

## MOURNING OR THUNDERING IN THE VALLEY OF MEGGIDO(N): THE TRANSLATION OF *SĀPAD* IN ZECH 12.11

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### Introduction

The plain of Megiddo is a wide and shallow valley lying to the south and east of the limestone promontory that is Mt. Carmel. It is drained by the Wadi Kishon and is extremely fertile, receiving upwards of 30 inches (76 cm) of rain during the rainy season between late autumn and early spring. In Zech 12.11 there is an apparent reference to a rite of mourning for the Northwest Semitic weather and storm god, Hadad-rimmon, that was held at this site. Some commentators interpret the name as a place name and this will be addressed below. Nevertheless, the existence of ritual mourning for an absent deity at this location is commonly taken for granted. Greenfield has consistently championed this viewpoint in a series of publications from 1976-1999. In direct contrast and almost in passing, Lipiński comments that both the translation, “mourning for Hadad Ramman,” and the supposed ritual on which it was based, are erroneous and speculative. He suggests that the underlying concept is that the sound of ritual beating of breasts in Jerusalem will be as loud as the beat of Haddu the Thunderer in the valley of Megiddo.<sup>1</sup> This paper investigates whether this interpretation can be sustained.

### Translations

It seems as if a straight construct, “mourning of Hadadrimmon,” is translated by ASV, NAB, NASB, NIV, NKJV, and GNB. Those translations that insert a preposition include NJB, “mourning for Hadad Rimmon,” NJPS, “wailing at Hadad-rimmon,” NRSV, “mourning for Hadad-rimmon,” and REB, “mourning over Hadad-rimmon.” Both readings are grammatically possible: the first makes for considerable ambiguity in interpretation; the second attempts to resolve any

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1 Jonas C. Greenfield, “The Aramean God Rammān/Rimmōn,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 26 (1976): 195-98; “Aspects of Aramean Religion,” in *Ancient Israelite Religion* (ed. Patrick D. Miller, Jr., Paul D. Hanson, and S. Dean McBride; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 67-78; “Hadad,” in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (ed. Karel van der Toorn; 2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 377-82; Edouard Lipiński, *The Aramaeans: Their Ancient History, Culture, Religion* (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta; Leuven, Paris: Uitgeverij Peters, 2000), 632.

ambiguity, but requires the reality of a well-known and documented ritual act to support it.<sup>2</sup>

### Dating

The collection of oracles that comprise Zech 9–14 is reckoned as difficult to date, resisting any prophetic attribution and lacking an overall coherence. On dating, the general scholarly consensus seems to favor the early to middle Persian period (539–423 B.C.E.), though arguments are still made for a Hellenistic dating. It is impossible to identify any historical or prophetic figures that might secure a more precise dating of this literary mosaic. A few, notably Carol and Eric Meyers, have argued for a more precise date, mid-fifth century, and for a discernible literary integrity.<sup>3</sup>

### Grammar

The translation of the phrase *kēmispad hādad-rimmôn* as a simple or straightforward construct rather begs the question and, as already noted, raises ambiguities. Does it indicate the storm god caught in an act of mourning? Is Hadad-rimmon a location and the phrase then to be read as “mourning at Hadad-rimmon” (cf. NJPS)? There is a place named Rimmon in Zech 14.10. There are, in fact, three place names with the element Rimmon: En-rimmon, ten miles north of Beersheba; Rimmon, fifteen miles north of Jerusalem; and Rimmon, about twenty-five miles northeast of Megiddo. However, none of them is in the valley of Megiddo, or associated with Josiah, Hadad-rimmon, or mourning.<sup>4</sup>

Behind the translations “for” or “over” is the reading of the construct phrase as an “objective genitive.” This is a type of construct in which the first noun (*nomen rectum*) indicates an action performed “to,” “for,” or “against” the person indicated by the second noun (*nomen regens*).<sup>5</sup> Waltke and O’Connor, adopting Chomsky’s concept of “surface” and “deep” structures, state that the construct’s ambiguous surface structure can, after analysis of its deep structure, be resolved

2 Bruce Waltke and M. O’Connor note the ambiguity implicit in such phrases as *’ahābāt ’ēlōhīm* “love of God” in Hebrew and English (*An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* [Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990], 141–42).

3 David L. Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14 and Malachi* (Old Testament Library; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1995), 23–25; Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, *Zechariah 9–14* (Anchor Bible 25C; New York, London: Doubleday, 1993), 26–27, 32–45.

4 Herbert G. May and John Day, eds., *Oxford Bible Atlas* (3d ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 61–63. The view that Hadad-rimmon is a place name lies behind the NJPS translation and is adopted by some commentators, including Meyers and Meyers, *Zechariah 9–14*, 342–44; Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14 and Malachi*, 122; Ben C. Ollenburger, “Zechariah,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible, Volume 7, Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature, Daniel, the Twelve Prophets* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1996), 632. These commentators note 2 Chr 35.25, where reference is made to the lament for Josiah (d. 609 B.C.E. at Megiddo) composed by Jeremiah and included in the lament repertoire of the singing men and women “till today.” In the Chronicler’s time these laments would surely have been held in the Second Temple, not in a location far from Jerusalem and Yehud. Overall, the evidence for any such ritual is flimsy.

5 *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar* (ed. E. Kautzsch; trans. A. E. Cowley; 2d ed.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1910), 415–16; Paul Joion, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (trans. and rev. T. Muraoka; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1991), 46; John C. L. Gibson, *Davidson’s Introductory Hebrew Grammar-Syntax* (4th ed.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 31–32.

in translation. As a sub-category of their “adverbial genitive,” they indicate a genitive of advantage or disadvantage. As others do, they cite as an example Amos 8.10, *ʿēbel yāhīd* “mourning for an only son,” found also in Jer 6.26, and thus, by analogy, *kēmispad hādad-rimmōn* “mourning for Hadad-rimmon.”<sup>6</sup> *ʿĒbel*, as a noun, is used in the objective/adverbial genitive sense in other places: Gen 27.41 *ʿēbel ʾābī* “mourning for my father”; Deut 34.8 *ʿēbel mōšeh* “mourning for Moses.” However, in verbal form, presenting most often in the HtD-stem (*hitpaʿel*), it is usually followed by the preposition *ʿal* “over” when the object of mourning is indicated.

The verb *sāpad* in the G-stem as a rule takes the preposition *lē*: Abraham mourning for Sarah (Gen 23.2), all Israel for Samuel (1 Sam 25.1, 28.3), and all Israel for Abijah, the son of Jeroboam (1 Kgs 14.13, 18). However, in 2 Sam 11.26, Bathsheba mourns *ʿal* “over” her slain husband Uriah, and, similarly, the old prophet and his sons mourn over the disobedient and dead man of god (1 Kgs 13.30). The nominal form, *mispēd*, is used once with *ʿal* and that, significantly, is in Zech 12.10. There we are told concerning the Davidic house and the inhabitants of Jerusalem *wēsāpēdū ʿālāyw kēmispēd ʿal hayyāhīd wēhāmēr ʿālāyw kēhāmēr ʿal habbēkōr* “and they will mourn over him, like mourning over the only son, and they will sob over him, like sobbing over the first-born.” Given the rhetorical repetition of *ʿal* (v. 10), it seems odd that this is not continued into v. 11 as *ʿal-hādad-rimmōn*, if a well-known ritual lament over the god is being compared to the violent grief over the death of an only and first-born son. The intensity of v. 10 is wholly lacking in v. 11. Nor is the analogy of the adverbial genitive of disadvantage, *ʿēbel yāhīd*, convincing in this verse. The noun is different and the usage a colloquialism.

Thus one is left with a straight construct, “mourning of Hadad-rimmon.” It is highly unlikely that this refers to mourning by the storm god himself. Moreover, there is no evidence for Hadad-rimmon as a site of ritual lamentation for the unfortunate monarch Josiah. Does the mythology and ritual of Hadad-rimmon then support an objective genitive of disadvantage?

### Myth and ritual

By the latter half of the second millennium B.C.E., Hadad had become the dominant storm god in Syria-Palestine. His chief characteristic in the Middle and Upper Euphrates had been that of the violent, tumultuous, and destructive storm: Adad “bellowing from the clouds” in the story of Atra-Hasis, or “rumbling” inside his black thundercloud in Gilgamesh XI.<sup>7</sup> However, as he moved west towards the Mediterranean coast, he became associated with and responsible for the life-giving rains, vital for agriculture in the region. The uncertainty of these rains influenced the mythological portrait of Hadad in Canaanite religion.<sup>8</sup> In areas dependent on seasonal rains rather than rivers, the rainmaker was paramount. At Ugarit he was referred to as the son of Dagan, an earlier fertility deity of the Middle and

6 Waltke and O'Connor, *An Introduction*, 147.

7 Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia* (Oxford: University Press, 1991), 31, 112.

8 Alberto R. W. Green, *The Storm-God in the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 153-54.

Upper Euphrates. In light of his position, he was called simply *bʿl* “lord,” his most popular epithet in the region, as seen in the Ugaritic texts and the Hebrew Bible.<sup>9</sup> Another common epithet of Baal among the Arameans was *Rammanu*, the “thunderer,” appearing as Rimmon in the Hebrew Bible, which mentions the god and his temple, presumably in Damascus (1 Kgs 15.18; 2 Kgs 5.18). The well-known stele from Ugarit shows the god with his spear channeling lightning flashes and shooting them to the ground. The club in his right hand may represent the power to hurl thunderbolts.<sup>10</sup> A clear distinction must be made between the so-called dying and reviving youthful vegetation deities and the meteorological storm gods. Yet disagreement remains as to whether these vegetation deities do, in fact, rise or return from the underworld: there are more manifestations of weeping than rejoicing. Mettinger, though he acknowledges the paucity and ambiguity of much of the evidence, comes out in favor of most of these gods reviving.<sup>11</sup> Mark S. Smith takes a much more rigorous view of the evidence, or lack thereof, and suggests that while the death of these deities can be demonstrated, there is little to support a revival or return.<sup>12</sup> Storm gods, however, do not die. They may sometimes disappear, even enter the netherworld, like the Hittite storm god of Nerik, his son Telepinu, and other storm gods, thus causing drought and infertility, but they are not described as dying and are, therefore, not the objects of mourning rituals.<sup>13</sup>

The deity who straddles the fence is Baal Hadad at Ugarit. He possesses all the characteristics of the storm god, but is forced to descend into the realm of Mot (Death) with all his meteorological paraphernalia.<sup>14</sup> From this plight he is rescued by the intervention of the goddess Anatu and the sun goddess Shapsu. Mettinger acknowledges Baal’s storm- and weather-god attributes, but is quite clear that Baal dies by entering Mot’s underworld realm, and that he does return to life. These actions correspond to the seasonal cycles of the year. Mettinger rejects the idea that Baal is a Hittite-style disappearing deity.<sup>15</sup> Smith also admits that at Ugarit the storm-god aspects of Baal were influenced by the natural cycle. However, he makes two further observations. He notes the complete absence of any mourning

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9 In *KTU [Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit]* 1.12 I 38-41, all Baal’s titles are mentioned: *bʿl//bn dgn*, *bʿl//il hdd*, Baal//son of Dagan, Baal//god Hadad.

10 André Caquot and Maurice Sznycer, *Ugaritic Religion* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980), Plate X.

11 Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *The Riddle of the Resurrection: “Dying and Rising Gods” in the Ancient Near East* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2001).

12 Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), ch. 6.

13 Harry A. Hoffner, Jr., *Hittite Myths* (2d ed.; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 14-28. Hittite deities seem particularly prone to raging, sulking, and disappearing. The subsequent drought or “ice-age” conditions prompt searching, rather than mourning. The bad moods of the gods are sealed in the “Dark Earth,” and the deity in question returns in a better frame of mind.

14 *KTU* 1.5 V 6-17; Mark S. Smith, “The Baal Cycle,” in *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry* (ed. Simon B. Parker; Atlanta: Scholars Press), 147-48; Nicholas Wyatt, *Religious Texts from Ugarit* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 123-24. The messengers sent to find Baal reach creation’s limit and look down into the underworld; *lbʿl.npl.ars* (1.5 VI 8-9) should probably be translated “[we came] upon Baal, fallen into the underworld,” rather than “fallen to (the) earth.” In 1.5 VI 24-25, El announces in his grief that *atr/bʿl.ard.ars* “after Baal I will descend to the underworld.”

15 Mettinger, *Riddle of the Resurrection*, 55-81.

or rejoicing for Baal in the ritual texts from Ugarit. He then goes on to link the god's dying and rising motifs to the funeral rites for the deceased kings of Ugarit and the enthronement of their living successors. He suggests the dying and rising divinity is an ideological concept, confined to the mythological texts and intended to explain the continuing but uncertain nature of kingship at Ugarit, of which Baal was the patron deity: a case of *mortuus rex, vivat rex*.<sup>16</sup> Both Mettinger and, more recently, Green argue that this notion is difficult to support from the sources. Further, Green is of the opinion that the idiosyncratic nature of the storm god at Ugarit derived primarily from natural and climatic changes such as the decline of the water-table in western Syria from the Late Bronze Age on. This had been the particular care of the god of the sea and underground water sources, Yam. As these sources dwindled, Yam was replaced by the god who brought the vital rains. Baal was connected with the climatic and agricultural cycles, and so, unlike the classic storm gods, he was required to display the passivity of vegetation deities.<sup>17</sup>

As noted above, evidence is lacking in the ritual texts for either rites of mourning or rejoicing. Mettinger cites the end of *KTU* 1.12 II 58-61, where the king is told to pour out water drawn from El's temple cistern. Since this comes at the end of a text that refers to the death of Baal and the subsequent drought, he thinks that this is an act of sympathetic magic to signal and ensure the returning rains of autumn, evidence of celebration of Baal's revivification. The celebration, if such it was, seems very muted. In *KTU* 1.17 VI 26-32 the envious Anatu proffers *bl mt* "deathlessness" if Aqhat will give her his wonderful bow. She also promises him the immortal life of Baal and El, though that of Baal, who either lives or is returned to life, seems rather more precarious. Mettinger himself admits that, as evidence for ritual procedures around Baal's death and return, these references are "very tenuous."<sup>18</sup> The same might be said of the references to the mourning actions of El and Anatu for the fallen Baal (*KTU* 1.5 VI 11-25; 1.6 I 2-10) being used as a bridge to communal mourning rites for Hadad-Rimmon. While the myths show the gods mourning, there is no evidence for rites of communal mourning at Ugarit, or elsewhere. Miller's automatic association of the women weeping for Tammuz in Ezek 8.14 with Zech 12.11 is representative of this glib approach.<sup>19</sup> Further, by the early Iron Age, Baal and Hadad had gone their separate ways, Baal to become the Canaanite storm god and Hadad the same for the Arameans.

Finally, there is the whole problem of religion in Yehud and the former Samaritan territories in the Persian period. Hanson interprets the period as a response to the calamity of Jerusalem's fall and the Exile, with the reapplication of pre-exilic royal and Temple tradition in Haggai, of priestly tradition in Zech 1-8, of prophetic tradition as apocalyptic in Zech 9-14, and of the wisdom tradition

16 Smith, *Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 120-30.

17 Mettinger, *Riddle of the Resurrection*, 66; Green, *Storm-God*, 217-18.

18 Mettinger, *Riddle of the Resurrection*, 68-71.

19 Patrick D. Miller, *The Religion of Ancient Israel* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 2000), 241, n. 75.

in Job.<sup>20</sup> In a similar vein, Albertz understands Deutero (9–11) and Trito (12–14) Zechariah as the response of marginalized prophetic or quasi-apocalyptic groups to the shift from Persian to Macedonian rule.<sup>21</sup> Keel and Uelingher observe that in the post-exilic and Persian period Yehud, both rigorous orthodoxy and separation from “foreign” religions prevailed.<sup>22</sup> Any discussions of the “famous” mourning rite of Hadad-Rimmon are notably absent from studies in the religion of Israel.<sup>23</sup> Through Hellenistic and Greco-Roman times, Hadad’s pre-eminence as a storm god continued. Avi-Yonah traces the deity’s manifestations from Zeus Heliopolitanus of Greco-Roman times back through Ba’al Shamēm of the Persian Period to Haddu of Ugarit. At all times the deity is presented as a storm and weather god whose thunder, lightning, and rain presage ensuing fertility. He manifested as the god of Mt. Carmel in Roman times, consulted by Vespasian. He was also given the epithet *Keraunios*, the “thunderer.” In all of this there is no evidence for any mourning rituals.<sup>24</sup>

### Semantic field of *sāpad*

The primary meaning of this verb is most probably “to strike the breast” in an act of mourning, as in Isa 32.12a, where *sēpōdāh* (imp.) “beat upon the breasts” should be read following LXX κόπτεσθε. *Sāpad* often appears with the other physical manifestations of extravagant mourning characteristic of the ancient Near East: tearing garments, wearing sackcloth, lacerating the flesh, wailing and howling.<sup>25</sup> Thus one of the most basic and obvious acts of mourning, the beating of the breast, came to denote the entire demonstration of mourning; the figure of speech is synecdoche where a part symbolizes the whole.

### Conclusion

There is no evidence for either a divine or monarchic ritual mourning on the plain of Megiddo. The popular conjecture that there was such a rite derives from an uncritical gathering and conflation of a variety of data on very different gods in the

20 Paul D. Hanson, “Israelite Religion in the Early Post-Exilic Period,” in *Ancient Israelite Religion*, 485-508.

21 Rainer Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period* (2 vols.; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), 2:454-58.

22 Othmar Keel and Christoph Uelingher, *Gods, Goddesses and Images of Gods in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 404-5.

23 A good example is Ziony Zevit, *The Religions of Israel: A Synthesis of Parallaxic Approaches* (London, New York: Continuum, 2001). This exhaustive study of ancient Israelite religion, including the cult of Baal, makes no reference either to Hadad-Rimmon nor to Zech 12.11. In fact, Zevit argues that ritual laceration was not invariably associated with mourning. The self-laceration of the priests of Baal (1 Kgs 18.28) is not an act of desperation to revive the god, but the culmination of a summoning rite that had begun early in the day. The shouts that accompanied it were not mournful but joyful (539-40).

24 M. Avi-Yonah, “Mount Carmel and the God of Baalbek,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 2 (1952): 118-23; Javier Teixidor, *The Pagan God: Popular Religion in the Greco-Roman Near East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977) 52-60.

25 J. Scharbert, “*sāpad*,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (= TDOT; ed. G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren; trans. J. T. Willis, G. W. Bromiley, and D. E. Green; 15 vols.; Grand Rapids, 1974-2006), 10:299-303(299). Cf. 2 Sam 3.31; Isa 32.11-12; Jer 6.26, 16.5-6; and Mic 1.8, where the mourners howl and wail like jackals and ostriches.

manner of Frazer's "The Golden Bough." For example, Albright states that there is "ample proof that there was annual weeping for Tammuz, for Adonis at Byblos, and for Hadad-Rimmon at Megiddo."<sup>26</sup> There is evidence for the first two, but none for the last. He and others ignore differences in deity, location, time period, and myth and ritual. In the same way, in his first article Greenfield frankly notes that this mourning for Hadad-Rimmon "is not known from other sources." Then he immediately claims that it is related to the "deep mourning" for Haddu-Ba'al at Ugarit and the mourning rites associated with Adonis. He concludes that the rite was well known by a Jerusalem prophet and was very probably a frequent event. The evidence from Ugarit is tenuous at best as has been observed, and the myth/legend of Adonis, the handsome youth slain by a boar, is quite different. In his most recent article, Greenfield asserts more confidently that this rite of mourning was practiced beyond Megiddo. He refers briefly and without elaboration to the Ugaritic texts in question, and suggests that the mourning rites for the city of Tyre in Ezek 27.30-31 are an example of how well-known the supposed ritual at Megiddo was.<sup>27</sup> The mourning rites in Ezekiel can apply to most of the ancient Near East throughout the entire biblical period and there is absolutely no evidence to link them to Megiddo. If, as Greenfield suggests, it was a well-known, widespread, and frequent event, more references than Zech 12.11 might be expected.

In Zech 12.11 the emphasis is not on any specific rite of mourning but on the intense uproar of the communal mourning in Jerusalem. It is not mourning in the traditional western sense of everyone sitting in a sad but dignified silence, but rather that of a funeral in today's Middle East. The LXX text of Zech 12.11 is hopelessly corrupt, but the Vulgate is revealing. The Latin noun used, *planctus*, is from the verb *plangere*, whose literal meaning is "to beat," specifically to beat the breast in mourning, but also to signify the noise of mourning. The sense is clear, the *planctus*, that clamorous reverberation of extravagant grief in Jerusalem, will be like the *planctus Adadremmon*, the rumbling beat of the thundering storm god on the plain of Megiddo. *Sāpad* is used in exactly the same way, conveying the sheer din of mourning, the thudding of countless fists on breast-bones, the unrestrained shouting and howling, all like the resounding cracks of thunder and the gusty, howling winds that announce the presence of the storm god of Mt. Carmel. It is not possible to identify the "pierced one" who is mourned so excessively, but what is obvious is the tremendous volume.

### Translation

In light of this evidence, any translation of the simple construct form in Zech 12.11 needs to express the thunderous cacophony of grief, and might be along the following lines:

"On that day, the noise of mourning in Jerusalem will be as great (loud) as the thunder of Hadad-rimmon in the valley of Megiddo(n)."

<sup>26</sup> William F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan: A Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths* (London: Atlone, 1968; repr., Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 127.

<sup>27</sup> Greenfield, "Hadad," 380-81.