The Sea as Everyday Space
(Psalms 104 and 107)

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However we define "everyday space," the sea as it is conceptualized in the Hebrew Bible would seem not to belong.[1] It may be argued that everyday space needs to be suitable minimally for human visitation and ideally for occupation. However, in much of the Hebrew Bible, the sea is presented as space that is hostile to human life. In fact, one crossed the boundary from land into the sea at one's peril, because the sea is first and foremost a realm of chaos and death.

The Babylonian poem, "Marduk, Creator of the World," succinctly demonstrates the antagonistic distinction between land and sea common to ancient Near Eastern cultures. The poem describes the world before creation as an utterly watery place:

> All the world was sea. The spring in the midst of the sea was only a channel.[2]

The superabundance of water and the absence of land characterize the uncreated world. Fittingly, creation culminates in the creation of land:

> Marduk tied together a raft on the face of the waters,
> He created dirt and heaped it on the raft.[3]

The depiction of the earth as a raft coincides with the conception of the earth as a flat disk borne by the primordial sea.[4] It also underlines the precariousness of terrestrial life, supported, as it is, by a raft-like structure, in a cosmos dominated by water.[5] Thus, the poem makes clear that sea and land are antithetical spaces. If the sea represents uncreated chaos, then land represents created order. If land is inhabitable for human beings, then the sea is the very opposite: uninhabitable and, indeed, hostile to human life. In short, the sea is the place farthest removed from everyday space.

Despite the fearsome conceptualization of the sea, however, we know that there existed among the ancient Near Eastern peoples, the Israelites included, seafarers who embarked for the sea as a matter of daily life (Ezekiel 27–28; Psalm 107). The everyday practices of these seafarers contradicted the official cosmography in which the sea is off-limits to human activities. To use Henri Lefebvre's language, there was a contradiction between conceived space and lived space.[6] The contradiction was ignored by the learned scribes and priests and other proponents of the official cosmography for a time. However, the lived experience of seafarers and the image of ships on the cosmic sea ultimately helped Israel reconceptualize the sea and humanity's and God's relationship to it.

2. "*The Sea was a Barrier and Not a Highway*"

In his classic work, *Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, George Adam Smith writes that "the sea was a barrier and

not a highway" for the Israelites.[7] He ascribes Israel's refusal or inability to embark for the Mediterranean Sea primarily to the givens of physical space, that is, to geography. It was "the inhospitable character of the coast," the fact that Israel had no usable harbor, that prevented the Israelites from becoming seafarers.[8] He then attributes the biblical conception of the sea to geography:

> And this [the geographical fact that Israel has no harbor] echoes through most of the Old Testament. The sea spreads for us for spectacle, for symbol, for music, for promise, but never for use… the sea was a barrier and not a highway… Throughout the language the sea is a horizon.[9]

In short, the writers of the Hebrew Bible conceived of the sea as an impenetrable wall because of geography, and both geography and cosmography prevented the Israelites from venturing out into the sea. Smith conveniently thought of perceived, conceived, and lived space as concurrent.

Smith's analysis of space, from the perspective of critical spatiality, appears naive, even simplistic. The relationship between perceived space, conceived space, and lived space is more complex and more dynamic than he seems to allow. Thus, while I agree with him that both Israelite geography and cosmography were hurdles to Israel's willingness and ability to embark—as I will explain below—Israelite cosmography was not as monolithic and inflexible as Smith assumes, nor Israel's geography as uninviting to seafarers. There were seafaring Israelites, "those who go down to the sea in ships" (Ps 107:23),[10] and their very presence in the sea, as precarious as that was,

helped transform Israelite conception of the sea and, in turn, of God.

a. *Cosmography (or Conceived Space)*

Ancient Israelites could speak of the cosmos as being made up of two parts, the heavens and the earth. Consider the first verse of Genesis: "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth" (1:1 NRSV; cf. Psalm 148). In contrast, they could also speak of a four-tiered cosmos, divisible into heaven, earth, sea, and Sheol (Job 11:8–9; cf. Ps 139:8–9).[11] But the most common conception of the cosmos was as a three-tiered structure made up of heaven, earth, and the underworld. This, for example, is the assumption of the Decalogue: "You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth" (Exod 20:4 NRSV).

The prevalent three-decker *Weltbild* is terra-centric. It places the dry land, the part of the cosmos that is inhabitable for human beings, at the center of the cosmos. In that sense, we can also say that the *Weltbild* is anthropocentric. However, neither *terra firma* nor *anthropos* is the dominant feature of the cosmos. Rather, water is. And the earth and its inhabitants can be said to enjoy an existence delimited and, in an important sense, threatened by the superabundant waters that surround the patch of dry ground, above, below, and all around. The sea, more than anything else, dominates the cosmos.

Within official Israelite cosmography as presented in the Hebrew Bible, there are two cosmic seas: the upper sea and the lower sea. The upper sea was thought to be separated from the lower sea by the firmament (Gen 1:6–8), a solid but permeable, dome-like structure, itself supported by columns (Ezek 1:22–26; Job 26:11). The earth, thought to be a flat

disk floating on the lower sea (Isa 40:22; cf. Ps 136:6), functions as a platform for terrestrial life and as a permeable barrier from the lower sea, corresponding to the firmament. The sea that surrounds the earth all around was thought of as the surface of the lower sea. In short, the cosmic seas surround the earth, above, below, and all around.

I would like to make three points in regard to the relationship between the earth and the sea within this cosmography.

First, the existence of the earth and the survival of life on the earth were understood as contingent on the defeat and expulsion of the sea from the earth. In theological terms, Israelite cosmography implies a deity who battled and defeated the sea in primordial time and continues to fight and expel the sea from the earth in historical time. As is well known, a number of biblical passages allude to God's primordial battle against the chaos sea and assume that *Chaoskampf* preceded the creation of the cosmos (Pss 29:3; 74:13–15; 93:3–4; Isa 51:9–11).[12] God, however, did not permanently destroy the chaos sea at creation. The threat of chaos, which the sea symbolizes and embodies, persists in time.[13] The worldwide flood during the time of Noah makes this point forcefully. The waters, which God allows to burst upward from "the fountains of the great deep" below the earth and to crash down from above through "the windows of the heavens" (Gen 7:11 NRSV), destroy all life on earth, save the sea creatures and those safely shut in in Noah's Ark (7:16). That is to say, the sea continues to threaten life on earth, and God must maintain the boundary between sea and land, as the psalmist (Ps 104:9) and the Joban poet (Job 38:8–11) realized, in order for earth and life on earth to survive. In short, God has and must continue to battle and restrain the sea for earth and earthly life to exist.

The second point is that life on earth can flourish because God releases, in a controlled and measured way, the waters of the supernal and infernal seas. As was made clear in the Noahide flood, terrestrial life cannot survive the onslaught of the chaos sea. But neither can it survive an absolute deprivation of its waters. Rather, God must allow various forms of precipitation to pass through the firmament through sluices, called "windows of heaven" or "doors of heaven,"[14] from the upper sea and the infernal waters to surge up through wells, springs, rivers, and lakes to water the earth. Without these waters, the earth would be a dry, desolate, and moribund place. Thus, if the expulsion of the sea is the first miracle that makes life on the earth possible, the controlled distribution of water is the second miracle that allows life to flourish on the earth. In short, life on earth is a double miracle involving at once the expulsion of the sea and the distribution of its waters.

Third, the cosmic sea around the earth was thought to mark the ends of the earth, thus to delimit the realm proper to human activity. In fact, the Hebrew phrase for "ends of the earth" (ʾap̄sē-ʾāreṣ) suggests this.

The Hebrew word ʾep̄es is a loanword from Mesopotamia and is related to the Akkadian noun *apsu*, the subterranean sea and the realm of Enki/Ea.[15] There is doubt concerning the suggested Mesopotamian etymology.[16] However, Arent J. Wensinck cites verses where the phrase ʾap̄sē-ʾāreṣ clearly preserves the original meaning "sea" for ʾep̄es. Zech 9:10b and Ps 72:8 both read:

> *mîyyām ʿad-yām*
> *wûminnāhār ʿad-ʾap̄sē-ʾāreṣ*
>
> from sea to sea
> and from the river to the ends/seas of the earth

In the first line above, "sea (*yām*)" parallels "sea (*yām*)." Between the first and second lines, "sea (*yām*) parallels "river (*nāhār*)," a common word pair, and "sea (*yām*)" also parallels *ʾep̄es*. In the second line, "river (*nāhār*)" parallels *ʾep̄es*. These parallels strongly suggest that *ʾep̄es* means something like "sea" or "river," a meaning that preserves its Akkadian etymology. In light of these observations, I propose that, in the history of the development of the phrase, there was a time when *ʾap̄sē-ʾāreṣ* meant "seas (around) the earth." Later, because of the literal equation of the seas around the earth with the limits of the earth, the phrase came metaphorically to mean the "ends of the earth."[17] In other words, the phrase *ʾap̄sē-ʾāreṣ* itself suggests that the Israelites thought of the sea as marking the very limits of the earth.

In conclusion, we note that the seas above, below, and around the earth, as conceived in Israelite cosmography, were terrifying spaces, endowed with personified hostility toward God and orderly creation and diametrically opposed to the possibility of human life and flourishing. The seas were the literal ends of the earth and thus of everyday space. Martin Noth writes, "wherever the sea is mentioned in the Old Testament it… appears… as a menace on the edge of the inhabited world, whose dangerous and uncanny power is broken only when it meets dry land."[18] Is it any wonder, then, that few Israelites dared embark for the sea?

b. Geography (or Perceived Space)

George Smith, in his characteristically lyric style, writes of "the inhospitable character of the [Mediterranean] coast":

> I have thrice sailed along this coast on a summer afternoon with the western sun illuminating it, and I remember no break in the long line of foam where land and sea met, no single spot where the land gave way and welcomed the sea to itself. On each occasion the air was quiet, yet all along the line was disturbance. It seemed as if the land were everywhere saying to the sea: I do not wish you, I do not need you.[19]

Various geographers and historians have repeated and perpetuated Smith's view that the Israelites were not a seafaring people because Israel had no harbor on the Mediterranean coast. For example, Noth writes, "the [Mediterranean] coast of Palestine, which is accompanied by a straight line of low-lying dunes, is almost entirely lacking in natural harbours which might have tempted the inhabitants to go in for seafaring and might have attracted foreign sailors."[20] Yohanan Aharoni agrees: There was a "lack of convenient harbours and natural anchorages."[21] Philippe Reymond articulates a common conclusion to these observations. He writes that there was "une sorte de hiatus entre la vie de la mer et la vie de l'Israélite" and explains that the typical Israelite was "un terrien, un paysan qui a peur de la mer."[22] Noth goes farther and claims that "seafaring and sea-trading played no part at all in Israel."[23]

According to many scholars, not only geography, but geopolitics also contributed to Israel's landbound life. By the end of the era of the judges, all Israelite tribes appear to have

had lost control of the Mediterranean coast to the Philistines and the Phoenicians.[24] Furthermore, Israel's access to the Red Sea to the south was challenged and often blocked off by the Edomites. In short, it appears that Israel was landlocked by the beginning of the monarchic period.

To summarize, I agree with the majority of scholars that, for reasons of cosmography, geography, and geopolitics, Israel was mostly a landbound people. However, scholars have overstated the case in claiming that "seafaring and sea-trading played no part at all in Israel." The sea was certainly not a highway for the Israelites. But neither was it only a barrier. It was a road, a road less traveled by, certainly, but a road the Israelites often wanted to try out and sometimes did. The story of those who went down to the sea and dared to transgress a cosmographical boundary into a space of chaos left a small but indelible mark on the pages of the Hebrew Bible and, more consequentially, in Israel's conception of space and of God that is worthy of careful study.

3. Seafaring in Ancient Israel (or Lived Space)

Not all scholars agree with the portrayal of Israel as a people who were fearful of the sea and landbound due to the givens of conceptual and physical space. Robert Stieglitz, building on the former work of S. Yeivin and Cyrus Gordon, has since 1971 repeatedly argued that "the sea played a most significant role in the history of ancient Israel."[25]

In his 1971 dissertation, Stieglitz characterized the era of the judges as a time when native Canaanites, the Sea Peoples, and the emerging Israelite tribes engaged in a "struggle for the coast."[26] He acknowledged that Manasseh and Dan, originally coastal tribes, lost control of the coast during this period to different contingencies of the Sea

Peoples, the Sikkuls (or Tjekker) and the Philistines. However, Stieglitz optimistically judged that the tribes of Asher and Zebulun successfully gained and maintained control over "almost the entire coastal strip from the vicinity of Tyre to Jaffa" into the time of the monarchy.[27] This position has failed to garner support, and Stieglitz himself has more recently revised his position. He writes, "the Canaanite coast of the Early Iron Age was dominated by the Sea Peoples and the remaining coastal Canaanites, those called 'Phoenicians' by Homer and the later Greeks."[28] He has correctly come to agree with the majority of scholars that Asher, Dan, Manasseh, and Zebulun lost control over the coast, leaving Israel without access to the Mediterranean Sea by the time of David.

Stieglitz's most significant contribution to the ongoing debate concerning Israel and seafaring is his reconstruction of "the maritime policies of the Hebrew kings."[29] In this regard, Stieglitz sees Israel's alliance with Tyre as central, which began under David, was strengthened by Solomon, and continued in modified form into the 8th century BCE.

The inception of the alliance is connected to David's military successes: chiefly, his victories over the Philistines and the acquisition of control over the Mediterranean coast from Dor to Tell Qasile, just north of Jaffa; and the subjugation of Edom, which gave him an access point to the Red Sea (2 Sam 8:13–14; 1 Chr 18:12–13). That David won access to the two major seas of the Near East and defeated the Philistines likely attracted the favorable attention of the Tyrians. The alliance, once formed, benefited both parties at the expense of the Philistines. Israel battered the Philistines on land, and Tyre wrested dominance over the lucrative Mediterranean trade from the Philistines. Furthermore,

Israel exported agricultural goods to Tyre, and Tyre her exotic goods to Israel.[30]

Solomon strengthened and expanded the alliance his father had formed with Tyre: he married a Tyrian princess;[31] he imported Tyrian goods, labor, and skill for the construction of the Temple and his palaces (1 Kgs 9:10–14);[32] and he established a lucrative joint sea-trade venture at Ezion-geber, near Elath on the Red Sea (1 Kgs 9:26–28; 2 Chr 8:17–18), and possibly also at Dor (1 Kgs 4:11).[33] The sea-trade venture continued the Israelite-Tyrian policy of weakening Philistine operations in the Mediterranean and additionally challenged Egyptian dominance of the Arabian sea-trade. Thus, soon after Solomon's death and the dissolution of the United Kingdom, Shishak of Egypt destroyed Solomon's fort at Ezion-geber during his 925 BCE military campaign through Judah and Israel.[34] Evidently, Israel and Tyre's operations in the Red Sea were successful enough to have concerned Egypt.

After Solomon, Jehoshaphat attempted to refortify Ezion-geber and rebuilt a fleet there (1 Kgs 22:47–49; 2 Chr 20:35–37). Stieglitz is probably correct in arguing that the nautical knowledge necessary to build seafaring ships and to launch a long-distance operation was not native to Judah.[35] The necessary knowledge came either directly from Tyre or, more likely, indirectly through Israel (2 Chr 20:35–37).[36] Stieglitz argues that an alliance between Jerusalem, Samaria, and Tyre, which continued long after Solomon, explains the exchange of goods and knowledge that made Jehoshaphat's sea venture possible. A glance at the marriage relationships illustrates this well: Ahab married Jezebel, daughter of the Tyrian king Ethbaal II (1 Kgs 16:31), and Jehoshaphat allied himself to Ahab by marriage, presumably by marrying his son Jehoram to Ahab's daughter, Athaliah (2 Chr 18:1; 2 Kgs 8:18). These alliances explain, first, how Ahaziah,

Ahab's son, had the necessary nautical knowledge and, second, why he helped Jehoshaphat (re)build a fleet of ships at Ezion-geber (1 Kgs 22:49; 2 Chr 20:35–37). Jehoshaphat's failed attempt to emulate Solomon was an international affair that involved Judah, Israel, and Tyre.

There is no other mention of sea-ventures after Jehoshaphat. But it is possible that Judean kings continued to embark for the gold of Ophir from Elath until Edom wrested Elath from Judean control for the final time during Ahaz's reign (2 Kgs 16:5–6). Two observations argue for this. First, Uzziah rebuilt Elath (2 Kgs 14:22; 2 Chr 26:2), which his father Amaziah had taken back from Edom (2 Kgs 14:7). Because Elath is located at the juncture of the King's Highway and the Way of the Red Sea, important overland trade routes, it is possible that Uzziah rebuilt it primarily to protect and tax the passing caravans. However, Elath's location on the Red Sea with access to the Arabian market by sea may have tempted Uzziah to set sail. Second, a shard from Tell Qasile that reads "gold of 'Ophir," dated to circa 700 BCE, provides further evidence that Judeans may have continued to set sail for Ophir.[37] These are far from conclusive evidence, but they lend support to Stieglitz's thesis that Israel and Judah continued to nurture nautical ambitions and had an active maritime policy into the 8th c. BCE.

In sum, Israel and Judah were not seafaring peoples in the same way Tyre was. Seafaring was far from being the most important source of their economic and political fortunes. Agricultural, horticultural, and pastoral enterprises and controlling the overland trading routes were.[38] Nevertheless, the Israelites did embark for the Red Sea and also likely for the Mediterranean Sea alongside their key nautical ally, the Tyrians. These sea ventures were not always successful, and they were not carried out

continuously throughout Israel's history. But they demonstrate Israel's commitment to maritime trade and, importantly for our purposes, that seafaring was a lived reality for a small portion of the society and a conceptual reality for Israelite kings and their officials. Stieglitz also reminds us that the Israelites were well acquainted with the Tyrians, who the Israelites likely envied at some level. Ezekiel, for example, portrays the Tyrians as sitting "in the seat of gods, in the heart of the seas" (28:2) and in "Eden, the garden of God" (28:13). Ezekiel seems to have thought that to have mastery over the ways of the sea made the Tyrians god-like.

4. *The Transformation of the Sea into Everyday Space*

We have seen that the Israelites conceived of the sea as a fearsome, monstrous space, as space beyond ordinary space. The sea was thought to be a chaos deity God defeated in primordial time and an enduring chaotic force requiring divine restraint and management. At the same time, the sea was a known lived space for the Tyrians and, to a lesser extent, for Israelite seafarers. The contradiction between the sea as conceived in official cosmographies and the lived experiences of seafarers created a tension that, at some point, required resolution. Two psalms, Psalms 104 and 107, offer us glimpses into the thought processes involved in that resolution. In both psalms, the image of seafaring ships signals, by their conspicuous presence, the dramatic transformation of the conceptualization of the sea and of God. We turn first to Psalm 104.

a. Psalm 104

Psalm 104 is interesting for our investigation because it actually contains two distinct conceptualizations of the sea, the first of a cosmic sea congruous with the official Israelite cosmography and the second of a sea that might be characterized as everyday space.[39]

In verses 6–13, we meet the cosmic sea. In verses 7–9, we have a personified sea that, at YHWH's rebuke, flees and whose waters run up mountains and down valleys until they reach their appointed place, presumably outside the earth to form its border. YHWH, it seems, regards this sea as a foe and establishes a boundary it is forbidden to cross to cover the earth (104:9). In contrast, verses 10–13 speak of the controlled distribution of the waters of the sea. In these verses, we see God making springs gush up from the infernal sea (104:10) and rain fall from the supernal sea (104:13). In sum, Ps 104:6–13 depict the double miracle that makes it possible for life to flourish on the earth: the expulsion of the sea from the earth and the measured distribution of its waters to fructify the earth. This is the sea as a force of chaos that calls for God's dual mastery to cast out and let in.

We meet a diametrically opposed conception of the sea in verses 25–26. Whereas the sea is depicted as being expelled from the earth in verses 7–9 to safeguard earthly life, verses 25–26 place earthlings, represented by the ships, directly in the sea.

> Yonder is the sea, awesome and vast,
> there are creeping things without number,
> small creatures with large ones.
> There go the ships,

> Leviathan whom you formed to play with. (104:25–26)

On the one hand, the point is clear and simple: The sea is open for human travel. On the other, a complex and remarkable conceptual transformation has taken place between verses 6–13 and verses 25–26. The sea is no longer the ends of the earth, and cosmic space has become everyday space. We can analyze the transformation in four steps.

First, the sea and Leviathan are distinguished and separated from one another. In the Ugaritic *Baal Cycle*, Yamm, the sea deity, could be identified with the sea dragon, called either Tunnan or Litan. At the beginning of the conflict between Mot and Baal, Mot says to Baal,

> When you struck down Litan, the fleeing snake,
> Annihilated the twisting snake,
> The powerful one with seven heads. (*KTU* 1.5 I 1–3)[40]

Litan is the Ugaritic cognate for Hebrew *liwyāṯān*, "Leviathan." And "fleeing serpent," "twisting snake," and "the powerful one with seven heads" are epithets for the one Litan.[41] Furthermore, the narrative context of these lines suggests that Litan here refers to Yamm, whom Baal indeed struck down. There is further textual evidence for the equation of Litan and Yamm. In *KTU* 1.3 III 38–42, Anat lists the enemies of Baal whom she claims to have defeated:[42]

> Surely I struck down Yamm, the Beloved of El,
> Surely I finished off River, the Great God,

Surely I bound Tunnan and destroyed him.
I struck down the Twisty Serpent
The Powerful One with Seven Heads.

lmḫšt.mdd.ʾilym
lklt.nhr.ʾil.rbm
lʾštbm.tnn.ʾištmxh
mḫšt.bṯn.ʿqltn
šlyṭ.d.šbʿt.rʾašm[43]

Mark Smith and Wayne Pitard note that epithets like "Twisty Serpent" and "the Powerful One with Seven Heads" seldom appear independent of a proper name.[44] Thus, they argue that it is unlikely that the epithets in lines 41–42 introduce a new character. In their opinion, the epithets describe Tunnan, the Ugaritic cognate for the Hebrew *tannin* ("dragon/sea monster"), mentioned just above in line 40. Then, since Tunnan and Litan share the same epithets, it follows that they can be equated. Finally, Smith and Pitard argue that the "trice-repeated *l* [*la*, translated asseveratively as "surely"] in lines 38–40 argues for an intimate relationship" among the three lines and so also among the monsters mentioned therein: Yamm, Nahar, and Tunnan.[45] Without pressing for absolute identity between Yamm, Nahar, Tunnan, and Litan, we can recognize a fluidity in the identity of Yamm and the sea monster Litan.[46] Yamm and Litan could be and, it seems, were in fact thought to be the same in Ugarit.

We see a similar equation of the sea and the sea dragon in the Hebrew Bible. In Psalm 74, the sea, sea dragons, and Leviathan appear as parallel terms and are likely to be understood as referring to one and the same entity (74:13–14). Isa 51:9–11 also conflates sea monsters and the spatial sea. On the basis of these and other passages, we can see that the separation of the sea and the sea dragon

is not a given in the Hebrew Bible. Thus, that they are distinguished in Ps 104:25–26 is a non-trivial detail. The ability to conceive of the sea as a spatial reality distinct from the sea monster, which we see in other biblical passages, I suggest, is an important first step toward the full demythologization of the sea.[47]

The second step in the transformation of the cosmic sea into everyday space involves the pacification of the sea. The pacification of the hostile sea is not an automatic corollary to the distinction and separation of the sea monster and the spatial sea. The spatial sea can, even after its separation from the sea monster, retain its mythological potency as a chaotic force. This is the case in Exodus 15, where the sea retains its mythic, destructive characteristics (15:1, 4–5, 8, 10), and in Daniel 7, where the great sea can be argued to remain mythic despite the fact that monstrous beasts come up from, therefore are distinct from, the sea (7:2–3). The sea in Ps 104:25–26, in contrast, has been defanged of its mythic ferocity. God has no need to rebuke it, and it does not flee from God. To be certain, the sea is an "awesome and vast" place. But, rather than being destructive and chaotic, it appears as a container for small and large creatures and, among them, God's prized plaything, Leviathan.

This brings us to the third step. Leviathan is domesticated. Leviathan appears four times in the Hebrew Bible outside Psalm 104: Isa 27:1; Ps 74:14; Job 3:8; and 40:25–41:26. Each time, Leviathan is a mythic entity. Job 40–41 implies that God created Leviathan, as he says he did the Behemoth (40:15), and this observation has led to speculations that Leviathan is a crocodile.[48] Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that Leviathan in Job remains mythological, for it breathes fire and smoke, unlike a crocodile (41:10–13). In meaningful contrast to these

occurrences, Leviathan in Ps 104:26, though its name recalls a fearsome and monstrous entity, appears as a creature "God formed to play with." The signifier "Leviathan" no longer points to a mythic sea monster but rather to a creature of delight, pacified and domesticated to sport among other sea creatures.

Fourth and finally, the ships confirm the transformation of the cosmic sea into everyday space. Without the ships, one could argue that the sea has been pacified and Leviathan domesticated sufficiently to serve as God's play pool and rubber ducky but that they remain hostile to human beings, much like the sea in Exodus 15 and Leviathan in Job 40–41. The presence of ships, however, dispels this possibility and confirms that the sea has indeed undergone a total transformation from a cosmic sea to space suitable for human travel. To put it in other words, the image of seafaring ships that first raised the difference between the lived space of seafarers and the conceived space of cosmographers to conscious thought appears in the psalm as a confirming indicator that the conception of the sea has made a radical shift to account for the lived experiences of seafarers. The sea has been reconceived as this worldly, everyday space.

In conclusion, we must note that, concomitant with the sea, YHWH has also changed. YHWH whose identity as creator and king was once tied to having defeated the sea and the sea dragon in mortal combat is in Ps 104:25–26 represented as exercising a more pacific form of sovereignty: he plays with the sea dragon in the sea. The result, I would argue, is a picture of a deity whose power and authority overwhelm into joyful submission both the sea and the sea dragon and, along with them, all the cosmos and all creatures, small and large. The power of the sea has decreased. God's has increased.

b. Psalm 107

Psalm 107, likely a post-exilic work, is a structural and thematic unity that evinces considerable literary craftsmanship.[49] The main body of the psalm (107:4–32) may be divided into four sections (107:4–9, 10–16, 17–22, and 23–32). They form a chiastic structure. The two middle sections speak of those who suffer imprisonment and other ills on account of their own sins (107:11, 17). The two framing sections deal with those who find themselves in the wilderness or the sea, two typical chaos regions in the Hebrew Bible, and are in need of deliverance. In each section, the afflicted cry out to God and God delivers them (107:6, 13, 19, 28). And each section concludes with an exhortation that the redeemed give thanks to YHWH for his faithfulness (*ḥesed*) and his wondrous works (*nip̄lᵊʾôṯ*) (107:8, 15, 21, 31). On the whole, the main body of the psalm portrays a cyclic pattern: distress, cry for help, deliverance, and thanksgiving. Within the cycle, the wilderness, darkness, imprisonment, and the sea are metaphors for various but typical experiences of suffering. At the same time, these images portray concrete hardships that real persons could experience.

Of particular interest for our purposes is the fourth section (107:23–32) concerning those who go down to the sea. In this climactic section, the actual and the mythic are brought together in a dramatic confrontation. On the one hand, the passage depicts an everyday scene of people going to work. On the other, there can be no doubt that these people, seafarers who go down to the sea, work in a cosmic space of immense power and danger.

> Those who go down to the sea in ships,
> who do work on the mighty waters,
> they saw the deeds of YHWH,
> his wonders in the deep.
> He spoke and raised the stormy wind,
> which lifted up its waves.
> They rose to heaven, they went down to the depths.
> Their soul melted away because of calamity.
> They reeled and staggered like drunkards,
> and all their skill was confounded (107:23–27).

The psalmist refers to the sea as "the mighty waters" (107:23), "the deep" (107:24), and "the depths" (107:26). These terms are often used to describe the cosmic chaos sea and evoke the mythological cosmography we reviewed above in which the sea is a boundary to human life.[50] To transgress this boundary is to step beyond the realm of human activity and to reach out for the "seat of gods" (Ezek 28:2), thus to invite the ire of God and destruction. Yet that is exactly what the seafarers do, step into a cosmic, mythic space as a matter of everyday life.[51]

Thus two conflicting motifs are brought together in this passage, and this should have meant destruction for the seafarers. However, they not only survive the experience— duly marked as miraculous—their experience is commended for proclamation to the entire worshipping community.

> Let them thank YHWH for his steadfast love,
>   for his wonders to humankind.
> And let them exalt him in the congregation of the
>   people,
> and praise him in the assembly of the elders
>   (107:31–32).

This is remarkable. By holding up the experience of the seafarers, which was likely strange to the vast majority of the congregation, the psalmist focalizes the perspective of the entire congregation through nautical eyes. The congregation is being led, not only to thank the God of the seafarers, but in fact to see their God as this God and to interpret their experiences through the conceptual framework adumbrated in the seafarer's experience. And what this involves is a radical reconceptualization of God and the sea, that is, of theology and cosmography.

We saw in our analysis of Psalm 104 that the reconceptualization of the sea happens concomitant with the reconceptualization of God and his relationship to the sea, and it is no different in Psalm 107. The transformation of the cosmic sea into everyday space that occurs in Ps 107:23–32 accompanies a surprising theological development of YHWH as one who causes the chaotic behavior of the sea (107:25–26) and as one who calms it (107:29).

Throughout most of the Hebrew Bible, YHWH defeats the chaos sea (Psalm 74; Isaiah 51), rebukes it (Psalm 104), keeps it at bay (Psalm 104; Job 38), establishes the earth on it (Psalm 93), manipulates it (Exodus 14–15), and even receives praise from it (Psalm 148). But he is rarely depicted as stirring the sea into a state of chaos as he is in Psalm 107.[52] The biblical writers mostly agreed with the peoples of Ugarit and Mesopotamia and attributed the destructive behavior of the sea to the sea. Within this framework, the calming of the sea was the consequence of YHWH acting against the chaos sea. In short, the assumption was that YHWH and the sea are distinct, antagonistic entities. Psalm 107 departs from this tradition and radically reimagines YHWH's relationship with the sea and, in so doing, remaps the cosmos. The thesis that YHWH absorbs the qualities of El and Baal is well-known in biblical

scholarship.[53] What we have in Psalm 107, I propose, is a rare instance in which YHWH absorbs the qualities of the sea deity, Yamm.

We can detect an understandable resistance to the idea that YHWH subsumes Yamm's powers in the commentaries. For example, Mitchell Dahood writes that "the relationship between Yahweh and Abyss (// Leviathan) is essentially combative" and preserves a theology that distinguishes YHWH from the sea.[54] So too Hans-Joachim Kraus, who writes, "The violent sea obeys the orders of God."[55] More recently, Frank Lothar Hossfeld and Eric Zenger write that the fundamental message of Ps 104:23–32 is that "YHWH can defeat the sea's chaos."[56] These commentators perpetuate the common theological framework in which YHWH and the sea are distinct and separate entities who stand in opposition to each other. In so doing, they miss the psalmist's radical theological claim, funded by a strong monotheistic impulse, that YHWH alone is responsible for the sea's roiling and calm, for the good and the bad that his people experience.

It is important to note, in this regard, that the psalmist refers to the sea by recognizably mythological terms, as noted above. It is equally important to note that it is YHWH who manipulates the sea's behavior by means of the storm:

> He spoke and raised the stormy wind,
> which lifted up its waves. (107:25)

> He made the storm be still,
> and the waves of the sea were hushed. (107:29)

The sea here is an inert material with no agency of its own. It roars or quiets down as the consequence of divine action. That is to say, even when the sea appears to act like the

cosmic sea of chaos, it is nevertheless YHWH who stands behind the phenomenon. To put it strongly, YHWH, the only God, has obviated the theological need for Yamm and has subsumed his functions.

YHWH's absorption of Yamm has important theological consequences: YHWH is the sole cause of both weal and woe, of the bad and the good. It also has important consequences for the conception of space: No space is beyond YHWH's control. YHWH is not the God of the hills only (1 Kgs 20:23), of fertile fields only (Ps 104:10–18), but equally of the desert (Ps 107:4–9) and of the sea (107:23–32). The consequence of this theology is that it is within God's power and freedom to open all and any space for humanity, to make every space everyday space. Gert T. M. Prinsloo, writing about the Book of Jonah, argues that "[a] relationship with [YHWH] turns even the most unlikely locations, a storm-battered ship or a violence-ridden city, into meeting places, points of contact between the divine and human spheres."[57] He makes the perceptive observation that theology is determinative of spatiality. Psalm 107 presents for our consideration a similar but more radical thought: YHWH is always already there in the off-center places, even in the farthest edges of the world, even in the seas around the earth, as sovereign lord. It is not only in Nineveh and Babylon but even in the heart of the sea that one can dare hope to find YHWH. The theological meaning of the transformation of the sea into everyday space is that God is everywhere regnant in the cosmos.

Psalm 107:24 states that the seafarers saw "the deeds of YHWH and his wonders" in the sea. We might be tempted to interpret YHWH's deeds and wonders, in accord with the traditional framework in which YHWH and Yamm stand in opposition, as YHWH's battle and victory over the sea and all that the sea symbolizes and embodies. But the psalmist

teaches us another way. Within the radically monotheistic theology of the psalm, we must acknowledge YHWH behind the turbulence of the sea as well as its calm. YHWH's deeds and wonders are equally the sea's calm and its violence. For some, this knowledge may prove comforting, to be able to ascribe all things to God who remains sovereign. For others, it may prove a stumbling block, that God is the source of both the good and the bad. The psalmist, in any case, presents it as something to be proclaimed in thanksgiving:

> Let them thank YHWH for his steadfast love,
> for his wonders to humankind.

The psalmist, it seems, would push the congregation of the people and the assembly of the elders toward a decision.

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Endnotes

[1] For an overview of the term "daily life" as it has been used in the historiography of the ancient Near East, see Daniel C. Snell, "The Ordinarity of the Peculiar Institution," in *Life and Culture in the Ancient Near East* (eds. Richard E. Averbeck et al.; Bethesda, MD: CDL, 2003), 3–8. The basic way to define "everyday space" is as the place where "daily life" takes place.

[2] From Benjamin R. Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature* (3rd ed.; Bethesda, MD: CDL, 2005), 488. See also Wayne Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1998), 130.

[3] Foster, *Before the Muses*, 488.

[4] For biblical reflexes of this conception, see Isa 40:22, where the earth is pictured as a "round disk." For the notion that the earth is flat and floats on the sea, see Ps 136:6, where the verb rq' implies that the earth is beaten flat and the preposition *el* implies that the sea is under the earth. See the discussion in Paul Seely, "The Geographical Meaning of 'Earth' and 'Seas' in Genesis 1:10," *Westminster Theological Review* 59 (1997): 231–55, esp. 236–39 and 246–50.

⁵ For the raft as an untrustworthy vessel, consider the following lines from "The Favor of Kurigalzu": "I, like a [drifting] raft, have none to put confidence in me, / like a sunken vessel, I was not deemed useful, / the shore gave me up" (Foster, *Before the Muses*, 282).

⁶ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith; Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 39. Lefebvre (ibid.) speaks of "the triad of the perceived, the conceived, and the lived" spaces. Edward W. Soja (*Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* [Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996], 53–82) adapts Lefebvre's triadic conception of space and offers us a modified "trialectics of spatiality." Gert Prinsloo ("Place, Space and Identity in the Ancient Mediterranean World: Theory and Practice with Reference to the Book of Jonah," in *Constructions of Space V: Place, Space and Identity in the Ancient Mediterranean World* [eds. Gert T. M. Prinsloo and Christl M. Maier; LHBOTS 490; New York: T & T Clark, 2008], 1–24 [6]) summarizes Soja's discussion: "Firstspace (physical/concrete/perceived space), that is, the description of a place or an environment; Secondspace (imagined/conceived/abstract space), 'space produced by language, metaphor, and ideology'; Thirdspace (lived space), the confrontation between various social groups and their space(s)."

⁷ George Adam Smith, *Historical Geography of the Holy Land* (25ᵗʰ ed.; London: Harper & Row, 1966), 105.

⁸ Ibid., 103.

⁹ Ibid., 104–105.

¹⁰ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical translations are my own.

¹¹ The four-tiered world matches what we find in Sumer: heaven, earth, Apšu, and underworld. See W. G. Lambert, "The Cosmology of Sumer and Babylon," in *Ancient Cosmologies* (ed. Carmen Blacker and Michael Loewe; London: George Allen & Unwin, 1975), 42–65 (48).

¹² See, for example, 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: Eerdmans, 2006); John Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Paul K.-K. Cho, *Myth, History, and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

[13] Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988).

[14] For "windows of heaven," see Gen 7:11; 8:2; 2 Kgs 7:2, 19; Isa 24:18; Mal 3:10. For "doors of heaven," see Ps 78:23. See also Ps 135:7 and Jer 10:13; 51:16, where if we read *bdq* for *brq*, we may have here another reference to the sluices of the firmament.

[15] For a brief survey of the issues involved and a suggested Semitic etymology, see Bob Becking, "Ends of the Earth אפסי ארץ," *DDD*: 300–301.

[16] See ibid.

[17] For a counter argument, see Philippe Reymond, *L'eau, sa vie, et sa signification dans l'Ancien Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1958), 171.

[18] Martin Noth, *The History of Israel* (trans. Stanley Godman; London: Adam and Charles Black, 1958), 13.

[19] Smith, *Historical Geography*, 105.

[20] Noth, *History of Israel*, 13.

[21] Yohanan Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography* (trans. A. F. Rainey. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 9.

[22] Reymond, *L'eau,* 163.

[23] Noth, *History of Israel*, 13.

[24] Cyrus H. Gordon, "The Mediterranean Factor in the Old Testament," in *Congress Volume Bonn 1962* (VTSupp 9; Leiden: Brill, 1963): 19–31 (31).

[25] Robert R. Stieglitz, *Maritime Activity in Ancient Israel* (Diss, Brandeis University, 1971), 11; Gordon, "Mediterranean Factor"; S. Yeivin, "Did the Kingdoms of Israel Have a Maritime Policy?" *JQR*, New Series, 50.3 (1960): 193–228.

[26] Stieglitz, *Maritime Activity*, 120.

[27] Ibid., 145; see Gen 49:13.

[28] Robert R. Stieglitz, "Hebrew seafaring in the biblical period," in *Mediterranean Historical Review* 15:1 (2000): 5–15 (8).

[29] Stieglitz, *Maritime Activity*, 147. See also his, "Hebrew Seafaring," 9; Yeivin, "Maritime Policy"; Oded Borowski, *Daily Life in Biblical Times* (SBLABS 5; Atlanta: SBL, 2003), 58–59.

[30] Ibid., 153–54.

[31] Among Solomon's foreign wives was a Tyrian princess; see 1 Kgs 11:1, where Sidon is likely a general term for both Sidon and Tyre. Psalm 45 may have been composed on the occasion of Solomon's marriage to this Tyrian princess.

[32] The exact nature of Solomon's relationship to the Tyrian King Hiram is ambiguous. 1 Kgs 9:10–14 suggest that Solomon may have been less than his equal.

[33] Stieglitz, *Maritime Activity*, 155–57; "Hebrew Seafaring," 10; and Yeivin, "Maritime Policy," 204.

[34] Egyptian attempts to wrest control of the maritime trade in the Red Sea may go further back to during Solomon's reign, resulting in rather a marriage alliance; see Yeivin, "Maritime Policy," 203–204, 211–12.

[35] Stieglitz, *Maritime Activity*, 163–64.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid., 171–72; idem. "Hebrew Seafaring," 10.

[38] John H. Holladay, Jr., "How Much Is that in…? Monetization, Money, Royal Estates, and Empires" in *Exploring the Longue Durée: Essays in Honor of Lawrence E. Stager* (ed. David Schloen; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 207–222.

[39] These two depictions may belong to two separate redactional layers of the psalm. See Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 3, A Commentary on Psalms 101–150* (Hermeneia; ed. Klaus Baltzer; trans. Linda M. Maloney; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 46–48. Hossfeld and Zenger (ibid., 48) note that 104:25–26 "expands the basic text's division of space between heaven (vv. 1–4) and earth (vv. 10–23) to a cosmic threeness of heaven, earth, and sea."

[40] Cited from Mark S. Smith, "The Baal Cycle," in *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry* (SBLWAW 9; Atlanta: Scholars, 1997), 81–180.

[41] Cf. Isa 27:1; Ps 74:13–14.

[42] The thorny issue of whether Anat claims to have fought and defeated Yamm need not detain us here. See the discussion of this issue in Mark S. Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle*, *Volume I* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 100–101 and n. 197 and Mark S. Smith and Wayne T. Pitard, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle, Volume II: Introduction with Text, Translation and Commentary of* KTU/CAT *1.3–1.4* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 244–45.

[43] Cited from Smith and Pitard, *UBC II*.

[44] Smith & Pitard, *UBC II*, 251–52.

[45] Ibid., 252–53. For an opposing view, see Brendon C. Benz, "Yamm as the Personification of Chaos? A Linguistic and Literary Argument for a Case of Mistaken Identity," in *Creation and Chaos: A Reconsideration of Hermann Gunkel's Chaoskampf Hypothesis* (Eds. JoAnn Scurlock and Richard H. Beal; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 127–45.

[46] On the topic of the fluidity of the identity of deities in the ancient Near East, see Benjamin Sommer, *Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[47] See Gen 1:21; Isa 27:1; Ezek 29:3; 32:2; Amos 9:3; Jon 2:1, 11; Job 40–41.

[48] David J. A. Clines, *Job 38–42* (WBC 18B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011), 1190–92.

[49] See Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 99–101, 104–108.

[50] See, for example, Herbert G. Mays, "Some Cosmic Connotations of *Mayim Rabbîm*, 'Many Waters,'" *JBL* 74 (1955): 9–21.

[51] An apt modern analogy might be the image of astronauts flying out to outer space and into a black hole.

[52] We find an exception in Jonah 1 (v. 4). See Prinsloo, "Place, Space and Identity," 12–13.

[53] Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth, Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973); Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (2nd ed; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

[54] Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms III, 101–150* (AB 17A; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 87.

[55] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1–59* (trans. Hilton C. Oswald' Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 329.

[56] Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 107. They do record their surprise that YHWH is indeed depicted as responsible for the chaotic behavior of the sea: "YHWH's power, which both causes the storm at sea (!) and stops it again" (ibid., 108).

[57] Prinsloo, "Place, Space and Identity," 24.