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WE (AND) THE PHILISTINES: MIGRATING ETHNIC GROUP? NEOLIBERAL ENTREPRENEURS? SETTLER-COLONIALISTS? OR GOOD PIRATES?

Raz Kletter

Abstract

In 1998, Neil Silberman showed how early scholarly portrayals of the Philistines reflected the values of the Victorians. The Philistines were presented by the Victorians either as good colonialists who brought an enlightened Indo-European civilization to the East, or as barbaric destroyers who ruined the supposedly decadent Canaanite culture. The time has come to reflect on more recent images of the Philistines. In the 1970–1980s, they went through a great transformation from a Bible-centered model or image of cruel invaders and enemies to that of an advanced, cultural people. Several other images have appeared since, competing for hegemony. I review them here, focusing especially on the most recent image of them as "merry pirates," which has not yet been studied critically. My aim here is not to support any particular "image" of the Philistines but to study these scholarly constructions and their relations to our time. Based on the results, it seems that the future of the Philistines may be as unpredictable as their past.

En 1998, Neil Silberman a montré comment les premières représentations savantes des Philistins reflétaient les valeurs des Victoriens. Les Philistins étaient présentés par les Victoriens comme de bons colonialistes apportant la civilisation indo-européenne héritière des Lumières à l'orient, ou comme des barbares qui détruisirent la culture cananéenne supposée décadente. Il est temps d'analyser des images plus récentes des Philistins. Dans les années 1970–1980, ils ont subi une grande transformation : décrits d'abord sur la base d'un modèle centré sur la Bible ou comme des envahisseurs et des ennemis cruels, ils sont maintenant devenus un peuple avancé et cultivé.

Plusieurs autres représentations sont apparues depuis, qui rivalisent pour s'imposer. Je les passe en revue ici, en me concentrant plus particulièrement sur l'image la plus récente de « joyeux pirates », qui n'a pas encore fait l'objet d'une étude critique. Mon but n'est pas de défendre une « représentation » particulière des Philistins, mais d'étudier ces constructions savantes et leurs liens avec notre époque. Au vu des résultats, il semble que l'avenir des Philistins soit aussi imprévisible que leur passé.

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3

"The Philistines were mighty carousers" (Albright 1956, *115*)

"The Philistines were … cosmopolitan devotees of the grape" (Wilford 1992)

Introduction

In "The Sea Peoples, the Victorians, and Us," Neil Silberman (1998) showed how early scholarly portrayals of the Philistines related to the scholars' lives and worldviews.[1] Victorian scholars portrayed the

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[1] Cf. White (1984, 38): "In telling a story, the historian necessarily reveals a plot."

Philistines as good colonialists and Indo-European civilizers. For R. A. Stewart Macalister, they were:

> The only cultured or artistic race who ever occupied the soil of Palestine … Whatsoever things raised life in the country above the dull animal existence of fellahin were due to this people.[2]

The Philistines were—like Macalister—foreigners who came "from their healthy maritime life to the fever-haunted and sirocco-blasted land of Canaan" (Macalister 1913, 72). Another early view presented them as barbaric destroyers of a supposedly decadent Canaanite culture (Silberman 1998, 270–71).

More than a century separates us from the Victorians: it is time to reflect on more recent portrayals and, especially, widen our perspective to also study and review non-European scholars.[3] My aim in this article is not to support one specific interpretation of the Philistines over another. Rather, it is to investigate critically some of the scholarly constructions or "images" of these people and to discuss how these images relate to our time.

Migration of an Ethnic Group: The Enemies of Israel

From the beginning of research in the nineteenth century until the mid-twentieth century, the Philistines were seen as a migrating ethnic group and the archenemies of Israel. Philistine ethnicity was a "given," easily identifiable in the archeological record—notably by the pottery called "Philistine" since 1908 (Albright 1931, 54) (Fig. 1).

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[2] Macalister 1912, 58; cf. Macalister 1913, 129.

[3] Perhaps it is also time to note that while Silberman's article was published in a volume honoring the distinguished Israeli scholar Trude Dothan, it ignored Israeli research, moving from the British Mandate directly to Muhly (1992). Silberman worked in Israel as an assistant to Dothan, including on finds from Philistia (Silberman 2013: ix).

Fig. 1: Philistine Bichrome Pottery of the Iron Age I: deep crater (right), bottle (center) and stirrup jar (left). (Wikimedia Commons, author Hanay, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/7f/Philistine_pottery.JPG)

The ability of biblical archeologists of that era to look at the Philistines without a biblical lens was limited. The Philistines were part of the "biblical people" (Dothan 1985, 175)—just not the best part. The Israelite-oriented attitude of William Albright left little room for the Philistines. He saw them as "invading hordes" and "northern barbarians" (Albright 1923, 16, n. 6; 1931, 57):

> The Philistines and the Tsikal [came] from the regions of the Aegean, bringing a rude barbaric energy from the north as well as exotic culture of Mycenaean type. Before the end of the century, they were menacing Israel seriously.[4]

Albright followed the biblical picture of the Philistines as the bad guys. They "threatened to reduce Israel to hopeless servitude" and "neglected no effort to assure their domination, if we may judge by their

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[4] Albright 1940, 219. On Albright's ideological positions, see Sherrard 2011, 35–109.

ruthless control of the manufacture of iron tools and weapons," while their leaders, the *seranim*, "seem to have been tyrants after the Aegean model" (Albright 1940, 221–22). Philistine wine craters and beer jugs proved that they were boozers (Albright 1956, 115).[5] Once they "over-whelmed" the Canaanites, they turned their attention to Israel, initiating "a century of desultory conflict." Only Saul and David prevented them from becoming "permanent lords of Palestine" (Albright 1963, 38) (Fig. 2).

G. Ernest Wright (1966, 73) followed suit: soon after settling down, the "rapid advancing tentacles of Philistine power were reaching down

Fig. 2: David and Goliath (Gustav Doré, The Holy Bible with Illustrations, 1886, London: Cassel, Petter, and Galpin)

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[5] However, see Stager 1995, 345; Yasur-Landau 2005.

the Jordan Valley." Luckily, Saul and David saved the day (Wright 1966, 77–8). Trude Dothan's (1982, 296) classic book *The Philistines* concluded with the same happy ending.

Kathleen Kenyon (1979, 212, 232) followed the narrative of "barbaric groups" who produced a "dark age" that ended with King David's triumphs. Yet, her view was more balanced. The Philistines were settlers, not just raiders: they destroyed Canaanite cities, but also assimilated with the Canaanites (Kenyon 1979, 213–19).

Benjamin Mazar (1975, 268–69) described the "huge wave" of the Sea Peoples, including the Philistines, destroying, annihilating and looting; only Egypt was barely saved from this "holocaust." As usual, the historical role of the Philistines ended with their defeat by King David, but atypically Mazar (1975, 270; 1980) also described the Philistines positively as "tall people, of slim and erect stature" with an impressive material culture.

From Ugly Ducklings to Beautiful Swans

Beginning with the 1970s, the Philistines underwent a great transformation, from being a despised people to being a cultured people. There were several factors behind this transformation.

The Copenhagen or "Minimalist" School (Thomas Thompson, Neils Peter Lemche, Philip R. Davies, and others) ushered in skeptical attitudes toward biblical historicity.[6] Hence, the biblically oriented, negative picture of the Philistines no longer carried the same weight. More important was the growth in excavations and publications about Philistia, as well as the development of ever-narrowing academic specializations. Iron Age Philistia become a full-fledged field of research, as exemplified by the career of the Israeli scholar Trude Dothan. Scholars who invest years in excavating and studying Philistia are likely to appreciate positively the material culture associated with the Philistines (Figs. 3–4).

For Amihai Mazar, the Philistines were part of a wave of "civilized immigrants" from the Mycenaean world:

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[6] See Ben Zvi 2002; Pfoh 2024.

Fig. 3: Tel Qasile, the Philistine Temple excavated by Amihai Mazar
(photo R. Kletter)

Fig 4: Philsitine Cult stand, Yavneh (9th Century BCE),
with standing female figures and palms (Photo R. Kletter

They should not be defined merely as sea raiders or pirates who caused destruction and devastation. … They retained a highly sophisticated urban culture and artistic traditions in a period of turmoil.[7]

In the opinion of Seymour Gitin:

The Philistines, contrary to the assumptions of some scholars, were not mere pirates who plundered and destroyed … Thus, on the basis of the archaeological record, we can conclude that the Philistines … were not the barbarians portrayed in the Bible, but rather the founders of a highly sophisticated society.[8]

Following the archeologists, the popular media reported that the Philistines "were not the bad guys, after all" but an "advanced society." Their pottery "demonstrates high artistic and esthetic abilities." They knew how to write, and formed "a great ancient civilization" (Pear 1983). They created grand architecture and imaginative, fine pottery—so they were no longer deserving of the withering epithet "Philistine" (Wilford 1992). A picture has emerged from the long-term excavations by Trude and Moshe Dothan "of the Philistines as great traders, master builders, and one of the most civilized peoples of their time" (Wilford 1992).

The supposedly Greek descent of the Philistines was a respectable, even "elevated" origin (Wilford 1992). Lawrence Stager called them "Mycenaean Greeks" (in Wilford 1992).[9] The Philistines' love of drinking turned from blemish to virtue. This new, positive image is an academic one, and is not yet shared by the public as a whole. The slur "Philistine" did not become obsolete.[10]

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[7] Mazar 1985a, 105–6; cf. Mazar 1985b, 119–20.

[8] Gitin 2003, 59.

[9] Cf. Finkelberg 2005, 153; for criticism, see Middleton 2015. For the issue of imagining material cultures in the Aegean as "ethnic groups," see Maran 2022.

[10] It still lives in art, the academy, politics, etc. (Kistler 2016, 240). Intellectuals engage in a "Philistine controversy" (Beech and Roberts 2002), even if those who use this term are often placed in a worse light than their opponents (Jobling and Rose 1996, 383–84).

Earlier studies described a disappearance or assimilation of the Philistines during the tenth century BCE (Dothan 1982, 296; Bunimovitz 1990, 219). But the Philistines did not disappear:

> Their material culture shows signs of acculturation even though their sense of ethnic identity remained secure for at least another half millennium.[11]

> The Philistines did not disappear, but in fact continued to live and eventually prosper again at Ekron, where their history can be documented for four hundred more years.[12]

Migrants Out—Merchants In

In the 1990s, scholars challenged the image of a migrating ethnic group, offering instead the picture of successful maritime merchants. This image came not from biblical archeologists but from scholars of the Cyprus and the Aegean. Discussing the Sea Peoples in Cyprus—in his view unrelated to the Philistines—James Muhly (1984, 1992) argued that the centralized Mycenaean palace economy blocked "entrepreneurial initiatives." After its collapse, people moved freely as "enterprising merchants and traders, exploiting new economic opportunities, new markets, and new sources of raw materials" (Muhly 1992, 19). Susan Sherratt (1998, 292) elaborated on this idea: the Sea Peoples were not an ethnic group, but an "economic and cultural community whose ostensibly 'ethnic' features are of structural rather than primarily genetic or linguistic significance."[13]

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[11] Stager 1995, 348.

[12] Gitin 2003, 60.

[13] In tandem, the pottery associated with the Sea Peoples is not "some kind of conscious ethnic denominator with genetic race or language embodied in the fabric" but "a continuation of the process of import substitution" (Sherratt 1998, 302). Arthur Knapp (2021) rejects the notion of large-scale migrations but without following the "mercantile model." On forced migration in archeology, see Hamilakis 2016.

Ethnicity started to become a bone of contention, but Sherratt's formulation of it was unfortunate. An ethnic community is, simultaneously, an economic and cultural community. Ethnicity is neither defined by "structural" nor by "genetic/linguistic" features. Such notions fit the older, "primordial" definitions of ethnicity. Newer definitions stress feelings and beliefs (Kletter 2014, with references).

According to Sherratt (1998, 294, 305–6), the Sea Peoples were the product of an expansion of international trade. They migrated and caused destruction, but these acts were of secondary importance and were the results of a greater initial cause. The "prime causes" were "changing economic strategies," namely, a shift from a centralized Bronze Age palace economy to a decentralized, entrepreneurial economy. The Sea Peoples were the "moguls" of Cyprus, who carried "low level uncontrolled trade" in an "aggressively open economy" (Sherratt 1998, 301, 305):

> They were probably a pretty cosmopolitan bunch … Many of them may have been living more or less where they were all the time, or have come from nowhere very far away at all … While the grouping of people under ethnic denominations was an important component of Egyptian and Hittite diplomatic and military rhetoric, [these denominations] may refer to little more than the inhabitants of a few individual cities whose names we cannot now identify—or indeed such ethnicities may not have existed consciously outside Egyptian diplomatic speak.[14]

Unexpectedly, Sherratt (1998, 307) ends her article by throwing in ethnic labels: the Sea Peoples were what the Greeks called "Phoenicians," "who saw themselves—insofar as they did collectively—first and foremost as *cnaʿani*" (Canaanite, in Hebrew).

Alexander Bauer applied Sherratt's model to the Philistines. They were an "emerging socio-economic group," or even an "emerging merchant class," forming a "network of decentralized maritime trade." Philistine settlements were not strongholds, but urban trading nodes (Bauer 1998, 149–52, 159). Places with a few Philistine items were not governed by Philistine elites but by locals. The Philistines did not "expand"

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[14] Sherratt 1998, 307.

into the periphery; rather, the Canaanites were drawn to the Philistine mercantile centers, which explains the Philistines' acculturation (Bauer 1998, 161).[15] Economic terms were used liberally to enhance this image ("freelance," "mercantile," "marketing strategy," etc.).

Michal Artzy employed this image to Tel Nami on the Carmel Coast. The "nomads of the sea" crossed the Carmel ridge, maybe to achieve "a more prosaic 'tax break.'". They were the employees of the economic powers, but when the latter collapsed, their "sailor's trade" became an "entrepreneurial vocation" (Artzy 1997, 439, 441, n. 4). A variety of economic terms garnishes her discussion: "subcontractors," "entrepôt," "capital," etc. However, the result is more romantic than capitalistic: the pirates of the sea meet the camel caravans, which carry exotic incense in (far too heavy, fragile) collar-rim jars.

Silberman (1998) tied the beginning of the "mercantile image" (Muhly 1992) to the rise of neoliberalism. Indeed, proponents of the "mercantile image" tend to use economic terms liberally and present economic agents as idyllic role models. Perhaps one should also see an influence of the discourse about globalization, which became popular in the 1990s. However, in this "mercantile model" these economic terms are often used as embellishments, not as core concepts.

Why did the "mercantile model" not become more popular? It seems that its formulation by Sherratt (1998) failed to convince. If the label "Philistines" was just "Egyptian diplomatic speak," how did the Philistines reach the pages of the Bible and give their name to a land or two (Shai 2009)? More crucially, the basic assumption of two contrasting types of trade (centralized/decentralized) is faulty. The ancient economy and trade were multifaceted and not separated along a clear private–public divide. Royal traders dealt with private business, and temples executed long-range trade through "private" traders. Since the written sources are mostly institutional, we know less about private trade and cannot quantify it.[16] Additionally, there is neither evidence for large-scale Philistine trade, nor evidence that many Philistines

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[15] Cf. Balter 1999, 36; Bauer 2014.

[16] Radner 1999; Steinkeller 2004; Monroe 2009; Jursa 2010, 208–28, 762–72; Graslin-Thomé 2016. See also Routledge and McGeough 2009.

were wealthy merchants. Philistine settlements do not resemble trading posts.[17] Philistine Iron I trade is nondescript in comparison to the large-scale Late Bronze Age trade.[18]

The "mercantile model" does not explain how the Philistines overtook Philistia. As merchants, they would have had to cooperate with the "local" Canaanites. Groups of so-called "Sea Peoples" appear in the Late Bronze Age as mercenaries, not as merchants. They are also depicted as entire families moving on land.[19]

Colonial Settlers?

In the early twentieth century, about two-fifths of humanity lived under colonial rule (Dietler 2010, 19). After World War II, a postcolonial discourse started to form but did not immediately affect the images of the Philistines.[20] The "mercantile model" seldom acknowledged colonialism. Bauer (1998, 150, n. 13) called the Philistine settlements "colonies," and Sherratt and Sherratt (1991, 356–8) spoke of peaceful trading colonies but did not discuss colonization in terms of asymmetrical power relations.[21]

For John Wilford (1992), the Philistines were not "colonialists" but "refugees." Yet these are not contradictory terms: the Puritans in America were both. Stager toyed with the idea that "the ships [found

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[17] Barako 2000; Yasur-Landau 2010, 289–94.

[18] Master 2009; Monroe 2009, 281; Yasur-Landau 2010, 300–2, 339, 342; Master et al. 2015; Malkin 2016, 298.

[19] Drews (1998, 39) claimed: "No Canaanite nation vanished, and no Philistine nation suddenly appeared. It was only the names that changed." However, Canaanites/Philistines were not nations, and names of "ethnic groups" are a vital part of their identity. The argument that the Medinat Habu reliefs portray locals escaping Egyptian raids (Drews 1998, 58–9) does not hold water. The scene shows the carts advancing towards, not escaping from, the Egyptians. With the families are men dressed like Sea People warriors in other scenes. For claims that genetic evidence supports Aegean arrivals, see Meiri et al. 2013; Feldman et al. 2019.

[20] Young 2015, 150; 2016, 59. An exception perhaps is Wright (1966, 71, n. 17).

[21] Hodos 2006, 20–22; Dietler 2010, 18.

50 km off Philistia] were headed for Phoenicia's colony of Carthage, near present-day Tunis. It would have been a very nice cargo for the colonists" (in Balter 1999, 36–37).[22]

Research on the Philistines remains mostly a pre-postcolonial field. As Łukasz Niesiołowski-Spanò (2016, 5–6, 9–11) observed, studies of the Philistines seldom used terms related to the study of colonies (he thought that the reason could be a lack of data).

When one consults the appearance of words like "colony," "colonization," or colonialism in excavation reports on Philistia in the last decades, an interesting picture emerges. Focusing on excavation reports is natural: they are the major product of archeological excavations and carry a longer-lasting impact than articles. Such reports hold thousands of pages (Table 1).[23] "Colonization" and/or "colonialism" were seldom mentioned in some older reports. For example, Dothan (1978, 104) called the Philistines once "mercenaries or colonists." Thirty years later, in a more extensive report on the same site, there is not even one such mention (Dothan and Brandl 2010). In the *Qasile* I report, the Phoenicians but not the Philistines created colonies (A. Mazar 1980, 81, 84, 111). In the *Qasile* II report, colonization is accredited twice to the Phoenicians and once to the Sea Peoples (Mazar 1985b, 82, 124 and n. 220). In the *Ashkelon* 1 volume, colonization or colonialism never refer to the Philistines (Stager et al. 2008), while in *Ashkelon* 3 they refer only to later Greek colonies (Stager et al. 2011). The ten mentions of the terms "colonies," "colonization," and "colonialism" (and like terms) in the *Tel eṣ-Ṣafi* I report (Maeir 2012) are not an improvement: they all occur in bibliographical lists, except a sole reference to the Philistines as a "colonizing population" (Lev-Tov 2012, 604). In the *Tel eṣ-Ṣafi*

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[22] Elsewhere, Stager (1995, 342) wrote that the Philistines "completely destroyed the Egypto-Canaanite centers before building their new cities on the smouldering ruins" and that their occupation "must have resulted in the extirpation or displacement of many of the Late Bronze Age inhabitants."

[23] Excluding Iron II reports (except Ashkelon 3), since they hardly discuss the arrival of the Philistines. The major excavation reports on Philistia in recent decades were published in English.

Table 1: Colonies, Colonization, etc., in Excavation Reports on Philistia

Report, Year, Excavator/s	Pages	Mentions of Philistine/s	Mentions of Colonies/ Colonization	Colonies/ Colonization in relations to the Philistines
1. Ashdod V, 1993, Dothan/Porath	312	77	–	–
2. Ashdod VI, 2005, Ben Shlomo	319	214	–	–
3. Ashkelon I, 2008, Stager	699	155	23	–
4. Ashkelon 3, 2011, Stager	836	116	30	–
5. Azor, 2012, Ben Shlomo	241	191	–	–
6. Deir el-Balah, 1978, Dothan	118	43	1	1
7. Deir el-Balah, 2010, Dothan	399	22	–	–
8. Qasile I, 1980, A. Mazar	203	113	4	–
9. Qasile II, 1985, A. Mazar	261	332	3	1
10. Tel es-Safi I, 2012, Maeir	964	922	10	1
11. Tell es-Safi II, 2020, Maeir	548	245	2	–
Total	**4900**	**2430**	**73**	**3**

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II report, such mentions are expunged: only two appear in the entire volume, both in bibliographic lists (Maeir and Uziel 2020).

Since the 1970s, Israeli scholars have led the archeological research of Philistia. There have been important foreign teams, but the majority of the fieldwork and of the publications have been by Israelis. Many Israeli archeologists ignore (post)colonialism, probably because of the sensitive issue of colonialism and modern Israel. For example, one article mentions, in the first page alone, Philistine "centers," "cities," "finds," "homelands," "frontiers," "polities," "settlement," "sites," "spatial expansion," and "territory" (Gadot 2006, 21) but not "colonists" or "colonization." In another article, a recolonization of pigs is acknowledged in Europe, but the Philistines just "established themselves" in Philistia (Meiri et al. 2013, 1, 6). Should one conclude that the pigs were colonists, but not the Philistines who took them to Philistia? In the study of the Philistines, we are not yet postcolonial (Hamilakis 2012).[24]

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[24] Postcolonialism is acknowledged in other disciplines in Israel, notably sociology and history (Malkin 1987; 2016; Hodos 2006; Ram 2018; for the Philistines, see Finkelberg 2003, 115; 2005, 153–58). To clarify, the accusation that Israel is colonialist is often hypocritical because it ignores other situations like Syria in

There are, perhaps, other factors that can explain why relatively few scholars have correlated the Philistines with (post)colonialism.[25] One perhaps relates to the difference between the situation in Bronze Age Philistia and the historically better-documented later Greek and Roman colonies. Scholars also point out that European colonialism, laden as it was with capitalism and industrialism, was very different than colonialism in the ancient world. However, the Classical period is a separate field of expertise from the Bronze and Iron Ages. Few studies on Philistia deal with the two disciplines together. So the avoidance is not due to a comparison with the Classical period. It is more likely the result of a lack of appreciation of (post)colonial theory in general.

One may argue that the Philistines did not have a long-lasting "motherland," having lost many or all of their cultural/political connections to it. However, we know that the Iron II Philistines kept connections to the Aegean World and Cyprus, since we can see as much from features of their pottery, iconography, and language. In any case, if the Philistines were migrants from a "motherland," there is no reason not to consider them in relation to (post)colonialism. I stress again that the aim of this article is not to promote the adoption of one "image." It is legitimate to argue that the Philistines were not colonists; but arguing so cannot be based on ignorance of (post)colonial theory.

Some scholars do acknowledge the Philistines as colonizers. For Ann Killebrew (2000, 244), they were "well-organized and relatively prosperous colonizers." Anthony Russell (2009) discussed the Philistines under a postcolonial model of hybridization, while Pitkänen (2014, 8) employed the frame of settler-colonialism to both the Philistines and Israelites. Among Israeli scholars, Shlomo Bunimovitz and Zvi Lederman (2011) grasped the Philistines as settlers, with a hybridization process in Philistia and Canaanite resistance in the periphery. Yasur-Landau (2003, 46, 49–51; 2007; 2010) compared the Philistines to Greek colonists. Their migration was a "violent colonization"; they

Lebanon, Turkey in Syria, Russia in Ukraine, and so on, and it presents a complex historical conflict in "flat" terms: one side is guilty and colonial, the other innocent and local.

[25] I thank the readers for their comments on this aspect.

destroyed or subdued local settlements and took the land.[26] He also imagined the "others":

> The Canaanite elders at the end of the twelfth century saw their country changing before their eyes; their old rulers were gone and their small-town palaces replaced by fast-growing cities of foreigners … Many of their old villages were gone, and fewer people could be seen between the new cities. What had been Canaan was made into Philistia.[27]

Replace "Canaanite" with "Palestinian" and a recent past emerges. Behind the Canaanite elder is an elderly Palestinian, who is holding a key to a lost home.[28] The point is not whether Yasur-Landau thought about it when writing this section, but that some readers would. This explains, perhaps, the reluctance of other archeologists to acknowledge (post)colonialism as a possible conceptual reference for the Philistines.

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Merry Pirates?

According to the most recent "image" of the Philistines,[29] they never established colonies or were ever settler-colonists. Rather, they were good, cosmopolitan pirates, who were living happily side by side with the Canaanites. Interestingly, this image is largely based on an act of piracy: using (rather, abusing) postcolonial terms and concepts while denying their postcolonial nature. I will review it in more detail, since it has not yet been studied in depth.

In similarity to other scholars (above), proponents of the "piracy image" avoid mention of words like colonization, colonies, or colonialism, thus avoiding (post)colonialism. The Philistines are never

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[26] See also Fantalkin 2017, 108; Koch 2021. For lack of a general wave of destruction, see Millek 2021, 2022.

[27] Yasur-Landau 2010, 345.

[28] On the other side of the picture is both a distant past and the Holocaust. On settler-colonialism in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, see Handler and Kotef 2023, with references.

[29] Advocated mainly by Aren Maeir of Bar Ilan University, with several co-authors.

colonists: they just "appear" or "settle" (Maeir et al. 2009, 72). When other studies that refer to (post)colonialism are cited, the proponents of the piracy image add negative evaluations to counter the argument or reference made in the citation. For example, a rare citation that mentions "colonial North America" is immediately qualified by the claim that historical archeology only "complicates the picture even more."[30] Historical archeology acknowledges colonialism: it cannot avoid doing so. In recent articles, advocates of the pirate image have suppressed mentions of colonies, colonists, or colonization completely.[31]

Sometimes, advocates of the piracy image equate "material culture" (in archeology, an assemblage of artifacts) and "culture" (in the sense of civilization):
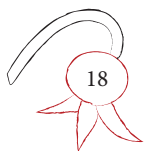
> After the initial stage of the Philistine culture, once there is no direct evidence of contact with the Aegean, and the Philistine material culture developed in independent directions, there is evidence [for] uniquely Cypriot influence on the Philistine pottery assemblage.[32]

Notice how the old-fashioned "influence" flourishes here under a thin façade of "hybridization" or "entanglement," and how material culture becomes the active agent, a synonym for culture. This is a simplistic equation, which presents relations between people as "objective" relations between people and objects:

> One must be careful not to fetishize material culture in such a way that relations between people become mystified as relations between objects and people. To do so … amounts to swallowing one of colonialism's frequent ideological conceits.[33]

Supposedly, the Philistines had a "pirate-like culture."[34] What is a "pirate-like" culture, given that no new typology of cultures is offered?

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[30] Maeir and Hitchcock 2011, 58*; cf. Maeir and Hitchcock 2011, 56*; Maeir et al. 2013, 10, 21.

[31] For example, Maeir and Hitchcock 2017; Maeir 2019.

[32] Maeir et al. 2009, 73.

[33] Dietler 2010, 20–21.

[34] Maeir and Hitchcock 2017, 250; cf. Maeir 2019, 311.

Substances of "pirate culture" are invented for the piracy image out of thin air: the *serens* of the biblical Philistines were "charismatic pirate leaders" because a similar-sounding Luwian title means "warlords."[35] But this Luwian title has no proven relation to pirates, and the same is true about the biblical term *seren*.

Louise Hitchcock and Aren Maeir (2014, 631) bring one example of pirates who converted to Islam in order to explain "early Iron Age anomalies showing aspects of local and imported cultural packages [*sic*]." They ignore many contradictory examples, like the pirates of Henry Avery, who looted, raped, and killed Muslim pilgrims, or the sinking of Muslim trading ships by colonial Portuguese.[36] Selecting isolated examples to fit a theory is poor methodology. Some Philistines could be pirates,[37] but piracy cannot explain the Philistine settlement in Philistia as a whole (Knapp 2020).

The supporters of the piracy image also romanticize piracy à la Hollywood (e.g., the *Pirates of the Caribbean* series). They glorify pirates as a merry tribe of good cosmopolitans, and portray them mainly as egalitarian, skilled people; maritime transporters of valuable commodities to areas inhabited by poor people; and peaceful people who assist coastal dwellers (Fig. 5).

This is a strange inversion. Only once do we find a mention of the "acquisition of slaves" by pirates (Hitchcock and Maeir 2014, 626). Such a polite euphemism masks the pain and suffering of the many victims of piracy. In history, pirates were not peaceful and beneficial people, but perpetrators of horrible acts of arbitrary, cruel, and repellent violence, who had a large part in the slave trade.[38]

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[35] Hitchcock and Maeir 2014; Maeir and Hitchcock 2017, 257; Maeir 2019, 312. Maeir et al. (2013, 4, n. 3, 15) object to Faust's treatment of Philistine ethnicity, but accept his treatment of Israelite ethnicity, which is based on the same "method" of identifying ethnicity by lack of material features (see Kletter 2014, 2016).

[36] Eklöf 2016, 7; Lewis 2019; Hanna 2020.

[37] Sherratt 1998, 305–6; Emanuel 2017, 2021.

[38] Eklöf 2016, 2; Lewis 2019, 94. Colonial administrators often branded acts of the colonized as "piracy" (Campo 2003).

Fig. 5: Philistine Captives, Medinat Habu, Egypt (Wikimedia Commons, author Remih, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/6f/Medinet_Habu_Ramses_III14.JPG). Were the Philistines good, peaceful pirates?

To deny the relevance of a colonial or postcolonial perspective, scholars of the piracy image paint a rosy picture in which Philistines and Canaanites live side by side in harmony. Maeir, for example, talks about the "amalgamation of various people of nonlocal origins … [who] settled in Canaan alongside the local Canaanites" (Maeir 2019, 312). "Not only were the Canaanites incorporated into Philistine culture," in his view, "but, at most, nonlocal elements took over elite roles at these sites and did not supplant the entire socioeconomic structure" (2019, 318).

How do nonlocal "elements" take over elite roles? Do elites give up voluntarily their positions of power to recently arrived outsiders?[39] The supposed idyllic life that both cultures shared is one-sided:

> The Philistine culture was less grandiose than the great, centralized city-states of the late Bronze Age. … Yet Philistine culture was a product of the internationalism of this age. … At the same time, the Philistines were also something more than a purely Aegean, Cypriot, Anatolian or Canaanite culture. The vibrancy and endurance of Philistine culture, and the fascination it holds for archaeologists studying the Mediterranean, lies rather in the plurality of its cultural, technological and artistic remains, its traditions and its practices.[40]

The Canaanite culture participated in the Late Bronze Age long-distance trade, but, as one can see, the scholars of the piracy image would not let it bask in the light of "internationalism." The Canaanite culture was no less vibrant, fascinating, or pluralistic than the Philistine culture. The above-cited passage betrays the very unequal power relations that it ties to obscure. Notice the use of the term "purely" in relation to Philistine culture. Purity is a term entangled in racial, xenophobic, and colonialist practices.[41] There is no pure culture, and no one culture is purer than another.

Entangled Terminology
Advocates of the piracy image shift between several theoretical terms about the arrival of the Philistines to Philistia. They use such terms in order to add theoretical weight to their arguments, and yet these terms are postcolonial terms. Postcolonialism is a vast field that has dealt, for a half-century now, with theories and practices of migration and col-

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[39] Consider the modern elite of professors. Can one give examples of professors who have given up their tenured positions voluntarily, to some "nonlocal elements", such as visiting guest-scholars? One could suggest that the Canaanite elites were removed earlier, say, by the Egyptians, who then put the Philistines in their place. However, such thing was not suggested by the supporters of the "merry pirates" image, nor is there completing evidence to support it.

[40] Hitchcock and Maeir 2013, 58.

[41] Bhabha 1994; Stockhammer 2012, 2; Greenberg and Hamilakis 2023.

onization.[42] As there is no other comparable framework, it is hard to ignore postcolonial terms. But the advocates of the piracy image try to detach these terms from their postcolonial matrix, and they avoid dealing with networks of asymmetrical power relations, which is a vital issue in postcolonial theory.[43] Let us now study the use of these theoretical (postcolonial) terms in relation to the piracy image.

Creolization

"Creolization" first appeared in relation to the Philistines in an unpublished lecture by Maeir in 2004. It was, reputedly, a preferred term, meaning the creation of new "hybrid" languages, usually by a dominated language under a dominant language.[44] Later, Maeir claimed that he used this term "largely [as] a sociolinguistic term" while others used it "mostly, but not always, in a colonial context" (Maeir 2012, 42; 2007, 19). His use of creolization was, supposedly, free of colonial overtones.[45]

In 2013, Maeir (in Hitchcock and Maeir 2013, 47) admitted that he formerly saw the "emergence of the Philistines as a process of creolization that led to a blended [*sic*] culture," but he blamed other scholars for using this term:

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[42] On postcolonialism in biblical studies, see Rukundwa 2008; Nicolet-Anderson 2013; Sugirtharajah 2018. For archeology, see Dietler 2010; Lydon and Rizvi 2010; Hamilakis 2012; Greenberg and Hamilakis 2023.

[43] Some of these terms were used earlier in studies of the Aegean world and Cyprus, before being adopted to studies of the Philistines. However, this article is focused only on Philistia, as I do not consider myself an expert in Aegean/Cypriot archeology.

[44] Ben-Shlomo et al. 2004, 20, 28; cf. Uziel 2007, 169. Ben-Shlomo et al. (2004, 20) refer to a "paper in press" on creolization (cf. Shai et al. 2008, 240). That paper was seemingly published in 2013 (Maeir 2013, 191), but it does not discuss creolization. In 2007, Maeir (2007, 19) spoke about the appearance of bichrome Philistine pottery as evidence for a process of cultural change, "which in the anthropological terminology is defined as a process of acculturation, and in a term from socio-linguistics as a process of creolization." Anthropology and sociolinguistics can be acknowledged—but not postcolonialism.

[45] Only, there is no creolization free of (post)colonialism (see below).

> Creolization and acculturation are treated as processes that typify Philistine "colonialist activity" [citing Killebrew] … Creolization has come under criticism [citing Hitchcock] … for functioning as a thinly veiled substitution for the term colonialism, re-enforcing asymmetrical relationships and reifying a dualistic approach to Philistine identity over the multivocal approach argued for here.[46]

Soon, Maeir criticized the concept of creolization, not mentioning his prior use of the term (Davis et al. 2015, 140, n. 1), though, he still entertained the idea that the Philistines spoke creole languages "based on Late Bronze Age and/or Iron Age trade languages" (Davis et al. 2015, 144, 157).

Creole languages are not formed by equal relationships. The word "creole," first attested in 1590, meant "Spaniard born in the new world." In research, creolization has been used in "a wide range of colonial and post-colonial contexts."[47] It involves asymmetric power relations: among other things, locals under a process of creolization lose their own languages (Dietler 2010, 8, 19). Creolization and hybridization are used in postcolonial studies as "positive inversions of what were formerly derogatory terms of colonial racial discourse that viewed mixing as a threat to purity" (Dietler 2010, 51). Some scholars are calling for the abandonment of the term "creolization" because of its painful colonial and racist legacies.[48] Maeir did not abandon this term for this noble reason, but because one cannot invoke creolization without invoking colonialism. The use of this term was an abuse, which he tried later to disown.

Hybridization

Hitchcock used the term "hybridization" for Cyprus, while Maeir applied it to "Philistine" pottery.[49] Writing together at a later date, both criticized the use of this term sharply:

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[46] Hitchcock and Maeir 2013, 47.

[47] Webster 2016; cf. Baron and Cara 2011, 3–18.

[48] Palmié 2006; but cf. Stewart 2007.

[49] Maeir et al. 2013, 3, n. 2; Ben-Shlomo et al. 2008. Maeir also recommended "acculturation" for a while (Ben-Shlomo et al. 2008, 234). For an earlier use of "hybridization" for Cyprus, see Knapp 2008, 57–61; Knapp and Voskos 2008.

> [Hybridization is] situated in nineteenth-century practices of cross-breeding plants and animals … In addition, social practices termed as hybrid have become associated with resistance by subaltern groups … The term has become greatly diluted to the point of contradiction.[50]

They tried to detach hybridization from postcolonialism:

> The earliest shift from the migration narratives of the past to more nuanced approaches for understanding the region was by Knapp … for Cyprus in his discussion of hybridization processes. Hybridization processes refer to the interactions between agents from two or more social groups in any type of social situation.[51]

> Feldman … explicitly takes her understanding of the term from biology, perceiving it as a neutral term and rejects the definition used in postcolonial studies.[52]

Can hybridization fit any type of social situation, including equal relationships between peoples? Can this term be made neutral? "Hybridity" and "hybridization" are terms employed by generations of racists and colonialists (Dietler 2010, 51). In post(colonial) studies, it refers to interactions and negotiations that take place between colonists and the colonized, and to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonialism.[53] One cannot detach this term from (post)colonialism.[54]

Transculturalism
Advocates of the "piracy image" also employed the concept of "transculturalism":

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[50] Hitchcock and Maeir 2013, 51.

[51] Ibid., 49.

[52] Ibid., 51, n. 6.

[53] Bhabha 1994; Young 1995; Canclini 2005, xxiii–xxxvii; Knapp 2008, 57. For the term "contact zone" as a place of meeting of cultures, often under highly asymmetric power relations, see Pratt 1991.

[54] Dietler 2010, 52; Stockhammer 2012, 52–54.

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> A transcultural approach regards the transformation of Cypriot identity and the emergence of Philistine identity as multivocal, drawing on the symbolisms, objects, social practices and artistic and technical styles of a broad cultural and ethnic range of social actors from around the Mediterranean.[55]

This concept evolved in the twentieth century *from postcolonial thinking*. It was coined by Fernando Ortiz Fernández, a scholar of and activist for Afro-Cuban culture. It is a critical, loosely defined concept, which rejects fixed "cultures" and tries to transcend national and ethnic agendas. It recognizes individuals that have multiple cultural connections, which are not identical to national identities.[56] Although this term can be used in various situations, it does not enable one to eschew postcolonialism.

Entanglement

In recent years, those who follow the piracy image propose "entanglement" as their preferred term, an antidote to a "monolithic understanding" of a "straightforward invasion."[57] The Philistines were, supposedly "an entangled transcultural society, comprised of various groups deriving from the eastern and central Mediterranean, along with local Canaanites—all joining to form a unique culture" (Maeir 2019, 311), and "a group of very mixed origins (entangled), deriving from various regions and origins, including nonlocal and local Canaanite elements" (Maeir 2019, 318).

In the following quote, an "entangled culture" develops from "a set of influences", which transforms into a "new cultural entity" like an egg that breeds the chicken that lays the egg:

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[55] Hitchcock and Maeir 2013, 51; for use of this term earlier by an Aegean scholar, see Panagiotopoulos 2011.

[56] Welsch 1999; Herren et al. 2012; Bond and Rapson 2014, 8–15; Flüchter and Schöttli 2015, 2.

[57] Maeir and Hitchcock 2017, 249; Maeir 2019, 310; Maeir and Uziel 2020.

This culture should be seen as a unique "entangled" culture, developing from a diverse set of influences, which transforms into a new and definable cultural entity.[58]

Hitchcock and Maeir (2013, 50) mentioned Aegean scholars as sources for this term, but once, in another article, Maeir admitted its postcolonial origins: "Perhaps, Dietler's … and Gosden's … 'entanglement' perspectives, although used by them in colonial cultural contexts, might be useful in relationship to 'interculturalism'" (Maeir 2012, 42, n. 43). He tries here to distance himself from "colonial contexts," but entanglement is a postcolonial term. It first appeared in anthropology, history and archeology in the 1990s in direct relation to postcolonialism:[59]

Entanglement means the complex process by which alien colonists and native peoples became increasingly entangled in webs of new relations and through which there developed a gradual transformation of all parties to the encounter.[60]

It is not a neutral term, and cannot imply equal relations between parties that become "entangled."

So far, we have seen that proponents of the piracy image tried to empty the term "entanglement" of its postcolonial essence. Did they succeed? Let us check how they employed this term in practice by looking at three examples that they gave for "Philistine entanglement." The first relates to pottery:

The use of the deep bowl and krater in Philistia would have appealed to both migrant and indigenous elements in the Philistine culture.[61]

Perhaps, but how does it prove noncolonial relations? The deep bowl and krater under discussion are pottery types of Aegean origin. So the Aegean culture, via the Philistines, provides civilization to the "indigenous elements." This is not an equal relationship. So far, the advocates

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[58] Maeir 2019, 312.
[59] Thomas 1991; Silliman 2016.
[60] Dietler 2010, 9.
[61] Hitchcock and Maeir 2013, 53.

of the piracy image have not given even one example of Aegeans/ Philistines admiring objects of Canaanite origin. The second example relates to seals:

> It is quite plausible to suggest that the motif was re-introduced to the East by an Aegean patron and a Canaanite seal carver.[62]

This is a classic example of asymmetric power relations, the foundation stone of colonialism. The newcomer Aegean from the enlightened West is the patron of the local, Canaanite laborer in the passive East. So far, those supporting the piracy image seem unable to imagine a Canaanite patronizing a Philistine. The third example relates to altars:

> They may therefore have found their way to the Levant as a pottery motif [,] and their construction as three-dimensional objects … may be the result of patrons providing varied descriptions to the crafters who made them. In this way, the Ashkelon installation may be the result of local production … that was described in cultural traditions which were handed down generationally and ultimately became modified through a process of "Chinese whispers."[63]

> It is quite likely that they [two-horned altars] represent the Cypriot appropriation and interpretation of an Aegean symbol, which later found its way into Philistine culture through the amalgamation of a "western motif" with a pre-existing Levantine tradition of four-horned cultic objects.[64]

Knowledgeable Philistine patrons provide work to "local"—read Canaanite—"crafters." The entanglement boils down to an "amalgamation," which is easily undone to expose two stereotyped building blocks:

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[62] Hitchcock and Maeir 2013, 53.

[63] Hitchcock and Maeir 2013, 56. "Chinese Whispers" is a children's game, in which the participants whisper messages from person to person, and then compare the original message to the final one. Typically, the corruption of the message offers amusement. Many in North America know this game as "Broken Telephone."

[64] Hitchcock and Maeir 2013, 57.

Philistines and Canaanites, West and East.[65] The game of "Chinese Whispers" carries an Orientalist burden of Chinese as an unintelligible or confused language. Messages in "Chinese Whispers" do not evolve into valuable communications: being corrupted, they become a matter of ridicule. Notice, again, the fetishism of material culture: objects seemingly "find their way" to various places on their own.

Supporters of the piracy image characterized other scholars (Dothan, Bunimovitz, Gitin, Faust, and Lev-Tov) as "simplistic proponents of migration or colonization narratives," who, supposedly, present the Philistines as "Mycenaean colonists imposing their civilization on backward Canaanite natives" (Hitchcock and Maeir 2013, 44–46). To the best of my knowledge, none of these scholars called the Canaanites "backward natives." In trying to discredit other scholars, the advocates of the piracy image replicate the language of colonialism.

Compare how they explain writing in Philistia:

> Thus, if someone of an Aegean, Cypriot, or Anatolian background in Iron I Philistia required an inscription, it is very likely that this individual would have had to patronize a local scribe writing in Canaanite … or to seek out a (perhaps foreign-born) scribe who knew Cypro-Minoan or some other "western" writing system—or alternatively, to devise some other (perhaps experimental) solution.[66]

It seems that they cannot imagine a Canaanite owning an inscription.[67] A Canaanite could write in Philistia only under the orders of a Philistine

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[65] Yet Philistines/Canaanites were not fixed identities that met and mixed (Hodos 2006, 14–17). In the process of colonialism "both parties eventually become something other than they were" (Dietler 2010, 18).

[66] Davis et al. 2015, 146.

[67] Compare the definition of the "truly definitive corpus" of Philistine inscriptions (Davis et al. 2015, 146–47) as "those inscriptions found at or coming from sites in Philistia in conjunction with material cultural attributes usually associated with the Philistine culture." Have you not declared that this culture is multivocal, entangled, and transcultural? Compare "the person who wrote this inscription may have been non-Semitic because the inscription was found in a Philistine level" (Davis et al. 2015, 150).

patron.[68] This patronage was based on an enlightened Western origin, whether Anatolian, Cypriot, or Aegean. In a few "entangled" Philistine inscriptions, they recognized some "Canaanite letter forms." The base metal of the Philistine culture could be Canaanite; but it became valuable only under a Western veneer:

> Likely, it was necessary in this early period to turn to a Canaanite scribe to execute an inscription … for reasons discussed above. Thus, the language of the patron may not necessarily have been the same as that of the scribe who executed the inscription.[69]

How could a Philistine patron tell a Canaanite scribe what to write, if the two did not share a common language? If the Canaanites were merely engravers, they were not "scribes."

It is difficult to employ postcolonial terms while denying postcolonialism. This explains why some of these writings retreat into empty jargon, betraying a fundamental lack of clarity. For example, Maeir et al. suggest that the Philistine culture and identity

> drew on a plethora of social and cultural practices that were heterogeneous and multi-regional … This culture may have undergone a complex "ethnogenesis" … or "transcultural" processes …, or a complex "hybridization" … The result was encounters, entanglements, appropriations and merging of numerous constituent groups, due to shared economic and/or socio-political interests.[70]

Must one combine all the leftovers in a one-pot *salmagundi*, like pirates far from civilization? Do "cultures" become "encounters" or "entanglements"? The result is that nothing of value is said:

> The complex sociocultural background of the Philistines can be seen in the very diverse connections and subregional differentiation of

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[68] Patronage can be supportive or abusive, but it is never an equal relationship (Pfoh 2022). The advocates of the piracy model employed patronage one-sidedly, with Philistines as patrons and Canaanites as clients.

[69] Davis et al. 2015, 150.

[70] Maeir et al. 2013, 2–3.

the Philistine culture, indicating complex origins, relations, and developments.[71]

The "very diverse connections" supposedly show a past, complex "background"; but at the same time, they indicate future, complex "developments." The "complex sociological background" leads to itself ("complex origins") like a snake eating its tail.

If one is unwilling to acknowledge the postcolonial nature of the terms one uses, and is unable to clarify how they can (supposedly) be made neutral, one finds shelter in jargon. The proponents of the piracy image proclaim the discovery of a noncolonial, entangled good life lived between people side by side, only to describe asymmetrical, abusive domains, replicating the colonial order. Postcolonial terms cannot be "purged" and used as a shield from postcolonialism. Our languages and our disciplines are deeply entangled by hundreds of years of colonialism:

> The language used to enact, enforce, describe or analyze colonialism is not transparent, innocent, ahistorical or simply instrumental.[72]

> Archaeology was already born colonized … Archaeology often constituted an instrument, as well as a product, of colonialism defining, constructing, controlling, and even appropriating the past of colonized peoples.[73]

Conclusion

I have read a wide array of literature for this article: sometimes troubling, always interesting. It shows how the drastic changes in the conceptualization of the Philistines relate to our own changing lives and ideologies.

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[71] Maeir 2019, 311.

[72] Young 1995, 163.

[73] Dietler 2010, 3–4. Even those opposing it admit that "postcolonial theory is one of the main frameworks for thinking about the world and acting to change the world" (Saltzman and Divine 2008).

Sixty years ago, the Philistines were the rightful owners of the slur "Philistine."[74] They were a migrating ethnic group, whose history matched the biblical stories, and hence were negatively portrayed as the archenemy of Israel (they were also "mighty carousers"). To the admiring eyes of the archeologists who excavated sites in Philistia, past the heyday of biblical archeology, the Philistines became an advanced culture of civilized folks (they were "cosmopolitan devotees of the grape"). When neoliberalism and globalization were "hot," the Philistines became daring economic entrepreneurs, connecting cultures, supplying vital commodities and enriching the world. For others, the Philistine lived in a pre-postcolonial world, in which one could use postcolonial concepts but claim that they can be purified and used neutrally. Few claim the Philistines as fathers and mothers (Jobling and Rose 1996, 381); but scholars have casted the image of the Philistines in their own image.

Barbarous invaders, boozers, civilized town-builders, great connoisseurs of wine, rich entrepreneurs, settler-colonialists, and good pirates. Need we mention that these are not necessarily conflicting terms, and that a people includes a variety of "types"?

What will the future images of the Philistines be? Based on this study, I am unwilling to make a prediction. The limitations of the data, coupled with a nearly endless human imagination, hint that the future of the Philistines may be as unpredictable as their past.

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[74] Jobling and Rose 1996; Ingram 2020, 16.
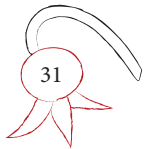
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Abstract

Although there may be some significant differences between oral discourse and written discourse, this article explores the similarities of how textualization can occur across media, from everyday conversation to literature, with special reference to the cognitive-linguistic practices associated with person reference. It begins with observations taken from conversation analysis to understand the basic practices of person reference in talk-in-interaction, *including* the preference for achieving recognition and the preference for minimalization. It then provides two examples of person reference in written material culture: (1) *bullae* A and B from excavations at Lachish, which contain two Hebrew names translated as "Eliakim, (son of) Yehozarah"; and (2) a discussion of text-critical variants concerning person reference in 2 Samuel 3:23–25 and in 2 Kings 24:18//Jeremiah 52:1. This analysis leads to the following conclusion: for successful communication to occur, textualization requires some level of co-cultural knowledge between speakers/writers and hearers/readers in ways that requires the speakers/writers to make certain assumptions about the co-cultural knowledge of the hearers/readers and design their speech/writing accordingly. Therefore, any particular example of textualization should not be understood as explicitly containing all of the information shared between speakers/writers and hearers/readers. This article ends with reflections on the implications of this conclusion on understanding both individual manuscripts of ancient literature and the text-critical "variants" between manuscripts of the "same" literary text as examples of textualization within textual plurality, a characteristic of ancient literature.

Bien qu'il puisse y avoir des différences significatives entre le discours oral et le discours écrit, cet article explore les similitudes de la textualisation à travers différents médias, de la conversation quotidienne à la littérature, en se référant particulièrement aux pratiques cognitivo-linguistiques associées à la référence aux personnes.

Il commence par des observations tirées de l'analyse de conversation pour comprendre les pratiques de base de la référence aux personnes dans les interactions parlées, y compris la préférence pour obtenir la reconnaissance et la préférence pour la minimisation. Il fournit ensuite deux exemples de référence aux personnes dans la culture matérielle écrite : (1) les bulles A et B des fouilles de Lakish, qui contiennent deux noms hébreux traduits par « Éliakim, (fils de) Yehozarah » ; et (2) une discussion sur les variantes textuelles concernant la référence aux personnes dans 2 Samuel 3:23-25 et dans 2 Rois 24:18//Jérémie 52:1. Cette analyse mène à la conclusion suivante : pour qu'une communication réussie ait lieu, la textualisation nécessite un certain niveau de connaissance co-culturelle entre les locuteurs/auteurs et les auditeurs/lecteurs de manière à ce que les locuteurs/auteurs fassent certaines hypothèses sur les connaissances co-culturelles des auditeurs/lecteurs et conçoivent leur discours/écriture en conséquence. Par conséquent, tout exemple particulier de textualisation ne doit pas être compris comme contenant explicitement toutes les informations partagées entre les locuteurs/auteurs et les auditeurs/lecteurs. Cet article se termine par des réflexions sur les implications de cette conclusion pour la compréhension à la fois des manuscrits individuels de la littérature ancienne et des « variantes » textuelles entre les manuscrits du « même » texte littéraire en tant qu'exemples de textualisation au sein de la pluralité textuelle, une caractéristique de la littérature ancienne.

TEXTUALIZATION ACROSS MEDIA: A CASE STUDY BASED ON PERSON REFERENCE FROM TALK-IN-INTERACTION TO EPIGRAPHIC DATA

Raymond F. Person, Jr.
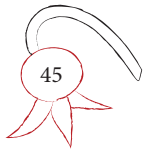
Introduction

I accept the premise of conversation analysis that face-to-face talk-in-interaction is the most basic form of language,[1] so I want to briefly summarize John Heritage's important work on epistemics in conversation to provide important background information for my argument.[2]

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[1] This article is a revision of a paper I gave at the Fourteenth Conference on Orality and Literacy in the Ancient World with the theme "textualization" hosted by The Hebrew University of Jerusalem from June 20–23, 2021. I want to thank the other attendees for their feedback and especially Margalit Finkelberg, Rachel Zelnick-Abramovitz, and Donna Shalev, the conference organizers.

[2] For those unfamiliar with conversation analysis, I recommend the following: Hutchby and Wooffitt 2008; Sidnell and Stivers 2013.

In two 2012 articles, Heritage asserted that talk-in-interaction not only draws from shared knowledge between the participants, but also serves the purpose of reducing the imbalance of knowledge between the participants. That is, he demonstrated that "territories of knowledge," especially when there is "an imbalance of information between speaker and hearer," are often the engine that drives talk-in-interaction and that, when that imbalance has been equalized, the topic for that particular sequence of conversation has run its course and generally comes to an end (Heritage 2012a; Heritage 2012b).[3]

I assert that all forms of language are texts in that participants (including speakers/hearers and writers/readers) can refer to the talk/epigraphic object in future social actions. Furthermore, despite differences between oral and written discourse, all texts assume some co-cultural or shared knowledge as they also may impart new information. My assertion assumes the basic premise concerning epistemics as described by Heritage, even as I describe how written texts adapt practices from everyday conversation.[4] I will argue that for successful communication to occur, textualization requires some level of co-cultural knowledge between speakers and writers, on the one hand, and hearers and readers, on the other, in ways that requires the speakers and writers to make certain assumptions about the co-cultural knowledge of the hearers and readers and to design their speech and writing accordingly; therefore, any particular example of textualization, including manuscripts of literary texts, should not be understood as explicitly containing all of the information shared between speakers/writers and hearers/readers. I will use person reference as my case study, looking at three different types of texts: an extract from a telephone conversation, two *bullae* or seal impressions, and text-critical "variants" in two biblical passages (2 Sam 3:23–25 and 2 Kgs 24:18//Jer 52:1). The article ends with my reflections on the implications of this conclusion for our understanding of what can justifiably be understood as one of the most literate forms

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[3] For an excellent review of the recent discussion of epistemics within conversation analysis, see Heritage 2014.

[4] For my most thorough discussion of how "literary" characteristics (including in oral traditions) adapt conversational practices, see Person 2016.

of textualization in antiquity—that is, when a scribe copied a *Vorlage* to produce a new manuscript of the "same" literary work that often contained "variants." Thus, this article builds upon arguments made in *Scribal Memory and Word Selection: Text Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Person 2023), in which I argue that the ideas of "original text" and "variants" are anachronistic, especially in light of the characteristics of textual fluidity and textual plurality evident in late Second Temple literature. Nevertheless, here I provide an example of a "variant" for which we can discern which reading might be earlier (2 Kgs 24:18//Jer 52:1).

Person Reference in Conversation

I begin my discussion of person reference in everyday conversation with a quote from an early study in conversation analysis by Harvey Sacks and Emanuel Schegloff:
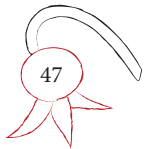
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> For reference to any person, there is a large set of reference forms that can do the work of referring to that one (e.g., he, Joe, a guy, my uncle, someone, Harry's cousin, the dentist, the man who came to dinner, et cetera). (Sacks and Schegloff 1979, 16–17)

In this quote, they note that we have multiple ways to refer to third-party non-present persons, which can be seen as a problem that needs to be solved: which particular person reference should someone choose in any given context? Conversation analysts have identified two preferences that help us solve this problem: the preference for achieving recognition and the preference for minimalization. The preference for recognition has been described as follows:

> Referring expressions are designed to achieve recognition: They evidence the broader underlying principle of recipient design by which speakers make use of a referential form that should enable their recipients to link a referring expression with a real person. (Stivers et al. 2007, 12–13)

In short, there must be enough information in the person reference so that the other participant in the conversation can identify who the

speaker is referring to. The preference for recognition is universally primary and must be met for successful communication. The preference for minimalization has been described as follows: "On occasions when reference is to be done, it should preferably be done with a single reference form" (Sacks and Schegloff 1979, 16)—that is, this secondary preference emphasizes economy in the process of recognition.

Furthermore, we need to make a distinction between "locally initial" and "locally subsequent" positions and forms (Schegloff 1996)—that is, the first time someone is referred to in a conversation (the locally initial position), a locally initial form often provides adequate recognition, so that, in English, a proper name is generally used. However, in later references to the same person (locally subsequent positions), a locally subsequent form can be minimal, so that, in English, for example, pronouns are generally used. Even though we can identify locally initial and locally subsequent forms based on general use, these are not hard-and-fast rules, so that, for example, in some situations a locally subsequent form may occur in a locally initial position. This situation is illustrated by Example 1 from a phone conversation between two college friends with the pseudonyms Nancy and Hyla:
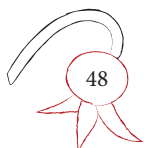
Example 1

```
01   Nan:   You don't want to see his forty year old?
02   Hyl:   hhhhhhh. U:h- uh k .hhhh I can live without her,
03          °.hhhhhh
04          (0.2)
05   Hyl:   That's alright,
06   Nan:   uh Oh::,
07          (.)
08   Hyl:   [Bu: t]
09   Nan:   [My f]:ace hurts,=
10   Hyl:   =°W't-° (.) Oh: what'd'e do to you.
11          (.)
12   Nan:   ↑GOD'e just (>) pracally killed my dumb fa:ce,=
13   Hyl:   =Why: Ho [=ow.    ]
14   Nan:             [(With,)] (.) with this thing I don' ee I
15          wasn't even looking I don't kno::w,
16          (.)
```

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17 Nan: But 'e just like o:pened up, (0.6) a lo:ot y'know 'v
18   (0.4) the pimples I ha:ve¿=
19 Hyl: =Eoh::,

(Kitzinger et al. 2012, 26)

In line 5, Hyla brings the previous topic to a close. Lines 6–7 suggest a brief pause between topics. Lines 8 and 9 occur at the same time (denoted by the brackets), so that in line 8 Hyla may be returning to the previous topic, but Nancy's "My face hurts" in line 9 introduces a new topic. Hyla's response in line 10 is at first "What" followed by "Oh" denoting that she now understands the topic. Note that Hyla introduces a person reference here that is a locally subsequent form, "What did **he** do to you?" Who is he? As outsiders, we might imagine other possibilities (for example, an abusive boyfriend), because the pronoun does not appear to provide adequate recognition; however, in the fuller transcript it becomes clear that Hyla knew that Nancy had recently gone to a dermatologist and correctly assumed that that visit was the source of her face hurting. This is one of those somewhat unusual cases that Celia Kitzinger et al.(2012) have identified as "locally initial indexicals"—that is, a locally subsequent form used in a locally initial position that nevertheless achieves recognition because of the co-cultural knowledge between the two participants. They described this example as follows: "By selecting the indexical, rather than his name (if she knows it) or a descriptor such as 'your dermatologist,' Hyla trades on—and claims access to—shared knowledge about the dermatologist" (Kitzinger et al. 2012, 126). In short, Hyla could provide the initial person reference to the dermatologist with a minimal form that nevertheless achieves recognition, because she produces her person reference according to audience design—that is, Nancy obviously knows who is responsible for her face hurting.

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Person Reference in *Bullae* A and B from Lachish

Figure 1. *Bulla* A. (Photo by T. Rogovski; courtesy of The Fourth Expedition to Lachish)

Figure 2. *Bulla* A. (Line drawing by A. Yardeni; courtesy of The Fourth Expedition to Lachish)
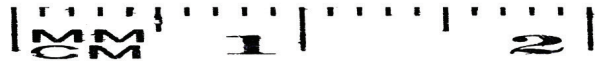
Figure 3. *Bulla* B. (Photo by T. Rogovski; courtesy of The Fourth Expedition to Lachish)
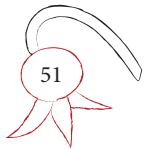
Figure 4. *Bulla* B. (Line drawing by A. Yardeni; courtesy of The Fourth Expedition to Lachish)

Now I want to assert that much the same thing is the case with *bullae* A and B from Lachish. These were found in the 2014 season of excavations at Lachish in Level III, a destruction layer associated with the campaign by Sennacherib, King of Assyria, in 701 BCE (Figs 1–4).[5] These *bullae* come from the same seal, and on the back side you can see the depressions made by the strings when the clay was applied to a roll of papyrus. The *bullae* include two lines of Hebrew written in a script typical of the eighth century BCE with one name on each line that reads: "belonging to Eliakim, (son of) Yehozarah" (in square script: לאליקם יהוזרח) separated by an iconographic depiction of two does facing each other.

The excavation directors concluded the following concerning their interpretation of the writing on the bullae:

> Thus, it is possible that Bullae A and B … stem from the personal seal of Eliakim the Royal Steward in the time of Hezekiah (according to 2 Kgs 18:18), son of Yehozarah (not mentioned in the Hebrew Bible but on the bulla from the Israel Museum) and grandson of Hilkiah (also mentioned in 2 Kgs 18:18). (Klingbeil et al. 2019, 48)

In 2 Kings 18:18, we find a reference to "Eliakim son of Hilkiah, who was in charge of the palace" (NRSV). A bulla in the collection of the Israel Museum belonged to "Yehozarah, son of Hilqiyahu [Hilkiah], servant of Hizqiyahu [Hezekiah]" (Klingbeil et al. 2019, 48). Their interpretation notes that in the Hebrew Bible בֵּן ("son of") can mean "grandson of," so that they propose this reading of 2 Kings 18:18 ("Eliakim, grandson of Hilkiah") as a way of reconciling what at first appears to be an inconsistency among the three sources of historical biographical information.

What I want us to notice is that they have essentially reconstructed the shared knowledge necessary for a fuller recognition of "Eliakim." That is, assuming that their interpretation is valid, anyone in ancient Lachish reading these *bullae* would have likely known more about

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[5] These figures are used with permission of the co-directors of The Fourth Expedition to Lachish, 2013–2017: Martin Klingbeil, Yosef Garfinkel, and Michael Hasel. I thank them for providing me with these figures that are also published in Klingbeil et al. 2019, 44–45.

"Eliakim" than these two Hebrew names suggest, including his title (Royal Steward) and other ancestors (Hilkiah). Presumably, their historical elaboration is simply making explicit for us moderns what would have been co-cultural knowledge to the ancients associated with the text on the papyrus rolls and for whom recognition was achieved with "Eliakim, (son of) Yehozarah" on the *bullae*.

Person Reference in Text-Critical "Variants"

Here I repeat the quote from Sacks and Schegloff I gave above: "For reference to any person, there is a large set of reference forms that can do the work of referring to that one" (1979, 16–17), because this remains the case in the composition/transmission process of ancient literature, not simply in conversation. This is most obvious when we consider how often "variants" may occur in the extant manuscript evidence related to person reference. Although others assume that "variants" are the result of "scribal errors" or theologically motivated revisions, I have argued that these "variants" are best understood (at least, in the majority of cases) as "synonymous readings," an idea I borrow from Shemaryahu Talmon even though I have significantly expanded its application (Person 2023). Here, I am simply concerned about the cognitive-linguistic mechanisms that are operative in *Vorlage*-based "copying"—that is, how are words selected by scribes as they "copy" a manuscript physically present to them into the new manuscript that they are producing in ways that nevertheless allow for textual fluidity and textual plurality as characteristic of the composition/transmission process, rather than aberrations of the "copying" process? Below, I provide a discussion of a set of text-critical "variants" in 2 Samuel 3:23–25 and one "variant" in 2 Kings 24:18// Jeremiah 52:1.

Concerning the text-critical "variants" in 2 Samuel 3:23–25, I provide the text in Hebrew of the Masoretic Text (MT) and one of the Dead Sea Scrolls (4QSam[a]) and the Greek of Codex Vaticanus of the Septuagint (LXX[B]) with English translations, and then I provide a list of the "variants" in this passage related to person reference (also bolded in the

English translation).[6] This order should not be assumed to represent any conclusion about which "variant" is "original" or even "earlier." In the first "variant" concerning Abner, I also provide the Greek variant reading from the Lucianic recension of Samuel (LXX[L]).

Example 2

2 Sam 3:23–25

MT   ויואב וכל הצבא אשר אתו באו ויגדו ליואב לאמר בא אבנר בן נר
אל המלך וישלחהו וילך בשלום ויבא יואב אל המלך ויאמר מה עשיתה
הנה בא אבנר אליך למה זה שלחתו וילך הלוך ידעת את אבנר בן נר
כי לפתתך בא ולדעת את מוצאך ואת מבואך ולדעת את כל אשר אתה עשה

When Joab and all the army that was with him came, it was reported to Joab, "Abner son of Ner came to **the king**, and he has dismissed him, and he has gone away in peace." Then Joab went to the king and said, "What have you done? Behold, **Abner** came to you; why did you dismiss him, so that he surely got away? You know that **Abner son of Ner** came to deceive you, and to learn your comings and goings and to learn all that you do."

4QSam[a]   [מה ויאמר המלך אל יואב ויבוא בשלום] וילך וישלחהו דויד אל נר בן
[את ידעת הלוא וילך שלחתו] זה למה אליך אבנר בא הן עשיתה
[את לדעת מבואך ואת מוצאך את ולדעת בא] הלפתותך כי אבנר
[vacat] עושה אתה אשר כול

"Son of Ner came to **David**, and he has dismissed him, and he has gone away [in peace." 24 Then Joab went to the king and said, "What] have you done? Behold, **Abner** came to you; why did you [dismiss him, so that he surely got away? You know that] **Abner** [came] to deceive you, [and to learn your comings and goings and to learn] all that you do."

LXX[B]   καὶ Ιωαβ καὶ πᾶσα ἡ στρατιὰ αὐτοῦ ἤχθησαν, καὶ ἀπηγγέλη τῷ Ιωαβ λέγοντες Ἥκει Αβεννηρ υἱὸς Νηρ πρὸς Δαυιδ, καὶ ἀπέσταλκεν αὐτὸν καὶ ἀπῆλθεν ἐν εἰρήνη. καὶ εἰσῆλθεν

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6 The Hebrew text for MT comes from *BHS*; the Hebrew text for 4QSam[a] comes from Cross et al. 2005; and the Greek for LXX[B] and LXX[L] comes from Brooke et al. 1927.

Ιωαβ πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα καὶ εἶπεν Τί τοῦτο ἐποίησας; ἰδοὺ ἦλθεν Αβεννηρ πρὸς σέ, καὶ ἵνα τί ἐξαπεσταλκας αὐτὸν καὶ ἀπελήλυθεν ἐν εἰρήνη; ἦ οὐκ οἶδας τὴν κακίαν Αβεννηρ υἱοῦ Νηρ, ὅτι ἀπατῆσαί σε παρεγένετο καὶ γνῶναι τὴν ἔξοδόν σου καὶ τὴν εἴσοδόν σου καὶ γνῶναι ἅπαντα, ὅσα σὺ ποιεῖς;

[23]When Joab and all the army that was with him came, it was reported to Joab, "Abner son of Ner came to **David**, and he has dismissed him, and he has gone away in peace." [24]Then Joab went to the king and said, "What have you done? Behold, **Abner** came to you; why did you dismiss him, so that he got away in peace? [25]Do you not know about the evil of **Abner son of Ner**, that he came to deceive you and to learn your goings and comings, all that you do?"

MT: המלך: the king
4QSamᵃ: דויד: David
LXXᴮ: Δαυιδ = דויד: David

MT: אבנר: Abner
4QSamᵃ: אבנר: Abner
LXXᴮ: Αβεννηρ = אבנר: Abner
LXXᴸ: Αβεννηρ υἱοῦ Νηρ = אבנר בן נר: Abner son of Ner

MT: אבנר בן נר: Abner son of Ner
4QSamᵃ: אבנר: Abner
LXXᴮ: Αβεννηρ υἱοῦ Νηρ = אבנר בן נר: Abner son of Ner

Before discussing the "variants," we should note that within their literary contexts these "variants" are not unique—that is, in the text where there is complete agreement between these versions, each of these "variants" are found. Also, the order given for the "variants" should not be understood as indicating priority related to any purported "original text," especially since I reject the very idea of an "original text" as anachronistic for ancient literary texts.[7] Rather, I provide the reading from

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[7] This example is taken from Person 2023. In this monograph, I provide further rationale concerning my theoretical approach combining the study of talk within conversation analysis with "variants" in text criticism, my rejection of the idea of an "original text," discussion of many other text-critical "variants" (including

the MT first simply because it is the "received" text, then provide the reading from one of the Samuel manuscripts of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and lastly the Septuagint reading.

In these three verses alone, David is referred to as "David," "the king," the third person singular pronoun embedded within the verb, and the second person singular pronoun. In v. 23, we have the variation between "the king" in MT and "David" in 4QSam[a] and LXX.

In these three verses alone, Abner is referred to by "Abner, son of Ner," "Abner," the third person singular pronoun, and the third person singular pronoun embedded within the verb. In v. 23, we have the variation between "Abner, son of Ner" in LXX[L] and "Abner" in MT, 4QSam[a], and LXX[B]. In v. 25, we have the variation between "Abner, son of Ner" in MT and LXX and "Abner" in 4QSam[a].

In *Scribal Memory and Word Selection* (Person 2023), I assert that, when ancient scribes copied a physical manuscript before them to produce a new manuscript, they drew from their co-cultural knowledge as they "copied" the manuscript in ways that allow for variation from the exact words in the *Vorlage*, but the vast majority of "variants" are nevertheless synonymous readings so that even when the scribes produced a manuscript with different lexemes (so-called "variants") they really had not changed a thing. Extending the idea of scribal performance, I use the idea of scribal memory as the label for this co-cultural knowledge that influenced the composition/transmission process. Combining and paraphrasing quotes from Alger Doane (1994, 435–36) and Jonathan Ready (2019, 213–14) on scribal performance and Alan Kirk (2008, 219) and Shem Miller (2019, 265) on scribal memory, I described the copying process as follows:

> Performing scribes transmitted a living tradition to their contemporary audience as they exercised their scribal memory while copying their *Vorlagen*. Scribes never stopped performing. Whether they were sticking to their *Vorlagen* or departing from them, their *Vorlagen* were ancillary—that is, visual, material supports for the primary existence and transmission of the literary texts in the medium of memory. When

others related to person reference), and a proposal for a cognitive-linguistic mechanism for word selection based especially on Jefferson 1996.

performing their texts, they drew not only from the *Vorlagen* physically present before them, but also from those *Vorlagen* that existed within scribal memory, which included traditional associations of words and traditional interpretations of literary texts. When scribes copied their *Vorlagen* into new manuscripts; written texts, traditional texts, and performed texts all interfaced with one another in the mind of the scribes in ways that often produced what we understand as "variants," but for them are simply alternative attestations of tradition and performance. (Person 2023, 36–37)

The ideas of scribal performance and scribal memory are clearly an extension of Albert Lord's insight concerning performance in oral traditions: "We cannot correctly speak of a 'variant,' since there is no 'original' to be varied" (1960, 101).

To return to the "variants" concerning person reference in 2 Samuel 3:23–25, I should be more explicit about how I think oral traditions and literature with roots in oral tradition differ from everyday conversation concerning person reference. In any talk-in-progress, the sequence of turns is not yet decided and each speaker is producing their turns-at-talk within the ongoing context of the conversation. In contrast, the transmission of traditional literature like the Hebrew Bible occurs in communities in which not only the scribes who were copying a manuscript knew the literary text as preserved in scribal memory (including preserved partially in the *Vorlage* before them), but in the collective memory of the scribes' audiences as well. Therefore, the sequential character of conversation is not as strong in traditional literature.

Furthermore, it is highly unlikely that every reading of a scroll would start at the beginning of the manuscript, thereby creating different locally initial readings based on where the scribe began to read. In the terminology of conversation analysis, the distinction between locally initial and locally subsequent locations becomes less important. Moreover, familiarity with the literary text makes recognition of the literary characters easier to achieve. Nevertheless, a certain degree of what in conversation are locally initial forms (most importantly, personal names) is necessary for the social function of the traditional literature in defining the community and its identity, especially in the education of children or initiates into the community. Therefore, even

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though recognition may be achieved more easily for those most familiar with the literature, the educational purpose of traditional literature to socialize suggests that a minimal approach to all person references may prove problematic. Based on the observation that person reference in the Hebrew Bible is often a location for variation between the extant manuscript traditions, it seems that textual plurality and textual fluidity in scribal performance allows for significant variation in the copying of manuscripts with regard to person reference. Although recognition of traditional characters may be easier to achieve and there is in some sense no locally initial location, the exclusive use of the most minimal forms (typically subsequent forms, such as pronouns) would undercut recognition, especially for those in the community who are the most unfamiliar with the texts—that is, those whose epistemic status with regard to the literature is among the lowest. Therefore, the initial forms can appear in various locations within the literature, so that what we perceive as "variants" can occur in relationship to a certain percentage of person reference terms within a given passage.
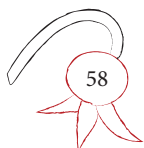
Individual scribes may have differing tendencies related to the selection of person reference terms based on their assumptions concerning their audience's epistemic status and therefore their own epistemic stance in relationship to the perceived epistemic status of their audience. Some scribes may assume a high epistemic status for their audience and therefore be more prone to omit the more explicit terms of person reference. Some scribes may assume a low epistemic status for their audience and therefore be more prone to add terms of person reference to facilitate better recognition. Of course, the same scribe may make one assumption for one audience when copying one text and another assumption for the same or another audience when copying another text.

Because of what seem to be competing/conflicting tendencies based on the preferences for recognition and minimalization in the text-critical evidence, I think that it is probably best to assume that variants related to person reference are generally understood as synonymous readings. For example, "David" and "the king" in 2 Samuel 3:23 are synonymous readings and as such both should be treated as "original" and

"authentic."[8] That is, although I do not discount that scribes sometimes made changes to a text for ideological reasons, I think that we, modern scholars, too often assume that that is the case, based on a presumed "original" text with ideological changes made by later scribes. However, once we accept textual plurality and textual fluidity in the context of scribal performance and scribal memory, we have little (if any) methodological basis to establish "early" from "late" readings much less what is "original."[9]

Despite my continuing insistence that we have little methodological basis to distinguish "early" from "late" readings, I will now discuss one such exception in the determination of an earlier and later reading pertaining to person reference. Nevertheless, this exception helps illustrate the notion of synonymous readings at the same time that it makes use of the observations from conversation analysis to person reference, specifically the preference for recognition and the preference for minimalization. This example comes from a comparison of MT 2 Kings 24:18 and LXX 2 Kings 24:18 and its parallels in MT Jeremiah 52:1 and LXX Jeremiah 52:1.[10] Here, I simply provide the "variants" from these four texts:

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[8] Shemaryahu Talmon first applied the term "synonymous reading" to text-critical variants in the Hebrew Bible. See Talmon 1961. For further discussion of synonymous readings in the Hebrew Bible, see Person 2023. For my discussion of synonymous readings not only in the Hebrew Bible but also the New Testament and Homer, see Person 2021.

[9] For my fuller critique of the efficacy of the current historical-critical methodology, see Person and Rezetko 2016; Person 2023, 304–10.

[10] The Hebrew text for MT comes from *BHS*; the Greek text for LXX 2 Kings 24:18 comes from Rahlfs 1979; and the Greek text for LXX Jeremiah 52:1 comes from Ziegler 1957. See Person 1997, 82, 97, 100, 103. In this work, I still assumed an "original text," so I would reach different conclusions concerning many of the "variants" I discussed then among MT 2 Kings 24:18–25:30; LXX 2 Kings 24:18–25:30; MT Jeremiah 52:1–30; and LXX Jeremiah 52:1–30. At that time, I was still operating under the assumptions of the consensus model and its methodologies. Nevertheless, I think that this specific example has some unique circumstances that increase the probably of determining which reading is earlier, even though these two "variants" should continue to be understood as synonymous readings.

Example 3

2 Kgs 24:18
MT: חמיטל בת ירמיהו מלבנה: Hamutal, daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah
LXX: Αμιτααλ θυγάτηρ Ιερεμιου = חמיטל בת ירמיהו:
Hamutal, daughter of Jeremiah

Jer 52:1
MT: חמיטל בת ירמיהו מלבנה: Hamutal, daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah
LXX: Αμιτααλ θυγάτηρ Ιερεμιου ἐκ Λοβενα = חמיטל בת ירמיהו מלבנה:
Hamutal, daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah

First, I want to note that "Hamutal, daughter of Jeremiah" and "Hamutal, daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah" are synonymous readings in that they both clearly point to Hamutal, who is identified earlier in this verse as Zedekiah's mother. Furthermore, "Jeremiah" and "Jeremiah of Libnah" are synonymous readings in that they both specify Hamutal's father. So the question becomes as follows: why was "of Libnah" added or omitted in this case in relationship to "Jeremiah." As has long been noted by commentators, Jeremiah 52 is a chapter that was copied from the book of Kings (2 Kgs 24:18–25:30)—that is, the original location for this passage was most likely the book of Kings, because its genre fits much better there than in the book of Jeremiah. Assuming this consensus, I have argued elsewhere that "of Libnah" was an addition made most likely at the time that 2 Kings 24:18–25:30 was copied into the book of Jeremiah as a way to clarify that Hamutal's father ("Jeremiah of Libnah") was not the prophet Jeremiah of the book of Jeremiah ("Jeremiah of Anathoth"; see Jer 29:27) as found in MT Jeremiah 52:1 and LXX Jeremiah 52:1. At a later time, this same "addition" was made in the book of Kings as found in MT 2 Kings 24:18 under the influence of Jeremiah 52:1.

Within 2 Kings 24:18–25:30//Jeremiah 52:1–30, there are many other "variants" related to person reference, sometimes as simple as a difference between "he" (indicating a leader) and "they" (indicating the leader and those he leads), that I would now interpret as synonymous readings as in the example of 2 Samuel 3:23–25 above.

Therefore, LXX 2 Kings 24:18 has the earliest reading.[11] This conclu-
sion is consistent with my current understanding of person reference.
That is, the more minimal "Jeremiah" (as in LXX 2 Kgs 24:18) provided
adequate representativity for recognition of Zedekiah's heritage, espe-
cially since here Jeremiah is not of central importance; however, the
scribe who copied the text into the book of Jeremiah added "of Libnah"
based on his co-cultural knowledge within his scribal memory as a way
of insuring recognition of this "Jeremiah," not "Jeremiah of Anathoth,"
who is of central importance within the book of Jeremiah. Therefore,
even though I think that we would have no basis methodologically to
determine "early" from "late" if we only had these two readings in MT
2 Kings 24:18 and LXX 2 Kings 24:18, the fact that this passage was
also used later in the book of Jeremiah provides us with a more objec-
tive basis for determining that "Jeremiah" was the earlier reading in 2
Kings 24:18 and the addition "of Libnah" likely entered the tradition
after 2 Kings 24:18–25:30 was copied into the book of Jeremiah. Thus,
although there remains no theological rationale behind this change, we
can use what we know about person reference from conversation anal-
ysis to tip the balance in such a way that we can make a decision on the
earlier reading. Nevertheless, when some later scribe of 2 Kings also
added "of Libnah" (leading to MT), I think we can continue to argue that
this would be understood by the ancients and should be understood by
us moderns as a synonymous reading, one that may enable better the
preference for recognition as the book of Jeremiah gains prominence,
which necessarily overrides the preference for minimalization in some
cases based on the scribes' assumptions concerning the epistemic status

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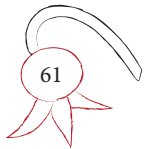
[11] In Person 1997, I concluded that LXX 2 Kings 24:18 was the "original"
reading. Here, I am avoiding "original" altogether, because I allow that, with the
characteristic of textual fluidity and textual plurality for ancient texts, there was
no single "original text"; therefore, there can be no single "original" reading—that
is, I certainly allow that some early texts of the book of Kings could have had
either reading before the passage was copied into the book of Jeremiah, so that the
kind of unilinear argument I have given here remains problematic when applied
to the vast majority of "variants" and even undercuts further any certainty I have
with this conclusion now compared to when I wrote Person 1997.

of their audience, which could be influenced by reusing a passage from one book in another book.

Conclusion

The examples I have discussed above all illustrate how the preference for recognition and the preference for minimalization are practices that influence textualization across media, from everyday conversation (at one extreme of the oral–literate continuum) to written texts, even in the *Vorlage*-based "copying" of manuscripts (at the other extreme). Furthermore, speakers and writers must take into account the epistemic status of their hearers and readers, in order to determine their own epistemic stance and how it influences their negotiation between these two preferences to produce adequate representativity. Because of co-cultural knowledge, Hyla can refer to Nancy's dermatologist in the initial person reference for him with the minimal pronoun "he" and the artisan who manufactured the seal that produced *bullae* A and B can refer to Hezekiah's Royal Steward simply as "Eliakim, (son of) Yehozarah." Moreover, both Hyla and the artisan can achieve recognition well of the non-present third person individuals in their targeted audiences—that is, "he" and "Eliakim, (son of) Yehozarah" are designated with their audiences' epistemic status in mind in ways that facilitate competent communication and also meet the secondary preference for minimalization. Somewhat similarly, because of scribal memory and the shared knowledge of the scribes' audiences, the two examples of text-critical "variants" illustrate that scribes in the process of producing new manuscripts based on *Vorlage*-based "copying" select terms of person reference based on their perceived understanding of their audiences' epistemic status. The various terms for David and Abner in 2 Samuel 3:23–25 provide competent recognition of these two characters; however, the fact that there is no consistent pattern we can discern related to the preference for minimalization within any one manuscript tradition demonstrates from yet another perspective how many ancient texts can be characterized by textual fluidity. However, despite what we perceive as "differences," each manuscript can nevertheless present the

"same" text in a tradition that values multiformity. At the same time, we can nevertheless see that most person references in this passage agree and make use of minimal forms, including pronouns and pronouns embedded within the Hebrew verbs. Thus, it may be the case that the principle of recognition and the principle of minimalization are both met within the tradition, but, since in some ways no person reference is necessarily locally initial in traditional literature, scribes were not required to adhere verbatim to the terms for person reference as they "copied" their *Vorlagen*. Therefore, they continued to prefer subsequent forms for the purpose of minimalization, but also would sometimes use initial forms even in subsequent positions for the purpose of increasing recognition. In the case of Jeremiah of Libnah in 2 Kings 24:18//Jeremiah 52:1, we can see how the reuse of a passage from the book of Kings in the book of Jeremiah could provide an incentive for the "addition" of "of Libnah" in the Jeremiah version. This "addition" increased the likelihood of adequate recognition of Jeremiah of Libnah in the book of Jeremiah, which concerns the prophet, Jeremiah of Anathoth, so that the more minimal, yet synonymous, "Jeremiah [of Libnah]" would not have been misunderstood as "Jeremiah [of Anathoth]."

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THE *TALE OF THE POOR MAN OF NIPPUR* BETWEEN MESOPOTAMIAN AND BIBLICAL WISDOM

Giorgio Paolo Campi

Abstract

This article provides a tentative new overall reading of the literary composition in the Akkadian language known as *The Tale of the Poor Man of Nippur*, one that implies a partial reassessment of previous scholarly understandings and that is grounded in a comparative approach with selected examples from both Mesopotamian and biblical wisdom literature. First, a brief philological overview of the extant manuscripts and an outline of the plot (with notes accompanying its most debated and/or obscure passages) are provided, along with some remarks about the information they offer. Second, a review of past scholarly understandings of the tale highlights the hermeneutical impasse that interpreters have found themselves at. Third, the identification of a shared background of tropes and motifs between *PMN* and both Mesopotamian and biblical wisdom texts of the "pious sufferer" type is argued to be the foundation for a new reading that circumvents the impasse and allows *PMN* to be understood in a new context and envisioned as a "hypertext" conversing with both Near Eastern wisdom traditions. Ultimately, *PMN* can be read as an example of "skeptical literature" in line with other cognate examples stemming from the wisdom tradition.

Dieser Artikel bietet eine vorläufige neue Deutung der literarischen Komposition in akkadischer Sprache, die als *Der arme Mann von Nippur* bekannt ist. Diese Deutung impliziert eine teilweise Neubewertung früherer wissenschaftlicher Auffassungen und beruht auf einem vergleichenden Ansatz mit ausgewählten Beispielen sowohl der mesopotamischen als auch der biblischen Weisheitsliteratur. Zunächst werden ein philologischer Überblick über die erhaltenen Handschriften und ein Abriss der Handlung (mit Anmerkungen zu den umstrittensten und/oder schwer verständlich Textstellen) gegeben und einige Bemerkungen zu den darin enthaltenen Informationen gemacht. Anschließend wird in einem Überblick über die bisherige wissenschaftliche Auffassung der Erzählung die hermeneutische Sackgasse aufgezeigt, in der sich die Interpreten befinden, wenn sie sich mit der Erzählung beschäftigen. Die Identifizierung eines gemeinsamen Hintergrunds von Tropen und Motiven zwischen *Der Arme Mann von Nippur* und der mesopotamischen sowie der biblischen Weisheitsliteratur des 'rechtschaffenen Leidenden' legt den Grundstein für eine neue Deutung, die die Sackgasse umgeht und es ermöglicht, *Der Arme Mann* in einen neuen Kontext einzuordnen und als 'Hypertext' zu begreifen, der mit der weisheitlichen Literaturtradition im Gespräch ist. Letztendlich kann *Der Arme Mann* als ein Beispiel für "skeptische Literatur" gelesen werden, in Übereinstimmung mit anderen verwandten Beispielen, die aus der Weisheitstradition stammen.

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THE *TALE OF THE POOR MAN OF NIPPUR* BETWEEN MESOPOTAMIAN AND BIBLICAL WISDOM[1]

Giorgio Paolo Campi

Dieser Artikel bietet eine vorläufige neue Deutung der literarischen Komposition in akkadischer Sprache, die als *Der arme Mann von Nippur* bekannt ist. Diese Deutung impliziert eine teilweise Neubewertung früherer wissenschaftlicher Auffassungen und beruht auf einem vergleichenden Ansatz mit ausgewählten Beispielen sowohl der mesopotamischen als auch der biblischen Weisheitsliteratur. Zunächst werden ein philologischer Überblick über die erhaltenen Handschriften und ein Abriss der Handlung (mit Anmerkungen zu den umstrittensten und/oder schwer verständlich Textstellen) gegeben und einige Bemerkungen zu den darin enthaltenen Informationen gemacht. Anschließend wird

in einem Überblick über die bisherige wissenschaftliche Aufassung der Erzählung die hermeneutische Sackgasse aufgezeigt, in der sich die Interpreten befinden, wenn sie sich mit der Erzählung beschäftigen. Die Identifizierung eines gemeinsamen Hintergrunds von Tropen und Motiven zwischen *Der Arme Mann von Nippur* und der mesopotamischen sowie der biblischen Weisheitsliteratur des 'leidender Gerechter' legt den Grundstein für eine neue Deutung, die die Sackgasse umgeht und es ermöglicht, *Der Arme Mann* in einen neuen Kontext einzuordnen und als 'Hypertext' zu begreifen, der mit der weisheitlichen Literaturtradition im Gespräch ist. Letztendlich kann *Der Arme Mann* als ein Beispiel für "skeptische Literatur" gelesen werden, in Übereinstimmung mit anderen verwandten Beispielen, die aus der Weisheitstradition stammen.

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Introduction

Since the moment of its rediscovery, the Akkadian language composition known as *The Tale of the Poor Man of Nippur* (hereinafter, *PMN*) has puzzled Assyriologists, folklorists, and scholars in literary-related fields.[2] It is perhaps because of its ambiguous literary identity, its problematic positioning within the standards of ancient Near Eastern (ANE) literature and genres, and the challenges it poses to scholarly constructs that such work has attracted a fair amount of attention across the board throughout the decades.[3] Indeed, *PMN* is an extremely elusive

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[2] Line numbers are taken from Baruch Ottervanger's edition of the text (Ottervanger 2016). I have abbreviated the title for the sake of expediency.

[3] This attention brought about in recent times the latest edition of the text in the twelfth volume of the SAACT series by Baruch Ottervanger (2016) and the one-of-a-kind movie adaptation project coordinated by Martin Worthington in 2018, which is well worth mentioning. Professor Worthington and some of his students at the University of Cambridge made a short movie—acted in Akkadian!—using the very text of *PMN* as a script. The movie is available on YouTube on the Cambridge Archaeology channel at this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pxYoFlnJLoE. It can also be downloaded as an mp4 file at this link: https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.39131.

text, and to grasp its meaning feels much like—to borrow St. Jerome's well-known metaphor concerning the book of Job—*murenulam strictis tenere manibus*.[4]

This article will outline a fresh overall interpretative key for *PMN*, arguing for the need of a partial reassessment of former scholarly understandings of its overall nature; while this will add an additional layer of complexity to modern readings of this literary composition, it will also show how complexity was an integral and actually a vital part of *PMN* itself, unfolding in its hypertextual relationship with tropes and motifs usually found in wisdom literature and traditions.[5] However, before undertaking the investigation of this relationship from a literary-critical and hermeneutical perspective, an updated philological and historical framing of *PMN* and a detailed presentation of its contents are in order.

Context, Author, and Date

The only complete copy of the text, in Neo-Assyrian script (STT I, 38), was found along with some other fragments (STT I, 39 + STT II, 116)[6]

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[4] *Incipit Prologus Sancti Hieronymi in Libro Iob* (BSV 2007, 731:19); cf. Reiner 1978, 202, referring to *PMN*: "Es ist offenbar ein Stück Literatur, geschaffen zu einem uns unbekannten Zweck."

[5] Assuming with Wilfred Lambert (1996 [1960], 1) that "wisdom" "is strictly a misnomer as applied to Babylonian literature," I would argue that with this term we therefore define a convenience label arbitrarily coined by modern scholarship; cf. Cohen 2013, 7–19; Oshima 2014, 2 n5. Thus, "wisdom" is envisioned here as a "critical genre," that is, an etic, non-native genre that is not inherent in the ANE sociocultural context, as opposed to emic or "ethnic" genres. As such, "wisdom" gathers within itself heterogeneous literary works; despite this limit, however, the use of it as a label still proves heuristically useful in studies on ANE literature, especially in a comparative perspective with biblical literature. For further discussion about the debate and about the relevant terminology used here, see recently Samet 2020, 328–29; 341 n1, with further literature.

[6] *Editio princeps* in Gurney 1956. *Addenda* and *corrigenda* in Gurney 1957, 135–36; 1958; George 1993, 75. For further bibliography featuring more recent editions, collations, translations, comments, and studies see Saporetti 1985,

within a tablet collection likely belonging to a scribal workshop (*bīt mummi*) unearthed in Sultantepe/Ḫuzirina in what is today south-eastern Turkey.[7] Three fragments in Neo-Assyrian script (K.3478 obv.; K.19604; Rm.468) come from the Library of Ashurbanipal in Nineveh,[8] and yet another little fragment of a school tablet in Neo-Babylonian script (N 4022) was found in Nippur.[9] The identity of the composer and the date of the original composition are unknown; the colophon of STT I, 38 (ll. 161–173) marks the *terminus ante quem* at 701/0 BCE.[10] Older hypotheses by Oliver Gurney, Edmund Gordon, and Ephraim Speiser posited an early dating in the Old Babylonian or Middle Babylonian periods, going as far back as the first half of the second millennium BCE.[11] More recently, however, André Finet and Baruch Ottervanger

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78–80; D'Agostino 2000, 117; Rositani 2013, 176; Ottervanger 2016, xiv–xvi; Stol 2019; Jiménez 2021, 170–73; Heinrich 2022.

[7] For general overviews about the tablet collection in Sultantepe see Lambert 1959; Reiner 1960, 1967; Pedersén 1998, 178–80, and more recently Robson 2013, 48–50; 2019, 128–38, who concludes that the extant tablets are likely "the remains of a scribal school … for the sons of provincial officials and the like (Robson 2013, 50); cf. D'Agostino 2000, 137 n154; Ottervanger 2016, 45 n163; Lenzi 2023, 38–39.

[8] The fragment K.3478, now held by the British Museum, was rediscovered among the British Museum Geers Copies by Wilfred Lambert, who signaled its existence to Gurney. See Gurney 1956: 148–49; further collations are found in George 1993, 75. K.19604 was identified by Lambert (1992, 38) and Rm.468 by Simo Parpola. These two new fragments have been recently published in Jiménez 2021, 170–73; see there for further discussion on this material.

[9] Published by Maria de Jong Ellis (1974).

[10] The colophon of STT I, 38 reports (*PMN* ll. 169–170) that the text was written during the year of the eponym Hanānu (701/0), governor of Til-Barsip, on the twenty-first day of the month Addāru, corresponding to February-March 700 BCE; see Saporetti 1985, 78 n9; D'Agostino 2000, 138; and Ottervanger 2016, 45–46. The colophon is also featured in Hunger 1968, 111 n354, among others from the Sultantepe collection; cf. Pearce 1993, 186–87.

[11] Building on von Soden 1950, 187–90, Gurney (1956, 158 n17) took the use of the modal particle *tušam(m)a* (*tu-šá-am-ma*) in *PMN* l. 17 as a sign of early composition, since this particular word does not seem to be used after the Old Babylonian period; cf. Finet 1992, 102; D'Agostino 2000, 120 n41. Developing a suggestion made by Gurney (1956, 159 n40), Edmund Gordon (1960, 140 and

have made several arguments in favor of a later dating to the first half of the first millennium BCE, with suggestions anywhere some decades to slightly more than a century before the 701/0 date featured in the colophon of STT I, 38. Their observations are mainly based on intertextual correspondences and parallelisms with texts roughly fitting in that

nn138–39) highlighted a shared motif between *PMN* ll. 35–40, an Akkadian proverb (*KAR* 174 iv 8–10; for a German translation, see Ebeling 1927, 47–48; cf. D'Agostino 2000, 124 n66), and another Sumerian one regarding bribery (for the text and an English translation, see Ottervanger 2016, 28 n35); thus, he pushed the date of composition as far back as the first two centuries of the second millennium BCE, and proffered the idea that the tale had originally been written in Sumerian. Against Gordon's arguments, see the remarks in Ottervanger 2016, x, 28 n35. Ephraim Speiser (1957) dealt with some orthographic parallels between *PMN* l. 73 and *EE* iii 69 and posited a Middle-Babylonian date for *PMN*; he is followed in such a stance by de Jong Ellis (1974, 88); cf. Ottervanger 2016, 34 n73. The folklorist Heda Jason (1979, 194) supported the early dating hypothesis (early 2nd mill. BCE), adducing new considerations based on her definition of *PMN* as a "swindler novella": since oral literature of this kind was usually set in large-scale economic centers, she deems it likely that *PMN* came to light during the Old Babylonian period, when Nippur's political and economic influence was still strong. Recently, Irene Sibbing-Plantholt (2022, 232 n140) opted for a Middle-Babylonian date "based on the locale of the story and the syllabary used"; but in quoting Dietrich 2009 in her support, she misunderstood the main point of that article (!); see below, note 12. Moreover, Erica Reiner (1986, 2–3) (also mentioned by Sibbing-Plantholt) only mentions a tentative date (ca. 1200 BCE) for the humorous composition from Uruk (W.23558, colophon d. 818 BCE) known as *The Tale of the Illiterate Doctor from Nippur* or alternatively as *The Doctor of Isin* or *Ninurta-Pāqidāt's Dog Bite* (see especially George 1993, 63–74 and further Finkel 1994; D'Agostino 1995, 2000, 61–78; Reiner 2003; Worthington 2010, 29–30; D'Agostino 2014, 69–70; cf. Ottervanger 2016, 40 n122): the fact that this text shares some similarities with *PMN* does not provide sufficient grounds for such a conclusion, especially in the light of clearer intertextual connections with later texts; see below, note 12 and note 52 about similarities between *PMN* and another Sumerian composition (*The Three Ox-Drivers from Adab*) dating from the second millennium BCE.
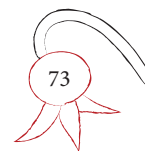
same time frame, most prominently the Standard Babylonian recension of the Gilgamesh Epic (ca. 1300–1000 BCE).[12]

This very brief overview allows us to make some preliminary observations: first of all, the original place of the composition notwithstanding,[13] it must be acknowledged that from a geographical point of view *PMN* knew a widespread diffusion all over the ANE cultural macro-region in the first half of the first millennium BCE; its presence spanned from the peripheral Sultantepe in the far north, to Nineveh and then all the way down to Nippur in the very center of Babylonia. This consideration dovetails with the fact that as a literary piece *PMN*

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[12] Finet (1992, 102–6) pointed out intertextual allusions and links between *PMN* and the Standard Babylonian (SB) version of the *Gilgamesh Epic* (especially tablet X), which was compiled and finalized by scribal scholar Sîn-Lēqi-Unninni somewhere between 1300 and 1000 BCE (see George 2003, 28–33; 410–11); he further envisioned the linguistic archaisms featured in the text not as signs of an early composition, but rather as literary devices aimed at parodic allusion. Indeed, the SB *Gilgamesh Epic* must have certainly been well-known in the Sultantepe scribal school, as fragments from tablets VII (SU 51, 129A+237) and VIII (SU 51, 7) were found there (edition in Gurney 1954; cf. George 2003, 381). Ottervanger followed Finet's lead in determining that "the text of the tale suggests that its composer was acquainted with works of Mesopotamian literature which either were composed or reached their final form in the late second and the early first millennium B.C.E." (Ottervanger 2016, x), and went further in identifying several intertextual connections of *PMN* with the SB *Gilgamesh Epic* (Ottervanger 2016, 21–26 nn4, 8, 11, 22; 35 n82; 37 nn95, 100; 41–42 n132) and with the so-called *Advice to a Prince* (also known as the *Babylonian Fürstenspiegel*), dated by Lambert (1996 [1960], 111) to between 1000 and 700 BCE (Ottervanger 2016, 35 n79); cf. Zgoll 2003, 197–98. On this work, see more recently the updated discussion in Finn 2017, 85–95, which argues, however (90), that at least the core of the composition might have originated earlier than the first millennium BCE, as it shares some linguistic traits with *kudurrus* and private *Fluchinscriften* from the Kassite period (16th–12th c. BCE) and might reflect elements of Nebuchadnezzar I's (ca. 1121–1100 BCE) Marduk-centered theology. Dietrich's (2009, 350–52) sociologically oriented analysis of *PMN* supports a later date in the first half of the first millennium BCE.

[13] Perhaps the very city of Nippur. So, for example, Jason 1979, 194; Dietrich 2009, 335; Ottervanger 2016, ix.

had gained quite an appreciation as well, so much so that it was even included in the Library of Ashurbanipal.[14] Moreover, this large-scale reception might be due to the fact that *PMN* is situated in the context of scribal education: the colophon of STT I, 38 informs us that the copy was written by a certain Nabû-rēḫtu-uṣur, a *šamallû* (LÚ.ŠAB.TUR, l. 163) "novice, apprentice scribe" studying as a *mār* (DUMU) *mummu* "member of a scribal workshop" belonging to the *ša rēši* (LÚ.SAG) "courtier"[15] Nabû-aḫa-iddin (l. 164), *ana tāmarti* (IGI.DU$_8$.A) "for the reading"[16] of another scribe, Qurdi-Nergal (l. 165).[17] The school tablet

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[14] Cf. Saporetti 1985, 14; D'Agostino 2000, 111, which ascribes the appreciation gained by *PMN* to its alleged monarchical views (on this point, cf. also Annus 2024, 120); Fink 2017, 180 n38. According to Heinrich (Jiménez 2021, 170), the newly published fragments K.19604 and Rm.468 from the Nineveh library are "indicative of two distinct Assyrian recensions of the tale." Indeed, *PMN* must have been very popular in the Assyrian capital if echoes of it (or perhaps even quotations) can be found in the petition advanced to King Ashurbanipal by the former exorcist under Esarhaddon and then "forlorn scholar" Urad-Gula (K.4267 = ABL 1285; see Parpola 1985 and SAA 10, 294), who referred to Gimil-Ninurta as an example to effectively illustrate the miserable condition he was in after losing his position at court (Parpola 1985, 273 and n15; cf. Parpola 2007, 102–3). As Lucio Milano (1998, 127) aptly remarks: "One has to keep in mind that it is not Gimil-ninurta who writes the tale of the Poor Man of Nippur: it is actually a scribe, whose psychology must not have been far from that of an Urad-Gula"; cf. Oshima 2014, 7 n22.

[15] *Contra* D'Agostino (2000, 137–38 n155), who renders *ša rēši* as "quello della testa" ("the one of the head"). The consensus (with a few exceptions) is that from at least the fourteenth century BCE onward officials designated with such a title were eunuchs; for recent discussions (with further references), see Peled 2013, 785–86 and n2; Yalçin 2016, 124 and n6; Nissinen 2017, 230–34; Groß and Pirngruber 2014; Frazer 2022; May 2023; cf. Ambos 2009; Ottervanger 2016, 45 n164. The same title also recurs within the plot (*PMN* l. 126), where it is associated with members of the *ḫazannu*'s entourage; see Saporetti 1985, 73–74 n126, 77 n4.

[16] On the exact meaning of the expression *ana tāmarti*, see Pearce 1993, 186–88.

[17] While it is universally accepted that at some point in time the scribal school in Sultantepe had been run by Qurdi-Nergal and his family, this must not have been the case here; in fact, in 701/0 Qurdi-Nergal was likely still a *šamallû* himself, as it appears from other documents in the Sultantepe collection; see Ottervanger 2016, 45 n165 *contra* Pearce 1993, 186; cf. Robson 2013, 49; 2019, 135–36. If,

fragment from Nippur (N 4022) further proves that *PMN* was used as a school text for exercises in scribal schools even later, that is, in the Neo-Babylonian period.[18]

Plot Outline

The plot of the tale can be briefly summarized by looking at its structure.[19] As the modern title of the work foreshadows,[20] the story is set in the city of Nippur and begins with a destitute man named Gimil-Ninurta suffering from a terrible hunger; the first section introduces the protagonist and describes his miserable condition (ll. 1–10); in the second part (ll. 11–69) are presented two plans devised by Gimil-Ninurta to improve his condition. At first, Gimil-Ninurta resolves to go the marketplace and exchange his robes for a sheep. He does so, but he gets just a cheaper three-year-old she-goat[21] instead of the expected sheep (ll. 11–15). The animal exchange probably implies some irony with a comic intent: the three-year-old (*šulušī'um*) goat (*enzu*; ùz) was worth less than a sheep: Gimil-Ninurta must therefore have expected a more lucrative return from the exchange of his miserable clothes, but he has

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following Ottervanger 2016, 45 n165, we understand that Nabû-rēḫtu-uṣur wrote STT I, 38 for the reading of Qurdi-Nergal *at the instruction* of Nabû-aḫa-iddin, the latter is much more likely to have been in charge of the scribal workshop at that time, while Qurdi-Nergal was still to obtain the title of *šangû*-priest of the gods Zababa and Baba and to become chief of the workshop. On Nabû-aḫa-iddin and Nabû-rēḫtu-uṣur, see further *PNAE* 2/II, 799a–801b; Saporetti 1985, 77 n4; D'Agostino 2000, 137 n153; and *PNAE* 2/II, 861a–862b; Saporetti 1985, 77 n2; D'Agostino 2000, 137–38 n155, respectively.

[18] Or, at the very least, only some excerpts from it were used for this purpose; see de Jong Ellis 1974, 89; cf. Ottervanger 2016, x.

[19] This structural subdivision of the plot is indebted to the one sketched out by Dietrich 2009, 336; cf. also Cooper 1975, 163–67; Helle 2020, 217–18.

[20] See Ottervanger 2016, xi, for a brief overview on the tale's modern title fortunes.

[21] Or a "third-rate goat" if at l. 15 we read *šullulta* instead of *šullušita*, which looks like a viable option both from a philological and a narrative perspective; see Giorgetti 1986 and cf. ll. 59, 62.

been disappointed.[22] Gimil-Ninurta would like to eat the goat, but he cannot, probably because social conventions dictate that he should host a dinner party and share the goat with neighbors, relatives, and friends: he does not have enough money to do so, and, in any case, he would not eat as much as he would like (ll. 16–20).[23] Thus, Gimil-Ninurta devises a second plan: he takes the she-goat to the local authority of his community, the *ḫazannu* of Nippur, to submit a plea in exchange for the gift of such goat.[24] In giving the she-goat to the *ḫazannu*, Gimil-Ninurta is

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[22] See Gurney 1956, 145; Saporetti 1985, 61–62 n15; D'Agostino 2000, 109; 120 n40; Ottervanger 2016, 24–25 n15.

[23] See, above all, Milano 1998, 116–17, who envisions the imagined slaughtering and consumption of the goat as taking place in a non-sacrificial context, *contra* Gurney 1956, 158 nn17–20; cf. Saporetti 1985, 62 n19; D'Agostino 2000, 109–10 n3; Ermidoro 2015, 56–57.

[24] This term designates the "chief magistrate of a town, of a quarter of a larger city, a village or a large estate" (*CAD* Ḫ, 163); thus, it is usually translated as "mayor" (Gurney 1956, 150–58; Cooper 1975, 170–74; Foster 2005, 813–18; but cf. Ottervanger 2016, *passim*, who seems to prefer "chief" when the term occurs in logographic writing, NU.BÀN.DA, and "mayor" when it is found in syllabic writing, although he is not always consistent with this principle throughout the translation) or equivalents: cf., e.g., Italian *borgomastro* (Saporetti 1985, 59–76) and *sindaco* (D'Agostino 2000, 118–38; Rositani 2013, 176–81; 2021, 156–159); German *Bürgermeister* (*AHw* I, 338). Dietrich (2009, 336 n15) suggests that this title might conceal a reference to the *šandabakku* (ᴸᵁ́GÚ.EN.NA), i.e., the office name of the governor of Nippur since the Kassite period. However, even if this was the case this must not be taken as a hint of an early date, since governors of Nippur kept this title well into the Achaemenid period and changed it for *paqdu* only under the rule of Xerxes I (486–465 BCE); see Oppenheim 1985, 569 n2. Throughout the text, the term is found written both logographically (NU.BÀN.DA, *PMN* ll. 24, 30, 33*, 39*, 50*, 52*, 56*, 69, 87, 92 , 94, 95, 98, 126, 146; asterisks signal an either partially or totally reconstructed portion of text according to Ottervanger 2016's edition) and with syllabic spelling. In the latter case, it is preceded by two different determinatives: ᴸᵁ́ (*PMN* ll. 21, 41, 88*, 104, 114, 148*), generally indicating a profession (and usually found elsewhere with *ḫazannu*; see *CAD* Ḫ, 163–165), and ᵐ (*PMN* ll. 26*, 34*, 36, 37, 101*, 118, 120*, 142*, 144*, 152, 153*, 154, 160*), i.e., the single vertical wedge usually affixed before male personal names (cf. Hurowitz 2010, 88 n2). For this reason and for the fact that the proper name of the *ḫazannu* is never mentioned, Jean Bottéro (1982, 26) raised the possibility

probably hoping that he would host the dinner party in his place so he could eat and drink to his heart's content at the price of the goat only (ll. 21–33).[25] The officeholder, however, mistakes Gimil-Ninurta's present as a bribe,[26] he does not comply with Gimil-Ninurta's demands and sends him away with just a little third-rate beer, a bone of the goat, and the gristle of a sinew (ll. 34–63).[27] At this point Gimil-Ninurta gets furious and swears a threefold revenge on the *ḫazannu* in the presence of the gatekeeper Tukulti-Enlil, only to be laughed at by the *ḫazannu* who had overheard (ll. 64–69).[28] The bulk of the story (ll. 70–158) is dedicated

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that the purpose of the tale is to convey by some kind of antonomasia the idea of a tight link between the character and his office, thus sketching a prototypical *ḫazannu*; cf. D'Agostino 2000, 121 n48; Fink 2013, 94 n71. As a public office, the *ḫazannu*ship featured prominently in the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian periods (for discussions, see Fox 2000, 155–56; Van Buylaere 2010; Ponchia 2012, 217–20; Tarasewicz 2012), further corroborating the later date hypothesis.

[25] Cf. Gurney 1956, 145; Saporetti 1985, 62 n21; D'Agostino 2000, 121–22 n50; Ermidoro 2015, 57.

[26] It is not clear why exactly he would think so: this is due partly to the fragmentary state of tablet STT I, 38, in particular between ll. 53 and 56. On the bribe and its role in the tale, see further below.

[27] Interpreters agree that the mention—along with the third-rate beer, *šikar* (ᴋᴀš) *šalulte*, ll. 59 and 62—of the bone (*eṣentu*) and (the gristle of a) sinew (*gīdu*) delivered to Gimil-Ninurta in ll. 58 and 61 is used to further emphasize the snub inflicted on the poor man; see, e.g., D'Agostino 2000, 125–26 n74; cf. Moran 1991, 327–28; Milano 1998, 115–16; Zgoll 2003, 197. However, in stating that the pairing of bone and sinew is not known elsewhere in the extant literature, D'Agostino fails to recall that Job 10:11 features the two terms עצם and גיד (both of which share roots with the Akkadian terms in *PMN*), in close association. Admittedly, however, these are two very different contexts, since Job here is directly addressing God as his maker using anatomical metaphors; cf. Habel 1985, 199.

[28] The role of the gatekeeper is not to be underestimated: he is always the first and most important witness of Gimil-Ninurta's statements about his revenges. Within the shared "audience" scenario that Zgoll envisioned in both *PMN* and *šu'illa* rituals, the gatekeeper is paralleled by the *āšipu*, the expert leading the ritual; see Zgoll 2003, 191. On Zgoll's take on *PMN*, see further below and note 114. Through Tukulti-Enlil's testimony, Gimil-Ninurta's revenge intentions become binding on him. For an overview about the social background and possible specific reasons behind Gimil-Ninurta's revenge frenzy, see Dietrich 2009, 338–40.

to Gimil-Ninurta's fulfillment of the three physical revenge acts (i.e., violent beatings) against the *ḫazannu*, which are carried out through some gimmicks. In the first case (ll. 70–114), Gimil-Ninurta appeals to the king and asks him for a chariot for one day, assuring that he would pay a rent of one *mina* of red gold for it; the king promptly grants him the chariot and new fancy garments (ll. 70–84).[29] Gimil-Ninurta disguises himself as a high dignitary, he catches two birds, which he puts into a box, and gets back to the *ḫazannu*'s palace (ll. 85–87).[30] When the *ḫazannu* sees him so dolled up, he invites him inside and they have dinner together. Gimil-Ninurta tells him that the king has sent him to offer the gold in the box he is bringing to the Ekur, the temple of Enlil, city god of Nippur (ll. 88–95). During the night, after the *ḫazannu* has fallen asleep, Gimil-Ninurta opens the box and frees the birds inside (ll. 96–97).[31] When the *ḫazannu* wakes up, he finds the box open and empty, and cries out to Gimil-Ninurta. Thus, the latter tears up his clothes in a simulated despair and blames the *ḫazannu* for the disappearance of the gold, beating him up for reimbursement (ll. 98–106). Additionally, the *ḫazannu* gives him as presents two pounds of red gold and new clothes (ll. 107–108). Upon leaving, Gimil-Ninurta declares to Tukulti-Enlil that this is the first act of revenge and that two more will follow (ll. 109–114). For the second revenge (ll. 115–117), Gimil-Ninurta dresses up as a physician/doctor (*asû*, l. 122): he has his hair shaved and his head spread with ashes (ll. 115–117). [32] Again, Gimil-Ninurta goes to the *ḫazannu*'s palace, and after he has proven his medical expertise by showing the *ḫazannu* where he had previously

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[29] About Gimil-Ninurta's odd exchange with a seemingly too benevolent king, see further below.

[30] On actual bird-catchers in Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian times, see Ottervanger 2016, 36 n85; Worthington 2020, 175 n676, with further literature. About the ruse of the two birds framed in a folkloric perspective, see especially Faragó 1970, 155–58; Gurney 1972, 156–57. On a possible, albeit remote, reminiscence of a section from the *Dialogue of Pessimism*—as suggested by Gurney 1956, 160—see Ottervanger 2016, 36 n85.

[31] On the restoration and reading of ll. 86 and 97, see Reiner 1967, 183 n7.

[32] On these difficult lines, see Saporetti 1985, 72; D'Agostino 2000, 132 nn121–22; Ottervanger 2016, 39 n115, 117.

been beaten, he is invited therein to heal the *ḫazannu*'s bruises (ll. 118–126). Gimil-Ninurta asks for a dark and secluded place to practice his art; when he is left alone with the *ḫazannu*, he binds him and for the second time he beats him up (ll. 127–134). Upon leaving the palace, Gimil-Ninurta declares to Tukulti-Enlil that still one act of revenge is left to be perpetrated (ll. 135–139).[33] For the third act of revenge (ll. 140–158) Gimil-Ninurta asks some random man, in exchange for a fee, to go before the *ḫazannu*'s palace and shout "I am the one of the goat" (ll. 140–146).[34] Gimil-Ninurta hides under a bridge; after the *ḫazannu* has sent all of his servants to catch the man who shouted and has been left alone outside, Gimil-Ninurta jumps out from under the bridge and beats him for the third and final time (ll. 147–158). Finally, after the third beating, in the coda (ll. 159–160), the half-dead *ḫazannu* crawls back into Nippur, while Gimil-Ninurta goes away into the plain outside the city.
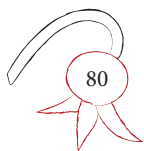
The Hermeneutical Impasse: A Problematic Literary Identity

Since the moment of its publication, scholars dealing with *PMN* have found themselves at a loss in trying to understand this text according to the usual literary-critical coordinates, so much so that many commentators have spoken of it as a *unicum* in ANE literature.[35] The first element that many have considered extraordinary is the complete absence of the gods from the action in the narrative. The divine sphere does not play any active role, either direct or indirect, in the story; *PMN* can therefore be described as a "human-centered" tale. Ottervanger argues

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[33] Sibbing-Plantholt (2022, 261) considers this skit to be an example of "medical satire"; on the comic role of the *asû*, see Reiner 1986; D'Agostino 1995; and especially 2001; Worthington 2010; cf. Noegel 1997, 108–9; Ottervanger 2016, 40 n122; Rumor 2016.

[34] For a philological study focused on ll. 142–143, see Leichty 1977.

[35] See, e.g., Gurney 1956, 145; Lambert 1959, 120, 122; Cooper 1975, 163; D'Agostino 2000, 109; George 2003, 60; Foster 2005, 813; Rositani 2013, 176.

that one of the possible reasons for such a peculiar absence might be the fact that "Mesopotamian religion would not easily sanction a reversal of the social order inherent in the tale's plot" (Ottervanger 2016, xii). This consideration, while plausible, is only partial, and needs to be better substantiated, as I will show below. Over time, three main interpretive keys have been proposed for *PMN*. Of course, there is not any clear-cut distinction between them; on the contrary, these readings significantly overlap, displaying the inextricably problematic and composite literary identity of *PMN*. The next few paragraphs are devoted to a brief review of each one in turn.

Humor

The foremost feature associated with *PMN* is humor: it has traditionally been considered by scholars as an example of a Mesopotamian humorous literary genre.[36] That humor is a basic ingredient of the tale is hardly disputable. Gurney himself, upon its publication, spoke of it as a "humorous tale" (Gurney 1956, 145).[37] Of course, the Mesopotamian man was not a "stranger to laughter," as Georges Contenau argued some decades ago (Contenau 1954 [1950], 302): humor is an anthropological constant,[38] and it is just not conceivable on an anthropological or psychological level to deny the human propensity for light-heartedness,

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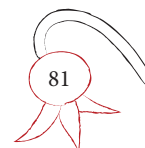
[36] See, e.g., Speiser 1957, 43; Foster 1974, 72–73; Cooper 1975, 167–70; Wiseman 1980; D'Agostino 1995, 68 n2 (with further literature); Frahm 1998, 147–49; 2008, 463; Worthington 2010, 26; Minunno 2014: 63–64; Ottervanger 2016, ix; Salin 2020, 64; Noegel 2021a, 72–73, 138. In 2000, *PMN* was included in an anthology of humorous texts from Babylonia and Assyria edited by Italian Assyriologist Franco D'Agostino (2000).

[37] This looks like a curious and timely coincidence because just six years before, in 1950, Georges Contenau had stated in his classic work *La vie quotidienne à Babylone et en Assyrie* that the Mesopotamian man was a complete "stranger to laughter" (!); Contenau 1954 [1950], 302. Twenty years later, Hungarian folklorist József Faragó (1970, 155) deemed *PMN* relevant for cultural history in that it represented "the final proof that the people of Mesopotamia knew how to laugh, that they, too, had their funny stories"; cf. Frahm 2008, 463; Minunno 2014, 61 and n2.

[38] Cf. Frahm 1998, 147; 2008, 464.

laughter, and fun. However, humor is also culture-specific, in that it always stems from and is shaped by cultural matrices each related to a specific time and place. Thus, it would be a fatal mistake to anachronistically project modern paradigms of thought and *Weltanschauungen* onto ancient texts to try and find how humor worked in ancient times and how the Mesopotamian *mens comica* in particular was shaped.[39] For literary-critical purposes, this means that a "humorous genre"—or any literary genre—should not be reified. No text has just one single aim, in this case to elicit laughter; even more so considering that every text is always potentially embedded in a complex and differentiated reception network.[40]

Belles Lettres and Social Commentary

Apart from its humor, the story's elevated literary dimension must be considered as a second important feature. The composition, for example, has an elaborate prosodic structure featuring formal parallelisms, paronomasia, alliterations, strategic repetitions or variations, polysemy, and hendiadyses; furthermore, it is filled with wordplays and both phonetic and visual puns in the writing.[41] These textual features dovetail with the extra-textual, archaeological, evidence mentioned above, proving once again that *PMN* was a *belles lettres* composition deeply rooted in scribal culture, and making it most likely that its expected recipients were the classes of literati.[42] Given this *Sitz im Leben* for the text, we might expect that this was not just a humorous tale in the sense of a mere joke or an exercise in style, but it was something conceptually more sophisticated,

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[39] Cf. D'Agostino 1998; 2000, 9–58; Frahm 2008; D'Agostino 2014, 68; Lenzi 2019, 187–92; Noegel 2021b; Southwood 2021, 13–15. About the "professionals of laughter" in Mesopotamia and further discussion about humorous texts and their social context, see Ali 1970; Foster 1974, 81–85; Römer 1975–1978; Minunno 2014.

[40] On these points, see further Holm 2005, 254, with further literature. Cf. D'Agostino 2001, 207; Southwood 2021, 12–14.

[41] See above all Noegel 1996; Ottervanger 2016, xii–xiv, 22–23 n10; Noegel 2021a, 72–73.

[42] See D'Agostino 2000, 111, 115–16; Haul 2009, 148–49; Minunno 2014, 64–65.

hiding between the lines a social and political satire or critique:[43] after all, Gimil-Ninurta is a poor man who struggles against his existential and social condition and thanks to his wit manages to turn the tables. It could be read as a narrative dealing with class struggle and social justice but also as an anti-bureaucratic, anti-corruption, maybe even an anti-establishment tale.

Folktale

Finally, the third feature, or interpretive key, is the way in which *PMN* has been influenced by popular culture. Folktales and fables with a similar structure and closely comparable narrative features have been found in Egyptian literature,[44] in a tale from the *Arabian Nights*, and in traditions from other areas of Europe (e.g., Turkey, Hungary, Italy, Sicily in particular, Provence, and Spain), and they have been extensively discussed.[45] In fact, behind its finest literary filigree *PMN* hides a folk tradition of oral narratives that may have had gnomic or didactic aims. This influence is so strong that *PMN* is sometimes labeled *ipso facto* as a folktale.[46] Ethnopoetic analyses have variously associated

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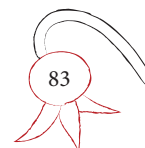
[43] See, e.g., Cooper 1975, 167–70; Oppenheim 1977, 274–75; Bottéro 1982; D'Agostino 2009, 115; Dietrich 2009, 340–50; Fink 2017, 177–78; Annus 2024, 120–121. Indeed, it could be defined, as Jerrold Cooper (1975, 163) phrased it, "a masterfully wrought humorous tale of an abused pauper's triumph over his oppressor."

[44] See Jason 1979; cf. Oppenheim 1977, 275.

[45] See Gurney 1956, 148–49, 1957, 1972; Faragó 1970; Julow 1970; Kločkov 1975; Saporetti 1985, 1996; cf. D'Agostino 2000, 116 n21; George 2003, 60. Recently, Jennifer Finn (2019) has argued for an influence of *PMN* on Herodotus's account of the Pisistratid tyranny (*Histories* I.59–64). For a handy geographical map visualizing all attestations of the *PMN* motif, see Saporetti 1985, 10.

[46] In his monumental anthology of ANE texts, Foster (2005, 813) lists *PMN* as a "unique example of a Babylonian folktale." D'Agostino 2000, 109; 113–15 ultimately envisions *PMN* as a "riunione composita di differenti racconti popolari, riuniti da uno scriba all'inizio del I mill. a.C." (113); cf. Gurney 1957, 136; Gurney 1972, 157; George 2003, 60; Cohen and Wasserman 2021, 133.

Gimil-Ninurta with the traditional roles of the trickster,[47] the rascal, and the dupe, and *PMN*'s subgenre has been associated with the "swindler novella" or the "wisdom novella" (see Jason 1979, 191–98). At the very least, it is clear that it is a highly refined piece of literature that reworked a traditional popular narrative: as Adolf Oppenheim once remarked, it is a much-refined poetic rendition of a very well-known story (see Oppenheim 1977, 274).[48]

PMN and Wisdom: A Viable Addition

Considering the framework sketched so far, *PMN* would not seem to unambiguously fit within the boundaries traditionally associated with Mesopotamian "wisdom" literature as a critical genre.[49] Apparently, both a speculative-philosophical attitude and an existential scope—variously associated with Mesopotamian (and biblical) wisdom[50]—are lacking in this straightforward narrative of wrongdoing and retaliation. However, if some issues are taken into consideration, these two aspects might not appear so far apart from each other. First, as has been recognized, the issue of poverty so relevant in *PMN* has a privileged role not only in legal texts, but in wisdom literature as well, both biblical

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[47] See Gurney 1972, 150–51; Reiner 1986, 4; Finn 2019, 20–22.

[48] Cf. Buccellati's (2024) recent remarks about the two strands he identifies in the Mesopotamian wisdom tradition, a popular one (proverbs and folk stories), and an "intellectual" one (literary texts). According to his analysis, the latter marks an epistemic turn from the former, in that it is the product of a "scribal structuring" and "channeling" of the former into thematic and narrative constructs.

[49] Lambert did not include *PMN* in his most famous anthology, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Lambert 1996 [1960]), maybe because of the then still recent publication of the text (but neither did *PMN* feature in his additions in Lambert 1995; cf. Alster 2005, 18 n3), whereas Wolfram von Soden (1990) did include it as one of the *Weisheitstexte*; similarly, Annunziata Rositani (2013, 176–81; 2021, 153–159) more recently included *PMN* in her anthology of Mesopotamian wisdom literature; cf. also Lévêque 1993, 19–23; Holm 2005, 262; Perdue 2008, 128–29.

[50] See Lambert 1996 [1960], 1–2; and Alster 2005, 18–24, respectively.

and Mesopotamian: the poor, together with orphans and widows, often appear as the category most exposed to risks of social injustice, and therefore their need for protection is emphasized.[51] Second, other folktales like *PMN* have often been associated with wisdom literature, because they are featured on compilation tablets along with other wisdom compositions, or because of their didactic purpose and morally flavored lessons.[52] Third, humorous over- or undertones and witty language are not foreign to either folktales or wisdom texts in both Sumerian and Akkadian.[53] Finally, specific satirical intertextuality patterns between

[51] See above all Fensham 1962; Gowan 1987; cf. von Rad 1975, 90 nn28–29; Whybray 1990, 22–23. On the conception of poverty in Akkadian literary texts, see further Lion 1998; cf. Levin 2001, 254–56. In this regard, it must be considered that—albeit belonging to completely different socio-historical contexts and having no direct relation to *PMN*—various excerpts from biblical wisdom literature mainly relating to class struggle (poor vs. rich) and social injustice seem to perfectly illustrate the conflictual exchanges between Gimil-Ninurta and the *ḫazannu* staged in *PMN*. Notable examples include (translations follow the NRSVue): Prov 14:20: "The poor are disliked even by their neighbors, but the rich have many friends" (cf. *PMN* ll. 16–20); 18:23: "The poor use entreaties, but the rich answer roughly" (cf. *PMN* ll. 34–63); Sir 13:3: "A rich person does wrong and even adds insults; a poor person suffers wrong and must add apologies" (cf. *PMN* ll. 58–63); 31:3–4: "Rich people toil to amass possessions, and when they rest, they fill themselves with their delicacies. Poor people toil to make a meager living, and if ever they rest, they become needy" (cf. *PMN* ll. 1–9, 92; for the *pasillu* sheep—UDU.AS$_4$.[LUM]—featured in this line as a delicacy, see *CAD* P, 221; *AHw* II, 838–839; Saporetti 1985, 69 n92; Ottervanger 2016, 36 n92).

[52] See, e.g., Gordon 1960, 124; Alster 2005, 23; 373–90; Samet 2020, 340–41. Adolf Oppenheim (1977, 381 n61) noticed a possible parallel "in tenor and milieu" between *PMN* and a Sumerian tale known as *The Three Ox-Drivers from Adab* (TCL 16, 80+83; CBS 1601), which Bendt Alster (1991–1993, 31) defined as a "burlesque folktale" and "a humorous tale teaching a social lesson." On this text, see Falkenstein 1952, 114–20; Foster 1974, 70–72; Alster 2005, 373–83.

[53] For Mesopotamian folktales and humor, see Samet 2020, 340–41; for humor in Sumerian proverbs, see especially Alster 2005, 21–22 and n21 (with further literature); cf. Samet 2020, 330. Among Akkadian wisdom compositions, *The Dialogue of Pessimism* (dating hypotheses range from the twelfth to the seventh century BCE) has received the greatest deal of attention in relation to its use of humor: in this regard, see especially Speiser 1954, 105; Foster 1974, 81–82;

PMN l.79 and a Babylonian wisdom composition called *Advice to a Prince* (1000–700 BCE), which have been detected by Ottervanger, might point in the direction of a "dialogue" between *PMN* and traditional wisdom themes.[54] Admittedly, these considerations alone are not sufficient to partly reassess former scholarly understandings of *PMN* and to circumvent the hermeneutical impasse that has so far blocked our way forward. Nonetheless, they at least warrant an attempt to trace in *PMN* other features and motifs traditionally associated with wisdom, such as the motif of the pious sufferer.

The Pious Sufferer Motif in *PMN*

Four compositions, traditionally ascribed to the Mesopotamian wisdom tradition, share the well-known motif of the so-called "pious sufferer":[55]

D'Agostino 2000, 79–108; van der Toorn 2003, 81–83; Greenstein 2007; and Samet 2008, which argues that the *Dialogue*, by means of irony and inverted quotations from other works, mocks the conventional social order and conveys a cynical and nihilistic worldview; something very much like this will be argued below for *PMN*. Literature on the *Dialogue* is extensive; see the recent summary in Samet 2020, 335–36.

[54] See Ottervanger 2016, 35 n79; on this text, see Lambert 1996 [1960], 110–15 and pls. 31–32; Diakonoff 1965; and Reiner 1982.

[55] These four works have received in-depth treatment with respect to the pious sufferer motif in Bricker 2000, 198–206; Oshima 2014, 19–25; and Verderame 2021, upon which I rely for extensive discussion. In the following, I will just highlight the relevant features of these works to be compared with *PMN*. For the use of the expression "pious sufferer" instead of "righteous sufferer," the latter shared by much modern scholarship, see Mattingly 1990, 318; cf. Oshima 2014, 19.

(a) Sumerian *Man and His God* (19th–18th c. BCE)[56]
(b) Babylonian *Man and His God* (17th c. BCE)[57]
(c) RS 25.460 (16th–12th c.? BCE)[58]
(d) *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi* (first half of 1st mill. BCE)[59]

The narrative framework and premises in these four compositions are similar to those of *PMN*.[60] The main character in (a)/(b) is an

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[56] This text is known in nine duplicates, all coming from Nippur and dated to between the nineteenth and the eighteenth century BCE. A first edition was provided by Samuel Kramer (1955) and was based on five duplicates. The most recent edition, featuring a composite text and a translation, can still be found only online (ETCSL 5.2.4). For discussions on this composition, see Klein 2006; Oshima 2014, 19–22; and more recently Verderame 2021, 223–28, with previous literature. See *COS* 1.179, 573–575 for an English translation.

[57] This text is known from only one copy without provenance, now kept in the Louvre Museum (AO 4462). The first edition is in Nougayrol 1952. Lambert (1987, 187) dated it to the reign of Ammi-ditana (1683–ca. 1645) on paleographical grounds. See recently Oshima 2014, 22–24; Verderame 2021, 229–31, with previous literature. See *COS* 1.151, 485 for an English translation. New hand copies in Oshima and Anthonioz 2023, 20–21; Oshima 2024, 79–81.

[58] This text in Akkadian language is known only in this acephalous copy (RS 25.460) found in the so-called "Maison de Textes Magiques," in the area of the Southern Acropolis of Ugarit, and it was first published in Nougayrol 1968 (*Ugaritica* V, 162); more recent editions are in Arnaud 2007, 110–14; and Cohen 2013, 165–75. The date of this text might range from the late OB period to the early MB period; the *terminus ad quem* is the fall of Ugarit in the early twelfth century BCE. For recent discussions, see Oshima 2014, 24–25; and Verderame 2021, 231–32. See *COS* 1.152, 486 for an English translation.

[59] For an overview of the sixty-four manuscripts of *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*, between tablets and fragments, uncovered up to July 2022, see Oshima 2014, 5–9; Lenzi 2023, 52–61. The poem was first edited by Lambert (1996 [1960], 21–62; 283–302; 343–45; pl. 1–18; 73–74). Recent editions of *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*, with extensive discussions, are found in Annus and Lenzi 2010; Oshima 2014, 3–114; Lenzi 2023, 62–183. See *COS* 1.153, 486–492 for an English translation.

[60] Some commentators have highlighted a dense intertextual network between the incipit of *PMN* and the SB *Gilgamesh Epic*, which clarifies several graphical and lexical choices in *PMN*. In particular, the miserable state of Gimil-Ninurta seems to recall the depiction of a worn-out Gilgamesh mourning the death of

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able-bodied man in the prime of his life, socially connected, and financially comfortable; such is the meaning of Sumerian ɢᴜʀᴜš in (a). This is rendered in Akkadian with *eṭlu*, used at the beginning of (b).[61] In *PMN*'s incipit, Gimil-Ninurta is described with this very term, *eṭlum* (l. 1).[62] Moreover, the righteous *eṭlu* in (a)/(b) is suffering: he mourns the fact that he has been deserted by his god to his miserable fate, and he groans; Gimil-Ninurta's condition is one of distress as well, and it manifests with similar symptoms.[63] He is described not only with the

his friend Enkidu in replying to Siduri (tab. X, ll. 40–52; text and translation in George 2003, 680–81) and to Ut-napishtim (X, 220–25; George 2003, 690–91); see Gurney 1956, 158 nn1–8; Finet 1992, 89; Ottervanger 2016, 22–24 nn10–11. Most recently, Annus (2024) highlighted some shared narrative patterns between *PMN* and the portrayal of the god Ninurta in the Babylonian Creation Epic tradition (see Lambert 1986) and in a Sumerian epic composition known from a late bilingual edition (*Angim*, Cooper 1978). Intertextual allusions to the epic genre should not automatically rule out other patterns of connection. On the contrary, they attest all the more to the fact that *PMN* is a work in dialogue with other literature, and that it must be understood in light of other knowledge deriving not just from the fruition of the text in itself. The relationships between *PMN* and SB *Gilgamesh*, or between *PMN* and the Ninurta epic tradition, play on a compositional level, whereas the relationship between *PMN* and the pious sufferer compositions, as it will be argued, is rather oriented toward the conveyance of an overall message, but it is no less tight.

[61] See Zisa 2012, 9; Ottervanger 2016, xi n10; Verderame 2021, 229; cf. *CAD* E, 407. Unfortunately, the incipit of (c) is lost (see Verderame 2021, 231), but in light of the similitudes between the three texts the same characterization of the protagonist—or a similar one—is not to be ruled out.

[62] On the mimation here, see D'Agostino 2000, 118 n24; Ottervanger 2016, 21 n1.

[63] The term that identifies the sufferer's malaise in (a) is ɢɪɢ (Akk. *mrṣ) and covers a broad semantic spectrum that involves physical condition, emotional distress, and social marginalization (see Zisa 2012, 11; cf. Southwood 2021, 3–5; Verderame 2021, 224 n6); this term is not featured in Gimil-Ninurta's description. A hint to this lexical root might be spotted at the end of *PMN* l. 121 (the gatekeeper Tukulti-Enlil speaking to Gimil-Ninurta disguised as a physician), where Gurney (1956, 156–57) restored *šá ta-mar-*[*ra-ṣu*] and translated "(Who are you) who are s[ick]?". This would be an appropriate and humorous reversal: Gimil-Ninurta is recognized as suffering when he should instead be mending someone else's suffering! However, other restorations seem more fitting in this place: see von

hendiadys *katû u lapnu*, "poor, needy and destitute" (l. 1),[64] but also as *lummunu*, "miserable," "oppressed" (l. 2);[65] he dwells *šūnuḫis*, "wearily" (l. 3); again his *zīmu*, "appearance" (l. 8) and *libbu*, "heart" (l. 11) are *lummunu*.[66]

Soden 1990, 178 n121a (so also Cooper 1975, 175, followed by D'Agostino 2000, 133 and n124): *šá ta-mar-*[*ú-šú*] "that you might se[e him]? [i.e., the *ḫazannu*]"; Saporetti 1985, 102: *šá ta-mar* [*ḫazanna*]; and Ottervanger 2016, 12; 40 n121: *šá ta-mar* [*be-lí*] "that you will vis[it my lord]? (*bēlī*)." In any case, the opening description in *PMN* refers both to physical and psychological conditions and to social positioning.

[64] The two terms are found close to one another in a list (De Genouillac 1928, 125) and in a hymn (*ABRT* 1 54 iv 12 = K.3600+DT75); cf. Lambert 1996 [1960], 18 n1. It might be worth mentioning briefly that the formulaic hendiadys עני ואביון is found extensively throughout the Hebrew Bible (Deut 15:11; 24:14; Isa 41:17; Jer 22:16; Ezek 16:49; 18:12; 22:29; Ps 35:10b; 37:14b; 74:21; 109:16) to designate not only poverty *per se* but also a condition of affliction and oppression; see *HALOT* I, 5; II, 856. It is sometimes used in the prayers' first-person pleas to God to describe their condition (Ps 40:18a; 70:6a; 86:1b; 109:22). On the pious sufferer motif in individual complaint psalms, see Paganini 2020.

[65] The adjective *lummunu* is derived from the verb *lemēnu*, "to fall into misfortune, to come upon bad times, to run into evil" (*CAD* L, 116 1a; cf. *AHw* I, 542). It should be noted that this verb can also mean "to be angry," with *libbu* ("heart") as its subject, or "make angry," with *libbu* as its object; see *CAD* L 117 1b and *CAD* L 118b, respectively. Given the designation of Gimil-Ninurta's *libbu* as *lummunu* in l. 11 (cf. below, note 66), this might as well be another pun (cf. below, note 110): Gimil-Ninurta is at the same time "miserable," but his misery already hints at the following plot developments. In addition, the verb *lemēnu* is attested in (d) I 53; 56 (here with *libbu* as subject; cf. Lambert 1996 [1960], 32; Annus and Lenzi 2010, 32; Oshima 2014, 208); II 2. In another composition ascribed to the Mesopotamian wisdom tradition, the so-called *Babylonian Theodicy*, we find the expression *lumun libbi* (l. 8; cf. l. 255), literally "evil thing of the heart," probably to be translated as "grief" rather than "anger"; see Oshima 2014, 345. This composition also features both *lemēnu* and *lumnu* (<*lemēnu*) in the description of the weak and poor man (ll. 283–285); see Salin 2020, 130–32.

[66] On the alternation of these designations in the mss. and the possible reasons behind it, see Ottervanger 2016, 23–24 n11. The *libbu* ("heart, entrails") is especially featured in (b), where it is mentioned as the first seat of the sufferer's affliction (l. 2): *ḫa-mi-iṭ* ⌈*li*⌉*-ib-bu-uš du-ul-la-šu ma-ru-iṣ-ma* ("His heart was seared, he was
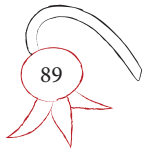
In (a), the first negative effect of the absence of the god is the inability to produce food, the very foundation of life; the man deserted by his god becomes unproductive, and as a consequence he starves.[67] The motif of hunger recurs in (c) and is prominent in (d) too,[68] and Gimil-Ninurta endures a crippling hunger as well (ll. 6–7; 9); however, if in (a) and (d) hunger is an *effect* of *the god's* action (i.e., going away or punishing), in *PMN* hunger is the initial *cause* of *Gimil-Ninurta's* actions.[69]

In a similar fashion, Gimil-Ninurta shares with the pious sufferer the risk of social marginalization, which is tightly linked to illness and malaise.[70] He is frightened of being isolated and alienated from relatives and neighbors (ll. 19–20), and his attempt to avoid this situation is one of the plot mechanisms that trigger the narrative, whereas in (a)/(b)/(d) social alienation is a consequence of the god's seemingly antagonis-

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sickened with his burden"; for text and translation, see Lambert 1987, 188–89; *COS* 1.151, 485; Zisa 2012, 8); on the *libbu* as vehicle for an embodied metaphor of physical pain and distress, see Zisa 2012, 12–15; Salin 2020, 155–92; cf. *COS* 1.179, 573 (a) l. 34; *COS* 1.153, 488 (d) I 111, 113; Ps 22:15b: "My heart [לבי] is like wax; it is melted within my breast"; cf. Paganini 2020, 651–54.

[67] See Verderame 2021, 223. About the social ideologization of hunger and its political use in ancient Mesopotamia, see Richardson 2016. The marginalization of the hungry as a tool to reinforce the dominant narrative of the state apparatus as provider of food security could be another target of *PMN*'s biting irony.

[68] See *COS* 1.152, 486 (ll. 17'–18'); and Zisa 2012, 18–20, respectively.

[69] As Milano (1998, 115) points out, Gimil-Ninurta's hunger takes from the start paradigmatic and existential hues: "The hunger of the Poor Man is not only hunger for bread …; it is the ancestral hunger of the poor *par exellance*" [sic]; the universal scope of the tale is also suggested by the characterization of its locale, which is Old Babylonian Nippur, but—as phrased by Oppenheim (1977, 274)— "in fact we are in a fairyland where anyone can enter the king's palace and ask the king that a chariot be put at his disposal for a day upon payment of one mina of gold." Along this same line of thought, cf. also Haul 2009, 148–49; and Bonneterre 2021, 155, which adds: "La figure du citoyen dans la misère … présente tous les traits de l'absurde. Quoi de plus grotesque en effet que de quêter sa nourriture dans la glorieuse cité de Nippur, carrefour de toutes les richesses transitant sur la terre?"; cf. D'Agostino 2000, 111–12 and n9.

[70] Cf. above, note 63.

tic attitude.[71] In (a), ll. 35–45, the man addresses to the unresponsive god a complaint about the bad treatment meted out to him not only by hostile people and ill-wishers, but also by acquaintances, servants, and friends: they curse and abuse him, they lie to him, and they pervert his words, slandering him. The man is burdened when he enters his very own house as well (l. 33); l. 48 also mentions a "brother" (šEš), but in a broken context.[72] The situation in (d) I 78–98, closely resembles the one in (a): city and land turn into enemies. Brother, friend, and companion either flee from the man or slander him and cause him some harm; his servants publicly curse him. The man's family also turns their back on him, treating him as an outsider.[73] In (b), the theme of social alienation is not so prominent, but it is likely implied in l. 15, where it is said that "if a brother does not look after his brother, would a friend not slander his friend?"; as Takayoshi Oshima makes clear, this line implies that "if one had his god, his brother would look after him, and no friend would slander him."[74]

Finally, in (a), the focus is only on the individual and on his personal relation to the god; however, this changes in (b); the god here does not just intervene for the benefit of the sufferer in the end, but he also urges him to behave with his subordinates in a similar way.[75] This

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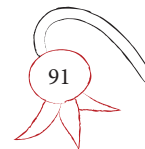
[71] Notably, (c), ll. 9'–12', contradicts this trend and depicts the relationship between the sufferer and his family in a positive light; family members mourn the man and try to figure out what the source of his suffering is after multiple failures of the divination professionals; cf. Cohen 2013, 173–74; Verderame 2021, 231.

[72] Female members of his family (mother, sister, and wife), however, are portrayed in a positive light: they stand by his side, as he indirectly asks for their help in joining his lament before the god (ll. 64–68). Cf. Oshima 2014, 21.

[73] See Oshima 2014, 21; 190; Verderame 2021, 233–34; cf. Habel 1985, 144, 296.

[74] Oshima 2014, 23 n94. However, this line of text is partially broken (*ú-ul d*[*a-(a)-g*]*i-il a-*⌈*ḫu*⌉ [*a*]*-ḫi-iš-šu ka-ar-ṣí ib-ri-im ib-ra-šu la -*⌈*a*⌉*-*[*ki-il*]), and several slightly different interpretations have been proposed. See again Oshima 2014, 23 n94 for a survey.

[75] See Verderame 2021, 230. This variant of the main theme allowed the *topos* of the pious sufferer to extend beyond the boundaries of wisdom literature into epistolography, where it found a convenient application. The sender of the letter, asking a superior for protection, presents himself according to the prototype of the

inchoate ethical ideal of hierarchical power in which the superior protects the subordinate can also be seen in *PMN*, where power relations and the concept of protection play a pivotal role. The initial quarrel between Gimil-Ninurta and the *ḫazannu* looks much like a case of misgovernment and corruption specifically involving a bribe. Apparently, there has been a misunderstanding between Gimil-Ninurta and the *ḫazannu*: Gimil-Ninurta wants to give the she-goat to the *ḫazannu* as a *šulmanni kadrê* (l. 29) "welcome present / greeting gift"; Gurney (1956, 158 n29) states that *šulmānu* is "the regular term for a gift offered to a person in high position for the purpose of soliciting his favour." Zgoll showed how in both profane contexts featuring an audience with a king or someone higher in the hierarchy of power and in the hand-lifting rituals (*šu'illa*) involving a plea to one or more gods, the concept of reciprocity underlies the interactions between the *orans* asking for help or favor and those on the receiving end of the plea. In this context, "Das 'Begrüßungsgeschenk' ehrt den Beschenkten und soll ihn im Gegenzug zur Fürsorge verpflichten; zugleich ist es Zeichen der Unterwerfung unter seinen Schutz."[76] Such a scenario fits perfectly at this point in the plot of *PMN*; in the initial audience at the *ḫazannu*'s palace, *PMN* draws a picture where the reciprocity implied in the exchange between a petitioner and the recipient of the plea is not only left unfulfilled but is also reversed to the detriment of Gimil-Ninurta. However, D'Agostino (2000, 124 n66) notices that the term *kadrû* may indeed designate a bribe (see *CAD* K, 33c); this would make the *ḫazannu*'s answer mentioning a *ḫibiltu* much more on the point; cf. Ottervanger 2016, 28 n40. In fact, the *ḫazannu* mistakes the gift as a bribe (thus somehow suggesting that he was used to such practices), so much so that he asks

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pious sufferer, ideally assimilating the addressee of the supplication to a deity. See, e.g., Liverani 1974, which deals with a letter sent from the vassal king Rib-Adda to King Amenophis IV found in the archives of Tell el-Amarna—perhaps the oldest example of this kind. This practice was widespread in the Neo-Assyrian period as is shown by numerous letters sent to the kings of Nineveh in the seventh century BCE; cf. Verderame 2021, 232 and n21.

[76] Zgoll 2003, 197. Cf. Zernecke 2011, 280: "The gift as greeting in an actual audience (corresponding to the offering in the hand-lifting ritual), the proskynesis, and the praise of the elevated person aim at obligating the elevated person to help."

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Gimil-Ninurta what *ḫibiltu* (l. 40) "crime, offense, damage" has taken place.[77] After being rejected by the *ḫazannu*, Gimil-Ninurta turns to the

[77] The proverb in *KAR* 174 iv 8–10 connects *kadrû* and *ḫibiltu* as well. The latter word has been variously interpreted as the "outrage" in itself of bringing a *kadrû* (Gurney 1956, 159 n40); a crime/offense/wrong committed by Gimil-Ninurta; or a wrong/disgrace that he has suffered; see Lambert 1996 [1960], 340 nn8–10; Saporetti 1985, 64–65 n40 and the literature mentioned there; D'Agostino 2000, 124 n66; Ottervanger 2016, 28 n40. For wordplay involving the term *ḫibiltu*, see Noegel 2021a, 73; cf. Moran 1991, 327–28; and Noegel 1996, 173–74. At l. 53, Ottervanger (2016, 10, 16, 30 n53) reads [*x x x x x x*]*x-u lu-u ṣab-tum* "[As soon as he is tired], let [the bri]be be seized," but this seems rather arbitrary: the text is badly damaged. However, the previous misunderstanding involving the bribe is undeniable. This specific theme is also explicitly addressed in several biblical wisdom passages; a brief overview of the most significant ones could shed some light on the scene presented in *PMN*. In the Hebrew Bible, we find the two terms מתן ("present," "gift") and שחד ("bribe" more properly; see *HALOT* IV, 1456–1457). These must have been quite common as tools to win the favor of powerful people (Prov 17:8; 18:16; cf. Sir 7:9). On the other hand, practices involving a שחד are firmly condemned by both the Covenant Code (Exod 23:8) and the Deuteronomic Code (Deut 16:19), because a שחד blinds (עור) clear judgment and twists (סלף) the deeds of the righteous; thus—albeit common— they are not socially acceptable. Prov 17:23 reads: "The wicked accept a *concealed* (מחק) bribe to pervert the ways of justice" (cf. Prov 21:14); significantly, in *PMN* the *ḫazannu* hurries to get Gimil-Ninurta inside (ll. 27–31), perhaps because he did not want him to be seen with what he thought was a bribe. Cf. also Deut 10:17; 1 Sam 8:3; 12:3; Isa 5:23; 33:15; 2 Chron 19:7; Ps 15:5; 26:10; Job 6:22. On Samuel's sons taking bribes, cf. Grottanelli 1999, 89–90. This insistence on the theme of justice, albeit hidden, might suggest that *PMN* might even have served some sort of cautionary purpose (cf. D'Agostino 2000, 111). Uriel Simon (1967) identified as a literary form in biblical texts what he called "juridical parables," the most prominent example being the so-called *Parable of the Poor Man's Ewe* (2 Sam 12:1–4), which shares some similarities with *PMN* in characters and contents; Simon (1967, 220–221) defines the juridical parable as "a realistic story about a violation of the law, related to someone who had committed a similar offence with the purpose of leading the unsuspecting hearer to pass judgement on himself"; notably, the brief parable in 2 Sam 12:1–4 likely had an independent existence before its editorial incorporation in the longer narrative (cf. Cathcart 1995, 216– 17). However, similarities notwithstanding (cf. Ottervanger 2016, 30–31 n56), nothing suggests that *PMN* served such a specific function.

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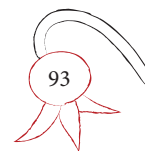
highest rank in the hierarchical scale of human power, namely the king, who immediately complies with his requests (ll. 70–84). Thus, during the first revenge, the true nature of the *ḫazannu* bursts out: he is arrogant with the weaker, but on the other hand he is also servile with those more powerful than him: he immediately welcomes into his palace Gimil-Ninurta disguised as a high official and completely changes his attitude toward him (ll. 88–95).

The role of the king in the narrative and his seemingly positive attitude toward Gimil-Ninurta are very odd, especially in the face of the sociopolitical and satirical nature of *PMN*, and this deserves further discussion. After being wronged by the *ḫazannu*, Gimil-Ninurta resolves to go the king's palace (l. 70). After entering into his presence and greeting him (ll. 72–75), Gimil-Ninurta asks the king to lend him a chariot for one day (l. 76–77). In exchange, Gimil-Ninurta commits one *mina* of red (or refined) gold, which he will pay at an unspecified future date (l. 78). The king immediately complies with Gimil-Ninurta's request, giving him also some new garments[78] without even asking the reason for such request (ll. 79–82). Thus, the king helps Gimil-Ninurta only on the guarantee of a promise, without any further assurance; furthermore, this promise is not even realistic—especially if it is coming from a worn-out man such as Gimil-Ninurta!—as one *mina* of "red" gold was a substantial monetary amount.[79] This episode also appears odd in relation to the social norm(s) of reciprocity in audience scenarios as sketched out by Zgoll (2003, 197–99). In a sense, the king belies this norm for an opposite reason than the *ḫazannu*: this exchange in fact is a one-way transaction, and Gimil-Ninurta brings no gift to the audience as an offering. Interpreters have linked the benevolent dis-

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[78] About which see Saporetti 1985, 68 n82; D'Agostino 2000, 128 n95; and Ottervanger 2016, 35 n82.

[79] On the two variants in the mss. *ruššâ hurāṣa* (ᴋ[ᴜ̀].ɢɪ), "red gold" (STT I, 38) and *mu-uš-e* ᴋᴜ̀.ɢɪ, "refined (?) gold" (STT I, 39), see Ottervanger 2016, 34 n78. In any case, it is clear that we are dealing here with a very precious metal. On "red" gold being a pure and thus a pricey kind of gold, see D'Agostino 2000, 128 n90; cf. more recently van der Spek et al. 2018, 114–15 on red gold in sources from Kassite Babylonia.

position of the king to the unrealistic fictional scenarios of fairytales.[80] Ottervanger (2016, 35 n79) sees instead a satirical take on the character of the king, who, enticed by the rich sum promised, immediately grants his favor without bothering to investigate the reasons why a citizen had been treated unfairly.

The reading of the following l. 71, placed between Gimil-Ninurta's resolution to go to the king's palace (l.70) and his plea (ll. 72–80) followed by the king's grant (ll. 81–82), is crucial to the understanding of this passage, both on a textual and a contextual level. On a textual level, the problem lies in the understanding of the expression *i-na* ⌜*ṭè*⌝-mi ʟ⌝ ᴜɢᴀʟ at the beginning of the line and its relation to what follows. Most commentators understood this as a genitive compound (*ina ṭēmi šarri*) and translated it along the lines of "By order/By will of the king, prince and governor give fair judgment."[81] Ottervanger (2016, 33 n71) confronts this consensus with a strong grammatical argument: in a construct state, *ṭēm* should be expected instead of *ṭēmi*. Moreover, since Gimil-Ninurta does not turn to the king so that the latter can right his wrong, but just to obtain the material tools to enact his revenge, it would make no sense to state at this point that the prince and governor act righteously by order of the king. Ottervanger understands *ina ṭēmi* as a self-standing adverbial locution (cf. *CAD* Ṭ, 94–96) and translates accordingly: "By reason king, prince and governor should render a judgment of truth."[82] This latter interpretation would rule out their being any possible monarchical implications, as D'Agostino (2000, 111) would

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[80] See, e.g., Oppenheim 1977, 241; and Haul 2009, 149. In particular, Jason (1979, 195–96) saw in the king the traits of the "helper" character in folktales, and especially in the "wisdom novella," where the general rule is that helpers "do not reflect upon the hero's deeds and orders, but act as he demands of them" (196).

[81] See, e.g., Gurney 1956, 153; Cooper 1975, 171; Saporetti 1985, 67; von Soden 1990, 176; D'Agostino 2000, 127; Foster 2005, 933; and Rositani 2013, 178; 2021, 157. Cf. Saporetti 1985: 100, which transliterates *i-na* ⌜*ṭe*⌝-*mi* [*šá* ʟ]ᴜɢᴀʟ, thus making a genitival compound the only possible reading. The text of STT I, 38 is partly damaged in this spot, but a reconstruction of *šá* is entirely conjectural and ultimately unwarranted: there is no trace of this sign left, unlike for *ṭè*, *mi*, and the very first part of ᴜɢᴀʟ.

[82] Ottervanger 2016, 17.

have it instead, since l. 71 would not be an indirect praise of the just rule of the king.[83] The following contextual analysis of l. 71 within the narrative seems to further disavow this view. On a contextual-narrative level, there are two different ways to understand l. 71: it could be understood either as direct speech, expressing Gimil-Ninurta's thoughts, or not. In the first case, l. 71 looks like "a statement of the hope of the wronged Nippurite" (Ottervanger 2016, 33 n71), and parallels Gimil-Ninurta's inner monologues of ll. 12–13; 17–22.[84] In this case, not only would it be part of the narrative, but also a device allowing its unfolding: as it also appears from the statements of purpose for the three acts of revenge (ll. 66–68; 111–113; 137–139), Gimil-Ninurta's actions are always foreshadowed by programmatic speech. If it is not understood as direct speech, l. 71 appears as an extrinsic consideration made by the scribe about Gimil-Ninurta's deliberation to resort to asking for the king's help and the rationale behind it. However, this does not look like a feasible explanation for l. 71. In fact, the narrative flow in *PMN* is self-explanatory; this would be the only instance of the scribe/narrator intervening to provide a rationale for plot mechanisms or to express an abstract judgment about characters or events. We might have a similar case in ll. 79–80 just below, where it is said that the king does not even ask Gimil-Ninurta for an explanation of his request. However, such a description is smoothly blended in the narrative: even if there might be some meta-textual implications in these lines,[85] their function is—far from being an assessment of the king's naivety—to portray the king either as the obliging helper of folktales or as a greedy and unprincipled sovereign. Given *PMN*'s highly refined literary guise, it would not come as a surprise if these lines included a conscious reuse of the folktale trope for satirical purposes.

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[83] Cf. also Oppenheim 1977, 275; Annus 2024, 120.
[84] Cf. Cooper 1975, 166; D'Agostino 2000, 126–27 n82.
[85] See Jason 1979, 196.

PMN *and Job*

Given this shared background between *PMN* and the ANE composi-tions featuring the pious sufferer,[86] it should not come as a surprise that *PMN* bears some similarities even with the biblical text of the pious sufferer, the book of Job.

The vast majority of exegetes and commentators have envisioned the pious sufferer motif as the primary and most explicit feature of Job,[87] and under this light they have variously paralleled it with the Mesopotamian texts addressed just above.[88] The outcomes of the previous paragraph, which have highlighted the existence of the same background between these texts and *PMN*, also provide the grounds for a further compari-son between *PMN* and Job. These two literary works are clearly very dif-ferent at their heart, and in a sense symmetrically opposed: while *PMN* is the tale of a man seeking an immediate improvement of his condition of poverty and hunger and a personal comeback, Job is a man who after losing an ideal initial condition reckons with his seemingly inexplicable suffering brought about by God. However, these two otherwise very

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[86] This common background had already been noticed by Dietrich (2009, 341, 350–52). However, his view that Gimil-Ninurta must have seen himself as "just" because he was the former *ḫazannu* and unfairly lost his position to the current one seems too far-fetched and is ultimately not convincing; there is nothing in the plot to back up such a stance (cf. Ottervanger 2016, xi n9), and the characterization of Gimil-Ninurta as an ordinary man (cf. Milano 1998, 116) definitely rules it out.

[87] See, e.g., Tsevat 1976, 364: "The primary theme is the suffering of the innocent. For the overwhelming majority of readers and commentators this is, and always has been, the problem of the book." Cf. Dell 1991, 29–34.

[88] Literature abounds since at least Jastrow 1906; throughout the decades and among many others, see Dhorme 1926, lxxxvi–lxxxvii; Andersen 1976, 26–29; Albertson 1983; Alonso Schökel and Sicre Diaz 1985, 19–37; Habel 1985, 29, 45, 462–63; Hartley 1988, 6–11; Weinfeld 1988; Clines 1989, 38–39; Mattingly 1990; Witte 1994, 100–6; Janzen 2003, 21–28; Ravasi 2003, 135–49; Vicchio 2006, 17–21; Clifford 2007, xi–xiii; Uehlinger 2007, 124–63, and more recently Gray 2010, 5–20; Schmid 2010, 69–74; Seow 2013, 51–55; Mazzoni 2020, 14–16; Vicchio 2020, 181–82.

different texts nevertheless share—beyond the motif of the pious sufferer—other similarities.[89]

One such similarity is structural in nature. In both texts, a key role is played by the cyclical nature of the structure and the division of the text into blocks with a similar outline—though with variations in content. In turn, these blocks can be further subdivided into repeating subsections.[90] Not only do we find the heavy use of repetition—of entire scenes,[91] of key formulas and idioms, or simply of keywords[92]—in both texts, but we also see the number three given a pivotal structural role to play: Gimil-Ninurta takes revenge three times in three different cir-

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[89] Some formal analogies between *PMN* and Job, recently highlighted by Annus (2024, 116–119), further encourage a comparison between the two texts : (1) both of them begin in the same way, with the mention of a "man" (*PMN* l. 1: *eṭlum*; Job 1:1: איש) followed by an introductory formula expressing his geographical origin (*PMN* l. 1: *mār Nippūri*; DUMU EN.LÍL.KI; Job 1:1: איש היה בארץ־עוץ); (2) both of the protagonists' names foreshadow the content of the narratives (for the name Gimil-Ninurta, see above, note 65, and below, note 110; on the name Job and its various possible meanings, see Seow 2013, 252–53, 266); (3) after the introductory sentences, both texts talk about the economic condition and the social status of the protagonist (*PMN* ll. 1–10; Job 1:2–3). Moreover, Annus (2024, 125–140) also argues that chs. 6–27 of the Testament of Job (TJob, composed between the 1st c. BCE and the 1st c. CE)—another text dealing with the Job narrative material—used as its source material *PMN* or another Mesopotamian narrative very much like it.

[90] As far as Job is concerned, this happens especially in the dialogue section, chs. 4–27. For Job see, e.g., Westermann 1981, 81–83; Hartley 1988, 36–37; and Hoffmann 1996, 69–75. For the cyclical/repetitive structure in *PMN*, see above all Cooper 1975, 163–67; cf. D'Agostino 2000, 112–15.

[91] The council scene (Job 1:6–12; 2:1–6); the messenger scene (1:13–15, 16, 17, 18–19); in *PMN*, Gimil-Ninurta's reason for going to the *ḫazannu*'s palace is first narrated (ll. 9–22), and then exposed by Gimil-Ninurta himself to the *ḫazannu* (ll. 42–50). Every time he stands on the threshold of the *ḫazannu*'s palace, Gimil-Ninurta repeats to the gatekeeper Tukulti-Enlil his "revenge count" (ll. 65–69; 109–114; 135–139).

[92] For Job, see Habel 1985, 49–50; 81–83; for *PMN*, see in general Ottervanger 2016, xiv, 22–23 n10; cf., e.g., the recurring formulas to describe Gimil-Ninurta's inability to change his clothes (ll. 10, 12, 14) or the three beatings of the *ḫazannu* (ll. 102–103, 134, 155–156).

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cumstances;[93] in the dialogue section of Job (chs. 4–27) "the number three is prominent … three speakers each deliver three speeches in a threefold cycle. In each cycle Job has three responses."[94]

Furthermore, many exegetes believe that "Job had its forerunners in ancient Near Eastern folklore" (Habel 1985, 35), and at least the prologue-epilogue prose narrative of Job (1–2; 42:7–17) probably circulated as an oral saga or folktale before the composition of the book (as also implied by Ezek 14:12–20), only later to be written down in a literary form and juxtaposed to the dialogues.[95] As already seen, a

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[93] The number three is not a mere structural feature of *PMN*, as it is also mirrored in the tale's plot: Gimil-Ninurta buys a three-year old (or a third-rate: cf. above, note 21) goat from the marketplace (l. 15), he receives third-rate beer from the *ḫazannu* (ll. 59, 62; see Saporetti 1985, 66 n59; and D'Agostino 2000, 126 n75; for a different interpretation, see Ottervanger 2016, 31–32 n59), and will repay him three times as much (ll. 68, 158); the characters' actions ideally divide the night in the palace of the *ḫazannu* into three sections (ll. 94, 96, 98). Threefold repetition is a literary device known elsewhere in biblical, Ugaritic, and Akkadian literature (see Ottervanger 2016, 23 n3), but it is most significant in the case of Job and *PMN* as it stacks with other similarities between the two texts; on repetitions in biblical prose more generally, see Zeelander 2012, 55–79. Furthermore, the use of repetitions in these cases may be grounded in the oral origins of both Job and *PMN*; cf. Sandoval 2020, 269.

[94] Hartley 1988, 37. It is almost generally agreed that the third cycle was originally complete, but in reconstructing its truncated end in ch. 27 and addressing the missing third mention of Zophar exegetes are faced with the thorniest of problems; see discussions in Alonso Schökel and Sicre Diaz 1985, 49–54; Habel 1985, 37–38; Hartley 1988, 24–26; Dell 1991, 52–53 n161; Janzen 1993, 229–32; Witte 1994, 7–55 (with a history of previous scholarship); Hoffmann 1996, 276–88; Steinmann 1996, 87–88 (which argues for a basic structure based on fourfold groupings); Ravasi 2003, 24 and n10; 31–32; Gray 2010, 59–62; Seow 2013, 29–30; Mazzoni 2020, 12–14.

[95] Early theories also considered the existence of a *Volksbuch* and/or an epic substratum underlying the framework narrative; also, the fact that the prologue and epilogue (Job 1–2; 42:7–17) belong to the same composition that was originally detached from the dialogue section is not universally accepted (see, e.g., Hoffmann 1981; and Schmid 2010, 15–19; cf. recently Bührer 2022). For more on these issues, see discussions in Weiser 1975, 12, 39–41; Alonso Schökel and Sicre Diaz 1985, 44–45 and nn19–21; Habel 1985, 29, 35–36, 49; Hartley 1988,

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similar fate must have befallen *PMN*, which arose in an oral environment and was later penned down and reworked into a refined literary composition.[96]

Finally, the presence of humor in biblical texts has been much discussed, and while it does not seem to be one of the primary dimensions of Job, as Dirk Geeraerts stated: "A reading of the Book of Job as a humorous text is not an altogether implausible option" (Geeraerts 2003, 40). Indeed, several scholars have engaged with Job addressing the issue of humor and its many facets.[97] The somewhat unexpected closeness shown just above between Job and *PMN*—a text that is instead overtly humorous—can only encourage these approaches and in turn be encouraged by them.

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21–24; Dell 1991, 6–7 and n3, 199–205; Ravasi 2003, 21–23; Gray 2010, 17–19, 43; Seow 2013, 27–29; and Sandoval 2020, 269–70. Carole Fontaine (1987) provided a formalist analysis of the framework narrative according to Vladimir Propp's structural units of folktales. William Urbrock (1972, 1975, 1976) has consistently argued that the presence and use of formulas are evidence for oral antecedents to the poetic sections of the book of Job as well; cf. Habel 1985, 9–10, which also mentions the works by Victor Maag and Georg Fohrer. Most recently—and much more significantly for the topic of this article—Martin Leuenberger (2022) has read the frame narrative in Job against its ANE cultural background, and argued that this tale, as a conscious reworking of the ANE *Hiobstoff*, was not a naive, popular *Volksbuch*; on the contrary, it exposes a complex and articulated theological view, which criticizes traditional wisdom and its optimistic orientation.

[96] Cf. Newsom 2009, 269 n31, which states: "[*PMN*] uses schematically opposed characters, as well as closely parallel narrative and verbal repetition" but also adds that "the character type of the clever 'nobody' who bests his social betters and the humorous and class-conscious revenge plot makes this composition a better candidate than Job for the status of folktale."

[97] Literature on the subject reaches a wide scope, and often interlaces with studies on the "theatrical" dimension of Job and the interpretation of the book as a whole as a dramatized comedic play; for a narrower focus on humor in Job and many references to further bibliography, see Geeraerts 2003, 40–42; Pelham 2010; and Claassens 2015, 149–54; cf. most recently Southwood 2021, 13–15.

PMN as Skeptical Literature

The preceding paragraphs have revealed an image of *PMN* as a "dialogical" composition or—to use Gérard Genette's more sophisticated definition—a "hypertext,"[98] that is, a literary work that "converses" with previous ones and which can only be understood in its entirety through prior knowledge derived from sources other than the text itself. This happens on the level of formal composition and intertextuality, but also on the broader level of tropes and content, and it is especially in the scope of the latter that affinities between *PMN* and the pious sufferer compositions must be understood. However, *PMN*'s humorous, lighthearted, and at times irreverent tones do not suggest a reappraisal of this tradition for the purpose of homage or reaffirmation but rather for the purpose of mockery and ridicule. Indeed, several scholars have seen in *PMN* some form of parody of different literary forms and genres, especially epic.[99] Finet (1992, 102–6) explicitly ascribes the recurrence of archaizing language in *PMN* to a parodic aim. Finn (2019, 22) makes a case for *PMN* being a sort of parodic take on *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta*, a Sumerian-language poem (one in a cycle of four, dated to the Ur III period, 2112–2004 BCE) that recounts the conflicts between Enmerkar, king of Uruk, and the lord of the city of Aratta, and displays features similar to *PMN* in the narrative (recurrence of three-based patterns, gimmicks, violation of hospitality, etc.).[100] Helle (2020, 217–18) argues that *PMN* can be read as "a satirical reuse of a pattern otherwise associated with 'high' epic narratives" (213), i.e., the two-act structure that he sees in the mirroring of the wrong suffered by Gimil-Ninurta and his subsequent triple vengeance. Parody-like compositions are not

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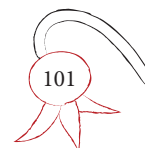
[98] See Genette 1997, 5: "By hypertextuality I mean any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the *hypertext*) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary."

[99] See above, notes 12 and 60 for intertextual patterns between *PMN* and epic material.

[100] Cf. Ottervanger 2016, 22–23 n10 and n2. Further discussion, transliterated texts and translations of *Enmerkar* and the rest of the cycle are found in Vanstiphout 2003; cf. *COS* 1.170, 547–50.

lacking in ANE literature. An example is LKA 62 (VAT 13833), which Dietz-Otto Edzard (2004) and Jennifer Finn (2017, 150–54) interpret as a "purposeful parody of an Assyrian campaign report" (Finn 2017, 151) featured in a poem dedicated to the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser I (LKA 63). Both texts have been dated to his reign (1114–1076 BCE), but hypotheses range from the Middle to Neo-Assyrian period.[101] A more significant case can be made for STT I, 40+41+42, the well-known *Letter of Gilgamesh*, a fictitious letter, one of several examples of "bogus royal missives … popular in first-millennium intellectual circles" (George 2003, 118). Its fictitious author is none other than Gilgamesh himself, and it has a clear parodic aim: Gilgamesh is writing to a foreign king, asking him for precious stones, metals, animals, and slaves in absurd, farcical amounts under threat of military retaliation.[102] In this light, *PMN* would be best described as a parody of the pious sufferer motif as well.[103]

A further assumption takes its cue from the parallels between *PMN* and Job sketched out above. In a landmark monograph on the book of Job, Katharine J. Dell exposed the inadequacy of the label "wisdom" to

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[101] For a recent discussion, with further literature, see Fink and Parpola 2019, 177.

[102] Most notably, this particular text was found in Sultantepe in the very same library where the main mss. of *PMN* were also unearthed; the first edition is in Gurney 1957, 127–35. On this text as a whole and on its parodic intent, see D'Agostino 2000, 50–58; George 2003, 117–19; Finn 2017, 138–41; and Pryke 2019, 178, with further literature. It might be worth mentioning that parts of tablets I and II of *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi* were found in Sultantepe as well (Lambert and Gurney 1954), as well as another fragment with snippets of tablet V (Lambert 1996 [1960], plate 18; Gurney and Hulin 1964, plate 143); see recently Lenzi 2023, 38–40 and cf. Andersen 1976, 26 n4; Ravasi 2003, 138 and n35; Verderame 2021, 232–33 n22, with further literature.

[103] As a literary device, parody can only happen within a dialogic interface between different literary works, in that it "must have a model to imitate" and earlier examples to mock (Hallo 2009, 287); cf. Dell 1991, 147–57; Greenstein 2013, 67–69, with further bibliography about philosophical and literary-critical approaches regarding parody as a literary device/form/genre. For a reappraisal of parody as an interpretive lens in biblical criticism, see Kynes 2011. Within the fourfold categorization scheme he sketches out, *PMN* could be placed both in the "ridiculing" and the "rejecting" sections, using its literary precursors as "targets."

describe it and proposed that it best be described as a parody, one that is mainly based on deliberate misuses and displacements of traditional forms and is aimed at conveying a skeptical message (Dell 1991).[104] I argue here that the aim and scope of *PMN* in its ANE context fit this proposal rather well. In the pious sufferer compositions, the outcast condition of the sufferer is caused by the neglect of the protagonist by the god or by the god's actions: at the outset, the normal state of affairs experienced a *metaphysical* crack. The god's actions—or his non-action/desertion—are necessary requirements for the development of events: the sufferer can be reintegrated into society only by means of the god's intervention, because it is the god who caused the rupture in the first place.[105] This is not so for *PMN*: as mentioned above, it is instead a totally "human-centered" tale, and the gods are notably absent, not in the sense that they left Gimil-Ninurta, but in the sense that they do not play any role: there is no mention of the divine sphere. Rather, the suffering condition is plainly stated at the beginning as a matter of fact devoid of metaphysical superstructures; as a consequence, it is Gimil-Ninurta with his own—all too human(!)—grit and determination who strives to get himself out of the initial condition.[106] Let us compare, for example, composition (b) mentioned above and *PMN*: the protagonist of (b) after reflecting in his *kabattum* and in his *libbu* ascribes his suffering to a sin he cannot identify (ll. 12–13),[107] whereas Gimil-Ninurta in a similar

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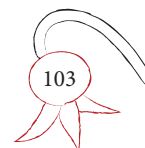
[104] Samet (2008) makes a similar case in the ANE context for *The Dialogue of Pessimism*: thus, it is no mere coincidence that both compositions make use of bitter and sharp humor; cf. above, note 53.

[105] In this respect, the description of Marduk as a destructive but also consoling and healing god in (d) I 1–34 is particularly telling. Cf. Southwood 2021, 2–5. Verderame (2017, 62–63) remarks that the man who is deserted and has lost the protection granted by his god is thus exposed to illness and other harmful agents, including demonic attacks. In fact, the "deserted man" is featured prominently not only in wisdom literature, but also in incantations against demons: the common perception located the cause of evil and pain on the extra-human level. It might also be this kind of epistemological framework that *PMN* tries to mock.

[106] Cf. Dietrich 2009, 350–52; Ottervanger 2016, xi–xii.

[107] For reference to text and translations of (b) and about the *libbu*, see above, notes 57, 65–66; on the *kabattum*, see further Zisa 2012, 12; Oshima 2014, 175.

condition resolves—in his *libbu* (!)—to sell the goat in the marketplace (ll. 11–13).[108]

But parody would not be such without a more straightforward subversion of its models, which is disclosed by *PMN* in its own humorous hue: in fact, the gods *are* mentioned, but for every mention there are clear ironical connotations.[109] The very name of Gimil-Ninurta plays on

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[108] Furthermore, note that in both cases the same verb *malāku* "to take counsel/advise/deliberate" in the Gt-stem is employed: *amtalkamma*, (b) l. 12 / *imtallik*, *PMN* l. 11; see *CAD* M/1, 156 c4; *AHw* II, 593; cf. Ottervanger 2016, 23 n11.

[109] The only possible exception being a standard greeting formula that mentions Enlil, the city of Nippur, Ninurta, and Nusku (ll. 37–38); cf. D'Agostino 2000, 124 n64, which does not see in the expression any parodic intent. Gimil-Ninurta's greeting of the king in l. 75 is more ambiguous, and the mss. report different versions. In STT I, 38, the king is defined as a king "whom Lamassu extols," *ša šurruḫu Lamassu* (ᵈLAMÁ); cf. the translations in, e.g., Gurney 1956, 153; Saporetti 1985, 75; D'Agostino 2000, 75; Foster 2005, 933; Rositani 2013, 178; Ottervanger 2016, 17. Cooper (1975, 172) took the king as subject and ᵈLAMÁ as object (*lamassa*), thus translating "who strengthens good fortune." For Lamassu being here the protective/tutelary goddess rather than an abstract concept denoting "(good) fortune," "dignity" (cf. *CAD* Š/2, 38 3c), see Ottervanger 2016, 34 n7. STT I, 39 has instead *ša šūtara Lilû* (*šu-ta-⌜ra⌝* ᵈLÍL⌉). The last sign is partly erased, and Ottervanger (2016, 34 n75) reconstructs it as LÍL; the two signs LAMÁ (KAL) and LÍL (KID) are identical except for the fact that the latter has a final single vertical wedge, whereas the former has a double vertical wedge. Since the last part of the sign with a single vertical wedge is clearly visible, despite the abrasion, Ottervanger's conjecture looks sound. He understands *šūtara* as a Š-stem causative <(*w*)*atāru* and translates accordingly "whom the Lillu-demon made superior." The purpose of an appeal to the protective deity Lama/Lamassu in a wishful greeting is rather obvious. Moreover, this divine being was often represented iconographically in introductory scenes before kings, standing behind the *orans* for whom she intercedes, with both her hands lifted in a blessing gesture; see Spycket 1960, 81; RlA 6, 453–455. This might be loosely linked to Gimil-Ninurta's weird lifting of both hands before the king to greet him (l. 74, *ullāma qātēšu*, following the restoration *u[l-l]a-[m]aʾ* proposed by von Soden in Gurney 1957, 136. Cf. the later reconstruction with the singular, *ul-la-a¹* in von Soden 1990, 176 n36a, to be read *ullâ qātīšu* "holding high his hand"). However, it should be noted that such iconography of the goddess had fallen into disuse, at least in Babylonia and Assyria, after the OB period; see again Spycket 1960, 84. Cf.

a pun: its literal meaning is "kindness/favor of Ninurta," even if he does not appear to be "favored" at all.[110] The gods are mentioned collectively three times (ll. 66, 111, 137) by Gimil-Ninurta before each one of his revenges. The expression *taḫdāt ilāni* ("greetings of the gods") featured in these lines is used ironically to hint at the "abundance of the gods," that is, the abundance of beatings that Gimil-Ninurta will inflict on the *ḫazannu*.[111] At l.6, there might be a hint pointing to the goddess of the harvest, Nisaba,[112] but it is also said that Gimil-Ninurta's stores are lacking grain. At l.91, the city god, Enlil, is mentioned, but the offering in the box Gimil-Ninurta is taking to Enlil's temple, the Ekur, is just part of his deceit. Finally, ll. 105–106 portray a blatantly ironic scene: the *ḫazannu*, while being beaten, professes himself as a sacred protégé

Ottervanger 2016, 34 n74, which instead sees a humorous undertone in the image of a prostrated person trying to lift both hands. Less obvious is an appeal to a *lilû* demon in the same circumstances, since such entities are mostly associated with winds and ghostly apparitions; see Verderame 2013, 125; cf. *CAD* L, 190; *CAD* Z, 60; RlA 7, 23. The spelling preceded by the divine determinative, usually absent before LÍL, might point in the direction of a scribal error for ᵈLAMÁ'; however, it might be worth mentioning that the sumerogram LÍL/KID could also be read as *zaqīqu* (see OB Nippur LÚ, 825 = MSL 12, 028 A r vii 10'). Apart from designating phantasmatic presences and entities connected to dreams, such term can also refer to specific manifestations of gods in the context of dreams, denoting messenger entities, or in the context of intercessions, denoting "some kind of divine communication in answer to prayers" (*CAD* Z, 60); see Zgoll 2012, 94–98; *CAD* Z, 59 1a 2'. Whichever is the case, it is clear that Gimil-Ninurta appeals here to non-human entities not out of personal piety, but out of custom, and on top of that with a utilitarian purpose, namely for himself to be welcomed and his plea to be accepted by the king.

[110] This is not the only pun discernible in the name; the elaborate wordplays are evidence that its use was deliberate and served specific functions. On the reading of the name and its multiple references and puns, see Noegel 1996, 185 n62; D'Agostino 2000, 118 n26; Hurowitz 2010, 88 and n4; Fink 2013, 94 n71; Ottervanger 2016, 21 at n2; and Annus 2024, 121.

[111] See Cooper 1975, 168; D'Agostino 2000, 126 n79; and Ottervanger 2016, 32 n66; cf. Noegel 1996, 175 n28.

[112] The word "grain" is written logographically with the same sign (ᵈNISABA) used for the name of the goddess Nisaba; cf. D'Agostino 2000, 119 n31.

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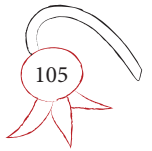
(*kidinnu*) in order to arouse the (religious) pity of his assailant. At this point, he has not yet recognized Gimil-Ninurta: in fact, he addresses him as "my lord" (*bēlī*), and the warning he makes for the shedding of his blood as an *ikkibu* ("sin," "taboo") against Enlil (*ik-kib* ^dBE) is best explained if the *ḫazannu* still believed that he was being beaten by a high dignitary on his way to the Ekur to pay homage to Enlil himself.[113]

Thus, *PMN* employs images and devices that serve to instantiate a reversal or a deformation in a parodic sense of the traditional motifs and tropes of the wisdom tradition—such as the pious sufferer—and the pious worldview they convey. The outcome is a disillusioned picture, or perhaps even a pessimistic inclination: relying on the gods cannot do any good, since they do not care at all about human affairs.[114]

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[113] For further discussion on this scene, and the meaning of the two terms *kidinnu* and *ikkibu*, see Gurney 1956, 160–61 n106; D'Agostino 2000, 131 n117; and Ottervanger 2016, 38 n106. For possible hidden wordplays, see Noegel 1996, 185.

[114] As already mentioned above, Zgoll 2003 linked the help requests to a social superior featured in *PMN* to the ritual actions in *šu'illa* rituals and showed how they paralleled each other within the shared conceptual horizon of the "audience" scenario and the social norms of reciprocity. As Alan Lenzi (2010, 311) remarks: "The gods invoked in the *šuilla*s are being addressed in an official capacity as cosmic authorities." Since Gimil-Ninurta's plea for help was not satisfied and indeed was misunderstood by the *ḫazannu*, and only superficially fulfilled by the king, this might well be another hint at the inefficiency of both social superiors and the gods in their role of cosmic guarantors of order and justice; cf. Dietrich 2009, 339–40. Significantly, as Beaulieu (2007, 11) remarks, the feelings expressed in *šu'illa* prayers "are very much the same as the ones we find in compositions about pious sufferers," that is, "praise of the deity, sense of guilt, ignorance of the fault committed, feelings of dejection, paranoia, abandonment, bodily ailments and disease." This recalls once again the idea expressed above about *PMN*'s rehashing of the pious sufferer motif, thus closing the circle of allusions: Gimil-Ninurta is both a supplicant before the human authority and implicitly a "pious sufferer" before the gods, but in both cases his pleas are rejected, and his vicissitudes can only find resolution thanks to his own actions. Cf. also Edward Greenstein's (2007, 59) analysis of humorous tones in *The Dialogue of Pessimism*: "The text's ridicule of the gods goes hand in glove with its pervasive display of ridicule toward the master and the upper class he represents. The ridicule finds expression in the character of the clever and brazen servant." For more on this text, cf. above, note 53.

Conclusion

The philological framework of the text and the overview of past scholarly assumptions about *PMN* given in the first half of this article (i.e., it is a humorous and a satiric composition drawing from folk tradition but preserved in a refined and intellectual form) showed that these cannot—and must not—be set aside. However, an in-depth comparison between *PMN* and the pious sufferer texts stemming from both Mesopotamian and biblical traditions highlighted the presence of several shared motifs, and some fuzzy passages of the plot of *PMN* have become clearer thanks to it. Thus, the literary identity of *PMN* stretches even further out than former interpretations were willing to grant: as its intertextual connections also reveal, *PMN* is a *pastiche*-like work that "dialogues" with other literary products, and one can fully grasp its message only from the privileged point of view of those familiar with them—a feature that fits very well with a *belles lettres* composition included in the scribal curriculum.

As far as wisdom tradition is concerned, *PMN*'s use of its tropes looks like a deliberate attempt to parody ancient understandings of piety. In this way, *PMN* allusively expresses a bitter and disillusioned worldview that ascribes it to a dimension close to *The Dialogue of Pessimism* or Job envisioned as "skeptical literature": the laughter it elicited must have been a very bitter or a cynical one. Once again, the modern reader's perception is put to the test and questioned as to how the very same literary tropes could be used, reused, or misused in different hues: in theological speculation and theodicy but also in a refined form of entertainment such as *PMN*.

Significantly, Manfried Dietrich included *PMN*—along with other texts such as the *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi* and the *Babylonian Theodicy*—in the scope of the *Krisenliteratur* ("crisis literature"), marking the dark side of society and public life in the first half of the first millennium BCE.[115] To social criticism may now be added an existential uneasiness:

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[115] Dietrich 2009; cf. also Fink 2013, 93–96, which treats *PMN*—along with other texts, such as the *Dialogue Between Shupe-ameli and His Father*, the *Babylonian Theodicy*, and the *Dialogue of Pessimism*—as an example of intellectual

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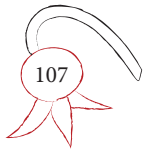
PMN, while employing its undeniable humorous tone, highlights the inadequacy of traditional and religious answers to the timeless problem of injustice and suffering. It is tempting to see in *PMN* not only a mere attempt to make fun of the examples of piousness displayed in wisdom literature, but also—by means of a conscious rejection of the metaphysical dimension of evil and suffering—to radically polemicize with the epistemological framework in which such examples could have arisen. It is the lack of a *pars construens* after this devastating *pars destruens* that shapes the nihilistic void between a witty allusion and a bitter laugh.

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"Gegenkultur." *PMN* is one of those "dangerous texts" that ridicule "das herrschende System" (Fink 2013, 82).

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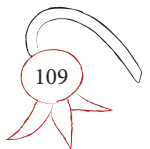
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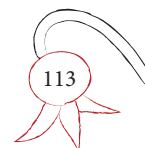
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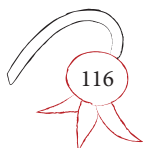
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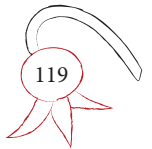
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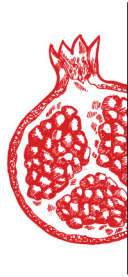
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JUDEANS AND SAMARIANS AT TAHPANHES: SPECULATING ON THE IDENTITY OF THE KING IN PAPYRUS AMHERST 63 COL. XVII

Marshall A. Cunningham

Abstract

In this short article, I offer a speculative identification of the unnamed king who receives a caravan of Judeans and Samarians in Papyrus Amherst 63 col. xvii. I also identify the location of the royal site where the meeting might have occurred. Through a close reading of this passage and a comparison with a similar account of Judean and Samarian migration in Jeremiah 40–44, I argue that the caravan arrives at Tahpanhes, modern-day Tell Dafana, an important royal outpost in the eastern Nile Delta. The king was most likely Apries, a member of the Saite dynasty, who is said to have come to Judah's aid in the early sixth century BCE and whose military exploits are recorded in two stelae that have recently been discovered at Tell Dafana.

In diesem kurzen Aufsatz biete ich eine spekulative Identifizierung des namenlosen Königs an, der in Papyrus Amherst 63, Spalte xvii, eine Karawane aus Judäern und Samariern empfängt. Ich identifiziere auch den Ort des königlichen Ortes, an dem das Treffen stattgefunden haben könnte. Durch eine genaue Lektüre dieser Passage und einen Vergleich mit einem ähnlichen Bericht über die Migration der Judäer und Samarier in Jeremia 40–44 stelle ich fest, dass die Karawane in Tahpanhes ankommt, dem heutigen Tell Dafana, einem wichtigen königlichen Außenposten im östlichen *Nildelta*. Der König war höchstwahrscheinlich Apries, ein Mitglied der Saiten-Dynastie, der Juda im frühen sechsten Jahrhundert v. Chr. zu Hilfe gekommen sein soll und dessen militärische Heldentaten auf zwei Stelen aufgezeichnet sind, die kürzlich in Tell Dafana entdeckt wurden.

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Marshall A. Cunningham

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Introduction

Papyrus Amherst 63, a scroll featuring a collection of Aramaic compositions written in Demotic script,[1] features a short narrative concerning the arrival of a group of Judean and Samarian refugees to an unnamed royal outpost. At this outpost, they are received by an unnamed king who welcomes them into his kingdom with an offer to sustain them. In this article, I begin by outlining the basic contours of this narrative in Papyrus Amherst 63 column xvii (hereafter, P. Amh. 63 col. xvii). I then briefly highlight similarities between it and the story of the prophet Jeremiah's forced flight to Egypt in Jeremiah 40–44. Finally, I suggest that the two accounts are similar enough to use the Jeremianic version

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[1] For a full introduction to the scroll, its scribal idiosyncrasies, and its basic contents, see Holm 2023.

to fill in gaps in P. Amh. 63, identifying its unnamed king as Apries, the fourth pharaoh of the Twenty-sixth Dynasty, and the royal outpost of Tahpanhes as the site where he receives the Judean and Samarian caravan.

The narrative of the Judean and Samarian caravan occurs in col. xvii of P. Amh. 63[2] and immediately precedes what Tawny Holm (2017) has identified as a sacred marriage hymn for the goddess Nanay. Alongside Holm's dedicated critical edition of this column, Karel van der Toorn (2018) and Richard Steiner and Charles Nims (2017) have published complete critical editions of P. Amh. 63 that offer analysis of this scene, and the following summary relies heavily on their readings.

The text opens with narration in the first person,[3] with the speaker describing the arrival of a caravan of Samarians (*Šmryn*) appearing before an unnamed king (*bmry mlk'*; l. 2). When asked their place of origin, a spokesman for the caravan answers:[4]

ʾ[n(h)] ˹mn˺-[y]hwd ʾt(h)	[I] come from [Y]ehud.
ʾḥy mn-šmry˹n˺ m{m}y˹t˺(y)	My brother is brought from Samaria.
pkʿt ʾdm ˹m˺sq ʾḥty myrwšl{l}m	And now[5] a man is bringing my sister up from Jerusalem.

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[2] In the Steiner and Nims edition, this is identified as col. xvi (Steiner and Nims 2017).

[3] In a recent article on when the Judean garrison at Yeb was established, Kahn (2022, 154) has connected this scene with the description of the Elamite jackal causing chaos in Rash's temples in the preceding column, suggesting Rash as the caravan's point of origin. None of the recent critical editions of P. Amh. 63, however, make this connection. All three treat the caravan section as the beginning of a new composition. The dramatic shift from the hymnic material in col. xvi to this use of the first person in col. xvii supports separating the two as distinct compositions that have been juxtaposed in P. Amh. 63.

[4] This transliterated Aramaic text comes from Holm's (2017) reconstruction of the passage. For the Demotic signs behind this transliteration, please refer to Holm's edition and to those of Van der Toorn (2018) and Steiner and Nims (2017).

[5] The conjunction *p-* appears in the two Aramaic inscriptions from Sam'al (KAI 214–15) and, according to Jonas Greenfield (1978, 94), likely represents a dialectal variant. See Holm 2017, 8.

In response, the king offers exceptional hospitality and to treat the members of the caravan to a feast. After the feast is described, the text transitions—without a marked break[6]—into a sacred marriage hymn for the goddess Nanay.

While the details surrounding the scene are vague, there is strong evidence to suggest that the Judean and Samarian caravan is to be understood as a group of refugees: displaced soldiers and their families fleeing war and seeking shelter. First of all, the narrator identifies the band of Samarians as a *gys*, a "troop" (l. 1).[7] Although previously attested only in later Aramaic dialects (Holm 2017, 7),[8] *gys* occurs again in a broken but clearly military context in col. xxi (l. 17) of P. Amh. 63, where it refers to a group under the control of Aššurbanipal's general. Van der Toorn's transcription of col. xvii's fragmentary opening line, in which he reconstructs more text than either the edition by Holm or Steiner and Nims, adds that the group consisted of *'nš dqy*, "broken men" (Van der Toorn 2018, 203). This speculative reading would suggest a group of soldiers and their families battered by war and in search of refuge.[9]

Line 5 of col. xvii concludes with the Demotic signs NYS + ʾ. The recent editions disagree in how they interpret this unit. Steiner understands the Demotic sign to reflect Aramaic *nsy*, and interprets the form as a first person common plural imperfect form from the root *ns'*, "to lift."[10] Holm prefers to take NYS as a passive participle from the root

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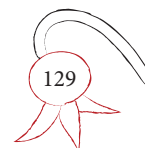
[6] The scribe who compiled P. Amh. 63 often, though inconsistently, employed the Demotic sign SP, "remainder," perhaps representing Aramaic *sōp*, "end," to divide between distinct literary sections on the papyrus. The marker appears after l. 19 of col. xvii, apparently to mark the end of the current composition (Holm 2017, 22, 36).

[7] All three recent editions of the text translate *gys* as "troop" (Holm 2017, 6–7; Steiner and Nims 2017, 63; Van der Toorn 2018, 203–5).

[8] Compare CAL (https://cal.huc.edu/), s.v. *gys*, for examples (accessed December 7, 2023).

[9] The presence of women and children among the caravan is strongly suggested by the presence of the Judean leader's sister (*'ḥty*). On this latter point, see Holm 2017, 23.

[10] They translate: "The plants, with everything else, we will carry (for you)" (Steiner and Nims 2017, 64).

nws, "to flee," and translates "refugee."[11] Van der Toorn offers a third option, reading NYS as the noun *nēs*, "battle flag" or "banner," "a pars pro toto for a military unit, 'battalion.'"[12] While none of these readings is definitive, either "refugee" or "banner" would fit the sense of the local syntax,[13] and both readings support interpreting the caravan as composed of military refugees.

The sad state of the Judean and Samarian refugees is offset by the kindness and hospitality of the unnamed king who receives them: "Come in, young man. Let us host you."[14] Rather than turning the caravan away, the king offers them shelter and sustenance. A series of clauses with imperfect verbs describes the bountiful future that the refugees might have in the king's land as well as his own investment in their success:

nṭ ʿm ʿmk kl nys	We will feed your people, every refugee.[15]
'l ptwrk ysm 'gnt	On your table bowls will be set.
wmn kl m ʿyn yyn	From every fountain, wine (will flow).
['gnt] wmn kl mn mnt špr	[Bowls?] and from every vessel,[16] a great portion.

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[11] This would be a masculine singular Gp participle, with the singular standing in for the entire group (Holm 2017, 9).

[12] He continues: "what in the Elephantine Papyri would be referred to as the *degel*" (Van der Toorn 2018, 204).

[13] The key factor in each case is how to render the Demotic sign NṬʿ that precedes *nys*. The phrase *kl nys* seems to be in apposition to *ʿmk*, "your people," suggesting that the sign NṬʿ should represent a verbal form to create a clause. Steiner and Nims (2017) unconvincingly translate "plant," a comparatively late noun known from Jewish Babylonian Aramaic (see DJBA: 745b). Also, it is unclear what it would mean for the king and his subjects to "carry plants" in this context. Holm (2017) suggests a D-stem first person common plural imperfect of *ṭʿm*, "we will feed," while Van der Toorn (2018) prefers a G imperfect of *ndʿ*, "we will know/recognize."

[14] The form *n'rḫk* (split between ll. 4–5), a first person common plural jussive form with a second person masculine singular suffix, is likely in the otherwise unattested C-stem for the root *'-r-ḫ/ḥ* ("to visit, travel" in the G) (Holm 2017, 9). For a discussion of unmarked jussive forms in Egyptian Aramaic, see Muraoka and Porten 1998, §24k.

[15] Following Holm 2017, 5–6, 9.

[16] Following Holm (2017, 10), who interprets *mn* as the noun *mn* or *m'n*, "vessel." Compare DNWSI, s.v. *m'n*, 588.

As a result of the king's generosity, the refugees find their circumstances greatly improved, at least for the time being.

While the narrative in col. xvii provides the geographic origins of the caravan, the text's first person speaker identifies neither the location of the royal palace nor the name of the generous king who so graciously receives the Judeans and Samarians. Consistent with his treatment of P. Amh. 63 as the product of an ethnically diverse group of refugees who fled Assyrian rule before joining together at the desert oasis of Palmyra, Van der Toorn suggests that the king in question rules over Palmyra.[17] As Dan'el Kahn (2022, 154) has pointed out, however, there is absolutely no evidence that Palmyra was inhabited between the end of the Bronze Age and the Hellenistic era, making Van der Toorn's incredibly complicated theory of P. Amh. 63's composition history (and thus this historical reference) quite implausible.

More compelling in her conjecture is Holm (2017, 2023), who suggests that we might understand this king to be a pharaoh who receives this caravan somewhere in Egypt.[18] She does not push the issue,

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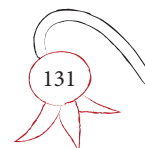
[17] Van der Toorn (2018: 8–36) argues that the place of refuge for the diverse communities reflected in col. xvii and its broader literary context was the desert fortress of Palmyra. Based on a number of historical clues that he sees in the text, he argues that the text recounts an otherwise unattested flight of troops from Judah to the Syrian stronghold in the wake of Sennacherib's Levantine campaign at the end of the eighth century. Among those clues, Van der Toorn highlights the presence of Samarians under the authority of a Judean general, which he argues would have been most likely after the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 720 but before refugees from Samaria would have been fully integrated into the Kingdom of Judah; the mention of a *ḥlṣ tmr*, "fortress of palm," as a reference to Palmyra; and the parallels between the pantheon of Palmyra in the Roman period and the variety of deities recognized in section four of P. Amh. 63, particularly the association between the god Bol and Bethel. In general, Van der Toorn's suggestion is incredibly speculative, with each layer of argument building on previous speculations. It also adds significant complexity to the process of transmission without corroborative evidence.

[18] Holm tentatively suggests that the king who welcomes the Judean and Samarian refugees could be an Egyptian and that some of those responsible for compiling/producing P. Amh. 63 "had come most immediately from Judah and Samaria" (2023, 172–73). Her suggestion avoids the problem of an otherwise unattested

admitting that it is also possible that the welcoming king is the same one addressed elsewhere in the composition (Holm 2017, 22). However, P. Amh. 63's technical ties to Egypt, its use of an exclusively Egyptian writing system, and the fact that many of its diverse traditions can be linked to communities who were settled in Egypt at the time when P. Amh. 63 was likely compiled[19] make Holm's suggestion all the more likely.

If Holm is correct that the account of the Judean and Samarian caravan is meant to take place in Egypt, then a comparison with a similar account of migration to Egypt may allow us to fill in some of the omitted details. Jeremiah 40–44 narrates the prophet Jeremiah's forced flight from Judah in the aftermath of a political assassination of the Babylonian-appointed governor, Gedaliah, and his supporters. While the traveling party in that narrative is primarily composed of Judeans fleeing Babylonian reprisal, it does include a group of Samarians that had been taken captive by the rebel Ishmael outside Mizpah.[20] Notably, the group includes men of fighting age alongside their families (41:16; 44). Finally, according to Jeremiah 43:7–9, the Judeans and Samarians in Jeremiah's caravan made their first stop at the Egyptian city of Tahpanhes (תחפנחס). Once there, the prophet received an oracle that began by identifying the city as the site of a royal palace (בית פרעה) before performing a sign-act and announcing Pharaoh's (and the caravan's) impending devastation at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian army (43:8–12).

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migration to Palmyra by Judean and Samarian forces. It treats Egypt as the location of the cultural and religious "mixing" demonstrated by the document, a point that is well-attested in the historical record. Holm also highlights a number of other details that support identifying the composition's origins with Egypt, including a potential reference to the Yahu temple at Yeb and frequent reflections on drought.

[19] For a concise and helpful discussion of the variety of traditions and communities reflected in the document and their relationship to Egypt, see Holm 2023, 165–73.

[20] According to Jeremiah 41:10–16, Ishmael intercepted a group of eighty worshippers coming from Shechem, Shiloh, and Samaria. He spared ten of them, and it is reasonable to conclude that they were included in "the remnant of those people whom Ishmael ben Nataniah captured at Mizpah after he assassinated Gedaliah ben Ahiqam" (Jer 41:16).

The Tahpanhes of this passage from Jeremiah has traditionally been associated with the site of Tell Dafana (Greek Δάφναι) in the eastern Nile Delta. W. M. F. Petrie (1888), who first excavated the site, believed that the tell was an ancient border fort that housed Greek mercenaries, specifically the στρατόπεδον that Psammetichus I is said to have established for Ionian and Carian mercenaries, according to Herodotus.[21] Recently, a reexamination of Petrie's discoveries in the British Museum and a new excavation led by François Leclère have produced a radically different picture of Tahpanhes/Daphnae in the late seventh and early sixth centuries BCE (Leclère et al. 2014). Rather than a military outpost showing considerable Greek influence, Leclère et al. argue that the site's architectural features "correspond to those of a classical temple town functioning as a frontier post, and it is to this specific context that the presence of [Greek] imports must be understood" (2014: 9). As a royal temple city and a gateway to the Levant, Tahpanhes/Daphnae was the first large town that travelers from Asia would have encountered on their trip to Egypt, and it would have been a point of departure for Egyptian travels east (Leclère et al. 2014). Anecdotally, Petrie noted that the locals encountered during his expedition called the site "Kasr el Bint el Yehudi," or "the Palace of the Jew's Daughter" (1888, 47), suggesting a long tradition of Judean or Jewish association with the site.

Notably, two stelae have been discovered in the environs of Tell Dafana in the twenty-first century commemorating royal achievements and victorious campaigns in Canaan by the Saite king Apries.[22] Apries ruled Egypt from 589 to 570 BCE and was the fourth king of the Twenty-sixth Dynasty. In one of these stelae, dated to the seventh year of his reign (582 BCE), Apries claims to have raised his army of Egyptian and foreign soldiers, in order to set out to meet an enemy—likely the

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[21] *Histories* 2.154 (compare 2.30, 107); Petrie 1888, 48.

[22] The first was discovered in 2011 and dates to year seven of his reign (El-Maksoud and Valbelle 2013). The second stela was discovered in 2021 and was published by Mostafa Nour, John Iskander, and Sameh Hashem in 2023. It is likely from early in Apries's reign—year one or two—and deals primarily with small royal accomplishments and the mustering of troops. See also James Hoffmeier's (2023) recent treatment of Jeremiah's journey into Egypt in BAR.

Babylonians—beyond the borders of Egypt. It is likely that Tahpanhes/Daphnae was the staging ground for this campaign, as it had been for one of Apries's predecessors, Psammetichus I, when he campaigned in the Levant in 637 BCE.[23] These stelae, which promote Apries's skill as a military leader and defender of Egyptian sovereignty, speak to both the strategic and ideological importance of Tahpanhes/Daphnae for Apries at the beginning of his reign.

The Saites were a line of rulers from the region of Sais in the western Nile Delta who reestablished Egyptian independence during the mid-seventh century BCE, pushing the Assyrians out after a decade of imperial domination. In addition to throwing off the Assyrian yoke, the Saites had imperial aspirations of their own: the first two kings of the Twenty-sixth Dynasty, Psammetichus I and Necho II, expanded their kingdom's borders and established control in the southern Levant during the last third of the seventh century BCE. They incorporated important trade centers in the region like Ashkelon and Ekron into their imperial orbit, and they also seem to have acquired Judah as a vassal. Necho II even went so far as to appoint his preferred king, Jehoiakim, to the Judean throne (2 Kgs 23:35).[24]

As Egypt and Babylon struggled over the territory vacated by the Assyrians in the southern Levant at the end of the seventh century and during the first decades of the sixth, Judah seems to have consistently aligned itself with the Saites. Jehoiakim was a Saite vassal prior to Nebuchadnezzar's victory at Carchemish in 605 BCE, and, depending on how one reads the notice in 2 Kings 24:7 about the king of Egypt not heading out to battle, the Judean king may have expected Egyptian support when he ultimately rebelled against Babylon.[25] Roughly a

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[23] Herodotus mentions Psammetichus I's campaign against Ashdod in *Histories* 2.157. An ostracon, written in Demotic and dated to the twenty-eighth year of Psammetichus's reign (637 BCE), mentions that the king is in Daphnae and planning to invade Canaan (Chaveau 2011).

[24] See also Schipper 2011.

[25] The reference likely recalls the resounding victory that Nebuchadnezzar won against Necho II at Carchemish, driving the Egyptians out of the Levant (Cogan and Tadmore 1998, 307–8). However, the Historian's decision to include it here

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decade later, Zedekiah—a Judean king who had been appointed by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kgs 24:17)—called on Apries to aid his own rebellion.[26] And, perhaps more importantly, if the claim in Jeremiah 37:5 is historically accurate, Zedekiah actually received that support and was thereby able to temporarily hold off the Babylonian incursion.[27] Apries and the Saites, then, are remembered in contemporary Judean sources as friends to the crown and its subjects—if not always Yahweh's chosen ally for Judah[28]—and as sources of support against the threat of Babylonian hegemony.

This relationship between Judah and the Saites, and between Zedekiah and Apries in particular, explains why Jeremiah's traveling party would seek refuge in Egypt following Gedaliah's assassination. Judah and Egypt shared a recent history of cooperation and a common enemy in Babylon. This history might also account for the positive reception that the Judean and Samarian caravan receives from the unnamed king in P. Amh. 63. If this is, in fact, the case, and it is this relationship between Judah and Egypt that stands behind the narrative in col. xvii, then we might make two further speculative claims based on the narrative of Jeremiah 40–44 and the inscriptional evidence from Egypt. First, the setting for the meeting between the refugees and the king that

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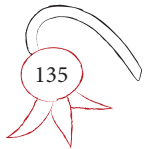
at the conclusion of the brief treatment of Jehoiakim's reign suggests that their failure to leave their territory was related to the Judean king's ultimate demise.

[26] This expectation seems to be asserted in texts like Ezekiel 17, which records a Judean envoy sent to Egypt seeking military aid in its condemnation of Zedekiah's politics. Compare also Lachish Letter 3, which mentions that Coniah, a Judean general (שר הצבא), went to Egypt and sent word back to Judah (ll. 13–15).

[27] While Jeremiah 37:5 claims that Apries, identified by title (פרעה) rather than name, sent troops to Jerusalem to (successfully) drive back the Babylonians, that campaign is otherwise unattested in contemporary Greek and Egyptian sources. Herodotus does claim that Apries undertook campaigns to Sidon and Tyre during his reign (*Histories* 2.161), which means that he may still have considered the Levant (and especially its ports) as territory worth fighting for.

[28] For example, the pan-Egyptian curse of Jeremiah 44 predicts Apries's delivery into enemy hands, just like Zedekiah had been delivered to Nebuchadnezzar. Ezekiel 17, too, denounces the Judean monarchy for relying on Egypt for support against the (superior?) Babylonian Empire.

is narrated in col. xvii should be identified as Tahpanhes/Daphnae, an important gateway between Egypt and the Levant. Second, the king who treats the broken Judean and Samarian families with such kindness should be identified as Apries, the Saite monarch who was on the throne in 586 when Judah fell, who may have still considered Judah a vassal of his Egyptian empire, and for whom Tahpanhes was a site of strategic and ideological importance.

If the preceding analysis is correct, then it raises an important question concerning the relationship between P. Amh. 63 and some of the literature that has been preserved in the Hebrew Bible. Despite significant differences in how each text evaluates the Judean and Samarian refugees and their decision to enter Egypt, I have argued that there are enough points of narrative overlap to rely on the narrative in Jeremiah 40–44 to fill in details for the sparser version in P. Amh. 63. Of course, this (posited) shared account would not require that one narrative be dependent on the other, nor would the available evidence allow us to determine a direction of dependence if we were to somehow establish a direct link between the two texts.[29] Still, the inclusion of a shared account of a migration to Egypt during the Saite period in P. Amh. 63 and the Hebrew Bible would provide an important piece of data for considering the processes that led to the compilation of the Hebrew Bible and to authoritative literature more broadly. P. Amh. 63 famously includes an Aramaic parallel to Psalm 20 alongside a pair of psalm-like prayers to Yahu,[30] which demonstrates that a genealogical relationship between the traditions preserved in both collections is at least possible. The varying evaluations of the migration to Egypt, if indeed there is a shared tradition between the two accounts, might then offer an opportunity to

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[29] If there is any dependence between the two compositions (P. Amh. 63 and Jer 40–44) or if they share a tradition about migration to Egypt, it is entirely possible that the account in P. Amh. 63 was earlier (Persian period?) and reflects a more apologetic stance towards a flight to Egypt, while the author of Jeremiah 40–44 set their account in the Neo-Babylonian period to further highlight the negative aspects and rebellious elements in the story (Simeon Chavel, personal communication).

[30] The parallel to Psalm 20 occurs in col. xi. For a discussion of the parallels, see Nims and Steiner 1983; Zevit 1990; Van der Toorn 2017.

consider the values that informed the compilation processes behind P. Amh. 63 and the Hebrew Bible.

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