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Editorial

Introduction to Myth-Making in the Hebrew Bible

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Do you remember the first time you learned about ancient Near Eastern stories from the 'World of the Bible'? For many of us, these stories invoked curiosity due to their unfamiliarity, as well as their unmistakable similarities with biblical and classical stories. The way that cosmogonic, anthropogonic, and etiological stories relate to human lived experience and our observable world is intriguing to a broad audience. The topic of myth remains of interest to the general public, as is evident in popular books, movies, and even video games, as well as across many scholarly disciplines. Among biblical scholars, many of us recall the first time we heard about *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, the title of Frank Moore Cross's impactful book, as well as his nuanced contextualizing contrast that some have taken as a dichotomy (Cross 1973). Cross utilized the categories of myth, epic, and history, while analyzing his data in ways that cut across such genre distinctions. While Cross's influential work in *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* was initially published in 1973, it remains essential reading for biblical scholars interested in the topic of myth-making.

The focus of this Special Issue is an analysis of myth-making in the Hebrew Bible, with the purpose of demonstrating how attention to myth-making improves our historical and comparative studies of the Hebrew Bible in its ancient Near Eastern context. The scope is inclusive of historical, cultural, sociological, literary, and cognitive perspectives. Because myth is a topic that appeals to popular audiences as well as scholars in diverse areas, it is important to foster conversation among scholars of Religious Studies more generally, as well as Biblical Studies, and those who study myth theory within any scholarly discipline. The topic of myth is central to Religious Studies, as is the discussion of theories of myth. It is often partnered with the study of ritual and theories of ritual within Religious Studies, for many fitting reasons. In Biblical Studies, there has been strong engagement with ritual theory, while the study of myth has remained somewhat side-lined, for reasons elaborated within the following articles, despite the fact that many scholars over the past 40 years have promoted the rigorous discussion of myth. Looking back, the works of John W. Rogerson, Robert A. Oden, Brevard S. Childs, J. J. M. Roberts, Simon B. Parker, and Nick Wyatt stand out, as these scholars posed questions and articulated positions regarding the category of myth within Biblical Studies, in turn forging pathways for scholars working in this area in recent decades.

This Special Issue features biblical scholars working directly with myth-making in the Hebrew Bible, engaging with past theorization of myth, and theorizing myth-making themselves. The study of myth-making in the Hebrew Bible is central to interdisciplinary work on ancient Near Eastern and ancient Mediterranean literatures and religions. Therefore, a primary aim of this issue is for biblical scholars to speak to scholars within our field as well as scholars in adjacent fields, who might have had less exposure to how far the discussion of myth-making in the Hebrew Bible has come: far beyond the outdated dichotomies of the Bible, as 'proper history' and *Truth*, versus *myth*, as 'false' or "others' stories". This Special Issue contributes to existing scholarship on the topic of myth-making in the Hebrew Bible by building on foundational discussions of the category of myth within Biblical Studies and taking up the charge of past scholars to continue to scrutinize how we implicitly and explicitly use theories of myth. The work represented in this issue reflects scholarly

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conversation with the 2014 volume *Myth and Scripture: Contemporary Perspectives on Religion, Language, and Imagination*, which Dexter E. Callender, Jr. edited as a volume of papers presented within the Society of Biblical Literature unit "The Bible, Myth, and Myth Theory" between 2006 and 2008, as well as conversation with the annual conference proceedings of the "The Bible, Myth, and Myth Theory" unit since that time (Callender 2014).

The following articles model several ways to scrutinize how we understand myth and how our understanding of myth impacts our reconstructions of ancient social, political, literary, and cultic phenomena, providing a range of frameworks and valuable insights. Debra Scoggins Ballentine provides the theoretical background for the Special Issue by introducing the history of interpretation of myth within Biblical Studies, with the goal of encouraging cross-disciplinary rectification of the category of myth. Ballentine analyzes Eusebius's antique contrasting of myth with *Truth*, and then situates the categorical opposing of myth with Bible within Romantic notions of myth. The article promotes current biblical scholarship that contributes to the study of myth across the Humanities.

Diklah Zohar proposes that biblical stories of brotherly animosity function as ethos myths. Zohar identifies variations among the stories, while emphasizing the common elements of favoring the younger brother and the jealously of the elder brother. Turning to the historical setting of civil war between the polities of Judah and Israel, Diklah explicates this ethos myth as a means for Judean reflection upon the military and political relationship of Judah with Israel.

Amy Balogh exhibits the benefits of richly nuanced comparison in her analysis of the Garden of Eden story with the story of human work within *Enuma Elish*. Balogh builds an insightful argument about the relationships between memory, human labor, and access to the divine. Balogh is attentive to how myths are multilayered within their historical and geopolitical contexts, as well as to how the theme of the cultural value of work remains highly relevant in the contemporary context.

Aryeh Amihay and Lupeng Li offer a comparative study, utilizing the inversion principle that cuts across geographical 'cultural milieu' boundaries, disciplinary boundaries, and genre boundaries of 'history' and 'myth'. Discussing past scholarly approaches to comparative study within biblical scholarship, they make important distinctions between methodological concern for "Parallelomania" and scholarly positions that effectively inhibit comparison. This article is grounded within much-needed broader scholarly efforts to challenge "orientalist definitions of space and culture" and the "need to destabilize and question hegemonic Eurocentric paradigms that dominate scholarship."

Andrew Tobolowsky proposes a conceptual model of 'mythic vocabulary' to move us beyond the fundamentally structuralist paradigms of mythic topos and mythic motif. His attentiveness to the history of Biblical Studies' engagement with myth, as well as his discussion of historiography intertwined with mythic vocabulary, helpfully challenge notions of the composition and development of biblical anthologies, as well as how we reconstruct Judean and Israelite histories.

I greatly appreciate this opportunity to share these contributions to the audience of *Religions*.

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