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The Giant in a Thousand Years: Tracing Narratives of Gigantism in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond

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Ancient Tales of Giants from Qumran and Turfan

Contexts, Traditions, and Influences

Edited by

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Table of Contents

Preface	V
List of Abbreviations	IX

<i>Matthew Goff</i> Introduction	1
---	---

Part One

Gibborim and Gigantes

Antecedents, Reception, and Comparative Contexts from the Hebrew Bible and Greek Literature

<i>Brian R. Doak</i> The Giant in a Thousand Years: Tracing Narratives of Gigantism in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond	13
--	----

<i>Samantha Newington</i> Greek Titans and Biblical Giants	33
---	----

<i>Michael Tuval</i> “Συναγωγὴ γιγάντων” (Prov 21:16): The Giants in the Jewish Literature in Greek	41
---	----

Part Two

Tales of Giants in their Ancient Jewish Context

The Dead Sea Scrolls, the *Book of Watchers*, and Daniel

<i>Joseph L. Angel</i> The Humbling of the Arrogant and the “Wild Man” and “Tree Stump” Traditions in the <i>Book of Giants</i> and Daniel 4	61
--	----

Amanda M. Davis Bledsoe

Throne Theophanies, Dream Visions, and Righteous(?) Seers:

Daniel, the *Book of Giants*, and *1 Enoch* Reconsidered 81

Ida Fröhlich

Giants and Demons 97

Matthew Goff

The Sons of the Watchers in the *Book of Watchers* and the Qumran *Book*

of Giants: Contexts and Prospects 115

Loren T. Stuckenbruck

The *Book of Giants* among the Dead Sea Scrolls: Considerations of

Method and a New Proposal on the Reconstruction of 4Q530 129

Part Three

Enochic Traditions in Central Asia and China

Exploring Connections and Affinities between

Giants in Ancient Judaism and Manichaeism

Gábor Kósa

The *Book of Giants* Tradition in the Chinese Manichaica 145

Enrico Morano

Some New Sogdian Fragments Related to Mani's *Book of Giants* and the

Problem of the Influence of Jewish Enochic Literature 187

John C. Reeves

Jacob of Edessa and the Manichaean *Book of Giants*? 199

Jens Wilkens

Remarks on the Manichaean *Book of Giants*: Once Again on Mahaway's

Mission to Enoch 213

Index of Citations of Ancient Texts 231

Modern Author Index 251

The Giant in a Thousand Years

Tracing Narratives of Gigantism in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond*

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I. The Embarrassing and Alluring Giant

The giants of the Hebrew Bible received very little independent scholarly attention during the twentieth century, and only within the last decade have these figures begun to attract serious focus.¹ This situation is at least somewhat surprising, given the immense popular interest in giants for many readers of the Bible – though it should come as little shock to see that again biblical scholars

* I am sincerely thankful to the participants in the “Tales of Giants from Qumran and Turfan: Ancient Contexts, Traditions and Influences” conference (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich, June 2014) for their hospitality and feedback. Many of the arguments and sources in this essay appear in more elaborate form in my book *The Last of the Rephaim: Conquest and Cataclysm in the Heroic Ages of Ancient Israel* (ILSer 7; Boston/Washington, D. C.: Ilex Foundation/Center for Hellenic Studies, 2012).

¹ For recent work approaching the topic from a variety of angles and time periods, see Joseph L. Angel, “Reading the *Book of Giants* in Literary and Historical Context,” *DSD* 21 (2014): 313–46; Doak, *Last of the Rephaim*; Deane Galbraith, “Manufacturing Judean Myth: The Spy Narrative in Numbers 13–14 as Rewritten Tradition” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Otago, 2013); Matthew Goff, “Monstrous Appetites: Giants, Cannibalism, and Insatiable Eating,” *JAJ* 1 (2010): 19–42 (34–37); idem, “Gilgamesh the Giant: The Qumran Book of Giants’ Appropriation of Gilgamesh Motifs,” *DSD* 16 (2009): 221–53; Christophe Lemardelé, “Une Gigantomachie dans la Genèse? Géants et héros dans les textes bibliques compiles,” *RHR* 227 (2010): 155–74; Lothar Perlt, “Riesen im Alten Testament: Ein literarisches Motiv im Wirkungsfeld des Deuteronomiums,” in idem, *Deuteronomium-Studien* (FAT 8; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994), 205–46; Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *The Book of Giants from Qumran: Texts, Translations and Commentary* (TSAJ 63; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997); idem, “The ‘Angels’ and ‘Giants’ of Genesis 6:1–4 in Second and Third Century BCE Jewish Interpretation: Reflections on the Posture of Early Apocalyptic Traditions,” *DSD* 7 (2000): 354–77; idem, “The Origins of Evil in Jewish Apocalyptic Tradition: The Interpretation of Genesis 6:1–4 in the Second and Third Centuries B. C. E.,” in *The Fall of the Angels*, ed. Christoph Auffarth and Loren T. Stuckenbruck (TBN 6; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 87–118 (now available in updated form in Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *The Myth of Rebellious Angels: Studies in Second Temple Judaism and New Testament Texts* [WUNT I.335; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014], 1–35).

have neglected those things most important to the readership of the church, synagogue, or general public. Indeed, the popular or even cartoonish appeal of giant or monstrous beings may have actively repelled the academy in the past, as the sheer popularity of conspiracy theories about burials of giant bones or fantastical creatures does not lend scholarly gravitas to this field of study.² To put it bluntly, giants can be embarrassing.

From time to time, scholars have succumbed to the lure of explaining stories of giants in the Bible through historicizing or medicalizing interpretations. One may find, for example, attempts to analyze a character like Goliath (1 Samuel 17) on the basis of hypopituitarism or other physical pathologies.³ Even scant examples of larger-than-normal physical remains in the Levant provoke speculation about the origins of giant stories, and Adrienne Mayor's fascinating study of ancient folk science in *The First Fossil Hunters* gives a plausible etiology for at least some tales of the monstrous and gigantic: fossils of extinct animals appeared to ancient observers as "real" monsters or giants that must have once interacted with human heroes in the distant past.⁴ To be sure, along these lines the ruins of the Late Bronze Age urban centers in Israel/Palestine, whose giant walls and inhabitantless structures were visible during the biblical period, could have appeared to later Israelites as evidence of some by-gone Canaanite race.⁵ Well into the modern period, giant structures and mysterious monuments captivated

² See attempts to prove the historicity of the Bible's giants stories in different ways by Charles DeLoach, *Giants: A Reference Guide from History, the Bible, and Recorded Legend* (Metuchen: Scarecrow, 1995) and Clyde E. Billington, "Goliath and the Exodus Giants: How Tall Were They?" *JETS* 50 (2007): 489–508.

³ See, e.g., Diether Kellermann, "Die Geschichte von David und Goliath im Lichte der Endokrinologie," *ZAW* 102 (1990): 344–57; James N. Ford, "The 'Living Rephaim' of Ugarit: Quick or Defunct?" *UF* 24 (1992): 73–101 (88). In recent popular literature, see Malcolm Gladwell, *David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2013), 3–15; Gladwell (p. 14) claims that "many medical experts now believe" (?) that "Goliath had a serious medical condition."

⁴ Adrienne Mayor, *The First Fossil Hunters: Paleontology in Greek and Roman Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), esp. the list of ancient testimonia on pp. 260–81. On the giant-fossil theory of giant stories, see also Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom*, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1920), 1:385–87. Already in antiquity, Augustine of Hippo cites a fossil tooth as evidence of the reality of giant offspring from the episode in Gen 6:1–4. See Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (New York: Random House, 2000), esp. the examples in book 15, and the extended discussion of the fossil tooth in Maura Nolan, "Historicism After Historicism," in *The Post-Historical Middle Ages*, ed. Elizabeth Scala and Sylvia Federico (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 63–86 (64–69).

⁵ In Joshua 7–8, the very name of the city of Ai ("ruins") indicates a connection between the conquest narratives and prominent ruins. See Ronald S. Hendel, "Biblical Views: Giants at Jericho," *BAR* 35 (2009); accessed online at <http://basarchiv.org>, 23 December 2009), and the well-documented existence of giant fortification structures from the Middle Bronze Age (ca. 2500–1460 BCE) by Aaron Burke, "Walled Up To Heaven": *The Evolution of Middle Bronze Age Fortification Strategies in the Levant* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2008).

romantic travelers in the region, proving the allure of the giant over millennia. One example of such a traveler, the Irish Presbyterian missionary Josias Porter (1823–1889), ornately wrote of the “memorials of ... primeval giants” that he saw “in almost every section of Palestine,” ranging from enormous graves to massive city architecture.⁶ Porter identified the “wild and wondrous panorama” of the Argob region in southern Syria as the site of past giant activity, and felt certain that the remains he saw there were “the very cities erected and inhabited by the Rephaim.”⁷

Neither the historicizing/medicalizing nor the fossils/ruins approach can go very far toward explaining the power these giant traditions came to have in the Hebrew Bible and in so many other literatures over such a long period of time. When taken to extremes, these interpretations can obviously become fantastical or problematically reductionist, and at best the medical-gigantism and fossil-inspiration approaches could only account for the initial motivation for giant stories in selected cases.

In this paper, I would like to attempt a very broad view of the giant in the Hebrew Bible, with the goal of tracing the appearance of giants through several lenses: the giant as divine or semi-divine figure, as anti-law and anti-king, as elite adversary and elite animal, as unruly vegetation, and as the defeated past. It is precisely this kind of thematic overview that has been lacking in the literature, as giants have more typically been treated piecemeal, as mere footnotes or oddities in their narrative contexts. The very rubric of the “biblical giant” could automatically obscure the variety of gigantic figures and their roles throughout time, but it is still the case that giants appear prominently and repeatedly in the Bible, forcing us to consider whether there is something unique or uniquely “biblical” about the Bible’s giants. Though the giant has recently and justifiably received more attention from those working with the Enochic corpus and the Qumran traditions, as well as from those studying the medieval engagement with giants,⁸ we ignore the *Ursprung* of these later materials in the Hebrew Bible to the det-

⁶ Josias L. Porter, *The Giant Cities of Bashan, and Syria’s Holy Places* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1884), 12.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁸ On *1 Enoch* and the various materials from Qumran related to giants, see Stuckenbruck, *The Book of Giants*, and the relevant sections of George W. E. Nickelsburg *1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, Chapters 1–36; 81–108* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001); Angel, “Reading the *Book of Giants*”; Goff, “Monstrous Appetites”; *idem*, “Gilgamesh the Giant.” For the medieval giant and more recent literary presentations, see the major studies of Richard Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages: A Study in Art, Sentiment, and Demonology* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1952); Walter R. Stephens, *Giants in Those Days: Folklore, Ancient History, and Nationalism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1989); Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1984); Jeffrey J. Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1999).

riment of the field of giants in Judaism conceived as a whole. Thus, this essay is an attempt to organize the Bible's giants by category and to continue to elevate these figures as a rightful object of scholarly attention.

II. Five Categories of Giant Thinking in the Hebrew Bible

The five categories of thinking about the Hebrew Bible's giants presented below reflect the wide range of meanings these figures elicit, though other configurations are obviously possible and there is overlap among several of the categories. The biblical giant is not limited to appearing in either "mythical" (divine or semi-divine) or "historical" (human) forms, but in many cases straddles these boundaries as a reflection of the intermingling of myth and history in the Bible generally. Following Walter Stephens' study of gigantism folklore and theology in Latin Europe, where the giant stood as "the most fundamental figure of the Other," we might say that the biblical giant primarily embodies otherness vis-à-vis God and Israel.⁹ This sense of otherness and opposition permeates all biblical presentations of giants, and stands in stark contrast to other Mediterranean and Near Eastern literatures of the Iron Age in which gigantic height can take on positive qualities of dominance or heroism.¹⁰ Therefore, following Stephens again, if the giant can represent such different qualities in societies across time – say, dominant and heroic in some parts of the ancient world but corrupted and defeated in others – then it is fair to say that giants cannot merely be viewed simplistically, as ogres or dummies, but rather they must be scrutinized as loaded ideological figures that communicate ideals and anxieties on many fronts.¹¹ Though the first two categories discussed here are common starting points for thinking about giants (giant as divine figure and giant as anti-king), the last three categories remain under-explored and represent rich points of engagement with the figure of the giant (giant as elite animal adversary, giant as unruly vegetation, and giant as defeated past).

⁹ Stephens, *Giants in Those Days*, 58.

¹⁰ If Gilgamesh can properly be called a giant by reason of his stature in the *Gilgamesh Epic* (I.53–61), where each of his feet is three cubits long and each stride six cubits. Likewise, the "Stele of Vultures" records a height of 5.5 cubits for the Sumerian king Eannatum. See Andrew R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1:447, 540–41. Ancient Near Eastern art often depicts the king as a heroic figure who gigantically towers over others, such as Naram-Sin on his famous stele (ca. 2220 BCE) and the Egyptian Ramses II on a temple relief commemorating his victory at Qadesh (ca. 1274 BCE); see, respectively, Irene Winter, "Sex, Rhetoric, and the Public Monument: The Alluring Body of Naram-Sin of Agade," in *Sexuality in Ancient Art: Near East, Egypt, Greece and Italy*, ed. Natalie B. Kampen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 11–26; Othmar Keel, "Kanaanäische Sühneriten auf ägyptischen Tempelreliefs," *VT* 25 (1975): 413–69 (see especially 419, fig. 2 and other images on pp. 421, 427, 440, 446, 448).

¹¹ Stephens, *Giants in Those Days*, 5.

1. The giant as divine or semi-divine figure

The Bible's own starting point for reflection on the giant occurs in the primeval history of Genesis. Though no word for gigantic size/height appears in the passage, Gen 6:1–4 has always played a prominent role for defining the origins of gigantic beings through illicit sexual congress between divine and human realms.¹²

¹ When humans began to increase upon the face of the land, and daughters were born to them, ² certain divine beings (בני האלהים) saw how beautiful the human women (בנות האדם) were, and so they took wives for themselves from among them, whomever they chose. ³ YHWH said, "My spirit will not remain (ידון) with humans forever, for they are but flesh; their lifetime will be 120 years." ⁴ The Nephilim were on the earth in those days – and also afterward – when the divine beings procreated with human women. They bore children to them; they were the heroes of old, famous men (הגברים אשר מעולם אנשי השם).

A basic narrative crux that has bedeviled generations of scholars involves the relationship between the "divine beings" and the "Nephilim." Does the author insert the Nephilim here in order to associate the primeval era of the "heroes of old" with the time of the Nephilim? Or does the comingling of divine beings and human women *result* in the birth of the Nephilim? In his Genesis commentary Gunkel set the tone for much twentieth century scholarship, calling the reference to the Nephilim in verse 4 "eine beiläufige Notiz, ohne inneren Zusammenhang hinzugefügt" (an incidental note, added without inner connection).¹³ Von Rad took the reference as more coherent, citing etiological purposes – explaining the existence of heroic figures – and supposed the author wanted to ensure these heroes were seen as a "demonic" invasion into the natural order.¹⁴ On purely literary grounds, there is no reason to see any aspect of this particular passage as more "incidental" than any of the other cryptic fragments of tradition in Genesis 1–11; more than other passages, though, this text seems to provoke a particular interpretive anxiety, manifesting itself in more or less arbitrary source-critical judgments or sheer dismissal (e.g., Brevard Childs calls Gen 6:1–4 "a foreign particle of pagan mythology ... a mutilated and half-digested particle" that

¹² See, e.g., John J. Collins, "The Sons of God and the Daughters of Men," in *Sacred Marriages: The Divine-Human Sexual Metaphor from Sumer to Early Christianity*, ed. Marti Nissinen and Risto Uro (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 259–74; Ron Hendel, "The Nephilim were on the Earth: Genesis 6:1–4 and its Ancient Near Eastern Context," in Auffarth and Stuckenbruck, *The Fall of the Angels*, 11–34; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, trans. J.J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg: 1984), 363–83.

¹³ Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis: übersetzt und erklärt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1901), 53.

¹⁴ Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, rev. ed., trans. J.H. Marks (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1972), 115. See also Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 365, 369, who sees Gen 6:4 as a secondary accretion meant only to explain the birth of heroic warriors (גבורים).

“struggles with independent life against the role to which it has been assigned within the Hebrew tradition.”¹⁵

Others venture to see the relative clause in Gen 6:4 (אשר) with nuances of result, purpose, or cause, thus drawing the otherwise isolated verse into narrative conversation with the passage as a whole: the Nephilim were on the earth in those days, *with the result being that* the divine beings procreated with human women.¹⁶ Rüdiger Bartelmus proposed just such a translation already several decades ago, which allows more space for viewing Gen 6:1–4 (as Bartelmus does) as a tale recounting the beginning of the ongoing battle between the hero and the giant that would reverberate throughout the Hebrew Bible.¹⁷ Whether the Nephilim are to be conflated with the “divine beings” in verses 2 and 4 or whether the Nephilim somehow incited the transgression as a third party, the explanatory note in verse 4 makes the Nephilim a part of the divine-human union. Some readings already in antiquity placed the Nephilim themselves as the result of the union – divine beings + human women = Nephilim (giants) – but the grammar of אשר as a resultant clause probably cannot work in this manner.

More than *mere* etiology, then, the incident in Gen 6:1–4 allows mythical and narrative space for the origin of giants. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the report of the Hebrew spies in Num 13:31–33:¹⁸

³¹ But the men who went up with him [Caleb] said, “We are not able to go up against the people, because they are stronger than us.” ³² So they brought a bad report of the land that they had spied out to the sons of Israel, saying, “The land that we have gone through as spies – it is a land that eats up its inhabitants! And the people we saw in its midst are huge (אנשי מדות).¹⁹ ³³ We also saw the Nephilim there – the sons of Anaq are from the Nephilim – and we seemed like grasshoppers in our eyes and likewise we were in their eyes!”

Here an explanatory note in the midst of the report identifies the Anaqim (בני ענק) as מן הנפילים, “from the Nephilim.” But in what sense? Despite frequent protests to the contrary, the מן in Num 13:33 can only indicate genealogical

¹⁵ Brevard Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 1962), 54, 57.

¹⁶ For this use of אשר, see Ronald J. Williams, *Williams' Hebrew Syntax*, 3rd ed., rev. and expanded by John C. Beckman (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2007), 163–66; P. Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 2 vols. (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2005), 2:595–98. In the Hebrew Bible, see Gen 13:16; Exod 20:26; Deut 4:40; 1 Sam 15:15; 1 Kgs 3:13; 2 Kgs 9:37, and other examples in Williams, *Williams' Hebrew Syntax*, 165–66, as well as W. Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, ed. E. Kautzsch, trans. A.E. Cowley (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2006), 165b, 166b.

¹⁷ “Die Riesen waren in jenen Tagen auf Erden, so daß die Göttersöhne zu den Töchtern der Menschen eingingen und diese ihnen Kinder gebaren, nämlich die Heroen der Vorzeit.” See Rüdiger Bartelmus, *Heroentum in Israel und seiner Umwelt* (ATANT 65; Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1979), 23.

¹⁸ See now Galbraith, “Manufacturing Judean Myth.”

¹⁹ Literally “men of [notable] measure.” Compare with איש מדה in Isa 45:14; 1 Chr 11:23; 20:6.

derivation;²⁰ the Hebrew conquest of the land now participates in the divine acts of control and ordering from the Torah's primeval history.²¹ These Nephilim descendants in the land are not pure gods, but neither are they normal humans.

Though we lack any certain manner of historically situating these only references to the Nephilim in the Bible to one another,²² the note in Num 13:33 makes no sense for an audience that does not know of either Gen 6:4 or another Nephilim tradition, and therefore it seems reasonable to assume that the huge inhabitants from the spies' report were drawn into the Nephilim tradition later. If anything is "secondary" in Gen 6:4, it is the "and also afterward" clause (גַּם כֵּן אַחֲרָיו כֵּן), which could have been easily added to make sense of the fact that these Nephilim – understood superordinately as "giants" (on parallel with "Rephaim" in Deut 2:11) – clearly appear later in the storyline (not only in Num 13:33, but also in the figure of Og of Bashan and others in the conquest, not to mention Goliath).

Another avenue by which giants could be viewed as divine or semi-divine figures involves the identity of the Rephaim as mythical shades of the dead or powerful embodied spirits inhabiting the land.²³ The prominence of Og – king of the land of the Rephaim – as an adversary in the memory of the wilderness wandering and conquest led biblical authors to gesture toward both a gigantic stature for this king as well as his semi-divine identity.²⁴ A fragmentary and debated Ugaritic reference (*KTU* 1.108.1–3) suggests that the territory the Bible ascribes to Og and the Rephaim was viewed by at least the fourteenth or thirteenth century BCE as the habitation of a certain Rapiu, patron deity of the Rapiuma in Ugaritic myth:²⁵

²⁰ Ephraim A. Speiser, *Genesis* (AB 1; New York: Doubleday, 1964), 44, Nahum Sarna, *Genesis* (JPSTC; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 46, and Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 243, all attempt to differentiate the Anaqim from "actual" (?) Nephilim and claim the מַן in Num 13:33 is a term of comparison. However, nowhere in the Hebrew Bible does מַן function in this exact kind of comparative manner (see Williams, *Williams' Hebrew Syntax*, 10–25, and sources cited there), but מַן frequently does function as a normal indicator of genealogical derivation (e.g., Gen 15:4; 35:11; 1 Sam 2:20, and the description of Og of Bashan as "from" [מִן] the Rephaim in Josh 12:4).

²¹ Emil G. Kraeling, "The Significance and Origin of Gen. 6:1–4," *JNES* 6 (1947): 193–208 (195).

²² Doak, *Last of the Rephaim*, 78–79.

²³ For a review of this problem, see Doak, *ibid.*, 153–99.

²⁴ See references to Og in Num 21:26–35; 32:33; Deut 1:4; 3:1–3; 4:47; 29:7, 31:4; Josh 2:10; 9:10; 12:2–5; 13:12, 30; 1 Kgs 4:19; Pss 135:11; 136:19–20; Neh 9:22. Og is associated specifically with the Rephaim in Deut 3:11; Josh 12:4; 13:12.

²⁵ On the most debated phrase in question here ('il ylb b'trt 'il tpt bhdry), see, among many to weigh in on the topic, John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan* (JSOTSup 265; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 50; Nicholas Wyatt, "À la Recherche de Rephaim Perdue," in *idem, The Archaeology of Myth: Papers in Old Testament Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2010), 69–95 (88 n. 16); Anson Rainey, "The Ugaritic Texts in Ugaritica 5," *JAOS* 94 (1974): 184–94 (187), who finds *KTU* 1.108.3 to be "certainly reminiscent" of Gen 14:5, Josh 12:4, and 13:12; Francesca Stavrakopoulou, *Land of Our Fathers: The Roles of Ancestor Vener-*

May Rapiu (רפ'ו), king of eternity, drink wine, may he drink,
 the powerful and noble god, the one who rules in Athtarat (ב'תרט),
 the god who reigns in Edrei (?) ('il תַּרְתַּבְּר'י), who sings and plays
 on the lyre ...

The fact that either/both Og or/and the Rephaim are said to dwell at Ashteroth-karnaim (Gen 14:5) or Ashteroth and Edrei (Josh 12:4; 13:12) suggests continuity between the region of Ashteroth and Edrei, Og, and the deity Rapiu. In Deut 1:4 and Josh 12:4, Og is described as “reigning” or “enthroned” in the same location as Rapiu using the same language (יֹשֵׁב = יָבַט in *KTU* 1.108.2), further suggesting reliance on earlier tradition in the Bible’s memory of Og as a shadowy, fearsome leader with connections to the divine realm. As such, and as one of the aboriginal inhabitants of the Levant, Og would also then be a giant, as would his people, the Rephaim (see Deut 2:11, 20; 3:11).

Two other aspects of the Og-Rephaim presentation in the Hebrew Bible draw these figures into comparison with divine beings. First, the famous description of Og’s giant bed in Deut 3:11 makes Og not only a giant but compares him with a divine figure, as some have recently shown that the dimensions of Og’s bed correspond exactly to the dimensions of the ritual sex bed used by Marduk and Zarpanitu at the Etemenanki ziggurat in Babylon (nine cubits by four cubits).²⁶ The comparison could be polemical, but more likely reflects the awe and stature attached to the Og tradition, and elevates Og to a supernatural level, requiring the powerful deliverance of Israel’s God to cross into the land.

Second, we should also notice that the paradoxical descriptions of Rephaim in the Bible as living warriors and as shades of the dead parallels the existence of

ation in Biblical Land Claims (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 68; and now Mark S. Smith, *Poetic Heroes: Literary Commemorations of Warriors and Warrior Culture in the Early Biblical World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 138–39, who sees no problem in the geographical correlation between this Rapiu and the biblical Rephaim. Since I do not think the fifth century BCE Byblos coffin inscription refers to Og, I do not discuss it here, but some think the term *h'g* in this text refers to “Og” (or “the Og”) as a haunting spirit of some kind (*h'g ytbqsn h'dr*; “the mighty Og himself will take revenge”). This Og reading has been reasonably discredited by Frank M. Cross, “A Newly Published Inscription of the Persian Age from Byblos,” in idem, *Leaves from an Epigrapher’s Notebook: Collected Papers in Hebrew and West Semitic Paleography and Epigraphy* (HSS 51; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 282–85, but cf. Jean Starcky, “Une inscription phénicienne de Byblos,” in *Mélanges offerts à M. Maurice Dunand* (MFOB 45; Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1969), 259–73; Karel van der Toorn, “Funerary Rituals and Beatific Afterlife in Ugaritic Texts and in the Bible,” *BibOr* 48 (1991): 80–101 (93); Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11* (AB 5; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 184; Klaus Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (AOAT 219; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1986), 210–11.

²⁶ Maria Lindquist, “King Og’s Iron Bed,” *CBQ* 73 (2011): 477–92, building on the work of Timo Veijola, “King Og’s Iron Bed (Deut 3:11): Once Again,” in *Studies in the Hebrew Bible, Qumran, and the Septuagint Presented to Eugene Ulrich*, ed. Peter W. Flint et al. (VTSup 101; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 60–76, and Ulrich Hübner, “Og von Baschan und sein Bett in Rabbat-Ammon (Deuteronomium 3,11),” *ZAW* 105 (1993): 86–92.

the Rapiuma as deified ancestor kings in the Ugaritic corpus, suggesting that the biblical authors thought of the Rephaim as an ambiguous, powerful contingent of heroic warriors.²⁷ Scholars have approached this odd dichotomy between the living and dead Rephaim in various ways, usually assuming some transfer of meaning from one realm to the other – e.g., Rephaim originally referred to the dead, but was transferred to the Rephaim of the conquest, or it originally referred to living warriors in the conquest who were demoted to impotent shades of the dead in later tradition. A more productive and holistic approach to the question, however, would be to see the Rephaim as semi-divine heroic figures, along the lines of archaic and classical Greek hero concepts as well as at Late Bronze Age Ugarit, where great warriors of bygone eras not only claimed divine parentage but also continued to function through the hero cult as a force of fertility, protection, and legitimation for contemporary devotees.²⁸ Hartmut Gese provocatively argued that even Gen 6:1–4 contributed to this hero cult ideology, as it sought to simultaneously provide a legitimate explanation for the birth of semi-divine heroic figures while still limiting their life-spans and circumscribing their power under YHWH’s purview.²⁹ If the hero cult interpretation has any merit for the Rephaim and for the Nephilim in Gen 6:1–4, then it may be most productive to understand the etymology of the Hebrew נפלים from the verb נפל with connotations of falling *in heroic battle*.³⁰

In summary of this strand of biblical giant thinking, giants are not simply abnormally big humans, but rather they function as anti-gods who transgress boundaries (human and divine miscegenation in Gen 6:1–4) or guard geographical boundaries with cosmic significance (Og and the Rephaim in the Transjordan blocking God’s people, the Israelites). In Gen 6:1–4, the Nephilim incident is a coherent and integral part of the boundary transgression pattern in Genesis 1–11.

2. The giant as anti-law and anti-king

Perhaps the most famous giant story in the Bible – indeed in all literature – is the battle between David and Goliath in 1 Samuel 17. Notable text-critical problems abound in this chapter, including the question of Goliath’s height at either six

²⁷ For the living Rephaim in the Bible, see Gen 14:5; 15:20; Deut 2:11, 20; 3:11, 13; Josh 12:4; 13:12; 17:15; 1 Chr 20:4; for Rephaim as the dead, see Isa 14:9; 26:14, 19; Ps 88:11; Job 26:5; Prov 2:18; 9:18; 21:16; as a geographical description (the “valley of Rephaim”), see Josh 15:8; 18:16; 2 Sam 5:22; 23:13; Isa 17:5; 1 Chr 14:9.

²⁸ See my review of the relevant literature in Doak, *Last of the Rephaim*, 153–99.

²⁹ Hartmut Gese, “Der bewachte Lebensbaum und die Heroen. Zwei mythologische Ergänzungen zur Urgeschichte der Quelle J,” in *Wort und Geschichte: Festschrift für Karl Elliger zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Hartmut Gese and Hans Peter Rüter (AOAT 18; Zurich: Kevelaer, Butzon & Bercker, 1973), 77–85 (83–85).

³⁰ Brian R. Doak, “Ezekiel’s Topography of the (Un-)Heroic Dead in Ezek 32:17–32,” *JBL* 132 (2013): 607–24; idem, *Last of the Rephaim*, 63–65.

cubits and a span (in the Masoretic text) or four cubits and a span (4QSam^a and Greek).³¹ The difference between six cubits and four cubits is the difference between a strikingly tall person in this context and an impossible physiology in any period, but in either reading Goliath certainly qualifies as a “giant,” not just with respect to his extraordinary height but also considering his embodiment of otherness (as Philistine), political opposition to Israel, and arrogance. To be sure, the Philistines are the quintessential political “other” for Israel in the memory of the early monarchy, and Goliath’s non-Semitic name encodes foreignness for an Israelite audience, as do the multiple and unique technical terms used for the giant’s armament.³²

With regard to arrogance, Goliath is the Bible’s only speaking giant, and his only words are boasts and taunts, even delving into humor (“Am I a dog that you come at me with sticks!”; 1 Sam 17:43). Moreover, there is something comic and grotesque about the fight scene: David’s slingshot stone to the forehead – which apparently does not immediately kill Goliath – followed by hacking off the giant’s entire head certainly achieve their desired ends, but they do so in a way that makes Goliath a gruesomely beheaded object of derision and loathing. There is something bathetic and gratuitous about the scene, and many classical artistic depictions captured these features in striking ways.³³

David’s encounter with Goliath is so significant because, until this point in the basic (canonical) narrative of the Hebrew Bible, giants had been a recurring problem that resisted permanent solution. Even God’s own flood in Genesis 6–9, putatively destroying every breathing thing, did not resolve the problem of the Nephilim – they appear again, subsumed within or as ancestors of the Anakim in Num 13:33 – and Joshua’s conquest, though seemingly totalizing in a cursory reading of the book of Joshua, failed to eradicate the giants in Philistine territory. Only David’s stunning victory over Goliath ensures that giants never again threaten Israel. As David’s first act of warfare in 1–2 Samuel, the killing of the giant initiates and legitimizes David’s status as king vis-à-vis Saul so as to overshadow (rather than merely illustrate) the narrative of David’s election in 1 Sam 16:1–13. True, David and his men fight Goliath and other giants later in

³¹ Frank M. Cross et al., *Qumran Cave 4.XII: 1–2 Samuel* (DJD 17; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).

³² גִּלְיָת is probably linguistically Anatolian (compare τ- with *-wattas* and Lydian *-uattes*). See Peter Machinist, “Biblical Traditions: The Philistines and Israelite History,” in *The Sea Peoples and Their World: A Reassessment*, ed. Eliezer D. Oren (Philadelphia: The University Museum, University of Pennsylvania, 2000), 53–83 (63–64); P. Kyle McCarter, *1 Samuel* (AB 8; New York: Doubleday, 1980), 291–93.

³³ Here I am thinking of Caravaggio’s “David with the Head of Goliath” (1606–07; Rome, Museo e Galleria Borghese), but note also Sebastiano Ricci, “The Victory of David over Goliath” (date unknown; New York, Moretti Fine Art Gallery), and Giuseppe Vermiglio (1587–1635), “David Holding Goliath’s Head” (date unknown; Bologna, Publico Podio collection). Much more recent examples would include, e.g., the photograph of Charlie White, “Champion,” in his “Everything is American” series (2006; <http://charliewhite.info/everything-is-american/>).

the narrative (2 Sam 21:15–22//1 Chr 20:4–8), but these accounts are presented in retrospect and serve to highlight the importance of David’s giant battles as a central aspect of his military career.

As in many different literatures throughout the medieval period, at least, legitimate kingship requires the defeat of the giant or other monstrous forces of which the giant is one prominent representative. The king must become a counter-giant, an anti-giant, to defeat the anti-king and anti-order giant. There are few better representations of this dynamic than the frontispiece to modernity’s most towering statement of political control and monarchy, Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan* (1651), which portrays the king lurching over the horizon as the gigantic solution (the Leviathan) to the monster of brutish natural competition and violence. Only a giant can defeat a giant. David’s victory over Goliath is a symbol of the order and law David can establish, superior to the temporary and failed leadership cycles that characterize the period after Moses but before David (the judges and Saul). This same dynamic is also present in the giving of the law and narratives of conquest over giants in Exodus–Joshua: the law and the victory over Canaan’s gigantic population are drawn into interpretive relationship, as the Israelites are to practice the justice and righteousness that the native inhabitants could not achieve. The previous inhabitants (represented at some points as giants, such as the Anaqim and Rephaim) had polluted the land and made it unclean, but the Torah is to transform it into something clean (see, e.g., Gen 15:16; Leviticus 18; Deut 9:1–5).

If the giant is kept in check by the king, then the nation is safe. The Bible’s narrative presents the singular monarchy of David as the official solution to giants, and David’s victory acts as a mythical mirror of not only the giant-killings by Moses, Joshua, and Caleb in the conquest (Numbers 13; Deut 1:28, 1:46–2:1, 14; Joshua 11–15), but of God’s own cataclysm directed against the Nephilim and others in Genesis 6–9.³⁴ The flood’s leveling effect must be repeated as a return to the divine primeval order, a concept reminiscent of Mircea Eliade’s categorization of religions in their “cosmogonic” function, i.e., creating an ordered, pristine world of the founding creation ritual.³⁵ In this way, we may think of the royal defeat of the giant *in illo tempore* (in the creative founding rituals of the past mythic world) as connected to the defeat of the giant *illud tempus* (now and forever).³⁶

³⁴ In reading the Gen 6:1–4 episode as the cause for the flood, I follow Ronald Hendel, “Of Demigods and the Deluge: Toward an Interpretation of Genesis 6:1–4,” *JBL* 106 (1987): 13–26.

³⁵ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. W. R. Trask (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1959), 20–48.

³⁶ Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. R. Sheed (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1996 [orig. pub., 1958]), 395–96.

3. *The giant as elite adversary and elite animal*

As human-like embodiments of that which is wild and untamed, the biblical giant takes on the role of “wild man,” “freak,” and “elite adversary” for heroic displays of fighting prowess.³⁷ In the pre-modern world, as Richard Bernheimer argues, “wildness” was a very potent category, encompassing all that “was uncanny, unruly, raw, unpredictable, foreign, uncultured, and uncultivated. It included the unfamiliar as well as the unintelligible.”³⁸ Moreover, the giant’s “wild” status, at least in the developed anthropological theology of the Middle Ages, posed difficult questions about the giant’s origins, and thus questions about the status of the giant’s soul (do giants have a soul or not?) and the categorization of giants as a type of non-human animal.³⁹ Ancient Mesopotamian kings routinely bragged of their hunting exploits, the prey being exotic animals in faraway lands; the Assyrian royal lion hunt represents the apex of this tradition insofar as it has been passed down to us visually.⁴⁰

I conflate these potentially distinct categories of the “elite adversary” and the “elite animal” in order to highlight the correspondence between elite military victory against a prestige animal (lion) and the defeat of an Egyptian giant in 1 Chr 11:22–23.⁴¹

²² Benaiah son of Jehoiada was a man of valor and a worker of great deeds from Qabzeel. He struck down two (sons) of Ariel of Moab, he went down (יָרַד) into a pit and struck down a lion on a snowy day, ²³ and he struck down an Egyptian man, a giant man (אִישׁ מְדַד), five cubits tall (i.e., 2.3 meters, or 7.5 feet). In the hand of the Egyptian was a weaver’s beam; he went down (יָרַד) with a staff, and snatched the spear from the hand of the Egyptian and killed him with his own spear.

³⁷ These categories are helpfully emphasized by Gregory Mobley, *The Empty Men: The Heroic Tradition of Ancient Israel* (New York: Doubleday, 2005); idem, “The Wild Man in the Bible and the Ancient Near East,” *JBL* 116 (1997): 217–33. See also Jacob L. Wright, “Making a Name for Oneself: Martial Valor, Heroic Death, and Procreation in the Hebrew Bible,” *JSOT* 26 (2011): 131–61, on the question of “name making” and exotic threats.

³⁸ Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages*, 19–20.

³⁹ See the stimulating discussion, with bibliography, on the anthropology of the giant in Stephens, *Giants in Those Days*, 58–138.

⁴⁰ Baruch Halpern, *David’s Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 114–21, has collected many references to royal animal breeding and hunting. On the Assyrian lion hunt, see Michael B. Dick, “The Neo-Assyrian Royal Lion Hunt and Yahweh’s Answer to Job,” *JBL* 125 (2006): 243–70; Othmar Keel, *Jahwes Entgegnung an Ijob. Eine Deutung von Ijob 38–41 vor dem Hintergrund der zeitgenössischen Bildkunst* (FRLANT 121; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), 61–66, 76–81, and many of the plates in Richard David Barnett, *Sculptures from the North Palace of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh (668–627 B. C.)* (London: British Museum Publications, 1976).

⁴¹ See Christophe Lemardelé, “Asiatic Lions versus Warriors: Archaic Motifs in Biblical Texts,” *SemClass* 3 (2010): 223–25; Doak, *Last of the Rephaim*, 114–15; and commentary in Sara Japhet, *I & II Chronicles* (London: SCM, 1993), 247–48; Ralph W. Klein, *I Chronicles* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 305–6.

The focus on the Egyptian's height and the reference to the "weaver's beam" (compare with the giant's "spear like a weaver's beam" in 1 Sam 17:7; 2 Sam 21:19; 1 Chr 20:5) mark this adversary as a giant, and his Egyptian status further makes him an iconic enemy of Israel. The thematic parallel between the killing of the lion and the giant is even marked verbally by the use of ירד ("descend, go down") to describe the approach to both lion in the pit and the giant, even though it is somewhat awkward for the narrator to say that Benaiah "went down" to the giant.

In the parallel passage of David's mighty men in 2 Sam 23:20–23, the adversary is only an Egyptian "of notable appearance" (מראה). This passage in 1 Chr 11:22–23 is actually one of two instances where the Chronicler transforms a description of a "man" (איש) from a non-giant to a giant – in the account of battle against a six-fingered man in 2 Sam 21:20, the six-fingered man is an איש מדין ("man of strife, a mean or contentious individual"; the result is the same if we read איש מדון), whereas in the parallel passage of 2 Chr 20:6 he is a "giant man" (איש מדה). It is quite possible that the Chronicler did not make a copying error here or work from a *Vorlage* different from the Samuel text, but rather in both cases intentionally sought to ensure both the six-fingered man and the Egyptian were read as giants, further magnifying the valor of the Israelite hero in his struggle against an enhanced enemy.

4. The giant as unruly or overgrown vegetation

Joshua 17:14–18 contains a suggestive reference that draws the confrontation with the giant into a floral narrative of clearing out unruly vegetation in the land for Israelite habitation. Responding to a complaint about lack of inherited space from the sons of Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh), Joshua recommends that they go to "forest and cut out (√ ברא) for yourselves there (a spot) in the land of the Perizzites and the Rephaim – if the hill country of Ephraim is (too) narrow for you ... although it is forested (i.e., the hill country), you will clear it (√ ברא), and even its furthest borders will be yours, for you will dispossess the Canaanites – even though they have chariots of iron, even though they are strong" (vv. 15, 18). The area in question here had apparently already been cleared of inhabitants in Num 21:35, as Moses had defeated Og of Bashan, "the last of the Rephaim" (Deut 3:11; cf. Josh 12:4; 13:12). Whatever the case, this forest (יער) represents the margin of habitable society; it is land uncultivated for crops and for settled, peaceful society (Isa 29:17; 32:15) – to be sure, the forest is a place of banditry (1 Sam 22:1–5) and natural threat (2 Sam 18:8; Isa 56:9; Hos 2:12).⁴² Notably, in Josh 11:21 the eradication of the Anaqim is described with the verb כרת ("cut

⁴² See Brian R. Doak, "Some Worthless and Reckless Fellows': Landlessness and Parasocial Leadership in Judges," *JHS* 11 (2011): 1–29 (24–26); Michael B. Rowton, "The Topological

down, cut off”), a term used for many kinds of violence but specifically describing acts of plant cutting in Deut 19:5, Isa 44:14, and 1 Kgs 5:20 (Eng. v. 6), among other examples.

Clearing out forests and cutting down trees are related to cutting down giants, as both forest and giant represent that which is unruly and overgrown as opposed to what needs to be cultivated for law and human flourishing.⁴³ Dominance over nature includes overcoming wild forestland as well as the creatures who live there; recall the fateful journey of Gilgamesh and Enkidu in Tablet V of the *Gilgamesh Epic*, where the quest to harvest tall cedar trees coincides with the fight against the monstrous cedar tree forest guardian, Humbaba.⁴⁴ The overgrown enemies in the land of Canaan during the wilderness and conquests periods reflect the overgrown plants there as well; just before the panicked account of the Anaqim in Num 13:33, verse 23 describes abnormally huge grape clusters, requiring two adult carriers, and Deut 8:7–9 similarly characterizes the promised land as an eruption of natural phenomena (water, plant life, and minerals).⁴⁵ This connection between overgrown creatures and tall/wild plants finds significant expression in the Egyptian “Craft of the Scribe” text (Papyrus Anastasi I), where the land of Canaan is characterized as

overgrown with junipers and *alluna* [Semitic *ʾln*, oak] and cedars (that) have reached the sky, where lions are more numerous than leopards and bears, and surrounded with Shasu on every side ... The face of the pass is dangerous with Shasu, hidden under the bushes. Some of them are four or five cubits, nose to foot, with wild faces. Their thoughts are not pretty, they do not listen to cajoling, and you are alone ...⁴⁶

Plant height metaphors abound in the Hebrew Bible as representatives of all that is opposed to God.⁴⁷ Isaiah 2 uses multiple images of trees – cedars of Lebanon and oaks of Bashan – that grow so tall as to rival God’s own height, represented by Mount Zion. Only Zion can boast in its “beautiful elevation” (Ps 48:3 [Eng. v. 2]), while other mountains look on in envy (Ps 68:16–17 [Eng. vv. 15–16]). In Ezekiel 17 and 19, tall trees and vine stems that grow out of control must

Factor in the ‘apiru Problem,” *AsSt* 16 (1965), 375–87 (376), as well as Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages*, 25, on the relationship of the giant to that which is “uncultivated.”

⁴³ This motif also appears in classical Greek literature, as the term *hybris* can describe unruly plant life, as well as gluttonous animals or creatures out of control in some other way; see Ann Michelini, “Hybris and Plants,” *HSCP* 82 (1978): 35–44; Gregory Nagy, “Theognis and Megara: A Poet’s Vision of his City,” in *Theognis of Megara: Poetry and the Polis*, ed. Thomas J. Figueria and Gregory Nagy (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1985), 22–81.

⁴⁴ George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, 1:144–47, for comments on Humbaba and pp. 1:602–15 for an edition of the text from Tablet V.

⁴⁵ Brian R. Doak, *Consider Leviathan: Narratives of Nature and the Self in Job* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 80–82, 140–41.

⁴⁶ James P. Allen (trans.), “The Craft of the Scribe,” in *Archival Documents from the Biblical World*. Vol. 3 of *The Context of Scripture*, ed. William W. Hallo (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 9–14 (especially p. 12 [18.7] and p. 13 [23.7]).

⁴⁷ See Doak, *Consider Leviathan*, 140–41; idem, *Last of the Rephaim*, 120–23, 144.

be brought down and tossed to the ground in YHWH's fury. The connection in these passages between rival political programs and the plot of foreign kings against Israel follows a spatial pattern similar to that of the "arrogant ascent to heaven" plotline, where the upward ambition of Babylonian monarchs leads to a great fall (e.g., Isa 14:12–20; Ezekiel 28; Dan 4:10–12; compare with Gen 11:1–9). Ezekiel portrays the Assyrian empire as a giant tree in Ezek 31:3–14, unequaled in height yet overly proud with its tall status, and Isaiah satirizes the boasts of the Assyrian king Sennacherib in Isa 37:24, as he claimed to have ascended the highest mountains and cut down the tallest trees. Lofty trees will fall down low, forests will be abolished, cedars of Lebanon will be ruined, and oaks of Bashan cut down – all by YHWH, and no one else (Isa 10:33–34; Zech 11:2).

5. *The giant as the defeated past*

Already within the Hebrew Bible, we find that Israel is particularly self-conscious about its status as "unique" within the historical and social context of the Iron Age.⁴⁸ As such, the Bible's descriptions of early Israel in particular forge an identity against every kind of national or regional past, and define Israel primarily in terms of the Abrahamic covenant and the concomitant ancestral lineage. True, Israel does come to occupy the boundaries of territory at some point (at least in the biblical memory of the United Monarchy), but the claim to that land is not presented as primordial occupation, or through genealogical appeal to an autochthonous population in the land. Certainly the Israelites could have claimed ancestry from those they casted as the native population (of Canaanites, Jebusites, Perizzites, and so on), but it is not even the case that all biblical authors saw these groups as stable occupants. In Deut 2:9–23, for example, the author gives us a historical précis of dispossession: the Moabites drove out the Emim, Esau's descendants drove out the Horites, the Ammonites drove out the Rephaim ("Zamzummim"), and the Caphtorim (roughly equivalent to the Philistines) drove out the Avvim (see also Amos 9:7). Israel does what others have done.

One may compare Israel's imagination of the passing of the "age of giants" in the conquest – notwithstanding David's later encounter with Goliath and David's "mighty men" in conflict with other giants – with the archaic Greek rumination on the end of the "heroic age" insofar as both literatures imagine the collapse of the great Late Bronze Age civilizations as a climactic battle. For Homer and congeners, this is the Trojan War, perhaps symbolic of a series of military engagements in the thirteenth–eleventh centuries BCE but not reflec-

⁴⁸ Peter Machinist, "The Question of Distinctiveness in Ancient Israel," in *Essential Papers on Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. Frederick E. Greenspahn (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 420–42.

tive of the complex series of demographic shifts that changed mainland Greece during the period.⁴⁹ Even though there are Greek traditions that describe the end of this Heroic Age with divine judgment upon the heroes, such as early interpretive traditions for the *Iliad*,⁵⁰ classical Greek elites would still claim lineage through these heroes; notwithstanding the interpretation of Zeus' *boulē* ("plan") at the opening of the *Iliad* as a plan to rid the polluted earth of overly-large heroes, the faults of Achilles and others do not match the scathing moral judgments the Bible casts upon the pre-Israelite population of the land. The Greek *Gigantomachy* and *Titanomachy* – independent stories but conflated already in the fifth century BCE⁵¹ – clearly embody the "new good versus bad old" dynamic in the mythic past, even as the Greek obsession with visual depictions of the gigantomachy in sixth century temple art and architecture (most prominently at the Siphnian treasury building at Delphi) must represent a deliberate attempt to politicize the gigantomachy for a contemporary context.⁵² From the West Semitic world, the Ugaritic Rapiuma, who for Ugaritic elites represented continuity and identification with the past, whereas the biblical Rephaim only indicate dis-identification.⁵³

In their role as marking the pre-Israelite past, giants act as a historiographic technique, marking the degradation and monstrosity of the former world. Giants stand not only at geographical boundaries but also at political and historical boundaries. There remain difficult questions about when any of the individual giant traditions were written, as well as questions about the nature of the conflation of various titles for giants living in the land such as Nephilim, Anaqim, Rephaim, Gibborim, Emim, Zamzummim, and so on. All such groups are of

⁴⁹ See Ian Morris, "The Collapse and Regeneration of Complex Societies in Greece, 1500–500 BC," in *After Collapse: The Regeneration of Complex Societies*, ed. G. M. Schwartz and J. J. Nichols (Tucson: The University of Arizona, 2006), 72–84; Margalit Finkelberg, *Greeks and Pre-Greeks: Aegean Prehistory and Greek Heroic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 167–68.

⁵⁰ See Schol. [D] *Il.* 1.5 in Martin L. West, *Greek Epic Fragments* (LCL 497; Cambridge: Harvard, 2003), and discussion in Gregory Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry*, rev. ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1999), 219–20; B. A. Heiden, *Homer's Cosmic Fabrication: Choice and Design in the Iliad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Margalit Finkelberg, "The End of the Heroic Age in Homer, Hesiod and the Cycle," *OP* 3 (2004): 11–24 (12–15); Doak, *Last of the Rephaim*, 123–28.

⁵¹ Malcolm Davies, *The Epic Cycle* (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1989), 14.

⁵² On the Gigantomachy iconography and the debated meaning of the images for sixth century BCE audiences, see the following: Mary B. Moore, "The Central Group in the Gigantomachy of the Old Athena Temple on the Acropolis," *AJA* 99 (1995): 633–39; idem, "Lydos and the Gigantomachy," *AJA* 83 (1979): 79–99; Richard T. Neer, "Framing the Gift: The Politics of the Siphnian Treasury at Delphi," *ClAnt* 20 (2001): 273–336; Livingston V. Watrous, "The Sculptural Program of the Siphnian Treasury at Delphi," *AJA* 86 (1982): 159–72; Robin Osborne, *Archaic and Classical Greek Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 122–24.

⁵³ Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 69, uses this language of "cultural identification" and "disidentification" in this same way; see also idem, *Poetic Heroes*, 12, 76, 320.

great size, and all oppose Israel in some way. Rather than imagining this conflation as a late, synthetic process,⁵⁴ it is better to consider the rumination on giants as a kind of ancient antiquarianism, perhaps generally comparable to the type found in Mesopotamian and Greece in the eighth–sixth centuries BCE,⁵⁵ which for the author of Deuteronomy at least includes philological footnotes and a type of primitive ethnography of regional occupation (Deut 2:9–23) as well as a “museum” notice proving the existence of giant artifacts (3:11).

III. A Transition to the Early Jewish Giant

Having reviewed the biblical giant texts, how might we characterize the transition to the appearance of the giant in third–first century BCE? What historical, social, and religious developments prior to this context – but after the composition of the biblical materials themselves – can account for the appearance of giant traditions in *1 Enoch* (chs. 1–36, 85–90, 106–7), at Qumran in various forms (*Book of Giants* and other fragments), and in other texts from this early Jewish interpretive matrix (e.g., Ben Sira, *Wisdom of Solomon*, *Jubilees*)? Obviously part of this question is predicated upon the dating of the biblical materials in question, yet whatever the gap we must find a way to account for the strikingly uniform assumption in these texts that the Bible could be read in such a way as to support a detailed account of giants, angels, and demons (most prominently from Gen 6:1–4, but also elsewhere).⁵⁶ Though a robust account of this development cannot be given here, some remarks are in order.

First, on a most basic – but nonetheless important – level, the early Jewish giant traditions participate in the rise of midrashic and exegetical tendencies that would come to characterize the entire “rewritten Bible” genre and texts with apocalyptic elements. In a programmatic essay on the topic, Loren Stuckenbruck has rightly argued that the preoccupation with a standard demonic/gigantic interpretation of Gen 6:1–4 among early Jewish interpreters was not only a rou-

⁵⁴ See Stuckenbruck, “The Origins of Evil,” 87–118, esp. 92, for comments on the problem of conflation.

⁵⁵ For the ancient Near East, see Paul-Alain Beaulieu, “Antiquarianism and the Concern for the Past in the Neo-Babylonian Period,” *BCSMS* 28 (1994): 37–42; Irene Winter, “Babylonian Archaeologists of The(ir) Mesopotamian Past,” in eadem, *On Art in the Ancient Near East*, 2 vols. (CHANE 34; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 2:461–80; Piotr Michalowski, “The Doors of the Past,” in *Festschrift for Hayim and Miriam Tadmor*, ed. Amnon Ben-Tor, Israel Ephal, and Peter Machinist (Erls 27; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2003), 136–52; E. Klengel-Brandt, “Gab es ein Museum in der Hauptburg Nebukadnezars II. in Babylon?” *FB* 28 (1990): 41–46. For a parallel development in Egypt (mid-eighth to late-sixth centuries BCE), see Peter Der Manuelian, *Living in the Past: Studies in Archaism of the Egyptian Twenty-Sixth Dynasty* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1994).

⁵⁶ For the most comprehensive and focused review of this question, see Stuckenbruck, “The Origins of Evil.”

tine social response based on oppression in the Hellenistic period – more than that, these particular interpretations saw important theological stakes at risk and sought to address them with their interpretations.⁵⁷ For example, a careful delineation between giants as completely destroyed beings or as continually existing spirits could help explain ongoing spiritual problems of possession or wickedness in various situations, and a dissociation of giants from early biblical heroes (such as Enoch, Noah, and Abraham) could help show that the divine guidance these heroes received had nothing to do with the corrupt arts of magic or “questionable areas of learning” attributed to the teaching of wicked angelic figures.⁵⁸ Moreover, the giants in these texts – especially at Qumran – seem to encode a broadly applicable political theology, as some of these interpretive communities apparently awaited a climactic moment when they would fight in a spiritual-physical battle against the Roman empire on par with an “end times” confrontation with giants-as-demons. Stories of giants were certainly entertaining enough in their own right without these multiple symbolic valences, but one can hardly ignore the political or spiritual currency giants must have held for the groups who curated these traditions.

The issue of how, why, and when giants become prominent in the early Jewish literature is enormously complex and involves guesses based on poorly understood fragments, though new efforts to analyze these materials – especially in the Qumran *Book of Giants* stream – promises to reveal a diverse yet coherent picture of meditation on the giant in early Judaism. Giants are mysterious and important enough in the Hebrew Bible to provoke speculation, and ancient interpreters were no doubt faced with the same anthropological and theological problems as medieval exegetes regarding the giant’s place in the created world, the divine salvific scheme, and the newly complex world of angels and demons in which giants were already intertwined. Because giants are so strange, so notable, they draw attention to themselves and thus highlight any problems of contradiction or chronology they could evoke. The most obvious of these problems involved the question of how the giants could have survived the flood – recall the comment above about how the descendants of Nephilim could have appeared in Num 13:33 – and the answers ranged from esoteric discussions of giants as spirits (such as in the watchers tradition) all the way to having the giant Og, who had already existed prior to the flood, ride Noah’s ark, survive the cataclysm, fight with Abram in Genesis 14, and then encounter the Israelites in the wilderness as recorded in Numbers 21 (see *Tg. Ps.-J. Gen 14:13*).

The Septuagint, notable for introducing Greek mythological nomenclature such as γίγας and τῆτιν into the biblical storyline, demonstrates how sleights of

⁵⁷ Stuckenbruck, *ibid.*, 89.

⁵⁸ Stuckenbruck, “The ‘Angels’ and ‘Giants’ of Genesis 6:1–4,” 362–63, 373–77.

translation could also achieve interpretive solutions.⁵⁹ In a particularly subtle example, the Greek translators transliterated the Hebrew רפאים as Ραφαῖν or Ραφαῖμ in many passages (Gen 15:20; Deut 2:11, 20, 3:11, 13; Josh 15:8; 2 Sam 23:13), while using γίγας (Gen 14:5; Josh 12:4, 13:12; 1 Chr 11:15) or τῖτάν in others (2 Sam 5:18, 22). In Josh 12:4 and 13:12, Og is explicitly identified as one of the רפאים in Hebrew, yet here there was no problem calling the רפאים “giants” (γίγαντες) since Og was not actually described as the *very last* of the Rephaim (*pace* some modern translations, such as the NRSV, for Josh 13:12). However, at Deut 3:11, the Septuagint ran into a potential problem, since here and only here Og is clearly specified as the last of his generation in Hebrew: “Now only (רק) Og, king of Bashan, was left over from the remnant of the Rephaim ...” Here the translator declined to call Og’s people γίγαντες, since he was aware that many giants remained to be killed later in the narrative (by David and his men in Samuel and Chronicles). Even within the Hebrew Bible problems like this seem to be a concern. Joshua 11:22b provides an “escape” clause for the Anaqim – who should have been wiped out completely by Joshua as clearly described in Josh 11:21–22a – that allows them to live along the Philistine coast, and Gen 6:4 has the וגם אחרֵי כֵן clause, providing some gesture toward logical coherence given the fact that Nephilim and other giants are mentioned later in the Torah and elsewhere.

The motifs of military might and overt political power emphasized in, say, the Deuteronomistic History or even the Torah recede into the background during the post-exilic period. The *gibbōr* is no longer to be trusted, and the “giant” accordingly exists in other forms – for example, as a possessing spirit or threatening ghost. Warnings against reliance on the power needed to defeat a giant in the style of Moses, Caleb, Joshua, or David come in many texts (e.g., Zech 4:6; Pss 33:16; 52:3; Prov 21:22; Ecc 9:11; cf. 3 Macc 2:4 and Bar 3:26–28). Proverbs 16:32 puts the matter directly: “Better is one who is slow to anger than a *gibbōr*, and one who has control of his temper than one who captures a city.” A midrash for Isa 3:2 identifies the גברים and איש מלחמה as “masters of the tradition” and “the scholar skilled in conducting himself ‘in the war of Torah,’” respectively.⁶⁰ The “spiritualizing” of the giants in *1 Enoch* 15 (with echoes in the Qumran texts) disembodies the wicked opposition just as concepts of kingship, valor, and war lived on outside of the way these formal institutions were imagined to have existed in the Davidic era. The Enochic insistence on the shade-like existence of the giants had indeed already found expression in Ezekiel 32, where the “fallen” *gibbōrīm* of the ancient world reside in Sheol, defeated and powerless just like

⁵⁹ See Doak, *Last of the Rephaim*, 100. Note also the article by Michael Tuval in the present volume.

⁶⁰ As cited in Richard G. Marks, “Dangerous Hero: Rabbinic Attitudes Toward Legendary Warriors,” *HUCA* 54 (1983): 181–94 (191).

the Egyptian Pharaoh whom Ezekiel says will join their ranks.⁶¹ Thus, the spirit giants of Enoch stand in continuity with Ezekiel's presentation centuries earlier.⁶²

IV. Conclusion

One could think of the career of the “biblical” giant as something of a one-thousand year arc, from David's victory over Goliath through the surge of interpretive efforts at Qumran and elsewhere at the beginning of the common era. Giants have had a life in Jewish and Christian traditions beyond this arc, and the stereotyped notion of a thousand-year period from David through Qumran and the intertestamental literature is only a historical gimmick. Yet, given the giant themes in the Hebrew Bible reviewed here, it is appropriate to think of the early Jewish giant as truly a “biblical” giant. While Stuckenbruck has reason to say that we cannot simply assume that post-biblical texts were only “adapting a tradition inherent to the biblical tradition,” we must still insist that the Hebrew Bible provides a far richer consideration of the figure of the giant than most have acknowledged.⁶³ The giant is nothing if not primordial, and nothing if not resilient – we may expect that their spirits will haunt us for another thousand years.

⁶¹ Doak, “Ezekiel's Topography.”

⁶² Stuckenbruck, *The Book of Giants*, 38–40.

⁶³ Stuckenbruck, “The Origins of Evil,” 88.