

“Pisser against a Wall”: An Echo of Divination in Biblical Hebrew

DUANE E. SMITH

1387 Scoville Avenue
Pomona, CA 91767

TROPES, be they metaphors, similes, metonyms, or the like, are among the most common of literary devices. In the context of an ancient text, they are also among the most difficult to unpack. As one approaches a phrase such as מִשְׁתִּין בְּקִיר, “pisser against a wall,” it is well to be mindful of Krister Stendahl’s concern. We cannot always be certain of the “tacit proposition that man remains basically the same through the ages.”¹ Ancient metaphors, similes, and metonyms² often reflect

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¹ Krister Stendahl, “The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West,” *HTR* 56 (1963) 199-215, here 199-200.

² See Steven Pinker, *The Stuff of Thought: Language as a Window into Human Nature* (New York: Penguin, 2007), for a discussion of the role of tropes, particularly metaphors and metonyms in language. As is common in cognitive linguistics, I use “source” and “target,” but I have no issue with those who prefer “vehicle” and “tenor.”

a culture that is so foreign to our own that we may fail to grasp their underlying significance.³ This is all the more the case if the trope appears to relate to seemingly familiar, natural imagery. It is with these concerns in mind that I approach the much-discussed but seldom critically studied trope that is the subject of this article.

Depending on how one understands it, the phrase *משתין בקיר* is an implicit metaphor, an implicit simile, or a metonym. Scholars have suggested interpretations that point to each of these three trope classes. Yet, when they bother to say anything at all in this regard, most scholars simply call it a “metaphor.” It is considered to be implicit because only the source is stated; the target is only implied. We even see interpretations in which there is an implied intermediate target. For example, a common understanding is to take *משתין בקיר* as the source of a metaphoric target, dog, further understood as the source of a second implied target, adult human male. This subordinate metaphor/simile generally means that some man is no better than a dog that urinates against a wall. With only the source available and a bare minimum of background information, it is very difficult to be certain if the phrase is an implicit metaphor, simile, or metonym.

Save one exception, which I will discuss later, the literal interpretation of *משתין בקיר*, “pisser against a wall” or the like, has never been questioned. There is a broad, but not universal, consensus among scholars that the final target of the trope is an adult human male or more generally males.⁴

In what follows, I will first study the occurrences of the trope in Samuel and Kings. I will then outline and evaluate various scholarly interpretations of the trope. Finally, I will propose a new interpretation that relies on the urine omnia in the *Assyrian Dream Book*, series ^d*Ziqīqu*.⁵ Based on these omnia, I will suggest that a *משתין בקיר* is a person who hopes for progeny.

³ See, e.g., “houses of clay . . . foundations of dust” (Job 4:19); פנות, literally “corner,” for “chief” (Judg 20:2; etc.); בערבת רכב, “rider of clouds” (Ps 68:5). Among common English tropes that are not understandable outside our own culture and history are “iron curtain,” “kick the bucket,” or “not playing with a full deck.” Further, note that the metonym “cool” had a completely different meaning as recently as the mid-nineteenth century (see Abraham Lincoln’s Cooper Union address).

⁴ For an interesting array of interpretive options, one should consult Henry Preserved Smith (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Samuel* [ICC; New York: Scribner, 1899] 225), who called the phrase “[n]ot (a) very refined description.” By 1963, John Gray (*I & II Kings: A Commentary* [OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963] 307) said of the phrase, “. . . denoting all males, (it) is a typical example of the direct, graphic, uninhibited speech of the Israelite peasant, particularly of the prophets.” And in 1998 Bruce C. Birch (“The First and Second Books of Samuel,” *NIB* 2:947-1383, here 1168) called it “a euphemism for the male gender by reference to their means of urination.”

⁵ A. Leo Oppenheim, *The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East, with a Translation of an Assyrian Dream-Book* (Transactions of the American Philosophical Society n.s. 46/3; Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1956) 179-373.

I. משתין בקיר in Biblical Hebrew

The phrase משתין בקיר occurs six times in Biblical Hebrew:

1. 1 Sam 25:22b, a curse of Nabal by David:

אם אֲשִׂאיר מכל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ עד הבקר משתין בקיר

If by morning I leave even a pisser against the wall of all who are his.

2. 1 Sam 25:34b, what amounts to a retraction of the curse in v. 22:

כי אם נותר לנבל עד־אור הבקר משתין בקיר

Indeed, by morning light there would not have been left to Nabal a pisser against the wall.

3. 1 Kgs 14:10b-c, regarding Jeroboam:

והכרתי לירבעם משתין בקיר עצור ועזוב בישראל ובערתי אחרי בית־
ירבעם כאשר יבער הגלל עד תמו

And I will cut off from Jeroboam a pisser against the wall, bonded and free in Israel, and I will burn the house of Jeroboam just as one burns dung until it is gone.

4. 1 Kgs 16:11b, an account of the annihilation of “the house of Baasha”:

לא השאיר לו משתין בקיר וגאליו ורעהו

He did not spare him a pisser against the wall or his kindred or his friends.

5. 1 Kgs 21:21b, regarding Ahab:

והכרתי לאחאב משתין בקיר ועצור ועזוב בישראל

And I will cut off from Ahab a pisser against the wall, bonded and free in Israel.

6. 2 Kgs 9:8b (identical to 1 Kgs 21:21b)

The larger contexts of the last two examples, 1 Kgs 21:21 and 2 Kgs 9:8, reflect knowledge of 1 Kgs 14:10 and 1 Kgs 16:11-13.⁶

⁶ Insofar as there is a consensus, scholars tend to view these passages and some of their surrounding context as material that a Deuteronomistic editor used to supplement traditional stories. Therefore, our trope may come from the exilic or postexilic period. So Burke O. Long, *I Kings, with an Introduction to Historical Literature* (FOTL 9; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984) 154-66, 223; Antony F. Campbell, *1 Samuel* (FOTL 7; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) 257; and John Harvey, “The Structure of the Deuteronomistic History,” *SJOT* 20 (2006) 237-58 and accompanying

מִשְׁתִּין is an active H-stem participle of *שָׁתַן, “urinate,” perhaps from the noun שִׁין, “urine.”⁷ Each of these passages indicates that not a single מִשְׁתִּין בָּקִיר will be left or that the מִשְׁתִּין בָּקִיר and the bonded and the free⁸ will be/are cut off. This point is made very explicit in 1 Kgs 14:10, “I will burn the house of Jeroboam just as one burns dung until it is gone.” But it is clear also in David’s curse of Nabal and the account of the destruction of the “house of Baasha.” Notice the predicates הכרתי (“I will cut off”) and לא השאיר לו (“he did not spare him”). This is the language of total annihilation. No one will be (or was) left. Even in the H-stem, כרת has a fairly wide range of connotations. By far the most common meaning, however, is to destroy the life of someone or some group and not simply exile him or her from the community. Genocide is the most common connotation. Psalm 109:13 is illustrative: “May his posterity be cut off [יִהְיֶה-אֲחֵרֵיתוֹ לְהַכְרִית]; may his name be blotted out in the second generation” (NRSV).⁹ In our passages with כרת, it is certain that the מִשְׁתִּין בָּקִיר will be “cut off” in this genocidal sense.¹⁰

A. Dogs

Perhaps the most common understanding of מִשְׁתִּין בָּקִיר is as the source of an implied metaphor with “dog” as a first implied target, which is then taken pejoratively to refer to “a man” as a second implied target. The modern equivalent would be SOB, except that a C, for “cur,” would perhaps replace the B. This understanding goes back at least to the Talmud.¹¹ Modern interpreters who follow this

bibliography. Also helpful is Thomas Römer, *The So-called Deuteronomistic History: A Sociological, Historical and Literary Introduction* (London/New York: Clark, 2007), and his bibliographic references.

⁷ Verbs built on nouns are uncommon, but not unknown, in Hebrew. A. S. Yehuda (“Ueber עֶצֶר וְעֹבֵד im Alten Testament,” *ZA* 16 [1902] 240-72, here 241 n. 1), agreeing with the common literal meaning, suggests that the participle came directly from the Ht-stem of the verb שָׁתַן.

⁸ Or “young and old,” as E. Kutsch (“Die Wurzel עֶצֶר im Hebräischen,” *VT* 2 [1952] 57-69, here 64-65) might prefer it.

⁹ See also, e.g., Amos 1:8; 2:3; 1 Kgs 11:16 (עַד-הַכְרִית כָּל-זָכָר בְּאֶדְוֹם, “until he destroyed every male in Edom”); Josh 11:21 (וַיַּכֵּת אֶת-הָעֲנָקִים, “and he destroyed the Anakim”); and Jer 11:19, in which כרת has the same connotation, this time in the G-stem.

¹⁰ On מִשְׁתִּין בָּקִיר specifically, see André Caquot and Philippe de Robert (*Les livres de Samuel* [CAT 6; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1994] 310 n. 1), who say that the phrase was “un cliché pour l’extermination d’une maison”; P. Kyle McCarter, Jr. (*I Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary* [AB 8; New York: Doubleday, 1980] 398) described the phrase as “the same stereotyped formula, always with reference to the extermination of the male members of a family.” See also Jon D. Levenson, “1 Samuel 25 as Literature and History,” in *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives* (ed. Kenneth R. R. Gros Louis, James S. Ackerman, and Thayer S. Warshaw; 2 vols.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1974, 1982) 2:220-42, here 230; among many others.

¹¹ *B. B. Bat.* 19b; *Midr.* 1 Sam 23:11, 58b; also Rashi, Isaiah di Trani ben Mali, David Qimhi, Levi ben Gershon.

suggestion combine the empirical fact that male dogs do urinate against walls with the account of Nabal being a Calebite (i.e., from of a long line of dogs; 1 Sam 25:3 LXX: ὁ ἀνθρῶπος κυνικός) and then see the “dogs” that will “eat anyone who dies” as a play between the *מִשְׁתֵּין בַּקִּיר* and *הַכְּלָבִים* (“the dogs”) in 1 Kgs 14:11.¹² 1 Kings 21:23-24 and 2 Kgs 9:19 also contain references to dogs. The wordplay might be significant but is hardly determinative. The literary history of these texts is far from obvious, and it may well be that at some fairly early time in that history the implied target of *מִשְׁתֵּין בַּקִּיר* came to be understood as “a dog” even if it had, as I will propose, another origin. Basing an interpretation of an obscure phrase on a pun—and a pun that is not completely secure in the text (*qere* כְּלָבִי, “Calebite,” and *ketib* כְּלָבוּ, ?)—seems misguided or at best overdrawn.

A variation on the idea that *מִשְׁתֵּין בַּקִּיר* refers to dogs is provided by Joshua Schwartz, who argues that the phrases refer not only to dogs but specifically to the “guard dogs or service dogs of the kings.”¹³ Schwartz summarizes his position as follows,

They [the dogs, the *מִשְׁתֵּין בַּקִּיר*] will offer the king and his household no protection and will themselves be killed. Ironically the corpses of these kings and their families will then be devoured by other dogs, the urban predators and scavengers. However, the canine interpretation might be taken one level further. Bearing in mind that the phrase *keleb* is sometimes taken to be a faithful servant, the guard dogs might symbolize the trusted servants and supporters of the kings and their male families. They too shall not survive and they too shall serve as a repast for the bloodthirsty wild canine scavengers.¹⁴

Schwartz makes the case that in Hebrew “dogs” refers sometimes to guard dogs and/or service dogs and at other times to stray, feral dogs. He also observes a rather pervasive negative attitude toward dogs in the Hebrew Bible.¹⁵ He speculates that Nabal would have had working dogs to mind his large herds and notes that 1 Sam 25:16 refers to David’s men as a *חומה* (“a wall”) that protects Nabal’s flocks. “What David then may be saying is that if Nabal begrudges him provisions,

¹² See, e.g., Moshe Garsiel, *Biblical Names: A Literary Study of Midrashic Derivations and Puns* (trans. Phyllis Hackett; Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1991) 247; and idem, *The First Book of Samuel: A Literary Study of Comparative Structure, Analogies and Parallels* (Ramat-Gan: Revivim, 1985) 128; Jan P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: A Full Interpretation Based on Stylistic and Structural Analysis* (4 vols.; SSN 20, 23, 27, 31; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1981–93) 2:481; Peter J. Leithart, “Nabal and His Wine,” *JBL* 120 (2001) 525–27, here 526. See also Tyler Williams, “Translation Theory 101” (online blog posting on *Codex*, <http://biblical-studies.ca/blog/wp/2005/09/22/dogs-urine-and-bible-translation-on-the-importance-of-translating-connotative-meaning/> [last modified September 22, 2005; accessed July 29, 2010]).

¹³ Joshua Schwartz, “Dogs, ‘Water’ and Wall,” *SJOT* 14 (2000) 101–16, here 115.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ See also D. Winton Thomas, “Kelebh ‘dog’: Its Origin and Some Usages of It in the Old Testament,” *VT* 10 (1960) 410–27.

he will, by killing his sheep dogs and guard dogs, take all of Nabal's property."¹⁶ Schwartz then expands this notion to the other passages by noting that many of them refer in their extended contexts to dogs. But Schwartz's major problem is exactly with these other passages. As we have seen, they use genocidal language targeted at humans, not dogs. The suggested symbolic relationship between guard dogs and faithful servants may mitigate, but not eliminate, this concern. Schwartz uses the "wild" dogs that "eat" those who die, to support his claims that the *משתיין בקיר* are working dogs. I see a logical error, question begging, in this argument. He bases much of his discussion on various rabbinic traditions that I will not recite here. His argument, however, that there is any distinction between these two classes of dogs in our specific passages, or that it is somehow important in understanding these passages, seems tenuous at best. In addition, one should question the semantic equivalence of *חומה*, most commonly a city or fortress wall, and *קיר*, most commonly a building or garden wall, in 1 Samuel 25.

Although the biblical contexts involve hostility and the trope may reflect the vulgar language of combatants,¹⁷ the problem with the common understanding of *משתיין בקיר* as referring pejoratively to a man as a dog is that it rests on two assumptions that are not necessarily true. First, it assumes that the original author or an editor understood the phrase as a pejorative expression. I will show that this may not have been the case. Second, it assumes that only dogs urinate against the wall or that they are the most likely species to do so.¹⁸ As Schwartz himself says, "Finally, urinating in public, and even against the wall, seems to have been accepted in 'human' society, and most Rabbis, at least would not have considered *משתיין בקיר* pejorative or a vulgarism if applied to humans."¹⁹ This statement supports both of my points above. As we will see, some rabbis even cited this phrase in support of the propriety of urinating against a wall "built upon rock."

B. Men and Boys

In addition to dogs, at least one species has young and adult males who on occasion urinate against walls. In fact, *b. B. Bat* 19b, referenced by Schwartz, until its very last comment, holds that the *משתיין בקיר* is an adult male. Most of the dis-

¹⁶ Schwartz, "Dogs, 'Water' and Wall," 109.

¹⁷ I thank an anonymous *CBQ* referee for noting that soldiers often use pejorative terms and expressions when referring to their enemies.

¹⁸ Interestingly, Yehuda ("עַר וְעֵנָה וְעֶצֶר וְעֹזֵב," 241 n. 1), who sees the direct target of the phrase as men in contrast to women and does not mention dogs, is still uncomfortable with the idea that a man is a *משתיין בקיר*. I think he states incorrectly, "... ist die Vorstellung vom 'Pissen an de Wand' im alten Orient gänzlich unbekannt." As I will show, there is at least one such extra-biblical image from the ancient Near East.

¹⁹ Schwartz, "Dogs, 'Water' and Wall," 111. In support of this position, Schwartz (111 n. 32) cites *m. B. Bat*. 2:1, *t. B. Bat*. 1.4 (Lieberman, 130), *b. B. Bat*. 19b, *y. B. Bat*. 2.13a, *b. Bek.* 44b.

cussion in the Talmud assumes that urinating against or near a wall is acceptable; the real issue is how far one needs to be away from the wall to prevent harming it or its foundation.²⁰ Of course, some sectarian practices may have differed; for example, the evidence from Qumran points to great modesty with regard to toilet practices.²¹

It is therefore no surprise that the second most common understanding of *משתין בקיר* is that it refers directly to a man or, more generally, to all male humans.²² Most scholars who hold this position take *משתין בקיר* to be the source

²⁰ *B. B. Bat.* 19b: “‘And urine.’ Said Rabba b. Hana: One is allowed to void his urine near the wall of his neighbor; as it is written [I Kings, xxi. 21]: ‘*Mashtin B'kir*.’ But does not our Mishna state that urine must be removed to a distance of three spans? The Mishna means urine which has been collected in a urinal. Come and hear another objection from the following Tosephta: ‘One must not void his urine against the wall of his neighbor, unless it be at a distance of three spans.’ This is said concerning a brick wall, but in the case of one made of stones, a distance of one span is sufficient to prevent harm by softening the ground under the wall. And if the wall is built upon a rock, then it does not matter at all. Hence it contradicts Rabba b. b. Hana? This objection remains. But does he not cite a verse? The verse means even such a creature as habitually voids its urine upon a wall—namely, a dog” (Michael L. Rodkinson, trans., *The Babylonian Talmud* [10 vols.; Boston: Talmud Society, 1918] 7:60).

²¹ Archaeologists have found latrines in excavations in the southern Levant, but very little is known about toilet etiquette or hygiene in general and urinating etiquette in particular. Jodi Magness (*The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls* [Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002] 105-13) provides a useful summary of the archaeology. Her discussion of toilet etiquette contrasts the practice of sectarians with the general practice of others at about the same time. “In contrast [to the sectarians] the silence of the ancient Roman sources concerning the placement and construction of domestic latrines reflects a lack of regulation or concern. . . . Our modern Western obsession with toilet privacy and hygiene has obscured the fact that the sectarian practices were the exception rather than the norm in antiquity” (pp. 109, 111). Her examples do not address urination when clearly separate from defecation. Edward Neufeld (“Hygiene Conditions in Ancient Israel [Iron Age],” *BA* 34 [1971] 41-66) makes no mention of the issue of toilet etiquette. Biblical references to “covering feet” are not much help and may refer only to defecation. It is possible that Saul going into a cave “to cover his feet” (1 Sam 24:2) points to an early modesty with regard to toilet etiquette. But, being in battle, he may have sought protection in a cave in contrast to the normal practice when at peace. Like the third-century C.E. rabbi Johanan, who left the synagogue to urinate near the wall, Saul may have been more concerned with bodily harm than with modesty (*y. B. Bat.* 2.13a; see Schwartz, “Dogs, ‘Water’ and Wall,” 111 n. 32). In Saul’s case, seeking such protection was a mistake. I thank an anonymous *CBQ* referee for pointing me to Magness’s work and 1 Samuel 24.

²² Smith, *Books of Samuel*, 225; Martin Noth, *Könige* (BKAT 9; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1968) 316; Gray, *I & II Kings*, 307; McCarter, *I Samuel*, 398; Peter R. Ackroyd, *The First Book of Samuel: A Commentary* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971) 197; Ronald F. Youngblood, “1, 2 Samuel,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (ed. Frank E. Gaebelein; 12 vols.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 3: 553-1104, here 762 (who references the source only by way of its translations); Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel* (New American Commentary; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996) 252 n. 131; Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999) 156; Kutsch, “Die Wurzel עצר,” 64-65

of a metaphor whose direct target is a human male, or, as Bruce C. Birch puts it, “the male gender by reference to their means of urination.”²³ In fact, Birch goes so far as to call the phrase a “euphemism”(!) for males. Scholars who claim that the phrase is a metaphor for males tend to assume that female humans cannot or would not urinate against the wall.²⁴ Some authors, for example, Robert Alter and Marvin A. Sweeney,²⁵ make it clear that they see the phrase as pejorative, but others do not.²⁶

Rather than regarding the phrase as a metaphor for males generally, Peter J. Leithart suggests that the expression refers to a specific male in each case.²⁷ In 1 Samuel 25, the first instance of this phrase, Nabal is the *מִשְׁתֵּין בְּקִיר*. Leithart explains the trope in the context of Nabal’s urinating upon awakening after a night of heavy celebration that included drinking great quantities of wine. He then extends this interpretation to the other five occurrences of *מִשְׁתֵּין בְּקִיר*. Although I tend to agree with Leithart’s understanding of the grammar and language of 1 Sam 25:37 about the elimination of the wine, I do not feel that his interpretation of that passage actually explains the trope in 1 Sam 25:22; 25:34, or, therefore, elsewhere.

In all the passages where *מִשְׁתֵּין בְּקִיר* occurs, it is reasonably clear that the final target of the phrase is a specific set of males. Interpreting the source as *directly* implying males on that basis, as many scholars do, or seeing Nabal as the first *מִשְׁתֵּין בְּקִיר* based on his relieving himself, is putting the cart before the horse. As I will discuss in more detail below, I see no reason that a narrator or editor would use a phrase like *מִשְׁתֵּין בְּקִיר* in exactly these contexts, but not in any other contexts, to mean little more than “a man,” “male,” or a specific male.

In addition, there are those who see the *מִשְׁתֵּין בְּקִיר* as a young boy who does not properly “cover his feet” (Judg 3:24; 1 Sam 24:3).²⁸ Beyond the presumption

(who believes that the defining words *עֶזוּב* and *עַצוּר* indicate younger and older than the age of majority, that is, twenty years old).

²³ Birch, “First and Second Books of Samuel,” 1168.

²⁴ Schwartz’s claim (“Dogs, ‘Water’ and Wall,” 104 n. 7) that “[i]t was taken for granted that women would have sought out a more concealed site to relieve themselves” may or may not be true of scholars who hold the “male” position or of the ancient women who he thinks would seek a more concealed site. It does seem to reflect sensitivities that do not necessarily apply to ancient times. A simple anatomical explanation seems better to me. Although not totally impossible, urinating against a wall is much more difficult and less practical for a woman than for a man.

²⁵ Alter, *David Story*, 156; Marvin A. Sweeney, *I & II Kings: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007) 185.

²⁶ E.g., Gray, *I & II Kings*, 307; and Birch, “First and Second Books of Samuel,” 1168.

²⁷ Leithart, “Nabal and His Wine,” 525–27, taking *בְּצֵאת הַיַּיִן מִנְּבֶל* in 1 Sam 25:37 as “while the wine was going out from Nabal” (p. 525) rather than the more common “when the wine was gone out of Nabal.”

²⁸ Julius Lewy (“Lexicographical Notes,” *HUCA* 12–13 [1937–38] 99–101) gives the most compelling argument for this interpretation. See also Edouard Dhorme, ed., *La Bible: L’Ancien Testament* (2 vols.; Bibliothèque de la Pléiade 120, 139; Paris: Gallimard, 1956–59) 1:903; Caquot and de Robert, *Samuel*, 310 n. 19. Among the rabbis, see E. Judah, *Midr.* 1 Sam 23:11.

that covering feet refers to urinating as well as defecating and that young boys either did not know how to do it or just did not do it, this suggestion has little to recommend it. One way to sustain this understanding is to think of the trope as meaning not even a little one will remain. Although I see this explanation as possible, it is not very probable. In this I agree with Martin Noth, who said, “werden alle männlichen Wesen bezeichnet (schwerlich nur kleine Kinder).”²⁹

C. Other Pejorative Understandings

One way to get around some of the objections is to read משתין בקיר as referring to a male or males (but not dogs) in a pejorative way and then explain how it is pejorative. David Maltsberger writes, “He who pisses on a wall is a vagrant, anti-social, and liable to be cut off from among the fellowship.”³⁰ But, as has been shown, the fate of the משתין בקיר is far more than being “cut off from among the fellowship.” Even if it were only that, his fate is determined not by the fact that he is a משתין בקיר but by events in the larger context of the account of which the curse is a part, for example, Nabal’s returning “evil for good” (1 Sam 25:21). The משתין בקיר is not “cut off” because he is a משתין בקיר. Rather, the text calls him a משתין בקיר because of some association with the one whose line is to be cut off. Perhaps a more charitable understanding of such an individual would be to take משתין בקיר as a metaphor for one who deserves to be cut off. In any case, we have already seen that there were those among the rabbis who thought that this very trope made urinating against a wall allowable under certain conditions.

Samuel Iwry also sees a polluter but takes a quite different approach. He suggests that the Hebrew expression should be read משתין בקור, “pisser in a spring,” rather than משתין בקיר, “pisser against a wall.”³¹ Iwry bases his argument on an analysis of the Northwest Semitic usage of expressions for wells, springs, and fountains and their contamination. He takes בקיר to be in error and emends the text to read בקור. But can Iwry’s understanding be correct? First, there is no indication in any manuscript, in any version or in the qere of any passage, that בקור should be read. Second, the Hebrew word for “spring,” “fountain,” and the like in all other contexts is מקור (*m* preformative), not קור. To be sure, Ugaritic *qr* (*qūru*?) means “spring” or “well.” But Ugaritic is not Hebrew, and, even if it were, the two cognate words have different morphologies. Iwry is aware of these issues but does not give them as much weight as I would. His suggestion is certainly possible, but

²⁹ Noth, *Könige*, 316.

³⁰ David Maltsberger in a comment on an online blog posting on *Abnormal Interests*, http://www.telecomtally.com/blog/2007/08/an_echo_of_divination_in_bibli.html (last modified August 6, 2007; accessed March 9, 2009).

³¹ Samuel Iwry [שמואל עברי], “שמואל עברי”, *קללת זיהום המים בירשאל ובמזרח הקדום*, (The Curse of Contamination of Water in Israel and in the Ancient East), *Beth Mikra* 28 (1982–83) 322–25. Caquot and de Robert (*Samuel*, 310 n 19) see this explanation as *très probable*.

one should seek to preserve the Hebrew text unless there is some strong reason to emend it. Interpreters should respect differences in the morphology of the Ugaritic and the Hebrew words and should not posit new forms in one language based on those in a cognate language without compelling evidence.

With the possible exception of some who see this phrase as signifying a man or boy, along with Schwartz's position, all of the explanations mentioned above depend to a greater or lesser extent on משתין בקיר being a pejorative of some sort. Except for the reference to "dung" in 1 Kgs 14:10, however, there is little in the local contexts to support a pejorative interpretation. If we look at the nearby vocabulary that either further defines the משתין בקיר or elaborates on the nature of those who are to be or have been destroyed, there is nothing in any of these nouns that is necessarily negative. I find no other contexts in which either עצור ("bonded") or עזוב ("free") is pejorative,³² and the same is true of גאל ("blood relative") and רעה ("friend"). These are rather straightforward terms. They do not imply anything negative in and of themselves. And this raises the question whether משתין בקיר is a pejorative expression. Although pejoratives are far from unknown in the Hebrew Bible,³³ there is no requirement to see them in contexts similar to those with משתין בקיר. For example, the genocidal context of 1 Kgs 11:16, עֲדֵה-כְּרִית לְיִזְכָּר, "until he had destroyed every male in Edom," is similar to that of our passages. The term זָכָר ("male") is not pejorative even in a genocidal context. Although at one level it makes sense that the "house" one seeks to destroy might be referred to in derogatory language, it is not necessarily the case. In 1 Kgs 14:10, the whole of משתין בקיר עצור ועזוב בִּישְׂרָאֵל is pejorative because of the word "dung," not on account of any internal reference within the phrase itself.

II. Assyrian Urination Omina and Their Implications

One of the many multitabular series discovered in the Assurbanipal library is the so-called *Assyrian Dream Book*, series ^d*Ziqīqu*.³⁴ One should understand each of the omnia in this collection in the context of a dream and assume that each omen

³² The exact meaning of these terms in this context is not clear, but neither of them appears to be pejorative. See Yehuda, "Ueber עצור ועזוב und ער וענה," 240-72; Kutsch, "Die Wurzel 'עצר,'" 60-65.

³³ See, e.g., Gen 37:19, where Joseph is called הַזֹּלֶה, "this dreamer," or 1 Sam 14:6, where the Philistines are called הָעֵרְלִים הָאֵלֶּה, "these uncircumcised," and many more. For additional examples, see Scott B. Noegel, "The 'Other' Demonstrative Pronouns: Pejorative Colloquialisms in Biblical Hebrew," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 33 (2004) 23-30. "Dung" is clearly used pejoratively in 1 Kgs 14:10.

³⁴ I follow Oppenheim's transliteration and line numbering (*Interpretation of Dreams*, 310). The translations are mine, although I consulted Oppenheim (p. 265) and Jean Bottéro, *Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods* (trans. Zainab Bahrani and Marc Van De Mieroop; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) 115.

begins, “In a dream. . . .”³⁵ After about twenty to twenty-five broken lines following the end of fragment K. 2582:20’, fragment K. 6267+ resumes with eighteen urine omina that are either unreadable or somewhat readable if quite fragmentary. The original unbroken tablet may well have had thirty or more human urine omina plus several dealing with dreams of horses, donkeys, bulls, dogs, and pigs urinating.³⁶ From the extant portion of the tablet, it appears that those omina whose apodoses involve having or not having sons, *mārē* (DUMU.MEŠ) make up the largest single subset in the urine omina portion of the collection.³⁷ Below are the most relevant omina for our purposes.

Tablet VII, Series ^d*Ziqīqu* (K. 6267 Rev. column I)

3'. DIŠ KÀŠ-šú ina IGI UŠ-š[ú]
 GIŠ.ZI []
 DUMU.MEŠ [(NU) TUK-šil]

If his urine flows in front of his penis (onto) a wall, [he will not(?) have] sons.

6'. DIŠ KÀŠ-šú ina IGI UŠ(-šú³⁸) i-[tal-ka-ma]
 GIŠ.ZI SILA [
 DUMU.MEŠ TUK-[ši]

If his urine flows in front of (his) penis (onto) a wall of a street,³⁹ he will h[ave] sons.

9'. DIŠ KAŠ-šú *ina* IGI UŠ-šú *i-tal*-[*ka-ma*]
su-qá-a-tu S[*I*.]
 NÍG.GA-šú *i-ḫab-ba*-[*tu*]
ana URU SUM-*n*-[*u*]

If his urine flows in front of (his) penis (onto) the streets, his property will be robb[ed] and given to the city.

13'. DIŠ KÀŠ-šú *ina* IGI UŠ-šú *i-tal-ka-ma*
ina IGI KÀŠ-šú *uš-kin*

³⁵ *i-na* MAŠ.GE₆-šú, *ina šunātišu*. See, e.g., K. 2582 + 3820 + 6739 obv. I:1.

³⁶ Oppenheim, *Interpretation of Dreams*, 226-27.

³⁷ See *ibid.*, 265.

³⁸ I emend the text by adding *-šú* in agreement with lines 3', 9', and 13'.

³⁹ Oppenheim (*Interpretation of Dreams*, 265) and Bottéro (*Mesopotamia*, 115) would have us understand GIŠ.ZI SILA as *igāra sūqa*, “the wall and the street.”

DUMU Û.TU-*ma*
 NAM .LUGAL.LA DÛ-*uš*

If his urine flows in front of his penis and he does obeisance in front of his urine, he will have a son and he (the son) will be king.

17'. DIŠ KÀŠ-šú GIŠ-ZI *iš-tin-ma ana* U[GU]
 DUMU.MEŠ TU[K-š*i*]

If he urinates his urine on a wall and ov[er], he will h[ave] sons.

19'. DIŠ KÀŠ-šú *ana* UGU GI.TUR.MEŠ []
 DUMU.MEŠ [(NU) TUK-š*i*]⁴⁰

If his urine (is) over small reeds(?), [he will (not?) have] sons.

Of these omina, A. Leo Oppenheim says, “The feature of the urine flooding the streets bears the stamp of a genuine dream-experience and the obvious identification of urine and offspring, i.e., *semen*, must be taken to be the expression of so-called infantile theories concerning sex.”⁴¹ Oppenheim relies in part on a Freudian interpretation of both the dream omina and infantile theories of sex,⁴² but my thesis here does not stand or fall on any such psychoanalytic understanding. The Mesopotamians associated urine (*šinatu* in Akkadian) and semen (*nīlu* or

⁴⁰ Scott B. Noegel (*Nocturnal Ciphers: The Allusive Language of Dreams in the Ancient Near East* [AOS 89; New Haven: American Oriental Society, 2007] 19-24) correctly, in my view, points to puns as a significant hermeneutical tool in dream omina. He sees them within other omina of the *Assyrian Dream Book*. Is there a hermeneutical pun in the urine omina specifically? One might see SILA (TAR) in line 7' as a pun that refers to both a street and a (future) ruler. Not only can the sign be read SILA > *sūqu* (“street”), it can also be read SIL > *šalātu* (II) (“to cut [into]”) (but CAD Š, I.238, says the meaning is uncertain), which is a homonym for *šalātu* (I) (“to rule,” “to have authority”), thus originally meaning progeny in line to rule. But the omen beginning in line 9' may well render such an understanding impossible. Urine flooding onto the street is bad. Unless, of course, one is supposed to limit the range of the pun to *šalātu* (II) (“to cut [into]”) only. See also n. 43 below for another way of understanding a possible pun relationship within these omina. Although all this is interesting, I think that it is even too speculative for this speculative paper.

⁴¹ Oppenheim, *Interpretation of Dreams*, 265.

⁴² Without specific mention of the Freudian works and ideas he considers, Oppenheim (*Interpretation of Dreams*, 185) says that his study takes “cognizance” of “the approach and methods initiated by Sigmund Freud.” On Freudian views of infantile theories of sex and the equation of urine and semen, see Otto Fenichel, *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis* (International Library of Psychology; New York: W. W. Norton, 1945) 232-33; and, of course, Sigmund Freud, “On the Sexual Theories of Children” (1908), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (ed. James Strachey; 24 vols.; London: Hogarth 1966-74) 9:209-26. For a Freudian interpretation of Mesopotamian omina, including dream omina but not specifically urine dream omina, see Mark J. Geller, “Freud, Magic and Mesopotamia: How the Magic Works,” *Folklore* 108 (1997) 1-7.

rihûtu) with water (*mû*) in literary and lexical texts.⁴³ This association of urine and semen and their common anatomical source may support the identification of urine with semen that Oppenheim suggests. Even given some uncertainty concerning a direct urine/semen identification in Mesopotamian texts, it is clear that many of the urine omina do associate urinating, at least in dreams, with progeny, with having sons.

In line 6' and all other occurrences, KÀŠ-šú should be read *šinātā-šu* (“his urine”) and GIŠ.ZI should be read *igāra* (accusative of *igāru*, “wall,” specifically a house or garden wall). SILA is to be read *sūqa* (accusative of *sūqu*) or one of its various synonyms, all meaning “street.” In line 17', *iš-tin-ma* is the G preterite third person masculine singular of *šatānu* (“urinate”). Unfortunately, the tablet is broken at a crucial point in line 17', so we cannot read the second condition of the protasis in its entirety.

These omina, like the others in the *Assyrian Dream Book*, involve “deductive divination,”⁴⁴ if P then Q. Jean Bottéro explains divination as a method for reading the minds of the gods who write their messages in dreams and unusual (and not so unusual) events, much the same as people once wrote in pictograms on clay.⁴⁵ And Scott B. Noegel observes:

Much like the Egyptian *tjt*, the semantic range of the Akkadian word *ittu* “sign” reveals a close conceptual relationship between “cuneiform signs,” “omens,” and “images.” Moreover, Mesopotamian divinatory professionals considered their literate gods capable of using a variety of writing surfaces to communicate their intentions, from clay and stone to animal livers and constellations. In second-millennium documents, we hear that writing is the “cosmic bond of all things,” and the secret of scribes and gods.⁴⁶

⁴³ The Sumerian text “Enki and the World Order,” lines 251-61 (see Samuel Noah Kramer and John Maier, *Myths of Enki, The Crafty God* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989] 47-48) appears to depend on a relationship among urine, semen, and water in the creative activity of Enki. The Sumerian love song “My Wool Being Lettuce” (see Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Harps That Once—: Sumerian Poetry in Translation* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997] 93) may well provide another example of the equation of water, urine, and semen. The most important lines for our purposes are badly broken, but the potency incantation LKA 102:6-8 appears to associate *nīlu* (“semen”), *šinatu* (“urine”), and even *zū* (“excrement”) in some unclear way. See Robert D. Biggs, *ŠĀ.ZI.GA: Ancient Mesopotamian Potency Incantations* (Texts from Cuneiform Sources 2; Locust Valley, NY: J. J. Augustin, 1967) 22-23 (suggested by Alan Lenzi in a private communication). Note also that Akkadian *šinatu* can be written UŠ.A (*CAD* Š, III.40) and both Akkadian *nīlu* and *rihûtu* can be written [E] A (*CAD* N, II.234 and *CAD* R, 341), both incorporating the Sumerian sign for water, E. In Biblical Hebrew, Prov 5:16-20 and Cant 4:12, 15 imply a connection between water and sexual relations, if not specifically semen.

⁴⁴ A description suggested by Bottéro, *Mesopotamia*, 130-34.

⁴⁵ Bottéro, *Mesopotamia*, 113-15. The earliest proto-Sumerian tablets are written in pictograms.

⁴⁶ Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 271. In *Gilgamesh* XI.186-87, Ea says, “It was not I who dis-

Turning specifically to dreams as a medium for the gods, Ann Jeffers cites Num 12:6b, “When there are prophets among you, / I, Yhwh, make myself known to them in visions;⁴⁷ / I speak to them in dreams,” and states:

Dreams seem to have been a recognized way of consulting the divinity (1 Sam 28:6) at one stage and then fallen into disrepute along with most of the means used by man to consult God’s will (Deut 13:1-5 threatens the death penalty for any spurious “dreamer of dreams”). Dreams can be passively “received” by both ordinary people and by cult specialists, prophets and kings, or dreams can be specifically sought in situations of extreme necessity.⁴⁸

Jeffers sees the whole of divination in an even broader context than does Bottéro:

As to divination, I would suggest the need to understand it in its cosmic framework. How is anyone able to foretell the future but in a world where signs, any signs, are part of the whole, and therefore can be interpreted because the sign incarnates and reflects the whole situation at the moment when it is read.⁴⁹

Whether one understands divination in Bottéro’s theological sense or in Jeffers’s broader cosmological sense, divination was an integral part of the Mesopotamian and Israelite (as well as Egyptian) understanding of both humans’ present and future world and of their attempts to read the minds of their respective gods. With regard to dream divination in Mesopotamia, however, Oppenheim makes this observation:

It is, however, rather curious to observe that in omen-conscious and portent-ridden Mesopotamia dream-omina never reached the popularity of the other methods of divination, based on *auguria oblativa*, while in Egypt—as far as the accidents of text survival allow us to draw conclusions—dream-omina were the only type of omnia which were systematically recorded and collected, and that already as far back as the first half of the second millennium B.C. Such a discrepancy is difficult to understand and to explain.⁵⁰

For our purposes, the most important point in this observation is that the Assyrians were not against bringing in Egyptian dream interpreters when needed (Akkadian *hardibi*; Egyptian *hrtp*). This, and the very existence of a collection like the *Assyr-*

closed the secret of the great gods. I only let Atra-Ḥasis behold a dream, and thus he perceived the secret of the gods.”

⁴⁷ There may have been differences between “dreams” and “visions,” but whatever that distinction may have been, it is not particularly relevant for our purposes here. See Ann Jeffers, *Magic and Divination in Ancient Palestine and Syria* [SHCANE 8; Leiden: Brill, 1996] 127-28) and Lester L. Grabbe (*Priests, Prophets, Diviners, Sages: A Socio-Historical Study of Religious Specialists in Ancient Israel* [Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995]), both of whom see little or no difference. See also Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 263-69.

⁴⁸ Jeffers, *Magic and Divination*, 128.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁰ Oppenheim, *Interpretation of Dreams*, 238.

ian Dream Book, makes it clear that oneiromancy was known and practiced in Assyria even if it did not have quite the same place as it had in Egypt.

There is a prehistory to the *Assyrian Dream Book* and a continuing tradition of urine dream omnia that outlasted the Neo-Assyrian period. An instantiation of tablet IX of the *Assyrian Dream Book* comes from Elamite Susa. This tablet was “written some time between the Old Babylonian period and the turn of the first millennium.”⁵¹ It is at least a reasonable assumption, but only an assumption, that an instantiation of tablet VII, with the urine omnia, also was known in these much earlier times. At the other end of the chronological range is Herodotus’s account of the dream of Astyages:

Astyages had a daughter, whom he called Mandane: concerning whom he had a dream, that enough water flowed from her to fill his city and overflow all Asia. He imparted this vision to those of the Magi which interpreted dreams, and when he heard what they told him he was terrified. (*Hist.* 1.107)⁵²

As far as this reflects a historical tradition, one should assign it to the early to mid Persian period. Christopher Pelling provides a very helpful discussion of the relationship between Astyages’ dream and *Assyrian Dream Book*.

In Herodotus too [as in the *Assyrian Dream Book*] there was more than one way of taking the dream. The urine might straightforwardly suggest Mandane’s future offspring, as modern critics tend uncritically to assume: it is true that the urinary and genital aspects of the uro-genital tract are often assimilated to one another in myths and folklore, just as they are with those “sons” of the Assyrian dream-book. In that case, Astyages’ dream would simply presage a successful, conquering grandson, and an heirless grandfather might indeed have little to fear. Yet the urinary/genital assimilation is comparatively rare in Greek thought, the darker, more negative suggestions of urine could also suggest to Herodotus’ audience a soiled bodily product rather than an honourably produced son, hinting at a distorted succession.⁵³

Although Pelling may be correct that the Greeks understood the dream differently from the Mesopotamians, there can be little doubt that urine dream omnia were part of the divination tool kit during the Persian period. This is true even if it is difficult to know the exact omen underlying Herodotus’s account.

⁵¹ Ibid., 257: “In fact, the tablet contains a collection of dream-omnia representing a tradition that differs only in a few points from the main tradition which is attested in Mesopotamia proper from the Middle Babylonian (Cassite) to the Neo-Assyrian period.”

⁵² Alfred Denis Godley, trans., *Herodotus with an English Translation* (4 vols.; LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966) 139.

⁵³ Christopher Pelling, “The Urine and the Vine: Astyages’ Dreams at Herodotus 1.107-8,” online at http://www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/History/madha/astyages_dreams.htm (last modified June 21, 2008; accessed July 29, 2010; references deleted). See also Oppenheim, *Interpretation of Dreams*, 265.

The point of this historical discussion is to demonstrate the window in time, starting as early as the Old Babylonian period and extending well into the Persian period, during which Mesopotamians knew of and employed urine dream omnia. Of course, oneiromancy has an even longer history. There is evidence of dream omnia from before the late Old Babylonian period, and both clinicians and fortune-tellers still practice dream interpretation today.⁵⁴

III. מִשְׁתִּין בְּקִיר—Another Look

While there are individual words in the urine omnia in the *Assyrian Dream Book* that are cognate with the words that make up the Hebrew expression מִשְׁתִּין בְּקִיר, such narrow linguistic relationships are not as important as the general semantic ranges of those same words in context.⁵⁵ Hebrew קִיר and Akkadian *igāru* (GIŠ.ZI) both refer to building or garden walls as opposed to city or fortress walls (חֹמֶה and *dūru* [BĀD]). And, of course, urine is urine.

Even more important are the functional implications. As we have seen, many of the urine omnia in the *Assyrian Dream Book* deal with progeny, having or not having sons. K. 6267:6'-8' and 17'-18' both promise progeny. Other omnia may also. Most are too broken to be certain. As I have already argued, in every context in the Hebrew Bible where one finds מִשְׁתִּין בְּקִיר, the complete elimination of progeny is implied. If we consider this in the context of the Akkadian urine omnia, we can understand מִשְׁתִּין בְּקִיר as the subject of a protasis whose apodosis relates to progeny. The implied deductive divination gives the מִשְׁתִּין בְּקִיר and his "house" the hope of posterity.⁵⁶ With his destruction, even that hope is gone. And so, according to my understanding, we have in the biblical usage a metonym (or possibly an implied metaphor) for a person who hopes for progeny.

There is one significant difference between the Akkadian and the Hebrew contexts. The Akkadian omnia clearly involve oneiromancy. But with one possible

⁵⁴ Oppenheim (*Interpretation of Dreams*, 245-47) provides a useful survey of the history and divergence of dream interpretation and reports from throughout the ancient Near East. He provides examples also from Sumer, Egypt, and Hatti, as well as a large number from Assyria and Babylonia. For a discussion of various types of dream experiences, see Oppenheim, 184-86; and Jeffers, *Magic and Divination*, 129. There is also a fragmentary tablet from Ugarit (*KTU* 1.86) that may be an oneiromancy text.

⁵⁵ *šinātā-šu ištīn* ("he urinates his urine") is a close semantic equivalent of מִשְׁתִּין ("pisser"), both based on the Semitic root *ŠYN and (*ana*) *igāri* ("[against] the wall") is a close semantic equivalent of בְּקִיר ("against the wall") with Akkadian *igāriu* and possibly Hebrew קִיר from Sumerian E.GAR.

⁵⁶ I wonder if the story in Daniel 2 contains, in addition to the theological message, a reaction against deductive divination. The king demands that the sages tell him both his dream *and* its interpretation.

exception,⁵⁷ the Hebrew contexts do not. The Akkadian omnia involve dreams about urination, not urination itself. We must be content with the fact that there is no direct linguistic hint of dream interpretation in the trope מִשְׁתִּין בְּקִיר. But we must also recognize, as Jeffers reminds us, that even in Israel, “[d]reams seem to have been a recognized way of consulting the divinity.”⁵⁸

Critics may raise two related objections to my thesis. First, there is no clear pathway by which the urine oneiromancy of the *Assyrian Dream Book* could find its way into Biblical Hebrew. Second, if there were such a pathway, the secret nature of the scribal and mantic traditions would have blocked it. Much of the knowledge of dream interpretation was in the hands of specially trained scribes and priests who held that knowledge in secret, *pirištu*. I would first note that the Deuteronomistic redactors were well aware of many of those secrets and offered dream interpretations as part of their own fare. Solomon’s dream at Gibeon in 1 Kgs 3:5-14 is an example. The Deuteronomistic redactors were likely trained in some or all of the secrets of the craft of divination.⁵⁹ In addition, Herodotus knew a version of the story of Astyages’ daughter, or, at a minimum, he knew about one Mesopotamian urine dream omen. As we have seen, this story reflects the same urine dream omen traditions as those in the *Assyrian Dream Book*. Thus, secret knowledge does not appear to be so secret after all. Not only did the Persians know it, but so did at least one Ionian Greek. If there was a pathway from Akkadian urine oneiromancy to the Greek world, then one cannot easily dismiss a possible pathway from those same sources to Biblical Hebrew.

If one were to believe that whoever first coined the Hebrew metonym had *direct* knowledge of one or more of the Akkadian urine omnia as collected in the *Assyrian Dream Book*, then one might be tempted to note that the individual urine omnia, as they have been preserved for us, do not explicitly refer to oneiromancy in their local contexts. Therefore, one might think that מִשְׁתִּין בְּקִיר lacks an explicit reference to dreaming because its source did not have one. But this can hardly be the case. First, as we have seen, the larger context of the collection of urine omnia clearly involves oneiromancy. Second, K. 6267 Rev. I:13’-16’, “If his urine flows in front of his penis and he does obeisance in front of his urine, he will have a son and he (the son) will be king,” is very hard to understand except in a dream. If taken outside the context of a dream, any man or woman could provide convincing evidence that his or her child would be king by the parents’ own willful action.

⁵⁷ See n. 66 below.

⁵⁸ Jeffers, *Magic and Divination*, 44; see also Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, “Eli’s Adjuration of Samuel (1 Samuel III 17-18) in the Light of a ‘Diviner’s Protocol’ from Mari (*AEM* I/1, 1),” *VT* 44 (1994) 483-97, and the literature cited there.

⁵⁹ On this, see esp. Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 113-59.

An approach one might take to bridge the lack of reference to a dream in the Hebrew metonym would be to argue that two events, even miraculous events, of which one is portrayed as a dream event and one is portrayed as a waking event, were not necessarily that different in the eyes of these ancient people. Consider the story of Jacob and his striped, speckled, and spotted lambs as narrated in Gen 30:37-43 and the dream version of nearly the same story, now with goats, in Gen 31:10-13.⁶⁰

The metonym could well have developed in Hebrew from incidental, as opposed to strictly literary, exposure to urine dream omnia within the general cultural context from which it arose. As we have seen, the time window for possible direct or indirect influence on Hebrew usage by the urine dream omnia tradition extended from just after the Old Babylonian period to at least the Persian period. Though it is impossible to be certain, I think the most probable time for the necessary cultural contact is the Neo-Babylonian period, specifically during the exile.⁶¹ This time period fits well with some views of the time of authorship and/or redaction of the stories that refer to the משתין בקיר.⁶²

I tend to think of משתין בקיר as a contraction, shorthand for some longer thought that carried the burden of a complete protasis of a deductive omen of which our expression was only the subject. Even so, I think that it entered Hebrew through cultural rather than direct literary contact. As such, it is an unconscious echo⁶³ of divination rather than direct borrowing. משתין בקיר is a metonymic source whose target is any person desiring progeny. This conclusion may explain why the trope occurs only in the context of genocide. This echo of divination reverses the deductive order of the urine omnia. As opposed to urine patterns indicating progeny for the משתין בקיר, the complete elimination of progeny now follows from the

⁶⁰ On these accounts, see Diana Lipton, *Revisions of the Night: Politics and Promises in the Patriarchal Dreams of Genesis* (JSOTSup 288; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999) 133-44. She suggests “dual causality” as part of her explanation of the tension between these two accounts.

⁶¹ Possibly there was sufficient contact in the Assyrian period. See Römer, *So-called Deuteronomistic History*, 74-78, 83-85, who follows Paul E. Dion, “The Suppression of Alien Religious Propaganda in Israel during the Late Monarchical Era,” in *Law and Ideology in Monarchical Israel* (ed. Baruch Halpern and Deborah W. Hobson; JSOTSup 124; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991) 147-216; and Eckart Otto, *Das Deuteronomium: Politische Theologie und Rechtsreform in Juda und Assyrien* (BZAW 284; Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1999) 14-99. But this contact seems to be at the level of vassal management and does not appear to me to have the depth of cultural contact that would be required to coin the trope.

⁶² See n. 6 above.

⁶³ Benjamin D. Sommer (*A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40-66* [Contraversions; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998] 6-31) provides a discussion of various types of intertextuality. I have borrowed the idea of “echo” from him.

death of the *משתיין בקיר*.⁶⁴ It is likely that this understanding of the trope, this echo, faded as contact was lost with practitioners of deductive divination⁶⁵ and urine omina, thus opening the way for the plurality of interpretations we begin to see in rabbinic literature and that we continue to see today.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ I thank an anonymous *CBQ* referee for suggesting this formulation.

⁶⁵ Burke O. Long (“The Effect of Divination upon Israelite Literature,” *JBL* 92 [1973] 489-97) notes other areas where divination influenced Israelite literature. On specific Mesopotamian influence, see Wayne Horowitz and Victor Hurowitz, “Urim and Thummim in Light of a Psephomancy Ritual from Assur (LKA 137),” *JANES(CU)* 2 (1992) 95-115.

⁶⁶ Although it is beyond the scope of this article, one might further reflect on Leithart’s suggestion (“Nabal and His Wine,” 526) regarding reading *מנבל היין* as “while the wine was going out from Nabal.” The text as it stands does not suggest it, but I wonder if this story depends on a lost legend of Abigail “reading” Nabal’s urine or perhaps reading his dream of urinating. One might also see an echo of urine divination in Prov 5:16. Even more speculatively, one might ask how Noah knows what had happened to him and whom to blame when *מיינו נזח*, “Noah awoke from his wine” (Gen 9:24).

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