HLL: LORD OF THE SICKLE*

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The Ugaritic God *Hll*

Among the more obscure deities mentioned in Ugaritic literature is a certain *Hll*, who is mentioned in only a handful of extant passages, from which precious little can be learned. The name is invariably embedded in a fixed formula invoking a group of goddesses known as the *Kaṭirātu*, "les *kṯrt* filles de *hll*, les *snnt*,"[1] who, in one variation, are also the *bnt hll b'l gml*, the 'daughters of *Hll*, lord of the *gml*.'[2] While the *Kaṭirātu* are understood to signify a class of divine artisans and *hll* may in this phrase connote "shouting" or "joyful noise,"[3] the 'lord of the *gml*' certainly signifies a distinct mythical character. Since nothing can be learned concerning this god's *mythos*, his interest lies mainly in his potential identification with *Hēlēl ben-Šaḥar*, the 'son of Dawn,' in Isa. 14:12–16. The latter was addressed as a mythical character who attempted to overthrow the regime of the sky god 'Elyōn on the pinnacle of Mount Ṣāphōn, but failed miserably and was hurled into the underworld. It is now generally believed that Isaiah's source was a Canaanite-Ugaritic one rather than a Babylonian myth, as had initially been considered,[4] but a precise analogue has not yet been forthcoming. A West Semitic provenance would gain probability if the Ugaritic *Hll* could be shown to be identical to Isaiah's Hēlēl. Both names could be derived from the same root *hll*, 'to shine, flash forth light.'[5] On present knowledge, *Hll*'s epithet is the crux. A *hapax legomenon*, the meaning of this title is not easily ascertained, but it is generally understood to carry an astral connotation of some sort.

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[1] *KTU* 1. 17. ii. 27 ff.; 1. 24. 6, 41–42, ed. Dietrich et al.1995: 49, 69 f.; Grelot 1956: 22.

[2] *KTU* 1. 24. 41–42, ed. Dietrich et al. 1995: 69 f.

[3] Grelot 1956: 22 and note 1 for a summary of proposed etymologies of the designation *snnt*.

[4] Grelot 1956: 19; Day 2000: 170.

[5] Brown et al. 1962: 237 s.v. 'הֵילֵל,' 'הָלַל'; Watson 1995: 746. This root, which only occurs in Job 29:3, 31:26 and 41:18 in the Old Testament, is cognate with the Akkadian verb *elêlu*, 'to be bright,' and the epithet *ellu*, 'bright, shining,' that was applied to astral deities such as Šamaš and Ištar; see Grelot 1956: 24 f.; McKay 1970: 453; Oldenburg 1970: 206 f., n. 121. More sceptically, Albright 1968: 187 note 3 deemed the etymology of 'Hēlēl' "obscure," cf. Etz 1986: 291 and note 7; Day 2000: 168. Gallagher's view (1994: 131–46) that Hēlēl and *Hll* represented the god Enlil, known as *Ellil* or *Illil* in Akkadian, is repudiated in Spronk 1998: 718; Day 2000: 168.

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A MOON GOD?

The term *gml* is commonly compared to Akkadian *gamlu*, 'hooked or curved (wooden) staff, boomerang,' 'crook, crooked handle,' or 'sickle.'[6] This derivation is linguistically impeccable, but what could a 'lord of the sickle' have referred to? The most obvious candidate is the lunar crescent, suggesting affinity with the Thamudic Arabic god of the new moon, Hilâlu(n).[7] In an attempt to buttress the equation of *Hll* and Isaiah's Hēlēl, Winckler emended *hēlēl* to *hêlāl*, 'new moon,' and *šaḥar*, 'dawn,' to *śāhar*, 'moon' on the basis of Arabic,[8] but, as his critics point out, none of the textual versions of Isaiah support these modifications and, whereas the word *šaḥar* is well attested in Hebrew, *śāhar* is unknown. Moreover, the lunar interpretation does not reinforce, but weakens the link with Hēlēl, as no Semitic myth features the moon attempting to usurp the heavenly throne and it is odd for the moon to be described as a 'son of the dawn.'[9]

But what if Ugaritic *gml* did not refer to the moon? The lunar interpretation of *gml* finds no support in the ancient Semitic material after all. The Akkadian word *gamlu* was not specifically used for the moon and the lunar nature of the Arabic Hilâlu cannot be extrapolated to the Ugaritic context as it appears late and is isolated within the Semitic world.[10]

A CRESCENTIC COMET?

There is no reason to dismiss the reading of *b'l gml* as 'lord of the sickle' or indeed 'lord sickle,'[11] but perhaps the term alluded to some other sickle-shaped celestial object than the new moon. Comets in the shape of sickles are a relatively common occurrence. In 1479, a comet *in modum trabis acutissimæ*, "in the manner of a sharply pointed wooden beam," was observed over Arabia *cum falce phœnaria*, 'with a punitive sickle,' and was accordingly depicted with a scythe-like implement inside its tail (fig. 1).[12] On 24 September 1816, Gilfillan of Comrie, Scotland, observed "a large luminous body, bent like a crescent, which stretched itself over the heavens."[13] In 1852, Ferguson described comet Encke as having "a crescent appearance, the concave side near the sun."[14] According to a certain W. S. Jacob, stationed in Madras, India, the nucleus of the Great Comet of 1854 "was as bright as a star of magnitude 5 and was in the form of a crescent."[15] Dembowski reported that the nucleus of the Great Comet of 1860 also "had the strange appearance of a parabolic crescent."[16] In 1861, comet Tebbutt was described as follows by Richard Main who was in charge of Oxford's Radcliffe Observatory: "A stream of light went off from the upper apparent part of the nucleus, and turned round towards the apparent west in the shape of

[6] Von Soden 1965: 279 s.v. 'gamlu(m)'; Gelb et al. 1956: 34–35 s.v. 'gamlu'; Bezold 1926: 98 s.v. 'gamlu.'

[7] West 1997: 476 and note 111; Gallagher 1994: 135–138; Etz 1986: 291 note 7.

[8] Götze, in Gordon, in Grelot 1956: 22–24.

[9] Day 2000: 168 f.; Watson 1995: 746 f.; Loretz 1976: 133; McKay 1970: 451 note 1, 452; Grelot 1956: 20, 42; Schmidt 1951: 165. Not so Spronk 1998 and Korpel.

[10] If *Hilâlu* was based on the same root *hll*, 'to shine, flash' as *Hēlēl* (Brown et al. 1962: 237 s.v. 'הֵלֵל'), the lunar connotation could have developed secondarily from an earlier sense of 'brightness.'

[11] For an alternative translation of *gml* see the appendix.

[12] Lycosthenes 1557: 494, with the intractable form *phœnaria* interpreted as *poenaria*. The illustration is also reproduced in Newburn et al. 1991: 1325. The comet was probably P/Swift-Tuttle.

[13] Milne 1841: 117.

[14] Kronk 2003: 207.

[15] Kronk 2003: 231 f.

[16] Kronk 2003: 286.

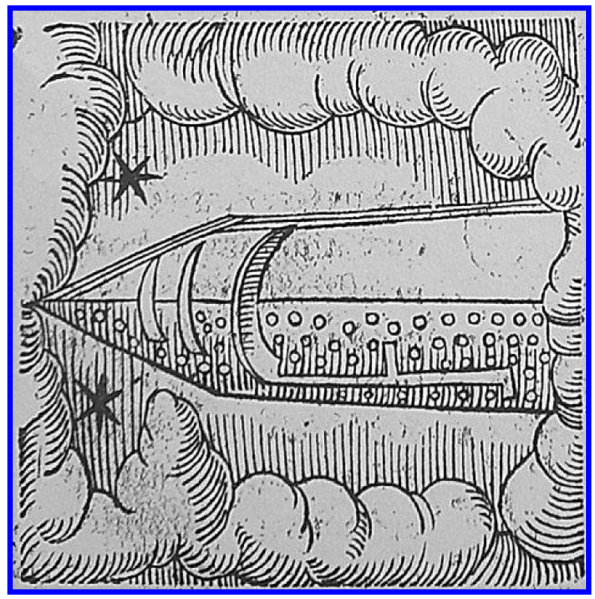

Fig. 1.—Illustration of a comet observed in 1479 over Arabia

a sickle."[17] "Main said a telescope revealed the nucleus was pear-shaped, with two curved streams of light still flowing from it. The lower stream was sickle-shaped . . ."[18] And comet Sawerthal appeared on 25 February 1888, to L. A. Eddie of Cape of Good Hope, South Africa "as a barbed spear, the barbed head resembling two wings" (fig. 2).[19] In ancient times, the Roman astrologer, Campester (third or fourth century C.E.), of whom hardly anything else is known, was cited to the effect that the legendary comet Typhon was *drepanoeidḗs*, "sickle-shaped."[20] Could *Hll*'s title have referred to a sickle-shaped comet?

Interestingly, attempts to explain Isaiah's Hēlēl as a comet reach back as far as 1858. During the visibility of Donati's comet in that year, a correspondence took place in the newspapers as to whether comets were mentioned or referred to in the Bible. "In this passage a certain Hillel is said to have fallen from Heaven, but it is unknown what Hillel means. Some interpreters derive the word from Hebrew verbs signifying to shine, to glory, to boast, to agitate, to howl, etc. A writer minded to obtain a far-fetched or expansive view of words suggested that Hillel indicated a comet, because comets answer to the ideas of brightness, swift motion, and calamity."[21] The suggestion was apparently not followed up

[17] Kronk 2003: 294.

[18] Kronk 2003: 297.

[19] Kronk 2003: 603. An illustration is given in Fuhr 1967: 103.

[20] Campester, apud Lydus (sixth century C.E.), *De Ostentis*, 15b, ed. Wachsmuth 1897: 44; cf. Gundel 1922: 1178; Liddell and Scott 1976: 449 s.v. 'δρεπᾰνοειδής.' This comet, which may or may not be related to the mythical monster of that name, was repeatedly discussed in Roman literature, e.g.: Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, 2. 23. 91; Apuleius of Madaura (second century C.E.), apud Lydus, *De Mensibus*, 4. 116 (4. 73); Avienus (fl. 380 C.E.), apud Servius (fourth century C.E.), *In Vergilii Aeneidis Commentarius*, 10. 272; Hephaestio of Thebes (fifth century C.E.), *Apotelesmatica*, 1. 24. 11 (99. 16 Engelbrecht).

[21] Chambers 1909: 218 f.

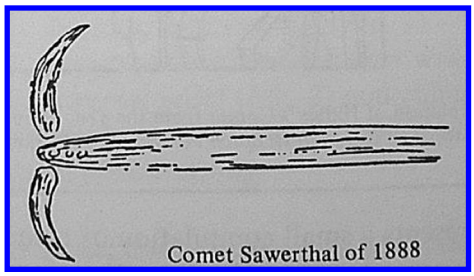

FIG. 2.—Comet Sawerthal, seen in 1888

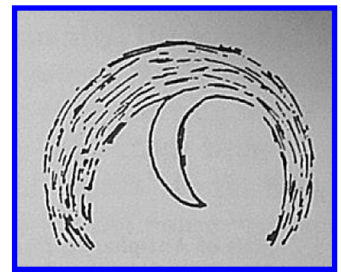

FIG. 3.—A comet seen in 1882

at the time, but in 1986 amateur astronomer and historian Donald Etz revived the issue. Etz reasoned that the myth of Hēlēl must have been based on the observation of some unusual celestial phenomenon, but ruled out the possibility that an asteroid could have been meant as "No known minor planets are visible to the naked eye today."[22] While asteroids can, of course, become visible to the unaided eye if they enter the earth's atmosphere as meteors, Etz went on to establish that the prototype of Hēlēl can only have been a comet.[23] From the account in Isaiah he deduced that this comet must have satisfied four conditions:[24]

1. As the event was unique and unfamiliar, it must have been a comet that recurs only at very large intervals.
2. As the protagonist was seen to mount upwards on the 'mount of assembly,' the comet must have been a prominent naked-eye object for several days or weeks at a time.
3. Supporting the interpretation of Hēlēl's initial target, 'the stars of El,' as the circumpolar stars, to be discussed below, Etz remarked: "To rise toward this point, an object would move northward. When cast below the southern horizon, it could be considered to have fallen into Sheol."[25] In order for a comet to have visually approached the pole, it must have been one whose orbit "would probably lie mostly below the ecliptic, rising above it for only a few weeks around perihelion, to enable it to move in an arc—first north, then south—while visible."
4. And in order for it to have been visible in the ancient Near East, it must near perihelion have risen far enough above the ecliptic to attain a latitude north of Babylon.

Etz stated that Halley is one of very few comets that could have met these criteria. Arguing that Isaiah's prophecy was aimed at Nabonidus,[26] he opted for 540 B.C.E. as the year in

[22] Etz 1986: 294.
[23] Etz 1986: 292.
[24] Etz 1986: 293, 295 f., 300 f.
[25] Compare: "If *hyll* behaved as described in this passage, it may have become visible first in the eastern sky at dawn, then changed position in the sky night after night in such a way that it appeared to be 'ascending,' seeking to raise its throne 'above the stars of *'l*.' It may also have moved northward, as though intending to sit on the mythic mount of assembly of the gods in the farthest North . . . But it fell, or was expected to fall, from the sky, cut down to the 'earth' and cast into Sheol." Etz 1986: 292.
[26] According to Etz (1986: 299), Nabonidus fits the analogy with Hēlēl well, as he actively promoted the worship of the stars, that of Sîn in particular, and fell from power in some way.

which Halley's appearance inspired the myth of Hēlēl. In that year, Halley's path would have looked like an advance to the north pole of heaven, up to 45° north, followed by a retreat to about 25° south.[27] But for all its technical detail, Etz' analysis remains problematic. While he suppressed the possibility of a meteor or a meteorite as the source of inspiration, one cannot exclude the possibility that Isaiah 14 was written by the historical Isaiah (fl. late eighth century B.C.E.) after all.[28] Indeed, the date of the author becomes entirely irrelevant if the prototype of Hēlēl was not an object observed in the lifetime of the author of Isaiah 14 at all; on the contrary, the wording of this prophecy suggests that Hēlēl's fate was widely known and already deeply entrenched in popular folklore by the time the prophet uttered his taunt.

A Crescent-Shaped Constellation?

Sickle-shaped configurations of stars qualify as other potential referents to *Hll*'s title 'lord of the sickle.' In Babylonian astronomy the term Sumerian ^{d}*gàm* or ^{mul}*gàm*, Akkadian ^{mul}*gamlu(m)* also denoted the constellation Auriga,[29] with inclusion of the stars *β Tauri*—which is *γ Aurigae*—and *ζ Tauri*, in the northern part of Taurus. This is especially significant considering that, although the Aurigid meteor streams appear to be of relatively recent origin, having been discovered only in the nineteenth century, this is close to the radiant of the Northern Taurids, a fairly prominent meteor shower that has been traced to comet P/Encke, whose progenitor, Proto-Encke, must have begun dusting some millennia prior to the rise of civilisation, as Fred Whipple first proposed in 1967.[30] Moreover, in Old Babylonian and early Kassite art, the adjacent constellation of Perseus was associated with the god Amurru, whose crooked stick or scimitar may have been recognized in the small group of stars—including *λ* and *μ* Persei—that appear to form a small curve to the side of the figure, not far from Auriga,[31] which was characterized as the *harpē*, 'sickle' by Hipparchus (second century B.C.E.).[32] Significantly, it is in the region immediately to the north of this 'sickle' that the Perseids appear, the most spectacular meteor shower, with observations stretching back as far as the first century C.E. or possibly the first century B.C.E.[33]

With some imagination, one of the circumpolar constellations, pivoting in a tight circle around the pole, can also be conceived as a sickle. As reflected in the name *msḫtyw*, the ancient Egyptians styled Ursa Major as an adze "and indeed the constellation looks

[27] Etz 1986: 291, 300 f.

[28] Day 2000: 169 f.

[29] *MUL.APIN*, 1. 1. 4; 1. 6. 5; 4. 5, in Brown 2000: 61, cf. 66; Reiner and Pingree 2005: 29, 80–81; Hunger and Pingree 1999: 59, 69, 71; Bobrova and Militarev 1993: 316; Black and Green 1992: 190 s.v. 'zodiac'; Von Soden 1965: 279 s.v. 'gamlu(m)'; Bezold 1926: 98 s.v. 'gamlu'; Gössmann 1950: 58 s.v. #142; Gallagher 1994: 136. Gelb et al. 1956: 34–35 s.v. 'gamlu' give only "a star."

[30] Norton 2002: 13; Rietmeijer 2002: 226; Delsemme 1976: 481; Steel et al. 1994: 466, 473 f.; Steel 1995: 149 f. Note that the *κ* Aurigids have also been shown to trace to the asteroid Heracles 5143 in the Taurid complex, Babadzhanov 2002: 226.

[31] Wilk 2000: 127, 241; Black and Green 1992: 130 s.v. 'Martu (Amurru).' The Babylonian association of Amurru and his scimitar with the constellation of Perseus must have been the source of the Greek tradition that Perseus was catasterized into the constellation of that name, Pseudo-Eratosthenes, *Catasterismi*, 22; Hyginus, *Poetica Astronomica*, 2. 12.

[32] Hipparchus, *In Arati et Eudoxi Phaenomena Commentarius*, 2. 5. 15.

[33] The parent body of the Perseids was comet P/1862III Swift-Tuttle, Norton 2002: 13; Rietmeijer 2002: 226. Hyginus' comment that Perseus' "knife" was "not marked by stars" (3. 11, tr. Condos 1997: 159) may indicate that he located this object in the area where the Perseids appear, to the north of the stars that seem arranged in the form of a sickle, Wilk 2000: 127, cf. 241.

somewhat like such an instrument."[34] As early as the Old Kingdom, the ritual counterpart of this sickle-shaped implement—employed in the ceremony of the 'opening of the mouth'—was characterized as 'the iron that came forth out of Set, the *msḫtyw*,' for which reason it may well have been formed from meteoritic iron.[35] This vindicates Plutarch's revelations that the Egyptians regarded the constellation of Ursa as "the soul of Typhon"[36] and iron as "the bone of Typhon,"[37] 'Typhon' being the classical deity that absorbed most of the mythological traditions surrounding the Egyptian god Set.[38] The conception of Ursa Major as a sickle forges a possible link with Hēlēl, who, in Isaiah's invocation, vowed to raise his throne *mimma'al ləkōkəbē-'ēl*, "above the stars of God," to "sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain." Gunkel,[39] seconded by Albright and Cross, interpreted the phrase *kōkəbē 'ēl*, "the stars of God," as a reference to the circumpolar stars of the north.[40] Etz elegantly showed that this hypothesis has two merits. First, it fixes the location of the event for any observer on earth; if Hēlēl had simply gone up to the zenith, the precise location would have depended on the position of the observer on earth.[41] Second, this interpretation identifies the stars of El and *Ṣpn*, the 'mount of assembly,' as one and the same location.[42]

In line with the possibility that Hēlēl was really a comet, the association of Auriga or Ursa Major with a sickle may have been reinforced by the passage of a conspicuous sickle-shaped comet through their domains. Although the connection is entirely speculative, it

[34] ". . . when the constellation is mentioned in the *Pyramid Texts*, Sect. 458c, it is determined by an adze as well as a star." Clagett 1995: 158 note 139; cf. Wainwright 1932b: 374. Brundage (1982: 85) gives a similar designation of Ursa Minor as "a curved, short-handled crozier" in Aztec lore, which was symbolically identified as the baton or sceptre carried by the god Quetzalcoatl, analogous to the case of Amurru.

[35] Hannig 2003: 564 s.v. 'msḫtjw'; Roth 1993: 70; Wainwright 1932a: 163, 171; 1932b: 375; Budge 1904: 247, 249 f.; 1911: 102. The term used for "iron" is *bjȝ*. In the 20th dynasty, Ursa Major is styled "this *Mśḫtyw* of Seth" that "always existeth in the northern sky," Wainwright 1932b: 375.

[36] ". . . and the soul of Isis is called by the Greeks the Dog-star, . . . , and the soul of Horus is called Orion, and the soul of Typhon the Bear." Plutarch, *Moralia: De Iside et Osiride*, 359C (21), tr. Babbitt 1999: 52–53. The Greek is: *tēn dè Typhōnos árkton*. Teucer of Babylon (first century C.E.?) and Vettius Valens (second century C.E.) classified *Typhon* as a part of the constellation of Leo, but because this lies immediately below Ursa Major they clearly relayed the same tradition, Boll 1903: 47, 163.

[37] "Moreover, they call the lodestone the bone of Horus, and iron the bone of Typhon, as Manetho records." Plutarch, *Moralia: De Iside et Osiride*, 376B (62), tr. Babbitt 1999: 146–47. The Greek is: *ostéon . . . Typhōnos dè tòn sídēron . . .*

[38] The representation of *Msḫtyw* as an adze was completely interchangeable with the alternative interpretation of the sickle as a bull or its foreleg, "this Foreleg of Seth," as on the northern panel of the astronomical ceiling of the secret tomb of Senmut and the northern panel of the vaulted ceiling of Hall K in the tomb of Seti I, Clagett 1995: 228, 248; Roth 1993: 70; Helck 1984: 580; Von Beckerath 1975: 512; Neugebauer and Parker 1969: 183, 190 f.; Wainwright 1932b: 375; 1933: 45; Boll 1903: 163.

[39] Mount Ṣāphōn "gilt nach dem Zusammenhange als höchster Berg der Erde und scheint ursprünglich der Nordpol, um den die Sterne kreisen, gewesen zu sein." Gunkel 1895: 132 note 7.

[40] Albright 1968: 232; Clifford 1972: 161 note 84; Cross 1973: 45; Etz 1986: 292; Page 1996: 101, 131 f. At the same time, the term also denoted the assembly of the 'sons of El' (Grelot 1956: 21), possibly the *bənē hā'elohīm*, 'the sons of (the) god(s)' of Gen. 6:2 and Job 38:7, where the *parallelismus membrorum* requires their identity with the *kōkabē bóqer*, 'the morning stars' (cf. Clifford 1972: 173 note 95), even though the link with the morning remains less transparent. Compare further the Ugaritic *pḫr kkbm*, 'assembly of stars' (*KTU* 1. 10. I 4, in Heiser 2001: 357; Page 1996: 101), and the *'abnē 'ēš*, 'stones of fire' on top of the cosmic mountain associated with Eden, Ezek. 28:14, 16, which Clifford (1972: 173) saw as the equivalent of the 'stars of El.'

[41] Contra Gallagher 1994: 140.

[42] Etz 1986: 295 f. The argument can also be construed the other way around: the apparent, polar significance of 'the stars of El' can be used as an argument to prove that *Ṣpn* was the Canaanite form of a mythical 'polar mountain.'

may be relevant that Typhon was repeatedly associated with the pole.[43] At least in the late tradition, Typhon's association with the pole was extended to his cometary aspect. Hephaestio of Thebes, classifying cometary types according to planets, described Typhon as a comet 'shapeless and slow-moving,' 'wont to following the sun into the extremities of the arctic pole.'[44] Earlier, Virgil's commentator, Servius, had stated that this comet 'is said to have been for some time in the north.'[45] Boll believed that the notion was based on the observation of a comet passing through the circumpolar sky.[46] Of course, the idea that a comet dubbed Hēlēl-*Hll* was once thought to proceed in the vicinity of the pole with or as a sickle-shaped instrument is entirely conjectural and at odds with his identification with Auriga. At this early stage, however, one needs to cast the net wide and not prematurely rule out any lines of reasoning. The fact that the Babylonians and their successors symbolized both Auriga and Ursa as chariots[47] undergirds the possibility that Hēlēl-*Hll* was linked with both, however that may have worked conceptually.

A Lateral Connection with Phaethon's Catasterism

Circumstantial support for the interpretation of the sobriquet 'lord of the sickle' as a possible reference to a comet and to Auriga derives from comparison with the mythology of the Greek demigod Phaethon. Phaethon, who fell from the sky in a tragic accident with the chariot of his father Helios, has often been compared to Isaiah's Hēlēl.[48] While a number of classical authorities implied or suggested a comet or meteor as the original prototype of the mythical Phaethon,[49] and Phaethon's fateful digression brought him—like the legendary comet Typhon—in the region of the celestial pole,[50] it is noteworthy that, in a number of late traditions, an episode of catasterism was appended to Phaethon's myth, identifying the fateful

[43] As a mythical giant, Typhon "passed from north to south, he left one pole and stood by the other." Nonnus, *Dionysiaca*, 1. 176–77, trans. Rouse I 1995: 16–17. As a symbol of the sun, he was invoked as "You who are midpoint of the stars above," *Greek Magical Papyrus* 4, 261–65, trans. Betz 1992: 43; compare Ulansey 1989: 86.

[44] *ámorphos kaì bradykínētos . . . epikataphéresthai dè eíōthe tōi Hēlíōi en tois pérasi tou arktikou pólou*, Hephaestio of Thebes, *Apotelesmatica*, 1. 24. 11 (99. 16 Engelbrecht), ed. Pingree 1973: 76. The qualification that Typhon 'followed' the sun may indicate the direction in which the comet was believed to have moved, i.e., from east to west.

[45] *. . . qui in septentrionis parte aliquando fuisse dicitur*, Servius, *In Vergilii Aeneidis Commentarius*, 10. 272, ed. Thilo and Hagen 1961: 423.

[46] Boll 1903: 164. This would have been in line with the Babylonian practice to describe planets in terms of the constellations they pass through or *vice versa*, cf. Brown 2000: 53; Koch-Westenholz 1995: 130 f.

[47] Examples listed in Bobrova and Militarev 1993: 315; Wainwright 1932b: 375; Langdon 1964: 94; Hunger and Pingree 1999: 71; Allen 1963: 390 s.v. 'β Tauri' include Sumerian ^{mul}*mar.gíd.da*, 'wagon' and Akkadian *ereqqu(m)* for Ursa, as well as the 'chariot of Enmešarra' in Babylonia for Auriga. Note that De Santillana and Von Dechend (1969: 266) distinguished the chariot of Auriga as "the two-wheeled race car," Greek *harma*, Latin *currus*, Babylonian *markabtu*, from that of Ursa as the four-wheeled one, Greek *hámaxa*, Latin *plaustrum*, Sumerian ^{mul}*mar.gíd.da*.

[48] Gunkel (1895: 133 f.) was perhaps the first to propose a relationship between Hēlēl and Phaethon, followed by Grelot (1956: 30, 38), who excluded the Ugaritic *Hll*; cf. Schmidt 1951: 167; Loretz 1976: 133; Forsyth 1987: 126–39; Watson 1995: 747. Astour (1965: 268 f., 273; cf. West 1997: 476) was adamant that the name, image, and myth of Phaethon all trace back to West Semitic mythology. McKay (1970: 453–56) argued the reverse, that the myth of Hēlēl was based on that of Phaethon. Etz (1986: 297 note 18) dismissed Phaethon as a weak parallel to Hēlēl, presumably because his agenda was to prove that Isaiah's report of Hēlēl was based on a contemporary observation of the sky, not an earlier one.

[49] Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 2, 320, with Bömer 1969: 321 f.; Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum Commentarius*, 1. 2. 109. 16–31. Compare *Sibylline Oracles*, 5. 512–31, with Kugler 1927: 39, 44 f.; Gundel 1928: 449–51; Van der Sluijs 2006.

[50] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 2. 171–81 and 63–75, 295–97, with Kugler 1927: 5 f., 17; cf. Seneca, *Hercules Oetaeus*, pp. 675–81.

hero with the constellation of *Hēníokhos* or Auriga, the Chariot: "But Father Zeus fixed Phaëthon in Olympos, like a Charioteer, and bearing that name. As he holds in the radiant Chariot of the heavens with shining arm, he has the shape of a Charioteer starting upon his course, as if even among the stars he longed again for his father's car."[51] Although recorded late, this agreement can hardly be coincidental, especially because Phaethon was never identified with any other constellations. It may be, then, that Phaethon's connection with Auriga was part of the same oriental heritage as the myth of his fall and his meteoric aspect.[52] The original meaning 'sickle' must then have been extended to the bearer of the sickle—the charioteer.[53]

CONCLUSION

Summing up, it is proposed that *Hll*'s epithet *b'l gml*, 'lord of the sickle,' was not, as is usually assumed, a reference to the new moon, but one to a sickle-shaped comet, perhaps further associated with an asterism in the form of a sickle, which is arguably Auriga or Ursa Major. This interpretation reinforces the possibility that this deity was identical to the fallen Hēlēl of Isaiah 14, all the more because another sky-fallen entity, Phaethon, who has long been compared to Hēlēl, was likewise associated with comets and with circumpolar constellations such as Auriga and Ursa Major. More generally, while this might rob the reconstructed Ugaritic pantheon of a 'moon god,' it will be worthwhile to consider in what other literary contexts a translation of *gml* either as a generic 'crescent' or as a crescentic comet or constellation might be called for. In Ugarit, the role of constellations or of transient celestial phenomena such as comets both in literature and religion, which is profound in ancient Mesopotamia, may well have been more pronounced than has so far been thought.

APPENDIX: AN ALTERNATIVE TRANSLATION OF *GML*

Virolleaud speculated that *gml* is 'perhaps simply' the Arabic *jamîl*, 'beautiful,' and translated "le maître parfait (?)."[54] Grelot added that one could equally translate "possesseur de beauté," which is "qualificatif fort séant pour un dieu astral, dont le nom provient

[51] Nonnus, *Dionysiaca* 38, 424–31, trans. Rouse III 1940: 122–23; compare Claudian, *Panegyricus de Sexto Consulatu Honorii Augusti* 28. 168–72; Knaack 1884: 2179; Grelot 1956: 25 note 3; Allen 1963: p. 84 f. s.v. 'Auriga'; Diggle 1970: 194 f. Knaack (1884: 2182) branded this catasterism 'free Alexandrinian speculation,' but as Diggle has shown, there is no evidence for an Alexandrinian source common to Ovid and Nonnus. Following the Hellenistic astronomical tradition, Hyginus (*Poetica Astronomica*, 2. 42) viewed Phaethon not as a constellation, but as an outer planet—Saturn.

[52] For this reason, De Santillana and Von Dechend (1969: 266 f.) proposed that the classical interpretation of Auriga as Phaethon's chariot rooted in Babylonian astronomy: "And since 'Enmesharra's chariot' is the vehicle of Auriga, beta zeta Tauri, there can be little doubt that the tradition of Phaethon's fall was already a Sumerian myth . . ." This may be leaping to conclusions, as there is as yet no evidence that the Sumerian or Babylonian sickle associated with Auriga was linked to a myth of a 'charioteer' falling from the sky.

[53] Compare: "What we suggest here is that the Sumero-Akkadian gàm/*gamlu* was interpreted by Greeks or some intermediate sources as a crooked reinholder (reinring) in a chariot attested in Mesopotamia from the 3d millennium B.C. on, and then reinterpreted as a rein holding person (the idea, image or name only, later echoed by Arabs). Whether gàm/*gamlu* could really mean that or what was the actual name of the device is not known, which dooms our suggestion to remain hypothetical." Bobrova and Militarev 1993: 316.

[54] Virolleaud 1936: 225. Compare *jamula*, 'to be beautiful physically,' and *jamāl*, 'beauty, elegance,' Grelot 1956: 22–24.

de la racine הלל I, «briller».”[55] If the meaning ‘to be beautiful, goodly’ had been pan-Semitic this would have been an attractive etymology, supported by Phaethon’s proverbial beauty and the ‘radiance’ reflected in his name. However, it seems to be a specific Arabic development of a root possibly reflected in Hebrew *gāmal* ‘to deal fully or adequately with, deal out to,’ ‘to wean,’ and ‘to ripen.’[56] This must represent a different root than Akkadian *gamlu*, unless the ‘ripening’ or the ‘beauty’ had some connection to the lunar cycle. One might then suppose that this root underwent a semantic shift from ‘crescent, sickle’ to ‘ripening, growth (as of the moon)’ in the Hebrew and Arabic branches of the family after the demise of Ugaritic.

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[55] Grelot 1956: 22–24.

[56] Brown et al. 1962 : 168 s.v. ‘גָּמַל.’ Is the same root seen in Akkadian *gamālu*, “to be obliging, to perform a kind act, to act so as to please, to come to an agreement” or “to spare, to save,” Gelb et al. 1956: 21–23 s.v. ‘gamālu’; cf. “Pardon geben, schonen, erhalten,” Bezold 1926: 98 s.v. ‘gamālu’?

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