

CHAPTER 24

Job and Not

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IN THE BOOK OF *JOB*, God relates to the characters (Satan and Job) as an interlocutor on a one-to-one basis.¹ He asks questions of Satan almost as a peer: “What brings you here? ...Did you happen to come across my dear Job?” (1:7–8, literally: “From where you come? ...Did you set your heart on my servant Job”). The closest tonality is in the book of Genesis, where God also speaks to Adam in very colloquial terms: “Where are you? ...Who told you that you are naked?” (3:9, 11). Where else in the Bible but in these two books do we hear God speak in such an informal, everyday style?

Can it be accidental? Let us assume it is not, and propose a *clef de lecture* that sees this as intentional. Let us assume, in other words, that the author explicitly wanted us to read the prologue as a counterpart of Genesis. Instead of approaching a human being (as in Genesis), the tempter (in *Job*) approaches God himself. He still tempts a human, but not offering something that is seemingly good. Rather, he touches now a raw nerve, and inflicts pain. But it remains a temptation. In my proposed reading of the text, the author of *Job* paints a scenario like the one he saw in Genesis, with the variation that here the tempter asks for permission. If so, *Job* is not what it seems.

Ludlul is the Babylonian text that is most often seen as the closest parallel to *Job*. But the parallel is not, I suggest, because of the suffering of the protagonist; it is rather because of the posture toward the divine that is in some ways at odds with the basic Mesopotamian perception, and comes the closest to the biblical perception of the absolute. Here, too, the connection with *Job* is not what it seems.

I can see Jack’s grin as he reads these words. Not only because the approach comes close, I trust, to the abiding sense of deft humor with which his writings brim, but also because the title will remind him of a joint moment in our scholarly lives, when I submitted to his editorial care an article entitled “Wisdom and not,” a wording that led to a lively debate as to the suitability of the terms.... I hope he will enjoy, now, this brief (and perhaps too bold?) interpretive sketch which I offer in his honor, remembering our many, though never sufficient, encounters, scholarly and human, brief and intense.

1. In this article references to the character “Job” are set in roman type, and those to the book of *Job* are italicized.

I. The Prophetic Dimension

The Tanakh Hypothesis

This paper, then, is, and is not, about *Job*. It suggests the possibility of a sub-text where there is more to Job as a character, and to *Job* as a book, than meets the eye. If the prelude is the counterpart of the book of Genesis, then the body of the text of *Job* can be seen as the counterpart of the historical/prophetic books and of wisdom. At a time when the canon was in some ways beginning to take shape and the biblical people were in search of an identity that could transcend the total collapse of earlier political fortunes, *Job* emerges as a scribal feat aimed at proposing a broad reflection about the *Tanakh* as a whole, and at the same time a reinterpretation of the history of the biblical people in a prophetic dimension. I see a division in four major structural sections.

The first section is the prologue and echoes, as we just saw, Genesis. It thus does not deal with the *Torah* as a whole, but only with the first book.

The second section (chs. 3–27) is a confrontation with the *Nebi'im*. It does not deal with any book in particular, but rather looks at two opposing views of history, with Job defending the value of a prophetic look at history. This validates the traditional conflation of the historical books and the texts of the prophets (in the narrow sense of the term) in a single whole, the *Nebi'im*.

I see the third section as relating to the “writings” of wisdom (*Ketubim*). There is no dialogue here. It begins with the *Encomium sapientiae* in ch. 28, followed by Job giving new vent to his very personal anguish (chs. 29–31). We then have a single voice (Elihu, chs. 32–37) presenting a “young” approach to wisdom: this section is asymmetrical because there is no rejoinder on the part of Job.

The fourth section (38:1–42:6) explodes literally like a burst of thunder: the God about whom the friends and Elihu have been talking in the third person, and whom Job has anxiously been seeking as an interlocutor in the second person, this God suddenly appears as a first person, that of the living God. This offers an opportunity for exploring the very principles that underlie the unity of the *Tanakh*.

Throughout, Job is at the same time a participant and a referee. As a foreigner, he looks from the outside at the grand book that is just now becoming such, the Bible. But in so doing, he emerges as the image of the people of the book, impersonating their anxiety and their urge for the living God, like the deer of the psalm looking for fresh water.

Part One. Job and Genesis (Job 1–2)

The Tempter

The prologue of *Job* is in itself a short story. Without much of a preamble, it plunges *in medias res* by means of a description of Job’s happy state first and then continues, without transition, with the conversation that Yahweh has with the tempter (“the Satan”), a conversation with the very colloquial tone I mentioned at the beginning, which is otherwise found only in Genesis. The tempter sets out to put Job to the test, first by depriving him of his material goods, then by “touching his bone and flesh” (2:5).

The great emphasis on the temptation aspect of the story supports the parallel with Genesis. And the implication is that the answer to the tempter should have been, in Genesis, to confront God in a frank open dialogue, not listening to specious alternatives. This is what we will see happening in *Job's* epilogue. It is thus also a vindication of God's behavior in Eden: there, it is God who seeks out Adam after the fall, and instigates the dialogue; in the epilogue of *Job*, it is again God who seeks out man, and engages in a narrative that ultimately justifies Job as much as God. If only Adam had engaged God in the same way....

The arrival of three friends from faraway has two other possible echoes of the Eden narrative, however remote. One is that they come from remote regions with exotic names (2:11) that are meant to defy identification (so that whether or not the identifications proposed hold true matters little, and goes in a sense against the intent of the story): it is a situation similar to the one we see with the first two of the four rivers of Eden (Gen 2:11–13). There is a great specificity in the very fact of naming, but the fact that their referential nature is obscure means that the intended effect is that of suggesting simply an exotic remoteness.

The second, even fainter, echo, is the reference to the seven days and seven nights during which the friends sit next to Job until he breaks the silence with great lament. Do we have here a hidden allusion to the seven days of creation, which usher in the whole rest of the biblical story?

The Wife

This first section of *Job* does not relate to the *Torah* per se, but only to Genesis. Nor is there any reflection about the content of the five books, as I suggest is the case in the remaining sections. But there is a dialogical confrontation between Job and his wife. It is an extremely short exchange (2:9–10), but it offers an anticipation of the confrontation of Job with his friends. Job accepts the loss of all his goods, saying: "Yahweh gave, Yahweh took: the name of Yahweh be blessed!" (1:21). So his wife urges him to give up and to bless (in fact, curse) God. But Job argues with her: "Should we accept the good from the hand of God, and should we not accept the bad?" (2:10).

In this perspective, Job is Adam revisited (as has often been noted), and in this sense, too, the prologue is a re-visitation of Eden. As a reflection imbued of the grand vision of the wisdom tradition, *Job* would then tell us how Adam should have behaved: if Job could remain centered on God even through extreme pain, Adam, too, should have argued with his wife and should have remained so centered in front of the tempter's pretense that he (Adam) could get something better than the good which God had already given him.

Part Two. Job and the Prophets (Job 3–27)

The Two Views of History

The rest of the story in *Job* opens with his long curse against his own birth (the entire ch. 3): "May the day be brought to naught in which I was born and the night that spoke of a boy conceived ... let it be darkness.... Why did I not die from the womb?" (3:3, 4,

11). This strongly resembles the stance of Jeremiah in his well-known “confessions”: “Accursed is the day in which I came to light ... accursed the man who brought my father the news.... Why did I come out of the womb?” (Jer 20:14, 15, 18).

This is clearly a very personal cry of anguish. But as the text unfolds, it assumes a larger meaning. Just as the prophets are extremely personal in their reflections and explosive statements but are at the same time addressing very directly the much wider arena, in a similar way Job’s outbursts, when contrasted with the position taken by his friends, project two different philosophies.

On the one hand, we have Job’s dynamic view of history: the cataclysmic events that affect the nation, just like those that affect the life of the single individual, cannot be ignored, much less denied. There is an essential mystery that beckons behind suffering, and it must be accepted in all its daunting reality: it is through it that we are made alive to the hidden presence, the affecting presence of God.

On the other side, there is the static rationalization of those who feel safer in their own construction of the rapport with God than in a suffered acceptance of his actual divine agency. Job’s interlocutors are the counterpart of the different ways in which the people of ancient Israel and Judah sought to bring down to their level their relationship with God, instead of remaining open to the manifestation of “his” level. The subtext is that all such rationalizations miss the point of what the history of Israel really has been.

Herein lies the inner unity of the two grand sections of the *Nebi'im*, the historical and the prophetic books. The understanding of history must be prophetic, or else it goes against the very sense of history. The inner danger of looking at history as an ordered plot is that one may end up taking for granted God’s intervention. *Job* reminds us with great intensity of the deeper meaning of history.

At the same time, the prophetic voice must be understood as embedded in history, or else it evaporates in moralism, which is exactly what happens with the friends. In fact, if there is, in the course of the story, a development of their personality it is precisely that they become more and more entrenched in their own mental outlook, less and less open to the way in which the divine will is incarnate in human suffering. Job’s passion, on the other hand, emerges as a model because it is unflinchingly rooted in reality.

The Ideological View of History

What is consistent in the friends’ attitude is the opacity of their response: they have no interest in human experience in general (their own in the first place) and belittle that of Job. They leave no room for a stark confrontation in line with the emblematic one of Jacob at Peni’el (Gen 32:23–33):

What has possessed your heart? Why do your eyes flash
as you thrust your spirit against God
and unleash words from your mouth? (15:12)

You may well be one who tears himself in anger—
but will the earth, for your sake, turn to wilderness?
will rocks be thrown out of place? (18:4)

Job's passion rests in his adamant adherence to reality, and the friends' mocking of his attitude does not match this reality. It pretends that it is not there, with pat answers to his suffering. Their assurances, it must be stressed, are perfectly orthodox, but therein lies their problem: they are *too* orthodox. Their way to draw conclusions is too self-satisfied, and thus they have a hollow sound. In the end, the posture of the friends borders on docetism: for example, Eliphaz tells Job that he "will laugh at desolation and hunger" (5:22), which is what the friends end up doing more and more in speaking to Job. For Job, however, it is the opposite: one must accept reality as it is, fully, without pretenses. Is it not a fact, he says, that it is God who derides the innocent (11:23)?

This applies to the larger history of the people: it is the wrong interpretation of "sacred" history to pretend that there is no present misery. Nor should the unfolding of this history be seen through the lens of a detached analysis: "we have searched it and so it is" (5:27), says Eliphaz with a great sense of certainty, whereas the real power to search in the depth is only God's—as the great *Encomium* of wisdom tells us in the opening of the third part (where the same verb חקר is used, 28:27: it comes after the wonderful allegory of mining, 28:1–12). Nothing that the friends say is in itself objectionable, unorthodox: their problem lies in developing a wrong sense of self-satisfaction in their people's history.

In a way, what the moralizing friends are envisaging is a static predictability in history. Suffering is part of a pattern, they say: there inevitably develops a correction course that will reverse the roles. True enough, this is attributed to God. But it is done in the way in which it would be attributed to the gods in a polytheistic system: the aim is to flatten history's events so that they all come out even.

Only at the end (but there is uncertainty in the textual tradition) does the second friend, Bildad, assume a tone that in some ways empathizes with Job's, anticipating Yahweh's own words at the end of the text: "Who can absorb the thunder of his power?" (26:14). It is a significant reversal, almost a conversion like the one of Elihu (see below, on "God's Voice"). There is, in fact, a slight progression of characters in the story. At the beginning, the three friends sit silently next to him for seven days and seven nights (2:13), which is the best sign of sharing in the pain. Also the first words of Eliphaz (4:1–4) are kind and circumspect, and he even refers to a dream, which describes a direct experience of God's voice (4:12–16). But then the insensitivity of the three friends becomes more and more apparent, and even aggressive. There is, we may say, a steady decay of humanity in their attitude, so that the final sympathetic statement of Bildad stands out all the more sharply. Ultimately, he says, no matter how much observing and searching we might do, the question is: how do we really internalize his voice?

The Prophetic View of History

Which is what Job is trying to do all along. In contrast with what may be considered a polytheistic view of things, Job's aim propounds a very different philosophy of history. It may well be that the just man should suffer inexplicably without redress, only knowing that it comes from God. Hence comes the anguish, in fact even the anger.

There is no glossing over. It is the struggle of Job with God, projected and re-visited now on a national level.

Against a smug and complacent interpretation of history, Job, in his outpouring, proposes an altogether different approach, a prophetic view. Prophecy defies logic, and accepts what cannot be explained by adducing proofs. Man cannot argue (רִיב) with God (9:3), cannot “choose words” with him (9:14), while God, for his part, may keep inflicting wounds “gratuitously,” without having to give any reasons for it (9:17). He can, in fact, “laugh” at the calamity of the innocent (9:23).

Job speaks of himself, but in him and in his suffering we see projected the plight of the people. He speaks, we must remember, as an outsider, a foreigner, the man of Uṣ: one of the friends indirectly seems to exclude him for this very reason from the circle of those endowed with wisdom (15:19). Perhaps precisely because of his role as an outsider he can take a fresh look at the history of the people. And thus he reaches an intense climax in his assessment of “sacred” history, where he describes explicitly the reversal of fortune onto the social body, in an extraordinary passage that has no parallels elsewhere in wisdom.

First he reminds his listeners that it is not the established institutional order that matters, because this, too, can be turned upside down, just as it has happened with him. We have a strophe encased between two verses (in italics below) that define in a nutshell a real philosophy of history, the one that can properly be seen as prophetic because here Job tells us how time itself is in the hands of God. It is really and ultimately only God who intervenes in history:

*With him is strength and effective rule,
to him belong the sinner and the tempter:
he makes administrators walk away barefoot
and makes judges look like fools because of their self-boasting,
he unbuckles the fancy belts of kings
and straps a rag around their waist,
he makes priests walk away barefoot
and turns the establishment upside down,
he makes those who trust in themselves fail in their speech
and those who are old fail in their judgment,
he pours contempt on the aristocrats
and strips the mighty naked down to their intimate parts
("loosens their girdle")
He is the one who removes the veil of darkness
and thus makes the shadow of death come out to light. (12:16–22)*

This is how God intervenes in history: the general principle is clearly articulated, and is illustrated by the specific examples. The “nakedness” is emblematic of the unveiling of truth, regardless of the status of the individuals, whose arrogance is ultimately exposed.

This passage ends with an extraordinary statement, which has the sound of a truly prophetic voice assessing history:

*He is the one who makes nations (גוֹיִם) grow great and then destroys them,
 the one who spreads nations out wide and then leads them astray,
 the one who makes leaders of the common people (צַמְדֵי־הָעָם) lose their mind
 and makes them wander aimlessly in the wilderness,
 they grope in darkness—and there is no light!,
 he makes them stagger as a drunkard would.
 It all belongs more with the prophets than with wisdom.*

Part Three. Job and Wisdom (Job 28–37)

The Personal Dimension of Wisdom

The third part of *Job* takes us into a deep and articulate reflection on the very nature of Wisdom—the third portion of the *Tanakh*. The supreme achievement of the biblical view of history is not a rationalization of the events, but a recognition that Wisdom is not an abstraction. It is, indeed, an ultimate principle, but one endowed with life and agency, and therefore fully operative in history.

It begins (ch. 28) with an *Encomium sapientiae* (to echo Erasmus), a grand statement which seems to be in the guise of a chorus. In the text, it is not attributed specifically to Job (as elsewhere in the text), and it may really be best understood as a sort of intermezzo. It opens with a remarkable literary piece, the great graphic representation of mining (28:1–12), described with surprisingly vivid details. It is a grand allegory of the human power of analysis: “(Man) is the one who sets an end of darkness (in the mines), the one who searches to the outer limit the stones of darkness and of the shadow of death” (28:3).

And then comes the essential question:

But as for wisdom—where can it be found?
 Where is the place of understanding?
 No human being (שׂוֹנֵי) knows the path to it,
 because it is not found in the land of the living. (28:12–13)

One cannot mine for it the way one does for minerals—that is the core of the answer. It is not a thing that can be *conquered* at “the end of darkness.” It can only be *received* “at the end of darkness,” because it coincides with God himself:

God (alone) is the one who understands the path to wisdom,
 because he knows its place,
 because he (is the one who could) behold the end of the earth,
 the one who could see what lies under the expanse of the heavens.
 And so, when giving substance to the wind
 or when he measured out the waters with a gauge;
 when making an established pattern for the rain
 and tracing a path in heaven for the thunderbolt;
 at that point he had wisdom clearly in view (רָאָה) and defined (וַיִּסְפָּרָהּ) it
 and said to man (לְאָדָם):

“Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom,
to stay clear of evil, that is intelligence.” (28:23–28)

The contrast with mining is impressive, poetically as well as conceptually: the whole encomium is really a literary jewel. The darkness of the mine is contrasted with the airiness of the sky. There, man labors in darkness to get to the ore; here God is in full control from the beginning, disposing of things in the full light of the sky. And the message is very clear: we cannot reach for wisdom as if it were an ore to be possessed, a good to be analyzed. It is rather in the essence of God himself and humans can only accept it in a state of fear and of grace: the fear that comes from realizing that God acts as he will, the grace that comes from not settling in a position of self-assured pride.

The “Confessions” of Job: A Deeper Moral Self

Following the *Encomium*, we have a new review, on the part of Job, of his personal situation. But it has a different tone. In the first place, Job does not now speak to his friends, but to Wisdom directly. And then there is a stronger emphasis on the inner dimension of morality. In his defense, which otherwise echoes his earlier protestations, Job affirms the innocence of his innermost thoughts: it is not only in his outward actions that he feels blameless, but also in the deepest recesses of his conscience, beginning with his sexual desires. Next he affirms, in an extraordinary statement, how he feels about not infringing the rights of slaves:

If I violate the rights (מִשְׁפָּט) of my slave and of my slave girl
when they have a dispute (רִיב) with me,
what shall I do when God stands up,
how shall I respond if he confronts me? (31:13–14)

And he goes on to proclaim a universal principle, with an eloquence reminiscent of Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice* (“if you prick us, do we not bleed?...”):

Did not the One who made *me* in the belly, so make *him* as well?
Did not (the same) One give us consistency in the womb? (31:15)

The deeper level of morality is significant in the broader context we are envisaging here. Wisdom proposes a higher standard, because it goes to the very heart of the person. And yet even living by this standard cannot be accounted for as a guarantee that things should go well. Projected onto the larger public sphere, the case of Job means that even wisdom does not give man a reason for standing up against God. Job’s critique extends here, therefore, to wisdom as well.

The “Young” Wisdom and the Ideology of Experience

There is a hidden symmetry between Part Two and Part Three of *Job*. Each part consists of three parallel sections, but in Part Two we have three sets of speeches, one

for each of the friends with a rebuttal by Job, whereas in Part Three we have three independent sections, tied together by the theme of wisdom: the *Encomium*, the “Confessions” of Job, and now Elihu’s harangue. Elihu addresses Job, as the friends do, but does not engage him in a debate, as the friends do. Rather, Elihu progressively comes around Job’s real conundrum. It almost looks as though Elihu were—an alter ego of Job! Which is why there is no rejoinder: Job sees himself as Elihu.

Elihu is not qualified as “friend”; Job does not respond to Elihu’s speech; God does not address Elihu, as he does Job and the friends. Except for the fact that Elihu addresses both Job and his friends, his speech stands by itself, almost as a counterpart to the *Encomium*. Whereas the latter describes wisdom from above, Elihu describes it from below, as it were. But there is an important clue: by his own definition, Elihu represents the “young” approach to wisdom (32:4, 6–7). That is: Elihu stands for later strands of the wisdom tradition, with which Job also identifies himself. It is, broadly speaking, the time when *Job* is edited in its final version, and the larger questions and presuppositions of their overall mental approach must have loomed large. The way I suggest we read it here is that even the “modern” wisdom movement may fall short of its real goal if it gets bogged down in its own moralism. If Elihu is indeed Job’s alter ego, then this can be read as a sort of *mea culpa*.

But where is the denouement? There is no rejoinder to Elihu’s speech to propose a dialectical resolution. Instead, and this seems to me another literary jewel of *Job*, it is Elihu himself who comes around, almost without admitting it, and shows how really young the young wisdom ought to be. Textually, it is still Elihu who speaks, but he finally sounds like Job, whom he addresses now, remarkably, as the one from whom one can learn. He says, addressing Job (37:19–24):

You are the one to teach us (הוֹדִיעֵנוּ) what we shall say to him,
 because we cannot analyze (נִצְרָה) things in the face of darkness.
 Can one report (יִסְפֵּר) to him that I do have something to say?
 as if a man were to say that he wants to be swallowed up (יִבְלָע)?

Elihu had been speaking eloquently about God, but still from a distance, presuming to teach (אָלַף) wisdom to Job who should all but remain silent (33:33). He was thus ending up supporting the ideology of experience, not experience itself. What even the “young” wisdom was missing was the sense of the living God, and it is this sense that wisdom must recover. The suffered experience of Job is thus the trampoline for wisdom to reach its goal: Job can teach Elihu, i.e., the whole “young” wisdom movement, how to *feel* God’s presence, not just how to *think* about it. What comes to matter more and more is experience as such. The confrontation with the past is in terms of its relevance for the here and now, not as a frozen construct.

And thus comes the second part of the denouement: Elihu opens the way for God’s epiphany. This will open with as a classical theophany, “from the heart of the tempest (הַסְעָרָה)”; and Elihu anticipates it by saying that one should listen to the rumble (הִגָּה) of his voice which roars like thunder and flashes with thunderbolts (37:1–4). And so he ends with the words that literally open the door to God’s entrance on the scene:

However bright, one does not see the light behind the clouds,
but as the wind passes, it sweeps them away. (37:21–22)

The stage is set.

Part Four. Job and Revelation (Job 38–42)

The Creation Ethos

“However bright the light may be, one does not see it if it remains behind the clouds.” It has been Job’s predicament all along. And he kept looking for the light to shine. So, now that the wind has blown away the clouds, what is the shape that the light can take?

We must remember that the premise clearly articulated in Part One is that Job was in fact without blame. All his protestations, therefore, were valid—when he was facing his friends in Part Two, or when he was stating his case in front of Wisdom in Part Three. He is indeed a suffering “just,” and none of the friends’ negative comments was applicable. In the end, God will vindicate him, though with an unexpected twist, as we shall see below.

The word that comes from God does not, in any way, address the question of suffering. A question that Job had not in fact ever asked as such: he had dwelt abundantly on his innocence, but never asking, “Why does this happen, why does it happen to me?” What emerges now with God’s “answer” is the relevance of the creation ethos, stated in a very forceful form: “where were you...?” It is the ethos that pervades the whole Bible and defines the entire prophetic outlook on reality. It is not so much a doctrine, as it is a submerged and ever present point of reference.

There is a sense of exclusivity in God’s utterance: creation is the only thing that matters. It forcefully brings us back to *Genesis* with which, in my hypothesis, the whole story had started. The ultimate message of the whole experience of the people of the Bible is that one must keep one’s eyes fixed on that foundational moment, when all of reality (the word *תצו*, “design,” 38:2, can be so understood) comes to be.

The Unity of the Tanakh

And this takes us to a reflection about our suggested hypothesis. Part Four may be seen as an overarching reflection about the very essence of what undergirds the *Tanakh* as a whole. If we think of the composition of *Job* as having taken place at some early point in the long trajectory of the gestation process of the canon, then it seems plausible to assume that in some indirect manner the question of inspiration and of revelation should have arisen. If the “books” (*biblia*) are not to be seen as a frozen thing, but as the witness of the inner life of God, perceived through human experience (“revelation”), then in some way they are the direct voice of an affecting presence that generates this experience (“inspiration”). The “books” must not, in any case, become so hardened as to mask and obscure the voice. They must not “suffocate the spirit,” as Paul will say.

In this light, the theophany in *Job* serves to affirm the unity of the *Tanakh*. It depends on the coherence of the perception that there is a single, ultimate referent for the entire message, a referent who speaks on his own terms. The adherence to the “living” God means precisely this: that the heavens narrate the glory of the creator, but that the ultimate goal is neither the construct (the heavens) nor the narration (the books), but rather the constructor and the narrator. Just as moralism does not compete with experience, so subservience to a frozen “thing,” even a word, does not compete with the surrender in trust to the one behind the thing or the word. The unity of the *Tanakh* rests then on revelation and on inspiration.

Revelation

Job tells us that revelation is not transmission of information, but self-disclosure of presence.

Yahweh re-emerges at this point in our story with his own name, and Genesis re-emerges as well, this time as the locus where creation is narrated. If creation is not to be seen as a myth, it is not because it should be considered as history, which it is not, but because it is understood as the supreme manifestation of God’s agency that sets in motion reality (הַיְשׁוּב). The full unpredictability of the living God is behind Job’s search, at the same time that it is its target. The “books” should not encase God within the trap of language and conceptualization. Speaking “about” suffering does not address the issue; it may only obfuscate this presence. Living it, experiencing it without pretenses, means accepting the revelation of his existence, and seeing in it the reality of his self-disclosure. The final words of Job bring out the full impact of what the reception of revelation should be: instead of “hearing with the hearing of the ear,” he can now see with his own eyes (42:5).

God is then not a distant writer who entrusts himself to a medium. The true character of God is that of a live interlocutor. The “books,” at the time when the sensitivity began to emerge for what will eventually be their ultimate configuration (the canon), must be seen as a witness to his life, to a revelation that breathes through the reality he has created. Lest he be entrapped in the figure of a puppet that can be manipulated, God interacts as himself.

Inspiration

But writing he does, through the voice and the hand of humans. This medium is a receptor of the self-disclosure, and refers constantly back to it: it is in this sense that it is *inspired*. It is not a matter of dictation; it is rather the sharing, the syncing of experience: the divine “experience” that takes shape in human experience. The fundamental message intrinsic in the notion of inspiration is that there should be no attempt at control or possession on the part of the “inspired.” Ultimately, the hidden (unconscious?) pretense of the friends and of the first Elihu was to exercise such control on morality. They wanted to teach Job against his own experience. They were not “inspired.”

So, the theophany in *Job* tells us that inspiration is a sharing of live experience, a sharing that rests on a special commonality between God and his human creature.

As attention was beginning to be focused on the permanence of the written text, an undeclared process of filtering would presumably also begin to take place, through which certain texts, and not others, would emerge as particularly significant. What *Job*, according to the interpretation suggested here, would have addressed was the question of the ultimate legitimacy of the process on the one hand, and, on the other, of the potential danger of a reification of the word of God, inspired by the otherwise natural trend towards control and possession of that word. It is in this sense that *Job* would broach in a very substantive manner the question of inspiration not just as the initial thrust behind the origin of the text, but also as the continued energy behind its fruition.

The Grand Vision

Parallels in the Wisdom Tradition

We see, in this trend toward the formation of a canon, the signs of a remarkable innovation: the development of a broad historiographic outlook that encompasses a long and distant past in a single narrative in function of the present.

Job, as here interpreted, proposes a mystical interpretation of this historical development, anchoring it to the canon as it was taking shape. It is “mystical” in the sense that it is wholly along interpretive lines that affect the deeper life of the individual and the community, seeing the books as a conceptual whole (hence a canon, even if *ante litteram*) and reducing the history that these books depict to a single confrontation with God. In *Job*, this is couched in rather opaque terms (assuming that it is in the first place what I am suggesting it may be), as a subtle allegory that looks only at the spirit of history, not at any of the details.

At the other end of the spectrum, the book of Chronicles presents the whole of Israel’s history, seen indeed as a single whole, but broken down into the full array of factual details that make up that development. It is symmetrically juxtaposed to *Job* as here understood because it relates facts without any overall apparent editorializing, truly as a “chronicle” from the very stark and abrupt beginning consisting of a list of names with Adam in the first place, down to the edict of Cyrus, where the narrative ends just as abruptly as it had begun, as if to indicate the openness of the historical process.

This grand vision of history becomes a theme in later wisdom literature. Here, history is embedded in a context aimed at proving the distinctiveness and merits of the biblical ethos in the face of the pervasive alternative proposed by the Greek ethos. This distinctiveness rests primarily on two pillars: the *personal dimension of wisdom* seen as an active subject, and, correlative to this, the *entanglement of this subject with a people* that retains its identity while going through a series of transformations. It is an apologetic approach, but in effect it identifies very acutely the two most distinguishing features on which the whole of the biblical message rests.

The most expansive treatment is found in the Wisdom of Ben Sira. It begins with an explicit reference to the *Tanakh*, which is repeated three times: “Many big things having been given us through the Law, the Prophets and the others who followed” (1:1), “the Law, the Prophets and the other traditional books” (1:3), “the Law, the

Prophets and the remainder of the books” (1:7). And in the latter part of the book we see depicted with broad strokes what the author presents as the history of salvation, beginning with creation (42:15–43:33), a section that ends with words slightly reminiscent of *Job*’s famous “Where were you...”: “Who has seen him and can expound about him? Who can extol him as he really is?” (43:31). He then goes on to celebrate the ancestors, introducing this section with words that seem to apply, if only obliquely, to the *Tanakh*: “our fathers as to genesis, ... the rulers in their kingdoms, ... wisdom’s texts in their teaching” (44:1–4). What follows is a long description of the individuals that stand out in this history: Enoch, Noah and the patriarchs (43:16–44:23), Moses and Aaron (44:23–45:26), Joshua, the Judges and Samuel (46:1–20), David and Solomon (47:1–22), the kingdom of Israel with Elijah and Elisha (47:23–48:15), Judah with Hezekiah and Isaiah (48:15–25), Josiah (49:1–16), to conclude with the High Priest of Sirach’s own time (50:1–24).

In the Wisdom of Solomon, there is a brief reference to creation in response to the secular view of time: “But they have no insight into god’s mysteries: for God has created man setting him on a course toward immortality, he made him in image of his own eternal being...” (2:22–23). It is then the personified Wisdom who actively takes control of history, beginning with Adam: “Wisdom herself took great care of the first formed father of the world...” (10:1) and continuing on down to Moses, where the historical sequence ends with a long description of the events of Exodus.

We find the same harking back to the roots of tradition in the very long speech of Stephen to the high priests in Acts 7, which begins with Abraham and ends with Solomon.

The Canon as an Ideological Construct

The proposal advanced here is that this sub-text would have taken shape in the later editorial stages of the formation of the text, at the time when the wisdom tradition we have just seen was also developing. If so, *Job*’s grand vision would go beyond the historiographical dimension, and look at the deeper reasons that gave rise to the canon in the first place, and at the possible dangers inherent in such a process.

As thought began to be given to the overall coherence of tradition and its writings, on the way toward the eventual establishment of the canon, we may assume that there was a growing sense of the deeper significance of that for which one was claiming a greater cohesiveness than that of a mere agglomeration. This would probably have taken two directions. On the one hand, the sheer human beauty of the construct would have come to be appreciated more and more in terms of its literary qualities: it was the *Tanakh* as an intellectual and cultural entity with a unity of its own in spite of the enormous internal variations. On the other, its coherence seemed to be tied to the shared referential acceptance of a single point of origin—the perception of God as the source of a single inspiration, translated into a multitude of different stylistic embodiments.

In this light, the sub-text of *Job* can be seen as intending to give weight to this second direction—the furthering of an awareness for a deeper *raison d’être* of the corpus, i.e., an awareness for the lasting and present value of revelation and inspiration. It

is in a prophetic vein, which reminds us of Jeremiah's objection to the cult, which, however orthodox, could become an end in itself: "Do not put your trust in deceptive words—the sanctuary of Yahweh, the sanctuary of Yahweh, the sanctuary of Yahweh" (Jer 7:4). Just as Jeremiah was speaking against the idolatry of the temple, so *Job* speaks (if in a more subtle manner) against the idolatry of the book. And this warning is put directly in the words of Yahweh, just as a prophet would. And the exclusive emphasis on creation harks back to Genesis.

When we speak of the canon, we think of it primarily as a philological corpus: the fixed collection of a series of books. The process that led to its formation is then seen primarily as a scribal exercise, one that assigned a place to each title in an ordered and officially recognized sequence—which is all true enough. But the canon is also an ideological construct, and this aspect must have preceded the scribal effort. The nature of this construct is unique and unparalleled within the broader cultural framework of the ancient Near East, and it seems indeed plausible to assume that ideology should have served as the initial driving force that led eventually to its scribal formalization. My proposal is that *Job* in its final redaction (whatever may be the dates of the earlier strands within the book) reflects precisely this stage (somewhere in the postexilic period) within what may be called the prehistory of the canon.

2. The Mystical Dimension

The Public and Private Spheres

The prophetic voice which I have sought to identify in *Job* belongs, at the core, to the mystical experience. In it, we see articulated a referential system that points to a principle (a referent) intangible and yet felt as a coherent affecting presence. In the biblical tradition, this referent is presented, by those so affected, as a specific being—God.

Prophetism is the public side of this experience: it proclaims to the people at large the reality of this principle (God) as it affects the life and destiny of society. The *Tanakh* hypothesis I have proposed looks at this aspect of the public sphere: it argues for an understanding of the biblical tradition in the light of the relationship to a single point of reference (God). It is a prophetic reading in the sense that the historical material is assessed in terms of its relevance for this relationship: the events befalling *Job* as an individual serve as a platform for expounding on the larger issue of the events befalling the people as a whole.

Certainly, *Job* remains in the first place a text about *Job* at the private level. The obvious, and universally held, interpretation sees in it the story of a suffering just as a way of posing the larger question as to the why of suffering in general, and as to the role that God may have in it. It is what is known as a question of theodicy.

And yet we may go further. At the private level, too, we see a mystical dimension being expressed. It is the moment when all the emphasis is placed on the experience of the intangible referent, God. Culturally, we only know the form which the experience takes when being described by the person who undergoes it, and speaks as a witness

to that experience. One such expression we find in *Job*: it is the lacerating sense of light beckoning in darkness. It is the private counterpart of the prophetic dimension, and is very close to it. In fact, we may say that the prophetic dimension at the public level is predicated, upstream of it, on the mystical experience at the private level. We will look at it briefly in the next section.

An unexpected parallel comes from a Babylonian text, *Ludlul*, which is in many ways so structured as to seem to be the farthest from any mystical interpretation. I will very briefly indicate, in the final section below, why that is not so, and why this text may be seen as the expression of a genuinely suffered experience in the mystical mold. The reason it is pertinent here is that this is the text that has been generally seen as the closest to *Job* (it is known as the “Babylonian Job”). I agree with this assessment, but for different reasons, which are in support of my overall argument, as we shall see.

Job’s Experience of the Living God

A deeper reading of the more obvious central theme of *Job*, the one pertaining to the “suffering just,” brings us to Job’s personal confrontation with God himself—not as an abstract cause of suffering, but as a person who is the direct target of our personal longing and yet seems to evade us or, in fact, even hurt us, and hurt us badly. This mystical reading of *Job* sheds further light on its prophetic dimension and the correlative view of history that we have discussed above. It is because the living God had primacy in Job’s personal life that it must also have primacy in the life of the people. The dark night of Job’s soul is also the dark night of the people’s soul.

Familiarity

The prologue tells us of a special relationship that God acknowledges for Job. It is God, called by his name as Yahweh, who first asks “the Satan” about his dear Job: it almost sounds as though he might be eager to hear about a pleasant encounter that the two may have had. He knows it cannot be so with somebody called “the Satan.” And the latter responds according to his nature: precisely because Job is a special friend of Yahweh, he must be tempted.

There is a clear tone of familiarity that Yahweh evokes in this exchange, found nowhere else but in Genesis. However, Job is not an interlocutor of Yahweh in the prologue. In his case, familiarity is only implied: Yahweh does not speak to Job, nor Job to him, even though it is clear that he knows Job well, personally, and is concerned about him, at the very moment that he allows the tempter to confront him. The first words that Job speaks are to his wife, and here the tone of familiarity towards God emerges indirectly: “Shall we face God in receiving (קבל) what is good, and not in receiving what is bad?” (2:10). The word used is “God” (הָאֱלֹהִים), not Yahweh. This may be taken to emphasize the fact that Job is a foreigner: he knows God well enough, but not by his name.

The calamities that follow are, yes, catastrophic on the two levels of the loss of all external possessions and then of the illnesses that wreck the body. But they are even

sharper on a third level, the silence of God, the darkness behind which he hides. True, Job suffers because he has become poor and ill. But he suffers on another level as well, because he now experiences the loss of God. It is the dark night of the soul.

The Darkness

Job knows God from a distance, as it were. And yet he knows him well enough to feel his absence. And the great silence is felt all the more because of the noise that emerges on the part of the friends in the guise of consolation. The depth of loneliness comes precisely because his interlocutors presume, in all good faith, to fill the silence with their words. They do not point to *his* presence hidden within his very absence. They pretend that he is present, when he is veiled in darkness; Job, instead, senses the presence beyond the darkness:

I am *not* cut off from darkness (אֲשִׁיחַ) even though gloom (אֲפֶלֶס) has covered (and hidden him) from my face. (23:17)

As for me, I know that the one who is going to deliver me is alive (אֲחַיִּים לִי), that in the end he will stand up high above the dust. (19:25)

This last sentence is one of the most famous in the whole book, and rightly so. What is particularly significant in our context is the emphasis on the *living* God. It is not given in the standard formulation אֲחַיִּים לִי (e.g., Isa 37:17) or אֲחַיִּים (Deut 5:26): but clearly the “deliverer” or “redeemer” is indeed God. And the acknowledgment of “life” is all the more poignant on account of the darkness and the silence. The lacerating moment of the mystical experience is in the fact that the subject, Job, feels the full impact of the intangible precisely when he cannot grasp him, and would most want to see him, hear him, touch him.

The emphasis is clearly on experience, the experience of the longing and of the search:

Oh, were it given that I might know enough to find him,
were it given that I might go to where he dwells! (23:3)

I cry to you, but you do not answer me,
I stand up, but you just observe me (from afar). (30:20)

The friends also could speak of God, but, precisely, *of* him, as a distant, abstract reality, almost as a material good.

Let the almighty (אֱלֹהִים) be your gold,
let him be your pile of silver! (22:25)

What you plan to do will come to be,
there will be light on your path! (22:28)

But Job was not looking for anything *from* God; he was searching for God himself. The friends could only offer platitudes, and Job was aware of it:

Does not his awesomeness strike you with terror?
 does not his fear fall upon you?
 Your stereotypes (זְקָרוֹן) are proverbs of ash,
 you hide behind a line of argument that is but clay! (13:11–12)

And it is interesting to note that as the friends' speeches get longer, Job's get shorter. Also the style of the friends changes from one to the other: Eliphaz starts with circumspection, Bildad becomes more blunt, Zophar is outright aggressive.

We have seen, in Part Three, how the last few words of Elihu dramatically change the scene, and open the door for the final epiphany. Elihu comes around, without fanfare, to Job's point of view (the situation is similar to the one in the Babylonian text known as the *Theodicy*, where in its final stanza the friend of the "sufferer" also comes around and accepts, almost without showing it, the point of view of the sufferer). Elihu, then, who has been arguing against both Job and the three friends, now says, as we have already seen:

You are the one to teach us (הוֹדִיעֵנוּ) what we shall say to him,
 because we cannot analyze (עֲרַךְ, "to lay out in order") things in the face of
 darkness. (37:19)

It is a strong statement, and it opens the way for the voice of Yahweh to make himself heard in person.

God's Voice

But there is no overt introduction to Yahweh's appearance. Its impact is all the greater because of the suddenness with which his voice is being heard—and because we do not hear what we would expect: a full vindication of Job. Now, this vindication does in fact come, but at the very end of the story, when we are told that Yahweh turns "in anger" to the friends in support of his dear Job ("my servant"), and claims that it was Job, not they, who "spoke the truth (נְכוּנָה) about me" (42:7). But this is at the end. When Yahweh's voice is first heard, he does in no way take Job's side. His words are all but reassuring as he asks bluntly of Job:

Who is this who darkens (מְהַשְׁיֵךְ) reality (עֲצָה, "design")
 with words that only show ignorance (מְלִיץ בְּלִי-דַעַת)? (38:2, see also 42:3)

It is not what we would expect. We have been told all along that the "darkness" was the one in which Job himself was engulfed, and we would expect Yahweh to finally show Job that that darkness has been lifted. Instead, we are now told that it is Job who has been darkening things. The "words that only show ignorance" were those of his friends, and we would expect Yahweh to recognize that this was the friends' problem: instead Yahweh attributes them now to Job (which is one reason why we may think of Elihu as an alter ego of Job).

We can see here a masterful literary ploy because it creates a suspense that makes the dynamics of the mystical relationship Job/Yahweh all the more striking. Yahweh answers by asking Job to answer:

Gird yourself like a champion (גִּבֹּר)
for I will now ask of you and you will answer me! (38:3)

Now, this is just what Job had asked! His early words to this effect are somewhat hidden in his rebuttal to Eliphaz's third speech, but they are quite explicit:

Oh, were it given that I might know enough to find him,
were it given that I might go to where he dwells!
I would then lay out in order (אֶעֱרָכֶה) in front of him my case (מִשְׁפָּט)
and I would fill my mouth with arguments (תִּוְכַחֲזוּת ~ יכח)... (23:3–4)

The contrast is apparent. Job goes here the way of the friends, he has become Elihu: the starting point is in keeping with his original and genuine mystical experience (“Oh, were it given...”), but he then gives way to the rationalizing bent of his friends (ערך is the same word Elihu will use to say that he could no longer rationalize things and needs Job's help to gain wisdom's real insight, 37:19). From wanting to see God for his own sake, Job had gone to wanting to debate him through logic; he had given up on his mystical quest. To argue in this way about the grand design of God (the עֵצָה which we can take to stand for “reality” as ordained by God, 38:2) is to *obscure* it; that was Yahweh's point.

Continuing his enumeration of things he would do, were he able to find God and “go where he dwells,” Job says:

...I would then know (אֶדְעֶה) the words (מְלִים)
with which he would respond to me,
I would understand what he might tell me.
Would he debate (יָרִיב) with me with all his power?
Why, no, surely he himself would have to stand by (and hear) me!
There, any upright man could argue (יכח ~ גִּוְכַח) with him,
and so I would escape forever from my judge (מִשְׁפָּטִי). (23:5–7)

It is this challenge that God says he will meet. Job had thrown down the gauntlet, and it is now God who takes it up.

How can you analyze creation? How can you argue or debate with the creator? That is what God says. “You were not there with me at creation,” God seems to say, “but you are here now, the witness of the reality I have created.” Hence Job's mystical search comes to its natural end.

Job's “Repentance”

God's challenge to Job, “Gird yourself like a champion,” echoes the wrestling (אבק) of Jacob in Genesis (32:23–32). But this time, Job does not fight back. His eagerness to “go where God dwells” and debate with him, dies out, as he

acknowledges that the marvel of creation, as a witness to God himself, is beyond analysis or argument:

I know that you can do all things
and no intent of yours can be stifled.
“Who is the one who obscures (מְעַלְמִים) reality through lack of knowledge?”
Well, I have blathered and failed to understand,
I have indeed no knowledge of things too extraordinary for me. (42:2–3)

I retract everything,
I repent in dust and ashes. (42:6)

Job repents of having become Elihu, if my interpretation has merit. There is a contrast here with the very long speeches that have gone before. This rejoinder could not be shorter, or starker. It reminds us of God’s summons to Moses in front of the burning bush: “Take off your shoes from your feet, because the place on which you stand is holy ground” (Exod 3:5). Job wanted to go “where God dwells”: well, he is here now! The repentance is thus the recognition of his impotence in front of the God he has now seen with his own eyes:

I had heard you with the hearing of the ear,
but now with my own eyes I have seen you. (42:5)

Job addresses now Yahweh as his interlocutor: God’s proper name had been swallowed up in the opacity of the various speeches, as if to underscore God’s silence. It may of course be attributed to the use of different sources. But it serves in any case a strong structural purpose: the speeches of the friends were ideological in tone, and Job’s attitude had swerved in that direction as well. It all reflected a closed mentality, adhering to logic and to abstract principles more than to the experience of God. Now, instead, Yahweh reappears, and it is *his* voice that Job hears, loud and clear. No matter *what* he says, it is *he* who speaks, personally. And that is the real final answer to Job’s suffering. Certainly, he becomes once again healthy and wealthy. But the whole redemptive encounter with God is glorious because it is, precisely, an encounter. He does not hear *about* God anymore; he *hears God* directly, speaking in his own name as Yahweh.

Ludlul and Not

The “Babylonian Job”

I came to *Job* from *Ludlul*. Usually, the comparative path follows the opposite direction: one looks for Mesopotamian parallels to biblical texts. In my case, instead, while working on *Ludlul*, which is also known as the “Babylonian Job,” it seemed useful to look for possible similarities in *Job*, and this led me to suggest the presence of similarities that are different from the ones generally recognized. (There is another Babylonian text with strong similarities, of a very different nature, the so-called *Theodicy*, but we will not look at this text here.)

Ludlul is a well-known Babylonian poem that goes back presumably to the late second millennium. It is known as the Babylonian Job because it presents in great detail the figure of a suffering just. It is in the form of a long poem, which at first blush does not strike the reader for having any particular literary value. It has in fact often been dismissed as lacking in any aesthetic quality, as being a little more than a collection of stereotypes. But a careful formal analysis shows that the text is the outcome of a remarkable spiritual experience and reflects a much deeper level of spiritual intensity than is normally attributed to it. It is in this respect that it is in fact closer to *Job* than is normally acknowledged. I have this in mind when speaking of “*Ludlul* and Not,” echoing the title of this paper. It is a different *Ludlul* that can be compared to *Job*, not just the one that describes a suffering just.

The core of the Babylonian text deals, in my view, with the problem arising from the divinatory silence, i.e., the inability of divination to provide clear signs:

My divinatory signs were confused
and contradictory every single day,
my course of action remained indecisive
even with diviners and dream interpreters. (i 51–52)

The diviner with all his skill
could not clarify my circumstances,
the dream interpreter with all his incense
could not reveal my destiny for me. (ii 6–7)

It is a moment of crisis, which the author develops at great length, and which is eventually resolved when through the intervention of Marduk all becomes clearer:

At the gate of the limpid omina
my omina became clear. (v 47)

There is of course more to the text than it is possible to examine here, but what is especially significant for our purpose is the role attributed to Marduk: as I interpret it, he emerges as an icon for fate itself, as if the author were attempting to give a face, or at least a name, to that element, fate, that is a pervasive presupposition to all of the Mesopotamian mental, and religious, outlook, but does never achieve a properly divine status. So the protagonist’s suffering is really primarily the one that derives from the silence of the divine sphere and the darkness resulting from the absence of valid divinatory signs (whether good or bad). It is in this regard that the similarity with *Job* becomes all the more meaningful: it is the closest one gets, in Mesopotamian religion, to something that tends, at least, toward a “mystical” dimension, something that exhibits more than anything else in Mesopotamia a veiled apprehension of what monotheism truly is.

The Mystical Side of Divination

The understanding of a “mystical” dimension is the one I have proposed earlier (see above, “The Public and Private Spheres”): a referential system which points to a principle (a referent) intangible and yet felt as a coherent affecting presence. This

principle, in Mesopotamia, is essentially the very impersonal figure of fate: the entire divinatory system emerges, we may say, as the mythology and the ritual of fate—a systemic approach aimed at seeking regularity within a reality that appears instead as vastly irregular. In this regard, there is a hidden spirituality within the divinatory art, which comes to light in the wisdom tradition beginning in the latter part of the second millennium, in which the diviner plays at times an explicit role as an author (thus in the *Theodicy* and most likely in *Ludlul* as well). It is the genuine sense of hopelessness that sets in when divination becomes confused, contradictory, unclear. It is not as though the diviners, qua technicians, realize that the whole system is losing its efficiency and want, cynically, to hide its defects. Far from it: there is instead a profound sense that the principle at the origin of the whole system is, at that point, unwilling to communicate. It is here where the two texts, *Ludlul* and *Job*, more properly converge than in the description of suffering, a comparison that remains essentially at the surface level.

The broader context in both cases is also of interest: it is that of the diviners in the case of *Ludlul* and that of the scribes in the case of *Job*.

The diviners of late second millennium Mesopotamia face in an existential way the problem arising from the failings of their bi-millennial art, and are led to reflect on the nature of what is at the source of the coherence that rules the universe. The failings seem to be a betrayal of that coherence, as it were, and their spiritual quest leads them on a search for the source of the coherence itself. There is, in their tradition, no established cognitive pattern for this source: and thus *Ludlul* treads the difficult path of reaching toward such a pattern, by establishing an implicit correlation between fate and Marduk.

The scribes of postexilic Judah are responsible for a crystallization process of the received texts that is gaining momentum; and *Job* deals with the danger of restricting attention exclusively to the textual dimension. Thus, both the diviners and the scribes reach for a spiritual dimension outside their own bailiwick. Neither divination nor scribalcy must be reduced to the mere level of a technique; this is the platform on which *Ludlul* and *Job* operate. These works are not isolated flights of fancy, but rather the voice of a segment in the two communities that aims for a deeper spiritual assessment of reality. A voice that I think we can rightfully consider as mystical in tone and substance.

3. Conclusion: The Absolute as Interlocutor

The brief reference to *Ludlul* helps us to highlight the particularity of *Job*—and, in fact, of the biblical mindset as opposed to that of Mesopotamia. The speeches by Yahweh in *Job*, addressed to a normal human being, are inconceivable in Mesopotamia, not only because of their length but because of their central argument, creation. A metaphor used to explain that God is outside the world of the finite is that of a surveyor: “Who stretched out the (surveyor’s) rope.... Who set down the benchmark (אָבֵן פְּנִיחָה)?” (38:5,6). The benchmark has to be outside the reality being measured, and that is one of the most poignant and beautiful biblical metaphors for infinity. In Mesopotamia, the universe is homeostatic and everything is within it; there is no referent

outside its compass. That is why creation is not really the final answer to Job's quest; rather, the *Creator* is the answer.

It is the Creator who addresses personally Job. And he does not address a hero, a demigod, or some fantastic being, but a very normal, and in his present state a very miserable, human being. Job does not even think of praise; he only retreats in awe. It is the substance of adoration understood in the proper sense of the term, i.e., as the recognition of a different plane of being, not just as the glorification of a superior individual—which is again a fundamental and radical difference between the biblical and the Mesopotamian mindsets. This gives the full explanation to the question of Job's "repentance": he realizes that he was not in tune with the reality of God, so he does not repent for any malfeasance, but only for his lack of understanding of who God, the Creator, is.

Job is an extraordinary cultural document. "Cultural," because the mystical dimension of Job's experience is communicated in terms accessible to human language and mental categories. Even if one may only be able to look at it from the outside, without sharing in its intensity, it is still understandable as a genuine human experience. All the more so because it is shared, in a stunning variety of different modalities, throughout the biblical "corpus." *Ludlul* is an isolated example of a Mesopotamian effort to reach for the absolute as an interlocutor, in fact, a very isolated example of a sensitivity for what is otherwise the deeper dimension of monotheism. The biblical record, on the other hand, is built entirely on such a premise, and the diversity of cases is matched only by its coherence. It is in part because of the deep awareness for this coherence that the author of *Job* in its final version has, in my view, sought to give voice not only to the personal mystical experience of the protagonist, but also to the need for preserving the sense that the corpus is not to become frozen once canonically defined, but is rather to maintain alive the presence of the absolute as interlocutor—something that Šubšī-mešrā-Šakkan, the author of *Ludlul*, would not have been able to consider even remotely.

A Bibliographical Note

I clearly make no pretense at having reviewed even minimally the immense bibliography relating to Job: what little I have seen did not show any intimation of the hypothesis I have here advanced. If so, I will have to carry by myself the burden of a proposal that strays out of the beaten path, but I am confident that Jack will love peeking with me in this direction even if it were to lead to a dead end.

Space prevents me from justifying my translations of the passages from *Job*. I have also chosen not to include bibliographical references, but I take the liberty to refer to two volumes where I deal in some detail with the central topics presented here:

"*Quando in alto i cieli...*": *La spiritualità mesopotamica a confronto con quella biblica*. Milano: Jaca Book, 2012.

Il pensiero nell'argilla: Analisi strutturale della letteratura mesopotamica. Milano: Jaca Book, forthcoming.

FROM MARI TO JERUSALEM AND BACK



Jack M. Sasson

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CONTENTS

Prefaceix
Contributorsxi
Abbreviations.xiii
Publications of Jack M. Sasson.xxi

PART I. ASSYRIOLOGICAL STUDIES

Kamiš at Ebla	3
<i>Alfonso Archi</i>	
“Not Tonight, Josephine!”: Women at War in Third Millennium BCE Syria? . . .	20
<i>Maria Giovanna Biga</i>	
L’élection du P. Scheil au Collège de France en 1905	26
<i>Dominique Charpin</i>	
Royal Hunt among the Semites, West and East: Fertility and Kingship in Myth and Ritual	69
<i>Gregorio del Olmo Lete</i>	
Heurs et malheurs de la vie conjugale en Mésopotamie: La séparation de corps dans quelques sources cunéiformes	96
<i>Sophie Démare-Lafont</i>	
“Si ce n’est toi, c’est donc ton frère ... ”	118
<i>Jean-Marie Durand</i>	
Albrecht Goetze: Three Mid-Century Reflections on Cuneiform Studies and Linguistics.	125
<i>Benjamin R. Foster</i>	
A New Manuscript of Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Netherworld.	141
<i>Alhena Gadotti and Alexandra Kleinerman</i>	
Prière à Itûr-Mêr pour le salut de Zimrî-Lîm.	147
<i>Michaël Guichard</i>	

Royal Women Sages in Aramaic Literature: The Unnamed Queen in Daniel 5 and Saritrah in the “Revolt of Babylon”	154
<i>Tawny L. Holm</i>	
The Beginning of the Sumerian Epic “Gilgameš and the Bull of Heaven” and Its Possible Historical-Political Background	178
<i>Jacob Klein and Yitschak Sefati</i>	
À propos d’une défaite de Mari et d’une négociation diplomatique	189
<i>Bertrand Lafont</i>	
Paul Haupt: Between Two Worlds	194
<i>Peter Machinist</i>	
Sumerian Literature at the Crossroads	225
<i>Piotr Michalowski</i>	
Contributions to the Dossier of Princess <i>Simat-Ištaran</i>	247
<i>David I. Owen</i>	
The Sitting Moon and the Goats of Gilead: A Rare Akkadian Astronomical Term and a <i>Hapax</i> in Song of Songs	275
<i>Gonzalo Rubio</i>	
Old Babylonian Bread Offerings	286
<i>Marten Stol</i>	
Ilumma-ila Unveiled	293
<i>Karel Van Lerberghe and Gabriella Voet</i>	
“Talking to Doors”: <i>Paraklausithyron</i> in Akkadian Literature	308
<i>Nathan Wasserman</i>	
Die Klausel á mu-ú/u ₈ -a-šè in altbabylonischen Miet- und Feldpachtverträgen aus Nippur, Isin und unbekannter Herkunft: Politische Motive für die Stilisierung von Rechtsurkunden?	322
<i>Claus Wilcke</i>	
Hurritische Beschwörungen mit Bezugnahme auf Ursprungsmythen	357
<i>Gernot Wilhelm</i>	
Un enfant à Alep	361
<i>Nele Ziegler</i>	
PART II. BIBLICAL STUDIES	
Translating Biblical Dialogue.	375
<i>Robert Alter</i>	
Job and Not	386
<i>Giorgio Buccellati</i>	

The Earliest Israel: Territorial History in the Highlands of Canaan 408
Israel Finkelstein

The Name Yhw³ as a People: Reconsidering the Amorite Evidence 417
Daniel E. Fleming

Joshua and Anomie: Retrojection, Projection, and Recovery 432
Douglas A. Knight

The Plague of Darkness and the Creation of Light: A Reading of Psalm
 105:26–36 from the Notion of Calamities in Chinese Perspective 443
Archie C. C. Lee

The Oracular Insertion in Zechariah 4: Another Look at the Evidence of
 Akkadian Royal Building Inscriptions 457
Eric M. Meyers and Carol Meyers

Myth, Poetry, and Cosmic Construction in Job 38:4–18 467
Choon-Leong Seow

A Mosaic for Miriam 489
Phyllis Tribble

PREFACE

Jack M. Sasson is *sui generis*. Born in Aleppo in 1941 to Iraqi and Syrian Jewish parents and raised during his middle childhood years in Beirut, he joined his family and kin in Brooklyn in 1955 for the start of his long residence in the United States. He completed the B.A. degree at Brooklyn College in 1962 and his Ph.D. in ancient Near Eastern and Islamic studies at Brandeis University in 1966. His career as a scholar took him to the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill where he became the William R. Kenan Jr., Professor of Religious Studies and remained until 1999 when he moved to Vanderbilt University as the Mary Jane Werthan Professor of Jewish Studies and Hebrew Bible, retiring in 2015.

Jack's multicultural breeding has a counterpart in the languages he uses, from Arabic, French, and Hebrew since his childhood, to multiple ancient and modern languages as an adult and scholar. By temperament, he is at home with others from many cultures—west and east, north and south. He possesses an encyclopedist's mind, its breadth nowhere more evident than in the masterful four-volume *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* which he conceived and edited. That breadth is complemented also with an in-depth, incisive knowledge of Assyriology, biblical studies, Jewish studies, and Islamic studies, to all of which fields he has made perceptive and lasting contributions over his long career in publishing and lecturing. For many years he has sent daily emails about publications, lectures, and other news items to a listserv named Agade comprising several thousands of scholars in ancient Near Eastern studies around the world. Yet the range of his knowledge also reaches beyond his scholarly fields to the world of classical music and opera, which he pursues avidly and even through occasional publication of concert critiques. In private he can often be heard singing songs in Arabic and French. Add to this his witty humor: he is truly a funny, happy man, delighting in irony, word-plays, and the never-ending stream of political and cultural absurdities. At the same time, he embodies the caring and outgoing traits of a true Mensch. Small wonder that he is honored and recognized by colleagues and beloved and respected by students, continually sought after by individuals in both groups. Many count him as one of their best friends, and he reciprocates their affection. He is devoted to his wife Diane, their sons David, Noah, and Daniel, their families, and his many relatives.

This is the scholar whom many of his colleagues aim now to honor with this volume of original essays. The chapters are divided into two main groups corresponding to his primary academic interests—Assyriology and biblical studies. Yet these two fields are not always fully distinct from each other, and a number of the articles could almost as well have been placed in the other section than where they now find themselves. In such cases we have consulted with the authors to determine where each would prefer to locate their essays. These cross-overs, rather than presenting a dilemma, in fact reflect Jack's own double loyalties as a scholar, which he coordinates smoothly and provocatively.

Our deep gratitude goes to several individuals. Chancellor Nicholas S. Zeppos of Vanderbilt University, who as provost collaborated with Jack to found and develop the now flourishing Vanderbilt Program in Jewish Studies, supported generously the publication of this volume. Dean Emilie M. Townes of the Vanderbilt Divinity School likewise encouraged this project from its inception and in many important ways. The thirty-six contributors have of course given mightily of their time and scholarship to make this collection of studies a significant contribution to our disciplines. Thankfully, we four editors worked efficiently together, not only in editing the articles and bringing as many as possible into conformity with the stylistic norms set by the publisher but also in accommodating several authors who understandably preferred to write in their own native languages and to follow stylistic norms conventional in their own lands. We also wish to thank Serena McMillan, Ph.D. student at Vanderbilt University, for carefully preparing the list of Jack's numerous publications. A special word of gratitude goes both to Jim Eisenbraun, who supported this volume since its conception and helped to usher it through the publication process, and also to the Pennsylvania State University Press and its editors and staff who completed the publication with skill and professionalism. And finally, we want especially to thank Diane Sasson for assisting with multiple details along the way—not at all an easy task since she like all the contributors have tried to keep the volume's publication confidential so we could surprise Jack with it when it was completed. It has been a labor of affection and respect for all of us to honor Jack with this volume of studies.

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AAICAB</i>	J.-P. Grégoire, <i>Archives administratives et inscriptions cunéiformes: Ashmolean Museum, Bodleian Collection, Oxford</i>
AB	Anchor Bible
<i>AB</i>	<i>Assyriologische Bibliothek</i>
AbB	Altbabylonische Briefe in Umschrift und Übersetzung
<i>ABD</i>	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by David Noel Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992
ABL	R. F. Harper, <i>Assyrian and Babylonian Letters</i>
<i>AfO</i>	<i>Archiv für Orientforschung</i>
<i>AHw</i>	Wolfram von Soden, <i>Akkadisches Handwörterbuch</i>
<i>AJP</i>	<i>American Journal of Philology</i>
<i>AJSL</i>	<i>American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures</i>
AMD	Ancient Magic and Divination
<i>Amherst</i>	Th. G. Pinches, <i>The Amherst Tablets</i>
<i>AnOr</i>	<i>Analecta Orientalia</i>
AO	Louvre
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
<i>AoF</i>	<i>Altorientalische Forschungen</i>
AOS	American Oriental Studies
ARET	Archivi reali di Ebla, Testi
ARM	Archives royales de Mari
ARMT	Archives royales de Mari, transcrites et traduites
<i>ARN</i>	M. Çig, H. Kizilyay, and F. R. Kraus, <i>Altbabylonische Rechtsurkunden aus Nippur</i>
<i>ArOr</i>	<i>Archiv Orientalní</i>
<i>ASJ</i>	<i>Acta Sumerologica</i>
AUCT	Andrews University Cuneiform Texts
<i>AuOr</i>	<i>Aula Orientalis</i>
AUWE	Ausgrabungen in Uruk-Warka: Endberichte
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
<i>BAP</i>	Bruno Meissner, <i>Beiträge zum altbabylonischen Privatrecht</i>
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>

<i>BagM</i>	<i>Baghdader Mitteilungen</i>
<i>BASOR</i>	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
<i>BBVO</i>	Berliner Beiträge zum Vorderen Orient
<i>BCT</i>	P. J. Watson, <i>Catalogue of Cuneiform Tablets in Birmingham City Museum</i>
<i>BDB</i>	Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
<i>BDTNS</i>	Base de Datos de Textos Neosumerios
<i>BE</i>	The Babylonian Expedition of the University of Pennsylvania
<i>BHK</i>	Rudolf Kittel, <i>Biblia Hebraica</i>
<i>BHQ</i>	Adrian Schenker et al. <i>Biblia Hebraica Quinta</i>
<i>BHS</i>	Karl Elliger and Wilhelm Rudolph, eds. <i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i>
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BIN</i>	Babylonian Inscriptions in the Collection of J. B. Nies
<i>BiOr</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Orientalis</i>
<i>BJRL</i>	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands Library</i>
<i>BKAT</i>	Biblischer Kommentar, Altes Testament
<i>BM</i>	British Museum
<i>BPOA</i>	Biblioteca del Proximo Oriente Antiguo
<i>BRev</i>	<i>Bible Review</i>
<i>BSA</i>	<i>Bulletin of Sumerian Agriculture</i>
<i>BWANT</i>	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten (und Neuen) Testament
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>BzA</i>	Beiträge zur Assyriologie
<i>BZAW</i>	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
<i>CAD</i>	<i>The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago</i>
<i>CANE</i>	Jack M. Sasson, ed. <i>Civilizations of the Ancient Near East</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>CBS</i>	Catalog of the Babylonian Section, University Museum, Philadelphia
<i>CDFLP</i>	Elmer B. Smick, <i>Cuneiform Documents of the Third Millennium in the John F. Lewis Collection in the Public Library of Philadelphia</i>
<i>CDLB</i>	<i>Cuneiform Digital Library Bulletin</i>
<i>CDLI</i>	Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative
<i>CHANE</i>	Culture and History of the Ancient Near East
<i>ChS</i>	Corpus der hurritischen Sprachdenkmäler
<i>CM</i>	Cuneiform Monographs
<i>COS</i>	William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger Jr., eds. <i>The Context of Scripture</i>
<i>CRAIBL</i>	Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres
<i>CST</i>	T. Fish, <i>Catalogue of Sumerian Tablets in the John Rylands Library</i>

CT	Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum
CTH	<i>Catalogue des textes hittites</i>
CTNMC	Th. Jacobsen, <i>Cuneiform Texts in the National Museum</i>
CTPSM	Cuneiform Texts in the Collection of the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts
CTU	Manfried Dietrich, Oswald Loretz, and Joaquin Sanmartín, eds. <i>The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani, and Other Places</i>
CUNES	Cornell University Near Eastern Studies
CUSAS	Cornell University Studies in Assyriology and Sumerology
DDD	Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst, eds. <i>Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible</i>
DNWSI	J. Hoftijzer and K. Jongeling, <i>Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions</i> , I/II
DoCu EPHE	<i>Documents cunéiformes de la IVe Section de l'École pratique des hautes études</i> (1982)
DULAT	Gregorio del Olmo Lete and Joaquín Sanmartín, <i>A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition</i> . 3rd ed.
EANEC	Explorations in Ancient Near Eastern Civilizations
EBib	Études bibliques
EBR	<i>Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception</i>
EHAT	Exegetisches Handbuch zum Alten Testament
ePSD	electronic Pennsylvania Sumerian Dictionary Project
ETCSL	Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature
FAOS	Freiburger altorientalische Studien
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FCB	Feminist Companion to the Bible
FLP	Free Library of Philadelphia
FM	Florilegium marianum
FMA	Jack M. Sasson, <i>From the Mari Archives: An Anthology of Old Babylonian Letters</i>
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
HALOT	Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm, <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
HAM/AUAM	Siegfried H. Horn Museum / Andrews University Archaeological Museum
HBAI	<i>Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel</i>
HKL	Rykle Borger, <i>Handbuch der Keilschriftliteratur</i>
HMA	Hearst Museum of Anthropology, University of California at Berkeley
HSS	Harvard Semitic Studies
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
IB	Ishan Bahriyat, Isin excavation sigla
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
Iraq	<i>Iraq</i> . British School of Archaeology in Iraq

ISET	S. Kramer, M. Çig, H. Kizilyay. Istanbul Arkeoloji Müzelerinde bulunan Sumer edebi tablet ve parçaları (Sumerian Literary Tablets and Fragments in the Archaeological Museum of Istanbul), I/II
ITT	Inventaire des tablettes de Tello
JAAR	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
JAC	<i>Journal of Ancient Civilizations</i>
JANEH	<i>Journal of Ancient Near Eastern History</i>
JANER	<i>Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions</i>
JANES	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JB	Jerusalem Bible
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JCS	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>
JEOL	<i>Jaarbericht van het Voor-Aziatisch-Egyptisch Gezelschap Ex oriente lux</i>
JESHO	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JQR	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
JR	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
JRAS	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
JTC	<i>Journal for Theology and the Church</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
K	Kuyunjik
KAI	Herbert Donner and Wolfgang Röllig, <i>Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften</i> . 2nd ed.
KAR	E. Ebeling, ed. <i>Keilschrifttexte aus Assur religiösen Inhalts</i> , I/II
KASKAL	<i>Rivista di storia, ambienti e culture del Vicino Oriente antico</i>
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
KAV	O. Schroeder, <i>Keilschrifttexte aus Assur verschiedenen Inhalts</i>
KBo	<i>Keilschrifttexte aus Boghazköi</i>
KJV	King James Version
KT Isin	Claus Wilcke, ed. <i>Keilschrifttexte aus Isin–Išān Bahrīyāt</i>
KTU	Manfried Dietrich, Oswald Loretz, and Joaquin Sanmartín, eds. <i>Die Keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit</i>
KUB	<i>Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköi</i>
LAI	Library of Ancient Israel
LAK	A. Deimel, <i>Liste der archaischen Keilschriftzeichen von Fara</i>
LAOS	Leipziger altorientalische Studien
LAPO	Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient

LAS	Simo Parpola, <i>Letters from Assyrian Scholars to the Kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal</i>
LB	Liagre Böhl Collection (Leiden)
<i>LIH</i>	L. King, <i>The Letters and Inscriptions of Hammurabi</i>
<i>LKA</i>	L. Ebeling, <i>Literarische Keilschrifttexte aus Assur</i>
<i>MARI</i>	<i>Mari: Annales de recherches interdisciplinaires</i>
MC	Mesopotamian Civilizations
MDAI	Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abt. Kairo
MDP	Mémoires de la Délégation en Perse
MEE	Materiali epigrafici di Ebla
MHET	Mesopotamian History and Environment: Texts
MS	Martin Schøyen Collection
MSA	Modern South Arabian
<i>MSL</i>	<i>Materialien zum sumerischen Lexikon / Materials for the Sumerian Lexicon</i>
MT	Masoretic Text
MVN	Materiali per il vocabolario neosumerico
NAB	New American Bible
<i>NABU</i>	<i>Nouvelles assyriologiques brèves et utilitaires</i>
<i>NATN</i>	David I. Owen, <i>Neo-Sumerian Archival Texts Primarily from Nippur</i>
<i>NEA</i>	<i>Near Eastern Archaeology</i>
NEB	New English Bible
Ni	Archaeological Museum, Istanbul (Nippur)
<i>NIB</i>	Leander E. Keck, ed. <i>The New Interpreter's Bible</i>
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NISABA	Studi Assiriologici Messinesi
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NJPS	<i>Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation according to the Traditional Hebrew Text</i>
NKJV	New King James Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
<i>NSGU</i>	A. Falkenstein, <i>Die neosumerischen Gerichtsurkunden</i>
NWS	North-West Semitic
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
<i>OBTR</i>	St. Dalley, C. Walker, and J. Hawkins, <i>Old Babylonian Texts from Tell al Rimah</i>
OECT	Oxford Editions of Cuneiform Texts
<i>OIC</i>	<i>Oriental Institute Communications</i>
<i>OIMA</i>	<i>Oriental Institute Microfiche Archives</i>
OLA	Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta
<i>OLZ</i>	<i>Orientalistische Literaturzeitung</i>
OMRO	Oudheidkundige Mededelingen uit het Rijksmuseum van Oudheden te Leiden

<i>Ontario</i>	M. Sigrist, <i>Neo-Sumerian texts from the Royal Ontario Museum</i>
<i>Or</i>	<i>Orientalia</i> (NS)
ORA	Orientalische Religionen in der Antike
<i>OrAnt</i>	<i>Oriens Antiquus</i>
<i>Orient</i>	<i>Orient: Report of the Society for Near Eastern Studies in Japan</i>
OSA	Old South Arabian
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTS	Old Testament Studies
OtSt	Oudtestamentische Studiën
PARS	Princeton Cotsen Collection
PBS	University of Pennsylvania, Publications of the Babylonian Section
<i>PDT</i> 1	M. Çig, H. Kizilyay, and A. Salonen, <i>Die Puzriš-Dagan-Texte der Istanbuler archäologischen Museen</i> , Part 1 = texts 1–725
<i>PDT</i> 2	F. Yildiz and T. Gomi, <i>Die Puzriš-Dagan-Texte der Istanbuler archäologischen Museen</i> , Part 2 = texts 726–1379
PIHANS	Publications de l’Institut historique-archéologique néerlandais de Stamboul
PLO	Porta linguarum orientalium
PPAC	Periodic Publications on Ancient Civilisations
<i>Princeton</i>	M. Sigrist, <i>Tablettes du Princeton Theological Seminary</i>
PRU	Palais royal d’Ugarit. Mission de Ras Shamra
PSBA	Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology
<i>RA</i>	<i>Revue d’assyriologie et d’archéologie orientale</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
RGTC	Répertoire géographique des textes cunéiformes
RIMA	The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods
RIME	The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Early Periods
RINAP	Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period
<i>RIA</i>	<i>Reallexikon der Assyriologie und vorderasiatischen Archäologie</i>
RS	Ras Shamra
<i>RT</i>	<i>Recueil de travaux relatifs à la philologie et à l’archéologie égyptiennes et assyriennes</i>
<i>RTC</i>	F. Thureau-Dangin, <i>Recueil des tablettes chaldéennes</i>
SAA	State Archives of Assyria
<i>SAAB</i>	<i>State Archives of Assyria Bulletin</i>
SAACT	State Archives of Assyria Cuneiform Texts
SAAS	State Archives of Assyria Studies
<i>SAAT</i>	George G. Hackman, <i>Sumerian and Akkadian Administrative Texts from Predynastic Times to the End of the Akkad Dynasty</i>
SANER	Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Records
SANTAG	Karl Hecker und Walter Sommerfeld, eds. <i>Arbeiten und Untersuchungen zur Keilschriftkunde</i>

SAOC	Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization
SAT	M. Sigrist, <i>Sumerian Archival Texts</i>
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SEL	<i>Studi epigrafici e linguistici sul vicino Oriente antico</i>
SEM	Edward Chiera, <i>Sumerian Epics and Myths</i>
Si	Archaeological Museums, Istanbul (Sippar)
SJAC	Supplement to Journal of Ancient Civilizations
SMEA	<i>Studi Micenei ed Egeo-Anatolici</i>
SNAT	T. Gomi and S. Sato, <i>Selected Neo-Sumerian Administrative Texts from the British Museum</i>
StBoT	Studien zu den Boğazköy-Texten
StMes	<i>Studia Mesopotamica</i>
StOr	<i>Studia Orientalia</i>
STT	O. R. Gurney and J. J. Finkelstein, <i>The Sultantepe Tablets, I/II</i>
STVC	Edward Chiera, <i>Sumerian Texts of Varied Contents</i>
SymS	Symposium Series (Society of Biblical Literature)
TAD	Bezalel Porten and Ada Yardeni, <i>Textbook of the Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt</i>
TCL	Textes cunéiformes, Musée du Louvre
TCS	Texts from Cuneiform Sources
TCTI 2	Bertrand Lafont and Fatma Yildiz, <i>Tablettes cunéiformes de Tello au Musée d'Istanbul, datant de l'époque de la IIIe Dynastie d'Ur. Tome II. ITT II/1, 2544–2819, 3158–4342, 4708–4714. PIHANS 77</i>
TDOT	G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, eds. <i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>
TIM	Texts in the Iraq Museum
TJAMC	E. Szlechter, <i>Tablettes juridiques et administratives de la 3e dynastie d'Ur et de la 1re dynastie de Babylone</i>
TLB	Tabulae cuneiformes a F. M. Th. de Liagre Böhl collectae
TLZ	<i>Theologische Literaturzeitung</i>
TM	Tell Mardikh
TMH (NF)	Texte und Materialien der Frau Professor Hilprecht Collection (Neue Folge)
TNIV	Today's New International Version
TRS	H. de Genouillac, <i>Textes religieux sumériens du Louvre</i>
TRU	L. Legrain, <i>Le temps des rois d'Ur</i> (= Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études 199)
UCP 9/2	H. E. Lutz, <i>Sumerian Temple Records of the Late Ur Dynasty</i>
UET	Ur Excavations: Texts
UF	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
UM	University Museum, Philadelphia
UTI	Fatma Yildiz et al. <i>Die Umma-Texte aus den Archäologischen Museen zu Istanbul</i>
VAB	Vorderasiatische Bibliothek
VAS	Vorderasiatische Schriftdenkmäler

VAT	Vorderasiatische Abteilung Tontafel. Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin
VS	Vorderasiatische Schriftdenkmäler der (Königlichen) Museen zu Berlin
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
<i>WÄS</i>	Adolf Erman and Hermann Grapow, <i>Wörterbuch der ägyptische Sprache</i>
WAW	Writings from the Ancient World
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WO</i>	<i>Die Welt des Orients</i>
WVDOG	Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft
YNER	Yale Near Eastern Researches
YOS	Yale Oriental Series, Babylonian Texts
<i>ZA</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Assyriologie</i>
<i>ZAR</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Altorientalische und Biblische Rechtsgeschichte</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>ZDMG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>
Zinbun	Zinbun: Memoirs of the Research Institute for Humanistic Studies
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>

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