

THE EYES OF ELI:
AN ESSAY IN MOTIF ACCRETION

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וְאֲנִי אֹמְרָתִי נִגְרַשְׁתִּי מִנֶּגֶד עֵינֶיךָ אֵךְ אוֹסִיף לְהִבִּיט אֶל־הַיְבֹל קֹדֶשׁךָ

As for me, I ponder, 'Driven from your sight, might I yet keep gazing at your holy sanctuary?' (Jon. 2.5)

We are told in 1 Sam. 3.1-2 about Eli that one evening, as the old priest went to lie on his couch within reach of God's ark in Shiloh, 'his eyes (*ketiv* eye) becoming dull, he no longer could see'.¹ This is a touching description about an elderly man who, as we learn from previous chapters, had lost God's trust and so hardly needed this infirmity to render him less suitable for ministering to God (as per Lev. 21.18). The notice about Eli's loss of sight will soon be repeated with minor variation at

1. Unless otherwise stated, all biblical references are from 1 Samuel. The literature on the first chapters of Samuel is immense and I have consulted a broad range of commentaries and secondary literature. Although I do not always cite it, Fokkelman's analytical *tour de force* (1993) has proven very useful. Both of us have found the same passages to be protean, but our treatments of them differ appreciably. As is well-known, the received Hebrew text of Samuel has its fair share of difficulties and appeal to the versions from which to enhance our comprehension is fairly standard in the literature. The issue of the relative merits of Greek and Hebrew, debated heavily since the mid-nineteenth century, came back in full force with the recovery of Qumran fragments of Samuel with many readings that match the Greek better than the Hebrew and some readings not found in either version. Ever since, how to treat the differences and whether to use them to restore a better original of Samuel have been hotly debated, with Pisano (1984: 1-12) offering a good (yet not the last) review of the positions. Barthélemy (1982: 137-53) has good judgment on the significance of crucial differences in the chapters relevant to this essay. Aside from the book of Pisano, there is much profit in also consulting Ulrich 1978 and Tov (ed.) 1980. The unity of 1 Sam. 3 is also discussed in the literature, with much interest in whether or not 4.1a belongs to it or not. See, for example, Spina (1991), who defends the latter view. In recent literature one meets with the curious assumption that if components of a narrative can be shown to fall into an elegantly balanced format (chiasms, ladders, rings or the like), it is evidence of a unity or integrity of construction. In turn, this unity of construction is deemed strong evidence that a composition has reached us in its original form, written or oral (see, e.g., Radday 1971). Most of the arrangements I have seen are highly accommodating to personal sensibilities. The opposite is also plausible: insertions and manipulations achieve harmonious configurations. On the historicity of the material reported in the Samuel chapters relevant to this paper is concerned, my notion is that there is truth in every scene but the real facts are less reliably conveyed

4.15. Even if we grant the allusion its metaphoric dimension of moral or ethical blindness, there is nothing in either context for which the quality of Eli's sight is a plot element, and so the question becomes why was its mention necessary at this juncture.² The matter is by no means critical to a better comprehension of the story or to evaluating the origins and adaptations of the Shiloh traditions. Yet, in this paper, dedicated to my good friend Herb Huffmon, the references to Eli's eyes will allow the exploration a literary device not often charted in the vast scholarship on the Bible as literature—sometimes a phrase displays accretion on its repetition across a narrative to convey intensification of meaning. I am calling it 'motif accretion' but any appropriate label will do. Because the paper means to please Herb, it will be about a prophet (but not about prophecy) and, of course, it will call on Mari texts to enrich the thesis.

Pregnant Phrases

Samuel's growing intimacy with God is developed over 1 Samuel 2 and 3, playing counterpoint (at 2.12-17, 22-25, 27-36) to the increasing deterioration of Eli's standing with God.³ 1 Samuel 2.11 is itself pivotal in charting this development, its language replaying in two other contexts, 2.18 and 3.1. Superficially, the phrase contains the same information about Samuel ministering to Eli; yet it carries new dimensions of meaning at each of its reappearances:

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| 2.11: | והנער היה משרת את־יהוה את־פני עלי הכהן |
| 2.18: | ושמואל משרת את־פני יהוה נער חגור אפוד בד |
| 3.1: | והנער שמואל משרת את־יהוה לפני עלי |

At 2.11, the clause is an insert, neither preceded nor succeeded by details about Samuel himself. Syntactically it reveals much that has unfortunately been obscured by translations. The participle *משרת* in fact controls two direct objects, God and Eli, for, as we learn from 3.1 and from Est. 1.10, the idiom is the same whether construed with the particle *אֵת* or the compound *אֵת־פְּנֵי*. So, rather than following the LXX in treating the phrase as describing two phases of the same act (*καὶ τὸ παιδάριον ἦν λειτουργῶν τῷ προσώπῳ κυρίου ἐνώπιον Ηλι τοῦ ἱερέως*, 'the child ministered in the presence of the Lord before Heli the priest'), we should recognize that at this juncture the boy had two distinct chores: 'The youth was serving the

2. This is in contrast to what is said about Isaac (Gen. 27.1), Jacob (Gen. 48.10), Ahijah (1 Kgs 14.4), and Tobit (2.10). Not relevant are the occasions in which individuals are blinded temporarily. Such blindness is said to strike individuals either as punishment or because of anxiety; for which see Holden 1991: 132-36.

3. There is much discussion in the literature about the weaving of independent narratives into 1 Sam. 2, allegedly originating in Samuel (some imagine Saul) and Eli traditions. See the commentaries and the papers of Peter-Contesse (1976), Ilan (1985-86) and Koorevaar (1997). Brettler (1997) wields a harsh scalpel to restore a text that fits his notion of the original that he deems consisted of 1.1-28, 2.11a, 2.18-21, and 3. Happily, this sort of speculation is not of immediate interest to this paper.

Lord *as well as* Eli, the priest'. The implication is that the child was learning his craft of attending on God by waiting on Eli. Not incidentally Eli is here for the last time titled as priest.⁴

This reference to Eli the כהן serves to introduce the crimes of Eli's sons, themselves כהנים (2.13), priests at Shiloh before the birth of Samuel (see 1.3). 'They did not "know" the Lord (לא ידעו את־יהוה)' contrasts with what is soon said about Samuel (at 3.7) and so also highlights their incapacity to experience the divine presence.⁵ In addition to their crime against worshipers, the sons of Eli were also compromising the purity of their own apprentices.⁶ The contrast with the apprentice (נער) Samuel in the verse immediately following (2.18) is sharpened by replay of את־פני יהוה, a phrase that is syntactically awkward in v. 17 but perfectly idiomatic in v. 18.

From this point, Samuel begins to take control, not just of the name his mother had given him (1.20), but also of the priesthood, for he is said to wear a linen ephod.⁷ Hannah's yearly gift to her son is certainly an indication of her continuous attachment to the child she vowed to God: yet we may notice that the ephod, which can be girt by means of a band (חשב, see Lev. 8.7) also required a מעיל ('tunic', Exod. 28.31; 29.5, etc). We may imagine, then, that Hannah took a role in supplying her son with priestly accouterment. A nice touch is that the Samuel that the sybil at Endor conjures is wrapped in a מעיל (28.14). The rendering '(girded by) just an ephod' for אפוד בד, proposed in Banwell (1989), would be unidiomatic. The rise of Samuel is itself monitored by what Jonathan Magonet calls the 'growing phrase':⁸

2.21: ויגדל הנער שמואל עם־יהוה

Meanwhile, young Samuel rose in God's esteem.⁹

4. Eli's title is recalled in a notice about his grandson Ahiya, a priest under Saul (1 Sam. 14.3) and, indirectly, in 1 Kgs 2.27, when the curse against his priesthood is fulfilled as Solomon dismisses Abiathar from his office.

5. The phrase לדעת את־יהוה has a broad range of meanings (see the dictionaries), almost invariably treated as cause for God's rejection or punishment. The offenses of Phinehas and Hophni were many: venality, greed and (we learn later) depravity among them. But in coveting what is God's, among them the fat of sacrifice (see 2.20), they rendered unfit for consumption the portion normally available to the sacrificers and their family, if not also all of Israel. There is much debate in the commentaries, inspired by the versions, whether vv. 13-14 described abuses, as did clearly vv. 15-16.

6. Consequently, 'The sin of the attendants was enormous in the Lord's judgment' (ותהי' 2.17). חטאת הנערים גדולה מאד את־פני יהוה.

7. 'Samuel was serving the Lord, an attendant girl in a linen ephod' (שמאל משרת את־פני' יהוה נער־חגור אפוד בד).

8. Magonet (1983: 31-33, 40-42) builds on the works of L. Fränkel and G.H. Cohn.

9. Hardly: 'Young Samuel meanwhile grew up in the service of the LORD' (TNK) or '...in the presence of the LORD' (RSV, i.e., at his sanctuary). Such renderings are unduly influenced by the versions, as for example, McCarter (1980: 80), 'Reading *lpny yhw* with LXX and 4QSam^a. The reading of MT ('*m yhw*, 'with Yahweh') has been influenced by '*m yhw* in v. 26, where it is certainly original.' Why is there such certitude and why might the influence not have gone the opposite way?

2.26: והנער שמואל הלך וגדל וטוב גם עִם־יְהוָה וגם עִם־אֲנָשִׁים

Young Samuel kept gaining stature and esteem, with God as with people.¹⁰

The first of these verses brings to a satisfying end the story of Samuel's parents (2.19-21a). As Hannah becomes progressively absorbed by her large brood, Samuel is taken into God's shelter. The second (2.26) occurs after a pitiful display of Eli's collapsed authority (2.22-26) and so serves to underscore Samuel's rising fame in Israel. Rather than sharp condemnation or pitiless punishment, Eli had engaged his sons in rhetoric too subtle for their ears.¹¹ In any case, they could not have heeded their father, for 'the Lord was resolved to kill them (כִּי־חָפֵץ יְהוָה לְהַמִּיתָם)'. This means that God had already decided to end Eli's priestly line. For this reason, the narrator could indulge in bringing Samuel out of his keeper's shadow before turning once more to the fall of Eli's house.

In this last indictment of Eli, at 2.27-36, a man of God reveals to Eli the cost of sinning: withdrawing the promise to sustain his line; premature death for the living; humiliation for the survivors; the deaths of Hophni and Phinehas on the selfsame day; and the anointing of a new leader. The loss to Eli was immense, for beyond his priestly functions inherited from Aaron, Eli was also Judge in Israel (4.18) and while that particular office was not hereditary, it brought prestige and honor on its holder. Distanced from God, he no longer was privileged to see divine holiness. Still, God was relatively kind to Eli, basically a decent, if weak-willed, priest, not revealing to him yet the greatest calamity that was to befall Israel under his watch: the loss and exile of the ark, and with it God's presence in Israel, until David's time.

At 3.1 occurs the final manifestation of the growing phrase I originally cited above ('Young Samuel was serving God, before Eli מִשְׁרַת אֶת־יְהוָה [וְהַנֶּעֶר שְׂמוּאֵל מִשְׁרַת אֶת־יְהוָה]), the impression being that as Samuel attended to God, Eli was likely an otiose observer. This distancing of Eli from Samuel no less than from God is, in fact, the controlling motif in the story of Samuel's rise, the old priest being clearly faulted for having lost Israel's contact with its God as expressed in two clauses that follow immediately the statement about Samuel: וְדַבְרֵי־יְהוָה הָיָה יָקָר בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם אֵין חֲזוֹן נִפְרָץ.¹² It is natural to assume that the two clauses complement each other, jointly referring to the dearth of communication from God. This is reflected in many translations, including that of the Tanakh, 'In those days the word of the LORD was rare; prophecy was not widespread'. Yet the two clauses are not redundant, for they distinguish between two distinct manifestations, the first aural ('An oracle from the Lord was rare in those days [וְדַבְרֵי־יְהוָה הָיָה יָקָר בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם]), and the second

10. See 2 Sam. 5.10 (= 1 Chron. 11.9), 'David kept growing stronger, for the Lord God of Hosts was with him (וַיִּלֶךְ דָּוִד הַלֹּךְ וְגָדֹל וַיְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי צְבָאוֹת עִמּוֹ)'.
 11. 'If people sin against each other, God might mediate for them. But if it is against the Lord that people sin, who could intercede for them?' This statement is clearly drawing on a proverb, but other interpretations of its meaning and setting are also possible; see Ward 1977 and Houtman 1977.
 12. The Masoretic punctuation attaches בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם at the end of the first clause. It could just as correctly have opened the second clause with these words.

visual ('no vision was had [נִפְרֵי'ן חֲזוֹן]).¹³ The theophany accorded Samuel will be developed along these distinct paths, setting up the hope that before the story ends, there will be reversal of either or both of these lacks. Actually, references to the senses of hearing and sight resonate throughout the stories about Eli and Young Samuel, serving not merely as figures for obedience and morality, but also as guideposts in the fortunes of God's servants.¹⁴ The eyes and ears of Eli chart this fall; those of Samuel are emblematic of his rise.

The Eyes (and Ears) of Eli

It is a pity that we never meet Eli until he had already been replaced as priest of Shiloh by his sons.¹⁵ He is aged and likely no longer playing a vital role in the conduct of the affairs of Israel. Yet, as we know from Scripture, it is death and not age or power that retires servants from their duty to God. What we learn about him is framed by two scenes in which Eli sits on a chair: in one he is near God's temple (1.9), and in the other by the town's heights (4.13).¹⁶ We first meet him watching but not hearing Hannah as she prays. His eyesight is excellent, for seated by the doorposts of the הַיִּכָּל (where later Samuel will have his fateful encounter with God at 3.3), Eli scrutinizes the lips of Hannah (וַעֲלֵי שִׁמְרֵי אֶת־פִּיהָ) as she prays, likely in the חֲצֵר ('courtyard'), just beyond the אֹרֶל ('vestibule'), that is, at a fair distance away. Once he realizes that Hannah is no drunkard, Eli's judgment, no less than his eye, is sharp and clear. He could not have acted more properly than when he eased Hannah's anxiety (1.17). Eli remains in favor despite what God must surely have known about his sons' inequity, for he delivers an effective blessing upon the couple's delivery of their child to God (2.21).

Eli's hearing is still unaffected by old age when he sets forth to reprimand his sons. Ostensibly he is driven to do so because he hears about their abuse of women attending to the Tent of Meeting (2.22), a crime that Eli could have witnessed when seated at God's temple. But his rebuke harks back to the cleavage the sons created between God and Israel. We notice how often the root שָׁמַע is replayed in very few

13. More commonly, the verb רָאָה (qal or niph'al) is attached to חֲזוֹן ('vision'). There is discussion in the literature on how to understand נִפְרֵי', a niph'al, because the Greek διαστέλλουσα is a present active participle (see Gnuse 1984: 123). נִפְרֵי' in the qal has an appropriate meaning when its subject is דָּבָר (2 Chron. 31.5) and there is no reason why a niph'al form (reflexive rather than passive) could not be connected with חֲזוֹן ('vision'), since this noun is commonly construed with the niph'al of רָאָה. (See the dictionaries.)

14. For some interesting remarks on the conjunction of hearing and seeing at Sinai, see Carasik 1999.

15. Josephus makes Eli an immediate successor of Samson and nestles the story of Ruth under his rule as judge (*Ant.* 5.9). He backtracks and retells, with deviations, the familiar text of Samuel in 5.10-11.

16. Although many passages in the HB link seats to God, kings and even priests (Zech. 6.13), they are also cited as belonging to lazy women (= Folly, Prov. 9.14) and as articles of home furnishing (2 Kgs 14.10). It is possible that Eli's seat is one of honor given to judges; but, aside from providing perfect brackets for the Eli's story, I would not read too much into its mention here, as does Spina 1991.

verses (2.22-25). Deterioration of Eli's position (as well as the health of his senses) begins at this point, because God had already decided to end the old man's line (2.25).

A good many allusions to sight (less obviously also, to hearing) are embedded in the condemnation the Man of God brings to Eli. It opens on an argument that is pregnant with potential: 'Have I shown myself to the house of your ancestors (הנגלה נגליתי אל-בית אביך) when, in Egypt, they belonged to the house of Pharaoh?' (2.27). The question is rhetorical and hardly benefits from a widely adopted emendation to remove the interrogative.¹⁷ God's pronouncement is about bodily appearance to (אל) someone; for elsewhere the niph'al of גלה is about exposure of the body (Exod. 20.26; 2 Sam. 6.20; Isa. 47.3) or parts thereof (Isa. 53.1; 40.5).¹⁸ This is emphasized in 3.21 where the same point is made twice, 'The Lord resumed being seen in Shiloh, for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh, in oracular matters (ויסף יהוה להראות בשלה כי-נגלה יהוה אל-שמואל בשלו בדבר יהוה)'. So, from the outset we are dealing with whether or not God allows himself to be seen by the favored, a theme that will be featured in ch. 3.¹⁹

The charge found in 2.29-30 is partially obscured by difficult language, but it reflects on the sons (treating sacrifices despicably) as well as on the father (Eli honors those who dishonor the sacrifice).²⁰ It is interesting that for 2.29a the Greek (LXX^B), looking ahead to the penalty segment of the oracle (at 2.32), proposes ἵνα τί ἐπέβλεψας ἐπὶ τὸ θυμιάμα μου καὶ εἰς τὴν θυσίαν μου ἀναιδεῖ ὀφθαλμῶ ('Why have you looked at my incense and meat offering with a wanton eye?'). In this way it carries forward the theme of sight that we are following.²¹

The doom predicted for Eli resumes:

2.32: ...והבטת צר מעון בכל אשר-יטיב את-ישראל...

You will look *anxiously*...at all that profits Israel.

2.33: ואיש לא-אכרית לך מעם מזבחי לכלות את-עיניך ולאדיב את-נפשך

But I shall remove for you no one from my sacrificial altar to empty your eyes and dry your throat.

17. See the excellent remarks of Driver 1913: 36.

18. Most relevant is Gen. 35.7, where Jacob consecrates an altar at Bethel, 'For God himself appeared to him (כי שם נגלו אליו האלהים) as he fled from his brother'. It is also used metaphorically, about justice (Isa. 56.1), sin (Ezek. 16.57; 21.29; Prov. 26.26) and, as we shall soon see, God's word (3.7). See Zobel 1975: 479-80.

19. Exod. 24.9-11 is the classic text, much debated, about the capacity of people to see God (or parts thereof) without themselves being prophets or the like.

20. Proposals for emending this verse are not lacking in the commentaries, some more facile in resolving the problems than others.

21. There is also a play on כבד, albeit across stems, in that God honors those who honor him (2.30, כי-מכבדי אכבד) rather than those Eli misguidedly honors (2.29, והכבד את-בניך), and Eli dies too obese (4.18, כי-זקן האיש וכבד) to survive a fall.

No less than in the previous verses, the language in 2.32-33 is unusual and difficult, attracting a broad array of emendations.²² Here, however, we need only notice how the eyes of Eli control them. In 2.32 Eli is to gaze at something, for the hiphil of **נבט** has that meaning when construed with a direct object. While the textual difficulties prevent us from knowing what Eli is observing (concretely or figuratively), the oracle obviously frustrates his hopes by adding ‘there shall never be an elder in your house’.

More directly personal is the prediction revealed in 2.33. ‘Emptying the eye’ and ‘drying up of the throat’ are idioms for distress, referring to endless tears and deep anxiety.²³ The idioms occur, singly or jointly (*italicized*) in the Hebrew Bible. Almost exclusively (see Job 31.16), they represent afflictions that are either due to God (*Lev. 26.16*; *Deut. 28.32*; *Jer. 31.12, 25*; *Lam. 2.11*; *4.17*; figurative, *Jer. 14.6*) or the result of (vainly) awaiting signs of grace (*Pss. 69.4*; *119.82, 123*; *Job 11.20*; *17.5*). We need not reconstruct their pathology or detail their symptoms to recognize how they are to affect Eli. What Eli hears is indeed brutal, but not without its measure of mercy: while his line is ending, Eli himself will witness neither the extermination of those around his altar (meaning Samuel?) nor the death of newborns in his household (meaning perhaps Ichabod and Ahituv). The death of sons may indeed be a brutal sign, even when he knew them to be immoral; but for now Eli is spared hearing about the greatest calamity of all: the capture of the divine Ark.

Eli’s eyes and what they can no longer see open the next major scene.²⁴ One day, we are told, Eli was lying down at his customary place, in the temple, presumably fairly close to the **הכּל**, the sanctuary where the Ark was kept and where Samuel had his cot. We suppose the time was night, but not because Eli and Samuel are said to lie down (**שׁכב**). In fact, Hebrew uses other verbs when sleep is specifically mentioned (McAlpine 1987: 59-62). We presume that it was night-time because at the conclusion of the drama Samuel is said to rise in the morning (3.15), and not because the drama unfolds when ‘God’s lamp was yet to be trimmed (**וּנר אֱלֹהִים**)’ (3.2). Sanctuary lamps were to be lit perpetually (**תמיד**, *Exod. 27.20*; *Lev. 24.2*; possibly otherwise in *Exod. 27.21*; *Lev. 24.3*), but they were kept alive for their capacity to burn (incense or the like) rather than to give light.²⁵

22. Most proposals try to conciliate with Greek readings that obviously have gone their own way.

23. On the first idiom, see Gruber 1980: 390-400, with Ugaritic equivalent. On the second, see Gruber 1987. Of the many emendations proposed for this verse, none is as gratuitous as attributing the distress to a third person rather than to Eli; see, for example, McCarter 1984: 88-89, who also misunderstands the idiom **הכרייה** with accusative and **ל**, always very negative (among others, see 1 Kgs 14.10; 21.21; 2 Kgs 9.8; *Isa. 14.22*); see Barthélemy 1982: 149-50.

24. Polzin (1989: 49-54) has good remarks on this topic as it concerns ch. 3.

25. In fact, the instruction in *Exod. 30.7-8* was to stoke (**להיטיב**) rather than to trim lamps in the morning for burning aromatic incense. In 2 Sam. 21.17, ‘trimming the lamp of Israel’ is a metaphor for the death of David (see also 1 Kgs 11.36). It is possible that the statement about God’s lamp in 3.2 suggests that the vision of Samuel came at a very opportune moment.

From Eli's perspective, however, night was no longer about darkness, for 'his eyes had begun to dull so that he could not see, החלו כהות לא יוכל לראות [qere ועינו]'. Hebrew has several words to describe deterioration of vision.²⁶ In Genesis, nothing is made of Leah's eyesight; rather, it is Jacob whose eyes fail him, in the wedding tent (Gen. 29) and later also when in Egypt (Gen. 48). It may well be that כהה was intentionally selected to foreshadow the censure Eli was again to suffer (3.13).²⁷ Eli's infirmity is not immediately germane to the plot; yet without it what will soon be said about Samuel might lose its power.

The Eyes (and Ears) of Samuel

Lying by the Ark, young Samuel—Josephus makes him twelve-years old (*Ant.* 5.10)—hears a call and answers twice: first from his cot (3.4), then as he draws near Eli (3.5). In this and two subsequent instances, neither he nor Eli was sleeping or awakening from sleep since the narrative lacks the vocabulary for either condition (יקש, עור or רדם, נום, ישן). Neither was Samuel dreaming, for the appropriate language (חלום, חלם) is also missing.²⁸ In fact, as we shall see, fully awake protagonists are necessary to bolster their acceptance of God's destiny.

In his third trip to Eli's couch, Samuel took back to his resting place Eli's instruction. Should God call him again, he is to answer (3.9), 'Speak Lord, for your servant is listening (דבר יהוה כי שמע עבדך)'. The language seems perfectly suited for the occasion, but in fact it is unique to this story (at 3.9, 10). Elsewhere, when God calls someone by name (once, but often twice), a 'Here I am' (הנני) suffices to initiate delivery of divine instructions.²⁹ As pointed out by my student David

26. The vocabulary for Eli's infirmity, as that attached to other personalities, is interesting but hardly diagnostic. It may be accidental that the two instances mentioning Eli lack coordination between subject and verbs. The verbs used are: (1) כהה ('to go dim'; see Akkadian *apû*, *barāru*, *dalāhu*, and derivatives), said of Eli's eye(s) (1 Sam. 3.2) and of Isaac's (Gen. 27.1, '...his eyes were too dim to see [ויהי כִּי־זָקֵן יִצְחָק וְתַבְהִיִן עֵינָיו מֵרְאוֹת]'); (2) כבד ('to become heavy'), said of Jacob's eyes (Gen. 48.10, 'Israel's eyes drooped with age; he could not see [ועינו ישראל כבדו]; he could not see [מזוקן לא יוכל לראות]'); (3) קום (to 'stand, freeze'), said of the eyes of Eli (1 Sam. 4.15, '...his eyes were fixed and he could not see [ועינו קמה ולא יוכל לראות]') and of Ahijah (1 Kgs 14.4, 'Ahijah could no longer see for his eyes were fixed from old age [וואחיהו לא יוכל לראות כי קמו עינו משיבן]).

It is not clear to me whether what is said about Leah belongs here: her eyes were רכות ('tender', Gen. 29.17). Because what is said about her contrasts with how her sister is described ('shapely and beautiful [יפה־האר ויפת מראה]), it is natural to think it a euphemism about an unattractive or abnormal appearance. Compare to what is said in Akkadian about a child with compromised appearance, *damqam-īnam*, literally 'fine eye' (CAD D, 67a; §, 236a).

27. Eli knew about his sons' sacrilege, yet he did not rebuke them (ולא כהה בם). The pun is noted by many, most forcefully by Fishbane 1982: 202.

28. Despite the efforts of Gnuse (1984: 133-52; modified in 1996: 83-84, see 83 n. 197, 'mixed genre of dream report and prophetic call'), we should resist locating a dream theophany anywhere in this narrative.

29. The formula generally includes three parts: (1) detailing the circumstances (may specify the caller, God or angel); (2) naming the called (once—God to Abraham, Gen. 22.1; angel to Jacob [recalled], Gen. 31.11; twice—angel to Abraham, Gen. 22.11; God to Israel/Jacob, Gen. 46.2; to

Calabro, it remains unclear whether הַנְּנִי of 3.4 is attributable to Samuel ('When the Lord called Samuel, he said "I am here"') or to God ('When the Lord's called Samuel, saying "I am about to..."'). If the latter, we recall that in 3.11 God finally gets to give a speech that begins with הִנֵּה אֲנִכִי. Here, however, narrative logic frustrates the formulation in favor of a progression of appeals, moving from no name (3.4), to one name (3.6, 8), to two names (3.10).³⁰ The episode itself scarcely deploys any of the expected elements common in calls to prophecy.³¹ It is doubtful that it aims to deliver comically about Samuel's inability to discriminate between the voices of God and Eli. Rather, it focuses on the pathetic moment when Eli realizes that God was bypassing him (וַיִּבֶן עָלָיו כִּי יְהוָה קָרָא לְנֵעֵר).³²

Yet Eli has not completely given up, for his were the unique and anomalous words he taught Samuel to say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening (דַּבֵּר יְהוָה כִּי שָׁמַע עַבְדְּךָ)'. The old priest may well have hoped that Samuel would not fully confirm the indictment brought by the prophet of God (2.27-36).³³ Here, the principle at play is that discordant versions of an oracle may compromise the potential of its fulfillment.³⁴ A well-known illustration (whatever its historical worth)

Moses, Exod. 3.4); (3) responding, 'Here I am'. The formula is the same when individuals (normally with authority) summon others, as when Eli calls Samuel at 3.16.

30. Commentators who privilege the Greek or Qumran versions do not always recognize this narratological logic and feel called upon to restore vocatives in defense of a more 'original' text; see, for example, McCarter 1980: 95.

31. As seen, for example, in the calls to Moses (Exod. 3), Isaiah (6.1-3), Jeremiah (1.1-10) and Ezekiel (1.1-28). Missing from the present scene are such core elements as the confrontation, the reluctance of the prophet, divine reassurance, divine commission and (probably) confirmatory sign; on all this, plus a good bibliography on the issue, see Gnuse 1984: 133-40. That 1 Sam. 3 does not transmit a call narrative has been seen by many commentators, most clearly by Simon (1981, 1997). However, he reads the story as a paedeia, the education of Samuel by a loving and kindly old man. Note that it is not a lack of intelligence that prevents Samuel from understanding what Eli does comprehend but rather a profound psychological block. Is it possible that God is calling him rather than Eli the priest? Conversely, Eli apprehends what Samuel fails to see, not because of superior intelligence or experience, but because he lacks the inhibitions generated by self-interest. Nothing deters him from assuming that God might turn to the young servant and pass over the old priest! In this way, Eli's humility compensates for Samuel's (1997: 66).

32. In this sense, its emotional equivalent is Saul's acceptance of his fate at Endor when, through Samuel's ghost, God brutally shreds his illusion about creating a dynasty (1 Sam. 28.17).

33. In this sense, the revelation brought by Samuel was by no means superfluous, as thought by Polzin 1989: 51. In Mari, diviners could even badger heaven into auspicious responses. Omens identified the perfect place in which to house an *ugbaltum*-priestess (ARM 3 42 = ARMT 26 178 = LAPO 18 958, p. 105). When this residence did not prove convenient (it was needed for other purposes), new rounds of omen-taking located another place, just as perfect (ARM 3 84 = ARMT 26 179 = LAPO 18 959, pp. 105-106).

34. This is not the same as confirming a prophecy through its fulfillment, an issue that exercised the Deuteronomist (Deut. 18.15-22). There are several illustrations of this principle, including fine examples of it embedded in the Ahijah of Shiloh narratives (1 Kgs 11.29-30 fulfilled in 12.15; 1 Kgs 14.7-16 fulfilled in 14.17 and 15.29).

It grieves me to remove from consideration an alleged Mari parallel as adduced by Hurowitz (1994). On the basis of a protocol for diviners published as ARMT 26 1, Hurowitz weaves a fanciful scenario in which Eli's plea to know God's message (just four words in 3.17!) is deemed evidence

of this notion is in the 1 Kings 22 account about Micaiah ben Imlah. Jehosaphat insisted on obtaining from him confirmation about the victory the prophets of Ahab were predicting (וּבִינָהּ לוֹ בַמֶּרְסָה).³⁵ This principle itself is venerable and is already known from the Mari archives, from which I cull four examples, all from the reign of Zimri-Lim (eighteenth century):³⁶

1. *A dream and a prophecy coincide*: Addu-duri (mother or aunt of Zimri-Lim) communicates her dream, brimming with sinister portents about the wellbeing of the king and his dynasty. She immediately cites the prophecy of an ecstatic that urges caution to the king. ARMT 10 50 (= ARMT 26 237 = LAPO 18 1094, pp. 278-79).³⁷
2. *Separate omen-takings match*: Zimri-Lim writes to his wife: ‘About the omens about which you wrote me, “I have had omens taken for the welfare of my lord: the enemy is delivered into my lord’s hand”. What you wrote me is exactly the same here too, as in my own omens: the enemy is delivered into my hand’. ARMT 10 124 (= LAPO 18 1170, pp. 353-55).
3. *Prophecy and a provoked oracle correspond*: Queen Shiptu transmits a prophecy (unfortunately lost in a break) brought by a berdache (*assinum*), Ili-ḥaznaya. The queen had extracted oracles of victory from mediums she intoxicated. She adds, ‘Even before the message of Ili-haznaya that (the goddess) Annunitum sent through him—5 days ago in fact—I myself posed (a similar) query. The message which Annunitum sent you and the information I obtained are one and the same’. ARMT 10 6 (= ARMT 26 212 = LAPO 18 1146).
4. *Message, repeated more specifically the second time*: Kibri-Dagan, governor of Terqa reports that a servant had a dream in which God warns, ‘You must not build this ruined house. If this house is built, I will dump it in the river.’ The dream not having been reported immediately, the servant received another dream the night after, ‘You must not build this house. If you build it, I will dump it in the river.’ The second message is more specific about who must not engage in rebuilding. By not

for the imposition of oaths requiring prophets to reveal all to their masters. Hurowitz tries hard to explain why this oath is imposed on Samuel *after* he had received a prophecy when in the Mari settings oaths made sense only when administered *before* omen-taking. Hurowitz proposes that Eli calls Samuel, ‘my son’ (בְּנִי), because they belonged to a prophetic guild (as in Amos 7.14 and often in 2 Kgs 2). Eli himself was a judge and not a prophet.

35. In apocalyptic literature a divine message may pass understanding and has to be delivered through another medium; see Dan. 10.1, ‘In the third year of Cyrus, king of Persia, an oracle was revealed (דְּבַר נְגִידָה) to Daniel, who was called Belteshazzar. That oracle was true, but it was a great task to understand the prophecy; understanding came to him through the vision.’

36. The principle is not to be confused with the many instances in which Mari dreams and prophecies were accompanied by snippets of hair and garment from the medium. These items were not taken to control the ‘authenticity of the prophetic word’ (as our esteemed jubilar asserted recently in Huffmon 2000: 50), but to make certain that in the first place there was a message to communicate.

37. See the commentary of Sasson 1983: 286.

acts: first, God is said ‘to arrive’ when twice earlier his presence is not physical.⁴¹ Third, there is explicit mouthing of Samuel’s name when earlier it was implicit. In between, God **יְהִי צַב**, an act that must not be treated hendiatically with what follows (as in McCarter’s AB commentary’s ‘stood calling’). The hithpael of **צַב** connotes taking a stand determinedly and without falter, often in assemblies or facing an enemy.⁴² But when God or his angel is the subject, it attests to their physical presence at crucial and sensitive occasions. There is a striking example of such a context in Num. 12.4-8, albeit the verbs used there are **יָרַד** and **עָמַד**, with **הִלֵּךְ** completing the staging. God seeks to suppress a rebellion against Moses:

Suddenly, the Lord told Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, ‘Come out, you three, to the Tent of Meeting’. The three of them went out. Descending (**וַיֵּרַד**) in a pillar of cloud, the Lord stood (**וַיַּעֲמֵד**) at the entrance of the Tent and called out, ‘Aaron and Miriam!’ When both of them came out he said, ‘Listen to my words: If there is a prophet among you, I may make myself known to him as Lord in a vision or I may make speak to him in dream (**וַיְהוּדָה בְּמַרְאֵה אֱלֹהִים אוֹתוֹדַע בְּחִלּוֹם אֲדַבֵּר-בּוֹ**)’. Not so with my servant Moses, who is trusted over my entire household. I converse with him mouth to mouth, visually (**וַיִּמְרָאֵהוּ**) and never parabolically; he may even look at the Lord’s form (**וַהֲמַנְתָּ יְהוָה יְבִיט**). So, why did you not fear maligning my servant Moses?’ Having expressed his anger against them, he left (**וַיֵּלֶךְ**).⁴³

In our passage, however, Samuel’s role is not yet prophetic. He is given no commission; he has no opportunity to cajole (as occurred repeatedly with Moses) or intercede (as does Abraham regarding Sodom). This situation is corrected in 4Q160 (‘Vision of Samuel’), a fragment in which Samuel prays on behalf of Israel. We find a similarity of prophetic constraint in Amos 9.1-4, a passage that opens with a vocabulary that is highly reminiscent of ours, ‘I saw my lord standing upright over the altar, saying... (**רָאִיתִי אֶת-אֲדֹנָי נֹצֵב עַל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וַיֹּאמֶר**)’.⁴⁴ Given the narrative

41. Elsewhere the Lord (YHWH) is said to arrive only in an apocalyptic passage (Zech. 14.5). All other arrivals of God (Elohim) occur in dream sequences: Abimelech in Gen. 20.3, Laban in Gen. 31.24, and Balaam in Num. 22.9, 20.

42. The verb occurs under two forms: **צַב** in the hithpael, **נֹצֵב** in the piel and niphil. There is likely a merging of two separate, semantically related verbal roots, each with only fragmentary attestation; compare their paralleling use in Num. 22.23, 31 (niphil) and 22.22 (hithpael). The niphil of **נֹצֵב** has a somewhat similar range of meanings, as in Gen. 28.13, ‘[Jacob dreams of a ladder with angels], The Lord was suddenly upright (**נֹצֵב עָלָיו**) over him, saying...’. It is possible that the narrator selected **נֹצֵב/צַב** in recall of Hannah’s words in 1.26, ‘I am the woman who stood here by you (**הִנְצַבְתָּ עִמָּכָה בְּזֶה**) praying to the Lord’.

43. In Hebrew poetry God is often placed in the center of combat (often in Song at the Sea, Habakkuk, and the Psalms, esp. Ps. 18). In prose texts too, God (or his intermediary, an angel) can be said to ‘arrive’ (**בּוֹא**, Gen. 20.3; 31.24; Num. 22.9, 20) or ‘appear’ (**נִרְאָה**) to individuals (1 Kgs 3.5); to ‘descend’ (**יָרַד**) within a cloud (Exod. 34.5; Num. 11.25; 12.5) or not (Gen. 11.5; 18.21; Exod. 19.11, 20; Isa. 31.4), and to show himself (niphil of **גִּלָּה**, see above). In apocalyptic literature divine beings are often said to stand (**עָמַד**) by the seer (Ezek. 43.6; Zech. 1.8-11; 3.5; Dan. 10.16).

44. See also 7.7. In most renderings of Exod. 34.5, God stands with Moses as he reveals to him his divine attributes; for example the TNK’s ‘The LORD came down in a cloud; He stood with him there, and proclaimed the name LORD (**בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה**)’.⁴⁴ This understanding is sustained by Exod. 33.19 where can be found the only other reference out of about

genre in which such appearances are embedded (tales and the like), and given that the Hebrew language readily constructs anatomic metaphors when expressing divine feelings or emotion—God has a human anatomy and displays human emotions—we cannot always determine whether we are dealing with figurative language about the nearness of God or with stated belief in ancient Israel about the visibility of God.⁴⁵ Whatever its practical implications, the presence of God in the delivery of messages was a literary convention in ancient Israel. This is especially obvious in recording dreams because their delivery gains in authority when deities personally relay warnings or encouragement.⁴⁶ However, the presence of gods during a recipient's wakened state is less commonly reported, whether to transmit prophecies, grant a vision, or channel an omen.⁴⁷ One Mari text exceptionally brings these matters to the fore.

FM 7 39 (A.1121+A.2731 = *LAPO* 18 984, pp. 130-33) is one of the more complex of prophetic documents in the Mari archives in that the writer (Nur-Sin, writing from Kallassu, near Aleppo) had compiled two separate oracles: the first attributed to the local Addu and delivered during omen taking; the second fabricated from the aural recall of another oracle (A.1968, attributed to Addu of Halab) that Nur-Sin had earlier sent to Zimri-Lim.⁴⁸ The portion in which we are interested covers ll. 13-33:

ina tērētīm, Addu, Lord of Kallassu is upright (*izzaz*), saying, 'Am I not Addu, Lord of Kallassu, who has raised him between my thighs and have restored him to his ancestral throne? Having restored him to his ancestral throne, I decided also to

twenty where God is the subject of *קרא בשם יהוה*. Yet, given that Moses had been instructed to present himself (*נצבת ל*) atop Sinai, it is possible that Moses is the subject of *ויהי צב עמו*. So it is not just euphemism that motivated the Vulgate to replace the ambiguous pronouns in 34.5 with 'Moses'. This is also the understanding of a number of translations, including the Jerusalem Bible, the German *Lutherbibel* (1984) and the French *Traduction Oecuménique de la Bible* (1988).

45. Whether or not these manifestations of a superbeing betray Hebrew credence in anthropomorphism or they confirm an image-centered worship in Israel are major issues that cannot be developed here. The literature on these topics is hirsute. Aside from the articles on 'anthropomorphism' or 'imagery' in good Bible dictionaries, I can refer readers to two recent collections of essays, van der Toorn (ed.) 1997 and Gittlen (ed.) 2002. On Mesopotamia, see the remarks by a master historian of art, Amiet 1997.

46. Best detailed in Oppenheim 1956: 18, and repeated in Gnuse 1996: 41-43, 73-74; Weinfeld 1977: 185-87.

47. The 'Ritual to Obtain an Oracular-Decision (*purussûm*)' (from the second millennium on, see Butler 1998: 349-77) includes incantations and instructions on cajoling a personal god to deliver oracles (see pp. 366-67). The repertoire of techniques differs little when provoking dreams. It is interesting that the vocabulary for deities stepping forth in dreams (Akkadian *tebûm*, *izuzzum*) is often attached to the delivery of divine messages (as in 'The prophet from Dagan of Tuttul rose and told me...', ARM 26 209.6-7), probably as an extension of the phenomenon of divine appearance. For a listing see Durand 1988: 389-90, repeated by others, for example van der Toorn 2000: 80-81. I should note, however, that in such contexts the verb *tebûm* ('to rise') acts as an auxiliary (much as does Hebrew *קום*) and so may not be taken literally.

48. See the exposition in Sasson 1994: 314-16. Nur-Sin writes about delivering animals for a ritual and gives reasons for his zeal in posting oracles to the king. The text has been re-edited in Lafont 1984. A.1986 is edited in Durand 1993.

give him a dwelling place. Now since I restored him to his ancestral throne, I shall take from his household a property in perpetuity. If he does not hand (it) over, I—the lord of throne, land, and cities—can take away what I have given. But if it is otherwise, and he does hand over what I am requesting, I shall give him throne upon throne, household upon household, land upon land, city over city; I shall give him a territory, from its eastern to its western (corners)?

This is what the *āpilū* said, with (Addu) remaining upright (*ittanazzaz*) there *ina tērētīm*. Therefore, the *āpilum* of Addu, Lord of Kallassu, is demanding the shrine at Alahtum as property in perpetuity. My lord should know this.

I have left the phrase *ina tērētīm* untranslated because the term *têrtum* (a derivative of *wârum*, ‘to go, move on’, so plausibly a cognate to תָּוֹרָה) is elusive in this context. In the phrase *têrētām epēšum*, it normally means ‘to take omens (on the organs of animals)’; such a meaning is obvious even when the verb is not expressed (AHw, 1350-51). In Mari of the Zimri-Lim period, the term also stood for ‘divine message’.⁴⁹ Therefore, how to translate it is at issue.⁵⁰ At stake is whether there is a coincidence of messages through separate routes (omen-taking and oracle, mutually confirming each other) or simply the delivery of just one oracle. In Mesopotamian lore, deities are said to be upright during sacrifice (e.g. ARM 26 3.1, 18), during the taking of omens, or at the granting of visions. Therefore, however skeptical we might be about such manifestations, for Nur-Sin the god Addu was *physically* present at that fateful omen-taking (*izzaz* in l. 14, *ittanazzaz* in l. 30).

The Eye(s) of God

The Mari material that reports the physical presence of a deity at the delivery of oracles merely bolsters what sensitivity to the accretion of sight and hearing motifs in 1 Samuel 3 imposes: awake, Samuel actually saw God.⁵¹ We notice, too, that, having seen God, Samuel did not need to call him by name, as Eli instructed (3.10). God delivered a condemnation that was so precisely targeted at Eli that Samuel

49. Construed with *nadānum* (ARM 26 6) and/or *qabūm* (ARM 26 206.28-34). The same can be said about *wūrtum* (ARM 26 199.52, 206.28-34) and *egerrū*, on which see Durand 1988: 384-86.

50. Pongratz-Leisten (1999: 66-69) reviews the diverse opinions, among them those of Anbar (1981), Durand (1982: 46-47), and Lafont (1984: 12). Deities are said to stand by during the taking of omens (‘Šamaš and Adad are duly present’; cited in CAD K 385a), their absence being an inauspicious sign (‘At the prayer of the diviner, the god was not upright’; cited from CAD N/2 295a). The appearance of a deity during omen taking may be documented in FM 7 50. An official writes Zimri-Lim about the illness of Abban, son and heir of king Hammurabi of Aleppo: ‘Regarding Young Abban who is ill. When Dadi-ḥadu wrote to my lord, I was traveling through Tuttul, so I have had omens taken about this child, and the god Itur-Mer came up to/for me (*ilēm*), In Abattum I had the *pirikkum* of Itur-Mer dropped in Abattum and the child made a sacrifice. Now the child has recovered, the God of my lord having helped him.’ Itur-Mer occasionally seems to act as one of the Hebrew *terāpîm* (Sasson 2001: 417-21). It is difficult to decide what ‘coming up’ implies when said about a deity.

51. It may be this privilege, rather than just their capacity to intercede with God, that helped link Moses and Samuel in Jer. 15.1; see also Ps. 99.6.

could scarcely keep it to himself.⁵² When in the morning Samuel opens the temple doors—whose manipulation elsewhere is symbolic for submission (Hezekiah, 2 Chron. 29.3) or rebellion (Ahaz, 2 Chron. 28.24)—Eli hardly needed to put under oath (3.17) to hear the report he was dreading all night long: the protocol of prophecy demanded full disclosure (Jer. 42.4).

Eli accepts his fate by declaring, ‘The Lord is who he is, and he will act as he pleases (יהוה הוא הטוב בעיני יעשה)’.⁵³ The sentiment is personal, but it draws on an accepted notion of the sovereignty of God (Judg. 10.15; 2 Sam. 10.12 = 1 Chron. 19.13) and of kings (Saul: 2 Sam. 19.19; David: 2 Sam. 24.22). Yet Eli could have used other perfectly venerable musings, such as what we find in Jon. 1.14 (see also Pss. 115.3; 135.6: ‘You are the Lord, and accomplish what you desire [כִּי־אַתָּה] כִּי־יְהוָה כִּאֲשֶׁר חָפְצָה עֲשִׂיהָ’), and we may therefore wonder whether this particular expression allowed the narrator to focus once more on the dilemma of a practically sightless man for whom God’s unclouded vision (עֵיִן) carries such a foreboding promise. Ostensibly the story should shift to Samuel, declared in the next couple of verses to be God’s choice (3.19–4.1a).⁵⁴ In fact, Samuel soon disappears from the ensuing story of the Ark, not to re-emerge until 7.3, vacating the stage for God’s terrible vendetta against the house of Eli.

Sightless in Shiloh

In the HB (but not in the LXX), the war against the Philistines is launched suddenly, perhaps even by Israel itself, in two phases, neither of them following consultation with God who might, in any case, have egged it on.⁵⁵ (Throughout the hostilities, the Philistines display a sharper appreciation of God’s powers than do the Hebrews.) The results were preordained and so predictable: a devastating defeat for Israel. The news certainly tingled the ears of those who heard it (3.11), including those of Eli who sat on a chair awaiting news of the Ark’s fate and what it might portend for Israel, and for him as well. The Greek text is easiest to follow, ‘Heli was upon the seat by the gate looking along the way’.⁵⁶ The Hebrew, however, is much more interesting for us, reading at 4.13: יָד דָּרַךְ מִצְפָּה (*qere* יָד) (‘and you [Samuel] will tell him [יהוה]’). If we accept the *qere* as a shortened form of יָד הַשַּׁעַר of 4.18 and vocalize the last word as מִצְפָּה (the commentaries are full of alternate suggestions), we might make

52. וְהִגַּדְתִּי לוֹ כִּי־שֹׁפֵט אֲנִי אֶת־בֵּיתוֹ עַד־עוֹלָם (‘And I declare to him [perfect with waw conversive] that I am judging his house for ever’, 3.13). We should not follow the readings of the LXX (‘I have told him [καὶ ἀνήγγελλα αὐτῷ]’) or of Driver (‘and you [Samuel] will tell him [יהוה]’). God derives wicked pleasure in conveying to Eli his loss of prestige.

53. בְּעֵינָיו (*ketiv*) is singular, as it is in 2 Sam. 12.9 (God’s); 19.19; 24.22 (David).

54. This is perceived by later readers, for the LXX expands on 3.21–4.1a, ‘And the Lord manifested himself again in Selom, for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel; and Samuel was accredited to all Israel as a prophet to the Lord from one end of the land to the other. And Heli was very old, and his sons kept advancing in wickedness, and their way was evil before the Lord.’

55. To march out against an enemy (4.1) is not necessarily a defensive action; see, for example, Num. 21.23; 1 Sam. 17.55.

56. καὶ ἶδου Ἡλὶ ἐκάθητο ἐπὶ τοῦ δίφρου παρὰ τὴν πύλην σκοπεύων τὴν ὁδόν.

a reasonable rendering, ‘Now Eli was sitting on a chair by the Mizpah-road Gate’.⁵⁷ The Masoretes, however, vocalized that word as a piel participle, מִצְפָּה (‘watching’), and so continued the exegesis implied by the LXX. It is true that this form does not necessarily imply the use of sight, as in Ps. 5.4, said of a worshiper awaiting (on signs from God?), and Mic. 7.7, said of the prophet, waiting in expectation; but it does sharpen our appreciation of how the motif of vision and sight remains in control of the story.

Samuel’s vision had confirmed to Eli God’s utter contempt for him; yet there was still the matter of the dignity of God when facing the enemy. So Eli sat ‘watching’ and listening for the ululations that would accompany the return of a triumphant army (Exod. 15.20-21; Judg. 11.34; 1 Sam. 18.6-7). He could neither see the bedraggled bearer of the horrible news, for his eyes had become fixed into a sightless stare (וַעֲיִנוֹ קָמָה, 4.15 [on which see n. 26]), nor could he distinguish any longer between the sound of triumph and of despair. As he falls backward and cracks his neck, sightless Eli has time to hear about the defeat of Israel, the great slaughter accompanying it, the death of his sons, and the exile of God.

Looking Back at God

When Hannah made plans to deliver her son to God at Shiloh, she said, ‘As soon as the child is weaned, I shall bring him, וּנְרִאָה אֶת־פְּנֵי יְהוָה, he will live there for good’ (1.22). The phrase I have not translated has been a crux for generations. As punctuated by the Masorites, the verbal form is a niph'al, with Samuel the presumed subject, translatable something like ‘...he shall appear before God...’ The phrase itself occurs half a dozen times in Hebrew Scripture, with the verb רָאָה vocalized as a niph'al in all but two cases (Gen. 32.10, 30). Yet in all instances the phrases can make good sense when the verbal form is a qal. It is therefore tempting to translate 1.22, ‘...I shall bring him and we shall look at face of God’.⁵⁸ If so, we would be dealing with a metaphor (or more likely with a calque) from neighboring cultures where ‘to look at the face of God’ (e.g. Akkadian *pān ilim naplusum*) simply meant to worship.⁵⁹ However, whether or not Hannah wanted her son to be

57. Mizpah, we learn from 7.11-12, is on the road leading to Eben-Ezer, possibly at Izbet Sertah, and archaeologists look for it at Nebi Samwal or Tell an-Nasbeh. Halpern (1999) tries to solve the problem by studying the architecture of gates. In his opinion the narrative dates from the tenth century.

58. Much has been written on this phrase, most recently in Wilson 1995, where he also gives the history of the debate. His use of Akkadian material, however, is faulty; see Veenhof 1995.

59. Thus in ARM 10 143 (= LAPO 18 1100) Zimri-Lim writes his aunt (or mother) Addu-duri, ‘...I will head to Ziniyan the day after (posting) this tablet of mine. On getting there, I shall repeatedly worship (lit. “keep on seeing the face of”) Dagan of Šubatam. Additionally, I shall unstintingly give him whatever he requests as his donation. I am well. News of your wellbeing should keep on reaching me.’ In Gen. 32.31 Jacob at the Yabbok praises himself, ‘I have met God face to face, yet I have survived (כִּי־רָאִיתִי אֱלֹהִים פָּנִים אֶל־פָּנִים וַתִּנְצַל נַפְשִׁי)’. On meeting his brother the next day, Jacob tells him, ‘(If you favor me, kindly accept this gift from me,) inasmuch as I have seen your face as seeing the face of God, in your acceptance of me (כִּי עַל־כֵּן רָאִיתִי פָּנֶיךָ)’. No doubt, the narrator is indulging in one more wordplay on the place

seen by God or simply to look at God, just a few years later Samuel indeed does see God, thereby sharpening his own vision about his role as mediator.

By then, however, Eli's eyes had already lost their capacity to focus on God and on the grinding demands God's service required.

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name פִּנּוּחַ. Certainly, there is here a psychological factor at work as Jacob flatters a brother he had reasons to fear. But it is also likely that we are dealing with an idiom by which Jacob equates the joy of seeing his brother with that of worshipping God.

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