

# Netting Marduk?

## The Concept of Hidden Transcripts and the Transfer of Cultural Knowledge from Mesopotamian to Judean Texts

### 1. Introduction

A question that exercises the mind of many scholars of the ancient Near East, particularly of biblical scholars, is how to show that the particular text we are working on has been influenced, directly or not, by another text, whether from the same culture or another one.<sup>1</sup> It is generally thought that when looking for traditions rather than individual texts the evidence required can be relatively light, but when identifying specific texts rather than wider streams of tradition the demand for evidence is much stronger. Having said that, unless an ancient author explicitly quotes another text there can never be absolute proof. As historians and literary scholars we need to work with probabilities rather than certainties, which in turn means that our conclusions have to be stated carefully.

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<sup>1</sup> See most recently Ben-Dov, J., 'The Inadequacy of the Term 'Influence' in Biblical Studies', *3000 Years of Textual Transmission* (2014) [available at [https://www.academia.edu/7499569/The\\_Inadequacy\\_of\\_the\\_term\\_Influence\\_in\\_biblical\\_Studies](https://www.academia.edu/7499569/The_Inadequacy_of_the_term_Influence_in_biblical_Studies); last accessed 02 Sep 2014], and, with reference to tradition history, the debate between Joshua Berman and Bernard Levinson and Jeffrey Stackert (in order of appearance): Joshua Berman, 'CTH 133 and the Hittite Provenance of Deuteronomy 13', *JBL* 130 (2011): 25-44; Bernard M. Levinson and Jeffrey Stackert, 'Between the Covenant Code and Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty: Deuteronomy 13 and the Composition of Deuteronomy', *JAJ* 3 (2012): 123-40; Joshua Berman, 'Historicism and Its Limits: A Response to Bernard M. Levinson and Jeffrey Stackert', *JAJ* 4 (2013): 297-309; Bernard M. Levinson and Jeffrey Stackert, 'The Limitations of "Resonance": A Response to Joshua Berman on Historical and Comparative Method', *JAJ* 4 (2013): 310-33.

In the following I intend to add a voice of caution to the debate regarding Mesopotamian influence. Evidence of influence of the *Enūma eliš* has been detected with a surprising regularity in recent literature.<sup>2</sup> More specifically, I will address the question whether YHWH's using a net is necessarily and mainly a reference to Marduk's combat with Tiāmat seeking to undermine the *Enūma eliš*' message that Marduk rules supreme. Instead, I will show that this literary motive is used much more widely and that with the evidence available to us it is more likely that it is a reference to the wider Combat Myth tradition.<sup>3</sup> As interlocutors I have chose three essays by C. L. Crouch and Casey Strine because their work is recent and because they present the argument with a high degree of sophistication.<sup>4</sup>

As is well known, Malul established the following criteria for showing direct influence of one text on another: i) strong similarities between the texts in question, ii) a relatively convincing historical scenario for the exchange to occur, and iii) the relative exclusiveness of phrases and ideas to the texts in question – otherwise it becomes logically difficult to decide which of the many texts is the source, and appeal to a wider tradition becomes stronger.<sup>5</sup>

While there are important difference between Joshua Berman's case regarding Deuteronomy 13 and CTH 133 and the case to be addressed here, both are searches for a specific ancient Near Eastern text which has influenced a biblical text. In their discussion of Berman's suggestion to connect Deuteronomy to Hittite treaties and the connected suggestion to redate Deuteronomy from the seventh century to a much earlier time, Bernard Levinson and Jeffrey

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<sup>2</sup> The text of the *Enūma eliš* is now available in two editions, W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths* (MC 16; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013) and Thomas R. Kämmerer and Kai A. Metzler, *Das babylonische Weltschöpfungsepos Enūma eliš* (AOAT 375; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2012). On a literary interpretation of the myth see most recently also the excellent study by Gabriel Gösta, *enūma eliš – Weg zu einer globalen Weltordnung: Pragmatik, Struktur und Semantik des babylonischen "Lieds auf Marduk"* (ORA 12; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> See also the sceptical tone of many of the essays in J. Scurlock and R. H. Beal, eds. *Creation and Chaos: A Reconsideration of Hermann Gunkel's Chaokampf Hypothesis* (Winona Lake, 2013) regarding the nature of Tiāmat's and Marduk's combat in the *Enūma eliš*.

<sup>4</sup> C. L. Crouch and Casey A. Strine, 'YHWH's Battle against Chaos in Ezekiel: The Transformation of Judahite Mythology for a New Situation', *JBL* 132 (2013): 883-903; C. L. Crouch, 'Ezekiel's Oracles against the Nations in Light of a Royal Ideology of Warfare', *JBL* 130 (2011): 473-92; Casey A. Strine, 'Chaokampf against Empire: YHWH's Battle against Gog (Ezek 38-39) as Resistance Literature', in *Divination, Politics and Ancient Near Eastern Empires* (ed. A. Lenzi and J. Stökl; ANEM 7; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014), 87-108. See also Casey A. Strine, *Sworn Enemies: The Divine Oath, the Book of Ezekiel, and the Polemics of Exile* (BZAW 436; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013), 230-43 where Strine discusses Ezek 17.

<sup>5</sup> Meir Malul, *The Comparative Method in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical Legal Studies* (AOAT 227; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1990).

Stackert review the literature on what constitutes evidence for such influence of a specific ancient Near Eastern text on a biblical text.<sup>6</sup> They rehearse Malul's arguments that not only do we have to show that any given text is suitably similar but also that there needs to be a given scenario of contact between the two texts.<sup>7</sup> According to Malul no such scenario would have to be shown with absolute certainty. For the case under discussion the similarities between the literary images for Marduk's combat with Tīāmat and Yhwh's use of a net are sufficiently clear to indicate that there is some similarity. It is also quite likely that the author / authors of the book of Ezekiel would have at least heard a version of the *Enūma eliš* at some point during their time in Babylon.

Berman, Stackert and Levinson agree regarding the 'need to identify shared elements that are highly distinctive'.<sup>8</sup> This criterion goes back to Malul who puts considerable weight on stressing the importance of identifying a solid basis not just for comparison but also for influence. Below I will argue that it is precisely this criterion which cannot easily be fulfilled by comparing the use of nets as weapons in Ezekiel and the *Enūma eliš* because of the much wider stream of tradition underlying the ancient Near Eastern Combat Myth tradition and particularly the use of a net.

As Caroline Waerzeggers has recently shown, it is difficult to find a social location for the transmission of texts from Mesopotamia to Judean authors, particularly with regard to texts access to which was restricted to specialists.<sup>9</sup> According to the data that she has processed we do not know of any Judean in a Mesopotamian city who was in direct contact with anyone either employed at a temple or outside but with sufficient training to have access to 'secret' texts. While it is logically impossible to prove a negative – a single text in which a Judean and someone with access to those texts are mentioned together – it appears that it is more likely that Babylonian scribes with access to 'secret' texts kept their knowledge within their guild.

Underlying their work is Stefan Maul's observation that many Neo-Assyrian royal

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<sup>6</sup> Levinson and Stackert, 'Limitations of "Resonance"', 311-20.

<sup>7</sup> Malul, *Comparative Method*.

<sup>8</sup> Berman, 'CTH 133', 27 cited in Levinson and Stackert, 'Limitations of "Resonance"', 313.

<sup>9</sup> Caroline Waerzeggers, 'Locating Contact in the Babylonian Exile: Some Reflections on Tracing Judean-Babylonian Encounters in Cuneiform Texts', in *Encounters by the Rivers of Babylon: Scholarly Conversations between Jews, Iranians and Babylonians in Antiquity* (ed. U. Gabbay and S. Secunda; TSAJ 160; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 131-46. As is well known, many Mesopotamian texts were not in wider circulation not only because not many people could have read the more complicated ones, but also because they were considered to be 'secret'.

inscriptions make reference to the Combat Myth tradition in order to aggrandise the ruler.<sup>10</sup> Crouch reads references to nets and water in Ezekiel's famous oracle against Tyre (Ezek 32) as references to an originally Western Semitic Combat Myth, and Strine reads the text as a 'hidden transcript' subverting the *Enūma eliš*.<sup>11</sup> The term 'hidden transcript' goes back to James Scott's *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, the result of Scott's research on (post)-colonial societies and the interaction of subordinates and powerholders in these societies and more generally.<sup>12</sup>

After a short introduction to Scott's work I will review some of the Mesopotamian evidence for nets (and other divine weapons) and their use in Combat Myths. In particular I will argue that reliance to Scott's work has led to an unwelcome renaissance of a form of tradition history in which references to a small part of a tradition are read as an indication that a particular text was known in the same form as it is available to us today.

## 2. James Scott's *Hidden Transcripts*

In his 1990 work, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, James Scott suggested reading the way that subaltern individuals and cultures interact with those in dominant positions as an expression of the subaltern's constant resistance to the dominant power. In order to illustrate and capture the idea behind his book, Scott quotes an Ethiopic proverb: 'When the great lord passes the wise peasant bows deeply and silently farts'.<sup>13</sup>

Scott's work is based on ethnographic work in a Malay village for which he initially used a class-based analysis.<sup>14</sup> From the perspective of the 21st century his conclusion that power relations have an immediate impact on discourse appear hardly revolutionary: among themselves the poor speak differently to when they speak to those who have power over them. Much of his study is

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<sup>10</sup> Stefan M. Maul, 'Der assyrische König – Hüter der Weltordnung', in *Priests and Officials in the Ancient Near East: Papers of the Second Colloquium on the Ancient Near East - The City and its Life: Held at the Middle Eastern Culture Center in Japan (Mitaka, Tokyo), March 22-24 1996* (ed. K. Watanabe; Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1999), 201-14; Stefan M. Maul, "'Wenn der Held (zum Kampfe) auszieht...': Ein Ninurta-Eršemma', *Or* 60 (1991): 312-34.

<sup>11</sup> Strine, 'Chaoskampf against Empire'.

<sup>12</sup> James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New York / London: Yale University Press, 1990).

<sup>13</sup> Scott, *Domination*, v.

<sup>14</sup> James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), especially pp. 284-289.

concerned with relationships between the powerful and those in serfdom and slavery within a society, but he also includes sections on how this kind of relationship pans out between colonial powers and empires on the one hand and on the other societies which are subsumed in the larger powers. The common ground between these cases is that those with power and those with much less power interact with each other.

Scott's argues that instead of openly contesting the claims of the powerful, slaves, servants and other subalterns create social spaces behind the scenes 'in which offstage dissent to the official transcript of power relations may be voiced'.<sup>15</sup> The hidden transcripts of the subaltern can be found 'expressed openly – albeit in disguised form'.<sup>16</sup> According to Scott all manner of expressions such as folktales, songs and jokes may contain criticism of the powerholders which is hidden behind anonymity or by having an obviously harmless reading and a 'hidden' critical interpretation.<sup>17</sup> The harmless reading is the performance of deference to the powerholder – the smile of the serf to the landowner who has the power to execute him. According to Scott, the subaltern is using this ritualised performance of deference to have time to read the real intentions behind the powerholder's actions, particularly where they may be potentially dangerous for the subaltern.<sup>18</sup> The powerholder, conversely, performs an equally ritualised role of mastery while trying to read whether the subaltern is planning something that might be dangerous to them. The public transcript of the situation is usually closer to the desires of the powerholder, but is never entirely 'written' by them.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Scott, *Domination*, xi.

<sup>16</sup> Scott, *Domination*, xi-xii.

<sup>17</sup> This is a major departure from a Gramscian reading of these power-relations in which the subaltern are understood to be complicit in the running of the current hegemony – until it self-destructs. What Scott, in my view, does not take enough on board is the fact that by permitting the subaltern classes to have social sites (of resistance), the powerholders effectively provide them with a safety-valve to let off steam where resistance is not only found, but also has space to dissipate, which, in turn, makes it more likely that the powerful stay in power. But see Scott, *Domination*, 184-92.

<sup>18</sup> Scott, *Domination*, 3-4. On the ritualised nature of the interaction, see pages 45-107. In explaining the interaction between the powerful and the subaltern, Scott draws on reactance theory as developed by social psychologists. This theory suggests that the heavier the threat of violence and coercion the less likely the subject is to change their belief-system, even though they may (unwillingly) comply with the demands made of them. Indeed, it might not be bad if some Western politicians read through Scott's book before deciding how to interact with other cultures.

<sup>19</sup> This means that, technically speaking, there are always a public transcript and at least two hidden transcripts: the hidden transcript of the powerless and the hidden transcript of the powerholder.

Scott's way of reading the texts produced by such encounters relies on having access to the public transcript and to at least one of the hidden transcripts: 'Without a privileged peek backstage or a rupture in the performance we have no way of calling into question the status of what might be a convincing but feigned performance.'<sup>20</sup> In other words, Scott is arguing that the public transcript functions as a kind of control to the interpretation of the hidden transcript. Thus, a public transcript clarifies 'its' hidden transcript but only together can they give a fuller account of events and interpretations of the events by those who have experienced a certain situation.

The section that follows turns to the way that hidden transcripts operate. According to Scott's understanding of the interaction between the subaltern and the powerholders, hidden transcripts are a way for either group to safely express their views uninhibited by social control and the public transcript that it produces. But any hidden transcript 'always remains a substitute for an act of assertion directly in the face of power'.<sup>21</sup> Subaltern hidden transcripts are, by definition, negations of the extent of the powerholders' control. They are written by the subordinates in social spaces that the subordinates have won through resistance from the powerholders. Scott goes on to analyse the techniques used to produce hidden transcripts, most of which rely on their polysemic nature allowing for 'harmless' interpretations as well as subversive ones.<sup>22</sup> However, without some form of a 'control' all we have is a polysemic text.

One of the the most famous, and maybe most obvious texts that have been read as hidden transcripts or hidden polemics is the naming of the sun and the moon as the 'two great lights' in Genesis 1. Many scholars interpret this text as denying the sun and moon gods Šamaš and Yariḫu their astral hypostases and their very existence; instead, the sun and moon are treated as natural phenomena created by the biblical God.<sup>23</sup> In the context of the ancient Near East referring to the

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<sup>20</sup> Scott, *Domination*, 4.

<sup>21</sup> Scott, *Domination*, 114-15.

<sup>22</sup> Scott, *Domination*, 136-82. In Biblical Studies the term often used to describe this kind of polysemic attitude is hidden polemic., see, e.g., Dalit Rom-Shiloni, 'When an Explicit Polemic Initiates a Hidden One: Jacob's Aramaean Identity', in *Words, Ideas, Worlds: Biblical Essays in Honour of Yairah Amit* (ed. A. Brenner and F. H. Polak; Hebrew Bible Monographs 40; Amsterdam Studies in the Bible and Religion 5; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012), 206-35; Yaira Amit, *Hidden Polemics in Biblical Narrative* (BibIntSer 25; Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2000).

<sup>23</sup> See, e.g., Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* (trans. John J. Scullion; A Continental Commentary London: SPCK, 1984), 126-31 (ET of Westermann, *Genesis I [1-11]* [3 vols; BKAT 1/1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1974]). Foundational for this work is, of course, Hermann Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit: Eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung über Gen 1 und Ap Joh 12* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1895). For further details see also Eckart Frahm, 'Counter-texts, Commentaries, and Adaptations: Politically Motivated Responses to the

sun and moon as 'big lights' would likely have been understood as a deliberate action by the author of the text to demote the two deities.

Such a control is rather more elusive in the context of Ezekiel 32. As I will argue in the following, even if we see the reference to the net as a reference to the Combat Myth tradition, we cannot deduce that the Marduk in the *Enūma eliš* was intended to be the target. It is, of course, possible that this is the case, but due to the pervasiveness of the Combat Myth tradition and its many occurrences it seems to me more likely that the allusion is less specific than has been claimed.

From 587 BCE onward Judeans<sup>24</sup> were not only practically under the control of outside powers as they had been previously as vassals of first the Neo-Assyrian and later the Neo-Babylonian empire, but also integrated into the Neo-Babylonian and Persian empires. As vassals but particularly as an integrated part of the empire, Judeans were firmly in the situation of subordinates with regard to their imperial overlords. This is illustrated well by the plethora of work on forced migration and on (post-)colonialism in the Bible in general and in Second Temple texts in particular.<sup>25</sup>

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Babylonian Epic of Creation in Mesopotamia, the Biblical World, and Elsewhere', in *Conflict, Peace and Religion in the Ancient Near East* (ed. A. Tsukimoto; Orient 45; Tokyo: Society for Near Eastern Studies in Japan, 2010), 3-33, here 14-17; Eckart Frahm, 'Creation and the Divine Spirit in Babel and Bible: Reflections on *mummu* in *Enūma eliš* I 4 and *rūaḥ* in Genesis 1:2', in *Literature as Politics, Politics as Literature: Essays on the Ancient Near East in Honor of Peter Machinist* (ed. D. S. Vanderhooft and A. Winitzer; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 97-116.

<sup>24</sup> The translation of יהודה as 'Judean' here is not to be understood as excluding the translation 'Jew'. It merely follows the formation of the Hebrew and Aramaic word as a gentilic adjective derived from the geographical name יהודה – Judah / Yehud. For a debate on the translation of the term Ἰουδαίος see the forum on the *Marginalia Review of Books*: <http://marginalia.lareviewofbooks.org/jew-judean-forum/> [last accessed 5 Sept. 2014].

<sup>25</sup> See, e.g., Emanuel Pfoh, *The Emergence of Israel in Ancient Palestine: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (Copenhagen international Seminar London: Equinox, 2009); J. J. Ahn and J. A. Middlemas, eds. *By the Irrigation Canals of Babylon: Approaches to the Study of the Exile* (LHBOTS 526; New York / London: T & T Clark, 2012); Jeremiah W. Cataldo, *Breaking Monotheism: Yehud and the Material Formation of Monotheistic Identity* (LHBOTS 565; New York / London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2012); John J. Ahn, *Exile as Forced Migration: A Sociological, Literary, and Theological Approach to the Displacement and Resettlement of the Southern Kingdom of Judah* (BZAW 417; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011); Jon L. Berquist, 'Constructions of Identity in Postcolonial Yehud', in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period* (ed. Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 53-66; Katherine Southwood, *Ethnicity and the Mixed Marriage Crisis in Ezra 9-10* (OTM; Oxford: OUP, 2010); T. M. Lemos, '"They Have Become Women": Judean Diaspora and Postcolonial Theories of Gender and Migration', in *Social Theory and the Study of Israelite Religion: Essays in Retrospect and Prospect* (ed. S. M. Olyan; Society of Biblical Literature

According to Scott's theory, ancient Judeans would have had to find protected spaces to which their imperial overlords could not access. Considering that after their punitive activities neither the Babylonians nor the Persians likely operated a system of supervision and spying even remotely akin to that of the former German Democratic Republic, it must have been relatively easy to find such (social and geographical) spaces. In addition to the physical space, questions of language and dialect matter as well. Scott cites studies of Northern English dialect use in which the change of dialect from a working class dialect to a 'standard' dialect can be perceived as a betrayal of the working class environment. Judeans could always communicate in Judean Hebrew – and if the texts in the Hebrew Bible are at least partially the result of such activity, this process seems to have worked.

It is quite likely that the book of Ezekiel contains hidden transcripts in reaction to the Babylonian and Persian overlords. The question, then, changes from being one of whether they are there to the question whether we are able to identify them with any confidence.<sup>26</sup> That means we need to ask how much relevant public transcript we have access to. The Persians appear not to have been overly concerned with the Judeans – to them, no doubt a small group of serfs – to warrant their explicit inclusion in a historical narrative. It is well known that apart from royal inscriptions no royal Babylonian archive is known today, which means that apart from the Babylonian Chronicle covering Nebuchadnezzar's early years, there is no further textual evidence referring to Judah in this time period.<sup>27</sup>

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Resources for Biblical Study 71; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 81-109.

<sup>26</sup> In respect of other Judeans the authors of texts such as Ezekiel were likely in a position of authority and perhaps even physical power. This means that the writings they produced are not merely the hidden transcripts of the powerless with regard to the Persians, but with regard to the inner-Judean discourse they produced either the hidden transcript of the powerholders or the public transcript. Scott's helpful analysis of the overall picture does not appear to address questions of this level of complexity.

<sup>27</sup> ABC 5. For a convenient English translation see Jean-Jacques Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles* (ed. B. R. Foster; SBLWAW 19; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004). There are, of course, a few short inscriptions and seals which illuminate the situation, but they are neither attempts by the Persians to write the history of Yehud, nor the result of Judean attempts to write their own history either. Such attempts are essentially 'limited' to the material in the Hebrew Bible.

### 3. Catching a Transcript with a Net

In a number of recent publications Carly Crouch and Casey Strine have interpreted the image of YHWH wielding a net as a weapon in battle as a veiled reference to Marduk's defeat of Tīamat as told in *Enūma eliš*, tablet 4 and therefore as propaganda against Babylon's supreme deity.<sup>28</sup> According to Crouch and Strine, the message of the hidden transcript is that YHWH is better at defeating Chaos than Marduk (and that therefore allegiance to him promises more success).<sup>29</sup> The following argument will to a considerable degree be negative, presenting the evidence that a net as a weapon is not specific enough to show that the referent is Marduk rather than any other god who is related to the Combat Myth. The result, however, can also be understood in a positive way, fine-tuning Crouch's and Strine's conclusions: the net as Yhwh's weapon should be understood as a reference to the wider Combat Myth tradition.<sup>30</sup> This does not mean that Jewish *literati* of the Second Temple period could not have read Ezekiel and the *Enūma eliš* together as a Kristevan intertext, but that is a question of reader response rather than likely authorial intent.<sup>31</sup> In the following we will first go through the Akkadian evidence for nets and then address Crouchs' and Strine's arguments in favour of interpreting Yhwh's net as an allusion to *Enūma eliš*.

#### 3.1 Mesopotamian Nets

Akkadian has a great variety of terms which are translated as 'net' into English. Among them are *birru*, *pūgu*, *saparru*, *šētu*, *šuškallu*.<sup>32</sup> Most of these refer to various forms of nets for hunting, for subdividing rooms and as 'carrier bags'. For our purposes in this essay the following three are

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<sup>28</sup> See n.2 above.

<sup>29</sup> For references to Crouch's and Strine's work see nt. 4 above.

<sup>30</sup> For an overview of Mesopotamian Combat scenarios in connection to Creation accounts see Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths*, 202-47.

<sup>31</sup> On the concept of these *literati* see Ehud Ben Zvi, 'Reading and Constructing Utopias: Utopia/s and/in the Collection of Authoritative Texts/Textual Readings of Late Persian Period Yehud', *Studies in Religion = Sciences religieuses* 42 (2013): 1-14; Ehud Ben Zvi, 'The Memory of Abraham in Late Persian / Early Hellenistic Yehud / Judah', in *The Reception and Remembrance of Abraham* (ed. P. Carstens and N.-P. Lemche; Piscataway: Gorgias, 2011), 13-60. Also see Irmtraud Fischer, 'Von der Vorgeschichte zur Nachgeschichte: Schriftauslegung in der Schrift – Intertextualität – Rezeption', *ZAW* 125 (2013): 143-60.

<sup>32</sup> Simo Parpola and Robert M. Whiting, eds., *Assyrian – English – Assyrian Dictionary* (Helsinki, 2007), 227. Thomas R. Kämmerer and Dirk Schwiderski, *Deutsch-Akkadisches Wörterbuch* (AOAT 255; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1998), 268 list the following: *abartu*, *alluḥappu*, *amazillu*, *bunzerru*, *kutum libbi*, *mišertu*, *musahḥiptu*, *mutērtu*, *muttabiltu*, *nuballu*, *pasūtu*, *pūgu*, *salītu*, *samahḥu*, *sannu*, *sapāru*, *šapargallu*, *šēšū*, *šētu*, *šuškallu*.

relevant: *saparru A*, *šuškallu* and *šētu*.<sup>33</sup>

According to the CAD *šētu* normally refers to a net for hunting birds and other animals. Unsurprisingly, it can also be used metaphorically to indicate a plan or a tactic for ensnaring an enemy, or in reference to sorcery. Thus, in *Erra* iv 18-19 Erra is described as having dealt with the Babylonians as follows: 'You ensnared them in a net and caught and destroyed them, warrior Erra.' Similarly, in ARM 26 197 the *qammatum* of Dagan of Terqa announces to Zimri-Lim of Mari that Dagan of Terqa is preparing a net with which to catch the king of Ešnunna.<sup>34</sup> According to *Etana* II, Šamaš is equipped with a *šētu* by which the eagle and the snake swear an oath, and which is dangerous to the eagle. In *Erra* III: 33 the eponymous anti-hero is said to have used a net, just like that which was used to kill 'wicked Anzu'.<sup>35</sup> The version of the *Myth of Anzu* that has survived features Ninurta disposing of him, but he does not use a net to do so, so that it is not clear whether *Erra* knows of a different version of the *Myth of Anzu* or is intentionally referring to two texts at the same time.

The Akkadian word *šuškallu*, itself a Sumerian loan, refers to nets that are weapons. Like the *šētu* it is used by Šamaš and by other gods. The Sumerian myth *Lugale* describes Ninurta as the 'battle-net' (III: 32; šú.uš.kal mē = *šuškal tāhāzi*), and in KAR 32: 29 Šamaš is praised 'O Šamaš, your net catches the evil ones'. This kind of praise is not restricted to deities, as in his famous prism Tiglath-Pileser I (ca. 1114-1076) describes himself as the 'strong king, net for the insubmissive, overwheeler in battle with criminals'.<sup>36</sup> Like *šētu*, *šuškallu* is also used to express the actions of sorcerers. Somewhat unsurprisingly, *šētu* and *šuškallu* can stand in parallel (e.g. *Ištar and Dumuzi* 131: 70).<sup>37</sup>

The third and last term for which I will present evidence here is *saparru*. It is the word chosen in *Enūma eliš* IV 41 to express the weapon that Marduk fashions in order to entrap Tiamat's

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<sup>33</sup> For the following see also Daniel Bodi, *The Book of Ezekiel and the Poem of Erra* (OBO 104; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 162-82.

<sup>34</sup> In ARM 26 209: 9-10 an *āpilum* of Dagan announces an oracle against Babylon that Dagan will gather it into a 'net and dagger' (*ana pūgim u šakārim upaḥḥarka*).

<sup>35</sup> For an evocative interpretation of *Erra* as the ancient equivalent to Apocalypse Now, see A. R. George, 'The Poem of Erra and Ishum: A Babylonian Poet's View of War', in *Warfare and Poetry in the Middle East* (ed. H. Kennedy; London: I. B. Tauris, 2013), 39-71.

<sup>36</sup> RIM A.0.87.1 iii 32-34, A. Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC. I (1114-859 BC)* (RIMA 3/1; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 18. Grayson translates *šuškallu* as 'snare'. For easier flow I have opted for net here.

<sup>37</sup> Walter Farber, *Beschwörungsrituale an Ištar und Dumuzi: Ātī Ištar ša harmaša Dumuzi* (Veröffentlichungen der Orientalischen Kommission 30; Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1977), 131.

entrails.<sup>38</sup> In an attempt to distinguish *saparru* from *šētu* and *šuškallu*, CAD suggests the translation ‘throwing net’, but it is relatively clear that we are dealing with another term for a net used in combat and hunting alike. What the precise difference is between *šētu* and *saparru* is not immediately obvious, but there are many options what the differences between the objects described by the individual words could be, for example, shape, different mesh size, material and dialect. The term is attested in several prayers and hymns which are addressed to Marduk, in which it usually refers not to Marduk’s weaponry but to the deceitful actions of others with which they try to entrap the person uttering the prayer.<sup>39</sup>

Use of the *saparru* is by no means limited to Marduk, so that a reference to a *saparru* would automatically raise his spectre in all contexts. Other gods have nets as their epithet – thus both Nisaba and Ninurta are described as ‘the net of the gods’ (*sapār ilī*), and the term is famously also used for human kings. In one of Assurbanipal’s inscriptions we find the following: ‘the net (var. onslaught) of the great gods, my lords, which cannot be escaped, ensnared them.’<sup>40</sup> Tiglath-Pileser III boasts how he ‘overwhelmed the lands of Bīt-Kapsi, Bīt-Sangi and Bīt-Urzakki and the tribe of Puqudu like a net (*saparru*).’<sup>41</sup> Esarhaddon uses the term to refer to his own achievements in hunting down his enemies: ‘Neither he who made the sea his fortress nor he who made the mountain his stronghold escaped my net (or) succeeded in escaping.’<sup>42</sup> Šamši-Adad V spreads his

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<sup>38</sup> Kämmerer and Metzler, *Das babylonische Welterschöpfungsepos Enūma eliš*, 206; Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths*, 89. With characteristic stringency and logic, Lambert regards *qerbiš* as referring to the inside of Tiāmat, rather than the inside of the net. The reason for this lies in *qerbiš* in line 48 which, according to Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths*, 475 cannot be translated as ‘within it/them’ (referring to the seven winds). He therefore translates line 41 as ‘He made a net to enmesh the entrails of Tiāmat’. Kämmerer and Metzler, *Das babylonische Welterschöpfungsepos Enūma eliš*, 206, 208 do not share Lambert’s observation and both times have *qerbiš* refer to the inside of the weapon used. According to Philippe Talon, *The Standard Babylonian Creation Myth Enūma Eliš* (SAACT 4; Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2005), 121 *saparru* is also attested in IV 44, IV 95, V 64, V 71 and VI 83.

<sup>39</sup> E.g. *Nabû-šuma-ukīn’s uninnu*-prayer to Marduk, line 30, see Takayoshi Oshima, *Babylonian Prayers to Marduk* (ORA 7; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 316-27.

<sup>40</sup> Prism A iv 61-62: *sapar ilī rabūti bēlēya ša la napašudi išḫupšunūti*, see Rykle Borger, *Beiträge zum Inschriftenwerk Assurbanipals: Die Prismenklassen A, B, C = K, D, E, F, G, H, J und T sowie andere Inschriften* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1996), 44, 235.

<sup>41</sup> For the first three see RINAP 1. 7: 6-7, For Puqudu see RINAP 1.47: 13-15, Hayim Tadmor and Shigeo Yamada, *The Royal Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III (744-727 BC) and Shalmaneser V (726-722 BC), Kings of Assyria* (RINAP 1; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 31, 118-119.

<sup>42</sup> RINAP 4.1: v 17-19, Erle Leichty, *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria (680-669 BC)* (RINAP 4; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 22.

net over all of the land of Nairi.<sup>43</sup> Finally, like the other two terms *saparru* is also used in magical and medicinal contexts. Thus in a Neo-Babylonian commentary we read that: ‘the drawing that he makes in front of the bed is a net, it ensnares all evil’.<sup>44</sup>

Building on Lambert’s analysis of Marduk in the *Enūma eliš* as a ‘Ninurta redivivus’ when he battles chaos on behalf of the other gods, Stefan Maul suggested that the Assyrian kings understood their battles with earthly enemies as real-life ‘Reaktualisierungen des mythischen Kampfes des Helden Ninurta und sich selbst als dessen irdisches und gegenwärtiges Abbild’.<sup>45</sup> According to Maul the use of flood imagery to describe the destruction wrought by Assyrian kings on foreign lands illustrates this well. Thus, the expression *abūb(ān)iš sapānu* is used in royal inscriptions, an expression which otherwise is limited to Ninurta’s actions, and to the actions of gods who acquired aspects of Ninurta character.<sup>46</sup> The flood as a weapon can point at least to

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<sup>43</sup> RIMA 3/2 A.O.103.1:i 53b-16a, A. Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC: II (858-745 BC)* (RIMA 3/II; Toronto/London: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 183-84.

<sup>44</sup> ZA 6 242: Sp. 13i: 18, J. Epping and Johann N. Strassmaier, ‘Neue babylonische Planeten-Tafeln III’, ZA 6 (1891): 217-44. Other magico-medicinal uses are attested, e.g. in STT 168: 15-16, O. R. Gurney and P. Hulin, *The Sultantepe Tablets II* (2 vols; Occasional Publications of the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara 3, 7; London: British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara, 1964). In Iraq 31 87, Wolfram von Soden, ‘Zur Wiederherstellung der Marduk-Gebete BMS 11 und 12’, Iraq 31 (1969): 82-89, the illness is keeping the person as if in a net.

<sup>45</sup> W. G. Lambert, ‘Ninurta Mythology in the Babylonian Epic of Creation’, in *Keilschriftliche Literaturen: Ausgewählte Vorträge der XXXII. Rencontre Internationale; Münster, 8.-12.7. 1985* (ed. K. Hecker and W. Sommerfeld; Berliner Beiträge zum Vorderen Orient 6; Berlin: Reimer, 1986), 55-60. For the quote see Maul, ‘Der assyrische König – Hüter der Weltordnung’, 329; see also Maul, ‘Wenn der Held’. On the related issues see now also Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths*, 202-47. Karen Sonik urges some caution regarding Lambert’s suggestion because, according to her, the equation of Marduk with Ninurta would suggest the equation of Tiāmat and Anzû, which she contests, see Karen Sonik, ‘From Hesiod’s Abyss to Ovid’s *rudis indigestaque moles*: Chaos and Cosmos in the Babylonian “Epic of Creation”’, in *Creation and Chaos: A Reconsideration of Hermann Gunkel’s Chaoskampf Hypothesis* (ed. J. Scurlock and R. H. Beal; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 1-25.

<sup>46</sup> This is true for Shalmaneser III, Šamši-Adad V, Tiglath-Pileser III, Sargon II and Sennacherib. For Shalmaneser II see RIMA 3/2 A.O.102.1: 53’-64’a; A.O.102.2:i 11-12a; 1 41b-51a; 2 47b-56a; ii 86b-89a; RIMA 3/2 A.O.102.4: l.e. 1-9; RIMA 3/2 A.O.102.6:i 24-27; i 42-48; i 57-ii 2; iv 26-36; RIMA 3/2 A.O.102.8:20-24a; 24b-40; 1’-5’a; RIMA 3/2 A.O.102.10:i 10-18 (referring to Tukulti-Ninurta II); RIMA 3/2 A.O.102.12:9-20; RIMA 3/2 A.O.102.14:15-21; 156b-159a; RIMA 3/2 A.O.102.16:i-5 (referring to Tukulti-Ninurta II); 286’b-290’; RIMA 3/2 A.O.102.28:29-34a; RIMA 3/2 A.O.102.29:34b-39a; RIMA 3/2 A.O.102.31:9b-17a; RIMA 3/2 A.O.102.32:4b-9a; RIMA 3/2 A.O.102.33:6b-13; RIMA 3/2 A.O.102.38:i’-4’a, Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC: II (858-745 BC)*, 9-10, 13, 16, 20, 23-24, 26, 34-35, 41, 44-45, 49, 51, 59-60, 64, 69, 74, 82, 104, 106, 109-111, 115. For Šamši-Adad V the only text is RIMA 3/2 A.O.104.1:9b-27, Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC: II (858-745 BC)*, 234. For Tiglath-Pileser III the inscriptions are: RINAP 1.47: 1-4, 22-23, 51: 1-4, 52: 1-4, Tadmor and Yamada, *The Royal Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III (744-727 BC) and Shalmaneser V (726-722 BC)*,

Ninurta and Marduk and the net can point to a large number of different Mesopotamian deities. This indicates that their joint occurrence should be read as an allusion to the wider Combat Myth tradition rather than only to specifically the *Enūma eliš*.

Following Maul, Carly Crouch has suggested regarding Tiglath-Pileser III and Sargon II in that light as well.<sup>47</sup> Tiglath-Pileser III refers to himself as a *saparru*<sup>48</sup> and Sargon makes use of

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*Kings of Assyria*, 116-117, 119, 135-136, 138. RINAP 1.20: 14-16, RINAP 1.39: 8-11, RINAP 1.47: 18-19, 24-25 have a related expression, DU6 *abūbi uabbit*, Tadmor and Yamada, *The Royal Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III (744-727 BC) and Shalmaneser V (726-722 BC)*, *Kings of Assyria*, 59, 97, 119-120. Sargon II uses the image in lines 288-289 (=ARAB 2.32) of his annals and line 134 (=ARAB 2.68) of the *Prunkinschrift* from where the expression is restored also in lines 168-169 (ARAB 2.39) of the annals, see Andreas Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II. aus Khorsabad* (Göttingen: Cuvillier, 1994), 148-146, 329-330 (lines 288-289), 168-169, 335 (lines 372-373), 229, 351 (line 134 in the *Prunkinschrift*); Daniel David Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia: Historical Records of Assyria from Sargon to the End* (ARAB 2; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1927), 16, 20; Hugo Winckler, *Die Keilschrifttexte Sargons: Nach den Papierabklatschen und Originalen: Band I. Historisch-sachliche Einleitung, Umschrift und Übersetzung, Wörterverzeichnis* (Leipzig: Eduard Pfeiffer, 1889), 46-47, 58-59, 123. In addition *abūbi uabbit* is attested in in Sargon's letter to Aššur, TCL 3 col i: 90 (=ARAB 2.151), II: 185 (=ARAB 2.158), Walter Mayer, 'Sargons Feldzug gegen Urartu – 714 v. Chr.', *MDOG* 115 (1983): 65-132, in his Cyprus Stele (ARAB 2.183; Florence Malbran-Labat, 'Inscription assyrienne', in *Kition dans les textes* (ed. Marguerite Yon; Publications de la Mission Archéologique Française de Kition-Bamboula 5; Paris: Editions Recherches sur les civilisations, 2004), 345-54 was unavailable to me), the Bavian inscription (ARAB 2.341) and the Nebi Yunis inscription (ARAB 2.348). It is hoped that through Grant Frame's publication of Sargon II's inscriptions in the RINAP series these references will become more widely available and that further references will come to light. For Sennacherib the inscriptions are: RINAP 3/1.34: 6b-11, A. Kirk Grayson and Jamie Novotny, *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704-681 BC)* (2 vols; RINAP 3/1-2; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 221. RINAP 3.1.1: 25 has *allabib abūbiš*, Grayson and Novotny, *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704-681 BC)*, 34, RINAP 3.1.19 ii: 13' DU6 *abūbi ušēme*, Grayson and Novotny, *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704-681 BC)*, 163, RINAP 3.1.26 i: 14'-17' has DU6 *abūbi ušbi'*, Grayson and Novotny, *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704-681 BC)*, 210, RINAP 3.1.34: 16-17 DU6 *abūbi uabbit*, Grayson and Novotny, *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704-681 BC)*, 222. Sennacherib's account of his destruction of Babylon also contains flood imagery, but there he claims that his destruction of Babylon exceeded in totality that brought on by the deluge, RINAP 3.1.25 vi: 7'-16', Grayson and Novotny, *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704-681 BC)*, 205-06. In the case of Esarhaddon things are not quite as clear. He does describe himself as the king whose passage is like the flood (LUGAL *ša tallaktašu abūbumma*), RINAP 4.94 rev. 7-14, Leichty, *Esarhaddon*, 184, but this allusion is one step further removed. Flood imagery also occurs in several other of Sennacherib's inscriptions, but usually to describe Marduk's anger and causing the Arah̄tu to swell over and flood the land. See RINAP 4.104 i 34 – ii 9a, 104 i 37 – ii 22, 114 i 19 – ii 11, 116: 13'-17', Leichty, *Esarhaddon*, 196, 203, 236 and 245.

<sup>47</sup> C. L. Crouch, *War and Ethics in the Ancient Near East: Military Violence in Light of Cosmology and History* (BZAW 407; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009).

<sup>48</sup> RINAP 1.7: 6-7, 47: 13-15, see above nt 46.

*ḥuḥāriš* / *ḥuḥāru*, a generic term for a bird-trap, and thus also for nets.<sup>49</sup> Crouch attaches importance to the fact that *ḥuḥāru* is a weapon used by Šamaš.<sup>50</sup> As we have seen, Šamaš also uses other weapons among them the *saparru*. In a recent article Crouch offers the Ištar temple inscription from Assur as another example.<sup>51</sup> In this text, Ištar uses the great storm and a net (*saparru*) as elements from the Combat Myth tradition; it is a much more convincing example for a ‘rewritten’ *Enūma eliš*. As Eckart Frahm has pointed out, Neo-Assyrian theologians were keenly involved in adapting Babylonian theological traditions for their context. Thus, there is an Assyrian version of the *Enūma eliš* in which Aššur replaces Marduk.<sup>52</sup>

Rather than seeing this as Sargon, Tiglath Pileser III – and Ištar herself – claiming Marduk’s authority for themselves, I think all these texts allude to – and are themselves part of – the wider Combat Myth tradition rather than specifically the *Enūma eliš*. Crouch, however, reads all the references to flood and to net, whether on their own or together as allusions to *Enūma eliš* that ancient readers and listeners would have picked up upon: ‘Sargon’s references [...] are most convincingly understood as references to the creation myth.’<sup>53</sup>

In his study of the links between the Erra epic and Ezekiel, Daniel Bodi also studies nets as divine weapons, particularly in the Erra epic.<sup>54</sup> According to Bodi, in Erra – and elsewhere in Akkadian literature – the net is used as a weapon to punish perjurers and others who have betrayed others. I am hesitant to follow Bodi’s interpretation entirely, but having said that, it is not surprising that being caught in a net might be a fitting punishment for people who have conspired (‘made nets’, e.g. Amos 7:10) against someone else, approximating *lex talionis* as a principle to decide punishment.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> AHW I: 353 and CDA 119. For the text see Fuchs, *Inschriften Sargons II*, 99 (317), 181 (339).

<sup>50</sup> Crouch, *War and Ethics*, 50

<sup>51</sup> C. L. Crouch, ‘Ištar and the Motif of the Cosmological Warrior: Assurbanipal’s Adaptation of Enuma Elish’, in *Thus Speaks Ishtar of Arbela’: Prophecy in Israel, Assyria and Egypt in the Neo-Assyrian Period* (ed. R. P. Gordon and H. M. Barstad; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 129-41.

<sup>52</sup> See Frahm, ‘Counter-texts, Commentaries, and Adaptations’ where he shows the importance of the myth to both Assyrians and Babylonians in the first millennium BCE.

<sup>53</sup> Crouch, *War and Ethics*, 50.

<sup>54</sup> Bodi, *Erra*, 162-82. In his study Bodi repeatedly refers to Jean-Jacques Heintz’ unpublished doctoral thesis which has not been available to me: Jean-Georges Heintz, ‘Le Dieu au Filet, Étude d’un thème de souveraineté divine du Proche-Orient antique dans ses rapports avec les origines du “herem” biblique’, (1965).

<sup>55</sup> On the issue in Amos see Crouch, *War and Ethics*, 110-15; John Barton, *Ethics in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 102-09 and in Ezekiel Crouch, ‘Ezekiel’s Oracles against

### 3.2 Ezekiel's Nets

In four recent studies C. L. Crouch and Casey Strine have suggested that the depiction of Yhwh as divine warrior, especially with a net as a weapon, is a conscious allusion to Marduk's use of the net in the *Enūma eliš*, and that the authors of Ezekiel are trying to subvert that text's message by inserting Yhwh in Marduk's role.<sup>56</sup>

In the first and programmatic of these essays, Crouch draws on Lawrence Boadt's work on Ezekiel's Oracles against the Nations.<sup>57</sup> In chapter 32 Ezekiel pronounces a divine oracle against Egypt, in which a considerable amount of Combat Myth imagery is used. Egypt is depicted as the 'dragon of the sea' (תנין) and Yhwh's weapons are a net (רשת; vs. 3) and a sword (חרב; vs. 10). Verses 4-9 are filled with the things that Yhwh is going to do with Egypt when he has defeated it. Curiously, in verse 11 Yhwh says that Babylon shall come and carry out his divine judgement on Egypt. For Crouch and Strine, this reference to Babylon opens up the strong possibility that not only the West-Semitic Combat Myth tradition is appealed to here, but that the Akkadian version is alluded to as well.<sup>58</sup>

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the Nations,' 488-89. I am not sure whether identifying the punishment meted out by YHWH on the nations as a *lex talionis* type punishment can solve the theological problem of the deity's actions being essentially war crimes. While it is true that to an ancient Near Eastern mind this would not have presented an issue as gods operated on a different ontological level altogether, I am not sure that all modern western philosophies of state would share the belief that as soon as an act is state/authority-sponsored punishment it is not wrong. On the issue see more recently also Nili Wazana, "War Crimes" in Amos's Oracles against the Nations (Amos 1:3-2:3), in *Literature as Politics, Politics as Literature: Essays on the Ancient Near East in Honor of Peter Machinist* (ed. D. S. Vanderhooft and A. Winitzer; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 479-501.

<sup>56</sup> Crouch and Strine, 'YHWH's Battle against Chaos in Ezekiel'; Crouch, 'Ezekiel's Oracles against the Nations'; Crouch, 'Ištar and the Motif of the Cosmological Warrior'; Strine, *Sworn Enemies: The Divine Oath, the Book of Ezekiel, and the Polemics of Exile*.

<sup>57</sup> Lawrence Boadt, *Ezekiel's Oracles Against Egypt: A Literary and Philological Study of Ezekiel 29-32* (BibOr 37; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1980). Crouch also acknowledges the work of John Day, *God's Conflict With the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (COP 35; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). She does not refer to Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos* who supports her view.

<sup>58</sup> John Day, *God's Conflict*, David Toshio Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction: A Reappraisal of the Chaokampf Theory in the Old Testament* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005); David Toshio Tsumura, 'The "Chaokampf" Motif in Ugaritic and Hebrew Literatures', in *Le Royaume d'Ougarit de la Crète à l'Euphrate: Nouveaux axes de recherche* (ed. J.-M. Michaud; Proche-Orient et Littérature Ougaritique 2; Sherbrooke: GGC, 2007), 473-99, and others have argued that the western Combat myth tradition is not linked to creation and is in this respect separate from the Mesopotamian Combat myth tradition which, in *Enūma eliš* combines both aspects in Marduk's

Crouch argues that just as the net (*saparru*) was a reference to the mythical combat at creation in the inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III, the net (רשת) in Ezekiel 32:3 is a clear allusion to mythical combat between God and chaos. She identifies both the battle of Ba'lu with Yammu from CTA 2.4, and the *Enūma eliš* as targets for the allusion. The strength of her argument lies in the fact that the oracle against Tyre in Ezekiel 26-28 which directly precedes the section against Egypt (Ezek 29-32) is replete with flood imagery, and it is likely that Tyre is intentionally identified as a form of chaos.

While the Tyre oracles and the Egypt oracles both show Yhwh defeating water-based chaos, I am not convinced by the argument that the two long oracle sections against Tyre and Egypt are linked so closely to each other as to form one larger oracle. In my view the parallels between Tyre's fate in Ezekiel 27, 29 and Egypt's fate in Ezekiel 31 and 32 are not sufficiently similar. Further, there is no reason to assume that the allusions to the Combat Myth theme in both sets of oracles is necessarily against a *Chaoskampf* associated with creation. I agree with Crouch in the assessment that biblical authors could allude to a *Chaoskampf* at creation but that does not mean that all such battles are automatically to be read in that way.

The other two key pericopes in Ezekiel in which Yhwh uses a רשת are in 12:1-16 (v. 13) against Zedekiah and in 17: 11-24 (v. 20) against Egypt. Regarding Ezekiel 12:3 Crouch and Strine argue that Ezekiel is making the argument that Yhwh has replaced Marduk as the main god of Babylonia rather than Judah here – which in turn means that Yhwh's counterpart on earth is no longer the king of Judah but the king of Babylon.<sup>59</sup> Zedekiah is explicitly punished – for breaking an oath, so that the use of the net is entirely appropriate. Additionally – although less relevant for Ezekiel 12 and 17, a deity could have more than one king as their earthly counterpart.<sup>60</sup> Presumably

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defeat of Tiāmat. C. L. Crouch, 'Made in the Image of God: The Creation of אדם, the Commissioning of the King and the *Chaoskampf* of Yhwh', *JANER* (forthcoming) has argued for a western Semitic connection between the *Chaoskampf* and Creation, as can be seen in Genesis 1 and Psalms 8, 18 and 89.

<sup>59</sup> Crouch and Strine, 'YHWH's Battle against Chaos in Ezekiel'. Bernard F. Batto, 'The Combat Myth in Israelite Tradition Revisited', in *Creation and Chaos: A Reconsideration of Hermann Gunkel's Chaoskampf Hypothesis* (ed. J. Scurlock and R. H. Beal; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 217-36, 224-25 revives an idea by Naphtali Tur-Sinai that Hebrew שפירה is a loaned form of Akkadian *saparru*, see Naphtali H. Tur-Sinai, *The Book of Job: A New Commentary* (rev. ed.; Jerusalem: Kiryath Sepher, 1967), 382-84, which would mean that this passage is also playing with the Combat Myth tradition.

<sup>60</sup> There are numerous cases of kings claiming the authority of local gods. For an exploration of the issue cf. Jonathan Stökl, 'Divination as Warfare: The Use of Divination across Borders', in

any member of the Judean and Israelite elites in the 8th century bce would have pondered the question with regard to the Assyrian empire but also with regard who really was Yhwh's counterpart – the king of Israel or the king of Judah. However, the literary image that is used in Ezek 12:13 is that of the net and the snare which a skillful hunter uses to catch his prey, an altogether different use of the same implement.<sup>61</sup>

Using Scott's concept of hidden transcripts Strine argues that far from being a potential problem the ambiguity of Ezekiel's intertext can be interpreted as an indication that Ezekiel is interacting as a subaltern with the Babylonian elite text *Enūma eliš*.<sup>62</sup> From that point of view, Ezekiel's ambiguity would become part of the author's / authors' communicative strategy in speaking clearly to their Judean / Jewish audience and at the same time having full deniability if questioned by their Babylonian overlords. In this construction, the relevant passages in the book of Ezekiel would have to have been written during the sixth century bce as there would not have been much need to compete with Marduk as depicted in the *Enūma eliš* but with relevant – but no longer extant – Zoroastrian texts.<sup>63</sup> This argument creates a logical circle, and one that uses its great weakness regarding the ambiguity of the intertext as an apparent strength. It is clear that in Ezekiel 12, 17 and 32 Yhwh is portrayed as a divine hero and thus in competition with Marduk – and all other gods who claim to have such great authority. However, this just follows the normal

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*Divination, Politics and Ancient Near Eastern Empires* (ed. A. Lenzi and J. Stökl; ANEM 7; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014), 49-63. The classic case of gods commanding other kings is well made by J. J. M. Roberts, 'Nebuchadnezzar I's Elamite Crisis in Theological Perspective', in *Essays on the Ancient Near East in Memory of Jacob Joel Finkelstein* (ed. M. deJong Ellis; Memoirs of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences 19; Hamden: Published for The Academy by Archon Books, 1977), 183-87.

<sup>61</sup> See also Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24* (NICOT Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 376-378, 547-548; Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 22; New York: Doubleday, 1983), 214-216, 316-324; Walther Zimmerli, *Ezechiel 1-24* (2., verb., erw. Aufl. ed.; BKAT 13/1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1969), 266-267, 386-387. For images of the net used to catch humans see, e.g., Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms* (trans. Timothy J. Hallett; London: S.P.C.K, 1978), fig 110-111 (90). The Egyptian use of the imagery in fig. 111 would suggest either that they have adopted the same language, or that the imagery of catching humans in nets is not specific enough.

<sup>62</sup> Strine, 'Chaoskampf against Empire'.

<sup>63</sup> One recent attempt to use later Zoroastrian texts for the study of the Hebrew Bible is Jason M. Silverman, *Persepolis and Jerusalem: Iranian Influence on the Apocalyptic Hermeneutic* (LHBOTS 558; London / New York: T & T Clark, 2012). While good arguments can be made for some of the texts being considerably earlier than their attested earliest manuscripts, there is little by way of confidence which text was written when and in what form. Considering the kind of upheavals that Zoroastrianism underwent it is – I think – unlikely that the texts remained unchanged.

ancient Near Eastern rhetorical and theological strategy by subordinate powers to see defeat – and loss of divine statues, etc, as the result of the power of their own god.<sup>64</sup> Thus, Ezekiel compares not just with Marduk as we find him in the *Enūma eliš* but also with Ninurta, Ištar and all the other hero-gods who have ever fought a *Chaoskampf*.<sup>65</sup>

## 4. Conclusions

As we have seen the usage of nets as weapons is widespread among deities and humans alike in the ancient Near East. Among others, Ninurta and Marduk use the weapon as part of their arsenal to win the battle against chaos. Most conspicuously, the net is far from being the only weapon, the flood being another one. From the deity defeating chaos and establishing order, the imagery is picked up by the Neo-Assyrian monarchs in their royal inscriptions to describe their actions and the destruction they are unleashing on foreign lands. Maul, Crouch and others have pointed out that it is likely that kings see themselves as earthly agents of deities and therefore carrying out their part in the establishment of order. Indeed, it is likely that the cluster of attestations of the net being used as a weapon against perjurers and conspirators, as noted by Bodi, should be linked to this aspect of establishing order, as usually the person using the net is a deity directly and explicitly involved in some form of a *Chaoskampf*.<sup>66</sup>

In order confidently to identify a text as a hidden transcript, it is necessary to know more about its precise setting and thus with which other texts it may have been in conversation. While it seems possible that Ezekiel 32 was conceived before the beginning of the Persian empire the mentioning of the ‘sword of Nebuchadnezzar’ is by no means a fixed point in the dating of the text, as the literary character Nebuchadnezzar is a magnet for many traditions, particularly at a much later date.<sup>67</sup> The dating of Ezekiel 27-31 is even less clear. Moreover, without the Tyre oracles,

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<sup>64</sup> See above and Roberts, ‘Nebuchadnezzar I’s Elamite Crisis in Theological Perspective’.

<sup>65</sup> For an *editio minor* see Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths*, 264.

<sup>66</sup> I cannot follow the logic in Crouch, ‘Ezekiel’s Oracles against the Nations,’ 489, that the concept of *lex talionis* is limited to non-royal circles. It seems to me that this phenomenon is generally widespread and can be seen also in royal inscriptions.

<sup>67</sup> See e.g. Jonathan Stökl, ‘Nebuchadnezzar: History, Memory and Myth-Making in the Persian Period’, in *Bringing the Past to the Present in the Late Persian and Early Hellenistic Period: Images of Central Figures* (ed. E. Ben Zvi and D. Edelman; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 257-69 and also C. Waerzegger’s contribution to this volume. Because of the Babylonian involvement in Egypt, Walther Zimmerli, *Ezechiel 25-48* (2., verb., erw. Aufl. ed.; BKAT 13/2; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1969), 767-73 thinks that 568/7, Nebuchadnezzar’s campaign against Egypt,

the major link between flood imagery and net imagery and the various Mesopotamian combat myths is considerably weakened.

Crouch, Strine and others have argued that Ezekiel is, in effect stating that the king of Babylon is said to have become Yhwh's new king. because In Ezekiel's eyes, the Babylonian king is strong and must therefore be acting on Yhwh's behalf. According to these scholars, this requires that Yhwh replace Marduk as the king's main deity. Even if we were to accept the previous line of argument, this point appears to be problematic. Rather than restricting himself to one king Yhwh could easily have taken two kings, like in the days of old, when the Northern Kingdom of Israel still existed. Thus, Ezekiel's message need not be anti-Babylonian but rather directed against those who say that Yhwh was no longer a force to be reckoned with.

The — to me more appealing — alternative is to read Ezekiel as alluding to a wider Combat Myth tradition of which the book thereby becomes a part. It seems likely that educated Judeans in the Second temple period likely had some access to wider ancient Near Eastern traditions and skillfully placed their own writing in this wider context.<sup>68</sup> It is tempting cautiously to see at least some texts in the book of Ezekiel as the product of such groups, as I have argued elsewhere.<sup>69</sup>

With regard to Yhwh's net in Ezekiel 13, 17 and 32, Yhwh is claiming a role elsewhere performed by Ninurta, Ištar, Ba'lu and Marduk. Judah's god is definitely depicted as a hero, but not only as a newer, better Marduk. Instead he continues the long ancient Near Eastern Combat Myth tradition. Like other deities before him he become part of or continues his involvement with this common tradition in which the strength of one's deity was expression. Each individual textual example in this tradition takes much that already exists and adds something new to . In order to identify one specific version as the 'donor' the cross-references have to be stronger than a simple

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is a likely *datum ad quem* for the oracle.

<sup>68</sup> Frahm, 'Creation and the Divine Spirit', strongly argues that the *Enūma eliš* would have been known widely enough during this period. Interestingly, Crouch herself argues against understanding Deuteronomy as a hidden polemic or hidden transcript because Assyria is not explicitly mentioned in the text (C. L. Crouch, *Israel & the Assyrians: Deuteronomy, the Succession Treaty of Esarhaddon, & the Nature of Subversion* [ANEM 8; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014]). Presumably, as a hidden transcript this would be precisely the strategy to adopt in order to hide one's intentions from the powerholders.

<sup>69</sup> Jonathan Stökl, "A Youth without Blemish, Handsome, Proficient in All Wisdom, Knowledgeable and Intelligent": Ezekiel's Access to Babylonian Culture', in *Exile and Return: The Babylonian Context* (ed. C. Waerzeggers and J. Stökl; BZAW Berlin: de Gruyter, forthcoming).

net.