

Divine Epithets as Perspectival Discourse

1 Introduction

This essay offers some consideration of divine “epithets,” the term of choice in the title of the Toulouse project, or as the Toulouse team puts it in a recent article, “le binôme «théonyme – épithète/épiclèse»” or “*sequence ou formule onomastique*”.¹ Epithets like names are descriptors, in other words, linguistic markers of identity. As such, formally they are to be situated within a grammatical description. Accordingly, at the outset it is to be noted that epithets consist primarily of non-verbal, atemporal syntax.² In this respect they resemble non-verbal PNs as well as the syntax of lists (as in administrative or economic lists or lists of deities or offerings). Lists comprise largely and sometimes exclusively of non-verbal syntax; the verbal syntax that is attested in lists is often dependent on nominal, non-verbal syntax. The epithets to be discussed below are often single appositional terms with or without single construct phrases. Sometimes the epithets entail more complex non-verbal syntax. For the sake of convenience, I would call these cases either “complex epithets” or “epithet-strings.”³ Insofar as they entail nominal syntax, such atemporal epithets are chiefly appositional substantives, construct or participial phrases, or nominal relative clauses. These fit Ellen van Wolde’s (2009, 105–6) cognitive grammatical classification of “nominal profiles” that may further express “relational profiles” (for example, with prepositional phrases). For these complex usages below, I use the term “epithet-string.” Epithets (whether simple or complex) with similar content or theme clustered⁴ in a single context constitute what may be dubbed an “epithet-field” (on analogy with *Wortfeld*, “word-field” or “semantic field”).⁵ Further distinctions are noted below.

1 Bonnet *et al.* 2019. See also Bonnet *et al.* 2019. The term “epithet” is used also by, among others, Rahmouni 2008 and Nagy 1990. A divine epithet may include a divine name, e.g., *btl* ‘nt, “Maiden Anat” or *zbl* ym, “Prince Yamm”, while a divine title may be construed more narrowly as the application of a predicate to a deity but without her or his name, for example, the titles *mlk*, “king,” and *zbl*, “prince.” The broader usage represented by epithets is characteristic for West Semitic texts.

2 For atemporal syntactical relations in Biblical Hebrew, see van Wolde 2009, 130–50. I would not include predicative participles of independent clauses for this discussion of epithets.

3 As these include constructs, attributive or appositional constructions, such “strings” show “the head.” In this respect, they differ from a “word chain” (which “chains together entities” and does not distinguish the “head”) as used by van der Merwe *et al.* 1999, 239.

4 Cf. “cluster of attributes” in cognitive linguistics as used in biblical lexicography, e.g., Widder 2014, 13.

5 Lexical field-theory was introduced by the German linguist Jost Trier in his 1931 Bonn dissertation, *Der deutsche Wortschatz im Sinnbezirk des Verstandes*; see Lehrer 1974. For semantic fields in

The main corpora for my remarks are the Late Bronze Age texts from the site of Ugarit and the Iron Age and later texts of the Hebrew Bible, with some reference made to other West Semitic languages and dialects as well as Akkadian. I have chosen the expression “perspectival discourse” in order to emphasize the range of social and political “work” that epithets may perform.⁶ Because epithets may give the impression of general knowledge about deities, they may obscure their ideological underpinnings. Like labels deployed for different historical phenomena (e.g., “America”), epithets for deities are not a form of objective knowledge. They served as resources for expressing perspectival discourse that may embed various elements of ideological production and projection; in this respect, they may function both descriptively and prescriptively. Today I begin with some introductory considerations about divine epithets drawn from the Late Bronze Age texts of Ugarit, and then proceed to two case studies, one taken from Iron Age Israel and the other based on Yehudian sources of the Persian period.

2 Background

In the twentieth century, the Ugaritic texts revolutionized the area of West Semitic divine names and epithets. Following the decipherment of the Ugaritic alphabetic script in the early 1930s and the production of text editions through the Second World War, the 1950s witnessed numerous studies devoted to individual deities,⁷ along with discussions of their epithets.⁸ It was assumed that a given deity had a single name yet multiple epithets.⁹ This assumption appears reflected indigenously in so-called Ugaritic deity-lists, which do not include titles for individual deities.¹⁰ It was also assumed that like divine names divine titles or epithets would recur over a given corpus, although the exigencies of poor attestation might preclude such an expectation in some cases. As a result, an epithet might be attested only once, but the vast majority of cases were expected to occur multiple times. Perhaps more important for researchers in the twentieth century, the name and epithets of any given

biblical studies, see Barr 1987, 136, 170–73. Cf. “lexical set,” in Widder 2014, 17–18 and 19–20, based on van der Merwe 2006.

⁶ The term “work” as used here falls broadly under the grammatical rubric of pragmatics. See Levinson 1983.

⁷ Smith 2001, 53, 66, 117 n. 232, 154. See the listings in Pope 1994, 385–86. The line of work has been re-opened in recent years in dissertations directed by Herbert Niehr in Tübingen and by John McLaughlin and J. Glen Taylor in Toronto School of Theology.

⁸ For example, Pope 1964, 235–312; Cooper 1981; Knutzon 1981; Rahmouni 2008; Bernstein 2009.

⁹ See the discussion of Zernecke 2013. Note also Stahl 2020.

¹⁰ Information from Ugaritic deity-lists is conveniently assembled in Pardee 2002, 11–24. See further Roche-Hawley 2012, 149–78.

deity were expected to tally to a picture or profile consistent over the corpus in question. Some epithets denoting rank would be applied to multiple deities, such as *zbl*, commonly glossed as “prince” and applied to Baal, Yamm, Yarih, and perhaps Rp’u; note similarly *’ilt*, “goddess,” for both Anat and Athirat or *’amt* “female slave,” for lower rank servant-goddesses.¹¹ Similarly, titles denoting relationship also apply to multiple deities, such as “beloved of El,” *mdd ’il*, for Yamm, Arsh and Mot (cf. *ydd ’il* also for Mot). By contrast, some markers of relationships may apply to one particular deity within a given corpus (e.g., *’ab*, “father,” for El or Baal as *bn dgn*, “the son of Dagan”). Moreover, some traits reflected in epithets would tend to be specific (or perhaps “distinctive” in Gregory Nagy’s terms¹²) to particular deities within a given corpus (e.g., the titles of craftsmanship such as *ḥrš yd* and *hyn*, unsurprisingly applied only to the craftsman god, Kothar).

Older deity studies would further analyze passages in which a deity appeared, working on the assumption that there would be significant –though perhaps not entire– consistency between the name, epithets and titles on the one side and textual representations on the other side. A further enterprise involved comparisons with other deities perceived to be similar in any number of traits. The result was a series of types of deities, or perhaps in retrospect, stereotypes of deities. Overall this approach taken through much of the twentieth century was not particularly driven by theoretical considerations; it was considered the result of the compilation of data. An exception in this regard was the appropriation of theory from Homeric studies conducted by Milman Parry and his student, Albert B. Lord, particularly in the latter’s well known book, *The Singer of Tales*.¹³ It was Lord’s Harvard colleague, Frank Moore Cross, who drew on Lord’s work about divine titles¹⁴ to forge his view that “epithets expand and contract in a variety of lengths suitable to metrical form in orally composed poetry.”¹⁵ Overall, Cross’ appropriation of Lord’s work reinforced the

11 This information as well as the following derives from Rahmouni 2008.

12 For his distinction between “generic” and “distinctive” epithets, see Nagy 1990, 18–35, esp. 22–23. For Nagy (p. 23), “distinctive” epithets are “capsules of traditional themes associated with the noun described. A distinctive epithet is like a small theme song that conjures up a thought-association with the traditional essence of an epic figure, thing, or concept.” Any number of West Semitic epithets, such as DN + GN (see below), might be placed in this category. However, the example cited by Nagy, namely Odysseus as *polutlas*, “much-suffering,” denotes this figure’s repeated experience, a type of epithet hardly found in the Ugaritic corpus.

13 See Lord 2000. The issue continued to be a matter of discussion in Homeric scholarship, e.g., Nagy 1990, 18–35.

14 Cross 1973, 52, 112, 117. See further Cross 1998, 24–29. Here Cross refers to “poetic formulae” and “oral formulae,” but not specifically to divine titles; still for Cross, such formulae included divine titles (as shown by his reference to “divine epithets” on p. 26). These discussions belong to Cross’ larger intellectual project to reconstruct ancient Israel’s epic tradition on analogy with Homeric epic. For this project, see Smith 2014.

15 Cross 1973, 52.

notion of the regularity of divine titles in Ugaritic and biblical literatures, despite the consensus in the field that meter is not a hallmark of West Semitic poetry. This approach also reinforced a further assumption that epithets were “traditional” elements available to composers.

As a result of this approach taken in the twentieth century, West Semitic divine epithets were viewed with a certain stability (perhaps even “solidness”). In this respect, divine epithets exemplified the approach or attitude of philology at the time: cataloguing and studying words in order to build foundations for further studies. Titles, like words more generally, were felt to enjoy a sort of regularity and solidity that could be unpacked and used to build a larger picture of divinity. Thus, scholarly works crafted lists of divine epithets¹⁶ that were felt to express sides of deities in addition to their very own names. Epithets, like names, were assumed to be expressive of largely stable divine identities over time and place. Moreover, epithets were felt to be little expressive of spheres apart from religion, unless the content of a given epithet suggested otherwise.

I say all this in order to point to what we did not do in the twentieth century, and how this may change in the twenty-first century. Let me offer five points in this regard. First, no one wrote a grammar –and more specifically a syntax– of West Semitic divine titles in the manner as was done for divine names. While there have been exceptions for specific classes of epithets, notably the four types of DNs + GNs, there has been no grammatical work for epithets along the lines of Herbert Huffmon’s grammatical analysis of personal names in his book, *Amorite Personal Names in the Mari Texts*.¹⁷ Like administrative texts, Ugaritic divine titles tend to reflect nominal syntax, and morphologically they tend to reflect nouns more than adjectival forms. Construct phrases and single nouns in apposition are the most common constructions for divine epithets. Notably, this is no less true for many personal names with theophoric elements. Yet while personal names are dominated by verbal syntax of suffix and prefix indicative forms predicated with or without theophoric elements, by contrast participles represent a major verbal form used in titles. Out of the 112 divine epithets analyzed by Aicha Rahmouni, we may count nine or perhaps eleven participles and no other verbal forms.¹⁸ (Notably participial syntax for divine titles is hardly uncommon outside of the Ugaritic texts.¹⁹) Interestingly,

16 Note the listing of 10 epithets in Cooper 1983, compared with 112 compiled by Rahmouni 2008. To be sure, Cooper’s entries generally focus on biblical parallels and some mention epithets in passing in the discussions of divine names.

17 Huffmon 1965.

18 Rahmouni 2008, #10, #13, #29, #42, #55, #65, #93, #96, #105 and perhaps #79 and #92.

19 For a standard example of DN + participle of *yṭb (for residence or enthronement)/*škn (for residence) + b- + GN, see Smith. 2016, 75–76, #3, and 77.

two titles claimed by Rahmouni include a nominal relative clause.²⁰ In sum, even the verbs and clauses in titles reflect nominal syntax.

Second, diachronic dimensions of titles largely were secondary to or subsumed under a general synchronic perspective in older discussions. In the case of Ugaritic, this is hardly surprising since the text corpus was produced within a relatively short period of time unlike Akkadian, Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek corpora. This situation, at least in the case of Ugaritic, reinforced generalization about deities and their titles, which were further reinforced by generalizations about similar types of deities across cultures (the parade case of this approach was the “patternism” reflected in Gaster’s *Thespis*). However, more nuanced means have been applied to the study of deities and their epithets. The recognition of “God in translation” across cultures and not simply God in comparison has become a major issue in West Semitics and further afield.²¹ Similarly, the specific impacts of different cultures on divine epithets has come into play in a major way. For example in Aren M. Wilson-Wright’s study of the West Semitic goddess Athtart at Ugarit, Emar and Egypt²² Athtart is called “the daughter of Ptah”²³ and she may also bear an epithet apparently developed within her Egyptian context, which supported the royal military use of horses: “mistress of the stable who punishes (?) the enemy”.²⁴ She is further called “lady of heaven, mistress of all the gods,” formulary also applied to Hathor and Mut.²⁵ In this case, titles may migrate within a single culture. As a further diachronic development, epithets may come to serve as proper names for deities, such as Babylonian Banit, a standard epithet for Nanay (traditionally the consort of Nabu).²⁶

In cases such as these, I wonder if or to what degree or how names and titles were distinguished in antiquity. It might be helpful heuristically to think in terms of a range of usage and understandings for DNs and divine epithets. We know DNs the original meanings of which were obscure yet may have received secondary interpretations (Marduk, Yahweh). By contrast, many divine names bear transparent meanings etymologically related to common nouns (e.g., Kothar wa-Hasis, Shapshu and Yarih). Further different, some titles function as proper names for deities otherwise lacking proper names (perhaps Baal, not to mention *b’lt gbl*). Finally, still other

²⁰ Rahmouni 2008, #24 and #101.

²¹ Smith 2008.

²² Wilson-Wright 2016, 55.

²³ Wilson-Wright 2016, 44.

²⁴ Wilson-Wright 2016, 44. The title is partially reconstructed and thus somewhat hypothetical. See also the Ptolemaic period title, “mistress of horses and the chariot, foremost of Wetjset-Hor [name of the nome of Edfu],” in Wilson-Wright 2016, 61. It is also to be noted that Wilson-Wright suggests an equestrian background in the West Semitic sources that in turn played in Athtart’s Egyptian reception.

²⁵ Wilson-Wright 2016, 57. See also her epithets, “lady of heaven, mistress of the two lands,” in Wilson-Wright 2016, 58.

²⁶ See van der Toorn 2019, 50–51.

epithets do not function as divine names where there is evidence of divine names (e.g., “Cloud-rider” for Baal or “Skilled of hands” for Kothar). There may be other subcategories to think about in this spectrum. For example, it has been commonly noted that there seems to be a proliferation of binomial names in the Ugaritic texts,²⁷ which in some cases may be considered DN + title (perhaps Kothar was-Hasis – but the binomial is not used in deity-lists),²⁸ and others that are not titles (e.g., “Earth-and-Heaven” and *šgr w’itm*, attested in deity-lists).²⁹ In addition, we may ask about the degree to which binomials are a feature in the Ugaritic texts and how they are deployed; this needs to be mapped out in detail. Overall, in considering names and epithets, I would want to reflect more on the nature of this constructed spectrum.

Third, divine names and titles tended to be regarded largely as religious predications and relatively rarely as political or social markers. Again, in the case of Ugaritic, this was hardly surprising since the vast majority of divine titles are attested in ritual or religious, literary texts. However, this operating assumption was entirely misplaced for societies where all politics are religious and all religion is political, so much so that these terms do not exist in West Semitic languages. Generally speaking, the perspective has changed in recent years.³⁰

Fourth, there was little theoretical consideration of titles as markers of traits, nor was there much consideration of the sum that any given deity’s name and titles yielded. In other words, deities were generally assumed to be persons. (Accordingly, in literary terms, major deities would be represented as relatively full or round characters, while minor deities would figure as flat characters or agents.³¹) What the field has witnessed is a mapping of how titles and other features migrate across deities in different times and places,³² accompanied by critical considerations of the notion of personhood.³³ In this discussion, any given deity can be viewed less as a person in any full sense and more as “a representative of a generic type.”³⁴ To some degree,

27 Cross 1973, 49 n. 23; and de Moor 1970, 223–24.

28 Information from Ugaritic deity-lists is conveniently assembled in Pardee 2002, 11–24.

29 These are not to be conflated with two deities listed together with connecting *w-*, e.g. *tkmn w-šnm* and *’il w-’atrt* in *KTU* 1.65.4–5 in Pardee 2002, 222–23 and 227–28.

30 It took me about three decades before I started looking at divine titles for their political importance. See Smith 2016, 71–98.

31 See Berlin 1994.

32 As long noted, e.g., Cross 1973, 49.

33 For the latter in the field of Assyriology, see Pongratz-Leisten 2011, 138–40; and Bahrani 2014, 77, using the term “bodyscape” to cover the realms of the person or self beyond the boundaries of physicality. My thanks to Tim Hogue for bringing this reference to my attention.

34 Pongratz-Leisten 2011, 138–39. She also rightly regards the person “as a multifaceted assemblage of parts: the organic body, name, roles, and image, even his or her seal, which in specific contexts could operate as an independent center for activities that were normally performed by the individual him/herself.” Given the use of “individual” in this quote, it may be asked if it may be

this may be the case; and while I certainly applaud recent efforts to get at ancient conceptions of personhood and in particular its relational dimension,³⁵ I am concerned that the approach to deities as representations of a generic type may be reductionistic, perhaps replaying older approaches to deities as types. I also wonder if the effort to keep the theological questions out of play may also harbor an implicit anti-theological project, but this is another matter. Modern scholars may prescind from truth-claims about deities, and they should, but we are not in a position to undermine the truth-claims that the ancients may have held about the personhood that their deities may have held for them. Indeed, while I applaud efforts not to get too mired in theological issues, it seems to me that some personhood, even its cultic system of communication may entail the deity's *persona* or "mask," is assumed of deity based on cultural assumptions about divine-human communication in cult. Indeed, several specifics of deities (and not just their roles such as warrior or ranks as royalty) are not entirely transferable across deities within a given corpus, for example the locations of their abodes and the associations made with those abodes or deities' specific emotional states, for example, Anat's weeping, or even the seemingly similar traits of gods that are in fact distinguished, e.g., El's broadly conceived **hkm* as opposed to Kothar's **hss* as a function of his technical know-how as a craftsman. Thus, the question of any given deity's "personhood" remains a desideratum. To be sure, this particular agenda lies somewhat beyond the agenda of research on divine titles. Still, divine titles have played into notions and expectations about divine personhood. A related issue is the degree to which titles may play in any mapping of notions about types of theism. Theism comes in any number of modes, for example number (monotheism, ditheism, tritheism, or polytheism)³⁶ or forms (anthropomorphism, theriomorphism or physiomorphic);³⁷ and these may be combined in any number of configurations, given the kaleidoscopic representation of ancient divinity. Especially as we enter into biblical territory, issues of theology and personhood of the Bible's chief deity necessarily intrude and arguably loom. In our own historical and intellectual *Umwelt* inflected by the Bible and its representations of divinity, we may have learned in recent decades how to move around critically in our materials, yet I wonder how well our critical perspective is working in ascertaining deities, their names and their titles.

This all by way of background. In the following case studies, the divine epithets are presented in relation to their temples. In these instances, divine epithets are all that audiences are told about the gods in question. Accordingly, divine epithets are

more precise to suggest that the person is *manifest via an assemblage of different dimensions of self*, including "the organic body, name, roles, and image" etc. In other words, in the case of deities there remains recognized a divine self or person.

35 Again, rightly, Pongratz-Leisten 2011, 139.

36 See Smith 2015, 278–93.

37 See Smith 2014b and 2016, 54–57.

in a sense all that the gods are in these texts; at the same time divine epithets would constitute signals of the larger realities that the gods marked by them were thought to evoke.

3 A Case Study of *ba'al bērit* (Judges 8:33, 9:4) and *'ēl bērit* (Judges 9:46): Epithets Lost in Memory?

The social processes of collective memory and amnesia and their literary enshrinement may pose particular challenges to understanding the divine epithets. A case study of divine epithets between collective memory and amnesia that I would like to consider is the god called *ba'al bērit* in Judg 8:33 and 9:4 as well as the god identified as *'ēl bērit* in Judg 9:46. As is well known, *ba'al bērit* may mean either “lord of (the) covenant” or “Baal of (the) covenant.” The interpretation of *ba'al bērit* is complicated further by the attestation of *'ēl bērit* in 9:46. This construct phrase³⁸ may mean either “god of (the) covenant” or “El of (the) covenant.” Both could be either divine titles or the names of gods, whether Baal or El.³⁹ This difficulty is not simply a problem to be resolved by various scholarly means that would simplify the matter, such as emendation, assumed error or historical reconstruction. As we will see, the difficulty is itself a datum worthy of our consideration.

The scholarly literature is divided over the deity behind these two labels, and the discussion is reviewed here in order to point to a larger point of Judges 9 about memory and composition. One approach is to see a single deity behind both divine descriptions. Studer speculated that a goddess, “the lady of Beirut,” stood behind the titles.⁴⁰ Other older commentators, such as Marie-Joseph Lagrange, were followed by Frank Moore Cross, Lawrence E. Stager, Baruch Halpern, Theodore J. Lewis and Stig Norin, in viewing El as the god of Shechem, as suggested by *'ēl bērit* in 9:46.⁴¹ For Cross (echoing Marie-Joseph Lagrange and others), the combined divine name and title, *'ēl 'ēlōhē yiśrā'ēl*, at Shechem in Gen 33:20 is evidence for El as the god of

³⁸ There are other cases of DNS in construct to a common noun, for example in the BH title “Yahweh of Hosts.”

³⁹ McCarthy (1978:222 n. 20) also compared the alleged North Arabian title, “Ilāt of the covenant,” citing Caskel 1958, 116. However, the interpretation is doubtful. For this information about the Thamudic B inscription (HU 800), I am grateful to M. C. A. Macdonald (personal communication, 19 April 2016), who suggests reading instead: *h 'lh q 'l nqm*, “O 'lh [god] of the lineage group of Nqm.” A revised edition of the Thamudic B inscriptions appears on the Online Corpus of the Inscriptions of Ancient North Arabia (OCIANA), at <http://krcfm.orient.ox.ac.uk/fmi/webd#ociana>.

⁴⁰ On this score, see Studer 1835, 230.

⁴¹ Cross 1973, 39, 46, 47, 49, and esp. n. 23; Stager 1999, 232 n. 7; Halpern 1983, 28 n. 35; Lewis 1996; and Norin 2013, 187.

Shechem. Cross⁴² suggests: “The original epithet of the Shechemite god was probably ‘El <long e> *ba’al-bērit*, “El lord of Covenant.” For Cross, Gen 33:20 reflects a process by which Yahweh had become identified secondarily with the god, El (although Yahweh is not mentioned in Genesis 33). Cross further based the identification of the god of Shechem as El in Judges 8–9 on his reading of *’il brt* in *KTU* 1.128.14–15 as “El of covenant.”⁴³ This phrase appears to be syntactically appositional to *’il dn* in line 16, which Cross took as “El the judge.” However, *’ilbrt* has also been thought in this text to refer to the god Ilabrat and the latter to “the powerful El,” with *dn* deriving from Hurrian *dūn-*, “to be able, to have power,” according to Meindert Dijkstra.⁴⁴ In view of the fact that the rest of the text is in Hurrian and not Ugaritic (apart from the name of El), one might not put much weight on the identification of *’ilbrt* in this text as “El of Covenant.” By the same token, the god Ilabrat is not a commonly attested god in the texts from Ugarit, and El is. Moreover, as Dijkstra’s own discussion indicates, El is a figure in *KTU* 1.128. By Dijkstra’s handling, El is otherwise named eleven times in this text (lines 1, 2, 4, 7 [2x], 9, 12, 13, 16 [2x], 18). Thus Cross’ overall interpretation is not unreasonable, and Stager, Halpern and Lewis follow suit. Halpern speculates that both instances of *ba’al bērit* in 8:33 and 9:4 are secondary: in 9:4 it “has been mutilated by vertical dittography from 9:3 *b’ly škm* or 9:5 *yrwb’l*.” This seems an unlikely explanation for two instances of *ba’al bērit*. Halpern supposes that the original title is *’ēl bērit* (meaning either “god of (the) covenant”⁴⁵ or “El of (the) covenant”) attested later in the story in 9:46.⁴⁶

Lewis adds iconographic evidence to the discussion.⁴⁷ A metal figurine depicting a striding figure with appositional swinging arms and a conical Egyptian-style crown was discovered in Late Bronze IIA Tel el-Balata (Shechem) (Field VII stratum XIII). This figurine has been thought to point to Baal,⁴⁸ for whom a striding position has been considered characteristic, although such figurines typically have one arm raised or the two arms in mirror position.⁴⁹ As further circumstantial evidence in favor of the identification of Shechem’s god with Baal-Hadad, Lewis notes the name of Hadad as the theophoric element in three personal names on a Late Bronze Age cuneiform fragment from Shechem.⁵⁰ Thus Lewis acknowledges that Baal was a god

⁴² Cross 1973, 49 n. 23.

⁴³ For this interpretation of *KTU* 1.128, see also Kitchen 1979, 458.

⁴⁴ Dijkstra 1993, 157–62, esp. 161.

⁴⁵ See Clements 1968, 21–32, esp. 26.

⁴⁶ Halpern 1983, 28 n. 35.

⁴⁷ See Lewis 1996, 416–23.

⁴⁸ For a picture, see Campbell 1993, 1352; and Toombs 1992, 1183.

⁴⁹ Negbi 1976.

⁵⁰ Lewis. 1996, 403, 415. Additionally, see Horowitz et al. 2018, 128, which provides a letter from Shechem with the Baal-name *Ba’lu-padi* (for related names, see Horowitz et al., 92 n. 3).

at Shechem.⁵¹ Lewis also notes an unprovenanced figurine thought to represent El.⁵² Lewis wisely concludes that the identifications for the god in Judges 8–9 are hardly certain, though “preference must be given to the deity El Berith.”⁵³ The basis for this preference is not evident.

The assumption by the scholars cited thus far is that the two divine referents are to be understood to be one deity and thus either *ba'al bērit* or *'el bērit* would contain a divine name and the other would contain a generic epithet (“lord of covenant” or “god of covenant”). As an alternative, Martin J. Mulder proposed that the two titles, *ba'al bērit* and *'el bērit*, could refer to the two gods, Baal and El.⁵⁴ J. Alberto Soggin also suggests that two deities are involved, each with his own temple.⁵⁵ Ronald E. Clements likewise understands the two titles as indicative of two different gods corresponding to two different social populations: *'el bērit* refers to the “the god of unsettled tribes living in the vicinity of Shechem, while Baal-Berith was the title of the god worshipped in the city’s main shrine, and so the god of the urban population.”⁵⁶ The social distinction claimed is particularly speculative.

To this complex picture, Mulder speculates further that Baal is the god in view in v. 27, since “the temple of their god” with a festival involving the harvest of grapes would fit this god.⁵⁷ Yet, El is associated with the harvest of the summer-fruit in *KTU* 1.23 (see especially, lines 13 and 28, and the accompanying mythic narrative in lines 30–76).⁵⁸ Similarly, the cutting of grapes on the New Year in anticipation for the fall festival for grapes in *KTU* 1.41/1.87 is given to El in line 1.⁵⁹ The deities that receive offerings for the fall festival include “the circle of El and the circle of Baal” (*KTU* 1.41/1.87.18). Thus, the basis for Mulder’s view that Baal is the god in this passage is open to question.

In view of this survey, it is apparent that the noun-phrases, *ba'al bērit* and *'el bērit*, may denote divine names or titles, but without a clear identity for a particular

51 Bourke (2012, 165 n. 2 and 170) also compares a parallel religious situation at Late Bronze Age Pella, with its evidence for a Baal-type standing figurines.

52 The unprovenanced metal figurine said to come from Nablus is now housed in the Harvard Semitic Museum (Lewis 1996, 418–19). The 3.5–3.75 inch high metal figure depicts a seated male, gazing upward, wearing a conical crown, with bent arms extended forward and holding a cup in his right hand. Southern Levantine seated male figurines in metal with any indication of divinity are most commonly identified as El. Lewis dates the figurine to the Late Bronze on the questionable grounds that there “is no clear example of male bronze statuary from a clearly identifiable Iron Age Israelite site.” See Lewis 1996, 419 n. 93.

53 Lewis 1996, 423.

54 Mulder 1999, 142. See also Day 2000, 70; and Gregorio del Olmo Lete. 2004, 249–69, esp. 249–50, 257, and 264.

55 Soggin 1981, 170–71.

56 Clements, 1968, 23–24.

57 Mulder 1999, 142. This reading of the god in v. 27 is also proposed by Day 2000, 70.

58 For this text and El’s place in it, see Smith 2006, 51, 73–95.

59 For this text, see the convenient presentation in Pardee 2002, 56–65.

god, whether El or Baal.⁶⁰ Indeed, the divine identity appears so obscure that Yahweh has been proposed as a third candidate.⁶¹ This interpretation is undermined by the fact that Yahweh nowhere appears in this story (apart from the theophoric element in the name of Jotham).⁶² The titles would suggest that the tradition was non-Yahwistic.⁶³ Notably, neither *ba'al bērit* nor *'el bērit* in Judges 9 is explicitly identified either positively or negatively. Clearly caution is in order. Multiple gods could stand behind the names/titles. Similarly, it is unclear whether the story entails one temple or three different temples (vv. 4, 27 and 46); each one is given a different and rather generic function (economy in v. 4, celebration in v. 27, and security in v. 46). As Lagrange put the point: “Malheureusement le nom du dieu demeure obscure.”⁶⁴

Stepping back from this survey, three considerations suggest that *'el bērit* may be prior to *ba'al bērit*. First, Cross' comparison of *'el 'ēlōhē yiśrā'el* likewise at Shechem in Gen 33:20 is suggestive of El. Second, it would be intelligible why a writer would generate a title of *ba'al bērit* from the god known as *'el bērit*; the opposite process would lack motivation. It appears to be with Baal/Baalim in mind that Judg 8:33 presents the title *ba'al bērit* as a secondary interpretation. Lagrange thought that this change was “pour insister sur le caractère idolâtrique de son culte.”⁶⁵ In context, the title serves as an example of the “baals” in the same verse, and together they serve to unpack the somewhat neutral reference to this divinity in 9:4. The author of 9:4 could have modified the deity's title as a baal-looking title in order to evoke a negative picture of this god and also with the “lords of Shechem” with their similar sounding title. Thus, it would be more intelligible why a writer would generate a title of *ba'al bērit* from the god known as *'el bērit*; the opposite process would lack motivation. This reading is consistent with the view in most research on Judges 9 that v. 46 seems to belong to an older section than v. 4.

Third, there is a somewhat underappreciated grammatical point relevant to this discussion. On the one hand, it is commonly recognized that *ba'al* may stand in construct as a generic element (cf. *ba'ālê bērit 'abrām*, “the lords of the covenant of Abram” in Gen 14:13) and thus *ba'al bērit* would make sense as a title for another

⁶⁰ Tigay (1987, 194 n. 12) takes the names as belonging to gods other than Yahweh, but otherwise does not identify them.

⁶¹ Echoing older commentators (e.g., Schofield 1962, 310), Halpern (1983, 28 n. 35) suggests that both *ba'al bērit* and *'el bērit* may be variants of “an epithet of an already syncretized Yhwh.” See also Sharon 2006, 98 n. 20. Halpern also understands the **ba'al* element in the personal names of Ishbaal and Meribbaal as a Yahwistic epithet. For a survey of views, see Avioz 2011.

⁶² The point is made by commentators, e.g., O'Connor 1990, 139.

⁶³ McCarthy 1978, 222. For McCarthy, the expression “men of Hamor” in 9:28 (also in Gen 33:19, Josh 24:32) is suggestive of the ancient covenant tradition at Shechem. See also Lewis 1996, 411–12, and 2006, 347 (with prior literature).

⁶⁴ Lagrange 1903, 184.

⁶⁵ Lagrange 1903, 164.

god.⁶⁶ On the other hand, BH *'el* as a generic (“god of”) is less common than *ba'al* as nouns in construct. There are some clear examples, e.g., “the god of your/my father” in Gen 49:25⁶⁷ cf. the superlative expression “God of gods” in Dan 11:36;⁶⁸ and “the god of glory” in Ps 29:3.⁶⁹ Moreover, other instances with the element *'el* plus other nouns could be read as constructs, i.e., “god of . . .” (e.g., *'el 'elyôn* in Gen 14:18–22; and possibly *'el bêt-'el* in Gen 31:13, 35:7 and *'el 'ôlām* in Gen 21:33). However, these may be understood as El titles (perhaps as appositional).⁷⁰ Indeed, other such titles, such as *'el 'ēlōhê yisrā'el* likewise at Shechem in Gen 33:20 and *'el šadday* in Gen 17:1, 28:3, 35:11, 43:14, 48:3 and Exod 6:3,⁷¹ are appositionals better read as El epithets. Indeed, this interpretation would seem to inform *'el šadday* in the priestly sections of Genesis (Gen 17:1, 28:3, 35:11, 43:14, 48:3; cf. 49:25) insofar as this epithet seems to serve as a priestly rubric for the El titles generally in the book of Genesis. By contrast, *ba'al* as a generic construct is much more common. Thus one might follow Cross in viewing *'el bērit* as relatively prior to *ba'al bērit* in the traditions embedded in Judges 9. However, his early dating prior to the monarchy for *'el bērit* in Judg 9:46 is questionable. The arguably conflicting reporting of the deity’s name/title in Judges 9 may point to a monarchic period survival cycled through by its composer-tradents. The singular attestation might suggest a concrete background for *'el bērit*, but it need not command a particularly old date. In short, *'el bērit* in Judg 9:46 may be a recovery of an older, surviving divine epithet. On this score, the case of *'el bērit* may not be unlike *'el šadday* embedded in relatively early monarchic traditions in Gen 49:25, Num 24:4, 16, and Ps 68:15, but recycled in the later priestly works in the Pentateuch (Gen 17:1, 28:3, 35:11, 43:14, 48:3 and Exod 6:3) and Ezekiel (1:24, 10:5), and particularly extended in Job (5:17; 6:4, 14; 8:3, 5; 11:7; 13:3; 15:25; 21:15, 20; 22:3, 17, 23, 25; 23:16; 24:1; 27:2, 10, 11, 13; 29:5; 31:2, 35; 32:8; 33:4, 34:4, 12, 13; 37:23; 40:2).⁷² Thus *'el bērit* in Judg 9:46 may provide some perspective on what literary processes a divine epithet may undergo, including its possible, additional interpretation as *ba'al bērit* in 9:4 and further in 8:33.

⁶⁶ As noted by Lewis 1996, 413.

⁶⁷ cf. “the god (*hā'el*), the god (*'ēlōhē*) of your father” in Gen 46:3 and “the god (*'ēlōhē*) of my father” in Exod 15:2.

⁶⁸ This is the single BH instance listed in *DCH* I:253–54.

⁶⁹ See Cross 1974, 257–58. Cross also notes a number of constructs with plural nouns.

⁷⁰ See Cross 1974, 255–57.

⁷¹ For a full listing of the attestations of *'el šadday*, see below. For a survey, see Witte 2017, 7–27. A cogent etymological proposal remains Cross’ rendering of the title as “the mountain one” (1973, 55), which would suit the Shaddayin as the title for the gods of the divine council headed by El as attested in the Deir Alla inscription; the divine council meets on the mountain of assembly.

⁷² The epithet also occurs in Ruth 1:20–21. While the book has been dated to the monarchy, its Late Biblical Hebrew features suggest a dating closer to Ezekiel and perhaps to Job as well. By comparison, the attestation in Isa 13:6 may suggest the transmission of the title between the earlier attestations and the later ones. See also Joel 1:15 and Ps 91:1.

The literary recovery of the epithet may point in turn to a social process of memory, in what Gregorio del Olmo Lete calls “textos alusivos (rememoración).”⁷³ The unusual and conflicting character of the names or titles in 8:33, 9:4 and 9:46 suggests the memory of an older tradition, but the lack of clarity about them also points to a certain socio-religious amnesia. The identity of the deity or deities does not appear perhaps clear to the ancient composers of vv. 4 or v. 46 or both. The title might have been used precisely because it seemed old to the tradents that sought to portray an older period. The forgotten background of the deity of the covenant at Shechem appears to not have been accessible to the book’s monarchic tradents. (In seeking to figure out this deity, biblical scholars may be retracing the tradents’ own difficulties and perhaps have not achieved so much more). Thus, divine epithets may bear signs of the literary and social processes entailed in their production and transmission.

Sometimes underappreciate in this discussion is that the fact the term **bērit* is the single clear and signal component in both divine names/titles. As perspectival discourse, this is an element that stands out in this case study, a focus on covenant and the deity’s role in its maintenance. This element has been thought to draw on an older tradition about covenant at Shechem (Josh 24:25) maintained under the religious patronage of a local deity.⁷⁴ Yet it is notable that the monarchic (re-)composers of Judges 9 show little, if any, concrete knowledge of the religio-political arrangement signaled by the *bērit*-element. On the one hand, covenant is central to the entire story; it narrates the making of covenant and its breaking. Jotham’s parable cum interpretation (9:8–20), too, gestures to the covenantal issue at stake. On the other hand, little in the story refers to the deity’s role in judgment between the parties apart from the invocation in v. 7 or the oblique references to divine agency in vv. 23 and 56–57. These would all appear secondary to the divine epithets in the story. The story as a whole may reflect a cumulative effort to cast the story in general covenantal terms perhaps because of the story’s inclusion of the divine epithets. In other words, the divine epithets recovered, used and extended may have helped to generate the interpretation of this memory of conflict at Shechem. In this reading, divine epithets exercise a certain literary influence or agency.

4 Multiplication of Divine Epithets in Comparison

My second case study involves the sets of divine epithets in two texts that bear a number of similarities. The first text is Ezra 1:2–4, further summarized in 5:13–15

⁷³ Del Olmo Lete 2004, 257.

⁷⁴ For Lewis (1996, 415), the DNs/titles reflect the concept of a divine treaty partner.

and putatively quoted a second time in 6:3–5. The second text is a famous letter from Elephantine, known in two versions (AP 30–31 = *TAD* A4.7 and A4.8, P. Berlin 13495 and Egyptian Museum, Cairo Museum Pap. No. 3428 = J. 43465).⁷⁵ While their contexts differ in any number of respects, both the Ezra and Elephantine texts were generated by local Yehudian communities concerned with rebuilding their temple that had been destroyed by enemies.⁷⁶

Both sets of texts date to the Persian period. The versions of the Elephantine text have been dated precisely to 25 November 407 BCE, based on the date officially represented at the very end of the text (“the 20th of Marcheshvan, year 17 of Darius the king”).⁷⁷ One or both versions may date sometime thereafter. The text of Ezra 1:2–4 is dated in v. 1 to “the first year of King Cyrus of Persia” (1:1 and in 2 Chron 36:22).⁷⁸ The Hebrew text quoted in Ezra 1:3–5 is thought to reflect an official edict as similarly expressed in the Cyrus Cylinder,⁷⁹ itself produced in the wake of Cyrus’ entry into Babylon on 29 October 539. Internal evidence to Ezra 1–6 about the

⁷⁵ *TAD* 1, pp. 68–75, which refers to the two texts as “drafts”; so too van der Toorn 2019, 137. According to Holger Gzella (2018, 213), “the text itself [*TAD* A4.8] contains a few corrections and may be only a copy of the original document [*TAD* A4.7] for the community archives.” Perhaps they are “two draft copies,” *pace* Porten 1968, 291. A report of events appears also in *TAD* A4.5, in *TAD* 1, 62–65. For a detailed reconstruction of the situation behind the letter, see van der Toorn 2019, 128–42.

⁷⁶ For the Elephantine letter central to this discussion, *TAD* A4.7, “Yehudians” remains a defensible translation for the gentilic **yhwdy*’ (cf. the translation “Jews,” in van der Toorn 2018, 15–18, 30–41). This letter refers to both the place Yehud (*TAD* A4.7:1, 19 and 22; see also A4.8:18) and the community at Elephantine as Yehudians (*TAD* A4.7:26, “we and our wives and our children and the Yehudians, all who are here”). This case would seem to reflect some sense of cultural identification or continuity between the place Yehud and the people that refer to themselves as Yehudians in the same communication between these two parties. Similarly, the settlement at Elephantine, insofar as it is called “the Yehudian garrison” in *TAD* A4.1:1 and 10, seems to be regarded as Yehudian by Hananiah, the sender of this letter, himself an authority in Yehud. When the Elephantine community and authorities in Yehud communicate, both may choose “Yehudian,” thereby affirming their shared identity and connection. In such cases, the community seems to have regarded itself as Yehudian and so also by authorities in Yehud, whatever other authorities were recognized in the corpus (e.g., in Samaria, in *TAD* A4.7:29), whatever markers of ethnicity are attested, and whatever the history of the community may have been (cf. van der Toorn 2019, 3 and 61–88). This is not to deny that the overall evidence is not complex and somewhat uncertain.

⁷⁷ So Porten 2002, 125 and 130.

⁷⁸ See also the same royal title in Ezra 1:2.

⁷⁹ For convenient access, see Kuhrt 2007, 70–74; and Cogan 2000, 314–16. Ca. 23 cm. in length, the Cyrus Cylinder appears to be a dedicatory inscription for a cult site (it was recovered from the area of the Marduk temple in Babylon that recalls why cult sites needed to be refurbished, namely the neglect of Cyrus’ predecessor and the resulting anger of Marduk; Cyrus’ victory over Babylon as recalled in this inscription is shown to be the god’s solution to the cult problem. The Cyrus Cylinder does not appear to have been a monumental inscription intended for display (such an inscription may have preceded this one and was the basis for the account of Cyrus’ victory here). It is unclear when in the sixth century the inscription is to be dated. In theory, it could be rather proximate to

rebuilding of the temple would not permit a date prior to 12 March 515.⁸⁰ A considerably later date for the Hebrew text of Ezra 1:2–4, its Aramaic variant in Ezra 6:3–5, and its narrative representation in Aramaic in Ezra 5:13–15, is suggested by the highly reduced, summary form (three verses) in these versions compared with the Cyrus Cylinder (45 lines, including the first four broken lines); Ezra’s identification of Cyrus as King of Persia (unlike Cyrus’ titular as “king of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad,” in the Cyrus Cylinder, line 20);⁸¹ its *interpretatio Yehudi*;⁸² and the many differences among Ezra 1:2–4, 5:13–15 and 6:3–5 (discussed below). The versions in Ezra generally show no memory of the Babylonian context in which the Cyrus Cylinder was produced. From these features, the versions in Ezra would appear to represent later Yehudian synopses molded in different ways to suit their concern specifically with the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple.⁸³ Accordingly, the temporal gap between the three versions of the Cyrus edict in Ezra 1–6 and the Elephantine text ca. 407 may be less than a century (perhaps even a matter of several decades).

Both texts are represented as documents: one a royal decree, the other a community letter. While presented as a document issued by a foreign king, Ezra 1:2–4 offers a condensed Yehudian version of the Cyrus Cylinder for a Yehudian audience; the Elephantine letter is likewise addressed by Yehudians to an authority in Yehud (with a copy sent also to Samaria). Ezra 1:2–4 is said to be circulated as not only orally but also as “a written edict” (so NRSV), literally *bēmiktāb*, “in writing” (NJPS). The narrative recollection of Cyrus’ edict in Ezra 5:6 is embedded in what is called an *’iggeret* (“letter” or “legal document”),⁸⁴ while in 6:3–5 the textual rubric

one or another of the versions in Ezra 1–6, in particular Ezra 1:2–4 that appears to be closest thematically.

⁸⁰ See *HCSB* 655.

⁸¹ Kuhrt 2007, 71.

⁸² In the Ezra versions Yahweh replaces Marduk as the central god in the edict, and the other gods are dropped from view altogether (“the gods of Akkad and Sumer” in line 33 in Kuhrt 2007, 72). By implication, the Ezra versions of the Cyrus edict would be represented as monotheistic. Yahweh is said to have given Cyrus “all the kingdoms of the earth” (Ezra 1:2), while Cyrus, led by Marduk to Babylon in victory (lines 15–16), is labelled by standard royal titulary, “king of the universe, mighty king, king of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad, king of the four quarters . . .” (line 20, in Kuhrt 2007, 71). The geographical focus in the Cyrus Cylinder is Babylon as well as “Ur and other cult-centres” (line 5), while Jerusalem is the cult-site named in the Ezra versions. The Cyrus Cylinder further names the human enemies whom Cyrus had defeated in battle, which are nowhere in view in Ezra.

⁸³ For the debate over whether any of the instances of the Cyrus edict in Ezra represent an authentic version, see Kuhrt 2007, 85, particularly criticizing comparison with the so-called “Gadatas” text as a likely Roman period forgery. Kuhrt also regards as “extremely unlikely . . . that the Persian government would have funded the costs of any rebuilding.” See also the preceding note.

⁸⁴ Hurvitz 2014, 25–27.

is *ṭē'm* (“order, decree”).⁸⁵ The further citation of Cyrus’ edict in Ezra 6:3–5 is introduced in 6:2b by the term *dikrônâ*, “memorandum,” the same descriptor (*zkrn*) used to refer to the temple document from Elephantine (*TAD* 4A.7 and 4A.8)⁸⁶ by a further Elephantine document (*TAD* 4A.9, lines 1 and 2).⁸⁷ All of the three passages in Ezra 1–6 show concern with their representations as written, official documents. As seen also in Ezra 1–6, *TAD* 4A.7 and 4A.8 are not only community documents. They are also full of references to other letters, including earlier ones (e.g., the letter of Vidranga in lines 7–8 and the letter to parties in Samaria in line 29; cf. the references to a letter sent and a reply not sent, in lines 18–19; and the letter requested in line 24). In this respect, Ezra –like Nehemiah and the Elephantine archive– reflects a literary world highly suffused with official documents and their authority (what might be called “a document literary culture”).⁸⁸

TAD A4.7 and A4.8 and Ezra 1–6 are both centrally concerned with permissions for the rebuilding of a destroyed temple.⁸⁹ They also use similar spatial formulae for these temples.⁹⁰ The Elephantine letter in line 6 uses *’gwr’ zy yhw ’lh’ zy byb byrt’*, “the temple of *yhw* the god that is in Yeb (Elephantine) the fortress,” echoed in line 13 (“that temple in Yeb the fortress”) and in line 25 (“the temple of *yhw* the god to (re)build it in Yeb the fortress”). Grammatically, this is the same type of identification as in Ezra 1:4: *bêt hâ’ēlōhîm ’ăšer bîrûšālā(y)im*, “the house of (the) God that is in Jerusalem.”⁹¹ The features shared by *TAD* I A4.7 and A4.8 and Ezra 1–6 extend to several thematic elements: (i) the destruction of the temple by enemies (Ezra 4:15, 5:12; *TAD* I A4.7:4–13, centered on “Vidranga the wicked” in lines 6–7); (ii) lamentation over the loss of the temple (Ezra 3:12–13; *TAD* I A4.7:15–17);⁹² (iii)

⁸⁵ Kaufman 1974, 109. For further references and discussion, see *HALOT* 1885; and Nebe 2018, 325–26. Cf. BH *ṭa’am*, “order, decree” in Jonah 3:7, evidently a loanword from Akkadian *ṭēmu* (so *HALOT* 377). Both forms appear in Ezra 6:14.

⁸⁶ For the two terms, see Gzella 2018, 213.

⁸⁷ Porten and Yardeni, *TAD* 1.76–77. The usage occurs 17 times, according to Porten and Lund 2002, 126.

⁸⁸ On documents in the literary world of Ezra 1–6, see Eskenazi 1988, 59, 73. Note further Hasler 2020.

⁸⁹ For this central theme in rebuilding accounts, see Hurowitz 1992. For Hurowitz (1992, 113–18), two sets of building accounts underlie Ezra 1–6, the first under Cyrus and the second under Darius.

⁹⁰ The resemblance has been generally noted, e.g., Hurowitz 1992, 115 n. 1. Porten (1968, 120; see also p. 55) believes that royal authority was needed for both temples. The idea of rebuilding the two temples as they were originally built is mentioned in Ezra 5:15 and 6:7 and *TAD* A4.7:25, as noted by Davis 2019, 142. The trope is attested elsewhere, e.g., McMahon 1997, 223 para. 30, “As it was built before, let them rebuild it in the same way.” Note also Haggai 2:3.

⁹¹ Porten (2002, 126, note g) compares Ezra 4:24, 5:2, 17, 6:12, and 7:16–17.

⁹² The first two elements are also linked traditionally in city laments, e.g., the enemies in the book of Lamentations (e.g., 1:5, 10, 17), and the peoples of Simaski and Elam in “The Lamentation over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur,” in Klein, 1997, 537. In these texts, the fundamental cause given for the destruction is the displeasure of a god, Yahweh in the first instance and Enlil in the second,

ongoing opposition from local enemies (Ezra 3:3, 4:1–24; *TAD* I A4.7:22: “they do not let us (re)build it”);⁹³ (iv) delay in official authorization to rebuild the temple (Ezra 5:3–17; *TAD* I A4.7:17–19); and (v) offerings conducted in the new temple (Ezra 6:17; *TAD* I A4.7:25–28).⁹⁴ (Bribes evidently played a role in both conflicts.⁹⁵) While there are many important differences between these texts and their contexts, *TAD* I A4.7 and A4.8 and Ezra 1–6 share a notable number of elements in telling each community’s story about rebuilding its temple. Read in tandem, these read like a “script.”⁹⁶ Thus it appears worth considering how choices in divine epithets contributes to this “script.”

Let us turn first to the divine epithets in Ezra 1:3–5 and its reflexes in 5:13–15 and 6:3–5, or more precisely, to the lack thereof in the latter two passages. Only Ezra 1:2–4 clearly contains epithets, with Ezra 5:13–15 entirely devoid of such and Ezra 6:3–5 using a phrase for the house (*bêt ’ēlāhā’ bîrûšāla(y)im*, “the house of God in Jerusalem,” in v. 3) that includes a reference to the deity. Ezra 1:2–4 contains three complexes of epithets contained within a thematic framing centered on the notion that the deity has “stirred” (**wr*) the human agents, Cyrus in the case of 1:1 (as in 2 Chron 36:22), and “the heads of patrimonial households belonging to Judah and Benjamin, as well as the priests and Levites” in 1:5 (cf. 2 Chron 21:16; Dan 11:2, 25). Within in 1:2–4, the three complexes of epithets move spatially from the broadest referent, “Yhwh, the god of heaven,” to a more restricted designation, “Yhwh, the god of Israel,” to yet a more specific referent, “the house of (the) god that is in Jerusalem.”⁹⁷

leaving personified Jerusalem and the goddess Nanna, respectively, to lament. Cf. the lament over the Jerusalem temple in Psalm 74 over its destruction by enemies. Lament may also be expressed for a temple that a party wishes to be built for the first time, e.g., the house that the god Baal desires according to his lament expressed four times in the Ugaritic Baal Cycle (*KTU* 1.3–1.4); see Pardee 1997, 253, 255, and 259. The expression of Baal’s lament, that “Baal has no house like the other gods,” is compared with Barrakab’s notice (*KAI* 216:15–20) that “my fathers the kings of Sam’al had no good house,” by Hurowitz, *I Have Built You an Exalted House*, 103–4.

93 For the opposition on the part of local Yehudians in the case of the Jerusalem Temple, see Haggai 1:2.

94 Additionally, see Porten 1968, 111, comparing Ezra 6:9; and Porten 2002, 126 note b comparing Ezra 6:10. Ezra 4:12 implies the former practice of sacrifices in the prior temple, as in *TAD* A4.9:8–11 (*TAD* I, pp. 76–77).

95 See Ezra 4:5. For bribes in the situation at Elephantine, see van der Toorn 2019, 126, 132 and 140–41; note also Bolin 1995, 131.

96 This sort of temple-rebuilding “narrative” relates in broad terms to the rebuilding of temples by Mesopotamian kings that refer to the destruction of the temple by enemies, e.g., “The Sippar Cylinder of Nabonidus,” in Beaulieu 2000, 310–11. See generally Davis 2019.

97 For the syntactical terminology (especially “head” and “apposition” here called APP), see Waltke and O’Connor 1990, 691, and Isaksson 2009, 73–76.

- (1) v. 2: *yhwh 'ēlōhē haššāmāyim*, “Yhwh, the god of heaven”
HEAD, APP construct X of Y
- (2) v. 3: *bēt yhwh 'ēlōhē yiśrā'ēl* “the house of Yhwh, the god of Israel,
construct X of Y = HEAD to APP construct X of Y
hū' hā'ēlōhīm 'āšer bîrûšālā(y)im that is, the god who is in Jerusalem”
deictic copula + HEAD + APP relative (non-verbal) prepositional predicate
- (3) v. 4: *bēt hā'ēlōhīm 'āšer bîrûšālā(y)im*, “the house of (the) God that is in Jerusalem”
construct X of Y = HEAD to APP relative (non-verbal) prepositional predicate

Before turning to the individual epithet in turn, it is to be noted that all of the epithets share the word, “the god” or “(the) God” whether in the absolute (*hā'ēlōhīm*) or construct (*'ēlōhē*). This consistent usage within the divine epithets taken together forge an “epithet-field” asserting Yhwh as “the god.” Moreover, the “epithet-string” in v. 3, *yhwh 'ēlōhē yiśrā'ēl hū' hā'ēlōhīm 'āšer bîrûšālā(y)im*, uses the explanatory deictic *hū'*, to be translated, “that is” or “namely.”⁹⁸ On the surface structure, this formulation asserts the status of Yhwh with respect to the location named in the following nominal relative clause, “in Jerusalem.” It may be suspected that at a deeper level, the divine status of Yhwh is itself being asserted in a strong form as *yhwh . . . hū' hā'ēlōhīm*, here resembling the biblical expression, *yhwh hū' hā'ēlōhīm* (Deut 4:35, 39; 1 Kgs 8:60, 18:39; 2 Chron 33:13).⁹⁹ As we will see below, the Elephantine letter to be compared somewhat similarly asserts Yhw’s status as “the god” (*'lh*). In general, it would be sufficient to mention this epithet once or perhaps initially to mark Yhwh as “the god” whether in Ezra 1:2–4 or in the Elephantine letter, but the multiple assertions of “the god” in these two texts perform this deity’s status for their respective contexts.

The first epithet, “the god of heaven,” in v. 1, occurs in Hebrew only here in Ezra (see the Aramaic form in Ezra 6:9, 10, 7:12, 21, 23).¹⁰⁰ This epithet marks the universal character of the deity’s authority, matching the extent of the authorship of the king that this deity is said to support over “all the kingdoms of the earth.” Thus, the divine authority of “the god of heaven” parallels the extent of rule claimed for the human authority of Cyrus. The epithet “God of heaven” bears ostensibly greater claim in being attributed not by the local community of Yehudians in Jerusalem but by the human king of the world. In context, the title may bear further thematic resonance, as Tamara Cohn Eskenazi comments: “For Ezra-Nehemiah, the

⁹⁸ For this use of *hū'*, see Fishbane 1985, 44–46; and Geller 1991, 15–33.

⁹⁹ This use of *hū'* is viewed “elective-exclusive”: “The element to be emphasized is the subject, which is singled out and contrasted with other possible or actual alternative(s).” So Muraoka 1985, 72. See also Geller 1991.

¹⁰⁰ Other BH attestations are Gen 24:3 and 7 and Jonah 1:9, arguably Persian period compositions. For the attestations in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, see Aitken 2007.

God of heaven is the power behind the earthly events, stirring humans to action while remaining behind the scenes. God's presence and command continue to find their expression in the written documents."¹⁰¹

The first, "God of Heaven," occurs not only in biblical sources but also in Yehudian sources from Elephantine (noted below).¹⁰² Notably, "the god of heaven" is not attested outside of BH or other Yehudian sources.¹⁰³ Conversely, BH does not attest to *b'l šmm*, which by contrast is rather common outside of the HB. According to Wolfgang Röllig, this god "appears relatively late in the vicinity of Palestine" and thus "it is no surprise that there are no references to him in the classical books of the OT."¹⁰⁴ The title "god of heaven" is characterized rather differently by Herbert Niehr: "The conception of a god of heaven was developed in the Northwest Semitic religions of the 1st millennium BCE, where a new type of supreme god, -> Baal shamem, arose . . . Yahweh as 'god of heaven' was thus modelled after a Syro-Canaanite supreme god."¹⁰⁵ Accordingly, "the god of heaven" looks like a Yehudian representation of such a "supreme god." At a minimum, "god of heaven" offers a Yehudian formulation within a larger cross-cultural set of terminology for the deity of heaven. At a maximum, it would additionally avoid the biblical specter of Baal past or present.¹⁰⁶ In either case, the title appears suggestive of an implicit claim made for this deity (arguably relative to other gods) to which other peoples might be expected to be able to give assent via translatability of their own gods as gods "of heaven" (cf. "the king of heaven" in Dan 4:34, put on the lips of Nebuchadnezzar).

V. 3 consists of two "epithet-strings": *bêt yhwh 'ēlōhē yiśrā'ēl*, "the house of Yhwh, God of Israel"; and *hū' hā'ēlōhīm 'āšer bīrûšālā(y)im*, "that is, the God who is in Jerusalem." The initial "string," *bêt yhwh 'ēlōhē yiśrā'ēl*, identifies the divine "ownership" of "the house." The epithet, "god of Israel," offers a concrete reference to a broad social identity. This common biblical epithet (196x in HB) evokes an old idea of Israel (e.g., Judg 5:3, 5),¹⁰⁷ entailing the past "people of Israel" (2 Sam 18:7, 19:41, Ezra 2:2, Neh 7:7, Ben Sira 37:25 B). These references to "the people of Israel" as well as "the god of Israel" in Ezra (1:3, 3:2, 4:1, 3, 6:21, 22, 7:6, 8:35, 9:4, 15; in Aramaic, in 5:1, 6:14, 7:15) are suggestive of the aspirational character that the term

¹⁰¹ Eskenazi 1988, 44.

¹⁰² For a listing for "god of heaven," see Porten 1968, 108–9 especially n. 12. Cf. "king of heaven," *melek šmayyā*, in Dan 4:34; and "lord of heaven," *māre'-šmayyā*, in Dan 5:23, and *mrh šmy* in the Genesis Apocryphon 7:7, 11:12–13, 15 and 12:17; cf. 22:16, 21). See Bernstein 2009, 295, 298–300, 301 n. 29, 304 and 305–7.

¹⁰³ So Niehr 1999, 370.

¹⁰⁴ Röllig 1999, 151.

¹⁰⁵ Niehr 1999, 370.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. the well-known defamatory forms of Baal Shamem in Dan 9:27, 11:31 and 12:11, discussed by Niehr 1999, 371 and Smith 2008, 283–87.

¹⁰⁷ See Stahl 2021.

“Israel” holds in the Persian period for Yehudians.¹⁰⁸ As one element in this complex of terms centered on Israel, the divine epithet “god of Israel” evokes a shared past heritage as embodied in the community’s traditions about Israel.¹⁰⁹ Where “the god of heaven” may link to outsiders across the empire, “the god of Israel” links insiders that identify with this heritage.

The “epithet string” in Ezra 1:4, *bêt hā’ēlōhîm ’āšer bîrûšālā(y)im*, “the house of (the) God that is in Jerusalem,” strictly speaking, belongs not to the god, but to the god’s house. The same point applies to the parallel Aramaic title, *’ēlāhā’ bîrûšālā(y)im* in Ezra 6:3, itself likewise preceded by the noun in construct, “house” (*bêt*). At the same time this epithet in v. 4 is informed by the preceding epithet in v. 3 that matches the location of the temple and the god in Jerusalem. This epithet in v. 4, *bêt hā’ēlōhîm ’āšer bîrûšālā(y)im*, belongs to one of the well-known types for DN + PN, namely DN *b-* + GN,¹¹⁰ yet it is notable that here it takes the form of nominal relative clause, specifically DN *dî b-* + GN. This nominal relative clause, “that is in Jerusalem,” occurs a total of ten times in the HB (Isa 28:14, Jer 29:25, 34:8, 2 Chron 30:14, 32:9; Ezra 1:3, 4, 5, 2:68, 7:27), with *bêt* as the antecedent only in Ezra 2:68 and 7:27. Thus the usage with *bêt* is specific to Ezra. The relative clause is not necessary in Hebrew (although it is occasionally used in Hebrew, e.g., Exod 3:7); it is quite at home in Aramaic. Thus, in this particular case, it might be tempting to regard the BH epithet *bêt hā’ēlōhîm ’āšer bîrûšālā(y)im* in Ezra 1:4 as an Aramaic calque of *bêt ’ēlāhā’ dî bîrûšēlem*, attested in Ezra 4:24, 5:2, 16 (see also Ezra 6:12, and Dan 5:3; see without the relative *dî* in Ezra 5:17, 6:3). If correct, this case would represent a development in an epithet due to linguistic influence.

It is to be noted that with its inclusion of “House of God” in vv. 3 and 5, 6:3–5 appears to be largely an expansion on this aspect of the letter compared with the

108 Cf. “land of Israel” in 1 Sam 13:19, 2 Kgs 5:2, 4, 6:23; Ezek 27:17, 40:2, 47:18; 1 Chron 13:2, 22:2; 2 Chron 2:16, 30:25, 34:7. For the BH phrase, see Hurvitz 2014, 42–44. There is no comparable biblical expression for Yehud (such as “the people of Yehud” or “the god of Yehud”). The singular *yēhūd* is rare (6x, only BA, in Dan 2:25, 5:13, 6:14, Ezra 5:1, 8, and 7:14); cf. Yehudians identified as the people of Mordecai (Esth 3:6); “the exile of Yehud” (Dan 2:25, 5:13, 6:14); “the Yehudians that are in Yehud and in Jerusalem” (Ezra 5:1). See Beyer 2018, 545.

109 Given the defective spelling of the name of Jerusalem in Ezra (as in Classical Biblical Hebrew/Standard Biblical Hebrew), it might be tempting to speculate that it might be an archaizing feature used to evoke Jerusalem and its temple of the pre-exilic situation as an aspiration for Jerusalem and the temple after the exile. Still, perhaps not so much weight is to be put on this observation given the relative rarity of the BH *plene* spelling. For the five occurrences of the *plene* spelling, see Hurvitz 2014, 127–29. Moreover, the defective spelling is common in Late Biblical Hebrew books; it occurs in Ezra, in 1:2–5, 7, 11, 2:1, 66, 3:1, 8, 4:6, 7:7–8, 27, 8:29–32, 9:9, 10:7. It is common also in Nehemiah (1:2–3, etc.), as well as Ecclesiastes (1:12, etc.) and Daniel (1:1, etc.); see also Late Biblical Hebrew Psalms (e.g., Ps 147:2, 12).

110 See the listing and discussion in Smith 2016, 74–75, 77.

version quoted in Ezra 1:3–5. Ezra 6:3–5 refers to the dimensions that the rebuilt temple is to take (60 cubits high and wide, and presumably long), as well as temple vessels (v. 4); both of these details are absent from the document of 1:3–5, although the temple vessels appear in the narrative of 1:7–8. In this detail, Ezra 6:3–5 incorporates into the official document what appears only in the narrative in Ezra 1 (in vv. 6, 9–11). The temple vessels recur in the narrative recounting of the decree in Ezra 5:13–15.¹¹¹ Their mentions in Ezra bear the evident “purpose of stressing continuity in the use of the same vessels . . . to demonstrate that the holiness of Zerubabel’s temple was not less than that of Solomon’s.”¹¹² The temple dimensions apart from 6:3 are without parallel elsewhere in Ezra, yet these too may serve to evoke Solomon’s temple in magnified dimensions.¹¹³ Ezra 6:3–5 bears a single divine name (“the house of God in Jerusalem,” v. 3), one attested already in longer forms in Ezra 1:4 and 5. By the theme of the house in 1:3–5, it would appear that 5:13–15 and 6:3–5 carry the theme of the house forward from 1:3–5. Themselves lacking divine epithets, 5:13–15 and 6:3–5 focus on the temple and seem to presume the divine identity mapped out via the epithets in 1:3–5. Perhaps the theme of the vessels sounded in 1:7 after the introduction to the divine epithets in 1:3–5 serves to carry forward those divine epithets.¹¹⁴ Together 1:3–5 and 6:3–5 appear to provide “documentary bookends” for the larger unit of Ezra 1–6 as literary preparation for the building of the temple.

At this point I would like to turn to the set of divine epithets in the document requesting the rebuilding the temple in Elephantine (*TAD* A4.7 and A4.8). Seven epithets appear in the duplicate texts, *TAD* A4.7 and A4.8 (with line numbers given from the former), six in relation to Yhw and one for Khnub. Typically, the divine name (DN) serves grammatically as “the head” relative to the rest of the divine epithet:

¹¹¹ See Ackroyd 1972; Kalimi and Purvis 1994; and Carroll 1997, 104–5. Porten (2002, 127 note p) compares cultic and Temple vessels in a number of BH sources (Num 7:13–85, 1 Kgs 7:48–50; 2 Kgs 25:15; Ezra 1:7–11, 5:14–15, 6:6; Neh 7:69; Daniel 5) with the reference to vessels “of gold and silver” in *TAD* 4A.7:12. Porten (2002, 127 n. 67) believes that the reference is assuming knowledge of Jerusalem Temple vessels: “the petitioners hoped to strike a responsive chord in the hearts of Jerusalem officials.”

¹¹² Kalimi/Purvis 1994, 455. The point about continuity is central in Ackroyd 1972, 177–80, and echoed by Carroll 1997, 104.

¹¹³ *HCSB* 655 suggests that a cube is assumed, apparently on the assumption that the length of 60 cubits is known from Solomon’s temple (1 Kgs 6:2) and expected in the rebuilt temple (see the depths of 20 and 40 cubits in Ezek 41:2). See the interesting speculation of Eskenazi 1988, 57.

¹¹⁴ For an interesting exploration in this vein, see Becking 2013.

line 2 *'lh šmy'*

“the god of heaven”¹¹⁵

construct X of Y (functioning as Head in itself)

line 5 *kmry' zy ḥnb 'lh' byb byrt'*

“the priests of Khnub the god that are in Yeb the fortress”

noun + construct particle + HEAD (DN) + APP epithet + prepositional phrase

line 6 *'gwr' zy yhw 'lh' zy byb byrt'*

“the temple of Yhw the god that is in Yeb the fortress”¹¹⁶ (see lines 13 and 25).

Noun + construct particle + DN + APP epithet + relative particle governing nominal predicate in the form of prepositional phrase

line 15 *yhw mr' šmy'*

“Yhw, the lord of heaven”

HEAD (DN) + APP construct X of Y

line 24 *'gwr' zy yhw 'lh,'*

“temple of Yhw the god”¹¹⁷

construct noun + construct particle + HEAD (DN) + APP simple noun

line 26 *mdbh' zy yhw 'lh'*

“altar of Yhw the god”

construct noun + construct particle + HEAD (DN) + APP simple noun

lines 27-28 *yhw 'lh šmy'*, “Yhw the god of heaven”

HEAD (DN) + APP construct X of Y

As indicated by the parallels (cited in the footnotes), the epithets are fairly regular at Elephantine. The vast bulk of them come up in reference to the temple at Elephantine: this deity's titles and his temple are mutually reinforcing religious markers.

115 See also *TAD* A4.7:27, A4.8:26; Dan 2:18, 19, 37, 44; Ezra 5:11, 12, 6:9, 10, 7:12, 21, 23. Note also Ezra 1:2; Neh 1:4, 5, 2:4, 20 (Hebrew). Note also Tobit 10:11; Judith 6:19. For discussion and bibliography, see Smith 2010, 222–23 n. 104.

116 *TAD* A3.3:1: [*b*]yt yhw byb

TAD B3.3:2: *bḥn zy yhh 'lh' zy byb byrt'*

TAD B3.10:2: *lḥn lyhw 'lh' zy byb byrt'*

GN + *habbîrâ* occurs also in BH: Esther 1:2 (also preceded by the relative pronoun), 2:5, 6, 3:15, 8:14, 9:6, 11–12; Neh 1:1; Dan 8:2.

117 See also *TAD* A4.10:8–9: *w'gwr' zy yhw 'lh' zyln ytbnh byb byrt'*.

Two “epithet-fields” centered on *yhw* govern this letter. This first centers on *šmy*, “heaven,” introduced first by the epithet in line 2, the commonly attested “god of heaven.” This is also the first divine epithet noted earlier for Ezra 1:2. For both texts “the god of heaven” serves as the opening epithet of choice. The wide currency of this title and its equivalents suggests a broad translatability of divinity known by audiences.¹¹⁸ In line 2 of the Elephantine letter, “the god of heaven” is not preceded by the divine name, unlike in lines 27–28 where the same epithet is preceded by the divine name. It would seem that *yhw* is the intended referent, given the attestation of the same title, “the god of heaven,” for *yhw* in lines 27–28 (see also *yhw* in lines 6 and 15).¹¹⁹ The omission of a divine name may be a formality of opening salutations that appeal generically –and with some general sense of the divine– to “the god of heaven” (see also *TAD* A3.6:1, A4.3:2–3) or to “the god/gods” more generally (*TAD* A4.1:2; A4.2:1, reconstructed; A4.4:1), as with the salutations in letters not involving Yehudians (A6.1:1; A6.6:1).¹²⁰ An implicit sense of translatability of divinity between the speakers and the addressee may inform the salutation in line 2. In any case, the attestation of the same epithet in lines 27–28 (with the divine name) frames the letter’s message as a whole. It is further reinforced by the third epithet in the middle of the letter, *yhw mr’ šmy’* in line 15. Thus, the deity’s status over the universe marks this group of divine epithets in this letter. The divine epithet in line 15, *mr’ šmy’*, may play a further rhetorical role in the letter when juxtaposed to the references made to the human addressee, “our lord (*mr’n*), Bagohi,” beginning in line 1. Line 2 further links the well-being of “our lord, Bagohi” to the disposition of the “god of heaven” in the blessing formulary in lines 1–2. Lines 17 and 23 further refer to Bagohi as “our lord.” Implicitly, it would seem, the human and divine uses of **mr’*, “lord,” appeal for an alignment of the wills of the lordships of the human and divine parties. Bagohi “our lord” should do according to the wishes of “the god of heaven” and “the lord of heaven,” the source of human well-being (*šlm*, in line 1).

118 See Niehr 2003; and note also Smith 2008, 222–23. Van der Toorn (2018, 131, 168, 192 and 2019, 75–76, 79, 83 and 103) also notes Baal Shamayin and Mar Shamayin in Papyrus Amherst 63, which he believes provides the backstory to the Elephantine community (van der Toorn 2019, 61–88). Van der Toorn (personal communication) also draws my attention to *yhw/yhh šb’wt* in the Elephantine ostraca.

119 Cf. the theophoric elements in the PNs: Jedaniah (lines 1, 18 and 21); Jehohanan (line 18); and Delaiah and Shelemiah (line 29).

120 The lack of DN here has been noted by Bolin 1995, 135: “The god of heaven” in line 2 refers, according to Bolin, to “the generic god of heaven (i.e. Ahura Mazda).” For this view, see also Aitken 2007, 259; see also van der Toorn 1999, 362. This view relies on the well-known high status of this god for the Persian administration, yet then it might be expected that the DN Ahura Mazda attested 22 times in the Elephantine corpus (in Porten/Lund 2002, 425) might bear this title; he does not. Still, while Ahura Mazda may not be the specific referent of the epithet “the god of heaven” in line 2, this epithet may play into a general sense of translatability for Yhw in this context and with Baal Shamem elsewhere, as noted above.

The second “epithet field” centers on the identification of *yhw* as “the god” (*’lh*). This marker already inheres in the use of *’lh* in the first “epithet field,” but it is extended further in lines 6, 24 and 26. In other words, *yhw* as *’lh* marks every single epithet in this letter. The epithets in the letter thus assert the place of “the god” in the situation, perhaps with the implicit message that *yhw hw*¹²¹*’lh*, much noted earlier for Ezra 1:2–4. In line 6 *’gwr’ zy yhw ’lh’ zy byb byrt’* offers this ostensibly minimal epithet for the deity. The relative clause that follows would seem to refer (narrowly speaking) not to the deity but to the temple associated with that deity, which recurs also in line 13 and is echoed also in line 25: “the temple of *yhw* the god to (re)build it in Yeb the fortress.” This is the same identification that noted above with the epithet in Ezra 1:4, *bêt hā’ēlōhîm ’āšer bîrûšālā(y)im*, “the house of (the) God that is in Jerusalem.” The formulary in context also echoes the opening identification of the letter-senders “the priests who are in Elephantine the fortress” (*khny’ zy byb byrt’*, line 1; a formulary itself paralleled in line 18, “the priests that are in Jerusalem,” *khny’ zy byrwšlm*). Thus “the god” takes his place with the place and priests linked together in this letter. They are represented in contrast to “the priests of Khnub the god who are in Yeb the fortress,” *kmry’ zy hnb ’lh’ byb byrt’* (line 5).¹²² Both Yhw and Khnub receive the epithet, “the god” and are associated with “Yeb the fortress.” Thus the “temple epithets” in lines 6, 11, and 25 containing the name of *yhw* in effect work to set up construct two groups in tension, what Jeffrey Sissons calls “two competing religio-social fields,”¹²³ on one side the god Yhw with his priests (*khny’*) along with their leader Yedaniah, and on the other side the god Khnub and his priests (*kmry’*, a different term),¹²⁴ along with their ally, Vidranga (in line 7 called “the wicked,” *lhy’*, his only epithet in this text).¹²⁵

This survey of divine epithets in Ezra 1:2–4 and in Elephantine letter shows a number of common points. The first is the overlap in the titles, “the lord/god of heaven.” This is a suggestive of a broad appeal to the addressees. Both texts also

121 For Aramaic *hw’* as copula, see Dan 2:28–47, 3:15 (HALOT 1858). See also the ketib *dhw’* in Ezra 4:9, in Rosenthal 1974, 21 para. 35. Cf. the second “epithet-string” noted above in Ezra 1:3 introduced by *hû’*, “that is.”

122 For the priests of Khnum (Khnub is a variant) at Elephantine and his temple in the Elephantine texts, see van der Toorn 2019, 22, 56, 98, 126 and 139. Cf. the god Khnum at Elephantine in the Ptolemaic period “Famine Stela,” in Lichtheim 1997, 131–34, who believes the text to be the work of Khnum’s priesthood at Elephantine; see also Morkot 2001, 154. The stela, found at Sehel Island located about 3 km. south of Elephantine, also refers to resources in the vicinity for building temples.

123 Sisson 2007 studies what he calls “two competing social fields” on one of the Cook Islands in the nineteenth century: newly established Christian churches versus indigenous Rarotonga ceremonial enclosures with god-houses (in which were stored wrapped wooden poles, representing divine ancestors).

124 As noted by commentators, e.g., van der Toorn 2019.

125 This characterization of Vidranga in TAD A4.9:6 and for the leader of the earlier Egyptian revolt in A6.7:7 is noted by van der Toorn 2019, 140–411 and 251 n. 93 and 252 n. 98.

focus on the god's spatial location relative to the temple in their specific locales. Thus, both sets of epithets convey the deity's power over the universe even as they also pinpoint the deity's location on earth. Within this broadly shared divine landscape, the Ezra and Elephantine texts differ in their usage of divine epithets. The outstanding difference: unlike Ezra 1:4, the Elephantine documents do not refer to "Israel" or "the god of Israel." In using the term, "Israel," Ezra evokes an ancient memory that shaped how Yehud and Yehudians recall themselves, a tie to a land and a people of old. Thus "god of Israel" carries a dense freight, a very meaningful memory. (In this respect, it is the opposite of the cases of *ba'al bēnīt* in Judg 8:33 and 9:4 and *'el bēnīt* in Judg 9:46, apparent casualties of collective amnesia and arguably recovery and re-interpretation as well.) By contrast to Ezra 1:4, the Elephantine letters make no such specific appeal to "Israel," perhaps fitting for an addressee, "Bagohi, the governor of Yehud" (line 1), who may not identify with –and may not be expected to identify with– "Israel."¹²⁶ The location of the communication, from Egypt, might also contribute to this omission (cf. "the gods of Egypt").¹²⁷ While many questions remain about both sets of texts as well as their epithets,¹²⁸ they locate the divine wishes of the Yehudian universal god in the specific geographical contexts of his temples, one located in his homeland and the other lying at the one of world's far reaches in biblical imagination.

Abbreviations

BA	Biblical Aramaic
BH	Biblical Hebrew
COS 1	<i>The Context of Scripture</i> , ed. William H. Hallo / K. Lawson Younger, Jr., vol. 1, Leiden, 1997.
COS 2	<i>The Context of Scripture</i> , ed. William H. Hallo / K. Lawson Younger, Jr., vol. 2, Leiden, 2000.
COS 3	<i>The Context of Scripture</i> , ed. William H. Hallo / K. Lawson Younger, Jr., vol. 3, Leiden, 2002.
DCH	<i>Dictionary of Classical Hebrew</i> , vol. I–VIII, ed. D. J. A. Clines <i>et al.</i> , Sheffield.
DN	divine name
GN	geographical name
HB	Hebrew Bible

¹²⁶ Despite his Persian name, Bagohi may have been Yehudian, according to Porten 1968, 291.

¹²⁷ A4.7:12//A4.8:13, A4.7:14 and C1.2:19, 25; D23.1.IX:8, in Porten/Lund 2002, 14.

¹²⁸ For example, the epithet "Most High" does not appear in these documents. The title in the Hebrew Bible is rather common: Gen 14:18–19, 22; Num 24:16; Deut 32:8; 2 Sam 22:14//Ps 18:14; 2 Kgs 15:35; Pss 7:18, 9:3, 21:8, 46:5, 47:3, 50:14, 77:11, 78:56, 83:19, 87:5, 91:1, 91:9, 92:2, 97:9, 107:11; Lam 3:35, 3:38; cf. Isa 14:14; Ps 82:6. See also the epithets 20x in Ben Sira according to Aitken 2007, 264.

HCSB	<i>The Harper Collins Study Bible</i> , ed. Harold W. Attridge <i>et al.</i> , San Francisco, 2006.
HALOT	<i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> , five vols., ed. M. E. J. Richardson <i>et al.</i> , Leiden, 1994.
KAI	<i>Kanaanäische und Aramäische Inschriften</i> , Herbert Donner / Wolfgang Röllig, Wiesbaden, 1971.
KTU	<i>Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani und anderen Orten/The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and Other Places</i> , Manfred Dietrich, Oswald Loretz / Joaquín Sanmartín, Münster, 2013.
NJPS	New Jewish Publication Society translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version translation
PN	personal name
TAD	<i>Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt</i> , vol. 1, ed. Bezalel Porten / Ada Yardeni, 1986, citing both texts number and page numbers.
TDOT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> , eight vols., ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis <i>et al.</i> , Grand Rapids, 1974–2018.
V(v.)	verse(s) of the Hebrew Bible

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