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**“The Aegean Ogygos of Boeotia and the Biblical Og of Bashan:
Reflections of the Same Myth.”**

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The Aegean Ogygos of Boeotia and the Biblical Og of Bashan: Reflections of the Same Myth¹

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Myth knows no boundaries. It is exchanged among cultures as quickly as merchandise and as fluidly as the movements of peoples. This is especially true of numerous ancient Near Eastern myths which often appear in Grecian guise in Hellenistic writings.² Indeed, as M. L. West asserts: »Greece is part of Asia; Greek literature is Near Eastern literature«. ³ Though an awareness of the cultural process of exchange has led a number of scholars to search for shared aspects of Aegean and Semitic mythology as reflected in their respective literatures, it is clear that much yet lies undiscovered.

In most cases, connections between Aegean and Semitic mythology are difficult, if not impossible, to prove. However, this does not make the search for shared mythology an unworthy enterprise. As W. Burkert notes:

»My emphasis is deliberately on providing evidence for correspondences and for the likelihood of borrowings. If in certain cases the materials themselves do not provide

¹ I would like to thank Profs. Saul Levin of the State University of New York at Binghamton and John Pairman Brown at Berkeley, California, for their helpful comments on this paper.

² In particular, see already, Robert Brown, *Semitic Influence in Hellenic Mythology*, 1898; but also Michael Astour, *Hellenosemitica: An Ethnic and Cultural Study in West Semitic Impact on Mycenaean Greece*, 1967; C. H. Gordon, *Homer and the Bible: The Origin and Character of East Mediterranean Literature*, HUCA 26 (1955), 43–108. Reprinted as a monograph (Ventor, 1967); John Pairman Brown, *The Mediterranean Seer and Shamanism*, ZAW 93 (1981), 374–400; *Men of the Land and the God of Justice in Greece and Israel*, ZAW 95 (1983), 376–402; *The Ark of the Covenant and the Temple of Janus*, BZ 30 (1986–87), 20–35; *From Divine Kingship to Dispersal of Power in the Mediterranean City-State*, ZAW 105 (1993), 62–86; R. Mondi, *Greek and Near Eastern Mythology*, in: *Approaches to Greek Myth*, ed. L. Edmunds, 1990, 140–198; Walter Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution: Near Eastern Influence on Greek Culture in the Early Archaic Age*, 1992; and M. Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, Vol. 1: *The Fabrication of Ancient Greece, 1785–1985*, 1987.

³ M. L. West, *Hesiod: Theogony* (1966), 31.

incontrovertible evidence of cultural transfer, the establishment of similarities will still be of value, as it serves to free both the Greek and the oriental phenomena from their isolation and to create an arena of possible comparisons.«⁴

Moreover, if we are to proceed with comparisons we must possess a clear definition of what is meant by »myth«. In this study I will employ the definition of »myth« proposed by R. Mondi who views myths not merely as narratives, but as conceptual foci expressed in literature.⁵ For example, the names of gods are conceptual foci to which the ancients attached certain functions, themes, and relationships with other gods. The mention of a divine name, therefore, conjures in the mind of the hearer a litany of information and associations. This definition of »myth« also accounts for local divergencies in otherwise similar mythic traditions. As J. Waardenburg observes:

»mythic elements derive their force precisely from the fact that they suggest rather than explain, and that they constitute cores of meaning without having been put together in any definite pattern. They function as foundation stones for certain basic assumptions in the life of a community or a person.«⁶

For this reason, a comparison of Aegean with Near Eastern myth requires that we keep a holistic eye open to similar ideas and motifs expressed in the mythic accounts. R. Mondi remarks:

»If it is to contribute anything toward the understanding of Greek myth, the ultimate goal of comparative study should be synthetic rather than analytic. Its task ought not to be the dismemberment of the corpus of contaminants, but rather should lie in the opposite process of placing Greek mythology – in its entirety – in a larger mythology of shared themes and concepts.«⁷

It is with these caveats and goals in mind, therefore, that I will examine a possible link between the Aegean myth of the heroic deluge survivor and legendary founder of Boeotia, Ogygos, and the biblical king Og of Bashan.

The Aegean hero Ogygos is known to us only in part through the works of Aeschylus, Hesiod, Empedocles, Pindar, Sophocles, and Heliodorus⁸, and has been connected by some scholars with Noah, Utnapishtim, and Deucalion.⁹ Yet, despite some affinities with these characters, no sure equation has been made.

⁴ Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution*, 8.

⁵ Mondi, *Greek and Near Eastern Mythology*, 141–198.

⁶ J. Waardenburg, *Symbolic Aspects of Myth*, in: *Myth, Symbol, and Reality*, ed. A. M. Olson, 1980, 55.

⁷ Mondi, *Greek and Near Eastern Mythology*, 144.

⁸ Aeschylus, *Septem Contra Thebas* 3.21; *Persae* 37; Hesiod, *Theogony*, 806; Empedocles, 84.7; Pindar, *Nemean*, 6.44; Sophocles, *Philoctetes*, 142; and Heliodorus, *Scrip-tor Eroticus*, 10.35, etc.

⁹ See, e. g., Astour, *Hellenosemitica*, 212.

Etymological Connections

One reason to connect Ogygos of Boeotia and Og of Bashan is the philological similarity between their names, a similarity which J. Fontenrose parenthetically noted almost forty years ago without further comment.¹⁰ Efforts to find an etymology for the Greek Ogygos have been, for the most part, unsuccessful. The ancient mythographer Pherekydes of Syros (c. 544 B. C. E.), linked the name Ogygos to Ogygia and Okeanos (Ὠκεανός [in Pherekydes as Ὠγηνός]) – »the ocean or edge of the world«. ¹¹ Moderns, on the otherhand, suggest Semitic and Afroasiatic etymologies deriving Ogygos from the Semitic root עוג – »draw a circle« or from the Late Egyptian wꜥ3, a »type of water or flood«. ¹² According to E. Meyer, the Greek name's connection to water relates to the flooding of nearby Lake Kopias.¹³ This would fit the schema presented by J. Fontenrose who, in the footsteps of Pherekydes, sees Ogygos as »originally not the flood survivor, but the flood itself«. ¹⁴ M. Astour, with other aspects of the Ogygos myth in mind (to be discussed below), suggests that we derive the name from the Semitic root עגג – »burn«. ¹⁵ Each of the etymologies is compelling. Afterall, Greek names with Semitic origins are not unknown (e. g., Ἰαπετός = יַפֶּת׳ [Japeth], Καδμείωνες = קַדְמוֹנִי [Qadmonites], etc.). ¹⁶

The biblical Og (עוג), on the other hand, recorded in the LXX as (Ὠγ), commonly is derived from the Semitic root suggested above, עוג – »draw a circle«. ¹⁷ However, the root does not occur in biblical Hebrew with this connotation. Aside from the personal name in question, the root appears only in connection with bread cakes and bak-

¹⁰ To my knowledge, Joseph Fontenrose (*Python: A Study of Delphic Myth and Its Origins*, 1959, 237 n. 27) is the only scholar to suggest a connection between the names Ogygos and Og, though only briefly in a note and without additional supporting evidence. Cf. M. R. James, *The Lost Apocrypha of the Old Testament: Their Titles and Fragments*, 1920, 40–42.

¹¹ Fontenrose, *Python*, 238; Hermann S. Schibli, *Pherekydes of Syros*, 1990, p. 14 n. 2. The Greek may derive ultimately from Mesopotamia. Prof. David Owen of Cornell University informs me that M. Astour also suggested deriving Okeanos from the Sumerian A.KI.AN.A(K) »the water of Heaven and Earth«.

¹² Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Culture* vol. II: The Archaeological and Documentary Evidence, 1991, 83–85. Bernal's proposal is problematic in that does not explain the presence of an *ayin* in the Hebrew. In any event, Bernal accepts my arguments for connecting Ogygos and Og. See 84 n. 36.

¹³ Eduard Meyer, *Geschichte des Altertums*, vol. II, 1884, 194. See also, Fontenrose, *Python*, 237.

¹⁴ Fontenrose, *Python*, 237.

¹⁵ Astour, *Hellenosemitica*, 212.

¹⁶ See, e. g., Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution*, 1–2.

¹⁷ This would connect with the Ὠκεανός which »circles« the earth.

ing.¹⁸ Thus, C. Rabin derives the name Og from the South Semitic root *gwg* »man«, which he also relates semantically to the roots, *גגג* »babble, slang« and *לעל* »mock, deride«.¹⁹ As with the Greek Ogygos, multiple etymologies also are possible for the Hebrew Og, and perhaps probable. Indeed, given the high frequency of puns and etiological word plays in antiquity, there may exist more than one popular etymology and though we cannot be certain as to which of those postulated lurks behind the Greek and Hebrew names, the similarity in sound between them suggests that we are dealing with the same figure.²⁰

Primordial Flood Survivors

However, where etymology fails to elucidate, textual tradition does not, and it is here where Ogygos' role as the survivor of the primal flood comes into play. Og of Bashan is recorded in the Bible as having been the last of the Rephaim, the denizens of the underworld (Jos 12,4). In talmudic and midrashic tradition, however, Og of Bashan is recorded as having survived the deluge by sitting on top of Noah's ark!²¹ Whether the Aegean and biblical floods are the same, of course, is impossible to know, but that both names identify giants who survive primal massive inundations is compelling.

The Pejorative Link

The link between Ogygos and Og is strengthened further by derogatory references to the legendary giants. In Ps 135,11 Og is grouped with other despised peoples and labeled as one of the »royalty of the Canaanites«. Accordingly, wherever he appears in the Bible, we are informed that he was »wiped out« along with other unworthies.²² Dtn 3,11, for example, calls him the last remnant of the *רפאים* »Rephaim«,

¹⁸ Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 1951, 728.

¹⁹ Chaim Rabin, »Og«, *EI* 8 (1967), 251–254 (Hebrew).

²⁰ Especially if we keep in mind that Pherekydes' puts Okeanos in its archaic form 'Ωγηνός, which is closer to the Hebrew. On the archaic nature of this orthography, see, Schibli, *Pherekydes of Syros*, 14 n. 2.

²¹ Midrash Bereshith Rabbah 31,13; Bavli Sanhedrin 108b; Targum Pseudo-Jonathan Dtn 2,11; 3,10; Yalkut Reubeni on Gen 7,22; and Zebahim 113b. Ogy in *ספר הישר*, Noah 27a – so in *editio princeps*, but in later traditions it was corrupted to 'Unni. Astour, *Hellenosemitica*, 158 n. 2.

²² One also might compare the reference in Dtn 3,11 to his gigantic bed, which when seen in the light of his eventual demise, appears as buffoonery. Other polemical aspects also may lie behind this passage. See, e. g., Ulrich Hübner, *Og von Baschan und sein Bett in Rabbat-Ammon (Deuteronomium 3,11)*, *ZAW* 105 (1993), 86–92.

who elsewhere are equated with זמזמנים »Zamzummim« (lit. »babblers«) (Dtn 2,20–21).²³ Moreover, if we accept C. Rabin's observation that the etymology for Og relates to the roots, עגה »babble, slang« and לעג »mock, deride«²⁴, the pejorative aspect of the mythical giant is clear.

Such references are mirrored in the Greek myth of Ogygos where his mother, Γαῖα »earth«, similarly is debased. Further, Γαῖα is linked to the destructive forces represented by the giants through her aspect of »Γαῖα πελώρη«. As R. Lamberton notes:

»Gaia pelore then is not simply big, not simply huge – she is monstrous, and the repeated, strident, pejorative epithet is as strongly determinative of our response to Gaia as the similarly insistent »big fool« [mega nepie] is of our response to Hesiod's brother. Moreover, it has long been noticed that the pelore group of epithets bind together Mother earth and her huge unruly offspring, the giants.«²⁵

Enemies of the Divine

The pejorative references to both Ogygos and Og stem undoubtedly from the fact that both are regarded as enemies of the chief gods, Zeus and Yahweh, respectively. Regarding the latter, we may note that according to Num 21,14 the battles against Og and Sihon were significant enough to be incorporated into a now lost »Book of the Wars of Yahweh«. Yet, the line connecting the two figures runs deeper. In the *Odyssey*, Zeus banishes the king of the giants, Eurymedon, to Tartaros (the underworld) for sexually violating his wife and sister, the beautiful daughter of Cronus and Rhea, Hera.²⁶ As a result, Hera bears Prometheus, a hero and deity of fire. In Gen 6,1–4, the semi-divine and colossal נפילים »Nephilim« (LXX has γίγαντες), who are identified in Num 13,33 with the ענקים »Anaqim«, gigantic denizens of the underworld, create an act of unprecedented hubris by impregnating the daughters of mortals. Gen 6,4 tells us that their offspring become גברים אשר מעולם אנשי הושיע »the heroes of old, the men of renown«. Like the violation of Hera, this act brings punishment, though instead of banishment, God brings upon the earth the great deluge. Thus, in both the Greek and biblical accounts, gigantic semi-divine beings who have connections with the underworld are punished from on high for sexual acts which result in the births of mighty heroes.²⁷ Such a string of connections, I would posit, is evidence of shared myth.

²³ See Rabin, *Og*, 253.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 251–254.

²⁵ Robert Lamberton, *Hesiod* (1988), 72–73. The emphasis is my own.

²⁶ *Odyssey*, 7.58–60.

²⁷ For a Mesopotamian counterpart to this tale, see Anne Draffkorn Kilmer, *The Mesopotamian Counterparts of the Biblical Nephilim*, in: *Perspectives on Language and Text*, eds. Edgar Conrad and Edward Newsing, 1987, 39–43.

Underworld Connections

There is another parallel between Ogygos of Boeotia and Og of Bashan, namely their associations with death and the underworld. Hesiod tells us that the gigantic enemies of Zeus are banished to Tartaros²⁸, which lay beneath the sea and the earth.²⁹ Homer describes Tartaros as the darkest depths of the house of Hades, the kingdom of the dead.³⁰ These and similar textual references compel J. Fontenrose to remark that »sea and death belong to the myth [of Ogygos] from the beginning«. ³¹

Interestingly, a Phoenician inscription at Byblos threatens to invoke the Semitic Og as a dead spirit to pursue grave robbers: [ע]לח ארן זן ... ולרגו עצמי העג יתבקשן האדר ... [for open]ing this sarcophagus and for troubling my bones, the Og will search out for me, the mighty ... «³² A neo-Punic-Latin bilingual tomb inscription (KAI 117) also makes supplication to לעל[נ]א רפאם »the divine Rephaim«. Not only does the name Og appear in a list of names found at Ugarit³³, but there is also reference to a *Rpu* who was King of Eternity and who, like Og of Bashan, lived in Ashteroth and Edrei.³⁴ We may add to this the mention of Og's bed in Dtn 3,11 which is, according to J. Starcky »sans doute un dolmen«. ³⁵ Perhaps we also should add to this the possibility of reading the description of Sihon's city (עיר מתיים) in Dtn 3,6 as »city of the dead«. ³⁶ Should we also see significance in the fact that just prior to engaging Og and Sihon in battle (Num 21,10), the Israelites first camped in אבחה »'Oboth«,

²⁸ Theogony, 718 ff.868.

²⁹ Theogony, 727 ff.; Erga, 19.

³⁰ Iliad, 8.15; 8.554.

³¹ Fontenrose, Python, 238.

³² Jean Starcky, Une inscription Phénicienne de Byblos, MUSJ 45 (1969), 260–273.

³³ For a recent comparison between the Ugaritic and biblical Rephaim, see Oswald Loretz, »Ugaritic and Biblical Literature: Das Paradigma des Mythos von den *rpum-Rephaim*, in: Ugarit and the Bible: Proceedings of the International Symposium on Ugarit and the Bible. Manchester, September 1992, ed. George J. Brooke, 1994, 175–224.

³⁴ See Marvin Pope, The Cult of the Dead at Ugarit, in: Ugarit in Retrospect: Fifty Years of Ugarit and Ugaritic, ed. Gordon D. Young, 1981, 171–173; Karl Spronk, Beatific Afterlife in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East, AOAT 219, 1986, 208–211.

³⁵ Starcky, Une inscription Phénicienne de Byblos, 266. On the historicity of this bed, see A. R. Millard, King Og's Bed and Other Ancient Ironmongery, in: Ascribe to the Lord: Biblical and Other Studies in Memory of Peter C. Craigie, ed. L. Eslinger, JSOTS 67, 1988, 481–492.

³⁶ Typically, the word מתיים is understood as »men« on the basis of הנשים והטף »the women and children« which follow, but note that we would expect in this case to find a definite article also on מתיים. Moreover, just a few verses later (Deut 3,19) we find »women and children« mentioned without מתיים, or אנשים for that matter. Note that the LXX and Vulgate read only »women and children« in Deut 3,6.

a name connected with ghosts and necromancy, and then in עיי עבריים 'Iye-ʿAbarim (lit. »ruins of those passed away«)?³⁷ These issues aside, it is clear that there was a figure Og who was intimately tied to the netherworld and who was the object of popular veneration in the Levant.³⁸ Thus, Og's connection with tomb inscriptions and the Rephaim, the deceased wanderers of the underworld,³⁹ is highly suggestive.

Military Associations

Moreover, the Ugarit *rpum* »Rephaim« have ostensible military connections. Not only is one of their kind referred to as a *mhr*, the Ugaritic word for »soldier«, but the Rephaim appear riding in chariots.⁴⁰ The Aegean Ogygos and biblical Og similarly are connected with military exploits; king Ogygos via his battle with Zeus, and Og via his battle with Moses. The offspring of the gigantic Nephilim (= רפאים) also are said to be »heroes (גברים) and men of renown« (Gen 6,4). Compare Ez 32,27 which mentions a class of warriors who await Pharaoh in Sheol: גברים נפלים מעולם »the heroes, the fallen ones of old«.⁴¹

Cosmic Battles

Moreover, according to Hellenistic sources, Zeus' battle against Ogygos' ally Typhoeus, to whom we shall return, was accompanied by theophanic wonders; a quaking earth and underworld, a blackened and rumbling sky, fires, and a seething sea.⁴² While we do not find all of these elements in the biblical account of the war against Og, we do hear of a few of them. For example, Rahab tells Joshua's spies that because of the battles with Og and Sihon, the terror of the Israelites quakes the land (Jos 2,9).⁴³ In Num 21,28–30 the bard's pen thrice describes Si-

³⁷ See, e.g., HALAT I, 19–20, s.v. אַבָּרִים², »ghosts, necromancy«. For a detailed survey demonstrating the importance of the meaning of biblical place names in the narratives which contain them, see Moshe Garsiel, *Biblical names: A Literary Study of the Mid-rashic Derivations and Puns*, 1987. Note also that the narrative follows on the heels of Aaron's death on Mt. Hor (Num 20,26–28).

³⁸ See, e.g., Johannes de Moor, *Ugarit and the origin of Job*, in: *Ugarit and the Bible*, 1994, 244–245.

³⁹ Jes 14,9; 26,14; Ps 88,11; Prov 2,18; 9,18; 21,16.

⁴⁰ Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook*, 124,8; 121:II,4. Perhaps, this explains why Homer's Eury-medon, king of the giants in the *Odyssey*, 7.58, is cast as Agamemnon's charioteer in the *Iliad*, 4.261.

⁴¹ Reading with the LXX: ἀπο'αἰῶνος. Note also that the LXX reads גברים as γιγάντων.

⁴² Fontenrose, *Python*, 239.

⁴³ The Hebrew root used here (בָּרַג) means »dissolve or inundate with water« (cf. Ps 65,11; Am 9,13) as does its Arabic cognate *ma'aja* which usually occurs in reference to the »surging« of the sea (cf. Qur'an 18,99).

hon's destruction of Moab as a conflagration which Yahweh has extinguished (נִירָם אֲכַבֵּד, lit. »their fire has perished« [21,30]).⁴⁴ Perhaps we also should translate סִיפָה in the lost Book of the Wars of Yahweh (Num 21,14), mentioned above, not as a place name, but as the well-attested noun »tempest«, i. e., »Waheb by storm, and the wadis, (in) Arnon«. The lament in Ezekiel 32, mentioned above in connection with the גִּבּוֹרִים »mighty warriors« who have fallen to Sheol, opens with a comparison of the Pharaoh to the Sea monster (32,2) and describes his doom as the blackening of the sun and stars (32,7–8).

The Leviathan and the Ban on Mount Hermon

Dtn 3,8–9 informs us that the Og's territory included Mount Hermon, which the Sidonians called Sirion, and the Amorites, Senir. Jdc 3,3 and I Chr 5,23 tell that Baal of Hermon was worshipped there. In the Roman period, both Zeus and the marine deity Leokothea (also named Ino), daughter of Kadmos and aunt of Dionysus, were venerated on the mount.⁴⁵ Og's link to this sacred mountain, therefore, is particularly interesting. It also might explain a problem which has long puzzled scholars. At least two Aramaic incantation bowls sum up their spells by threatening to bring down upon the accursed »the ban (חֲרָם), the prohibition and the anathema which came down upon Mount Hermon and upon the Leviathan the sea-monster and upon Sodom and Gomorrah«. ⁴⁶ In his exhaustive study of the Aramaic fragments of the Books of Enoch found at Qumran J. T. Milik remarks that whereas

»The curse of Leviathan and the Sea ... and also that of Sodom and Gomorrah, have a good Biblical ring about them ... The curse of Mount Hermon, on the other hand has no Biblical parallel ...«⁴⁷

Thus, Milik identifies this section as a quotation from the Book of the Giants. Though Milik's identification of this fragment is undoubtedly correct and apropos for what is about to be said, the curse on Mount Hermon does have a biblical precedent in the account of Og's defeat. Not only is Og associated with Mount Hermon but in Dtn 3,6–7 Og's demise is explicitly labelled a »ban« (חֲרָם), i. e., the identical term found in the Aramaic incantation texts.⁴⁸ This would explain why the giants are equated with Mount Hermon also in I Enoch 6,1–6.

⁴⁴ Contra, Paul D. Hansen, *The Song of Heshbon and David's Nîr*, HTR 61 (1968), 297–320.

⁴⁵ E. Lipinski, *Dictionnaire de la Civilisation Phénicienne et Punique*, 1992, 216.

⁴⁶ See, Charles D. Isbell, *Corpus of Aramaic Incantation Bowls*, SBLDS 17, 1975, 20,29–30.

⁴⁷ J. T. Milik, *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of Qumrân Cave 4*, 1976, 336.

⁴⁸ Note the wordplay »ban« חֲרָם and »Hermon« חֲרָמוֹן.

Moreover, if we see in these magical texts a reference to the traditions involving the giants Og and Sihon, then the mention of the Leviathan and the Sea in those same texts is noteworthy. The name of the Leviathan, אֲחִיָּה »Ahiyah«, is preserved in later Manichaean tradition as the gigantic enemy of none other than the archangel *Rapha-El* (more on this figure below).⁴⁹ Even more remarkable is the fact that in the Babylonian talmudic tractate Niddah 61a אֲחִיָּה is identified as the father of Og and Sihon! Thus, traditions regarding the giant Og seem to have involved also the Sea and the Leviathan (cf. the Roman veneration of Leokothea on Mount Hermon and Ezekiel 32).

The Link to Fire

Further, both Ogygos and Og appear traditionally linked to fire. We already have mentioned the god of fire Prometheus, the child of Hera's illicit union with giant Eurymedon which brought about the banishment of the Titans. In addition, the wife of Ogygos' companion Deucalion was named Πύρρα »fiery«. This, Astour asserts, is akin to the Egyptian story of the Shipwrecked Sailor, wherein the only survivor of the ship's crew

»landed on an island belonging to a serpent who threatened to reduce him into ashes and told him that all his family had been consumed by a fire that fell from heaven.«⁵⁰

The motif of flood alongside the serpent's island, which Astour avers »may be called »Island of Fire«, is similar to the accounts of both Odysseus, who survived a shipwreck by making way to the island Ogygia, and to Danae and Perseus, who were cast into the sea in a chest and who landed on the island of Seriphos (Heb שֶׁרִפָּי – both »serpent« and »blaze«). Thus, Astour concludes that the name of the rescue-island Ogygia and of the hero Ogygos should be derived from the Semitic root עָגַג – »burn, flame«.⁵¹ Moreover, the battle between Herakles and the giants takes place at Phlegra »Burning Lands«.

Talmudic tradition confirms the connection to fire, not only with Noah, but with Og of Bashan. Apparently, the torrents of the primal flood withstood by Og were mingled with fire, hot to the point of scalding. Had it not been for Og's incredible strength, he too would have been consumed.⁵² A link to fire also can be found in the Tractate Sanhedrin 108b:

⁴⁹ Milik, *The Books of Enoch*, 299.

⁵⁰ Astour, *Hellenosemitica*, 212.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Zebahim 113b; Sanhedrin 108b; Rosh ha-Shanah 12a; Yerushalmi Sanhedrin 10; 29b; Koh 9,4; Yelammedenu in Yalkut 11, 508 on Jes 64,1.

»... Noah rebuked them and spoke words to them that were hard as fiery flints, they derided them. They said to him ›Old man, what is this ark for?‹ He replied, ›The Holy One, blessed be He, will bring a flood upon you!‹ ›A flood of what, they jeered?‹ ›If a flood of fire, we have Alitha.‹⁵³

We also may parallel Og's mighty strength with the Greek myth of the giants whom the gods were unable to kill without mortal help.

ענקים: Necklaces and Giants

Another link between the two myths concerns the Egyptian city of Thebes which is known to have housed the cult of Anukis. M. Bernal relates Anukis to the Semitic root (ענק) meaning »necklace«, due to the goddess' association with jewelry and necklaces.⁵⁴ If Bernal is correct, this would parallel the geographical description of the Boeotian Thebes as a necklace and the etymology of Harmonia, Kadmos' queen, which means »striking together«. ⁵⁵ However, ancient commentators, like Rashi, use the root ענק with a another meaning which is more apposite here, »giants«. It is probably no coincidence, therefore, that the word ענק appears in reference to the Rephaim, like Og, who lived before the primal flood.⁵⁶

Furthermore, E. Maclaurin notes that the principle strongholds of the biblical Anaqim (ענקים) are later known as Philistine cities (Jos 14,12), suggesting that the word may be related to the Greek ἀναξ.⁵⁷ Ἀναξ has four meanings, of which the first two agree nicely with what has been said thus far: »the gods«, »Homeric heroes«, »the master of the house«, and »ship master«. He also notes that the adjective ἀναξίαλος »Lord of the Sea« occurs as an epithet of Poseidon, Zeus, Demeter, and Urania.

Such Aegean connections lead Maclaurin to add that the three tribes of the Anaqim given in the Bible, Sheshai, Talmi, and Achiman, may be related to the Aegean names Washasha, Telemachus, and the Achaeans, respectively.⁵⁸

Fertility, Snakes, and Cows: Bashan and Boeotia's Etymological Associations

The link between the characters' respective abodes, Boeotia and Bashan, is equally interesting. The biblical Bashan commonly has been

⁵³ The Alitha is a fire extinguishing demon, the Pyralis. See L. Lewysohn, *Die Zoologie des Talmuds*, 1858, 351.

⁵⁴ Bernal, *Black Athena*, vol. II, 102.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 103. Interestingly, another Greek myth relates how Kadmos and Harmonia turn into snakes and go to live in the Hesperides. See, e. g., Astour, *Hellenosemitica*, 160.

⁵⁶ Rashi on Gen 1,4.

⁵⁷ E. C. B. Maclaurin, *Anak'/Αναξ*, VT 15 (1965), 468–474, esp. 468 n. 4, but in most Greek dialects: Ἄναξ.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* For the biblical names, see, Jos 15,14; Jdc 1,20; Num 13,22.

associated with the Arabic root *bṭn* meaning »soft and fertile ground«; the proto-Semitic /*t*/ being represented in the Hebrew text by the letter [š]. This fits well with what is known of Boeotia. Its irrigation and marsh drainage system provided its inhabitants with an ever abundant yield of crops. As Diodorus Siculus records:

»... the Cephissus, flowing through Boeotia from [the land of] the Phoceans, has deposited quite a lot of soil.«⁵⁹

Furthermore, Boeotia was home to popular fertility cults where snakes and cows figured as primary symbols. Curiously, the giants referred to in Greek myth often appear with serpents attached to their legs or feet. This brings us to another possible etymology for the toponym as provided by the Ugaritic *bṭn*, meaning »snake«.⁶⁰ The connection between snakes and fertility/healing was intimate in the ancient Mediterranean world. See, for example, Mercury's well-known caduceus, which has become emblematic for the medical profession. Moreover, the connection between the Rephaim (lit. »Healers«)⁶¹ and snakes finds support in Ugaritic references to *Rpu-B'l*, whose parallel name Labbu is equated with the Babylonian dragon Labbu and its constellation, the Serpent (i. e., Hydra).⁶² The constellation ^{MUL}MUŠ also represented the chthonic healer-god Ningiszida.⁶³ Thus, C. Virolleaud connects *Rpu-B'l* with the healer Repha'El (Raphael) in Jewish angelology, whose symbol is also a serpent.⁶⁴ Further, as Astour points out:

»The feminine form of MŠ = MUŠ »serpent« also figures in the names of two mythical heroines: Mṭt-Dnty, the wife of Danel, and Mṭt-Hry, the wife of Kret.«⁶⁵

The Ugaritic hero Danel also is called a *mt rpi* »man of Rapha« (»Healing«). Kret as well, is associated with healers:

»Greatly exalted be Kret
Among the Rephaim of earth
In the assembly of the mighty.«⁶⁶ [15 (128) 3.3, 14]

⁵⁹ Bibliotheca Historica, I:39.13.

⁶⁰ C. H. Gordon, Ugaritic Textbook (1965). See texts 49:VI,19; 67:1,1; 1 Aqht 223; 2 Aqht VI,14; 'nt III,38. For m. pl. of *bṭn*, *bṭnm*, see 1001:6, rev 5; for f. pl. *bṭnt*, see 1001, rev 5.

⁶¹ Note that the LXX translates the Hebrew רִפְיִים »Rephaim« with γίγαντες »giants«.

⁶² Should we also connect this with the Greek constellation δράκων, lit. »serpent«? See, e. g., Aratus, Epicus, 46, and Manetho, Astrologus, 2.69.

⁶³ Astour, Hellenosemitica, 236–239.

⁶⁴ C. Virolleaud, La légende phénicienne de Danel: Texte cunéiforme alphabétique avec transcription et commentaire, précédé d'une introduction à l'étude de la civilisation d'Ugarit, 1936, 88 n. 1.

⁶⁵ Astour, Hellenosemitica, 224.

⁶⁶ The word *dtu* should be read with the Akkadian *datnu* which appears in the Amarna letters (EA 143:40) and is equated in an Akkadian lexical text with *qarrādu* »hero, warrior«. See, CAD D, 102, s. v. *datnu*.

We may add to the above a biblical reference to the tribe of Dan whose territory bordered on the area of Bashan. It is difficult not to see a play on the secondary meaning of the root *bṯn* »snake«.

»Dan is a lion's whelp,
It gusheth forth from Bashan« (Dtn 33,22).⁶⁷

Thus, the close relationship between snakes, fertility, and the Rephaim suggests an amalgam of religious imagery and shared myth.

There are additional parallels. The region of Boeotia was famed for its cattle.⁶⁸ In fact, the very name Boeotia (Βοιωτία) derives from the words »cattle-pasture«. ⁶⁹ Interestingly, the Hebrew Bashan frequently occurs in reference to bulls and cows. Take for instance the words of the prophet Amos: »Hear this word, you cows of Bashan« (4,1)! Ezekiel makes a similar reference:

»Ye shall eat the flesh of the mighty
and drink the blood of the princes of the earth
of rams, of lambs, and of goats,
of bullocks, all of them fatlings of Bashan« (39,18).

See also the words of the Psalter:

»Many bulls have compassed me,
Strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round about« (22,12).

Moreover, it is important to note that in the citations above the fattened animals are likened to powerful rulers in a pejorative manner. We have mentioned such insults in connection with the Ogygos and Og. Suffice it to add here that the term Βοιωτία »Boeotian« can appear in Greek as a synonym for »dull« or »stupid«. ⁷⁰ The prophet Amos likewise uses Bashan in his rebuke of the haughty and over-indulgent women of Samaria (4,1): »Hear this word, you cows of Bashan!« Compare this with Eubulus' use of Βοιώτιος »Boeotian« in reference to gluttony.⁷¹

The Sea

We already have mentioned the possible etymological connection of Og with Okeanos and אנקימ »Anaqim« with Ἄναξ (used in Poseidon's epithet), as well as Mount Hermon's association with the Leviathan.

⁶⁷ See Stanley Gevirtz, Adumbrations of Dan in Jacob's Blessing on Judah, ZAW 93 (1981), 30. Cf. Gen 49,17 »Dan shall be a serpent in the way, an horned snake in the path«.

⁶⁸ Bernal, Black Athena, vol. II, 84.

⁶⁹ H. G. Liddel, R. Scott, and H. S. Jones, A Greek-English Lexicon, 1925–40, 321.

⁷⁰ See, e. g., Plutarch, Proverbia, 2.995e.

⁷¹ Comicus, 34, 39.

Interestingly, the Bible also connects Bashan with the sea. Marvin Pope observes:

»Bashan is the mighty mountain which God//Yahweh coveted for his eternal abode (Psalm 68:16), and in verses 21–23 of the same Psalm it is said that God will shatter the heads of Israel's enemies and bring them back from the depths of the Sea so that Israel may plunge feet in the blood of their enemies and their dogs' tongues will partake of the same ... The collocation of Bashan and the depths of the Sea suggests that Bashan has cosmic, chthonic connections.«⁷²

Psalm 135 is particularly interesting in this regard for it prefaces the mention of the Sihon and Og battles with a proclamation of Yahweh's power not only over Heaven and Earth, but also over Sea (135,6).

There is of course, no way to reconcile the two locations geographically. Boeotia is in southeastern Greece, north of Attica and the Gulf of Corinth. Bashan is in the northern Trans-Jordan, approximately the area from the Yabbok northward to Hermon, between Gennesaret and the mountains of Hauran.⁷³ The geographical distance between the two locations, however, does not rule out the possibility that the legends have a common source and if J. R. Bartlett is correct in postulating a religious sanctuary at Gilgal as responsible for the preservation and transmission of the Og (and Sihon) tradition, we may posit that the diffusion of the myth stemmed from that locale.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, this must remain speculation.

Conclusion

In sum, the associations between Ogygos of Boeotia and Og of Bashan appear to be far from coincidence. Both are legendary first rulers with similar names and histories, and are connected traditionally with primal floods and the underworld. The places in which they rule also are similar in sound and meaning. Both Bashan and Boeotia were fertile places, and both have associations with cows, fertility, serpents, and the Semitic root ענק – »giant«. It is difficult to say just how these connections may be pieced together, but it seems likely that the accounts have a common origin or that they represent similar myths which conflated. Indeed, with R. Mondì, there is no reason

»to suppose the existence of a single hypothetical protomyth, from which our attested versions have descended. The evidence rather suggests that these various mythic ideas were circulating around the Mediterranean at least as early as the Bronze Age ...«⁷⁵

⁷² Pope, *The Cult of the Dead at Ugarit*, 171.

⁷³ See, e.g., J. R. Bartlett, *Sihon and Og, Kings of the Amorites*, VT 20 (1970), 257–277.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 275.

⁷⁵ R. Mondì, *Greek and Near Eastern Mythology*, 156.

Nevertheless, the similarity between the accounts which concern the two figures is informative.

Just why the biblical writers incorporated the legend of Og into their histories is difficult to say and a kernel of historicity cannot be ruled out⁷⁶, but it is possible that the figures provided a now lost theological dimension. It will be recalled that when Zeus offended Γαῖα by imprisoning the Titans in Tartarus⁷⁷, Γαῖα stirred up her sons, the giants, to make war with the gods. As the giants were immune from death at the hands of the gods, Zeus knew that the gods could not win without the aid of a mortal hero. Thus, he prepared himself by giving a mortal woman a great hero, namely Herakles, as her son.

In the Bible, a mortal hero also was required to rid the land of Og the giant, namely Moses. Moses' defeat of Og, therefore, would not be merely one battle among many en route to Canaan, but would have echoes of cosmic proportions. This would explain the high frequency with which Og appears both in biblical narrative accounts and in the liturgy.⁷⁸ Likewise, Og's association with the underworld suggests that when Moses slayed him, to some extent, he put down the chaotic forces of death.⁷⁹

This would be a fitting follow-up to the parting of the Reed Sea which could represent Yahweh's victory over the forces of Yam (»Sea«). Indeed, Rahab connects the killing of Og and Sihon with the parting of the Reed Sea when describing her fear of the Israelites (Jos 2,10). Elsewhere, we find Moses' annihilation of both Og and Sihon similarly equated with the miraculous events surrounding the exodus (e. g., Dtn 4,47; 29,7; Jos 9,10; Neh 9,22; Ps 135,11; 136,20). Note also Psalm 135, discussed above, which mentions the wars of Og and Sihon just after extolling Yahweh's power of Heaven, Earth, and Sea (135,6).

Evidence of Conflation

That there were multiple traditions concerning Og which underwent some conflation with other Aegean myths can be seen by the manner in which Og meets his demise in talmudic tradition. Here we

⁷⁶ On the historicity of Og see Bartlett, *Sihon and Og, Kings of the Amorites*.

⁷⁷ Note that the LXX translates רֵפַיִם »Rephaim« in I Sam 5,18; 5,22 with Τίτάνων »Titans«.

⁷⁸ Num 21,33; 32,33; Dtn 1,4; 3,1; 3,3; 3,4; 3,10; 3,11; 3,13; 4,47; 29,7; 31,4; Jos 2,10; 9,10; 12,4; 13,12; 13,30–31; I Reg 4,19; Neh 9,22; Ps 135,11; 136,20.

⁷⁹ Compare Celcus' references to the myths about the Titans as μυστήρια which, according to Schibli, Pherekydes of Syros, 80 n. 2, »shows the influence of allegorizing interpreters who read hidden philosophical meanings into the divine battles recounted by the ancients«.

find allusions to Achilles and Atlas as well. Upon discovering that Moses' camp was three parasangs in size, Og says to himself: »I shall now tear up a mountain of three parasangs, and cast it upon them [Israel's camp] and crush them«. After Og lifted the mountain in preparation for his attack, God »sent ants which bored a hole in it [the rock], so that it sank around his neck« (note the reference to a huge necklace here). Unable to shake it off, or to throw it at the Israelites, Og was caught in the predicament of Atlas. When Moses saw this, he took a twelve cubit axe and struck the giant's ankle, killing him (cf. Achilles).⁸⁰

It is, of course, impossible to know how or when these myths were transmitted. As R. Mondì correctly asserts:

»Systems of mythological thought are not the exclusive property of poets. They constitute a basic world view shared by all members of society, and components of such a world view can spread from one cultural area to another in any number of ways.«⁸¹

Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to assume that based on the presence of a Rephaim cult at Ugarit, the Phoenician tomb inscription bearing Og's name, and the known influence of ancient Syrian art on Greek grave scenes⁸², the direction of the transmission appears to be from East to West. If we accept W. Burkert's thesis that the »orientalizing revolution« took place sometime after 800 B. C. E.⁸³, then we have ourselves a *terminus post quem*. The associations which the two legendary figures have with snakes might suggest a later date still.⁸⁴

As for the vehicle of this transmission, it perhaps should be credited to the »migrating ›craftsmen of the sacred‹, itinerant seers and priests of purification« of the ancient Near East, who »transmitted not only their divinatory and purificatory skills but also elements of mythological ›wisdom‹«. ⁸⁵ To be sure, Pherekydes of Syros, from whom we derive much of our information regarding the origins of the Ogygos and Typhoeus myths, is said to have learned it from secret books of the Phoenicians⁸⁶,

⁸⁰ Berakot 54b; Targum Yerushalmi Num 21,35; Midrash Rabbah and Aggada Num 21,35; Niddah 61a.

⁸¹ Mondì, Greek and Near Eastern Mythology, 150.

⁸² See, e. g., G. Ahlberg, A Late Geometric Grave-Scene Influenced by North Syrian Art, *Opuscula Atheniensi* 7 (1967), 177–186.

⁸³ Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution*, 8. Close connections between Ugarit and the Bashan existed at the end of the Late Bronze Age. See, e. g., de Moor, *Ugarit and the origin of Job*, 245.

⁸⁴ J. Fontenrose, *Python*, 242, notes that »before 400 they [*gigantes*] are always represented as wholly human in body«. Nevertheless, an earlier association with snakes must have been in place before this date.

⁸⁵ Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution*, 6.

⁸⁶ For the relevant quotation from the Suda, see Schibli, *Pherekydes of Syros*, 81 n. 3.

though he just as easily could have adduced this from Hesiod.⁸⁷ Pending future discoveries, however, we must refrain from judgement.

Yet, despite our inability to explain how or when these myths were transmitted or conflated, the numerous connections between the two figures suggest that Ogygos of Boeotia and Og of Bashan derived from a single myth or stem from similar mythic ideas in circulation in the ancient Mediterranean world.

The author examines similarities between the legendary Greek hero Ogygos of Boeotia and the biblical giant Og of Bashan. In addition to the etymological connection between the names, the author analyzes the figures' shared textual associations with primordial floods, kingship, gigantism, the underworld, the sea, military prowess, battles with cosmic repercussions, and fire. He also investigates their dwellings, Boeotia and Bashan, for their pejorative nuances and their links to fertility, snakes, and cows. The author asserts that numerous points of contact between the two legends argue in favor of a shared Mediterranean myth, the examination of which, elucidates us as to the theological significance of the Og in the Hebrew Bible.

⁸⁷ Theogony, 304. As suggested by Schibli, *Pherekydes of Syros*, 83–84.