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## From Indo-European Dragon Slaying to Isa 27.1

### A Study in the Longue Durée

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## PREFACE

On April 23–25, 2015, Örebro School of Theology hosted the conference The Words of the Prophets, their meaning and history of reception—with special focus on the book of Isaiah and the Twelve Prophets with generous support from the Swedish Research Council. The conference brought together seventeen scholars from five different countries who offered papers and responses, a selection of which are published in this volume. We would first like to thank our colleague, Dr. Lennart Boström, who orchestrated the conference which proved to be a great success. We also take this opportunity to thank all the participants who gave valuable input, in particular Dr. Bo Krister Ljungberg, Prof. Göran Eidevall, Prof. Fredrik Lindström, and Dr. Blaženka Scheuer, who offered responses to the main papers.

For this volume, we have selected a number of excellent contributions by leading scholars from Great Britain, Finland, Norway, and Sweden, which all focus on different aspects of the book of Isaiah, its history, theology, and reception. It is our hope that these studies will shed new light on the book of Isaiah, which is arguably one of the most complex and yet also central books in the Hebrew Bible, as reflected in its rich history of interpretation to this day.

Finally, we are very grateful to Miriam Cantwell, Assistant Editor of Bloomsbury T&T Clark, to Duncan Burns who helped us with copy editing and indexing, and to the series editors Claudia V. Camp and Andrew Mein for accepting the volume in the esteemed Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies and for seeing it through to publication.

Tommy Wasserman  
Greger Andersson  
David Willgren



## ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York, 1992
AIL	Ancient Israel and Its Literature
AJSL	<i>Ancient Israel and Its Literature</i>
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AOTC	Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries
ARAB	<i>Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia</i> . Daniel David Luckenbill. Chicago, 1926–27
ArBib	The Aramaic Bible
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
ATM	Altes Testament und Moderne
ATDan	Acta Theologica Danica
AuOr	<i>Aula Orientalis</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BCOTWP	Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BEvT	Beiträge zur evangelischen Theologie
BHT	Beiträge zur historischen Theologie
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
BibEnc	Biblical Encyclopedia
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar, Altes Testament. Edited by M. Noth and H. W. Wolff
BOTSA	<i>Bulletin for Old Testament Studies in Africa</i>
BSOAS	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CC	Continental Commentaries
CHANE	Culture and History of the Ancient Near East
ConBOT	Coniectanea Biblica: Old Testament Series
DJD	Discoveries in the Judaean Desert
EB	Echter Bibel
ECC	Eerdmans Critical Commentary
ECL	Early Christianity and Its Literature
EdF	Erträge der Forschung

EJL	Early Judaism and Its Literature
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GKC	<i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i> . Edited by E. Kautzsch. Translated by A. E. Cowley. 2d. ed. Oxford, 1910
HAR	<i>Hebrew Annual Review</i>
HCOT	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
HKAT	Handkommentar zum Alten Testament
HSHJ	Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
Int	<i>Interpretation</i>
IRGLS	International Rennert Guest Lecture Series
IVBS	International Voices in Biblical Studies
JANES	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society</i>
JAJ	<i>Journal of Ancient Judaism Supplements</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JQR	<i>The Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
JSNT	Journal for the Study of the New Testament
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
KeHAT	Kurzgefasstes exegetisches Handbuch zum Alten Testament
LHBOTS	The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LNTS	The Library of New Testament Studies
LSAWS	Linguistic Studies in Ancient West Semitic
NAC	New American Commentary
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
NEchtB	Neue Echter Bibel
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NovT	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OTE	<i>Old Testament Essays</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTP	<i>Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i> . Edited by J. H. Charlesworth. 2 vols. New York, 1983
OtSt	Oudtestamentische studiën
PHSC	Perspectives on Hebrew Scriptures and Its Contexts
PIBA	<i>Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association</i>

<i>PRSt</i>	<i>Perspectives in Religious Studies</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
SAA	State Archives of Assyria
SANT	Studien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
<i>SEÅ</i>	<i>Svensk exegetisk årsbok</i>
SHCANE	Studies in the History and Culture
<i>SJOT</i>	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SRB	Studies in the Reception History of the Bible
SSN	Studia Semitica Neerlandica
StBL	Studies in Biblical Literature
SVTP	Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigraphica
TB	Theologische Bücherei: Neudrucke und Berichte aus dem 20. Jahrhundert
TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum
<i>UF</i>	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>



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FROM INDO-EUROPEAN DRAGON-SLAYING  
TO ISAIAH 27.1:  
A STUDY IN THE *LONGUE DURÉE*\*

Ola Wikander

An initial question to ponder: What does it mean to date a text?  
One of the most famous instances showing the relationship between the common Northwest Semitic cultural milieu and the Hebrew Bible that grew out of it is Isa. 27.1. This verse has even become a ‘poster boy’ of sorts for the comparative study of Ugaritic and Biblical Hebrew literature, and it is certainly not difficult to see why. The verse runs:

*Bayyôm hahû' yipqôd YHWH*  
*bēharbô haqqāšâ w<sup>e</sup>haggēdôlâ wēhah<sup>a</sup>zāqâ*  
*‘al liwyātān nāḥāš bārīah*  
*w<sup>e</sup>‘al liwyātān nāḥāš ‘aḡallātôn*  
*w<sup>e</sup>hārag ‘et-hattannîn ‘āšer bayyām*

On that day, YHWH will punish  
with his heavy, great and strong sword  
the Leviathan, the fleeing serpent,  
yes, the Leviathan, the writhing serpent –  
he will kill the dragon in the sea.

As noted for a long time and by many scholars, this verse contains etymological and poetic material identical with that found at the beginning of the Ugaritic tablet *KTU* 1.5, a passage from the Baal Cycle, in which

\* This study, as well as the conference presentation on which it is based, forms part of the research project *Dragons and Horses – Indo-Europeans and Indo-European in the Old Testament World*, which has been funded by the Swedish Research Council (project number 421-2013-1452). The same applies to the upcoming book publication mentioned later.

Addendum: It has recently come to my attention that R. D. Miller will soon be publishing a volume entitled *The Dragon, the Mountain, and the Nations: An Old Testament Myth, its Origins, and its Afterlives* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2016). Due to the date of delivery of the present manuscript, this book has not been available to me, and I have therefore not been able to refer to it.

Mot (the god of death) is threatening Baal while referring to his earlier, heroic exploits, which were apparently presupposed to be well-known by the audience:<sup>1</sup>

*k tmḥṣ . ltn . bṭn . brḥ*  
*tkly . bṭn . 'qltn .*  
*šlyt . d. šb't . rašm*  
*ttkh . ttrp . šmm .*

As/because you smote Lotan/Litan, the fleeing serpent,  
 killed off the writhing serpent,  
 the ruler with seven heads,  
 the heavens will burn hot and shine/be weakened.<sup>2</sup> (KTU 1.5 I 1-4)

The word <sup>a</sup>*qallātôn* ('writhing', 'twisting') in the Hebrew text is a *hapax legomenon*, and the fact that it is combined with an adjectival form of the root *brḥ* to describe a terrible serpent called Leviathan/*ltn* (different variants of the same name) proves beyond doubt that the expression is an ancient poetic formula. Actually, the term *bārīaḥ* itself in the sense of 'fleeing' or 'swift' is also uncommon, which adds to the evidence: it is quite unthinkable that the combination of the serpent Leviathan/Litan/Lotan<sup>3</sup> and these two specific words should have arisen by chance both in Ugaritic and Hebrew literature, and so a historical connection must be postulated.<sup>4</sup> This is rather well-known in modern exegetical scholarship.

1. The parallel is noted in many, many places and has become a mainstay of religio-historical exegetical scholarship. For one example, see J. Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, JSOTSup 265 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 105–6. Day refers to the use of the ancient material in the Isaiah text as being 'projected into the future in connection with the Eschaton'.

2. The Ugaritic text is quoted based on the standard edition KTU<sup>3</sup> – M. Dietrich, O. Loretz and J. Sanmartín, *Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani und anderen Orten/The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and Other Places*, 3rd ed., AOAT 360/1 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2013). The translation is the same that I give in O. Wikander, *Drought, Death, and the Sun in Ugarit and Ancient Israel: A Philological and Comparative Study*, ConBOT 61 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 52, with certain small changes. See that publication for the arguments underlying the translation.

3. The most plausible vocalization is probably Litan (*Lītānu* in the nominative): see J. A. Emerton, 'Leviathan and *Ltn*: The Vocalization of the Ugaritic Word for the Dragon', *VT* 32 (1982): 327–31.

4. The terms *'qltn* and *šlyt d šb't rašm* are also used of the serpent in KTU 1.3 III 41–42, showing again that the phrases are part of a set poetic formula.

However, in the present study, I would like to sketch and suggest a further trajectory of the tradition and, perhaps more importantly for the present purposes, ask what methodological implications such a search can have.

1. *Dating the Hebrew and Ugaritic Passages:  
Borrowing vs. Inheritance*

Let us start by talking of the relative dating of the two texts mentioned above. The verse from Isaiah includes ancient poetic material also found at Ugarit; the vocabulary used in this textual passage is very old indeed. Yet, it belongs to the part of the book often known as the 'Isaiah Apocalypse', sometimes regarded as one of the latest parts of the book of Isaiah as a whole. Going back all the way to Bernhard Duhm, it has been argued that Isa. 24–27 is a late, apocalyptic addition to the Isaianic corpus – Duhm himself believed the chapters to be as recent in their origin as the second century BCE.<sup>5</sup> This extremely late dating is less mainstream today; however, a post-exilic origin of the 'Apocalypse' is often assumed.<sup>6</sup> There have certainly been dissenting voices: for example, a recent monograph by William D. Barker dispenses with the idea of an 'Isaiah Apocalypse' altogether and also rejects the tendency to give the chapters a late dating.

5. B. Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaja*, HKAT 3/1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1892), 149.

6. As an example, see H. G. M. Williamson, *The Book Called Isaiah: Deutero-Isaiah's Role in Composition and Redaction* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 183, where it is stated that the origin of Isa. 24–27 lie 'beyond the time of Deutero-Isaiah' and that they are more at home in the times of Trito-Isaiah, Joel and Zechariah. A rather moderate view, 'earlier rather than late, closer to the time of the exile than to the book of Daniel' can be found in D. G. Johnson, *From Chaos to Restoration: An Integrative Reading of Isaiah 24–27*, JSOTSup 61 (Sheffield JSOT, 1988), 16. Another *via media* can be found in G. W. Anderson, 'Isaiah XXIV–XXVII Reconsidered', in *Congress Volume: Bonn, 1962*, VTSup 9 (Leiden: Brill, 1963), 118–26 (126), where the chapters are dated to 'the earlier rather than the later post-exilic period'. A generally post-exilic date, perhaps the fourth century BCE, is opted for in A. S. Herbert, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah: Chapters 1–39* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 144. Christopher B. Hays suggests an earlier date, 'between the late seventh and late sixth centuries' based on linguistic criteria – C. B. Hays, 'The Date and Message of Isaiah 24–27 in the Light of Hebrew Diachrony', in *Formation and Intertextuality in Isaiah 24–27*, ed. J. T. Hibbard and H. C. P. Kim, AIL 17 (Atlanta: SBL, 2013), 7–24 (23). Typically enough, another essay in the very same volume settles for the fifth century BCE and seeks intertextual relationships with Trito-Isaiah: J. T. Hibbard, 'Isaiah 24–27 and Trito-Isaiah: Exploring Some Connections', 183–200 (esp. 187). Other suggestions are legion.

In his book, Barker presents an impressive and almost humorous list of the extremely varied suggestions that have been given for the dating of Isa. 24–27.<sup>7</sup> The wide discrepancies between these various suggestions (encompassing the eighth to the second centuries BCE) illustrate how hard it is to fix texts of such unclear historical scope at a specific point in time. The arguments used have sometimes become somewhat circular (at least when one looks at the history of scholarship on this question with a bird's-eye view): on the one hand, it is often assumed that Isa. 24–27 is apocalyptic or proto-apocalyptic in genre, and that this genre is an intrinsically late one; but on the other hand, the exact definition of apocalyptic tends to vary, muddling the waters.<sup>8</sup>

I personally have no fixed view on whether or not Isa. 24–27 as a whole is to be regarded as a 'late' composition, nor do I intend to answer any such question of dating in the present study: quite the contrary, in fact. What I want to do here is to problematize the very idea of providing a secure date for a textual entity (a single verse, in this case) that includes within it material so ancient as to be in essence impossible to situate temporally (in the context of the Hebrew Bible). I shall argue below that Isa. 27.1 contains a reception of motifs even earlier than the aforementioned Ugaritic attestation – which in itself is something like a millennium (give or take) earlier than the post-exilic date sometimes assumed for the 'Isaiah Apocalypse'. The question then becomes, as stated above: What does it really mean to date a text? What does it mean that the Isaian verse is supposedly 'late' when it includes extremely ancient material?

The first thing one has to ask oneself when discussing striking parallels such as the one between Isa. 27.1 and the passage from the Baal Cycle is how this type of correspondence really came about. It is definitely not a matter of the author of the Isaiah passage having somehow read the Baal Cycle; it would be very hard indeed to come up with a credible scenario in which this could even be imaginable (Ugarit was, after all, destroyed shortly after 1200 BCE, and there are no signs of its literary culture having survived into the main parts of the Iron Age, let alone in Palestine as opposed to Syria). No, the only plausible way to explain this type of correspondence is to reckon with a type of 'Bardic Consciousness', a common repository of poetic material that was floating around, so to speak, in the common Northwest Semitic cultural milieu of which both the Ugaritic writings and

7. W. D. Barker, *Isaiah's Kingship Polemic: An Exegetical Study in Isaiah 24–27*, FAT 2/70 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 4–10 (with further references to various views on both genre and dating). The list of suggested dates is found on p. 5.

8. The latter point is underscored in Barker, *Isaiah's Kingship Polemic*, 6.

the Hebrew Bible provide individual instances. The Hebrew Bible did not ‘borrow’ from Northwest Semitic culture: it *is* Northwest Semitic culture. A similar yet not identical point is made by B. W. Anderson, who writes that the historical relationship between the Ugaritic and Hebrew texts ‘does not necessarily indicate that the poet had Ugaritic texts at hand’.<sup>9</sup> With this I definitely agree, it most certainly does not mean that. Anderson, however, goes on to suggest that there was a direct influence from ‘Ugaritic myth’ on early Hebrew poetry, and that this explains the historical influence (and even that Isa. 27.1 is specifically dependent upon the Ugaritic text). With this I would agree only if one defines ‘Ugaritic myth’ in a *very* broad way as meaning something like ‘the common Northwest Semitic poetic background of which we have an important instance preserved at Ugarit’. I do not believe that there need have been any actual contact between Ugarit, the city, and its culture and the early Israelites: rather *both* Ugaritic and Hebrew literature must be viewed as distinct representatives of a common Northwest Semitic cultural-poetic milieu. It may seem nitpicking to insist upon this distinction (shared mytho-poetic inheritance as opposed to borrowing from Ugaritic mythology specifically), but I believe it is important to make this point in order for one not to view Israelite culture as something too aberrant and unique within its context. To be specific: Israelite culture is a part of its Northwest Semitic context, though having its own individuality, just as is Ugaritic culture and literature does. And one does not need to borrow mythological motifs from one’s own culture. A similar (and in my view strictly incorrect) account of the parallel as a type of borrowing can be found in Kaiser’s commentary to Isa. 13–39, where it is said that ‘[t]he Israelites took the myth over from the Canaanites...’<sup>10</sup> Again, I would say: they did not need to ‘take the myth over’ from the Canaanites: linguistically and mytho-culturally, they *were* Canaanites.<sup>11</sup> This type of direct inheritance (and its being distinguished from intercultural borrowing) is quite important for the present purposes.<sup>12</sup>

9. B. W. Anderson, ‘The Slaying of the Fleeing, Twisted Serpent: Isaiah 27:1 in Context’, in *Uncovering Ancient Stones: Essays in Memory of H. Neil Richardson*, ed. L. M. Hopfe (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 3–16 (5).

10. O. Kaiser, *Isaiah 13–39: A Commentary*, trans. R. A. Wilson, ATD 18 (London: SCM, 1974), 221. It should also be noted that Kaiser is of the view that Isa. 24–27 should be regarded as late chapters (see 173–79).

11. Also, whether ‘Canaanite’ is actually a very good term for the traditions preserved at Ugarit is debatable, to say the least.

12. I also make this point in Wikander, *Drought*, 15 (referring specifically to Isa. 27.1 and using some of the same arguments).

We need not presuppose that the Ugaritic passage *as such* is the original locus of the poetic material shared with Isa. 27.1; rather, *both* of them must have inherited the poetic formula from the common Northwest Semitic background from which they sprang. Methodologically, as we know that the Hebrew Bible and the Ugaritic writings are generally very close to each other both in terms of linguistic inheritance and poetic form, there is no need whatsoever to postulate some form of cross-cultural borrowing in this case. We will, however, speak of such processes further on. Thus far, however, mytho-poetic inheritance has more explanatory power as well as being more parsimonious.

## 2. 'Etymological Poetics' as Method, and the Work of Calvert Watkins

In my 2014 monograph *Drought, Death, and the Sun in Ugarit and Ancient Israel*, I focused on this type of inheritance phenomenon in relationship to the mytho-poetical motifs of using drought as an illustration of the powers of death (personified or not) in Ugaritic and Hebrew literature, and I did this by tracing specific pieces of etymological material to which such motifs could be anchored and which could serve as their carriers over long periods of time. I refer to this methodology as 'etymological poetics'.<sup>13</sup> Even though using this term to refer to it is (as far as I know) my own idea, the approach is not unique. I would especially like to point to the work of Calvert Watkins, whose perhaps most well-known study concerned motifs of dragon-slaying (!) in the Indo-European world, as opposed to the Semitic-speaking one in which exegetes are often most at home. His book *How to Kill a Dragon* has as one of its central points a quest not only to survey stories in many Indo-European languages about heroes battling dragons or serpent monsters but also to try to reconstruct the source of these stories in a putative Proto-Indo-European myth that would, so to speak, have been inherited down the ages as a linguistically coded motif in the same way that the poetic phrases about the Leviathan apparently were before ending up in the Baal Cycle as well as in the book of Isaiah.<sup>14</sup>

13. It should be noted that my use of the term has nothing to do with the 'etymological poetics' of Martin Heidegger (I initially used the term without being aware of the Heideggerian sense of it).

14. C. Watkins, *How to Kill a Dragon: Aspects of Indo-European Poetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). It should be noted that the idea of a Proto-Indo-European dragon/serpent story has won a rather wide acceptance. Watkins was not

What Watkins did, in effect, was to study how such a motif may have been poetically transmitted in various branches of the Indo-European linguistic family, carried through the ages by using specific, poetically charged terminology. He reconstructed a poetic formula of an (often divine) hero slaying a serpent, sometimes using some form of weapon as his tool, and as we shall see later, he plausibly reconstructed a Proto-Indo-European formulation for this formula. Watkins's work has been both lauded and criticized, the former for its extreme erudition and vast knowledge of the ancient Indo-European literatures, and the latter for the somewhat speculative character of his reconstruction of a one-line-long proto-myth supposedly underlying many Indo-European serpent myths which are, it must be granted, very different in their actual formulations. Although this criticism is not to be ignored, I believe it very hard to overlook the parallels between the various Indo-European stories, and – not least – between the words used to convey them. Another piece of criticism leveled against Watkins has been that of asking how specifically Indo-European the serpent-slaying motif really is. It is, after all, present in many Semitic-speaking cultures of the ancient Near East.<sup>15</sup> And this is, in fact, the main underlying point of the present study.

Given that I myself have a background both in biblical studies, history of religion and Indo-European studies, it is perhaps not surprising that my current field of research is focused on motifs borrowed from the Indo-European cultural sphere into the world of the Hebrew Bible: this project will result in a 'polyphonic monograph' tentatively entitled *Unburning Fame: Horses, Dragons, Beings of Smoke, and Other Indo-European Motifs in Ugarit and the Hebrew Bible*. And even less surprising is the fact that one of the possibly Indo-European motifs that I am studying concerns the dragon/serpent-slaying mytheme.

This is not just a matter of personal taste. The intuition of Calvert Watkins – that myths of serpent battles constitute one of the most typically 'Indo-European' motif spheres of all – has certain consequences for a scholar engaging with the mytho-poetic history of the Hebrew and Ugaritic literatures. There are a number of striking parallels between the serpent-slaying myths alluded to in Northwest Semitic literature and

first to argue the point (although his take on is the most thoroughgoing), and one can also find it in general works on Indo-European mythology, such as, e.g., M. L. West, *Indo-European Poetry and Myth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 255–62.

15. The point of the Semitic serpent-slaying stories is made, e.g., in W. B. McCarthy, review of C. Watkins, *How to Kill a Dragon: Aspects of Indo-European Poetics*, *Journal of American Folklore* 112 (1999): 220–22 (222).



the ones appearing in many places in the Indo-European world. Even though I will have to defer a more complete discussion of the matter to my coming book, I will sketch some of these possible relationships here.<sup>16</sup> The reader is advised to take this relationship between the publications to heart: the book will include a major chapter on the relationships between Indo-European and Northwest Semitic serpent myths; the present study will merely sketch some of the conclusions arrived at there, and apply those to the specific case of Isa. 27.1.

### 3. *Sources of Indo-European Influences*

Early Indo-European influence of the Northwest Semitic world may have come from various sources.<sup>17</sup> Two of these are especially relevant: the Anatolian Indo-European speaking cultures of Asia Minor (especially

16. As mentioned, I will be looking at possibilities of transfer of the serpent-slaying motif from Indo-European sources into Northwest Semitic. There have, of course, been other suggestions for explaining these connections. Among others, one could mention A. K. Lahiri, *Vedic Vṛtra* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984), who concentrates on the *Enuma Elish* and views that tradition as having influenced Vedic mythology rather than the other way around. Another, more far-reaching view of serpent mythology in the ancient Near East can be found in R. D. Miller, 'Tracking the Dragon across the Ancient Near East', *Archiv Orientalní* 82 (2014): 225–45, in which a number of the same texts are discussed as in the present article; Miller also believes in a connection between the Indo-European and Northwest Semitic serpent-killing stories, and also brings the Hurrians into the equation. His article constitutes a wider overview of the dragon-slaying tales of the ancient Near East (regardless of linguistic family); he does not concentrate as much on specific pieces of text as I will do below. A wider, and more cosmologically oriented, comparison between the Baal Cycle and the Vedic stories can be found in N. Wyatt, 'Who Killed the Dragon', in *The Mythic Mind: Essays on Cosmology and Religion in Ugaritic and Old Testament Literature*, BibleWorld (London: Equinox, 2005), 18–37 (originally published in *AuOr* 5 [1987]: 185–98) (29–31). An Indo-Aryan background for Ugaritic battle mythology is also argued in N. Wyatt, 'The Source of the Ugaritic Myth of the Conflict between Ba'al and Yam', *UF* 20 (1988): 375–86.

17. By using the phrase 'early Indo-European influence', I want to make it clear that I am not referring to the of course massive influx of words and ideas that took place as part of the expansion of the Achaemenids or the spread of Hellenism; I am talking, instead, of influence at the Bronze or Early Iron Age stages, i.e. to a large extent of influence at the level of the shared Northwest Semitic poetic background itself (this is why I do not discuss later Greek or Iranian evidence within the present study, although these are certainly not without interest from a comparative point of view).



Hittites and Luwians) on the one hand, and Indo-Aryan influence (probably mediated through the Mitannians, who – while mainly being ethnically and linguistically Hurrian – had a clear Indo-Aryan influence or stratum in their onomastics and traditions as well). El Amarna onomastics clearly show the presence of both of these Indo-European cultural influences in the greater world of the Hebrew Bible at a point in time roughly comparable to that of the Ugaritic texts, with names showing Indo-Aryan provenance as well as Anatolian ones.<sup>18</sup> Thus, we know for a fact that Indo-European cultural influences were present in the Israelite or pre-Israelite milieu and, thus, that mythological input could have been received from those cultural contacts with Indo-European-speaking peoples. So, while the Hebrew Bible did not ‘borrow’ from Northwest Semitic culture, that earlier Proto-Northwest Semitic culture itself may have borrowed ‘foreign’ motifs from Indo-European-speakers (before subsequently letting these borrowings be inherited by its daughters, such as Ugaritic and Hebrew literature). We shall now look at some parallels both with Indo-Aryan and Anatolian material.

#### 4. *The Vedic Serpent Myth: Example Passages*

As an example of the possibly parallel dragon slaying mythology from Vedic India, we shall begin by looking at a piece of text:

*Yo hatvāhim ariṇāt sapta sindhūn  
yo gā udājād apadhā valasya  
yo aśmanor antar agniṃ jajāna  
samvṛk samatsu sa janāsa indrah.* (RV II 12.3)

He who after slaying the serpent released the seven rivers,  
he who drove out the cows that were held back by Vala,  
he who between the two rocks gave birth to fire,  
victorious one in battles – he, O men, is Indra!

A similar Vedic strophe, which (as Watkins points out<sup>19</sup>) is the very beginning of a Vedic hymn, is the following:

18. For a good overview and corpus of the Amarna onomastics (including linguistic analysis of the names and their etymological origin), see R. S. Hess, *Amarna Personal Names*, American Schools of Oriental Research Dissertation Series 9 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1993).

19. Watkins, *How to Kill a Dragon*, 304.

*Indrasya nu vīryāṇi pra vocam  
yāni cakāra prathamāni vajrī  
ahann ahim anv apas tatarda  
pra vakṣanā abhināt parvatānām.* (RV I 32.1)

Indra's heroic deeds I shall now proclaim,  
those pre-eminent ones that he carried out armed with the *Vajra*:  
He killed the serpent, he broke through all the way to the waters,  
he split the center of the mountains.

Just these lines will demonstrate rather clearly why the Vedic and Northwest Semitic dragon-slaying stories have been compared with each other and why a historical relationship appears probable. In both cases, we have tales of a young, stereotypically 'manly' storm god, using lightning as his weapon (in Indra's case, often identified with his so-called *Vajra*, compare with the lightning-shaped 'cedar weapon' used by Baal in the Baal Cycle and depicted on the *Baal au foudre* stele) defeating a terrible serpent. And just as Baal receives his weapons for destroying the sea god Yamm (an ally of the sea serpent) from the craftsman god Kothar-wa-Hasis, Indra receives his weapons from the Vedic craftsman god Tvaṣṭr.<sup>20</sup> The mythemes are highly similar, and some form of historical connection seems probable. But the quotation also points to important differences between the Vedic and Semitic stories. Indra's battle with the serpent is part of a struggle towards 'releasing the rivers', whereas the waters of the Northwest Semitic stories are definitely antagonistic to the divine heroes. One Vedic verse even refers to Indra as *apām netā*, 'the leader of the waters', a title one would be rather surprised to see applied to YHWH or Baal in their struggles against the Dragon(s).

### 5. The Question of Primacy

The question is, of course, why one would suppose the Indo-European tales of serpent slaying to be primary to the Semitic ones (and not the other way around) – if they are indeed somehow related. The fact that the Indo-European versions are disseminated over a very wide area indeed (perhaps, if one wants to believe Watkins, all the way from Germanic-speaking Northwest Europe to India) is a point in favor of Indo-European

20. This point is also mentioned in M. S. Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle*. Vol 1, *Introduction with Text, Translation and Commentary of KTU 1.1–1.2*, VTSup 55 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 113–14 (n. 224), without Smith himself giving much credence to the connection. He also refers to Lahiri, *Vedic Vṛtra*, among others.

primacy for the mytheme of dragon-slaying. It is quite easy to imagine that such a story or mytheme could have been transmitted along with the Indo-European languages over a vast area, much easier than postulating an originally Semitic (or at least Near Eastern) tale that was taken up by speakers of Indo-European languages and subsequently spread by diffusion over enormous (and linguistically Indo-European) territories. Also, as argued by Watkins, the Indo-European proto-myth appears to have used a specific dragon slaying poetic formula including the Indo-European verbal root *\*g<sup>wh</sup>en-*, ‘to kill’, and the word *\*og<sup>wh</sup>i-*, ‘serpent’, to produce the poetically impressive phrase *\*eg<sup>wh</sup>ent og<sup>wh</sup>im*, ‘he killed the serpent’, a phrase that may perhaps have been preserved in various ways all the way from Proto-Indo-European itself (this phrase is represented in its Vedic form in *ahann ahim* above). The poetic phrase would be much harder to explain as a piece of diffusionary borrowing, and it would make no sense whatsoever to presuppose its appearance from an originally non-Indo-European source. As pointed out by Watkins, the two words with the Proto-Indo-European phoneme *\*g<sup>wh</sup>* in it would form a beautiful poetic unit, which would only work as such when reconstructed all the way back to the proto-language itself and is especially powerful due to *\*g<sup>wh</sup>* being one of the rarest (and thus most distinctive) sounds of the reconstructed Proto-Indo-European language.<sup>21</sup> If this is so, the time-scale would not allow for the possibility of Semitic influence upon the Indo-European story (as Proto-Indo-European appears to have been spoken somewhere in the temporal span of, say, between 4500 and 2500 BCE, probably originally on the Eurasian steppes of southern Russia and the Ukraine). It would, however, make excellent sense to imagine that the (often Semitic-speaking) peoples of the ancient Near East took up this mytheme or story from their Indo-European neighbors, who were demonstrably there at the time (e.g. in the form of Anatolians, Mitannians and Indo-Iranians). Also, in the Semitic stories, the dragon-slaying motif is often inseparably tied up with the motif of the battle against the personified sea, which is not the focus of the Indo-European tales.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, in the Ugaritic Baal Cycle, the

21. For the Proto-Indo-European phrase, see Watkins, *How to Kill a Dragon*, 154, 301–3, 365. The point of the scarcity of Proto-Indo-European *\*g<sup>wh</sup>* is made on p. 305; one should also note that pp. 301–23 deal in various ways with the inherited results of the formula (which I have written with slightly different orthography than does Watkins himself).

22. Noga Ayali-Darshan has argued (and I generally agree with her conclusion) the idea of the battle against the sea is basically a Levantine motif (see N. Ayali-Darshan, ‘The Dispersion of the Story of the Combat between the Storm-god and the Sea in the Ancient Near East: Sources, Traditions and History’, PhD diss. (Hebrew

battles against Yamm (the god of the sea) and Mot (the god of death) are the central issues, whereas the dragon is only mentioned in passing. As the Indo-European stories do not focus on a battle against the personified sea (but include serpents, young storm gods and their weapons) it is easy to imagine that this version is the more primary of the two.

All this suggests Indo-European-speaking cultures as the original home of the serpent stories. Another point relevant to the question of primacy is the onomastics and epithets of the combatants themselves, as we find them represented in the Ugaritic texts, a point to which I shall return below, after discussing some Hittite evidence.

### 6. *The Hittite Serpent Story*

As mentioned earlier, there are basically two ways in which putative Indo-European myths of serpent slaying could have reached the Semitic ambit. One of these is the Indo-Aryan superstrate in Mitanni (perhaps with a second Indo-Iranian source in Iran). The other is the Indo-European-speaking cultures of ancient Anatolia, the most important of which were the Hittites and the Luwians. It so happens that a version of the ‘Storm God battling a terrible serpent’ story is preserved from the Hittite capital of Ḫattuša in no fewer than two versions. The most well-known of these begins with the Storm God being defeated by his serpentine adversary, known in Hittite as *Illuyanka*:-

<sup>MUŠ</sup>*Illuyankaš* <sup>d</sup>*Tarḫunna taruḫta*<sup>23</sup>

The Serpent conquered the Storm God.

University, Jerusalem [Hebrew]); her point is summarized in English in E. Greenstein, ‘The Fugitive Hero Narrative Pattern in Mesopotamia’, in *Worship, Women and War: Essays in Honor of Susan Niditch*, ed. J. J. Collins, T. M. Lemos and S. M. Olyan, BJS 357 (Providence, RI: Brown University, 2015), 17–36 (34).

23. The text of the Hittite serpent story has been edited in G. M. Beckman, ‘The Anatolian Myth of Illuyanka’, *JANES* 14 (1982): 11–25. My normalizations are generally based on the text in that edition; for the sake of making my argument later somewhat clearer, however, I have transliterated the Sumerogram <sup>d</sup>IM (‘Storm God’) using its Hittite pronunciation *Tarḫunna*-. Also, I have followed Alwin Kloekhorst in transcribing forms of the verb meaning ‘to conquer’ as *tarḫu*- or *taruḫ*- rather than simply *tarḫ*-; see A. Kloekhorst, *Etymological Dictionary of the Hittite Inherited Lexicon*, Leiden Indo-European Etymological Dictionary Series 5 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 835–37 (s.v. *tarḫu*<sup>21</sup>).

The fortunes of the Storm God do, however, change for the better. He gets help from the goddess Inara (similar to how Baal gets the help of Anat in his battle against Mot in the Baal Cycle), which means that he can finally return and destroy his adversary, although in a way which cannot necessarily be called heroic. The relevant passage runs:

*nu* <sup>d</sup>Inara <sup>m</sup>Hūpaš[iyan p]ēhutit nan mūnnāit  
<sup>d</sup>Inarašš-a-z unuttat n-ašta <sup>MUS</sup>Illuyank[an] ḫantesnaz šarā kallišta  
 kāša-wa EZEN-an iyami  
 nu-wa adanna akuwanna eḫu  
 n-ašta <sup>MUS</sup>illuyankaš QADU [DUMU<sup>MES</sup>-ŠU] šarā uēr  
 nu-za etēr ekue[r]  
 [n]-ašta <sup>DUG</sup>palḫan ḫumandan ek[uer n]e-za ninkēr  
 [n]e namma hattešnaš kattand[a] nūmān pānzi  
<sup>m</sup>Hūpasiyašš-[a uit] nu <sup>MUS</sup>illuyankan išḫimā[nta] kalēliet  
<sup>d</sup>Tarḫunnaš uit nu-kan <sup>MUS</sup>Illuyankan kuenta  
 DINGIR<sup>MES</sup> kattišši ešer

And Inara transported Hūpašiya and hid him.  
 Inara dressed herself, and she called the Serpent up from his hole:  
 ‘See, I am making a feast,  
 come eat and drink!’  
 And the Serpent came up together with [his children],  
 and they ate and drank.  
 They drank every vessel, and they were satiated.  
 And they could no longer go down into their hole;  
 Hūpašiya came, and he tied the Serpent up with a cord.  
 The Storm God came, and he killed the Serpent;  
 the gods were with him.<sup>24</sup>

In this Hittite text, one can once again note the use of the Indo-European verbal root \**g<sup>wh</sup>en-* (‘to kill, to slay’), which Watkins reconstructed as having been present in the proto-version of the serpent story (or rather, poetic formula), appearing in its Hittite form *kuen-*, etymologically the

24. The translation I give is the same that I provided in an earlier article on the transfer of and references between various ancient Near Eastern serpent battling stories: O. Wikander, ‘Job 3,8 – Cosmological Snake Charming and Leviathanic Panic in an Ancient Near Eastern Setting’, *ZAW* 122 (2010): 265–71 (269–70). A recent and illuminating study of the Hittite *Illuyanka*-text is G. Amir, ‘Once Upon a Time in Kiškiliša: The Dragon-Slayer Myth in Central Anatolia’, in *Creation and Chaos: A Reconsideration of Hermann Gunkel’s Chaoskampf Hypothesis*, ed. J. Scurlock and R. H. Beal (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 98–111.

exact same word appearing in Vedic *ahan(n)* in the phrase <sup>MUS</sup>*Illuyankan kuenta* ('he killed the Serpent', semantically identical to the above-quoted Vedic phrase *ahann ahim*).

It is of course not possible to say exactly what form of the Indo-European serpent-slaying tale may have entered into the Semitic-speaking world. The above examples are simply individual instances. However, these show that there was something to borrow from, and, as we shall see next, there are specific lexical correspondences that increase the likelihood of this having happened.

### 7. *Mythological Onomastics as a Key to Intercultural Borrowing*

One of the most interesting – and, I would say – rather spectacular correspondences between the Indo-European and Northwest Semitic serpent stories has to do with onomastics. The name of the Hittite Storm God who defeats his serpentine enemy is *Tarḫunna-*, a name that etymologically means 'Conqueror'. The importance of this etymology is made clear by the Hittite text itself, which earlier on describes the initial defeat of the Storm God using the words *Tarḫunna taruḫta*, 'he conquered the Conqueror', using etymological word-play as a part of the telling of the story. As shown by Heiner Eichner, this Hittite title is etymologically identical to the Vedic title *tūrvant-*, which also means 'Conqueror' (my translation) and is applied, not least, to Indra (the Vedic serpent slayer *par excellence*).<sup>25</sup> The same verbal root also occurs in the very salient compound word *Vṛtra-tura-* ('Vṛtra-Conqueror'), which is applied to Indra.<sup>26</sup>

Now, I believe that this etymological naming of the Storm God has been borrowed into the mythological tradition represented at Ugarit as well, in the form of Baal's ubiquitous title *aliyn*, 'the victorious one, the conquering one'. Given the fact that Mot refers to Baal's battle against the serpent as one of his apparently most well-known accomplishments,

25. H. Eichner, *Untersuchungen zur hethitischen Deklination* (printed *Teildruck* of PhD diss., Friedrich-Alexander-Universität zu Erlangen-Nürnberg, 1974), 28. The suggestion was further developed in Kloekhorst, *Etymological Dictionary*, 838 (s.v. *tarḫu<sup>ti</sup>*).

26. As an additional piece of circumstantial evidence for the importance of the 'Conqueror' expressions as poetic and formulaic epithets for the serpent story, one can look at Avestan literature, which is both linguistically and poetically closely related to the Vedic one. Here, we find the expression *vərəθra.tauruuā* ('Conqueror of resistance'), the second half of which is etymologically identical with Vṛtra (see N. Sims-Williams, 'A Bactrian God', *BSOAS* 60 [1997]: 336–38 [338]).

it is rather alluring to think that this is the ‘Conquering’ to which Baal’s Ugaritic title primarily refers. Looking at the other ring-side of the battle, I certainly find it quite interesting to note that the Vedic serpent bears a name that literally means something like ‘Coverer’ (from the root *vṛ-*), while the Northwest Semitic serpent monster is called ‘Encircler’ (from the root *lwy*). That is, both carry names having to do with hindering, keeping in or restricting access. A quite possible explanation is that both the title of the Ugaritic Storm God and that of the serpent are borrowed (or, rather, of course, calqued) from Indo-European epithets. The heroic storm deities carry names having to do with conquering, and the serpents carry names having to do with restriction. This would suggest a direct historical influence, and this influence is most easily explained as having come from Indo-European sources and into the Semitic ambit. This is suggested not least by the fact that the place in which these titles appear in the clearest way in the Semitic-speaking milieu is Ugarit, which had a demonstrable Hittite influence. Also, the associations of the relevant roots are the clearest in the Indo-European sources, which points to Indo-European being the home, so to speak, of the expression. Note the above-mentioned phrase *Tarḥunnan taruḥta* (‘he conquered the Conqueror [i.e. the Storm God]’) from the Hittite tale, which expressly associates the title with the serpent battle, and the *Vṛtra-tura-* (‘Vṛtra-Conqueror’) title applied to Indra.

#### 8. *Mythological Reception and the Longue Durée*

What, then, does all of this mean, as we return to the verse from the ‘Isaiah Apocalypse’? The mythological motif that ends up in Isa. 27.1 turns out perhaps to be part of an extraordinarily resilient chain of transmission, going back to the common Northwest Semitic background of which the Ugaritic texts are also an exponent, and – from there – probably to a borrowing from one or possibly two different Indo-European versions of the same story. ‘The Conqueror’ (a title present at Ugarit as well as in Anatolia and Vedic India) kills the Leviathan (whose name appears semantically to parallel that of the Vedic serpent Vṛtra, the ‘Coverer’). This borrowed and transformed ‘etymological poetic’ material was finally separated from its source and used in an eschatological context by the author of Isa. 27.1.

The term *longue durée*, originating in the Annales School of historical study, is actually a term relating to social history. It refers to the study of processes of historical change over long periods of history, as opposed to short-term change or events. Even though the term is perhaps not quite at



home in the field of exegetical and religio-historical study, I would like to employ it here as a description of what we are doing when studying relationships between textual entities that may have been as far apart as a millennium in their respective genesis. If we accept as probable that the stories of Storm Gods slaying serpents have a background in Proto-Indo-European culture – perhaps somewhere in the Eurasian steppes during the calcholitic or early Bronze Age – we are talking about a time span of several thousand years before the story ends up as an aside in the ‘Isaiah Apocalypse’.

Given the identical use of the extremely uncommon words represented in Hebrew as *bārīah* and *‘qallātôn* as descriptions of the Leviathan/Litan/Lotan in Isa. 27.1 and the Ugaritic passage from the Baal Cycle, the dependence of these two texts upon a single poetic tradition can be regarded as assured. But, as I have indicated briefly here, the ‘etymological poetics’ go even further, as Baal is referred to by the same title (‘Conqueror’) as the Hittite Storm God and the Vedic Indra and the name of the serpent (Leviathan/Lotan/Litan) appears to correspond rather well in semantics with the name Vṛtra, indicating that the putative transmission from Indo-European cultures (possibly conflated from both Anatolian and Indo-Iranian sources) was carried through specific words (although, of course, translated into their Semitic counterparts). If this is so, we have moved the genesis of the story very far back indeed. Here, the trajectories can only be sketched, but they show the power of ‘etymological poetic inheritance’ (even when applied to calques and loans) as a viable tool for outlining mytho-poetic transmission.

#### 9. Again: What Does It Mean to Date a Text? *Methodological Implications of Poetic Inheritance*

All of this brings us back to the question asked at the beginning of this study: What does it mean to date a text? The discussion about Isa. 27 has often centered on the dating of the chapter as ‘pre-exilic, exilic or post-exilic’ in the inner-Israelite sense. But if we look at the first verse of the chapter as a micro-unit in and of itself, this may, in a sense, become less of a central issue. To be certain, one can discuss when the ancient words were incorporated in a larger textual entity that we today know as a part of the book of Isaiah, but does this mean that we have ‘dated’ it? From a sort of *longue durée* perspective, the words about a Storm God having destroyed the fleeing/swift and writhing ‘Encircler’ can be dated at least to the Late Bronze Age (Baal Cycle), but, basing oneself on the apparent borrowing from Indo-European sources that seems to underlie that story,



the time-depths become much, much larger. A story existed about a Storm God destroying a serpentine enemy: if we want to believe the (speculative, though highly interesting) ideas of Calvert Watkins, that story may have been told around the camp-fires (so to speak) of Proto-Indo-Europeans on the steppes of Ukraine or southern Russia. Thence, it seems to have traveled with the Indo-European expansions, all over South Asia and Europe, and from its versions among speakers of the Anatolian and Indo-Iranian branches of Indo-European, it may have been borrowed into cultures that spoke Semitic languages, who combined it with the ancient Near Eastern mythological ideas about the terrible Sea. The names of the hero and the villain persisted in a way, inherited down from Proto-Indo-European and then translated into Semitic languages, yet still providing a clear etymological/semantic link to serve as a control for modern mytho-poetic comparison.

The Ugaritians and Israelites were part of the same mythological and literary milieu, and it is only natural that they shared words and ideas, not through borrowing but through shared linguistic and poetic relationships, and interactions sketched as a model here require two forms of transfer: direct 'etymological poetic' inheritance (from Proto-Indo-European to the various Indo-European branch languages and from the common Northwest Semitic background to Ugaritic and Hebrew) as well as actual *borrowing* in the real sense of the word: 'etymo-poetic' material jumping, so to speak, over the borders between linguistic families. It is certainly highly interesting that something as typically 'Old Testament' as the famous *Chaoskampf* against the serpent monster may represent not only retentions of ancient material from the Northwest Semitic culture of which the Hebrew Bible is inevitably a part but also a piece of evidence for the relationship between that world and the extra-Semitic milieu in which cross-cultural interchange could take place. The serpent stories were carried between linguistic cultures, and their appearance in Isa. 27.1 provides a late yet clear instance of this ancient cultural cross-fertilization.

But how 'late'? Post-exilic? Hellenistic? Or is the entire idea of a date of composition from the latter part of the history of the Hebrew Bible to be given up? I personally do not really believe it should be; however, as stated earlier on, my point is another one. As regards Isa. 27.1, one can ask oneself a number of different questions when it comes to the superficially simplistic matter of dating: 'when did the original motif come into being (Proto-Indo-European times, perhaps?)...or 'when did that motif migrate into the Semitic-speaking ancient Near East?' (sometime during the Bronze Age?)...or 'when did the motif acquire its poetic form (in an oral or literary fashion)?' (Proto-Northwest Semitic times?)...or 'when

was that form adapted to a specifically Hebrew idiom and context?’...or, finally, ‘when was the result of that adaptation inserted into the context often known as the Isaiah Apocalypse?’

All of these questions demand different answers, and different methodologies in order to answer them. In any case, neither the religio-historical background of the motif nor its position in the book provide any clear basis for dating, unless one stipulates quite clearly which link in this great chain of transmission that one is actually trying to date.<sup>27</sup> In a case such as Isa. 27.1, it is useless to speak of a ‘text’ with a date in any real sense. And this is my main point in writing the present study: that working with mythemes and motifs carried through the *longue durée*, so to speak, upsets the knee-jerk historicizing tendency of exegetical scholarship. As exegetes, we are trained to look for dateable scraps of historical information in texts in order to situate them in their milieux; irrespective of whether one is a hard-core ‘biblical minimalist’ or is of a more traditional bent, the quest tends to be one for secure dates. Verses such as Isa. 27.1 challenge this methodology, as its age cannot be adequately measured. This is the case even if one takes no Indo-European influences into account: the clear inheritance from the Proto-Northwest Semitic poetic background makes it so. And if one believes, as I do, that the Semitic serpent-slaying tales are influenced by (or even, perhaps, represent transformations of) an originally Indo-European mytheme, then the time-depths become truly staggering, and the labors of the traditional exegete become almost herculean.

#### 10. *Serpent Mythology as Traveling ‘Imperishable Fame’*

Besides Watkins’s work on trying to reconstruct the Proto-Indo-European formulae for describing the slaying of dragons or serpents from various attested Indo-European literatures, one of the most famous (to be honest, *the* most famous) reconstructed Proto-Indo-European poetic formula is

27. One may note with some interest that this difficulty is not always taken up and noticed by scholars comparing biblical and Indo-European motifs. For example, Daniel Ogden writes in his study of dragon myths (when referring to our verse) that the book of Isaiah ‘foretells God’s destruction of Leviathan with his sword’ and that this occurs ‘in the part of the book composed in the late eighth century BC’, a way of arguing that appears simply to identify the whole of Isa. 1–39 with the historical setting of First Isaiah, without further ado. Needless to say, most biblical scholars would have a hard time with so off-hand a dating. The quotation is from D. Ogden, *Drakōn: Dragon Myth and Serpent Cult in the Greek and Roman Worlds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 14.

that describing heroic fame itself. This is the phrase *\*ndʰgʷhitom k̑lewos*, ‘imperishable fame’, which indirectly identified already in 1853 by Adalbert Kuhn on the basis of the Vedic expression *akṣitam...śravas* and the Homeric *κλέος ἄφθιτον*, both of which represent identical etymological material (albeit with different word orders).<sup>28</sup> This equation has served (and still does serve) as the same type of ‘poster boy’ for etymological poetic comparison in the Indo-European ambit as the relationship between the Isaian and Ugaritic Leviathan passages do for Northwest Semitic. It is certainly interesting that one of the best inherited poetic formulae in Proto-Indo-European has to do with heroic fame itself, i.e. in a sense with (oral) literature. Watkins made the case that the dragon/serpent-slaying motif represents one of the clearest examples of what the ancient Proto-Indo-Europeans could have sung about when they described this ‘imperishable fame’, i.e. that serpent-slaying could have been of the most important pieces of ‘imperishable poetic fame’ that Proto-Indo-European society knew. And this story appears probably to have been borrowed into the Semitic-speaking ancient Near East.

In his book on the spread of early Indo-European, David W. Anthony argues that, together with the use of the horse, poetic stories of heroism and valor was one of the most important means by which the expanding Indo-European acquired a type of élite hegemony.<sup>29</sup> With this perspective in mind, it is certainly interesting and thought-provoking that the most famous Proto-Indo-European story of all appears to have traveled across the barriers to the realm of Semitic-language poetry (as well as the general Semitic word for ‘horse’, the word represented in Hebrew as *sûs*, probably being an Indo-European loan word<sup>30</sup>). The ‘imperishable fame’ of early Indo-European seems to have spread beyond its own linguistic family,

28. Specifically, the negation *\*n-* (which gives English ‘un-’, Latin ‘in-/im-’, Sanskrit *a-* and Greek *ἀ-*), a verbal adjective/passive participle of the verbal root *\*dʰgʷhei-* (‘to destroy, to make perish’) and *\*k̑lewos*, a noun from the root *\*k̑leu-* (‘to hear’), meaning ‘that which is heard’ > ‘fame’. The identification was originally made in A. Kuhn, ‘Ueber die durch nasale erweiterten nasalstämme’, *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung* 2 (1853): 455–71 (467).

29. D. W. Anthony, *The Horse, the Wheel and Language: How Bronze-Age Riders from the Eurasian Steppes Shaped the Modern World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

30. The origin of the word has been suggested to be Indo-Aryan (an idea supported, e.g., in M. O’Connor, ‘Semitic *\*mgn* and its Supposed Sanskrit Origin’, *JAOS* 109 [1989]: 25–32 [30 n. 30], and in T. V. Gamkrelidze and V. Ivanov, *Indo-European and the Indo-Europeans*, trans. J. Nichols, 2 vols., Trends in Linguistics: Studies and Monographs 80 [Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1995], 809) or, much more plausibly,

ultimately ending up in Isa. 27.1 (and probably being represented even into the New Testament, given the dragon symbolism in the Revelation of John).

The material is ancient. It has traveled through numerous cultures. Tracing this great river of poetic motifs, both through linguistic/poetic inheritance and actual *borrowing*, is certainly a study of the *longue durée*, in a sense – a study of that which is seemingly constant within a series of ever-changing mythological and theological contexts. The river has flowed a long way, making the identification of different stages in the transmission of its ideas a perilous task. It is a river that flows along a slow yet steadily meandering, perhaps even serpentine, path, and it is a river that makes us question what it really means to date a text.

Anatolian – specifically Luwian (see, e.g., J. Tropper, *Ugaritische Grammatik*, 2nd ed., AOAT 273 [Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2012], 45). In a chapter of my forthcoming book, I also argue the Luwian background, yet with the difference that I do not simply see the word as being derived from the Luwian word for horse (*azzu-*) as such, but specifically from the nominative plural of that word, *\*azzunzi*.