JONAH AND THE PROPHETIC CHARACTER

By

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABD	*The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. 6 volumes. Edited by David Noel Freedman. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
AEL	*Ancient Egyptian Literature*. Miriam Lichtheim. 3 vols. Berkeley: 1971-1980.
AoF	Altorientalische Forschungen
AJSR	*Association for Jewish Studies (AJS) Review*
ANET	*Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. Ed. James B. Pritchard. 3rd ed. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969.
AOS	American Oriental Series
AnSt	*Anatolian Studies*
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
BDB	*The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Francis Brown. S.R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1906; repr., Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000.
BN	*Biblische Notizen*
CAD	*The Chicago Assyrian Dictionary*. Chicago: The Oriental Institute, University of Chicago, 1921-
CANE	*Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*. 4 volumes. Edited by Jack M. Sasson. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1995.
CM	Cuneiform Monographs
DDD	*The Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*. 2nd ed. Edited by Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst. Leiden: Brill, 1999.
EA	Amarna letter in the edition of J.A. Knudtzon. *Die el-Amarna Tafeln*. Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1915.
Hist.	Herodotus of Halicarnassus. *Historiae*. Translated by A.D. Godley. *The Persian Wars, Books I-IX*. Loeb Classical Library 117-120. Cambridge,

Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1925.

JAF *Journal of American Folklore*

JANER *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions*

JCS *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*

JEA *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*

JNES *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*

JPS *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh: The Traditional Hebrew Text and Its New JPS Translation*. 2nd ed. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1999.

JQR *The Jewish Quarterly Review*

JSOTSup Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series

MC Mesopotamian Civilizations

NABU *Nouvelles assyriologiques brèves et utilitaires*

Od *The Odyssey* of Homer

OEANE *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Ancient Near East*. 6 volumes. Edited by E.M. Meyers. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

OtSt Oudtestamentische Studiën

RA *Revue d'Assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale*

RB *Revue biblique*

RBPH *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*

ResQ *Restoration Quarterly*

RlA *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und vorderasiatischen Archäologie*. Edited by Erich Ebeling et al. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1928-

SAACT State Archives of Assyria Cuneiform Texts

SZAK *Studien zur altägyptischen Kultur*

TBei *Theologische Beiträge*

VTSup Supplements to *Vetus Testamentum*

ZA *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*

ZÄS *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde*

ZAW *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

ZDA *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum*

ZHT *Zeitschrift für die historische Theologie*

INTRODUCTION

1. Folklore is characterized by multiple existence and variation.

2. The Bible is permeated by multiple existence and variation.

3. The Bible is folklore![1]

An eminent folklorist once penned this simple syllogism in an effort to demonstrate that what had usually been regarded as the unchangeable word of God may be the product of the fluid processes which also shaped non-sacred, even informal literatures. Modern biblical critics had long understood this principle but in different terms, and the association with "folklore," understood mainly as the province of ogres and wicked step-mothers, has not always been a welcome one. Part of the problem has been this very perception of what folklore is (or is not). Within the past few decades our definitions of folklore and its construction have been made more inclusive, and especially within biblical criticism we have come to recognize its trademarks more readily; what began exclusively as the study of oral types has now shifted to embrace written literatures which were subject to long periods of transmission and redaction.[2] But the field is still in flux. Nascent modes of reading inevitably yield new interpretations of biblical texts which have been reevaluated continuously over the last two millennia.

One such biblical text which has been the subject of ruminations and debates during this time is the book of Jonah. For such a short and seemingly straightforward

[1] Alan Dundes, *Holy Writ as Oral Lit: The Bible as Folklore* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999), 111.

[2] Two early examples of general folklore study in the Hebrew Bible are James George Frazer, *Folk-lore in the Old Testament* (New York: Tudor, 1923); Frances Lee Utley, "The Bible of the Folk," *California Folklore Quarterly* 4 no. 1 (1945): 1-17. A more specialized analysis of the "folk-tale" is Hermann Gunkel, *The Folktale in the Old Testament* (trans. Michael D. Rutter; Sheffield, U.K.: The Almond Press, 1987).

narrative, Jonah has never ceased to confound or inspire those who would claim to understand its "true meaning." Of course this presents another challenge in and of itself; for, as with any ancient text, the book of Jonah does not state its purpose, authorship, or audience. Though our interpretation of the text inevitably informs us on these matters we must be careful in how we, as readers, reach conclusions. Reading the book of Jonah from a modern context is also a worthy subject of examination, but there is no reason to presume that the story conveys the same meaning in this different context. There are any number of ways that people have read Jonah--as an invective against prophetic hypocrisy, as an account of an historical figure or as a theological and moral example, and so on. One method of interpretation is no more "correct" than any other; so we must state our intentions from the outset. Are we to situate ourselves in the world of the author(s) as closely as is possible, or do we instead describe the book of Jonah's significance for the modern reader? This study aims for the former but uses the apparatus of modern literary criticism and applies anthropological constructs which may be helpful in this regard. Specifically, I will explore how the book of Jonah may be read as a type of folktale depicting a failed rite of passage and suggest why that reading is appropriate for the worldview of its authors and audience.

The book of Jonah is particularly interesting because, within the confines of a very short narrative, it describes a grandiose journey from one edge of the world to the other. Over the course of the story the prophet winds from one extreme to another, over sea and into desert. Without the parenthetical glosses we find in some other biblical depictions of travel, Jonah moves across a number of different backgrounds that were beyond the knowledge of most Israelites. The concise, even terse, nature of the Hebrew

text during these episodes remains one of the more mysterious of its features for readers. Arguably, the book of Jonah is not, nor was it ever intended to be, a realistic or exhaustive retelling of an actual series of events. The brevity of the story and, especially, the fact that it allows only cursory mentions concerning world geography when spatiality is a principal theme, are among the compelling reasons that a folkloristic interpretation is warranted. For folklore, in spite of its popular association with the trivial or whimsical, contributes greatly to a society's expression of its most deeply seated fears, anxieties and hopes. The implications of folkloristics for other disciplines are only beginning to be recognized.

History of Interpretation and Purpose

After more than two millennia of interpretations, I am not the first to claim that the book of Jonah may be read as a folktale. Though the development folkloristics as a field is comparatively recent and the book of Jonah was not understood in those terms, the text had often been read allegorically and folktales are rich in allegory. It would be tedious--if not unprofitable--to offer a summation of the interpretations of the prophet Jonah or the book that bears his name. Moreover, separation of this history into rubrics of "Jonah in Christianity/Judaism/Islam" would be deceptively categorical. To show how easily this brief text has been adapted and readapted to the prerogatives of various interpretive communities, I have highlighted a few selected examples from antiquity. That the Jonah narrative is fluid enough to support expansions and contradictory or ambiguous readings, even in antiquity, is another reason that a folkloristic reading is

useful. Notwithstanding that the "*Volk*"[3] often construct and transmit stories informally, these derived readings of the canonical narrative follow certain conventions which we may recognize.

The book of Jonah is not directly mentioned in other biblical texts, but its imagery and language are clearly reproduced within the *Hodayot* hymns of the Qumran community.[4] The anonymous author is thankful for God's deliverance unto an earthly, restored Jerusalem:

> I thank You, O YHWH, for You have redeemed my soul from The Pit, and from Sheol Abaddon, You have brought me up to an everlasting height, and I walk in complete security.
>
> I was a mariner in a ship, in the raging of the seas. Their waves and all their breakers roared against me, and a whirlwind. And there was no place to restore my soul, and there was no path for a smooth way upon the face of the waters. The deep roared with my groaning, and I reached unto the gate of death.[5]

The New Testament mentions Jonah and interprets his story as a prefiguration for Jesus Christ, whose three days in the tomb ostensibly follows the example of Jonah's time in the big fish:

> Luke 11:29-30 (NRSV): When the crowds were increasing, he began to say, “This generation is an evil generation; it asks for a sign but no sign will be given to it except for the sign of Jonah. For just as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so the Son of Man will be to this generation.”

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[3] This German term at the base of "folklore" may refer generally to a people or nation but in this context it expresses the culturally engendered identity of a group. As discussed below the term originally connoted "common" or "simple" culture.

[4] "We may notice by these examples how the Qumran poets did not actually quote Jonah but merely appropriated enough vocabulary to bring the book to mind." Jack M. Sasson, *Jonah* (The Anchor Bible; New York: Doubleday, 1990), 214.

[5] IQH[a] 3:19 and 6:23 adapted from the translation of Robert B. Laurin, "The Question of Immortality in the Qumran 'Hodayot,'" *JSS* 3 (1958): 344-355.

> Matt 12:38-40 (NRSV): Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to him, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except for the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights on the belly of the sea monster, so for three days and three nights the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth."

Such a reading presumes that repentance is the theological crux of the Jonah narrative and, indeed, this is a repeated theme in early commentaries. The Jonah-as-precursor-to-Jesus paradigm set the book's interpretation in early Christian communities and the ascription of favorable traits to the person of Jonah took on a life of its own. Jerome, for example, claims (in his *Commentary on Jonah*) that the prophet resists God's initial command out of a sense of patriotism, for he fears for the safety of Israel and tries to get away as a matter of self-sacrifice.[6] Jonah (as Yunus) is revered in Islam as a faithful prophet as well, truly repentant for his initial flight but, as recounted in the *Qurʾān*, "Had it not been that he repented and glorified Allah, he surely would have remained inside the fish till the Day of Resurrection."[7]

The relationship between the book of Jonah and early Jewish literature is somewhat more ambivalent, perhaps owing to the very broad temporal and geographical spheres in which rabbinic literature developed. Many talmudic passages treating the book of Jonah are *midrashim* explicating details of the Hebrew text itself,[8] though Jonah

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[6] For an English translation see Timothy Hegedus, "Jerome's Commentary on Jonah: Translation and Introduction with Critical Notes" (M.A. thesis, Wilfrid Laurier University, 1991). Cited in Barbara Green, Jonah's Journeys. Interfaces (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2005).

[7] *Surah* 37:143-144. Translation from *The Qur'an*, (trans. Abdullah Yusuf Ali; Elmhurst, N.Y.: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an Inc., 1995), 297-298.

[8] E.g., *b. Ned*. 51b, which reconciles the discrepancy between *dāg* (Jon 2:1) and *dāgâ* by asserting that Jonah was spit out by the first fish (he was too comfortable apparently) and swallowed by a second, female fish, or *b. Šabb*. 21a, in which the nature of the *qîqāyôn* is discussed, with one rabbi claiming that the plant produces cotton seed oil and another mentioning that shopkeepers like to keep it by the entrances to their establishments for the shade and fragrance it provides.

is also clearly labeled a "false prophet" alongside other (in)famous biblical figures for "suppressing" his prophecy.[9] *Genesis Rabbah* supplies a more positive treatment, with Jonah identified as the widow's son resurrected by a miracle of Elijah (I Kgs 17:9-24).[10] *The Zohar* embellishes the fantasy of Jonah's story but similarly lauds the virtue of Jonah's repentance; the sincerity of his prayer causes God to revive the fish, which had died and was sinking with Jonah inside.[11]

The *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer* also depict Jonah in a favorable light. This midrash to Genesis and parts of Exodus and Numbers is attributed to the tannaitic sage Eliezer ben Hyrcanus but the text likely dates to the eighth century CE. Located within an exposition on the fifth day of creation, that of the creation of the birds and fishes, this aggadic discourse is noticeable for its fanciful elaboration of an already fantastic narrative. Jonah enters the great fish's mouth as one would enter a great synagogue; the eyes of the fish are windows of stained glass and a pearl radiating light like that of the sun hangs from the roof of its mouth.[12] The fish tells the prophet that his day to be swallowed in "the muzzle of Leviathan" has arrived, and the fish takes him to the creature. But Jonah shows Leviathan the "seal of Abraham" and scares it away. Jonah directs the fish to show him the underworld, the various locations of which comprise the matter of Jonah's "psalm" in

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[9] *b. Sanh*. 89a; my reference for all of the preceding is the *Soncino Talmud* (ed. Isidore Epstein; London: The Soncino Press, 1935-1938).

[10] This is evidently a widespread tradition from an early date, with references in *Midr. Psalms* (*Tehillim*) 26:220, *Pike de-Rabbi Eliezer* (discussed below) 10 and Jerome's *Commentary on Jonah*. Louis H. Feldman claims that the tradition is notable in its absence in Josephus; see Feldman, "Josephus' Interpretation of Jonah," *AJSR* 17 no. 1 (Spr. 1992): 1-29.

[11] *Beshalach* 82-88; *The Zohar by Rav Shimon bar Yochai*, (ed. and comp. by Michael Berg; Los Angeles, Calif., Kabbalah Centre International, Inc., 2003).

[12] I am depending on the German translation found in *Pike de-Rabbi Elieser:Nach der Edition Venedig 1544 unter Berücksichtigung der Edition Warschau 1852* (trans. Dagmar Börner Klein; Studia Judaica: Forschungen zur Wissenschaft des Judentums Band XXVI; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 90ff.

Jon 2:3-10: the pillars of the Earth, the firmament, Gehenna, Sheol, and even the foundation stone underneath God's temple.[13]

It is interesting to observe how such a brief narrative elicited so many diverse interpretations. For a trenchant and thorough review of these and many other interpretations of Jonah through the ages, we have at least two works: *The Legend of Jonah* by R.H. Bowers,[14] and Yvonne Sherwood's *A Biblical Text and Its Afterlives: The Survival of Jonah in Western Culture*.[15] Bowers' study is centered on readings of Jonah in ancient and medieval Christian literature, though his discussion of "Jonah and his friend the whale" as an interpretive pattern prepares the reader for the prevailing cultural model of the story. Far from being an external overview of the available material (*midrashim*, commentaries, and pop-culture references, among others), Sherwood's book analyzes Jonah with respect to four "mainstream" Judeo-Christian-Academic modes of reading the narrative: Jonah-Jesus as typological axiom, Jonah as Jewish stereotype, Jonah as a bad example deserving of divine punishment, and Jonah as subject of scientific rationalization.[16]

I mention Bowers in particular because he adopts that image which has dominated popular representations of the book of Jonah--the misguided but heroic prophet given a second chance in the belly of the benign whale by a forgiving God. Consequently, many

[13] "We learn from here," the rabbis proclaim, "that Jerusalem stands on seven mountains." The Jonah text has thus become an elucidation of sacred cosmography, and the innate human desire to explore those reaches beyond their knowledge (e.g., the underworld) is a theme from literature across the world we find expressed here.

[14] R.H. Bowers, *The Legend of Jonah* (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971).

[15] Yvonne Sherwood, *A Biblical Text and Its Afterlives: The Survival of Jonah in Western Culture* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[16] Sherwood, *A Biblical Text and Its Afterlives*, 9-48.

scholars who have examined the story's original context begin with that image in their minds. It is a classic image, and few outside of biblical scholarship recall the remainder of the narrative or much else aside from the "whale" episode.[17] As is the case with the interpretation of biblical texts, the needs and wants of faith communities have dictated its reception history; but the book of Jonah is much more complex than this when we account for the milieu in which it was developed. Rather than tracing the book of Jonah's mode of composition (tradition history) or its subsequent interpretation (reception history), I will attempt to fix my reading upon the context, inasmuch as that may be reconstructed, in which the narrative was most immediately evocative.

The purpose of this study is to offer another approach to the book of Jonah, one which ties together seemingly disparate concepts of literary and social theory; in this interpretation I propose that the Jonah story reflects an ongoing crisis in Israelite self-understanding. My thesis is tripartite: 1) That unique as the book of Jonah is among the biblical texts, it is similar in structure and content to at least two other ancient Near Eastern tales, and that all three may be read as "wondertales," 2) that the story's structure facilitates the portrayal of Jonah as a folk antihero whose failed *rite de passage* is allegorically linked to Israelite selfhood and, 3) that consequently the Jonah narrative served as a tool of allegorical meaning and edification of social organization in its postexilic context. That a lesson of such social and theological significance should be expressed in this brief and unusual narrative is one of the achievements of the book of Jonah.

[17] The *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, similarly, follows the biblical story only up to Jon 2:10, after which chapters 3-4 are ignored completely. Clearly Jonah's trial at sea has captured the imagination of readers much more than the text's other events.

Layout of This Study

Chapter One is an explanation of my methodology in both theory and praxis. To situate this methodology I briefly review the academic study of folklore and especially its use in biblical scholarship. Of particular importance to this study is a work of Vladimir Propp, *Morfológija skázki* (*Morphology of the Folktale*), dedicated to the identification of structural memes in folktales with fantastic content.[18] Though his data were strictly drawn from a set of 100 of these "wondertales," I argue that his methods can be applied to a smaller set of folktales with fantastic content that are more disparate in their origins and forms, including the Jonah story, provided that his methods are adjusted accordingly. In brief, Propp maintained that all wondertales share up to thirty-one structural features determined by plot roles and events, and that these "functions" occur in a prescribed order. As a result, tales with no apparent relation may in fact share structure when superficial representations, the groupings of which had previously dictated the course of comparative folkloristics, are discarded. I argue that the Jonah story is structurally analogous in its sequence of events to at least two other ancient Near Eastern narratives.

Despite their varied origins, all three of these tales incorporate a certain *topos* inasmuch as recurring elements in each follow a recognizable order. The Jonah narrative follows this morphology to a point but then inverts these functions while adhering to the same sequence. This divergence signifies Jonah's deviation from a rite of passage and results in his depiction as an antihero. In this shared *topos*, a hero goes forth from his

[18] *Morphology of the Folktale* (trans. Laurence Scott; 2d ed.; American Folklore Society Bibliographical and Special Series; Bloomington: Indiana University, 1968). This title may also be rendered *Morphology of the Wondertale*. See Anatoly Lieberman, "Introduction" in Vladimir Propp, *Theory and History of Folklore* (trans. Ariadna Y. Martin and Richard P. Martin; Theory and History of Literature, vol. 5; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), ix; I prefer to use "wondertale" over "folktale" as a translation for Propp's *skázka* because this more precisely conveys Propp's intention " not to study all the various and complex types of the folktale; I examined only one strikingly distinctive type, viz., the folk wondertale." Ibid., 70.

home "center" to a liminal area where he undergoes external and internal transformation before finally rejoining human society and enjoying an elevation of his social position. Therefore, the second part of this chapter includes a discussion of the center/periphery dichotomy and its implications for the *rite de passage* completed by the hero's quest. The *rite de passage* is a social rite which occurs across cultures and in many different forms of expression. My overview includes the works of Arnold van Gennep, who originally described the rite's three phases, and Victor Turner, who added immensely to van Gennep's foundation.

The second chapter puts my proposed morphology into application, demonstrating its flexibility by examining two wondertales analogous in structure and constitutive elements to the Jonah narrative. These stories are, 1) the two Sumerian poetic tales centered upon the person of Lugalbanda, referred to collectively here as "The Lugalbanda story," and, 2) a brief Egyptian tale extant in a single copy, known within academic circles as "The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor." Both of these tales differ greatly from one another and from Jonah with respect to their tradition history and origin but, as I hope to demonstrate, they all share structural conventions which suggest that they may have more in common than is readily apparent. They all draw upon a recognizable constellation of plot functions and character roles (*dramatis personae*) to depict the ritualized social elevation of a hero (a *rite de passage*).

In the third chapter, I turn to the Jonah narrative specifically. In order to situate my reading of the book of Jonah it is important to identify some of that story's features which suggest a folkloristic reading would be useful. I will review the major arguments concerning the language and external structure of the story as a prelude to reading the

book as a type of wondertale. I argue that although the Jonah story is likely relatively late and displays a high degree of literary artistry, the narrative incorporates easily recognizable "folk" elements and structures, suggesting that the narrative either developed in or was meant to reflect a folkloric social context.[19] The story was salient in this regard because its morphological components were recognizable and its *topos* was common enough to elicit certain expectations of the story's audience. By turning those expectations on end, the narrator transforms this morphology. It will be necessary to this end to address the question of *Gattung* and Jonah; namely, whether or not a single genre designation is appropriate and, as many commentators have suggested, whether Jonah may be read satirically.

In the second part of this chapter I will apply the morphology derived in Chapter Two to the Jonah narrative specifically. Here, I endeavor to show how Jonah's sequence is inverse to those we observe in the other tales that utilize this *topos*. As we see with the protagonists of those stories, Jonah is dispatched to the edge of the known world on a quest. But Jonah's flight from his directive foreshadows the unusual way in which his quest proceeds; after a diversion his quest is reinitiated and ultimately fails. I will suggest how the physical movements of the heroes in each story is reconciled with the tripartite divisions of van Gennep's *rite de passage*. My argument will be that the Jonah narrative adheres to this shared morphology before Jonah's frustrating shortcomings force the narrator to abandon the story altogether *in media res*. As a result, the audience may draw a stark contrast between the character of Jonah and the archetypal hero of this *topos*. In an allegorical interpretation the implications are disturbingly ambiguous and

[19] Note "folkloric," denoting the internal attributes of folklore itself, as opposed to "folkloristic," describing the hermeneutics of folklore or the academic study of folklore.

ambivalent–whereas he succeeds in his quest on the one hand, he fails miserably on the other.[20]

Chapter Four consists of a more nuanced explanation of Jonah's travels in terms of the preliminal, liminal and postliminal phases of the *rite de passage*. In particular, I argue that Jonah's geographical location at each stage along his journeys corresponds to each phase of his progress through this transformation. Jonah's final placement to the east of Nineveh, in particular, underscores that however close he came to successfully completing this transformation, he ultimately fails. The fact that this narrative's morphology shares so much in common with the other tales yet ends so differently underscores that Jonah is very much unlike those other protagonists, and his characterization can only be said to be antiheroic. Despite the apparent success of his quest, Jonah's failure to internally transform is reflected in his failure to reintegrate with human society or elevate his own social position.

This chapter will be, therefore, a synthesis of the conclusions reached up to that point. I suggest that the meaning of the Jonah story in its immediate context lay in its allegorical representation of the social frustrations and anxieties of Israelite society. The adaptation and personalization of a familiar *topos* allows the story's author(s) to express dissatisfaction with the transformation of the Israelite people, and the positing of a "real imaginary" world as a background for these lessons endows the story with rich symbolism. At the story's heart is the center/periphery dichotomy, a model which, both

[20] Or, as Robert P. Carroll reminds us, "Remember, Jonah is the most successful prophet-preacher in history: he converted the sailors and 120,000 Ninevites, giving him a one hundred per cent success rate." "Jonah as a Book of Ritual Responses," 261-268 in *"Lasset uns Brücken bauen…" Collected Communications to the XVth Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament, Cambridge 1995* (Eds. Klaus-Dietrich Schunck and Matthias Augustin; Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des Antiken Judentums, Bd. 43; Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1998), 266.

in terms of geography and social groupings, had significant implications for coming-of-age of postexilic Yehud.

Chapter Five explores modes in which the tale's postexilic audience and, to some extent, we may interpret the story's meanings and especially the antiheroic characterization of Jonah. I discuss three of these at some length: 1) Jonah as Israelite anti-prophet, 2) Jonah as failed social actor, and 3) the book of Jonah as false travel narrative. Rather than merely summarizing the topic I intend this chapter as a beginning point for more interpretations of and further investigation of the book of Jonah's many meanings. In anticipation of other studies concerning the symbolism of fantastic geographic locations mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, I include in Appendix I a brief discussion of the biblical references to Ophir and Sheba. Perhaps more narratives will be discovered in the future to shed light either on these places, Tarshish, or the features described herein. Besides being a boon for ancient Near-Eastern folkoristics, such finds would undoubtedly teach us more about the psychological centrism and geographic worldview of the ancients who told and transmitted fantastic stories.

Caveats

Concerning the unity of the book of Jonah, I try at all times to avoid presenting the production of the narrative as a diachronic process. The narrative may contain smaller units of formerly independent origins, but supposition about early, oral versions of the story opens up endless debate. This is especially true for the Jonah story because so little is known about its textual history. We must acknowledge that the narrative as we have it is deliberately set in written form because some author or editor found it

appropriate for his (or her) purposes. Moreover, an analysis of hypothetical antecedents to the story or to the recensions of the narrative goes too far afield. I also believe it is also important not to go beyond the purview of my goals with regards to authorial intent. We cannot discount intent since the story was clearly formed for some reasons and follows certain conventions; but we must not imagine that what we reconstruct is equivalent to the original. For example, though I argue that the Jonah story exhibits some features endemic to all wondertales, the wondertale is very much *our* literary category and not the end goal of the Jonah narrative's author(s). We cannot suppose that the ancients followed a check-list of Propp's functions. Nonetheless, insofar as we may infer what their purposes were for arranging and transmitting this tale, it is reasonable to argue that modern methods of literary criticism may enhance our interpretation of that work.

I am proceeding under several assumptions which are generally held in academia: 1) that the book of Jonah found final and written form in the postexilic period, 2) that although the book of Jonah is likely a highly redacted collection of shorter, perhaps originally oral units, its parts are well-suited to one another such that the story may be treated as a literary whole, and 3) that the basic storyline precedes the literary features applied to it rather than the plot structure resulting from literary artistry. In the same manner, as the reader has likely already noticed, I will continue to refer to the creators of the Jonah narrative variously as "author," "author(s)" and so forth. This allows for the convenient--and in my opinion necessary--avoidance of pinning this work to a particular scribe or even a certain "school" within Yehud. The text may reflect the interests of some groups over others but this is not necessarily a valid criterion for assigning authorship. The story also frustratingly resists our temptation as biblical scholars to pigeonhole it in

terms of its genre, origin, or theological message, thus making any definitive claim about a single objective of its authorship somewhat specious in my view. I am content to leave the matter partially open-ended; folklore by its very nature belongs to all people who receive and transmit it, and since the story was crafted partly to capture this anonymity delimiting its authorship and distribution in assured terms can be counterproductive.

Looking Forward

The mystery of this story has launched the tradition of Jonah beyond the confines of just the book of Jonah and onto the pages of various *midrashim* and scholarly works. As I have researched the book of Jonah, it has become increasingly evident that with so many "new" methods and approaches for the interpretation of biblical texts, perhaps there is renewed value in older modes of reading which have been neglected in recent decades. I view the work of Propp in this way; some find the preeminence of literary form in his work to be passé, a ghost of structuralist methods past. Though Propp's methods have certain limitations I am fascinated by the congruence between his syntagmatic morphology and the sequence of events comprising the *rite de passage*. That these stages also correspond to concepts of spatiality as presented in the narrative represents a fresh approach to the story.

Journey between lands is often depicted in the biblical narratives as a process during which characters to grow and develop, and this is no different in the case of the Jonah. Yet Jonah is also very different from these other biblical narratives in at least two respects: 1) That Jonah goes not simply to a foreign land but to the very edge of his world, and, 2) and how this transformation progresses. The fact that Jonah's course takes

an unanticipated direction in the story reflects upon the troubled social context in which that story took form. Thus, as structuralism has fallen to the wayside in favor of poststructural and even post-poststructural discourse, my effort here is to temper Propp's theoretical, literary construct with a realistic social application for that model. I cannot claim this as a new method of interpretation but only as a re-imagining of principles already used in scholarship for decades. It is my hope that readers will find this approach advantageous in their own interpretation of this vexing biblical text.

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CHAPTER I

A FOLKLORIST METHODOLOGY

1.1.1 Folkoristics and the Wondertale: Some Precepts

As we have already seen, a variety of approaches have been used in the interpretation of the book of Jonah. These different methods have yielded many dissimilar, and sometimes contradictory, conclusions about the alleged meaning of that text but none has been wholly satisfactory. Despite the fact that the book is in narrative style, using relatively simple language and is very short, its interpretation has remained problematic throughout the centuries especially as it is situated alongside the "Minor" prophetic books. Its uniqueness especially within the canon suggests that we consider its attributes in light of other Near Eastern literatures just as readily as any biblical text. Such a comparison may unfold in a number of ways, so it is important to establish a comprehensible mode of interpretation, and that is the subject of this chapter.

If the book of Jonah is to be read comparatively, then we might stress that any hermeneutic that requires readings from multiple socio-historical contexts has limitations. In this case that means that the social norms, as reflected in the literature, of the Sumerians and Egyptians differed from one another and from ancient Israel. Moreover, the texts studied here are not identical in form or content but rather are analogous to one another in some respects. This is an important point. The *rite de passage*, in whatever form it takes, is a primal experience, deeply embedded within the socio-historical fabric of all cultures, but it is represented in different ways and may serve any number of

purposes. So although these stories may depict rites of passage as defined by certain universal principles (more on this below), the stories themselves each reflect the social context in which they were formed. What these three stories share is that their appeal is very broad within each culture; their lessons have meaning for culture at large, and their narratives are structured such that their elements are culturally recognizable and significant. The interpretation of cultural material such as this is the defining goal of folkloristics, that is to say the study of folklore as a vehicle of cultural expression among groups.

A great deal of material besides narratives may be acknowledged as folklore, and not all of it was originally shaped as literature. The academic study of folklore, for example, derives from the nineteenth-century interest in oral storytelling among the illiterate and poorly educated masses of society, the *Volk*.[21] Folklore passed orally was purportedly the primary vehicle for conveying social knowledge. Many such items found written form at some point, and folkloristics was irrevocably tied to the study of written forms of literature that preserve vestiges of oral transmission. Storytellers in ancient societies were held in high esteem, and undoubtedly many of the narratives, songs, and other texts extant in the Bible are derived from oral antecedents. Social position and the maintenance of social organization was of profound importance in ancient societies, whose existence was continually challenged by threats to that organization by invaders, shifts in ethnic alignment, and disease, among other things. The book of Jonah, for one, lay at the interlocution of these social and historical factors.

[21] In early German studies of folklore, *Volk* is used mainly as a collective appellation for the rustic, lower classes of people in society. It is not a tangible group of people but an invention. The precondition that such people told and retold only non-serious items informally predicated much of the early work in the field; see Richard M. Dorson, "Introduction" in *Folklore and Folklife* (ed. Richard M. Dorson; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 1-50, esp. 10 ff.

The dominant mode for the interpretation of folklore and mythology in the late nineteenth century, that of the "historical-geographical" or "Finnish" school of Julius Krohn, has continued to dictate the course of folkloristics throughout the years. This hermeneutic resulted from the confluence of ideas in contemporary European intellectual climate: natural selection, scientific classification, nationalism, philology, and *Religionsgeschichte*.[22] The confluence of interests in social organization and linguistic taxonomy during this period fueled the academic classification of folk literature as historically and socially appropriate types. At this juncture an alternative mode of interpretation took shape, derived from the linguistic studies of Ferdinand de Saussure. Following de Saussure's studies of structure and syntax as the organization and reorganization of building blocks of meaning, "structural" literary analysis developed as the "study of interrelationships or organization of the component parts."[23] In contrast to the "historical-geographical" school structuralists were highly synchronic in their approach, mostly setting aside questions of socio-historical influences and authorial intent in order to focus on reader-reception and the finished forms of literature alone.

Earlier folkloristics, on the other hand, had thrived under a certain historically-conditioned nationalism prevailing in Europe during the nineteenth century. For one, the *Volk*, the purported peasants of society, were viewed as the backbone of national identity such that recovering the worldview of the *Volk* was the key to social and national existentialism. The idea that folklore is the oral product of the illiterate peasantry has by

[22] A term for that nineteenth-century school of thought that religion should be studied as a socio-cultural phenomenon and that, by implication, religions may be studied comparatively for stages of their development.

[23] Dundes, Alan, "Structuralism and Folklore," 79-93 in *Folk Narrative Research: Some Papers Presented at the VI Congress of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research* (ed. Juha Pentikäinen; Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuden Se, 1976).

now been largely abandoned.[24] Interpretation is by necessity more fluid than in years past, as we recognize folklore to broadly include numerous literary and non-literary genres. This has been made possible, in part, by a softening of the ideological divide between these two avenues; we acknowledge the value in recognition of structural elements but see these patterns as the result of socio-historical pressures, for example.

Interest in folkloristics as a distinct field was catalyzed especially by studies of the "fairytale." The term is derived from the German literary category *Märchen*, once thought of as a purely European style tale involving fantastic content.[25] This ancient genre has subsequently been the subject of many studies and recognized in the folklore of many other cultures, though the term *Märchen* is seldom applied anymore because of the restricted connotation used in early scholarship. In this study I refer to a particular type of tale with fantastic content also but I use the alternate term, "wondertale," in describing these.[26] I eschew "fairytale," which is sometimes equated with *Märchen*, because I think the scope of this category has been conceived too narrowly in scholarly literature; it conjures misconceptions that all such tales are for children, of European origin, involve fairies or ogres, and end "happily ever after." Wondertales are thematically more diverse than this and are structurally more complex. Thus a wondertale is a tale including fantastic themes or content and usually engaging a protagonist who strives to achieve a

[24] Simon J. Bronner, "Introduction" in *The Meaning of Folklore: the Analytical Essays of Alan Dundes* (ed. Simon J. Bronner; Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 2007), 1-50.

[25] The classic examples of *Märchen* cited in both academic and popular literature are the tales collected by the Grimm Brothers. As opposed to Hans Christian Andersen, who wrote his own, the Grimms gathered and edited tales. But we know that some parts of their tales even fictionalized by the Grimms themselves; Dundes, Alan, *Folklore Matters* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 44-45.

[26] Following a rendering of Propp's term *skázki* (pl.) for the literary category of his subject tales. Propp uses *skázka* contextually as either a tale in general or as a fairy tale, so Louis Wagner, "Preface to the Second Edition" in Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, ix.

particular goal against adverse circumstances. These parameters are somewhat broad but the advantage of using folkloristics to interpret such stories lie in the fact that speaking in general terms allows for comparison across cultures of recurring motifs, themes and plot sequences, among other things. Folkloristics routinely employs an "atomistic" approach, the dissection of tales by their components for comparative study. Based on such criteria, we may speak readily of any number of wondertale "types" grouped according to common elements.

By the early twentieth century interpreters had already noticed many affinities among the folktales of many cultures and began to postulate "rules" and categories for the various types they observed. The Danish folklorist Axel Olrik, for example, is most noted for his "laws" of epic literature such the "law of threes" (*das Gesetz der Dreizahl*, the idea that everything recurs in sets of three) or "law of contrast" (*das Gesetz des Gegensatzes*, that folk narratives constantly employ contrasts and binaries).[27] Though the connections among tales may be overstated we cannot deny the impact that some implicit yet powerful influences govern the shape folktales take. Though there are obviously some methodological problems with sticking to hard and fast "rules" with biblical and ancient Near Eastern literature, some generalizations may be helpful if we use them with the appropriate caveats.

We can discern more about the contexts for the formation of wondertales by studying their forms because these are very often conditioned by the sociological circumstances that make telling and retelling wondertales valuable. Such is the concern of the method of reading texts known as form criticism, pioneered within biblical studies

[27] Axel Olrik, "Epische Gesetze der Volksdichtung," *ZDA* 52 (1909): 1-12; English translation available in Dundes, ed., *The Study of Folklore*, 129-141.

by the German scholar Hermann Gunkel. The primary aim of form-critical study is to classify literature according to patterns and types, to identify and describe literary genre (German *Gattung*). But a secondary aim of form criticism is "to understand the oral stage of their [texts'] development."[28] This is a discipline in which *Gattungen* are viewed as products of the cultural mores that guided their construction

According to Gunkel, understanding the sociological setting and context for a literary work (the *Sitz im Leben*, in Gunkel's terms) is a hermeneutical key for understanding that work. Yet applying form criticism alone as used by Gunkel is unsatisfactory for cross-cultural study of the Jonah because its form is unique. Gunkel limited his material to be compared to narratives of the Hebrew Bible and proceeded from that perspective, but he also made overreaching claims such as, "many of the legends of the Old Testament are not only similar to those of other nations, but are actually related to them by origin and nature."[29] Though this might be plausible for the biblical corpus, it is a different matter entirely to claim a genetic relation among wondertales across a broad swath of cultures.

One of the problems with past studies in biblical folklore has been the presumption that biblical literature readily adopts and adapts ancient Near Eastern folklore in not only content but also form. Hebrew folklore may innovate in small respects, but the general belief is that author(s) recognized literary forms much as we do and consciously mimicked these from surrounding cultures. Not only is this an anachronistic understanding of *Gattung* but scholars have also tended to conflate or failed

[28] Gene M. Tucker, *Form Criticism of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 1.

[29] Hermann Gunkel, *The Legends of Genesis: The Biblical Saga and History* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003), 10.

to clearly differentiate the categories they assign to texts surviving from antiquity. There never has been a standard set of definitions for "myth" or "legend" or "fairy tale" that is corporately understood or universally recognized; scholars have sometimes used these terms interchangeably or without qualification.[30] Gunkel's greatest legacy has perhaps been the wide variety of approaches influenced by his emphases on oral transmission and the *Sitz im Leben*. Wondertales are not created *ex nihilo*; there exists a pool of themes, archetypes, and even historical personages that find their way into wondertales. These elements are constantly being reshuffled and rearranged into recognizable patterns. Comparative analysis of these structures allows us to determine the morphology of a tale type, which is our means of expressing how many tales may be interrelated by their adaptation of the same basic structure.

1.1.2 Form and Types of Biblical Folklore

At the foundation of the book of Jonah is the story itself, which I argue may be viewed as a type of wondertale. Certain literary features of the book of Jonah are an addition or a "filling out" which complements the basic structure of the tale. Based upon both form and content of the book interpreters have tried to assign it to one *Gattung* or another, the major arguments of which I will review in Chapter Three. Let it suffice here to say that none has been completely satisfactory, for the Jonah story has features of several types. On the one hand, it is clearly a non-historical narrative but, on the other hand, there are apparent historical references therein. The classic understanding of *Märchen* presupposes that those tales are devoid of historicized details or dynamism of

[30] See Elliot Oring, "Folk Narratives," 121-145 in *Folk Groups and Folklore Genres: An Introduction*. (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1986).

character, so this is clearly not a strong identification. Other, more "historical" Hebrew narratives contain elements which reflect non-historiographical tendencies.[31] In other words, constrictive definitions of literary form seldom apply to Hebrew texts since those texts were subject to frequent processes of redaction and refinement over long periods of time.

Scholars have identified several folkloric categories to describe certain narratives from the Hebrew Bible and identify parallels from the ancient Near East. Folk narratives are differentiated from other narratives because they purport to express the interests or traditions of society writ large, hence the recurrence of universal conventions. The Levitical purity laws, in contrast, were apparently produced by and addressed to a small and specialized segment of the population. Thus in biblical scholarship we see generally that the foundational stories of Israelite society are identified as folklore. The term "myth" is sometimes used very inclusively but a myth is, strictly speaking, a sacred narrative "explaining how the world and mankind came to be in their present form."[32] Myths very frequently describe the origins and nature of the world in terms that helped the ancients to understand the answers to their most fundamental theological or cosmological questions.[33] Legends are folk narratives that claim to give factual, though aggrandized, historical truth about a single episode or event. Unlike the primeval world

[31] Gunkel himself, sans the delicacy of modern political correctness, said that "Uncivilised races do not write history; they are incapable of reproducing their experiences objectively, and have no interest in leaving to posterity an authentic account of the history of their times." *The Legends of Genesis*, 1. The role of historiography in "historical" biblical writings is a very powerful factor to consider. The matter is taken up in numerous works but by way of introduction see John Van Seters, *In Search of History: Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1983), 209 ff.

[32] Alan Dundes, *Holy Writ as Oral Lit*, 13.

[33] Myths usually have a pronounced religious theme; Gunkel, *Legends of Genesis*, 14; Gunkel is known in the study of biblical folklore for his thesis that many aspects of the "legends" of Genesis are in fact "faded myths." Arguments labeling the book of Jonah as a legend usually follow the same argument.

of myths, legends are set in the world as we know it since their most salient feature is that they tell stories about real or purported historical or ancestral figures.[34] A novel is yet another form, consisting of distinct plot elements including an introduction, progression, and denouement, but it is also distinguished from these other genres in that a novel is the work of a single writer or school as opposed to a corpus accrued in stages. Novels are also more specific in some narrative details. As literary critic Vladimir Propp said about novels, "they are told not only as credible but as having happened in a definite location, at a definite time, and to definite people."[35]

All of these are distinguished from the tale, a blanket term for an incredibly diverse category which for purposes of simplification may be further divided into tales of the ordinary, tales of the fantastic, and fables.[36] These three types are united by certain characteristics: they usually involve brief and direct plots, easily-recognizable or archetypal characters, and are propelled by a single moral or "quest" which shapes all of the events therein. Tales involve a logical sequence of events, but this logic "is not always the logic of the everyday world...[it] may operate upon a set of extraordinary premises."[37] Tales may share certain features with other narrative genres, as these categories are not always mutually exclusive. The Lugalbanda tale, though fictional, derives its significance partly from the reference to the purportedly historical personage of Lugalbanda. Most folklorists of the past considered folktales categorically artificial in

[34] Following Gunkel, the most commonly cited biblical example of legends are the patriarch stories of Genesis 12-50. Gunkel used the term *Sage* for these stories, from which "saga" is derived to describe a closely related form. Gene Tucker makes the distinction that legends are decidedly more "spiritual" in tone than sagas; Tucker, *Form Criticism of the Old Testament*, 38.

[35] Propp, *Theory and History of Folklore*, 20.

[36] This division is made by Propp himself; *Morphology of the Folktale*, 5.

[37] Oring, "Folk Narratives," 130.

the way; even Propp declares that folktales are "deliberate and poetic fiction" which "never passes itself off as reality."[38]

"Tales of the ordinary" involve persons and events which are plausible and set in a world which follows the laws of nature as we know them. The Babylonian folktale known as "The Poor Man of Nippur," for example, though never situated within an historical context other than to say "once in Nippur"[39] is nevertheless staged in a world that follows normal conventions. The protagonist, Gimil-Ninurta, is something of an everyman; nothing fantastic or otherworldly happens to him. His opponent, the mayor of Nippur, is never named. The story follows certain narrative conventions; other folktales likely shared the pattern of this tale in its structure and characteristics.[40] Fables are differentiated in that they routinely take its audience away into a new reality and they frequently, though not as a rule, "personify animals or plants in able to teach or entertain."[41] The best known collection of fables is that featuring the Greek slave Aesop, though older fables are attested from the ancient Near East. The earliest fables frequently involve a verbal contest between creatures or personifications and later Babylonian and Assyrian folk followed Sumerian predecessors after their patterns.[42] The story of Etana, for example, incorporates "The Snake and the Eagle" which is presumed to have been an

[38] Propp, *Theory and History of Folklore*, 19.

[39] For a full translation and commentary see Benjamin R. Foster, *From Distant Days: Myths, Tales, and Poetry of Ancient Mesopotamia* (Bethesda, Md.: CDL Press, 1995), 357-362.

[40] Pertinent studies of this tale are Jerrold S. Cooper, "Structure, Humor, and Satire in the Poor Man of Nippur," *JCS* 27 no. 3 (July 1975): 163-174, and O.R. Gurney, "The Tale of the Poor Man of Nippur and Its Folktale Parallels," *AnSt* 22 (1972): 149-158.

[41] Tucker, *Form Criticism of the Old Testament*, 29.

[42] So "contest literature" as a genre as identified by W.G. Lambert. Contest literature is at the heart of many fables, though other subtypes may occur; *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*. (repr. ed.; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 150.

independent unit,[43] and the Hebrew Bible preserves Jotham's fable (Judg 9:8-15), perhaps an originally independent unit weaved into the narrative fittingly. This process of deliberately welding units of folk literature together, collecting eclectic strands of material and rearranging their constituent parts is an indispensable part of Vladimir Propp's folklore theory discussed below.

1.1.3 The Work of Vladimir Propp

The third category is the wondertale, and this is differentiated in that unlike tales of everyday life it is not set in a world which always adheres to the laws of nature as we know them, and unlike the fable human traits are not allegorized by anthropomorphized entities. Various interpreters have overlapped the wondertale with the fable (because of the use of fantasy) or use terms such as "tale" and "fairytale" interchangeably and without any qualification, leaving categories muddled. Vladimir Propp (1895-1970) was a Soviet-era literary critic usually identified as one of the "Russian formalists" of the early twentieth-century.[44] He was concerned principally with the *structure* of folktales, the data of which he infers from 100 Russian "wondertales," and the categorization of those tales by structural morphology. Propp's pool of wondertales is limited to the publication that was the standard for Russian folklorists of that time, Aleksandr Afanás'ev's *Rússkie Naródnye Skázki*.[45] Afanás'ev (1826-1871; also Anglicized as Afanasiev or Afanasyev)

[43] Ibid., 150.

[44] Formalism is an offshoot of structuralism, and Propp has been criticized for focusing on the structure of tales at the expense of their content. Propp did not think of himself as a formalist; rather, he chided formalism for its limitations in identifying the "ideological superstructure" of folklore and saw his method as something "beyond formalism"; *Theory and History of Folklore*, 128.

[45] Svatava Pirkova-Jakobson, "Introduction to the First Edition" in Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, xx. Afanás'ev did for Russian folklore what the Grimm's did for German folklore by compiling it and offering

did for Russian folklore what Jakob (1785-1863) and Wilhelm (1786-1859) Grimm did for German folklore by compiling it and offering an elementary comparative analysis. But Propp's contribution was his claim that the plots of these tales were comprised of up to thirty-one "functions," defined most basically as "an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action."[46] These functions may not all be observable, but Propp claimed that they always occur in a prescribed order which is never violated. He posited that wondertales are non-historical narratives involving the collision of the mundane with the supernatural predicated by an initial situation of either, 1) villainy, or, 2) misfortune or "lack" of something.[47] Though wondertales feature a constellation of supporting characters that have some part to play in the initiation, completion, or frustration of that quest, there are up to seven archetypal characters, called the *dramatis personae* by Propp, whose actions move the plot and whose representation differentiated from tale to tale only by superficial features.

Propp criticizes a few of the classification systems that preceded him, mainly because they are organized according to theme whereas he focuses instead on structure along multiple data points.[48] His emphasis on morphology stems from his dissatisfaction with the state of contemporary folklore studies and especially with the typology propounded by Antii Aarne (1867-1925). Aarne also used the atomistic comparative

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an elementary comparative analysis. This collection was used by all of the Russian scholars who Propp was in dialogue with in his own work, including Viktor Šklóvskij, the pioneer of the Russian formalist school, and Afanás'ev himself.

[46] Vladimir Propp. *Morphology of the Folktale*, 2d ed. trans by Laurence Scott (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968), 21.

[47] Propp admits that "these instances lend themselves to a grouping only with difficulty" because a 'lack' can range from anything from the search for an object to finding the way to free a person from a magic spell; ibid., 35.

[48] "...such a complex, indefinite concept as 'theme' is either left completely undefined or is defined by every author in his own way."; Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 7.

approach that characterized nineteenth-century European folklore studies.[49] He categorized the plots of diverse folktales according to recurring motifs and corresponding to a number system of his own creation. Aarne's work was translated and vastly expanded by folklorist Stith Thompson of Indiana University, thereby producing the number system known today in folkloristics as the "Aarne-Thompson (AT) classification system." Most scholars working with folklore in the early twentieth century used this system to some extent or at least critiqued it. The purpose of this taxonomy was ostensibly to develop a series of typologies for folktales, but it did little to develop the concept of morphology as envisioned by the Russian formalists.

One advantage of the AT index is that it may be used cross-culturally to group tales in typologies. An example of this system at work is as follows: the well-known fairy tale "Cinderella" is of type 510A,[50] a grouping that includes analogous folktales from many disparate cultures including India, Turkey and China.[51] The classification system assigns numbers 300-1119 as "ordinary folktales" (as opposed to tales about animals, jokes, etc) and the designation "A" identifies it as being a tale with a magical motif (as opposed to etiological, religious, etc). As could very well be expected, there are anomalous types, exceptions to the rule, and so forth that make such a classification scheme problematic. Returning now to Propp, it bears noting that he uses the AT

[49] The Grimm brothers planted the seeds for the concept of morphology in folk narratives in the Introduction to the second edition of *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (1819): "Always preserving a basic shape, a fairy tale can be told four or five times under different circumstances and in different ways so that it appears, from the outside, to be different... We find the tales, in various degrees of similarity and difference, not only in the different regions where German is spoke, but also among the ethnically allied Nordic peoples and the English, also among the Welsh as well as the Slavic nations."; translated in Maria Tatar, *The Annotated Brothers Grimm* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2004), 413.

[50] Alan Dundes, *Folklore Matters*, 22.

[51] Susan Niditch, *Folklore and the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993), 16.

numbering system in delimiting his source data in his own comparative study, accepting the existence of his wondertales as a distinct type comprising AT numbers 300-749.[52] But he tempers his endorsement of Aarne's "formalist" method:[53]

> Aarne does not really attempt to establish a scientific classification. His index is important as a *practical reference* and, as such, it has a tremendous significance. But Aarne's index is dangerous for another reason. It suggests notions which are essentially incorrect. Clear-cut division into types does not actually exist; very often it is a fiction.[54]

The AT index catalogs "motifs," though that term is used rather loosely by Thompson to mean a minimal narrative unit. Dorothy Irvin successfully demonstrates using the AT index that the "messenger stories" of Genesis (e.g., Gen 16, 18-19, 21, 22 and 28) may be linked to depictions of divine messengers in ancient Near Eastern narratives. As Irvin points out, Aarne was careful so as to distinguish literary motifs from tale types thus the method allows for easy comparison across many *Gattungen*.[55] But the disadvantage of the method lay in the fact that the body of ancient Near Eastern tales is limited so as to resist typology.[56] With correspondences being established by only these common motifs the connections between various tales seems tenuous at best or coincidental at worst, and the correspondences themselves are relatively few. Propp's dissatisfaction with groupings based on these small units of motif led him to develop a more fluid conception of form in which typology is derived not simply by the appearance of such units but by

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[52] Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 19.

[53] Though Propp is often referred to as a part of the "Russian Formalist" school he rejected that label for himself. In Propp's Soviet Marxist context, it was believed that "formalism" separated form (idealism) from content (realism) in an undesirable way.

[54] Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 10-11.

[55] Dorothy Irvin, *Mytharion: The Comparison of Tales from the Old Testament and Ancient Near East* (Alter Orient und Altes Testament 32; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978), 2 ff.

[56] Irvin acknowledges this limitation and uses Aarne's system rather than tailoring one to her own data set.

the distinctive sequence of functions. His method represents a "syntagmatic" approach, in which meaning is derived from the sequence of parts, in contrast to the "paradigmatic" methods, in which meaning is derived by the interchangeability of parts, of Claude Lévi-Strauss and the French structuralists.[57]

The difference in these cognitive approaches underscores the reason why Propp's example is suitable for a comparative folklorist reading of the book of Jonah as a *rite de passage*. For the *rite de passage* is founded upon a recognizable sequence which remains unaltered despite the variation in external circumstances surrounding the rite or depictions thereof. The paradigmatic approach, on the other hand, reads for oppositional patterns of discontinuities, and narrative sequences are in fact thematic sets of contrasting relations.[58] This is realized most acutely in Lévi-Strauss' assertion that binary pairs shape the meaning of folklore, namely that the juxtaposition of binaries is a hallmark of "myth."[59] Besides operating from a different methodological basis than Propp, Lévi-Strauss also seems to be more ambitious in his goals to explain the paradoxical worldviews that yield mythic structures which "always work from the awareness of oppositions towards their progressive mediation."[60] In this way the work of this branch of structuralism can be somewhat nebulous, and Lévi-Strauss endeavors to relate "deep" structural patterns in literature to other phenomena in cultural life. His single greatest

[57] "Lévi-Strauss regards such linear, sequential forms as superficial and obvious and superficial. Instead he prefers a nonlinear structural 'paradigmatic' (from the word 'paradigm') analysis, in which the contradictions of linear models can be resolved semantically by polar oppositions such as that in the Oedipus myth and autochthonous beings." Roland A. Champagne, *The Structuralists on Myth: an Introduction* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1992), 42.

[58] Dundes, "Structuralism and Folklore," 83.

[59] Lévi-Strauss' ambiguous application of "myth," as opposed to Propp's delimitation of his source material, is another indication that their goals are not necessarily the same.

[60] Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," *JAF* 78 (1955):428-444, cited in Dundes "Structuralism and Folklore," 81.

criticism of Propp is that Propp overemphasizes form at the expense of explaining the meaning of that sequence.[61]

Yet in considering a phenomenon in which sequence is of great importance Propp's emphasis on structural order helps us to correlate plot events with stages of the *rite de passage*. In its most basic sense Propp's morphology refers to a tale's formal structure, but morphology (as the term suggests) also allows for the interchangeability of external representations within that sequence as well since the sequence itself is paramount. Perfunctory details may vary from one tale to the next, but the interactions of principal characters to one another and their roles within the tale's cumulative structure of the tale may remain the same or change as needed for different social situations. This necessitates that folktales have a deeper connection with one another in order to be truly linked in any meaningful way; when wondertales share a morphology we see that there are in fact multiple correspondences among them that were not at first readily apparent. These correspondences are made clear by a recognizable sequence of events (functions) and recurring *dramatis personae*, and not by individual representations.

Propp's seven *dramatis personae* are the villain, the donor, the helper, the princess, the princess' father, the dispatcher, the hero, and the false hero.[62] His claim was that only by studying "functions" of the *dramatis personae* can one study a wondertale's

[61] Dundes, *Folklore Matters*, 73; Claude Lévi-Strauss, in particular, described Propp rather accusatorily as a formalist and shaped his critique of Propp around the purported divide between formalism (syntagmatic) and structuralism (paradigmatic). This touched off a decades-long contentious exchange, which is especially ironic since it was Lévi-Strauss's 1960 review of *Morfológija skázki* that helped bring Propp out of relative obscurity in the Soviet Union and into Western scholarship many years after Propp's work was originally published.

[62] It should be noted that although he uses terms such as "princess," Propp did not envision these characters as fixed. Princesses are common in the tales he analyzed but this persona may be any "sought after person." For Propp, unlike the literary structuralists who followed him, the persona is most salient only in how it advances the plot and not in the symbolic value of a princess.

structure and diagram it in succinct form for comparison with analogous wondertales. Propp's work was spread out over a number of years, and the nature of his scholarship changed over the years such that it moved away from strict formalism and into social applications of folklore, but he is best remembered for the arguments made in *Morphology of the Wondertale*. Propp's method is elegantly simple in its conception but his writings include symbols and formulae that may come across as hopelessly obtuse, such as: $\beta^{8}\delta^{1}A^{1}B^{1}C\uparrow H^{1}I^{1}K^{4}\downarrow w^{\circ}$. For this reason and others, his work has sometimes been misunderstood as too rigidly theoretical. In the decades following Propp's publications several modifications to those ideas have been advanced, especially during the heyday of literary structuralism in the 1960's and 1970's.[63] Propp's structural analysis has been applied to biblical narratives before, in fact, most successfully in Pamela Milne's study of Daniel 1-6.[64]

As I have mentioned, Propp's ingenuity lay mainly with his conviction that not only is the number of functions known to the wondertales in his set limited (to thirty-one) but also that their sequence is fixed, and he was revolutionary among his colleagues in this regard.[65] This is not to say that *every* function will appear in *every* tale but rather that when functions to appear they appear in a prescribed order. Nonetheless this is quite a claim, and the only way Propp is able to adhere to it is by being flexible in his application. It should be noted that unlike many of his contemporaries Propp did not use

[63] E.g., Robert Scholes' addition of other *dramatis personae* to Propp's schema; Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974) 104-106.

[64] Pamela Milne, *Vladimir Propp and the Study of Structure in Hebrew Narrative* (Bible and Literature Series; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988); Interestingly, Milne concludes that none of the stories in Dan 1-6could be described with the help of Propp's model, though she adheres rigidly to the conventions literary genres.

[65] Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 22.

his methods to make overreaching generalizations about the superorganic potential of human folklore. Propp's original work was limited to wondertales but later in his career he explored other forms of folk narrative--epics, legends, and so forth–which he saw as being derived from themes expressed in wondertales.[66] In this way Propp uses much ink discussing the diachronic development of folk narrratives, setting him apart from the French literary structuralists. Though it seems strange that structuralist and historical modes may merge with one another under these circumstances, Propp was very much a product of his time and place. His work demonstrates a profound interest in the historical development of the "folk" as an analogue to the working proletariat in Marxist philosophy. Many Western readers of Propp overlook the extent to which these political sympathies operate within his scholarship. Take the following statement about the creation of folklore:

> When social differentiation leads to the rise of classes, creative art is differentiated in the same manner. With the development of writing among the ruling classes, literature (*belles lettres*) springs up…All this [early literature] is not folklore, pure and simple; it is reflected and refracted folklore, but if we succeed in making a correction for the ideology of priests, for the consciousness of a new state and class, for the specific quality of new literary forms developed by this consciousness, we will be able to see the folklore basis behind this motley picture.[67]

For Propp, "myth and ritual are conditioned by economic interests" and folklore is the product of the oppressed classes.[68] The very act of analyzing Russian folklore had

[66]Propp saw other forms as later and more developed expressions of wondertales whose benefit to the scholar was not as a primary datum on par with wondertales but rather as another attestation of the themes first articulated in wondertales: "True, it sometimes happens that epic poetry has preserved elements and features absent elsewhere…In such cases for lack of data, we may make use of the heroic epic as well"; Propp, *Theory and History of Folklore*, 114. Propp studied epic in a separate publication, *Russian Heroic Epic Poetry* (*Russkij Geroičeskij Èpos*), published in 1955.

[67] Propp, *History and Theory of Folklore*, 13.

[68] Ibid., 112.

nationalist overtones, as the Bolshevik Revolution was propagandized by way of popular folk genres. The idea of an amorphous but culturally empowered "folk" lingered in the field for a long time. Alan Dundes was the first to forcefully disavow the notion that folklore is always passed orally,[69] and he redefined the "folk" as any group of people sharing a trait rather than a strictly ethnic designation, premises which are taken as a given in folkloristics today but were still widely held in the time of Propp.[70]

I believe Propp's basic methods may be adapted for use with the Jonah story but only with qualification since that narrative is the product of a radically different *Sitz im Leben* from any of Propp's tales. It is not immediately clear from reading Propp's work that he intended his methods as being applicable to non-European or non-Indo-European wondertales, though he has certainly been appropriated for that purpose.[71] Propp's work with archetypal *dramatis personae* evokes connections to the "psychic unity" of Jungian universalism applied most notably in the scholarship of Joseph Campbell and, to some extent, Lévi-Strauss. Propp himself seems to tacitly acknowledge that storytellers are limited in their creative enterprises by morphological principles of which they are consciously unaware, and indeed this conclusion seems inevitable if we argue vigorously

[69] Propp, like most of the early folklorists was obstinate about the dichotomy of oral forms and literature even as late as his *History and Theory of Folklore*: "Even if these changes are insignificant (but they can be very great), even if the changes that take place in folklore texts are sometimes as slow as geologic processes, what is important is the *fact of changeability of folklore compared with the stability of literature*" (Italics his), op. cit., 8.

[70] "Folk is not a dependent variable but an independent variable. We must see members of modern societies as members of many different folk groups." Alan Dundes, *Interpreting Folklore* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1980), 8; Bronner, "Preface and Acknowledgements" in *The Meaning of Folklore*, vii-xv, xii.

[71] Most especially, the idea that Propp would claim to derive an Ur-form of an Indo-European wondertale following Krohn's comparative hermeneutical foundation seems a gross overstatement of Propp's own intentions; Dundes, *Folklore Matters*, 143-144.

against the genetic relationship of wondertales of disparate origins.[72] Thus we must walk a fine line in this methodology and speak of these wondertales and their components as correspondences--and not borrowings--of one another.

It is not my intention to recall all thirty-one of Propp's functions and explain or apply each one to my own chosen wondertales since his body of data is so different, but I should explain his method and its advantages. Within Propp's framework of functions arbitrary designations of meaning and symbols have little value. He thoroughly and consistently resisted the tendency to read too much into individual representations. It did not matter to Propp whether the hero was aided by the acquisition of a magical horse or by eating a magical apple (function XIV), only that the hero benefitted from his attainment of a magical object (by either acquisition or ingestion). Paradigmatic structuralists would concentrate on the meaning of a mundane object (an apple) having magical potential, and motif typologists would group the apple tale with other tales involving apples. While these approaches have certain advantages these do not explain the apple's relevance in the sequence of events advancing the wondertale. Let us suppose that these three wondertales were grouped together simply by virtue of the fact that a *king* appears in each one (Enmerkar, the Egyptian king,[73] or the king of Nineveh). As the kings in each tale serve different functions, there seems to be no deeper connection among either the characters or the larger tales based upon this criterion. The kings in each narrative do not appear simply because they reign but because they have a relationship to and interactions with the protagonist of each story.

[72] Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 112.

[73] Plus there is the appearance of the mysterious snake who calls himself "the King of Punt."

Each of Propp's functions remains flexible out of necessity, but each rubric allows for more specific classification as derived from the data (represented by numerical superscript). One of Propp's original examples is as follows:

> XIII. THE HERO REACTS TO THE ACTIONS OF THE FUTURE DONOR. Designation: E. In the majority of instances, the reaction is either positive or negative
> 1. *The hero withstands (or does not withstand) a test (E^1).*
> *2. The hero answers (or does not answer) a greeting (E^2).*
> *3. He renders (or does not render) a service to a dead person (E^3).*
> *4. He frees a captive (E^4).*
> *5. He shows mercy to a suppliant (E^5).*
> *6. He completes an apportionment and reconciles the disputants (E^6).*
> *7. The hero performs some other service (E^7).*
> *8. The hero saves himself from an attempt on his life by employing the same tactics used by his adversary (E^8).*
> *9. The hero vanquishes (or does not vanquish) his adversary (E^9).*
> *10. The hero agrees to an exchange, but immediately employs the magic power of the object exchanged against the barterer (E^{10}).*[74]

In this schema the "hero" can react to the "donor" in nearly any way so long as the basic function is fulfilled. And the framework may include many wondertales united by such a broadly-conceived function so long as the parameters are set accordingly.

Though Propp limits himself to a set of one hundred Russian wondertales and draws his morphology from *that set alone*, I believe that his method is flexible enough to be adapted to a different set of tales with analogous features. This aspect of Propp's work is important in the crafting of my hermeneutic, for the wondertales which underlie the texts with which I work are as dissimilar from Propp's tales as they are from one another. Just as Propp's wondertales are correspond to one another in the functions of the *dramatis personae*, I believe that it is possible to indicate morphological parallels

[74] Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 42-43.

between the Jonah narrative and two stories using similar elements--the Lugalbanda story and "The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor." All three of these draw upon a common *topos* predicated by the hero's *rite de passage*. The similarity in these tales' storylines allow us to draw morphological parallels among them.

1.1.4 A New Set of Functions

Propp's method has the salient advantage of being able to examine concurrently a number of wondertales to find common structural items among them. Tales with similar morphological structures often share elements of content including a *topos*, defined as a recognizable arrangement of smaller literary feature such as themes, motifs, and settings. Propp reasoned that all Russian wondertales adhere to the 31-function model he developed, but in order to categorize ancient Near Eastern wondertales we need to derive a morphology suited to the appropriate data. The three wondertales examined within this study share a distinctive *topos*: a protagonist sets out for a distant foreign land that lies beyond a topographical boundary but becomes detained and isolated in the intervening area. While there this hero faces near-death but overcomes these circumstances and returns to complete his quest having been elevated in social standing. Using this basic framework as a guide and starting point, we see that the three stories in question actually share more specific correspondences. Any tale utilizing this *topos* will have some basic features in common with other tales since there is similar content, but they will nevertheless vary somewhat from one another in some respects. Recall that sequence is of paramount importance in Propp's system; identifying *dramatis personae* and functions

may be done simply by noticing in each tale how characters (and which ones) activate each plot event leading to the sequence shared by all three tales.

Each of these stories employs a *hero*, a *donor*, and a *helper*. The Lugalbanda poems and Jonah employ a separate *dispatcher*, whereas in "The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor" this role is implied in the story. There are other contributing characters in the tales (the sailors on the ship with Jonah, for example) but we differentiate between these and the *dramatis personae* proper because of their respective impact on plot progression. Incidental characters do nothing to truly advance the plot or make a significant impact upon the principal characters; they rather exist to fill out the story and, in the case of the Jonah story, only cause attention to be drawn back to the *dramatis persona*. *Dramatis personae* may also "double up" in that a single character may fulfill more than one of these indispensible roles. I argue in Chapter Three that part of the theological message of the Jonah tale is that, aside from the prophet himself, all of the roles of the *dramatis personae* are filled by the actions of God.

Consider the following simple list of functions, derived by charting the similarities between the sequence of events of only the three aforementioned wondertales and with character designations and functions modeled after the manner of Propp's list:

I - The hero is called upon to leave home on a quest; symbol: α
1. The hero responds (or does not respond) to a call to duty from dispatcher

II - The hero joins a group as a lesser member; symbol: β
1. The hero leaves as part of an overland expedition
2. The hero embarks a ship for a voyage

III - The hero goes forth and crosses a threshold into the wilderness while traveling to a foreign land; symbol: ↑
1. The hero crosses a barrier of water
2. The hero crosses mountains

IV - The hero's company faces unexpected adversity from nature; symbol: A

1. From illness
2. From a storm

V - The hero is stranded alone in "no-man's land" for three days; symbol: B

1. Abandoned by traveling companions
2. Expelled by companions
3. Lone survivor among companions

VI - The donor revitalizes the hero; symbol: C

1. Donor provides nourishment for rejuvenation
2. Donor provides shelter for the hero

VII - The hero gives thanks with an offering or a prayer; symbol: D

1. Hero offers a sacrifice
2. Hero prays
3. Hero offers a banquet

VIII - The helper and the hero meet; the hero fears the helper; symbol: E

1. The helper initially fears the helper

IX - The helper queries the hero; symbol: F

1. The helper interrogates the hero
2. The helper seeks out the hero

X - The hero praises the helper; symbol: G

XI - The helper foretells the destiny of the hero and gives him a gift; symbol: H

1. The helper foretells the hero's fortune and gives him goods
2. The helper foretells the hero's fate and offers him a skill

XII - The hero returns to the human sphere of action; symbol: ↓

1. The hero returns to his initial quest
2. The hero's initial quest goes ignored, the benefits already realized

XIII - The hero uses his newly acquired gift to bring about a status change for himself; symbol: γ

1. The hero uses a new skill
2. The hero uses new possessions

XIV - The hero and the dispatcher thrive upon the hero's return to humanity; symbol: δ

The symbols adopted for this set of functions are largely arbitrary, though I envision a structure in which α and β are balanced by γ and δ, respectively, and ↑ complements ↓, resulting in a roughly symmetrical pattern of functions corresponding to the pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal division of van Gennep's *rite de passage*. Other commentators have pointed out the symmetry of the Lugalbanda narrative[75] and the Jonah story[76] and these studies have done much to reveal that these tales exhibit careful arrangement, far from fulfilling the reputation wondertales have for triviality. In their written forms these wondertales show signs of even more complexity; the Lugalbanda narrative, for example, survives as epic poetry, a form which uses carefully chosen language. "The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor," on the other hand, evinces little artistic refinement and is composed in prose. The flexibility of Propp's method allows us to temporarily isolate narrative structure from the features of the written text.[77]

This list of functions is tailored to these three wondertales though there is obviously some overlap with Propp's list or any other set of functions derived from wondertales since *all* wondertales share the element of fantasy. This list differs from Propp's because these functions result from the common *topos* mentioned above rather than *topoi* operative within Propp's tales. I read the Jonah story as a transformation of this *topos* and, consequently, as a transformation of this morphology. In the following

[75] Jeremy Black, *Reading Sumerian Poetry* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1998), 67ff.

[76] See, for example, Phyllis Trible's detailed explanation of the "external structure" of the Book of Jonah; I will return to her description in more detail in Chapter Three. *Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method, and the Book of Jonah*, 110-111.

[77] Milne has remarked that "Morphology of the Folktale was not intended by its author to be so much a definitive work a as a directive one."; *Vladimir Propp and the Study of Structure*, 88.

chapters I analyze, in turn, the Lugalbanda story and "The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor" in order to demonstrate the affinities between those wondertales and Jonah. But although the Jonah story draws upon and maintains this recognizable sequence it diverges in some key respects, the result of which is the depiction of the failed rite of passage of its "hero," Jonah. In using this familiar *topos* the story inverts some of these functions to make its own, unique theological statements and remarks about the prophetic character of the prophet Jonah.

Propp himself discussed the potential of such transformations for the morphology of wondertales.[78] And much of his later scholarship shows a more marked interest in the folkloric interpretation of ritual.[79] Propp became very interested in the social implications of the wondertales he diagrammed, and his interests carry over into the present study. In short, he believed that elements of wondertales reflect or reinterpret social rituals. One such ritual is the *rite de passage*; syntagmatic in its structure this ritual is a literal or metaphorical separation, transition, and incorporation, which implies the paradigmatic shift between two opposed categories of being.[80] In these wondertales the *rite de passage* corresponds to a physical passage as much as a symbolic one since the hero ventures between spheres of human action. An interesting feature of this *topos* is that rather than undergoing change in some far-distant human land (the intended

[78] Propp discussed "transformations," whereby early folkloric elements morphed over time and for various contexts, much like linguistic elements; Propp, *Theory and History of Folklore*, 88.

[79] Unfortunately almost all of these works remain untranslated. For English works see especially *History and Theory of Folklore*, 105-108, "Fairy tale transformations," trans. by C.H. Severens in *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, (ed. Latislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska; Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971), 99-114, and "Study of the Folktale: Structure and History" *Dispositio* I (1976): 277-292.

[80] Alan Dundes, "Structuralism and Folklore," chapter 6 in *The Meaning of Folklore*, ed. Simon J. Bronner, 126-144.

destination for the hero) this critical action takes place, unexpectedly, in a "no-man's land" between human spheres of action. After facing a trial of his mortality there and demonstrating behavior appropriate to human-divine relations, the hero returns to the human sphere changed by his fortunes and elevated in his social standing. This *topos* relies heavily on the perception and symbolic demarcation of physical space, so let us now examine this in the context of ancient Near Eastern wondertales.

1.2.1 The Center/Periphery Dichotomy

Descriptive cosmography and, on a smaller scale, geography, is a very common subject in folklore from all over the world. The gods' establishment of the world and the place of humankind within it are primary concerns of myth, as we have already discussed. The wondertale frequently speaks to this as well, albeit more indirectly. As the wondertale is usually brief and begins *in media res* these tales rely on their audiences' presuppositions about spatiality. People share their perceptions of and traditions about space in social groups, over and apart from other groups possessing their own perceptions. This was especially true in the ancient world, where a relatively sparse population and great distances between population centers contributed to the idea that the human world existed as islets in a vast and uncharted sea of "The Other." In such a worldview there is a core and an edge, as well as varying degrees of distance from the core with which to reckon the limits of human space and the boundaries of otherness. We identify this cognitive distinction as "center" and "periphery," respectively, and recognize that this perceptual dichotomy, whether it is physical or metaphorical, is shaped by shared cultural norms within any given group.

Students of the formal study of religion (*Religionswissenschaft*) will recognize this pair from the writings of Mircea Eliade and Jonathan Z. Smith, theorists whose usage of these terms was applied especially to the demarcation of sacred space and ritual.[81] For Eliade the "center" is the "locus of reality,"[82] a place from which the world is centrifugally accorded levels of holiness and familiarity. In this schema the "center" may be the actual domicile, the village, the city-state or any other such territory but it is only an abstraction delimited by subjective perception. Ancient peoples recognized other hubs of human habitation beyond the periphery, though these were not regarded with the same familiarity or centrality of one's own home. In folklore these foreign lands are mysterious or sometimes treated as being fabulously wealthy or having access to unlimited valuable resources. Their inhabitants are referred to as being odd in their appearance or comportment, perhaps even sharing the attributes of animals. In this sense wondertales depicting fantastic foreign lands indirectly serve the purpose of dictating and/or reinforcing cultural self-definition vis-à-vis otherness. "The Other" as a cognitive construct stands in opposition to the subjective self, a philosophical point first articulated by Hegel in his *Phenomenology of the Spirit*.[83] Paul Ricoeur advances this idea by claiming that, "The selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that

[81] Eliade's "center" in the ritual sense was the *axis mundi*, the "meeting point between heaven, earth, and hell." This city, temple or mountain is the focal point for cosmological signification. Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Or, Cosmos and History* (trans.Willard R. Trask; Bollingen Series XLVI; Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1954), 34 ff.

[82] Charles H. Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 68.

[83] G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (trans A.V. Miller; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

one cannot be thought of without the other…instead one passes into the other, as we might say in Hegelian terms."[84]

Thus the center-periphery dichotomy need not be a spatial category only. Imagine, for example, a miniature *Volk* of factory autoworkers punching into and out of work in their different shifts using electronic punchcards. The workers on the first shift share a unique set of traditions in that they likely have shared "inside jokes" or stories about things that have happened during their shift, but these references have no context to a person on the second shift. Yet all the workers are employed by the same auto manufacturer, they make the same models of automobile, and they all even have the same type of punchcard. We, as a third party, would be able to read their punchcards uniformly and without regard to the different shifts and the subtle differences in the social contexts of the workers on each one. Now, a worker from the first shift who transfers into the second shift would immediately have a basic knowledge of this new social context, based on his or her prior experience as a worker at that automobile plant. But social nuances and experiences would be lacking until he or she becomes a fully participatory member of the new community and regarded the second shift as his or her cognitive center. But if this worker went to work for a new manufacturer altogether he or she would be farther from the base of their experience and would have to, initially, rely only on their most basic technical and social skills in order to adjust to this new work environment. This simple example is meant only to show that 1) the "center" is only a cognitive construct of shared preconceptions, and that association may apply to a group as small as one person or as large as the world, 2) that the bounds of this center are not

[84] Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (trans. Kathleen Blamey; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 3.

absolute but rather applied in gradation, and, 3) that reconciling the unfamiliar necessitates the ability to draw metaphors and analogues from past experiences.

When we apply these principles to the cognitive space of ancient Near Eastern geography we see that folk narratives very often capture the concerns and tensions resulting from cultures interacting with one another. Neighboring peoples may have interacted with one another frequently but usually display little direct knowledge of one another owing to the language barriers and physical distance between them. A society usually envisions itself at the center of the cosmos and far-distant lands and peoples at the putative edges of the physical world. Thus, a subjective dichotomy is drawn between "the known world" (οἰκουμένη) and those regions beyond "either travel or informed report."[85] In the absence of empirical knowledge, the ancients used imaginative descriptions of the "periphery" as a means to help identify themselves and their place in the world. Certain cultural markers enable identification and differentiation but that is valid only so long as that shared understanding of what those markers are and what they mean is intact. This factor is ethnicity, derived from the Greek word *ethnos*,[86] and is defined by the Norwegian anthropologist Fredrik Barth as a concept entailing, 1) biological self-perpetuation, 2) shared cultural forms and values, 3) having a field of communication and expression, and 4) possessing self-identification, as distinguished by comparisons with other groups.[87] In the ethnically pluralistic ancient Near East, space

[85] James S. Romm, *The Edges of the Earth in Ancient Thought: Geography, Exploration, and Fiction* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 37-38. Romm explains that οἰκουμένη ("inhabited earth") originates with Herodotus but soon thereafter became a "standard and ubiquitous usage." Though a survey exclusively of classical sources, many of the concepts discussed by Romm about peripheral areas carry over into ancient Near Eastern thought.

[86] A social designation usually translated as “nation” or “people,” *ethnos* can also be applied to smaller units. Much like ethnicity, *ethnos* is subjective and difficult to define.

reckoning appears as an indispensible component of group self-identity, and this is conditioned in part by the fundamental distinction in geography between what is the "center" and what comprises the otherness.

There are a variety of modes in which space may be perceived; we usually perceive space cartographically, as though we envision our position in the world and others as loci on a map with mathematically derived distances between them. The ancients, by contrast, perceived space "hodologically," meaning that space was not measurable in geometric terms. Rather, hodological space involves the perceptions one has of space as they move between two points as a sequence of transition--stages of this movement are taken one at a time rather than as a part of the whole, and the experience involves many facets of social, physical, and psychological perception and interaction.[88] This notion of space perception is especially useful for our purposes since these stories involve travel and describe the journeys as stages along a route. These interpretations of ancient spatiality are ultimately constructs of our own creation, but in today's context of globalization these heavily nuanced reconstructions of space perception may be a more difficult notion to accept.[89] It is easy now to send electronic messages across the world to

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[87] Fredrik Barth, "Introduction" in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (ed. Fredrik Barth; Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969), 10-11.

[88] The foundations for the anthropology of space and the genesis for the concept of "hodological" space, in particular may be found in the work of the philosopher Otto Friedrich Bollnow. The term "hodology" was actually coined by social psychologist Kurt Lewin. See esp. Bollnow, *Mensch und Raum* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1963).

[89] In spatial analysis, as in other modes of cognition, there are two levels of perspective--emic and etic, the former term referring to how peoples interpret space and the latter referring to how we, as outsiders, view those peoples' understanding of space. See Jon Berquist's discussion of the precepts of "critical spatiality" as it pertains to biblical narratives; "Critical Spatiality and the Construction of the Ancient World" in *'Imagining Biblical Worlds': Studies in Spatial, Social and Historical Constructs in Honor of James W. Flanagan* (ed. David M. Gunn and Paula M. McNutt; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 14-29. Berquist also discusses the trialectic concept of space advanced by Henri Lefebvre and Edward W. Soja, which is of great value in discussing power relations in the center-periphery schema.

near-instantaneous reception. Yet in a world in which only a few people traveled infrequently over relatively modest distances and only at great expense and considerable delay, the world seemed like a much bigger and more mysterious place.

Center/periphery is a natural binary for us to reconcile the spatial perceptions of the ancients because not only does ancient literature routinely employ binary pairs as contrasting symbols but we routinely use such binaries in cognition ourselves. When the subjectivity of "The Other" is extrapolated onto land features at the "periphery" we see not only other areas of human habitation but particularly non-human spheres of action, a place I have already referred to collectively as "no-man's land."[90] Land features such as mountains or bodies of water are natural boundaries or points of reference in the demarcation of "The Other," and the transgression of these boundaries signifies a symbolic but significant shift in this perceptual association with the "center."

1.2.2 The *rite de passage* and Social Position

The anthropological term assigned to this concept is liminality, and it was first used in this sense by the Belgian scholar Arnold van Gennep. Van Gennep's work centered on what he called the *rite de passage*, a social ritual accompanying changes or transitions of social statuses. Van Gennep identified three principal stages to this process: separation (*séparation*), transition (*marge*), and incorporation (*agrégation*).[91] As

[90] The term "no-man's land" is used as an alternative to "wilderness," which in Hebrew Bible studies is a weighty theological concept, and "wasteland," which to my sense connotes some sort of disaster area. "No-man's land" is simply the perceptual space at the edge of and beyond areas of normal human action and interaction. It may be any place that lay within reach of the human world but operates according to logic beyond human understanding.

[91] Solon T. Kimball, "Introduction" in Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), vii; Van Gennep also used the terms "pre-liminal," "liminal," and "post-liminal"

this is a sequence of distinct stages, it is unmistakably structuralist.[92] The classic example is that of the tribesman who sends his pubescent son away from society, the idea being that the boy's time spent in a dangerous wilderness transitions him from the world of women (the domestic sphere) to the world of men (the public sphere). Once the boy is reintegrated into society he is ready to fully participate as a man and with all the rights and responsibilities thereto. This example holds, but there are many other less formalized social rituals which may also be *rites de passage*--those associated with marriage and death, for example. Van Gennep points out that the defining feature of all of these, irrespective of purpose, is their shared tripartite structural division. In this literary *topos* the "no-man's land" is what van Gennep called the margin (the *limen*), and it is symbolized as a geographical space corresponding to the areas beyond the perceptual periphery.

Van Gennep's ideas about liminality in the *rite de passage* were adapted and argued more extensively by the anthropologist Victor Turner. Turner described a hierarchy of social status, realized through an implicit system of interpersonal relations, periodically interspersed with intense feelings of oneness and equality within a community (*communitas*).[93] With liminality being, "the voluntary or involuntary removal of an individual from a social-structure matrix,"[94] individuals outside of their

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interchangeably with these stages, thus highlighting the importance of crossing the *limen* to the whole process.

[92] Dundes draws an analogy between van Gennep's pattern and Propp's morphology of functions, noting that functions I-XI constitute separation, XII-XIV as transition, and XV-XIII as incorporation; "Structuralism and Folklore," 87.

[93] Turner distinguishes three types of *communitas*; applicable to this model is spontaneous (or existential) *communitas*, but he also posits modes of *communitas* where that spirit is organized into the social system (normative) or contrived to be a part of that social system (ideological).

normal social apparatus feel the equality of *communitas* as a result of the abandonment of their earlier social positions. *Communitas* denotes a shared feeling among persons in a liminal state but in the complete absence of other humans, it is realized as a desire to return to social interactions through the reorganization of normative social hierarchies. The liminoid feels this sense of *communitas* most acutely when at the cusp of reintegration to human society.

This point is critical to understanding the *topos* embedded within this type of Near Eastern wondertale; *communitas* is a transformative event realized in the near-death of the hero accompanying his metaphorical social death. As noted by Turner,

> Those undergoing it - call them 'liminaries'- are betwixt and between established states of politico-jural structure. They evade ordinary cognitive classification, too, for they are in a sense 'dead' to the world-and liminality has many symbols of death.[95]

His position outside of the human social matrix allows the hero of the story to see and experience things diametrical to normal human experience. The transgression of the *limen*, whether this is metaphorical or actual, is the catalyst for this change in perceived reality.[96] As Turner claims, "Actuality, in the liminal state, gives way to possibility, and aberrant possibilities reveal once more to luminaries the value of what has hitherto been regarded as the somewhat tedious daily round."[97] The hero exists temporarily in isolation

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[94] Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), 52.

[95] Victor Turner, "Variations on Liminality" 48-65 in *Blazing the Trail: Way Marks in the Exploration of Symbols* (ed. Edith Turner; Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992), 49.

[96] Among van Gennep's own conclusions, "it seems important to me that the passage from one social position to another is identified with a territorial passage , such as the entrance into a village or a house, the movement from one room to another, or the crossing of streets and squares." *The Rites of Passage*, 192.

[97] Turner, *Blazing the Trail*, 50.

where there is the potential for danger; the hero is subject to the "protective and punitive powers of divine or preterhuman beings or powers."[98]

The possibility of fantasy is integral to the wondertale, and fantasy is rationalized through the use of metaphor because the "no man's land" would have no significance if it had no recognizable modalities. Metaphor is what bridges the divide between the knowable and the unknowable. Again, I cite the words of Turner:

> Metaphor is, at its simplest, a way of proceeding from the known to the unknown…Metaphor is, in fact, metamorphic, transformative. Metaphor is our means of effecting instantaneous fusion of two separated realms of experience into one, iconic, encapsulating image."[99]

In the case of Jonah, the implication here is that the image of a man finding refuge from a stormy sea inside the belly of a fish is not a literal sequence of events but a metaphor for his complete isolation from the world he knows. Such fantastic descriptions are the province of the wondertale, and in reading stories for these descriptions of liminality through the transgression of symbolic boundaries we read metaphors for the internal and external changes comprising a *rite de passage*.

1.2.3 The Edge of the World

To prime ourselves for reading Jonah and these other stories for *rites de passage* it is useful to further explain the *topos* which interfaces with the morphology of that type of wondertale. All three of these tales show a marked interest in travel towards a far-distant, foreign land and in methods of approaching that land, suggesting the tales' meanings are conveyed by those depictions. Inasmuch as we are able to reconstruct how

[98] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and anti-Structure* (London: AldineTransaction, 1969), 105.

[99] Robert A. Nisbet, *Social Change and History: Aspects of the Western History of Development* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 4, cited in Turner, *Dramas, Fields, Metaphors*, 25.

ancient peoples conceptualized the overlay of space with social territories we see that they were routinely self-centric; though they knew that human cities lay at a distance from them they sometimes imagined that these places were located at the putative edge of the world. In between these spheres of human habitation was a potentially dangerous "no-man's land" littered with mysterious denizens and benefactors.

In ancient Israel contemporary neighboring peoples and lands were understood based on their distance (real or perceptual) from the Hebrews' homeland and their corresponding knowledge (or lack thereof) about those civilizations. There are at least three groupings we may distinguish in this regard: immediate neighbors (e.g., the Moabites), great empires in peripheral areas (e.g., the Egyptians), and far-distant, fantastic lands that were reckoned to be at an even greater distance, perhaps even at the very edge of the world. Narratives involving travel through the lands of Israel's immediate neighbors seldom elaborate on these movements; one notable exception is the wandering of the Israelites through the desert after the Exodus, a story replete with concepts of liminal space. There are several narratives involving Hebrews who visit Egypt, and though Egypt and its people are exotic from the perspective of the biblical authors this sense of otherness is limited by the relative proximity of Egypt to Palestine. In these narratives, for example, Hebrew characters converse with Egyptians without any language barrier and the text even Egyptian terms (e.g., *parʿōh*). This third grouping, in particular, interests us because this *topos* involves travel not just to a foreign land but to a far-flung place that lie at a great distance. Lands understood in this way are rarely mentioned within the biblical corpus because, in contrast to Egypt or Aram-Damascus, the Israelites knew hardly anything about them other than that they lay so far away. The

particular *topos* I use here has as much to do with the intervening space between Israel and the far away land as that land itself, meaning that the Jonah story is unique in this regard. The great distance involved in reaching Tarshish was regarded as so extreme that the narrator's imagination is given free license to depict the intervening area however he would like.[100]

The "hero" is dispatched to one of these fantastic foreign lands (FFL's hereafter) on a perilous mission but its successful completion would gain him an elevation in his social standing. On the arduous journey to this distant land, while in liminal "no man's land," the hero is beset with adverse circumstances and is forced into isolation by this condition. The hero is at the brink of death when he has some religious experience in which he has a moment of self-actualization and demonstrates his reverence for the Godhead. This epiphany is met with the hero's acquisition of a gift and the restoration of his original quest, which he goes on to complete once he is reincorporated into the social order with a new, higher status. This post-liminal phase of the narrative is usually the shortest, perhaps emphasizing that the journey itself is more important than the intended destination. Nevertheless, the draw of the FFL is a distinctive feature of this *topos* and there are some points that I must address to underscore how these concepts of liminal spaces differ from travel narratives in the Hebrew Bible or other literatures:

1) The element or possibility of fantasy is omnipresent once the hero leaves his center and crosses into liminal space. "No-man's land" is a place where the expected norms and conventions of nature are not the same, and are even inverted in some instances. It is a place where all of the laws of nature may be turned on end; animals may

[100]The biblical sojourns of Abraham (Gen 12:10-13:1) and, later, of Joseph (Gen 37:25-Gen 50-26) to Egypt depict that place as a strange land of unfamiliar customs and malefactors at every turn, but it is not depicted as intrinsically fantastic and is reachable by conventional means.

speak and even have supremacy over men, and it is portrayed as barren and inhabitable for human beings. Peripheral areas were "porous spaces" and borders between locales and territories "were zonal, not linear" in the perceptions of ancient peoples.[101] The FFL beyond this vaguely-defined "no man's land" is a land of enormous size or prodigious wealth. Precious metals and jewels may be so numerous that they are as common as water or soil are to a traveler. The lure of riches or glory spurs the dispatcher and helps to draw forth the hero, and reaching the FFL at all costs may become an obsession, reminiscent of the sixteenth-century quest to find the city of "El Dorado" in South America.

"No-man's land" is littered with dangerous denizens and creatures that do not exist in the human world. Late medieval cartographers sometimes used the phrase "Here be dragons" (Lat. *Hic sunt dracones*) on their maps in charting unexplored or otherwise dangerous territories between cities. These beings resemble creatures known to humankind but they are also radically different in some respects. Metaphor allows an audience to recognize familiar elements in the heroes' surroundings but only in distorted form. The snake in "The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor," for example, is serpentine in some respects but fabulously bejeweled and speaks like a human. But even the most fantastic of creatures is limited, for while humans may at great peril traverse "no-man's land" these creatures apparently cannot come to the human world except at their own risk, and they disappear when such an interaction is threatened. The wondertale bucks

[101] A recent dissertation by Micah Myers proposes geopoetic and ethnopoetic readings of Roman poetry that involves journeys to frontier areas. Myers mentions that these perceptions of frontier areas come with the rise of the nation-state, perhaps presenting a suitable analogy to the postexilic imperial context in which the book of Jonah likely took form. See "The Frontiers of the Empire and the Edges of the World in the Augustan Poetic Imaginary" (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2008), 1-12.

the expectations of an audience in such a way to make stories more memorable and entertaining.[102]

2) The FFL that the hero sets out for is a real, topographic place, though its precise location and characteristics may be shrouded in mystery and its location is "just beyond the geographic knowledge of those who try to pinpoint its location."[103] But in order to be meaningful, the audience must have known of the tangible existence of a locale by that name. It is not a divine realm like Mount Olympus nor is it created *ex nihilo* as a propagandist construct like the "Sugarcandy Mountain" of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. In all three of these wondertales there is some reason to believe that an actual city or land approximate to its folkloric representation actually existed, and people generally knew that, as can pieced together by appeals to archaeology and other textual sources. In the wondertale, however, the symbolism of that FFL as "The Other" trumps the mundane reality of the land which inspires it. Perhaps a fitting example of this phenomenon from ancient Near Eastern literature is the Egyptian "Tale of the Doomed Prince," concerning a heroic prince who visits the obscure but historically attested land of Naharina and embarks upon a series of fantastic adventures.[104]

The existence of "no man's land" is more murky, and intentionally so. There is a sense of otherness that the distance from the "center" alone does not convey. Physical

[102] "Folklore also reveals man's attempts to escape in fantasy from the conditions of his geographical environment and from his own biological limitations as a member of the genus and species *Homo sapiens*." So William R. Bascom, "Four Functions of Folklore," 279-298 in *The Study of Folklore* (ed. Alan Dundes; Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965).

[103] In reference to Tarshish; Sasson, *Jonah*, 79.

[104] This 18th dynasty story survives only from *verso* Papyrus Harris 500 in the British Museum. An unnamed Egyptian prince is prophesied by to die by a crocodile, a snake or a dog. The prince continuously runs from his ominous fate. The end of the tale is missing--to the never-ending frustration of Egyptologists; Naharina refers either to an area of Palestine or Mitanni.

boundaries granting access to these liminal spaces are clearly demarcated but there are seldom any other geographical markers within that space by which distances may be measured or places revisited. Though its corporeality may be understated for narrative purposes or the laws of nature stretched in that place, it is described as space that may be travelled through and walked upon. Consider the California gold rush of the nineteenth century; lured by tales of riches, thousands of prospectors called "forty-niners" set out to journey across a trackless and vast wilderness towards a place that they knew existed but knew little else about. Though the potential payoff was deemed worth the risk many prospectors perished by illness, attacks from Native Americans, and snow drifts in the space between their departing and arriving points. Hyperbolized folktales originating from westward expansion and stories of frontier life in the uncharted wilderness eclipse historical accounts of travel as Americana. More is left to the imagination in such narratives: forests are more dense, creatures more wild, and attackers more ferocious.

3) The FFL is invariably portrayed as distant or difficult to access by conventional means and lay beyond some sort of natural barrier--seas, mountains, deserts. Special means and provisions are always required for journeying towards this place in order to survive traveling through the "no-man's land" surrounding it. Aratta, for example, is a city that is in many respects a counterpart to the Sumerian city Unug (Uruk) but it lay a great distance from Unug and the rest of the Sumerian world such that it necessitates several days of overland journey across difficult terrain reach it. As I have already mentioned, the area surrounding human settlements was still largely uncharted and dangerous so far as the ancients were concerned, so movement from one human sphere of action to another through “no-man's land” involved special means and preparation. Such

preparation correlates to the initial stages of the *rite de passage* inasmuch as a difficult journey requires special equipment or physical and mental fortification and preparedness.

As may be deduced from this last point, movement is a critical action within this type of wondertale. Allusions to landmarks passed along such a journey underscore the fact that the hero traverses great physical distances and we witness the transition from center to periphery as a sequence of events or a gradation of the environs. The differences between center and periphery are contrasted with greater precision and in a more expanded way as a consequence. Some of the richest literary attestations of how ancient Near Eastern peoples thought of their neighbors involve some sort of campaign, exile or other visitation to a foreign land by a representative of the referent culture. Ancient literatures are also replete with the images of untamed wildernesses hidden away from areas of human habitation or cities: the "cedar forest" visited by Gilgamesh and Enkidu, Odysseus' stop at the island of the kyklops Polyphemos, and even some annalistic examples such as the annals of Esarhaddon describing his conquest of Egypt and the passage of his army through a strange land filled with two-headed snakes and flying green creatures of some kind.[105] Though these examples are not tied to this specific narrative *topos*, they attest to the existence of liminal space in the mental geography of ancient peoples and the fact that these spatial perceptions were related multifariously.

As we turn to examining the Lugalbanda story and the "Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor," against whose morphologies I read the Book of Jonah as a failed *rite de passage*, I would like to again emphasize the dangers of reading these wondertales for patterns of direct, "genetic" relationships. Even if the reader agrees with me that the three stories

[105] A. L. Oppenheim in *ANET*, 292.

share morphological components, we should eschew the temptation to link those stories, whose contexts are separated by so much time and space, to the hypothetical morphology of an ur-wondertale.[106] Not only would this yield specious results, but it would also serve little or no purpose. Rather, let us focus the next chapter's readings with the Jonah story in mind, for it is from that position that the other two wondertales will be examined. In the following chapter I will offer readings of those two wondertales and demonstrate how these share the morphology I described above. Both of those protagonists and their actions are parallels to Jonah and his inactions, and their successful *rites de passage* may be contrasted with Jonah's dysfunctional growth into a prophetic antihero.

[106] Much of the controversy surrounding the work of Propp concerns whether and to what extent this is his goal in *Morphology of the Wondertale*. It should be noted that although Propp's work has been occasionally appropriated for these ends, this was not a goal he set for himself and this is evident through his failure (originally) to relate his morphology to Russian or Indo-European culture, which (ironically) made him the target of critics such as Lévi-Strauss who related folkloric memes to other aspects of culture.

CHAPTER II

TWO MORPHOLOGICAL PARALLELS TO THE JONAH STORY

2.1.1 Comparative Analysis of Wondertales

In this chapter I will discuss two ancient Near Eastern wondertales that use a morphological structure and *topos* similar to those of the Jonah story. Rather than focus exclusively on biblical parallels to the book of Jonah's components, I feel it necessary to reach further afield for more suitable examples and narratives which fit this particular *topos*. Thus I have chosen to examine a Sumerian wondertale and an Egyptian tale that fit these criteria. I believe that these particular tales share more morphological parallels with the story of Jonah than any biblical narrative or even other ancient Near Eastern narratives. To express these points an extended discussion is needed, and the choice of only two wondertales for comparison is more wieldy and practical for this task than a broader data set would be. Other studies, while demonstrating applicability across a large number of narratives, have failed to reveal connections between those narratives on more than a couple of plot points, making their connections tenuous; Irvin's *Mytharion*, for one, suffers from this limitation. As in the case of the book of Jonah, these tales survive only in versions that were written and rewritten to emphasize certain elements and perhaps deemphasize others. The processes of revision and redaction inevitably modify or otherwise manipulate such narratives. This would be especially problematic if we were mapping a traditions history for each tale: the Lugalbanda material has survived in a few versions or recensions and "The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor" is extant in only a

single manuscript. But the texts' written features reflect literary artifice, their poetic forms and parallel constructions simply "flesh out" the morphological elements of the stories themselves.[107] By writing down these stories their composers introduced a process of standardization to what had been a more fluid manner of transmission. Despite the fact that these stories survive as written narratives, we shall see that there are folkloric features that suggest a long process of transmission and the use of widespread and recurring morphological elements.

To link the plot sequence of these wondertales to the stages of a *rite de passage* I will briefly introduce them and recount their major plot events in three sections corresponding to van Gennep's tripartite division of pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal states. This schema correlates to the intrinsic structure of both wondertales. Another objective of relating the plots of these stories is to highlight the parallels in content with the Jonah narrative, specifically to show how all three narratives share the same *topos*. This will establish a context for reading the Jonah story as a transformation of this morphology resulting in the depiction of a failed *rite de passage*.

2.2.1 The Lugalbanda Story as Wondertale

From the sixth millennium BCE up to the early 2nd millennium BCE the southern part of modern-day Iraq, very near to the Persian Gulf, was populated by peoples we call the Sumerians, after their name for that land. Their legacy to modern civilization is enormous because they devised the earliest known writing system. And though the Sumerians were likely not the earliest peoples to inhabit this region, their success at

[107] This story is also known simply as "The Shipwrecked Sailor" in some scholarship but I will follow Miriam Lichtheim's title for the piece.

administrative programs makes them among the earliest peoples we can study. The very earliest texts that may be "read" are pictographic tallies and economic records, dating to around 3200-3000 BCE from Uruk. Sumerian had become a language of stature and erudition in the Sargonic court, and it experienced a second flourishing during a period known conventionally among scholars as Ur III period.[108] Narratives that had been most likely transmitted through the spoken word found written form during the Ur III period.[109]

One such tradition survives in a two-part narrative concerning Lugalbanda, a legendary king of the Sumerian principality of Uruk. These tales are part of a larger cycle chronicling the struggles between Uruk and the distant city-state of Aratta.[110] Collectively these two epic texts are sometimes referred to as the "Lugalbanda cycle" or, individually, as Lugalbanda I (or "Lugalbanda in Hurrumkurra") and Lugalbanda II (or "Lugalbanda and Enmerkar"). Their provenance is unclear but there is much reason to believe that although these are two distinct works in all surviving copies they were treated as companion pieces even in antiquity, and current scholarship usually follows suit. Most philologists recognize that, "neither of them is a complete story without the other"[111] and that, "The two poems can best be seen as interrelated as two parts of one

[108] Academic shorthand for the 'third dynasty' of Ur, from the Sumerians' own division of their history.

[109] Nick Veldhuis has noted the complications inherent of our understanding of the history of Ur III literary texts. He summarizes, "We may date tablets, but only rarely may we date compositions. Literary compositions existed in a more or less fluid state." Veldhuis, "Sumerian Literature," in *Cultural Repertoires: Structure, Function and Dynamics* (ed. Gillis J. Dorleijn and Herman L.J. Vanstiphout; Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 29-43.

[110] The other two tales are not linked to one another as the Lugalbanda poems are. Enmerkar is their primary protagonist. These are known conventionally as "Enmerkar and Enšuḫgirana" and "Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta." Rather than simply framing the critical action of the epic, as is the case with the Lugalbanda poems, the conflict and competition with Aratta are at the heart of these epics' content.

cycle of tales."[112] The latter opinion suggests that the received text of the Lugalbanda material is an aggregate of units which were initially separate or, perhaps, an amalgam of competing traditions. Regardless of whichever possibility is closer to truth, it cannot be denied that both as a literary text and as a narrative the Lugalbanda poems reflect a high level of refinement and manipulation of its parts. There is some evidence to suspect that the story draws upon thematic precedents.[113]

Folklore is inherently pliable, and we recognize folkloric features as those flexible, universal elements which may crop up across cultures, such as the repetition of the number three. Epic, on the other hand, is a literary form concerning the persons and events important to a particular nation or culture. Thus Lugalbanda (like Jonah ben Amittai) is given an historical context and his purported deeds are portrayed as foundational to Uruk's socio-political identity. These categories are not mutually exclusive, and the survival of the story as epic does not at all preclude a folkloristic reading of the Lugalbanda narrative; epics especially are saturated with folkloric content since they often incorporate sequences from share many *leitmotifs* with wondertales. The Lugalbanda poems, for example, employ stock characters such as the hero's brothers whose limited contributions and anonymity suggest a folktale situation over an historical one. Lugalbanda's historicity is clouded by folkloric details and the hero himself is

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[111] Vanstiphout, *Epics of Sumerian Kings*, 97; After reviewing the arguments, Jeremy Black acknowledges the separate literary traditions of the poems, but maintains that, 'Lugalbanda can be treated as a complete work of literature in its own right.' and he makes note of "certain implied narrative references" between the two; *Reading Sumerian Poetry*, 69, 122.

[112] Bendt Alster, "Interaction of Oral and Written Poetry in Early Mesopotamian Literature," in *Mesopotamian Epic Literature: Oral or Aural?* (ed. Marianna Vogelzang and Herman Vanstiphout; Lampeter, UK: University of Wales Press, 1992), 23-69; cf. Claus Wilcke *Das Lugalbandepos* (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 1969).

[113] Sol Cohen notes variations in some of the younger epic texts concerning Aratta written in Old Babylonian; “Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta” (PhD diss., The University of Pennsylvania, 1973), 13.

characterized archetypally. Several facts support the assertion that he exists more as a legendary folk hero more than as an historical personage: his name[114] his legacy as the husband of the goddess Ninsun in the Fara god-lists, and the fantastic nature of his feats.[115] The Lugalbanda poems (and the other two Aratta poems, for that matter) are set in a world of fantastic and magical happenings. Other folkloric qualities abound here as well: normally no more than two characters are active at one time, repetition occurs threefold, characterization is simple, and so forth.[116] Therefore, there are hints that this literary epic is shaped heavily by fantasy, most likely by the adaptation of a wondertale or series of tales to epic length and form.[117] I follow the opinion of Bendt Alster: "I do *not* [italics his] want to say that our poems are folktales, but that they draw upon a popular narrative tradition which permeates them in many ways."[118]

Every Mesopotamian literary narrative, irrespective of whether it was passed orally by the *Volk* prior to its written form or not, was the creation of a literate elite that was able to produce poetry worthy of a highly developed aesthetic. This is where the

[114]The translation "junior king" is offered by William W. Hallo. If accurate, the king's name is even more meaningful given my argument that he matures into his kingship through his trials in the mountains. *The Ancient Near East* (New York: Harcourt, 1971), 45; another proposed translation is "dancing king."

[115] But if Lugalbanda was an historical personage of some kind then we have an interesting problem: does the king-list retroject Lugalbanda's name falsely onto a past age, or is Lugalbanda's worship as divine in the Old Babylonian period of Nippur and Uruk reflect euhemerism? I find the former explanation to be more plausible for several reasons, not the least of which is my suspicion of the king list's historicity. There are significant discrepancies between the lengths of reigns of those early kings vis-à-vis kings from later and better-documented periods such as Lugalbanda's supposed 1200 year reign.

[116] These features are noted by Alster in dialogue with the "epic laws" of Axel Olrik; "Epic Tales from Ancient Sumer: Enmerkar, Lugalbanda, and Other Cunning Heroes" in *CANE* 3, 2315-2326.

[117] Jeremy Black disputes the use of the term 'tale' for the narrative because "it suggests something linear (and usually prosaic) which provides a coherent, full tale to the hearer. In fact these poems often plunge *in media res*, frequently presupposing the details of the narrative to focus in a highly selective way on particular episodes while omitting others"; *Reading Sumerian Poetry* , 71.

[118] Alster, "Interaction of Oral and Written Poetry in Early Mesopotamian Literature" in *Mesopotamian Epic* Literature, 23-69.

folklorists' old romantic preconceptions about the *Volk* give way to a more inclusive understanding of what constitutes folklore as argued by Dundes and others. The astute reader will notice features within this particular story that make a folkloristic reading not only possible but also desirable.

2.2.2 Summary of the Lugalbanda Narrative

I am offering a summary of the Lugalbanda narrative, based upon translation of the two previously mentioned epic poems. In some cases this would be a problem since there are still many disputed nuances; but since I am interested mainly in plot functions and the principles of morphology, a philological analysis of terms and syntax may not be needed. I will utilize two recent English translations, each of which recounts the epics in two parts: "Lugalbanda in the Mountain Cave" and "Lugalbanda and the Anzud Bird" by Black et al.,[119] and "Lugalbanda in the Wilderness" and "The Return of Lugalbanda" by Herman Vanstiphout.[120] I have chosen these as primary texts because they are the products of specialists and because one translation is presented as prose (Black) while the other translation is arranged in verse (Vanstiphout).

I adopt a simpler identification of the two texts as "Lugalbanda I" (L I hereafter) and Lugalbanda II (L II hereafter). In-text citations of the poem will use the symbols A and B, for the two sections of Black's translation, accompanied by page number, and α and β for Vanstiphout's translation, accompanied by line number. The plot summary will be broken down into three sections--pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal--for clarity.

[119] Jeremy Black, Graham Cunningham, Eleanor Robson, and Gábor Zólyomi. *The Literature of Ancient Sumer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 11-31.

[120] Vanstiphout, *Epics of Sumerian Kings*, 97-165.

Once the morphology of the Lugalbanda cycle is explained and diagrammed we will compare that with the morphology of the "Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor" and we may begin to evince a typology based on at least fourteen shared functions.

I. Preparation and the March (*pre-liminal*; lines 1-74 of L I)

The epic is set in vague, mythologized terms near the creation of the world "in ancient days when heaven was separated from earth" (A.10) during which the city Unug enjoyed preeminence among Sumerian polities.[121] This story is deliberately staged during a period reconcilable with Sumerian historiography, yet there is a clear sense of removal from the present age. The remainder of the prologue emphasizes the industry of humankind–levees, canals, agriculture–juxtapositioned against the untamed elements of nature encountered later. This setting thus frames a sort of "golden age" in which feats of human ingenuity are in harmony with the cycles of nature. From the narrator's perspective this past era also allowed for more simplistic, dichtomous, or extreme representations of people and things as symbols of virtue or discord.

In media res we meet with Enmerkar, the king of Unug, who is resolute in his desire to destroy Aratta for reasons not clearly stated. Aratta's description as a "rebel land" (A.13; α.23) suggests an indigenous revolt against occupiers from Unug; but the third-person narration does not go further in providing a retrospective history. Rather, preparations are underway for a lengthy and taxing campaign against Aratta. Enmerkar musters his massive army to the sounds of horns across the kingdom, and troops gather in such numbers that "they covered the ground like a heavy fog, the dense dust whirled up

[121] Unug is another name for Uruk. Also referenced heavily is Kulaba (also Kulab) which is an ancient sector of the city devoted to the sky-god An. Sumerian poetry very frequently uses alternate names in parallel poetic formations.

by them reached to heaven" (A.13). The army's departure from Unug itself is described briefly, yet there is an emphasis on the overland distance this army crosses to reach the boundary of their land: "Five days passed. On the sixth day they bathed…and on the seventh[122] day they entered the mountains. Their crossing of the pathways was a huge flood rising upstream to a lake" (α.48-51), or "an enormous flood billowing upstream into a lagoon" (A.13).[123]

The army's journey up to this point is somewhat laconic in comparison to the description of this liminal boundary, and the nature of the text seems to change as if to reflect the crossing of that boundary. Following a description of King Enmerkar the narrator rather disjointedly introduces Lugalbanda by name for the first time:

> Seven they were, seven they were,
> Seven were the young lads born in Kulab.
> Uraš had born these seven, the Wild Cow had suckled them with milk.
> They were heroes, the handsomest in Sumer and princely in their prime.
> ...These seven were lieutenants of companies,
> They were captains of regiments.
> ...Lugalbanda was the eighth of them.
> [...] was washed in water.
> He went forward in modest silence; He loosened the [...] of the king, and marched out with the troops. (α.59-74)

Thus we are introduced to Lugalbanda as an afterthought; he is the runt of the group and seemingly a mere retainer of the divinely propelled king. The principal matter of this narrative concerns Lugalbanda's ascension to heroic status as a precursor to his eventual stewardship of Unug's throne. That the purported weakest, youngest or least of a group

[122] The number seven recurs throughout this wondertale –an example of what Dundes calls a "pattern number." *Interpreting Folklore*, 135.

[123] The text is legible but its meaning is mysterious. At the least this would seem to be some sort of liminal threshold.

turns out to be the best is a common folkloric meme.[124] The crossing of this liminal threshold provides an appropriate backdrop for the Lugalbanda's introduction since the boundary itself serves as an indirect reminder of Sumerian cosmology and myth, both of which are linked to the ideology of kingship foreshadowed by Lugalbanda's deeds.

II. Lugalbanda's Illness, Recovery, and Transformation (*liminal*, lines 75-500 of L I and lines 1-202 of L II)

At some point about halfway through the journey to Aratta (the text is not very specific), Lugalbanda is stricken with a mysterious and crippling "affliction of the head" which leaves him incapacitated (α.75-77). None of his comrades is able to help him. In a scene portending Lugalbanda's death and funeral, his companions move Lugalbanda to a mountain cave and assemble goods and victuals. His mouth remains closed and he takes no breath. Lugalbanda's brothers take counsel with one another, reluctantly agreeing to leave Lugalbanda in the mountain cave with provisions, to continue their campaign. They hope to return to this place after their campaign to retrieve his corpse (A.15, α.131-147), presumably to take him home for a proper burial.

Two and a half days of misery for Lugalbanda ensues. At the end of the third day, he finally petitions the god Utu (the sun) for healing as Utu prepares to depart the sky and pass into inaccessible darkness:

> In the mountain cave, the most dreadful place on earth, let me be ill no longer! Here where there is no mother, there is no father, there is no acquaintance, no one whom I value…Don't make me flow away like water in a violent death! Don't make me eat saltpetre as if it were barley! Don't

[124] Alster, "Epic Tales from Ancient Sumer," 2323; We are reminded also of the frequent appearance of this sequence in apologetic texts, which themselves demonstrate a more pointed interest in folkloric representations than in factual reporting.

> make me fall like a throwstick somewhere in the desert unknown to me!" (A.15).[125]

In a most interesting interlude, Utu receives Lugalbanda's pleas and dispatches Inana to him. She appears before Lugalbanda and "with power of life she let him go to sleep just like the sleeping Utu" (A.16). During this further episode Lugalbanda's symbolic death is emphasized, and the most basic dichotomies of existence become manifest; at the twilight between day and night, between life and death, between compassion and desertion Lugalbanda exists in a state of delicate tension.

In succession, the astral deities "accept his tears and gave him life." The gods' compassionate rays of light propel Lugalbanda from the cave and into the open, where Utu, "had caused life-saving plants to be born. The rolling rivers, mothers of the hills, brought life-saving water. After biting on the life-saving plants, after sipping from the life-saving water…he sped away like a horse of the mountains" (A.17). Thus begins a series of heroic and fantastic feats performed by Lugalbanda. Though "not knowing how to bake bread or a cake," he still manages to bake cakes of *giziešta*-dough. He hews juniper trees from the soil, in order to craft halters and fetters with their roots. Lugalbanda captures wild goats and even a wild brown bull, a prize worthy of the gods. He is overtaken by weariness and sleeps but is visited in his dreams by Zangara, god of dreams, and is instructed to sacrifice the brown bull he had just captured. Lugalbanda awakens and sacrifices the goats and bull as ordered, so that he may provide a sacred banquet for the gods. "Divine" Lugalbanda is portrayed as an equal to the gods at this juncture, as he "makes" all the great gods descend upon this pit in the mountains to attend

[125] Inana (Venus), Su'en (the moon), and Utu (sun) are astral deities, perhaps each representing a different stage of the transition to evening. Their successive actions reflecting the transition of cosmic time.

his divine banquet. The remainder of the first text extols the gods individually but is fragmentary before breaking off completely for an unknown number of lines.

The second Lugalbanda text opens with Lugalbanda still stranded alone in the mountains but now healthy. At some point, Lugalbanda had become aware of the fearsome Anzud bird (also Anzû or Imdugud) nearby and knows where it has nested its young. The absolute isolation of this place is repeatedly emphasized: "in the mountains where no cypresses grow, where no snake slithers, where no scorpion scurries…the Anzud bird had set its nest and settled his young inside" (β.36-41). Lugalbanda realizes that for fear of lethal force he must approach with great caution; Anzud is a powerful chimera, with "sparkling eyes" (B.25) and "shark's teeth and an eagle's claws. In terror of him wild bulls run away into the foothills, stags run away into the mountains" (β.47-49). Lugalbanda deftly prepares sweet cakes for Anzud's chick and even nurtures the creature in the hope of pleasing Anzud. Initially fearing that his offspring had been stolen because the young chick did not call back from the nest, Anzud and his wife cry loudly in grief. These cries make the Anunna (the collective of the greatest of Mesopotamian deities) "crawl into crevices like ants," but Anzud is delighted to see that his young has been well-cared for. Anzud blesses the as yet unseen stranger for his kindness and Lugalbanda realizes that it is safe to present himself.

Lugalbanda exchanges flatteries with Anzud and Anzud happily declares that Lugalbanda will have his wish granted. Most significantly, Anzud "adopts" Lugalbanda and Lugalbanda allows himself to be adopted into Anzud's protection like a "father" (β.126-128; B.25), stating repeatedly that "I would like you to decide my fate" (β.131). Lugalbanda chooses to receive the gift of speed and makes a promise to Anzud

foreshadowing his future kingdom and cementing the covenant just enacted: "I shall have woodcarvers fashion statues of you, and you will be breathtaking to look upon. Your name will be made famous in Sumer and will resound to the credit of the great gods" (B.26).

With Lugalbanda running quickly along the ground, the Anzud flies on high and spots the troops from Unug. But Anzud apparently does not want to be seen by other humans: "'What I have told you, the fate I have fixed for you, do not explain it to your brothers…Leave me to my nest, you keep to your troops' The bird hurried to his nest." Thus Anzud leads Lugalbanda back to the companions who had abandoned him (B.27; β.223) but remains in his own world, having interacted only with Lugalbanda.

III. Lugalbanda's Return to Humanity (*post-liminal*, lines 220-417 of L II)

Lugalbanda is immediately beset with questions from the perplexed generals who did not expect to see him again: "How is it that you have come back from the great mountains, where no one goes alone, from where no one returns to mankind?" (B.27). But Lugalbanda answers only vaguely and in metaphors, making no mention of his near-death, the celestial banquet, or, importantly, the encounter with Anzud. His brothers embrace and kiss him as if he were "a chick sitting in his nest, they feed him and give him drink," (B.28) an obvious replay of Lugalbanda's beavior. Lugalbanda's symbolic rebirth into and nurturing from the human community in this way complements his return.

The forces of Unug spend a number of months besieging Aratta to no avail and as the winter looms Enmerkar decides to send somebody back to Unug for the purpose of

propitiating the goddess Inana and hastening the victory of the troops from Unug. Lugalbanda volunteers to do this but with the condition that he travel alone, apparently to conceal his superhuman advantage in speed. In a matter of hours he traverses vast stretches of land and arrives in Unug's Kulaba district. Lugalbanda approaches Inana in her temple there and delivers Enmerkar's plea. Inana tells Lugalbanda that to conquer the foreign city Enmerkar must first capture a certain magical fish, cook, and present it as his offering. The epic ends with a short, retrospective exaltation of Aratta and Lugalbanda. This abrupt ending has caused some to speculate that this narrative is in fact just the beginning of a much larger narrative in which the fish is caught and Aratta eventually subjugated, but there is no evidence of this internally.

2.2.3 Morphological Analysis

In the time since Propp's work has been made available to Western scholarship, it has been applied to a wide array of narratives because Propp deals partly in archetypes and generic folkloric elements.[126] So far as I am aware, the first mention of Propp's work in the analysis of Sumerian epics was made by Henri Limet.[127] But Limet does not apply morphology directly, concerning himself mainly with literary form (as opposed to the narrative's structure) and referencing Propp's "contes marveilleux" merely to make a statement about the *Gattung* of Sumerian epics. His objective is to demonstrate that

[126] A mistranslation of a key term in one of Propp's early English translations has helped make this possible, as scholars have sometimes conflated character (external appearance, age, sex, etc) with tale roles (position as a *dramatis personae* with relation to functions). These are distinct factors. See Appendix I in *Patterns in Oral Literature* (ed. Heda Jason and Dimitri Segal; World Anthropology; Paris: Mouton Publishers, 1977), 313-320 and Adele Berlin, "Ethnopoetry and the Enmerkar Epics" 17-24 in *Studies in Literature from the Ancient Near East: Dedicated to Samuel Noah Kramer*. AOS 65 (ed. Jack M. Sasson; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).

[127] Henri Limet, "Les chants épiques sumériens," *RBPH* 50 (1972): 3-24.

Sumerian epics' forms, like Propp's tales, are influenced by oral recitation: "Le style est influencé, lui aussi, par les nécessités de la récitation publique."[128] Heda Jason has identified the other Aratta poems, "Enmerkar and Enšuḫgirana" and "Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta," as representative of a tale type depicting a struggle between a part-human, part-divine hero against a monster, and even assigned Proppian functions to them, though she does not mention the Lugalbanda poems.[129] The problem with Jason's approach is that Propp's functions are derived from a particular data set and not necessarily applicable outside of that set of Russian wondertales. *Some* elements of wondertales are universal, and Propp himself alluded vaguely to the possibility that certain functions appear across innumerable contexts. But his assignments of *dramatis personae* and "functions" were limited, so although we may adapt Propp's terms and methods we cannot apply them without some modification. This is true also because the morphology of the Lugalbanda story is inherently different than those of "Enmerkar and Enšuḫgirana" and "Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta"; rather than centering upon the exploits of a journeying hero, these other tales are concerned principally with the conflicts with Aratta.

This story's morphology utilizes four *dramatis personae* modeled after those of Propp's work. I identify these *dramatis personae* as follows:

- The **dispatcher** is Enmerkar
- The **hero** is Lugalbanda.

[128] Ibid., 16.

[129] Adele Berlin, "Ethnopoetry and the Enmerkar Epics" *JAOS* 103 no. 1 (1983), 17-24. Berlin adeptly notes the importance of space to these epic literatures, especially the demarcation of "our country" (Uruk) from the "afterworld" and notes that where "the principal battle takes place in a semi-mythic location which seems to be in 'the in-between space.'" Ibid., 22.

- The **donor**(s) are the celestial deities.
- The **helper** is Anzud.

There are several points worth mentioning about how these labels are applied. Propp proposes that all wondertales may be grouped based upon the motivations that precipitate the hero's quest. Either, 1) the realization of a lack and the desire to resolve that, or, 2) an act of villainy triggers the unfolding of the wondertale, though these are not mutually exclusive. As we have already seen, there is no "villain" in this type of wondertale as an actual *dramatis persona*, thus the hero's quest must be precipitated by a lack or the absence of something. On a perfunctory level the rebellion of Aratta and the resulting lack of political control over that area is the impetus for the quest, and thus Enmerkar's control over Aratta is the object of the story. Yet the influence of Lugalbanda's *rite de passage* upon this morphology adds another layer of meaning. The narrative's central focus on Lugalbanda's transformation, underscored by the emphasis on his initial position as the weakest and least experienced among his brothers, suggests that the story's most important sequence is that transformation itself. Enmerkar's lack of control over Aratta is actually overshadowed by his lack of a worthy successor, somebody who fulfills the Sumerian ideal of kingship. Lugalbanda's process of growth sets him apart from his brothers; he has in fact thrived in a place of non-being, "where no one can walk alone" (β.231). We see that the characterization of Lugalbanda's brothers fits with this qualification. They are not *dramatis personae* proper but are merely stock characters with no individual voice or dynamism.

Moreover, due to our experience with European wondertales like those collected by Propp or the Grimm brothers, we readily associate the wondertale with simpler (or at

least non-divine) representations of *dramatis personae*: an old woman or a talking fox, for example. My identification of the celestial gods collectively as the "donor" may be disarming in this context, just as it raises the theological outlook therein and whether (or if at all) this story may be rightly compared to the Jonah story. All three of the wondertales examined here involve divine interactions with humankind, the matter of which frequently recurs among the ancients in literature of all types. Prior to the advent of Neoplatonism as the dominant mode of Western theological discourse, direct interactions of the divine with humans in physical terms was widely accepted. It is frustrating that texts of the end of LI (the divine banquet sequence) are so broken and fragmented because this apparently lengthy scene might yield fruitful comparison with the tortured relationship between Jonah and God.

Based upon the fourteen functions I identified in the previous chapter I propose the following formula to represent the morphology of narrative, followed by explanation of each with its direct application:

$$\alpha^1\beta^1\uparrow^1A^1B^1C^1D^3EF^2GH^2\downarrow^1\gamma^1\delta$$

α - The hero is called upon to leave home on a quest: 1. When Enmerkar declares war on Aratta and organizes his army to campaign against the city, Lugalbanda is set to join it.

β - The hero joins an able group as a lesser member: 1. Lugalbanda is the eighth brother, an afterthought.

↑ - The hero goes forth and crosses a threshold into the wilderness while traveling to a foreign land: The group leaves Unug for Aratta, crossing over mountains and some body of water.

A - The hero's company faces unexpected adversity from nature: 1. Illness suddenly strikes Lugalbanda.

B - The hero is stranded alone in "no-man's land" for three days: 1. Lugalbanda's brothers abandon him because he is a liability to the overland campaign. Lugalbanda prays on the third day to Utu.

C – The donor revitalizes the hero: 1. Healing from the astral deities propels Lugalbanda to go forth from the mountain cave and find the "plant of life" and the "water of life."

D – The hero gives thanks with an offering or a prayer: 3. Lugalbanda prepares food and offers a banquet for the gods who saved him.

E - The helper and the hero meet; hero fears helper: Terrified of Anzud and hiding, Lugalbanda devises a plan to win his favor and secure his help.

F - The helper queries the hero: 1. Anzud calls out for the one who has provided care to his offspring.

G - The hero praises the helper: When Lugalbanda reveals himself he praises Anzud at length.

H - The helper foretells the destiny of the hero and gives him a gift: Anzud "fixes" Lugalbanda's fate and offers him a gift; Lugalbanda chooses speed.

↓ - The hero returns to the human sphere of action: 1. Lugalbanda returns to his campaign against Aratta with this new superhuman ability.

γ - The hero uses his newly acquired gift to bring about a status change for himself: 1. Lugalbanda uses his speed to return to Unug and learn from Inana what Enmerkar must do to secure victory; he learns the role of religious kingship.

δ – The hero and dispatcher thrive: Enmerkar successfully subdues Aratta and Lugalbanda receives praise and goes on to become king.

My adaptation and application of Propp's method is not perfect (it seldom is), and it requires some debatable interpretations be made, but we see that Propp's basic thesis about the wondertale holds–*that these events occur within a particular and prescribed order*. Just as the steps constituting a *rite de passage* must occur in the correct sequence,

so this type of wondertale follows a sequence of corresponding stages. Recognition of this sequence is an indispensible part of understanding how this narrative (and the other wondertales of this type) take form.

2.2.4 Lugalbanda and the *rite de passage*

Perhaps the most noticeable feature of this wondertale's plot is how a sense of movement is built into it. Except for the period of his illness the hero Lugalbanda seems to always be in motion, and descriptions of these movements make up a large part of the story. In Propp's morphology the simple symbols ↑ and ↓ represent the hero's departure and return to home, but in my morphology these take on the additional nuance of symbolizing the hero's departure from and return to areas of human habitation. These are perhaps the most essential functions in that they signify the spatial separation and reintegration between the hero and other humans that allows a *rite de passage* of social status to occur.

In this wondertale type the hero is constantly working to escape his own death, but the ritualized separation from and reintegration into the social sphere represents a symbolic death and a rebirth. Any wondertale which mimics this cycle will consequently use mortality, isolation, and renewed life as important themes. Lugalbanda's transformation in this respect is alluded to several times throughout the narrative. Recall that Inana enacted a "sleep" over Lugalbanda just before the dream sequence, and that the hero's sleep "strengthens the warrior" (α.334). The initial description of Lugalbanda barely includes him in the company of his fellows, introducing him merely as "going forward in modest silence" (α.73). Inasmuch as he is the eighth of the regimental

captains in the army his fate is different from that of the others; Lugalbanda is expected to be the unlucky brother, yet he surpasses his brothers and becomes the great one by the story's end.[130] This change in his position within the social order is made possible by the events that take place while he is in isolation. After his symbolic death Lugalbanda takes on new potential and, "Utu, the...of Enlil granted to him (Lugalbanda) the great office of herald of heaven" (α.430). This transformation is described within the narrative by appealing to spatiality as a metaphor for the hero's progress. We see that in the mountainous "no man's land" Lugalbanda exists in a liminal state, hovering between life and death in a place unknown to human knowledge. Lugalbanda is already "dead" with respect to other humans: "A man *unknown to anyone* (italics mine) is dreadful. And here, on this unknown road at the edge of the mountains, o Sun, there now is such a man unknown by anyone: this is unbearable!" (α.162-164).[131]

Even with a healed body, the hero once again faces the prospect of death, this time by the fearsome Anzud. But Lugalbanda's skill at gaining this hazardous creature's trust only secures and enhances his ultimate triumph.[132] Anzud is not of the human world. Anzud's abode, described as an "eagle-tree of Enki on the summit of Inana's mountain of mutlicoloured cornelian" (B.23), is well-hidden away from civilization "in

[130] This is noted by Alster as a common theme in folklore. "Interaction of Oral and Written Poetry in Early Mesopotamian Literature," 57; we recall from the Ugaritic *krt* epic that the hero Keret is the eighth son, rising to prominence after the deaths of his older brothers. Keret likewise favors his eighth daughter (*ttmnt*) to be "treated as the firstborn."

[131] Dina Katz notes that Lugalbanda's prayer to Utu conveys "double meaning" for two planes of existence; while the hero acts and pleads in this world while alive, "underneath is an additional level of allusions to death and the netherworld. The interplay of the two endows the plot of Lugalbanda with deeper meaning and greater impetus." *The Image of the Netherworld in the Sumerian Sources* (Bethesda, Md.: CDL Press, 1993), 72. This is reminiscent of Jonah's reference to the "belly of Sheol" while isolated in the belly of the "big fish."

[132] Nick Veldhuis, *Religion, Literature, and Scholarship: The Sumerian Composition «Nanše and the Birds»* (Cuneiform Monographs 22; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 36.

this highland that knows no cypress, where no snake slithers, no scorpion scurries" (β.37). Any human being isolated in such a place must exhibit wisdom and skill in order to survive, and though he is "wise and he [Lugalbanda] achieves many exploits," (B.23) one of the lessons of this wondertale is that the hero's realization of his relative powerlessness in the cosmic order is what eventually saves him. The roles of the donor and the helper contribute to this message, as both aid the hero and make him aware of his frailty in opposition to their own continued existence. This is why in all three tales both the donor and the helper have divine attributes. Extant Mesopotamian literature mentioning Anzud leads us to conclude that this figure is divine in some sense. He is known from the dawn of Sumerian literature and was perhaps a numinous representation of thunderstorms in the earliest periods.[133] Anzud is often portrayed iconographically as a giant bird with the head of a lion and he is known from the Akkadian Anzû Myth[134] and perhaps other, lost mythic cycles to have the power to "fix" one's fate by virtue of his theft of the gods' Tablet of Destiny.

Lugalbanda recognizes Anzud's awesome potential immediately and resolves that "I shall treat Anzud as befits him" (B.23). Though a hero who has already survived a great trial and been accorded divine favor, Lugalbanda "being clever and cunning" (β.50) keeps his ego in check and subjects himself to nurturing the offspring. Anzud is unsure whether the unknown benefactor is a god or a man: "If you are a god, I will speak with

[133] A classic study concerning the Anzud is W.W. Hallo and W.L. Moran, "The First Tablet of the SB Anzu Myth," *JCS* 31 (1979): 65-115; we learn from the Anzu myth that the bird was conceived by the Earth and born from mountain rocks.

[134] This narrative is known only from two Akkadian versions, an Old Babylonian version and a Standard Babylonian version, in a few copies. The older text is more complete. These most likely represent an older myth whose Sumerian form is not extant. The text concerns Anzud's theft of the tablets and the heroic exploits of the god Ninurta in retrieving them. Both versions are published in Stephanie Dalley, trans. *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others*, (rev. ed.; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 203-227.

you, indeed, I will befriend you. If you are a man I will fix your fate. I shall not let you have any opponents in the mountains. You shall be 'hero-fortified-by-Anzud'" (B.24). Lugalbanda and the Anzud's adoption of one another represents a reorganization of the hero's kinship; he is irrevocably changed by this experience as he attains a new position which parallels the social position he achieves in using Anzud's gift of speed. This episode is highly significant to making sense of the story as a whole, for Lugalbanda returns to the human community but he returns as one changed with respect to the social hierarchy he knows. In mitigating a potential crisis and demonstrating veneration towards the divine Lugalbanda has lived within the ideal of kingship, which the Sumerians believed was divine in origin.

This transition is effected in tandem with at least two indications of a profound sense of spontaneous *communitas,* which we will recall from Chapter One is an acute feeling of human equality resulting from the loss of the liminoid's status. The first instance is qualified by the hero's loneliness while witnessing some cosmological episode involving the astral deities during his time in "no man's land":

> When you go to sleep, all people go to sleep with you;
> Ever youthful Sun, when you rise, all people rise with you!
> O Sun, without you
> No bird is ever netted, no slave is ever caught.
> To him who walks alone you are the companion,
> O Sun, and you are the third of those who travel in pairs
> You are the helmet of him who holds the reins.
> The poor, the destitute, the naked--
> Your sunshine clothes them like a woolen robe,
> And like a white wooden cloth it covers even the slaves! (α.243-250)

The second instance of *communitas* occurs when Anzud leads him back to the troops from Unug which, by this point, are near to Aratta. Lugalbanda is immediately met with

questions from the shocked warriors but he keeps his whereabouts and new ability secret, as Anzud had advised him, and gives his brothers a vivid but untruthful description:[135]

> The highland streams, though mothers of plenty have very steep banks. Lying on my side, I drank as from the water-skin. I growled like the wolf, I grazed the water-meadows. I pecked the earth like the wood-pigeon, I ate wild acorns. (β.239-243)[136]

Lugalbanda, though he had been promoted to be the "herald of heaven" by the gods, treats his brothers as equals and they treat him the same, without regard to their respective ranks. His brothers apparently accept Lugalbanda's explanation of where he had been and "As small birds flocking together all day they embrace and kiss him. As if he were a gamgam-chick in its nest they feed him and give him to drink. Thus they drove away the illness of Lugalbanda" (β.246-250).[137] He is reincorporated into the human community, and they march on "as one man" against Aratta.

It is a year later as "they were hemmed in by the barrier of mountain thornbushes thronged with dragons" (B.28) that Lugalbanda finally gets the chance to exercise the skill befitting one of his experience and ability.[138] Enmerkar decides to curry divine favor but "no one knew how to go back to the city, no one was rushing to go back to

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[135] Importantly, Anzud is a liminal being and he returns to his world just before Lugalbanda's comrades would see him. Prior to vanishing Anzud advises Lugalbanda, "What I have told you, the fate I have fixed for you, do not tell it to your comrades, do not explain it to your brothers. Fair fortune may conceal foul: it is indeed so" (B.27).

[136] The wildlife similes are very interesting if, for no other reason, that they draw attention to the fact that Lugalbanda had, temporarily, had been a part of non-civilization. This dichotomy of nature/wild is observed in many Sumerian narratives, most notably in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* when Enkidu exists in nature, ignorant of human society until his union with Shamhat. The animals spurn Enkidu after he has symbolically joined the human world and he must leave the wilderness.

[137] This is an obvious parallel to the interaction with the Anzud's chick but it is unclear what illness is afflicting Lugalbanda since he was already healed. Could the "illness" be his loneliness?

[138] The careful reader will note the narrator's uneven distribution of time. Great detail may be given of particular episodes of a short time period while the passage of a relatively uneventful year is barely mentioned or glossed over. This is another frequently observed characteristic of folktales.

Kulaba" (B.28). Only Lugalbanda volunteers to go back to Kulaba by himself, knowing that his speed will aid him in returning across "the high hills where no one can walk alone, whence no one can return to humankind, you cannot return!" (β.335-336). His bravery brings him favor in the eyes of Enmerkar and once he returns to Kulaba, Inana "speaks to him as she would speak to her son." The piety of "holy Lugalbanda" and his heroism in "no man's land" has paid off.

The diametric opposition between primal concerns of life such as light/dark, life/death, sickness/health and so forth, is accentuated throughout the entire narrative. Christopher Woods has noted the paradoxical nature of the liminal space comprising the eastern horizon in Mesopotamian thought.[139] The easterly direction is considered highly dangerous in Mesopotamian stories, but this horizon is also held as a place of rebirth and rejuvenation because of its association with the rising sun. The strategic juxtaposition of these elements is analogous to that of the *rite de passage*; the transition from one state of social being to another is metaphorically linked to the transition from one extreme to its opposite. These convey some of the most fundamental anxieties of Sumerian civilization itself–the supply (or lack) of food, the appeasement (or dissatisfaction) of the gods, the success (or failure) of military campaigns. In successfully dealing with all of these changes in fortune Lugalbanda emerges as a tested leader with divine favor and as a paragon for future Sumerian kings. [140]

[139]Woods, "At the Edge of the World: Cosmological Conceptions of the Eastern Horizon in Mesopotamia" *JANER* 9 (2009): 183-239; Woods examines several stories, including Gilgamesh most prominently, but of most interest here is his discussion of the symbolism of the dark mountains as the site of Lugalbanda's rejuvenation. The mystical process of gestation was associated also with death; for, they are born having developed in darkness and without drawing breath. Ibid., 223.

[140] This concept of accepting one's fate as dictated by a supernatural being appears again in the "The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor" and is also a central theme in the book of Jonah.

2.2.5 Aratta and "No Man's Land" as Part of the Physical World

In many respects, the Sumerians were dependent upon the physical world for their survival to a degree unfamiliar to most in the modern world. Knowing the land's features and its seasonal cycles made the difference between reaping a fine harvest and malnourishment, for example. And due to the lack of a single area-wide political and military apparatus the people living there were cognizant of the reversals in fortune that could, in any given campaign season, make them subjects of a neighboring kingdom. Against this backdrop the Lugalbanda narrative presents a story in which human social habitats take up a relatively small amount of the total space of the physical world, and the rest of the topography is the mysterious "no man's land" through which Lugalbanda must travel to move from one human center (Unug) towards another (Aratta). The catalyst for his journey is the mysterious city of Aratta, depicted as the counterpart to Unug.[141]

Aratta appears in several Sumerian texts of the Ur III period as a city-state that lay beyond the borders of Sumer, on the other side of seven desolate mountain ranges.[142] Such a physical boundary--be it mountain ranges, seas, or deserts–add to the mystique of the FFL. Aratta was known primarily to merchants and military guides because of this distance and the peril in crossing it.[143] Its existence is attested in mythological literature

[141] Franz Wiggerman has described Mesopotamian geographical knowledge in contrastive terms as the "familiar world" and the "shadow world"; each geographic area of the center has a counterpart in the periphery, and intermingling of the two is rare. Human travelers in unknown lands must "seek protection in the performance of the proper rituals," e.g., Lugalbanda's staging of a divine banquet. See Wiggerman, "Scenes from the Shadow Side," in *Mesopotamian Poetic Language: Sumerian and Akkadian* (ed. M.E. Vogelzang and H.L.J. Vanstiphout; CM 6; Groningen: Styx Publications, 1996), 207-226.

[142] We are told in the other Aratta epics that messengers traveling between Unug and Aratta must cross mountain ranges including the Zubi ("black"). In another symbolic binary, we see that in the midst of these black mountains is where Lugalbanda is saved by the rays of the sun-god; Vanstiphout, Herman. "Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta" *Epics of Sumerian Kings*, 65 (v. 160).

[143] Cohen, "Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta," 58.

and even the cultic liturgy of Uruk[144] but there is no indication of Aratta in economic texts, leading some to question its historicity altogether.[145] That some scholars have taken its historical existence for granted is thus all the more puzzling; it cannot rightly be compared with other obscure lands such as Anshan, which is attested in economic texts.[146] As is the case with other obscure lands of ancient literature, modern archaeology has been brought to bear on the matter of Aratta's existence.[147]

Yet even though Aratta may have existed in some form or another to the east of Sumer, beyond the Zagros Mountains, the Aratta of this story is clearly a land of fantasy.[148] The fabulous wealth of Aratta is alluded to especially in "Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta" as the city has to give up some of its treasures at the demand of Enmerkar:

> The people of Aratta have as their task the trading of gold and lapis lazuli and the fashioning of golden fruits and fruity bushes laden with figs and grapes...; they shall heap up these fruits in great piles; they shall dig out flawless lapis lazuli in lumps; they shall remove the crowns of the sweet reeds, and for Inana, Lady of the Eana, they shall heap them up in piles in the courtyard of the Eana.[149]

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[144] E.g., in the Sumerian 'Bilgamesh and Huwawa,' as an obscure place; Antoine Cavineaux, *NABU* 43 (Juin 1998): 46: "Il est attesté 'physiquement'...le souvenir d'Aratta ne fut pas seulement maintenu par les épopées d'Enmerkar et Lugalbanda, Aratta était présente au coeur même d'Uruk."

[145] Sol Cohen thinks it odd that such a major trading center should be lost to history; Cohen, "Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta," 61.

[146] Yousef Madjidzadeh, "The Land of Aratta," *JNES* 35 (1976): 105-113; John F. Hansman, "The Question of Aratta," *JNES* 37 (1978): 331-336; Erica Reiner, "The Location of Anšan," *RA* (1973): 57-62.

[147] For information regarding the recent possible discovery of Aratta in modern Iran by the archaeologist Yousef Madjidzadeh, see Andrew Lawler. "Rocking the Cradle" *Smithsonian* 35 (2004): 40-49.

[148] It is "half-myth, half-reality" according to P. Roger S. Moorey. "Iran: A Sumerian El-Dorado?" in *Early Mesopotamia and Iran: Contact and Conflict, c. 3500-1600 BC: Proceedings of a Seminar in Memory of Vladimir G. Lukonin.* (ed. John Curtis; London: The British Museum Press, 1993), 31-45.

[149] The Eana is the temple of Inana in Unug; translation from Vanstiphout, *Epics of Sumerian Kings*, 91 (vv.618-625).

The Lugalbanda story operates under this conception of what Aratta is, and the draw of riches and glory compels Enmerkar to retain control of the land, even at risk of faltering in the area in between the two cities. To "end the life force of Aratta" Enmerkar is directed to cut off its connection to magical subterranean waters (B.31, β.407ff.), thus illustrating that a realistic depiction of Aratta is not a priority for the narrator.[150] The goal is rather to present a plausible impetus for placing Lugalbanda in the wilderness beyond Sumer's borders where his *rite de passage* may commence in isolation. In this tale and others of this type the FFL is barely described even though the purported object of the entire narrative lie in that place and not in the "no man's land" where the story's true action takes place.

2.3.1 "The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor"

In contrast to the multiple copies and recensions of the Lugalbanda story, the Egyptian tale known conventionally among scholars as "The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor" survives in only a single manuscript.[151] The hieratic papyrus containing this narrative, P. Leningrad 1115, dates to the Egyptian Middle Kingdom (c. 2040-1640 BCE)[152] but its provenance is unknown. This most interesting tale--about a man's trip to a strange island and meeting its giant snake-king--is couched as a frame story in which an

[150]Christopher Woods argues that the Mesopotamians believed that lands at their eastern horizon were connected to the mythological, life-giving *Apsû*. Woods, "At the Edge of the World," 200, 221; Although Aratta is a place where humans live it is also a place of fantastic description, as attested by the Arattans' access to these magical waters and the city's encircling dragons.

[151] The use of the term "sailor" most properly is rendered as "retainer" following William O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 2002), 267. I use the appellation "sailor" for the Egyptian term (*šmsw*) because of academic tradition.

[152] Miriam Lichtheim, *AEL* I*: The Old and Middle Kingdoms* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 211.

unnamed official tries to reassure his expedition leader as they return to Egypt following an unsuccessful mission. The apparently older and wiser official relates to his leader a wondrous journey he undertook some years before but at the end of the text the expedition leader is still discouraged (and seems to be bored, in fact). Here, we will be concerned only with the core portion of the text, the story related by the experienced man and a short story related by the snake-king in the center of the man's story. These two in sum comprise the two inner narratives. The outer frame narrative is short on folkloric content and only serves to introduce context for the relation of the main narrative, the sailor's narrative, which has been described aptly as a "journey that begins in the real world, progresses to the world of the fantastic with a splendid talking serpent, and ends in a return to the everyday world."[153]

This narrative contains several features suggestive of folkloric content: the anonymity of characters such as the king and the "sailor" himself; the use of proverbial statements at both the opening and closing of the text and the use of fantastic descriptions as well as esoteric circumstances all indicate that this written story likely mimics oral folktales.[154] "The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor" (TSS hereafter) is made even more interesting by virtue of the fact that the central, first-person narrative is embedded with another first-person narrative.[155] With these three narratives imposed upon one another

[153] Susan Tower Hollis, "Tales of Magic and Wonder from Ancient Egypt," *CANE* 4, 2255-2264.

[154] John Baines, "Interpreting the Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor," *JEA* 76 (1990): 55-72; "The circular character of the composition, along with the repetition of a part of the narrative (the shipwreck) and the interposing of proverbs pronounced by one of the characters during the dialogue, would seem to reflect an origin, or at least the influence, of a popular culture or of an oral tradition." José M Galán, *Four Journeys in Ancient Egyptian Literature* (Lingua Aegyptia. Studia monographia 5; Göttingen: Seminar für Ägyptologie und Koptologie Göttingen, 2005), 48.

[155] For a comprehensive review of the wordplay and literary artistry involved with this text, see Gary Rendsburg, "Literary Devices in the Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor," *JAOS* 120 (2000): 13-23.

the text divides neatly into a cyclical structure, a level of manipulation which suggests that the story's textual form was carefully crafted.[156] The central narrative adheres to the conventions of the *topos* described above, and its morphology surprisingly follows the structure and sequence of the Lugalbanda story, thus we will delimit our analysis accordingly and examine this central narrative only. Isolating this portion allows us to redirect the intended emphasis to the narrator's authority as a storyteller and not the veracity of that story in relation to the text's outer narrative.

Concerning the content of this central story, it is tempting to look for parallels between TSS and the well-known "Tale of Sinuhe," another text from the Middle Kingdom though longer and extant in more copies. Both stories concern travels to and return from fantastic lands and the expansion of the hero's knowledge. There is a pronounced liminality alluded to in each story, as Sinuhe encounters a man "at the edge of cultivation" who he fears might block his passage. Yet whereas the "Tale of Sinuhe" is set in a definite historical context (following the death of Amenemhat I) the setting for TSS is less restricted; the former feels like a historical novella more than a wondertale and the land Sinuhe visits is not so far away that it is fantastic, so this particular *topos* is not at work. Though it seems because of content that this story has much in common with some Hebrew narratives, I would argue that there are actually more affinities between TSS and the Jonah story than between the Sinuhe story and any of the Hebrew narratives that have survived.

[156] "A B C D C' B' A', where A, A' is the frame of the *šmsw* and leader, B, B' the narrator's departure and return, C'C' his life on the island, and D the central narrative of the snake," Baines, "Interpreting the Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor," 67; Stephen Quirke demonstrates a simpler pattern for the central narrative: "A-B-A', where the alien world of B provides the ground in which life can be learnt and renewed," "Narrative Literature," 263-276 in *Ancient Egyptian Literature: History & Forms* (ed. Antonio Loprieno; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 267.

2.3.2 Summary of the Tale[157]

I. A Storm at Sea (*pre-liminal*)

A "sailor" leaves Egypt for "the king's mines" with one hundred and twenty veteran sailors, "the pick of Egypt" with "hearts stouter than lions." While their experience could "foretell a storm before it came," a great storm nevertheless arises without warning during the expedition. The ocean swells and a massive wave smacks into their ship, causing the mast to break and the ship "dies." This sailor is the only survivor of the wreck, and a wave carries him onto the shore of an unknown island. He spends three days lying in the shade of some trees near the shore.

II. Discovering the Island and Meeting the Snake (*liminal*)

The famished sailor decides to look for food and discovers that the island is lush with vegetables, fowl and fish--so much that he had to "put some down, because [he] had too much in [his] arms." Thankful for these gifts, he makes a fire and gives a burnt offering to the gods. On hearing a thundering noise that splinters trees and shakes the ground, he fears that another wave will overtake the island. He soon realizes that the noise is rather a giant snake drawing near him:

> He was of thirty cubits; his beard was over two cubits long. His body was overlaid with gold; his eyebrows were of real lapis lazuli. He was bent up in front. Then he opened his mouth to me, while I was on my belly before him. He said to me: "Who brought you, who brought you, fellow, who brought you? If you delay telling me who brought you to this island, I shall make you find yourself reduced to ashes, becoming like a thing unseen."

[157] I will rely upon the translation of Miriam Lichtheim for this tale. This is a highly accessible translation for non-specialists and, its age notwithstanding, her compilation remains a standard edition for many comparative studies; *AEL* I, 112-115.

This terrifying sight causes the sailor to be speechless and forget everything. The snake takes him back to its lair, unharmed in its mouth, and queries him again with the same words. Having regained his composure, the stranded sailor is able to tell the snake about his troubles. Seeing that the man is no threat, the snake exhorts him to not be fearful:

> "It is god who has let you live and brought you to this island of the *ka*[158]...You shall pass month upon month until you have completed four months in this island. Then a ship will come from home with sailors in it whom you know. You shall go home with them. you shall die in your town."[159]

The snake's appearance and behavior indicates that he is divine, and this is a vital point in consideration of the ensuing tragic story about the unyielding power of fate told by the snake. He tells of how a "star fell" on this island once, killing his brothers, their children, and his "little daughter,[160] thus leaving the snake to find their corpses and wishing for his own death. Though devastated by his family's destruction and his loneliness, the snake kept living and learned to cope with his circumstances. That story ends with a moral which ties together all three narrative layers of TSS: "If you are brave and control your

[158] It is unclear if this is a geographic description, a metaphor, or something else. Lichtheim notes that it has been previously rendered as "phantom island"; Antonio Loprieno is literal when he refers to it as the "island of the spirit," "Travel and Fiction in Egyptian Literature" in *Mysterious Lands* (ed. David O'Connor and Stephen Quirke; London: UCL Press, 2003), 31-51; Adolf Erman provides for an alternative interpretation by reading "island of the *kaû*" ("island of provisions"). See Erman, "die Geschichte des Schiffbrüchigen" *ZÄS* 43 (1906): 1-26.

[159] Vladimir Golénischeff, the Russian Egyptologist who offered a French edition of the text and commentated on the narrative, infers from this passage that the snake is telling the man to wait for a regularly scheduled commercial ship to arrive, thus Egypt had ongoing trade relations with the land of Punt. "Le Papyrus hiératique de Saint Pétersbourg," *Recueil de Travaux* 28 (1906): 73-112; This seems to me an overanalysis. What is most important is that the snake reveals the man's fate to him, much like Anzud does for Lugalbanda.

[160] Previous commentators, including Golénischeff and Kurt Sethe, find in this brief story a shortened form of what was originally a separate tale in which the "little daughter" had a principal part; Gaston Maspero, *Popular Stories of Ancient Egypt* (ed. Hasan el-Shamy; Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC Clio, 2002), 81-88, n.14. This is entirely plausible given that many such tales involve the reorganization and integration of originally separate elements.

heart, you shall embrace your children, you shall kiss your wife, you shall see your home. It is better than everything else."

Prostrate before the snake, the impressed sailor vows to tell his king, the king of Egypt, of the snake-king's power. He further promises to send precious oils, incense, spices, laudanum, sacrifices and more "as is done for a god who befriends people in a distant land not known to the people," but the snake only laughs at him:

> You are not rich in myrrh and all kinds if incense, and myrrh is my very own. That *hknw*-oil you spoke of sending, it abounds on this island. Moreover, when you have left this place, you will not see this island again; it will have become water."

The ship arrives (presumably after four months have elapsed) and the sailor hails the ship from a tall tree. He recognizes those aboard the vessel from that distance and returns to report these events to the snake-king. The ruler of the island encourages him to go and tells him to "Make me a good name in your town!"[161] He gives the sailor spices, animals and many other exotic goods prior to sending him away. The man bids final farewell to his host: "Then I put myself on my belly to thank him and he said to me: 'You will reach home in two months. You will embrace your children. You will flourish at home. You will be buried.'"

III. Return and the closing of the central and outer narratives (post-liminal)

The sailor goes down to the shoreline and calls to the sailors on the ship. While still on the shore the sailor gives final praise to the snake-king. He boards the vessel and he and his new shipmates sail for Egypt and arrive after two months. The sailor visits the royal residence and presents his king with all of the precious goods he had acquired on

[161] Cf. Anzud's instructions to Lugalbanda to keep the encounter between the two of them a secret.

the mysterious island. Upon seeing the worthiness of this sailor the king praises him before god and all the counselors of the land. The king makes him an attendant of the court and endows the sailor with servants of his own.

2.3.3 Morphological Analysis

The four *dramatis personae* operative in this wondertale are the same as those we encountered in the Lugalbanda cycle, but two of these roles are *implied*. This means that those roles and their corresponding functions are not delivered by actors playing out events in the story, but they *are* characters referred to by the hero whose actions help to shape the story. Their actions are as crucial to advancing the plot as any other *dramatis persona* even though these actions may only be alluded to. The hero sets forth for "the king's mines" presumably because he had been dispatched by the king himself, for example, and, like Enmerkar in the Lugalbanda cycle, this dispatcher appears at the end of the tale to recognize the extraordinary achievements and abilities of the hero. Here is the full list:

- The **dispatcher** is the king of Egypt (implied)
- The **hero** is the shipwrecked 'sailor'
- The **donor** is the godhead (implied)
- The **helper** is the snake-king

In Egyptian thought everything in creation is subject to divine principles of order and balance that prevent disintegration and disarray. This concept is personified and sometimes deified as *Ma'at*,[162] a director of human actions and guardian of the natural

[162] Interestingly, Maria Theresia Derchain-Urtel has identified the snake with deified Ma'at. "Der Schlange des Schiffbrüchingen," *SZAK* 1 (1974): 83-104. Though this is possible I find this reading improbable;

order. Given the catastrophic shipwreck and the fact that he was already stranded in some strange land, the sailor had no reason to expect that he would be able to survive. He concludes that the bounty of this strange island as a thing that could only be a divine gift, compensation for the poor fortune resulting from an unusually powerful storm which left him in dire straits. This is only confirmed by the snake's assurance that "It is god who has let you live and brought you to this island of the *ka*." Like the Lugalbanda story, but unlike the story of Jonah, the sailor's peril comes about for no apparent reason; it is simply the result of unlucky chance. Among other theological viewpoints articulated in the Jonah narrative, God is directly responsible for Jonah's isolation rather than the prophet being the victim of a cruel fortune. This stems, of course, from Jonah's misdirection, but Jonah's psalm and hollow promise of a sacrifice stands in contrast to the sailor's thanksgiving sacrifice. More than simply being thankful to the gods for his life, especially since it had been imperiled by chance and not by their actions, the sailor's acknowledgment of the island's divinely given gifts testify to his faithful belief in the gods as able to sustain life even when death is near.[163]

Consequently the snake-king, the guardian of this fantastic island, is clearly the helper. There are several items worth noting in the sailor's relationship to the snake. The man is said four times to be "on [his] belly" before the snake while the snake speaks. This display of respect serves the double purpose of reversing these characters' respective roles in the natural order, serving to emphasize the fantastic nature of the island. The

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there is no internal reason to equate the snake who identifies himself as “king of Punt” with a deity who is almost always personified as female.

[163] His location on the “island of the *ka*” is likely a mytho-religious allusion in this vein. José Galán associates the imagery of the sailor on the shore with contemporary funerary art and texts depicting the land of the dead as a series of islands, which were not a normal part of everyday Egyptian geography. Like Lugalbanda in the cave and Jonah in the “belly of Sheol” the protagonist undergoes a symbolic death in the liminal state. Galán, *Four Journeys in Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 41.

sailor's repeated prostrations before the snake also give cause to wonder about the snake's possible divinity, as it was the sailor's burnt offering for the gods which drew the snake in the first place.[164] That the snake foretells the approach of a human ship within a fixed time frame further suggests this. Not only does the snake ease the sailor's anxiety about languishing and dying in a foreign land (a common theme in Egyptian literature) but he also thereby sets the conditions under which the sailor will return to human society. The power to dictate this is another indispensible feature of the helper within this set of tales. As a result of the valuable goods the snake gives the sailor to take back to Egypt, this benefactor ensures that the mission the sailor had set out for in the first place--acquiring wealth for Egypt--is accomplished, albeit in a different way than the sailor had planned or the story's audience likely expected.

The hero of this wondertale is closer to being a true stock character than is Lugalbanda (or Jonah). This likely stems from the fact that the Lugalbanda material is far richer and more developed than TSS. This hero is something of an everyman in comparison to Lugalbanda; not even his name is given. Though he never demonstrates Lugalbanda's superhuman abilities he is a hero nonetheless by his survival of the storm and his fortitude in the face of tragedy. His deference to the unpredictable mechanisms of the cosmic order as imagined by his society is perhaps his greatest virtue. He is a paragon not through his ability or inability to perform herculean feats but by his ability to remain faithful to that cosmic order when fantastic events have seemingly turned that cosmic order to its inverse.

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[164] Some read the snake himself as some sort of totemic deity. See Derchain-Urtel, as noted above. E.N. Maximov interprets the serpent in magico-religious terms in parallel to other ancient cultures; "O vzaimodeistvii religii i fol'kora na primere obraza volshebnogo zmeya iz 'Skazi o poterpevshem korablekrushenie' *Drevni Vostok* 2 (1980): 120-126 (Russian with French abstract). I prefer to see this as an intentional ambiguity.

Turning to the structure of the narrative, we see that all of the wondertale functions outlined in Chapter One may be identified therein. The following formula displays the morphology of this story:

$$\alpha\,^{2}\beta^{2}\uparrow^{1}A^{2}B^{3}C^{1}D^{1}EF^{1}GH^{1}\downarrow^{2}\gamma^{2}\delta$$

α – The hero is called upon to leave home on a quest; 1. A sailor leaves for "the king's mines" presumably dispatched by order of the king to return with gold.

β – The hero joins an able group as a lesser member; 2. He joins 120 experienced sailors, "the pick of Egypt" with "hearts stouter than lions."

↑ - The hero goes forth and crosses a threshold into the wilderness while traveling to a foreign land; 1. The ship sails on the sea, away from sight of land.[165]

A – The hero's company faces unexpected adversity from nature; 2. A powerful storm assaults the ship before they can sail to land and a wave hits the ship's mast, sinking it.

B – The hero is stranded alone in "no man's land" for three days; 3. Only the hero survives the shipwreck and he's washed ashore an unknown island; he languishes for three days in the shade of a tree.

C - The donor revitalizes the hero; 1. The island is lush and full of life-saving foods, which the sailor attributes to the providence of the gods.

D - The hero gives thanks with an offering or promise; 1. The sailor makes a burnt sacrifice for the gods.

E - The helper and the hero meet; the hero fears the helper; The snake is drawn by the sacrifice and rumbles towards the frightened sailor.

F - The helper queries the hero; 1. The snake demands to know whence the sailor came.

G - The hero praises the helper; The sailor would tell his king of the snake's power and he offers to send gifts.

[165] This is interesting to note because Egyptian maritime routes were almost always along coastlines. By losing sight of the coast the game was changed; the sailors' skills were compromised and they truly were traveling in "no man's land."

H - The helper foretells the destiny of the hero and gives him a gift; 1. The snake foresees the man's return to Egypt and sends him off with precious goods.

↓ - The hero returns to the human sphere of action; 2. The sailor embarks the passing human vessel and goes back to his king with newly-acquired riches.

γ - The hero uses his newly acquired gift to bring about a status change for himself; 2. The sailor presents his riches to the king and by so doing is deemed worthy for promotion.

δ - The hero thrives; The sailor prospers as an attendant to the king.

2.3.4 Enrichment through *Rite de Passage*

Once we have isolated the inner narratives the brevity and straightforward presentation of this tale allow us to easily trace the stages of the *rite de passage* within. As with the Lugalbanda story, the constituent elements of this recurring *topos* appear in sequence: the hero departs from the human world in the company of his comrades, penetrates a liminal topographical boundary (the sea in this case), becomes isolated while there and eventually returns to the human world with an elevated status. While on the island, in the absence of human contact, this sailor is statusless because of his removal from human social structures. Though there are no other humans against whom his status may be reckoned, it is exactly this state of limbo which allows for his subsequent elevation in social standing.[166] The sailor's loneliness "with [his] heart as his companion" is poignantly contrasted with the snake's repeated promises that the sailor will see his family, home and village again. Fortitude in isolation and resilience against adversity (both the man's and the snake's) as means to ultimate enrichment are important tropes

[166] "The passage from lower to higher status is through a limbo of statuslessness," Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 97.

throughout this wondertale.[167] This period in "no-man's land" is consequently a challenge to the liminoid (the sailor); he must prove himself worthy if he is to rejoin human society as a changed and more prestigious person. In this type of wondertale part of this test is the demonstration of proper reverence for the divine, which the sailor undertook with his thanksgiving sacrifice and continues through his interactions with the snake-king.

The sailor's return to humanity is punctuated by *communitas*, first in his longing to be returned to his home and then by his sighting of a human ship and recognition of "those that were in it."[168] This "recognition" is another concept we see repeatedly in the wondertales with this *topos* because it initiates the transition of the hero back to familiar space. The sailor's excitement at this experience comes with the tacit acknowledgment that he and his host must part ways, as they are of different worlds. Yet now that this sailor has been transformed and is more attuned to his own suffering and the helplessness of humankind, the sailor first pays due reverence to the snake-king who helped to make his transition possible.[169] Having duly acknowledged the place of humankind in cosmos as reliant upon divine favor, the hero is now readied to leave this world-turned-upside-

[167] "If the end is positive, the sufferings endured on the way disappear and are even seen as a necessary test to obtain the prize. This is in fact how the Egyptians perceived life itself on earth." Galán, *Four Journeys in Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 39.

[168] It is unclear what is meant by this. Does he "recognize" them only as human, as Egyptians, or are these somehow the sailors he had traveled with before? The text leaves all of these questions unanswered. There also seems to be some jumbling of the events since the sailor loads the goods given to him onto the ship prior to hailing the crew from the shore.

[169] The careful reader will note that the other humans do not disembark from the ship and come ashore even though they, too, might gain materially from the island's wealth. The reason for this is unclear–Are they afraid? Are they unable to disembark? The inference is that the hero is in a liminal state up until the moment he steps off the island and it vanishes. His fellow sailors do not participate and so cannot testify as to what is there. We may liken this to the Lugalbanda narrative in that episode where Anzud comes very close to the army, close enough to see, but does not approach them closely. The hero is a bridge between worlds.

down enhanced in at least two respects: he is renewed internally by wisdom and enriched externally by the acquisition of material goods.[170]

Even despite the great size of the ship on which this sailor had left Egypt and the experience of the large crew with him, this story suggests that there is inherent danger in traveling beyond one's own home area because such things did not make a difference in the sailor's fate. The sailor was saved from an unforgiving sea only by washing up on the shores of a nurturing island whose lushness is like that of a primordial garden. This is a place of otherworldliness, where the material wealth of "the king's mines" is dwarfed and its fantastic ruler is made of jewels instead of merely adorned with them. This liminal island is beyond human knowledge, "a world in which in which basic conventions of our concrete reality may be broken."[171] Such a world is subject to drastic turns and cataclysmic astronomical events without any rationalization of causation.[172] All of this creates a setting of chaos and uncertainty that amounts to an existential parallel for the "hapless traveler, who suffers disaster and does not know how to conduct himself in the situation in which he finds himself."[173] Though the snake and those events represent a separate world, the transformative wisdom learned in this situation prepares the hero for

[170] Following Stephen Quirke, who in comparing TSS with the "Tale of Sanehat" (Sinuhe) notes that, "both men return to their previous condition but changed by the interval; their external world is restored but enriched, physically and internally."; "Narrative Literature," 263-276. Another interpretation suggests that the true hero of this story is the snake and not the anti-heroic man, whose "long-winded" and "self-absorbed" narrative contradicts the ideals of Egyptian wisdom literature; see Betsy M. Bryan, "The Hero of the 'Shipwrecked Sailor,'" *Serapis* 5 (1979): 3-13.

[171] Antonio Loprieno, "Defining Egyptian Literature," 39-58 in *Ancient Egyptian Literature* (ed. Antonio Loprieno; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 50.

[172] John Baines suggests that the cataclysm which destroys the snake's family is perhaps an eschaton evoked by Egyptian mythical texts such as Coffin Texts Spell 1130. "Myth and Literature" in *Ancient Egyptian Literature* (ed. Antonio Loprieno; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 361-377.

[173] Baines, "Interpreting the Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor," 59.

situations of uncertainty in the human world and the truism that some things happen for reasons unclear to us.[174]

2.3.5 The Egyptian Division of Space and the Land of Punt

Let us now revisit the matter of spatiality in TSS as a prolegomenon to reading for descriptions of space in the Jonah narrative. Travel to and journeys through foreign lands are common in Egyptian literature of all kinds. This stems not only from the Egyptians' long history of interactions with other cultures but also from the dichotomous division of space that the Egyptians themselves held. They were much like the Sumerians and other early civilizations in that space was demarcated as habitable or non-habitable for humans; Egyptian texts describe the land as differentiated into "red land" (harsh deserts) and "black land" (fertile silt along the river banks). Like the Hebrews, the Egyptians thought of their land as "a finite geographical entity" among "endlessly scattered" foreign nations.[175] Egyptian identity was forged in contrast to the otherness of traders, prisoners, and resident aliens from the earliest periods. So Egyptian literature naturally mirrors this perceived world of cultural binaries in its literary representations:

> Rather than a physical organization of space, the implicit geography contained in fictional texts should offer traces of underlying cultural hierarchies. Oppositions such as close versus far, domestic versus foreign,

[174] There are varying interpretations as to what degree this story may be didactic. I read it as didactic myself since the snake's exhortation works in tandem with the sailor's exhortation to his superior: "See me after I had reached land, after I saw what I had tasted! Listen to me! It is good for people to listen." A fuller discussion of intention may be found in Eberhard Otto, "Die Geschichten des Sinhue und des Schiffbrüchingen als 'lehrhafte Stücke,'" *ZÄS* 93 (1966), 100-111.

[175] David O'Connor and Stephen Quirke, "Introduction: Mapping the Unknown in Ancient Egypt" in *Mysterious Lands* (ed. David O' Connor and Stephen Quirke; Encounters with Ancient Egypt; London: UCL Press, 2003), 1-21.

> town versus country are all indicative of an intensely marked cultural universe.[176]

This phenomenon is reflected within TSS by the snake-king's claim that the island "will have become water" once the sailor leaves. The island is amorphous and intractable, perhaps even as a dream, remaining as a place only in the sailor's memory and implying that the sailor could not find this place again if he wanted to. In contrast to the story's audience's mundane existence in Egypt, "the lord of Punt" offers a world of fantasy.

One matter left unresolved within the story is whether this island is in fact meant to be the land of Punt. The snake is a reliable source of information for the sailor, and there is no reason to believe that he is misleading the human when he calls himself "the lord of Punt." It is also possible that the snake-king merely speaks this way as a sort of metaphor. There is no other mention of Punt in the story whatsoever, and there is no indication within other Egyptian sources that Punt was ordinarily thought of as an island, though it was an actual place in Egyptian geographical reckoning. Most scholars place Punt along the coast of the horn of Africa, an area that the Egyptians usually travelled to by boat.[177] We know furthermore from Egyptian sources that Punt was a place of human commerce; the Egyptians traded with Punt for gold, ivory and other valuable goods from the Old Kingdom period on.[178] Although these trade relations commenced for a long

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[176] Antonio Loprieno, "Travel and Fiction in Egyptian Literature" in *Mysterious Lands*, Ed. O'Connor and Quirke, 34.

[177] A speculative map of foreign lands in the Egyptian worldview may be found in David O'Connor and Stephen Quirke "Introduction: Mapping the Unknown in Ancient Egypt" in *Mysterious Lands*, 1-21; see also Dimitri Meeks "Locating Punt," pp 53-80 in the same volume. Most scholars place Punt to the south and to the east of Egypt; the location of Punt along the eastern horizon of Egyptian mental geography makes sense when we consider the restoration of the hero after his near-death.

[178] "Punt" in *Lexikon der Äegyptologie*. (ed. Wolfgang Helck and Otto Eberhard; Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1982), 1199; Punt only appears in historical and autobiographical texts in the earliest of Egyptian literature but its reputation grows and develops as Egyptian trade itself expands.

time and involved extended periods of contact, Punt nevertheless seems to have been far enough away from Egypt so as to be "impregnated with mistery (sic), exotic and heavenly for ancient Egyptians."[179] The place evidently lay close enough to be a trading partner but far enough way to retain a mystique. Manfred Görg notes the paradoxical ways in which Punt is viewed in textual sources: "Beides kann nebeneinander seine Geltung haben: die symbolische Dimension und die lokale identität."[180]

What is clear is that neither Punt nor the "island of the *ka*" is synonymous with "the king's mines."[181] During the Middle Kingdom Egypt engaged in aggressive foreign trade, thus an Egyptian audience would have known that Egypt's king had mining operations all over the known world. "The king's mines" consequently does not connote any particular place. Its relevance for the audience lay in the fact that the destination is far beyond Egypt's borders and a source for their own land's incredible wealth. Much like Aratta, it is a place beyond "no man's land" for the hero to be sent in the dispatcher's service, to increase the wealth and prestige of the king. My own sense is that the sailor has not reached Punt but that his *rite de passage* occurs somewhere else. For the purposes of this tale's morphology, whether the sailor has in fact washed up on Punt's shore is beside the point since this was apparently not his destination. Lugalbanda reaches Aratta but the sailor seemingly does not reach "the king's mines." In the

[179] Cozzolino, Caterina. "The Land of PWNT" in *Sesto Congresso Internazionale di Egittologia*. vol. 2. (Turin: Sesto Congresso Internazionale di Egittologia, 1993), 391-398.

[180] Manfred Görg. "Ofir und Punt" *BN* 82 (1996), 5-8; Görg goes so far as to suggest that biblical Ophir and Egyptian Punt are one in the same. While this possibility has "eine weitere Attraktivität" as he puts it, there is no way to either prove or disprove this speculation.

[181] José Galán identifies the ship's destination as Bia, meaning "lands rich in minerals and stones of special value for the adornment and construction of buildings," and associated with sites along the Sinai coast. Galán goes on to vaguely link Punt with Bia though he acknowledges that the ancient sources are not helpful in this regard. See Galán, *Four Journeys in Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 22 ff.

following chapters, we will examine how the Jonah story transforms this same *topos* further to bring about a unique statement about the tale's protagonist.

CHAPTER III

TOWARDS A FOLKLORISTIC READING OF JONAH

3.1.1 Text and Story

Now that we have established a basic morphology for this type of tale and examined the *topos* which underlies two cognate tales, we may look more specifically at the book of Jonah itself. Jonah has inspired diverse interpretations through the use of a great many hermeneutical practices. Due to the many ambiguities--dubbed appropriately as "strategic mystification"[182]--in form and meaning, there hardly be a "correct" reading of Jonah. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the relevant issues of the Jonah narrative and to learn about its features and structure as a wondertale. The assumption is that if Jonah is an amalgam or compilation of various traditions, then these were arranged in such a way that the character of their diverse origins were minimized in order to present the narrative as a whole. This is especially true of folk literature since folklore inherently demonstrates little concern for authorship; folktales are the cultural property and reflect the interests of an entire community. In contrast to the pronounced superscriptions of some biblical texts ascribing authorship to the whole or to its parts, the book of Jonah is anonymous.

Thus, while we may speculate loosely about the authorship of the *textus receptus* or of its components it is important to realize that many such arguments are passionately debated because there are few definitive answers about such matters. Folk literature, and

[182] Magonet, Jonathan, *Form and Meaning: Studies in the Literary Techniques on the Book of Jonah* (2d ed.; Bible and Literature Series; Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1983), 112.

the wondertale in particular, most frequently speak to a society's most serious anxieties in heavily disguised images and symbols. To this end, there are seldom any explicit internal signifiers which allow us to delimit the circumstances in which folk narratives came together, and this is true of Jonah as well. Although the Jonah story testifies to the concerns of Israelite society in a particular context, the story is intended to convey more widespread appeal. The universality of the *rite de passage* and its frequent attestation in other wondertales as described by van Gennep lends credibility to this point; within the structure of the Jonah story, an audience in any period may readily recognize a sequence which appears in many aspects of life.

With these matters in mind, there are several issues concerning the story that I would like to address to facilitate this reading. First and foremost, we must distinguish the story, or narrative, of the book of Jonah from the Hebrew text itself. The latter is the subject of numerous studies of literary artistry, vocabulary, transmission history, and so forth. What concerns us here are folkloric attributes of the story--its symbols, its structures, its *dramatis personae,* its themes and motifs. This is difficult to do since the story is, in a sense, limited by the conventions of a written text whose prehistory is obscure. The Jonah story's authorship is anonymous, and intentionally so. It is of little use here to dwell upon anymore than the most basic generalizations in identifying its author(s) since these are suggested only by deduction. I will offer some supposition on these points and authorial intent in Chapter Five. Of more immediate concern is the structure and unity of the narrative, and it is to those matters that we now turn.

3.1.2 External Structure and Unity

The division of Jonah into four chapters, though artificial, seems natural enough given that there are two symmetrical "acts,"[183] one set to the west of Israel and at sea (chapters 1-2), and the other set at Nineveh to the east of Israel (chapters 3-4).[184] This easy division is facilitated by the identical wording of those sections' introductions: *wayĕhî dĕbar-YHWH ʾel-yônâ* ("When a word of the Lord came to Jonah…," 1:1, 3:1).[185] This observation had previously led biblical critics to assert that Jonah's two acts are in fact variant traditions concerning the same figure, though the modern consensus is that the repetition is a rhetorical feature meant to accentuate the re-launching of Jonah's quest. Moreover, the evidence to support the argument that these represent two distinguishable sources is simply lacking. In the early days of the "Documentary Hypothesis" of Pentateuchal sources, for instance, the divine name was held as the criterion for attributing textual fragments to Yahwist or Elohist sources, and this method has been used on the book of Jonah.[186] A simple tabulation of divine appellatives in the Book of Jonah reveals the following references to the Israelite god: 1) *YHWH*, 22 times, 2) *ʾĕlōhîm*, 9 times,[187] 3) *YHWH-ʾĕlōhîm*, once, 4) *YHWH ʾĕlōhē haššamayim*, once, 5) *ʾĕl*, once, and, 6) *YHWH* "his/my God," twice. But these terms do not correlate so neatly

[183] I prefer this theatrical term for reference to the two main sections, chapters 1-2 and 3-4, though this is a designation I make for my ease only and not a suggestion that these artificial divisions are recorded in the text itself. Each act is in turn divided into two "scenes."

[184] Sasson, *Jonah*, 16. Trible also employs a useful side-by-side comparison of the two sections to demonstrate that in terms of subject matter and, consequently, language the book of Jonah is highly symmetrical; *Studies in the Book of Jonah*, 186-192.

[185] All transliterated citations from the primary text of Jonah are adapted from the Masoretic Text (MT) as recorded in the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (ed. K. Elliger and W. Rudolph; 5th ed.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1997). English translations are my own.

[186] E.g., W. Böhme, "Die Komposition des Buches Jona," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 7 (1887): 224-284.

[187] In addition, *ʾĕlōhîm* is used generically in reference to foreign gods three times (1:5-6).

to the different sources they were purported to stem from; they reflect, rather, complex theological terminology with a range of meaning and nuances appropriate for their respective contexts.[188] There is no discernible pattern to the distribution of these terms as they relate to the text's unity, so we presume that the halves are corresponding and not competing.

Each of these acts is, in turn, divided into two "scenes" corresponding to the chapter divisions, "the first bustling with nameless foreigners, the second occupied only by Jonah and his god."[189] The most elegant and comprehensive study of this symmetrical design is advanced by Phyllis Trible, originally in her doctoral dissertation and expanded in a later work.[190] Her analysis is based largely on textual forms and literary techniques, but we may see that analogous plot elements are also brought to light in her bifurcation of the Jonah narrative. Below is one simple example of a parallel noted by Trible:[191]

6. Unnamed captain of the ship (1:6)	6. Unnamed king of Nineveh (3:6-9)
-efforts to avert disaster by	-efforts to avert disaster by
action	action
words to Jonah	words to Ninevites
hope	hope

[188] For more on the divine name in Jonah and the theological and contextual meanings of those, see Magonet, *Form and Meaning*, 33-38; Limburg, *Jonah*, 45-47; Sasson, *Jonah*, 93, 98 and 118; Trible, *Studies in the Book of Jonah*, 82-87.

[189] Sasson, *Jonah*, 16.

[190] Trible, *Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method, and the Book of Jonah* (Guides to Biblical Scholarship; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1994).

[191] Ibid., 110.

In this instance these characters mirror one another with respect to vocabulary and syntax but also, more generally, by their anonymity and a "theology of hope," elements more basic to the story's plot. Notwithstanding these correspondences, they differ from one another in the object, length, and type of discourse.[192] Whereas the ship's captain addresses Jonah directly while there is no indication that the king of Nineveh personally encounters the prophet at all. Trible resolves these small asymmetries actually play into the overall symmetry of the text, reflect Oriental "symmetrophobia" or stress the importance of one section over and against its counterpart.[193] Thus the story is a single, linear narrative in which sections complement one another. This is like a refrain from a song which is recognizable enough in its notes and rhythm but uses different lyrics for changing contexts.[194] The second act relies upon the first but whereas Jonah's first prayer lauds the mercy of God for deliverance from certain death, his second address towards God, after the coming of the worm, is for death when mortality is not threatened. And whereas the first prayer results in a second chance for the prophet the second prayer ends in reproach from Yahweh (4:10-11). The notes are similar but the tune has been transformed during the process by which Jonah has (mis)grown as a character, the recognition of which is one of the benefits of Propp's syntagmatic method.

Given this intricately arranged symmetry, it stands to reason that the text of this story comprises a single unit in transmission. In other words, except for possible small glosses and textual errors, there is a single, cohesive narrative rather than a series of

[192] Trible, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 113.

[193] Ibid., 198-200.

[194] We will recall Jimmy Buffet's popular song "Margaritaville" and the difference in the singer's words by the end of the song as he gets progressively more drunk: "some people claim that there's a woman to blame, but I know, *it's nobody's fault*" subsequently changes to "but I know, *hell, it might be my fault*," and, at last, "but I know, *it's my own damn fault*."

accretions to a core component. The symmetrical design of the story's elements does not preclude that the plot itself is linear. In fact, many folktales set up parallel sequences where, for example, the protagonist performs a parallel sequence of actions on consecutive days, yet the story reaches a critical point and some moral or lesson is expressed only at the end. Joseph Licht argues for a loose but unified structure based upon his claim that the narrative contains three "didactic points": that a prophet cannot escape his call, that God always accepts true repentance, and that God spares God's creatures because he likes them and wants them to exist.[195] Each of these lessons corresponds to a particular episode in the narrative, chapters one, three, and four, respectively such that,

> The central episode (Jonah's mission in Nineveh) is structurally the main main one: the conflict in it is prepared by the first episode, while the third and last episode resolves the conflict, closing the story. These considerations reveal a clearly structured plot, which produces the effect of a strongly 'logical' or coherent, narrative.[196]

I bring up Licht because it allows us to examine the single greatest challenge to the unity of the narrative, namely Jonah's "psalm." As we may deduce from Licht's statement above, he sees no place for the psalm and concludes that it is essentially an "intermezzo" of irrelevant origin.[197]

The idea that Jonah 2 is an intrusion upon the core narrative hardly began with Licht. The psalm obviously stands out as a poem in the midst of prose. Trible argues that the psalm disrupts the symmetry of the text's design as it does "not fit the context."[198] Her argument is made partly on form-critical grounds; she asserts that the psalm is a song

[195] Licht, *Storytelling in the Bible* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1978), 122.

[197] Ibid., 123 n. 4.

[198] Trible, *Studies in the Book of Jonah*, 79.

of thanksgiving (*Danklied*) for not drowning, uncharacteristically delivered by Jonah who "is not a creature of gratitude and thanksgiving."[199] On the other hand, Jonathan Magonet, also using literary interpretive methods, comes to the opposite conclusion: "We have demonstrated through stylistic and thematic analogies, as well as the use of key words, that the 'psalm' was also composed by the author of the book and included by him."[200] A third approach used more recently has been to not conclusively claim one or the other since the answer is, ultimately, obscure and the implications of little value. Sasson points out that even if the psalm is an intrusion to the narrative that it is a "well-suited" complement to it.[201] Limburg seems to support this reasoning when he declines to excise or diminish the psalm because it is "such an essential part of the narrative that it's difficult to imagine a version of the story without it."[202]

Although compelling arguments may be (and have been made) about the psalm's relationship to the context of the rest of the narrative, my sense is also that the psalm is an integral part of the story. The strange juxtaposition of Jonah's instruction to be thrown into the sea and a psalm thanking God for saving him from the sea reinforces the back-and-forth, unpredictable imagery of the whole act: Jonah's misdirection, the waves crashing into the ship, and sailors who seem reluctant to throw Jonah overboard only to abruptly change their minds (1:14). Moreover, the scene of Jonah expressing gratitude in the shelter of the "big fish" against the sea is a perfect counterbalance to its correspondence in the fourth scene, Jonah's ingratitude for the shelter of the plant against

[199] Ibid., 77 ff.; Trible notes how commentators have resolved to move the psalm to follow 2:11 to "fit" better with the context of the larger narrative.

[200] Magonet, Jonathan, *Form and Meaning*, 54

[201] Sasson, *Jonah*, 17.

[202] Limburg, *Jonah*, 32.

the sun (4:6-8). Thus I affirm the basic unity of the book of Jonah; this means that although the form of the psalm is different from the rest of the story it is still a part of the story that cannot be dismissed and, in fact, can be reconciled within the structure of the rest of the story. Features abound to suggest that the Jonah narrative shares a unity despite the possibility that the story's individual components are from disparate sources.[203]

3.1.3 Dating the Book of Jonah

It is virtually impossible to confidently date the book of Jonah since the story is nearly devoid of historical indicators. Commentators have most often been relegated to supplying a range of likely composition, beginning with the appearance of Jonah son of Amittai (2 Kgs 14:25)[204] during the reign of Jeroboam II and ending with the presumption of its existence as a part of "The Twelve Prophets" by Jesus ben Sirach (Sir 49:10) in the second century BCE. The range may actually be slightly shorter when we consider that some manuscripts of the third century apocryphal book of Tobit mention the Jonah story.[205] The mention of the neo-Assyrian city of Nineveh is of little aid; most

[203] A compelling case for unity is made by way of a list of evenly distributed theological elements, linguistic forms, and stylistic techniques. See Sasson, *Jonah*, 19-20.

[204] "He (Jeroboam II) restored the border of Israel from Lebo-Hamath as far as the sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the Lord, the god of Israel, which he spoke by his prophet Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet (*hannābîʾ*), who was from Gath-Heper." It is highly unlikely that the Jonah of the book of Jonah is anyone other than this Jonah from II Kings, though it is interesting to note that that book of Jonah never identifies its hero as *nābîʾ*.

[205] "Tobit sends his son Tobias away saying, "I believe the word of God that Jonah spoke about Nineveh, that all these things will overtake Assyria and Nineveh" (Tob 14:4, NRSV). Other texts supply Nahum in Jonah's place. Tobit is another late text incorporating many well-known folkloric motifs, including some shared with the Jonah story such as personal prayer from protagonist in distress to a merciful God (3:1-6) and the presence of a "big fish" which tries to swallow a man who instead catches it, eats it, and uses its organs for medicinal purposes (Tob 6:3-6).

scholars presume that the story postdates the neo-Assyrian period on linguistic grounds, even if the story is set during that period.[206]

Examination of the language used and the theological claims made in the book of Jonah have been more helpful in narrowing this range, although this is partly a function of textualization and cannot rule out that stories about Jonah were told in earlier versions or different formats. There is every reason to conclude that the book of Jonah in the form that we possess dates to the postexilic period.[207] There are a number of words and phrases in the text which evince the influence of Aramaic or are known only from late Hebrew literature. A few examples from just the first chapter of the book of Jonah should demonstrate this adequately:

1) *sepînâ* ("ship," 1:5): This is a biblical *hapax legomenon* but it is known in Imperial and Targumic Aramaic.[208] The normative biblical Hebrew term for a vessel is *ʾŏnîyâ* (e.g., 1:3).[209]

2) *ʾelōhê haššāmayim* ("God of heaven," 1:9): This appellative is common in writings set in the Persian period. Sasson notes that the choice of this appellative is contextual since it makes a theological statement about Israel's god vis-à-vis the gods of the non-Israelite sailors.[210]

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[206] Cf. Yezekiel Kaufmann, who suggests that Nineveh's status as a "grand city" in the narrative implies that the author(s) had first-hand knowledge of the city and thus dates its composition to before the city's fall in 612 BCE; *The Religion of Israel* (Abridged ed.; trans. Moshe Greenberg; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 83.

[207] "Das Jonabuch wird großer Einmütigkeit in nachexilische Zeit datiert"; Gerhards, *Studien zum Jonabuch*, 55.

[208] Sub *spynh*, J. Hoftijzer and K. Jongeling, *Dictionary of North-West Semitic Inscriptions, Pt. 2, M-T* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 797.

[209] *BDB*, 58.

[210] Sasson, *Jonah, 118.*

3) *šātaq* (“to calm down,” 1:11, 1:15): This verb is used in conjunction with *hayyām* (“the sea,” 1:11) and *zaʿap* (1:15)

4) *yitʿaššēt* (1:6): This is the only Hebrew appearance of this verb, though its Aramaic cognate appears in Dan 6:4.[211]

5) *še*, embedded as *běšellěmî* (1:7) and *běšellî* (1:12): The relative particle *še* appears mainly in late Hebrew and in texts of a Northern Palestinian (i.e., under Aramaic influence) origin.[212]

The book of Jonah also seems to presume a working knowledge of other Hebrew biblical texts, meaning Jonah might postdate texts written during the exilic and early postexilic periods.[213] André Feuillet's study of the links between Jonah and the "writing" prophets shows harmonies among Jonah and the books and Jeremiah and Ezekiel.[214] But because we are uncertain of exactly when all of these texts may be dated they are of little help in establishing a relative chronology by which to date Jonah. Previous commentators have noted connections between Jonah 3:9 and 4:2c with Joel 2:13-14a on the basis of their theological parallel constructions:

> Jon 3:9: "Who knows whether God may turn away and concede? He may turn back from his anger so that we do not perish" (*mî yôdēʿ yāšûb wĕniḥam hāʾĕlōhîm wĕšāb mēḥărôn ʾappô wĕlōʾ nōʾbed*)

[211] Limburg, *Jonah*, 29.

[212] *BDB*, 979.

[213] An interesting counterargument is made by H. Winckler, who sees the mention in II Kings as a gloss based upon the book of Jonah. "Zum Buche Jona," *Altorientalische Forschungen* 2 (1900): 260-265, 262.

[214] Specifically, he claims that the description of what happens when Nineveh repents (fasting, rending garments) is dependent on Jeremiah 36; Feuillet, André, "Les sources du livre de Jonas" *Revue Biblique* 54 (1947): 161-186; see especially 169-181; Feuillet ultimately concludes that unlike those other prophetic books "le livre Jonas ne ressemble à une légend populaire" but is rather a "conte populaire" based on its folkloric motifs, op.cit. 186.

> Jon 4:2c "For I know that you are a gracious and compassionate god, slow to anger and abundant in kindness, resisting punishment" (*kî yādaʿtî kî ʾattâ ēl-ḥannûn wĕraḥûm erekʾappayim wĕrab-ḥesed wĕniḥāmʿal-hārāʿâ*)
>
> Joel 2:13-14a "Tear your hearts and not your garments, and turn to the Lord your god, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abundant in kindness, resisting punishment. Who knows whether He may turn away and concede?" (*wĕqirʾû lĕbabkem wĕʾal-bigdêkem wêšûbû el-YHWH ĕlōhêkem kî-ḥannûn wĕraḥûm hûʾ wĕniḥāmʿal-hārāʿâ mî yôdēʿ yāšûb wĕniḥām*)

Whether Jonah adapts Joel, usually attributed to the fourth century, directly or they simply share a common source is unclear, but taken in combination with some of the other circumstantial evidence already noted we may tentatively assign an early postexilic date to the book's composition. The story itself is likely older and, as I have already maintained, the *topos* at the narrative's heart is certainly older. There are several possible extrabiblical sources from which the book of Jonah may adapt forms or content. These suggest that some of the elements we see in the Jonah narrative possibly have antecedents in the ancient Near Eastern milieu, but without attestation the nature of these remains speculation.

3.1.4 *Gattung*

Due to the unique structure of the book of Jonah it is very difficult to authoritatively assign the book to one literary category or another. More often, biblical critics discuss elements or sections of the book of Jonah as indicative of a certain genre, as is the case with Trible's description of Jonah's psalm as *Danklied* mention above. Literary genres (or *Gattungen*) follow conventional patterns that are well-suited to the social context (*Sitz im Leben*) in which they are created. We cannot describe with any certainty the socio-historical circumstances that led to the creation of the Jonah story, or

which immediate social needs were filled by disseminating it, and its own internal characteristics problematize the matter. As a result, interpreters' efforts have come to several different conclusions, with the only consensus being that a reading of the story as historical report no longer has currency.[215]

Most commentators read the story allegorically because of its use of symbols, but even in this vein there are several types worth considering. The narrative has often been called a parable, a short story which conveys subtext prescribing moral or religious behavior appropriate for certain situations or even for life generally. This category is somewhat broad--parables may not even be necessarily allegorical--and thus the commentator is allowed the designation without describing the effects of the literary form. This tendency is epitomized by Rofé who claims simply that, "the theoretical debate between God and Jonah, which finds expression in their actions as well, leaves no doubt that the Book of Jonah is a parable" without explicating the literary and textual features to support that conclusion.[216] More precise terms are available but these have sometimes been applied unevenly because of disagreement over what these categories mean.

Phyllis Trible explores several *Gattungen* at length and notes the problems with claiming one category over another. Cognizant of the moralizing effect the story has, she settles on situating the book of Jonah somewhere between midrash ("a commentary upon a theme in Scripture," namely, God's miracles) and legend (due to the narrative's

[215] Cf. Alexander Rofé, who claims that a "nearly unanimous agreement exists among scholars as to the literary genre of Jonah." I have found little to support this assertion; *The Prophetical Stories: The Narratives about the Prophets in the Hebrew Bible. Their Literary Types and History* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1988), 159.

[216] Ibid., 159.

purported historical quality").[217] The trend in Jonah studies of *not* assigning the book to a specific category in commentaries and studies or doing so only in the vaguest of terms is the "safest" resolution and perhaps the most satisfying.[218] Trible explores the possibility that the book of Jonah belongs to *Märchen*, an association first noted by German scholars at the beginning of the twentieth century and continued by Gunkel himself.[219] Trible highlights numerous *Märchenmotiven* in the story (discussed below) but also falls short of categorizing the book of Jonah with *Märchen*. I believe that she addresses the issue most clearly when she points out that while no book in the Hebrew Bible displays as many folkloric features as Jonah, it would be difficult to readily associate Jonah with *Märchen*.[220] Trible concludes that if one were to assign the *Gattung* of Jonah as *Märchen* then that category would need to be broadened, and this is not necessary for acknowledgment of the many *Märchenmotiven* therein. I must disagree, however, with Trible's assertion that "the *Märchen* proper seeks to entertain; it does not endeavor to teach"[221] because these are not mutually exclusive goals. Are we to believe that

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[217] Trible, *Studies in the Book of Jonah*, 177. The claim that the book of Jonah should be understood as a midrash of 2 Kings 14 goes back to Karl Budde, "Vermutungen zum Midrasch des Buches der Könige." *ZAW* 11 (1892), 37-51.

[218] E.g. McKenzie, Steven L. "The Genre of Jonah" 159-172 in *Seeing Signals, Reading Signs: The Art of Exegesis. Studies in Honour of Antony F. Campbell, SJ for His Seventieth Birthday* (ed. Mark A. O'Brien and Howard N. Wallace; JSOT Supp. 415; London: T&T Clark International, 2004); Perry, T.A. *The Honeymoon is Over: Jonah's Argument with God* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006); Handy, Lowell K. *Jonah's World: Social Science and the Reading of Prophetic Story* (Oakville, CT: Equinox Publishers, 2007).

[219] "Der märchenhafte Charakter dieser Erzählung ist unverkennbar. Alles ist hier wunderbar." von Baudissin, Wolf Wilhelm, *Einleitung in die Bücher des Alten Testaments* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1901), 594; see also Gunkel, *The Folktale in the Old Testament* (trans. Michael D. Rutter; Sheffield, U.K.: The Almond Press, 1987), 9.

[220] Trible, *Studies in the Book of Jonah*, 146.

[221] Ibid., 152; Subsequent to Trible's work folklorists have adopted a more fluid notion of folktales in which *Märchen* is recognized as a sub-category of a synonym to wondertales. The work of Dundes and others was especially influential to this end.

"Rumpelstiltskin," a quintessential Grimm *Märchen*, is intended as entertainment only and not also a cautionary tale for making foolish promises?[222]

The vast majority of readings of the book of Jonah presuppose edification as its primary purpose. James Limburg refers to the book of Jonah as a "didactic story," a catchall incorporating "a number of shorter literary types."[223] This opinion seems valid in light of the moralistic interpretations supplied by faith communities over the centuries, but I believe that it falls short inasmuch as the Jonah narrative may teach *and* entertain equally. I raise this point because it is related to my use of the term "wondertale" as discussed in Chapter One; *Märchen* is customarily associated with a folktale which uses fantasy to entertain only but the *Sitz im Leben* of the wondertale is, even in Propp's conception, more wide-ranging and its standards are more inclusive. For this reason, although we cannot identify the Jonah story as *Märchen*, I maintain that it may be read as a wondertale because its cumulative structure shares so much with the structures of other wondertales. The most basic features of the wondertale: fantasy, the quest of the protagonist, radical turns of events, and more, are all in the Jonah story.

Another factor to consider is whether and to what extent the book of Jonah is satirical. Satirical intent is tied to *Gattung* inasmuch as *Gattung* considers a piece of literature's place in the social fabric which, in some cases, may be to lampoon a particular ideal or institution. To this end, the person of Jonah is ordinarily seen as the ironic or sarcastic target of an anti-prophetic or anti-northern kingdom authorship. Satire, which

[222] The motif of foolish promises endangering one's offspring is found biblically in the story of Jephthah (Judg 11), to which a moralistic reading is usually applied.

[223] Limburg, *Jonah*, 22; Meik Gerhards treats it slightly more narrowly as a didactic novel ("didaktischen Novelle"), Gerhards, *Studien zum Jonabuch* (Biblisch-Theologische Studien 78; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2006), 71.

has been described as "a form of art and spirit, a purpose and a tone,"[224] encompasses several sub-genres. Among these are the parody (imitation of the particular work or literary style mocking an author, his subject or the style itself), the burlesque (flamboyant exaggeration of elements for mockery), and the farce (introduction of improbable and absurd situations to ridicule). Most interpreters who identify Jonah as a satire are content to leave it at that, especially since the lines between these categories are murky. Though the Jonah story undoubtedly elicits some humor, humor does not necessitate a satire. It is also unclear to me who or what is meant to be scoffed at since the focus shifts away from Jonah in the first and third scenes. In order for satire to be effective, one must understand the social context thoroughly—other stories of the same form, the contemporary opinion of Jonah the prophet, and more—to appreciate it. In the case of the book of Jonah, there are too many things that we do not know about its *Sitz im Leben* to say conclusively that it is a satire. Finally, it is most proper to say that the Jonah story may contain satirical elements without being a satire *per se*, inasmuch as it is unclear that a distinct category of literature of this sort existed in ancient Israel.[225] As we have already discussed, the Jonah story is unique among surviving Hebrew texts to the extent that its form is not immediately recognizable.[226]

3.2.1 Folkloric Parallels to the Jonah Story

[224] Robert C. Elliott as quoted in George A. Test, *Satire: Spirit and Art* (Tampa: University of South Florida Press, 1991), 7.

[225] See the discussion of John Day concerning Jonah as a satire. "Problems in the Interpretation of the Book of Jonah." in *In Quest of the Past: Studies on Israelite Religion, Literature, and Prophetism* (ed. A.S. van der Woude; OtSt 2; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990), 32-47

[226] Cf. John A. Miles, Jr., who insists that Jonah is a parody ("rather than satire") because Jonah's "literary style is so standardized as to be immediately recognizable." "Laughing at the Bible: Jonah as Parody" *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series 65 no. 3 (1975): 168-181.

The *Märchenmotiven* Trible notes are rooted in her conclusion that Jonah likely contains portions of fragmented myths, an argument reminiscent of Gunkel's claims about the patriarchal narratives. Incidentally, this was the principal line of reasoning by which Hans Schmidt became the first interpreter to identify extrabiblical narratives that may share content with the book of Jonah.[227] The *Religionsgeschichte* "school" of this period sought parallels for Hebrew narratives among several cultures, though the methodologies of these interpreters have subsequently been criticized. In this line of thinking, the Jonah tale includes elements adapted from mythological stories, and the presence of the big fish and the *qîqāyôn* are taken to be remnants of numenistic deities. Schmidt his contemporaries were particularly well-versed in classical literature and consequently sought to identify Jonah with Greek mythic cycles. One oft-cited myth in this scholarship, for example, is that of Perseus and Andromeda, a Phoenician princess whose mother, Cassiopeia, had angered the Nereids by proclaiming her supreme beauty.[228] As atonement, they demand that Poseidon release a sea monster (κῆτος)[229] and that the Phoenician king sacrifice his daughter to this monster by chaining her to a great rock at Joppa. But other than the mention of Joppa, there seems to be no connection with the Jonah narrative and the comparison falls apart.

[227] Schmidt categorizes these myths according to their supposed roles for the fish - "als Feind," "als Retter," and "als Umwelt." Schmidt, Hans, *Jona: eine Untersuchung zur vergleichenden Religionsgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck und Ruprecht, 1907); Trible follows this tripartite division in her review of possible mythic parallels to the "big fish."

[228] Schmidt, Jona, 12-22; Jeremias, Alfred, *Das alte Testament im Lichte des alten Orients: Handbuch zur biblisch-orientalischen Altertumskunde* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1906), 600.

[229] LXX renders *dāg gādôl* from Jonah 2 as κῆτος but this connection with the Perseus cycle may be coincidental, as this is a generic term for a variety of saltwater creatures in Greek from the earliest periods. The popular rendering as "whale" in English derives from the LXX, but even if the Israelites were aware of the existence of these sea mammals their taxonomy did not differentiate them from fishes.

The ancient Near Eastern world has yielded as just as few possible antecedents. In most myths (e.g., *Enuma Elish*) the sea creature is an enemy of humankind or a symbol for the chaotic and destructive power of water, not a helper as in the Jonah tale. One exception preserved by Berossus concerns the myth of Oannes, a fish-like being who lives in the sea at night but emerges to help humanity during the day:

> Oannes gave to men the knowledge of letter and sciences and crafts of all types. It also taught them how to found cities, establish temples, introduce laws and measure land. It also revealed to them seeds and the gathering of fruits, and in general it gave men everything which is connected with the civilized life.[230]

The *Religionsgeschichte* school understood the creature's descent and reemergence to spread knowledge and truth as corresponding to Jonah's being swallowed by the fish and reemerging to persuade Ninevites of the truth of the Israelite god.[231] Yet the fundamental differences are numerous, and it seems unlikely that the Oannes story directly influenced the Jonah narrative.[232] The more probable explanation is that both draw from a pool of shared symbols for the mystery and otherworldness of the sea, an understanding common to nearly all ancient cultures. Other possible parallels in Mesopotamian texts are similarly unsatisfying,[233] though Feuillet briefly compares the contents of the Jonah narrative with those of "The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor."[234]

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[230] Burstein, Stanley Mayer, *The* Babyloniaca *of Berossus* (Sources and Monographs on the Ancient Near East, vol. 1 fasc. 5; Malibu, Calif.: Undena Publication, 1978), 13-14; this reading is cited from a reconstructed text of the *Babyloniaca* since Berossus' work itself is not extant but survives only as quotations from Hellenistic works.

[231] Baur, Ferdinand Christian, "Der Prophet Jonas, ein assyrisch-babylonisch Symbol" *Zeitschrift für die historische Theologie* 7 (1837): 88-114; Schmidt, *Jona*, 74 ff; Though Oannes and the "big fish" both are helpful to humans (i.e. the fish saves Jonah from the sea) neither commentator explains how (or why) the descent/emergence of Oannes is transposed to the human Jonah.

[232] There are other methodological problems involving this narrative, obviously. Its provenance is unknown and the earliest date we can assign to Berossus probably postdates the book of Jonah.

3.2.2 Internal Folkloric Features

While we cannot claim that the Jonah story is a direct adaptation on any other story that we now possess, it has characteristics which suggest that the narrative began either as an orally transmitted wondertale or a literary piece imitating one. Folktales are particularly rich in symbolic patterns and formulae that make cross-cultural comparison possible. Six main characteristics of the Jonah story make a folkloristic reading of that narrative possible:

1) Reversal of roles and positions: Noteworthy within the Jonah story is the reversal of man and animal; rather than a man eating a fish, we have a "big fish" swallowing a man.[235] As a man is frightened by the appearance of a type of bird, or a man who puts himself on his belly before a snake, Jonah is displaying reversal of the natural order. In each case, the size of the creature, which is normally small in the hero's home world, is emphasized in order to contrast with the human's puniness. Man has dominion over creatures in the known world; but in a "no man's land" the opposite would seem to be true, with non-human creatures that resemble animals presented as as possessing great wisdom, strength, or dominion. In wondertales the hard-to-believe is made real. In the book of Jonah the wicked city of Nineveh immediately (and

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[233] Trible includes a full discussion of mythological motifs and alleged parallels, See Trible, *Studies in the Book of Jonah*, 131-143.

[234] Feuillet, "Les sources du livre Jonas," 164-165.

[235] Cf. Gen 1:26,1:28: *wĕyirdû bidgat hayyām*. This is the feminine *dāgâ*, which is used as a collective term (i.e., "school of fish"); *BDB*, 185. Interestingly, *dāgâ* is used in Jon 2:2 for unknown reasons. It is perhaps a transmission error. *Midrash Jonah* solves the problem by claiming that Jonah had failed to pray inside the comfortable male fish, was spit out, and that God had arranged instead for a pregnant female fish to swallow him! Limburg, *Jonah*, 110.

surprisingly) becomes repentant (3:5-10) upon the tersest of oracles from the least convincing of prophets.

2) Lack of tangible historical context: Other than the reference to the prophet of II Kings there is no chronological marker for placing Jonah in a particular period of Israelite history.[236] Were it not for the story's fantastic content it would be easier to associate the Jonah narrative with legends known from Hebrew scriptures. The book of Jonah's opening and closing *in media res* are reminiscent of folktales rather than, for example, the patriarchal legends of Genesis which are placed between a genealogy (Gen 11:10-32) and the death of Joseph (Gen 50:26). The Jonah story leaves details about its setting to inference or imagination, thus resisting a historicized interpretation and deferring our attention to the plot events themselves. Though Jonah son of Amittai, Joppa, and Nineveh are factually existent names in the ancient Israelite lexicon, neither the historical character of that prophet nor experiential knowledge of those places is ever emphasized. Notwithstanding the prophet's name, the story's author(s) portray Jonah as an archetype or an everyman. Joppa and Nineveh, which both lay beyond the periphery of the Israelite homeland, were places known to exist by all but were known in detail by only a few. Lowell Handy has called this setting the "imaginary real world" of Jonah insofar as these locales may be charted but that there was likely no concern for these as actual places.[237] Wondertales are deliberately hazy on matters like this; they employ a contrived scenery expressed by only the vaguest of terms because the truths of their lessons are not delimited by time or place.

[236] The king's anonymity and title of "the king of Nineveh" underscores the non-historical nature of the narrative. For a full discussion of this see Sasson, *Jonah*, 247 ff.

[237] Handy, *Jonah's World*, 23.

3) Style and characterization: We have already noted that Jonah is a relatively straightforward narrative, moving one scene to the next. Each scene may be treated as an individual unit of the whole. There are no parenthetical asides distracting our attention from this flow, and the single flashback (4:2) serves only to tie the entire narrative together and reemphasize the tale's symmetrical structure. We will observe that the story's characterization is relatively simple as well. The only named characters are Jonah and the God of Israel; the sailors and the Ninevites are distinguished not by name but by their "otherness" as non-Israelites.[238] We are not given insight as to the operations of these stock characters' minds. They only react to the things going on around them. Jonah, on the other hand, demonstrates self-knowledge but his emotional expression is limited to extremes. In the fourth chapter alone, he moves abruptly between being "greatly displeased and grieved" (*wayyēraʿ ʾel-yônâ rāʿâ gedôlâ wayyiḥar lô*; 4:1), being "very happy" (*wayyiśmaḥ yônâ ʿal-haqqîqāyôn śimḥâ gedôlâ*; 4:6), and being "grieved" again (*hêṭêb ḥārâ-lî*; 4:9). Dialogue is exchanged between no more than two characters at a time.[239] All of these features facilitate telling and memorizing the story in an oral context.

4) Brevity: This hardly needs mentioning since it is related closely to the previous point, but the entire narrative is relatively concise in comparison with other biblical stories. A third-person narration such as this one is "omniscient," free to explicate the situations in which Jonah finds himself or to further describe the story's odd turns of

[238] Ehud Ben Zvi interprets these characters' depictions as evidence of shifting attitudes about the "Israelitizeable" quality of the foreign in a postexilic social context. *Signs of Jonah: Reading and Rereading in Ancient Yehud* (*JSOT* Supp 367; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 89-90.

[239] The *mallāḥîm* and the Ninevites are not given individual voices; they act collectively, undifferentiated for the purposes of the narrator. This only adds to the simplicity of their characterization.

events, yet the narrator consistently declines to do so. For example, there seems to be no language barrier between Jonah and the sailors or the Ninevites because detailing the story in this way would divert our attention. Folktales are very often laconic in this way, both for the ease of transmission of a shorter story and because the saliency of the folktale lie in the easy recognition of motifs, *topoi*, and *dramatis personae*.

5) Embellishment: Wondertales aggrandize, embellish or otherwise twist reality in order to express the fantastic. The city of Nineveh is so huge that it is a three day's walk across (*wenînewēh hāyetâ ʿîr-gedôlâ lēʾlōhîm mahălak šĕlōšet yāmîm*, 3:3). The penitent zeal of the Ninevites, the size of the fish (2:1), the rapid growth of the *qîqāyôn* (4:6), and the intensity of the sun (4:8) cumulatively present a world of extremes. If the story is indeed meant to inculcate social norms or values, then it is in such a setting that the wondertale's teaching becomes most focused; the world is presented as given to extremes in order to clearly differentiate states of being and modes of conduct.

6) Outright fantasy: Though embellishment is not uncommon within Hebrew scriptures, the explicit use of fantasy separates Jonah from other Hebrew Bible narratives. The fantastic aspects of the Jonah story bothered Josephus, for example, who endeavored to minimize or rationalize the story's miracles in order to make it more acceptable for a wider audience.[240] The book's fantastic qualities also caught the attention of Martin Luther, who mused,

> But this story of the prophet Jonah is so great that it is almost unbelievable, yes it sounds like a lie, and more full of nonsense than any poet's fable. If it were not in the Bible, I'd consider it a silly lie. Because if one thinks about it, Jonah was three days in the huge belly of the whale. where he could have been digested in three hours and changed into the flesh and blood of the whale. He could have died there a hundred times, under the earth, in the sea, inside the whale. Isn't that living in the midst

[240] Feldman, "Josephus' Interpretation of Jonah," 16.

> of death? In comparison with this miracle the wonder at the Red Sea was nothing.[241]

Wondertales ask for the "willing suspension of disbelief," as Samuel Taylor Coleridge put it, to transport the audience to another world where the impossible is made possible. This most often takes the form of inversions to the natural world; animals may speak or exhibit other human behaviors, for example. The Jonah narrative includes many such fantastic sequences in its plot progression, especially for so short a story. That Jonah becomes entangled in so many strange events and reversals of fortune is part of the fantasy. In this world, a man may be eaten by a fish but not digested and a plant may grow to an extraordinary size and rapidly. Yet the Jonah story articulates an important theological belief inasmuch as natural elements--the storm, the "big fish," the *qîqāyôn*, and the caterpillar (*tôlaʿat*)[242]--are all "directed" (*mānâ*) by God rather than existing autonomously. This does not diminish the fantasy, it only qualifies it. Rather than existing as whimsical entertainment, the story conveys important moralizing points.

3.2.3 Wondertale Functions and Transformations in Jonah

Now that we have considered some of the folkloric content of the Jonah story, I would like to turn to the morphological structure of the narrative. It will become apparent through this exercise that there are many more intertextual correspondences between the Jonah story and the Lugalbanda poems and "The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor" (TSS) than are immediately noticeable. Having said that, however, there are

[241] *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Tischreden*, vol. 3 (Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1914), 551, translated and cited by Limburg, *Jonah*, 120-121.

[242] The precise meaning of the term is unclear and probably denotes a large number of species. It is variously rendered as worm, caterpillar, vine-weevil and so forth. I prefer caterpillar here because it (emphatically) "attacks" (*wattak*) the surface of the *qîqāyôn* and because the caterpillar is a symbol of metamorphosis; *BDB*, 1069.

important differences as well, and I accredit these variations to intentional manipulations of the *topos* noted before. The first of these concerns the *dramatis personae* of the Jonah story. The literary worlds of the ancient Near East are replete with self-directed beings and various deities who occasionally come face-to-face with human beings. But the book of Jonah is relatively late and, more to the point, it was written within a community for which monotheism is the reality. As a result, non-human characters that would act independently in other tales are here subjugated to the command of God.[243] When we examine the characters in this story for their actual impact upon Jonah's travels we see that the characters who move in and out of the story are simply ciphers; this narrative essentially concerns only a man and his god. This is outlined as follows:

- The **dispatcher** is the God of Israel.
- The **"hero"** is Jonah.
- The **donor** is God, through the agency of the "big fish"
- The **helper** is God.

The theological implications of this list are clear: God directs, God delivers, God gives, God tries every option yet Jonah, though the protagonist of tale in which we expect heroic deeds, is far from being a *true* hero.

The second point of divergence from the *topos* has relation to the sequence of events in this tale. As noted above, the two major "acts" of the narrative mirror one another to some degree, producing symmetry. Utilizing this vehicle, Jonah's

[243] The Lugalbanda epics and TSS circumstantially suggest that Anzud and the snake-king are theriomorphic representations. The trope of the "wise old man" helper as described by Jung is projected onto the form of "helpful animals. These act like humans, speak a human language and display a sagacity and a knowledge superior to man's." C.G. Jung, "The Phenomenology of the Spirit in Fairytales," in *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (2nd ed.; Bollingen Series XX; trans. by K.F.C. Hull; Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press), 207-244, see esp. 230 ff. Theriomorphism is common in wondertales but conspicuously absent in the Jonah narrative owing to the theological prerogatives of the Israelite community that disseminated it.

development as a prophet, which had gone awry from its inception, is effectively "rebooted,"[244] and set right only to fail again. But rather than strictly copying the first act the second act complements it, essentially picking up where the first left off with respect to Jonah's prophetic maturation. The result of this is a *transformation* of the morphological structure such that the underlying *topos* is still recognizable but other elements are radically altered.

Using the morphology detailed in Chapter One as a framework for identifying the "functions" in the Jonah story, let us consider their sequence more closely:

I - The hero is called upon to leave home on a quest; symbol: α

1. Jonah son of Amittai is told "Go at once to the grand city of Nineveh and prophesy upon it, for its wickedness has come before me."

II - The hero joins a group as a lesser member; symbol: β

2. Jonah decides to flee to Tarshish. He finds a ship headed to that place at Joppa and pays fares to board.

III - The hero goes forth and crosses a threshold into the wilderness while traveling to a foreign land; symbol: ↑

1. The ship sails across the sea and towards Tarhsish.

IV - The hero's company faces unexpected adversity from nature; symbol: A

2. God casts a powerful storm upon the sea, and the entire ship is imperiled.

V - The hero is stranded alone in "no-man's land" for three days; symbol: B

2. Jonah is tossed overboard into the raging sea and swallowed by a "big fish" that saves him from drowning.

VI - The donor revitalizes the hero; symbol: C

2. God's saving act renews Jonah and foreshadows the reigniting of his mission.

VII - The hero gives thanks with offering or a prayer; symbol: D

[244] To borrow a term from modern parlance, "rebooted" seems most appropriate for what I mean.

2. "But with a loud thanksgiving I will offer sacrifice to you" (2:10).

We will note that Jonah promises to make a sacrifice, but he never makes good on this. The closest Jonah comes to offering this sacrifice is his announcement in the fourth scene that he would rather die than live. At this point, Jonah's progression takes a turn as the prophet is disgorged onto "dry land" by the fish at God's arrangement (2:11). Back on *terra firma*, just as the story seems to wrap up, the story abruptly begins anew. The reader will quickly notice the near congruence between the openings of the first act (chapters 1-2) and the second act (chapters 3-4):

> 1:1-2: *wayyĕhî dĕbar-YHWH ʾel-yônâ ben-ʾămittay lēʾmōr qûm lēk ʾel-nînewēh hāʿîr haggedôlâ ûqrāʾ ʿālêhā kî-ʿāletâ rāʿātām lepānāy* ("A word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai saying, 'Get up, go to the grand city of Nineveh and call out upon it for their wickedness has come before me.'")
>
> 3:1-2: *wayyĕhî dĕbar-YHWH ʾel-yônâ šēnît lēʾmōr qûm lēk ʾel-nînewēh hāʿîr haggedôlâ ûqrāʾ ʾēlêhā ʾet-haqqerîʾâ ʾăšer ʾānōkî dōbēr ʾēlêkā* ("A word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time saying, 'Get up, go to the grand city of Nineveh and call out to it the declaration which I will tell to you'")

These dispatches are obviously intended to parallel one another; their identicalness is modified only by *šēnît*, which serves to link the two directives.[245] These verses are related closely enough to be intimately linked and complementary but not so close that they are identical. Moreover, rather than giving Jonah God's reasoning for the mission as God had in Chapter One, this time God qualifies that God will be more "hands on" in seeing the quest to completion by telling Jonah exactly what to say. Thus the mission is redirected but because the dispatches are not exactly the same, we should not view the text as non-linear.

[245] Trible, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 111.

I - The hero is called upon to leave home on a quest; symbol: α

1. Jonah is again told "Go at once to the grand city of Nineveh and prophesy upon it."

Jonah goes to Nineveh this time but the narrator declines to repeat functions II-VII and elaborate on how Jonah reaches Nineveh, so the narrative skips ahead to pick up where it had left off. Yet unlike in the Lugalbanda stories and in "The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor" the protagonist (Jonah) does not fulfill his goals through any heroic feat or cunningness or bravery. Jonah tersely and mechanically prophesies and the Ninevites convert *en masse*, and rather than Jonah, the Israelite, exhorting the Ninevites toward this conversion the king of Nineveh does so. His prophesying was so successful that the narrative effectively has not further use for him. Here, in this massive city, Jonah is as alone as he had ever been. This juncture is another natural place for the story to end but it continues with the interactions of the *dramatis personae* continuing according to the prescribed order, as if the actual mission were not complete. These continue up to a point before ending altogether when the text ends, but the surprising development is that the outcomes of these functions are actually the inverse of what we would expect:

II-VII are skipped

VIII - The herlper and the hero meet; the hero fears the helper; symbol: E

1. *Failure:* Jonah is displeased and complains to God: "Take my life from me" (4:3).

IX - The helper queries the hero; symbol: F

1. *Failure:* Jonah questions God first: "Is this not what I said when I was still on my own ground?" and God responds: "Are you really aggrieved?"

X - The hero praises the helper; symbol: G

Failure: Jonah leaves to go east of the city to sulk.

XI - The helper foretells the destiny of the hero and gives him a gift; symbol: H

1. *Failure:* God provides the *qîqāyôn* and Jonah is happy but then God sends the worm and supplies an easterly wind which makes Jonah miserable.

XII-XIV skipped

What are we to make of this spasmodic story arc in which a recognizable sequence is so radically altered? It may be the case that this strange structure and truncated ending result from the social context in which the story was formulated. If we are correct that the book of Jonah dates to the postexilic period, this makes sense because that age seems to have been punctuated by shifting cultural identities and social unrest. The mutual frustrations of both God and Jonah, therefore, might allegorize the contemporary dissatisfaction and insecurity of the nation's relationship with God. Alternatively, this warped morphology may emanate directly from the circumstances in which the book of Jonah came together; it is hard to know. But in any case the depiction of Jonah resulting from the narrative should leave little doubt about the tale's purpose: Jonah's confusion of character is diagnostic of the crisis of Israelite self-identity. By extension, the deliberate inversion of components of a recognizable folkloric trope likely represents the growing sense of uneasiness with the conventions of the world as perceived by the tale's author(s). Jonah's ambivalent relationship with God, in particular, reflects anxiety about those things purported to be taken for granted.

For quick visual reference, the formula of functions for this wondertale is as follows:

$$\alpha^{1}\beta^{2}\uparrow^{1}A^{2}B^{2}C^{2}D^{2}\alpha^{1}E^{1\text{-}}F^{1\text{-}}G^{\text{-}}H^{1\text{-}}$$

I have introduced the negative symbol (-) to stand for the inversion of the functions. The tale closes abruptly following function XI, as Jonah's quest fails to materialize a second

time and Jonah's fate is left unresolved, with the “hero” failing to return home or receive exaltation. As we will discuss in the next chapter, Jonah’s location directly corresponds to his progress in a *rite de passage*; since Jonah fails to complete this course of development the narrative leaves him, symbolically, out in the desert further away from his home than ever. Despite Jonah's claim to know of Yahweh's forgiving nature (4:2) he perpetually seems to miss the point. That Jonah gets so discouraged over an insignificant plant while evidently hoping for the destruction of a major city only reinforces the notion that Jonah falls short of God's expectations.

3.2.4 Morphology of a Quest Gone Awry

Below are the three wondertale morphologies I have already diagrammed, juxtaposed for visual reference and comparison:

The Lugalbanda cycle: $\alpha^{1}\beta^{1}\uparrow^{1}A^{1}B^{1}C^{1}D^{3}EF^{2}GH^{2}\downarrow^{1}\gamma^{1}\delta$

TSS: $\alpha^{2}\beta^{2}\uparrow^{1}A^{2}B^{3}C^{1}D^{1}EF^{1}GH^{1}\downarrow^{2}\gamma^{2}\delta$

Jonah: $\alpha^{1}\beta^{2}\uparrow^{1}A^{2}B^{2}C^{2}D^{2}\alpha^{1}E^{1-}F^{1-}G^{-}H^{1-}$

I have alluded to the erratic progression of Jonah's quest. In comparison with the Lugalbanda narrative and TSS, the Jonah story is relatively short, yet it moves from one end of the putative world to another. All three tales begin with a similar basic structure as their respective protagonists move towards the periphery, but Jonah goes in the opposite direction. Given this beginning, we would expect that the remainder of the tale would diverge wildly. This happens, on the one hand, inasmuch as Jonah is a flawed "hero" from the very beginning, but we see that despite Jonah's best efforts to divest himself of God's quest the sequence of events still unfolds according to the sequence

followed by the other wondertales. The Jonah story turns out so differently because of the shortcomings of the protagonist.

A turning point occurs in 4:3 following God's reappointment of Jonah to his quest and the latter's unceremonious completion of it. The careful reader will note that though Jonah has been in the city of Nineveh the story makes no mention of his interacting with its people. I liken this to Lugalbanda's near proximity to the place where his brothers were or the sailor's sight of other humans from the seashore upon a ship; both have come close enough to "recognize" his companions but has not yet had close contact with them. At this juncture, when Jonah seems to be on the cusp of reintegration at Nineveh, he demonstrates his failings by expressing displeasure rather than excitement. This point is made more clear by Jonah's subsequent withdrawal from the city. His symbolic distance from humanity has become intensified by the spatial distance, and the morphology degenerates as events continue in the correct order but in inverse of their prescribed outcome.

When we compare the three tales point-by-point with respect to the three stages of the *rite de passage*, the divergence of the Jonah narrative from this pattern becomes evident:

	Lugalbanda	**The Shipwrecked Sailor**	**Jonah**
	Pre-Liminal Phase		
Dispatcher	Enmerkar	King of Egypt	God
Home	Unug	Egypt	Israel

Lack causing quest	Dispatcher's control over Aratta	Dispatcher's control over resources	Dispatcher's control over Nineveh
Destination of hero	Aratta	"King's mines"	Tarshish
Point of hero's departure	"Crossing of the pathways"	Egyptian port	Joppa
	Liminal	*Liminal*	*Liminal*
Liminal boundary	walking across(?) waterway	Sea	Sea
Means of crossing	Walking across(?) waterway	Ship	Ship
Companions	Enmerkar, seven brothers, their armies	120 sailors	non-Israelite sailors
Adversity	Illness	Storm	Storm
Abandonment	Left by companions	Sailors die in storm	Thrown overboard by sailors
Time in peril	Three days, two nights	Three days	Three days, three nights
Shelter	In cave	In shade of tree	Belly of "big fish"
Sacrificial act	Hero makes a sacrifice	Hero makes a sacrifice	Hero promises a sacrifice
Exchange with helper	Helper “fixes” fate of hero, leads him back	Helper reveals fate of hero, foresees his	Helper deposits hero on land to return to

	to quest	return to quest	quest
	Post-Liminal	*Post-Liminal*	*Failure*
Human interaction	Hero rejoins military campaign	Hero embarks human ship	Hero disdains Ninevites, fails to interact
Homecoming	Hero returns to Uruk	Hero returns to Egypt	Hero goes to a place "east of the city (Nineveh)"
Divine praise	Hero is recognized for skill by a divine figure (Inana)	Hero is recognized for skill by a divine figure (pharaoh)	Hero is rebuked by God
Social position	Hero is elevated	Hero is elevated	Hero remains outside of the social matrix

In short, Jonah fails to progress to the postliminal phase of the *rite de passage* and remains mired in a liminal state. I will return to this point in the next chapter but here I would like to elaborate on the narrative's closing sequences. The tale's abrupt ending with Jonah in a literal and figurative desert has not escaped the notice of exegetes who would supply a more satisfactory resolution.[246] The break of events in this fashion was likely disheartening for a segment of the Israelite population that was hoping to see

[246] The first century CE apocryphal work *The Lives of the Prophets* purports to describe "the names of the prophets, and where they are from, and where they died and how, and where they lie." After his return from Nineveh Jonah is said to live with his mother in Sur (cf. Jud 2:28) and, in line with contemporary Jewish tradition, the mother and son are identified as the widow and son visited by the prophet Elijah (I Kgs 17:8-16).

reconciliation between Jonah and God, but given the cynical manner in which Jonah's motivations are depicted this ending is fitting both in terms of literary style and content. Just as Jonah's character is misshapen by his failure to grow into his prophetic role so the story is similarly deformed in its morphology, with the final events occurring in inverse and the conclusion left unstated and unresolved in abandonment.

The story's abrupt ending highlights a different, but related theological concept when we compare the story's meaning. It will be recalled that in both the Lugalbanda story and "The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor" that both the donor and the helper (divine figures) provide for the hero to experience moments of clarity about his place in the cosmos with relation to the divine: Lugalbanda witnesses some sort of celestial event and has his fate "fixed" by Anzud, while the sailor is told that the gods washed him upon that island and the snake-king dispenses wisdom about life's vicissitudes. The Jonah narrative manipulates this aspect of divine revelation; for, God does not reveal to Jonah God's further plans for him, and when Jonah complains of God's mercy God makes clear that clemency is decided not only by the city's wickedness or virtue. The culminating message, emphasized by this closing as much as the other events in the story, is that the operations of God are undiscoverable and incomprehensible to human beings.[247]

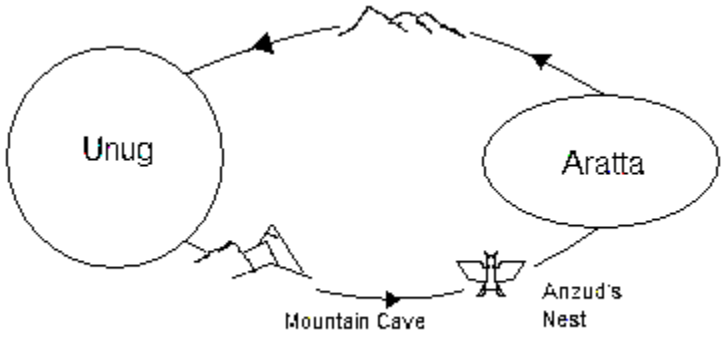
[247] Sasson compares the message of Jonah to that of the book of Job in this way; see *Jonah*, 351.

CHAPTER IV

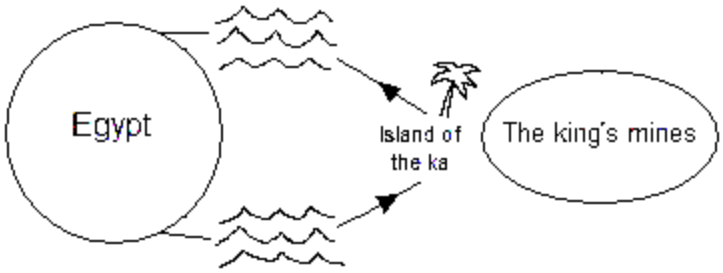
RITE DE PASSAGE AND SPATIALITY

4.1.1 The Book of Jonah and Physical Space

If we were to diagram the progression of Lugalbanda apropos of the physical space that the hero covers in that narrative, it would look something like this:

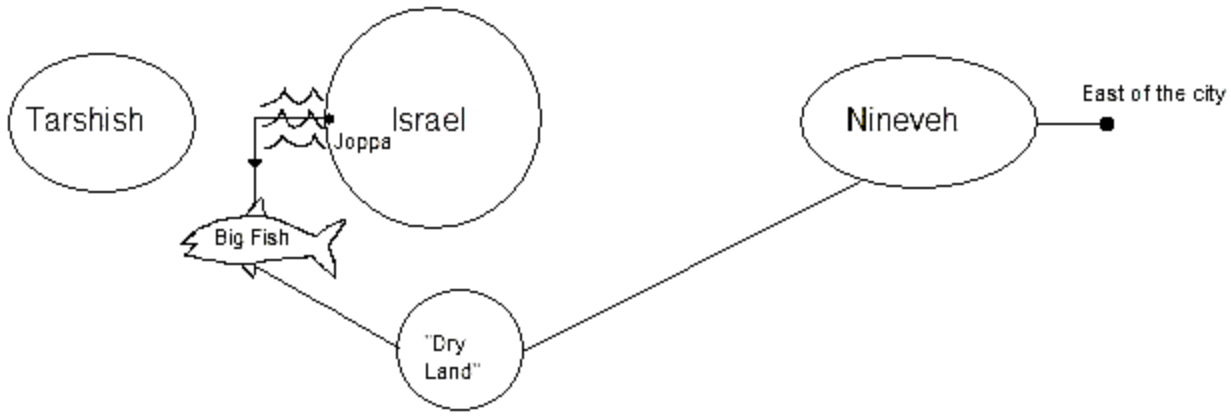


After leaving his home "center" at Unug, the hero enters into a liminal "no man's land" where he has transformative events at the mountain cave and at Anzud's nest, both of which allow him to continue on to Aratta, his intended destination. He ultimately returns to Unug enhanced in status by his travails. The movements of the hero of "The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor" would look similar:



The protagonist does not reach the king's mines, but after his diversion on the mysterious "island of the *ka*" he returns to Egypt. Having brought back great wealth to his grateful king, the narrative ends with the hero being elevated in social position. These events all conform to our expectations about the role of the hero in the wondertale; heroes go forth into a largely unknown and fantastic world, overcome danger during their separation, and return enriched by their experience, resulting in the hero's ascension in the social order. We recognize this sequence not only because all wondertales involve some permutation of this basic structure but also because these events correspond to a *rite de passage* as described by van Gennep. Though a *rite de passage* may take many forms (as it involves any transition of social position) in this specific folkloric *topos* the stages are readily visible because they are represented by the physical space that the hero occupies as he moves along the sequence.

In contrast to the models shown above, we see that Jonah's movements are very different in that he does not complete a cycle:



Jonah only crosses a liminal boundary once, when he departs from Joppa, and the story terminates with him far away from the place he departed from. Subsequent to leaving Joppa, at the very edge of his home "center," Jonah moves in liminal space. The sea, the "dry land" upon which the fish disgorges Jonah, and Nineveh are peripheral to Israelite geographic reckoning. The sea and the belly of the "big fish," in particular, comprise a "no man's land" of fantasy where we would expect Jonah's internal transformation to begin. Yet rather than relating his return the narrator describes Jonah as moving even further away from his center. Now that we have discussed how the morphology of the Jonah story diverges from this *topos*, we may examine how this structure interfaces with the depiction of physical space that we find in the narrative. This *topos* is an appropriate vehicle for depicting a *rite de passage* because it allows the narration to symbolize that transformation as a series of meaningful landscapes against which the actions are set. Jonah's failure to return from *terra incognita,* therefore, connotes that his transformation has failed. Though the *rite de passage* need not necessarily involve such physical movement from one space to another the depiction of that movement gives the narrator a clearly expressed and appropriate means to show the process.

4.1.2 Israelite Political Geography

The ways in which the Israelites conceived of geographic space changed frequently throughout their history due to the ebbs and flows of their socio-political structures and those of their neighbors. We must begin with the Hebrews' view towards "the land," a symbolic construct of high value in religious traditions ranging from Israelite henotheism to modern Judaism. "The land" means, most basically, the geographic area of Israel itself, but the attendant theological themes and motifs--especially the recurring cycle of conquering the land, holding onto it and carelessly ceding it--dominate much of the biblical canon. Though the political borders of the principalities and kingdoms comprising biblical "Israel" and "Judah" were in near-constant flux, the Hebrew Bible records that the Israelites' self-identity was partially conditioned by the distinction between the land of Israel and all other areas. An instance of Israelite self-centrism is captured Jonah's pointed reference to being "in my country" (*ʿal-ʾadmātî*; 4:2) "beforehand" (*qiddamtî*; 4:2),[248] as opposed to the implicit "in this country now." This worldview was accomplished also by the fact that the Israelite was surrounded on three sides chiefly by harsh deserts and on the west side by the Mediterranean, making borders easier to demarcate by topographical features. Moreover, for long stretches in the first millennium BCE the Israelites enjoyed relative freedom from their more powerful neighbors.

Of course, the Israelites were aware of other lands beyond their political borders, and the Israelites maintained continuous contact with and had firsthand knowledge of other groups of Canaanite descent such as the Moabites, Edomites, and Amalekites.

[248] Perhaps a wordplay on *qedem* ("east"), the direction which Israel lay when Jonah says this.

Beyond those immediate neighbors they had another level of awareness of the great civilizations of Mesopotamia, Persia, and Egypt whose peoples had periodically exerted cultural and political influence over the region. Hebrew scriptures document contacts with these peoples, usually by the invasion of some foreign army or narratives purporting that Hebrews had visited their lands.[249] Despite the number of these references it is clear that the authors of those texts, in fact, knew very little about those places; details are lacking, much of their ethnography is piecemeal or anachronistic, and such narratives exhibit the decided influence of folkloric material and motifs. Yet even further afield lay foreign lands which the Israelites knew something of, though perhaps only through secondhand sources. This group includes biblical Ophir, Tarshish, and Sheba, as well as a few others.[250] It is difficult to gauge the Israelites' attitudes about and knowledge of these places because they are alluded to only indirectly in Hebrew texts. Some are mentioned only through their purported progenitors in genealogical tracts (e.g., Gen 10), allowing writers to reconcile the social diversity of their contemporary world in kinship terms. Even in these texts authors betray a keen interest in ethnography and the relational value of the "center."

4.1.3 Israelite Cosmography and the World's Fringes

Based on the creation narratives and many scattered biblical references we know that the Hebrews, much like their immediate neighbors, posited that the earth was a flat disc. This disc was surrounded on its plane by an ocean, and this whole construct was

[249] E.g., Abraham's journey to Egypt, the Exodus cycle, Jacob's journey towards the land of the "sons of the east" (Gen 29:1).

[250] See Appendix A for a brief discussion of a few selected examples from Hebrew and cognate literatures.

surrounded by a cosmic ocean, held back from crashing upon earth by the "firmament" of heaven (*rāqîaʿ*, Gen 1:6-8).[251] This primordial ocean was chaos, held in check only by God's deliberate creation of the firmament and ordering of the universe into separate and, for all practical purposes, impenetrable sections. This model was based, in large part, by the natural conditions of the Israelite homeland itself, though it was also influenced to a degree by Mesopotamian cosmology. Rain and dew, which were necessary components of the agricultural cycle, were held to be the result of God allowing water from the supercaelian ocean through the *rāqîaʿ*.[252] Thus life itself depended on the correct functioning of this order to supply rains, and, conversely, destructive storms like the one in the Jonah story may also be divinely controlled.

This cosmological framework was supplemented by a new idea, realized in the years following the establishment of the first Jerusalem temple, that Jerusalem is at the world's center. The temple, in particular, is regarded as the seat of God's presence in the human world (2:5, 2:8), a construct also referred to as the Shekhinah.[253] This biblical conception is similar to the phenomenon of the *axis mundi* known from other cultures.[254] The *axis mundi* is the earth's "navel," the point from which creation and cosmic order radiated outwards.[255] Thus, the further one goes from that place, the further one would

[251] For more on this tripartite division of the cosmos in biblical and other Northwest Semitic sources, see Gregorio del Olmo Lete, "Cosmologie et anthropologie religieuses," in *Mythologie et religion des Sémites Occidentaux, vol. II* (ed. Gregorio del Olmo Lete; Leuven: Peeters, 2008), 243-250; see also Ps 69:35 and Exod 20:11.

[252] See David Neiman, "The Supercaelian Sea," *JNES* 28 no.4 (1969): 243-249.

[253] See also Isa 6:1, Isa 56:7, Jer 17:12.

[254] For a classic summary of the *axis mundi* see Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 12-17.

[255] Among his many examples of the *axis mundi*, Eliade argues that Mt. Gerizim is referred to as the "navel of the land" (*ṭabbūr ʾereṣ*; cf. Mt. Tabor) in Judg 9:37. Mountains very frequently are regarded as a divine

get from contact with God and closer to the world's fringes, represented by chaos, death, or darkness. As deity worship in the ancient Near East was usually centered around certain shrines or cities, the Jonah narrative asserts a powerful theological message in its depiction of God's autonomy over the nether regions of creation.[256]

The idea that the fringes of the world were wild and mysterious was a pervasive one, and this was in some respects only reinforced by the centralization of the Yahwistic cult to Jerusalem. The "founded" (to borrow Eliade's word) world of human beings contrasts sharply with the dangerous "no man's land" surrounding them. "The desert or wilderness is a place of strange, demonic, secret powers. It is a sacred land, a holy land in that it is a demonic realm; but it is not a place for ordinary men. It is not a place which is a homeland, where men may dwell."[257] This imagery is appropriated in Hebrew texts for figurative purposes as well, as in the case of Isaiah 34, which anticipates Edom as a dilapidated scrubland for jackals and demons: "It shall be called 'no-kingdom-there!'" (Isa 34:12).

The Jonah story operates within a cognitive world in which such depictions of physical space and geography are highly significant. Understanding the story relies in large measure on ascertaining what each physical setting that Jonah moves through means for his characterization. His successive proximity to (and distance from) his center represents his transformation, and though all of these places are real in the

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locus because heaven and earth literally meet at their summit. In Mesopotamia, ziggurats were built as artificial mountains for religious purposes. Ibid., 13.

[256] That is to say that multiple gods and goddesses could coexist and that deities held dominion only over their particular areas whereas other deities controlled areas closer to their home base. This is expressed, for example, by the many *bĕʿālîm* which populate Israel and neighboring lands (1 Kgs 18:18).

[257] Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 109.

categorical sense the narrative's manner of depicting them does not emphasize reality but only helps to underscore Jonah's warped development. What follows is a concise discussion of each place visited by Jonah in that sequence.[258] Each of these sites was chosen for inclusion in the story because of their position (actual and symbolic) in relation to the Israelites and to one another.

4.2.1 Joppa

Even despite the relative proximity of the Phoenician port city of Jappo (*yāpô*; modern Jaffa) to the Israelite homeland the city is mentioned only sparingly in the biblical corpus. The site is perhaps one of the ancient Near East's oldest harbors, going back several millennia.[259] During much of the Bronze Age it had limited autonomy but was under Egyptian sway.[260] During the first half of the first millennium BCE Joppa was apparently under the control of the Philistine city-state of Ashkelon.[261] With the onset of the Persian period, Joppa fell under the rule of a more powerful port city to its north, Sidon. In the Hebrew Bible Joppa is mentioned as the entry point of Lebanese cedar into Palestine as it continued on to the landlocked territory of Persian Yehud (Ezra 3:7, 2 Chr 2:15 = *yāpôʾ*). The city was not unfamiliar to most Israelites even though it was never within Israelite territory; it was reckoned to be just outside the historical boundary of the

[258] Though Jonah never actually makes it to Tarshish, I have included a consideration of that place also.

[259] J.P. Dessel, "Jaffa," *OEANE* 3: 206-207.

[260] EA 296 consists of a letter from a vassal king to the Egyptian pharaoh professing loyalty and the vassal's guardianship of the ports of Gaza and Joppa for Egypt, suggesting that the harbor was key to Egyptian mercantile interests.

[261] Joppa is among the cities belonging to Sidqia of Ashkelon besieged by Sennacherib during that king's assault on Palestine; *ANET*, 287.

Danites (Josh 19:46). The city even seems to have supported a small Jewish population during the Hellenistic period (2 Macc 12:3-4).[262]

Much like Ugarit centuries before it, Joppa in the first millennium BCE was the meeting place for many peoples of diverse origins. The Phoenician trade network was vast, and its commercial connections would have brought goods and traders from very far abroad, and outgoing shipments which traversed the full length of the Mediterranean and beyond were surely common too.[263] The city's location ensured that people there were under several different spheres of cultural influence as the borders of the great empires waxed and waned over the centuries. Thus the depiction in the Jonah story of the sailors who "cried out, each to his own god" (1:5) is consistent with how the Israelites themselves likely understood Joppa. Yet despite this important difference, we get the sense in the story that Joppa is not altogether exotic; Jonah was able to get there without any trouble, and the non-Israelite sailors recognize the Israelite god by proper name.[264]

Joppa is, figuratively and literally, the perfectly set *limen* ("harbor") for Jonah's separation phase in this abortive *rite de passage*; it lay at the northern frontier of Hebrew land, where the land meets the sea, at once familiar and foreign and in the opposite direction of where he is supposed to be.

4.2.2 Tarshish

[262] According to 2 Mac 12, the non-Judahite majority of Joppa feared Jewish rebellion, and out of loyalty to their Hellenistic governors they deceived 200 Jews living there into coming aboard boats only to drown them *en masse* in the Mediterranean. Judas Maccabeus responds by setting the harbor and its boats on fire during the night, thus plainly obliterating Joppa's commercial vitality and symbolically destroying its identity.

[263] Handy, *Jonah's World*, 25-26.

[264] Cf. Jonah's language about God (*ʾĕlōhîm*) while prophesying to the Ninevites (3:5, 3:9).

The geographical location of Tarshish is more obscure than Joppa. In order to get as far away from Nineveh as possible Jonah flees "towards Tarshish" (*taršîšâ*) so although its location was never known, scholars presume that Tarshish lay to the west of Joppa. This inference is supported by biblical references to Tarshish as a far-distant trading port whence large ships transported goods into the eastern Mediterranean.[265] Hebrew scriptures relate that during Solomon's reign Israel traded with Tarshish directly and that its ships brought "gold, silver, ivory, apes and peacocks" to the court (I Kgs 10:22) once every three years (2 Chr 9:21). Whether or not these anachronistic accounts contain some truth, they argue that the opulence of Solomon's trading empire was so highly regarded that he was known even at the edges of the world. Tarshish was known primarily by the ancient Israelites for its transoceanic remoteness. Several biblical texts reference "Tarshish ships" (e.g. Isa 2:16, Ezek 27:12, 27:25, 2 Chr 20:36-37) as suggesting vessels large enough and well-built to travel great distances across the sea.[266] Tarshish was also known as a source of precious silver (Jer 10:9), a fact attested non-biblically also.[267]

Just as unclear as where Tarshish was located is whether this place is one and the same as either Tartessos or Tarsus. Many scholars have concluded that biblical Tarshish is one or the other.[268] Tartessos is known from the Hellenic world as a previously

[265] Tarshish is a person mentioned in Gen 10:4-5 as among the descendants of Javan, and "from these the maritime nations branched out." Presumably this name denotes an eponym for the region of Tarshish, as it does for Ophir, for one. More examples of this phenomenon are discussed by Zecharia Kallai, "The Reality of the Land and the Bible" in *Biblical Historiography and Historical Geography* (ed. Gershon Galil and Moshe Weinfeld; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1998), 186-201.

[266] Sub *taršîš*, *BDB*, 1077.

[267] See Pierre Bordreuil, Felice Israel, and Dennis Pardee. "Deux Ostraca Paléo-Hébreux de la Collection Sh. Moussaïeff." *Semitica* 46 (1996): 49-76.

independent city-state on the Iberian Peninsula which was absorbed into the expanding Carthaginian maritime empire during the sixth century BCE. The city was known in antiquity as a source of precious metals and gemstones, and its mineral trade with the Phoenicians was probably known to the biblical authors.[269] After that time Tartessos seems to have dwindled in size and influence.[270] Tarsus is another possible identification, and its relative nearness to Joppa makes this a more plausible scenario for scholars who question the viability of a trade network extending over the vast distance between Joppa and Tartessos. The matter even reaches into antiquity, as Targumic translators were apparently hesitant to address the ambiguity and replaced "to Tarshish" (1:3) with "to sea."[271]

In the Jonah tale the most salient feature of Tarshish is that it is a place outside of Israel and it is in the direction opposite Nineveh. The city is never described since Jonah never arrived there; it need only be some place beyond the sea which lay "just beyond the geographic knowledge of those who try to pinpoint its location."[272] This destination, in the expectation of both Jonah and the story's audience, is a place for Jonah to hide and

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[268] A helpful summation of the major arguments and the issues involved for locating Tarshish is made by André Lemaire, "Tarshish-*Tarsisi*: Problème de topographie historique biblique et Assyriene," 44-62 in Galil and Weinfeld, eds. *Biblical Historiography and Historical Geography*.

[269] The Greek historians Strabo and Herodotus insist that the name of the legendary king Arganthonios of Tartessos is connected to the Greek word for "silver." Their accounts describe that the first Greek to reach Tartessos was a sailor named Kolaeus who had been blown off-course by winds. The generous king loaded the visitor's ship with silver and sent him home, a narrative reminiscent of "The Shipwrecked Sailor."

[270] The most comprehensive historical and archaeological analysis of Tartessos is by Michael Koch, and though he does not address Tarshish in the biblical texts at length his study attests to the high volume of Mediterranean trade that came through Tartessos in the first millennium BCE. Its reputation was probably known far and wide; *Tarschisch und Hispanien: historisch-geographische und namenkundliche Untersuchungen zur Phönikischen Kolonisation der Iberischen Halbinsel* (Madrider Forschungen 14; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1984).

[271] So Targum Jonathan to the Minor Prophets; see Kevin J. Cathcart and Robert P. Gordon, *The Targum of the Minor Prophets* (The Aramaic Bible v. 14; Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1989), 105.

[272] Sasson, *Jonah*, 79.

wait for God's directive to be forgotten. As it is beyond a liminal boundary (the sea), Jonah presumes that he can escape God's control there. Yet although he has ventured into peripheral areas and secured his own isolation there Jonah discovers that it would not have mattered even if he had reached Tarshish.

4.2.3 The Sea and the Belly of the "Big Fish"

In contrast to Joppa and Nineveh, the sea and the "belly" of the "big fish" are off-the-map locales more fittingly described as "no-man's land." We will recall from above that the sea is treated within Hebrew literature as representation of the wild and dangerous aspects of existence. Were it not for the firmament above, the seas would crash over the world, creating unpredictable chaos. The Israelites were originally a landlocked people, and the potential danger of the sea was only slightly diminished by the advent of Israelite maritime travel.

Sea travel was considered inherently dangerous, and biblical writers attributed particular danger to easterly winds for their ability to wreck large "Tarshish ships" (Ps 48:7; Ezek 27:25-36).[273] This apprehension is evident even in the travel literature of ancient civilizations with more maritime experience. Historical accounts and stories frequently ascribe storms at sea to divine punishment or retribution and, conversely, survivors of shipwrecks as either lucky or deserving of special mercy. In his history of the Persian wars, Herodotus claims that sudden appearances of storms "past all bearing"

[273] Ezek 27:25-36 is an allegory concerning Tyre but it attests to a certain attitude about sea travel in general which can only be said to be negative: "Your wealth, your wares, your merchandise, your mariners, your sailors -- those repairing your breaches and conducting your trade, and all of those men fighting within you, all of the many within your hull, will fall into the sea's heart on the day of your downfall" (Ezek 27:27); Shelley Wachsmann, "Seafaring," *OEANE* 4: 505-509.

laid waste to Xerxes' attack fleet at least twice:[274] "All this was the work of heaven's providence, that so the Persian power might be more equally matched with the Greek, and not much greater than it."[275] Storms were not random events; the gods sent storms and deliverance from them. In this context it is appropriate for the shipwrecked sailor of the Egyptian tale to offer a sacrifice as thanksgiving to the gods he deems directly responsible for not only saving his life but also for washing him upon a bountiful isle. Whereas in earlier periods of Israelite history the forces of the sea were believed to be under the control of a host of numenistic deities, within the book of Jonah that authority was subsumed by the God of Israel "who made both sea and land" (1:9) and has the ability to "cast a mighty wind upon the sea" (*hēṭîl rûaḥ-gedôlâ ʾel-hayyam*, 1:4).[276] In "no-man's land" the unexpected is reality, and a place where things may not be as they first seem; Jonah's engulfment by the fantastic *dag gedôl* saves him from one great (*gedôl*) danger but seems to put him in an even more precarious position. The possibility that Jonah's mission might end in his death is ever present.

This is what makes Jonah's episode within the "belly" or "inward parts" (*mēʿeh*) of the big fish so fascinatingly fantastic. Not only is Jonah swallowed but not digested but this also does not occur even over the course of three days and three nights.[277] Another marvel follows: Jonah seems genuinely grateful for being alive! Of most interest here, however, is the language of his psalm, which is laden with cosmological

[274] *Hist.*, 7.188, 8.10-13, 8.118-120.

[275] *Hist.*, 8.13; also cited in Sasson, *Jonah*, 91.

[276] For more on God's dominion over the sea, see F. Stoltz, "Sea," *DDD*, 737-742; note especially the verb *hēṭîl*. This root and its derived forms are somewhat unusual but very strong in meaning; *BDB*, 376-377.

[277] The repetition of the number three is a well-attested meme in folklore from across the world including the Hebrew Bible, which "is especially fond of the number three, resorting to it only slightly less than the number seven." Sasson, *Jonah*, 153.

and mythological allusions to this place in which he finds himself. Jonah refers to being in the "heart of the sea," (*bilbab yammîm,* 2:4), an expression which occurs in an alternate form (*leb-yammîm*) six times in the prophetic pronouncements against Tyre in Ezekiel 27-28 and in a few other texts as *leb-yām* (e.g., Prov 23:34). In conjunction with the "belly" of the fish, these anatomical descriptions are reminiscent of Marduk's triumph over the primordial sea-serpent of watery chaos, Tiamat, from the *Enūma Eliš*:

> When Tiamat opened her mouth to consume him, he drove in the evil wind that she did not close her lips. As the fierce winds charged her belly,[278] her body was distended and her mouth was wide open. He released the arrow, it tore her belly, it cut through her insides, splitting the heart.[279]

In this case, also, we have a hero who is swallowed but not consumed by a sea creature, but, unlike Marduk cutting through Tiamat's internal organs, Jonah relies on God to get disgorge him from the fish.[280] As is the case with the other wondertales, the "no man's land," liminal space, is an area for the protagonist to confront with the primal and visceral aspects of existence.

Even more vivid is the equation of Jonah's predicament with the "belly of Sheol" (*beṭen šeʾôl*), a unique construction within attested Hebrew literature. The conception of Sheol is not easy to reconstruct but to generalize we may say that it is the chthonic realm of the dead, where one descends to after death, and is connected with the grave and the

[278] Akk. *kar-ša-ša*. Though not a cognate of *mēʿîm, karšu* is a very close approximation in meaning for both specific organs (belly, womb, etc) and for a part of the lower body in a more general sense; "*karšu*," *CAD* 8.223-225.

[279] *ANET,* 67; "her insides" (*qer-bi-šá*) and "heart" (ŠÀ-*ba*) reinforce the visceral imagery of this passage. Composite text adapted from Philippe Talon, *The Standard Babylonian Creation Myth: Enūma Eliš* (SAACT, 4; Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2005).

[280] God is consistently depicted in the Hebrew Bible as having the power to placate the sea and its creatures. See, e.g., Job 26:12, Pss 74:13, Pss 89:9.

underworld.[281] This area was conceived of as being underneath the earth's surface, underneath both the continental land mass, the sphere of human activity, and the oceans surrounding it.[282] There are several notable parallels with the netherworlds of other peoples, owing perhaps to cultural diffusion, but Sheol signifies a very unique cultural construct as well. In the Hebrew Bible it is seldom described directly but is often used metaphorically for despair or a place beyond God's control.[283] As a domain of the dead Sheol is the great equalizer, a place to where all of the dead go "no matter what their earthly social status or spiritual condition."[284] Thus to be in the "belly of Sheol" is tantamount to being stripped of all standing in the social order, the divestment of which is a critical function of liminality.

Jonah's placement in the "big fish" puts him in a world completely unfamiliar to him and the story's audience, a place intended to evoke shared cultural virtues that affirm his status as a hero. As we saw with the Lugalbanda narrative and "The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor," the protagonist is stranded and on the brink of death in "no man's land" when his transformation begins. Thus in spite of Jonah's efforts to throw his mission off-course by going to a foreign land in the opposite direction he still proceeds

[281] Theodore J. Lewis, "Dead, Abode of the," *ABD* 2.101-105.

[282] The Hebrew notion of oceanic geography was likely very similar to that of the Mesopotamians, from whom so many Hebrew ideas were adapted. Mesopotamian texts consistently evince the belief that the surface land mass of the earth was surrounded by a cosmic ocean that reached to all of the earth's ends. For a treatment on this point, see Wayne Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography* (MC 8; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1998), 325-330.

[283] Lowell Handy suggests that the Jonah story reflects changing attitudes about Sheol in this respect: "In Jonah it is clear that Yahweh can command even the region of Sheol…most biblical passages presume that the dead are beyond Yahweh's realm;" *Jonah's World*, 39.

[284] Sasson, *Jonah*, 171; cf. Eccl 9:10: "Whatever you may find in your palm to do, do with all of your strength, for there is no action, no reasoning, no knowledge, and no wisdom in Sheol, where you are going."

along the course of a *rite de passage* although it will be again diverted, this time finally and irrevocably, by the prophet's failings.

4.2.4 "Dry land"

Following the ordeal inside the belly of the "big fish" Jonah is regurgitated upon "the dry land" (*hayyabbāšâ*, 2:11), a place like that the sailors had so furiously tried to reach during the storm at sea (1:13). If the fish's belly is a "no-man's land" one interpretation may be that Jonah has reemerged into the human world by setting down upon "dry land," but this place is neither qualified nor identified. On the other hand, in tandem with the cosmological implications of Jonah's episode at sea we may see symbolic significance in the use of the term *yabbāšâ*. The most conspicuous use of this term in Hebrew scriptures occurs in "first" creation story, Genesis 1:9-10, as a fundamental component of Hebrew cosmography:

> *wayyōmer ʾĕlōhîm yiqqāwû hammayim mittaḥat haššāmayim ʾel-maqôm ʾeḥad wětērāʾeh hayyabbāšâ wayĕhî-kēn wayyiqrāʾ ʾĕlōhîm layyabbāšâ ʾereṣ ûlmiqwēh hammayim qārāʾ yammîm wayyarʾ ʾĕlōhîm kî-ṭôb*
>
> God said, "Let the water beneath the heavens be gathered to a single place, that the dry land may appear, and so it was. And God called the dry land "earth" and the gathering of the waters he called "sea." And God saw that it was good.

This understanding of *yabbāšâ* conforms neatly with Jonah's transformative process since rites of passage are frequently articulated as a rebirth or a new creation while in the liminal state. Moreover, the use of this term here preserves the literary congruence of the third scene and the first scene since this word parallels with its earlier occurrence (1:9) and God's repeated directive comes again while Jonah is on *terra firma*. However brief this description is, we may see this as another liminal stage in Jonah's transition back to

the human world from the chaotic sea.[285] Previous attempts to locate where Jonah has landed miss the point inasmuch as Jonah's location is not a matter of real geography; he is still in a place where reality is not comprehensible to human beings.[286]

4.2.5 Nineveh

Though it had existed since at least the late Uruk period, Nineveh had apparently been a relatively small and unimportant place until the neo-Assyrian period when Assurnasirpal II (reigned 883-859 BCE) commissioned the city's expansion. But the reign of Sennacherib (reigned 704-681 BCE), saw the city rise from minor cultic center to administrative capital of the Assyrian Empire.[287] This king launched an aggressive building campaign during which the city increased dramatically in size and bureaucratic capacity. Though Sennacherib was assassinated by his sons (2 Kgs 19:36-37), the city's expansion continued and Nineveh remained the capital of the Assyrian kings until it fell to a joint Median and Babylonian army in 612 BCE.[288] City planning for the Assyrian monarchy was an exercise in grandeur; the enclosed city lay on an area of about 750 hectares, replete with carvings and statuary of Assyrian royal iconography. Sennacherib's palace alone had a main axis of nearly 500 meters, and he and his successors outfitted the city with numerous aqueducts, gardens, parks, and other

[285] The term *yabbāšâ* is used in other liminal movements in Hebrew scriptures such as when the Israelites cross the "Sea of Reeds" (Ex 14) to leave Egypt and, later, enter into Canaan by crossing the Jordan (Josh 4:22). In terms of religious psychology *yabbāšâ* may mean more than simply "dry land."

[286] For an overview of opinions on Jonah's landfall, see Sasson, *Jonah*, 220-221.

[287] J.E. Reade, "Ninive (Nineveh)," *RLA* 9.5/6 (2000): 388-433.

[288] There is sufficient evidence to suggest that Elamites and other peoples were present at the city's sacking as well. As attested to in the Hebrew Bible, the Assyrians made many enemies who gladly joined forces against their common foe; J.E. Reade, "Ninive (Nineveh)," *RLA* 9.5/6 (2000): 388-433.

engineering marvels which expanded Nineveh dramatically.[289] This reputation preceded the city, and the hyperbolic statement of Nineveh's size in the book of Jonah conforms to the expectation that Assyrian civil engineering was of a fantastic scale.

The author(s) of the Jonah story have no apparent first-hand experience of the city, suggesting that it was already in ruins by the time the Jonah story was formed. The anonymity of the "King of Nineveh," which it should be noted is not an actual title of the Assyrian kings, reinforces the folkloric conventions of this narrative. Historicized details like this would only potentially undercut the carefully constructed atmosphere of the folktale. What is more germane for the narrative's purposes is the symbolic representation of Nineveh. "For the Israelites of the seventh century Nineveh was the capital of their worst nightmare as the political center of the empire in which they were absorbed."[290] Long after the city itself had fallen, Nineveh was still remembered as a focal point for the hostile socio-political agenda of the Assyrian rulers.[291]

Assyria was well-known to the biblical writers owing to that nation's program of expansion during the early first millennium BCE. But aside from the brief mention of Nineveh in Gen 10:11-12, the city of Nineveh itself does not appear much until the prophetic books, a period coinciding with that city's preeminence as the Assyrian capital.[292] In Hebrew texts the city is frequently the subject of excoriation or a paragon

[289] David Stronach and Kim Codella, "Nineveh," *OEANE* 4:144-148.

[290] Handy, *Jonah's World*, 33.

[291] Compare, for example, Nineveh with the favorable description of Persian Shushan (Susa) in the book of Esther. Also a world capital of a mighty empire, the spin is different because of the Persians' more relaxed social policy. Incidentally, Susa had been leveled itself by Ashurbanipal in 647 BCE.

[292] The foundation of the city is attributed to Nimrod, of the Hamites.

of iniquity. The book of Nahum, in particular, takes an antagonistic stance towards the city and foretells its destruction:

> What has become of that lions' den, that pasture of great beasts, where lion and lion's breed walked, and lions cub – with none to disturb them? [Where is] the lion that tore victims for his cubs and strangled for his lionesses, and filled his lairs with prey and his dens with mangled flesh? (Nah 2:12-13)[293]

Zephaniah 2:13-15 also strongly condemns the city for its irreverent pride. Thus the stunning and instant reversal of its king to the uninspired, one-sentence prophesy of a foreigner underscores that the story is still operating in a world of fantasy.

Although Jonah has returned from his isolation literally he has not returned figuratively. Nineveh in its repentance allegorically represents the ideal for Israel: a people who recognize their iniquity and take strong steps to live in accord with God's directives, much as the sailors' devotions turned to Israel's God while Jonah stands aloof on the ship's deck. Nineveh in this story is a parallel to Israel, not what it is but what it *could* and *should* be. Jonah's failure to recognize and interface with that that reality is at the heart of his misshapen transformation.

4.2.6 "East of the City"

After coming so close reemerging from the hinterlands in his journey of prophetic development, Jonah instead withdraws from Nineveh and goes out "east of the city" further away from both Nineveh and Israel (4:3). The site of Nineveh is bordered on its west by the Tigris River, but the easterly direction of Jonah's movement from the city

[293] JPS translation; the lion is known in Mesopotamian iconography as a common symbol for the Assyrian king, though we know it had been appropriated by the Judean and other courts as well.

was surely chosen for its symbolic value. André and Pierre-Emmanuel LaCocque note the psychological symbolism of the west-east in this story:

> Jonah's flight to the west is probably to be interpreted in parallel with many popular legends as a plunging into darkness. One can find confirmation of this in the awakening of Jonah's conscience at dawn (4:7, Italics theirs), while he sits to the east of Nineveh (4:5) under the blowing of an east wind (4:8).[294]

Yet if Jonah's placement here results in an "awakening" of his conscience his arousal is strikingly unlike Lugalbanda's divinely inspired revitalization at dawn. In an ironic twist, Lugalbanda's epiphany at the eastern horizon of his world, nearer to the rising of the sun, is countered here by Jonah's physical placement at the east but his symbolic incongruity with the rising sun. Rather than the eastern horizon being the place where Jonah's fate is "fixed" as it is in the other tales, he now sits, literally and figuratively, in a state of limbo.[295] Jonah is left gazing westwards, much as he had been at the story's beginning, upon the city of Nineveh waiting to see what is going to happen next. Despite all of the space he had traversed, not much has changed within him.

Jonah is greatly pleased by the fantastically rapid growth of the *qîqāyôn*, but just as it is easily withered by the caterpillar's attack, Jonah's misery has been brought about through his failure to recognize that God's true miracle was not the *qîqāyôn* or even the "big fish" from earlier but, rather, the repentance of the Ninevites. Even as Jonah purports to understand this (4:2) he does not demonstrate it through his actions. Thus the Jonah narrative utilizes this *topos* to place Jonah in places of fantastic potential, but the

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[294] LaCocque and LaCocque, *Jonah: A Psycho-Religious Approach to the Prophet*, 79. It is also worth noting that this "east wind" is one of the four objects "appointed" (*wayyĕman*) by God in the text, along with the "big fish" (1:17), the *qîqāyôn* (4:6), and the worm which attacked the plant (4:7). Recall the danger of easterly winds to "Tarshish ships" mentioned above.

[295] For the "Cutting of fates" at the eastern horizon as a feature of Lugalbanda and other Mesopotamian narratives, see Woods, "At the Edge of the World," 213 ff.

narrative re-imagines it as well. The symbolic geography of this story is fraught with parallels to Jonah's own (failed) transformation. At the crucial moment in Nineveh that he seems to be on the verge of reintegrating with humanity he instead fails and withdraws from the city (and human society) completely.

4.3.1 Liminality and *Communitas*

As I have alluded to before, the scene in which Jonah prophesies in the city of Nineveh is pivotal to the development of the rest of the story. How the hero relates to society in light of that society's values is the implicit drive of these tales. Among other reasons, the book of Jonah was developed to help a group shape its self-identity in a pluralistic social world, so it reasons that the story's concerns would include meditation on Israelite selfhood. This is a causative factor in the book of Ezra's composition, and even other texts indirectly contribute to the establishment of group identity. Much of the book of Leviticus, for example, addresses the cultic laws and rituals by which Israelites distinguish themselves from others. The Hebrew texts authorized and communicated the shared beliefs and values of Israelite society. We may think of religious rites as purely ceremonial but, as the anthropologist Mary Douglas has pointed out, ritual is "pre-eminently a form of communication."[296] Thus since the *rite de passage* is a readily recognizable social ritual, its depiction in the Jonah narrative contributes to forming or reinforcing the normative values of Israelite society.

Jonah makes it to Nineveh, another human center, from "no man's land" but he never really leaves the liminal phase in doing so. This is suggested to me by the fact that nowhere at this point in the story is it mentioned that Jonah has a moment of recognition

[296] Mary Douglas, *Natural symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (New York: Pantheon, 1970), 8.

or acknowledgement of humanity after being deprived of all social standing. Victor Turner regards the internal transformation of somebody undergoing a status change as being achieved, in part, through a profound sense of humility, a moment in which that liminoid recognizes and is humbled by their limitations and/or their own insignificance within the cosmos.[297] This event may coincide with the feelings of others in the same liminal state and foster a sense of *communitas* which, we will recall, is the intense feeling of community one in the liminal state may feel for others. Establishing this connection is an indispensible step to renegotiating one's place in the social structure, but Jonah's words and actions in the final scene indicate that he either does not recognize this connection or does not accept it.

The people in the city are performing a social ritual of their own through their sudden belief in God coupled by their public demonstrations and pronouncements of that belief. The narrator emphasizes that everyone in the city "from great to small" (*miggedôlām weʿad-qeṭannām*; 3:5), "man and beast" (*hāʾādām wehabbehēmâ*; 3:8) participate; Jonah's mission is in this sense a complete success. The Ninevites' are so thorough, in fact, that they do not need Jonah for anything else and we notice Jonah's *absence* from this scene. Perhaps Jonah's dissatisfaction comes from this realization, or perhaps he is disappointed that he has not received the accolades he expects comes with the prophetic office (more on this in the following chapter). In any case, he has missed the crux of the story in that God's actions, not his, are important in this situation, and he apparently feels no empathy with the people he was charged with helping to reform. As we are given so little insight into Jonah's psychological state, it would be difficult to

[297] In "rituals of status elevation" the "ritual subject or novice is being conveyed irreversibly from a lower to a higher position in an institutionalized system of such positions…they are subjected to trials and ordeals to teach them humility." Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 167-169.

ascribe to his character more complex emotions. Jonah is better characterized by his reactions to God's actions than by his own self-motivation.[298]

Rather, let us return to the matter Jonah's interactions with other humans, first broached in the last chapter. In comparison with the same juncture in both the Lugalbanda narrative and "The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor," the Jonah story is devoid of the hero's "recognition" of his fellows as social beings. Just as he did not participate in the sailors' ritual actions, Jonah does not share in the Ninevites' rituals to appease God. Ritual "recognises the potency of disorder"[299] and endeavors to prevent disorder by presenting an exemplum of continuity and organization in social structures. Jonah speaks of performing ritual actions at the Temple, but these other ritual actions take place completely outside of this sacred space and still work, thereby effectively ending the monopoly of Temple-centric ritual expression. Jonah's absence at this critical moment means that he is left in an uncertain state, without a place in the new social organization taking form around him.

4.3.2 Whose Story?

By failing to experience the transformative shift in social standing that one would expect in the wondertale morphology that this story adapts, Jonah is revealed to be an

[298] There is potential for more development in this area, and a multitude of works have already constructed psychoanalyses of Jonah. In addition to the aforementioned study by LaCocque and LaCocque, as well as several short excurses by Lifshitz (*The Paradox of Human Experience*, see esp. 75, 171-112, and 207-208), I point the reader to the following overviews: Uwe Steffen, *Jona und der Fisch: Der Mythos von Tod und der Wiedergeburt* (Berlin: Kreuz Verlag, 1982); Michael A. Corey, *Job, Jonah, and the Unconscious* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1995); Jongsoo Park, "The Spiritual Journey of Jonah from the Perspective of C.G. Jung's Analytical Psychology" *Inspired Speech* (ed. John Kaltner; New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 276-285.

[299] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (New York: Praeger, 1966), 94.

antihero.[300] His shortcomings in the story are conditioned in part by the ways in which the author(s) envisioned the heroic (and antiheroic) figures of their cultural past. Just as Lugalbanda's actions make sense in the context of idealized Mesopotamian kingship, Jonah's behaviors operate within a certain venue of cultural values and expectations. Even in this short narrative Jonah is revealed to be capricious or ambivalent. If an allegorical interpretation of his character has merit this makes an easy identification of his representation difficult. Lugalbanda, to cite the example again, represents a social role, and his qualities combine to form a paragon of that role. Jonah, on the other hand, emerges as a symbol of erraticism because of his schismatic behavior with respect to the social structures described in the tale. The question, therefore, becomes: who is Jonah a stand-in for? It is not enough to simply view Jonah's character as a warning of reckless prophecy or as a parody of prophetic hypocrisy; the argument must necessarily be more nuanced because the character himself is.

This returns us to the matter of the social context in which the story was likely composed. The early postexilic period in Yehud seems to have been rife with uncertainty and anxiety about shifting group identities and prerogatives. Contemporary biblical texts imply that an unprecedented program of social conditioning seems to have been advanced by the priestly elite of Jerusalem, as suggested, for example, through the discouragement of intermarriage with "foreigners" by authority figures like Ezra the priest (Ezr 10:10ff.) and Nehemiah (Neh 13:23-27).[301] Moreover, biblical scholarship has maintained that this

[300] Not to be confused with the "false hero" identified by Propp as one of the eight *dramatis personae*, the antihero does not constitute a distinct role but is rather a variation on the hero *persona*.

[301] Daniel Smith, *The Religion of the Landless: The Social Context of the Babylonian Exile* (Bloomington, Ind.: Meyer-Stone, 1989), 64-65; the marriage of Israelites to "people of the land" of mixed genetic stock created a construct of social crisis, for not only was the cult "polluted" but the bloodline itself had been "polluted."

period witnessed the production and revision of a great number of biblical texts, including the foundational history of the Israelites vis-à-vis other peoples as discussed in the Pentateuch.[302] The dearth of non-biblical historical texts describing events in southern Palestine during the first two centuries immediately following the restoration support the notion that the peoples there were in socio-political flux.

Numerous models of the socio-political structures during this time have been recently advocated but these are largely done through correlation to civilizations of whose social histories we have better attestation. Archaeological findings on the matter have also been somewhat inconclusive, though there is strong evidence that Jerusalem itself was much smaller in the Persian period than it had been before the Exile.[303] The most popular opinion formed on this basis is that a group of returnees, a "charter group," were dispatched by the Persians to enact their overlords' administrative policies, and under that aegis they reestablished the Jerusalem cult and dictated the social prerogatives alluded to in the biblical texts.[304] As a corollary to this model, this Jerusalem-based elite are said to have propounded a "pure" form of Yahwism to counter the Samaritan cult that had formed in the north centered at Mt. Gerizim.[305] The Ezra-Nehemiah tradition

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[302] This was articulated by Martin Noth, whose "P narrative was the normative basis" for the rest of the Pentateuch; see Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions* (trans. Bernhard Anderson; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1981), 8-19.

[303] Ephraim Stern, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible. Volume II: The Assyrian Babylonian and Persian Periods 732-332 BCE* (Anchor Bible Reference Library; New York: Doubleday, 2001), 581.

[304] Berquist, Jon L. Judaism *in Persia's Shadow: A Social and Historical Approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 45 ff. A "charter group" is defined as "an elite who moved into new territory, as representative of both the imperial crown and the home religious community. See John Kessler, "Persia's Loyal Yahwists: Power, Identity and Ethnicity in Achaemenid Yehud," 199-206 in. *Judah and Judeans in the Persian Period* (ed. Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006).

[305] "Written into this 'history' was an 'Israel' that promoted their own self-interests and explained their own situation, over against those of others such as the 'people of the land,' that is, those who had remained

suggests that this northern cult was actively trying to derail the formation of Jerusalem-based Yahwism (Ezra 4:1-5) and thereby subvert social development in Yehud.[306] As a result, authors and editors who represented the interests of the Jerusalem elite retrojected negative traits onto the former kingdom of Israel and on its institutions. The only thing that we may say with certainty is that Hebrew texts reflect that there was social and religious discord in multiple quarters because of differing opinions on what constitutes "Israel" and what the nation's correct religious expression should be.[307]

Though the biblical texts seldom detail the situation, based on this reasoning we disavow the so-called "Myth of the Empty Land," the notion that Judah was empty during the Exile.[308] On the contrary, those who had filled the power vacuum among the Judahites remaining after 587 BCE likely viewed the returnees, whose texts not only survived but also formed the core of the biblical texts, as interlopers. It may be as some interpreters have concluded: that the returnees propagated the Jonah story to identify that northern prophet as the personification of all that was wrong with the kingdom of Israel, and applied that as a metaphor for those whose social and religious systems had taken

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behind, and peoples from other regions such as Samaria." Paula McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel* (Library of Ancient Israel; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 182.

[306] Social scientists who study agrarian societies use the terms "devolution" or "regression" to refer to "a situation in which a sociocultural system loses organizational complexity and reverts to a stage of historical development normally characteristic of earlier societies." Other periods of Israelite history witnessed this trend, but the instability of centralized power in early postexilic Yehud, in particular, played a pivotal role in shaping the worldview of the book of Jonah's author(s). For more information on the collapse of agrarian societies, see Stephen K. Sanderson, *Social Transformations: A General Theory of Historical Development* (Oxford, U.K.: Blackwell, 1995), 125-133.

[307] Mark W. Hamilton notes that "Ethnic identity is not a fixed datum but rather a complex series of interlocking characteristics." Religion was a major factor in this identity, but not the only variable. "Who was a Jew? Jewish Ethnicity during the Achaemenid Period" *ResQ* 37 (1995): 102-114. See also, e.g., Hag 1:2 and the book of Malachi.

[308] This term is taken from the title of Hans Barstad's reconstruction of exilic Judah, *The Myth of the Empty Land: A Study in the History and Arcaheology of Judah during the 'Exilic' Period* (Symbolaem Osloenses Fasciculus Suppletorius 28; Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1996).

foothold in the area of Jerusalem prior to their arrival. Another popular interpretation, following Otto Eißfeldt, presumes that universalism in the book of Jonah is an invective against the prideful, nationalistic worldview epitomized by the Ezra-Nehemiah traditions.[309] I not convinced that this view is satisfying; the social context in which this story was formed is so obscure, and the message of the narrative itself is so convoluted, that it seems another option is available:

> A closer look at certain actions and attitudes of Jonah, however, calls for some re-assessment at this point: flight, complaint, frustration stubbornness, self-pity, anger, repeated and strenuous wish for death. Such characterizations do not suggest self-confidence. In fact, self-pity would seem to preclude self-confidence. Moreover, the stubbornness and dogmatism that we see in Jonah reveal a certain *lack* (Italics his) of self-confidence, a basic inner insecurity. This suggests an audience uncertain about their own future (unlike the contemporaries of Amos), and raising serious questions about their relationship to God's ways with the world.[310]

The ability to convey such ambivalence and inner conflict concisely, to be at once mundane and fantastic, serious and whimsical, is what makes this story suitable for depicting a *rite de passage*, which inherently involves extremes and the depiction of uncertain social statuses. Furthermore, the wondertale's free use of fantasy allows for fundamental questions of self to be pursued in abstract terms.

In pluralist postexilic Palestine Israelite social identity was likely forged partly through the *ritualization* of shared origins. In this sense, it is a matter of scale; for the nation Israel had also journeyed to the "belly of Sheol" and been delivered from the fringes only to find that its own composition had changed. This is a drama not of a particular group within Israelite society but of Israelite society itself; every part of the social structure had been fractured by the Exile and, regardless of whether any one person

[309] Otto Eißfeldt, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, 3.aufl. (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1964), 547.

[310] Terrence E. Fretheim, "Jonah and Theodicy," *ZAW* 90 (1978): 227-237.

had come from Babylon or not, all persons were affected in some measure by the socio-political reorganization going on around them.

It is as though Israelite self-definition and the relationship of a people with their God are being redefined through Jonah and his sequence of symbolic acts. The social transformation of the *rite de passage* is an expression of and a response to the anxiety and malaise caused by the social upheaval of postexilic Yehud. Where narrative convention has prepared us to find a hero who knows how to behave we instead find Jonah, and there are more specific ways that the antiheroic Jonah may have been understood in the tale's *Sitz im Leben*. I will address a few of these in the following chapter but here let us conclude briefly with another comparison to the Lugalbanda narrative and "The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor."

In those other wondertales the *topos* of the hero going out into the fantastic world allows their respective narrators to draw attention to the protagonists' pre-liminal social status. Their encounters with the unknown bring out their greatest virtues, and they not only reclaim but surpass their social standing and they pridefully express that transition and profess wonderment at the places they find themselves. The hero is somebody to model oneself after, a person who can overcome outrageous circumstances in a sphere of non-being to not only survive but achieve greatness. Jonah, on the other hand, seems only to view the fantasy of the places he visits with weariness or fear. He welcomes the fantastic happenings around him not with astonishment but with passivity. This attribute of the hero--to view the world with awe--is especially damning to Jonah since this narrative pointedly puts all of the world's wonders under God's direction. Jonah is unimpressed not only by the gravity of his mission but also by the scope of the world he

has seen. This indirect insult to God inevitably figures in the shaping of Jonah's character.

CHAPTER V

JONAH AS FOLK ANTIHERO

5.1.1 The Character of Jonah

The characterization of Jonah in this narrative leaves many questions for us as interpreters. Why is *this* biblical prophet, who is only mentioned once outside of the book of Jonah, selected to be the protagonist of this tale? Why is he a figure whose story conveys complex and, at times, ambiguous social and theological significance? There is of course the chance that the author(s) of the book of Jonah chose this figure at random; more likely, however, is that the very brief mention of the prophet Jonah in 2 Kings was interpreted as an historical figure in need of further narrative development. If this is the case, perhaps something pertaining to Jonah ben Amittai's prophecy in this text (that Israel should militarily expand its borders) was meant to resonate with the audience of the Jonah's story.[311] Yet given the problems in reading the Jonah story in an historical mode alone, this hypothesis seems hardly able to address the issues involved with Jonah's multifaceted characterization.

In this final chapter I will introduce at least three ways that the Jonah story and its protagonist were understood in its postexilic social context. Charting the narrative's structure ultimately has no purpose if we cannot somehow relate those sequences to the

[311] We are unable to exactly date the book of Jonah thus we may only speak of its audience and what they knew of biblical texts in only vague terms. Interpreters presuppose that this tale's audience was a literate elite, and that Israel's history was well-known to them, meaning that the audience would naturally recognize the historical figure and understand the tale in a quasi-historicized context, so Hartmut Gese: "Hörer, bei seiner Kenntnis des bekannten Jona wird eine Geschichte erzählt, zu deren Verständnis natürlich die Kenntnis dieses Jona vorausgesetzt werden muß"; "Jona ben Amittai und das Jonabuch" *TBei* 16 (1985): 256-272; repr. pages 122-138 in *Alttestamentliche Studien* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1991).

Sitz im Leben within which the Jonah story was produced and transmitted. The Jonah story seems to me to inversely mimic a heroic *rite de passage*, and I believe that Jonah is depicted as an antihero. Thus I propose three aspects of the antiheroic Jonah that emerge as a result of his failed *rite de passage*: 1) Jonah as Israelite anti-prophet, 2) Jonah as failed social actor 3) the book of Jonah as failed travel narrative. These interpretations are not mutually exclusive, and there are numerous other interpretations one may draw from my thesis. The cumulative effect of these interpretations for an allegorical reading of the Jonah story is to characterize postexilic society itself as deeply conflicted as the character of Jonah is.

5.2.1 Jonah as Israelite anti-Prophet

Jonah is obviously not the "typical" prophet; his brief prophecy (3:4) is hardly the reason why the narrative bears his name. Gerhard von Rad's *The Message of the Prophets* grants only a single paragraph to Jonah but multiple chapters to the long, oratorical texts of Isaiah and Jeremiah. Even more recent surveys seem comfortable with other "minor" prophetic books while maintaining considerable distance from Jonah.[312] Yet despite the brevity of his oracle, Jonah is among the most effective of Israelite prophets. On the one hand, his stunning success in persuading the Ninevites makes Jonah stand out in contrast to the other prophets of the Hebrew scriptures. In spite of this achievement it is worth noting that Jonah is never called a "prophet" at any point in the

[312] Gerhard von Rad. *The Message of the Prophets* (trans. D.M.G. Stalker; New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 256; trans of *Die Botschaft der Propheten* (Siebenstern Taschenbuch 100/101; Munich: Siebenstern Taschenbuch Verlag, 1967).; rev from *Theologie des Altens Testaments*.

Hebrew narrative.[313] That inference is drawn from the matching the name of our protagonist with "Jonah son of Amittai the prophet" (*hannābîʾ*) from 2 Kings 14:25.[314] In that passage Jonah is depicted as successfully predicting the restoration of Israel's borders by Jeroboam II, leading to the belief that Jonah is to be understood as a nationalistic prophet.[315] This presumption accords with the commonly held view that the book of Jonah espouses a sort of universalism at the prophet Jonah's expense, namely that he is a caricature or an object of derision for the story's audience. But given the wide acceptance of a late date for the book of Jonah, it is remarkable that so many interpreters have presupposed that Jonah's audience would necessarily feel this strongly about a prophet of Israel's distant and remote past. David Payne concludes that the reaction of the Jonah story's audience to the person of Jonah (as it relates to the 2 Kings account) would be neutral: "Audience-reaction to the person of Jonah would have been neither hostile nor strongly sympathetic , but rather, objective and critical--a dispassionate scrutiny of a rather remote character."[316]

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[313] He is referred to as a "prophet" explicitly in later writings, perhaps to clarify his role. He is identified as a "prophet" (Ἰωνᾶ τοῦ προφήτου) in Matt 12:39 for prefiguring Jesus and repeatedly called "prophet" in Josephus "to counteract any doubts readers might have had--given the problem of Jonah's unfulfilled prediction--concerning Jonah's status," Feldman, Josephus' Interpretation of Jonah," 8ff.

[314] Several Hebrew terms have been rendered with English "prophet" including *nābîʾ*, *ḥōzeh*, and *rōʾeh*, the semantic differentiation of which has been the subject of many studies and intense speculation. For our purposes, it suffices to say that *nābîʾ* is the most common and perhaps the most inclusive of the functions ascribed to Israelite prophets. These terms are not interchangeable but are rather subject to forces of geographical, temporal and semantic distribution, the implications of which are in dispute.

[315] The assumption that Jonah ben Amittai represents a nationalistic prophet of the worst kind is now disputed within Jonah studies. Magonet claims that Jonah's role in 2 Kings is not as a nationalistic prophet but only as a "prophet speaking the authentic word of YHWH at a particular moment in history," *Form and Meaning,* 104. David F. Payne seems to affirm this view when we states that, I cannot think that the reader would have held any such view of Jonah on the basis of 2 Kings 14:25, which states no more than what he said came true"; "Jonah from the Perspective of Its Audience," *JSOT* 13 (1979): 3-12.

[316] Ibid., 6.

If we accept that the author(s) of the book of Jonah does not mean to portray Jonah as a nationalist, this leaves the prophet's characterization open to other, more dynamic possibilities of meaning. Though the connection to the earlier prophet is made, nothing of this historical Jonah's personality is transferred to the tale. In contrast to the great prophets of Israel's past, whose stories or writings were already in circulation by this period, Jonah is a blank slate. With this opening, the author(s) of the Jonah story is free to distinguish his character and story from other prophetical stories while still appearing to retain the same narrative spirit in which those stories appeared. One study in particular by Ehud Ben Zvi focuses of the "meta-prophetic" character of both prophet and narrative. As summed up succinctly by the author:

> The hyperbole and drastic reversals of expectation contribute much to the atypical characterization of the prophet. They surely serve as attention getters. Significantly, they raise the very basic question of the *necessary* (Italics his), minimal attributes that a prophet of the monarchic past must have had, within the discourse/s of the postmonarchic Yehud. These atypical features draw attention to, and comment on, the character of the person fulfilling the role of the prophet, and indirectly on the 'office' of prophet, on prophecy and on prophetic books--that is, books in which not only the main human character is a prophet, but also YHWH's word/s are associated directly with prophets. Hence the 'meta-prophetic' character of the book of Jonah.[317]

According to Ben Zvi, the book of Jonah is deliberately unique in almost every respect, from its opening directive, to prophesy in a foreign land, to its "pointing to the (partially) Israelitizable character of the 'foreign.'"[318] The connection to 2 Kings 14 therefore allows the author(s) to reconceptualize Israelite prophecy as it existed in a much earlier period.

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[317] Ben Zvi, *Signs of Jonah*, 88-89; Ben Zvi concludes that the book of Jonah "carries a message of inner-reflection, and to some extent critical self-appraisal of the group within which and for which this book was written. This message leads to, and reflects a nuanced self-image within the literati themselves and an awareness of the problematic character of the knowledge they possessed." ibid., 100. Following Gese, Sasson, and others, Ben Zvi rejects that the book of Jonah is a satire.

[318] Ibid., 98.

Without commentating on Jonah ben Amittai directly, the exceptional role of Jonah in this tale allows us to view this character against the other prophetic folk heroes of the northern kingdom in the Kings narratives: Elijah and Elisha.

Although the book of Jonah is a part of "The Book of the Twelve" its connection to other prophetic texts seems tenuous. This is partly for reasons of form; Jonah is written mostly in prose whereas the other "writing" prophets are all revealed in poetic texts. This fact perhaps reinforces Jonah's connection to the narratives of the books of Kings but there are other reasons to consider the book of Jonah as tied to these sections. Ben Zvi makes several pointed linguistic and stylistic arguments for disconnecting the Jonah story from other postexilic prophetic texts.[319] This is not to say that the Jonah story actually dates to an earlier period than I have argued here but rather that Jonah's author(s) may have deliberately imbued the work with stylistic trademarks resembling those of the books of Kings. Jonah ben Amittai is the first prophet to be mentioned after the death of Elisha (2 Kgs 13:20), and he is the last "true" northern prophet.[320] It stands to reason that the scant memory of this prophet's career, juxtaposed against the traditions of those larger-than-life prophets, provoked curiosity among later Israelites who noticed the disparity. Were the book of Jonah written as an historical account rather than as a fantasy we might deduce that it was intended to fill a perceived gap, perhaps portraying Jonah as a contemptible figure deserving of no further mention in the Kings narrative. This point would also make Jonah into something of a *midrash* but it would also anticipate that Jonah's audience held onto negative preconceptions about Jonah ben

[319] Ibid., 90 ff.

[320] That is to say the last of the classical or "non-writing" northern prophets; Gese, "Jona ben Amittai und das Jonabuch," 258.

Amittai. My sense is that this prophet, as alluded to above, was chosen for this story exactly because so little was known about his historical personage other than that he followed the great prophets Elijah and Elisha.

As it is, there are a few thematic and literary correspondences between the stories of Jonah and Elijah that suggest that the Jonah story is written in the style of the Elijah narrative. These are summed up most succinctly by C.A. Keller, who notes the following: both stories open with the formula *wayyĕhî dĕbar-YHWH* characterizing the protagonists as prophets (Jon. 1:1, 3:1; cf. 1 Kgs 17:2, 17:8, 18:1, 21:17) and use the verb *mnh* denoting God's actions, there are similarities between the prayers of Jonah and Elijah (Jon 4:3-8; cf. 1 Kgs 9:4-14), God's displays sovereignty over forces of nature, the protagonists recover with the help of natural elements, and both prophesy to foreigners.[321] Unlike most of the other Israelite prophets, Elijah, Elisha and Jonah are remembered not for their oracles but for their spectacular deeds. Elijah was dispatched by a word of God to go to the east of the Jordan (1 Kgs 17:2). And Jonah's misery under the *qîqāyôn* is similar to an incident recorded in 1 Kgs 19:2-4. After taking flight for fear of denouncing Ahab's court, Elijah walks for a day into the wilderness and sits under a broom-shrub (*rōtem*). While there, Elijah prays that he might die: "Enough! Now, Yahweh, take my life, for I am not as good as my ancestors" (*wayišʾal ʾet-napšô lāmût wayyōʾmer rabʿattâ YHWH qaḥ napšî kî-lōʾ-ṭôb ʾānōkî mēʾăbōtāy*; 1 Kgs 19:4).[322] And after the crossing of a liminal boundary (the Jordan River) Elijah is elevated (literally) as Elisha is elevated in

[321] Keller, "Jonas. Le portrait d'un prophet," 331.

[322] Cf. the parallel constructions *YHWH qaḥ napšî* with Jon 4:3 and *wayišʾal et-napšô*+the infinitive construct *lāmût* with Jon 4:8. Subsequent to falling asleep under the *rōtem* Elijah awakes, is provided with restorative cakes and water, and walks for forty days and forty nights to the mountain of God. He goes into a cave there where the "word of Yahweh came to him." This incident shares some motifs with the Lugalbanda poems also.

status by his inheritance of his mentor's mantle (2 Kgs 2:15).[323] Though there is not enough known about the book of Jonah's composition history to definitively support the claim that some of the details we find in the Jonah story are adapted from traditions about Elijah and Elisha, the possibility is tantalizing. Nonetheless, the similarities among these prophets helped Jonah's ancient audience to understand the story contextually.

In addition to their miraculous acts Elijah and Elisha are renowned for their ability to forcefully represent the mandates of God, even in counter to the socio-political structures of their period.[324] Both Jonah ben Amittai of 2 Kings and Jonah the protagonist of the book of Jonah are ambiguous in this repsect. Thus in spite of some parallels between Elijah, Elisha, and Jonah, there are indications that the narratives about Elijah and Elisha are appropriately at odds with the Jonah story: Elijah is bold and unyielding, Jonah is diffident; Elijah announces God's initiation and suspension of drought (1 Kgs 17:2-18:1) whereas Jonah is caught off guard by God's stirring up a storm;[325] God hears the voice of Elijah pleading to save a life, but God hears the voice of Jonah bemoaning the preservation of others' lives (though he is concerned for his own life) and then pleading for the taking of his own life (Jon 4:3). Other, smaller plot motifs suggest dissimilarity in parallel constructions. Elijah, for example, is awakened suddenly by the touch of a "messenger" (*malʾāk*; 1 Kgs 19:5-7) but Jonah is awakened suddenly by

[323] In a scene somewhat reminiscent of Jonah, the dichotomy between the river's waters, "divided right and left" and the dry land (here, *khārābâ*) upon which they cross is emphasized.

[324] Maximilian Weber was among the first to offer sociological analysis of prophets and power structures. This paradigm has continued to develop in prophecy studies such that biblical scholars now speak of prophets as "central" (those operating at the royal court) or "peripheral" (those outside, usually against the court) prophets. This division follows Robert Wilson, whose *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1980) remains a standard work for studies on Israelite prophecy.

[325] Later folk traditions strongly associate Elijah with meteorological mayhem: storms, winds, fire from the sky, and so forth on the basis of 1 Kgs 18 and 19:11-2. The contrast between Elijah, who can announce God's control of storms, and Jonah, at whom God "hurls" a storm, is striking.

the brusque message of the ship's captain (Jon 1:6). Elijah is recorded to have performed a great number of miracles and healings. Not only does Jonah not perform any miracles of his own, he seems passive to all of the wondrous things happening around him. Such reversals of the heroic attributes of an important prophetic figure of the ninth century underscore Jonah's shortcomings. The situation is similar with regards to Elisha; the Jonah narrative appeals to these stories but the author(s) of the book of Jonah decline to fashion Jonah as a similarly praiseworthy figure. Jonah is the alter ego of these prophetic folk heroes, and he embodies the antithesis of their greatest virtues.

Rather than viewing the Jonah story as an invective against a particular prophet or the long-defunct northern kingdom, I believe that a reasonable alternative exists when we take into account the transformative potential of the *rite de passage*. Both Elijah and Elisha are compliant with the directives of God, and God directs each of them (through ongoing communication) through a sequence of events as agents and mouthpieces. In this respect Elijah and Elisha both develop their prophetic careers through a sequence of episodes not unlike a *rite de passage*. Elijah, for example, is directed multiple times to "go" (*lēk*; 1 Kgs 17:2, 18:1, 19:15, 21:18) or "go down" (*rēd*; 2 Kgs 1:15) followed by another form of that same verb as he moves from one place to another, one episode to the next. Jonah resists from the very start and moves in the wrong direction; *qûm lēk* (1:2) is followed by *wayyāqom librōaḥ* (1:3). Only later (3:2-3) is *qûm lēk* complemented by actions denoted by *ylk*. One of the purposes of these constructions from a narrative standpoint may be to draw contrasts between Jonah and these northern folk-hero prophets.

5.2.2 Jonah as Failed Social Actor

Another way to understand Jonah's failed *rite de passage* is to employ a metaphor of a social actor missing his cue. As mentioned in Chapter Three of this study, commentators have often referred to the internal divisions of the Jonah narrative as "acts" and "scenes." We speak of *dramatis personae* and backdrops of action in literature as though we are watching actors on a stage, performing actions. Just as a play performed on the stage has a sequence of events leading to denouement, the Jonah narrative has a distinct sequence, one stage leading to the next, of ritualized actions and reactions performed by Jonah. Yet by the end of the narrative, Jonah is in no better a position than he had been at its opening, and his character lacks the critical dynamism we associate with theater.

The theater metaphor is apt for describing the Jonah narrative because of the melodramatic performances that Jonah himself undertakes. The non-Israelites in the Jonah narrative are not *dramatis personae* but are merely stock characters, thus the fact that they recognize and meet God's demands means that the dramatic spotlight stays on them only briefly and returns directly to Jonah and his failure to conform to those standards. So far as dramatic value is concerned, Jonah does not disappoint; the prophet himself encapsulates the indecision and ambivalence of Israelite selfhood in the postexilic period. Jonah's inability to grow and transform to meet the changing circumstances of this drama speaks to these matters.

Commentators have long argued that the book of Jonah advocates universalism in contrast to the religious and genetic exclusivity of Israel as articulated in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. The seemingly favorable portrayal of foreigners, the sailors and the

Ninevites, as respecting the power of the God of Israel is ostensibly the reason for this observation. In truth, the matter is more complicated, and the contention that the Jonah story champions universalism is difficult to support through direct evidence.[326] Jonah's relationships with these minor characters are more indicative of his own failings than any virtues ascribed to the non-Israelites in the story. After all, the narrator is silent on this point, preferring instead to let the audience imply that ethnic stereotypes are being challenged within the story.

This constant focus on Jonah allows weaknesses in his personality to be exposed, and Jonah is consequently revealed to be a poor communicator. Communication between persons in social systems underpins the sociological perspective of dramaturgy pioneered by Erving Goffman in his 1959 work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.[327] In Goffman's view, a human "actor" presents himself to other humans based upon a set of culturally encoded norms and expectations, standards which are negotiated upon from a number of different. The goal from the actor's perspective is to be viewed through his face-to-face interactions in any way he wishes--irascible, noble, or unpredictable, and so forth. To illustrate how this applies to Jonah's social situation, let us look at Jonah's "performances" in terms of ritual actions in the story. This is appropriate because ritual is, ultimately, a form of social communication.

Of the four scenes in the Jonah story three of these end with the performance of some ritual action.[328] In the first instance, the fearful sailors each cry out to their own

[326] See R.E. Clements, *The Purpose of the Book of Jonah* (VTSup 28; Leiden: Brill, 1975), 16-20.

[327] New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1959. I mention Goffman here because it is he who first used the theater metaphor to describe symbolic interactionism in human behavior.

god while Jonah sleeps in the hold below. He is awakened by the captain to participate in this action, but the narrative mentions no such gesture on Jonah's part. Jonah participates in the casting of lots (itself a ritual action) and when the blame is placed upon him he explains that "I am a Hebrew" (1:9). In this perceptual sphere of socio-political organization this is a significant descriptor of self, and the sailors' onset of terror causes them to turn to Jonah for a solution to make the sea calm (1:11). Rather than explain why this storm has befallen them Jonah offers himself as a sort of sacrifice, explaining "because I know that it is on my account that this great storm is upon you." (*kî yôdēaʿ ʾānî kî bešellî hassaʿar haggādôl hazzeh ʿalêkem*; 1:12). This seemingly selfless act actually has nothing to do with God; it is the sailors who cry out (1:14) and make vows and sacrifices to God (1:16). Jonah has retreated again, failing to participate.

At the end of the second scene, at the conclusion of his intricately constructed psalm, Jonah says, "I will offer sacrifice to you. What I have vowed, I will perform." (*ʾezbeḥā-llak ʾašer nādartî ʾašallēma*; 2:10).[329] Once again, this ritual action is framed as a failure. Not only is his newfound piety ultimately revealed to be false but Jonah's offering of his own life in the parallel sequence in the fourth scene (4:3, 4:9) is hardly the ultimate sacrifice that Jonah intimates. The third scene is notable especially because of Jonah's absence in all of the ritual actions described. The Ninevites' repentance is so thorough that even beasts will be covered in sackcloth (3:8) but Jonah is still excluded. Inasmuch as ritual behaviors are "social dramas," public displays in which societal

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[328] Carroll, "Jonah as a Book of Ritual Responses," 261 ff.; as described by Carroll, these three actions are, 1) the sailors offering a sacrifice to God and making vows (1:16), 2) Jonah's psalm and promise of sacrifice (2:9), and 3) the Ninevites' repentance and wearing of sackcloth (3:6-8).

[329] It is interesting to note that the action of Jonah's address to God uses the same form as his "prayer" from chapter two (2:2), *wayyitpallēl*. Even though similar language is used in this section corresponding to Jonah's speech in the second chapter, the context is radically different; a change in the dynamic between these *dramatis personae* has clearly occurred.

conflicts and prerogatives are played out, we see that Jonah's failure to participate in these actions represents that he remains outside of social organization.[330]

Social dramas signify a "great collective gesture" of society since they enact and reinforce that society's ideals, and participants who fulfill prescribed roles in such rituals are like actors who affect the plot and of a theatrical performance.[331] Jonah's intention to represent himself as a harbinger of God's destruction fails; for the prophet fails to realize that God's purpose was to redeem Nineveh and not to destroy it. In spite of the effectiveness of his message, Jonah has failed to reconnect with humanity and his subsequent sulking in an area to "east of the city," away from others, means that Jonah finds himself in a role he does not want, and he is superfluous to the drama playing itself out in the city. The drama has, essentially, gone on without him after his announcement to repent.

5.2.3 The Book of Jonah as False Travel Narrative

In the ancient world there was a certain measure of prestige attached to persons in the ancient world that had travelled beyond their own homelands. The Greek and Roman intellectual traditions relied heavily upon personal travelling experiences as a foundation for higher levels of education.[332] Presupposing that the Jonah story's postexilic audience was a literate elite, it makes sense that this audience was familiar with similar travel narratives that taught them about the world outside of Yehud. Hebrew narratives

[330] Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1974), 37 ff.

[331] Jack David Eller, *Introducing Anthropology of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2007), 132.

[332] Using the example of the Greek geographer Pausanias, makes the point that in this tradition knowing the cultural geography of a land was more important than that land's topographical features. The educated elite were expected to have a working knowledge of these matters; see *Pausanias: Travel Writing in Ancient Greece* (Classical Literature and Society; London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 2007), 32-43.

depicting or otherwise mentioning international travel appear frequently but such expeditions are undertaken only by people who were adequately prepared for the inherent dangers of ancient travel. The areas between settlements at the periphery were lawless places where one might expect attacks. Roads were considered unsafe for the unprepared such that biblical Hebrew employs a metaphor for safe roadways in the wilderness.[333] Though he sets out to go even further than any other Israelite had gone (to Tarshish), Jonah is apparently unaware or unconcerned of the potential dangers. Moreover, the Jonah story betrays no recognition of the fact that the breadth of these travels are unusual or remarkable; two of ancient literature's greatest heroes--Gilgamesh ("He who saw the deep") and Odysseus ("who saw the towns and learned the customs of many men")[334]--are celebrated for their travels and triumphs, but the author(s) of this tale insert no such praise for Jonah.

Travel literature is an ancient form; it interfaces with a number of more specific themes including the descriptive (e.g., Strabo's *Geographica*), the travelogue (e.g., Pausanias' *Periegesis*), the heroic (e.g., Homer's *Odyssey*) and the whimsical (e.g., Lucian of Samosata's *True History*). The book of Jonah is not an example of travel literature *per se* since the author(s) invest very little in describing the places the prophet visits, and the Jonah story lacks the aesthetic we see in travel narratives. The content of the story and the fact that travel and movement are primary themes suggest, on the other hand, that the tale was intended for those who knew something of international travel and perhaps of travel literature. An interesting aspect of the Jonah story in this regard is that

[333] E.g., Isa 40:3. Abraham, to cite another example, is repeatedly said to have servants and guards at his disposal to protect his considerable property during his sojourns (e.g. Gen 13:1-7; Abraham and Lot's "marching in stages" may be seen partly as a security measure).

[334] *Od*. 1.3

Israel's experiences moving into and out of Canaan is a dominant theme of Hebrew literature. Jonah himself, as an Israelite, is a symbol of a people whose self-identity had been forged by the memories of sojourning following the Exodus from Egypt and the Exile in Babylon. As the *rite de passage* in this topos includes actual travel over physical space and is a process of growth and transformation, it stands to reason that the Jonah story delivers commentary on Israel's history and confused social situation allegorically through Jonah's travels.

The Jonah story's emphasis on travel and distant lands accords well with the hodological conception of space introduced in Chapter One. We will recall that hodological space is the non-quantifiable, mental space between two points as experienced by persons moving along "paths" between those two loci. When the protagonist encounters the unfamiliar or the dangerous on his journey an interaction between Jonah and the Other results in a valence between them and the creation of hodological space. Over the course of this journey these spaces are experienced sequentially, one at a time, and thus in a hodological frame of reference the end point of a journey is directional (as opposed to fixed). As this is a psycho-social construct of spatiality rather than a mathematical one, we see that the demarcation of spaces and the distances between is perceptual and not empirical. In the Jonah story the Other is encountered by Jonah fairly frequently, represented by physical environs and the entities that populate those spaces. Jonah's progression is thus represented as a sequence of stages, and each encounter with the Other leads him towards progressively unfamiliar spaces before he enters a subjectively perceivable space, i.e., the city of Nineveh.

The far point of his disassociation from familiar space sees Jonah in the belly of the "big fish," but as he transitions along this path he is met with human characters who are at once familiar and foreign. The story's depiction of multiethnic relations through these encounters underscores Jonah's transition to liminal space and his near-return from it because ethnic identity (both of the characters and Jonah) is a principal concern of the story's author(s).

A common presumption is that at the time the book of Jonah was produced, Israelite ethnicity had been in flux for many years, and that identity was no longer tied to a particular land as it had been. Contemporary biblical texts, especially Ezra and Nehemiah, espouse a particularly slanted view of the social situation preceding, during, and following the deportees' return to Yehud.[335] These narratives presume that when the "returnees" arrived from Babylon that they alone reconstituted the social, political, and religious structures of Yehud. Though people were living in these areas during the Exile (the "people of the land") these peoples were accorded no legitimacy as heirs to Judahite traditions. This "Myth of the Empty Land,"[336] discussed earlier, is linked conceptually to several themes we observe in postexilic biblical texts. The Assyrian deportation in 722 BCE and the Exile at its various stages had left persons of Hebrew/Israelite/Judahite genetic stock all over the Eastern Mediterranean world.[337]

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[335] That is to say the Persian satrapy proximate to the preexilic territory of Judah. The demography and political borders of this entity remain somewhat unclear, though this has been the subject of several recent studies. See especially Charles E. Carter, *The Emergence of Yehud in the Persian Period: A Social and Demographic Study*, JSOTSup 294 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), essays in Lipschits Oeming, eds. *Judah and Judeans in the Persian Period*, and essays in Yigal Levin, ed. *A Time of Change: Judah and Its Neighbours in the Persian and Early Hellenistic Periods* (London: T&T Clark, 2007).

[336] Historical "myth" as a social construct is distinguished from myth as a literary or religious category. On this point see Bob Becking, "'We All Returned as One!': Critical Notes on the Myth of the Mass Return," 3-18 in Lipschits and Oeming, eds., *Judah and Judeans in the Persian Period*, esp. 6-7.

Thus in this context one theme that pertains to the social world of Jonah's audience is the concept of the "remnant." This is particularly noteworthy because the biblical notion of the remnant signifies restoration and transformation. The phrase "remnant of Israel" (*šĕʾār yiśrāʾēl*) first occurs in Isa 10:20-22 to describe those who will return to the land following the Assyrian conquest, though the idea is picked up later to refer to the faithful who survive the Babylonian siege (e.g., Isa 37:4) and those who return to the land after the Exile (e.g., Ezra 9:15, Zeph 2:7-9). The rejuvenation of Israel extolled by such texts contrasts pointedly with the imagery of Jonah sitting to the east of Nineveh under a withering plant under the hot sun. Compare, for instance, the specific imagery used within the book of Zechariah with chapter four of the book of Jonah:

> Thus said the Lord of Hosts: 'Although it will be incomprehensible in the eyes of the remnant of this people in those days, is it also impossible in my eyes?' says the Lord of Hosts. Thus said the Lord of Hosts: 'I will deliver my people from the lands of the east and from the lands of the west. And I will bring them home and settle them in the area of Jerusalem; they will be my people and I their God in truth and justness.' (Zech 8:6-8)

> 'For what it (the remnant) sows shall prosper: the vine will give its fruit, the land will give its bounty and the sky will give its dew. I will bestow all of these things upon this remnant of the people.' (Zech 8:12)

Thus while Israel purportedly will enjoy a peaceful existence after its roaming about, Jonah does not share in this reward because he has not returned home in neither a literal nor metaphorical sense. With respect to such a worldview, Jonah's travails seem especially pointless as concerns his social standing since nothing has changed for him.

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[337] During this period "Israelite" and "Judahite" identity seems to be more fluid than it had been in the past. This is evinced especially by the Israelite fortress at Elephantine, in Egypt. These Aramaic-speakers were evidently mercenaries who had been in Egypt since the seventh century BCE and practiced into the Persian period their own form of Yahwism alongside worshiping indigenous gods such as Khnum. Their genetic stock was likely an admixture of several previously distinct groups.

I believe that this message is only reinforced by Jonah's failure to experience *communitas* while in Nineveh; his refusal to accept the Ninevites as deserving of mercy and his subsequent self-exile testify to his skewed perception of the social organization of the world in which he finds himself. Rather than finding the Ninevites to be entirely alien to him Jonah realizes that these Ninevites also have a relationship with God.[338] Instead of describing a heathenish people and city the narrator describes what could have been an Israelite city. The sailors and Ninevites aptly exhibit the ability to modify their behavior in a way laudable by the Hebrew prophets, even outside of the sacred space of the Jerusalem Temple. Unlike those travel narratives in which the inhabitants of foreign lands follow their own eccentric customs, ultimately this story reveals foreign people and destinations as not so different in this way we would expect. The learned Jerusalem elite who interpreted this story would find this to be a most unusual travel narrative; Jonah emerges as the foreigner and an embodiment of profound confusion, a personage into whom the author(s) of the narrative poured conflicting images of the indigenous, the foreign, and the "remnant."

5.3.1 Conclusions

My purpose has been to show that the Jonah story may be open to many further possibilities for interpretation once we consider the impact of the *rite de passage*. Previous commentators have overlooked the *rite de passage* as a shaping influence upon

[338] The final divide between God and Jonah seems to be on this point; Jonah feels privileged because of his relationship with God. As noted by Ze'ev Haim Lifshitz, "God's answer to Jonah: Free choice comes in response to Divine personal attention. Free choice is an expression of man's responsibility to one's fellowman, to the world: it is a man's link to God, and through this link -- man's obligation to the world--an obligation to take on responsibility for the development of the world and for its preservation."; Lifshitz, *The Paradox of Human Existence: A Commentary on the Book of Jonah* (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1994), 229.

the Jonah narrative mainly because there is expectation that such metamorphosis concludes *successfully*. In the Jonah story, however, this is emphatically not the case. Moreover, the *rite de passage* is such a fundamental construct in the makeup of social systems that it is usually intimated or described only in figurative terms. Because this process is universal yet obscured by symbols and archetypes, folkloristics is a useful avenue for interpretation. As I mentioned at the outset, this is but one method; other methods, such as the literary aesthetic approach (e.g., Trible), the psychological approach (LaCoque and LaCoque) or theological perspective (e.g., Lifshitz) are equally valid, and my intention has not been to proffer my own views as paramount but only to open up some perspectives on how to interpret the Hebrew Bible.

I have endeavored to describe how the complicated structure of this little story transforms the sequential stages of a *rite de passage* by presenting the Jonah narrative alongside the Lugalbanda narrative and "The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor." My goal has been to demonstrate that in this context we may discern a familiar *topos* shared by all of these stories. I believe that the affinities between these two narratives and the Jonah narrative have been neglected heretofore because of the dissimilarity of their literary forms. It should be clear by this point that the book of Jonah defies genre classification; there are aspects which we may say are "like" those of a folktale or "similar to" facets of a *midrash*, but, ultimately, the text, like many others from the ancient Near East, is wholly unique. Propp's syntagmatic method of analysis, while limited in applicability, is useful for our reading of the Jonah narrative because of its emphasis on the wondertale proceeding along a prescribed sequence of events. Notwithstanding the obvious problems in equating the form analyzed by Propp with those discussed here, I maintain

that his hermeneutic may be adapted and redirected for this purpose because of the imaginativeness of the subject matter. Propp's study of *dramatis personae* and functions also is relevant to the Jonah story because of the changing and ambivalent nature of the relationship between Jonah and God; throughout the narrative the focus keeps returning to this relationship. The use of folkloric *topoi* and motifs to express this suggests that the story has intended meaning for all persons within and sectors of society as it existed at that time.

The Jonah story shares a number of features with these other stories despite their varied origins but perhaps none is more important than the *topos* of the hero who sets out for a distant land but gets mired in "no man's land" instead. This underpinning allows the story's audience to see the hero's geographical location and condition as a metaphor for his transformation of status culminating in a *rite de passage*. Among people in antiquity, conceptions of physical space and topographical boundaries differed radically from our own, and the penetration on such areas (in one form or another) is frequently the subject of adventures surviving from antiquity. Jonah's adventure takes a different tack inasmuch as his outcome is unlike those of Lugalbanda or the "sailor," even despite the many correspondences between these tales. I have alluded to several possible purposes for the author(s)' having done this, but what is clear is that Jonah's character is the embodiment of profound disorder. There is not enough information to warrant a claim that the author(s) were familiar with these particular narratives but it nevertheless appears that both author(s) and audience were familiar with these structural elements in this sequence such that they were understood in the story's contemporary context.

Ultimately, the Jonah story conveys an important meaning that belies the quirky, even whimsical, setting of that narrative. Although the story surely had value as entertainment also, we see that in Jonah two virtues, recognition and acceptance, are wanting. Each of these qualities are multifarious, and the interplay between different aspects of recognition and acceptance reveal why Jonah barely misses the mark in some ways but dramatically fails in others. Even as he recognizes that God is "a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abundant in kindness, having compassion concerning an injury" (*ʾēl-ḥannûn weraḥûm ʾerek ʾappayim werab-ḥesed weniḥām ʿal-hārāʿâ*; 4:2) he fails to absorb its implications. And while he fails to recognize or share in the humanity of the Ninevites he nonetheless delights greatly in a worthless plant. Jonah's story is compelling because he is the personification of inconsistency, especially as compared to the staid Lugalbanda or to the Egyptian sailor; but Jonah can also be frustrating for his audience. Perhaps this is the message that the author(s) of this story wished to convey to Israel in both the story's content and structure; that in order to adapt to an ever-changing world people had to learn to discard culturally conditioned assumptions and trust in God's direction. Their intentions may not have been so lofty, but they did succeed in providing a very good story.

APPENDIX A: OTHER FAR-DISTANT LANDS IN BIBLICAL LITERATURE

Numerous examples from ancient Near Eastern literature suggest that all of those early civilizations maintained ethnocentric conceptions that were modified by geographic space. Even though cultural contacts were established through diplomacy and the trade of commodities from the earliest periods of recorded history, the great distance and topographic barriers between peoples sometimes fostered a sense of mystery or fantasy about one another. The traits of especially distant foreign lands are sometimes caricatured in folkloric accounts by a referent culture, thus making it unclear to us whether there is some reality behind it. Also complicating matters are that these foreign lands are not uniformly understood within the referent culture or shift over time, as is the case with the Mesopotamians' descriptions of Makkan and Meluḫḫa.[339] What all of these places in ancient Near Eastern folklore have in common is that some liminal boundary separates them from the referent culture, and, in a sense, endows them with a sense of fantasy. The distance between the referent culture and the fantastic foreign land is a place of non-being or danger--a sea, a desert, or a desolate mountain range, for example.[340]

There are several lands mentioned in biblical texts whose precise location and/or attributes are obscure to us. Most of these which are clearly outside of the land of Israel are close enough to these are not fantastic or greatly mysterious in their descriptions;

[339]These lands, sometimes conflated, sometimes placed at opposite ends of the world, are an apt example of what I mean: "While generally the two names represent true historical and geographical entities, at times they assume a quasi-legendary aura of lands situated in far-away corners of the world." I. J. Gelb. "Makkan and Meluḫḫa in Early Mesopotamian Sources" *RA* 64 (1970): 1-8. See also Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, 328-329

[340] For a classic study on the crossing of liminal areas to reach Tilmun (also Dilmun), Makkan, and Meluḫḫa in Mesopotamian sources see Wolfgang Heimpel, "Das Untere Meer" *ZA* 77 (1987), 22-91.

these include Shinar (e.g., Gen 14:1) and Uz (e.g., Job 1:1), two lands which seem to have been relatively close in proximity to Israel. On the other hand, there are other locales mentioned that we can categorize alongside Tarshish as being distant enough from Israel so as to exist beyond the range of Israelite geographic knowledge. These places were seemingly at the world's edges by Israelite topographic reckoning, and legends about them flourished because of their distant locations. In consideration of potential folkloristic study on this spatial construct within biblical studies I offer the lands of Ophir, Sheba, and some of the various nations listed in Ezekiel 27, as places falling within this category. The fact that not much at all was known about these lands distinguishes them from lands such as Egypt in the minds of the Israelite audience, and subsequent generations contrived imaginative folk narratives about their mention.

Ophir (also Uphir): Ophir is mentioned a few times in the books of Kings and Chronicles as a land engaged in the trade of gold and other precious goods with Solomon (I Kgs 9:26-28, 10:11, 10:22). These scant references imply that Ophir had symbolic value to the ancient Israelites as a land of incredible wealth since its placement in the Hebrew Bible clearly aggrandize Solomon's clout as a political player in the region. This is supported by an ostracon found at Tell Qasile recording a transaction of "gold from Ophir to Beth Horon."[341] Ophir was also known as a prominent source of silver for kingdoms in Iron Age Palestine.[342] The name appears as a likely eponym in Gen 10:29 and I Chr 1:23 as a descendant of Joktan, and in subsequent traditions Ophir is inextricably linked with Havilah, another land. These genealogical references are likely

[341] Benjamin Mazar "The excavations at Tell Qasile: Preliminary Report" *Israel Exploration Journal* 1 (1951), 210.

[342] Amihai Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible: 10,000-586 BCE* (The Anchor Bible Reference Library; New York: Doubleday, 1990), 510.

another instance of biblical authors reconciling their contemporary political geography within the authority of their own canon.

The fantastic reputation of Ophir extends into later periods and was likely aggrandized directly from its biblical account. The *Kitāb al-Magāll*, a pseudo-Clementine tract of mysterious origins, mentions that a king named Pharaoh ruled over Saba and annexed Ophir and Havilah. "He built Ophir with stones of gold, for the stones of its mountains are pure gold."[343] In attempting to locate Ophir scholars have naturally focused on places known in antiquity for mines and metallurgy. Martin Noth placed it on the Red Sea, conveniently located for Solomon's fleet at Ezion-Geber[344] and, though more outlandish claims have been made subsequently, this idea has proven to be the most durable and widely accepted.[345]

Saba/Sheba: In a number of respects, Saba is the less mysterious than Ophir from our perspective because we know a great deal about Saba as an historical entity. Two terms in biblical Hebrew which most likely refer to the same land (*sebāʾ* and *šebāʾ*) are used in both absolute and gentilic form in a number of contexts, including ethnography (Gen 10:7), as describing purveyors of fine wares (Ezk 27:22-24),[346] and as describing marauders (Job 1:15). But we know much about this land and its people from extrabiblical textual sources and the finds of modern archaeology. The kingdom of the

[343] This text further aggrandizes biblical accounts of contacts with Saba/Sheba and Ophir to describe, among other things, the gold trade with Ophir and the tradition of female rulers of Saba. A full translation from the Arabic and commentary is available from Margaret Dunlop Gibson, *Apocrypha Arabica* (London: C.J. Clay and Sons, 1902).

[344] Martin Noth. *Könige I* (Neukirchen-Vlyun: Neukirchener Verlag, 1968), 222-223.

[345] See, for example, the connection with the gold of Nubia from Egyptian sources as compellingly argued by Albert Herrmann. *Die Erdkarte der Urbibel* (Braunschweig: Komissionsverlag von Georg Westermann, 1931), 77; a fuller discussion of onomastics and the location of Ophir may be found in D.T. Potts. "Distant Shores: Ancient Near Eastern Trade with South Asia and Northeast Africa" pp. 1451-1463 in *CANE* vol. 3.

[346] It should be noted that Sheba is mentioned alongside Tarshish in this regard.

Sabaeans was located on the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, proximate to modern Yemen. Inscriptions in South Arabian dialects go back at least into the second millennium but the richest sources of socio-political information concern the attempts by the neo-Assyrians to bring the South Arabian tribes, including Sheba, into the Assyrian orbit because of their material wealth.[347] This kingdom's location, on the other side of an inhospitable desert from Palestine, and its ancient ruins fostered all sorts of rumors from European writers who readily associated Sheba/Saba with the Holy Grail, the three magi and the "Queen of Sheba."

The most noteworthy biblical mention of Sheba concerns the visit of the "Queen of Sheba" to King Solomon's court, reported in I Kgs 10 and memorialized in countless incarnations in film, literature, and other cultural references. All of these traditions seem to be spawned from the same account, namely the narrative in I Kgs, but there are some interesting variations to note. Josephus identifies the Queen of Sheba as Nicaule, "Queen of Egypt and Ethiopia."[348] There is a similar, interesting tradition about this visit in a later Ethiopic text, the *Kebra Nagast*.[349] One of the most fascinating aspects of the narrative is how it has engendered so many variations in the folklore of disparate cultures. Something about the fantasy and imagination of this narrative, which is actually

[347] Ephraim Stern. *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible. Volume II: 732-332 BCE* (The Anchor Bible Reference Library; New York: Doubleday, 2001), 296-297.

[348] *Jewish Antiquities*, 6.2, 6.5; Josephus' version is essentially a paraphrased account of the biblical text but the origin of his name for the queen--and the impetus for identification of Sheba with Egypt and Ethiopia--is obscure.

[349] Sometimes hailed as the "National epic of Ethiopia," this Ge'ez text relates how a Queen Makeda visited Solomon, became impregnated by him, and returned to her land to bear a son named Menyelek. This prince returns to Solomon years later to learn about God and kingship but eventually returns to Ethiopia, bringing the Ark of the Covenant with him. *Kebra Nagast: The Queen of Sheba and Her Son Menyelek* (trans. E.A. Wallis Budge; 3d ed.; London: Kegan Paul, 2001).

rather ordinary in terms of the length and detail of the text, has inspired repeated retellings and reinterpretations.

In Quranic tradition the land of Saba is depicted as an edenic place of two gardens of sustenance, but its people had turned away from Allah in "ingratitude" and towards the deceptions of Satan.[350] Its queen in Solomon's time has the name Bilqis (or Balqis) and her kingdom is reported as distant in both space and culture by Solomon's spy, the hoopoe bird: "I have compassed (territory) which you have not compassed, and I have come to you from Saba with true tidings. I found there a woman ruling over them and provided with every requisite; and she has a magnificent throne."[351] This fantastic account is staged as a lesson in religious orthodoxy; Bilqis leads her people in solar worship and requires Solomon's instruction in worship of the true God.[352] Intrigued by this land which symbolizes the inverse of his own, Solomon begins the proselytization of Bilqis. Even in antiquity, the biblical authors' shortage of factual knowledge about the purported encounter of these two rulers and the nature of the queen's land contributed to a growing sense of the fantastic potential of the foreign.

Lands in Ezek 27: It would not be useful to go through all of the lands mentioned in the "ship of Tyre" prophecy individually because their mention is so laconic, but I do include these names here and group them together because the purpose of these mentions is to outline the extent (in all directions) of the geographic world known to the text's author(s). From that perspective, though Tyre may have traded with even the most

[350] Surah 34 (*Saba'*); translations from *The Qur'an* (22d ed.; trans. Abdullah Yusuf Ali; Elmhurst, NY: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an Inc., 2007).

[351] Surah 27(*al-Namal*).22-23.

[352] Surah 27.

distant lands and acquired exotic goods, its extravagance ultimately was the city's undoing. Some of the lands listed here are familiar to us and are mentioned briefly in other Hebrew texts. At least a few of these lands were apparently not very far from Israel (e.g., Arvad and Gebel, other Phoenician ports) but we conclude from their meager biblical attestation that the Israelites had little, if any, direct contact with these places. Yet other lands mentioned here have been confidently identified through various means that lay a great distance from Israel; these include Uzal (in modern Yemen), Elishah (Sicily or the Italian peninsula), Javan (Ionia), and Meshech (Armenia). A couple of terms remain completely obscure (e.g., *Gammadim*; 27:11).[353] We will never be able to fully reconstruct the implications of all of these places for Israelite mental geography, but their role here as sources for rare and expensive commodities suggests that the imaginations of the biblical writers was expansive enough to reach even to the world's ends.

[353] The form suggests that this term is gentilic, but Gammad as a land is not otherwise attested.

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