'Ezekiel's oracles against the nations in light of a royal ideology of warfare'
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Over the last few decades a steady stream of scholarship has argued for a mythological background to the oracles against the nations (OANs) in the book of *Ezekiel*.[1] Very few of these, however, have attempted to make any overarching sense of Ezekiel's use of mythological motifs, either within the OANs or as part of the theological and literary project of the book as a whole. This essay will argue that Ezekiel's use of these motifs, both within the cycle of OANs and as part of the book as a whole, is derived from the royal military ideology current in Jerusalem prior to the exile, and that the OANs comprise a direct attempt to incorporate the experience of exile into this ideology. Ultimately, however, Ezekiel's efforts to this end were perceived to have failed, and alternative ideological explanations of warfare were introduced. This essay will therefore conclude by addressing the accrual of additional material within the OANs.

Current research

There are two principle exceptions to the generally *ad hoc* studies of mythological motifs in *Ezekiel*. The first of these is the work of C. Auffarth, who addressed the purpose of Ezekiel's mythological allusions as part of his more wide-ranging study on the theme of creation in myth and ritual.[2] His analysis of the Tyre oracles in chapters 26-28 argued that the oracles were aimed at emphasising Yahweh's particular kingship, and deploying the mythological motifs to this end.[3] The issue of

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[1] M.C. Astour, 'Ezekiel's prophecy of Gog and the Cuthean legend of Naram-Sin', *JBL* 95 (1976): 567-579; C. Auffarth, *Der drohende Untergang: „Schöpfung" in Mythos und Ritual im Alten Orient und in Griechenland am Beispiel der Odyssee und des Ezechielbuches*, Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten 39 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991); L. Boadt, *Ezekiel's Oracles against Egypt: A Literary and Philological Study of Ezekiel 29-32*, BO 37 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1980); P.-M. Bogaert, 'Montagne sainte, jardin d'Éden et sanctuaire (hiérosolymitain) dans un oracle d'Ézéchiel contre le prince de Tyr (Éz 28,11-19)', in *Le Myth, son Langage et son Message: Actes du Colloque de Liège et Louvain-la-Neuve, 1981*, edited by H. Limet and J. Ries, Homo Religiosus 9 (Louvain-la-Neuve: Centre d'Histoire des Religions, 1983); J.B. Geyer, 'Mythology and culture in the oracles against the nations', *VT* 36 (1986): 129-145; J.B. Geyer, *Mythology and Lament: Studies in the Oracles about the Nations*, SOTSMS (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004); H.J. Van Dijk, *Ezekiel's Prophecy on Tyre (Ez. 26,1-28,19): A New Approach*, BO 20 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1968); A.J. Williams, 'The mythological background of Ezekiel 28:12-19?', *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 6 (1976): 49-61; R.R. Wilson, 'The death of the king of Tyre: the editorial history of Ezekiel 28', in *Love and Death in the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of Marvin H. Pope*, edited by R.M. Good and J.H. Marks (Guildford, Conn.: Four Quarters, 1987); K. Yalmon, 'The dirge over the king of Tyre', *Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute* 3 (1964): 28-57.

[2] Auffarth, *Der drohende Untergang*.

[3] Auffarth, 88-99.

whether the motifs in question were 'Canaanite' or 'Israelite' in origin was deferred for an examination of the subsequent oracles against Egypt, on the grounds that the use of Egyptian mythological material in those oracles would indicate that Ezekiel was using local traditions against the nations, rather than any native Israelite traditions.[4] Auffarth contended that the oracles against Egypt in chapters 29-32 reflected Egyptian mythology about the gods Horus and Seth, and consequently concluded that the motifs used against Tyre were Canaanite rather than Israelite in origin.[5] Auffarth then went on to argue that Ezekiel's use of these foreign mythological motifs was part of his political polemic against the gods and customs of Babylon, with the dating scheme in chapters 40-48 pointing toward a subversive theological reinterpretation of the New Year festivities celebrated in Babylon in association with the kingship of Marduk.[6] In an entirely new interpretation of the traditional theology of *Heilsgeschichte*, Ezekiel was imagining a festival celebrating Yahweh's kingship instead.[7]

I will address Auffarth's interpretation of the OANs, particularly those directed against Egypt, in more detail below, but must here object to his contention that the mythological motifs in question are not natively 'Israelite', and consequently also to his conclusion that Ezekiel's use of these motifs marks a significant and novel departure from the theological tradition.

The New Year tradition to which Auffarth refers centred around an annual celebration of the kingship of the god Marduk; a kingship which had been won by him at the time of creation through his successful defeat of the goddess Tiamat, a deification of cosmic chaos. Through Marduk's defeat of Tiamat, the order of the universe was preserved against chaos. This *Chaoskampf* motif was common throughout the ancient Near East, and that such a tradition was well-known in Israel and Judah has been convincingly established.[8] Though deliberately obscured in the priestly account of creation in Gen. 1, it is clear from other texts that Israel and Judah knew of a cosmological account in which it was Yahweh's victory over the forces of chaos, embodied as watery sea creatures, which enabled the establishment of an ordered world. The strongest evidence for this tradition occurs in *Psalms*, where the tradition of Yahweh as creator is firmly associated with acclamations of Yahweh's own kingship.[9] If Ezekiel was making an argument for the New Year festival being a celebration of the kingship of Yahweh rather than Marduk, it was far from a

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[4] Auffarth, 98-99.

[5] Auffarth, 99-103.

[6] Auffarth, 106-117. Though based solely on the Egypt OANs and unconnected to the New Year festival, Boadt also suggested that Ezekiel's use of mythological allusions was designed to mock foreign beliefs (170-171).

[7] Auffarth, 114-115.

[8] Most recently see J. Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament*, COP 35 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

[9] See my *War and Ethics in the Ancient Near East: Understanding Military Violence in Light of Cosmology and History*, BZAW 407 (Berlin: de Gruyters, 2009).

theological novelty, and the traditions with which he was doing it were just as native to his audience as they would have been to a 'Canaanite' one.

The familiarity of Ezekiel and his audience with these myths in their own theological tradition raises the possibility that Ezekiel's object in using them in his OANs was not as polemic against foreign political and religious traditions but as an internally-orientated theological argument. In fact, I will argue that Ezekiel's concern is to *support* the ongoing legitimacy of these traditions within the native Judahite tradition complex.

In advance of that argument, however, we must consider the second proposal which has been put forth with regard to the overarching purpose of Ezekiel's use of these motifs in the OANs. This has been made by J.B. Geyer, initially as a short article concerned with the forms of OAN in the Hebrew Bible, and subsequently and in greater detail in a monograph.[10] In the one, he argues that the OAN form found in *Isaiah*, *Jeremiah* and *Ezekiel* (excepting chapter 25) comprises the 'living prophetic tradition' of the eighth to sixth centuries BCE, and is characterised principally by its use of mythological traditions and loose literary form.[11] In the other, he revives S. Mowinckel's arguments for the cultic origins of the 'Day of Yahweh' tradition, and in particular locates it within the lament tradition as witnessed by the old Sumerian laments.[12] He also follows Mowinckel in contending that these laments and the cultic tradition in question were centred around the festival of the enthronement of Yahweh and 'the chaos-cosmos tradition celebrated in the Jerusalem cult', though his analyses of the *Ezekiel* OANs revolve primarily around mythological traditions divorced from the *Chaoskampf* motif so central to that festival.[13] Geyer's ultimate conclusion is more persuasive than that of Auffarth in terms of the religious and theological tradition to which it appeals, but it finds its principle weakness in the fact that Geyer demands a functioning liturgical context for the lament-oracles 'in the temple in the time of the monarchy before the Deuteronomic reforms'.[14] Though Geyer does refer to the continuation of this lament tradition 'even into exilic times in circles beyond the influence of the Deuteronomists', he gives no explanation for why the tradition persisted into the exilic period and beyond, or why the strongest evidence for it – in *Ezekiel* and Isa. 14 especially – is from the period of the monarchy's collapse (at best, from Geyer's point of view) or well into the post-monarchic period (at worst). (And the evidence from *Jeremiah*, of course, can hardly be said to be beyond the influence of the Deuteronomists.) The origin of the mythologically-based OAN tradition in the temple cult would readily explain

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[10] Geyer, 'Mythology and culture in the oracles against the nations'; Geyer, *Mythology and Lament: Studies in the Oracles about the Nations*.

[11] Geyer, 'Mythology', 135, 124, 132.

[12] Geyer, *Mythology*, 77-148.

[13] Geyer, *Mythology*, 148. He relates the ship of Ez. 27 to an Egyptian myth of Amduat and the cosmic tree tradition in Ez. 31 to an unspecific mythological tradition regarding the fall of tyrants, reflected also in Isa. 14 (39-74).

[14] Geyer, *Mythology*, 179-180.

Ezekiel's familiarity with it, and a connection with a lament tradition would certainly account for its appeal in a period of national crisis, but ultimately the *Ezekiel* OANs demand a more comprehensive explanation for their use – in a period of a collapsing monarchy, no less – of a tradition fundamentally based in the royal mythological tradition.[15]

That explanation is to be found in the extent to which the *Chaoskampf* motif, with its central emphasis on the kingship of Yahweh, had become entwined with the military endeavours of the human Judahite king.

As mentioned, the *Chaoskampf* motif – in the Hebrew tradition, as in the Babylonian, clearly part of the mythology of creation – is strongly associated with the recognition of Yahweh as king of the gods. Much as in the Babylonian celebration of Marduk's kingship, with which many are more familiar, Yahweh's kingship arises from his successful defeat of chaotic forces, typically characterised as water or sea. In addition to the fully mythological association of this victory with creation, however, the royal ideological tradition perceived the defeat of chaos also in the historical military victories of the human king against his enemies on the battlefield. God and king acted in tandem to facilitate the ongoing defeat of chaotic forces – historically personified as the king's military enemies – in favour of an ordered cosmos centred on the national capital. The human king's successes on the battlefield reflected the involvement of the divine king in the conflict, and the divine king's power and universal authority was confirmed in the human king's success. Due to the nature of the sources which have come down to us, the clearest indication of this synergy is again evident in *Psalms*. In Ps. 18, for example, both the king's and Yahweh's battles are conceived in cosmological terms, as is affirmed by the cosmological imagery employed: the psalm speaks of Yahweh's weapons in meteorological terms (hail, thundering, lightning [reading ברק with the Septuagint and 2 Sam. 22.15], coals of fire; 18.11-15). His chariot is the wind, he is clothed in clouds and his actions culminate with 'then the channels of the sea were seen, and the foundations of the world were laid bare' (18.16). Yahweh then proceeds in the subsequent verses to convey this knowledge of warfare to the king.[16]

From this concept of the divine and human kings' synergy derived the common ancient Near Eastern theological belief that defeat of the human king on the earthly battlefield was tantamount to the defeat of the divine king in the divine sphere. As a consequence of it, the spectacular defeat of Yahweh's human king in Jerusalem and Judah's final fall against the Babylonians dealt a major theological and ideological blow to the royal circles of Jerusalem. It is this essay's contention that Ezekiel's use of cosmological mythological motifs in his OANs is directly related to the theological

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[15] Note also that Geyer's basis for associating the Yahwistic *Chaoskampf* with laments is Westermann's assertion that the theme appears only in the psalms of community lament, which is certainly too limited a sphere for the tradition (Geyer, *Mythology*, 148; cf. my *War and Ethics in the Ancient Near East*).

[16] For additional examples, see my *War*, 68-76.

threat posed by this disaster, namely, the possibility that Yahweh had lost his status as divine king and creator.

Ezekiel's particular concern with the vindication of Yahweh's name is of course well known and frequently noted by commentators.[17] The debasement of the nations in the OANs has already been connected to this intended vindication by some of these, but this essay's particular object is to buttress this assertion by demonstrating that Ezekiel's diatribes against the nations are not generalised or imprecise expressions of judgment against traditional enemies, but undertaken specifically and deliberately in reference to the mythological traditions of Judah.

Cosmological mythology in the OANs

The OANs of Ez. 25-32 open with a series of brief oracles directed against Judah's immediate neighbours: Ammon, Moab, Philistia and Edom. As Geyer already noted, these possess a form distinct from the oracles in the subsequent seven chapters, and are wholly lacking in mythological allusions.[18] Their similarities with the OANs in Am. 1-2 (also noted by Geyer), however, suggests a reason for their inclusion in these chapters, which will be addressed in further detail below.

We turn first to the oracles against Tyre and against Egypt, which together dominate the OAN section. The prevalence of water language in the cosmological traditions makes its definitive identification within the Tyre oracle difficult, and so the Egypt oracles will be addressed first.

Egypt

Ezekiel's use of the cosmological tradition with regard to Egypt is clearest in the first oracle of Ez. 29.[19] Egypt is called *hattannim haggādôl*, the great sea monster, sprawling in the middle of the Nile (29.3).[20] The accusation laid at its door is having declared 'My Nile is mine, and *I* made it' (29.3). The first person emphasis is made in the Hebrew by the use of the grammatically unnecessary *ʾᵃnî*, which also serves to contrast the claims of Egypt against the repeated assertions that *ʾᵃnî yhwh*. There is

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[17] E.g., Auffarth, 89-90; P.M. Joyce, *Ezekiel: A Commentary* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 18, 27-28; P.M. Joyce, *Divine Initiative and Human Response in Ezekiel*, JSOTSup 51 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1989), 127; R.W. Klein, *Ezekiel: The Prophet and his Message* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina, 1988), 130; W. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia, Penn.: Fortress, 1979, translated by R.E. Clements from *Ezechiel 1, I. Teilband*, BKAT 13.1 [Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukircher Verlag, 1969]), 37-38, 61.

[18] Geyer, 'Mythology', 129-130.

[19] Despite this, Auffarth includes it as part of his argument for the Horus-Seth motif in the Egypt OANs as a group (100).

[20] The relevance of the sea monster is self-evident; the verb used for its actions in the Nile, *rbṣ*, has been suggested to have a connection to the mythological traditions of the chaos monster, though the extant examples are not strong enough to make this sure (Boadt, 28). Elsewhere Boadt remarks on the exemplary quality of the Nile as watery chaos (106).

only room for one *'ᵃnî*, and Egypt's claims to the role are about to be brought down by Yahweh himself.

The most thorough catalogue of the mythological allusions in the Egypt oracles was undertaken by L. Boadt in 1980.[21] With regard to this oracle, he notes the appellation of Egypt as *hattannim haggādôl*, arguing against its prosaic identification as a mere earthly crocodile, and connects the description of its destruction as being dragged from the water to Baal's battle against Yam.[22] In the absence of a full Judahite account of Yahweh's battle against chaos it is difficult to identify further allusions in such a brief passage, but it is possible that the assault on *hattannim haggādôl* via its mouth ('I will put hooks in your jaws') is one such allusions, given that in the Babylonian version, *Enūma eliš*, Marduk's assault on Tiamat is similarly via her mouth.[23] More definitively, the drying up of the chaos waters into dry land is a recurring motif in biblical passages referring to the *Chaoskampf*, and this is a recurring theme throughout these chapters against Egypt (29.10; 30.12; cf. 32).[24]

Ezekiel 30 contains a series of relatively prosaic description of Egypt's coming judgment, though its opening salvo referring to the 'day of Yahweh' may be a subtle allusion to the cosmological tradition.[25] More interestingly, the description of 30.16, 'I will set fire to Egypt, Sin will writhe in anguish and No will be split apart' includes a collocation of *'eš*, fire, and *bq'*, to split, known from the battle of Anat against Mot, a version of *Chaoskampf* current alongside the traditional rendering of Baal against Yam at Ugarit.[26] Even more decisively, however, *bq'* appears in the Hebrew version of Yahweh's battles against chaos, even in the wholly demythologised version extant in Gen. 1.

Having clearly set the cosmological scene in Ez. 29 and gently maintained it through Ez. 30, Ezekiel arrives at Ez. 31, in which Egypt's arrogance is described according to an extended arboreal metaphor.[27] According to Auffarth, one of the reasons to contend that Ezekiel is in these chapters using Egyptian mythology rather than Israelite is a supposed absence of this 'cosmic tree' in the Israelite tradition.[28] Quite how he relates this assertion with the Gen. 2-3 tradition is not clear, particularly given the convergence of the tree, a 'garden of God' which is clearly identified as the garden of Eden, the theme of illegitimate usurpation of divine

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[21] Boadt, *Ezekiel's Oracles against Egypt*.

[22] Boadt, 35.

[23] En.el. IV 95-102.

[24] Cf. Jer. 51.36; Nah. 1.4; Isa. 50.2.

[25] See Geyer, *Mythology*, 77-148. Boadt also connects 30.8, regarding the defeat of Egypt's followers, to a passage at Job 9.13 regarding the defeat of Rahab's followers, but the terminology is probably not specific enough to warrant much confidence in the connection (68).

[26] Boadt, 74.

[27] This is presuming that the 'Assyria' in 31.3 is an errant reference and that the metaphor is aimed at Egypt as 31.2, 18 suggest. If the application to Egypt is in fact superficial and the passage ought to be divorced from Ezekiel's OAN schema, then the dominance of overtly cosmological material in the Egypt oracles is even stronger.

[28] Auffarth, 101.

prerogative and punitive consignment of the offender to death. Admittedly there are a number of differences between Ez. 31 and Gen. 2-3, most obviously the absence in Ez. 31 of individual human offenders, but the similarities are clearly sufficient to suppose some common mythological tradition, albeit one divergent in particularities in these instances. Geyer, as already noted, argued that both this chapter and Isa. 14 were based on a mythological tradition regarding the falls of tyrants, but did not adduce any specific evidence as to the nature of this tradition.[29]

Given the apparent background of this passage in a tradition which appears elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible in the context of creation, what becomes especially striking about this passage in the context of the present study is the extent of the cosmological references it contains. Though he does not include the passage amongst those relating to the *Chaoskampf*, Boadt already noted several of these. First there is the persistent and repeated use of language of the primeval waters, most especially *mayim* (*rabbîm*), *t^{e}hôm* and *n^{e}harôt* (31.4, 5, 15). More crucially, these terms occur in pairs which are overwhelmingly associated with the creation traditions of *Chaoskampf*. *Mayim* parallels *t^{e}hôm* in 31.4, as it does in Gen. 1.2; Ps. 33.7; 104.6; 135.6; Prov. 8.28-29 and Job 28.14; 38.16, almost all of which are in the explicit context of Yahweh's creative activities. The association is affirmed by the reference to *n^{e}harôt*, which in its plural form is associated 'aux *eaux souterraines* et cosmiques, aux eaux primordiales, au Grand Océan qui est identique au chaos'.[30] The reference to *mayim rabbîm* in 31.5, 15, especially in combination with *n^{e}harôt*, reiterates this imagery.[31] In this passage, then, there is a very strong association of the imagery with the cosmological waters of chaos, especially at the opening and concluding sections, which thereby frame and reiterate the image.

At the same time, however, there is also very clear imagery of the primeval garden of Eden, known more familiarly in its Gen. 2-3 form (see above). While detailed speculation is exceedingly difficult, given the nature of the biblical sources on the creation traditions, Ezekiel seems to reflect a composite tradition, one which combines the theme of watery chaos with a secondary but associated threat to Yahweh's authority in the guise of an arrogant usurper. That the usurper is portrayed as gaining its strength from the primordial waters is perhaps more than coincidental; the waters seem barely restrained in their support for the tree in the opening passages of the verse, while the concluding passage of judgment declares explicitly that Yahweh's punishment of the tree was accompanied by a holding back of the streams of the deep and a checking of the great waters (31.15).[32] The waters of

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[29] Geyer, *Mythology*, 74.

[30] C.A. Keller and R. Vuilleumier, *Michée, Nahoum, Habacuc, Sophonie*, CAT 116 (Paris: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1971), 124; cf. Boadt, 106. See also Hab. 3.9-10; Ps. 93.3-4; Nah. 2.7, 9.

[31] On the cosmological associations of *mayim rabbîm* see H.G. May, 'Some cosmic connotations of mayim rabbîm, "many waters"', *JBL* 74 (1955): 9-21. Likewise Boadt, 109. For a clear cosmological combination of the phrase with *n^{e}harôt*, see Ps. 93.3-4.

[32] Preceding these two descriptions of how Yahweh will constrain the chaos waters is the phrase 'I will make the deep mourn', which strikes many as odd and which JPS would prefer to see as

chaos, through their agent the tree (*viz*., Egypt), had attempted to reassert their powers in the creative order once more; yet once more they had been defeated, and Yahweh's authority and power affirmed.

Having thus developed his imagery of Egypt as a historical manifestation of Yahweh's primeval chaotic opponent and again reiterated the authority of Yahweh over such manifestations of chaos, Ezekiel brings the image to its climax in Ez. 32. The imagery of Egypt as the *tannîm*, recognisable already from Ez. 29, reappears here, with its domain overtly identified as the *nᵉharôt* this time, rather than circuitously as the Nile (32.2). Egypt is also called *kᵉpîr*, a royal image; Boadt observes that 'in sharp contrast to the dignities of royalty connected with the lion, Ezekiel plays on the theme of the mythological defeat of the royal aspirations of Yam (Sea) and Mot (Death) for rule over creation'.[33] Here more clearly than anywhere else in Ezekiel's Egypt oracles, the threat to Yahweh's kingship is revealed. Yet with corresponding decisiveness, Egypt's claims to kingship are quashed, and its true role, that of the chaos monster defeated by Yahweh, is declared. That the defeat is achieved first and foremost through use of Yahweh's net reiterates the cosmological theme: though no Hebrew version of the *Chaoskampf* remains extant, the net is a prominent royal weapon of Marduk in the Babylonian version, and it is one of the most deliberate allusions used in the royal inscriptions to align the activities of the human king with those of the god.[34] The subsequent depiction of Egypt's fate repeats much of the imagery of Ez. 29, and the chapter culminates in a description of Egypt's descent into Sheol. Though confusing and repetitive, the section seems most probably to be an elaboration on the conclusion to Ez. 31, in which the challenger to Yahweh's authority is put away into the realm of the underworld, beyond any hope of revival.

Tyre

Having established the centrality of the cosmological mythology in Ezekiel's portrayal of Egypt's offences and downfall, we may now return to the oracles against Tyre in Ez. 26-28. As already conceded above, the imagery here is complicated by the geographical location of the city on an island off the Levant coast; its standard description in, for example, the Assyrian royal inscriptions was 'Tyre who dwelt in the middle of the sea', and it is difficult to distinguish in places

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analogous to the two subsequent verbs. The descent into Sheol which the act marks is perhaps rooted in the tradition of the upper and lower firmaments being the divided body of the defeated chaotic power (see En.el. IV 137-138).

[33] Boadt, 131.

[34] En.el. IV 95. See also my *War*, 23-24, 37-38, 48-49.

the extent to which the water language used of the city is deliberate cosmological allusion and the extent to which it is merely a consequence of geographical reality.[35]

Nonetheless, the collective force of the language with regard to Tyre, especially in light of the language used of Egypt, is enough to suggest that Ezekiel was with his Tyre oracles making much the same cosmological argument as with those directed against Egypt: Yahweh's power over the forces of chaos persist, even in the face of the defeat of his earthly royal counterpart in Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 26 opens the sequence against Tyre. After an indictment suspiciously similar to that against Ammon in 25.3, the announcement of the city's destruction is expressed in a mixed combination of historical and mythological language. On the one hand the dominant referent is to the armies of the nations, who will wreak the city's destruction (26.3, 7-13). At the same time, however, the first mention of the nations is followed sharply by an analogy to the waves of the sea, which Auffarth identifies as language of flood.[36] It is then this flood which is initially credited with the destruction of the city, culminating in the remains of the city described as a 'naked rock...a place for the stretching of nets'; the same phrases recur in the culmination of the passage (26.4-5, 14). Collectively, these images evoke the *Chaoskampf* as recounted in *Enūma eliš*: like the net, the flood is one of Marduk's characteristic weapons, and royal inscriptions frequently refer to the effects of their conquest with it in terms such as 'laid waste as though ruined by the flood'.[37] The particular phrase, *kīma til abubi*, is oddly reminiscent of the description of Tyre as a naked rock, and the opaque phrase about the spreading out of nets there would seem to confirm the image as related to the tradition of *Chaoskampf*. The passage culminates with phrases already familiar from 31.15, referring to the ruination of the city as when the *t*ehôm* is brought over it and the *mayim rabbîm* cover it.[38]

This brings us to Ez. 27, which principally comprises a seemingly-endless description of the ship of Tyre, culminating in its destruction in the midst of the sea. Van Dijk suggests that the ultimate destination of the Tyrian ship in the depths of the sea 'are more or less the primordial sea and figure of the Pit', which may render the passage a variation on the preceding chapter, but perhaps the most concrete association of the passage with the cosmological tradition is the data marshalled by Auffarth with regard to the use of similar boats in processions of the New Year festival in Babylon.[39] If correct, the destruction of Tyre's pretentions to such a role

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[35] *ṣur-ru ša qabal tam-tim* or *ṣur-ru a-šib qabal tam-tim*; see Van Dijk, 12. Geyer also argues that while the language may be the natural means of speaking of the city, it is also indicative of Tyre's identification with chaos (*Mythology*, 39).

[36] Auffarth, 90. Van Dijk would also

[37] H. Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III King of Assyria: Critical Edition, with Introductions, Translations and Commentary* (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1994), Summ. 1:9; Summ. 7:25 (*kīma tíl a-bu-bi ú-ab-bit*).

[38] On these paralleled, see above and again May, 'Some cosmic connotations of mayim rabbîm, "many waters"'; Van Dijk specifically emphasises that these images are not aimed at 'demythologising' the tradition (11).

[39] Auffarth, 93-94.

would cohere with the overall depiction of Tyre and Egypt as usurpers of Yahweh's power which must accordingly be destroyed.

This theme continues into the final chapter on Tyre, Ez. 28. The chapter is fraught with textual issues which have frequently contributed to the variety of interpretations for the mythological imagery its two-fold structure employs.[40] Van Dijk contends that 28.2, with Tyre's self-depiction as a god dwelling in the midst of the sea contains no allusion to Canaanite mythology, yet he makes the intriguing proposal that the baffling phrase in 28.12 should be read 'serpent of perfection' (*ḥawwat-m taknît*, with an emphatic final mem, for MT *ḥôtem toknît*), in keeping with the Edenic imagery of the subsequent verses.[41] More persuasive, however, are the arguments put forth for the latter half of the chapter (28.11-19) having the Jerusalem temple and its high priest as its referent. To this end, P.-M. Bogaert argues that the passage was originally a thinly-veiled oracle against the high priest in Jerusalem, which was mistaken subsequently as actually referring to the king of Tyre and appended to the Tyre OANs.[42] Given the combination of an Edenic tradition with a more overtly cosmological one in Ez. 31 regarding Egypt, the confusion is explicable. This leaves us with the oracle in 28.1-10, in which the association of Tyre with the chaotic waters are evident if without illuminating detail, and which in its description of Tyre's fate reiterates that described of Tyre in Ez. 27 and parallels that decreed for Egypt in Ez. 31, 32.

Across the Tyre and Egypt OANs, then, we can see a consistent use of mythological imagery which acts to identify the nation in question with the forces of chaos defeated by Yahweh at creation. The equally consistent insistence that Yahweh will defeat these forces in their present manifestations acts to affirm the ongoing authority of Yahweh as creator and, ultimately, as the divine king, despite the necessity of his dissociation from his traditional historical agent, the king of Judah.[43]

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[40] For various attempts to account for the variety of material in the chapter, see e.g., Bogaert, 'Montagne sainte, jardin d'Éden et sanctuaire (hiérosolymitain) dans un oracle d'Ézéchiel contre le prince de Tyr (Éz 28,11-19)'; Wilson, 'The death of the king of Tyre: the editorial history of Ezekiel 28'; and Yalmon, 'The dirge over the king of Tyre'.

[41] Van Dijk, 113-116.

[42] Bogaert, 142-143.

[43] This proposal dovetails directly with an argument put forth by M. Nobile, that *Ezekiel* exhibits a tripartite structure mirroring the ancient Near Eastern epic form which culminates in the construction of the house of the god ('Beziehung zwischen Ez 32,17-32 und der Gog-Perikope (Ez 38-39) im Lichte der Endredaktion', in *Ezekiel and His Book: Textual and Literary Criticism and their Interrelation*, edited by J. Lust, BETL 74 [Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1986]). Auffarth's observation that a number of the dates in Ez. 40-48 are the first of the year probably also ties into this schema, though again the primary referent should be an internal Judahite framework of Yahweh's kingship rather than polemic against a Babylonian political theology (113-114).

Subsequent redaction of the OANs

This identification of cosmological motifs in the Tyre and Egypt OANs has left a few passages unaccounted for.

Ezekiel 25

The first and foremost of these is Ez. 25, in which are found oracles against Ammon, Moab, Edom and Philistia. These are possessed of a quite distinct form as compared to the subsequent oracles against Tyre and Egypt, and are wholly lacking in cosmological – or indeed any mythological – elements.[44] The chapter is often thus described as an addition to the text, sometimes by Ezekiel himself, and usually for the purpose of obtaining a symbolic seven nations in the OAN cycle.[45] This may well have been part of the purpose of their addition, but their distinct style suggests also another. As the oracles progress, from Ammon to Moab to Edom to Philistia, they begin to develop a stronger and stronger series of correlations between the offence of which the nation in question is accused and the punishment which is to be enacted upon it.

The clearest case is the final oracle against Philistia. In the indictment the Philistines are accused of acting 'vengefully', with the centrality of this to the accusation being emphasised through the threefold repetition of the root *nqm* (25.15). In direct correlation to this, the judgment to be enacted against the Philistines is to be Yahweh's 'great vengeance', with words from *nqm* used twice (25.17). I have discussed elsewhere the theologically problematic nature of Yahweh's involvement in punishments which comprise the same acts for which the condemned are accused, and suggested that the principle underlying such instances is one of *lex talionis*, in which the punishment mirrors the offence but, unlike the offence, is not itself a crime.[46] This appears to be the principle in view here against the Philistines.

The same principle is at work in the preceding oracle against Edom. There the indictment again involves a three-fold use of *nqm*, and the announcement of judgment a two-fold use of the same (25.12, 14).

The connection between act and consequence is less clear in the first two oracles, and this is not helped by the uncertainty as to whether the references to Edom (Seir)

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[44] So also Geyer, 'Mythology'.

[45] So e.g., Zimmerli, 61; Geyer, 'Mythology', 141; Boadt, 9. The fact that the chapter is lacking the Ezekielian date formula has not generally been interpreted in favour of the passage's authenticity either. As for the seven-nation scheme, the addition of four nations in Ez. 25 leaves the cycle one short of the requisite seven until the oracle against Sidon in 28.20-26 is accounted for, which may rather indicate that it is the addition to make the symbolic seven.

[46] See my *War*, 110-115. This is a more precise correlation between crime and punishment than represented by the 'poetic justice' seen frequently in the prophetic books by P.D. Miller Jr. (*Sin and Judgment in the Prophets: A Stylistic and Theological Analysis*, SBLMS 27 [Chico, Ca.: Scholars, 1982]) and in *Ezekiel* in particular by K.L. Wong (*The Idea of Retribution in the Book of Ezekiel*, VTSup 87 [Brill: Leiden, 2001]).

in 25.8 and Ammon in 25.10 are deliberate, or accidental accretions.[47] Nonetheless the second oracle (principally against Moab, with appearances also by Seir and Ammon) seems to have a motif of 'the nations', who appear both in the content of the offence and playing a role in the punishment (25.8, 10). There may also be a recurring motif of exile in these oracles, again as part of the offence (25.3) and punishment (25.4, 7, 10). The connections in this first half of the chapter, however, are unfortunately vague.

The clarity of the principle in the latter two oracles, however, is provocative, particularly in light of the absence of mythological language. I have argued elsewhere that a *lex talionis* approach to warfare is an approach quite distinct from the cosmological framework adopted among royal circles, and it is intriguing to find it here in Ez. 25, set next to yet remaining independent of the cosmological approach taken in Ez. 26-32. Though in Ez. 26-32 Ezekiel appears to be reasserting the legitimacy of the cosmological framework for understanding Yahweh's military activities, by the end of the exilic period Deutero-Isaiah is already dissociating Yahweh's creative and royal identity from his cosmological role as the divine warrior king.[48] There, Yahweh's military endeavours against Babylon deploy precisely the *lex talionis* model. In Ez. 25, then, we may have an attempt, albeit an incomplete one, to update the original cosmological arguments made in Ez. 26-32.[49]

Egypt

That such an intention is at the heart of Ez. 25 is supported by the announcement of Egypt's restoration in Ez. 29 The announcement is remarkable in many ways. Certainly the relatively positive tenor of the passage causes it to jar with Ezekiel's negative portrayal of the fates of foreign nations elsewhere, leading to suggestions that it must be secondary.[50] If this is the case then there remains to be established the purpose of the addition. A clue may be found in the similarities between the

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[47] See e.g., B. Gosse, 'Le recueil d'oracles contre les nations d'Ézéchiel xxv-xxxii dans la redaction du livre d'Ézéchiel', *RB* 93 (1986): 535-562; B. Lang, 'A neglected method in Ezekiel research: editorial criticism', *VT* 29 (1979): 39-44; and also the commentaries.

[48] See my 'Redefining the ideology of war: Deutero-Isaiah, cosmology and *lex talionis*'.

[49] In light of the fact that it appears to be the absence of an Israelite or Judahite king through whom Yahweh may act that provokes the abandonment of the cosmological military schema in Deutero-Isaiah, it is interesting that in the Edom oracle it remains Yahweh's traditional agent (Israel) who enacts the punishment. As Israel is not identified as the agent against Philistia, however, it would seem that this peculiarity most likely derives from the special relationship between Israel/Judah and Edom. On the nature and origins of this relationship, see J.R. Bartlett, *Edom and the Edomites*, JSOTSup 77/PEFMS 1 (Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1989); J.R. Bartlett, 'Edom and the fall of Jerusalem, 587 B.C.', *PEQ* 114 (1982): 13-24; and B. Dicou, *Edom, Israel's Brother and Antagonist: The Role of Edom in Biblical Prophecy and Story*, JSOTSup 169 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1994).

[50] See the commentaries. Against such arguments W. Vogels has contended that the parallels between Israel's eventual restoration and that promised to Egypt are a reflection of Ezekiel's universalistic tendencies ('Restauration de l'Égypte et universalisme en Ez 29,13-16', *Biblica* 53 (1972): 473-494).

language used to describe the nature ('I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations', 29.12) and duration ('forty years', 29.12, 13) of Egypt's punishment and the language typically used by Ezekiel to describe the fate of Judah in terms of an exile followed after forty years by a second exodus (4.6; 11.16; 12.15; 20.23, 35-36; 23.15; 36.19).

These similarities, combined with the express statement of Egypt's role in Israel's follies (29.16) and the strong tradition of the first exodus being from Egypt and resulting in forty years in the wilderness, suggests that the decree of forty years in exile as Egypt's punishment is most persuasively viewed as the ultimate in *lex talionis*: what Egypt did to Israel – not once but twice – will now be turned against Egypt. In a great historical *inclusio*, Yahweh will bring the generation in exile back upon Egypt.

Ammon

Finally, one instance outside the OANs suggests that there may have been a revision of *Ezekiel* with a principle of *lex talionis* against the nations involved in Judah's downfall in mind.[51] This is the brief oracle against Ammon, which appears in Ez. 21.33-37. Both B. Lang and B. Gosse argue that this oracle was originally directed against Jerusalem itself.[52] If they are accurate in this assessment, the shift from Jerusalem to Ammon may have arisen out of the perceived responsibility of Ammon for Judah's fate, per the preceding narrative episode. Without both forms of the oracle extant it is difficult to say, but a similar phenomenon appears to have occurred elsewhere: Jer. 50.41-43 repeats almost verbatim an oracle against Judah from 6.22-24, directing it instead against Babylon and Isa. 47 does something similar with Isa. 3.16-4.1.

Conclusions

We have argued that Ezekiel's use of cosmological mythological motifs in his OANs was directly related to the theological threat to Yahweh's status which was posed by the military defeat of Judah. The mythological imagery, identifying Egypt and Tyre as chaotic forces and describing their defeat by Yahweh, was deployed by Ezekiel as a means of affirming the power of Yahweh as creator and divine king. Ultimately

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[51] Boadt briefly suggested that the use of certain phrases in the Egypt oracles and in oracles against Judah were intentional, and Davis has made a similar proposal with regard to the Tyre oracles; these smaller-scale correspondences may further support an editorial effort to achieve this effect across the book (Boadt, 176; E.F. Davis, '"And Pharaoh will change his mind..." (Ezek. 32:31): dismantling mythical discourse', in *Theological Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Brevard S. Childs*, edited by C. Seitz and K. Greene-McCreight [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999]).

[52] Gosse, 'Le recueil d'oracles contre les nations d'Ézéchiel xxv-xxxii dans la redaction du livre d'Ézéchiel'; Lang, 'A neglected method in Ezekiel research: editorial criticism'.

Ezekiel's efforts to this end were perceived to have failed, and passages describing the defeat of the nations in terms of a policy of *lex talionis* were introduced.

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