# THE SIRI EPIC AS AN ETHNOGRAPHIC MODEL FOR CRITICALLY REIMAGINING PERFORMANCE IN JUDGES 5 AND EXODUS 15

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## ABSTRACT

At present, the methodological approaches used to explore performance in framed songs–specifically, Judges 5 and Exodus 15–are dominated by an inherited paradigm that largely precludes non-evolutionist models of text. This thesis argues that non-biblical ethnographic performances such as the Siri epic performance that incorporate the empirically derived insights of real or even imagined traditional performers, along with the conceptual vocabulary and epistemological categories that their reception elicits, can help us to re-imagine performance, and in so doing, unearth previously unexplored dimensions of the biblical text that evolutionist textual frameworks would otherwise foreclose.

This research engages with the work of Finnish folklorist and comparative religion scholar Lauri Honko on tradition ecology, and particularly his reception of the Siri epic from Karnataka, south India. The ritual performance of the Siri epic involves embodiment, where the singers are perceived as being inhabited by deity and exhibit ecstatic behaviours. In this thesis, the Siri epic and its performance is employed, not as a direct comparison with Judges 5 and Exodus 15, nor as a hermeneutical lens through which the biblical text ought to be interpreted. Rather, it is suggested that reading ethnographic works such as the Siri epic alongside framed songs can provide us with a framework to critically re-imagine performance in the story world of the text.

The heuristic process of critically re-imagining performance in framed songs using ethnographic works can enrich scholarship by providing a critical and empirical framework where non-evolutionist textual models can be explored, leading to new insights and fresh questions. Questions like, to what extent do the audiences in the story world of Judges 5 and Exodus 15 do literary work in the text? While this process of critically re-imagining performance as a research method is a hypothetical exercise, it is also an exercise that ultimately leads scholars back to the biblical text but with a newfound ethnographically informed perspective. In so doing, this thesis emphasises the importance of embracing diversity of method, person, and perspective.

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CHAPTER 1

# 1. INTRODUCTION

*Sometimes… He used to sing little by little… Mostly we had no opportunity to listen his singing day by day, had we? If he had come by chance, 'sing like this, dear, like this you sing', he used to say. Later at the time of his death, on a raised platform, placing his hand on my head, he gave the advice: 'My blessing is that hereafter, let this story do good to you. Let that Kumara be there doing good', thus, these words he said. After that, there was no opportunity to hear more lessons from him, to learn this story, and he passed away.*

– **Gopala Naika**[1]

*When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, 'Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you.' Elisha said, "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit. He responded, 'You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not.' As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven.*

– **2 Kings 2:9**

## 1.1 Background

One of the major tensions in biblical studies today is rooted in the 'special status' that the Hebrew Bible has traditionally been afforded; a status that has in essence conceptualised it as epistemologically distinct from the Afro-Asian textual culture from which it emerged.[2] Mroczeck suggests that this 'special status' is the result of an 'anachronism of two kinds': 'a religious one–"Bible"–and a bibliographic one–book".'[3] As a religious work, perceptions regarding inspiration and canon formed a basis from which the Hebrew Bible came to be seen as divine and other. Later, this dynamic was compounded through the incorporation of this ancient work into book-form, an act that projected onto it assumptions and organising principles that foreclose important questions about how the works contained within it may have functioned in antiquity prior to the invention of books. One example of this can be seen in the matter of authorial attribution where it was assumed that, similar to society today, in antiquity written works were named after their authors; this modernist assumption has since proved premature.[4] This, along with

[1] In this quote Gopala Naika recounts his experience of learning under the tutelage of his teacher Soomayya Naika who tutored him for two years before passing away. See Lauri Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, Folklore Fellows Communications 264 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1998), 522.

[2] Note for example Giambattista Vico in 1744 who argued for the special status of Judeo-Christian history. See Giambattista Vico, *The New Science of Giambattista Vico.* Translated by Jason Taylor and Robert Miner. (London: Yale University Press, 2020).

[3] Eva Mroczek, *The Literary Imagination in Jewish Antiquity* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 4.

[4] See John Barton, *A History of the Bible: The Book and Its Faiths.* London: Penguin, 2019, 2.

other discoveries concerning the nature of Afro-Asian and early Jewish literature, raises important questions as to what other important aspects of the Hebrew Bible may have been precluded a priori as a result of yet to be challenged assumptions.[5]

The Hebrew Bible did not always exist in book-form, and there has been a growing recognition that not only is it not a book—in the modern literary sense of the word— but that the historical tendency to treat it as one has imposed on it categories that were non-existent in the ancient world and are problematic for scholarship today.[6] I use the term problematic because it has been variously demonstrated that the modernist attitudes encompassed within bookishness can impose romantic, evolutionist and even colonial assumptions into analysis of biblical texts. While historically, such assumptions have impacted the study of the Hebrew Bible as a whole, they have had and continue to have a particularly telling impact on the study of inset hymns and other poetic texts that present as having been orally performed.

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[5] The use of the term 'ancient Near East' has increasingly been recognised as problematic due to its associations with colonialism. As Smith and numerous others have pointed out, biblical atlases that 'omit the region south of Palestine and Egypt,' as well as the use of imprecise designations of biblical lands such as the "Near East" or "the Middle East," reflect a Eurocentric orientation. See Abraham Smith, "Black/Africana Studies and Black/Africana Biblical Studies," *Brill Research Perspectives in Biblical Interpretation* 4.2 (2019): 59. In its place the designation 'ancient Southwest Asia' is increasingly being used; see Rebekah Welton, "Yahweh the Wrathful Vintner: Blood and Wine-Making Metaphors in Isaiah 49:26a and 63:6," *Journal for Interdisciplinary Biblical Studies* 4.3 (2022): 19–41, doi:10.17613/950y-vj25. However, following Gifford Rhamie, the term 'Afroasiatic' or as I will spell it 'Afro-Asiatic' will be adopted to reposition the 'epistemic centre' of the discourse to explicitly recognise that African countries such as Ethiopia and Egypt are very much a part the region being referenced. Gifford Rhamie, "Whiteness, Conviviality and Agency: The Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26–40) and Conceptuality in the Imperial Imagination of Biblical Studies" (PhD diss., Canterbury Christ Church University, 2019), 25. See also Cain Hope Felder, "Afrocentric Biblical Interpretation," in *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. John H. Hayes (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 13–16.

[6] 'Book historians like Roger Charles have shown to what extent our bookish habits of organizing the written world –"inventorying titles, categorizing works and attributing texts"– are historically contingent. Warnings of anachronism abound, but these categories remain largely naturalized. For example, language about the "publication" of "biblical books" persists in the field. Further, the concerns of scholarly bibliography– establishing date, provenance, author, and authoritative text–drive the organization and study of these materials. Sources, then, are mined for the bibliography: which biblical texts, exactly, did the writer possess? In what form? How did he understand biblical authorship? What view of Scripture did he hold? We ask questions that reflect modern desires to establish authoritative texts, trace authorial attribution, and define relationships and hierarchies between texts. We want to fill in the blanks in our own knowledge of these texts and complete our own fragmentary bibliographies; but we also project these interests onto ancient people themselves.' Mroczek 9-10

In biblical studies, orality is a term laden with presuppositions that can all too often espouse an evolutionist conception of literary history, one that assumes that *poetry* (such as Judges 5 and Exodus 15) is older than *prose* (such as Judges 4 and Exodus 14). While it is of course possible for a poetic text to be older than a prose text, the problem lies in the underlying rationale. In biblical studies, this assumption has historically been rooted in romanticism where the Israelites along with other ancient cultures were, in rather colonialist terms, depicted as 'uncultivated savages' lacking the necessary sophistication to express themselves with the 'polish' seen later *in prose*.[7] This evolutionist view of the historical development of literature conflated *poetry* with orality, and illiteracy with inferiority and antiquity, while associating prose with sophistication, and literacy with intelligence. As a result, rather than viewing texts like Judges 5 and Exodus 15 as sophisticated works of verbal art, early scholars initially came to see them as visceral spontaneous works driven by emotion.

Contemporary biblical scholarship is undergoing a process of reckoning with problematic aspects of its past including the romantic, evolutionist and colonialist attitudes of some of its forebears. Insofar as the challenges relating historical conceptions of orality are concerned, three main responses have emerged in Hebrew Bible scholarship: (1) *Oral Context* approaches that explore how orality may have impacted the textualization of the texts under analysis, as well as how those processes might impact their interpretation; (2) *Performance Critical* approaches that proceed from recognition that it was through oral (and aural) performance that the earliest encounters with the biblical text occurred;[8] and (3) *Emic Literary* approaches that seek to understand the written, literary and interpretive aspects of the Hebrew Bible in light of the textual culture of early Jewish and Afro-Asian literature, and in so doing some conceptualise orality as a literary trope.

Historically speaking, the assumption that the Hebrew Bible has oral roots has been axiomatic to the biblical studies discipline. To begin with, even scholars such as Wellhausen who exclusively adopted

[7] Johann G. Herder, *The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, trans. James Marsh, 2 vols (Burlington, VT: Smith, 1833), 2.6 (cited in Vayntrub, *Beyond Orality*, 1).
[8] Kelly R. Iverson, "Oral Fixation or Oral Corrective? A Response to Larry Hurtado." *NTS* 62 (2016): 200

literary methodologies were of the opinion that there was an underlying orality to the Hebrew Bible. Of course, the main point of contention between the literary critics like Wellhausen, and form- and tradition-historical critics such as Gunkel, was over the belief as to whether the oral layer of the Hebrew Bible could be accessed or not.[9] Whereas the phenomenon of orality was initially conceptualised as separate from writing, subsequent developments proved the oral-written divide to be a false dichotomy. This resulted in a wave of contemporary efforts to delineate how, in the Hebrew Bible, orality and writing might be understood as co-existing within an oral-literary dynamic.[10] Scholars such as Niditch, Miller, and F.W. Allsopp have developed nuanced models variously illustrating the interplay between orality and writtenness in the Hebrew Bible and in particular, how its hypothetical oral context might impact various aspects of the biblical text, such as register, textualization and interpretation.

In many ways the application of performance criticism to the biblical text reflects an underlying recognition by some scholars that in the case of texts such as the Bible, words may in fact be only one part of a text; and that other paralinguistic elements could play an important role in influencing its communication and meaning. One of the key proponents of this approach in biblical studies is David Rhoads whose thinking on performance initially developed from his own experience of performing New

[9] Wellhausen whose documentary hypothesis argued that the oral origins of the Hebrew Bible were inaccessible and therefore irrelevant; and form-critics such as Hermann Gunkel, whose evolutionary form-critical (and later tradition-historical) approaches were premised on the assertion that not only could oral genres such as 'myth' and 'sage' be detected in the Hebrew Bible, but that these and other oral genres contained interpretive clues bound within that unit of text's hypothesised *Sitz im Leben*. Note in particular Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1973), and Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis*, trans. Mark E. Biddle, Mercer Library of Biblical Studies (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997).

[10] Najman explores the evolving attitudes toward writing in the biblical text noting increasingly preferential attitudes. See Hindy Najman, "The Symbolic Significance of Writing," in *The Idea of Biblical Interpretation: Essays in Honor of James L. Kugel*, ed. Hindy Najman and Judith H. Newman (Leiden: Brill, 2004). Carr studies the interaction between orality and literacy arguing that education played an important role in the interaction between orality and literacy; as part of a process of enculturation texts would be read, recited and memorized. David McLain Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Schiedewind, explores the complexities of emergent literacy and how the text came to be authoritative. William M. Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book: The Textualization of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Jafee studies the rabbinnic legal tradition demonstrating how it emerged through an interaction between orality and writing. Martin S. Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth: Writing and Oral Tradition in Palestinian Judaism, 200 BCE – 400 CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

Testament texts.[11] Performance criticism bears some similarity to oral context approaches in that there is 'a recognition that biblical communities were predominantly oral cultures' and that part of the scholar's role is to draw out 'remnants of oral performance'.[12] The major difference however, is that performance critical approaches attend to the biblical text 'either as transcriptions or prior oral compositions or as written compositions designed for oral performance'.[13] In practice, this results in scholars looking for signs such as gesture, movement, props and other dramaturgical activity.

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the intense study of scribal and educational contexts, and a deeper understanding of second-temple Judaism have done much to highlight the vitalixty, multiformity and sophistication of pre-canonical textual culture in Afro-Asia and early Judaism. Various scholars have demonstrated the need for us to disavow ourselves of our preconceived notions of how ancient literature works—such as the assumption that poetry precedes prose—and develop the means to approach the texts of the Hebrew Bible on their own terms and within the emic nuances of their own comparative literary contexts. To this end, scholars such as Smith, Mroczek and Vayntrub have demonstrated the efficacy of this methodology as well as its ability to provide constructive challenge to bookishness and biblicism.[14] Moreover, in the case of texts such as Judges 4 and 5 and Exodus 14 and 15, this emic literary approach has presented a viable basis for approaching these texts without assuming that they derive from oral roots.

Nevertheless, inasmuch as *oral context* and *emic literary approaches* present reasonable responses to biblical anachronism, they nevertheless do not have the benefit of being based on the contingent realities of an actual performance. On the other hand, while *performance critical* approaches

[11] David Rhoads, "Performance Criticism: An emerging Methodology in Second Testament Studies—Part I" BTB 36/3 (2006): 118-33

[12] Jeanette Mathews, *Prophets as Performers: Biblical Performance Criticism and Israel's Prophets*, 61.

[13] Rhoads, "Performance Criticism: An emerging Methodology in Second Testament Studies—Part I" 119

[14] Smith for example, approaches Judges 5 as a literary commemoration of a warrior poem, that re-uses and reconfigures older elements to give them new meaning. See Mark S. Smith, *Poetic Heroes: Literary Commemorations of Warriors and Warrior Culture in the Early Biblical World*. (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 265-266

do tend to be premised on the insights from actual performances, the performances underlying performance critical theory tend to be derived from contemporary western performances and derived from the study of theatre. In this thesis, however, I propose a fourth option, one that lies between *performance criticism* and *emic literary* approaches. Robert Miller demonstrated that the analysis of texts such as Judges 5 and Exodus 15 can be assisted by reading them alongside ethnographic works especially those whose performance context and tradition is more readily available to us.[15] In an effort to identify the 'oral in the Old Testament', Miller demonstrates the utility of drawing on analogous textual and performative characteristics in various works as varied as Homeric epic, Icelandic saga (traditions preserved only in writing), and Arabic epic poetry (an oral performance tradition that can still be accessed today) as a means of illuminating potential oral-performative dynamics within the biblical text.

One of the insights highlighted by the study of performance is the fact that 'the verbal element is only one part of the text, not necessarily its core', as such; there has been a shift in terms of how performances are captured in written form, with scholars recognising the need to extend their text through annotation, which may include additional notes on audience and performer interactions as well as various paralinguistic features, including kinesics, proxemics, artefacts as well as integral and collateral actions.[16] In the Hebrew Bible, texts that present as oral performance do not have the benefit of extended texts; this, coupled with the temporal distance between us and ancient Israel, renders their actual performance contexts and traditions forever inaccessible.[17] Nevertheless, Miller's approach demonstrates that in such cases, it is possible to draw on ethnographic works for which extended texts (or their equivalents) as a means of reflecting on potential oral-performative dynamics in the story world of the biblical text. While Miller himself approaches this dynamic from an oral background perspective– and thus draws on ethnographic works as means of providing empirical evidence for those aspects of the biblical text that may have been originally oral–I am proposing that ethnographic works with extended texts can

[15] Robert D. Miller II, *Oral Tradition in Ancient Israel*, Biblical Performance Criticism 4 (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011)

[16] Lauri Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 47-48

[17] On extended texts see Lauri Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 48-51

be employed in a different way, namely to, albeit hypothetically, explore performance in the story world of biblical texts that present as oral-performance. Unlike Miller, this approach does not assume that biblical texts that present as oral performance need to be approached in light of a hypothetical oral background.

In addition to proposing that ethnographic works along with their extended texts can be used hypothetically to explore performance in the story world of the biblical text, this thesis also demonstrates how such works can be used to explore performance. It will be argued that actual real-world ethnographic performances along with their extended texts can be used as an empirical framework for critically re-imagining performance in the story-world of the biblical text. While this approach can rightly be labelled as subjective, scholars such as Rhoads have demonstrated that the contemporary performance of biblical texts can function as a method of research, in the sense that the process of thinking through and then performing biblical texts can reveal textual insights that might not otherwise have been considered.[18] While what's being suggested here is not *performance as research*, in the sense that our approach does not involve the actual process of performing the biblical text, it does however involve critically re-imagining its performance and using insights from ethnographic works to do so. Moreover, it argues that similar to *performance as research*, this process of *critically re-imagining performance as research* can enable scholars to engage with the biblical text in new ways that may not otherwise have been possible, or that might have been foreclosed as a result of some of the aforementioned evolutionist assumptions pertaining to orality and literary history.

One of the challenges inherent in the proposal to critically re-imagine performance in the story world of the biblical text by drawing on ethnographic works from contexts outside of ancient Israel is that of cross-cultural comparison. Inasmuch as the proposal to draw on empirical ethnographic studies of ethnographic performance as a means of thinking anew about performance in the story world of the text has the potential to provide fresh insights into the biblical text, the differences between the biblical text

[18] Mathews, *Prophets as Performers*, 62

and the ethnographic performance that is being read alongside it cannot be ignored. Nevertheless, as Miller and others note, cross-cultural comparisons between materials from distant cultures can in fact be a strength, particularly when it comes to identifying potentially transcultural features of texts that operate at a phenomenological level.[19] Indeed, it is this argument that has been central to the structuralist thinking and oral formulaicism that has often dominated conceptions of oral performance in biblical studies.

Up until his untimely death in 2012, one of the most prominent researchers in comparative oral literature was John Miles Foley, who also founded the *Oral Tradition Journal* now based at Harvard University–a journal dedicated to the study of the world's oral traditions, past and present. Miller suggests that with adjustment, Foley's five criteria for cross-cultural comparison can be applied to the Hebrew Bible.[20] However, while Miller's analysis of the bases for comparing the Hebrew Bible and other ethnographic works is useful insofar as it provides a logical rationale for comparing aspects of the text that evidence similarity at the phenomenological level, it is nevertheless true that by considering only those aspects of literature that evidence phenomenological similarity, the analysis falls all too easily into the structuralist redundancy inherent in historic geographic and oral formulaic approaches. Inasmuch as Miller presents the use of ethnographic works as a way to move beyond oral formulaicism, by focusing only on those elements that these works share in common with the Hebrew bible, his analysis ultimately

[19] Tradition-historical scholar Ivan Engnell, for example, argued that 'comparing Israelite material with relatively far-distant lands and cultures—India and Iran, for instance— actually can be more fruitful than comparing it with closer regions, such as Arabia.' Ivan Engnell*, A Rigid Scrutiny: Critical Essays on the Old Testament*. Trans. John T. Willis. (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1969), 8.

[20] Foley's five criteria are as follows, (1) a written, textual tradition, (2) its oral basis, (3) common genre, (4) dependence on tradition; and (5) both synchronic and diachronic viability. Cited in Miller, *Oral Tradition in Ancient Israel*, 55. Miller argues that in order for Foley's cross-cultural framework to be applied to the Hebrew Bible criterion (2) an 'oral basis', and (3) a 'common genre' require further nuancing. In so far as (2) the oral basis criterion is concerned, Miller, of course, argues that the Hebrew bible's oral credentials lie in its oral roots, however, as highlighted by emic literary approaches, another basis lay in represented orality. Perhaps the most contentious aspect of Miller's adjusted scheme, argument for the broadening of Foleys (3) 'common genre' requirement due to the limitations of genre, suggesting that instead 'it is necessary to only have a very generic correspondence between biblical material and the comparand…' See Miller, *Oral Tradition in Ancient Israel*, 55.

leaves him in a not too dissimilar place, namely, identifying formulaic structures in an attempt to argue for the oral background of the Hebrew bible.[21]

Rather than focusing predominantly on those aspects that ethnographic works and biblical texts that present as oral performance have in common, I propose that a more fruitful use of ethnographic works lies in reflecting on aspects of difference, and in particular on those extended aspects of ethnographic performance such as kinesics, proxemics and artefacts. Rather than drawing scholarly attention away from the biblical text, drawing on extended dimensions of performance in ethnographic works to critically re-imagine performance in the story world of the biblical text in fact leads to a deeper appreciation of the text, sensitizing scholars to new dimensions of text, fresh perspectives and alternative real-world performative possibilities that they may not have previously been aware of, such as: the subtle ways in which literary texts may indicate performer–audience interaction; the fact that repetition may be functional and not simply artistic; and that the actual performance of a text may take on a very different form or even forms to that which might appear to be indicated in the text.

## 1.2 Why the Siri epic?

Having laid out the case for using ethnographic works to critically re-imagine performance in the story world of the biblical text, the next item for consideration is the selection of a suitable ethnographic performance to use as part of this critical activity. One of the key selection criteria for our ethnographic performance is that alongside the text itself we are also provided with a performance record detailing its reception and textualization. This is because, as stated above, it is primarily those extended dimensions of performance that will be drawn on to critically re-imagine performance in the story world of the text. Along these lines, one of the areas of ethnographic performance that has received the most detailed work and attention, particularly by folklorists, is that of oral epics. While the requirement that our selected

[21] Note for example Miller's exploration of the Icelandic Saga, he focuses on the phenomenological characteristics held in common between texts in the Hebrew Bible and Icelandic Saga and then uses these characteristics to argue for the presence of oral structures in the Hebrew Bible. See Miller, *Oral Tradition in Ancient Israel*, 43-46.

ethnographic performance also has a detailed record of its reception narrows the field, the field is nevertheless an extensive one and my comments will be limited to some of the major works.

Of course, when discussing the textualization of oral epics one of the most important developments is found with the textualization of the Finnish Kalevala by Elias Lönnrot, whose familiarity with the rich oral traditions of Karelia, and his internalisation of the Finnish epic diction enabled him to compose the Finnish Kalevala. In addition to the text of the Kalevala, we have access to various studies analysing how Lönnrot was able to achieve this; nevertheless, given that Kalevala performance itself was limited to writing, it is not appropriate for our purposes here.[22] In addition, one cannot discuss the textualization of oral epics without referencing the ground-breaking work of Milman Parry and Albert Bates Lord and their collection and documentation of Serbo-Croatian epic.[23] Indeed, it was their work that laid the foundations for the development of oral-formulaic theory. Though the work of Parry and Lord was indeed ground-breaking, their focus was largely on unearthing the compositional processes underlying performance, and as such the insights their study provides centre on composition rather than seeking to give as full an account of the actual performance itself as possible.

Although there have been numerous other studies on the textualization of oral epics, none are more extensive or have had more impact in recent years than that of Finnish scholar Lauri Honko's textualizing of the Siri epic.[24] Honko is widely regarded as one of the greatest folklorists of the 21st century, yet despite the fact that biblical scholarship and folkloristics have shared intellectual roots, very few biblical scholars have engaged with his work. Through live field studies and the incorporation of the expert

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[22] See Lauri Honko, "The Kalevala as Performance," in *The Kalevala and the World's Traditional Epics* (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2002) 13-25

[23] Milman Parry & Albert B. Lord, *Serbocroatian Heroic Songs*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953).

[24] See Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*. Other works on the textualization of oral epics include: Alfred Kroeber textualized a Mohave telling about clan migrations that came to be known as one of the longest known epics among the Native Americans. See A. L. Kroeber, *Mohave Historical Epic*. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1951); The Son-Jara epic is from Mali and celebrates the legend Sunjata the founder of the old Malian Empire. See John William Johnson, *The Epic of Son-jara: A West African tradition* . (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986). The Paabuuujii epic, is a Raajasthani epic about the warrior king Paabuujii. What's particularly interesting about this epic is that it synchronously performed alonf with cloth painting. John D. Smith, *The epic of Pabuji: A study, transcription and translation*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Another broader work that is worth consulting is Honko, Lauri. *The Kalevaleh and the World's Traditional Epics.*

knowledge of the tradition bearer and owner of the Siri epic, Gopala Naika, Honko elucidates how texts such as the Siri epic function as embodied text. The Siri epic itself is a text with roots in Hinduism originating from Karnataka, South India, a region known for its rich oral and epic traditions. Unlike many epics that centre on war and epic battles, the Siri epic centres on the life of Siri, a woman fighting for self-determination in the midst a patriarchal society.

One of the most interesting aspects of Honko's reception of the Siri epic is his thick archiving of Siri epic performance. Not only does Honko document his codification of the epic text and the artificial setting that was necessary for its collection, but he contrasts this with the other sacred and profane settings in which the epic text is most often performed. Not only does Honko's thick archiving of the Siri epic allow for an in-depth appreciation of the epic and its various performance contexts, but through his theory of tradition ecology he also provides a conceptual framework and language that can help us as biblical studies scholars to perceive alternative aspects of text and performance. While more will be said on this later, for now it is sufficient to note that central to Honko's analysis of the Siri epic is the insider-informed insights of the epic singer, Mr Gopala Naika. Rather than approaching Gopala as a subject, Honko's analysis of the Siri epic had the added benefit of being informed by the expertise of the singer himself. This provided invaluable insights that might not otherwise have been discovered. While there are other options, the ethnographic work that this thesis shall draw on is Honko's reception of the Siri epic.

## 1.3 Why Judges 5 and Exodus 15?

Having identified the Siri epic as the ethnographic work that will be used to assist our re-imagination of performance in the story world of the biblical text, the other issue that needs to be considered is which biblical texts to read it alongside and why. Earlier, it was highlighted that evolutionist and romanticist assumptions have had and continue to have a particularly telling impact on the study of poetic texts that present as having been orally performed. While, in some ways, all poetry could be said to be performative, the Hebrew Bible contains a specific group of framed poems that can be distinguished

by the fact that they are placed in the mouths of literary characters, thus giving them the impression of having been orally performed. Of this group of texts, two bear cursory similarities with Siri epic performance in that not only are they presented as having been sung rather than spoken, but they are also twice-performed, in the sense that both Judges 5 and Exodus 15 follow narratives—Judges 4 and Exodus 14—that appear to depict those events mentioned in the song. While it is of course possible for other framed poems to be read alongside the Siri epic, for the reasons given above, Judges 5 and Exodus 15 will be the focus of this thesis.

## 1.4 Thesis outline

**Chapter 2** establishes the methodological rationale for this thesis. It explores the metacritical characteristics of contemporary folkloristics and its relationship to the study of the Hebrew Bible and how both together can provide a helpful critique of biblical studies as a discipline and romantic conceptions of textually presented oral performance. Central to this chapter is its proposition that the critical *re-imagination of performance* can function as a *research method* whose value lies in the fact that the underlying process of using ethnographic works such as the Siri epic to re-imagine performance in the story world of the text has the ability to sensitise scholars to dimensions of the biblical text previously foreclosed by evolutionist models.

**Chapter 3** Introduces Honko's method of tradition ecology—including his concept of mental texts—and delineates his reception of the Siri epic. In so doing, it highlights the value that the insider knowledge of the singer, Mr Gopala Naika, brings to our understanding of performance and the Siri epic itself. In addition, particular attention is paid to those extended aspects of the Siri epic text that give insight into the nature of its performance as well as its various performance contexts. In so doing, this chapter provides the empirical framework against which Judges 5 and Exodus 15 will be read and then critically re-imagined.

Before concluding, in **chapters 4** and **5,** Judges 5 and Exodus 15 will be reconstructed as literary representations of mental texts and analysed using Honko's theory of tradition ecology. Moreover, in

order to critically re-imagine performance in the story world of the songs in Judges 5 and Exodus 15 respectively, these chapters draw heuristically on the Siri epic performance contexts of *jātre* and cennɛ play. During this process of analysis and re-imagining, particular attention is paid to the questions that this process leads us to ask of the biblical text and any previously foreclosed dimensions this process reveals. Finally, in **chapter 6**, conclusions are drawn.

## 1.5 Looking Ahead

In his book *The Critical Imagination*, James Grant highlights the at times counterintuitive but important role that the imagination plays in critical inquiry.[25] The approach taken in this thesis, is perhaps best viewed as a critical experiment regarding the extent to which ethnographic works such as the Siri epic— exposing us to different worldviews, perspectives and epistemologies— can assist biblical scholars in overcoming some of the inherent challenges present in romantic and evolutionist models of text, and in so doing identify alternative textual models and possibilities. Essentially, critically re-imagining Judges 5 and Exodus 15 by drawing on Siri epic performance will allow us to construct a hypothetical performance that can in turn be utilised as a vantage point to reflect critically on the biblical text itself. To be clear, what's being suggested here is not a direct comparison between Judges 5, Exodus 15, and the Siri epic; rather this exercise is heuristic in nature, acknowledging the fact that irrespective of the distance between these texts, ethnographic works such as the Siri epic can help to elicit new questions, conceptual vocabulary, and methodological insights, and identify other dimensions of biblical texts such as Judges 5 and Exodus 15 that evolutionist approaches otherwise foreclose.

Questions of epistemology, power, and inclusion run deep in this research, not only because we are reading a text from south India with roots in Hinduism alongside texts from ancient Israel with roots in Judaism.[26] The use of Lauri Honko's work in this thesis entails the application of folkloristic

[25] James Grant, *The Critical Imagination*, Oxford Philosophical Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013

[26] Despite various attempts to develop comparative bases between Hinduism and Judaism, the fundamental and epistemological differences between the two religions are well noted. See Barbara A. Holdrege, *Veda and Torah: Transcending the Textuality of Scripture* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996). Nevertheless, it

methodologies to the biblical text, and despite that fact that biblical studies and folkloristics have shared intellectual roots, there has been an enduring perception amongst biblical scholars that the application of folkloristic methodologies to the biblical text is a peripheral endeavour with preference given to the application of 'normative' historical-critical and literary approaches. By demonstrating the value that the application of an alternative interdisciplinary approach can bring, this thesis also raises questions about the traditional dominance of historical-critical and literary approaches as well as their gatekeepers, thus highlighting the importance of intellectual curiosity and open-mindedness. In a similar vein of thought, folkloristics has often served as a vehicle for giving voice to those marginalised along racial, gender and socioeconomic lines. Traditionally, the biblical studies discipline has been dominated by white, male, Eurocentric voices to the neglect of others; our use of Honko's empirical ethnographic study of the Siri epic and its reception will highlight, not only the importance of incorporating a greater diversity of perspectives but will also demonstrate the analytical value that the use of intentionally inclusive methods can bring.[27]

is worth noting that within Indian biblical studies, Hindu, Dalit and tribal hermeneutics have all provided fruitful ground for biblical scholarship and fresh interpretive approaches. As David Chalcraft observes, 'an authentic hermeneutic can also be found, it is felt, like so much else, in India's villages, among the practices of oral storytelling, dance drumming and craft found there, or in remembering the pan All-India social issues and problems. Ethnographic developments posit closely involved work and collaborative field work amongst Bible users, hearers and readers and appliers of the texts in a variety of vibrant contexts in India to capture and promote the range of diversity in the country. There ethnographic studies can be conducted amongst any community, whether that be the Anglo-Indian Christians of Kolkata, or the snake-charming Sapera nomadic groups to name only two ethnic or occupational groups who share a sense of communal identity.' David J. Chalcraft, "Strategies Past, Present and Future: The Context and Variety of Biblical Studies in Indian Culture and Society," in *A Biblical Masala: Encountering Diversity in Indian Biblical Studies*, ed. David J. Chalcraft and Zhodi Angami (Delhi: Christian World Imprints, 2021), 71. See also R. S. Sugirtharajah, *The Bibleand Asia: From the Pre-Christian Era to the Postcolonial Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013); George Soares-Prabhu and Scaria Kuthirakkattel, *A Biblical Theology for India*, Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth Theology Series (Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 1999); Ayyanethu Malayil Jose Bijimon, *Indian Poetics (Kāvya Śāstra) and Narratology towards the Appreciation of Biblical Narrative*, Studies in Biblical Literature 165 (New York: Peter Lang, 2016).

[27] As David Janzen asserts, biblical studies, like any other academic discipline, controls its discourse and limits what amounts to proper academic work in the field, in other words as its gatekeepers in academic departments and editorial boards and professional societies recognize some kinds of activities as valid and refuse to recognise others. See David Janzen, *The Liberation of Method: The Ethics of Emancipatory Biblical Interpretation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2021), 76.

CHAPTER 2

# 2. FOLKLORE, PERFORMANCE AND THE CRITICAL IMAGINATION

*I did the dictation thinking that it will be good if it reaches schools and colleges in the days to come. This is the light of our Tulunaadu and Tulu people. It is good if somebody keeps the said askaras up, this was my intention. 'That person is younger than me. Even if my life goes in telling this, my heart feels that way.'*

– **Gopala Naika**[28]

*Then the Lord answered me and said:*
*Write the vision;*
*make it plain on tablets,*
*so that a runner may read it.*

– **Habakkuk 2:2**

## 2.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter sets out the underlying rationale for the application of contemporary folkloristic methodologies to Judges 5 and Exodus 15. It does so by taking a high-level view of biblical studies and demonstrating the ability of folkloristics to interrogate the power structures inherent in the discipline (religious institutions, academia etc.) as well as within the biblical text itself. Then, after delineating the nature of the relationship between folkloristics and the Hebrew Bible, it rejects the notion of oral performance as constructed by oral background and oral formulaic approaches, arguing instead that orality in texts such as Judges 5 and Exodus 15 is textually presented and should therefore be analysed as a literary trope. Finally, this chapter presents the critical-reimagination of textually presented songs as a method of research arguing that critically imagining texts such as Judges 5 and Exodus 15, through the use of ethnographic works can sensitise scholars other previously unexplored and non-evolutionist dimensions of text.

[28] The quote is taken from Lauri Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, Folklore Fellows Communications 264 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1998), 13. Honko defines *askras* as 'the smallest emic units of composition.' Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 90. These will be discussed later in this chapter.

## 2.2 Folkloristics and Metacritical critique

Folkloristics is a complex multi-layered discipline that, broadly speaking, involves the study of traditions both ancient and contemporary. Reflecting on its study, Noyes observed that it is helpful to think about folklore as 'a trinity' containing three elements: ethnography, practice and theory. These three 'are mutually dependent and mutually constitutive; they cohabit to different degrees, in singular folklorist bodies.'[29] Located somewhere between the humanities and the sciences, folkloristics draws inspiration from both and in so doing, occupies a curious position within academia. Indeed, as practiced today, there is an increased focus on the role of power and its impact on the subaltern and the marginalised. The position of folkloristics within academia creates 'constructive and critical opportunities,' not only in terms of how we analyse disciplines, but also in terms of the institutions and regimes that shape their acceptance.[30]

As research informed by the Second World War demonstrated, folklore —particularly in the form of narratives surrounding national events— can be, and *has* been, co-opted by the powerful as a type of cultural hegemony to supress the marginal.[31] For example, not only did concepts such as the 'Aryan Volk' in World War II evidence the co-opting of German folktales by the Nazi regime and sympathetic scholars, but 'nationalist, populist, revolutionary, and colonialist scholars around the world have continued to produce cultural objects in the hope of modelling social futures.'[32] The ensuing further marginalisation was an inevitable output of the role of evolutionist literary history (Herder, Wellhausen Gunkel et. al) in the cultural aims of German state-craft. The concepts of a German volk were already long in development from the time of Herder and persist in the intellectual substructure of the discipline since his framework in general persists. There is thus potent possibility in working outside of such conceptual models to

[29] Noyes, *Humble Theory*, 13.

[30] Noyes, *Humble Theory*, 12.

[31] T. J. Jackson Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities," *The American Historical Review* 90.3 (1985): 567–93, doi:10.2307/1860957.

[32] Dorothy Noyes, "The Social Base of Folklore," in *A Companion to Folklore*, ed. Regina Bendix and Galit Hasan-Rokem, Blackwell Companions to Anthropology 15 (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 14.

challenge romanticism and evolutionist assumptions and contribute to the decolonisation of the field of biblical studies itself.

Since the end of World War II, the study of folklore itself has undergone a period of decolonisation. In the 1960s German folklorists queried their responsibility for the emergence of the Nazi Myth of Aryanism, and American folklorists critiqued the comparative method used by German and other European scholars as being Eurocentric, in need of a more scientific basis and irrelevant to the civil rights struggle.[33] In response, folkloristics took what has come to be known as a 'social turn' which eschewed the evolutionist and hierarchical assumption that folklore (tradition) existed only amongst the peasant and lower classes. Increasingly, folklorists came to conceptualise folklore (tradition) as operating within social matrices of actors seeking to accomplish particular ends (more will be said on this later in this chapter); and emerging from the 'interstices of institutions and the new platforms of digital culture'.[34] In other words, through the exercise of reflective practice, contemporary folkloristics has undergone (and is still undergoing) a process of decoupling itself from problematic aspects of its romantic, evolutionist and colonialist intellectual past.

The application of contemporary folkloristic methodologies to the Hebrew Bible as is being proposed here has the potential to alert us to various metacritical dynamics at play beyond the story world of texts such as Judges 5 and Exodus 15 and sensitise us to the broader systems and actors that shape their reception. While as texts sacred to a number of religious traditions (including Christianity and Judaism), religious actors and institutions have historically played an important role in shaping their reception, the landscape shaping their reception today is increasingly complex and nuanced. In addition to the biblical studies discipline, it includes societies (such as the Society for Biblical Literature), journals, educational institutions, and influential scholars all of which can be understood as playing a gatekeeping role—directly and indirectly— and defining the normative interests of the biblical studies discipline,

[33] Noyes, Dorothy. "The Social Base of Folklore." Pages 13–39 in *A Companion to Folklore*. Edited by Regina Bendix and Galit Hasan-Rokem. Blackwell Companions to Anthropology 15. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 14.

[34] Noyes, Social base, 14.

which historically, has been dominated by white, male, and Eurocentric perspectives.[35] In addition to folkloristics' embracement of the social turn, a core argument in this thesis is that, by amplifying non-white, Eurocentric and female voices, ethnographic models such as the Siri epic provide scholars with constructive opportunities to reflect critically on their approach to the biblical texts, using models derived without the evolutionist literary substructure that is so prevalent within biblical studies.[36]

One of the challenges of engaging folkloristic methodologies is the fact that for a long time, folklore studies has existed within an inherited paradox: on the one hand, folkloristics has had a profound impact on biblical studies and the humanities; in biblical studies the foundational concepts of folkloristics are articulated in the work of Hermann Gunkel and even earlier in the cultural relativism of Herder; moreover, these ideas were disseminated more broadly across the humanities including the social sciences, psychology and anthropology. On the other hand, it is also true that there has been a concurrent narrative conceptualising the study of folklore as the marginal enterprise of pseudo-academics. This latter determination was an impulse of the aforementioned evolutionist thinking that located folklore among the "peasants and primitives", and therefore conceived of the knowledge contained therein as inferior to the types of knowledge that might be gained through more 'normative' intellectual pursuits. In the academy, this dynamic manifested itself in various ways including in a paucity of funding for folklore projects. The passing of the *Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore* in 1989 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), however, signalled an important change.[37]

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[35] See Gale A. Yee, "Thinking Intersectionally: Gender, Race, Class, and the Etceteras of Our Discipline," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 139.1 (2020), 7–26, doi:10.15699/jbl.1391.2020.1b; Wongi Park, "Multiracial Biblical Studies," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 140.3 (2021): 435–59, doi:10.15699/jbl.1403.2021.1.

[36] To this end some scholars call for the decolonisation of biblical studies, and academia in general. See Fernando F. Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies: A view from the Margins.* (USA: Orbis Books, 2000)

[37] In the 1989 recommendation UNESCO defined folklore as follows: 'Folklore (or traditional and popular culture) is the totality of *tradition*-based creations of a cultural community, expressed by a group or individuals and recognized as reflecting the expectations of a community in so far as they reflect its cultural and social identity; its standards and values are transmitted *orally*, by imitation or by other means. Its forms are, among others, language, literature, music, dance, games, mythology, rituals, customs, handicrafts, architecture and other arts.' See UNESCO, *Records of the General Conference, 25th Session, 17 October to 16 November 1989* (Paris: UNESCO, 1990).

Following the passing of the *Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore*, numerous folklore projects experienced increases in funding, drives to digitise folklore archives, and various forms of governmental protections.[38] The legitimation of folklore by such an influential body as UNESCO appears, at least in part, to have had an influence on the broader societal discourse on perceptions of folklore and its relevance. Indeed, even within academia, folklore is increasingly coming to be viewed less as the dirty linen of modernity and more as a valid type of knowledge, preserving information that may indeed be of practical benefit to contemporary society beyond the preservation of pithy sayings, proverbial wisdom and the recounting of founding narratives.[39]

What is also notable about the recommendation is its recognition that folklore 'forms part of the universal heritage of humanity, and … is a powerful means of bringing together different people and social groups and of asserting their cultural identity.'[40] In other words, behind the express desire to safeguard folklore is a recognition of the fact that folklore can be employed to mobilise certain actions. In line with the theorising of Richard Bauman and other folklorists, it is possible to view UNESCO as an actor working within a broader social matrix seeking to utilise folklore to further its goal of 'bringing together different people and social groups.' Though UNESCO's goal of fostering world peace may not, in the first instance, appear to be problematic, this does not negate the need to observe such initiatives with caution and deeper reflection because institutions 'generate their own folklore.'[41]

When approaching folklore as a social phenomenon, folklorists observed that organisations, businesses and professions develop their own cultural expressions, which, as intimated by Antonio Gramsci, tend to sustain patterns of behaviour that support organisational goals and that of the prevailing

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[38] According to Simon Bronner the 1989 UNESCO recommendation had the effect of asserting that 'traditional knowledge and folklore should not be simplistically conceived of as a pale reflection of mainstream knowledge.' Simon J. Bronner, *Folklore: The Basics* (London: Routledge, 2017), 144.

[39] In fact, today the work of folklorists is having an increasingly telling impact on real-world contemporary issues, such as globalisation, ecology, and environmentalism. See Dorothy Noyes, *Humble Theory: Folklore's Grasp on Social Life* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2016), 11. Simon Bronner suggests that the real-world impact of folklore stems from four interrelated factors: '(1) publicizing folklore and (2) purposing folklore … (3) politicizing folklore and (4) legalising folklore.' Bronner, *Folklore*, 145. Furthermore, the efficacy of traditional knowledge is also increasingly being explored within the sciences and medicine.

[40] UNESCO, Short Records.

[41] Noyes, "The Social Base of Folklore," 23.

status quo.[42] And it is upon this very point that UNESCO's approach to the preservation of folklore has come under criticism, because it defines folklore in a way that tends to suit its own ecological objectives. By defining folklore as 'traditional knowledge', UNESCO interprets folklore as being 'the cumulative and dynamic body of knowledge, know-how and representations possessed by peoples with long histories of interaction with their natural milieu.'[43] This dynamic, whilst unsurprising, is problematic because UNESCO's definition of folklore limits its scope to rural and historically defined people groups, but more significantly it acknowledges that 'traditional knowledge and folklore … [have become] a significant source of social, cultural, economic and political power.'[44] In other words, there is a recognition that the way in which institutions such as UNESCO define and delimit folklore has increasingly serious social, cultural, economic and political consequences. The question as to how folklore ought to be defined is an increasingly ethical one, evident in the growth of literature interrogating the agendas of institutions that purport to protect intangible intellectual property such as traditional knowledge and folklore.[45]

The example of UNESCO given above underlines the important role folkloristics plays in critiquing and interrogating the 'political and economic ecologies of formalised agendas for ongoing cultural conversation and protection.'[46] By defining folklore along ecological lines and safeguarding its preservation, UNESCO was not simply acting out of an altruistic impulse, it was acting in a way that furthered its broader institutional aims. While UNESCO is not the primary object of this research, as an entity seeking to safeguard cultural expressions and traditions, the above discussions concerning the

[42] Noyes, "The Social Base of Folklore," 23.

[43] UNESCO, "Traditional Knowledge," *Memobpi* (Bureau of Public Information: Paris, 2006), 1.

[44] American Folklore Society, "American Folklore Society Recommendations to the Wipo Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge, and Folklore," *The Journal of American Folklore* 117.465 (2004): 296–99, doi: 10.1353/jaf.2004.0080.

[45] See J. Sanford Rikoon, "On the Politics of the Politics of Origins: Social (In)Justice and the International Agenda on Intellectual Property, Traditional Knowledge, and Folklore," *The Journal of American Folklore* 117.465 (2004): 325–36, doi:10.1353/jaf.2004.0081; Kristin Kuutma, "Who Owns Our Songs? Authority of Heritage and Resources for Restitution," *Ethnologia Europaea* 39.2 (2009): 26–40, doi:10.16995/ee.1052.

[46] Rikoon, "On the Politics of the Politics of Origins," 325. See also Nicolas Adell, "The French Journeymen Tradition: Convergence between French Heritage Traditions and UNESCO's 2003 Convention," in *Heritage Regimes and the State*, ed. Regina F. Bendix, Aditya Eggert, and Arnika Peselmann, Göttingen Studies in Cultural Property 6 (Göttingen, Universitätsverlag Göttingen, 2013), 177–95; Michael Dylan Foster, "UNESCO on the Ground," *Journal of Folklore Research* 52.2–3 (2015): 143–56, doi:10.2979/jfolkrese.52.2-3.143.

nature of the relationship between UNESCO and folklore serves the function of introducing some of the meta-considerations necessary for both our analysis of Judges 5 and Exodus 15, and our reflection on the biblical studies discipline as an institution, especially as it defines and relates to folkloristics. As we shall see, while contemporary folkloristics has made numerous steps beyond the early romantic and evolutionist conceptions of folklore, within biblical studies, folklore and the application of folkloristic methodologies continue to be bound within an evolutionist framework concerned with hierarchy and orality rather than the social matrices in which the biblical traditions may have operated.

## 2.3 Folkloristics and the Hebrew Bible

The recognition that the Hebrew Bible's composition history is complex—spanning many centuries, involving numerous authors, editors, redactors and the passing down of various traditions from one generation to another—is axiomatic to the critical study of the Hebrew Bible. Given that that we do not have first-hand access to the Hebrew bible's compositional processes and the people behind them, various biblical scholars have engaged folkloristic methodologies to help inform their hypotheses. Of course, the scholar most widely credited with drawing the attention of biblical scholarship to folkloristics is Hermann Gunkel whose evolutionary theory that oral narratives develop over time from short, simple forms to lengthy, complex ones, has for many years shaped scholarly conceptions of orality in the Hebrew Bible.[47] Through an emphasis on oral genres Gunkel sought to intuit between 'the narrative that lies before us and its prehistory', thereby challenging some of the underlying assumption of the documentary hypothesis that the pre-literary stage of the Hebrew Bible would remain forever inaccessible.[48] Gunkel's

[47] As Nahkola demonstrates, Gunkel was not the first biblical scholar to utilise orality as a critical construct, Aulikki Nahkola, *Double Narratives in The Old Testament: The Foundations of Method in Biblical Criticism*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 290 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2001).

[48] Gunkel defined these genres as follows: Myth (*Mythus*) 'a story in which the high figures of the great gods plain the main role'; Saga (*Sage*) a story where historical persons—or characters thought to be historical—are the effective participants in the action,' and legend (*Legende*) 'a story with a characteristically spiritual tone'; and the folktale (*Märchen*) 'the stories of less sophisticated peoples and circles,' in Hermann Gunkel, *The Folktale in the Old Testament,* trans. Michael D. Rutter (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 26. It should however be noted that the task of defining folklore genre is fraught with terminological fuzziness, as C. Scott Littleton points out, 'one man's

folkloristic informed methods have been variously applied throughout the Hebrew Bible often, but not exclusively under the more widely known labels of form-criticism and tradition-historical criticism.[49] A product of his time, Gunkel was heavily influenced by romanticism and his application of folkloristics to

myth is all too often another man's legend; what to one scholar is manifestly an example of "lower mythology" is to another simply a folktale or *Märchen*. Rarely indeed does one find a clear-cut statement as to the key differences between the terms utilised.' C. Scott Littleton, "A Two-Dimensional Scheme for the Classification of Narratives," in *The Bloomsbury Reader in the Study of Myth,* ed. Jonathan Miles-Watson and Vivian Asimos (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 12. In his work *Creation and Chaos,* Hermann Gunkel in dialogue with Julius Wellhausen, the father of documentary criticism, states that 'one may rigorously distinguish between the present state of a narrative and its prehistory. In regard to all the narratives of Genesis, it is the task of scholarship, after the literary facts have been determined, to raise the question—often much more important—as to whether perhaps a statement can be made concerning the earlier history of the narrative. Thereby one will not infrequently establish that a body of material which had been present in Israel long before the written record received by us, has been transmitted to us out of a later time, and in a more modern recension.' Hermann Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos in the Primeval Era and the Eschaton: A Religio-Historical Study of Genesis 1 and Revelation 12*, trans. K. William Whitney Jr (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 6. It should be noted that Wellhausen agreed that the Hebrew Bible had a preliterary oral stage, but disagreed as to the extent to which it could be accessed and be considered to be reliable, noting in his *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* that 'the longer a story was spread by oral tradition among the people, the more was its roots concealed by the schools springing from it.' Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1973), 343. This is echoed in Ernest Nicholson's introduction to Gunkel's commentary on Genesis: 'Wellhausen himself held a low estimate of the significance of the precompositional stage and spurned the task of investigating it as of no more than an antiquarian interest and outside the scope proper of the theologian and exegete. The work of creative planning, arrangement, and composition of the diverse materials in the sources of the Pentateuch was held to be the accomplishment of the authors of these sources; it was they who gave order to, and wove connections between, whatever medley of disconnected oral materials they inherited.' Ernest W. Nicholson, "Foreword to English Translation" in *Genesis*, by Hermann Gunkel, Mercer Library of Biblical Studies (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), 3–4.

[49] There are several important surveys on the impact of folklore studies on the analysis of the Hebrew Bible: James George Frazer, *Folk-Lore in the Old Testament: Studies in Comparative Religion, Legend and Law*, 3 vols (London: Macmillan, 1918); J. W. Rogerson, *Myth in Old Testament Interpretation*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 134 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1974); S. Talmon, "The 'Comparative Method' in Biblical Interpretation—Principles and Problems," in *Congress Volume Göttingen 1977*, John Emerton ed., Vetus Testamentum Supplements 29 (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 320–56, doi:10.1163/9789004275522_017; H. Munro Chadwick and Nora K. Chadwick, *The Growth of Literatur*e, 3 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936), 2.629–77; Patricia G. Kirkpatrick, *The Old Testament and Folklore Study*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 62 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988); Dan Ben-Amos, "Folklore in the Ancient Near East," in *The Anchor BibleDictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 2.818—28; Susan Niditch, *Folklore and the Hebrew Bible*, Guides to Biblical Scholarship Old Testament Series (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993). A contemporary application of folkloristic method to the Hebrew Bible is Nancy Lee's *The Singers of Lamentations,* where she uses a socio-rhetorical approach to draw comparisons between the poetic traditions of former Yugoslavia, Jeremiah and Lamentations. She analyses them as having been composed by poetic singers who employ their individual artistry to respond to a context in which their cities have been destroyed. It should be noted however, that her approach is heavily influenced by Parry and Lord's oral-formulaic theory though not without modification. See Nancy Lee, *The Singers of Lamentations: Cities under Siege, from Ur to Jerusalem to Sarajevo*, Biblical Interpretation Series 60 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 45–46.

the biblical tax carried with it the aforementioned evolutionist frame that presumes an oral background to the biblical text and folklore.

Indeed, biblical scholarship today is awash with various oral background theories that delineate a variety of hypotheses concerning the Hebrew Bible's oral roots and the extent to which a perceived oral background might be said to have hermeneutical implications. Indeed, even amongst those who do subscribe to the oral background approach, there is little consensus as to what its oral roots are, the extent to which orality might be said to persist through textualisation, the relationship between orality and writtenness, and which model (or models) of orality ought to be applied to the biblical text.[50] Not only do these differences often result in scholars talking past each other, but they can all too easily obscure their evolutionist roots, especially amongst those who perpetuate 'oral-mindsets' theories.[51] Paul Evans, for example, picks up on this correctly, noting the inherent danger of exoticizing orality by characterising it as 'other' and separate to literacy and writtenness.[52]

Recent efforts to develop oral and folkloristic informed models have sought to overcome the problematic romanticism of Gunkel and other early form- and tradition-historical scholars, by developing increasingly nuanced models that attempt to conceptualise how orality and literacy can both exist within an oral-literary continuum, and not be incompatible with the historical-critical and literary methodological frames that have dominated the discipline. One of the chief proponents of this approach is Susan Niditch who, to quote Evans further, argues that 'oral characteristics vary with different types of biblical texts that are located at different places or stages on the oral literary continuum.'[53] Similarly, F. W. Dobbs-

[50] 'It is not simply that scholars today do not all agree on what it might mean to identify the oral background of a text. The idea of Orality in biblical studies has shifted over time, alongside views of it in other humanistic disciplines.' Jacqueline Vayntrub, *Beyond Orality: Biblical Poetry on Its Own Terms*, The Ancient Word (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 2.

[51] See Ruth Finnegan, "How Oral Is Oral Literature?," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 37.1 (1974): 52–64, doi:10.1017/S0041977X00094842; Jack Goody, *Literacy in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968); Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, New Accents (London: Routledge, 1988).

[52] Paul S. Evans, "Creating a New 'Great Divide': The Exoticization of Ancient Culture in Some Recent Applications of Orality Studies to the Bible," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 136.1 (2017): 749–64, doi:10.15699/jbl.1364.2017.284912.

[53] See Evans, "Creating a New 'Great Divide'," 764. See also in Susan Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature*, Library of Ancient Israel (London: SPCK, 1997), 78–79.

Allsopp asserts that operating within the Hebrew text is an 'aboriginal spokenness' or 'informing orality' that 'animates' its poetic tradition suggesting for example, that the use of 'I' in poems such as Judges 5 and Exodus 15 'may be a (now written) reflex of a once embodied presence.'[54] More specifically, Dobbs-Allsopp proposes that texts such as Judges 5 and Exodus 15 ought to be considered as inscribed oral performances where textuality is 'not deeply ingrained in the core poetic idioms.'[55] Nevertheless, their continued insistence on the importance of a text's oral-background betrays the fact that many biblical scholars have been slow to embrace the 'social turn', if at all. Even Lee, whose work on Lamentations draws on a socio-rhetorical approach influenced by contemporary folkloristics, ultimately leans on assumptions as to the Hebrew bible's oral background.[56]

Given the fact that folkloristics and biblical studies have shared intellectual roots, one cannot help but note the inherent irony of the fact that, within biblical studies, there has not been more engagement with contemporary folkloristic theory. While in some respects developments in the two disciplines can be characterised as 'parallel but separate', in other respects there has been little development at all.[57] The dynamic might be attributed to a variety of factors. Inasmuch as Gunkel embraced the use of folklore methodologies, his work was nevertheless characterised by a tension brought about by biblicism, wherein he relented from identifying the received form of the Pentateuch as folklore, insisting at certain points that any folklore had in fact been expunged.[58] Other more contemporary scholars such as Alter, Bynum

[54] F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *On Biblical Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 288–89.

[55] Dobbs-Allsopp, *On Biblical Poetry*, 286.

[56] For example, Lee asserts, 'thus, following S. Niditch, it is not necessary to demonstrate whether biblical Lamentations was originally oral or written; it is traditional literature coming from an oral context; it is analysis of the poetry as reflective of that dynamic that might shed greater light on its meanings and impact.' Lee, *Singers of Lamentations*, 49.

[57] See Vayntrub, *Beyond Orality*, 13. Susan Niditch further observes that 'important trends seem to suggest that work in oral-traditional literature and folklore studies currently has little influence on the study of Hebrew Bible in some quarters or that the influence of folklore even if implicit is not fully recognized or appreciated.' Susan Niditch, "Folklore and the Hebrew Bible: Interdisciplinary Engagement and New Directions," *Humanities* 7(1).6 (2018): 9, doi:10.3390/h7010006. See also Lee, *Singers of Lamentations*, 4.

[58] It should be noted that Gunkel was heavily influenced by Herder's romantic and highly problematic genre-centred poetics in which he asserted that biblical poetry had its origins in folklore, the oral medium of the 'uncultivated savages' of primitive antiquity. While it may well have been the case that biblical poetry or at least some of it had oral roots, Herder's wider and unfounded inference is that material of ancient oral provenance is of inferior quality. Note, for example, his words taken from *The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*: 'The tongue strives to express itself, and falls upon strong expressions, because its language is not become weak and facile from a multiplicity of

and Zakovitch similarly argue that the Hebrew Bible contains no folklore, however, their objections are evolutionist in nature and assume a definition of folklore as being material of oral or oral-derived origins.[59]

Dorothy Noyes observes that folklorists 'labour under the stigma of the F-word, constantly having to explain it or to invent in its place new euphemisms.'[60] Inasmuch as biblical scholarship has benefitted

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empty sounds and stale metaphorical expressions. They often speak too, as the Orientals, and as uncultivated savages speak, till at length with the progress of nature and art they learn to express themselves like polished or like fashionable men.' Johann G. Herder, *The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, trans. James Marsh, 2 vols (Burlington, VT: Smith, 1833), 2.6 (cited in Vayntrub, *Beyond Orality*, 1). Despite Gunkel's extensive application of folkloristics to the Hebrew Bible, he remains hesitant to admit folklore is present in the text: 'what has the Bible to do with folktales? Is it not an attack on the prestige of the holy book to seek in it products of the Imaginations? And how can the lofty religion of Israel—to say nothing of the New Testament—contain material filled with what may be creative, yet nevertheless subordinate belief? These questions must be answered first by saying that the Bible hardly contains a folktale anywhere. The elevated and rigorous spirit of biblical religion tolerated the folktale as such at almost no point and this near total eradication from the holy tradition is one of the great acts of biblical religion.' Gunkel, *The Folktale in the Old Testament*, 33. We find similar hesitancy in the work of contemporary scholars engaged in this area. Robert Alter, for example, states, 'I should like to stress is that the immemorial inventions, fabrications, or projections of folk tradition are not in themselves fiction, which depends on the particularizing imagination of the individual writer. The authors of the patriarchal narratives exhibit just such an imagination, transforming archetypal plots into the dramatic interaction of complex, probingly rendered characters. These stories are "historicized" both because they are presented as having a minute causal relation to known historical circumstances and because (as Schneidau argues) they have some of the irregular, "metonymic" quality of real historical concatenation; they are fiction because the national archetypes have been made to assume the distinctive lineaments of individual human lives.' Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, rev. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 48.

[59] David Bynum agrees and in his response to Alter's article "samson without folklore" states, 'I was eager before this to purge folklore from the study of Samson, and to dispel with it also the fog which it exhales upon the historical facts about oral tradition, and upon the rightful power which an accurate knowledge of those facts must exercise over an optimally liberated appreciate criticism of any "folkloristic" text, including certainly the Samson saga in the Old Testament Book of Judges.' David E. Bynum, "Samson as a Biblical *φὴρ ὀρεσκῷς*," in Niditch, *Text and Tradition,* 59. Avigdor Shinan and Yair Zakovitch note that 'in fact we often become aware that the official, written version of a story (i.e., the Bible's version) was meant to dispute views and opinions that were accepted when a story still made its way orally through the world. By fixing stories in writing, biblical writers aimed to establish what they deemed to be the "correct" tradition, the tradition that was worthy of preservation, and to eliminate traditions and viewpoints that they considered unsuitable or impossible to accept.' Avigdor Shinan and Yair Zakovitch, *From Gods to God: How the BibleDebunked, Suppressed, or Changed Ancient Myths and Legends,* trans. Valerie Zakovitch (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 2012), 5. Note also Yassif, 'it bears reemphasis that the Hebrew Bible is not ethnographic-folk material. It contains the only extant evidence from the biblical period of the rich and multi-faceted folk culture that was set down in writing out of religious, historical, national, and artistic motives. The reconstruction of the image of Hebrew folk narrative of the biblical period relies solely upon that complex and multifaceted written literature.' Yassif, *The Hebrew Folktale*, 8–9. Some have gone as far as suggesting the existence of ideological warfare between literary elites and oral tellers, see Werner H. Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul, and Q*, Voices in Performance and Text (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997)

[60] The 'F-word' mentioned here is of course 'Folklore,' and alludes to Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*, where Hester Prynne, a young woman accused of adultery is publicly shamed and forced to wear a scarlet 'A.' The inference here is that the study of folklore is seen by some in the scholarly world as something of a pseudo-

from the insights provided by folkloristics, it is nevertheless true that those who engage the Hebrew Bible using methods such as folkloristics that fall outside of the more typical literary and historical critical paradigm, expose themselves to the risk of having their scholarship dismissed as peripheral because it is not in line with the status quo.[61]

This dynamic is reflective of some of the broader discussions taking place in the biblical studies discipline concerning its tendency to privilege antiquarian interests to the neglect and marginalisation of others, including folkloristics.[62] While this thesis acknowledges the historical impact that folkloristics has had on the biblical studies discipline, it also contends that ongoing evolutionist attitudes regarding orality demonstrate the fact that biblical scholars have not engaged folkloristics seriously enough. The lack of a more wholistic dialogue between biblical studies and folkloristic scholarship has resulted in an imbalance where biblical studies scholars engage with folklore studies only at those points where they intersect with the 'grand theories' their own discipline— such as composition, meaning and genre— to the neglect of other decidedly folkloristic interests.[63] Commenting on the role of folklore and the Hebrew Bible, Yassif observes:

> The primary (and often sole) aim of these studies is biblical inquiry: analysis of the sources and development of the biblical texts; comparison of different versions of tales to facilitate the understanding and interpretation of biblical topics; analysis of the pattern and style of various biblical texts; understanding the social background from which the biblical literature grew; bringing historical criticism to bear on the truth of the events recounted, employing, *inter alia*, archaeological finds.[64]

science. See Dorothy Noyes, *Humble Theory: Folklore's Grasp on Social Life* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2016), 11.

[61] Commenting on Niditch's book *Folklore and the Hebrew Bible*, renowned scholar John Collins stated that it 'can be placed toward the end of the spectrum of scholarship that is characterized by suspicion of theological and normative interests and sees its task as purely descriptive.' John J. Collins, review of *Folklore and the Hebrew Bible*, by Susan Niditch, *The Journal of Religion* 75.2 (1995), 263–64, doi:10.1086/489576.

[62] See David Janzen, *The Liberation of Method: The Ethics of Emancipatory Biblical Interpretation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2021), 1–28. Gale Yee's article reflecting on her becoming the first Asian-American and woman of colour to be elected president of the Society of Biblical Literature is of particular note. See Gale A. Yee, "Thinking Intersectionally: Gender, Race, Class, and the Etceteras of Our Discipline," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 139.1 (2020), 7–26, doi:10.15699/jbl.1391.2020.1b.

[63] The term 'grand theories' is a sociological concept borrowed from C. Wright Mills and Todd Gitlin, *The Sociological Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 25–49.

[64] Yassif, *The Hebrew Folktale*, 8.

By not engaging folkloristics as an equal partner in a critical conversation, biblical scholars have, perhaps unwittingly, straightjacketed texts such as Judges 5 and Exodus 15 within a romantic paradigm that lacks the critical tools, language and conceptual framework to critically re-imagine alternative ways in which texts presented as songs placed in the mouths of literary characters could function—tools that ethnographic studies, such as the Siri epic possess in abundance.

As an alternative to succumbing to oral-background theories that narrowly perceive folkloristics as elucidating the oral background of biblical texts, this thesis proposes instead that to approach orality as a literary trope in which 'characters and speakers perform certain kinds of speech in the written texts'[65] allows us to approach texts like Judges 5 and Exodus 15 outside the inherited evolutionist frame, thus positioning them for the application of contemporary ethnographic approaches that recognise the fact that there is a 'social dynamic' wherein traditions can be understood as serving social ends such as the maintenance of group identity,[66] the status quo[67] and even theology.[68] After all, orality is not a necessary criteria for the application of folkloric methods; tradition can take various forms including dance, dress, digital media, and of course, textually presented song and speech.[69]

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[65] Vayntrub, *Beyond Orality*, 9.

[66] See Gertraud Koch, "Work and Professions," in Bendix and Hasan-Rokem, *A Companion to Folklore,* 157.

[67] The recognition that folklore can be co-opted by the powerful to suppress the marginal led several scholars to explore the role of 'cultural hegemony' and questions of power in folklore. See for example T. J. Jackson Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities," *The American Historical Review* 90.3 (1985): 567–93, doi:10.2307/1860957. This perspective is not dissimilar to that of Marxist analysts who imagine folklore to reflect the power struggle between the elites and the disenfranchised. See footnote 56 for a further discussion of the usefulness of Marxism for folkloristics.

[68] Dorothy Noyes, "The Social Base of Folklore," in Bendix and Hasan-Rokem, *A Companion to Folklore*, 14; Eviatar Shulman, "Canonical Belief Narratives of the Buddha: Folklore and Religion in the Early Buddhist Discourses," *Narrative Culture* 8.2 (2021): 187–217, doi:10.13110/narrcult.8.2.0187.

[69] Some have even suggested that 'folklore is everything'. See Bendix and Hasan-Rokem, "Introduction: Concepts and Phenomena," 2. For more information on contemporary iterations of folklore in the digital space and popular culture, see Trevor J. Blank, *Folk Culture in the Digital Age: The Emergent Dynamics of Human Interaction* (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2012). See also Michael Dylan Foster and Jeffrey A. Tolbert, *The Folkloresque: Reframing Folklore in a Popular Culture World* (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2016).

## 2.4 The Social Turn

Today, as Miller observes: 'when most Old Testament scholars talk about theory in oral tradition they are talking about the oral-formulaic school', such is the vestige of oral formulaicism that biblical scholarship might be described as being 'bound' by an 'Oral Formulaic gibbet.'[70] Oral-formulaicism refers to the theory of oral composition developed, in the first instance, by Parry and Lord and subsequently extended to various oral and oral-derived literatures.[71] Indeed, while very few, if any, biblical studies scholars continue to apply oral-formulaic theory directly, it is evolutionist in its origins and continues to exert a structuralist influence on the discipline, particularly in relation to repeated attempts by scholars, including Miller, to identify and delineate the 'oral characteristics' of biblical texts.[72]

One of the other implications of oral-formulaic theory was the light that it shone on the role of the singer of tales. In the process of collecting Serbo-Croatian epic, Parry and Lord sought to uncover the compositional processes of oral literature by engaging in field work and making empirical observations regarding the role played by singers such as Avdo Međedović as they composed in-performance, epic works that were at times thousands of lines long, as well as their audiences. As Ronald Hendel observes:

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[70] See Miller, *Oral Tradition in Ancient Israel*, 8,12.

[71] See John Miles Foley, *The Theory of Oral Composition: History and Methodology* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988).

[72] See Miller, *Oral Tradition in Ancient Israel*, 12. Of particular note is the work of Kawashima, who attempts to apply oral formulaic theory to Judges 5. Robert S. Kawashima, *Biblical Narrative and the Death of the Rhapsode*, Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004). See also Raymond F. Person Jr, *The Deuteronomic History and the Book of Chronicles: Scribal Works in an Oral World*, Society of Biblical Literature Ancient Israel and Its Literature 6 (Atlanta GA: SBL Press, 2010); Jean-Louis Ska, "A Plea on Behalf of the Biblical Redactors," *Studia Theologica* 59.1 (2005): 4–18; Joachim Schaper, "The Living Word Engraved in Stone: The Interrelationship of the Oral and the Written and the Culture of Memory in the Books of Deuteronomy and Joshua," in *Memory in the Bibleand Antiquity: The Fifth Durham-Tübingen Research Symposium (Durham, September 2004)*, ed. Stephen C. Barton, Loren T. Stuckenbruck and Benjamin G. Wold, Wissenchaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 212 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 9–24. In addition, many others demonstrate reliance on conceptions of an oral-literary divide conceptualised in the work of theorists Walter Ong and Jack Goody. See Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, New Accents (London: Routledge, 1988); Jack Goody, *Literacy in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968). See also for example William M. Schniedewind, *How the BibleBecame a Book: The Textualization of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

> A. B. Lord has demonstrated, on the basis of his fieldwork and analysis of South Slavic oral epic traditions, that the difference between a short narrative and a long narrative corresponds to a difference in inclination of storyteller and audience, not to a historical movement from short to complex.[73]

The recognition that the interaction between a singer/storyteller and their audience can impact the way in which a narrative is told, and ultimately a text's significance, has played an important role in sensitising biblical scholars to issues of performance.

In essence, Parry, and especially Lord, pioneered a new model of traditional text, based on ethnographic insights gained from live empirical field-studies of a Serbo-Croatian epic, a comparative model that alerted scholars to some of the real-world dynamics of oral composition and performance and the fact that these dynamics may well be present in other ancient texts, such as Homer and the Hebrew Bible. At the same time, however, despite its roots in ethnography and empirical observation, Lord's approach was nevertheless evolutionist in nature, for inasmuch as the role of singers and audiences was noted and observed, they were approached by oral literature researchers as objects and to an extent 'primitive'. Ultimately, this resulted in a situation where, despite scholarly awareness of the role played by singers and their audiences, once produced, the oral-formulaic approach analysed texts apart from the social matrices surrounding their audiences and producers. This resulted in 'analytical abstractions' that divorced traditions from those who bear it.

> The basic conceptual operation underlying the perspective with which we are concerned seems to be correlation, the association on some abstract level of a superorganic, collective-representationalized corpus of folklore traditions with a population which is identified as a folk group and participates in it collectively. The folklore is the product through the re-creation of the whole group and its forbears, and an expression of their common character. It is spoken of in terms of traditions, with a tradition conceived of as a superorganic temporal continuum; the folk are 'tradition bearers,' that is, they carry the folklore traditions on through time and space like so much baggage—particular people and generations come and go, but the group identity persists and the tradition lives on in essentially two different realms. There is a high degree of abstraction implicit in this point of view; both the folklore and its connection with its bearers are analytical abstractions, at a far remove from the integration between people and lore on the empirical level.[74]

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[73] Ronald S. Hendel, *The Epic of the Patriarch: The Jacob Cycle and the Narrative Traditions of Canaan and Israel*, Harvard Semitic Monographs 42 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1987), 137.

[74] See Richard Bauman, "Differential Identity and the Social Base of Folklore," in *Toward New Perspectives in Folklore*, ed. Américo Paredes and Richard Bauman (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1972), 33.

By way of example, having collected thousands of lines of text from Avdo Međedović, much of Parry and Lord's work primarily involved the abstract comparative analysis of thousands of formulae for the purpose of generating hypotheses such as whether identifying the presence of a certain percentage of formulae could be used to determine an epic oral origins.[75] Indeed, these and other high level abstractions, played an important role in the rejection of comparativist oral-formulaic theory by American folklorists and their movement towards more functional and socially-oriented analyses.[76]

The initial excitement and flurry of research that accompanied oral-formulaic theory has largely been abandoned by folklorists and biblical studies now finds itself in its bathos. Reflecting on oral-formulaicism Honko stated that: 'if five percent of the intellectual power devoted to pure speculation around fragmentary text corpuses had been directed at empirical studies on oral composition and the textualization of oral epics, we would certainly have more and better models than the South Slavic.'[77] The same could be said of biblical studies, we are in need of better and more empirically-grounded models of text and textually-presented speech, in particular, that are not foreclosed by the unhelpful romantic assumptions that continue to reside in the substructure of the discipline.[78]

This is where, ethnographic studies such as the Siri epic have the potential to play an important and critical role. Unlike the south-Slavic epic model of Parry and Lord, Honko's reception of the Siri epic, its integration of the lead singer Gopala Naika's insights as a co-researcher, alongside first-hand observations of performance and audience, provide an empirically-informed though culturally-distant framework for thinking through the sort of dynamics that could come into play when traditions such as Judges 5 and Exodus 15 are approached as functioning within social matrices where actors compete to

[75] Note for example Culley's study of the Pslams where he concluded that they did not contain enough material to make a sufficient determination as to their oral character. See Robert C. Culley, *Oral Formulaic Language in the Biblical Psalms.* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967).

[76] Richard Bauman, "Towards a Behavioral Theory of Folklore: A Reply to Roger Welsch," *The Journal of American Folklore* 82.324 (1969) 161–70, doi:10.2307/539077; Noyes, "The Social Base of Folklore."

[77] Lauri Honko, "Oral and Semiliterary Epics: A Panel in Mysore," *Folklore Fellows' Network* 10 (1995): 1–6.

[78] The need for more empirically based models of text is a growing discussion. See Raymond F. Person Jr and Robert Rezetko, eds, *Empirical Models Challenging Biblical Criticism*, Ancient Israel and Its Literature 25 (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2016). This publication was in turn inspired by Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Empirical Models for Biblical Criticism* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985).

pursue their own ends,[79] rather than as 'fragmentary text corpuses' in need of redemption by oral-background. [80] Like their oral-formulaic forbears, analyses of Judges 5 and Exodus 15 that limited their scope to the identification of formulae or oral characteristics should rightly be labelled as abstractions.[81]

## 2.5 Judges 5 and Exodus 15 as Literary Works

As mentioned above, Judges 5 and Exodus 15 feature amongst the works in the Hebrew Bible that represent sung performance through written text. Presented in the form of poetry and framed by their surrounding narratives as having been sung, their presence in the Hebrew Bible has raised numerous questions regarding the extent to which the Hebrew Bible and its contents might be classified as epic: the 'master genre of the ancient world'.[82] Moreover, with the discovery of Afro-Asian cuneiform tablets containing lengthy foundation myths such as the Atrahasis epic, the Enuma Elish and the Baal cycle, for many the suggestion that there may also been an ancient Israelite epic was a logical comparative inference. Herder, for example, suggested that 'what Homer was to the Greeks, Moses was to the

[79] Bauman, "Differential Identity and the Social Base of Folklore," 35. Noyes, for example, argues that 'rather than expressing a pre-existent identity among insiders, [folklore] more often constructed one aggressively and sometimes humorously, at social boundaries.' Noyes, "The Social Base of Folklore," 14.

[80] For example, Marxist analysis conceives of folklore as the expression of a culture war between the elites and the 'subaltern' elements within society. See Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony." While some have dismissed such theorising as conspiracy and therefore unhelpful, and others have questioned whether elites really need cultural hegemony in order to exert control, Gramsci took particular interest in the producers of folklore suggesting that the lower social stratum in which folklore was produced included not only rural peasants, but also urban proletariats 'oppressed by the bourgeoise, aided and abetted by intellectuals.' Alan Dundes, "Observations on Folklore: Antonio Gramsci," in *International Folkloristics: Classic contributions by the Founders of Folklore*, ed. Alan Dundes (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 132. Gramsci argued that in order to maintain control over society, elites would consciously co-opt cultural forms such as folklore 'by organizing and even inventing traditions that appealed to the masses but ultimately served the interests of the elite to remain economically, socially and politically superordinate.' Bronner, *Folklore*, 129. What is particularly significant about Gramsci is the fact that besides, like other Marxists, conceptualising folklore as an opiate of the people and a means of keeping the lower classes in a state of subservience, he argued that it was necessary for folklore to be subjected to serious study, and that its elimination could help bring about class consciousness and revolution. See Dundes, "Observations on Folklore," 132–33.

[81] Raymond F. Person Jr, *From Conversation to Oral Tradition: A Simplest Systematics for Oral Traditions* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 4–7.

[82] John Miles Foley, "Introduction," in *A Companion to Ancient Epic*, ed. John Miles Foley, Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World Literature and Culture (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 1. For a thorough review on the study of epic in the Hebrew Bible, see Charles Conroy, "Hebrew Epic: Historical Notes and Critical Reflections," *Biblica* 61.1 (1980): 1–30. See also Susan Niditch, "The Challenge of Israelite Epic," in Foley, *A Companion to Ancient Epic*, 277–88.

Hebrews.'[83] This view, however, has been variously disputed because while Judges 5 and Exodus 15 exhibit a number of comparative similarities to Mesopotamian and Ugaritic epics, it is also true that, if the classic definition of epic— as heroic, lengthy oral narratives — is strictly applied, then neither Judges 5, Exodus 15, nor any text in the Hebrew Bible satisfies the criteria.[84] The texts are not lengthy (i.e. thousands of lines long), neither can their oral origins be satisfactorily proven.

Nonetheless, biblical scholars are all too aware of the limitations of genre classifications.[85] As Miller and others have demonstrated, with adjustment more generic cross-cultural comparisons between the

[83] See Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Vom Geist der ebräischen Poesie: Eine Anleitung für die Liebhaber derselben und der ältesten Geschichte des menschlichen Geistes* (Leipzig: Barth, 1825), 72, 75 (cited in Conroy, "Hebrew Epic," 2); Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis*, trans. Mark E. Biddle, Mercer Library of Biblical Studies (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), 216–18.

[84] Much of the discussion of regarding epic revolves around questions of the extent to which the biblical material fits varying definitions of epic. Watson for example asserts that 'an epic is poetry which is spoken, rather than acted, sung or read silently. It is a long narrative poem, composed orally and is concerned chiefly with heroic deeds of an edifying kind,' Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques*, 2nd ed., Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 26 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), 84. As Bullard observes, scholars of epic in the Hebrew Bible fall into two groups; 'those who refer to whole sections of the Bible as epics,' and those 'who believe that epic poems underlie portions of the Bible.' See Roger A. Bullard, "Looking in the Old Testament for the Epic Genre," *The BibleTranslator* 64.1 (2013): 101, doi:10.1177/0260093513481152; Nahum M. Sarna, "Epic Substratum in the Prose of Job," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 76.1 (1957): 12–25, doi:10.2307/3262127. Many developments in this area came as the result of comparative studies with the ancient Afro-Asia. Mowinckel for example noted that Umberto Cassuto also drew on similarities between Hebrew and Canaanite literature, suggesting that 'although we possess at present no example of Israelite epic poetry, it may be assumed with certainty … that among the Israelites too, this literary category was widely current.' Umberto Cassuto, *The Goddess Anath: Canaanite Epics of the Patriarchal Age: Texts, Hebrew Translation, Commentary and Introduction*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1971). Cross similarly argues that poetic epic was the *Grundlage* for the JE material and, based on the presence of traditional formulae, that Exodus 15 embodies mythological themes. See Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 112. Note also Frank Moore Cross, "Epic Traditions of Early Israel: Epic Narrative and the Reconstructions of Early Israelite Institutions," in *The Poet and the Historian: Essays in Literary and Historical Biblical criticism* ed. Richard Elliott Friedman, Harvard Semitic Studies 26 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 13–40.

[85] Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the debates concerning the attempts to define the literary genre 'apocalypse.' Collins, for example, concludes, 'at least in the case of ancient literature our knowledge of function and setting is often extremely hypothetical and cannot provide a firm basis for generic classification. The only firm basis which can be found is the identification of recurring elements which are explicitly present in the texts.' John J. Collins, *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, Semeia 14 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979), 1–2. This attempt to define genre using the classificatory system was rigorously critiqued by many, including Newsom who suggested that a more Bakhtinian model with more of an emphasis on the social and historical aspects of genre would be a better way forward. Carol A. Newsom, "Spying out the Land: A Report from Genology," in *Seeking out the Wisdom of the Ancients: Essays Offered to Honor Michael V. Fox on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Ronald L. Troxel, Kelvin G. Friebel, and Dennis R. Magary (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2021), 437–50. On Bakhtin in particular, see M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, University of Texas Press Slavic Series 1 (Austin:

Hebrew Bible and epic can be made. For example, drawing on the work of Richard Dorson, Niditch notes that all of his observations concerning epic 'apply well' to the biblical materials:

> so many of the works that might be considered to be epic are 'stirring traditional narrative(s) of perilous adventure, daring, and manhood.' They may be 'sung, chanted, recited, acted out, danced,' but the role of oral composition 'remains open to question in each culture where folk epics have arisen' … heroes manifest human qualities such as bravery or physical might, that they often have divine helpers, and that they may use 'guile' as well as strength to vanquish enemies. Underlying story patterns involve conquests, travels, and valour, but the relationship of these works to history varies, for 'the hero of history attracts splendid legends, and the hero of fiction assumes a realistic and historical dimension, so that they tend to converge over the course of the epic and saga process.'[86]

Even though the assumption of an oral background belies her observations, when the more generic criteria above are set alongside Judges 5 and Exodus 15, similarities do emerge. Both narrate 'stirring narratives of perilous adventure – Judges 5 tells the tales of how ancient Israel led by a female judge, warrior and prophetess defeat the enemy Sisera, and Exodus 15 narrates how led by YHWH, ancient Israel crossed the Sea and experienced the miraculous defeat of the Egyptians by YHWH. While both narratives are framed as having been sung, their designation as song indicates rhythmic performance with Exodus 15:20 framed as involving dancing. Both stories involve heroism, divine help from YHWH, and Judges 5 in particular involves guile on the part of Jael who deceives and kills the commander of the enemy army (Judg 5:24-27).

Notwithstanding the above, our analysis here is not dependant on the extent to which Judges 5 or Exodus 15 can be demonstrated as fulfilling the criteria deemed necessary for comparison with Afro-

University of Texas Press, 1981); M. M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). For discussions on Bakhtin's genre theory and biblical studies, see Roland Boer, ed., *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies*, Society of Biblical Literature Semeia Studies 63 (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2007). More recently, the subject of genre was revisited by Collins, who acknowledged the challenges present in Semeia 14 noting that nevertheless, 'the first stage in the analysis of any genre is to identify it. This stage requires definition, at least of the prototypical core, even if there are also fuzzy fringes. Without such definition, or without clarity about a prototypical core, there can only be confusion as to what it is that we are talking about.' John J. Collins, "The Genre Apocalypse Reconsidered," *Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum* 20.1 (2016): 40, doi:10.1515/zac-2016-0001. In a similar vein it is also worth noting that a similar debate has taken place in relation to wisdom literature. See Will Kynes, "The 'Wisdom Literature' Category: An Obituary," *Journal of Theological Studies* 69.1 (2018): 1–24, doi:10.1093/jts/flx214.

[86] Niditch, "The Challenge of Israelite Epic," 287 citing Richard Dorson, "Introduction," in *Heroic Epic and Saga: An Introduction to the World's Great Folk Epics*, ed. Felix J. Oinas (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1978), 4.

Asian epic or indeed the Siri epic; after all, our purpose here is not that of direct comparison. Rather, as we move toward our discussion of how ethnographic works like the Siri epic can assist us in eliciting new questions of the biblical material, recognition of what has gone before is necessary. Ultimately, the impulse to define literary texts such as Judges 5 and Exodus 15 along the lines of epic or indeed other known oral genres once again falls back on romantic assumptions. As a basis for reading Judges 5 and Exodus 15 alongside ethnographic works like the Siri epic, whose reception can elicit new questions, the argument being made here is to instead approach them as literary works presented in the story world of the text as having been embodied.

## 2.6 Judges 5 and Exodus 15 as Thick Materials

Unlike contemporary folklorists who, through field studies, can gain direct access to singers and their audiences, in the case of ancient texts such as the Hebrew Bible, biblical scholars cannot look to ancient Hebrew singers or spectators for models of text based on the contingent realities of actual performance, because history has rendered them forever inaccessible.[87] While some scholars have addressed this dynamic through the use of hypothetical oral contexts that condition the interpretation of the text, others have shown that imagined orality is irrelevant, and that scholars should instead approach them as purely literary work, this thesis is suggesting another approach; which is to read Judges 5 and Exodus 15 as literary works, alongside Honko's reception of the Siri epic which is an ethnographic model of text rooted in the contingent realities of actual performance. To be clear, this is not a comparative exercise, neither is it an attempt to elucidate the performance context of ancient Israel– this performance context will always be poorly understood. Rather, in recognition of the difficulty inherent in looking beyond the present historical critical and literary paradigms of the discipline, it represents a complementary and intentional effort to draw on the alternative epistemological frame, conceptual vocabulary, and ethnographic perspectives inherent in Honko's reception of the Siri epic to highlight

[87] Miller, *Oral Tradition,* 100.

possible lacunae in our present textual models and uncover new and potentially unexplored dimensions of the biblical texts.

Reflecting on scholarly attitudes to orality in biblical studies, Althea Spencer-Miller, makes the argument that the dominant 'literary orientation' amongst biblical scholars creates 'lacunae in their depictions of orality' that are difficult to access from within a Western epistemological framework.[88] Challenging Walter Ong's colonialist assumption that readers of books are likely to find it difficult 'to conceive of an oral universe of communication or thought except as a variant of a literate universe,' Spencer-Miller makes the autoethnographic argument that not all readers of books hail from western contexts devoid of orality[89], noting that Ong's presuppositions 'exclude' the existence of readers and scholars who, for example, by virtue of their cultural background, have both oral and literary signatures:

> I am a product of only one small island's culture, Jamaica. I also think and act under the influence of the larger Caribbean region and its diverse cultures. As such, Ong's grating assumption confirms my experience that aspects of those cultures are excluded from the presuppositions, history, and deployment of traditional exegetical methods and theories within biblical scholarship. That exclusion requires that as a scholar within the Western epistemological framework I must contain instincts cultivated in the nurturance of my island and regional heritage. Western biblical scholarship, as a cerebral-cognitive universe, constrains the holism of communication events in the Caribbean context, which is oral in its cultural orientation. A Western orientation implicitly requires that scholars adopt a voyeuristic, literary posture in relation to oral cultures. However, voyeurism cannot penetrate to the generative sources driving the complex, throbbing dynamic that is under observation. Neither can it satisfy the oral-literate consciousness. Ong points to this voyeuristic inadequacy when he observes with respect to mastering the Latin language, 'Although it was tied in to a residually oral mentality, it provided no access to the unconscious of the sort that a mother tongue provides.' … Those missing instincts, the inaccessible unconscious, arguably are the lacunae in the fabric of biblical interpretation and in its subset, orality studies.[90]

Moreover, Spencer-Miller suggests that one way of bridging the lacunae present in biblical scholarship's depiction of orality is to include the subjective insights of scholars who come from cultural backgrounds closer to orality. While, as stated above, we are not looking to oral background as an interpretive lens, Spencer-Miller's point is both well-made and informative for our efforts here.

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[88] Spencer-Miller's comments are made largely in dialogue with New Testament scholarship, but her observations are just as relevant for critical analysis of the Hebrew Bible. See Althea Spencer-Miller, "Rethinking Orality for Biblical Studies," in *Postcolonialism and the Hebrew Bible: The Next Step*, ed. Roland Boer, Semeia Studies 70 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 36.

[89] See Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 3.

[90] Spencer-Miller, "Rethinking Orality for Biblical Studies," 37–38.

Auto-ethnography is one of the defining elements of Honko's study of the reception of the Siri epic. Although Gopala Naika, the singer of the epic, was himself illiterate, Honko include him as a co-researcher in his ground-breaking ethnographic project, and elicited and integrated Naika's self-reflections —on singing, textualisation, and a wide variety of related matters— into his model of text. In so doing, Honko demonstrated just how much of a difference ethnographic insider-knowledge provided by singers like Naika can make to our understanding of the dimension in which texts can operate. Furthermore, in his study of the Siri epic, Honko's emphasis on the singer is extended still further through his elucidation of benefits of focussing on thick materials. Honko observed that the study of various categories of folklore such as oral epics, especially amongst those of the historic-geographic school, tended to rely on the comparative study of archived collections of folklore, namely 'thin' materials.[91] This was largely as a result of the historic-geographic impulse to collect and trace the provenance of various traditions from various producers, chart their vectors of influence and reconstruct their origins. This resulted in the production of textual models, such the oral-formulaic model adept at elucidating broader international, phenomenological and trans-cultural phenomena.[92] In so doing, it brought many findings to light, such as Emily Zobel Marshal's observation that the traditional tellings of the West African Anansi stories by slaves in the Caribbean and the Americas adapted to reflect their local circumstances: for

[91] Proponents of the Historic-geographic school argue that provenance and development of articular genre or tale-type could be traced, and its original form reconstructed, through the comparative analysis of its available variants. See Susan Niditch, *A Prelude to Biblical Folklore: Underdogs and Tricksters* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 1–4. Its influence in Hebrew Bible scholarship is particularly evident amongst early Scandinavian scholars.

[92] The historic-geographic school was initially developed by Nordic scholars towards the end of the nineteenth century and is sometimes referred to as the Finnish Method. It assumed that traditions such as those found in Judges 5 and Exodus 15 once existed as an original/*ur* or archetype form that they sought to trace geographically and temporally often in an effort towards reconstruction. See Elo-Hanna Seljamaa, "Remarks on the Historic-Geographic Method and Structuralism in Folklore Studies: The Puzzle of Chain Letters," *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics* 2.1 (2008): 85; Christine Goldberg, "The Historic-Geographic Method: Past and Future," *Journal of Folklore Research* 21.1 (1984): 1–18; Robert A. Georges, "The Pervasiveness in Contemporary Folklore Studies of Assumptions, Concepts, and Constructs Usually Associated with the Historic-Geographic Method," *Journal of Folklore Research* 23.2/3 (1986): 87–103; Lauri Harvilahti, "Finland," in *A Companion to Folklore*, ed. Regina Bendix and Galit Hasan-Rokem, Blackwell Companions to Anthropology (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 397–405.

example, she discovered that the more violent the colonial experience, the more violent the Anansi stories became.[93]

The problem with 'thin' analyses is that not only does their placement within an archive divorce them from their natural setting, but in so doing it also engenders an analytical frame that operates on a predominantly phenomenological level, providing a 'bird's-eye' view of comparative perspective that overlooks and cannot account for the more 'organic' microforms of variation that occur as a tradition is retold within a specific location or by a specific singer. In other words, while the study of traditions sourced from 'thin' archives might be able to provide a rationale for why some Anansi stories took on more violent forms that others, they struggle to reconcile the presence of the more substantial differences than can occur across two or more tellings of a single narrative, framed as having come from (or actually coming from) the same author(s)/ editor(s)/ singer(s). The reception of Judges 5 and Exodus 15 in biblical studies are excellent examples of this very tension. Both songs are staged within larger framing narratives (Judges 4, Exodus 14) that relate events of national significance which the literary characters in the story world of the text then recount through song. The tension lies in the fact that whilst the narratives and the song purport to relate to the same events, they nevertheless contain differences that at certain points are significant (more will be said on this later). Indeed, the more typical evolutionist explanation offered by historical and literary critics is that the prose and narrative accounts are of different origins, and that version may predate and influence the other. On the other hand, the perspective offered by thick archiving in the methodology Honko termed 'tradition ecology' is that the sort of variation posited by biblical studies scholars as problematic, is in fact common and normal in ancient literatures.

[93] See Emily Zobel Marshall: 'as well as glorifying survival strategies, the Anansi tales reflected the prominence of violence in the lives of slaves and Maroons. Anansi is often depicted as brutal and merciless, as evidenced in "Tiger's Death," a classic Anansi tale of bloodshed. Anansi and Monkey plan to kill Tiger, Anansi's sworn enemy and Monkey's godfather. Anansi prepares some fish for their breakfast and Tiger steals it and eats it all. Monkey and Anansi start to challenge Tiger, and Puss gets involved, saying, "Come, make we beat him off to deat."… Puss's easy comment, "Come, make we beat him off to deat." and Tiger's murder at the hands of a gang who bludgeon him to death, cold-blooded and relatively unprovoked, suggests a familiarity with violence and death.' Emily Zobel Marshall, *Anansi's Journey: A Story of Jamaican Cultural Resistence* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2012), loc. 1799.

In calling for the study of 'thick' rather than 'thin' materials, Honko demonstrated the utility of developing complementary models of text, centred on empirical observations of how singers and audiences of living performance traditions have been observed to function within their natural environments. As Pekka Hakamies and Anneli Honko note:

> Observations on oral epics throw new light on the importance of context on the variation of content, the problem of memorisation and oral composition, differences between oral and written compilation, changes in the text caused by singing and dictating, the status of the singer in the power-structure of the tradition community and the wider society, and so forth.[94]

Known amongst Nordic scholars as the 'father' of the 'new folkloristics', Honko, like his forbears, draws on a strongly functionalist perspective. Unlike 'thin' archives, 'thick' corpuses of folklore rely upon live field studies of performance and the 'intensive collect[ion] of the repertoires of one or several informants in one community or region.'[95]

> By producing 'thickness' of text and context through multiple documentation of expressions of folklore in their varying manifestations in performance within a 'biologically' definable tradition bearer, community or environment, it has created a solid field of observation conducive to the understanding of prime 'causes' or sources of variation, i.e. the mental processes of oral textualization and construction of meaning.[96]

An integral element in Honko's approach to 'thick' archiving is the involvement of the Singer as an expert, whom the researcher can consult and interview in order to obtain supplementary insights. This insider knowledge is critical to analysis as it enables the researcher to engage metacritically with textualised works and thereby build a much more organic and comprehensive perspective than would have been possible through the study of static texts or through the observation of textualisation alone.[97] As we shall

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[94] Pekka Hakamies and Anneli Honko, "Five Decades of Theoretical Contributions," trans. Clive Tolley, in Hakamies and Honko, *Theoretical Milestones*, 11.

[95] Honko, "Thick Corpus and Organic Variation," 201.

[96] Honko, "Thick Corpus and Organic Variation," 199.

[97] According to Bronner, Alan 'Dundes defined oral literary criticism as tradition-bearers' comments on their traditions.' Simon J. Bronner, "Metafolklore and Oral Literary Criticism," in *The Meaning of Folklore: The Analytical Essays of Alan Dundes*, ed. Simon J. Bronner (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2007), 77. See also Dundes's comments: 'a past-oriented folklore collector would tend to regard his informants as relatively unimportant carriers of precious vestigial fragments, fragments which might prove useful in the central task of historically reconstructing the past. For the execution of historico-comparative studies, one needed only minimal information concerning the place and date of collection. It is clear that for the kinds of theoretical and methodological questions that nineteenth century folklorists were asking, e.g., "what was the original form of an item of folklore and what were the genetic relationships between various forms or subtypes of that item of

see, such perspective can sensitise outsiders, such as ourselves, to dimensions of text that evolutionist models foreclose.

When discussing Honko's reception of the Siri epic, it is important to recognise that we are also discussing performance, a broad term that in addition to encompassing various sub-genres such as dance and music, also references a broad spectrum of activities including rituals, healing and the performing arts.[98] Similar to Judges 5 and Exodus 15 that are presented as having been sung in the story world of the text, the Siri epic is also sung. While, as Giles and Doan point out, there has been a tendency to conceptualise performance as an aspect of a text's oral background, this however is not necessary, after all in the case of Judges 5, Exodus 15, and Honko's reception of the Siri epic, performance is textualised and can therefore be analysed as a literary trope, and its performance can be approached as taking place within the story world of the text.[99]

In addition to Parry and Lord who theorised that epic singers composed their songs under the pressure of performance, the work of classicist scholar Gregory Nagy has also been particularly influential in biblical studies, with biblical scholars drawing on insights gleaned from discussions on performance contexts in ancient Greece and ancient Afro-Asia. [100] Biblical studies scholars have found further utility in performance critical approaches that draw on theoretical insights provided by contemporary theatre and performance studies.

Hebrew Bible scholars are not completely oblivious to the work of Honko as he is referenced in works by both Niditch and Miller, the two leading voices on folkloristics in biblical studies. Niditch in *Epic*

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folklore?"' Alan Dundes, "Metafolklore and Oral Literary Criticism," *Monist* 50.4 (1966): 506, doi:10.5840/monist196650436.

[98] Richard Schechner, "Performance Studies: The broad spectrum approach" in *The Performance Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Bial and Sara Brady 3rd edn (London: Routledge, 2016)

[99] See for example William Doan and Terry Giles, *Prophets, Performance, and Power: Performance Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*(New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2005), 11. ). Honko refers to this as the shift from a prior 'text is king stage' to a 'performance is king' stage, see Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 44. See also Robert D. Miller II, "The Performance of Oral Tradition in Ancient Israel," in *Contextualizing Israel's Sacred Writings: Ancient Literacy, Orality, and Literary Production*, ed. Brian B. Schmidt, Ancient Israel and Its Literature 22 (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2015), 175–96.

[100] See Gregory Nagy, *Poetry as Performance: Homer and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Shimon Levy, *The Bibleas Theatre* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2002); Terry Giles and William Doan, *Twice Used Songs: Performance Criticism of the Songs of Ancient Israel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009).

*and History in the Hebrew Bible* notes Honko's observations that 'even within single epics, multiple genres and variations in linguistic style and register are possible,' as well as the fact that 'poetry is not a necessary criterion of epic.'[101] Miller demonstrates a wider reading of Honko, bringing various insights from Honko's extensive repertoire of research to bear on various aspects of oral tradition in Israel, as well as a recognition of the need for 'more and better empirical studies on living oral epic traditions' and 'a careful comparison of the results and their cautious application to other epics whose performance contexts will always remain poorly known but may be elucidated with the help of comparisons.'[102] Another scholar who engages with Honko's work is Raymond Person Jr, who amongst other things recognises that Honko's research on living traditions presents a fundamental challenge to assumptions underlying both source and redaction criticism about 'the literary unity of a text produced by a single author.'[103]

At the time of writing, the most comprehensive application of Honko's work to the Hebrew Bible was undertaken by Gareth Wearne, whose attempt to delineate 1 Samuel 23:19–24:22 and 26:1–25 as mental texts is insightful but less than convincing.[104] Honko's writing on folklore spans five decades and multiple volumes, and Wearne consults only one of Honko's shorter articles and does not mention of any of Honko's major theories.[105] Perhaps the most notable absence in his work is its lack of any references to Honko's major theory of 'tradition ecology,' which is perhaps demonstrated in his selection of two texts with striking verbal correspondences: 1 Samuel 23:19–24:22 and 26:1–25, correspondences that most likely serve as indicators of literary dependency, rather than examples of the potential operation of a mental text. Nevertheless, Wearne has done what many biblical scholars have not, which is to recognise the potential of Honko's work to significantly impact our reading of biblical materials. As we shall soon see in our reimagination of Judges 5 and Exodus 15, to this extent Wearne was correct.

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[101] Niditch, "Epic and History in the Hebrew Bible."

[102] See Niditch, "Epic and History in the Hebrew Bible," 92.

[103] Raymond F. Person Jr, "The Problem of 'Literary Unity' from the Perspective of Oral Traditions," in *Empirical Models Challenging Biblical Criticism*, ed. Raymond F. Person Jr and Robert Rezetko, Ancient Israel and Its Literature 25 (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2016), 222–24.

[104] Gareth J. Wearne, "Reading Samuel as Folklore: 1 Samuel 23.19–24.22 and 26.1–25, a Case Study," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 41.3 (2017): 337–54, doi:10.1177/0309089216661167.

[105] The only article Wearne references is Lauri Honko, "Epics along the Silk Roads: Mental Text Performance, and Written Codification," *Oral Tradition* 11.1 (1996): 1–17.

## 2.7 The Critical Imagination and Critically Re-imagining Performance as Research

The importance of bringing 'critical approaches' and 'imaginative work' together in biblical studies was highlighted recently in the edited volume *Psalms and the Use of the Critical Imagination* celebrating the work of Susan Gillingham and, in particular, her work regarding the creative and imaginative afterlife of the psalms and her embrace of the collaborative critical opportunities inherent in reception historical studies.[106] Yet, there is also a broader sense in which the critical imagination can be understood. Premised on the recognition that 'intelligently appreciating and criticizing artworks also involves, at least in central or important cases, responding imaginatively to them', James Grant demonstrates that there is a long and established history of academics, scholars and philosophers including Hume and Kant who have reflected on the often-interconnected relationship between criticism and imagination.[107]

The concept of the critical imagination is central to this thesis, which proposes to use Honko's reception of the Siri epic as a means of critically re-imagining Judges 5 and Exodus 15. Underlying this approach is the argument that the act of critically re-imagining ancient works can be aided by reading thick, ethnographic works like Honko's reception of the Siri epic, alongside the Hebrew Bible and, in particular, texts such as Judges 5 and Exodus 15, that contain represented orality. As we shall see, thick, ethnographic works such as the Siri epic can sensitise biblical scholars to other empirically-based textual possibilities, that lie outside of the immediate historical-critical and literary paradigms. Stated differently, insider-informed ethnographic studies—that are less encumbered by the evolutionism so inherent in the substructure of the biblical studies discipline— can be used as a basis for identifying and exploring other potential dimensions of the biblical text. This is because scholarly ethnographic works, like Honko's reception of the Siri epic, provide an alternative hypothetical position from which the biblical text can be critiqued. This point must not be overlooked, the purpose of this thesis is not to make comparative

[106] Katherine Southwood and Holly Morse, eds, *Psalms and the Use of the Critical Imagination: Essays in Honour of Professor Susan Gillingham*, The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 710 (Sheffield: T&T Clark, 2022); See also Susan Gillingham. "Biblical Studies on Holiday? A Personal View of Reception History," in *Reception History and Biblical Studies*. Edited by Emma England and William John Lyons. (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 17-30

[107] James Grant, *The Critical Imagination*.54

assertions as to how Judges 5 and Exodus 15 were understood, nor is it the intention of this thesis to make assertions as how these texts should be understood, rather, the purpose of this thesis is to utilise the Siri epic to elicit new questions of the biblical text that might otherwise not be asked. By its very nature, this task requires us to look at the biblical text through new lenses, and one way of doing this is by drawing on the ethnographic lenses that can be found in thick ethnographic models of text and accessed through the critical imagination.

Perhaps, the biblical studies approach that most closely resembles what we are intending to do here is that of performance as research—the application of practice-led or practice-based research to the biblical text.[108] Observing that performance itself can function as a 'mode of knowing', this branch of performance criticism asserts that analysing contemporary performances of biblical texts is a valid method of research and a valuable means of exploring the performative contours of biblical texts.[109] On this point, it is worth following Mathews and quoting Rhoads:

> The experience of translating, memorizing, and performing these works has placed me in a fresh medium, an entirely different relationship with these texts than that of a silent reader and even quite distinct from the experience of hearers in an audience ... I enter the world of the text, grasp it as a whole, reveal this world progressively in a temporal sequence, attend to ever detail, and gain an immediate experience of its rhetoric as a performer seeking to have an impact on an audience. I have gotten in touch with the emotive and kinetic dimensions of the text in ways I could not otherwise have been aware.[110]

By way of example, Perry notes the experience of Margret E. Lee, who having studied the sound of the Greek of the Sermon on the Mount, discovered that attempting to actually perform the sermon made her uneasy with her analysis and 'opened new questions and issues she had never considered.'[111]

> My sustained, microscopic analysis of the Sermon's sounds had neglected the Sermon's coherence as a literary whole, and the transitions from one section to the next. Although I felt confident that I understood each of the Sermon's parts, I felt at a loss as I tried to capture the overall mood of the Sermon. Is it placid, angry, frustrated, patient, variable? Are the beatitudes consoling or sarcastic? How should the Lord's Prayer sound in the middle? Is the prohibition of

[108] Mathews, *Prophets as Performers*, 62-63
[109] Robin Nelson ed., *Practice as research* in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies ,Resistances. (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2013) 4-9 cited in Mathews, *Prophets as Performers*, 62.
[110] Rhoads, "performance Criticism—Part I", 120.
[111] Peter S. Perry, *Insights from Performance Criticism* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Pres, 2016), 160.

> anxiety reassuring or testy? Is there any other way to end the Sermon than by shouting? And how does the Sermon's emotional tone modulate from one section to the next?[112]

Stated differently, performance as research suggests that the process of performing biblical texts can provide scholars with knowledge, insights and questions that they might not otherwise have had.

The approach being proposed here is not the same as performance as research, but it does bear similarities. Rather, this approach might best be referred to as re-imagining performance as research. Instead of drawing on contemporary performances of biblical texts as a means of identifying and exploring the contours of biblical performance, this thesis argues that ethnographic performances such as the Siri epic can be used to re-imagine performance in works such as Judges 5 and Exodus 15 that present, in the story world of the text, as having been performed. Our critical re-imagining of these texts thus functions as a type of literary performance that allows us to read the biblical text against other alternative performative dynamics of biblical text not from the perspective of evolutionist oral background theories, or contemporary models of performance derived from theatre studies, but through the under-explored lens of ethnographic performance, which falls outside of the western lens that can all too easily dominate our conceptions of what a performance is, and how it manifests textually.[113]

## 2.8 Chapter Summary

In this chapter we outlined the ability of folkloristics to interrogate deeper lying power structures and explored its application by biblical scholars to the Hebrew Bible. It was argued that, rather than adhering to oral-formulaicism and the underlying evolutionism inherent in oral background approaches, this thesis will approach Judges 5 and Exodus 15 as literary tropes containing textually presented songs. In so doing,

[112] Perry, *Insights from Performance Criticism*, 160. Perry goes on to assert 'In short, it is worth the time of every student and scholar of the Bible to perform. How can we ask the right questions of a text unless we get inside the primary way in which it is communicated? How can we reunite the text that has been broken down into its smallest parts? The process of preparing, internalizing, and performing a text allows us inside the communication of these traditions and unites the insights of many disciplines'.

[113] On the danger of underrepresentation see Nathan Esala, "Ideology and Bible Translation: Can Biblical Performance Criticism Help?," The Bible Translator 66, no. 3 (2015): 216–29, at 217.

the case was made for critically re-imagining texts as form of research that can sensitise scholars to aspects of the biblical text that might not otherwise be considered.

CHAPTER 3

# 3. AWAKENING THE CRITICAL IMAGINATION:

# TRADITION ECOLOGY, MENTAL TEXTS AND SIRI EPIC PERFORMANCE

*I think, changes are very few, should not happen.*
*Now the words which are said this year should come next year, too.*
*I mean, very few differences will be there and even these without purpose.*
– **Gopala Naika**[1]

*You must neither add anything to what I command you nor take away anything from it,*
*but keep the commandments of the Lord your God with which I am charging you.*
– **Deuteronomy 4:2**

## 3.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter elucidates Honko's theories of tradition ecology and mental texts and in so doing, delineates the methodological framework that will later inform our analysis of Judges 5 and Exodus 15. In addition, it represents an effort to awaken the critical imagination by outlining those extended insights provided by Honko and Naika that extend beyond the verbal level and can be used to respond imaginatively to Judges 5 and Exodus 15.

## 3.2 Tradition Ecology

Biblical scholarship is only just starting to wake up to the importance and implications of Honko's work.[2] To date, a limited number of biblical scholars have engaged with his work, and even fewer have engaged in any substantial way. As mentioned previously, of the few biblical scholars who do engage with Honko, none so far have engaged with his theory of tradition ecology as a means of analysing variations such as those that can be seen in Judges 4 and 5 and Exodus 14 and 15.[3] Susan Niditch, for example, in her article

[1] Lauri Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, Folklore Fellows Communications 264 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1998), 540.

[2] Person and Rezetko, *Empirical Models Challenging Biblical Criticism*, 223–24.

[3] Niditch for example cites Honko but only in a cursory way, see Susan Niditch, "Epic and History in the Hebrew Bible: Definitions, 'Ethnic Genres,' and the Challenges of Cultural Identity in the Biblical Book of Judges," in *Epic and History*, ed. David Konstan and Kurt A. Raaflaub, The Ancient World: Comparative Histories (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 92. Miller also engages with Honko, see Miller, "The Performance of Oral Tradition in Ancient

'Epic and History in the Hebrew Bible,' only makes mention of Honko's assertion that poetry is not a necessary criteria of epic, and fails to go on to apply any of his insights in her later comparisons of Judges 4 and 5.[4] Miller references Honko a number of times but when he does so, his focus is on what Honko identified as a 'pool of traditions' and 'gobbets,' which he suggests are equivalent to what Honko calls 'multiforms.'[5] Even the most systematic attempt to apply Honko's tradition ecology to the Hebrew Bible by Gareth Wearne fails to engage with his thinking in a substantial way, suggesting for example that 1 Samuel 23:19–24:22 and 1 Samuel 26:1–25 are 'mental texts' when they are clearly literarily dependant, and also fails to apply anything from Honko's well-developed framework of variance analysis, which he named tradition ecology, to assess the differences between the two.[6]

Tradition ecology is Honko's functionalist theory of how traditions (such as sung epic) adapt to their environments. From a tradition-ecological perspective, Honko draws on some of the tenets of the historic-geographic school posited that when a tradition, such as the Siri epic—or in our case, the victory of Deborah and Barak in Judges 5 or the sea crossing in Exodus 15—enters new environments, it can undergo four types of adaptation, as tradition bearers shape it according to its new environment and the sensitivities of their audience.[7] In the case of the Siri epic which is led by Gopala Naika, and in the case of the story world of Judges 5 and Exodus 15, the tradition bearers are the singers who perform the narratives. Tradition ecology is a systems-thinking approach which posits that traditions (or in our case, songs) operate within broader social and cultural systems, as well as within the consciousness of the individuals and communities receiving and passing them on. It embraces the fact that both stability and change are an integral part of ethnographic literature and create a framework for exploring how and why some elements of tradition change while others remain the same. The four types of change identified by

Israel." However, the most comprehensive engagement with Honko is that of Gareth J. Wearne, "Reading Samuel as Folklore: 1 Samuel 23.19–24.22 and 26.1–25, a Case Study," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 41.3 (2017): 337–54, doi:10.1177/0309089216661167.

[4] Niditch, "Epic and History in the Hebrew Bible," 92.

[5] See Miller, "The Performance of Oral Tradition in Ancient Israel," 37, 57.

[6] Wearne, "Reading Samuel as Folklore."

[7] It's worth noting here that the underlying logic of this approach is not too dissimilar to the more general argument of Gunkel that narratives adapt according to their environment.

Honko are milieu-morphological adaptation, tradition-morphological adaptation, functional adaptation, and tradition-ecological adaptation. These four elements form the analytical frame essential to our critical reimagining of Judges 5 and Exodus 15, therefore each will be discussed in turn.

### 3.2.1 Milieu-morphological adaptation

Milieu-morphological adaptation refers to the fact that when traditions are introduced into a new environment, they often attach themselves to natural features within the landscape of the host tradition community. This first type of milieu-morphological adaptation, known as familiarisation, is especially true of traditions of foreign origin that may contain elements unfamiliar to the host community. An example of familiarisation are those situations in a telling where the names of foreign fruits, animals or plants, might be replaced by the names of fruits, animals and plants known to the host community.[8] Glosses, such as those updating place names, could potentially fall into this category. Another iteration of milieu-morphological adaptation is *localisation*, where a tradition might be linked to visible, known places within the natural local milieu.[9] Referred to by Eskerod as 'milieu dominants', these are often places or features in the natural environment that stand out due to an unusual feature, such as a large mountain, a strange rock formation or an odd-shaped tree. An example of a potential milieu dominant from one of our focal texts might include the palm of Deborah (Judg 4:4); this and other examples will be discussed more later. Indeed, Honko notes numerous examples of odd-shaped rocks and spruces in birch forests that have stories attached to them.[10]

[8] See Emily Zobel Marshall, *Anansi's Journey: A Story of Jamaican Cultural Resistence* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2012), loc. 827

[9] Lauri Honko, "Four Forms of Adaptation of Tradition," in *Theoretical Milestones: Selected Writings of Lauri Honko*, ed. Pekka Hakamies and Anneli Honko, Folklore Fellows Communications 304 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 2013), 174.

[10] Honko suggests that the milieu-morphological connection of a tradition to a place is not coincidental but is likely to be the result of one of four factors. In addition to milieu-dominance, he suggests that the following also play an important role: exploitation of the natural milieu, the local historical frame of events, and place names. See Honko, "Four Forms of Adaptation of Tradition," 175.

### 3.2.2 Tradition-morphological adaptation

Tradition-morphological or interior adaptation refers to the adaptation of a tradition to the cultural and socioeconomic structures, roles, values and norm systems of the host tradition. Firstly, incoming traditions may be linked to 'supranormal or historical persons that are dominant in the current tradition of the group or area', otherwise known as tradition dominants. Examples of tradition dominants from our focal texts might include well known characters such as Moses or Deborah. More will be said about these examples later. Secondly, another type of tradition-morphological variation that can occur is censorship, wherein elements of a tradition that are seen as unacceptable or incompatible are replaced or supplemented by ones that are. Suggestions of censorship can be seen in the arguments of numerous scholars that the Hebrew Bible contains no folklore, the suggestion being that any elements of folklore in the Hebrew Bible were intentionally redacted.[11] The final element of tradition-morphological adaptation delineated by Honko was genre-transformation, a process whereby 'a tradition element is absorbed into a specific genre and modified, adapted to the communication typical for the genre.'[12]

### 3.2.3 Functional Adaptation

Functional adaptation refers to the process whereby tradition bearers (singers) adapt the tradition to the performance situation or moment. Such changes are momentary and represent something akin to a 'final polishing in the adaptation process' and is influenced by factors such as 'the narrator's personality, the composition of the audience, current spheres of interest within the tradition community, events in the immediate past' as well as 'hopes and dreams for the future.'[13] An excellent example of functional adaptation has already been given above with respect to the differences between the version of the Siri

[11] Robert Alter, "Samson Without Folklore," in *Text and Tradition: The Hebrew Bibleand Folklore*, ed. Susan Niditch, Semeia Studies 20 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990), 47–56; Avigdor Shinan and Yair Zakovitch, *From Gods to God: How the BibleDebunked, Suppressed, or Changed Ancient Myths and Legends,* trans. Valerie Zakovitch (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 2012); Eli Yassif, *The Hebrew Folktale: History, Genre, Meaning*, trans. Jacqueline S. Teitelbaum, Folklore Studies in Translation (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999).

[12] Honko, "Four Forms of Adaptation of Tradition," 177–78. Hermann Gunkel, *The Folktale in the Old Testament* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015). This article was first published in *Adaptation, Change, and Decline in Oral Literature,* edited by Lauri Honko and Vilmos Voigt and published by the Finnish Literature Society (Studia Fennica 26), Helsinki, in 1981.

[13] Honko, "Four Forms of Adaptation of Tradition," 181–82.

epic that was dictated, *kate,* and the version that was sung, *sandi*.[14] While both texts were captured from the same tradition bearer, they were of different genres and were collected under different circumstances.

The Siri epic text captured by Sudha and Gowda was dictated in Naika's house, through a lengthy and labour-intensive process lasting many months, in which the tradition bearer would say 4–5 words, wait until they had been written down and then continue.[15] In contrast, the text captured by Lauri Honko and his team was sung in a secluded palm grove, over the course of seven days, and was collected with the benefit of recording equipment.[16] The basic plot between the two tellings was consistent, but the sung version contained a larger number of episodes. The dictated version of the Siri epic was shorter, nearly half as long, and its poetry was far less elaborate, consisting of shorter and more regular lines.[17] This type of adaptation is what Honko refers to as functional or situational adaptation and provides a fascinating framework for reimagining the issues of stability and change across texts, such as Judges 5 and Exodus 15 that also exist in other genres. While the above example cited in the Siri epic highlights the pragmatic implications of performance settings, it is also the case that through functional adaptation, tradition bearers can imbue their telling with relevancy, giving it 'a news value and a topical message.'[18]

[14] See discussion on textualisation above.

[15] Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 257.

[16] The following excerpt provides insight into the performance setting: 'the first day was unexceptional insofar that we arrived in Ujire in the afternoon and settled ourselves in Deevappa Gowda's house, where he and his wife helped us to arrange a "studio" in their palm garden ready with two Sony Walkman Professional audio recorders and making notes on the content of singing. Lauri Honko stood behind the video camera sideways to the singer a few meters away. By taking the singing on three tapes simultaneously we eliminated the gaps caused by cassette changes. We did not want to interrupt the singer: he would have to decide for himself when it was time to make a pause. Most of the time there were thus only four people present, all concentrating on the production and documentation of the singing. The occasional presence of Deevappa Gowda, his wife or son did not last long and was mostly attached to the fixing of possible tea breaks and serving of refreshments. The arrangement was ideal from the point of view of concentration. The time resource was unlimited and under the control of the singer.' Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 270–71.

[17] Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 82.

[18] Honko, "Four Forms of Adaptation of Tradition," 181–82.

### 3.2.4 Eco-typification

Eco-typification refers to the fact that traditions can adapt in ways that reflect specific geographic areas or social groups. Honko refers to 'climates of tradition[s]' where traditions materialise and are experienced according to how they 'coalesce with the physical environment and people's lifestyles.'[19] Stated differently, ecotypification refers to the natural adaptation of a tradition to the social, economic and cultural systems within which the tradition bearers and their communities operate; in this way, it not only reflects factors such as the physical environment in which it is being performed, but also things such as the behaviours and cultural identity of individuals or cultural units.[20] As will be more fully discussed later, one potential example of this can be found in Exodus 15, in the Sinai versus Horeb debate, where some scholars view references to Sinai as a reflection of Northern kingdom traditions and references to Horeb as a reflection of a Judahite tradition.

However, it should be pointed out that of the four elements of tradition-ecological adaptation, eco-typification is the most tenuous. In spite of the many attempts made by folklorists to develop methodologies to identify ecological adaptation, including elucidating concepts such as 'ecotypes,' in practice it has not been straightforward to identify which elements of tradition or variation within in a local culture are specific to a particular group. Roger Abrahams, for example embraced ecotypes as an analytical tool in his work *Deep Down in the Jungle*, where he identified linguistic features that he believed were communicative phenomena unique to the Black community in Camingerly, Philadelphia.[21] These features included the narrator's tendency to identify themself with the hero of the story.[22] It is important to note that his findings were challenged due to the fact that the materials used by Abraham to identify the ecotypical features of the Black community in Camingerly are in fact generalisations for the Black community in the United States as a whole.[23] Despite its problems, scholars such as Hasan-Rokem

[19] Honko, "Four Forms of Adaptation of Tradition," 183.

[20] Lauri Honko, "Thick Corpus and Organic Variation: An Introduction," in Hakamies and Honko, *Theoretical Milestones*, 17–18.

[21] See Roger D. Abrahams, *Deep Down in the Jungle: Black American Folklore from the Streets of Philadelphia* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), doi:10.4324/9780203793657.

[22] Honko, "Four Forms of Adaptation of Tradition," 185.

[23] Honko, "Four Forms of Adaptation of Tradition," 186.

highlight the ongoing analytical usefulness of this concept for exploring the 'dialectics of stability and change' and for that reason we will nevertheless continue to utilise it, albeit with a certain amount of caution.[24]

## 3.3 Mental Texts: A Paradigm Shift

Irrespective of the nature of their composition (i.e. literary, semi-literary or oral), traditions only make themselves available for scholarly analyses once they have been textualised. In their attempts to theorise composition-in-performance, Parry and Lord postulated that traditional singers recomposed their epics by drawing on a 'pool of tradition' which they defined as:

> a store of thematic, poetic, performatory and other traditional models, elements and rules shared by different singers. These integers seemingly survive in free, almost chaotic coexistence as evidenced by the endless combinations in which they appear in the individual tellings and performance situations.[25]

Key to their formulation of this pool of tradition was the insight that the pool existed 'in the mind' of the tradition bearer.[26] Honko's formulation of mental texts is not too dissimilar. He defines the mental text as 'a kind of "pre-narrative," a pre-textual frame, that is, an organized collection of relevant conscious and unconscious material present in the singer's mind. … This material consists of (1) textual elements and (2) generic rules for reproduction.'[27] In spite of the availability of various cognitive and psychological models, Honko developed his model intuitively, rather than grounding it within prevailing theories of consciousness, and for this reason his conception of mental texts has not been without critique.[28] Nevertheless, despite its limitations, much of Honko's theorising as to how oral traditions are recalled do

[24] Galit Hasan-Rokem, "Ecotypes: Theory of the Lived and Narrated Experience," *Narrative Culture* 3.1 (2016): 113, doi:10.13110/narrcult.3.1.0110. For an extensive survey of the ecotype, see David M. Hopkin, "The Ecotype or a Modest Proposal to Reconnect Cultural and Social History," ed. Melissa Calaresu, Filippo de Vivo and Joan-Pau Rubiés, *Exploring Cultural History: Essays in Honour of Peter Burke* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 31–55. Also see David M. Hopkin, *Voices of the People in Nineteenth-Century France*, Cambridge Social and Cultural Histories 18 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 166–72.

[25] Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 92.

[26] Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 92.

[27] Honko, "Epics Along the Silk Roads."

[28] Pekka Hakamies, "Innovations in Epic Studies by Lauri Honko," *Approaching Religion* 4.1 (2014): 14.

appear to align with more contemporary theories of cognition.[29] Nevertheless, as stated earlier, it is important to note that a singer's mental text only becomes accessible to analysis through a literary representation of performance.

It would be easy to mistake the concept of a mental text as simply being a synonym for tradition, however, it must be pointed out that this is not the case. Not only is there variation in terms of the manifestation of that mental text, but it is also the case that no two singers possess the same mental text, even in cases where two or more tellers are performing the same story with similarities at the levels of text, context and structure (texture). As such, the major aspect of Honko's conception of the mental text is its ability to account for the variance that characterises folklore. It embraces the fact that in traditional performance no telling is performed exactly the same way twice.[30] From this perspective, it is possible to suggest that in Hebrew Bible scholarship, perhaps too much has been made of the fact that there are numerous instances, such as with Judges 5 and Exodus 15, where the Hebrew Bible contains more than one version of the same narrative telling, and where those tellings display variances. If variance is, as numerous scholars suggest, a characteristic of traditional literature, perhaps it ought to be embraced as a normative characteristic of the Hebrew Bible.[31] This dynamic is evident in the two texts of the Siri epic archived by Honko, where, as noted above, despite various differences such as length, number of episodes

[29] Here the words of Pyysiäinen are particularly informative, 'I agree that a folklore scholar or a scholar of religion, should be primarily interested in his or her traditional materials and not in cognitive processes per se; yet cognitive theorising can help explain the nature of these materials only if the scholar has such knowledge of these theories that they can be employed as explanatory tools, not just as terms and labels borrowed from an alien context.' Ilkka Pyysiäinen, *Magic, Miracles, and Religion: A Scientist's Perspective* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2004), 155–56.

[30] It should however be noted that Honko's application of the concept of a mental text to Elias Lönnrot's literary composition of the Kalevala has been criticised, given that it does not explain or account for Lönnrot's undoubted use of written sources. See Hakamies, "Innovations in Epic Studies by Lauri Honko," 14.

[31] What Bernard Cerquiglini claimed of medieval literature might also be said of biblical literature: 'medieval literature does not produce variants: it is variance.' Bernard Cerquiglini, *In Praise of the Variant: A Critical History of Philology*, trans. Betsy Wing (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 78. Indeed the most salient work on this is that of Paul Zumthor In his study of medieval manuscript Paul Zumthor developed the concept of Mouvance to account for the large amounts textual variation that saw in the manuscripts, variability that at times included the rewriting and even the removal of sections of writing. Paul Zumthor, *Toward a Medieval Poetics,* trans. Philip Bennet (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991). Originally published in Paul Zumthor *Essai de poétique médiévale*, Collection Poétique (Paris: Seuil, 1972).

and genre, they were noted as essentially following the same plot line.[32] As will be discussed later here we find another aspect wherein Judges 5 and Exodus 15 can be critically reimagined: rather than approaching them and their prose narratives as textual variants, they could, like the Siri epic, be different manifestations of the same story, performed based through the use of mental texts.

To conceptualise how mental texts work, Honko argues that we ought to 'assume that memory works by mental images and units of meaning rather than by verbal expressions.'[33] These mental images cannot be exhausted because when the tradition bearer draws on it for expression, 'the force of an image may be pressed into a particular function for a moment, but when the actual expression is over and the aim has been achieved, the image returns almost intact to its original and polyvalent form of existence in the human consciousness.'[34] This perspective ties in very much with the view that traditional texts are episodic in nature; likewise, a mental text can be conceived of as a sequencing of traditional images that are pressed into words under the pressure of performance.[35]

Helping us conceptualise how mental texts come into being, Honko argues that the empirical evidence supports the idea that one of the factors dominating the 'conscious' part of the composition of traditional tellings is the 'storyline.' The storyline is the 'backbone of the mental text' and can be defined as the 'plot units necessary for the progress of the story to be told,' and 'the number and order of these units is important but not necessarily stable: certain plot units may be said to be more necessary than others, consisting of a kind of *sine qua non*-units … whereas some are optional and function as means of emphasis and embellishment.'[36] Stated differently, through his fieldwork and conversations with Naika, Honko establishes that singers are aware of their storylines, and that their storylines are subject to

[32] Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 105.

[33] Honko, "Epics Along the Silk Roads," 5. Wearne, who applies the concept of 'mental image' to his analysis of 1 Samuel 23:19–24:22 and 26:1–25 argues that the term is 'problematic' suggesting that 'it is not certain that performers perceive them in the form of visual representation' and that the term 'mental' in fact 'does little to help us understand their function,' as such he proposes that they ought to be called 'constituents' instead. Wearne however provides no evidential basis for these assertions. See Wearne, "Reading Samuel as Folklore," 340–42.

[34] Honko, "Epics Along the Silk Roads," 5.

[35] Honko, "Epics Along the Silk Roads," 5.

[36] Honko, "Epics Along the Silk Roads," 6.

'conscious editing throughout the[ir] performance career.' While much of the storyline remains stable for long periods of time, the singer 'is aware of most major changes he has made to storyline and may vividly discuss the reasons for them.'[37]

Perhaps the most significant element of Honko's theory for the purpose of analysing variation in Judges 4 and 5 is the performance strategy. As Honko notes, suggestions of a storyline or plot 'should not mislead us into thinking that the singer has little else to do than guard plot,' and prior to each performance a tradition bearer has to decide 'how to perform,' and in order to do so they must develop a performance strategy.[38] The decisions on how to perform are in turn determined by the generic rules and performance context. Elucidating this dynamic further, he asserts:

> The key word here is adaptation. Large epics can never be performed in their entirety. Performers and audiences have their preferences … The singer must also select the mode of performance, the external apparatus and the physical means of performance. He must define the limitations and contextual requirements that the performance situation sets on his singing of the epic. For instance, a working or ritual context normally implies extensive collateral activities which cannot be ignored by the singer. He must select a time-frame and decide when, how much and what parts of the epic can be rendered. Such decisions may have to be readjusted in the light of events unfolding in the ritual process, audience reaction and other intervening incidents … In other words, the singer's performance strategy must be open and flexible to accommodate real life.[39]

Honko identifies variation as part and parcel of traditional tellings; he also notes that it is often strategic and purposeful. As will be demonstrated later, by identifying and analysing variation in texts, such as Judges 5 and Exodus 15, we can begin to develop hypotheses regarding what the strategy and purpose of a singer may have been.

Having conducted a detailed comparison of two versions of the Siri epic, a dictated version and a sung version, Honko discovered that the 'factor clearly most responsible for the textual differences between the two versions' was the handling of what he came to identify as 'multiforms.'[40] Epic breadth is

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[37] For example, when Naika was asked about the extent to which matters concerning 'mental disorder, family conflict [and] childlessness' affected his epic plot, he asserted that such issues were secondary and that his role in composition was to 'keep clear the "king's road" (*raajakida saadi*) or the "main royal road" (*minju raja saadi*), i.e. the progress of the epic story.' Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 137–39.

[38] Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 134.

[39] Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 139–40.

[40] Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 86. See also Zumthor on 'Mouvance'.

created through the extension of multiforms, and Honko noticed that the sung version of the Siri epic was constituted by far more intricate and elaborate multiforms, which the singer appeared to have struggled to replicate when dictating.[41] Contrary to Lord, it was the sung epic that was demonstrated to have 'the fundamental artistic supremacy.'[42]

> Multiforms are perhaps the most important tool in the singer's craft: they build on the fact that basic situations recur and that a particular narrative feature or event is best expressed through poetic convention. The repeatability of situations and the conformity of expressions do not, however exclude, variability. On the contrary, manifestations of a multiform are rarely completely identical. It is variation and nuance which lend multiforms semantic exactitude and poetic importance.[43]

While the concept of multiformity is not common within biblical studies, it is used widely amongst folklorists, often in a descriptive sense.[44] Honko defines multiforms as 'repeatable and artistic expressions of variable length which are constitutive for narration and function as generic markers.'[45] He also argues for a more analytical understanding of multiforms where they need to evidence linguistic textural connections. This is because definitions of multiform that do not function at the level of texture lend themselves toward the analysis of the more abstract phenomenological level of variation rather than the more nuanced, organic variation that takes place within specific tradition systems.[46] Since then, scholarly

[41] Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 257–60.

[42] Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 88.

[43] Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 100.

[44] For example, Niditch cites Lord and Bynum when defining multiformity as 'the repetition of the same essential pattern of content in one narrative.' Susan Niditch, *A Prelude to Biblical Folklore: Underdogs and Tricksters* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 77. Miller states that 'in all cases the traditional "gobbets" as I would call them, are intentionally crafted *aides memoires* that are constitutive for narration and function as generic markers. In general, they include story lines (or story patterns, or structural pathways for the action, characters, etc.), textual elements such as images of situations (like scenes, which the basic units of Icelandic saga composition), and some traditional phraseology (which may or may not be formulaic).' Miller, "The Performance of Oral Tradition in Ancient Israel," 37.

[45] See Honko, 'multiforms must be recognised by some linguistic feature, e.g. keywords which tend to appear in all variants and which probably have a strategic role in the recall and production of a particular multiform in epic discourse.' Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 101.

[46] Honko writes: 'we need the term on the level of texture, so much so that the recognition of a multiform is dependent on the presence of certain keywords … Its comparative analysis should take place within a shared tradition-ecological system; in a sense, it exists on the level of emic categories and should, at least ideally, be recognised by the singer(s).' Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 102.

understanding has advanced to view them as not only useful for the purpose of composition, but as socially transmissible, and existing in a variety of forms.[47]

One of the ongoing conversations within folklore studies concerns the matter of how to go about identifying the various content units present within the telling. Whereas early critical approaches such as the historic-geographic approach were interested in universal categories of comparison, folklorists increasingly question the value of etic categories and units:

> The problem … of defining folklore boils down to the task of defining exhaustively all the forms of folklore. Once this has been accomplished, it will be possible to give an enumerative definition of folklore. However, thus far in the illustrious history of the discipline, not so much as one genre has been completely defined.[48]

Not only is the lack of an enumerative definition of folklore categories problematic, but there is also an issue that etic categories risked imposing modern categories on traditional texts. Instead, scholars such as Dan Ben-Amos argue that there is a need to identify the ethnic/emic categories of traditional ethnographic productions, namely, those analytical categories that can be shown to have come from within the tradition itself.[49]

The advantage of developing thick materials is the fact that the process affords access to the singers themselves, thus allowing the researcher to identify emic units of content by listening to the singer and more importantly through dialogue and interview. Honko identified three types of emic categories: those which the singer recognises themselves; those that the singer would probably recognise if pointed out; and those that the singer would not recognise under any circumstances.[50] Of course, in the case of Judges 5 and Exodus 15 we are not in a position to interview the singers who exist only in the story world of the literary text, however, what was interesting about Honko's experience with Naika was that Naika

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[47] On the theoretical development of the multiform, note in particular Anna-Leena Siikala, *Interpreting Oral Narrative*, Folklore Fellows Communications 245 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1990); Frog, "Linguistic Multiforms: Advancing Oral-Formulaic Theory," *Folklore Fellows' Network* 48 (2016): 6–11.

[48] See Alan Dundes, *Interpreting Folklore* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1980), 252.

[49] Dan Ben-Amos, "Analytical Categories and Ethnic Genres," in *Folklore Genres*, ed. Dan Ben-Amos, Publications of the American Folklore Society, Bibliographical and Special Series 26 (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981), 215–42.

[50] See Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 126–31.

often corroborated Honko's own hypotheses as to what the underlying constituent emic unit might be.[51] Multiforms are an example of an emic unit, and while in the case of Judges 5 and Exodus 15, given that the singer in the story world of the text are inaccessible, we will draw on Honko's criteria in order to help us identify them.

Although the value of etic analytic categories for folkloric analysis has been variously challenged, they remain essential for comparative analysis—especially in instances where we no longer have access to the tradition bearers, as is the case in Judges 5 and Exodus 15. As noted above, even in the case of emic categories which can be discussed with tradition bearers, the tradition bearers themselves may not be conscious of all of the tools and units of composition at their disposal, as the logic behind the segmentation of the tellings and the identification of its content units is a negotiation.[52] With Judges 5 and Exodus 15 and the assertion that traditional tellings function through the summoning of mental images, part of our etic analysis will involve studying them as literary representations of mental texts, segmenting them into episodes and demarcating each image that has been pressed into words. In this sense, an episode is similar to a multiform, however, the difference between the two lies in their levels of operation. A multiform is identified as such through its texture and repetition, whereas an episode relies on neither and may be unique.[53]

At the same time, however, it is also true that not all aspects of performances fit within episodes demarcated by image boundaries. Performances evidence additional non-narrative features such as 'time markers,' 'spatial setting,' 'refrains,' so the application of episodic structuring should only be applied to narrative portions.[54] While some of these features are not emic in nature, and although much of Honko's theory of organic variation is premised on the need to develop more native means of analysing traditional

[51] Honko observed the following: 'the obvious difficulty in eliciting emic terms is that the interviewer has to use some words for the story and the compositional units within it. They are often picked up by the singer, as if corroborating the harmony between the question and the emerging answer.' Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 130–31.

[52] See Honko: 'the singer of an oral epic does not confirm the problems of textual presentation in the same manner as the scholar who noted down his epic performance. The scholar may have to draw lines of demarcation which would be meaningless to the singer.' Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 117–18.

[53] Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 118.

[54] Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 118.

literature, etic categories 'free of tradition ecological limitations' still function as essential critical apparatus. This is especially the case in tellings such as Judges 4–5 and Exodus 14–15, where the apparent differences include broader comparative categories such as genre (or register). What is more, as Dell Hymes highlights, the use of etic cross-cultural categories does not preclude the possibility of ethnopoetic sensitivity, especially in the sense that etic approaches harbour the potential to reveal 'implicit ethnopoetic rules.'[55]

## 3.4 Gopala Naika: Our Insider

Gopala Naika is an unlettered agriculturalist from Machar, a village in Tuḷunāḍu, south India. Known for its rich oral culture, Tuḷunāḍu has become a centre for the study of oral tradition in south India and has, over the centuries, received various folklorists and anthropologists seeking to document its traditions.[56] Naika is also an expert and locally renowned epic singer and leader of the Siris, a possession cult with roots in Hinduism. Embodiment, the act whereby a performer is inhabited by deity in the form of a character from the epic is a common feature of ritual epic performance in Tuḷunāḍu, and while the role of the Brahmin caste system in Hindu society is being increasingly challenged, embodiment is an activity that tends to be limited to the *dalits*, often referred to as the untouchable caste.[57] To date, the Siri epic

[55] 'The demonstration of such patterning from one performance to the next within a single culture and, with appropriate variations, across a number of cultures not only increases the likelihood that "measured verse" and attendant features constitute a real, verifiable dimension of Native American verbal art; it also calls ever more insistently for taking *line, verisicle, verse, stanza, scene, act* and *part* into account as meaning-bearing, rhetorical signals in their own right.' Foley, *The Singer of Tales in Performance, 21* (citing Dell Hymes, "Tonkwa Poetics: John Rush Buffalo's 'Cayote and Eagle's Daughter'," in *Native American Discourse: Poetics and Rhetoric*, ed. Joel Sherzer and Anthony C. Woodbury, Cambridge Studies in Oral and Literate Culture 13 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 22.

[56] A point that cannot be understated is the fact that in the context of Tuḷunāḍu, epic performance is not limited to ritual contexts only, epics inform even the most mundane aspects life. On this point Viveka Rai, for example, documented nine separate contexts in which elements of the *Kooti Cennaya* epic might be performed, noting that in addition to ritual events such as annual festivals and weddings, the epic might also be heard while working in the fields, while peeling areca nuts, and while relaxing at home. See B. A. Viveka Rai, "Epics in the Oral Genre System of Tulunadu," *Oral Tradition* 1.11 (1996): 169–70.

[57] David J. Chalcraft, "Strategies Past, Present and Future: The Context and Variety of Biblical Studies in Indian Culture and Society," in *A Biblical Masala: Encountering Diversity in Indian Biblical Studies*, ed. David J. Chalcraft and Zhodi Angami (Delhi: Christian World Imprints, 2021), 70–71. Miho observes that the ritual practices by people of lower castes are often make sense as a resistance to high caste domination.

collected by Honko and his team represents the best available and best documented Siri text.[58] Honko and Naika first met during a fieldwork training exercise and, from Honko's reflection on the interview that followed, it is clear that Naika left a deep impression on the Finnish folklorist.[59]

The drive to textualise the Siri epic in writing first came about because of Naika's desire to record the Siri epic in a more permanent form, so that it could benefit younger generations even after his death. It was eventually recorded by Ms Sudha, a student at the local college near Naika's village, and Chinnappa Gowda, a PhD researcher with an interest in Būta rituals.[60] The epic was captured by hand over several months in various locations: 'the technique was simple: the singer said 4–5 words, waited until they had been written down, and continued.'[61] This process was far from ideal. Their recording sessions were weeks and sometimes months apart, and referring to this type of performance as *kate*, Naika himself recognised that this means of performing the epic resulted in a less cohesive telling, with less 'power':

> So, when telling the *kate*, this full power cannot be brought about. For those who write down, you see, there will be a little, some small [problems]. One must tell stopping all the time. Look, while performing the *sandi* one should tell rap rap, beating all the time. One [piece] joins another in a connection. Telling

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See Miho Ishii, "'Wild Sacredness' and the Poiesis of Environmental Network: Relational Divinity, Hierarchy, and Spirit Possession in Buuta Worship in South India," *Abstracts of the Annual Meeting of the Japanese Society of Cultural Anthropology* (2012), doi:10.14890/jasca.2012.0.115.0, (this article is only available in Japanese). See also Karin Kapadia, "Dancing the Goddess: Possession and Class in Tamil South India," *Modern Asian Studies* 30.2 (1996): 423–55, doi:10.1017/S0026749X00016528.

[58] While English summaries and prose narration in Kannada have been in existence since 1952, these are far removed from the poetic texture of traditional performance. Nevertheless, these factors do not mean that the Siri epic is unknown with it being referenced in various forms of Indian popular culture, including local novels and films. Some original Siri diction has been noted to exist in a collection of Tuḷu epics collected in 1972, however this was by no means a complete text. The catalyst for the collection and thick archiving of the Siri epic was a 1984 meeting that took place between Finnish folklorist Lauri Honko and K.S. Haridasa Bhat, the Director of the Regional Resources Centre for Folk Performing Arts at M.G.M College, in the run up to the 150th anniversary of the *Kalevala*, the Finnish national epic. This initial meeting sparked a number of collaborative projects, including a seminar on the epic traditions of Tuḷunāḍu and Finland in Udupi, in 1985, and more pertinently a Finnish-Indian scholarly training course in 1989 which was also in Udupi. It was during this training course that that Honko's interest in the Siri epic was piqued. In Honko's own words: 'my interest in the Siri Epic had been aroused in the first *paliodaliya* I had witnessed in Machar in February 1989.' Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 254.

[59] Reflecting on his first interview with Naika, Honko noted the following: 'at the conclusion of the training course, Lauri Honko discussed for three hours in Dharmastala with Gopala Naika through Chinnappa Gowda's interpretation. Short questions elicited elaborate answers by the singer. It became clear that before us sat an intelligent singer and possession priest in full command of all the professional knowledge that goes with the role. When we had to depart, the work with the Siri epic seemed to promise ample reward should we be able to continue it one day. There was no doubt that the long oral epic in question could open up a window to the Tulu culture and its rich oral poetry.' Honko, *The Siri Epic, Part I*, xxii.

[60] No first name is given for Ms Sudha.

[61] Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 257.

> the *kate* this connecting does not happen. While stopping all the time, the telling does not proceed. Once you stop suddenly, you are forced to think. Where did I stop, from where to start again, one must begin to think.[62]

Indeed, when compared later to a sung version of the epic, collected by using electronic recording equipment, it was apparent that while both contained all the essential elements of plot, the dictated Siri epic was significantly shorter than the sung epic and exhibited far less elaboration.

What Sudha, Gowda and Honko's textualisation of the Siri epic text illustrates, is that textualisation results in the loss of various aspects of communication, as highlighted by scholars such as Bauman and John Miles Foley.[63] Furthermore, especially in contexts where electronic recording equipment is unavailable like in ancient Afro-Asia, the mechanics of textualisation can also impact writing itself. In some cases, this impact might be minimal, like for the Finnish folklorist Elias Lönnrot who, known as the singing scribe, developed a stenographic system that allowed him to write as the pace of the traditional singers in Karelia. In others this would not be the case. The mechanics of writing in the ancient world—using the media of stone, clay or parchment—make the odds of the existence of a similar phenomenon in Afro-Asia or ancient Israel highly unlikely.[64] As such, even if Judges 5 and Exodus 15 could be proven to be transcribed oral performances, it would be reasonable to assume that the structures of dictation would have resulted in similar issues to those highlighted by Naika, namely less cohesion and less 'power.'

### 3.4.1 Textualisation, Voice and Power

Gopala Naika's reference to power above can be understood in a number of ways. In the first instance, his metacritical reflection on the difference between performing *kate* for the first textualisation of the Siri epic and *sandi*—his usual sung mode of performance—echoes Foley's concept of 'word power.' He uses this term to refer to 'how words engage contexts and mediate communication in verbal art from oral

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[62] Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 90. The term *sandi* refers to sung performance.

[63] See Richard Bauman, *Verbal Art as Performance* (Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 1978), 15–24; John Miles Foley, *How to Read an Oral Poem* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 85–93.

[64] See Lauri Honko, "The Kalevala as Performance," in *The Kalevala and the World's Traditional Epics* (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2002), 18–19, as well as A. N. Doane, "Oral Texts, Intertexts, and Intratexts: Editing Old English," in *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History*, ed. Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 75–114.

tradition.'[65] Put differently, in the context of verbal art, the aesthetic of performance has the effect of connoting deeper levels of traditional meaning.[66] In the case of the Siri epic, Naika observes that *kate*, the form used for dictation, limits the extent to which he is able to draw on his artistic repertoire:

> *Kate* means telling very slowly, telling from one meaning to another meaning. *Sandi* is sung in a voice. While singing [the singer] lengthens a little. When singing what we call *sandi*, the voice increases a little, you see, it becomes larger. *Kate* is said short, that much.[67]

In his metacritical reflections, Naika conceptualises the difference between the two media through his conception of voice. *Sandi* has 'voice,' which refers to the oral means by which the content of the performed epic is knitted together through musicality, 'rhythmical seams' and 'elaboration.'[68] *Kate*, on the other hand, with its constant stopping and starting, lacks voice and can therefore (along with its textual product) be understood as possessing less aesthetic (and spiritual) power.[69]

At the same time, there is also a dynamic in which the perceived power inherent in *sandi* is more than just an aesthetic: it is simultaneously deeply rooted in spirituality and religion that govern and determine certain aspects of its textualisation. By way of example, during the interview Naika made a number of references to the fact that once begun, certain descriptions must be completed:

> In this way, if one has begun to sing a *sandi* about Ajjeru's death, one cannot stop. The *sandi* between his death and his burning into ashes. Only after he has been burnt, it can be left and one can sit in silence. If we sing about his life and finish the *sandi* after his death, his corpse is still there. There is a sad task

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[65] See John Miles Foley, *The Singer of Tales in Performance*, Voices in Performance and Text (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 1; John Miles Foley, "Word-Power, Performance, and Tradition," *The Journal of American Folklore* 105.417 (1992): 275–301, doi:10.2307/541757.

[66] On this point note see especially Foley's concept of immanent art, in John Miles Foley, *Immanent Art: From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991).

[67] Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 89–90.

[68] See Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 91. Honko further observes that the concept of knitting songs together is also employed in ancient Greece, where ῥαψῳδός literally means 'song stitcher.' See also John Miles Foley, *Traditional Oral Epic: The Odyssey, Beowulf, and the Serbo-Croatian Return Song* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), 27.

[69] The concept of 'voice' in traditional literature has been more widely discussed with various theorists acknowledging its importance particularly in relation to textualisation. Whereas some emphasise the fact that voice is lost during textualization. See Doane, "Oral Texts, Intertexts, and Intratexts," 104–5. Others argue that the human form has a transformal effect with implications far beyond the words that are spoken. See Paul Zumthor and Marilyn C. Engelhardt, "The Text and the Voice," *New Literary History* 16.1 (1984): 74, doi:10.2307/468776. Along similar lines, Honko asserts that 'For Gopala Naika, "voice" clearly represents the key element of the "epic style," by way of both physiological, emotional and intellectual force, i.e. in dimensions not easy to separate. By "knitting together" and releasing the "full power" of the story, *soro*, the voice is the prime source of coherence, i.e. textuality for the oral epic in performance.' Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 148–49.

> for her. One cannot leave it like that, no. Nowadays, such a thing may happen. However, the dead body should be burnt into ashes. Afterwards one could stop. This is called one *gattu*.[70]

Similarly, Gopala also advised that is leaving some part of the epic incomplete and result in physical manifestations of fever and illness:

> One can leave [singing] and stop after Kumara has gone to Maya. If left in the middle, it will bring certain difficulties for those in possession and for Kumaras. So, in their body there is like a hidden fire burning, a fever, an inherent fever. If one does not finish, thus a fever will ensure. If we finish thus, it is like taking a pill and cooling down the fever. [71]

The dynamics of embodiment in Siri epic performance are such that the epic personages are perceived to be real and present through the performers. It is through dynamics such as these that we see the importance of recognising the role played by the supernatural dimension of the text. The manner in which the tradition bearer handles the text is understood to have spiritual and real-world consequences. Interestingly, Naika makes no such comments in relation to *kate*, the mode relied upon when dictating the text.

From Naika's reflection, not only can we see that the sung and now textualised *sandi* evidences greater word-power, it also reveals that singing is perceived as a performance mode that yields greater spiritual power. This becomes particularly evident in the 'opening of the mouth ceremony', a ritual that accompanies some Siri epic performances. During this ritual, experienced singers will sing at novices, who if they have been possessed by a personage from the Siri epic, eventually sing back revealing their spiritual embodied identity.

### 3.4.2 Invocations, writing and the power of the writer\editor

There is also another sense in which questions of textualisation highlight issues of power, one that is especially close to some of the concerns expressed by biblical studies scholars. As noted above, Naika is illiterate and so, in the first written textualisation of the Siri epic, relied upon Sudha and Gowda to write down the Siri epic for him, while he dictated. Some months after the dictation had been completed, Naika approached Gowda wanting to continue the dictation process because, although the narrative of the Siri

[70] Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 137.
[71] Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 136.

epic had been captured in writing, the written text did not include the invocations, which for him meant that the text was 'incomplete.'[72] Despite Naika's persistence, Gowda refused the request.

The ability of Gowda to refuse to write the rest of the epic down is illustrative of the power dynamic that can exist—particularly in contexts of illiteracy—between singers and authors/writers/editors. By refusing the request, Gowda as the writer was effectively exercising control over Naika's text. This is a dynamic that has long been recognised by biblical studies scholars, who given the complicated transmission history of texts such as Judges 5 and Exodus 15, recognise the tensions and power imbalances that layer the Hebrew Bible and, in the case of Judges 5 and Exodus 15, exist between (1) the narratives' unknown author(s)/editor(s); (2) the anonymous third-person narrative voice in the prose and (3) the first-person voice(s) of the character(s) in the story world of the text who perform as literary constructions of the author(s)/editor(s). Indeed this dynamic, and in particular, the differences that exist between the stories as depicted in the third-person narrative voice of the prose, and the stories as depicted in first-person voices of the characters, have been the subject of much discussion, and the question as to whether the canonical placement of the account side-by-side, represent an attempt on the part of the author(s)/editor(s) to recast one telling in light of the other.[73]

## 3.5 Embodiment: Conceptualising the Supernatural

One of the most striking dynamics of Siri epic performance is the belief that the performers come to be possessed by the characters of the epic text, a phenomenon that results in the performer's various ecstatic and charismatic behaviours. In addition to his work as a folklorist, Lauri Honko was also a comparative religion scholar and was interested in the interplay between folk beliefs and experience in folk narratives.[74] The advantage of thick materials such as the Siri epic is that they can allow insight into

[72] 'Months after the completion of the dictation, Mr Gopala Naika visited Dr Gowda several times in Ujire, saying that an important part of the epic had not been taken down and insisting that the work be continued. Without it the text would be incomplete.' Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 258.

[73] Robert S. Kawashima, *Biblical Narrative and the Death of the Rhapsode* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 17–34

[74] See, for example, Lauri Honko, "Memorates and the Study of Folk Beliefs," in Hakamies and Anneli Honko, *Theoretical Milestones*, 135–148; Anna-Leena Siikala, *Mythic Images and Shamanism: A Perspective on Kalevala*

both. From the wider context detailed in Honko's accounts of his reception of the Siri epic and through the insights provided by the singer, it is clear that even once textualized, the Siri epic operates within a broader complex of cultural, religious and experiential matrices familiar only to insiders. Scholars have also recognised the presence of a similar dynamic with the Hebrew Bible, for example, Culley in *Themes and Variations: A Study of Action in Biblical Narrative* where he argues for the need to consider the 'religious dimension' of texts.[75] While the recognition of this dimension in the biblical text has been a point of controversy, folklorists have demonstrated that the operation of belief systems need not lead to anachronism—and in the case of the Hebrew Bible, confessionalism[76] or the form of biblicism that has (in part) led to the perpetuation of evolutionism. [77] Belief, can in fact, function as a critical construct that shapes perceptions and worldviews.

Honko, in his article *Memorates and the study of folk beliefs*, gives the fictional example of an interview with an informant named Maria Savolainen who provides researchers with a personal account of an experienced event—namely, a memorate—in which she recounts her encounter with a supernatural being. In so doing, Honko shows how memorates reveal those situations where supernatural beliefs actualise and influence behaviour, as well as the role that communities play in reaffirming those beliefs.[78] When approaching issues such as possession whose assumptions rely on the presence of an operating belief in the supernatural, Honko's elucidation of the role of memorates is particularly

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*Poetry*, Folklore Fellows Communications 280 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 2002), as well as Ilkka Pyysiäinen, *Magic, Miracles, and Religion: A Scientist's Perspective* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2004).

[75] Robert C. Culley, *Themes and Variations: A Study of Action in Biblical Narrative*, Semeia Studies 23 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1992), 36–42.

[76] Robert C. Culley, *Themes and Variations*, 36–42; James W. Watts, *Understanding the Pentateuch as a Scripture* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2017); John Barton, *A History of the Bible*, 6.

[77] Observations on the inherent tensions between the Bible as a religious text and object of study have been well noted, see, for example, John Barton, *A History of the Bible: The Book and Its Faiths* (London: Penguin, 2019), 612; Culley, *Themes and Variations*, 42.

[78] See Honko, "Memorates and the Study of Folk Beliefs," 140. At the same time however, Mihi Ishii notes that in the case of posession rituals such as those found in South India, 'the formation of divine worlds does not necessarily depend on people's beliefs in religious powers or in magical things,' noting instead that 'divine worlds are created through concrete relations and actions among persons, things, spirits, and deities that take tangible as well as intangible forms.' Miho Ishii, "Acting with Things: Self-Poiesis, Actuality, and Contingency in the Formation of Divine Worlds," *HAU Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 2.2 (2012): 372, doi:10.14318/hau2.2.019. However, belief is a more effective model for capturing and integrating first hand, insider perspectives such as those of Gopala Naika.

important because it takes the takes functional role of personal experience seriously and shows how belief and communities play a functional role in shaping an informant's perception of that experience. Drawing on this framework enables scholars exploring the role of phenomenon such as embodiment and possession in the Siri epic text, for example, to take the subjective reported supernatural personal experiences of singers such as Gopala Naika seriously, because they can be approached analytically as memorates that provide insight into the type of situations that activate those charismatic behaviours referred to as possession. This insight becomes all the more relevant when questions concerning the relationship between charismatic behaviour and prophets in the Hebrew Bible. Inasmuch as some of the classical scholarly depictions of biblical prophets as spontaneous, visceral and charismatic have rightly been recognised and dismissed as evolutionist vestiges of romanticism, the depiction of possession in Honko's reception of the Siri epic (as well as Naika's memorates) nevertheless raises questions regarding the operating beliefs that audiences in the story world of the text may have about performers.

As we read the Siri epic and Honko's reception of it alongside Judges 5 and Exodus 15, it is important that our model attempts to incorporate the insights and experiences from Naika himself, and not only the researcher's observations of him. The Siri epic and Judges 5 and Exodus 15 come from a context far removed from the world of most western scholars, and as Bowman notes there is a need for 'informed empathy and empathetic understanding to get inside worldviews sufficiently to grasp their internal logic.'[79] Our access—limited though it may be—into a different worldview and way of perceiving text is provided by Gopala Naika. By treating Gopala's subjective experiences of textualisation as memorates, we establish an analytical basis upon which the critical imagination can then be engaged. Vladimír Bahna suggests that Honko's theory of memorates can be taken a step further by engaging with false memories research.[80] Bahna highlights that human memory does not function along the lines of

[79] As Bowman observed, 'When it comes to folk beliefs, anthropologically, and sociologically oriented investigators of primitive religion and folklorists investigating folk narratives become involved with the same material.' See Marion Bowman, "Vernacular Religion, Contemporary Spirituality and Emergent Identities: Lessons from Lauri Honko," *Approaching Religion* 4.1 (2014): 101, doi:10.30664/ar.67542.

[80] Bahna writes, 'to take false memories research into account in the study of folklore and other socio-cultural phenomena does not mean that we are judging our informants, as to whether this or that really happened, but exploring how tradition and society influence our memories about particular events.' Vladimír Bahna,

passive storage and recall, and that as such, it is possible for people to 'unknowingly' remember events differently from how they 'historically happened, or remember events that didn't happen at all.'[81] The relevance of this to our considerations here lies in the fact that it underlines of the role of community and context in the construction of memory. While what actually happens during textualisation is important, what is most pertinent is the matter of how such an experience is remembered by the singer and their receiving community.

In Honko's reception of the Siri epic, possession refers to the ecstatic states experienced by Naika as well as his fellow singers. It is (pejoratively) described by the researchers as 'mental illness,' and at times appears to involve violent episodes, fainting, the appearance of drunkenness, dreams, auditions and voices, and impersonation of characters within the epic.[82] On occasion, participants have also been observed as inducing such ecstatic states in others through intense music and singing.[83] This dynamic raises serious questions concerning the ethics of the research conducted by Honko and his team, especially given the fact that these charismatic experiences leave some participants in a state of vulnerability.[84] To be clear, this thesis is not assuming that those who participate in such activities are mentally ill, rather, it acknowledges the personal experiences (memorates) of Gopala Naika and the Siris

"Memorates and Memory: A Re-Evaluation of Lauri Honko's Theory," *Temenos* 51.1 (2015): 13, doi:10.33356/temenos.8783.

[81] Bahna, "Memorates and Memory," 12.

[82] Inasmuch as Honko's ethnographic model of the Siri epic helps us to conceive of an alternative non-evolutionist models of text, his medicalising description of possession is at times unhelpful and in need of revision.

[83] Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 229–30.

[84] Consider Honko's problematic description of the Siri women: 'the deviant mental patient turns into a medium of divine will,' in Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 396. He also notes that recounting one's history of mental illness is an important part of the initiation process: 'the singer explained that it is through her illness history that a woman becomes a member of the Siri group.' Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 344. A better way of conceptualising this would be to employ a framework similar to that of Anna-Leena Siikala, who conceives of similar charismatic behaviours as being the result of an altered state of consciousness, this can be seen in the following description: 'the structure of the shamanic session lent itself to techniques for achieving an ecstatic state: accompanied by rhythmic music, the Shaman called for his helper sprits in an increasingly agitated state. … In this way he actually applied psychotechniques not unlike those used in hypnosis in order to pass from a waking state into an altered state of consciousness. Through his singing, drumming and use of appropriate paraphernalia the protagonist in the session, the shaman, brings within his audience's reach a glimpse into the otherworldly reality.' Anna-Leena Siikala, *Mythic Images and Shamanism: A Perspective on Kalevala Poetry*, Folklore Fellows Communications 280 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 2002), 45.

where, in the context of singing the Siri epic, these manifestations are actualised and understood as evidencing embodiment, the inhabitation of deity.[85]

Embodiment itself is a concept originating in anthropology.[86] Scholars are increasingly recognising that much of academic discourse operates within the dichotomic framework of Cartesian dualism with its separation of body and mind. Cartesian dualism 'presumes the reductionist presupposition that the body is subordinate to the mind, and history to ideas,' and that emotions and passions are disembodied in the texts, products of the human mind divorced from the holistic personhood of the subject(s)/bodies who once produced them.[87] Amongst other things, disembodiment has been observed as having a sanitising effect on material that might otherwise have been shocking or dislocating.[88] Certainly, in the case of Judges 5 and Exodus 15, the suggestion that such works might best be reimagined in the vein of embodied ecstatic utterances changes the dynamics:

> Embodiment theory seeks to move across the supposed body/mind dichotomy and to understand the embodied contexts of experience that are central to life processes. This does not mean that 'body' is made the object of analysis, replacing 'mind.' It implies, rather, a new holistic approach, in which body, mind, and experience are brought together.[89]

The growth in calls to consider performed biblical texts as embodied texts evidences some movement towards answering Spencer-Miller's critique concerning biblical studies' lack of holistic insider

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[85] As Andrea Lobb observes, the concept of 'critical empathy' has risen to prominence of late aided by its promotion by figures such as Steven Pinker, see Andrea Lobb, "Critical Empathy," *Constellations* 24.4 (2017): 594–607, doi:10.1111/1467-8675.12292. Lou Agosta has written extensively on empathy, their following observation helps to conceptualise the point being made here: 'in empathic receptivity one is open to the other individual—receptive to the animate expressions of life of the other person—affects, emotions, appetites, moods, pleasures and pains (sensations), vicarious experiences, and so on. This empathic receptivity is a way of being affected by the experiences of other people.' Lou Agosta, *A Critical Review of a Philosophy of Emphathy* (Chicago, IL: Two Pears, 2018), 26.

[86] Frances E. Mascia-Lees, ed., *A Companion to the Anthropology of the Body and Embodiment*, Blackwell Companions to Anthropology 13 (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011); Jeanette Mathews, *Performing Habakkuk: Faithful Re-enactment in the Midst of Crisis* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012), 31–32.

[87] Gifford Rhamie, "Whiteness, Conviviality and Agency: The Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26–40) and Conceptuality in the Imperial Imagination of Biblical Studies" (PhD diss., Canterbury Christ Church University, 2019), 60–61.

[88] Consider Mathews: 'a pertinent issue when discussing performance art is the normalization of what was originally a dislocating experience into acceptable behaviour. The nude body and bad language, even blasphemy, have become more and more acceptable in mainstream media. Clearly this critique is applicable to biblical prophetic performance also—the very act of canonization is a sanitizing process that normalizes the traditions.' Mathews, *Prophets as Performers*, 52–53.

[89] Andrew J. Strathern and Pamela J. Stewart, "Personhood: Embodiment and Personhood," in Mascia-Lees, *A Companion to the Anthropology of the Body and Embodiment*, 388–402.

knowledge.[90] The concept of embodiment, however, that biblical scholars draw on tends to be rooted in notions concerning the physicality of the human body, i.e., the tendency for songs and words to be framed as having originated in the mouth of traditional personages or involving a range of body parts. This is rather different to ethnographically informed ecstatic experiences such as those that characterise Siri epic performance.[91]

Reading the Siri epic alongside songs such as Judges 5 and Exodus 15 challenges us to avoid the philosophical disassociation that can so easily detached from the corporeal bodies of the people behind them. While on some level this can be understood as a culturally conditioned dynamic wherein those hailing from Western philosophical traditions tend to approach the issue of embodiment from a philosophical standpoint that assumes the existence of a separation between body and mind, thus viewing texts as the product of the mind and therefore separable from the body, it is also true, that this separation between singer and text is also an outworking of the evolutionism often inherent in the prevailing literary approaches. Eastern philosophical traditions, on the other hand, pursue a different phenomenology of embodiment 'aimed at the transformation of ourselves and of the world through bodily and linguistic processes.'[92] This brings to the fore an important issue concerning embodied texts in the Hebrew Bible. While it is possible to conceive of embodiment through the lens of a separation of mind and body (between singer and text), it is also possible to perceive of embodiment as a phenomenon that transforms the singer and their song within the story world of the text. It is this latter view of embodiment that will be our focus here.

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[90] S. Tamar Kamionkowski and Wonil Kim, eds, *Bodies, Embodiment, and Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 465 (London: T&T Clark, 2010).

[91] See Dobbs-Allsopp, *On Biblical Poetry*, 284. In relation to the proverbs Vayntrub argues, for example, that 'by attributing its *disembodied* inscribed text to a legendary past figure who *embodies* wise speech, the book of Proverbs implies that writing has the capacity to preserve and transmit the internalized speech of tradents.' Vayntrub, *Beyond Orality*, 205. See also, Mathews, *Prophets as Performers,* 15.

[92] Hilge Landweer, "Embodiment: Phenomenology East/West – Introduction," *Yearbook for Eastern and Western Philosophy* 2017.2 (2017): 4–5, doi:10.1515/yewph-2017-0003. Note for example Kamionkowski and Kim whose volume frames embodiment as and exploration of 'questions about the nature of God's body(ies) and human bodies in the Hebrew Bibleis in large part about understanding the self and the communal bodies in which we find ourselves.' Kamionkowski and Kim, *Bodies, Embodiment, and Theology*, 10.

This framing of embodiment is essential for our appreciation of engagement with the cultural and sociological conditioned descriptions of traditional performance in the Hebrew Bible, Afro-Asia and Karnataka, where, as demonstrated above, traditional performance can include unfamiliar ecstatic behaviours conceptualised as coming from a transformed or altered state of consciousness. Given that traditional performances function within cultural contexts, for them to be perceived as authentic, they must conform to the receiving communities' expectations of what embodied performances looks like. From what we have learned from comparative studies on ancient Afro-Asia and the Siri epic, the cultural framework through which traditional performance is perceived involves various forms of ritual and ecstatic behaviour, such as: trembling, feebleness and weakness in various parts of the body; a sense of being 'affected' or 'struck'; manifestations of a frenzied state; the delivery of divine oracles and of visions; intercessory prayer; the ritual performance of battle scenes; impersonation of the gods; and singing and playing musical instruments.[93] Suffice it to say, without such manifestations it is probable that a traditional audience may not perceive a performance to be authoritative.

## 3.6 Siri Epic in Performance: New Textual Dimensions

Having spent some time reflecting on the metacritical observations of Naika and various aspects of method, we will now proceed to consider the natural and functional contexts in which the Siri epic text operates. The Siri epic itself comes from the Tuḷuva people from south Kanara, a region in the southwest of Karnataka region, in southern India. The epic takes its name from the main protagonist, Siri, a woman believed to be of divine origin.[94] What's particularly interesting about the Siri epic is that unlike the vast majority of epics that centre on the battles and heroic exploits of male warriors, the Siri epic centres on Siri's non-violent struggle for justice as she experiences 'the typical ordeals of a woman in Tulu society with its particular mix of matrilineal and patriarchal kinship systems.'[95] Central to the epic and the Siris,

[93] For an extensive treatment see Nissinen, *Ancient Prophecy*, 172.
[94] For an outline of the Siri epic, see appendix A.
[95] Lauri Honko, *Textualization of Oral Epics*, Trends in Linguistics Studies and Monographs (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 220.

the cult preserving the epic, are the fates of Siri's only son Kumara and her female descendants Sonne, Gindye, Abbaya and Daaraya, all of whom become embodied by cult members during the annual Siri festival and during the ritual known as Paliodaliya.[96] Honko's reception of the Siri epic elicits three framing insights that will inform our later re-imagination of Judges 5 and Exodus 15.

### 3.6.1 A sung performance may be but one part of a larger epic whole

Another interesting observation that Honko's thick study of the Siri epic, is the fact that, in its natural and ritual contexts, the Siri epic is never performed in full. It took Honko and his team six days to collect a full version of the sung epic, and on one of those days Naika had to take a break due to exhaustion. Given the length of the Siri epic and the demands it places on the singer, from a practical perspective, it is somewhat understandable that the epic is not (at least not now) performed in full as a narrative. In rural agrarian communities such as Machir where Naika lives, neither the singer nor their audience are likely to have the time needed to attend an almost week-long performance— even the Siri epic festival the high point in the cults annual calendar lasts one night as part of a larger three-day celebration (more will be said on this later). This elicits interesting questions regarding the ongoing debate concerning the existence of ancient Israelite epic.[97]

Honko's findings demonstrate that it is possible for epics to exist as cantos without ever having been sung in full. On this particular point, it is useful to note the initial controversy surrounding the composition of the Finnish national epic, the Kalevala.[98] For years, while many were aware of the existence

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[96] Honko, *The Siri Epic. Part 1*, ix.

[97] Nahum M. Sarna, "Epic Substratum in the Prose of Job," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 76.1 (1957): 13–25, doi:10.2307/3262127; Charles Conroy, "Hebrew Epic: Historical Notes and Critical Reflections," *Biblica* 61.1 (1980): 1–30; Frank Moore Cross, "Epic Traditions of Early Israel: Epic Narrative and the Reconstructions of Early Israelite Institutions," in *The Poet and the Historian: Essays in Literary and Historical Biblical criticism,* ed. Richard Elliott Friedman, Harvard Semitic Studies 26 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 13–40; Susan Niditch, "Epic and History in the Hebrew Bible: Definitions, 'Ethnic Genres,' and the Challenges of Cultural Identity in the Biblical Book of Judges," in *Epic and History*, ed. David Konstan and Kurt A. Raaflaub, The Ancient World: Comparative Histories (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 86–102; Roger A. Bullard, "Looking in the Old Testament for the Epic Genre," *The BibleTranslator* 64.1 (2013): 99–111, doi:10.1177/0260093513481152.

[98] See 'Introduction', in Elias Lönnrot, *The Kalevala: An Epic Poem after Oral Tradition*, trans. Keith Bosley, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Satu Apo, "Lönnrot's Voice in the Kalevala," in *Dynamics of Tradition Perspectives on Oral Poetry and Folk Belief*, ed. Lotte Tarkka (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 2003).

of smaller cantos, few thought that together they could constitute an epic until Elias Lönnrot, a medical doctor, philologist and canto collector became so versed in Finnish folk traditions that he was able to use his knowledge of Finnish folklore and fluency in epic diction to compose it, having never heard the epic in full. The fact that Elias Lönnrot was able to recompose the Kalevala having never heard it in full, even though many never thought such an epic existed, is indicative of the complexity and nature of epic performance.[99] Thus, there is also a sense in which our critical reimagination of Judges 5 and Exodus 15 is foregrounded by the empirical observation that, in theory, unattested epic traditions can exist even if they are not written at length or in full. This dynamic reminds us of the need to be cautious but not reductive of the questions that the 20th century Siri epic leads us to as of ancient Hebrew שיר (song). Sung performances may be but one part of a larger whole.

### 3.6.2 Natural performance contexts may differ to textual performance contexts

One of the observations in Honko's reception of the Siri epic is the fact that the collection of the lengthy Siri epic text required the use of a more practical yet artificial performance setting that, as we shall see, was very different to the more dynamic natural contexts in which the Siri epic was ordinarily performed. When looked at in isolation, it would be nearly impossible for an outsider to identify the deep ritual and functional context in which the epic text operates. Not only is this because much is lost when a performance is textualized, but in the case of the Siri epic, it is also true that the internal evidence within the Siri epic text divulges few clues as to its ritual performance. In the case of Siri epic performance, while the epic text itself focuses on narrating the life of Siri and her descendants, the use of the text in secular and sacred context demonstrates very different objectives. When read alongside texts such as Judges 5 and Exodus 15, this elicits the question as to whether, in the story world of the text, the performance of

[99] It was Lönnrot's grasp of the Finnish epic register and his exposure to the cantos over time enabled him to develop a mental text of the Kalevala which included the various elements discussed here such as performance strategy and storyline. 'The Kalevala is not a book, it is five books or, more appropriately no book at all. It is a peculiar mental text in Elias Lönnrot's mind, developed in interaction with the epic registers of different regions as manifested by singers whom he met or received materials from.' Lauri Honko, "The Kalevala as Performance," in *The Kalevala and the World's Traditional Epics* (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2002), 15.

these songs could have taken a very different ritual and functional form to that of a varied retelling of the narrative.

### 3.6.3 Linear narration in the text may not equate to linear narration in its performance

Another important heuristic indicator stemming from Siri epic performance, is the fact that in its three natural performance contexts, Siri epic performance involved very little linear narration.[100] It is often assumed that epic performance involves storytelling and narration, however, in Siri epic performance, little to no narration is involved. Instead, singers embodying the characters of the epic text engage in what is known as dialogic discourse where they converse with one another as though they are participants in a particular scene within the epic. More will be said on dialogic discourse below, however, for now it is sufficient to note the critical observation that, even if textualised as a narrative, a performance may not necessarily the take the form of a narrative and may in fact have other functional uses.[101]

## 3.7 The Siri Epic in its Sacred and Secular Performance Contexts

As we progress toward re-imagining performance in Judges 5 and Exodus 15 in light of the questions our reading of the Siri epic elicits, we will first consider the three natural performance contexts in which Siri epic performance occurs—with a view to drawing on these later— as a means of illustrating the insights this hypothetical approach provides as well as the further questions it empowers us to ask of the biblical text. What follows is descriptive, but the evocative thick depictions provide the depth necessary for reimagination.

### 3.7.1 The Paddy fields

On a later trip in 1993, the researchers visited Naika to observe the phenomenon of the singing that took place in the paddy fields. Honko's description of the setting is particularly informative, adding necessary

[100] Given Rai's identification of nine settings in which another epic from the Karnataka region is performed, we ought to bear in mind how pervasive epic is in Karnataka and that Honko's list of three performance contexts may not be exhaustive, see Rai, "Epics in the Oral Genre System of Tulunadu."

[101] Dialogic discourse is defined and discussed below.

colour to the picture of Naika as a traditional performer and the profane context in which epic singing might occur. As such, it will be quoted here at length:

> When we were visiting Gopala Naika in Machar to plan our interview schedule with him, he invited us, to our surprise, to document his work in the paddy field, where he and the women plucking, and planting would sing the Siri epic. We were happy to accept the invitation and marched with our video equipment along the long slippery mud walls which divided the huge field into rectangular squares. I placed my camera under a small palm tree near a junction of mud walls hoping for at least some shadow against the scorching midday sun … Gopala Naika was standing in the water near the women plucking seedlings in the middle of a large square field. A woman was singing so it seemed, the Ajjeru subepic … The scenery was splendid, lush rice seedlings rising from clear water towards the sun, the splashing of plucking hands, the female voices joining the singer in refrains and creating regular rhythm for both work and song. Pairs of buffaloes walked majestically before the ploughmen in fields farther away.[102]

Particularly insightful are Honko's observations concerning the content, length, and nature of the singing that took place in the paddy fields:

> The female singer … sang the introductory part of the Ajjeru epic … She dealt with the episode of Ajjeru's tears flowing towards the holy temple where the god Beramma mercifully decided to take the appearance of the poor Brahmin … At this point there was a pause and some discussion, after which the voice … was heard again, now singing an epic song unknown to me and dealing with the football-like cendu-game where the players are gods … Next followed an epic song which was easy to recognise as the Siri epic … Gopala Naika was now participating as the lead-singer and [the woman] acted as the co-singer, essentially repeating what had just been sung by the leader. They both sang the refrain together and 7–8 other women seemed to join in. The text turned out to be part of the Ajjeru subepic describing, very suitably, the scene where the old man goes from his Satyanapura palace to the paddy field regulating the water flow from one square field to another and admiring the beauty of the needle like green seedlings. The flow of narrative is here much slower than in the solo song; not only do the refrain lines take time, but everything else must be repeated in equal length by the co-singer.[103]

Besides the lack of linear narration, Honko observes that the women who joined in the singing knew the song, or at least elements of it, and joined in, in a type of call and response dynamic. The singing appears to be sporadic, at times being interspersed with discussion. Interestingly, the singing of the episode of Ajjeru's tears would appear to reflect a form of milieu-morphological adaptation through which Naika selects an episode of the Siri epic that reflects their present environment, namely the paddy field. Moreover, the cendu-game referenced in the song is an activity that is usually carried out in a field. The singing is not of only one type, there were solos, antiphonal and group singing, all varied in terms of speed

[102] Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 552.
[103] Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 552–53.

and repetition. When asked as to whether singers in this context experienced possession Gopala answered 'no,' and even questioned the appropriateness of singing the Siri epic in such profane settings.[104] Nevertheless, it should be noted that Naika's statements are not without inconsistencies, especially given his acknowledgement that it was while working that he first experienced embodiment.

### 3.7.2 The Paliodaliya

During the fieldwork training course in 1989, Honko and his team were invited to document a *paliodaliya* (house ceremony) led by Naika. This took place in Machar, at his house described by the researchers as 'a strip of country houses on both sides of a lush paddy field belt.'[105] Paliodaliyas take place during a full moon and can last from sunset until dawn. They take place in the front yard of a house before a temporary altar and are attended by an audience of villagers consisting of men, women, boys and girls of all ages; the researchers described the yard as being full to 'overflowing.'[106] The ritual setting of the paliodaliya is functional in that it is performed as a healing ceremony for those suffering from illnesses thought to be caused by one of the divine personages of the Siri epic. The scene is described by Honko as follows:

> [The Siri Women] were about twenty in number, standing in white saris with yellow flowers in their hair in the middle of a square space, in two facing lines sideways to the temporary altar at the end of the small yard. The possession priest called Kumara (Gopala Naika) strode with bounding steps between the lines assisted by two male Vottukumaras (*vottu* 'near', 'by the side'). Their upper bodies were naked, the lower part was wrapped in one long cloth, dark red in colour. On one side of the yard a four-man orchestra was sitting with pipes, drums and a small harmonium. On Kumara's command it started playing shrill tunes, as if activating the participants, to stop suddenly when the priest raised his hand.[107]

Not only does the paliodaliya introduce yet another form in which the Siri epic manifests itself, namely dialogic singing, but it is also heuristically significant that in this setting the epic takes on an additional healing function. The ceremony itself is described as beginning before midnight with the giving of various offerings, prayers, and invocations. While the offerings, prayers and invocation involved no linear

[104] Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 550–51.
[105] Honko, *The Siri Epic. Part 1*, xx.
[106] Honko, *The Siri Epic. Part 1*, xxi.
[107] Honko, *The Siri Epic. Part 1*, xxi.

narration of the Siri epic, there was some in the form of the Ajjeru subepic which recounts the events leading up to the birth of Siri's son Kumara at the 'high point' of the ceremony:

> The high point of the ritual, the appearance of possession, was at hand when the linear narration ceased and Kumara opened the first Areca bud and spread the panicles of Areca flower to form a whisk half a meter long. It began to sway in his hand, now toward the altar, now to the Siris who had stood up. His bulging eyes betrayed a gleaming second look: he had ceased to be Gopala Naika, the singer of epics, he was the vehicle of divine being. [108]

Following Naika's embodiment of Kumara, the Siri women stand swaying, each of them given an areca flower. While rocking the areca flowers in their arms and with a backdrop of 'aggressive' instrumentalisation by the orchestra, the researchers described the Kumaras as directing 'exalted words' at the Siri women who in turn come to embody the female 'mythical personages' of the Siri epic. [109] The researchers report a change in tone following the embodiment of the Siri women, with the rest of the ceremony involving no further linear epic narration, 'instead, the Kumaras and the Siris sang short pieces to each other while Kumara began to address each Siri individually; it sounded like dialogic discourse.' [110] Dialogic discourse functions as another heuristic indicator and warrants further comment. The term refers to a type of embodied divine conversation where Siris and Kumaras engage one another, sometimes simultaneously, while embodying the characters of the epic. While there is no linear narration, their dialogue reflects scenes pertaining to their personages in the Siri subepic. Each cult member identifies with a specific deity whom they come to embody during each performance.

### 3.7.3 The Būta Festival (including Sacred Play and Siri Jātre)

The annual *Siri jātre* (Siri festival) can be attended by hundreds, if not thousands of participants and spectators. It takes place on the third night of a larger three-day *būta kōla* (spirit festival), where impersonators depict 'in powerful dance and song the history of several village deities.'[111] Honko's account of his first encounter with the Siri jātre is apt:

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[108] Honko, *The Siri Epic. Part 1*, xxi.
[109] Honko, *The Siri Epic. Part 1*, xxi.
[110] Honko, *The Siri Epic. Part 1*, xxii.
[111] Honko, *The Siri Epic. Part 1*, xxii.

> There were several Siri groups and about three hundred people in the audience. It was simultaneously a *buuta* festival *(buuta koola)* with low-caste impersonators depicting in powerful dance and song the history of several village divinities … The complexity of performance traditions began to emerge: there was very little linear narration heard in the Siri groups. Most of the time, the epic discourse was transformed into invocations, prayer adhortations and other related but non-epic genres. This experience turned routine fieldwork into a true training of epic scholars.[112]

On the evening of the second day, a select group of Siri perform a re-enactment of a popular scene in the Siri epic known as the cennɛ play.[113] The performance takes place in the main courtyard atop a stage, while it involves acting and the use of various props including a sacred cennɛ board. Exhibiting outward signs of possession, the performers act out the cennɛ play which involves a mixture of singing, dialogic discourse, and narration from a lead Kumara.

Whereas the cennɛ play performance is directed externally for the benefit of those who are not part of the Siris and draws attention to the Siri cult in an environment where various epic traditions and performances compete for attention, the Siri jātre performance is for the benefit of its members and potential initiates. What was particularly notable amongst Honko's numerous observations is the fact that 'in its most authentic cultural context, the Siri Festival', the text of the Siri epic was 'impossible to obtain' even though it permeated the activities of all the Siri performers.[114] The jātre itself is similar to the paliodaliya in form but larger in scale with additional ritual elements such as an offsite invocatory ritual. What is particularly notable about the Siri jātre is the fact that it creates a context not only for healing but also for spectators and potential initiates to receive pastoral counsel from the lead tradition bearer, embodying Kumara:

> The recitation by the assisting Kumaras and the responding Siris went on for the main part of the ritual, about 45 mins. The parallel event, Gopala Naika's attending to his clients, took place in front of but slightly outside the main stage of the ritual. First, a male person asked for advice … In all three cases Gopala Naika said everything he had to say utilising poetic language, whereas the clients and their companions answered in plain speech.[115]

[112] Honko, *The Siri Epic. Part 1*, xxii.
[113] Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 393.
[114] Honko, *The Siri Epic. Part 1*, xxii.
[115] Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 488.

The Siri jātre continues late into the night and ends with an orchestra-accompanied procession out of the temple to a leaf shrine where the Siris lay down their ritual areca leaves. Honko's accounts are outstanding in their ability to capture the dynamism and colour of embodiment, thus providing a rich background for our attempts to develop an ethnographic framework for the purpose of reimagining Judges 5 and Exodus 15 as embodied performance.

## 3.8 Chapter Summary

In this chapter Lauri Honko's methodological framework of tradition ecology was introduced, as was the concept of the mental text where it was noted that, under the pressure of performance, singers utilise performance strategies to adapt their telling according to their performance context employing various emic, etic, formulaic and multiformic units of content. In addition, this chapter introduced Gopala Naika as the singer and owner of the Siri epic, and it highlighted the central role played by ecstatic embodiment in Siri epic performance and outlined the contexts in which Siri epic performance occurs. Next we will draw on these elements to critically re-imagine performance in the story world of Judges 5 and consider this implication this method has for our analysis of the biblical text.

CHAPTER 4

# 4. PERFORMANCE AS SALVATION, HEALING AND PASTORAL CARE: READING JUDGES 5 AS JĀTRE

*Presently, the people who are with me, they were mostly mad people! understand? [Laughs] Now, they are not mad. Formerly, all these people were like this: all these people used to fall losing their consciousness and the people who were mad, all were of this kind, the mad people who are with me. Now, they have become alright.*

– **Gopala Naika**[1]

*And whenever the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand, and Saul would be relieved and feel better, and the evil spirit would depart from him.*

– **1 Samuel 16:23**

## 4.1 Chapter Introduction

Having outlined our methodology of tradition ecology in chapter 3, this chapter engages in a close reading of Judges 5 as a literary representation of a mental text belonging to the singer in the story world of the text. Here, the Siri epic is not being used as a direct comparison to Judges 5, but as a text whose reception by Honko allows for new questions otherwise foreclosed by the evolutionism and biblicism inherent within the biblical studies discipline. For the purpose of this critical exercise, this chapter re-imagines Judges 5 in light of jātre and draws on those extended aspects of jātre performance as highlighted in the Siri epic to re-imagine Judges 5, and in so doing, we will reflect on what additional textual dimensions, if any, this process brings to light.

## 4.2 Towards the Text: Judges 5

Judges 5 has gained notoriety amongst Hebrew Bible scholars as a challenging passage to negotiate.[2] However, this view is largely the result of historical critical influence and the drive amongst

[1] This quote is taken from Lauri Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, Folklore Fellows Communications 264 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1998), 530.

[2] Charles L. Echols, '*Tell Me, O Muse': The Song of Deborah (Judges 5) in the Light of Heroic Poetry*, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 487 (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 3; Tyler Mayfield, "The Accounts of Deborah (Judges 4–5) in Recent Research," *Currents in Biblical Research* 7.3 (2009): 306–35, doi:10.1177/1476993X09104456. In particular, note Younger who observes: 'this song poses one of the most difficult passages in the Old Testament. Its date, authorship, text, unity, vocabulary, and structure have been debated by scholars for centuries. A detailed

early scholars to mine Judges 5 for historical critical clues as to its potential origin and *Sitz im Leben*. Indeed, the assumptions that the *Sitz im Leben* and potential origins could be uncovered led to what is perhaps one of the most well-known hypotheses concerning Judges 5, namely that it is one of the oldest texts in the Hebrew Bible.[3] While there have been attempts to ground this view in linguistic and archaeological argumentation, a significant element of the reasoning behind arguments for an early dating for Judges 5 lies in an evolutionist conception of literary history that conceives of poetry as proceeding prose. As discussed above in relation to the work of Gunkel and Herder, this perspective is undergirded by romanticist assumptions rather than evidence; assumptions such as prior to its inclusion in the biblical text, the song of Deborah circulated orally (e.g. as a warrior or victory song) or functioned as an early performed text.

At the same time, however, the evolutionism undergirding much of the critical analyses of inset poems like Judges 5 is increasingly being problematised and challenged, the approach being presented here as a part of that trend. If we approach the orality of Judges 5 as a literary trope, there is no need to assume orality, identify the historical origins of the song in Judges 5 apart from its narrative frame, or seek to interpret it in light of a hypothesised oral background. Approaching Judges 5 without its typical evolutionary frame empowers us to explore other textual dimensions by using ethnographic models such as the Siri epic to critically re-imagine performance in the story world of the text.

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discussion of all these issues and the opinions of other scholars would easily produce a book in and of itself.' K. Lawson Younger, *Judges, Ruth*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2021), 190.

[3]The challenges relating to the dating texts is the Hebrew Bible and Exodus 15 and Judges 5, in particular, are well known. For example, using a linguistic methodology and a hypothetical reconstruction of Hebrew poetry Robertson dated Exodus 15 to the 13th century and Judges 5 to the end of the 12th century. See David Robertson, *Linguistic Evidence in Dating Early Hebrew Poetry*, Dissertation Series 3 (Missoula, MT: Society of Biblical Literature, 1972). Cross has suggested a 10th century date for Exodus 15. Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 121–25. Coogan has dated Judges 5 to the 10th Century. Echols notes that Judges 5 has even been dated to the first century CE. Charles L. Echols, *"Tell Me, O Muse": The Song of Deborah (Judges 5) in the Light of Heroic Poetry,* Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 487 (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 45. Davies similarly dates Exodus 15 as late as the 5th century, see Graham I. Davies, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Exodus 11–18*, International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), 306. A useful discussion on dating Judges is also provided in Smith, *poetic heroes,* 211-212

As an inset song, Judges 5 falls into the category of staged poetry, in which a poem is framed as having been performed by characters within the narrative. Following the prose narrative of the defeat of Sisera in Judges 4:1-23, the narrator in Judges 5:1 frames the poem in Judges 5:2-31a as having been sung by the characters of the preceding narrative, who are largely legendary figures (or to use the language of Honko, tradition dominants) within the biblical tradition. Moreover, these staged poems evidence what Vayntrub identified as a 'double performance frame' where 'the narrative stages the poem as speech, and the speaker, within the words of the poem, stages her speech among her listening audience in the world of the story.'[4] In other words, in staged poetry singers also signals to us, as readers, that they are performing for a particular audience. Given our effort to critically re-imagine performance in Judges 5, recognition of this insight is particularly important. We see this principle at work in Judges 5:3 where the singer calls out to the kings and rulers and potentially again in Judges 5:10 where she calls out to the merchants.

An important observation from our exploration of Siri epic performance was that even when centred on the same epic text, performances can take very different forms. So much so that, at least in that case of the performance of the Siri epic at the Siri jātre, the presence of the Siri epic text was virtually unrecognisable–this was partly due to the presence of dialogic discourse and a paucity of linear narrations. Stated differently, the study of the Siri epic revealed that ethnographic performances can assume unpredictable forms. In as much as the song in Judges 5 presents in the form of a cyclical but clear narrative arc, Siri epic performance provides an empirical basis upon which to question the common assumption that texts that are presented in cyclical but clear narrative arcs are performed as such. In the the case of the Siri jātre, the performance of the text takes on a functional rather than a narrative role.

As a performance, jātre performance is an annual ritual directed internally toward the religious community facilitating a ritual space where participants and community members can receive healing, pastoral care and re-affirm their individual salvation. While it is possible to critically re-imagine Judges 5 in light of all of the Siri epic performance contexts highlighted above, I have elected to re-imagine it in

[4] Vayntrub, *Beyond Orality,* 6

light of jātre because the presence of multivocality works especially well with the complexity inherent in jātre performance.

The song of Deborah in Judges 5 itself is not about healing, pastoral care, or individual salvation. Nevertheless, reading it alongside Honko's reception of jātre performance, invites reflection on what a performance of Judge 5 might look like were it to be re-imagined along the lines of jātre. Not only does this approach invite us to engage the critical imagination, but in so doing it sensitises us and leads us to reflect on other alternative dimensions of the Hebrew text precluded by evolutionist models of text. For example, one of the effects of reading Siri epic performance alongside Judges 5 is that it reframes our analysis of the literary role of invocations raising the question as to whether audiences in the world of the story do literary work in the text.

## 4.3 Performance Context: Jātre

The Siri epic is a story about Siri, a woman of divine origin and her descendants' non-violent struggle for justice. At the same time, the three natural performance contexts identified by Honko show how the Siri epic itself is engaged in various functional and ritual ways that would have remained unknown to us were it not for Honko's thick archiving and thorough documentation. In other words, Honko's study of the Siri epic revealed that ethnographic performance can be instrumentalised to facilitate functions and rituals that lay well beyond the realm of storytelling and entertainment. Put another way, during the Siri jātre, the performance of an epic tradition about a woman and her descendants' struggle for justice forms the basis of what is essentially an insider religious ritual.

Before proceeding to discuss the Siri jātre itself, it is important to consider why and how people join the Siri cult in the first place. As indicated in the quote from Naika at the beginning of this chapter, people tend to join the Siri cult as a result of what is perceived to be a mental or spiritual illness resulting from possession by a Siri personage. Through a process known as the opening of the mouth, recruits are either 'healed' or referred on to a priest; if they are healed, the devotee is required to enter Siri service

for a minimum of three years.[5] Devotees who attend the Siri jātre tend not to do so alone. In an apparent recognition of the apparently positive impact that engagement with the Siri cult had on a loved one's condition, devotees usually arrive supported by family members who, during the intense possession rituals, help to keep the devotee hydrated, attend to them if they are overcome by possession, and keep a look out for thieves who mingle amongst the crowds.[6]

The Siri jātre itself takes place once a year and is the only occasion when the different Siri groups from across the region will come together. Attendance by devotees is seen as an act of devotion. Unlike the būta rituals which involve colourful costumes, and storytelling for the benefit of a gathered audience, the jātre caters primarily to devotees.[7] Siri epic performance at the jātre involves no linear narration but instead involves dialogic discourse, a phenomenon particular to Siri epic performance where participants embody the characters of the epic and engage in sung non-narrative conversational dialogue. In addition, while there are some members of the audience who are not Siri devotees, jātre performance is perhaps best thought of a mass participation ritual engaged by embodied Siri devotees who stand in lines while the lead singer and his associates move between them engaging in dialogic discourse. The performance takes place before dignitaries who collectively supervise and authorise the performance a group of dignitaries made up of authoritative local and religious figures and involves elements of mass procession towards the end of the performance where participants engage in a figurative ritual bath.

There are three key elements that help to elucidate the spiritual function of jātre. The first element is theology. In the Siri epic text and jātre ritual, invocation plays a particularly important role; as noted above, in the first written version of the Siri epic that was codified by Sudha and Gowda, the absence of invocations led Gopala Naika to assert that the text was incomplete. Furthermore, the jātre itself is preceeded by an extensive and elaborate series of invocation referred to as the seating of deity; it is through this process of invocation that possession leading to embodiments begins. In Siri epic

[5] Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 348.

[6] As Honko observes, 'each Siri took her final position in the row … with her nearest family companions to guard her against thieves and overwhelming possession.' Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 456.

[7] Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 455.

performance, invocation is a spiritual act which can be seen in the adhortative verbiage employed by Gopala Naika at various points in the invocations and jātre ritual. His words reveal the presence of an underlying theology that perceives the performance as an act of cleansing (indeed this can also be seen in the ritual bathing); note the following example:

> —doing the periodic service, today,
> Taking the yearly gift, from year to year, from Era to era,
> The taken gift, becoming thousand and one types of root-
> medicine, becoming thousand and one types of herbal
> medicine,
> Becoming thousand and one types of amulets, let it be obtained
> in the taken gift.
> The promise of protection by bolyottu Kumara and by the
> trinity gods in Looknaadu be there in this areca-flower
> bud![8]

As mentioned above, devotees are expected to dedicate at least three years to their Siri group. Not only is this alluded to in the poetic verse above, but attendance is likened to medicine and is associated with the divine Kumara's protection, a type of salvation as well as further protection from illness.

The second element of jātre is healing. The jātre functions as type of healing renewal for attendees. The proceedings—as documented by Honko and his team—involve opening of the mouth rituals, where initiates thought to be afflicted by spiritual illness that can manifest itself in disturbing and at times violent behaviour such as biting, are brought forward by their families and communities for ritual diagnosis. In this ceremony, they are sung at until they reveal the epic personage with whom they identify, if any. This is not too dissimilar to what takes place in the paliodaliya.[9] Naika was observed to delegate this function to some of the more experienced Siri women, with the more stubborn cases being escalated to him as lead tradition bearer. Healing through jātre also functions as the beginning part of an initiation into to the cult. This is why Naika comments that 'the people who are with me, they were mostly mad people! Understand?'[10]

[8] Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 442.
[9] For a description of the paliodaliya, see section 4.5.2.
[10] The quote is taken from Lauri Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 530.

The third and final functional element of jātre under consideration is that of pastoral counsel. During the jātre, Naika is assisted by other Kumaras, which enables him to not only delegate the opening of the mouth ceremonies, but also the leading of certain elements of the performance as well. This enables Naika to attend to those waiting to see him for blessing and counsel. While these consultations appeared to be largely of a spiritual nature, they also provided a source of income for Naika as those with whom he consulted in turn provided monetary donations.

## 4.4 Judges 5 in Light of the Extended Performative Dimensions of Jātre

In the preceding section we outlined the performance context of jātre, observing that jātre performance of the Siri epic involved the adaptation of the epic to a specific functional context beyond that of narration. This section schematises jātre performance by elucidating its core elements before going on to consider the extent to which these core performative dynamics might already present in the text of Judges 5 and by implication the extent to which a reading of Judges 5 as jātre would need to rely on critically re-imagining them. The core performative dimensions of jātre performance can be delineated as follows: the social dimension; the embodied-charismatic dimension; and the mass participation dimension. Each of these will now be considered in turn.

### 4.4.1 The Social Dimension

One of the similarities between the Siri jātre and the performance the takes place in Judges 5 is the fact that both begin with invocations— though with jātre performance Honko documents that in addition to the invocations that took place leading up to the performance, there was also a separate service of invocations that took place prior to the jātre in a separate location. With Siri epic performance, invocations play a functional role in bringing about embodiment. Moreover, for the Siris not only does invocation invoke the presence of deity but it also seats deity within the performers transforming them into the personages of the Siri epic. As part of the invocatory ritual the lead singer acknowledged the presence of the dignitaries present and, the wording of the invocations include homages paid to various deities. As such, the invocation contributes to the jātre performance frame, providing further insights that

might not otherwise have been apparent, such as the social dynamics that exist, particularly in terms of the perceived power differentials between deity, performers, and human audiences.

As observed above, Siri epic performance operates within a broader social caste system where embodied performance is almost exclusively the realm of the untouchables. The recognition of the dignitaries by Siri leader Gopala Naika provides a subtle hint as to the initial power imbalance that exists between himself, as a performer of a comparably lower social status, and the dignitaries overseeing the proceeding. During performance however, a type of social reversal takes place in which performers, embodied by deity come to assume a heretofore absent authority over and above that of the dignitaries as they are perceived as speaking and performing under the auspices of deity, and at times speak truth to power.

Reading Honko's reception of jātre performance alongside Judges 5 alerts us to the potential for similar social dimensions to be in operation in the story world of Judges 5 where, during the invocation the singer acknowledges authoritative figures in the form of 'kings' and 'potentates' (Judg 5:3) and then later gives a possible indication as to the presence of merchants (Judg 5:10). Aside from the fact that the prose narrator and the singer in the story world of the text identify the lead singer as Deborah, we have no other indication as to the singer's status. While, for the purposes of this critical exercise we are electing to re-imagine the lead singer as a performer who embodies Deborah rather than Deborah herself, it is also the case that even if we took the character in the story world of the text to be Deborah who had status as a jhudge and prophetess, the presence of other powerful, authoritative, economically wealthy individuals would still result in power differentials between performer and audience.

While we will explore the social dimension of performance in Judges 5 further, particularly with reference to the performance frame of Judges 5, it should nevertheless be recognised that our ability to do so is limited by the fact that our actual reception of Judges 5 is limited by that which is contained in the Hebrew text which, unlike Honko's reception of jātre, does not include thick descriptions. In addition, the religious and social framework of the story world of Judges 5 cannot be conflated with the religious and social framework of South India and the Hindu Caste system, since there are serious material

differences between the two. Furthermore, there is also the fact that whereas the lead singer (referred to a Kumara) in jātre performance is a male who performs before male dignitaries, the lead singer in Judges 5 appears to be a female performance before male kings, potentates and merchants. These gender differences have the potential to add a further layer of complexity beyond that which occurs in jātre performance.

### 4.4.2 The embodied-ecstatic dimension

Another core performative aspect of jātre performance is the embodied-charismatic dimension. This refers to the various ecstatic behaviours exhibited by performers as they are inhabited and in turn embody the Siri epic personages during performance. While the embodied-charismatic aspect of performance also impacts upon the social dimension of performance, in the sense that ecstatic behaviour can lend further authority to a performer in the sense that such behaviour is perceived as evidencing inhabitation by deity, jātre performance centres on a specific ecstatic phenomenon known as dialogic discourse which is one of the main points that distinguishes Siri epic performance from other types of possession rituals, as seen in the būta kōlas.[11] As noted previously, the dialogic discourse referenced here is a very particular ethnographic phenomenon, wherein participant engage with one another in in sung conversations based on scenes from their epic characters subepic.[12] This is a very different dynamic to linear narration and storytelling.

Given the centrality of ecstatic embodiment to Siri epic performance and the role that dialogic discourse play in jātre performance in particular, reading jātre alongside Judges 5 raises the question as to the extent to which performance in Judges 5 might reflect similarly ecstatic performance. In the first instance, while the text does acknowledge Deborah's status as a prophetess it does not employ the more typical Hebrew terms referencing ecstatic behaviour such as in the use of נבא in the niphal or hithpael

[11] For further information see Miho Ishii, "Playing with Perspectives: Spirit Possession, Mimesis, and Permeability in the Buuta Ritual in South India," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 19.4 (2013): 795–812, doi:10.1111/1467-9655.12065; Peter J. Claus, "Mayndala: A Legend and Possession Cult of Tulunad," *Asian Folklore Sudies* 38.2 (1979): 95–129, doi:10.2307/1177686; and in particular, B. A. Viveka Rai, "Epics in the Oral Genre System of Tulunadu," *Oral Tradition* 1.11 (1996): 169–70.

[12] For a summary of the Siri epic and its various subepics, see appendix A.

stem. In addition, Judges 5 contains no direct mention of possession, fainting, vigorous dancing or other actions commonly associated with ecstatic states. As such, in reflecting on the dynamic that an embodied-ecstatic dimension can bring to performance, this thesis will not be making the argument that the performance in Judges 5 is embodied-ecstatic performance. Rather, it will be argued that drawing on jātre performance to critically re-imagine Judges 5 as embodied-ecstatic performance highlights alternative aspects of text that might not otherwise have been explored.

From this perspective, dialogic discourse provides an interesting case in point: one of the challenges with poetic texts such as Judges 5 is identifying the voice that is speaking.[13] The absence of those conventions used for introducing direct speech in narrative can create ambiguity as to who is speaking and when.[14] This dynamic is compounded when additional foibles of the medium of Hebrew poetry over issues such as grammatical gender, and text-critical issues that include the existence of more than one major Greek recension.[15] While our analysis of Judges 5 will be based on the *Biblia Hebraica Quinta*, this point nevertheless helps to underscore the inherent challenges scholars have identified. Inasmuch as the phenomenon of dialogic discourse is not present in the text of Judges 5 and is particular to Siri epic performance, it does provide an alternative framework within which to reflect on the challenge of multivocality that is present in Judges 5.

[13] The issue of multivocality of Judges 5 is complex; scholars have detected different voices in the passage, sometimes even within the same verse. See Daniel Block, *Judges, Ruth*, The New American Commentary 6 (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 1999), 214-15. While block suggests that Judges may contain the voice of an original Deborah, Fokkelman has suggested that the voice present in the text is: a lyricist. See J. P. Fokkelman, "The Song of Deborah and Barak: Its Prosodic Levels and Structure," in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom*, ed. David P. Wright et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 596. Sasson argues that voice in the text contains the voice of poet Jack M. Sasson, *Judges 1–12*, The Anchor Yale Bible(New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 283. Dobbs-Allsopp even suggests that the voice is that of a once-embodied singer of songs, though it should be noted that his work is evolutionist in nature due to its assumption of an oral-background. See F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *On Biblical Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 289.

[14] Mathews, Prophets as performers, 7

[15] On the foibles of grammatical gender in Hebrew poetry note Malka Muchnik, *The Gender Challenge of Hebrew*, The Brill Reference Library of Judaism 42 (Leiden: Brill, 2015). For a discussion on the differences between the A and B texts in the Septuagint, see Nathan LaMontagne, *The Song of Deborah in the Septuagint*, Forschungen zum Alten Testament 2.110 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 15–19.

One well known example of multivocality can be found in Judges 5:7, which starts off with a third-person verbal form (חדלו) before switching to what, in the first instance, appears to be a first-person form partway through the verse (שקמתי):

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | חדלו פרזון בישראל עד שקמתי דבורה שקמתי אם בישרא | 7 |
| 7 | Village life in Israel ceased<br>Until I Deborah arose,<br>Rose up <<a mother in Israel>> | |

To complicate matters further, the LXX reads שקמתי as a third person form (ἀναστῇ), and others point out that a תי– can also be indicative of a less common second person feminine ending. Indeed, it is this latter translation that appears to be preferred in more recent translations such as the NRSV.[16] However שקמתי is translated—whether as a first-, second-, or third-person form—has implications for our perception of who the speaker is. A first-person translation of 'I' might imply that Deborah is speaking; a second person 'you' that Deborah is being addressed; and a third person 'she' might indicate that Deborah is being spoken of by someone, such as the narrator. Given that I am reading Judges 5 as jātre in the context of dialogic discourse, the first person 'I' translation has been preferred.

For the purpose of our critical re-imagination of performance in Judges 5, The 'I' of Judges 5 will be approached as that of a singer in the story world of the text—whose inhabitation by the spirit of YHWH results in their embodiment of the narrative's legendary characters, such as Deborah and Barak. One of the dynamics of dialogic discourse is that, aside from the lead singer, the narrative identify of performers only becomes evident when they speak, and even then it takes foreknowledge of the Siri epic to match the sung conversational dialogue of participants with their epic personage.[17] If we apply this approach to Judges 5, and attempt to use the words themselves to identify which personages may be participants in the performance, the presence of the following characters can be critically re-imagined:

[16] See GKC §44ff.

[17] In Siri epic performance it is often only when a performer opens their mouth that their epic personage becomes identifiable. The same approach has been taken here, although as mentioned above, there is not always absolute clarity on who speaks and when, especially when it comes to distinguishing Deborah from the lead tradition bearer.

| Personage | Judges 5 |
|---|---|
| Lead Singer/ Deborah | vv. 2–5 |
| Deborah | vv. 7a–11a |
| Deborah | v. 11b |
| Barak | v. 12a–b |
| Deborah | vv. 12c–22 |
| The Angel of YHWH | v. 23 |
| Deborah | vv. 24–28a |
| The Mother of Sisera | v. 28b |
| Deborah | v. 29 |
| The Mother of Sisera + Ladies-in-waiting | v. 30 |
| Deborah | v. 31 |

Dialogic discourse is but one element of the embodied-charismatic dimension in jātre performance. In addition to providing an alternative lens through which to consider multi-vocality in Judges 5, jātre performance also highlights the impact that embodiment can have on the texture of a performance. Stated differently, Honko's reception of jātre highlighted some of the more subtle ways that the embodied-charismatic dimension of performance can manifest itself at the textual level. For example, while repetition is a common element of Hebrew poetry and epic performance, Honko's reception of the Siri epic alerts us to the fact that the repetition present in a performance may not only by artistic. Jātre performance alerts us to the fact that repetition can be functional and for example, reflect an effort by a lead singer to, for example, control possession. While this function is only being critically re-imagined in Judges 5, the act of doing so alerts to the possibility that textual, elements such as repetition may well have a functional role in performance, even if we don't have the thick materials necessary to determine what that function could have been. The fact that repetition may indicate the operation of practical non-textual functions beyond aesthetics is not something that is usually considered when it comes to performance, and yet it is a consideration that reading jātre alongside Judges 5 evokes.

### 4.4.3 The mass-participatory dimension

While jātre performance is led by a lead singer, it is nevertheless a performance that involves mass participation and, in so doing, provides an empirical basis upon which to consider the sort of elements that might be involved in performances that involve many participants in a ritual-type setting.

Similar to the performative dimensions mentioned above, the extent to which jātre performance can be compared directly with performance in Judges 5 is limited. Aside from the presence of multiple voices, the text of Judges 5 itself does not present as a performance that involves numerous additional participants in a ritual-type setting. Nevertheless, this is also true when one compares the Siri epic text itself, with the way in which the Siri epic text is performed during the Siri jātre. However, the added value of having sight of both the Siri epic text and jātre performance is that together, they provide empirical ethnographic insight, not only into the fact that the performance of a text may take a very different form to the dynamic implied in the text; but also into the types of activities, such as procession, ritual bathing, standing in lines, that can be engaged *en mass* as well as the ensuing real-world dynamics that occur between singers, participants and audiences that such activities can bring. While this is perhaps the most tentative aspect of our critical exercise of re-imagining Judges 5, reflecting on the ethnographic mass participatory dimensions of jātre performance nevertheless leads us to reflect on potential aspects of performance in Judges 5 that are not usually considered, and lead us to ask different questions of the biblical text.

## 4.5 The Deborah Tradition in Judges 5:1–31 as a Literary Representation of a Mental Text

As stated above, mental texts exist as a series of images or scenes organised according to a core storyline that becomes accessible to analysis through literary representation. As Honko observes, on their own these images may not mean much until they are 'related to each other, combined in a particular way or put into a sequence.' [18] Furthermore, it is important to note that the actual images utilised by the singer such as a particular type of house or funeral are far more likely to be grounded in the visual and physical realities known to the teller. It therefore follows that if we are to reimagine the song in Judges 5 as having been performed in the story world of the text, by a singer (or singers) embodying the characters of the narrative, we must first identify what the core storyline of the song could have been. Unlike Honko who

[18] Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 97.

was able to interview the singer of the Siri epic, we do not have access to the singer in the story world of Judges 5 or its literary author(s)/editor(s); as such, we are thus left to reconstruct a hypothetical mental text of the song in Judges 5 ourselves. While it is of course possible to deduce a storyline from Judges 5:1–31 alone, we have the added benefit that two versions of the same story (Judges 4:1–23 and Judges 5:1–31) have been placed side-by-side by the author(s)/editor(s) of the Hebrew Bible–it is this dynamic that makes these texts thick and therefore particularly suited to the application of Honko's method of tradition ecology. We will identify the common storyline through a comparison of Judges 5:1-31 and Judges 4:1–23. In so doing we will also establish a robust basis for the application of tradition ecological analysis.[19]

For almost as long as the critical study of the Hebrew Bible has existed, scholars have been intrigued by the existence of doublets and repetition.[20] This is especially true in the case of the song of Deborah in Judges 5:1–31, which is immediately preceded by a narrative in Judges 4:1–23 of what would appear to be the same events presented in the song.[21] The ingenuity of Honko's conceptualisation of mental texts lies in its ability to frame how the same song/story can assume very different forms, even when told by the same singer(s)/storyteller(s) within a particular community, region, and in our case text.[22] While, In the case of Judges 5 (and much of the Hebrew Bible), the author(s)/editor(s) remain unknown to us, the placement of Judges 4 and Judges 5 (and Exodus 14 and 15) side-by-side provides an

[19] As noted above, within tradition ecology, Honko identified four types of adaptation: milieu-morphological, tradition-morphological, functional and tradition-ecological. For a review of these concepts, see chapter 3.

[20] In particular, note Aulikki Nahkola, *Double Narratives in The Old Testament: The Foundations of Method in Biblical Criticism*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 290 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2001).

[21] There is a lot of literature discussing the nature of relationship between the poetry and the prose. Graham S. Ogden, "Poetry, Prose and Their Relationship: Some Reflections Based on Judges 4 & 5," in *Discourse Perspectives on Hebrew Poetry in the Scriptures*, ed. Ernst R. Wendland (Reading: United BibleSocieties, 1994), 111–30; Jack M. Sasson, "'A Breeder or Two for Each Leader': On Mothers in Judges 4 and 5," in *A Critical Engagement: Essays on the Hebrew Biblein Honour of J. Cheryl Exum*, ed. David J. A. Clines and Ellen van Wolde (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012), 333–55; Mark S. Smith, *Poetic Heroes: Literary Commemorations of Warriors and Warrior Culture in the Early Biblical World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014); James W. Watts, *Psalm and Story: Inset Hymns in Hebrew Narrative*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 139 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992); K. Lawson Younger, "Heads! Tails! Or the Whole Coin?! Contextual Method and Intertextual Analysis: Judges 4 and 5," in *The Biblical Canon in Comparative Perspective: Scripture in Context IV*, ed. K. Lawson Younger, William W. Hallo and Bernard Frank Batto, ANE Texts & Studies 11 (Lampeter: Mellen, 1991), 109–46.

[22] Honko, "Thick Corpus and Organic Variation," 201.

instructive literary basis upon which to re-imagine Judges 4 and Judges 5 (contrary to historical-critical approaches) as deriving from the same authorial/editorial locus (whoever they may have been). This approach challenges the prevalent historical critical approach within biblical studies that often perceives variation between Judges 4 and 5 as signalling the presence of different sources or even that the texts are in fact two different narratives altogether. [23] To approach Judges 5 as literary representation of a mental text is to assume is to assume the competency of the singer(s) in the world of the text as well as that of its author(s)/editor(s). It provides an instructive basis whereupon we can analyse variation as an organic and intentional phenomenon, rather than something that is incidental or clumsy.

On a phenomenological level, scholars such as Christopher Booker have demonstrated that stories tend to adopt similar, if not the same, overarching frameworks.[24] While the use of etic categorisation techniques, such as story-structuring devices, comes with the potential of imposing external frameworks foreign to the material at hand, they also provide a useful starting point for the comparison of a phenomenon that might at first sight appear to be quite different.[25]

| **Sequence** | **Plot** | **Judges 4** | **Judges 5** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Exposition | Israelites under oppression | vv. 1–3 | vv. 6–9 |
| Rising Action | Deborah and Barak muster Israel against the enemy | vv. 4–13 | vv. 12–18 |
| Climax | A great battle is fought | vv. 14–16 | vv. 19–22 |
| Falling action | Sisera is killed by the tent-dwelling Jael | vv. 17–22 | vv. 24–27 |
| Dénouement | Israelites free from oppression | vv. 22–23 | v. 31 |

As we can see from the table above, on the phenomenological level a core storyline shared between Judges 4:1–23 and 5:1–31 can reasonably be hypothesised. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the storyline in Judges 4:1–23 which is more similar in form to a prose narrative proceeds linearly, progressing from exposition

[23] Some argue that the accounts are completely independent, see Roland de Vaux, *The Early History of Israel* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1978), 789–90. Others, from a literary perspective, suggest that the accounts are complementary, though stemming from different sources. See Yaira Amit, *The Book of Judges: The Art of Editing*, Biblical Interpretation Series 38 (Leiden: Brill, 1999). For the opinion that the poetic account has been influenced by the prose one, see Walter Houston, "Misunderstanding or Midrash? The Prose Appropriation of Poetic Material in the Hebrew Bible(Part I)," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 109.3 (1997): 342–55, doi:10.1515/zatw.1997.109.3.342.

[24] See Christopher Booker, *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories* (London: Continuum, 2004).

[25] See previous discussion of etic and emic categories.

to denouement in a smooth story arc. This, however, is not the case in Judges 5 which, evidenced by the absence of certain verses, contains several elements not directly related to the progression of the plot. The texts missing from our delineation of Judges 5 are: vv. 1–5 which consist of the narrative introduction, the song's title and invocation; vv. 10–11 which is not a part of the core plot but instead features a traditional storytelling context; v. 23 which is an interjection from the angel of the Lord; and finally, vv. 28–29 which is the scene involving the mother of Sisera. While these texts undoubtedly add to the aesthetic of Judges 5, their absence does not directly impact plot progression. This is very much a reflection of traditional performances which often proceed in a cyclical pattern where plot is progressed by switching from one scene to another.

Based on my analysis above, we now find ourselves in a position to reimagine what Judges 5 and Judges 4 might look like as mental texts consisting of a series of images/scenes organised according to a shared storyline, and then adapted according to the tradition bearer's performance context and strategy:

| **Judges 4:1–23** | **Judges 5:1–31** |
|---|---|
| **(1)** The Israelites under oppression vv. 1–3<br>a. Hazor vv. 1–2a<br>b. Harosheth-ha-goiim v. 2b<br>c. Chariots of iron v. 3 | **(1)** The Israelites under oppression vv. 6–7a<br>a. Trade routes v. 6<br>b. Unwalled hilltop villages v. 7a |
| **(2)** Deborah and Barak muster Israel vv. 4–13<br>a. The Palm of Deborah vv. 4–5<br>b. Mount Tabor vv. 6–10<br>c. Elon-bezaanannim v. 11<br>d. Wadi Kishon / Chariots of iron v. 13 | **(2)** Deborah and Barak muster Israel vv. 13–18<br>a. Military roll call vv. 13–18 |
| **(3)** A great battle is fought vv. 14–16<br>a. Mount Tabor vv. 14–15<br>b. Harosheth-ha-goiim v. 16 | **(3)** A great battle is fought vv. 19–21<br>a. Kings v. 19<br>b. Stars v. 20<br>c. Kishon river v. 21 |
| **(4)** Death by a tent-dwelling woman vv. 17–22<br>a. Elon-bezaanannim v. 17<br>b. Tent vv. 18–20<br>c. Tent peg and mallet v. 21<br>d. Tent v. 22 | **(4)** Death by a tent-dwelling woman vv. 24–27<br>a. Hospitality v. 25<br>b. Tent peg and mallet v. 26<br>c. The assault v. 27 |
| **(5)** The Israelites are free from oppression vv. 23–24 | **(5)** The Israelites are free from oppression vv. 31 |

While the two tellings follow the same core storyline, we can see that even at this macro level the focal images/scenes of the storyline in Judges 5:1–31 and Judges 4:1–23 are very different. From a tradition

ecological perspective, one of the key differences between the two tellings lies in the fact that the images/scenes built around the storyline in Judges 5 appear to be much more typical of epic-type tellings. These typical epic images/scenes usually operate on the more generic level progressing through series of traditional scenes and images, such as the military roll call in vv. 13–18, and allusions to traditional architecture such as the unwalled hilltop settlements of Iron IIA, or ancient hospitality customs. Of particular note is the fact that, in Judges 5, the only specific geographical locations or milieu dominants to which the teller connects the events are Tanaach, the waters of Megiddo and the river Kishon. This is in stark contrast to the telling in Judges 4 for which each scene is centred on the location or locations where the action takes place. Stated differently, the telling in Judges 4 displays a far greater number of linkages with the local milieu than the telling in Judges 5, which from a tradition ecological perspective, may be indicative of localisation, a milieu-morphological strategy to link and adapt the Deborah tradition to the local-historical frame of events.[26]

## 4.6 Reading Judges 5 alongside Jātre

As we now move to critically reimagine Judges 5 as jātre, we shall do so by drawing on our delineation of Judges 5 as a literary representation of a mental text and through dialogic discourse. The four forms of adaptation identified by Honko (milieu-morphological, tradition-morphological, functional and ecological) will be used to draw hypotheses as to the teller's performance strategy, i.e., how and why they adapt their mental text of the Deborah and Barak tradition in particular ways. This will involve paying close attention to the traditional language and structures employed by the teller; to this end, the text of Judges 5 will be annotated in order to highlight particular emic elements. The symbols <M>…</M> will be used to indicate the presence of multiforms (i.e. <M> *multiform* </M>) and epithets will be delineated using angle brackets (i.e. << *epithet* >>). Underlining indicates comparative correspondence. Once again, this

[26] Milieu-morphological adaptation refers to the adaptation of a tradition to the its physical surroundings and the natural environment, tradition-morphological adaptation refers to the adaptation of a tradition to the prevalent cultural phenomena and norms, functional adaptation references the short-lived adaptations that occur in performance, and ecological-adaptation refers to those adaptations identified as being typical of a particular people, regional or cultural group. For a full discussion of this see section 4.3.

reading is intended to be heuristic, not exegetical; its purpose is to critically reimagine performance in Judges 5 through the ethnographic lens of the Siri epic.

### 4.6.1 Can I Have Your Attention, Please! Metonymic Titles, Multiformity and Functional Adaptation in Judges 5:1–2

5:1 ותשר דבורה וברק בן־אבינעם ביום ההוא לאמר
5:2 בפרע פרעות בישראל בהתנדב עם ברכו יהוה

5:1 And Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam sang on that day saying[27]
5:2 <M> "When flowing[28] locks unravel[29] in Israel,
when the people offer themselves willingly—
bless the Lord! </M>

In Judges 5:1 the prose narrator establishes the performance frame for the song that follows. They focus in particular on Deborah and Barak and frame the song as having been performed by them 'on that day'(ביום), a reference to the preceding prose narrative (Judg 4:23). By placing the poem in the mouths of two of the main literary characters of the preceding narrative, the narrator then frames the performance in Judges 5 as taking place within the broader prose context of God's subjugation of King Jabin through Deborah, Barak, Jael and the armies of Israel. In so doing the narrator presents the performance that follows (in Judges 5) as a response to what previously transpired in the prose (Judges 4). The narrative voice does not reappear again until the end of the song in Judges 5:31.

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[27] The use of the third feminine singular form תשר in Judges 5:1 has been highlighted as a strong indication that the song in Judges 5 is reporting the actions of Deborah and Barak or 'female X and male Y,' but that it is also emphasising the centrality of the character Deborah to the telling. Some take this to be an indicator that this grammatical construction is designed to communicate that the song was sung by a female tradition bearer. See Fokkelman, "The Song of Deborah and Barak," 214n3.

[28] This metonyimic construction has traditional resonances with hair. Susan Niditch, *Judges: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster, 2008), 70.

[29] As noted by Sasson, when ב prefixes an infinitive construct it acts as a conjunction generally conveying one of three senses: temporal such as 'when,' causal such as 'because' or adversative as in 'though.' 'God could be praised at a specific occasion, because of his accomplishments on indeed in spite of his actions. As such, this construction can, and has been translated in various ways.' Sasson, *Judges 1–12*, 284. The translation of בפרת has generated much discussion with opinions being divided largely between two possible derivations: (1) the Hebrew root "let go, let alone" referring to the unbinding of hair, or (2) the unattested Arabic based root "excel, be eminent, lead." J. Gerald Janzen, "The Root pr' in Judges V 2 and Deuteronomy XXXII 42," *Vetus Testamentum* 39.4 (1989): 393, doi:10.1163/156853389X00174. The widely diverging meanings of this term are illustrated in the rendering ἀπεκαλύφθη ἀποκάλυμμα (a revelation was revealed), found in multiple Greek manuscripts. To further underline this point, in an apparent attempt to incorporate its diverse potential meanings Sasson notes that the Targum goes 'completely homiletic.' Sasson, *Judges 1–12,* 284.

Following the introduction of the song in Judges 5:1, the lead singer in the story world of the text calls those present to attention. This dynamic is typical of ethnographic performance contexts where, similar to a stage crew who dim the theatre lights or initiate a 'hush' to quieten the audience, tradition bearers must get their audience's attention before commencing.[30] In Judges 5:2 this appears to be achieved through the use of a formulaic construction that communicates notions of self-sacrifice and warriorhood. This formulation occurs again later in v. 9 and comparison of the two reveals a close textural connection; both center on the use of the *hithpael* form of the verb, meaning to make a voluntary contribution (נדב) and both are employed in connection with people (עם).

| **Judges 5:2** | **Judges 5:9** |
|---|---|
| When flowing locks unravel in Israel,<br>when the people offer themselves willingly—<br>bless the Lord! | My heart goes out to the commanders of Israel<br>who offered themselves willingly among the people.<br>Bless the Lord. |

The themes of warriorhood and sacrifice to which the multiform speaks appear to run throughout the song, particularly with regard to praising those noted as having participated in the battle: Deborah and Barak offer themselves (vv. 7, 12), as do Ephraim (v. 14), Zebulon (vv. 14, 18), Issachar (v. 15), Naphtali (v. 18) and Jael (vv. 24–27). Insofar as the differences between the two multiforms are concerned, we note that in v. 2 it is the people (עם) who offer themselves, whereas in v. 9 it is the commanders (חוקקי).

The prime position of this self-sacrifice formulation at the beginning of this telling, its repetition, the linguistic and textural connections between the two variants, and its thematic centrality make it a prime emic candidate for the compositional device Honko referred to as a multiform, which was earlier defined as 'repeatable and artistic expressions of variable length which are constitutive for narration and function as generic markers.'[31] We shall refer to it as the 'self-sacrifice multiform.' In addition, its position here at the beginning of the song indicates that it could even have functioned as a title for the song, thus metonymically referencing the Deborah and Barak tradition in its entirety, especially in light of the

[30] Techniques known to have been used by traditional performers to capture an audience's attention include clapping, instrumentation, special gestures and calls. See Richard Bauman, *Verbal Art as Performance* (Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 1978).

[31] A more detailed discussion of multiforms can be found in section 4.4.

aforementioned generic function and compositional role multiforms are known to play.[32] In addition, our recognition of the presence of these multiforms has the potential to shed light on the 'when flowing locks unravel' (בפרע פרעות) formulation. If, as I am suggesting, these two verses represent different uses of the same multiform, then, given that locks are associated with the Nazirite warrior tradition, the latter multiform's parallel use of the term commanders (חוקקי) supports the present translation of 'when flowing locks flow,' over and above those that translate פרע as lead.[33]

The use of multiforms by the singer represents a sophisticated use of the poetic medium through which a teller can lengthen, shorten and adapt their composition while simultaneously marshalling a field of traditional meaning well beyond that of the lexical definition of the words themselves.[34] The switch in emphasis from the willing sacrifice of the people in v. 1 to that of the commanders in v. 9 may well represent functional adaptation, in which the singer adjusts the multiform to sharpen its meaning. More will be said on this later when we look at verse 9; for now, it is sufficient to note that through employing it, the singer signals that performance is underway.

### 4.6.2 Seating the Spirit of YHWH: Power, Possession, and the Art of Tarrying in Judges 5:3–5

5:3 שמעו מלכים האזינו רזנים אנכי ליהוה אנכי אשירה אזמר ליהוה אלהי ישראל
5:4 יהוה בצאתך משעיר בצעדך משדה אדום ארץ רעשה גם־שמים נטפו גם־עבים נטפו מים
5:5 הרים נזלו מפני יהוה זה סיני מפני יהוה אלהי ישראל

5:3 "Listen, O Kings![35]
Give ear, O Potentates!
I, even I, will sing[36] to YHWH[37]

[32] Frog notes that it is possible for multiforms to be so strongly associated with a particular epic that 'they could function metonymically as a title for the whole song.' See Frog, "Multiforms and Meaning: Playing with Referentiality in Kalevalaic Epic," in *Laulu kulttuurisena kommunikaationa – Song and Singing as Cultural Communication – Песня как средство культурной коммуникации*, ed. P. Huttu-Hiltunen, J. Seppänen, E. Stepanova, Frog, and R. Nevalainen (Helsinki: Juminkeko, 2011), 49–50.

[33] As Niditch points out, the Nazirite tradition is one that 'associates the male warrior's power, sacral status, and free unbound hair.' Niditch, *Judges*, 78.

[34] As Honko notes, 'oral epic breathes through multiforms.' Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 100.

[35] This verse is structured using formulaic word pairs. The first is kings (מלכים) // potentates (רזנים). The second of which is a rare term, which only occurs 5 times in the Hebrew Bible, always in poetic contexts and, always paired with מלכים see Hab 1:10; Ps 2:2; Prov 8:15; 31:4.

[36] Sing (שיר) // make music (זמר), this is a common word pair in Hebrew and can also be found in Ugaritic.

[37] YHWH (יהוה) // God of Israel (אלהי ישראל) is a common Hebrew word pair. In addition, there has been a certain amount of interest concerning the repetition of the pronoun 'I,' with many suggesting that it refers to Deborah rather than Barak. See for example George Foot Moore, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Judges*,

I will make music to the God of Israel.

5:4 <M> O YHWH when you came forth from Seir
When you marched from the open country of Edom
The earth quaked,
Even[38] the heavens melted[39]
Even the clouds dripped water

5:5 The mountains flowed[40] before YHWH
<<The One[41] of Sinai>>
Before YHWH, the God of Israel. </M>

The lead singer commences her performance in Judges 5:2–5 with a form referred to in Siri epic performance as the seating of deity, but that in biblical studies is better known as an invocation. In so doing she calls out to the kings (מלכים) and potentates (רזנים) which is instructive, indeed. Much of the staged and unstaged poetry in the Hebrew Bible commences with an invocation wherein the speaker draws attention to some aspect of an audience that is listening within the story world of the text. However, our reading of invocation alongside the seating of deity in the Siri epic elicits further questions regarding some of the power dynamics that might be at play. In the case of the Siri jātre , performance of the epic is presided over by dignitaries whose presence authorises the performance and who can intervene if, for example, a performance takes too long.[42] Though we are employing the critical imagination here, it has nevertheless been prompted by that which we see in the actual text. This elicits

International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1895), 137–38.

[38] Dahood sees resonances between the Hebrew term even (גם) and the Ugaritic term for thunder; see Mitchell J. Dahood, *Psalms*, 3 vols, The Anchor Bible(Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 1.14. Whilst Dahood's methodology has been variously questioned, the possibility of such deeper metonymic references remains. This is especially true of oral performative contexts such as that this.

[39] Melted (נטף) literally means to drip or drop. As noted by Niditch, the Old Latin and Vulgate suggest that heaven 'was in uproar' or 'disturbed' giving a more cosmogonic reading. See Niditch, *Judges*, 71.

[40] The verb flowed (נזל) has generated much discussion with many suggesting that it ought to be emended to זלל meaning 'shake'; the BHQ reading has been retained here.

[41] This expression is rare and appears only here and in Psalm 68:9. Some take this here to be a gloss, a position reflected in the Old Latin reading, whereas others take it to be a divine title. Indeed, Muraoka notes that in some rare cases זה is used adjectivally before a noun and cites Judges 5:5 as one such case. See Joüon and Muraoka, §143i. For further discussion, see Barnabas Lindars, *Judges 1–5: A New Translation and Commentary,* International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 233–34. Although Lindars rules out the possibility of this being the 'chance survival of an obsolete title,' research has demonstrated the ability of oral traditions to preserve archaisms whose use and meaning have long since been lost. John Miles Foley, *The Singer of Tales in Performance, Voices in Performance and Text* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 113–14.

[42] Honko for example recounts a situation in relating to a play where the dignitaries needed to intervene as the performance was taking too long. See Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 415–17.

the question as to whether elements of the listening audience might be hierarchically above, below or peers of the singer and do literary work in the text.

The sort of power dynamic that can exist when performing before a listening audience is easier to observe through thick descriptions such as those accompanying Honko's reception of the Siri epic where, for example, prior to participating, devotees had to exchange gifts with the gathered dignitaries and were observed bowing before the entrance to the main temple.[43] The fact that the singer in Judges 5 is first presented as addressing authority, may well signify that the context in which her performance is about to take place involves a wider hierarchical power structure that she must acknowledge and who she may well address at various points in her performance. Nevertheless, while our tradition bearer in Judges 5 acknowledges the gathered authorities, she is clear that it is for YHWH that she sings and that He is her ultimate authority, not anyone else.[44]

As noted in chapter 3, in the Siri epic tradition invocation, the seating of deity is more than a formality for Naika. An epic is perceived as incomplete without it, and it is through the invocation that possession and embodiment occur, as such it is important to recognise that it is as an act with deep religious and cultural roots. Having acknowledged and seated the earthly dignitaries in her presence, the Singer proceeds to seat YHWH—the divine one in Judges 5:4–5—through a theophany, a poetic form containing descriptions of YHWH's coming.[45] Theophanies can be found throughout the Hebrew Bible, and given the presence of a number that share similar texture to Judges 5:4–5, they also present

[43] Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 455.

[44] Feminist and womanist scholars have taken particular note of questions of power and hierarchy in Judges 4 and 5, see, for example, Athalya Brenner, *A Feminist Companion to Judges*, Feminist Companion to the Bible4 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993). Others, such as Yoder, have explored the role of political power. John Charles Yoder, *Power and Politics in the Book of Judges: Men and Women of Valor* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2015).

[45] For other examples of theophanies, see Deut 33:2, 2 Sam 22:8–16, and Ps 18:7–15. See Paul J. Achtemeier, *Harper's BibleDictionary* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1985); Dale Patrick, "Epiphanic Imagery in Second Isaiah's Portrayal of a New Exodus," *Hebrew Annual Review 8 (1984): Biblical and Other Stories in Honor of Sheldon H. Blank*, ed. Reuben Ahroni (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1985), 125–41.

themselves as further examples of the operation of multiforms.[46] Of the various theophanies that do occur in the Hebrew bible, the closest is that found in Psalm 68:7–8 [MT 68:8–9]:

| **Judges 5:4–5** | **Psalm 68:7–8** |
|---|---|
| O YHWH when you came forth from Seir | O God, when you went out before your people, |
| When you marched from the open country of Edom | when you marched through the wilderness, |
| The earth quaked, | the earth quaked, the heavens poured down rain |
| Even the heavens melted | at the presence of God, <<the God of Sinai,>> |
| Even the clouds dripped water | at the presence of God, <<the God of Israel>>. |
| The mountains flowed before YHWH | Rain in abundance, O God, you showered abroad; |
| <<The One of Sinai>> | you restored your heritage when it languished; |
| Before YHWH, <<the God of Israel>> | |

When these two texts are placed side-by-side in this way with the textual connections underlined, the similarity between the two becomes clear. There is linguistic similarity, textual correspondence, and corresponding <<epithets>>, and there is diachronic similarity: YHWH marches forth, the earth trembles/quakes, and the heavens pour.

Other theophany multiforms of a similar texture can be found in Numbers 10:35, Deuteronomy 33:2 and Habakkuk 3:3–6. From a tradition ecological perspective, given that we are reimagining Judges 5 as a mental text, a comparison of these theophanies as multiforms will provide a useful context for exploring adaptation.

[46] 'Multiforms must be recognised by some linguistic feature, e.g. keywords which tend to appear in all variants, and which probably have a strategic role in the recall and production of a particular multiform in epic discourse.' Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 101.

| **Numbers 10:35b** | **Deuteronomy 33:2** | **Habakkuk 3:3-6** |
|---|---|---|
| Arise, O Lord, let<br>your enemies be<br>scattered, | The Lord came from Sinai,<br>and dawned from Seir upon us;<br>he shone forth from Mount Paran.<br>With him were myriads of <<holy ones>>;<br>at his right, a host of his own. | God came from Teman,<br><<the Holy One>> from Mount Paran.<br>His glory covered the heavens,<br>and the earth was full of his praise.<br>The brightness was like the sun;<br>rays came forth from his hand,<br>where his power lay hidden.<br>Before him went pestilence,<br>and plague followed close behind.<br>He stopped and shook the earth;<br>he looked and made the nations tremble.<br>The eternal mountains were shattered;<br>along his ancient pathways<br>the everlasting hills sank low. |

Honko describes epic performance as 'the art of tarrying; a leisurely or rather a lingering over certain expressive points in the plot'; in so doing, he highlights the utility of multiforms, which can be extended or shortened according to the aesthetic and compositional needs of the singer.[47] As can be seen from the tables above, the theophany multiforms vary quite substantially in terms of length and content while demonstrating the necessary similarity in texture that enable us to identify them as multiforms. While some of them stop at imaging YHWH's coming (Num 10:35b, Deut 33:2) others exhibit a dynamic in which YHWH's coming visibly impacts the surrounding environment (Hab 3:3–6, Ps 69:7–8, Judg 5:4–5).[48]

Looking more specifically at the matter of the differences between the multiforms, this is where the approach of tradition ecology can be seen as adding value to analysis. From the foregoing discussion, a formulaic way of expressing the theophany multiform present in Judges 4–5 is: 'YHWH goes forth + the environment affected.' When reduced in this way it is possible to view the various nuances concerning the manner in which it is expressed as adaptations, which gives the potential to provide further insight as to the operating performance strategy. In the case of Judges 4–5, this underlying formula is adapted to

[47] See Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 86.

[48] Num 10:35 demonstrates the ability of tradition bearers to press wide fields of traditional meaning into compact forms, and as has been noted by numerous scholars, Num 10:35 is much more than a request for YHWH to 'arise.' See George Buchanan Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Numbers,* International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1903), 96–97; Philip J. Budd, *Numbers*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1984), 115.

reference Seir (שעיר), the open country of Edom (שדה אדום) and the One of Sinai (זה סיני)—a rare epithet for YHWH. The inclusion of specific geographic references may indicate milieu-morphological adaptation, and a more specific strategy of localisation where the singer develops links between their telling and the local frame familiar to their audience. Similarly, the use of a rare title for YHWH may evidence a tradition-ecological adaptation in which the singer describes YHWH in a manner specific to a certain area or social group. While the latter cannot ultimately be proven due to a lack of appropriate evidence, the former example describing YHWH's coming from Seir/Edom can be perceived as possessing localised connotations, in light of the fact that storms coming from the south, where Seir and Edom are located were known to be particularly powerful.[49] Furthermore, in light of the known ancient tensions between Israel in the north and Judah in the south, a description of YHWH coming from the south could also present as a polemic against the north.[50]

Finally, as noted above, this beginning section of the poem serves as an invocation. In jātre performance, the seating of the deity (or invocation) leads to possession and embodiment. Knowledge of this raises the question as to whether the invocation in Judges 5:2 might be performing a similar function. While the text itself gives no explicit indication of this, asking the question nevertheless sensitises us to the fac that the singer's description of YHWH's coming as visibly affecting the surrounding environment—causing such shaking (Judg 5:4, רעשה) and flowing (Judg 5:4, נטפו)—are reminiscent of the type of behaviour displayed during possession, and our reading of jātre elicited this insight. In terms of critically re-imagining Judges 5, this metaphorical language could be read as mirroring the visible effects of rising possession of the lead singer as she embodies Deborah in the story world of the text.

[49] Sasson, *Judges 1–12*, 286–87

[50] For example, Sasson argues that the issue of where God marches from 'is of matter only if climatology (storms from the south are powerful) or tradition (Yahwism arose in the South) is at stake.' Though he does go on to suggest that in this case such details matter less than 'the poet's conceit that God would force nature into aberrant behaviour when Israel's fate was endangered.' Sasson, *Judges 1–12*, 286–87. See also Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 222–23.

4.6.3 Once Upon a Time: Milieu-morphological Adaptation in Judges 5:6-7a

| | **Judges 4** | | **Judges 5** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | ויספו בני ישראל לעשות הרע בעיני יהוה ואהוד מת | 4:1 | בימי שמגר בן־ענת בימי יעל חדלו ארחות והלכי נתיבות ילכו ארחות עקלקלות | 5:6 |
| | וימכרם יהוה ביד יבין מלך־כנען אשר מלך בחצור ושר־צבאו סיסרא והוא יושב בחרשת הגוים | 4:2 | חדלו פרזון בישראל | 5:7a |
| | ויצעקו בני־ישראל אל־יהוה כי תשע מאות רכב־ברזל לו והוא לחץ את־בני ישראל בחזקה עשרים שנה | 4:3 | | |
| 4:1 | And the sons of Israel did evil again in the eyes of YHWH when Ehud died. | 5:6 | In the days of <<Shamgar, son of Anat>>. In the days of Jael, roadways[51] ceased. Travellers took to byways.[52] | |
| 4:2 | And the Lord sold them into the hand of <<Jabin King of Canaan>>, he reigned in Hazor and the commander of his army was Sisera. And he was living in <<Harosheth of the people>>. | 5:7a | Village life[53] in Israel ceased.[54] | |
| 4:3 | And the sons of Israel cried out to YHWH for because of the nine hundred chariots of iron that belonged to him, and he tormented the sons of Israel sorely for twenty years. | | | |

As noted above, the oppression scene is one of five shared elements of plot that Judges 5 and Judges 4 have in common. As such, the parallel scene in Judges 4 will be used as a comparative lens for exploring adaptation in Judges 5. In Judges 5, the lead singer embodying Deborah commences her dialogic discourse centring on Israel's experience of oppression. She begins by establishing the temporal framework for the events she is about restate; this is achieved through a formulation of 'in the days of' (בימי) + two traditional

[51] Some read roadways (ארחות) as caravans, but this is not necessary; see Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 224.

[52] The only other place where עקלקלות is found is Ps 125:5. Some readings, such as Old Latin, suggest this term also has moral and geographical undertones.

[53] The interpretation of פרזון is contentious. Soggin translates it as 'the leading class,' Boling as 'warriors' and Lindars as 'villagers.' J. Alberto Soggin, *Judges: A Commentary*, 2nd ed., Old Testament Library (London: SCM, 1987), 82; Robert G. Boling, *Judges*, The Anchor Bible(Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 109; Lindars, *Judges 1–5*, 209. Block however suggests that it is best 'to understand פרזון as a collective designation for residents of rural unwalled settlements' citing supporting evidence in Akkadian from the Amarna letters is persuasive. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 225.

[54] Interpretations of חדל generally fall between one of two root meanings: 'to stop' and 'to grow plump.' Whilst some opt for the latter interpretation, most agree that travel ceased. Niditch highlights the sociological implications for each, Niditch, *Judges*, 71.

personages, namely Shamgar and Jael, both foreigners (Judg 5:6).[55] This linking of tradition with historical persons represents traditional-morphological adaption and is similarly evident in Judges 4 where the tradition is linked to other personages, namely Ehud and Jabin, King of Hazor (Judg 4:1–2). This variation, in terms of whom the tradition is linked to, may once again be illustrative of how performance context can influence adaptation.

The linking of tellings to known personages is a common practice in traditional literature. However, it's worth noting that in Judges 4 the linking of the Deborah tradition is not without controversy. First, in antiquity, Canaan was never regarded as a singular unit ruled over by a single king, and second; the reference to <<Jabin, King of Hazor>> in Joshua 11:1–14 implies that King Jabin may have reigned during an earlier period than that implied by Judges 4.[56] However, while such dynamics are controversial for contemporary scholars, folklorists recognise the linking of traditions with historical or supernormal beings is more about lending authority to the narrative than historicity.[57] The fact that Jabin is mentioned elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible and designated as the King of Canaan suggests that at the very least, Jabin was an important figure within the traditional milieu. The same is true for Judges 5 where definitively proving the history of Ehud and Jael is even more challenging than that of Jabin. In any case, each literary character is likely to have had their own metonymy and traditional associations. According to the prose narrator, the time period in Judges 4 is associated with a left-handed Israelite and a Canaanite king, while the singer in the story world of Judges 5 associates her telling with two foreign heroes.

[55] When recounting pre-history, it is common for tradition bearers to use signals to differentiate it from the present. Fairy tales, for example, are often depicted as occurring 'once upon a time…' and 'in a land far away…' formulaic devices that create distance in term of both time and location. See Lauri Honko, "Four Forms of Adaptation of Tradition," in *Theoretical Milestones: Selected Writings of Lauri Honko*, ed. Pekka Hakamies and Anneli Honko, Folklore Fellows Communications 304 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 2013), 173. Similar to the various '*wyhy*' constructions, בימי appears to function as an indicative marker of Israelite tellings, see Victor Sasson, "The waw Consecutive/waw Contrastive and the Perfect. Verb Tense, Context, and Texture in Old Aramic and Biblical Hebrew, with Comments on the Deir'Alla Dialect and Post-Biblical Hebrew," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 113.4 (2001): 602–17, doi:10.1515/zatw.2001.017; Susan Niditch, "Epic and History in the Hebrew Bible: Definitions, 'Ethnic Genres,' and the Challenges of Cultural Identity in the Biblical Book of Judges," in *Epic and History*, ed. David Konstan and Kurt A. Raaflaub, The Ancient World: Comparative Histories (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 89–90.

[56] Sasson, *Judges 1–12*, 252–53.

[57] See Honko, "Four Forms of Adaptation of Tradition," 177–78.

Having delineated the temporal frame, each of the tellings is progressed quite differently. While the stylistic differences between the two are quite clear with the singer in Judges 5 operating within a highly stylised register and the prose narrator in Judges 4 adopting a narrative tone, from a tradition ecological perspective, even more substantial differences between the two tellings can be seen in the images and scenes through which the narrator and the singer progress their storylines. In Judges 5:6–7a, the singer, using terse succinct language threads together a series of evocative but fairly generic visual images; in v. 6 she begins by imagining the roadways ceasing (חדל), immediately following this up with a verbal image of travellers taking to the byways (עקלקלות). Taken individually, it is possible these images could be left open to other interpretations, however by threading all three together, the singer narrows and focusses the possible range of meanings making the implications clear: the days of Shamgar and Jael were fraught with imminent danger. On the other hand, in Judges 4, the prose narrator utilises a very different strategy, one that centres on a much higher degree of specificity. Whereas the singer in the story world of Judges 5, makes no reference to specific geographical locations when commencing her song (Judg 5:2-3), the prose narrator of Judges 4 grounds their telling firmly within the geographical milieu from the very beginning—referencing both Hazor and Harosheth-ha-goiim, and then further describing them as the towns where King Jabin and Sisera dwelt (Judg 4:2).

### 4.6.4 The Self-identification of Deborah and Pastoral Intervention in Judges 5:7b-9

5:7b עד שקמתי דבורה שקמתי אם בישראל
5:8 יבחר אלהים חדשים אז לחם שערים מגן אם־יראה ורמח בארבעים אלף בישראל
5:9 לבי לחוקקי ישראל המתנדבים בעם ברכו יהוה

5:7b Until I Deborah arose,
Rose up <<a mother in Israel>>
5:8 They chose[58] new gods
When there was war in[59] the gates,
Was shield seen or lance
Amongst << forty thousand>> in Israel?

[58] Although the MT presents בחר as 3ms, the context calls for a plural; plural translations are reflected in OT and Vat.

[59] Interpreting Judges 5:8 is notoriously challenging and various reconstructions have been suggested. The MT reading suggests reading לחם as 'bread,' as do the Old Latin and some Greek versions. See Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 227. However, with the wider context connoting battle many have found this to be problematic, including the Masoretes who emended the verbal form to the verbal root לחם meaning 'to fight, engage in battle,' indeed a

5:9 <M> My heart is with the leaders[60] of Israel
Who for the people offer themselves willingly
Praise the LORD. </M>

Although the prose narrator frames this song as having been performed by Deborah and Barak (Judges 5:1), it is not until in Judges 5:7 that, in the story world of the text, the lead singer explicitly identifies herself as Deborah and attributes to herself the honorific epithet <<mother in Israel>>. Of note here is the repetition of the self-sacrifice multiform identified above as part of the invocation in Judges 5:2. However, what was not discussed previously is the fact that in Siri epic performance the texture of the invocation has a secondary functional use, which elicits the question as to whether the recurrence of the invocational texture, elsewhere in the Siri epic might also be-reimagined as having a similar functional use. Dialogic discourse takes place under possession which means that participants exhibit ecstatic behaviours of varying intensities. When possession became too intense or took on disturbing forms, Naika would employ verbiage from the invocation as a means of keeping the possession of other participants under control.[61] This analytical insight provides a particularly insightful basis upon which to consider the singer's redeployment of the self-sacrifice multiform here in Judges 5:9. For example, when read alongside the jātre, this second use of the self-sacrifice multiform raises the question as to whether the singer might be employing the multiform in a functional way; while we cannot know one way or the other, if read in light of jātre performance, the repetition of invocations could be seen as a potential pastoral intervention by a lead tradition bearer seeking to ensure that the participants are not overcome.

### 4.6.5 Competing with Commercial Interests: Functional Adaptation in Judges 5:10–11

5:10 רכבי אתנות צחרות ישבי על־מדין והלכי על־דרך שיחו
5:11 מקול מחצצים בין משאבים שם יתנו צדקות יהוה צדקת פרזנו בישראל ירדו לשערים עם־יהוה

5:10 You who ride on white donkeys

form of consensus appears to have settled around this translation. See Natalio Fernández Marcos, ed., *Judges*, Biblia Hebraica Quinta (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2011), 56–57.

[60] With לחוקקי many emend the preposition, noting that it is probably functioning denominatively. A similar construction also occurs in Num 21:18.

[61] Explaining this phenomenon, Honko states 'the invocations construct the world as a confluence of different power networks, a joint stage for gods and men where the mystery of possession replaces other forms of communication and creates a special manoeuvrability of the human mind through the sacred language of Epic.' Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 275.

You who sit on luxurious blankets[62]
You who walk in the way,[63] consider your ways!
5:11 Amid the sound of musicians[64] between the watering holes[65]
Who recount the justice of the Lord
Justice for the village dwellers[66] in Israel
Then down[67] to the gates went the people of the LORD.

The jātre ritual is performed against a commercial backdrop; market stalls are set up outside the main staging area with traders selling food and goods to those attending the three-day būta kōla and Siri jātre festivities. In Honko's reception of the Siri epic the researchers noted that regular announcements were made over the loudspeakers encouraging people to give, in such a way that at times the announcements appeared to compete with the folk and religious activities.[68] When discussing the role of the audience above, it was noted that our reading of the Siri epic elicits the question as to whether audiences do literary work in the text. From this perspective, Judges 5:10–11 becomes particularly significant as the singer momentarily breaks away from her dialogic discourse to address the merchant classes. Such a dynamic can be understood as functional adaptation, a situational adjustment made by a teller in response to their performance context in the story world of the text. From a tradition ecological perspective, such adaptations have the potential to provide additional clues to the context in which the performance is taking place.

[62] Joüon and Muraoka note that plurals sometimes take Aramaic endings, see Joüon and Muraoka, §90c. On that basis most scholars suggest the Hebrew root מד**.** Others have suggested the root דין thereby reading 'those who sit in judgement.' Fernández Marcos, *Judges*, 57–58.

[63] Some suggest it is preferable to join שיחו with the beginning of v. 11. See Fernández Marcos, *Judges*, 57. This is not necessary.

[64] The meaning of מחצצים is uncertain. Translations of this term vary and a number of roots have been suggested, including חצים (arrows) and חצה (to divide). Others follow 2 Chr 5:22 and suggest 'trumpeters.' Here, following Coogan, it is understood in an onomatopoeic sense. Michael Coogan, "A Structural and Literary Analysis of the Song of Deborah," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 40.2 (1978): 148.

[65] משאבים is another rare form, which may refer to wells, troughs or, following the NRSV, watering places.

[66] See note on Judges 5:7a above.

[67] While some, such as Lindars, suggest that this line is out of place, it is nevertheless attested in all versions. Lindars, *Judges 1–5*, 248.

[68] Consider Honko's observation, 'quite obviously, the offerings, later mainly in the form of money left on a table at the temple steps, were an important part of the "service" to be accomplished by the Siris, a fact that the loudspeakers did not allow anyone to forget. The shrill adhortations to bring the offerings to the temple, ejected through the megaphones, were close to expelling all pious concentration on the ritual.' Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 455–56.

The singer calling out to the merchant classes, described as riding on their donkeys, may indicate that, in the story world of the text, she is performing in a context where her audience was not stationary and that animals were present, while the reference to watering places (משאבים) may be indicative of the topography, and the reference to musicians (מחצצים) could be an indication that the performance was also taking place to music, and when read alongside Siri epic performance we note that music was also an important element for embodiment. Furthermore, it is worth noting that given the general climate in the Afro-Asia, watering places were natural locations for people to meet and trade; if this performance is understood to have taken place near one, then it is not implausible that, in the story world of the text, singers might have to compete with commercial interests.[69] As such, the singer's admonition to the merchants to 'consider their ways' could be seen as a mild rebuke to an unruly element of her audience, and an acknowledgement that commercial interests were impinging too heavily in the spiritual rituals at hand. Furthermore, her command of these merchant folk may also indicate hierarchy in the sense that, while embodied by the spirit of YHWH, she inherits the authority to command them. In any case, once again, our reading of jātre performance elicits the question as to whether the audience in the world of the story does literary work in the text.

### 4.6.6 Deborah and Barak Converse: Single Word Metonymy in Judges 5:12

5:12 עורי עורי דבורה עורי עורי דברי־שיר קום ברק ושבה שביך בן־אבינעם

5:12 a. Awake, awake,[70] Deborah[71]
b. Awake, awake, Deborah, tell a song[72]
c. Rise up, Barak, lead away your captives, << son of Abinoam >>

In Judges 5:12 the discourse resumes. However, given that Deborah is the one being addressed, the first voice in v. 12a–b would appear to be that of another singer embodying Barak who exhorts Deborah to

[69] Robert Alter in his discussion of type-scenes, for example, highlights the importance of places of water as meeting places as well as a location where many of the patriarchs met their wives. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, rev. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 70.

[70] Niditch notes that the phrase 'awake, awake' is 'used in calls to arms as in the call to the divine warrior (Isa 51:9) and to the sword, a metonymic evocation of his power [in] Zech 13:7.' Niditch, *Judges*, 73.

[71] Some have cited the reference to Deborah here as evidence against any the suggestion that Deborah is the one singing. See Moore, *Judges*, 149. However, in performance it is not unusual for a character to talk to themselves.

[72] In line with the aims of this thesis it worth noting that the form דברי־שיר hints at an oral performative context.

awake (עורי) and tell a song (דברי־שיר). Deborah responds in kind, admonishing Barak to rise up (קום) and lead his captives away (שבה שביך). Reimagining this as a dialogic discourse makes the use of the feminine imperative עורי by an embodied Barak and the use of the masculine imperative קום by an embodied Deborah all the more intriguing, especially when we note that such language often occurs in ancient Afro-Asian 'ritual services when gods are awakened with prayers at dawn,' as well as in military contexts to rouse YHWH before Israel goes into battle.[73] Indeed, the single word metonymy seen here also shares texture with the aforementioned theophany multiform employed during the invocation, through which the tradition bearers are spiritually awakened by deity.

### 4.6.7 Adaptation in the Muster Episodes: Universality in Judges 5:13–18

| **Judges 5:14–18** | | **Judges 4:4–13** |
|---|---|---|
| אז ירד שריד לאדירים עם יהוה ירד־לי בגבורים | 5:13 | ודבורה אשה נביאה אשת לפידות היא שפטה את־ישראל בעת ההיא |
| מני אפרים שרשם בעמלק אחריך בנימין בעממיך מני מכיר ירדו מחקקים ומזבולן משכים בשבט ספר | 5:14 | והיא יושבת תחת־תמר דבורה בין הרמה ובין בית־אל בהר אפרים למשפט ויעלו אליה בני ישראל |
| ושרי בישששכר עם־דברה וישששכר כן ברק בעמק שלח ברגליו בפלגות ראובן גדלים חקקי־לב | 5:15 | ותשלח ותקרא לברק בן־אבינעם מקדש נפתלי ותאמר אליו הלא צוה יהוה אלהי־ ישראל לך ומשכת בהר תבור ולקחת עמך עשרת אלפים איש מבני נפתלי ומבני זבלון |
| למה ישבת בין המשפתים לשמע שרקות עדרים לפלגות ראובן גדולים חקרי־לב | 5:16 | ומשכתי אליך אל־נחל קישון את־ סיסרא שר־צבא יבין ואת־רכבו ואת־המונו ונתתיהו בידך |
| גלעד בעבר הירדן שכן ודן למה יגור אניות אשר ישב לחוף ימים ועל מפרציו ישכון | 5:17 | ויאמר אליה ברק אם־תלכי עמי והלכתי ואם־לא תלכי עמי לא אלך |
| זבלון עם חרף נפשו למות ונפתלי על מרומי שדה | 5:18 | תאמר הלך אלך עמך אפס כי לא תהיה תפארתך על־הדרך אשר אתה הולך כי בידאשה ימכר יהוה את־סיסרא ותקם דבורה ותלך עם־ ברק קדשה |
| | | ויזעק ברק את־זבולן ואת־נפתלי קדשה ויעל ברגליו עשרת אלפי איש ותעל עמו דבורה |
| | | וחבר הקיני נפרד מקין מבני חבב חתן משה ויט אהלו עד־אלון בצענים אשר את־קדש |
| | | ויגדו לסיסרא כי עלה ברק בן־אבינעם הר־תבור |

[73] See Sasson, *Judges 1–12*, 294.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | ויזעק סיסרא את־כל־רכבו תשע מאות רכב ברזל ואת־כל־העם אשר אתו מחרשת הגוים אל־נחל קישון | 4:13 | |
| 4:4 | Deborah a prophetess,<< a woman of fire>>[74] was judging Israel at that time. | 5:13 | Then the refugees[75] to the leaders came down[76], <<the people of the LORD>> came down to me, |
| 4:5 | She sat under the <<Palm of Deborah>> between Ramah and Bethel, in the hill county of Ephraim, and the sons of Israel would travel up to her for judgement. | 5:14 | From Ephraim whose root is in Amalek[77]<br>After you[78] Benjamin, with your people.<br>From Machir they went down<br>And from Zebulon those who draw the marshal's[79] staff |
| 4:6 | She sent for and summoned <<Barak son of Abinoam>> from Kedesh of Naphtali and she said to him 'Has not YHWH the God of Israel commanded, "Go, and position yourself at Mount Tabor and take with you ten thousand men from the sons of Naphtali and from the sons of Zebulon. | 5:15 | The chiefs of Issachar [came] with Deborah<br>As Issachar thus[80] Barak,<br>Into the valley gave chase on foot.<br>In the districts[81] of Reuben<br>There was much carving[82] of the heart |
| 4:7 | I will draw out to the Wadi Kishon, <<Sisera the commander of Jabin's army>>, his chariots as well as his hoard, and I will place him into your hand."' | 5:16 | Why did you remain among the campfires,[83]<br>To listen to the whistling[84] for the flocks?<br>In the districts of Reuben<br>There was much searching[85] of the heart. |

[74] The epithet אשת לפידות is much discussed, often translated as 'wife of Lappidot', it can also be translated as 'woman of fire' as has been rendered here.

[75] The form שריד has also been variously translated with some arguing that it in fact designates a well-known town in southern Zebulun. Nadav Na'aman, "Literary and Topographical Notes on the Battle of Kishon (Judges IV–V)," *Vetus Testamentum* 40 (1990): 423–26.

[76] יָרַד as vocalised here, translates as from the root 'to go down,' however other roots have also been suggested, namely, have dominion (רדה) and beat down (רדד).

[77] Some see a need to emend עמלק following LXX, but this is not necessary. See discussion in Lindars, *Judges 1–5*, 252–53.

[78] Niditch suggests that אחריך בנימין serves as a 'war cry,' but this is unconvincing. Note the use of a similar construction in Hos 5:2.

[79] Although ספר is usually translated as 'scribe,' this translation makes sense if we understand it to mean the one who records the enlisting soldiers.

[80] Here the comparative particle כ appears to be missing, nevertheless the use of כן suffices. Fernández Marcos, *Judges,* 61.

[81] The meaning of פלגה is disputed. In Job 20:17 it means waterways, whereas in 2 Chr 35:5 it suggests family divisions.

[82] Some Greek manuscripts suggest searching (חקר) rather than carving (חקק) or even a more poetic reading such as 'draw'; cf. Prov 8:27 and Job 26:10.

[83] משפתים only occurs twice in the Hebrew Bible, here and in Genesis 49:14. Although Fernández Marcos translates it as 'sheepfold,' he notes that 'the phrase can be accepted as a proverbial expression for those who stay at home.' Fernández Marcos, *Judges*, 61.

[84] שרקות here may be a reference to the shepherds' pipes, or their calls to the sheep.

[85] Note the use here of חקר rather than חקק.

4:8 And Barak said to her 'if you go with me I will go, but if you do not go with me I will not go.'

4:9 And she said 'I will certainly go with you, nevertheless there will not be glory for you on the road you travel, for YHWH will betray Sisera by the hands of a woman.' Then Deborah rose up and left with Barak for Kedesh.

4:10 And Barak summoned Zebulon and Naphtali to Kedesh and ten thousand men ascended by foot, and Deborah went up with him.

4:11 <<Heber the Kenite>> had separated from Kain, from the sons of <<Hobab the father in law of Moses>> and had encamped as far as <<the Oak of the Dead>>[87] which is near Kadesh.

4:12 When they told Sisera that <<Barak, son of Abinoam>>, had gone up to Mount Tabor

4:13 Sisera summoned all his chariotry, nine hundred chariots of iron and all of the people that were with him from <<Harosheth of the people>> to the Wadi Kishon.

5:17 Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan; And why did Dan stay with the ships?
Asher sat by the coast of the sea,
remaining by his landings.

5:18 Zebulon a people whose spirit taunts death
As did Naphtali on the heights of the fields[86]

Whereas the muster episode in Judges 4:4–13 immediately follows the oppression episode in Judges 4:1–3, the oppression episode in Judges 5 follows the embodied speech of Deborah and her challenge to the authorities. As noted above, the muster episode in Judges 5 begins, at least in part, within the embodied speech of Deborah and, as indicated by the use of the first common singular in 5:13, continues from 5:13–14. With the switch to the third person in v. 1, in line with our reimagination of performance, it can be understood as being taken up by the lead singer. Here, in Judges 5:15–18 the singer lists various groups: praising Issachar (v. 16), and reserving disapproval for Reuben (v. 15, 16), Gilead (v. 17), Dan (v. 17) and Asher (v. 17). In Judges 4, once again the same episode is characterised by a higher degree of specificity and is once again more firmly rooted in the local milieu. While the catalogue in Judges 5 is not without

[86] מרומי שדה may also serve as a more technical reference to the hillside terraced farming of early Iron Age settlements.

[87] Many render אלון בצעננים phonetically, as Elon-bezaanannim. However, it also has additional connotations, with the form meaning sleep (ישן) which in texts such as Jeremiah 51:9 serves as a euphemism for death.

geographical comment (Reuben is associated with shepherding, Gilead is described as residing beyond the Jordan, and both Dan and Asher are described as being by the coast), in comparison to the level of detail used to describe those listed in Judges 4, Judges 5 is much more generic.

The prose narrator begins the muster episode of Judges 4 with a description of Deborah mustering Barak, her commander. The prose narrator describes Deborah as a prophetess and in so doing also makes use of the woman of flames (אשת לפידות) epithet, a moniker that is found nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible. The rarity of the reference raises the possibility that this form could be a candidate for an eco-type, though without further evidence this cannot ultimately be proven.[88] Our suggestion that the prose narrator in Judges 4 is particularly sensitive to the local milieu is further highlighted by the reference to the <<Palm of Deborah>> in Judges 4:5. As observed by Honko and other folklorists, one of the adaptations that occurs in traditional storytelling is milieu-morphological adaptation, where a tradition such as the victory of Deborah over Barak becomes linked to a prominent feature within the natural milieu.[89] The Palm of Deborah may well have been a prominent local tree whose unusual features attracted attention and traditions which may have gone back to historical events.[90] Milieu-morphological adaptation may also explain the unusual name of the tree in Judges 4:11 referred to by the tradition bearer as the Great Oak of the Dead (אלון בצענים). As noted in Judges 4:11, אלון בצענים is the location of Heber the Kenite and the place where Barak was later slain. Given what we know of tradition ecology, the slaying of Barak nearby could provide insight into the name the Great Oak of the Dead.[91] Certainly in Judges 4 it is worth observing that the telling essentially begins by the Palm of Deborah and ends near the

[88] This epithet has generated much discussion. Note for example Schroeder's title to her introduction 'Woman of Flames or Inflammatory Woman?'; Joy A. Schroeder, *Deborah's Daughters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[89] See Honko: 'there are many examples of how strangely shaped or isolated fragments of rock are pointed out as the home of the troll, how the sacrificial tree is a spruce in a birch forest or a tall pillared spruce which stands out from other trees … sometimes a milieu dominant results from human agency: the so-called karsikko tree which is stripped so that only one branch remains as a memorial is a Finnish example of this.' Honko, "Four Forms of Adaptation of Tradition," 176.

[90] Honko, "Four Forms of Adaptation of Tradition," 176. In addition, it is worth noting that in the Hebrew Bible, this is not the only tree associated with a Deborah; indeed, in Gen 35:8 we find reference to אלון בכות 'the oak of weeping,' where Deborah, the nurse of Rebekah, was reported to have been buried.

[91] As Block observes, the term 'elon' tends to denote a sacred spot. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 202.

Great Oak of the Dead, a dynamic through which the prose narrator firmly grounds their prose narration within the ecology of the landscape.

The argument that the prose narrator in Judges 4 is much more grounded in a sense of place than the singer in the story world of Judges 5 is furthered by the various ways in which the prose narrator in Judges 4 links the sequences of actions in their telling to specific named locations. We are told that: the Palm of Deborah was located between Ramah and Gilead (v. 4); Barak was summoned from Kadesh (v. 6); Barak along with ten thousand men are told to take position on mount Tabor (v. 6); Deborah drew out Sisera's forces at the Wadi Kishon (v. 7); Deborah went with Barak to Kadesh (v.9); Barak summoned his warriors, Zebulon and Naphtali to Kadesh, and Deborah went along with him (v. 10); the Great Oak of the Dead was near Kadesh (v. 11); and finally, that in response, Sisera summoned his troops and chariots to Wadi Kishon (v. 13). Of course, while there are aspects of geography over which scholars continue to debate such as the location of Kadesh, my note regarding the greater level of specificity in Judges 4 nevertheless stands.[92]

Given the specificity of the prose narrator in Judges 4, it is of particular note that the singer in Judges 5 references numerous tribes whereas the prose narrator in Judges 4 mentions only two: Zebulon and Naphtali. From a tradition-ecological perspective, the fact that Zebulon and Naphtali are the only consistent tribes across the two side-by-side literary representations of the victory of Deborah is potentially informative. While much speculation has occurred—and continues to occur—in relation to the tribes mentioned and not mentioned in the roll call in Judges 5, the fact that only Zebulon and Naphtali are consistently mentioned raises the possibility for reimagining the singer in the story world of Judges 5 as employing their catalogue device in a functional way.[93] Stated differently, the use of the catalogue device with its expansion of the number of tribes involved may reflect functional adaptation which, as

[92] Sasson, *Judges 1–12*, 262.

[93] Alexander Globe, "The Muster of the Tribes in Judges 5 11e–18," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 87.2 (1975): 169–84, doi:10.1515/zatw.1975.87.2.169; Lawrence E. Stager, "The Song of Deborah: Why Some Tribes Answered the Call and Others Did Not," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 15.1 (1989): 51–64; Johannes C. de Moor, "The Twelve Tribes in the Song of Deborah," *Vetus Testamentum* 43.4 (1993): 483–94, doi:10.2307/1518497.

previously mentioned, is a term coined by Honko to refer to those impermanent situation-bound changes that can infuse traditional tellings with 'a news value and topical message.'[94]

Once again, our reading of the Siri epic alongside Judges 5, has elicited questions as to whether the audience does literary work in the text. In other words, from a tradition-ecological perspective, reference by the singer in the story world of the text, to tribes other than Zebulon and Naphtali could be viewed as being reflective of the performance situation where the teller speaks to the hopes and fears of the audience rather than communicating narrative details.[95] As such, references to the other tribes in her dialogic discourse can be reimagined to be a reflection of the social and political circumstances of this particular performance, revealing underlying power dynamics in which the teller exercises her spirit-driven authority to mock, praise and condemn members of the listening community. Indeed, Honko observed this type of dynamic in the būta rituals.[96] Not only does this further indicate the potential for the singer in the story world of the text to speak truth to power—given the onlooking dignitaries—but to also function prophetically: mediating messages to listeners on behalf of deity, praising, mocking and rebuking as appropriate.

### 4.6.8 The Battle Episode: Universality in Judges 5:19–22

| | **Judges 5:19–21** | | **Judges 4:14–16** |
|---|---|---|---|
| 5:19 | באו מלכים נלחמו אז נלחמו מלכי כנען בתענך על־מי מגדו בצע כסף לא לקחו | 4:14 | ותאמר דברה אל־ברק קום כי זה היום אשר נתן יהוה את־סיסרא בידך הלא יהוה יצא לפניך וירד ברק מהר תבור ועשרת אלפים איש אחריו |
| 5:20 | מן־שמים נלחמו הכוכבים ממסלותם נלחמו עם־סיסרא | 4:15 | ויהם יהוה את־סיסרא ואת־כל־הרכב ואת־כל־המחנה לפי־חרב |

[94] Honko, "Four Forms of Adaptation of Tradition," 182.

[95] See Honko, 'one discovers that the historical truth is less important to preserve than the actual message of a legend.' Honko, "Four Forms of Adaptation of Tradition," 175.

[96] Honko writes, 'it is true that the social order is momentarily reversed during the ritual, even if in well controlled forms. The castes come to the fore: the buuta impersonator who may belong to the untouchables suddenly transmits the voice of god. The ethical questioning which he (the god) directs at the decisions and behaviour of those in power in the society may be deemed rhetorical and rarely of any practical consequence to the elite in the focus of questioning. Yet the constellation as such the voice of god coming through the mouth of the lowest in society, the fact that the powerful must humbly listen to an inquiry into their morals and seek understanding and acceptance in the presence of the widest possible audience I, is a profound reminder of the existence of a divine social justice.' Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 396.

לפני ברק וירד סיסרא מעל המרכבה
וינס ברגליו
4:16 וברק רדף אחרי
הרכב ואחרי המחנה עד חרשת הגוים
ויפל כל־מחנה סיסרא לפי־חרב לא
נשאר עד־אחד

5:21 נחל קישון גרפם נחל קדומים נחל
קישון תדרכי נפשי עז

5:22 אז הלמו עקבי־סוס מדהרות דהרות אביריו

4:14 And Deborah said to Barack <M>
'Arise, this day YHWH has given Sisera into your hand, has not YHWH gone before you?' </M> And Barak went down from Mount Tabor and ten thousand men followed him.

4:15 And YHWH threw Sisera and all of his chariots and his whole company into confusion[99] before the mouth of the sword, in front of Barak. And Sisera dismounted his chariot and fled on foot.

4:16 And Barak pursued the chariots and the army as far as <<Harosheth of the people>>, and the whole of Sisera's army fell before the mouth of the sword not even one remained.

5:19 Kings came, they fought
Then the kings of Canaan fought
At Taanach[97] by the waters of Megiddo[98]
They seized no silver or gain.

5:20 From the heavens the stars fought,
From their orbits[100] they fought with Sisera.

5:21 The river Kishon swept them away
The primaeval[101] river, the river Kishon.
March in strength, O my soul!

5:22 Then beat the horses' hooves,
the galloping of his steeds.

Following the muster episodes, both Judges 4 and 5 proceed immediately into the battle episode. In Judges 5, the singer, embodying Deborah, achieves this by shifting from her use of a catalogue device back to a technique of progressing images; in this instance she moves from kings (v. 19), to heavens (v. 20), to waters (v. 21). In so doing, the singer in the story world of Judges 5 mentions a number of features in the natural milieu, such as the river Kishon, Taanach and the waters of Megiddo. But she does so only in passing, giving little sense of the actual topography, for example in v. 19c, she mentions both Taanach and the waters of Megiddo but shares nothing about the distance between the two locations, which is

[97] Taanach was a site five miles east of Megiddo.

[98] Megiddo was a major fortress in the valley of Jezreel.

[99] Note the 's use of יהם to indicate 'confusion,' both here in Judges 4:15 and in Exodus 14:24.

[100] On the form pathways (מסלה) Niditch suggests 'orbit' which is appropriate. Niditch, *Judges*, 69.

[101] The form of the word primaeval (קדומים) here has caused some difficulty, which is reflected in the textual variances found in Syriac and other texts. Some, such as Boling, Cross and Freedman repoint it to read 'overwhelmed them,' but this is unnecessary. See Boling, *Judges,* 113; Frank Moore Cross Jr and David Noel Freedman, *Studies in Ancient Yahwistic Poetry*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975), 29, 35.

around 5 miles. This is in contrast to Judges 4 where the locus of the narrative action is the prose narrator's primary focus as indicated by their far more expansive topographical comments, noting for example that Barak descended (ירד) Mount Tabor (v. 14), and was pursued (רדף) as far as Harosheth-ha-goiim (v. 16).

Insofar as the battle itself is concerned, both the prose narrator of Judges 4 and the singer within the story world of Judges 5 have Sisera in view as the enemy who is being fought against. Nevertheless, there are also several significant differences between the two; whereas the prose narrator in Judges 4 focuses on the defeat of Sisera and his chariots, the singer in the story world of Judges 5 maintains a more universal scope, suggesting that the kings of Canaan also fought (Judges 5:19). Of course, given that the prose narrator in Judges 4:2 refers to Jabin as the king of Canaan, it could be argued that as Jabin's commander, Sisera represents Canaan as a whole. Nevertheless, with each successive image in Judges 5, the singer's messaging becomes more universal in scope. Starting with the stars (הכוכבים) the embodied Deborah proceeds to also mention the river Kishon (נחל קישון) as joining the fighting. In contrast, whereas the singer in judges 5 depicts the heavens as joining the fight, the prose narrator in Judges 4 suggests that it is YHWH who joins.

From a tradition-ecological perspective, we notice a continuation of the localisation seen in previous episodes of Judges 4. While through the battle episode the singer in the story world of the text does include references to places and geographical features, they are not as firmly grounded in the local topography and continue to be surrounded by a certain amount of geographical ambiguity.[102] Moreover, although aspects of the geography of Judges 5 might be ambiguous to modern scholars, it is of course possible that this may not have been the case for the audience in the world of the text; especially if some of the references used represent specific ecotypes. In addition, it's also worth observing that unlike belief and historical legends, myth and pre-history tend to be portrayed as taking place in a time different to the present.[103] As such, the singer's sometimes obscure geographical referencing and universalising tendency may represent an archaising strategy and an attempt to make their song timeless for the audience in the

[102] See Lindars, *Judges 1–5*, 264–65.
[103] See Honko, "Four Forms of Adaptation of Tradition," 173.

story world of the text. Conversely, the often detailed and specific nature of the prose narrator's commentary in Judges 4 may reflect familiarisation, a type of morphological adaptation in which the story is adapted in order to give it a more plausible frame within the local milieu.

### 4.6.9 The Angel of YHWH: Meroz as Unintelligible Speech in Judges 5:23

5:23 אורו מרוז אמר מלאך יהוה ארו ארור ישביה כי לא־באו לעזרת יהוה לעזרת יהוה בגבורים

5:23 'Curse Meroz'[104] said <<the angel of YHWH>>.
'Curse a cursing upon those who dwell in her
For they did not come to help YHWH
To help the Lord against the mighty.'

As is the nature of dialogic discourse in jātre, conversations other than those of lead singer can be overheard. Here in Judges 5, yet another performer reveals their identity, this time however it is not Barak that is being embodied, rather it is the angel of the Lord, a significant literary figure in ancient Israel often understood to be a being of divine origin.[105] The message that this embodied personage brings is a curse. With three often being a significant number in the Hebrew Bible and folklore more generally, the fact this divine being curses (ארר) three times ought not to be overlooked.[106] Human curses are one thing, but in performance contexts, divine curses can be perceived as being much more potent.[107] The object of the embodied angel of the Lord's curse is Meroz (מרוז), a *hapax legomenon* and a term over which there is very little scholarly agreement.[108] However, one option that is yet to be seriously considered is the fact that performance settings, such as was the case with the Siri jātre, can contain large amounts of

[104] This is the only mention of Meroz (מרוז) in the Hebrew Bible. Given the fact that it occurs at the end of the catalogue episode, its geographical location has been conjectured but is ultimately unknown.

[105] Suggestions include: (1) Meroz was a geographical location whose inhabitants allowed Sisera to escape (Moore, *Judges*, 161–2); (2) Meroz was a clan; (3) Meroz was a clan who had a treaty arrangement with Israel (Albrecht Alt, "Meros," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 58.3–4 [1941]: 244–47, doi:10.1515/zatw.1941.58.3-4.244); (4) Meroz were the Israelites who sided with the Canaanites (Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 238–9). All of these suggestions are hypothetical and the identification of Meroz is made all the more challenging by the fact that Judges 5:23 is the only place where the term is located.

[106] Number is important in folkloristic contexts, see Alan Dundes, *Holy Writ as Oral Lit: The Bibleas Folklore* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 21–36.

[107] Anne Marie Kitz, "Curses and Cursing in the Ancient near East," *Religion Compass* 1.6 (2007): 615–27, doi:10.1111/j.1749-8171.2007.00039.x.

[108] Lindars, for example, suggests that Meroz is a clan that 'was in a position to cut off the flight of the main body of the enemy and refused to do so.' He also includes a useful summary of differing position. Lindars, *Judges 1–5,* 272–73.

unintelligible speech.[109] While it is of course possible that the meaning of מרוז has simply been lost, our reading of the Siri epic alongside Judges 5 alerts us to the possibility that, sometimes, the use of unintelligible forms and challenging grammatical constructions by the singer, are in fact textualizations of ecstatic utterances, or divine speech that while untranslatable, can resonate deeply in a cultural context or the story world of the text. Indeed, we also noted above that such ecstatic occurrences may well lend further authenticity to a singer's performance, especially if the audience expects and anticipates this such manifestations.

### 4.6.10 Power and Patriarchy in the Tent of Jael in Judges 5:24–27

**Judges 4:17–22**

וסיסרא נס ברגליו אל־אהל יעל אשת חבר הקיני כי שלום בין יבין מלך־חצור ובין בית חבר הקיני 4:17

ותצא יעל לקראת סיסרא ותאמר אליו סורה אדני סורה אלי אל־תירא ויסר אליה האהלה ותכסהו בשמיכה 4:18

ויאמר אליה השקיני־נא מעט־מים כי צמאתי ותפתח את־נאוד החלב ותשקהו ותכסהו 4:19

ויאמר אליה עמד פתח האהל והיה אם־איש יבוא ושאלך ואמר היש־פה איש ואמרת אין 4:20

ותקח יעל אשת־חבר את־יתד האהל ותשם את־המקבת בידה ותבוא אליו בלאט ותתקע את־היתד ברקתו ותצנח בארץ והוא־נרדם ויעף וימת 4:21

והנה ברק רדף את־סיסרא ותצא יעל לקראתו ותאמר לו לך ואראך את־האיש אשר־אתה מבקש ויבא אליה והנה סיסרא נפל מת והיתד ברקתו 4:22

4:17 And Sisera fled on foot to the tent of Jael, <<the wife of Heber the Kenite>>, for there was peace between Jabin king of Hazor and

**Judges 5:24–27**

5:24 תברך מנשים יעל אשת חבר הקיני מנשים באהל תברך

5:25 מים שאל חלב נתנה בספל אדירים הקריבה חמאה

5:26 ידה ליתד תשלחנה וימינה להלמות עמלים והלמה סיסרא מחקה ראשו ומחצה וחלפה רקתו

5:27 בין רגליה כרע נפל שכב בין רגליה כרע נפל באשר כרע שם נפל שדוד

5:24 <<Most blessed[110] among women>> is Jael,
<<Wife of Heber the Kenite>>
<<Most blessed among tent-dwelling women>>

[109] Reflecting on their process of translating the Siri epic, Honko noted 'in the first "raw" version of our translation, there were plenty of "domesticated," i.e. "anglicised" or "more civilised" expressions, as if trying to cover up what was actually said in Tulu, because it was deemed too distasteful or unintelligible, i.e. too "other" for the internal readership and for that matter, academic Tulu.' Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 589.

[110] The preposition here is functioning superlatively.

between the house of <<Heber the Kenite>>.

4:18 And Jael went out, called to Sisera and said to him, 'Turn aside my lord, turn aside to me, do not fear.' And he turned aside into her tent. And she concealed him with a covering.

4:19 And he said to her, 'Please give me something to drink, a little water for I am thirsty.' And she opened a leather skin of milk, gave him a drink and covered him.

4:20 And he said to her 'stand at the opening of the tent it shall be that when someone come asks "Is there a man here" then you will say "There is not."'

4:21 Then Jael the <<wife of Heber>> took a tent peg and put the mallet in her hand, she entered stealthily and drove the peg into his temple and hammered it into the ground, while he was asleep while he was tired, he died

4:22 As Barak was pursuing Sisera Jael went out to meet him and she said to him, 'come and I will show you the man whom you seek.' And he came to her and to his surprise Sisera was lying dead with the peg in his temple.

5:25 Water he asked for, and milk she gave him,
Curds in a lordly bowl she brought him.

5:26 Her hand to the peg she stretched out,
Her right hand for the workman's hammer,
She hammered Sisera,
She shattered his head,
She smashed and pierced his temple.

5:27 Between her legs[111] he knelt, he fell, he lay
Between her legs he knelt, he fell,
Where he knelt, there he fell—dead.

Preceded by an embodied interjection from the angel of the Lord, the singer in Judges 5 moves on to sing of the tent scene. First, she recognises a new character, Jael through a series of honorific epithets acknowledging her status as the wife of Heber (אשת חבר) and a tent-dwelling woman (נשים באהל). She then describes a hospitality scene in which a request for water is exceeded by an offer of curds, which is contrasted with the scene that immediately follows where she constructs the scene of Sisera's death through short onomatopoeic phraseology centring on her use of tent tools, namely a hammer and tent peg (v. 26). The singer in the story world of Judges 5 then bookends her dialogic discourse by progressing through a series of suggestive imagery centring on Jael's legs and Sisera being between them, images

[111] Following Niditch the construction בין רגליה has been translated this way to capture the euphemistic nature of the imagery. Niditch, *Judges*, 69.

which taken together ultimately depict Sisera as having been raped and murdered (v. 27).[112] Similar to the other episodes in the prose narration of Judges 4, the tent episode in Judges 4:17–22 is far more specific than the singer's depiction of the same episode in Judges 5 and has a much greater sense of location; even though the action is focused on the tent of Jael, there is nevertheless a clear sense of movement through which the scene progresses in location from outside the tent (v. 18a) to inside the tent (vv. 18b–21) to outside the tent again (v. 22).

The aforementioned pattern of specificity in the language of the prose narrator in Judges 4 is particularly evident here in the tent episode, and while both accounts centre on a core narrative in which Jael, the tent-dwelling wife of Heber the Kenite, offers hospitality to Sisera before killing him, there are numerous differences. Whereas the singer's depiction of the tent episode in Judges 5 jumps to a scene in which Jael offers Sisera hospitality, the prose narrator in Judges 4 depicts Jael as first calling him aside and concealing him. Whereas the singer in the story world of Judges 5 is content with referring to Jael as the wife of Heber the Kenite (Judg 5:24), the prose narrator of Judges 4 qualifies the relationship between Jabin and Heber (Judg 4:17). Whereas the singer in Judges 5 portrays Jael as killing Sisera immediately after her offer of hospitality (Judg 5:26), the prose narrator in the Judges 4 telling depicts Sisera as first asking Jael to stand guard and falling asleep before Jael attacks him stealthily (Judg 4:19–20). Whereas the voice of singer in the story world of Judges 5 ends their song with a verbal image of Sisera lying dead (Judg 5:27), the prose narrator in Judges 4 telling ends with Barak arriving as a witness (Judg 4:22). Taken together, the prose narrator in Judges 4 frame their more expansive account on the issue of how Jael went about killing Sisera whereas, in contrast, the Singer in Judges 5 glorifies Jael's killing of Sisera with little explanation.

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[112] As Mieke Bal argues 'in a society in which women are in the tent and in which their position is utterly circumscribed, the number of moments when they have power over a man can be counted on the fingers of one hand. The confrontation of Jael with the enemy of her people unleashes in the mind the possibility of a reversal of roles … It is important to see the image in 5:27 in this context: it is the liberation of an always limited imagination, as much in its experiences as in its means of expression. The images that are brought forth, liberated from the restrictions of the epic narrative are metonymically inspired by the few experiences that this woman has by virtue of her own power: to mate, to give birth, and, now to murder. Killing assumes the form of inverted sexual intercourse.' Mieke Bal, *Murder and Difference: Gender, Genre, and Scholarship on Sisera's Death* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988), 131.

Looking at the tent episode from a tradition-ecological perspective, the noted differences between the two tellings once again appear to be reminiscent of tradition-morphological adaptation. The fact that the focus of the prose narrator in Judges 4 is explanation to the point that they also utilise the traditional trickster motif as a means for explaining how Jael as a woman was able to defeat Sisera, a male warrior, is informative. It may well be indicative of a more patriarchal performance context, where the concept of a woman defeating a male warrior may not have been as readily accepted. As Honko observes, the world of the singer's audience is conditioned by social and economic factors that function as a filter sifting out elements that might be viewed as unacceptable within a receiving community, this he refers to as censorship. Conversely, the fact that the singer in the story world of Judges 5 version engages in an unqualified and vicarious celebration of Jael's killing of Sisera could in fact be suggestive of a performance context less inclined towards patriarchy. Once again, our reading of the Siri epic can be seen here to be eliciting questions of the extent to which the audience does literary work in the text, as well as their hierarchical role before the singer. Certainly, as previously noted in our consideration of the Siri epic, the context of embodied performance is one such space in which typical social roles can be reversed, and once inhabited by deity, even those more typically viewed as being on the margins of society can speak truth to power.

### 4.6.11 An Unwelcomed Visitation in Judges 5:28-30

| | |
|---|---|
| 5:28 | בעד החלון נשקפה ותיבב אם סיסרא בעד האשנב מדוע בשש רכבו לבוא מדוע אחרו פעמי מרכבותיו |
| 5:29 | חכמות שרותיה תענינה אף־היא תשיב אמריה לה |
| 5:30 | הלא ימצאו יחלקו שלל רחם רחמתים לראש גבר שלל צבעים לסיסרא שלל צבעים רקמה צבע רקמתים לצוארי שלל |

| | |
|---|---|
| 5:28 | Through the window she looked out |
| | From behind the latticework << the mother of Sisera >> called |
| | Why does his chariot delay its coming? |
| | Why do the feet of his chariots linger? |
| 5:29 | Her wise women in waiting answer her |
| | Indeed, she herself answers |
| 5:30 | Are they not finding and dividing the spoils? |
| | A girl or two for each man, |
| | Colourful garments[113] as plunder for Sisera, |

[113] The word colorful garments (צבעים) occurs only in Judges 5.

Colourful double embroidered garments
For their necks as spoil?[114]

There has been a tendency to perceive Sisera's mother and her ladies-in-waiting as something of a typological vignette, or 'conventionalised portrait of the queen or woman of status.'[115] However, a critical reimagining of Judges 5:28–30 as embodied dialogic discourse presents a challenge to the notion that the mention here of Sisera's mother is just a narrative convention or an effective storytelling device. As was seen in Honko's study of the Siri epic, the embodied representation of a traditional personage tends to be an indication that a personage had a certain amount of significance within a tradition. Given that Sisera's mother here is clearly categorised as the enemy, her appearance along with that of the ladies-in-waiting could perhaps be critically reimagined as the manifestation of an unwelcome spirit, or that the possession of some of the singers has taken on a disturbing form. As Honko noted in his study of the būta kōlas, in embodied performance not all traditional personages are viewed positively or indeed welcomed.[116] As such, rather than serving as an ironic inclusion and apposition to the <<mother of Israel>> image in verse 7, the sudden appearance of אם סיסרא along with her ladies in waiting could be reimagined as a shocking and troubling appearance of an evil spirit.

### 4.6.12 Freedom and Exorcism in Judges 5:31

**Judges 4:23–24**

ויכנע אלהים ביום ההוא את יבין 4:23
מלך־כנען לפני בני ישראל
ותלך יד בני־ישראל הלוך וקשה על 4:24
יבין מלך־כנען עד אשר הכריתו את
יבין מלך־כנען

4:23 On that day God humbled <<Jabin King of Canaan>> before the sons of Israel.

4:24 And the hand of the sons of Israel grew harder upon <<Jabin King of

**Judges 5:31**

כן יאבדו כל־אויביך יהוה ואהביו כצאת 5:31
השמש בגברתו ותשקט הארץ ארבעים שנה

5:31 'May all your enemies perish thus, O YHWH!
But may your friends be like the sun as it rises in its strength.'
And the land rested for forty years.

[114] As Fernández Marcos notes the spoil is for the necks of the women and not Sisera. See Fernández Marcos, *Judges,* 65.

[115] See Niditch, *Judges*, 82; Susan Ackerman, "The Queen Mother and the Cult in Ancient Israel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 112.3 (1993): 385–401, doi:10.2307/3267740.

[116] For example, in the Siri epic tradition, if a participant reveals themselves to be impersonating a character other than a member of the Siri family, their accompanying family will be advised to take them to a priest to be cured. See Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 345.

Canaan>> until they destroyed
<<Jabin King of Canaan>>.

In the case of both Judges 4 and 5, the variations conclude using a form of words communicating the Israelite's newfound freedom. In Judges 4 the prose narrator focuses on Jabin whose epithet is used three times (Judg 4:23–24) while the overall suggestion is that the defeat of Sisera freed Israel from oppression, it is further qualified by with the suggestion that Jabin's destruction was eventual and not immediate. In Judges 5, on the other hand, the singer in the story world of the text employs the freedom episode immediately after the visitation by the mother of Sisera (Judg 5:31) Here in Judges 5:31 the lead singer steps back in decisively, issuing a curse and then a blessing. Given that dialogic discourse is primarily a conversation between embodied performers, the curse can also be understood as having been directed at the mother of Sisera and her ladies-in-waiting. As such, the singers actions here could be viewed as a type of exorcism where, through the use of a curse and then a blessing, the embodied Deborah in the story world of the text, rescues and liberates the performance from a perceived spiritual enemy; in a similar way to how the prose narrators Deborah freed Israel from a physical enemy. Once again, the differences between the two variations of the Deborah tradition reveal a universalising tendency in Judges 5 and a localising one in Judges 4.

## 4.7 A Critically Reimagined Reading of Judges 5

Poised, she stands at the head of the cult. Aligned in rows before her, her followers close their eyes, waiting in anticipation. Raising her hands in the air, she reminds all present of the honour inherent in offering oneself to be used by YHWH, of the valour of the Nazirite warriors of old, and of Deborah and Barak, who defeated the enemy under YHWH's inspiration. Her audience knows her subtext; by speaking of those who offered themselves to YHWH in the past, she invites all to offer themselves to YHWH in the present. Lowering her hands, she looks out across the sea of faces and casts her eyes on the seated dignitaries seeking authorisation. All too familiar with the local custom, she waits. After a few moments,

it comes—a nod from the lead dignitary acknowledging her presence and commanding that she states her purpose. Already displaying subtle signs of trembling, she declares it, 'I, even I, will sing to YHWH. I will make music to the God of Israel.' And with another nod, her ritual is authorised. The air is now thick with expectation.

As she looks up into the night sky, the mini-orchestra strikes up an intense rhythm. Her followers are swaying now; possession is rising. Crying out to the heavens, she invokes the presence of deity. Drawing on natural features familiar to her cult, she describes YHWH's coming, reminding them that even nature quakes in YHWH's presence. Urged on by the relentless driving rhythms of the musicians, the swaying previously evident amongst many of her followers intensifies into trembling. Then, it happens. Her countenance changes, and her eyes take on a second look, inhabited by the spirit of YHWH. She is no longer a tradition-bearer, but the embodied Deborah.

Deborah pauses for a moment, taking in the scene before her. She begins to walk amongst the rows of cult members, stopping every so often and staring intensely into their eyes. It's as if she's looking for someone. Conversations can be heard all around her as participants break out in dialogic discourse. Amongst the various voices, an embodied Jael can be heard singing of how she deceived and killed Sisera, and a Barak can be heard answering her song with a description of how he arrived at Jael's tent to find Sisera dead. Honing in on Barak's voice, Deborah—the lead singer—approaches and engages with him. She tells of the fearful days of Shamgar and recalls the pitiful position of their armed forces. In the background, while the performance goes on, merchants who have set up shop to service the attendees ply their trade: food, ritual items, water, and more are available, and to the side of the staging area, a queue begins to form.

Heavy breathing is increasingly being heard amongst the participants. They are sweating now, and as possession reaches its zenith, some faint, overcome by the experience, and are attended to by family members waiting close by. Ever alert to the needs of her constituency, the embodied Deborah restates her invocational multiform, reminding participants of the virtue of self-sacrifice, and their heightened possession begins to ease. As family members seek water to help revive their loved ones,

Deborah becomes all too aware that the bartering of the merchants is beginning to impinge on the sacredness of the liminal moment. Breaking away from her dialogue, she casts a fierce gaze on the merchants and issues a startling admonishment. They, too, have a duty to YHWH to fulfil.

Spotting the gathering queues, Deborah delegates the leading of the ritual to an apprentice and heads across to attend to them. Maintaining her poetic diction, Deborah fields the requests of those queuing for counsel. Some seek life and spiritual counsel, others seek healing and entry into the cult, while others seek divine favour and blessing. At the conclusion of each encounter, seekers place something in her hand, a token of appreciation for her services.

When she returns to the main proceedings, the ritual is in full sway. Novices are being sung at in a process that reveals the legendary characters they are embodying, the musicians continue with their pressing rhythms, and the air is awash with sung dialogic discourses discussing the scene from the Deborah and Barak victory tradition. As she makes her way to the front, one of the devotees embodying Barak calls out to her, 'Awake.' She responds in kind, and another dialogic discourse ensues, cataloguing those who did and did not offer themselves to YHWH. Deborah's speech reaches out beyond the story world, reflecting local issues and tribal tensions. As she does so, she casts a knowing look at the dignitaries, who recoil slightly under her watchful eyes. They are overcome by the sense that through this singer, YHWH is holding them to account, challenging them to identify whether they are amongst those who offer themselves or those who do not.

As she moves on to recount the battle, recalling how even nature itself had come to their aid, another voice calls out to her. She proceeds to move towards another devotee who reveals themselves as embodying the Angel of the Lord—that divine personage who appears in key moments throughout Israel's history. Deborah acknowledges him and waits to hear what he has to say. Trembling profusely, the devotee delivers their embodied message. Framed in ecstatic, partially unintelligible speech, it's a curse reinforcing YHWH's disapproval of those who failed to come to YHWH's aid. Buoyed by this affirmation of her message, Deborah begins to walk at pace. She's searching again.

Weaving between the lines, Deborah tunes her ears to the cacophony of sung conversations taking place all around her. Eventually, she hears the voice she was seeking; the voice is midway through describing how they invited Sisera into their tent. Deborah approaches Jael, blesses her, and they converse about Jael's heroism and Sisera's death. Suddenly, several devotees break rank and make their way towards Deborah. Noticing this unusual break in protocol, some of the dignitaries stand up, inquiring as to what is going on and whether an intervention is required. One of the rank breakers howls in disbelief, accusing Deborah of lying, revealing herself to be the mother of Sisera. She and those who broke rank with her dispute his death and begin to tell another narrative. Recognising this intrusion as that of an evil spirit, Deborah exorcises them with a curse. Whispers start to spread amongst the dignitaries and those watching. 'Such manifestations occur only amongst those who have not prepared themselves adequately,' says the lead dignitary. Returning to the front, the embodied Deborah brings the proceeding to a close with a blessing. As their possession subsides, the now exhausted devotees sit down; some, still in a state of ecstasy, continue to tremble and mutter, and others take a well-earned sip of water. Concerned, the lead singer heads over to those who have caused the disruption; it's late, but a conversation is needed.

## 4.8 Evaluation

As has been stated previously, the purpose of this critical exercise has not been to provide an authoritative interpretation of Judges 5. Rather, reading Judges 5 alongside jātre has allowed for a critically re-imagined reading of performance in the story world of Judges 5 as a ritual as a religious ritual engaged by devotees seeking salvation, healing and pastoral care, and within a complex socio-religious structure where traditional performance brings about a powerful reversal of the prevailing social order and where tradition bearers, often from the lower social classes speak truth to power. However, this is not all that was achieved. Critically re-imagining Judges 5 as jātre was not the goal of this exercise, rather it was part of a method. The process of critically re-imagining performance in Judges 5 in light of jātre led us to ask new questions of the biblical text, questions such as: might invocations have a functional use (Judg 5:2)?

Could be there any significance to the reuse of invocational texture later in the performance (Judg 5:9)? Might untranslatable forms such as Meroz ( מרוז ) represent ecstatic unintelligible speech? However, perhaps the most significant insight highlighted by our critical re-imagination of Judges 5 is the question as to whether in Judges 5:2, 5:9, 5:13-18 and 5:27 the audience do literary work in the text, which is not a question that is usually asked, yet our reading of Siri epic performance elicited it.

CHAPTER 5

# 5. PERFORMANCE AS ADVERTISING:

# READING EXODUS 15 AS SACRED PLAY

*I did not have strength to pluck seedlings like the others. The woman called Seesama was very good in plucking. A Pujaarti woman … As to the sandis, she knows almost all the sandis. Her husband knows too. In addition, all her brothers were standing as impersonators for this Kooti Cennaya in different places. In that way she has a little more knowledge of that too. All the singing at that time, such as the baiderle sandi, Iisvara sandi, singing and hearing all.*

– **Gopala Naika**[1]

*Tell of it, you who ride on white donkeys,*
*you who sit on rich carpets*
*and you who walk by the way.*
*To the sound of musicians at the watering places,*
*there they repeat the triumphs of the Lord,*
*the triumphs of his peasantry in Israel*

– **Judges 5:10–11**

## 5.1 Chapter Introduction

Having critically re-imagined Judges 5 as jātre, this chapter will again draw on the Siri epic to re-imagine Exodus 15. Once again, the Siri epic is not being used here as a direct comparison to the biblical text, but as a means of re-imagining performance in the story world of the text for the purpose of identifying new and previously foreclosed dimensions of the biblical text. As a critical exercise, this chapter re-imagines Exodus 15 as sacred play, a specific form of Siri epic performance that highlights the potentially competitive dynamics of performance and the purpose of which is to draw maximal attention to the cult.

## 5.2 Towards the Text: Exodus 15

Similar to Judges 5, there is a long scholarly tradition in which Exodus 15 has been read through evolutionist frameworks. As poetry, the song(s) in Exodus 15 have often been assumed—under the previously outlined herderian influence— that Exodus 15 is amongst the oldest works in the Hebrew Bible,

[1] The quote is taken from Lauri Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, Folklore Fellows Communications 264 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1998), 532.

and that prior to its inclusion in the biblical text it (or parts of it) may have circulated orally, have been used as an early performed text. A prime example of the operation of this evolutionist frame is observable in the suggestion that the text referred to by some as the song of Miriam (Exod 15:21) is older than the preceding song of Moses (Exod 15:1-18).[2] This assumption is premised on a evolutionist conception of literary history, one that assumes that biblical narratives developed from short, simple oral narratives to lengthier, complex literary ones. Of course, shorter doesn't necessarily mean older; and the implications of the evolutionist frame extend far beyond issues of dating to include; questions regarding sources that often assume that Exodus 15 is either composite in nature, or has non-literary origins; questions of genre, where attempts determine the genre of Exodus 15 are often belied by evolutionist assumptions that it has oral origins or was an early performed text. Similarly, this is also reflected in the various historical critical attempts to identify its *Sitz im Leben* and thus identify its original audience. Nevertheless, inasmuch as questions of form, date, setting, and sources have, in the past, been central to critical enquiries of Exodus 15, the analysis that follows seeks to circumvent the evolutionism belying such questions by approaching Exodus 15 as a literary work, by reading it alongside the Siri epic as an ethnographic model, and more specifically through the performance framework of sacred play.

Like Judges 5, Exodus 15 falls within the category of staged poetry, where a poem is placed in the mouths of literary characters in the story world of the text. Following a prose narrative of the sea crossing in Exodus 14:1-30, Exodus 15 contains two poems, the first is placed in the mouth of Moses and the Israelites (Exod 15:1-18), and the second is placed in the mouth of Miriam (Exod 15:21b). Like Judges 5, the song in Exodus 15 begins with an invocation signalling to us as readers who the audience of the performance is; while the singer invokes the deity as their witness, the prose narrator in Exodus 15:1 also implies the presence of the Israelites. As was highlighted in our critical re-imagining of Judges 5 above, our reading of the Siri epic reframes our analysis, raising questions as to the literary roles played by audiences and witnesses. More specifically, and as we shall see, our use of the performance context of sacred play in relation to Exodus 15, alerts us as readers to potential elements of singer-audience

[2] Martin Noth, *Exodus*, Old Testament Library (London: SCM Press, 1962) 121.

interaction with both similarities and differences to those Honko that observed in reception of the Siri epic in the context of sacred play.

Textual variance is a widely recognised feature of ancient literature; from a tradition-ecological perspective, the fact that, as highlighted by Zumthor, intentionality may lie behind such variance has perhaps not been taken seriously enough. As was demonstrated in Honko's study of the Siri epic, it is possible for a single text to be performed in a wide range of performance contexts and in multiple genres (genre adaptation). Not only was Gopala Naika able to perform the Siri epic in the artificial performance contexts—as both *sandi* (sung) and *kate* (dictated)— necessary for the codification of the full text into writing, but Naika was also able to take his Siri epic text and adapt it to the form of a secular antiphonal work song, and then in ritual contexts to adapt it once again to the fully-fledged dialogic discourse characteristic of the Paliodaliya healing rituals and the Siri jātre. In as much as Naika's ability to modify the genre of a tradition is illustrative of his skill as a singer, it also demonstrates the importance of a singer's performance strategy. Certainly, a performance designed to illicit the necessary rhythm for synchronising the plucking or planting of rice crops in a paddy field is different to a ritual performance requiring the intensity necessary for possession, or indeed, that which might transform a text into a sacred play designed to draw attention to and, perhaps, establish the superiority of one tradition over and above others.

## 5.3 Performance Context: Sacred Play

Cennɛ is a traditional board game from southern India that features prominently in the final part of the Siri epic, known as the Abbaya and Daraya subepic.[3] The night before the Siri jātre, which, as stated previously, represents the fullest expression of Siri epic performance, involves a play in which the cennɛ game scene from the Abbaya and Daraya subepic is re-enacted by a limited cast, consisting of the few

[3] Abbaya and Daaraya are sisters and skilful players of cennɛ. During a competitive game a mysterious Brahmin character stirs up intense competition between the two sisters leading Abbaya to strike her sister over the head with the cennɛ board killing her. Overcome by grief Abbaya throws Daaraya's body into the well and, at the suggestion of the Brahmin man who is in fact Kumara in disguise, throws herself into the well also.

main characters in the subepic: Abbaya, Daraya, and Kumara, who takes the form of the Brahmin.[4] The play takes place on a stage before a large audience that includes dignitaries, other Siris, curious bystanders, and others looking for entertainment. This re-enactment of the cennɛ play is not to be mistaken for acting, instead it is best viewed as a sacred embodied play.[5] The actors process to the stage and perform under possession, and while more linear narration is involved than during jātre, dialogic discourse dominates. In addition, it should be noted that cennɛ play performance involves another feature not found in jātre performance, namely, the use of stage props including a cennɛ board which are used to support the performance.[6] For example, just as in the Abbaya and Daaraya subepic itself, during the cennɛ play re-enactment the Brahmin uses trickery and shifts the cennɛ board while Abbaya and Daaraya are not looking.

One of the insights gained from Gopala Naika was that narratives such as the Siri epic can play a central role in how people understand and give meaning to the world around them. Naika recounted a time in his formation when the Kōṭi Chennaya warrior epic was foremost in his thinking and how his conversion to the Siri cult created an internal shift in his worldview and being.[7] Stated differently, the narratives within the epic text can help participants to frame their everyday lives and activities, and shape their perspective of the world around them. For example, as we saw earlier, for the Siris and Naika, working in a paddy field brought to mind scenes from the Ajjeru subepic where the epic personages were

[4] For a summary of this scene, see appendix A.

[5] Consider Honko's description, 'at around 9.45 p.m. the next act, the cennɛ game between the Abbaya and Daaraya impersonators, who had bathed and dressed in the meantime, was about to begin at its designated place at the southern end of the temple square. It was a small natural platform of black rock on which a chair had been placed. The orchestra and four dignitaries headed by Mr Hebar arrived, followed by an old Kumara who was not able to walk and was carried by two men. Then came the impersonators of Abbaya and Daaraya, trembling in mild possession, each surrounded by three siris who held their hands. The narrow passage closed after the procession had passed by.' Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 412.

[6] The cennɛ game performance involved various references to the cennɛ game: '"How to play cennɛ, sekkadi?" thus when we said, / "Naraayina, inside the stone coffer put your hands, dears! / On the top, today, the golden beads, / Silver board, will be found!" thus he said / Naraayina, putting hands / Inside the stone coffer / We counted the beads, today, / Counting the beads / We played cennɛ-game, sekkadi-game!' Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 417.

[7] See Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 534. For more information on the Kōṭi Chennaya epic, see B. A. Viveka Rai, "Epics in the Oral Genre System of Tulunadu," *Oral Tradition* 1.11 (1996); Shankar Narayana D. Poojary, *Epic of the Warriors: An English Translation of the Kōṭi Chennaya Pārdana* (Chennai: National Folklore Support Centre, 2007).

themselves in luscious green field. The insight that the narratives of texts like the Siri epic can be world-forming is an important one, especially in so far as the performance context of Sacred Play is concerned. The cennɛ play takes place within *the būta festival* where through performance, a variety of epic traditions are put on display for the watching crowds. Moreover, whilst these performances take place within a religious framework, there is a competitive element to them in the sense that performers look to both attract recruits and establish the superiority of their tradition over and above the others on display. For the Siri cult, sacred play was a means of displaying (and perhaps even marketing) their epic world to an external audience and draw attention to their cult.

Though ritual in nature, sacred play is a very different type of performance to that of the *Siri jātre* which is primarily for internal participants. While dialogic discourse continues to dominate, it is accompanied by the acting of lead singers and the use of props that together, help onlookers to grasp what is taking place. The cennɛ board scene is one of the most popular scenes in the Siri epic, so much so that the playing cennɛ continues to be associated with various taboos.[8] As such, with the cennɛ board scene being so well-known, there is the added dynamic that the play itself functions as a type of seconding of a story that is already known to the crowd. This was demonstrated in the fact that the play observed by Honko was not an accomplished performance, which meant that audience members had to step in, in order to bring it to its conclusion.[9]

[8] A taboo exists wherein sisters are not allowed to play each other, if they do, they risk being cursed; see Marine Carrin, "Dialectics of Autochthony and Foreignness in the Bhuta Cults of the Kanara Coast," in *Journeys and Dwellings: Indian Ocean Themes in South Asia*, ed. Helene Basu (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2008), 192; Peter J. Claus, "Playing *Cenne*: The Meanings of a Folk Game," in *Another Harmony: New Essays on the Folklore of India*, ed. Stuart H. Blackburn and A. K. Ramanujan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 265–93.

[9] It should be noted however that the cennɛ play observed by Honko and his team involved a different Siri group to that of Naika. According to the researchers this particular performance of the cennɛ game was below par to the point that others had to step in move the cennɛ pieces and rotate the board, as well as finish the singing. 'The performance did not last very long and obviously suffered greatly from the defective coordination by Kumara, whose role had not been properly allocated in advance … At one point the men sitting nearest began to help: they moved the pebbles and rotated the ends of the board as if to signal foul play. The performance became more structured only when a sturdy black-haired man sitting opposite the flegmatic [*sic*] old kumara took over his part and began to sing, actually fairly well.' Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 417.

## 5.4 Exodus 15 and the performative dimensions of Sacred Play

### 5.4.1 The social dimensions of power

Similar to our consideration of Judges 5 alongside jātre, one of the strongest correspondences between cennɛ play (Siri epic), and Exodus 15 lies in the presence of invocations at the beginning of the performance. The invocations accompanying the cennɛ play performance were observed to contain a mix of epic narrations and rhetoric found elsewhere in other prayers and invocations. Honko's thick descriptions of these invocations provide additional insights that the text alone does not provide, particularly in relation to the ensuing performer-audience interaction that accompanies them. In the case of the cennɛ play, the invocations took place before a thronging crowd, and as part of the invocatory process the singers (or at least two female singers) first spent time acknowledging the presence of the seated dignitaries, an act that signals that the performance is taking place within a dynamic of social hierarchy and, given the apparent lack of greeting from the male singer, patriarchy.[10]

Though brief, the invocatory texts in Exodus 15:1b–3 and 15:21b-c contain a mixture of praise and exhortations addressed ליהוה to (or for) YHWH the Divine Warrior. While the singers provide few explicit clues as to the presence of an audience beyond YHWH; the prose narrator portrays Israel itself as being present as both audience and participants (Exod 15:1a, 20). While the deity would of course sit at the top of any hierarchy, the Siri epic alerts us to the reality that a social entity such as Israel is not monolythic and that as such, we can envision the presence of power structures at work between performers and their audiences as well as amongst performers within the story world of the text where the prose narrator distinguishes between Moses and the sons of Israel (ובני ישראל) at the beginning of the performance, and then Miriam and all the women (כל־הנשים) at the end. Moreover, whereas the prose narrator provides no further qualifications to Moses' status, Miriam's status is qualified twice: she is a prophetess (הנביאה) and

[10] "The ailing old Kumara sitting near the cennɛ table looked frail and unconcentrated; his eyes kept wandering. Raising his hand he set the singing with Abbaya and Daaraya in motion although his voice was barely audible. Both female impersonators had a bunch of areca flowers in their lap; their shrill voices penetrated the noisy air as they responded to Kumara's words. Taking turns, they first greeted the dignitaries… The discourse was a peculiar mix of epic narrations and rhetorrics found in prayers and invocations…" Honko, *Textualising the Siri epic*, 412.

Aaron's sister (אחות אהרן). This dynamic is not too dissimilar to Judges 5, where the prose narrator includes similar qualifications regarding Deborah, noting her status as a prophetess and titling her as Judge. While this could of course be due to the fact that Moses was well known within the story world of the text whereas Miriam was less known, it may nevertheless be indicative of patriarchal tensions that, in the case of Miriam and Deborah, are circumnavigated through perceptions of spiritual status. Performance can be transformative, so much so that even under the patriarchal gaze, women in the story world of the text can lead the praise of YHWH at times over and above their male peers.

### 5.4.2 The embodied-ecstatic dimension

Embodiment, specifically the possession of performers by divinity accompanied by various ecstatic behaviours, is a central element of Siri epic performance even within the setting of sacred play. The song in Exodus 15 has been described by biblical scholars as embodied performance, but by embodiment, what is often meant is the relation that the text makes to features of the body or in the case of Exodus 15, YHWH's body. After all, YHWH's right hand (Exod 15:6,12) and nostrils are referenced (Exod 15:8) and are described as being used to destroy the enemy. While some of the charismatic behaviours on display in the Siri epic are documented in the Afro-Asian imagination more broadly as well as in the Hebrew Bible and the example given above of Saul, suggestions that performance in the story world of Exodus 15, might have involved embodiment of a similar charismatic kind to that seen in Siri epic performance, can only be tentative, implied through a reading where the act of invocation functions as a seating of deity within the person of the singer(s). In addition, in spite of the various charismatic behaviours evidenced in Afro-Asia, dialogic discourse—a central feature of Siri epic performance—has not been attested. The closest that we come to this phenomenon in Exodus 15 is the fact that this is described as a song and moreover, the fact that it is a song that contains the voices of various literary personages, namely, Moses, Pharoah and Miriam. Such similarities can by no means be equated to correspondence.

### 5.4.3 The dramaturgical dimension

One of the defining features of cennɛ play performance is its dramaturgy through which the Siri epic text is transformed into play and performed before and with an audience. As such, the cennɛ play involves a number of dramaturgical elements not present in other Siri epic performances: procession, physical staging, the use of props and re-enactment. Moreover, these elements work together to create various moments of performer-audience interaction. The cennɛ play performance begins with a procession where the dignitaries, along with a small orchestra and singers (already in a state of possession) [11] process to a physical stage which was a natural platform of black rock with a chair on it.[12] While the procession itself consists only of a small group, it nevertheless engenders interaction with the audience who had to part in order to let them through to the stage.[13] The performance itself involved a re-enactment of the Siri epic cennɛ board scene supported by the use of props such as an actual cennɛ board with pieces. With the performance not being a particularly distinguished one, the singers forgot to move the pieces on the cennɛ board as appropriate, a failure that induced members of the audience who were sat close-by to step in, move the pieces on the cennɛ board, and help bring the performance to a conclusion.

From the evidence presented in the text, the extent to which the song in Exodus 15 presents similar dramaturgical elements to those found in cennɛ play performance is limited. From the text in Exodus 15, there is little to suggest the occurrence of a procession at the beginning of the performance involving dignitaries and an orchestra. As mentioned above, the presence of hierarchy is, at most, implied by the narrative prose's framing of the song as having been performed before Israel who as a social group are hierarchical and not monolithic. If we were to imagine the dramaturgy of procession to be present in

[11] Honko describes the procession leading up to the start of the Siri epic as follows: "At around 9.45 p.m. the next act, the cennɛ game between Abbaya and Daaraya impersonators, who had bathed and dressed in the meantime, was about to begin at its designated place at the southern end of the temple square… The orchestra and the four dignitaries headed by Mr Hebbar arrived, followed by an Old Kumara who was not able to walk and was carried by two men. Then came the impersonators of Abbaya and Daaraya, each trembling in mild possession, each surrounded by three Siris who held their hands." Lauri Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 412

[12] Lauri Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 412

[13] 'Then came the impersonators of Abbaya and Darraya, trembling in mild possession, each surrounded by three Siris who held their hands. The narrow passage closed after they had passed by' Lauri Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 412

the performance of Exodus 15, the strongest candidates for it occur towards the middle and end of the song where the Singer describes YHWH as leading his people and passing by the inhabitants (Exod 15:12-17), and again later when the prose narrator describes Miriam and the women going out after her. In addition, Exodus 15 makes no reference to the presence of a physical stage (indeed the only staging is a literary one), and insofar as references that might be imagined as indicating the use of props, the only explicit functional refence is to pharaoh's sword (Exod 15:9), as suggestions as to the Divine warrior's possession of a weapon such as a mace are only by inference (Exod 15:6).

One further point distinguishing any potential dramaturgy in Exodus 15 from that of Siri epic sacred play relates to the fact that the two narratives are in substance very different from one another. As previously mentioned, the Siri epic is largely about non-violent struggle for justice, whereas Exodus 15 depicts the victory of YHWH the Divine Warrior over His enemies. As such if we are to imagine potential dramaturgy in Exodus 15, it would involve the re-enactment of physical battle which is very different to the cennɛ play which involves the playing of a board game— though it should be mentioned that while the cennɛ play viewed by Honko excluded any violence, in the epic itself the game does in fact have a violent end. Two further dramaturgical elements mentioned reference in Exodus 15 but not in sacred play are music and dance. Admittedly, aside from the stated presence of the orchestra no further mention is made of music in Honko's reception of the Siri epic as sacred play, as such it is difficult to determine the extent to which musical accompaniment played a role in cennɛ play performance, if at all. In any case, it is clear that it played nowhere as prominent a role as it did in jātre. In Exodus 15, however, the presence of musical accompaniment is indicated by the prose narrator who, in a scene reminiscent of the Afro-Asian victory song tradition, presents Miriam and the women as going forth with tambourines (Exod 15:20). In addition to musical accompaniment Exodus 15 features dance, another feature that is notably absent from Siri epic performance (Exod 15:20).

Of course there are significant differences between Exodus 15 and the Siri epic, however, what's most significant here is the fact that such differences do not preclude the overarching point which is that reading the Siri epic (within the performance context of sacred play) alongside Exodus 15, elicits the

question as to how Exodus 15 might be re-imagined in a dramaturgical ways. While this is certainly not the first time a dramaturgical re-imagining of Exodus 15 has been proposed, our route to this proposition is very different in that it is not premised on evolutionist suggestions of original oral roots, the erroneous romanticist hypothesis premising re-enactment of the festival of Marduk[14], or the application of contemporary performance critical concepts from disciplines such as theatre studies, rather it is elicited by reading Exodus 15 alongside a thick ethnographic texts. Furthermore, Honko's thick descriptions of in sacred play do well to highlight how dramaturgy also elicits singer-audience interaction, such as the separation and then narrowing of a crowd to allow a procession to reach the staging area. Such insights based on actual performance are unavailable to us in the text alone (including the Siri epic); this is where ethnographic works like the Siri epic gain analytical utility because they lead us to, albeit hypothetically, explore other possibilities, and in so doing lead us to ask new questions of the biblical text. In this instance, what aspects of Exodus 15, if any, might be re-imagined along dramaturgical lines and to think through how those dramaturgical aspects might be imagined to generate singer-audience interaction in the story world of the text.

### 5.4.4 The competitive dimension

In his reception of the Siri epic text during the cennɛ play performance, Honko observed that the unlike the other ritual performances of the Siri epic, the cennɛ play performed a specific function of drawing attention to the Siri epic tradition in a performance context (the Būta Festival) where numerous other traditions were also performed. As such, to approach the Siri epic text within the performance context of Sacred Play elicits the recognition that not only do texts (sometimes) have to function in environments where they have to compete with other traditions for attention, but what this particular reception of the Siri epic adds, is its recognition that the performance of text can have a competitive

[14] Sigmund Mowinckel and Hermann Gunkel to the quite specific theory that once a year during the time of the monarchy, the enthronement of YHWH was celebrated with a grand procession and cultic procession. See Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas, 2 vols (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), 4, 11; Hermann Gunkel and Joachim Begrich, *Introduction to Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel,* trans. James D. Nogalski (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2020), 81. This is not being argued here.

dimension beyond that of vying for the attention of onlooking audiences. The performance context of sacred play in Siri epic performance alerts us to the fact that the performance of text can also be an avenue through which a singer or singers seek to demonstrate the superiority of their tradition over and above that of others. Furthermore, this can have an important impact on a singer's performance strategy, which in the case of the Siri epic, resulted in various adaptations some of which— such as the staging, use of props, and higher levels of linear narration—— may be absent altogether in other performances of the same text.

In the case of the Siri epic and sacred play, such adaptations included the use of props, a greater use of linear narration as well as elements such as procession, that create opportunities for singer-audience interaction and participation. Furthermore, this dynamic also influenced the selection of the episode of the Siri epic that was performed as sacred play, evidenced in part by the popularity of the cennɛ board game. The cennɛ board game scene has proved to be one of the most well-known part of the Siri epic, thus, in addition to what has already been mentioned, there is a further dynamic in the sense that the choice to perform the cennɛ board game scene as sacred play not only reflects the fact that the audience are already familiar with it, but it also reflects an intentional decision on the part of the Siris to perform that part of their tradition that was most well-known and therefore likely to have the widest appeal.

In the text of Exodus 15, there are no indications that performance in the story world of the text takes place within an actual festival comparable to the aforementioned Būta Festival; speculation regarding such festivals in ancient Israelite antiquity is a recognised vestige of the evolutionist framework that this thesis is arguing against. To be clear, the point being made here is that the effect of reading the Siri epic (within the performance context of Sacred Play) alongside Exodus 15, lies in the fact that it not only sensitises us to dimensions within the text that might be indicative of interactions with other Afro-Asian traditions, but it alerts us to the fact that performances can be competitive not only in the sense that they might vie for the attention of onlooking audiences, but also in the sense that they can be

representative of broader attempts by a singer or singers to demonstrate the superiority of their tradition over and above others.

## 5.5 Re-imagining the Sea Crossing Tradition in Exodus 15:1–21 as a Literary Representation of a Mental Text

Having outlined the Siri epic performance context of sacred play and the performative dimensions of text that its reception as sacred play elicits, we now proceed towards the next step in our methodology which is to conceptualise how Exodus 15:1-21 might be re-imagined as a literary representation of a mental text, namely, as a series of images organised according to a storyline. This will establish a basis for the application of tradition ecology through close reading thus allowing for the elucidation of the potential performance strategy of the singer in the story world of the text. As Honko suggests, the backbone of any mental text is its storyline. Given our analysis of Exodus 15:1-21 as the literary work of unknown author(s)/editor(s), our analysis assumes that the prose narrative version of the sea crossing in Exodus 14 and the song recounting the sea crossing in Exodus 15:1-21 can be approached as two different versions of the same literary representation of a mental text. As such, similar to our analysis of Judges 5, we will begin by comparing Exodus 14 with Exodus 15 in order to identify a common storyline shared between the events as described by the prose narrator in Exodus 14 and the singer(s) in Exodus 15.

As was the case with our analysis of Judges 5, our delineation of Exodus 15 as a literary representation of a mental text begins with a comparative analysis of the song in Exodus 15 with its parallel telling in Exodus 14:1–31 for the purpose of identifying a common shared storyline. A comparison between the two texts reveals the presence of the following basic story line:

| **Basic Sequence** | **Basic Storyline** | **Prose Narrator (Exodus 14)** | **Singer (Exodus 15)** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Initial situation | Israelites Flee Egypt | 14:1–20, | (implicit) |
| Complication | The Egyptians pursue the Israelites | 14:21–25 | v. 9 |
| Transforming action | YHWH Parts the waters | 14:21–25 | v. 8 |
| Dénouement | The Egyptian army is destroyed | 14:26–28, 15:19 | vv. 1, 4–6, 10, 12 |
| Final situation | Israel is saved | 14:29–31 | vv. 13-18 |

While Exodus 14 and 15 have much in common in terms of their imagery, there is nevertheless a distinct difference in terms of the way how the prose narrator sequences their telling in Exodus 14:1-31 versus how the singer sequences their telling in Exodus 15. This is particularly evident in the fact that the singer mentions the destruction of the Egyptians repeatedly throughout the first half of the song (Exod 15:1,4-6,10, 12), and even before the description of YHWH parting the waters (Exod 15:8). Further underlining the sequential differences between the narrative and prose tellings is the fact that the singer in Exodus 15 does not present the enemy as uttering their threats (Exod 15:9) until after the Egyptian army's destruction (Exod 15:1,4-6) and after the parting of the waters (Exod 15:8), which is a completely different order to the prose narrative in Exodus 14 where the threat and pursuit of the Egyptians (Exod 14:5-10) occurs before the destruction of the Egyptian army (Exod 14:28) and before the parting of the waters (Exod 14:21-25).

Irrespective of the fact that both Exodus 15 and Judges 5 are framed as songs (שיר), that were sung in the aftermath of significant events, the manner in which each song recounts events is very different. While the singer(s) in Judges 5 follows the general sequence of events described by the prose narrator of Judges 4, the singer(s) in Exodus 15 re-arranges the sequence of events described in Exodus 14, repeating YHWHs defeat of the Egyptians several times. Furthermore, both Exodus 14 and 15 contain additional episodes not present in the other telling. Exodus 14 includes an account of the Israelites' encampment by the sea (Exod 14:1-4) whereas Exodus 15 includes no such account, but the singer does include an apparent depiction of Israel passing through Canaan (Exod 15:13-17) which is not depicted by the prose narrator in Exodus 14.

In addition to the points raised above, a comparison of Exodus 14 and 15 also reveals a major difference between the subject of the two accounts. Inasmuch as YHWH is present as a key character in the Exodus 14 account, providing instruction at key points in the narrative (Exod 14:1-4,15-18,26), parting the waters (Exod 14:21-22), intervening in the form of pillar of fire (Exod 14:24-25), and drowning the Egyptians (Exod 14:26-28), the focus of the narrative is on Moses. This, however, is not the case with the Exodus 15 where aside from the prose introduction to the song, Moses and his actions are never

mentioned; instead, the song centres on praising YHWH for his actions in defeating the enemy and leading his people through Canaan. This, once again, is a different dynamic to the song in Judges 5 which, similar to the prose narration in Judges 4, which maintains its focus on depicting the actions of the persons within the narrative.

While differences such as those highlighted above have led some scholars to suggest that the singer in Exodus 15 might in fact recounting a different event altogether to the one depicted in Exodus 14, or to propose literary explanations as to how different elements of the poem may have derived from different sources and contexts, tradition ecology and folkloristics highlight the fact that these types of dynamics are not uncommon in ethnographic performance where singers will develop a performance strategy and narrate their storyline flexibly as they respond artistically to their performance context and audience. In so doing, singers may omit some scenes that might more typically be expected while drawing on the wider tradition to add others that might not. From this perspective, the fact that, unlike the song in Judges 5, the singer(s) in the story world of Exodus 15 does not progress the song in a linear story arc but instead, reverses the order of some of some events while apparently repeating, omitting, and adding others, makes performance of the song in Exodus 15 all the more intriguing.

The freedom with which the singer in the story world of Exodus 15, repeats and re-arranges and adds to the storyline, may well be indicative of the presence of an audience who are already familiar with the sea crossing narrative and for whom the chronology of the performance is therefore less important. Indeed, the prose narrator frames the audience of the performance in Exodus 15 as consisting of those who witnessed the event themselves (Exod 14:30). As noted previously, one of the most significant effects of reading Exodus 15, alongside Siri epic performance, is that it elicits questions as to the role played by the audience. If, in our critical re-imagining of performance in Exodus 15 we understand the audience as being already familiar with the events described in the song, this may in fact shed light on the freedom with which the singer in the story world of Exodus 15, repeats and re-arranges and adds to the storyline. If an audience is already familiar with the events depicted in a performance, the order in which they occur matters less and may instead be indicative of a performance strategy geared towards moments of singer-

singer and singer-audience interactivity where the lead singers, like a conductor, marshals elements of their telling to provoke particular reactions and responses, and in response to their in-situ reading of their audience. For example, during their observation of the cennɛ play performance, at various points Honko and his research team observed the lead singer interject and skip scenes to hurry the performance along and meet the time constraints imposed by the dignitaries.[15]

Under pressure of performance, decisions relating to which scenes and images to deploy are the prerogative of the singer and may reflect other aesthetic considerations. While unlike the cennɛ play performance where its thick archiving enabled us to identify the fact that the performance took place under time constraints imposed by authoritative persons within the audience, the song in Exodus 15 contains little information concerning the audience. Nevertheless, our reading of cennɛ play performance does invite us to think about the sort of dynamics that might drive the performative choices of the singer in the story world of Exodus. In terms of their employment of a performance strategy, the observation that the singer, unlike the prose narrator, focuses their telling on YHWH is indicative of the implementation of a differentiated performance strategy one in which YHWH rather than the characters in the story world of the text, remains the central focus of each sung scene; as such, the imagery deployed by the singer in Exodus 15 coalesces around YHWH and YHWHs actions as the Divine Warrior.

Given the above, if we are to re-imagine the song in Exodus 15 as a literary representation of a mental text, consisting of a series of images organised according to a storyline, our delineation of the text needs to take the proceeding features into account. It does not proceed in a linear story arc focusing on the characters mentioned in the prose narrative of Exodus 14, rather knowledge of the sea crossing narrative appears to be assumed and the singer instead focusing on YHWH's activity as the Divine Warrior,

[15] "Now Kumara's voice was heard continuing the story, partly repeating what had just been sung and describing the proposal and the sending of invitations to the wedding. He concluded by asking: "At that time, what happened tell, children!" This seemed to be an attempt to speed up the story and make it reach the episode of the fateful cennɛ play. The Abbaya-singer responded by starting from the episode where the poor Brahmin meets Sonne … But Kumara was not satisfied. Obviously, time did not allow such a lengthy introduction… Thus Kumara himself too the lead and sang…The time allocated for the cennɛ drama was about to end. The dignitaries were considering stopping the performance, partly of the disorderly manner in which it had been conducted." Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 415.

revisiting YHWHs victories in battle several times over. In addition, there is also a need to recognise the prose framing of the song, not only do we find a prose framework at the beginning of the song in Exodus 15:1a connecting it to the proceeding prose and a tradition dominant, further prose narration occurs later on in Exodus 15:19-20b where the victory of YHWH over Pharoah is re-iterated and a different tradition dominant is introduced. In both cases, the tradition dominants are named in the prose but not the song. What follows is a delineation of Exodus 15 as a literary representation of a mental text:

**Prose Framework (Exodus 15:1a)**
- The Seating of the Divine Warrior (Exodus 15:1b–3)
- The Battle part I (Exodus 15:4–5)
- The Battle part II (Exodus 15:6–7)
- The Battle part III (Exodus 15:8)
- The Challenge (Exodus 15:9)
- The Battle part IV (Exodus 15:10)
- Performative aside (Exodus 15:11)
- The Battle part V (Exodus 15:12)
- The March of the Divine Warrior (Exodus 15:13–18)

**Prose Framework (Exodus 15:19-20b)**
- Victory Song (Exodus 15:21b)

The above delineation of Exodus 15 as a literary representation of a mental text will form the framework for our tradition-ecological analysis of Exodus 15 that follows.

## 5.6 Reflecting on Exodus 15 in Light of the Performative Dimensions of Cenne Play Performance

Having re-imagined Exodus 15 as a literary representation of a mental text and thus identifying a common storyline, we shall now draw on this outline to structure our tradition ecological analysis of Exodus 15. Similar to our previous analysis of Judges 5, our analysis of Exodus 15 will use annotation to draw attention to the use of particular emic features: <M> will be used to indicate the presence of multiforms (i.e. <M> *multiform* </M>) and << >> will be used to highlight the presence of epithets (i.e. << *epithet* >>). Unlike Honko's reception of the Epic which is accompanied by additional thick materials detailing aspects of the performance that fall outside of the sung words themselves, the only additional information accompanying our reception of Exodus 15 is that contained within the song's prose frame. As such, it has generally been the case that scholarship has attempted to explore performance in Exodus 15 by drawing

generic clues from the text itself–be it the prose frame or internal evidence taken from within the song itself, or from reading it in light of theories of performance such as those found within theatre studies or comparative analysis.[16] The analysis that follows takes a different path choosing to instead explore the performance in Exodus 15 by drawing on ethnographic extra-textual categories taken from real-world cennɛ play performance as a means of identifying alternative textual dimensions often precluded by evolutionist models of text.

This critical exercise begins with an elucidation of the framework—drawn from those extratextual dimensions of performance that were identified as being central to Honko's reception of cennɛ play performance—through which Exodus 15 will be critically re-imagined. As noted above, cennɛ play performance involves four core extratextual elements: hierarchy, embodiment, dramaturgy and competition. Hierarchy refers to those power dynamics that were observed as existing between singers, audience, and deity. Re-imagining Exodus 15 in light of these dynamics will involve the identification of the singer(s) and audience(s) and deity in the Hebrew text, reflection on potential power differentials between them, as well as how these power dynamics might impact the performance. Embodiment refers to the perceived inhabitation of performers by deity and the ensuing manifestation of ecstatic behaviours. Re-imagining Exodus 15 as embodied performance involves consideration of the extent to which the text itself evidences the more ecstatic kind of embodiment seen in cennɛ play performance and, as discussed, amongst some of the Hebrew prophets. Moreover, our exploration of ecstatic embodiment in Exodus 15 will also involve a broader consideration of how the perception of a singer's inhabitation by deity might impact upon singer-audience interaction. Dramaturgy is a recognition of the specific function of cennɛ play performance as sacred play where performers re-enact a scene from the cennɛ play episode of the Siri epic using props. Critically re-imagining Exodus 15 as dramaturgical performance involves reflecting on the text of the song and potential cues within its prose frame to consider how it might function as a dramaturgical performance, what props if any such a performance might involve, and potential elements of singer audience interaction. Finally, it was also noted that competition was a key element of cennɛ play

[16] See for example Giles and Doan, *Twice used songs*.

performance, with performers seeking to establish the priority of their tradition over and above that of others. To re-imagine Exodus 15 as a competitive performance is to consider the text itself with a view to identifying the presence of other traditions that performers could potentially be competing against. The analysis and re-imagination that follows will proceed within this cennɛ play performance-informed frame. It begins with an analysis of how the double-performance frame establishes an ambiguous staging for the song, which creates interpretive gaps that the reader in turn is invited to fill.

### 5.6.1 Prose Frame in Exodus 15:1a

15:1a אז ישיר־משה ובני ישראל את־השירה הזאת
ליהוה ויאמרו לאמר

15:1a Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to YHWH saying:

The prose introduction in Exodus 15:1a serves as one part of a double performance frame that links the song that follows it to the preceding narrative and frames the words that follow in the voice of the tradition dominant Moses (משה), and the Israelites (בני ישראל ). Here in Exodus 15:1a the prose narrator utilises this literary device to present the song that follows as having been sung in the immediate aftermath of the sea crossing presented in the preceding prose narrative of Exodus 14. However, when read alongside the song itself, this prose frame presents a number of challenges.

Firstly, inasmuch as the prose narrator frames the performance that follows as having taken place in the immediate aftermath of the sea-crossing through their use of אז, the chronology internally evidenced within the song itself extends well beyond the immediate aftermath of the sea crossing event, beyond the traditional lifetime of Moses to the conquest of Canaan (Exod 15:15) and perhaps even to the time of Philistines (פלשת , Exod 15:14).[17] While each of these determinations have been the subject of scholarly debates, the contrast between the temporal frame suggested by the prose frame, and that suggested by the internal evidence of the song itself has the effect of rendering the timing of the performance ambiguous.

[17] Durham, *Exodus*, 208

A second challenge presented by the prose frame is that it creates further ambiguity over who sings. Whereas the prose narrator presents a scene in which Moses and the Israelites sing, the song itself —notwithstanding the presence of potentially archaic forms that can render grammatical number ambiguous—presents as having been sung in the singular.

The third and perhaps most significant tension between the prose frame and the song lies in the arena of genre. While the prose narrator in Exodus 15:1a frames the performance as song ( שירה ), the singer employs the emic term *praise song* (זמרה). Furthermore, in the second prose frame following the song of Moses, the song of Miriam (Exod 15:21b-c), which employs near identical wording to Exodus 15:1b, is presented by the prose narrator as yet a different genre of song, namely a *victory song*. From a tradition ecological perspective, one way to account for the varied genre designations in Exodus 15 is by applying Honko's insight that singers can engage in genre-modification whereby they adapt their performance into another genre. Indeed, this dynamic can be seen in cennɛ play performance where singers actively adapt the Siri epic text into a sacred play. Stated differently, the evident tension in Exodus 15 between the genre designations in the prose frame and those indicated by the song itself, may be indicative of the sort of genre-modification that singers were observed as undertaking in Siri epic performance. Nevertheless, even if genre-modification is used as a potential means of framing this tension, this does not resolve the fact that—notwithstanding the noted challenges regarding genre—even when the song is considered apart from the prose frame, there is much about nature of the performance in the story world of that ultimately remains ambiguous.

Inasmuch as the prose introduction reveals an attempt by the prose narrator to frame the performance in a particular way, it is also apparent that the textual tensions arising from this activity have the concurrent effect of contributing further to the indeterminate aspects of the performance that takes place in the world of the text. Whilst I would not go as far as to argue that the ambiguity furthered by the prose frame represents discursive literary strategy, it is nonetheless the case that the presence of such ambiguity leads the reader to consider what frames of reference it might be appropriate to draw upon when seeking to approach Exodus 15 as performance. As noted above, while some choose to do this by

applying genre-based categories such as a praise song or victory song, and others draw on various forms of comparative analysis with other Afro-Asian traditions, and others yet utilise contemporary performance theories, this approach of reading the Hebrew text alongside ethnographic performance represents yet an alternative. Engaging in this critical exercise of reading Exodus 15 alongside cennɛ play performance is a recognition of the fact that the text of Exodus 15 provides only a limited account of the performance that takes place in the story world of the text. It is also a recognition that while there is much that cannot be known about performance in ancient Israel, the heuristic application of alternative ethnographic models such as cennɛ play performance have the potential to bring attention to other dimensions of the Hebrew text, that more typical evolutionist literary models preclude.

### 5.6.2 Invocation as the Seating of the Divine Warrior: Titles, Multiforms and Genre-modification in Exodus 15:1b–3

15:1b אשירה ליהוה כי־גאה גאה סוס ורכבו רמה בים

15:2 עזי וזמרת יה ויהי־לי לישועה זה אלי ואנוהו אלהי אבי וארממנהו

15:3 יהוה איש מלחמה יהוה שמו

15:1b <M>'I will sing to YHWH, for he has triumphed gloriously;
horse and rider alike he has tossed into the sea.</M>
15:2 My strength and my song of praise[18] is <<YH>>,[19]
He has become my salvation;

[18] Some follow a variant reading here, taken from an alternative root of זמר, meaning 'protection.' Given the context of traditional performance, the proposal of a variant reading here is unnecessary especially since the same construction can also be found later in Psalm 118:14 and Isaiah 12:2. Indeed with these two verses being almost identical to Exodus 15:2a, this may well have been a praise formula. See also discussion in Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, The New American Commentary 2 (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2006), 349.

[19] Through their continued use of the first person, the teller further develops their embodied performance through which they, in the first instance, praise YH. While it is generally agreed that YH is a shortened form of YHWH, it is also true that there has been a fair amount of discussion over whether <<YH>> is an archaic epithet or a late addition. While debates such as this are ultimately unknowable based on the evidence currently available to us, it does raise the prospect of <<YH>> being a potential example of ecological adaptation, where the teller makes a minor adaptation typical to particular region or social group. If <<YH>> is archaic, as suggested by BDB, its use here could be indicative of a Northern telling, as, indeed, the ability of traditional tellings to preserve archaic forms is well-known. See Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques*, 2nd ed., Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 26 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), 35–39. Likewise, if it were discovered to be a late name, perhaps even later than YHWH, as Freedman suggests, it may represent adaptation it to a southern Judean audience. On the suggestion that this is a late name, see Roland de Vaux, *The Early History of Israel* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1978), 339. Others such as Freedman argue that the use

this is my God, and I will praise him,
<<my father's God>>, and I will exalt him.
15:3 YHWH is a man of war;
YHWH is his name.

Exodus 15:1a, is but one part of a 'double performance frame'.[20] Here in the second part of the performance frame, the lead singer staged by the narrator as Moses draws attention to their audience towards YHWH with the declaration אשירה ליהוה (I will sing to YHWH) in v. 1b. On this point, both narrator and singer are congruent: the intended recipient of the performance is YHWH. Exodus 15:1b-3 constitutes an invocation, which is more typically perceived as device through which the presence of deity is invited and acknowledged. The multiformic nature of the invocation employed by the singer at the beginning of his performance is indicated by the use of a near identical form later in the song, there however, the narrator frames it as having been sung by Miriam and the women (Exodus 15:20-21a):

| **Exodus 15:1b** | **Exodus 15:21** |
|---|---|
| <M>'I will sing to YH, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has tossed into the sea. </M> | <M>'Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has tossed into the sea.' </M> |

The use of this multiform as a means of introducing both Moses's and Miriam's words is reminiscent of the self-sacrifice multiform utilised to introduce the performance in Judges 5:2. The construction here immediately after the prose frame further strengthens the argument that these multiforms may well have functioned as titles associated with specific traditions, with the horse and rider multiform being specifically associated with sea crossing tradition. The difference between the two multiforms lies in the form of the verb to sing (שיר). Whereas the form used in Exodus 15:1b is cohortative (אשירה), the form used in Exodus 15:21b is an imperative (שירו) and perhaps a subtle emphasis on authority. In any case, what we appear to have here is a dynamic in which the imagery of a horse and rider being thrown into the sea may well have become synonymous with the tradition of YHWH's rescue of the Israelites from Egypt.[21]

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of this form evidences that this verse was in fact a later addition to the poem. David Noel Freedman, *Pottery, Poetry, and Prophecy: Studies in Early Hebrew Poetry* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1980), 200.

[20] Vayntrub, *Beyond Orality*, 7

[21] More can be said on v. 21, particularly in relation to its potential implications for re-enactment. Comment on this, however, will be reserved for later.

Inasmuch as the narrative frame provides a literary staging for the song in Exodus 15, presenting it as having been sung by Moses and the Israelites before YHWH and in the aftermath of the sea crossing, our reading of Exodus 15:1-21 alongside Siri epic performance invites reflection not only on its literary staging, but also on the staging of the performance in the story world of the text. Given that the double-performance frame introduces us to aspects of audience in the story world of the text, one of the dimensions of Exodus 15:1-3 that our reading of cennɛ play performance alerts us to is the immanence of social dynamics between performer(s) and audience(s). For this reason, the knowledge that the performance in the story world of the text takes place primarily before YHWH and secondarily before the Israelites provides an instructive and social basis upon which to reflect on the dynamics of performance. Indeed, as previously noted YHWH is the focus of Exodus 15:1-21 and the fact that YHWH is also the primary audience of a performance celebrating YHWH's own actions establishes a dynamic in which the singer or singers maintain a position that is hierarchically below and in deference to the one whom they are singing to and about, YHWH. This, coupled with the adhortative nature of the song, suggests that praise of YHWH is at the centre of Exodus 15 performance.

The performance itself begins with the use of the 1cs form אשירה by a singer, as noted above the use of the 1cs here contrasts with the prose frame which suggests a collective performance by Moses and the Israelites. This shift, coupled with the fact that the chronology depicted within the song itself extends well beyond the chronology of the narrative and frame, provides a subtle indication that the performance that takes place within the story world of the text may well have been different to that depicted by the frame established by the prose narrator. Indeed, it is the recognition of such differences that has often led historical critical scholars to suggest the use of different sources.However, when read alongside Siri epic performance where performances often take very different forms to the narratives upon which they are based, we are presented with an alternative hypothetical framework for exploring differences between narrative and performance. In cennɛ play performance there is a dynamic where, inasmuch as those who perform are not the actual characters within the Siri epic, through performance they represent and come to embody them.  When read alongside performance in Exodus 15 this raises the question as

to whether, in the story world of Exodus 15:1b-3, a similar dynamic might be re-imagined where the performance is not led by the Moses and the Israelites of Exodus 14 per se, but by a more limited cast involving a later singer who through performance comes to represent or embody them. This is not a question that is usually asked of Exodus 15, but our reading of cennɛ play performance alongside the tensions between the song and narrative frame elicit it.

Inasmuch as the literary embodiment evident in the performance frame and the singer's declaration that YH is their praise song strengthen the argument that the song in Exodus 15 ought to be approached as embodied performance in and of themselves, it must be conceded that these features do not demonstrate exegetically the operation of the more ecstatic type of embodiment seen in cennɛ play performance or in Hebrew Bible texts such as 1 Samuel 10. Nevertheless, if, for the purpose of this critical exercise we re-imagine the performance in the story world of the text as involving embodiment of an ecstatic nature, our reading of performance in Exodus 15 takes on a very different dynamic. Siri epic performance sensitises us to some of these potential dynamics, noting for instance that in ethnographic performance— beyond acknowledging the presence of audience members and/or deity— invocations can be functional serving as the means through which singers seat deity within their person and come to exhibit ecstatic behaviours that lend authenticity and authority to their performance.

While, as noted above, the performance in Exodus 15 contains no explicit recognition of ecstatic embodiment, as a critical exercise, re-imagining the song as ecstatic performance has an important and transformative effect on our perception of the invocation and thus the remainder of the performance. If Exodus 15 is critically re-imagined as involving embodiment of an ecstatic kind, then when read alongside cennɛ play performance, the invocation represents an act of becoming, where perhaps long after the sea crossing event and defeat of Egypt described in the preceding narrative, a singer representing Moses and the Israelites invites the spirit of YHWH to inhabit and assist them in a performance through which they praise YHWH the Divine Warrior and remember YHWH's past acts of deliverance. Such a proposition has the potential to account for some of the aforementioned tensions between the prose frame and the song itself. Furthermore, given the empirical insights that the Siri epic and cennɛ play performance give us into

the sort of power dynamics that can exist between singers— particularly those believed to be inhabited by deity— and their audiences, ecstatic embodiment also provides us with a real-world basis for reflecting on the nature of power depicted in the text and its story world. When perceived by their audience as being inhabited by deity, singers can assume an authoritative status above that which they may possess in their everyday life, above that of their onlooking audience, but not above that of deity who performs through them.

The singer's use of epithets plays an important role in this opening scene, as through them, they place <<YH>> at the centre of their introductory scene. In addition to referring to <<YH>> as their 'strength,' 'song' and 'salvation,' the singer employs the <<my father's god>> epithet, an epithet with rich metonymic patriarchal-tribal resonances.[22] The significance of this lies in the aforementioned potential that <<YH>> was a local name for YHWH, or drawing on Honko's tradition-ecological terminology, an ecotype. If <<YH>> was indeed a localised name for YHWH, the fact that it is used here by the embodied teller here may subtly indicate the singer's bias and an agenda favouring one locality over another. Ecotypes howver, are one of the weakest elements in Honko's model. In any case, the teller marshals these various elements towards the scene's climax in where YHWH is revealed as the Divine Warrior.

Scholars have long discussed the sense in which the phrase 'strength and song' ought to be understood, particularly in relation to the unobvious connection between עזי (strength) and זמרת (song). If, however, we imagine Exodus 15 in the context of ecstatic embodiment, the connection between song and strength becomes more apparent in the sense that during performance a singer's song and strength are perceived as emanating not from themself but from the spirit of <<YH>> inhabiting them. The cennɛ play observed by Honko was also preceded by an invocation, and with actors displaying visible signs of possession. Given our intentional use of the cennɛ play performance, a similar dynamic can be reimagined here in Exodus 15:1b–3 where, having invoked YH, the Divine Warrior, the lead tradition bearer displays

[22] On the 'God of my father' epithet, see Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 3–12; Albrecht Alt, *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion*, trans. R. A. Wilson, The Biblical Seminar (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989).

visible signs of possession, and thus is ready and empowered for the next scene in the sacred play: the battle.

Given that we are re-imagining performance in Exodus 15 in light of cennɛ play performance, one further point to signpost here in our discussion of the staging of the performance as dramaturgy. As noted above, cennɛ play performance involved dramaturgy in which elements of the singing were also acted out, sometimes with props. As we move forward with this critical exercise, elements of our analyses will also involve a layered consideration of not only the type of actions that might be imagined as accompanying the words of Exodus 15, but also the kinds of singer-audience interactions that might occur when dramaturgical activity takes place within a framework that includes embodiment hierarchy and competition. While the text itself contains few direct exegetical indications of dramaturgy, it's worth signposting Exodus 15:19-21a where the prose narrator utilises the prose frame to add dramaturgy to Miriam's song (Exod 15:21b-c). More will be said on this later, but for now it suffices as evidence that the text of Exodus 15 is not devoid of dramaturgy.

### 5.6.3 The Battle Part I: Gesture and ים־סוף as Milieu Dominant in Exodus 15:4–5

15:4 מרכבת פרעה וחילו ירה בים ומבחר שלשיו טבעו בים־סוף
15:5 תהמת יכסימו ירדו במצולת כמו־אבן

15:4 <M>'Pharaoh's chariots and his army alike he tossed into the sea;
his picked officers were sunk in <<Yam Suph>>[23].</M>
15:5 The floods covered them;
Like a stone they sank down into the depths.

Here in Exodus 15:4 the singer draws on the multiform previously employed in the invocation (15:1b). While a detail such as this would usually be viewed through the lens of repetition, our reading of performance in Exodus 15 alongside the Siri epic alerts us to the fact that in Siri Epic performance lead singers may use invocational texture later in the performance to control rising possession among fellow participants. During the cennɛ play observed by Honko and his team, some of the performers fainted and

[23] Debates continue over the translation of this term, the potential location of the sea crossing event, and indeed whether there was a sea crossing event at all.

lost consciousness under the intensity of possession.[24] Knowledge of this dynamic alerts us to alternative possibilities in terms of the performance that takes place in the story world of Exodus 15:4, namely that the re-use of invocational texture can potentially be re-imagined as an attempt to mitigate the effects of intense possession in fellow performers.

This second use of the multiform in Exodus 15:4 includes an adaptation through which the singer increases the specificity of the multiform, revealing that it was Pharoah's horses and Pharoah's officers who were cast into the sea and sunk. Given that we are drawing on Honko's reception of cennɛ play performance to critically re-imagine Exodus 15 as sacred play, this particular close reading also involves an active sensitivity to how the song might be re-imagined as having been accompanied by dramaturgy involving a limited cast of actors and perhaps even props and music.[25] While the words of Exodus 15 nevertheless serve as a guide for our critical re-imagination of the performance, the process of re-imagining extratextual dynamics not discussed in the text is a subjective one, especially when an ethnographic performance of a distant text such as the Siri epic is used to aid the process of re-imagination. Nevertheless, this critical approach also leads us to ask different question of phenomena such as this multiform; for example, if this performance is imagined to be dramaturgical, then this second iteration of the multiform may also be an indication of the presence of other performers impersonating Pharoah's 'chariots', 'army' and 'choice officers'. The context of conflict could then be indicative of a battle between these new entrants to the stage and the lead singer inhabited by YHWH, the Divine Warrior.

Debates concerning the translation and location of יַם־סוּף are well rehearsed elsewhere, but from a tradition-ecological perspective, it is worth noting that in ancient cultures, geographical locations often

[24] Commenting on the cennɛ play Honko states, 'the conclusion of the present act was a clumsy affair with one of the impersonators losing consciousness for a while and the too many helping men disagreeing about what to do next.' Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 417.

[25] While the following description is taken from a būta performance, it is an excellent example of the skills possessed by traditional performers who, at times, can perform epic scenes without the need for words, 'though heavily varied in as to its intonation and pitch, and a pantomime … using hand gestures and dance steps as his medium, the impersonator was able to tell, especially with his eloquent fingers, from where the Nandigoona Mayisandaaya had come, and how he had greeted the people present and run round the temple and received offerings. It was amazing to see how the pantomime could pick up details of what had happened moments earlier and how a single utterance could tell a story.' Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 419–20.

came to be known by their milieu dominants. These are natural objects or phenomena 'which, because of their uncommonness stand out from their surroundings and dominate the field of vision.'[26] In other words, irrespective of whether an actual location is being communicated, the singer's use of Yam Suph in this verse images a place of reeds. This is the only place in Exodus 15 where this epithet is used, and one element often overlooked in these discussions is the fact that Yam Suph may not be a location at all. Along these lines some have suggested an alternative pointing of סוֹף (end), giving a reading of 'sea of the end' or more metaphorically the sea at the end of the world.[27] Another possibility is that, the singer's use of the epithet could also be an allusion to the broader narrative of the Moses tradition in which, as a baby, Moses was hidden using the reeds on the shore of the river Nile (בסוף עַל־שְׂפַת הַיְאֹר, Exod 2:3). To utilise the language of folklore ecology, this would represent a tradition-morphological adaptation through which the teller is once again linking the sea crossing tradition with the tradition of the dominant figure of Moses. This type of subtlety and art is especially possible in the arena of ethnographic performance where, as noted previously, even one word such as reed (סוף) can be resonant with metonymy and a wealth of traditional resonances.

In Exodus 15:5 the singer brings the first part of their description of YHWH's destruction of the enemy to completion. Not only does the lead singer describe YHWH's casting and sinking of the enemy in the sea, they describe them as being covered with a flood. Particular mention here should be made of the singer's use of cover (יכסימו). In light of the song's temporal ambiguity the retention of the *-mu* ending here and in other places could indicate that the singer in the story world of the text is using a particularly archaic form of כסה, in an effort to bring about an epic register and figuratively transport their audiences back in time to the setting of the events being performed. What is particularly interesting about the singer's employment of this possible archaism here is their pairing it with depths (תהום), a similarly archaic term whose metonymy resonates with primaeval floods, such as those found in the creation account (Gen 1:2). Through the employment of this construction, the teller creates a powerful image of pharaoh's forces

[26] Honko, "Thick Corpus and Organic Variation," 201.

[27] See discussion in Graham I. Davies, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Exodus 11–18*, International Critical Commentary (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 348–51.

instantaneously being covered by the ancient primaeval flood waters, before sinking down into their depths like a stone. While the reference to stone (אבן) here is often taken to be figurative, our effort to re-imagine this as performance, sensitises us to elements within the song that have the potential to be indicative of the surrounding environment, props and other extratextual aspects of performance. From this perspective, such figurative speech could be indicative of a gesture where, in order to emphasise their point, the singer, embodied by the divine warrior, picks up a stone from the surrounding environment and drops it to coincide with the words 'like a stone.'

### 5.6.4 The Battle Revisited: YHWH's right hand, irony and weaponry in Exodus 15:6–7

15:6 ימינך יהוה נאדרי בכח ימינך יהוה תרעץ אויב
15:7 וברב גאונך תהרס קמיך תשלח חרנך יאכלמו כקש

15:6 Your right hand[28], O YHWH, glorious in power—
your right hand, O YHWH, smashed the enemy.
15:7 In the wealth of your majesty you annihilated your adversaries;
you loosed your divine wrath, it devoured them like chaff.

Maintaining their verbal artistry through the use of staircase parallelism, a feature common to Ugaritic epic, the embodied lead singer builds on the previous battle scene by focusing on YHWH's right hand. Indeed, as demonstrated by Vermeulen, body parts can be used as poetic devices.[29] Not only is this significant in terms of indicating the sort of gestures a performer might make, but some have also highlighted that the imagery of this verse may imply that the divine warrior is wielding a weapon, perhaps even a mace similar to that of Baal, depicted on a well-known Baal stele.[30] In further support of the argument that the singer is implying that YHWH has a weapon in his hand, is their use of the form רעץ (to smash) + reference to an enemy, likely Egypt or the Pharaoh, which resembles descriptions in Egyptian execration texts, where, in order to vanquish an enemy, a ritual object might be bound, stamped upon on

[28] See "Right Hand," in *The Eerdmans BibleDictionary*, ed. Allen. C. Myers (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987).

[29] As Vermeulen has shown in her study of Judges 4 and 5, body parts can be utilised as a compositional device particularly when opposites such as up-down and left-right are used. See Karolien Vermeulen, "Hands, Heads, and Feet: Body Parts as Poetic Device in Judges 4–5," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 136.4 (2017): 801–19, doi:10.15699/jbl.1364.2017.249369. See also Brad E. Kelle and Frank Ritchel Ames, *Writing and Reading War: Rhetoric, Gender, and Ethics in Biblical and Modern Contexts*, Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series 42 (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2008).

[30] Davies, *Exodus 11–18*, 352.

or 'smashed'.[31] The significance of this is that it may well indicate an attempt from the singer in the story world of the text to be ironic, implying that the Egyptians have been stamped upon, just like their execration texts.[32]

The language used by the embodied lead singer in Exodus 15:7 is indicative of language used to describe Egyptian Pharaohs engaged in imperial campaigns.[33] Similar to the previous scene, the singer proceeds to develop a picture of YHWH's complete destruction of the enemy, which is achieved through their deployment of the form חרון—a term reserved for descriptions of God's wrath—which the teller describes as being loosed (שלח). While numerous scholars have suggested connections between חרון and fire (e.g. Num 1:16, 11:1), the teller's use of שלח and employment of the divine warrior theme suggests the possibility that another connection may well be intended.[34] While, as mentioned above, the Baal stele depicts Baal with a mace in his right hand, it is also the case that Baal is depicted with lightning in the other. In the same way that the language of the text implies YHWH's possession of a weapon, the language can just as easily be seen to imply that in his other hand, he possesses lightning. Indeed, elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible there does appear to be a tradition in which lightning is one of YHWH's weapons (Pss 18:15 [MT]; 144:6; Zech 9:1). Sometimes he is pictured as holding it in his hand (Hab 3:4), and even described as loosing (שלח) lightning like arrows (Pss 18:15 [MT], 144:6). Finally, in a number of places we also find a tradition regarding YHWH's use of lightning in connection with the sea, indeed YHWH is able to use lightning to expose even the depths of the sea (Job 36:29–33; 2 Sam 22:15–16) and this appears to be the

[31] 'From the Old Kingdom through the Roman era, priests performed official ritual cursings of the potential enemies of Egypt. The ceremonies included the breaking of red pots and figurines inscribed with formal "Execration Texts" listing Nubians, Asiatics, Libyans, living and deceased Egyptians, as well as generally threatening forces. The texts themselves contain no explicit curses, but instead serve to identify the fate of the enemies with that of the destroyed pot or image.' Robert K. Ritner, "Execration Texts," *The Context of Scripture: Canonical Compositions, Monumental Inscriptions, and Archival Documents from the Biblical World*, eds. William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, 3 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 1.50.

[32] Weaponry featured in some of the other performances that took place during the Siri jātre: 'the old paatri acted out his role. He was in rather heavy possession, dripping sweat in the hot night as he danced before the dignitaries and the orchestra, waving his sword high in the air or making peculiar sweeping movements with it as if blessing the persons in front of him.' Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 410.

[33] Davies, *Exodus 11–18*, 352.

[34] Propp for example suggested that the 'comparison of Yahweh's fury to a conflagration may be the source of later, multiform tradition that the Egyptians encountered divine fire in the sea.' Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, 519.

implication here in Exodus 15; even as chaff at the bottom of the sea, YHWH's enemies cannot escape his wrath.[35] When re-imagined as performance, such language may also pre-figure the teller's use of a weapon in their right hand as a prop, to figuratively smash, annihilate and devour the enemy.

The metonymy highlighted in Exodus 15:6–7 is part of a particularly sophisticated episode in which the singer draws on divine warrior imagery to portray YHWH, subtly implying the use of weaponry. The fact that YHWH's possession of weaponry is described implicitly rather that explicitly may well be the result of censoring. As noted above, other Afro-Asian deities such as Baal are also depicted as weapon wielding deities and by not explicity describing YHWH as possessing a weapon the singer, at least through their words may be attempting to differentiate YHWH in order to emphasise superiority. This dynamic may well represent tradition-morphological adaptation in which the teller is drawing on the wider Afro-Asian tradition to convey a rich telling of YHWH and his power. As we learn later on, though a weapon may well be implied, ultimately YHWH did not need to use it to defeat the enemy.[36] Furthermore, if we imagine that like the cennɛ play this performance of the sea crossing had to compete for attention with other Afro-Asian epic tellings and traditions, such as the Baal cycle of myths, then such polemics are perhaps to be expected. Not only does our critical re-imagining of this scene highlight potential aspects of gesture or the potential use of weaponry as props, but when read alongside cennɛ play performance, it draws attention to the presence of various elements that serve as nuanced arguments for the superiority of YHWH over and above the rulers and gods of Egypt and Afro-Asia.

### 5.6.5 The Battle Part III: Nostrils, Irony, and Tradition-Morphological Adaptation in Exodus 15:8

15:8 וברוח אפיך נערמו מים נצבו כמו־נד נזלים קפאו תהמת בלב־ים

15:8 With a blast from your nostrils the waters surged upwards,
The waves stood up like a dam;
The primaeval waters congealed[37] in the heart of the sea.

[35] On Job 36:29–33, see David J. A. Clines, *Job 21–37*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 2006), 872–73; On 2 Samuel 22:15–16, see David Allen Hubbard, *2 Samuel*, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989), 264.

[36] See section above on milieu-morphological adaptation.

[37] There are various competing explanations for what this means, some have even suggested that the waters were frozen, see Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, 521.

The lead singer now moves their focus to a different body part: YHWH's nose, a common poetic metaphor.[38] Drawing on this nose metaphor the lead singer proceeds to demonstrate YHWHs mastery over the waters. As if to illustrate YHWH's power, the teller portrays YHWH as able to manipulate the water according to his will, an attribute with resonance in other Afro-Asian epic traditions, such as the storm god tradition where, Baal defeats the 'prince sea,' probably by drying him up, before being declared god of gods and building a palace.[39] Once again, these broader traditional resonances are more implicit than explicit and, while they may of course be further evidence of tradition-morphological adaptation and censorship of elements deemed unacceptable for the teller's audience, the heuristic of sacred play also alerts us once again to the potential for an underlying competitive dynamic in which the performer presses the case for the superiority of their tradition above all others. Though YHWH is able to wield a weapon, here the singer makes the case for YHWHs superiority by portraying YHWH as able to manipulate the ancient chaotic waters with only his nostrils. From a performance perspective, one could re-imagine this to be accompanied by a gesture such as blowing. One final point that's worth noting in relation to Exodus 15:8 is that in Siri epic performance, intense blowing was understood as a sign of rising possession.[40] As such, blowing gestures, could be reimagined here as having more than one function, not only providing support to the singer's verbal communication, but also lending authority to the singer's performance by signalling to the onlooking audience their embodiment by deity. Without reading Exodus 15 alongside Siri epic performance, this is not a potential dimension to the performance that would be considered.

[38] Stuart, *Exodus*, 353.

[39] See the discussion on 'The Storm God and the Sea in the ancient Near East' in Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, 554–57.

[40] Honko writes, 'when the song ended, the whole group joined in the typical melodious shout: soo-o! Solo turned into chorus. The participation in multiple ecstasy and overlapping expressions of strong emotion was thus declared open. There were "blowing noises," i.e. strong breathing through puckered lips, in Gopala Naika's recitation. These occur frequently with other Kumaras and also Siris, also without singing.' Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 461.

### 5.6.6 The Challenge of the Enemy: Weaponry in Exodus 15:9

15:9 אמר אויב ארדף אשיג
אחלק שלל תמלאמו נפשי
אריק חרבי תורישמו ידי

15:9 The enemy said, 'I will pursue, I will overtake,
I will divide the booty, and my desire shall be satiated by them.
I will empty my sword, and my hand shall dispossess them.'

In Exodus 15:9, another singer enters the stage. The fact that the singer language reflects that of the king of Egypt in the narrative of Exodus 14:5-10, could be understood as indicating that the embodied enemy is that of Pharoah, who of course in the ancient world was viewed by many as a god. Utilising alliteration and language evocative of a predator on the hunt, the embodied enemy presents his challenges to the lead singer, the embodied Moses who portrays the divine warrior. Given that the audience has already been made aware of the outcome, the scene is somewhat ironic. Apparently sizing themselves up to the embodied Moses, Pharaoh draws a comparison between his right hand (יד) and that of YHWH's. Whereas YHWH's possession of a weapon in vv. 5–6 is implicit, the explicit mention of a sword here alerts us once again to the potential presence of props, with the embodied Pharoah possessing a sword. This dynamic sets up the stage for a face-off between the sword wielding Pharoah and the Divine Warrior.

### 5.6.7 The Battle Part IV: Gesture and Wind in Exodus 15:10

15:10 נשפת ברוחך כסמו ים צללו כעופרת במים אדירים

15:10 You blew with your breath, the sea covered them;
Like lead they sank in the mighty waters.

Following the interjection of the enemy, the emptiness of their hollow threats in v. 9 is exposed. If we re-imagine these words as being accompanied by dramaturgy, mirroring and enhancing the verbiage, this scene is likely an intense one with the wielding of weapons between two adversaries building tension. As was seen in cenne play performance, key moments such as this draw in audience participation and with those audience members who are close to the action needing to move or adjust their position to keep clear of the weaponry being brandished boisterously. Nevertheless, as quickly as the tension of the scene was built, it is quickly dissipated. Pharoah is quickly defeated with an ironic gesture as the embodied Divine Warrior underlines his power and brings about Pharoah's demise by simply blowing on him, just as

he blew on the waters. If such an action were to take place it may well be imagined as inducing laughter or cheering from certain parts of the audience. This ending of this scene is not too dissimilar to that of the scene in Exodus 15:5 where the teller describes the enemy as sinking like a pebble in the waters, and image which is intensified with the lead singer now describing the enemy as sinking like lead (עפרת) in the mighty waters.

### 5.6.8 The Battle Part V: Consuming the Egyptians in Exodus 15:11–12

15:11 מי־כמכה באלם יהוה מי כמכה נאדר בקדש נורא תהלת עשה פלא
15:12 נטית ימינך תבלעמו ארץ

15:11 'Who among the gods, is like you O YHWH?
Who like you is majestic in holiness,
awesome in splendor, performing extraordinary wonders?
15:12 You extended your right hand,
the earth swallowed them.

Having exposed the enemy as a pretender banishing him from the stage, the embodied Moses—utilising a traditional incomparability formula typical of ancient Afro-Asia—praises YHWH, noting the superiority of YHWH's attributes over all others.[41] Once again, YHWH's right hand is brought into focus. This time, however, the embodied Moses describes YHWH's hand not as having an effect on the waters, but on the land. While there has been much debate over the earth swallowing imagery here in v. 12 and whether ארץ ought to be taken as a metaphor for the sea, it is also possible that the teller here is simply pointing forward to the next part of the Divine Warrior campaign which shifts from the sea to the land.[42]

### 5.6.9 The March of the Divine Warrior: Multiforms and Functional Adaptation in Exodus 15:13–17

15:13 נחית בחסדך עם־זו גאלת נהלת בעזך אל־נוה קדשך
15:14 שמעו עמים ירגזון חיל אחז ישבי פלשת
15:15 אז נבהלו אלופי אדום אילי מואב יאחזמו רעד נמגו כל ישבי כנען
15:16 תפל עליהם אימתה ופחד בגדל זרועך ידמו כאבן עד־יעבר עמך יהוה עד־יעבר עם־זו קנית
15:17 תבאמו ותטעמו בהר נחלתך מכון לשבתך פעלת יהוה מקדש אדני כוננו ידיך

15:13 <M> 'With loving-kindness you led your redeemed ones;
by your strength you tenderly led them to your <<holy pasture.>>[43]</M>

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[41] See Davies, *Exodus 11–18*, 357–58.

[42] Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, 529–30.

[43] One point to note is the teller's description of YHWH leading Israel to נוה which has been translated here as pasture. Identifying the locating of YHWH's pasture has proved particularly controversial, with various locations, including the whole land of Canaan, Shittim, Sinai/Horeb, Jerusalem and Shiloh all having been suggested. see

15:14 <M>The people heard, they quaked with terror;[44]
stomach pains seized <<the inhabitants of Philistia>>.
15:15 Then <<the chiefs of Edom>> lost heart;
<<the leaders of Moab>> seized up with trembling;
all <<the inhabitants of Canaan>> waved back and forwards.
15:16 Fear and dread came over them,
by the strength of your right hand, they became as stone
until your people, O YHWH, passed by,
until the people who you redeemed passed by.</M>
15:17 <M>You brought and planted them on the mountain of your own possession,
the location, O YHWH, where you fixed your dwelling place,
the holy place, O Lord, that you established with your own hands.</M>

In v. 13 the singer in the story world of the text brings about a distinct shift; indeed, it is the recognition of this shift that has led many to suggest that the poem is composite in nature.[45] However, given what we know of traditional performance, such shifts in imagery are a normal part of ethnographic tellings which often proceed in a cyclical rather than a liner fashion— i.e. through sharp changes in scenery.[46] The teller achieves this shift through the employment of two procession multiforms, the first of which is a procession multiform, repeated later in v. 17.

| **Exodus 15:13** | **Exodus 15:17** |
|---|---|
| נחית בחסדך עם־זו גאלת נהלת בעזך אל־נוה קדשך | תבאמו ותטעמו בהר נחלתך מכון לשבתך פעלת יהוה מקדש אדני כוננו ידיך |
| <M> 'With loving-kindness you led your redeemed ones; By your strength you tenderly led them to your <<holy pasture.>> </M> | <M> You brought and planted them on the mountain of your own possession, the location, O YHWH, where you fixed your dwelling place, the holy place, O Lord, that you established with your own hands. </M> |

More specific commentary on Exodus 15:17 will be reserved for later, but for now it is sufficient to observe the similarities between the two. One of the effects of employing the procession multiform is that it creates a sense of movement towards a final destination, which in the case of v. 15 is that of YHWH's

Abraham Malamat, "Pre-Monarchical Social Institutions in Israel in the Light of Mari," in *Congress Volume Jerusalem 1986*, ed. J. A. Emerton, Vetus Testamentum Supplements 40 (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1988), 165–76.

[44] The translation of the verbs as either past or future in these verses has been a point of contention, some of this is undoubtedly the result of the implications to dating, authorship and theology. The challenge here is that the Hebrew text alternates between perfect and imperfect forms. Nevertheless, it has now been well-established that imperfect verbs can be used to communicate the preterite sense, which the context of this passage calls for. For a more extended discussion of this issue, see Davies, *Exodus 11–18*, 363–65.

[45] See, for example, Durham, *Exodus*, 207–8; Brevard S. Childs, *Exodus: A Commentary,* The Old Testament Library (London: SCM, 1974).

[46] See Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 117–18; Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, New Accents (London: Routledge, 1988), 144.

encampment. At the same time, the effect of the singer's sandwiching of the divine warrior's march with these two multiforms has the effect of framing the descriptions in between as taking place whilst YHWH the Divine Warrior leads his people to their destination. As Honko observed, ethnographic performances such as the Siri epic 'breathe' through multiforms, with singers shaping and adapting them under the pressure of performance, and according to context.[47]

Given the warrior-like imagery in the preceding verses, some have argued that the pattern in Exodus 15 follows that of Afro-Asian victory enthronement pattern.[48] The imposition of such a framework on Exodus 15 however obscures the shift that takes place here in Exodus 15:13 where the singer shifts their tone through a greater concentration on pastoral imagery. If we continue to re-imagine this as having been performed by a lead singer embodying Moses, this effect is likely to be compounded, due to the wider metonymic and traditional resonances of Moses' own pastoral experience as a shepherd (see Exodus 3:1). Here in Exodus 15:13 the singer describes YHWH as not simply נחה but as leading His people to נוה, which translates as a stopping place, pasture or settlement. The singer compounds this shepherding imagery further both through the use of נהל—which in this context might be best understood as 'tenderly led'—and the construction עם־זו גאלת, through which the teller draws on the rich Afro-Asian kinship tradition. In so doing, the lead singer highlights not only a depth of relationship between YHWH and his people, but an intimacy; indeed the imagery of YHWH shepherding his people is found throughout the Hebrew Bible.

The singer's description of YHWH leading Israel to נוה which has been translated here as pasture has proved particularly controversial, with scholars positing various potential locations within the physical

[47] Lauri Honko, "Epics along the Silk Roads: Mental Text Performance, and Written Codification," *Oral Tradition* 11.1 (1996): 1–17.

[48] On the victory enthronement pattern see Niditch, *Oral World and Written*. As highlighted by Niditch, imagery of YHWH as the divine warrior is not uncommon in the Hebrew Bible, noting that this imagery often forms part of a larger victory-enthronement pattern. 'The "victory-enthronement pattern" that described the plot of these narratives is rooted in and formulaically expresses the essence of war: challenge by enemies; preparation of weapons for the hero; march to battle; victory; victory shout; march out of battle/procession; celebration (banquet); housebuilding. The motifs of victory-enthronement, not all of which need appear in any one account and all of which metonymically evoke the larger pattern, also describe military aspects of the narratives about human heroes, set as they are in actual patterns of war.' Niditch, "The Challenge of Israelite Epic," 286.

milieux, including the whole land of Canaan, Shittim, Sinai/Horeb, Jerusalem and Shiloh.[49] However, given the pastoral imagery of this passage, the broader etymological connections between נוה and a shepherd's abode,[50] other intra-biblical suggestions of an association between נוה and tent,[51] as well as broader arguments that Exodus 15:13 may have a 'tent-shrine' in view,[52] I would argue that that the location the teller has in view here is more likely to be of pastoral nature, perhaps a place such as Shiloh where a mobile could be established. Indeed, such a reading would also help to provide further context to the singer's pairing of נוה (pasture) with קדש (holiness). From a tradition ecological perspective, the significance of the singer's use of <<holy pasture>> may reflect the use of an ecotype, where the singer localises their telling by utilising a colloquialism familiar to the audience in the story world of the text, but not to us as outsiders.[53]

Having verbalised an image of YHWH as a divine shepherd in Exodus 15:13, In Exodus 15:14 the singer circles back to expand on their description of YHWH's march where they draw on what Durham refers to as a 'fear of the inhabitants' device, a verbal cataloguing tool that lists the neighbours with whom Israel at one point or another was in conflict.[54] The various neighbour epithets utilised by the teller (<<the inhabitants of Philistia>>, <<the chiefs of Edom>>, <<the leaders of Moab>> and <<the inhabitants of Canaan>>) have generated much discussion with discussion of <<the inhabitants of Philistia>> featuring prominently. Indeed, as noted earlier, this reference in particular has proved challenging for those attempting to date the performance as evidence appears to suggest that the Philistines were not yet in

[49] The whole land of Canaan is suggested by Martin Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary*, trans. J.S. Bowden, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1962), 125. That Shittim is the location referred to here is argued by Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 141. The classic view that the song has Jerusalem in view is proposed by Childs, *Exodus*, 252. On the suggestion that Sinai/Horeb is meant here, see David Noel Freedman, "The Name of the God of Moses," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 79.2 (1960): 151–56, doi:10.2307/3264465. On the argument that Shiloh is being referred to here, see Mark S. Smith, *The Pilgrimage Pattern in Exodus*, The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 239 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 223–26.

[50] Malamat, "Pre-Monarchical Social Institutions."

[51] See Isa 33:20; Job 5:24, 18:15.

[52] Note Cross who identifies נוה with a 'tent-shrine' See Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew*, 125.

[53] For a discussion on ecotypes, see section 4.3 above.

[54] Durham notes that the 'fear of the inhabitants of the land of Canaan is a common device of the narratives of conquest and settlement (Num 22:2–6; Josh 2:8–11).' Durham, *Exodus*, 208.

Canaan when the Israelites left Egypt.[55] But, there does appear to be a tradition placing their arrival in Canaan 'before the arrival (or emergence) of the Israelites' (cf. Gen 26:1–33; Josh 13:1–3; Judg 3:1–4).[56] In any case, while it is of course possible to translate this passage in the imperfect, thereby suggesting that the <<the inhabitants of Philistia>> epithet was prophetic, or to suggest that these epithets could be understood as a reference to the geographical region over which the Philistines would come to rule rather than the Philistine nation, our model of folklore ecology highlights the possibility of another explanation.

Similar to what was argued in Judges 5, the flexibility of catalogue multiforms as performance devices affords singers with the opportunity to engage in functional adaptation, a short-lived form of variation through which the teller focuses in on the immediate hopes, fears and interests of their audience.[57] As such, it may well have been the case that the telling in the story world of the text reflects a time when Philistine aggression was a current fear held amongst their audience. In so doing the teller may have utilised their catalogue multiform as a means of speaking to their immediate audience's present circumstances. It should, however, be re-iterated that dating Exodus 15 is not of primary interest in this research, nevertheless this does highlight the potential for tradition ecology to be used as a means of exploring alternative possibilities.

One of the dynamics of reading Exodus 15:14-16 alongside Honko's reception of cennɛ play performance, is the fact that it sensitises us to language that is reminiscent of ecstatic behaviour. Whereas the going forth of YHWH in Judges 5 is portrayed as impacting nature, in Exodus 15:14–16, the processing of the divine warrior along with his people is described as having a similar effect on the inhabitants of Canaan. Through their employment of similar imagery to that used in the earlier in Exodus 15:8-10 where the lead singer describes the sea as having been caused to surge, stand up and congeal, the singer here in Exodus 15:14-16 portrays a similar dynamic as occurring on the land with the inhabitants of Canaan describing them as noted as quaking (רגז), trembling (רעד) and waving back and forth (מוג) all of which are

[55] William Foxwell Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan: A Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths*, The Jordan Lectures 1965 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968), 46–47. Freedman, *Pottery, Poetry, and Prophecy*, 142.
[56] Davies, *Exodus 11–18*, 365.
[57] See section on functional adaptation above.

characteristics of possession. This is not something that is usually observed by scholars and it is our reading of cennɛ play performance that has elicited it. Taken further, one potential implication of this reading is that it portrays YHWH's capture of Canaan as being so complete that not only does YHWH capture the land but YHWH also metaphorically possesses its peoples. As noted previously, possession also played a role in cennɛ play dramaturgy, with some performers unable to continue because they had been overcome. As we critically re-imagine this in light of cennɛ play performance, the language here lends itself to a setting of particularly intense ecstatic experience among the limited cast of performers.

In Exodus 15:17 through the use of the verb נטע, the lead singer draws an agrarian metaphor of YHWH planting Israel on his mountain into the song. This may well serve as evidence of reuse and the tradition-morphological adaptation in which the teller links the events described to places familiar to their audience. When describing the location where YHWH plants his people, the singer makes use of the epithet <<mountain of your inheritance>> which, similar to the <<holy pasture>> epithet in v. 13, has resulted in much discussion concerning the potential location of the mountain to which the teller is here referring.[58] While is impossible to know whether the singer in the story world of the text is referring to a specific geographic or metaphorical location, this reference presents another potential example of the employment of an ecotype, decodable only through the sort of local knowledge to which we no longer have access. As Honko suggests, there are certain places in the natural environment about which stories are told and to which traditions become attached. Drawing on the work of scholars such as C.W. von Sydow and Albert Eskerod, Honko identifies that these places tend to be milieu dominants, places in the natural environment that stand out due to their unusual features or uncommonness.[59] In Afro-Asia, mountains feature prominently in local tradition. For example, there is evidence of a tradition linking Baal

[58] With regard to the issue of mountain and physical location see Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, 562–68; Davies, *Exodus 11–18*, 366–71.

[59] Note, for example, Honko's discussion: 'there are many examples of how strangely shaped or isolated fragments of rock are pointed out as the home of the troll, how the sacrificial tree is a spruce in a birch forest … when a milieu dominant has sprung up, that is when people have begun to narrate something about a particular natural object, an accumulation of traditions can be expected around this space.' Honko, "Four Forms of Adaptation of Tradition," 176. See also C. W. von Sydow, *Selected Papers on Folklore* (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1948), 146–65.

to the physical milieu of Mount Zaphon, and in ancient Israel there a various traditions linking YHWH's dwelling-place with mountains and hills such as Horeb, Sinai, Zion and, of course, Shiloh.[60]

The ability of mountains and striking natural features to inspire and fill their beholders with awe and wonder is well known, especially in Afro-Asia where there were strong cultural associations that viewed the mountains as the physical dwelling-places of the gods. Though it is of course possible that the epithet <<mountain of your inheritance>> referred to a specific mountain that stood out as distinct in the local landscape, it is also true that the linking of events to a particular location can also be rooted in actual events. As noted by folklorists, one frequently comes across local legends, accounts and explanations of place names which suggest that the attachment of a tradition to a particular place goes back to historical events. To be clear, this is not an attempt to comment directly on questions of historicity; after all, folklorists also note that sometimes whilst indicating that something significant happened at a particular location, what actually happened does not always correspond with what the tradition said happened there.[61] Simply put, while on the one hand the <<mountain of your inheritance>> epithet could be indicative of milieu-morphological adaptation and the linking of the sea-crossing tradition to a distinct looking mountain, it could also be the case that the linking of the sea-crossing tradition to a local mountain was an example of tradition-morphological adaptation, which is indicative that something did occur at that mountain. Whether it can be linked reliably to a sea-crossing tradition is a whole other question that in the first instance, would require the concrete identification of the mountain itself. For our purposes here, it is possible to imagine the lead singer gesticulating in the direction of a known mountain within the local milieux as a means of grounding the telling within the everyday experience of their audience

[60] For a discussion of linking which can occurs as a part of milieu-morphological adaptation, see chapter 4 above. Also for the connection between Baal and Zaphon, see Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, 563.

[61] Honko gives the example of the Finnish parish of Isokyrö that contains a well 'where according to legend, the corpses of dead soldiers have been sunk. One narrator claimed that this happened when his mother was still alive, and that the men in question were Russian soldiers from Orismala … Archaeologists who examined the well actually found bones, skulls, weapons and jewellery, but they dated from prehistoric times.' Honko, "Four Forms of Adaptation of Tradition," 176.

before concluding with the words, 'YHWH will reign eternally!' thus declaring YHWHs universal rule (Exod 15:18).[62]

### 5.6.10 Prose narration: Exodus 15:19–21a

15:19 כי בא סוס פרעה ברכבו ובפרשיו בים וישב יהוה עלהם את־מי הים ובני ישראל הלכו ביבשה בתוך הים

15:20 ותקח מרים הנביאה אחות אהרן את־התף בידה ותצאן כל־הנשים אחריה בתפים ובמחלת

15:21a ותען להם מרים

15:19 <M>When Pharaoh's horses and chariots alike entered the water, the Lord turned the sea back upon them; but the Israelites walked through the sea on dry land.</M>

15:20 Then <<the prophetess Miriam>>,<< Aaron's sister>>, took up a tambourine in her hand; and all the women followed after her with tambourines and with whirling.[63]

15:21a And she answered them singing:

Following the singer's declaration that 'YHWH will reign eternally', a second prose frame in Exodus 15:19-21a is introduced into the text. This framework operates in two directions: Exodus 15:19 refers to the words of the preceding song, whereas Exodus 15:20-21a frames Miriam's refrain that follows. In Exodus 15:19 the prose narrator draws on the sea crossing multiform once more, this time however, the multiform is transformed into a prose summary of the sea crossing event. While the performance itself extends beyond the sea crossing and into the conquest, the prose narrative summary's focus on the sea crossing has the effect of conflating the sea crossing and conquest events of the preceding song, while placing greater emphasis on the sea crossing, YHWHs role in the victory and the miracle experienced by Israel.

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[62] This phrase has deep roots within Afro-Asian epic traditions: in Afro-Asian epic traditions, such as KTU 1.2.4.10 where Baal is told 'take your everlasting kingdom, your eternal dominion' and in *Eumna Elish* IV:28, 'it is Marduk who is king.' See Allan Rosengren Petersen, *The Royal God: Enthronement Festivals in Ancient Israel and Ugarit?*, The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 259 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998). Numerous scholars have highlighted, the significance of the teller's use of a similar construction here at the end of the song of the sea is likely to be found in the fact that the usual word order has been inverted. Putting reign (ימלך) after YHWH (יהוה) is an emphatic construction typical of proclamations of kingship and implies that all other gods were pretenders who have now been removed from contention. Along these lines, it has been variously noted that universal lordship is intended here. See Stuart, *Exodus*, 61; Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus,* trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967), 177–81; Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 82; Durham, *Exodus*, 209.

[63] Note the lengthy discussion of dance in Poethig, who notes that it is a technical term often used to denote the victory song tradition and circular dance. Eunice Poethig, "The Victory Song Tradition of the Women of Israel" (DPhil diss., University of Oxford, 1985), 52–66.

In Exodus 15:20 the prose narrator introduces a second performance frame that provides information not introduced in the preceding song or prose frames. Unlike the preceding song which the narrator framed as having been sung by Moses and the Israelites, here the prose narrator frames what follows as having been sung by Miriam who unlike Moses, is referenced using a variety of epithets, <<the prophetess Miriam>>, a title that connects her to the Afro-Asian prophetic tradition, and she is also referred to as <<Aaron's sister >> referring to the tradition of Aaron as the brother of Moses. This second epithet may well be an example of linking, a dynamic prevalent in tradition-morphological adaptation where a tradition is linked to a dominant person within a tradition group, such as Moses, thus serving a legitimating function. In this context the reference to Miriam is of particular note, especially given the context of embodiment, the role of women in the Afro-Asian victory song tradition, and the fact that female prophets were not uncommon in Mesopotamia.[64] Furthermore, the use of qualifying epithets with Miriam and not with Moses, could be a reflection of patriarchy and may represent an attempt by the author to justify Miriam's role by re-affirming her status as a prophetess and Aaron's sister. In any case, the prose framework plays an important role in framing the performance that follows as being led by women. Without it there would be little to suggest that what follows was female led.

Another important aspect of the performance frame introduced by the prose narrator is the fact that the performance led by women here included hand-drums (תף) and rhythmic dancing (מחלה). [65] Music and dance are not mentioned in the first part of the performance, or at least not explicitly. When it comes to re-imagining this in light of cennɛ play performance, it would appear that this section introduces a musical conclusion lead by a female tradition bearer. Given that cennɛ play performance involves a limited cast, we could re-imagine Exodus 15 as also involving a small number of female accomplices.

[64] Jonathan Stökl, *Prophecy in the Ancient Near East: A Philological and Sociological Comparison*, Culture and History of the Ancient Near East 56 (Leiden: Brill, 2012); Corrine L. Carvalho and Jonathan Stökl, eds, *Prophets Male and Female: Gender and Prophecy in the Hebrew Bible, the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Ancient Near East*, Ancient Israel and Its Literature 15 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013).

[65] On the translation of this term, note in particular Poethig's study of the form where she argues that it 'refers particularly to the actions of a group celebrating victory. The actions almost certainly included singing accompanied by movement.' Poethig, "The Victory Song Tradition of the Women of Israel," 52–66. In so far as the cennɛ play is concerned there was no specific mention of embodied dancing, however, there were numerous examples of embodied dancing of a whirling kind in other bũta rituals.

Furthermore, given the explicit use of hand-drums in Exodus 15:20 we could equally imagine all of the women involved in this scene using hand-drums as props.

The performance frame ends in 15:21a with the construction ותען להם מרים; of particular note here is the use of the feminine singular form ותען (she answered) along with the form להם (to them) which is made up of a preposition and a masculine plural pronoun— suggesting she was responding to the men, rather than the women. It is the presence of these two forms that has led to suggestions of antiphonal singing and comparisons with Bedouin parallels.[66] While, as noted previously, grammatical gender incongruence is common in Biblical Hebrew and especially in Hebrew poetry, we nevertheless find grounds here for a reading in which, as the subject of the verb ענה, a female singer embodying Miriam enters the scene in response to the proclamation of the embodied Moses in Exodus 15:18. While the prose performance frame In Exodus 15:20-21a is brief, it is here more than anywhere else in Exodus 15 that the dramaturgical dimension in text of Exodus 15 itself is most explicit. Our reading of cennɛ play performance alongside Exodus 15 alerts us to the fact that rhythmic music accompanied by vigorous bodily movements could be yet another indication of the embodied-charismatic dimension.[67] Indeed, a boisterous swirling dance, is likely to capture and hold any audience's attention thus providing a climatic conclusion to a song recounting one of the most significant episodes in ancient Israel's history.[68]

### 5.6.11 Victory Song: Multiformity, Music and Dance in Exodus 15:21b

15:21b שירו ליהוה כי־גאה גאה סוס ורכבו רמה בים

15:21b <M>'Sing[69] to YHWH, for he has triumphed gloriously;

[66] Sarna, *Exodus*, 76.

[67] Note for example Saul who apparently danced while in a ecstatic state in 1 Sam 19:18–24. In addition, Propp notes that female ecstatics were not unknown in the ancient Afro-Asia. Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, 546.

[68] Consider the description of a swirling dance observed by Honko during the būta kōla: 'a wild swirling dance ensued in front of the temple, the impersonator leaping in different directions to the intensive rhythm created by the drummers and pipers. Raising the sword high in the air and mumbling something monotonous like "bobobobboo" [*sic*] (impossible to hear in the noise) he jumped both feet together round a temporary stool-like altar with leaves and flowers in front of the temple, turned around toward the audience on his left several times, made a torch bearer run before him as he dashed round the temple twice … The dance continued for several minutes at the speedy pace maintained by the shrieking sounds of drums and pipes. Finally, he raised his hand and was able to silence the orchestra with a commanding look.' Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 419–20.

[69] It should be noted that the verb שירו here is given as an imperative, whereas in 15:1 it is given as a first common singular, this is the only difference between the two multiforms.

Horse and rider alike he has thrown into the sea.'</M>

In Exodus 15:21b, the embodied Miriam answers the proclamation of the embodied Moses, through the use of the sea-crossing multiform. While its use once again may serve as further evidence of its metonymy and association with the sea-crossing tradition, our reading of cennɛ play performance alerts us to another alternative possibility. In the case of the cennɛ game, Honko observed a situation where the lead singer used repetition as a way of communicating to the other performers that they needed to hurry the performance along.[70] Given that in the story world of the text these are the only words said by Miriam, It would not be out of place to re-imagine an abrupt ending to the performance, especially in light of the insights that Honko's reception of the Siri epic and cennɛ play performance has given us into some of the real world dynamics of ethnographic performance. To demonstrate how these various insights come together, what follows next is a critically re-imagined reading of Exodus 15 in light of cennɛ play performance.

## 5.7 A Critically Reimagined Reading of Exodus 15

Trembling and with his eyes fixed straight ahead, the embodied Moses makes his way through the audience. With each step, the crowd seated on the floor part before him like the waters of which he is about to sing. He ascends the stage, a naturally raised platform of rock; he fixes his eyes straight ahead, an act that causes some in the crowd to strain to see what he might be looking at. Suddenly, as if awakened from sleep, he returns to himself and focuses his eyes on the gathered dignitaries. They acknowledge him; the sacred play can begin. Holding his hands out in front of him with his palms facing upwards, he announces his performance; it's the highly anticipated episode of the crossing of Yam Suph. The singer closes his eyes and seats the spirit of YHWH. As he does so, his quaking intensifies.

[70] Honko writes, 'now Kumara's voice was heard continuing the story, partly repeating what had just been sung … This seemed to be an attempt to speed up the story … thus Kumara himself took the lead and sang … thus Kumara brought the narration to the final scene, but obviously a little too late. The time allocated for the cennɛ drama was about to end. The dignitaries were considering stopping the performance.' Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 414–15.

Suddenly, his eyes open, his trembling lessens, and he stares out at the crowd with a newfound intensity; his whole demeanour has changed, and a commanding presence has replaced the humble deference with which he had entered the stage. He is no longer a tradition bearer; possessed by the spirit of YHWH, the divine warrior, he has become the embodied Moses. Moving with newfound confidence, he takes ownership of the platform, stops, and looks into the eyes of a man in the front row. Using dialogic discourse, the embodied Moses tells him of how YHWH threw Pharaoh and his men into the sea. His intensity causes the man to withdraw a little. To emphasise his point, he picks up a stone amd drops it. At that point, the embodied Moses breaks his stare and focuses on another in the front row, a woman, and tells her of how YHWH then covered them with the waters. She, too, withdraws.

Breaking his gaze once again, the embodied Moses returns to the centre of the stage and draws attention to his right hand; in it, he wields a sacred weapon—a mace! No wonder so many keep withdrawing from him! He swings his mace to and fro, vanquishing warriors to his left and crushing those to his right. His possession is rising. Becoming increasingly animated he reminds the audience of the primordial, chaotic deep of creation and the waters symbolic of the Afro-Asian gods that YHWH defeats time and time again. As he describes the seas, Moses swings his mace in the direction of the crowd. And he does so with such vigour that those in his line-of-sight recoil, afraid that it might escape his grasp, their movement mimicking the rippling of the waters of which he sings.

With the crowd focusing on the actions of the embodied Moses, few notice the appearance of a trembling figure approaching Him from the side of the stage. It's Pharaoh with a sword in his hand! *'Watch out!* He has a blade in his hand! *Watch out!'* cry some within the audience, prompting the embodied Moses to face his challenger. A dialogic discourse between the two ensues. The embodied Moses is breathing heavily, hyperventilating even. In response to Pharaoh's threats, the embodied Moses blows on Pharaoh, despatching him from the stage with his only breath, to the delight of an increasingly raucous audience. Playing to the crowd, the embodied Moses pauses for a moment, lifting his eyes towards the moonlit sky; he praises YHWH once again.

Having defeated his enemies, the embodied Moses descends from the stage and begins to process through the thronging crowd, mace in hand. As he tells of ancient Israel's journey through Canaan, his command of the audience is impressive. Every so often, he pauses and stares at audience members who cannot help but freeze under the intensity of his gaze and dialogic discourse. Having worked the crowd, he returns to the stage where a throne awaits. He proclaims to the crowd that following the subjugation of YHWH's enemies, He, too, took up residence in his holy habitation and, raising his mace in the air, shouts victory before taking a seat. He is still quivering.

The sacred play, however, is still ongoing. From the crowd's edges, hand drums start to be heard cascading over the driving instrumentalisation of the orchestra. The embodied Miriam and several other embodied women begin to dance and whirl through the crowd towards the stage; like the embodied Moses, they tell of YHWH's victory over Pharaoh and his casting of horse and rider into the sea. Overcome by the zeal of the moment, others in the audience begin to join in their victory dance and celebrate along with them. As Miriam and the other women ascend the stage and make their way towards the embodied Moses, it's clear from the lively atmosphere, boisterous dancing, and shouts of praise to YHWH that the performance has been a success. Despite the existence of other epic traditions competing for attention, the sea crossing tradition of YHWH and this collective moment of communal ecstasy will not easily be forgotten over the coming year.

## 5.8 Chapter Summary

Reading Exodus 15 alongside cennɛ play performance has allowed us to re-imagine performance in the story world of Exodus 15 as having been conducted by a limited cast of performers in an attempt to draw maximal attention to their cult. While the purpose of our critical re-imagination of Exodus 15 is not to provide an interpretation of Exodus 15, the process of critically re-imagining it did bring to light a number of questions relating to the dimensions of the biblical text. Similar to Judges 5, our cognisance of the functional role of invocation cennɛ play performance (and Siri epic performance more generally) raises the question as to whether invocations are purely stylistic or whether they might play a functional role

(Exod 15:1b–3). Recognition of the competitive elements of cennɛ play performance alerted us to various aspects of the text that could be indicative of competition with other Afro-Asian traditions (Exod 15:6–7, 8, 9, 10,11), however the aspect of Exodus 15 that our reading of cennɛ play performance makes us particularly sensitive to are those aspects of language and imagery that are reminiscent of possession, the passage includes blowing and rigidity (Exod 15:8,9) trembling, seizing, (Exod 15:14-15) as well as vigorous dance (Exod 15:2). While the song in Judges 5 hints at the presence of various audience members, it is intriguing to note that there is an additional dynamic to Exodus 15 in that the singer explicitly references only one audience member, YHWH. As the only named audience member and one who is cited throughout, this raises the question as to whether YHWH is said to be doing literary work in the text and if so, what might that mean? Futhermore, could it be a subtle indication that the performer in the story world of the text is in fact encountering deity as they perform? While this is a question for which we are unlikely to find a definitive exegetical answer, it is not one that is usually asked and it is one that our reading of Exodus 15 alongside Siri epic performance elicits.

# CHAPTER 6

# 6. CONCLUSION

*Without losing senses, without losing consciousness, not going in burning blaze,*
*let us descend from the settled sacred moment, let us descend!*
– **Gopala Naika**[1]

*The oracle of one who hears the words of God,*
*who sees the vision of the Almighty,*
*who falls down, but with eyes uncovered.*
– **Numbers 24:5**

This thesis has demonstrated that the process of using an ethnographic work such as the Siri epic (and Lauri Honko's reception of it) to critically re-imagine performance in Judges 5 and Exodus 15 can alert us to new dimensions of the Hebrew Bible previously foreclosed by evolutionist models of text. Nevertheless, inasmuch as our critical re-imagining of Judges 5 as jātre and Exodus 15 as sacred play resulted in creative readings of those texts, it is important to emphasise that the production of those readings was not the primary goal of this thesis. What this thesis was most concerned with was the critical imaginative process behind the production of those readings, a process that involved reading the Siri epic alongside the Judges 5 and Exodus 15 as a text whose reception elicits new questions and ways of thinking not only about performance in the story world of the text, but also the biblical text itself.

Following the introduction, in chapter 2 I began by outlining the relationship (or lack thereof) between contemporary folkloristics and the biblical scholarship. Particular attention was paid to the social turn in folkloristics which brought about a renewed focus on performers and a metacritical interest in interrogating the deeper social and power structures behind their traditions. In chapter 3, I outlined Lauri Honko's methodological framework of tradition ecology which was essential to my attempt to delineate how texts such as Judges 5 and Exodus 15 can be reimagined as literary representations of mental texts. To this end I also drew on Honko's study of the Siri epic and Gopala Naika's performance of it, elucidating those extended performative aspects of texts such as the jātre and cennɛ play performance, contexts that would form a basis for critically reimagining performance in the story world of Judges 5 and Exodus 15 as

[1] Lauri Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, 521.

embodied-charismatic performance. In chapters 4 and 5 I engaged in a close reading and critical re-imagination of Judges 5 and Exodus 15. This involved the application of Honko's theory of tradition ecology as a means of exploring how the singer in the story world of the text uses and varies their material and the heuristic use of the jātre and cennɛ play performance contexts as the basis for critically re-imagining Judges 5 and Exodus 15 respectively.

The approach outlined above which I term *critically re-imagining performance as a method* represents an attempt to explore whether the Siri epic, a thick, ethnographic, text far removed from Afro-Asia can be utilised as a means of engaging the critical imagination and lead to fresh perspectives on issues of text, performance, and the biblical studies discipline. In pursuit of this goal, this thesis makes several contributions.

**One**, this thesis highlights the fact that greater interdisciplinary dialogue is needed between biblical studies scholars and folkloristics, particularly in relation to questions of orality and performance. Honko's reception of the Siri epic alerts us to the fact that it is possible for textualised traditions such as Judges 5 and Exodus 15 to have operated within hermeneutical frameworks very different to those traditionally conceived. This raises important questions regarding the traditions underlying how the Hebrew Bible might have functioned. In line with our observations concerning the Siri epic, it highlights the potential to reconsider the question as to whether there could have been an ancient Israelite epic. Certainly if, in their natural performance contexts, epics such as the Siri epic are rarely (if ever) performed in full, then it does raise the question as to whether Judges 5 and Exodus 15—along with other שיר, such as 1 Chr 16:1–3, Josh 10:12–13, 2 Sam 1:19–27, 2 Chron 6:1–2, Num 21:17–18, 27–30, 1 Sam 18:7 and Ezra 3:11—could have formed a part of such an epic, thus functioning in a similar manner to the cantos from which Elias Lönnrot composed the Kalevala.

**Two,** ethnographic models of text based on real-world performance, can be particularly adept at capturing the inherent dynamism of texts in performance, and their adaptation by singers. There is a need for biblical scholarship to pay more attention to thick non-literary models of text as well as the concepts and language employed by scholars like Honko to communicate their reception. As insightful as Siri epic

performance is, it was Honko's reception of it that provided us with a framework within which to interpret it, as well as the methodological tools, concepts and language to start to conceptualise a very different model of text, and then apply those insights to our analysis of performance in Judges 5 and Exodus 15. Indeed, it was the application of Honko's theory of tradition ecology that formed the basis of our critical re-imagination and allowed us to engage the texture of biblical text in new ways and thus perceive dimensions of Judges 5 and Exodus 15 that have been foreclosed by other more evolutionist textual models.

**Three,** in the case of texts such as Judges 5 and Exodus 15 where actual insiders and performance traditions are inaccessible, we have seen that the process of *critically re-imagining performance as a method* and using ethnographic works such as the Siri epic to do it, can raise important questions of the biblical text itself and provide keen textual insights, even though the resultant reading is purely hypothetical. In light of the vast differences that exist between the Siri epic (and its reception) on the one hand, and the songs in Judges 5 and Exodus 15 on the other, this is a particularly important point to note. Indeed, of the various nuances and insights that our analysis uncovered, perhaps the most consequential is the fact that audiences have the potential to do literary work in the text. This is not a question that is often asked of songs yet was elicited by our reading of the Siri epic, and while this was explored only briefly it certainly presents as a fruitful avenue for further research.

**Four**, ethnographic works such as the Siri epic can sensitise scholars to prospective aspects of text and performance that might not otherwise have been considered, or that they might not otherwise have known existed. Given our lack of access to the performers and performance traditions of ancient Israel it is quite possible that there are aspects of text and performance that we as tradition outsiders may overlook, but that other more extensively documented thick performances, like the Siri epic, may help us to recover. Our reading of the performance contexts of jātre and cennɛ play alerted us to the potential operation of various aspects of performance, from the more generic elements of performance such as invocation, music, props, dance, and mass participation, to those that might be more uniquely associated with Siri epic performance such as ecstatic-embodiment, dialogic discourse, lineation and unintelligible

speech. Furthermore, it alerted us to the fact some performative elements can involve further functional intricacies imperceptible to outsiders, such as the fact that in Siri epic performance lead singers employ texture from the invocation as a means of controlling possession. In Judges 5:9 for example, we observe the singer re-using invocational texture. While we cannot claim this to represent an actual attempt to control possession, our reading of the Siri epic does cause us to reflect on whether something more than repetition might be taking place.

**Five**, another aspect of performance highlighted by the Siri epic relates to questions of power. It was observed that the Siri epic functioned within a complex social caste system and religious matrix where tradition bearers, who almost without exception come from the lowest castes, perform before dignitaries, many of whom are of the higher social classes. For them, embodiment results in a form of social transformation in which, once inhabited by deity, those usually on the social margins of society speak truth to power, sometimes even admonishing the dignitaries. Our awareness of this dynamic in Siri epic performance sensitised us to the sort of power differentials that might exist between singers and their audiences in the story world of the text. One of the factors that stands out is that, unlike Siri epic performances which were led by Gopala Naika and other male Kumaras, the performances in Judges 5 and in the latter section of Exodus 15 are led by women. Similar to the role reversal that takes place in Siri epic performance where during performance, the previously untouchable Gopala Naika becomes endowed with the authority to speak truth to those in the higher echelons of the caste system, in Exodus 15 and Judges 5, a similar role reversal appears to take place where women, in a likely patriarchal setting, speak truth to the male authorities present. Put another way, Siri epic performance alerts us to the fact that embodiment could potentially mean that when inhabited by YHWH, female singers are empowered to exhort, admonish, and even mock those patriarchal forces that in other settings dominate their lives.

**Finally,** the heuristic application of the Siri epic to Judges 5 and Exodus 15 highlighted our own epistemological limitations in terms of our ability to perceive the potential differences between what texts say and how they are used. This was especially evident in the case of the Siri jātre, where the Siri epic—a story about a woman prevailing against the social dilemmas of her time—is utilised as a means of

facilitating healing, salvation, and pastoral care. While Judges 5 and Exodus 15 clearly speak about YHWH's victory in battle, the analogy of the Siri epic demonstrates that this knowledge alone is not sufficient for us to definitively determine how these texts may have been used, or what the function of their performance might have. True to the spirit of folkloristics, by demonstrating the latent potential of a sub-discipline often dismissed as peripheral, this thesis, at least in part, serves as a metacritique interrogating the power dynamics within biblical studies that have resulted in so few scholars taking contemporary folkloristics seriously as an equal partner in a critical conversation. Similar to an intellectual property regime, and not unlike many other academic disciplines, biblical studies is guided by various traditions, institutions and discourses that ultimately determine who and what is considered to be of central concern, as well as who and what is deemed to be peripheral. As is increasingly being recognised, scholarship is enriched when each and every idea is weighed based on its own merit, rather than on who says it and where they say it from.[2] While steps are being taken to increase diversity in biblical studies as a discipline, it continues to be dominated by white, male, Eurocentric perspectives.[3] Insofar as answering some of the emergent questions concerning how we can make biblical studies more diverse and inclusive, perhaps part of the answer may lay in a greater appreciation of thick, empirical, ethnographic, insider-informed theories of texts, developed by folklorists like Lauri Honko, a scholar who despite his brilliance was willing to be tutored by a humble unlettered singer of tales named Gopala Naika from Machar in Karnataka, south India.

[2] Gale A. Yee, "Thinking Intersectionally: Gender, Race, Class, and the Etceteras of Our Discipline," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 139.1 (2020), 7–26, doi:10.15699/jbl.1391.2020.1b; Wongi Park, "Multiracial Biblical Studies," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 140.3 (2021): 435–59, doi:10.15699/jbl.1403.2021.1.

[3] For example, the Society of Biblical Literature has set up a number of societies seeking to support greater representation. These include the Status of Women in the Profession Committee, the Underrepresented Racial and Ethnic Minorities in the Profession Committee and the Black Scholars Matter Task Force. See also Ekaputra Tupamahu, "The Politics of Scripture: The Stubborn Invisibility of Whiteness in Biblical Scholarship," *Political Theology Network,* 12 November 2020, politicaltheology.com/the-stubborn-invisibility-of-whiteness-in-biblical-scholarship/. Note also David Janzen, *The Liberation of Method: The Ethics of Emancipatory Biblical Interpretation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2021), 11–12.

# APPENDIX

## The Siri Epic: An Introduction

In order to contextualise Lauri Honko's theoretical contribution and its relevance to our analysis of Judges 5 and Exodus 15, it is necessary to provide a condensed summary of the Siri epic in its entirety. Given that the Siri epic itself is not easily found online, this summary will help the reader to contextualise this project and its findings. The Siri epic begins with a series of invocations: there are three in total, namely, the installation of the seat, the seating of the divine assembly, and the salute to the divinities, and as noted by Gopala Naika, the forms of the invocations vary according to the ritual performance context. These invocations take the form of highly formulaic songs that are of a different genre to the epic itself. The epic itself consists of four parts, the Ajjeru subepic; the Siri subepic; the Sonne, Gindye subepic; and the Abbaya and Daaraya subepic. The summaries presented here are a highly condensed version of the scene-by-scene summaries provided in *Textualising the Siri Epic.*[1]

## A.1 The Ajjeru Subepic

The Ajjeru subepic centres on the character of *Aarya Bannaaru Birmu Paalava*, otherwise known as Ajjeru (which means honourable grandfather). Ajjeru falls victim to the wiles of Shiva and the other local deities who desire to test the people of Lookanadu and create a Tulu story. Ajjeru is visited by the god Naagaberamma, disguised himself in the form of a poor Brahmin man, who informs Ajjeru that the reason for his misery and lack of progeny lies in the fact that he has allowed the temple of his ancestors to fall into ruin, thus causing the familial deities to become displeased. Ajjeru rectifies the situation by returning to Lookanadu, restoring the temple and performing various rites and rituals, including a great festival where the local deities receive offerings and devotions in the form of impersonations. At this festival, Ajjeru receives an areca flower, which on his return home he places in a stone chest. The next day he

[1] Lauri Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic*, Folklore Fellows Communications 264 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1998), 605–33. Spelling of non-English terms in this summary follows Honko's transliteration.

hears crying coming from the stone chest and upon opening it, finds a female child enclosed within the areca flower. He names the child Siri. While Siri is still very young, she receives a marriage proposal and eventually marries Kaantu Puunja, who mistreats her, for example by visiting a prostitute or being continually absent. Nine months after the wedding, Siri gives birth to a son, Kumara. Ajjeru is warned that upon seeing Kumara's face he will die, however, despite Ajjeru's best efforts to protect himself, Kumara deceives Ajjeru into looking at him and Ajjeru dies.

## A.2 The Siri Subepic

The Siri subepic begins with Ajjeru's funeral and Siri sending a messenger to her husband Kaanta Puunja to come assist in the funeral. He doesn't, leaving Siri perform the funeral rites for Ajjeru alone. News of Ajjeru's death travels and a relative Annu Setti arrives to lay claim to the throne of Satyanapura Palace. He bribes the court who then rules in favour of his claim to the throne over that of Siri, and at court even Siri's own husband speaks against her. Giving up her claim to the throne, Siri leaves and after a further altercation with her husband, is divorced. Siri takes flight once again with her son Kumara, who is also referred to as the golden child, seeking to fulfil Ajjeru's vow to take Kumara to the temple in Lookanadu. When Siri arrives at Lookanadu she is initially shunned by the Brahmin in charge of the temple, who eventually realises that he has made a mistake and begs for forgiveness.

On departing Lookanadu, Kumara asks to be sent away from Siri to Maaya, prophesying that she will remarry. As prophesied by Kumara, two kings happen upon Siri, and discovering that they were all born in flowers, they take Siri into their palace in Boolamallige as their sister. A man by the name of Kodsaara Alva, visits the palace, falls in love with Siri and proposes. The proposal and marriage lead to conflict between Siri and Kodsaara Alva's first wife, Sammu, but things are resolved through the mediation of Durgalla Pergade Ajjeru of Kaanebottu. Siri falls pregnant once again, and on her return with Sammu from a desire feast in Ujamaara, gets into trouble when being given a tour of an enchanted forest. Kumara appears and assists Siri with the birth of the child, who he sends to Durgalla Pergade Ajjeru. Saamu returns

to Kodsaara Alva alone, tells him what happens, and dies. As for Kumara, he asks Siri to send him to Maaya, which she does.

## A.3 The Sonne and Gindye Subepic

Durgalla Pergade Ajjeru, the one who mediated between Siri and Sammu, finds a young girl floating in an areca flower, and he takes the child under his care and calls her Sonne. Ajjeru goes hunting in a place where Paddontaaya and his bride Gindye live. After praying to the god Kaanteesvara, Gindye becomes pregnant. She and her husband send Babbu, a labourer, pick leaves of a tree that she had wanted to eat. As the labourer climbs down from the tree, he encounters a tiger who only leaves after Babbu promises to give an offering to the god Kaanteesvara if Gindye gives birth to a boy, or if the child is a girl, he would give it to the tiger to eat. Later, while hunting, Ajjeru hears the sound of a child crying in a cave, so he names her Gindye and looks after and raises her alongside Sonne.

Sonne consents to a marriage proposal from Guru, one of two brothers living in a nearby estate, and they live happily. Upon receiving her first period, a feast is held in Gindye's honour. Sonne's husband, Guru Marla refuses to go, as his wife (who is older) has not yet reached puberty and he fears losing face. Sonne's status and her arrival at the feast causes a stir, and when guests threaten to leave, Sonne decides to depart. Having disgraced her husband, he makes her live and work outside of the palace. While tending to cattle, Sonne has a dream in which she is told to offer devotions to the god Nandolige, and that afterwards she would attain puberty. Soon afterwards the offering is made, her relationship with her husband is restored, and she has her first period. Sonne becomes pregnant and gives birth to twin girls, Abbaya and Daaraya.

## A.4 The Abbaya and Daaraya Subepic

Having noticed Abbaya and Daaraya simulating a cennɛ game, Guru Marla has a cennɛ board made for them and they become well-known for their cennɛ abilities. In the meanwhile, Boilya Sandramu Setti who was looking for brides for his sons is made aware of Abbaya and Daaraya, and visits Guru Marla with a

proposal. Initially, Guru Marla is hesitant to give permission, but Sonne is not. After some negotiation and consultation with an astrologer, a date is set. In preparation for the wedding, Guru Marla and Sonne depart from the palace to invite Ajjeru to the wedding, leaving the twins behind. On their way they encounter a Brahmin man to whom Sonne is rude. After apologising to the Brahmin, Guru Marla invites him to visit the twins on his way to Lookanadu.

Having heard that the twins play cennɛ very well, he challenges them to play each other. The Brahmin man stirs up rivalry between the twins, leading Abbaya to hit her sister on the head with the cennɛ board, killing her. Under the encouragement of the Brahmin, Abbaya then throws her sister's body in the well before jumping to her own death, and the Brahmin follows suit. Eventually, Guru Marla and Sonne return to find the house empty and the presence of blood. Unable to find the bodies, they summon Ajjeru who lowers a basket with two areca buds into the well; upon doing so, the areca buds transform into the bodies of the twin girls, which are then burned on the funeral pyre.

The god Naarinya hears of what happened and the nearness of their wedding and allows the girls three more days on earth. Abbaya and Daaraya return, and while at the wedding altar, they announce that they must soon return to the divine seat from whence they came, and in their place they assign to their grooms two girls, Cennagea and Celuvaga, to take their place. Abbaya and Daaraya return to console their parents and fulfil a vow to visit Nandolige. Unsure of the way to Nandolige, they pray to Kumara and are guided there by a creature known as Nandigoona Mayisandaaya. When they arrive at the Nandolige temple, they perform various rituals before a voice invites them to take up a place next to Kumara in the temple.

## A.5 The Kumara Conclusion

The epic finishes by circling back to describe what happened to Kumara. Kumara becomes maya (divine), returns to Bolyottu and stirs up trouble by causing illness amongst the various villagers. The king sends for a priest, but the priest's efforts are to no avail. A local astrologer advises the king that the ills being caused by Kumara can be eased by creating a shrine for Siri, Kumara and the god Bemmeru. The king

relents, and having built the shrines holds a festival that lasts nine days. The festival includes an impersonator through whom Kumara speaks, and through the impersonator Kumara declares his prior actions and their role in creating and spreading the Tulu story and, amongst other things, declares his actions to have been in line with his mother Siri's wishes. Kumara speaks to the sacredness of the Tulunaadu story, exhorting the people to preserve it.

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