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Lions, Serpents, and Lion-Serpents in Job 28:8 and Beyond

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In the 1963 *Festschrift* for G. R. Driver, Sigmund Mowinckel argued that Biblical Hebrew שחל originally denoted a mythical serpent dragon and later came to be used as a poetical term for a lion. That meaning, he believed, was evident above all in Job 28:8.[1] He states, "Originally שחל may have meant the serpent dragon, the mythical wyvern or 'Lindwurm'. Because of the combination of serpent (dragon) and lion in mythopoetical and artistic fancy, it has also been adopted as a term for the lion."[2]

Few have been convinced by Mowinckel's argument that שחל denotes a snake, and still fewer by his mythopoetical explanation of the term's resultant double meaning: "lion" and "serpent."[3] Mowinckel's position is no doubt weakened by some

The comments of Daphne Haddad, Scott Redd, Casey Strine, Bill Fullilove, Izaak de Hulster, and the editors of *JBL* made this a better essay, and I am grateful for their help. I alone am responsible for any remaining error. All the line drawings in this essay are my own.

[1] Sigmund Mowinckel, "שַׁחַל," in *Hebrew and Semitic Studies Presented to Godfrey Rolles Driver in Celebration of His Seventieth Birthday, 20 August 1962* (ed. D. Winton Thomas and W. D. McHardy; Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), 95–103. He had previously written on the topic: "Šaḥal," in *Gamle spor og nye veier; Tydninger og Tegninger. En hilsen til professor Lyder Brun ved hans 25-aars Professorjubilæum fra elever og venner* (Kristiania: Grøndahl, 1922), 7–16.

[2] Mowinckel, "שַׁחַל," 103.

[3] The most recent full-scale study of the lion in the Hebrew Bible concludes that Mowinckel's position is "intriguing but invalid" (Brent A. Strawn, *What Is Stronger than a Lion? Leonine Image and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* [OBO 212; Fribourg: Academic Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005], 324), while a massive new work on the serpent in the ancient world does not include שחל among words for "serpent" in Biblical Hebrew (James H. Charlesworth, *The Good and Evil Serpent: How a Universal Symbol Became Christianized* [Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010], 425–51). Those who follow

of his more far-fetched arguments, such as the identity of שׁחל and נחשׁ,[4] or the overstated claim that the meaning "lion" is "impossible" in Job 28:8.[5] Yet some of his fundamental points remain cogent: that Semitic terms for "lion" and "serpent" are not entirely distinct, and that the fuzzy lines between these terms result from an ancient worldview in which animal categories were often mixed, even challenging modern boundaries between the mythical and the real.

This essay revisits Mowinckel's שׁחל as a way into the broader issues of conceptualization and classification of lions and serpents in the ancient Near East. After considering comparative philological, literary, and iconographic evidence, I argue that שׁחל in Job 28:8 evokes both a lion and a serpent, and that semantic parallelism and phonology contribute to the animation of a dragon of which the שׁחל is an integral part. This specific case suggests the importance of myth, poetry, and imagination in translating ancient Semitic terms for "lions" and "serpents" and the benefit of taking into account ancient conceptions of animals in philology and exegesis.[6]

I. Etymology

Gesenius-Buhl and its English cousin, Brown-Driver-Briggs,[7] follow Theodor Nöldeke in relating the Biblical Hebrew substantive שׁחל to a hypothetical verbal root *שׁחל, comparing Akk. *šaḫālu* and Arab. *saḥala*.[8] On this line of thought, שׁחל means "howler" or "bellower." However, Akk. *šaḫālu* is now understood to mean "to

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Mowinckel are Marvin Pope (*Job: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [3rd ed.; AB 15; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1973], 202), Lester L. Grabbe (*Comparative Philology and the Text of Job: A Study in Methodology* [SBLDS 34; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977], 93), Stephen Geller ("'Where Is Wisdom?': A Literary Study of Job 28 in Its Settings," in *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel* [ed. Jacob Neusner et al.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987], 179 n. 14, 155, 163–64), and the NEB.

[4] "[I]n fact . . . שַׁחַל is fundamentally the same as נָחָשׁ. The fundamental meaning of שַׁחַל also is a being 'endowed' with supernormal and mysterious force, with 'mana'" (Mowinckel, "שַׁחַל," 102).

[5] Ibid., 95, 103.

[6] On ancient Near Eastern ethnozoology and folk taxonomy, see Paula Wapnish, "Towards Establishing a Conceptual Basis for Animal Categories in Archaeology," in *Methods in the Mediterranean: Historical and Archaeological Views on Texts and Archaeology* (ed. David B. Small; Mnemosyne 135; Leiden/New York: Brill, 1995), 233–73.

[7] *Wilhelm Gesenius' Hebräisches und Aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das alte Testament* (17th ed.; ed. Frants Buhl; Leipzig: Vogel, 1921), 819. This is even clearer in Gesenius's *Thesaurus philologicus criticus linguae Hebraeae et Chaldaeae Veteris Testamenti*, completed by Emil Rödiger (3 vols.; Leipzig: Vogel, 1829–53), 1388. See also BDB, 1006, s.v. שׁחל.

[8] Nöldeke, review of Friedrich Delitzsch, *Prolegomena eines neuen hebräisch-aramäischen Wörterbuch zum alten Testament*, *ZDMG* 40 (1886): 725; see also the discussion in *HALOT* 4:1461.

filter" rather than "to call, proclaim," as Nöldeke and others supposed.[9] Arabic *saḥala* refers to paring, peeling, stripping off, or filing, though it may also be used of the rolling sound in the chest of a donkey.[10] Edward Lipiński has recently revived this view of Biblical Hebrew שׁחל, though on the basis of different Akkadian evidence. He explains it as "a metaphorical appellation based on the verb *šḫl* that means 'to smooth' or 'to sharpen.'"[11] Lipiński points especially to Akk. *šêlu* A (<*ŠḪL), which is used of pigs sharpening their teeth and of the sharpening of weapons,[12] and he suggests that the parallel שִׁנֵּי כְפִירִים // קוֹל שָׁחַל in Job 4:10 alludes to the original meaning of the word: "the grinder [of the teeth]."[13]

Yet other evidence points in a quite different direction. The postbiblical Hebrew verb שׁחל, widely attested in the C-stem, has to do with sliding through holes, threading a needle, and slipping between things.[14] As Stephen Geller notes, this "sounds most serpentine."[15] Additionally, the Old Babylonian snake god ^{d}*Šaḫan* is used in personal names at Dilbat for the logogram ^{d}MUŠ (= ^{d}*ṣēru*).[16] Finally, modern Egyptian Arabic attests *siḥliyyâ*, a nominal form of *saḥala*, meaning "lizard."[17] Rather than having to do with sharpening or bellowing, this reptile seems to have been so named because of its ability to peel off its skin.

[9] *CAD* Š/1, 77–78; *AHw* 3:1128. See Franz Delitzsch, *A Biblical Commentary on the Book of Job* (trans. Francis Bolton; 2 vols.; 1881–82; repr., Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1966), 2:100 (originally published as *Biblischer Commentar über die poetischen Bücher des alten Testaments,* 2. Band, *Das Buch Iob* [Leipzig: Dörffling & Franke, 1876]); and Marcus Jastrow's gloss of Akk. *šaḫālu* in Jastrow 2:1548, s.v. שׁחל and שׁחלא.

[10] Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (8 vols.; London: Williams & Norgate, 1863–93), 4:1319, 1320.

[11] Lipiński, "'Lion' and 'Lioness' in Northwest Semitic," in *Michael: Historical, Epigraphical and Biblical Studies in Honor of Prof. Michael Heltzer* (in Hebrew; ed. Yitshak Avishur and Robert Deutsch; Tel Aviv/Jaffa: Archaeological Center Publications, 1999), 218.

[12] *CAD* Š/2 , 275–76; *AHw* 3:1211.

[13] Lipiński, "'Lion' and 'Lioness,'" 218.

[14] Jastrow 2:1548, s.v. שׁחל II; Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods* (Dictionaries of the Talmud, Midrash and Targum 3; Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press; Baltimore/London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 1127, s.v. (hereafter *DJBA*). This is a cognate of Akk. *saḫālu*, "to pierce," and its verbal adjective *saḫlu* (*CAD* S, 28–29, 61; *AHw* 2:1003, 1009).

[15] Geller, "'Where Is Wisdom?'" 179 n. 14.

[16] Howard Wohl, "Niraḫ or Šaḫan," *JANES* 5 (1973): 442–43 and n. 13. This is also pointed out by Geller, "'Where Is Wisdom?'" 179–80 n. 14. On the interchange between /*l*/ and /*n*/ in Semitic, see Edward Lipiński, *Semitic Languages: Outline of a Comparative Grammar* (2nd ed.; OLA 80; Leuven: Peeters, 2001), §§17.3–17.4.

[17] Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic (Arabic–English)* (ed. J. Milton Cowan; 4th ed.; Urbana, IL: Spoken Language Services, 1994), 466; and Elias A. Elias, *Elias' Modern Dictionary: Arabic-English* (7th ed.; Cairo: Elias' Modern Press, 1954), 293. See also Grabbe, *Comparative Philology*, 93; Geller, "'Where Is Wisdom?'" 179 n. 14.

Most problematic is the datum offered by Ugaritic. Mitchell J. Dahood considers it likely that Biblical Hebrew שׁחל occurs in the Ugaritic PN *šḥlmmt*,[18] but the meaning of this word, which is attested four times in the Baal Cycle (*CTU* 1.5 v 19; 1.5 vi 7; 1.5 vi 30 [partially reconstructed]; 1.6 ii 20), is quite difficult to determine. Gregorio del Olmo Lete and Joaquín Sanmartín gloss *šḥlmmt* as "mythical place of the divine dead, antechamber to the Underworld."[19] Mark S. Smith seems to follow this line of thinking, rendering the term with "Death's Realm."[20] Richard J. Clifford, however, interprets it as "lions of death."[21] Though far from certain, *šḥlmmt* is probably best interpreted as a compound word, "mortality-shore," or the like, where the element *šḥl* is a cognate of Arab. *sāḥilu*, "shore."[22] Thus understood, it cannot contribute to an etymological discussion of Biblical Hebrew שׁחל.[23]

After reviewing possible cognates in Akkadian, Arabic, Ugaritic, Aramaic, and Epigraphic South Arabian, Michael M. Kaplan states, "[B]y no stretch of the imagination can the meaning 'lion' for שׁחל be related semantically to the meanings of those attested roots."[24] Indeed, the old etymology in BDB and its newer iteration offered by Lipiński are unconvincing. One alternative is that שׁחל is a primary noun, as *HALOT* suggests.[25] If, however, שׁחל is de-verbal, the most impressive etymological data relate to snakelike reptiles that can peel off their skin and slide through the smallest spaces.[26]

[18] Dahood, *Psalms II: 51–100. Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB 17; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968), 333.

[19] Olmo Lete and Sanmartín, *Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition* (trans. and ed. Wilfred G. E. Watson; 2nd rev. ed.; 2 vols.; HO 67; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2004), 2:812 (hereafter *DUL*).

[20] Smith, "The Baal Cycle," in *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry* (ed. Simon B. Parker; SBLWAW 9; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 148–50, 156.

[21] Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament* (HSM 4; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 84 n. 57.

[22] So *DUL* 2:812. See also Josef Tropper's gloss "‹Todesstrand›(?)" (*Kleines Wörterbuch des Ugaritischen* [Elementa linguarum orientis 4; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2008], 118). For the Arabic, see Lane 4:1320.

[23] The relation between Biblical Hebrew שׁחל and Ug. *šḥlmmt* is made still more problematic by the fact that one would expect a cognate ŠḪL rather than ŠḤL, as attested.

[24] Kaplan, "The Lion in the Hebrew Bible: A Study of a Biblical Metaphor" (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1981), 105–6.

[25] *HALOT* 4:1461.

[26] If this etymology were accepted, שׁחל would be related to the *hapax legomenon* שְׁחֵלֶת (Exod 30:34), which is connected with a type of shell (see *HALOT* 4:1462). Ludwig Köhler originally related Biblical Hebrew שַׁחַל to Arab. *saḥlal*, "offspring, young of a lion" ("Lexikologisch-Geographisches," *ZDPV* 62 [1939]: 121, citing Ibn Manẓūr's *Lisān al-ʿArab* 13:352, 10), but in the first edition of KBL (1953), 961, he compared Arab. *ḥisl*, "young one of the *ġabb*-lizard when it first comes forth from its egg" (Lane 2:569). Lothar Kopf justifiably calls the second into question, though he himself suggests comparing Arab. *saḫla*, "lamb," which is even less likely ("Arabische Etymologien und Parallelen zum Bibelwörterbuch," *VT* 8 [1958]: 207; Lane 4:1325).

II. שחל in the Hebrew Bible and Its Early History of Interpretation

שחל occurs seven times in Biblical Hebrew: Job 4:10; 10:16; 28:8; Ps 91:13; Prov 26:13; and Hos 5:14; 13:7. The term is clearly used of a lion in Job 4:10 (// אריה and כפיר); Job 10:16 (where God hunts Job like a שחל); Prov 26:13 (// ארי); Hos 5:14 (// כפיר); and Hos 13:7–8 (// נמר, דוב, and לביא). The evidence in Biblical Hebrew is supported by Talmudic Hebrew שחל and Jewish Literary Aramaic שחלא,[27] though the latter is a loanword from Biblical Hebrew. In *b. Sanh.* 95a, Rabbi Yoḥanan lists both שחל and שחץ (see Job 28:8a; 41:26b) among the six names for the lion: "The lion has six names. They are ארי, כפיר, לביא, ליש, שחל, and שחץ."[28]

However, the meaning of שחל in Ps 91:13 has caused both modern and ancient interpreters some trouble, as it parallels both פתן and כפיר.[29] The translations of the LXX, the Vulgate, and the Peshitta all reflect "asp." The LXX and Symmachus read ἀσπίδα (LXX 90:13),[30] Vg. *asp*, and Syr. *gārsāʾ*.[31] Only the targum renders "lion's whelp" (בר אריון). The translations of the versions are likewise divided on שחל in Job 28:8. While the LXX (λέων), Syr. (ʾryʾ), Vg. (*leaena*), and Tg. 2 (ליונא) all translate "lion," Tg. 1 translates "serpent" (חיויא).

Considering the case of Ps 91:13, Brent Strawn states, "[T]he case can be made that Versions are simply mistaken or interpretive."[32] The second is more likely. Thus, the questions are ultimately *why* the versions interpret the text the way they do and *how* such a translation was possible. Presumably the parallelisms כפיר | תנין || שחל | פתן in Psalm 91 and בני שחץ || שחל in Job 28 influenced such translations. But then what cognitive process enabled a translation of שחל as "serpent" when it is translated "lion" in every other case?[33] Could it be that, in the *Weltanschauung* of the writers of the Hebrew Bible and its early interpreters, "lions" and "serpents" were not as distinct as they are in systems of classification in the modern West? That would not be surprising, considering the terms in Semitic that may mean both "lion" and "serpent."

[27] Jastrow 2:1548, s.v. שחלא.

[28] Isidore Epstein, ed., *Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud: Sanhedrin: New Edition* (trans. Jacob Shachter and H. Freedman; London: Soncino, 1994).

[29] See esp. Marvin Tate, *Psalms 51–100* (WBC 20; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 449–50 n. 13a.

[30] See Takamitsu Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 98, s.v. ἀσπίς II (hereafter *GELS*). The reading of Symm. is preserved in the Syro-hexapla as *ʾsps*.

[31] It may be, however, that the Syr. and the Vg. are dependent on the LXX.

[32] Strawn, *What Is Stronger than a Lion?* 323.

[33] Aside from the mistake of the LXX in Prov 26:13 (reading שָׁלַח), the versions in Job 4:10; 10:16; Hos 5:14; and 13:7 translate either "lion" or "panther."

III. Semitic Terms for "Lion" and "Serpent"

Mowinckel spends more than half of his essay attempting to relate שחל to various terms for "serpent" in Semitic.[34] He opens the discussion with two analogies from Akkadian and Ethiopic which suggest that some Semitic cognates for words meaning "lion" or "serpent" in Biblical Hebrew have the opposite meaning in those languages. This is a particularly important point that deserves to be fleshed out a bit more.

Biblical Hebrew ארי and אריה are commonly used for "lion," as are cognates in Old, Official, and Palmyrene Aramaic, as well as Syriac.[35] However, cognate evidence in Ethiopic and Akkadian attest other meanings. While Geʿez *ʾarwe* means "animal, wild animal, beast, wild beast, or reptile" in the absolute, the phrase *ʾarwe mĕdr* means "snake, serpent, dragon."[36] Tigré attests the meaning "serpent" for *ʾarwe*.[37] Akkadian *erû* C, on the other hand, means "eagle,"[38] which, as Wolfram von Soden states, "ist der 'Löwe' der Luft."[39]

Biblical Hebrew לביא is used in poetic contexts for "lion" or "lioness," as is its Akk. cognate, *labbu* (< *LBʾ).[40] In *CT* 13.33–34, however, *labbu* is used of a mythological serpent.[41] Toward the beginning of the tale, the terrible monster that Tišpak battles is twice called a "serpent" (^{muš}[*bašmu*]) (obv. lines 5–6),[42] but then throughout the remainder of the text it is called a "lion" (*labbu*; obv. lines 17, 20, 24; rev. lines 4, 7, 9).[43] The same creature, however, is undoubtedly in view. This is the monster

[34] Mowinckel, "שַׁחַל," 98–102.

[35] See *DNWSI* 1:107, s.vv. *ʾry*$_3$, *ʾryh*$_1$; J. Payne Smith (Mrs. Margoliouth), ed., *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary, Founded Upon the Thesaurus Syriacus of R. Payne Smith* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1903), 28, s.v. *ʾaryāʾ* (hereafter Payne Smith); Michael Sokoloff, *A Syriac Lexicon: A Translation from the Latin. Correction, Expansion, and Update of C. Brockelmann's* Lexicon syriacum (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns; Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2009), 98.

[36] Wolf Leslau, *Comparative Dictionary of Geʿez (Classical Ethiopic): Geʿez–English, English–Geʿez* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1987), 40.

[37] Ibid.

[38] *CAD* E, 324–25; *AHw* 1:247.

[39] Von Soden, "*aqrabu* und *našru*," *AfO* 18 (1957): 393.

[40] *CAD* L, 24–25; *AHw* 2:526.

[41] For the translation, see Benjamin R. Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature* (3rd ed.; Bethesda, MD: CDL, 2005), 581–82 (hereafter *BTM*^{3}). For the text, see Erich Ebeling, "Ein Fragment aus dem Mythos von der grossen Schlange," *OLZ* 19 (1916): 106–8.

[42] Reading ^{muš}[*baš-ma*], as restored in Theodore Lewis's edition after *KAR* 6 ii 21 ("*CT* 13.33–34 and Ezekiel 32: Lion-Dragon Myths," *JAOS* 116 [1996]: 31 and n. 18). Frans Wiggermann, however, restores MUŠ.[ḪUŠ] in obv. lines 5, 6, and offers the same reading in line 3 as well ("Tišpak, His Seal, and the Dragon *mušḫuššu*," in *To the Euphrates and Beyond: Archaeological Studies in Honour of Maurits N. van Loon* [ed. O. Haex et al.; Rotterdam: Balkema, 1989], 117). Whatever the reading, the creature is ophidian in nature, as the muš element suggests.

[43] Wiggermann attempts to resolve this double designation by assuming that *labbu* is an

that the Middle Assyrian version portrays as a massive snake (^{muš}*ba*[*šmu*], *KAR* 6 ii 21)[44] that eats fish, birds, wild donkeys, and Mesopotamians, and which in the Babylonian Map of the World is grouped together with the mythological sea-serpent (*mušḫuššu rabû*), Anzu-bird (*anzû*), and scorpion-man (*girtablullû*)—all composite creatures of some sort.[45] The Aramaic proverbs of Ahiqar, in fact, allude to the *Labbu* myth in an attempt to explain why a snake would be referred to as a *labbu*:

There is no lion in the sea,	אריה לָא [אִי]תי בימא
therefore the *sea-snake* is called *labbu*.[46]	על כן יקראון לקפָּא לבא

This explanation reflects a similar kind of analogy between lions and snakes that may also have influenced the meaning of Akk. *erû* as "eagle."[47] Given the lion's sym-

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epithet for the beast, meaning "the Raging One" (< *labābu* A; see *CAD* L, 24, s.v. *labbu* B; *CAD* L, 7, s.v. *labābu* A), rather than "lion" ("Tišpak," 118). I am not persuaded by this line of thinking, and it does not seem as if Wiggermann is entirely convinced either (p. 126 n. 5).

[44] See the translation in *BTM*^{3}, 579, as "dra[gon]-snake."

[45] BM 92687 obv. 5′. See Wayne Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography* (Mesopotamian Civilizations 8; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1998), 22–23, 35–36.

[46] The translation and transcription are those of James M. Lindenberger, *The Aramaic Proverbs of Ahiqar* (Johns Hopkins Near Eastern Studies; Baltimore/London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 105 (line 117, saying 34). The top half of either a *pê* or a *rêš* is missing in the second poetic line. Bezalel Porten and Ada Yardeni transcribe both *pê* and *rêš* (*Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt,* vol. 3, *Literature, Accounts, Lists* [Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1993], 46 [line 165]) (hereafter *TAD* 3). Upon personal investigation of the papyrus in the Neues Museum in Berlin, I conclude that *rêš* is unlikely, since the vertical stroke does not extend above the line where the missing horizontal stroke would be. Compare the *qôp-rêš* sequence in יקראון in the same line. See the plate in the *editio princeps* (Eduard Sachau, ed., *Aramäische Papyrus und Ostraka aus einer jüdischen Militär-Kolonie zu Elephantine: Altorientalische Sprachdenkmäler des 5. Jahrhunderts vor Chr.: Tafeln* [Generalverwaltung der königlichen Museen zu Berlin; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1911], Tafel 46, plate 55).

Lindenberger's connection of קפא with Akk. *kuppû* ("eel," or "snake") is cogent (Lindenberger, *Ahiqar*, 106; *CAD* K, 551–52, s.v. *kuppû* B, # 3; and Benno Landsberger, in collaboration with I. Krumbeigel, *Die Fauna des alten Mesopotamien nach der 14. Tafel der Serie* ḪAR-RA = *ḪUBULLU* [ASAW 42/6; Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1934], 63).

[47] From a philological perspective, J. J. M. Roberts suggests that the meaning "sea serpent" for *labbu* in *CT* 13.33–34 is due to the fact that the noun *labbu* ("lion") fell together with the Akk. verb *lawû* ("to encircle," from LWY, as BH לויתן and Ug. *ltn*; see *CAD* L, 69–77, s.v. *lamû*; *AHw* 1:541–42, s.vv. *lawûm*, *lamû* II) in the Ešnunna region under Assyrian influence, whence the consonantal shift *w* > *b*: *lawû* > *labû*. The Middle Assyrian version of the *Labbu* myth attests the verb as *la-bu-na* (*KAR* 6 ii 24), which seems to be a play on the name *labbu*. The *labbu* thus took on the qualities of both a serpent and a lion (J. J. M. Roberts, personal communication, January 12, 2010). In 1972, Roberts analyzed *labbu* as a *parras* form: **labbayu* > **labbīu* > *labbû* (*The Earliest Semitic Pantheon: A Study of the Semitic Deities Attested in Mesopotamia before Ur III* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972], 116 n. 444). See also Lindenberger, *Ahiqar*, 106.

bolic dominance in Syria-Palestine and Mesopotamia,[48] it stands to reason that other animals that especially embodied predatory prowess and chaotic threat could be described functionally as the "lions" of their realms. The sea-snake, in this case, is the "lion" of the sea.[49]

Though לישׁ is attested only three times in the Hebrew Bible (Job 4:11; Prov 30:30; Isa 30:6), it clearly means "lion," as do cognates in Jewish Literary Aramaic[50] and classical Arabic.[51] Its Akkadian cognate *nēšu* is the common term for "lion."[52] However, *nēšu* (<*NḪŠ) is also cognate to Biblical Hebrew נחשׁ, the typical word for "snake."[53] In the Standard Babylonian Gilgamesh epic, *nēšu* also takes on the meaning "serpent." In SB Gilg. XI. 305, the creature that smells the plant of heartbeat is called a *ṣēru* (MUŠ). In line 314, however, it is called a "lion of the earth" (*nēši* (UR.MAḪ) *ša qaqqari*). This same phrase is preserved in the pharmaceutical series *Uruanna* III, where it is equated with a "chameleon" (*ḫulamēs*/*šu*) and listed between insects: UR.MAḪ *qaqqari* = *ḫu-la-m*[*e-šu*].[54] In C 5 of the medicinal commentary, the [*ḫu-l*]*a-me-su* is listed between insects and worms.[55] Drawing attention to a similar phrase in a lexical text at Ebla (*na-iš gàr-ga-rí-im*) and to the etymology of Gk. χαμαιλέων ("on the ground" + "lion"), Åke Sjöberg argues that the *nēši ša qaqqari* in SB Gilg. XI and the נחשׁ in Genesis 3 were, in fact, chameleons (see Gen 3:14-15) and that Akk. *nēšu* and Biblical Hebrew נחשׁ may actually mean "reptile."[56] Whether a serpent or a chameleon, it is clear that Akk. *nēšu* can be used in some contexts to refer not only to animals of the modern bio-

[48] Annie Caubet, "Animals in Syro-Palestinian Art," in *A History of the Animal World in the Ancient Near East* (ed. Billie Jean Collins; HO I/64; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2002), 223; and, in the same volume, Catherine Breniquet, "Animals in Mesopotamian Art," 158, 161.

[49] By analogy, see Wapnish's discussion of the popular epithet of Akk. *nāḫiru* as the "horse of the sea," either because of its peculiar snort or because of the way it rears up out of the water ("Conceptual Basis for Animal Categories," 263–64).

[50] Jastrow 2:710, s.v. ליתא II, ליתא.

[51] Lane 7:2684.

[52] *CAD* N/2, 193–97; *AHw* 2:783.

[53] Landsberger suggests that **nayθ* (Akk. *nēšu*) and **labʾ* (Akk. *labbu*) were the original Semitic words for "lion" and "lioness" respectively. Biblical Hebrew לישׁ, he thinks, arose from **nayθ* > **layθ* in order to bring the term for a male lion more closely into line with the term for a female lion (**labʾ*) (Landsberger, *Fauna*, 76 and n. 7). On the /l/ and /n/ interchange, see Lipiński, *Semitic Languages*, §§17.3–17.4.

[54] Landsberger, *Fauna*, 43 (B 4). See *CAD* Ḫ, 227–28; *AHw* 1:353. This is also noted by Andrew R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition, and Cuneiform Texts* (2 vols.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 2:896.

[55] Landsberger, *Fauna*, 43 (C 5); see the discussion on pp. 116–17.

[56] Sjöberg, "Eve and the Chameleon," in *In the Shelter of Elyon: Essays on Ancient Palestinian Life and Literature in Honor of G.W. Ahlström* (ed. W. Boyd Barrick and John R. Spencer; JSOTSup 31; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), 222 and 224 n. 23.

logical family *felidae* (i.e., cats) but also to animals of the order *squamata* (i.e., scaled reptiles).[57]

IV. What Have Lions to Do with Serpents?

These data raise the questions of why and how words for lions and serpents seem to have been so closely connected in Semitic. The implicit analogy operative between the two in ancient Near Eastern literature and iconography is, in my estimation, fundamental. This analogy, along with the pairing of such beasts as dangerous creatures of the wilderness par excellence, facilitated the combination of these animals into a single *Mischwesen*. In some cases, one of the animals seems to have been able to fill the conceptual slot of the other as well.

A. Analogy and Juxtaposition

The phrasing in SB Gilg. XI. 314, which refers to the serpent (*ṣēru* [MUŠ], line 305) as the "lion of the earth" (*nēši* [UR.MAḪ] *ša qaqqari*) is particularly instructive. Considering also the meaning "eagle" for Akk. *erû* and the use of *labbu* for the sea-snake in *Ahiqar* 165, it would seem that each domain has its own "lion." Thus, the eagle is the "lion" of the sky, the eel the "lion" of the sea, and the serpent the "lion" of the earth. The four-legged king of beasts is the center term.

So animals that might be quite distinct according to modern systems of classification were sometimes connected metaphorically on the basis of their power and threat in the animal kingdom. Andrew George comments on the logic of the phrase "lion of the earth" in the Gilgamesh epic:

> The "Lion of the Earth" is an epithet well suited to the snake, which when alarmed is a threat every bit as dangerous to human beings as the obviously more threatening four-legged version. In ancient Mesopotamia lions and snakes were more of a kind than one might think, for they held an equal terror for the Babylonian traveller. According to the common omen apodoses *šiḫiṭ nēši* and *šiḫiṭ ṣēri*, "attack by lion" and "attack by snake", the two most feared encounters in the open were with exactly these two animals, and these alone: according to the dictionaries no other animal appears in this phrase in such texts.[58]

[57] Akkadian *ḫulmittu*/*ḫulmiṭṭu* should also be noted in this connection (see *CAD* Ḫ, 230; *AHw* 1:354). This animal is connected with the mythical *mušḫuššu*-dragon in A 44 of the commentary ḪAR.gud (Landsberger, *Fauna*, 36, 62). In *CT* 14.7 the *ḫulmittu* is described as a serpent with four feet (*Fauna*, 53–54; *CAD* Ḫ, 230). Landsberger questions the relation of the *ḫulmittu* to the *ḫulamēšu* (*Fauna*, 116–17), but the cognates to *ḫulmittu* in Biblical Hebrew (חמט), targumic Aram. (חומטא), and Syr. (*ḥuwlmāṭā'*) all mean "lizard, chameleon," or the like (see *HALOT* 1:327–28; Jastrow 1:435; Payne Smith, 131; and Sokoloff, *Syriac Lexicon*, 426), just as Akk. *ḫulamēšu* does.

[58] George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, 2:897. See *CAD* Š/2, 416, s.v. *šiḫṭu* A; *AHw* 3:1209,

Indeed, lions and serpents are often paired as dangerous creatures of the wilderness, as illustrated in the oracle against the beasts of the Negev in Isa 30:6:

An oracle against the beasts of the Negev:	משׂא בהמות נגב
In a land of trouble and distress,	בארץ צרה וצוקה
whence the lioness and lion,	לביא וליש מהם
the snake and flying serpent,	אפעה ושׂרף מעופף
they lift their wealth upon donkeys' shoulders,	ישׂאו על־כתף עירים חילהם
their treasures on camels' humps,	ועל־דבשׁת גמלים אוצרותם
upon a people who do not profit.	על־עם לא יועילו

It is precisely these beasts from which YHWH promises to rescue the faithful in Ps 91:13 as they travel along "the path":

11 For he will appoint his angels for you,	כי מלאכיו יצוה־לך
to guard you in all your ways.	לשׁמרך בכל־דרכיך
12 With two hands they will lift you,	על־כפים ישׂאונך
lest you strike your foot on a stone.	פן־תגף באבן רגלך
13 Upon the שׁחל and the viper you will tread.	על־שׁחל ופתן תדרך
You will trample the lion and the sea serpent.[59]	תרמס כפיר ותנין

Robert Alter is correct to point to the actual dangers of such "noxious creatures" in ancient Palestine.[60] But this trope reflects not only the realia of pedestrian travel but also an ideological spatialization between "civilized center" and "chaotic periphery" that characterizes much of ancient Near Eastern literature.[61] Animals such as lions and serpents occupied what Frans Wiggermann calls "the shadow side,"[62] typically depicted in travel narratives as both dangerous and exotic, over against one's own "cultured space." This uncultivated space was the natural habitat for creatures of the wild. An Egyptian scribe reports of his travels to the Levant in Papyrus Anastasi I: "You do not tread the road to Magara, where the sky is dark by day. It is overgrown with junipers and *alluna* and cedars (that) have reached the sky, where

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s.v. *še/iḫṭu(m)*. Compare the comments of Lewis along the same lines ("*CT* 13.33–34 and Ezekiel 32," 35–36).

[59] The lion and the serpent appear together also in Amos's famous oracle about the Day of YHWH (5:19), where they represent the encroachment of "chaos" into that space in which one feels most secure.

[60] Alter, *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: Norton, 2007), 323.

[61] See Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, 20–42, 67–106; and Sabrina Favaro, *Voyages et voyageurs à l'époque néo-assyrienne* (SAAS 18; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2007), 124–29.

[62] Wiggermann, "Scenes from the Shadow Side," in *Mesopotamian Poetic Language: Sumerian and Akkadian* (ed. M. E. Vogelzang and H. L. J. Vanstiphout; Cuneiform Monographs 6; Groningen: Styx, 1996), 207–30.

lions are more numerous than leopards and bears, and surrounded with Shasu on every side."[63] In the Sumerian disputation *Ewe versus Wheat*, Wheat observes: "Snakes, scorpions, highwaymen that dwell in the desert – / They all threaten your life in the high plains!" (lines 128–29).[64]

Not far removed from such seemingly prosaic reports, however, is the mythical conception of the wilderness as the haunt of terrifying composite beasts, evil spirits, and demons.[65] These creatures often blur the line between the "mythical" and the "real." So, for example, Esarhaddon claims to have encountered two-headed winged serpents in his travels between Egypt and Meluḫḫa.[66] This should not be surprising, however, given that even in the "proto-scientific" Babylonian lexical lists "occasional distinctions between the real and the mythical world were overlooked, especially when dealing with animals."[67] The trampling of the characteristic beasts of the wilderness, therefore, may be indicative not only of successful travel but also of the mythic conquest of chaos. This seems to be the case in Ps 91:13, which lists the sea serpent (תנין) among the foes of the righteous. Erich Zenger aptly notes: "Here the topos of the conquest of wild animals as a proof of divine or royal power, widely attested in ancient Near Eastern mythology and iconography, but also in political propaganda, is taken up in order . . . to attribute to the one who previously was in trouble and persecuted . . . the role of one who fights against chaos."[68]

B. Combination

The implicit analogy between "lions" of various realms and the fuzzy lines between real and mythical creatures seem to have motivated the regular combination of several different animals into a single horrific beast. The clearest example is in the *mušḫuššu*, which, with its serpentine body, neck, and head, leonine forelegs, and the hind legs and talons of an eagle, combines the "lions" of the earth and sky

[63] James P. Allen, trans., "The Craft of the Scribe (Papyrus Anastasi I)," *COS* 3.2:12.

[64] For translation and text, see Herman L. J. Vanstiphout, "Lore, Learning and Levity in the Sumerian Disputations: A Matter of Form, or Substance?" in *Dispute Poems and Dialogues in the Ancient and Mediaeval Near East: Forms and Types of Literary Debates in Semitic and Related Literatures* (ed. G. J. Reinkink and H. L. J. Vanstiphout; OLA 42; Leuven: Peeters, 1991), 27 and n. 21.

[65] See Shemaryahu Talmon, "Har and Midbār: An Antithetical Pair of Biblical Motifs," in *Figurative Language in the Ancient Near East* (ed. M. Mindlin et al.; London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1987), 117–42.

[66] Annals fragment f: rev. 4–7 in Riekele Borger, *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons Königs von Assyrien* (AfOB 9; Graz: Ernst Weidner, 1956), §76 (p. 112).

[67] Wolfram von Soden, *The Ancient Orient: An Introduction to the Study of the Ancient Near East* (trans. Donald G. Schley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994; German original, 1985), 151–52.

[68] Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51–100* (trans. Linda M. Maloney; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005; German original, 2000), 431.

with the four-legged predator of the steppe (fig. 1).[69] It is, indeed, "a combination of the three most awesome creatures from the animal kingdom."[70] This sort of combination is apparent in ancient Near Eastern iconography of all periods, from Mesopotamia to Egypt to Anatolia.[71] The following focuses on the combination of lions and serpents.

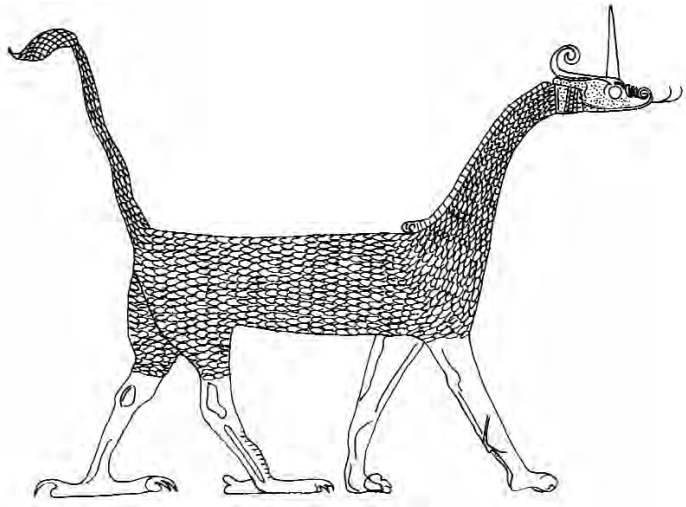

FIGURE 1. Tile *mušḫuššu* from Ištar gate. Al Hillah (Babylon), ca. 575. V A Bab 1434–1449, Pergamon Museum.

A Mesopotamian cylinder seal from the Late Uruk or early Jemdet Nasr period shows gigantic leonine figures with long, serpentine necks (fig. 2).[72] This theme seems to have been somewhat common in Predynastic Mesopotamia, given the number of other Mesopotamian seals that attest similar figures[73] as well as its

[69] *CAD* M/2, 270–71; *AHw* 2:683; F. A. M. Wiggermann, "mušḫuššu," *RlA* 8:455–62; idem, "Tišpak," 117–33; and W. G. Lambert, "The History of the muš-ḫuš in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *L'animal, l'homme, le dieu dans le Proche-Orient ancien: Actes du Colloque de Cartigny, 1981, Centre d'étude du Proche-Orient ancien (CEPOA), Université de Genève* (ed. Philippe Borgeaud et al.; Cahiers du CEPOA 2; Leuven: Peeters, 1985), 87–94. See *ANEP*[2], nos. 760, 761.

[70] Lambert, "History of the muš-ḫuš," 87. As Caubet also notes, the animals in this group are complementary: "The bird in the air is the counterpart to the crawling snake" ("Animals in Syro-Palestinian Art," 231).

[71] The breadth of this survey is simply meant to suggest how widespread and persistent these motifs are in the ancient Near East and thus to illustrate the possibility of similar conceptions in Syria-Palestine, without implying direct influence.

[72] Dominique Collon, *First Impressions: Cylinder Seals in the Ancient Near East* (rev. ed.; London: British Museum Press, 2005), no. 885 (hereafter Collon).

[73] See Lewis, "*CT* 13.33–34 and Ezekiel 32," 34, figs. 5–6.

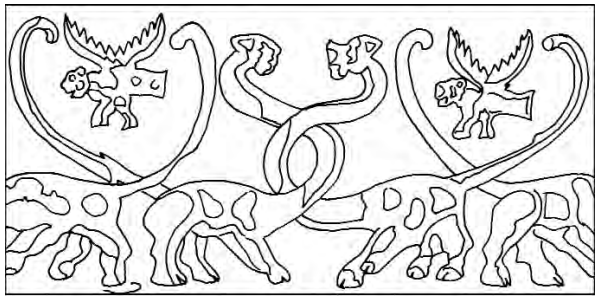

FIGURE 2. Seal impression. Uruk, ca. 3100. MNB 1167, Louvre.

appearance in contemporaneous Egyptian art, which reflects Mesopotamian influence.[74] This is evident in the Narmer Palette, from the ancient Upper Egyptian capital, Nekhen. The reverse of the palette shows two monsters with leonine bodies and heads and long, entwined necks that form a circular depression for grinding eye paint (fig. 3).[75] Two other Predynastic slate palettes from Egypt show almost identical figures.[76]

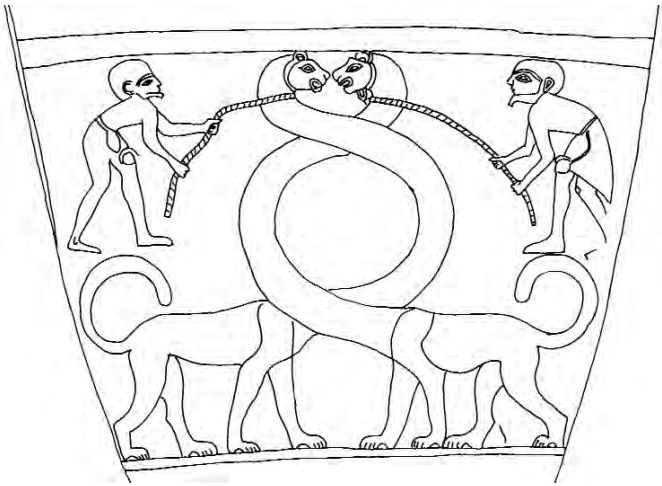

FIGURE 3. Siltstone Palette of Narmer, reverse, middle register. Kom el-Ahmar (Hierakonpolis), ca. 3000. CG 14716/JE 32169, Egyptian Museum, Cairo.

[74] See ibid., 35 and n. 52.

[75] Steve Vinson, "Narmer," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt* (ed. Donald B. Redford; 3 vols.; Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 2:494–95 (hereafter *OEAE*); Krzysztof M. Ciałowicz, "Palettes," *OEAE* 3:19; *ANEP*^{2}, no. 297.

[76] See Lewis, "*CT* 13.33–34 and Ezekiel 32," 35, figs. 8–9.

The seven-headed hydra slain in cosmic battle, well known to biblicists who compare YHWH's battle with Leviathan, also combines leonine and serpentine features. Two impressions from Tell Asmar depict this beast in a slightly different fashion. While the earlier impression portrays a fully serpentine figure (fig. 4),[77] the later impression shows the body of a lion with seven serpent heads (fig. 5).[78] The latter depiction is found also in an Early Dynastic engraved shell inlay of either Ninĝirsu or Ninurta slaying the *mušmaḫḫu* (fig. 6).[79]

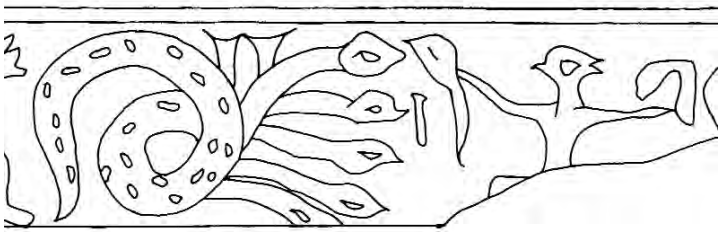

FIGURE 4. Detail of seal impression, lower register. Tell Asmar (Ešnunna), ca. 2500–2334. After Henri Frankfort, *Stratified Cylinder Seals from the Diyala Region* (OIP 72; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), no. 497.

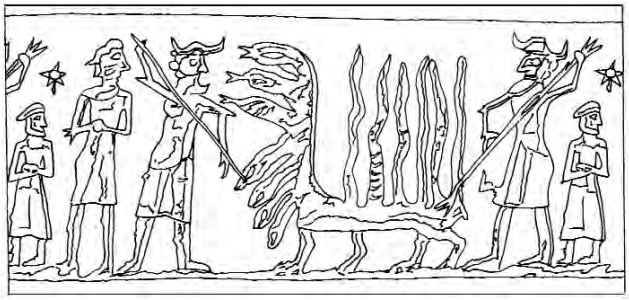

FIGURE 5. Seal impression. Tell Asmar (Ešnunna), ca. 2334–2197. IM 15618, Iraq Museum.

The Neo-Sumerian libation vase from Tello dedicated by Gudea to Ningišzida juxtaposes a pair of entwined serpents (*bašmu*) with a pair of dragons, which stand on their hind legs, their forelegs clutching gateposts (fig. 7).[80] These dragons have a serpent's head, a spotted feline body, the wings and claws of an eagle, and a

[77] Henri Frankfort, *Stratified Cylinder Seals from the Diyala Region* (OIP 72; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), no. 497; Collon, no. 839.

[78] Frankfort, *Stratified Cylinder Seals*, no. 478; Collon, no. 840; *ANEP*^{2}, no. 691.

[79] *Treasures of the Bible Lands: The Elie Borowski Collection* (ed. Rivka Merhav; Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv Museum, 1987), 16; *ANEP*^{2}, no. 671. It is now in the Bible Lands Museum, Jerusalem.

[80] *ANEP*^{2}, no. 511.

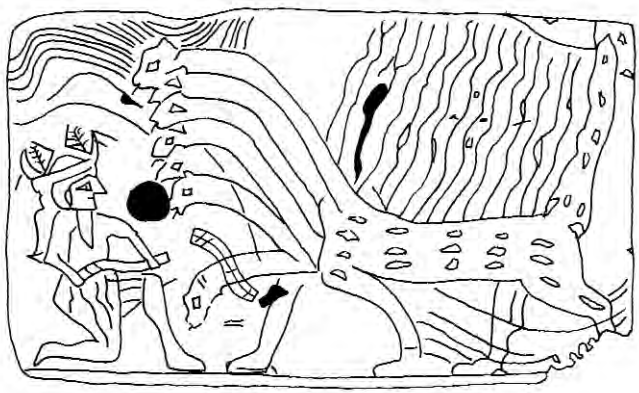

Figure 6. Ivory shell plaque. Southern Mesopotamia, ca. 2500–2400. BLMJ 2051, Bible Lands Museum.

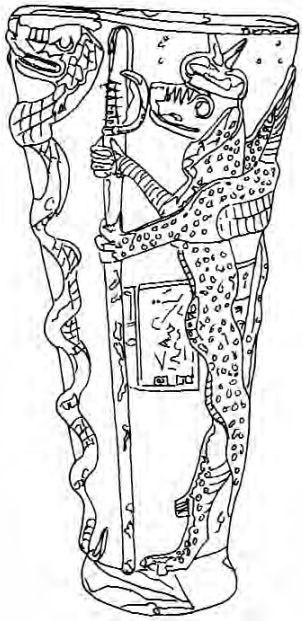

Figure 7. Steatite libation vase of Gudea. Tello (Ĝirsu), ca. 2100. AO 190, Louvre.

scorpion's stinger. Wiggermann suggests that this is a depiction of the *mušḫuššu*.[81]

Such a combination is preeminently evident in the *Labbu* myth (*CT* 13.33–34) referenced previously. Lewis concludes from his investigation of this text: "The choice of the word *labbu* with its leonine connotation is likely not accidental. I suggest returning to Heidel's notion of 'a composite monster or dragon with leonine and serpentine attributes.'"[82] Lewis goes on to argue convincingly that such a combination of the lion and the serpent is the background for YHWH's oracle against Pharaoh in Ezek 32:2b: "You are like a lion [כפיר] among the nations, / You are a dragon [תנים] in the seas."[83] By attributing to Pharaoh the awe and power of the כפיר and the תנים, Yhwh demonstrates sovereignty as the divine warrior who vanquishes Egypt.[84]

[81] Wiggermann, "mušḫuššu," 458.

[82] Lewis, "*CT* 13.33–34 and Ezekiel 32," 34, citing Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis: The Story of Creation* (2nd ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 141.

[83] Lewis, "*CT* 13.33–34 and Ezekiel 32," 38–40 (translation his).

[84] Ibid., 46.

Though such composite beasts figure prominently in contexts of cosmic battle,[85] they appear in other contexts as well. Even if the combat myth was the original impetus for the mixing of lions and serpents, ancient Near Eastern zoology and vocabulary, as well as biblical interpretation through the Hellenistic and Roman periods, attest the persistence of such mixing far beyond that context. Moreover, even without their combination into a *Mischwesen*, the lion and serpent share the potential for "inspir[ing] paralyzing, heart-stopping fear when encountered."[86] It is the power, awesomeness, and deadliness of the lion that characterize it above all in ancient Near Eastern thought. And by analogy, other animals that evoke similar awesomeness and deadliness may be considered the "lions" of their realms.

C. Substitution

Finally, comparison of two seals portraying scenes from *Etana* suggests that a lion or serpent may fill the slot of the other. In the extant versions of the legend, the eagle that eventually carries Etana to heaven befriends a serpent[87] but then betrays it by devouring its offspring.[88] BM 129473 from the Early Dynastic period portrays the eagle with the serpent's young in its talons (fig. 8).[89] Yet BM 129480 from the Old Akkadian period depicts a lion, not a serpent, at the foot of the poplar in which the eagle builds its nest (fig. 9).[90]

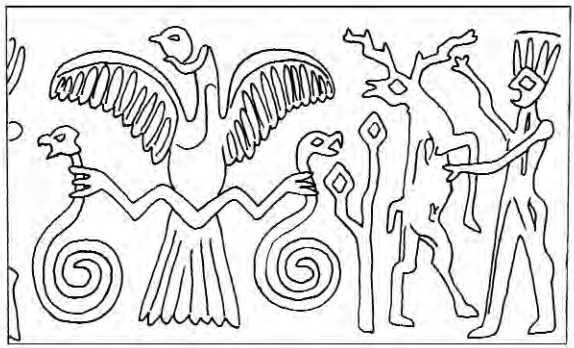

FIGURE 8. Seal impression. Western Asia, ca. 2600–2334. BM 129473, British Museum.

[85] See Lewis's thesis in ibid., 28.

[86] Ibid., 35.

[87] It is referred to as a *ṣēru*. In the Old Babylonian version, its ophidian nature is underscored by a play on *ṣēru*, "serpent," and *ṣēru*, "above," in line 6 (Foster, *BTM*[3], 536 n. 1).

[88] See translation in Foster, *BTM*[3], 533–54.

[89] Collon, no. 852.

[90] Collon, no. 851.

Figure 9. Seal impression. Western Asia, ca. 2334-2197. BM 129480, British Museum.

There may also be a switch between serpents and lions in Ps 58:5–7, where the suppliant first imagines the wicked as serpents, and then as lions:

5	Their venom is like the venom[91] of a serpent,	חמת־למו כדמות חמת־נחש
	like a deaf viper that stops up its ear	כמו־פתן חרש יאטם אזנו
6	so it will not hear the sound of the charmers,	אשר לא ישמע לקול מלחשים
	the expert conjurer of spells.	חובר חברים מחכם
7	O God, knock out the teeth in their mouths!	אלהים הרס־שנימו בפימו
	Tear out the jaws of the lions, O Yhwh!	מלתעות כפירים נתץ יהוה

Even if such alternation is uncommon, it suggests a degree of identity between lions and serpents that could facilitate substitution of roles in art and literature.

V. שחל in the Literary Context of Job 28

As Edward L. Greenstein has pointed out, determination of lexical meaning in Job 28:1–11 has been problematic, typically conditioned as it is by the assumption that these lines describe ancient processes of mining that are otherwise unmentioned in Israelite literature.[92] One sees this assumption at work in Lester Grabbe's reasoning about the meaning of שחל in v. 8: "That which is searched out is deep within the earth; therefore, one is not likely to expect the lion here since one would not normally associate the lion with mining underground."[93] In order to attend to

[91] It is possible that חמת here is a dittograph of the preceding, as it is untranslated in the LXX and the Syr. However, the LXX may be glossing over the repetition.

[92] Greenstein, "The Poem on Wisdom in Job 28 in Its Conceptual and Literary Contexts," in *Job 28: Cognition in Context* (ed. Ellen van Wolde; Biblical Interpretation Series 64; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2003), 267. See also Scott C. Jones, *Rumors of Wisdom: Job 28 as Poetry* (BZAW 398; Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 2009), 1–2, 233.

[93] Grabbe, *Comparative Philology*, 93; cf. Mowinckel, "שַׁחַל," 95.

the literary context of שחל in Job 28:1–11, I must first summarize my understanding of the conceptual background of these lines, which is somewhat different than Grabbe and others suppose.

A. The Foreign Exploits of Ancient Mesopotamian Kings

The poem in Job 28 is modeled on the ancient Near Eastern motif of royal expedition to the edge of the world to plunder exotic treasure.[94] This motif finds its clearest expression in the standard version of the Gilgamesh Epic, but elements of it are evident also in the epics of Enmerkar, Lugalbanda, and Sargon the Great, among others. It is not restricted to epic, however, but reverberates also in the somewhat more "realistic" Assyrian travel narratives in which kings boast of bringing home cedars from the Amanus, precious stones from the mountains, or lions from the steppe. The common theme of these corpora is that they recount the praiseworthy deeds of ancient Mesopotamian kings, who claim to have accomplished what none other before had accomplished. Mario Liverani calls this "the motif of the 'first discoverer,'" where the achievement of reaching a remote place or possessing an exotic product is set in contrast to a past in which that achievement did not exist.[95]

To lay claim to being the "first discoverer," the hero must journey from the cultured center into the chaotic wilderness, the natural habitat of terrible beings: lions and serpents, ghosts and demons, and horrifying composite beasts. In this journey to gain status, wisdom, and insight,[96] the protagonist must conquer that "heroic space"[97] and its inhabitants to reach the edge of the world and then return home safely again.

B. Animals at the Periphery: Job 28:7–8

The two couplets in Job 28:7–8 portray just such peripheral creatures in an eight-line description of the world in which the hero's search is undertaken (vv. 5–8). While vv. 5–6 describe its topography, vv. 7–8 list the fauna that occupy the liminal space between the known world and the world beyond: animals of the air (v. 7) and ground (v. 8).

[94] The following section summarizes the much more extensive treatment in Jones, *Rumors of Wisdom*, 30–104.

[95] Liverani, "The Deeds of Ancient Mesopotamian Kings," in *CANE* 4:2361. The portion after the quotation paraphrases Liverani.

[96] See Jack M. Sasson, "Comparative Observations on the Near Eastern Epic Traditions," in *A Companion to Ancient Epic* (ed. John Miles Foley; Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World; Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 228.

[97] See Favaro, *Voyages et voyageurs*, 124–29.

7 A path no bird of prey knows,	נתיב לא־ידעו עיט
on which no falcon's eye has gazed.	ולא שזפתו עין איה
8 בני־שחץ have not trod upon it,	לא־הדריכהו בני־שחץ
No שחל has moved over it.	לא־עדה עליו שחל

Though the exact nature of the בני־שחץ and the שחל is in dispute, two primary interpretive options for both terms are lions and serpents. In the Hebrew Bible, as in Mesopotamian inscriptions, birds, lions, and serpents are found together in the regions beyond civilization. Serpents inhabit the wilderness (Deut 8:15; cf. Num 21:6); lions make their home in the forests and thickets (Ps 10:9; Jer 4:7; 5:6; 12:8; 49:19; 50:44; Amos 3:4; Mic 5:7); and the vulture, hawk, eagle, raven, and ostrich are "associated with desolate places, such as ruined cities from which humans have been expelled" (see Job 30:29; 38:41; 39:13, 26–30).[98]

C. בני־שחץ *in the Book of Job*

The phrase בני־שחץ occurs only in Job 28:8 and in YHWH's speech in Job 41:26 [Eng. 41:34]. In the closing lines of that final speech, YHWH says of Leviathan:

25 [33] There is none on earth who can dominate[99] him,	אין־על־עפר משלו
one made without fear.	העשו לבלי־חת
26 [34] He looks on all the haughty.	את־כל־גבה יראה
He is king over all the proud.	הוא מלך על־כל־בני־שחץ

As Carol Newsom has pointed out, "pride" is essential to the rhetoric of the Leviathan speech, which is aimed at underscoring its embodiment of God's awesome workmanship.[100] As an echo of Job 40:11b–12a, the statements in 41:26 remind Job of his inability to humble all the proud[101] but also invest him with a renewed sense of royal authority.[102] English translations of בני־שחץ in Job 41:26 almost invariably render "proud beasts" or the like, appropriately taking into

[98] Carol A. Newsom, "The Moral Sense of Nature: Ethics in the Light of God's Speech to Job," *PSB* n.s. 15 (1994): 22, summarizing Othmar Keel, *Jahwes Entgegnung an Ijob: Eine Deutung von Ijob 38–41 vor dem Hintergrund der zeitgenössischen Bildkunst* (FRLANT 121; Göttingen; Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978).

[99] Translating as משל II in accord with the focus on kingship, height, and power in this section, rather than משל I, as all the major lexica suggest.

[100] Newsom, "Moral Sense of Nature," 24–25; eadem, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 251–52.

[101] Newsom states, "The dynamics of the Behemoth and Leviathan speeches serve to confront Job's own pride and fantasies of domination. Job is no god but a creature" ("Moral Sense of Nature," 24).

[102] Samuel E. Balentine, *Job* (Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary 10; Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2006), 691–92, 697–98.

account both the etymological evidence for שחץ having to do with pride, impudence, or boldness, and the literary context in which such pride is clearly emphasized.[103]

But the pride of Leviathan is rooted in his physical features. Job 41:7 [Eng. 41:15] makes that clear: "Rows of armor are (his) arrogance."[104] The description of Leviathan in 41:5–22 [Eng. 41:13–30] is somewhat like a moving camera, detailing the dragon's wondrous composition. The focus moves from his head to his neck to his heart to his belly, as the creature rises and makes his way from land out to his natural habitat—the sea (cf. Ps 104:26).[105]

Though the בני־שחץ are not *necessarily* of the same composition as Leviathan, it is reasonable to suppose that they are, in fact, cut from the same cloth. Mowinckel states, "The context of Job xli. 26 . . . seems to indicate that the בני־שחץ, whose king is Leviathan, are beings of the same kind as himself, i.e., serpent-like and dragon-like beings, primarily conceived of as living in the sea."[106] The translations of כל־בני־שחץ by the OG, Syr., and the Targums of Job 41:26 seem to have been conditioned by such an interpretation. The OG reads "all that are in the waters" (*πάντων τῶν ἐν τοῖς ὕδασιν*); the Syr. translates "all reptiles" (*klh rḥšʾ*). The first rabbinic Targum on this line is "all the sons of fish" (כל־בני כווריי),[107] while the Qumran "Targum" (11Q10), like the Peshitta, reads "reptile" (רחשׁ).[108] In light of the literary context and the interpretations of the ancient versions, it is no stretch, then, to identify those "proud beasts" in Job 41:26 as reptilian creatures much like Leviathan himself.

Despite the fact that pride is not the point of focus in the poem on wisdom in Job 28, the meaning "proud beasts" for בני־שחץ in v. 8 is dominant among English translations. The only exceptions are the Geneva Bible and the KJV, which trans-

[103] For etymological evidence related to Biblical Hebrew שחץ, see *HALOT* 4:1463.

[104] The OG (*τὰ ἔγκατα αὐτοῦ*), Aquila (*σῶμα αὐτοῦ*), and the Vg. (*corpus illius*) reflect "his back" (גֵּוֹה) rather than "arrogance" (MT גַּאֲוָה). But the consistent focus on "pride" in this speech recommends against this interpretation (Carol A. Newsom, "The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible,* vol. 4, *1 & 2 Maccabees; Introduction to Hebrew Poetry; Job; Psalms* [ed. Leander Keck et al.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1996], 624).

[105] Ibid., 623–25.

[106] Mowinckel, "שָׁחַל," 97.

[107] Tg. 2 is "lion's whelps" (בני אריון), while Tg. 3 is "lords of violence" (מרי חטופא). For other variants in targumic manuscripts, see David M. Stec, *The Text of the Targum of Job: An Introduction and Critical Edition* (AGJU 20; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 303*.

[108] Georg Beer proposed that OG, Syr., and the rabbinic Targums were translating בני־שרץ (*Der Text des Buches Hiob untersucht* [2 vols.; Marburg: Elwert, 1897], 2:255), and he was followed by Édouard Dhorme (*Le livre de Job* [2nd ed.; Paris: Gabalda, 1926], 588) and Marvin Pope (*Job*, 346). It is more likely, however, that these versions are trying to clarify the habitat of Leviathan (with Robert Gordis, *The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation, and Special Studies* [Moreshet 2; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1978], 490).

late בני־שׁחץ with "lion's whelps" in 28:8, despite having rendered the same phrase as "children of pride" in 41:26. They seem to have recognized that the context in Job 28:8 calls for a somewhat different rendering, since it is more interested in naming than describing. This interpretation has precedent in the Targums and in the Talmud as well. Targum 2 reads "sons of lions" (בנייא דאריוון), and שׁחץ is listed among six terms for "lion" in *b. Sanh.* 95a.

11Q10, however, reads תנינֵי, "sea serpent" (12.5).[109] In Aramaic, תנינא always means "dragon," "sea-snake," or "crocodile," but never "lion."[110] In its only occurrence in the book of Job (7:12), Biblical Hebrew תנין likewise means "dragon" or "sea monster." The rendering of בני־שׁחץ with תנין in 11Q10 is particularly striking, because of both the conservatism of its translators[111] and the fact that תנין occurs therein only two other times, where it glosses נחשׁ בריח (10.4 = Job 26:13) and לויתן (35.4 = Job 40:25).

There is, then (now perhaps unsurprisingly), conflicting evidence about the identity of these beasts. Are the בני־שׁחץ "lions" or "serpents"? Given the context of the phrase in Job 41:26, I would suggest that the בני־שׁחץ are beasts of a reptilian nature in Job 28:8a, where it is aptly translated "serpents," or perhaps even "dragons." Yet, as I have attempted to demonstrate, the distinction between "lions" and "serpents" in the ancient Near East was not always very sharp. Thus, the possibility remains that these beasts exhibited both ophidian and leonine features. And while Mowinckel's statement that "[t]he *benē šaḥaṣ* do not so much belong to zoology as mythology"[112] presents a dichotomy that is not borne out by ancient classifications (especially evident in the lexical texts), he is correct to suggest that these are animals that challenge modern conceptions of zoology.

D. שׁחל *in the Context of Job 28:1–11*

As with the בני־שׁחץ in Job 28:8a, the evidence concerning the identity of the שׁחל in v. 8b is divided. At the outset of the essay, I argued that the best etymological evidence relating to שׁחל (if it is indeed de-verbal) relates to reptiles. Such an

[109] The transcription follows Michael Sokoloff, *The Targum to Job from Qumran Cave XI* (Bar-Ilan Studies in Near Eastern Languages and Culture; Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1974), 50.

[110] Jastrow 2:1682, s.v; Sokoloff, *Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period* (2nd ed.; Dictionaries of the Talmud, Midrash and Targum 2; Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press; Baltimore/London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 587a; *DJBA*, 1223a; Payne Smith, 616; Sokoloff, *Syriac Lexicon*, 1655. Its earliest attestation is in *Ahiqar*, line 90 (*TAD* 3:36–37), where it means "dragon."

[111] David Shepherd, *Targum and Translation: A Reconsideration of the Qumran Aramaic Version of Job* (SSN 45; Assen: Van Gorcum, 2004).

[112] Mowinckel, "שַׁחַל," 97.

identity, in fact, finds support in its early history of interpretation, which includes "asp" in Ps 91:13 (LXX 90:13; Symmachus; Vg.; Syr.) and "serpent" in Job 28:8 (Tg. 1). In its two other occurrences in the book of Job, however, שחל clearly means "lion" (Job 4:10; 10:16). The ancient versions are unanimous in this interpretation of those passages,[113] and שחל persists in Talmudic Hebrew as one of the six names for "lion" (*b. Sanh.* 95a).

The rather clear use of שחל in Job 4:10 and 10:16 for "lion" seems to present a simple case for the same interpretation in Job 28:8. But while "lion" is a possible—and perhaps even preferable—gloss on שחל in the wisdom poem, both the cognitive context outlined throughout this essay and the literary context of Job 28:1–11 suggest that the case is hardly that simple.

There are two planes of meaning at work in the first section (vv. 1–11) of Job 28. As Stephen Geller states, "[T]here is a 'realistic,' narrative plane comprising a description of how jewels are to be found . . . ; there [is] also the poetically dominant plane of metaphor and associations."[114] In the exposition of these planes, it is useful to employ the more historically rooted corpus of travel and campaign reports in Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions as analogies to the wisdom poem's "realistic" plane. On the other hand, Mesopotamian epics such as the standard version of Gilgamesh offer helpful correlates to the poem's more "symbolic" plane. As with the nature of the "dark stone" in Job 28:3 (אבן אפל וצלמות), initially understood as material wealth but eventually identified with wisdom, the topography and fauna of Job 28:5–8 may be understood on two levels in the course of reading and rereading the poem. These lines run as follows:

5 A land from which food springs,	ארץ ממנה יצא־לחם
beneath transformed as fire.	ותחתיה נהפך כמו־אש
6 A place of lapis is its stones,	מקום־ספיר אבניה
which has dust of gold.	ועפרת זהב לו
7 A path no bird of prey knows,	נתיב לא־ידעו עיט
on which no falcon's eye has gazed.	ולא שזפתו עין איה
8 Serpents have not trod upon it,	לא־הדריכהו בני־שחץ
No lion has moved over it.[115]	לא־עדה עליו שחל

In the poem's more "realistic" plane, vv. 5–6 depict a jungle-like mountain region encrusted with precious stones that glow like flames. The birds of v. 7 serve

[113] While שחל is interpreted as "lion" in these contexts, it is worth noting that כפירים is translated by "serpents" (δρακόντων) in the parallel line in OG Job 4:10b (and also in OG Job 38:39)—a word typically used to translate לויתן, נחש, פתן, and תנין throughout the LXX (see *GELS*, 177; and HRCS [2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998], 348).

[114] Geller, "'Where Is Wisdom?'" 158.

[115] I have discussed the text, grammar, and translation of vv. 5–8 extensively elsewhere and will not repeat it here (see Jones, *Rumors of Wisdom*, 143–59).

as markers of distance but also of danger to any who would seek to venture beyond where even they fear to fly. That danger is underscored by juxtaposing the power of the lion and the wiliness of the serpent, both master predators, like the birds of prey in v. 7. The failure of the most skilled and feared creatures of their realms—sky, steppe, and dust—signals that the explorer will need to be still more skilled and fearless, paying no heed to the resounding "no!" (לא) that rings throughout these lines.

However, the binding of El's fount, which in v. 11 is called the "sources of the rivers" (מבכי נהרות),[116] and the exposure of the mysterious "dark thing" (תעלמה, v. 11b) that lies in their watery depths retrospectively imbue the preceding lines with still more cosmic and symbolic significance. Understood now as a voyage into the realm of the gods, the description of the land in vv. 5–6 becomes a divine mountain-garden with lapis boulders and gold dust. In this plane, vv. 7–8 become more than a listing of the quintessential creatures of the wild. The juxtaposition of the bird of prey, serpent, and lion animates a terrifying composite guardian of that divine realm, just as *Mischwesen* like scorpion-men and lion-eagles guarded the path through the mountains on the epic journeys of Gilgamesh and his father, Lugalbanda. The bird of prey, serpent, and lion, are, in fact, precisely those animals combined in Marduk's *mušḫuššu*: the three "lions" of the dust, sky, and steppe. The phonology of vv. 8–9a likely impacts this semantic shift, as the repetition of *šîn*, *ḥêt*, and *lāmed* and the emphatic *ṣādê* conjure up a "lion" that hisses and spits: לֹא־הִדְרִיכֻהוּ בְנֵי־שָׁחַץ / לֹא־עָדָה עָלָיו שָׁחַל / בַּחֲלָמִישׁ שָׁלַח יָדוֹ. Neriglissar similarly described the *mušḫuššu* in VAB 4 i 26–27 as a beast "who spatter[s] enemy and foe with deadly venom."[117]

VI. Conclusions

The foregoing investigation of philological, iconographic, and literary evidence surrounding lions and serpents in the Hebrew Bible and the ancient Near East suggests that these animals were not viewed in Linnean categories. The case of שחל demonstrates the difficulty of analytic definition for such animal terms and the necessity of considering indigenous classification, which grouped them accord-

[116] Reading מַבְּכֵי נְהָרוֹת for MT's מִבְּכִי נְהָרוֹת. See ibid., 167–69.

[117] The transcription is from Stephen Langdon, *Die neubabylonischen Königsinschriften* (trans. Rudolf Zehnpfund; VAB 4; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1912), 210–11; the translation is that of Lambert, "History of the muš-ḫuš," 87. From the opposite angle, note also the description of a serpent that roars (*ramāmu*) in *CT* 388 (= VAT 10180^{b}), line 12: *ina lumun* MUŠ *ša ina* É *kīma* UR-MAḪ *ir-mu-mu* (my transcription; see also Lewis, "*CT* 13.33–34 and Ezekiel 32," 34).

ing to function[118] and even created analogies between those that symbolized similar salient characteristics.

Though the best gloss for שׁחל in Job 28:8b is probably "lion," as elsewhere in the book of Job, this "lion" may well be analogous to what Sîn-liqe-unninni called the "lion of the earth." Like other Semitic terms, it seems likely that שׁחל could be used for either "lions" or "serpents" and, by extension, could connote both. Serpentine connotations are especially strong in the larger poetic context of Job 28, where the clustering of the שׁחל, the birds of prey, and the בני־שׁחץ in vv. 7–8, as well as the phonology of vv. 8–9a, suggest the presence of a terrifying dragon that guards the path to a wondrous world of riches and wisdom.

Despite the shortcomings of Mowinckel's essay, his key contribution was attempting to account for nonscientific zoology in philological analysis. His recourse to Scandinavian lore, in fact, offered a helpful analogy to an ancient Near Eastern worldview that often did not make sharp distinctions between what moderns would call the "realistic" and the "fabulous." Following his lead, studies of the fauna of ancient Israel and its neighbors must take seriously the complexities presented by indigenous perceptions and resist imposing reductive zoological conceptions onto ancient terms.[119]

[118] On the lexicographical series ḪAR-ra *ḫubullu,* see Benjamin R. Foster, "Animals in Mesopotamian Literature," in Collins, *History of the Animal World in the Ancient Near East,* 272–73; and Wapnish, "Conceptual Basis for Animal Categories," 241–44.

[119] See now the relevant study of Bernd Roling, *Drachen und Sirenen: Die Rationalisierung und Abwicklung der Mythologie an den europäischen Universitäten* (Mittellateinische Studien und Texte 42; Leiden: Brill, 2010).

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