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What happened to Kemosh?

*Post-state states are »religions«.*¹

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Introduction

What happened to Kemosh?

From the Mesha Stele and the Hebrew Bible, we know that Kemosh was the patron deity of the Iron Age Levantine kingdom of Moab. Less known is what happened to Kemosh after Moab's loss of political independence. The present article fills that lacuna by tracing Kemosh's evolution in the era after Moab's absorption into the Neo-Babylonian Empire. This question of Kemosh's »afterlife« is of interest to scholarship on the Hebrew Bible because Yhwh, like Kemosh, was the patron deity of an Iron Age Levantine kingdom. Unlike Kemosh, much is known indeed about Yhwh's postnational career! Far more famous than Kemosh, the worship of Yhwh also survived the dissolution of the kingdom(s) over which he was once patron, especially in and through the Hebrew Bible. But the achievement of the Hebrew Bible can be more fully appreciated when the other religious options are known which its authors faced; plumbing the »paths not taken« can enhance scholarly understanding of the »path taken« by the Hebrew Bible and its deity. The case of Kemosh represents that control case: a historical path available to Yahwists in the postmonarchic epoch – available but not traversed.

Twin studies provide a helpful analogy here. Julius Wellhausen wrote in 1894 that it remained unanswered »why, from approximately the same beginning, Israelite history arrived at quite a different end result from, say, Moabite history«.²

¹ Maurice Bloch, *In and Out of Each Other's Bodies: Theory of Mind, Evolution, Truth, and the Nature of the Social* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2013), 34.

² Julius Wellhausen, *Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2002), 33. Reinhard G. Kratz has used this quote programmatically in several works: idem, »Chemosh's Wrath and Yahweh's No: Ideas of Divine Wrath in Moab and Israel,« in *Divine Wrath and Divine Mercy in the World of Antiquity*, ed. idem and Hermann Spieckermann, FAT II/33 (Tübingen, 2008): 92–121, 93; idem, »Israel als Staat und als Volk,« *ZThK* 97 (2000): 1–17, 5.

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Wellhausen thus acknowledged that Israelite and Moabite histories started very similarly, only later to diverge.³ A few years earlier, Francis Galton, the father of twin studies, had argued for the heuristic value of comparing twins in view of just such an arc of initial similarity and later difference: »[w]e might begin by enquiring about twins who were closely alike in boyhood and youth, and who were educated together for many years, and learn whether they subsequently grew unlike, and, if so, what the main causes were which, in the opinion of the family, produced the dissimilarity.«⁴ Because of their resemblance at the outset, comparing twins offers unique scientific opportunity to isolate the factors without which the brothers would presumably have followed a similar trajectory.

So likewise, comparing the history of Kemosh and Yhwh can help to specify those historical and intellectual events without which Yhwh would presumably have developed along similar lines to Kemosh. The two deities are, if you will, like twins: »closely alike« in their Iron Age »boyhood« and »educated together« in the general curriculum of southern Levantine religions. They did, however, »grow unlike«. But heretofore, the nature of their »adult« unlikeness has been rather hazy. Works on Kemosh typically focus on his tenure as the patron of a territorial kingdom, and the little attention given to his profile after Moab's imperial incorporation does not bring him into meaningful comparison with Yhwh.⁵ The

3 This is a major point of Reinhard Kratz's essay, »Reste hebräischen Heidentums am Beispiel der Psalmen,« *NAWG.PH* 2 (2004): 25–65.

4 Francis Galton, »The history of twins, as a criterion of the relative powers of nature and nurture,« *Fraser's Mag* 12 (1875): 566–576, 566. For more on Galton's work, see John C. Waller, »The birth of the twin study – a commentary on Francis Galton's ›The History of Twins‹« *International Journal of Epidemiology* 41/4 (2012): 913–917.

5 This observation applies to the following otherwise sturdy guides to the career of Kemosh: Gerald L. Mattingly, »Moabite Religion and the Mesha' Inscription,« in *Studies in the Mesha Inscription and Moab*, ed. John. Andrew Dearman, ABS 2 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 211–238; Udo Worschech, *Das Land Jenseits des Jordan: Biblische Archäologie in Jordanien*, SBZ 1 (Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus, 1991); idem, »Der Gott Kemosh: Versuch einer Charakterisierung,« *UF* 24 (1992): 393–401; Hans-Peter Müller, »König Mēša' von Moab und der Gott der Geschichte,« *UF* 26 (1994): 373–395; Galo W. Vera Chamaza, *Die Rolle Moabs in der neuassyrischen Expansionspolitik*, AOAT 321 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2005), 42–46; Erasmus Gaß, *Die Moabiter – Geschichte und Kultur eines ostjordanischen Volkes im 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.*, ADPV 38 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009), 62–65; Herbert Niehr, »Chemosh,« in *Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception*, ed. Choon-Leong Seow and Hermann Spieckermann, 5; 50; Daegyung Jang, »An Integrative Study of the Moabite Religion during the Iron Age II Period: Glimpsing Religion in Text and Context,« *The Mediterranean Review* 1/2 (2008): 39–62. Partial exceptions include Hans-Peter Müller, »Chemosh,« *DDD*²: 186–189, Paul J. Jr. Ray, »Kemoš and Moabite Religion,« *Near East Archaeological Society Bulletin* 48 (2003): 17–31, and Josey B. Snyder, »Did Kemosh Have a Consort (or Any Other Friends)? Re-assessing the Moabite Pantheon,« *UF* 42 (2010): 645–675. Snyder's study refers back to the history of Yhwh (p. 667) and Müller and Ray include helpful information about Kemosh's »afterlife«.

present article breaks new ground: by discovering more exactly what happened to Kemosh in the era after Moab's absorption, it will embolden the »main causes ... which produced [Yhwh's] dissimilarity« relative to him.

This article thus tells two stories: on the one hand, Kemosh and Yhwh developed along parallel lines. Both deities evidence a tendency towards »translatability« in their postmonarchic phase.⁶ In the Hellenistic period, this meant that they both underwent, to different extents, »the Greek interpretation«: they became identified with their equivalent deity in the Greek pantheon. On the other hand, Kemosh and Yhwh »grew unlike«, because, different from Kemosh, Yhwh's evolution included a counterbalancing force: *inscripturation*. Yhwh's »translation« into a Greek deity could only go so far, because his personality and profile were expanded and fixed literarily. Like a good poem, Yhwh's irreducible *writtenness* meant he could not be rendered easily into another religious language. On the other hand, prophetic oracles and regional stories about Kemosh were never gathered into an authoritative corpus – and so Kemosh was transferable; there was nothing to prevent him from becoming the Greek god Ares, full stop. The conclusion of the present article reflects on the historical reasons why Yhwh experienced inscripturation while Kemosh did not.

1 Kemosh and Yhwh: »Closely Alike in Boyhood«

Kemosh and Yhwh were »closely alike in boyhood«. The initial similarity of Kemosh and Yhwh is obvious even to a casual reader of the Mesha Stele; Ginsburg rightly remarked, »if the name of Jehovah were substituted for Chemosh, it would read like a chapter from the book of Kings«. ⁷ The Mesha Stele and the Former Prophets include at least these features in common: the Mesha Stele depicts a national deity, Kemosh, who is »angry with his land« (רַגְזָה; cf. I Reg 11,9),⁸ and so permits a neighboring king to oppress (עָנָה) Moab (line 5; cf. II Reg 17,20). However, Kemosh then delivers (פָּדָה) the king from his enemies (line 4).⁹ In grati-

⁶ For more on deity translation, see Mark S. Smith, *God in Translation: Deities in Cross-Cultural Discourse in the Biblical World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

⁷ Ginsburg is quoted in Archibald H. Sayce, *The Higher Criticism and the Verdict of the Monuments* (New York: E. & J.B. Young & Co., 1894), 374.

⁸ Kratz, »Chemosh's Wrath,« 98 n. 15.

⁹ The language of »deliverance« with the root פָּדָה is, of course, widespread throughout the Hebrew Bible, including the Former Prophets; with a king as its object, only in II Chr 32,22 and Ps 20,9.

tude, the king constructs a sanctuary in honor of Kemosh on a high place (line 3).¹⁰ Kemosh is also the recipient of *herem*, or total ritual warfare (line 17),¹¹ and the dedicand of captured cultic objects (lines 12–13).¹² Kemosh communicates military commands to the king via divination or prophecy: »Go, take Nebo from Israel!« (line 14, cf. also line 32 at the end).¹³ These similarities can be generalized: Kemosh and Yhwh are both the symbolic center of their respective national theologies. The index of their anger is national subjugation, and the index of their favor is military success and building campaigns; their loyal servant and human analogy is the king. What Routledge writes of the Mesha Stele stands true of Yhwh in these passages, too: both pose a »centralizing triad« of land, deity, and king.¹⁴

The similarities may not stand so obvious as to elicit a quote like Ginsburg's, but the »boyhood« parallels between Kemosh and Yhwh can also be drawn from another unit within the Hebrew Bible: the Psalms. Several psalms can be dated, in the main, to the monarchic period (29; 47; 89; 93; 95–99).¹⁵ Like the Former Prophets, these psalms show Yhwh as the kingly patron of the Judean monarch. But they also suggest something the narrative materials do not: the importance of the »combat myth« to Judean royal ideology. In some of these psalms, Yhwh does battle against the power of chaos to secure life and order for his people; so, for example, the older hymn inset in Ps 89, wherein Yhwh subdues the waters and

10 The vocabulary of »building a high place« (בנה/עשה במה) occurs frequently in the Former Prophets: I Reg 11,7; 14,23, II Reg 17,9; 21,3; with the king as subject, only in I Reg 11,7; II Reg 21,3, and II Chr 33,3.

11 See Philip D. Stern, *The Biblical Herem: A Window on Israel's Religious Experience*, BJS 211 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 19–56.

12 The Hebrew Bible does not record that the captured cultic objects of other nations were brought before Yhwh, but it does reflect awareness of this practice, as when the ark of the covenant is brought before Dagan in I Sam 5.

13 André Lemaire compares this command to the war oracle of I Reg 22,12 in idem, »Oracles, politique et littérature dans les royaumes araméens et transjordanien (IXe–VIIIe s. av. n.è.),« in *Oracles et prophéties dans l'antiquité: actes du Colloque de Strasbourg, 15–17 juin 1995*, ed. Jean-Georges Heintz (Paris: De Boccard, 1997): 183; 185. For more comparisons between the Mesha Stele and the Former Prophets, see Christian Molke, *Der Text der Mescha-Stele und die biblische Geschichtsschreibung*, Beiträge zur Erforschung der antiken Moabitica [Arq el-Kerak] 5 (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2006), 29–47.

14 Bruce Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age: Hegemony, Polity, and Archaeology*, Archaeology, Culture, and Society (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 151.

15 Reinhard Kratz, »Der Mythos vom Königtum Gottes in Kanaan und Israel,« *ZThK* 100 (2003): 147–162; idem, *Reste hebräischer Heidentums am Beispiel der Psalmen*, Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen 1, Philologisch-historische Klasse 2004/2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004); Reinhard Müller, »Die frühe Jahweverehrung im Spiegel der ältesten Psalmen,« in *Anfänge und Ursprünge der Jahweverehrung*, ed. Cilliers Breytenbach et al., *BThZ* 30 (Evangelische Verlagsanstalt: Leipzig, 2013): 89–119.

crushes Rahab (v. 9.10) before Yhwh makes (בנה) the world (v. 11). Scholars have long observed that this theme of battle and ensuing world-building traces back to Canaanite antecedents.¹⁶ But a few have also noted that the Mesha Stele contains vestiges of this mythic pattern. Philip Stern writes in his study of סרר (?), that the Mesha Stele »refer[s] to the ancient theme of the deity slaying the monster of chaos ... By defeating Yhwh, Kemosh slew the chaos monster and restored the Moabite world order.«¹⁷ Stern further observes that Mesha's building actions following military conquest correspond to the combat myth pattern, first of defeating chaos and then of construction.¹⁸ In this way, royal psalms, too, can be profitably compared with the Mesha Stele, and underscore the initial similarity of the deities Kemosh and Yhwh. The iconography of stamp seals from the monarchic period substantiates their resemblance.¹⁹

Of course, even identical twins do not share completely interchangeable genetic material, and this is probably also the case for Kemosh and Yhwh: certain qualifications on their similarity must be observed. Some will point to the exodus tradition: even granting that Cisjordanian royal theology shared much in common with Moabite, surely the story of Yhwh bringing the people up from Egypt differentiated Yhwh from Kemosh! In fact, Stephen Russell's well-researched conclusion bears repeating here: »This Israelite tradition [of an exodus] may have taken hold in the south only after the influx of refugees from Israel around the time of the Assyrian invasion in 722 BCE.«²⁰ Before that time, the exodus tradition would have played no role in the Jerusalem cult. In Israel, things were different; the pre-exilic Bethel calf cult promulgated the exodus tradition.²¹ But even so, it is hard

16 Hermann Gunkel and Heinrich Zimmern, *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit. Eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung über Gen 1 und Ap Joh 12* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1895, 1921).

17 Stern, *Ḥerem*, 41.

18 Nicolas Wyatt makes similar observations about the presence of *Chaoskampf* themes in the Mesha Stele (idem, »Arms and the King: The earliest allusions to the *Chaoskampf* motif and their implications for the interpretation of the Ugaritic and biblical traditions,« in »Und Mose schrieb dieses Lied auf«: *Studien zum Alten Testament und zum alten Orient*. FS Oswald Loretz, ed. Manfred Dietrich and Ingo Kottsieper [Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1998]: 831 f.; 867); also, Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001], 162).

19 Stefan Timm, »Das ikonographische Repertoire der moabitischen Siegel und seine Entwicklung: vom Maximalismus zum Minimalismus,« in *Studies in The Iconography of Northwest Semitic Inscribed Seals: Proceedings of a Symposium Held in Fribourg on April 17–20, 1991*, ed. Benjamin Sass and Christoph Uehlinger, OBO 125 (Fribourg: University Press Fribourg, 1993): 161–191.

20 Stephen C. Russell, *Images of Egypt in Early Biblical Literature: Cisjordan-Israelite, Transjordan-Israelite and Judahite Portrayals*, BZAW 403 (Berlin: De Gruyter), 193.

21 *Ibid.*, 77.

to know to what extent this tradition, celebrated at one or a few sites, would have penetrated the royal theology of all Israel (Judeans of Elephantine 300 years later still show no awareness of the exodus tradition).

A stronger qualification on the primordial similarity of Kemosh and Yhwh takes departure from the histories of the territorial kingdoms over which each deity reigned. Moab was smaller than Israel, and founded perhaps in imitation of its older, stronger neighbor.²² Also, Yhwh was patron deity over *two* Levantine kingdoms, and Kemosh over one. But the more consequential historical difference between the kingdoms concerns their demise. It used to be thought, following Josephus, that the Babylonians razed Moab in 582 BCE, shortly after destroying Jerusalem. Craig Tyson has proven the historical inaccuracy of this reconstruction.²³ To anticipate the reflections of the conclusion, it appears that Moab experienced a rather gentler absorption than Judah into the Neo-Babylonian Empire – and thus never had to reckon as gravely with national defeat. Nor, either, was Moab's loss of independence foreshadowed by the downfall of a sister kingdom that shared the same patron deity.

But this history belongs to the postnational life of Kemosh; his »boyhood« similarity to Yhwh obtains. From initial likeness, the evolutionary paths each deity took would fork, and the »twins« grew dissimilar. Paragraphs below rehearse the story of Kemosh, century by century. They also note the ways in which Yhwh was developing alongside Kemosh: how both deities responded to their changed status as formerly patron deities through a willingness to »translate«.

6th century BCE: Babylonian Juridical Documents

Two Babylonian juridical documents from the 6th century. BCE feature the deity Kemosh as part of theophoric names. The later one, from 505 BCE during the reign of Darius I, names an individual named *Kamuš-ilu*, or »Kemosh is god«. ²⁴ The earlier one dates to 524 BCE, the 6th year of Cambyses (II), »king of the nations« (*šar mat mat*). This document details a transaction undertaken by one Kinabu-

²² Gerald L. Mattingly, »Who Were Israel's Transjordanian Neighbors and How Did They Differ?« in *Israel: Ancient Kingdom or Late Invention?*, ed. Daniel I. Block (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008): 201–224.

²³ Craig W. Tyson, »Josephus, *Antiquities* 10.180–82, Jeremiah, and Nebuchadnezzar,« *JHS* 13 (2013): 1–16.

²⁴ Georges Contenau, *Contrats neo-babyloniens*, Vol. II, *Textes Cunéiformes* 13 (1929), No. 193, 1. 33. See Raymond A. Bowman »An Aramaic Journal Page,« *AJSLL* 58.3 (1941): 302–313, 313.

balat, the owner of Tamunu, a female Egyptian slave. Kinabubalat was the son of *Kamuš-šar-ušur*, a name meaning »Kemosh protect the king«. ²⁵

As with Judeans resident in Babylonia, the reasons for the expatriation of these Moabites are hard to determine: they may have been deportees or merchants. ²⁶ And as with Yahwistic names in Babylonian records, the names *Kamuš-ilu* and *Kamuš-šar-ušur* indicate continued loyalty to the patron deity of a lost state. But the Neo-Babylonian language of these names as well as the presence of Babylonian theophora in the same family tree testify to some degree of cultural assimilation. More than that: the name *Kamuš-šar-ušur* itself is interesting and paradoxical. It testifies to the perdurance of a formerly national deity even as it also prays by that deity – and in the language of empire – for the safety of the Persian king (*šar*). It is, in Bowman's words, »a hybrid-name«, ²⁷ and its hybridity works not only at the linguistic surface in its concatenation of west and east Semitic elements. It is also hybrid in that it takes the former symbolic center of Moabite national theology, the deity Kemosh, and then invokes Kemosh in support of the Persian king. ²⁸ Kemosh who used exclusively to bless the Moabite king now blesses the king of a foreign empire.

This hybrid name demonstrates in miniature the challenges and changed conditions of worshipping a formerly national deity after the loss of statehood. Two occurrences of the deity name *Yaḥû-šar-ušur* in Babylonian texts show that in this regard, Yhwh was developing in parallel to Kemosh. ²⁹ Of course, by this

25 In the body of the text, Kinabubalat addresses his brother, Sinbitri, another son of *Kamuš-šar-ušur*. Kinabubalat had lent his slave Tamunu to a friend named Lakipi, but in this document Kinabubalat sets a time limit on Lakipi's loan and dedicates the slave to his brother in return for payment.

26 Van Zyl notes that the bearer of the Kemosh-name in this document need not have been Moabite, since the deity Kemosh is attested elsewhere than in Moab. But he later speculates on the basis of this text that the name *Kamuš-šar-ušur* belonged to a Moabite exiled to Babylonia under Nebuchadnezzar (Albertus H. van Zyl, *The Moabites*, Pretoria oriental series 3 [Leiden: Brill, 1960], 39; 157); see also Ran Zadok, »West Semitic Groups in the Nippur Region between c. 750 and 330 B.C.E.« in *Exile and Return: The Babylonian Context*, ed. Jonathan Stökl and Caroline Waerzeggers, BZAW 478 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 94–156, 95 n. 4.

27 Bowman, »Journal Page«: 313.

28 It is possible but extremely unlikely that there was still a Moabite *šar* at this time, and it was for him that the theophoric name prayed. The latest mentioned Moabite king is *Kamāš-ḫaltâ*, a vassal of Assurbanipal who captured a rebellious king and brought him to Nineveh in the mid-7th century, about a century before the case of Tamunu; Stefan Timm, *Moab zwischen den Mächten: Studien zu historischen Denkmälern und Texten*, ÄAT 17 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1989), 374–392; Chamaza, *Die Rolle Moabs*, 109–113.

29 One document is a promissory note for barley from 550 BCE (Laurie E. Pearce and Cornelia Wunsch, ed., *Documents of Judean Exiles and West Semites in Babylonia in the Collection of David*

time, Yhwh had already drawn apart from Kemosh in having undergone inscription. So, for example, the same theological move that these theophoric names make appears in lyric form in the roughly contemporary Second Isaiah materials. By making Yhwh the benefactor of the Persian king Cyrus (the father of Cambyses mentioned in the case of Tamunu), Isa 45 attests the same theological adjustments. This biblical text and these theophoric names reckon with the power of empire, acknowledging the political supremacy of the Persian rulers while creatively upholding the theological supremacy of their formerly national god.

5th century BCE: Sakkara Papyrus no. 13

Another theophoric name featuring Kemosh appears 50 years later than the case of Tamunu, this time in Persian Egypt.³⁰ In 1926 at Sakkara, under the aegis of the Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte,³¹ Cecil Firth excavated what turned out to be a bureau of the Persian military administration in Memphis (specifically, the office tasked with waterways).³² As at the Persian garrison of Elephantine 800+ km to the south, the personnel of the Persian military administration in Memphis were drawn from regions all over the Persian Empire, including the southern Levant.³³ The deity name Kemosh occurs once among personal names found in these Aramaic fragments, on papyrus no. 13.³⁴

Sakkara papyrus no. 13 is almost completely illegible because of decomposition. Nonetheless, line 3 of the verso contains the word for a Persian military unit

Sofer, CUSAS 28 (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 2014), 90; 103). The other is a deed record from Susa in 494 BCE (Ran Zadok, *The Earliest Diaspora: Israelites and Judeans in Pre-Hellenistic Mesopotamia*, Publications of the Diaspora Research Institute 151 [Tel Aviv: Diaspora Research Institute, 2000], 46).

30 On paleographic grounds, Noël Aimé-Giron dates the Sakkara texts to the middle of the 5th century BCE (idem, *Textes Araméens d'Égypte* [Cairo: Service des antiquités de l'Égypte/Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1931], 62).

31 Cecil M. Firth and Battiscombe Gunn, *Excavations at Saqqara: Teti pyramid Cemeteries*, Vol. 1 (Cairo: Imprimerie de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1926), 1–6.

32 Aimé-Giron, *Textes Araméens*, 54.

33 *Ibid.*, 58.

34 Ludwig Koehler's entry on Kemosh lists three occurrences of the name Kemosh in the Sakkara papyri (*Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros* [Leiden: Brill, 1953], 441). Both van Zyl (*Moabites*, 40) and Müller (*DDD*², 188) repeat this claim. But Aimé-Giron only notes one Kemosh-name (p. 30), as does the reference work by Bezalel Porten and Jerome A. Lund (*Aramaic Documents from Egypt: A Key-Word-in-Context Concordance*, The comprehensive Aramaic lexicon project: Texts and studies 1 [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002], 365). In fact, the other two proposed Achaemenid witnesses to the name Kemosh come from unprovenanced stamp seals.

– לַגִּד, a term scattered throughout the cache of documents – and line 4 presents the personal name כַּמֹּשׁ פִּלְטָה, meaning, »Kemosh has saved«. ³⁵ Aimé-Giron deduced that the name belonged to a Moabite. ³⁶ As with the Kemosh-named individuals in the Babylonian documents, it is impossible to know under what circumstances a Moabite man ended up serving in the Persian military in Egypt, whether by conscription or choice. What the name does show is that the cult of Kemosh persisted, and adjusted: just as Kemosh featured in a Babylonian sentence-name in the case of Tamunu, so in Egypt under the Persians, Kemosh functions as subject in an Aramaic sentence-name. It should be compared with the Yhwh names of Achaemenid Egypt: two found at Sakkara, ³⁷ and, of course, in greater abundance in the archives at Elephantine. Exactly equivalent Yhwh-names have been found in the Elephantine corpus: פִּלְטָה, meaning »Yhwh has saved«. ³⁸

No shrine to Kemosh has been identified outside of Moab as with the Judean temple on the island of Elephantine. But the fact that Yhwh names like פִּלְטָה occur in the same context where daily offerings were being made to Yhwh suggests that the appearance of Kemosh in a parallel theophoric name was hardly vestigial. ³⁹ Kemosh was a power for salvation in the lives of Moabite expatriates, even if he no longer reigned over the Moabite kingdom. His power also could be expressed in a foreign language. Here, too, as above, Kemosh was amenable to translation. The Yhwh known from Elephantine shared this transferability. At least there, Yhwh's translatability was not yet offset by inscription.

4th century BCE: The Sarra' Inscription

When it was discovered, the Sarra' inscription was being used as a paving stone. ⁴⁰ In conversation with Frank Moore Cross, Joseph Thaddée Milik dated the frag-

³⁵ Aimé-Giron, *Textes Araméens*, 30.

³⁶ Van Zyl suggests that when Moab fell to Babylon, some Moabites »fled to Egypt where they earned a living as hirelings« (*Moabites*, 157).

³⁷ Aimé-Giron, *Textes Araméens*, 58.

³⁸ Arthur E. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1923), No. 82, l. 10; No. 13, l. 15; No 40, l. 1. Also, cf. Neh 10,23, I Chr 3,21. On פִּלְטָה as a short form of פִּלְטִיָּה, see Martin Noth, *Die israelitischen Personennamen im Rahmen der gemeinsemitischen Namengebung*, BWANT 46 (Hildesheim: Olms, 1966), 36–41; 255.

³⁹ Angela Rohmoser, *Götter, Tempel und Kult der Judäo-Aramäer von Elephantine: Archäologische und schriftliche Zeugnisse aus dem perserzeitlichen Ägypten*, AOAT 396 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2014), 198–220.

⁴⁰ Joseph Thaddée Milik, »Nouvelles Inscriptions sémitiques et grecques du pays de Moab,« *LA* 9 (1959): 330–441, 331.

ment on palaeographic grounds to 350–325 BCE.⁴¹ Unlike with the two previous examples from the 6th and 5th centuries BCE, the Sarra' inscription was written by a Moabite in Moab. Also, in it, the deity Kemosh is not part of a theophoric name but of a stereotyped expression of devotion (עבד כמש).⁴² This inscription proves that the worship of Kemosh – now postdating the loss of Moab's independence by a couple centuries at least – persevered. Notable, too, is the fact that even in Kemosh's homeland, the language used to evoke devotion to the deity is *Aramaic*. In this regard, the Sarra' inscription witnesses to the same phenomenon as the previous two examples: Kemosh could be worshipped in a tongue not his own.

It is hard to know to what extent these aforementioned artifacts of the 6th–4th centuries reflect a preservation bias; perhaps Moabites worshipped Kemosh in the Moabite language during this same period, and it just so happens that texts about him in the imperial *lingua franca* were more durably transcribed (or transcribed at all). That Kemosh received veneration in Aramaic in his homeland does not set him apart from Yhwh: inscriptions from Jerusalem also appear in Aramaic, and use the name Yhwh.⁴³

The Aramaic portions of the Hebrew Bible (Daniel, Ezra) also attest to this phenomenon of speaking about a regional deity in the language of empire. But they show that Yhwh had »grown unlike« Kemosh: Yhwh had become inscripturated, and in addition to being addressed in Aramaic, Yhwh was also liberally invoked in his »mother tongue«, Hebrew. Signs of a similarly counterbalancing corpus – antecedents to a »Moabite Bible« composed in Moabite – have not been forthcoming.⁴⁴ Although the data are limited indeed, they all point in the same direction: towards a willingness to »translate« Kemosh, without a countervailing literary fixity and expansion as in Yhwh's case.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 332. The first line of the inscription specifies to whom the monument is dedicated: סרא מלכתא »Sarra', the queen,« for which Ray names the inscription (*idem*, »Kemoš«: 20).

⁴² *DNWSI* II: 816–819.

⁴³ At least as part of theophoric names, e.g., *CIIP I.1: 1–704*, no. 31; 228; 367; 371 et al.

⁴⁴ Though Christopher A. Rollston anticipates that »many more inscriptions will be found« in the Transjordan (*idem*, »40 Predictions for Epigraphy in the Next 40 Years,« in *40 Futures: Experts Predict What's Next for Biblical Archaeology* [Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 2015]: 74–76, 75), and excavation of Moabite sanctuaries at Dhiban, 'Ataruz, and Mudayna is ongoing.

2 Kemosh Goes Greek

The Sarra' inscription is the last attestation of the name Kemosh. But it must not be supposed that Kemosh ceased to be worshipped by Moabites. Rather, Kemosh underwent the *interpretatio graeca*: as with his cognates in the Phoenician and Ammonite pantheons, the deity Kemosh became merged with his Hellenistic equivalent. The bent towards translatability that artifacts from previous centuries attest came to full flower as Kemosh was equated with another deity of the eastern Mediterranean.

The first evidence for this merger is several late second century (CE) coins recovered from Rabbathmoba, the erstwhile capital city of Moab.⁴⁵ One coin shows the bust of Septimius Severus (193–211 BCE) on one side and a war deity on the other.⁴⁶ The *war deity* iconography dovetails nicely with Kemosh's profile in the Mesha Stele, and Hill opines that »it would be natural to give the name Kemosh to the deity represented on the coins of Rabbathmoba.«⁴⁷

But several other identities besides Kemosh have been ascribed to this divine figure on the Rabbathmoba coins. Knauf and Bowersock both focus on the name given to Rabbathmoba during the reign of Elagabalus (218–222 CE), when coins of the same provenance and iconography bear the designation »Areopolis« or »Arsapolis«. Knauf finds in this city name a Greek transcription of the Arabian deity named *Rudā'*, known from several other Palmyrene inscriptions.⁴⁸ Bowersock believes that the city name Arsapolis includes the Hellenized form of the local Nabataean deity named *Ar*, which is also a place-name known from the Hebrew Bible.⁴⁹ In this he follows Jerome.⁵⁰ But Bowersock's explanation, by his own admission, leaves the element *-sa* of the name Arsapolis mysterious.⁵¹

45 Ernst Axel Knauf, »Arsapolis: eine epigraphische Bemerkung,« *LA* 34 (1984): 353–365, 353.

46 George Francis Hill, *Catalogue of the Greek Coins of Arabia, Mesopotamia, and Persia Bd. 28: Nabataea, Arabia Provincia, S. Arabia, Mesopotamia, Babylonia, Assyria, Persia, Alexandrine Empire of the East, Persis, Elymais, Characene* (Bologna: Arnaldo Forni, 1965), 44.

47 *Ibid.*, xliii.

48 Knauf, »Arsapolis«: 353.

49 Glenn Warren Bowersock, »The Arabian Ares,« in *Tria corda: scritti in onore di Arnaldo Momigliano*, ed. Emilio Gabba, Athenaeum: Biblioteca 1 (Como: Edizione New Press, 1983): 43–47, 45.

50 Thomas P. Scheck, ed., *St Jerome: Commentary on Isaiah, Including St. Jerome's Translation of Origen's Homilies 1–9 on Isaiah*, Ancient Christian Writers 68 (New York: Newman Press, 2015), 242.

51 Bowersock, »Arabian Ares«: 46.

Knauf's proposal is sounder, orthographically, but struggles to account for why a deity named after a betyl would be pictured as a *war deity*.⁵²

A simpler reconstruction follows the speculation of Eusebius, who wrote that the city name Areopolis derives from the Greek god *Ares*.⁵³ Such an explanation needs no special pleading, orthographically, and the iconography of the coins eminently fits. Both Bowersock and Knauf acknowledge that, whatever the deity's origins, he has been conformed pictographically to the Hellenistic *Ares*.⁵⁴

But this *Ares* is not just *Ares*: Hill is correct to say that it is *Kemosh*. The two deities have merged; more accurately, the local Semitic war deity *Kemosh* has undergone the Greek interpretation, and has become identified with his counterpart in the theological *lingua franca* of the eastern Mediterranean. This claim has been made before, though desultorily.⁵⁵ But the present article mounts a more thorough case on the basis of several comparative data. *Kemosh* was not alone as a »translated« west Semitic deity. His cognate deities in Tyre (*Melqart*) and even more proximately in Ammon (*Milkom*) also merged with Hellenistic deities of war. Across the river Jordan in Samaria, the deity *Yhwh* also underwent the Greek interpretation, though notably his profile matched the Greek »high god« *Zeus* rather than a war deity like *Heracles* or *Ares*.

Tyre, Ammon, and Samaria

The patron deities of Tyre, Ammon, and Samaria were »siblings« to *Kemosh*, »closely alike in boyhood and youth, and educated together for many years«, if not quite »twins« to *Kemosh* like *Yhwh*.⁵⁶ As such, the fact that they all experi-

⁵² Knauf, »Arsapolis«: 355. Though see the standing stone recovered from the Moabite 'Ataruz temple (Chang-Ho Ji, »The Early Iron Age II Temple at *Ḥirbet 'Aṭārūs* and its Architecture and Selected Cultic Objects,« in *Temple Building and Temple Cult: Architecture and Cultic Paraphernalia of Temples in the Levant (2.–1. Mill. B.C.E.)*, ed. Jens Kamlah, ADPV 41 [Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012], 203–222, 212).

⁵³ R. Steven Notley and Ze'ev Safrai, ed., *Eusebius, Onomasticon: The Place Names of Divine Scripture*, Jewish and Christian Perspectives Series 9 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 40.

⁵⁴ Bowersock, »Arabian *Ares*«: 354; Knauf, »Arsapolis«: 46.

⁵⁵ Mattingly, »Moabite Religion«: 222; Ray, »Kemoš«: 21; Müller, »Chemosh«: 188.

⁵⁶ *Melqart*, unlike *Yhwh*, was one of *three* deities worshipped in Tyre, alongside *Ešmun* and *Astarte* (see Corinne Bonnet, *Melqart: cultes et mythes de l'Héraclès tyrien en Méditerranée*, *Studia Phoenicia* 8 [Leuven: Peeters, 1988], 25–42). *Milkom* may have only been a dynastic title for the Ammonite deity *El* (see Joel S. Burnett, »Iron Age Deities in Word, Image, and Name: Correlating Epigraphic, Iconographic, and Onomastic Evidence for the Ammonite God,« *SHAJ*

enced Graicization corroborates the thesis that Kemosh became the deity Ares. Also, the witnesses below to this phenomenon of deity translation are all, importantly, *indigenous*: translation was not (only) foisted on Semitic deities by Hellenizing outsiders; insiders, too, accepted and reproduced the equation between their own deity and his Greek cognate.

The Phoenician deity of Tyre, Melqart, became identified with the Greek war deity Heracles. Examples of this merger are abundant.⁵⁷ But for our purpose, an important indigenous witness is the well-known cippi of Melqart from Malta. A pair of engraved pillars fashioned by two brothers from Tyre in the 2nd century BCE, they make a bilingual dedication: in Phoenician to Melqart of Tyre and in Greek to Heracles.⁵⁸

The Ammonite deity Milkom also became identified with the Greek war deity, Heracles. One indigenous witness to this equation is a Greek inscription from Rabbat Ammon, the former capital of Ammon. The inscription dates to »l'époque macédonienne«⁵⁹ and it honors an official of the Heracles cult named Maphtan. This name is Ammonite; it is not inflected for case and is apparently equivalent to the Hebrew word מפתח, »threshold«. This Greek inscription attests to an equation made not by an outsider to Levantine religion, but by a devotee of the Ammonite deity, now Hellenized as Heracles. 2nd century coins from Rabbat Ammon also support the merger of Milkom and Heracles; they picture a war deity much like Tyrian Heracles.⁶⁰ Heracles of Ammon in the Hellenistic period was a transformation of the local war deity, namely, Milkom.

For some circles in Samaria, Yhwh, too, underwent the Greek interpretation. According to 2 Macc 6:2, the Yhwh temple on Mt. Gerizim had been renamed »the Temple of Zeus the God of Hospitality, as the people who lived there had requested.« Josephus refers to this same event, embedding a letter to Antiochus into his *Antiquities*; in it, the Samaritans petition Antiochus to exempt them from his decrees against Judaism and to rename their temple after Zeus Hellenios (*Ant* 12.258–264). Debate rages around whether the phrase about the Samaritans' request in 2 Macc is an insertion, and to what extent Josephus's account con-

10 [2009]: 153–164). Yhwh of Samaria is not a »twin« to the Yhwh of Jerusalem, but a different regional manifestation of the same deity.

57 E.g., II Macc 4,18–20 as well as Lucian's *De Dea Syria*. See Bonnet, *Melqart*, 399–415.

58 *Ibid.*, 244–247.

59 Charles Clermont-Ganneau, »L'Heracleion de Rabbat-Ammon Philadelphie et la déesse Astéria,« *RAr* 3/5 (1905): 209–215, 209.

60 Hill, *Catalogue*, xxxix–xli; also Warwick Wroth, *A Catalogue of the Greek Coins of Galatia Cappadocia, and Syria* (Bologna: Arnaldo Forni, 1964), lxxxix–xci.

tains a historical memory.⁶¹ For the present article, all that matters is that a deity translation occurred in Samaria in the Hellenistic period: Yhwh was translated into Zeus. Probably some Samaritans accepted this equation, and others did not.⁶²

This was likely also the case for Antiochus's renaming of the Jerusalem temple, and the deity translation effected there; the Bible records the dissenting perspective, but no doubt some Jews welcomed the identification of Yhwh and Zeus. Like Kemosh, Yhwh was translated into a Greek deity – with the important difference that Yhwh was equated with the »high god« Zeus and not the war god Heracles. However, Yhwh's translation could only go so far, because unlike his cognate Levantine deities, the worship of Yhwh had become recentered on an authoritative body of literature. The conclusion below reflects on the historical and intellectual reasons that »produced [this] dissimilarity« between the formerly twin-like deities Kemosh and Yhwh. By doing so, it highlights the achievement of the Hebrew Bible.

3 Comparing and Contrasting Kemosh and Yhwh: »Subsequently Grown Unlike«

By the time of the Ares coin from Areopolis in the late second century CE, Kemosh and Yhwh had grown very unlike indeed. As noted, Yhwh had shown many signs of developing in parallel to Kemosh: Yhwh's profile adjusted to accommodate Persian political supremacy; Yhwh was worshipped in foreign lands and invoked in the imperial *lingua franca*. In some quarters, Yhwh underwent the Greek interpretation.

But the principal, glaring difference between the development of Kemosh and the development of Yhwh is the presence of religiously authoritative literature. Yhwh was inscripturated, and Kemosh was not. The personality of Yhwh was fixed and expanded, literarily, while Kemosh lacked this counterpoise, and so became the Greek god Ares, without remainder. But why was Kemosh not *written down* as Yhwh was?

As suggested above, one historical factor can be isolated that may have yielded this »adult« difference between the deities: namely, that Judah experienced a violent national defeat, whereas Moab was absorbed more gently into

⁶¹ Jonathan Kirkpatrick, »How to be a Bad Samaritan: The Local Cult of Mt. Gerizim,« in: Ted Kaizer, *The Variety of Local Religious Life in the Near East in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods*, RGRW 164 (Leiden: Brill, 2008): 155–178.

⁶² Elias J. Bickermann, *The God of the Maccabees: Studies on the Origin of the Maccabean Revolt*, trans. Horst R. Moehring, SJLA 32 (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 62–65.

the Neo-Babylonian Empire.⁶³ The defeat of Judah meant that the former institutions of national life – king and temple and land – were no longer functional; and having been displaced, they stood in need of substitutes. If the opening epigraph by Maurice Bloch is correct, then religion is, among other things, a »shadow state« compensating for the loss of political independence.⁶⁴ That compensation among some Judean deportees and their intellectual descendants took the form of *scripture*. Prophetic oracles and regional stories about Yhwh were gathered into an authoritative corpus. Messianic hope, a virtual temple, and a people's history became surrogates for the king and temple and land that were lost. By contrast, the temple and king and land of Kemosh did not need surrogates, because apparently their function did not experience severe interruption so much as cooption into the Neo-Babylonian provincial system; a »shadow state« emerges only when the state is truly lost – not when it experiences a transfer of management. Moab also lacked the same opportunity Judah had to reflect on defeat, since it did not share Judah's situation of watching a northern sister kingdom with the same patron deity fall.

If Yhwh became like a good poem that cannot be translated easily across religious languages, Kemosh remained like a legal work or administrative document, which functions just as well in various tongues. The consequence for Kemosh was that, when all these religious languages in which he was equally at home grew senescent, so did he. The irreducible *writtenness* of Yhwh – and his complex, literary presentation in the Hebrew Bible – is, on the other hand, what rescued him from the »graveyard of the gods«.

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⁶³ See James A. Sauer, »Transjordan in the Bronze and Iron Ages: A Critique of Glueck's Synthesis,« *BASOR* 263 (1986): 1–26, 18, and the archaeological overview in Hans M. Barstad, *History and the Hebrew Bible: Studies in Ancient Israelite and Ancient Near Eastern Historiography*, FAT 61 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 117–120.

⁶⁴ Bloch, *Into and Out of*, 34.

Abstract: What happened to Kemosh in the era after Moab's loss of political independence? The present article first argues that this question is of interest to scholarship on the Hebrew Bible because Kemosh and Yhwh were initially twin-like: both were patron deities of Iron Age Levantine kingdoms and shared various similarities of profile. As such, comparing the postnational history of Kemosh and Yhwh can help to isolate the historical and intellectual events without which Yhwh would presumably have developed along similar lines to Kemosh. This article next argues that both deities underwent »the Greek interpretation« by becoming identified with their equivalent in the Greek pantheon. But unlike Kemosh, Yhwh's evolution included a counterbalancing force, i.e. *inscripturation*. Because prophetic oracles and regional stories about Kemosh were never gathered into an authoritative corpus, Kemosh became the Greek god Ares, without remainder.

Résumé: Qu'est-il advenu de Kemosh suite à la perte d'autonomie politique de Moab? Cet article défend d'abord la pertinence de cette question pour la recherche biblique, car Kemosh et Yhwh sont à l'origine comme des jumeaux: tous deux sont des divinités d'un royaume du Levant à l'âge du Fer et partagent différents points communs. De ce point de vue, la comparaison des destinées post-nationales de Kemosh et de Yhwh permet d'isoler les événements historiques et intellectuels sans lesquels Yhwh aurait probablement connu la même destinée que Kemosh. Cet article cherche à montrer que les deux divinités ont subi une *interpretatio graeca* par une assimilation avec leur correspondant dans le panthéon grec. Cependant à l'inverse de Kemosh, l'évolution de Yhwh contenait une force de résistance, à savoir, *la mise par écrit*. Kemosh est simplement devenu le dieu grec Ares parce que les oracles prophétiques et les récits régionaux le concernant n'ont jamais été rassemblés dans un corpus autoritatif.

Zusammenfassung: Was geschah mit Kemosch in der Zeit nach Moabs Verlust seiner politischen Unabhängigkeit? Der vorliegende Artikel verdeutlicht zunächst, dass diese Frage relevant für die Erforschung der Hebräischen Bibel ist, weil Kemosch und Jhwh einander ursprünglich sehr ähnlich waren: Beide waren Schutzgottheiten eisenzeitlicher Königreiche in der Levante und wiesen ein ähnliches Profil auf. Deshalb kann die nachstaatliche Geschichte von Kemosch und Jhwh dazu beitragen, die historischen und intellektuellen Ereignisse herauszuarbeiten, ohne die Jhwh sich vermutlich ähnlich entwickelt hätte wie Kemosch: Beide Gottheiten haben eine *interpretatio graeca* erfahren. Anders als Kemosch durchlief Jhwh mit der *Verschriftlichung* aber noch eine andere Entwicklung, die der *interpretatio graeca* entgegenwirkte. Weil prophetische Orakel und regionale Geschichten über Kemosch nie in einem autoritativen Korpus gesammelt wurden, ging Kemosch restlos in dem griechischen Gott Ares auf.