

# When Monsters Walked the Earth: Giants, Monster Theory, and the Reformulation of Textual Traditions in the Enochic *Book of the Watchers*

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**Abstract:** This article examines an Early Jewish text entitled the *Book of the Watchers* that is part of a larger work known as *1 Enoch*. The *Book of the Watchers* offers a vivid and disturbing portrait of the excessive violence on earth that led to the flood, attributing the situation to destructive giants. *Watchers* expands and interprets the account of the crisis that precipitated the flood in Gen 6:1-4. Comparison of the two texts demonstrates that *Watchers* in particular expands the description in Genesis 6 of the giants (sons of the angels) and the violence they perpetrate. Exegesis, however, alone cannot explain this phenomenon. Appeal to monster studies can help us better understand the issue. This article argues that the retelling of the flood story in the *Book of the Watchers* was popular in ancient Judaism because it offers a compelling construction of the known world, and social customs that are normative within it—including a prohibition against murder and the delineation of norms regarding of food—by offering a shocking description of the antediluvian world, before divine regulations regarding such behavior were promulgated. The heinous and cannibalistic violence of the antediluvian era as presented in the *Book of the Watchers* helps justify the current (post-diluvian) order by presenting a coherent account of how it came into being in a way that legitimates God’s dominion over it. The essay also explores how attending to the theme of the monstrous can provide insight into the *Book of the Watchers* in relation to older mythic traditions embedded in Genesis 1 and the Babylonian creation poem, the *Enuma Elish*. The article also contends that *Watchers*’ reformulation of the flood story with its heightened monstrosity can be profitably explained against the backdrop of cultural anxieties that were pervasive during the Hellenistic era during which it was written.

**Keywords:** Exegesis, Cannibalism, monster theory, Giants, *1 Enoch*, *Book of the Watchers*

The *Book of the Watchers* offers a disturbing account of life on earth before the flood:

They devoured the labors of men. And when they were unable to supply them, the giants grew bold against them and devoured the men. They began to sin against birds, animals, reptiles and fish, and to eat the flesh of each other. And they drank the blood. (*1 En.* 7:3-5)<sup>117</sup>

While *1 Enoch* is relatively unknown today, it was an important work in ancient Judaism and early Christianity. One legacy that testifies to the importance of the book in antiquity is that it remains

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<sup>117</sup> This essay is an extensively revised and expanded version of a paper I delivered at a conference in 2014 on Animals and Monsters at St. Andrews, Scotland. An earlier form of this research can also be found on the “Flood of Noah” website. This essay uses for the text and translation of *1 Enoch*, with modification, in George Nickelsburg and James C. VanderKam, *1 Enoch* (Hermeneia; 2 vols.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001-12). For a basic overview of this composition, see Matthew Goff, “1 Enoch,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Books of the Bible* (ed. M.D. Coogan; 2 vols.; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1.224-37. Feedback from the anonymous reviews of this article have enriched its content. I also thank Alana Zimath for her assistance with this essay.

to this day in the canonical Old Testament of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, one of the oldest forms of Christianity. For this reason the work in its entirety is preserved only in Classical Ethiopic (Ge'ez). The *Book of the Watchers*, the first section in the text of *1 Enoch* (chs. 1-36), is a Jewish work written in the third century BCE. We know that it was composed originally in Aramaic, since fragments of the composition, along with Aramaic fragments of other works now in *1 Enoch*, were discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls. The *Book of the Watchers* puts forward a shocking description of the days before the flood. The cannibalistic crimes recounted in *1 Enoch 7* are committed by giants who rampaged across the world. According to most Ethiopic manuscripts of *Watchers*, they are of incredible stature: 3,000 cubits tall, or well over a mile. Both their bodies and their crimes transgress norms. The *Book of the Watchers* teaches that the giants are an important catalyst in the crisis that led to Noah's flood.

The portrayal in the Enochic *Book of the Watchers* of the antediluvian crisis that triggered the flood leaves readers with a clear question. The account of the flood in Genesis 6 never describes cannibalistic giants causing havoc on the earth. So why would an ancient Jewish text offer such a monstrous depiction of the flood? In this essay I would like to explore this issue. There is clearly an exegetical aspect to *Watchers'* presentation of the flood. While this conclusion is common in biblical studies, I would like to highlight a key issue that is often not stressed—that *Watchers* reconfigured the flood story in a way that transforms it into a much more monstrous tale than anything in the book of Genesis.

This leads to the other key point of this article: that reflection on the cannibalistic giants of Enochic literature can be informed by the burgeoning field of monster studies. This is an interdisciplinary field of scholarship that develops theoretical frameworks which help us comprehend how and why humanity has been and remains interested in tales about horrifying and disturbing creatures. Scholars of this field of knowledge often engage the issue of cannibalism—monsters who devour human beings. As we shall see below, they often understand this issue by means of psychoanalytic theory. They also emphasize that societies circulate stories about monsters as a way to articulate norms of conduct since such tales recount the disturbing creatures who lurk beyond the boundaries of what is known and accepted. In this way monster studies, as I would like to show, can help us understand how *Watchers* recounts the flood, and in particular how it thematizes eating. The essay will then suggest that examining the theme of the monstrous can illuminate how *Watchers* can be interpreted in relation to mythic traditions in Genesis 1. This chapter is profitably compared to the Babylonian creation account, the *Enuma Elish*, in which the chief god Marduk kills a sea monster named Tiamat and fashions the known world out of her body. Genesis 1, formulated in the context of the Babylonian exile, appropriates older mythic traditions in a way that does not highlight any monstrous creature along the lines of Tiamat. The reformulation of Genesis traditions in *Watchers*, by contrast, accentuates and heightens the monstrous. This return of the monstrous, I suggest, can be helpfully situated against the backdrop of the Hellenistic age during which it was written. As experts in monster theory discuss, the creation and dissemination of stories about monsters should be expected from cultures dealing with moments of intense anxiety or crisis. While it is common to understand the formation of the *Book of the Watchers* in terms of political violence perpetrated by Hellenistic empires, the cultural climate of the early Hellenistic age, as I discuss below, is a conducive context for the increase in monstrosity evident in *Watchers*.

## TEXTUAL REFORMATIONS OF AN ANTEDILUVIAN CRISIS

The monstrosity of the account of the antediluvian period in the *Book of the Watchers* can be demonstrated by comparing it with Genesis 6, in particular its first four verses:

When people began to multiply on the surface of the earth, and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that they were fair; and they took wives for themselves of all that they chose. Then the Lord said, "My spirit shall not abide in mortals forever, for they are flesh; their days shall be one hundred twenty years." The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and

also afterward—when the sons of God went in to the daughters of humans, who bore children to them. They are the mighty men who are of old, the men of renown (הַגְּבוּרִים אֲשֶׁר מֵעוֹלָם אֲנָשֵׁי הַשָּׁם).<sup>118</sup>

This passage has long struck commentators as perplexing. These verses contain the first story in the Hebrew Bible about angels. It is also arguably the oddest story in the Bible about angels. They are referred to as “sons of God,” a common ancient Hebrew idiom for divine beings (e.g., Ps 29:1; 82:6).<sup>119</sup> It construes them as coming down to earth to have sex. The offspring of the “sons of God” and the women are called הַגְּבוּרִים, literally “the mighty ones.” The ambiguous Hebrew term *naphîlîm* can be understood as also signifying these children, but this is not clear on the basis of Genesis 6 itself. The word derives from the root נפל (“to fall”) and has in the history of interpretation been variously understood. *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, for example, interprets the term as signifying the angelic fathers; they “fell” (נפלו) from heaven.<sup>120</sup> Compilers of the Torah presumably took the term *naphîlîm* of Genesis 6 as signifying instead the children of the angels, as did its ancient Greek translators since they employ the same word to translate both *gibbōrîm* and *naphîlîm*—*gigantes* (“giants”; more on this below). The word *naphîlîm* occurs only one other time in the Hebrew Bible (Num 13:33), to signify one of the original and gargantuan peoples of Canaan, the Anakim. The odd locution in Gen 6:4 that the Nephilim were on the earth then “and also afterwards” (וְגַם אַחֲרֵי-כֵן) seems to reflect awareness that they appear later in the Bible, implying, on the basis of Num 13:33, that the antediluvian *gibbōrîm* are the distant ancestors of the Canaanite giants. The root נפל on several occasions in the Hebrew Bible denotes soldiers who have fallen in battle (as in, for example, Judg 8:10 and 1 Sam 17:49). The term גבור likewise often describes elite and accomplished soldiers (e.g., 2 Sam 23:16). In that sense *naphîlîm* would be a fitting term for soldiers who ‘fell’ long ago (“the fallen ones” or “the ones who are fallen”). This is a reason why it is often suggested that the *gibbōrîm* of Genesis 6 allude to an otherwise lost Israelite epic tradition of legendary warriors.<sup>121</sup> The relationship between the *gibbōrîm* and the *naphîlîm*, however, remains an ambiguous point.<sup>122</sup>

Genesis 6:4 does, however, make two things clear about the *gibbōrîm*: that they are “of old”

<sup>118</sup> Ronald S. Hendel, *The Text of Genesis 1-11: Textual Studies and Critical Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 132-33.

<sup>119</sup> For the present discussion it suffices to note that these creatures are from the heavenly world. While how exactly they were understood when Genesis 6 was initially produced cannot be recovered, the text presumes that they are transmundane and that their sexual interaction with women constitutes a violation of a designated boundary between the realms of heaven and earth. This is suggested by the unusual offspring that are produced and the subsequent flood. Such sexual activity is not presented as a sanctioned or regular occurrence. For the broader issue of the development and variety of conceptions of angels in ancient Israel and the Second Temple period, see Annette Reed, *Demons, Angels and Writing in Ancient Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 65-81; Simon B. Parker, “Sons of (the) God(s),” in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (ed. K. van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst; Leiden/Grand Rapids: Brill/Eerdmans, 1999), 794-800; R.M.M. Tuschling, *Angels and Orthodoxy: A Study in Their Development in Syria and Palestine from the Qumran Texts to Ephrem the Syrian* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007); Michael Mach, *Entwicklungsstadien des jüdischen Engelglaubens in vorrabbinischer Zeit* (TSAJ 34; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992).

<sup>120</sup> This late antique text uses Enochic traditions as an interpretative lens with which to understand Genesis 6, also specifying that the “fallen ones” in question are Shemhazai and Azazel, the two key angels who descend to earth in Watchers. See Annette Yoshiko Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity: The Reception of Enochic Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 213; P.S. Alexander, “Targumim and Early Exegesis of ‘Sons of God,’” *JJS* 23 (1972): 60-71.

<sup>121</sup> For an overview of this issue, see Brian R. Doak, *The Last of the Rephaim: Conquest and Cataclysm in the Heroic Ages of Ancient Israel* (Boston/Washington, D.C.: Ilex Foundation/Center for Hellenic Studies, Trustees for Harvard University, 2012), 54-66.

<sup>122</sup> For discussion of this issue, see Matthew Goff, “Warriors, Cannibals and Teachers of Evil: The Sons of the Angels in Genesis 6, the *Book of the Watchers* and the *Book of Jubilees*,” *SEÅ* 80 (2015): 79-97 (82); Doak, *The Last of the Rephaim*, 54-66.

(מעולים) and are “men of renown” (literally “men of the name”; אנשי השם). Interestingly, both expressions are reasonably understood as positive, denoting that “the mighty ones” were on the earth long ago and had a great reputation. What they did to achieve this fame is, however, not specified. The emphasis on their fame is a core reason they are understood as warriors, as is their lineage. This can be likened to Greek epic. The military prowess of the legendary Achilles is attributed to the fact that he was not an ordinary human but rather a semi-divine being, with one human and one divine parent (his mother was Thetis, a Nereid, and his father King Peleus). The famous warrior-king of Mesopotamian tradition Gilgamesh likewise has a mixed human-divine parentage. So too the *gibbōrîm* of Genesis 6.<sup>123</sup> Understanding “the mighty men” of Genesis 6:1-4 in relation to such comparisons can elucidate the odd fact that the passage describes them in positive, if brief, terms.

But when one turns to the very next verse, the reader is confronted with a problem—wickedness, Gen 6:5 states, spread throughout the earth. This raises an exegetical issue—how should the legendary warriors of verse 4 be related to the increase of evil of verse 5?

It is possible that the location of Gen 6:1-4 as prefacing the rest of the flood account may indicate that some ancient scribes considered the children of the angels to be evil, despite the passage’s somewhat laudatory description of them. The first four verses of the chapter are often understood in biblical studies as an independent text that had some sort of editorial development and tradition-history that are different from the rest of the flood narrative.<sup>124</sup> Its placement at the beginning of the flood narrative may reflect the opinion that the *gibbōrîm* are evil, and that the sexual dalliance between angels and humans was inappropriate. This textual theory would offer a coherent explanation of the question at hand, namely, how the angels and their sexual encounter on earth should be understood vis-à-vis the flood. Understood in this way, it was the offspring of the angels and the women who increased the evil on the earth that led to the flood. This understanding of the giants as inherently negative may also help us understand why the Hebrew word *gibbōrîm* is translated with *gigantes* in the form of Gen 6:4 found in the ancient Greek translation of the Torah.<sup>125</sup> In Greek myth, the *gigantes* are rebellious and vicious; they attempt and fail to challenge Olympian rule.<sup>126</sup> The translation choice, carried out in the third century BCE, is a kind of *interpretatio graeca*. The translators’ appeal to the *gigantes* as a way to understand the children of the angels conveys that they understood them very negatively. It is perhaps possible to delineate a negative view of the offspring of the angels that predates *Watchers*, suggesting that its reformulation of the tale may be in continuity with an older, pre-Enochic interpretative tradition. In any case, despite what we can infer about how ancient transmitters of Gen 6:1-4 understood it, its positive but terse account of the *gibbōrîm* remained and this is what was preserved in the Masoretic text. The story as we have it leaves open the key issue of how the evil that triggered the flood started or what form it took.

The Torah in ancient (pre-Christian) Judaism was quite fluid in terms of its textual form. Nevertheless, some writings from the period seem to engage versions of Torah passages that do not

<sup>123</sup> For an important effort to situate the sons of the angels in a broad comparative context, see Doak, *The Last of the Rephaim*, 222-30.

<sup>124</sup> The scholarship on this point is extensive. See, for example, Doak, *The Last of the Rephaim*, 60; Ronald Hendel, “Of Demigods and the Deluge: Toward an Interpretation of Genesis 6:1-4,” *JBL* 106 (1987): 13-26 (esp. 16); Gerhard von Rad, See his *Genesis: A Commentary* (rev. ed.; London: SCM Press, 1972 [orig. pub., 1949]), 113; Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis* (trans. M.E. Biddle; Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997 [orig. pub., 1901]), 59; Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (New York: Meridian Books, 1957 [orig. pub., 1878]), 317. See also Archie T. Wright, *The Origin of Evil Spirits: The Reception of Genesis 6:1-4 in Early Jewish Literature* (rev. ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 51-96.

<sup>125</sup> This explains the conventional description in English of the sons of the angels in Genesis 6 as “giants,” a broad term used to describe a wide range of creatures that appear in the mythology of various cultures. Here the term has a specific referent—the sons of the angels described in Genesis 6.

<sup>126</sup> Françoise-Hélène Massa-Pairault, ed. *Géants et gigantomachies entre Orient et Occident. Acts du Colloque, Naples, 14-15 Novembre 2013* (Naples: Centre Jean Bérard, 2017).

appear to be substantially different from their form in the Masoretic text. The *Book of the Watchers* constitutes a good example of this issue. This composition can be plausibly understood as telling a similar but more expansive version of the flood story in Genesis.<sup>127</sup> Genesis, for example, never specifies how many angels came down to earth. None of the angels are named in Genesis; the book also does not state where on earth they arrived when they descended from heaven. The *Book of the Watchers*, however, is clear on all these points. It asserts that the total number of the angels who descended was 200, and the names of their twenty chiefs are given. *Watchers* divulges further that the arrival point of the angels on earth was Mount Hermon, a fitting locale, given that, as a large mountain, it is a point on earth close to heaven.

The *Book of the Watchers* exhibits very little interest in the flood itself. The concern of the text is rather for the spread of evil and violence on the earth before the flood. According to *1 En.* 10:2, God sent an archangel to explain to Noah that it was coming, but there are many core details of the flood story as found in Genesis that are not in *Watchers*. These include the building of the ark, its measurements, the number or kind of animals present on the vessel, and the chronological length of the flood. *Watchers* is primarily interested in the flood as the means of punishing the watchers and their offspring; the flood also serves as a model for eschatological judgment (*1 Enoch* 10-11).

When it comes to the evil that preceded the flood, *Watchers* by contrast offers more narrative than Genesis. *1 Enoch* 8 recounts that the angels disclosed supernatural and unsanctioned knowledge on various topics.<sup>128</sup> In this way, *Watchers* provides an etiology for several types of knowledge that are critical for human civilization (more on this below), such as metallurgy, that is, how to acquire metals from the earth and how to make weaponry from this resource; they also reveal knowledge about types of ornamentation used by women; these include antimony, a metallic compound used in antiquity for the production of cosmetic eye-paint, and gems from the earth (8:1).<sup>129</sup> This is a gendered iteration of the angelic revelation that for *Watchers* plays a central role in the antediluvian crisis that led to the flood. It has a ‘male’ aspect, in that being able to produce destructive weapons triggered more violence, and a ‘female’ aspect, in the sense that innovation in female beautification, in the androcentric mindset of the text, led to more temptation and promiscuity.<sup>130</sup> Excesses of violence and sex characterize the antediluvian period, according to *Watchers*.

*Watchers* provides vivid and disturbing details about the children of the angels that are not found in Genesis. The Enochic text appears to show awareness of the trope that they are warriors, refashioning their martial prowess in horrific terms. They are no longer “men of renown.” They are unspeakably violent. They do not just murder people—they eat them. This unsettling portrayal of the angelic offspring offers a clear way to understand how they should be related to the rise of evil and violence that necessitated the flood—they are its prime cause. Above I observed that it is unclear in Genesis how to relate the *gibbōrīm* of Gen 6:4 to the increase of evil stated in verse 5 which precipitated the flood. *Watchers*, by contrast, is clear on this point. The Enochic reconfiguration of the *gibbōrīm* into terrifying, cannibalistic giants can be understood as offering a solution to an exegetical problem.

As is clear from the description of the antediluvian acts of the sons of the angels in *1 Enoch* 7

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<sup>127</sup> This important issue is explicated in more depth below.

<sup>128</sup> For an overview of this theme, see Reed, *Fallen Angels*, 24-57.

<sup>129</sup> Fritz Graf, “Mythical Production: Aspects of Myth and Technology in Antiquity,” in *From Myth to Reason? Studies in the Development of Greek Thought* (ed. R. Buxton; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 317-28.

<sup>130</sup> Matthew Goff, “Male and Female, Heaven and Earth: Claude Lévi-Strauss’ Structuralist Approach to Myth and the Enochic Myth of the Watchers,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Study of the Humanities. Method, Theory, Meaning: Proceedings of the Eighth Meeting of the International Organization for Qumran Studies (Munich, 4-7 August, 2013)* (ed. S. Thomas, B. Hartog, and A. Schofield; STDJ 125; Brill, 2018), 77-91; Annette Yoshiko Reed, “Gendering Heavenly Secrets? Women, Angels, and the Problem of Misogyny and Magic,” in *Daughters of Hecate: Women and Magic in Antiquity* (ed. D. Kalleres and K. Stratton; Oxford: Oxford University Press), 108-51.

that was quoted at the outset of this article, they consumed blood. It is notable that the text emphasizes this point. Since they are devouring humans, one could readily assume that they swallow blood when they do so. The legal code in Leviticus asserts that blood is holy and belongs to God, not the person in which it flows.<sup>131</sup> It is an embodied way to conceive of life, and the act of being alive, as under divine control. Leviticus 17:11 claims that the soul (שׁוֹפָר) is in the blood; blood was conceptualized as the seat of life. This ancient theorization of blood makes intelligible why it is treated with such reverence in the sacrificial worship of ancient Israel and other religious traditions of the ancient Near East. Understood against this religio-cultural backdrop, the ingestion of blood does more than break a food taboo. It is affront against God. Describing the giants as consuming blood is a way to depict them as evil and opposed to God.

*Watchers'* assertion that the giants ingest blood can also be understood as having an exegetical aspect. It makes sense in relation to the account in Genesis 9 of God's covenant with Noah and his sons after the flood. Genesis 9:1-6 states:

God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. The fear and dread of you shall rest on every animal of the earth, and on every bird of the air, on everything that creeps on the ground, and on all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and just as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. Only, you shall not eat flesh with its life (שׁוֹפָר), that is, its blood. For your own lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning: from every animal I will require it and from human beings, each one for the blood of another, I will require a reckoning for human life. Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person's blood be shed.”

This pericope is generally attributed in biblical scholarship to the Priestly source.<sup>132</sup> In it God asserts that he will never send another flood and that humankind will maintain power over other creatures on earth, provided that they keep two rules. People are not to eat blood or kill other people (9:4-6). These commandments are found within a larger passage in which God grants humankind the right to consume meat, a visceral expression of human dominion over other animals (v. 3). It may strike readers as odd that God's promise to never send another flood is based on people agreeing to never ingest blood. *Watchers* can be plausibly interpreted as a consequence of reflection about the diluvian laws God gives to humanity.<sup>133</sup> This ban in Genesis 9 against consuming blood, its linkage between killing and the swallowing of blood, and the fact that it brings up the issue of eating meat at all, become easier to understand if the reader imagines the crisis that led to the flood as it is presented in *Watchers*. With regard to the evil on earth that triggered the flood Genesis provides relatively few details. *Watchers* offers an antediluvian narrative that is informed by some form of Genesis 9. Additionally, because Gen 9:4 constitutes the first time the Hebrew Bible states that humans can

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<sup>131</sup> I engage this issue in more depth in Matthew J. Goff, “Monstrous Appetites: Blood, Giants, Cannibalism and Insatiable Eating in Enochic Literature,” *JAJ* 1 (2010): 19-42. Consult also Yitzhaq Feder, *Blood Expiation in Hittite and Biblical Ritual: Origins, Context, and Meaning* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014).

<sup>132</sup> For a helpful overview of this scholarly tradition, see the discussion of Genesis 9 in Alexander Rofé, *Introduction to the Composition of the Pentateuch* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 28-45. Those interested in a recent and extensive examination of the Priestly source can consult Liane M. Feldman, *The Story of Sacrifice: Ritual and Narrative in the Priestly Source* (FAT 141; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020).

<sup>133</sup> Samuel L. Boyd has recently argued that *1 Enoch* 7 (and also the iteration of the flood story in *Jubilees* 5) makes explicit this same key point, which he argues is implicit in the Priestly text of Genesis 9—that animal consumption plays a major role in the violence that triggered the flood. See his “The Flood and the Problem of Being an Omnivore,” *JSOT* 43 (2019): 163-78.

consume meat, the era before the flood can be imagined as a time of vegetarianism. This context would make the giants' cannibalistic violence even more shocking.<sup>134</sup>

As I have sought to demonstrate, interpreting the *Book of the Watchers* as an exegetical text can be an instructive exercise. We should not, however, anachronistically assert our modern notion of canon onto ancient Jewish literature. It is evident that in the late Second Temple period there was an extensive interest in traditional writings that were considered to have a form of authoritative status. Many Jewish works from this period, including the *Book of Jubilees*, the *Animal Apocalypse*, the *Temple Scroll* and the *Genesis Apocryphon*, in myriad ways explore and reconfigure specific texts and themes of the Pentateuch. The *Community Rule* states that when at least ten members of the Dead Sea sect are together, one of them must be reciting or expounding the Torah, day and night (1QS 6:6-7). But there is not in this era a "Bible," in the sense of the fixed canon of the Old Testament. Rather there was a loose body of traditional lore in textualized form with which Jewish scribes could and did display a great degree of literary creativity. Hindy Najman many years ago offered to explain the textuality of ancient Judaism not through appeal to anachronistic biblical or scriptural categories of analysis but rather what she termed "Mosaic Discourse."<sup>135</sup> The Dead Sea Scrolls offer a crucial window into a lost Jewish textual world, in which scripture is important but before the Bible (a term never found in the scrolls) comes into being as a textual and theological category.

The material in *Watchers* from the third century BCE offers a fleeting glimpse into this lost textual world. *Watchers* does not present itself as exegeting a scriptural text, in contrast to rabbinic midrash, a genre that emerges later and is self-consciously modeled as a verse-by-verse exposition of a sacred text. Rather *Watchers*, by using the pseudepigraphic device of attributing authorship to Enoch, whom the text extols as a righteous scribe from the antediluvian age, presents the watchers myth as what actually happened long ago, as an etiology of the flood, and as events witnessed and recorded by Enoch.<sup>136</sup> *Watchers'* presentation of the watchers and their violent offspring betrays an abiding concern with the deep past (an issue to which I return below). The composition's articulation of antediluvian events reflects reliance on early forms of Genesis texts—but not simply reliance on them. *Watchers* expands and enlarges their content. As discussed above, the book of Genesis for example never provides the names of the angels or much detail regarding the violent rampages on earth that triggered the flood. To make this assessment one must posit that the scribes who produced *Watchers* had access to a form of Genesis 6 that is by and large similar to the Masoretic form of the text that became part of the Bible. This is, in my view, a reasonable position. While the Dead Sea Scrolls show a great deal of variety regarding how they engage Genesis traditions, they also include several manuscripts of Genesis that are quite similar to the later Masoretic versions of these texts, suggesting that Genesis had a degree of textual stability in this period, as George Brooke has stressed, that one does not find in this period with, say, the Psalms.<sup>137</sup> Other compositions such as *Jubilees* or

<sup>134</sup> Yael Shemesh, "Vegetarian Ideology in Talmudic Literature and Traditional Biblical Exegesis," *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 9 (2006): 141-66.

<sup>135</sup> Hindy Najman, *Seconding Sinai: The Development of Mosaic Discourse in Second Temple Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 2003). See also Eva Mroczek, *The Literary Imagination in Jewish Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); *ibid.* "The Hegemony of the Biblical in the Study of Second Temple Literature," *JAJ* 6 (2015): 2-35.

<sup>136</sup> Matthew Goff, "Reading Jewish Wisdom From Before the Flood: Authorship, Prophecy, and Textuality in Enochic Literature," in *Authorschaft und Autorisierungsstrategien in apokalyptischen Texten* (ed. J. Frey, M.R. Jost and F. Tóth; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 171-91; Annette Yoshiko Reed, "Pseudepigraphy and/as Prophecy: Continuity and Transformation in the Formation and Reception of Early Enochic Writings," in *Revelation, Literature, and Community in Late Antiquity* (ed. Philippa Townsend and Moulie Vidas; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 25-42.

<sup>137</sup> George J. Brooke, "Genesis 1-11 in the Light of Some Aspects of the Transmission of Genesis in Late Second Temple Times," *HeBAI* 1 (2012): 465-82 (471). While the Dead Sea Scrolls present Genesis as having some coherence as a book (4Q8 [4QGen<sup>b</sup>] for example indicates that it could at that time circulate as a book with a title [ברשית] that is in accord with its title in later Judaism, בראשית, it is not clear that Psalms existed as a single book in this period, as Mroczek, *The Literary Imagination*, 51-85, argues.

the *Genesis Apocryphon* tell stories about the patriarchs which show detailed engagement—a kind of ancient textual scholarship—with forms of Genesis texts that are again similar to what became the book of Genesis.<sup>138</sup> Annette Reed, who has justly criticized scholarship on Second Temple Judaism for its overemphasis on biblical categories, emphasizes this point with regard to *Watchers*. Speaking specifically about Gen 6:1-4, she writes: “What is allusive and unexplained in Genesis, however, is expounded in spectacularly specific detail in the *Book of the Watchers*.”<sup>139</sup> The overarching goal of the composition was not necessarily to fill out an incomplete story in a scriptural text, or to demonstrate that Genesis, when properly retold, is a consistent and comprehensive narrative.<sup>140</sup> Rather *Watchers* constitutes reflection about the deep past that is informed by textual traditions found in Genesis. Its presumed brief and incomplete account of antediluvian events constituted an opportunity for creative reflection on this period.<sup>141</sup> The transformation of the warriors of renown in Genesis 6 into cannibalistic giants of the *Book of the Watchers* can be reasonably understood as a form of exegesis on texts of Genesis, with “exegesis” employed here as a second-order term of analysis, an etic rather than emic characterization of the content of *Watchers*. If it is interpreted in this way, the composition’s disturbing, violent giants constitutes an odd, and monstrous, form of exegesis.

## FORAYS INTO A MONSTROUS FIELD OF KNOWLEDGE

It is reductive, however, to limit the significance of *Watchers* to exegesis. There is more to the story. Although most people today have never heard of the composition, this was not the case in antiquity. The Dead Sea Scrolls, on the basis of the fact that the composition was copied and reworked, attest that some Jews in the second and first centuries BCE considered *Watchers* to have a type of authoritative status. The New Testament Letter of Jude quotes from it, presuming that it has some sort of authoritative status, and this comportment towards *Watchers* is continued in early Christian writings. The core tale of *Watchers*, that angels descended from heaven to have sex with women and produce children, was reconfigured and reimagined by numerous other ancient Jewish texts, including the *Animal Apocalypse*, the *Book of Jubilees* and the Qumran *Book of Giants*. They all came up with their own depictions of the giants, the sons of the angels. While scripture was an important cultural category in ancient Judaism, the appeal and popularity between 200 BCE and 100 CE of such material—in part because none of these works explicitly frame themselves as exegeting citations of *Watchers*—cannot be wholly explained through appeal to exegesis.

I would like to suggest that we can arrive at a plausible understanding of both *Watchers*’ portrayal of violent, destructive giants and the popularity of stories about these antediluvian creatures in ancient Judaism through engagement with scholarship on monsters and the monstrous.

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<sup>138</sup> For an annotated translation of *Jubilees* that explicates how it reformulates material in Genesis (and Exodus) see Matthew Goff, “Jubilees,” in *The Jewish Annotated Apocrypha* (ed. J. Klawans and L.M. Wills; New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 1-97.

<sup>139</sup> Reed, *Demons, Angels and Writing*, 199. For her criticism of forms of anachronistic applications of biblical perspectives onto the study of Second Temple literature, see, for example, pp. 23-25. Reed’s sentiments regarding *Watchers* vis-à-vis Genesis 6, with differing degrees of nuance, are common in biblical studies. See for example Julie Galambush, *Reading Genesis: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2018), 40; James L. Kugel, *The Bible As It Was* (Cambridge MA/London: Belknap Press, 1997), 110-12.

<sup>140</sup> In part to avoid such conclusions, scholars of ancient Judaism generally now no longer or only very sparingly use “Rewritten Bible” as a category of analysis, which used to be employed with much more regularity. See Daniel Machiela, “Once More, with Feeling: Rewritten Scripture in Ancient Judaism—A Review of Recent Developments,” *JJS* 61 (2010): 308-20.

<sup>141</sup> As discussed below, *Watchers*’ engagement with the primordial period is fully in accord with the intellectual currents of the early Hellenistic period.



What are monsters? The term denotes a second-order category of analysis used to interpret creatures from a vast range of cultural and historical contexts. The term, as scholars of monster theory (monstrologists?) know, originates from the Latin word *monstrum*, which can be related to the verb *monere*, “to warn”; Augustine connects the noun instead to *monstrare*, “to show,” explaining that the term denotes signs that “show by signifying something” (*Civ.* 21.8).<sup>142</sup> The word *monstrum* often was invoked to interpret something strange or unusual as some sort of ominous portent. The birth of a child with a defect or the sighting of an odd creature could easily be construed as an omen, indicating some sort of future calamity or hardship.<sup>143</sup> As Jeffery Jerome Cohen has emphasized, a monster is a signifier; it points to something that is beyond itself.<sup>144</sup> Timothy Beal offers in his valuable book *Religion and Its Monsters* (2002) the definition of monsters as “personifications of the *Unheimlich*.”<sup>145</sup> This conception of the monstrous utilizes the Freudian locution that is normally rendered as “uncanny.” A more literal translation would be “un-home-ly.” Following this thread, monsters are creatures which cannot be bounded or confined within a normative sense of place. They disrupt epistemological and taxonomic categories that conceptualize and articulate what is normal. So understood, monsters constitute “threatening figures of anomaly.”<sup>146</sup> The term “monster” frequently refers to mixed, hybrid creatures that reconfigure component parts of actual animals in ways that do not occur in nature, as with the sphinx or centaur.<sup>147</sup> To this end Cohen argues that the monster signifies a kind of “ontological liminality”; that is, the term can be applied to an entity that transcends and is unconstrained by normativizing categories of classification.<sup>148</sup> For this reason, he aptly observes, one should discern a rise in interest in monsters during times of crisis. Political and military events and forms of disaster, because they are moments of turmoil, change, and violence, compel people to re-examine the world and the categories they deploy to understand it. This perspective is quite valid with regard to ancient Judaism (a point I return to below).

The interest people have in monsters is extensive and is not restricted to moments of crisis. Cohen emphasizes that the monstrous as a cultural category offers an effective way to articulate, and demonize, alterity. Monsters can represent the “dialectical Other,” and as such they do not only offer us a way to conceptualize enemies who are invading.<sup>149</sup> Monsters also offer a way to understand

<sup>142</sup> Terry Kirk, “Monumental Monstrosity, Monstrous Monumentality,” *Perspecta* 40 (2008): 6-15 (7). For the key passage, see St. Augustine, *The City of God* (trans. Henry Bettenson; New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 982.

<sup>143</sup> D. Felton, “Rejecting and Embracing the Monstrous in Ancient Greece and Rome,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous* (ed. A. Simon Mittman and P. Dendle; Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), 103-32 (104).

<sup>144</sup> Jeffery Jerome Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (ed. J.J. Cohen; Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 3-25 (4). See also Georges Canguilhem, “Monstrosity and the Monstrous” (trans. T. Jaeger), *Diogenes* 40 (1962): 27-42.

<sup>145</sup> David Gilmore, *Monsters: Evil Beings, Mythical Beasts, and All Manner of Imaginary Terrors* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 5.

<sup>146</sup> Timothy K. Beal, *Religion and Its Monsters* (New York/London: Routledge, 2002), 4.

<sup>147</sup> Asa Simon Mittman, “Introduction: The Impact of Monsters and Monster Studies,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion*, 1-16 (5); Gilmore, *Monsters*, 6.

<sup>148</sup> Cohen, “Monster Culture,” 6. See also idem, “Postscript: The Promise of Monsters,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion*, 449-64 (452). Noël Carroll articulates the idea that monsters ignore and break through normative cultural categories in his well-known study of horror films by terming this trope “fusion”—the blending of things together into one entity that are in conceptually different categories, such as the zombie (which is both living and dead). He also stresses that another common recurring characteristic feature of monsters is “magnification”—the increase of a creature’s size far beyond biological norms. Since the giants of the *Book of the Watchers* are 3,000 cubits tall, they excessively exemplify Carroll’s trope of “magnification.” See his *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 43-52. For discussion of the gigantic and the grotesque, consult Susan Stewart, *On Longing; Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

<sup>149</sup> Cohen, “Monster Culture,” 7.

places which are far away and different from the ones we consider normal. Lurking at the edge of the known world, as map makers of earlier eras often asserted, *hic sunt dracones* (“here be dragons”).<sup>150</sup> Monsters in this sense demarcate the boundaries of normative space. They can do so by providing a glimpse of how strange things are on the other side. Stories of this sort were often told in the ancient world. Writers such as Herodotus and Ctesias, for example, gave expression to India in the Greek imaginary as a region populated with fantastic creatures. They include cynocephali (humans with heads of dogs or other animals), ants larger than foxes that burrow into the ground for gold, or the *martikora* (manticore), a creature with a human face, a lion’s body, and the tail of a scorpion.<sup>151</sup>

Such writers also told stories about far-flung tribes to construct ethical norms that help define civilization, by offering lurid depictions of the monstrous conduct beyond the pale.<sup>152</sup> For example, Herodotus claims that the Messagatae, an Iranian nomadic tribe that lives in Central Asia, devour and sacrifice their elderly (1.216; cf. 3.25). He further asserts that other remote peoples such as the Scythians are cannibals who have no conception of justice or law (4.18, 102, 106). Strabo around the turn of the common era makes similar comments about the people of Ierna (Ἰέρνη), or Ireland. In his construal, the Irish are cannibals who consume the bodies of their fathers when they die and that among them incest is routine:

Besides some small islands round about Britain, there is also a large island, Ierne, which stretches parallel to Britain on the north, its breadth being greater than its length. Concerning this island I have nothing certain to tell, except that its inhabitants are more savage than the Britons, since they are man-eaters as well as heavy eaters, and since, further, they count it an honorable thing, when their fathers die, to devour them, and openly to have intercourse, not only with the other women, but also with their mothers and sisters; but I am saying this only with the understanding that I have no trustworthy witnesses for it; and yet, as for the matter of man-eating, that is said to be a custom of the Scythians also, and, in cases of necessity forced by sieges, the Celts, the Iberians, and several other peoples are said to have practiced it (4.5.4; cf. 7.3.6).<sup>153</sup>

In this lurid mode of ethnography, the shocking conduct on the edge of the known world to the west

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<sup>150</sup> Chet Van Duzer, “Hic sunt dracones: The Geography and Cartography of Monsters,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion*, 387-436; idem, *Sea Monsters on Medieval and Renaissance Maps* (London: The British Library, 2014).

<sup>151</sup> For the large ants referred to by Herodotus, see 3.102. Aulus Gellius, in *Attic Nights* 9.4 (second century CE), asserts that he read in Ctesias (fourth century BCE) and other works that there are “marvels in the Far East,” signifying India, including men who have dog heads, monocoli, who hop around on one leg, and pygmies. Consult Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones and James Robson, *Ctesias’ History of Persia: Tales of the Orient* (London: Routledge, 2010), 110 (also 33). For the *mantikora*, see Felton, “Rejecting and Embracing the Monstrous,” 125. Note further Rudolf Wittkower, “Marvels of the East: A Study in the History of Monsters,” in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 5 (1942): 159-97 (160-61).

<sup>152</sup> I also discuss this material in “Deep Time, the Monstrous, and the Book of the Watchers in the Hellenistic Age,” in *Notions of Time in Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature* (ed. S. Beyerle and M. Goff; Berlin: de Gruyter, forthcoming).

<sup>153</sup> Horace Leonard Jones, *Strabo, Geography, Vol. II: Books 3-5* (Loeb Classical Library; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1923), 261. Diodorus likewise construes the Scythians and the Irish as cannibals (5.32.3). Pliny asserts that the Scythians engages in cannibalism and likens them to barbarian tribes north of the Alps (*Nat. His.* 7.2). For more on the topic of cannibalism, consult Cătălin Avramescu, *An Intellectual History of Cannibalism* (trans. A. Ian Blyth; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Mark P. Donnelly and Daniel Diehl, *Eat Thy Neighbour: A History of Cannibalism* (Stroud: Sutton, 2006).

reminds Strabo of the horrors in the distant east (Ireland and Central Asia, respectively). In either direction, when one goes beyond the fringes of civilization, one encounters monstrous forms of life. A similar presentation of imagined distant space is found in the *Acts of Andrew and Matthias* (third or fourth century CE). In this account the apostle Andrew travels to the mysterious city of Myrmidonia, whose inhabitants “ate no bread and drank no water but ate human flesh and drank their blood. They would seize all who came to their city, dig out their eyes, [and] make them drink a drug prepared by sorcery and magic” that would make their victims behave like animals.<sup>154</sup>

One countervailing impulse in the study of the monstrous is to reflect not on the strange creatures that roam in faraway lands but on the monster within. And one can note the odd relationship between them. Beal’s conception of the monster as expressing *das Unheimliche* can be helpful here. He wants to say more than that monsters embody a violation of a person’s normative values. *Das Unheimliche*, the un-home-ly, is not just out there. As the saying goes, the call is coming from inside the house. He terms this the paradox of the monstrous.<sup>155</sup> David Gilmore in his *Monsters: Evil Beings, Mythical Beasts and All Manner of Imaginary Terrors* (2002) makes a similar observation. He promotes a psychoanalytical perspective with regard to monsters. He avers that the monster is “not simply a political metaphor, but also a projection of some repressed part of the self.”<sup>156</sup> The monster represents the *id*, the classical Freudian term for the disturbing and animalistic instincts that are found deep within the human unconscious, but in an externalized form. This understanding of the issue offers a psychoanalytic way to explain the cross-cultural trope that monsters, while conquered by heroes, typically survive to fight another day.<sup>157</sup> In this construal of the topic, the monster and his overthrow constitute a projection of the *id*. It is effectively repressed but nonetheless remains, lurking in the shadows of the human mind. The universality of the trope, in this line of thinking, accords with the assessment that, despite the diversity of human cultures, the physical nature of the brain and thus its inner workings remain constant.

## MONSTROUS, ANTHROPOPHAGOUS, ANTEDILUVIAN GIANTS

The key question for the matter at hand, however, is not how the brain works. Rather it is - how can monster theory assist our efforts to interpret the giants of the *Book of the Watchers*? A Freudian, psychological perspective towards the issue strikes me as interesting. But very little is known about whoever wrote the literature of *I Enoch*, which complicates speculation about their psyches. The story of *Watchers*, however, clearly accords with the cannibalism that is a prominent object of study in monster theory. Our own culture’s on-going obsession with the zombie apocalypse, as evident in shows such as *The Walking Dead*, underscores this point. Gilmore hypothesizes that cannibalism is “the primary form of human aggression.”<sup>158</sup> In his perspective, cannibalism represents

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<sup>154</sup> See David Frankfurter, *Evil Incarnate: Rumors of Demonic Conspiracy and Satanic Abuse in History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 77. For an edition of the *Acts of Andrew and Matthias*, see Dennis R. MacDonald, *The Acts of Andrew and the Acts of Andrew and Matthias in the City of Cannibals* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990). Consult also Lautaro Roig Lanzillota, “Cannibals, Myrmidonians, Sinopeans or Jews? The Five Versions of the Acts of Andrew and Matthias and Their Sources,” in *Wonders Never Cease: The Purpose of Narrating Miracle Stories in the New Testament and its Religious Environment* (ed. M. Labahn and B. J. Lietaert Peerbolte; London: T. & T. Clark, 2006), 221-43.

<sup>155</sup> Beal, *Religion and Its Monsters*, 4.

<sup>156</sup> Gilmore, *Monsters*, 16. See also Jeffery Jerome Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), xii.

<sup>157</sup> Cohen, “Monster Culture,” 4.

<sup>158</sup> Gilmore, *Monsters*, 186.

our desire to eat laid bare, revealing it to be a primordial, animalistic impulse that can be clearly discerned as such when cultural norms about what one is supposed eat are removed. Gilmore asserts further that the ubiquitous human fear of cannibalistic monsters attests the existence within the mind of a primary desire, the raw and unmitigated urge to eat, which is then projected onto an external entity, the monster.<sup>159</sup> He also thinks that guilt is a core human response to having this disturbing and yet essential desire. Following this theory, myths and lore about cannibalism signal a kind of psychological drama, or perhaps fantasy, in which people wrestle with the urge to be both the eater and the eaten, the expression of cannibalistic impulses and an interest in being devoured, as a product of the guilt of having alimentary urges that are so disturbing.

It is not necessary to endorse Gilmore or his orthodox Freudian approach to cannibalism *in toto*. His perspective, however, underscores a key point—that the anthropophagous monsters of the *Book of the Watchers* can be profitably understood as a way to engage a topic that might be described as the ethics of food. It is *de rigueur* in biblical studies for scholars to understand that a central or core theme in the literature of *I Enoch* is the origin of evil. But it is not evident, in my opinion, that “evil” is the best descriptor for the behavior of the giants or their motivation, but it depends on how one defines the term. They are not driven by a malicious intent to kill or harm people. Their actions are not an effort to carry out a malevolent plot or a master plan to dethrone God. Instead, according to *Watchers*, the crisis on earth that necessitated the flood was motivated by the base, animalistic urge of the giants to eat, run amok (*I Enoch* 7). The act of eating food is an essentially destructive activity that is simultaneously necessary for life to continue. However, the consumptive act with regard to the giants is harmful for all life on earth. Their horrific rampages occur because their appetites, in a very literal sense, are unconstrained. They devour the food of humankind, then humans and then each other. As already discussed, Genesis 9 highlights the perspective that the re-creation of the world after the flood is predicated on the establishment of restrictions on eating practices. God exhibits genuine concern about what the people of Israel should put inside their bodies, as is evident from the copious laws in the Pentateuch regarding diet. One can reasonably interpret the *Book of the Watchers* as highlighting this key point, with monsters. The composition offers an intriguing example of how monsters can help articulate and enforce social norms, a point often emphasized by scholars of the monstrous.<sup>160</sup> *Watchers* does so with regard to food, by articulating a disturbing account of what happened on the earth long ago when the desire to eat was wholly unimpeded.

## **THE RETURN OF THE REPRESSED? *ENUMA ELISH*, GENESIS 1, AND THE *BOOK OF THE WATCHERS***

I would like to suggest one other way that attending to the theme of monstrosity can help us better understand the *Book of the Watchers* in relation to older textual materials in Genesis. As is well-known in biblical studies, a broadly attested creation motif is the so-called *Chaoskampf*, the depiction of the formation of the world not as *creatio ex nihilo*, as many hold today, but rather as asserting that the creator god heroically defeated some form of powerful monster who is associated with chaos.<sup>161</sup> While this scholarly trope is plausible, one should stress, as Debra Ballentine reminds us, that utilization of the word “chaos” to denote the era before the reigning god assumed control construes the perspective of his own dominion as an objective and neutral term of scholarly

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<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

<sup>160</sup> Cohen, “Monster Culture,” 12, argues that “the monster polices the border of the possible.”

<sup>161</sup> Gregory Mobley, *The Return of the Chaos Monsters—And Other Backstories of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 16-33.

analysis.<sup>162</sup> The parade example of the ancient Near Eastern trope of creation via the killing of a monster is the Mesopotamian text the *Enuma Elish*, a work often understood as having been produced in the late second or early first millennium BCE.<sup>163</sup> This composition was for centuries recited at the Akitu festival, a major ceremony in ancient Babylonian religion. It was celebrated twice a year to commemorate the spring and fall equinoxes. The spring Akitu festival is also a ceremony for the New Year. Its most visible and central component involved a procession of a cult statue of Marduk, the chief god of Babylon, along other deities and the king out of the city, and their return three days later. This gave spatial and physical expression to a triumphant renewal of the religious-political order after a brief period of chaos, re-asserting the legitimacy of the normative order with Marduk and the king at the center.<sup>164</sup> This public procession articulated core elements of the drama of the *Enuma Elish* itself, the reading of which was a component of this festival.<sup>165</sup> In this work the stability of the world and the rule of the gods is endangered because of the machinations of Tiamat, a monstrous sea dragon who became the mother of a horde of other monsters. They include snakes and dragons, along with various hybrid creatures such as scorpion men, fish men, and bull men. Together they contest the rule of the gods (1.134-46).<sup>166</sup> The problem they pose to the gods is resolved by the deity Marduk. He does more than slay her. He segments her body into pieces and forms the known world out of those portions. Marduk's grand victory over Tiamat constitutes the etiology of his enthronement as king of the gods and provides a rationale for his centrality in the cult of the city of Babylon.

Genesis 1 is generally and plausibly thought in biblical studies to have been initially written in the sixth century BCE by priestly scribes (to whom the so-called P source of the Pentateuch is attributed), in the context of the Babylonian exile.<sup>167</sup> The scribes responsible for it would very likely have known about the Marduk-Tiamat creation motif of Babylonian religion found in the *Enuma Elish*. As mentioned above, this was not an obscure text but at the center of a major Babylonian

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<sup>162</sup> Debra Scoggins Ballentine, *The Conflict Myth and the Biblical Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 186.

<sup>163</sup> For discussion of the dating of the composition of the *Enuma Elish*, see W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 439-44. This source also includes a text and translation of the text (pp. 50-133). One can also consult Philippe Talon, *Enūma Eliš: The Standard Babylonian Creation Myth* (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2005), and, for an accessible English translation, Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 228-77.

<sup>164</sup> Lauren Ristvet, *Ritual, Performance and Politics in the Ancient Near East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 153-58; Beate Pongratz-Leisten, *Ina šulmi īrub: die Kulttopographische und ideologische Programmatik der akītu-Prozession in Babylonien und Assyrien im 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (Mainz am Rhein: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1994). See also Paul J. Kosmin, *Time and Its Adversaries in the Seleucid Empire* (London/Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2018), 30-34.

<sup>165</sup> There are different scholarly reconstructions as to how public the recitation of the *Enuma Elish* was during the Spring Akitu festival. Compare, for example, Ristvet, *Ritual, Performance and Politics*, 153 (who describes the ceremony beginning with a priest publicly reading aloud the *Enuma Elish*) with Takayoshi Oshima, *Babylonian Prayers to Marduk* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 36 (who describes the high priest of Esagila, the central temple to Marduk in Babylon, reciting the poem during the Akitu without any audience). See also Anette Zgoll, "Schauseite, verborgene Seite und geheime Deutung des babylonischen Neujahrsfestes. Entwurf einer Handlungstheorie von ‚Zeigen und Verbergen,‘" in *Die gezeigte und die verborgene Kultur* (ed. B. Streck; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007), 165-89. As is clear from the discussion below, my argument does not hinge on whether the text was recited publicly or not.

<sup>166</sup> Mobley, *The Return of the Chaos Monsters*, 18.

<sup>167</sup> For a concise overview of why biblical scholars attribute Genesis 1 to a Priestly source, see Rofé, *Introduction to the Composition of the Pentateuch*, 18, 36. For a more extensive discussion of this issue, see Mark S. Smith, *The Priestly Vision of Genesis 1* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010).

festival, the Akitu.<sup>168</sup> How the Babylonians praised and described the dominion of Marduk changed how the Israelites in exile extolled their own deity, particularly with regard to creation. With the priestly authors of Genesis 1, they incorporated some core aspects of the *Chaoskampf* myth but at the same time sought to avoid recounting a scenario that was too similar to that of Marduk and Tiamat.

According to Genesis 1, the foundation of the normative order of the cosmos testifies to the ability of God to exert his will over the primeval waters which is associated with unformed matter (*tohu va-vohu*; NRSV: “a formless void”; Gen 1:2). The term “deep” in Gen 1:2 (*tehom*), signifying the watery abyss, is generally regarded as related to the Akkadian name Tiamat. The Bible (to my chagrin) does not begin with a battle royale between God and a sea dragon. Tiamat, however, lurks beneath the surface. The chapter puts forward an abstract iteration of this conflict, perhaps to avoid the suggestion that there is no creature, however powerful, who poses a legitimate threat to God’s control. This move also avoids the direct inference that there was a time when God was not in control. But Genesis 1, despite its theological hesitations, incorporates the core idea found in the *Chaoskampf* tradition as exemplified by the *Enuma Elish* by repeatedly asserting that God has full and unfettered control over the waters, as is clear from Gen 1:6-9, and also by the fact that “the great sea monsters” (*ha-tanninim ha-gedolim*) were the first creatures he fashioned—without any sense whatsoever that they pose a threat (v. 21; cf. Job 40:19). Other biblical texts do not share the same restraint with regard to asserting that God killed a dragon when he created the world. Psalm 74, for example, praises his manipulation of the waters during his creation in a way that poetically combines it with his defeat of a sea monster: “You divided the sea by your might, you broke the heads of the dragons in the waters; you crushed the heads of Leviathan” (vv. 13-14; cf. 89:10-12; cf. Isa 51:9). The motif of creation à la Genesis 1 utilizes older ancient Near Eastern creation traditions but, when compared to the *Enuma Elish*, the battle with monsters is absent. The *Book of the Watchers*, through its effort to portray the flood as the divine defeat of transgressive giants, writes monsters back into the story. Creation and the flood are thematically parallel in that both delineate the formation of the world via divine control over water. The *Book of the Watchers* reasserts the theme of monstrosity not with a sea dragon but rather through its violent giants and the re-creation of the world through the flood. The popularity and appeal of monsters offers a way to understand how the monstrous re-emerged into accounts of the primordial past (the return of the repressed?), after some scribes, such as the priestly intellectuals responsible for Genesis 1, sought to neuter this theme.

## THE MONSTROSITY OF THE HELLENISTIC AGE

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<sup>168</sup> Even if one does not hold that the *Enuma Elish* was publicly recited during this festival, it is still likely that exiled Judeans in Babylon, along with the city’s population in general, knew at least the basic story of the *Enuma Elish*—that the natural order was established by Marduk’s defeat of Tiamat, and that this conquest was deployed to legitimate the authority of the king, by homologizing him with Marduk. The affinities between the *Enuma Elish* and Genesis 1 do not require that Judean scribes engaged in a close and careful textual study of the former composition to write the latter, only that they knew core elements of its narrative. Since the *Enuma Elish* provided mythic backstory to the very public procession of the spring Akitu festival, this is a reasonable view.

Also note that the *Enuma Elish* itself advocates the teaching of its core theme of the kingship of Marduk to people at all levels of Babylonian society. It concludes by stressing that one is to teach the fifty names that extol the dominion of Marduk: “The wise and learned should confer about them, a father should repeat them and teach them to his son, one should explain them to shepherd and herdsman” (VII.146-48; Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths*, 133).

Because of the political utility of the cosmogonic myth of the *Enuma Elish*, that the victory of Marduk over Tiamat can legitimate monarchic power, there is also some evidence that the composition was adapted to other spheres of political power in a Syro-Mesopotamian context. There is for example an Assyrian version of the *Enuma Elish* that was promoted by that monarchy which prioritizes not Marduk but Ashur, the state deity of the Assyrian monarchy. This evidence for the spread and reception of the *Enuma Elish*, aside from its utilization during the Akitu festival, also speaks to the possibility that the core narrative elements of the composition were broadly known in the Mesopotamian world and not restricted to an esoteric priestly elite. See W.G. Lambert, “The Assyrian Recension of Enūma Eliš,” in *Assyrien im Wandel der Zeiten: XXXIXe rencontre assyriologique internationale, Heidelberg, 6.-10. Juli 1992* (ed. H. Waetzoldt; Heidelberg: Heidelberger Orientverlag, 1997), 77-79.

It is helpful, however, to explain the expansion of the monstrous in *Watchers* beyond that of Genesis not simply through appeal to a universalist, perennial interest in monsters. It is interesting to inquire if any more specific insights can be acquired by examining why we see this renewal of the monstrous in the third century BCE, the time when *Watchers* was written.<sup>169</sup> A traditional explanation of the giants and their violence is that of Nickelsburg. He argued that they represent the *Diadochi* (“successors”), the generals of Alexander the Great who fought brutal wars with each other in the Near East in the fourth century BCE after the death of the conqueror and the dissolution of his empire.<sup>170</sup> Such an interpretation is possible. But it offers no compelling way to explain why a representation of these brutal generals would be set in the primordial period. A leading reformulation of the interpretation of the giants offered by Nickelsburg has been more recently put forward by Anatheia Portier-Young. She argues that *Watchers* constitutes “symbolic resistance to imperial violence and hegemony.”<sup>171</sup> This constitutes one part of her larger scholarly project, to articulate Jewish apocalyptic literature and its origins as a form of theological resistance to empire.<sup>172</sup> The core move is not to stress the *Diadochi* as did Nickelsburg but rather the contemporary difficulties of living under an empire—violence perpetrated by the state, and its concomitant humiliation and indignation, that are a natural result of being a subject people under the thumb of a hostile power. In the context of the third century BCE, Judea was controlled by the Ptolemaic Empire of Egypt and in 198 BCE dominion over the region shifted to the Seleucid Empire. In Portier-Young’s formulation, Jews in the third century BCE were powerless to overthrow their unjust rulers by force, so some launched more cerebral forms of resistance. *Watchers* offers, according to her formulation, an anti-imperial alternative construal of the world. Important in this perspective is that *Watchers* appropriates Greek myth—the traditional lore of the hegemonic rulers—and repurposes it so that the story now disrupts their worldview. *Watchers*’ account of the giants for her represents an inversion of the gigantomachy of Greek myth, the basic contours of which were laid out above. The Greek *gigantes*, like the children of the watchers in *I Enoch*, are violent and upend the normative order. The appropriation of this myth however in her reading constitutes a type of inversion in that in *Watchers* the violent giants represent Hellenistic rulers. The Greeks are recoded as the true barbarians.

I am, to some extent, sympathetic to the perspectives on the giants offered by Nickelsburg and Portier-Young. The third century was a time of strife in Judah and was the central site in which a long series of wars between the Ptolemaic and Seleucid empires, often called the Syrian Wars. It is certainly possible that the violence of the giants represents the violence of the period. But this interpretation does not square well with key aspects of *Watchers* itself. It has already been mentioned that this viewpoint does not offer a good explanation why the narrative is set in the time of the flood. Also *Watchers* very much does relate the antediluvian crimes of the giants to its contemporary world—but not to Judah’s Ptolemaic overlords, or any other sort of king. The bodies of the giants are destroyed but their spirits are condemned to roam the earth and harass humankind as evil spirits (*I Enoch* 15). This is an etiology of demonic forces in the world, not of political opponents. While it is not difficult to construe imperial opponents in demonic terms, a move clearly made for example in the book of Revelation, the evil spirits of *I Enoch* 15 do things that one finds attributed to evil spirits cross-culturally, not imperial rulers. The evil spirits for example in particular attack pregnant women,

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<sup>169</sup> See also my “Deep Time, the Monstrous, and the Book of the Watchers.”

<sup>170</sup> Nickelsburg, *I Enoch* 1, 170.

<sup>171</sup> Anatheia Portier-Young, “Symbolic Resistance in the Book of the Watchers,” in *The Watchers in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (ed. Angela Kim Harkins, Kelley Coblenz Bautch, and John C. Endres, S.J.; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 39-49 (here 39). See also eadem, “Constructing Imperial and National Identities: Monstrous and Human Bodies in Book of Watchers, Daniel, and 2 Maccabees,” *Interpretation* 74 (2020): 159-70.

<sup>172</sup> Anatheia Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

because they, as *1 En.* 15:12 states, resent that they themselves were born from women. Fearsome demonic creatures, such as Lamashtu in a Mesopotamian context, or Obyzouth as described in the late antique *Testament of Solomon* (ch. 13), take particular pleasure in harming women during the liminal moment of giving birth. It was a way in antiquity to explain the dangers of giving birth by positing that particularly powerful spiritual forces would go after pregnant women. The giants do in *Watchers* represent and explain problems that contemporary people faced in the third century BCE—but the difficulties that are enumerated involve topics such as disease and problems in childbirth, not violence or injustice perpetrated by the state. Portier-Young's idea that *Watchers* reconfigures the Greek gigantomachy works only if one starts from the perspective that the giants represent Hellenistic rulers. This is a possible but not necessary starting point.

Moreover, understanding the giants of *Watchers* as representing the violence of Hellenistic empire does not fit well with the basic point elucidated in the previous section of this essay—that Genesis 1 in its account of creation writes the monsters of the *Chaoskampf* out of the story, whereas *Watchers*, in its account of the re-creation of the world through the flood, puts them back in. Genesis 1, as mentioned above, was likely written in the context of the Babylonian exile. The priestly scribes responsible for this text were among the elites taken there when the powerful Babylonian empire destroyed Jerusalem and its temple and conquered Judea. The *Enuma Elish* was a core part of the majority religion in the context of the exile in Babylon, while the Jews were a minority community. In this context, as I have already suggested, the priestly writers of Genesis 1 took on elements of the core act that legitimated Marduk's sovereignty, his defeat of Tiamat, and applied them to their own deity while avoiding an explicit and overt connection to the creation myth of the city and its empire that was subjugating them. The people responsible for Genesis 1 in the sixth century BCE and *Watchers* in the third century BCE were both under the thumb of empire—the Babylonians and the Ptolemies, respectively. In the former case the monsters were written out the story but in the latter they were written back in. This suggests to me that appeal to living under empire, and all the violence and injustice which that entails, is in and of itself not sufficient for explaining the watchers myth of *1 Enoch* and its giants.

In terms of how to move forward here too monster studies can be instructive. As mentioned above, scholars such as Cohen have argued that we should expect a rise in monsters and interest in them in times of crisis, moments in which normative and conventional explanations are easily seen as insufficient. The Babylonian exile was humiliating and traumatic. Some biblical texts reflect the raw emotions of that difficult period. Psalm 137, for example, offers a form of revenge fantasy, . It depicts Israelites weeping by the rivers of Babylon while being taunted, wishing that Babylonian infants be bashed to death against rocks. But the Hellenistic period was a crisis of a different sort. Political violence and imperial aggression were clearly part of the Hellenistic era, as the work of Portier-Young emphasizes. But the challenges and anxieties of the period should not be reduced to state violence.

While the Hellenistic era is a macro-descriptor, a label that extends to several centuries and very different cultures, two overarching factors can be stressed. One, the Hellenistic period constitutes an expansion of the boundaries of the known world. Alexander the Great had extensive military campaigns in India, and the cultures of a vast area, from Egypt to what is today Afghanistan, came under the influence of a set of similar cultural factors. Despite their differences people were exposed, often in the medium of the Greek language, not only to Greek culture but also that of other peoples in a new way. Space does not permit a comprehensive treatment of this complex issue but this cultural situation led to a degree of epistemological uncertainty and anxiety. Conventional claims regarding ethnic self-identity had to contend with a new pluralistic environment in which conflicting constructions of knowledge were in circulation. Berossus (third century BCE), for example, was a priest of Marduk who wrote in Greek the *Babyloniaca*, an account of the early history of the world that prioritized Mesopotamian traditions. He drew on the archaic Mesopotamian *apkallu* tradition. These ichthyomorphic, antediluvian sages were revered as custodians and originators of antediluvian wisdom. According to Berossus, foundational aspects of civilization such as writing, mathematics and agriculture, were bestowed to humankind by a giant fish monster, by the name of Oannes. In the



Hellenistic era such claims were contested and debated by intellectuals, as part of a vibrant discourse about the origins of civilization.<sup>173</sup> The Egyptians, or at least some Egyptian intellectuals, bristled at such accounts, as they conflicted with Egyptian accounts of early human history. One Hellenistic Egyptian philosopher, Chaeremon, also writing in Greek, claimed that this the Babylonian story about Oannes is a type of ‘fake news’. He asserts that the putative sea monster was really a king of old disguised in a fish costume.<sup>174</sup> Hellenistic culture is defined not simply by the spread of Homer and Greek ideas throughout the Near East. Various national traditions that had been developed as a way to make the world intelligible were challenged when the boundaries of the world became larger. Different scribal intellectuals wrestled with ways to construe human history in universalistic terms and the origins of knowledge evident throughout the Hellenistic world, such as writing and astronomy. A common move was to engage in a type of heurmatography by positing a single source of such knowledge, a culture hero, from whom it disseminated outward to other cultures and the rest of the world.<sup>175</sup> As with Berossus on Oannes, scribes often extolled cultural heroes in a way that gave pride of place to their own indigenous mythic traditions.

This raises a second important overarching factor regarding the Hellenistic era. A people generally regarded, even by themselves, as young (the Greeks), conquered several peoples regarded as much, much older—not just the Jews but also the Egyptians, the Babylonians, and Iranians. Age and antiquity were important values and were accorded value and respect. In this perspective there was something ‘backward’ about the Hellenistic era—particularly from the perspective of the ancient peoples under Greek rule. Not only do they not have national sovereignty—they have more wisdom and knowledge than their upstart rulers. The son has dominion over the father. This is not only a political crisis but a cultural one.<sup>176</sup> The problem is not simply state violence but also a more unsettling sense of *Unbehagen*—a pervading sense of unease and anxiety about the status quo.

The factors under discussion help explain why there was a renewed interest in the distant, primordial past in the Hellenistic Near East. It served as a cultural space in which intellectuals of various ethnicities could highlight the accomplishments and traditions of their own people, while presenting the knowledge of other cultures as secondary and derivative. At roughly the same time as Berossus, Manetho, an Egyptian priest of the goddess Neith, wrote a chronology of Egyptian kings that stresses the profound antiquity of this monarchic tradition.<sup>177</sup> While their writings are only preserved in later sources, the *floruit* of both Berossus and Manetho makes them roughly contemporary with the *Book of the Watchers*. It offers a cultural context that explains why Jewish scribes in the same period were interested in the primordial epoch, and in articulating it terms of their own national traditions. Enoch becomes valorized as an antediluvian sage—a viewpoint never espoused in the Hebrew Bible—whose knowledge is preserved. The book of *Jubilees* asserts that Enoch was the originator of writing and was the first to acquire genuine astronomical knowledge (4:17); the latter claim is implicit in the other booklet of *1 Enoch* written in the third century BCE, the *Astronomical Book* (chs. 72-82). Both writing and astronomy were common topics in Hellenistic discourse about the origins of civilization. The desire of these contemporary intellectuals to reach

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<sup>173</sup> I deal with this issue at more length in “A Blessed Rage for Order: Apocalypticism, Esoteric Revelation, and the Cultural Politics of Knowledge in the Hellenistic Age,” *HeBAI* 5 (2016): 193-211. See also William McCants, *Founding Gods, Inventing Nations: Conquest and Culture Myths from Antiquity to Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); Sandra Blakely, *Myth, Ritual, and Metallurgy in Ancient Greece and Recent Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>174</sup> Pieter Willem van der Horst, *Chaeremon: Egyptian Priest and Stoic Philosopher* (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 10-11.

<sup>175</sup> Leonid Zhmud, *The Origin of the History of Science in Classical Antiquity* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006), 23-44.

<sup>176</sup> Interpreting the Enochic literature of the early Hellenistic age in terms of cultural concerns rather than only state-sanctioned violence is also endorsed by Reed, *Demons, Angels, and Writing*, 102-5.

<sup>177</sup> John Dillery, *Clio's Other Sons* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015).

back to the deep past and describe it in a way that emphasizes their own native lore testifies to a type of cultural anxiety evident in the Hellenistic Near East.

Understanding the Hellenistic era as a time of cultural crisis helps explain why we see a return of the monstrous in this period. This is not to dismiss the thrust of Portier-Young's work that imperial violence and injustice play a role in understanding Enochic literature. My sense is that one should also consider other cultural factors in order to understand *Watchers* and its giants. That sense that something is out of place or not quite right is, as scholars of monsters such as Cohen have emphasized, a time when we should expect a rise in monstrosity. The cultural backdrop of the early Hellenism of the Near East, with its anxieties about the new political norm and emerging interest in the primordial past, offers a way not just to understand why *Watchers* reformulated traditions found in Genesis 6 in a way that made them more monstrous but also why the scribes carrying out this textual work were interested in the antediluvian period in the first place. This also provides a way to understand the valid parallels that Portier-Young observes between the Greek *gigantes* and Jewish traditions about antediluvian sons of angels (which were also recognized in antiquity, as is clear from Josephus [*Ant.* 1.73]). The relationship between the two myths involving the defeat of primordial colossal warriors is not necessarily one inverting the other. As is clear from the Pergamon altar, in the second century BCE the *gigantes* of Greek myth were depicted in monstrous form, as having snakes for legs and wings, the hybrid combination of elements of various animals.<sup>178</sup> If one looks at older visual depictions of the depictions of the gigantomancy, the *gigantes* are not anguipedes but rather hoplites, that is, humanoid warriors, as at the Siphnian Treasury in Delphi (6<sup>th</sup> century BCE) or in the description of them in Hesiod (*Theog.* 185), whose writings are often dated to the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE.<sup>179</sup> With the *gigantes* one can discern an increased monstrosity in the Hellenistic period. This does not contrast but rather complements the move from the sons of the angels in Genesis 6 as legendary warriors to the monstrous giants recounted in *Watchers*. Both the Greek and Jewish examples testify to a cultural environment during the Hellenistic age in which traditions about the primordial past could be re-imagined in a way that made them more monstrous. The issue surely requires further elaboration, but here I have attempted to sketch out the basic cultural contours of the period in which these developments can be understood.

## CONCLUSION

One can reasonably understand the Enochic *Book of the Watchers* as engaging in a kind of monstrous exegesis. The scribal intellectuals who produced the work in the third century BCE reconfigured older textual traditions regarding the flood in a way that made the sons of the angels much more monstrous. The composition reinvents the *gibbōrîm* from legendary warriors into cannibalistic giants. As I have tried to show, this development is not simply an exegetical issue. I have also attempted to demonstrate that this transformation is intelligible in the Hellenistic context in which the book was written. The field of monster studies helps us understand the giants' anthropophagous rampages as not only acts of profound violence but also a way to delineate social norms and conduct, especially regarding food, by putting forward disturbing portrayals of life on earth before such norms were in effect. The heightened monstrosity of the *Book of the Watchers*,

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<sup>178</sup> Carlos A. Picón and Seán Hemingway, eds. *Pergamon and the Hellenistic Kingdoms of the Ancient World* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2016); Erich Gruen, "Culture as Policy: The Attalids of Pergamon," in *From Pergamon to Sperlonga: Sculpture and Context* (ed. N.T. de Grummond and B.S. Ridgway; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 17-31; Max Kunze, *Der Pergamonaltar: Seine Geschichte, Entdeckung und Rekonstruktion. 1992, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Antikensammlung Preußischer Kulturbesitz* (Mainz am Rhein: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1992).

<sup>179</sup> Richard T. Neer, "Framing the Gift: The Politics of the Siphnian Treasury at Delphi," *Classical Antiquity* 20 (2001): 273-344; Livingston Vance Watrous, "The Sculptural Program of the Siphnian Treasury at Delphi," *AJA* 86 (1982): 159-72.

discernible when compared to older Genesis traditions, becomes intelligible in the context of a climate of cultural anxiety and epistemological uncertainty that was pervasive in the early Hellenistic period. It is a valuable exercise to engage ancient Jewish literature through the lens of monster theory.