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Historiolae in the Hebrew Bible

Herein I argue that several biblical texts constitute *historiolae*. *Historiolae* are performative texts whose recitation evokes the power of the narrative and its figures into the present situation. Thus, the resolution of the narrative creates an efficacious paradigm for the circumstance that the reciter attempts to resolve.[1] While *historiolae* are familiar to students of Mesopotamian,[2] Egyptian,[3] Hittite,[4] Ugaritic,[5] Aramaic,[6] Graeco-Roman,[7] and rabbinic texts,[8] they have not been discussed in conjunction with the Hebrew Bible, unless later texts cite biblical passages for this purpose.[9] Nevertheless, I contend that we may understand a number of biblical texts as originally functioning as *historiolae*. Indeed, the pervasive performative use of *historiolae* throughout the ancient Near East and Mediterranean worlds over such a long period of time would make their absence in Israelite texts rather surprising.

I divide my study into four sections. In the first, I briefly demonstrate how *historiolae* work by way of a few examples drawn from different times and cultures. This will enable me to point out their salient features and the alternative forms they can take. In the second, I turn to eleven biblical texts that I contend contain *historiolae*. These include performative references to Yahweh's defeat of Leviathan, the miracles at the Reed Sea and in the wilderness, and Yahweh's miraculous victories during the conquest of Canaan. In the third section, I offer some additional observations on a number of shared features, literary and linguistic aspects, and related texts and issues that this study brings to attention. The fourth portion of this essay offers concluding remarks.

1 *Historiolae*

Scholars working in a number of disciplines have studied the way that some performative texts employ mythological traditions whose narrative resolution creates an effica-

1 A comprehensive study of *historiolae* remains a desideratum for each of the cultures listed, except Mesopotamia. See Ceravolo (2022).
2 Sanders (2001); Ceravolo (2022).
3 Sørensen (1984); Meyer and Smith (1994); Satzinger (1994); Bresciani (1998); Rouffet (2012); Graham (2021).
4 Haas (2006); Francia (2013); Bachvarova (2016) 213–217; Casa (2023).
5 Pardee (2002) 167–191; Smith (2022) 233–235.
6 Naveh and Shaked (1985) 111–124; Polzer (1986); Müller-Kessler (1996); (1999); (2017); Bohak (2008) 312–314; Shaked, Ford, and Bhayro (2013) 13–18.
7 Barb (1966); Faraone (1988); Frankfurter (1995); (2009); (2017); Johnston (2014a); (2014b); Zellmann-Rohrer (2016); Sowers (2017); Franek and Urbanová (2019a); (2019b).
8 Swartz (1996) 198–199; Bohak (2011).
9 See Angel (2009); Müller-Kessler (2013); Lanfer (2015); Waller (2022); Molin (2023).

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cious paradigm for the situation at hand.[10] It involves what David Frankfurter has called "'active analogizing'… a form of dynamic storytelling, a bricolage of environment, tradition, and ritual speech" (Frankfurter 1995, 472). Moreover, as Fritz Graf notes, "historiolas should not be understood as abridgments of well-known myths or as *ad hoc* inventions, rather the narrator understands them as proof of an all-embracing order into which he integrates his rite" (Graf 2006).

Often the similarity between the narrative used as a paradigm and the situation that the ritualist intends to address is more asserted than real, as Daniel Waller points out.

> To trace the mechanism of the *historiola* is to trace a peculiar kind of causal reaction. Like any mechanism, it has a logical necessity. It knows the use of '=' but uses it in a peculiar way. It says: this situation is the same as this situation, though in many senses there is no similarity. The difference can be expressed in the distinction we draw between a sound and its echo, which is also one of logical necessity. They are not the same, though there are close similarities, and one is dependent upon the other for its existence. What appears to be concomitance is really a kind of concomitant causal phenomenon. In using the *historiola*, the magical practitioner makes use of a technique that permits a connection between present time and mythical time to exist *now.* And within that concomitant connection *in-the-now,* the cause of the mythical event is allowed to echo its effects in the present (Waller 2015, 272).[11]

For Waller, "*historiolae* which allude to earlier narratives work through the *repetition* of mythical time, while *ad hoc historiolae* work through *participation* in mythical time" (Waller 2015, 271).

To demonstrate Waller's useful distinction by way of examples, I turn first to an Egyptian performative spell written in Demotic from the 3rd c. BCE. The papyrus offers a cure for scorpion stings that the practitioner performs by addressing the patient's wound. It includes the following mythological recitation in which Isis instructs Anubis as follows:

> Lick from your tongue to your heart and vice versa, up to the edges of the wound! Lick to the edges of the wound up to the limits of your strength! What you shall lick, you shall swallow. Do not spit it out on the ground, for your tongue is the tongue of Shay (Fate); your tongue is that of Atum (Ritner 1993, 96).

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10 Alternatively, Sørensen (1984), argues that *historiolae* invoke a deity or deities to take note of the mythological paradigm as a precedent for action and to respond accordingly.

11 Note similarly the observation by Frankfurter (1995) 459, concerning the Philinna papyrus: "(1) the past tense suggests that it describes events in mythic time; (2) in contrast to the Babylonian toothache spell, the Philinna papyrus shows that a *historiola* need not explicitly reflect a well-known mythological discourse like a cosmogony; (3) the lack of explicit application, in the Philinna spell, to a 'real-world' situation suggests that the narrative's power is invoked by implicit analogy; and (4) the fact that this is the entire spell – lacking not only application, but also invocation or *voces magicae* – demonstrates that the magical power of the Philinna spell and its analogues is, indeed, contained within the narrative itself, not sacred names, symbols, or commands".

The patient is then instructed to lick his wound with his tongue while it bleeds. As Robert Ritner explains: “The patient, assimilated to Anubis, is thus depicted as a dog licking his wounds” (Ritner 1993, 96). Here the recitation of the mythological paradigm of Isis healing Anubis creates a precedent that makes the spell efficacious for the human patient. It *repeats* mythical time.

My second example is a Greek ritual text that integrates the tradition of Genesis 19 and dates to the 4th c. CE. Here the similarity between the narrative and its intended effect is hardly apparent, as it functions to make the passions of a woman “burn” for the client by telling lumps of sulfur to serve him as they did God when he fired them upon Sodom and Gomorrah.

> A “bringer,” an “inflamer” with unburnt sulfur, in this manner: Take seven lumps of unburnt sulfur, and make a fire from vine branches. Say the following spell over each lump, and throw it into the fire. The spell is this: “The heavens of heavens opened, and the angels of God went down and overturned the five cities – Sôdom and Gomora, Adama, Sebouie and Sêgôr. A woman, hearing the voice, became a pillar of salt. You are the sulfur which God rained down in the middle of Sôdom and Gomôra, Adama, Sebouie and Sêgôr! You are the sulfur which served God – just so, serve me, NN (male), with regards to NN (female), and do not let her lie down nor find sleep until she comes and completes the mystery of Aphrodite”.
> Throw into the fire and say: “If I throw you into the fire, I adjure you by the great Pap Taphe Iaô Sabaôth Arbathiaô Zagourê Pagourê, and by the great Michaêl, Zouriêl, Gabriêl, Sesengenbarpharangês, Istraêl, Abraam, bring her, NN (female), to NN (male)”.[12]

As Waller remarks, *historiolae* like this one “ask only for the effect; these conjure the cause”; this *historiola* thus achieves a sort of “transubstantiation” of the sulfur (Waller 2015, 276). It goes beyond establishing a paradigm as precedent and illustrates the *participation* in mythical time.

My third example is an Akkadian charm for healing a toothache (ca. 600 BCE).

> (1–23) When (the sky god) Anu [created the heavens], the heavens created [the earth]. The earth created the rivers, the rivers created the branch canals. The branch canals created the dampness, the dampness created the tooth worm. The tooth worm came, crying, before Shamash (god of justice); before Ea (god of wisdom) his tears flowed. “What will you give for me to eat? What will you give for me to suck?” “I will give you the ripe fig (and) the apricot.” “What would I want with the ripe fig or the apricot? Put me among the teeth and set me in the jaw so that I may suck the blood of the tooth and chew up the chewed up (food particles collected) in the jaw.”
> Drive in a peg and so get hold of the foot (of the tooth).
> “Because you said (all this), O tooth worm, may Ea strike you with his mighty hand!”
> (24) Recitation for a sore tooth.
> (25–26) Its ritual: You mix together *billatu*-beerwort, a lump of malt and oil. You recite the recitation three times over it. You put (it) on his tooth.[13]

12 *PGM* XXXVI, 295–311, translated by Bohak (2008) 204; treated also by Waller (2015) 274–277.
13 The translation is that of Scurlock (2014) 401–402. Frankfurter (2017) 99–100, and Ceravolo (2022), also briefly discusses this text.

Here the spell achieves the remedy by applying a mixture to the tooth, but also by way of the *historiola* recited before its application. Like the Egyptian example, it *repeats* mythical time. Of note is that this *historiola*, like the Demotic spell for a scorpion sting, does not contain the so-called *similia similibus* formula, i. e., “as then, so also now”, that one finds in some others.[14] As Frankfurter observes: “the specific declaration to apply the *historiola* may be only implicit” (Frankfurter 1995, 462). The narrative is sufficient to activate the effect, or as Seth Sanders argues, “the application is rather the outcome of an interaction among the text, performer, audience, and occasion” (Sanders 2001, 434, n. 19). Its power was derived by means of the recitation of the myth as a perlocutionary act.[15]

In addition, not every *historiola* contains instructions or involves mechanical praxis – the licking of a wound, the throwing of objects into a fire, or the mixing and application of special ingredients. This is because *historiolae* do not in themselves comprise a genre.[16] Thus, the Neo-Assyrian incantation known as the *Cow of Sîn* describes a successful mythological birth by the divine bovine wife of the moongod Sîn. It then applies the *historiola* to a mortal woman giving birth simply with the words: “Just as Geme-Sîn gave birth normally, may also this girl in labour give birth. Let the midwife not tarry, let the pregnant one be all right”.[17] Thus, in some cases instructions and the manipulation of materials were deemed unnecessary to make *historiolae* effective. Nevertheless, the *Cow of Sîn* does employ the illocutionary “as then, so also now” formula.

Historiolae were perceived as efficacious because of the myths they contain. I find Frankfurter’s definition of myth especially useful here.

> (It) is not a particular type of narrative but rather a *source* for narrative: a kind of repository of power and authoritativeness that can be represented in various narrative forms and performative settings and that people draw into their world and experiences through telling certain stories in certain ways. Myth is that quality of certain narratives – paradigmatic, foundational, ancestral, and so on – that allows them to convey blessing and efficacy through various types of performance (Frankfurter 2017, 97).

It is through the lens of this definition of myth that I view foundational biblical traditions in which Yahweh defeats Leviathan, performs miracles at the Reed Sea and in the wilderness, and during the conquest of Canaan.

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14 Frankfurter (1995) 469, designates those *historiolae* that contain no formula as “*historiolae* proper” and those that do as “clausal *historiolae*”.

15 I adopt the term from Frankfurter (2017) 103.

16 Sørensen (1984), groups Egyptian *historiolae* into five basic types, and notes throughout the great flexibility in their use. See also Frankfurter (2017) 440.

17 The textual editions and translation are that of Veldhuis (1991) 9. The text is also discussed by Sanders (2001) 432 – 434; Ceravolo (2022).

2 *Historiolae* in the Hebrew Bible

Before turning to the biblical texts, I emphasize that not every text that references Israel's mythical past constitutes a *historiola*, only those in which humans employ mythical traditions as paradigms to resolve current situations, and which occur in highly ritualized contexts in which speech and myth have a performative dimension.[18] I also do not intend the collection here to be exhaustive, only representative. I grant that other *historiolae* might have escaped my attention.

I also readily acknowledge that I am integrating an entirely new data set into the discussion of *historiolae.* While scholars have long recognized the reuse of mythic themes in biblical texts as metaphors of deliverance and/or restoration, I contend that, in some contexts, they possessed a performative dimension that aimed to enact that deliverance and/or restoration. The *historiolae* from elsewhere in the ancient Near East provide models in this regard. Furthermore, the mythemes discussed herein certainly had multiple lives before they were fossilized into their present literary contexts. Thus, I aver that we are presented with the *historiolae* integrated into their final literary forms. Consider similarly the famous silver amuletic scroll from Ketef Hinnom (7th-6th c. BCE) containing the priestly blessings that later appear in Num 6:24–26. Its amuletic form shows that it was worn around the neck for apotropaic and/or prophylactic purposes.[19] According to the biblical account, these words were spoken by Yahweh directly to Moses, who related them to Aaron. Since the silver scroll was never intended to be unrolled, some of its performative power rested in its written form – whether or not the text was recited as well. Therefore, the blessing's placement in the mouth of Yahweh to Moses mythologizes and historicizes its performative *Sitz im Leben.* I posit that we may view the *Sitz im Leben* of the mythemes examined here in a similar light. Thus, while previous scholarship has tended to focus on *historiolae* as represented by oral and/or amuletic genres that aimed to heal, I submit that there is comparative value in examining to what degree select mythemes in biblical texts might have functioned originally as *historiolae.*

I also recognize that the Israelite *historiolae* often differ from those found elsewhere by expressing a desired outcome for the community rather than an individual, but this should not surprise us. Biblical texts generally have a communal focus due to Israel's semi-nomadic past and its perceived identification with the divine covenant, which continued to influence conceptions of Israelite identity long after the Israelites had become largely urban. Thus, the communal nature of Israelite texts is rather

18 Thus, I exclude psalms that cite such myths to teach (e.g., Psalm 78) or to praise Yahweh (e.g., Psalms 29; 105; 114; 135; 136) and oracles in which Yahweh recalls his own acts of power (e.g., Isaiah 10–12; 43, Jeremiah 2; 16; 23; 31; Ezekiel 16; Amos 2; 3; Hosea 2; Micah 6; Psalm 81, etc.). For a convenient collection of possible texts, see Alviero (2011). On illocutionary language in the Hebrew Bible, see Hillers (1995).
19 See Avner and Zelinger (2001); Barkay, Lundberg, Vaughn, and Zuckerman (2004). Na'aman (2011), argues that the amulets date to the early Second Temple period, not long after the temple's construction.

unique in the ancient Near East. So, for example, one does not find a communal focus in prayers from Mesopotamia.[20] Moreover, all the proposed Israelite *historiolae* have a *Sitz im Leben* in times of personal or national distress that require resolve. Such fits well Frankfurter's observation that *historiolae* frequently appear in healing spells "because situations of illness, accident, and childbirth were so dire in antiquity as to require more dramatic invocations of divine power than were possible with mere directives, prayers or commands" (Frankfurter 1995, 461). Indeed, the Israelites understood a national crisis as a kind of illness to the national body in need of *r-p-ʾ* "healing" (e.g., Exod 15:26; Isa 19:22; 57:18; Jer 3:22; 30:17; 51:8; Hos 5:13; 7:1; Ps 60:4). With these observations as background, I now move to eleven biblical texts that I contend contain *historiolae* (Isa 26:7–27:1; 51:9–16; Psalm 74; 77; 80; 83; 89; 106; 114; Daniel 9; Nehemiah 9).

2.1 Yahweh's Defeat of Leviathan (Isa 26:7–27:1; 51:9–16; Psalms 74; 89)

2.1.1 Isa 26:7–27:1

I begin with four texts that reference Yahweh's defeat of Leviathan. The *historiolae* in these texts function much like some from other times and cultures that identify an enemy with a demon or some other monstrous being. Indeed, as Jørgen Sørensen observes, a *historiola* "stamps trouble or danger as something inimical and strange, alien or even menacing to the cosmic order" (Sørensen 1984, 13). The first of these *historiolae* appears famously in a prophecy of Isaiah (Isa 27:1). The reference is part of a unit of texts commonly known as the Isaian Apocalypse (Isaiah 24–27). However, most understand the relevant passage in 27:1 as the last in a smaller lament that begins with 26:7.[21] The prophet opens by distinguishing the righteous, with whom he identifies, from the wicked, who continually practice iniquity and ignore Yahweh's majesty (26:1–11). The ritual dimension of the text is clear not only by its appearance in a prophecy, but because it is part of Isaiah's performative prayer on behalf of Israel:

> Indeed, the course of your judgments O Yahweh we await – for you,
> for the name and for your memorial is (our) breath's desire.
> My being desires you at night,
> indeed, my spirit inside me seeks you (26:8–9).

Isaiah then employs the illocutionary language of execration.

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20 Lenzi (2011) 21, observes that ritual prayers from Mesopotamia were not recited in congregational settings, but were intended for individuals. Thus, their communal dimension was only implicit.

21 Thus, Blenkinsopp (2000) 366–367. Roberts (2015) 326–341, does not distinguish individual components of the chapters.

O Yahweh, they do not see your exalted hand,
let them see and be ashamed by the zeal of the people.
Indeed, let fire devour your enemies (26:11).[22]

He then recollects moments in Israel's history in which Yahweh came to the rescue. He recalls how other foreign overlords controlled Israel previously, but that Yahweh had put an end to their memories. They now dwell among the shades (26:13–14). He observes that Yahweh has intervened before on behalf of Israel against its oppressors (26:15–16). Their current liminal situation, Isaiah asserts, is no different: "Like a pregnant woman drawing near to give birth, writhing, crying in her pangs, thus are we before you, O Yahweh" (26:17). He then prophesies Yahweh's impending punishment of evil doers: "For behold! Yahweh goes out from his place to punish whoever dwells on the earth for his iniquity. And the earth will reveal its blood, and its slain will no longer be covered" (26:21). It is at this moment, at the climax of his lament, when Isaiah invokes the mythical moment:

On that day:
Yahweh will punish with his cruel, and mighty, and strong sword,
Leviathan – fleeing serpent,
and Leviathan – twisting serpent,
and he will kill the dragon in the sea (Isa 27:1).

Here the primordial past becomes relevant and powerful by being made imminent. Joseph Blenkinsopp remarks:

> There can be little doubt that, in the context of 13–27 as a whole, a *political* connotation is present and intended, but the introduction at this point of the ancient motif of the cosmic conflict and victory of the creator-deity suggests that the scribe has in mind the final overcoming of evil as a metahistorical and metaphysical force (Blenkinsopp 2000, 372).

Indeed, scholars typically understand it as a descriptive mythological reference, demythologized détournement, and/or metaphorical in nature. I aver that instancing the myth functions within the prophet's lament in the same way that the Demotic, Greek, and Akkadian *historiolae* did for their clients. They make the paradigm of Yahweh's defeat of Leviathan a precedent. Israel's current crisis must now conform with cosmology. The implication is that as then, so also now.[23]

22 Roberts (2015) 328, suggests reading the line "let the fire of your enemies devour them", but notes that the *mem* on *to'klēm* could be enclitic, in which case we would render the stich: "let fire devour your enemies".
23 The *historiola* linguistically enforces the connection between the Israelites *p-q-d* "seeking" Yahweh's help (Isa 26:16), his coming forth to *p-q-d* "punish" the sinners (26:21), and his *p-q-d* "punishment" of the dragon (27:1).

2.1.2 Isa 51:9–16

Deutero-Isaiah integrates the same *historiola* in a later prayer for intervention.[24] The illocutionary petition opens:

> Awake, awake, dress with power, O arm of Yahweh,
> awake like in the days of old, generations of antiquity.
> Was it not you who cleaved Rahab,
> who pierced Dragon?!
> Was it not you who dried up Sea,
> the water of the great Deep?!
> Who made the depths of Sea,
> a path for those redeemed to pass (51:9–10)?!

Here the "as then, so also now" formula is explicit: "awake like in the days of old." The reference to creating a route for the redeemed in the sea identifies the cosmic moment with the tradition of the exodus, another myth to which I shall return.[25] Now that the prophet has recalled Yahweh's primordial victory and Israel's mythical past, he applies their power as a paradigm to his current situation in exile:

> And let the ransomed, O Yahweh, return,
> and come to Zion with jubilation and eternal happiness upon their head.
> Let joy and happiness overtake them,
> and suffering and sighing flee (51:11).

From here the prophecy speaks in the voice of Yahweh who asserts that he has put his words into the prophet's mouth (51:16).[26] He reprimands the exiles for forgetting their maker "who stretched the heavens and founded the underworld" (51:13). It is for this reason, he adds, that they live in continual fear under foreign oppression. Nevertheless, he promises to free them, because they are his people (51:14–16). As he proclaims, "I am Yahweh your God who roils the sea and heaves its waves" (51:15) and "I planted heavens and founded earth" (51:16). The prophecy implies that since Yahweh has demonstrated power over the dragon in primordial times, so too can he deliver his people now. As Hendrik Bosman notes:

> The memories of creation and exodus are much more than inert mythological fossils embedded in the religious traditions of Israel; they are dynamic recollections of the Lord's interventions in the past that can be hoped for in future (Bosman 2009, 80–81).

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24 On this passage as an individual unit, see Baltzer (2001) 355–359; Blenkinsopp (2002) 31–32; Paul (2015) 366–371.

25 See Blenkinsopp (2002) 333.

26 Blenkinsopp (2002) 334–335, notes the inconsistent use of second person masculine plural suffix (51:12a), feminine singular verb (51:12b), masculine singular subject (51:14), and second person singular suffixes and pronoun (41:16). The switch in person and pronouns thus also blends the prophet with Zion.

Much like some Egyptian *historiolae* in which the practitioner identifies himself as the god, either directly or indirectly, the prophecy's move to Yahweh's voice collapses the boundary between God and the prophet and between the mythical realm and reality, which in turn folds mythical time into the present.[27] Klaus Baltzer similarly noticed the illocutionary use of time.

> With this text too one can ask about the theory and practice of the performance. Here again the problem of time has a special relevance. If we do not confine ourselves to the formula about the unity of time and place as a theatrical rule, then events on the stage can very well bind together different times and present them as simultaneous. The cultic drama in particular regularly presents past as present (Baltzer 2001, 358).

I submit that this prophecy too incorporates an Israelite *historiola.*[28]

2.1.3 Psalm 74

The third text that integrates this *historiola* occurs in a national lament attributed to Asaph (Psalm 74).[29] The psalm focuses on the destruction of the temple and asks Yahweh to remember his people whom he created in antiquity and redeemed (74:2). It describes the despoiling and burning of his sanctuary and the enemy dishonoring his dwelling place, indeed all the sanctuaries in the land (74:3–8). It thus marks a cosmic event that requires a cosmic response. The psalm bewails the disappearance of prophets and the enemy blaspheming his name (74:9–10). It then hails Yahweh as a savior king (74:12). It is at this moment, when the psalmist recalls the primordial defeat of the dragon, employing what Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger label the "incantational 'thou' style" (Hossfeld and Zenger 2005, 248).

> You shattered Sea with your strength,
> you smashed the heads of the dragons upon the waters.
> You crushed the heads of Leviathan,
> you gave him as food for the people of the desert (74:13–14).

The psalmist then continues with additional descriptions of his cosmological power: his control over springs and rivers, creation of the moon and sun, and division of the seasons (74:15–17). He then laments the enemy's reviling of Yahweh's name and the community's defeated circumstance, and he appeals to Yahweh's memory of the covenant (74:19–20). He concludes by issuing a battle cry for Yahweh to come to the rescue:

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27 See Sørensen (1984) 9–10; Frankfurter (1995) 469–470, expounds upon on the effects of such an identification.

28 Note the comment of Paul (2015) 367, "The prophet implores God to deliver His people just as He subdued the monsters of the deep".

29 So Dahood (1968) 199; Gerstenberger (2001) 77–81; Hossfeld and Zenger (2005) 239–251.

"arise O God, state your case, remember that your reproach comes from a foolish people all day long" (74:22)! Hossfeld and Zenger's description of the psalm's use of myth is apposite:

> …one could apply vv. 13 – 15 to the exodus and occupation of the land as the mythic primeval time of Israel. The idea would here be transferred to the exodus, or to the battle of gods between YHWH and Pharaoh at the Sea of Reeds. This "mythic" event, which stood "at the very beginning," thus acquired both an etiological and a paradigmatic function: *because* and *in the manner that* YHWH at that time destroyed a superior, life-threatening enemy and so rescued Israel, just so he should and will now demonstrate his power, effective of life and salvation, against the enemies who mock him and to the benefit of his congregation (Hossfeld and Zenger 2005, 248 – 249).

Much like some Egyptian *historiolae*, this passage insists "on world order by bringing out the full consequences of offending it" (Sørensen 1984, 16). The references to Yahweh's creative cosmic acts bolster the power of the primordial myth in the *historiola.* Here the *historiola* references "a crisis resolved, using the authoritative components of myth in an efficient, abbreviated way" (Frankfurter 2017, 102).

2.1.4 Psalm 89

The incipit for this lengthy prayer for deliverance ascribes it to Ethan the Ezrahite, perhaps the wise man who appears elsewhere (1 Kgs 5:11; 1 Chron 2:6).[30] It begins by proclaiming Yahweh's steadfast love and faithfulness (89:2 – 3), but then briefly slips into Yahweh's voice to reaffirm the covenant with the line of David (89:4 – 5). Afterwards, the psalmist speaks in his own voice and observes how the heavens and the assembly of divine beings praise the uncomparable Yahweh (89:6 – 9). He then recalls his mythic power of old:

> You rule the surging of the sea,
> when it lifts its waves, you still them.
> You crushed Rahab, like a corpse,
> with your strong arm you scattered your enemies.

He recalls Yahweh's creation of the mountains Zaphon, Amanus, Tabor, and Hermon (89:10 – 14),[31] and he extols his love, righteousness, strength, and protection (89:15 – 19). He then cites an earlier oracle (2 Sam 7:8 – 16), here called a vision spoken to his pious ones, in which Yahweh selected David to rule and promised to crush all his adversaries and support his dynasty forever (89:20 – 38). This section "equips the king with positively mythic power" (Hossfeld and Zenger 2005, 405). However, rather than return to the psalmist's voice, the prayer moves seamlessly from the previous oracle

30 So Dahood (1968) 321, who also labels it a royal psalm.
31 With Dahood (1968) 314.

to a lamentation in the present: "but you have rejected and you have refused, and you became furious with your anointed. You have abhorred the covenant of your servant! You have polluted his consecration to the earth" (89:39–40)![32] The voice continues to accuse Yahweh of shaming the throne and the people (89:41–46). The harangue closes with the exclamatory *selah!*

Since the previous oracle also ended with *selah* (89:38), and now a change in speaker is noted, it remains unclear at first whether Yahweh's voice continues and now focuses on reprimanding Israel. Even the reference to "your servant" (89:40) could refer to David as Israel's servant (89:21). The psalmist's voice does not re-emerge clearly until the end of the lament when he addresses Yahweh directly and asks him how long his anger will burn (89:47). Thus the lament ambiguously and simultaneously blames Israel and accuses God for the current situation. Hossfeld and Zenger remark: "the comparison between past and present now gains meaning because the crisis in the 'now' causes a quest for the previous history" (Hossfeld and Zenger 2005, 412). Then, after briefly contemplating the inevitability of death, we once again hear *selah* (89:48–49). The ritualist closes by asking where Yahweh's steadfast love has gone, and petitions him to remember the reproaches that his enemies now hurl at his anointed. He ends his prayer with the doxology: "blessed is Yahweh forever, Amen and Amen" (89:50–53).

As in Isa 51:9–16, the speaker's move in and out of Yahweh's voice without warning (89:4; 89:39) blurs the boundary between the mythical past and reality and brings the divine presence to the present day.[33] The psalmist also oscillates between "I" and the collective "we".[34] Hossfeld and Zenger's summarize the prayer aptly:

> Psalm 89 is the psalm of a scribal theologian who makes his chief concern the fate of the Davidic dynasty and, beginning with the situation of dynastic discontinuity in which he finds himself, reminds God of the obligations God has undertaken – indeed, by his accusations puts God under pressure to act (Hossfeld and Zenger 2005, 405).

The psalmist creates this pressure to act by way of the prayer's use of the *historiola.* The invocation of the mythic past to alter the present is implicit.

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32 Hossfeld and Zenger (2005) 411, do not comment on the ambiguity of the speaker, but apparently see it as the accusatory voice of the psalmist: "The divine discourse took place 'once,' in the past. Now, in the speaker's present, what dominates is an incommensurable misery, described in the lament and standing in diametric opposition to the statements both of the hymnic section and the divine discourse".
33 Hossfeld and Zenger (2005) 404, note that the psalm, along with the Asaph and Korah psalms, stands within the prophetic tradition.
34 Discussed by Hossfeld and Zenger (2005) 404.

2.2 Exodus Traditions (Psalms 77; 80; 106; 114; Nehemiah 9; Daniel 9)

2.1.1 Psalm 77

Six texts also reference Yahweh's mythic acts of miraculous power during the exodus. These illustrate well the veracity of William Propp's comment that "the Exodus itself becomes a template for future reenactments of God's great, creative act *in illo tempore*..." (Propp 2006, 795). I begin with Psalm 77, another lament ascribed to Asaph. The psalmist begins by describing his urgent distress and calling to God with a failed spirit (77:1–7). He connects his pain to divine abandonment (77:8–11), and then pauses to consider Yahweh's wonders of old and acts of power (77:12–15), before concluding by evoking the miracles at the Reed Sea.

> You redeemed your people with your strength,
> the sons of Jacob and Joseph. *Selah.*
> Waters saw you, O God,
> waters saw you and they writhed,
> indeed the deeps quaked.
> Waters poured forth,
> the skies gave forth clouds of thunder,
> your arrows went forward.
> The sound of your thunder like wheels,
> lightning lit up the world,
> the earth quaked and shook.
> Through the sea was your way,
> and your path through the mighty waters,
> your tracks were unknown.
> You led your people like the flock,
> by the hand of Moses and Aaron (77:16–21).

Hossfeld and Zenger understand the water here as additionally allusive:

> It is true that the emphasis on the element of water has an obvious association with the passage through the sea, but here it is a matter of the mythical–cosmic confrontation between the superior God-king and the waters of chaos... (Hossfeld and Zenger 2005, 279).

In this psalm, the *historiola* serves as a climax, thus making its paradigmatic employment a crescendo. Here the "as then, so also now" formula is implicit.

2.2.2 Psalm 80

Yet another psalm of Asaph contains a *historiola.* This individual lament begs Yahweh to save him and asks him how long he will continue to unleash his fury upon his people (80:1–7). He asks for relief from Israel's enemies and for deliverance (80:8). He then

turns to Yahweh's previous act of salvation during the exodus, using a vine as a metaphor for Israel.

> A vine from Egypt you uprooted,
> you drove out nations and planted it.
> You cleared before it,
> and its root took root and it filled the land (80:9–10).

All of the positive consequences of Yahweh's deliverance, the psalmist adds, have now given way to disaster. Its walls have been breached and the vine's fruit is now plucked by passersby and gnawed by wild pigs (80:13–14). He then issues the "as then, so also now" formula.

> God of hosts, please return,
> look from the heavens and see,
> and visit this vine.
> And the stock that your right hand planted,
> and the son you strengthened for yourself.
> It is burned with fire, cut away,
> from the blast of your face may they perish.
> Let your hand be upon the man of your right hand,
> upon the son of man you have strengthened for yourself (80:15–18).[35]

The depiction of Yahweh as a gardener recalls traditions of Eden, thus drawing to the present the primeval origins of Yahweh's salvation (Hossfeld and Zenger 2005, 315). The reference to God's "blast" (*g-ʿ-r*) similarly recalls traditions concerning his battle against the primordial sea (e.g., Isa 17:13; Nah 1:4; Ps 106:9).[36] The psalmist asserts that in the same way that Yahweh saw fit to claim Israel for himself and free it from Egypt, so also now should the present crisis find resolve so that Israel can invoke his name (80:18–20). The metaphor of the vine is especially striking as it functions literarily much like the lump of sulfur in the Greek *historiola.* It embodies the object that the prayer seeks to transform.

2.2.3 Psalm 106

This lengthy post-exilic national petition begins with the words "praise Yah" and notes God's steadfast love (106:1). Nevertheless, the context is one of national calamity, as the psalmist then calls upon Yahweh to deliver his people.

> Remember me, O Yahweh, when you favor your people,
> visit me when you deliver,

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35 Gerstenberger (2001) 105, considers the possibility that 80:9–16 may be a "ceremonial interlude".
36 Noted by Hossfeld and Zenger (2005) 316.

> to see the goodness of your elect ones,
> to take joy in the joy of your nation,
> to glory in the people of your inheritance (106:4–5).

After confessing the people's current and past sins, he reminds the listener that in the past Yahweh did not reject them, but came to their rescue. Thereafter a *historiola* enumerates a long list of Yahweh's wonders that alternate with descriptions of Israelite rebellion and unfaithfulness. We hear of the parting of the Reed Sea, the people's safe passage, and annihilation of the enemy.

> He blasted against the Reed Sea and it became dry,
> he led them through the deeps as though desert.
> He delivered them from the hand of a hater,
> and he redeemed them from the hand of an enemy.
> Waters covered their adversaries,
> not one of them was left (106:9–12).

God's "blasting" (*g-ʿ-r*) again summons traditions concerning his battle against the primordial sea. The psalmist also references Israel's past wickedness: the earth's swallowing of Dathan and Abiram, the making of the golden calf, the apostacy at Baal Peor, the plague that Phinehas averted, and the people's worship of idols that brought the oppression of foreign nations. Yet, despite their frequent backsliding, the psalmist maintains that Yahweh's love was unrelenting (106:6–46). The prayer then departs from the long list of miracles and demonstrations of Yahweh's power in Israel's mythical past for the present day.

> Deliver us, O Yahweh our God,
> gather us from the nations to thank your holy name,
> to take pride in your praise.
> Blessed is Yahweh, God of Israel,
> from eternity to eternity.
> And let all the people say "Amen, praise Yah" (106:47–48).

The summoning of the mythical past into the present circumstance is again an implicit demonstration of the "as then, so also now" formula. It becomes efficacious by perlocutionary means.

2.2.4 Psalm 114

Each verse in this brief salvation psalm recalls Yahweh's powerful deeds in the mythical past. As Erhard Gerstenberger notes, the psalmist enacts "that moment when Yahweh defeated chaos and had his reign proclaimed over all the earth, coinciding with the liberation of Israel from Egypt" (Gerstenberger 2001, 283). According to Stephen

Geller, he applies the language of creation to cast Israel's exodus as the creation of a new nation (Geller 1990).

> When Israel went out from Egypt,
> the house of Jacob from a people of strange speech,
> Judah became his sanctuary,
> Israel his dominion.
> The sea saw and fled,
> the Jordan turned back around.
> The mountains skipped like rams,
> hills like offspring of a flock.
> What is it to you, O Sea, that you fled,
> O Jordan that you turned back around?
> The mountains you skipped like rams,
> hills like offspring of a flock.
> From the presence of the Lord, whirl O earth,
> from the presence of the god of Jacob.
> Who turns the rock into a pool of water,
> flint into springs of water (Ps 114:1–8).

Geller also sees the reference to Judah and Israel in the second verse as

> …a mythically framed way of referring to the second great act of *Heilsgeschichte*, the Conquest of Canaan. And the fact that the poet refers to the Exodus in simple historical terms but to the Conquest in an image which evokes mythically expressed creation-kingship must be taken as evidence of a poetic intention to establish two dimensions, or levels, of meaning in the poem: history and myth (Geller 1990, 183).

Gert Prinsloo postulates that the psalm

> …originated in the postexilic community as an exhortation to believe that Yahweh can and indeed will turn the misery of his poor, defenseless and exploited people into a new era of salvation… As such salvation becomes a present reality and an eschatological certainty for the postexilic community who perceive themselves as poor and needy (Prinsloo 1998, 321).

Susan Gillingham similarly understands it as a post-exilic salvation psalm that speaks to the hope of a future Zion (Gillingham 1999, 39). Adele Berlin observes the way the verses move from the past to the present and activate their mythic references:

> The "present" on which the mythic past is brought to bear is the situation of the exilic or postexilic Judean community – individuals already in Judah or those hoping for a return to Judah. Psalm 114 is not simply celebrating an event in the distant past. For the psalmist, the distant past is happening now and always (Berlin 2008, 361).

Berlin also espies the paradigmatic power of the myth: "Irrespective of their historicity, the narratives of the creation and the exodus had taken on a mythic dimension, serving as archetypes, symbols of God's power that transcend actual historicity" (Berlin 2008,

360 – 361). Willem Prinsloo calls the psalm a "persuasive text" (Prinsloo 1992, 174). Such views argue in favor of seeing the mythical components as functioning as a *historiola.* Here the "as then, so also now" formula is again implicit.

2.2.5 Nehemiah 9

This chapter opens with the narrator's report of exilic returnees assembling on the twenty-fourth day of the seventh month to fast in sackcloth and throw earth upon themselves (9:1). The communal ritual also involves segregation from foreigners, prostration, confession of sins, and reading from the scroll of the teaching of Yahweh for long portions of the day (9:2 – 3).[37] Since a narrator introduces the ritual and prayer containing the *historiola*, we have here a literary representation of a *historiola*'s performance. It thus gives us a window into how the invoking of mythological traditions of performative power accompanied post-exilic ritual recitation of the law. The account gives us insight into how a *historiola*'s "power arises from a series of performative conditions, from the authority of the teller to the timing of the event to the responsiveness of the audience" (Frankfurter 2017, 96). The narrator next informs us that Levites stood on a raised platform and cried out to Yahweh and instructed all those assembled to rise and bless Yahweh with them (9:4 – 5). Seven Levites, who speak in unison, then recount Yahweh's magisterial mythical works including the creation of the heavens, the highest of the heavens, and their host, and all the earth, and the seas with all the life they contain (9:6). They recall how Yahweh brought Abram from Ur to Canaan and changed his name to Abraham (9:7). Afterwards, they extol Yahweh's signs and wonders performed in Egypt (9:11 – 12).

> The sea you cleaved before them,
> and they passed in the midst of the sea on the dry land,
> and their pursuers you cast into the depths like a stone in fierce waters.
> And with a pillar of cloud you led them daily,
> and with a pillar of fire at night to light for them the path on which they went.

The Levites then recount how Yahweh spoke to the Israelites from the heavens, gave the law on Mt. Sinai, bestowed manna upon them, and drew water from a rock (9:13 – 15). They praise Yahweh's graciousness despite Israel's disobedience, recalling especially the golden calf incident (9:16 – 18). The Levites then repeat the marvels of the divine pillars, manna, and water, and add the miracle of the Israelites' undamaged clothes and unharmed feet during the forty-year wandering (9:19 – 21). They describe the possession of Canaan including the mythological wars against Sihon of Heshbon and the giant Og of Bashan, and the Israelites' eventual success in the land

37 Some of Ezra's prayer also recalls acts performed by Moses in the wilderness and by Solomon at the dedication of the temple. See Harkins (2016).

(9:22 – 25).[38] The Levites then return to Israel's defiance of the covenant and prophets, which led to oppression and exile (9:26 – 35). The diversity of mythic traditions enumerated here confirms the observation of Frankfurter that *historiolae* are often "compilations and syntheses of diverse lore" (Frankfurter 1995, 472). The Levites activate the *historiola* when they bring the prayer to the present day and call upon Yahweh to deliver them: "And now, our God, the great God, the warrior, the awesome, who guards the covenant and lovingkindness, let not the suffering that has overtaken us be small before you" (9:32). Citing the sins of their ancestors as the cause for their hardship they then turn to the topic of their Persian rulers.

> Behold, we are today slaves,
> the land that you gave to our fathers to eat of its fruit and its goodness,
> behold we are slaves upon it.
> And it gives its abundant yield to kings you set over us, because of our sins,
> and they rule over our bodies and our livestock as they please,
> and we are in great distress (9:36 – 37).

As Jacob Myers observes:

> The author of our prayer psalm drew upon a wide knowledge of the theology and traditions of his people, skillfully weaving into it elements of instruction, exhortation, and confession. As such it is prophetic rather than priestly. …Through it all runs the implied hope that Yahweh has taken note and will grant them relief (Myers 1965, 169 – 170).

Thus, the *historiola*'s formula "as then, so also now" is implicit. The Levites cite Yahweh's wonders in the mythic past in the expectation that their current plight will find similar resolve.

2.2.6 Daniel 9

We also find a *historiola* in Daniel's prayer. Since Daniel narrates this account in his own voice, we again must view it as a literary representation of a *historiola*'s performance. However, unlike Nehemiah, the book of Daniel contains a highly fictionalized set of stories. Nevertheless, we can assume that the account of his prayer represents an accurate depiction of the sort of prayer one might recite in such a circumstance. The ritual setting of his supplication is evident in that it is accompanied with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes (9:3). He either is mourning the loss of Jerusalem or attempting to induce a theophany.[39] Elsewhere, the narrator tells us that he prayed three times a day on his knees (6:11).

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38 On the mythology involving the giant Og, see Noegel (1998).

39 Hartman and Di Lella (1978) 278, assert that the practices prepared Daniel "for understanding the divine revelation".

Daniel's lengthy penitential confession cites Israel's sins as the reason for their exile. Afterwards, he brings the myth of the exodus to the present day: "Now, O Yahweh, our God, you brought your people from the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and you made for yourself a name to this day" (9:15). He then calls upon Yahweh to restore Israel and Jerusalem because his name is attached to the city and his people (9:19). Just then Gabriel visits him and informs him of the future restoration (9:20 – 27). Gabriel's immediate arrival is the story's way of illustrating that the prayer and its *historiola* were successful.

2.3 Yahweh's Miraculous Victories During the Conquest of Canaan

2.3.1 Psalm 83

The *historiola* contained in this pre-exilic national lament lists Yahweh's amazing victories over Israel's enemies during the period of the Judges. Again it is a psalm of Asaph. This one too calls upon Yahweh not to remain silent, but to rescue Israel who is besieged by enemies seeking to annihilate them (83:1 – 5). Not only do they assail Israel, they are forging a covenant against God (83:6). The psalm then identifies them as Edomites, Ishmaelites, Moabites, Hagrites, Byblians, Ammonites, Amalekites, Philistines, and Tyrians, all supported by the Assyrians (83:7– 8). While the historical record knows of no such coalition,[40] much like some performative ritual texts found elsewhere, the list merely attempts to cover potential contingencies. The psalm then moves to its *historiola:*

> Do to them as with Midian,
> as with Sisera, as with Jabin in the wadi Qishon.
> They were destroyed at Endor,
> they became dung for the land.
> Make them, their nobles, like Oreb and Zeeb,
> all their princes like Zebah and Zalmunna,
> who said "Let us possess for ourselves the oases of God" (83:10 – 13).

The events recounted are recorded in Judges 4 – 7 and involve the victories of Gideon and of the prophet Deborah and her general Barak. Both campaigns – the former taking place in the Jezreel Valley and the latter between Mt. Tabor and Tanaach – were ordained by God through various oracular means and received divine assistance (Judg 4:6 – 7; 6:12 – 26; 34; 7:9 – 11). According to the Song of Deborah, even the "stars of heaven" fought for them (Judg 5:20). The psalmist's reference to the two Midianite generals, Oreb and Zeeb, calls for nothing less than the beheading of Israel's enemies

40 Noted by Dahood (1968) 273.

(Judg 7:25). The psalm's language then becomes highly illocutionary, again resembling an execration ritual.

> My God, make them like the weed,
> like chaff before wind.
> Like a fire burns a forest,
> and like a flame engulfing mountains.
> Thus, you will pursue them with your tempest,
> with your storm you will terrify them.
> Fill their faces with ignominy,
> and they will seek your name, O Yahweh.
> They will be ashamed and terrified forever,
> and they will be abashed and perish.
> And they will know that you, your name is Yahweh, you alone,
> are Most High over the whole earth (83:14 – 19).

About the similes used in the imprecation, Delbert Hillers writes: "similes are frequently found in contexts where the writer expects or desires some objective effect on his world" (Hillers 1983, 184).

3 Additional Observations

The eleven texts examined herein demonstrate that Israelites too employed *historiolae.* With Waller's distinction in mind, all of the cases I have presented work through the *repetition* of mythical time. Each of the texts shares in common a ritual setting, an illocutionary or perlocutionary voice, and the recitation of ancient myth to create a paradigm that aims to resolve a present emergency. At this juncture, a number of additional observations are in order.

3.1 Israelite *Historiolae* and Laments

It is remarkable that nine of the eleven *historiolae* occur in laments (Isa 26:7– 27:1; Psalm 74; 77; 80; 83; 89; 106; Nehemiah 9; Daniel 9). Four of them are national laments (Psalm 74; 83; 89; 106). The brief prayer of intervention in Isa 51:9 – 16 is less clearly a lament, but it does call for the departure of suffering and sighing and it designates Yahweh as the comforter of Israel and its protector from oppression (51:12 – 13). The context of Psalm 114 is also a bit unclear, but Prinsloo argues for its use "in times of hardship" to "encourage and console" (Prinsloo 1992, 174). The context of lament is in keeping with the Israelites' understanding of a national crisis as an illness to the national body.

3.2 *Historiolae* and Asaph

It also is of interest that four of the five psalms containing *historiolae* belong to Asaph. Thus they represent the northern traditions of ancient Israel (Rendsburg 1990, 73). While the Asaph psalms are not the only ones in the Psalter to reference exodus traditions, they are quite pronounced in them.[41] Hossfeld and Zenger also point out a number of parallels between the Asaph collection and Psalm 89 (Hossfeld and Zenger 2005, 404, 406, 412, 415). The northern origins of the Asaph *historiolae* are also relevant if we consider the proposal that Nehemiah 9 too was composed in northern Israel.[42] Thus, the evidence suggests that the use of *historiolae* might have been more common in northern Israel, though times of crisis also encouraged their use elsewhere, especially after the Assyrian campaigns in the late 8th century BCE, when some northerners likely fled to Judah with their liturgical and other traditions.[43]

3.3 Literary *Historiolae*

Interestingly, only the two literary depictions of *historiolae* being performed reference rituals of fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.[44] They also are the only cases in which texts are consulted just prior – the teachings of Moses (Neh 9:3) and the scroll of Jeremiah (Dan 9:2) – though this perhaps reflects the scribal settings in which they appear. The passages in Nehemiah and Daniel also stand out, because as reported moments they constitute forms of narrative modeling. The account in Nehemiah specifically records the occasion as a public event. The ritual actions taken, the mythical memories evoked, and the chronological and historical anchors provided, all implicitly evince what post-exilic Jewish leaders promoted as proper cultic actions and behavior. They thus sanction the public ritual use of *historiolae* by cultic leaders. The same may be said of the learned and multilingual community who produced and circulated the stories of Daniel. He too provided a model for how to conduct oneself and retain one's cultic identity in a multicultural, Hellenistic world. However, unlike the Levites in Nehemiah, Daniel performs

41 Noted also by Goulder (1995); (1996). Psalm 78, also attributed to Asaph, contains numerous references to the exodus miracles, but it does not call upon Yahweh to respond in the here and now. Instead it evokes the memory of these events for future generations (78:6 – 7). Psalms 81, 105, 135, and 136, the first of which also belongs to Asaph, call to mind the exodus, but they do so as an exultation. Again, Yahweh is not summoned.

42 See the well-articulated arguments of Welch (1929); (1930); to which Rendsburg (1991), adds linguistic support.

43 See Rendsburg (2014). On the northern origins of the exodus myth, see Carroll (1971); Hoffman (1989).

44 Harkins (2017) 90, observes: "This emphasis on mourning and rumination may have assisted in cultivating states of rumination and other imaginative processes that allowed groups throughout the Second Temple period to access God's presence. This may help us to understand the relationship that these prayers of ritual mourning have with covenant remaking experiences".

his *historiola* in private. Thus, we can assume that ritual elites performed *historiolae* in a variety of sanctioned settings.

Moreover, unlike the prophecies and psalms that are stand-alone performative documents, the prayers in Nehemiah and Daniel cannot be divorced from their surrounding narratives. The former follows closely upon the return of the exiles and another public reading of Moses' teachings during which the public learned of the festival of Sukkoth and celebrated it. The narrator informs us that it had not been observed since the time of Joshua (Neh 8:17). Immediately after the prayer, the community pledges its commitment to the covenant in writing (Neh 10:1). Thus the public prayer marks a new beginning and a time of cultic renewal. Daniel's prayer induces Gabriel's visit and is followed by divine dreams and visions. It occurs during the reign of Darius (Dan 9:1). Thus, his prayer teaches that proper cultic behavior led to divine communion and salvation from imperial domination.

At the same time, we should keep in mind that the two literary depictions of *historiolae* are also performed when recited, which in itself constitutes a form of ritual, as Michael Swartz observes:

> Indeed, the force of recitation needs to be taken quite seriously as a potent form of ritual behavior and as an example of the actualization of sacred space in time. Memorization, recitation and performance, we must remember, are physical acts, requiring intensive preparation, stamina, and physical prowess (Swartz 1997, 153).[45]

3.4 *Historiolae* and Execration

When describing the hoped-for destruction of the enemy, some *historiolae* occur in contexts that employ the language of execration. In this way, they resemble the Song of the Sea (Exodus 15), which itself reflects an accurate knowledge of Egyptian execration rituals.[46] In fact, the Levites draw upon this very tradition when they describe the events of the exodus: "their pursuers you cast into the depths like a stone in fierce waters" (Neh 9:11, cf. Exod 15:5). Indeed, the *historiolae* that reference Leviathan's defeat (Isa 26:7–27:1; 51:9–16; Psalm 74; 89) especially resemble Egyptian execration rituals for vanquishing the serpent Apep, the enemy of Ra, and Leviathan's counterpart in Egyptian myth. Moreover, Egyptian experts performed that ritual also to prevent the hostile actions of enemies, and it too involved the piercing of the serpent, and the destruction of enemies by beheading and burning them (cf. Isa 26:11).[47]

Yet, we find such imprecation with the other Israelite *historiolae* as well. The psalmist calls for the beheading of enemies and for Yahweh to make them like a weed

45 Nevertheless, as Waller (2019) 233, reminds us: "Illocution is simply a feature of language-in-use (whether spoken or written)…".

46 See Noegel (1996).

47 See Ritner (1993) 136–190.

blown away by wind and a burning forest that scorches mountains (Ps 83:12–15). The psalmist pleads for the deliverance of Israel, whom he describes as a vine (Ps 80:15), and for the perishing of its enemies (80:17). Psalm 89 recalls Yahweh's promise to cut off and strike his enemies in the hope that he will do so again (89:24). Given the highly charged ritual contexts in which such similes and metaphors appear, I submit that we should understand them as more performative than literary.[48] From this perspective, we may view their inclusion with the biblical *historiolae* as functioning like similes and metaphors in other texts of performative power.[49] Indeed, similes and metaphors are highly apposite devices for *historiolae* as they identify one object or situation with another. In essence, they constitute mimeses of them. Furthermore, enhancing the performative dimension of similes and metaphors was the Israelite's ontological understanding of the written and spoken word, a conception shared throughout much of the ancient Near East.[50] In Israel, a *dābār* was both a "word" and "object".

3.5 The Language of Israelite *Historiolae*

Attention to the language of the *historiolae* is instructive in another way as well. Their performative dimension obtains in the overlapping of the past and present.[51] It is the shift from past to present verbal forms that activates the "as then, so also now" formula – what Sanders has seen as the *preterit-thema* inserted into present reality.[52] Thus, most of the biblical cases conform to other *historiolae* in linguistic form as well. Only once is the formula slightly altered to "as then, so also in the imminent future" (Isa 27:1). Yet, the effect is the same. In fact, not all *historiolae* employ the past tense. Some even narrate the mythical portion in the present.[53] The passage in Isaiah is thus just slightly variant.

48 The performative dimension of such devices was spotted forty years ago by Hillers 1983, who even drew attention to the similes in Ps 83:12–15. See more recently Kitz (2007); (2014) 18–22. Nevertheless, the "magical" function of other psalms, notably Psalms 7, 35, 58, 59, 69, 91, 109, 141, was posited almost 100 years ago by Nicolsky (1927).

49 On such language in Egyptian *historiolae*, see Vernsel (2002) 122–126.

50 See, e.g., Contenau (1955) 164; Rabinowitz (1993); Frankfurter (1994); Noegel (2010).

51 Johnston (2014a) 125, observes: "Although some *historiolae* do use the past tense to narrate their myths, implying that their paradigmatic action occurred at an earlier time, others use the present tense, which can be understood in either of two ways. 1) The present tense may imply that narrating something that already took place causes it to happen *again, right now*, thus bringing its paradigmatic power into the quotidian realm in a particularly vivid manner. 2) The present tense may also imply that what is narrated is happening *now for the first time*, at the very moment that the practitioner is narrating it".

52 Sanders (2001).

53 The forms that analogies can take in *historiolae* are many and varied, and they can even defy logic. Note the remarks of Vernsel (2002) 129: "So we conclude for the moment that the choice of models in

Moreover, the difference between those *historiolae* that function implicitly or explicitly is reflected in the vocabulary that each type employs. For those that operate implicitly, the speaker engages a lexicon of reflection, meditation, and memory, sometimes focused on covenantal obligations. One finds this in Isaiah 26:7–27:1, and Psalms 77, 89, and 114. In the former, one hears the prophet *q-w-h* "hope" for God and long to *z-k-r* "invoke" his name (26:8, cf. 26:13). He *ʾ-w-h* "desires" and *š-ḥ-r* "seeks" Yahweh, and observes how the people of the world *l-m-d* "learn" from his righteousness (26:9). In Psalm 77, the lamenter hopes to obtain God's ear (77:2). He *d-r-š* "seeks" him (77:3), *z-k-r* "remembers" him (77:4; 77:7; 77:12), and *h-m-h* "murmurs" and *h-g-h* "utters" prayers over him (77:4; 77:13). He *ś-y-ḥ* "meditates" (77:4; 77:7; 77:13) and *ḥ-š-b* "considers" the days of old (77:6). His spirit *ḥ-p-ś* "searches" in anguish (77:7).[54] The psalmist of Psalm 89 *š-y-r* "sings" and *y-d-ʿ* "makes known" God's steadfast love (89:2). He recalls the covenant sworn with David (89:4–5), and recounts the way the heavens and divine beings *y-d-h* "praise" him (89:6). He asks who is mightier and contemplates his faithfulness (89:9). He ponders his exalted power and the righteousness of his divine rule (89:12–17). The oracle that he recounts constitutes a lengthy meditation upon his covenant with David and its promises (89:20–38). He asks that Yahweh *z-k-r* "remember" how brief his life is (89:48–49). He thinks of his steadfast love of *hā-riʾšōnīm* "old" (89:50) and pleads with God to *z-k-r* "remember" the reproach of his servants (89:51). The brief salvation psalm (Psalm 114) similarly meditates upon God's acts of cosmic power – the exodus, and conquest of Canaan, the splitting of the Reed Sea and the Jordan, the quaking mountains, the trembling of the earth, and the drawing of water from rock.

However, when the *historiolae* function explicitly, the text employs no such language of reflection or contemplation. The mighty acts of old are merely listed and the speaker calls upon God to act, either before or after the list. In Isa 51:9, the prophet summons God to *ʿ-w-r* "awake". The speaker in Psalm 74 calls upon Yahweh to *z-k-r* "remember" the community and the enemy (74:18; 74:22), to *r-w-m* "rise" to his feet (74:3), and to not *š-k-ḥ* "forget" them (74:19; 74:23). He begs God to *n-b-ṭ* "look" to the covenant (74:20) and to *q-w-m* "rise up" (74:22). The penitent exile in Psalm 80 pleads with God to *ʾ-z-n* "give ear" (80:2), to *y-p-ʿ* "shine" upon his people (80:2), to *ʿ-w-r* "rouse" (80:3) and *h-l-k* "go forth" (80:3). He asks him to *š-w-b* "return" (80:15), to *n-b-ṭ* "look" (80:15) and *r-ʾ-h* "see" (80:15), to *p-q-d* "visit" (80:15) and *ḥ-y-h* "revive" them (80:19), and he repeatedly requests that he *š-w-b* "restore" (80:4; 80:8; 80:20) and *ʾ-w-r* "show favor" to his people

comparative formulas is liable to a liberty that often verges on arbitrariness. Although there are fixed and recurrent models, either taken from nature or from cultural tradition, which have an authority in themselves, the users are apparently free to vary, associate, recreate, make additions, and all this practically without restriction. In other words, there seems to be a remarkable tolerance or rather openness to improvisation. In this process we often observe that the *logical relevance* of a particular comparison is *not* the decisive consideration".

54 Gerstenberger (2001) 91, sees the use of some of these reflective verbs as representing a "congregational search for identity and security".

(80:4; 80:8; 80:20). In Psalm 83, we hear the exhortations to *d-m-h* "(not) be silent" (83:2), *ḥ-r-š* "(not) be mute" (83:2), and *š-q-ṭ* "(not) be quiet" (83:2). The exile in Psalm 106 beseeches Yahweh to *z-k-r* "remember" him and his people (106:4), to *p-q-d* "visit" them (106:4), *y-š-ʿ* "deliver" them (106:47), and *q-b-ṣ* "gather" them (106:47). The Levites in Nehemiah 9 plead with Yahweh that he *ʿattāh* "now" not deem their suffering *m-ʿ-ṭ* "small" (9:32). Daniel prays that Yahweh *š-w-b* "return" his anger (9:16), *š-m-ʿ* "hear" his prayer (9:17), and *ʾ-w-r* "show favor" (9:17). He implores God to *n-ṭ-h* "incline" his ear (9:18), *š-m-ʿ* "hear" his supplication (9:18; 9:19), *p-q-ḥ* "open" his eyes (9:18), and *r-ʾ-h* "see" their desolation (9:18). He asks that God *s-l-ḥ* "forgive" them (9:19), *q-š-b* "attend" to their needs (9:19), and *ʿ-ś-h* "act" (9:19). Therefore, where invocation is indirect, the speaker carefully reflects, calls to memory, and contemplates God's past acts of power, but where the invocation is direct, there is no meditation. Thus, the perlocutionary and illocutionary means of making *historiolae* efficacious appear to have entailed different forms of ritual engagement in Israel, the former involving a more inward and prolonged memorializing of the mythic past.

3.6 Texts Related to the Leviathan *Historiolae* (Job 3; Jer 51:34–45; Ezek 29:1–16; 32:1–16)

A few biblical texts beyond those examined here are relevant to the four *historiolae* that reference Yahweh's defeat of Leviathan. The first is a line in the curse that Job utters against the day of his birth: "let those who curse a day (*ʾōrĕrē-yôm*), imprecate it (*yiqqĕbūhū*); those prepared to rouse (*ʿōrēr*) Leviathan" (Job 3:8).[55] The line has long been something of a curiosity. Of particular interest is how the passage identifies Leviathan with the illocutionary function of a curse. Indeed, the narrator introduces his entire speech as a *q-l-l* "curse" (3:1). Might it be that the passage refers to people who rouse Yahweh against Leviathan in a *historiola* to imprecate others?[56] This is in fact what the Leviathan-centered *historiolae* accomplish. Moreover, the four related

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55 Pope (1973) 30, argues that we should read the word *yôm* as *yām* "Sea". However, the noun is written plene in the MT. Thus, I see it as "day," but also as an allusion to Sea, since "demons of the day" had just been mentioned (Job 3:5). See Noegel (2007). The day demons also might figure into the imprecation involving Leviathan.

56 Cf. Job 41:2 in which Yahweh asserts that he alone has power over Leviathan. No human *yəʿūrennū* "can rouse him." Wikander (2010) 270, offers a fascinating study of parallels, including charms from Aramaic incantation bowls, and concludes: "It seems as though Job 3,8 combines this notion of summoning up the chaos power with the tradition of using a spell against it. The "ones who are prepared to rouse Leviathan" are also the ones who "curse Yamm", thus integrating this dual tradition into an orderly whole. It certainly does appear as though the sorcerers of 3,8 are not the "good" fighters against chaos who use magic to put the monster to sleep (such as Ea, the hero of the Hymn of the Pearl and the unnamed spellcasters referred to in the Aramaic incantation bowls) but rather persons who use this very magic to call up and "bind" it for their own purposes. They "curse" Leviathan, but it is not made clear whether they do this to defeat him – or to control him".

historiolae also attach a curse to a certain day, much like Job's curse: "perish the day on which I was born. That day, let it be darkness… that night… let it not be counted with the days of the year… behold that night…" (3:3–4; 3:6–7). Isaiah's *historiola* specifically identifies the slaying of Leviathan with a specific day to come, i.e., "on that day" (Isa 27:1). Deutero-Isaiah calls upon Yahweh to act today as in the "days of old" (Isa 51:9) and to save them from the oppressor whom Israel fears "the whole day" (51:13). The psalmist calls upon Yahweh to remember that he created his community in antiquity (Ps 74:2) and refers to him as a "king of old" (74:12). After evoking Leviathan, he adds "the day is yours, and indeed night is yours" (74:16). He asserts that he should act now because fools blaspheme him "all day long" (74:22). The day of deliverance called for is thus a direct response to the day of suffering during which the ritualist summons Yahweh to action.[57] Note too that both Isaiah and the psalmist employ the same root ʿ-*w-r* "wake, rouse" as Job in their *historiolae* (Isa 51:9; Ps 80:3).

Three other texts deserve consideration for their references to the dragon: Jeremiah's prophecy against Babylon (Jer 51:34–45), Ezekiel's oracle against Egypt (Ezek 29:1–16), and his dirge over pharaoh (Ezek 32:1–16). Jeremiah's prophecy laments Nebuchadnezzar II's destruction of Jerusalem, describing the king as the primordial *tannīn* "dragon" that devoured it (51:34).[58] The people and city then pronounce curses upon Babylon (51:35). Yahweh responds by taking up the people's cause and promising to avenge them in kind. He states that he will make Babylon a desolation by drying up its sea and fountains (51:36–37). Ironically, he will then drown it in the waves of another sea (51:42). After he defeats it, he will force the dragon (now called Bēl) to disgorge what it swallowed – implying the return of the city's exiles (51:44). The prophecy inverts the role of the dragon. It is no longer part of a *historiola* that works *against* the king, but a metaphor *for* him. Integrated into the prophecy is a curse, albeit in a different context – one perhaps containing overtones of the defeat of Tiamat in Babylonian myth. The prophecy also enacts the curse by way of illocutionary literary devices that connect the creature's actions with its talionic punishment.[59] Thus, much like the relevant *historiolae*, the prophecy brings together the primordial dragon, curses, and the performative power of speech. It applies a mythological pattern to the current political situation of the exile and deportation. It thus draws upon features found in the Leviathan-focused *historiolae*, but it uses them differently.

Ezekiel's prophecy is similar in many respects. Yahweh calls pharaoh the great dragon of the sea that lurks in the channels of the Nile, and he promises to haul him out with hooks and throw his unburied corpse into the desert for the beasts of

57 The Levites who call for Yahweh's deliverance also beg Yahweh not to treat their suffering lightly as it has continued to "this day" (Neh 9:32), and they cry: "Behold, we are today slaves" (9:36).

58 On the text's structure and import, see Lundbom (2004) 469–481.

59 See Noegel (2014) 36–38. Such devices also have performative power in Greek and Latin charms, because as Vernsel (2002) 156, observes: "For the word poetics comes from Greek ποίησις (*poiesis*), which has a double meaning: 'creation' and 'poetical composition'".

the earth and birds of the sky (Ezek 29:3–5).[60] The oracle predicts Egypt's utter destruction, the removal of its inhabitants, and eventual return (29:6–16). The context is now Egyptian, suggesting an allusion to Apep.[61] A tendency to demythologize is apparent in Yahweh's claim that the Nile belongs to him, because he made it (29:9), an assertion that runs counter to Egyptian belief that associates the Nile's flood waters with the god Hapi. As in Isaiah, this prophecy guarantees the drying of the waters that maintain the creature's existence. Here too we find the role of the dragon inverted and employed as a metaphor. While the prophecy does not contain a *historiola*, it does situate the monster in an illocutionary pronouncement that ushers in its demise. It applies the primordial myth to current events as well, as Moshe Greenberg observes: "The message of the oracle fits the situation in Judah in January 587, in which beleaguered Jerusalem vainly hoped for help from Egypt" (Greenberg 1997, 612).

Ezekiel's dirge too metaphorically identifies pharaoh with the dragon that roils the seas and rivers (instead of the Nile's channels) and it promises to capture it with a net (instead of hooks) and to expose its dead carcass to the animals (Ezek 32:2–7). Accompanying pharaoh's death will be cosmic events: the darkening of the sun at day and the moon and stars at night (32:7–8). Again the dirge inverts the dragon's role and uses the mythological paradigm to describe the fall of Egypt, this time by the sword of Babylon (32:11). Here as well, it occurs in the illocutionary speech of Yahweh. Thus, like the passage in Job, Jeremiah's prophecy, and Ezekiel's other oracle, this text draws upon a constellation of mythemes and patterns found in the *historiolae* that evoke Leviathan's defeat. Each of the texts also employs a lexicon of execration. They thus offer additional evidence for the knowledge and use of *historiolae.*

3.7 How the Israelite *Historiolae* Have Escaped Attention

One other topic concerning the eleven proposed *historiolae* requires comment. Given that the use of *historiolae* was so widespread in antiquity and over such a long span of time, one might ask why scholars have never before considered these or any other biblical texts as containing *historiolae.* I suspect that one reason might be the rather long-held stubborn dichotomy that sharply distinguishes magic from religion. This view, which is largely informed by biblical and later theological polemic, has long vexed the discipline of Biblical Studies. This is not the place to wade into such weed-entangled waters, but suffice it to point out that the last few decades have seen a welcome sea change in this regard.

It also is plausible to think that biblical texts have escaped attention, because the canonized Bible naturally conceals the fact that it is a collection of many different types

60 The noun here is *tannīm* instead of *tannīn* (also in 32:2), likely because the older form was misconstrued as an Aramaic plural. See Greenberg (1997) 601.
61 Greenberg (1997) 612, suggests the god Sobek, because he understands the creature here as a crocodile.

of texts and oral traditions that once circulated independently. This especially may be the case for those scholars whose primary focus has been on Greek, Latin, Coptic, or later Christian *historiolae*, who perhaps are less familiar with the Hebrew Bible. Conversely, such *historiolae* might constitute unfamiliar territory to biblical scholars. Nevertheless, the use of *historiolae* is quite expected in a book that contains numerous references to illocutionary speech, from blessings and curses, to commands, threats, promises, and prophecies. Biblical texts even describe the creation of the world as occurring by fiat.

Another contributing factor, observed recently by Brian Sowers, might be that scholarship on *historiolae* has focused overwhelmingly on prescriptive sources perceived to have been actually used by practitioners or clients – amulets, ritual tablets, papyri, incantation bowls, and the like. Given this focus, it is understandable why biblical texts have remained outside the scholarly purview. Moreover, this focus has had another unintended consequence: "Scholarly preference for prescriptive *historiolae* tacitly suggests that literary *historiolae* are rare or that they operate indistinguishably from their prescriptive cousins" (Sowers 2017, 42). Thus literary texts like Nehemiah 9 and Daniel 9 were never considered. Nevertheless, as Sowers' recent study of Aelia Eudocia's Greek epic poem *Conversion* (5th c. CE) shows, the literary use of *historiolae* can have ritual significance and bear allusive intertextual power. They too deserve attention for the way they depict the ritual uses of *historiolae.*

4 Conclusion

In this contribution, I have argued that eleven biblical texts give evidence for the use of *historiolae* in ancient Israel. These texts attest to their use from the 8th–2nd century BCE. Of course, there are inherent limits in applying the category *historiola* to these texts, because we possess only the finished product into which, I contend, the *historiolae* have been integrated. They are thus literary records of their original performative use. Nevertheless, the deployment of these particular mythical paradigms (defeat of the dragon, creation, the exodus, and conquest of Canaan) contain all the requisite features found in *historiolae* from elsewhere in the ancient world including the narrative resolution of mythical events to affect a present reality, a ritual context for their use, the perlocutionary exertion of mythic authority, and/or the employment of illocutionary and often execrative language. Two of them (Nehemiah 9; Daniel 9) constitute literary depictions of the performance of *historiolae*, but all of them represent efforts to "reduce the situation to its cosmological significance in order to subject it to ritual control" (Sørensen 1984, 430).[62]

62 Sørensen (1984) 430, is particularly applicable to the *historiolae* in Nehemiah and Daniel: "…the *Conversion* clarifies how late antique Christian communities interpreted, appropriated, and manipulated Greco-Roman, Egyptian, and Jewish rituals in their own narratives, even when those narratives employ overtly 'anti-magic' polemics. This article, therefore, is not merely a literary reading of rituals, nor does

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it simply impose ritual terminology onto late antique hagiographies. My approach provides a new taxonomy of *historiola*, the literary *historiola*, and situates that new taxonomy within the literary and religious context(s) of late antiquity. The final product, I hope, elucidates how narratives of power (*historiola*) operate in literary depictions of narrating power (narrated *historiola*), specifically when performances of narrated *historiolae* became ritualized events".

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