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Mesopotamian Imagery and Influence in the Book of Daniel

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By

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Sometimes neglected in the scholarly literature on the book of Daniel is the investigation into Mesopotamian parallels and influence linguistically, culturally, and literarily on its content and composition. However, some recently published articles are giving the subject of Daniel in its Near Eastern milieu the attention it deserves. This paper will examine two of these recent essays and one earlier work on the subject, and posit some original ideas on possible Mesopotamian influence particularly in regard to oneiromancy (dream interpretation) and animal imagery in the book of Daniel.

The Life of the Courtier

The first article, by Karel Van Der Toorn,[1] begins with a look at the Neo-Assyrian correspondence between kings and various types of court scholars, so as to see what light is shed on Daniel's depiction of life at court. The article's other main focus is an examination of possible Mesopotamian prototypes for the account of Daniel in the lions' den in chapter 6, specifically *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi* ("I shall praise the Lord of Wisdom" – often referred to as the "Poem of the Righteous Sufferer" in Assyriological literature) and extant letters from Urad-Gula to Assurbanipal. Both stories, like Daniel 6, recount the courtier's fall from grace, and *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi* ends with the courtier's restoration through the intervention of Marduk. Van Der Toorn posits that although the author of Daniel was familiar with these stories, he misinterpreted the metaphorical use of lion's den imagery in the Urad-Gula letters and other Mesopotamian authors to describe the cutthroat competition of life at court as the literal punishment for a sage fallen from grace.[2] It seems unlikely, however, that the crux of Daniel 6, Daniel's miraculous

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[1] Karel Van Der Toorn, "Scholars at the Oriental Court: The Figure of Daniel Against Its Mesopotamian Background," in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, ed. John J. Collins and Peter W. Flint, 37-54.
[2] Ibid., 52.

delivery from the deadly maws of the lions, is founded upon a cultural misunderstanding or linguistic misreading. The prevalence of this type of story, what Van Der Toorn calls the "Tale of the Vindicated Courtier"[3] narrative pattern, can be most easily explained by the very fact that life for the courtier in an ancient Near Eastern court[4] was volatile and difficult. The account in Daniel 6 rings true with other similar stories because they all depict a common occurrence in court life. The Lord's delivery of Daniel from the lion's den is not a metaphorical misreading, but an independent story with a theological point that fits in well with themes from the rest of the book, particularly the Lord's delivery of Daniel's friends from the flames of the furnace in Daniel 3. Literary similarity does not necessarily equal direct literary dependency.

Returning to the first part of the article, of particular interest to this study is the list of religious experts in the service of the Neo-Assyrian kings. Drawn from texts translated in Simo Parpola's book,[5] Van Der Toorn concludes that while Daniel preserves the general atmosphere of life at court, i.e. the intrigue and ruthless competition, his failure to mention some of the more important specialists such as the physicians (*asû*) and lamentation priests (*kalû*) demonstrates a lack of knowledge when it comes to detail.[6] However, the omission of these two groups may simply denote their lack of importance and skill in regard to dream interpretation. While Dan. 4:3 does state that Nebuchadnezzar summoned all of the wise men of Babylon, the four groups mentioned in v. 4 are not put forth as being a comprehensive list of the scholars at court.

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[3] Ibid., 43.
[4] Or any Medieval court, or politics today for that matter.
[5] Simo Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars to the Kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal. Part II: Commentary and Appendices*, XIV-XXI.
[6] Van Der Toorn, 41-42.

Two groups that are mentioned both in chapter 2 and 4 are the חַרְטֻם (Akkadian – *ḥardibu*) and אָשַׁף (Akkadian – *āšipu*). Van Der Toorn allows for the possibility that the *bārû* ("one who sees/observes") and the *ḥardibu* were the experts in dream interpretation.[7] The *bārû* are not mentioned in Daniel, but the *ḥardibu*, Egyptian priests specializing in dream interpretation, are. A. Leo Oppenheim cites a British Museum tablet published by C. H. W. Johns that "shows that Egyptian interpreters of dreams were consulted at the Assyrian court during the period of or before Assurbanipal."[8] Oppenheim concludes that the practice of the Assyrians employing foreigners as dream interpreters is partial evidence of the lack of importance that they ascribed to this type of divination.[9] Thus, Van Der Toorn posits that the prominence that Daniel affords dream interpretation is an exaggeration compared to the historical reality, enlisting Oppenheim[10] in support of his assertion that "the Assyrian kings were averse to having dream interpreters at their courts."[11] It is important to note, however, that the Neo-Babylonian monarchs had a role in society different from the Assyrian kings that ruled before them. Oppenheim writes that as high priest, the Assyrian king "seems to have considered dream-epiphanies below the theological standing of a king and a priest, while his Babylonian confrère, devoid of any priestly rank, views such experiences as extraordinary and worthy of being recorded."[12] Hence it is understandable that

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[7] Ibid., 41-42.
[8] A. Leo Oppenheim, *The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East*, 238.
[9] Ibid., 238-239.
[10] Ibid., 238.
[11] Van Der Toorn, 42.
[12] Oppenheim, 200.

Nabonidus repeatedly records his dreams,[13] and that the book of Daniel gives dream interpretation a greater prominence in the Babylonian court.

Returning to the אָשַׁף (Akkadian – *āšipu*), another group of scholars listed in Daniel two and four, recent scholarship makes the assertion that "by the Neo-Assyrian period, the exorcist or *āšipu* had subsumed oneirology within his professional expertise."[14] Sally A. L. Butler supports this assertion first by noting that the Mesopotamians considered dreams, especially nightmares, as having a demonic cause to them. A bad dream had a physical substance that could be transferred to a substitute and destroyed. It was the job of the *āšipu* to diagnose and remove the evil substance from the dreamer's body and through various rites "to make a bad dream favourable."[15] Butler cites several Neo-Assyrian tablet inscriptions as her primary sources including the "Ashur Dream Ritual Compendium" and the "Shamash-shum-ukin Dream Ritual," both edited by Butler in her book. Correspondence also exists between Esarhaddon and an exorcist named Nabu-nasir regarding these dream ritual actions.[16] As noted above, the Neo-Babylonian kings were more amenable to dreams and the subsequent written records of those dreams. If, as Butler asserts, the *āšipu* were the Neo-Assyrian dream ritual experts, it is entirely possible that they could figure prominently in the Neo-Babylonian court.

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[13] Ibid., 250.
[14] S.A.L. Butler, *Mesopotamian Conceptions of Dreams and Dream Rituals*, 120.
[15] Ibid., 121.
[16] See Simo Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars*, No. 298.

Regarding the content of these dream rituals, Oppenheim notes what he calls a "curious echo" in the Babylonian Talmud.[17] The following is a portion of the text of a Neo-Assyrian ritual addressing the god Nusku:

> You [Nusku] are the judge, judge (now) my case: This dream which during the first or the middle or the last watch of the night was brought to me and which you know but I do not know – if (its content predicts something) pleasant, may its pleasantness not escape me – if (it predicts something) evil, may its evil not catch me…[18]

This is an excerpt of a prayer from the Babylonian Talmud, Berakoth 55b:

> Sovereign of the Universe, I am Thine and my dreams are Thine. I have dreamt a dream and I do not know what it is…if they are good dreams confirm them and reinforce them…and if they require a remedy, heal them…As Thou didst turn the curse of the wicked Balaam into a blessing, so turn all my dreams into something good for me![19]

Modern Definitions of Divination

Before continuing on to a discussion of the next article, a brief introduction to Mesopotamian divination and dream manuals is in order. In order to further define divination, the following authors offer various definitions of the term, and the beliefs underlying its use in the Mesopotamian context. Positing an initial general definition is T. Witton Davies:

> Divination may be provisionally defined as the attempt on man's part to obtain from the spiritual world supernormal or superhuman knowledge. Divination takes for granted the primitive belief that spiritual beings exist, are approachable by man, have means of knowledge which man has not, and are willing upon certain conditions known to diviners to communicate the special knowledge which they are believed to possess.[20]

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[17] Oppenheim, 299.
[18] Ibid., 298.
[19] Ibid., 299.
[20] Davies, T. Witton. *Magic, Divination, and Demonology: Among the Hebrews and their Neighbors*, 6.

A. Leo Oppenheim adds the aspect of supernatural forces having an influence upon history, as well as the idea that the powers may have a concern as to how history affects individuals and groups:

> Basically, divination represents a technique of communication with the supernatural forces that are supposed to shape the history of the individual as well as that of the group. It presupposes the belief that these powers are able and, at times, willing to communicate their intentions and that they are interested in the well-being of the individual or the group – in other words, that if evil is predicted or threatened, it can be averted through appropriate means.[21]

Finally, Jean Bottéro forms his definition around the worldview of the ancient Mesopotamian system of thought:

> They were convinced that the world around them did not have a raison d'être within itself. It depended entirely on supreme forces that had created it and that governed it primarily for their own advantage. The images of these gods were based on a human model; they were greatly superior, however, by their endless life, by their intelligence, and by their power that was infinitely above our own. Everything on earth, all objects and events, came forth from the gods' actions and their will, and fitted into some kind of general plan that *they*[22] had in mind. This plan was impenetrable, as such, to humans, who discovered its unfolding from day to day. Nothing that we are ignorant of in the past, the present, and, of course, the future, escaped the gods' knowledge and their decisions. But they could report on it to mankind at their pleasure: this was the entire meaning of divination.[23]

In Bottéro's definition man has little ability to manipulate or even observe the actions of the gods. Rather, it is the gods who are manipulating the entire universe according to their will, and allow man to know of their intentions only "at their pleasure."[24] However, whatever method of divination was used, whether or not it had to be performed more than once, eventually produced an answer to the query. The ancients may not have thought they had much ability to manipulate the gods, but divination at least provided the means

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[21] Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead* Civilization, 207.
[22] His italics.
[23] Bottéro, Jean, *Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods*, 105-106.
[24] Ibid., 106.

to discern what they were planning to do. This bases divination on one simple premise, that all divine action causes material reaction:

> This fundamental tenet assumes that divine stimulus, due to its omnipotent character, naturally arouses reactionary physical activity in all things. Thus, the deities are the activating directors of a material world in which individual components can function as their agents. As a result, there are three ways one can detect a divine catalyst behind an occurrence: (1) by its extraordinary quality, (2) through duplication or repetition, and (3) through ritual.[25]

Included in the category of individual components functioning as agents of the gods are human beings themselves. Termed anthropomancy, subsumed in this category are prophecy and oneiromancy, in which the deities manipulate the body and senses of the person in order to reveal the future. The only distinction being that in the former this occurs consciously, while in the latter unconsciously.[26] The possibility of being the subject of divine manipulation was not restricted to any certain group of people, nor was it restricted only to people. Besides anthropomancy, there was also chemomancy (manipulation of inanimate objects) and zoomancy (manipulation of animals). In regard to the meaning of these revelations, however, the Mesopotamians restricted the interpretation to trained professionals.[27]

The *bārû*

According to the tradition of one ancient text (*BBR* 24+25), Enmeduranki, the antediluvian king of Sippar, learned the arts of divination directly from the gods Šamaš and Adad:

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[25] Anne Marie Kitz, "Prophecy as Divination" (forthcoming *CBQ* article).
[26] Ibid., (forthcoming).
[27] Ibid., (forthcoming).

> Šamaš and Adad [made him sit] before [them] on a golden seat. They showed him how to observe oil on water, a mystery of Anu, [Enlil and Ea], they gave him the Tablet of the Gods, the liver, a secret of heaven and nether world...[28]

He, in turn passed this knowledge on to families of Nippur, Sippar, and Babylon, thus founding the guild of expert diviners and instituting their mantic techniques.[29] These techniques were complicated, and the literature was highly technical and cryptic. Thus, trained experts were required to properly interpret the omens. Reoccurring many times in the texts is the word *bārû*, meaning literally "one who sees/observes." The *bārû* was primarily a haruspex, i.e. one who divines the will of the gods from the features of an animal's internal organs, although he was adept at other divinatory skills as well. Certain general requirements had to be met, such as approved family descent, physical perfection, and the appropriate training.[30] This training, according to the Enmeduranki text, consisted of the recitation of omens including those involving sheep, entrails, oil, and birds. The ability to debate the finer points of divination was also a requirement.[31] This is reminiscent of the training Daniel and his companions underwent in the language and literature of the Chaldeans.[32]

Divination in Mesopotamia

Two main methods of divination were practiced in ancient Mesopotamia, these being haruspicy and astrology. Haruspicy, performed by a *bārû*, began with a prayer to the gods, calling on them to "write their message upon the entrails of the sacrificial animal. He then investigates, in traditional sequence, the animal's organs, such as the

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[28] W. G. Lambert, "The Qualifications of Babylonian Diviners," in *Cuneiform Monographs 10: Festschrift für Rykle Borger zu seinem 65. Geburtstag am 24. Mai 1994*, ed. by Stefan M. Maul, 152.
[29] Lambert, 141.
[30] Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, 81-82.
[31] Lambert, 144.
[32] Dan. 1:4, 17, 20.

windpipe, the lungs, the liver, the gall bladder, and the coils in which the intestines are arranged, looking for deviations from normal state, shape, and coloring."[33] Descriptions were given in a cryptic scientific code language (still a riddle to scholars) and then compared with a compendium of haruspicy for proper interpretation. Bottéro gives an example of a haruspex interpretation: "If in the liver, the part called "The Gate of the Palace" is double, if there are three "kidneys," and if on the right-hand side of the gall bladder two clearly marked perforations are pierced: this is the omen of the inhabitants of Apišal whom Narâm-Sîn made prisoner by means of a breach in the wall."[34]

The other predominant method was astrological divination, in which Babylonian astrologers observed and made note of occurrences strange and ordinary in the skies above. The various astronomical events, i.e. the gods writing their messages across the skies, communicated to the educated observer what was to come. Tablets upon tablets were incised with observations, charts, and astrolabes, forming extensive compendia providing future observers with possible interpretations of astral phenomena.

Whatever its source, a written omen was transcribed in the form of a protasis and an apodosis: "if situation x prevails, then consequence y will follow."[35] Jean Bottéro gives an example of this form from a meteorological omen: "If the north wind sweeps the face of heaven until the appearance of the new moon: the harvest will be abundant."[36] The following are the titles and a brief description of four different divination manuals. First, the *Enūma Anu Enlil* ("When Anu and Enlil…") contains some seventy tablets for astronomical and meteorological omens. Next, the *Šumma ālu* ("If a city…") includes

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[33] Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, 212.
[34] Bottéro, 130.
[35] James C. VanderKam, *Enoch and the Growth of an Apocalyptic Tradition*, 54.
[36] Bottéro, 130.

107 tablets of omens concerning the behavior of animals. Significant omens were the behavior of animals when the army marched out to war, during a religious procession, at the climax of a religious festival, and their behavior at the city gates, the palace, or within the temple. The *Šumma izbu* ("If an anomaly…") has at the minimum twenty-four tablets dealing with omens about births and deformities. Prominent topics are deformities in newborn lambs, multiple births, the birth of deformed children, and children with animal-like features born to human mothers. Finally, *Ziqīqu, Ziqīqu* ("O, Dream God! O, Dream God…") holds eleven tablets of dream interpretation omens which are divided between those that contain omens, and those that record rituals and incantations for the receiver of evil dreams. The collection, which began its development in the Old Babylonian period, is of a Neo-Assyrian provenience, from Assurbanipal's library.[37]

Mesopotamian diviners had an elaborate system for relating the protasis to the apodosis. The semantic connection between the two "was based on a real, imaginary, analogical, or purely conventional relationship, that made one the sign or the symbol of the other."[38] Connections could be made based on simple plays on words, homophones, and even puns. Although it remains to be seen whether modern scholars will be able to fully understand the system, the fact remains that the apodoses were not arbitrary. Dream interpreters and diviners in general have deposited an entire system, which had to be properly learned and mastered in order to provide the correct interpretation.[39]

The culture of ancient Mesopotamia perceived a close connection between their religion and their everyday life. They recognized that their gods could and did speak to them in many and various ways. The tasks of the diviner were to perform the rituals that

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[37] Oppenheim, *The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East*, 256.
[38] Ibid., 119.
[39] Ibid., 122.

provided media for the gods to communicate their messages, giving meaning to the strange occurrences of the day and the world of dreams at night. Whatever the particular method of divination may have been, the diviner sought to correctly interpret these supernatural messages. The multitudes of divination interpretation texts testify to the diviners' systematic and comprehensive approach toward understanding the messages of the gods.

The text of the *Ziqīqu, Ziqīqu* dream manual as well as fragments of a few others have been edited and published by Oppenheim in his singular work on dreams in the ancient Near East. In the first part of his book, Oppenheim designates three kinds of dream accounts in the ancient Near East, i.e. message dreams, symbolic dreams, and mantic dreams.[40] It is the third group, mantic dreams, which are of particular interest in relation to the book of Daniel. Robert Gnuse incisively delineates the categories of Ancient Near Eastern dreams and further defines mantic dreams:

> Classification of ancient dreams by modern scholars is somewhat artificial. But the reports appear to fall into two major categories, the simple message dream and the symbolic or ambiguous dream. The first type seldom needs the assistance of the oneirocritic; the message is auditory and clearly understood by the recipient. The second type may be auditory, but it usually has visual imagery instead. This visual imagery lends to the dream that ambiguity which requires interpretation. Occasionally this category may be divided into two more groups, the symbolic and the mantic. The distinction between these last two categories is difficult. Symbolic dreams are simple with one or two symbolic statements, gestures, or a single visual image. The dream may be interpreted by the dreamer. The mantic dream is a more complex vision, usually visual, not auditory, which has many motifs and symbols with their own respective meanings. Usually a professional is needed to interpret these dreams. The dreams in the book of Daniel would be classic mantic dreams.[41]

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[40] Oppenheim, *The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East*, 186-217, 237-245.
[41] Robert Karl Gnuse, *The Dream Theophany of Samuel: Its Structure in Relation to Ancient Near Eastern Dreams and Its Theological Significance*, 16.

In mantic dreams, it is possible that no clear message may be given, and the scene(s) are cryptic, full of symbols.

Literary Form of Dream Reports

The basic format or structure of dream reports remained constant from ancient Sumer to the Hellenistic era. It begins with the setting, which includes the person who dreamed the dream, when and where the dream happened, and what factors brought the dream to the person. The dreamer is usually said to be deeply asleep. The time is often not specifically given, but one can surmise that it may have been near the time that the dreamer was soon to awake for the day. This is the time when sleep is the lightest, the dreams are the longest, and the dreams are more easily remembered since the dreamer awakes soon afterward.[42]

Following the setting, the dream itself is recounted. Mantic dreams are unlike auditory dreams where the deity or deities speak, or symbolic dreams where the vision is simple and the deity desires to make a clear point to the dreamer. Cryptic scenes laden with symbolism, that the dreamer passively observes, characterize the mantic dream. The vision is always prophetic in nature, leading the dreamer to look for an interpretation once he awakes.[43]

Following the dream, the account usually records that the dreamer "awoke with a start," which emphasizes the powerful effect that the vision had on the dreamer.[44] As far as this basic structure is concerned, the parallels with the dream accounts in Daniel are obvious. As one example, Daniel 7 begins with the basic setting. Daniel had a dream while he was lying on his bed and it occurred during the first year of Belshazzar king of

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[42] Ibid., 49, n. 28.
[43] Ibid., 20.
[44] Ibid., 18.

Babylon (1-2a). He then recounts the dream, which is full of cryptic scenes and symbols (2b-14, 21-22). One noted difference is that a heavenly interpreter explains what Daniel has seen during the dream itself (16b-18, 23-27). However, when he awoke he still was deeply troubled by his thoughts and his face turned pale, affirming the disturbing nature of the dream (28). Central in the structure of the chapter are vv. 16b through 18. The brief interpretation that the angel gives acts as a summary of the whole vision. He interprets the meaning of the four beasts that appeared earlier in the dream in v. 17, and in v. 18 anticipates the saints' possession of the kingdom later in the dream in v. 22. This acts as a middle pivot or hinge, joining the beginning and end of the chapter.[45] Daniel 7 itself acts as a hinge for the entire book by concluding the Aramaic portion while at the same time being the first of the four visions that comprise the second half of the book. The four kingdoms are symbolically represented both in chapters 2 and 7, and the final judgment introduced in chapter 7 is further stressed in chapter 12.[46]

One dream omina fragment of first millennium origin found in Susa has a strange parallel with Daniel 4. Without getting into a discussion of the origin of this chapter, the thematic correspondence between the two texts is striking:

> Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like cattle. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird.[47]

> If a man turns (*sahāru* or *târu ana*) into a wild animal:
> If a man turns into a lion: lo[sses and]
> If a man turns into a lion and [ ] against [ ]:
> humiliation of the man (= the dreamer).

[45] Paul R. Raabe, "Daniel 7: Its Structure and Role in the Book," 270-271.
[46] Ibid., 272-273.
[47] Dan. 4:33 (4:30 in Aramaic)

> If a man [turns] into a do[g and (?) :] and the countries will…against him; the palace will see distress (KAL.SAL for SAL.KAL) and his crime/punishment [will be heavy (?)].[48]

While Daniel 4 does depict Nebuchadnezzar becoming like an animal in reality, and the Susa tablet contains only dream omina of such occurrences, it is the shared cultural milieu that is apparent here.

The Chaos Combat Myth

The second essay by John H. Walton[49] examines the possible influence of Akkadian as well as West Semitic literature on Daniel 7. Walton's approach is to view the dream account in Daniel 7 as being in the genre of chaos combat myth. He suggests adding the *Anzû* myth as a possible addition to the background of Daniel 7, along with *Baal and Yamm*[50] and the *Enuma Elish.*[51]

Briefly summarized, the *Anzû* myth[52] is the story of the theft of the Tablet of Destinies (used by the gods to create and maintain the order of the universe) from Enlil, the chief god, by the Anzû bird (a combination of eagle and lion). Different gods are approached in the search for a champion to recover the tablet, but all decline. Finally, Ninurta is persuaded to fight through the influence of his mother Mami. He engages Anzû in battle, but is unable to injure the beast, due to the tablet's power of invulnerability granted to whomever wields it. Enlisting the counsel of Ea, Ninurta then manages to pluck Anzû's wing feathers. When the bird summons them back to itself, Ninurta looses an arrow, which is then also drawn back to the bird and strikes the killing

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[48] Oppenheim, *The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East*, 257-258.
[49] John H. Walton, "The *Anzu* Myth as Relevant Background for Daniel 7?," in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, ed. John J. Collins and Peter W. Flint, 69-89.
[50] For text and translation see Simon B. Parker, ed., *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry*, 87-106.
[51] For a translation see Benjamin R. Foster, *Before the Muses Volume I*, 351-402.
[52] See Foster, *Before the Muses Volume I*, 461-485.

blow. Anzû is slain, and after some negotiation Ninurta returns the tablet to the gods. For his victory, Ninurta is declared the greatest among the gods.

Walton goes on to describe the similarities between Daniel 7 and the *Anzû* myth as well as *Baal and Yamm* and the *Enuma Elish*. These, along with the differences, are conveniently summarized in a chart at the end of his article,[53] comparing all four texts in regard to ten different categories. What generally typifies a chaos combat myth, based on these four sources, is the basic story of a conflict between rebellious chaotic forces (usually embodied in monsters related to the sea) and the forces of the established order (the gods, represented by a designated champion). The chaotic monster wields great power and speaks boastful words against the gods. Having selected a champion, the gods watch as he engages in battle against the foe, eventually defeating it, and restoring order to the universe. As a reward for this victory, the champion is given an everlasting kingdom and/or declared the chief of the gods.

Walton admits that none of the three myths, including his suggestion of the *Anzû* myth, are able to act as a sole exemplar for Daniel 7. He concludes that it draws from all of them, along with a significant amount of the author's own creativity.[54] Walton notes some of the significant differences between Daniel and the other texts, such as the fact that there is no theft of any powerful object like the Tablet of Destinies (although the Little horn attempts to wield a similar sort of power to the Tablet of Destinies).[55] The Most High/Ancient of Days and the Son of Man are never threatened or frightened by the appearance of the four beasts.[56] The fourth beast and the little horn are dispatched with

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[53] Walton, 85.
[54] Walton, 85-88.
[55] Ibid., 76.
[56] Ibid., 78-79.

no difficulty, and most significantly, without a battle against a designated champion.[57] They are simply stripped of their authority and destroyed. Despite these important differences (especially the lack of combat), Walton still sees the chaos combat myth genre as the background to Daniel 7. He writes that Daniel 7 "ought to be recognized as an informed and articulate literary mosaic whose author has assimilated and mastered a wide spectrum of literary traditions in order to transform them to his own theological will and purpose."[58]

Unlike all of the other compositions, however, Daniel 7 is a dream account. The four beasts and the horns have stated symbolic meanings attached to them on the first level of meaning. *Baal and Yamm* has been viewed in a secondary sense as being symbolic of environmental[59] (seasonal change) and political events,[60] while the *Enuma Elish* can be viewed as a propaganda piece for the city of Babylon and the supremacy of Marduk in the pantheon of Mesopotamian deities,[61] noting that the myth exists in an earlier form with different main characters.[62] Unlike Daniel 7, however, these symbolic meanings are secondary and also modern critical interpretations. The ancients viewed them as true accounts of supernatural events in the past. Daniel 7 is certainly in a Near Eastern milieu, using imagery recognizable and in line with the surrounding cultural context, but it is not a chaos combat myth recounting supernatural events from the past, but rather a mantic dream, with the purpose of predicting coming events in human history.

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[57] Ibid., 79, 81.
[58] Ibid., 88.
[59] See L. L. Grabbe, "The Seasonal Pattern and the Baal Cycle," *UF* 8: 57-63.
[60] See M.S. Smith, *The Ugaritic Ba'al Cycle: Volume I: Introduction with Text, Translation and Commentary of KTU 1.1-1.2*, 96-110.
[61] Foster, 351.
[62] Ibid., 158-201.

This is not to say that a theophany is not part of the dream. Obviously, the heavenly throne room scene depicts a supernatural event (9-10, 13-14). However, as Walton himself admits, unlike the other champions, who receive their power and authority as result of or in anticipation of their victory over the chaotic foe, the Son of Man receives glory, authority, power, and an everlasting kingdom (14) without "even [being] mentioned as having a role in the court that carries out the verdict"[63] upon the beast and the little horn. This also assumes that the heavenly court is convened only to judge the beast and the little horn. In harmony with one of the characteristics of apocalyptic prophecy, the heavenly judgment is more likely a final end time judgment upon the "ten thousand times ten thousand" (10) who stood before the Ancient of Days. The heavenly events, i.e. the judgment of all people and the establishment of the everlasting kingdom of the Son of Man, continue irrespective of the boastful words of the little horn, although he too is judged (22, 26). Following the final judgment, the saints of the Most High and the Son of Man rule an everlasting kingdom (27). This apocalyptic theology moves in a linear advancement toward a definite end to human history and stands particularly in sharp contrast to the cyclical worldview of the surrounding mythologies. Not merely a rough assimilated remnant of mythological imagery, Daniel 7, while remaining in the same cultural milieu, changes the meaning and significance of the imagery to the point that they can be considered ex-mythological. The outward appearance is the same, but the genre (dream account, not chaos combat myth) and theology behind the characters and events are entirely different.[64]

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[63] Walton, 81.
[64] Horace D. Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh*, 163, 579.

Daniel's Beasts and the *Šumma izbu*

Other scholars have taken a different approach, focusing on the physical features of the beasts themselves for Mesopotamian parallels. An example of this approach is Paul Porter's work,[65] in which he notes parallels between the descriptions of the beasts and several omens from the collection *Šumma izbu*.[66] As related above, the *Šumma izbu* is a collection of omens dealing with deformities in animal and human births. The physical features in many of the anomalies described in these omens bear a striking similarity to the beasts and horns described in Daniel 7:[67]

> And behold, another beast, a second one, like a bear. *It was raised up on one side*...(Daniel 7:5)
> If an anomaly's *right shoulder is raised* – your enemy will carry off the power of your country; a palace official will die; birth of a moron in your land. (*Šumma izbu* XIV 10)
> If an anomaly's *left shoulder is raised* – the prince will carry off the power of the enemy land; birth of a moron in the enemy land. (XIV 11)
>
> it had three *ribs in its mouth* between its teeth... (5)
> If an anomaly holds its lung(s) in its mouth – a strong king [...] (XVII 16')
>
> After this I looked, and lo, another, like a leopard ...and *the beast had four heads*; and dominion was given to it. (6)
> If an anomaly has *two heads*, but (only) one neck – the king will conquer wherever he turns; he will conquer a land which does not belong to him (var.), the king will have no opponent. (VII A 1-2)
>
> After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, ...and *it had ten horns*. (7)
> Several multiple-horned anomalies are described in Tablet IX, e.g., IX 64': "If an anomaly has one horn on its left and two on its forehead, and one on the right – overthrow of the army of the prince; the army of the enemy [...]"
>
> ...and behold, *in this horn were eyes*... (8)
> X 42' *If an anomaly's eyes are on the top of its head* – end of the reign. (Cf. also X 63': "If an anomaly's eyes are normal, but it has *a third one on its hoof* – an enemy will overthrow the prince's auxiliary troops").

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[65] Paul A. Porter, *Metaphors And Monsters: A literary-critical study of Daniel 7 and 8.*
[66] See Erle Leichty, *Texts from Cuneiform Sources, Volume IV: The Omen Series Šumma Izbu.*
[67] Citations are from Porter, 17-18. *Šumma izbu* citations are according to Leichty. Italics are Porter's.

the fourth beast…with its…*claws* of bronze… (19)
XIX 15' If a cow gives birth and (the calf's) *fore-feet are like the paws of a lion* – the prince's weapon […]
XIV 47 If an anomaly's *four legs are like the paws of a lion* – […]

It cannot be said that there is an exact correspondence between the two texts, but the kinds of unique anomalous beasts present in Daniel are anticipated and possible in the *Šumma izbu*. Porter points out that the two works share references to animals on their sides, animals with multiple heads, animals with displaced eyes, and composite beasts of various descriptions.[68] The above omens are not isolated or rare in the *Šumma izbu*. Many other omens could be selected for comparison with Daniel 7.[69] As stated above, the similarities are in physical description, not necessarily in their significance. In regard to the comparisons, Porter concludes, "that the evocative power of the animal anomalies in Daniel 7 and 8 does not stem from any perceived literal absurdity, but from their stylistic associations with Mesopotamian omen traditions."[70] In other words, the beasts of Daniel 7 are not meant to match up exactly with any specific omens, but rather they are to evoke an identification of the style and possibility of such beasts existing, and that their existence has a deeper and symbolic meaning.

Strangely missing from Porter's comparisons between Daniel 7 and the *Šumma izbu* is any comparison involving the first beast in v. 4. He does not state a reason for this omission, so the reader is left to wonder, although there are omens in the *Šumma izbu* that present themselves for possible comparison.[71] Perhaps Porter omits drawing comparisons in regard to this beast because none of the omens quite fit. There are omens

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[68] Porter, 18-19.
[69] See Leichty, II 1, 8, 44; III 1, 27n.; IV 20, 31, 33, 56; V 1-122 esp. 42-58, 77, 96, 107; VI 53; VII 1-22; XVII 76; XX 9-17, 20-25, 28; Old Babylonian Version 11, 12, 40, 51.
[70] Porter, 29.
[71] See Leichty, II 1, 44; IV 56; VII 1-6.

describing birth anomalies with leonine or bird-like features, but never both together on one anomaly. Coincidently, the closest correspondence that can be reached between the first beast of Daniel 7 and Mesopotamian bestial imagery possibly is the Anzû bird itself. Walton also overlooks this possibility, stating "the first three beasts in Daniel 7 do not coincide with any of the standard monsters from Akkadian literary traditions, showing instead more affinity to the animal abnormalities typical of *Šumma izbu*."[72] The probable reading of the Anzû's Sumerian name is Imdugud. It is "envisaged as bird-like but having the head of a lion, and of gigantic size so that the flapping of its wings could cause whirlwinds and sandstorms."[73] The description of the first beast (before its transformation) as being like a lion and having the wings of an eagle[74] correspond perfectly to the description of Imdugud. Also corresponding physically to the first beast, although to a lesser degree, is the goddess/demoness Lamaštu. She is described "as having the head of a lion, the teeth of a donkey, naked breasts, a hairy body, hands stained (with blood?), long fingers and fingernails, and the feet of Anzû (Imdugud), that is, bird talons."[75] This demon, instead of acting only at the behest of the gods, practiced evil on its own initiative. The first beast of Daniel 7 has been consistently identified with the kingdom of Babylon. It may be possible that the correspondence between the first beast and creatures particular to Mesopotamian mythology act as an additional aid in confirming the identification for the reader.

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[72] Walton, 73.
[73] Jeremy Black and Anthony Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia*, 107.
[74] Dan. 7:4
[75] Black and Green, 116.

An Assyrian Underworld Vision

One final demonstration of composite creature imagery is "The Underworld Vision of an Assyrian Prince." This is a Neo-Assyrian text, considered a royal propaganda piece due to the veiled references to Sennacherib and court politics. The Assyrian crown prince of the story, named Kummâ, is possibly Assurbanipal.[76] Due to reasons that are obscured by the mutilated condition of obverse (perhaps some type of calamity), Kummâ desires to see the underworld. He offers sacrifices to Ershkigal and prays to her and Nergal in the hopes that his request might be granted. Kummâ's request is granted in the form of a dream in which he receives a view of the underworld.[77] During the course of this dream he encounters the various gods, goddesses, and demons of the underworld, some of who have a combination of bestial and human physical characteristics. The pertinent parts of the text are as follows:

> Namtartu, his wife, had the head of a cherub, (her) hands and feet being human.
> Death had the head of a dragon, his hands were human, his feet [...]
> The Evil Genie had a human head and hands, was crowned with a tiara and had the feet of an eagle. With his left foot he was trampling on a crocodile.
> Alluhappu had a lion's head, his four hands and feet were (like) those of human beings.
> The upholder of Evil had the head of a bird, his wings were spread out and he flew here and there; (his) hands and feet were human. Humut-tabal, the ferryman of the underworld, had an Anzu head, his four hands and feet [...]
> The Ghost had an ox's head, his four hands and feet were (like) those of human beings. The Evil Spirit had a lion's head (his) hands and feet were those of Anzu.
> Šulak was a lion, standing constantly on his hind legs.
> The Oath had a goat's head, (his) hands and feet were human. Nedu, the porter of the underworld, had a lion's head, and human hands, his feet were those of a bird.
> Total Evil had two heads, one was the head of a lion, the second was the head of [...]
> [Muh]ra had three feet, the two front ones were those of a bird, the rear one was that of a bull. He had fearsomeness and luminous splendour. Of two gods I did not know the names – one had the head, hands, and feet of Anzu, in his left hand [.....].

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[76] Alasdair Livingstone, *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea*, XXVIII.
[77] Alexander Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels*, 132.

> The other had a man's head, he was crowned with a tiara, carried in his right hand a mace, in his left hand, before him, ... In all, fifteen gods were present. I saw them and saluted [them] in prayer.[78]

Conclusion

Whether the dream actually occurred is immaterial to the fact that this type of imagery was prevalent and fully integrated into Mesopotamian religion. The textual (and pictorial) evidence of gods, goddesses, demons, and *Šumma izbu* anomalies (considered possible, whether actually having occurred or not) demonstrate this more than adequately. The incidence of this type of imagery in Biblical books such as Daniel and Ezekiel[79] indicate a Mesopotamian cultural influence on these texts. The Babylonian exile put the Israelites into direct contact with two thousand years of Mesopotamian culture. Beginning in Sumer, this unique culture passed from empire to empire. From the Old Babylonian to the Neo-Assyrian and finally to the Neo-Babylonian empire, religious beliefs and culture were passed down predominantly through textual, but also through artistic depictions. Aspects of this religion can be seen in the differences between the imagery of pre-exilic prophecy compared to that of exilic and post-exilic prophecy, especially in apocalyptic literature. Thus, the predominant influence for the imagery of prophecies such as Daniel 7 is the Mesopotamian cultural milieu. John J. Collins sees Hosea 13[80] as the most plausible source of biblical influence on the choice of beasts, but he admits that this text does not shed any light on the composite aspects of the monsters that emerge out of the sea.[81] As seen above, no single Mesopotamian source accounts for all of the imagery in Daniel 7. Rather, it is a general influence in the

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[78] Livingstone, 71-72.
[79] See Ezekiel 1
[80] Hos. 13: 7-8
[81] John J. Collins, *Daniel*, 296.

background, adapted and changed to fit the unique theological perspective and worldview of ancient Israel.

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