

Ezekiel's *gillûlîm* and Ritual Defecation in Ancient Near Eastern Texts: Between a Metaphor and a Symbolic Act (NB Akkadian, OB Mari, Greek, Aramaic, Talmudic Texts, and the Ugaritic *marzeah* Feast)

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The term *gillûlîm*, literally “dung gods,” is the favorite term in the book of Ezekiel to designate “idols,” where it is used 39 out of a total of 48 times in the Hebrew Bible. The present article attempts to show that the choice of this unusual term is based on acts of ritual defecation as part of various ceremonies attested and described in the ancient Near Eastern texts. I shall suggest that in certain texts the references be taken either as metaphors or symbolic gestures. One has first to determine the meaning of the act of ritual defecation and then trace the transformation of its original meaning and its reutilization as a metaphor in subsequent ancient Near Eastern literature.

1. The Outrageous Scatological Metaphor Used by Ezekiel in the Babylonian Exile

The Exilic prophet Ezekiel seems to have coined the term *gillûlîm*, usually rendered as “dung” or “excrement,” and made it his favorite term for designating idols and idol-worship. His employment of this word accounts, as said above, for about three-fourths of its occurrences in the Bible. In a detailed study of the term *gillûlîm* in Ezekiel and the Hebrew Bible,¹ I have reached the

¹ D. Bodi, “Les *gillûlîm* chez Ézéchiél et dans l’Ancien Testament et les différentes pratiques culturelles associées à ce terme,” *RB* 100 (1993): 481-510. M. I. Gruber (“*glwlym eidola*,” in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, ed. K. van der Toorn, B. Becking and P. W. Van der Horst [Leiden: Brill, 1995], 656-57, esp. 656), dates the emergence of the term in the time between Josiah’s reform in 622 and the destruction of the Temple in 587/586 BCE.

Professor David Marcus has had a double influence in my career. His *Manual of Akkadian* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1978) helped me begin to learn Akkadian with his exercises on the first ten of Hammurabi’s laws. They found their way into my own *Petite grammaire de l’akkadien* (Paris: Geuthner, 2001), which I still use in teaching Akkadian.

following conclusion: instead of postulating two different roots *gl/gll* (*gāl*) “to be round” / “heap of stones,” and *gl/gll* (*gēl*) (constr. pl. *gel^elē*) “excrement,” and to relate the latter to the term *gillûlîm*, it seems more correct to see here a single root *gl/gll* with two possible meanings which belong, however, to the same semantic field. The basic meaning would be “being round,” a feature applicable to pebbles, stones, boulders, rollers, and other materials out of which idols were made. The derived meaning would be “excrement,” stemming from the fact that fecal matter of human or animal origin manifests the feature of rotundity. Ezekiel particularly exploits this derived meaning and speaks of pagan gods as “dung-gods.”

While commenting on a proverb in the Babylonian Talmud (*b. Baba Qama* 92b), “When hungry a dog is ready to swallow even his [own] excrement (*gll*),” Rashi (1040-1105) suggested that the term *gll* could also refer to “stones.”² This underlines the difficulty in understanding which one of the two possible meanings this root may have. Ezekiel’s favorite word for “idols,” *gillûlîm*, has clear scatological connotations. Through assonance, the term *gillûlîm* echoes another Hebrew term, *gēlēl*, which means “excrement” and to which it is also etymologically related.

The connection between the unusual Hebrew term *gillûlîm* and the term for excrement (*gll*) was already noted by another medieval rabbinic commentator, Ibn Ezra (1089-1164). He explained the term *gillûlîm* in Lev 26:30 with reference to Ezek 4:12 “human excrements” *b^egel^elē šē’t hā’ādām*, literally “excrements that come out of humans,” and Ezek 4:15 “human excrements” *g^elelē hā’ādām*. According to Ibn Ezra, the term represents an outrageous and denigrating way of designating pagan idols as dung and

² Cf. L. E. Stager, “The Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel,” *BASOR* 260 (1985): 1-35, esp. 13, “Later we are informed that the Temple ‘is being rebuilt with *’eben gēlāl* (not ‘huge, or dressed stones’ as in many translations, but literally ‘stones of rolling,’ or ‘round stones’...)” For the Aramaic references, see H. G. M. Williamson, “*’eben gēlāl* (Ezra 5:8, 6:4) Again,” *BASOR* 280 (1990): 83-88, who paraphrases this Biblical Aramaic phrase with “specially selected stones.”

refuse.³ The term *gillûlîm* would, therefore, be a particularly derogatory expression.⁴ In modern times, this explanation has been reiterated by H.-W. Wolff who suggested that the Hebrew term *gillûlîm* should best be translated with “*Scheißgötter*,” or “shit-gods.”⁵

The episode with excrement *b^egel^elê šē’t hā’ādām* at the very beginning of the Book of Ezekiel (4:12) might serve as a redactional clue toward understanding the similar-sounding and frequently occurring term *gillûlîm* in the rest of the book. In the choice of such a particularly outrageous term, Ezekiel seems to be extrapolating from an element of ritual defecation in connection with the Ištar festival that was still regularly celebrated in the Babylonian exile in his time, the sixth century BCE. He elaborates a virulent attack against idolatry, which he identifies as an act of polluting oneself with excrement. In light of the Mari OB text quoted below (3.1), which mentions the expression “he defecated in the cup in which he drank” or “dropped excrement in the cup” as an expression of breaking up an alliance, the practice of idolatry expressed as the worship of “dung gods” may retain some of that original meaning of breaking a covenant and desecralization. The term *gillûlîm* in Ezekiel may, therefore, be used as a metaphor. It attests to the transformation of an originally cultic act of defecation into a powerful metaphor in the service of an extremely spiteful polemic. Another prophet makes a scatological reference as an act of utter desecration of the priests. In Mal 2:3, the prophet, in the name of YHWH, threatens the priests for improper conduct with making

³ Ibn Ezra’s commentary in the Rabbinic Bible, available online: https://www.sefaria.org/Ibn_Ezra_on_Leviticus.26.30.4?lang=bi. Cf. Ezek 4:12 (YHWH to Ezekiel) “And you shall eat it as a barley cake, baking it in their sight on human excrements *b^egel^elê šē’t hā’ādām*.” (*šē’at* from the root *yāšā’* “to go out”). N. H. Sander and I. Trenel, *Dictionnaire hébreu-français* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1959, 1982), 609 reflecting the etymology proposed by the Rabbis. So also L. Kopf, “Arabische Etymologien und Parallelen zum Bibelwörterbuch,” *VT* 8 (1958): 161-225, esp. 177. For *HALAT*, 931, the etymology is uncertain. In Akkadian, see *AHW.*, 270 s.v. *ezû(m)* I “to defecate” and *zû* “excrement,” maybe from the root *yz’*; and cf. Heb. *yš’*.

⁴ J. A. Motyer, “Idolatry,” in *New Bible Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1987), 503-5.

⁵ H. W. Wolff, “Jahwe und die Götter in der alttestamentlichen Prophetie,” *Ev.Th.* 29 (1969): 397-416. Wolff attributes the term *gillûlîm* to Ezekiel as the first prophet who coined it and does not to see it as a product of the priestly circles as suggested by W. Zimmerli.

them ritually impure by throwing dung on them, “I will strew excrement (*pereš*) upon your faces, the excrement (*pereš*) of your festal sacrifices.”

2. *Ritual Defecation in the Babylonian Ištar Festival*

Ritual defecation is mentioned in the so-called “Love Lyrics” or texts related to the liturgy associated with the Ištar festival. The texts are fragmentary so that it is not always easy to make sense of who is speaking and fully grasp the action that is taking place. The texts have been roughly dated after 1000 BCE.⁶ Lambert published a few fragments in 1959, offering an initial, tentative treatment. As a probable *Sitz im Kultus* for the fragments he translated, Lambert suggested a public New Year festival in the month of Nisanu taking place in Babylon.⁷ He further identified thirteen more fragments, both Assyrian and Babylonian, with two pieces of a related ritual tablet ascertaining that all the pieces belonged to a single corpus, and that the paragraphs were for recitation in rituals for Ištar of Babylon.⁸ Lambert also pointed out the unusual descriptions found in these ritual texts, expressing his puzzlement as to their correct understanding: “Imagery of the boldest kind is commonplace, and the eroticism is the most explicit for ancient Mesopotamia. Parallels are hard to find [...] How should we take it? As actual record merely, as jest, as innuendo, or as something else?”⁹

Consider these lines:

(12) *ana tar-ša Ḫur-sag-kalam-ma lúkur-gar-ru ina kin-ši-šú
ik-kam-mi-iš-ma*

(13) *te-nin-di inaddi^{di} in-ḫī in-na-ḫu i-te-bi-ma Kiš^{ki} ra-ba-a lu-mur*

(14) *Bābili(E)^{ki} šá-qa-a lud-gul-ma i-za-am-mur* (B iii 12-14).

The *kurgarrû* will squat down in front of the Ḫursagkalamma.

⁶ W. G. Lambert, “Divine Love Lyrics from Babylon,” *JSS* 4 (1959): 1-15.

⁷ Lambert, “Divine Love Lyrics,” 7: “The language of the text compels a date of composition later than 1000 B.C.”

⁸ W. G. Lambert, “The Problem of the Love Lyrics,” in *Unity and Diversity. Essays in History, Literature, and Religion of the Ancient Near East*, ed. H. Goedicke and J. J. M. Roberts (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 98-135.

⁹ Lambert, “The Problem of the Love Lyrics,” 99.

He will groan, strain himself! He will then stand up and sing, “Let me contemplate the great Kiš (referring to the result of his laborious effort), let me look at lofty Babylon.”¹⁰

The above translation follows D. O. Edzard’s rendering. He offered the following comments, “Man mag uns fäkalische Phantasie vorwerfen [...] die ‘Love Lyrics’ sind weder sehr lieblich noch sehr lyrisch.”¹¹ Indeed, these liturgical texts related to the Ištar festival speak of breaking wind,¹² mention the smell of armpits, and make explicit scatological references.

There are several particular classes of cultic personnel associated with the goddess Ištar. They bear significant names and perform scatological rites as part of the celebrations related to her festival. These are the *kurgarrû* and the *pilpilû*. In light of modern gender studies, scholars try to determine whether they were homosexual, bisexual, or intersex beings; hermaphrodites, transvestites, castrates, male prostitutes, or simply cult performers.¹³ The

¹⁰D. O. Edzard, “Zur Ritualtafel der sog. ‘Love Lyrics,’” in *Language, Literature, and History: Philological and Historical Studies Presented to E. Reiner*, ed. F. Rochberg-Halton (AOS 67; New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1987), 57-69, esp. 57-58; *kamāšu*, *kamāsu* B, CAD K, 120b, “to squat down, to kneel”; *tēnintu* “weeping, whining”; *inḫī* from the root *anāḫu* I, “sich ganz furchtbar anstrengen,” “to make an effort, strive.”

¹¹ Edzard, “Zur Ritualtafel der sog. ‘Love Lyrics,’” 58. He comments (p. 68): “*kurgarrû*, *assinnu* und noch andere waren beileibe keine ‘Kultpersonen’ im klerikalen Sinne. Es waren Personen mit festgeschriebenen Rollen, vermutlich von bestimmtem Aussehen, besonderer Redeweise, bei denen das vorauszusetzende Publikum ganz bestimmte Handlungen erwartete—so wie etwa über zwetausend Jahre später die Charaktere des Commedia dell’ arte.”

¹² Lambert, “The Problem of the Love Lyrics,” 120 (Group II, B, ll. 10-12): “I sent [you?], my girl-friend, to Kār-bēl-mātāti; why did you break wind and become embarrassed? Why did you make the wagon of her lord a..[.] smell?”; and p. 122 (Group IV, l. 17): *šá su-ḫa-ti ni-pi-is-su* “the smell of armpits,” *šarātum* “to fart.”

¹³ B. Groneberg, “Die sumerisch-akkadische Inanna/Ištar Hermaphroditos?” *WO* 17 (1986): 25-46, esp. 33 n. 54, understands *kurgarrû*, *assinnu*, *pilpilû* as bisexual beings or transvestites. CAD K, 558: “There is no evidence that they (*kurgarrû*, *assinnu*, *kulu’u*) were eunuchs or homosexuals. However, in the Descent of Ištar the ref[erence] to the *kurgarrû* as neither male nor female may indicate that they were transvestites performing in female apparel.” Basing himself on an omen text about sexual acts (CT 39 44 15), W. G. Lambert suggests that the *assinnu* was a eunuch either by birth or castration; see “Prostitution,” in *Außenseiter und Randgruppen, Beiträge zu einer Sozialgeschichte des Alten Orients*, ed. V. Haas (Xenia; Konstanzer Althistorische Vorträge und Forschungen 32; Konstanz: Universitätsverlag Konstanz, 1992), 127-57, esp. 151. See also I. Peled, “*kula’utam epēšum*: Gender Ambiguity and Contempt in Mesopotamia,” *JAOS* 135 (2015): 751-64; idem, “Visualizing Masculinities: The Gala, Hegemony and Mesopotamian Iconography,” *NEA* 79 (2016): 158-65.

meanings of these two names are revealing. According to Edzard,¹⁴ the Akkadian term *kurgarrû* is etymologically derived from Sumerian k u r - g a r - r a, where the term k u r means “a heap, a monticule,” while g a r corresponds to the Akkadian verb *šakānu* “to place, to put.” Literally the term means “the one who places little heaps,” implying little heaps of excrement. This tablet from the so-called “Love Lyrics” would, therefore, describe the cultic act of defecation that the *kurgarrû* performs as part of his performance during the Ištar festival. The above text would illustrate why the *kurgarrû* bears such a peculiar name.

The other member of Ištar’s cultic personnel is called *pilpilû*. This term too comes from Sumerian: p i - l i - p i - l i, which literally means “he who makes pee-pee,” or “he who is constantly urinating.” These terms seem to imply that during the Ištar festivals, the *kurgarrû* and the *pilpilû* were defecating and urinating in front of Ḫursagkamma, Ištar’s temple in Kiš. This etymology of k u r - g a r - r a has been endorsed by J.-J. Glassner but criticized by J. S. Cooper.¹⁵ The strongest argument for the correctness of Edzard’s etymology of the term k u r - g a r - r a is its association with p i - l i - p i - l i “he who makes wee-wee” in an OB Proto-Lú lexical list (MSL 12 42:279-80).¹⁶ The term might have acquired different meanings in the course of centuries, but as suggested by Glassner, it could originally have belonged to the world of childhood, child-like behavior, designating young, immature beings, or mimicking child-like

¹⁴ Edzard, “Zur Rituallafel der sog. ‘Love Lyrics,’” 58 and n. 6 there.

¹⁵ J.-J. Glassner, “Inanna et les ME,” in *Nippur at the Centennial*, ed. M. de Jong Ellis (35th RAI, Philadelphia, 1988; Philadelphia: Occasional Publications of the S. N. Kramer Fund 1992), 55-86, esp. 61: “le nom kur.gar.ra, vraisemblablement ‘fait des petits tas’, comme du reste pi.li.pi.li, ‘qui ne cesse de faire pipi’, semble bien faire allusion, de façon imagée, à des êtres non encore arrivés à maturité et qui, de ce fait, car ils échappent aux normes contraignantes de la société, sont aptes à se débrouiller dans des situations transitoires.” J. S. Cooper, “Sacred Marriage and Popular Cult in Early Mesopotamia,” in *Official Cult and Popular Religion in the Ancient Near East*, ed. E. Matsushima (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1993), 8-96, esp. 92 n. 70.

¹⁶ I. Peled, *Masculinities and Third Gender. The Origin and Nature of an Institutionalized Gender Otherness in the Ancient Near East* (AOAT 435; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2016), 132-44: gala/kalû; 155-202: *assinnu* and *kurgarrû*; 267-70: pi-li-pi-li/*pilpilû*; S. Svärd and M. Nissinen. “(Re)constructing the Image of the Assinnu,” in *Studying Gender in the Ancient Near East*, ed. S. Svärd and A. Garcia-Ventura (University Park: Eisenbrauns, 2018), 373-411. These studies discuss the gender of these characters.

behavior like defecating and urinating in public. In the context of the permissive Ištar festival, a regression to child-like behavior would have been tolerated.

The excessive behavior of various members of Inanna/Ištar's cultic personnel might be reflected in the sarcastic proverb mentioning the defecation of Ištar's *kalû* priest: "A lamentation priest (*gala/kalû*) wiped his anus and said, 'I must not stir up that which belongs to the Queen of Heaven (i.e., Inanna/Ištar) my lady'" (SP 2.100).¹⁷ Alster interprets it as a case of "Wellerism" in which Ištar's lamentation singer shows his own ludicrous character and excessive behavior by the pompous statements he makes in the most inappropriate situations. From Sumerian times on, there were sarcastic voices deriding the excesses of the goddesses' cultic personnel during the Inanna/Ištar carnival, which tended to give a preposterous significance even to the act of defecating and wiping one's *derrière*. The proverb that associates the *gala/kalû* lamentation singer with defecation raises the possibility that the Hebrew term *gillûlîm* may contain another wordplay on the name of this member of Ištar's cultic personnel.¹⁸ The interaction of Ezekiel and his epigones, who redacted the book bearing his name, with Mesopotamian religious and literary culture has now become a well-accepted feature of Ezekiel studies.¹⁹

The city of Kiš was identified with a group of tells located on an ancient abandoned river bed of the Euphrates some fifteen kilometers east of Babylon. The city was in fact an agglomeration composed of Kiš together with ̣ursagkamma, dedicated to the goddess Ištar.

¹⁷ B. Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Summer: The World's Oldest Proverb Collections* (2 vols.; Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 1997), 1.65 and 2.371: *gala-e bìd-da-ni ̣a-ba-an-da-zé-er èm ga-ša-an-na ga-ša-an-mu ba-ra-zi-dè-en-e-še*.

¹⁸ Bodi, "Les *gillûlîm* chez Ézéchiél et dans l'A.T.," 484-88, where I suggested possible wordplays on *gallû* "demons" and *gallulu* "to commit crime."

¹⁹ D. Bodi, "Babylonian Background of the Book of Ezekiel," in *The Oxford Handbook of Ezekiel*, ed. C. Carvalho (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 1-32; publication online (2020) at www.oxfordhandbooks.com DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190634513.013.1

The identification of the heap of excrement made by the *kurgarrû* with “Babylon which is highly built” may be interpreted as an act of derision, a reversal of values, something that was allowed and encouraged during the Ištar festival. With the phrases *Kiš rabâ lūmur* “Let me contemplate the great Kiš,” and *Bābili šaqâ ludgul* “let me look at lofty Babylon,” the *kurgarrû* is in fact quoting song incipits. On the roof of his terrace, the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar boasts, “Is not this great Babylon, which I have built?” (Dan 4:30), which could also be taken as an echo of such songs praising royal architectural achievements. During the liturgy of the New Year’s celebration in Babylon, the following lines from *Enūma eliš* 6:57-58, were sung: (Marduk’s order to the Anunnaki) “Construct Babylon, whose building you have requested. Let its brickwork be fashioned. You shall name it ‘The Sanctuary.’”²⁰

According to R. Harris, the so-called “Jester” or *aluzinnu*-Texts suggest that during the carnival-like Ištar festival, the *kurgarrû* and *assinnu* together with other participants, *pilpilû*, and *kalû*, were performing pranks, scatological wordplays, jokes, and bawdy speech to lampoon the goddess.²¹ One such “Jester or Trickster Text” starts with the opening line, “My city, Babylon the holy, mountain of *šurru*-glaze (*a-li ká.dingir.ra kù ša-du-ú ša šur-ri*).”²² The link with the *aluzinnu*-Texts provides a clue in understanding the meaning of such acts of defecation in public. In lexical *Lú*-lists, the *aluzinnu* appears in immediate association with words meaning “slanderer” (*dabbibu*, *ākil karšī*), “farther” (*šāritu*), “defecator” (*naššiḫu*), and (*tēšû*) “prone to diarrhea.”²³ Since one of his characteristics is that he is absurdly boastful, these terms should probably be taken metaphorically to designate a “blow-hard, windbag, bull-shitter,” as applied to jeerers and outrageous critics of social and religious

²⁰ E. A. Speiser, “The Babylonian Creation Epic,” in *ANET*, 68. R. Labat, *Le poème babylonien de la création* (Paris: A. Maisonneuve, 1935), 149, renders *libana alâ* with “let us build the city” instead of “let its brickwork be fashioned.” For the text and a somewhat different translation, see W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Epics* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 112-13.

²¹ R. Harris, “Inanna-Ishtar as Paradox and a Coincidence of Opposites,” *History of Religions* 30 (1991): 261-78, esp. 275: “The ‘improper speech’ of the text suggests that scatological jokes were part of the entertainment.”

²² A. D. Kilmer, “An Oration on Babylon,” *AoF* 18 (1991): 9-22, esp. 10.

²³ B. R. Foster, “Humor and Cuneiform Literature,” *JANES* 6 (1974): 69-85 esp. 74 (VAT 9717).

norms. He makes fun of dignified persons such as incantation-priests (*āšipu*) by impersonating them and producing preposterous ritual prescriptions.

Several classicists convincingly argued for a connection between the Mesopotamian *aluzinnu* and the Greek ἀλαξών “boaster, buffoon, bullshit artist.”²⁴ The tradition would have been transmitted from Mesopotamia (ALAN.ZÚ, *aluzinnu*)²⁵ through Northern Syria to the Hittites (LÚALAN.ZÚ)²⁶ and Ionian Greeks in Asia Minor practicing the Iambos festival in honor of the fertility goddess Demeter and Dionysus, a vegetation god linked to the New Year festival, whose special plant is the grapevine. West gives a series of examples from Archilochus (680-645 BCE),²⁷ a Greek poet from Paros, an island not far from Izmir and Bodrum in modern-day Turkey, describing the excesses of the Ionian Iambos, akin to Ištar’s festival.²⁸ Revelry, ritual copulation, and bawdy behavior of the daughters of Lykambes, offering themselves to a series of men, are performed in the temenos of Hera, the goddess of marriage and family, with the goal of desacralizing the sacred ground of the temple. Some elements of these rites persist with the *galli*, the priests of Cybele and Attis, from Phrygia in Asia Minor to Roman times.²⁹ From the scatological pranks originally associated with the religious sphere in

²⁴ M. L. West, “Some Oriental Motifs in Archilochus,” *ZPE* 102 (1994): 1-5, esp. 2 n. 8; R. Drew Griffith and R. B. Marks, “A Fool by Any Other Name: Greek ΑΛΑΖΩΝ and Akkadian *aluzinnu*,” *Phoenix* 65 (2011): 23-38, esp. 24. Cf. the abstract noun ἀλαξονεία “boastfulness.”

²⁵ W. H. P. Römer, “Der Spassmacher im alten Zweistromland, zum ‘Sitz im Leben’ altmesopotamischer Texte,” *Persica* 7 (1975-1978): 43-68, esp. 47: ALAN.ZÚ “der die Gestalten [= *lānum*] kennt, d.h. ein Imitator.”

²⁶ A. Ünal, “The Textual Illustration of the ‘Jester Scene’ on the Sculptures of Alaca Höyük,” *AnSt* 44 (1994): 207-18 esp. 215 describing the *aluzinnu*: “He disguises himself like a woman or a king, thus holding kings as well as religious persons up to public ridicule; he is ‘Imitator’ and ‘Persiflator,’ i.e., satirizer. He deals with tamed bears, billy goats and appears as tightrope-walker (*Seiltänzer*) and glutton (*Vielfrass*); he sits on chamber pots and lets off farts.”

²⁷ Archilochus quotes the famous proverb about “The bitch (who) in her haste gave birth to blind puppies,” already found in Northern Syria, in 18th century BCE Mari (*ARM* 1.5:10-13: *kalbatum ina šutēpurī-ša ḥuppuḍūtim ūlid*); cf. W. L. Moran, “Puppies in Proverb—From Šamši-Adad I to Archilochus,” *EI* 14 (1978): 31-37 = W. L. Moran, *The Most Magic Word: Essays on Babylonian and Biblical Literature* (ed. R. S. Hendel; CBQMS 35; Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2002), 87-99.

²⁸ W. von Soden and J. Oelsner, “Ein spät-babylonische *pārum*-Preislied für Ištar,” *Or* 60 (1991): 339-43.

²⁹ W. Roscoe, “Priests of the Goddess: Gender Transgression in Ancient Religion,” *HR* 35 (1996): 195-230.

Mesopotamia and among the Hittites, in classical Athens scatological humor around feces, flatus, and urine entered the comedies such as *Wealth, Peace, Birds* of the playwright Aristophanes (445-385 BCE) and other classical authors.³⁰ Scatology continued being used in denouncing political, religious, and social abuses in several Greek plays.³¹

The celebration of the Ištar festival continued in Ezekiel’s time and beyond, as late as the Hellenistic period. One text, BRM I, 99:37-39, mentions several members of Ištar’s cultic personnel, such as the *kurgarrû*, the *assinnu*, and the singers who are paid six shekels of silver for the first day of the procession.³² This feature is important for biblical studies and in particular for the mention of such idolatrous practices as the worship of “dung-gods” *gillûlîm* by Ezekiel, an exilic prophet who lived and exercised his activity near Nippur and who seems to have coined a particular term with reference to these scatological practices.

The ninth-century BCE *Poem of Erra* 4:52-59 describes some other ritual activities performed by the *kurgarrû* and the *assinnu*:

(52) As for Uruk, the dwelling of Anu and Ištar, the city of *kezrētu*-women, joyful lasses (*šamhātū*), and courtesans (*harimtū*), (53) from whom Ištar took away the husbands and whom she delivered into the[ir]/yo[our] hands; (54) male Suteans (and) female Suteans, (who) shout *yarurūt[u]!*, (55) rose up (in/against) Eanna; the *kurgarrû*, and the *assinnū*, (56) whose masculinity Ištar has turned to fem[ininity] to make the people reverent,

³⁰ K. Rosenbecker, “‘Just Desserts’: Reversal of Fortune, Feces, Flatus, and Food in Aristophanes’ ‘Wealth,’” *HSCP* 108 (2015): 77-102, esp. 80: “the Athenians in particular may have been accustomed to the representation of the god Wealth as the young and beautiful son of Demeter.” Political speech is compared with flatulence. In *Wealth*, l. 1184, people throng to temples only when they need to defecate, a joke at the expense of the corrupt religious official. The proxy of Zeus Soter is offered a share from the feces left behind by the just folk of Athens, offering the corrupt gods, and those who benefit from their malfeasance, the substance that they have metaphorically force-fed to decent mortals. Hermes, the messenger of the gods, is offered to drink urine.

³¹ R. L. S. Tordoff, “Excrement, Sacrifice, and Commensality: The Osphresiology in Aristophanes’ ‘Peace,’” *Arethusa* 44 (2011): 167-98; A. T. Edwards, “Aristophanes’ Comic Poetics: ΤΡΥΞ, Scatology, ΣΚΩΜΜΑ,” *TAPS* 121 (1991): 157-79.

³² Ph. M. Hibbert, “Liebeslyrik in der arsakidischen Zeit,” *WO* 15 (1984): 93-95, esp. 95.

(57) the carriers of dagger, carriers of razor, scalpel and flin[t-blade], (58) who regularly infringe on a taboo (*ītakkalū a[sakka]*) to delight the heart of Ištar.³³

The expression *asakka akālu* is frequent in documents from Mari and Terqa. When buying a field and making a contract, or concluding an alliance, the parties would eat bread or plants (*ninda, sar + akālu*), drink wine or beer (*geštin, kaš + šatû*), anoint themselves with oil (*ī + pašāšu, lapātu*), materializing the curse in case one of the parties would break the oath, denounce the contract, commit perjury, or break the alliance.³⁴ In an OB legal contract after the purchase of a field, the parties, all bearing Amorite names, concluded the real-estate transaction with a meal where they “ate bread, drank beer, and anointed themselves with oil” (M.1065, ll. 22-24, *ninda ti-ku-lu kaš ti-iš-tá-u ù ì ti-il-tap-tu*). The contract was made in the house of an *aluzinnu* named Erra-dalīlī “Erra is my praise” (l. 26). The *aluzinnu* are well attested at Mari intervening in the palace as entertainers, subordinate to the chief musician. In the lexical list Lú, they are described as *ēpiš namūtīm* “jokers, mockers.” They wear boots (*ARM 22 324 iii:20* ^{kuš}*me-še-en MUL ša a-lu-zi-ni*) and hats (*sagšu*). Since they also appear with bear-tamers, they may be described as showmen. Like other musicians, they owned a house and had to provide for their families. The lexical list Igituh equates the *aluzinnu(m)* with the *sābi’u(m)* “tavern keeper.”³⁵ The *aluzinnu* in question might have been a well-known entertainer and tavern-keeper in the area. The lines of the contract correspond to *ARM 8.13:11’-14’ ka-ra-am i-ku-lu ka-sa-am iš-tu-ú ù*

³³ My translation is based on L. Cagni, *L’Epopée de Erra* (Studi Semitici 34; Roma: Istituto di Studi del Vicino Oriente, 1969), 110. Cf. I. Peled, “assinnu and kurgarrû Revisited,” *JNES* 73 (2014): 283-97, esp. 288. For a discussion and bibliography on the *Poem of Erra*, see D. Bodi, *The Book of Ezekiel and the Poem of Erra* (OBO 101; Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1991), 52-68.

³⁴ For the numerous references in the Mari texts, see D. Charpin, “Manger un serment,” *Méditerranée* 10-11 (1996): 85-96, esp. 91-92.

³⁵ N. Ziegler, *Les musiciens et la musique d’après les archives de Mari* (Florilegium marianum 9; Mémoires de NABU 10; Paris: SEPOA, 2007), 277-78: “Les amuseurs-*aluzzinu*.”

ša-am-na-am ip-ta-šu “they ate from (the same) platter, drank from (the same) cup, and anointed each other with oil.”³⁶

In the *Erra Epic*, the *kurgarrû* and the *assinnu* are characterized by the expression *itakkalû asakka* which is a Gtn-stem preterite 3 m. pl. of *akālum*. This iterative verbal form indicates that they repeatedly and regularly transgress the taboo. The terms *kurgarrû* and the *assinnu* designate members of the temple personnel, most often mentioned in connection with Ištar. They were performing games, plays, dances with daggers and music as part of the ritual of the great festivals and were dressed in distinctive garments. The *kezrētu*-women wear a particular hairdo and have a special relationship with the goddess Ištar. One clay terra-cotta figure now in the Louvre Museum, depicts a man playing lute and a woman with a special hairdo, playing tambourine, and copulating at the same time.³⁷ As mentioned above, similar kinds of erotic games are found both in Hittite and Greek references associated with feasts in honor of fertility goddesses.

In the Sumerian version of *Inanna’s Descent to the Netherworld*, the god Enki creates the *kur-gar-ra* from the dirt under his nails, associating this creature with filth. Together with the *gala-tur-ra* “little or junior gala,” they rescue the goddess from the realm of the dead. The Akkadian version differs considerably. In the Ninevite version of *Ištar’s Descent*, Ea, the god of wisdom, creates *Ašûšunāmir*, an *assinnu* who is also called *kulu’u* in a version of this myth found in Assur. The creature is the victim of Ereškigal’s curse. Being sexually undifferentiated, it is able to cross the boundaries and descend to the netherworld, fetch Ištar’s corpse, and bring her back among the living, allowing sexual reproduction to resume on earth. S. Maul suggests that the *kurgarrû* and *assinnu* were perceived as neither completely male nor female,

³⁶ J.-M. Durand, “Sumérien et akkadien en pays Amorite,” *MARI* 1 (1982): 79-89, esp. 81. The term *karam* is a hapax; *kāsum* means “cup” and corresponds to Heb. *kôs*; J. M. Sasson, *From the Mari Archives. An Anthology of Old Babylonian Letters* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 232.

³⁷ D. Charpin, *La vie méconnue des temples mésopotamiens* (Paris: Collège de France, Les Belles Lettres, 2017), 154 fig. 5-3.

appearing as transsexual transvestites, wearing make-up made out of a stone called *kurgarrānu*, able to cross the boundaries between the living and the dead, and inspiring fear in the population (*šupluḫu*, *Erra Epic* 4:56) on account of their magical powers and capacity to inflict harm.³⁸ He compares their powers to those of shamans. The latter are perceived as persons who can enter in contact with the dead and access their power through lamentations and trance.

The Ištar festival at Mari at the nearby Dēr sanctuary was among the most important ones to which most of the surrounding kings and vassals were invited to attend. Musicians held a central place. The *kalû* sang a balag ending with an eršemma. What is relevant for our topic is the mention that in the Mari protocol for Ištar’s festival, after the wrestling and other entertainment, “the solid and liquid excrement should be removed” (*tabīšātum ikkabbīšā*).³⁹

3. References to Defecation in Old Babylonian Mari Texts

There are two texts from the Mari royal archives dating from OB times pertaining to our topic.⁴⁰

3.1. The Symbolic Act of “Defecating in a Cup” in ARMT 122 [A. 221]:34-44

A Mari letter, sent by Huzīrī, a vassal of Zimrī-Līm who ruled in the region of Qaṭṭunan, located north of Mari, mentions the symbolic act of defecation.

³⁸ S. Maul, “*kurgarru* und *assinu* und ihre Stand in der babylonischen Gesellschaft,” in *Aussenseiter und Randgruppen: Beiträge zu eine Sozialgeschichte des Alten Orients*, ed. V. Haas (Xenia, Konstanzer Althistorische Vorträge und Forschungen 32; Konstanz: Universitätsverlag, 1992), 159-72, esp. 163 n. 37, quoting the Myth of Lugale, where it is said that this make-up was capable of putting men in an ecstatic state of trance.

³⁹ J.-M. Durand and M. Guichard, “Les rituels de Mari,” in *Recueil d’études à la mémoire de M.-T. Barrelet*, ed. D. Charpin and J.-M. Durand (Florilegium marianum 3; Mémoires de Nabu 4; Paris: SEPOA, 1997), 19-79, esp. 52 n. 207, text no 2 iii 27. Akk. *tabāštānum* from *ba’āšum* “what stinks.”

⁴⁰ I thank D. Charpin for calling my attention to the OB Mari text ARMT 122 [A. 221] analyzed here, and Walther Sallaberger, who advised me to omit a Hittite text from this discussion. The text (KUB 30.31, Ro i,1-6) used to be understood as referring to the king and the queen “urinating” or “defecating” in the Kizzuwatna temple. The key term in this text is now understood as “anointing,” as found in *The Chicago Hittite Dictionary* (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 2002), Š/1, 47: *šakniya* “to anoint, smear (with oil)” — a denominative verbal form from *šagan* “oil” — with a lengthy discussion of the previous literature. The understanding of the Hittite passage, however, is still listed as “uncertain.”

Huzîrî asks Zimrî-Lîm to write to Kabiya, the king of Kaḥat, so that a noble named Akîn-Amar may be imprisoned for treason. He states that Akîn-Amar once enjoyed the honor of having a seat in front of his suzerain after concluding an alliance with Zimrî-Lîm. Akîn-Amar initially drank a cup with Zimrî-Lîm, a symbolic gesture in the act of making an alliance.⁴¹ However, he later broke that alliance by “defecating in the cup in which he drank.”

Another matter: Why doesn’t my lord write to Kaḥat concerning Akîn-Amar? Sir, is Akîn-Amar just my enemy? Isn’t he also my lord’s enemy? Why does he enjoy peace with my lord? Once he had a seat before my lord. He drank a cup and lifted it up. My lord counted him among his nobles, dressed him with a vestment, and gave him a *ḥubutum*-wig. Yet turning around, he dropped excrement in the cup in which he drank (*ina kâsim ša ištu zê-šu izzî*). He became an enemy of my lord.⁴²

In commenting on this text, Charpin further suggests that the act of defecation in the cup or goblet represents a symbolic gesture actually signifying the opposite; it is an act of rebellion, indicating that the vassal is breaking the alliance he previously concluded with his suzerain:

This passage is very instructive for the study of symbolic gestures. First of all, one learns that when a vassal visited his sovereign, the latter gave him a goblet from which he was invited to drink. Returning to his residence, the vassal took this goblet and retained it as a testimony of the favors which his “father” had shown him. One also sees the use

⁴¹ For a series of texts where drinking a cup is mentioned in the context of concluding an alliance, see J.-M. Durand, “Sumérien et akkadien en pays amorrite,” *MARI* 1 (1982): 79-89, esp. 86-87, and 88 n. 1.

⁴² M. Guichard, “Au pays de la dame de Nagar,” in *Recueil d’études à la mémoire de Maurice Birot*, ed. D. Charpin and J.-M. Durand (Mémoires de Nabu 3; Florilegium marianum 2; Paris: SEPOA, 1994), 235-72, esp. 238: (34) *ù ša-ni-tam am-^rmi^l-ni[m] be-lí a-na Ka-ḥa-at^{ki}* (35) *aš-šum ^mA-ki-in-A-mar la-a i-ša-ap-pa-ra-am* (36) *lú A-ki-in-A-mar na-ak-ri-^rma^a* (37) *ú-ul na-ka-ar be-lí-ia-a š[u]-ú am-mi-nim* (38) *i-na na-ka-ar be-lí-ia š[u]-ú am-mi-nim* (40) *i-na sa-li-ma-a[t] be-lí-ia ^rwa-ši^l-ib* (39) *1-šu lú šu-ú ma-ḥa-ar be-[lí]-ia ú-ši-ib-ma* (40) *ù ka-sa-am iš₇-ti ù iš-šu-ma be-lí* (41) *it-ti lú-meš im-nu-šu túg ú-la-ab-bi-sú^l* (42) *ù ^{túg}ḥu-bu-ur-tam iš-ku-un-šu ù i-tu-ur-ma* (43) *i-na ka-si-im ša iš₇-tu-ú ze-e-šu iz-zi* (44) *[ù i]t-ti be-lí-ia ik-ki-ir*.

which could be made of it should one wish to signify the intention of revolting...⁴³

Instead of translating the phrase with “defecating in a cup,” Jack Sasson renders it with “dropped excrement into the cup.”⁴⁴ Charpin suggests that the symbolic gesture negates the curse that usually accompanies the concluding of an alliance consecrated by the ceremonial drinking of wine or beer (see above on *asakka akālu*). Either defecating into a cup or dropping excrement into a cup would be an act of desecration, breaking up an alliance that was previously concluded.⁴⁵

Another way of viewing this text is to see it simply as a metaphorical expression or a figure of speech which one vassal uses in his letter in order to incriminate another vassal in the eyes of their common suzerain.⁴⁶ This is the unique mention of an act of defecating in a cup. If we take the reference to “defecating in a cup” as hyperbole, it would show that in the ancient Near East, scatological metaphors signal derision, and this may also be the case in interpreting the term *gillûlîm* in the Hebrew Bible.

3.2. *Excrement and Urine in the Temple of Annunitum in Mari (ARMT 26.1/1 n° 198, 10'-14')*

An OB Mari tablet belonging to the genre of “texts with prophetic content,” dealing with the acts and words of one of the cultic personnel—the *assinnum*—mentions the presence of excrement in the temple of the goddess Annunitum. She is thought of as an avatar of the Mesopotamian goddess

⁴³ D. Charpin, “A Contribution to the Geography and History of the Kingdom of Kahat,” in *Tell al-Hamīdīya 2*, ed. S. Eichler, M. Wäfler, D. Warburton (OBO Series Archaeologica 6; Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1990), 67-85, esp. 81.

⁴⁴ Sasson, *From the Mari Archives*, 268.

⁴⁵ D. Charpin, “Les formules juridiques des contrats de Mari à l’époque amorrite: entre tradition babylonienne et innovation,” in *Trois millénaires de formulaires juridiques*, ed. S. Démare-Lafont and A. Lemaire (Hautes études orientales 48; Geneva: Droz, 2010), 13-42, esp. 41-42.

⁴⁶ Guichard, “Au pays de la dame de Nagar,” 240 n. h.

Ištar.⁴⁷ Annunītum is one of the major divine figures in the region on the Northwest bank of the Euphrates. At Mari Annunītum has at least two temples, one inside the city walls and another one outside. One Mari text (A.222) relates the dream of the Dame Ayala, who saw a lady from Šeḫrum quarreling with a lady from Mari about the office of the high-priestess: *[i-n]a ba-ab an-nun-ni-tim ša ka-wa-tîm(TUM)* “at the gate of Annunītum’s (shrine) outside the walls” (ll. 6-7).⁴⁸

This goddess is attested since the Dynasty of Akkad (2350-2150 BCE) and is thought to incarnate the warlike aspect of the goddess Ištar. On an alabaster votive object from Narām-Sîn or Maništušu we find the name ^d*Ištar-AN.NU-ni-tim*, and many texts from Drehem mention her name. Her cultic centers are in the cities of Sippar and Akkade, where in her Ulmaš temple she is called Ulmašītu.⁴⁹ She also appears in Elam in the city of Bubê. Her cult in Mari is well attested and goes back at least to the Ur-III period (*ARMT* 7 169:194). On a tablet listing the number of sheep to be sacrificed to the 25 gods worshipped at Mari, Annunītum occupies the tenth position and receives six sheep, just one less than the deity Dīrītum, who receives seven. She is, therefore, a major figure in the Mari pantheon.⁵⁰ This divinity may be present under different

⁴⁷ In the Mari version of the “General Rebellion against Narām-Sîn,” both goddesses are mentioned side by side, “according to the judgment of Eštar and Annunītum” *i-na di-[i]n eš4-tār ù an-nu-ni-t[im]* in A.1252+M.8696, l. 10 ; D. Charpin, “La version mariote de l’insurrection générale contre Narām-Sîn’,” in *Recueil d’études à la mémoire de M.-T. Barrelet*, ed. D. Charpin and J.-M. Durand (Mémoires de NABU 4; Folilegium marianum 3; Paris: SEPOA, 1997), 9-17 (text M). The same appears in the related OB text MAH 10829, l. 4 (text G); A. K. Grayson and E. Sollberger, “L’insurrection générale contre Narām Suen,” *RA* 70 (1976): 103-28, esp. 111. The two sources G and M, though deriving from a common original, present a somewhat different text.

⁴⁸ J. M. Sasson, “Mari Dreams,” *JAOS* 103 (1983): 283-93, esp. 291, (commentary on l. 12), and J.-M. Durand, *Archives épistolaires de Mari* 1/1 (ARM 26.1/1; Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1988), 468-69.

⁴⁹ D. O. Edzard, “Annunītu,” in *Wörterbuch der Mythologie, I: Götter und Mythen im Vorderen Orient*, ed. D. O. Edzard et al. (Stuttgart: E. Klett, 1965), 42. R. Borger, *Einleitung in die assyrischen Königsinschriften I* (HdO I, Ergänzungsband 5, Leiden: Brill, 1961), 59-60, presents a two page listing of all the attestations of Annunītum with a discussion of various spellings of her name (with bibliography).

⁵⁰ G. Dossin, “Le panthéon de Mari,” in *Studia Mariana*, ed. A. Parrot (Leiden: Brill, 1950), 40-50, esp. 47. Dossin thinks that the goddess Annunītum is represented on the mural painting of investiture in the Mari palace.

names and seems to have been more venerated by the southern Benjaminite Amorite tribes than the northern Sim'alite ones.⁵¹

The text quoted below deals with matters of cult. The beginning of the tablet is broken and there is apparently little hope of finding the corresponding join. Nevertheless, the main part of the text conveys a report of an *assinnum*, named Šēlebum “The Fox,” belonging to the cultic personnel of the Annunītum. This letter mentions his complaining on account of the abundance of excrement and urine which surround him while serving the goddess Annunītum in the precinct of her temple.

(10') Twice since I went to the enemy (11') and now for the third time (12') she? (the goddess) came to dwell in the temple (13') and I dwell in an abundance of excrement and urine (*u anāku m[ā]di[š]* *zê u šināti wašbāku*) (14') and my food is the reed from the temple precinct.⁵²

According to the editor of this tablet, the message was probably written by a great priestess, Inib-šina, who is informing Zimrī-Līm about the situation in the local sanctuary. The travels of the goddess Annunītum are well attested in other Mari texts. Apparently, Šēlebum, the *assinnum*, is saying that he went twice to fetch the goddess in enemy territory and a third time when the hostilities between Zimrī-Līm and the Benjaminites ceased. This would place the tablet at the beginning of Zimrī-Līm's reign in years two and three, during his wars with the Benjaminite Amorite tribes. Šēlebum complains of the deplorable conditions in which he is living and working in the temple of Annunītum. In Durand's view, “if the text deals with the temple of Annunītum *ša kawātīm* ‘outside the walls’, one sees the sad usage that was made of it by the peasants from its environs, and by the very people who came to visit the

⁵¹ J.-M. Durand and M. Guichard, “Les rituels de Mari,” in *ibid.*, 19-78, esp. 46-47. The goddess Anunnītum's oracular promise to Zimrī-Līm, *a-na-ku e-li-ka a-ḥa-ab-bu-ub* (ARMT 10 8:1-11), “I will make love to you,” signifies the goddess's favor and protection; she is acting tenderly like a lover.

⁵² Durand, *AEM I/1* (ARM 26.1/1), 425, n° 198: (10') *ši-ni-šu iš-tu a-di na-ak-[ri-im]* (11') *ak-šu-du i-na-an-na ša-al-[ši-šu]* (12') *é-tam úš-ba à a-na-ku m[a]-di-i[š]* (13') *ze-e à ši-na-ti wa-aš-ba-ku* (14') *ù' g[i] t[i]-mi-nim a-ka-a[l]*.

goddess.”⁵³ Apparently, either the visitors or the animals brought along to be sacrificed to the goddess Annunītum were defecating in the precincts of the temple, thus befouling the temple area. This practice, however, might correspond to what we read in an inscription found in Athens dating from the fifth century BCE prohibiting the discharge of excrement on the temple precinct (see below, section 4). In the latter case, the excrement was probably of animal origin, an inevitable nuisance due to the presence of animals brought to the temple precinct in order to be sacrificed.

From a literary point of view, the complaint of Šēlebum makes a parallel between the goddess's dwelling (*ušbu*) in the sanctuary and his dwelling (*wašbāku*) in the precinct befouled by excrement. Here again one can offer another interpretation and see the reference to excrement and urine in this Mari text as hyperbole, meant to drive home the point that the speaker's living conditions are abject, but not that he is actually living on a dung heap.

4. Prohibition to Leave Dung in Temple Area in a Greek Text from the Acropolis in Athens, 6th-5th Century BCE

The so-called Hekatompedon Decree on a marble inscription (IG I² 4) shows that dung and defecation in temple area was something undesirable.⁵⁴ The text represents an archaic Athenian law regulating personal conduct and the management of cult and ritual on the Acropolis. The inscription is damaged. It is preserved on forty-odd fragments that altogether contain fewer than half the inscription. The document is essential for the understanding of the history of the Acropolis prior to Pericles. The inscription is executed in perfect symmetry with letters of 2.2 centimeters in size and represents one of the most beautiful pieces of classical Greek epigraphy on account of its calligraphy. The letters are disposed with regular spacing, where each line is composed of 38 letters, a fact which considerably facilitates the restoration of lacunae. Since

⁵³ Durand, *AEM I/1* (ARM 26.1/1), 425 n. e.

⁵⁴ F. Sokolowski, *Lois sacrées des cités grecques* (Paris: De Boccard, 1969), 4-6.

the inscription represents decrees issued by the people of Athens, it cannot be dated prior to the institution of democracy in this city in 508/507 BCE, which would furnish the *terminus post quem*. The inscription, however, appears to be a fifth century BCE copy of an older original composed in the sixth century. Based on epigraphical indications, the execution of this copy of the ancient Athenian regulatory decree is dated to 485/4 BCE.⁵⁵ The inscription preserves the original archaic terms and grammatical forms, including the use of infinitives as imperatives. The calligraphic letters, the nature of the rules, and the fine Parian marble bearing the decree suggest that the inscription was meant for prominent display.

The sacrificers (*hierorgontas*) are not to “roast meat *m'[optan]*”/or “burn fire *m[e kaen]*”/or “urinate” between the temple and the great altar to the east, and to the south of the temple within the Kekropion, and throughout the entire Hekatompedon. Nor are they to throw dung out (*mēd' ontho[n] egb[alen]*). And if anyone does any of these things knowingly, the treasurers may punish him with a fine not to exceed three obols (lines 8-13).⁵⁶

The pertinent phrase for the present analysis is found in l. 11: *mēd' ontho[n] egb[alen]* “nor are they to throw dung out.” This injunction warns those in charge of the sacrifices not to discard animal dung in the spaces bound by the various buildings. The term ὄνθος, found in the classical Greek of Homeric epic (*Iliad* 23.775-77), designates animal excrement, dung, and may originally have been a non-Greek word (*-nth-*).⁵⁷ The passage in the *Iliad* describes a competition, a foot race for the first prize, a Phoenician wine-mixing crater, between Odysseus and Ajax. The race is supervised by Achilles. Odysseus prays to his patron goddess, Athena who makes Ajax slip over the

⁵⁵ B. Jordan, *Servants of the Gods. A Study in the Religion, History and Literature of Fifth-Century Athens* (Hypomnemata 55; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 52-53. For a photo of the restored inscription, see B. Holtzmann, *L'acropole d'Athènes. Monuments cultes et histoire du sanctuaire d'Athèna Polias* (Paris: A. & J. Picard, 2003), 85, fig. 67.

⁵⁶ From Jordan, *Servants of the Gods*, 20 (Greek text), 21 (English translation).

⁵⁷ A. Bailly, *Dictionnaire grec-français* (Paris: Hachette, 1950), 1383; H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961), 1231, *onthos, ho*, “dung of animals,” and 979, where *kopros* refers to human and animal excrement.

dung of several bulls that Achilles had sacrificed in honor of his fallen companion, Patroclus. In a humorous scene, the loser, Ajax, falls head first into the slippery mass and his mouth and nostrils are filled with animal dung (ὄνθος; *Iliad* 23.775-80). The passage indicates that the animals about to be sacrificed, probably sensing their pending slaughter, lost control of their bowel movement. It must have been a nuisance when the sacrifices were made in the temple area.

The term seems to be an archaism, being rather rare in later Greek. It occurs in a fifth century BCE inscription in two lines enjoining personal hygiene (IG I² 789). The tragic poet Aeschylus (525-456 BCE) uses it (*Fragments* 275 N² = 478a Mette) as well as Apollodorus, 2.5,5 (first century CE?). As pointed out by B. Jordan, “Although here the word refers to the dung of animals, it is likely that in the archaic period it was a common word of colloquial speech for *kopros*, which replaced *onthos*, in the classical period.”⁵⁸

The injunction probably implied a prohibition of defecating on the temple precincts and applied to humans as well, enjoining them not to leave or throw animal dung in the space between the temples. Moreover, the lacuna in line 8 was restored either with “to roast” or “to urinate.” If the latter restoration is correct, it would provide a striking parallel to the OB Mari text (see above 3.2) where a member of the temple personnel complains of the insalubrious conditions in which he is living and working and mentions both urine and excrement left by the visitors or their animals brought for the sacrifices. This archaic Athenian law reflects the requirement of maintaining ritual purity of the temple precincts. Either human defecation or the presence of animal dung is prohibited and the culprit is fined. There are parallels for similar injunctions in other Greek sanctuaries. An inscription pertaining to the sanctuary of Elektrona in Ialysios requires the precinct managers to maintain the ritual purity of both sanctuary and *temenos* at all times.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Jordan, *Servants of the Gods*, 45 with a commentary on this word.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 26.

One finds fragments from ancient Greek inscriptions that used to be posted at the entrance of temples. They often represented copies of older inscriptions pertaining to the rules of propriety and hygiene with respect to temples. In Antiquity, the Greek sanctuaries were places where people gathered in order to sacrifice animals and to celebrate banquets. The existing sanitary installation might have been inadequate. Therefore, there was a need to constantly remind the participants not to defile the temple premises. Thus, a fragmentary inscription from the second century BCE found in Epidaurus (IG IV² I, 45), but representing a copy of an older one, stipulates in ll. 8-9 the following: *m[ēde kopron mēde spodon ekbal]lein en t[ōn temenei]* “not to throw either excrement or ashes at the temple-precinct.”⁶⁰ The lines were restored from other inscriptions where this prohibition is regularly found. Another inscription was found in Delos, dating from the third century BCE, with a similar regulation concerning the sanctuaries of the gods Dionysus and Leto, *mēd' e[is to] t[e]menos to tēs Lētous [mē]t[e kopro]n, mēte spodon, mēte [allo mēthe]n* “nor in the temple-precinct of Leto, nor excrement, nor ashes, nor anything.”⁶¹

5. Defecation in an Aramaic Incantation Text, 3rd Century BCE

Among the cuneiform tablets that have been found in Uruk-Warka, and presently kept in the Louvre Museum, there is one dating from the third century BCE and written in Aramaic.⁶² The tablet is extremely precious since Aramaic is written in cuneiform syllables and provides the earliest example of the way Aramaic was pronounced and vocalized. The tablet contains two incantations. They come from a time when magic and medicine, therapy, and ritual overlapped and were often identical. The incantation might also reveal

⁶⁰ F. Sokolowski, *Lois sacrées des cités grecques, supplément* (Paris: De Boccard, 1962), 59 n° 24.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 107 n° 53.

⁶² G. R. Driver, “An Aramaic Incantation in the Cuneiform Script,” *Afo* 3 (1926): 47-53; C. H. Gordon, “The Aramaic Incantation in Cuneiform,” *Afo* 12 (1937-39): 105-17. For a recent treatment of this text with new readings and bibliography, see M. J. Geller “The Aramaic Incantation in Cuneiform Script (AO 6489 = TCL 6,58),” *JEOL* 35-36 (1997-2000): 127-44.

some awareness of a psychosomatic connection of human ailments. The purpose of the second incantation is to appease the wrath of an enemy. The text describes the action of the conjurer, and lines 34-35 identify what is bad (hostility and bad feelings) as being evacuated, or defecated.

(34) *ṭa-ba-ti-ia mi-in-ni pu-^rum¹-mé-e ^rde-le-e¹,*

My good things drawn from his mo[u]th,

(35) *bi-^ri-šá-ti-ia mi-in šá-^rqé¹-e ^rle-qé-eṭ¹*

my bad things collected from h[is] th[i]ghs/a[r]se (AO 6489 34-35).

The formula is expressed in evident parallelism and is striking on account of its extreme realism. Nevertheless, the phrase remains difficult to interpret. According to one scholar, the conjurer expresses a wish that his appeased enemy may now have only good words on his behalf and that his hostile humors may go out of him with his act of defecation.⁶³ What is bad is clearly identified with excrement. We would deal here with an act of mimetic magic expressed through a metaphor of defecation.

6. *Ritual Defecation Mentioned in the Mishnah and the Gemara of the Talmud and the Ugaritic marzēaḥ*

The second century CE⁶⁴ Mishnah *Sanhedrin* 7:6 mentions the following ritual action, “the one who uncovers himself (= defecates) before Ba‘al Pe‘or” הפוער הפוער עצמו לבעל פוער (*hpw^r ṣmw lb^l p^{wr}*)—this is how one performs an act of service to it.”⁶⁵ The commentator on the Mishnah, Pinhas Qehati, explains that the

⁶³ A. Dupont-Sommer, “Une tablette cunéiforme araméenne de Warka,” *RA* 39 (1942-44): 35-62 esp. 52. He compares it with Mark 7:15, “...the things which come out of a man are what defile him.”

⁶⁴ Rabbi Yehuda ha-Nasi, who was born around 138 CE, compiled the Mishnah. The Mishnah itself is generally supposed to have come to closure at the end of the second century. J. Neusner, *The Mishnah A New Translation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), xvi, points out that approximately two-thirds of the named sayings belong to rabbis who lived between 135 and 200 CE.

⁶⁵ Pinhas Qehati, *Mishnayot: Maseket Sanhedrin* (Jerusalem: Hekal Shelomo, 1991), 410-11 (M. *Sanh.* 7:6); M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi...* (New York: Pardes, 1950), 1203: *pā‘ar* “to uncover (oneself) especially to commit nuisance (defecate) before the idol Peor”; “to ease oneself.”

phrase designates the one who defecates before the idol of Ba'al Pe'or. This Mishnah states that even if one indulged in an act of derision by defecating in front of Ba'al Pe'or, it would still be considered as an act of idolatry because ritual defecation in front of this divinity was part and parcel of the way this god was usually worshiped.

The Babylonian Talmud (b. *Sanh.* 64a)⁶⁶ presents a long discussion about the different ways in which idols and pagan gods are worshiped. It relates a story told by Rabbi Yehuda in the name of Rab about a gentile woman who, in order to find help for her sickness, vowed that if she recovered in gratitude she would serve every idol. She recovered and went to serve all idols. On reaching in front of Ba'al Pe'or, she asked its priests how should she proceed in order to worship this god. The priests instructed her to eat beets (or beet leaves, which induce bowel movement) and to drink strong wine and then to defecate צואה (*šw'h*) in front of the idol.⁶⁷ Finding this manner of worship repugnant, she preferred returning to her sickness than worshiping this god, saying, "I would rather fall sick again than serve an idol in such a manner."

The rabbinic discussion that follows insists that even a pagan woman would find such practices repugnant. The Talmudic story seems to be a fiction created *ad hoc* to teach the repugnance of idol worship. It falls in the same category as the fictional story found in b. *Gittin* 57a. Onqelos wants to convert to Judaism. Using necromancy, he raises *Yešû hannôšerî* (viz., Jesus) from the dead. He asks him, what is his punishment? Jesus tells him that he was punished with boiling excrement בצואה רותחת (*b'ešô'â rôtaḥat*). "As the Master

⁶⁶ *Talmud Babli* (Jerusalem: Institute for Talmudic Publications, 1974), b. *Sanh.* 64a.

⁶⁷ One finds the idea of ritualized defecation giving precise rules with respect to defecation at dawn or at dusk in a Brahmin ritual dating from 1096 CE. The Brahmin rises at dawn and starts the day with meditating on Śiva so that the day may be prosperous. After finding an appropriate spot and laying leaves, he should evacuate both the excrement and urine from his body. During the act of evacuation, he turns his face toward the north at dawn and toward the south at dusk. The procedure of wiping oneself, with certain kinds of leaves and with a precise number of handfuls of dirt, is also specified. I thank Pierre-Sylvain Filliozat for this reference to Brahmin ritual defecation in *Somashambhupaddhati* (French translation by Hélène Lachaux-Brunner [Pondichéry: Institut français d'Indologie, 1963], 4-8, §§ 3-11).

said: Anyone who mocks the words of the Sages will be sentenced to boiling excrement.”⁶⁸ *Avodah Zarah* further relates a story of how a certain Jew named Sabta, from the town of Avlas in Cilicia, hired an ass to a gentile woman who went to relieve herself in front of Pe‘or. Probably wanting to deride her and her worship, the Jew entered the same sanctuary, defecated in front of Pe‘or, and wiped himself on the idol’s nose. While the attendants in the Pe‘or shrine praised his action, the rabbis in the Talmud declare his behavior reprehensible as it was still an act of idolatrous worship: “He that uncovers himself (= defecates) before Ba‘al Pe‘or thereby serves, even if his intentions were to degrade it.”⁶⁹ Tractate b. *Avodah Zarah* 44b, in the Mishnah, relates a discussion between a certain Proclos and Rabban Gamaliel, who was surprised to find the latter bathing in Acco in the bath of Aphrodite, where her idol was set up. Rabban Gamaliel answered that the statue of Aphrodite “stood by a sewer and that people were urinating before it,” implying that nobody really revered the statue of the goddess at that local bath. The rabbinic discussion in the Gemara explains this Mishnah by contrasting the worship of Aphrodite with that of Ba‘al Pe‘or, clearly establishing that Aphrodite’s statue was not worshiped with urine, while Pe‘or was customarily worshiped with ritual defecation.

“This [statue] stands by the sewer and all people urinate before it.” And if people urinate before it, what of it? For Raba has said: Pe‘or (Num 25:3) proves [the contrary], because people evacuate in its presence every day but it is not annulled as a consequence. “But I maintain that [Rabbi Gamaliel’s answer] was not fallacious”—because [in the case of Pe‘or] such was the mode of its worship, but [with Aphrodite] it was not the mode of her worship.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ <https://www.sefaria.org/Gittin.57a.5?lang=bi>

⁶⁹ *The Babylonian Talmud, Seder Neziḳin, Tractate Sanhedrin* (trans. J. Shachter and H. Freedman; London: Soncino, 1935), 2: 436-37.

⁷⁰ *The Babylonian Talmud, Seder Neziḳin, Tractate ‘Avodah Zarah* (trans. A. Mishcon and A. Cohen; London: Soncino, 1935), 220-21.

The rabbis in the above Talmudic tractates, describing the rite of ritual defecation offered as worship to a pagan deity of their time (between the ends of the second and sixth centuries CE), use a traditional reference to a pagan rite mentioned in the Hebrew Bible as Ba'al Pe'or (Greek *Beelphegor*, where the *gamma* renders the guttural 'ayin). The biblical references to this divinity, however, remain vague and make no mention of ritual defecation. Originally, Ba'al Pe'or was simply a toponym. The name Pe'or פְּעוֹר is related to הפּוּעַר "the opening" and to the root פִּעַר "to open (wide)" (i.e., the bowels). This is how it probably came to be associated with bowel movement and defecation.

In the Hebrew Bible, however, this Moabite divinity is associated with fertility rites and with "eating the sacrifices for the dead" (Ps 106:28) with no reference to defecation. Ba'al Pe'or probably represents the chthonic aspect of the Canaanite god of fertility. In Isa 5:14, Hebrew *pa'ar* "to open wide" is said of the mouth of the netherworld. In Num 25:3, 5, 18, the Israelites on their way to the land of Canaan, while encamped at Shittim in the plains of Moab, indulged in orgies and rituals in an idolatrous fertility cult, worshiping together with the Moabite females the divinity Ba'al Pe'or. In a Transjordanian location the Israelites "played the harlot (*znh*) with the daughters of Moab" (Num 25:1),⁷¹ by joining the local population in the licentious rites of the fertility cult. Therefore, the memory of that initial episode at Ba'al Pe'or became paradigmatic in presenting idolatry as adultery in respect to YHWH by almost all Hebrew prophets between the eighth and sixth centuries BCE

⁷¹ According to Num 25:9, because of this act of apostasy, 24,000 Israelites were struck by a plague. Ba'al Pe'or is the name of a god (Num 25:3) who was worshiped on Mount Pe'or (Num 23:28) and is associated with the sanctuary to which the name Bêt-Pe'or was given (Deut 3:29; 4:46; Josh 13:20). According to one opinion, the place and the sanctuary were located some twelve miles north-east of the Dead Sea and the Jordan's mouth; N. Glueck, "Some Ancient Towns in the Plain of Moab," *BASOR* 91 (1943): 13-18; O. Henke, "Zur Lage von Beth Peor," *ZDPV* 75 (1959): 155-63. The exact location, however, is uncertain; H.-W. Wolff, *Hosea* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 163-65; F. I. Andersen and D. N. Freedman, *Hosea* (AB 24; Garden City: Doubleday, 1980), 541. According to Ps 106:28, they also ate "sacrifices for the dead" (*zbhy mtym*) there, probably sharing meals with a dead divinity in funeral banquets celebrating the burial of the god of vegetation.

(Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel).⁷² The marriage metaphor expresses the covenant with YHWH, while adultery stands for unfaithfulness to the covenant.⁷³ The eighth century prophet Hosea does not tell us what happened at Ba'al Pe'or but expresses his great abhorrence of it: "They came to Ba'al Pe'or, consecrated themselves to *bōšet* ('shame' or rather 'vigor')⁷⁴ and became abominations (*šiqqûšîm*) like the thing they loved (*k'e'āh^abām*)" (Hos 9:10). The term *šiqqûšîm* "abhorrent things" is also used as a synonym for idols. For example, either the statue of Zeus erected in the Jerusalem temple by Antiochus Epiphanes IV (175-164 BCE) or his own statue, which he introduced there, were called *šiqqûš m'ešômēm* "abomination of desolation" (Dan 11:31; 12:11). In this context, the final term in this reference in Hosea, "love" *'āhab*, contains a *double entendre*. It stands for religious allegiance to a foreign deity (cf. Akkadian *raḥāmu*, *rāmu*) and could refer to sexual acts of devotion to this god associated with fertility rites.

Moreover, some scholars view the eighth century BCE Old Aramaic Balaam inscription found in Deir 'Alla in Transjordan as a *hieros logos* of the Ba'al Pe'or sanctuary.⁷⁵

⁷² The plague on the Israelites was stayed when Phinehas, the son of the high priest, killed Zimri, from the tribe of Simeon, and Cozbi, a Midianite woman with whom Zimri violated the covenant. According to G. Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation: The Origins of the Biblical Traditions* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 105-21, it was an act of ritual intercourse that yoked this Israelite man to a pagan god and made him break the covenant with Israel's god. "The sensual rites of worship indicate a connection to the Phoenician Baal and the Moabite Chemosh [...]. From Jerome's time, writers have commonly associated Baal and Chemosh with the Roman Priapus"; J. C. Slayton, "Baal-Peor," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1: 553.

⁷³ D. Bodi, "When YHWH's Wife, Jerusalem, Became a Strange Woman: Inversion of Values in Ezekiel 16 in Light of the Istar Cult—From Spouse to Brothel Boss (*'iššā zônā šallātet*)," in *Foreign Women—Women in Foreign Lands: Studies on Foreigners and Gender in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East in the First Millennium BCE*, ed. A. Berlejung and M. Grohmann (Orientalische Religionen in der Antike 22; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 77-108.

⁷⁴ M. Tsevat, "Ishboshet and Congeners: the Names and their Study," *HUCA* 46 (1975): 71-81, has shown that Hebrew *bšt* is related to Akkadian *baštu*, well-attested in Babylonian and El-Amarna onomastics, e.g., the OB female name *muti-bašti* "My-Husband-is-My-Baštu"; see *CAD* B, 143. In personal names *baštu* means "dignity, pride, vigor" and may also mean "guardian angel." This interpretation has been upheld by G. J. Hamilton, "New Evidence for the Authenticity of *bšt* in Hebrew Personal Names and for Its Use as a Divine Epithet in Biblical Names," *CBQ* 60 (1998): 228-50.

⁷⁵ A. Caquot and A. Lemaire, "Les textes araméens de Deir 'Alla," *Syria* 55 (1978): 189-208; J. A. Hackett, *The Balaam Text from Deir 'Alla* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1984); E. Lipiński, "Baal,"

The connection between vigorous sexuality and chthonic aspects of the fertility rites associated with Ba'al Pe'or have been related to the Ugaritic myth of Ba'al who, during his stay in the netherworld in the form of a bull, makes love to a heifer, mounting her up to 88 times, probably a symbolic figure (*KTU*² 1.5 v:18-21).⁷⁶ Another example of sex in the netherworld occurs between the Mesopotamian gods Nergal and Ereškigal. In this composition, the hospitality custom starts with food and ends with sex. M. Hutter has pointed out the semantic relationship between eating and sexual relationship in the text's use of the verb *šebû* "to become sated, to be satisfied."⁷⁷

However, sex in the netherworld does not seem to be a common feature in ancient Near Eastern mythology. The netherworld is by definition a place where life and reproduction do not take place.

In later Jewish tradition dating from the sixth century CE, the cult of Ba'al Pe'or is associated with the Marzeah feast (*Sifre Numbers 13 marze'ĥîm*). The mosaic map found at the sixth-century church at Madeba labels the

Dictionnaire encyclopédique de la Bible (Turnhout: Brepols, 1986), 172-73; J. Hoftijzer and A. van der Kooij (eds.), *The Balaam Text from Deir 'Alla* (Leiden: Brill, 1991).

⁷⁶ K. Spronk, "Baal of Peor," *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, 2nd ed., ed. K. van der Toorn, B. Becking and P. W. van der Horst (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 147-48, esp. 148 (bibliography). This feature in the Ugaritic myth probably reflects a later development. In the myth *Nergal and Ereškigal* as well, as part of taking power over the netherworld, Nergal has intercourse with Ereškigal for seven days (vi:35-42). In the earlier Mesopotamian perspective, however, as found in the Sumerian version of *Inanna's Descent*, there is neither sex nor reproduction in the netherworld. According to ID 297 and 361, the demons "know no food, know no drink, eat no grain offering, drink no libation, accept no nice gifts, never enjoy the pleasure of sexual intercourse, never have any sweet children to kiss"; see W. R. Sladek, *Inanna's Descent to the Netherworld* (Unpub. Ph.D. Diss., The Johns Hopkins University, 1974), 66: "Sexual intercourse is hated especially by the demons not only because it is fun, but because it creates life which is the antithesis of the netherworld. The demons will do everything in their power to prevent it." In the Akkadian version of *Ištar's Descent*, while she is in the netherworld, there too all sexual reproduction stops on earth. The netherworld, being the realm of death, is fundamentally hostile to sex, which is related to life and procreation.

⁷⁷ M. Hutter, *Altorientalische Vorstellungen von der Unterwelt. Literar- und religionsgeschichtliche Überlegungen zu 'Nergal und Ereškigal'* (OBO 63; Freiburg, Switzerland: Universitätsverlag, 1985), 84. In his detailed study of the myth, Hutter focuses on the subtleties of the language in discussing the erotic components of food and drink, the motif of seductive bathing, and sexuality among the netherworld deities. On the connection between the myth of Nergal and Ereškigal and Abigail and David in 1 Samuel 25, see D. Bodi, "David as an 'Apiru in 1 Samuel 25 and the Pattern of Seizing Power in Ancient Near East," in *Abigail, Wife of David and Other Ancient Oriental Women*, ed. D. Bodi (HBM 60; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013), 24-59, esp. 53.

Transjordanian area in which the idolatrous worship at Ba'al Pe'or took place as “*Betomarseas*, i.e., Bēt Marzēah alias (*ho kai*) *Maioumias*.” The Mayumas festivals were observed in various cities of the Mediterranean with such licentiousness that the Roman rulers had to ban them.⁷⁸ In the Hebrew Bible the *marzēah* banquets are attested in connection with mourning (Jer 16:5-7) and excessive feasting (Amos 6:4-7).

One particular Ugaritic text describing the *marzēah* banquet may provide the background of the Canaanite Ba'al Pe'or celebration, combining several elements such as drinking strong wine, excrement, and allusion to the netherworld. In *KTU* 1.114, ll. 15-22 (RS 24.258)⁷⁹ El, the father of the gods invited other gods to a banquet where the wine flowed freely. El is “dead” drunk, and falls down as if dead, like those who go down to the netherworld, collapsing in his own excrement. El's experience most probably mirrors that of his worshipers during the *marzēah* feast. Excessive drinking of wine loosens the bowels and the bladder as in Isa 28:8. The end of this Ugaritic text seems to indicate that it was apparently used as a prescription for overcoming a hang-over. Since El himself recovered from his excessive drinking, the prescription might be as effective for his followers.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ M. H. Pope, *Song of Songs* (AB 7C; Garden City: Doubleday, 1977), 218; idem, “The Cult of the Dead at Ugarit,” in *Ugarit in Retrospect: Fifty Years of Ugarit and Ugaritic*, ed. G. D. Young (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1981), 159-79; idem, “A Divine Banquet at Ugarit,” in *The Use of the Old Testament in the New, Studies in Honor of W. F. Stinespring*, ed. J. M. Efron (Durham NC.: Duke University, 1972), 170-203, esp. 171-72. *Midrash Leviticus Rabbah* 5:3 and *Numbers Rabbah* 10:3, 7 relate the *marzēah* to the Mayumas festivals.

⁷⁹ M. Dietrich and O. Loretz, *Studien zu den ugaritischen Texten I. Mythos und Ritual in KTU 1.12, 1.24, 1.96, 1.100, und 1.114* (AOAT 269/1; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2000), 403-523, on *KTU* 1.114; D. Pardee, “‘Ilu on a Toot,” *The Context of Scripture*, ed., W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger Jr. (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2003), 302-5, col. 1; M. S. Smith, *Poetic Heroes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 190-91. For El's sexual exploits with several maidens, see J. Scurlock, “Death and the Maidens. A New Interpretative Framework of *KTU* 1.23,” *UF* 43 (2011): 411-34.

⁸⁰ M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín, *Die keilalphabetische Texte aus Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani und anderen Orten* (AOAT 360/1; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2013), 134. Cf. A. Caquot and J.-M. de Tarragon, *Textes ougaritiques II: Textes religieux, rituels, correspondance* (Paris: Cerf, 1989), 76-78 (bibliography); F. Gangloff and J.-C. Haelewyck, “Osée 4.17-19. Un *marzēah* en l'honneur de la déesse 'Anat,” *ETL* 71 (1995), 370-82 esp. 376 n. 101. Isa 28:7-8 seem to reflect a *marzēah* banquet: “These also reel with wine and stagger with strong drink, the priest and the prophet reel with strong drink, they are confused with wine, they stagger with strong drink [...] For all tables are full of vomit, no place is without excrement (*šō'ā*)”; B. A. Asen, “The Garlands of Ephraim: Isaiah 28.1-6 and the *marzēah*,” *JSOT* 71 (1996): 73-87.

15 'il yṭb bmrzḥh El remained seated in his *marzeaḥ*-banquet,
yšt [y]n. 'd šb' El drank wine unto satiety,
trṭ. 'd škr must unto drunkenness.
'il. hlk. lbth El went to his house,
yštql. lhṭrh. proceeded to his residence.
y'msn.nn. ṭkmm wšnm. Ṭukamuna and Šunuma supported him,
wgšnn. ḥby. Ḥabay approaches him,
20 b'l. qrnw wḏnb. the one with two horns and a tail.
ylšn bḥr'ih. wṭnth. He (El) flounders in his excrement and his
urine,
ql. 'il El collapses.
'il. kyrdm. 'arṣ El is like those who go down to the netherworld.⁸¹

In b. *Qiddushin* 72a, Rabbi Yehuda ha-Nasi inquires of his disciple Rabbi Levi, who has just returned from Babylon, what the Persians, the *ḥbrym*, i.e., the sect of fire-worshippers, and the Ishmaelites look like. Rabbi Levi describes the Ishmaelites as being “like the demons (*š'yrym*) of the privy.” He is in fact comparing the Ishmaelites to the Arabian *Jinn*, who live on excrement and stink.⁸² The Hebrew term *š'irîm* in the indefinite plural stands for “satyrs, demonic chthonic spirits” and is a homonym of “goats,” which may explain the later connection with Greek satyrs, Pan, and Roman Priapus.⁸³

⁸¹ For numerous philological notes on this text, see S. E. Loewenstamm, “Eine lehrhafte ugaritische Trinkburlesque,” *UF* 1 (1969): 71-78; J. C. de Moor, “Studies in New Alphabetic Texts from Ras Shamra 1,” in *ibid.*: 167-88, esp. 167-75; H. P. Rueger, “Zu RS 24.258,” in *ibid.*: 203-6. B. Margulis, “A New Ugaritic Farce,” *UF* 2 (1970): 131-38; *idem*, “The Ugaritic Feast of the Drunken Gods: Another Look at RS 24.258 (KTU 1.11),” *Maarav* 2 (1979-80): 65-120; F. C. Fensham, “Some Remarks on the First Three Mythological Texts in *Ugaritica* V,” *UF* 3 (1971): 21-24, esp. 22.

⁸² J. Wellhausen, *Reste arabischen Heidentums gesammelt und erläutert*, 3rd ed. (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1961), 150.

⁸³ For a detailed study of these chthonic spirits, see J. M. Grintz, “Do not Eat on the Blood’: Reconsiderations in Setting and Dating of the Priestly Code,” *ASTI* 8 (1972): 78-105.

Conclusion

In the study of ancient Near Eastern texts, M. Liverani points out the benefit of establishing, whenever possible, a “homologous series” saying that,

the most productive type of study of the single document towards its total comprehension derives (...) from the setting of the text in a homologous series, chosen so as to enlighten the particular structure under study, and to set apart the paradigmatic variants and the syntagmatic successions.⁸⁴

It has become a standard procedure of historical investigation to try to establish analogies between historically similar events or texts. The observation of analogies between similar texts or events in the past gives the historian the possibility of ascribing to them a certain degree of probability. Furthermore, it allows one to explain what is unknown by using that which is better known. Without claiming it to be an all-powerful interpretive device, analogy is considered to be one of the principal tools of the historian's trade. I believe that the above series of texts could represent one such homologous series, all dealing with defecation in various contexts.

The first OB Mari text (§3.1) seems to reflect a symbolic act of “defecating in a cup” “or dropping an excrement in a cup.” In this context, the symbolic act signifies the breaking up of an alliance. This feature is important for biblical studies in view of Ezekiel's use of an outrageous scatological metaphor: *gillûlîm* “dung-gods” (see §1 above) in order to signify the breaking up of Israel's covenant or alliance with YHWH by the worship of foreign gods. Idolatry pollutes and desacralizes just as excrement renders a person soiled.

The defecation done by the *kurgarrû* (see above §2), the name of another member of the cultic personnel, as part and parcel of the Ištar carnival, is a symbolic act allowed as part of the excesses which accompanied the Ištar festival. It is in the very nature of the goddess Ištar to overturn the reigning

⁸⁴ M. Liverani, “Memorandum on the Approach to Historiographic Texts,” *Or* 42 (1973): 178-94, esp. 181.

conditions and transform what is shameful into something acceptable for the duration of the festival. By defecating in front of spectators and comparing the heap of excrement with the city of Kiš, the *kurgarrû* derides the building activities of Mesopotamian kings who pride themselves of building lofty cities. This ritual act of defecation conveys in a very graphic manner one of the features of Ištar, the goddess who performs inversions, and during her festival authorizes acts of desacralization. The link between the *aluzinnu* or “Jester Texts” and the Greek Iambos ritual in the cult of Demeter and Dionysus, accompanied with scatological texts and pranks, performed by buffoon *ἀλαξών* (*alazōn*), seem to be a continuation of an ancient Near Eastern tradition. In both cases, the scatological acts and texts are in the service of desacralization and deconstruction. They contribute to the development of a rhetoric of disparagement and denigration and perform a social function of criticizing established religious discourse and rituals.

The second OB Mari text (see §3.2 above), in which the *assinnum*, a cult functionary of the local avatar of the goddess Ištar, complains about the insalubrious conditions in which he lives and works, might reflect the careless behavior of the worshipers who came to the temple of Annunītum. The excrement and the urine mentioned as befouling the temple precinct may come from the animals brought for sacrifices as well as from humans. The Greek inscription from the Acropolis in Athens (see §4 above) is part of an archaic sixth century BCE law regulating the hygiene and ritual purity of the temple precinct. Urine and excrement in the space between the temples could come from the sacrificed animals as well as from humans. Such carelessness was prohibited and penalized out of a desire to maintain the ritual purity of the sacred ground of the temples. In this case, we are not dealing either with a cultic or symbolic act. Rather, it is a straightforward prohibition of unseemly behavior on the sacred premises.

In the third century BCE Aramaic incantation (see §5 above), one may take the conjurer’s wish, “may my bad things (hostility, bad feelings against me) come out of his (enemy’s) arse,” as an affirmation of mimetic magic. The

formula should favor the cessation of hostile feelings of the enemy who would evacuate them through an act of defecation.

Finally, the Mishnah and the Babylonian Talmud (see §6 above) give late evidence dating from the end of the second to the sixth centuries CE of the existence of defecation practiced as a ritual act in honor of some pagan divinity designated under the traditional name Ba'al Pe'or. The mention of wine as a laxative in the Talmudic story recalls the same effect of excessive drinking of wine by the god El in the Ugaritic text KTU 1.114.

Only two texts in the above series describe ritual acts of defecation (the Ištar festival [§2] and the Talmudic references [§6]). Once it stands for a symbolic act (§3.1: defecating in a cup at Mari). Twice the texts refer to insalubrious hygienic conditions of temple precincts (at Mari [§3.2] and Athens [§4]). Twice the excrement and defecation have a metaphoric usage (in Ezekiel [§1] and in the Aramaic incantation [§5]). It is hoped that the present article will prompt the collection of additional comparative evidence on the link between defecation and desacralization.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ When Jehu attempted to wipe out Baal worship in Samaria, he turned the temple of Baal into a latrine. 2 Kgs 10:27 “And they demolished the pillar of Baal, and demolished the House of Baal, and made it a latrine to this day.” Ketib *mḥr' wt* “dung heap,” qere *mwš'wt* “latrine,” with LXX and medieval commentaries. “Such an act desecrates the site, but it also provides the focal point for prior references to the extermination of all the males of the house of Ahab who ‘piss against the wall’ (see 1 Kgs 21:21; 2 Kgs 9:8; cf. 1 Kgs 14:10; 1 Kgs 16:11)” M. A. Sweeney (OTL; Louisville, KY.: Westminster, John Knox Press, 2013), 339.