MESOPOTAMIAN ELEMENTS IN THE PROEM OF PARMENIDES? CORRESPONDENCES BETWEEN THE SUN-GODS HELIOS AND SHAMASH[1]

ἵπποι ταί με φέρουσιν, ὅσον τ' ἐπὶ θυμὸς ἱκάνοι,
πέμπον, ἐπεί μ' ἐς ὁδὸν βῆσαν πολύφημον ἄγουσαι
δαίμονος, ἣ κατὰ πάντ' [ἄστη] φέρει εἰδότα φῶτα·
τῆι φερόμην, τῆι γάρ με πολύφραστοι φέρον ἵπποι
ἅρμα τιταίνουσαι, κοῦραι δ' ὁδὸν ἡγεμόνευον.
ἄξων δ' ἐν χνοίηισιν [ἴει] σύριγγος αὐτήν
αἰθόμενος (δοιοῖς γὰρ ἐπείγετο δινωτοῖσιν
κύκλοις ἀμφοτέρωθεν), ὅτε σπερχοίατο πέμπειν
Ἡλιάδες κοῦραι, προλιποῦσαι δώματα Νυκτός,
εἰς φάος, ὠσάμεναι κράτων ἄπο χερσὶ καλύπτρας.
ἔνθα πύλαι Νυκτός τε καὶ Ἤματός εἰσι κελεύθων,
καί σφας ὑπέρθυρον ἀμφὶς ἔχει καὶ λάινος οὐδός·
αὐταὶ δ' αἰθέριαι πλῆνται μεγάλοισι θυρέτροις·
τῶν δὲ Δίκη πολύποινος ἔχει κληῖδας ἀμοιβούς.
τὴν δὴ παρφάμεναι κοῦραι μαλακοῖσι λόγοισιν
πεῖσαν ἐπιφραδέως, ὥς σφιν βαλανωτὸν ὀχῆα
ἀπτερέως ὤσειε πυλέων ἄπο· ταὶ δὲ θυρέτρων
χάσμ' ἀχανὲς ποίησαν ἀναπτάμεναι πολυχάλκους
ἄξονας ἐν σύριγξιν ἀμοιβαδὸν εἰλίξασαι
γόμφοις καὶ περόνησιν ἀρηρότε· τῆι ῥα δι' αὐτέων
ἰθὺς ἔχων κοῦραι κατ' ἀμαξιτὸν ἅρμα καὶ ἵππους.
καί με θεὰ πρόφρων ὑπεδέξατο, χεῖρα δὲ χειρί
δεξιτερὴν ἕλεν, ὧδε δ' ἔπος φάτο καί με προσηύδα·
ὦ κοῦρ' ἀθανάτοισι συνάορος ἡνιόχοισιν,
ἵπποις ταί σε φέρουσιν ἱκάνων ἡμέτερον δῶ,
χαῖρ[ε], . . . (Parm. B1.1–26)

The mares which carry me, as far as ever my heart may desire, were escorting me, when they brought and placed me on the resounding road of the goddess, which carries through all places the man who knows. On it I was carried; for on it the well-discerning horses were straining the chariot and the maidens were leading the way. The axle glowing in the naves was sending forth the whistle of a pipe (for it was being whirled around by the two rounded wheels on either end), whenever the daughters of the Sun, leaving the realm of Night, hastened to escort me towards the light, after they had with their hands pushed back the veils from their heads. There are the gates [separating] the ways of Day and Night, and they are enclosed by a lintel and a threshold of stone; and the etherial gates themselves are covered with big wing-doors, of which Dike, whose vengeance is stern, possesses the rewarding keys. The maidens appeased her with gentle words and knowingly persuaded her to push back quickly from the gates the bolted bar. And a gaping chasm of the doors was produced by the gates' opening which had set revolving in their sockets one after the other the brazen axles fitted with bolts and pins. Straight through them did the maidens guide the horses and the car on the broad way. And the goddess received me gladly and took in her hand my right hand and addressed to me the following words: 'O young man coming to our abode with immortal charioteers with the horses which carry you, welcome!'[2]

[1] I thank all those who read earlier drafts of this paper: M. Griffith, A. A. Long, A. Bulloch, C. W. Greenewalt, A. Kilmer, L. Pierce, I. Pafford, and A. Littauer. Any remaining error in fact or interpretation is my own. This paper is dedicated to Dr Carol Brandert.

[2] Edition and translation in L. Tarán, *Parmenides* (Princeton, 1965), 7–9.

This paper will examine the striking similarities between the journey of Parmenides' narrator and that of the Babylonian sun-god Shamash (Sumerian UTU),[3] similarities that confirm previous scholarly attempts to discern attributes of Helios and/or Apollo in the proem.[4] While the metaphors of a horse-drawn chariot and 'daughters of the sun' are attested Greek associations with the sun-god Helios, three elements of Parmenides' proem are explained more readily with reference to Shamash: the downward passage[5] through gates that are described in great structural detail; the association between these gates and the figure of Justice; and the identification of Parmenides' narrator as Greek κοῦρος, a word that covers the semantic range of a common epithet of Shamash (and of his disciple Gilgamesh), Akkadian *eṭlu*. Whether or not Parmenides invoked Babylonian antecedents intentionally, his choice of images indicates a certain degree of Babylonian influence on Greek deities and literary culture more generally.

The 'gates of the paths of Night and Day'[6] reflect *Theogony* 744ff., in which Night and Day pass one another across a 'great threshold of bronze'[7] located in Tartarus, next to where Atlas separates the earth and heavens (see further below). The specific phrase 'gates of Night and Day' does not occur in Babylonian texts, and therefore it could be solely Greek in origin. The extraordinarily detailed description and context of the gates, however, cannot be explained fully with reference to Greek material alone. In *Iliad* 5.749 and 8.393, Hera is said to pass through 'the gates of heaven which the *Horai* control'[8] on her chariot, and Hesiod conveniently includes Justice among the *Horai*.[9] These gates, however, open automatically for Hera and are not described in any detail, and no other Greek author associates Justice with divine gates. Hades/Erebos is sometimes said to be locked, and Pluto/Hades is occasionally depicted holding the key[10] to these otherwise undefined gates. Mount Olympus, too, apparently lacks gates.[11] Lines 22–7 of Pindar's sixth Olympic Ode provide a clear parallel for the imagery of a chariot drawn by animals who know their way, and the narrator's destination is 'the gates of song',[12] but these remain unelaborated. Despite their rough contemporaneity, the vision of Parmenides is quite distinct from that of Pindar.

Elaborate gates and the divine figure of Justice appear more frequently in Babylonian texts, however; especially in conjunction with the sun-god Shamash, who is both uniquely associated with justice and represented as passing through doors or gates of 'heaven's interior' at the end of his daily celestial journey.[13] At least one

[3] For general information, see 'Utu' in J. Black and A. Green, *Gods, Demons, and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia* (Austin, 1992), 182–4.

[4] For arguments in favour of the solar trajectory of Parmenides' journey, see W. Burkert, 'Das Proömium des Parmenides und die Katabasis des Pythagoras', *Phronesis* 14 (1969), 1–30, following W. Kranz, 'Über Aufbau und Bedeutung des Parmenideischen Gedichtes', *Sitzungberichte der Königlichen Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 47 (1916), 1158–76. For a semantic rebuttal of Kranz's hypothesis, see Tarán, (n. 2), 23.

[5] Or *katabasis*; see the thorough discussions in Burkert (n. 4) and in P. Kingsley, *In the Dark Places of Wisdom* (Shaftesbury, 1999), 58ff.

[6] *Πύλαι Νυκτός τε καὶ Ἡματός . . . κελεύθων*. Edition: Tarán (n. 2).

[7] *μέγαν οὐδὸν χάλκεον*. Translation: M. L. West, *Theogony. Works and Days* (Oxford, 1988), line 750.

[8] *πύλαι . . . οὐρανοῦ ἃς ἔχον Ὧραι*.

[9] *Theogony* 902ff.; cited in A. Mourelatos, *The Route of Parmenides* (New Haven, 1970), 15.

[10] Cf. Pausanias 5.20.3; another possible keyholder is Aeacus, according to Apollodorus 3.12.6.

[11] Except perhaps in *Iliad* 8.411; cf. M. L. West, *The East Face of Helicon* (Oxford, 1997), 141.

[12] Lines 22–7; cited in Mourelatos (n. 9), 42.

[13] W. Heimpel, 'The sun at night and the doors of heaven in Babylonian texts', *Journal of*

Babylonian text implies that Shamash is solely responsible for opening heavenly doors, and that this function is one of his chief duties: 'Opener of the doors of p[ure] heaven; Shamash, TI-ka, socket, key, lift[er, you]. Without you no god [ ] the doors of heaven'.[14] These divine doors or gates and their bars, latches, bolts, and keys are described in great detail in texts such as the following royal lustration ritual:

> When you [Shamash] raise the latch pin from the lock of the pure heavens,
> When you free the bolt of the pure heavens,
> When you open the great door of the pure heavens.[15]

Indeed, the Great Hymn to Shamash describes him as the one '[who is master of] strike-point and pin, latch, and handlebar'. Likewise, Parmenides' gates are high-reaching (*aitheriai*) and fitted with large doors that are bolted with a bar and are unlocked by keys. The bronze door hinges and their sockets, rivets, and nails are described in particularly exacting detail by Parmenides in lines 18–21 of the proem.

Even more striking is the figure of 'Avenging Justice' in Parmenides' proem. Justice (*Dikē*) wields the keys to the gates of Night and Day, and the daughters of the Sun (*Hēliades*) persuade her to unbolt and open the gates for them. Similarly, a Babylonian prayer said at sunset clearly associates Justice (*Mīšarum*) with Shamash and his passage through the divine gates:

> O Šamaš, when you enter *heaven's interior*,
> May the pure bolt of heaven greet you,
> May the door of heaven salute you.
> May Justice, your beloved vizier, bring you straight in.[16]

In his commentary on this text, Foster notes that the words conveying the concepts of 'justice' and 'straightness' in the fourth line have the same triliteral root in Akkadian.[17] Indeed, the rest of the sunset prayer exhorts Shamash to 'go straight on your path, / Make straight your way, go the true course to your dwelling. / O Šamaš, you are the judge of the land, administrator of its verdicts'.[18] Shamash is generally associated with justice, arbitration, and final judgement; 'he was often invoked in prayers against evil magic and in the prayers of diviners, *as investigation and*

Cuneiform Studies 38/2 (1986), 127–51; see W. Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography* (Winona Lake, 1998), 266 for gates of heaven.

[14] Text: E. Ebeling (ed.), *Keilschrifttexte aus Assur religiösen Inhalts*, Band 1 (1919), 7: 2ff. Translation: Heimpel (n. 13), 134.

A note on Akkadian translations: The possible translations of the Akkadian passages cited here are fairly limited, and, whenever possible, I cite the concise English renderings in B. Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature* (Bethesda, 1993). The Akkadian phrase meaning 'heaven's interior' is *qereb* (or *qerbu*) *ša šamê*, lit. 'the inner part of the heavens'.

[15] Text: H. C. Rawlinson (ed.), *Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia* 4 (19??), 17. Translation: Foster (n. 14), 662; also cited in Heimpel (n. 13), 133.

[16] *ana qereb ša šamê ina erēbika / šigar šamê ellutum šulma liqbukum / dalat šamê liqrubākum / Mīšarum sukkallum narāmka lištēširkum.* Text: Bertin, *Revue d'Assyriologie* 1 (1886), 157–61. Edition: S. Langdon (ed.), *Oxford Editions of Cuneiform Texts* 6 (19??), 11–12. Translation: Foster (n. 14), 675. Emphasis indicates an emendation of Foster's translation to include the relevant phrase 'heaven's interior'. I thank the reviewer of this paper for noting that the Babylonian figure *Mīšarum* is Justice personified, while Parmenides' *Dikē* has a more abstract, cosmic role as guardian of the gates of Day and Night. Perhaps Parmenides both reflects and transforms earlier representations of Justice.

[17] Foster (n. 14), 675.

[18] *bēl (Ebarra) alik padānka līšir / harrānka šūšir urha kīnam ana duruššika alik / ša māti dayyānu ša purussêša muštēširša atta.* See n. 16.

perception of the truth were his special responsibility'.[19] These aims are shared by Parmenides, whose narrator is driven 'straight along the road'[20] after taking leave of Justice and her gates. Even though fr. B5 suggests that Parmenides advocated (or understood) philosophical circularity, he asserts in fr. B6 that 'mortals who know nothing' wander a 'path of all things [that] is back-turning',[21] that is, not straight and true. Helios is likewise associated with light, truth, judgement, and straightforward enquiry (see further below), and solar imagery therefore matches Parmenides' tone and philosophy.

A third point of similarity is too apt to be coincidental. After Parmenides' narrator has been welcomed by the unnamed goddess at the end of his journey, the goddess addresses him as 'young man', or *kouros*. This word may refer to Apollo, who is frequently conceived as a divine *kouros* or *ephebe*.[22] Kingsley rightly observes that the Greek

> *kouros* has a great deal in common with the world of the divine, . . . [and is] often essential for gaining access to the world of the gods. He [is] needed for prophecy, for oracles, for the magical process of lying down in a special place at night to obtain messages from the gods through dreams.[23]

Precisely the same words, however, could be used to describe the Mesopotamian hero Gilgamesh, who receives divinely inspired dreams while sleeping in specially constructed huts throughout Tablet IV of the Standard Babylonian epic. He is the ultimate initiate, seeking esoteric knowledge and profiting from his partially divine parentage. Like his friends at home in Uruk, Gilgamesh is frequently referred to as a 'young man' (Akkadian *eṭlu*), a word having roughly the same semantic range as the Greek word *kouros*. It is therefore significant that Shamash, the patron deity of Gilgamesh, is addressed as *eṭlu* in two of the Babylonian texts cited above.[24] Hence, the identification of Parmenides' narrator as *kouros* further confirms his resemblance to Shamash.

Of course, many of the above-mentioned qualities reside in the Greek gods Helios and Apollo as well. Homer describes Helios as one 'who sees everything and hears everything',[25] just as Shamash is praised as the one 'who scrutinizes all there is'.[26] Even though Apollo, too, presides over truth and clarity, Helios alone appears to share many of the attributes of Shamash. Just as Shamash appears to enter the underworld only on select occasions (for example, when judging the dead), Helios threatens to descend to Hades and shine among the dead, implying that such an act is unusual.[27] Shamash

[19] Foster (n. 14), 646; emphasis added.

[20] *ἰθὺς κατ' ἀμαξιτόν*; Parm. B1.21.

[21] *βροτοὶ εἰδότες οὐδὲν πλάττονται . . . πάντων δὲ παλίντροπός ἐστι κέλευθος*; Parm. B6.4–9.

[22] See the excellent discussion in A. Stewart, 'When is a kouros not an Apollo? The Tenea 'Apollo' revisited', in M. A. Del Chiaro (ed.), *Corinthiaca* (Columbia, 1986), 54–70; cf. also W. Burkert, *Greek Religion, Archaic and Classical* (Oxford, 1985), 144ff. See also Burkert's argument (n. 4) regarding aspects of Apollo in Parmenides' proem.

[23] Kingsley (n. 5), 72–3.

[24] OECT 6, CIWA 4; see nn. 14, 15. The Akkadian word *eṭlu* is often coupled with *qarrādu*, 'hero'. It is possible that Tablet XII of the SB epic of Gilgamesh also describes Shamash as a *qarrādu eṭlu* (lines 80–5); cf. R. J. Tournay and A. Shaffer, *L'épopée de Gilgamesh* (Paris, 1994). Another recent edition, however, has 'Nergal' (^{d}U.GUR) instead of 'Shamash' in the relevant lines; S. Parpola, *The Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh* (Helsinki, 1997), 66, 116.

[25] *ὃς πάντ' ἐφορᾷ καὶ πάντ' ἐπακούει*; *Od.* 12.323, *Il.* 3.276; cf. West (n. 10), 20.

[26] UFBG 503–10, line 3; trans. in Foster (n. 14), 665.

[27] *Δύσομαι εἰς Ἄϊδαο καὶ ἐν νεκύεσσι φαείνω*; *Od.* 12:383. Compare with the usual epithet

(and his Sumerian and Hittite counterparts) sometimes rides in a chariot driven by his servant Bunene,[28] and the chariot of Helios could easily have been influenced by Near Eastern tradition.[29] Only the presence of the *Heliades* in the proem lacks a clear Babylonian parallel; the daughters of the Sun may be either a literary innovation reinforcing the solar imagery or/and a proxy for the powers of Helios/himself.[30] The *Heliades* provide one indication that Parmenides' narrator travels along a solar path;[31] another is that Hesiod's gates of Night and Day are situated near the boundary between heaven and earth, that is, the horizon at the western edge of the known world.[32] The downward journey in Parmenides' proem might therefore follow the course of the sun as it sinks out of sight into (or is replaced by) darkness.[33]

The close relationship between Helios and Shamash presents an interesting puzzle: could it be that Parmenides alludes to attributes of the sun-god Helios exclusively? If so, the elaborate gates of Justice must be linked with Helios, even though no other extant text suggests such a connection. Perhaps our lack of information is an accident of preservation; Aeschylus' lost play entitled *Heliades*, for example, would have been

of Shamash, 'judge of those above and below', and references to his journey through the underworld, his light perhaps dimmed or blocked out by the house of the dead; Heimpel (n. 13), 146 and B. Alster, 'Incantation to Utu', *Acta Sumerologica* 13 (1991), 27–96. On the other hand, Pindar asserts that the sun shines on the virtuous dead even when it is night above; cf. West (n. 11), 541ff. The New Kingdom Egyptian text *Amduat* also describes the journey of the sun-god through the underworld as it is rejuvenated at night; cf. E. A. W. Budge, *The Egyptian Heaven and Hell* (Chicago, 1906). West (n. 11), 417 compares *Od.* 12.383 with Ištar's threat to interchange the realms of the living and the dead in Tablet VI of the Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh.

[28] Cf. 'Bunene' in *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* and references in West (n. 11), 507ff. In addition, an incantation to Sumerian Utu mentions his 'four-lion yoke'; lines 91 and 100 in Alster (n. 27), 30. Shamash is, however, most often depicted travelling on a anthropomorphized boat on Akkadian cylinder seals; see the example in J. Oates, *Babylon* (London, 1986), 173, fig. 121. Hymns to Shamash rarely mention his mode of transportation at all.

[29] Cf. the discussion in West (n. 11), 507ff. So, too, the fact that Helios is represented with rays emanating from his shoulders could derive from similar representations of a Cretan deity that influenced Apollo as well, and this deity seems in turn to have been influenced by representations of Shamash; see A. J. Evans, *JHS* 21 (1901), 170; cited in 'Sun and sun worship' in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge.*

[30] See D. Blank, 'Faith and persuasion in Parmenides', *CA* 1 (1982), 168–78. Blank argues that the Heliades' self-unveiling 'establishes a relationship of mutual trust' (p. 170) with Parmenides' narrator, establishing them as πιστοί; furthermore, the frequency of words derived from πίστις/πείθω in connection with the Heliades in Parmenides' proem points to the importance of religious faith as well as that of simple persuasion (pp. 171ff.). This argument further establishes the fundamental 'Hellenism' of the Heliades in Parmenides' proem.

[31] But *not* that of Phaethon; cf. Tarán (n. 2), 23–4. It is difficult to say exactly where Parmenides' narrator travels, because the manuscripts of Sextus provide several versions of the key phrase in Parm. B1.3; cf. D. O'Brian and J. Frère, *Le Poème de Parménide* (Paris, 1987), 3 for possible emendations. Tarán (n. 2), 11–12 suggests that the best manuscript reads 'through all towns' (κατὰ πάντ' ἄστη), and Kranz (n. 4), 1159 interprets this phrase as 'über die ganze Erde'. Tarán's reading is based in part on an Orphic parallel that corroborates the solar interpretation of Parmenides: Ἥλιε Πῦρ διὰ πάντ' ἄστη νίσεαι; O. Kern, *Orphicorum Fragmenta* (Berlin, 1922), 47.3.

[32] *Contra* M. E. Pellikaan-Engel, *Hesiod and Parmenides: A New View on their Cosmologies and on Parmenides' Proem* (Amsterdam, 1974), 70. See instead O. Gigon, *Der Ursprung der griechischen Philosophie von Hesiod bis Parmenides* (Basel, 1968), 29. Likewise, 'heaven's interior', where Shamash finds his night dwelling, is immediately below the horizons surrounding the earth; Heimpel (n. 13), 130–2. Hesiod, like his Mesopotamian counterparts, complicates matters when he locates 'the House of Night' simultaneously in Tartarus and near Atlas.

[33] *Contra* Kingsley (n. 5), 70ff.

an excellent resource.[34] In the absence of clear evidence to the contrary, we cannot rule out the possibility that the Babylonian sun-god tradition influenced the attributes of Helios (and hence eventually those of Apollo) well before Parmenides wrote his proem. If, on the other hand, it is one day proved that neither Helios nor Apollo is ever associated with gates and *Dike* herself, we must consider the possibility that Parmenides was influenced by Babylonian imagery more directly. While the thorny question of transmission is beyond the scope of this paper, the reader will find provocative discussions in recent works.[35] For the time being, I leave this question and its implications to others.

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[34] Even so, the available evidence suggests that Aeschylus' *Heliades* recounted the story of Phaethon, which is not necessarily relevant to the account in Parmenides (see n. 31). S. Radt (ed.), *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta* 3, *Aeschylus* (Göttingen, 1985), F68–73a.

[35] For transmission of Near Eastern material to Greece generally, see West (n. 11), ch. 12. For transmission of Babylonian beliefs to Parmenides specifically, see Kingsley (n. 5), 11–27, 46–8.

HELOTS CALLED MESSENIANS? A NOTE ON THUC. 1.101.2.

Θάσιοι δὲ νικηθέντες μάχῃ καὶ πολιορκούμενοι Λακεδαιμονίους ἐπεκαλοῦντο καὶ ἐπαμύνειν ἐκέλευον ἐσβαλόντας ἐς τὴν Ἀττικήν. οἱ δὲ ὑπέσχοντο μὲν κρύφα τῶν Ἀθηναίων καὶ ἔμελλον, διεκωλύθησαν δὲ ὑπὸ τοῦ γενομένου σεισμοῦ, ἐν ᾧ καὶ οἱ Εἵλωτες αὐτοῖς καὶ τῶν περιοίκων Θουριᾶταί τε καὶ Αἰθαιῆς ἐς Ἰθώμην ἀπέστησαν. πλεῖστοι δὲ τῶν Εἱλώτων ἐγένοντο οἱ τῶν παλαιῶν Μεσσηνίων τότε δουλωθέντων ἀπόγονοι· ἧ καὶ Μεσσήνιοι ἐκλήθησαν οἱ πάντες.

In this well-known passage, Thucydides mentions the earthquake and the revolt of Helots and *perioikoi* that prevented the Spartans from helping the Thasians against the Athenians. Virtually everything Thucydides says or implies here, particularly but not only the chronology of the events, has aroused fierce controversy. As far as Thucydides' description of the rebels is concerned, though, there seems to be very little disagreement in recent scholarship. Nevertheless, as I shall try to demonstrate, most scholars misinterpret the passage precisely on this point, with serious consequences for the interpretation of some fundamental aspects of Helotry. In the following, the interpretation of the last two sentences (underlined in the text above) in recent scholarship will be discussed, then the text itself will be analysed, to show how it should most probably be translated, and the consequences of this translation for the interpretation of Helotry will be briefly addressed.

The sentences under discussion have been understood in two very different ways: either as if they meant that, in general, in Thucydides' times, the Helots were called Messenians, because the majority of them were descendants of the 'old Messenians', or that the majority of the Helots who revolted against Sparta after the earthquake were descendants of the 'old Messenians', and for that reason all the rebels—or all the Helots who revolted—came to be called Messenians.[1] In many cases, translators, in particular, seem not to have reflected on such implications, and have rendered the

[1] The possibility of combining these two interpretations and taking the passage to mean that, in general, in Thucydides' times, the majority of the Helots was formed by descendants of the 'old Messenians', and therefore all those who revolted were called Messenians is excluded by the obvious link between *πλεῖστοι* and *οἱ πάντες*.