Bodies and Heroes

IN THIS BOOK I make three overarching arguments about what I am calling the "heroic body" in ancient Israel, particularly as it is represented in the Hebrew Bible but also including relevant iconography and with comparative gestures toward the Bible's larger Mesopotamian context to the east and also the Greek Mediterranean context to the west:

(1) Biblical authors paid significant attention to the bodies of their heroes (successful warriors in battle, founding figures, and kings), and saw the heroic body as a primal source of meaning. Though differences in genre skew any attempt at a rigorous numerical content analysis, roughly it is fair to say that the Bible focuses on bodies more than any other comparable ancient Near Eastern corpus and joins the Homeric *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as the most robust heroic bodily text from the ancient world.

(2) Ancient Israelite authors—and thus, we must presume, their earliest audiences—participated in what we might call a kind of "body determinism" or physiognomy. That is to say, they saw bodily features as communicating, before and beyond a character's actions or choices, a coded message about that character's story and ultimate fate. In other words, a character's fate can be read through his or her body.

(3) The heroic bodies in the Hebrew Bible can be read on multiple levels, but, considered as individual stories within a more local context or considered together as a group, they tell a story—narrating Israel's composition as a corporate and national body, with all of the ambiguity and problems bound up with that process, then the flourishing of that body in royal exemplars, and then the dissolution of that body. This body-story runs parallel to the national script told by the

mainstream narrative of the Bible about the rise and fall of Israel as a nation, making the body and the nation co-leading actors in the drama of the Bible.

Describe the Body

One immediate obstacle facing this project involves the confusing reticence of ancient authors to describe the physical bodies of characters in anything like the detail contemporary readers might expect or desire. Then again, it is not always the case that modern writing—especially good writing—features exacting bodily descriptions. Indeed, many masterful pieces of fiction describe their characters' physicality in no overt way whatsoever, and many ancient works do refer to characters' bodies. A parade example of physical-descriptive reticence from the ancient world in the Christian Bible is Jesus of Nazareth: the most famous human in history and the one most frequently depicted artistically from the medieval period through today received not one shred of narrative physical description in any of the Gospels (and certainly no contemporary visual renderings), this despite the fact that contemporary ancient biographies (e.g., the Roman "Lives" genre, or Greek "Bioi") did utilize physical character descriptions in what most contemporary readers would consider "normal" ways.[1]

The most prominent literary products of the archaic Greek word, the Homeric *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, utilized stock bodily images repeated at various points. Heroes are "shining," "powerful," and "huge"; women are "white-armed," "lovely haired," and so on. These images are not stunningly detailed, but they are present. One ancient scholiast on the *Iliad* stated that Homer most frequently described characters through their facial expressions, perhaps indicating that he saw the face as the most important locus of physicality, though evidence for this in the text remains scant.[2] Still, heroes in the *Iliad* undergo vivid ordeals and transformations

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1. This genre of ancient "biography" became particularly important after Constantine in the fourth century CE (so Arnaldo Momigliano, *The Development of Greek Biography*, expanded edition [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993], 9); for an overview of the genre, see Koen De Temmerman and Kristoffel Demoen (eds.), *Writing Biography in Greece and Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016). On Jesus's physical appearance, see Joan E. Taylor, *What Did Jesus Look Like?* (London: T & T Clark, 2018).

2. René Nünlist, *The Ancient Critic at Work: Terms and Concepts of Literary Criticism in Greek Scholia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 254.

that highlight the body. Spears cut open the heroic bodies, spewing livers and entrails out on the ground. We do not need to have a feature-by-feature description of Hector's face or arms or hair color to grasp the extreme importance of his body as the epic closes. Mirroring and yet going beyond other struggles for the bodies of the dead in the *Iliad*, Achilles's refusal to give up Hector's body, followed by the agreement reached between Achilles and Priam in *Iliad* 24, serves as the final point of meditation on the status of the heroic enterprise and the role of the body in that enterprise. The results of this meditation may be ambiguous for the reader—is Homer ultimately endorsing the glory of war, or subverting it, or complicating it? What is the relationship between the individual heroic body and the polis? Whatever the case, the heroic body is the crucial point of focus.

In Mesopotamia, the very popular *Gilgamesh Epic*, at least as represented in the standard version (from the seventh century BCE), describes the hero's body before any of the main narrative action begins in Tablet 1 (portions of which are broken in the extant tablets). In one sense, we see the narrator going to great pains to emphasize certain things, but none of these bodily descriptions would help us know anything about what Gilgamesh was supposed to "actually" look like:[3]

> *Surpassing all other kings, hero endowed with a superb physique . . . (I.29)*
>
> *Gilgameš so tall, perfect and terrible . . . (I.37)*
>
> *The goddess Bēlet-ilī drew the shape of his body, the god Nudimmud brought his form to perfection . . . (I.49–50)*
>
> *A triple cubit was his foot, half a rod his leg. Six cubits was his stride . . . cubits the . . . of his . . . His cheeks were bearded like those of . . . , the locks of his hair growing thickly . . . As he grew up he was perfect in his beauty, by human standards he was very handsome . . . (I.56–62)*

3. Translation from Andrew George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), I, 539–43. After the initial introduction, Gilgamesh is described as "perfect in strength" (I.211, 218). I have removed brackets from the translations here where George reconstructed the text.

Later, when the fellow hero Enkidu arrives on the scene, the narrator describes him enough to convey the basics of his "wild man" appearance and physical strength:[4]

> *All his body is matted with hair, he is adorned with tresses like a woman: the locks of his hair grow as thickly as Nissaba's . . . (I.105–7)*
>
> *Mightiest in the land, he possesses strength, his strength is as mighty as a lump of rock from the sky (I.124–25)*

After his sexual learning experience with the woman Šamḫat, Enkidu's body changes:[5]

> *Enkidu had defiled his body so pure, his legs stood still, though his herd was on the move. Enkidu was diminished, his running was not as before, but he had reason, he was wide of understanding. (I.199–202)*
>
> *You are handsome, Enkidu, you are just like a god . . . (I.207)*

One simple reason for this descriptive lacuna in ancient literature involves the economy of writing: ancient authors are not known to have produced "art for art's sake," or to have given the reader lavish and ornate physical descriptions of anything beyond what is required to advance the plot or provide essential information.[6] In the case of Gilgamesh and Enkidu, to know of Gilgamesh's beauty and strength and size is to know of his status as exemplary hero and king; to know that Enkidu was a wild man but was transformed into the shining equal of Gilgamesh is to know enough to see their fight, reconciliation, and journey as meaningful. The bodies have to work together for the characters to work together.

Still, merely acknowledging the seemingly utilitarian feature of ancient character description does not answer *why* ancient authors wrote like this. Material considerations could play a role. Writing instruments and skilled

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4. George, *Gilgamesh Epic*, I, 545.

5. George, *Gilgamesh Epic*, I, 551.

6. Jeremy Schipper, "Plotting Bodies in Biblical Narrative," in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Narrative*, ed. Danna Nolan Fewell (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 389–97, here 390–95, and "Body; II. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament," in *The Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, vol. 4, ed. Hans-Josef Klauck et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 269–74.

scribes were relatively rare and expensive. In the cuneiform literatures broadly we tend not to find lengthy digressions into the details of landscape, psychological motivation, history, and so on (though at moments such digressions were certainly possible), and even in texts written in the more user-friendly script systems (i.e., the Canaanite-type alphabets) only the Hebrew Bible has anything resembling "gratuitous" detail for characters or situations, and even here ornate descriptions are not exactly the rule. Moreover, we should not mistake our contemporary image obsession as a transhistorical principle. Mirrors were not common before the seventeenth or eighteenth century of the Common Era, and their emergence ushered in a host of psychological and personal consequences;[7] mobile phones with cameras pointing not only outward toward beautiful beach scenes or trendy breakfast plates but backward, toward our own faces, and the whole host of bodies on the internet and in print media have, to say the least, made one's appearance a more ubiquitous thing in recent times.

Having said all of this, sparse description can be an artistic technique, even in ancient literature. Taking up a literary line of thought on the Bible's often enigmatic character descriptions, Adele Berlin discusses the shadowy physicality of its protagonists in terms of the artistic technique of suggestion: through only *hints* at a situation, the narrator invites the audience into a world of imaginative projection.[8] "Minimal representation can give maximum illusion," and descriptions of "one outstanding trait" can be "that magic line of suggestion around which the reader fills in the picture."[9] This type of suggestion comports with Erich Auerbach's famous opening essay in *Mimesis*; he saw the biblical style as "fraught with background," leaving readers to wonder what bodies look like, what voices sound like, what characters were doing before they appear on the scenes in which they appear, and all manner of other haunted questions.[10] Although

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7. Sabine Melchior-Bonnet, *The Mirror: A History*, trans. K. H. Jewett (New York: Routledge, 2002).

8. Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 137–39; she elsewhere notes (*Poetics*, 34) that what we lack in the Hebrew Bible is not so much any physical description of characters but rather detailed elaborations on the physical appearance of human beings—"we know that Bathsheba was beautiful but we have no idea what she looked like."

9. Berlin, *Poetics*, 137.

10. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Thought*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003; first published in 1946 by Francke), "Odysseus's Scar," 3–23.

we are currently at a loss to say whether this type of style was intentionally cultivated by Iron Age storytellers, we do see it frequently enough to suspect that it was at least an implied standard for communicating in the narrative genre broadly.

When considering the heroic body in the Hebrew Bible, we must pay attention not only to the obvious, explicit references to body parts but also to the status of the heroic body as a whole and the meaning of the body in a variety of circumstances. Thus, we may consider the textual descriptions of bodies in this study on three horizons:

(1) The way bodies were described, whether general (calling a character "beautiful") or more specific (portraying a particular body part, or even mentioning it).
(2) Descriptions of bodies in a more holistic manner, or the fate of bodies as central elements in a narrative (e.g., a body is tossed in a ravine; a body is killed in a gruesome manner; an individual is bodily humiliated, taken captive, or retrieved).
(3) A broader societal meaning, involving the "display and care" of the body, ideas about the way it must look or where it must go, sexuality and fertility, ritual, and many other factors encompassing the larger, historically situated, social scene in which bodies are considered.[11]

To give an example I take up in detail later in this book, the first horizon appears in the description of Saul as a head taller than his contemporaries, while the second appears in the narrative of Saul's dead remains being transferred between various locales; the third involves the social politics of David's attempt to manage Saul's corpse and the community's larger expectations about who should be king, where the king should be or not be, and so on. The reference to height is an explicit cue, asking readers to fixate on this aspect of Saul's body as a site of meaning—an indication of character, as foreshadowing, as irony, satire, and so on. The transfer of Saul's bones operates on another level but involves the literal physicality of the king, without which the struggle—first between Israel and Philistia, then between factions of Israelites—cannot occur and its symbolic resonances fall flat. And running through all considerations of the body is a

11. I take a cue here from Mark Hamilton, *The Body Royal: The Social Poetics of Kingship in Ancient Israel* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 3.

larger level of social assumptions about bodies, exploding outward to the broadest construction of all meaning about a "person" or "character."

The body is therefore real and present in all cases, but on different levels. While considering these varying horizons of reference, I have deliberately not allowed the focus to slip into either overly vague or atomistic territory—for example, considering every reference to a character or that character's traits on any level as tantamount to a de facto focus on the "body," or dwelling on every minute reference to a "hand" or "eye" as if it bears massive weight. In all cases, interpreters considering the body must demonstrate the exact relevance of the body as a major factor in the text.

Religion and the Body: A Brief Genealogy

To understand why the current focus on the body has become fruitful and necessary within the fields of religion, history, and literary studies broadly, I want to trace something of the genealogy of body theorizing. A relentless focus on the body, if improperly justified, may come off as a myopic obsession with one category of existence or expression as opposed to so many others that could receive attention. Why focus on the body as opposed to ideas, or imagination, or descriptions of emotion, or any of the other myriad aspects of textual characterization or existence? Does the body become an unhelpfully all-encompassing term (are "emotions" not part of the "body"? What about *any* action or thought or description?), or awfully reductive, as if we must now view all subjects only through the lens of clashing material objects, endlessly physical? Though it is impractical to trace a comprehensive genealogy of the conversation about the body as a site of religious meaning, a rehearsal of the contours of body-talk, culminating, for our purposes here, in the intersection of the body, religion, and the hero, will begin to explain many crucial choices of interpretation in the present study. I do not propose a novel reading of body theory here; rather, I seek an intellectual and methodological ground for the investigations at the heart of this book.

It has become almost perfunctory in such reviews to begin with the grand original sin against the body in the modern period: In René Descartes's famous seventeenth-century meditation, the meditator severs the body—indeed severs all senses and physical things—from the ability to think (*cogito*).[12] In the Cartesian mode, the body is a liar, or the body

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12. René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy, with Selections from the Objections and*

may believe the lies of some grand demonic deceiver. The results of this line of thinking in Western philosophy and for the study of religion are well known and resulted in manifold efforts to recover the corporeality of human action. In the twentieth century, seminal thinkers for the sociology of religion such as Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss opened up new vistas for reflection on the role of the body, and a parade of the century's most prominent thinkers in fields ranging from sociology to philosophy, linguistics, literary theory, religious studies, neuroscience, visual arts, and more followed in their wake—for example, Michel Foucault, Mary Douglas, Pierre Bourdieu, George Lakoff, and Catherine Bell, to name a few.

In the opening pages of his groundbreaking *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (1912), Durkheim famously posited that religions "are grounded in and express the real."[13] What is "real"? For Durkheim, *society* is real, as expressed in his pithy summary of the entire book: "religion is an eminently social thing."[14] At the heart of religion's social things lie the collective rituals of the group. The "totemic emblem," around which the group rallies, is "the visible body of the god,"[15] and the "collective effervescence" of the group grows heated, frantic, even "outlandish." Within this context "the religious idea seems to have been born."[16] Human bodily action (cries, words, dancing, bowing) directed toward "the same object" produces the social unity of religion's substance.[17] In the review of the Australian tribes at the center of his ethnographic work, Durkheim finds the soul-body duality a woefully incomplete expression of either the "soul" or the "body," as both elements assimilate into the other and depend upon the other.[18] For Durkheim, society itself would die if not specifically for the corporeality of the group.[19]

Replies, rev. ed., trans. and ed. J. Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996; originally published as *Meditationes de prima philosophia*; Paris: Michael Soly, 1641).

13. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. K. E. Fields (New York: Free Press, 1995; originally published as *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse: Le système totémique en Australie*; Paris: F. Alcan, 1912), 2.

14. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 9.

15. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 223.

16. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 220.

17. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 232.

18. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 245–47.

19. Philip A. Mellor and Christ Shilling, *Re-forming the Body: Religion, Community and Modernity* (London: SAGE, 1997), 1. Sociologists and religious studies theorists continue to

Nevertheless, Durkheim's focus on "belief" as the ultimate center of religion, with ritual (and thus the body) coming in second place,[20] left to others the task of elevating the body to its current place of importance among theorists. Durkheim's nephew and collaborator, Marcel Mauss, took up the body—particularly bodily gestures—in an essay often cited as one of the foundational documents in the sociology of the body, "Les techniques du corps" (1936).[21] Mauss began by noting the specific ways in which our bodies are taught to do so many things in particular and peculiar ways—to swim when we are children, to march in the infantry as soldiers, or to walk with our hands open or closed or in other marked gestures.[22] Mauss spoke of these gestures as part of the individual's *habitus* (a term that would be taken up much more famously by Pierre Bourdieu and defined as "the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations"),[23] which is to say, the individual's bodily habits as shaped by society, education, and a host of other factors.[24] Key words such as *prestige, mimicry, tradition,* and *authorization* describe the formation of the body, and the central naming of the body as the center of the discussion emphasized its importance:

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debate the extent to which the body played a vital role in Durkheim's work; on the recovery of Durkheim's emphasis on the body within sociology, see Mellor and Schilling, *Re-forming,* 1–4, as well as Kenneth Thompson, "Durkheim and Sacred Identity," in *On Durkheim's Elementary Forms of Religious Life,* ed. N. J. Allen, W. S. F. Pickering, and W. Watts Miller (London: Routledge, 2012), 92–104, esp. 99–101.

20. Ariel Wilkis characterizes Durkheim's views on the body as "paradoxical," since, on the one hand, the body was very important for Durkheim, "but only in a very precise sense," i.e., "as a metaphor," not at the center of his sociology. "Thinking the Body. Durkheim, Mauss, Bourdieu: The Agreements and Disagreements of a Tradition," in *Thinking the Body as a Basis, Provocation and Burden of Life: Studies in Intercultural and Historical Contexts,* ed. G. Melville and C. Ruta (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2015), 33–35.

21. Marcel Mauss, "Techniques of the Body," trans. B. Brewster; reprinted in Marcel Mauss, *Techniques, Technology, and Civilisation,* ed. N. Schlanger (New York: Durkheim Press/Berghahn Books, 2006), 77–96; originally published as "Les techniques du corps," *Journal de Psychologie* 32.3–4 (1936): 271–93. See one recent and concise review of the Durkheim–Mauss–Bourdieu trajectory in Wilkis, "Thinking the Body." On Mauss, see, e.g., Carrie Noland, *Agency and Embodiment: Performing Gestures/Producing Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 18–54 and Talal Asad, "Remarks on the Anthropology of the Body," in *Religion and the Body,* ed. Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 42–52, here 46–49.

22. Mauss, "Techniques," 78–80.

23. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice,* trans. R. Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 78.

24. Mauss, "Techniques," 80.

> In this case all that need be said is quite simply that we are dealing with techniques of the body. The body is man's first and most natural instrument. Or more accurately, not to speak of instruments, man's first and most natural technical object, and at the same time technical means, is his body.[25]

As such, the body is inextricably and arbitrarily bound up with one's place, with one's total position within society and its complex network of symbols on every level.[26] In Talal Asad's reading, Mauss's goal was not simply to imply that our physical gestures and meanings are culturally determined—a fact already well-recognized even in Mauss's time—but rather to focus on notions of *aptness* and *expert practice*.[27] Only by doing this will we understand how bodies within specific contexts function as primary, natural instruments, whose movements are learned and practiced, and not merely knowing that bodies do different things or respond in supposedly "autogenic" ways to primordial impulses.[28] To cite one more mid-twentieth century interpreter, Maurice Merleau-Ponty also notably argued in his major work *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) for the "primacy of perception" and claims that the body brings all "existence" into being itself, actualizing all that we are,[29] thus emphasizing, like Mauss, the body's ability to create and work.[30]

Very much has occurred between Durkheim, Mauss, and Merleau-Ponty in the early to mid-twentieth century and the current state of

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25. Mauss, "Techniques," 83.

26. See Wilkis, "Thinking the Body," 37, for this emphasis on Mauss's insistence on the arbitrary (i.e., social/relational, opposed to obligatory) nature of social phenomena.

27. Asad, "Remarks," 46–47.

28. Asad, "Remarks," 48.

29. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomonology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; New York: Humanities Press, 1962), e.g., 408–409: "We do not say that the notion of the world is inseparable from that of the subject, or that the subject thinks himself inseparable from the idea of his body and the idea of the world; for, if it were a matter of no more than a conceived relationship, it would *ipso facto* leave the absolute independence of the subject as thinker intact, and the subject would not be in a situation. If the subject *is* in a situation, even if he is no more than a possibility of situations, this is because he forces his ipseity [individual identity] into reality only by actually being a body, and entering the world through a body. . . . We are in the world, which means that things take shape."

30. On this point, see also Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 71.

scholarship employing "body theory" in some capacity. The anthropologist Mary Douglas, also working in the Durkheimian vein, saw the body as dually expressed—a "social body" and a "physical body"—and wrote persuasively about the way societies constrain the appearance, grooming, and ideals of the body.[31] The body is the most primary "natural symbol," and the society's values are acted out on the individual in this respect. At various points in the chapters that follow in this book, I seize upon Douglas's argument about the relationship between a "social body" and an individual, physical body: "The social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived."[32]

Even as late as 1990, however, the president of a learned society on religion was able to proclaim that "the human body probably seems like the most unlikely imaginable theme for a presidential address to this society."[33] The most recent few decades, however, have made the topic perhaps one of the *more likely* topics for such occasions.[34] Major figures adopted by the guild of religious studies scholars in addition to Mary Douglas, such as Pierre Bourdieu, Judith Butler, and Michel Foucault emphasized the body in creative and complex ways, forming bridges for body theorizing into many disciplines.[35] The renewed interest in ritual gave prominence to the

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31. Douglas's major explorations of the body as social symbol began in her *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, with a new preface by the author (New York: Routledge, 2002; originally published by Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), 117–40 for the "two bodies," and continued in *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*, with a new introduction (London: Routledge, 1996; originally published by Barrie & Rockliff, 1970), esp. 69–87.

32. Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, 69.

33. Meredith B. McGuire, "Religion and the Body: Rematerializing the Human Body in the Social Scientific Study of Religion," *JSSR* 29.3 (1990): 283.

34. See the review of figures and literature through around 1990 in Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 94–117. Important studies on the body over the past two decades are too voluminous to cite here in a meaningful way; examples of recent and readable entryways into the topic from a variety of disciplinary lenses might include Chris Shilling, *The Body and Social Theory*, 3rd ed. (London: SAGE, 2012); Avril Horner and Angela Keane (eds.), *Body Matters: Feminism, Textuality, Corporeality* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2000); Mark Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Sarah Coakley (ed.), *Religion and the Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000 [paperback]); David Cave and Rebecca Sachs Norris (eds.), *Religion and the Body: Modern Science and the Construction of Religious Meaning* (Leiden: Brill, 2012); Barbara Baert (ed.), *Fluid Flesh: The Body, Religion and the Visual Arts* (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2009).

35. Bourdieu, *Outline*, esp. 72–96; Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (London: Routledge, 1993); Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. A. Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1995; originally published in 1975

body, canonized in Catherine Bell's *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (1992) and a host of ongoing studies in the field,[36] and addressed the centrality of the body not for just reflecting one's ethereal "beliefs" about gods or reality but rather as bodily activity shaping and creating and redefining that reality. Bodies tell stories and create realities, and then encode the values visually; not merely a functional tool or a vacant display, bodies function as both tool and display.

How and for what purpose, exactly, has the body been adopted as a category for studying religion and text, both ancient and modern? Though there is no way to give an adequate review of the variety of approaches here, a few broad contours may be sketched out.[37] Most of all, the focus on the body became a visceral way to emphasize the "situatedness" of all projects. Bodies are *located* somewhere, and we are *taught* how to move and display our bodies for specific ends in particular situations. Charles Darwin had argued that bodily movements and facial expressions were genetic, not learned, but subsequent anthropological research demonstrated that they were in fact learned—and thus cultural and social and ideological in every

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by Editions Gallimard). For analysis of Bourdieu in this respect, see Bell, *Ritual Theory*, 78–80; lisahunter, Wayne Smith, and elke emerald (eds.), *Pierre Bourdieu and Physical Culture* (London: Routledge, 2014); on Butler, see Christopher Peterson, "The Return of the Body: Judith Butler's Dialectical Corporealism," *Discourse* 28.2–3 (2006): 153–77; María Celeste Bianciotti, "Cuerpo y género: apuntes para pensar prácticas eróticas de mujeres jóvenes. Aportes de Judith Butler y Pierre Bourdieu," *Revista Latinoamericana de Estudios sobre Cuerpos, Emociones y Sociedad* 6.3 (2011): 70–82; on Foucault, see Mark D. Jordan, *Convulsing Bodies: Religion and Resistance in Foucault* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014); Cressida J. Heyes, *Self-Transformations: Foucault, Ethics, and Normalized Bodies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Laura Hengehold, *The Body Problematic: Political Imagination in Kant and Foucault* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007). Ladelle McWhorter's short essay, "My Body, My Self: Foucault and Ecofeminism," *Philosophy Today* 49 (2005): 110–15, clearly lays out (with specific reference to Foucault) many of the key lines of critique against the Cartesian dualism I mentioned earlier.

36. See also Bell's introduction to ritual, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); for other studies on ritual and body, see, e.g., several essays in Coakley (ed.), *Religion and the Body*; Scott Kugle, *Sufis and Saints' Bodies: Mysticism, Corporeality, and Sacred Power in Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), esp. 1–42, for adoption of body theorizing for his material; for ancient Israel, see various references in Ithamar Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory in Ancient Israel* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), though Gruenwald does not offer any particular ritual theory of the body as such.

37. Bell, *Ritual Theory*, 94, has a partly overlapping list of reasons: "the rich tradition of anthropological studies of the body; the critique of traditional objectivisim and its 'mentalist' or 'mind-centered' notions of knowledge; and the impact of feminist and gender studies, which, in some circles, have inspired a new 'erotics' of interpretive practice."

way.[38] This insight overlaps with the postmodern project of dismantling "natural" dualisms of all kinds in gender studies (female/male), ecological hermeneutics (nature/culture), sexuality (heterosexual/non-heterosexual), sociology (individual/society), and so on, further emphasizing the malleable and non-eternal boundaries of the body. Moreover, the rise of ritual studies confronted a long history in at least Western Christendom of more ethereal philosophizing and theologizing in terms of souls and doctrines and ideas.

Interest in the body does not have to participate in a pseudo-relativist or postmodern cultural project, however.[39] Attention to the body simply pays close attention to what is obvious and open all around us, to our most primal ways of signifying who we are and what we want, and attention to the body follows texts—both ancient and modern—that insist on making the bodies of their characters a significant part of their plots and characterizations. And it is, to be clear, *textual descriptions of bodies* that must be our focus when we study ancient literature, and for the vast majority of cases we have very little evidence outside of the text (e.g., archaeology, visual art) to temper our reading of the text.[40] For contemporary texts, observation and action in the real, contemporary world illustrates and incarnates the reading; for anything chronologically before that, we are largely left to our own imaginations and the imaginations of our narrators. For this reason, at least for those of us committed to historical and contextual readings as an important site of meaning, any perspective we can get on the text that takes us back into the world of its composition and early reception should enrich our understanding of the bodies we find there.

Embodied Biblical Studies

Is there something distinctly "biblical" about the focus on the body? For Christian theology, at least, the body should be at the center of any discussion about God, because it is in the body of Jesus that God would be

38. Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, with contributions by Paul Ekman, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009; originally published in 1872 by John Murray); see discussion in Bell, *Ritual Theory*, 94.

39. For a critique of which see Eagleton, *Illusions*, 69–75.

40. See, however, Chapter 4 in this book, which examines iconographic and archaeological evidence for heroic bodies.

incarnated (this is not clearly a biblical idea, except in the gospel of John).[41] In the Hebrew Bible, the opening primeval narratives in Genesis serve as an instructive case. God creates through speech, which, though bodily, is a fairly ethereal process (compared to, say, the Enuma Elish, where human-bodies are created through crushed god-bodies). Everything created in Genesis, though, is *material*—God never explicitly creates "minds" or "ideas," only celestial bodies, the dome (*raqia*), waters, creeping animals and swarming sea creatures and flying birds (all adjectively characterized by their bodily movements),[42] and finally human beings:

> Then God said, "Let us make humans in our image (*tselem*), according to our likeness (*demut*) . . ." So God created humans in his image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them. (Gen 1:26–27)

The enormous amount of philosophical or theological attention paid to the "image of God" has too often overlooked the most basic and enduring feature of this "image," namely, that it is a *physical, bodily image*.[43] Recent

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41. E.g., recently, Ola Sigurdson, *Heavenly Bodies: Incarnation, the Gaze, and Embodiment in Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016). Distinctly (non-Christian) Jewish notions of divine incarnation also exist; see Esther J. Hamori, "Divine Embodiment in the Hebrew Bible and Some Implications for Jewish and Christian Incarnational Theologies," in *Bodies, Embodiment, and Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, ed. S. Tamar Kamionkowski and Wonil Kim (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 161–83, esp. 171–77, and, for a more popular (and controversial) treatment, Daniel Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ* (New York: New Press, 2012). For Judaism, see Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, "The Problem of the Body for the People of the Book," in *Biblical Limits: Reading Bibles, Writing Bodies: Identity and the Book*, ed. Timothy K. Beal and David Gunn (London: Routledge, 2002), 34–55.

42. Note, e.g., the repeated use of the verb *remesh* in Genesis 1 to characterize all animals—they are "creeping things."

43. For comments on this problem focusing on the body, including the aversion to interpreting God's image as physical in Genesis 1, see Stephen D. Moore, *God's Gym: Divine Male Bodies of the Bible* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 83–85. Catherine L. McDowell reviews the corporeal interpretation of Genesis 1:26–27 in her *The "Image of God" in the Garden of Eden: The Creation of Humankind in Genesis 2:5–3:24 in Light of the* mīs pî pīt pî *and* wpt-r *Rituals of Mesopotamia and Ancient Egypt* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 127–28. Gerhard Von Rad considered the physical, bodily image "the original notion" of this text, one that never gave way to a "spiritualizing and intellectualizing tendency"; see his *Genesis: A Commentary*, rev. ed., trans. J. Marks (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1973; originally published in 1972 by Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht), 58. James Barr also declared the "referential" meaning of likeness and image language in Genesis 1 as referring to humanity's intellectual or spiritual qualities to be founded on a wrong understanding of the author's purpose, though he eschewed a purely physical interpretation at the same time; "The Image of God in the Book of Genesis—A Study of Terminology," *BJRL* 51.1 (1968): 11–26.

work comparing the "image" language of Genesis 1 with ancient Near Eastern conceptions of the divine image highlights this dynamic, at least insofar as Mesopotamian and Egyptian divine images embodied deities in corporeal fashion.[44] Moreover, the neo-Assyrian royal practice of erecting a *tsalmu* ("image") to mark conquered territory may also signal something of the corporeal image that a deity or king could create to mark his presence on earth or as a proxy in some foreign land.[45]

In Genesis 2, commonly attributed to the J (Yahwist) source with his earthy proclivities and anthropomorphic deity, God sculpts (*yatsar*) the human from the dust of the earth, perhaps much like a potter creates pots (compare with Jer 18:11; Hab 2:18), and then breathes the breath of life into his very nose (Gen 2:7).[46] God plants a garden (2:8), presumably like a gardener would plant any garden but with divine skill, and God speaks to the man with presumably human speech, heard with human ears and comprehended with a human brain (Gen 2:16–17). In Genesis 3, God walks in the Garden, where the humans hear him walking and later speaking and then hide, prompting God to call out "Where are you?" (Gen 3:9). If, as McDowell contends, Genesis 2–3 extends the idea that humans are in the "image" of God (but without using the precise terminology of "image"), and we see further divine anthropomorphism there (which we certainly do), then it stands to reason that the entire creation-garden narrative of Genesis 1–3 offers a relatively coherent picture of God's "image" (a humanoid body) and humans with bodies in that image.[47] Physicality and spatiality everywhere mark the deity's existence in these chapters, and these qualities persist throughout Genesis and beyond.

In an effort toward typologizing God's bodies in the Hebrew Bible, Mark Smith assigns God three "bodies," the first of which (and most important for our present discussion) is a basically human body, physical

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44. E.g., McDowell, *Image of God*, whose interpretation of the comparative evidence leads her to see the divine-human relationship primarily in terms of kinship; Brent A. Strawn, "Comparative Approaches: History, Theory, and the Image of God," in *Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David L. Petersen*, ed. Joel M. LeMon and Kent H. Richards (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 117–42, esp. 129–35.

45. Strawn, "Comparative Approaches," 131–32.

46. Theodore Hiebert, *The Yahwist's Landscape: Nature and Religion in Early Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 30–82, esp. 64.

47. McDowell, *Image of God,* esp. 117–78. This observation would not preclude any other senses of the divine image, such as royalty or kinship or other psychological/spiritual qualities.

and present on earth.[48] As Smith points out, however, and in contrast to my earlier suggestion about God's body in Genesis 2–3, acts of talking, walking, breathing, and so on do not strictly require a "body." Nevertheless, they usually do. Notwithstanding the fact that deities can presumably do almost anything in abnormal ways, the human features of God's bodily appearance persist throughout Genesis—particularly in chapter 18, where Abraham dines with three "men" (*anashim*), one or all of whom turn out to be God, and in chapter 32, where Jacob wrestles with a "man" (*ish*) to whom Jacob ascribes the title "God" (*elohim*).[49] Even in Exodus 24, where the deity appears as a "superhuman" or "liturgical" divine body, to use Smith's terms,[50] God has presumably humanoid "feet," the bottoms of which a small group beholds partway up the mountain.

Turning back to human bodies: Genesis 3 notably fixates upon the naked and then clothed bodies of Adam and Eve. Adam's bodily connection to the earth—*adam* the man is made from *adamah* the earth—forms both a linguistic and thematic connection in Genesis 3–4, as Adam must till the earth with great toil after his misadventure with the Tree of Knowledge and Cain, tiller of the *adamah*, brings fruit of the *adamah* as an offering to God which is rejected. Cain then receives a bodily "mark," some mysterious visible feature that will signal divine protection in the face of his recently committed murder (Genesis 4). The primal human ancestors in Genesis 1–11 all have very *old* bodies, their individual lives mostly all spanning nearly a millennium, leaving us to imagine whether they appear extremely wrinkled or preternaturally youthful throughout it all since the text offers no other physical descriptions.

All of these bodies come in only the first eleven chapters of Genesis. I do not want to provide a skewed emphasis only on Genesis for discerning the Hebrew Bible's overall attitude toward the body, but, given

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48. Mark S. Smith, "The Three Bodies of God in the Hebrew Bible," *JBL* 134.3 (2015): 471–88, and now Smith's *Where the Gods Are: Spatial Dimensions of Anthropomorphism in the Biblical World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 13–30.

49. Smith, "Three Bodies," 474–77. The major study of these particular and rare texts, in which God is directly called a "man," is Esther J. Hamori, *"When Gods Were Men": The Embodied God in Biblical and Near Eastern Literature* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), esp. 1–25, 65–103, but cf. Anne K. Knafl, *Forming God: Divine Anthropomorphism in the Pentateuch* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 109–25, who critiques Hamori and Benjamin D. Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 40–42, 53, 132–33, for overemphasizing the uniqueness of Genesis 18 and 32 vis-à-vis other theophanies of the divine body.

50. Smith, "Three Bodies," 478–80.

its place at the front of the canon, and given the fixation on bodies and their consequences in Israel's story at such an early stage in the received canonical order, I do want to suggest that a focus on the body as a primary site of meaning is natural to this literature and overtly suggested by the biblical authors themselves. As I hope to show in this study, at least for the bodies of heroic figures in a variety of settings, bodies play a decisive role throughout the Hebrew Bible—patriarchal corpses traverse national boundaries to indicate legitimacy and covenant in the land; the height and hair and beauty and bones of kings determine the fate of the nation; reckless military leaders sever body parts, drive home left-handed daggers, and grow their hair long to preserve strength; prophets splay their bodies, mouth-to-mouth, on other bodies to revive the dead and contort their bodies on the ground to enact the drama of Israel's demise. Beyond this, priestly bodies enact and receive rituals. Sexualized bodies—breasts, vaginas, mouths, penises—seduce Israel to sin (e.g., Ezekiel 16 and 23) or characterize the ideal lover in the throes of bliss (Songs).

Indeed, we might ask: Is there a coherent or even remotely comparable corpus of texts in the ancient world that focuses on the human body as much as the Bible?

Body Trajectories in Recent Hebrew Bible Research

The field of biblical studies has indeed adopted the theoretical rubric of the body—faster than some disciplines, slower than others—and what has now become a relatively steady stream of monographs and essays over the past twenty-five years has drawn the Bible into the orbit of corporeality.[51]

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51. For books: Géza G. Xeravits (ed.), *Religion and Female Body in Ancient Judaism and Its Environments* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015); Joan E. Taylor (ed.), *The Body in Biblical, Christian and Jewish Texts* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014); S. Tamar Kamionkowski and Wonil Kim (eds.), *Bodies, Embodiment, and Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (London: T & T Clark, 2010); Jennifer L. Koosed, *(Per)mutations of Qohelet: Reading the Body in the Book* (London: T & T Clark, 2006); Hamilton, *The Body Royal*; Jon L. Berquist, *Controlling Corporeality: The Body and the Household in Ancient Israel* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002); Alice A. Keefe, *Woman's Body and the Social Body in Hosea 1–2* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001); Silvia Schroer and Thomas Staubli, *Body Symbolism in the Bible*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001; originally published in 1998 by Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft).

Essays include, e.g., Danna Nolan Fewell (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), "Part III The Bible and Bodies," 389–480; Adriane Leveen, "Returning the Body to Its Place: Ezekiel's Tour of the Temple," *HTR*

In one of the earlier major contributions to the topic, Jon Berquist proclaims that the Hebrew Bible "obsesses about bodies," yet at the time his study appeared (2002), "the body in ancient Israel [was] rarely studied and barely understood."[52] Since that time, however, many new works have appeared to fill this gap. In two particular areas, specifically gender studies (feminism and masculinity studies) and disability studies, the body takes center stage. For example, the feminist focus on embodiment made the female bodies in Hosea an apt topic for Alice Keefe's study, in which she argued that an over-focus on the individual female as "adulteress" in Hosea obscured the role of the social body and the economic situation in the eighth century BCE. Locating various symbolic levels of the body allows Keefe to connect the text with "the material and corporeal bases of human existence" and identify the broader cultural and familial metaphors at play—over and against the adultery of a single woman, fantasies of sex cults, and so forth.[53] Summarizing efforts to understand the divine body in the Bible, Kamionkowski notices several recent trends, such as a rising complexity in the terminology of anthropomorphism, recognition of difference in divine-body descriptions across texts, and an overall increase in studies devoted to the topic of understanding the divine body as truly a body.[54] Though earlier studies of the human body in the Bible had largely focused on questions of purity and gender, Kamionkowski points to newer work that engages with ideologies of all kinds including power, biology, theology, emotions, and disability.[55]

Indeed, the field of disability studies in particular has been the outstanding area for exploration in biblical studies related to the body.[56]

105.4 (2012): 385–401, and many of the essays in Beal and Gunn, *Biblical Limits*, esp. Eilberg-Schwartz, "Problem of the Body" and Mark K. George, "Assuming the Body of the Heir Apparent: David's Lament," 164–74. Some have used the "body" rubric in a significant way without engaging the history of body theorizing in any explicit manner, such as, recently, Sandra Jacobs, *The Body as Property: Physical Disfigurement in Biblical Law* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), but see further elaborations in Jacobs's essay, "The Body Inscribed? A Priestly Initiative," in *The Body in Biblical, Christian and Jewish Texts*, ed. Joan E. Taylor (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 1–16.

52. Berquist, *Controlling Corporeality*, 1.

53. Keefe, *Woman's Body*, 12–13.

54. S. Tamar Kamionkowski, "Introduction," in *Bodies, Embodiment, and Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, ed. S. Tamar Kamionkowski and Wonil Kim (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 3.

55. Kamionkowski, "Introduction," 6–9.

56. Significant recent studies include Sarah J. Melcher, Mikeal C. Parsons, and Amos Yong (eds.), *The Bible and Disability: A Commentary* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press,

Though disability theorists articulate their methods in a range of ways, most focus on the *social* context of the body:[57] like the body itself, concepts of disability are not entirely natural; they are also constructed, and as such they are loaded sites of meaning.[58] When working with a literary text, disability theorists may ask questions such as these: What concepts of ability and disability has the author constructed in this text? How does the body and its disabilities in this text intersect with notions of gender, power, and race? What kinds of bodies are acceptable or valued or devalued in this context, and why? The field trends toward activism and reflects on contemporary politics, economics, and legal codes. For ancient texts (like the Bible), disability readings often hew to classic literary and historical questions, but the full gamut of ideological critiques and cultural deconstructions also abounds.

For example, reflecting on the problem of scant bodily description in the Hebrew Bible, Jeremy Schipper notices that typical readers imagine bodies not explicitly described as "disabled" to be "abled" bodies—that is, normal bodies. However, the Bible's "normal" body (by volume of description)

2017); Candida Moss and Jeremy Schipper (eds.), *Disability Studies and Biblical Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Jeremy Schipper, *Disability and Isaiah's Suffering Servant* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Rebecca Raphael, *Biblical Corpora: Representations of Disability in Hebrew Biblical Literature* (London: T&T Clark, 2008); Saul M. Olyan, *Disability in the Hebrew Bible: Interpreting Mental and Physical Differences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Hector Avalos, Sarah J. Melcher, and Jeremy Schipper (eds.), *This Abled Body: Rethinking Disabilities in Biblical Studies* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007); Jeremy Schipper, *Disability Studies and the Hebrew Bible: Figuring Mephibosheth in the David Story* (London: T&T Clark, 2006). My own introduction to this stream of literature was Rebecca Raphael's "Things Too Wonderful: A Disabled Reading of Job," *PRS* 31 (2004): 399–424. For an example of New Testament scholarship in this vein, see Louise J. Lawrence, *Sense and Stigma in the Gospels: Depictions of Sensory-Disabled Characters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); for theology, e.g., Deborah Beth Creamer, *Disability and Christian Theology: Embodied Limits and Constructive Possibilities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

57. In other words, since what counts as "disabled" can vary widely, what one group marks as a "disability" tells us a lot about their values. This is not to ignore the fact that the "medical model" of disability, which focuses on the physical properties of healing or managing the real problems disability creates, has a focus very different from the "social model," which separates "impairment" (physical issues that prevent a certain level of bodily performance) from "disability" (a socially constructed set of values and even discrimination against impaired people). On this, see Schipper, *Disability and Isaiah's Suffering Servant*, 15–18.

58. For interdisciplinary approaches to disability studies concepts, see Rachel Adams, Benjamin Reiss, and David Serlin (eds.), *Keywords for Disability* (New York: New York University Press, 2015); Lennard J. Davis (ed.), *The Disability Studies Reader*, 4th ed. (London: Routledge, 2013); Dan Goodley, *Disability Studies: An Interdisciplinary Introduction* (London: SAGE, 2010).

could very well be considered as impaired by any number of illnesses and physical problems.[59] Thus, Schipper argues that "like disability, 'able-bodied' is a marker of bodily difference and not the default normal state of human existence from which disability deviates."[60] As Rebecca Raphael puts it, we "cannot begin to define disability without reference to something else, and that something else also requires definition."[61]

One may thus pit bodies against each other in any number of ways and for any number of reasons; a structuralist or perhaps poststructuralist flair permeates these discussions, as interpreters build up and/or deny meaning based on pairs of strong opposites, such as "disabled"/"abled," "strong"/ "weak," and so on. In her *Biblical Corpora*, Raphael, for example, focuses on the priestly body (particularly in Leviticus) and its power for representing God through various concepts of bodily perfection.[62] To be sure, the priestly focus on blemishes, discharges, and so on that would make one bodily (and thus spiritually? morally?) unfit for tabernacle/temple service makes the priestly body obvious and meaningful for definition of the "disabled" on biblical terms. Without other visual iconography in the sacred space, the priest's body is the visual point of focus.[63]

The field of "masculinity studies" represents one of the more recent trajectories in biblical studies focusing on the way bodies are constructed in the text.[64] In his recent book *Making Men* (2015), Stephen Wilson traces

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59. In perhaps the most influential of the recent pioneering works on disability studies, Lennard J. Davis points out that words like "normal," "normalcy," and "average" appear only relatively recently in European languages (e.g., the current definition of "normal" appears in English around 1840; *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* [London: Verso, 1995], 24).

60. Schipper, *Disability and Isaiah's Suffering Servant*, 19.

61. Raphael, *Biblical Corpora*, 11.

62. Raphael, *Biblical Corpora*, 31–39.

63. Raphael, *Biblical Corpora*, 39.

64. For a recent review of developments in this field, see Eric Thurman, "Adam and the Making of Masculinity," in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Narrative*, ed. Danna Nolan Fewell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 411–21. Some of the pioneer studies in this field for biblical studies are Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, *God's Phallus and Other Problems for Men and Monotheism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994) and David J. A. Clines, "David the Man: The Construction of Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible," in Clines, *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 212–43. Several major edited volumes and monographs have appeared in the past two decades, e.g., Ovidiu Creangă (ed.), *Men and Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010); Ovidiu Creangă and Peter-Ben Smit (eds.), *Biblical Masculinities Foregrounded* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014); Stephen

the history of masculinity studies beginning with Freud's contention that both female and male traits inhere within everyone, with gender identity as male or female encouraged or suppressed at childhood (and onward), on through the rise of "sex-role theory" in the twentieth century, which asserted masculinity and femininity to be "roles" played out on a "social stage" toward a well-oriented society, and then finally to the more contemporary critiques of sex-role theory as perpetuating inequalities and failing to recognize gender along a spectrum (without exactly clear roles).[65] In its most basic formulation today, the study of masculinities analyzes the way men's identities and bodies are constructed and reflected in texts, both ancient and modern, and emphasizes variety, difference, and themes of power, dominance, and violence often associated with males. This field has obvious implications for the topic of this study, since many of the Bible's "heroic bodies" are male and function as rubrics—of emulation, disassociation, or other forms of subtle comparison—for other male characters.

These trajectories of disability and gender raise many questions: Is the "heroic body" a potential or productive opposite of the "disabled body"? Are both male and female bodies equally "heroic" on biblical terms, or is "heroism" a function of primarily male identity in these texts? Was the "heroic body" a native concept in ancient literature, and specifically in the Hebrew Bible? Is there a "hero-normative" body? Much of this depends, as is so often the case, on definitions and the point one wants to make. The Hebrew Bible offers nothing like a sustained focus on the heroic body on its own terms or vis-à-vis other kinds of bodies in general—though it does offer a focus on heroic bodies vis-à-vis other specific bodies in narrative contexts and for specific reasons. In the present study, I would like to attempt positing the "heroic body" as a certain kind of body within the biblical corpus; at the very least, it is a body that belongs to a "hero" (specifically in warrior, royal/leaderly, and "founder" capacities, or especially where these categories overlap; more on this in a moment) and also a body that is described, manipulated, or used in some remarkable way. These heroic bodies are not exactly binary opposites to "disabled" bodies in the

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M. Wilson, *Making Men: The Male Coming-of-Age Theme in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Rhiannon Graybill, *Are We Not Men? Unstable Masculinity in the Hebrew Prophets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Ilona Zsolnay (ed.), *Being a Man: Negotiating Ancient Constructs of Masculinity* (London: Routledge, 2017). Note also the chapter titled "Israel's Ideal Man" by Jonathan Kaplan in *My Perfect One: Typology and Early Rabbinic Interpretation of Song of Songs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 135–53.

65. Wilson, *Making Men*, 5–8.

Hebrew Bible, though insofar as heroes of the type I am describing are triumphant over others, the narratives in which they appear may very well posit something congruous to the abled-disabled dynamic that disability theorists have found at play in the political theology of any number of biblical texts. Sometimes, these categories, if pursued simplistically, become confused—one case in point being Jacob in Genesis 32 (see Chapter 2 of this book).

I review these trajectories—highlighting gender and disability—not because I have the ability to provide a sophisticated gender or disability analysis of every key text in this study, but because these approaches deal so explicitly with the body, and they represent profound avenues by which interpreters have begun to consider the body as significant. My own approach represents more of a literary and ancient sociohistorical analysis, fascinated by the problem of why bodies were described by these authors specifically at the points where they are described, and how those bodies evoke and provoke other bodies in the literature. My hope, having now considered disability and gender analyses broadly, is that these theoretical approaches could become better integrated with historical-critical and literary readings, and I will attempt to model what that might look like, even if in small ways.

Following some cues from Mark Hamilton's study, *The Body Royal: The Social Poetics of Kingship in Ancient Israel* (2005), I focus on the drama of Israel's politics, religion, and social-symbolic world that plays itself out on significant bodies, of kings, warriors, and founding figures, as well as the bodies against which these kings, warriors, and founding figures claim significance. Like Hamilton, we will find it necessary to examine a broad range of materials, cutting across any particular book, corpus (such as the "Deuteronomistic History"), time period, or region. In doing so, we will find that biblical authors reflect on the heroic body in a variety of ways and that comparanda from Greece and the Bible's broader ancient Near Eastern environment sharpen our focus on the Bible's local adaptation of broadly shared heroic-bodily concerns across the ancient Mediterranean world.[66]

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66. Hamilton, *Body Royal,* 2–3.

Define the Hero

The term "hero" is somewhat unstable in discourse about both contemporary and ancient worlds, and thus far I have been using it without a clear definition. Like "love," "glory," or "wisdom," "hero" can take on entirely different trajectories and nuances dependent on the angle of viewing, the circumstance of the communicator, a sudden polemical intent, a rhetorical flourish, and so on. Moreover, the bodies we might describe as "heroic" under a specific definition could also more simply be considered "extraordinary," a term that might encompass any number of bodies not considered under simplistic binaries such as abled/disabled, heroic/unheroic, and so on.[67]

Although this definition will hopefully sharpen in chapters to come, a few preliminary words are in order to justify the choices made here for our case studies.[68] Rather than considering the "hero" very broadly and functionally as "any prominent actor in a narrative," I want to focus on characters who function at the intersection of three categories: (1) *warriors in battle*; (2) *kings and other notable leaders*; (3) *founding figures*. Some of the most important case studies in light of our body theme, such as Saul and David, occupy space in all three of these categories simultaneously and their bodies play telling, specific roles in defining their heroic identity. In fact, following the Hebrew Bible's lead in this regard, Saul and David are the "model heroes" for this investigation of the heroic body, with the definitions reverse-engineered to fit their narratives. One may come to any number of other ways to define the heroic or delimit one's attention to the body in the biblical corpus, but the Saul-David exemplar has the advantage of imposing a grid that is native to and prompted by the text we are examining—thus helping to guard against blatant anachronism and haphazard associations in what I hope to be a study guided by the basic principles of the historical-critical method, in addition to literary and other cultural theories involving the body.

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67. For this terminology of the "extraordinary" body, see Schipper, "Body; II. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament," 269. For a consideration of the "hero" on broad terms as a focal point of cultural attention, see Ari Kohen, *Untangling Heroism: Classical Philosophy and the Concept of the Hero* (London: Routledge, 2014), esp. 1–4 for fascinating comments on heroism as a particularly American obsession.

68. For comments and bibliography on the question of "heroic" definition, especially in conjunction with the category of "epic," see Brian R. Doak, *The Last of the Rephaim: Conquest and Cataclysm in the Heroic Ages of Ancient Israel* (Boston: Ilex Foundation and the Center for Hellenic Studies, 2012), 37–44.

Perhaps most central to the heroic definition across cultures, both ancient and modern, however, is the category of the *warrior*. Heroes fight and die, and their bodies are obviously central in a literal, physical sense. Moreover, though contemporary audiences redefine categories of the heroic for their own times, heroes are often thought to live in a "heroic age," during which great battles of the past occur and against which contemporary action may be measured.[69] The figures in the heroic age attract and define other heroes as well, figures who associate with or oppose each other. The books of Judges and Samuel, particularly, in the Hebrew Bible create and enshrine the memories of the early heroic period, and it is here that we find the formative warrior conflict that places ancient Israel most squarely within the conversation of ancient heroic poetry.[70] Warriors typically have leaders; before Israel's monarchy, the Bible presents these leaders (called "judge/judges," *shophet/shophetim*) as something like short-term, nationalist guerrilla fighters, and later, after Saul, as "king/kings" (*melek/melakim*). Speaking of the category of the king alongside other types of leaders more generically is fraught with problems for biblical scholars, since the Hebrew Bible itself makes quite a stir about the question of formal kingship vis-à-vis other roles (see, for example, Deuteronomy 17–18; Judges; 1 Samuel 8), but in their function as warriors and leaders of warriors, kings fall together with other, less formal rulers.

The inclusion of "founding figures" under my definition of the heroic is somewhat harder to defend. I discuss it further in Chapter 2 devoted to Jacob, but for now, let me say that the patriarchs—particularly Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph—do embody something of the interplay between "royal" and "warrior" roles (certainly less so on the "warrior" front, though it is not entirely absent), and the placement or movement of their bodies (for Jacob and Joseph) marks a loaded moment of national identity during the settlement of the land. They are something like "uber-heroes" who embody everything for Israel. Moses—whom I do not treat in detail in this

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69. See, e.g., the classic studies of H. Munro Chadwick, *The Heroic Age* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1974; reprint of 1912 edition); Cecil M. Bowra's *Heroic Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1952) and *The Meaning of a Heroic Age* (London: King's College, 1957), as well as the review and updated discussion for Israelite poetry by Charles L. Echols, *"Tell Me, O Muse": The Song of Deborah (Judges 5) in the Light of Heroic Poetry* (London: T & T Clark, 2008), 135–64.

70. On this, see Mark S. Smith, *Poetic Heroes: Literary Commemorations of Warriors and Warrior Culture in the Early Biblical World* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 2014), and many sources cited there.

study—also falls into this category, probably even more clearly as he is the first "national" leader and does act in clearer warrior capacities.

Prophets could also be considered "heroes" in the sense that they are leading actors in the drama, and their own actions are not always separate from warrior activities—here I am thinking particularly of Samuel's and Elijah's acts of sword-hacking enemies (in 1 Sam 15:33 and 1 Kgs 18:40, respectively). In terms of the heroic body, prophets act in a variety of roles that are incredibly fascinating on a number of levels and worthy of more attention than they have received in terms of the body.[71] Nevertheless, because of the strict identification I have set out between heroes and warriors, they are not included here except in passing references where relevant.

Finally, we must admit that in many cases we have characters who could be sites of heroic-bodily reflection, *but their bodies are simply not described in any detailed manner*. Deborah, for example, would fit two of the three heroic qualities listed here—being an early and powerful judge in the book of Judges and leading Israel into battle—but we learn nothing notable about her body in that role (except that she is a woman, and in that sense her otherwise undescribed body is a unique one in terms of Israel's national leadership). Joshua is clearly a heroic warrior/leader, but for whatever reason the narrators of Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, and Judges had no interest in highlighting any particular aspect of his body. We do find relatively unremarkable references to Joshua's "hand" as an aspect of his leaderly or military agency (e.g., Josh 8:18, 26), and his feet stand on holy ground (Josh 5:15) or he commands the feet of others to stand on the necks of enemies (Josh 10:24). Routine references that are common for nearly all biblical characters of this nature are not the specific bodily cues that prompt the reflections in this study, which home in on examples where some aspect of the heroic body plays a meaningful, intentional role in the narrative. Admittedly, however, the selection of heroic bodies for consideration is ultimately a matter of judgment. The heroic-bodily moments I seize on in this study spark what Mark Hamilton

71. But see William Doan and Terry Giles, *Prophets, Performance, and Power: Performance Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (London: T & T Clark, 2005); Rhiannon Graybill, *Are We Not Men*, and "Voluptuous, Tortured, and Unmanned: Ezekiel with Daniel Paul Schreber," in *The Bible and Posthumanism*, ed. Jennifer L. Koosed (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014), 137–56.

(following George Hunston Williams) calls a “luminous particularity,” that is, “a telling detail that illuminates the whole.” [72]

An Orientation to Comparative Moves

At various points in this study—certainly more prominent in some places than others (e.g., Chapters 4 and 6), and sometimes relegated to footnotes in place of what could be a more robust interaction in the body of the text—I make comparisons with both Greek and ancient Near Eastern materials outside the Bible, specifically those related to the bodily image of the hero. Though such a practice will seem quite normal to those who study the Bible “in its ancient context,” I am committed to raising the problem of the justification for comparison. To be sure, even the word “context,” which for some has a natural meaning with no need for explanation at all (i.e., as the historical context of authorship), is not self-evident;[73] one may speak of historical contexts, literary contexts, contexts within communities of reception, theological contexts, and contexts of identity for the reader at numerous levels (e.g., politics, gender, race, sexuality, religion). Not one of these contexts is obvious, clear, or natural for all projects.

Those of us who treasure comparative arguments may rightly feel uncomfortable if, in the end, our justification for the choice of comparative materials is merely that we see similarities between one thing and another thing, or that we happen to be familiar with the comparanda by accident of our training or reading, or even that the comparanda we use happen to have been produced in a vaguely similar geographical world or within some broadly shared chronological horizon.[74] What, then, are the ideal grounds for comparison?

In a sense, the value of a given comparative move rises or falls on the success of the comparison for the rhetorical and analytical purposes of the researcher. There is no particular comparison that is strictly “natural,” and none are strictly forbidden. Reflecting upon his influential essay “In

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72. Hamilton, *Body Royal*, 9.

73. On this problem, see Jon D. Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism: Jews and Christians in Biblical Studies* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1993), esp. 106–26.

74. I have treated this subject, as well as the specific comparison between the ancient Near Eastern and Aegean world, in Doak, *Last of the Rephaim*, esp. 25–50; the present discussion is a truncated and sharpened version of that treatment.

Comparison a Magic Dwells," J. Z. Smith argued for an emphasis on choice, and he reaffirms the commitment to viewing comparison's purpose for dealing with malleable "aspects and relations," not "things," and for emphasizing difference as well as sameness in the comparative act.[75] Toward this end, Smith has influentially argued that comparison should be a "polythetic" enterprise (as opposed to "monothetic"), seeking not "the idea of perfect, unique, single differentia" but rather a flexible set of differences and similarities among compared materials.[76] Even so, I am very happy to agree with Brent Strawn's argument that comparison, on the grandest level, is not, in fact, "optional" but rather a neurologically required activity: "comparison seems to be the default disposition, perhaps the most foundational of all methods."[77] The bedeviled details of how this act of comparison plays out must emerge in each case, even if the overall comparative act is natural, but we should organize our efforts in this regard so that comparisons remain flexible, open, and self-conscious.

Having essentially admitted that there is no specific thing that *demands* to be compared with any other thing, it is certainly true that scholars in biblical studies have typically delimited their choice of comparisons by considering the question of *historically bounded influence*. Did a particular episode, character, or literary motif derive from some other group or religion? The stakes are always implicitly theological, even if in ghost-form, and have often been explicitly apologetic. Whatever spiritual obsession one may have with discovering the true uniqueness of the biblical message for contemporary purposes, the question is in fact raised by the literature itself[78]—ancient Israel genuinely claimed for itself a special status, a set-apartness that makes the issue of its comparability with its broader ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean world a loaded historical problem

75. Jonathan Z. Smith, "The 'End' of Comparison: Redescription and Rectification," in *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age*, ed. Kimberly C. Patton and Benjamin C. Ray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 238–39. The earlier essay is Jonathan Z. Smith, "In Comparison a Magic Dwells," in Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982), 19–35.

76. Jonathan Z. Smith, "Fences and Neighbors: Some Contours of Early Judaism," in Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982), 4–5.

77. Strawn, "Comparative Approaches," 117–18.

78. The classic essay on this topic is 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; originally published in I. Eph'al and M. Cogan (eds.), *A Highway from Egypt to Assyria: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern History and Historiography Presented to Hayim Tadmor* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1990).

as well as a continually alluring case study in the way religions and their texts may evoke other religions and their texts as congeners, foils, satire, appropriation, and polemic. Briefly put, I see the Bible's heroic depictions in conversation—sometimes complimentary, sometimes adversarial—with heroic literature that blossomed in the Homeric world of the late eighth century BCE through the classical period. This move does not ignore the eastern Mesopotamian contexts, nor the Egyptian for that matter, but rather seeks to include the Aegean world in the conversation. This dual focus, then, to the East and to the West, frames my comparative turn.

Looking to the West, discussions of the "hero" in the Bible cannot help but invoke the broader Mediterranean context of heroic literature—particularly the Aegean world of the eighth to fifth centuries BCE.[79] Though classicists have, for the last few decades but especially recently, been in the habit of acknowledging the ancient Near Eastern influence of everything from material culture and writing scripts to myths, laws, and rituals,[80] biblical scholars have historically had a more difficult time assimilating insights from the Mediterranean world into their own work.[81] The reasons for this vary. Some of the problem stems from the very origins of biblical studies as an independent academic discipline. During the birth and early flourishing of the modern university in eighteenth–nineteenth century CE Europe, the need to re-create a modern state on the model of Greece or Rome, combined with the continuing centrality of the Bible as an object of intense debate in the post-Reformation period, led to the creation of a new

79. Most influential for me in this respect has been the work of Gregory Nagy, particularly *The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry*, rev. ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999; first published 1979) and, in more popular format, Nagy, *The Ancient Greek Hero in 24 Hours* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

80. Major and relatively recent examples include Walter Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution: Near Eastern Influences on Greek Culture in the Early Archaic Age*, trans. Margaret E. Pinder and Walter Burkert (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992; originally published in 1984 by Carl Winter); Christoph Auffarth, *Der drohende Untergang: "Schöpfung" in Mythos und Ritual im alten Orient und in Griechenland am Beispiel der Odyssee und des Ezechielbuches* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991); Martin West, *The East Face of Helicon: West Asiatic Elements in Greek Poetry and Myth* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997); Carolina López-Ruiz, *When the Gods Were Born: Greek Cosmogonies and the Near East* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Bruce Louden, *Homer's Odyssey and the Near East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

81. But see, to cite one example to the contrary, Dale Launderville, *Piety and Politics: The Dynamics of Royal Authority in Homeric Greece, Biblical Israel, and Old Babylonian Mesopotamia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003).

Bible—as the subject of a classical-style academic inquiry.[82] Inevitably, the Bible would then be studied not only with the tools flourishing for the Greek and Latin classics (e.g., philology, which at any rate had been a long practice in biblical studies before the modern period), but also using the terminology, assumptions, and categories of Greek and Latin studies as they existed at the time. The sheer prestige of Greek literature in the academy all but ensured that the academic study of the Bible would have to "elevate" its texts to the status of Homer, Hesiod, and later classical authors (a move prefigured broadly already in Greco-Roman antiquity).[83] The Bible would thus be compared with the Homeric corpus as epic literature,[84] and biblical poetry was assigned a "meter" on the basis of classical poetry.[85]

Nevertheless, the comparison with Greek materials deserves more attention, albeit for different reasons and on a different basis. Detailed archaeological and textual studies showing exchange on the levels of material culture and shared literature provide enough evidence to see frequent and deep contact across the Mediterranean world. From the Levant, the Phoenicians famously spread to the far western worlds of Spain and northwest Africa, and from the Aegean world, Greeks had their own trade

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82. Michael C. Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

83. E.g., Josephus in *Against Apion*, and for discussion of this phenomenon, Gunnar Haaland, "Convenient Fiction or Causal Factor? The Questioning of Jewish Antiquity according to *Against Apion* 1.2," in *Flavius Josephus: Interpretation and History*, ed. Jack Pastor, Pnina Stern, and Menahem Mor (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 163–176. Others such as Philo, the author of the Letter of Aristeas, and Ezekiel the Tragedian participate in this phenomenon.

84. See the sources listed in Ken Dowden, "West on East: Martin West's *East Face of Helicon* and Its Forerunners," *JHellSt* 121 (2001): 167–75, esp. 168–69, and examples such as Zachary Bogan, *Homerus,'Ebraizon sive comparatio Homeri cum scriptoribus sacris quoad normam loquendi* (Oxford: Hall, 1658) and Otto Gruppe, *Die griechischen Kulte und Mythen in ihren Beziehungen zu den orientalischen Religionen*, vol. 1: *Einleitung* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1887). Julius Wellhausen's famous invocation of Friedrich August Wolf's *Prolegomena ad Homerum* (first published in 1795; now in translation as *Prolegomena to Homer*, 1795, trans. Anthony Grafton [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014]) in at least the title of his own *Prolegomena* also comes readily to mind (*Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*, trans. J. Sutherland Black and Allan Menzies [Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock]; earlier published [in its second edition] as *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels*, 1883).

85. James L. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981). As Kugel points out (*Idea*, 233), the comparison among poetic traditions was not bounded only by the search for a past in ancient Greece and Rome, but also included indigenous European traditions.

networks.[86] Concerning our specific heroic focus in the present work, recent investigations have even gone as far as to suggest that biblical heroic depictions participated in an intertextual engagement with Homeric epic by way of emulation or polemical contest.[87] At the very least, comparison between warrior concerns in Greek and Semitic texts has proven to be a fruitful way to see new things in each corpus and explore what makes a particular text uniquely meaningful in its context.

Turning to the East, comparisons with the ancient Near East abound in Hebrew Bible studies and seem to require little justification. The geographical location and (Semitic) linguistic stream that ancient Israel inhabited ensured some amount of basic literary, religious, and cultural sharing, thus making the comparative move more obvious for historically minded interpreters. Even so, clear, traceable material links between Israel and these other cognate cultures in the ancient Near East have been notoriously hard to come by. Though at points biblical authors mimic phraseology or extended imagery that is quite suggestive of very specific materials in the Ugaritic corpus,[88] we have as yet uncovered no cache of Ugaritic tablets lurking in the archives of Israelite scribes. By what channels, and during what time period, did Israel interact with this literature?

For heroic materials specifically, in his *Poetic Heroes* Mark Smith has recently shown many detailed possibilities for reading heroic tropes in Ugaritic stories concerning Aqhat, Baal, and the Rephaim.[89] Moreover, the parade example of heroic presentation from ancient Mesopotamia, the *Gilgamesh Epic*, enjoyed wide dissemination across the Near Eastern world, with versions in Sumerian, Akkadian, and Hittite; archaeologists discovered

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86. E.g., Markus Witte and Stefan Alkier (eds.), *Die Griechen und der Vordere Orient: Beiträge zum Kultur- und Religionskontakt zwischen Griechenland und dem Vordere Orient im 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (Fribourg: Academic Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003); John Boardman, *The Greeks Overseas: Their Early Colonies and Trade*, 4th ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1999; originally published in 1964 by Pelican Books); Ann C. Gunter, *Greek Art and the Orient* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Maria Eugenia Aubet, *The Phoenicians and the West: Politics, Colonies, and Trade*, trans. Mary Turton, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2001; originally published in 1987 by Ediciones Bellaterra).

87. Azzan Yadin, "Goliath's Armor and Israelite Collective Memory," *VT* 54.3 (2004): 373–95; but cf. Serge Frolov and Allen Wright, "Homeric and Ancient Near Eastern Intertextuality in 1 Samuel 17," *JBL* 130.3 (2011): 451–71.

88. E.g., many examples in Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), esp. 19–107.

89. Smith, *Poetic Heroes*, 97–208.

a fragment of the epic at Megiddo from a Late Bronze context (within the borders of what would later become Israel), and clay analysis proved that scribes produced the text in the Levant, perhaps at Gezer (i.e., it was not imported from Mesopotamia).[90] Many scholars of Greek heroic texts now assume that the "heroic pair" model of Achilles and Patroklus derived from Gilgamesh and Enkidu.[91] Thus, in addition to Homer, various ancient Near Eastern texts provide crucial comparative material for interpreting the heroic body in ancient Israel. Because far less work has been done by biblical scholars with relation to the Greek Mediterranean world, I have weighted my own comparative interests in that direction. Even so, more studies could and should be directed toward considering, for example, the role of the body in the Ugaritic corpus and the cuneiform literatures more broadly.

I assume it as axiomatic that within the historical-critical tradition I generally adopt, comparisons between Israel and Greece or between Israel and the broader ancient Near East should be predicated on demonstrable shared contact through material culture, language, and/or more-or-less-demonstrable literary influence. Though one cannot usually give a complete justification for these shared elements in a totalizing manner for every minute comparison or for a set of comparisons as a whole (except in a separate project that could be devoted to just such justifications), an open recognition of the grounds for comparison and the problems haunting the comparative enterprise at least allows for a level of reflexivity appropriate for the task at hand. Moreover, I understand that within the boundaries of the historically critically justified set of materials under comparative consideration, the extent to which any given comparison comes off as illuminating depends on the crucial choices the interpreter makes and the ability of the comparison to offer some new vista on the compared materials. In the end, comparison is more like magic than science. The concept of "luminous particularity" mentioned by Hamilton applies not only to the selection of textual episodes of the heroic body I interpret in this book, but also to those extra-biblical texts we examine and the way they reflect on the Bible—and the way the Bible reflects on them.

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90. Albrecht Goetze and Selim J. Levy, "Fragment of the Gilgamesh Epic from Megiddo," *Atiqot* 2 (1959): 121–28; Yuval Goren, Hans Mommsen, Israel Finkelstein, and Nadav Na'aman, "A Provenance Study of the Gilgamesh Fragment from Megiddo," *Archaeometry* 51.5 (2009): 763–73.

91. West, *East Face*, 334–437, and Bruno Currie, "The *Iliad, Gilgamesh*, and Neoanalysis," in *Homeric Contexts: Neoanalysis and the Interpretation of Oral Poetry*, ed. Franco Montanari, Antonios Rengakos, and Christos C. Tsagalis (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2012), 543–80.