

**‘I AM AGAINST YOU’:  
YAHWEH’S JUDGEMENT ON THE NATIONS AND ITS ANCIENT  
NEAR EASTERN CONTEXT<sup>1</sup>**

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**Summary**

*‘I am against you’ is a phrase that occurs several times in the Old Testament in relation to Yahweh’s judgement on the nations. Both Nineveh and Babylon, the respective capitals of the two great superpowers of the day, are so addressed (Nah. 2:13; 3:5; Jer. 50:31; 51:25). Yet what does that mean against the wider background of Ancient Near Eastern literature? This paper examines the issues raised by this statement and the possible theological implications its usage has for pre-exilic Israelite religion.*

**I. Introduction**

‘I am against you’, as spoken by Yahweh, is a phrase that occurs several times in the Old Testament, in Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Nahum.<sup>2</sup> The majority of the occurrences are directed against foreign nations, perhaps most notably, in the case of Nahum and Jeremiah, against Nineveh and Babylon, the capitals and therefore the representative centres of the great superpowers of their day. The parallels between the two cities in the Old Testament writings are numerous. Both cities are condemned for their pride and injustice, for their self-satisfaction and self-confidence. Both, indeed, are condemned in identical terms in Isaiah 47 and Zephaniah 2, for saying in their hearts ‘I am, and there is

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<sup>2</sup> Jer. 21:13 (against the house of David); 50:31; 51:25 (against Babylon); Ezek. 13:8, 20 (against false prophets); 26:3 (against Tyre); 28:22 (against Sidon); 29:3, 10 (against Egypt); 35:3 (against Mt. Seir); 38:3; 39:1 (against Gog); Nah. 2:13; 3:5 (against Nineveh).

no one besides me'. Furthermore it is evident, and in the case of Babylon explicitly stated, that the fall of these cities and the nations they represent cannot and will not come through the agency of the people of Israel. At the time of Nahum and Zephaniah the northern kingdom of Israel had already been taken into captivity in Assyria leaving behind it the tiny kingdom of Judah, a kingdom scarcely capable of defending itself let alone mounting an offensive against the capital of its overlord, some 700 miles or so away. During the time of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, on the other hand, the kingdom of Judah was also brought to an end and its people carried away captive to Babylon.

What credibility, then, does the phrase 'I am against you' have in such a context, either for the nations so addressed or, more importantly, for the people to whom the prophets are writing? Again, in the case of Babylon, there are explicit references to other nations or individuals from those nations being used as the instruments to accomplish the purposes of Yahweh. In Jeremiah 51:11 reference is made to the 'kings of the Medes',<sup>3</sup> whilst in Isaiah there is the even more explicit reference to Cyrus of Persia (Isa. 45:1). What right does Yahweh have to use a third party to carry out his judgement on a nation that is not his? A passage of similar import is found in 1 Kings 19 where Elijah is sent to anoint Hazael as king over Syria. What right does Yahweh have to appoint kings in another country?<sup>4</sup> Other passages in which the right of Yahweh to interfere in the affairs of other nations is asserted can be found throughout the Hebrew Bible. In 2 Kings 5:1, for example, Yahweh is credited with giving deliverance to Syria through Naaman, the commander of the Syrian army; in Isaiah 10 Yahweh can both use Assyria as an instrument of his anger and dispose of her later; in Daniel 5 it is within his jurisdiction and capability to bring to an end the Babylonian kingdom and to inform its king that he is doing so. The prophecy of Nahum may also be invoked here. In this seventh-century BC text<sup>5</sup> there are detailed predictions about the fall of Nineveh, the whole course of events being attributed to Yahweh (1:9, 14; 2:13; 3:5–6), patently without the aid of his own people as the instruments of the destruction.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. also Isa. 13:17.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. A. Lemaire, 'Prophètes et Rois dans les Inscriptions Ouest-Sémitiques (IX<sup>e</sup>–VI<sup>e</sup> siècle av. J.-C.)', in A. Lemaire (ed.), *Prophètes et Rois: Bible et Proche-Orient* (Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 2001), 86–93. He notes that the Tell Dan inscription states, more normally, 'Hadad made me king', 88.

<sup>5</sup> See B. Becking, 'Divine Wrath and the Conceptual Coherence of the Book of Nahum', *SJOT* 9 (1995) 277–96.

The following questions therefore remain: What right does Yahweh have to interfere in the politics of other nations? More than that, what ability does he have to affect the course of history outside his own territory? It may be asked whether there are any examples elsewhere in the Ancient Near East of deities effecting political changes outside their own territory and, if so, what is the underlying theology?

## II. Deity-nation relationships

The question of deity-nation relationships is interesting, especially the relationship with foreign nations. It may be supposed, and this is supported by the texts, that a deity has a responsibility for his or her own people or territory. This would include the defence of that territory against foreign invaders or, on occasions, the granting of permission to foreign nations to invade, spoil or rule over that territory for a time in order to execute judgement on the deity's own people, presumably for sins committed. These concepts can be seen in the Bible, for example in the time of Hezekiah where Yahweh acts in defence of his people, or in his use of Assyria and Babylon to execute the final judgement on his people in taking them away captive from their own land.<sup>6</sup> The concepts are also widespread throughout the Ancient Near East. From the beginning of historical records deities have an affinity with their own territory and a duty to protect it. Texts from the third millennium BC from the pre-Sargonic period, for example, portray Ningirsu, the god of the territory of Lagash, actively involved in repelling invaders from nearby Umma during the course of a border dispute. Failure to protect one's territory is viewed in a variety of ways: generally it is the permissive will of the deity for one reason or another, for example, as the result of sin — the so-called *Weidner Chronicle* anachronistically views the course of history and the succession of dynasties (some of which are foreign) as being determined by Marduk in relation to the treatment of his cult by the king.<sup>7</sup> Another possibility is that an individual city god may be overruled by the divine council. The course

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<sup>6</sup> For Assyria see Isa. 7:17, 20 where it speaks of Yahweh's use of Assyria to carry off Israel, or Isa. 10:5 where he calls Assyria 'the rod of my anger'. For Babylon see Hab. 1:5–11 for the coming Babylonian invasion, or Jer. 25:9 where Yahweh calls Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon 'my servant'.

<sup>7</sup> A.K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (TCS V; Locust Valley, NY: J.J. Augustin, 1975), 145–51.

of events is determined and cannot be altered. The pleadings of the city god on behalf of his/her people are to no avail.<sup>8</sup>

Divine activity is not limited to defence but it is through their help that territory is extended, through the agency of their people. Once again examples for this are numerous — the Old Testament conquest narratives, the Mesha stele (although this is arguably defence), or everywhere in the Assyrian royal inscriptions. With the deity operating by means of his people foreign nations are subdued, territory is annexed and thereby the influence of the deity is expanded.<sup>9</sup> All these may be termed ‘normal activities’ of a deity in respect to foreign nations.

The question now arises of the validity of a deity outside his/her own territory. In the Ancient Near East ‘territory’ is not limited to the city with which he or she is connected but includes the wider regional pantheon of which they are a member and within which they have a specific role to play. Here the waters get a bit muddied. The topics of syncretism, borrowing and sharing of deities and their roles are outside the scope of this particular paper, but the phenomenon was widespread. In addition certain deities are by nature more universal than others, especially those that represent physical phenomena, such as sun, moon, or weather. In consequence deities in different areas that represent these phenomena share similar characteristics. It is recognised, for example, that the sun shines on everyone and is therefore concerned with all peoples.<sup>10</sup> However, general beneficent or malevolent action on the part of a deity directed at humanity as a whole is not the same as active involvement in politics. ‘Universalism’ is limited in this respect.

The physical presence of a divine image in another territory also seems to extend the validity of the deity to that area. The so-called ‘Marduk prophecy’ describes how Marduk, the god of Babylon, went on his travels to different places — to the land of the Hittites, to

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<sup>8</sup> In the *Ur Lament* 76–168 Ningal pleads for her city Ur. Lines 167–68 read ‘An is not one to change his command, and Enlil does not alter what he has uttered’ — her pleas are overruled.

<sup>9</sup> The ‘Dream of Gyges’, contained in inscriptions of the Assyrian king Aššurbanipal, falls into the same category. According to the story Gyges, king of Lydia, was told in a dream by Aššur, the god of Assyria, to submit to Aššurbanipal, which he subsequently did. According to the Assyrian redactors of the inscriptions, therefore, it was within Aššur’s remit to approach foreign rulers with a view to drawing them under the banner of Assyrian sovereignty.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, the *Great Šamaš Hymn*, 23–26, B.R. Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature*, Vol II. (Bethesda, MD: CDL, 1993), 537. Cf. the chapter on ‘Universalism’ in H.W.F. Saggs, *The Encounter with the Divine in Mesopotamia and Israel*, Jordan Lectures in Comparative Religion 12 (London: Athlone, 1978), 153–88, esp. 180–82; J. Bottéro, *Religion in Ancient Mesopotamia* (trans. T. L. Fagan; Chicago and London: University of Chicago, 2001), 96–97.

Assyria, or to Elam — and the different effects that his presence had on these places. Historically, each time Marduk went on a journey was the result of an invasion during the course of which the image of Marduk was carried off. Such ignominious events, however, are recast as reflecting the will of Marduk. Propagandistic though the document no doubt is it still seems valid to take from it that the presence of the Marduk statue in the foreign territories mentioned gave him some jurisdiction over them, or relationship with them, temporary though it might be.<sup>11</sup> Another way in which the validity of deities may be extended is the presence of their devotees in foreign territories. This seems to be more on an individual basis — the protection and blessing (or otherwise) of their protégé — but it does show that in some way there was the recognition that deities transcended territorial boundaries.

The more specific question of divine political interference may now be addressed. In one sense there is a lot of evidence for gods involved in this, especially in Assyrian royal inscriptions. However, it is generally performed through the agency of the Assyrian king and his army, so that this is no different from other examples cited earlier of deities extending their sphere of operations or acting administratively in new territories. On the other hand, the phenomenon of deities acting on their own initiative to make political changes in foreign territories is much less well documented. Indeed, in several cases which appear at first glance to be pertinent (for which see below), it may be argued that they actually fall into one of those categories already mentioned above. As always the issue of textual preservation should be borne in mind. Texts which bear the most resemblance to biblical prophecy come from the Mari period and from the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian periods, texts separated from each other temporally by about a thousand years. It should be remembered that the religious background is therefore somewhat different, reflecting the political situations in force at the time when they were written.

### III. Evidence from Mari

The site of Tell Hariri, ancient Mari on the mid-Euphrates, has yielded some 25,000 tablets, a number of which have been published. These include letters and administrative texts which shed light on a number of

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<sup>11</sup> The ‘travelling’ of deities is well documented in the literature. Compare the desire of Šauška of Nineveh to travel to Egypt in EA 23, whereupon her statue is duly despatched with the request to send it back in due course. See W.L. Moran, *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University, 1992), 61–62 with his comments.

aspects of the cultural, political and religious history of the city and to a certain extent the surrounding areas down to its destruction in the first half of the second millennium BC. One or two letters in particular have a direct bearing on the topic under discussion.

One letter contains the claim by the god Addu of Aleppo to have given control over ‘the land in its entirety’ successively to Yahdun-Lim, Samsi-Addu then finally to Zimri-Lim. The text is worth quoting:

Thus says Addu: the land in its entirety I gave to Yahdun-Lim, and thanks to my weapons he had no rival. He forsook me and (so) the land which I gave to him I gave Samsi-Addu. Samsi-Addu ... [gap], (followed by a promise) I will restore you. I restored you to the throne of the house of your father. The weapons with which I fought the sea I gave to you. With the oil of my victory I anointed you and nobody stood against you.<sup>12</sup>

Here Addu of Aleppo credits himself with effecting political change in the Mari region. This is somewhat surprising for two reasons. First, Aleppo is some distance from Mari. Second, Addu is not the city god of Mari — Itur-Mer is — nor is he the god of the mid-Euphrates region — Dagan is. What then is Addu doing, effectively claiming sovereignty over the region?

As far as Zimri-Lim, the last mentioned, is concerned the statement becomes somewhat more explicable in that Zimri-Lim himself spent some time in exile in the kingdom of Yamhad, whose capital was Aleppo, if not actually in Aleppo itself. The king of Yamhad, Yarim-Lim, at some point gave one of his daughters in marriage to Zimri-Lim. He is also credited later by Zimri-Lim with having helped him to regain the throne.<sup>13</sup> In this sense, then, Addu of Aleppo can claim to have ‘restored you to the throne of the house of your father’.<sup>14</sup>

What is to be understood by the previous two claims? There are several possibilities. First, given that the letter in which the claims are made originated in Aleppo, is this merely empty boasting? This is not likely. The letter comes across as a thinly-veiled threat: Zimri-Lim is to learn the lesson of history and to accede to Addu’s demands, otherwise he will be removed from power. The oracle was certainly taken seriously enough to be conveyed to Zimri-Lim. Whether he himself

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<sup>12</sup> A.1968 5–6’. J.-M. Durand, ‘Le combat entre le Dieu de l’orage et la Mer’ (*MARI* 7; Paris: Editions recherche sur les civilisations, 1994), 43–46.

<sup>13</sup> *ARM* 28 16 24–26: ‘It is my father who caused me to sit (lit. “enter”) on my throne and he it is will strengthen me and “bind” the foundation of my throne’ — Georges Dossin et al. (eds.), *Archives royales de Mari* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1950–).

<sup>14</sup> Addu of Aleppo and Addu of Kallassu make the same claim in another text, A.1121+A.2731, edited by B. Lafont, ‘Le Roi de Mari et les Prophètes du Dieu Adad’, *RA* 78 (1984) 7–18. The relevant lines are 14–19 and 49–51.

took any notice of it is a different matter.<sup>15</sup> Secondly, it could be a retrospective claim: because of the strength of the kingdom of Yamhad at the time when the letter was written, and the fact that the king of Yamhad (and thereby the god of Aleppo) had been instrumental in helping Zimri-Lim to regain the throne, Addu could claim to have had a hand in the previous history of the region as well.<sup>16</sup> This is much more likely. However, there is a third possibility: this is a case of divine monarchical structure. Itur-Mer may be the city god of Mari, Dagan may be the regional god of the mid-Euphrates region, but Addu of Aleppo is the supra-regional god of the lands west of the Euphrates. This is possibly even more likely. Certainly the importance of Addu of Aleppo can be seen already in third millennium BC texts from Ebla and Mari. In the Ebla texts he also seems to eclipse Dagan, the god in charge of the region.<sup>17</sup> The overall importance of Addu also in the Amorite states in Mesopotamia in the first part of the second millennium BC is well documented, in some areas better than in others.<sup>18</sup> Addu can make such claims, then, because Mari lies within his sphere of operations, within his jurisdiction. This is not a case of a god determining events that take place outside his territory.

Another text that is often mentioned is one in which Dagan, the god of the mid-Euphrates region, passes judgement on Tišpak, the god of Ešnunna. The letter to the king is from one Šamaš-nāšir, who is under instructions to listen out for an oracle from the god and to report one to the king should he hear it. The relevant part of the oracle he hears is as follows:

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<sup>15</sup> In A.1121+A.2731 Nur-Su'en writes to Zimri-Lim to say that he has written 'once, twice, and five times' about a request from Addu of Kallassu which has not been heeded.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. the *Weidner Chronicle* where Marduk is credited with political authority before his historical rise to power. Present theology determines past history.

<sup>17</sup> See F. Pomponio & P. Xella, *Les dieux d'Ebla* (AOAT 245; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1997), 52–54, 106.

<sup>18</sup> See D. Schwemer, *Die Wettergottgestalten Mesopotamiens und Nordsyriens im Zeitalter der Keilschriftkulturen* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2001), for a detailed discussion of the available evidence. Cf. the ethical dimension to Addu's requirements in A.1121+A.2731 52–55, and A.1968: 7'–11', or the granting of asylum to political refugees (J.-M. Durand, 'La religión en Siria Según la documentación de Mari' *MROA* II/1 [Sabadell, 1995], 466ff.).

[Dagan said: 'Let Tišpak] be called. I am going to give a verdict.' Tišpak was summoned and Dagan spoke as follows to Tišpak, saying, 'Since ... you ruled the land. Now your "time" has come. You will meet your "time" like Ekallatum.'<sup>19</sup>

Despite gaps in the text and uncertainty of meaning the general thrust of the passage seems clear. How is it, then, that Dagan can pronounce such a verdict on Tišpak the god of Ešnunna?

There are two possibilities, either of which may be the case. First, the underlying context is war with Ešnunna. Several letters in the same section in *Archives royales de Mari* XXVI contain reports from prophetic figures who warn against making peace with Ešnunna. In response to the advance of the troops of Ešnunna the oracle is pronounced — Dagan would see to it that the attack was stopped, presumably through the agency of Zimri-Lim and his allies, and that the heyday of Ešnunna would be over. At the same time the wider context of the letter appears to refer to some kind of divine assembly to which Tišpak is summoned and within which Dagan renders his verdict. The picture thus would tend to accord to Dagan the role of chairman of that assembly. If this is an accurate representation, this would mean Dagan, the chief god of the mid-Euphrates region was effectively acting as head of a pan-Mesopotamian pantheon. Is this a case of a god getting ideas beyond his station?<sup>20</sup> Not necessarily. It should be noted that by this time Dagan had already been identified with Enlil, effectively the chief god of the Mesopotamian pantheon. On this basis his territory extended over the Euphrates into Mesopotamia proper, a territory that naturally included Ešnunna.<sup>21</sup>

One final passage for consideration from this time period comes in a letter from Hammurabi of Babylon to Zimri-Lim. The letter is in reply to a complaint from Zimri-Lim that too few troops have been sent by Hammurabi in answer to a request for help in the face of an Elamite invasion. The relevant line, unfortunately occurring after a fragmentary passage, reads:

<sup>19</sup> *ARM XXVI/1* 196 [A.3719] 1'–10'. The translation follows the suggestions of J.-M. Durand, *ARM XXVI/1* 422–23.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. D. Charpin, 'Prophètes et Rois dans le Proche-Orient Amorrite' in A. Lemaire (ed.), *Prophètes et Rois*, 50.

<sup>21</sup> Already in the Sargonic period it appears that in Mesopotamia Dagan was recognised as being in the west what Enlil was in Mesopotamia itself — an inscription of Naram-Sin of Agade lists Dagan among the major gods of the empire immediately after Enlil, and it was to Dagan of Tuttul that Sargon of Agade himself bowed down in the course of his conquest of the mid-Euphrates region. Line 17 of the Epic of Zimri-Lim reads: 'The enemies of ENLIL he made his enemies'. All the commentators that I have seen are agreed that 'Enlil' should here be read 'Dagan'.

Our gods Dagan and Addu established (?) hostility between the ruler of Elam and the ruler of Ešnunna<sup>22</sup>

This sounds promising. However, J.-R. Kupper states that the letter can only relate to the year ZL 9', a year in which many militarily notable events took place, and at the beginning of which the Elamites conquered Ešnunna.<sup>23</sup> This was accomplished with the aid of soldiers from Mari and Babylon. Therefore, it could be said that Dagan and Addu<sup>24</sup> had a part to play in the hostilities between Elam and Ešnunna.<sup>25</sup>

It appears, then, that all the texts examined above are explicable within the normal religious framework, and not by recourse to a kind of universal authority for any 'high god' to effect political changes in foreign lands. However, the evidence which has been invoked thus far comes from a period when the so-called 'high gods' were not altogether linked with political hegemony (with the possible exception of Addu of Aleppo). Dagan and Enlil, for example, are the chief gods of the mid-Euphrates and of Mesopotamia respectively, despite the fact that their principal cities are of little importance politically. Does the situation change when Marduk or Aššur take over as 'king of the gods' in answer to their cities' status as the political hubs of their respective kingdoms or even empires?

#### IV. Evidence from the First Millennium BC

For the sake of space the situation may be illustrated by two texts, one from Assyrian royal inscriptions and one from the inscriptions of Nabonidus, from times when the kingdoms of Assyria and Babylon are expanding, or presiding over extensive empires.<sup>26</sup> The first comes in the Annals of Sennacherib. During his seventh campaign he invaded

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<sup>22</sup> *ARM XXVIII* 1 [A.97] 5'.

<sup>23</sup> J.-R. Kupper, *ARM XXVIII* 1. See also D. Charpin, *ARM XXVI/2* 31–43, 149, 152, 159.

<sup>24</sup> It is interesting that Addu is mentioned here, not Marduk the god of Babylon. Does this reflect Hammurabi's Amorite background, or is it partly determined by the fact that he is writing here to Zimri-Lim?

<sup>25</sup> It is worth noting that other scholars are also uncomfortable with the idea of deities taking an interest in a foreign ruler. D. Charpin, "Prophètes", 43–44, refers to a message of support sent to Zimri-Lim by Eštar of Ninet (taken to refer to Ištar of Nineveh), expresses initial surprise, then explains away the situation.

<sup>26</sup> The Assyrian prophecies found in S. Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies* (SAA 9; Helsinki: Helsinki University, 1997) have not been included here since they do not actually appear to offer anything out of the ordinary. The indications are that the Assyrian army will be used to bring about the fulfilment of the individual prophecies.

Elam, and destroyed and spoiled a number of its cities. Before the might of Assyria the Elamite ruler Kudur-Nahhunte showed discretion and fled to the mountains. Sennacherib advanced against his capital city but had to turn back owing to adverse weather conditions and returned to Nineveh. He then makes this comment:

At that time, at the command of Aššur my lord, Kudur-Nahhunte, king of Elam, did not last three months. On a day before his time, he suddenly died.<sup>27</sup>

The Babylonian chronicle series reports that Kudur-Nahhunte ‘was taken prisoner in a rebellion and killed’.<sup>28</sup> Sennacherib says nothing of this but attributes the event to the command of Aššur. On what grounds does Sennacherib claim this? Certainly there is no admission of Assyrian involvement in his death — Aššur’s command is fulfilled without Assyrian intervention. Is this a case of Aššur finishing off the job that Sennacherib was prevented from doing? If so, it implies that he is at liberty to be active in Elamite territory. Does the fact that Sennacherib has rampaged on Elamite territory thereby extend Aššur’s jurisdiction to the whole of Elam? Whatever the answer may be to these questions it should also be remembered that this is a later rewriting of history in the light of events on the ground. The fact that Kudur-Nahhunte had died or been killed so shortly after Sennacherib’s abortive invasion of the area was vindication for his campaign, and was surely a declaration of the will of Aššur in this respect. The question remains whether within the framework of Assyrian theology the same claims could have been made before the event.

The final example is perhaps the most interesting of all, and the one which potentially shows most parallels with Yahweh’s call of Cyrus to perform his will, recorded in Isaiah. This is not the celebrated Cyrus cylinder since there Marduk is doing no different from what many other gods had done over the centuries — inviting a foreign ruler to come and exercise sovereignty over his land. The text is rather that which contains a report of the dream which Nabonidus saw in the first year of his reign. The account is worth quoting in full:

Ehulhul, the temple of Šin in Harran, in which from days of old Šin, the great lord had established a residence, the delight of his heart — his heart became angry with that city and temple and he raised up the Umman-manda (the Medes) and destroyed that temple, and reduced it to a ruin heap. During my lawful reign, Šin, the great lord became reconciled with that city and temple out of love for my rule; he had mercy. At the beginning of my everlasting rule he let me see a dream: Marduk, great lord and Šin, luminary of heaven and earth stood, both of them. Marduk said to me, ‘Nabonidus, king of Babylon, on your chariot horses

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<sup>27</sup> Col. v 11–14.

<sup>28</sup> Chronicle 1 iii 13–14. Grayson, *Chronicles*, 80.

carry bricks. Build Ehulhul, and establish the residence of Šin, the great lord, inside it'. In fear I said to the Enlil of the gods, Marduk. 'That temple which you spoke of building, the Umman-manda are surrounding it and their strength is immense.' But Marduk said to me, 'The Umman-manda whom you spoke about, they, their country and the kings, their allies, will not exist'. When the third year arrived, he raised up against them Cyrus, king of Anšan, his young servant and he scattered the numerous Umman-manda with his small army, captured Astyages the king of the Umman-manda and brought him to his land in fetters.<sup>29</sup>

Were it Šin himself who were talking it could once again be argued that this is another case of a god acting in the interests of his own city, just as he acts against his city at the beginning of the passage. However, it is Marduk who speaks. Harran at this time, on Nabonidus' own acknowledgement, lay outside Babylonian domination, yet here Marduk claims to be able to affect the political situation there, a claim that appears to be substantiated by subsequent events. Moreover, it is not through Babylonian forces that the 'liberation' of Harran takes place, but through the agency of Cyrus, a third party. The passage is once again explicable on the basis that upon the fall of Assyria and before Median expansion the Babylonians had conquered Harran and stationed a garrison within it.<sup>30</sup> In divine terms, therefore, Harran belonged to Marduk. At the same time, assuming that the dream is genuine and that it is included in the inscription precisely because it is understood to have been fulfilled, this is the closest parallel to the biblical material in Ancient Near Eastern literature of which the present writer is aware.

At the same time, is it really a close parallel? Marduk is the king of the gods, the god of an extensive empire. How can this compare with the predictions of the God of a territory a fraction of the size? It surely cannot be the case that *any* national god could have the same pretensions to greatness and universalism. One has only to look at vassal treaties to see that there were times when states were forced to acknowledge that the gods of another nation were more powerful than their own.

## V. Conclusions

What conclusions, then, can be drawn from this investigation? The authority which Ancient Near Eastern, specifically Mesopotamian, deities have over other nations seems to be linked with territory.

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<sup>29</sup> See H. Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids von Babylon und Kyros' des Großen* (AOAT 256; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2001), 2.12 I I 7–29.

<sup>30</sup> Chronicle 3, 58–75. Grayson, *Chronicles*, 95–96.

Claims can be retrospective in relation to territory held in the present. Territory held in the past may also give a deity a present authority over it. Conquest of foreign nations and the expansion of kingdoms is generally performed through the agency of the deity's own people. The cases of deities acting on their own (that is, without the intervention of their own people) in relation to the politics of other nations, deposing and appointing kings, or bringing judgement upon them by means of a third party are rare and can usually be explained. It remains a general rule that the right to effect political changes in other countries seems to be linked with human political hegemony.

However, the claims of Yahweh go beyond this. He claims to be able to appoint kings in other countries; he can use nations not his own to punish others; he is even able to take the great superpowers of the day, use them for his own purposes and then dispose of them. On a positive note he is also able to bring deliverance to nations that are not his. This is remarkable given the size of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah and their insignificant position on the political world stage and the fact that even the superpowers of Assyria and Babylon stop short of such claims. The explanation may well lie in the monotheistic outlook of the final form of the Hebrew Bible. If Yahweh is the only God, the creator of the ends of the earth, the 'Most High' who 'rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will' (Dan. 4:17, 32) or, to quote Jehoshaphat, 'You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations' (2 Chr. 20:6), then it is well within his jurisdiction to use whom he pleases to accomplish his purposes. At the same time, if this is indeed the explanation, it is striking the extent to which this particular theology of Yahweh in relation to the nations pervades the Old Testament scriptures.