Behemoth, Beast of the Negev? A Fusion of Animals, Mythical Beasts and Monsters in Isaiah 30:6

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Abstract

The presence of mythical creatures in the Old Testament has caused wide dissension amongst scholars. Approaches range from viewing these mythical creatures as an integral part of the ANE mythical milieu, to intentional attempts to liberate some texts from mythical connotations. None of these viewpoints have adequately dealt with the appreciation of the reality, or 'realness' of mythical creatures. This article sheds new light on the often-sheltered practice of mythical creatures being 'transformed' into natural animals. This article further explores the possibility that the people of the ANE regarded natural animals and mythical creatures as equally real and authentic. Specifically, this paper will be exploring how mythical creatures have been dealt with by the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah 30:6-7 presents a fusion of creatures, both natural and mythical. Did Isaiah indeed refer to mythological creatures, and if so, why are these mythological creatures mentioned in the same breath as 'natural' animals such as donkeys? Investigating the portrayal of the fiery flying serpent, amongst the young and old lions, as well as the viper, drew attention to the distinct probability that Isaiah 30:6 may have implicated Behemoth, instead of a generic reference to the beasts of the Negev. Subsequently, the likelihood that Behemoth is a more appropriate interpretation is investigated.

Keywords: Behemoth, beasts, fiery flying serpents, mythical, Negev.

Introduction

Isaiah 30:6, presenting a seemingly fusion of creatures, both natural animals and mythical, represents one of those texts where the presence of mythical creatures has caused wide dissension amongst scholars. Approaches range from viewing these mythical creatures as an integral part of the Ancient Near Eastern (ANE)[1] mythical milieu, to intentional attempts to liberate some texts from mythical connotations. None of these viewpoints have adequately dealt with the appreciation of the reality or 'realness' of mythical creatures. Presenting mythical beasts (from our modern perspective) in conjunction with so-called natural beasts (again from our modern perspective) may seem peculiar, but the people of the time most probably did not distinguish between mythical and real animals, as both had been a reality in their daily lives. However, this reality does not allow for an argument why the mythical beast can be interpreted as a natural animal.

It is evident that some creatures in the Hebrew Bible cannot be accurately identified. The creature in question is either 'forced' into a category of known animals or identified as a mythical creature. These ambiguous animals seem to appear throughout the Hebrew Bible. The term 'animals' will be used throughout this discussion, even when water inhabitants and flying creatures are referred to. This article endeavours to establish that the distinction

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[1] Please note that references to the Ancient Near East in this paper incorporate Greece, normally being excluded, and that the acronym ANE will be used from now on.

between real animals and mythical creatures was hazed and such that it was impossible for the people of the Ancient Near East to distinguish between mythical and real. Actually, that it did not matter to them whether the animal was a mythical creature or not, as it was only necessary to ascertain of just how dangerous the animal really was and what grade of threat it posed to their safety.

A further observation is that mythical creatures are mentioned together with 'natural' animals in the same text. Here however, some biblical interpreters may experience a dissonance when reading about a mythical creature in the Old Testament and could subsequently discard the creature as being mythical. By exploring Isaiah 30:6, this paper hopes to shed new light on the often-sheltered practice of mythical creatures being 'transformed' into natural animals and that the people of the ANE regarded natural animals and mythical creatures as equally real and authentic. Thus, two questions arise: a) Has there been a fusion of animals, beasts and monsters in this Isaiah text? b) The beast of the Negev in Isaiah 30:6; could it actually be the mythical creature Behemoth?

An assessment of how the Hebrew Bible classifies animals, with specific reference to so-called mythical animals, is followed by a brief overview of mythical creatures of the ANE in order to later assist in evaluating the occurrence of mythical creatures or ambiguous animals in Isaiah 30:6.

Classification of animals in the Hebrew Bible

The Hebrew Bible provides an interesting insight into animal arrangement. It is hardly an animal classification. The arrangement was basically based on where the animals dwelled – on the earth, in water or flying. The animals of the earth have been arranged into domestic animals, further being distinguishing between non-cloven hoofed and cloven-hoofed, with the latter further differentiated as being cud-chewing or not, etcetera. The next arrangement was wild animals, primarily distinguishing dangerously lethal animals from other wild animals. The dangerously lethal animals include predators, serpents and mythical animals such as Behemoth, Fiery Flying Serpents, Cockatrices, etcetera. The waters had been predominantly inhabited by fish and mythical sea-dragons. The collective word for birds is עוֹף, with smaller birds referred to as צִפּוֹר. The mythical phoenix bird, the Ziz[2] forms part of this arrangement. Other mythical creatures mentioned are: Leviathan and several really generic references to Rahab, תַּנִּינִם or sea-dragons.

To this concise summary of basic animal arrangements in the Hebrew bible, three further peculiarities pertaining to animals in the Hebrew Bible needs to be added. Firstly, strong associations between animal and people are made, for example the description of the tribe of Judah in Genesis 49, associating Judah with a young lion (Genesis 49:9 DBY) and Issachar with a strong donkey (Genesis 49:14 GWN), etcetera. Secondly, the use of animal metaphors is frequently employed, such as Lamentations with wild animals like deer, lions and foxes[3]. And nations like Egypt with Rahab.[4] The third peculiarity of animals in the Hebrew bible is that what I would like to call – miracle animals! Not only is the Hebrew Bible rich in its poetic descriptions and portrayals of living creatures, including the magico-mythical (term conceived

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[2] Ziz: Psalms 50:11 and 80:14 use the expression זִיז שָׂדָי (*zîz saday*), generally being translated as:
the creatures of the field; wild beasts of the field; a singular wild beast, to even the beauty of the field.
My insight is that זִיז שָׂדָי may be better understood as being the Ziz, well attested in the Targums and
Rabbinic sources.
[3] Lamentations 1:6, אַיָּל; 3:10, אַרְיֵה; 5:18, שׁוּעָל.
[4] The sea-monster in the Hebrew Bible represented chaos and cosmic evil like in the ANE cultures. But it was also used as a metaphor to describe and name opposing empires and nations such as Rahab for Egypt (Freedman, 1992: 611), prevalent in Isaiah 30:7, as well as in Psalm 87:4 and Ezekiel 29:3; 32:2.

by Van Dyk, 2009), it also tells the wonderful tale of Balaam's talking donkey in Numbers 22:28. This article is not about discussing this inimitable manifestation of talking animals. However, it is sufficing to say that the talking donkey seems universal and timeless in that Donkey, in the Shrek movie-series, has become one of the most popular computer-animated characters of all our generation. Balaam's descendants would have been very wealthy if he copyrighted his story.

Mythical creatures of the ANE

The argument, that Israel's *Umwelt* did have an influence on the physical resemblances of creatures of the Hebrew bible, will not be discussed, but deserves to be noted. The magico-mythical creatures from the ANE, depict a creative permutation of animal and human bodies with animal or human heads, in combinations such as lion-dragons and scorpion monsters (Black et al, 1992:118ff). A few random examples are the Greek chimaera, with a lion upper body, a goat's waist and the bottom part of a dragon, or the Egyptian deity Seth, with a human body, a forked tail and a strange animal head. Labbu was a Mesopotamian composite of a sea-dragon and a lion-serpent. Many monsters had more than one head (Typhon had a hundred), and their breath was deadly poisonous. Most possessed the unique propensity to instantly regenerate severed limbs or heads. In conclusion, these monsters were usually enormously large in size; Typhon's heads reached the stars and Apophis, the serpent that attacked Atum Re's night boat, was gigantic in size.[5]

Having considered the manner the Hebrew Bible looks at animals, as well as acknowledging ANE creatures alive in Israel's *Umwelt*, the reading of Isaiah 30:6 introduces some interesting inferences.

> The burden of the beasts of the South[6]. Through the land of trouble and anguish, from whence come the lioness and the lion, the viper and fiery flying serpent, they carry their riches upon the shoulders of young asses, and their treasures upon the bunches of camels, to a people that shall not profit *them*. Isaiah 30:6 (ERV)

Fusion of animals with the 'fiery flying serpent'

Isaiah 30:6 names another creature alongside the 'natural' animals, '… the lioness and the lion, the viper', namely the 'fiery flying serpent'. The fiery flying serpent forms part of a rather extensive list of different expositions of the serpent in the Old Testament. These are: the serpent in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1-4), serpent as a metaphor (Proverbs 30:19; Ecclesiastes 10:8: 11; Amos 5:19; Isaiah 65:25; Jeremiah 46:22; Mica 7:17), the serpent that sprung forth from a rod (Exodus 4:3; 7:10, 15), a fiery serpent (Numbers 21:6, 8; Deuteronomy 8:15), a serpent associated with evil people (Psalms 58:4, 140:3-4), as an enchantment (Genesis 30:27; 44:5; 15; Leviticus 19:26; Numbers 23:23, 24:1; Deuteronomy 18:10; 1 Kings 20:33; 2 Kings 17:17; 21:6; 2 Chronicles 33:6), brazen serpent (Nehushtan) (Numbers 21:92; Kings 18:4) and fiery flying serpent (Isaiah 14:29, 30:6). Furthermore, the serpent has also been equated with the dragon. Briefly, the serpent as a dragon is mentioned in its generic form (Deuteronomy 32:33; Job 30:29; Jeremiah 9:11), as a dragon landmark (Nehemiah 2:13;

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[5] The enormous size of the leviathan is thus illustrated by R. Johanan, from whom proceeded nearly all the *haggadot* concerning this monster: 'Once we went in a ship and saw a fish which put his head out of the water. He had horns upon which was written: 'I am one of the meanest creatures that inhabit the sea. I am three hundred miles in length, and enter this day into the jaws of the leviathan.'
[6] Some translations refer to the Negev.

Psalm 44:19; Isaiah 13:22; Jeremiah 9:11, 10:22, 49:33, 51:37), and Pharaoh as the personification of the dragon (Ezekiel 29:3; 32:2).

As in the ANE, the Hebrew Bible portrays some magnificent serpent monsters. One serpent-monster, namely שְׂרָפִים (*seraphim*) deserves closer scrutiny as it strongly relates with the 'fiery flying serpent' in Isaiah 30:6. The שְׂרָפִים (seraphim), שָׂרָף singular, are portrayed as magnificent and imposing beings with six wings in attendance in God's temple. Isaiah 6:2 depicts שְׂרָפִים עֹמְדִים, translated as 'standing seraphim', and attending to Yahweh on his throne. They most probably stood high above and next to, or behind Yahweh. The שְׂרָפִים are described as each having six wings; two for covering their face, two for covering their feet and the other two wings were used for flying. However, who were the שְׂרָפִים and what did they really look like?

The שָׂרָף had been likened to a kind of angelic being, often translated into English as a 'fiery serpent', but angelic figures as portrayed in the New Testament had a humanlike body whereas the שְׂרָפִים had a serpent body. The only resemblance thus, was that both had wings. Apart from reading v. 4 where it states that after the one שָׂרָף had spoken, the temple was filled with smoke, indicating that smoke bellowed from their mouths and nostrils as they spoke, no further details can be extracted from the following texts in which the seraphim appear. In Deuteronomy 8:15 and Numbers 21:6, 8, the prevalence of combining נָחָשׁ (serpent) and שָׂרָף as a Hebrew word combination led to translators creating a 'fiery snake', 'flying serpents', 'darting adders' and 'poisonous snakes'. Isaiah 14:29 is translated as 'a viper will come from that snake's root' (GWN) and Isaiah 30:6 as a 'fiery flying serpent' (NKJ).

To get a better idea of what the שְׂרָפִים looked like and to learn more about their function, the search needs to extend into the surrounding cultures of the ANE. Joines (1967:414) concludes that 'the seraphim of Isaiah's inaugural vision are to be understood in the light of the Egypt symbol of the winged uraeus.' A function of the uraeus is to protect the pharaoh and sacred objects by breathing out fire on his enemies. The difference is that the Egyptian uraeus had four wings, symbolising the Pharaoh's ruling over the four corners of the earth. My own assumption is that Yahweh's seraphim have six wings, possibly to prove Yahweh's guardians' superiority over similar beings known in the ANE, as well Joines' notion that the two pairs of wings were instrumental in covering the face and the feet to acknowledge Yahweh's kingship above all. Whereas the seraphim shook the temple by filling it with smoke, it is attested that the uraeus in Egyptian myths possessed the power to spew out an intense fire on the enemies of the pharaoh. It is improbable that smoke will be produced without producing fire first. Therefore, it may be deduced that the seraphim also spewed out fire first, resulting in smoke, but that Isaiah chose to only record the filling of the room with smoke (Joines 1967:415).

Thus, serpents and other monsters played an important role in the life-world of the ancient Israelites. The fact that all serpents are named different and individually, indicates that each possess a unique and definite personality. This includes the fiery flying serpent. Why though, are these animals mentioned in the same breath as the fiery flying serpent in Isaiah 30:6? Two reasons come to mind. Firstly, the 'fiery flying serpent' is actually recognised to be a 'natural' animal. To quote Baker (2013: 109), 'The adder is literally a burning snake, this one having wings, (as in Isaiah 6:2 and 14.29), perhaps a metaphorical description of its swift darting attack.' Or as Herodotus (1920:107) describes the winged serpents of Arabia as being similar to Egyptian serpents. Sourdille (1910:74–75) believes it to be as a tree-lizard. Wiseman (1972) tries to find another explanation to identify these fiery flying serpents. It could either be a poisonous winged insect, or that the ascription 'flying' needs be questioned. Thus, the fiery flying serpent is a natural animal, deservingly mentioned amongst the other natural animals. The second reason for the mentioning of the fiery flying serpent together with the lion and the adder, is that not only Isaiah, but his entire audience did not distinguish between natural or mythical creatures. To them all, the fiery flying serpents had been a 'reality' and had been grouped together with potentially lethal animals. Noth (1960:134) agrees that there is no

reason to delegate these mythological creatures like the 'fiery flying serpent' as mere figures of speech, whilst Joines (1967) convincingly argues that Israel was acquainted with the symbol of the winged serpent.

My conclusion therefore is, that the fiery flying serpent simply was what is said in Isaiah 30:6 - flying serpents breathing fire. Not a sand-viper, nor an adder, nor a cockatrice as mentioned in Isaiah 59:5 and Job 20:16. However, for the modern interpreter though, it is a mythical creature, but to the people who dared travelling through the Negev, it was unambiguously just another extremely dangerous animal. Furthermore, when reading Isaiah 30:6 together with Isaiah 27:1 and 51:9, it becomes evident that the animals mentioned in these three Isaiah texts represent both 'real' animals, as well as mythical animals.[7] The appearance of the same creatures in both the ancient past or the future, as well as the timespan from pre-exilic to post-exilic, serves as positive confirmation that mythical creatures are intrinsically imbedded in the Israelite worldview.

The distinctive line between myth and reality becomes distorted, as Von Soden (1994:51–152) acknowledges '…occasional distinctions between the real and the mythical world were overlooked, especially when dealing with animals.' This thought is echoed by Wapnish (1995:235) that textual sources often do not provide sufficient information to allow for a proper identification. She concludes: 'The history of folk classifications has shown that it is not unusual for mythological creatures to be included with the palpably real' (Wapnish, 1995: 243).

Mythological creatures were unquestionably not viewed by the people of the ANE as figments of creative imaginations. Considering the vast number of mythological creatures, each with its own unique composition and character, it is remarkable that the people from the ANE had no apparent difficulty in recognising them. The distinction between different creatures in the respective societies were not based on a scientific taxonomy but was convincingly established on the simple belief that the creature in question is dangerous to their safety or not. Only our post-modern society has the distinct privilege to distinguish between the magico-mythical and 'natural' animals, and only because we do not share the same horizon of interpretation with ancient civilisation. This concise reflection supports the notion that natural and mythical creatures are mentioned together, because they form a collective taxonomy purely based on the danger they may pose to people. Despite pervasive speculation among scholars of the true identity of these animals mentioned in Isaiah, the exact recognition of some of these animals still remains speculative.

Beast of the Negev

The introduction by the word מַשָּׂא in Isaiah 30:6 here refers to an oracle, a unique approach in that this oracle is against animals or creatures. Although the object of the oracle points towards Egypt, Roberts (2015:255) believe that the oracle is rather aimed at the prophet's own leaders. The exact borders of the wilderness the Negev are not entirely clear, except that the Negev seems to have been situated in the region between Canaan and Egypt. Genesis 13:1-3 may provide some insight as it speaks of Abraham on his journey from Egypt through the Negev on his journey to Bethel. Joshua 15:21 signifies the Negev as the desert region to the south, therefore the translation of beast of the south.[8] The desert in the ANE was conceived much differently from what we as post-modern people understand the term. It is therefore interesting to note that Job 6:18, refers to certain death for anyone who veers into the 'waste' (ESV), 'desert' (NAB) or wasteland (NIV). This is because '…the desert has an affinity to the chaotic state of the world which Yahweh overcame when he created the cosmos' (Mauser,

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[7] Isaiah speaks a lot about wild creatures. Isaiah also speaks about 'wild beasts of the desert', 'satyrs' as well as 'wild beasts of the island' (Isaiah 13:21-22), and specifically about wild oxen (Isaiah 34:7); wild donkeys (Isaiah 32:14) and wild beasts (Isaiah 56:9-12).
[8] Other texts referring to the southern desert region is Genesis 12:9, Numbers 13:17 and Deuteronomy 1:7.

1963: 51). Thus, it recognises that desert/wilderness is one of the powers that Yahweh had to defeat, because, 'In ancient Semitic mythology the desert was widely regarded as still in a state of primeval chaos' (Budd, 1984: 234). Wright (1987: 269) speaks of 'dry chaos' of the desert as opposed to the 'wet chaos' of Genesis 1:2 Further highlighting the chaos that prevails in the desert/wilderness, Leal (2004: 74) succinctly endorses the mythical, 'The presence of satyrs, mentioned in Isaiah and elsewhere, denotes chaos, and their dancing in the wilderness manifests the frenzied evil associated with this place.' The word בַּהֲמוֹת, in Isaiah 30:6 is a feminine plural construct form with נֶגֶב, literally beast (animals) of the Negev. However, in a context where other mythical fiery flying creatures are also mentioned, there seems to be a clear allusion to more than an ordinary animal. In fact, this could in all probability be the mythological creature Behemoth. The fierceness of the beast is here then consonant with the fierceness and chaos associated with the Negev.

Views on Behemoth
The term בְּהֵמָה, generally meaning cattle, large animals or beasts, appears in 172 verses in the Hebrew Bible. Behemoth בְּהֵמוֹת, on the other hand, is a hapax legomenon[9] only mentioned in (Job 40:15). Because of this subordinated presence in the Hebrew Bible, many interpreters through the ages, have been mystified as to what Behemoth actually represents, as concluded by Watson (2005:363), that the '…origin and identity of Behemoth is far more opaque, since clear allusions to this creature are otherwise lacking.' This is exemplified as Behemoth has typically evoked three types of responses from interpreters.

Behemoth is a natural and real animal
A major discussion amongst scholars centred on what kind of animal Behemoth is. Thomas Aquinas likened Behemoth to an elephant, although acknowledging that it was wicked and evil (Gordis, 1978:565). Samuel Bochart identified it as a hippopotamus in a publication in 1663. A possible reason for this identification is that in Egypt the Pharaoh hunted down the red hippopotamus (Perdue, 2009:177). However, in Egyptian religion, the hippopotamus was associated with Seth, the god of chaos (Balentine, 2006:85). The identification of Behemoth as a hippopotamus, seems to have been the general trend until Cheyne (1897) challenged the general acceptance that both Behemoth and Leviathan were merely natural animals by stating that both creatures do not correspond in any way whatsoever with any known animal. Driver (1956), transferred some of Leviathan's features to Behemoth in terms of him being a crocodile. Then it really becomes fused (and confused?). On the other hand Ruprecht (1971) believes that Leviathan is actually a hippopotamus after its description in Job 40:25-41:3 (Masoretic text) and that Leviathan is just another name for Behemoth. Couroyer (1976) interprets Behemoth as a buffalo and not a hippopotamus. In a subsequent article, after establishing a link with the Ugaritic *rum*, he confirms his initial interpretation (Couroyer, 1977). To conclude this issue, Clines (2013:113) acknowledges that it must have been odd for the early readers of Job to learn that the hippopotamus is regarded by Yahweh as his masterpiece, and that the crocodile is accredited by Yahweh to be the king of the beasts. In their natural habitat though, they are not remotely worthy of the majestic description appraised to them by Yahweh himself.

Behemoth does not exist
Secondly, some interpreters believe there was no such thing as Behemoth. Behemoth was just a figment of Job's imagination and that it only serves a symbolic purpose (Habel, 1985:559). Wolfers (1995) also regards Behemoth as a mere symbol. Similarly, it was expounded that the existence of Behemoth is a misreading, as Tur-Sinai (1967:558) believes that Job 40:15-24 does not refer to Behemoth at all, but that this passage actually only presents the mythical Leviathan. Behemoth does not exist, but is a parody on the possible outcomes, should God dare to follow Job's advice on how to order the universe (Wilson, 1975).

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[9] For an insight on the complexity of hapax legomenon, refer to (Greenspahn, 2016).

No creature called Behemoth existed, and there is no evidence of a terrestrial partner for Leviathan (Wolfers, 1995:162).

Behemoth is a mythical monster

Thirdly, Behemoth is indeed a mythical creature with supernatural powers. As early as 1892, Toy argued that both Behemoth and Leviathan were water animals associated with the '…primeval seas Apsu and Tiamat as they appeared to be presented in the emerging Babylonian Epic of Creation' (cited in Wilson, 1975:2). Gunkel (2006:39–42) calls Behemoth an '*Urzeit*' monster, an appellative of Rahab in Isaiah 30:6, as well as principal of the dry land before creation. In turn, Pope (1965: 329–32), Perdue (2009: 218–32) and Mettinger (1992: 39–49) believe that Behemoth is a primeval monster of chaos.

Although Behemoth, בְּהֵמוֹת like Leviathan (Job 41), is being described by Yahweh in a grandiose manner in Job 40:15-24, exegetical commentary on Behemoth is virtually non-existent. The noun בְּהֵמָה is a common feminine singular absolute, meaning 'beast'. However, according to Botterweck and Ringgren (2007:6), the plural בְּהֵמוֹת indicates a very large beast rather than multiple beasts. This is because, in classical Hebrew, the use of the plural has an added use to English, where the plural use becomes countable. In classical Hebrew, the plural can also express an increased intensity to portray a majestically animal, much bigger than normal. An interesting conclusion is that when the plural is,

> …applied to deities, this intensive plural is sometimes referred to as the 'honorific plural.' In other words, the divine being is so thoroughly characterized by 'God-ness' that only a plural is appropriate for his designation (Waltke & Yu, 2007: 371).

Ugaritic heritage presents support to this insight, as use of the plural in Ugarit, may also '…reflect a divine vanguard of a deity' (Smith, 1990:77).

The appearance of Behemoth in various Old Testament passages

Although the Hebrew word, בְּהֵמַת is a status construct singular, and the word בְּהֵמוֹת a feminine plural of the noun, it could easily appear to be homographs.[10] This may be symptomatic in the understanding of some texts. Furthermore, a comparison between the Masoretic text rendition of Behemoth in Job 40:15 and the rendition of the 'beast' in Isaiah 30:6, reveals an interesting phenomenon. Job 40:15 presents בְּהֵמוֹת, whilst in Isaiah 30:6 it is בַּהֲמוֹת. The Hebrew consonants are identical. But keep in mind that in Job 40:15 it is regarded as proper noun, whilst in Isaiah 30:6 it is the feminine construct form in combination with נֶגֶב. Although they look similar, grammatically they are different. Not only the vocals, but also the grammatical forms.[11] Greenspahn (2016: 24) substantiated the biblical homograph to be as '…printed consonants are taken as the basis for decisions with respect to homograph and homographic roots…' Job 3:8 is a perfect example where ים may be vocalised as either *yom*, meaning 'day' or *yam* meaning 'sea', exactly because the original text had been written without vowels (Seow, 2013:80). Consequently, this had obviously lead to radically different interpretations, seeing that most translations preferred the word 'day' (Habel, 1985:85). And exactly herein lies the problem. A creature named and adroitly described by Yahweh himself, ought to have more appearances in the Hebrew Bible than just in Job 40:15. The fact that Behemoth had a mythological presence in the Hebrew Bible as well as in the ANE,[12] necessitates a further investigation of whether Behemoth (as a mythical monster) could have been 'mistranslated' in other texts in the Hebrew Bible. Translators should be prompted by the context of any text,

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[10] Two words seemingly spelled similar, having different meanings and origins and sometimes the same pronunciation.

[11] Proper noun versus the status construct form of the noun.

[12] This issue is discussed later, where Pope (1965) and Day (1985) respectively associates Behemoth with the "ferocious bullock of El" and El's calf Atik.

with errors having been made not adhering to this tenet, because, as John Barr (2014: 8) succinctly states '… because the guidance of context was not clear enough, or because the translators were confused in applying it, or because their knowledge of Hebrew was insufficient, or because they were distracted by other motives such as etymological and theological interpretation.'

Three texts (except Isaiah 30:6) therefore merit further scrutiny as to whether בְּהֵמוֹת / בְּהֵמָה were cattle, large animals or beasts, or possibly Behemoth.

The promise of absolute destruction

Deuteronomy 32:24 presents בְּהֵמוֹת and promises absolute destruction. Here the threat is that God 'will also send the teeth of beasts upon them, with the poison of serpents of the dust.' (WEB). Variations in the plural in Hebrew was discussed earlier. It may either be an increase in numbers or may refer to an increase in the size of one creature. Mere speculation and subsequent incorrect transcription, or even a misinterpretation of the Hebrew text at some stage in the distant past, may have altered the meaning from Behemoth possibly to multiple beasts. Considering the visual impact of horrific teeth in this text, together with the pairing with 'serpents', combines to point towards a mythical creature[13] in the form of Behemoth.

Psalm 73:22 contains בְּהֵמוֹת. It reads, 'So foolish was I and ignorant: I was a beast before thee' (GNV). The psalmist, generally known for artistry in the use of words, wants to convey his being extremely uncouth before God. Therefore, to compare himself with only a normal four-legged natural beast, appears to be a poor attempt at describing his bad behaviour to God. Spurgeon (1882: 359) agrees to a comparison with a brutal and merciless creature such as Behemoth, as the text clearly indicates '...a monstrous and astonishing beast'. This pertains well to Behemoth as this had not only been such a beast, '...but one of the most brutish of all beasts' (Spurgeon, 1882: 359). This evidently draws a parallel with Behemoth.

Ezekiel 8:10 presents בְּהֵמָה. Several translations of this text refer to 'the abominable beasts'. This may not be the correct interpretation as this verse talks about the portrayal on a city wall of every form of detestable crawling creatures and house idols. The presence here of 'normal' beasts, although loathsome, seems out of place. Isn't it therefore, plausible that Behemoth as a mythical beast, is implicated, as in Job 40:15?

A particular focus on Isaiah 30:6 and Job 40:15

Isaiah 30:6 speaks of the beasts of the Negev, the young and old lions, the viper and the fiery flying serpent. The peculiar pairing of mythical creatures and 'normal' animals requires closer examination. 'The burden of the beast of the south' as in many English translations, here seems inappropriate. Behemoth as a mythical creature would be a better 'fit' by linking it with the fiery flying serpents. Naming natural animals together with mythical creatures may seem peculiar, but the people of the time seemingly did not distinguish between mythical and real animals as both had been a reality in their daily lives. Consideration must also be given to the mythological context of the rest of this text (Isaiah 30:6) and the reference to Rahab (although in a metaphoric role) in v. 7, and that Isaiah mentions בְּהֵמוֹת in the same context as fiery flying dragons, lions, the (sphinx?) and serpents. The contexts of these verses clearly indicate that it does not refer to beastly cattle. Was this perhaps a case of deliberate ambiguity, considering

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[13] The Enuma Elish describes Mother Hubur (Tiamat) preparing for her battle with the storm-god Marduk. She creates eleven gruesome monsters to assist her in the ensuing battle. A summary of Tablet II: 19-32 reveals some of these features, namely, monsters with poison instead of blood, with ferocious teeth and fearless in battle.

the fusion of mythical animals and 'real' animals in Isaiah 30:6? This is in contrast with Job chapters 38-39 where the natural animals are discussed separately from Behemoth and Leviathan in Job 40-41. Schunk(1966), together with Duhm (1922) and Donner (1964), had been in early agreement that the translation of 'Beasts of the South' is out of place in this context and that it does not reflect the intended meaning of the prophet.

As already pointed out, Behemoth is only mentioned once in the Hebrew Bible. However, Behemoth is widely attested in Rabbinic literature. Attestations regarding Behemoth are found in 1 Enoch 60:7-9, Ezra 6:49-53 and Baruch 29:4. In 1 Enoch 60:7-9, Behemoth is a male monster occupying the wilderness and paired with Leviathan, a female monster dwelling in the abysses of the primeval ocean. Ezra 6:49-53 confirms the pairing of both creatures. Baruch 29:4 suggests that the תַּנִּין created on the fifth day of creation in Gen. 1:21 are in fact, the pairing of Leviathan and Behemoth and that both will be kept alive until the end of time, where they will be served as food in celebration. Behemoth then, is recognised as the male counterpart of Leviathan, and is a great beast that roams both on land, and in the waters. These texts lead to Pope's (1965:265) proposal that Behemoth is an archetype of pre-Israelite mythology that was inter-related with some ancient myths and may also have had parallel functions in different myths. But, if Behemoth is only attested once in the Hebrew Bible, why then did Rabbinic literature speak at length about it? My insight therefore is that Behemoth, like the mythical bird Ziz (Gutmann, 1968: 220), also widely and openly attested in Rabbinic literature, had a more prominent part in the life-world of early Israel, than is been reflected in the Old Testament. A probable reason for this is that the sacredness of the Bible had been 'protected' by translators and interpreters, whereas the Rabbinic literature was distant enough from the general Christian reader to ask uncomfortable questions.

Behemoth, as Pope (1965:270) suggests, also appeared to have been paralleled in ANE myths. The 'ferocious bullock of El', *glil'tk,* (slain by Anat in Ugaritic myths), and the Sumero-Akkadian 'bull of heaven' (slain by Gilgamesh and Enkidu), as well as Behemoth, are all associated and related. In the Ugaritic myth Anat slays Lotan together with the 'ferocious bullock of El,' *glil'tk.* Day (1985:84) equates Behemoth with El's calf Atik (KTU 1.3.III.43-44). Another text (KTU 1.6.VI.51-3), presents El's calf Atik as also dwelling in the waters, just like Behemoth does in Job 41:23. In both these cases, El's calf Atik is mentioned together with Leviathan (Day, 1985:84). The fact that Leviathan is presented in both Ugaritic texts as being part of a pair with Atik, and that Job introduces both Behemoth and Leviathan together (sequential) in Job 40-41, the pairing is matched. Thus, it becomes clear that a tradition existed of the 'bull' and Atik and Behemoth. An interesting connotation with the tail of Behemoth, is that Enkidu had nearly been killed by the thick tail of the 'bull of heaven' (Pope, 1965:272).

Behemoth is portrayed as a mythical monster in Job 40:15-24, although not as a sea-monster, but conceivably as an aquatic creature. The question arises, how could the beast of the Negev desert then be associated with Behemoth, an aquatic monster? The Hebrew Bible clearly indicates that Behemoth is at home in water in the river Jordan. Job 40:23 (ESV) reads, 'Behold, if the river is turbulent he is not frightened; he is confident though Jordan rushes against his mouth.' However, an interesting insight is that the author could not have been Hebrew, as he would have known that there were no hippopotamuses in the Jordan (Jamieson et al, 1875:343).

Rabbinic literature also regards Behemoth as an aquatic creature. Both 4 Ezra and Baruch 29:4 also associated Behemoth with the desert. This adds to the notion that Behemoth is not a hippopotamus, as does Konkel's interpretation that Behemoth does not merely swallow up the water of the river Jordan in v. 23, but that it rather depicts an aggressive act by an enormous beast that 'literally robs the stream of water' (Konkel, 2005:231). Yahweh himself describes Behemoth as being at home on land as well as in the waters. This is congruent with Childs' (1955:20) observation that the image of chaos in the latter part of Genesis 1:2 is

'watery' and in the first part of Genesis 1:2a, the image of chaos is 'arid waste'. This accentuates Perdue's calling Leviathan and Behemoth 'two great incarnations of chaos' (Perdue, 2009:179), which allows for Leviathan as well as Behemoth to inhabit all of creation, as chaos entails intermingled waters, desert soil and darkness. Therefore, Behemoth, a '… primordial monster with whom the ruler of creation must contend for sovereignty over the cosmos…' (Perdue, 2009:177), is therefore closely associated with Leviathan as a mythological monster of primeval chaos.

Therefore, based on the context of Isaiah 30:6, together the fusion of natural animals and mythical creatures deliberated above, added by the use of the metaphor for Egypt in v. 7, namely Rahab,[14] and concurring with Roberts (2015:337), that the sea-monster in the Hebrew tradition was also known as Rahab, I would like to propose the distinct probability that Isaiah could have meant 'Behemoth of the Negev'.

Conclusion

I want to initiate my concluding remarks by quoting from a Punch cartoon ('Zoology',1869), in which a Railway Porter, holding a tortoise in his hand, addresses an old lady who wants to travel with a 'Menagerie of Pets' – 'Station Master say, Mum, as Cats is Dogs and Rabbits is Dogs, an so's Parrots; but this ere 'Tortis' is a insect, so there ain't no charge for it!'

When some scholars argue to identify a mythical creature with a real animal, it sometimes resembles a sense of desperation to define a creature that does not fit into a specific species or genus. Some simply deny its existence, some make the 'tortoise' an 'insect', don't charge for its passage and silently deny its unique existence. Irrespective of this rejection and dissonance, the reality of the ancient Israelite milieu cannot not be altered.

Having observed mythological creatures being mentioned in the same breath as 'natural' animals, the biblical scholar or reader should not experience a dissonance when reading about a mythical creature in the Old Testament, and thereby discard the creature as being mythical. I hope to have established that the distinction between real animals and mythical creatures was hazed and that it was impossible for the people of the ANE to distinguish between mythical and real. They regarded natural animals and mythical creatures as equally real and authentic. The ancient Near Eastern worldview did not attempt to make clear-cut distinctions between 'realistic' and 'fabulous' animals in the way modern interpreters embark on this subject. Considering the vast number of mythological creatures prevalent in the ANE, each with its own unique composition and character, it is still remarkable that its people had no apparent difficulty in recognising them.

The distinction between different creatures in the respective societies were not based on a scientific taxonomy but was convincingly established on the simple belief that the creature in question is dangerous to their safety or not. This viewpoint, supported by a recent study of the fauna of the ANE by Roling (2010), confirms the enigmatic original discernments of animals and creatures in ancient Israel and its neighbours, and suggests that modern interpreters refrain from moderating ancient zoological conceptions.

By exploring Isaiah 30:6, as well some other applicable texts, this article hopes to have shed new light on the often-sheltered practice of mythical creatures being 'transformed' into natural animals. Behemoth has been a reality in the lives of the Israelites. Thereby, interpreting texts pertaining to animals in the Hebrew bible, care should be taken to acknowledge the poetic quality of the text, together with the appreciation of the ancient notion of imagination and myth.

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[14] Rahab is also known as being another name for Leviathan. See Blenkinsopp, 2011: 38.

Finally, this article has aimed at its core, for two questions to be answered. The first, has there been a fusion of animals, beasts and monsters in Isaiah 30:6? Definitely. The second - the 'beast' of the Negev in Isaiah 30:6, could it actually be the mythical creature Behemoth? Assessing the contextual circumstances, most probably.

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