

**Identities and Societies
in the Ancient East-Mediterranean Regions**

Comparative approaches

Henning Graf Reventlow Memorial Volume

Edited by
Thomas R. Kämmerer

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The Mesopotamian Precursors of Adam's Garment of Glory and Moses' Shining Face

Amar Annus, Tartu

Introduction

The most valuable part of the present paper derives its inspiration from the discussion with Dr. Jeremy A. Black (1951–2004) in the end of September 2003 in Oxford's public house *Turf*. This evening, which unfortunately was the last one for us to sit together, he told me about his current research on the meaning and use of the Sumerian compound noun *si-muš₃* with its graphic variants *si-muš₂* and *si-muš*. He related to me that according to its use in the Sumerian literary texts, the compound noun describes the brilliant appearance of divine or semi-divine objects, by putting together the aspects of brightness and horn. The aspects of "horn-like" and "brilliant" appear to be closely related in Sumerian, because even the independent noun *si* can have both meanings, "horn" and "brilliance", and the logogram *SI* is used in learned Akkadian texts for both "horn" (*qarnu*) and "radiance" (*šarūru*).

The second part of the compound word, *muš₃* or *muš₂*, is found in the bilingual texts and lexical lists corresponding to Akkadian *zīmu* "appearance", which also denotes „luster" and „glow" with reference to divinities and stars.¹ According to the glossary found in the website of the Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature (ETCSL), *muš₃* has two meanings in Sumerian literary texts – "face" (freq. 97) and "flat space" (freq. 67), and *muš₃-me* means "countenance" (freq. 12).² The compound word *si-muš₃* with its graphic variants occur 15 times in the current ETCSL corpus. The compound should mean "of horn-like (= brilliant) appearance" that is probably related to visual effect when the rays of light are refracted on the surface of fine shell, and the iridescent object can be perceived as having a light of its own. The visual effect of *si-muš₃* or "shining horns" is often described in the Sumerian contexts with the verb *gun₃* "to be multicoloured" that refers to the same optical effect, similar to rainbow.

The mixture of brilliance and horn in the Sumerian compound idiom reminded me of the old exegetical problem of Moses' shining face in Exodus 34:29–35 and related material from the other Near Eastern sources. The Hebrew phrase in Ex. 34:29 that describes the shiny appearance of Moses' face that the Israelites were afraid of, is *kī qāran 'ōr pānāw*, "because the skin of his face was horn-like/bril-

1 My work on the present paper was partly supported by a grant from the Estonian Science Foundation ETF 8669. I am thankful to Mara Woods for proofreading my English. See CAD s.v. *zīmu*. All abbreviations in this paper are those found in *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* (CAD), volumes P, R, T, and others.

2 The ETCSL database in Internet was collected under the direction of late Dr. J. Black. The translations of Sumerian texts in the present paper are taken from this source, with few modifications (see <http://www-etcsl.orient.ox.ac.uk>).

liant”. The phrase uses an unusual denominative verb *qāran*, deriving from the common Semitic root **qrn* “horn”. The root is not normally used as a verb, but the syntax clearly indicates that **qrn* here is a verb, not a noun. At the same aforementioned event in Oxford, I attempted to suggest to Jeremy the parallel of *si-muš₃* with Moses’ shining face, but he did not make any comment. “I don’t like to compare” he had said me once earlier, when I tried to discuss with him the relationships of Sumerian literature with the Bible. The following pages of such a comparative study are dedicated to the pleasant memory of Jeremy A. Black.

Association of horn and brilliance in Mesopotamian sources

Recently S. Sanders has rightly pointed out that “the conceptual connection between horns and light was in fact a common feature of the international Near Eastern cuneiform high culture of the early first millennium BCE” (Sanders 2002: 403). Yet one can find the same conceptual connection already in Sumerian texts of the third millennium BCE. It is appropriate first to cite and briefly comment on the contexts of the passages where *si* and *si-muš₃* occur in Sumerian literature. The word *si* regularly means “horn” in the Sumerian texts (freq. 435 in ETCSL), but in some rare contexts (freq. 6), the word clearly means “brilliance”, as in *Enki and Ninhursaga* 53, where *e₂-suhur si^dnanna-a-ta* means “from Nanna’s radiant high temple”. The noun *si* in this context can denote the “horns” of the moon-god, the shining crescent, but *si* means “brilliance” in other contexts as well. In the hymn to *Iddin-Dagan A* 8, the eldest daughter of Suen, Inana, “fills heaven and earth with her great brilliance” (an ki si gal si-a). The cases where *si* alone refers to “brilliance” in the Sumerian literary corpus seem all to be somehow related to the horns of the moon-god. A similar brilliance was sometimes also called *si-muš₃*. In *Enmerkar and En-suhgir-ana*, lines 2-5, there is a praise of Unug:

kul-aba₄^{ki} iri^{ki} an ki-da mu₂-a unug^{ki}-ga mu-bi^dtir-an-na-gin₇
 an-ne₂ us₂-sa-bi si-muš₃ gun₃-a an-na gub-ba-bi ud-sakar gibil
 na-nam “Kulaba, city which has grown from earth to heaven; Unug, whose
 fame like the rainbow reaches up to the sky, a multicoloured sheen, it is indeed
 the new moon standing in heaven.”

The fame of Unug is here compared to rainbow, and multicoloured sheen of *si-muš₃* to the new moon with its shiny horns, the usual depiction of the moon-god in Mesopotamian literature. In another instance, *Temple hymns* 169–172, the temple of Utu in Larsa has the shining horns of a bull, whose *si-muš₃* has an impressive appearance:

e₂ an-ta e₃-a dalla e₃ kul-aba₄^{ki}-a eš₃ e₂-babbar₂ ninda₂[?]
 babbar₂ gu₂-zu^dutu-ra an-na NI-eš te-na-ab si-muš₃-zu ma-
 sila₃ tu₁₁-tu₁₁ kug za-gin₃-na “O house which comes forth from
 heaven, resplendent in Kulaba, shrine E-babbar, shining bull, lift your neck to
 Utu who in the sky! Your shining horns are aggressive, holy and
 lustrous.”

The same Sumerian compound also describes the splendour of the Sun-god, as in *Lugabanda in the mountain cave*, line 232: šul^dutu si-muš₃ kug-ga-na an-ta mu-ta-la₂ “the youth Utu extended his holy splendour down from heaven”, and in *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta*, lines 132 and 208: ^dutu agrun-ta e₃-a-gin₇

si-muš₂ ha-ma-ab-gun₃-gun₃ „Let them make si-muš₂ colourful for me as when Utu comes forth from his cella“. In the latter context, it is difficult to determine, to what si-muš₂ refers. The ETCSL interprets as follows: “have them (= Arattans) make its shining horns colourful for me as when Utu comes forth from his chamber”. It seems that the word refers here to victorious glory of Enmerkar after the defeat of Aratta. In the hymn to *Šulgi D*, the king is explicitly adorned with *si-muš*. In line 28, the king hurls angry words against the people of the foreign lands that are hostile to Nanna, and in the line 29 it is said of him: am zid am gal-še₃ tud-da-gin₇ si-muš gu₂-nu-me-en₃ “You are adorned with splendid horns, like a virile wild bull born to be a great wild bull.” One uncertain attestation of *si²-muš₂* may be found in the hymn to *Ninurta G*, lines 70–71: si²-muš₂-zu-a ni₂ nu-un-te a₂-ur₂-za gu₂-da he₂-em-mi-la₂ “May she (= Nanše) who has no fear of your splendour embrace your limbs!” In these instances, the word describes appearances of the mythical or historical kings.

Sometimes the Sumerian word denotes the shining horns of sacred cattle in different temples. In the *Lament for Sumer and Ur*, line 411, a reference is made to mighty cows of Ur, whose brilliance is forfeited during the enemy destruction: ab₂ mah-bi si-muš₃-bi ba-ra-an-dab₅-be₂-eš si-bi ba-ra-an-kud “Its mighty cows with shining horns were captured, their horns were cut off.” In *Enmerkar and En-suhgir-ana*, lines 183–84, si-muš₃ twice refers to splendid horns of the cow, who feeds Nisaba and in lines 196–97 to the horns of the goat, who does the same job. In the *Temple Hymns* 147–56, the reference is to a wild cow in the courtyard of É-gud-du₇-šar, “House with numerous perfect oxen”, temple of Ningublag at Kiabrig. Its master is “the princely son” of Nanna, who is compared to “a great wild bull, an elephant rejoicing in its own strength”, and finally to “a wild cow growing horns and delighting in its shining horns” (line 152: sumun₂ si mu₂ si-muš₃-a-ni-še₃ hul₂-la).

Summarily, the brilliance of „shining horns“ in Sumerian texts refers to the luminous appearance of temples, deities, kings, and finally, to the horns of the moon-god and sacred cattle in Sumerian temples. The description of deities and victorious kings in the literary texts as having si-muš₃ appearance is certainly related to iconographic motif of horned tiara or *Hörnerkrone* that they wear in iconographic representations, as Naram-Sin on his victory stele. The divine luminosity and horned tiara are probably related through the horns of the new moon that often form the upper part in the iconographic representations of horned tiara.³

No explicit counterpart exists for si-muš₃ in Akkadian, as the word in this form does not occur in lexical lists. But in some bilingual texts there is evidence for the use of the Sumerian words si and si-muš₂ for Akkadian *šarūru* „brilliance“ (see CAD *s.v.*). Instead of si-muš₃, the Sumerian logogram *še-ir-zi* was normally used for writing *šarūru*. In the bilingual hymn to Enlil, first published by T. Meek in BA 10/1, no. 9, there is evidence in reverse 14ff. for Enlil having an appearance of wild bull with shining horns. In this passage the bare si is used for writing *šarūru* and can be translated as follows:

Great mountain Enlil, whose peaks rival the heavens, whose base is solidly grounded in the holy abyss, who reclines in the lands like a fierce wild bull, whose horns shine like the brilliance of the Sun (CAD R 188, 360).

3 See R. M. Boehmer, “Hörnerkrone”, in: *RIA* 4 (1972–1975): cols. 431–434.

The sign SI is written twice in the Sumerian version of the line 14f that should be transliterated either as: si še-ir-zi^{si} ^dUtu mul-mul-la-gin₇, or si še-ir-zi si ^dUtu mul-mul-la-gin₇. In the first option the second SI is taken as a gloss to *še-ir-zi*, and in the second case SI might refer to the “rays” of the brilliance, and the translation should be „whose horns gleam like the rays of the sun” (CAD Q 139). The first reading fits better with the interlinear Akkadian translation *qarnāšu kīma šarūr šamši ittanabiṭu* “whose horns shine like the brilliance of the Sun”. According to both readings the close connection of “horns” and “brilliance” in Mesopotamian imagination is clearly discernible. The “crown of horns” is attested with several deities like Marduk, Ninurta and Lugalbanda (see CAD Q 139), and it is suppositional to assume that this crown was imagined to bear divine brilliance.

In the bilingual text *Exaltation of Ištar*, the Sumerian si-muš₂-bi ma-az-ma-az equates to Akkadian *ša šarūrša hitbuṣ*, “her (= Ištar’s) splendour is as exuberant (as that of Sin, her father)” (LKA 23, rev. 14f).⁴ In another bilingual text edited by A. Falkenstein in UVB 15 36-37, the brilliance of the sun-god is described with the expression si-an-ta-muš-bi, translated into Akkadian as *šarūru elātu*, “exalted brightness” (line 5).

Astronomically, the Akkadian *qarnu* often refers “to the visible part of the moon’s or sun’s disk during an eclipse” (CAD Q 138). In the Adad section of the astronomical omen series *Enūma Anu Enlil*, the thin shining rim of the sun is called both a horn and a light: *šumma ūmu SI-šú ŠUB-ma Sîn adir mūtūti ibaššū* “if the day casts its horn and the moon is dark, there will be deaths”. In the following, the omen is commented: „in the evening watch, the moon is having eclipse; si = *qarnu* “horn”, si = *šarūru* „brightness” (ACh Adad 33: 21). It is observable that the association of “horn” with “brilliance” was already Sumerian and was well known to Babylonian scholars. The astrological commentary in CT 26 43 viii 5–10 further speculates on the meaning of SI, equating it with the following Akkadian words – *qarnu* „horn”, *šuharruru* “to daze”, *arāmu* “to mask”, *šētu* “shining”, *šarūru* “brilliance”, *nūru* “light”. Similar associations are also found in the medical texts and commentaries (see CAD, s.v. *šarūru*).

The iridescent luminosity was regarded as a sign of divinity in the Ancient Near East. Therefore even fly’s wings had important symbolic value, because they also have the membrane structure, so that one can see a spectrum in them in sunlight (Kilmer 1987: 179). In the Mesopotamian story of the flood in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (XI 164–67), the necklace of lapis lazuli flies becomes the symbol of humanity for the mother Goddess. In this respect, the chain of flies in a necklace was a symbolic reference to the rainbow, which is the sign of the covenant between the God and all creatures of the earth in Gen. 9:13–17 (Kilmer 1987: 180).

The primordial finger-nail covering in Jewish, Arabic and other sources

Besides Moses, the combination of the horn-like fine shell substance with brilliance is also found in the Jewish apocryphal traditions concerning Adam’s primordial garment of glory in Paradise, which consisted of shiny fingernail covering over all the body. After the fall this substance remained only on man’s tips of fingers and

4 It should be noted that in CAD H, p. 8 the sign muš₂ of the passage is read erroneously as *suh*.

toes.⁵ *Genesis Rabbah* 20:12 comments on Genesis 3:21 as follows:

In R. Meir's Torah it was found written, "Garments of light ('*ōr*)". This refers to the clothes of the first man, which were like a torch [shedding radiance], broad at the bottom and narrow at the top. Isaac the Elder said: "They were as smooth as a finger-nail and as beautiful as a jewel" (Reuling 2006: 251).

This finger-nail covering in Genesis 3:21 was understood to be the primordial clothing of Adam and Eve at the creation before the Fall. This is also the case in the passage of *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer* 14: "What was the clothing of the first man? A skin-of-nails and a cloud-of-glory covered him. When he ate from the fruit of the tree, the skin-of-nails was stripped from him and he saw himself naked. The cloud of glory flew off him" (Anderson 2001: 123).

The Targums, both Palestinian and Babylonian, read in Genesis 3:21 "and God made to Adam and his wife garments of glory" in place of Masoretic text's "garments of skin". The Targums specify further by "garments of honour (to be worn) upon/for the skin of their flesh". The "garments of light" in R. Meir's Torah is very similar to the parallel phrase in all Targums, it only omits the reference to flesh (Reuling 2006: 253). *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* to Genesis 3:21 combines the elements of light and fine shell, and the clothes God made according to it were of snake-skin and meant to replace the original paradisiacal nail-like garments before the man found himself naked because of his sin:

And JHWH God made for Adam and for his wife garments of honour from the skin of the serpent, which he stripped of him, (to be worn) over the skin of their flesh instead of the fingernail-like clothing of which they were stripped and he clothed them (Reuling 2006: 253).

Some variants of the Jewish tradition about primordial luminous covering of Adam are preserved in Arabic sources. Haisam ibn Muhammad explicitly says that the whole story about Adam's fingernail covering is a "Jewish finding" (Schöck 1993: 113).⁶ According to al-Tabari (*Annales* 1.105.3) Adam was in Paradise fully covered with the material of fingernails (*zūfur*). When he sinned, the covering disappeared, according to Tabari's *Commentary on Qur'an (Tafsīr XII 354, no. 14406/ VIII 143,12ff.)*. After the fall, this covering was replaced by the current skin, only rest thereof has remained on the top of fingers and toes. According to Tha'labi's *Tales of the Prophets*, the remains of the original covering are still visible in order for man to learn about his original state (24,18–20).⁷ In the account of Wahb ibn Munabbih, the clothing of the first couple in Paradise was light (al-Tabari, *Tafsīr XII 355, no. 14408/ VIII 134,17ff.*). Ibn Qutaiba knew another variant according to Wahb, which

5 It may be significant in this context that *si* in Sumerian and as cuneiform logogram sometimes also corresponds to Akkadian *ubānu* "finger". In the texts of ancient Mesopotamia, when speaking of cattle, *qarnu* and *šupru* are very often referred to as a natural pair. Akkadian *šupru* means both fingernail and hoof (see CAD s.v.).

6 For the Jewish sources, see Lambden 1992.

7 In 27:25–26, Tha'labi states: „Er (= Gott) schwächte seine (= Adams) Haut und machte ihn dunkel, nachdem zuvor seine Haut ganz wie die Fingernägel gewesen war. Er ließ ihm ein wenig davon an seinen Fingerspitzen, damit er sich dadurch seines ursprünglichen Zustandes erinnere“ (Schöck 1993: 120).

combined the fingernail and light covering with each other.⁸ Similar stories are still told in the contemporary Middle East. According to oral lore of the Yezidis, Adam's primordial garment was the holy shirt (*khirqe*) and the divine light on his forehead, which were removed by the God (Spät 2008: 664–65, 671).⁹

In the Syrian Christian sources, the fingernail covering of the first couple is not attested, but there are plenty of references to the original glorious garments of Adam that he lost in the fall and which Christ gained back by incarnation and baptism in Jordan (Brock 1990: 66–72). For example, Ephrem Syrus wrote in *Commentary on the Diatessaron*, XVI 10, commenting on Matt. 21:20–21 as follows:

When Adam sinned and was stripped of the glory in which he was clothed, he covered his nakedness with fig leaves. Our Saviour came and underwent suffering in order to heal Adam's wounds and to provide a garment of glory for his nakedness. He dried up the fig tree in order to show that there would no longer be any need for fig leaves to serve as Adam's garment, since Adam had returned to his former glory, and so no longer had any need of leaves or garments of skin (Brock 1990: 69).

The idea of the primordial finger-nail covering of first men had a greater appeal for less theologically orientated minds, since it is an excellent motif for folk literature, explaining the origins of the fingernails in human body. For the same reason, the theologians of the Near East may have despised the motif for its simpleness. This is probably the reason why Ephrem and other fathers writing in Syriac seem to be ignorant of the finger-nail covering of Adam, and speak only about his luminous garment. According to Syriac *Cave of Treasures*, similar garments of light were also worn by the angels (Spät 2008: 676).

The folkloristic motif of an original finger-nail covering of the first human beings may be more ancient than the extant Near Eastern sources and, the association of "horn" with "brilliance" may be of common Eurasian intellectual heritage. O. Dähnhardt in his *Natursagen* 100 years ago pointed out many parallels to finger-nail covering of Adam among the European, Asian and Siberian nations that speak about first human beings (Dähnhardt 1907: 226–227). It is not my intention here to investigate if all these variants in Europe and Asia derive from Jewish-Christian sources or if some of them are either independent or from a different source, but so wide dispersal of the motif probably indicates its very old age.¹⁰ Even in these ethnographically gathered materials, a clear connection is made between the horn-like substance and fingernail covering. For example, according to Dähnhardt, "die Volkssage der Kleinrussen" tells the following:

8 *Kitāb al-Ma'ārif* 14,12ff.: "Gott umkleidete Adam mit einem Kleid von Horn (*zufur*). Das Kleid erneuerte sich von Tag zu Tag und wurde immer schöner. Als die beiden [Adam und Eva] von dem Baum assen, schwand ihr Kleid – ihn [Adam] hatten Strahlen wie die der Sonne umgeben –, und wurde zu den Finger- und Zehenspitzen ihrer Hände und Füße" (Schöck 1993: 113).

9 "Yezidi tradition holds that the black *khirqe* and *qof* ("crown," in this case a conical hat) worn by Sheikh Adi, a divine incarnation and the central figure of Yezidi religious history, used to emanate light" (Spät 2008: 676 n. 73).

10 Dähnhardt 1907: 226 notes the variants from the following sources in the old-fashioned terminology: Weissrussisch, Grossrussisch, Wogulisch, Ungarisch, Bulgarisch, Rumänisch, Czechisch, Mährisch, Mohammedanisch.

Noch lange, ehe der erste Mensch gesündigt hatte, war er auf dem ganzen Körper mit solchem Horn, wie wir es an den Nägeln haben, bedeckt. Und es verlangte ihn weder nach Kleidern, noch nach Schuhen, wie uns jetzt. Als er aber sündigte, fiel das Horn von ihm ab, und nur zur Erinnerung, dass er einst damit bedeckt war, ist ein wenig von jenem Horn an den Enden der Finger und Zehen geblieben, und die wird "Nägel" genannt.¹¹

Adam's luminous garments and Moses' shining face: Two sides of one coin

The primordial luminous garment of Adam is directly related to Moses' shining face on Sinai in many areas of Jewish theological speculations. In the context of Exodus narrative, the shining face of Moses derives from his encounter with the God on Sinai.¹² Similarly, *si-muš₃* in the Sumerian texts sometimes describes, as was analyzed above, the appearance of persons and objects that have been in contact with the divine world.

The shining countenance of Moses is often associated with luminous prelapsarian appearance of Adam in Paradise according to some Jewish exegetical traditions, in the Qumranic and Rabbinic texts. Thus in the Dead Sea Scrolls fragments known as *Words of the Luminaries (4Q504)*, the tradition about Adam's former glory follows with a reference to the luminosity bestowed on the glorious face of Moses on Sinai (Orlov 2007: 327–329). The association between the glory of Adam with Moses was made even more explicit in other sources, such as Macarian Homilies (Orlov 2007: 333–339). The Samaritan text *Memar Marqah* insists that when Moses ascended to Mount Sinai, he received the image of God which Adam cast off in the Garden of Eden (Orlov 2007: 331). *Deuteronomy Rabbah* 11.3 offers important witness for Adam/Moses connection in the following midrashic dialogue:

Adam said to Moses: "I am greater than you because I have been created in the image of God." Whence this? For it is said, "and God created man in his own image." Moses replied to him: "I am far superior to you, for the honour which was given to you has been taken away from you, as it is said: "but man (Adam) abideth not in honour," but as for me, the radiant countenance which God gave me still remains with me. Whence? For it is said: "his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated" (Gottstein 1994: 183).

G. Gottstein also points out another significant midrashic passage from *Midrash Tadshe* 4, where Moses is Adam's luminous counterpart:

In the likeness of the creation of the world the Holy One blessed be He performed miracles for Israel when they came out of Egypt. ... In the beginning: "and God created man in his image," and in the desert: "and Moses knew not that the skin of his face shone" (Gottstein 1994: 183).

11 Dähnhardt 1907: 226. The original of this quote is *Etnograf. Zbirnyk* XII, S. 21, Nr. 15.

12 As S. Sanders explains: "Moses' physical proximity to the source of revelation added a layer to his appearance, a physical mark of inhumanity, and it is possible that the Israelites shrank away from Moses simply because they did not recognize him behind his divine persona. The Exodus passage introduces the religious problem of how divine radiance might be visualized and incorporated into the body" (Sanders 2002: 404).

The traditional association of Adam's primordial glory with Moses' shining face is also well known in Syriac sources. Thus Ephrem in his *Commentary on Genesis II*, 14-15 comments on the clothing of Adam in Genesis 2:25 as follows:

It was because of the glory in which they were wrapped that they were not ashamed. Once this had been taken away from them, after the transgression of the commandment, they were ashamed because they had been stripped of it, and the two of them rushed to the leaves in order to cover not so much their bodies as their shameful members. ... For just as Israel could not look upon the face of Moses (Exod. 34:33-35), neither were the animals able to look upon the radiance of Adam and Eve: at the time when they received names from him they passed in front of Adam with their eyes down, since their eyes were incapable of taking in his glory (Brock 1990: 206-207).

The Jewish traditions about Moses' horn-like shining face and Adam's primordial clothing of the finger-nail substance, freely alternating with his "garment of light" had predecessors in ancient Mesopotamian texts. The use of the words *si* and *si-muš₃* in Sumerian and as the logograms in Akkadian texts reveals the natural connection of iridescence with the illuminated membrane structure, which well corresponds to certain aspects of the luminosity, which Adam and Moses had in Jewish traditions. The motif of opalescence that surrounds divine persons and objects is amply attested in the Mesopotamian art and literature, and there are quite many terms in Akkadian denoting holy luminosity: *melammu*, *namrirru*, *namurratu*, *puluhtu*, *šarūru*, and others. All those types of luminosity can be put on as clothes by divine figures in Mesopotamian texts (see CAD L 18-19).

Thus the ancient enigma of Moses' horns, which was introduced to the western world by Jerome's imperfect translation of Exodus 34:29 as *quod cornuta esset facies eius* can be solved with reference to ancient Mesopotamian idiom that peculiarly connected the divine luminosity with horn-like substance. This connection was probably deeply rooted in the folklore traditions of the Ancient Near East, and the linguistic idioms reflected common beliefs. Subsequently, the ancient association of the multicoloured iridescence with the horned tiara or royal crown in Mesopotamia was shared by a stream within Jewish tradition, which took Moses' radiance as a sign of his coronation in heaven (cf. Sanders 2002: 405). According to some midrashic fragments the crown appeared on Moses' head and horns were grown to him in order to wage war and gore the hostile angels during his ascent to Sinai (see Kasher 1997). There are varieties of explanations offered for Moses' horns within the Jewish texts, but a great number of traditions associate Moses' shiny appearance with regaining Adam's paradisiacal garment of glory, as was pointed out above. According to some Jewish traditions in the Targumim and midrashim, all the Israelites were invested with the garments of glory at Sinai:

There exists well-established tradition that the Israelites were invested with similar garments (or even crowns) of glory when they accepted the Torah. These garments guarded Israel from the angel of death and rendered her immortal. At Sinai, Israel achieved a state similar to Adam prior to his fall. When Moses delayed from coming down from the mountain, Israel constructed the Golden Calf and venerated it, the garments were removed, and the sentence of death was reimposed. "Adam and Eve did not last long in

their state of glory" is doubled with its mythic alloform, "Israel did not last long in her state of glory" (Anderson 2001: 122).

While according to Jewish traditions Moses brought back the primordial angel-like luminosity of Adam by receiving Torah on Sinai, in the Christological thinking of Ephrem and other Syriac church fathers, even more glorious state than Adam's was brought into the world by Christ. In the theological and historical schemes that Ephrem composes concerning these original robes of glory, there is also an intermediary place for Moses between Adam and Christ, and a subtle distinction is made between the brightnesses of Moses and Christ, in his *Hymns on the Church* 36.6: "The brightness which Moses put on (Ex. 34:29) was wrapped on him from without, whereas the river in which Christ was baptized put on Light from within, and so did Mary's body, in which He resided, gleam from within".¹³

The light of fingernails in Habdalah ceremony

The theological connection of Adam's glorious garment with Moses' shining face is further elaborated in very interesting way in the Jewish Kabbalah, which provided an explanation for gazing at one's fingernails during Habdalah ceremony, or even provoked the custom itself. Habdalah means „distinction“ and its blessing is one of the most ancient ones in Judaism that is recited at the termination of Sabbaths and festivals, in order to emphasize the distinction between the sacred time and the ordinary weekdays, between holy and profane.

At the end of the evening service of a day following one of greater holiness, a special Habdalah ceremony is performed that begins by a pronouncing a benediction over a cup of wine or any other beverage except water. At the conclusion of Sabbaths brief benedictions are added over spices and freshly kindled light, which are followed by a lengthier benediction that emphasizes the distinction. While pronouncing the benediction over the light in the Habdalah candle, it is customary to open and close the hands and gaze at the fingernails. Stress is laid on the fact that one recites the benediction on seeing the blaze of the fire reflected on the fingernails.¹⁴ If there is no fire, it is sufficient to look merely at the reflection of the light of the stars in nails (Finesinger 1937–38: 348–49).

Some Rabbinic sources give the information that the custom was very popular, but the scholars or more enlightened ones rejected the habit (Finesinger 1937–38: 350–51). The motives for their rejection may have been the custom's alleged association with divination, and its background in Middle Eastern folklore. Habdalah is still a living tradition in Judaism, and one can gather some relevant information even from popular sources. Thus a modern popular book explains that the custom of cupping the hands around the flame and gazing at the fingernails is „in keeping with the belief that in Eden, Adam and Eve were completely covered with a membrane akin to this hornlike substance that emitted rays of Primordial Light" (Gottlieb 1989: 237).

By gazing into the light reflected by fingernails from the fire in Habdalah candle, the man reflects about Adam's prelapsarian condition that was closer to him

13 Brock 1990: 70. In some texts of anti-Jewish polemic, the pericope of Moses' shining face was reinterpreted as referring to his veil, as in 2Cr 3:12–18; see Brock 1981.

14 See "Habadala", in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, Vol. VI (New York and London, 1904), pp. 118–121.

during holidays than in the following weekdays, but still far removed because of Adam's sin. The Zohar section *Vayaqhel* 208 speculatively explains the symbolism of fingernails in Habdalah custom, also in connection with Moses on Sinai:

It is only at the conclusion of the Sabbath that we say "who createst the lights of the fire" in allusion to the lower grades. But both the upper and the lower grades are symbolized by our fingers. The finger-nails are of great importance in this symbolism. They are on the back of the fingers, and thus symbolize the Hinder Countenance, which need to be illumined from that Lamp: it is called "the back". Whereas the inner and nail-less side of the fingers symbolizes the Inner Countenance which is hidden. This symbolical action is based on the verse, "and thou shalt see my back; but my face shall not be seen" (Ex. 33:23). "My back" is represented by the outer and nail-part of the fingers which, when we say the blessing over the light, must be placed so as to catch that light; "but my face shall not be seen", and hence the inner side of the fingers symbolizing the Inner Countenance, need not face the light to be illumined by it, as their illumination emanates from no other source but the Supernal Lamp in the height of heights, which is utterly concealed and undisclosed. The outer and nail parts of the fingers must therefore be shown to the light, but the inner parts not (Simon and Levertoff 1933: 207–208).

According to the Kabbalistic interpretation in the Zohar, the Habdalah ceremony fortifies the participants "against the departure of super-spirit" that was with them during the holidays, and "by this departure a man's own soul is left forlorn and naked" (Simon and Levertoff 1933: 208). Thus the "super-spirit" that was with man during the holidays is akin to the fingernail covering of Adam during his prelapsarian period, and the remains of it on his fingertips are reminders to man of his original condition. It is customary in the Habdalah ceremony for a box of aromatic spices to be handed round, accompanied with an appropriate blessing, and Zohar *Vayaqhel* 208b explains the custom in reference to Genesis 27:27, "and he smelled the smell of his raiment" as follows:

Now, the raiment here mentioned has been expounded as alluding to the garments of Adam the first man, those in which the Holy One arrayed him when He placed him in the Garden of Eden. When Adam sinned, however, he was stripped of these precious garments and was clothed in others instead. The original garments with which Adam was arrayed in the Garden of Eden were of the same kind as those in which the legions, called „hind-parts“, are arrayed, and bear the name of "nail-raiment". And so long as Adam remained in the Garden of Eden all those legions encompassed and guarded him so that no evil could come near him. But after he sinned he was stripped of those garments and clothed in profane garments, made out of vicious stuff and evil spirits, and the holy legions departed from him; and there was only left on him of the original covering the fingernails (Simon and Levertoff 1933: 208).

Ascent and descent on the Paradise Mountain

In Jewish and even more in Christian traditions the lost glory of Adam and its eventual recovery are extremely important issues for theological speculation from different points of view. It suffices here to summarize that for Christian theologians,

Adam's primordial glory was regained in Christ for humankind.¹⁵ The whole process was often expressed in metaphoric language of putting off and on the luminous garments. Adam's fall and his loss of the garments of light, the gnostic and neoplatonic descriptions of the soul's descent – all these are variations of the theme, of which there are predecessors in ancient Mesopotamian religious texts. The metaphoric imagery and expressions of clothing derive from the antecedent Mesopotamian mythological imagery of losing and regaining the clothes or powers during the descent and ascent of a deity to and from the netherworld (see Annus 2006a: 17–23).

In various versions of these stories, which all have a background in the Middle Eastern folklore, the set of motifs are combined differently, in order to aim at some theological ends. But the resulting stories may still contain the motifs from the same stock.¹⁶ In order to strengthen the argument for the Mesopotamian ancestry of the idea about paradisiacal luminosity, it is necessary to bring some paradise images into discussion.

According to both the Ancient Near Eastern sources and to the Hebrew Bible, the temple is the architectural embodiment of the cosmic mountain (Holloway 1991: 329). The temple as cosmic mountain was called *é-kur* "house, mountain" in Sumerian, and the word "mountain" was very common element in Mesopotamian temple names.¹⁷ In the Hebrew Bible, a cosmic mountain or *Axis Mundi* is variously identified as the mountain Eden, Sinai, or Zion (Anderson 1988: 190–192).

In Mesopotamian temple architecture, the ziggurat symbolized and functioned as an artificial cosmic mountain (Holloway 1991: 330). The same image is recognizably in the background in Ezekiel's descriptions in 28:13–14, where "Eden, the Garden of God" is "the holy mountain of God" (see Brock 1990: 51). Some technical terms of Mesopotamian origin were used in Ezekiel's plan for the altar in the ideal temple (Ez. 43:13–17). It was to rise in steps to the '*ariel* or *har'el*', which term in Hebrew derives from Akkadian *arallû*, the netherworld from which the world mountain rose (see Holloway 1991: 330–31).

Subsequently, in later Jewish and Syriac sources, Paradise is often visualized as a mountain, bearing striking similarities with the Mesopotamian ziggurat.¹⁸ I have pointed out in another paper that the paradise image of the Edessa scholar Bardaisan (154–222 AD) was modelled on that of the ancient ziggurat (see Annus 2006). The same is true about Ephrem's view of Paradise as the highest mountain with terraced levels, which he relates to different states of life in the Church. This evidence clearly shows that symbols such as the ziggurat and other images of ancient Mesopotamian cosmic geography were used by Syriac writers as traditional sources for their own interpretations (see Murray 1975: 306–309).

15 For Ephrem, see Brock 1990: 66–74; see also Golitzin 2003.

16 For example, in the apocryphal *Life of Adam and Eve* God sends upon Adam after his fall 70 evils, in the latter's words: "to our eyes, and to our ears and as far as our feet, plagues and portents laid up in (his) treasures" (Anderson 2000: 76–81). The situation is similar to the Akkadian version of *Ištar's Descent*, where the netherworld mistress Ereškigala imposes upon the fallen goddess sixty diseases on every part of her body. The descent or fall is in both cases associated with mortality, the former divine or angelic state changes into that of a mortal being.

17 See George 1993: Lexical Index, s.v. *hur.sag* and *kur*.

18 The temple tower in Mesopotamia also had "horns" (*qarnu*), which probably refer to ziggurat's upper parts (*qarni ziqqurrati*), covered with shining metal (see CAD Q 139).

Moreover, in his further speculations, Ephrem is even more dependent on ancient Mesopotamian intellectual traditions. In the passage under discussion, *Hymns on Paradise* 2.10–12, he relates that Paradise, the ark of Noah and the Mount Sinai have exactly the same threefold divisions, indicating that these have basically the same value as religious symbols. To quote his words:

When He made this intricate design (= the Paradise mountain) He varied its beauties, so that some levels were far more glorious than others. To the degree that one level is higher than another, so too is its glory the more sublime. In this way He allots the foothills to the most lowly, the slopes to those in between and the heights to the exalted. When the just ascend its various levels to receive their inheritance, with justice He raises up each one to the degree that accords with his labors; each is stopped at the level whereof he is worthy, there being sufficient levels in paradise for everyone: the lowest parts for the repentant, the middle for the righteous, the heights for those victorious, while the summit is reserved for God's Presence (= Shekhinah). Noah made the animals live in the lowest part of the Ark; in the middle part he lodged birds, while Noah himself, like the Deity, resided on the upper deck. On Mount Sinai it was the people who dwelt below, and priests round about it, and Aaron halfway up, while Moses was on its heights, and the Glorious One on the summit (Brock 1990: 88–89).

It has often been pointed out that the flood ark in the Ancient Near Eastern mythology was the architectural embodiment of the cosmic mountain, or a ziggurat (Holloway 1991: 338–39). More recently J.-J. Glassner showed that in the Babylonian esoteric text *Esagil Tablet*, which describes the land's principal temple of Marduk, the measures of its ziggurat were exactly identical with those of Utnapishti's boat as described on the 11th tablet of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. According to these two texts, both the ziggurat of Esagil and the deluge vessel had seven storeys and their height and length was equal, having a cuboid structure and vertically sevenfold division.¹⁹ S. Holloway's paper (1991) has further brought out multiple reasons why the Ancient Near Eastern world and the Hebrew Bible regarded the cosmic mountain, the temple and the deluge vessel as ideologically and cosmologically closely related entities. Precise correspondences of the dimensional proportions and structure are also found between Noah's ark and the Solomonic temple in the Hebrew Bible (Holloway 1991: 348–49).

In his description of the Paradise mountain, Ephrem continues and adds to the old tradition, when he equates its three parts or levels with those of Noah's ark and Mount Sinai. Finally he identifies this tripartite structure with the Church herself in 2.13: "Here is the harbor of all riches, whereby the Church is depicted" (Brock 1990: 89). Elsewhere in the Syriac tradition, the cosmic mountain Eden is identified as "the holy church" (Anderson 1988: 208–209).

Ephrem's paradise mountain and deluge vessel consist of three hierarchical layers, while Marduk's ziggurat and Utnapishti's boat had seven. The threefold and sevenfold structure of the cosmic mountain were in a variation already in ancient Mesopotamia, where there is evidence for both. The sevenfold division was present in the structure of the ziggurat, which was probably related to the seven planetary spheres and their corresponding deities (see Annus 2007: 8–16). The tri-

¹⁹ See Glassner 2002; Holloway 1991: 339–41; cf. Hempelmann 2004.

partite division is found with Mesopotamian ziggurats as well, in conformity to the standard cosmology, where there are three heavens or "paths" of Anu, Enlil and Ea, being the arcs along horizon over which the stars are seen to rise.²⁰ Also the Jerusalem temple was symbolically divided either into three or seven parts (see Himmel-farb 1993: 14, 32–33).²¹

Consequently, when Ephrem is speaking about the structural affinity between the paradise mountain and the ship of deluge, dividing them both into three hierarchical layers, this is in a continuity with ancient Mesopotamian scholarly lore, where the ziggurat and deluge vessel were conceived as identical in structure. When identifying this cosmic structure with the Jewish temple and the Christian Church, which is feminine in Syriac, Ephrem is continuing the ancient tradition that regarded the holy mountain in its ziggurat form as feminine.

The word *ziqquratu* is of feminine gender in Akkadian and occurs as the epithet of Istar of Nineveh in Assurbanipal's hymn to her: "O ziggurat, pride of Nineveh, which bears [awe-inspiring splendour!]"²² The seven stages of it were associated with descent and ascent of the goddess Inana or Istar, as related in the Sumerio-Akkadian myth on her descent to the netherworld. The seven levels of the building correspond to the seven garments or powers of the goddess, which she removes during her descent at every gate of the netherworld and subsequently puts on again during her ascent. The descent from the ziggurat's silver-coloured top would symbolize undressing, while ascending it would symbolize putting on the garments (see Annus 2007: 11). The locality that the goddess visits during her descent journey is called *kur*, which means both "mountain" and "netherworld" in Sumerian, thus alluding to the world mountain whose foundations lied in the netherworld.

Thus the luminous garments of Adam in Paradise or on the Paradise Mountain before his fall, about which we have evidence in the apocryphal texts of late Judaism and in the Syrian fathers, have a complex background in ancient Mesopotamian myths. In some Jewish and Syrian sources a parallelism is further elaborated between Adam's garments and Moses' shining countenance on Sinai, which strengthens the connection of obtaining and losing the divine splendour with the ascent to and descent from the divine mountain, the mount of Paradise or Sinai. It is also significant that to Adam before the fall and to Moses on Sinai are given the same position in mutually corresponding cosmic structures by Ephrem (Brock 1990: 53).

One more example will suffice to show that Ephrem's treatment of Paradise Mountain as hierarchical structure equal to the feminine Church is not an isolated example. In the beginning of the apocryphal *Acts of Thomas* 6–7 there is a hymnic description of a female being, who is called "maiden" in the earlier Greek version, but changed to "my Church" in Syriac. This female being in the Greek version is a female heavenly person, whose dwelling place is between heaven and earth. Some-

20 For ziggurats, see Wightman 2007: 27–29; for cosmology, see Rochberg 2004: 7.

21 In Jewish literature a threefold heaven or a heavenly temple is found in *1 Enoch* 14 and in the *Testament of Levi*. The sevenfold heaven is found in the *Ascension of Isaiah* and in *Hekhalot* texts that corresponds to the sevenfold descent to the Queen of the Underworld in the Mesopotamian myths *Istar's Descent* and *Nergal and Ereškigal*. It is thus probable that the teachings of three and seven heavens in Jewish and Christian esotericism originate in Babylonian traditions (Dalley 1994: 253).

22 See A. Livingstone, SAA 3 7:9. In early Christian literature Church is frequently called with feminine epithets such as "maiden", "mother", "virgin", and in Syriac she is sometimes called "daughter of light", see Klijn 2003: 30–31.

times she enjoys blissful company of the King of Heaven in her bridal chamber. The Syriac version is cited below:

My church is the daughter of light; the splendour of kings is hers. Charming and winsome is her aspect, fair and adorned with every good work. Her garments are like unto flowers, the smell thereof is fragrant and pleasant. On her head dwells the King, and He feeds those who dwell with him beneath. Her tongue is the curtain, which the priest raises and enters in. Her neck is the lofty light of steps which the first architect did build. ... Her tongue is the curtain, which the priest raises and enters in. Her neck is the lofty flight of steps which the first architect did build. Her hands, both of them, proclaim the place of life; and her ten fingers have opened the gate of Heaven. Her bridal chamber is lighted up, and full of sweet odour of salvation. ... Her gates are adorned with truth. ... The living are in attendance upon her, and they look to their Bridegroom who shall come, and they shall shine with his glory, and shall be with Him in the kingdom which never passes away. And they shall be in the glory to which all the just are gathered; and they shall be in the joy into which some enter; and they shall put on shining garments, and shall be clothed with the glory of their Lord. And they shall praise the living Father, whose majestic light they have received.²³

This heavenly female being is described here as an architectural building furnished with gates and steps, which in turn are anthropomorphically identified with her body parts. A. Klijn resumes: “We may draw the conclusion that we are dealing with a heavenly figure taken from the surrounding Semitic world showing characteristics related with the Jewish Wisdom” (Klijn 2003: 31). I think that one can speak about this “well-known Semitic female being”, as Klijn ambiguously calls her (2003: 39) much more concretely. The goddess Istar is in its background, who was sometimes conceived as the embodiment of the ziggurat. There are some important references in this text to the bridal chamber, where the members of the church convene in order to be clothed with the glory of their Lord. According to Ephrem, the actual bridal chamber is Paradise, where the beautiful people are clothed with the Robe of Light (Brock 1990: 72). This has a parallel in the image of ancient Babylonian ziggurat, whose roof-top structure was the place for the divine bed-chamber, and where, according to Herodotus (1.181), only the god-chosen women could spend the night with the deity. In the hymn of the *Acts of Thomas* we have a description of the bridal chamber without any overtones of sexuality, but according to Bardaisan’s heretical views, in the bridal chamber took place the sexual union of Father with the Mother (Annus 2006).

The Mesopotamian myth of the goddess’ descent to the netherworld had one more relevant interpretation, according to which the goddess refers to the human or cosmic soul in its way to incarnation and back to heaven (Annus 2007: 16–25). The aspects of the human person are found in Ephrem’s above mentioned text as well, where the threefold structure of a human person – intellectual spirit, soul and body – also reflects the divisions of Paradise (Brock 1990: 53). In *Hymns on Paradise* 9.20–21 he describes the glorification of the human person in clothing metaphors:

Far more glorious than the body is the soul, and more glorious still than the soul is the spirit, but more hidden than the spirit is the Godhead. At the end

23 Lines 1–8, 15–24, 29, 34–47; the translation is from Klijn 2003: 28–29.

the body will put on the beauty of the soul, the soul will put on that of the spirit, while the spirit shall put on the very likeness of God's majesty. For bodies shall be raised to the level of souls, and the soul to that of the spirit, while the spirit will be raised to the height of God's majesty (Brock 1990: 143).

The continuity of Mesopotamian religious imagery in the Jewish and Christian conceptions of divine luminosity appears to be a complex phenomenon, but some details help to point out their precursors in the ancient Near Eastern world. There are some significant similarities in the conceptions of divine luminosity between the Mesopotamian deities or kings, and Jewish-Christian semi-divine figures such as Adam and Moses.²⁴ By investigating the continuity of mythical images and motifs found in Middle Eastern texts from different periods, I tried to argue in this paper that pieces of very old imagery are frequently fit into new narratives without significant changes to the content.

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24 The redeemed state of humanity was often described as divine or angelomorphic one in the texts of late Judaism, see Fletcher-Louis 2002.

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