

ANCIENT OF DAYS

I. In a throne vision with mythological traits, God is depicted as the 'attiq yôminlyômayyâ', traditionally rendered as 'the Ancient of Days' (Dan 7:9.13.22). The expression is to be interpreted as a construct chain expressing a genetivus partitivus. The basic meaning of the common Semitic root 'TQ is 'to be advanced'. The expression then can be rendered as 'advanced in days' implying that the deity was seen as one 'far gone in years' or 'ancient of days'. The background of the imagery in Dan 7 has been looked for in Canaanite mythology (EMERTON 1958; COLLINS 1977; 1993); in a Mesopotamian text (KVANVIG 1988); and in contemporary Hellenistic/Egyptian mythological patterns (VAN HENTEN 1993). The imagery of the Ancient of Days has influenced the throne visions in *1 Enoch*.

II. The struggle between Antiochus IV Epiphanes/'the →Sea' and the 'one like a →Son of Man' in Dan 7 has been interpreted as a late rewriting of the mythic themes in the Ugaritic Baal-cycle in which the younger god →Baal empowered by the older →El defeats the inimical Yammu (Sea; e.g. EMERTON 1958; COLLINS 1993). Although this view does not go unchallenged (FERCH 1980) and although it provokes problems on the level of interpretation, it must be conceded that in the Ugaritic texts El has some traits in common with the imagery of the 'Ancient of Days'. El is depicted as venerably aged; the grey hair of his beard (*šbt dqn*) is referred to (*KTU* 1.3 v:2. 25; 1.4 v:4; 1.18 i:12 [restored]). Moreover, he receives the epithet *ab šnm*, 'father of the years', by which he is portrayed as the oldest among the gods. A proto-sinaitic inscription has *d ṭb*, to be read as **zu šiba(ti)*, 'the grey(-haired) one', as an epithet of El, which is here probably a designation of →Ptah (M. DIJKSTRA, Semitic Worship at Serabit el-Khadim (Sinai), *ZAH* 10 [1997] 92-93).

However, the rendition 'father of the years' for *ab šnm* read as **abu šanima* has not remained unchallenged. This challenge is provoked by two different features. 1) The

plural of the Ugaritic noun for 'years' is normally construed in the feminine *šnt* and not the masculine *šnm*. Therefore, scholars have been arguing for different interpretations of the noun *šnm*. J. REIDER (Etymological Studies in Biblical Hebrew, *VT* 4 [1954] 283-284) and A. A. WIEDER (Three Philological Notes, *Bulletin of the Institute of Jewish Studies* 2 [1974] 108-109) proposed a translation '→Exalted Ones'. M. POPE (*El in the Ugaritic Texts* [VTSup 2; Leiden 1955] 34-36) suggested 'Father of the Eldest' which would indicate both the high age and the consequent weakness of El. 2) *šnm* occurs as the second element in the binomial deity *Ṭknn-w-Šnm*, →Thukamunawa-→Shunama. H. GESE (*RAAM* 97-98. 193-104), A. JIRKU (*Šnm* (Schunama), der Sohn des Gottes 'Il, *ZAW* 82 [1970] 278-279) and C. H. GORDON (El, Father of *Šnm*, *JNES* 35 [1976] 261-262; FERCH 1980:82-83) read the expression *ab šnm* as an epithet for El: 'the father of Shunama'. Besides, J. AISTLEITNER (*WUS* Nr. 312) interprets *šnm* as "Die Bezeichnung der hochgelegenen himmlischen Wohnung Els". These alternative interpretations, however, are not convincing: 1) The epithet *ab šnm* occurs only in a formulaic sentence: "She/He/They appeared in the encampment of El and entered the camp of the King, the Father of Years" (Baal-epic: *KTU* 1.1 iii:23-34; 1.2 v:6; 1.3 v:7-8; 1.4 iv:23-24; 1.5 vi:1-2; 1.6 i:35-36; Aqhat: *KTU* 1.17 vi:48-49). 2) Although *šnm* is the regular plural for the feminine noun 'year', it should be noted that other nouns have variant plural-forms; e.g. *riš*, 'head' is attested in the plural as *rišt* as well as *rišm* (COLLINS 1993:127n. 25). 3) The deity Shunama occurs in Ugaritic texts only together with Thukamuna (D. PARDEE, *Ṭukamuna wa Šunama*, *UF* 20 [1988] 195-199). Although Shunama, together with Thukamuna, is presented as a son of El in the Ugaritic texts (*KTU* 1.65:1-4; 1.114) and the deity Thukamunawa-Shanuma holds a relatively prominent position in the Ugaritic pantheon-lists (J. C. DE MOOR, The Semitic Pantheon of Ugarit, *UF* 2 [1970] 215-216) it is not quite clear why the formulaic epithet

ab šnm should refer to a deity not attested on its own in the mythological texts.

KVANVIG (1988) has tried to relate elements of the throne vision in Dan 7 with a seventh century BCE Assyrian text: 'The Underworld Vision of an Assyrian Prince' (SAA III, No. 32) in which 15 deities are portrayed in hybrid forms. Although this might give some religio-historical background to the vision of the four beasts, the depiction of God as 'ancient of days' is not elucidated by it, since in the Assyrian text an expression or epithet parallel to 'attiq yômînyômayyâ' cannot be found (COLLINS 1993:128-131).

VAN HENTEN (1993) has related the imagery of Dan 7 with contemporary Hellenistic-Egyptian material. He interprets the 'eleventh horn' as referring to Antiochus IV Epiphanes and as a character framed on the model of →Seth-→Typhon. As regards the designation 'Ancient of Days', VAN HENTEN (1993:227-228) refers to the fact that →Zeus has been regarded as the "author of days and years" and that →Thot was venerated as "lord of time" and "lord of old age".

III. In the designation 'Ancient of Days' two traits of Gods are interwoven. The concept of God's eternal existence (e.g. Ps 9:8; 29:10; 90:2; see also →El-olam) expressed in epithets as 'ābî 'ād, 'everlasting father' (Isa 9:5) and *melek 'ôlām*, 'eternal king' (Jer 10:10). The notion of God as an old man popular in Hellenistic times (HARTMAN & DI LELLA 1978:217-218) may have traces in the OT (e.g. Job 36:26).

In the throne vision of Dan 7 the Ancient of Days appears sitting at the head of the divine →Council. From the continuation of the vision it becomes clear that the Ancient of Days is identical with Yahweh, the God of Israel. He takes away the power from the fourth beast and empowers the one like a →Son of Man with 'dominion, glory and kingdom' in order to rule righteously over the →Saints of the Most High.

The designation 'Ancient of Days' has influenced the imagery in the Similitudes of *I Enoch*. In various throne visions, God is depicted as *rē'ša mawā'ēl*, 'Head/Sum of

Days' (*I Enoch* 46:1. 2; 47:3; 55:1; 60:2; 71:10-14) who likewise will empower the forthcoming Son of Man with everlasting rule.

IV. Bibliography

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B. BECKING

ANGEL I מלאך

I. The consonants L'K in the Semitic languages signify 'send', with a more focused nuance in certain languages of specifically 'send with a commission/message' (CUNCHILLOS 1982). The *mēm-* prefix and *a-vowels* of Heb *mal'āk* conform generally to what is expected for an instrumental noun (*maqṭal*) identifying the vehicle or tool by which the action of the verb is accomplished (in this case, the means by which a message is sent, hence 'messenger'). Because the verb is not attested in Hebrew, some suspect that this noun is a loan word from another language. However, since the root is widely attested in the Semitic languages, and since even the verb is attested in north-west Semitic (Ugaritic), it is best to see the Hebrew noun as a relic of a once more generative root that otherwise disappeared in Hebrew because of a semantic overlap with a preferred and less specific term ŠLḤ 'send'.