

**Blood and Dust: Listening for Sommer's 'Echo' in Akkadian and Hebrew Texts**

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The goal of this presentation is to raise a methodological question about a particular type of allusion. Simply put, the question is how can we identify echoes of Akkadian literature or culture in Tanakh? Of course, scholarly literature has not ignored this question but today I would like to raise it anew in the context of Benjamin Sommer's definition of echo. I only raise questions. I hope this audience will help me find answers.

Developing his thoughts from **Ziva Ben-Porat**, *The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After*, 1981; **Carmela Perri**, "On Alluding," *Poetics*, 1978; **Earl Miner**, "Allusion" *Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 1965, **Ziva Ben-Porat**, "The Poetics of Literary Allusion, *PLT: A Journal for Descriptive Poetics and Theory of Literature* 1, 1976, and others, **Benjamin Sommer**, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40-66*, 1998, 16, proposed a taxonomy for intertextuality in his study of Isaiah 40-66. I think one of his taxa, with a little modification, is particularly relevant to the concerns of this session. He called that taxa "echo." Sommer wrote,

. . . what do we have in the case where elements of an earlier text reappear in a later one, but the meaning of the marked sign in the source has little effect on a reading of the sign with the marker in the alluding text? I will term this phenomenon "echo."

For any discussion of such echoes of Akkadian in Tanakh, we must perhaps broaden our concept of intertextuality, and therefore echo, to include shared and/or consciously contrasted culture contexts as well as specifically literary ones. If a few of the things I am about to say seem trivial, I have sought to illustrate a point with examples of minimum controversy.

Concerning large narrative blocks, it is uncontroversial that there are echoes of Akkadian literature in, say, the Genesis flood account. There are so many, specific, thematic markers that it would be perverse to think otherwise even if the Genesis story is perfectly understandable without recognizing any of these markers.

At the individual lexeme level, there is a considerable set of nearly indisputable Akkadian loanwords in Hebrew. Some of which, as used in Tanakh, were not necessarily recognized as loanwords in much the same way that we don't generally recognize "garage" as a French loan. Of example, Hebrew נְכָסִים, "assets," "property," is no doubt a loanword from Akkadian *nikkassu* as Mankowski, and recently Tawil and many others have attested. Occasionally it is even possible to identify the dialect of the source of a loanword. כַּוָּנִים, from neo-Babylonian *kawānu* (Akkadian *kamānu*, "cake") for example. Lexicographical, morphological, and phonetic markers serve as reliable control. It would be perverse to think that none of the proposed loanwords are echoes of Akkadian language and culture.

It being perverse to think otherwise, we must acknowledge echoes of Akkadian at the micro level as exemplified in loanwords and at the macro level as exemplified in the Noah story. But I think it also perverse to deny that these exemplifications represent two extreme points on a continuum of linguistic complexity. Extremes that students can identify by rather clear markers. But, how do we identify and control for possible echoes in the muddled middle of that continuum?

We could take up several such candidate echoes from recent literature. But allow me to offer my own example of a candidate echo, one that I stumbled upon several months ago: the famous requirement to cover the drained blood of hunted animals with dust in Leviticus 17:13.

And if any Israelite or any stranger who resides among them hunts down an animal or a bird that may be eaten, he shall pour out its blood and cover it with dust (בְּאַפֶּרֶת).

Had I been giving this presentation in, say, November of last year, I would have argued, with at least a minimum level of conviction, for there being an Sommerian (not necessarily Sumerian) echo of Akkadian literature or culture in this law. An echo now lost and buried within the text of Leviticus. But in the meantime, I've more or less talked myself out of it, or better, talked myself into thinking it unsupportable.

Still, it provides an illustration of the problems of control when looking at passages that lack complex thematic markers on the one hand or narrow but well-defined philological markers on the other.

Why did I think there might be an echo of Akkadian culture or literature in this passage?

In the context of a ritual to rid a person of a ghost induced disease, *BAM* 323:3-4 reads in my translation,

Dust of an abandoned city (*epir âli nadî*), dust of an abandoned house, dust of an abandoned temple, dust of an abandoned tomb, dust of foundations(?), dust of an abandoned canal, dust of a road; you gather (them) together; mix (them) with bull's blood (*dām alpi*) (and) make a figure of the evil thing.

While there are a few other choices, the logogram used to denote “dust”, SAḪAR, likely stands for *epir* (*eperu* in the bound form, Hebrew עֶפֶר) and blood (*dāmu*) is blood (דָּם). If, with these elements of this ritual text in mind, one asks the question "why?" regarding the Biblical law, one is well on the way to seeing a possible echo.

But is this enough? Even though Milgrom came to a similar, if much less specific, conclusion, saying in 1991 that his preferred explanation of the Biblical law was “that the blood will not be used in chthonic rites - that is, for divination.” (*Leviticus 17-22: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, [The Anchor Bible; Doubleday: New York, 1991], 1483)

Whereas earlier I opted for (the) explanation no. 5 [so the blood does not cry out for vengeance, I now prefer no. 7 [So that the blood will not be used in chthonic rites - that is, for divination]. It complements the ban on animal slaughter outside the sanctuary, which, in my view, is also directed against chthonic worship. I also like no. 4, blood as life, the very one offered by the text. These two (nos. 4 and 7) are not mutually exclusive: the ban on using blood in chthonic worship (no. 7) implies that, instead, the blood should be returned to God

My own conclusion still bothers me. Would the Biblical text have triggered a thought in learned ancient readers that a desire to prevent the manufacture of such a figurine was the motivation for the law? I'm not sure there is any way of knowing.

The methodological questions that I hope this example illustrates are: How do we control our research when we encounter candidate echoes in this middle part of the echo continuum? What qualifies as a marker in these middle areas? What disqualifies potential markers in a way that prevents us from slipping into some form of *nouveau* pan-Babylonianism? Or is it impossible to identify sound methodological criteria that would allow us the joy of hearing real Akkadian echoes in the Biblical text, echoes from that muddled middle of a near certain continuum?