The Roots of Apocalypticism in Near Eastern Myth

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Apocalyptic literature as such is not found in the period covered by this article (the third to mid-first millennia in the ancient Near East) but chiefly in the period from the third century B.C.E. to the second century C.E., and, in some Christian circles, down to the Middle Ages. The ancient roots of apocalyptic literature, however, can be traced to far earlier literature of the ancient Near East (back to the late third millennium). Its early history is not merely of antiquarian interest, but illuminates the purpose and rhetoric of mature apocalyptic works. These latter works fall within a venerable tradition of theological and philosophical reflection on divine and human governance, a kind of ancient "political theory." Read apart from their literary history, works such as the books of Daniel and Revelation, 1 Enoch, 4 Ezra, and 2 Baruch can appear to modern readers as bizarre in imagery and confusing in logic.

The first modern scholar to have seriously attempted to trace the roots of apocalyptic literature in ancient texts was Hermann Gunkel (1862–1932), whose Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit: Eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung über Gen 1 and Ap Joh 12 appeared in 1895. He belonged to the history-of-religions school, or religionsgeschichtliche Schule, which champi-
onded autonomous historical-critical scholarship and insisted that the Bible be
seen against its environment. Gunkel argued that Genesis 1 and Revelation
12 consisted of "basically the same material, which [in Revelation] surfaces a
second time, but in a different form. In the ancient instance it is the myth of
Urzeit, which travels from Babylon to the Bible, in the new a prediction con-
cerning the Endzeit" (p. 398).

His book demonstrated that Genesis 1 and Revelation 12 were not free
compositions of their authors but adaptations of traditions from outside, ulti-
mately from Babylon. He concluded that the combat myth entered Israelite
literature in the monarchical period, rather than in the patriarchal era or the
Babylonian Exile, the periods of borrowing suggested by earlier scholars. It is
a mark of Gunkel's genius that with the little material available to him he did
not simply list motifs and themes but concentrated his attention on the one
Gattung (the combat myth) that included so much else: the Urzeit ("primai
time") Endzeit ("end-time") equation, creation and new creation, the monster
symbolizing evil, and divine kingship. Gunkel's pioneering work retains its
usefulness despite its obvious deficiencies: he had access to only a fraction of
the Akkadian texts now available and knew nothing of the combat myth in
the Canaanite texts from Ugarit (first discovered in 1929); he had a romantici
st tendency to overstate origins as explanation and undervalue reception and
particular usage.

Later scholars have been able to make use of the Ugaritic texts, which are
closely related to early Biblical Hebrew and are composed in the same poetic
tradition, as well as the enormous amount of Sumerian and Akkadian litera-
ture unearthed and published since Gunkel. It is now possible to chart the
history of relevant genres, motifs, and themes in a variety of works over many
centuries. In particular, scholars can describe the interaction of Canaanite and
early Israelite traditions and sketch the inner-biblical development that led to
fully developed apocalyptic works such as Daniel and Revelation. A number
of points are still under discussion. These include the way in which traditions
from Mesopotamia came into Canaan as well as the date and extent of their
influence and the inner-biblical sources of apocalyptic literature.

This article is selective, examining in the early literature only those genres,
motifs or recurrent elements, and ideas that were important in the later mature
apocalyptic works. Among the genres, the most important by far is the com-
batt myth, for it provided not only imagery but also a conceptual framework
for explaining divine rule over the world. Other genres are the vaticinia ex
eventu ("prophecies after the fact") found in some Akkadian texts, and the
dream vision (though the relevance of the specifically Akkadian form of this
last genre is disputed). Among the recurrent elements are the divine assembly
under the high god responding to a major threat, cosmic enemies portrayed as
monsters, various heavenly beings, divine decrees or secret knowledge, and
a sage-mediator of heavenly knowledge. Among the topics are explorations of
the nature of evil and new creation or restoration of the original order.

Mesopotamia

History and Religion

The course of Mesopotamian history shows two impulses, one toward local
rule exemplified in the city-states, and the other, more sporadic, toward large
and complex political systems aimed at dominating large areas. The first
period for which there is a record is the Early Dynastic (2900—2350 B.C.E.), a
period when families ruled various cities. The Akkadian and Ur III dynasties
at the end of the third millennium represent a shift from city-state to nation-
state. The Akkadian system, in contrast to the earlier Sumerian system, fea-
tured a centralized state around king and court. Though Sumerian and
Akkadian languages and populations were distinct, the culture itself was a
common Mesopotamian one.

In the second millennium, Mesopotamia became divided into two geo-
political regions, Babylonia and Assyria. From the eighteenth century B.C.E.
to the end of the millennium, Babylon and Assyria were the two great nation-
states. Babylon and Assyria were international in ambition and contacts, and
their fortunes unfolded in an international context. Northern Syria came into
the picture as its coastal cities—Ugarit, Byblos, Tyre—rose to prominence.
Northwest Mesopotamia became a meeting point of Mesopotamian and
Levantine culture. The essentially cooperative international atmosphere was
ended, however, by population movements in the last two centuries of the sec-
ond millennium. The dominant empires of the first millennium were the
Neo-Assyrian empire (935—612 B.C.E.) and its successor, the Persian empire
(539—333 B.C.E.), both complex and vast in extent.

The chief gods in the pantheon were Anu (Sumerian An), "sky," the god
of heaven and head of the older generation of gods, whose consort was Antu;
Ellil (Sumerian Enlil), son of Anu, father of Ninurta, "king of all populated
land," head of the younger generation of Sumerian and Akkadian gods whose
consort was Nintil or Ninhursag and whose cult center was Nippur; and Ea
(Sumerian Enki), god of water, wisdom, and incantations, whose consort was Ninnah or Damkina and whose cult center was Eridu. With the rise of the Amorites and of the city-state Babylon, the warrior-god Marduk became important, taking over titles of other gods. In Old Assyrian religion Ashur was the national god, to whom the king regularly reported his activities, especially war. After the middle of the fourteenth century B.C.E., the Assyrian pantheon became babylonized. In the Assyrian version of Enuma elish, Ashur took the place of Marduk.

The assembly of the gods was an important part of the organization of the divine world and the major decision-making body; all the gods were subject to its decrees. The members of the assembly, the fifty "great gods" and the seven gods of the fates (šimātu). The divine triad of Anu, Enlil, and Ea was preeminent, with Anu presiding over the assembly. In a democratic give-and-take, the member gods made decrees affecting matters in heaven and earth and responded to various crises. Indeed, the divine assembly can be viewed as a reflection of "democratic" practices that once prevailed in Sumerian city-states. The Akkadian term is puhru tiššu, "assembly of the gods." The institution is also attested in Canaan: Ugaritic pbr (bn) šm, Phoenician šmr, and biblical šdm (Ps 82:1) and šmd (Jer. 23:18, 22; Job 15:8; Ps. 89:8). In Mesopotamia, the members are specifically identified and act as individuals, but in Canaan the assembly as a whole or its head, El, acts rather than individual members (Mullen 1980).

The major office of divine governance was kingship. Kingship over the gods could be won by a particular god resolving a crisis or defeating a threat to cosmic order. Human kingship is age-old in Mesopotamia and was the dominant form of government everywhere from the early second millennium forward. The Sumerian King List seeks to demonstrate that the country was always united under one king, ruling successively in different cities: "When kingship was lowered from heaven, kingship was (first) in Eridu," and so on; it existed in heaven independently of any earthly king. When kings are mentioned in creation myths, they organize the human race so it can carry out its basic task of providing for the gods. Kings were not ordinarily considered divine but had to be appointed by the gods. A supernatural aura surrounded the king, for he was the regent of the gods, represented divine order on earth, and conversely, represented the people before the gods.

A common way of resolving threats to cosmic order was force of arms. The gods were involved in the wars that kings waged on earth; war was both political and religious. The new order resulting from the war could be said to represent the will of the god or gods. War was thus a way for the gods to exercise their rule and oversee the rise and fall of kingdoms.

**Literature and Themes Relevant to Apocalyptic Literature**

**Genres**

The Combat Myth. One of the most long-lived genres in ancient literature was the so-called combat myth. It lasted as a live genre into the period of full-blown apocalyptic works and had an enormous influence on them. In fact, the genre provided ancient poets with a conceptual framework for reflecting on divine power and human kingship, and on the rise and fall of nations. Instances of the myth in Mesopotamia are Lugal-e, Anzu, and Enuma elish. In Canaan it is represented by the Baal Cycle. In early biblical poetry it is found in Yahweh's victory over Pharaoh at the sea (Exodus 15) or over the sea itself (several psalms). No ideal form of the combat myth exists, of course, but a consistent plot line can be abstracted: a force (often depicted as a monster) threatens cosmic and political order, instilling fear and confusion in the assembly of the gods; the assembly or its president, unable to find a commander among the older gods, turns to a young god to battle the hostile force; he successfully defeats the monster, creating the world (including human beings) or simply restoring the pre-threat order, builds a palace, and receives acclamation of kingship from the other gods.

There are three combat myths sufficiently preserved to be analyzed: the Sumerian Lugal-e of the late third millennium; the Akkad-ian Anzu, extant in an Old Babylonian and a Standard (early-first-millennium) version; and Enuma elish, dated variously to the eighteenth, fourteenth, or, more commonly, the twelfth century. Each influenced its successor.

The best way of analyzing the myths is by attending to their plot rather than to their ideas, a method somewhat contrary to modern analytical habits. For us stories are usually regarded as entertainment or as illustration of a "point" derived from discursive reasoning; but for ancient Near Easterners narrative was the medium for expressing serious thought. The plots of the three combat myths will be briefly told with attention to "discourse time," the time taken in the telling.

Lugal-e tells how the young warrior-king Ninurta (god of thunderstorms and floods) defeated the mountain-dwelling monster Azag, restored the flow of the river Tigris, after which he judged the stones that had taken part in the battle, assigning them their various functions. The story begins with Sharru, Ninurta's weapon, reporting to his master that in the mountains the plants and stones have made Azag king and that the monster is planning to take over his domain. Ninurta's first fray against them, made against the advice of Sharru, is defeated by the dust storm Azag raises. Sharru now brings to Ninurta strategic advice from Enil, Ninurta's father: send a rainstorm to put down the
dust. The strategy works; Ninurta defeats Azag. Ninurta then collects the waters that had been trapped in the mountain ice and routes them to the Tigris. Ninlil, his mother, lonesome for her absent son, pays him a visit. Ninurta sends her home before exercising judgment over the stones. Each is judged according to its degree of participation in the battle against him. Ninurta returns to Nippur to receive the acclamation of his father and the other gods.

Five features of *Lugal-e* are relevant for other combat myths, including those found in apocalyptic literature. (1) The relationship of the older god (Ninurta’s father, Enlil) and the younger god (Ninurta)—a common relationship in combat myth—is perennial in ancient Near Eastern palace life, as Thorkild Jacobsen points out: “Under the early political forms, which are here reflected, the king (*lugal*) was usually a young man whose task it was to lead the army in war. The supreme ruler was an older experienced administrator, here Ninurta’s father, Enlil. Thus his military exploits serve to impose and maintain Enlil’s authority” (Jacobsen 1987, 236 n. 4). The same relationship holds for Anu and Marduk in *Enuma elish*, El and Baal in the Ugaritic texts, the Ancients of Days and the Son of Man in Daniel 7, and the one seated on the throne and the Lamb in Revelation 4–5. (2) The “evil,” or threat to order, in this story is that the water necessary to fertilize the fields of Mesopotamia is trapped in mountain ice. The victory over or defeat of the evil consists in making that water once again available to the inhabitants, thus restoring the fertility intended by the gods. The nature of the victory casts light on the meaning of divine kingship in the myth. Kingship (including its permanence) is proportional to the threat that has been put down. The more profound the threat, the more profound the victory undoing it. Yet, as Neil Forsyth recognizes, not every warrior-god’s victory is a cosmogony (1987, 44–45). Marduk’s victory over Tiamat in *Enuma elish* surely is cosmogonic, but Ninurta’s victory in *Anzu* is not so wide-ranging, nor is Baal’s victory over Mot in the Ugaritic tablets. (3) The evil is portrayed as a “natural” force (water trapped in mountain ice), but here, as in other references to nature, there is an implied historical reference, for the northern and eastern mountains were the homelands of historical invaders of the plains. A dichotomous distinction between myth and history cannot be drawn; the two domains are related. (4) Judgment of enemies (and allies as well) follows the victory, an action that occurs also in *Enuma elish* (VI 11–32) and in the apocalypses in Daniel 7 and 8–12 and Revelation 17–19. (5) The victorious god reestablishes the original order; *Urzeis becomes Endzeis*. Rev 21:1 is a succinct expression of the victory: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and sea was no more.”

The observations just made also apply to the second of our three Mesopotamian examples of the genre of combat myth, *Anzu*. It is partially preserved in an Old Babylonian version (first half of the second millennium) and much more completely in an early-first-millennium Standard Babylonian version, originally consisting of about 720 lines on three four-column tablets. It was canonical, in “the stream of tradition,” that is, copied by scribes in their training and widely distributed. It influenced *Enuma elish*.

The prologue sings of Ninurta, “the Mighty One,” a title that recurs throughout the myth. The world is in crisis: the beds of the Tigris and Euphrates have been laid out, but no water flows in them to fertilize the land of Mesopotamia. At a certain point, the fresh waters of the Apsu are released to supply the two rivers, a happy turn of the plot somehow caused by the birth of Anzu (the text is not clear). Anzu is a birdlike creature with a monstrous head, conceived by earth and born in a mountain fastness. Such a creature would make an ideal gatekeeper for the gods, thinks Anu, the head of the older generation of gods, and recommends him to Enlil, head of the younger generation of gods. Anu’s judgment proves disastrous, however, for Anzu uses his post to steal from Enlil the Tablet-of-Decrees, which determines the destiny of things, the “software program of the world.” To meet the crisis, the assembly of the gods meets. Anu promises to any god who can capture back the tablet a great name and recognition as mighty. Anu turns first to Adad, then Gerra, and finally Shara, but all refuse to lead the army. They know that Anzu and not Enlil possesses the Tablet that makes its possessor’s commands all-powerful.

Then Belet-ili, the mother goddess, asks Ninurta, the son of Enlil, to go out against Anzu. Family honor is at stake, she explains, for Anzu rejected his father. In contrast to the verbose refusals of the three gods, Ninurta’s answer is a quick yes. He loses the first battle when Anzu’s authoritative word turns his arrows back. Wise Ea’s advice enables him to succeed: shake feathers loose from the birdlike Anzu and in the moment when he calls his loose feathers back to his body, release your feathered arrow so that it will be caught up in the irresistible stream toward Anzu’s body. Caught up in the flow, Ninurta’s arrow pierces and kills Anzu. Then Ninurta drenches the mountain open stretches with water. Wind-borne feathers from Anzu’s dead body signal the gods that Ninurta is victorious. The gods summon Ninurta home and, declaring that he has avenged his father Enlil, acclaim him with a series of new names.

Analysis of *Anzu* in discourse time shows what events the poet chooses to delay on:
The dramatic structure of Enuma elish is more complex than its predecessors, being in five acts.

1. I.1–20. The first twenty lines are a theogony, in which a series of gods are born when the primordial waters Apsu and Tiamat were an undifferentiated mass and there was no land. The emergence of the gods is also the emergence of two rival dynasties: Apsu-Tiamat versus Anshar-Anu-Ea-Marduk (Goldfess 1980, 127–30). The monster Tiamat thus represents both a natural force (cosmic waters) and a political reality. “Myth” and “history” are intertwined. Another indication of the historical interest in the entire myth is the large amount of discourse time devoted to political debate in the divine assembly.

2. I.21–79. In the initial confrontation of the rival dynasties, Ea defeats Apsu and builds his palace to celebrate the victory.

3. I.79–VI.121. Foreshadowed by the first confrontation, the major conflict between the son of Ea, Marduk, and the widow of Apsu, Tiamat, is the theme of the bulk of the work. Tiamat, still angry over the death of her husband Apsu at the hands of Ea, plots an assault against the rival dynasty. When they learn of her plans, the assembly is frightened and seeks to appoint a military commander. After two gods refuse to go, Marduk agrees on the condition that the assembly make his decree supreme. He slays Tiamat in single combat and from her body builds the universe and his shrine Easagil.

4. VI.122–VII.144. The gods, grateful for Marduk’s victory and obliged by their oath, give him “Anu-ship.” He in turn promises them that Babylon will be their new residence and that man, a new creature, will be their servant. From the blood of the slain Kingu (Tiamat’s general), Marduk forms man. The gods build Marduk a city and a temple and give him fifty names of honor.

Many of the remarks already made about Lugal-e and Anzu also apply to Enuma elish. As in these other myths, one god is exalted over gods and humans. In contrast to the other myths, however, in Enuma elish Marduk does not reestablish a threatened or disturbed order but forms a world that never existed before. He creates. The genre of combat myth has been expanded not only in length and complexity but conceptually as well.

What does it mean to create in the ancient Near East? The concept of creation in the ancient Near East differs from the modern Western view, shaped as the latter is by evolutionary and scientific concerns (Clifford 1994, chap. 1). Ancient accounts usually imagined creation on the model of human activity (molding clay, building a house, fighting a battle) or natural processes (life
forms left by the ebbing Nile flood). What emerged from the process for the ancients was a populated universe, human society organized for the service of the gods with a king and culture, and not, as with modern accounts, the physical world (often only the planet earth in its solar and stellar system). Ancient accounts were often portrayed as dramas, which is not surprising in that the process was imagined as personal wills in conflict. This is far from the impersonal interaction of modern scientific accounts. Lastly, the criterion for truth in ancient accounts is dramatic plausibility in contrast to our need for one complete explanation.

In Enuma elisih, creation of the world is possible because a hostile rival dynasty has come to an end with the death of Tiamat. A new stage has been reached with the exaltation of Marduk. As part of this settlement, Marduk builds a palace or palace-city where he can be acknowledged by the other gods as supreme. He forms the human race to work and provide for the gods. Creation is thus intimately linked to his victory. Later biblical texts link divine victory exaltation to creation and envision creation as the building of a temple or temple-city, for example, Isaiah 65–66 and Revelation 19–22.

Vaticinia ex eventu. Five texts from Mesopotamia, some of them formerly designated “prophecies” from their alleged resemblance to biblical literature, are now widely judged to be relevant to apocalyptic literature. They are best described as prophesies after the fact (vaticinia ex eventu). Sections typically begin with “a prince shall arise.” No kings are named, presumably so that the vagueness will give the impression that future events are being predicted. Kings and kingdoms, however, can be identified from the historical details. Reigns are judged sweepingly as either good or bad. The surveys are very much like the historical surveys in later works such as Daniel 7, 8, and 11 and the Apocalypse of Weeks and the Animal Apocalypse in 1 Enoch.

Whether all five texts represent a single genre is not certain, but there are two clear subcategories: prophesies in the third person (Text A, the Dynastic Prophecy, and the Uruk Prophecy), and prophesies in the first person (the Shulgi and Marduk Prophecies).

Text A, from seventh-century Assur, is organized by the refrain “and a prince shall arise” (repeated eight times in a fragmentary tablet). The number of years in each reign is given as well as a characterization of the major events in that reign, historical, meteorological, and agricultural. The events in Text A took place in the twelfth century, five centuries before its composition, so they all are ex eventu by definition.

The Uruk Prophecy, possibly composed in the reign of Amel-Marduk (biblical Evil-Merodach, 561–560), preserved mainly on the reverse side of the tablet, narrates the rise of six kings. The fifth king is Nebuchadnezzar II (604–562). The genuine prediction comes in lines 16–19: “After him (Nebuchadnezzar II) his son will arise as king in Uruk and become master of the world. He will exercise rule and kingship in Uruk and his dynasty will be established forever. The kings of Uruk will exercise rulership like the gods.” The past “predictions” are intended to lend credibility to the last statement. The course of history has been determined by the gods: Nebuchadnezzar’s son is meant to rule forever.

The Dynastic Prophecy, a Late Babylonian text, speaks successively of the fall of Assyria, the rise and fall of Babylonia and Persia, and the rise of the Hellenistic monarchies. The victory of Alexander the Great over Darius at Issus in 333 B.C.E. is described. After this comes the genuine prophecy, a prediction of another battle, in which Darius is victorious over Alexander: “Enil, Shamash, and [Marduk] will be at the side of his army and the overthrow of the army of the Nanaean (= Thracian, i.e., Alexander) he will bring about. He will carry off his extensive booty and [bring (it)] into his palace. The people who had experienced misfortune will enjoy” well-being. The mood of the land [will be a happy one].” By its detail, length, and climactic placement of the final prediction, the text gives the impression that the gods have determined the victory of Darius over Alexander. The predicted victory, however, never took place; Darius never defeated Alexander.

In the second subcategory—prediction in the first person (by a god or king)—are two texts that were paired in scribal editions, the Shulgi Prophecy of the late second or early first millennium and the Marduk Prophecy, perhaps from the reign of Nebuchadnezzar I (1125–1104).

In the Shulgi Prophecy, unfortunately heavily damaged, Shulgi, a Sumerian king of the Third Dynasty of Ur (2112–2004), who was considered a god and the founder of the city of Nippur, speaks of the kings who will come after him. His successor will submit to Assyria, and Nippur will be cast down. The reign of the Babylonian king, however, will be cut short by the command of Enil. Another king will arise, restore the shrines, and rebuild Nippur.

In the Marduk Prophecy, Marduk describes his (i.e., his statue’s) peregrinations, which can be dated to the first millennium: the statue’s journey to Hatti and back to Babylom, to Assyria and back to Babylom, and finally to Elam and back to Babylom. The god brought prosperity wherever he went, but his stay in Elam spelled disaster for Babylom. After Marduk returned from Elam to Babylon, however, “a king of Babylon will arise” (probably Nebu-
Daniel 7 (Kvanvig 1988, 389–555; ANET 1969, 109–10). In the relevant thirty-four lines on the obverse side, a visionary, Kummāya, sees in the night a vision of the netherworld: fifteen gods in hybrid form (human or animal heads, hands, and feet) standing before him, and "one man, his body was black like pitch. His face was similar to that of an Anzu bird. He was wearing a red robe. In his left hand he was holding up a bow. In his right hand he was holding a sword." The seer then sees the warrior Nergal on a throne, who, enraged, intends to put him to death because he has dishonored Ereshkigal, Nergal's wife. Ishum, Nergal's counselor, dissuades his master. A description of an ideal king follows, though the context is unclear: "This [spirit] which you saw in the netherworld, is that of the exalted shepherd: to whom my father [ ], the king of the gods, gives full responsibility. . . . " Next comes a prediction and an admonition, and the section concludes with brief reports in the first person and in the third person.

Though the text bears a general resemblance to Daniel 7, with the night dream of gods in hybrid form and the warrior-god on a throne pronouncing judgment, there are major differences. Judgment is given against the visionary himself, whereas in Daniel it is against the beasts from the sea; the ideal ruler in the Vision is extremely shadowy, whereas in Daniel he receives an eschatological kingdom. The pattern of relationships in the two texts is quite different. Finally, the texts have little in common with regard to aim. In the Vision, the aim is to encourage piety to the god of the netherworld; in Daniel, it is to encourage Jews to resist the hellenizing policies of the Seleucid kings (J. J. Collins 1993, 283–86). The "Vision of the Netherworld" is of interest, however, as a precedent for the tours of heaven and hell that are popular in later, especially Christian, apocalypses.

Recurrent Elements

One of the important and persistent recurrent elements in the genre of combat myth is the divine assembly, thrown into confusion yet charged with the responsibility of resisting the monster's threats. A considerable amount of discourse time is devoted to its discussions in Anzu and Enuma elish. Dramatically, the magnitude of the threat is expressed through the terror and consternation of the gods as they meet. The decrees of the assembly are powerful and binding in heaven and on earth; they are prominent in all the combat myths. Nonetheless, its decrees are not automatically effective against every cosmic threat, for they can be rendered ineffective by a monster. A warrior-god must do away with the evil before the decrees are effective. At the end of Lugal-e (lines 679 forward), Ninurta receives the homage of the Anunnaki gods and
his father Enlil grants him new status. In Anzu, the victorious Ninurta receives names of honor and authority from the gods, a harbinger of the fifty names that Marduk in Enuma elish receives from the gods. In Enuma elish the assembly’s decree plays an extraordinarily important role. Before he sets out, his destiny is declared supreme: “Your destiny (šimmu) is unequalled, your word (has the power of)! ... From this day forwards your command shall not be altered. Yours is the power to exalt and abuse. ... We hereby give you sovereignty over all of the whole universe” (IV.4–14). In the final tablets (end of IV to VII) Marduk constructs the universe and the assembly’s earlier decree takes effect as they acclaim his fifty names.

The decree of the assembly that exalts one deity because of his victory over cosmic enemies is a theme found in a transposed form in apocalyptic literature. Though heavenly decrees in the combat myth are primarily concerned with kingship, they can also be concerned with broader questions of the divine will and human activity. In the Bible, a vestige of the decision-making assembly is found in Gen 1:26 (“Let us make man in our image”) and 11:7 (“Let us go down and confuse their language”), in the designation of heavenly beings as the host or army (the literal meaning of YHVH zebah), and in affirmations that Yahweh is incomparable to other heavenly beings (e.g., Exod. 15.11; Deut. 3.24; 1 Kgs. 8.23; Ps. 86.8; 95.3). Apocalyptic literature in particular exploits the heavenly assembly. God is often in the assembly, surrounded by heavenly beings, messengers or angels, and there is constant reference to “destinies,” and decrees (Brown 1958a; 1958b; 1959).

Related to the decree of the assembly is the Tablet-Of-Decrees (puppi šimmātī), which in Akkadian narratives occurs only in Enuma elish (where it plays a central role), Enuma elish (I.57; IV.121; V.69, presumably derived from Enuma elish), and Erra (IV.44). The tablet was worn around the neck of the god in charge, and it could be put on and taken off like a garment—for Enlil removed it to take a bath in Anzu. Neither English “destiny” nor “fate” is a satisfactory translation of šimmu, for these English words imply inevitability, whereas the Akkadian word connotes something decreed but not necessarily unalterable. “Destinies” were subject to change through magic; they were usually transmitted from a higher power, from god to king, king to subject, father to child. In mythology and literature, the highest gods, usually Anu, Enlil, and Ea, decreed the destinies establishing the nature and pattern of things in heaven and on earth. šimmātī were regarded as introduced at creation, for Enuma elish (I.8) describes pre-creation as a period when “no destinies had been decreed.” Other words for similar determination of things and events are Sumerian me or qal-hur (= Akkadian parsu, asurtu). In later apocalypses, the seer is frequently shown heavenly visions of meteorological and natural phe-}

nomena and of future events. Such visions should be understood against the ancient Near Eastern background of “destinies”—things and events that have been determined by the divine.

Another relevant recurrent element of the genre of combat myth is the enemy as monster. Azaz is a monster. Anzu’s strange appearance was proverbial; his face, possibly that of a bat, inspired terror. Though Tiamat, personified Sea, is not described clearly in Enuma elish, scholars assume that the dragon depicted fighting a god on many seals is Tiamat; the seven-headed Hydra of some seals may have been later identified with Tiamat. The monsters are often interpreted as natural forces: for example, the storm-god’s attack on the monster in the mountains reflects thundershowers sweeping into the mountain ranges. Though such a natural reference cannot be denied, there are as well historical and political dimensions to the monsters. Azaz and Anzu reside in the northeastern mountains, the homeland of the enemies of the Mesopotamian plain dwellers. Enuma elish views Apsu, Tiamat, and Kingu as usurpers of the legitimate throne that belongs by right to Anu and Marduk. H. H. Schmid notes:

In Mesopotamia, Ugarit, and Israel, Chaoskampf appears not only in cosmological contexts but just as frequently—and this was fundamentally true right from the first—in political contexts. The repulsion and the destruction of the enemy, and thereby the maintenance of political order, always constitutes one of the major dimensions of the battle against chaos. The enemies are not other than a manifestation of chaos which‘must be driven back. (1984, 104)

An important motif is the seer-hero who is brought into or ascends to the world of the gods to receive wisdom and knowledge about the future. It is his task to communicate this wisdom to the human race. The preeminent seer in apocalyptic literature is Enoch, the hero of the several booklets that make up 1 Enoch. He is also the hero in other writings and is mentioned in Sirach, Wisdom of Solomon, and the New Testament. As one raised up to heaven and given special knowledge, he served as the model for Daniel, John, and Ezra. Enoch has antecedents in Mesopotamian tradition.

A key biblical text that mediated Mesopotamian lore to Levantine literature and applied it to Enoch was Gen 5:21–24. There Enoch is seventh in a ten-member genealogy of pre-flood patriarchs. The Priestly writer makes comments about Enoch that are not made about the other nine patriarchs: instead of describing his death, the Priestly writer has “he walked with God” (ḥāṭēḥōhem); then he was no more because God (qēḇōhem) took him.” The Hebrew spellings noted above are significant. The prefixed definite article hā- in the first occurrence suggests that the correct translation is not “God” but
“divine beings,” the heavenly beings who lived with God. The Genesis text thus says that even while on earth Enoch associated with heavenly beings, unlike the other patriarchs. Further, the end of his stay on earth did not mean the end of his communion with heavenly beings; he was taken up into the heavens to be with God.

The Sumerian King List, a schematic history of pre-flood kings, which exists in copies ranging from ca. 1500 B.C.E. to 165 B.C.E., has long been recognized as a source of Genesis 5. The kings in the lists, like the ancestors of Genesis, are extraordinarily long-lived; in some versions of the list, there are ten kings, the last of whom is the flood hero. Some versions have in seventh place a figure like Enoch, named Enmeduranki or Enmenduranna, who ruled in Sippar, a city sacred to the sun-god. Enoch’s age of 365 years, which differs so dramatically from the other pre-flood heroes in Genesis, is most naturally explained as a reflection of the solar calendar, another link to Enmeduranki of Sippar. Most important, two texts show Enmeduranki in the presence of the gods Shamash (the sun-god) and Adad. In one he is brought into the assembly and given special wisdom.

Shamsh in Ebabbarra [appointed] Enmeduranki [king of Sippar], the beloved of Anu, Enlil [and Ea]. Shamash and Adad [brought him in] to their assembly, Shamash and Adad [honoured him], Shamash and Adad [set him] on a large throne of god, they showed him how to observe oil on water, a mystery of Anu [Enlil and Ea], they gave him the tablet of the gods, the liver, a secret of heaven and underworld, they put in his hand the cedar-rod, beloved of the great gods.” (VanderKam 1984, 35-40; cf. Kvanvig 1988, 185-86)

Enmeduranki is brought into heaven and there is taught divination, how to read the future. He is the prototype of the biblical Enoch, who in Genesis is taken up to heaven to walk with the heavenly beings.

Further refinement to the Enmeduranki tradition has been provided by recently published texts that have made it possible to reappraise the so-called bīt mēšerī ritual series. The texts list the apkallu, legendary pre-flood creatures of great wisdom; seven in number, they taught the human race wisdom and craft.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kings</th>
<th>Sages</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Alulim</td>
<td>U-An</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Alagar</td>
<td>U-An-dugga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Ammeluanna</td>
<td>Enmedugga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Ammegalanna</td>
<td>Enmegalamma</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

They are followed after the flood by four more sages. The text gives apkallu a short notice. Utuabzu, the sage of Enmeduranki, has an especially interesting notice: “Utuabzu, who was taken up into heaven, the pure puru fishes, the puradu fishes of the sea, the seven of them, the seven Wise, arose in the flood, who direct the plans of heaven and earth.” Riekele Bor the editor, believes that the text strengthens the possibility that Enmedura as predictor of the future and the seventh ruler in primordial time was prototype of Enoch. He notes, however, that the myth of Enoch’s journey to heaven comes ultimately from Enmeduranki’s sage, the seventh pre-flood as Utuabzu.

Genesis 5:21-24 is the oldest surviving example of the Enoch tradition in the Bible. From this modest source text a mighty stream was destined to flow.

**Themes**

The two themes most relevant for later apocalyptic works are cosmic the new creation. Though the threat is undeniably prominent in the cosm myth, the most important thing is the god’s defeat of it and consequent ex tination to the top rank. In Lugal-e the evil is that the water destined to irrigate the Mesopotamian plains is trapped in the ice of the northern and eastern mountains. This is not simply a natural malfunction but the conscious strateg of the mountain-dwelling monster Azag, who has been made king by the mountain plants and stones. Azag thwarted the god’s intent that Mesopotamian fields be fertile and support human workers to care for and feed them. Azag’s act is against gods and human beings. Azag and his constituency plants and stones are not pure mythical, for the northern and eastern mountains were the homeland of the plains dwellers’ historical enemies. The evil Lugal-e is therefore (in modern terms) both “natural” and “historical,” affecting both gods and human beings. By defeating Azag, Ninurta truly restored the cosmos as a coherent system.

In the first part of the two-part Anzu the evil is the same as in Lugalthat is, the failure of the mountain waters to reach the plains. How that problem was solved (at the beginning of the epic) cannot be determined from the fragmentary text. The major evil, however, is Anzu’s theft of the Tablet-o
Decrees from its rightful custodian, Enlil. The divine decision regarding all reality encoded in the tablet is in the power of a monster hostile to the divine assembly. The evil is that things will not work right because the tablet is in the wrong hands. By getting the tablet back, Ninurta ensures the survival of the world the gods have created.

_Enuma elish_ is more complex, and so is the evil in its two sections. In the first section (1.1–79), the evil is the rival dynasty represented by Apsu, who is killed by Ea. In the second part, the evil is the rival dynasty represented by Tiamat. She is violent and irrational; the world would never have been created if she were to rule. Marduk’s victory establishes the legitimate dynasty and eventuates in creation.

The three combat myths see the universe as threatened once upon a time by a monster with sufficient power to destroy it or change it for the worse. The divine assembly—that is, the gods as deciding and acting—cannot by itself resolve the problem. The evil is not simply a cosmic malfunction but is willed by a particular being. The evil plays itself out on the natural and historical planes.

Closely related to the evil is the god’s victory over it. Is the victory merely a restoration of the pre-threat order, or is it new creation? At the very least, _Ensei_ becomes _Ursei_, for the original order is renewed. This is surely true for _Lugal-e_ and _Anzu_. _Enuma elish_, however, is a different case. It is true creation. Marduk makes the world as we know it. The world did not exist prior to Tiamat, for it is from her body that the cosmos is constructed.

_CANAAN_

History and Religion

By the third millennium Syria-Palestine was populated by West Semitic peoples speaking an Old Canaanite language. After 1200 B.C.E., the Old Canaanite area was divided into three areas: Palestine (the area south of Mount Hermon, later conquered by the tribes of Israel), the areas of the Aramaean city-states, and Phoenicia, the long narrow strip of land along the Mediterranean from Arvad to Mount Carmel in the south. In a Ugaritic text, "Canaanite" refers to an area distinct from the city of Ugarit, but in modern usage "Canaanite" is customary for the whole littoral.

A common literary tradition is attested for the Old Canaanite (Phoenician) culture. Religious and mythological poetic texts excavated at the Late Bronze (mostly fourteenth century B.C.E.) city of Ugarit display vocabulary, especially word pairs, recurrent elements, and techniques found also in Phoenician inscriptions and in early biblical poetry. The Ugaritic texts provide a northern sampling of literary and religious traditions shared by Canaan and Israel.

Canaanite scribes in the employ of royal courts in the major cities knew Mesopotamian literature. Canonical texts have been found at Boghaskhly (ancient Harran) in the Hittite empire, at Ugarit, at Meskene (ancient Emar, a crossroads of east and west), and even at Megiddo in Palestine (a fragment of _Gilgamesh_). These texts were understood by Levantine scribes, for Akkadian was a diplomatic language in the late second and early first millennia. One can assume that some scribes employed in Canaanite and Israelite temples and palaces were trained in the traditional manner—by copying canonical texts. It is thus not surprising to find Mesopotamian influence on Canaanite and biblical literature. A good example of a western borrowing of an eastern literary genre is the creation-flood story. Attested in the Sumerian Flood Story, _Atrahasis_ and _Gilgamesh XI_, and some versions of the Sumerian King List, it is echoed in the flood story found at Ugarit, and has strongly influenced the Bible in Genesis 2–11 (Clifford 1994, 144–46).

The god lists of Ugarit, like those of Mesopotamia, list many more deities than the few who play prominent roles in myths, but we are here chiefly concerned with the executive deities. The most important mythological texts found at Ugarit (in excavations from 1929 forward) are the story of King Keret, the story of Aqhat, and the cycle concerning Baal’s combat. They are written in a cuneiform adaptation of the Canaanite alphabet.

The head of the pantheon is the patriarch El, creator of heaven and earth. His consort is Asherah. There is no sacred triad in Ugarit; Mesopotamian Enlil and Ea have no real analogues. El presides over the assembly of the gods, whose members in Ugaritic texts (unlike Mesopotamia) are not precisely identified nor shown engaged in lively debate. El or the assembly _tout ensemble_ speak and act. El is portrayed as old and wise, though there are hints that in olden days he was a feared warrior-god. His decree, approved by the assembly, is of extraordinary importance. Both Anat and Asherah confess: "Thou art wise, O El, and thy decree is long life." The young god Hadad (Baal) is a warrior. The assembly decrees, "Our king is Aiyyan Baal, our judge above whom there is no other." His weapons are those of the storm—lightning, thunder, wind, and rains that bring fertility—and his bellicose consort is Anat. Two divine beings play significant roles as Baal’s enemies: Mot (Death) and Yamm (Sea). One of the major interpretative problems of the Baal Cycle is El’s relation to Baal and to Baal’s enemies Yamm and Mot. Mot is called "son of El,"
and Yamm in KTU 1.1 is given a name and palace by El. Elsewhere El favors Baal and grants him permission to build his palace.

Literature and Themes Relevant to Apocalyptic Literature

Genre of Combat Myth (Baal Cycle)

The six tablets of the Baal Cycle (KTU 1.1–6 = ANET 129–42) belong to the genre of combat myth, which we have singled out as having extraordinary influence on apocalyptic literature. The similarities of the Baal Cycle to the Mesopotamian combat myths are striking: (1) the enemy is Sea in KTU 1.1–3 = ANET 129–31, 135–38, recalling Tiamat in Enuma elish; (2) the divine assembly under its president An or El is threatened and commissions a young warrior-god to battle the foe, though in the Baal Cycle the commission must be inferred from the goddesses’ quote of the decree that their king is Baal; (3) events are decided by a battle that is cosmic in scope; (4) the warrior-god’s victory is symbolized by a palace and dedication feast for all the gods. Some scholars have proposed that this combat myth originated among West Semites on the grounds that the sea phenomenonologically is important only in Syria-Palestine. The theory is unlikely, however, because the word “sea” in Mesopotamian myths can refer not only to the ocean but to the waters in the northern mountains, as it does in Anzu. It is now clear that the literary antecedent of the Marduk–Tiamat conflict in Enuma elish is not the West Semitic Baal–Yamm story but the native Anzu (Lambert 1986).

The Ugaritic combat myth is in the same poetic tradition as early biblical poetry and thus is much more pertinent to later apocalyptic literature than the Akkadian works analyzed above. Unfortunately, four of the six tablets of the Baal Cycle cannot be put in their proper sequence because of broken beginnings or ends. Hence we cannot be certain of the plots. Here the Akkadian works are useful, for they can supply the sequence and plot only dimly discernible in the Ugaritic texts. In the Baal Cycle only tablets V (ANET 138–39) and VI (ANET 139–41) preserve the ending and the beginning that demonstrate their sequence. (Normally the last line of a tablet is repeated as the first line of the succeeding tablet.) Tablets I–III (ANET 129–31, 135–38) tell of the Baal–Yamm conflict and tablets IV–V (ANET 131–35, 138–41) of the Baal–Mot conflict. The majority of scholars assume a single cycle, which first depicts Baal’s war with Yamm and then describes his war with Mot. It is more probable, however, that the two conflicts are not two acts in a single drama but variants of the same myth. There are good indications that the two stories are variants: tablets III (ANET 135–38) and IV (ANET 131–35) show an identical sequence of actions (Baal has no palace like the other gods, an embassy is sent to the goddess to ask her to intercede with El for Baal’s palace, the goddess prepares for her journey and departs for El’s abode, the goddess praises El’s decree, El grants permission, the craftsman god is summoned to build it. Positioning two versions of a single myth avoids a dramatically implausible never-ending seesaw battle between Baal and his enemies.

Baal–Yamm. Tablets I–III (ANET 129–31, 135–38) are about the Baal–Yamm conflict. We do not know the original sequence of the tablets, and so any summary of the plot must be regarded as tentative. At a certain point Yamm (Sea) is given authority (“a name”) by El, who charges him to drive Baal “from his royal throne, the resting place, the throne of his domination.” El commands the craftsman-god Koshar wa-Hasis to build a palace for Yamm. (Throughout the cycle, the palace plays an extremely significant role as the concretization of kingship.) So commissioned, Baal sends ambassadors to the assembly presided over by El, ordering them to surrender Baal. The assembly is terrified at the approach of Yamm’s messengers, and El immediately hands Baal over, “Baal is your servant, O Yamm” (“your subject” in political language). Baal tries to fight but is restrained by Anat and Ashart, presumably because they regard the assembly’s action as legally binding. After some major gaps in the tablets, Baal eventually has the opportunity to attack his enemy with Koshar wa-Hasis at his side. Koshar fashions two magic weapons against Yamm, the second of which succeeds in knocking Yamm to the ground, where Baal finishes him off. Baal is acclaimed king: “Yamm is dead! Baal reigns!”

The Baal–Yamm story is more fragmentary than the Baal–Mot story; the plot is uncertain and important matters are left unexplained. Why does El commission Yamm and give him a palace? Why does the assembly hand Baal over to Yamm, and why is Baal later able to best him in combat? A major problem in Ugaritic mythology—the unclear relationship of El to Baal, Yamm, and Mot—keeps us from fully comprehending the essential point of this myth.

Baal–Mot. The Baal–Death combat myth is told in tablets IV–VI of the Baal Cycle (ANET 138–42); the extant material is greater and in surer sequence than is the case with the Baal–Yamm story. Most scholars believe that tablets IV-VI are the proper sequence. Tablet VI (ANET 139–141) immediately continues tablet V (ANET 138–39), since its first line repeats the last line of tablet V, but the proper placement of tablet IV (ANET 131–35) is far from
uproot the base of your dwelling. Surely he will overturn your royal throne. Surely he will shatter your scepter of judgment" (1.6.vi.24–29). Mot stops out of fear. Baal renounces his throne and the cycle ends with a banquet of the gods. Shapshu is lauded as judge, probably for her role in settling the conflict of kingship.

The overall interpretation of the Baal Cycle is made difficult by the uncertain sequence of tablets I–IV (and columns within tablet II), many broken passages, and our ignorance of its social location. Was the cycle recited in the temple? Was it used to support the authority of the king? Several interpretations have been proposed: ritual and seasonal, cosmogenic, and rhetorical and political. Each has some validity yet no single theory does justice to all the data. Few would deny any reference to the change of seasons. Mot represents the dry summer season or dry areas, and Baal represents the fertilizing rains of the Levantine winter. An exclusively seasonal explanation, however, neglects the obvious political features of the myth. Mot and Baal act more like generals and politicians than natural forces, and Baal’s kingship has to have some reference to the Ugaritic king, who, like Baal, needed military power in order to reign. Others see in the cycle a cosmogony or creation account, in which Baal creates a cosmos after defeating some form of chaos. This interpretation accounts for the life–death struggle, and the prominence of cosmic order and the palace, but in the Ugaritic texts only El and Asherah are given the title creator; the most that Baal accomplishes by his victory over sea and death is to reconstitute cosmic and political harmony. Historical interpretations see the myth as reflecting the rise and fall of the gods of different peoples; for example, the rise of Baal allegedly at the expense of El reflects the god of a new dynasty in the history of Ugarit. This interpretation is unsatisfactory, however. Baal does not replace El but is commissioned by him, and the commission of a young god by a senior god in the face of a cosmic threat is a characteristic feature of ancient palace life and of the genre of combat myth.

The best approach is to view the cycle according to its genre, the combat myth, and to reconstruct its plot by analogy with the better-known combat myths of Mesopotamia. In the typical plot, a monster threatens the cosmic order; the assembly of the gods meets amid considerable trepidation; finding no willing warrior among the senior deities, it turns to a young outsider, who successfully defeats the monster and returns to the assembly to be acclaimed king. This abstract plotline does not completely resolve several puzzles in the Baal Cycle (e.g., the relation of El to Baal, Mot, and Yamm), but it allows us to arrange the tablets in order with some confidence. It also explains the prominent role of Baal’s palace, the need for El’s permission, the fact that Yamm and Mot, despite their names, are portrayed not as primordial forces.
but as seekers of political power. Baal’s royalty explains the relation of these mythic texts to the people of Ugarit, for human kingship is a reflection of divine kingship. These myths must support the authority of the Ugaritic king, whose proper rule ensures fertility, upholds family and civic order, and sees to the proper honoring of the gods.

Recurrent Elements

The assembly of the gods plays a significant role in the Baal–Yamm story.

The gods sat to eat, / the holy ones to dine, / Baal stood before El. / When the gods saw them [the hostile messengers of Yamm], / . . . . / the gods lowered their heads / upon their knees, / and upon their princely thrones. / Baal rebuked them. / “Why have you lowered, O Gods, / your heads upon your knees / and on your princely thrones? / I see, O gods, you are terrified / from fear of the messengers of Yamm, / the emissaries of Judge River. / Lift up your heads, O gods, / from upon your knees, / from upon your princely thrones!” (KTU 1.2.I.20–28)

Despite Baal’s protests, the assembly surrenders him to Yamm’s messengers, and their decision, even though made in fear, is binding.

In biblical passages such as 1 Kgs. 22:19–23; Isaiah 6; and 40:1–8; Psalm 82; and Job 1–2, the assembly plays a major role, and in apocalyptic literature it sometimes forms the context in which God acts, e.g., Daniel 7 and Revelation 4–5. The biblical emphasis on the unicity and absolute power of Yahweh reduces the members of the assembly to spectator, choristers, or messengers, but the assembly persists as part of the heavenly scene.

Sea is apparently a monster. In KTU 1.3.III.39–IV.3, Anar recalls the allies of Yamm, the enemies of Baal: El’s river Rabbim, the dragon, the crooked serpent, Shiyat with seven heads. In KTU 1.5.I., Lotan is the ally of Mot. Lotan appears in the Bible under the name Leviathan in Ps. 74:13–14; Job 3:8; 26:12–13; 41:1–34; Isa. 27:1; Rev. 12:3; 17:1–14; 19:20; 21:1; 2 Esdras 6:49–52. Mot is not described but may also be a monster. To judge by their names, Yamm and Mot represent forces hostile to the human race and terrify the divine assembly. Unfortunately the precise nature of their threat is unclear.

The decree is ascribed to El. The assembly is not recorded as issuing decrees on its own. When the goddesses Anat and Asherah ask El to permit Baal to build a palace after his victory over Mot and Yamm, they praise his decree: “Your decree, O El, is wise. Your wisdom is eternal. A life of good for-
probably the Ugaritic king, his regent on earth—enjoy limited kingship. The limit differs strikingly from the triumph of Ninurta in Anzu, Marduk (or Assur) in Enuma elish, and Yahweh's victory in the Bible.

The above survey of Mesopotamian and Canaanite material prompts four observations.

1. One must be careful methodologically about describing the elements of the genre of combat myth in the ancient Near East. There is no ideal form of the myth but only diverse realizations. What is essential? Joseph Fontenrose's initial classification in Python: A Study in Delphic Myth (1959) was useful but relied too much on the formal qualities of the actors and too little on their function. Neil Forsyth's The Old Enemy: Satan and the Combat Myths adapts Vladimir Propp's description in Morphology of the Folk Tale to provide the following scheme (Forsyth 1987, 448–51).

   1. Lack
   2. Hero emerges
   3. Donor
   4. Journey
   5. Battle
   6. Defeat
   7. Enemy ascendant.
   8. Battle rejoined
   9. Victory
   10. Enemy punished
   11. Triumph.

2. Kingship and cosmic order are inextricably bound up with each other in that the god's restoration of pre-threat order (Lugal-e, Anzu; Baal–Mot, Baal–Yamm?) or creation of order (Enuma elish) is the great act and sign of his kingship. The kingship of the victor god is in a sense "monothestic"; that is, one god is singled out at the expense of the other gods' sovereignty, usurping their supremacy in the pantheon and over the universe.

3. What modern thought distinguishes as "nature" and "history" is not clearly distinguished in ancient thought. Natural forces are described as historical enemies. Monsters engage in political activities (stealing the Tablet-of-Decrees), lead armies, and conduct campaigns.

4. Do the texts look forward to a permanent final state? Norman Cohn concludes that Mesopotamian, Canaanite, and early biblical faith views were essentially "static yet anxious" (Cohn 1993, 227) and that Zoroastrianism introduced hope for a permanent phase of absolute peace. One can argue, however, that the combat myth, even outside the Bible, already contains a hope for a permanent kingdom, or, better stated, the unimpeded rule of a single deity. One god became supreme over all the other gods and over a particular cosmic evil. People presumably hoped for the abiding order, though perhaps they were not surprised when fresh cosmic threats arose. But endless repetition, eternal return, is not the message in the combat myths considered above.

THE BIBLE

History and Religion

By ca. 1200 B.C.E., a group of tribes occupied part of Palestine and formed a league of tribes known as Israel, which shared a common story. Yahweh their God had rescued them from Egypt, made a covenant, and brought them into Canaan. Some poetry from this period survives.

To judge by this early poetry, Israel made use of the poetic repertory and concepts of Canaanite religious literature. The fixed pairs of words, vocabulary, and poetic syntax found in the largely fourteenth-century Ugaritic texts also occur in Hebrew poetry such as Exodus 15, Judges 5, Deuteronomy 33, and Psalm 114. The well-known animosity of the Bible to "Canaanite" religious practices should not mislead us into thinking the Israelis were a hermatically sealed enclave in Canaan. The very vehemence of the Bible shows the affinity between Canaanite and Israelite culture.

Israelite poets described Yahweh in the language used of the gods El and Baal in Canaan. The exploits of Yahweh were sometimes depicted in the genre of the combat myth. Yahweh is a storm-god using weapons of wind, rain, and lightning to defeat his foes (e.g., Ps. 18:8–20; 29; 77:12–21). Though sharing much with their neighbors, Israelite poets were distinctive in their explicit historical interest and reference. The poets celebrated Yahweh's victories not over other gods or monsters but over the army of Pharaoh in Egypt. Yahweh fought Israel's battles. These historical acts were nonetheless celebrated with mythic language and concepts, which deepened their significance and gave them a cosmic scope. The combined historical and mythic reference enabled Israel, relatively insignificant in comparison with other peoples, to reckon itself as extraordinary, the special people of the Most High God.

In the course of Israel's history, the prominence given to either the mythic or the historical dimension in religious writings varied. Early poetry generally maintained a balance between mythic and historical elements: for example, Yahweh fights on the heavenly plane for Israel (e.g., Judg. 5:4–5, 20–21), but the poem is mainly about a historical battle between Israel and a coalition of northern kings. In some works borrowed from neighboring courts and temples, Israelite scribes left mythological elements "untranslated," that is, not referred to historical events. Though some postexilic writings such as Isaiah
24–27, 65, and Zechariah 9–14 do not immediately refer mythological
description to historical events, one must be cautious about making the
myth–history correlation a criterion for charting the development of apocaly-
ptic literature. Myth and history are not dichotomous concepts. Historical
reference can be implicit in nonbiblical mythology, which may well have in
view a historical people and dynasty (Roberts 1976). The prominence of
myth or history in a literary work may depend on the genre rather than on a
"worldview."

It has been argued that historical and sociological changes in the post-
exilic period, particularly the end of native kingship and the related "office" of
prophecy, encouraged the development of apocalyptic writing. In sixth-
century literature such as Isaiah 34–35, 40–55, and the later oracles of the
book of Ezekiel, a change in the character of prophecy is already discernible.
New traits or patterns have emerged. One is the democratizing and eschatolog-
ing of classical prophetic themes and forms. A second is the doctrine of two
ages, an era of "old things" and an era of "new things," the beginning of a
typological treatment of historical events. The significance of history was
increasingly discovered in future fulfillment. A third element is the resurgent
influence of myths of creation used to frame history and to lend history tran-
scendent significance (Cross 1973, 343–46).

Literature and Themes Relevant to Apocalyptic Literature

Genre of Combat Myth

We can distinguish four stages in the use of the combat myth by Israel:
(1) early poetry such as Exodus 15, (2) liturgical poetry (psalms) of the
monarchic period, (3) Second Temple literature such as Isaiah 40–66 and
Zechariah 9–14, and (4) fully developed apocalyptic literature such as Daniel
7 and Revelation 12. In the first stage, the old hymns celebrate a past event,
Yahweh's victory, which has brought Israel into existence. Yahweh defeated
threats (Pharaoh, the Red Sea) to Israel's existence enabling the people to live
safely in their land. In the second stage, hymns such as Psalms 93, 96, and 114
praise the ancient past victory that brought Israel into being. In communal
laments such as Psalms 74, 77, and 89, Israel is threatened by enemies. The
psalmist narrates before God in liturgy ("remembers") the original combat
whereby God defeated its enemies. The purpose is to persuade God to repeat
the primordial victory and defeat the present threat. In the third stage, the
postexilic period, Israel has been destroyed in that it has lost its land and
Temple. The validity of Yahweh's past victory has been annulled. Hence the
psalmist beseeches God to fight and win a victory over Israel's enemies in the
future. In the fourth stage, exemplified in Daniel 7 and Revelation 12, a seer is
told that the victory has already taken place in heaven; the seer is to bring the
news of victory to the beleaguered faithful on earth.

The criterion for distinguishing the stages above is how the combat myth
is viewed by each. In the first stage the combat-victory is a past and still valid
event (the victory over Pharaoh at the Red Sea), and it is the reason for Israel's
present existence. In the second stage, liturgical hymns praise the past victory
as still potent. Communal laments, however, view the community as pro-
foundly threatened to the point that the old saving event has lost its efficacy
and must be renewed. In the third stage, the combat victory has been
annulled, for Israel lies in ruins. Hence the community prays God to act again
on the model of the ancient deed. In the fourth stage, the period of Daniel
and Revelation, the combat has taken place and the victory has been won in
the real or heavenly world, but only the seer (and his readers) knows it. We
now turn to a representative work from each of the four stages.

1. Exodus 15 is the best known adaptation of the combat myth of the
early poetry. Its early date is strongly suggested by archaic linguistic features
(Cross 1973; Sáenz Ballell 1993). The first part of the poem celebrates Yah-
weh's defeat of Pharaoh on the sea (sea itself is not the enemy), and in the sec-
ond part, Yahweh's leading the people to his shrine, where his kingship is
acclaimed. Its genre—hymn—differs from the narrative realizations of the
combat myth we have so far seen. The structure is not identical to
Forsyth's ideal outline of the plot, which is drawn from purely narrative real-
izations. The first scene, "lack or villainy," occurs in v. 9, "I will purge, I will
overtake, I will overtake, my desire shall have its fill of them." The assembly of
gods is only vestigially preserved because of the demands of Israel's mono-
theistic faith. The battle is described in v. 8. Yahweh is exalted to kingship
over the other gods (v. 11): "Who is like you, Yahweh, among the gods, / Who
is like you, majestic in holiness, / Awesome in splendor, working wonders!
You stretched out your right hand, the earth swallowed them"; (v. 18): Yah-
weh will reign for ever and ever!" A special emphasis is the procession of the
people through Canaan to Yahweh's shrine, where his kingship will be cele-
bated. The narrative plot has been broken up for the sake of liturgy.

The hymn celebrates a specific historical event in the myth—Yahweh's
victory over Pharaoh at the Red Sea. "Historical" here means only that the
Israelites believed the exodus took place at a particular time and place.
Though the extant extrabiblical combat myths did not have an explicitly his-
torical reference, they depicted creation or reestablishment of a particular cos-
mic order and must have therefore had in mind a specific king and people. The Bible is, nonetheless, much more explicit about historical events and gives them much more emphasis than nonbiblical texts.

2. In liturgical poetry of the monarchical period the combat myth is discernible in some hymns, for example, Psalms 93, 96, and 114, in which it functions as in the early hymns. The combat myth functions differently, however, in communal laments such as Psalms 74, 77, and 89. In this genre Israel, threatened by enemies, recites before God ("remembers") the old combat victory at the beginning. The purpose is to persuade God to repeat the primordial victory and defeat the present threat. This use differs from the previous stage and points forward to stage 3: the victory is a past historical event but its present potency is now in doubt. People have to pray that the original deed be renewed.

Psalms 89 is a good example of how the combat myth functions in communal laments. Recent commentators rightly regard it as a literary unity (Clifford 1980). It "remembers" before Yahweh his ancient world-creating victory (in this psalm it includes the installation of the Davidic king) in order to appeal to God’s noblesse oblige: Will you allow the king who represents your combat victory to be defeated in battle? Verses 6–19 describe that cosmic victory as a single event that includes a procession and consecration of a king.

[10]You rule the raging Sea; you still its swelling waves.
[11]You crushed Rahab with a mortal blow; your strong arm scattered your foes.
[12]Yours are the heavens, yours the earth; you founded the world and everything in it.
[Verses 16–19 describe a triumphant procession to Yahweh’s shrine, after which the Davidic king is consecrated.]

20Then you spoke in a vision to your consecrated one and you said,
I have set (my) servant above the mighty men,
I have raised up a man of (my) choice from the army.

28Yes, I make him my firstborn,
the highest of the kings of the earth.

3. After the capture of Jerusalem, the destruction of the Temple, and the end of the monarchy, it was understandable that Israelites concluded that God’s work had come to an end. Texts such as Isa. 51:9–11 view the combat victory as no longer in effect and ask God for a new deed similar to the ancient one.

9Awake, awake, clothe yourself with power, arm of Yahweh!
Awake as in days of old.
generations long ago.
surely it was you that hacked Rahab [sea monster] in pieces, that pierced the Dragon.
[It was you that dried up Sea]
the waters of the Great Deep;
that made the abysses of Sea
a road for the redeemed to walk on.

11So let the ransom of Yahweh return,
let them come with shouting to Zion.

Second Isaiah imagined the ancient deed that gave birth to Israel as the Exodus conquest and a cosmogonic victory (43:16–17). God is about to do something new modeled on the old (43:18–21). In the prayer of 51:9–11, the prophet asks God to do again the ancient combat victory over Sea, which will result in the return of the exiles to Zion. The ancient deed is a thing of the past; it is now projected into the future. May God bring it about!

4. In Daniel 7, written in the 160s B.C.E., vestiges of the combat myth appear. In the plot of the Mesopotamian and Canaanite examples examined earlier in this essay, the young warrior, after vanquishing the sea monster and restoring order, receives kingship from the chief god and the assembly. Though no one would argue that fourteenth-century Canaanite texts directly shaped Daniel 7, there can be little doubt that the combat myth has influenced the scene: the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven (v. 13) recalls the epithet of Canaanite Baal, "rider of the clouds"; the Ancient of Days (v. 9) evokes the epithet of Canaanite El, 'b ʾımm, "Father of Years." The pattern of relationships is further proof of influence: the interaction of two god-like figures is unprecedented in the Bible but common in the Ugaritic texts; there is opposition between the sea and the cloud rider. There are, of course, major differences such as the introduction of the motif of the four kingdoms, and the beast is slain not in combat but by judicial decree (J. J. Collins 1993, 286–94). Knowledge of the Canaanite background can highlight important points in Daniel 7: the earthly kingdoms symbolized by the four beasts are agents of a more primordial evil, Sea; no battle needs to be fought, the victory is already won; Israelite monotheism has made the old warrior-god into an angelic representative of Israel.

The book of Revelation has also drawn on the combat myth. One could perhaps argue that chaps. 4–5 are a vestigial reflection of the divine assembly
thrown into consternation by its inability to find within its ranks a defender of divine rule; the Lion turned Lamb would be the heavenly hero. Revelation 12 is more certain. The enemy is a seven-headed dragon, for which there is no biblical parallel but a clear one in the Ugaritic Baal cycle, "Lotan (Leviathan) the twisting serpent... Shalat with seven heads" (*KTU* 1.5.i.1–3 = *ANET* 138). The dragon's ten horns show an attempt to relate it to the fourth beast in Daniel 7. As in Daniel 7, Revelation 12 uses the combat myth (however vestigial) to show that the victory has been won (A. Y. Collins 1976). It has happened in the heavens, the real world, but is not yet displayed on earth. An event of *Urzeit* is now an event in *Endzeit*. When the beasts and the dragon will be destroyed on earth (Rev. 17:1–20:15), the new heavens will appear.

The above survey shows the various ways in which the genre of the combat myth appears in biblical literature. In many old poems and psalms the combat is past and undergirds the present order. With the exile, the present order has collapsed, and so the combat is moved to the future, with a view to restoration.

**CONCLUSIONS**

What can we learn about apocalyptic literature by studying its early antecedents? First of all they teach us that the imagery and themes of apocalyptic literature are not bizarre and obscurantist, as is sometimes claimed. For example, the combat myth was a customary ancient way of thinking about the world. Ancient Near Eastern "philosophical" thinking was normally done through narrative. Retelling one basic narrative in slightly different versions enabled ancients to reflect about the governance of the world and explain the course of history, especially the history of their own nation. Their era took for granted the existence and power of the gods and factored them into their reflection, as our era takes for granted and reckons with a different (and less ultimate) range of forces, for example, the power of ideas, of free trade, of energy resources. To do philosophy, theology, and political theory, modern thinkers employ the genre of the discursive essay rather than the narrative of the combat myth. Despite the differences, one should not forget that ancients and moderns share an interest in ultimate causes and both are intent on explaining the cosmos, the nature of evil, and the validity and the functions of basic institutions. Apocalyptic literature at bottom is not bizarre and opaque, but is rather a narrative way of reflecting about theology, philosophy, and history, and of inculcating a way of life.

**NOTES**


2. There have been several systems of reference to the Ugaritic texts, but *KTU* is now the standard text. A widely used English translation is that of H. L. Ginsberg in *ANET*. The equivalences of tablets of the Baal Cycle in *KTU* and *ANET* is as follows: *KTU* 1.1 = *ANET* VI AB iv; *KTU* 1.2 = *ANET* III AB, C, B, A; *KTU* 1.3 = *ANET* V AB; *KTU* 1.4 = *ANET* II AB; *KTU* 1.5 = *ANET* I AB; *KTU* 1.6 = *ANET* I AB.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

*Abbreviations*


Primary Texts
Mesopotamia
Lugal-e:

Anzu:

Enuma Elish:

Akkadian Prophecies, Text A:
ANET, 451–52.

Akkadian Prophecies, Uruk Prophecy:

Akkadian Prophecies, Dynastic Prophecy:

Akkadian Prophecies, Shulgi Prophecy, and Marduk Prophecy:

Canaan
Baal Cycle:


Secondary Studies
Kvanvig, Helge S. 1988. Roots of Apocalyptic: The Mesopotamian Background of the
Persian Apocalypticism

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Persian or Iranian apocalypticism presents a unique interest because of its striking similarities with the Judeo-Christian tradition, making at the same time a somewhat alien and unfamiliar impression that is due to a different cultural background. For almost two centuries the problem of Iranian influence on Jewish and Christian eschatology has attracted Western scholarship and also stirred up an ardent debate. Could it be that the entire worldview of Western apocalypticism up to the present time ultimately derives from ancient Iran? The end and renewal of the world, the apocalyptic time reckoning, the signs and tribulations of the end, the struggle of God and his Messiah against evil, personified in the figure of Satan and his demons, would thus be ideas having a foreign origin. The fact is that all these ideas are found in Iran and, what is more, they are essential and well integrated in the Zoroastrian religious worldview. Or—as the opposite party contends—does Jewish and Christian apocalypticism represent a natural and continuous development out of biblical prophecy?

The discussion is further complicated by the nature of the sources. The origins of Persian apocalypticism are not apparent, since the older texts, the Avesta, contain only isolated eschatological assertions or allusions to ideas that may be interpreted in an apocalyptic framework. In fact, no coherent apocalyptic tradition can be restored from the Avesta that has come down to
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