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Manfried DIETRICH und Ingo KOTTSIEPER

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Down with Hêlêl!

The Assumed Mythological Background of Isa. 14:12

Klaas Spronk, Amsterdam

In 1976 Oswald Loretz took part in the ongoing scholarly debate about a possible myth referred to by the prophet mocking the king of Babylon. The title of this article in *UF* 8, 133-136, "Der kanaanäisch-biblische Mythos vom Sturz des Šahar-Sohnes Hêlêl," is slightly misleading, because in his conclusion Loretz only speaks of elements from Canaanite mythology in Isa 14:12-15: the mountain of the assembly of the gods and the god Šahar, who is known in Ugaritic texts in the divine pair *šhr wšlm*. With regard to *hyll* as a possible reference to an ancient myth, he avoids rash conclusions. He only admits that there could be a relation with Ugaritic *hll*, and also with the Greek myth of Phaeton. The by many scholars proposed identification with the Canaanite god Athtar is merely mentioned, not discussed. In his *Ugarit und die Bibel* (1990) Loretz is even more cautious. He speaks of "eine klar erkennbare Weiterführung kanaanäischer Traditionen" (p. 160), but makes no remarks on the possible mythological background of *hyll*. Instead, in calling this passage a description of the "Sturz Luzifers (= 'Glanzgestirn'), he points to another "Weiterführung", namely in later Jewish, intertestamental and in early Christian literature.

A similar reticence in this matter can be found with Watson. In his opinion the king of Babylon is "designated mockingly as Hêlêl in the guise of Athtar; but there is no evidence for the acknowledgement of Hêlêl's real existence or of his cult."¹ So a century of modern research on this topic seems to end in a *non liquet*.²

¹ W.G.E. Watson, "HELEL," *Dictionary of Deities and Demons* (= DDD), ed. K. van der Toorn et al., Leiden 1995, 746-750 (with a convenient survey of previous research), esp. p. 749.

² D.E. Gowan, *When Man Becomes God. Humanism and Hubris in the Old Testament* (Pittsburgh Theological Monographs 6), Pittsburgh 1975, 50-53, concludes his discussion of attempts to reconstruct the original myth with the remark that it is better to think here of a combination of mythological themes. Cf. also B. Gosse, *Isaïe 13,1-14,23 dans la tradition littéraire du livre d'Isaïe et dans la tradition des oracles contre les nations* (OBO 78), Freiburg/Göttingen 1988, 232: "La reconstruction de l'arrière-fond d'Is. 14,12-15 ressemble à un tableau impressionniste. The same opinion is found with J.B. Burns, "Does Helel 'Go to Hell'?", *PEGLMBS* 9 (1989), 89-97; cf. also *ZAH* 2 (1989), 202: "the mythological background to Is 14:12-15 remains resolutely obscure." G.L. Keown, *A History of the Interpretation of Isaiah 14 : 12-15*,

It is typical of this situation that some scholars have recently returned to the older view that the writer of Isa. 14 used a Mesopotamian deity to symbolize the king of Babylon. Sweeney refers to the myth of Ishtar's journey to the netherworld.³ Gallagher sees a resemblance between the god Illil (Sumerian Enlil) and the *hyll* of Isa. 14 (1) in their name, (2) in their association with dawn, (3) in their being called a devastator, (4) their astral function, (5) being the highest / wanting to be like the highest, and (6) their fall into the netherworld.⁴ Gallagher admits that this theory does not solve all problems, but he regards the proposed identification as 'very probable.' It cannot be denied, however, that the evidence is only circumstantial. One of the main problems is the difference between Hêlêl wanting to be like the highest and Illil already holding this status. This cannot simply be dismissed by 'looking at it from a Judaeic perspective' putting Illil in second place compared to the God of Judah, because this does not solve the problem that we have no parallels in Mesopotamian mythology of Illil reaching for the top.

Recently O'Connor suggested 'thematic correspondence' between Gilgamesh XI and Isa. 14 'designed to evoke the mythic imagery of the Mesopotamian story as to invert its story-line and create a parody on the fall of the Mesopotamian king'.⁵ This offers no clue to the identification of *hyll bn-šhr*. In his opinion this is probably 'no more than a familiar Canaanite alloform for the ancient Near Eastern mythological character who exceeds his proper status and subsequently has to undergo humiliation'.⁶

Most scholars still find the best parallel in the Ugaritic myth of Baal describing the unsuccessful attempt of Athtar to take the vacant throne of Baal, on the heights of the Zaphon (KTU 1.6.I:53-65). But until now no

diss. Ann Arbor 1979, 139 concludes: "No modern scholar is able to identify : *hyll bn-šhr*" (cf. Gosse, p. 233, n. 1).

³ M.A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39* (The Forms of the Old Testament Literature 16), Grand Rapids 1996, 237f. See for the identification with Ishtar already F. Delitzsch, *Das Buch Jesaja* (BCAT), Leipzig 1889⁴, 212.

⁴ W.R. Gallagher, "On the Identity of Hêlêl Ben Šahar of Is. 14:12-15," *UF* 26 (1994), 131-146. Of the earlier scholars 'focusing on Mesopotamian data to explain the passage,' he mentions F. Delitzsch in his commentary on Isaiah and B. Alfrink, "Der Versammlungsberg im äußersten Norden (Is. 14)," *Bib* 14 (1933), 41-67. A relation to Illil (Ellil) had been already suggested by J.A. Montgomery, as reported by A.T. Clay, "Ellil, the God of Nippur," *AJSL* 23 (1907), 269-279, esp. p. 278. This was rejected, again, by O. Procksch, *Jesaja*, I (KAT), Leipzig 1930, 197: 'da Ellil zur Morgenröte keine Beziehung hat und auch kein gestürzter Gott ist.'

⁵ R.H. O'Connell, "Isaiah XIV 4B-23: Ironic Reversal Trough Concentric Structure and Mythic Allusion," *VT* 38 (1988), 407-418. This is based on earlier suggestions by R.C. van Leeuwen, "Isa. 14:12, *hōlēš 'l gwym* and Gilgamesh XI, 6," *JBL* 99 (1980), 173-184, accepted by W.G.E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry* (JSOTS 26), Sheffield 1984, 309f.

⁶ Art. cit., p. 417.

convincing answer has been given to the question why Athtar would have been called *hyll* (literary: 'the shining one') in Isa. 14. There also remains a striking difference between Athtar, who is promoted by Athirat but subsequently acknowledges his own inferiority, and *hyll bn-šhr*, who is the example of unfounded pride which has had a fall.⁷

In this article presented to Oswald Loretz, the problem regarding the possible mythological background of Isa. 14 is approached along lines set out by professor Loretz himself. Firstly, any comparison of biblical with extra-biblical texts should be based on a sound exegesis of all texts involved; secondly, one should beware of simplifications in distinguishing biblical thought from the mythology of Israel's 'Umwelt'.⁸

Most studies on the identity of *hyll* are restricted to vss. 12-15, because here one finds the interesting mythological elements. These verses cannot be simply separated, however, from their context, especially vss. 4-23. It may even be useful to look at the previous chapter as well, for it is placed under the same heading *mš' bbl*. As was demonstrated elsewhere,⁹ 14: 4b-23 appears to be built up of three stanzas. The first describes the fall of the oppressor (4b-11). It can be separated again into two substanzas, one about the happy reaction to the fall of the oppressor (4b-8), the other about his reception in the netherworld (9-11). The second stanza describes the fall from heaven into the netherworld (12-20a); again in two parts: his fall from heaven (12-15) and his miserable state after death (16-20a). The third stanza is about his twofold extinction (20b-23), that of his sons (20b-21) and of his city (22-23). This structure is indicated, among others things, by a number of key-words (for instance, '(y)k' in 4b, 12 and 15), many cases of external parallelism within the separate units, and the balance in length of the (sub)stanzas consisting of respectively 7+7/7+7/4+4 verses. Within this structure the verses about the king as *hyll bn-šhr* take a central place. A closer look at the

⁷ Cf. the more elaborate discussion of the proposed identification with Phaeton and Athtar in my *Beatific Afterlife in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (AOAT 219), Neukirchen-Vluyn 1986, 221-223; and Gowan, op. cit. (see n. 2), 51f. See on the god Athtar now also P. Xella, "Les pouvoirs de dieu 'Attar: Morphologie d'un dieu du panthéon ugaritique," *Ugarit, Religion and Culture* (Fs J.C.L. Gibson), ed. N. Wyatt et al. (UBL), Münster 1996, 381-404. Like Loretz, *Ugarit und die Bibel*, 223, he completely (and rightly!) ignores suggestions about a relation between KTU 1.6.I and Isa. 14. B. Margalit seems to make a hint at it when he remarks in his study of Athtar (*Ugarit, Religion and Culture*, 179-204; esp. p. 181): "some scholars have surmised that the figure of 'Athtar has been co-opted from another, no-longer extant mythical cycle or tradition (...) which portrayed 'Athtar in a different, more aggressive fashion (...) The speculation is however superfluous, if not demonstrably wrong."

⁸ See on these methodological matters now his "»Ugaritic and the Biblical Literature«: Das Paradigma des Mythos von den *rpum* - *Rephaim*," *Ugarit and the Bible*, ed. G.J. Brooke et al. (UBL), Münster 1994, 175-224.

⁹ Cf. my AOAT 219, 213-219.

way in which they are tied to the other parts within the larger unit(s) may offer some clues for a better understanding.

In his article on Isa. 14: 12-15 Loretz offers a stichometrical analysis in which he emphasizes that vs. 12a and vs. 12b are parallel; note the wordpairs *gd'//npl* and *'rs'//šmym*.¹⁰ Both *hyll bn-šhr* and *hwlš 'l gwym* supplement and clarify the preceding lines. Loretz leaves open the possibility that they are in themselves parallel as well, as suggested by Clifford, who thinks that the second could be 'a misunderstood divine epithet of Helel'.¹¹ Unfortunately, the phrase *hwlš 'l gwym* remains a *crux interpretum* and is, therefore, of little help in the interpretation of the supposedly parallel line.

In the next three verses the theme of 'heaven' versus 'earth' or 'nether-world'¹² is worked out. The king may have had many thoughts about his heavenly state (a throne 'above the stars of El', a place at the mount of the assembly,' to be 'on the crest (*byrkty*)¹³ of Zaphon', 'above the heights of the clouds,' and 'equal to Eljon'), but now he has to face the simple truth: he is brought down into the netherworld, 'to the lowest (*byrkty*) of the pit.' In vss. 13-14 most qualifications refer to the heavenly place the king hoped to ascend. Only the last words (*'dmh l'lywn*) say something about him personally. The reaction in vs. 15 to the king's proud thoughts only speaks of the place he went. The remarks on the bitter reality about his person are found in vss. 9-11. They are spoken by the kings with their thrones not in heaven but in the netherworld. The relation between these verses is underlined by the repetition of a number of keywords: *š'wl*, at the beginning (9a), in the middle (11a), and at the end (15) of the unit; *ks'*: the thrones in the netherworld (9b) and above the clouds (13b); and the second person singular personal pronoun *'th* (10b and 13a) introducing the contrasting statements.

This means that in the interpretation of the central lines of this unit the reference to the dead kings as *rp'ym* (vs. 9b) should also be taken into

¹⁰ UF 8, 134. In *Ugarit und die Bibel*, 160, Loretz appears to have dropped this analysis again in favour of the interpretation by H. Wildberger, *Jesaja 13-27* (BK X/2), Neukirchen-Vluyn 1978, 532ff. (cf. also the edition in *BHS*), although he earlier criticized it for not taking into account the clear *parallelismus membrorum*.

¹¹ R.J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament* (HSM 4), Cambridge 1972, 161, n. 83. Cf. also J.B. Burns, "hōlēš 'al in Isaiah 14:12: A New Proposal," *ZAH* 2 (1989), 199-204, who speaks of 'the perfect symmetry and parallelism of the verse' (p. 203).

¹² See on *'rs* a designation of the netherworld N.J. Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Nether World in the Old Testament* (BibOr 21), Rome 1969, 23-46. Cf. also R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, Edinburgh 1985, 149: "The term 'eret'z in its three senses of 'earth,' 'land,' and 'underworld' is a connecting thread for the whole poem."

¹³ Cf. M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, "Ugaritisch *šrrt špn*, *šrry* und hebräisch *jrktj špwn*, UF 22 (1990), 79-86, about *yrkty špwn* as parallel to *bmtj 'b* and referring to 'umwölkten Gipfel' of the mountain Zaphon (p. 85).

account. As is now acknowledged by many scholars, the way the word *rp'ym* is used here seems to be inspired by the ancient Canaanite conception of royal ancestors having become powerful spirits of the dead, called *rp'um* in Ugaritic texts.¹⁴ The emphasis on their weakness (vs. 10), sharply contrasting the belief in their supernatural power, fits in well with the mocking of the king who thought he would reach heaven, but fell down into the netherworld. The use of this term and in this connection points to a mingling of mythology and royal ideology. It seems likely that the phrase *hyll bn-šhr* also has its place within this framework.

Before discussing this issue further, it seems wise to take a closer look at the structure of the chapter as a whole. The concentric pattern found in vss. 9-15 appears to be not the only one in Isa. 14.¹⁵ There is also a close connection between vss. 9-11 and 16-20. Both describe the reaction of 'all the kings of the nations' (9b, 16b) to the downfall of the king of Babylon. The contrast between his former and his present state is indicated by the repetition of the verb *rgz*: the world of the dead is stirred up (9a) by the coming into the netherworld of the one 'who made the world tremble' (16b). While his pride is now brought down (11a), his former victims lie in honour (18b). To this can be added that vss. 9-11 are followed by a line introduced by 'yk, whereas vss. 16-20 are preceded by a line with 'k as first word. The combination of these two lines within the concentric structure adds another element to the interpretation of *hyll bn-šhr*, mentioned in the first '(y)k-line. The related vs. 15a can be read as an antithetic parallel. In vs. 15a 'l-yrkty-bwr is clearly meant to surpass 'l-š'wl in the first half. It indicates the deepest part of the netherworld, just as *byrkty spwn* in vs. 13b denotes the top of the mountain. Since vs. 15a is so clearly related to vs. 12a, it may be assumed that *hyll bn-šhr* indicates not simply being in heaven, but also obtaining a high status there. This is supported by vs. 13a speaking of his throne 'above

¹⁴ Cf. J.C. de Moor, "Rāpi'ūma - Rephaim," ZAW 88 (1976), 323-345; my AOAT 219, 220; M.S. Smith, "Rephaim," ABD, V, 674-676, esp. 675; Loretz, art. cit. (see n. 8), 193.

¹⁵ Cf. Alter, op. cit. (see n. 12), p. 149: "The poem is a wonderful interaction of vertical movements, first down, then up, then down again"; and Gowan, op. cit. (see n. 2), 48. The concentric structure of this chapter, or parts of it, is also described by H. Barth, *Die Jesaja-Worte in der Josiazeit* (WMANT 48), Neukirchen-Vluyn 1977, 129f.; W.C. van Wyk, "Isaiah 14:4b-21: A Poem of Contrasts and Irony," OTSWA 22f. (1979f.), 240-247; W.S. Prinsloo, "Isaiah 14:12-15 - Humiliation, Hubris, Humiliation," ZAW 93 (1981), 432-438; and O'Connell, art. cit. (see n. 4); but all with different results. This does not have to mean that one is better than the other. We should leave open the possibility of a number of concentric elements partly overlapping each other and thus breaking the perhaps all too regular schemes presented by Van Wyk and O'Connell. With regard to the structure described by O'Connell it should also be remarked that this is in so far misleading that parallels are sometimes only supported by his summary of the verse and not always supported by more objective indications, such as repetition of words or use of known parallel pairs.

the stars of El' and by the conclusion of his proud thoughts in vs. 14: *'dmh l'lywn*, 'I will make myself like the most high.' The use of the related verb *'lh* indicates that the divine epithet *'lywn* should be taken literally here.

It is important to note the well considered use of divine names. The name of YHWH is mentioned only in the beginning (vs. 5a) and at the end of the poem (vss. 22-23), thus underlining once again the concentric structure. In all these places it is described how YHWH is victorious over the king of Babylon, punishing him because of his wickedness. In the centre of the poem, which mockingly bewails the failed attempt of the king to take the highest place in heaven, the name of YHWH is missing. Instead, we hear of *'l* and *'lywn*. In a context which also speaks of the Zaphon as the mount of the divine assembly these names have to be associated with Canaanite religion.¹⁶ On the other hand, it should not be left unnoticed that both *'l* and *'lywn* are not used here in the first place to denote deities. Just as *'lywn* can be taken literally as denoting the highest position in heaven, *'l* is used in a genitive construction, which (as with *'lhym*) can be interpreted as a superlative. In this way the poet marks the difference between YHWH and other gods.

These indications of the relation between YHWH and the gods of Canaan are subordinate to the central theme of the text, namely the conflict between YHWH and the king of Babylon pretending to be of divine stature. That this is the central theme will become clearer when we look at the wider context, viz. the complete oracle against Babylon (13:1-14:23). Recently, Gosse has demonstrated that these chapters should be interpreted as a unity and that also 14:12-15 fits in well within this larger framework.¹⁷ He notes especially the many relations (by the repetition of words) between 13:9-13 and 14:5-6, 12-17, and between 13:14-18 and 14:18-21.¹⁸ With Gosse¹⁹ the verb *rgz* can be regarded as an important keyword of these chapters. In 13:13 it is used of YHWH making heaven tremble, in 14:16 the subject is the king who made the earth tremble, in 14:9 we hear of the netherworld trembling because of the

¹⁶ See on the problem of Zaphon not associated, as usual, with Baal, but with El, now J.C. de Moor, "Ugarit and Israelite Origins," *Congress Volume Paris 1992*, ed. J.A. Emerton (VTS 61), Leiden 1995, 205-238, esp. 231f. It is El who has taken over the mountain of Baal; cf. also K. Koch, in *Ugarit and the Bible* (see n. 8), 166, n. 38. The basic argument against the commonly held view that behind Isa. 14 lies a myth of Baal replacing El as the high god of the Canaanite pantheon (cf., for instance, E.E. Elnes, P.D. Miller, *DDD*, 564), is that the text says nothing of a struggle. There is also no clear relation between *hyll bn-šhr* and the god Baal.

¹⁷ Op. cit. (see n. 2), 232f.; cf. also S. Erlandsson, *The Burden of Babylon. A Study of Isaiah 32,2-14,23* (CB OT Ser. 4), Lund 1970, referring to the many links between 13:2-8 and 14:4b-21 (p. 161), and between 13:19-22 and 14:23 (p. 125).

¹⁸ Op. cit., 145f., 237f.

¹⁹ Op. cit., 276.

descent of the king. In both 13:13 and 14:16 the verb *rgz* is paralleled by *r's*. This use of these two verbs denotes the rivalry between YHWH and the king, ending in the king finding his right place not among the gods in heaven, but covered with worms in the netherworld. A similar function seems to have been attributed to the word '*brh*, 'anger' (of YHWH in 13:9; of the king in 14:6).

Gosse lists most parallels between the chapters 13 and 14, but he pays no attention to their structure. Having established the concentric structure of chapter 14, it should not be left unnoticed that something similar can be traced in the preceding chapter. Both beginning (vss. 1-6) and end (vss. 17-22) describe the coming of peoples destroying Babylon (note the repetition of the name of Babylon in vss. 1 and 19, of *mmlkwt* in vss. 4 and 19, and the relation between the gathered nations in vs. 4 with the names of peoples in vss. 17 and 20). The description of the feebleness and fear (vss. 7-8) is paralleled by the attempt to flee for the massacre (vss. 13-16; note the repetition of '*l-kn* in vss. 7 and 13). Both vs. 9 and vs. 12 indicate that mankind shall be decimated. This leaves vss. 10-11 as the central part of the chapter: the heavenly bodies shall be darkened and the proud shall be humiliated.

When we now place these chapters with their concentric structure next to each other, we see that many of their parallels fit within this scheme:²⁰

ch. 13	ch. 14
vss. 1-6	vss. 4-8
<i>bbl</i> (1)	<i>bbl</i> (4)
anger (' <i>p</i>) of YHWH(3)	anger (' <i>brh</i>) of the king (6)
<i>kl-h'rš</i> (5)	<i>kl-h'rš</i> (7)
vss. 7-9	vss. 9-11
weakness (<i>rph</i>)(7)	weakness (<i>hlh</i>) (10)
the coming (<i>bw'</i>)	the coming (<i>bw'</i>)
of the Day of YHWH	of the king
on earth	into the netherworld
vss. 10-11	vss. 12-15
<i>kwkby</i> of heaven(10)	<i>kwkby</i> of El(13)
<i>yhlw</i> (10)	<i>hyll</i> (12)
sunrise (<i>šmš bš'tw</i>)(10)	dawn (<i>šhr</i>)(12)

²⁰ J.D.W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33* (WBC), Waco 1985, 186, regards Isa. 13-14 as a unity with one concentric ('arch') structure, but his analysis placing 14:4b-7 at the center as the 'keystone' of these chapters, is not convincing. It relates very large blocks to small pieces (for instance, 14:8-20a to 14:3-4a) and it is not supported by clear arguments, such as the repetition of words.

vss. 13-16	vss. 16-20a
<i>rgz//r's</i> (13)	<i>rgz//r's</i> (16)
<i>hrb</i> (15)	<i>hrb</i> (19)
<i>byt</i> (16)	<i>byt</i> (17)
vss. 17-22	vss. 20b-23
death of children (18)	death of children (21-22)
wilderness (21-22)	wilderness (23)

14:4-23 functions as a reaction to the fulfilment of what is announced in chapter 13 to which it is related in both content and form. An important consequence is that in the present context ²¹ Isa. 14:12-15 is related to 13:10-11. The latter verses play a central role. Their last lines give a summary of the two chapters: YHWH shall stop (*šbt*, cf. 14:4b) the arrogance of the proud; He shall make them fall (*špl*, causative of *npl*, cf. 14:12). According to vs. 10 this shall be combined with the darkening of the stars, sun, and moon. Right at the beginning of 14:12-15 these two elements of 13:10-11 are placed next to each other: the downfall and the darkening of heavenly lights. It can be no coincidence that in 14:12 the poet used a noun related to the verb *hll*, which we find only in Isa. 13:10 and in Job 29:3; 31:26 (in connection with the sun) with the meaning 'to give light.' ²² In Isa. 13:10b we also come across a perfect parallel of *bn-šhr*, 'son of dawn,' because this can be regarded as a poetic description of *hšmš bš'tw*, 'the sun in its rising.'

This and the other indications mentioned above, derived from the study of the structure of the text, lead to the conclusion that *hyll bn-šhr* denotes the king's arrogant idea of being able to take the highest place in heaven, as if he

²¹ There is hardly any reason to assume that these chapter were built up of originally separate material. On the basis of the structural analysis offered here only 14:1-3 seems to be of a second hand, because (1) it is not poetic, (2) it cannot be related, like the rest of chapter 14, to any part of the previous chapter, (3) it has a different subject, namely the salvation of Israel. It is likely that these verse were added when the oracle against Babylon was placed (by the writer of Deutero-Isaiah?) at the beginning of the collection of oracles against the nations (Isa. 13-23). It now functions as a reading principle: in the following oracles the sovereignty of YHWH is at stake. Babylon may already have become the symbol of powerful wickedness, as it is known, for instance, in the book of Revelation. See on the redaction history of this part of the book of Isaiah – with Isa. 13:1-14:23 as a later addition, H.G. Williamson, *The Book Called Isaiah. Deutero-Isaiah's Role in Composition and Redaction*, Oxford 1994, 157-175. Cf. also the remark by Delitzsch, op. cit. (see n. 3), 208, about 14:1-2: "Hier haben wir den Trostinhalt der c. 40-66 in nuce."

²² Sweeney, op. cit. (see n. 4), 229, presumes "an intentional pun between the name given to the monarch in v. 12, *hēlēl*, 'shining one,' and the imperative for 'wail' *hēlilā* of *hēlilī* (cf. 13:6; 14:31)." This suggestion is supported by the occurrence – ignored of overlooked by Sweeney – of the verb *hll* and the related noun *hyll* in both chapters.

were the sun.²³ We may find a related conception hidden in the difficult text Ps. 110:3, which seems to speak of the king coming forth 'from the womb of dawn'.²⁴ As a consequence, the title of this article should be taken literally: the idea of a god named Hêlêl should be abandoned. *hyll* is no more than an epithet, which can be compared to the use of Akkadian *ellu / elletu*, which can refer to, among other things, shining purity, to light, and also to gods, kings, and priests.²⁵

The closest parallel is not found outside Israel, but in Ezek. 28.²⁶ This applies to both content and form. In this oracle against Tyre its king is reproached for saying that he is a god. For this he shall be punished: he shall die a shameful death. The fulfilment of the prophecy is indicated, as in Isa. 14:4-23 following the announcement in Isa. 13, by a satiric song of lament over the fallen king. The satiric element in texts like Ezek. 28:12-19 and Isa. 14:4-23 lies in the fact that in mourning one tends to be very positive about the deceased (as is indicated in a modern expression like 'praising someone to the skies; cf. Dutch 'ophemelen'). The best example of this is the beautiful song of David at the death of Saul and Jonathan: 'How ('yk) have the mighty fallen (*nplw*)' in 2 Sam. 1:19-27.²⁷

Having studied Isa. 14:12 within its own context, we are now in a better position to evaluate the extra-biblical evidence used in the history of research

²³ In my dissertation (AOAT 219, 224f.) I defended the identification of *hyll* with the moon, like Ugaritic *hll*, relating Isa. 14:12 to Egyptian and Mesopotamian texts mentioning next to each other sun and moon as symbols of eternal life (cf. Ps. 72:5; see on this text now also M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, "Von Hebräisch '*m/lpny*' (Ps 72,5) zu Ugaritisch '*m »vor«*," *Ascribe to the Lord* (Fs P.C. Craigie, ed. L. Eslinger et al.; JSOTS 76), Sheffield 1988, 109-116). The context, however, points to the more simple solution of relating the entire phrase to the sun.

²⁴ Cf. H.J. Kraus, *Psalmen 60-150* (BK XV/2), Neukirchen-Vluyn 1978⁵, 933, who also points to the possible relation of this text to *bn-šhr* in Isa. 14:12.

²⁵ Cf. CAD, E, pp. 102-105. Wildberger, op. cit. (see n. 2), 551, initially came to a similar conclusion: 'Es liegt zunächst zweifellos nahe, die Bezeichnung mit der auch dem Hebr. bekannten Wurzel *hll* zusammenzubringen (...) Das mit ihm zusammengehörende *ellu* bzw. das fem. *ellitu* ist im Akk. Epitheton von Astralgöttheiten (so Grelot, VT 6, 303). Das heißt, daß auch *hyll* nicht eigentlich Name, sondern Epitheton einer Gottheit ist,' but eventually he chooses for restricting *hyll* to 'Beiname des kanaanäischen Morgensterns 'Attar' (p. 552).

²⁶ The comparison between these texts was already made by Jerome; cf. J. Barr, "Thou art the Cherub," *Priests, Prophets and Scribes* (Fs J. Blenkinsopp, ed. E. Ulrich et al.; JSOTS 149), Sheffield 1992, 213-223, esp. 220, calling this "rightly and naturally." Cf. among others, also Barth, op. cit. (see n. 15), 134f.; Gosse, op. cit. (see n. 2), 237f.; N. Wyatt, *Ugarit and the Bible* (see n. 8), 413; and K. Jeppesen, "You are a Cherub, but no God!," *SJOT* 5/1 (1991), 83-94, esp. 92.

²⁷ See on Isa. 14:4b-23 as a deliberate parody of the solemn dirge form as it is represented in David's lament, G.A. Yee, "The Anatomy of Biblical Parody: The Dirge Form in 2 Samuel 1 and Isaiah 14," *CBQ* 50 (1988), 565-586.

to interpret this text. It may have become clear that in the case of *hyll bn-šhr* the reference to Greek, Ugaritic, or Mesopotamian mythology often was too rash. Nevertheless, a number of elements in the following verses, namely the mention of El, of Zaphon as the mountain of the divine assembly, and the allusion to the *rp'um* as powerful spirits of the royal dead ancestors, call for a closer examination of a possible Canaanite background. The same can be said of the parallel text Ezek. 28.²⁸ Instead of the usual comparison with mythological texts, it appears to be more fruitful to look at the Canaanite royal ideology as preserved in Ugaritic texts. In a number of letters the Hittite king is consistently called 'the sun' (cf. KTU 2.16:6-10, esp. l. 9: *špš nr*, 'the sun who is shining'; 2.23:1f. etc.²⁹), just as Akk. *šamšu* can be used as an epithet of rulers.³⁰

Even more interesting is the parallel with a passage in the Ugaritic legend of Keret, where his children are bewailing him because of his coming death (KTU 1.16.I:1-23).³¹ Within the context of mourning, reminiscent of Isa. 14, Keret is called 'son of El.' It is suggested that as a god he could not die. We probably do not have to take this literary, because we have to reckon with the exaggeration inherent to most dirges. In an other part of the text Keret's death is described as 'joining El' and 'reaching the sun-set' (KTU 1.15.V:16-20). This offers an even better parallel to Isa. 14:12-15, as it combines the association of the king with the sun and his close relation to El.

There are many indications that the ancient Israelites were familiar with this kind of royal ideology suggesting a divine status of the king.³² It remains a matter of dispute whether and, if so, for how long, this was accepted in Israel. There can be no doubt about it, however, that the poet of Isa. 13-14 is referring to it, in this way emphasizing the conflict between YHWH and the king of Babylon. It may also have become clear that *hyll* is not the name of a god and that Isa. 14:12-15 does not reflect a myth about a fight between gods. The poet certainly used some mythological elements, but these are only rightly understood within the framework of ancient royal ideology.

²⁸ Cf. O. Loretz, "Der Wohnort El's nach Ugaritischen Texten und Ez 28, 1-2.6-10," *UF* 21 (1989), 259-267.

²⁹ Cf. J.-M. Cunchillos, in *Textes ougaritiques*, II, Paris 1989, 298, 309.

³⁰ Cf. CAD, Š, 337; note also the old Babylonian women's name *Hammurabi-dšamši*, 'Hammurabi is my sun'; cf. W. Schottroff, "Gottmensch, I," *RAC*, XII, 155ff., esp. 176.

³¹ See on this text and the idea of the divinity of the king, M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, "Die Wehklage über Keret in KTU 1.16 I 2-23 (//II 35-50)," *UF* 12 (1980), 189-192; my AOAT 219, 153f.; J.C. de Moor, *ARTU*, 211f.; and T. Kleven, "Kingship in Ugarit (KTU 1.16 I 1-23)," *Fs Craigie* (see n. 21), 29-53.

³² Cf. B. Lang, "Der vergöttlichte König im polytheistischen Israel," *Menschwerdung Gottes - Vergöttlichung von Menschen*, ed. D. Zeller (NTOA 7), Freiburg / Göttingen 1988, 37-59; J.C. de Moor, *The Rise of Yahwism* (ETHL 91), Leuven 1990, 239ff.; and Loretz, *Ugarit und die Bibel*, 204-209.