

# Anzu and Ziz: Great Mythical Birds in Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Rabbinic Traditions

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## Introduction

Many ancient Near Eastern mythological motifs, particularly those relating to the *Chaoskampf*—the primordial battle against forces of chaos—found expression in the Hebrew Bible, and were further developed in post-biblical and rabbinic literature.<sup>1</sup> H. Gunkel was the first to note traces of the Babylonian cosmogonic battle *Enūma eliš* in biblical traditions and in the Apocrypha.<sup>2</sup> The subsequent discovery of the Ugaritic divine conflict between Baal and “Prince Sea (*zbl ym*)-Judge River (*ṭpṭ nhr*)” reawakened scholarly interest in combat traditions preserved in the Bible and in later Jewish sources.<sup>3</sup> Research focused mainly on the representation of insubordinate forces by elements of water. The turbulent, uncontrollable qualities of water pertinently depict chaos, whether as a threatening natural element, or by means of mythopoetic representation, such as the deified figure Sea/River and the monsters associated with it, such as “Leviathan” (*ltn*); “winding serpent” (*bṭn brḥ*; *bṭn ‘qltn*); “dragon” (*tnn*).<sup>4</sup>

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1. I thank Dr. Kenneth Whitney whose comment led me to writing this article; Prof. Peter Machinist for his many insights on the myth of Anzu; Prof. Menahem Kister and Dr. Maren Niehoff for their helpful comments. I am particularly grateful to Prof. Simo Parpola who checked the existence of the variant Zû in the Neo-Assyrian corpus. This is an updated version of a Hebrew article that was published in *Shnaton* 14 (2004), 161–91.

2. H. Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit* (Göttingen, 1895); English trans.: K. W. Whitney Jr., *Creation and Chaos in the Primeval Era and the Eschaton* (Grand Rapids, 2006). The idea was perhaps propounded first by G. A. Barton; see W. G. Lambert, “A New Look at the Babylonian Background of Genesis,” *JTS* 16 (1965), 287–88.

3. Following is a partial list of the many studies in this field: A. J. Wensinck, *The Ocean in the Literature of the Western Semites* (Amsterdam, 1918). For comparisons of biblical and Ugaritic motifs, see F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge, Mass., 1973), 91–144. For analysis of traditions of the battle with sea-monsters in the Bible, see M. K. Wakeman, *God’s Battle with the Monster* (Leiden, 1973); J. Day, *God’s Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea* (Cambridge, 1985). For Cassuto’s attempt to trace the hypothetical ancient Israelite epic regarding the rebellion of sea against the creator, see U. Cassuto, “The Israelite Epic,” *Biblical and Oriental Studies* (Jerusalem, 1973), 2.69–109 (the Hebrew original was published in 1943). For the extension, exegesis, and reuse of motifs from the ancient Near East through biblical to rabbinic and medieval literature, see M. Fishbane, *Biblical Myth and Rabbinic Mythmaking* (Oxford, 2003).

4. Mythologies of many cultures regarded the state of the world in its primordial stage as watery, see *inter alia* A. Jeremias, *The Old Testament in the Light of the Ancient Near East* (London, 1911), 6, n. 1;

Chaotic forces were embodied in many other mytho-poetic figures besides water, such as those signified by the eleven monsters vanquished by the god Ningirsu/Ninurta.<sup>5</sup> Two cases demonstrate the presence of non-watery primeval chaos monsters in biblical traditions. First, “Behemoth,” mentioned alongside Leviathan in God’s response to Job (Job 40:15–24), compared to the Bull of Heaven from the epic of Gilgamesh, and to the Ugaritic *‘gl il*.<sup>6</sup> Yet the mythological background of this bovine creature in the biblical description is somewhat obscure, so that some scholars believe that Job’s “Behemoth” relates to a real animal.<sup>7</sup> It is Behemoth’s appearances in post-biblical literature that clarify and reinforce its mythical, sinister nature in the former, biblical representation, exemplified in its enormous dimensions, the amounts of food and drink it consumes daily, its role in the eschatological struggle with Leviathan and eventually, its being served as a special delicacy in the messianic meal for the righteous.<sup>8</sup>

The second case is the metaphoric description of the king of Egypt by the prophet Ezekiel as “a lion among the nations . . . like a dragon (*tannîm*) in the seas” (Ezek. 32:2–10). T. J. Lewis suggested that the mythic figure underlying the description is a composite creature, with leonine and serpentine features, borrowing from a lion-dragon/serpent figure of enormous dimensions known from the Mesopotamian

W. G. Lambert, “Old Testament Mythology in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context,” in J. A. Emerton, ed., *Congress Volume Jerusalem, VT Supp.* 40 (Leiden, 1988), 129. See also the Neo-Babylonian version of the “Creation of the World by Marduk” ll. 10–11: “All the lands were sea; the spring which is in the sea was a water pipe,” in D. T. Tsumura, *The Earth and the Waters in Genesis 1 and 2, JSOT Supp.* 83 (Sheffield, 1989), 80. For translations of *Enûma eliš*, see E. A. Speiser, in *ANET*<sup>3</sup>, 60–72; A. K. Grayson, in *ANET*<sup>3</sup>, 501–3; B. R. Foster, *Before the Muses* (Bethesda, Md., 1993), 351–402. For the Ugaritic tale of the struggle between Baal and Yam, see M. S. Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle, VT Supp.* 55 (Leiden, 1994), 1.235–36; idem, “The Baal Cycle,” in S. B. Parker, ed., *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry SBLWAW* 9 (Atlanta, 1997), 87–106. The Egyptian Instructions of Meri-Ka-Re mention restraining the water monster among the god’s beneficial acts to humanity (M. Lichtheim, in W. W. Hallo, ed., *COS*, 1.65, col. 2 and n. 29; O. Kaiser, *Die mythische Bedeutung des Meeres in Ägypten, Ugarit und Israel, BZAW* 78 [Berlin, 1962], 36); in the Hittite myth of Iluyanka the storm god fights a serpent at sea (H. A. Hoffner, *Hittite Myths*, 2nd ed. *SBLWAW* 2 [Atlanta, 1998], 13, § 25).

5. W. G. Lambert, “Ninurta Mythology in the Babylonian Epic of Creation,” in K. Hecker and W. Sommerfeld, eds., *Keilschriftliche Literaturen, BBVO* 6 (Berlin, 1986), 57–58, demonstrated how Marduk replaced Ninurta at a relatively late stage, the myth ascribing to him the former’s traits and victories.

6. Already Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos*, 61ff. recognized the mythological background of Behemoth. Parallels have been collected by M. H. Pope, *Job, AB* (New York, 1965), 320–22; see also Day, *God’s Conflict*, 80–82.

7. The medieval commentator Ibn Ezra mentions the opinion that it is an elephant. A more popular view is that Behemoth is the hippopotamus (see Day, *God’s Conflict*, 76, for advocates of this identification). For various attempts to identify “Behemoth” as well as “Leviathan,” “Tanin,” and others, see G. R. Driver, “Mythical Monsters in the Old Testament,” *Studi Orientalistici in Onore di Giorgio Levi Della Vida* (Rome, 1956), 1.234–49, and Day, *God’s Conflict*, 62–87 for the opposite view.

8. For rabbinic sources see L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia, 1925), 5.41–50. for Behemoth in the Apocrypha see K. W. Whitney, Jr., *Two Strange Beasts: A Study of Traditions concerning Leviathan and Behemoth in Second Temple and Early Rabbinic Judaism* (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1992), 149 (published as *Two Strange Beasts: Leviathan and Behemoth in Second Temple and Early Rabbinic Judaism, HSM* 63 [Winona Lake, 2006]).

epic Labbu.<sup>9</sup> Possibly, this creature is also hinted at in Ben Sira's metaphorical allusion to sin as a serpent who bites with teeth of a lion (Sirach 21:2–3; for another possible allusion see the reference to Daniel 7 in n. 59 below).

This study will attempt to add another member to the group of creatures belonging to the sphere of combat myths. Anzu, a mythic Mesopotamian bird, left its talon prints in the Bible. As in the cases of Leviathan and Behemoth, traditions regarding Anzu are hinted at in the Bible and more fully developed in post-biblical literature. Furthermore, this discussion has consequences for the reconstruction of the general course of transmission and change that mythical traditions have undergone from ancient Near Eastern traditions to the Bible and to classical rabbinic sources.

### *Anzu*

Sumerian myths depict Anzu as a mountain-dwelling bird of prey. Like Labbu, the lion-serpent, it is a composite creature, portrayed in literature and iconography as an eagle with a lion's face.<sup>10</sup> Anzu's most prominent feature is its gigantic size.<sup>11</sup> In the Sumerian "Epic of Lugalbanda" Anzu nests within a tree of extensive dimensions, its roots penetrating the seven-headed river of Utu, the sun god.<sup>12</sup> Anzu hunts wild oxen in the eastern mountain range, and carries them to its nest by its talons and around its neck to feed its young. When flapping its broad wings Anzu could cause windwhirls and sandstorms. Other distinctive qualities are its weird countenance and

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9. T. J. Lewis, "CT 13.33–34 and Ezekiel 32: Lion Dragon Myths," *JAOS* 116 (1996), 28–47. While pointing out a number of similarities between the Epic of Labbu and Ezekiel 32, Lewis did not suggest a direct literary link between the two compositions, recommending rather "to look for common traditions and the shared legacy of motifs" (Lewis, "Lion Dragon Myths," 46). The Epic of Labbu was preserved in one copy only from the library of Ashurbanipal, see F. A. M. Wiggermann, "Tišpak, his Seal and the Dragon Mušhuššu," in O. M. C. Haex et al., eds., *To the Euphrates and Beyond, Archaeological Studies in Honor of Maurits N. van Loon* (Rotterdam, 1989), 117–33. For a translation see Foster, *Before the Muses*, 484–85.

10. "Anzû," *CAD* A/2, 153–55. See I. Fuhr-Jaepfelt, *Materialien zur Ikonographie des Lowenadlers Anzu-Imdugud* (Munich, 1972), 2–3. For textual descriptions of Anzu see B. Landsberger, "Einige unerkannt gebliebene oder verkannte Nomina des Akkadischen," *WZKM* 57 (1961), 8ff. Thorkild Jacobsen who emphasized the natural-allegorical characteristics of Mesopotamian myth, suggested that Anzu (Sumerian IM.DUGUD, "heavy rain") was the mythopoetic expression of a thunder cloud, the bird's body representing the cloud hovering over the ground and the lion's face explaining the roar of thunder (Th. Jacobsen, "Parerga Sumerologica," *JNES* 2 [1943], 119; Th. Jacobsen and S. N. Kramer, "The Myth of Inana and Bilulu," *JNES* 12 [1953], 167, n. 27; Th. Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness* [New Haven, 1976], 128–29).

11. In this respect too it is similar to Labbu whose description includes actual measurements regarding its length, width, and the perimeter of its ears (CT 13, ll. 8–13; see Lewis, "Lion Dragon Myths," 31), and when it dies its blood flows constantly for three years, three months, and a day (CT 13, rev. l. 9; Lewis, "Lion Dragon Myths," 32). Compare to the description in Ezek. 32:6: "I will drench the earth with your oozing blood upon the hills, and the watercourses shall be full with you."

12. C. Wilcke, *Das Lugalbandaepos* (Wiesbaden, 1969). See the translation in Th. Jacobsen, *The Harps that Once . . . Sumerian Poetry in Translation* (New Haven-London, 1987), 320–44. The seven-headed river is mythological, and Jacobsen suggested that it was connected to Utu, the sun god, due to its location in the mountains, where Utu rises (*The Harps that Once*, 323, n. 3). The cosmic tree appears in Ezek. 31:7 growing by the mythological "abundant waters"; see H. G. May, "Some Cosmic Connotations of *mayim rabbim*, 'Many Waters,'" *JBL* 74 (1955), 20–21.

roaring voice—at dawn Anzu spreads its wings and roars with a frightening voice in the direction of the sun rising in the mountains, causing the land to tremble.<sup>13</sup>

Similar to other composite creatures in Mesopotamian art and literature, Anzu was not initially related to chaotic forces. It became a threatening force in the Akkadian epic known by its name, the Epic of Anzu.<sup>14</sup> According to this story the bold bird stole the Tablet of Destinies from Enlil,<sup>15</sup> the chief god, thus gaining cosmic powers and control over the world and gods, disrupting the existing order.<sup>16</sup> Petrified, the gods seek a hero to confront Anzu, return the tablet to its legitimate owner and restore order to the world. It is up to Ninurta, Enlil's son, to face up to the seemingly invincible Anzu, and win eternal glory.

The Epic of Anzu belongs to the genre of combat myths. The original Akkadian title of the story was accordingly “*Bin šar dadmē*”—son of the king of inhabited places, referring to Ninurta, the protagonist. Anzu was fit to personify the threat against cosmic order because it dwelled in the mountains—the realm external to habitation, civilization, and order in the worldview of Mesopotamians.<sup>17</sup> Anzu was born in the mountains (I:25; 53), and retreated there after stealing the heavenly Tablet (I:83). The final confrontation between the hero Ninurta and the rebel Anzu took place in the mountains (II:29).

Like the subsequent and more famous divine combat myth, *Enūma eliš*, the plot of Anzu takes place in primordial times. *Enūma eliš* explains the creation of the world as a by-product of the divine combat, whereas in the Anzu epic the plot takes place a short while later. The world is assembled, but not completed. Gods exist, yet

13. Jacobsen, *The Harps that Once*, 324, ll. 45–46. Its dreadful voice was also mentioned in the Akkadian Epic of Anzu, in the description of the creature's birth, which is regrettably broken and partially missing (Anzu I: 35; For text editions, see below, n. 14), and in the description of its encounter with Ninurta (II: 49). Landsberger, “Einige unerkannt,” 8, proposed that Anzu looked like a bat. See also W. W. Hallo and W. L. Moran, “The First Tablet of the SB Recension of the Anzu-Myth,” *JCS* 31 (1979), 70, n. 14.

14. See the latest edition of A. Annus, *Epic of Anzu*, *SAACT* 3 (Helsinki, 2001). Previous editions with translation are M. E. Vogelzang, *BIN ŠAR DADMĒ: Edition and Analysis of the Akkadian Anzu Poem* (Groningen, 1988), and the additions from the Neo-Assyrian text found at Tel Sherikhan near Mosul published by H. W. F. Saggs, “Additions to Anzu,” *AfO* 33 (1986), 1–29, for which see W. L. Moran, “Notes on Anzu,” *AfO* 35 (1988), 24–29. For a translation only, see Foster, *Before the Muses*, 481–85.

15. The origin of this story is in the Sumerian Ninurta mythologies such as the epic “Ninurta and the Turtle,” in which Ninurta struggles with Anzu and returns the Tablet of Destinies that Anzu stole from Enki; B. Alster, “‘Ninurta and the Turtle,’ UET 6/1 2,” *JCS* 24 (1974), 120–25; S. N. Kramer, “Ninurta's Pride and Punishment,” *Aula Orientalis* 2 (1984), 231–37; see also Jacobsen, *Treasures of Darkness*, 132–33.

16. For the Tablet of Destinies as key to world rule and order, see A. R. George, “Sennacherib and the Tablet of Destinies,” *Iraq* 48 (1986), 133–46.

17. In Lugale, another Ninurta battle epic (J. van Dijk, *Lugal ud me-lam-bi nir-gál* [Leiden, 1983]), Ninurta fights against the mountain monster ASAG (Akkadian *Asakku*) which is accompanied by stones, a battle which “expresses the unease felt by the inhabitants of the Mesopotamian plain about the inhabitants of the Zagros mountains” (J. Black and A. Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia* [London, 1992], 36). This victory is mentioned in the hymn of praise to Ninurta at the beginning of the Anzu epic. The image of the raiding enemy as a foreign bird is found in Egypt too. In the composition entitled “The Prophecy of Neferti” from the twentieth century B.C.E. Asiatics are represented by a metaphorical strange bird nesting in the Delta area, eating Egyptian crops and bringing about distress and fear (H. W. Helck, *Die Prophezeiung des Nfr.tj, Kleine Ägyptische Texte* [Wiesbaden, 1970], 16–28).

there is no sign of humans; the riverbeds of the Euphrates and Tigris are established, yet their waters have not been released.<sup>18</sup> The birth of Anzu released the desired water accompanied by winds and dust storms (I:36–39) and Ninurta's slaying of Anzu is accompanied by further floods of water (III:17–20).<sup>19</sup> Anzu is thus firmly associated with the watery element, whose source was indeed in the mountains. The chaotic element must first be created, then conquered. Imbalance and then renewed, advanced stability must be achieved before the world can assume its final shape.

Anzu, the rebel bird was a famous mytho-poetic figure in Mesopotamia. Of the various divine combat myths, Anzu is apparently one of the oldest known, first attested in the Old Babylonian period, and recognized also from a Standard Babylonian (SB) version. The later version was canonized around 1200 B.C.E. in content as well as in the division of text into tablets.<sup>20</sup> The place of the Anzu epic in Mesopotamian cultural tradition is corroborated by its connection to *Enūma eliš*. As shown by Lambert, in that famous composition Marduk is intentionally portrayed as “Ninurta redivivus” proving “direct and conscious borrowing” from the Epic of Anzu.<sup>21</sup> Such overt and deliberate borrowing could only have been effective if Anzu was a familiar figure.

In the Neo-Assyrian period, through a process of historicization, mythical symbols were used to portray the king in a heroic light, his mundane victories described in terms reminiscent of the slaying of cosmic chaotic enemies such as Anzu and Tiamat.<sup>22</sup> By this time Anzu was a longstanding symbol in Mesopotamian culture.

Were the Israelites acquainted with the Epic of Anzu? A seventh century B.C.E. cylinder seal portraying the battle of Ninurta and Anzu was discovered in Israel

18. Vogelzang, *BIN ŠAR DADMĒ*, 31 (text), 40 (translation). For background analysis to these lines, see also *ibid.*, 134; See also Hallo and Moran, “The First Tablet of the SB Recension,” 92; Annus, *Epic of Anzu*, 19. Lambert, “A New Look,” 296, placed the event of damming underground water as an intermediate phase of creation, parallel to creation acts of the third day in the Bible; Gen. 1: 9ff. See Annus, *Epic of Anzu*, xii.

19. *Ibid.*, x. The mountains were known as the region of the sources of the great rivers, hence the connection between the birth and death of Anzu in the mountains and the release of water.

20. Even after canonization of the SB version Mesopotamian scribes continued to copy the OB version and other Ninurta-Anzu combat myths such as Ninurta and the Turtle which are attested as early as the third millennium B.C.E. (Jacobsen, *Treasures of Darkness*, 132). See Vogelzang, *BIN ŠAR DADMĒ*, 8–10. Copies of the epic were found at many Mesopotamian sites (Assur, Nineve, Sultatepe, and Tarbişu; the OB version was found in Susa), spanning a period of 1500 years.

21. Lambert “Ninurta Mythology,” 56. In both epics the story takes place in primordial days, and a force external to civilization represented by the gods is threatening the world order by stealing the Tablet of Destinies (*tup šimāti*) which bestows upon its holder cosmic control. In *Enūma eliš* Tiamat the sea monster, Qingu her helper, and eleven monsters form the chaotic threat, while in the Anzu epic it is the demonic mountain bird which steals the heavenly tablet, threatening Anu, Enlil, Ea, and the rest of the gods. In both stories the gods nominate a junior god to fight their battle, rewarding him accordingly.

22. For the political application of the “cosmic combat” motifs in Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions, in particular the Epic of Anzu and *Enūma eliš*, see Annus, *Epic of Anzu*, xxi–xxiv. E. Weissert demonstrated the use of literary patterns from *Enūma eliš* in the description of the historical battle against the Babylonian-Elamite coalition in 691 B.C.E. Sennacherib cast himself in the role of Marduk and his political enemies in the role of the cosmic chaotic forces. Historicization of the myth legitimized in this case the destruction of Babylon; Weissert, “Creating a Political Climate: Literary Allusions to *Enūma eliš* in Sennacherib’s Account of the Battle of Halule,” in H. Waetzoldt and H. Hauptmann, eds., *Assyrien im Wandel der Zeiten*, HSAO 6 (Heidelberg, 1997), 191–202.

(see Figure 1).<sup>23</sup> While this sporadic, graphic witness cannot count as proof of knowledge of the Epic of Anzu, it does show that symbols of the combat myth had arrived along with the Assyrian army, part and parcel of a general cultural influence. Furthermore, studies have shown that the Bible employs literary motifs and linguistic expressions reflecting royal Neo-Assyrian inscriptions when “quoting” Assyrian speakers, concluding that some biblical authors must have been acquainted not only with the “Assyrian experience,” but also with official royal literary traditions.<sup>24</sup> Considering that the Epic of Anzu played a role in the language of royal Neo-Assyrian inscriptions, underlying the criminal characterization of some of the figures in imperialistic propaganda, it is highly probable that biblical authors were familiar with this creature and its traditions—even if they did not know the epic itself, before the Babylonian exile.<sup>25</sup>

*Zīz šāday (Ps. 50:11; 80:14)*

Anzu is hinted at in the twofold mention of *zīz šāday* in Psalms. In Psalm 50 God refutes the anthropomorphic notion that he relies on sacrifices to sustain him, in language reminiscent of prophetic rebuke.<sup>26</sup> His pronouncement is phrased in the first person by a double chiasmic parallel (vv. 10–11), followed by a declarative sentence (12) and a rhetorical question (13):

23. See O. Keel and Ch. Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis, 1998 trans. by T. H. Trapp from *Göttinnen, Götter und Gottessymbole* [Fribourg, 1992], 293, # 284a–b).

24. For Neo-Assyrian elements in Rabshakeh’s address, see Ch. Cohen, “Neo-Assyrian Elements in the First Speech of the Biblical Rab-Šāqē,” *IOS* 9 (1979), 32–48. Machinist demonstrated how Neo-Assyrian royal language is reflected in speeches of the Assyrian king as if quoted in the book of Isaiah (P. Machinist, “Assyria and its Image in the First Isaiah,” *JAOS* 103 [1983], 719–37). For Neo-Assyrian terminology in Isa. 10:13–14, see also W. R. Gallagher, *Sennacherib’s Campaign to Judah* (Leiden, 1999), 78–83. The text describing the settlement of exiles in Samaria by the “king of Assyria” (2 Kings 17: 24–41) also bears thematic and linguistic similarities to descriptions of the resettlement of exiles, their guidance and direction in proper Assyrian citizenship in the inscriptions of Sargon II; see S. M. Paul, “Sargon’s Administrative Diction in II Kings 17:27,” *JBL* 88 (1969), 73–74; H. Tadmor, “Royal City and Sacred City in Mesopotamia,” *Town and Community* (Jerusalem, 1968), 200–201, (in Hebrew; English title taken from an abstract published in Joan G. Westenholz, ed., *Capital Cities* [Jerusalem, 1998], 13). For possible reconstructions of the route through which Assyrian traditions reached the Israelite authors, see Machinist, “Assyria and its Image,” 729–33.

25. This fits in with general claims regarding the consequences of integration in an open, international society which followed the Assyrian conquest of Judah (see Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses*, 283–372). Lately John Walton has proposed that the description in Daniel 7, long known to be rooted in Mesopotamian and West-Semitic combat myths (cf. J. J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Vision of the Book of Daniel*, *HSS* 16 [Ann Arbor, Mich., 1977], 96–106; P. G. Mosca, “Ugarit and Daniel 7: A Missing Link,” *Biblica* 67 [1986], 496–517)—also refers to the myth of Anzu, especially in the description of the fourth monster (J. Walton, “The Anzu Myth as Relevant Background for Daniel 7?,” in J. J. Collins and P. W. Flint, eds., *The Book of Daniel*, *VT Supp.* 83 [Leiden, 2001], 1.69–89). His claim regarding the eclectic use of elements derived from varied divine combat myths by the author of Daniel substantiates our conception that Anzu by then was a known character in Israelite lore (see also n. 59).

26. For the affinities of this psalm to prophetic admonition see B. Schwartz, “Psalm 50—Its Subject, Form and Place,” *Shnaton* 3 (1978–79), 77–106 (Hebrew with English abstract).

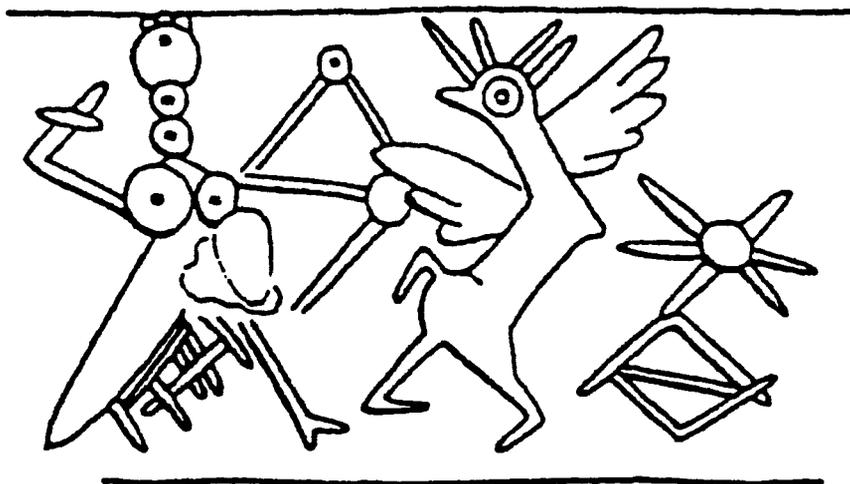


Fig. 1. From *Gods, Goddesses and Images of God in Ancient Israel* by Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger. English translation by T. H. Trapp copyright © 1998 Fortress Press from the German *Göttinnen, Götter und Gottessymbole* copyright © 1992 Herder Verlag, Fribourg. Used by permission of Augsburg Fortress Publishers.

בהמות בהררי־אלף	כי־לי כל־חית־יער	(י)
וזיו שדי עמדי	ידעתי כל־עוף הרים	(יא)
כי־לי תבל ומלאה	אם־ארעב לא־אמר לך	(יב)
ודם עתודים אשתה	האוכל בשר אבירים	(יג)

<sup>10</sup> For every beast of the forest is mine, Behemoth<sup>27</sup> on a thousand hills.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>11</sup> I know all the birds of the mountains<sup>29</sup> and Ziz *sāday* is mine.

<sup>12</sup> Were I hungry, I would not tell you; for the world and all that is in it is mine.

<sup>13</sup> Shall I eat the meat of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? (Ps. 50:10–13)

Psalm 80 portrays Israel as a cosmic vine, devastated by its enemies. Following a description of the glorious past (vv. 9–12) the poet complains about the current dismal situation (13–14):

27. RSV translates by the plural collective form “cattle”; similarly NJPS translates by the generic term “beasts.” Although the parallel *יער חיתו* supports this interpretation, our understanding of the mythological context of the entire passage leads us to prefer the proper name “Behemoth” here, as in God’s answer to Job (Job 40:15). The name is thus derived from plural of extension of *בהמה*, “powerful animal.” *HALOT*, 112.

28. Dahood proposed to translate here: “the beasts in the towering mountains,” reading *בהררי אל* for *בהררי אלף* (M. Dahood, *Psalms I: 1–50, AB* [Garden City, 1966], 307). He based his interpretation on Ps. 36:7: *ה' צדקתך כהררי אל משפטין תהום רבה אדם ובהמה תושע ה'*. His suggestion reinforces the cosmic and mythological context of this verse (see the term *תהום רבה*). In Psalm 80, where *ziz* is mentioned for the second time, we find the branches of the vine compared to *ארזי אל*—mighty cedars. Another proposal, suggested to me by E. L. Greenstein, is to derive *אלף* from “bull,” here in the collective, thus reading: “Behemoth in the mountains of bulls.”

29. Translated by RSV according to LXX, Syriac, and Targum: “birds of the air.” *BHS* offers a Hebrew *Vorlage*: *מרום* or *שמים*. However, the *hapax* *עוף הרים* of MT is preferable to *עוף השמים* which is the common compound, found 38 times in the Bible and once in Aramaic (Dan. 2:38). It preserves precisely one of the mythic characteristics of the legendary Anzu-bird, its mountain habitation (see below).

ט גפן ממצרים תסיע תגרש גוים ותטעה.  
 י פנית לפניך ותשרש שרשיה ותמלא ארץ.  
 יא כסו הרים צלה וענפיה ארוזיאל.  
 יב תשלח קצירה עדים ואלנהר יונקותיה.  
 יג למה פרצת גדריה וארוה כלעברי דרך.  
 יד יכרסמנה חזיר מימך<sup>30</sup> וזיו שדי ירענה.

<sup>9</sup> You plucked up a vine from Egypt; you expelled nations and planted it.

<sup>10</sup> You cleared a place for it, it took deep root and filled the land.

<sup>11</sup> The mountains were covered by its shade, mighty cedars by its boughs.

<sup>12</sup> Its branches reached the sea, its shoots the river.

<sup>13</sup> Why did you breach its wall, so that every passerby plucks its fruit,

<sup>14</sup> The boar from the forest ravages it, and *Ziz sādāy* feeds on it. (Ps. 80:9–14)

The construct expression *zīz sādāy* appears in these two passages only. The *nomen regens sādāy* is a poetic form of the word שדה meaning usually “open country, field,” here, probably to be translated “mountain, highland.”<sup>31</sup> Yet the meaning of the *nomen rectum*, *zīz*, and consequently, the unique construct, requires consideration.

*Zīz sādāy* is explained in both cases by most modern commentators as “everything that moves in the field.”<sup>32</sup> This translation follows an etymological interpretation

30. The suspended letter in this word denotes, according to Jewish tradition, “the middle of Psalms” (b. *Qiddushin* 30a). There are three other cases of suspended letters in the Bible, two of which also contain the guttural letter ‘ayin (Job 38:13, 15). E. Tov explains these cases as scribal corrections, the guttural wrongly omitted by the original scribes. The other case of a suspended letter is the deliberate, ideological “correction” of the name משה in Jud. 18:30 to מנשה by the addition of a suspended nun (Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* [Minneapolis, 1992], 57).

31. The form *sādāy* appears in the Bible 13 times in poetic texts only, all but once in construct forms, and it often denotes animals’ habitation (*HALOT*, 1309, s.v. שדי: חיתו שדי (Isa. 56:9; Ps. 104:11); בהמות שדי (Joel 2:22; Ps. 8:8); זיו שדי (Ps. 50:11; 80:14). Also תנוב(ו)ת שדי (Deut. 32:13; Lam. 4:9); תלמי שדי (Hos. 10:4; 12:12); שמרי שדי (Jer. 4:17); צור שדי (Jer. 18:14); and once in the absolute state אשר שדי (Ps. 96:12; in the parallel text 1 Chr. 16:32 the more common form appears *sādāy*). The ending *-ay* may have been an archaic Semitic feminine ending, its traces found perhaps in the word *gōbay* “locusts,” or the name *Šāray* (S. C. Layton, *Archaic Features of Canaanite Personal Names in the Hebrew Bible*, *HSM* 47 [Atlanta, 1990], 241–49). For the meaning “mountain(s)” or “highland(s),” see W. H. Propp, “On the Hebrew ŠĀDE(H), ‘Highland,’” *VT* 37 (1987), 230–36, and n. 66 below.

32. So the dictionaries: “the moving things of the field” (*BDB*, 265); “the small creatures that ruin the fields” (*HALOT*, 268, s.v. זיו I); followed by modern commentaries. See also the latest attempt to identify this construct as an animal taxon resulting in: “small herbivorous terrestrial animals”; R. Whitekettle, “Bugs, Bunny, or Boar? Identifying the *Ziz* Animals of Psalms 50 and 80,” *CBQ* 67 (2005), 264. The ancient versions differentiated between the two occurrences of the identical expression, indicating a difficulty. LXX translates Ps. 50:11 ὡραιότης ἀγροῦ—the beauty of the field (cf. also Vulgata’s *pulchritudo agri*), which is used to translate biblical words of glory and splendor, such as הוד (Ps. 43:3); הדר, (Ezek. 16:14; Ps. 95:6); תפארת (Isa. 44:13). It may be that the translator referred to the more common word זיו which is attested in some of the manuscripts (contra M. Niehoff, “The Phoenix in Rabbinic Literature,” *HTR* 89 [1996], 256, who believes LXX is hinting at the phoenix; see below). The rendition of Ps. 80:14 is “wild beast”: ὄνος (LXX); *singularis feris* (V); *bestiae* (Jerome); *hayawāthā* (S). For the versions see D. W. Thomas, “The Meaning of *ziz* in Psalm LXXX.14,” *Expository Times* 77 (1964–1965), 385; see also A. S. Herbert’s reference to this article in “Zeitschriftenschau,” *ZAW* 78 (1966), 91. In Isa. 66: 11 the lexeme *ziz* means “breast” (compare Akkadian *zīzu* in this sense; *CAD* Z, 149). Here too, many Hebrew manuscripts present the variant זיו. *Ziz* also appears in the Bible as a personal name, in the forms זינא (2 Chr. 4:37; 11:20), and זינא, written also זינא (1 Chr. 23:10; LXX and G do not support the variant

of the substantive *ziz* based on the verb זָז “to move,” first attested in the words of the medieval commentator Rashi: “and *ziz šāday* is mine: the creeping insects of the field; *ziz*, because they move from one place to another” (his commentary to Ps. 50:11; cf. idem, Ps. 80:14).

Although Rashi does not reveal his sources, he was most likely familiar with the Rabbinic Hebrew word זָז—grouped with other words meaning “flies.”<sup>33</sup> Originally, *ziz* seems to be an onomatopoeic word like זָזָה “fly,” alluding to the buzzing sound made by flying insects, referring by semantic extension to other, non-buzzing crawling insects in Rabbinic Hebrew. This *ziz* is perhaps related to Akkadian *zīzānu/sīsānu*, meaning “locust.”<sup>34</sup> Accordingly, biblical *ziz šāday* was explained as a general name for field insects.

This explanation may fit the context, but it does not reflect the full scope of the original meaning of the verses. According to the development of the character of *ziz* in rabbinic sources, and in the light of analogous mythical traditions such as Leviathan and Behemoth, it is preferable to understand *ziz šāday* as alluding to a sinister, Anzu-like mythological bird.

#### *Ziz in classical rabbinic literature*

Although they must have been aware of the meaning “worm,” “insect,” rabbinic sources offer a very different context for the biblical *ziz šāday*. In several sources *ziz* represented a mythological creature:

Rabbi Johanan in the name of Rabbi Jonathan said, “Instead of that which I have forbidden you, I have permitted you . . .” Instead of certain fish, Leviathan. Instead of certain birds, *Ziz*. This is one of whom it is written, “I know every bird of the mountains and *Ziz šāday* belongs

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Zina). Etymology of this name is unclear; some suggest it is connected to *ziz* in the sense of breast, as in “breast sucking child” (cf. S. E. Loewenstamm, “Ziza, Zina,” *Encyclopedia Biblica*, 3.911 [Hebrew]). The rabbinic word *ziz* meaning projection, hook (M. *Eruvin* 10:4) is also connected to this sense.

33. In y. *Shab.* XIV, 14b it appears next to זָזָה וְהַגִּיזִין, זָזָה וְהַגִּיזִין, זָזָה וְהַגִּיזִין. See also T. *Terumot* 7:11; T. *Bekh.* 1.8; b. *Hul.* 67b; Sifra *Shemini* 7:1. See A. Cohen, “Studies in Hebrew Lexicography,” *AJSL* 40 (1924), 170; M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (New York, 1950), 393.

34. *CAD* S, 321. I find Shveka’s attempt to distinguish between the sense of flying buzzing insects and the rabbinic word *ziz* in the sense of small, crawling insects, unconvincing (A. Shveka, “Anzu, Ziz, and the Locust,” *Shnaton* 16 [2006], 145, n. 9 [Hebrew with English abstract]). The slight gap in meaning can be easily explained by semantic expansion. His suggestion to see in the figure of the biblical *ziz šāday* a giant locust, mostly for its ability to block out the sun, is interesting. However, the locust was a natural phenomenon (see Shveka, *ibid.*, 148), and all its seemingly mythic characteristics (dimming the sun, making a loud noise, causing fear and then wreaking havoc, and finally piling up and rotting, disseminating a terrible stench) were realistic features. Unlike Leviathan, Behemoth, and Ziz, the rebellious action of the locust (if one agrees with Shveka that there was a rebellious side to this “army of God”) was not a one-time act in primordial days related to the cosmogonic battles of God against the powers of chaos, but a recurring natural phenomenon, likened to the onslaught of a terrible enemy. The affinities with descriptions of realistic armies, such as of Assyrian troops, which were also sent by God as punishment, yet often outdid their task and were eventually punished (cf. Isa. 5:26–30; 10:5–19), point to the background of those motifs in the descriptions of the locust.

to me” (Ps. 50:11). Rabbi Judah b. Rabbi Simeon said, “At the moment when he spreads his wings he dims the disk of the sun.” . . . Why is its name *Ziz*? Because in it there are many tastes, a taste of this and a taste of that (*mizzeḥ ūmizzeḥ*). Instead of certain animals, Behemoth on a thousand hills. (Midrash Leviticus Rabba 22:10; cf. Midrash Ps. 18:23).

According to this aggadic tradition *Ziz* is a proper name, denoting a specific legendary creature, a giant bird fulfilling a role parallel to that of Leviathan and Behemoth. The name is explained as derived from the variety of its tastes. The same tradition is also reflected in another aggadic source, an episode in a series of fantastic fish tales from the Talmud, which underscores its cosmic dimensions:

Rabbah b. Bar Hanna further related: Once we traveled on board a ship and we saw a bird standing up to its ankles in water while its head reached the sky. We thought the water was not deep and wished to go down and cool ourselves, but a *Bath Kol* (divine voice, lower grade of prophecy) called out: “Do not go down there, for a carpenter’s axe was dropped [into this water] seven years ago and it has not [yet] reached the bottom.” . . . R. Ashi said: That [bird] was *Ziz sādāy* for it is written: *And Ziz sādāy is with me.* (b. *Baba Bathra* 73b)

Here *Ziz* appears as a cosmic bird; its legs embedded in the foundations of earth, its head reaching heaven.

In several rabbinic sources the giant bird *Ziz* is grouped together with two other famous legendary giant creatures—Leviathan, the water monster, and Behemoth, the terrestrial beast. *Ziz* personifies the third realm—sky, and together the three represent the entire living environment: water, land, and air.<sup>35</sup> The affinity is not only in their gigantic size but also in their shared fate. The three creatures will serve as the main course at the messianic banquet for the righteous in the world to come. This motif is picked up by the ancient *piyyuṭ* of Qalir, written in Israel in the fifth–sixth centuries C.E.:

He will then show them three consolations	ואז יראם שלש נחמות
<i>Ziz</i> and Leviathan and Behemoth	זיז וליתן ובהמות
<i>Ziz</i> who feeds them with all sort of tastes	זיז המטעים כל מין מטעימות
Spreads its wings mightily <sup>36</sup>	פורש כנפיו בתעצומות
And dims the luminaries as far as the deeps <sup>37</sup>	ומכהא מאורות עד תהומות.

35. This has been pointed out by the fourteenth c. commentary on the *piyyuṭim* by Abraham ben Azriel, *Arugat Habosem*, ed. E. E. Urbach (Jerusalem, 1963), 3.101–2. The three are also joined in the following midrash: “So it is taught in the name of R. Meir: But ask now the Behemoth and it shall teach you (Job 12:7)—‘*The Behemoth of a thousand hills*’ (Ps. 50:10); and the fowl of the air and it shall tell you (ibid.)—that is *ziz sādāy* (Ps. 50:11); or speak to the earth and it shall teach you (ibid.)—that is the Garden of Eden; and the fishes of the sea shall declare to you (ibid.)—that is the Leviathan. Who knoweth not among all these that the hand of the Lord has wrought this? (Job 12:9)” (*Pesikta Rabbati*, 16, 80:2–81:1 = *Pesikta de-Rab Kahana*, 6, 58:1; see B. Mandelbaum, *Pesikta de Rav Kahana* [New York, 1962], 112–13; Midrash Numbers Rabba, 21:18).

36. *בתעצומות* instead of *בתעלומות*, following a version discovered in the Cairo Geniza; see J. Schirrmann, “The Battle Between Behemoth and Leviathan according to an Ancient Hebrew *Piyyuṭ*,” *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities* 4 (1971), 351–52.

37. See *ibid.*, 351. For the development of the artistic motif of Leviathan, Behemoth, and *Ziz* as food served at the messianic meal, see J. Gutmann, “Leviathan, Behemoth and *Ziz*: Jewish Messianic Symbols in Art,” *HUCA* 39 (1968), 219–30.

Some elements of the traditions of the cosmic monsters seem to be a late development, such as their being served in the messianic meal for the pious.<sup>38</sup> However, the grouping together of the three monsters was perhaps motivated by similarities, which existed primarily independently. Thus it seems evident that the size of the monsters was an original mythic element. Another possible originally separate element may be their rebellious nature, leading to their consequent suppression by God. The rebellious character is explicitly mentioned in traditions regarding sea, for example:

Rab Judah said in the name of Rab: At that time when the Holy One Blessed be He, desired to create the world, He said to the ruler of the sea<sup>39</sup>: “Open your mouth and swallow all the waters of the world” (Rashi explains: so that the land will appear). He said to Him: “Lord of the Universe, it is enough that I remain with my own.” Thereupon He struck him with His foot and killed him; for it is written: By His power He stilled the sea; by His skill He struck down Rahab (Job 26:12) (b. *Baba Bathra* 74b–75a).<sup>40</sup>

In these traditions the dramatic subjugation of water monsters is set in primeval times. Although our sources do not speak explicitly of the rebellious nature of Ziz, the bird monster, it appears that a tradition regarding its rebellion in primordial times existed, hinted at in the following midrash, which elaborates on the argument of the snake when enticing Eve to eat the fruit from the tree of knowledge:

R. Judah b. R. Simon said: He (the serpent) argued: “whatever was created after its companion dominates it. Thus: heaven was created on the first day and the firmament on the second: does it not bear its weight? The firmament was created on the second and the herbs on the third: do they not interrupt the waters? Herbs were created on the third day and the luminaries on the fourth; the luminaries on the fourth and the birds on the fifth.” R. Judah b. R. Simon said: The Ziz is a clean bird (may be eaten) and when it flies it dims the orb of the sun. “Now you were created after everything; make haste and eat before He creates other worlds which will rule over you” (Genesis Rabbah 19:4).<sup>41</sup>

According to the opening words of the serpent in this midrash, each phenomenon created in the first six days dominates its predecessor, domination specifically expressed by the ability to bear the weight of the sky, to change the course (absorb?) of the water, maintain and grow plants (in one of the manuscripts, following the assertion that the luminaries were created after the herbs a different hand added in the margins the question: “do they not ripen their fruit?”). Common to all examples is

38. The basis for the tradition of serving the mythological creatures to the pious in the eschaton is Ps. 74:14, yet the verse probably refers to casting Leviathan as food for people inhabiting the wilderness (cf. KJV, NJPS), playing out the contrast between wilderness and sea. The transfer of this motif to the eschaton and its expansion to include the non-watery creatures is a rabbinic development.

39. The epithet *ים של ים* is not known from the Bible, and is an exact parallel of the Ugaritic *zbl ym* “Prince Sea” (Cassuto, “The Israelite Epic,” 83; I. Jacobs, “Elements of Near Eastern Mythology in Rabbinic Aggadah,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 28 [1977], 2).

40. Similarly: “When the Holy One, Blessed be He created the sea, it went on expanding until the Holy One, Blessed be He, rebuked it and caused it to dry up” (b. *Hagiga* 12a; see also Exodus Rabba 15:29; and the late addition to *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana* 2:4, ed. Mandelbaum, 455–56).

41. Leviathan and Behemoth too were created at the dawn of time, on the fifth day of creation according to the apocryphic compositions 4 Ezra 6:49–52; 2 Baruch 29:4. See also Genesis Rabba 7:21; b. *Baba Bathra* 75a; Targum Yerushalmi to Gen. 1:21.

the ability of the latter phenomenon to transform the former. This does not necessarily indicate a negative force from the anthropocentric viewpoint; on the contrary, these are the powers which keep the world as we know it going, such as the control the sun has of the plants, which makes them grow and produce fruit.

The phrasing of the midrash shows that the flight of Ziz is different from other phenomena mentioned. Unlike previous reasoning, phrased in the pattern of a rhetorical question (for example: “do they not interrupt the waters?”) and mentioned to explicate and exemplify the opening statement of the snake according to Rabbi Judah b. Rabbi Simon, the control of birds over the sun is represented by a particular incident, brought in the name of the same rabbi. Apparently, in the absence of a “natural” explanation for the control birds must have over the sun, the author of this midrash resorted to a known mythic tradition about the control of one ancient bird over the sun, an event connected to primordial times. However, the juxtaposition of Ziz’s ability to fly and dim the sun with the rest of the controlling phenomena implies that this is a powerful act, by which Ziz controls / transforms the sun.

Other phenomena besides Ziz are also described with the ability to “dim the orb of the sun” in rabbinic sources, and these are all wonders from the time of creation: the primordial light (Genesis Rabba 3:5); the heels of the first man (who was of cosmic dimensions in aggadic midrash; Leviticus Rabba 20:2); the ancient giants (Genesis Rabba 26:4). In the first two examples the phrase “dim the orb of the sun” represents a static, relative state. The sun in these cases is not actually darkened, the phrase draws attention to the luminous nature of the primordial light and Adams heels, which outshine the sun. There is no hint in these cases of a rebellious act. On the contrary, they were created with their radiant quality by God, who can make use of their attributes at will, such as to store the unique glow of the first days for the righteous in the messianic future.

In contrast, the very same phrase “dim the orb of the sun” bears a sinister meaning in the story of the giants. In this case dimming the sun is a rebellious act of extortion—“Their necks reached (*‘onqim*) the orb of the sun and they demanded: ‘send us down rain’” (Genesis Rabba 25:4). Spreading its wings and dimming the orb of the sun, Ziz acts more like the rebellious giants than the glowing primeval phenomena. In this case the dimming of the sun is not a result of the nature of Ziz, but of its actions. The sun does not merely seem dim in comparison with the brilliance of its wings. It is dimmed in reality, its light eclipsed by a willful deliberate action aimed at defying God’s authority and sovereignty.<sup>42</sup> Control over the sun and the ability to eclipse it indicate, therefore, more than a neutral power, and is different in nature from the control of the firmament over the sky, of the plants over the water, and of the sun over the plants. All the other examples are a natural and desired part of the normal course of the world, existing from creation to present days, whereas Ziz’s flight threatens to overturn world order, devastating the world by cosmic black-out,

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42. Contra M. Margulies, *Midrash Wayyikra Rabbah* (New York and Jerusalem, 1993), 523 (Hebrew), who equates the spreading of Ziz’s wings with the glow of Adam’s heels. In his opinion the Rabbis quoted Job 39:26 here because they interpreted the name זִיז mentioned there in the sense “to glow” (זִיזָה). About the identification of Ziz and זִיז see below, n. 47.

an extreme act related to the instability typical of the days of creation, and not to the ongoing existence of the universe.

Accordingly, although our sources do not speak explicitly of the rebellious nature of Ziz, the bird monster, it seems that this trait is indicated in its ability to dim the sun by spreading its wings. A solar eclipse is a sign of calamity and devastation. Darkness is conceived as chaotic, typifying the unformed void (*tōhū wābōhū*) and the watery deep which preceded creation (Gen. 1:2; cf. Isa. 45:19). Job curses the day he was born wishing it would turn dark (Job 3:4–5), cursing even the night of his conception and wishing that darkness would consume it (Job 3:9). Mentioning Leviathan and perhaps alluding also to Yamm<sup>43</sup> in this connection (Job 3:8) is illustrative of the reversal of creation, return of chaos and darkness.<sup>44</sup>

Darkness is often seen as part of, or as a result of heavenly combat, among other terrible changes in heaven and on earth (Isa. 50:2–3; Ezek. 32:7–9; Ps. 44:20). In the Bible God alone possesses the power and ability to control the luminaries, on His own or through agents, and the motif of darkness is closely connected to theophany, especially common in the descriptions of the apocalyptic “Day of the Lord” (Isa. 13:10; Joel 2:10; 3:4 [2:31]; 4:15; Amos 5:18–20; 8:9; Zeph. 1:15).<sup>45</sup> Attributing the dimming of the sun to the act of Ziz spreading of its wings at will portrays an ability to control elements which should otherwise have been under God’s control, threatening a reversal of creation.

Since only Ziz had wings and control of the aerial realm, this is the only element that was undoubtedly originally its own among the three monsters.<sup>46</sup> It is therefore probable that we see here a remnant of a tradition no longer extant in our sources, that of the rebellious nature of Ziz. This trait and its huge dimensions deemed Ziz fit to join Leviathan and Behemoth in the category of threatening mythic monsters of cosmic proportions. The analogy to traditions regarding Leviathan and Behemoth—Ziz’s companions in biblical (cf. “Behemoth” in Ps. 50:10) and midrashic traditions

43. Notice the intentional wordplay between the terms *yām* (sea) and *yōm* (day), first mentioned by Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos*, 59, n. 1, in the name of Gottfried Schmidt. Greenstein proposed that יָמ here in the sense of Yamm is a deliberate use of a Phoenician vocalization ( $\bar{a} > \bar{o}$ ) “with the apparent purpose of adding a pagan, Canaanite nuance to the name of the old Canaanite deity Yamm” (E. L. Greenstein, “The Language of Job and Its Poetic Function,” *JBL* 122 [2003], 655).

44. See M. Fishbane, “Jeremiah IV 23–26 and Job III 3–13: A Recovered Use of the Creation Pattern,” *VT* 21 (1971), 151–67.

45. Von Rad drew attention to the meaning of the “Day of the Lord” as a day of battle and complete victory of God; G. von Rad, “The Origin of the Concept of the Day of Yahweh,” *JSS* 4 (1959), 97–108; idem, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (New York and Evanston, 1962/1965), 2.119–25. For the concept of the “Day of the Lord,” see S. M. Paul, *Amos*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, 1991), 182–87 and bibliography there.

46. The *piyyuṭ* of Qalir also ascribes the same ability to Leviathan: “his fins dim the disk of the sun” (Schirrmann, “The Battle,” 353:54), and likewise in a late addition to *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana* (ed. Mandelbaum, 455). In this case Leviathan is not acting threateningly, and the fins outshine the sun, in combination with the glow of Leviathan’s skin, which like the original light of the seven days is said to be reserved for the future righteous as building material for their *sukkah*. This motif was initiated in Leviathan’s case by the interpretation of the enigmatic biblical words חרורי חרש as fins (dimming) the sun (חרש) in the description of Leviathan (Job 41:22; see M. Kister, “Some Observations on Vocabulary and Style in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in T. Muraoka and J. F. Elwolde, eds., *Diggers at the Well* [Leiden, 2000], 148).

(Leviticus Rabba 22:10; b. *Baba Bathra* 73:b–74:a)—highlights the place of Ziz in combat traditions and its defiant nature.

### *Possible Sources for Ziz Traditions*

Mythical giant birds exist in many cultures, some of which belong to the same cultural milieu in which rabbinic literature was formed. It is natural to assume that elements from these mythologies found their way to Jewish sources, and their traces can be seen in some Ziz and other rabbinic traditions concerning giant birds.<sup>47</sup> Two mythic bird figures have been suggested in previous studies as possible background and sources for rabbinic Ziz: the Persian heavenly rooster (Vendidad 18:15–25) and the Greco-Roman Phoenix. Before acknowledging the ancient Near Eastern roots of Ziz we will discuss these two characters as possible sources for Ziz traditions.

### *Ziz and the Heavenly Rooster*

The Aramaic Targum to Ps. 50:11 identified *ziz sādāy* with the cosmic bird from rabbinic legend (b. *Baba Bathra* 73b), yet branded it further the “Wild Rooster”: “I know of all sorts of birds which fly in the sky, and the wild rooster, whose ankles rest on earth while its head reaches the sky, sings before me.”<sup>48</sup> The cosmic rooster singing in the presence of God is familiar from Persian mythology. The rooster is a sacred bird, a helper of the good god, protecting believers during the night. Due to its awakening call at dawn, it was connected to the sun and seen as a positive power, deemed the enemy of sloth and oversleep.<sup>49</sup>

Based on the Aramaic Targum to Ps. 50:11 Ginzberg concluded that “in most of the Ziz legends the dependence upon Iranic mythology is evident.”<sup>50</sup> However, the characteristics of the mythological Persian rooster are intrinsically different from those of the rabbinic Ziz. The Persian rooster is a positive power, typified by an unusual ability to see from afar.<sup>51</sup> Its far-sightedness enables it to detect the light of

47. Rabbinic sources mention a few other legendary birds, such as: בר יוכני (lit. “son of the nest”; b. *Yoma* 80a; *Suk.* 5a–b; *Bekh.* 57b); בן נץ (b. *Git.* 31b; *Baba Bathra* 25b; Rashi and others interpreted it as a winged angel); רננים (b. *Bekh.* 57b; compare b. *Men.* 9b; *Sifra* 1:14); and עוף הזורל (lit. “bird of the sand,” a.k.a. *Urshina*; see below, n. 60). Initially these were different birds, later partially identified and equated: בר יוכני is בר רננים in b. *Bekh.* 57b; רננים is the wild rooster in the Aramaic Targum to Job 39:13. The wild rooster is Ziz according to the Targum of Ps. 50:11; and Ziz is connected to נץ in Leviticus Rabba 2:10. The process of “literary contamination” led to בר יוכני being said to be served at the messianic banquet; see L. Ginzberg, “Beiträge zur Lexikographie des Aramäischen,” in V. Aptowitz, ed., *Festschrift Adolf Schwarz* (Berlin and Vienna, 1917), 360; idem, *The Legends of the Jews*, 47–48, n. 139. Lack of distinction between original motifs in separate rabbinic traditions and secondary diffusion undermine the study of these texts in R. van den Broek, *The Myth of the Phoenix* (Leiden, 1972), 264–68.

48. “Wild rooster” translates also Job 3:6 (רננה), 38:36 (שכור), 39:13 (כנף רננים).

49. J. Darmesteter, *The Zend-Avesta Part I, The Vendidad* (Oxford, 1887; repr. 1965), 193–95, XVIII:15–25. For the connection of the Persian rooster with the rooster in Greco-Roman traditions, see M. Grünbaum, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Sprach- und Sagenkunde* (Berlin, 1901), 37–41.

50. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, 48. At the same time he is aware that the rabbinic figure of Ziz is composite, commenting that: “To quite a different cycle of legends belongs the conception of the gigantic bird Ziz, which will be eaten by the pious in the world to come” (ibid., end of n. 139).

51. The meaning of its Persian name *parōdars* is “the seer.”

dawn before all others, and with its expressive voice the rooster arouses the loyal servants of god. The heavenly rooster does not “dim the orb of the sun.” On the contrary, it invites the sun to rise and shine on the whole world. The heavenly seer and singer cannot account for the traditions regarding Ziz, the primordial rebellious bird, and it seems that the identification of the two in the late Aramaic Targum of Psalms is secondary.

### *Ziz and the Phoenix*

According to another suggestion, Ziz is the Graeco-Roman Phoenix.<sup>52</sup> The major characteristics of this bird are a connection to the sun and longevity of life, combined with an ability to recreate or rejuvenate itself after its death. As in the case of the heavenly rooster, the most noticeable possible connection with Ziz is the association of the bird with the sun. The Phoenix symbolizes the sun and is associated with it in all traditions, even in its external features: its head is adorned with a halo of sun rays, its colors are those of sunrise—hues of gold and blazing crimson.<sup>53</sup> Birds are symbolically connected to the sun in many ancient traditions, and in the Sumerian Anzu traditions as well, yet it is necessary to check whether this motif in traditions regarding Ziz indicates a Greco-Roman cultural influence. In the case of Ziz the connection to the sun finds expression in its spreading its wings, thereby dimming the orb of the sun, a threatening, sinister act. A similar motif is found in a Jewish tradition describing the Phoenix, and because this point has consequences for the reconstruction of the sources of the Ziz traditions, it will be dealt with below in detail.

### *The Phoenix in 2 Enoch and in 3 Baruch*

In two apocryphal compositions the Phoenix appears as a companion to the chariot of the sun. In 2 Enoch (Slavonic Enoch) the seer ascends to heaven, where he sees two birds pulling the chariot of the sun, one like the Phoenix, the other called Chalkydri, composite lion-dragon figures, crimson like the rainbow, and of enormous dimensions (“nine hundred measures”).<sup>54</sup> The creatures carry dew and heat, descend to earth, and ascend from it with the sun’s rays according to God’s orders (6:6–7).

A similar, expanded vision is found in 3 Baruch (the Greek Apocalypse of Baruch).<sup>55</sup> In this apocalypse an angel leads Baruch the scribe to the upper heavens.

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52. Niehoff, “The Phoenix in Rabbinic Literature,” 256, 260ff. The obvious differences between the characteristics of each one of the birds is explained by her as a result of mythopoetic development: “Once the phoenix had become familiar, it grew in the rabbinic imagination into a huge mythological monster similar to the leviathan” (ibid., 263).

53. Van den Broek, *The Myth of the Phoenix*, 233–60.

54. 2 Enoch 12:1–3; R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (Oxford, 1913), 2.436. A composite, leonine-serpentine creature brings to mind the snake-lion from the Labbu myth, and the metaphoric depiction of the king of Egypt from Ezek. 32 (above, n. 9).

55. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha*, 527ff. The Phoenix possibly appears in another Jewish source, a tragedy written by the Hellenistic Jew Ezekiel in the second century B.C.E. (H. Jacobsen, *The Exagoge of Ezekiel* [Cambridge, 1983], 63:254–69). However, the identification of the remarkable animal in the description of Ezekiel with the Phoenix, stated already in the fifth–sixth centuries C.E., is

In the site from where the sun goes forth Baruch sees a bird of huge dimensions circling the sun. The angel identifies it as the Phoenix, explaining that the bird is guarding the earth—by flying alongside the sun and spreading its wings, thus receiving the sun's fiery rays. Were it not to receive the rays, the angel explains, the human race would not survive, along with all other living creatures. The angel stresses that God appointed this bird (6:3–7). Then, as the angels open the three hundred and sixty-five gates of heaven, Baruch hears the noise of the bird. He is told that the role of the Phoenix's voice is to awaken the earthly roosters from slumber, which then go on to awaken humanity while the angels prepare the sun (6:13–16). Then, as the sun shines behind the Phoenix, it spreads out its wings, gradually gaining full measure. At dusk, the sun's rays are defiled from the lawlessness and unrighteousness of men it has seen all day, and the Phoenix likewise contracts its wings, exhausted from having restrained the burning heat and fire of the sun from scorching all living creatures. The angel repeats the assertion that without the shielding wings of the bird, there could be no life (8:7).

What is the relation of the motif of the Phoenix, spreading its wings in front of the sun, to the ability of Ziz to dim the sun by spreading its wings? Despite the basic resemblance of the act itself, it must be noted that the motif plays a completely different role in each case. The traditions of Ziz regard the sun as an essential necessary element of the world order, and dimming it is considered emblematic of mutinous, sinister powers threatening to reverse the world to pre-creation chaos. In contrast, the same act by the Phoenix in the upper heavens in 3 Baruch plays a reverse role. The sun itself is deemed dangerous. By spreading its wings in front of the sun the Phoenix is a permanent sunscreen, acting to preserve the world order from the destructive heat of the sun.

The difference in the nature of the act points to a difference between the two actors and their purposes. As shown before, spreading the wings and dimming the sun is a negative, power-driven act in rabbinic sources, whereas in 3 Baruch it is a positive, benevolent act. The Phoenix is exhausted and spent by the end of the day, resting all night just to return ceaselessly to its task the following morning. Another difference lies in the frequency of the act. The midrash does not state when Ziz spreads its wings, but the context suggests that it probably refers to a one-time mutinous event during creation, whereas the Phoenix in 3 Baruch fulfills the role of sunscreen daily. A third difference is reflected in God's attitude toward the two birds. Ziz's ability to dim the sun is apparently subversive, directed against God. 3 Baruch does not indicate an independent act or a sovereign creature. Special emphasis is given to the fact that the Phoenix is ordered by God to spread its wings (6:7), thereby becoming an essential cosmic element, an unparalleled emphasis when compared to all the other recorded acts of the bird.

These fundamental differences between the two characters in their similar acts are not independent of each other. The motif of spreading the wings in front of the sun in 3 Baruch and in rabbinic sources regarding Ziz seems to be a link between

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contested; see B. Z. Wacholder and S. Bowman, "Ezechielus the Dramatist and Ezekiel the Prophet," *HTR* 78 (1985), 253–77.

them, perhaps even a polemic. This possible link can be described in one of the following ways:

1. Direct literary borrowing. Since 3 Baruch is the earlier source, this kind of link can only mean that the midrashic figure of Ziz is borrowing from the description of the Phoenix in 3 Baruch.<sup>56</sup> If this is the case, the midrash must have developed the motif of spreading the wings from a positive, constant act, prearranged by God in order to preserve earthly life, which brings the obedient Phoenix to complete exhaustion daily, to a power oriented, insubordinate element, threatening world order, displaying the control of Ziz, created on the fifth day, over the sun, created on the fourth (Genesis Rabba 19:4).
2. Both traditions rely on a third (hypothetical) source. In this case, the author of the pseudoepigraphic 3 Baruch integrated into the description of the Phoenix, the companion of the sun, motifs that originated in the ancient Near East—the spreading of the wings in front of the sun, and perhaps also the bird’s cosmic size.<sup>57</sup> The same two motifs have found their way into traditions regarding Ziz in rabbinic sources.

The second option is more likely. The Phoenix in Jewish apocalyptic literature has unique features. Only in 3 Baruch does the Phoenix take the role of guardian of the world, a permanent sunscreen. As van der Broek has shown, the exceptional characteristics of the Phoenix in this description testify to the borrowing of elements from other solar bird traditions, and their adaptation into a unique apocalyptic story with its distinct quality.<sup>58</sup> The concept of the three hundred and sixty-five gates of heaven (6:17) is Persian. The source of the role of the Phoenix to awaken the roosters before sunrise is found in the Persian Heavenly Rooster traditions and the concept of the all-seeing sun-god, in charge of justice and observant of sins, is also well known from ancient Near Eastern traditions. The compilation of pre-existing motifs and elements, recasting them in order to fashion a new construction is typical of other apocalyptic compositions as well, perhaps of the entire genre.<sup>59</sup> It is, therefore, reasonable,

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56. See Niehoff, “The Phoenix in Rabbinic Literature,” 262 on Genesis Rabba 19:4: “R. Judan relies on the monotheistic redaction of the phoenix myth in the *Apocalypse of Baruch*.”

57. See van den Broek, *The Myth of the Phoenix*, 267–68: “. . . the author of the *Greek Apocalypse of Baruch* made use of an oriental tradition, also known to the Jews, concerning a huge bird capable of covering the sky with its wings and thus robbing the sun of its worst intensity.” However, I do not find the origin of this tradition in Persian circles but in ancient Near Eastern ones. The classical authors compared the size of the Phoenix to an eagle and an ostrich, the large birds known to them, whereas cosmic dimensions are typical of texts influenced by eastern sun birds (ibid., 251–52). Bar-Ilan suggested that the cosmic dimensions of the Phoenix in apocryphal sources were ascribed to it in accordance with its prolonged existence, in light of the biblical conception of God and His dimensions, “like rabbi like pupil” (M. Bar-Ilan, “Fabulous Creatures in Ancient Jewish Traditions,” *Mahanayim* 7 [1994], 106 [Hebrew]).

58. Van den Broek, *The Myth of the Phoenix*, 263–64, mentions mythic birds from many traditions, but does not refer to the Mesopotamian Anzu. As mentioned above (n. 54), it seems also that the two birds accompanying the sun in 2 Enoch, the Phoenix and Chalkydri, bearing leonine-serpentine features, recall the monster from the Mesopotamian Labbu myth.

59. Walton, “The *Anzu* Myth as Relevant Background,” 85–88, discovered a similar eclectic quality in Daniel 7. In his opinion, the author of Daniel 7 implemented motifs from the combat myths to enrich the apocalyptic picture he was drawing.

that the element of spreading the wings in front of the sun is not original to 3 Baruch, but borrowed, and this fits well with the eclectic nature of the entire passage, which has little in common with the known representations of the Phoenix in the ancient world.

Furthermore, it is hard to accept the possibility that the rabbis were familiar enough with the figure of the Phoenix from apocalyptic literature to use it in their rendition of Ziz, since there are other references to the usual figure of the Phoenix in rabbinic literature. “The bird of the sand,” as the Phoenix is called in rabbinic sources, is totally distinct from Ziz, and there is no overlapping or confusion between the two. It is known for its usual traits—regeneration and longevity. These qualities are interpreted as the bird’s reward from God for an act of righteousness towards God or men.<sup>60</sup>

Although in the present state of things we cannot rule out this possibility entirely, it is unlikely that the rabbis created the threatening Ziz as a mytho-poetic development of the apocalyptic Phoenix tradition, while preserving the figure of the Phoenix with its usual characteristics. There is a large discrepancy between the concept of the pious bird awarded immortality and Ziz, the cosmic monster threatening a reversal of order which will be subdued and served in the messianic meal.

The Phoenix in 2 Enoch and 3 Baruch is a unique composite figure, composed from various elements of other then-known sun-birds. It is not impossible, that in the making of this figure the authors borrowed elements from a cosmic bird, which expresses its defiance against God by spreading its wings and dimming the sun. Although we have no direct proof of the existence of an ancient (Israelite or other) tradition regarding such a motif prior to rabbinic times, its conjectured existence affords the best explanation, in my opinion, for both the remarkable resemblance expressed in the motif of spreading the wings and dimming the sun, and the many differences between the two figures. The fact that the angel stresses twice, that of all the roles of the Phoenix, the spreading of the wings alone is an act ordained by God,

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60. The bird of the sand is mentioned in a midrash on the words “She also gave some to her husband” (Gen. 3:6): “Also is an extension; she gave the cattle, beasts and birds to eat of it. All obeyed her and ate thereof, except a certain bird named *זרל* (sand), as it is written: ‘Then I said, I shall die with my nest and I shall multiply my days as the sand’ (Job 29:18). The School of R. Jannai and R. Judan b. R. Simeon differ: The School of R. Jannai maintained: It lives a thousand years, at the end of which a fire issues from its nest and burns it up, yet as much as an egg is left, and it grows new limbs and lives again. R. Judan b. R. Simeon said: It lives a thousand years, at the end of which its body is consumed and its wings drop off, yet as much as an egg is left, whereupon it grows new limbs and lives again” (Genesis Rabba 19:5; translation follows H. Freedman, *Midrash Rabbah, Genesis* [London-New York, 1983]). Note similar traditions in S. Buber, ed., *Tanḥuma* (Vilna, 1885; Jerusalem, 1964), 155; *Midrash Shmuel* 12:2. The Babylonian Talmud refers to the Phoenix under the caption “Urshina”: “Urshina, father found him lying in the side of the ark. He said to him: don’t you want food? He answered: I saw that you were busy, so I said I will not upset you. He said to him: May you not die, as it is written: ‘I shall die with my nest and I shall multiply my days as the sand’ (Job 29:18)” (b. *Sanhedrin* 108b). It is noteworthy that the midrash concerning the “bird of the sand” in Genesis Rabba follows directly the section dealing with “Ziz the clean bird which flies and dims the orb of the sun,” but the two are separate entities, to each its own name and features, and with distinct characters. The “bird of the sand” was, according to the midrash, the first righteous creature, its refusal to take its share of the fruit of knowledge wins it the reward reserved for those who had tasted the tree of life—eternal life. The Babylonian Talmud also regards the Phoenix’s longevity as a prize for its considerate attitude toward Noah. The threatening nature of Ziz is fundamentally different.

might even indicate a polemical undertone, directed at the tradition of the rebellion of the bird against the creator, from which the author was apparently borrowing.

### *Ziz and Anzu*

Motifs related to Ziz's two counterparts, Leviathan and Behemoth, the legendary biblical monsters, are entrenched in ancient Near Eastern traditions. I suggest that there we can also find the roots of traditions regarding Ziz, the rabbinic cosmic bird.<sup>61</sup> Ziz reflects traditions regarding Anzu, the lion-faced roaring eagle. The first point of contact between Anzu and Ziz is their cosmic dimension. However, as shown before, cosmic dimensions characterize other eastern mythic birds; hence, this feature alone is too common to indicate a connection. Two other points of contact, unique to Anzu and Ziz alone, may indicate such a link.

The second point of contact is the element of struggle and combat, the main theme of the Epic of Anzu. As claimed above, this element is subtly hinted at in rabbinic traditions regarding Ziz as well, expressed by its ability to spread its wings and dim the sun. The juxtaposition of Ziz to Leviathan and Behemoth in rabbinic myth reinforces by way of analogy the rebellious nature of Ziz. The third point of contact is the relation to primordial times. Like Leviathan and Behemoth, Ziz is a primeval creature, set in the cosmogonic era with its special wonders, like the story of Anzu.

The last two unique elements, together with the element of the cosmic size of the birds, testify to a link between Anzu and Ziz. Like Anzu, Ziz was a cosmic bird, which defied the divine hierarchy and tried to reverse the world order in primordial days.

Studies dealing with mythic traditions in rabbinic literature have asked whether they are the recurrent remains of older traditions or inner-Jewish developments, namely, memory or interpretation. When trying to reconstruct the original Israelite epic, Cassuto claimed that midrashic mythical motifs fed on an ancient Near Eastern heritage, growing from traditions current among the people and renewed in rabbinic literature.<sup>62</sup> Other scholars claimed that midrashic mythological elements result from the interpretation and elaboration of biblical themes and verses, a development of inner-Jewish ideas. Daniel Boyarin, for example, called Cassuto's claim that mythic materials were preserved in folk tradition till later periods "naive and unnecessary."<sup>63</sup> In his opinion, midrashic mythology is but a psychoanalytic act of interpretation based

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61. See the words of Kohler connecting the rabbinic Ziz with the Mesopotamian Anzu (Zu): ". . . mythical giant-bird *Ziz*—זִיז, I think it is the same mentioned in Assyrian Mythology as the divine bird *Zu*"; K. Kohler, "Contributions to Hebrew and Assyrian Philology," *Hebraica* 1 (1884), 31; I thank Dr. Ronnie Goldstein for this reference.

62. Cassuto himself does not reject the possibility of late, interpretive development: "Needless to say, not all the material to be found in post-biblical Jewish literature, on this and on similar subjects, is applicable for the purpose of our reconstruction. For in part, it is but the product of later development, or of the midrashic interpretation applied by the Rabbis to Biblical passages; but in part it undoubtedly preserves ancient elements retained by the memory of the people even after the original poems had sunk into complete oblivion" (Cassuto, "The Israelite Epic," 82).

63. D. Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1990), 151, n. 5. Fishbane too presents rabbinic myth as the result of creative hermeneutical process entrenched in Scripture (Fishbane, *Biblical Myth and Rabbinic Mythmaking*, 193–213).

on a close reading of the Bible itself. It is an explicit expression of repressed biblical elements, a development of a preexisting subconscious layer in the Bible, hidden there in metaphorical images. This is a plausible claim in the cases of Leviathan and Behemoth, since the major nucleus of midrashic elements is found already in biblical texts. It does not, however, explain the case of Ziz. As shown before, the language of the Psalms does not indicate that Ziz is necessarily a legendary bird. Rabbinic Hebrew knew a word *ziz* meaning “insect,” which fits nicely with the biblical text. It is therefore unlikely that rabbinic legends of Ziz are an independent act of interpretation of the biblical verses. They are better explained as the result of Mesopotamian cultural influence.

One must further try to trace the route through which Anzu motifs filtered into midrashic literature. There are two hypothetical reconstructions:

- a. Mesopotamian influence was horizontal, a result of direct contacts between rabbinic literature and Mesopotamian culture.
- b. The influence was vertical, rabbinic Ziz traditions originating in biblical conceptions, rooted in the cultural milieu of the ancient Near East.

It would seem that the first possibility is probable in the light the contacts which existed in Babylon between the Jews and the Parthians in the first centuries C.E., in a society which still preserved a significant part of a Mesopotamian cuneiform-related cultural heritage.<sup>64</sup> Reconstructing the course of influence in this case would start with the Akkadian Anzu epic and other Mesopotamian myths, through Aramaic translations to Babylonian Jewish circles, and from them to the rabbis in the land of Israel.

However, this reconstruction is met with two major difficulties. First, the few studies dealing with the question of the influence of ancient Near Eastern culture on the Babylonian Talmud indicate that the contact occurs mostly within the sphere of “scientific-professional” texts: dream interpretations, omens, medicine, mathematics, and astronomy, and not in the area of literary-mythological motifs.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, reconstruction of a direct course of influence, from Mesopotamian traditions to rabbinic literature, assumes that there is a late midrashic interpretation, disconnected from the original meaning of the biblical text, and that the rabbis implemented the character of the cosmic bird on the term *ziz šāday* secondarily. However, it is precisely the mythological element that fits in well in the verses, both from a linguistic perspective and from the context, as will be shown here.

There is another point of resemblance between Anzu and Ziz, found in the biblical text but unparalleled in the midrash. Anzu, as seen above, dwelled in the moun-

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64. For the claim that cuneiform culture continued till the end of the third century C.E., see M. J. Geller, “The Last Wedge,” *ZA* 87 (1997), 47–49.

65. On this matter Geller pronounced: “if one expects to find Gilgamesh or Adapa in the Babylonian Talmud he will be disappointed. While mythology is culture specific, ‘science’ (in the European sense) is universal, and therefore one actually finds technical terms and specific concepts known from Akkadian within Talmudic passages dealing with medicine and omens, or mathematics and astronomy”; M. J. Geller, “The Survival of Babylonian Wissenschaft in Later Traditions,” in S. Aro and R. M. Whiting, eds., *The Heirs of Assyria, Melammu Symposia I* (Helsinki, 2000), 3.

tains, Akkadian *šadû*. The construct expression *zîz šāday* occurs in both psalms, and the *nomen rectum*, *šāday* is etymologically identical to Akkadian *šadû*.<sup>66</sup> In Ps. 50:11 *zîz šāday* parallels the construct “bird of the mountain,” a biblical *hapax*, which was indeed “corrected” to the common “bird of the sky” by some versions (Greek, Syriac, and Aramaic).<sup>67</sup> The motif of dwelling in the mountain, central to the character of Anzu, is not mentioned at all in rabbinic sources. The parallelism “bird of the mountain” || *zîz šāday* suggests that the biblical verses already refer to elements from Mesopotamian myth. The first compound “bird of the mountain” is therefore an anticipatory explanatory hyperonym of the proper name *zîz šāday*, just as “every beast of the forest” relates to “Behemoth on a thousand hills” in the former verse.

One might also point out the possibility that the consonant *z*, common to both names, indicates an etymological link between Akkadian Anzu and Hebrew *zîz šāday*. Although this is an attractive possibility, it is extremely difficult to prove. The three phonological changes—dropping of the initial vowel *a*, assimilation of *n* to *z*, and the shift of the vowel *u* to *i*—do not allow us to regard the possibility of an etymological link as more than a tentative speculation for the time being.<sup>68</sup>

### *Zîz šāday in the Psalms*

The mythological meaning of *zîz* sheds new light on the two psalms. In Psalm 50 God’s control over *Ziz* is symbolic of His control over all wild animals: “For every beast of the forest is mine . . . for the world and all that is in it is mine” (Ps. 50:10–12). Mention of Behemoth and *Ziz*, mutinous monsters in this context, is comparable to the mention of Behemoth and Leviathan in the words of God to Job. God demonstrates His total control over creation by describing His control over the earth and water monsters, Behemoth and Leviathan (Job 40–41). The battle against primordial

66. For *šādeh / šāday* meaning “mountain,” see S. Talmon, “*har*,” *TDOT*, 5.431; Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 52ff.; Propp, “On the Hebrew *ŠĀDE(H)*.”

67. “Bird of the sky” occurs often as a general designation in the Bible; see Hos. 4:3; Zeph. 1:2; Gen. 1:30; 2:19; 6:7; 7:23; 9:2; Deut. 28:26; 2 Sam. 21:10; et al. The version “bird of the sky” was preferred by *BHS*; *HALOT*, 286, s.v. זִיז I; and *RSV*.

68. The Bible indicates that Assyrian names were distorted in various ways in their Hebrew rendition, and in any case our argument does not depend on a morphological resemblance. Landsberger, “*Einige unerkant*,” 8, showed that the sign *an* was a phonetic part of the name and not a determinative, but it is possible that this was not understood in the periphery, where *an* was taken as a determinative (divine), and the creature was called *Zû* (this was suggested to me by Prof. Hayim Tadmor). Another possibility is that the form *Zû* reflects a Neo-Assyrian variant of the name, where the first unstressed syllable was often dropped, for example: *annāka-nāka*, *anēnu-nēnu*, *akê-kê*, as indicated to me by Prof. S. Parpola. However, Parpola informs me that in the entire corpus of Neo-Assyrian inscriptions there is no evidence for this happening in the case of Anzu. The reading *Zû* leaves us with two phonological changes in the Hebrew rendition, the doubling of the consonant *z*, and the shift of the vowel *u* to *i*. Shveka’s assessment that *Ziz* cannot be a proper name because it is found in the construct state (Shveka, “Anzu, *Ziz*, and the Locust,” 144), does not take into account the special character of these mythological creatures, which puts them in a position between a proper name and a generic term. Thus, in a Neo-Assyrian royal inscription an adverbial derivation *anzāniš* “like the Anzû-bird” describes the manner of horses (*CAD* A/2, 152), and in the Bible the parallel construct *בהמות שדה* (Joel 1:20; 2:22; Ps. 8:8), while indeed translated as the normal plural “beasts,” is reminiscent of the big animal as well, in particular in Joel 1:20 which juxtaposes a verb in the singular to the name: *גם בהמות שדה תערוג אליך*.



that roar as roars the sea . . .” (Isa. 17:12). Therefore, it is likely that by mention of the mythological animals devastating the vine—Israel, the author of Psalm 80 was hinting at real enemies, perhaps even historical events of his time, recast in allegorical language.

Is it possible to decipher this cryptic language, reveal the historical background of the psalm and unravel the enemy (or enemies) symbolized by the boar and Ziz? Despite its wild nature, the boar is not a frequent symbol of the devastating enemy.<sup>72</sup> Thus, its background and source are hard to determine. Egyptian myth portrays the pig as a vile wild animal, associating it with Seth, god of chaos and evil.<sup>73</sup> The connection to Egypt is highlighted also by the interpretation of Rashi to this verse, suggesting that the suspended letter ‘*ayin* in the word ער” can be interpreted as an *aleph*: “When Israel is fortunate, they make their enemy like the animal of the Nile (אור), which has no power to go up the land, but when they are destined for trouble, their enemy becomes stronger like the animal of the forest (ער), destroying and slaughtering.” The “boar of the forest” is, therefore, an appropriate symbol of Pharaoh, and some scholars have identified him as Pharaoh Necho, king of Egypt in the days of Josiah.<sup>74</sup> A different pointer to the time of composition is the title attached to Psalm 80 in the majority of the LXX versions, associating it with Assyria: ψαλμὸς ὑπὲρ τοῦ Ἀσσυρίου, as well as its apparent northern background, hinted at by its mention of Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh (v. 3), suggesting it was composed prior to the destruction of the northern kingdom and the exile of its inhabitants, events which are not mentioned in the psalm.<sup>75</sup>

72. The only other place in the Bible in which the boar depicts a wild and dangerous force is in the LXX version of the advice of Hushai to Absalom (2 Sam. 17:8), where after the words “. . . your father and his men are courageous fighters, and they are as desperate as a bear in the wild robbed of her whelps” it adds: καὶ ὡς ὄξ τραπεῖα ἐν τῷ πεδίῳ—“and like a boar in the plain.”

73. In spell 112 of the Book of the Dead (R. K. Ritner, in Hallo, ed., *Context of Scripture*, 1.31), Seth transforms into a black boar, inflicting Horus’ eye, a story explaining why the pig became an abomination in Egypt. The myth of the god Seth incarnated as a pig, who attacked the moon, Osiris, ripping it apart and scattering the pieces, similarly explains the concept of the pig as a contemptible animal in Egypt (Herodotus, II:47; Plutarch, “About Isis and Osiris,” *Moralia* 353–54). For the pig as an abominable and contaminating animal with negative powers, see P. Galpaz-Feller, “The Stela of King Piye: a Brief Consideration of ‘clean’ and ‘unclean’ in Ancient Egypt and the Bible,” *RB* 102 (1995), 511–14; S. Ikram, *Choice Cuts: Meat Production in Ancient Egypt* (Leuven, 1995), 29–33 (the last two sources were brought to my attention by Dr. Danel Kahn).

74. See Z. P. Hayut, *Sefer Tehillim, Mikra Meforash* (1902; repr. Jerusalem, 1970), 176 (Hebrew); H.-J. Kraus, trans. H. C. Oswald, *Psalms 60–150* (Minneapolis, 1993), 143 (from the 5th German ed.). For the suspended ‘*ayin* and the possibility that it is a scribal correction, see n. 30 above. Rashi compared the boar from the forest to the trampling fourth animal from Daniel 7, which, as Walton suggested (above, n. 25), is comprised of various elements, some of which are taken from the myth of Anzu.

75. See E. König, *Die Psalmen* (Gütersloh, 1927), 356; B. Dinaburg, “A Psalm of the Time of King Hoshea ben Elah,” in I. Press and E. L. Sukenik, eds., *Yerushalayim: Journal of the Jewish Palestine Exploration Society Dedicated to the Memory of Abraham Mosheh Luncz* (Jerusalem, 1928), 250–61 (Hebrew); A. Weiser, *Die Psalmen* (Göttingen, 1950), 358; O. Eissfeldt, “Psalm 80,” *Albrecht Alt Beiträge zur Historischen Theologie* 16 (Tübingen, 1953), 65–78 (= idem, *Kleine Schriften* [Tübingen, 1966], 3.221–32). Others agreed with the pre-northern exile context, but argued in favor of its composition in the period of the Judges (Y. Kaufmann, *Toledot ha-emuna ha-yisre’elit* [Tel-Aviv, 1937], 2.148–49; Hebrew), or in the period of king Saul (H. Heinemann, “The Date of Psalm 80,” *JQR* 40 [1950], 297–302; A. Roifer, “The End of Psalm 80,” *Tarbiz* 29 [1960], 113–24 (Hebrew with English summary). Perhaps the unusual form

The symbolic, literary configuration of the psalm renders a decisive identification of its historical background unlikely, though it seems safe to conclude that it does reflect the Neo-Assyrian pressure of the northern kingdom during the second half of the eighth century B.C.E. If indeed this is the case, then the mythological aspect of *zīz šāday* testifies to another dimension in the meaning of the psalm, a political-polemical one. The poet likens the Assyrian enemy to *zīz šāday*, i.e., Anzu, the mythic mountainous bird from Mesopotamian lore threatening the world order. The metaphoric description of Israel as a cosmic vine whose “branches reached the sea, its shoots the river” (v. 12) is likewise a simile borrowed from the context of Assyrian imperial language, referring to maximal territorial extension, from one end of the world to another.<sup>76</sup> This phenomenon indicates one of the Israelite’s reactions to the pressure of Assyrian propaganda—a reversal of roles, casting Israel in the role of the expanding empire, Assyria in the role of the cosmic-mythic enemy, using the stock phraseology common in royal inscriptions of the Assyrian conqueror.<sup>77</sup>

According to our analysis, neither psalm deals with insects or beasts, nor do they draw a simple metaphoric parable from the world of nature alone. God’s control over *zīz šāday* and the devastation of the cosmic vine are correctly interpreted only in the light of ancient Near Eastern mythic tradition, like other biblical texts using mythological motifs, while adapting and integrating them in biblical fashion. Furthermore, the addition of Anzu / *zīz šāday* to the biblical mythic stock not only furthers our understanding of these specific two psalms, but might also shed light on the role of mountains in biblical poetic imagery, such as in Psalms 29 and 114.<sup>78</sup>

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*křsm* typical of Aramaic forms (above, n. 70) testifies to its northern origin. The impression that Psalm 80 was written prior to the Babylonian exile is buttressed by the observation that Psalm 89, reflecting probably the last stages of the kingdom of Judah, makes a deliberate use of Psalm 80 (compare 90:12 with 89:26; 80:13 with 89:41–42); see Hayut, *Sefer Tehillim*, 176; Roifer, “The End of Psalm 80,” 116–17.

76. N. Wazana, *All the Boundaries of the Land* (Jerusalem, 2007), 95–122 (Hebrew).

77. For demonization of the enemy in Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions by casting it in the role of the mythological enemies, see above, n. 22; F. M. Fales, “The Enemy in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: ‘The Moral Judgement’,” in H.-J. Nissen and J. Renger, eds., *Mesopotamien und seine Nachbarn, XXV Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* (Berlin, 1982), 425–35; H. Tadmor, “Propaganda, Literature, Historiography: Cracking the Code of the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions,” in S. Parpola and R. M. Whiting, eds., *Assyria 1995* (Helsinki, 1997), 325–38, esp. 326.

78. Paul Mosca suggested that the sequence sea-mountain-desert in Psalms 29 and 114 reflects the Ugaritic Baal myth (Mosca, “Ugarit and Daniel 7,” 503–4, n. 38). However, in the Baal cycle the mountain is the god’s abode and site of his temple, and Mosca does not explain why this element was joined to the enemies of the god, water (sea and river), and desert (to be identified with *mwt*). Mountains were created side by side with the watery deep and the sea (Isa. 40:12 and elsewhere), and in language reminiscent of *Chaoskampf* phraseology, God’s theophany proves the rebellious nature of the mountains mentioned next to that of the Sea: “He rebukes the sea and dries it up, and He makes all rivers fail; Bashan and Carmel languish, and the blossoms of Lebanon wither; the mountains quake because of Him, and the hills melt” (Nah. 1:4–5a). Compare the actions of the god Erra who is depicted as ruler of the universe and said to “convulse the sea, obliterate mountains”; The Epic of Erra, IIIId:5; translation in Foster, *Before the Muses*, 778: 5. Nahum here is clearly drawing from “a general stock of so-called mythological storm imagery, which is well known elsewhere in the Bible and the Canaanite world beyond”; Peter Machinist, “The Fall of Assyria in Comparative Ancient Perspective,” in Parpola and Whiting, eds., *Assyria 1995*, 182.

*Conclusion*

Our study reveals that Anzu left its mark in biblical and post-biblical literature, *ziz šāday* preserving the memory of mythic elements originating in the Mesopotamian Anzu epic. The reconstruction of the journey of this motif from the ancient Near East to the Bible and rabbinic literature reinforces Cassuto's claim, that elements repressed in the Bible reemerged in rabbinic literature, indicating continuity of folk traditions based on an ancient Near Eastern heritage. Cassuto's case study for this phenomenon was descriptions of divine combat against water—"Ruler Sea," "Leviathan." It is now possible to add another divine conflict, the battle against the rebellious mountain bird. Traces of this myth found expression in biblical poetic texts, comparable to traces of the cosmogonic battle of God against the chaotic water monster and the sinister land monster. Tracing the footsteps of Anzu-Ziz also helps determine the general question of the nature of some of the mythical Rabbinic traditions: memory, not interpretation.



"Anzu and Ziz: Great Mythical Birds in Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Rabbinic Traditions" (PDF). *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society*. 31: 111–135. Retrieved 26 November 2012. According to tradition, these rings were given to Judas Iscariot as payment for betraying Jesus. Going further back into Persian antiquity, there is a bird, amrzs, or slnamurv. In Indian legend the garuda on which Vishnu rides is the king of birds, in the Pahlavi translation of the Indian story as represented by the Syrian Kalilag and Damnag, the Simurgh takes the place of the garuda, while Ibn al-Molaffa speaks instead of the anl~a.