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Ezekiel's Topography of the (Un-)Heroic Dead in Ezekiel 32:17–32

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This essay is an attempt to address several interpretive problems in Ezek 32:17–32 in light of religious ideas prominent in ancient Mediterranean expressions of hero cult. Previous studies have not adequately dealt with the richness of Ezekiel's striking and unusual imagery in this passage, and I contend that a reading that more fully develops the meaning of Ezekiel's presentation vis-à-vis the history of religious ideas regarding the power of the heroic dead is the most appropriate one in terms of Ezekiel's overarching message in this chapter. I argue that Ezekiel's invocation of ancient Israelite heroic traditions involving the Gíborim and Nephilim are more pronounced than previous interpreters have been willing to acknowledge, and that a more complete exposition of the passage in light of Ezekiel's (re)interpretive motif involving the role of the "heroes of old" (v. 27, with the LXX) yields nuances that have not received adequate exploration. I also demonstrate the manner in which a fuller integration of the exegesis of this passage with cognate traditions regarding the afterlife of heroes in ancient Greece and elsewhere in the Mediterranean reveals hitherto unnoticed nuances behind several enigmatic phrases in this passage. This demonstration provides a more detailed and forceful context supporting the claim already made by several commentators that the theological importance of Ezek 32:17–32 rests specifically with its rejection of heroic ideals. Finally, my analysis shows that this passage exhibits a more striking authorial unity than has typically been assumed, viz., that Ezekiel's pervasive heroic imagery and reference to the underworld form a unified, coherent, and provocative description of an impotent and (un-)heroic foreign horde inhabiting their own ignominious places in the afterlife.

Unfortunately little scholarly attention has been paid to Ezekiel 32, which is surprising since the text provides perhaps the most explicit tour through the land of the dead available in the Hebrew Bible and is rich with polemical and ambiguous imagery describing the fate of fallen enemy hordes. In this essay, I attempt to address several interpretive problems in Ezek 32:17–32 in light of religious ideas prominent in ancient Mediterranean expressions of hero cult. Earlier studies have not adequately dealt with the richness of Ezekiel's striking and unusual imagery in this

passage, and I contend that a reading that more fully develops the meaning of Ezekiel's presentation vis-à-vis the history of religious ideas regarding the power of the heroic dead is the most appropriate one in terms of Ezekiel's overarching theological message in this chapter.

Indeed, Ezekiel's invocation of ancient Israelite heroic traditions involving the Gibborim and Nephilim are more pronounced than previous interpreters have been willing to acknowledge, and a more complete exposition of the passage in light of Ezekiel's reinterpetive motif involving the role of the "heroes of old" (v. 27, with the LXX) yields nuances that have not received adequate exploration. I argue that a fuller integration of the exegesis of this passage with cognate traditions regarding the afterlife of heroes in ancient Greece and elsewhere in the Mediterranean reveals hitherto unnoticed nuances behind several enigmatic phrases in this passage (e.g., in vv. 23, 25, and 27). This demonstration provides a more detailed and forceful context supporting the claim already made by several commentators that the theological importance of Ezek 32:17–32 rests specifically with its *rejection* of heroic ideals.¹ Finally, my analysis shows that this passage exhibits a more striking authorial and thematic unity than has typically been assumed: Ezekiel's pervasive heroic imagery and reference to the underworld form a unified, coherent, and provocative description of an impotent and (un)heroic foreign horde inhabiting their own ignominious places in the afterlife.

The comparison of concepts from the archaic and classical Greek-speaking Western world with those of the Hebrew Bible has a long and sometimes venerable history, beginning already in antiquity itself and continuing through the many prominent studies in the twentieth century and into the last two decades.² At the

¹E.g., Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, vol. 2 (trans. J. D. Martin; Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 176; Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 22A; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 670; Walther Eichrodt, *Ezekiel: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 438–41; Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, vol. 2, *Chapters 25–48* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 231–34; and, briefly, Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann, *Das Buch des Propheten Hesekiel (Ezechiel) Kapitel 20–48* (ATD 22; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001), 440.

²Already in the first century C.E., Josephus remarked in reference to Gen 6:1–4 that "the deeds that traditions ascribe to them [the giants] resemble the audacious exploits told by the Greeks of the giants" (*Ant.* 1.73) (*Jewish Antiquities*, vol. 1, *Books 1–3* [trans. H. St. J. Thackeray; LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1930]). Consider also the efforts of the seventeenth-century British scholar Zachary Bogan, who attempted to compare Homer and the Bible; see his *Homerus, 'Ebraizon sive comparatio Homeri cum scriptoribus sacris quoad normam loquendi* (Oxford: Hall, 1658). See other ancient and Renaissance sources in Ken Dowden, "West on the East: Martin West's *East Face of Helicon* and Its Forerunners," *JHS* 121 (2001): 168–69. Most recently, see Carolina López-Ruiz, *When the Gods Were Born: Greek Cosmogonies and the Near East* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); and Bruce Loudon, *Homer's Odyssey and the Near East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). Other influential modern works include Walter Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution: Near Eastern Influences on Greek Culture in the Early Archaic Age* (trans. Margaret E. Pinder and Walter Burkert; Revealing

present moment, I am not prepared to make any detailed claims about the issue of the historical diffusion of the motifs I will be comparing in what follows. Rather, I would simply suggest that the imagery used to describe the dead warriors in this passage participates in a broadly shared Mediterranean world of religious thought—which can be characterized as a Mediterranean *koinē*—though the similarities implied by this *koinē* must be held in strict tension with the local and the particular.³ Any recognition of commonality for comparative purposes does not, of course, imply strict homogeneity between any two regions or among any particular aspect of language, culture, or society as a rule, but rather represents an invitation to explore the often underemphasized elements that bound Mediterranean religions—including those of ancient Israel—together.⁴

Antiquity 5; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992; first published 1984); M. L. West, *The East Face of Helicon: West Asiatic Elements in Greek Poetry and Myth* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997); Peter Walcot, *Hesiod and the Near East* (Cardiff: Wales University Press, 1966); Christoph Auffarth, *Der drohende Untergang: "Schöpfung" in Mythos und Ritual im alten Orient und in Griechenland am Beispiel der Odyssee und des Ezechielbuches* (Relionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten 39; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991); Charles Penglass, *Greek Myths and Mesopotamia: Parallels and Influence in the Homeric Hymns and Hesiod* (London: Routledge, 1994); Robert Rollinger and Christoph Ulf, eds., *Griechische Archaik: Interne Entwicklungen – Externe Impulse* (Berlin: Akademie, 2004); Jacqueline Duchemin, "Contribution à l'histoire des mythes grecs: Les lites primordiales dans l'Illiade à la lumière des sources proche-orientales," in *Philius Charin: Miscellanea di studi classici in onore di Eugenio Manni* (6 vols.; Rome: Bretschneider, 1980), 3:837–79. In the United States, specifically, a large number of studies originated in the creative genius of Cyrus Gordon's attempts at East–West comparison, though many of these are of limited value: see, e.g., Cyrus H. Gordon, "Homer and the Bible: The Origin and Character of East Mediterranean Literature," *HUCA* 26 (1955): 43–108; and idem, *The Common Background of Greek and Hebrew Civilizations* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1965); Michael C. Astour, *Hellenosemitica: An Ethnic and Cultural Study in West Semitic Impact on Mycenaean Greece* (Leiden: Brill, 1965); John Pairman Brown, *Israel and Hellas* (3 vols.; BZAW 231, 276, 299; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1995).

³This specific phrase "Mediterranean *koinē*" has been used by others; see, recently, Corinna Riva, "The Culture of Urbanization in the Mediterranean c. 800–600 BC," in *Mediterranean Urbanization 800–600 BC* (ed. Robin Osborne and Barry Cunliffe; Proceedings of the British Academy 126; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 203–32. Note also Azzan Yadin, "Goliath's Armor and Israelite Collective Memory," *VT* 54 (2004): 383–85. I use the comparative terminology of the *koinē* in my own expanded study of the intersection of the heroic and gigantic in the Hebrew Bible and other ancient Mediterranean literatures (in which elements of the current essay appear in a different form): see Brian R. Doak, *The Last of the Rephaim: Conquest and Cataclysm in the Heroic Ages of Ancient Israel* (Illex Foundation Series 7; Center for Hellenic Studies; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), esp. ch. 1 for the comparative issues and ch. 4 for comments on the Ezekiel 32 passage.

⁴Riva ("Culture of Urbanization," 203) also states that "one may ... define this *koinē* as international. At the same time, the modes of its reception were geographically specific, giving rise to local interpretations and meanings that individual groups assigned to it." To be sure, the past few decades of comparative religious scholarship have seen an increased focus on that which is specific and that which is different; see, e.g., Jonathan Z. Smith, "In Comparison a Magic

The context of the lament in Ezek 32:17–32 in the book of Ezekiel and in the broader corpus of prophetic books is notable: many have noticed the form of lament for a foreign ruler present here, combined with the motif of the descent to the underworld, which can be compared with other such forms in Ezekiel (e.g., Tyre in 26:1–21) and elsewhere (Isa 14:4–21).⁵ In a stimulating comparative study, Dale Launderville has discussed many of the Mesopotamian and Greek parallels to Ezekiel’s motif of the “Descent to the Underworld” and correctly notes something of the unheroic nature of Pharaoh’s and others’ experiences in Sheol: their journeys are a “one-way trip,” whereas classically heroic figures such as Odysseus and Gilgamesh are able to engage in a *katabasis* and return to the living world, perhaps empowered and ennobled in some way for their trouble.⁶ There is also the intriguing issue of the relationship between Ezek 32:17–32 and Gen 6:1–4, to which I will return shortly, and several interpreters have found some connection, however shadowy, between the Nephilim in Gen 6:4 and the repeated use of the verb נפל in Ezekiel 32 to describe those slain in battle.⁷ Theodore J. Lewis has analyzed Ezek 32:1–16—which constitutes the first part of what may be viewed as a long, two-part lament over Egypt in the chapter—in terms of the conflation of leonine and serpentine language for Egypt.⁸ Lewis persuasively demonstrates that some aspects of Ezekiel’s presentation of Egypt drew upon the prophet’s East Semitic geographical setting, from which we can garner parallel iconographic representations. Whatever the value of Lewis’s specific arguments in this respect, it is at least clear that the author of Ezekiel 32 could have drawn upon a wide spectrum of religious ideas in the Near Eastern and Mediterranean world and adapted these ideas creatively for his own purpose.

Dwells,” in idem, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 19–35.

⁵E.g., the seminal study of the dirge by Hedwig Jahnow, *Das hebräische Leichenlied im Rahmen der Völkerdichtung* (BZAW 36; Giessen: Töpelmann, 1923), esp. 231–39; and R. Mark Shipp, *Of Dead Kings and Dirges: Myth and Meaning in Isaiah 14:4b–21* (Academia Biblica 11; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 46, who reads Ezekiel 32 as a lament parody and reviews much of the previous scholarship. Note that Ezek 31:15–18 also resounds with the imagery of the underworld found in ch. 32, and both are concerned with Pharaoh.

⁶Launderville, *Spirit and Reason: The Embodied Character of Ezekiel’s Symbolic Thinking* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007), 308–12. At several points, Launderville draws on the thorough study of Lawrence Boadt, *Ezekiel’s Oracles against Egypt: A Literary and Philological Study of Ezekiel 29–32* (BibOr 37; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1980), 150–68.

⁷Paul Humbert reads Ezekiel 32 in light of Gen 6:1–4 specifically in terms of the theme of *hybris* (“Déméasure et chute dans l’Ancien Testament,” in *Maqqél shâqédh: La branche d’amandier. Hommage à Wilhelm Vischer* [Montpellier: Faculté Libre de Théologie Protestante de Montpellier, 1960], 69–71). See also Emil G. Kraeling, “The Significance and Origin of Gen. 6:1–4,” *JNES* 6 (1947): 196–97; Ron Hendel, “Of Demigods and the Deluge: Toward an Interpretation of Genesis 6:1–4,” *JBL* 106 (1987): 22; Block, *Book of Ezekiel*, 228–29.

⁸Lewis, “CT 13.33–34 and Ezekiel 32: Lion–Dragon Myths,” *JAOS* 116 (1996): 28–47.

I. TEXT AND TRANSLATION

The text of Ezek 32:17–32 poses several problems; at crucial moments, text-critical and translational issues are highly contested, and no definitive solution is forthcoming for some of these difficulties. Even a brief perusal of the commentaries and available commercial translations reveals widely diverging choices for key terms,⁹ and the state of the text in both the Hebrew and Greek witnesses seems to be somewhat impaired, requiring minor surgery in some instances. As a point of reference, my translation of the passage is as follows:¹⁰

(v. 17) In the twelfth year, on the fifteenth day of the month,¹¹ the word of YHWH came to me, saying: (18) Son of man, wail [נהה] over¹² the multitude/hordes [על המון] of Egypt and bring it down [והרדהו],¹³ her and the daughters of the majestic nations, to the land below [i.e., the Underworld, אל ארץ תחתיות], with those who go down to the Pit [יורדי בור]. (19) Whom do you surpass in beauty? Descend [רדה], and be laid to rest with the uncircumcised [ערלים]! (20) In the midst of those slain by the sword they will fall [יפלו], she is given over to the sword; they drag [her away] [משכו],¹⁴ along with all her hordes.

(21) The rulers of the Gibborim [אלי גבורים]¹⁵ will speak to him from the midst of Sheol, along with his helpers [עזריו]: “They have come down, they lie down, the uncircumcised, slain by the sword!” (22) Assur is there, and all her assembly, its graves [קברתי] surrounding it, all of them slain, fallen [הנפלים] by the sword. (23) Her graves are placed in the outermost regions of the Pit [בירכתי בור], and her assembly all around her grave, all of them slain, fallen [נפלים] by

⁹For major critical commentaries, see Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 163–78; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37*, 659–70; Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 435–41; Paul M. Joyce, *Ezekiel: A Commentary* (Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 482; New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 187–89; Block, *Book of Ezekiel*, 215–34; G. A. Cooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936), 350–59.

¹⁰A more detailed treatment of the relevant issues, as well as a summary of the various proposals for emendation, can be found in Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 163–71; and Boadt, *Ezekiel's Oracles against Egypt*, 150–68.

¹¹The Hebrew does not specify which month, a problem solved in many Greek witnesses by adding “in the first month” (τοῦ πρώτου μηνός [= בראשית]; see Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 163).

¹²לעל is a formulation unique to this passage, while other terms such as קין (Ezek 27:32; 32:16), אנה, ספד, אבל, etc. are more common.

¹³The הו- suffix on the imperative refers to the horde (המון), while the fem. אותה refers to מצרים (?). מצרים is not a city and thus is not clearly feminine; on the other hand, its dual grammatical formation could prompt the feminine אותה. But see v. 20, which has אותה + המון, recalling, quite probably, המון + מצרים in v. 18.

¹⁴משך often means “stretch out, draw, lengthen, delay,” etc., but here must mean to pull or drag down (cf. Deut 21:3; Isa 5:18; Hos 11:4; Pss 10:9; 28:3; Job 40:25).

¹⁵Greek γίγαντες, as in v. 12 and below in v. 27. This follows a relatively consistent trend in the Greek translations of using γίγας as a translation for נפלים, ענקים, גבר, and רפא/רפה.

the sword, the ones who spread terror [חתית] in the land of the living [בארץ חיים].

(24) There is Elam, and all her horde around her grave, all of them slain, fallen [הנפלים] by the sword, who went down uncircumcised to the earth below [ארץ תחתית], the ones who spread their terror [חתים] in the land of the living; they bear their shame with those who go down to the Pit. (25) In the midst of the slain¹⁶ they placed a bed for her, among all her horde, her graves all around him/it, all of them uncircumcised, slain by the sword, for their terror [חתים] was placed in the land of the living; they bear their shame, with those who go down to the Pit, in the midst of the slain they are placed.

(26) Meshek and Tubal are there, and all her horde, her graves all around, all of them uncircumcised, those slain by the sword,¹⁷ for they spread their terror [חתים] in the land of the living. (27) But they do not lie down [ישכבו] with the fallen Gibborim of ancient times [גבורים נפלים מעולם],¹⁸ who went down to Sheol, with their weapons of war, their swords placed under their heads, and their iniquities [עונתם] upon their bones [עצמותם], for the terror [חתית] of the Gibborim was in the land of the living [בארץ חיים].

(28) So will you, in the midst of the uncircumcised, be broken and lie down with those slain by the sword. (29) Edom is there, her kings and all her leaders, who for all their valiance are placed with those slain by the sword, they lie down with the uncircumcised, with those who go down to the Pit. (30) The princes of Zaphon are there, all of them, and all the Sidonians who went down with the slain, in their terror [בחתים], ashamed of their might [מגבורתם], and they lie down uncircumcised with the slain of the sword, and they bear their shame with those who go down to the Pit.

(31) When Pharaoh sees them, he will be consoled for his entire horde,¹⁹ slain by the sword, Pharaoh and all his army, declares the lord יהוה. (32) But I will spread my terror [נתתי את חתי] in the land of the living, and he will be laid down in the midst of the uncircumcised, with those slain by the sword, Pharaoh and all his horde, declares the lord יהוה.

¹⁶Note that the Greek for v. 25 has only three words (“in the midst of the slain ...”), which does not accurately reflect any Hebrew text.

¹⁷The freely alternating forms in this verse (e.g., using the *pulal* participle of חלל instead of the construct noun, etc.), which are completely acceptable here, suggest that it is not appropriate to emend any particular formulation based on the other verses in this lament.

¹⁸Following the Greek here, τῶν γυγάντων τῶν πεπτωότων ἀπὸ αἰῶνος. Though the characterization of the גבורים as ערלים (“uncircumcised”) would fit with imagery throughout the passage, the original reading here is very likely מעולם (“from ancient times”), and in fact it is the repeated appearance of ערלים in these verses that prompted the error (presumably via dittography from v. 28 into v. 27) in the first place.

¹⁹I would prefer to retain the orthography in the MT Ketiv for המונה, with the final ה marking the third masculine singular (as in the next verse).

²⁰Reading the Qere (MT חתינו).

II. EZEKIEL'S FALLEN HORDES AND HEROIC IMAGERY

Several features in this passage reveal affinities with—and intentional disjunctions from—other extant Mediterranean concepts of the heroic dead. Specifically, I would suggest five areas in which themes of heroic power and afterlife appear in our text at hand, and I will briefly discuss how the author of Ezek 32:17–32 adopts, reconfigures, and adapts these themes for his own purposes.²¹

1. The fact that we have here military figures who are very clearly presented as actively inhabiting or straddling the dichotomy between the worlds of the living and the dead is, on the most basic level, an important similarity between the religious language of this text and the evidence for Greek hero cult.²² There are, in fact, other well-known Semitic texts that participate in this world of heroic ideology, most notably the Ugaritic *rp^um* texts.²³ Succinctly put, in archaic and classical Greek materials we find the identity of the hero representing something of a duality: the hero acts on the stage of epic as warrior, performing great deeds in battle, but he then proceeds to play a role *after death*, in cult, for blessing and benefit, thus embodying what would seem at first to be contradictory roles, that is, as killer and as healer.²⁴ The hero dies, but this death ushers in a new era of existence in the

²¹I am content to attribute this passage to the sixth-century prophet Ezekiel, though others have argued (unnecessarily, in my view) for various additions and redactional layers. For example, Zimmerli (*Ezekiel*, 170) tried to identify an “original lament,” about half the length of the passage as it now stands. What he has cut out of this original lament, however, are many references that give the text its specific heroic flavor (he claims that a “strange hand” has introduced heroic elements into v. 27 and elsewhere [p. 174]).

²²This is not to deny, of course, that unheroic or otherwise unnotable humans could be viewed as acting in the world of the living after death.

²³E.g., *KTU* 1.161, 1.20–22, etc. Summaries of past scholarship on the *rp^um* question, with ample bibliography, can be found especially in Theodore J. Lewis, *Cults of the Dead in Ancient Israel and Ugarit* (HSM 39; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), passim; Klaas Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (AOAT 219; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1986), 161–96, which contains a very detailed treatment and translation of all the key texts; Nicolas Wyatt, “A la Recherche de Rephaïm Perdue,” in *The Archaeology of Myth: Papers on Old Testament Tradition* (BibleWorld; London: Equinox, 2010), esp. 75–78; and André Caquot, “Rephaim,” *DBSup* 10:344–57.

²⁴See also Wolfgang Speyer, “Heros,” *RAC* 14:861–77, esp. 870 with reference to heroes as healers. The heroic ability to ensure fertility (of land and humans) is easily transferred into the realm of healing; the Asklepios cult, in particular, combined healer and hero ideologies, but there were many others as well, such as Herakles, Achilles, and Amphiaraus. See Lewis Richard Farnell, *Greek Hero Cults and Ideas of Immortality: The Gifford Lectures Delivered in the University of St. Andrews in the Year 1920* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1921), who discusses Herakles as healer (pp. 150–51) as well as offering a lengthy review of the Asklepios tradition (pp. 234–79). Compare also the epithet “healer of the world” given to a hero in *Bhagavadgītā*, e.g., 6 (63) 15.35–40, in *The*

cultic present of the audience. This dichotomy has been partly revealed through archaeological discovery, which has confirmed the reality of such cults as early as the eighth century B.C.E. (and perhaps much earlier), and also through texts wherein a complex and symbolic vocabulary invoking both elements of the hero's life in epic and the "hidden agendas" of heroic afterlife are present.²⁵ One gets the very distinct impression, however, that, unlike the *rpum* or the Greek *hērōs*, the "heroes" of Ezekiel 32 are stuck in the underworld—the most they can do is glibly rise up to meet the next of their comrades, Pharaoh (v. 21). There are other subtle indications in this passage, however, that reveal as the target of this parodic lament a competing viewpoint, one that sees the heroic dead in a serious and ongoing role in the living world.

2. The imperative used in v. 18 to induce the lament, נהה, is a rare word, used in this way only here and in Mic 2:4 (the nominal נהה, "wailing," appears seven times: Jer 9:9, 17, 18, 19; 31:15; Amos 5:16; Mic 2:4). The act of heroic lament is of course well attested throughout the Mediterranean world, encountered in the West most prominently and earliest in the Homeric corpus (e.g., *Il.* 24), and belongs to a "heroic code" linking death, glory, and immortality in epic.²⁶ In the Hebrew Bible, we find a genuine and, I believe, early, form of heroic lament in a passage such as 2 Sam

Bhagavadgītā in the Mahābhārata, A Bilingual Edition (ed. J. A. B. van Buitenen; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 43.

²⁵ The manifestations of hero cult in ancient Greece have been the subject of enormous interest over the last century, as attested by the plethora of major studies devoted to the topic; for a concise and recent overview, see Gunnell Ekroth, "Heroes and Hero-Cults," in *A Companion to Greek Religion* (ed. Daniel Ogden; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 100–114; and Carla M. Antonaccio, "Contesting the Past: Hero Cult, Tomb Cult, and Epic in Early Greece," *AJA* 98 (1994): 389–410, as well as Antonaccio's more extended treatment in *An Archaeology of Ancestors: Tomb Cult and Hero Cult in Early Greece* (Greek Studies; Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995). See also the essays in *Ancient Greek Hero Cult: Proceedings of the Fifth International Seminar on Ancient Greek Cult, Organized by the Department of Classical Archaeology and Ancient History, Göteborg University, 21–23 April 1995* (ed. Robin Hägg; Acta Instituti Atheniensis Regni Sueciae 8; Stockholm: Svenska Institutet i Athen, 1999), as well as the new collection edited by Christine Schmitz and Anja Bettenworth, *Mensch – Heros – Gott: Weltentwürfe und Lebensmodelle im Mythos der Vormoderne* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2009); Greg Nagy, *Homer the Preclassic* (Sather Classical Lectures 67; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); idem, *The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry* (1979; rev. ed.; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); idem, "The Sign of the Hero: A Prologue to the *Heroikos* of Philostratus," in *Flavius Philostratus, Heroikos* (trans. with an introduction by Jennifer K. Berenson Maclean and Ellen Bradshaw Aitken; Writings from the Greco-Roman World 1; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), xv–xxxv.

²⁶ See Nagy, *Best of the Achaeans*, 94–117, and the essays in *Lament: Studies in the Ancient Mediterranean and Beyond* (ed. Ann Suter; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), esp. Christine Perkell, "Reading the Laments of *Iliad* 24," 93–117; and Brendan Burke, "Mycenaean Memory and the Bronze Age Lament," 70–92. I borrow the phrase "heroic code" from Perkell, 94.

1:17–27, where David laments for the fallen Saul and his sons.²⁷ It is of great further importance to note the reference in 2 Sam 1:18, where the song itself is given a specific name (“[Song of the] Bow,” קשת), and is to be found in a (now lost) collection entitled “The Book of the Upright” (ספר הישר); this ספר הישר may have contained several such heroic laments, to be recited at important moments in the community. Given the ignominious status of those being lamented in Ezekiel 32, however, the “lament” here can only be a parody. The inversion of the reverence and awe inherent in the heroic dirge displayed here nevertheless reveals Ezekiel’s familiarity with this mode of discourse as specifically applied to the heroic context, and the lament itself takes on a powerful, performative spoken power (*Koinzidenz-fall*) in v. 18, where the speaker’s words will “bring her down ... to the Underworld” (והורדהו אותה ... אל ארץ תחתיות).

3. The repeated use of the *Leitwort* חתית deserves some elaboration. This exact form is unique to Ezekiel, appearing six times in our passage (vv. 24, 25, 26, 27, 30, 32) as well as in another lament in 26:17 to describe the city of Tyre, though terms of similar derivation occur elsewhere (cf. מַחֲתָה in Isa 54:14; Jer 17:17; Prov 10:14, 15; 14:28, as well as the very common verbal root חתת, “be dismayed, terrified”). We could justifiably translate חתית in our passage generically as “terror,” as I have in my translation, and indeed we often find just such a use of this root attached to military scenarios. Soldiers may become “terrified” or “thrown into a panic,” and the Israelites are warned against falling into just such a state as they approach the land: אַל תִּירָא וְאַל תַּחַת, “Do not fear or be terrified” (Deut 1:21; 31:8; Josh 1:9; 8:1; 10:25; cf. 2 Chr 20:15, 17; 32:7). In other places, we find the גבור (“hero”) as the subject of this dismay, as in Jer 51:56 (וְגִלְכָדוּ גִבּוֹרֵיהֶּ חֲתָתוּם קִשְׁתוֹתָם), “her warriors are taken, their bows are broken”) and Obad 9 (וַחֲתוּ גִבּוֹרֵיךָ תִּימֹן), “Your warriors shall be shattered, O Teman”), where in each case the חתת that is experienced has something like a crushing or scattering effect—bows are smashed and warriors are thrown into a frenzy, as if from a divine force. To be sure, Gen 35:5 describes a חתת אלהים that falls upon all of the cities through which Jacob and his family travel.

This last instance of חתת as a “divine panic” from God is intriguing, and it is here that we see significant overlap with the Akkadian cognate *hātu, hattū, haattu*, (“terror, panic”).²⁸ Specifically, these Akkadian terms describe panic as a type of induced, supernatural terror, that is, the panic that comes from a divine authority (or even a king), as well as “panic” as a mental illness, a symptom of sickness, fever, or some other sudden fear. The word *haattu*, particularly, is almost exclusively connected to panic or terror caused by ghosts or witchcraft, for example:

²⁷ P. Kyle McCarter, at least, is willing to date the poem in a tenth-century context (*II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary* [AB 9; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984], 78–79).

²⁸ See *CAD* 6/H, 1, 150–51.

šumma amēlu eṭimmu iṣbatsu [...] u ḥa-a-a-at-ti eṭimmi irtanašši

If a ghost takes possession of a man ... if he has repeated attacks of panic (caused by) a ghost...²⁹

I would like to suggest the possibility that the use of חתית in Ezekiel 32 reflects something of this sense of supernatural, ghost-induced panic, in that our author is specifically *denying* the fallen dead any power of חתית over those who are now living (in the contemporary world of the author). In our passage, the “terror” was always in *the land of the living* (בארץ חיים), which is to say that the “fallen” (נפלים) were able to spread their panic only while they were alive, as emphasized repeatedly in vv. 23, 24, 25, 27, 29, and 32.³⁰

In v. 27 particularly, we learn that even the Gibborim of the ancient world, who may have held some special (even if disreputable) status in ancient Israelite thought (Gen 6:4), are effective only in their historical epoch and not beyond. The insistence that the only “terror” these figures have left is in powerless human memory comes in vv. 28–29, where the author drives home with repeated and clear imagery the status of the warriors as broken (שבר), lying down (שכב), and in the Pit (בור), this last location emphasizing the physical earthiness of death, its finality. The atmosphere is one of total impotence, suggested even if obliquely by the notion of uncircumcision throughout the passage.

The juxtaposition of ארץ תחתיות and ארץ חיים (“underworld”) is the central obsession of the speaker in Ezekiel 32, and the central ideological effort here seems to be directed at severing these two worlds from each other as decisively as possible. The specific power of this image of powerless death must, I contend, lie in a *counter-image*, viz., a concept of the fallen dead who are thought to have the power of spreading חתית into the land of the living as a divine or semidivine panic from the grave. Verse 27 is notable here, since an explicit connection is made between the גבורים נפלים מעולם (following the Greek here) and their חתית; YHWH’s commanding position over and against his חתית-spreading rivals is made clear at the end of the oracle in v. 32: כי נתתי את חתיתי בארץ חיים (“But I will spread *my* חתית in the land of the living”).

The idea that the dead hero has the power to cause terror and to harm in the “land of the living” is clearly exemplified in the Greek epic tradition. Two examples from the world of tragedy come to mind. In Aeschylus’s *Orestia* trilogy, the figures of both Agamemnon and Klytemnestra prove potent from beyond death, as a visit to Agamemnon’s grave in the *Libation Bearers* begins a cycle of violence leading to the murder of Klytemnestra and her lover, while the murder of Klytemnestra brings

²⁹KAR 267:2, as cited in CAD 6/ H, 1. Compare with Job 7:14: “You terrify me [וחתתני] with dreams, and you frighten me with visions.”

³⁰The alternative, and perhaps more straightforward, view here is that the threat of death is a wisdom motif; that is, death is the great leveler, and even the mightiest warrior and empire will meet the same gloomy fate.

about (in the form of the Erinyes) an attempt at vengeance. A more direct illustration of the hero's fury (as opposed to blessing) after death comes in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*: Oedipus promises that his vengeful spirit will brood against Creon and his land forever (784), while, alternatively, his heroic body will serve as a blessing for the location of its rightful burial (552, etc.), and Oedipus promises the Athenians blessing in return for defending him as opposed to disaster for their enemies, Thebes (450–60).³¹ The prophet Samuel's inauspicious appearance to Saul in 1 Sam 28:15–19 may also be considered an instance of the power of the notable dead to haunt the living, though in Samuel's case the prophet only recounts the fated decision of YHWH that seemed obvious throughout the preceding narrative.

4. The special attention the prophet pays in this passage to the bones of dead in v. 27 is remarkable on several fronts. There is a text-critical problem in the phrase **ותהי עונתם על עצמותם**, as many want to emend **עונתם** to “their shield” (presumably either **מגניהם** or **ענותם/צנותם?**), which would make sense on two levels, viz., the parallel with swords under heads in the preceding line (**ויתנו את חרבותם תחת** **ראשיהם**),³² and the possibility of graphic confusion between **עונתם** and **צנותם**.³³ But other factors militate against this emendation. The notion of “iniquity” bound up in the bones of dead heroes may preserve a polemic against a widespread notion that the powers of blessing and fertility were connected with heroic bones—as was apparently the case in the Greek conception of hero cults.³⁴ The bones of these

³¹ See also 1380–85, where Oedipus speaks of the *kratos* (“power”) of his curse after death against those who would mistreat him. See also Brian R. Doak, “The Fate and Power of Heroic Bones in Ancient Israel and Greece,” *HTR* 106 (2013): 201–16.

³² The practice of burying warriors with their weaponry is apparently a very ancient custom in the Levant; see, e.g., Yosef Garfinkel, “Warrior Burial Customs in the Levant during the Early Second Millennium B.C.,” in *Studies in the Archaeology of Israel and Neighboring Lands in Memory of Douglas L. Esse* (ed. Samuel R. Wolff; Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization 59; Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago), 143–61.

³³ Zimmerli (*Ezekiel*, 168) accepts this solution. See comments in Pohlmann, *Hesekiel*, 435. Note also the shield/Gibbor connection in 2 Sam 1:21: **כי שם נגעל מגן גבורים**, “for there the shield of the mighty was defiled.” But cf. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37*, 666, who maintains the reading “iniquities,” citing the “terror” in the next clause: “since it is the result of their terrorizing ... it may refer to some visible stigma set on their limbs as punishment.” The word **צנה** appears only one time as plural in the Hebrew Bible (**צנות**, 2 Chr 11:12), out of around twenty uses of the word, perhaps suggesting that the singular (**צנה**) was more commonly used collectively (as in 2 Chr 9:15; Ezek 39:9, etc.).

³⁴ On such objects of power, see the early study of Friedrich Pfister, *Der Reliquienkult im Altertum* (1909–12; repr., Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten 5; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1974); Gregory Nagy, *Pindar's Homer: The Lyric Possession of an Epic Past* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 177; and Barbara McCauley, “Heroes and Power: The Politics of Bone Transferal,” in Hägg, *Ancient Greek Hero Cult*, 94 n. 30. McCauley argues that bones themselves were not viewed as talismans. See, more recently, Doak, “Fate and Power of Heroic Bones.”

Gibborim, Ezekiel contends (in the MT), are not only bereft of blessing but actively covered with עוֹן .³⁵

By the time of the Greek translation, incidentally, which reflects עונות , the reference in Ezek 32:27 was understood in the context of a gigantomachy:

καὶ ἐκοιμήθησαν μετὰ τῶν γιγάντων τῶν πεπτωκότων ἀπὸ αἰῶνος οἱ καὶ κατέβησαν εἰς ἄδου ἐν ὄπλοις πολεμικοῖς καὶ ἔθηκαν τὰς μαχαίρας αὐτῶν ὑπὸ τὰς κεφαλὰς αὐτῶν καὶ ἐγενήθησαν αἱ ἀνομίαι αὐτῶν ἐπὶ τῶν ὀστέων αὐτῶν ὅτι ἐξεφόβησαν γίγαντας ἐν γῆ ζωῆς

and they lay down with the giants, fallen long ago, the ones who went down to Hades by weapons of war, and they placed swords under their heads and the lawless acts that they created were upon their bones, since they terrified giants in the land of the living.³⁶

The invocation here of bygone heroic figures terrifying giants may be an oblique reference to stories such as the one (Pseudo-)Apollodorus enshrines in his compendium of Greek mythology (*Bibliotheca* 1.6.1): only a human—Herakles, specifically—can defeat the giants, as the gods are powerless to kill them.³⁷

Whatever the case, as Klaas Spronk points out, the אצמ is an important image in the Ezekielian world of symbols, and the burying or revivification of bones plays a critical function in what can be read as a two-part drama in Ezek 37:1–14 and 39:11–20.³⁸ In the first instance, in the midst of a valley of dry bones (37:1) the רוח יהוה sweeps in and brings the dead, Israel, up out of their graves. In 39:11–20, we find the only other reference in Ezekiel to the גבורים (39:18, 20), and it comes in a context where the term עברים (“those who cross over”) may be read in the sense of the departed, heroic dead (vv. 11, 14).³⁹ The location of the עברים , east of the Jordan (39:11), coincides with the homeland of the רפאים in Numbers–Deuteronomy, and the Ugaritic *‘brm* is a parallel term to describe the *rp²um* who “cross over” from the underworld (*KTU* 1.22:1:15).⁴⁰ Moreover, the reference to “horse and chariot” alongside the גבור in 39:20 recalls the association of these items with the *rp²um* in *KTU* 1.20–22 generally.⁴¹ The scene in Ezekiel 32 may have provided inspiration

³⁵To say that iniquity lies in the bones could also be an image of iniquity at the deepest level of one’s physical being (see, e.g., Job 33:19).

³⁶See Kraeling, “Significance and Origin of Gen. 6:1–4,” 204–5.

³⁷Apollodorus, *The Library* (trans. James G. Frazer; 2 vols.; LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921).

³⁸Spronk, “Travellers עברים ,” *DDD* (2nd ed.), 876–77, as well as the perceptive analysis of Saul M. Olyan, “Unnoticed Resonances of Tomb Opening and Transportation of the Remains of the Dead in Ezekiel 37:12–14,” *JBL* 128 (2009): 491–501.

³⁹See Spronk, “Travellers עברים .” On the Hebrew Rephaim as departed spirits, see, e.g., Lewis, *Cults of the Dead*; Caquot, “Rephaim,” 344–57; Johannes C. de Moor, “Rāpī’ūma – Rephaim,” *ZAW* 88 (1976): 323–45.

⁴⁰Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife*, 229. See also the references to אבת (“ghosts”? “mediums”?) as a geographical locale east of the Jordan in Num 21:10–11; 33:43–44, as well as עברים in Num 33:44.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 229–30. Though nowhere in the biblical texts are the רפאים directly associated with

for, or been conceived as a thematic counterpart to, the presentation in 37:1–14/39:11–20, as these scenes are connected not only via references to bones and the place of the dead but also by other specific vocabulary, such as קבר, המון, and גבור.⁴² In the end, the simple text-critical solution of עונתם for עונתם may obviate the value of some of what has been said here, but we should not overlook the possibilities attendant upon taking the MT as the original reading.

5. The notion that those killed in heroic battle have a special place in the afterlife is a shared feature of Ezekiel 32 and Greek heroic literature, even as Ezekiel 32 may be the only text in the Hebrew Bible to give such a detailed description of this geography.⁴³ In the most famous depiction of heroes in the underworld in Greek epic, *Odyssey* book 11, we find a gloomy scene of the dead, accessed by a type of ritual pit ceremony (11.23–50). Though some have asserted that the scene in book 11 demonstrates no awareness of rank in the afterlife, this appears to be not entirely true; the dead are still organized into various groups, such as brides, unwed youths, old men, children, and, finally, “men slain in battle, wearing their blood-stained armor” (*Od.* 11.35–41).⁴⁴ After Odysseus encounters various women, including wives of heroes, he then finds Agamemnon (11.385), who is presented as a feeble shade, followed by Achilles, Patroklos, Antilochus, and Aias (11.465–70). Achilles in particular bemoans his fate, and, in a rather un-Iliadic fashion, wishes that he could live on earth as a slave rather than in his current state (*Od.* 11.487; cf. *Il.* 9.410–16). Still, as M. L. West argues, the Homeric dead do preserve something

horses and chariots, as they are in the Ugaritic materials cited here, it is worthwhile to note that dozens of so-called horse-and-rider figurines have been uncovered in burial and cultic contexts in Israel, particularly from the seventh century. These figures are anonymous, and it is often assumed that they represent ʾYHW or some other male deity, or perhaps that they are symbols of wealth or status and thus depict the nobles buried at the site. No one (to my knowledge) has yet suggested, however, that these images may somehow draw on the imagery of a specific class of horse-riding preternatural dead, as in *KTU* 1.20–22, who visit important cultic sites or graves. See images and discussion in Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel* (trans. Thomas H. Trapp; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 341–49, figs. 333a–336; Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead* (JSOTSup 123; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 251, fig. 12. There is one enigmatic instance of chariots referenced in the context of “death,” in Elijah’s exclamation in 2 Kgs 2:12: “My father! My father! The chariot of Israel and its horsemen!” At any rate, many biblical authors do offer polemics against the role of the horse and rider as agents of deliverance, though in each case such invectives seem to have only a generic military target (as in Exod 15:1, 21; Isa 43:17; Jer 8:6; Zech 9:10, 12:4; Pss 33:17; 76:7; 147:10; Prov 21:31).

⁴² As pointed out by Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife*, 229–30.

⁴³ There is a hint of a similar conception, though, in Isa 14:4–21. See Otto Eissfeldt, “Schwerterschlagene bei Hesekiel,” in *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy Presented to Theodore H. Robinson by the Society for Old Testament Study on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday, August 9th, 1946* (ed. H. H. Rowley; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1950), 73–81.

⁴⁴ Quotations here and below are taken from Homer, *The Odyssey* (trans. A. T. Murray; revised by G. E. Dimock; LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

of their earthly identity and role (e.g., in dress, manner of speech, etc.), and later periods would see the detailed development of highly demarcated positions in the afterlife.⁴⁵ And even as Achilles laments his final fate, Odysseus is apparently able to discern Achilles' lordly status in death: "For before, when you were alive, we Argives honored you equally with the gods, and now that you are here, you rule mightily among the dead" (11.484–86).⁴⁶

It is unclear just how systematic Ezekiel's own presentation is intended to be, but one can detect a certain organization into three tiers:⁴⁷ the Gibborim of the ancient world, who inhabit their own realm (v. 27); Assur, Elam, Meshek, and Tubal, all of whom are mentioned in sequence and treated as though the name of the country is an eponym of some sort (vv. 23, 24, 25, 26); and smaller entities (Edom, Zaphon, and Sidon) that are mentioned in a different manner, as nations with kings or princes and a population. We might depict the arrangement crudely as follows:

Assur	Elam	Edom	
	Meshek	Zaphon	Gibborim of Old
	Tubal	Sidon	
	(Pharaoh)		

Assur is relegated to the "uttermost edge of the Pit" (ירכתי בור) in v. 23—presumably in the sense of distance and ignobility—and could thus be in a class of its own. Assur is also not described as "uncircumcised," while the others in the group are, though the meaning of this omission is not clear. The fact that there exists such a remote region—a type of ninth circle of hell, as it were—indicates some geographical organization.⁴⁸ Ezekiel's underworld suggests that this geography is indeed a segregated one, indicated also by the reference in v. 21 to "rulers of the Gibborim" (אלי גבורים). The members of the group including Assur, Elam, Meshek, and Tubal are all treated as individuals, around whose graves are gathered that eponym's hordes; it is even conceivable that Ezekiel imagined these names as the names of eponymous deities, who, in the fashion of biblical polemic elsewhere (most notably Psalm 82), have died and now inhabit the underworld.⁴⁹ Presumably Pharaoh is to rest among this first group of major powers-as-eponyms and,

⁴⁵ West, *East Face of Helicon*, 164; West even compares the state of monarchs in the underworld in Ezekiel 32 with Achilles' status as ruler in the underworld (pp. 165–66).

⁴⁶ See *ibid.*, 165–66, and 166 n. 268, for other references to the fate of kings in the afterlife in Greek materials, e.g., Aeschylus, *Pers.* 691; *Cho.* 355–62.

⁴⁷ Launderville (*Spirit and Reason*, 309–12) also notes the special place of the ancient Gibborim in v. 27, and, drawing on the work of Boadt (*Ezekiel's Oracles against Egypt*, 154–61, etc.), suggests the possibility of a three-tiered structure.

⁴⁸ It is not clear why Assur should be relegated to this most dishonorable realm. The negative memory of Assyrian hegemony apparently still remained strong during the sixth century, even after Nineveh's destruction. See also Ezek 23:7 and 31:3 for negative images of Assyria.

⁴⁹ Alternatively, it may be that the eponym represents some kind of rhetorical standard or

as an embodied god in the Egyptian religious conception, would fit in along with Assur and the others.⁵⁰ The smaller nations are mentioned last and may even be grouped together with the generic “slain by the sword,” that is, the common soldiers killed in battle.⁵¹ Whatever the case, all of the חרבי חרב as a general category are grouped together in the underworld (v. 20), a category under which all of the nations and individuals mentioned in the passage fall.

The use of the verb נפל in a specific framework describing this landscape of the fallen, heroic dead occurs in a number of notable biblical passages.⁵² Consider, for example, the threefold refrain of David’s lament for Saul and Jonathan in 2 Sam 1:19, 25, 27: אִיךְ נִפְלוּ גִבּוֹרִים (ו), “How the Gibborim have fallen!”⁵³ The taunt (משל) against Babylon in Isa 14:4–20 describes a personified Babylon’s descent to Sheol with terminology that is evocative of the intermingling of traditions regarding the Nephilim, the giants, the Rephaim, and the afterlife. In Isa 14:9, the רפאים (Greek γίγαντες) are aroused in Sheol to meet the fallen leader, to wit, the fellow “leaders of the earth” (עתודי ארץ) and “kings of the nations” (מלכי גוים). In 14:12, the verb נפל appears in its crucial context: אִיךְ נִפְלָה מִשָּׁמַיִם הַיְלֵל בֶּן שָׁחַר, “How are you fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn!”⁵⁴ Note also the series of terms in this passage that convey cognate notions of falling down or being cast away, such as שכב, ירד, גדע, חלש, and שלח. These words are then powerfully opposed to the verb עלה (“go up”) in 14:13–14. A similar juxtaposition of notions of rising and falling in terms of life and death appears in Isa 26:14: מֵתִים בִּלְיַחַי רִפְאִים בִּלְיָקֻמוֹ, “dead do not live, Rephaim do not rise” (i.e., with קום as the equivalent idea to עלה in this formulation).⁵⁵ In Ezekiel, the lament over Tyre in 26:18 is intoned “on the day of

symbolic “center” representing the place for each nation. Assur was certainly a deity, but others seem not to have been commonly known as gods.

⁵⁰Note also that the seemingly strange reference to Egypt’s “loveliness” (ממי נעמת) in Ezek 32:19 is possibly a parody on a Ugaritic euphemism for the underworld, *nʿmy*, “loveliness.” See Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife*, 204, 337, citing *KTU* 1.5.6.6–7.

⁵¹See Launderville, *Spirit and Reason*, 310.

⁵²The term נפלים describes fallen warriors in Josh 8:25; Judg 8:10; 20:46; 1 Sam 20:46; 31:8; 1 Chr 10:8; 2 Chr 20:24, as well as three other times in Ezekiel 32 (vv. 22, 23, 24). The verb נפל is used elsewhere to refer to the fallen dead in a significantly plentiful number of contexts: Exod 19:21; 32:28; Lev 26:7, 8, 36; Num 14:3, 29, 32, 43; Josh 8:24, 25; Judg 4:16, 22; 5:27; 12:6; 20:44; 1 Sam 4:10; 17:49, 52; 31:1; 2 Sam 1:4, 10, 12; 2:16, 23; 3:34, 38; 11:7; 21:9, 22, 39; Isa 3:25; 10:4; 13:15; 31:3, 8; 37:7; Jer 6:15; 8:12; 9:21; 19:7; 20:4; 39:18; 44:12; 46:12; 49:26; 50:30; 51:4, 8, 44, 47, 49; Ezek 5:12; 6:4, 7, 11, 12; 11:10; 17:21; 23:25; 24:21; 25:13; 28:23; 30:4, 5, 6, 17; 33:27; 35:8; 39:4, 5, 23; Hos 7:16; 13:16; Amos 7:17; Pss 18:39; 45:6; 78:64; 82:7; 91:7; 106:26; Job 1:15, 16; Lam 2:21; 1 Chr 5:22; 10:1, 8; 20:8; 21:14; 2 Chr 29:9; 32:21.

⁵³Note that Jer 46:12 combines נפל and גבר (in a derisive manner).

⁵⁴Cf. Isa 21:9, נפלה ונפלה בבל, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon,” as well as Jer 51:4, 8, 44, 47, 49, where this same imagery appears. I am inclined to see Isaiah 14 as earlier, though both could be drawing from a common source of some kind. Amos 5:2 interestingly uses the “X נפלה” motif for Israel; see also Amos 8:14.

⁵⁵Isaiah 26:18–19 goes on to exploit the verb נפל in terms of dying and rising, perhaps

your fall” (מפלתך), also in v. 15), an event that culminates in a cataclysm by flood (v. 19),⁵⁶ and in ch. 28 we read of the king of Tyre’s fate, as he is cast down from the holy mountain down to “earth” (ארץ, v. 17).⁵⁷ It is important to notice the connection in Ezek 26:20 between the fall of the arrogant ruler and the primeval inhabitants of the underworld: “I will bring you down with those who go down into the Pit [בור], to the ancient people [עם עולם], and I will settle you in the earth below among the ancient ruins [בחרבות מעולם].”

In summary of the meaning of these references for my broader argument, I may state the following. The author of Ezek 32:17–32 seems clearly to be exploiting an established correlation between Nephilim, the verb נפל, and ancient Gibborim. These concepts, then, could be conceived of in terms of one another at least by the early sixth century B.C.E., if not far earlier.⁵⁸ The passage in Ezekiel 32 thus bears an important witness to the conflation of these significant traditions, as the author seems intentionally to be moving *beyond* simply using a common word, נפל, to describe the dead in battle, but rather is alluding either to a broader tradition of “fallen” Gibborim in a manner reminiscent of the fragmentary reference in Gen 6:1–4 or to the very text of Gen 6:1–4 itself. Daniel I. Block thinks that the use of the Gen 6:1–4 Gibborim tradition here is “shocking” and asks how Ezekiel could “hold up the antediluvians as honorable residents of Sheol, when his own religious tradition presents them as the epitome of wickedness, corruption, and violence?”⁵⁹

The obvious answer to this question is that these figures must *not* have been the epitome of wickedness in all of the tradition’s plurality—even though the actors in Gen 6:1–4 may well be the proximate cause of the flood, the Nephilim and Gibborim are still presented with an aura of reverence and the significance that was attached to the distant past.⁶⁰ The haunting power of the Gibborim of old, set

reversing the expected connotation of נפל as falling (= death) and instead using נפל to describe the earth “casting forth” (= giving birth to?) the Rephaim (v. 19b): תפיל ראפים וארץ. See Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah: A Continental Commentary*, vol. 2, *Isaiah 12–27* (trans. Thomas H. Trapp; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 551, 556.

⁵⁶See Ezek 26:3–6; 27:17, 27, 34, and discussion in Paul D. Hanson, “Rebellion in Heaven, Azazel, and Euhemeristic Heroes in 1 Enoch 6–11,” *JBL* 96 (1977): 195–233, esp. 211.

⁵⁷It should be noted that ארץ here, as elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible and cognate Northwest Semitic and Mesopotamian literatures, often refers to the *underworld*; see 26:20, where this is made more explicit.

⁵⁸It is not the case, *pace* Francesca Stavrakopoulou, *Land of Our Fathers: The Roles of Ancestor Veneration in Biblical Land Claims* (Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 473; London: T&T Clark, 2010), 66–67 n. 42, that the Nephilim (נפלים) are named as such in this passage. Rather, the concept of the “fallen” (נפלים) is so closely related to the tradition of fallen warriors here that the association between the נפלים, the נפלים, and the heroic dead here is surely intentional. Of course, consonantly, נפלים and נפלים are identical, leaving open the possibility that נפלים in Gen 6:4 could have been vocalized as נפלים.

⁵⁹Block, *Book of Ezekiel*, 228.

⁶⁰A similar view is expressed by Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife*, 280: “Because Gen 6:1–4 refers to a well-known tradition about ancient giants it has to concede that these heroes, although they

alongside the less mythically fearsome and impotent hordes of Israel's current enemies, presents a paradox of heroic ideologies, and it seems that something of this religious conflict is built into the fabric of Ezekiel's symbolic world. On the one hand, the prophet recognizes and even endorses the trope of heroic power from the grave, and, on the other, he seeks to extinguish it for specific populations. Even as the author of Ezek 32:17–32 *divests* the fallen heroes of their power to act, and thus *denies* his audience any notion of an active, real hero cult with its terror, it is important to notice the ways in which he still *invests* these figures with some resonance of traditional power at the critical turning point of v. 27. Indeed, as Walther Eichrodt briefly observed in his commentary forty years ago, the characters in this passage “belong to that heroic age celebrated in widely known epics as standing at the beginning of man's history, and some of its glamour still clings to them.”⁶¹

III. CONCLUSION

The unity and widespread nature of this heroic—or better, *anti*-heroic—portrayal in the chapter as I have described it lend considerable credence to those who have argued for a distinct theology of history and the heroic dead in Ezek 32:17–32,⁶² and a more robust recognition of the features pertaining to heroic dualities of living action and, in this case, *inaction*, in the world of the dead further helps to identify some aspects of shared heroic ideology circulated in the eighth to sixth centuries in the Mediterranean.

This interaction with “foreign” religious ideas through polemic is of course part of a seemingly large number of attempts in the Hebrew Bible to neutralize the power of some forbidden idea. Peter Machinist, for example, sees a “point-counterpoint” dynamic in play in the reported speech of the Rab Shakeh in 2 Kings 18–19 and Isaiah 36–37 (cf. 2 Chronicles 32).⁶³ In this multiply recorded episode, genuine Assyrian propaganda is, in Machinist's view, recorded, modified, and *subverted* by its distorted inclusion in the biblical text. The Rab Shakeh comes to speak not just for the Assyrians but also for those *within* Judah opposing Hezekiah's reforms, thus making the status of Judahite “insider” and Assyrian “outsider” a complex one. However, the process of subverting existing theologies through polemical adoption and adaption is culturally and religiously perilous, since, as

lost their power, obtained immortal fame, because their name is still remembered.” See Hendel (“Of Demigods and the Deluge”) on Gen 6:1–4 and the flood.

⁶¹ Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 438.

⁶² For example, Zimmerli (*Ezekiel*, 176) finds “mingled” into Ezekiel 32 “something of the nature of a doctrine of world ages, with which Hesiod can be compared as a close parallel.” See also Pohlmann, *Hesekiel*, 440; and Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 441.

⁶³ Machinist, “The Rab Šāqēh at the Wall of Jerusalem: Israelite Identity in the Face of the Assyrian ‘Other,’” *HS* 41 (2000): 151–68.

Machinist points out, the biblical authors run the risk of “ideological ambiguity” if the opposing views appear too frightening or persuasive, thus backfiring on the author.⁶⁴ The “Other” as a historiographic or religious trope “both repels and fascinates,”⁶⁵ and this ambivalence proves to be deeply creative as the “other” idea must be recognized as dangerously powerful and persuasive even as it is simultaneously mocked. Similarly, in a recent study Jeremy M. Hutton analyzes the appropriation of “hostile theologies” through the Israelite use of the *Chaoskampf* motif in Isa 51:9–11 (cf. Psalms 74; 89). Hutton is able to show that this appropriation not only subversively rejects the “false” views of others who might attribute such victories over chaos to deities other than YHWH but also suggests that the prophet in Isaiah 51 sought to criticize members of *his own community* who would use the *Chaoskampf* motif in supposedly inappropriate ways.⁶⁶

Prophetic subversion, then, can be viewed not only as criticism of that which is foreign but also as a scathing rebuke to *insiders* who would ally themselves with wrong ideologies. These kinds of subversions rely not only on vague associations that “insiders” may draw between the rejected ideas and foreign/“outsider” practice, but rather they are aimed at that which is “foreign” or “outside” *within* those on the “inside.” Ezekiel’s use of heroic death imagery in Ezek 32:17–32 has, I have argued, drawn upon the language of a broader Mediterranean heroic *koinē*. Although Ezekiel speaks the language of this *koinē*, he by and large participates in an exilic and postexilic trend in the Hebrew Bible toward the *denigration* of heroic ideals; indeed, in these later periods, the only “hero” one will be able to speak of is God alone, while the valor of humans recedes, like the גבורים נפלים מעולם (“the fallen Gibborim of ancient times”) into the shadowy past. The “foreign” image against which Ezekiel draws up his polemic in ch. 32 is thus composed at least partly of Israel’s own memories of a past heroic age—memories that could never function straightforwardly in a changed political context. For postexilic authors generally, God becomes Israel’s only meaningful actor, separating Israel from every other nation. Indeed, it is this distinction between Israel and others that is at the heart of how later interpreters would come to read a passage like Ezek 32:17–32; as stated in *Sifre Deut.*, commenting on Deut 32:8 (Pisqa 311, “When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance...”):

When the Holy One, blessed be He, gave the peoples their inheritance, He made Gehenna their portion, as it is said, *Asshur is there and all her company* (Ezek. 23:33), *There are the princes of the north, all of them, and all the Zidonians* (Ezek. 32:30), *There is Edom, her kings* (Ezek. 32:29). Should you ask, who will possess their wealth and honor? the answer is, Israel...⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Ibid., 164.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 166.

⁶⁶ Hutton, “Isaiah 51:9–11 and the Rhetorical Appropriation and Subversion of Hostile Theologies,” *JBL* 126 (2007): 271–303.

⁶⁷ *Sifre: A Tannaitic Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy* (trans. Reuven Hammer; Yale Judaica Series 24; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 317.