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Innehåll

Exegetiska dagen 2012/Exegetical Day 2012

William K. Gilders — Ancient Israelite Sacrifice as Symbolic Action: Theoretical Reflections 1
Corinna Körting — Response to William K. Gilders 23
Göran Eidevall — Rejected Sacrifice in the Prophetic Literature: A Rhetorical Perspective 31
Gunnel Ekroth — Response to Göran Eidevall 47
Stephen Finlan — Sacrificial Images in the New Testament 57
Thomas Kazen — Response to Stephen Finlan 87

Övriga artiklar/Other articles

Josef Forsling — The Incoherence of the Book of Numbers in Narrative Perspective 93
Miriam Kjellgren — The Limits of Utopia: A Levinasian Reading of Deuteronomy 7 107
Ola Wikander — Ungrateful Grazers: A Parallel to Deut 32:15 from the Hurrian/Hittite *Epic of Liberation* 137
Hallvard Hagelia — "…every careless word you utter…": Is Matthew 12:36 a Derivative of the Second Commandment of the Decalogue? 147
Torsten Löfstedt — Don't Hesitate, Worship! (Matt 28:17) 161
Kari Syreeni — Did Luke Know the Letter of James? 173
Birger Gerhardsson — Grundläggande uppgifter om de synoptiska liknelserna: Vad de är och vad de inte är 183
Bengt Holmberg — René Kieffer – minnesord 189

Recensioner/Book Reviews

Klaus-Peter Adam, Friedrich Avemarie och Nili Wazana (red.) *Law and Narrative in the Bible and in Neighbouring Ancient Cultures* (Josef Forsling) 193

Stephen P. Ahearne-Kroll, Paul A. Holloway och James A. Kelhoffer (red.) *Women and Gender in Ancient Religions: Interdisciplinary Approaches* (Hanna Stenström) 195

Dale C. Allison, Volker Leppin, Choon-Leong Seow, Hermann Spieckermann, Barry Dov Walfish och Eric Ziolkowski (red.) *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception, v. 3* (Göran Eidevall) 198

Dale C. Allison, Volker Leppin, Choon-Leong Seow, Hermann Spieckermann, Barry Dov Walfish och Eric Ziolkowski (red.) *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception, v. 5* (Mikael Larsson) 199

Joseph L. Angel — *Otherworldly and Eschatological Priesthood in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Torleif Elgvin) 202

Eve-Marie Becker och Anders Runesson (red.) *Mark and Matthew I: Comparative Readings: Understanding the Earliest Gospels in their First-century Settings* (Tobias Hägerland) 204

Bob Becking — *Ezra, Nehemiah, and the Construction of Early Jewish Identity* (Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer) 207

April D. DeConick — *Holy Misogyny: Why the Sex and Gender Conflicts in the Early Church Still Matter* (Hanna Stenström) 210

Daniel R. Driver — *Brevard Childs, Biblical Theologian: For the Church's One Bible* (LarsOlov Eriksson) 212

Göran Eidevall och Blaženka Scheuer (red.) *Enigmas and Images: Studies in Honor of Tryggve N. D. Mettinger* (Stig Norin) 215

Weston W. Fields — *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A Full History* (Cecilia Wassén) 218

Miriam Goldstein — *Karaite Exegesis in Medieval Jerusalem: The Judeo-Arabic Pentateuch Commentary of Yūsuf ibn Nūḥ and Abū al-Faraj Hārūn* (Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer) 221

Leif Hongisto — *Experiencing the Apocalypse at the Limits of Alterity* (Hanna Stenström) 223

Jan Joosten — *The Verbal System of Biblical Hebrew: A New Synthesis Elaborated on the Basis of Classical Prose* (Ulf Bergström) 225

Christos Karakolis, Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr och Sviatoslav Rogalsky (red.)
Gospel Images of Jesus Christ in Church Tradition and in Biblical Scholarship (Mikael Sundkvist) 228
Thomas Kazen — *Issues of Impurity in Early Judaism* (Cecilia Wassén) 230
Chris Keith — *Jesus' Literacy: Scribal Culture and the Teacher from Galilee* (Tobias Ålöw) 233
Anthony Le Donne — *The Historiographical Jesus: Memory, Typology, and the Son of David* (Jennifer Nyström) ... 236
Kenneth Liljeström (red.) — *The Early Reception of Paul* (Martin Wessbrandt) 238
Aren M. Maeir, Jodi Magness and Lawrence H. Schiffman (ed.)
'Go Out and Study the Land' (Judges 18:2): Archaeological, Historical and Textual Studies in Honor of Hanan Eshel (Torleif Elgvin) 241
David L. Mathewson — *Verbal Aspect in the Book of Revelation: The Function of Greek Verb Tenses in John's Apocalypse* (Jan H. Nylund) 243
Robert K. McIver — *Memory, Jesus, and the Synoptic Gospels* (Jennifer Nyström) 246
Sun Myung Lyu — *Righteousness in the Book of Proverbs* (Bo Johnson) 248
Stefan Nordenson — *Genom honom skapades allt: En exegetisk studie om Kristi preexistens och medlarfunktion i Nya testamentet* (Hanna Stenström) 251
Stefan Nordgaard Svendsen — *Allegory Transformed: The Appropriation of Philonic Hermeneutics in the Letter to the Hebrews* (Johannes Imberg) 253
Donna Lee Petter — *The Book of Ezekiel and Mesopotamian City Laments* (Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer) 255
Stanley E. Porter, Jeffrey T. Reed och Matthew Brook O'Donnell
Fundamentals of New Testament Greek
Stanley E. Porter och Jeffrey T. Reed
Fundamentals of New Testament Greek: Workbook (Jan H. Nylund) 258
Karl Olav Sandnes — *The Gospel 'According to Homer and Virgil': Cento and Canon* (Maria Sturesson) 260

Tanja Schultheiss — *Das Petrusbild im Johannesevangelium* (Finn Damgaard) 263
William A. Tooman — *Gog of Magog: Reuse of Scripture and Compositional Technique in Ezekiel 38–39* (Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer) 265
Paul Trebilco — *Self-designations and Group Identity in the New Testament* (Rikard Roitto) 267
Caroline Vander Stichele och Hugh Pyper (red.) — *Text, Image, and Otherness in Children's Bibles: What Is in the Picture?* (Mikael Larsson) 270
Patricia Walters — *The Assumed Authorial Unity of Luke and Acts: A Reassessment of the Evidence* (Carl Johan Berglund) 272
Amanda Witmer — *Jesus, the Galilean Exorcist: His Exorcisms in Social and Political Context* (Jennifer Nyström) 274

Till redaktionen insänd litteratur 278

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Ungrateful Grazers: A Parallel to Deut 32:15 from the Hurrian/Hittite *Epic of Liberation*

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The text of the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32 undoubtedly contains many traces of early religio-historical motifs and ideology – regardless of its antiquity or lack thereof.[1] The purpose of this short article is to highlight one such possible instance or retention, namely a parallel with a passage from the Hurro-Hittite bilingual *Epic of Liberation*, recovered from Boğazköy and edited in 1996 by the late Erich Neu (whose edition forms the basis of the references to the text in this article, unless otherwise noted).[2]

The text, which is in Hurrian but is supplied with a Hittite translation, includes a variety of different materials. The main story of the text concerns the Hurrian Storm God Teššub (equated with his Hittite counterpart Tarḫunna),[3] who visits the underworld goddess Allāni (rendered in the Hittite version as *taknāš* dUTU-*uš*, "the Sun Goddess of the Netherworld"), and the demand for the titular "Liberation" (Hurrian *kirenzi*, Hittite *parā tarnumar*) of certain captives from the city of Ebla. It appears that the story was originally meant as an aetiology for the destruction of the city of Ebla, the assembly of which does not seem to want to release the prisoners (apparently leading to the city's destruction). The preserved text of the *Epic* appears to derive from Middle Hittite times.[4] Wilhelm

[1] For an overview of the various (and extremely diverse) suggestions concerning the dating of Deuteronomy 32, see Sanders 1996, esp. pp. 1–96 (with extensive references to further literature). For a view of the Song as a late text, see Hidal 1978.

[2] The argument put forth here will also be published in popular form in Swedish in Wikander (forthcoming). That version will of course not include the type of scholarly analysis given here.

[3] Indeed, the opening of the text (attested only in Hurrian) begins with the words "I will sing of Teššub, the great king of Kummi" (*širadile Teššōb Kumminevi t*[*alāvuši*] *evri*; normalization based on the analytical transcription of Kbo XXXII, Ir, lines 1–2, found in Neu 1996, 466 and the "raw" version in Neu 1996, 30).

[4] For introductions to the *Epic of Liberation*, see (besides the commentary and edition in Neu 1996) Gilan 2010, 58–59 and von Dassdow 2011, 219–220. An English translation can be found in Hoffner 1998, 65–80. Another important translation with introduction is

dates the copies today in existence to the early 14th century BCE, though the Hurrian story itself is probably older.[5]

However, the text also includes a number of moralistic fables. These parables or fables are described by the text itself as what Neu translates in the singular as "*lehrreiches Beispiel*" (Hurrian *mādi*, Hittite *ḫattātar*).[6] This type of illustrative tale inserted into an epic narrative is somewhat unusual, and the parables give a "Wisdom" feeling to the text which is rather remarkable.

It is one of these passages that seems to include a motif also found in Deuteronomy 32. Verses 13–14 of the Song of Moses metaphorically describe YHWH's caring for his personified people in the following way:

yarkībēhû ʿal-bāmôtê[7] *ʾāreṣ*	He let him ride the heights of the land,
yaʾăkîlēhû[8] *tĕnûbôt śādāy*	he let him eat the yields of the field,
*wayyēnīqēhû dĕbaš missela*ʿ	and he let him suck honey from a cliff
wĕšemen mēḥalmîš ṣûr	and oil from the flint of the rock –
ḥemʾat bāqār waḥălēb ṣōʾn	cream of cows and milk of sheep
ʿim-ḥēleb kārîm	together with fat of rams,
wĕʾêlîm bĕnê-bāšān wĕʿattûdîm	and deer from Bashan and goats,
ʿim-ḥēleb kilyôt ḥiṭṭâ	together with the choicest insides of wheat
wĕdām-ʿēnāb tišteh-ḥāmer	and the blood of the grape you drank as wine.[9]

But then, suddenly, the imagery changes in verse 15. Now, Israel is no longer the eater of animals, but is itself represented as one – and a rather stubborn animal, at that:

wayyišman yĕšūrûn wayyibʿaṭ	But Jeshurun grew fat and gave a spiteful kick[10] –

Wilhelm 2001, which does, however, not include the parables. Note also de Martino's 1999 review of Neu's edition.

5 Wilhelm 2001, 82.

6 As Neu (1996, 126) himself points out, the Hittite word *ḫattātar* literally means something like "wisdom" ("*Weisheit, Verstand, Klugheit*").

7 Kethiv reading.

8 Reading follows suggestion in Kittel's apparatus (based on Samaritan, LXX and Syriac).

9 The LXX adds "and Jacob ate and was sated."

10 The root *bʿṭ* (quite rare in Biblical Hebrew) is normally understood as "kick," which then has a metaphorical meaning "despise" – so for example Koehler and Baumgartner (*HALOT*, 142 [s.v. *bʿṭ*]). Chaim Rabin (1967, 228–230) proposes that the less physical meaning is primary, based on an identical Arabic root. The meaning "kick" is, however, securely attested in Mishnaic Hebrew (see Jastrow 1950, 180 [s.v. *bʿṭ*]). The above transla-

šāmantā ʿābîtā kāśîtā	you grew fat, you grew thick, you grew obstinate –
wayyiṭṭōš ʾĕlôah ʿāśāhû	and he forsook the God that had made him,
waynabbēl ṣûr yĕšūʿātô	and he spurned the rock of his salvation.

As Christensen succinctly puts it: “In short, Israel behaved like a spoiled ox fattened on rich pasture.”[11] These are the lines that concern us here.

A close parallel to this verse occurs in one of the fables of the *Epic of Liberation*. The beginning of the parable (given here only in the Hittite version, due to the much more certain state of knowledge of that language than of Hurrian) runs:

> *alian*[*an*]*-za apēl tuegga*[*zšet*] ḪUR.SAG-*aš awan arḫa šūet. nu-šš*[*an*] *aliyaš parā tamēdani* ḪUR.SAG-*i pā*[*it*]. *naš warkešta, naš šūllet, nu appa* ḪUR.SAG-*an ḫurzakiwan dāiš. wešiyaḫḫari kuēdani* ḪUR.SAG-*i mān-an paḫḫuenanza arḫa warnuzi,* ^{d}IM-*āš-man-an walaḫzi, paḫḫuenanza-man-an arḫa warnuzi.* ḪUR.SAG-*ašš-a maḫḫan ištamašta, nu-šši-kan* ŠÀ-*ŠU anda ištarakkiat, nu* ḪUR.SAG-*aš aliyanan appa ḫuwarzašta. aliyanan kuin warganunun, kinuna-mu appa ḫurzakizi. peššiandu-ya-n aliyanan* $^{\text{LÚ.MEŠ}}$*ṢĀʾIDŪTIM, dāndu-ma-n* $^{\text{LÚ.MEŠ}}$MUŠEN.DÙ^{TIM}, $^{\text{UZU}}$Ì $^{\text{LÚ.MEŠ}}$*ṢĀʾIDŪTIM dāndu,* KUŠ-*ma* $^{\text{LÚ.MEŠ}}$MUŠEN.DÙ^{TIM} *dāndu*.[12]
>
> A mountain drove away a deer from its body. The deer went off to another mountain. It grew fat, and it became arrogant, and then it started cursing the mountain: “May the fire burn the mountain on which I am grazing,[13] may the Storm God strike it, may the fire burn it!” When the mountain heard this, its heart became sick inside it, and it cursed the deer back: “The deer that I made fat, now he curses me! May the hunters fell him, the deer, may the fowlers take him, may the hunters take [his] flesh, may the fowlers take [his] skin.”[14]

tion is intended to reflect the possibility of both root meanings being punningly referenced by the author.

[11] Christensen 2002, 806.

[12] Normalization based on the edition of KBo XXXII 14, II^{r}, line 1 – II^{r}, line 16, found in Neu 1996, 75, 77. I have (anachronistically) added simple punctuation in order to make comparison with the translation easier.

[13] There is a discussion regarding whether the cursed mountain is the old one recently left by the deer or the new one on which he is currently grazing (see Hoffner 1998, 69, with further references), but either interpretation fits the present argument.

[14] The translation is mine, informed by the analyses of Neu (1996, 75, 77, 98–115), Hoffner (1998, 69) and Melchert (2005).

The fact that this story is meant as a moralistic parable is made quite clear by the text itself, as the narrator exclaims (Hurrian version):

[*n*]*āli mannobur*	It is not a deer –
manni taršuvani[15]	it is a human!

The text then explains that the real sense of the story concerns a man who runs away from his town and is accepted in another one. He then "becomes arrogant" (Hittite *šulle-*) and commits evil deeds against it.[16]

This story includes a great many similarities to Deut 32:15. Both concern a (metaphorical) animal that grows fat and spurns the "rock" (or "mountain") that used to grant it protection and food. In both cases, this is used as an allegory for human disloyalty: in the Hurrian/Hittite text, the disloyalty is to a city, and in the Hebrew case, the spurned one is the God of Israel (who is identified as the "rock of salvation"). One should, however, note that the parable from the *Epic of Liberation* also ends by mentioning the "god" (Hurrian ergative singular *eneš*) or "gods" (Hittite nominative plural DINGIR.MEŠ, read *šiwanneš*) of the city cursing the disloyal man:

ārdivinešša eneš šidilai (Hurrian, I^{r}, line 22)
"May the god of the city curse him!"

URU-*yaš-an* DINGIR.MEŠ *ḫuwartan ḫarkanzi* (Hittite, II^{r}, line 21)
"The gods of the city have cursed him/hold him cursed."[17]

Compare this with Deut 32:19

wayyarʾ YHWH wayyinʾāṣ	YHWH saw, and he spurned
mikkaʿas bānāyw ûbĕnōtāyw	out of anger his sons and daughters.

[15] Transcription based on I^{r}, line 17 (Neu 1996, 76). The normalization is inspired by the analysis of a parallel passage from another parable in Wegner 2007, 223–224.
[16] Again, there is a discussion concerning which of the two cities this refers to (see above, n. 13).
[17] My understanding of the Hittite lines is informed by the translation and analysis in Neu 1996, 76–77; 120–121. The translation of the Hurrian version is, however, patterned on the analysis of a parallel passage in Wegner 2007, 223–225. Wegner prefers the optative sense of the Hurrian *-ilai* form (referred to by her as "debitiv-finalis" and as "transitives Gerundium" by Neu [1996, 108, 120]), and I have chosen to do the same.

which is then followed by highly graphic representations of the divine "spurning" in verses 20–26. Thus, both stories tell of gods rejecting faithless subjects whom they have nourished and protected, by using parables concerning metaphorical animals being fed by a mountain/rock, which that animal then grows obstinate against and quarrels with.

In fact, a very concrete similarity between the stories may be in evidence in their very form of composition. The Hebrew text uses three verbs to express the fattening and rebelliousness of the animal/people: *šāmantā ʿābîtā kāšîtā* ("you grew fat, you grew thick, you grew obstinate"). A very similar construction is used in the Hurrian version of the parable from the *Epic*. Here, the "arrogance," expressed by a single verb in the Hittite version quoted above, is described using three separate words: *fūru tēlu tapšū*. This collocation, the exact semantics of which is not entirely clear, is referred to by de Martino as a "stereotyped expression"[18] describing the rebellious attitude of the animal of the parable of and the man that rejected his city. It is quite possible, then, that the author of the Hebrew text attempted to convey his similar message using an analogous expression made up of three parts. All of this suggests, I argue, that the imagery of the kicking animal in Deut 32:15 represents a reception and transformation of an older parable or type-scene, which is represented in the *Epic of Liberation*.

If Deut 32:15 really does represent a reception of the same motifs found in the Hurrian/Hittite passage, one may note that a fascinating reinterpretation has taken place. The generic "mountain" of the Hurrian parable has as its counterpart the common Israelite metaphorical expression applied to YHWH, the "rock" (*ṣûr*, known as a description of the Israelite deity from many places in the Hebrew Bible, such as 1 Sam 2:2; 2 Sam 22:32; 2 Sam 23:3; Isa 26:4; Ps 18:3; Ps 18:47). It appears, therefore, as though the author has welded these two images together in a highly creative manner – the "mountain" of the fable motif is combined with the "rock" of Israelite theology. It is also interesting how the preceding verses (32:11–13) specifically speak of YHWH letting the Israelite people travel across the "heights" and giving them food derived from the mountains and from various animals. As pointed out by Miller,[19] the imagery of the rock

[18] de Martino 1999, 341 (with further discussion regarding the Hurrian verb *tapš-*, which he regards as originally having to do with becoming parched or burnt, out of which the "quarrelling" meaning allegedly grew). See also the discussion in Neu 1996, 103, 119.
[19] Miller 1990, 230.

emphasizes the constancy of YHWH's faithfulness as opposed to the inconstancy of the people: a similar inference can probably be made for the Hurrian/Hittite text as well, but it becomes all the more poignant due to the "rock" being a common piece of imagery in Israelite tradition.

In Deuteronomy 32, YHWH is both the (metaphorical) rock itself and the one who brings forth nourishment from a (more physically imagined) rock.[20] In the parable from the *Epic of Liberation*, the personified mountain is at once the feeder and the one from which the deer is being fed; Deuteronomy makes the imagery more complex by seemingly separating God from the "rock" from which he brings forth oil (32:12) but then applying the very word "rock" (*ṣûr*) to YHWH himself. However, there is a similar duality present in the Hurro-Hittite story, as it begins by telling a parable about a mountain and then explaining that mountain as being a symbol of a city and its god(s). Thus, the mountain is both a place and a deity.

The connection between the *ṣûr* of Deuteronomy 32 and the "mountain" (Hurrian *fabni*, Hittite Sumerographic writing ḪUR.SAG-*aš*) of the parable is made all the more plausible by the argument put forth already in 1959 by W. F. Albright, that in this text, the word *ṣûr*, being the etymological equivalent of Ugaritic *ġr* (i.e. /*ġūru*/) and Aramaic *ṭûr* ("mountain"), has a background in Ancient Near Eastern language concerning divine mountains.[21] Basing himself on this, Mayes argues that the word ought to be translated "mountain" in the present passage.[22] A similar punning reference to the motif of the ungrateful grazing animal and the mountain may perhaps be found in the use of the rare term *yěšūrûn* for Israel – Cazelles has suggested that its occurrence here is meant phonetically to invoke an association with *šôr* ("ox"),[23] an idea which I find rather speculative, though not without merit.

Possible extensive Hurrian influence on early Israelite culture has been argued for example by Nicolas Wyatt.[24] Such a direct connection between the culture that produced the *Epic of Liberation* and that which produced

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[20] For the latter point, see McConville 2002, 456.

[21] Albright 1959, 345, esp. n. 4. Albright specifically refers to Syria and Anatolia in his note concerning divinized mountains, which is especially relevant to the present case, which concerns a Hurrian/Hittite text.

[22] Mayes 1981, 383.

[23] Cazelle's suggestion is found in Mayes 1981, 386–387 (without reference) and is also referred to by Christensen (2002, 805–806).

[24] Wyatt 1990, 355.

Deuteronomy 32 is, however, only one possible way in which the motif of the fat, ungrateful animal could have made the journey between them.[25] The fact that the Hurrian/Hittite text uses and refers to the story as a "*lehrreiches Beispiel*" is a sign that it might have circulated more widely in the Ancient Near East, as a famous Wisdom parable which just happens to appear (in slightly different form) in the two texts. In the Hurrian/Hittite case, the story is used as a general illustration of morality, of the need for faithfulness toward those who have granted you shelter and nourishment; the Hebrew case reworks this imagery into an illustration of the special relationship between Israel and YHWH that the author wishes to describe.

One may well ask how the identification of a parallel such as this one could affect the delicate question of the dating of Deuteronomy 32. It is of course a fact that a close correspondence with a Bronze Age text could be regarded as providing support for an early dating. Yet, as I have pointed out elsewhere,[26] parallels with early extrabiblical material can and do occur in late texts as well – poetic phraseology has a way of surviving through centuries of tradition, being reinterpreted and reinserted in a way serving the needs of the composition at hand – indeed, such appears to have been the case here, where a theologically creative reworking has used the motif of the ungrateful animal quite differently from how it is used in the Hurrian/Hittite text. However, the occurrence of such an early motif fits well with the many archaic Northwest Semitic ideas present in the Song of Moses (references to life-giving dew, the polytheistic slant of verse 8, etc.) as well as with apparent linguistic archaisms, such as the large number of narrative short *yiqṭol* forms. The parallel certainly does not weaken the case for an early dating of Deuteronomy 32. At the very least, it suggests that the author was well versed in traditional and quite ancient forms of literary diction.

A question necessarily implied by an observation such as the one made in this article is how one is to view such parallels, stretching from Bronze Age Anatolia to the Hebrew Bible. One thing that is necessary to acknowledge is that pointing out parallels of this kind demands a specific attitude towards Ancient Near Eastern textual material – namely one in which (a) the religious and literary cultures of the region are regarded as having been closely connected with one another (in itself nothing remark-

[25] If the above argument concerning the phrases *šāmantā ʿābîtā kāšîtā* and *fūru tēlu tapšū* is correct however, a direct relation with the Hurrian text gains greater probability.
[26] Wikander 2012, 157–158, esp. n. 381.

able at all) and (b) the possibility of orally "inheriting" poetic phrases and ideas is taken seriously. These propositions are essentially the same as those underlying my doctoral dissertation (2012).[27] Basing oneself on such axioms, the distance between the Song of Moses and the Hittite Empire (or, indeed, the Hurrians, which are most relevant in the context) is not that great. However, there is as always a methodological question of how parallels of this sort are to be studied in order to preserve stringency of analysis. Given the discussion above, I would like to underscore the importance of separately discussing both surviving motifs and more literal correspondences, keeping in mind that these two types of retentions may influence and help in preserving each other. Also, one must not lose sight of the fact that inheriting motifs and literary material does not have to involve the authors "reading" the specific texts with which we find parallels – often, all one can argue for is a shared cultural, religious and poetic background. And, again, it must be remembered that such parallel motifs and poetic expressions, preserved from earlier cultural milieus, can be (and very often are) inserted into quite new contexts and given new meanings by later authors. Such appears to be the case in the Song of Moses, which has woven old motifs into a rich new tapestry, illustrating a relationship between God and people. The image of the ungrateful, grazing animal is an old one, used as a wisdom parable in a Hurrian/Hittite bilingual, but in Deuteronomy 32, it becomes a tool of theology. Unearthing the background of motifs such as this one helps underscore the strategies of reinterpretation employed by the biblical text. At a level earlier than redaction, the text has been created from ancient material – that has been given new import. If one recognizes that a version of this little tale was used in the Ancient Near East as a parable for disloyalty and haughtiness, its role in Deuteronomy 32 is given another layer of meaning. The story was one of general human weakness, but in the Song of Moses, this weakness has been historicized and made concrete. If the ancient audiences of the text were aware of the motif's history, this point must have become even more poignant, as the possibly well-known illustration of general faithlessness is now transposed to them specifically. The animal is no longer just "a human" (*taršuvani*), it is Israel – and the mountain is YHWH himself.

[27] See esp. Wikander 2012, 26–27 and 222.

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