The Hebrew Bible and Greek Philosophy and Mythology – Some Case Studies

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***Résumé**. Cet article reprend la question des relations entre la Grèce et Israël dans la deuxième moitié du premier millénaire avant notre ère. Il est possible que certains textes comme Gn 6,1-4 ; Jg 9 et Jg 11 aient repris et adapté des textes grecs alors que d'autres textes bibliques, comme Gn 18 ou Dt 17, partagent des thèmes communs sans qu'on puisse postuler une dépendance littéraire. Il semble que le livre des Juges soit le livre le plus « grec » de la Bible hébraïque.*

1. Introduction: The Hebrew Bible and Greece, between theology and history of religion

As is well known, the discoveries of written documents from Mesopotamia at the end of the 19th century provoked a major crisis in traditional biblical scholarship. More generally, it also created a crisis in the traditional Christian European worldview, a crisis which led to the famous "Babel-Bibel Streit" at the beginning of the 20th century. After these discoveries, it seemed that the biblical stories reporting the creation of the world and the flood had much older forerunners. The biblical stories probably even depended upon them. Around 1890, this discovery of Mesopotamian (and also Egyptian) parallels led to the foundation of the "Religionsgeschichtliche Schule" (The school of history of religions) in

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Göttingen, which gathered mainly Protestant OT and NT scholars. It comprised names such as Hermann Gunkel (1888), Alfred Rahlfs (1891), Ernst Troeltsch (1891), William Wrede (1891) and Hugo Greßmann (1902). Their idea was to understand the Bible in a socio-cultural perspective and to investigate Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Persian and Hellenistic influences on the Old and the New Testaments. Hermann Gunkel's commentary on the book of Genesis[1] is a good example of this comparative approach. This commentary, which remains a valuable source of information, consistently mentions parallels between the narratives of Genesis and the Mesopotamian texts, but often also links to Greek mythology, as well as to German, Nordic and other folklore. He notes for instance that the transformation of Lot's wife into a pillar of salt can be compared to Greek mythology, where one hears about Niobe changed into stone or Cadmus transformed into a serpent (p. 213). However, Gunkel is not interested in elaborating the question of dependence or borrowing, sometimes he will speak of a common oriental origin: "eine alte orientalische Erzählung..., die uns in hebräischen und griechischen Absenkern erhalten ist" (p. 200).

After the First World War, this kind of approach was no longer theologically correct. Karl Barth's so-called "dialectical theology" insisted on the specificity of Christianity and the Bible, which cannot be compared to other religions. The idea of the Bible's incomparability does not leave any room for comparison between biblical texts and Ancient Near Eastern or Greek mythology. Famous biblical scholars such as Gerhard von Rad consequently insisted on the specificity of Israel's faith and traditions and had no interest in investigating extra-biblical parallels[2].

Scholars less influenced by this kind of theology were interested in Ancient Near Eastern parallels, often so that they could gain arguments for the supposed early date of biblical texts. For example, they compared the book of Deuteronomy or other cove-

[1] Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis übersetzt und erklärt* (Nowacks Handkommentar zum Alten Testament, Abtl. 1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1901).

[2] See especially Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (Louisville: Westminster J. Knox Press, 2001). The two volumes in German were written in the 1950s.

nant texts with the Hittite treatises from the end of the second millennium. These attempts were combined with the idea of an intrinsic separation between Orient and Occident until the Hellenistic area.

A typical example of this idea is Th. Boman's (1952) very influential work, which underwent seven editions (1983): *Das hebräische Denken im Vergleich mit dem Griechischen.*[3] In this book he argues that Greek and Hebrew thoughts are incomparable. His opposition of Greek and Semitic thinking may also have a hidden theological agenda: he can claim that Christianity is close to Platonism and not to the Old Testament, which he then uses as a foundation upon which to reconstruct the "Hebrew" psyche as opposed to the Greek one.

With a different agenda, E. Auerbach, in his seminal book *Mimesis* (1946),[4] compared texts from the Odyssey with biblical narratives, for instance comparing the episode of "Odysseus's scar" in book 19 with the story of the Aqedah in Gen 22. He is not interested in the question of mutual influence, but in the different ways in which the author of the Odyssey and the author of Genesis 22 depict their characters. He wants to show that the Greek and the Biblical forms of representation of human characters have deeply influenced the Occidental civilization.

We should also mention Cyrus Gordon's important study of 1955 about "Homer and the Bible",[5] in which he noted parallels between Ugaritic, Hebrew and Greek literature and claimed a common Eastern Mediterranean epic tradition (43), connected to the fact that the Mediterranean Sea should not be considered a barrier but rather a bridge. John P. Brown later took up this quite

[3] Thorleif Boman, *Das hebräische Denken im Vergleich mit dem Griechischen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1952).

[4] E. Auerbach, *Mimesis: Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur* (Bern: A. Francke, 1946, 9th ed. 1994); English translation: *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973).

[5] C. H. Gordon, "Homer and the Bible: The Origin and Character of East Mediterranean Literature", *HUCA* 26 (1955): 43-108. See also C. H. Gordon, *Before the Bible: the Common Background of Greek and Hebrew Civilisations* (London: Collins, 1962).

revolutionary study at the time. His aim was to show by linguistic and thematic comparisons that Greek and Biblical texts have much in common. Neither Gordon nor Brown were primarily interested in the question of literary dependency, but rather in the idea of a common Mediterranean culture[6].

In a way, Gordon was a forerunner of John Van Seters, who, after the collapse of the traditional explanation of the formation of the Pentateuch in the 1970s, focused on Greek parallels to the Yahwist. Van Seters argued that the "Yahwist" did not write in the tenth or ninth century but in the Babylonian or Early Persian period. In order to strengthen his hypothesis of the Yahwist as a "Historian" who wrote a prologue to the "Deuteronomistic History", he compared him to Greek historians like Herodotus or Thucydides[7]. Since then, several comparisons between Greek and biblical texts have been suggested, either in order to date the Biblical texts at a very late period: they would be already "Hellenistic"; or simply to argue for a common "mythological tradition" from which Greek and Biblical narratives arose[8]. These comparisons can also include material or philological investigations, as for instance Israel Finkelstein's important article of 2002[9], where he shows that Goliath's armor in the book of Samuel reflects the equipment of Greek hoplites in the seventh to the fifth centuries BCE (p. 143), and that the Hebrew term "*seranim*" which designates the Philistine rulers is probably a loanword from the Greek

[6] John P. Brown, *Israel and Hellas* (3 vols., BZAW 231, 276, 299; Berlin - New York: De Gruyter); idem, *Ancient Israel and ancient Greece: religion, politics and culture* (Minneapolis: Fortress). See similarly Michael C. Astour, *Hellenosemitica: an Ethnic and Cultural Study in West Semitic Impact on Mycenaean Greece* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1965).

[7] John Van Seters, *In Search of History. History in the Ancient World and the Origin of Biblical History* (New Haven - London: Yale University Press, 1983), and also, *Prologue to History. The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1992).

[8] See the discussion in Lester L. Grabbe (ed.), *Did Moses Speak Attic? Jewish Historiography and Scripture in the Hellenistic Period* (JSOT.S 317; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001).

[9] Israel Finkelstein, "The Philistines in the Bible: A Late-Monarchic Perspective," *JSOT* 27 (2002): 131-167.

tyrannos, which seems to appear around the seventh century BCE (p. 136-7).

The conviction that many biblical texts were written at a much later period than traditionally assumed partially explains the more recent interest in exploring the relation between Greece and the Hebrew Bible. It is also the consequence of newer historical, and archaeological, investigations according to which contacts between Greece and the Levant happened already in the Assyrian period[10] (for instance Hellenistic importations in Palestine during the Persian period; Greek mercenaries in the sixth century: Arad ostraca, Alkaios[11]).

Therefore, it is plausible to assume that biblical texts from that period (at least starting from the Persian period) may borrow Greek mythological texts and themes.

At this point, we need however a methodological caveat. Not all parallels between a Greek and a Biblical tradition allow claiming direct dependency, whichever way this dependency goes. To give just one example: recently Bernd Diebner has argued that the first creation account in Gen 1, normally dated to the Babylonian or early Persian period (sixth century BCE), takes up Plato's and Aristotle's doctrines of the different stages of the soul and was therefore written around 300 BCE[12]. He does present a rather interesting synopsis that indeed shows some parallels. Yet, are these parallels strong enough to suggest literary dependency? Both texts share the idea of a progression, from the most basic to

[10] For instance Robert Rollinger, *Interkulturalität in der Alten Welt : Vorderasien, Hellas, Ägypten und die vielfältigen Ebenen des Kontakts* (Philippika 34; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010).

[11] See O. Kaiser, "Athen und Jerusalem. Die Begegnung des spätbiblischen Judentums mit dem griechischen Geist, ihre Voraussetzungen und ihre Folgen", in M. Witte and S. Alkier (ed.), *Die Griechen und der Vordere Orient. Beiträge zum Kultur- und Religionskontakt zwischen Griechenland und dem Vorderen Orient im 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (OBO 191, Freiburg (CH) - Göttingen: Universitätsverlag - Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 87-120, 93.

[12] B. J. Diebner, "Platonisch-Aristotelisches und frührabbinische Denkstruktur von Gen 1-3. Zur kulturgeschichtlichen Einordnung von Schöpfungs- und Paradieserzählung", in *Seit wann gibt es "jenes Israel". Gesammelte Studien zum TNK und zum antiken Judentum.* (Beiträge zum Verstehen der Bibel 17, Münster: LIT-Verlag, 2011), 89-96.

the most differentiated and complex forms. This idea may be quite common to an intellectual reflection about the origins of the world. Since one cannot find closer relationships between the texts, Diebner's interesting observations cannot prove a Hellenistic date for the priestly creation account in Genesis 1. On the other hand, the parallels between the prologue to the Flood story in Gen 6:1-4 and the Catalogue of Women which is attributed to Hesiod, in which it is stated that Zeus decided to destroy the race of men because "the children of the gods (*tékna theôn*) should not mate with wretched mortals" cannot be overlooked. The *tékna theôn* in the catalogue remind of the *bene elohîm* in the Hebrew text. Like the Catalogue of Women, Gen 6:1-4 states that the women were beautiful and that divine beings had sexual relations with them, and that the offspring of these unions were the heroes of the heroic age. Therefore, it is quite plausible to assume that the author of Gen 6:1-4, nowadays considered as the latest addition to the Flood account, was familiar with the type of tradition reflected in the Catalogue of Women[13].

However, here we must address a methodological problem linked to the different "textual support" for Greek and Biblical mythological traditions. Whereas the biblical narrative is transmitted in a textual form that has become canonical and for which one can approximately date redactional stages, the Greek myths have never been canonized and are often found in rather late writings, which include many variants. So it remains very difficult, although in some cases not impossible, to compare two textual witnesses.

In what follows, I would like to think of different kinds of possible relations between Greek and Biblical traditions in order to distinguish "structural" parallels, possible influences, and cases where it is possible to postulate a direct literary dependency.

[13] John Van Seters, "The Primeval Histories of Greece and Israel Compared," *ZAW* 100 (1988): 4-22; Andreas Schüle, "The Divine-Human Marriages (Genesis 6:1-4) and the Greek Framing of the Primeval History," *ThZ* 65 (2009): 116-128.

2. Homer and Moses

There are some interesting parallels between Homer and Moses. Both figures are more mythical than historical. It is often assumed that the name Homer stands for a process of transmission and revisions of poetic and epic traditions that became fixed during the sixth century BCE[14]. According to M. West, Homer is a fictitious name for a collection of epics[15], and the Greeks of the sixth or fifth century understood the name "Homer" to represent the whole body of the heroic tradition[16]. The same goes for Moses and the Torah. The literary shaping of the Pentateuchal traditions started around the seventh century BCE. They were gathered in one document at the end of the fifth century. The Homeric epic shaped Greek culture and identity in the same way that the Pentateuch shaped the identity of nascent Judaism in the Persian and Hellenistic periods.

In Greece, the "age of the lawgivers" goes from the end of the middle of the eighth century until the beginning of the fifth[17]. This age corresponds to the time in which the legal codes of the Hebrew Bible (Covenant Code, Deuteronomic code, Holiness code) were composed. There are indeed some interesting parallels between the Greek and the biblical codes, as Anselm Hagedorn has recently shown[18].

Although the book of Deuteronomy and its "code" have often and rightly been compared to Assyrian law codes and vassal treaties, some passages also fit well with Greek laws.

[14] Gregory Nagy, "Homeric Poetry and Problems of Multiformity: The 'Panathenaic Bottleneck'," *Classical Philology* 96 (2001): 109–119.

[15] Martin West, "The Invention of Homer," *Classical Quarterly* 49 (1999): 364-382.

[16] Gilbert Murray, *The Rise of the Greek Epic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934 [=1960], 4th ed.), 93.

[17] Henri van Effenterre and Françoise Ruzé, *Nomima : recueil d'inscriptions politiques et juridiques de l'archaïsme grec* (Collection de l'Ecole française de Rome 188, Rome: Ecole française de Rome, 1994-1995), v.

[18] Anselm C. Hagedorn, *Between Moses and Plato: Individual and Society in Deuteronomy and Ancient Greek Law* (Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments 204, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004).

This is especially the case for the quite astonishing "law of the king" in Deut 17:14-20. It has often been noticed that such a "law", in which the powers of the kings are restricted and according to which the king is controlled by his "brothers" does not really match Ancient Near East royal ideology. R. Achenbach, J. Rückl and myself have recently argued that this "law" should not be understood as a "dtr" text, but as a post-dtr insert from the Persian period. The redactors who inserted this passage were probably concerned with the question of knowing whether the (Davidic) monarchy could still have a future in the Persian period. Apparently, they tried to elaborate a compromise allowing for the possibility of a Judaean monarchy (under Persian authority) with however a restricted power[19]. Comparisons with Greek texts could strengthen such a view. According to Hagedorn[20], the Homeric epics depict a king, who, as is the case in Deut 17, "has no legal or judicial authority, a concept completely foreign to the royal ideology of the Ancient Near East" (p. 151). Herodotus (4.161) reports that Battus, the King of Cyrene, lost military and other privileges in the context of a reform led by a certain Demonax: "he set apart certain domains and priesthoods for their king Battus but gave all the rest which had belonged to the kings, to be now held by the people in common". In contrast to his son, later exiled, Battus obeyed Demonax's law, similar to the way in which, in Deut 17:14-20, the king should obey the law of Moses. The picture of a king who obeys the law and conducts himself accordingly appears in certain texts by later Rhetors and is presented as an example to follow (Hagedorn, p. 154). The almost "democratic" picture of Deut 17, where the king is chosen and controlled by free (male) citizens does indeed fit better with Greece than with the Ancient Near East. A Persian period date for the law of the king would explain perfectly the "democratization" that it reflects and which

[19] Reinhard Achenbach, "Das sogenannte Königsgesetz in Deuteronomium 17,14-20," *ZAR* 15 (2009): 216-233; Jan Rückl, *A Sure House. Studies on the Dynastic Promise to David in the Books of Samuel*, PhD Diss., University of Prague-University of Lausanne, 2012; Thomas Römer, "La loi du roi en Deutéronome 17 et ses fonctions" in Olivier Artus (ed.), *Loi et justice dans la littérature du Proche-Orient ancien* (BZAR 20; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2013), 99-111

[20] See footnote 18.

can be explained in the context of a rather autonomous Judean community governed by a group of priestly and secular aristocrats at least when it comes to internal affairs.

Yet, the parallels with Greece do not necessarily reflect a direct influence from Greece. It may be more cautious in this case to use the philosophical idea of an "Axial Age" (Karl Jaspers[21]), in which major philosophical changes appear that then deeply influence human civilization.

Similar cases of common traditions occur in several Greek and Biblical narratives. For these cases, one cannot go further than to argue for a cultural background common to both sides of the eastern Mediterranean regions.

3. Abraham goes Greek. The case of Gen 18-19

The visit of three divine beings in Gen 18:1-16 has always intrigued commentators. According to the Church Fathers, the narrative demonstrates the dogma of the Trinity, whereas, in rabbinic tradition, the three visitors are identified with angels (the same idea also occurs in Hebrews 13:2). In the text of Gen 18, one notices an alternation of verbs in the singular and in the plural, which led historical-critical scholarship to propose that the present narrative combines either two documents or two traditions. In any case, the present text presupposes that Yhwh is among the three visitors (see especially 18:16ff.).

The scene of Gen 18:1-16 has its closest parallel in a Greek myth, which tells the incognito visit of three gods who reward an old man or an old couple for their hospitality by offering them an offspring.

Ovid's *Fasti* (written around 15 CE) offers the best literary parallel. It makes use of older Hellenistic mythic traditions[22]:

[21] Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History* (Westport [CT]: Greenwood, 1976).

[22] Book V. Translation by A.S. Kline (2004): http://poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/Fastihome.htm.

> "Jupiter, and his brother who rules the deep ocean, were journeying together, with Mercury. It was the hour when yoked oxen drag back the plough, and the lamb kneels down to drink the full ewe's milk. By chance, an old man, Hyrieus, farmer of a tiny plot, saw them, as he stood in front of his meagre dwelling. And spoke to them: 'The way's long, little of day is left, And my threshold's welcoming to strangers.' He stressed his words with a look, inviting them again: They accepted his offer, hiding their divinity. They entered the old man's cottage, black with smoke: ... Two pots stood there: the smaller contained beans, the other vegetables: each boiling beneath its lid.
>
> While they waited, he poured red wine with a trembling hand: The god of the sea accepted the first cup, and when he'd drained it, he said: 'Let Jupiter drink next.'
>
> Hearing the name of Jupiter the old man grew pale. Recovering his wits, he sacrificed the ox that ploughed his meagre land, and roasted it in a great fire ... Now the table was bright with food, bright with wine: ... Jupiter's word was: 'If you've a wish, ask it: All will be yours.' The old man said calmly: 'I had a dear wife, whom I knew in the flower of my first youth. Where is she now, you ask? An urn contains her. I swore to her, calling on you gods, "You'll be the only wife I'll take." I spoke, and kept the oath. I ask for something else: I wish to be a father, and not a husband.' The gods agreed: All took their stand beside the ox-hide — I'm ashamed to describe the rest — then they covered the soaking hide with earth: Ten months went past and a boy was born. Hyrieus called him Urion, because of his conception".

There are several interesting parallels with the Biblical account: In both cases, the gift of a son is a reward for the hospitality that an old man (without children[23]) shows to gods whom he does not recognize as such at the beginning of the story. In both cases, a divine figure reveals the divine identity to the old man. In both cases, there is also an etiological interest. Yet, it is connected to the gift of the son in different ways. The author of Gen 18:1-16 was certainly familiar with a tradition similar to the one inform-

[23] Apparently Gen 18 does not presuppose the existence of Ishmael.

ing Ovid's account. One may say that there might have been a common Levantine-Mediterranean tradition, but, as Westermann must acknowledge, we lack evidence for such a "vorderaltorientalische Vorgeschichte"[24]. The author of Gen 18:1-16 may also have blended the tradition of the three divine visitors with another theme. Gen 18 was probably conceived as the continuation of Gen 13 (separation between Abraham and Lot), where Abraham settles in Hebron/Mamre. Interestingly, other biblical texts associate Hebron with the number "three": Num 13:22; Josh 15:14; Judg 1:10 all mention three lords of Hebron: Sheshai, Ahiman and Talmai[25]. These figures are called *ʿanaqim*, a word whose etymology is unclear. However, there is a possible Greek parallel in the Greek word ἄναξ (*wanax), that designates a divine or a human "lord". Thus, one could argue that Gen 18:1-16 aimed to transform an old tradition of three divine ancestors of Hebron/Mamre into a yahwistic one. Their title *ʿanaqim* prompted the use of the motif of the visit of three deities that are identified to the only god Yhwh.

The following chapter that deals with Lot and his family also displays some parallels with Hellenistic mythological traditions. The transformation of Lot's wife is the only "metamorphosis" in the Hebrew Bible; the divine interdiction to return recalls the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice (as related in Apollodorus, *Library* 1.3.2.)[26]. The curious ending of Lot's narrative (where he becomes the ancestor of the Moabites and the Ammonites through incest) also displays some parallels to Greek mythology. Of course, the closest parallel is the story of Noah's drunkenness in Gen 9 (which also combines vine and sexual transgression). However, the setting of Gen 19:30-38 in a cave combined with the motif of vine also evokes a myth related to Dionysus. Dionysus has to hide in a cave where he plants the first vineyard and gets drunk the nymphs. This is the opposite of the story of Gen 19, where the daughters get their father drunk.

[24] C. Westermann, *Genesis. Teilband 2. Genesis 12-36.* (BK I/2; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener 1981), 334.

[25] According to Gen 14:13-14, Abraham has three allies in Hebron.

[26] English translation of J.G. Frazer: http://www.theoi.com/Text/Apollodorus1.html

To sum up: Gen 18-19 contains several parallels to Greek myths. The most explicit one is certainly the encounter of Abraham with the three divine visitors. However, none of the mentioned parallels allow to claim a direct dependence of Gen 18 on a concrete Greek text or narrative.

The case is quite different when it comes to the story of Jephtah's sacrifice in Judges 11.

4. Jephtah's sacrifice and Euripides

I have argued elsewhere that the story of the sacrifice of Jephtah's unnamed daughter (Judg 11:30-32, 34-40) presupposes the Greek tradition of Iphigenia, more specifically the two versions written by Euripides: "Iphigenia in Tauris" (412 BCE) and "Iphigenia at Aulis" (407 ? BCE)[27]. Without repeating all the arguments here, let us recall that it is quite possible that the book of Judges, which in its kernel contains savior stories from the North, was integrated as a dtr link between the books of Joshuah and Samuel. The story of Jephtah's daughter does not belong to the dtr edition of the book of Judges, but was inserted later. One can easily identify it as an addition. Jephtah's vow contradicts 11:29, where Jephtah already received Yhwh's spirit. The gift of the divine spirit originally led to the Jephtah's victory, which is told in 11:29, 33 and 12:1-6. Now, the account of Jephtah's vow and sacrifice interrupts this narrative. It has often been observed that this story has several connections inside the Bible, with the narrative of Abraham's sacrifice. However, the closest parallels are to be found in the Greek legend of Iphigenia. Iphigenia's history of tradition is as complicated as the history of traditions of the Hebrew Bible. The *Kypria* of Stasinos mentions Iphigenia for the first time. It is an epic of the 7th or 6th century BCE that we know only through a few summaries. Apparently the reasons of the sacrifice and the fate of

[27] Thomas Römer, "Why Would the Deuteronomists Tell About the Sacrifice of Jephtah's Daughter?", *JSOT* 77 (1998): 27-38 and more detailed Thomas Römer, "La fille de Jephté entre Jérusalem et Athènes. Réflexions à partir d'une triple intertextualité en Juges 11," in Daniel Marguerat and Adrian Curtis (ed.), *Intertextualités. La Bible en échos* (MoBi 40; Genève: Labor et Fides, 2000), 30-42.

Iphigenia are presented with enormous diversity[28]. In some versions she is actually killed by her father; in other versions, an animal is substituted for her, and Artemis takes her away so that Iphigenia can become her priestess. Euripides' tragedies display both patterns. In *Iphigenia in Tauris*, Artemis substitutes a hind and takes Iphigenia away to Asia. The original version of *Iphigenia at Aulis* apparently ended with the death of the girl. I would like to argue that the author who inserted the story about Jephtah's daughter into the book of Judges knew the tradition around Iphigenia according to Euripides. It is quite possible that he went to Greece where he assisted to a representation of Iphigenia, or he could have had access to a written form of one or both plays that circulated in written form among literate members of the audience and performers at minor festivals. At that time, the text was not stable, and so we cannot be sure in what precise form the author of Judg 11 knew the Iphigenia tragedy. Apparently he knew both endings of the tragedy and tried to combine them, since Judg 11 displays a certain ambiguity regarding the fate of Jephtah's daughter.

The following parallels between the Biblical narrative and the plays of Euripides strengthen the idea that the redactor of Judg 11 depended directly on Euripides.

Both for Iphigenia and for Judg 11, the vow is made in the context of a military crisis. In Iphigenia as well as in Judg 11, the girls are initially running joyfully to meet their fathers and both fathers are complaining about their fate, accusing their daughters of bringing affliction over them.

> IA[29]: "Do not be angry with me, mother, if I run from your side and throw myself on my father's breast." (631-2)
>
> Judg 11:34: "Then Jephthah came to his home at Mizpah; and there was his daughter coming out to meet him with timbrels and with dancing."

[28] Pierre Bonnechère, *Le sacrifice humain en Grèce ancienne* (Kernos. Supplément 3; Athènes - Liège: Centre International d'Etude de la Religion Grecque Antique, 1994).

[29] http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0108%3Acard%3D1 (E.P. Coleridge).

IA: "Woe is me! To what perplexities the gods have brought me at this pass! ... I have taken my child and devoted her to death, that my affliction may be attended with the fewest tears". (539-540)

Judg 11:35: "Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low; you have become the cause of great trouble to me."

In Iphigenia as well as in Judg 11, the girls are acting in a heroic way. They accept to be offered as a sacrifice and they exhort their father to do so:

IA: "I am resolved to die; and this I want to do with honor, dismissing from me what is mean (1375)"; "O my father, here I am; willingly I offer my body for my country and all Hellas, [that you may lead me to the altar of the goddess and sacrifice me, since this is Heaven's ordinance." (1554-5)[30]

Judg 11:36: "My father, if you have opened your mouth to Yhwh, do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth".

In both texts we find the idea of a commemoration for the young girl offered in sacrifice:

IA: "May it be yours, maidens, to hymn in joyous strains Artemis, the child of Zeus, for my hard lot; and let the order for a solemn hush go forth to the Danaids". (1470); "Sing with me, maidens, sing the praises of Artemis ..." (1490)

Judg 11:40: "Every year, for four days, the daughters of Israel would go out to commemorate the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite".

The conclusion of the Biblical narrative also calls to mind an initiation festival at Brauron which was connected to the myth of Iphigenia and took place every fourth year. We do not have any indication that such a ritual existed in Judah. Therefore we may conclude that the biblical author transformed the ritual into literature.

[30] The authenticity of this passage is disputed.

I find it plausible to assume that the story of Jephtah's daughter has been written around 350 as a supplement to Jephtah's story. Perhaps the redactor wanted to bring the heroic stories of the saviors ("Judges") closer to Greek tragedies. He might also have a theological agenda. Judg 11 is silent about Yhwh's reaction to Jephtah's vow and sacrifice. In contrast to to Gen 22, there is no happy end and no divine intervention from heaven. This brings us close to Euripides' tragedies, where according to Gliksohn, the divinity absents itself from the human drama (according to Gliksohn, Euripides uses the *deus ex machina* in a subversive manner)[31]. Additionally, the message of a deity who does not interfere with (foolish) human actions brings the author of Judg 11.29-40* close to the theology of Qoheleth.

Was it necessary for the addressees of Judg 11 to know the myth of Iphigenia in order to understand the story of Jephtah's daughter? Probably not. The addressees can understand the story for itself but the educated addressees (those interested in Hellenistic culture) would gain access to a supplementary meaning when they understand Jephtah's daughter as a Hebrew Iphigenia. Recently, W. Gross has qualified this thesis as "unglaubwürdig"[32], without offering a better explanation, as far as I can see. Thus, maintaining the idea of a Greek influence on Judg 11 seems the best option. Evidently, the redactor did not copy from a Greek text, but he had a rather good knowledge of the Iphigenia tradition.

I would like to conclude this short investigation with another text from the book of Judges, which also display strong literary parallels with a Greek text.

[31] J.-M. Gliksohn, *Iphigénie de la Grèce antique à l'Europe des Lumières* (Littératures modernes, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1985), 45.

[32] Walter Gross, *Richter* (Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament; Freiburg i.Br.: Herder, 2009), 601.

5. Jotham's fable and Aesop

Aesop is a legendary Greek fabulist mentioned in Herodotus and Aristotle. According to these sources, he would have lived around 620-560, but many scholars doubt that he ever existed[33]. However in the fifth century, there was a legend about this figure, and an important number of fables were attributed to him. Scholars often suppose that there existed a collection of fables attributed to Aesop in the fifth century, but no material evidence of such a document has been found until today[34]. Several collections of the fables were made in Greek and Latin, but they are all lost, and the remaining manuscripts date from the Middle Age. Therefore it is very difficult to decide which of the fables (classified in different ways by Emile Chambry and Ben Edwin Perry) go back to the fifth century BCE and which were added later.

An interesting case is the fable of the Trees and the Olive, which presents striking parallels with the Biblical fable of Jotham[35].

Aesop, Perry 262 = Chambry 252	*Judges 9*
The trees went forth so that they could anoint (Chambry: elect) a king to rule over them. They said to the olive tree: 'Please be our ruler.'	[8] The trees once went forth to anoint a king over them; and they said to the olive tree, 'Rule over us.'
The olive tree said to them, 'Why would I abandon my oil, which is valued by the gods and men, in order to become the head of the trees?'	[9] The olive tree said to them, 'Shall I abandon my oil, by which gods and men are honored, and go to sway over the trees?'
The trees said to the fig tree, 'Agree to rule over us.'	[10] And the trees said to the fig tree, 'Come you, and rule over us.'
The fig tree answered, 'Why would I	[11] The fig tree said to them, 'Shall I

[33] Martin L. West, "The Ascription of Fables to Aesop in Archaic and Classical Greece", in *La Fable* (Entretiens XXX, Vandœuvres–Genève: Fondation Hardt, 1984), 105–36.

[34] Tomas Hägg, *Parthenope: Selected Studies in Ancient Greek Fiction (1969-2004)*, (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 1997, reprint 2004), 47.

[35] Colette Briffard, "Gammes sur l'acte de traduire," *F & V* 101, CB 41 (2002): 12-18.

abandon my sweetness and delightful fruit in order to become the head of the trees?'.	abandon sweetness and my good fruit, and go to sway over the trees?'
	12 And the trees said to the vine, 'Come you, and rule over us.' 13 The vine said to them, 'Shall I abandon my wine which cheers gods and men, and go to sway over the trees?'
The trees said to the thorn bush, 'Rule over us.'	14 Then all the trees said to the thorn bush 'Come you, and rule over us.'
The thorn bush said to the trees, 'If indeed you have resolved to anoint me to be your king, come and rest under my shadow, otherwise, a fire will come forth from the thorn bush and devour the cedars of Lebanon!'	15 And the thorn bush said to the trees, 'If indeed you are anointing me king over you, then come and take refuge under my shadow; but if not, fire will come out of thorn bush and devour the cedars of Lebanon.'

These texts are related so closely on the literary level (the vine is missing in the Aesop version of the fable) that we must postulate literary dependency (or a very stable oral tradition): either Judg 9 depends on the Aesop fable, or vice-versa, or both texts have a common *Vorlage*.

When it comes to the Biblical text, we should mention that Judg 9 is the only example of the literary genre of a fable in the Hebrew Bible (except perhaps the somewhat unclear verse of 2 Kgs 14:9). One can find some allegories (as in Ezek 10:1-10) or parables (2 Sam 12:1-4), but Judg 9:8-15 remains the only explicit form of a fable.

Moreover, this fable with its narrative introduction related to the figure of Jotham (9:7-20, together with v. 5), interrupts the narrative logic. Therefore, it is quite possible to consider that the original story goes from 9:6 ("All the leaders of Shechem and Beth Millo assembled and then went and made Abimelech king by the oak near the pillar in Shechem.") to 9:22ff ("22: Abimelech commanded Israel for three years. 23: Then God sent a spirit to stir up hostility between Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem. He made the leaders of Shechem disloyal to Abimelech..."). The idea that Abimelech killed his 70 brothers and that Jotham was able to

hide in order to escape the massacre is probably borrowed from the book of Kings (see the 70 sons of the kings in 2 Kgs 10:6-7 and the hiding of Joash in 2 Kgs 11:1-3). Thus, it is plausible that the story of Jotham could have been introduced in the Hellenistic era in order to anticipate and radicalize the critical attitude towards absolute monarchy, as 1 Sam 8 will especially highlight. The redactor could have taken over a fable ascribed to Aesop either from a written collection of Aesopian texts, or from a well-known oral fable[36]. Since the fable is short and simple, one should not rule out this possibility.

On the other hand, the Greek of the Aesopian fables probably indicates a date later than the fifth century. Since the fables of Aesop are only available through late Byzantine manuscripts, it cannot be excluded that the fable of the Trees and the Olive was taken over from the Biblical tradition. However, since the literary genre of the fable is quite unique in the Hebrew Bible, the first solution seems preferable. Thus, the redactor of Judg 9 might have known either an Aesopian collection or he might have taken over the fable from a fixed oral tradition. In this case, the book of Judges would be the most "Hellenistic" book in the Law and the Prophets[37]. In addition to the sacrifice of Jephtah's daughter and Jotham's fable, the story of Samson also betrays several parallels to the Greek legends about Heracles[38]. Why, then, was Judges the most open book for "Hellenistic" insertions? Perhaps this is related to the fact that in the Persian period the adventures of the Northern saviors could be compared to the exploits and tragedies of Greek heroes.

[36] Gross, *Richter*, 487-9, postulates that the fable was first transmitted independently, before it was inserted in its present context.

[37] Giovanni Garbini, "Il cantico de Debora," *La parola del passato* (1978): 5-31, points out Greek mythological motives in Judg 4-5, which seem however somewhat constrained.

[38] Claudia Nauerth, "Simsons Taten. Motivgeschichtliche Überlegungen," *DBAT* 21 (1985): 94-120.

6. Conclusion: Hellas and the Bible

To sum up, one should definitely abandon the idea of a cultural and ideological barrier between Greece and the Levant. Since the Persian period at least, there were contacts between Israel/Judah and the eastern part of the Mediterranean world. It is therefore not that startling to imagine Judean redactors familiar with Greek traditions. In some cases, positing a common tradition is the most plausible option; in other cases, one cannot rule out the Judean adoption of Greek mythical traditions. Thus, the Hebrew Bible is not only the daughter of the Ancient Near East, she also owes some of her features to the Greek world.