of which are fatal. It can be aimed at a person or a community of individuals. Through prayer, the affected individual would seek assistance from the gods or seek their judgment against the witch. He/she might utilize magic to neutralize magic, using, for example, amulets, apotropaic figurines, and the like, or rely on a specialist, an exorcist, to render magic ineffectual. Additionally, the affected individual, i.e., the cursed person, may prosecute the offender of the crime in a human court.[30]

Westbrook specifies three main categories of transgressions against the gods in his examination of criminal law in the ancient Near East,[31] and witchcraft is one of the offenses that generate the most social impurity. He emphasizes that the appropriate response to this type of offense is the offender's death or exile, as well as purification ceremonies. However, Westbrook makes no mention of the specific case of *Maqlû*, in which the plaintiff seeks to punish witches through legal means not only while they are alive but also after they die, by preventing them from entering the netherworld, the afterlife to which their souls aspire. The punishment meted out to the witch in the *Maqlû* ritual is ideologically similar to the penalty prescribed by the biblical כרת, at least as interpreted, in my opinion correctly, by Milgrom. He

[28] Westbrook 2009: 294.
[29] Emphasis is my own.
[30] Westbrook 2009: 292.
[31] Westbrook 2003: 657-91.

views the excision of the social rabble-rouser from society and the afterlife as the most powerful tool for social redress.

As mentioned above, the book of Jeremiah employs magical rhetoric—or "witchcraft rhetoric"—to depict false prophets, the Jerusalem elite, and even the people of Judah as hostile adversaries of God. By framing their preaching, actions, and stubborn refusal to heed Yahweh's prophet as equivalent to "murder," the Jeremiah redactor asserts that their behavior not only generates impurity but also something far graver: They alienate the people from Yahweh. They are not witches, but they are likened to them; they do not perform magic, but their actions mirror the intent of such practices. The Jeremiah redactor views their actions as grievous as one of the most heinous crimes in the ancient Near East: witchcraft. As a result, the rhetoric of witchcraft becomes the literary vehicle for delivering this powerful accusation.

Throughout this study, I have noted that while Jeremiah often appears as a messenger of Yahweh's curse, it is important to remember that the theology behind his message is ultimately aimed not at punishing, but at healing Judah as is shown in the image of God's cup of wrath in Jeremiah 25, which marks the conclusion of the book's first major section and initiates a shift toward a message of hope for Israel—a hope that continues to unfold in the chapters that follow.

As I discussed in Chapter VI, the author of Jeremiah 25 employs the striking image of the cup of God's wrath (vv. 15–17, 27–28) to depict Yahweh's judgment on Israel while also nodding at a future restoration. This vivid and unsettling metaphor portrays divine anger as a poisonous drink—something that seeps into and consumes the individual. I argue that this image draws on the broader literary motif of ingesting harmful substances, a motif well attested in Mesopotamian magical traditions and Assyrian loyalty oaths, which may have served as a source of inspiration for the biblical author. In vv. 27–28, the act of vomiting the contents of the cup symbolizes the expulsion of internal toxicity, akin to the removal of a curse in exorcistic rituals. The cup functions as a counter-curse designed to cleanse Israel and prevent total annihilation. This cleansing also signifies Yahweh's intention to deliver Israel from the deceptions of false prophets, whose rhetoric mirrors the antisocial malevolence associated with

Assyrian witches. Both figures serve as universal enemies of their respective divine orders, embodying wickedness and societal disruption. The false prophets, cast as fictional collective adversaries of God, are held accountable for Judah's downfall and estrangement from Yahweh. This tradition would stand the test of time: "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves" (Matthew 7:15).

Jeremiah 25 marks a climactic moment in the text, depicting the people and leaders of Judah consumed by the consequences of their own corruption. The cup of wrath, rendered as a poisonous yet regal libation, symbolizes both Israel's destruction and the possibility of renewal—a theme developed further in Jeremiah 31. This powerful literary device underscores the prophet's central critique of false prophets and their misleading rhetoric, while offering a glimpse of hope amidst divine judgment.

Several dimensions of this research can be approached through a variety of methodological lenses—for instance, the discussion of Israel's impurity in relation to the land's defilement, and Jeremiah's use of metaphor to depict Israel's marital relationship with God. It would be worthwhile to examine how these and other themes intersect with the central argument advanced in this study, particularly in relation to Jeremiah's use of "magical language." This study does not aim to be comprehensive; rather, it seeks to open new avenues of exploration into the rhetoric of this complex and compelling book. Throughout, I have attempted to interweave both inner-biblical and extra-biblical exegesis, guided by the conviction that Jeremiah—and biblical prophecy more generally—cannot be fully understood through compartmentalized methodologies, which often dominate the field, but requires a more holistic approach; one that takes seriously the broader cultural and religious context in which the book emerged, and recognizes that Jeremiah and other prophets did not function in isolation from their ancient Near Eastern environment.

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