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# THE TABLET AND THE SCROLL

Near Eastern Studies in Honor of  
WILLIAM W. HALLO

edited by

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Daniel C. Snell  
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# ON EVALUATING CLAIMS OF LITERARY BORROWING

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Among the many topics encompassed by Bill Hallo's encyclopedic scholarly interests, the comparative method in Biblical studies is one to which he has repeatedly returned. Since his programmatic article "New Viewpoints on Cuneiform Literature" (IEJ 12 [1962] pp. 13-26), he has devoted a good deal of attention to illustrating the value of the comparative method not only for the content of Biblical literature, but also for the processes by which it was composed and transmitted. The following study was prompted by his interest in this method, and it is a pleasure for me to offer it here in his honor.

## *The Problem*

Comparative studies are particularly appropriate in the study of Hebrew scriptures since a comparative method of sorts is as old as the Bible itself. Biblical religion defines itself in relation to other religions, normally (though not invariably) polemicizing against them. In so doing it shows knowledge of certain practices and beliefs of neighboring religions, such as the use of idols in worship, human sacrifice, astrology and divination, and certain myths (as alluded to in Elijah's taunts in I Ki. 18). By Hellenistic and Roman times comparative material was employed both in the interpretation of the Bible and in religious polemics about it. Philo of Alexandria debated with detractors of the Torah who argued on the basis of Greek myths that such biblical stories as the Tower of Babel were no less myths than those the Jews derided in Greek literature.<sup>1</sup> The Babel-Bible controversy of more recent times led to similar polemics. To the "Babelists"

the contents of the Bible were essentially derivative of Babylonia, little different, unoriginal, and no better. To their opponents, on the other hand, the Bible was essentially original, radically different, and superior to anything Babylonian. One legacy of these early polemics is a penchant, dubbed "parallelomania," that has been defined as

that extravagance among scholars which first overdoes the supposed similarity in passages and then proceeds to describe source and derivation as if implying literary connection flowing in an inevitable or predetermined direction.<sup>2</sup>

Cooler heads saw that the study of parallels had value apart from polemics. E.A. Speiser described this value as it applies to Biblical studies as follows:

... it is only by isolating first the inherited and borrowed elements that we can gain a true appreciation of the final contribution of the Bible; the independent achievement is thus brought out in clearer relief.<sup>3</sup>

Such a statement could, of course, be made with reference to any civilization which borrowed from others. Indeed, the great comparatist J.G. Frazer made this point while describing the problem I wish to focus on:

To sift out the elements of culture which a race has independently evolved and to distinguish them accurately from those which it has derived from other races is a task of extreme difficulty and delicacy, which promises to occupy students of man for a long time to come.<sup>4</sup>

Frazer made this comment in *The Golden Bough*, which he published in 1890. That we still have not reached agreement on how to distinguish borrowed

1. Philo, *On the Confusion of Tongues*, §§ 1-14; cf. H.A. Wolfson, "The Philonic God of Revelation and His Latter-Day Deniers," in J. Goldin, ed., *The Jewish Expression* (Bantam, New York, 1970), p. 89. Josephus frequently quoted foreign sources as analogues to Biblical themes or in confirmation of biblical statements; see *Antiquities* I, §§ 93-95, 104-8, etc. Comparative materials were used where available in rabbinic exegesis of the Bible. See, for example, *b. Rosh Hashanah* 26a-b; *Menahot* 34b; *Gen. R.* 79:7; *Mekhilta, Pisha*, XIII (ed. Lauterbach, p. 100); *Lam. R.* proem 23 (ed. Buber, p. 20); *Pesiq. Rab Kah.* ch. 24 (ed. Mandelbaum, pp. 361f.); Rashi at Num. 19:15 and 20:10; Ibn Ezra at Exod. 23:19; Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, 3:29, 49, etc.

2. S. Sandmel, "Parallelomania," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81 (1962), pp. 1-13.

3. E.A. Speiser, ed., *At the Dawn of Civilization*. Vol. 1 of *The World History of the Jewish People, First Series: Ancient Times* (Rutgers University Press, 1964), pp. 255-56.

4. Quoted by H. Frankfort, *The Problem of Similarity in Ancient Near Eastern Religions* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1951), p. 3.

from original elements is clear from two recent statements about the relationship between Biblical and Mesopotamian parallels. Theodore Gaster, Frazer's modern editor, writes in the introduction to his revision of Frazer's *Folklore in the Old Testament* that the Hebrew compiler of Genesis "had ... a cuneiform original before him."<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, the Assyriologist A.R. Millard says of the flood story, which most consider the outstanding example of a borrowed story in the Bible, that "... it has yet to be shown that there was borrowing, even indirectly."<sup>6</sup>

#### Criteria for Identifying Parallels

Numerous considerations go into the evaluation of potential parallels, such as establishing channels of transmission between the donor culture and the recipient culture. In the case of the Hebrew scriptures and the rest of the ancient Near East, frequent contacts between pre-Israelite Palestine and the Israelites, on the one hand, and Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Syro-Palestinian states on the other hand, provide sufficient channels to make borrowing in principle likely.<sup>7</sup> At the heart of the debate, however, is the question of how to evaluate the *content* of apparent literary parallels. How similar must two literary phenomena be in order to qualify as parallels, and what more is demanded if one is to argue that the two are historically related? For the purposes of the present discussion, it is also important to ask the question in a negative way: how much dissimilarity can we tolerate

between parallels before dismissing the claims of parallelism or relationship?

Not many Biblical scholars ever wrote about this question explicitly enough to formulate criteria. One who did was W.F. Albright. As a rule of thumb in evaluating individual cases, Albright demanded shared complexity or pattern:

Even when story motifs can be found in different contiguous lands, it is not safe to assume original relationship or borrowing except where the motif is complex, forming a pattern.<sup>8</sup>

The same safeguard was advocated by Wellek and Warren in their *Theory of Literature*:

[In the study of sources and influences] parallels must be exclusive parallels; that is, there must be reasonable certainty that they cannot be explained by a common source, a certainty attainable only if the investigator has a wide knowledge of literature or if the parallel is a highly intricate pattern rather than an isolated 'motif' or word.<sup>9</sup>

As a safeguard, this demand for complexity or pattern seems so reasonable that few would want to challenge it. Although there is a danger that the principle might cause us to overlook some real parallels, on the whole, when applied judiciously, it seems a handy criterion for ruling out the spurious. It is when it is applied too rigidly, when it is given the status of inviolable law, that the principle threatens to exceed its usefulness. I would like to mention a few examples where this may have happened, and then turn to some evidence which may help us view the question empirically rather than hypothetically.

Surely the most celebrated cases of suspected literary borrowing involve the Biblical creation and flood stories in Genesis. Alexander Heidel, followed by Speiser, listed eight similarities between the Babylonian *Enuma Elish* and the first creation narrative in Genesis (each noted differences as well) and stressed especially their identical order in each.<sup>10</sup> The even greater similarity between the Biblical and Mesopotamian flood stories is almost universally conceded, with the shared episode of sending out the birds forming the strongest argument for a literary relationship.<sup>11</sup> Of late, however, doubts have been voiced. In the year following the appearance of Speiser's commentary on Genesis, W.G. Lambert denied the relevance of some of Heidel's similarities and concluded that "the differences [between the Biblical and Mesopot-

5. Gaster, *Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament* (Harper & Row, New York and Evanston, 1969), p. xxvii.

6. Millard, "A New Babylonian 'Genesis' Story," *Tyndale Bulletin* 18 (1967) p. 17.

7. See Y. Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel* (trans. M. Greenberg, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1960), pp. 217-221. Palestine in the second millennium was exposed to Egyptian culture due to intermittent Egyptian hegemony (see J. Bright, *A History of Israel* [3d ed.; Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1981], pp. 53, 108-115) and to Mesopotamian culture through the use of cuneiform writing. An instance of Egyptian literary influence on scribes from Canaan is found in passages in the Amarna letters which echo Egyptian hymns (a phenomenon which enhances the likelihood that part of Ps. 104 is ultimately related to an Egyptian prototype); see W.F. Albright, "The Egyptian Correspondence of Abimilki," *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 23 (1937), pp. 197-199. For cuneiform writing and texts in Palestine see, for example, the texts published by W. W. Hallo and H. Tadmor, "A Lawsuit from Hazor," *IEJ* 27 (1977), pp. 1-11, and H. Tadmor, "A Lexical Text from Hazor," *IEJ* 27 (1977), pp. 98-102, and the other cuneiform texts from Palestine cited by them in the footnotes. These texts include inscribed liver models for use in divination, a fragment of the *Gilgamesh Epic*, and lexical texts, a staple of scribal training. The Amarna letters indicate the presence of cuneiform scribes in more than a dozen Palestinian cities. Economic ties between Mari and Palestine are attested in several texts; see A. Malamat, "'Silver, Gold, and Precious Stones from Hazor.' Trade and Trouble in a New Mari Document," *Essays in Honor of Yigael Yadin*, *Journal of Jewish Studies* 33 (1982), pp. 71-79 and earlier studies cited there on p. 71 n. 2. Among the Mesopotamian texts found at Ugarit is an Akkadian fragment of the flood story; see W.G. Lambert and A.R. Millard, *Atra-hasis. The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1969), pp. 131-133.

8. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity* (Doubleday, Garden City, N. Y., 1957), p. 67.

9. R. Wellek and A. Warren, *Theory of Literature* (3d ed.; Harcourt, Brace & World, New York, 1956), p. 258.

10. A. Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis* (2d ed.; University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1963), p. 129; E.A. Speiser, *Genesis* (Doubleday, Garden City, N. Y., 1964), pp. 9-10.

11. Lambert, "A New Look at the Babylonian Background of Genesis," *Journal of Theological Studies* N. S. 16 (1965), pp. 201-202.

amian accounts of origins in Gen. 1-11] are indeed so great that direct borrowing of a literary form of Mesopotamian traditions is out of the question." He concluded that what borrowing did take place probably occurred during the Amarna age (fourteenth century B.C.E.) and reached the Hebrews in oral form.<sup>12</sup> Shortly thereafter, M. Weinfeld argued that "there exist many differences between Babylonian myth and Genesis 1 which are difficult to explain if we assume direct borrowing from Babylonian material" (this point was substantially admitted even by earlier advocates of a relationship).<sup>13</sup> Weinfeld approved of S. Herrmann's argument in favor of *Egyptian* inspiration for Genesis 1, citing especially the detailed similarity of a cosmogonic passage in *The Instruction for King Meri-ka-Re*.<sup>14</sup> Here we find several scholars applying the criterion of complexity, or detailed correspondence, and pattern; even those whose case does not satisfy this criterion concede that failure to do so prevents a precise explanation of the relationship between the parallels.

Until recently, at least the assumed relationship between the Biblical and Mesopotamian flood stories escaped challenge, but even this finally happened. Millard has raised the question in the following manner:

It has yet to be shown that there was borrowing, even indirectly. Differences between the Babylonian and Hebrew traditions can be found in factual details of the Flood narrative ... and are most obvious in the ethical and religious concepts of the whole of each composition. All who suspect or suggest borrowing by the Hebrews are compelled to admit large-scale revision, alteration, and reinterpretation in a fashion which cannot be substantiated for any other composition from the ancient Near East or in any other Hebrew writing.<sup>15</sup>

Here we have Albright's rule of thumb elevated to the status of a law, albeit in a very exaggerated form: Even where a complex pattern is shared by two compositions — as in the flood stories — too many differences still rule out a literary relationship. As we shall see, differences between different versions of a text that are as extensive as those between the Biblical and Mesopotamian flood stories are, in fact, quite common in the ancient Near East.

For the purpose of close examination I would like to look at another celebrated case of suspected literary borrowing, the famous *carpe diem* passage in Eccl. 9:7-9. Since 1905 it has been widely held that this passage owes its inspiration to one in the Old Babylonian version of

the *Gilgamesh Epic* where Siduri tells Gilgamesh of the futility of his quest for immortality and advises him to enjoy this life. Here are the two passages, side-by-side, with the similar lines facing each other:

*Gilgamesh**Ecclesiastes 9:7-9*

When the gods  
created mankind,  
Death for mankind  
they set aside,  
Life in their own  
hands retaining.

As for you, Gilgamesh,  
let your belly be full,  
Make merry day and night.  
Of each day make a feast  
of rejoicing

Go, eat your bread  
in gladness  
And drink your wine  
in joy;  
For your action was long ago  
approved by God.

Day and night dance  
and play!  
Let your garments be  
sparkling fresh,  
Your head be washed.

Let your clothes always be  
freshly washed,  
And your head never lack  
ointment.

Bathe in water.  
Pay heed to a little one that  
holds on to your hand.  
Let a spouse delight in  
your bosom,

See life with a woman you love,  
All the fleeting days of life that  
you have been granted  
under the sun — all your  
fleeting days.

For this is the task  
of [woman(?)].<sup>16</sup>

For this alone is what you can  
get out of life and out the  
means you acquire under  
the sun.

Speiser commented on the relationship between the two passages that

the proof that the Biblical passage must be literarily (even if not directly) dependent on the Babylonian one is the identical order in which the ideas are presented.<sup>17</sup>

We may note the following elements, in the same order: eating and rejoicing, fresh clothing, treating the head, and loving one's wife.

12. "A New Look," p. 299; cf. J.H. Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic* (Philadelphia, 1982) (henceforth EGE), p. 119 n. 35.

13. Weinfeld, "The Creator God in Genesis 1 and in the Prophecy of Second Isaiah," *Tarbiz* 37 (1967-68), pp. 112-113.

14. Translated by J.A. Wilson in ANET p. 417d.

15. Millard, "A New Babylonian 'Genesis' Story," p. 17 (emphasis added).

16. *Gilgamesh*, Old Babylonian Version, Meissner fragment, iii, 6-14; see EGE, p. 168. The similarity of this passage to Eccl. 9:7-9 was first pointed out by H. Grimme, "Babel und Koheleth-Jo-jakin," *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* 8 (1905), pp. 432-438.

17. Apud H.L. Ginsberg, "The Quintessence of Koheleth," in A. Altmann, ed., *Biblical and Other Studies* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1962), pp. 286-287.

Even this parallel, however, has been challenged. A similar passage has been noted in the Egyptian *Song of the Harper*:

Follow thy desire as long as thou shalt live.  
Put myrrh upon thy head  
and clothing of fine linen upon thee,  
Being anointed with genuine marvels  
of the god's property.<sup>18</sup>

R. Gordis pointed to classical and modern parallels as well as the *Gilgamesh* and Egyptian passages and concluded:

It is obvious ... that there can be no question of borrowing in so universally human a context, unless there were some unusual feature in common, or at least the same sequence of details. None of these factors obtains here. The Babylonian poet speaks of the joy of children, which is lacking in Koheleth, while the Egyptian poet lacks the reference to the love of woman found in the Hebrew sage. Virtually the only feature in common [among all the texts - J.H.T.] is the emphasis upon clean clothes (and even the fine oil mentioned is missing in the Babylonian poem). In addition, the long interval of time separating these poems from Koheleth rules out the possibility of borrowing, though it is quite conceivable that the theme was a conventionally popular one throughout the orient.<sup>19</sup>

Gordis is able to achieve this sweeping denial of significant similarities only by insisting that the Egyptian passage be taken into account, too, so that only motifs which appear in all three passages may be counted. His critique, therefore, carries less weight than intended. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that there are some differences.

#### *An Empirical Approach:*

##### *Foreign Versions of Mesopotamian Texts*

In all the cases we have reviewed, the advocates of literary relationship have been prepared to accommodate some differences in details, feeling that these were not enough to damage their cases. Their opponents seized upon these very differences to argue that borrowing did not take place. How are we to escape this impasse? To return to our earlier formulation of the question: How much divergence may one allow between seemingly related materials before concluding that there is no literary relationship after all? The question cannot be answered

in statistical terms, but I believe we can find some guidance in certain Mesopotamian texts which we have in copies and translations from peripheral areas. In what form was Mesopotamian literature known *outside* of Mesopotamia? How much do the peripheral versions resemble the native Mesopotamian versions to which they are *indisputably* related?

Within Mesopotamia itself there are many instructive cases of Sumerian literature borrowed into Akkadian, with differences in details and values as extensive as those between the Biblical and Mesopotamian flood stories. But since the early symbiotic relationship between Sumerians and Akkadians often makes it impossible to speak of two separate cultures, and because the Biblical focus of our question demands examples from the periphery of Mesopotamia, we shall confine our attention to the latter.

A good deal of material from the peripheral areas is available for comparison with Mesopotamian originals. For the *Gilgamesh Epic* we have texts in Akkadian, as well as Hittite and Hurrian versions, from the Hittite capital Hattusha (Boghazköi, in Asia Minor). Of special significance for Bibliists, there is also an Akkadian fragment of the epic from the Canaanite site of Megiddo.<sup>20</sup> All of these are from about the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries B.C.E. Numerous other compositions are also found in peripheral copies or translations.<sup>21</sup>

Several peripheral versions have been found to differ markedly from their native Mesopotamian counterparts. According to S. Moren, none of the peripheral manuscripts of the omen series *Shumma Alu* is from the version of the text that was standard in Mesopotamia; they are all from "non-canonical" versions.<sup>22</sup> Akkadian versions of the myth *Nergal and Ereshkigal* have been found at Amarna, Egypt (fourteenth century) and at Sultantepe in northern Assyria (eighth or seventh century). O.R. Gurney had this to say about the relationship between these versions:

The essential outlines of this story are already present in the Amarna version, but whereas the latter presents a bald, concise narrative of hardly more than a hundred lines, the Assyrian version is a literary com-

20. See EGE pp. 110-129.

21. See J. Siegelová, "Eine hethitisches Fragment des Atra-ḫasis Epos," *Archiv Orientalni* 38 (1970), pp. 135-139 (Hittite fragment of *Atrahasis*); E. Reiner and H.G. Güterbock, "The Great Prayer to Ishtar and its Two Versions from Boğazköy," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 21 (1967), pp. 255-266 (Akkadian texts from Mesopotamia and Boghazköi and Hittite translation from Boghazköi); E. Laroche, "Une hymne trilingue a Iškur-Adad," *Revue d'Assyriologie* 58 (1964), pp. 69-78, and J. Nougayrol and E. Laroche in *Ugaritica* 5 (Mission de Ras Shamra 16. Imprimerie Nationale and Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, Paris, 1968), pp. 310ff. and 773ff. (trilingual versions of Mesopotamian literary works and versions from peripheral sites); Speiser and A.K. Grayson in ANET, pp. 111 and 514 (*Anzû* in copies from Assyria, Sultantepe, and Susa, with Sumerian forerunner from Ur); Speiser in ANET, p. 114 (*Etana* in copies from Assyria and Susa). See also n. 7, above, and n. 23 below.

22. S. Moren, *The Omen Series "Šumma Alu": A Preliminary Investigation* (University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, 1978), p. 36.

18. Translated by J. A. Wilson in ANET, p. 467. Compare also this passage from the *Instruction of Ptah-hotep* (Wilson, p. 413):

If thou art a man of standing,  
Thou shouldst found thy household  
And love thy wife at home.  
Fill her belly; clothe her back.  
Ointment is the prescription for her body.

19. Gordis, *Koheleth: The Man and His World* (3d ed.; Schocken, New York, 1968), p. 304.

position enlivened by much incidental conversation and containing passages borrowed from other works; moreover, the whole of Nergal's first journey to the Underworld and his return to heaven are found only in the later [i.e., Sultantepe - J.H.T.] text. Yet we cannot be sure that these additions are of late origin. Most Assyrian manuscripts of such poems are in the direct line of descent from Old Babylonian originals, and the Amarna tablet may well represent an abbreviated local version, like that of the *Gilgamesh Epic* found at Bogazkoy.<sup>23</sup>

Lambert went even further in his assessment of the differences between the two recensions and concluded that the Amarna version "is so completely different from the traditional Mesopotamian one as to give the impression that oral tradition alone will explain it."<sup>24</sup>

The Hittite version of the *Gilgamesh Epic* is especially useful for our purposes. This version is an abridgement of a native Mesopotamian version.<sup>25</sup> It abbreviates some episodes and omits others entirely, including those which involve descriptions of the Babylonian city Uruk and were of little interest to an Anatolian audience. But the episode describing the journey to the Cedar Mountain and its monstrous guardian Huwawa receives a great deal more attention, presumably because its locale was supposed to be close to Anatolia and the events provoked interest on the part of Anatolian listeners or readers. The Hittite version includes the storm-god among those who endowed Gilgamesh with his attributes at birth. This god had played no role in the Mesopotamian version but was popular among the Hittites. Another theme which appears in modified form in the Hittite version is the early life of Gilgamesh's friend Enkidu. The Old Babylonian, Standard Babylonian, and Hittite versions describe the life of Enkidu among the wild animals before he became civilized. The Babylonian versions speak of Enkidu's hairiness and his clothing. In the Old Babylonian version he is implicitly naked (the harlot eventually clothes him), whereas the Standard Babylonian version says he was garbed in a garment like the god of wild animals and cattle, which means either that he was naked or wore a rustic garment.<sup>26</sup> The Hittite version says nothing about hairiness or clothing or nakedness. It shares with the Babylonian versions only the statement that he grazed and drank water with the animals, though it terms the latter "wild animals" instead of "gazelles." The comparison between the versions may be described in tabular form as follows:

<i>Old Babylonian</i>	<i>Standard Babylonian</i>	<i>Hittite</i>
	raised by animals	raised by animals
ranges steppe with wild animals	ranges steppe with wild animals	
hairy	hairy	
	doesn't know people or civilized land	
implicitly naked	implicitly naked	
	garbed in garment like god of wild animals and cattle (=either naked or in rustic garment)	
eats grass	eats grass with gazelles	grazes with wild animals
	drinks water with wild animals	drinks water with wild animals
sucks milk of wild creatures		
unaccustomed to bread	implicitly unaccustomed to bread	
unaccustomed to beer	implicitly unaccustomed to beer	

It cannot be denied that these descriptions are related, since they are each other's counterparts in two versions of the same composition. But if we did not know that, and if we were to apply the exacting criteria exemplified in the arguments against borrowing in *Ecclesiastes* and *Genesis*, we might have to conclude instead that the two passages are independent crystallizations of the popular wolf-boy or hairy anchorite themes.<sup>27</sup> It will do no good to object that the comparison of the Hittite and Babylonian versions may be invalid since the Hittite version may reflect a different Babylonian version than the ones known to us. There were multiple versions of many ancient literary texts and we have no control over which versions reach foreign territory. The fact is simply that the Hittites had a version which differed from the Babylonian ones known to us, and these are the versions which are available for comparison. To state that the Hittite version differs because it stems from a different version would simply explain the difference, not render it invalid for our argument.

#### *The Implications of the Evidence*

This brief survey shows that the peripheral versions of Mesopotamian literary texts may not only differ from the Mesopotamian versions in detail, but that they may abbreviate them or even modify them in accordance with

23. O.R. Gurney, "The Myth of Nergal and Ereshkigal," *Anatolian Studies* 10 (1960), p. 107. The texts are translated by Speiser and Grayson in ANET, pp. 103-104 and 507-512.

24. Lambert, "A New Look," p. 300.

25. See EGE, p. 112.

26. See EGE, pp. 198-200.

27. See EGE, p. 204.



their own ideology and local interests, precisely as the Bible appears to have done.

If these data appear to weaken the grounds for opposing claims of literary borrowing — and I believe that they do — then this has some unsettling implications. For it means that an alleged relationship between a Biblical text or motif and some ancient Near Eastern counterpart cannot be refuted simply by pointing to differences between the two, even if they are numerous. How, then, can such claims be examined critically? We must consider degrees of probability: clearly, the fewer such differences and the more similarities, the more plausible the claim will seem. We also have to consider circumstantial evidence, such as the likelihood of a given author being familiar with motifs, or literature, stemming from a particular foreign provenience — in other words, with the question of channels of transmission.<sup>28</sup> Another circumstantial criterion would be the number of parallels from the same source found in the same author or in the same period. The latter seems applicable to Eccl. 9:7-9, for Ecclesiastes contains another parallel to the *Gilgamesh Epic*, Eccl. 4:9-12,<sup>29</sup> while another book from the same — postexilic — period contains yet another parallel to the epic, Dan. 4:30.<sup>30</sup> These parallels suggest that several motifs from the *Gilgamesh Epic*, or

perhaps even the epic itself, may have been known to Jewish writers during the postexilic period.<sup>31</sup> In discussing the first of the Ecclesiastes passages, H.L. Ginsberg expressed a hunch that Koheleth may have had an Aramaic version of the advice of Siduri.<sup>32</sup> The likelihood of this suggestion, and of knowledge of *Gilgamesh* in Israel during the postexilic period, is enhanced when one considers that another composition about a Mesopotamian figure, the *Tale of Ahiqar*, made its way in Aramaic as far west as Egypt by the Persian period.<sup>33</sup>

To the extent that one can gather circumstantial evidence of this sort in support of supposed literary parallels, one will have greater confidence in proposing a relationship between them. But neither the absence of such evidence nor differences between a Biblical passage and its supposed antecedent or source will by themselves constitute a strong argument against the relationship. This conclusion will be more welcome to “parallelomaniacs” than to their opponents, and in incautious hands it can be misused. But to ignore it would shackle us in recognizing real parallels that are valuable in illustrating both the rootedness of the Bible in its Near Eastern environment and its own creativity.

28. For example, it is plausible that 1 Kings 18:27 reflects knowledge of Canaanite mythological motifs, for it is likely that Elijah and his audience would have been familiar with such motifs since the cult of Baal was being actively promoted by Jezebel. That echoes of Assyrian royal inscriptions in Isaiah are directly or indirectly related to such inscriptions is plausible because Assyrian royal propaganda was spread to the Levant by several means, including inscriptions; see the superb discussion by P. Machinist, “Assyria and its Image in the First Isaiah,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 103 (1983), pp. 719-737.

29. See EGE, pp. 165-167. That the Ecclesiastes passage is dependent on an external source is made likely by its reference to a *threefold cord*; this detail is irrelevant in the context of Ecclesiastes, the theme of which is “two are better than one.” Its presence in Ecclesiastes is explained by the dependence of the latter on the *Gilgamesh* tradition; in the Sumerian form of that tradition the value of the two men acting together is explained by the saying “the towed boat will not sink,” which is further explained by “a towrope of three strands cannot be cut.” The reference to the threefold cord makes sense only in the original context. The presence of such a “blind motif” in a text is often an indication of dependence; see J. van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1975), p. 163: “a ‘blind motif’ ... is some unexplained action or detail that assumes consciously or unconsciously that the earlier account is known.” Saul Lieberman noted that the rabbis often quoted sources *in extenso*, including details that were not essential for the point they were making; see *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York, 1962), pp. 7, 33.

30. See Tigay, “Paradise,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Keter, Jerusalem, and Macmillan, New York, 1972) 13:79-80; EGE, p. 207 n. 43. That the Babylonian king whose fate is described in Daniel 4 may have been Nabonidus instead of Nebuchadnezzar is irrelevant to the present argument (see W. von Soden, “Eine Babylonische Volksüberlieferung von Nabonid in den Daniel Erzählungen,” *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 53 [1935], pp. 81-89; F.M. Cross, *The Ancient Library of Qumran* [revised edition; Doubleday, Garden City, 1961]), pp. 166-168.

31. This suggestion is not much enhanced by references to *Gilgamesh* and *Huwawa* in Qumran texts and later literature; none of these references necessarily reflects knowledge of the epic itself. See EGE, p. 252. The same is true of the tale of *Kombabos* in Lucian’s *De Syria Dea*; see R.A. Oden, Jr., *Studies in Lucian’s De Syria Dea* (Harvard Semitic Monographs 15; Scholars Press, Missoula, Montana, 1977), pp. 36-40.

32. See Ginsberg, cited in n. 17 above.

33. A.E. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.* (Clarendon, Oxford, 1950), pp. 204-248. See J.C. Greenfield, “The Background and Parallel to a Proverb of Ahiqar,” in *Hommages à André Dupont-Sommer* (Librairie d’Amérique et d’Orient Adrien-Maisonneuve, Paris, 1971), pp. 49-59; “Ahiqar in the Book of Tobit,” in *De la Torah au Messie. Mélanges Henri Cazelles* (Paris, 1981), pp. 329-336.