INTRODUCTION

Although biblical interpretations of royal illness are rooted in a shared ancient Near Eastern cultural ethos, the biblical accounts are unique. Ugaritic, Akkadian, Greek, and Aramaic reports about diseased rulers are sporadic and are distributed over several millennia. Biblical accounts of royal illness, by contrast, are concentrated almost exclusively in the historiographic writings of the Hebrew Bible.[1]

This study analyzes the social, historical, and literary contexts that shape the representation of royal illness in the Bible. If modern politics is any indication, the declining health of rulers can lead to political instability, regime change, and even war.[2] Rather than focusing only on the political ramifications of royal illness, however, scribes of antiquity used this motif also to reflect on the nature of kingship and its relation to gods, dynasties, and nations. Taking this observation as a starting point, the goal of this study is twofold. First, I will describe and analyze how royal illnesses are presented in

[1] I am aware that terms like "biblical" or "Bible" need to be used with caution, since recent research has shown that the collection of texts we refer to as "the Bible" is not a stable canon. It actually presents but a small fraction of the literature available to the scribes of Late Persian Period Yehud. See Eva Mroczek, "The Hegemony of the Biblical in the Study of Second Temple Literature," *JAJ* 6.1 (2015): 2–35; and Eva Mroczek, *The Literary Imagination in Jewish Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). Nevertheless, for the Early Persian Period, the canon of the Hebrew Bible is still representative of the main repertoire of literature available to scribes.

[2] This is the case for both dictatorships and parliamentary systems, although the degree to which an ailing ruler can affect the course of politics differs, depending on the respective form of leadership. For studies about ill rulers in modern times, see Jerrold M. Post and Robert S. Robins, *When Illness Strikes the Leader: The Dilemma of the Captive King* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993); and David Owen, *In Sickness and in Power: Illness in Heads of Government in the Last 100 Years* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2008).

the Deuteronomistic History and in the Book of Chronicles.[3] Second, I will trace how scribes use depictions of royal illness to craft their views about history, dynastic and religious crises, and the concept of kingship. It is quite likely that the biblical accounts were an expression of political thought that made use of the king's bodily integrity as an opportunity for formulating ideas about Judah's and Israel's leadership and how this leadership impacts Judah's and Israel's past, present, and future.[4] Consequently, analyzing royal illness in the Bible allows for insights into the articulation of national identity and the memory of kingship in Judah and Israel.

Royal Illness in the Bible and the Ancient Near East

The Hebrew Bible knows no shortage of royal illness. King Saul is tormented by an evil spirit (1 Sam 9–31); David suffers from geriatric ailments (1 Kgs 1–2); Asa has an ailment in his feet (1 Kgs 15:23; 2 Chr 16:12); Ahaziah of Israel falls ill after injuring himself in an accident (2 Kgs 1); Ben-Hadad is beset by a nondescript illness (2 Kgs 8:7–15); Jehoram of Judah has a bowel disease that causes his intestines to fall out (2 Chr 21); Uzziah suffers from a skin condition referred to as צרעת (2 Kgs 15:5; 2 Chr 26:21–23); Hezekiah becomes mortally ill and suffers a skin rash referred to as שחין (2 Kgs 20; Isa 28; 2 Chr 32:24); and the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar is afflicted with temporary insanity when he starts acting like an animal (Dan 4).[5] Furthermore, Saul's grandson Mephibosheth is unable to walk after a childhood injury and Jeroboam's son dies after a short illness (1 Kgs 14), as does the first

[3] The concept of a Deuteronomistic History as coherently edited account of Judah's and Israel's past ranging from Deuteronomy to 2 Kings has been increasingly called into question. Nevertheless, because the current discussion is not crucial to the overall thesis of this study, I will continue referring to the Deuteronomistic History although it is probably more accurate to refer to a collection of Deuteronomistic Histories that grew over an extended period of time. For discussions surrounding the concept of the Deuteronomistic History, see the introduction to Part I of this study.

[4] For a full exploration of political thought as it is expressed within the Hebrew Bible, see Ehud Ben Zvi, "Memory and Political Thought in the Late Persian/Early Hellenistic Yehud/Judah: Some Observations," in *Leadership, Social Memory and Judean Discourse in the Fifth–Second Centuries BCE*, ed. Diana V. Edelman and Ehud Ben Zvi (WANE; Bristol: Equinox, 2016), 9–26.

[5] I am also considering cognitive and emotional disorders, since ancient Near Eastern sources do not clearly distinguish between physical and mental well-being; see Markham J. Geller, *Ancient Babylonian Medicine: Theory and Practice* (Chichester, UK: Wiley & Blackwell, 2010), 164–167.

son of Bathsheba and David (2 Sam 12). In some instances, people in general can be punished by illness for the mistakes of their kings, as is the case when Pharaoh marries Sarah (Gen 12) or when David takes a census (2 Sam 24:10–17; 1 Chr 21:1–17). Finally, several kings suffer from injuries they sustain on the battlefield, including Joram of Israel (2 Kgs 8:23), Josiah (2 Chr 35:23), and Joash (2 Chr 24:25–26).[6] While this list presents the full spectrum of ailments associated with royalty, the present study is focused exclusively on non–battle-related injuries and illnesses that affect the king and his closest family members directly. Here, we turn to the fates of Saul; David; David's son; Jeroboam's son; Asa; Ahaziah; Uzziah; Ben-Hadad; Jehoram of Judah; and Hezekiah.[7] Because biblical accounts of royal illness did not develop in a cultural vacuum, it will be necessary to provide a brief overview of the representation of royal illness in textual sources of the ancient Near East more broadly.[8]

Royal archives across the ancient Near East provide glimpses of the constant concern for the health and well-being of rulers and their families. The royal correspondence of the Assyrian court of Nineveh, for example, suggests that the king had to undergo apotropaic rituals meant to ward off the physical effects of witchcraft, curses, and other potential threats.[9] Likewise, kings had at their disposal hosts of specialists commissioned to protect their physical integrity. This

[6] For the treatment of kings who suffer injury on the battlefield, see Kerry H. Wynn, "First and Second Chronicles–Esther," in *The Bible and Disability: A Commentary*, ed. Sarah J. Melcher, Mikeal C. Parsons, and Amos Yong (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017), 121–158, especially 135–136 and 138–140.

[7] For brief studies that cover all of these cases of royal illness, see Claudia Bender, "Geschick Gottes? Krankheiten im Königshaus als Problem inneralttestamentlicher Geschichtsschreibung," *BN* 104 (2000): 48–68; Jeremy Schipper, "Joshua–Second Kings," in *The Bible and Disability: A Commentary*, ed. Sarah J. Melcher, Mikeal C. Parsons, and Amos Yong (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017), 93–120; and Wynn, "First and Second Chronicles–Esther," 1–158.

[8] As Diane Price Herndl remarks in her study on literary representations of illness in women, the descriptions and experiences of women are never "free of the ways that illness has been represented before, but neither one is entirely constrained either." See Diane Price Herndl, *The Invalid Woman: Figuring Feminine Illness in American Fiction and Culture 1840–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 12.

[9] This is the case, for example, in the comprehensive ritual *bīt rimki*, which is fashioned to protect the king by combining rituals against witchcraft and curse-related illnesses (*šurpu* and *maqlû*). See Jørgen Læssoe, *Studies on the Assyrian Ritual and Series Bît Rimki* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1955). For similar rituals, which are aimed at purifying the king's body, see Claus Ambos, "Purifying the King by Means of Prisoners, Fish, a Goose, and a Duck: Some Remarks on the Mesopotamian Notion of Purity," in *How Purity is Made*, ed. Petra Rösch and Udo Simon (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012), 89–103.

can be observed especially for King Esarhaddon, who regularly corresponded with incantation priests apparently on account of his poor health.[10]

Prior to the Neo-Assyrian Period, texts from the Late Bronze Age also provide ample evidence that the health and wellness of kings and their inner circles were a source of worry at the court. The Amarna Correspondence, for example, informs us of how the king of Ugarit requested a physician (*asû*) from the Egyptian court, complaining that "there are no physicians here."[11] Similarly, the correspondence between the Hittite and Babylonian courts implies that the Hittite ruler, Muwatalli, appreciated the service of Babylonian physicians to such an extent, that he refused to release them.[12] The health of the king also stands at the center of several rituals for the Hittite king Muršili II, who was left unable to speak after witnessing the sound of thunder.[13] The importance of maintaining health at the court can also be gathered from a letter sent by the king of Mari, Zimri-Lim, to his wife Šibtu. In this letter, the king criticizes a servant for mingling with others even though she is suffering from

[10] For the correspondence between the king and various scholars, including exorcists, see Simo Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars* (SAA 10; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1993); and Steven W. Cole and Peter Machinist, eds., *Letters from Priests to the Kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal with Contributions by Simo Parpola* (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1998). One good example for Esarhaddon's constant concern about his health is expressed in SAA 10, 236. In this letter, the exorcist attempts to calm the king by stating that his health problems are caused by seasonal factors, and not by divine disfavor. For a discussion of the letter, see Karel van der Toorn, *Sin and Sanction in Israel and Mesopotamia: A Comparative Study* (SSN 22; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1985), 67.

[11] EA 49, transliterated and translated by Jørgen A. Knudtzon, *Die El-Amarna Tafeln mit Einleitung und Erläuterung Vol 1.* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1915), 317; William L. Moran, *The Amarna Letters: Edited and Translated* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 120–121.

[12] See Nils P. Heeßel, "The Babylonian Physician Rabâ-Ša-Marduk: Another Look at Physicians and Exorcists in the Ancient Near East," in *Advances in Mesopotamian Medicine from Hammurabi to Hippocrates*, ed. Annie Atia and Gilles Buisson (CM 37; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 13–15. For additional information about the Hittite rulers and their need for foreign physicians, see Trevor Bryce, *Life and Society in the Hittite World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 163–175.

[13] See Jörg Klinger, "Krankheit und Krieg im Spannungsfeld zwischen mythischer und realer Katastrophe," in *Disaster and Relief Management/Katastrophen und ihre Bewältigung*, ed. Angelika Berlejung (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 476. Scholars have often attempted to attribute the king's symptoms to a stroke. For editions of the ritual text itself, see René Lebrun, "L'aphasie de Mursili II = CTH 486," *Hethitica* 6 (1985): 103–137; and Albrecht Götze and Holger Pedersen, *Muršilis Sprachlähmung: ein hethitischer Text mit philologischen und linguistischen Erörterungen* (Copenhagen: Levin & Munksgaard, 1934).

a disorder referred to as *simmu*.[14] Based on the textual sources available to us, it appears that the preoccupation with the health of rulers and members of the court was at least partly prompted by a permanent concern about the dynastic and political stability in the region.

Sporadic references to the failing health of kings are not only discussed in royal correspondence; they also appear in sources like myths, omen literature, chronicles, and epics, where royal illness is frequently attributed to the sacrilegious behavior of the king. Sacrilege, for example, plays a major role for a series of kings who belong to the Third Dynasty of Ur, which ruled Babylonia during the third millennium BCE. In several omen texts and royal chronicles, that postdate the reigns of these kings by several centuries, various illnesses are attributed to calamitous rulers (*Unheilsherrscher*) who are punished for transgressions mostly associated with the cult.[15] The circumstances of the king's death are often obscure, as witnessed in the case of Shulgi, whose body and mind were consumed after he took away the property of Esagil and Babylon.[16] Likewise, Amar-Sin changed the sacrificial order of

[14] See Jean-Marie Durand, "Trois études de Mari," *MARI: Annales de Recherche Interdisciplinaires* 3 (1984): 143–146.

[15] These reports are most likely derived from the omen literature and were only subsequently integrated into the royal chronicles. For the observation that the omen literature was absorbed into the royal chronicles and not vice versa, see Albert K. Grayson, "Divination and the Babylonian Chronicles," in *La Divination en Mésopotamie Ancienne, et dans le régions voisines: Rencontre assyriologique internationale, 14th, Strasbourg, 1965* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1966), 71; and Albert K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (TCS 5; Locust Valley, NY: Augustin, 1975), 45–49. Initially, however, it was assumed that the royal chronicles preceded the omen literature. See Leonard W. King, *Chronicles Concerning Early Babylonian Kings, Vol. 1.: Introductory Chapters* (London: Luzac, 1907), 28; and Hans-Gustav Güterbock, "Die historische Tradition und ihre literarische Gestaltung bei Babyloniern und Hethitern bis 1200," *ZA* 42.1–4 (1934): 18–19. For a general account of the genre of "historical omens" and the death of kings, see Jerrold Cooper, "Apodotic Death and the Historicity of 'Historical' Omens," in *Death in Mesopotamia: Papers Read at the XXVIe RAI*, ed. Bendt Alster (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1980), 99–105.

[16] See William W. Hallo, "The Death of Kings: Traditional Historiography in Contextual Perspective," in *Ah, Assyria: Studies in Assyrian History and Ancient Near Eastern Historiography Presented to Hayim Tadmor*, ed. Mordechai Cogan and Israel Eph'al (ScrHier 33; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1991), 158; and Tonia M. Sharlach, *An Ox of One's Own: Royal Wives and Religion at the Court of the Third Dynasty of Ur* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 178. For a translation of this text, see Grayson, *Divination*, 45–49, 152–156; and Jean-Jacques Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles*, ed. Benjamin R. Foster (SBLWAW 19; Atlanta: Society for Biblical Literature, 2004), 85, 269.

Marduk's cult at Esagil and was punished as a consequence.[17] According to an extispicy text, he was overcome by "the hand of misfortune" in his palace.[18] Other texts are more detailed, since we also know that Amar-Sin was initially predicted to be gored by an ox. Eventually, however, the king succumbed to a "bite of the shoe," which some scholars have interpreted as a description of gangrene.[19]

While most of the sources discussed so far are dated either to the Old Babylonian or the Neo-Assyrian Periods, we encounter similar motifs in late cuneiform texts dating to the Neo-Babylonian Period and early Jewish traditions from the Second Temple Period. Sacrilege is again the cause of malady in the Aramaic "Prayer of Nabonidus," which is known to us from the Qumran library.[20]

[17] Even though the text is set in the nineteenth century BCE, it is likely that the composition stems from a later period. See Ernst F. Weidner, "Historisches Material in der babylonischen Omina-Literatur," *MAOG* 4 (1928–1929): 226–240. The text in question was first discovered in Assur. Additional copies were found in Sippar. See F. N. H. Al-Rawi, "Tablets from the Sippar Library, I. The 'Weidner Chronicle': A Suppositious Royal Letter Concerning a Vision," *Iraq* 52 (1990): 1–13. For a bilingual Babylonian version of this text, see Irving L. Finkel, "Bilingual Chronicle Fragments," *JCS* 32.2 (1980): 72–73. Information about the death of Amar-Sin is also preserved in an omen text dating to the Old Babylonian Period. See Albrecht Götze, "Historical Allusions in Old Babylonian Omen Texts," *JCS* 1.3 (1947): 260–261; and Ivan Starr, "Notes on Some Published and Unpublished Historical Omens," *JCS* 29.3 (1977): 160–162.

[18] This text presents an irregular spelling for Amar-Sin, which is presented as BUR-^{d}XXX. Scholars like Albrecht Götze assumed that Bur-Sin and Amar-Sin are one and the same individual. See Götze, "Historical Allusions," 260–261. However, Ivan Starr has argued that the distinctive orthography points to the fact that we are dealing with two different kings and that BUR-^{d}XXX stands here for a king of Isin who was called Bur-Sin. See Starr, "Historical Omens," 163. Finally, Nils P. Heeßel has pointed out that Bur-Sin is not known for committing sacrilege and is also not represented in the omen literature. Therefore, he views BUR-^{d}XXX as an Akkadianized form of Amar-Sin. See Nils P. Heeßel, "Būr-Sîn or Amar-Su'ena: Was There a 'Historical Omen' of Būr-Sîn of Isin?," *JCS* 68 (2016): 101.

[19] For this tentative diagnosis, see Alan Millard, "The Weidner Chronicle (1.138)," in *The Context of Scripture, Vol. 1: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World*, ed. William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, Jr. (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 470 n. 8. However, this is impossible to verify. It is also unclear whether the king is first said to be gored by an ox only to be later "bitten by his shoe" or whether the text preserves two different accounts of Amar-Sin's death. For the first possibility, see Millard, "The Weidner Chronicle (1.138)," 469. For the second translation, see Cooper, "Apodotic Death," 105. Ivan Starr assumes that we are dealing with two traditions that were subsequently combined; see Starr, "Historical Omens," 162. Jerrold Cooper, by contrast, assumes that this is a scribal mistake. See Cooper, "Apodotic Death," 105.

[20] At its core, this account probably goes back to the Neo-Babylonian ruler Nabonidus. In the "Verse Account of Nabonidus," the Babylonian king is characterized as uncouth and incompetent. For the cuneiform text and its transliteration, see Sidney Smith, *Babylonian Historical Texts Relating to the Capture and Downfall of*

This text describes how King Nabonidus, after committing an unspecified transgression, was stricken with a skin disease, which forced him to spend seven years in the desert.[21] The king recovers only with the help of a Jewish diviner, who instructs him in the correct way to worship and pray to "the God most high." A similar account of a ruler who falls ill after committing sacrilege is preserved in a Late Babylonian cuneiform text from Uruk,[22] which describes how Shulgi commits various cultic transgressions before

Babylon (London: Methuen, 1924), 27–97. See further, Hanspeter Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Kyros des Großen samt den in ihrem Umfeld entstandenen Tendenzschriften: Textausgabe und Grammatik* (AOAT 256; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2001), 563–578. Nevertheless, despite his alleged folly and political ineptitude, the contemporary sources do not portray the king as mentally unstable or diseased; see Susan Ackerman, "The Prayer of Nabonidus, Elijah on Mount Carmel, and the Development of Monotheism in Israel," in *The Echoes of Many Texts: Essays in Honor of Lou H. Silberman*, ed. William G. Dever and James E. Wright (BJS 313; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 55–56; and Paul-Alain Beaulieu, "Nabonidus the Mad King: A Reconsideration of his Steles from Harran and Babylon," in *Representation of Political Power: Case Histories from Times of Change and Dissolving Order in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Marlies Heinz and Marian H. Feldman (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 138–139. Still, several scholars have speculated that the verse account portrayed the king as suffering from a mental illness that in part at least has to do with Sidney Smith's translation of the "Verse Account of Nabonidus." For examples, see Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Nabonidus," in *ISBE, Vol. 3*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (1995): 470. For scholars who assume that Nabonidus was portrayed as insane, see A. Leo Oppenheim, "The Babylonian Evidence of Achaemenid Rule in Mesopotamia," in *The Cambridge History of Iran Volume 2: The Median and Achaemenian Periods*, ed. Ilya Gershevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 540.

[21] For a translation and transliteration of the text, see John J. Collins, "242. 4QPrayer of Nabonidus ar," in *Qumran Cave 4.XVII: Parabiblical Texts, Part 3*, ed. James C. VanderKam (DJD XXII; Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 83–93. For the *editio princeps*, see Józef T. Milik, "'Prière de Nabonide' et autres écrits d'un cycle de Daniel," *RB* 63 (1956): 407–415. The same skin disorder is reported for the animals during the ten plagues of Egypt (Exod 9:9) and when Job got painful sores (Job 2:7). In 2 Kgs 20:7, we hear how Hezekiah is healed from this disorder. Finally, שחין also appears as a subcategory to the skin disease צרעת in Lev 13:18. Susan Ackermann argues that the "Prayer of Nabonidus" merges several motifs into one account. See Ackerman, "Prayer of Nabonidus," 54. Carol Newsom has observed a similar merging of different motifs, which she approaches through the model of mental blending as it has been developed by Mark Turner and Gilles Fauconnier. See Carol A. Newsom, "Why Nabonidus? Excavating Traditions from Qumran, the Hebrew Bible, and Neo-Babylonian Sources," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Transmission of Traditions and Productions of Texts*, ed. Sarianna Metso, Hindy Najman, and Eileen Schuler (STDJ 92; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 72–76.

[22] Hermann Hunger, *Spätbabylonische Texte aus Uruk, Vol. 1* (ADFU 9; Berlin: Mann, 1976), 19–20.

being punished – presumably by a disease – and sent into exile.[23] The resolution of the episode is uncertain, owing to the damage to the remainder of the text, but some scholars argue that the king is healed by an exorcist before returning to civilization.[24] Similarly, in the Book of Daniel, King Nebuchadnezzar is punished by madness following his hubris. According to Dan 4:30–31, Nebuchadnezzar spends seven years in the wilderness, eating grass until he acknowledges the dominion of God. Only then is the sanity of Nebuchadnezzar restored and only then can the ruler return to his office of kingship. It is likely that these accounts are interrelated, although scholars do not agree about how the Nabonidus tradition found its way into Jewish writings and whether the "Prayer of Nabonidus" inspired Nebuchadnezzar's insanity in Dan 4 or vice versa.[25]

The parallels between these accounts suggest that the motif of the exiled and ailing ruler who has committed sacrilege and undergoes some form of conversion was a popular *topos* in late cuneiform writings and early Jewish literature. Sacrilege, royal illness, and conversion are again an issue with the death of Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 2 Maccabees 9:1–12. After failing to conquer and plunder the temple of Persepolis, Antiochus hears about political unrest in Judea and decides to destroy Jerusalem and massacre the Jews.

[23] Although Shulgi is generally considered a successful king, we encounter the notion that he was guilty of some type of transgression. Thus, a liver omen from Mari refers to "the omen of Shulgi who cast down his crown"; see Jan-Waalke Meyer, *Untersuchungen zu den Tonlebermodellen* (AOAT 39; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlag, 1987), 193. It is likely that not everyone viewed the unusually long period of his reign as a blessing – especially potential successors to the throne, who may have had some reservations. See Hallo, "Death of Kings," 158.

[24] For this interpretation of the events, see Antoine Cavigneaux, "Shulgi, Nabonide, et les Grecs," in *"An Experienced Scribe Who Neglects Nothing": Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Honor of Jacob Klein*, ed. Yitschak Sefati, Pinhas Artzi, Chaim Cohen, Barry L. Eichler, and Victor Avigdor Hurowitz (Bethesda, MD: CDL, 2005), 64–65.

[25] For different suggestions concerning the relationship between the "Prayer of Nabonidus," Dan 4, and Shulgi's transgression, see Matthias Henze, *The Madness of King Nebuchadnezzar: The Ancient Near Eastern Origins and Early History of Interpretation of Daniel 4* (JSJSup 61; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 63–73; Cavigneaux, "Shulgi, Nabonide, et les Grecs," 70–72; Newsom, "Why Nabonidus?" 57–80; Carol A. Newsom, "Now You See Him, Now You Don't: Nabonidus in Jewish History," in *Remembering Biblical Figures in the Later Persian and Hellenistic Periods: Social Memory and Imagination*, ed. Diana V. Edelman and Ehud Ben Zvi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 270–282; and Caroline Waerzeggers, "The Prayer of Nabonidus in the Light of Hellenistic Babylonian Literature," in *Jewish Cultural Encounters in the Ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern World*, Mladen Popović, Myles Schoonover, and Marijn Vandenberghe (JSJSup 178; Leiden: Brill, 2017), 64–75.

In response, God strikes him with a bowel disease. While writhing in pain, Antiochus falls off his chariot, which causes him to break every bone in his body. Finally, after becoming infested with worms and having pieces of flesh fall off his body, he acknowledges the power of God and then dies. A similar fate is visited upon Herod the Great, who dies of an extremely painful bowel disease after committing various sins.[26] Herod Agrippa also succumbs to an intestinal disease that causes him to be infested by worms as a consequence of his committing sacrilege after allowing himself to be venerated like a god.[27] These accounts seem to combine Hebrew and Greek motifs of hubris and the arrogant ruler who suffers defeat by the hand of God.[28] While the late cuneiform sources stand at the end of a long tradition about the kings of the Third Dynasty of Ur, the early Jewish accounts display a need to cope intellectually with the Jewish diaspora and with life under foreign leadership.[29]

A notable exception to the tendency of highlighting sacrilege as the source of royal illness is the Ugaritic Kirta Epic (KTU 1.14–1.16), which seems to be less concerned with sacrilege and more focused on the contradictory nature of sacral kingship. In this epic, we learn how King Kirta of Khabur undergoes several tribulations in the hopes of securing a dynastic successor for himself.[30]

[26] See Josephus, *BJ* 1.656 and *Ant.* 17.6.5.

[27] See the Acts of the Apostles 23:21–23 and Josephus, *Ant.* 19.344–600. For more information on the motif of the disease-related deaths of wicked rulers, see David J. Ladouceur, "The Death of Herod the Great," *Classical Philology* 76.1 (1981): 25–34; and Thomas Africa, "Worms and the Death of Kings: A Cautionary Note on Disease and History," *Classical Antiquity* 1.1 (1982): 1–17.

[28] The circumstances of the king's retreat and his subsequent rage calls to mind Xerxes in Aeschylus, *Persians*, lines 422, 470, 481. See Daniel R. Schwartz, *2 Maccabees* (CEJL; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), 352. The motif of worms infesting a tyrant, either before or after death, can be found both in Greek and Hebrew sources as, for instance, in Isa 14 and the examples from Josephus listed above. See Schwartz, *2 Maccabees*, 357–358. The motif of the bowel disease may be inspired by Jehoram's fate in 2 Chr 21. See Louise J. Lawrence, "Evil and the Body of Antiochus IV Epiphanes: Disability, Disgust and Tropes of Monstrosity in 2 Maccabees 9:1–12," in *Evil in Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Chris Keith and Loren T. Stuckenbruck (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 62.

[29] See Carol A. Newsom, *Daniel: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2014), 129–130.

[30] For transliteration and translation of this text, see Edward L. Greenstein, "Kirta," in *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry*, ed. Simon B. Parker, Edward L. Greenstein, Mark S. Smith, Theodore J. Lewis, and David Marcus (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 9–48. For translations, see Dennis Pardee, "The Kirta Epic (1.102)," in *The Context of Scripture, Vol. 1: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World*, ed. William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, Jr. (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 333–343; and Nick

To be sure, sacrilege still plays a role, since Kirta falls ill on account of an unfulfilled vow to the goddess Athirat.[31] Yet the epic does not dwell on sacrilege as the cause of Kirta's illness, but rather goes on to describe how illness in a king could affect his subjects and how the motif of the ailing ruler reveals tensions in the concept of sacral kingship. For one, Kirta's physical decline is accompanied by a drought in the land, which suggests a correspondence between the health of the king and the well-being of the state and the people.[32] Furthermore, during the course of Kirta's disease his children repeatedly ask:

> "How can you, father, die like (mortal) men do?
> How can that be when they say: 'Kirta is the son of 'Ilu?'
> The offspring of the Gracious and Holy One?
> Or, gods, do they die?
> The offspring of the Gracious One –
> Surely he will live?"
> (KTU 1.16.1.17–18, 20–23//1.16.2.40, 43–44)[33]

This statement implies that the Ugaritic concept of kingship views the ruler as a divine offspring and, consequently, as immortal. This is significant insofar as the disease of Kirta points to the tensions inherent in the nature of sacral kingship, which assumes that the king partakes in divine qualities while still being subject to mortality.[34] This story also likely served a didactic function in

Wyatt, *Religious Texts from Ugarit,* 2nd ed. (BS 53; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 176–243.

[31] For this interpretation, see Simon B. Parker, *The Pre-Biblical Narrative Tradition* (SBLRBS 24; Atlanta: SBL Press, 1989), 172–174. It should, however, be noted that this passage is damaged and partly illegible.

[32] Several scholars refer to this phenomenon as "sympathetic drought." See, for instance, Parker, *Pre-Biblical Narrative Tradition*, 186–188; Gary N. Knoppers, "Dissonance and Disaster in the Legend of Kirta," *JAOS* 114.4 (1994): 579; Greenstein, "Kirta," 35; Pardee, "Kirta Epic (1.102)," 341 n. 83; and Wyatt, *Religious Texts from Ugarit*, 232. A similar correlation between the king's well-being and the state of land and people can be observed for Ur-Namma, a king of the Third Dynasty of Ur, of whom it is said that the land lay desolate when he was dying. For translations of the lament that contains this description, see Sharlach, *Ox of One's Own*, 177 n. 7.

[33] For this translation, see Theodore J. Lewis, "The Sha'tiqatu Narrative from the Ugaritic Story about the Healing of King Kirta," *JANER* 13 (2013): 189.

[34] See Knoppers, "Dissonance and Disaster," 577. Other scholars have argued that the usage of Kirta's epithets points to a criticism of the king's quasi-divine status and expresses a loss of faith in kingship. See Parker, *Pre-Biblical Narrative Tradition*, 213. See further, Simon B. Parker, "The Historical Composition of KRT and the Cult of El," *ZAW* 89.2 (1977): 173.