Interpreting "heroic" concepts in Ancient Near Eastern Studies:

Towards an emic framework for the understanding of Shimshôn and Gilgameš

Doctoral Thesis

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the pursuit of Truth and the Father of Truth, יהוה.

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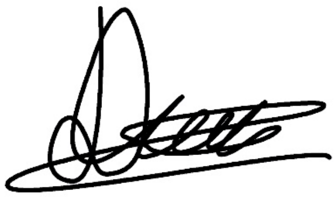

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ABSTRACT

Understanding Heroes of Old: Towards an emic framework for the understanding of the concept of "heroes" in the Ancient Near East, focusing on Shimshôn and Gilgameš in particular, as examples and case studies

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ABSTRACT

The confluence of modern and ancient concepts is a constant in academics' minds. Much of our modern culture can trace its roots, even tangentially, to some ancient custom performed by our ancestors or necessitated by environmental changes. However, in many cases, this link between the ancient and the modern is so distant that it is no longer apparent to the modern researcher. This creates a knowledge gap that the mind's subconscious automatically fills by interpreting the unknown through the known, resulting in the ancient being interpreted through the lens of the modern. This has been proven to be controllable and, in some cases, preventable.

In this thesis, a framework is proposed that would incorporate cognitive sciences, emic-etic theory, and Panofsky's Iconology to provide a researcher with the means to independently isolate the source material they are studying and, as much as possible, remove their own modern-cultural-infused bias from the subject matter. The concept of "Heroism" was chosen as a test, with Shimshôn and Gilgameš used as subject matter since a direct comparison has yet to be done (or isn't widely available), even though researchers often compare the two to Herakles as if they were contemporaries in a vast pantheon of Ancient Near Eastern heroes. Through a systematic and methodological approach, the emic characters of Shimshôn and Gilgameš are revealed and contrasted.

Keywords

Cognitive sciences, Gilgamesh, Samson, ancient Near East, cultural diffusion, bias, cognitive sciences, emic, etic, heroic myths, character studies, indigenous perception, ancient lived experience, Sitz im Leben

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1.1 Introduction

Stories and folklore surrounding heroes have been with us for many millennia. The oldest such story that we know about, the Mesopotamian Epic of Gilgameš,[1] was written more than 4500 years ago at the very beginning of human literary thought (George, 2004), as a story and later adapted as a moral lesson. The latest iteration of a modern-day cultural hero is a newly rewritten story that is less than a year old, covered in CGI and owned by a massive capitalist corporation that uses familiar tropes to make stories and characters popular and relatable, creating massive 'fandoms', which could be classified as cultures (or sub-cultures) in their own right.

The superficial differences between these two are immense, as is the motive behind their creation. Ancient stories generally depict mythological narratives that serve as either moral lessons or "origin" stories for the way things are. Modern stories, especially superhero comics, are usually a way of escaping the current situation (World Wars, Cold War tensions, corporate greed, etc.), where characters do the things we wish we could, with little to no real consequences. However, the biggest difference lies in our perception, which is what we will focus on in this study.

Our modern concept of a hero is formed by our cultural norms of what a hero is supposed to be. Gilgameš was (presumably)[2] formed by the ancient Mesopotamian cultural norm of what a hero was supposed to be. The pitfall lies in failing to realise that these norms are different. In looking at the ancient world, we need to bridge the knowledge gap between the knowledge structures (which influence and shape perception) of the original author(s) and our own. If this knowledge gap is left as is, we risk falling in, so to speak, and perceiving ancient sources only through the lens of our own knowledge structures.

[1] In this study we will use the phonetic spelling of the original names (cf. Chapter 2).

[2] Though it is quite probable that Gilgameš was imagined as the archetype of what the ideal king/hero in Mesopotamian culture should look like, we are dealing with culture. Culture, fortunately and unfortunately, has the tendency to not only include the obvious, but also sometimes be influenced by the unexpected and incidental. Instead of a cultural norm/ideal, perhaps the author(s) of Gilgameš had an amazing imagination and wrote what we would call the first "superhero" story, which was then later used by Mesopotamian keepers of culture as a character study. We do not know either way, and probably never will, as the people who knew the truth first-hand have been dead for at least 4500 years.

Knowledge structures are contextual, cultural and situational structures that inform, store, and help us make sense of the knowledge that we obtain throughout our lives. When we consciously add knowledge through research or study, this new information is processed through our own unique experiences and understanding to form part of our personal knowledge structures. When we do so as a society, the new data form part of that society's culture. This aspect will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

In this way, when we read about and study ancient characters from stories (historical or fictional), we have a preconceived notion about what they look like and what their characters are like, based on our own knowledge structures, built up through experiences and learned knowledge. Even knowledge passed down to us through cultural norms or traditions, perpetuated in various forms, can influence us personally.

To a certain extent, the very source material we study could have indirectly influenced us through cultural diffusion over millennia, even before we knew it existed. A modern-day researcher studying ancient cuneiform, for example, is influenced by its development into an alphabetic script through Ugaritic, Phoenician, Greek and, later, Latin, which developed into the modern alphabets with which they learned to read, write, and study. This connection to, and discovery of, an ancient original version of modern concepts or inventions is partly the reason the discipline of Ancient Near Eastern studies exists – to study where we come from as a civilisation.

However, these concepts or inventions are no longer in their original forms and have been changed through countless cultures, leading to the development of our own. The use of writing, for instance, was once seen as an exclusive privilege held by a literate elite, and therefore not necessarily helpful to everyone in society. This idea was radically changed during the Renaissance, and after the invention of the printing press, the dissemination of information became a social norm, to the point that even farmers now need to be literate to operate their equipment and sell their crops. This may lead to a modern misconception that ancient farmers also needed to be literate if the intervening millennia, cultural, and technological changes are not acknowledged.

It is vital to acknowledge the universality and long developmental history of our modern concept of heroism. In this modern, globalised age, we have a long, complicated cultural history spanning many cultures and millennia. Great leaders of a mythical era are present in the mythology of almost every culture on the planet. One near-universal 'heroic' attribute of historical figures is that they are often perceived as larger-than-life and not necessarily how they really were, usually by design. Nebuchadnezzar is generally portrayed as a great and powerful king, and Ramses II created an aura of power and gravitas that has transcended the millennia and still captivates the imaginations of modern writers, artists, and storytellers (Kuhrt, 1995; Cox, Davies, and Davies, 2007).

The interactions of the gods with humans almost always involved a mediating figure central to the story. In later times, the gods themselves became "heroes" of stories designed to teach morals and one's place in the cosmos. Most famous of these are the mythologies of ancient Egypt, ancient Greece, and Canaan (through the Bible), with the Scandinavian/Germanic pantheon also receiving much attention in recent years[3]. Interestingly, the Mesopotamian pantheon is the least known in popular culture, as it is not as widely presented. All of these mythologies contributed to a primary, base concept of a "hero": an individual that is neither a normal, weak human nor a fully god.

Every culture on earth has such individuals immortalised in stories. Over time, these stories from diverse cultures have been swallowed up and assimilated into our modern "Western" globalised culture. Heroes from across the globe have become part of everyday culture thanks to these folk stories. The European Robin Hood, the Chinese Mulan, and the Middle Eastern Aladdin/Arabian Nights cycle are known worldwide, thanks in part to Walt Disney and other media franchises. But even before Disney popularised folk stories in animated movies, these stories were well known, though not as universally as cultural heroes, which portray a certain moral code repackaged for new generations. These heroes are approachable, understandable, and normal human beings with qualities that we can aspire to attain. Their stories, whether true, embellished or completely fabricated, teach us some valuable life lessons about ourselves. The values portrayed in these lessons are universal, which is why these heroes (or local equivalents) are known practically everywhere.

More recently, the comic books of the previous century have created a whole pantheon of new heroes, dubbed "superheroes". These heroes also possess qualities and traits that teach readers about moral principles. Many of these heroes are based on older

[3] This is due in part to popular culture (the MCU Thor, various games and other media depict the pantheon, and Scandinavian culture as a whole, as powerful and likeable) and a resurgence in older religious beliefs, especially after the revival in German nationalistic history and a "return" to society's status before Christianity made Europe "weak" (von Schnurbein, 2016).

archetypes in religious texts, such as the Hebrew Bible and ancient Vedic manuscripts of the Indus Valley and/or cultural folklore, such as the medieval Robin Hood story, Victorian era stereotypes (Spring-heeled Jack), and the Golem of Prague legend.

Modern “superheroes” are household names, thanks in large part to the relatively recent “Marvel Cinematic Universe” (MCU), which started in 2008 with the Iron Man movie and has since introduced a whole host of heroes, antiheroes, and villains to popular culture. Superman, from the rival DC Comics publisher, is perhaps the most famous of the modern superheroes and has come to be the epitome of what a “superhero” represents. Kind, caring, self-sacrificial and humanly flawed, yet god-like in his abilities with a strong masculine jawline, the character of Superman has become a “trope” of its own in modern culture.

Conversely, Batman, another famous superhero, is a study in the darker, more fallible side of a hero. Recently, the Deadpool phenomenon has revealed a completely different superhero: one who is irreverent, deeply troubled and the complete opposite of the “bastion of morality”-character one has come to expect from superheroes. This hero is not only deeply flawed but also has very little to teach the modern audience in terms of pure morals. His role is more that of a shocking entertainer: One who presents a completely different outlook on “serious” moral issues and makes light of societal norms on topics such as death, destruction, sex, and vices.

Another recent development in the storytelling of heroes has come with the advent of the “RPG” (Role-Playing Game) genre. Initially, this type of game was a pen-and-paper “tabletop” game, most famous of which is the Dungeons and Dragons system. In such an RPG system, a group of players tell a story together, each deciding how their characters, usually the heroes of the story, react and grow. The heroes thus created usually have attributes of their human counterparts, along with all the abilities and attributes that the human player wished they had, had they been born in a world of magic. Such roleplaying usually ends up being an emic study of a particular fantasy race/class, with players earning bonuses if they act more in line with how their character would have responded than with how they would in real life.

These RPG systems soon found their way into computer games, with a whole genre[4] of games developing where the story is no longer told about some mythological hero who is on a set path to victory and a moral lesson.[5] Now the player (listener) is in control of the story and can alter it according to their own desires and fantasies. No longer is a hero's moral code thrust onto the listener or student. Now, as the player, you can control the character and create your own moral principles. Thus, the hero of the story is no longer tied to a specific set of rules and morals. The "saviour" can be a malevolent vampire or werewolf, or even a spiteful necromancer or common thief who, even though they defeat the evil of the story, have become an even greater evil. On the other hand, the character can also be purely good, being a pure paladin or dragon slayer. Or the character can be any range of greys between. In this form, the traditional "hero-character" has now become what we want them to be, reflecting our own modern value systems and cultural contexts.

This modern way of treating heroes and viewing heroic matters seems a far cry from the original, almost sacred, veneration of heroes. Or is it? Is our modern concept of a "hero" still similar, at the fundamental level, to what ancient heroes were? Are we continuing a long tradition of telling stories through heroic figures, albeit in much different forms? Or are we simply projecting our "superman-like" concept of a hero onto ancient texts? How did ancient people really perceive their concept of a hero?

Modern scholars (Leeming, 1981; Bartholome, 1990; Enstrom, 1991; George, 2004; Forest, 2007a, 2007b) often ask questions like these and then attempt to answer them using concepts and ideas that were developed in cultures other than the original ones. Since modern scholars do live in a time and culture often far removed from the cultures they are studying, this is inherently unavoidable.

A comparison between the modern definition of a hero, for example, Superman, and an ancient one, such as Herakles or Gilgameš, presupposes that they are analogous. If such a study is to be done, they must be put on the same level. Superman (or the concept of Superman/modern hero) must be compared to an ancient hero in the basest terms possible, as the culture that developed Superman is far removed from the relatively primitive one that developed Gilgameš and Herakles. In fact, by even proposing such a

[4] Usually called Story-Rich RPGs, these include famous series titles such as The Elder Scrolls, Dragon Age, Fallout, Baldur's Gate and more.

[5] Some computer games have continued the tradition of a linear story with a single set hero telling a story that the player then simply follows as they play, usually reinforcing positive heroic tropes, such as honour, selflessness, and hope/help for the weak.

comparison, we are presupposing that these ancient cultures knew of the idea of a "superhero" in modern terms and viewed some of their heroic characters in that way. This imposes our modern understanding of heroes and the modern concept of superheroes onto an ancient culture that cannot speak for itself. In the process of foisting our understanding upon that culture, the culture loses its strength and integrity.

It is up to us as scholars to preserve ancient concepts as far as possible in our studies. The first step would be to define the cultural terms in question, as words often shift in meaning over time.

The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines the word "hero" in English as:

1. a: a mythological or legendary figure often of divine descent endowed with great strength or ability
   b: an illustrious warrior
   c: a person admired for achievements and noble qualities
   d: one who shows great courage
2. a: the principal character in a literary or dramatic work — used specifically of a principal male character especially when contrasted with *heroine*
   b: the central figure in an event, period, or movement
3. plural usually **heros**[6]: submarine sense
4. an object of extreme admiration and devotion: idol[7]

The word "hero" comes from the Greek word ἥρως (*hērōs*). According to *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon*, this word means:

1. a hero, in **Hom**. used of the Greeks before Troy, then of *warriors* generally; and then of all free men of the heroic age, as the minstrel Demodocus, the herald Mulius, even the unwarlike Phaeacians.
2. in **Hes**. the *blessed heroes* are the fourth age of men, who fell before Thebes and Troy, and then passed to the Islands of the Blest.
3. *heroes, as objects of worship*, *demigods* or men born from a god and a mortal, as Hercules, Aeneas, Memnon, **Hdt**., **Pind**.; then of such as had done great services to mankind, as Daedalus, Triptolemus, Theseus, **Anth**.

[6] American spelling.
[7] Direct quote from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hero.

4. later, the heroes are *inferior local deities*, patrons of tribes, cities, guilds, founders of cities, etc.; as at Athens, the ἥρωες ἐπώνυμοι were the *heroes after whom the φυλαί were named*, **Hdt**.[8]

These definitions fit our modern concept of what a hero is, and fulfil this meaning in many modern applications. However, did ancient Mesopotamia also see figures like Gilgameš this way?

Moving away from a 'modern-centric' worldview, an intercultural, inter-period study must first identify the fundamentals of what a hero was and meant to the ancient world. What was Gilgameš to the ancient Mesopotamian, for example? What did the author(s) of Gilgameš want to achieve with Gilgameš? Answering these questions should be the Mesopotamians themselves, but using an emic-based analysis[9] borrowed from anthropology (Pike, 1967a; Harris, 1976; Jorion, 1983b; Berry, 1989a; Smith, 2005a; Franklin, 2009b; Wu, 2011a; Mostowlansky and Rota, 2016b) one can strive to arrive at an answer from the ancient Mesopotamians as to what the concept of a "Mesopotamian hero" may have been to them. This will be examined in more detail in Chapter 2.

How was this concept of a hero transmitted to the modern world? There have been numerous studies comparing Gilgameš to Greek heroes such as Herakles and Prometheus (Kluger, 1991; Forest, 2007b; Ziolkowski, 2012).[10] Since modern thought did have some of its origins in Greek thought, this makes sense. However, such studies only look at the assimilation of Mesopotamian concepts into Greek, and thus the modern world, to the West across Anatolia. What about South to Canaan/Israel? The concept of a 'united' culturally connected ancient Near Eastern culture is a well-established fact[11] (Knapp, 1988; Kuhrt, 1995; Smith, 1995). Does this apply to the concept of heroism a well? If so, the core concepts will remain the same in the Hebrew Bible, which is one of

[8] Direct quote from http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0058%3Aentry%3Dh(%2Frws&highlight=hero

[9] The use of emic/etic methodology is an often debated and controversial topic that has been called into question throughout its conception by Pike (Jorion, 1983; Craffert, 1994, 1995; Markee, 2012; Mostowlansky and Rota, 2020). It is, however, still a valid and necessary methodology for cross-cultural research and, with a little help from cognitive science, it can work, as will be shown in this thesis (Zhao, 2015).

[10] Almost all studies that involve Gilgameš seem to mention Herakles.

[11] A "united" ANE culture refers to the broad interconnectedness of the different cultures within the ANE where each culture was influenced (even if only tangentially) by another's. This does not imply that the different cultures were the same, it only recognises the shared cultural concepts present in the ANE, which have been very well established by archaeological finds as well as shared ideologies and, in some cases, even Pantheons.

the cornerstones of “Western/Christian Civilisation”. A comparison between a Mesopotamian and a biblical hero should, in that case, show similarity in the characteristics of the heroes. In this study, we will therefore be comparing Gilgameš and Shimshôn, using an emic-etic approach that seeks to “boil down” their story elements into comparable blocks.

Shimshôn appears comparable to Gilgameš on many levels. Firstly, Canaanite/Israelite culture is much closer to Mesopotamian culture than Greek culture is. This is due to geographical proximity and the fact that the Mesopotamian empires often conquered or held sway over the Canaanite area before and after the United Kingdom[12] era in Israelite history, culminating in the Babylonian Exile (c. 598/7 BC) (Knapp, 1988; Kuhrt, 1995; Knapp and Manning, 2016). The Israelites also have familial links to Mesopotamia, as established in the Hebrew Bible (Genesis recounts how Abraham comes from Mesopotamia, and how his male descendants regularly went back there for wives, maintaining cultural ties to the region) with cultural diffusion most certainly happening. Culturally, there are more direct lines of diffusion between Mesopotamia and Canaan than via the trade routes of Western Anatolia to Greece, not least the shared language and general culture.

On a more direct level, both characters are leaders, appointed and blessed by their gods. Both stories in their final form (as we have them today) carry moral lessons, and both have weaknesses that are all too human. Shimshôn is also one of the archetypes used for modern heroes,[13] as well as being part of an ancient Near Eastern literary tradition.

It therefore makes sense to study both the Mesopotamian and Israelite concepts of heroism and thereby start to establish a truly ancient Near Eastern concept of heroism, ‘untainted’ by modern ideas. This is the goal of most scholarly works, achieved in other fields and with other characters, to various degrees of success. However, Shimshôn and Gilgameš have never been directly compared[14], and as such the need to do this study with as little modern interference as possible is vital. In later studies, more characters can

[12] In this study we are not concerned with how historically accurate the Bible is, or the authenticity of any of the characters. We will be using terms such as “United Kingdom” that are known in the academic world and refer to a specific time in Israelite history, theoretical or not. This is akin to using the “Mythological Era” or “United Kingdom” for periods described in Egyptian literature. Neither of these eras are definitively linked to a specific year, but everyone knows what you are talking about when you refer to them.

[13] Superman is apparently based on Moses, Shimshôn, and the Jewish Golem of Prague, according to Jewish researcher Roy Schwartz and others (Schwartz, 2021)

[14] Cf. below under Literature Review on page 14.

be added to this study, a pursuit which will form an even better picture of what the cross-sectional hero in the ancient Near East looked like.

The habit of superimposing our understanding onto someone or something else is integral to modern life. It is acknowledged as being part of the very fabric of communication (Tubbs and Moss, 2008) and communication-experts are trained in ways to make their understanding/worldview clearer to others (Martin and Nakayama, 2007). In contrast, in cultural studies, and specifically ancient cultural studies, it is, however, imperative that the view of the culture being studied is acknowledged above our own. Only in this way can one begin to understand the ancient world through the eyes of the ancients, rather than imposing our understanding on them.

As an illustration, I quote Bendt Alster in a 1974 article on Mesopotamian heroes, “The Paradigmatic Character of Mesopotamian Heroes”. He says:

“*Let me state clearly that my purpose by raising this question is not to join the general line in much modern scholarship, one that sets itself as a task to deprive the ancient literary sources of actual reality whenever possible, instead of asking what the texts intend to say”* (Alster, 1974).

He then goes on to reference a case where the antediluvian portion of the Mesopotamian Kings-lists was often relegated to the realm of mythology or simply omitted and included in an appendix. He feels that historical studies tend to disregard the original motives and contexts of the documents studied, imposing modern knowledge and categories on them to make them conform to a particular way of thinking. This, he feels, is because scholars are conditioned to a certain way of thinking based on studies grounded in the Homeric (Greek) poems (Alster, 1974, p. 51), something we will be exploring in Chapter 2.

This study will develop a scientific and thus repeatable and reusable framework incorporating the culture-centric view of ancient cultures, within which to study ancient sources. This framework will also foster the acknowledgement and understanding of the cultural voice of ancient cultures, preventing them from being drowned out by modern studies based on modern views and “reviews” of ancient civilisations and texts.

This framework will be applied to analyse the texts of Gilgameš and Shimshôn, in a blend of literature study and emic-etic anthropology, with the aim of clarifying the ancient concept of what a “hero” was to the ancient authors and audience.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND HYPOTHESIS

Bias is integral to us as human beings. It is how we discern our cultural norms from that which is not the norm. It is how we make up our minds about what we like or dislike. However, when it comes to ancient studies, it should not be about what we as scholars like or dislike. It should be about what the sources tell us in their pure[15] form, without our biases informing our perceptions of them.

This problem has been extensively addressed in the fields of Anthropology, Ancient Studies, Theology, and several other disciplines, with much debate over the semantics of methodology, without any clear way to address the difficulties emerging. Many scholars[16] acknowledge that a scholar's cultural context affects the outcome of the study. Emic-etic considerations were proposed to ameliorate the situation, but were then shot down and given up for re-evaluation without replacement.

In simple terms, “emic” is usually taken to mean simply focusing on the *Sitz im Leben* (from German, literally “situation/setting in life”) or cultural context of an artefact. “Etic” refers to an outsider’s viewpoint on an artefact. However, there is usually very little acknowledgement of a scholar's existing knowledge structures or their inherent biases, which influence their perception of the emic. Various valid methodologies define themselves in terms of a specific goal or target, but none seem to address the issue of the modern scholar’s inherent bias, because the terms and usage of emic-etic are usually very vague.

There is therefore a need for a theoretically sound, scientifically formulated general framework that clearly defines emic goals and quantifies these as steps in the analysis of a source.

Based on this need to limit the inherent bias of scholars from affecting a study, I hypothesise that:

A structured approach to the non-biased study of ancient sources would require the use of an emic framework to shield the scholar from modern/other influences. Such a framework would help the scholar become aware of bias/influences (interference) through

[15] Here the “pure” source refers to the primary source itself, not commentaries (ancient and modern) about said source. Though these are important, these should never be confused with the original. Translations are, however, often a cause of cultural interference as the nature of translation demands picking one word to translate words which have multiple meanings in the original. The only possible solution to this is to keep one’s translation work emically grounded in the culture.

[16] For details, cf. Chapter 2.

the radical, ongoing awareness of the scholar's existing knowledge structures, which could influence the perception of source material. By utilizing an ongoing feedback structure, these inherent biases can be identified and, if applicable, prevented from influencing the study. This should lead to a less biased/interrupted cross-cultural study of the concept of heroism in the ancient Near East, or at the very least an awareness of this.

1.3 MOTIVATION FOR STUDY

Bias is any preconceived idea or experience that one has about a subject before engaging with it. All humans carry bias, as their experiences and life has influenced the way in which they perceive their world. Added to this, is the process of acculturation in which one is steadily seeped in and bombarded by the culture that one grows up in, to the point where one's personal and societal culture is considered "normal". Within academia one's life experiences probably influenced the decision to do research on a topic or in a field in the first place. This leads to significant bias in any work before it has even started.

The prime motivation for this study is to find a non-biased, or, at the very least, a more bias-aware way to explore ancient cultures without modern concepts, ideology, and "norms" getting mixed into the study. This is, admittedly, very difficult to achieve as any scholar is already steeped in their own culture. As an extreme example of this, one can simply look at any of the organised religions' different factions/denominations. The main reason why these subdivisions exist is because the inherent biases and different worldviews of the adherents influence them to look at the same verse/line/*sutra* and interpret it differently.

The ideal would be to remove or limit the natural acculturation of the scholar in their own culture so that they may focus on the target culture. Academia suffers from much the same issues in that we are still humans, and subject to the same interpretations based around our personal experiences and cultures. The unmonitored mind in any field will automatically default to and compare new knowledge with existing knowledge, thus creating links where, potentially, none should exist.

In academia, as opposed to most religious fields, we are aware of this issue and attempt to rectify it, to an extent. The prevalence of different schools of thought do attest to the diversity of approaches and backgrounds informing academic studies, and specifically their motivations. These differences often give rise to greater academic output as points are discussed, argued, and counter argued. Over time, this leads to a nominal consensus. However, in this entire process, bias is still one of the factors that leads to massive debates, as a consensus is usually only reached when everyone shares the same common academic culture, as happened with the relatively global standardization of archaeology and its practices in the 1960s and dawn of “modern archaeology” in the 1980s (Fagan, 2009, 2010).

Practically, this means that everyone has the same internal and taught biases when it comes to the field. In studies related to an academic field (i.e., articles and studies on methodology and field-related rules), this is perfectly acceptable and encouraged as it creates a uniform, normalized field that is easy to teach and work in. Realistically this has also broadly followed national and cultural-linguistic lines, with the British/American-English school making up the majority of “mainline” and “traditionist” schools of thought, with the French and German schools pushing for more alternative ways of thinking and doing, especially so in the field of ancient Near Eastern cultures.[17]

However, one must not confuse internal cohesion and normalization with the lack of personal biases (and even institutional ones) when it comes to looking at ancient sources. It is therefore important to also acknowledge and address the pre-existing knowledge structures on which new knowledge is built and through which we perceive our world.

The goal is to develop and implement a research framework that can be reused by any academic study to emically look at ancient cultures and cultural artefacts with the minimum of modern interferences. Inherent bias can only be overcome when students are aware of their biases and can limit them from unduly influencing the study. This includes the methodology, motivation, and hypothesis of a study. If these are set too narrowly, or widely, it will influence the results and oftentimes the original source will agree with one’s hypothesis simply because it is not allowed to disagree. The hypothesis and methodology need to reflect the sources studied in such a way that the sources inform the direction and scope of the study, not the other way round. In very rare cases, it may be necessary to limit the original source, but this should never be the norm and should only be done after a general emic-etic study has been undertaken to eliminate bias.

[17] Based on an overview lecture given by ANES members and study material taught by UNISA in the “ATC” modules, personal experience with French and German academics, as well as comments by Kuhrt, Fagan and others.

An emic-etic methodology would help eliminate this inherent bias by asking the source what it wants to tell you, not using methodology to make it tell what you want to hear. Once it has revealed its knowledge emically and with no external influence, one can then delimit and bring in other sources and influences to probe and etically compare the emic knowledge gained from the source.

Culture, as defined by scholars, is a collection of spoken and unspoken rules that are influenced by the perceptions of a group of people about their immediate world and surroundings (Knapp, 1988b, pp. 4–6; Fagan, 2010, pp. 17–18). The modern scholar perceives these ancient cultures through a lens of thousands of years, and very limited cultural artefacts compared to the number of artefacts created when the culture was “alive”. Modern scholars therefore need to understand the cultural contexts and perceptions that led to the creation of the artefacts we find today. The best way to do this is to understand the artefacts within the cultural context of the original culture. This cultural context should only be understood emically, in terms of itself, without any modern interference, at least initially.

Analogies and comparisons, while useful tools, are internally biased as they assume that both cultures had a similar development. In the field of ancient cultural studies, however, we have almost no other tools available, so we must sanitise and clean the tools we have, just like in a laboratory where cross-contamination of bacterial cultures are avoided by sanitising the tools after each use. This, I believe, is best done through an emic-etic study where the culture that is studied is interpreted by itself before it is compared to extra-cultural exemplars. An emic-etic study would first seek to establish an emic baseline for a particular culture (i.e., sanitize the source to be devoid of any external biases) before an etic comparison is done with similar cultures/sources. If the latter is done before the former, cultural biases from both the compared cultures as well as the scholar doing the study can more readily creep in as there is nothing to show bias against.

For example, if I were to study Gilgameš and Shimshôn together, then attempt to write a chapter on each individually, the chapter on Gilgameš would include elements I learnt from Shimshôn, and the chapter on Shimshôn would include elements I learnt from Gilgameš. To prevent this, one should mentally and physically isolate the two by not studying them at the same time, or shortly after the other, and being aware of any lingering ideas about the one that could influence a reading of the other. The same holds for any topic to be compared or studied.

This framework will be developed and tested in this study on ancient Near Eastern stories that haven't received much comparative attention. This is by design, as it also limits the amount of modern interference from other studies. The two initial ancient sources researched, Shimshôn and Gilgameš, were chosen because they are unique in a few respects. Firstly, they appear to be the most complete "hero" stories in Israelite and Mesopotamian literature, respectively. Being longer and more complete "storylines" than say, David's Men, and more focussed on a single character than the *Enuma Elish*, the characters of Shimshôn and Gilgameš are comparable on an individual, unique character level. They are standalone "heroic" (in our modern sense of the term) archetypes[18] of their respective cultures that don't contain needless theologies and national histories that break up the narrative.

Standing out as individuals, these two heroic figures are typologically perfect to compare the Israelite and Mesopotamian heroic archetypes. Since there is the commonly held belief that the Babylonian/Mesopotamian way of thinking influenced the Bible through the Israelite captivity (Knapp, 1988b; Bietak, 1993; Ahlström, 1995; Parker, 1995; Boshoff, Scheffler and Spangenberg, 2006), comparing an Israelite and a Mesopotamian hero could shed further light on the Bible as well.

All in all, this study strives to have an impact on the way in which ancient studies are perceived, as well as the subjects of said studies, hopefully contributing to the debate surrounding the use of emics and etics, and perhaps even the use of additional alternative methods of study.

[18] In as far as the Jewish people look up to Shimshôn as a heroic figure and figure of Jewish resistance, Gilgameš is used in ancient Mesopotamian culture as a famous figure to teach morals, as well as in more modern times, an inspiration for Saddam Hussein's modern revival of the ancient Mesopotamian "Warrior-King" ideology. Cf Chapters 3 and 4 for details on this, as well as references

1.4 LITERATURE REVIEW

What follows here is an overview of some general sources on Gilgameš and Shimshôn. A more detailed literature review is provided with each chapter, about that chapter. This literature review was done before the main study commenced and was meant as a cursory look at what literature existed. This initial probe was superficial on purpose to avoid the pitfalls of influencing oneself with other ideas before the actual study commences.

1.4.1 GILGAMEŠ AND SHIMSHÔN

Because this study's methodology is based on eliminating bias, this section will only cover the most basic and necessary literature that was used to develop the study. No other sources will be looked at before the basic surveys and readings of Gilgameš and Shimshôn are completed, to minimise the possibility of modern influence.

A cursory review has shown that although not a lot of research has gone into the relation between Shimshôn and Gilgameš, there has been some scholarly interest in the topic.

A 1973 Harvard dissertation titled "Samson, Enkidu, and Gilgamesh: Two Comparisons" by Judith R Sebestyen looked promising as a starting point, as she might have covered the same ground as this study. Unfortunately, I have been unable to get access to this dissertation as, according to Harvard, the dissertation is only available in hardcopy and attempts by UNISA Inter Library Loans to get it has been unsuccessful to date.[19] It is therefore impossible to gauge the contributions of this work beyond acknowledging that it was done.

Several scholars have studied the characters of Gilgameš and Shimshôn, though few cover the subject explicitly as a comparison. This is a bonus for this study, as there are fewer studies to add possible bias and interference before this study begins in earnest. The closest comparison between Gilgameš and Shimshôn is made by Gregory Mobley in his *Samson and the Liminal Hero in the Ancient Near East* (2006), although this is still not a direct character comparison, as he compares Shimshôn to different aspects of heroes in the ancient Near East as a whole, not Gilgameš specifically. Most journals compare Gilgameš to Biblical elements or compare Greek, Mesopotamian, and Biblical

[19] UNISA Library reference numbers for both attempts: 198084829, 193497926

motifs (Heidel, 1949; Mobley, 1997; Abusch, 2001; De Villiers, 2004; Pryke, 2019). These studies might prove useful but are not used as main sources, as they don't cover Shimshôn and Gilgameš explicitly. These sources will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3, the Gilgameš chapter.

This study will start with the more "encyclopaedic" works, like Kuhrt's The ancient Near East (1995) and the "Civilizations of the ancient Near East" collection edited by Sasson (1995). These sources will provide valuable background information on Gilgameš and Shimshôn, as well as the context in which they were written.

Complementing these historical-cultural reference works is the vast corpus of ancient Near Eastern texts that can be found in collections such as "From Distant Days" by Benjamin Foster; "Babylonian Historical Literary Texts" by Albert Grayson; and "Wisdom from the Late Bronze Age" by Yoram Cohen.

Foster's work has many ancient Mesopotamian texts (poetry, prose, and letters) neatly catalogued according to their themes. Translated by Foster, these texts will help in establishing a "baseline" against which to measure Gilgameš. These will be complimented by Grayson's (1975) collection of Babylonian texts that, while dealing only with epics and prophesies, will help to build the overall context of the Gilgameš Epic. Both these authors introduce the ancient texts with short essays on the "outlook of the ancient authors" in which they discuss the contexts and "S*itz im Leben*" of the ancient authors. This ties into this study's "emic" methodology of understanding the context of the work, as well as the author.

Forest also touches on a secondary objective of this study, claiming that the author(s) of the Old Testament were intimately acquainted with the myths and epics found in Babylonian literature. This he bases purely on what should be labelled etic (i.e., universal) motifs and an assumption that the Israelites were immersed in Babylonian/Mesopotamian culture during their exile. This connection, or lack thereof, will be further explored when comparing Gilgameš to Shimshôn on a literary level.

"Wisdom from the Late Bronze Age" (Cohen, 2013) covers a wider spectrum of texts and is useful in that it can be used to stylistically compare the Late Bronze/Early Iron Age texts of the Bible.

In 1949, Alexander Heidel wrote a book titled *The Gilgameš Epic and Old Testament Parallels*. Interestingly, the only mention made of Shimshôn in his work is on page 149, and it occurs in a footnote to prove a tangential point on the meaning of “soul” (Heidel, 1949, p. 149). He does, however, offer some other parallels in the thinking of Old Testament authors and the Gilgameš Epic. Much of this has been re-hashed in more modern articles on the subject (especially Sasson’s “Civilizations of the ancient Near East”) (Franke, 1995; Greengus, 1995; Margueron, 1995; Scurlock, 1995; Smith, 1995; Xella, 1995) This issue will be further examined in the Chapters 3 and 4.

As a base text for Gilgameš, the AR George two volume translation, “The Babylonian Gilgameš Epic”, will be used. It contains translations of all the major Gilgameš texts, as well as commentary by AR George himself, along with other experts (George, 2003a, 2003b). It is a definitive work and has been acclaimed by many scholars[20] as the standard text of Gilgameš[21].

The Buried Foundations of the Gilgameš Epic (Fleming and Milstein, 2010) is a work that, while having no direct bearing on the topic of this study, has merit as a reference. In it, the authors discuss the origins of the epic, as well as evidence of an older text, and thus an explanation for the discrepancies and contradictions found in the main Babylonian texts of Gilgameš.

For the story of Shimshôn, there is the Hebrew Bible, specifically the book of Judges, chapter 13 to 16. The Septuagint, Masoretic, Vulgate, and applicable Aramaic fragments will be consulted as base texts. Other Israelite literature will come from the same sources, along with applicable Dead Sea texts, such as 1QJudg (Rezetko, 2019), containing the story of Gideon. Quoted biblical text in this study will be presented in English (King James Version[22]) to facilitate ease of reading.

The Septuagint seems to contain the most accurate original text with regard to the original language, as correlated by the fragments of the Dead Sea scrolls found to date[23]. There are also several Aramaic Old Testament fragments in the British Library, to which I have

[20] (Foster, 2005; Gadotti, 2005, 2019; Röllig, 2005; Charpin, 2006; Streck, 2007).
[21] It was also personally recommended to me by the current curator of the British Museum’s cuneiform collection, Dr Irving Finkel, at the start of this study .
[22] This version was chosen as “visual” presentation of the verses alone and not used for study at all. This choice was made because the KJV is universally accepted as a “standard” text, regardless of the translation quality. The actual study was done in the Hebrew and Greek, with the help of transliterations and dictionaries.
[23] https://williamaross.com/2021/03/16/the-new-dead-sea-scroll-discoveries-and-the-septuagint/

graciously been granted access. These will, however, only be used to verify particulars of the Shimshôn story in which most translations and versions are quite similar. All other character-specific sources will be discussed in more detail in the relevant chapters.

It should be noted here that the use of translations causes a clash with the "emic" nature of this study. Translations are subject to interpretative biases and can skew the original texts. In an effort to limit this, the sources used are, as far as possible, the most accurate and complete versions available to the author. Unfortunately, the use of translations is unavoidable for this study, particularly for Gilgameš, as I did not have access to Akkadian training. In Shimshôn's case, the author has access to direct transliterations and Bible-translating tools that make reading Hebrew and Greek easier.

In an effort to overcome translation problems, complete dictionaries and lexicons of the ancient languages were used alongside the original texts and translations for difficult or contentious words or phrases. This would offset some of the bias, though not all. Additional care should always be taken in this regard.

1.5 LIMITATIONS

A framework must stay within a set of parameters, lest it misses the goal for which it was developed. These parameters, in turn, must be realistic, broad enough to include as many primary sources in ancient studies as possible, yet rigid enough to ensure that the "rules" of the framework are never broken. Limitations to the development of a framework are perhaps more philosophical than practical.

The parameters for this emically ancient source analytical framework are as follows:

- The framework is limited to literary (i.e. those that have text that can be read) sources, though it could possibly be adapted to other types as well.
- It must be suitable for as many literary sources as possible. This means that there should be no reference to specific religious or cultural traits. The framework should be able to work with any literary source, from any period and cultural context.

- It must be generally usable by most academics, and therefore include clear instructions and firm base rules that, if followed correctly, will enable anyone to duplicate the results to within reasonable accuracy.[24]
- It must be compatible with translations as not all texts can be read by everyone.

These rules must guide the user into the emic philosophy and methodology of the framework by limiting all potential influences and biases.

From these general parameters, we can already see two major limitations. Firstly, the human factor. We are not robots, and regardless of rules, no two humans will produce the same results in any given circumstance. Secondly, the framework isn't simply a rigid tool, but rather a flexible guideline to adapt to the specific source, culture or context. It endeavours to provide the researcher with a state of mind, self-discipline, as well as traditional academic tools to analyse the source.

I believe that simply looking at a source through a passive methodology is no longer enough. An active methodology is required where the researcher is mentally prepared to study a source, and mindful of all influences on an active level, not a passive one, where bias is, at best, acknowledged in text and, at worse, incorporated in the study without acknowledging it.

As with all studies in ancient cultures, this study is also limited by the following:

- Age of the subject matter.
- Modern biases which are deeply entrenched and difficult to uncover as they are automatic reactions.
- Age of the cultural context of the subject matter relative to the time of study.
- The cultural difference between the writer and cultures being studied.
- An academic understanding of the ancient languages involved.

These limitations are not easily overcome. They may, for example be caused by time, which as of the time of writing, cannot be reversed or changed. Time has eroded much of the ancient cultures of the Middle East. Other cultures supplanting the old ones and in turn, being supplanted by even newer cultures have literally and figuratively buried

[24] I consider approximate reproducibility as successful because we are dealing with humans. No two humans will think alike, and no two humans interpret rules the same way, no matter how one sets them. If the essence of the study has the same conclusion, the framework is a success.

ancient Sumerian, Babylonian, and Israelite cultures under tons of cultural information that hides the true nature of the culture, making it harder to compare elements in each.

To overcome some of the limitations, the specific methodology used by this study will focus on the purity of source material and purity of understanding and interpretation of said source material. To this end, all ancient source material will be placed in its own cultural “box”, examined as emically as possible and examined only with regard to itself and its own culture. This will ensure that time-related changes to the source culture will be considered, and a unified picture presented, with which the cross-cultural comparisons can then be done. This will also prevent situations where an Israelite cultural phenomenon is comparable to one part of Mesopotamian culture, but not another.

The above decision causes a self-imposed limitation. Simply looking at the source materials in a vacuum won’t do. This study will cast its net very wide to gain as much information on the context of the source material as possible. Without this bigger picture, the study will fall into the same trap as it describes modern scholars doing - interpreting ancient cultural data in modern terms instead of ancient ones. However, this wide net should only cover these topics to give context for the main texts and characters.

This aim does introduce another potential problem: Bias. Paradoxically, the aim of this study being an anti-bias methodology, the author must be very aware and careful of personal biases and inferences when dealing with the source material and analysing it emically. It would be very easy to inadvertently mix bias into the equation during an exercise to eradicate bias. This would occur with normal neural connections formed when reading, word associations, and form stimulation. For instance, a verse in Gilgameš describing or praising a deity might be subconsciously linked to a Biblical Psalm or a similar work of literature.

To address this potential issue, the author will track all inferences and connections made during the initial emic readings of Gilgameš and Shimshôn and identify those that are not supported by the source culture. For example, if the author associates Shimshôn’s riddles with the riddles of the Sphinx in Greek mythology, this would be immediately identified during the “checkup” discussed above and dismissed.

1.6 METHODOLOGY AND STRUCTURE

1.6.1 METHODOLOGY

The main theoretical focus of this study is its methodology. It therefore forms a chapter of its own (Chapter 2).

1.6.2 STRUCTURE

1. **Chapter 1: Introduction**
   Laying out of research problems and questions, basic literature review and introductory remarks.
2. **Chapter 2: Methodology**
   Here, the basic methodology and methods will be explained and fleshed out in detail.
   a. **Emic-etic**
      A discussion of Kenneth Pike and Erwin Panofsky and their theories on immersive, "insider" based analysis of cultural artefacts.
   b. **A Practical Framework**
      The framework for the study is laid out in practical steps.
3. **Chapter 3: Critical Interpretative Analysis of Gilgameš**
   In this chapter, only the applicable source, i.e. Gilgameš, is studied, with the heroic characteristics highlighted, within the cultural context of the particular culture's *Sitz im Leben*.
   a. **Subject Matter (Reading notes)**
      Initial readings and notes on the subject, stripped of any cultural meanings.
   b. **Contextual Analysis**
      Studying the subject through the lens of the cultural context, using contemporary works.
   c. **Intrinsic Character Traits**
      Based on the above analysis, this section will attempt to "get into" the head of Gilgameš and flesh him out as a character, as the ancient Mesopotamian author and reader could have seen him.

4. **Chapter 4: Critical interpretative analysis of Shimshôn**

In this chapter, only the applicable source, i.e. Shimshôn is studied, with the heroic characteristics highlighted, within the cultural context of the respective culture's S*itz im Leben*.

a. **Subject Matter (Reading notes)**

Initial readings and notes on the subject, stripped of any cultural meanings.

b. **Contextual Analysis**

Studying the subject through the lens of the cultural context, using contemporary works. This is somewhat tricky, as there are not many other Hebrew works surviving from the time of the judges. This would necessitate the inclusion of the parallel Canaanite cultures as well, as these must have had an influence on Israelite culture.

c. **Intrinsic Character Traits**

Based on the analysis above, this section will attempt to "get into" the head of Shimshôn and flesh him out as a character, as the ancient Biblical author(s) and readers would have seen him.

5. **Chapter 5: Internal ideological "Hero" study**

Here, the intrinsic character traits of the two subjects will be compared, and their contexts examined. Similarities and differences will be highlighted and discussed on a theme-by-theme basis. This section will follow a more traditional "cultural" comparison, where elements of one culture is compared to another.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and reflection

Here the final remarks on the study and final conclusions are noted. Reflections in terms of how the framework functioned, and could be used in future, will be included here.

Chapter 2
Methodology

Chapter Abstract

In this chapter, the methodology of this study is explained and developed. Emic-Etic methodology is reviewed, discussed, and implemented. Added to this, iconology and Panofsky's contribution to the philosophy behind the methodology is discussed, as well as the contribution of cognitive science and perception studies. From these, an emic framework is described and theoretically laid out for use in later chapters and, possibly, other studies. This emic framework relies heavily on the ability of the user to be self-aware enough of their own thought-process to enable them to weed out any bias that slips in and to control their thoughts. This is where cognitive science provides a valuable scientific basis for the idea that this is possible, just not consciously implemented by many scholars at this time.

Perception and the accompanying bias are an integral part of the experience of any human being. The aim of this study is to limit this perception-based bias when working with ancient sources and to foster a radical, ongoing awareness of existing knowledge structures that may influence study results, both before and during the study. This will be attempted using an emic-etic-based framework, informed by cognitive sciences and Panofsky's (1939, 1955a) work.

In this chapter, we will examine Kenneth Pike's "Emic-Etic" concepts as a foundation for the proposed framework. On this foundation, we will add the structured study of perception and cognition from the field of cognitive sciences. This will enable us to use the framework more effectively, grounding the control of perception in hard science. Lastly, the work of Panofsky offers a step-by-step guide to implementing emics and cognitive science in practice, connecting the theoretical framework with practical study and real sources.

2.1 FOUNDATION METHODOLOGIES (BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW)

2.1.1 EMIC-ETIC METHODOLOGY

At its most basic level, all science is supposed to be based on the idea of interrogating the source material and not jumping to conclusions without evidence. This is what the "scientific method" defines as a system where all arguments are based on a thorough interrogation of the subject matter, with minimal input from the researcher, based on "cold" logic and fact. In this regard, humanities, especially cultural studies,[25] are a lot messier than pure sciences, because human decisions and human culture cannot easily be analysed and "boiled down to cold hard facts" as would be the case with mathematics or advanced physics.

Complicating matters further is that researchers are also subject to their own culture with its norms of interpreting the world. In addition to culture, researchers are also shaped by their own knowledge structures, which shape how they interpret new information. This, in turn, influences and informs the direction, analysis and interpretation of the study and source material. This process led to early culture and anthropology studies being extremely modern/western-centric, with a focus on European Western culture and its origins in Greek/Roman culture.

Enter the "emic-etic" methodology.

The terms "emic" and "etic" were first coined in the 1950s by Kenneth Pike, a linguist, to describe a new way of ordering and defining linguistic constructions, and as an extension of language and human behaviour. This culminated in his famous work, "Language in relation to a unified theory of the structure of human behaviour", published in 1954.

The basic theory that Pike developed was that linguistic tools could be applied to anthropology, with language and words replaced by behavioural culture. He used two words, "emic" and "etic", to describe two different, yet closely related ways of studying culture (Pike, 1967a, 1993b).

[25] Here I include history and archaeology as part of "culture studies".

“Emic” was derived from the word “phonemic”, the linguistic definition of sounds and inflections that change the meaning of similarly spelt/pronounced words in a particular language. The new word was formed by taking the last syllables of the word “phonemic” and dropping the “phon” prefix to free the word from exclusively being used for sounds. (Pike, 1967, pp. 8–9). Phonemes are sounds usually specific to a particular language and are based on intrinsic language rules that must be studied. If a non-speaker of that original language tried to pronounce or understand the words or sounds using their own linguistic rules, they would not be able to understand much or to communicate effectively.

In analogy, “emic” in culture studies was to mean the study of cultural artefacts in a culture that differentiates one behaviour from another and that can only be understood within the context of that culture. In other words, things that are described by a culture and that are given a cultural identity by that culture, are what Pike calls Emic Units (1967, pp. 9–12).

To illustrate using a completely unrelated cultural example (to keep our ANE and Biblical source material uninfluenced), social rules based on gender in Tibetan culture would dictate that women never eat with men when there are guests in a house[26]. As a Western outsider who is not familiar with the cultural norms, one would think it strange and shrug it off as the women and children being too shy or the men hogging all the power. Approaching this situation emically, one would first gain understanding of the specific culture and its norms before coming to a conclusion as to the reasons for this behaviour. This is important as any conclusions or assumptions made about something before its context or indigenous meaning were understood invariably led (and still leads) to misunderstandings.

“Etic” was derived from “Phonetic”, the linguistic study of sounds and their physical production (Pike, 1967, pp. 8–9). Phonetics scientifically classifies sounds and how they are made regardless of culture and produces general rules that can be applied to all languages. To use or understand any of these rules does not require any prior knowledge of the language one is studying as the rules are universal and empiric. Culturally, “etic” would then refer to all the generalised rules and frameworks that are created by anthropologists to study a culture, and therefore compare cultures across the same generalised categories.

[26] As experienced by myself during the time I lived in Macleod Ganj, India where the Tibetan culture is prevalent.

Using the same Tibetan example from before, an emic study would gather empirical evidence about Tibetan social norms, based on categories developed by the scholar, and then etically compare these to their own or similar Asian cultures. A conclusion from such an "emic-etic" study would invariably be comparative, using etic elements of all the cultures considered (Pike, 1967, pp. 8–11; Markee, 2012).

Pike never meant for these concepts to become the polar opposites that they seem to have become today (Jorion, 1983, pp. 45–46; Watson-Gegeo, 1988, pp. 579–582). In fact, it makes sense that a properly emic study of one culture would lead to an etic comparison between it and another culture, usually the culture of the researcher. The proposed framework in this study will follow a similar pattern where an emic study of ancient sources provides the proper source material for an etic-based cross-cultural comparison.

Using an emic-etic approach to study ancient cultures, though rare, is not a new idea. A panel in Germany chaired by Dr Pommerening discussed the use of emics in studying Classical Greek and ancient Egyptian sources (Pommerening et al., 2015). This panel mentioned the "familiarity" with which modern scholars see Greek texts, creating the illusion that modern European cultural thought is similar to that of ancient Greek cultural thought. Egyptian culture is contrasted to this as being too far removed from modern culture, and therefore emically "unknowable".

Brian Hayden also discussed the use of emic-etic methodology in archaeology, looking into the relative merits and problems associated with modern typology of artefacts versus original use (Hayden, 1984).

The basic tenets of the emic-etic methodology are found in a wide range of fields, particularly in the arts and humanities where they are variously interpreted. The term emic has been used to describe ancient cultural ideas that were self-described by the ancient culture being studied (Stone, 1995; Lloyd, 2010). Emic-Etic methodology has been suggested for Biblical studies, and shown to be misunderstood (Craffert, 1995; Franklin, 2009). In the field of anthropology and, by extension of Pike's work with the Summer Institute of Linguistics'[27] Bible translation work amongst living cultures, the terms emic-etic provided a breakthrough in understanding a culture different from that of the

[27] SIL is stylized as "SIL International" recently.

researcher. The focus was shifted from "how do these savages[28] compare to the 'Christian' European high culture" to "how do these people understand and interpret the world around them, in their own words?" This is then compared on a peer-to-peer basis with other cultures (Markee, 2012).

AR George, who is regarded as one of the foremost scholars on Gilgameš, and on whose work this study is based, also discussed emic-etic methodologies as tools in ancient textual analysis (George, 2004). In fact, in his 2004 article, he highlights the issues that have arisen from the use of modern typologies, analytical categories, and nomenclature when studying ancient texts (George, 2004), and seems to advocate a more emic method of studying these texts.

Daniele Cuneo asks who is qualified to interpret ancient sources emically, arguing that the only person who can truly emically analyse or study ancient sources, especially literary ones, are the people who created them (Cuneo, 2011). This speaks to the nature of emics and is quite true in a literal sense. To truly emically study something, one must be so immersed in its culture and context that one becomes a part of it. This is impossible in ancient studies without time-travel. Cuneo does, however, consider it wholly impossible to derive original meaning from ancient sources without boiling them down to extremes and therefore "freezing critical thinking". He relegates the terms "emic" and "etic" to placeholders to be replaced once a "new horizon of meaning" has been established, in which the source material influences the researcher, and the researcher likewise influences the perception of the source (Cuneo, 2011, p. 127). Cuneo further argues that interpretation is part-and-parcel of a study and that, in the end, the result will always be a "self-renovating hermeneutical hybridization of concepts, techniques and methodological approaches" (Cuneo, 2011, p. 128).

Marvin Harris is often quoted on emics and etics and is seen as one of the "reformers" of the term and methodology. He takes Pike's theoretical concepts and applies them to the real world, in a more realistic setting. In this, Harris, even more than Pike, can be seen as the father of modern emic-etic research. Almost every article reviewed here quotes one of his works, especially his 1979 book: *Cultural Materialism: The Struggle for a Science of Culture*, although the consensus at the time was that he had stepped on too

[28] I use this term to also show how the use of emic/etic methods influenced the way in which Westerners moved away from seeing undeveloped cultures as "primitive" and started to acknowledge them as people in their own right, not beholden to Western standards of civilisation.

many toes by implying that anthropologists, archaeologists, ethnographers, and almost anyone associated with the social sciences were incompetent for not using an emic approach as he understood it (Beidelman, 1982; Schiffer, 1983). However, his views have since been re-evaluated and he is credited (Jorion, 1983b; Hayden, 1984; Longman, 1985a; Cousins, 2014; Mostowlansky and Rota, 2016b; Keimer and Thomas, 2022a) for his contribution to the understanding and final definition of emic-etics, critics notwithstanding.

Harris' survey and definitions (1976) of the terms and usage of "emic" and "etic" (in an anthropological context) are largely similar to that of this study, since ancient studies are by-and-large anthropology executed on non-living cultures. He also directly addresses the detractors of emics (such as Bishop Berkeley) who argue that the behaviours observed in cultures only exist in the minds of the observer, and not in any factual form (Harris, 1976, p. 348). Though this is a debatable point, given that all experience is necessarily informed by one's own experiences (Smith, 2005), Harris contends that in the real world one must do what one can to mitigate this but still accept emic principles as these would yield the best results (Harris, 1976, pp. 346–348). Though one may never find a truly emic reading of a source, one would come as close as humanly possible by ignoring the self, internal bias, and cultural influences.

In a more diverse setting, Boersema argues for a double etic-emic system in Christian missionary work. In such a system, the initial contact of the missionary is an etic interaction where the cultures of the missionary and the target culture meet and interpret each other in terms of their own understanding. After this initial etic meeting, an emic understanding develops between the two groups, and this can then lead to another etic reading of the gospel, followed by an emic understanding (Boersema, 2010).

This description is also applicable to a student of ancient cultures, as initially, there is an etic understanding of the ancient culture on behalf of the modern student, based on the knowledge they have before studying the source. This is then replaced with a more grounded emic understanding as one's knowledge develops.

Berry, in his much-cited article, "Imposed Etics—Emics—Derived Etics: The Operationalization of a Compelling Idea" (Berry, 1989), proposes a framework for the emic-etic study of another culture in an anthropological context. He states, one should start an emic study of one's own culture, usually as a question. These emic traits (in his example a questionnaire) are then exported to the culture to be studied as an “imposed etic” concept. This then becomes emic knowledge as the etic concepts are challenged and changed by the target culture. The emic concepts from the first study in one’s own culture can then be compared to the emic concepts in the target culture. (Berry, 1989, p. 730)

Berry also points out (by way of a Mexican study into family planning) that traditionally even scholars who claim to do “emic” research end up simply implanting their own ideas and “internal emics” into their studies. Speaking of living cultures, he points out that by simply changing one’s approach to more open-ended questions and enquiries, one gets a more emic perspective of the studied culture. In this way, the original understanding that a culture has of a particular concept may be studied emically and then accurately compared to another in an etic study (Berry, 1989, pp. 732–734). This method agrees with Jorion (1983b) (see below) and this study in the acknowledgement of one’s own etic understanding of a target culture and seems to be quite similar to that proposed by Jackson and Niblo (2004), discussed below.

In *Emic or Etic? Interpreting the Hebrew Scriptures* (2015) Charles Isbell attempts to portray the New Testament authors of the Gospels as “etic” commentators of Jewish beliefs. He claims to differentiate between “emic” Jewish scholars and “etic” Greek commentators in the New Testament, trying to prove a theological point about the continuity between the Old and New Testaments. This continuity, he argues, is the product of theologians and Greek commentators trying to gain legitimacy for the “new” theology posed in the New Testament, as opposed to the Judaic Old Testament.

Isbell assumes that the New Testament and Judaism were both products of different groups interpreting and reinterpreting the Old Testament (Isbell, 2015, p. 4). This, ironically, shows that while he liberally labels New Testament writers as “etic commentators”, he himself is etically looking in at the situation in the first few centuries AD.

Isbell recounts a series of apparent “challenges” that early church commentators and New Testament authors wanted to address in their “new” theology (2015, pp. 7–16). In doing so, he exposes himself as also being an etic onlooker, as his entire list is backwards engineered from modern Christian theology and is not reflected in the texts that he quotes.

Focussing on labelling his subjects as either etic or emic to an ancient culture, Isbell nit-picks certain passages in the New Testament, without, ironically, emically studying them in their literary and cultural context. He uses Catholic and other derivative theologies to interpret the texts (etic), instead of reading the New Testament texts for themselves, stripped of more modern theologies (emic). By doing this he reaches the conclusion that the authors had to have been Hellenic (i.e. etic), and that they were influenced by a Greek philosophy (2015, p. 15).

This is an example of where emic-etic terminology is used, without actually applying the methodology in interpreting the subject matter.

Pieter Craffert has taken a cautionary approach to the use of emic-etics in ancient studies. He argues, based on a review of New Testament studies which uses this methodology, that in the end, the use of an emic-etic methodology does not make a study immune to ethnocentricity (Craffert, 1994). He therefore cautions against the blind use of an emic methodology by simply disregarding the researcher's own cultural interpretations. He elaborates on this in another article, claiming that, with an emic-etic approach, one is never truly "emically" examining the source, as the very language and framework one uses is subject to one's own interpretations, and therefore it contaminates the source (Craffert, 1995).

Craffert is correct in his conclusions that the emic-etic methodologies, as inherited from anthropology, pose these problems. However, these are only problems if unaddressed, something Craffert also recognises (1994, pp. 3–4). In the works he surveyed, it was shown that the researchers did not take care to fully immerse themselves in the subject matter, and to truly emically analyse the source material. Time and again he points out how modern theologies, terminology, or ideas are interpreted into ancient ones. Leading to the conclusion that, "… the emic-etic distinction functions as an excuse for avoiding the challenges posed by the interpretive turn." (1994, p. 19). Due to this failure to address modern ideas seeping in, Craffert labels emic-etic methodologies as having failed in ancient studies and were therefore not in widely accepted use at that time (Craffert, 1995, p. 33).

The current study takes this warning seriously, and as a result would attempt to fill this gap by isolating any cultural interpretation using another three-tiered system that will be discussed later in this chapter, as well as including the relatively novel field of cognitive studies and perception. I believe that this does answer the call for a redefinition of the emic-etic methodologies (Craffert, 1995, pp. 33–34):

> *Being rehabilitated into an interpretive discourse implies that emics and etics (if they are to be maintained) have had to be redefined either for designating different interests in the interpretive process or for identifying when one is using one's own language and when the language of the subjects*

A revisiting and academic reminder of the original methodology behind emic and etics is presented by Karl Franklin (2009), a student of Kenneth Pike's, who had originally developed it. In contrast to Isbell, surveyed above, Franklin demonstrates how emics and etics can be used to interpret and understand the New Testament, as well as the Old.

Franklin also addresses some of the arguments against the use of emics and etics, recalling Pike's own descriptions and use-cases (Pike, 1967a, 1993b), however he does not address criticism that emics and etics are still subject to the user's own interpretations and biases (Craffert, 1995). Franklin chooses to gloss over this, and quotes Pike as saying that emics and etics are a "stereoscopic window to the world" for a "detached viewer" (Franklin, 2009, p. 1). Though this could be interpreted as being "detached" from one's biases (as this author argues), Franklin's meaning seems to be of one "detached" from the target culture, and not the study, which makes the whole study etic, not emic.

Another *SIL* graduate and student of Pike, Dan Wu, attempts to make emics relevant in Biblical studies by addressing some of the criticism from Craffert, building on the foundations of Pike along with Berry's work. He reminds us that emics and etics were never meant to be in opposition (Wu, 2011, p. 3), but rather to work together. He also cautions against the use of "emic" and "etic" without proper definition, citing Pike himself who said that "[etics] 'are in reality the emics of the subculture of the scientific community" (Wu, 2011, p. 4).

In light of this he argues with Berry that the researcher should also include an acknowledgement of their own emic perspective and experience (Wu, 2011, pp. 5–7), though he does not add that one should then use that acknowledgement to separate their personal emic view from the study. This is something that I strongly argue for.

Wu argues that Berry's emic-etic-derived-etic system can be used in the Biblical context by accepting that the Biblical text is "a legitimate and coherent communicative entity in and of itself" (Wu, 2011, p. 8). By accepting this, a truly emic study would first look at the literary, contextual, and cultural aspects of a text before applying etic models and information from modern theologies.

Wu proposes a modified version of Berry's system (2011, p. 9):

> *The researcher once again begins from within their own culture and uses the tools and concepts from their emic perspective to formulate an imposed etic. That etic is then brought to bear on the Biblical text, as a means of accessing meaning indigenous to the text. However, as the text is analysed and understood in its own terms (i.e., exegesis), the imposed etic is modified, or perhaps even discarded in favour of an etic that reflects a more valid understanding of the other culture…*

This, Wu calls a more "self-aware" and "critical approach" than previous studies, though individual researchers probably automatically did the same without realising it.

A comprehensive review of emic-etic methodology is provided by Paul Jorion (Jorion, 1983b) where he discusses various combinations of emic-etic methodologies. He attempts to recalibrate or reframe the emic-etic system for a more practical use (Jorion, 1983b, p. 44), after criticizing Pike's original thesis as lofty, yet unrealistic due to, ironically, its imposition of modern ideals and cultural formulae on a target culture (Jorion, 1983b, p. 42).

Jorion then proceeds to detail the different emic-etic definitions prevalent in anthropology at the time:

He describes emic as:

- 'through the native's eye' (original)
- 'the native as ultimate judge' (of the accuracy of one's study)
- 'the categories and rules one must know to think and act as a native'
- 'common ground between Us and Them'

Jorion also proposes his own definition: "emic" is where the common sense of the scholar and the common sense of the target culture intersects (Jorion, 1983b, pp. 61, 64–65). He also describes the movement of facts/fact gathering in a study from etic to emic. This is contrary to most uses of emic-etic, where an emic study leads to an etic study. Here, Jorion proposes that a study may also start as an etic one (i.e., cross-cultural) and develop into an emic one.

This combination of emics and etics is precisely what this study attempts to illustrate. It is possible, using emics, guided by additional principles, to catch a glimpse of what ancient cultures experienced. These perceived experiences can then be boiled down to scientific etic units that can be studied cross-culturally but are still controlled and analysed emically.

Jorion's definition is contrary to the generally held view of emics as the "native's point of view". However, his conclusion that emics must be interpreted as "what our commonsensical usage of everyday language allows him [the native] to be" (Jorion, 1983b, p. 65), implies that there should be an honest assessment of what our "commonsensical language" is and how it would affect our study, and more importantly, our perception of the source material. In this, Jorion answers a key critique from sceptics of emic-etics (Craffert, for one, as outlined above) in that emics should be acknowledged as one's interpretation of the source material.

Brian Hayden (1984) examines how the original typologies and the synthetic ones imposed on artefacts by archaeologists are potentially unrelated. He argues that one should be disciplined in enforcing one's typology, which should be as close to the original as possible. This "original" classification should be informed by an emic ethno-archaeological survey (if possible) and experimental archaeology. This entire process is inherently emic, as it consults the original context (as far as it is known) in creating the classification. Experimental archaeology itself is also inherently emic, as it seeks to recreate the exact circumstances that created a specific artefact or ecofact. In this regard, it is a valuable tool to help reconstruct and understand ancient concepts, as it only uses contextually known facts in the recreation.

It should be noted that Hayden is speaking in the context of North and Central American archaeology where there are modern societies with which one could consult to gain anthropologic and ethnographic information on ancient customs. In the ancient Near East, one has no such ethno-archaeological amenities, and one has to piece together this information on a trial-and-error basis (where artefacts found at sites are literally experimented with to see if they could cause/create what we find/see), based on very limited information, and incorporating a wide range of multidisciplinary fields and referencing various cultural points. Ancient Near Eastern experimental archaeology is therefore a very limited field and still in its infancy, when compared to the European and American disciplines.

Keimer and Thomas (2022a) recently published an article (after the methodology of the current study was finalised), in which they also point to the problematic use of modern concepts and ideas to describe ancient systems. Their article focuses on the Biblical monarchies, or “individuals who had authority over others” as they accurately and emically describe the “kings” in the Bible (Keimer and Thomas, 2022*a*, p. 86). They propose that the standard approach in Biblical scholarship should be revised. They argue that to successfully understand the true nature of Biblical governmental systems, one must define what they call “native” elements, key ideologies, and expressions hidden by our modern perceptions of concepts. Interestingly, they do not seek to prove the historicity of the Biblical kings and so get stuck in the quagmire that is Biblical archaeological dating debates. They allow for the non-historicity of the kings, whilst also acknowledging that there was a broader ancient Near Eastern context in which the stories played out. The author of the “histories” of the kings of Israel would have been familiar with these universal ancient Near Eastern concepts and incorporated them into the details of their histories.

Keimer and Thomas’ approach is aligned with the fundamental methodology of this study, in that it recognizes that the use of modern terms and frameworks to identify and interpret ancient sources skews the study. Using the source materials’ own definitions and basic, universal (or contextual) elements to interpret the sources leads to a better, more accurate interpretation of the original source, stripped as far as possible of modern interference. This, in turn, provides a more solid foundation on which to build future studies. This understanding of emics will be further discussed below under the actual methodology of this study.

Tremper Longman’s article (1985) on the “literary approach” details the pitfalls of the approach, as well as ways of avoiding them. The literary approach is similar to an emic-etic approach in that the Bible is viewed as secular literature and not “holy, untouchable and immutable” scriptures. In this regard, it is emic as it seeks to understand the motivations behind the texts and analyse them in their own right as documents.

However, Longman points out several issues and potential problems with this approach. The first issue is that, as with most interdisciplinary fields, scholars are divided as to how to proceed, define, and go about analysing literature. In Biblical scholarship, the field often encourages uniformity and the adoption of theories and methodologies currently *in vogue.*[29] This, Longman argues, is an issue, as often ideas filter into Biblical scholarship

[29] This is an issue in South Africa as well, where the research-culture has turned towards a concept called “Africanization” where disciplines seek to make their fields more acceptable to African culture and do

from secular sources and are adopted without properly adapting the ideology and methodology to the field. In defence of this "new" theory, Biblical scholars become embroiled in arguments and defences of methodologies and structures above actual analysis. This pitfall can be circumvented by opening a study up to all possible methodologies and using a mixture of theories tailor-made for each study, Longman concludes (Longman, 1985, pp. 387–388).

The second pitfall Longman identifies is in technical and structural jargon, versus understandability and accessibility. He argues that some scholars who have fallen into the paradigm pitfall detailed above are then so focused on using the newest and most current technical terms and ideas, that these terms are never adequately defined in terms of Biblical studies. The solution Longman proposes is that one must properly define one's technical jargon in terms of the study, as well as seek clarity of expression in one's work to avoid misunderstandings (Longman, 1985, p. 388).

The third pitfall is a purely emic-etic one, and one that forms the basis for the motivation of this study: the imposition of "*modern western [Christian] concepts and categories on ancient Semitic literature*" (Longman, 1985, p. 388). Siding with Kugel (1981), in agreeing that one cannot use modern words and concepts in describing ancient texts, Longman proposes an emic-etic methodology where a Biblical text is interpreted according to its own context without using modern terminology (Longman, 1985, pp. 388–391). This is also an answer to Isbell's skewed use of emics to prove a point (see the part on Isbell above).

The fourth pitfall that Longman points out is that in focusing too much on the text, one forgets that the text had a human author with their own thoughts, feelings, and contexts. Here he views a balanced approach, where the student focuses on both the text and the possible motivations of the author. Though impossible to fully glean from the limited information that we have, it is still possible and important to acknowledge that ancient texts had ancient authors who had human motivations for writing what they did (Longman, 1985, p. 392).

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research with an Africa-centric view. In Biblical studies, this is exceptionally true, and has led to a larger focus on what "Africa perceives in the text" as opposed to actually studying the text in its own context (cf. later in this section where we discuss Punt 1999, page 39-40.

The fifth and final pitfall Longman points out is that Biblical scholars are drifting towards the rejection of the historical aspects of Biblical texts. This then leads to the rejection of any history-based assessment of the Biblical texts and, subsequently, ignores a large part of their context. To avoid this, Longman proposes that one acknowledges that the Biblical books were not written as historical records (for the most part), but that they still represent the author's perceptions and perhaps divine revelations, within a historical setting. Longman concludes by suggesting that Biblical textual research should include all facets of literature and historic contexts, without excluding any facet. This will lead to a richer understanding of the text (Longman, 1985, p. 938).

In another field, the field of Psychology, Niblo and Jackson developed a framework for doing emic "qualitative" research that could be useful here. They reviewed all the articles containing a cultural element published in the *Australian Journal of Psychology* between 1983 and the end of 2002. They found that of the 35 identified articles, 89% applied Western standards to their subjects, even if they were not discussing a "Western" culture. Only one article used an emic approach to measure intelligence amongst the Aborigine tribes based on indigenous understanding of intelligence (Niblo and Jackson, 2004, pp. 129–131).

For Niblo and Jackson this represents a problem, especially in a multi-cultural country such as Australia. Consequently, they developed a rough 9-step framework to guide researchers to doing qualitative emic studies (Niblo and Jackson, 2004, pp. 131–132):

- Step 1: Identification of the culture to be studied, as opposed to simply classing people according to religion or country. Not all people from a country are from the same culture.
- Step 2: Identification of variables in the target culture
- Step 3: Literature review
- Step 4: Assembling a multi-cultural research team to help with the emic understanding of target cultures
- Step 5 & 6: Equivalent sampling and data collection
- Step 7: Qualitative data analysis where data is continuously compared to the rest of the data set
- Step 8: Exhaustive emic description of every culture sampled

- Step 9: Etic comparison of similar concepts, with an emic study of culture-specific concepts

This 9-step framework is theoretically sound and attempts to solve the cross-cultural divide by using researchers from that culture. The use of multi-cultural teams and proper cultural definitions minimizes cultural contamination of ideas and addresses many of Craffert's criticism of emic methodologies, especially his critique of the confusing nomenclature and definitions, and pitfalls of not making accurate, equivalent comparisons in cultural comparisons, i.e. comparing "oranges with oranges": (see section 2.3 below for the practical implementation of this).

However, realistically for ancient studies, this framework cannot be used as is and requires much recalibration. Steps 1 and 2 are, however, quite necessary for the delimitation and identification of the source to be studied.

Step 3, the literature review, is where most of the confusion and vague definitions come from in emic studies. This is because one must cast a wide net and include many different viewpoints on a topic. If left unchecked, these can and will influence the direction of a study, as well as influence any conclusions made. One must therefore guard against influences in the literature review as much as with any other aspect of a study.

Step 4 is impossible, since ancient cultures are extinct, and one cannot employ anyone from within the culture to help. However, steps 5-9 are not only possible, but critical in avoiding the various pitfalls and issues inherent in emic studies as outlined in this section (Longman, 1985; Craffert, 1995).

Through taking care to qualitatively collect data that is equivalent to the data being compared, one avoids making cognitive leaps and comparing "apples and oranges", something Craffert points out repeatedly (Craffert, 1994, 1995). By continuously defining one's data only in relation to its own dataset, one gets a skewed bias towards the data set, in this case the culture being studied. This is a good thing, since the goal of emics is to have the target culture define itself in terms that we can understand, quantise, and study or compare etically. This would also solve the issue of definitions, since by having the potential data set define itself, we are not imposing any modern definitions on the source material. This is also a more complex and robust system than the one Barry proposed (1989), though they share the same fundamentals.

Niblo and Jackson's steps 8 and 9 are also aligned with the goals of this study – to create a comprehensive emic baseline of a culture (in this case a cultural aspect) for external and equivocal etic comparison.

Emics and etics are further promoted by Mostowlansky and Rota in their article for the special issue of *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* on an emic-etic methodology to study religion. They are also the authors of the Cambridge Encyclopaedia of Anthropology article, "Emic and Etic" (Mostowlansky and Rota, 2020). They broadly cover the same material as others here (Harris, 1976; Hayden, 1984; Longman, 1985; Franklin, 2009; Cuneo, 2011), and choose to focus on the cluttered and ambiguous definitions prevalent in this debate. To clear up the clutter and opaque debates over the exact definition of emic-etic and insider/outsider, they propose a multi-tiered system, much like Panofsky's "three-layered system" (see later in this chapter, section 2.13 and 2.3.3) (Mostowlansky and Rota, 2016a, p. 327).

This system, which Mostowlansky and Rota call the "iterative model" is a progression of observations, each building on the previous, as well as self-analysing and critiquing the previous analysis, switching the emic-etic and insider/outsider roles with each stage. In this model, a researcher would make a "first order observation" as though they were an "insider" (what one traditionally would call an emic approach). This observation is then analysed as if the researcher were an external observer, using a more etic approach. This "second order observation" is then observed from an "insider" perspective, and so forth, until one can be certain of the facts and facets implicit in the material/source culture (Mostowlansky and Rota, 2016a, pp. 327–329).

This approach sums up the emic-etic nature of academic research and peer-review but offers little in terms of a framework for actual research, since it is a continuing cycle of observation and observation of the observation without ever coming to a firm conclusion. This system would present what is essentially a series of "preliminary findings" that may then be debated, without ever reaching a conclusion. It is akin to baking a cake but starting over each time one is ready to pour the batter into the pan. The consequence is that the cake is never baked, but the baker practices their baking skills.

Mostowlansky and Rota do, however, highlight three "dimensions" in which emics/etics have developed, namely "existential-political," "methodological" and "epistemological". Studies, they say, usually focus on one of these three without considering the others.

Here, they join everyone in favour of emics/etics in that a more comprehensive and inclusive methodology is key, where all facets of a study are taken into account (Mostowlansky and Rota, 2016a, p. 333).

This is also taken up by Numa Markee (2012), who points out that, in addition to all the other definition issues, the field of anthropology and ethnography is further complicated by various different perspectives on culture, often evident in the same study. However, she does not really offer much in the way of a solution, concluding that "there will always be differences in qualitative methods".

The International Encyclopaedia of Communication (2008 & 2017) also featured three short articles on emics and emic-etic research in the field of communication analysis (Lindlof, 2008; Scarduzio, 2017; van Oudenhoven, 2017). In general, these short articles serve as basic information only. However, Scarduzio does make some interesting observations about the practical usage of emics "in the field".

She defines the basic emic methodology in terms of three steps:

- Observation
- Classification based on loose terms that are based on context
- Re-examination/revisiting steps 1 and 2

This cycle continues until no new or surprising information comes to light (Scarduzio, 2017). This is broadly the same as the emic "Russian nesting doll" model put forward by Mostowlansky and Rota (Mostowlansky and Rota, 2016a).

In his two-part article (1999a, 1999b), Jeremy Punt argues for the emic study of African theology. He argues that each cultural grouping in Africa has their own take on the Bible, and as such, they should be studied emically. In this regard, he is using emics to correctly describe the study of how an African culture defines Biblical concepts, as opposed to how a Euro-centric culture would interpret the Bible (etic) (Punt, 1999a, pp. 10–11). In his second part, Punt praises this development highly, pointing to how African societies have embraced the Bible and made associations between its cultural rules and their own. This, he argues, is something to be pursued and even encouraged (Punt, 1999b, pp. 322–323). In these two articles, Punt correctly details the use of emic methodology to understand the "Africanization" phenomenon in Biblical studies. He argues that instead of using etic, Eurocentric theologies and imposing these on African contexts, the African cultures need to define their own theologies in terms of their own cultural contexts (Punt, 1999b, pp. 313–315).

It is all good and well, from an anthropological standpoint, to study how a relatively modern non-European, traditionally non-Judeo-Christian culture views its holiest book. However, when one is doing research, or even theological readings of the Bible, emics should be used to gain understanding of and insight into the meaning proposed by the original authors of the text, *not* one's own. In this, Punt fails to realise that while he is describing emics in the Western study of African churches, he is encouraging an etic, cultural-infused reading of the texts which are supposed to inform theology in those same churches. Through this, he is encouraging the culture which he proposes to study to change using a text introduced by his own culture. Eventually, the original culture he wanted to study will be changed forever, and the study made moot. This is because he is encouraging the use of non-ancient (and therefore etic in this context) cultural traits to inform the study of ancient texts.

This is good example of how theological and anthropological fields do not mix well. And it also serves as a reminder for more scientific fields (like history and archaeology) to not make the same mistakes. A clear distinction should be made between theological studies and secular studies. The former deals with faith-based "facts" and assumptions, whereas the latter does not require a belief in the tenets of the source text.

If one is doing research from a theological/religious viewpoint, one's work has an inherent expectation that one has some sort of personal belief in, or spiritual connection to, the holy texts that one is studying, be it the Bible or any other text. A pastor or theological scholar/student doing an exegesis of a verse is expected to at least acknowledge the spiritual nature of the text in some form. A secular scholar, doing a secular study (even in a Biblical studies department), is not expected to acknowledge or believe in the religious text they are studying, as the field is not a theological one, but a secular academic one.

Engler and Whitesides recently wrote an introduction to an issue of *Religion*, in which they introduce articles on four emic concepts that could potentially help better define methodologies and studies in religion (Englerand Whitesides, 2022). However, all four these concepts are indigenous words loaned from their original Afro-Brazilian contexts and used in the context of cross-cultural study. The thinking is that these words define certain paradigms and concepts in a way that English somehow does not, as they are connected to a cultural behaviour that illustrates them. This is a very emic-based endeavour if these words are used within their own cultures, something that is highlighted in all of the articles of this special issue (Botta, 2022; Cruz, 2022; Engler, 2022; Engler and Whitesides, 2022; Lundell, 2022; Maćkowiak, 2022; Marques, 2022; Pontzen, 2022).

The proposed terms are outlined in four articles in this special issue of Religion. Barbara Cruz (2022) uses *virada* – a musical term that describes transitions and "turns" in music in Afro-Brazilian culture, as well as transitions of religious and cultural thoughts when they interact. Cruz proposes to view the syncretism between two Afro-Brazilian religions, *Terecô* and *Tambor de Mina*, using language and terms present within the culture, in this case *virada*. This is an in-cultural way to describe the confluence of two cultures, and the exchange of formed ideas, where, after the exchange, both ideas remain parallel and truly overlapping without superseding each other (Cruz, 2022, p. 21).

Steven Engler (2022) introduces *feijoada* – a culinary term that describes mixtures in foods, much like *paella*. Engels proposes to use *feijoda* as a technical scholarly term for a final cultural mixture as scholars perceive it today, without being analysed first. A *feijoda* is a cultural ideology or entity that is known to have been mixed but not yet analysed. The use of this word would then preclude any etic connotations to mixtures before it being properly analysed (Engler, 2022, p. 26).

Eleonora Lundell (2022) suggests *encruzilhada* – a cultural term for crossroads, with the South Brazilian religious connotation of fluid, open boundaries between concepts which are fixed. Lundell makes sense of the concept of ontological borders within the Umbanda and Candomblé religions of Brazil, using the very loaded Candomblé term, *encruzilhada*. It is a loaded term, since in the local belief systems, crossroads play an important role as physical symbols of "spiritual nodes" where the spiritual and mundane meet. Lundell would proposes applying this concept to cross-cultural and cross-religious studies, where, in the spirit of *encruzilhada,* both sides "co-learn" from each other, without influencing each other's identity. This would also prevent the Euro-centric (and what she calls "anthropocentric") bias in studying religions deemed "non-real", as in not related to one of the big Abrahamic or Eastern religions (Lundell, 2022, pp. 105, 118).

Lucas Marques (2022) explicates *caminho* – a religious-cultural term for "path", specifically the initiation path that denotes the process of becoming and learning through "*being and making, gift and initiation, to com`pose* (sic) *a partial and situated knowledge*" (Marques, 2022, p. 122). Through using the concept of the "learning path", Marques argues for the use of the term and the concept in modern anthropology as a subdivision of emics, where the act of studying and writing is a learning experience, beyond the more "formal" methodological study (Marques, 2022b, pp. 123, 134).

Outside of the Brazilian context, two articles explore the usage of other terms as anthropological tools. Benedikt Pontzen (2022) employs *bōkā* – a term used by Islamic authors to refer to the process of contacting/using pre-Islamic rituals to gain access to the spirit-world and affect some outcome. However, Pontzen notes that this term is a very nuanced and varied term, since it is originally a Hausa term for a spiritual "lifeworld" (sic), that also encompasses every spiritual aspect of their pre-Islamic religious practices and spiritual experiences. It is therefore un-translatable, even into another west-African language, as the word is so steeped and meaningful in that specific local context (Pontzen, 2022, pp. 79–80). After ethnographically describing the word, and what it means to different users in West-Africa, Pontzen concludes that *bōkā* as a term in its context cannot be adequately described by outside anthropologists. He argues that Western-based scholars often use words that are rooted in Western culture to describe concepts that are so far removed or alien from the Western context, that the rich meaning is lost. However, he does not argue for the adoption of "local" terms. Rather, he argues for the careful examination of the cultural terms used in English, identifying their original root-meanings, then comparing these to the cultural terms and concepts studied in the target culture.

Sergio Botta (2022) introduces Mesoamerican religious terms: *zemi* (Antillean), *teotl* (Nahutl), and *huaca* (Andean) – Mesoamerican terms that describe their own experiences with "extra-human" entities. Botta comes from the deconstructionist viewpoint on religion, querying why the language used in the discourse of world religions tends to favour Western thought, over that of indigenous systems. Generally, little mention is made of how non-Western religious systems viewed themselves. Botta proposes that, when discussing a culture, one should (as far as possible) use their own concepts to do so. This would, he argues, result in a more emic position being developed from which one can properly analyse cultural aspects (Botta, 2022, pp. 61–62).

Cruz, Engels, Lundell, and Marques make good points on the use of emic terminology within a specific culture. However, what is immediately apparent in their articles is that they are steeped in Afro-Brazilian culture, practicing the religions which they study. This is not a bad thing, as it gives them a uniquely emic view into the culture that they are studying. It does, however, narrow their articles' views slightly in that they propose the use of cultural ideologies that are heavily biased towards their own culture.

If these concepts were to be used only in studies pertaining to Afro-Brazilian cultures and concepts, then this would make sense. If, however, they are used outside of their emic cultural contexts (i.e. for studies unrelated to their cultures, as the issue of *Religion* would have it, though not all authors[30] of the articles in the issue state this as a goal), such use ultimately only adds to the issues of definitions in the emic-etic debate by adding more definitions to an already cluttered field, only to define terms and concepts that are already broadly defined in English. One would again simply be replacing the "oppressive, colonial English" with a more "ethnic" nomenclature from another culture, with the same results.

A point that they all make, and which is pertinent to emics in general and this study in particular, made even clearer by Pontzen and Botta, is that one must contextualise one's study in the culture one is studying. This means that, where possible, local cultural concepts and terms should be used. In ancient studies, this is a lot harder, as one does not have a "local" with whom to converse and learn concepts from. One should, however, try to understand the spirit in which the ancient texts/artefacts were created, and as far as possible, refer to ancient cultures in terms of themselves, in terms that would make sense to them, were they still alive.

Smith did a practical experiment with students at the Oregon State University (Smith, 2005). In it he had students from various classes of the Natural Resources and Community Values course read a letter that had both factual and value-based sentences. Each student had to correctly identify each, to test whether their training in Values had contributed to an "emic" understanding of the topic. The experiment showed that the students identified most of the letter as value-based, whereas a panel of science-writers identified most aspects as fact-based. This illustrated to Smith the emic-etic definition conundrum: One person's emic understanding of a system (due to training or living in it)

[30] Botta, Maćkowiak, and Pontzen do not espouse this claim

is fundamentally different to someone's emic view that does not have training/live in the situation.

In this case, the "subject" being studied was the use of value-based arguments. These the students could identify because they had training in the field, whereas the scientific writers panel could not consistently do so as they had no training in values. Both groups had training in environmental affairs and both groups had an emic understanding of the subject matter (the students by learning about fact versus value and the scientists by having written the letter), but the emic views of the two groups differed wildly because of their experiences (Smith, 2005, pp. 356–360). The same is true in a culture where the emic experience and understanding of one group of people are be fundamentally different to another. Priests and rulers, for instance, enjoy a completely different S*itz im Leben* than do lower "classes", such as farmers and labourers.

2.1.1.1 EMIC-ETIC METHODOLOGY IN MODERN NON-HISTORICAL CROSS-CULTURAL CONTEXTS

Emic-etic methodologies and principles have also been proposed for use in more modern contexts, such as corporate settings. It is worthwhile to briefly look at these studies, as they offer another perspective on an analogous problem.

The development of an emic-etic methodology in international corporate communications setting is well documented. Delva, Allen-Meares and Momper (2010) detailed Modern cross-cultural studies in a business/corporate setting, called "longitudinal studies". Here they study the ways in which interviewers conduct cross-cultural studies, and how these would benefit from a more emic approach, as opposed to an "etic" one. In their case studies, they show how the interviewer's line of questioning can affect the outcome, and how these questions need to be adapted to the person being interviewed's cultural context.

Buckley et al. wrote a detailed paper on this in 2014. Here they argued for an emic-etic approach to international intercultural communication. They use linguistic and kinship as data points in corporate culture across different languages and countries in Europe to illustrate how effective cross-cultural communication can be when approached emically, with understanding for different cultures and approaches (Buckley *et al.*, 2014, pp. 320–322). Both studies show how the use of emic-etic principles can make intercultural studies more effective and less prone to bias.

In their chapter on selecting an appropriate research methodology in the *Doing Social Research: A global Context* textbook, Bagele and Kawulich outline various good practices for selecting a research methodology in modern cross-cultural studies (Bagele and Kawulich, 2012). Emic-etic methodologies are, however, only mentioned as an alternative method to present one's findings, not as a tool to inform a study (Bagele and Kawulich, 2012, p. 16). Emics as a tool for organisational research is discussed by Nancy Morey and Fred Luthans in their article "An Emic Perspective and Ethnoscience Methods for Organizational Research" (1984).

Morris et al, (1999) argue for more emic-etic processes in the perceptions of justice in modern corporations. They argue that an emic-etic analysis of culture and its role in pronouncing judgements will create a more inclusive and culturally sensitive working environment.

Punnett et al propose an emic-etic-emic cycle in international business research to help foster communication and understanding between cultural groups. Using open-ended, non-leading questionnaires and self-study during the research limits the researcher's own paradigms from influencing the study (Punnett *et al.*, 2017).

Chao and Lambert give a rough overview of the emic-etic approach (Chao and Lambert, 2013), with the goal of promoting it in the field if psychology. However, they also fall into the paradigmatic trap detailed by Craffert in that vague definitions are given, with "buzzwords" like "native's view", but no mention is made of specifically how this methodology should work beyond the basics.

Another common cross-cultural setting is English as a Second Language Training (ESL). In an article on the subject, Watson-Gegeo proposes that ethnographic tools, such as emic-etic analysis, be used to bridge the gap between different cultures and so bring teachers closer to the students (Watson-Gegeo, 1988). It is a simple review of basic ethnographic work and the basics of what emic-etic analysis means for teaching settings.

Zhao, in his article titled "Reconceptualizing the Self Phenomenon: Toward an Emic Conception of the Self" (Zhao, 2015), argues for an emic understanding of the concept of "self". This can be regarded as the most "emic" of emic studies, as now the researcher's own perception of themselves and what constitutes "themselves" is described. This self-knowledge, he argues, can become "a force that acts back on one's existence in the world" (Zhao, 2015, p. 256). This is because, through studying oneself honestly, one can also identify how one would study others, through a clear definition of who one is versus who/what “they” are (Zhao, 2015, p. 255). Since emics is successfully being coupled with what amounts to cognitive science, this means that the basic argument of this thesis is sound in theory, i.e., that through self-study, self-control and the control of environments and sources, one can accurately identify and remove biases from how we perceive the world, or, in this case, ancient sources.

2.1.1.2 EMIC DEFINITIONS

From the literature surveyed above, it becomes clear that while the concept of emics is well understood as a good way to examine cultures or concepts, it has taken on a character of vagueness driven by philosophical rather than practical applications. Practical emics differ from theoretical discussion emics in that they are directed towards concrete actions and concepts, within a well-defined framework.

In this study, we aim to present a practical use for emics, and not a philosophically phrased ideal. This means we need to define the terms “emic” and “etic” in concrete terms, as relevant to this study.

Practically, an “emic” study of ancient sources would examine them in their own terms, with limited interference from modern cultural concepts and interpretations. This means that the texts are taken at face value and analysed only in their own contexts and cultural settings, bearing in mind that these represented an ideal or state of mind at a particular point in time. These cultural settings are the only “lenses” for studying the characters and are themselves subject to interpretation, given that they are mostly dead (in an anthropological sense).

This problem can, however, be overcome by strictly adhering to an internal reference system that always links new knowledge to existing internal knowledge. In this way, the source and its context become the only “lens” that can interpret the source. Practically, this also applies to the study’s delimitations. The context that we are using is the original author’s context, not the historicity of any given character. This is because emic cultural studies, if done in a purely emic sense, cannot gauge the veracity or historicity of facts, only whether the relevant culture believed it to be so at a given point in time.

To summarise, through emically studying a culture’s *Sitz im Leben*, one excludes any etic analysis. Etic analysis is done through the lens of an external knowledge structure. Emic analysis, by its nature, focuses on the source's internal knowledge structure. Only once the emic analysis is complete can an external etic lens be used to compare elements.

2.1.2 COGNITIVE STUDIES AND PERCEPTION

Cognitive sciences represent the study of how humans process information, especially pertaining to their environments and gained knowledge. The emic-etic methodology and cognitive sciences therefore share the field of human perception. Cognitive sciences have long also studied how cultures change and interact on the cognitive level (Paul, 1952; Carp, 1997; DiMaggio, 1997; Shepherd, 2011; Quinn, 2012). What sets cognitive sciences apart from anthropology is that it is a psychology-related field and not a humanities/social sciences field. Interestingly, these fields come to the same general conclusions (see Zhao, 2015 for the anthropological view, versus Talmy, 1995; Carp, 1997; Hatano and Wertsch, 2001).

This study seeks to address the perception of ancient sources. It is therefore pertinent to look at the various studies around perception, and what is known about the way in which the human brain structures information (cognition) which leads to the way in which information is perceived.

A person is subject to interpreting what they perceive through the lens of their own experiences, cultural norms, and knowledge structures. These need to be acknowledged and then kept away from an emic reading or study, lest they influence the study.

If one can train one's brain to ignore these familiar ways of constructing new information, then one is be able to bypass the formation of bias in a study, by keeping a focused, self-aware mind on what one is studying. In this way, information processing is more centred on the source material than on trying to "refile" it. This process encourages the formation of a new knowledge structure, based on the source directly.

Carp (1997, p. 270) notes that "If perception is culturally variable, it is historically variable as well." This is the theoretical basis of this study. Since our culture affects how we perceive the world around us, perception differs between different cultures. This is true even of the same culture over time. Values, beliefs, and theories widely accepted 100 years ago are today regarded as nothing more than fantasy, pseudo-science, and wishful thinking. The same is true of cross-cultural historical cultural perception when scholars that are steeped in a modern culture seeks to understand an ancient one across millennia.

This culturally influenced perception is the root of most bias (Paul, 1952) and this bias is extremely difficult to get rid of, as it has informed our lives and, in many cases, shaped them for as long as we have been self-aware (Quinn, 2012). It is therefore extremely hard to put aside and look at anything without it.

It is easier to accept bias, considering that it is a part of the development of a human. The way in which we perceive the world around us is part of what makes it possible for us to function in a particular society, and flourish. The way in which the brain processes this information makes it want to conform new information with existing cultural "frameworks" with which the mind is familiar (DiMaggio, 1997; Shepherd, 2011). Giving up, or "pausing" this passive ability in our brains is akin to trying to unlearn how to walk. While possible, it requires significant effort, self-awareness, and control of one's cognitive functions. This means that one must literally "think about what you are thinking about".

Carp cites several anthropologists who managed to "soak in" their target culture, learning how to think, feel and emote like their research subject culture (Carp, 1997, pp. 270–278). However, these were anthropologists studying "live" cultures. They *could* "soak up" the cultures and explore them in all their colourful glory because they are there. Ancient studies seek to study ancient and long dead cultures. In many cases thousands of years and countless cultural iterations, replacements and destructions separate the modern scholar from their ancient subjects. It is impossible for the modern scholar to ever immerse themselves fully in their subject cultures.

Not everything that was present in ancient times is preserved in the archaeological record due to ancient destruction, natural erosion, treasure hunters, illegal artefact hunters/traders, modern construction, and so on (Fagan, 2009, p. 61). Even if this percentage could be made higher through better heritage management, no culture will ever become "alive" without its living, breathing humans. The only way in which we can unlock their culture is through studying their artefacts, mindful of that it represents a very small fraction of the culture.

Ancient cultures were, luckily, also subject to the same cognitive perception processes as we modern humans are. This means that their perception of the world, or worldview, can be glimpsed through their artefacts. Studying these are what scholars have done for hundreds of years now. Most of these studies have, however, devolved into familiar patterns. Ancient heroes and myths are invariably equated with the more well-known and more recent Greek ones. Artefacts and archaeological finds are spatially analysed and fit into a "known" pattern, that is itself a construct of modern scholarship.

What is needed is that we, as modern scholars, focus more specifically on finding the cognitive patterns left imprinted on/in the artefacts/sources (Talmy, 1995; Hatano and Wertsch, 2001). This can only be done by turning one's own cognitive cultural "framework" off and forcing the brain to look at the source material "dumb". Through this the brain should recognise "new" cognitive markers, and instead of trying to conform the studied markers, develop a new framework within which to place the new, ancient information. This would bring the scholar closer to how the ancient audience would view the source, without the lens of modern biases and cultural interpretations.

2.1.2.1 BANISHING BIAS

Bias is, as we've established earlier, an inherent part of one's cognitive perception system. It is the brain's way of processing new information and parsing it to fit into an already-established framework through which the brain understands the world around it. This framework is made up from, informed and reinforced by one's value system, beliefs, physical cultural traits, education, and language (DiMaggio, 1997; Barrett, 2007; Gauchat and Andrews, 2018). Carp (1997, p. 298) sums up the complexities of this information-brain-perception system quite well: "Not only do people with different sense ratios think differently about the world, but people with different sense ratios also have different worlds about which to think!"

Different biases literally live in their own worlds, as they each perceive the world differently according to their own perceptions of reality. Thus, the ancient world and modern worlds are, in effect, two completely different worlds with different rules, as perceived by the inhabitants.

But does bias have to be embraced?[31] The answer is no. If not acknowledged, the personal bias of the author or the modern contexts of the study taint the conclusions of

[31] Many new studies and papers submitted in 2019 at a student postgraduate research-presentation at UNISA were explicitly embracing bias as part of their studies in the form of "a [insert personal belief, culture or language] reading" of different ancient and Biblical sources. Though not academically wrong, they do serve to muddy the water somewhat as these studies are, invariably, used as arguments or counterarguments instead of looking at what the original text said.

the research. Modern biases should forever be banished from the study of ancient cultures. This is a very lofty and possibly pretentious-sounding goal. It is also very much necessary for those who wish to study ancient cultures to not confuse what is not known, but theorised, with hard facts. Practically this is possible, though extremely difficult (Quinn, 2012, p. 300). Since the brain tries to conform new information according to a set, learned knowledge structure, it is important to pause this process and examine it closely. This can be achieved by challenging the framework with radically different information, as a start. Lyons (2011) goes as far as to say that our brains are wired to assume something before it is seen (2011, p. 305). This, he argues, is also proof that one can do something about it. Calling it the "*cognitive penetrability of perception*", he argues that perception models often miss that the mind can overrule anything we perceive, and that we can consciously do so.

Another solution is to embrace bias, to make it part of the study to highlight how the scholar feels about a subject. This is an attempt at bringing post-processual thinking into academia and "eliminate" the effect of bias by placing the bias in the spotlight. Though possibly helpful in some areas of study, this solution is particularly unhelpful when studying ancient cultures, since one's own bias of perception is then taking over and interpreting all the new perceptual markers in terms of one's own experiences. This produces a work that merely shows a researcher's feelings about a subject, and not the real facts or cognitive perceptions of the culture that created the source.

The influence of bias seems to happen at a stage just beneath awareness (Shepherd, 2011; Quinn, 2012), making it important for a researcher to become more self-aware and dig it out from under awareness, so that it forms a conscious part of reasoning. This will reveal any undue influences that can then be dealt with and ignored before it subconsciously affects one's thoughts and conclusions. Since bias is an almost automatic reaction to outside information, it is imperative that it be caught before it influences information going out (in the form of speech and writing).

Quinn, in his article on "Collection Development and the Psychology of Bias" recommends that a researcher does the following to get rid of inherent biases (2012, pp. 298–199):

- Avoid superficial thinking
- Avoid "top-of-mind" associations
- Avoid "gut-feeling" without sufficient evidence

- Monitor one's mood/psychological state
- Remember and actively combat stereotypes, sterilising the study of them
- Avoid generalization about an article
- Seek articles that challenge one's beliefs
- Challenge one's dismissal of articles/sources as undesirable

These points can be directly transposed onto ancient sources, with some tweaks. Obviously, one cannot dismiss ancient primary sources if one is studying them. Actively seeking ancient sources that challenge one's modern perceptions are also not helpful either, as some sources may be precluded due to the study's limitations. The points that remain are valuable suggestions that can, and should, be heeded in ancient studies.

Superficial thinking is something that all researchers are guilty of at some point. Avoiding it during one's worktime should help focus and narrow down a study. Quick associations and "gut-feelings" usually originate with one's bias. Being mindful of these and self-aware enough to counter associations before they have been sufficiently proven is a very important skill to learn if one is to defeat bias. This is of particular importance when working with ancient sources, specifically Biblical ones, as most modern academics[32] are at least familiar with, and at most steeped in, a Judeo-Christian culture with its own connotations and assumptions surrounding the Bible and Biblical culture. This countering of associations should be regarded as the "first line of defence" against bias seeping in as one is working.

In the same way, stereotypes and generalizations about ancient cultures should be limited. Generalization in ancient studies cannot be avoided completely since it is implicit in writing history. Stereotypes and generalizations learnt through prior education should, however, be taken out of consideration when addressing an ancient source.

This advice is echoed by Pajares (1996), who applies Bandura's (1986) self-efficacy theories on academia. These studies, however, focus more on how academics with lower self-efficacy perform in academia as opposed to those with higher levels. Their conclusions and theories show that it is possible for the academic to change their thought-system and exercise a measure of self-control through self-awareness and what Bandura calls "self-referent thought". This is an element that is also present in Indo-Tibetan Buddhist philosophies (Kobayashi, 2010) with self-awareness and emptying the mind

[32] Modern "Western" academics, myself included.

being two of the main tenets of Buddhist meditation and study. This “physicality of thought”, making one’s thoughts a conscious part of one’s study, is something that has gained traction in recent years (Cerulo, 2014), and is of great value to the field of ancient studies if properly applied.

In practically applying this “physicality of thought”, it is beneficial to physically manifest one’s thoughts in the form of writing them down. In doing so, one automatically concentrates more on what is thought as it requires awareness to pen down. This, in turn, will reveal any patterns of perception that is based on previously existing structures of knowledge. Thus revealed, these patterns can be gauged as either beneficial, detractive, or neutral in the study.

2.1.3 ICONOLOGY, THE PANOFSKY CONNECTION, AND CULTURE

While an emic-etic methodology is well-represented in studies on ancient cultures, it requires a direct and “pure”[33] source. As noted above by AR George, using modern ideas and modern categories to sort or even analyse ancient cultures is dangerous as it implies and asserts a modern order and concept onto a source that may not even fit in such a category.

To prevent this, one must use a form of analysis that does not presuppose nor impose any form of structure onto the source. Rather, this analysis must take its structure and categories from the source itself. This aligns with the ideas of Erwin Panofsky, who was a renaissance art scholar, critic, and pioneer in his field who defined the field of “iconology” as opposed to “iconography”, arguing (Panofsky, 1939, 1955a, 1992) for a dual approach to art analysis where both form and context are to be considered.

Though writing in the context of art and art analysis, Panofsky argued that “iconography” was too focussed on the picture of the image, rather than what made the image. “iconology”, he argued, would expose the cultural thinking behind the image, which would give greater meaning to it (Panofsky, 1955a). His thinking in this mirrors that of Pike as well as emic-etic analytics.

Iconography, he argues, is the study of images, stories and allegories (Panofsky, 1939, p. 11), where too much emphasis is put on prior learning/knowledge about the subject. Instead, Panofsky proposes “iconology”, the key difference being that the former’s use of the suffix “graphy” connects it to writing and description, whereas “logy” would then rather refer to thought and reason (Panofsky, 1955b, p. 32). His reasoning is that to understand the iconography of art (i.e., what the art is describing), one must at the very least be knowledgeable about the art’s context (cultural, social, and religious). To understand the iconology, however, requires a clear head and reasoning, which could also unlock the reasoning behind the art. These two concepts are therefore different in their methodology as well as their end-results. One is not able to understand the iconography of the art without understanding the art’s culture. In many cases, one must be deeply immersed and acculturated to appreciate the finer nuances. One is, however, able to study the

[33] Again, the meaning here is “pure” for the source, i.e., unedited.

iconology and glean some basic Iconography from learning-based knowledge on the culture.

To accomplish an iconological study, Panofsky proposes a three-tiered system where one analyses art through three “layers of meaning” (1955a, pp. 28–31). These layers would force one to look past the iconography of the art, searching for elements which can be gleaned without understanding the culture as a native. These elements are then used to analyse the art from a more universal angle.

The three layers are: The “Primary, or Natural subject matter” – the layer which all people, from any culture would see. According to Panofsky, this layer is identified through a “History of Style,” in which most people would recognise something regardless of background or culture, such as an apple or the act of eating. If we take an example of a picture of a man waving, any (most) culture would identify the man using natural biological markers (face structure, hair length, stance).[34] They would also recognise natural features in the picture (ground/background trees, etc.), as well as more specific details, such as that the man is raising his hand, not his foot. These are basic, natural details common to all humans, and recognisable across cultures. Most basic objects fall in this category.

The “Secondary, or Conventional subject matter” – this layer incorporates some cultural facts. These may be learned, without necessarily understanding why. This layer is identified through a “History of types”, i.e., inside knowledge of how a particular culture views and portrays certain traits and themes. This layer is therefore not universal and can only be properly understood by those with knowledge of how the source culture works. Panofsky uses the example of saints and how they are portrayed. These motifs are readily identifiable, as they are Primary-layer objects (a knife, weapon, and/or flower) that, when superimposed or grouped with another (man, woman, animal, plant, and/or building), create a motif through complex symbology.[35] These motifs can be learned by an outsider.

The “Intrinsic meaning, or Content” – This layer generally requires a more in-depth study of a culture. This layer, according to Panofsky, is understood through the knowledge of

[34] While this study does acknowledge that in recent times there has been much debate around what makes a gender, this study is not commenting on either end of that debate. Here we are simply looking at what most cultures would perceive regardless of whether the “man” is, in fact, one.
[35] This was found to be true of ancient Egyptian symbolism as well, where a hand plus the *Ankh* with its base aligned to the palm of the hand means “Applying/giving life”, whereas the *Ankh* in another position simply means “life” (Coetzee, 2017).

how the human mind works within its home culture. Here the attitudes of the time and S*itz im Leben* of the art are brought in to shed more light on the subject. This layer is a lot closer to iconography than iconology, since it can theoretically still be done by an "outsider" using learnt knowledge. In this layer we are dealing with the cultural perception of the art, so it is the trickiest one to identify and use, especially in a historic context.

Panofsky has, however, been criticised for his muddying of terms, as iconology and iconography are extremely similar, and he never properly differentiated between the two (Hasenmueller, 1978, p. 292). Since then, iconography has been adopted as the only term, and iconology has been relegated to a subdivision of iconography. Despite this, his layered system is particularly significant in an emic-etic context, as it provides an easily accessible tool to prevent one's own cultural perceptions from influencing the work. This is done by attending to basic elements first, then slowly working up to more complex cultural perception elements. This method is useful to this study, since, when one applies (and strictly follows) Panofsky's basic theory of the "three layers of meaning", one generates raw data on which an emic-etic analysis can be done, without imposing any modern meaning on the data beyond that inherent to language.

While we as historians are interested in all three layers of a given artefact or primary source, the method by which we describe each layer is intrinsically linked to the results. In this study, an emic methodology will be added to each layer. This means that each layer and the source alone inform the subsequent layers without external biases creeping in. Even better results can be obtained if each layer is examined emically within the source culture than if modern theories of psychology, analysis, and typology are used to define it. To achieve this, one should refrain from using any modern or foreign concepts or constructs to define ancient artefacts.

Consider, once again, the Tibetan culture. They are an ancient culture that do not worship a god and have no concept that is comparable to the Judeo-Christian concept of a monotheistic, all-powerful deity. They accept only a shamanistic view of spirits as guides (or stumbling blocks) to living according to the teachings of the Buddha, an enlightened person[36].

[36] https://www.britannica.com/topic/Buddhism

A Western scholar, using Panofsky's three-layered system, would immediately classify the Buddha as a deity at the first level. This makes sense if one considers external influences as well, given that the Buddha's teachings are seen as sacred texts to align one's life with and that there are images and statues of the Buddha everywhere. They would compare the images and statues to Christian icons and statues of Christ and Hindu statues of their plethora of gods. In doing so they would insert a foreign concept, that of deism, into their understanding of a non-deistic culture.

However, when using an emic, source-centred method, external comparisons are avoided when doing the initial analysis. Doing this, one quickly realises that where the outsider sees the Buddha venerated and interprets it as worship like unto a deity, the Buddhist sees one who is to be emulated and followed, so that one may become Buddha as well, without referring to the Buddha as a deity. In fact, the term "God" (as we Westerners understand it) does not exist in the Tibetan language, as there are no gods in Buddhism.[37]

The purity of information, and immediate reduction of the amount of bias and external noise is evident when sources are viewed in this way. The only caveat is that the researcher must be extremely focussed and disciplined to achieve this isolation. This includes having complete control over their environment.

This analysis theory is also quite similar to a methodology called "Interpretive Analysis" (Yanow, 2014). This methodology is used in government and business policy research as "interpretive policy analysis" (Yanow, 2014, p. 3). It incorporates a lot of the essence of Panofsky's work, as well as the basic tenet of emic analysis – the understanding and interpretation of the source material in the context of its original creators.

Using interpretative analysis techniques, the researcher is continually challenged by questions about the research material. What is the context of this particular piece of evidence? Dvora Yanow (2014) uses an example where, in a hypothetical study, a researcher compared cereal intakes across different schools in the U.S. After analysing the data as an outside observer (etic analysis), the researcher realised that some schools in a certain region have a lower-than-average cereal intake than others. According to all the data that was gathered this was an unexplainable anomaly that, according to the

[37] Based on growing up in India, living amongst the Tibetans for ten years.

researcher, was impossible. However, along came a colleague who used interpretative analytics and in this way shed light on the situation. Analysing and interpreting the context of the data, the colleague showed that the data was actually normal for the region, where eating cereal with cold milk (as was the norm for the other regions) was seen as inappropriate and culturally bad luck. Eating cereal with warm milk made the cereal less appealing to children, who then opted for other meals (Yanow, 2014, pp. 1–2). Without the cultural context for the data, the cereal researcher would probably have missed why they had an outlier, and thus the study would have been skewed. Using Panofsky's "layers" and emic theory, this cultural phenomenon would not have been obvious to the outside observer (first researcher), as it falls under the "secondary or conventional subject matter" layer and required "insider" knowledge of the source culture to discern.

This "insider" knowledge is known naturally to those who take part in the culture through acculturation. Since ancient cultures are dead, this is impossible so we must create this "insider knowledge" from the sources we have.

2.2 PERCEPTION

Before diving into how the methodologies discussed above will help limit bias, we first need to understand perception to define exactly what the mechanism this study wishes to address is.

The way in which a person perceives the world around them is inherently biased, as perception is a one-way process. Information is processed through various channels and then compared with existing knowledge structures. Once analysed, the information is incorporated into existing knowledge structures as "new" information, processed through known information and understood in terms of past knowledge. See the section above on cognitive studies for a more in-depth look at how this works.

This process means that our perceptions are largely influenced by past experience and, in some cases, by the very things that we perceive. These become hard-coded into who we are. Bypassing perception is therefore admittedly a tall order. However, the author believes that through careful and methodical self-analysis and a structured, disciplined study regime it is possible to break through one's own perception (see above, section 2.1.2, and Lyons, 2011b; Zhao, 2015b) and catch at least a glimpse of what the original author(s) meant. Through emic cultural analysis this is possible in theory, as it has been proven to work with living cultures (see Framework below).

To better understand this process, we can turn to the field of communication studies. Models from this field accurately portray how messages are encoded by an originator of an idea (speaker), then decoded, after interference, at the receiver's end. These interferences are anything that can change or influence the message, including the message's physical attributes, the media it was encoded in, the media we must decode it in (or into), and the understanding (and therefore the personal biases influencing that understanding) of the message.

For instance, an ancient text is inscribed onto a clay tablet (encoded onto media). This clay tablet has inherent flaws: it is fragile and prone to chipping (which could damage the text or even alter a character, thereby changing the meaning). A modern researcher reads the text (as an academic reader of, say, Akkadian) and transcribes (decodes into another media) the text onto paper or computer. Both these mediums are also prone to their own weaknesses, such as spelling errors. These faults are not really fixable, as they are inherent to the mediums involved (clay/paper). However, what is fixable is the understanding of the text itself, and the decoding of the message that the original author of the tablet had wanted to convey.

According to the Tubbs communication model, there are three factors that affect the transmission of a message from sender to receiver. These are the message, the channel by which that message is conveyed, and the Interference that is inherent to the channel. These are created and interpreted differently by the sender and receiver (Tubbs and Moss, 2008, p. 9). If we are to apply this model to ancient studies, we (the scholars/students of ancient culture) become the "receivers", the source material's original author/culture becomes the "sender", and the "message" is the meaning and information that is inherent in the source material.

The original authors of ancient source material did not intend for their message to reach us, in some cases more than 5000 years after they created it. We were not the intended receivers. This creates an internal bias in that the message is created inside a cultural paradigm that we do not have full access to today. This also means that the communication is passive, as opposed to active. There is truly little that we as receivers can do to clarify the message itself since we cannot contact the original author and ask them to clarify as we would with active communication.

The channel, in this case ancient texts and translation, is fraught with its own internal biases. Cultural concepts are lost during translation, as is meaning, and misidentification by scholars can do lasting damage to the understanding of a text or even a culture. The channel has its own interference as well, in the form of damage to the primary source and the length of time it is removed from our own time.

Interference in the channel can also come in the form of academic studies that muddy the water around a topic, particularly if there is no consensus. In this same vein there is personal motive, lack of knowledge about the context of the source, and one's personal culture that imprints certain ideas and ideals on one which then influence how we interpret, and even present, the Message.

The receiver is also subject to personal biases that arise from personal experiences, acculturation to the society they live in and, ultimately, interpretations and connections that their brain makes according to patterns established by the former two interferences.

There is not much one can do about the way in which we receive the message, i.e., the channel. Archaeological practice is, for the most part, a scientific system. Aside from personal biases that slip in during interpretation, the system can, and does, deliver raw sources that can be analysed separately, without bias, by other parties. There is also little one can do about the losses and missing information inherent to studying sources that are older than 1000 years.

The first step of impartial "interrogation" should be done using the basest, most universal of elements that can be discerned in the primary source. Instead of assuming a fact based on prior knowledge structures, the student uses the source to identify the fact. This would then force the formation of a perception to use new knowledge to interpret itself and not be influenced by existing knowledge structures.

Only when they have exhausted what the basic elements in the source mean/denote, do the students turn to other sources for an explanation of the primary source. If a basic meaning cannot be gleaned, interpretation and speculation should be held to a minimum and confined to the most basic of descriptions. Such an essential result would necessitate the use of general terms that are universally understood and that can be understood from the given source, staying away purposefully from context and culture-specific terms.

This suggestion is derived from Erwin Panofsky's "three layers of Meaning" (Panofsky, 1955a; Keenan, 2014), where art is first interpreted solely on the basis of the elements contained in it. Once these elements have been identified as, for example, a tree, a human, some fruit, and so on, a study is done on the cultural context of these elements to garner meaning. Using the same premise on ancient sources to identify the basic elements in a universal fashion before adding cultural bias and perception through an emic-etic study should yield interesting results.

This, then, forms the basis of the framework which is both the core methodology and one of the outcomes of this study. This framework will attempt to guide any person using it to study a primary source with as little bias as possible.

A full methodological discussion, outline and framework outline follow.

2.3 A PRACTICAL EMIC FRAMEWORK (SOLUTION)

An "emic" analysis in ancient Near Eastern studies is, in its most basic form, impossible, as pointed out repeatedly by various scholars (Craffert, 1994, 1995; Cuneo, 2011, and others – see section above). We, as modern scholars, cannot immerse ourselves in the ancient cultures we study, as they no longer exist. Neither can we use proxies in modern cultures to try to emically understand ancient cultures, as the concepts simply become muddled. This was discovered in our sister field of anthropology when anthropologists started to compare Australian Aboriginal mindsets to "primitive" African ones (Jorion, 1983b, pp. 64–65).

Many studies[38] (including my own past studies) have, for instance, used modern-day concepts of culture to explain ancient cultural norms, or compare them (see literature surveys in the relevant chapters, sections 1.4, 3.2.1, and 4.2.1). Though it is entirely possible to do such a comparison, are we as scholars of the ancient Near East really comparing "oranges with oranges"? What proof do I, as a modern scholar, have that I am really understanding the source culture as it understood itself?

[38] At UNISA, for instance, the institutional repository shows research from Law (Van Blerk, 2006) to Iconography (Coetzee, 2017) and Gender Rights (Ferreira, 2004) comparing modern to ancient cultural artefacts. In fact, comparison is the aim of this study too.

This is a conundrum. Unfortunately, nothing short of a time machine will be able to completely resolve this. However, we can attempt to eliminate as much bias as possible through the methods and frameworks used.

Luckily, ancient Near Eastern studies are already familiar with the concept of an emic analysis through the term "*Sitz im Leben*". The term, originally coined in German by Hermann Gunkel, is borrowed from Biblical studies, and, as a concept, it is used to describe the situation, context, and milieu in which ancient people found themselves. An emic analysis would take this concept and attempt to interpret the subject matter through the *Sitz im Leben* of the original culture, using the available information.

However, in a purely emic study, it is important to strictly adhere to an emic mindset, i.e. constantly and consistently asking the question "how did the original author of the work see his work?" This is opposed to an etic mindset where the questions are "what do I see/perceive?" and "what does my culture gain/understand from this?".

By asking oneself questions like these, most superficial bias is cancelled out, as the focus remains on the original author rather than one's own knowledge system. This occurs through a constant internal comparison between what the author believes and knows from studies and what the raw text presents. If these differ, then the source material's presentation has taken over that of the author. Personal biases and ideology become highlighted and eliminated through this kind of focussed and separated self-evaluation.

How does one practically do this, then? How does one clear one's biases and apply etic processes to one's own thought process, whilst simultaneously applying emic processes to the source? The answer lies in focus and self-knowledge, as well as communication studies. Laying out one's relationship with the source material in terms of a communication model clears up any confusion, as well as setting the right tone for the study, placing oneself on the receiving end in terms of the source material. This is then followed up by a self-analysis along etic lines, which self-identifies and corrects any influences that are not from the source itself. Finally, the three layers of meaning developed by Panofsky provides a rigid framework that can be laid over the source material that would automatically guide the study along emic lines. This framework will then be used to study Gilgameš and Shimshôn in the following chapters.

2.3.1 PERSONAL ETIC STUDY

It is possible to eliminate the interference that come from modern sources, the receiver's culture, and preconceived ideas. Through consciously identifying and ignoring these ideas and keeping them out of the study (i.e. doing an etic study on oneself), one can achieve a form of unbiased, neutral "spectatorship" that is necessary for looking at ancient sources and understanding the message that the original author wanted to convey, untainted by the receiver's biases and interferences (i.e. an emic study on the source material).

By focussing one's thoughts and knowing who one is, one can identify these influences and other factors that would influence and form one's perception. Once identified on a personal level, one can then prepare one's mind to enter a state where it is clear of interference by cancelling out these factors in the thought-process and one can achieve a focussed reading of the source material.

Techniques aiming to achieve this are not novel. Almost every religion on the planet has a similar technique to clear the mind before holy texts are studied. In this framework, the author is going to apply the theory of these techniques to clear, not only his own head, but also any influences that may affect how he perceives the sources.

The first step is to assume the role of receiver by consciously placing oneself in a state of mind to study. This is a highly personalised process, as each person will have a different way of achieving this. For myself, this turned out to be an auditory process involving certain kinds of music, as well as physically writing things down.

Once the first step is achieved, the second consists of identifying all possible forms of interference that the receiver can sense and taking note of these physically. This takes the form of an etic study of one's own knowledge structures, backgrounds, and experiences. Influences that can disrupt, change, or distract the process and study should also be identified and shut out where possible, otherwise taken note of and consciously ignored. The third step, then, involves consciously clearing the receiver of all interferences using a technique of meditation and focus. Thus centred, the receiver is ready to begin the study of the source, taking note of all aspects making up the iconology framework developed by Erwin Panofsky.

2.3.2 THE THREE LAYERS OF MEANING

The receiver begins with the three layers of meaning as defined by Panofsky. In this respect, firstly, the primary subject matter, the basic forms, should be identified through questions such as, “What is the primary source that is being studied?”, “What basic form is being portrayed?”, “What is it made of?”, and “Can it be identified without further study and without bias of form?”. This can be done in one go, or form by form.

Once these questions have been answered, the secondary subject matter can be identified by interpreting the basic forms identified earlier through the cultural lens of the relevant culture. However, this is where modern interference can slip in, so an internal baseline must be established first. Identify as much as possible about what the source says about these forms, internally, by comparing each of the basic forms with each other to establish connections, relationships, and knowledge that is inherent to the source. This can then be compared to what is known about the relevant cultural ideas within the broader academic corpus.

Finally, the basic forms, internal forms, and cultural forms can be aggregated to form a whole picture that can be compared on an etic plane. However, here Panofsky’s “intrinsic meaning” should not be identified unless it is readily apparent from the aggregate form. It must be recognised that even though receivers have done all they can to purge interference and bias, they are still external receivers, standing outside the culture being studied. As such, no inferences as to meaning, form, or cultural significance is ever to be made, including in the language used.

The receiver should, however, compare the final forms to what the source says before concluding the study. Comparing the described forms to the source will ensure that it is a faithful representation and no “rogue” ideas slipped in, ensuring that a truly emic analysis has taken place.

Through this method of study, the receiver would arrive at an aggregate form that is as true to the original message as possible, having formed no personal inferences, connections, or ideas and simply reported the forms as seen. These aggregate forms may then be presented, contrasted, and compared to other aggregates to establish cultural links or shared ideas. The significance of this method is that the resultant aggregate form is internally identified in the source and is a product of as little external ideas as possible.

The following is a brief summary of the stages to develop an aggregate (emically formed, "etic enabled") form, such as the ones that will be developed in this study of Gilgameš and Shimshôn:

1. Personal preparation to assume the role of Receiver:
    a. Meditation and self-focus techniques, including audio-stimulants
    b. Identification of bias, interference and influences that act on the Receiver
    c. Eliminate identified bias, interference (including environmental interference) and influences
2. Study the source:
    a. Identify primary subject matter using basic forms as description
    b. Identify secondary subject matter using internal connections as defined by the source
    c. Identify secondary subject matter using external knowledge bases on the culture, and correlate finds
    d. Describe an aggregated form, combining elements from primary, secondary, and internal subject matter
3. Check the aggregate forms against the source for bias
    a. The final form should be checked against the source to make sure no undue influences skewed or introduced foreign ideas into the from
    b. This can happen as a continual reminder/refresher during all stages

These steps are followed practically, in the structure of the study, as well as mentally during the time used to work on the sources/references.

2.4 EMIC FRAMEWORK APPLIED TO GILGAMEŠ AND SHIMSHÔN

In testing the framework, the stories of Gilgameš and Shimshôn will be used to demonstrate its effectiveness and workability.

This emic analysis will establish a benchmark by examining what the ancient people thought of Gilgameš and Shimshôn, and whether they were viewed as heroes in the modern sense. This will also answer the question of what the ancient definition of a hero was in these respective cases (Jackson, 2007).

Integral to this analysis is an ideological study of what a hero meant to ancient Mesopotamians, Israelites, and us. This ideological cultural comparison would help separate modern biases from ancient data and compare the ideologies of the two ancient cultures surrounding heroes. This emic analysis on what the ancient cultures viewed as “heroic”, will look at as broad a spectrum of important and “heroic” people from their respective literary and historic traditions as possible. This is to give a complete-as-possible picture of what the cultures viewed as “hero-worthy” and will include all stories, myths, legends, and records of characters that are highlighted as great people, worthy mentors, and used as examples for future generations.

As part of this analysis of the characters, the study will also look at the kind of words, language, and honours associated with these people. This will help distinguish between heros and people who were simply an important in society. It will also help to identify when a story is royal propaganda. Propaganda might be useful in identifying what the desirable traits in a leader were, so they should not be disregarded.

As stated earlier, in an attempt to keep the immersion in ancient Mesopotamian and Israelite culture and words, the names of the characters studied are spelled in the phonetic forms of the ancient languages and we will not be using anglicised versions of the names. Mesopotamian spelling follows AR George’s translations, and ancient Hebrew (in as much as that can be found) will follow the phonetic spelling found in the Brown-Driver-Brigg’s Biblical Dictionary. Whilst it would be even more correct to simply use the original script to write the names, this would make it harder to understand for the reader and would be excessive.

This analysis will include a literature study of the text to gather information on how the heroes are described. It will also convey which words, phrases, and tones are used. This will reveal similarities in the literary tools and language used to tell the stories. Taken together with the emic "hero-analysis", this literature study will help to paint a picture of what the ancient Sumerians (and later Babylonians) thought of these stories they developed, and how that compares to the Biblical narratives.

The literary comparison between Shimshôn and Gilgameš will be done on a theme-by-theme basis. These themes will comprise piety, loyalty, leadership, combat prowess, romance, relationships, social setting, character role, and plot points (of the story). These themes will show where Shimshôn and Gilgameš are similar and where their stories diverge.

In taking the results of the ideological and literature studies together, a near-as complete picture of what the ancient people saw as a hero should emerge. This picture will also show whether Shimshôn, Gilgameš, and any other ancient figures people call heroic today were regarded as such by the culture of the time. If this differs, then a clear bias in modern studies will be evident. The similarities and differences between Shimshôn and Gilgameš should also show whether the stories are related, and if so, to what extent Shimshôn, which is the younger story, was influenced by that of Gilgameš.

The study process is thus outlined below:

1) Emic study of stories with regard to how the hero is portrayed to establish a cultural benchmark for the heroism portrayed in the story (Chapters 3 & 4, section 1):
   a) Study the Gilgameš epic in relation to its Mesopotamian context and ideology as close to the original contexts as possible, looking at themes, language used, character motivations and symbolism/symbolic actions
   b) Study Shimshôn in a similar fashion, with at least 2 months' gap between the two
   c) Double check that a truly emic conclusion was reached, and not unduly influenced by translation, culture, or author's personal connections
2) Perform internal (intra-cultural) comparison with comparable stories in the same culture to finalize the benchmark, based on the same parameters as the previous study (themes, language used, motivations, etc.) (Chapters 3 & 4, sections 2 & 3):
   a) Compare Gilgameš to Mesopotamian myths, such as Enuma Elish and the myth-cycles surrounding Lugalbanda, Gilgameš's father
   b) Compare Shimshôn to other Biblical stories, such as the annals of the other Judges and Kings.

3) Perform external comparison between Mesopotamia and Israel's heroic "benchmarks" as established in the preceding steps on the same parameters as the internal comparison (Chapter 5)

Through these three main steps, a proper, emic ideology should be presented and can be held as a cultural-historically accurate presentation of Mesopotamian and Israelite heroic ideology.

Any differences between this and modern interpretations will stand out as potential biases that will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis, with the origins examined and discussed to avoid future bias.

2.5 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

In this chapter we examined Pike's emic methodologies, cognitive science, and Panofsky's "iconology" in an attempt to build an emic-based research framework. This framework can be used as a tool by a researcher to attempt to understand the emic, original context of ancient sources and artefacts. In this chapter we honed in on textual analysis and the perception bias that may slip in when one interprets what one sees through one's own knowledge structures. Through firstly identifying and listing one's own potential biases, then focussing on a primary subject matter analysis of the subject, using generic and globally recognisable traits (i.e. that which can be identified without any training or assumptions), an emic first impression can be gained that is as bias-free as one allows it to be. This is variable because perception is controlled by the individual and can, through self-control, be managed to prevent as much bias as possible. Only after this initial analysis was done, should a deeper contextual analysis be made using other knowledge sources.

From cognitive sciences it was shown that research has already confirmed that the personal management of perception is not only possible, but a necessity for modern research (Deliège, 1997; DiMaggio, 1997; Lyons, 2011; Zhao, 2015; Gauchat and Andrews, 2018). This framework and philosophy will now be applied to the study of Gilgameš and Shimshôn in the following chapters.

Chapter 3
Emic & Etic Analysis of the Epic of Gilgameš

Chapter Abstract

In this chapter, Gilgameš is emically studied and analyzed using the ideas set forth in the framework (cf. Chapter 2). First, a basic "subject matter analysis" reveals how the author/editor of the Standard Babylonian version portrayed Gilgameš as a bored king, larger than life, but dissatisfied with his life and seeking excitement and contest to his power/strength. A deeper contextual analysis reveals the details of his actions in the context of the Mesopotamian cultures as we know them. This contextual analysis also explores the various scholarly views on Gilgameš' actions and motivations. Finally, an emically-arrived-at picture of Gilgameš is presented for comparison in Chapter 5.

This chapter directs attention to the emic analysis of the Epic of Gilgameš, using the framework discussed in Chapter 2. The text used is AR George's translation of the epic (George, 2003a, 2003b). This translation is widely regarded as being the best and most faithful modern English translation available (see Chapter 1). The critical edition also includes all cuneiform pieces of the Epic collected as of 2003, and the text incorporates material from all fragments. Although details do differ across the various versions (Sumerian, Hittite, Old Babylonian, and later), the *Standard Babylonian Text* is generally seen as the most complete version, incorporating most aspects of the story and comparable to the final form of Shimshôn as present in the Hebrew Bible. The text in George's translation as a whole can be viewed as representing the story of Gilgameš as told between 3000 and 1000 BC (Kuhrt, 1995; George, 2003a).

The first step in this analysis is a reading of the translation, with notes taken on the primary, or subject matter, layer of the character Gilgameš. This is done by hand, as there is evidence of better "connectedness" and focus if notes are done by hand (Ihara *et al.*, 2021). This will enhance the researcher's connection with the source material through increased focus.

These notes will be followed up with a cultural contextual study of Gilgameš, which will colour the first reading with cultural concepts gleaned first from the text itself, and then from known academic sources. The exercise includes looking at the original meaning (if known) of words used to describe Gilgameš. From these efforts, the intrinsic meaning(s) ascribed to Gilgameš by the original authors and later copiers/storytellers may be gleaned.

The text of Gilgameš is divided into tablets and lines (of text). These correspond to the separate physical tablets and the lines of text on them, counted from the top of the tablet to the bottom. Throughout this study, we will refer to the text using these demarcations.

Before delving into the texts, any prior knowledge and potential sources of interference must be listed and "declared" as they come up, as these will influence the perception of the texts. Though this may seem arbitrary, it serves as a concrete and practical way to keep the study bias-aware, as with the use of original names. Not all these "influences" are negative, however, as sometimes prior knowledge can be useful in adding context. However, by declaring them, it makes the scholar particularly aware of them and forces a cognition of them that might otherwise have been lost or integrated into the study without a trace.

I acknowledge certain prior knowledge systems and possible sources of bias with regard to Gilgameš from the following sources:

1) A master's degree in Ancient Near Eastern Cultures
    a. – prior reading and discussions on Gilgameš in an academic setting
    b. – familiar with ancient Near Eastern cultural norms and traits
    c. – intimately familiar with archaeological theory and practice
    d. – reliance on translations and dictionaries – author does not speak or read ancient Mesopotamian languages
2) A modern Western person that is steeped in modern culture
    a. – familiar with Gilgameš' online imagery in various forms, from semi-historical representations to anime-inspired superheroes
    b. – avid gamer and therefore exposed to games' portrayals of both ancient life and ancient characters
    c. – exposed to modern heroes and concepts in and around heroism
    d. – exposed to modern ideals of males in society, coming from a more traditional patriarchal society (Afrikaner) and religion (Christianity)
    e. – experience in some leadership roles may affect perception of leadership
    f. – lifelong multicultural experiences may change the "common" perception on cultures, but also add other possible avenues of influence

3.1 SUBJECT MATTER ANALYSIS

The subject matter layer is concerned with the attributes that can be discerned by most people, regardless of culture or language. This means that one does not need any cultural training in the source material or source culture to recognize these attributes. To achieve this, the author took notes that purposefully ignore any knowledge or training received about Babylonian culture generally and Gilgameš specifically.

Tablet I gives the most information on Gilgameš description-wise, so most of the information in this section will come from here. The following is a discussion and description of the lines in *Tablet I* that describe Gilgameš on a physical, "subject matter" level. As far as possible, all other 'levels' are avoided in this section.

3.1.1 DESCRIPTION OF GILGAMEŠ TABLET I LINES 1-90

Line 1 introduces Gilgameš as a male character.

Line 2 then goes on to call him "wise in all matters". This is also hinted at in Lines 1 and 3 where it is said that Gilgameš "saw the Deep, the country's foundations", implying that Gilgameš understands the world. Lines 6-8 confirm this, telling us that Gilgameš brought back wisdom and secrets from before the flood. However, at this point in the study we cannot speculate on meaning too much, as this will be discussed later in the contextual and intrinsic sections. These lines serve more as a teaser for the story, than an actual character description of Gilgameš.

Lines 9 to 28 break off from the character of Gilgameš to describe Uruk, the city that Gilgameš rules. As this gives us no new or direct information[39] on his character, we skip to Line 29.

Line 29 describes Gilgameš as "surpassing all other kings" and "heroic in stature". "Surpassing all other kings" would imply that he did something that no other king could, or was a better king than those before him, presumably in Uruk, as this is the city over which he is king. Describing him as "heroic in stature" leads directly into the main issue which this study and framework seeks to address. What exactly is meant by "heroic" in an ancient Babylonian context? Our Western modern bias would have us imagining Gilgameš in some heroic pose or with heroic bearing, inspiring awe through his mere

[39] Indirect inferences are not discussed in this section.

presence. But is this how the original author saw Gilgameš in their mind's eye? This will be explored in the contextual analysis, as we will be looking at contextual clues in the epic, as well as other cultural clues, to determine the meaning here.

Line 30 describes Gilgameš as "Brave" and a "scion of Uruk". Calling Gilgameš a "scion", not just an inhabitant or as hailing from Uruk, speaks to a deeper relationship with the city. Gilgameš is a son of the city, one of its features.

Line 30 also describes Gilgameš as a "wild bull". This implies strength of character and also an untamedness, and physical strength, likened to that of a bull.

Line 31 describes Gilgameš as the "vanguard". In battle, the vanguard would be the first troops to join battle with the enemy. These are usually the strongest, bravest soldiers in the army who inspire the main body of the force to fight hard through their brave actions.

Conversely, Line 32 describes Gilgameš as one who could also be counted on to protect the rear, presumably also in battle. This shows that he is trustworthy as a person.

Line 33 continues the theme of trustworthiness and protection, calling Gilgameš a "mighty bank" that presumably protects from the sides (or flanks, if the military metaphor is continued).

Lines 35 and 36 contain some more bovine symbolism. Gilgameš is described as a "wild bull of Lugalbanda, perfect in strength" and as suckling the wild cow Ninsun. Lugalbanda was Gilgameš' father, so calling him his father's wild bull implies that he was a strong, wild son and powerful symbol of the dynasty. Gilgameš' mother is the Babylonian goddess Ninsun and being nursed by a goddess would surely add to one's strength.

Line 37 describes Gilgameš' physical appearance. He is tall, makes a powerful impression, and incites terror. Gilgameš inspires a sense of awe in those who see him, and a healthy dose of respect. This does not seem like someone you would want to mess with.

Gilgameš is also described as having reached Uta-napishti "through great force" (Line 42). This would imply that he is headstrong and focussed on a task to which he sets his mind.

Lines 45 and 46 describe Gilgameš as being of "kingly stature" and saying of himself "I am the King". This ties into Line 29 and establishes that Gilgameš is no mere pretender to leadership/royalty. He is king by birth and, as implied by the previous lines, by deed.

Gilgameš is then called “two-thirds … god, one-third human” (Line 48). Lines 49 and 50 go on to describe how the gods “drew his form” and “perfected him”. These lines would suggest that there is more to Gilgameš than being an ordinary human. He is divine by birth. This makes him even greater than other kings and adds to the overall image of being “great and powerful”, developed by the previous lines.

Lines 56 to 58 describe Gilgameš as exceptionally large. Some lines are missing, but we have his foot, leg, and stride measurements. According to the text, “A triple cubit was his foot, half a rod his leg. Six cubits was his stride.” Since the original author and audience would be familiar with a cubit, an explanation is warranted:

A Sumerian cubit seems to have been around 500 mm, or 0,5 meters long, according to the *Royal gur-Cube*, found by Eckhard Unger in 1916, dated to c. 2650 BC, that belonged to Naram-sin (Segrè, 1944, p. 74; Powell, 1995, pp. 1995–1996). Another “standard” was found that dated from the 2nd millennium BC, which measured about the same at 533,4 mm (Stone, 2014), though no reference is given. From the *gur-Cube* we can assume a standard of about 500 mm for a Sumerian/Babylonian cubit. Applying this to the measurements given about Gilgameš, it would seem that his feet are about 1,5m long, his leg about 3 meters and his stride about the same. Taken literally, these proportions are anatomically impossible — suggesting a deliberate hyperbole amplifying the "larger than life" image the text constructs around Gilgameš.[40] This is attested to by George and H. Otten, who compare this description to the five and a half cubits (2.8m) ascribed to Eannatum’s version, and the Hittite version of Gilgameš that has him at 11 cubits (5.7m) tall, with a chest that is 9 spans wide (George, 2003a, p. 447). A span is half a cubit, so according to this description, his chest was almost 2.5 m wide! The message here seems to be that Gilgameš is larger than life. He is “great” in every sense of the word.

Line 59 starts with a broken description of Gilgameš’s beard and then hair (Line 60). It is described as long, thick, and healthy. This then leads into Lines 62 and 63, where he is described as incredibly handsome by human standards.

After this, the text changes to describe his leadership attributes. He lords over Uruk “like a wild bull, head held high” (Line 64). He is unbeatable in combat, described as having “no equal when his weapons are brandished” (Line 65). He also keeps his “companions

[40] We will refrain from making any assumptions or connotations about this metaphor beyond the obvious, as the original Babylonian meaning of this metaphor is not apparent in text.

… on their feet by the [or his] ball (or, by extension, sporting contests) (Line 66). Lines 67 to 86 describe how the young men and women of Uruk are dominated, “unfairly vexed”, and not free to live their lives with Gilgameš basically doing with them as he pleases, forcing them into contests and sexually dominating the young women through the practice of giving a new bride to the ruler on the wedding night. This is described as “fierce arrogance” and “tyranny” (Line 69).

This is in stark contrast to lines interspersed with those above where Gilgameš is described as Shepherd of Uruk (Line 71 and 87), who guides the “numerous people” (Line 70 and 88). He is described as “powerful, pre-eminent and expert” (Lines 75 and 90). These are positive aspects of his character and highlighted against the wrongs he commits against the people of Uruk, “the sheepfold”.

Using the term “sheepfold” throughout *Tablet I* to describe the city relates to Gilgameš being seen as the “shepherd”. The sheepfold is supposed to be a haven for the sheep, where they are protected and cared for by the shepherd. However, this shepherd is abusing his position and hurting his flock.

The description of Gilgameš in *Tablet I* then concludes, and the tablet continues with the people’s complaint to the gods about his deeds. The description of Gilgameš paints the picture of a mighty warrior, a proud and powerful king. He is physically imposing, both in character and spirit. He is seen as trustworthy and brave, a strong leader who is larger-than-life. However, he is not without fault and it would seem that his success and leadership have made him indifferent to his role as shepherd, and he has now turned to abusing his “flock”.

3.1.2 SCATTERED DESCRIPTIONS OF GILGAMEŠ

There are more descriptions of Gilgameš scattered throughout the rest of the text. These will be discussed briefly here as they only serve to build on, and expand, the basic description of Gilgameš offered in *Tablet I*, Lines 1-90. Although many phrases may be used to infer certain aspects and characteristics of Gilgameš, these will not be discussed in this section since we are only concerned with the outright description of Gilgameš as given by the text. These will be discussed separately under 3.2 Contextual Analysis below.

3.1.2.1 TABLET I

When the harlot, Shamhat, tells Enkidu about Gilgameš, she calls him "perfect in strength" (Line 211), and describes Uruk as a place where Gilgameš "lords it over the menfolk like a wild bull" (Line 212).

In Line 234, after telling Enkidu about the "festivals" that are held every day with drums and harlots and much noise, Shamhat calls Gilgameš "the man so merry".

In response to Enkidu wanting to unseat Gilgameš as "mightiest in the land" (Line 221), Shamhat speaks the following lines about Gilgameš:

236 He is fair in manhood, he has dignified bearing,

237 his whole person is graced with charm.

238 He has a strength more mighty than you,

239 he is unsleeping by day and by night.

240 O Enkidu, get rid of your sinful intention,

241 as for Gilgameš Šamaš loves him.

This shows us two more attributes about Gilgameš. Firstly, despite all his wrongs, people like Shamhat still appear to like Gilgameš as is shown by her defending him when Enkidu wants to fight him. This might be because he plays into Shamhat's livelihood, who is described as a harlot. Secondly, Shamhat describes him as "fair", "dignified", and "full of charm". This would suggest that he is quite likeable, despite the things he does that bother the people of Uruk.

3.1.2.2 TABLET VI

The Gilgameš as handsome "catch" is echoed later in Tablet VI when Ištar fancies Gilgameš as partner and approaches him.

6 The lady Ištar looked covetously on the beauty of Gilgameš:

7 'Come, Gilgameš, you be the bridegroom!

8 Grant me your fruits, I insist!

9 You shall be my husband and I will be your wife

This section will be discussed in more detail later (See under the Actions of Gilgameš, sub section 3.2.7.4).

3.1.2.3 TABLET VI LINE 2 & TABLET VIII LINE 63

Tablet VI describes Gilgameš's hair while he is cleaning up after he came back from defeating Ḫumbaba:

1 He washed his matted hair, he cleaned his equipment,

2 he shook his locks down over his back.

Tablet VIII also adds some details on Gilgameš' hair. In the midst of Gilgameš's grief over losing his now best friend and companion, Enkidu, Gilgameš was pulling out his hair in mourning:

63 He was pulling out his curly [tresses] and letting them fall in a heap,

Taking these segments together with Tablet I Line 60, we can say that Gilgameš had a long, thick curly mane.

This concludes how the text describes Gilgameš physically. Indirectly, we will now look at Gilgameš's actions through a "contextual analysis", giving us a closer look at his character.

3.2 CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

In the previous section, we looked at the "obvious" physical properties evident in the text which are used to describe Gilgameš. However, what about cultural attributes? What did everyone hearing the story in Mesopotamia have in mind when hearing Gilgameš described as a "king" and "shepherd"? In this section we will "unpack" what it meant for Gilgameš to be Gilgameš in ancient Mesopotamia, as described in the Subject Matter Analysis section (3.1) above.

The Epic of Gilgameš does not give us enough cultural context to infer what many of the contextual meanings may be. Seeing the description of Gilgameš in the epic in the context of ancient Mesopotamia is therefore tricky, as one has to rely on other studies and sources which could possibly contain bias. Fortunately, a strong academic tradition of more than 100 years covering Mesopotamia can help as reference. The problem for this study, however, is that this established academic tradition also has established biases which need to be kept away from any analysis.

To avoid bias in this regard, we will only use the parts of the studies that rely directly on primary sources presented. We will not use theories nor implied or derived explanations of primary sources, especially those that use other cultures[41] to project or infer ancient Mesopotamian cultural ideas.

In the previous section, it was established that Gilgameš was a man, a king, a leader, respected, handsome, and often described as larger-than-life. So, what do these characteristics mean in the context of ancient Mesopotamia? Gilgameš also performed many actions, some of which could be described as downright flippant. How do these portray him when viewed in context?

It should be noted here that in pursuit of the context of Gilgameš, the study is looking at the context of the original author(s) and setting of the story. We are *not* critiquing the historicity of Gilgameš or opining which parts of the story are feasible or not. We will, however, briefly survey the possibilities of being historically accurate for the sake of being thorough, as well as for the sake of identifying idiomatic expressions versus reality.

[41] For some reason, some academics (cf. section 3.2.1 Literature on Gilgameš below) love to use Classical Greek material and project that against Mesopotamian culture to define Mesopotamian ideas. This is wrong and adds a massive margin for Western bias and error.

3.2.1 LITERATURE ON GILGAMEŠ

After completing the first analysis on the basic elements that describe Gilgameš, it is pertinent to look at some academic literature to gain some context. Since there are now other authors, and therefore other "influences", included here, one must take care to avoid including any biases by identifying them and comparing what is said against the source material. If there is insufficient evidence in the text as is, and if the statements are not compatible with the subject matter analysis above, it should be rejected or, at most, included with a disclaimer and explanation as to how it fits.

What follows is a brief review of some of the sources used. More complete arguments are included in the rest of the thesis, where pertinent, as they form part of the general argument in the analysis and would be redundant to repeat.

3.2.1.1 ACADEMIC ARTICLES

The following are articles and books that have bearing on the themes studied here and merit some discussion.

Andrew George is widely recognized as the foremost expert on Gilgameš. His 2002 translation of the Epic of Gilgameš forms the basis for this chapter, being both complete and exhaustive (at the time). His 2004 paper, "The Epic of Gilgameš: thoughts on genre and meaning" explores different aspects of the Epic of Gilgameš, especially as to its classification.

George argues that despite the recent practice to stop classifying ancient Mesopotamian texts using anachronistic labels, scholars persist in identifying the Epic of Gilgameš as a myth or legend as fits their view. This, he argues, is problematic of the way that scholars approach the work (George, 2004, pp. 9–11). However, he also notes that modern labels matter little if the scholar isn't predisposed by them. What does matter, he argues, is that each interpretation has a useful contribution to studying the text in the modern context. He warns, however, that our modern understanding of the texts should not detract from the fact that the ancient authors and audiences considered stories about Gilgameš to be historical, or at least based on some historical fact (George, 2004, pp. 15–16). This view aligns with the aim of this study, which is to examine the source material through the eyes of the original audiences and authors, as much as possible.

Alster (1974) takes a similar approach, discussing the pragmatic nature of Mesopotamian heroes. He argues that their stories, specifically Gilgameš, are products of the belief that history is an “endless succession of cyclic periods” (1974, p. 60) as found in Iranian and Indian religions. However, his greatest contribution, at least to this study, is that he points out how one should let the texts speak for themselves and not impose too many modern constraints and ideals upon them. To this end, he contextualizes different texts, concluding that they hold a deeper value that is missed because scholars do not respect the spiritual achievements of ancient Mesopotamia in their own right (Alster, 1974, p. 60).

In his 1986 article titled “Ištar’s Proposal and Gilgameš’s Refusal: An Interpretation of The Gilgameš Epic, Tablet 6, Lines 1-79”, Tziva Abusch questions Gilgameš’s motives for refusing Ištar’s proposal. He argues that Ištar is goddess of the underworld and that her proposal is actually a trap designed to ensnare Gilgameš as Lord of the Underworld, thus dooming him to it. Gilgameš sees through this and this is why he rejects her. This point of view Abusch bases on a reading of several *funerary texts* with similar formulae. As intriguing as this possibility may be, it seems implausible. Firstly, Ištar is not generally seen as the goddess of the underworld according to ancient sources and modern interpretations, Ereškigal is. In *Tablet VII, Line 203* Ereškigal is also called just that:

203 [there sat the] queen of the Netherworld, Ereškigal

Ištar is seen as the goddess of love (sexual), fertility and war. The only connection to the underworld in the Epic of Gilgameš is where Ištar threatens to “smash the underworld…” (*Tablet VI*, Line 97) and flood the world of the living with the dead who will devour the living, if her father, Anu, does not give her the Bull of Heaven. Because she has to smash or destroy the underworld rather than simply open it and allow the dead to rise, shows that she does not have the power over the underworld that Abusch would ascribe to her, at least not in the context of the Epic of Gilgameš. In *Tablet XII*, she is also clearly not in charge of the Underworld, since she isn’t mentioned once. In other sources, like “Descent of Inanna to the Underworld”, Ereškigal and Ištar are two very separate beings and are called “sisters”, with Ereškigal being the ruler of the underworld[42] and not Ištar.

Secondly, whilst the *funerary texts* might have a similar formula (and might actually be something the author of Gilgameš was playing at), this does not connect them at all. The other two texts he uses are both negative, with Ereškigal (the actual goddess of the

Underworld) trying to entrap Nergal, and a demon ensnaring a woman. Though similar, there is nothing else in the story of Gilgameš that supports the connection suggested by Abusch. In light of this, his proposal, whilst interesting, seems to be a case of "it looks like it could fit", while it does not really fit into the context or story.

In 2001, Abusch traced the development of the story of Gilgameš through three versions in'*The Development and Meaning of the Epic of Gilgameš: An Interpretive Essay*', namely the Old Babylonian version, the eleven-tablet version, and the twelve-tablet version. He points out that in the Old Babylonian version, Gilgameš is a man, portrayed as a man. He is then progressively portrayed as more-king-than-man and later as a god in the 11-tablet and 12-tablet versions. This progression to "god", Abusch argues, is evident in the endings of each version. In the Old Babylonian version, Gilgameš never sees Ūta-napišti, and is turned back by the Tavern woman, Siduri, after she teaches him to be a civilized man again. In the 11-Table*t* version, Ūta-napišti is the one who teaches Gilgameš about the grand scheme of things and how a leader and a king should act. In the 12-Tablet version, the story ends in the underworld, where Gilgameš has now become its ruler, according to Abusch.

The situation does not seem as clear-cut as Abusch makes it out to be, however, since the *Standard Babylonian* version (what Abusch calls the 12-Tablet version) contains much the same content as the 11-Tablet version, with the exception of the outlying twelfth tablet. In this tablet, Enkidu, who is suddenly alive, goes down to the netherworld to fetch Gilgameš's ball and mallet,[43] which had fallen down there. Enkidu is captured by the goddess of the Netherworld, and Gilgameš enlists the gods to help him get Enkidu back. They only manage to resurrect his ghost, who then proceeds to list, in much detail, the systematic suffering and despair in the Netherworld, including the rotting of one's sex organs, showing Gilgameš that all pleasure and "life" is drained here.

Nowhere in this *Tablet* does Gilgameš enter the Underworld, and it does not mention Ištar at all. Abusch is casually inserting a theory from the previous article about Ištar trying to trick Gilgameš into becoming the god of the Underworld, with as much proof as there was there.

[43] One is immediately reminded of the "ball" with which Gilgameš terrorized the people of Uruk in *Tablet I*, something that AR George also notes (George, 2003a, p. 449).

The journal, "Gilgameš and the world of Assyria", contains journal articles by eminent scholars like AR George on Gilgameš. Two French articles in this journal, both by Jean-Daniel Forest, "L'Epopée de Gilgameš et la Genèse" (Forest, 2007a) and "L'Epopée de Gilgameš, ses origins et sa postérité" (Forest, 2007b) illustrate the hypothesis of this study clearly. The articles explicate how modern concepts are continually pulled into studies on ancient people and how these then affect the study. Forest continually subjects Gilgameš and Enkidu to modern ideals and ideas, going as far as to call Gilgameš an archetype for religious change and "hero that challenges the status quo". This account contradicts the accepted academic position that Gilgameš was repentant at the end of the epic, captured in Ūta-napišti's warning to Gilgameš that "death and life they did establish/ the day of death they did not reveal" when Gilgameš sought the plant that grants everlasting youth (George, 2003a, p. 669), *Babylonian Tablet X*, Line 321-322).

Furthermore, and proving the point of this study, Forest calls Gilgameš "*un géant à la force surhumaine*" (p. 27 a great/mighty superhuman), citing his mother's divinity and father's "heroic" status. Nowhere in the original text is Gilgameš even alluded to as a "superhuman", simply a "great king". In fact, this supposedly "superhuman demi-god" requires the help of the gods, specifically Shamash, quite often during the story. This is a perfect example of how a modern concept of what we believe a superhuman is, is superimposed on an ancient "hero" that superficially meets our modern criteria.

Forest also calls Enkidu the embodiment of Capricorn in the story, citing his wild nature. Each stage of the story is then similarly linked to a modern zodiac sign, citing the actions of the main characters and their changing personalities, with the story arch cycling through the twelve zodiacs we know today. This is a problematic connection, as the Greek zodiac is significantly younger than the Babylonian one with no indication that the constellations were similar before the first millennium BC. Forest acknowledges this by conceding that the zodiac connections were probably made during the first millennium BC and could therefore be accepted as celestial cyclical periods. However, he does not explain how these familiar Greek zodiac signs are connected to the unique Babylonian zodiac, which one can assume the author of the Babylonian Epic of Gilgameš was familiar with.

The dangers of this line of thinking and modern bias is also shown in Forest's work (Forest, 2007a) where his study takes an unnecessary detour to explain how Jesus' story, as told in the Gospels, also conforms to this supposed cycle of zodiac symbolisms. This, he argues, is proof that the Gospels must be a literary work of fiction as no person can consciously live according to this cycle. There is, however, no evidence of the gospels being written in the manner of this cycle, and there is considerable evidence for the historicity of Jesus' life[44].

In *Gods and Heroes of the Ancient World Series: Gilgameš*, Pryke (2019) Introduces the character of Gilgameš, his origins, and stories. In the seventh chapter, Pryke speaks of the reception and influence of Gilgameš on the rest of the world, including on the Hebrew Bible. Pryke's book is, unfortunately, filled with modern ideas and concepts being imposed on ancient ones. However, as stated in her introduction, this is intentional with the goal of making Gilgameš more accessible to the general public (Pryke, 2019, pp. 8–9). Pryke also acknowledges the anachronistic nature of using terms like "king" and "hero", as these concepts carry their own modern meanings that might not be accurate in terms of ancient cultures (2019, p. 68).

Pryke discusses the possible influence of Gilgameš on the Hebrew Old Testament. She concludes that based on current evidence, there probably was only tertiary influence in the form of shared cultural values and much later influences of Greek culture. In this, she is, however, influenced by Forest. Forest's work is, as shown earlier, completely unrealistic and relies on very shaky connotations between Greek and Mesopotamian mythologies that simply do not work. Through this very tenuous strand, Pryke mentions, the flood, and several other concepts as possibly having influenced the Old Testament writers. Though a possibility, all her reviewed material is of such a general nature that a better explanation is that it only proves that both Gilgameš and The Old Testament are part of the greater culture of the ancient Near East with its shared cultural concepts. This is, in fact, conceded by Pryke (2019, p. 195) when discussing the similarities in "wisdom" literature and how the Biblical versions are closer to the older editions of the story of Gilgameš.

Interestingly, Pryke claims that "Gilgameš and his companion Enkidu have been compared to Samson since the late 19th century" (2019, p. 199). There is no reference given for this statement and considering that neither this author nor the entire UNISA Post

[44] This is the general consensus of most modern scholars, cf. VanVoorst, 2003; Casey, 2010 and Johnson, 2010.

Graduate Library Department could find a single article[45] on this besides the thesis mentioned earlier, this statement is probably either based on assumption or was written in error. Pryke probably meant that where Gilgameš the lion fighter is often compared to Herakles the lion fighter, Shimshôn was being compared to Gilgameš through Herakles being so often compared to Shimshôn on the same grounds (See Chapter 5, Section 5.5 Connection with Lions).

De Villiers (2006) also provides a basic overview of much of the material that Pryke covered regarding the parallels between Gilgameš and the Bible. However, De Villiers also fails to recognise that all the examples are merely proof of the same cultural contexts, not direct influence of one on the other.

Harris is credited by George as having risen to the challenge of bringing a multi-disciplinary study to Mesopotamian texts (George, 2004, p. 2). Of pertinence to this study, Harris wrote a 1992 article, titled 'The Conflict of Generations in Ancient Mesopotamian Myths', in which she highlights the inter-generational conflicts that are readily apparent in most Mesopotamian manuscripts. Using legal texts which outline real-life situations in Mesopotamian family life, Harris manages to present a convincing picture of Mesopotamian family dynamics and generational conflicts (and their resolution in the courts of the time). These accounts are invaluable in exploring some of the contexts in which Gilgameš finds himself.

[45] Mobley's *Samson and the Liminal Hero in the Ancient Near East*, reviewed later in Chapter 4, Section 2, also does not compare Gilgameš to Shimshôn on a direct basis, rather using broad topics to group Shimshôn in with "wild men" known in the ANE mythological corpus. I think the issue is that, whilst many scholars might compare them superficially as part of the heroic corpus of the ANE, they are not compared on a character-to-character basis as in this thesis.

3.2.1.2 REFERENCE WORKS

Reference works are not listed and discussed, as they only contributed to the contextual picture of Gilgameš, as well as providing details that the ancient Mesopotamians would be familiar with, like their measurement of cubits, the meaning of words, and social norms and interactions. In this regard, the articles edited by Sasson in CANE are especially useful for their encyclopedic neutrality and facts. These are listed in the bibliography at the end of the thesis.

For Sumerian literature, the Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature (ETCSL) is used (Black *et al.*, 1998). In text, manuscripts are referenced according to their corpus number, e.g. "The Sumerian King List (ETCSL 2.1.1)". The Concise Dictionary of Akkadian (Black *et al.*, 2000) is used for word definition lookups.

3.2.2 DATING GILGAMEŠ

Before looking at the contextual clues in the story, we must first determine during which period of Mesopotamian history the story takes place, as this will lead us to the physical cultural traits to look out for. Mesopotamia has had a long and rich cultural history during which social institutions changed significantly. The earlier city-states became towns in ever-expanding kingdoms and empires, which significantly changed the role of the leader of a city-state (Knapp, 1988b; Kuhrt, 1995a; Postgate, 1995a; Yoffee, 1995).

According to the Sumerian king-lists, Gilgameš was a real king who lived during the Early Dynastic period (3100-2900 BC) of Mesopotamia. However, these lists are notoriously incorrect and contain many anachronisms and obvious fabrications. Gilgameš, for example, is credited as the sixth king after "the flood", with a reign of 126 years, after a series of other kings credited with much longer reigns (with Etana being given a reign of 1560 years) (George, 2003a, p. 103). These lists were never meant as a historic record and were mostly developed during the so-called "Sumerian Renaissance" of the Ur III period, hence their exaggerated content (Kuhrt, 1995). This has led some scholars to believe that Gilgameš might have been associated with a god who was worshipped during the Early Dynastic period and later came to be "humanized" in various stories and myths (Black and Green, 1998). This could be attested to in the name of Gilgameš in some documents from First Millennium Babylon where Gilgameš is spelled as "*Gil-sag-mes*", possibly trying to link him to a lesser-known Early Dynastic period deity called *Pabilsag* (George, 2003a, pp. 85–86).

George, in the research section of the Epic of Gilgameš, dates Gilgameš to about the same time, with Sumerian and Akkadian poems and prose starting from about 2300 BC (George, 2003a) which mention Gilgameš as a literary character and mythological "hero". The Ur III period (pre-2000 BC) and associated libraries are especially full of older fragments and versions of Gilgameš-related stories, together with stories about Enmarkar and Lugalbanda, his predecessors (if the Sumerian king-lists are to be believed). However, most of these date from Late Sumerian or Early Babylonian literary traditions (George, 2003a). To date, no contemporary reference to Gilgameš exists for the period in which he was supposed to have reigned, which lends some credence to the theory that Gilgameš may be no more than a mythological figure.

Here, one must, however, distinguish between the quasi-historical Gilgameš and the Gilgameš of the epic. The epic represents the ideals of the author at that time, not the supposed historical king. One must also remember that, by the time the "complete" set of the Gilgameš Epic was finalised in Old Babylonian (possibly around 1500 BC), the culture had changed from Sumerian to Babylonian.

Old Babylonian culture was derived from Sumerian culture and therefore many of the ideals present in Sumerian were likely carried over into Babylonian. Babylonian authors took older Sumerian works as "classical" literature, and the highest form of literary arts (Ellis, 1976; Dalley, 1993; Bottéro, 1995; Michalowski, 1995; Potts, 1997). As part of this movement, the Epic of Gilgameš in its twelve-tablet form was standardized from a collection of older Sumerian poems and prose (George, 2004, pp. 6–8).

Dating the content and context of the text in the Standard Babylonian version is therefore more complex than simply assigning a period and studying social interactions at that time. It represents the thoughts of the older Sumerian, as well as the derived Babylonian cultures. To properly contrast the epic against its contextual backdrop, one should look at both ancient Sumerian, as well as Babylonian, cultural values.

3.2.3 LEADERSHIP AND KINGSHIP

In ancient Mesopotamia, the apex of society was the king and the priesthood (Margueron, 1995; Roaf, 1995; Robertson, 1995; Stol, 1995). In Gilgameš's time, each city-state had a patron deity, and the priesthood of that deity shared ruling power with the secular king. This shared authority usually led to much internal strife and court intrigues, with kings claiming to be appointed by the gods themselves, and priests vying for relevance in court. Often, this would also result in inter-city warfare with kings trying to control the temples (and therefore taxation) of more well-to-do cults (Kuhrt, 1995; Roaf, 1995; Charvát, 2017).

This situation is somewhat mirrored during the later Babylonian period, although city-states slowly ceased to exist (Kuhrt, 1995; Postgate, 1995). This could be part of the reason why the Babylonian version does not contain the Sumerian stories about how Gilgameš went to war with the city state of Kish and other stories less-relatable to a Babylonian audience.

In the case of Uruk, Gilgameš's city, historical kings held the title of *En*, which is the title of "high priest" (Postgate, 1995). This would clearly set the king above the priesthood in that city, which is probably why the clergy don't play a massive role in the story. Gilgameš also has direct access to the gods in the story, something that is the usual purview of priests. In fact, the lines seem so blurred at Uruk during this time that the palace and temple seemed to have been one physical building (Robertson, 1995).

In other city states, the *En* was not always the king. In Ur, for instance, the *En* was a priestess who lived in a cloistered community and represented the earthly Inanna (Postgate, 1995, p. 398). Uruk, therefore, represents a consolidation of secular and religious power in one person. This would also explain some of Gilgameš's character traits (see below, section 3.2.7 Actions of Gilgameš).

In Mesopotamian art from the UR III period, rulers are usually shown as physically larger than their subjects (Postgate, 1995). This ties into the larger-than-life portrayal of Gilgameš in the text, specifically his larger-than-life dimensions.

Leadership by "divine right" is something that was part and parcel of the Mesopotamian context. Kings would often include the names of various gods in their genealogies to prove that they ruled through a "divine birthright". Some kings, especially usurpers, would invoke the name of a popular god to legitimise why they could depose the old king (Kuhrt, 1995; Postgate, 1995; Peterson, 2018).

During the city-state period, kings would often portray themselves as “shepherds” of the “flock” in the city. This speaks to the king’s role as protector and leader of the population of the city. Any problems and needs the people have, were brought to him and he would solve problems and resolve disputes (Klein, 1995; Postgate, 1995). In this, we see a “father figure”, one who cares for the needs of the population and protects them against outside forces (Jacobsen, 1963, 1989).

At Uruk, this would be especially pronounced with the king not only in charge of the physical needs of the populace but also the spiritual. With the title of *En*, the king of Uruk was both the people’s physical shepherd as well as their spiritual one, responsible for maintaining the religious rites and ceremonies that would bring divine blessing on the city.

3.2.4 MALE IN MESOPOTAMIAN SOCIETY

Mesopotamia, being largely patriarchal, meant that leadership and being male usually went hand in hand, though there were exceptions. However, in Mesopotamia, no female was ever made ruler over a city state. Being a male also granted certain privileges, such as being socially free and able to determine one’s own life generally. In contrast, women were often told what to do, who to marry, and how their lives would be lead.

Marriage contracts and official documents from the UR III period seem to show women, and indeed any unmarried child, in a completely subservient role. In these households, the father (or if he is dead, the mother) would decide who their children married. Sons were given a wife who was chosen by the father, and daughters were given to families which their fathers chose (Stol, 1995, pp. 488–489).

Daughters were often bought for the sons of a family, as the wording of many marriage contracts show. They were seen as daughters under the authority of their father-in-law, until they had children. (Greengus, 1995, pp. 479–480; Stol, 1995, pp. 489–490). Sons, similarly, were treated as lower rank, until such time as the father had died, or the son had established a self-sustaining family of his own (Harris, 1992; Stol, 1995, pp. 488; 491).

This pattern established the father-figure as a ruler of his household. However, the household was still governed by certain rules and rights. The patriarch could not act unfairly or despotically towards the family. The father was, like the king, expected to be fair and was judged by society and the gods. Family members seemed to have the right to enforce familial law if it wasn't being followed correctly by the father (Harris, 1992; Greengus, 1995). In fact, in *The Conflict of Generations in Ancient Mesopotamian Myths*, Rivkah Harris mentions two cases where children took their father to task legally for not fulfilling his role or breaking the law (Harris, 1992, p. 623; 625). This shows that while institutionalised patriarchy was enforced, it was regulated and men were not above the law.

Women could own property and assets outside the control of the patriarch and could become the head of the household should the patriarch die (Greengus, 1995; Stol, 2016). This gave women more power than one would expect. Women could not initiate divorce, but if a man initiated it and the woman was found without fault, she was remunerated and protected against him (Greengus, 1995).

In Gilgameš, this patriarchal pattern is followed, with Gilgameš imposing his will on the young people of Uruk. These "young people" are presumably so named because they are younger than Gilgameš, and socially, therefore, not worth listening to. They have to cry out directly to the gods to intervene, who then do. This is similar to the cases Rivkah Harris mentions, in which family members have to bypass the patriarch and go directly to the authorities. Similarly, Gilgameš as the father-figure over Uruk, is the defender and protector of Uruk, and yet he does not care for the sheep of his "sheepfold" as he should. This neglect necessitates "crying out" to the gods, who then send Gilgameš's mother, Ninsun, to speak with him and inform him of the plan with Enkidu. From this storyline, even though Ninsun is a goddess, she is also seen as the matriarch of Gilgameš's family. Were this not so, Šamaš would have spoken with Gilgameš directly, as he seems to have no trouble interacting with him during the fight with Ḫumbaba. We thus see Mesopotamian culture reflected in the Epic of Gilgameš (Greengus, 1995; Stol, 1995). It is a good example of "art imitating life", where social norms and institutions are anachronistically canonised in stories which show how the gods and great people obey the status quo/laws of the time.

3.2.5 KINGLY HEROISM IN MESOPOTAMIA

Now that we have established Gilgameš in his role as a male and leader in ancient Mesopotamian society, we need to look at what makes him stand out in Mesopotamia, what makes him "surpass all other kings". For this, we need to look at Gilgameš's peers, the kings of Uruk: Enmerkar and Lugalbanda. These kings were the subjects of quite a large part of the Sumerian literary corpus. It is against this background that we must look at how Gilgameš was portrayed in the Epic of Gilgameš.

The legendary founder of Uruk, Enmerkar, was celebrated as a great king and founder of the city of Uruk. He is also the first "semi-historical" king that ruled in Uruk as recorded by the Sumerian Kings List (ETCSL 2.1.1). This list records Mes-kiaĝ-gašer, Enmerkar's father, as the one who founded Eanna's temple. In the next generation, Enmerkar built Uruk. Mes-kiaĝ-gašer's father was supposedly the sun god Šamaš, which lends some divine credibility to the rule of the dynasty founded by Enmerkar who was Šamaš's grandson.

Enmerkar is also credited with the invention of cuneiform writing in *Enmerkar and the Lord of Arakka* (ETCSL 1.8.2.3). However, from this text, it becomes clear that the story is less about the invention of writing than it is about showing Enmerkar's title as King of Kings and, and by extension, Uruk's superiority over a rival kingdom (Katz, 2017).

Lugalbanda is Enmerkar's son and, according to the Epic of Gilgameš and other manuscripts,[46] the father of Gilgameš. He is actually deified together with Gilgameš, in tablets[47] dating from the Ur III period, albeit mostly as a local patron deity of Uruk. During the Ur III period there are at least two kings who claim a personal link to Lugalbanda. King Shulgi of Ur claims spiritual descent from Lugalbanda and kinship with Gilgameš. King Sin-kasid of Uruk name Lugalbanda as his personal god to whom a shrine is built(Jacobsen, 1989; Alster, 1995).

After Lugalbanda, a "Dumuzid the fisherman" succeeds him. What is interesting is that Dumuzid is mentioned in the epic as one of Ištar's previous lovers who has ended up as a "colourful *allalu* bird with a broken wing". Gilgameš refuses to marry Ištar and cites this event as an example of what happens to her lovers. Gilgameš pronounces this right after receiving the offer to also become a lover of Ištar and by extension take his place next to her as keeper of the temple and "husband" to Inanna/Ištar on earth (George, 2003a). In

[46] Gilgameš and Ḫuwawa (Version A&B) (ETCSL 1.8.1.5 & 1.8.1.5.1), King Shulgi Hymns (ETCSL 2.4.2.1-26) and various other praise hymns that mention this (Cf ETCSL 4-Hymns)
[47] Shulgi A, D, P and, W (ETCSL 2.4.2.1;4;16;23), A hymn to Hendursaja (ETCSL 4.06.1), The lament for Sumer and Urim (ETCSL 2.2.3), amongst others.

the king list, Gilgameš then succeeds Dumuzid. In the story, Ištar's attempted seduction of Gilgameš may allude to a succession from Dumuzid to Gilgameš, as per the king list.

Most of our sources on Lugalbanda, Gilgameš, and Enmerkar come from the Ur III period, which shows that the literature built around these kings is part of a concerted effort to create a "divinely inspired monarchical line" to which the later kings of Ur III, Lagash, and other cities could connect themselves and, through this, to derive more power and legitimacy to claim the blessings of Ninsun (Sjöberg, 1973, p. 98).

3.2.6 GILGAMEŠ OUTSIDE 'GILGAMEŠ'

In this study we are concerned with how the ancient Mesopotamians saw Gilgameš and, therefore, how we as modern scholars might see him. It is therefore worth taking a look at how Gilgameš is perceived by modern scholars to have influenced other literary traditions.

AR George reviews Gilgameš's possible influence on Greek literature, especially Homer, as put forward by West and Absuch (George, 2003a, pp. 54–57). Martin West, in *The East Face of Helicon* (1997), gives an exhaustive review of the studies done before 1997. Most of these, however, seek to connect ancient Mesopotamian literary tradition with the more well-known Greek tradition as part of the subconscious "orientalist" tendencies researchers exhibit when it comes to connecting the ancient Near East and Europe.

This proclivity is quite evident in West's linkage of a passage from the *Iliad* where the gods divide up the earth into three spheres of influence. Here, Zeus takes the sky, Poseidon the waves and Hades the "misty dark". West then proceeds to liken this myth to a passage in the *Atrahasis* myth (the Mesopotamian creation cycle) where Anu takes the sky, Enlil the "earth", and Enki the seas (West, 1997, pp. 109–110).

At face value these passages seem similar, as these are roughly equivalent gods (Anu being the father of Mesopotamian gods, Zeus being the father of the younger Greek gods) dividing up the same spheres of influence (West, 1997, p. 110). This view does not take into account the complexity of Mesopotamian gods, nor does it show any correlation between Mesopotamian beliefs and Greek ones.

Although Anu is often equated with Zeus, Enki and Enlil are problematic for West's argument. Enki literally means "lord of the Earth", whereas "Enlil" was the god of everything "between the earth and sky" and was widely seen as the keeper of magic and life (hence his association with the *apzu* waters) (Wiggermann, 1995). In fact, the Mesopotamian text quoted by West reads “Anu went up to the sky, [Enlil took] the earth for his realm; the bolts, the trap-bars of the sea were e[stablished] for Enki the wise chieftain.” Nowhere is there a mention of an underworld[48], which, according to Mesopotamian beliefs, was ruled by a goddess named Ereškigal. If these passages were similar, then wouldn’t Ereškigal be mentioned as the god of the underworld and “misty dark” as Hades is claimed in the Greek passage?

Cultural diffusion and the subsequent interchange of ideas and ideologies is something that is well attested and there is a large body of evidence to show how many ancient Near Eastern ideologies spread to the Greek, and later Roman, cultures and eventually influenced European thinking. But just because there are elements that have crossed over, does not mean that every literary work in Greek literature was influenced by Gilgameš or Mesopotamian ideas, as West implies in his conclusion (1997, pp. 625–630).

The only thing that we can say for certain form the available evidence is that the concept of gods having dominion over articular parts of creation was a concept that may have diffused from Mesopotamia to Greece. However, as shown in the passages that West used, the Greeks did not seem to copy Mesopotamian gods and beliefs. If they had, the gods and realms of their control would line up much better, with a clear equivalent god in each pantheon.

The problems with West’s thinking have been sufficiently pointed out by George (2003a, pp. 54–57), concluding that any similarities between the Homeric works and Gilgameš could just as well be down to the fact that ancient Mesopotamian motifs were exported in a “raw” (i.e., unincorporated in a literary work) form to the Greek city-states.

In more modern times, after the rediscovery and popularisation of the Epic of Gilgameš in 1849AD, Gilgameš and Enkidu have entered modern pop culture through various versions and translations of the story into more accessible languages.[49]

Gilgameš is also the inspiration for various novels, and characters in novels, such as “Gil Gamesh” from *The Great American Novel* by Phillip Roth (1973). Saddam Hussein closely identified himself with Gilgameš and his book, *Zabibah and the King* (2000), is

[48] Unless one equates the “waters” with the “underworld”, as is a Mesopotamian belief.
[49] In addition to being published in both academic and colloquial English, the Epic of Gilgameš has also been translated into every major language.

loosely based on his version of the epic. He also referenced and compared himself to Gilgameš in his resignation speech to his generals (Damrosch, 2006).

Though any resurgence of popular interest in ancient sources is good, modern pop culture can skew history. There are also several anime and manga[50] that portray Gilgameš in a way that would seem completely alien to the Middle East, and especially to the ancient Sumerians. These versions take elements from the original Epic, such as his leadership style, trust in his own strength, and quest for immortality, and spin them into a typical Japanese-style anime story that borders on the ridiculous[51] when compared to the original, it would be wholly unrecognisable to the original author(s) of Gilgameš. It must be noted, however, that the over-the-top dialogue and fight scenes do echo what one encounters in the Epic, especially where Enkidu and Gilgameš slaughter the Bull of Heaven. Although the intention of these artists is not to present a Gilgameš that is true to the original Epic, these stories do serve to skew our modern understanding of history.

An animated Gilgameš also appears in the online battle arena game Smite,[52] which pits the gods and mythological characters of various cultures against each other. Gilgameš is present as a very powerful warrior who prefers to get close to his enemies and overpower them with strong attacks. The developers chose to stay true to the original epic, with Gilgameš's ultimate ability being "the Winds of Šamaš," which pin an enemy in a whirlwind. This is similar to the epic when Šamaš helped Gilgameš and Enkidu by pinning down Ḫumbaba with the winds.

According to the International Movie Database (IMDb), two short films have been made of the Epic of Gilgameš: Peter Ringgaard's 2011 film (34 minutes long)[53] and Joseph Dankha's 2012 7-minute short[54]. There is also a planned animated film based on the Epic of Gilgameš, called *Gilgamesh*, directed by José M. Ferrucci and Tomás Lipgot, however

[50] Japanese "anime" style comic books
[51] Specifically, *Gilgamesh* and *Fate*. In both of these a character called "Gilgamesh" is presented in Japanese style and has features that are vaguely similar to the original. Japanese anime and manga are, in my opinion, the lowest form of storytelling as the focus is invariably on the smooth-skinned, unrealistically sexual portrayal of the characters who are usually portrayed as a mix between prepubescent children and adults, with their genders completely mixed up and sexuality excused by a flimsy "this character looks 6 but is actually 1000 years old so it's not paedophilia".
[52] Developed by Titan Forge Games and published by Hi-Rez Studios in 2015, the game is still supported and has an active player-base of which I was a part of. (https://store.steampowered.com/app/386360/SMITE/)
[53] https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1920943/
[54] https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2518768/

no other information is available as of 2024, beyond its 1h30m runtime, making it the longest and, potentially, most complete version of the epic on film.

3.2.7 THE ACTIONS OF GILGAMEŠ

The story of Gilgameš can be divided into different sections based on the actions of himself and some main characters that shed light on the character of Gilgameš. These actions show character development and his growth as a ruler with empathy towards life and its conditions in ancient Mesopotamia. At first, he is called out as a bad domestic ruler, then he is given Enkidu by the gods as a counter. However, the two of them team up and, against the advice of the gods, go on an adventure to kill Ḫumbaba. Ištar then propositions him, which he promptly and disrespectfully declines, ending with the death of the Bull of the Heaven. After Enkidu dies because of their actions, Gilgameš seems to have learnt a form of empathy and love for his fellows. This leads to him going on another quest, again ignoring the gods' advice, to find the tree of life so that Enkidu may live. He returns after many adventures, ultimately unsuccessful, but wizened and ready to endeavour to be a better king.

These "growth steps" shed light on how the author wants to portray Gilgameš. Looking at these steps in light of the cultural conventions set out above, the character of Gilgameš becomes clearer, and an "archetype" may be formed.

3.2.7.1 GILGAMEŠ AND HIS "FLOCK"

At the beginning of the story, Gilgameš oppresses and abuses his subjects. Even though he is shown as a "bad shepherd", the tone of the text remains somewhat light-hearted as the explanation for his actions is that he is simply bored. This contrasts with the image of how a king is usually portrayed. Kings usually seem to go out of their way to declare how much they care for their subjects and how much loyalty/faith they have in the gods[55]. Poems, letters, and other documentation[56] from the Sumerian period, all paintings depict the kings as righteous, if inflated, leaders who care for their people only in theory.

What is interesting is that Gilgameš is praised as a great leader (*Tablet I* Lines 29-65) right before the text jumps into what he is doing against the people (Line 66 and on). The aim of the aforementioned praise could be to show that Gilgameš is a good king, simply bored, and needs someone his equal to keep him in check (as the gods decide). However,

[55] For instance, the Sumerian King List (ETCSL 2.1.1) calls Etana and Lugalbanda "shepherds", and Kings Ur-Namma (ETCSL 2.4.1.3), Shulgi (ETCSL 2.4.1), Shu-Suen (ETCSL 2.4.4.a), and Ibbi-Suen (ETCSL 2.4.5.5) are all praised as "just", "right", and blessed personally by the gods.
[56] Cf. ETCSL catalogue for more, especially Catalogue 2: "*compositions with a historical background and royal praise poetry*".

it could also be a sarcastic way of mimicking the way that Sumerian kings would talk about themselves, since the kings all brag about their pious natures and their "goodness" and their "just" rules approved by the gods (See footnotes above and ETCSL Catalogue 2). In this case the actions of Gilgameš contradict this "goodness" and despite being stated as "good", his deeds are bad.

Looking at the structure of the lines, it could be intentional to highlight Gilgameš's disregard for his divine duty to his people. Lines 18 to 29, which describe the city of Uruk, seem to mirror the "look at my works" formula which is employed throughout the Middle Eastern royal texts, such as those on the monuments of Ramses II, Sargon, and later Nebuchadnezzar (Matthiae, 1976; Kuhrt, 1995; Postgate, 1995). The text then proceeds into praises of Gilgameš, and how mighty, powerful, handsome, and brave he is. This again mirrors the common Mesopotamian formula discussed above (ETCSL Catalogue 2, see particularly Shulgi (A&D).

This illusion of a "good" king is quickly dispelled by the accusations of the people against Gilgameš. Suddenly, Gilgameš goes from being an apparent great and grand figure to being the culprit and a tyrant. The contrast is most notable between Lines 29-32 and Lines 66-69:

29 Surpassing all (other) kings, hero endowed with a superb physique,

30 brave native of Uruk, butting wild bull!

31 Going at the fore he was the leader,

32 going also at the rear, the trust of his brothers!

33 A mighty bank, the protection of his troops,

and

66 [his] companions are kept on their feet by the ball.

67 The young men of Uruk are wrongfully vexed,

68 Gilgameš lets no son go free to [his] father.

69 Day and night he behaves with fierce arrogance

In the former, he is a protector of his men, and seems to care for his troops. In the latter, he abuses their loyalty by keeping them busy with his own games and practices.

Lines 71-77 show an even starker contrast where the "Shepherd of Uruk" abuses his flock:

71 he who is shepherd of Uruk-the-Sheepfold!

72 [Gilgameš] lets no [daughter go free to her] mother,

73 [the women . ..] their [...] soon,

74 [their] complaint[. ..] ... before [them:]

75 '[Powerful, pre-eminent,] expert, [... ,]

76 [Gilgameš] lets [no] girl go free to [her bride-groom.]'

77 The warrior's daughter, the [young man's bride,]

Calling Gilgameš by his title of shepherd and then listing non-shepherd-like behaviour represents a "calling out" of this supposedly righteous and trustworthy king. It would seem that Gilgameš did not take his position as caregiver to the people of Uruk seriously, despite being a "protector" of his troops. This would imply that when Gilgameš was engaged in war or sport, he was an excellent and safe leader, but in domestic affairs, he did not perform as well.

The people of Uruk cry out, and the gods decide to intervene. They order Aruru to create an equal to Gilgameš, one "equal to the storm"[57] (*Tablet I* Line 97) and a rival (Line 98) to keep Gilgameš occupied and save Uruk. Gilgameš apparently had premonitory dreams about this, as Shamhat tells Enkidu at the end of *Tablet I* (Lines 246-197). Here, Ninsun calls Enkidu a friend and close companion to Gilgameš, and he responds by agreeing to acquire a "friend" and a "counsellor" (Lines 296 & 297).

In this part, Gilgameš is shown as a poor domestic leader who seems to seek challenges and excitement rather than ruling as is and caring for his people. Gilgameš is also slightly redeemed at the end, as he agrees to accept the friend the gods made him. This shows that, despite being independent and doing as he pleases, Gilgameš still accepts the authority of the gods.

[57] The storm possibly references the tumultuous nature of Gilgameš' heart and character at this point.

3.2.7.2 BEFRIENDS ENKIDU

Enkidu is brought into Uruk, and thus civilisation, by Shamhat. Before bringing him, Shamhat had described Gilgameš to Enkidu who, upon hearing how Gilgameš treats his subjects, vowed to "change the order of things" (*Tablet I* Lines 220-222):

220 I, myself, will challenge him, mighty ... ,

221 [I will vaunt] myself in Uruk, (saying) "I am the mightiest!"

222 [...] ... I shall change the order of things,

Shamhat, however, begs Enkidu not to, since the gods are with him and bless him (*Tablet I* Lines 240-244):

240 O Enkidu, get rid of your sinful intention,

241 as for Gilgameš Šamaš loves him.

242 Anu, Enlil and Ea broadened his wisdom:

243 even before you came from the uplands,

244 Gilgameš in Uruk was having dreams about you:

Here, Shamhat defends Gilgameš as one favoured by the gods, specifically Šamaš. This special connection between Gilgameš and Šamaš is undeniable. Throughout the text Šamaš is an enabler of Gilgameš. He is at first accused of making Gilgameš adventurous and discontent with life, seeking adventure and excitement (*Tablet III*, Lines 45-48). Gilgameš asks him to help and guide him (*OB III*). In turn, he then helps Gilgameš against Ḫumbaba (*Tablet V*, Lines 137-143) and is honoured for it after Gilgameš and Enkidu kill the Bull of Heaven. As the god of light and justice, Šamaš is also often invoked as a protector or influencer before dangerous situations in the story. Šamaš is seen as a hero of light in Mesopotamian culture. He is a righteous, morally incorruptible god who always judges impartially. He "loves" Gilgameš, which shows that, despite his behaviour, Šamaš approves of him (and probably planned the whole story to teach him life lessons).

In *Tablet II*, Shamhat domesticates Enkidu further by taking him to a shepherd's camp and having him live among them for a while. Here, Enkidu is described in a way that contrasts sharply with Gilgameš as "Shepherd of Uruk" (*Tablet II* Lines 59-62):

59 His heart [now wise . ...]

60 [he would] massacre wolves and [chase] away [lions.]

61 [As] the senior herdsmen lay sleeping,

62 Enkidu was their herdsman, a [wakeful man.]

The next part starts off with mention of a wedding invitation, probably one of the shepherds that Enkidu was staying with (Line 63):

63 [A certain] fellow [was invited] to a wedding

Between this and his arrival in Uruk, there is a lacuna, and we are unsure of exactly what made him come to Uruk to confront Gilgameš. From context, we can infer that someone, probably one of the herdsmen, was invited to a wedding in Uruk. Enkidu could have inquired about the event and was informed of Gilgameš's practice of taking the bride to be for himself. This would not have sat well with Enkidu, as, in the next legible lines, he is barring Gilgameš from entering the "wedding house" (*Tablet II* Lines 100-115):

100 [He stood] in the street of Uruk [the sheepfold.]

101 [...] parted, strength [... ,]

102 he blocked the path [of Gilgameš.]

103 The land of Uruk was standing [around him,]

104 the land was gathered [about him.]

105 A crowd was jostling before [him,]

106 the menfolk were thronging [around him.]

107 They were [kissing his feet] like a little baby's;

108 already the man ... [...] ...

109 For Išḫara a bed of[. ..] .. .

110 for Gilgameš, like a god, a substitute was in place.

111 Enkidu with [his] feet blocked the doorway of the wedding house,

112 not allowing Gilgameš to enter.

113 They took hold of each other in the doorway of the wedding house,

114 they joined combat in the street, the Main-Street-of-the-Land.

115 The door jambs quaked, the wall shook.

This first meeting between Gilgameš and Enkidu shows how evenly matched the two were in terms of strength and stature. The people seemed to adore Enkidu, as Gilgameš saw in his dream. Yet at the same time they were not openly rebelling against Gilgameš. In this scene, Enkidu is standing up for what his pure natural being sees as an injustice against the freedom he would have known in the wilds. Gilgameš, met with this force of equal strength, does not back down and fights.

The rest of the text is heavily fragmented, however, and all that we can glean from it is that, after a tremendous fight, neither seems to be bested, and Gilgameš takes Enkidu to meet his mother, Ninsun, and calls him "friend". By this time, Gilgameš has probably realised that Enkidu was the person about whom he had dreamt and whom he had said he would accept.

By befriending Enkidu, Gilgameš clearly respects strength. He met his match in Enkidu, one who could stand his own against Gilgameš. It is possible that this was the reason why Gilgameš had terrorised the young men of Uruk, forcing them into contests and competitions. Perhaps Gilgameš was searching for an equal to match his own martial and physical prowess. This does tie in with the theme of Gilgameš having "no equal amongst men" and being a "king that surpasses all others" that the narrative established earlier. The only way that Gilgameš could find an equal was if the gods made one for him.

3.2.7.3 THE EXPEDITION TO KILL ḪUMBABA

After becoming fast friends, Enkidu and Gilgameš set out on an adventure despite warnings from the gods, elders, and Enkidu himself not to go to the cedar forest to attack Ḫumbaba.

Gilgameš, however, tells Enkidu not to "speak like a weakling" (*Tablet II* Line 232) and goes ahead with plans to go to the cedar forest. Here too, in convincing Enkidu to join him, Gilgameš invokes themes of strength and martial prowess, relying on combined experience, wit, and power. This theme is repeated throughout *Tablets II-V* with the same general formula.

Each of the three chastisements by Gilgameš (as per the Standard Version) is followed by a reason or example of their prowess and their strength/equippedness to deal with the situation. In the first (*Tablet II*), Gilgameš mocks Enkidu for telling him how dangerous Ḫumbaba is:

Tablet II Gilgameš to Enkidu:

232 Why, my friend, [do you] speak like a weakling?

233 With your feeble talk you [vex] my heart!

234 As for man, [his days] are numbered,

235 all that ever he did is but [wind.]

236 ... do not exist [......]

237 You were born and grew up in the [wild.]

238 Lion took fright of you, [you experienced all,]

239 grown men, too, fled [from your presence.]

240 Your heart, well tried, [is tested in] combat;

241 come, my friend, [I will go] to the forge!'

Here, he cites Enkidu's wild nature and how he (and by extension presumably Gilgameš) is better than a mere human whose "days are numbered". Gilgameš says that wild animals and other humans fled from Enkidu, and he is "tested in combat", so they will be successful.

In the second instance (*Tablet IV*), they are on their way and bad dreams about the strength of Ḫumbaba demotivate them. Gilgameš rouses the party by pointing out how far they've come and asserting that they cannot give up now, with the usual references to strength and combat experience:

Tablet IV Gilgameš to both of them:

233 '[Why,] my friend, are we [speaking] like weaklings?

234 [We who] came across all (those) mountains,

235 [did not ...] ...... before us?

236 Before we have withdrawn[......]

237 My [friend,] experienced in combat,

238 who ... battle [......]

239 [...]you kept touching and (so) you do not fear[... ,]

240 [...] like a very dervish, change [...]

241 Let [your shout] boom loud [like] a kettledrum,

242 let the stiffness of your arms depart and feebleness go forth [from your knees!]

243 Take hold of me, my friend, we shall [go on] as one,

244 [let] your mind dwell on combat!

245 Forget death and [seek] life!

246 [...] ... the careful man.

247 "[He who] went first protected his person, let him bring the companion to safety!"

248 It is they who have established a name [for] future [time!]'

In the final instance (*Tablet V*), they are about to attack Ḫumbaba and Gilgameš loses his nerve after Ḫumbaba has threatened them. Enkidu uses Gilgameš's ploy and encourages him in the way the latter normally does.

Tablet V Enkidu to Gilgameš:

100 'Why, my friend, [do you] speak like a weakling?

101 With your feeble talk you vex my heart!

102 Now, my friend, there is a single ...

103 To gather up the copper (ingots) from the channel-moulds of the copper- founder?

104 To blow on the coals for a double hour, to ... what is alight for a double hour?

105 To send the Deluge is to crack the whip!

106 [Do not] pull back your foot, do not make a retreat!

107 [...] ... make your blow good and strong!'

Unfortunately, the text ends in a lacuna so we have no idea what the rest of Enkidu's speech entails. It is apparently successful as, when the text resumes in Line 130, they are attacking Ḫumbaba. Though fragmented, this section fits in with the motivational nature of the other two. Lines 106 and 107 again call to mind the strength and call to action of the previous two speeches.

The theme of strength and power is also reflected in a broken and lost fragment of *Tablet II*. This fragment describes their unrealistically heavy (and presumably large) weapons:

247 They [were sitting] down exchanging views, to [......]

248 'Let us cast axes [......]

249 hatchets of seven talents each,[......]

250 Their swords of seven talents each,

251 ... [.........] Scribal annotation: [new] break

252 Their belts of one talent apiece,

253 the belt of[.........]'

254 [...] ... [......] Scribal annotation: new break, new break

Scribal annotation: five lines skipped

The total weight here seems to be one sword of seven talents, one hatchet of seven talents, and a belt of one talent per hero. This is a total of 15 talents per hero. The Babylonian talent was roughly equivalent to 30 kg[58], so 15 x 30 kg = 450 kg of weapons per hero, if we take the meaning of the word *bilā(gun.àm)* (talent) as "weight". However, the word can also refer to "load, yield or rent (of equipment)" (Black *et al.*, 2000, p. 44). If the meaning is "value" in terms of the value of the equipment, then one could imagine high-quality, ridiculously expensive weapons.

The original from which this extant tablet was copied in ancient times was also damaged so we do not have the Standard Version's complete description of their weapons. However, the *Yale Tablet* (*OB III*) provides another version, with different weights:

163 They took [each other (by the hand)] and betook themselves to the forge,

164 (where) the craftsmen were sitting down in discussion.

165 Great hatchets they cast,

166 they cast axes of three talents each.

[58] There are 60 minas in a talent, with a mina at roughly 500 grams average (Powell, 1995, pp. 1954–1955; Black *et al.*, 2000, p. 44)

167 Great daggers they cast:

168 the blades were two talents each,

169 half a talent were the crests of their handles,

170 the daggers' gold mountings were half a talent each.

171 Gilgameš and Enkidu had a load of ten talents each.

Here, each hatchet is three talents and the (complete) dagger also three talents. The text gives a summary of ten talents for each hero, which does not make sense on its own. However, a text from the older *Ischali tablet* (*OB Ischali*) also mentions loot of ten talents, but no weapons crafted before the fight:

36' the war-net of two talents and dirk of eight talents,

37' a burden of ten talents he took up, he went down and trampled through the forest.

From these lines two possibilities arise. The first is that the word “talent” is being used interchangeably for weight and value. In the *Ischali text*, a dirk (usually a longish dagger) is four times heavier than a war net that is used to ensnare an opponent. This seems unrealistic when working with weights, but more realistic when “talent” is read as the value for the items looted. The same holds for the *Yale* text, where the 10 talents[59] could be the total value of the gear.

The second possibility is that the talents are ambiguous. Weight or value, they add a sense of grandeur and massive scale to Gilgameš and Enkidu. In *Tablet I*, Gilgameš is described in terms that are not only massive, but also completely disproportionate. Together with the weapons being outlandishly large/expensive/both, it builds on the “Gilgameš as larger-than-life” theme, as well as playing into the “heroic strength” theme described earlier (in 3.2.5 Kingly Heroism in Mesopotamia). Either way, the picture painted here consists of massively ludicrous weapons (either on cost or size, possibly both).

Even though against it at first, Enkidu, Ninsun, and the Elders of Uruk eventually give in and allow Gilgameš to go to the cedar forest, after making Enkidu promise to look after Gilgameš. Much of *Tablet III* is filled with repetitive votive/ritual-style text that enforces

[59] Probably a reference to the *Ichali text* as a source, or a common source listing ten talents.

the protection of the gods, the martial prowess of Enkidu and Gilgameš, and the blessings of the people on the two to return safely.

In the tablet, both Ninsun and Gilgameš pray to Šamaš for the protection of Gilgameš and Enkidu on their quest. Šamaš, as protector of travellers, is expected to guide and protect them on their journey. Šamaš and Gilgameš are also closely associated, even outside the epic. The Sumerian King List suggests that Gilgameš is one of Šamaš's descendants through Lugalbanda. This theme recurs throughout the epic and is made more interesting by the fact that Gilgameš is often called a protector of people as well.

This connection is further highlighted through how Ninsun opens her address to Šamaš in *Tablet III*:

45 she scattered incense before Šamaš, she lifted her arms:

46 'Why did you assign (and) inflict a restless spirit on [my] son Gilgameš?

47 For now you have touched him and he will travel

48 the distant path to where Ḫumbaba is.

In this prayer, Ninsun is blaming Šamaš for Gilgameš's lust for adventure, as if he had somehow influenced him. She even prescribes to him how to help her son against Ḫumbaba:

87 On the day that Gilgameš, Enkidu and Ḫumbaba come face to face,

88 send against Ḫumbaba, O Šamaš, the great stormwinds:

89 South Wind, North Wind, East Wind, West Wind, Blast, Counterblast,

90 Gale, Tempest, Typhoon, Hell-Wind,

91 Icy Blast, Hurricane, Tornado:

92 Let (these) thirteen winds arise so the face of Ḫumbaba darkens,

93 and the weapon of Gilgameš catches Ḫumbaba!

In *Tablet V*, Lines 137-143, Šamaš does exactly this:

137 Šamaš roused against Ḫumbaba the mighty stormwinds:

138 South Wind, North Wind, East Wind, West Wind, Blast, *139 Counterblast, Gale, Tempest, Typhoon,*

140 Hell-Wind, Icy Blast, Hurricane, Tornado.

141 Thirteen winds rose up and the face of Ḫumbaba darkened-

142 he cannot charge forwards, he cannot kick backwards-

143 and then the weapons of Gilgameš did catch Ḫumbaba.

That Šamaš ultimately has to intervene to help the heroes defeat Ḫumbaba makes all the larger-than-life weapons and stature of the two heroes seem useless and comically human. However, it is also an answer to the ritualistic prayers and actions of the two and their supporters in Uruk.

The style of ritualistic repetition is, of course, a natural part of storytelling and highlights certain aspects of the action, such as Ninsun's prayer, which is answered word-for-word. It shows the audience how the gods would act out their supplications "in real life". This, in turn, underscores the need for the ritual and pageantry that define the religion of the time.

Ninsun, being a goddess herself, is now asking a greater god to help her son, a lesser deity, by listing what he will become:

101 'O Šamaš, will Gilgameš not ... the gods?

102 Will he not share the heavens with you?

103 Will he not share a sceptre with the moon?

104 Will he not become wise with Ea of the Apsu?

105 Will he not rule the black-headed race with Irnina?

106 [Will he] not dwell in the Land-of-No-Return with Ningišzida?

This is further proof that Gilgameš is destined to great things and is more than simply a claimant to divinity. The gods themselves affirm that he is divine and that he is one of their own, not simply a human. Despite this apparent divinity, however, Gilgameš also asked for Šamaš's help according to *OB III*:

216 Gilgameš was kneeling [in the presence of Šamaš,

217 the words he was saying [...] ... :

218 'I am going, O Šamaš, to the place [of Ḫumbaba,]

219 let me come through safely, [keep me] alive!

The preparation for the expedition, the expedition itself, and then the subsequent conquest of both Ḫumbaba as well as the cedar forest all plays into the "strength" themes of the previous tablets. Here, Gilgameš and Enkidu are portrayed with larger-than-life weapons, and a continuous reminder that they are the best. Despite warnings not to, Gilgameš relies on his own strength and that of Enkidu to power through any obstacles until faced with a real obstacle to his strength: Ḫumbaba. In this instance Šamaš has to bail him out of trouble, so to speak, showing that even Gilgameš has his limits.

What is also pertinent to later events is that Enkidu warned Gilgameš twice to kill Ḫumbaba before Enlil finds out and they are in deep trouble:

184 Ḫumbaba, guardian of the Forest (of Cedar), finish him, slay him, do away with his power,

185 before Enlil the foremost has learned (about it)!

186 The [great] gods could be angry with us,

187 Enlil in Nippur, Šamaš in [Larsa ...]

188 Establish an eternal [... ,]

189 how Gilgameš [slew] Ḫumbaba [...]'

The text is repeated later in Lines 241-245. The thinking here is that somehow, they can cover up their crime against the gods by "establishing an eternal" story about how they slew Ḫumbaba. This shows how, to their minds, a good story and adventure is more important to the gods than leaving things be. A mighty warrior can, through his strength and heroic acts, get a free pass if the thing he did was glorious enough. This seems to be allowed by the gods, since Šamaš actually does come to help them and later they are only punished for killing the Bull of Heaven.

3.2.7.4 REJECTING IŠTAR AND KILLING THE BULL OF HEAVEN

In *Tablet VI*, we are once again back in Uruk. Gilgameš and Enkidu have returned as victors and Gilgameš has just had his bath and a change into clean clothes. Thus spruced up, he is observed by Ištar.. She desires him and comes to him with a proposal many kings in Mesopotamia would[60] kill for:

6 The lady Ištar looked covetously on the beauty of Gilgameš:

7 'Come, Gilgameš, you be the bridegroom!

8 Grant me your fruits, I insist!

9 You shall be my husband and I will be your wife!

10 Let me harness for you a chariot of lapis lazuli and gold,

11 whose wheels are gold and whose horns are amber.

12 You shall have in harness "storm-lions", huge mules.

13 Come into our house with scents of cedar!

14 When you come into our house,

15 doorway and throne shall kiss your feet.

16 Kings, courtiers and nobles shall be bowed down beneath you,

17 they shall bring you tribute, [all the] produce of mountain and land.

18 Your nanny-goats shall bear triplets and your ewes twins,

19 your donkey foal under load shall outpace a mule.

20 At the chariot your horse shall gallop majestically,

21 at the yoke your ox shall acquire no rival.'

This proposal from Ištar calls to mind the "sacred wedding" performed by the king of a city state and Ištar, usually with a substitute priestess. During this annual ceremony, the king would ceremoniously "marry" Ištar, often consummating the marriage with a sexual encounter (Kuhrt, 1995; Postgate, 1995; Roaf, 1995; Wiggermann, 1995). It was usually a sign of pride and status when a king held such a ceremony. At Uruk, the king in his role

[60] Apparently, the favours of Ishtar was a religiously acceptable premise for attacking one's rival city state(Kuhrt, 1995; Margueron, 1995).

as *En* would perform this sacred marriage ceremony as one of Ištar's lovers, or *Ama-ushumgal-ana*, with a priestess as representative of Ištar (Postgate, 1995, p. 398).

Gilgameš, as one of the great kings of Uruk, no doubt also conducted this ceremony multiple times in the past. However, this time he is no longer in control as *En*. This time, the goddess herself is proposing marriage, not a priestess who still the king's subject and could be domineered and controlled.

The exact reason Gilgameš refuses such a lofty offer is contentious. Abusch holds that Ištar was also a goddess of the Underworld (something that seems quite implausible and not compatible with her well-attested role as goddess of fertility, sex, and war, see section 3.2.1 above) and that she was trying to trick Gilgameš into becoming lord of the Underworld, much like the story of Nergal and Ereškigal (Abusch, 1986, 2001).

Abusch seeks to connect three texts which mention the marriage formula. These texts[61]: *Ereškigal to Nergal*, '*a demon to a female human*', and Ištar to Gilgameš (1986, p. 149), show how supernatural entities use the marriage formula unilaterally to assert their dominance. We can thus deduce that in this instance Ištar is trying to control and dominate Gilgameš and make him lord of the Underworld (Abusch, 1986, pp. 148–151) Gilgameš supposedly sees through this ruse and refuses.

Abusch bases this theory on a very, very loose reading of Line 16:

16 Kings, courtiers and nobles shall be bowed down beneath you,
17 they shall bring you tribute, [all the] produce of mountain and land.
18 Your nanny-goats shall bear triplets and your ewes twins,
19 your donkey foal under load shall outpace a mule.
20 At the chariot your horse shall gallop majestically,
21 at the yoke your ox shall acquire no rival.'

Read in context, and without importing connotations from outside the Gilgameš text, this passage simply means that Gilgameš will have dominion over all manner of life, but not death and certainly not that he will rule the Underworld, as death or rebirth isn't mentioned anywhere in this part of the epic. Here, Ištar offers Gilgameš all the power and blessings

[61] After Abusch 1986a, p. 148

a king of Mesopotamia could wish for. Other leaders would bow to his power, and his animals, symbols of the all-important agricultural economy of Mesopotamia, would prosper.

AR George (2003a, pp. 470–472) takes a more practical view. In his opinion, Ištar is simply seeking a loyal and powerful king to rule her earthly dominion (her *Eanna* temple) in perpetuity. This, he bases on the older Sumerian texts[62] which clarify the respective roles of Ištar and Gilgameš in "our house" (*Line 14*):

O my wild bull, may you be our man, I shall not let you go!

O lord Bilgames[63], my wild bull, may you be our man, I shall not let you go

with

O Bilgames, may you be its lord, let me be its lady!

George argues that Gilgameš resents this attempt from a goddess to control him, and thus refuses. George's explanation seems more plausible than that of Abusch, given a direct, emic reading of the texts including the Sumerian origin of the Babylonian text considered as standard.

While agreeing that Gilgameš resents control, I believe a vital factor to consider is that Gilgameš values strength and power. He would have all these things that Ištar has promised on his own terms, not as a "subject" of Ištar, who, as goddess, would have the most power in this relationship, and mistreat him as she has done with her previous lovers. My proposal is substantiated by the way in which Gilgameš replies to Ištar's offer. He does not acknowledge her as goddess of anything and instead addresses her as if she was a human woman that would be required to serve him as a human wife.

22 [Gilgameš] opened his mouth to speak,

23 [saying] to the lady Ištar:

24 '[If indeed I were] to take you in marriage

25 [......] myself and my clothing,

26 [......] my food and my sustenance?

27 [Will you feed me] bread fit for a god?

---

[62] Nippur A& B, VAS X 196, Mê-Turan & Schøyen
[63] Sumerian version of Gilgameš

28 [Will you pour me ale] fit for a king?

29 [.........] should I bind,

30 [.........] should I pile high?

31 [Would...] wrap [...] in a cloak?

32 [Who...] would take you in marriage?

From the first lines of his response, we can gather that Gilgameš does not believe that Ištar would fulfil any of the household duties expected of a wife at the time. Though quite damaged, one can infer from the text that Gilgameš is asking (possibly sarcastically or derisively) whether she would take care of him and his clothes (*Line 25*), make sure that he is well fed (*Lines 26-27*) and take care of him as befitting his class (*Line 28* and possibly onwards). This is in line with the social norms in Mesopotamia at the time as we understand them today (Greengus, 1995; Stol, 2016).

What makes this sarcastic is twofold. Firstly, no wife of a king would ever be expected to perform any of these household functions in person. They would have a staff of attendants who took care of these. What Gilgameš is doing here is insulting her as potential wife in that she cannot provide for him what any common man would expect. Gilgameš then pushes the rejection further by heaping insults on her based on her previous lovers. He brings up all her previous amorous escapades (most of these are known from Mesopotamian mythological material) and asks if he would be treated the same (*Tablet VI* Lines 44-79).

This "bullying" of Ištar should be seen in context. Gilgameš has just defeated Ḫumbaba against the advice of another goddess (Ninsun, his mother) and all the elders and people of Uruk, as well as Enkidu, his trusted companion. He was on a "high" so to speak. His lust for strength and power had cumulated in the destruction of Ḫumbaba and the conquest of the cedar forests.

Here, Ištar, through lust or perhaps jealousy, is trying to associate herself with him by making him her earthly husband, something that the title of *En* already bestows on him according to the religious customs of Uruk at the time (see section 3.2.3 Leadership and kingship above). In Line 89, her father, Anu, seems to confirm this by telling her that it was her fault that Gilgameš insulted her, as she had gone looking for trouble:

87 Anu opened his mouth to speak,

88 saying to the lady Ištar:

89 'Ah, but did you not provoke King Gilgameš,

90 so then Gilgameš recounted things that insult you,

91 things that insult and revile you?'

AR George notes here that “provoke” could also be “quarrel with”, as per other manuscripts (George, 2003a, p. 625). Either way, Ištar’s proposal was not a friendly one and Gilgameš responded in kind. His response is in line with the irreverent and flippant character we’ve come to know by now. Speaking from a position of strength, he belittles and insults Ištar, calling her out on the way she treats her lovers.

Ištar is, however, his consort according to tradition in Uruk. So, his rejection of her opens up quite an interesting idea: Gilgameš does not respect his city-state patron. He seems to respect the traditions, however, as he had asked advice of his mother and later the blessings of Šamaš (as established earlier). This situation leads to an interesting tangential question: was Gilgameš honouring Šamaš, the sun god of Larsa and twin brother of Ištar, instead of Ištar? Does the epic have some sort of subtext that speaks to the inter-temple rivalry and how Gilgameš, the *En* of Uruk and the *Eanna* Temple of Ištar prefers Šamaš over Ištar? This could possibly be a hint as to the original authorship of this part of the story, though it is too tangential to include in much detail here. It could also be a potential motivation for Ištar who, as the actual goddess of Uruk has thus far been neglected in favour of the “adventurous” Šamaš.

After Ištar is humiliated, she asks for and, after a delay of seven years, receives the bull of Heaven with which to punish Uruk and Gilgameš. The Bull of Heaven is unique to the stories surrounding Gilgameš. What its exact connotations are in the cultural context of the time is a matter for much discussion. Theories of cultural revolution and zodiac signs are the most common explanations with the Bull of Heaven seen as the Taurus constellation (George, 2000, 2003a, 2004; De Villiers, 2004).

Regardless of what exactly it was or stood for, Enkidu and Gilgameš tear it apart in their typical heroically overpowered fashion (Line 128-150):

128 Enkidu opened his mouth [to speak,]

129 saying to Gilgameš:

130 'My friend, we vaunted ourselves [(...) in our] city,

131how shall we answer the dense-gathered people?

132 My friend, I have experienced the might of the Bull of Heaven,

133 [... its] strength [and] learning [its] mission.

134 I will once again [experience] the might of the Bull of [Heaven,]

135 behind [the Bull] of Heaven I shall [... ,]

136 I will seize [it by the tuft of its tail.]

137 I will set [my foot on the back of its hock,]

138 in ... [... I will . .. it.]

139 Then [you] like a [butcher(...), brave and] skilful,

140 press home your knife between the yoke of the horns and the slaughter-spot.'

141 Enkidu circled round behind the Bull of Heaven,

142 he seized it by the [tuft] of its tail.

143 [He set] his foot on [the back of] its hock,

144 [in ...... he] ... it.

145 Then Gilgameš like a butcher[(...)], brave and skilful,

146 [pressed home] his knife between the yoke of the horns and the slaughter-spot.

147 After they had slain the Bull of Heaven,

148 they took up its heart and set it before Šamaš.

149 They stepped back and prostrated themselves before Šamaš,

150 both of them (then) sat down together.

This entire piece is worth taking note of. Firstly, Gilgameš and Enkidu are, once again, overpowering a supernatural beast, this time with no help from Šamaš. In a show of great strength and skill, Enkidu holds and wrestles the Bull of Heaven while Gilgameš slaughters it. In lines preceding this segment, the bull was described as supernaturally strong and powerful, much more powerful than any normal bull. Here, Enkidu and

Gilgameš are overpowering it in the same manner as one would wrangle[64] a normal bull and kill it. Once again, their strength and martial proficiency is on display. Gilgameš is called "brave and skilful", whilst Enkidu seems to shrug off "experiencing" the "might of the Bull of Heaven" (Lines 132 & 134).

In the older Sumerian version, Gilgameš and Enkidu are drinking and enjoying themselves when the Bull of Heaven comes. They nonchalantly finish their drinks before attempting to take on the bull. The ending is also slightly different, as the meat is distributed to the poor (George, 2003a; De Villiers, 2004).

The picture being painted here is one of power of two powerful heroes that can overcome mighty supernatural beasts practically bare-handed. This time they achieve this without divine help, and they seem overconfident to the point of cockiness. They have now defied the gods twice by destroying special creatures that the gods had made.

After killing the Bull of Heaven, they offer up its heart to Šamaš. Once again this is highly irregular as the Bull of Heaven seems to be the property of Anu, yet now it is subjected to Šamaš who is the son of Anu (Jacobsen, 1963; Kuhrt, 1995; Wiggermann, 1995). This action seems to again point to a shift in religious loyalty towards Šamaš and away from the more traditional Anu and Ištar who were the first deities to be associated with Uruk.

After defeating the Bull of Heaven, Enkidu and Gilgameš celebrate and Gilgameš starts a song about himself:

172 'Who is the finest among men?

173 Who is the most glorious of fellows?'

174 'Gilgameš is the finest among men!

175 [Gilgameš is the most] glorious of fellows!'

After destroying a celestial being, Gilgameš has cause to celebrate. However, neither one of the two seems to acknowledge here that what they have done might have consequences. They are, once again, "high" on victory, irreverent and proud of their own strength.

[64] There are many references to bulls being killed in this fashion in Mesopotamian art and literature (cf. George, 2003b, p. 100).

3.2.7.5 ENKIDU DIES AND GILGAMEŠ IS SET ON HIS JOURNEY TO FIND THE PLANT OF LIFE

After their celebration, Gilgameš and Enkidu go to sleep and *Tablet VII* starts with a chilling, jarring return to the reality that they have defied the gods:

1 'My friend, for what reason were the great gods taking counsel?'

We have very little context here as there is a 26-line lacuna at the start of the text with many more lines damaged. However, it appears Enkidu had a terrible dream of death, probably his own, considering the context later on:

71 Why, my friend, did your heart talk profanities [... ?]

72 [the dream] was precious and the apprehension was much

73 [......] were buzzing like flies,

74[...] were many, the dream was rare.

75 "To the one who survived grieving was left,

76 the [deceased] left sorrow to the one who survived."

In the quote above, it is Gilgameš who is answering Enkidu, though he is probably copying something Enkidu had said earlier. Once again, Gilgameš invokes Šamaš in the next lines, though now he also recognises Anu, Enlil, and Ea:

77 [I will] beseech the great gods and entreat them,

78 I will seek out [Samas], I will appeal to your god[s].

79 I will pray [to Anu], the father of the gods [... ,]

80 [May] Enlil, the great counsellor, [hear my] prayers in your presence,

81 may [my entreaty . ... to Ea.]

82 I will make a statue of you in gold without limit,

Here Gilgameš is invoking the main gods, though the text is quite broken, and the actual "entreaty" to the gods is missing. What does stand out here is that Gilgameš is not only asking for Šamaš this time, but also invokes the names of the powerful triad: Enlil, Anu, and Ea. These gods are the most powerful in the Mesopotamian pantheon (Jacobsen, 1963; Wiggermann, 1995) who, between them, control the weather, agriculture, fertility, and the sky. Ea is also the god of ritual purification and would therefore be useful in purifying Enkidu of the poison he mentions later (*Tablet VII*, Line 175). It is unclear if the gold statue is meant for the gods or for Enkidu, but it is an indication of the lengths to which Gilgameš is willing to go to save his friend.

After much lamenting, cursing Shamhat the harlot, and wishing that he had never been brought to Uruk, Šamaš rebukes Enkidu who calms down and tells Gilgameš his dream. Lines 165-188 are pertinent to the study:

165 'Quite something, my friend, (was) the dream I saw during the course of this night!

166 the heavens thundered, the earth responded,

167 with me standing (there) between them.

168 There was a man, his expression was grim,

169 his face was like that of an Anzú-bird.

170 His hands were a lion's paws, his claws an eagle's talons,

171 he took hold of my hair, he was too strong for me.

172 I struck him so he sprang back like a skipping-rope,

173 he struck me and capsized me like a raft.

174 Like a mighty wild bull he trampled over me,

175 poison he ... [...] my body.

176 "Rescue me, my friend! [...]"

177 But you were afraid of him and[......]

178 You ... [......]'

179-181 Short lacuna

182 '[He struck] me, he turned me into a dove.

183 [He bound] my arms like (the wings of) a bird,

184 to lead me captive to the house of darkness, the seat of Irkalla:

185 to the house which those who enter cannot leave,

186 on the journey whose way cannot be retraced;

187 to the house whose residents are deprived of light,

188 where dust is their sustenance, their food clay.

Here, Enkidu is made powerless by a supernatural being, which, from context, we can infer is a personification of either death or the passage of time resulting in death. The "passage of time", rather than simply death itself, derives from the observation that the being does not simply take Enkidu, but first fights him and poisons him, suggesting time going by. This interpretation could also fit in with the theme of the latter part of the epic - that of defeating death or the passage of a human's life. Either way, the result is the same.

Enkidu is overpowered by the being, whom Enkidu admits "was too strong for me" (Line 171). He describes himself as "capsized… like a raft" (Line 173) and "trampled". Later, he is transformed into a dove (Line 182) and thus made completely incapable. He asks for help from his "friend", presumably Gilgameš, but even Gilgameš was afraid of this being and apparently powerless (Lines 176-177).

In contrast to the epic fights Enkidu and Gilgameš had, first with themselves, then with Ḫumbaba, and lastly with the mighty Bull of Heaven, this fight with a mystical creature only goes one way. Enkidu and Gilgameš are no match for this being which takes Enkidu to the Underworld. The subtext here seems to be that Gilgameš cannot help his friend against death. Indeed, Gilgameš, too, seems to be afraid of death when confronted by it.

After much agony Enkidu dies after twelve days at the end of *Tablet VII*:

254 The day he saw the dream [his strength] was exhausted.

255 Enkidu was cast down and (lay) sick for one day, [a second day.]

256 Of Enkidu, on his bed,[......]

257 A third day and a fourth day, of [Enkidu ...]

258 a fifth, a sixth and a seventh, an eighth, a ninth [and a tenth (day).]

259 Enkidu's sickness [......]

260 an eleventh and a twelfth day, [......]

261 Enkidu on the bed[......]

262 he called to Gilgameš and [...... :]

263 '[My god] has spurned me, my friend,[... ,]

264 like one who in the midst of battle[......]

265 I was afraid of combat [...... ,]

266 my friend, he who in combat[......]

267 I, in [combat, ...]'

Though very fragmented, the gist is clear: the strength and power that Enkidu and Gilgameš had relied on have disappeared. Unfortunately, the text is too fragmented to infer anything else from the lines about combat.

After Enkidu's death, Gilgameš mourns and conducts a lavish funeral for him, described in *Tablet VIII*. Lines 59-64 of *Tablet VIII* shows us the state that Gilgameš is in:

59 He covered (his) friend, (veiling) his face like a bride,

60 circling around him like an eagle.

61 Like a lioness who is deprived of her cubs,

62 he kept turning about, this way and that.

63 He was pulling out his curly [tresses] and letting them fall in a heap,

64 tearing off his finery and casting it away, [... like] something taboo

Gilgameš is mourning as one would mourn a close relative or family member, something he had promised to do earlier, in Lines 44-45. This mood is in stark contrast to the merriment and care-free attitude of the previous tablets. Gilgameš is now tasting the frailty of humanity in the face of concepts like death, seemingly ordained by the gods and irreversible.

The text of Enkidu's funeral rites is heavily damaged, but we can infer from the surviving text that they were opulent and grand. Gold and silver abound, imported[65] lapis lazuli and other precious stones are used to create funerary objects and offerings to the gods. All this lavishness points to a funeral which was held in the same manner that their lives were lived: grandiose, unrealistically large-scale, and extremely expensive. The over-the-top effect in *Tablet VIII* recalls the weapons made by Gilgameš and Enkidu, and, in fact, at least some of the funerary artefacts depict scenes from their adventures, such as the Cedar Forest (Line 169).

During the funeral proceedings, Gilgameš makes gifts to the gods who will accompany Enkidu to the afterlife and hopefully show him favour. Interestingly, all the gifts are again presented to Šamaš presumably before being given to the other gods (Lines 134-206).

[65] Traditionally from the area known as modern-day Afghanistan, though there were ancient deposits in other areas of the Mediterranean(Edens, 1992; Potts, 1993).

Presumably, this is because, as god of justice, Šamaš is most suited to work justice for Enkidu. This action refers to the pattern established earlier, indicating how Šamaš is worshipped by Gilgameš more than any other god in the pantheon, including “his lady” Ištar.

One of the gifts that Gilgameš brings is to Ištar, as is the custom for the king (Jacobsen, 1963; Roaf, 1995):

134 [...] Ištar, the great queen.

135 [A throw]stick of. .. , the pure wood,

136 [for] Ištar, the great queen, [he displayed to Šamaš:]

137 '[May] Ištar, the great queen[...] receive this,

138 may [she] welcome my friend [and so walk at his side!]'

This behaviour, again, cements the role of ritual and ceremony in the epic's subtext. The funeral rite and ritualistic gift-giving to all the gods that could help one in the Underworld is a cultural and religious fact of life in the Mesopotamian context(Jacobsen, 1963). Gilgameš’s action happens regardless of the circumstances of Enkidu’s death, and independently of any action either party may have taken against the other. It does not factor here that Enkidu directly disrespected Ištar, and that she is indirectly the cause of his death (by sending the Bull of Heaven against them).

The ritual and adherence to religious norms and customs are more important to the author of the epic than what we would call “narrative cohesion” in the modern world. As we saw earlier, part of the epic's subtext is obedience to existing customs and the *status quo*, despite the story. The thing to do when one’s friend is dead is to offer gifts to all the gods that can help him on his journey into the Underworld, perform certain rituals, and provide for the deceased on his travels. Gilgameš’s deeds in this regard take up an entire tablet. Unfortunately, much of the tablet is fragmented and lost, so many details are missing, such as what motivated Gilgameš to want to dam up the Euphrates River (*Tablet VIII*, Line 212).

After the funeral, *Tablet IX* starts with Gilgameš roaming in the wild as he promised Enkidu in *Tablet VIII*. Gilgameš is lamenting the loss of Enkidu, but, through mourning, the focus seems to have turned to his own death, rather than the death of Enkidu (*Tablet IX*, Lines 3-7):

3 'I shall die, and shall I not then be like Enkidu?

4 Sorrow has entered my heart.

5 I became afraid of death, so go roaming the wild,

6 to Ūta-napišti, son of Ubār-Tutu,

7 I am on the road and travelling swiftly.

This change represents a major shift in attitude from the proud, strong, god-defying Gilgameš we have come to know thus far. In Line 9, he is actually afraid of lions, though apparently this is all a dream. Later, when he encounters the “scorpion-men”, he is also full of dread, though he continues on.

Twice, Gilgameš now finds solace with the moon god, Sîn, and not with the usual Šamaš. This could be because he is now living in the wild, and the moon seems a wilder, more feral symbol than the sun. The sun is a daily occurrence, with its yearly trek across the sky not as readily apparent as the moon's monthly cycle, which looks slightly different each night. Gilgameš’ life is now darker, more unstable and wilder. It seems reasonable that he would now feel a closer affinity to the moon than he would to the bright sun. This conclusion is supported by the moon, which seems to inspire him now (Line 14):

14 [... in the] presence of the moon he grew happy to be alive.

Gilgameš happily goes on to slaughter the lions that had earlier scared him, showing a return to the Gilgameš of old. Presumably, his new resolve motivates him to continue his journey to find Ūta-napišti and retrieve the secrets of life and death, as the next lines contain another prayer to Sîn after casting something off. The text is extremely damaged and also includes an 8-line lacuna, so we can infer very little else, including what was cast off.

After travelling for an indeterminate amount of time, Gilgameš arrives at the twin peaks guarded by the scorpion-people. Who exactly these “scorpion-people” are, is unclear, but they are presented as sentient beasts rather than fully human. The text does not provide much detail about them, and their identities are well beyond the scope of this study. Gilgameš is greeted by them as two-thirds god, one-third human:

48 The scorpion-man called to his female:

49 'He who has come to us, flesh of the gods is his body.'

50 The scorpion-man's female answered him:

51 'Two-thirds of him are god but a third of him is human.'

and later also:

80 'There was not [ever], O Gilgameš, [...] like [you,]

These lines pick up the descriptions of Gilgameš in *Tablet I*, where he is described as a king like no other and only a third human, the rest divine. This repetition probably serves as a reminder here (to Gilgameš as well as to the audience) that he is special and that he has the power to succeed.

After explaining his mission of finding Ūta-napišti and learning the secrets of life and death to them, the scorpion-people let him through the pass between the peaks. After what seems to be a journey of twelve “double hours”, Gilgameš finally reappears in the light, in a place of beauty where the trees are made of precious stones. Here, he meets Šiduri, a tavern keeper and brewer who promptly locks herself in her tavern. In typical overbearing fashion, Gilgameš demands that she open the door and threatens to break it down (Tablet X, Lines 19-24):

19 Gilgameš [spoke] to her, [to the ale]-wife:

20 'Ale-wife, why when you saw [me did you bar] your [gate?]

21 You barred your gate [and went up on the] roof.

22 I shall strike the door, I shall [break the bolt.]

23 [.........]my[... ,]

24 [.........] in the wild.'

The text is, again, quite broken and what follows in the next 47 lines is mostly a re-telling of the story thus far. Gilgameš begs Siduri to tell him how to get to Ūta-napišti. After at first claiming that crossing the sea is impossible for all but Šamaš, she points him in the direction of Ūta-napišti’s boatman, Ur-šanabi, who is busy stripping cedars in the forest with the “Stone Ones”, with the intention of making punting poles.

True to form, Gilgameš grabs his weapons and charges in to fight them. There is no attempt to even reason with anyone first. Gilgameš subdues Ur-šanabi and destroys the

Stone Ones. Only after this apparent one-sided fight is over, does Gilgameš and Ur-šanabi speak. Gilgameš explains what has happened, and that he seeks to speak to Ūta-napišti. Ur-šanabi points out that Gilgameš destroyed “with your own hands” (Line 156) the means with which to cross the ocean: the Stone Ones were destroyed, and the punting poles not made. Gilgameš then takes on the job of finishing the poles (Lines 159-162).

When he is done, the two set off across the ocean and, after about three days of travel, they reach the waters of death, presumably surrounding the island on which Ūta-napišti lives. Here, after running out of punting poles, Gilgameš uses his and Ur-šanabi’s garments as a make-shift sail, and his arms as a yardarm, in the typically over-the-top fashion we have come to expect of Gilgameš.

This journey of Gilgameš shows him at the lowest point in his life, but it also shows how he defaults to violence and threats in almost any situation. He attacks the lions that haunted his dreams, he threatens the non-threatening tavern woman, and attacks Ur-šanabi and his Stone Ones unprovoked, hindering his own progress in the process. Without Enkidu to reason with him, Gilgameš seems wild and rough, almost as if he is becoming like Enkidu was at the start of the story.

3.2.7.6 ANSWERS FROM ŪTA-NAPIŠTI

Upon finally arriving at the island, Gilgameš is questioned by Ūta-napišti, and he again recaps the story. Ūta-napišti’s response is interesting in that he does not enable Gilgameš like the scorpion-people or the tavern lady. He asks Gilgameš an important question and reminds him of his position:

267 'Why, Gilgameš, do you constantly [chase] sorrow?

268 You, who are [built] from the flesh of gods and men,

269 whom they [made] like your father and your mother!

270 Did [you] ever, Gilgameš, [...) to the fool?

271 They placed a throne in the assembly and [told you,] "Sit!'

272 What is given to the fool is [beer] sludge instead of[...] ghee,

273 [he chews] bran and grist instead of[...]

274 He is clad in a mašḫandu-garment, instead of [... ,] *275 instead of a belt, a cord of[...]*

276 Because he has no advisers [... ,]

277 (because) he has no words of counsel [...... ,]

278 have thought for him, Gilgameš, [...... ,]

279 [...] their master, as many as[......]

Ūta-napišti reminds Gilgameš that he is a semi-divine king, given a throne to sit on whereas the fool is given beer sludge and other less desirable things. Throughout, he reminds Gilgameš of his royal and semi-divine station in life. He tells Gilgameš to "have a thought" for this "fool" (presumably the common person), and to possibly take care of him as expected of the king in Mesopotamia. He also adds an analogy concerning the moon and "gods of the night" (Line 281), however, the tablet is too damaged to infer much from it directly. AR George postulates that the line has something to do with the rituals and natural cycles with which the king is associated in Mesopotamia, and the role that the king has to fulfil to complete certain necessary rituals for the cycles to continue (George, 2003a, p. 505).

This assumption can reasonably be inferred from Lines 286-290:

286 Now consider[...... ,]

287 your aid ... [......]

288 If, Gilgameš, the temples of the gods [...] provisioner,

289 the temples of the goddesses ... [...]

290 They [...] .. : , the gods [... ,]

If one reads over the gaps, it would seem that Ūta-napišti is reminding Gilgameš of his role as provisioner of the temples, i.e. one that provides for the gods and keeps them happy with their subjects, maintaining their temples and shrines, and fulfilling rituals to reinforce their power.

Gilgameš has a lot to keep him busy, and a lot for which he is responsible. Ūta-napišti's question in Line 267 "*Why, Gilgameš, do you constantly [chase] sorrow?*" can be seen as an exclamation of exasperation. Why is Gilgameš, a truly divine king and one to whom the city of Uruk is looking for guidance and wisdom, wasting his time with foolish quests that end in sorrow? This important question reveals the theme of the epic as a whole.

Ūta-napišti continues his monologue about how death is part of the human condition and how everything has a time. He (and the tablet) ends with:

319 The Anunnaki, the great gods, were in assembly,

320 Mamniftum, who creates destiny, made a decree with them

321 death and life they did establish,

322 the day of death they did not reveal.

This is the final word. Gilgameš has come seeking life and trying to escape death. Yet, Ūta-napišti tells Gilgameš, the gods created life and death, the latter's time never to be known by man.

Gilgameš, still not swayed by Ūta-napišti's words, replies (*Tablet XI*, Lines 1-7) to him by stating that Ūta-napišti does not look much different from himself, and that he intends to fight him, although out of respect, Gilgameš ultimately refrains. Again the wild nature of the grieving Gilgameš, unfettered and unchecked by Enkidu, is revealed. Gilgameš would have his answers through a show of strength.

Gilgameš asks Ūta-napišti how he came to attend the gods' assembly and find life. In answer, Ūta-napišti recounts the entire Mesopotamian version of the flood for the next 199 lines. As this does not concern Gilgameš as a character, we skip over this and come to when Ūta-napišti addresses Gilgameš again in Line 207.

At this point, Ūta-napišti offers to call the gods to assembly for Gilgameš so that he can plead his case before them, but only if Gilgameš can stay awake for six days and seven nights. However, Gilgameš seems to fall asleep almost immediately and Ūta-napišti orders his wife to bake a bread for each day that Gilgameš is asleep, since

220 'Being deceitful, mankind will deceive you.

Through the bread, they will keep track in case Gilgameš claims that he was awake. When Ūta-napišti does wake Gilgameš, he protests that he barely slept before he was woken, only to be presented with the evidence.

This subplot is an interesting reflection of the human side of Gilgameš. Though he is two-thirds divine, his third human part keeps taking over. He is afraid of death, he is deceitful and lacks discipline and self-control, and he is susceptible to human weaknesses such as sleep and deprivation.

Due to Gilgameš's failure to stay awake, he becomes depressed again, complaining to Ūta-napišti that still he hasn't received any answers, and that death is all around him:

243 How should I go on, Ūta-napišti? Where should I go?

244 The Thief has taken hold of my [flesh.]

245 In my bed-chamber Death abides,

246 and wherever I might turn [my face], there too will be Death.

Gilgameš again realizes that death is a reality for him no matter what he tries to do. After this interlude, the action happens very fast and within 82 lines the story ends, rather abruptly.

Ūta-napišti seems unimpressed by Gilgameš's laments and, after cursing (and perhaps even banishing) his boatman Ur-šanabi, orders the latter to get Gilgameš cleaned up and dress him in a royal robe. It appears that Ūta-napišti has the power to put a spell on the robe to keep it from spoiling until they arrive at Uruk. This behaviour implies that Ūta-napišti is answering Gilgameš's laments by reminding him of his life's role. Gilgameš has come, now he couldn't summon the gods, so he has no other option but to go home and be a king.

Ūta-napišti's wife, however, has mercy on Gilgameš and asks her husband what he is going to give Gilgameš after his long journey and effort. Ūta-napišti reluctantly? tells Gilgameš of a plant that would grant youth back to its user. Gilgameš wastes no time and creates a channel, either in the sea or on land, that leads down to subterranean waters, ties rocks to his feet, and dives down. Gilgameš retrieves the plant, is cast out on the shore again, and travels home with Ur-šanabi. On the way, he stops at a pool of cool water, leaving the plant unattended. The plant is then promptly stolen by a snake. Devastated, Gilgameš bemoans that his toils have benefited only the snake. Upon discovering that the plant is stolen, Gilgameš actually weeps:

308 Then Gilgameš sat down weeping,

309 the tears streaming down the side of his face.

This level of mourning happens only one other time[66], when Gilgameš is mourning Enkidu's death in *Tablet IX*:

1 For his friend Enkidu Gilgameš

2 was weeping bitterly as he roamed the wild:

We see the normally strong, driven Gilgameš now broken. He has gone to the ends of the earth and back. He has retrieved the plant that would grant him (eternal?) youth, and after all his adventures and travels, he has now lost his prize to a snake in a moment of weakness. All his effort and strength could not change that he was also just a man. He had a place and responsibility, a role to play, and nothing he did could change that.

When they arrive back in Uruk, Gilgameš tells Ur-šanabi to admire the city of Uruk, using words copying *Tablet I* Lines 18-23:

18 Go up on to the wall of Uruk and walk around,

19 survey the foundation platform, inspect the brickwork!

20 (See) if its brickwork is not kiln-fired brick,

21 and if the Seven Sages did not lay its foundations!

22 [One sar is] city, [one sar] date-grove, one sar is clay-pit, half a sar the temple of Ištar:

23 [three sar] and a half (is) Uruk, (its) measurement.

This repetition directs us back to the start of the story where the city is described and Gilgameš is introduced as its great king who had seen "the Deep". We have come full circle, and the city is described in its four different sections, or aspects: urban, agricultural, industrial, and religious. One presumes Gilgameš will now rule Uruk as a great king and leader of life in Uruk – the city's shepherd.

Now directed back to *Tablet I* by the repetition, we find that ironically the tablet now sheds more light on the end of the story than it did on the beginning:

1 [He who saw the Deep, the] foundation of the country,

[66] Possibly also when Gilgameš and Enkidu find out they are to be punished, though this is inferred from other fragments (Such as OB III) and is not part of the Babylonian text or official corpus.

2 [who knew ... ,] was wise in everything!

3 [Gilgameš, who] saw the Deep, the foundation of the country,

4 [who] knew[... ,] was wise in everything!

5 [...] ... equally [... ,]

6 he [learnt] the totality of wisdom about everything.

7 He saw the secret and uncovered the hidden,

8 he brought back a message from the antediluvian age.

9 He came a distant road and was weary but granted rest,

10 [he] set down on a stele all (his) labours.

Gilgameš's journey may have seemed pointless. He had gone to the ends of the earth and returned empty-handed and that much closer to death. However, Line 8 says that this was not all in vain. He has brought back a message from before the flood. This is a reference to a lesson Ūta-napišti taught Gilgameš: at the end of the tale about the flood, Ūta-napišti recalled how the gods had given him and his wife immortality because they had survived the storm that had raged for six days and seven nights[67]:

128 For six days and seven nights,

129 was blowing the wind, the downpour, the gale, the Deluge [laying flat the land.]

130 When the seventh day arrived,

131 the gale relented, [...] The sea grew calm,

132 that had fought like a woman in labour,

133 the tempest grew still, the Deluge ended.

134 I looked at the weather, and there was quiet,

135 but all the people had turned to clay.

After this, Enlil was mad at them for surviving, but Ea told him:

185 On him who commits a sin, inflict his crime!

186 on him who does wrong, inflict [his] wrong-doing!

The gods had planned to kill all life, so being alive was a crime against their plans. Enlil was therefore forced to inflict life on them, for the "crime" of living:

[67] This is probably why he challenged Gilgameš to stay awake for the same amount of time.

198 And now, consider what is to be done with him."

199 Enlil came up into the boat,

200 he took hold of my hands and brought me out.

201 He brought out my woman, he made her kneel at my side,

202 he touched our foreheads, standing between us to bless us:

203 "In the past Ūta-napišti was (one of) mankind,

204 but now Ūta-napišti and his woman shall be like us gods!

This was Ea's final trick to reward Ūta-napišti and thus preserve creation.

Gilgameš, however, had no such crime to be "punished" for, and there was no reason for him to become immortal, as shown by the challenge and subsequent failure. Ūta-napišti states that there is no reason for the gods to assemble on behalf of Gilgameš. The "message from before the flood"[68], then, is that everything has its reasons and its place. Immortality and life are for the gods to give and take as they please. It is for the mortal to live out their own roles and so contribute to the grand cycle of life. This includes "special" individuals, such as Gilgameš who is semi divine. Thus concludes the story of Gilgameš.

Tablet XII will not be included here, as it is a later addendum and does not serve any purpose in the story nor does it shed any additional light on the character of Gilgameš.

[68] AR George postulates that the message is that mankind is immortal through the continuation of the cycle of life and cultural practices (George, 2003a, pp. 527–528, cf. also George, 2004). George bases his postulation on a reading of the above as well as on the original *Atraḫašis myth*. However, any allusion to humanity is absent from the Gilgameš text, and therefore not relevant to its message. If the message was that mankind is immortal through its continued culture, this would have been alluded to in the text. I believe that the personalised nature of Gilgameš being sent back to the city as a king connects on a more personal level to the audience in that everyone has their place in society, and that is how it must be.

3.3 THE EMIC GILGAMEŠ

What follows is therefore an emic summary of Gilgameš. This is the Gilgameš that has presented himself through the subject matter and contextual analyses: the "hero" Gilgameš, according to his own text.

Before delving into the character, we need to look at what "hero" meant in Akkadian, and more specifically in the Epic of Gilgameš. This is, of course, a very subjective meaning since we have no way of knowing what all the nuances of the word originally meant. We have only what we can glean from the manuscripts. Two different words are translated as "hero" by George on eight occasions:

šanūdu ("illustrious, heroic")
of Gilgameš (*Tablet I*, Line 29):

29 Surpassing all (other) kings, hero endowed with a superb physique,

qurādu ("hero, warrior"),
of Enkidu (*Tablet I*, Line 103):

103 In the wild she created Enkidu, the hero,

of Šamaš (*Tablet VII* Line 148):

148 Enkidu [heard] the words of Samas the hero,

of Šamaš (*Tablet X* Line 81):

81 The one who crosses the ocean is the hero Samas:

of Enlil (*Tablet XI* Lines 16, 178 & 182-183):

16 their counsellor, the hero Enlil;

178 saying to the hero Enlil

182 saying to the hero Enlil:

183 "You, the sage of the gods, the hero

These are the only instances of these words in the Standard Babylonian Version of the epic. Only once is Gilgameš, the "hero" of the story in our understanding (both literary and figuratively/character-wise), called a hero. On the face of it, this means that our understanding of Gilgameš as a "hero" may need some revision. Gilgameš is called *šanūdu*, which means someone who is considered illustrious and "heroic"[69]. The word derives from the root *nâdu* (Black *et al.*, 2000, p. 356), which means to "praise, celebrate", and is generally used of people, especially kings (p. 230) Our modern use of the word "hero" when someone does something that is praiseworthy, is similar. The term implies that Gilgameš is considered praiseworthy and as having performed deeds that are to be celebrated. Considering that the context of this line is right at the start, it can be argued that this is part of a "hyping" up of Gilgameš and his deeds to the audience.

The other word, *qurādu*, is used for "warrior" or "hero" (Black *et al.*, 2000, p. 291) and is used of Enkidu, Šamaš, and Enlil. The root for this word, *qarādu* means "warlike" (p. 285), the connotation being that these are mighty warrior-like beings, possibly very trustworthy, as per the contexts of the lines quoted above.

Enkidu is a wild man created by the gods to equal Gilgameš and therefore has no peer. As *qurādu* he is given the same warlike, "knightly" title as two gods, Šamaš and Enlil, highlighting his violent, warlike tendencies which appear similar to those of the deities.

Gilgameš, the *šanūdu*, is also quite a wild man. Linguistically it would seem that he is peerless, since he is given a unique title: that of illustrious, praiseworthy person, as opposed to one who is purely "warlike". He is given to doing everything in an over-the-top, illustrious fashion. Being larger-than-life, he acts accordingly. Despite not being called *qurādu* explicitly, the text does describe his warrior-like deeds, though never actually calling him one[70] (*Tablet I*, Line 31-34). He is also, however, apparently incapable of sitting still and seeks adventure and excitement over his assigned roles as king and *En* of Uruk. He seems to want to seek more out of life than is the given norm.

Gilgameš is a character who seems to yearn to live life. He glories in his own strength and abilities. He does not shy away from any fight, often instigating one. He respects the *status quo* to an extent but does not seem to respect religious norms when they do not suit him.

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[69] The use of the word here is due to the author/translator's understanding of the word "hero(ic)", since there are many different words related to "hero" in the dictionary:
*altarru ("*strong, heroic*",* (Black *et al.*, 2000, p. 13)
šakadu ("heroic", p. 348)
taqridu, same root as *qurādu* ("heroic warrior", p. 399) and
uršanu ("warrior, hero" & "wild dove", p. 427)

[70] The Standard Babylonian text, as translated by George (2003a), does not call Gilgameš a "warrior" at all. However, other texts do, for example *Bilgames and the Bull of Heaven* and *Poem of the Mattock* (George, 2003a, pp. 14, 107).

Several times, Gilgameš is described as physically large and handsome. This sets him apart as a leader that people will want to follow because of his natural charisma. However, he seems to lean into these traits and uses them for his own pleasure above taking care of his people. No one in Uruk could stand up to him in combat or sport and he didn't let the sons and daughters of Uruk "go free", i.e., determine their own paths. He dominated and controlled the people of Uruk, ironically so, since he too sought to determine his own path.

Once Enkidu arrives on the scene, Gilgameš becomes enabled. Now he is a boisterous adventurer who, together with the friend that he could not succeed in dominating, wants to conquer the forests of Lebanon. He values the strength and vitality he recognizes in both Enkidu and himself. These characteristics power the duo through their adventures. Strength and power are what they trust in. Any conflict is resolved with a quick and powerful attack. Gilgameš is never shown to take time to reason about a situation. When doubts creep in, he reminds himself and Enkidu of their combined strength and how they have overcome other obstacles.

Once confronted by death, however, this façade of power and strength falls away to reveals but a mortal man. Two-thirds divine or not, Gilgameš fears death in his heart-of-hearts. His actions at this point are designed to allay his own insecurities about not living (enough) and even to defeat death.

By pursuing victory over death, Gilgameš discovers that each person has a place and a role assigned by the gods. As special as he is, Gilgameš is a king and a "shepherd" of Uruk. He cannot be more or less than that because this is what the gods ordained for him.

3.4 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

In this chapter we met the emic Gilgameš. He is a restless, powerful king that inspires awe and surrounds himself with deeds of strength, usually way beyond what would be expected of a mortal. He seems restless as "shepherd of Uruk" and goes on increasingly epic adventures to show his strength, together with his companion Enkidu. Strength and bravado are a large part of their identity, which ultimately feeds into his larger-than-life image, as well as feeding his ego.

In the end, Gilgameš loses Enkidu due to their combined hubris, and he sets off to do the most fitting thing he can: find Ūta-napišti and learn from him the secret of immortality. This ultimately fails too, and then follows Ūta-napišti lecture teaching Gilgameš about fate and one's role in life. For Gilgameš, he says, there remains but to be a good shepherd of Uruk, and so to ensure the continuation of civilisation. In the end Gilgameš has to learn this valuable lesson about trying to change his fate. The gods are, ultimately, in control of one's fate and it remains for one to fulfil one's own roles and obligations and not reach for more than one's allotment. Gilgameš is thereby transformed from a restless, rebellious king to a good one who cares for his people and culture more than for personal glory.

In this way, the emic Gilgameš becomes visible as I perceived him through an emic framework, having followed this framework to limit the external influences and factors that colour my perception and inform my knowledge structures.

Chapter 4
Emic & Etic Analysis of the Story of Shimshôn

Chapter Abstract

In this chapter, Shimshôn is emically studied and analysed using the ideas set forth in the framework (Chapter 2). First, a basic "subject matter analysis" reveals how the Biblical narrator portrays Shimshôn on the most basic level as a strong, divinely chosen man, who was at war with the Philistines yet loved their women. A deeper contextual analysis revealed the details of his actions in the context of late 2nd millennium Canaan, adding depth and understanding to our picture of Shimshôn. This contextual analysis also explores the various scholarly views on Shimshôn's actions and motivations. Finally, an emically arrived at picture of Shimshôn can be presented for comparison with Gilgameš in Chapter 5.

This chapter analyses the story of Shimshôn, as told in the Book of Judges chapters 13-16, using the framework discussed in Chapter 2. Because this is part of the Bible, selecting a source document is, ironically, slightly trickier than selecting the source for Gilgameš. Whereas the Epic of Gilgameš is known from several manuscripts and fragments, a standard is extant: the Babylonian Epic of Gilgameš, which has survived in a cohesive form in the original Akkadian.

The Biblical texts[71], on the other hand, exist in many more manuscripts and fragments, translated into different languages, all with slight variations and deviations. This is, for the most part, because the Bible is a religious manuscript. It was disseminated and translated over a wide area and into various languages. The Roman conquest and destruction of Jerusalem also did not help matters, as the Hebrew texts were all hidden or lost. The discoveries at Qumran in the early part of the 21st century have helped the case, but ironically, the Greek Septuagint remains the oldest copy of much of the Hebrew Bible, though it also only exists in three different manuscripts[72] dated from between the 3rd to the 5th centuries AD and the original, or copy of the original, was lost. The oldest complete version in the original Hebrew used to be the *Aleppo Codex*, dated to c. 920AD, until the book was damaged in the 1940s by anti-Jewish protestors in Syria (Ofer, 2015). A parallel

[71] This study will not delve into the various theoretical manuscripts and so-called "sources" for the Old Testament. Here, we are purely concerned with the text as we have it now, and not the theoretical origins of the said text, as that is far beyond the scope of the current study.
[72] The *Vaticanus*, *Sinaiticus* and *Alexandrian* codices are very high quality (mostly) complete Greek "Bibles" containing both the Old and the New Testaments and are seen as "industry standard" manuscripts for translations of the Biblical text.

Old Testament from the 2nd century BC written in Aramaic is known, extant in all the various Aramaic (Syriac) manuscripts dating to the 5th century AD and later (Wright, 1870).

The sad fact here is that we need to rely on the veracity of ancient scribal traditions and modern translation practices to provide us with an accurate version of the original story, which was probably in the form of an oral tradition. For the purposes of this study, we require a text that is as close to the original as possible. As there is no trace left of the original, save for what was copied, recopied, and translated, this necessity is hard to supply. The oldest such text exists in Greek in the form of three Greek Bibles, namely the *Vaticanus*, *Sinaiticus,* and *Alexandrian* codices.

Because the Bible is such an important part of the Jewish and Christian faiths, many translations and editions have been made, each seeking to improve or highlight certain aspects. Most Bible translations in English use at least one of the Greek manuscripts mentioned above, together with the Hebrew Aleppo (where possible), the Hebrew *Masoretic text* (the oldest complete copy of which is the *Leningrad Codex*) and the fragments found at Qumran, collectively known as the *Dead Sea Scrolls* (*DSS*). The *DSS* fragments help fill in the gaps in the Hebrew in a Semitic language and are used by most academic-based translations as a reference.[73]

Despite the oldest text being in Greek, the Hebrew and Aramaic will be chiefly employed in this chapter as the original culture and syntax of the story of Shimshôn is closer to Hebrew tradition than it is to Greek tradition. Even the Masoretic Hebrew language of the early Middle Ages is closer to the original Hebrew and Aramaic versions in terms of language than to Greek. Once older manuscripts become available, this situation can be rectified, and studies updated if necessary.

For the purposes of this study, I have used a Bible study software suite called TheWord (Stergiou, 2015). It contains several Bible modules, dictionaries, and other resources for studying and analysing Biblical texts. I have used the King James Version (KJV+ with Strong's numbers) for the text, augmented by additional interpretation from the NIV and Hebrew Interlinear Study Bible. For reference, the digitized *Aleppo Codex* is also included

[73] As per the NIV translation notes, as well as conversations with Bible translators, one of whom is my father, Gerrie Coetzee, who was instrumental in the 2017 Afrikaans language translation of the Bible from the original Aramaic, copyrighted by PwL. Ek sou dit byvoeg!

in the program and was consulted for Hebrew text and spelling. The Word also includes the Brown-Driver-Briggs' Hebrew Definitions module,[74] which links with the Strong's reference system for easy identification and definitions of Hebrew and Aramaic words. For the transliterations of Hebrew words, both BDB and HiSB[75] are used.

An example of the kind of difficulties the researcher may encounter, is the convention of most translations to replace the Tetragrammaton with "the LORD". This follows Jewish custom to never pronounce the name of God. However, in this study we will be using "יהוה" (written as YHWH[76] to make font management easier when printing and typing) as it is more correct and a better identifier than the generic "lord" (*adon*) or "God" (*El*), which could potentially refer to any Canaanite god.

It is also important to remember throughout that Shimshôn is a story contained in the book of Judges, which is itself contained in the Old Testament. This means that the version we have today is part of the overall narrative which the author of Judges/the history of Israel wanted to tell. It is not a stand-alone story. For the purposes of further and contextual analysis it is therefore necessary to look at the context in which the story finds itself within the book of Judges. This will be further explored in Section 4.2 Contextual Analysis below. To help with this, the Josephus version of Shimshôn, contained in *Antiquities*, book 5 chapter 8, will be utilized during the contextual phase.

The Roman-era historian Josephus is unique as a source as he offers a perspective on the Biblical narrative that is drawn from the fully developed Jewish culture and religion of the first century AD. Although this is still later than the supposed date for Shimshôn, it is a lot closer than we are and may represent some of the original perspectives on the story that have since been lost. However, since this is predominantly a study of the story of Shimshôn as recorded in the Bible, Josephus' work is simply added as an extra flavour and as a more contemporary commentary on the story in the Bible. It should also be noted that Josephus' work is not a purely "emic" version of the Shimshôn story, as it represents his perspective of the story, removed from that of the texts as we have it in Judges. His

[74] Abbreviated as "BDB" in text, cited as "(Brown, Driver and Briggs, 2012)"
[75] This is a Hebrew interpolated Study Bible module that has Hebrew, transliteration, and English gloss toggles.
[76] I use this contraction as it accurately represents the Tetragrammaton as it is written, without adding vowels that are not present.

work is only added to give a complete story, and no conclusions should be drawn from it that are not already present in the Judges text.

It should be noted here that, for the purposes of this study, the story of Shimshôn, as well as the rest of the Bible, will be studied in the same way as one would study any other ancient manuscript. Personal religious convictions and beliefs are strictly excluded as these are a very strong source of bias that limits one's ability to look objectively at the source material, something scholars seem to struggle with when dealing with Biblical manuscripts. The author is a Christian and believes in the infallible Word of God as portraying a true message to believers for instruction and building the faith. However, there is, and should always be, a very distinct separation of "church and study". Just because the Bible has special spiritual meaning does not make it "too holy" to study logically and with facts. The Bible as we have it today was written, edited, and redacted by many people, ostensibly under the guiding hand of God. However, as we shall see in this chapter, people are people and mistakes in language, embellishments and anachronisms do not subtract from the spiritual value of the Word of God. In fact, it grounds it in the real world.

Any prior knowledge and potential sources of interference will now be listed here.

The author acknowledges certain prior knowledge systems and possible sources of bias with regard to Shimshôn from the following sources:

1) A master's degree in Ancient Near Eastern Cultures
    a. – prior reading and discussions on Shimshôn in an academic setting
    b. – familiar with ancient Near Eastern cultural norms and traits
    c. – intimately familiar with archaeological theory and practice
    d. – reliance on translations and dictionaries, with very limited Hebrew knowledge
    e. – familiar with Biblical archaeology and Old Testament studies in an academic setting with heavy theological overtones
2) Being a modern Western person who is steeped in modern culture
    a. – familiar with Shimshôn online imagery in various forms, from semi historical representations to anime-inspired superheroes
    b. – familiar with Shimshôn as a hero-archetype in culture and heroic name-recognition associated with the "Samson" name

c. – exposed to modern heroes and concepts in and around heroism
d. – exposed to modern ideals of males in society, coming from a more traditional patriarchal society (Afrikaner) and religion (Christianity)
e. – experience in some leadership roles may affect perception of leadership
f. – lifelong multicultural experiences may change the "common" perception on cultures, but also add other possible avenues of influence

3) Being a Christian, with Christian, Bible-centred upbringing
   a. – theological concerns from being brought up on the Bible and stories about characters in the Bible
   b. – upbringing could cause latent Biblical biases with regard to historicity, as well as deeply imbedded knowledge structures from being raised on the Bible, but with other people's ideas and beliefs surrounding it.

4.1 Subject Matter Analysis

The subject matter layer is concerned with the attributes that can be discerned by anyone, regardless of their background. It aims to identify the most basic, universally recognisable elements and descriptors in the text. This means that one does not need any cultural training in the source material or source culture to recognize these attributes. To achieve this, the researcher should take notes that purposefully ignore any knowledge or training received about the Bible or Canaanite/Israelite culture.

4.1.1 Judges Chapter 13

Chapter 13, verse 1, sets the scene within a culture called the “Israelites”, whose territory was being occupied by another culture called the “Philistines”. The conception and birth of Shimshôn is foretold by a supernatural being (verses 3-6), identified as an “angel of YHWH” in the text, misunderstood by Mânôach, the child’s father-to-be, as a “man of God” (verse 8) and later seemingly identified as YHWH in verses 22-23. The whole situation implies a supernatural event. Of note here is that only the father is named. Shimshôn’s mother is identified only as the “wife of Mânôach”.

Verses 5, 7, 8 and 14 have specific laws and rules surrounding the child. The hair on his head may not be cut (verse 5), his mother may not drink any alcohol, and he is to be a “*nâzîyr* onto God” (verse 7). The meaning of a “*nâzîyr*” is not immediately evident from the text, except that from context one can infer that it is some sort of devotee. This will be explored in the Contextual Analysis section below. Verse 5 also mentions that this child will be a son, reiterated later in verse 24, so Shimshôn can be identified as a male. Verses 24 and 25 state that YHWH considers Shimshôn to be special and blesses him, once again highlighting a supernatural connection. Verse 25 especially mentions that

25 … the spirit of YHWH began to move him at times …

This implies that Shimshôn was somehow possessed by the spirit of YHWH and moved/was moved to act on YHWH’s behalf. This will also be investigated further in the contextual analysis.

4.1.2 JUDGES CHAPTER 14

Chapter 14 starts with Shimshôn's quest for a wife. This would presume that he is now of marrying age, i.e., an adult, though at this stage the exact age isn't clear. Verses 2-4 illustrate Shimshôn's headstrong character. He wants what he wants. However, verse 4 says that this is just a pretext. YHWH had planned for him to do this to make trouble with the Philistines. His headstrong character is thus actually not as free as he assumes.

Verse 6 has Shimshôn killing a lion which attacked him without his parents being aware, even though they were walking with him. YHWH's spirit came over him and he killed the lion with his bare hands, ripping it apart. This is not normal human behaviour and, again, shows us that Shimshôn has a supernatural connection. The text does not explain how the parents did not know this, but it also does not provide any details surrounding how they were travelling and exactly when this happened, whether they were travelling at the time of the attack or perhaps resting with Shimshôn being a little ways off from his parents.

Verse 7 says that the woman intended as his wife pleased Shimshôn, literally "she was straight/pleasant to his eye". Verses 8-9 Skips to Shimshôn and his parents on their way to "take her". Shimshôn turns off the path and sees the carcass of the lion he had killed earlier, finding a bee's nest in it with honey. This he eats, and gives some to his parents as well, without mentioning where he had found it.

Verses 10-14 Describes the preparations for the betrothal celebration, where he is given thirty companions by the Philistines the moment they see him. His encounter with the lion inspires him to pose an impossible riddle at his wedding about the lion and the honey he found inside. There is no way that his guests would know about the lion, so he bets a large amount of clothing (wealth) on them not figuring it out in the seven days of the feast. This shows that Shimshôn is also sly and likes to make trouble.

In verse 15 the Philistines complain to the Shimshôn's bride to be about his behaviour and asks her to find out what the solution to the riddle is, threatening her family. In verses 16-17, Shimshôn's unnamed bride convinces him to tell her the answer to the riddle through using emotional manipulation, so as to save her family. Shimshôn is taken in by her coaxing, and he tells her, causing him to lose the bet because she gives his answer to the Philistines. This does seem to save her and her family's life, but Shimshôn remains unaware of it.

Verse 19 has Shimshôn flying into a rage after the men he had tried to trick tricked him by asking his bride for the riddle's answer. The "spirit of YHWH" comes over him and he slaughters 30 men in a nearby town, steals their clothing, and gives the loot to the men at his wedding as promised. This is the behaviour of a violent and uncontrolled man that seems to use divine power to commit murder. This point will be further examined in the contextual analysis.

Verse 20 tells us that Shimshôn's bride was given to his "companion", a person which the text describes as his "friend". This "friend" could have been someone that he entrusted the woman to, since the word used here can also men "one who tends"[77], or an associate.

[77] H7462 רָעָה ra`ah (raw-aw') v.
1. to tend a flock i.e. pasture it.
2. (intransitively, literally or figuratively) to graze.
3. (generally) to rule.
4. (by extension) to associate with (as a friend).

4.1.3 JUDGES CHAPTER 15

Chapter 15 starts with Shimshôn making trouble again, insisting on seeing the woman he considers his wife. She was given to his companion since he had left the wedding apparently before he could consummate the marriage.

He appears action-driven, vengeful, and spiteful. Seeking revenge, he burns down the town's crops (verses 4-11). Verses 12-16 declare that Shimshôn does not harm his countrymen, called "men of Judah" here. It seems that his divine power only comes when fighting against the Philistines, who regularly pay a heavy price. The Israelites capture him without incident.

Verses 18-19 shows Shimshôn to be arrogant and demanding, even of his god, blaming YHWH for not having water. Verse 20 describes Shimshôn as one who "judged" Israel and leader (implied in the word "judge"[78]), who had lead them for 20 years.

[78] שָׁפַט shaphat (shaw-fat') v.
1. to judge, i.e. pronounce sentence (for or against).
2. (by implication) to vindicate or punish.
3. (by extension) to govern.
4. (passively, literally or figuratively) to litigate.

4.1.4 JUDGES CHAPTER 16

Chapter 16 starts with Shimshôn visiting a prostitute in Gaza (a Philistine city) and again damaging the Philistine infrastructure by destroying the gates to evade capture. Shimshôn apparently cannot keep his hands off Philistine[79] women and seems to take pleasure in fighting their men.

In verses 6-17 he falls in love with a woman from Sobek. The verses show Shimshôn to be completely under the spell of this woman. He would, with enough prodding, do anything for her. He would even hand her the keys to his own demise. He is completely blind to her potential betrayal. The Philistine leaders find out and convince her to betray him for a large sum of silver. She accepts and tries to get the secret of his strength out of Shimshôn. After three attempts, she finally succeeds to get the secret out of him by using the same kind of emotional manipulation as his first bride had used in chapter 14.

Verse 19 mentions Shimshôn's long hair, braided into seven locks, as the source of his strength. Unfortunately, no other description is given. Cutting these locks of hair soon results in the loss of his divine connection. In verse 24, the Philistines rejoice over the capture of Shimshôn, and about how their god, Dagon[80], handed him to "their men". This is a change from the usual Philistine interactions with Shimshôn, where they had always come out worse off. It is by reason of this history that they feared him and his strength.

In verses 28-30, Shimshôn resolves to attempt to bring the temple of Dagon down. Through this plan, it seems, he is redeemed, as divine power returns and his renewed strength topples the temple's pillars, so that the entire structure falls on everyone assembled, killing them all.

From this basic subject matter analysis, it appears that at this moment in history, there is conflict between the Israelites and the Philistines, who have become their overlords. The character of Shimshôn emerges as a headstrong, murderous Israelite male who was chosen by YHWH as some sort of champion or representative even before his birth. YHWH selects Shimshôn and gives him divine martial powers when fighting the Philistines. The sign of this "divine championship" is his long hair.

[79] We do not know whether the prostitute was Philistine or not.
[80] There is little-to-no archaeological evidence for the worship of Dagon as Philistine god. However, as it is written in the text, we will not be too worried about the historicity of his worship.

4.2 CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

In the previous section, we established commonly identifiable features of Shimshôn. He is a man, called a leader or one who judges, chosen by YHWH, feared by the Philistines with a rather ironic love of their women in that this leads to his demise. He receives divine power against the Philistines through the "spirit of YHWH". He is consecrated as a special individual for YHWH from birth and called a Nazarite. As a symbol of this he has long, braided hair.

But what did all this mean to the Israelites at the time of the story's composition? What is the cultural backdrop against which this story takes place? The story itself is rather lean on cultural details, so we need to examine both the cultural aspects described in the earlier books of the Bible, as well as modern archaeological and academic studies.

Now we will focus on the setting and context of the story of Shimshôn. However, to do this we also need to look at the dating and contextual clues in the story in their historical setting.

Judeo-Christian Biblical studies as a discipline has been in existence since the 1st Century AD, in the form of commentaries and philosophical arguments in and around the texts. Before this, there was a rich Jewish tradition which started with the Hellenistic period and the Maccabee leader Alexander Janneus. This means that we have more than 2000 years of study, most of it religious, on Biblical texts. However, rather than clearing the issue up, the long history actually clouds the source material considerably due to religious bias concerning doctrines. Since our study is purely concerned with cultural concepts and not religious dogma, this religious body of work will, for the most part, be ignored. Where all bias can be stripped from the study/source, we will do so if it is pertinent to the character of Shimshôn.

A 200-year-old, non-theologically fuelled academic tradition from which we will draw external information and that can serve as a non-religious reference work is extant. Although this academic tradition is not completely separated from religious studies and influences, it is in a better position to be free from religious influences than actual religious "Biblical studies" which seek to use archaeology and academic studies to prove the Biblical narrative as "true" and thereby, perhaps, validate their religious beliefs. Due to the lack of other textual evidence, most of the Israelites' physical culture is derived from the narrative in the Bible. It should be noted, however, that the Bible is a religious book, written to promote a specific set of rules and sequence of events, enshrining these as divinely inspired. This does not necessarily result in a true reflection of the reality of the people at that time. As an example, the Israelites displeased YHWH many times and were then "handed over" to various enemies. In the case of Shimshôn, these were the Philistines.

We can learn as much from negative pronouncements, as we can affirmations. The Bible records many instances of Canaanite cultural and religious practices that the Israelites copied. The inscriptions at Kuntillet 'Arjud, where reference is famously made to "YHWH and his Asherah", are a testament to the fact that the Israelites did not seem to hold themselves to the standard that the authors of the Biblical books would have wanted. They juxtaposed YHWH and Asherah (a Canaanite fertility goddess), possibly showing that they thought of Asherah as the consort of YHWH, something that is explicitly forbidden in the Bible[81] (Dever, 1984).

4.2.1 LITERATURE ON SHIMSHÔN

Here follows a non-exhaustive review of the pertinent sources used. Though there are several more referenced, these usually illustrate a tangential point and are not relevant to the direct study of Shimshôn, simply helping to "set the scene" or support another source. These will not be discussed in more detail. The sources below have direct bearing on the study of Shimshôn and are also discussed in the analysis. Some of the sources not discussed here may also be mentioned in the analysis, but are not major studies with bearing on the study, simply mentioned as part of it.

Reference works are also not listed or discussed, as they contributed only to the contextual picture of Shimshôn and provided details familiar to the ancient Israelites and Canaanites, especially their social norms and interactions. In this regard, the articles edited by Sasson in CANE are especially useful for their encyclopaedic neutrality and facts.

Shimshôn has been widely discussed and studied as an archetype of Biblical "heroism" and, as is the trend, it seems, compared to Greek heroes, such as Herakles. Mobley is particularly concerned with Shimshôn's place as hero in the ancient Near East (Mobley,

[81] Exodus 20:3: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me".

1997, 2005, 2006), and offers some valuable insights on the topic. *Samson: Hero or Fool?: The Many Faces of Samson*, edited by Eynikel and Nicklas (2014) offers some different views. Most of the research done, study Shimshôn in some form of media, such as medieval and Renaissance art (Spronk, 2014), music (Wisse, 2014), movies (Zwick, 2014), Rabbinic discourses (Nikolsky, 2014), Islamic literature (Eynikel, 2014), and European literature (Schöpflin, 2014).

Of interest to this study, however, are the character and literature studies of the actual character of Shimshôn. In *The Many Faces of Samson,* Exum explores the different character traits and facets of Shimshôn and his story, through the different ways that Shimshôn has been viewed. Exum explores Shimshôn "as fool" (Exum, 2014, p. 14), considering his rash quick-to-pummel-the-Philistines attitude. However, she concludes that if Shimshôn is to be a fool, he is rather a "fool for love", than simply a rash violent fool. Next, she explores Shimshôn "as a moral lesson" (Exum, 2014, p. 15). Here she shows how the way that the story portrays the Philistine women could be construed as a warning for Israelites about the dangers of "bad, foreign women", and how they made a mighty Israelite hero fall. Through this, she introduces the third facet of Shimshôn, i.e., that of "hero".

When discussing Shimshôn as "hero", Exum follows the text, and arrives at a similar conclusion as the Subject Matter Analysis done in this study, i.e., that Shimshôn is seen as an "agent of God". However, she equates this to "hero", due to the connotations of the modern word and not anything in-text. Exum also mentions the "beginning" of Israel's salvation through Shimshôn, and not its final deliverance, something discussed later in this chapter.

Up to this point, Exum has stayed close to the Hebrew text of the Biblical story and did not include many modern ideas or concepts. However, with the discussion on Shimshôn "as freedom fighter" (Exum, 2014, p. 17), Exum starts to include the usual connections with other "nationalist" heroes, such as the Scottish Rob Roy. She points out that this facet of Shimshôn would show him to be an "underdog" in a resistance story, bravely standing up against a mightier foe.

On the flipside, she also explores "Shimshôn as Terrorist", since "one group's freedom-fighter is another group's terrorist". And terrorist is exactly what Shimshôn was to the Philistine, Exum points out from the text, in how he constantly harasses and causes major damage to them. This cumulates in the ultimate sacrifice (and ultimate victory for Shimshôn) when he collapses the temple on the Philistines.

Exum then proceeds to Shimshôn “as Xenophiliac” (Exum, 2014, p. 20), due to his apparent attraction to the Philistine women. She also notes, correctly, that Shimshôn does not attack the Philistines because of their treatment of Israel. Rather, it is their treatment of him that causes him to lash out at them. This facet of Shimshôn, again supported by the text, does not directly contradict the “Shimshôn as Freedom-Fighter” aspect described by Exum. The reason for this is that the “Freedom-fighter” role is given by the author of the story, but never really proven by the actual narrative. These facts may, perhaps, indicate that the Shimshôn story is, in fact, a story that has been edited to fit a certain narrative.

Next, Exum argues for the “comic/tragic” facet of Shimshôn (Exum, 2014, pp. 20–24). In this facet, God’s controlling of Shimshôn’s actions makes him the tragic comic in a play, a “proto-Divine Comedy”, in which the heroic, hapless, and naïve Shimshôn is moved about the board like a pawn, and he has to accept his predestined fate, not knowing what God is doing, nor having any say in the matter. Whether this was the original intent of the story, we may never know, as there simply isn’t enough information in the texts. As Exum points out, however, this does seem to be the light in which Shimshôn is portrayed, even unwittingly, by the author/editor of the story of Shimshôn.

In discussing the tragic part of Shimshôn, Exum postulates against Gunn (1992), who argues for a humanistic approach to Shimshôn. He maintains that we must not neglect the human nature of Shimshôn, and that he, no doubt, also had feelings about what was happening to him.

The above circles back to the point of this study. If we presume to know the thoughts and feelings of Shimshôn, we are adding our own, very much etic, reading into his story. We do not know what Shimshôn thought, nor what the narrator wanted him to think, since the text we do have, does not include this. Any “reading” of Shimshôn that adds to the ancient sources we have, includes too much modern, foreign material, which ends up muddying the waters around Shimshôn, obscuring the little the text does say about him.

Exum adds to this tragic-comic view of Shimshôn by adding a "trickster" facet to him. Under this, she discusses Shimshôn as a "wild man", domesticated by a woman,[82] but then also God as a trickster, using Shimshôn and "tricking" him using his own weaknesses and human nature. She describes Shimshôn as living "marginalised" between two cultures, Philistine, and Israelite. In the same way, he is also marginalised within his own society, being a Nazirite and yet also a hedonist. In addition, his strength sets him apart from others, as in this he is abnormal. This marginalisation makes Shimshôn perfect for the role of trickster, as he is exhibited as one who is outside society, able to reflect on society, and yet he is also an interesting oddity within society (Exum, 2014, p. 25).

Exum also briefly explores the view that Shimshôn is a stand-in for the Israelite nation (Greenstein, 1981; Exum, 2014, pp. 26–27), and they myth contains therefore a metaphorical moral lesson to stay true to God and not to whore after idols. In the process of this argument, Exum discusses Greenstein's theory that Shimshôn is a personification of the nation of Israel - a riddle which leads the reader to discover a deeper meaning in the text. This meaning, Greenstein argues, is that just as Shimshôn was chosen by God as Nazirite, so Israel was chosen with a covenant, and just as Shimshôn was imbued with divine strength, so too the Israelites were strengthened and guided by God's power. Then, just as Shimshôn fell to the wiles and seduction of the "heathen" Philistine women, so too the Israelites fell to the seductive worship of pagan gods. Then, just as Shimshôn repented and turned to God again, restoring his power, so too Israel will receive God's power when they turn back to God (Greenstein, 1981, p. 252).

Greenstein goes on to list many similarities between Shimshôn and the Israelite nation, including the longing for water at Mara (compared to Shimshôn crying out to God for water). He also attempts to address the incongruity with the other judges, where Shimshôn is the only judge who not only does not care about Israel but also does not fight for or lead Israel in any way in the text. This, he argues, is because Shimshôn *is* Israel, and therefore does not need to be shown to fight *for* Israel.

While all this seems to "fit", and Greenstein makes excellent points, he does so through the lens of theology and the rest of the Bible, making it an etic study. In this regard, he might have a point about the version of the text we received. However, what about the

[82] Though this is similar to Enkidu and Gilgameš, I refrain from commenting on that here in this chapter, as this chapter is dedicated solely to Shimshôn. Chapter 5 will deal with both.

original story? Furthermore, as Exum points out, nowhere in the story in the Biblical text does the narrator call for Shimshôn's obedience. The call to obedience is an integral part of most of the prophet's words concerning Israel, its fall to pagan gods, and eventual restoration through repentance. If Shimshôn were under the same obligation, it is left implied and not spelled out as done in other contexts elsewhere in the Bible.

Greenstein is correct in stating that he does not believe this to be the only meaning of the Shimshôn story. In fact, he concedes that this theory is not readily apparent to the casual, or "sensitive" reader. It only becomes apparent after they have "reflected upon the text afterwards, sorted out its peculiarities, and made sense of them." (Greenstein, 1981a, p. 253). Unfortunately, "making sense of them" often includes adding our own theologies and ideas into a story to make sense (see Chapter 2, the discussion on Cognitive Science – section 2.1.2). In this case, Greenstein's "sense" seems to be heavily influenced by theological teachings about Shimshôn, and an attempt to smooth over incongruences in the text, instead of letting the text speak for itself, as it is.

Exum concludes that Shimshôn has many "faces", and each of these is shown only when approached in the right way.

> His character is hard to pin down, and, if he cannot be all things to all readers, he can at least be many things to different readers, and often more than one thing to the same reader (I'm an example of that). He is a man of many faces, not all of which are mutually exclusive (Exum, 2014, p. 30).

This is the very definition of etic – the outside perspective on the subject's face, and not the internal reason for the face. This approach is also the problem this study attempts to address. An ancient text is rarely written with an open interpretation in mind. So, what was the original author's motive behind the story?

This is a question that Elie Assis attempts to answer in '*The Structure and Meaning of the Samson Narratives (Jud. 13–16)*'. Assis explores the structure of four episodes that he has identified. These 'episodes' are (Assis, 2014, p. 3):

1) Shimshôn's first marriage to the Timnahite
2) The episode of wanting to sleep with her
3) Shimshôn's visit to the prostitute in Gaza
4) Shimshôn's dalliance with Delîylâh

According to Assis, the structure of each of these episodes is similar, following a like pattern (2014, pp. 4, 6–9):

1) Shimshôn is physically attracted to a Philistine woman
2) This leads Shimshôn to break the rules of the Nazirite
3) Shimshôn is frustrated (first two) or satisfied (last two) sexually and gains superhuman power, but through this he is dominated by a woman's will
4) Shimshôn uses the power to hurt or humiliate the Philistines.

This pattern, Assis argues, is the basis of what drives Shimshôn – a primal, base desire and its fulfilment. This, he argues, is proof that the idea of "Shimshôn as Israel" cannot be viable, as the narrative structure clearly fits a character (Shimshôn) and not a metaphorical nation (Assis, 2014, pp. 2, 11). Assis also notes that the placement of the story, between the "real" judges of the book of Judges, and the beginning of Shemû'êl's story that leads to Israel having a monarchy, is interesting. It is as if, right before the start of the monarchy-cycle, the editors of the Old Testament wanted to drive home the point of dependence on God and that all power comes from Him.

However, the above is purely a premise, since Shimshôn is not mentioned once in the later stories[83]. If the book of Samuel did mention Shimshôn as a sort of a warning to the kings, we could have accepted this as a valid assumption. As it is, it remains purely speculative, and therefore unprovable.

Assis concludes that Shimshôn is a superhuman hero, when YHWH bestowed upon him the divine miraculous powers, however, take away those divine and unnatural powers, and we are left with "an extraordinary weak and foolish man" (2014, p. 11).

Shimshôn's nature and character is also extensively discussed by Bartholome (1990) in her dissertation titled '*Samson: Hero, martyr, or fool?*'. Bartholome, however, is not only concerned with Shimshôn as ancient story here, but with *Samson* as character in culture.

[83] The exception is a very curious case in the book of 1 Samuel, chapter 12 verse 11. This verse lists some judges as having saved Israel, the last of which is usually translated as "Samson". However, the LXX and Masoretic (Aleppo) have "Samuel" there:
1Sam 12:11:
και απεστειλεν κυριος τον ιεροβααλ και τον βαρακ και τον ιεφθαε και τον <u>σαμουηλ</u> …
יהוה את ירבעל ואת בדן ואת יפתח ואת <u>שמואל</u>
This could be an ancient spelling-error, as the context would imply that this should rather be Shimshôn rather than Shemû'êl. However, since both the oldest sources for this verse clearly say "Shemû'êl", we go with that as part of an emic philosophy.

To this end, he traces Shimshôn's development from the Bible, through Josephus and then on to modern portrayals, such as Milton's *Samson Agonistes* and modern movies[84].

Bartholome's contribution is, however, predominantly a discussion and survey of how Shimshôn was portrayed through various forms of media from Biblical times until the present day, tracing his growth from "hero" to "martyr" in the collective minds of ancient Israelites, Romans, Renaissance artists, and modern people. As a result, Bartholome's discussion is fixed on the modern perception of Shimshôn, not the ancient one.

In discussing the ancient perceptions, Bartholome falls prey to the same snares as most other commentators on ancient Shimshôn, in that she quickly associates Shimshôn with Herakles, following Margalith (Margalith, 1987). This is, again, rather far-fetched, considering the chronological chasm[85] between the two cultures. Bartholome does, however, note that the story of Shimshôn is comprises earlier folklore, and was inserted into the book of Judges by the Deuteronomistic editor, along with the appropriate "judge" formulae and format (Bartholome, 1990, p. 56). She concludes that Shimshôn is used throughout history as a kind of "blank slate" Biblical hero on which to project one's societal and religious ideals of what a "Biblical hero" should look like (Bartholome, 1990, p. 166).

Othniel Margalith employs a methodology that is similar to the one proposed in this study in his articles: "Samson's Foxes" (1985), "Samson Riddle and Samson Magic Locks" (1986), and "The Legends of Samson/Heracles" (1987). In each of these, he first addresses his subject matter in the form of three statements/questions that are then answered, a more emic approach:

1. Is the subject a common form in the Bible?
2. Is the subject really what it purports to be?
3. What is the *Sitz im Leben* of the subject?

These questions are similar to the structure of the study as set out here, although the focus and detail is slightly different, since, in this study, the subject is approached in a focused manner and uses Panofsky and Pike's theories in their purer form, presupposing nothing and analysing as much as possible, as outlined in Chapter 2. Margalith fails in

[84] Bartholome mentions many different movies in her thesis, c.f pp. 155–158 of her thesis for a discussion on not only Samson in cinema, but also how the concepts inherent in the story of Samson affected movies in general

[85] The earliest date for the texts of the story of Shimshôn is in the 7th century BC. The earliest date for evidence of Jewish and Greek thought meeting and exchanging ideas is after Alexander the Great's conquest of the area around 330BC.

his attempt to involve the *Sitz im Leben*, since he links plausible yet unprovable ideas together to present a wholly believable, but ultimately unprovable series of events that is not based in the context nor historical narrative of his subjects, something Mobley objects to as well (Mobley, 2006, pp. 7–10).

The image of Shimshôn as heroic figure and “role model” is discussed by Gregory Mobley in his book *The Empty Men: The Heroic Tradition of Ancient Israel*. Mobley attempts to trace the character of Shimshôn, much in the same manner as Exum above, to its original roots, speaking of “many Samsons” (Mobley, 2005, p. 172) to explain the possible different sources/traditions that finally formed around the Shimshôn of the Bible we know today. However, instead of focussing on just one aspect, he analyses the story of Shimshôn in light of the different aspects of Shimshôn shown or derived from the original Biblical narrative. Through this Shimshôn is shown to us as a “rough-and-ready frontier type”, in the same vein as the title of the book, referencing the “empty man” concept Mobley sees in Judges 9:4, 11:3, and 2 Chronicles 13:7 (Mobley, 2005, p. 1). These “empty men” are generally translated as “vain and useless” and are understood to mean “vagabonds” or “scoundrels”. Mobley makes the logical assumption that, since the available source material we have portrays a society based on kinship-ties and a strict primogeniture system, a stratum of unlanded, kinless people, predominantly men, who would probably resort to being outlaws and/or mercenaries is inevitable. However, Mobley claims that such a reference “connotes an entire Israelite heroic tradition submerged in Biblical texts” (Mobley, 2005, p. 2). Such a hypothesis is problematic, since we have, by his own admission, no real proof of this tradition beyond assumptions based on existing literature, which don’t mention such elements. The connotation is therefore based on the absence of evidence.

These men, Mobley argues, represented the true frontiersmen of the pre-Kingdom era, and their stories were seen as too adventurous, too rebellious by the later redactors of the Old Testament books during the times of conquest and eventual exile. Mobley rejects the traditional and theological interpretations of the stories about these men, exploring Ehud (’Êhûd), Gideon (Gidʿôn) (and his son Abimelech, (’Ăbîymelek)), and Shimshôn in a more emic light, focusing on the little details in their respective stories (Mobley, 2005).

He also incorporates and draws extensively from European, Greek, and Mesopotamian mythology and folklore for comparisons to illustrate how these characters would act. Of particular note is how he compares Shimshôn to the Mesopotamian concept of a “Chaos” monster/agent and a “Wild Man”[86]. Mobley reads elements of chaos or wildness into the story of Shimshôn that are not present in the text, but appear only when one reads it through a particular lens and cultural perception. However, by doing so, he illustrates how one’s existing knowledge structures and perception can affect the reading of a source. The same can be said of how Shimshôn’s modern image of an indomitable “hero” shapes Mobley’s view of Shimshôn and his actions in the Bible. Through repeatedly incorporating and including references to modern ideas, such as “frontiersmen”, evoking modern or near-modern idealistic images of cowboys and rough trappers of the North American frontiers, Mobley undermines the premise of his book as looking for the ancient character of Shimshôn.

Despite this, however, Mobley also successfully portrays Shimshôn in a different, more human light than other authors, who still see him in his theological and historical religious place rather than as an ancient Israelite folk character. In this, Shimshôn casts off the theological and nationalist auras that 2000 years of religion and politics have thrown over him, and he emerges as a man who would not be tamed by civilisation or rules.

Mobley also discusses Shimshôn as a “liminal Hero” in the general ancient Near Eastern concept of such heroes in his book, *Samson and the Liminal Hero in the Ancient Near East* (2006). In this book, Mobley attempts to “locate” Shimshôn as a character using his actions, similar to what we will be doing in this chapter, as well as his relation to three themes. These themes are “stated in terms of an opposition” (Mobley, 2006, p. 34) to highlight the liminal nature of Shimshôn, and structure the study. These are: Field & House, Agitation & Rest, and Male & Female. In choosing these topics, Mobley used only the Shimshôn text, making his study emic in nature. Mobley also steers the study clear of any debates and findings regarding the developmental process of Judges and the Old Testament as a whole.

Through first examining these topics in the Shimshôn narrative, then using the Epics of Gilgameš and of *Erra and Ishum* as a Mesopotamian comparison, Mobley finds the identity of Shimshôn as a “liminal hero” in the broader ANE cultural corpus, though he does not directly compare Shimshôn to Gilgameš as character, focusing instead on the themes in the narratives to shed light on Shimshôn’s place in the roster of ANE liminal

[86] More specifically in his article *The Wild Man in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (1997).

heroes. He also brings in Biblical elements and characters not found in the book of Judges. Through this, Mobley identifies the "otherness" in Shimshôn, his "wild nature" (as evidenced that he is rarely seen to "settle") comparable to Enkidu and the earlier David. He is a "wild man" and a "warrior" (Mobley, 2006, p. 109). An interesting point that Mobley makes is that despite Shimshôn's apparent "otherness", he is embraced as a hero in Israelite culture. Through this he notes how the "wild man" is not seen as negative in Biblical literature, citing many instances of the hero being moulded in "the wilderness". YHWH's spirit is likewise seen as a primal force, giving the hero the type of raw strength that is usually associated with the wilderness. In this way, Shimshôn becomes the "monster" from the wilderness, usually slain by a hero.

On a character level, the "otherness" or "betweenness" of Shimshôn is discussed by Wilson (2014) and Gillmayr-Bucher (2014). In '*Samson the Man-Child: Failing to Come of Age in the Deuteronomistic History*', Wilson argues that Shimshôn's impulsiveness and lack of judgement signifies a lack of maturity. The story of Shimshôn is thus a "coming-of-age" tale that fails on purpose, as a sign of the inter-generational struggles of the time. In a way, the story of Shimshôn is thus the product of the psychological experience of young people at the time, where the older generation fought and settled the land, and the younger generation now caught between the Canaanite cultures around them and the still immature and growing "new" Israelite culture of their fathers (Wilson, 2014, pp. 53–58).

Whilst Wilson does correctly identify the story of Shimshôn as different to the other judges, and of containing definite folkloric elements, his conclusions are based on studies from the Balkans and other areas and does not consider the bare-bones style of the Biblical authors.

We cannot assume much psychological information from the story of Shimshôn since it is too far removed from modern versions. Even the most ancient version dates to at least 1000 years after the story would have taken place if it were historical. If the story is fictional and included/edited to fit the narrative that Israel is immature without a God-fearing leader, who is then appointed by Shemû'êl, then we have no idea when the story was actually penned(Wilson, 2014a, p. 60). Without a date, it becomes increasingly difficult to ascertain any thoughts and feelings inherent in the text, since there is also no S*itz im Leben*. Ironically, it is exactly the assumption about the *Sitz im Leben* of the nation of Israel at the time that leads Wilson to this conclusion (2014, pp. 57–60).

In '*A Hero Ensnared in Otherness? Literary Images of Samson*', Gillmayr-Bucher also explores the "otherness" of Shimshôn, particularly in literature. In the Biblical texts, she considers the relationships portrayed in the story of Shimshôn as different to the rest of the judges where there is a definite division between the Israelites and other nations by the judges. In the story of Shimshôn, the Israelites and Philistines are shown to be enemies, with the Philistines being the "other", the 'pagans' to guard against, but Shimshôn, the judge who is supposed to enforce the difference, challenges that perception repeatedly. Through interacting with them, however, he picks up personal quarrels with them, fighting them for personal reasons, ultimately becoming the "other", an enemy in their eyes (Gillmayr-Bucher, 2014, pp. 34–35).

This otherness is also explored in the way the two main women in the story, Shimshôn's first wife and Delîylâh, are portrayed. They are betrayers, antagonistic to the story, though their personal feelings are never shown. Through betraying Shimshôn, they show how Shimshôn is the only one left out, oblivious of his "otherness" of not belonging. Despite being betrayed (repeatedly by Delîylâh), Shimshôn still trusts them and wants to belong, showing his obliviousness to the whole matter. This blind attraction towards the Philistine women makes Shimshôn an "other" to his own people as well (2014, pp. 35–37).

The otherness, Gillmayr-Bucher points out, was ordained by birth, with YHWH declaring Shimshôn a "holy other", a nazir. This automatically sets him apart from the rest of his people anyway. This otherness is then seemingly encouraged by YHWH who, Gillmayr-Bucher notes, is the only "character" in the story who does not mark him as "other", but who does "set him up as the 'other'" (2014, p. 38).

Gillmayr-Bucher then studies the "otherness" in modern literature (specifically German literature), how it embraces the "otherness" of Shimshôn, and how he is a modern champion of "otherness". Her conclusion is that the original author of Shimshôn probably used the story as a mirror, reflecting cultural interactions and the ambiguity between cultures which result from it. She remarks on how this leaves certain people in a state of "between" or "otherness".

Ottuh and Schipper (2011) both utilize psychological methods to analyse the character of Shimshôn. Ottuh's '*Was Samson a Promiscuous Man (Judges 13-16)? Viewing Samson as a Human Figure in a Theoretical Approach*' (2019a) utilizes several modern psychological theories to gain understanding of Shimshôn's actions and the motivations behind them.

Ottuh minutely uses the exact words and phrases used in the Hebrew and expounds on these using psycho-analytical methodology, based largely on causal theory. (Ottuh, 2019a, p. 253). His point of departure is that, according to causal theory, every action must have a cause, and therefore every action Shimshôn does, is linked to something else. Following this line of thought, tracing his relationship with God, his emotions (as assumed from the text), and his actions, Ottuh concludes that Shimshôn was plagued by a desire to love and be loved (2019a, p. 261).

Ottuh's main objective is to exonerate the character of Shimshôn from being branded a wild, promiscuous man. He excuses Shimshôn's behaviour through showing how it is just human to want to be loved, and that the only thing that Shimshôn is really guilty of is a lack of self-restraint when his anger does flare up.

Similarly, Schipper attempts to humanise Shimshôn through focussing solely on Judges 16, verse 17-20. In these verses, Shimshôn gives up his secret of his strength, and trusts Delîylâh. This, Schipper argues, is a sign of how much Shimshôn is misguided and lulled into a false sense of security.

According to Schipper, Shimshôn was exhausted from everything that had happened, being driven by both the betrayal of his first wife and the Israelites. Shimshôn wanted peace, something even the prostitute at Gaza could not give him. With Delîylâh, it seems, Shimshôn could finally rest properly and sleep, as shown by the emphasis on sleep shown in the text (Schipper, 2011, p. 61).

Furthermore, he points out that after the first ambush by the Philistines, the text does not show that they attacked him again, merely that Delîylâh says they "are upon him" (Schipper, 2011a, p. 64). This, coupled with his desire for rest, and possibly love, makes him ostensibly think that Delîylâh will not betray him and that he does not need YHWH's help any longer. He fervently wishes to retire and is therefore a "fool for love", as Schipper concludes (2011, p. 68).

Van der Zee attempts to understand Shimshôn in light of the judges and other examples of leadership in the Bible in '*Samson and Samuel: Two Examples of Leadership*' (Van der Zee, 2014). She compares the non-conforming Shimshôn to the ideal "super-judge"

Shemû'êl, concluding that they are complete opposites. Though her study does not add anything new to the field, she does emically and thoroughly go through the text of Shimshôn's story as we have it, coming to an emic, text-based conclusion. She does this by only staying in the source material (the book of Judges and the book of Samuel), comparing and contrasting two characters within the same culture, relative timeframe, and, supposedly, both "Judges" of Israel.

Through this emic look, she also concludes that the book of Judges was not written with any political agenda. The book demonstrates not the title of leadership that Israel should have (i.e., between "king" or "judge"), but the type of leadership. Shemû'êl stands in direct contrast to the anarchy of judges, especially the complete mess of duality and "otherness" that seems to be Shimshôn. Through the book of Judges, the stability and peace brought by the theocratic judge Shemû'êl is highlighted.

In '*Samson's Suicide: Death and the Hebrew Literary Canon*', Harris (2012) explores how Shimshôn's "heroic" suicide and one-man-army character has influenced Hebrew thought and, more specifically, the literature and popular mindset of the modern-day Israeli nation. She asserts that the death of Shimshôn, and the way he killed so many of "Israel's enemies" with his death has inspired the modern Israeli population, especially the military, in how the ideal male "hero of Israel" should conduct himself - to even lay down his life for the good of the Israeli cause (Harris, 2012, pp. 68; 88).

This view resulted in and was bolstered by the creation of the "sabra-soldier" myth, a sort of warrior-poet who was "young and robust, daring and resourceful, direct and down-to-earth, honest and loyal, ideologically committed and ready to defend his people to the bitter end." (Harris, 2012, pp. 67–68). This myth was then used as a model for the youth of the young nation of modern Israel to follow.

Harris follows this myth, as well as the use of Shimshôn imagery, from the earliest "sabra" myths, and onto the challenge to this ideal by the new wave of modern Israeli stories that paraphrase and modernise (or parody) the same well-known Biblical stories that gave rise to the *sabra* stories. Harris uses Amos Oz's '*The Way of the Wind*' short story to illustrate how the modern author re-used much of Samon's material to build his own story, questioning the established orthodox hegemony over the country in a similar way in which the story of Shimshôn seems to challenge the laws of his time (Harris, 2012, pp. 83–84).

4.2.2 DATING AND CONTEXTUALISING THE STORY OF SHIMSHÔN

Before delving into the character of Shimshôn, we first need to establish the context of the story to accurately date it so we can apply the correct cultural context. Accurately dating any Biblical book is problematic due to the scarcity of sources in the original languages and time-periods. Except for limited fragments and incomplete books found at Qumran (of which there are no published usable fragments for the story of Shimshôn), there does not seem to exist any Biblical text containing the narrative of Shimshôn physically dating to before the 4th century AD. Sources after this date also generally in Greek, Aramaic (Syriac), or a modernised Hebrew.

This leaves the dating and verification of the texts to internal source material, such as king-lists, linguistics, and archaeology. These, too, can be flawed. For example, there is no way to independently verify the king-lists through artefacts related to the kings. They can only be dated and verified when there is contact with cultures like Babylon and Assyria whose manuscripts and records survived and mentioned conquered vassals. Thus relatively “late” kings of Israel and Judah are present in the historical record whereas the more biblically famous, but chronologically earlier, kings like David and Solomon are almost absent[87] (Dever, 1995; Kuhrt, 1995; Scheepers and Scheffler, 2000; Boshoff, Scheffler and Spangenberg, 2006).

This scarcity of dating evidence also pertains to the tumultuous politics and religious minefields that surround archaeological work in Jerusalem. The Al-Aqsa Mosque and its surrounding terrace and buildings are built on the area where the Temple of Solomon and some of the palaces of David would have stood (Kuhrt, 1995; Galor, 2017). Up until relatively recently, archaeology in the area was extremely limited due to Muslim veneration of the site and restricted access. Much-politicized Israeli-led excavations into and under the complex since the 1990s, as well as current excavations on what is generally believed to be the city of David will hopefully lead to a better understanding of the archaeology of the city and potentially add more kings mentioned in the Bible to the list of archaeologically verified kings.

Linguistics, too, cannot shed much light on the date of original authorship of many of the texts in the Bible, as the texts we have today were re-written and translated multiple times

[87] Ongoing archaeological digs in Jerusalem may shed some more light on this period.

throughout history and we cannot be sure of their textual or linguistic integrity and history (Barmash, 2020). As mentioned at the start of this chapter, the oldest complete, physical copy of many of the books of the Bible is only extant in a Greek Bible from the 4^{th} century AD, namely the *Codex Sinaiticus*. This sentiment, as well as a scalding review of the "document hypothesis" is shared in Ehrensvärd's 2006 article, "Why Biblical texts cannot be dated linguistically" (Ehrensvärd, 2006).

Further complicating matters is the "minimalist" and "maximalist" debate that has been raging since the 1800s about Bible history. Broadly speaking, the minimalist school questions the veracity of the Biblical manuscripts and assumes none of it to be a true representation of history, unless proven to be so by archaeology. The minimalist cause is therefore bolstered by the religious and political arguments that prevent archaeologists from properly excavating key locations that could prove or disprove the Biblical narrative. Because of this lack of archaeological evidence, the minimalists seek to compress all Biblical books into a smaller timeframe and fit them into very narrowly defined historical periods which fit the available evidence. To achieve this, the minimalists tend to dismiss most parts of the histories given in the Old Testament as fictitious (Boshoff, Scheffler and Spangenberg, 2006).

The maximalists, on the other hand, generally treat the Biblical text as representing the Israelite version of the history of the region and dismiss the lack of evidence as something to be rectified when possible. The Biblical account is taken as mostly accurate, though unproven, and placed over history where possible (Boshoff, Scheffler and Spangenberg, 2006). Some of the main points of contention between these schools is the date of the Exodus (and subsequent invasion of Israel), date of the kings of the United Monarchy (David and Solomon), and the dates and lengths of the reigns of the kings, specifically Solomon, Ahab, and Jehoshaphat (Cazelles, 1975; Boshoff, Scheffler and Spangenberg, 2006).

For the sake of brevity in this study, we will not delve into the pros and cons of each of these schools of thought, as this is another debate altogether. I subscribe to a philosophy that could be described as a mixture of both: sources should be studied in their own contexts and no assumptions made without original source material, even if this means treating the Bible as a chronologically flawed document as part of a study.

In this study, we will attempt to present, with full knowledge of all the issues surrounding such a simplistic approach, a rough date for Shimshôn that is internally given by the content of the story in the Bible and calibrated by extra-Biblical sources, such as Josephus. This study is primarily concerned with the character of Shimshôn, not the chronology of Biblical works, nor their historical accuracy. The story is, however, set in an area with a rich, albeit complicated, historic record. Whether the story reflects actual events or not, the author of the story had knowledge of this rich history and it no doubt influenced their telling of the story.

The story of Shimshôn mentions that the Philistines invaded the land of Israel. Israel is an area in Canaan, with Philistia being an area covering much of the coastlands from Ashkelon up the coast to Dor and Akko (Douglas, Tenney and Silva, 2011). The Philistines are commonly identified as one of the groups of the 'Sea Peoples'. These were a collection of nebulous and much debated groups of people that appear in the ancient Near East starting around the late 1200s BC and coinciding with the massive political and economic upheavals of the 13th and 12th centuries BC.[88] Whether these people were part of the reason for the upheaval or part of its consequences is still a matter of much debate, as are their origin and physical culture (Artzy, 1987; Cifola, 1988; Kuhrt, 1995, pp. 386–393; Knapp and Manning, 2016)

It appears that the Philistines carried at least some Mycenaean influence, though heavily mixed with local Canaanite and other Semitic features. This is evidenced by Greek-Minoan names found in the very limited amount of linguistic evidence and Greek-Minoan style pottery uncovered in the region, together with more Semitic artefacts and alphabets (Stone, 1995; Maeir et al., 2008).

Wherever they came from, a group called the "*prst*", identified as "*pereset*", or "Philistines" by the Egyptians, were involved in several attacks on Egyptian assets by sea in the Nile Delta, as well as by land to the east. This group was later settled by Ramses III in garrison towns across Canaan (Cifola, 1988), according to the *Papyrus Harris*. Later on, as Egyptian power waned in Canaan, the Philistines would go on to form a distinct culture of their own and dominate parts of the region (Kuhrt, 1995; Sharon, 2001; Knapp and Manning, 2016)

[88] Interestingly, the Hebrew word פלשתי *pelishtîy*, anglicized as "Philistine" means "immigrant" and is probably a reference to the Sea Peoples being immigrants to Canaan (Brown, Driver and Briggs, 2012).

The dating of the Philistine settlement in Canaan is intrinsically linked to the Egyptian chronology of the New Kingdom period. The *Papyrus Harris* and reliefs on Ramses III's mortuary temple at Medinet Habu are the only known sources that definitely mention the Philistines, and so it follows that their settlement is related to the reign of Ramses III. This only holds if the identification of "*prst*" with the Philistines is correct, which it would seem is based on various other sources, including a figurine with an inscription calling the area "*prst*" sometime between 664 and 650 BC (Spalinger, 1977; Sharon, 2001).

The initial invasion seems to have taken place in the 8th year (Kuhrt, 1995; Knapp and Manning, 2016), or possibly 5th year (Drews, 2000) of Rameses III's reign, in the period between 1179-1176 BC. The reliefs on Ramses III's mortuary temple at Medinet Habu are the only source for this invasion, however, and there is some doubt as to the accuracy of the information and whether or not Ramses III stole some events, as he did raw materials, from the temples of Ramses II and Merneptah (Kuhrt, 1995; Cox, Davies and Davies, 2007). Another possible complication is that the Philistines had occupied and lived along the coast of Canaan for a while prior to the attacks during the reign of Ramses III. Pottery associated with the Philistines can be dated to between 1193 and 1175 BC, pushing the date for the Philistine invasion even higher (Bietak, 1993; Stone, 1995). If this is true, then Ramses III probably claimed to have settled the Philistines in the lands in the typical Egyptian fashion of rewriting history on their monuments to portray a positive outcome, whereas reality was quite the opposite: the Philistines had settled in the land, and Egypt was too weak or disinterested to drive them out.[89]

Egyptian dates and periods are also marred by extensive debates and issues surrounding source materials. Kuhrt, in her seminal reference work, *The Ancient Near East c.3000-330 BC*, lists three possible dates for the reigns of many of the kings of New Kingdom Egypt. These differences generally span 20 to 50 years, though for Rameses III there is only one date span, namely 1184-1152 BC (Kuhrt, 1995, p. 205). This conviction is due to the relative certainty of the dates associated with the Ramesside period, despite ongoing debate (Cryer, 1995; Kuhrt, 1995; Hagens, 2006; Hawkins, 2011). For the purposes of this study, we will accept these dates as relatively accurate as they do not

[89] This is, incidentally, one of the main reasons Egyptian sources are so hard to accurately date or prove (Cryer, 1995).

have much of a bearing on the study itself. However, much work is needed to create a stable and well-established chronology for the ancient Near East.[90]

The established date for the Philistines can thus be taken as starting sometime from 1193 BC and ending with the invasions and loss of Canaan to the Babylonians during the 7th century BC (Spalinger, 1977). To fix the story of Shimshôn to this timeframe, we need to look at where, in the contextual book (Judges, and by extension the rest of the Bible) of the story, the Philistines are mentioned.

In Genesis, the Philistines are mentioned a few times, mostly in reference to their land, i.e., ארץ פלשתים or "*eretz pelishtim*". This is most likely an anachronism that snuck in due to the final edition of the text we have being completed sometime during the latter half of the 1st millennium BC, when the area was called by that name. A similar passage in Exodus chapter 13 shares this anachronism:

> *13:17 And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt:*

Anachronism also affects the dating of the Exodus itself, which we will not get into in this study.

The reference to "war" could also reference the countless Egyptian military operations in the area, as well as the relatively strong garrisons. If it is a reference to the Philistines, it could help prove that the Philistines were established before Ramses III's supposed settlement of them (Stone, 1995). However, until the chronology of Canaan, Egypt and the historicity (or lack thereof) of Biblical stories is proven, this remains a highly speculative area.

In the book of Joshua (Chapter 13), there is a direct reference to the five main centres that the Philistines occupied:

> *13:3 From Sihor, which is before Egypt, even unto the borders of Ekron northward, which is counted to the Canaanite: five lords of the*

[90] Often, kings and dynasties are only dated through association with other kings and not through direct dating methods, usually due to a lack of artefacts or proper providence of artefacts found in private collections and excavations. Pottery studies have been invaluable in attempting to sort out the chronology of the region, though these are still not connected directly to specific kings (Shea, 1985b; Na'aman, 2016b; Barmash, 2020).

Philistines; the Gazathites, and the Ashdothites, the Eshkalonites, the Gittites, and the Ekronites; also the Avites

These lands are listed as some of the places that still needed to be conquered. They are conquered, without any mention made to Philistines in the first chapter of the book of Judges:

1:18 Also Judah took Gaza with the coast thereof, and Askelon with the coast thereof, and Ekron with the coast thereof.

What is interesting here is that the tribes of Judah and Simeon are simply mentioned to have casually taken over three of the five main Philistine centres without so much as a reprisal or a mention of a Philistine. Later, in Judges and 1 & 2 Samuel, the Philistines are the main antagonists against Israel, so it seems to make no sense not to mention them here, if indeed they were living there. The reason might be that they were not present when Judah took the cities, and only invaded later, placing this passage before 1195 BC. This would mean that the Joshua passage is also an anachronism, mentioning the name of the area after it was settled by the Philistines at a time when they weren't there yet.

The rest of the book of Judges mentions the Philistines only three times before the story of Shimshôn, in chapters 3 and 10. Chapter 3 foreshadows that the Philistines and other nations wil be a present danger to Israel, as they are being utilized by YHWH to test the obedience of the Israelites:

3:1 Now these are the nations which the YHWH left, to prove Israel by them, even as many of Israel as had not known all the wars of Canaan;

3:2 Only that the generations of the children of Israel might know, to teach them war, at the least such as before knew nothing thereof;

3:3 Namely, five lords of the Philistines, and all the Canaanites, and the Sidonians, and the Hivites that dwelt in mount Lebanon, from mount Baalhermon unto the entering in of Hamath.

3:4 And they were to prove Israel by them, to know whether they would hearken unto the commandments of the YHWH, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses.

If the tribes of Judah and Simeon ever did capture the cities as chapter 1 verse 18 implies, they had lost them by this point in the story, as the verse mentions the full "five Lords of the Philistines".

The other reference in chapter three reads almost as a footnote, and is the first reference to action by or against the Philistines:

3:31 And after him was Shamgar the son of Anath, which slew of the Philistines six hundred men with an ox goad: and he also delivered Israel.

Shamgar was the third officially named leader of the Israelites in the book of Judges, after Joshua and Caleb had died. Absolutely nothing else is known about him other than the contents of this verse, which confirms that he killed 600 Philistines and saved Israel. The verse helps us fix the story to a rough date. Since he is the first person who is mentioned in action against the Philistines, it stands to reason that this event occurred soon after 1195 BC,[91] possibly even during their invasion.

After Shamgar, a series of leaders are mentioned with varying degrees of details. Barak and Deborah (verses 4-5) and Gidʿôn (Gideon) (verses 6-8) each get their own detailed narratives. Then after Gidʿôn's son causes civil war, a short list with brief descriptions of periods judged and where they were buried consist only of Tola and then Jair.

We encounter the Philistines for the first time again in chapter 10:

10:6 And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim, and Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Zidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines, and forsook the YHWH, and served not him.

10:7 And the anger of the YHWH was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the children of Ammon.

10:8 And that year they vexed and oppressed the children of Israel: eighteen years, all the children of Israel that were on the other side Jordan in the land of the Amorites, which is in Gilead.

10:9 Moreover the children of Ammon passed over Jordan to fight also against Judah, and against Benjamin, and against the house of Ephraim; so that Israel was sore distressed.

10:10 And the children of Israel cried unto the YHWH, saying, We have sinned against thee, both because we have forsaken our God, and also served Baalim.

[91] That is, unless the word "Philistines" here refers to actual immigrants, in which case this date is useless, and presents an interesting case of violence against immigrants in Palestine, considering recent modern history.

The Philistines, it would seem, "vexed"[92] the Israelites but in this case, it was the Amorites who were the main aggressors with the Philistines only mentioned as raiding. In chapters 11 and 12 the Amorites are dealt with by another judge, Jephthah. The Philistines are next mentioned in the story of Shimshôn. This makes Shimshôn the first "judge" or leader of Israel to deal with the Philistines, in Judges chapter 13:

> *13:1 And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the YHWH; and the YHWH delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years.*

The forty years mentioned in the verse do not appear connected to any other event and could actually be linked to the passage in chapter 10. This is the author's supposition because the Philistines were mentioned as aggressors in chapter 10 but never dealt with or mentioned again. The narrative instead shifted to Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon who fought against the Ammonites. Chronologically chapter 10 takes us back to when a judge was raised up to lead the Israelites against the Philistines. The story of Shimshôn happens independently of the accounts about the other Judges who dealt with the Ammonites mentioned before him.

Shimshôn's chronologic relationship within the book of Judges is uncertain. The text provides no synchronisation with the surrounding accounts, and external evidence offers no firm resolution. The references to the Philistines put the story sometime between c. 1200 to 1100 BC, in a time when we have little to no archaeological evidence of the Israelites. This is due to the similarity between Israelite and Canaanite cultures and the way they seemed to flow together in the archaeological record in pre-Kingdom times. Despite this lack of hard archaeological evidence, most Biblical scholars put the time of Judges in the same period (Albright, 1940, 1945; Cazelles, 1975; Kitchen, 1975; Kuhrt, 1995; Douglas, Tenney and Silva, 2011; Wong, 2012; Knapp and Manning, 2016)

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[92] The word translated as "vexed" is רָעַץ, *râʻats*, which means "to shatter" and is commonly used metaphorically to denote a broken spirit (Brown, Driver and Briggs, 2012).

4.2.2.1 BIBLICAL CHRONOLOGY, A POSSIBLE SOURCE OF INFORMATION

Taking a slight detour[93], the Bible itself could also give us a rough date, if the reigns of the kings of Israel are to be believed. What follows is a very rough reading of the kings of Judah as found in 1 & 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles. A full discussion of this topic is a study unto itself and will be published by the author in the future. As this is only tangential to this study, the following will be brief.

We have an archaeologically proven date of 596 BC for the first exile of Judah to Babylon, when the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem and exiled King Jehoiachin. This event and its date is also attested to in Babylonian records. Working back from there, we get:

[93] It should be noted that all of the statements and arguments made in this section are still in the hypothetical phase. It is part of an unpublished study I have undertaken, and it is far from complete or properly compared against existing chronologies. It serves as a reminder that the Bible does also have an internal chronology that has to be calibrated but might still be useful.

Table 1: Rough dates for the kings of Judah extracted from 1 & 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles, excerpt from an unpublished study in progress by the author.

Reign	Date		Event	Age	Kings			Chronicles
11	585	BC	Zedekiah	21	II		II	
0	596	BC	Jehoiachin Taken to Babylon		II	24:15	II	36:6
0,25	596,25	BC	Jehoiachin Becomes king of Judah	18	II	24:8	II	36:9
11	607,25	BC	Jehoiakim starts reign	25	II	23:36	II	36:5
0,25	607,5	BC	Jehoahaz starts reign	23	II	23:31	II	36:2
31	638,5	BC	Josiah starts reign	8	II	22:1	II	34:1
2	640,5	BC	Amon	22	II	21:19	II	33:21
55	695,5	BC	Manasseh	12	II	21:1	II	33:1
29	724,5	BC	Hezekiah	25	II	18:2	II	29:1
16	740,5	BC	Ahaz	20	II	16:2	II	28:1
16	756,5	BC	Jotham	25	II	15:33	II	27:1
52	808,5	BC	Azariah(Kings)/Uzziah(Chronicles)	16	II	15:2	II	26:3
29	837,5	BC	Amaziah	25	II	14:2	II	25:1
7	844,5	BC	Athaliah/Jehoiada					
40	884,5	BC	Joash	7	II	11:21-12:2	II	24:1
1	885,5	BC	Ahaziah	22	II	8:26	II	22:2
8	893,5	BC	Jehoram	32	II	8:17	II	21:5
25	918,5	BC	Jehoshaphat	35	I	22:42	II	20:31
41	959,5	BC	Asa	NA	I	15:9-10	II	
3	962,5	BC	Abijah		I	15:2	II	13:2
17	979,5	BC	Rehoboam	41	I	14:21	II	12:13
-4	1015,5	BC	Temple built		I	6:1		
40	1019,5	BC	Solomon		I	11:42	II	9:30
40	1055,5	BC	David		I	2:11	I	29:27

Granted, there are many difficulties with the king lists as they are set out in the Bible. These have been examined by, most notably, Albright (Albright, 1945), Finkelstein (2011), Na'aman (2016b), Shea (1985), Cryer (1995), and Ben Tor (2004), though the latter is more concerned with proving that Hazor's occupation layers disprove the rest of the chronology, specifically that proposed by Finkelstein.

However, in the Gilgameš section (Chapter 3, specifically 3.2.2 & 3.2.3) of this study, we used the very dubious Sumerian King list to place a quasi-historical Gilgameš, so it is only fair that we ignore all the religious politicking and treat the "Judean King list" with the same academic courtesy as the Sumerian Kings list.

Therefore, based on the above king list, the Temple of Solomon was built in c. 1015 BC. This date, taken with 1 Kings chapter 6 verse 1 below, gives us a date of c.1495 BC for the Exodus.

> *6:1 And it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month Zif, which is the second month, that he began to build the house of the YHWH.*

This is an outrageously[94] early date and has yet to be proven outside the Biblical literature. It is also inconsistent with the Philistines being present in Judges and is one of the many chronological inconsistencies between the stories in the Pentateuch and the historic record. For the purposes of this thought experiment, we will use the maximum "high dates" that are as liberal as possible and fall into the framework of this study as they come from a literal reading of the text.[95]

Josephus claims that Joshua lived 65 years after the exodus, so Joshua dies in c. 1430 BC. This leaves about 345 years (1430 BC-1055 BC) for the judges, Shemû'êl, and Saul to occur. Saul's reign is debatable, since the particular text dealing with its length (1 Samuel 13:1) is damaged and the numbers lost. A reference in the New Testament (Acts 13:21) sets his reign at 42 years, based on the Samarian version of the Old Testament.

Using this "high period" of 42 years, we get a date of 1092 BC for the start of Saul's reign, and about 1140 BC for the birth of Shemû'êl. This leaves about 200 years for the events of the Judges, the last of which seems to be Shimshôn, as there are no other judges mentioned after Judges chapter 16. It would therefore seem that, according to the author(s) of the Bible, Shemû'êl was the direct successor to Shimshôn, with a short interlude during which ʿÊlîy (Eli) was in charge as high-priest.[96] This places the events of Shimshôn somewhere between 1200 and 1140 BC, which is more or less where we expect him to be if he is the first judge to deal with the Philistines.

[94] Most minimalists will be cringing at this date, just as most maximalists would probably be celebrating.
[95] These dates will most certainly be wrong and will have to be calibrated. However, they do serve as a hypothetical earliest possible date and help narrow down the periods concerned.
[96] This assumes that the Judges mentioned in Judges chapter 12 are concurrent with Shimshôn. This view is shared by Josephus in *Antiquities* 5.9.

Though this is a very rough thought-experiment, this apparently "high-date" for the Exodus results in a date for Shimshôn which perfectly aligns with the information we have about the Philistines, shows that there might actually be some merit to this line of enquiry.

4.2.2.2 DATE AND CONTEXT

The period in which Shimshôn's events are set is therefore not long after the Philistines first appeared in Canaan. This period is pre-Kingdom Israel, in a time when the different tribes seemed to come together *ad hoc* to fight a common enemy before returning to their individual lives.

Very little is known about the material culture of the Israelites, such as they were, during this time. The Biblical narrative prevalent in Judges is that the Israelites kept worshipping local Canaanite deities and had to be periodically re-unified as a culture by specific people in authority who worshipped YHWH, called judges by the author of the book. This illustrates a period of change and a struggle between what is presented in the Biblical narrative as "Israelite" culture where only YHWH was worshipped and Canaanite culture with their own pantheon of deities.

With regard to customs and physical cultures, we can safely assume that this "struggle" was not only limited to religious practices. The Israelites, according to the Biblical account, were also Canaanite in origin and had been relatively isolated from Egyptian culture. Their physical culture and customs were therefore quite similar to those of the Canaanites[97] (Cazelles, 1975; Raban, 1987; Scheepers and Scheffler, 2000).

[97] This is so much so the case that the two are usually mentioned together as part of the same "branch" of culture in reference books, such as Sasson (1995) and Kuhrt (1995).

4.2.3 MALE IN ISRAELITE/CANAANITE SOCIETY

The story of Shimshôn identifies him as a male. In Canaanite/Israelite society, the male was the leading gender. Leaders and rule-makers were invariably male. Prophets and those "chosen by YHWH" in the Bible were also predominantly male, with some exceptions. However, even these exceptions, such as Deborah, are accompanied by and operate under the guardianship of a male leader.

The absence of non-Biblical texts detailing any practical social or legal practices in Israel itself does make it slightly more difficult to pinpoint exactly of what these consisted. However, the Bible does provide some glimpses into how society works, and how men were expected to behave and treated (Avalos, 1995).

Israelite society was a strong patriarchal society, built around the idea that the (eldest) male was always the leader of a family. A firstborn son was also the heir and progenitor of his family's legacy. Often, the family of a great leader would become a clan onto itself. In the book of Judges, this can be seen with the Gileadites, descendants of Gilead, a descendant of Ephraim and founder of the Gileadite family (Judges 11). There are many other such references in the genealogies to people being identified with and leading their ancestral clan, named after a common grandfather or great-grandfather. In the "table of nations" (Genesis 10) this technique is used to show which descendants of Noah ended up as which nation (Vermeulen, 1996; Demeke, 2001; Baasten, 2003).[98]

The family was ruled similarly to a kingdom, and the entire social structure can be treated as a quasi-feudal one where each person in a nuclear family is subservient to the father (and in some cases the eldest son), who, in turn, is under the authority of the clan head. These clans make up a tribe, and each clan head (called elders or leaders of the families) is subservient to the leader of the tribe, usually the leader of the dominant clan. These tribe leaders then submitted to YHWH directly, or to the appointed priest, prophet, judge, or king, depending on which period one is in (Avalos, 1995).[99] In the case of Shimshôn,

[98] What is interesting is that Nimrud, a "Hamite", is credited with building (founding) almost all the large cities in Mesopotamia. Canaan is also listed under the descendants of Ham, not Shem, despite academics in the 1700s broadly classifying most cultures in Canaan and Mesopotamia as "Semite". Naming the descendants of Ham as "Semites" shows a clear bias in how scholars blindly interpreted the texts based on the cultural norms associated with the Bible. However, recently, only the languages of this area have been classified as Semitic, as a matter of "convenience", since the "Table of Nations" is considered more a list of alliances than an actual record of genealogy (Vermeulen, 1996; Demeke, 2001; Baasten, 2003).

[99] Though Avalos sums up the Biblical social structure quite well in his article, some of this information is also based on my own reading of the Biblical text.

who was a judge, the leaders of the tribes would be bound by the "divine appointment" to follow him.

This "authority through the male" is also present in the preface of the narrative of Shimshôn where his father asks YHWH to come back and speak to him directly (Judges 13 verse 8):

> *13:8 Then Mânôach intreated YHWH, and said, O my Lord, let the man of God which thou didst send come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born.*

YHWH attends to this request, appearing again, recapping what he had said to Mânôach's wife, this time in the presence of her husband. She does not seem to accept what YHWH had said until her husband was also informed and present.

Josephus, however, paints a more colourful picture here of passionate jealousy and how it was Mânôach's wife who asked YHWH to send the messenger back to also deliver the news to her husband to assuage his jealousy (*Antiquities*, 5.8). This is in direct contrast to verse 8 where it is clearly the husband, Mânôach, who "intreated" YHWH. This is probably due to Josephus trying to "spice up" the original story of Shimshôn as a national folk hero of the Jewish people for his Greek audience (Feldman, 1988; Ronace, 2004; Jonquière, 2014). Josephus seems to go to some lengths to make Mânôach seem flawed with jealousy, even though he also describes him as "a person of such great virtue that he had few men his equals; and without dispute the principal person of his country." (*Antiquities*, 5.8).

Ronace (2004) argues against Feldman (Feldman, 1988) that Josephus did not try to paint a picture of some sort of noble parentage for Shimshôn. To the contrary, the text (source) itself agrees with the Biblical narrative for the most part and only diverges when highlighting how jealous Mânôach was, how afraid his wife was of him, and how possessive he was. This seems to contradict the normal picture of an Israelite husband as portrayed in the Bible where the man is an almost stoic picture of a stable patriarch and authority, though it does point to the more sinister underbelly of a purely patriarchal society.

The father of a family was also responsible for the arranged marriage of his sons to suitable daughters (Avalos, 1995; Gruber, 1995). The sons could also sometimes choose their own brides, as we see Shimshôn do, although he still left the actual negotiation for the bride to his father (Judges chapter 14 verse 2 and 10):

> *14:2 And he came up, and told his father and his mother, and said, I have seen a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines: now therefore get her for me to wife*(sic)*.*

and

> *14:10 So his father went down unto the woman: and Shimshôn made there a feast; for so used the young men to do.*

In none of this is there any reference to what the woman would want. She only "pleases" Shimshôn (verse 3), or more literally she looks "straight"[100] to his "eye", and Shimshôn wishes to marry her, seemingly on sight as he didn't talk to her until verse 7, where she again "looks straight" at him. This is followed by a marriage/betrothal feast in verse 10. In chapter 15 verse 2, we see again how the father of the house, in this case a Philistine household, can break the betrothal and "hand" his daughter over to another suitor.

Males were also generally the "people of the land". Whenever YHWH speaks to the Israelites, it is usually to the "sons of Israel", though this may be superfluous as the word for "son", *bên* (בן) can also mean "child", "descendant", or "a member of a group".[101] Women seemed to be a matter of course and nature and not to be concerned with matters of national importance or religious doctrine. It was the woman's place to follow her immediate male superior and that was that (Gruber, 1995; Parker, 1995).

This is how we have it in the Bible at present. However, as noted earlier, we do not have a complete picture of the Biblical world, nor do we have the raw primary source material to show us the real picture. What we have in the Bible is a combination and redaction by a specific group of people for a specific reason, i.e., the presentation of the message of

[100] יָשַׁר, yâhar (BDB Definition: to be right, be straight, be level, be upright, be just, be lawful, be smooth).
[101] בֵּן, bên (BDB Definition: son, grandson, child, member of a group).
a) son, male child
b) grandson
c) children (plural — male and female)
d) youth, young men (plural)
e) young (of animals)
f) sons (as characterisation, i.e. sons of injustice [for unrighteous men] or sons of God [for angels])
g) people (of a nation) (plural)
h) of lifeless things, i.e. sparks, stars, arrows (figuratively)
i) a member of a guild, order, class

YHWH, often as vindication and justification for the actions of (or against) the kings, or as an explanation as to why they were being perennially oppressed by the superpowers of the time.

Cullen Murphy, in his article "Is the Bible Bad News for Women?" (1998) tells of how Professor Tivka Frymer-Kensky felt that there was an unequal distribution of finds which add the women's perspective in Mesopotamia versus those found in her own Israelite heritage. There is no doubt that these artefacts? Perspectives? probably existed, but they were simply not considered important for the narrative of the Bible.

Some other studies seek to rectify this patriarchal slant in the Bible through a re-reading of the Old Testament from a female-centric perspective (Trible, 1973). Others, such as Klyman (2014), seek to psychoanalyse the women in the Bible using modern feminist ideology. Both studies, and others like them, fail in their mission to show the feminist side of the Old Testament texts because they fail to recognise the source for what it is and end up with a text skewed by personal biases and beliefs, and not at all what the original authors had in mind.

It should be noted that these feminist-slanted "ancient" studies seek to rectify centuries of patriarchal religious repression of women and their stories in Western Christian culture. However, these repressions happened (and continue to happen) in the context of the religious practices of the three main "Abrahamic" religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) and are based on the Biblical narrative as interpreted by a patriarchal religious leadership and scholarship. This is where an understanding of the source should guide the modern scholar of any gender to reject any modern religious[102] connotations and should focus solely on the ancient source and its message without being influenced by modern bias.

Frymer-Kensky, a female historian, gives an answer (quoted in Murphy, 1998, p. 18) to the feminist perspective in the Bible: "we do not know enough about the culture or the texts to definitively say that ancient Israel was as patriarchal and "anti-feminist" as the Old Testament seems to portray it", and "the Bible simply isn't a book that was written/compiled/redacted with women in mind".

[102] This includes an increasingly popular pagan movement and their recycling of ancient Celtic and Germanic religious symbolism. These modern practices should not in any way influence scientific inquiry into the relevant cultures. Science should rather show the facts, with religion following those facts.

Simply put, the Old Testament texts were written by men, within a patriarchal context, for men to describe and catalogue a patriarchal society. Women do not feature much because they did not feature in the minds of the compilers of the stories.

Any arguments for or against feminism or gender roles in the Bible, in my opinion, proves why a study such as this one is necessary. Scholars need to stop thinking in terms of "how the text affects me today" and we need to think of ancient texts as sources that tell a story that we should be listening to without our own baggage getting in the way. An ancient text is not supposed to make a modern adult with a different set of cultural norms feel guilty or triggered, especially if the context is entirely secular and scholarly. This calls for a detachment from the works to be studied and for self-control based on self-awareness around the subject.

4.2.4 LEADERS IN ISRAELITE SOCIETY

Part and parcel of being a free male in Canaan (as cultural region in which Israel found itself) was that one was naturally a leader. However, out of the males, there were appointed leaders. These leaders were usually appointed by YHWH through some kind of divine sign, or by the direction of a representative. Secular appointments are recorded in the Bible, though these are invariably portrayed as negative, such as that of Abimelech in Judges 9. Contrasted to the latter is the case of Japheth in Judges 11 and 12, though his rule was not universally accepted (see Judges 12 where the Ephraimites rebel against him).

Over time,the character of the leader in the Bible changes from sole national leader (Moses and Joshua) to regional and periodical "judges". The difference between these types of leaders is evident in the root of each. Moses and Joshua are both called "Servants of YHWH" (עבד יהוה) in Deuteronomy:

Moses:

34:5 So Moses the servant of YHWH died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of YHWH.

Joshua:

24:29 And it came to pass after these things, that Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of YHWH, died, being a hundred and ten years old.

These two leaders stand out in the Biblical text as "servants" of YHWH. No other leader[103] is this described using this formula ever again.[104] The meaning of the Hebrew "servant", עבד (*'ebed*), is given as a "slave, servant" in the BDB. This is not different from what one would call a servant who worked as a labourer. The title is therefore one that sets these men apart from other men as belonging to YHWH in a way, having no other master or concerns other than doing the will of YHWH.

[103] The exception being David in Psalms 18 and 36. This particular description is an outlier considering that the official books which detail his reign never mention him as such.
[104] There are many references to someone calling themselves or others servants of YHWH, but never again is an individual depicted employing that precise word-order.

This particularity of description contrasts with the regional leaders who came after Joshua who were never directly called "judges" in their own stories, but whose records all end with "and so-and-so *judged* Israel so many years". Shimshôn is also labelled thus in Judges chapter 16 verse 31:

16:31b … … And he judged Israel twenty years.

In this instance, the focus isn't on YHWH or the person's relation to him. The focus is on the deed of sitting in judgement over and judging (שפט, *shâphaṭ*) the people of Israel. BDB gives the definition as "to judge, govern, vindicate, punish", all in verb form, never in noun from, as in a title. There is no connection to YHWH in the title of 'judge' either, and it would seem like the judges, whilst divinely inspired, are there to act as judges to the people and to lead them and thus vindicate them. They were chosen in times of need, usually by YHWH, although the populace could also select a leader.[105] No actual judgements are recorded in the book of Judges, though this is not evidence of a lack of pronouncements. These judges are predominantly portrayed as regional leaders who would lead Israel away from their sins against YHWH and free them from whatever punishment there was. This makes them more "freedom fighter" than "judge" (Exum, 2014).

The situation as just described seems to point to a gradual shift in leadership away from YHWH towards an independently operating "agent" of YHWH who "rules" when there is trouble in the land. The last judge, Shemû'êl, was also used as prophet to appoint the first king by popular demand. This appointment marks the final break between theocracy under YHWH and a more secular rule by divine right. The word for "king", מלך (*melek*), literally just means "to rule", according to the BDB. In the Bible, there is no reference to YHWH within this Hebrew term. In the books of Kings and Chronicles there is a mention as to whether the king "did what was right in the eyes of YHWH" or not. However, this is usually not mentioned as part of the title, just as a summary of the reign of the king.

Returning to Shimshôn the judge, according to our own understanding of "judge", Shimshôn would be tasked with judging cases and keeping Israel on the path prescribed by YHWH (Avalos, 1995; Exum, 2014; van der Zee, 2014). However, the story in the Bible does not record any such instance and only mentions how Shimshôn opposed, fought,

[105] Cf. Judges 9 when Abimelech, the son of one of the judges, gains popular support to form a rulership as king.

and killed Philistines. He almost never interacts with his fellow countrymen, save for being asked by them to stop pestering the Philistines (Judges 15, verse 10-14) and for interacting with his parents. He is therefore more a lone agent of YHWH than an active “judge/leader” in the traditional sense established by the rest of the book of Judges.

4.2.5 THE NAZARITE

The term Nazarite is an interesting phenomenon that is mentioned, but not explained, in the story of Shimshôn. For an explanation, we need to turn to the book of Numbers where the Israelite laws are recorded. Numbers 6, verses 1 to 12 are worth taking a closer look at:

6:1 And YHWH spoke to Moses, saying,

6:2 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, when either man or woman shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazarite, to separate themselves unto YHWH:

6:3 He shall separate himself from wine and strong drink, and shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat moist grapes, or dried.

6:4 All the days of his separation shall he eat nothing that is made of the vine tree, from the kernels even to the husk.

6:5 All the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head: until the days be fulfilled, in the which he separates himself unto YHWH, he shall be holy, and shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow.

6:6 All the days that he separates himself unto YHWH he shall come at no dead body.

6:7 He shall not make himself unclean for his father, or for his mother, for his brother, or for his sister, when they die: because the consecration of his God is upon his head.

6:8 All the days of his separation he is holy unto YHWH.

6:9 And if any man die very suddenly by him, and he hath defiled the head of his consecration; then he shall shave his head in the day of his cleansing, on the seventh day shall he shave it.

6:10 And on the eighth day he shall bring two turtles, or two young pigeons, to the priest, to the door of the tabernacle of the congregation:

6:11 And the priest shall offer the one for a sin offering, and the other for a burnt offering, and make an atonement for him, for that he sinned by the dead, and shall hallow his head that same day.

6:12 And he shall consecrate unto YHWH the days of his separation and shall bring a lamb of the first year for a trespass offering: but the days that were before shall be lost, because his separation was defiled.

From this, we can gather that the Nazarite oath was something taken by an individual to consecrate themselves to YHWH as part of a personal spiritual journey. What is interesting here is that both men and women were allowed to perform this oath. Based on what we know about leadership in Israel, as discussed above, this would imply that the Nazarite oath has nothing to do with leadership or any position in society.

The various rules surrounding the Nazarite, i.e., that they are not allowed to touch any grape vine products, any dead bodies, or to mourn for their families, would also suggest that these people were not removed from society and everyday life. They were a part of society and had to live a consecrated life and do what they had pledged within society. Once fulfilled, they were then released from their vow after a ritual at the temple/tabernacle. These rules were strict, and one immediately lost one's Nazarite status if they were broken (verses 9 to 12).

The word "Nazarite" in Hebrew is נָזִיר/ נָזִר (*nâzîyr / nâzir*), which means a "consecrated or devoted one", according to the BDB. This is also used to denote "a consecrated one", "a devotee" or Nazarite (oath-taker) and, unconnected to the spiritual element, "an untrimmed (vine)" (Brown, Driver and Briggs, 2012).

Another usage of נזיר occurs in Genesis 49:26 where Joseph is mentioned as having been separate from his brothers, literally: *נְזִ֥יר אֶחָֽיו*. This is most likely an allusion to his having been especially separated, as this is the only instance where the text uses *nâzir* as separated.

49:26 The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate (נזיר) from his brethren.

The connection with "untrimmed vine" is also mentioned once in Leviticus as part of a law governing what may be harvested during the jubilee year in Leviticus 25:5:

Lev 25:5 That which grows of its own accord of thy harvest thou shalt not reap, neither gather the grapes of thy vine undressed (נזירך): for it is a year of rest unto the land.

However, this usage may also be an allusion to the untrimmed/uncut hair of the Nazarites.

Given these rather strict rules, it is interesting that Shimshôn did not fulfil his Nazarite vows in the expected manner.

As we saw earlier, becoming a Nazarite was a personal choice. In the case of Shimshôn, however, he did not make a choice to become a Nazarite. He was declared to be one by YHWH from birth. In the laws in Numbers, there seems to be no precedent for this. What makes matters more complicated from an emic standpoint is that Shimshôn is the only Nazarite whose life is explained in any detail in the whole Bible. There is thus no other Nazarite to compare with Shimshôn and we only have these non-specific rules in Numbers that don't really give a full picture.

In the story of Shimshôn, his mother is given the same rules as a Nazarite while she is pregnant with him. This shows how truly special he is, considering that even while still being formed in his mother's womb he was to be considered as a Nazarite and not fed anything he was not supposed to consume through his mother.

The specifics surrounding Shimshôn and his actions as a Nazarite will be discussed in detail, together with his actions, as it is more pertinent there.

4.2.6 SHIMSHÔN OUTSIDE HIS STORY

Shimshôn, being a Biblical figure, is well represented in extra-Biblical sources, albeit mostly biblically inspired or religious ones. This is because the story of Shimshôn was never lost, and continued to be read, translated, and interpreted ever since it was first written. This long history has created a longstanding tradition around Shimshôn, to the extent that secular culture identifies It as a symbol of strength. He also influenced the religious and secular art of the Renaissance and even a great English play by Milton: *Samson Agonistes*.

In extra-Biblical sources, the focus is generally on portraying Shimshôn's strength in defeating the Philistines, his brute power and bravery in facing and killing the lion bare handed, his betrayal by Delîylâh, and his final act of vengeance on the Philistines. Most of these portrayals date from c. 1000 AD to modern times, and most of these are either religiously inspired or religious works (i.e., paintings adorning chapels or icons) themselves.

However, most of these extra-Biblical perspectives derive from the story of Shimshôn and show how Shimshôn was perceived by modern artists and their benefactors. One exception to this is how Shimshôn is used as a symbol of strength and power, especially when shown fighting and killing the lion. An extreme example of this in popular culture is the following painted advert lithograph from France, c.1910 AD (Figure 1):

Figure 1: Coloured lithograph: 'Samson' printed by Kossuth & Cie, c. 1910.[106]

[106] Open Collection: Science Museum Group, JSTOR (https://www.jstor.org/stable/community.26396908).

Here, Shimshôn is being used in a simile to show how strong the tires of this French brand (*Samson Tires*) are. They are non-skid (*antidérapant*), and puncture-proof (*imperforable*) and their strength is shown by the figure of Shimshôn presenting the tire, perhaps even testing his strength against it. The brand name, *Samson*, is also meant to evoke strength and reliability. This name is used by various modern-day companies, including a Taiwanese company, *Samson Machinery*[107] and a German corporation, Samson AG[108], much to the same effect.

More recently, Israeli defensive systems contractor, Rafael Systems, maintains a product-family of remote weapons systems named after Shimshôn. These are essentially remote-controlled guns and missile launchers that are sold with the tagline, "Power. Manoeuvrability. Precision."[109]. Israel is, amongst other things, known for heavily trading on their Biblical heritage and naming a weapons-system after one of the Biblical warrior figures is an example of this, as the name immediately conjures up Shimshôn's slaughter of Philistine hordes and his indomitable nature.

Even Josephus comments that the name of Shimshôn "signifies one that is strong" (Whiston, 1737), which isn't what the name in its literary sense means. Shimshôn, שמשון (*shimshôn*), means "like the sun" according to BDB. This is related by root to שמש (*shemesh)* which is used for the sun and any reference to it and its movements from east to west.

Despite the literal meaning of his name, culturally it would seem that Shimshôn was regarded as a symbol for strength and power by the Jewish people, also in the first century AD, at least as far as Josephus was concerned. The more modern Jewish state and Zionist movements of the 19th and 20th century CE also looked to the positive images of Shimshôn as the ideal "soldier-pioneer"(Harris, 2012, p. 68) in the new country they were forging amid countless attacks: strong, brave, honourable, never backing down and ultimately self-sacrificial (Harris, 2012). This also ties in with the "Samson as freedom-fighter" facet that Exum briefly explores (2014, p. 17).

All these relatively modern uses of Shimshôn as symbol of strength ironically speak to the core of this study, which is the preservation of the original meaning which the ancient

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[107] https://www.samson.com.tw.
[108] https://www.samsongroup.com.
[109] https://www.rafael.co.il/worlds/land/all-in-one-remote-controlled-weapon-stations/.

authors gave their subject, as opposed to how modern people see it today. It is imperative that we, as academics, present and maintain a balanced, unbiased, and "untainted" version of our original sources, lest popular culture and sentiment cloud the truth we seek in the manuscripts and sources that we study.

4.2.7 THE ACTIONS OF SHIMSHÔN

To understand Shimshôn emically, one must also analyze his deeds as recorded in the story. There are seven main "scenes" where Shimshôn acts to anger and attack the Philistines, starting with a simple "innocuous" wedding, and culminating in his destruction of the temple of Dagon and killing the Philistine leadership, along with himself.

Whether these were all the actions Shimshôn undertook is unknown, as the Bible does not specify that it is describing all his actions. One can infer from the text, however, that he was somewhat active early on, since chapter 13 verse 25 states that "the Spirit of YHWH began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol" which would imply that there were other instances where YHWH could have used him. However, it is unclear from the text exactly what the phrase means, and exactly when he started his mission against the Philistines.

Josephus adds to this confusion by adding a little detail at Shimshôn's wedding: At the wedding Shimshôn is given 30 Philistine men as "groomsmen". Josephus adds here that these men were actually tasked with keeping an eye on Shimshôn, and not solely as "groomsmen", because the Philistines were afraid of him. This would imply that the Philistines knew of Shimshôn's strength and feared him. From this one may infer that this was not the first time that Shimshôn had interacted with the Philistines, although perhaps he had never killed any of them before. Alternatively Josephus could simple be adding in details with hindsight.

Since Shimshôn is said to have "judged" Israel for 20 years, the assumption is usually that the story occurred over a span of 20 years. However, the story itself does not specify time exactly and consequently we do not know how much time elapsed between the different deeds that were recorded. This leaves the possibility that the story of Shimshôn as recorded in the Bible, and which formed the basis of Josephus' source, starts near the end of his time as judge and recounts only his final few actions and how he defeated the Philistines.

4.2.7.1 TRIES TO GET MARRIED TO A PHILISTINE WOMAN

Chapter 13 ends with the following words:

> *13:24 And the woman bore a son, and called his name Shimshôn: and the child grew, and YHWH blessed him.*
>
> *13:25 And the Spirit of YHWH began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol.*

What exactly is meant by the "Spirit of YHWH" "moving" him is unknown, though from the context of both the story and accounts of other Biblical figures, it would seem that YHWH was influencing and inspiring him to do things.

The very first thing that he does is recorded in chapter 14 verse 1-4:

> *14:1 And Shimshôn went down to Timnath and saw a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines.*
>
> *14:2 And he came up, and told his father and his mother, and said, I have seen a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines: now therefore get her for me to wife.*
>
> *14:3 Then his father and his mother said unto him, "Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goes to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines?" And Shimshôn said unto his father, "get her for me; for she pleases me well."*
>
> *14:4 But his father and his mother knew not that it was of YHWH, that he sought an occasion against the Philistines: for at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel.*

The connection to YHWH is immediately apparent in verse 4. This connects with verse 25 in chapter 13 where YHWH "moves" him. From this, we can conclude that Shimshôn is an agent of YHWH and that his actions, whilst carried out by him, were inspired by YHWH.

At this point, Shimshôn is technically breaking his Nazarite oath since the spirit of the law about a Nazarite is to be "set apart" from things that YHWH does not approve of, including marrying outside the Israelite culture and faith system, something that is prohibited in the Mosaic Laws (Exodus 34:16 and Deuteronomy 7:3). The Biblical passage does not explicitly say that they had refused him, but Josephus's *Antiquities* says that Shimshôn had "over-persuaded them" (*Antiquities* 5.8) and his father conceded.

Both the Biblical narrator and Josephus stress that this was YHWH's doing, an assertion which excuses Shimshôn from technically breaking Mosaic Law, since the will of YHWH would supersede that law. This conclusion is never drawn in either the Bible or Josephus but can be inferred.

4.2.7.2 SHIMSHÔN AND THE LION

The marriage proposal leads directly to one of the most iconic moments in the story of Shimshôn: his bare-handed killing of the lion and the honey that he found in its carcass later. Verse 5 starts off with:

> *14:5 Then went Shimshôn down, and his father and his mother, to Timnath, and came to the vineyards of Timnath: and a young lion roared against him.*
>
> *14:6 And the Spirit of YHWH came mightily upon him, and he rent him as he would have rent a kid, and he had nothing in his hand: but he told not his father or his mother what he had done.*

Here the spirit of YHWH enables him to literally tear a lion apart, in self-defence. In ancient times, the lion was seen as a symbol of wild, untamed strength and ferocity. Shimshôn being able to overcome a lion without weapons shows how much more powerful he is with YHWH's spirit than normal "strong" humans. So far, this whole situation seems innocuous and "normal", inasmuch as it can be with a man that can bare-handedly tear a lion apart. However, in verse 8 the story with the lion is continued:

> *14:8 And after a time he returned to take her, and he turned aside to see the carcase of the lion: and, behold, there was a swarm of bees and honey in the carcase of the lion.*
>
> *14:9 And he took thereof in his hands, and went on eating, and came to his father and mother, and he gave them, and they did eat: but he told not them that he had taken the honey out of the carcase of the lion.*

This part of the narrative is in direct contravention of a Mosaic Law that forbids any Israelite from touching the carcass of a wild animal, much less eat honey from it. The particular law is found in Leviticus 5:2, and again illustrates and reinforces the "purity" aspect also present in the Nazarite oath:

> *5:2 Or if a soul touches any unclean thing, whether it be a carcase of an unclean beast, or a carcase of unclean cattle, or the carcase of unclean creeping things, and if it be hidden from him; he also shall be unclean, and guilty.*

Here, Shimshôn is directly breaking the prohibition of even touching the carcass of any animal that died. By giving his parents the honey, he also made them guilty, as the law says that one is guilty even if one didn't know. Interestingly, this contravention isn't punished or even mentioned in text as being contrary to what is expected from an Israelite and a Nazarite. This pattern follows a trend in the story of Shimshôn of directly contravening the rules and laws of his people and God without any repercussions, ostensibly to create situations in which the Philistines can be attacked.

4.2.7.3 ENTRAPS PHILISTINES WITH THE RIDDLE

The lion and the honey lead directly to Shimshôn's first confrontation with the Philistines. Shimshôn was on his way to the wedding feast and made up the now infamous riddle to mess with the 30 Philistine "groomsmen" given to him:

> *14:12 And Shimshôn said unto them, I will now put forth a riddle unto you: if ye can certainly declare it me within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty sheets and thirty change of garments:*
>
> *14:13 But if ye cannot declare it me, then shall ye give me thirty sheets and thirty change of garments. And they said unto him, Put forth thy riddle, that we may hear it.*
>
> *14:14 And he said unto them, Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness. And they could not in three days expound the riddle.*

Now, 3000 years or so later, Shimshôn's riddle is known wherever the Bible has been read. The Philistines, however, had no such luxuries and could not answer him, resorting to threatening his bride and her family with death if they lose the bet. They stood to lose not only the clothes but also face as they were supposed to be the overlords in this situation. This account shows that Shimshôn knew what he was doing: he put them in an impossible situation where they would lose face if they could not answer him. Any other host might have been sensitive to this situation and refrained from setting such an expensive bet, but, as we learned in verse 4, YHWH was driving Shimshôn to create a situation where he could stir trouble.

The riddle itself has also been the subject of much debate[110] amongst scholars (Carus, 1907; Torcszyner, 1924; Nel, 1985; Davies, 2004; Marcos, 2014). Margalith (1986) makes the most sense with his analysis of the *Sitz im Leben* of the riddle. Quoting and building on the work of Yigael Yadin,[111] he postulates that the riddle was based on a shared language between the Philistines and the tribe of Dan as well as knowledge of the myth of Aristaeus (Margalith, 1986). Tracing a fundamentally Greek riddle all the way back to a theoretical Minoan origin for the Philistines (see above, section 4.2.1) to land as a shared bit of knowledge between the Philistines and the tribe of Dan is a bit of a stretch. Possible, probable even, but as yet unproven. Until we have more data on the language and origins of the Philistines and their interactions with the tribe of Dan, this will only stay speculation.

In verse 16 and 17, we find the first instance of a woman nagging Shimshôn to reveal something. The groomsmen had forced this Shimshôn's betrothed to find a solution to the riddle by threatening to burn her family, so she did her best to convince him to tell her, finally resorting to accusing him of not loving her, making the ceremony quite miserable:

> *14:16 And Shimshôn's wife wept before him, and said, Thou dost but hate me, and lovest me not: thou hast put forth a riddle unto the children of my people, and hast not told it me. And he said unto her, Behold, I have not told it my father nor my mother, and shall I tell it thee?*
>
> *14:17 And she wept before him the seven days, while their feast lasted: and it came to pass on the seventh day, that he told her, because she lay sore upon him: and she told the riddle to the children of her people.*

This incident constitutes a betrayal of Shimshôn, and reveals that he is not without fault. He is ostensibly a semi-supernatural agent of YHWH, but he is susceptible to a woman's manipulation, ironically. The answer given by the Philistines is slightly different in Josephus, but the gist remains the same. However, in Josephus Shimshôn plays with the words in retort: "Nothing is more deceitful than a woman: for such was the person that discovered my interpretation to you.…"[112], whereas the Biblical version says "… And he

[110] The debate is continued to the point where the core of the Biblical narrative is called into question completely and it becomes a veritable orgy of weird ideas thrown into a blender of postulation, each building on the other including the customary sexual innuendos, until there is nothing left but academics squabbling over a point that has nothing to do with the original source material.
[111] "Ve-Dan lamah yagur oniot?" ("Why does Dan dwell in ships?"), Minutes of the 19th Convention of the Israel Exploration Society (Jerusalem, 1965), p. 47., as per Margalith 1986.
[112] Josephus, *Antiquities Book V Chapter 8, par.6.*

said unto them, If ye had not plowed [*sic*] with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle."[113]

The next part is similar in both sources: Judges reads:

> *14:19 And the Spirit of the YHWH came upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon, and slew thirty men of them, and took their spoil, and gave change of garments unto them which expounded the riddle. And his anger was kindled, and he went up to his father's house.*

The only difference is that Josephus makes it seem like more time elapsed while Shimshôn attacked the men: "Accordingly he gave them the presents he had promised them; making such Askelonites as met him upon the road his prey"[114]. This makes him seem more like a highway robber than the Biblical story's seemingly "one shot" raid of Ashkelon. Whatever the case may be, Shimshôn reacts extremely violently to being betrayed by his betrothed and he murders 30 other people for their possessions to pay off his debt. This action isn't described as wrong in either the Bible or Josephus, even though his behaviour breaks several laws, not least of which is the famous "thou shalt not murder" and the specific Nazarite rule that Nazarites broke their vows when someone died near them, and they touched the body (Numbers 6:9).

It would seem that Shimshôn's actions are still approved by YHWH, as verse 19 clearly says that the spirit of YHWH came on him and then he did these things. Here is a clear disconnect between what most people would see as "wrong" (i.e., murder and theft) and that approved by YHWH towards a specific goal, even if it breaks the laws set out earlier in the Bible. Shimshôn is "above" the law in a sense. He is allowed to use any and all means to deliver specific strikes against the Philistines. After killing the 30 and paying his debt, he flounces off in anger to his parent's house.

An interesting aspect of his behaviour here is that he goes to kill Philistines from another town to pay the Philistines who he now owes, instead of simply ignoring, or killing the 30 groomsmen. This shows that despite his mission to free Israel from the Philistines, Shimshôn acknowledges that he led the men into the trap and honours his deal with them. Shimshôn has, despite his homicidal tendencies, a sense of honour and fairness when he makes a deal.

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[113] Judges 14:18.
[114] Josephus, *Antiquities Book V Chapter 8, par.6.*

4.2.7.4 SHIMSHÔN AND THE FOXES

Chapter 15 continues the story of Shimshôn's betrothed, with Shimshôn coming back "after some time" to claim her, with a goat kid presumably as a gift. Her father refuses to let him see her, claiming that he had given her to one of Shimshôn's companions.

15:1 But it came to pass within a while after, in the time of wheat harvest, that Shimshôn visited his wife with a kid; and he said, I will go in to my wife into the chamber. But her father would not suffer him to go in.

15:2 And her father said, I verily thought that thou hadst utterly hated her; therefore I gave her to thy companion: is not her younger sister fairer than she? take her, I pray thee, instead of her.

This part differs from Josephus again, who states that Shimshôn had divorced her because of her betrayal. The verse in the Bible also shows how women were treated in those days, with the woman's father offering Shimshôn her younger sister as replacement, as if he were complaining about defective goods and would be placated by a replacement. Josephus, however, tells us that the "girl despised his anger", which tells us a little about her feelings as well, though probably through the more modern lens of Josephus' time.

Shimshôn refuses and uses the incident as an excuse to vindicate what he is about to do:

15:3 And Shimshôn said concerning them, Now shall I be more blameless than the Philistines, though I do them a displeasure.

The verse also proves that he acknowledges some guilt over entrapping the Philistines earlier, as he says that "now" he will be more blameless, as if he had shouldered blame before.

Shimshôn then goes and burns down the Philistine harvest by taking foxes, tying their tails together with a burning piece of wood between them, and setting them free in the Philistine fields. This part is often seen as symbolic, since it would have been more natural to tie a stick to each fox individually and set them on fire. Tying two animals together first is just more complicated and would probably result in two fighting foxes, rather than a wild run into the Philistine fields, as Margalith also points out (Margalith, 1985).

In fact, the fields may originally have referred to an area named after foxes. The theory, put forth my Margalith (and building on others), is that this area may have been the city of Shaʿalbîym / שעלבין which literally translates as "place of foxes". Since the Israelites/Canaanites were familiar with the grey fox, they would associate this animal with that place. When the Philistines arrived with their proto-Greek Minoan background, they knew the animal as a "fox" (i.e., a bushy-tailed reddish animal with white/bright tail). The Greeks had a colloquialism for foxes, calling them "torch/fire tails", on account of how their bright tails would look like they were alight, according to Aechylus, the ancient Greek playwright. The Philistines would then call this place by the Greek colloquialism, something that the local Canaanites and Israelites would then confuse into a detail like "foxes with torches on their tails" (Margalith, 1985, pp. 226–228).

There may therefore not have been any foxes involved, simply a Shimshôn and a few torches in the field. However, much more research is needed, as well as older sources than we currently have, to verify this. However, since this is a comparison of concurrent cultures, it is within the realm of possibility.

When the Philistines find out the reason for Shimshôn's arson, they execute the woman's father and her by burning both. Josephus states that they also killed all the relations of the woman. From this drastic action, we infer that what the father did was not considered normal, as they would have supported him in his decision if it had been usual. Instead, they blame him for their suffering, claiming he angered Shimshôn.

Shimshôn's response again recalls some form of chivalry, even though he appears as a cold-blooded killer in the story. Shimshôn declares that he will be avenged:

> *15:7 And Shimshôn said unto them, Though ye have done this, yet will I be avenged of you, and after that I will cease.*

Shimshôn is going to avenge himself on them because of what they have done to his wife and her father/family. He then proceeds to either kill or maim the Philistines there. The language used is either a metaphor for a massive slaughter, or he literally hit them so that their thighs and hips were separated/dislocated, effectively killing them in the long run through infection, since the survival rate in ancient times from this sort of injury was very low (Gruber, 1995; Xella, 1995).

Josephus' version doesn't link the killing with the woman and her family as the Biblical version does. According to Josephus, Shimshôn killed many Philistines in the "plains country" and then moved to Etam in Judah because the Philistines were attacking there. This version does make more sense if we consider Shimshôn in his role as judge and "freer" of Israel, but should be noted as being a much later opinion on the story.

Shimshôn is then handed over to the Philistines in exchange for the Philistines leaving Judah alone. They agree, and his own people capture Shimshôn, who does not act against them. When he is handed over to the Philistines, the spirit of YHWH comes on him again and the ropes that bound him slide off his hands. He then kills a thousand Philistines with a donkey's jawbone, finishing with a short verse:

15:16 And Shimshôn said, With the jawbone of an ass, heaps upon heaps, with the jaw of an ass have I slain a thousand men.

This verse is indicative of the state of mind Shimshôn is in at that moment. He has killed many Philistines and feels invincible. He is boasting in his strength and power. After this, Shimshôn becomes thirsty and calls out in a seemingly flippant way against YHWH, who answers him by providing a spring:

15:18 And he was sore athirst, and called on YHWH, and said, Thou hast given this great deliverance into the hand of thy servant: and now shall I die for thirst, and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised?

Without context, it looks as though Shimshôn had started to think he did not need YHWH and that He was simply an assistant to the great deeds that Shimshôn was performing. However, Josephus adds some (outside) context to this passage, saying that Shimshôn was "too proud of what he had performed"[115] and did not give the due glory to YHWH who had given him the supernatural strength to do this. So, YHWH makes him thirsty to remind him of his humanity. Once Shimshôn calls out to him and asks to be spared. The tone in the original? Biblical passage is influenced by Shimshôn's haughty statement in verse 16, but the context was lost somewhere in the transmission to modern texts, it would seem, as here we only read…...

This chapter of Judges ends with a summary statement, saying that Shimshôn judged Israel for 20 years. The inclusion of his time as a judge here could indicate that this story/cycle is concluded. All the other judges in the book of Judges have their "judgment periods" given at the end of their stories, so this fits the formula. If this is so, then chapter 16 is an addition, like a part II to conclude the story that was told about Shimshôn.

[115] Josephus, *Antiquities Book V Chapter 8, par.9*

Alternatively, chapter 16 could also act as a sign of Shimshôn's redemption after his earlier lapse into thinking he was defeating the Philistines by his own power. The latter idea is a stretch, however, as the story never explicitly states that YHWH ever rejected him, despite his attitude and killer instincts.

4.2.7.5 SHIMSHÔN AND THE PROSTITUTE

The story continues in chapter 16 with Shimshôn again visiting a Philistine woman, this time a prostitute in Gaza. Gaza was a well-known Philistine stronghold, and one would imagine that Shimshôn was not the most popular person amongst the Philistines after his previous slaughter of them. His sojourn thus suggests a deliberate confrontation.

The Philistines try to keep him in the city and capture him, but at midnight he literally breaks through the gate, and carries the wooden doors off to a hill near Hebron. This seems an unnecessary risk but also serves as a way for Shimshôn to let the Philistines know that he can come and go as he pleases. He is flaunting his superhuman strength and trusting in it to get him out of any situation.

What is interesting to note is that in this entire episode, chapter 16 verses 1-3, YHWH is not mentioned once. This may be due to this part being an addition, with a new author or writing style that did not highlight YHWH's involvement. In any event, this is something that we cannot know for certain until older manuscripts predating edits and redactions surface.

Another interpretation, given by Ottuh (2019a), is that after the initial failed marriage, Shimshôn, as a normal human being, went through the motions of grief and catharsis, working through his lost love. Alhough it is certainly plausible that Shimshôn felt some remorse or sadness, nowhere is time mentioned in the story. This means that it is difficult to assign a non-text-based reason for the actions of Shimshôn based on when what happened. Shimshôn could have visited the prostitute (Josephus doesn't mention her, only an inn) a few weeks after the first incident, or it could be several years and several unmentioned women later. We simply do not know and any speculation to the contrary based on narrow readings of the source text should be viewed as nothing more than quasi-historical fiction.

4.2.7.6 SHIMSHÔN AND DELÎYLÂH

The story continues in verse 4 of chapter 16, with Shimshôn falling in love with another woman, Delîylâh. Delîylâh is probably not her real name, and rather a name made up for literary reasons, since it is a little too on the nose for the woman who made Shimshôn weak to be called דלילה ("feeble"). Whatever the origins of her name, the Philistine lords asked her to find out how to defeat Shimshôn and, true to the formula now established, she agrees to betray him for many pieces of silver. Josephus's version is slightly different: Shimshôn had forsaken the ways of his people and started living with a prostitute (even though the text in Judges does not specify this), called Delîylâh. Though similar, there is a clear focus on Shimshôn seemingly abandoning his people and their customs and laws:

> *However, he at length transgressed the laws of his country; and altered his own regular way of living and imitated the strange customs of foreigners. Which thing was the beginning of his miseries.*[116]

Josephus seems to consider Shimshôn's fall to the Philistines as a direct result of his transgressions of the laws of Israel. However, this is probably born from the stirring national identity founded in Jewish customs during the time that Josephus lived, and his using the story of Shimshôn as a cautionary tale against adopting foreign customs.

Josephus mentions, in passing, that the first time Delîylâh bound Shimshôn, he was "disordered in drink and asleep". Some scholars have grasped at this mention to link Shimshôn to other legends where the hero (or villain) is pacified with drink before being defeated (Davies, 2004). Davies uses this very tenuous link to suggest a correlation between the story cycles of Shimshôn and Susanawo, a Japanese story with similar elements (hero's hair bound, hero saving a people, etc.).

The Biblical story recounts how Shimshôn played a game with Delîylâh[117], answering her queries with right-sounding tall tales, and each time breaking free from his bonds to strike the ambushing Philistines (Judges chapter 16, verses 6-14). The last tale, that of weaving his seven braids into a loom, shows us another aspect of his supernatural strength:

> *16:13 And Delîylâh said unto Shimshôn, Hitherto thou hast mocked me, and told me lies: tell me wherewith thou mightest be bound. And he said unto her, If thou weavest the seven locks of my head with the web.*

[116] Josephus, *Antiquities Book V Chapter 8, par.11*

[117] Some more recent scholars have challenged this interpretation of Delîylâh. Mark Lackowski sums up these alternative interpretations in his article *Victim, Victor, or Villain? The Unfinalizability of Delilah* (2019). Though many of the interpretations hinge heavily on inferences based on Biblical Textual Criticism, presupposing certain aspects of the text, Lackowski concludes that Delîylâh is an "unfinished character" who is much more than the text, taken at face value, makes her out to be. However, what is evident from the text is that between her and Shimshôn, she was the victor, as Lackowski points out (2019, p. 215). What is left vague (purposefully according to Lackowski), is whether or not she is, in fact, a villain playing both sides to her own advantage, or a victim, being thrust in an impossible situation. Laskowski argues for all three: she is a victim first, turns the situation against both the Philistines and Shimshôn, coming out as the (richer) victor, having symbolically defeated the patriarchy through defeating Shimshôn and becoming wealthy in the process. Though this interpretation certainly sheds a different light on her character, there is not enough direct textual evidence to definitively state whether she conforms to any of these portrayals. Since the core philosophy of this study is to study the text "as is" with no assumptions that are not directly text-based, we will proceed to discuss the text "as is".

16:14 And she fastened it with the pin, and said unto him, The Philistines be upon thee, Shimshôn. And he awaked out of his sleep, and went away with the pin of the beam, and with the web.

The story of Shimshôn does not mention pain, or broken hair at this point so it is safe to assume that the strength that the author ascribes to Shimshôn is supernatural to the extent that even his hair, usually not associated with one's strength, does not break when pulled. A loom such as this would have been heavy, large, and bulky. The sheer pull on his roots would be enough to pull them out. This does not happen, however, and he leaves with the entire structure apparently attached.

Delîylâh's next ploy is to accuse him of not loving her enough:

16:15 And she said unto him, How canst thou say, I love thee, when thine heart is not with me? thou hast mocked me these three times, and hast not told me wherein thy great strength lieth.

Her words are different to the previous two times (verses 10 and 13) when she said:

….. thou hast mocked me, and told me lies: now tell me, I pray thee, wherewith thou mightest be bound…

As before with the woman he wished to marry, Shimshôn falls for this. He again exposes his secret to a woman who is out to betray him, yet demands he show her his love by confiding in her. She repays his confidence by making him sleep and having someone[118] shave Shimshôn's head, thus breaking his Nazarite symbol. The action also breaks the "blessing" of YHWH, and he loses his strength. This is shown in verse 20 where he wakes up, thinking that he will just brush off the Philistines again, relying on his strength as before. However, this time he cannot because YHWH had left him. He is immediately captured and blinded by the Philistines.

[118] The text clearly states that she called someone. However, due to popular belief and theologically based, yet incorrect iconographs and paintings, it is commonly held that Delîylâh did the cutting. Houtman sums it up perfectly:
In a euphemistic way it is narrated in Judg 16:19a that Delilah, after love- making and sexual intercourse with Shimshôn, let him fall asleep lying upon or over her. In that position she summoned a man who had been instructed before by her, to come and cut Shimshôn's hair. Such an interpretation underlies to all appearance LXXA and the Vulgate. Nevertheless, another picture of the course of events became more dominant. On account of its poly-interpretable text the Vulgate became the source of a more decent and chaste picture: a sitting Delilah shaves the hair of a Shimshôn lying with his head on her lap. So strong was the concept of the sitting Delilah, that also in the case of the barber as Shimshôn's executor Delilah usually is depicted as a sitting woman." (Houtman, 2014, p. 84).

This is a tangential, but clear warning that cultural, religious, and theological factors can, and do, influence even basic, innocent facts. This is why an emic reading of the text, word for word, is extremely important.

The question then is why did Shimshôn reveal his secret to this woman? He should have known that she would betray him as she did the previous three times. Could it be a desire for love after losing his wife to the Philistines twice over, as Ottuh (2019a) puts forth? Was he perhaps tired of being Shimshôn, agent of YHWH (with an apparent insomniac problem, according to Schipper (2011)? Was he a victim of "otherness", caught between two worlds, longing for acceptance from one, but being denied it (Exum, 2014; Gillmayr-Bucher, 2014; Wilson, 2014)? If one takes the cyclical nature of the story as fact, then that may be the preferred answer: Shimshôn does these things because it is part of the literary cycle established by his author, and no other argument is necessary.

If the textual source isn't enough, however, one could argue that the answer could be in a mixture. We know that Shimshôn had a big ego, as evidenced by his treatment of YHWH after the jawbone incident. We also know that his betrothed/wife was pleasing to him as a man, so it is feasible that he missed her. We know that love was the foundation of his relationship with Delîylâh, as it is explicitly stated in the Biblical narrative that he loved Delîylâh. We also know that he has a weakness for women who "wear him down" by nagging and accusing him of not loving them when he refuses their requests (usually to defeat him or his purpose).

Perhaps then, Shimshôn was tired of being YHWH's agent, and had thought to settle down with Delîylâh and to retire from his campaigns. This, then, would be his true transgression and reason for YHWH leaving him now after seemingly ignoring all the other wrongs and defilement of his Nazarite vows, including drinking. Shimshôn had perhaps now given up being a Nazarite. However, the text does not specify this as such, and this supposition could simply be speculation based on surviving sources. There could be another reason entirely, especially considering that if the author of the story had meant for him to give up his Nazarite status, he can be expected to have said so.[119]

For the purposes of this study, the former suggestion, i.e., that this is a literary device used by the author of the story to get Shimshôn caught again, is a more desirable option than the latter. The theory that Shimshôn was simply tired of being an agent of YHWH, whilst probable, mixes in too many modern concepts for it to be emically acceptable,

[119] Exum (2014) comes to the same conclusion, as should any emic scholar. If the source doesn't state something earth-shattering, then perhaps the source did not mean to imply it.

whilst the others depend on assumptions about Shimshôn that we simply do not have the data to prove or disprove.

4.2.7.7 FINAL REVENGE

For the Philistines, the story ends in a great victory. Shimshôn was finally subjugated and blinded, never to bother them again. They decide to keep him alive, probably as a form of punishment, to live out his days powerless and blind. In time, his hair grows back and, with his hair, his power.

The connection between long hair and power is strange, as the story of Shimshôn makes this sound like some form of divine magic linked to his hair length. Nowhere in the Bible is something similar ever mentioned, yet here there is a definite element of thaumaturgy involved with Shimshôn's hair and strength. This is probably due to some magical elements slipping into the story when it was in its "oral traditions stage".

On the other hand, Margalith again attempts to pull an answer from Greek mythology (1986b, 1987a). However, his reasoning completely fails in the light of an emic reading of the text, despite his claim to be doing exactly that. He claims that the narrator was influenced by several Greek stories that the Israelites learnt from the Philistines. However, as with the other studies quoted here, this is a stretch. It assumes that the Philistines had knowledge of Greek myths that we know only from the Classical era, which postdates the Philistines by several hundred years. It also presupposes that there was non-violent contact between the Philistines and the Israelites. Equating Herakles or any other Greek hero to Shimshôn through the Philistines is highly suspect in logic. If there is to be any Greek mingling, a more probable avenue would be the Hellenization of Judaism during the 2nd and 1st centuries BC, during which time much of the Old Testament, as we have it today, was translated, and Greek stories and concepts could have slipped in then. There is no evidence of this as of yet, however.

Whether purposefully magical or not, by the time Shimshôn's strength returns an unspecified time later, the Philistines hold a celebration in the temple of Dagon. Dagon was a god of grains and fertility and the adopted patron deity of the Philistines (Van der Toorn, 1995), though the exact identification of this deity is in question, considering that there is little to no evidence for him outside the Bible. Earlier Shimshôn had destroyed the Philistine grain harvest and now presenting Shimshôn as a captive in the temple of Dagon was probably a form of bringing the culprit in front of the divine "judge".

In any event, the final vengeance would be Shimshôn's, since he asked the boy guiding him to take him to the supporting pillars. Here, again, Josephus and the Bible differ. The Biblical account has him positioned between the pillars (verse 29), and then pulling them both down, making the whole structure unstable and crashing down on the assembled Philistines (verse 30). Josephus, meanwhile, states that, sensing he was near them, he "rushed with force against them"[120], pushing them over.

Pulling or pushing aside, Shimshôn requests to be granted strength for his last act of vengeance, as payback for his eyes:

> *16:29 I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes*

Through this, he is, in the eyes of the narrator and reader, redeemed by his request of YHWH. He regains YHWH's blessing, his strength, his main weapon and his "reward" the destruction of 3000 Philistines in one go. It should be noted that the text here only specifies that with this action Shimshôn has killed many more Philistines than he did in his whole life. It never specifies that through this he saved Israel.

Whether this conclusion was YHWH's plan from the beginning is unknown. Josephus certainly believes that his death is a punishment for breaking the "laws of his country"[121], though this issue is never brought up earlier when Shimshôn does much worse by cold-bloodedly murdering people. Besides, YHWH apparently did not mind Shimshôn sleeping with Philistine women, since it was part of his plan in chapter 14 to use the wedding as a way to make trouble with the Philistines.

The entire chapter 16 only mentions YHWH near the end when Shimshôn is seemingly "redeemed". This may point to YHWH not having been pleased by how easily Shimshôn fell prey to the wiles of Philistine women and punishing him. Josephus and Jewish culture would agree with this, making this final act against the Philistines one of opportunity and vengeance and not premeditated.

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[120] Josephus, *Antiquities Book V Chapter 8, par.12.*
[121] Josephus, *Antiquities Book V Chapter 8, par.11.*

On the other hand, it could have been part of YHWH's plan from the start, with the first wedding, woman, and order of events a sort of prophetic "dry run" of the events that were to come, sort of like a formula for a Shimshôn-cycle of desire, betrayal, foolish trust, defeat, and ultimate victory through destruction.[122]

In this cycle, Shimshôn sees the woman/Delîylâh and falls in love. The Philistines persuade her to betray Shimshôn by getting him to reveal a secret. He reveals the secret after being coaxed and challenged on his feelings, which then leads to his temporary defeat. From this defeat, however, Shimshôn rises up to deal a crushing blow to the Philistines. This crushing blow, it can be argued from the Biblical narrative, broke Philistine power enough to allow Shemû'êl to negotiate a peace treaty with the Philistines a hundred or so years later. Thus, Shimshôn did truly "begin" to free Israel from the Philistines, even if he himself did not get what he wanted.

Thus ends the story of Shimshôn. In the words of Josephus:

> And indeed this man deserves to be admired for his courage, and strength, and magnanimity at his death: and that his wrath against his enemies went so far as to die himself with them. But as for his being ensnared by a woman, that is to be ascribed to human nature; which is too weak to resist the temptations to that sin. But we ought to bear him witness, that in all other respects he was one of extraordinary virtue[123]

[122] This is a possible reason for the break in the text at the end of chapter 15. Chapters 14 and 15 could have been the original story, with chapter 16 added on the same formula during later times, then combined as one story by even later editors. There is some evidence for this to be the case, such as how similar the stories are, and then how Shimshôn is allowed to break every Mosaic Law, how Shimshôn himself never really sets out to save Israel explicitly (without being angered by the Philistines), and how there is a clear break from the narrative formulae familiar in the previous Judge stories. This possibility could form the basis for further study but remains outside the scope of this study.
[123] Josephus, *Antiquities Book V Chapter 8, par.12*

4.3 THE EMIC SHIMSHÔN

Shimshôn is a complex character, given a very light overview in the Bible. Shimshôn is at the same time a "holy" (set-apart) person, yet he keeps falling for Philistine women, and his eventual capture follows as a direct result of his womanizing. He is supernaturally strong and intelligent, yet his heart melts the moment a woman mentions feelings of love, and he loses all wit. He is an agent of YHWH yet seems to have *carte blanche* to break His rules. He seems to delight in killing/hurting Philistines and thereby fulfilling his fate as given by YHWH, yet he keeps rebelling against this premise and continually "defects" to the women of his enemy.

YHWH uses him and his desires as a weapon against the Philistines. Shimshôn is a consecrated, yet dirty weapon and YHWH uses his fondness for women to further his own plans against the Philistines through brute force. For Shimshôn, it seems like his battles are personal, backed up by YHWH and not undertaken for YHWH.

In the text as we have it, there is no evidence of anything more. Shimshôn is not the prototype for some sort of messianic figure as he completely fails in the task of being a Nazarite according to a literal, strict reading of those rules. Since he is an "impure" Nazarite, he does not fit the Biblical picture of what the Israelite messiah should be, i.e., pure, righteous, saviour of Israel against her enemies. He is not a "freedom fighter" in the same vein as Joshua or the later kings. YHWH may use him as a weapon, but Shimshôn has no in-text motivation to save Israel, only his own desires, which land him in hot water with the Philistines.

Shimshôn is never called a "hero", גבר, in the Biblical text, nor by Josephus directly[124]. This may be due to some of the original story being lost, or to the focus of the story being on Shimshôn's deeds rather than his greatness. Despite this, many scholars continue to apply the Hellenistic idea of a "hero" to Shimshôn (Feldman, 1988; Bartholome, 1990; Davies, 2004; Ronace, 2004; Mobley, 2005).

Shimshôn does not judge or lead Israel in the traditional sense. He is on a one-man mission as an unconscious agent of YHWH. Indeed, there is no clearly defined goal or mission that Shimshôn is identified with other than the extremely vague "… and he shall

[124] This even though he does extol Shimshôn's virtues because "this man deserves to be admired for his courage, and strength, and magnanimity at his death" (Josephus, *Antiquities Book V Chapter 8, par.12).*

begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.” (chapter 13 verse 5). Even in this, the mission does not bring complete “freedom” it would seem. Shimshôn is said to only “begin” to free the Israelites from the Philistines. His final act of “heroic suicide” does not free the Israelites from the Philistines, only weakens the latter. He is considered a bad judge, inasmuch as he does not actively lead or judge Israel. The story of Shimshôn was not written (solely) as a lesson to Israel. Although there may be some merit to the symbolism of national disobedience to YHWH, as scholars[125] postulate (Greenstein, 1981; Nikolsky, 2014), we have absolutely no way of confirming this.

If one looks at the internal and external context of the Shimshôn story, then it becomes clear that the story is the prelude/start of the narrative of Israel fighting against the Philistines. Shimshôn is the last judge of the book of Judges. After him came the high priest ʽÊlîy, and then Shemûʼêl took over. Apart from the fateful battle where ʽÊlîy’s sons lose the Ark of the Covenant and their lives, most battles after Shimshôn against the Philistines are successful, whereas before Shimshôn, there is no reference to any conflict having taken place, and one gets the impression that the Israelites simply rolled over and accepted the Philistines as overlords before Shimshôn.[126] Shimshôn is therefore the very blunt, bloody weapon that YHWH used to start the centuries-long open war between the Israelites and the Philistines.

If we accept this explanation, it provides motivation for the seemingly contradictory nature of Shimshôn’s actions. Shimshôn breaks YHWH’s laws repeatedly, yet YHWH gives him supernatural power to get out of the trouble he got himself into. One can say that YHWH is using Shimshôn’s human, “weak” nature to lure the Philistines in, then unleashing his divine power through his agent.

Shimshôn as agent of YHWH has a very specific context. The context is that of a human male who is chosen since birth by a deity, YHWH, to do his will. This person has his own life and will as well, but the context dictates a surrender to the will of the deity as “agent”. This sets the scene for a duality of wills. On the one hand YHWH wants certain things from Shimshôn, on the other hand Shimshôn wants things from himself and life, expecting power from YHWH to achieve them. Hence, the “long leash”, so to speak, where

[125] As well as most pastors.
[126] This is something that is reinforced in Judges chapter 15 verses 9-13 where the men of Judah, traditionally the leaders of Israel, hand over Shimshôn instead of opposing the Philistines, despite knowing Shimshôn’s power.

Shimshôn is allowed a life, up to the point of going his own way, and in exchange YHWH gets an agent that starts the freedom-process finished under King David's rule.

This duality of wills leads us to the "otherness" that is so prevalent in the text and is often attributed as its main message (Exum, 2014; Gillmayr-Bucher, 2014; Wilson, 2014). Shimshôn, the man, was caught between two cultures, two wills, his life being used by YHWH to affect change, but never really fitting in. This design is similar to that of the stories of the prophets of the Old Testament. YHWH expects them to act as sole agents as well.

As pointed out earlier, the story of Shimshôn happens at a time when the "servant of YHWH" was replaced by a "judge"-agent, one who is not necessarily always a willing[127] agent. However, when it comes to Shimshôn, he seems to have willingly operated in the "other", the ambiguous. Unlike the other judges and prophets who were definitely on the YHWH's side, Shimshôn was on his own "side", with backup from YHWH. This, Mobley argues, makes Shimshôn the "monster" of the story, because he is a "wild man" empowered with divine strength to defeat the more civilized culture of the Philistines (Mobley, 2006, p. 115).

With regard to this duality, Shimshôn is not, as Wilson (Wilson, 2014) argues, a "man child" who fails at coming of age and coming into his own. "His own" was ordained from birth. His only reason for being was to be an agent of YHWH. Rather, he is a tragic character as envisioned by Exum (2014). Though she uses the term "comic", she is referring to the "classic, inclusive vision" (Exum, 2014, p. 20) of seeing the tragedy but accepting it as a vehicle towards an end. The cycle of Shimshôn running into his own desire, being humiliated then scoring a major victory with the help of YHWH fits into this framework perfectly. Shimshôn, in the pursuit of his own life (orchestrated by YHWH, as the narrator informs us), blunders into humiliation, but time and again this humiliation is used by YHWH to inflict a greater defeat on the Philistines.

[127] Cf. Gid'ôn's initial hesitancy and refusal, as well as that of Barak and the almost-kingship of Abimelech.

4.4 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the emic Shimshôn was described using the emic framework detailed in Chapter 2. Shimshôn was described without using modern cultural terms and ideas, nor comparisons to Herakles or other cultures.

Shimshôn is a destined person from the start. He is ordained by YHWH to be His champion against the Philistines. Shimshôn seems to both revel in his role, as well as rebel against all the laws and principles of his culture. His supernatural strength allows him to easily defeat any enemy, to the point where he becomes haughty and disrespectful towards YHWH. Despite this, he is seemingly forgiven for any infractions until he surrenders his secret to Delîylâh and is captured. In all this, Shimshôn seems to both embrace and rebel against his fate as champion of YHWH. In the end, even his rebellion is used to further YHWH's victory against the Philistines.

Shimshôn is therefore not a "hero" in the traditional sense. Shimshôn is a freedom fighter, but one who fights for his own freedom, not that of Israel. He uses his God-given strength to pursue his own desires and to pursue his revenge when his desires cause issues with the Philistines. However, despite this the story states that YHWH used Shimshôn to fulfil his own goals throughout the story. Shimshôn had an illusion of free will and rebellion against cultural and religious institutions, but in reality, he was still an agent of YHWH. This caused Shimshôn to be caught in an "in-between" state, not fully accepted by the Israelites, but also not accepted by the Philistines (or, at least, the Philistine leaders): a wild monster.

In his final moments Shimshôn calls out to YHWH and he has a larger victory than before his capture. Through this YHWH ultimately prevails, and Shimshôn gains his freedom in death. Through his death Israel is also saved and kept safe until the time of the kings who could organise Israel into a strong kingdom.

Chapter 5
Gilgameš and Shimshôn

Chapter Abstract

In this chapter, the characters of Gilgameš and Shimshôn are compared to each other based on the "Emic" attributes identified in Chapters 3 and 4 for Gilgameš and Shimshôn respectively. Through this comparison, their common attributes of strength, leadership, and relationship to the divine are highlighted. Their connection to symbolism, such as the sun and lions, are also explored in the light of the previous chapters. The chapter concludes with the similarity between the two of both being tools in the hands of the gods, used by the narrators of their stories to show how the gods predestine the lives of humans. In this regard, they may be viewed as "brothers in arms". They are both portrayed as strong, brave and larger-than-life.

This chapter is the conclusion to Chapters 3 and 4. Here, the emic characters of Gilgameš and Shimshôn will be compared. With the help of this method, we should be able to find similarities, if any. The author will also highlight relevant existing scholarly links.

In Chapter 3, we found the emic Gilgameš: a restless, powerful, *šanūdu* king who desires more meaning in life. He searches for and finds the fabled Ūta-napišti, who grants him the plant of immortality. However, it is only when he loses it that he realises that he is, despite all his physical and political power, and his will to take action, simply a servant of the gods with a particular role to fulfil.

In Chapter 4, we encountered Shimshôn, the tragic agent of YHWH who seemed caught in a cycle of falling in love, only to be betrayed and used, ultimately, as a blunt instrument to wreak the vengeance of YHWH on the Philistines and to start the process of freeing Israel from the Philistines.

From their emic characters, there a pattern emerges. Both are "ill-fated" (to our thinking) by their gods to serve as servants and thus fail in their own personal missions. Both characters are leaders, though they rely on their strength to single-handedly defeat foes instead of leading and fighting with their people.

Additionally, both characters have ostensible connections to the sun-god, according to modern scholars (see below, section 5.4 Connections to the Sun). Both characters are also closely associated with lions, at some stage killing animals of this species.

The patriarchal attitudes, male leadership roles, and other similar cultural traits found in both stories are near-universal to the ancient Near East and are only indicative of a shared cultural heritage and internal cultural diffusion that defines most ancient Near Eastern cultures. These shared features do not necessarily show any influence between the two cultures beyond the shared general cultural values of the ancient Near East.

5.1 "ILL-FATED" SERVANTS TO THE DIVINE

Both Gilgameš and Shimshôn are controlled by divine fates. Though Gilgameš only realises it at the end of his story, Shimshôn's life was predestined and declared from birth.

Shimshôn, as Nazarite, is unique between the two, as Gilgameš is not chosen explicitly in the text as a specific cultural "holy" person, nor is he the agent of a specific god. Gilgameš is "one-third" god himself, through his divine parents and grandparents, whereas Shimshôn is a normal human, born of human parents, according to the text.

Their lives, however, are very much governed by their respective gods. In the beginning of his story, Gilgameš revels in his role as king, abusing his power. We learn that he is bored, seemingly, and yearns for someone to match his power. The gods give him Enkidu, however, together they disrespect the gods so much that Enkidu is taken away again. This sets Gilgameš on a quest for immortality that leads him to learn that his role in life is as king and as "shepherd of Uruk" and that he, as mortal, is not supposed to aspire to immortality (not even through deeds, such as the ones with Enkidu) even though he is part god himself. The gods have ordained the way things should be, and are, and it is for the mortal to accept it.

Shimshôn also rebels against his role, choosing to reject most of his Nazarite oath and continually breaking the rules in pursuit of his own love life. Whether his actions are really his choice is a matter of debate, since many of his deeds are rubber-stamped by YHWH even though they contradict His rules. In addition, YHWH is said to plan[128] at least one of these transgressions and use it to his own advantage. In the end, however, Shimshôn's is also forced to accept that he must break the Philistine yoke on the Israelites and so fulfil his pre-ordained destiny, becoming the catalyst to set Israel free.

Love is also a common denominator in both stories, with Gilgameš mourning the death of Enkidu, his best friend and lover, which leads him to try to gain immortality and, in the process, learn his role as ordained by the gods. Similarly, it is Shimshôn's love of the Philistine woman and of Delîylâh that leads him to be betrayed each time and fulfil the will of YHWH. In the process, his role as saviour becomes clear.

[128] Alternatively, one may postulate that at the very least, YHWH uses His foreknowledge to his own ends.

5.2 LEADERS OF STRENGTH

Both heroes rely on brute strength to overcome their enemies. As a result, both develop egos based on their strength and indomitability. Gilgameš is confident in his own strength to the point of being overly cocky. Because of this, he appears larger-than-life and completely over-the-top in his actions. He chooses melee weapons, such as swords, dirks, and hatchets, over longer-range weapons, such as bows, probably so as to demonstrate his strength and dominance over his opponents. The two massive beasts that he and Enkidu face are also dealt with in an up-close and personal way.

Shimshôn, on the other hand, takes his supernatural strength and machismo even further, using no weapons. He fights the Philistines barehanded, or with whatever is at hand, most famously the jawbone of a donkey. There is also no mention of Shimshôn ever wearing armour, so we can assume that he doesn't dress for combat at all, considering that most of his engagements are not planned and happen as he goes about his business (at a wedding celebration, visiting Delîylâh, and shown as a trophy at the Philistine celebration). The only "prepared" engagement we know of in the story is when Shimshôn burns the fields and avenges his wife's death, suggesting he prepared some equipment.

Both Shimshôn and Gilgameš fought alone, though in the latter's case, Enkidu accompanies him until his death. However, no normal human companions from the populace join them. Both characters receive their strength from the gods, Shimshôn as a sort of divine boon in times of trouble and Gilgameš as a "blessing" on his life. They quickly seem to forget these divine gifts, though, and both of them have to be reminded that the gods are the ones who give them their strength, positions, and roles, not their choices or their own powers.

In addition to generally fighting solo, neither of them seems particularly worried about ever losing a fight. They also don't bother asking their fellow countrymen for assistance. Both Gilgameš and Shimshôn are shown to prefer the "fight first, think later" approach to difficult situations. This attitude lands them both in trouble, Shimshôn with Delîylâh and not recognising her as a threat to his power, and Gilgameš with generally fighting and destroying things impulsively before thinking about the situation and context (cf. the Stone Things he destroyed, as well as his insistence to fight the Ḫumbaba and Ištar, albeit the latter merely verbally). This lack of contextual awareness costs him the plant of life at the end as well, when he allows it to be stolen by a snake.

Both of the characters receive divine assistance, with Shimshôn's power coming and going as YHWH wishes and as his hair is shaved or grown. Gilgameš is saved at least once by Šamaš, his friend, who pins Humbaba down with all the winds so Gilgameš can land the killing blow.

Though not an exact comparison, Shimshôn's last prayer/cry to YHWH to grant him his last strength to push over the pillars, and Gilgameš's cry to Šamaš for help, both underline that despite all their bravado and ego, they are at the mercy of the gods in the end and without divine help, they would not have the strength they do.

Shimshôn, however, is willing to "go all in" in his quest for vengeance, sacrificing his life in a final act of strength and killing the 3000 Philistines in one go. Gilgameš is less inclined to give up his own life, being shocked that his deeds have consequences when Enkidu dies. Gilgameš also usually kills anything before it can seriously harm him, whereas Shimshôn found himself in a more serious situation of do-or-die.

In the end, both characters learn that strength, as everything else in life, is temporary. Civilisation and society, however, are, in contrast, eternal and continue despite the individual. Shimshôn's legacy is that future generations will be free from Philistine rule, even though he himself did not do any direct "saving". Gilgameš's legacy is in having shepherded a city-state and being remembered by future generations.

5.3 LEANINGS TOWARD CULTURAL REBELLION

An interesting feature of both Gilgameš and Shimshôn is that they seem to lean, at first, towards not associating with or being what their respective societies expect of them.

As discussed throughout, Gilgameš does not fulfil his role as caring "shepherd of Uruk" as he should. Rather, he seems to oppress his people, and in his restless adventuring, his people are abandoned. Furthermore, he does not honour Ištar as one would expect from an En of Uruk, the city of Ištar's temple. Instead, he favours Šamaš, the sun god, twin brother of Ištar and God of the rival city-state of Larsa. Only in mourning does he give Ištar her dues and offerings when preparing Enkidu's funeral. In addition to this, Gilgameš also kills the Bull of Heaven, then offers some of it up to Šamaš, effectively placing Anu's property below Šamaš and humiliating Ištar. This imbalance is never rectified by the story.

Similarly, Shimshôn also abandons his people in favour of the Philistines, preferring their female company above that of the Israelites. The men of Judah easily surrender Shimshôn to the Philistines, indicating that they don't accept him as an integral part of their society. Like, Gilgameš, Shimshôn also disrespects his god, YHWH, demanding water as if the deity owed him care. He also disregards all the laws of YWHW, not only the Nazarite ones, but also the religious-cultural laws for the Israelites, such as the prohibition against marrying outsiders as well as murder. This happens, although Shimshôn should have known right from wrong, if the Biblical narrative is followed and Mosaic Law was in place before Shimshôn's time.

Both Gilgameš and Shimshôn seem to shy away from their cultural norms, and through their actions, they embrace the opposite of those norms. In their stories, this phenomenon highlights their free nature and sets them apart from their peers. However, it also continuously gets them into trouble. Gilgameš is punished for killing Ḫumbaba through losing Enkidu, Shimshôn is never granted peace because his scraps with the Philistines snowball into a situation where he is the Philistine leadership's priority target, a fact which ultimately leads to his death.

Because of the death of Enkidu, Gilgameš goes on his epic journey to find eternal life, but instead discovers his real purpose of being a good king and caretaker of civilisation. Through being captured and blinded by the Philistines, Shimshôn turns to YHWH and realises his ultimate goal, namely personal revenge, which has the consequence of ostensibly saving Israel. This breaks the Philistines by destroying their temple and their leadership, breaking their strength and ensuring Israel's survival into later times.

5.4 CONNECTIONS TO THE SUN

Both characters are associated with the sun: Gilgameš through being Šamaš's favoured, Shimshôn through having a name that means "sun", or on the surface, "Šamaš".

In 1907, Paul Carus wrote a rather long article that the story of Shimshôn was some sort of ancient solar myth that had been cleansed by later religious editors of the Bible from its "pagan origins". As evidence, he mixes Canaanite religious practices, Celtic fairies, Greek epics (Homer and Herakles), the Gospels (Judas being equated with Delîylâh), the Gilgameš Epic (Enkidu the wild man), and so forth. He even compares the seven-pointed halo of the Persian sun-god to the seven locks of Shimshôn's head. Explaining away the lack of any evidence of any solar cycle in the Bible, he writes:

> Though the Shimshôn legend must have been the ancient Hebrew myth of the adventures of the sun-god, all those extraordinary miracles which savor of pagan divinities have been reduced to deeds of human valor and among other things the most characteristic event of a mythological nature, Shimshôn's resurrection, has been removed (Carus, 1907, p. 77).

This evidence is presented in a very convincing manner, but it is ultimately wrong. The only solar connection, if one looks emically at the source material, is Shimshôn's name. Even this, according to the Brill Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible Online, is a tenuous link as described under the entry for "Shemesh" (Lipiński, 2022):

> As used in the Bible, Hebrew שמש, vocalized šemeš in the MT, is never an actual divine name. Palestinian toponymy of Biblical times reflects, nevertheless, the Canaanite cult of the Sun-god, as shown by the place names Beth-Shemesh (Josh. 15.10; Josh. 21.16, etc.), En-Shemesh (Josh. 15.7; Josh. 18.17), Ir-Shemesh (Josh. 19.41). They preserve the memory of sanctuaries devoted to the solar deity, which is probably mentioned ca. 800 bce in the Deir ʿAllā plaster inscription (I,6). The bêt Šemeš in Jer. 43.13 is, instead, the temple of the Egyptian Sun-god in Heliopolis (Re). Surprisingly enough, Hebrew anthroponomy does not contain obvious traces of a solar cult, for Shimshôn's name may simply mean 'little sun', as suggested by the diminutival suffix -ōn < -ān, while the Aramaic proper name Shimshai (Ezra 4.8–9, Ezra 17, Ezra 23) can just be 'sunny' or 'sunlit'. The same meaning can be attributed to Shashai (Ezra 10.40), that may originate from Šamšay, since ss transcribes Šamaš in the Tell Fekherye inscription (Line 7).

The name "Shimshôn" is therefore probably more closely related to the idea of "my little sunshine" than to the Mesopotamian sun-god, "Šamaš". Once again, we see highlighted the necessity of looking at the context of ancient texts and stories emically, reining in any thoughts of headline-grabbing claims backed up by scant evidence or a rather dubious "it was removed from a source document that we do not have".

5.5 CONNECTION WITH LIONS

In their respective stories, both Gilgameš and Shimshôn killed lions. Shimshôn does so with his bare hands, overcoming the lion’s strength with his own (Judges 14:5-6). Gilgameš, on the other hand, uses weapons (Tablet IX, lines 8-18) to kill multiple lions. In both stories, there is no mention of hesitation, though Gilgameš does at first “grow afraid” of the lions until he reaches out to the god Sîn and realises he is in a dream. When he wakes up, he goes out to hunt lions. In both stories, their respective gods help them gain the strength and confidence to take on lions.

Strawn, in his book *What Is Stronger than a Lion? Leonine Image and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* explores this phenomenon, noting that while Shimshôn isn’t alone in killing a lion in the Hebrew Bible, he is certainly the most famous for it and the most daring of the killers. The lion which attacked him is described as “roaring”, and therefore hungry and more dangerous than the ones encountered by Gilgameš (Strawn, 2005, pp. 35–37).

We should note that the wearing of a lion pelt as a cloak was seen as a mark of leadership in Mesopotamian culture, presumably showing that the person wearing the pelt had overcome the lion (Strawn, 2005, p. 178). Gilgameš wears such a pelt when he wanders the wilderness after Enkidu’s death, where he kills even more lions. While Shimshôn is never depicted as wearing a lion-skin in the text, he does gain sustenance from the carcass in the form of honey, as well as using the carcass as a clue to a very hard riddle with which he torments the Philistines.

Both have been portrayed with lions in various art forms. Gilgameš famously adorned the wall of the Assyrian throne room, in a carving now in the Louvre, Paris:

Figure 2: Gilgameš as “Master of the Beasts”, Louvre AO19862, Palace of Sargon II, Khorsabad, c. 713–706 BC

This image (Figure 2) of Gilgameš holding a lion and a snake showing his dominance over nature is perhaps the best known depiction of Gilgameš. However, the relief does not depict any specific scene from the standard Babylonian epic, since Gilgameš did not hold the lions before moving through the pass. He “fell” on them with his hatchet and dirk and fought them.

Much more faithful to the epic itself, cylinder seals from Mesopotamia, some of which are shown below (Figures 3 & 4), including some found as far east as the Indus valley, bear the same motifs (Edens, 1992; Potts, 1993).

Figure 3: Brown and white quartz var chalcedony cylinder seal showing Gilgameš fighting a lion, Akkadian c. 2400-2200 BC, British Museum 89147.

Figure 4: Greenstone facies cylinder seal showing Gilgameš and possibly Enkidu fighting a lion, Akkadian c. 2400-2200 BC, British Museum 103229.

No weapons are shown on the seals, even though the text says that Gilgameš used weapons. The lack of weapons highlights his perceived strength and bravery.

Similarly, Shimshôn as powerful agent is usually depicted during the Renaissance and Middle Ages as either pulling down the pillars of the temple of Dagon[129] or killing a lion[130],

[129] *The Death of Samson* (cf. unknown Genoese origin, 1650; Dore, 1870) and *Samson's Death* (cf Massijs, 1549) are examples.
[130] For instance, *Samson and the Lion* (Dürer, 1498; Van Meckenem, 1475, etc) and a Spanish Capital depicting Samson killing a lion (MetMuseum 21.21.2, c. 1175-1200).

though many other scenes from his story are also present, such as his time with Delîylâh,[131] the most popular theme.

The archaeological record evidences almost no reliefs made by the ancient Israelites before the captivity to Babylon, nor much after that (save for some Hellenistic-era mosaics). There is nothing in art near contemporary to the story of Shimshôn as there is with Gilgameš. This is frustrating, as beautiful reliefs of almost everything and everyone in Mesopotamia, and massive reliefs of Egyptian kings and important officials, as well as daily life, are extant. When it comes to Israel and Canaan, there is, for the most part, a massive hole in the imagery. This is probably because Canaan was a place of almost constant turmoil and warfare during the 1st millennium BC. Kingdoms rarely lasted for more than 100 years independently, and cities were sacked regularly. Any reliefs that may have existed were destroyed, and when the cities were rebuilt, survival was of greater importance than creating elaborate artworks.

In 2012, one possible example, a tiny seal, was discovered in Tel Beit Shemesh, with the figures of a large animal with a feline form and a small humanoid on it.

Figure 5: Seal depicting two figures, possibly depicting Shimshôn killing a lion, though it is impossible to tell without details. Found in situ, *dated to the 12th or 11th centuries BC*[132]

[131] *Samson and Delilah* (cf. Rubens, 1610; Van Dyck, 1620; Rembrandt, 1628 &1638; etc).
[132]https://www.haaretz.com/2012-07-30/ty-article/stone-seal-could-prove-Shimshôn-legend/0000017f-f0ca-d487-abff-f3fef5850000 and https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2012/08/120813103403.htm.

Israeli media immediately connected the seal to the story of Shimshôn, though no academic work has as yet[133] done so. It is therefore completely possible that the seal does not depict Shimshôn, but a general motif. The image of a ruler or "great warrior" defeating or subjugating a lion or lions is a general motif found throughout the ancient Near East, in almost all its cultures and across its many periods (Strawn, 2005; Ornan, 2023, p. 25). Ashurbanipal, for one, has arguably the most elaborate murals portraying himself hunting all kinds of animals, including several scenes with lions.

Figure 6: Detail of relief showing Ashurbanipal killing a lion, Assyrian c. 645-635, British Museum 124886

The only surviving images we have of Shimshôn that we know for a fact is him, is in a religious context, usually Christian. This is most probably because of the spread of the Bible from c. 200 AD, and the popularization of the famous stories in it, such as Noah, Abraham, Shimshôn and the Lion, David and Goliath and so forth.

Most images of Shimshôn with the lion look something like this (Figures 7, 8, and 9):

[133] As of the date of writing (August 2022), there is no official word on this seal being anything other than a figure of a large animal and a humanoid, which is good emic practice considering that there is almost no information given on the seal.

Figure 7: Engraving, c. 1475 AD, Germany, Israhel van Meckenem, British Museum E,1.95

Figure 8: Detail of a tankard, c. 1580, Germany, showing Shimshôn and the lion, along with David and Goliath and Abraham sacrificing Jacob on other faces.

Figure 9: Relief showing Shimshôn fighting a lion, Somogyvár, 1170-1190, sandstone. Kaposvár, Rippl-Ronai Museum, Inv. No. 73.14060.1

The motif of a hero consistently fighting a lion barehanded seems universal. The subject is usually pictured pulling at the head or limbs of a lion, sometimes plunging a weapon into its body. Ancient Mesopotamia, as well as the story of Shimshôn, seem to agree on how one heroically kills a lion. Whether barehanded or not, portraying someone getting up close and personal with a lion and killing it appears to be the ultimate imagery of strength, power, and bravery, often used in the ANE to show the strength and bravery of kings (Ornan, 2023).

5.6 MESOPOTAMIAN INFLUENCE ON THE STORY OF SHIMSHÔN

Since the story of Shimshôn is set several centuries after the Epic of Gilgameš was finalised in the standard Babylonian version, one could reasonably expect some Mesopotamian elements to perhaps sneak in, especially since the oldest versions of the Hebrew Bible we have all date to after the return from Babylon and Persia.

Though specific details and actions all differ, there is one unifying feature in both stories: strength. Both characters are consistently portrayed as having, using, and trusting in their own massive strength. The portrayal of the hero killing a lion in close-quarters combat, though universal in the ancient world, may have influenced the author of Shimshôn to some extent.

However, to gauge the real influence of Mesopotamia on the Bible, we need sources that are much older than the Biblical manuscripts we have now. Josephus and the Biblical narrators mention documents and sources that are older than the ones from which they are writing. The Mosaic Law, for instance, was copied from an older document by at least two kings of Judah (2 Kings 22) and apparently recompiled by Ezra after returning to Jerusalem in the 5th century BC (Nehemiah 8).

At present, the available manuscripts date to the late 1st millennium AD, which makes them unfit for comparison with other ancient Near Eastern cultures, as they could easily have acquired elements from other sources, such as Greek histories. Even the DSS manuscripts are too "late", having mostly been written after 200 BC and could therefore be subject to reinterpretation after the Babylonian conquest. Older manuscripts from before the Babylonian captivity (c. 587 BC) would prove to be much better source material for comparison.

Until such material is available, however, any attempt to connect the two cultures would be subject to potential contamination from later cultural interactions. There would be Babylonian/Persian customs, motifs, and features in texts dating from the captivity, since the Israelites were exiled there for at least 70 years, with many Jews only returning much later, before and during Roman times, according to Josephus[134].

[134] Josephus, *Antiquities Book XVIII Chapter 9, par.8-9.*

5.7 CONCLUSION

An emic look at two very recognisable heroes can strip away the millennia of bias and assumptions that have built up around them. Looking at each character in their own, individual *Sitz im Leben*, has exposed the basic characteristics of these characters.

Gilgameš and Shimshôn may be regarded as characters who embody "strength" in their respective cultures. Though not culturally linkable, they are "brothers" in the sense that they are similar characters, ill-fated to divine will, valuing their own strength and ability to combat and defeat their foes above teamwork. In this, they also seemingly rebel (at least at first) against the socially accepted norm that one needs to be a part of society to function in it by rejecting their own society's cultural norms, laws and traditions and forging their own path.

In this, they are vessels for the narrators of their respective stories to show how the gods ordain one's role as a set path, using one's personal abilities for their greater plan or to keep the status quo. For all their strength and bravado, larger-than-life-sized egos, rebellion against the norms, and "epicness" of their stories, they are but tools to the gods. They are thus both "fated", in that they have a particular role ordained for them from the start.

Both are martially gifted and exceptional warriors. People fear and respect them for this. In this, they have also become larger-than-life in their own literature and in modern perception. However, this modern perception has incorporated a lot of Western ideas into how we see them. Contra these ideas, the true ancient Near Eastern hero did not forge his own path, but ultimately conformed to the will of the gods.

This realisation, then, can be taken as the emic understanding of the concept of heroism in the ancient Near East, specific to Mesopotamian and late Israelite culture. The hero is someone who displays impressive qualities of bravery, fighting prowess, and divine provenance, being "praiseworthy", but ultimately subject to the will of the gods.

Chapter 6:
Study reflection and Conclusion

This study went through several iterations before settling in the current form. At first, only the concept of heroism was going to be studied. However, early on the author realized that a paradigm shift at the fundamental levels of writing and source material study was necessary to answer the question “what did ancient people see as a hero, and does it differ from the ideology of today?”. Integral to this question is the concept of perception. How does one perceive a fact? What influences perception? The answers to these seemingly arbitrary questions lay in the development of a methodology that was based on an emic model and augmented with cognitive science theory. This led the study into a new direction which incorporated cognitive science as a core element. This field highlights the possibilities surrounding control of one’s thoughts on a fundamental level to control bias and how one processes knowledge.

The focus on Gilgameš was the result of seeking the oldest “heros” known in literature with a complete story. A comparison was called for and Shimshôn was chosen as the most complete mythological “hero” in Biblical literature who has a story that has been studied and compared to various other “heroes”, especially those in Greek literature. A comparison like this does not seem to have been done before and this study would hopefully fill that gap, as well as add to the Babylonian influence on the Bible debate in a small way.

The actual study itself, with the implementation of the methodology and framework for studying ancient sources, took about two years to complete, but was fraught with difficulties arising from the author’s domestic situation. This, again, highlighted the need for a focussed, still mind that can self-analyse all thoughts about the source material, and a fixed, scientifically backed framework that can operate under any condition. Being a cloistered scholar, concentrated on a single purpose and taken out of the world around one, but in the modern world that ideal is impossible to achieve.

Cognitive science was instrumental in providing a solid scientifically proven and backed foundation upon which to build. This meant that the author could focus on the work and train his brain to analyse each thought and statement that was written down for bias. The contribution of the study is to encourage more scholars to self-analyse their thought patterns to minimise undue and irrelevant influences. These skills are especially necessary in our modern 21st century life where information is everywhere with the ability to influence one through all manner of cultural norms and myths, or even a casual scroll on the internet. Information has become dangerous and biased through the open nature of the internet, where anyone can write and publish anything about any topic with little to no control or peer review. It is the researcher's responsibility to keep his mind clear of any influence that could affect them in any way and potentially change the outcome of a study.

One unexpected? outcome of the study was a practical change to the normal way of studying ancient sources was to use only original phonetic spellings, as opposed to the more anglicized ones. Though not doing anything to add facts to the study, using the original names does condition one's mind to only look at the characters in terms of their direct contexts, without adding any other thoughts and feelings that are associated to them via their "common" names, used in modern culture.

The result of the emic approach was a highly distilled first impression of each character, followed by a more in-depth, controlled discussion of each narrative's context, as revealed through the heroes' actions in their respective stories. From this, an emic picture could be drawn of how the ancient authors and audience of each story most likely saw them. It is noted that we cannot say with absolute certainty that the emic depictions accurately reflect ancient reality, due to the massive amounts of lost data about the stories and their cultures.

From this analysis, some interesting points emerge. Gilgameš, for instance, stripped of the modern ideals and ideologies that some scholars have thrust upon him, becomes a little clearer as a character and can be accurately compared without debates as to finer points that have little to no proof beyond the theoretical. In Shimshôn's case, a possible literary cycle was described (though not discussed due to the limitations of this study). The cycle sheds light on the folklore of ancient Israel which was later consolidated as the books of Judges, possibly more. This cycle possesses the potential to illuminate some of the motivations for the story of Shimshôn, and why there are so many seemingly contradictory passages within the rest of the Bible. In the study, Shimshôn especially had to be stripped of more than 2000 years of added layers of social perception which have permeated into Western European culture to the point that "Shimshôn/Samson" and "strength" have become idiomatic synonyms.

Similarly, the study shows that, on a basic ideological level, Gilgameš and Shimshôn can be considered "brothers" through their strength, their "macho" attitudes as seen in their actions and words, and the fact that both found their true place at the end of their stories. However, it is not for "finding their place" that these two characters were remembered in later generations, but rather for their deeds of superhuman strength and valour. The "flavours" of their stories seem to have caught on in the modern mind more readily than their true message.

From this tendency, we deduce that humans automatically look for human strength, prowess, and valour. Stories like Shimshôn and Gilgameš' were necessary throughout the ancient world to remind people that, no matter the strength of the person, the gods were still the makers of fate. In this way, the narratives are both part of the shared Multicultural ancient Near Eastern Culture, using similar and familiar feats and motifs.

6.1 MODERN HEROICS AND ANCIENT CUSTOMS

At the start of this study, we noted that the modern concept of heroes may differ from the perceptions of ancient cultures. This was one of the earlier hypotheses that was later changed. Though used only in Chapter 1 to set the scene, so to speak, the superficial comparison between ancient characters and more modern superheroes also highlights an important part of an emic study: context. The inclusion of the discussion of superheroes here, rather than earlier, was intended to limit external influences and ideas about modern heroism that might have affected the emic study of Gilgameš and Shimshôn.

For the purpose of this study, we used the modern concept of "hero" as popularised by Western comics and the subsequent films that have received near-global attention. It should, however, be noted here that the rise of the "superhero" as we know it today only represents a small part of Western (American and European) cultural myth-building and is not representative of cultures around the globe. These modern stories became popular simply through the mass marketing of comics and movies, which were, until recently, predominantly "Western" in origin. Most non-American cultures also have their own local heroes, based on myths often thousands of years old, only becoming known in recent years.

6.1.1 THE MODERN SUPERHERO

The oldest traceable Western "superhero" who shares the same generally identifiable traits as more recognisable modern ones is Spring-Heeled Jack. He is widely considered to be the original "dual identity" hero in Western culture who gave rise to famous tropes in TV personalities such as Zorro and can even be seen as the original archetype of a Batman-esque hero (Nevins, no date; Gavaler, 2014). Jack was a stereotypical upper-class British heir, cheated out of his fortune, who then turned to mysterious India to find a solution and returned to avenge himself on his enemies, using a combination of magic, oriental mystique and technology. The story weaves popular ideas and tropes of the time into the story, along with the typical colonial tropes of taking ideas and artefacts from the Orient and applying them in Western culture to gain an edge.

From this story derives the familiar trope in comic stories where the societal norms and views are incorporated into the story and quite literally "sets" it in its own time-context. In this way, the origin story of many modern superheroes, as well as their real-world development (and multitude of versions), have many similarities in their development with ancient myths and epics (like Gilgameš and Shimshôn). The motivation behind creating a modern "hero" character based on a real-life event or person is similar.

Some of the most iconic modern superheroes personify the hopes and aspirations of their times. Batman was created during the Great Depression, where crime and injustice were rampant, as a troubled hero also suffering from injustice, but dispensing vengeance on "evil". Similarly, Superman gave hope in the same era as a sort of Messianic figure who surpasses humanity's problems and could defeat evil using super-human/alien means, not supernatural ones. Some argue that this Superman was an unofficial mascot for Roosevelt's 'New Deal' and 'Greater-Than-Reality' plans for dealing with the Great Depression (Hoberek, 2016, p. 124).

Many other modern superheroes also originated during or after the Second World War (The Shield, Captain America, Wonder Woman, Daredevil and Green Arrow are all examples). These were usually national heroes/mascots of a nation used to play on Nationalist symbolism and languages to help popularise the war and portray it as an "outright good" vs "outright evil" combat, with the help of these archetypal characters.

Later they were adapted to the Cold War setting of nationalist ideologies, with some superheroes (such as Green Arrow and Batman) coming to represent the more brooding and “darker” undertones of modern Western society. These characters live on in modern times through many iterations, re-imaginings, and movies. Their original cultural context-bound forms make them easy to adapt to modern audiences and to portray and discuss modern ideas and situations through them.

Exhibiting evolution, the superheroes of the earlier 1900s have been changed and re-imagined with modern ideals. For example, the latest iteration of Superman has become a more modern, brooding and thinking man with his own inner demons, different from the original. Ironically, sometimes the original traits were turned on their head because of the audiences. Wonder Woman was originally planned and designed as a symbol of Women’s empowerment and as a role model for girls in 1944. Later versions of Wonder Woman gradually turned her into a sex-symbol, as that is what the male-dominated audience seemed to want. (Avery-Natale, 2013, p. 72)

A new, brooding, irreverent, take on the dark underbelly of modern society gave birth to Deadpool (1990), arguably one of the most irreverent characters ever written. What sets this character apart from other superheroes is that he doesn’t stand for what is good, but rather for whatever he feels in the moment. He regularly breaks the fourth wall, and thereby also the “mythos” which surrounds traditional heroic character building. He represents the modern disillusionment with the state of the world.

People have become desensitized to storytelling, having seen behind the curtain, so to speak. With this revelation comes an acceptance that stories, whilst having a deeper moral meaning or context, are just stories meant to reflect an aspect of culture, usually an ideal form, and the mystery of storytelling is now an open secret, where the reader/listener is fully a part of the process of suspension of disbelief.

We can thus see that “superheroes” are very much a product of their cultural milieu. In the same way, the ancient heroes were manufactured/built up to reflect specific life-lessons and moral messages in their respective cultures. These nuggets of societal wisdom are usually endemic to that specific cultural context and, while possibly understandable or relatable in another cultural context, they cannot be transferred easily between cultures without losing their original meaning. It is therefore imperative that the “hero” character is never too far removed from its original context when studying them in an academic setting. For this reason emics and, especially the premise of the framework proposed in this study (see Chapter 2), is especially helpful in isolating the original contexts. It falls to the scholar studying the character to cross the knowledge gap between the original author/culture and their own. Without this attempt, undue influences will skew their understanding and lead to a version of the character/source material which reflects the modern scholar’s perspective of the source and not the source itself.

This is a point that Smith makes in his article “It ain't easy studying comics” in the Cinema Journal of 2011. Smith argues that, to properly analyse and study comics, the scholar must be aware of their own limitations. He argues that it is not simply enough to have a background in art or film, but that to “approach and recognise that comics are a distinctive form of cultural expression in their own right” is vital (Smith, 2011, p. 112).

For Smith, the scholar must acknowledge his limitations of knowledge or experience freely. This, he argues, will help inform the study without making assumptions about a comic. This is sensitive to both the original source material and the contemporary fan base.

The concept of “heroism” is thus universal in its attempt to portray the best, most desirable, praiseworthy traits of a culture at a given point in time. Just as the various superheroes were designed around the aspirations, nationalist fervour, and ideals of their times, so too Gilgameš and Shimshôn represented the aspirations and dreams of their original contexts and creators. By studying them in their contexts and minimising external interference as much as possible, it is possible to see them as their own, emic selves and to glean comparative elements. Their characters and contexts are unique; however, since their creators are unique, with unique cultural contexts.

This universalist view of an emic concept of heroism merits further study, especially in ancient cultures. If one can establish a truly emic baseline for all ancient cultures against which to measure modern assumptions, the study of ancient cultures will become much more accurate and definitive, with fewer cross-cultural comparisons based on modern perceptions. The process towards consensus and understanding where our world comes from will also profit from this. The concepts and framework set forth in this study can potentially be used to fuel more emically-envisioned studies.

6.2 MODERN APPLICATIONS

By looking at the original contexts of ancient sources as we have done in this study, we come to realise the importance of this emic/indigenous way of thinking in wide-ranging modern contexts. How many baseless and time-wasting arguments and populist leaders' rhetoric could be avoided if one applied this same framework to the way one goes about understanding the world around us? After first understanding the specific context of a situation through emic means, one may then proceed to inform oneself by widely reading/gathering outside information that informs the topic in an etic manner. This method can then lead to a truly informed opinion on the matter that would take into account not only modern (etic) opinions and values, but also the original value and knowledge systems (emic) which informed the complex developments or contexts that we can see or interpret today.

Through such a thoroughly objective way of dealing with often complex issues, both modern and contextual bias can be largely mitigated, and proper dialogue and discourse can be achieved. In some instances, entire arguments can be avoided as modern emotions would not dictate a course of action that would judge an earlier time in terms of modern standards.

This method will by no means stop all arguments and differences of opinion, but it could, however, result in a normalisation of an emic- like understanding of different points of view across cultures, times, and geographic distributions. Such a normalisation would lead to greater discourse, and a greater acceptance of other groups' viewpoints or opinions.

In a time when individualism, personal feelings, and self-determination are given greater weight than traditional standards set out by a culture employing this method is also a great test of one's integrity. If we were to truly accept that each person has the right to individual determination, this right should extend to ancient cultures also. In accepting the right of ancient cultures to have their own contexts and individualised meanings, we are obliged to adopt an emic perspective to better understand them, rather than an etic one.

In a way, ancient stories therefore continue to teach us valuable lessons for our own time, even if tangentially and through the act of studying them.

6.3 ADDITIONAL RESEARCH

It is hoped that this study will foster a new way of thinking about the interpretation and modern perception of ancient peoples and sources, with a practical framework to guide scholars. Some areas in which this would be most useful include:

- Individual character studies of all “heroic” characters in the ancient Near East, which will enable a thorough understanding of each “hero” within their own contexts and not mingled with others.
- Similar to the above, an emic framework will also help with the identification of the “indigenous voice” of the various cultures of the ancient Near East on a much more emic and personal level. This could even include a study of ancient Egyptian culture in its original contexts, and research on how these contexts influence Africa, and sub-Saharan Africa specifically.
- Archaeological excavations, and specifically the interpretation of finds, represent another possible future field of study with regard to this study. Briefly mentioned in Chapter 2, emics in an archaeological setting is not a new concept. However, archaeologists are subject to the same influences as other researchers. More so, in fact, as the hard work and often frustrated expectations of excavation staff to “find something cool” lead to immediate conclusion-jumping when something is found[135]. Though these conclusions are usually filtered in the final reports, the temptation to speculate about finds is never far away. When an emic framework, such as the one proposed here, is implemented on an archaeological site, it will ground (pun intended) the excavation team to their context. This will help to build a proper picture of the site, by the people excavating it. A similar system has been employed at by Ian Hodder at Çatalhöyük[136] until 2018, where site members were encouraged to keep a diary and keep track of their emotional states during the dig, as he acknowledge that emotions can alter the contextualization of finds (Fagan, 2009, p. 61). This is part of a newer wave of archaeology, called post processual, experimental archaeology where the context not only of the finds, but also the researchers are considered to avoid biases(Fagan, 2009, pp. 61–62).

[135] This observation derive from my personal experience on digs in Israel as well as in South Africa.
[136] https://www.catalhoyuk.com/research/archive_reports.

- As pointed out in Chapter 3, section 3.2.7.4, the rejection of Ištar by Gilgameš in favour of Šamaš represents a break from tradition where the *En* of Uruk is supposed to honour Ištar. In the story Gilgameš is firmly established as the *En* of Uruk. Yet he repeatedly consorts with Šamaš, even offering a part of the Bull of Heaven to him after rejecting Ištar. Šamaš was traditionally associated with Larsa, which was a rival city to Uruk. This could point to some original story of an *En* of Uruk that rejected his own goddess in favour of Šamaš. This is certainly a field for future research using the emic framework to perhaps glean some more information regarding the contexts that formed the story of Gilgameš.
- In Chapter 4 the possible split of the story of Shimshôn between Judges chapter 15 and 16 was described. At the end of chapter 15, the story ends with the customary “and he judged Israel for 20 years”[137] formula familiar to all the other judges in the book. Then, in chapter 16, the story resumes with Shimshôn’s meeting of Delîylâh and his eventual capture and death, after which the story is again concluded with the “judged for *x* years”[138] formula. This is grounds for at least an article highlighting the discrepancy and attempting to explain it in light of the rest of the book of Judges and its possible developmental history.

[137] Judges 15:20.
[138] Judges 16:31.

6.4 STUDY CONCLUSION

At the start of this study, a question was posed: Can one do an emic study of ancient sources? Despite the obvious limitations of time passed and removal from modern culture, this was shown to be both theoretically and practically possible. Through concentration, self-control, and self-awareness, one can gain some understanding of the context of ancient cultures. This is helped through Panofsky's proposed three-layered analysis methodology and strict adherence to emic methodology. Through definitive emic delineation, cognitive sciences definitions, and Panofsky's techniques, an emic-powered framework was developed and implemented in the study.

This framework was used to study the emic Gilgameš and Shimshôn on their most basic emic levels. By looking at these characters emically, some modern assertions and assumptions about them could be dispelled. Looking past modern connections to Herakles and modern ideas, the emic Gilgameš was shown in his own light, as the text portrays him. Similarly, the emic Shimshôn was shown in his own context, without unnecessary connections to the sun god or other assumptions. The two emic characters could be compared as emic equals, without interference from other factors.

This yielded some interesting results, with many similarities being found between the two. Both are rebellious, proud, divinely touched men who value self-determination and strength above all else. Ultimately, this leads them to accept their divinely planned fates, as their rebellion against cultural norms results in loss and, in Shimshôn's case, death.

This study also touched on the use of emics in academia and the very valid concerns which it raises. However, in developing this framework and applying it successfully to two different ancient sources, I believe the use of emics has been somewhat vindicated. The inclusion of cognitive sciences in the framework addresses the issues raised against emic methodology, especially concerns about personal biases.

Preventing personal bias interference is useful in modern times as well. By implementing a conscious, focused methodology for processing and interpreting information, we can prevent the most obvious biases and open ourselves to a more understanding, open experience of the world.

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