



# “WHO WILL LAMENT HER?”

THE FEMININE AND THE FANTASTIC  
IN THE BOOK OF NAHUM

LAUREL LANNER



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# "WHO WILL LAMENT HER?"

The Feminine and the Fantastic in the Book of Nahum

Laurel Lanner



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NEW YORK • LONDON

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AB	The Anchor Bible
<i>AfO</i>	<i>Archiv für Orientforschung</i>
AJSL	<i>American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures</i>
ANE	Ancient Near East
ANET	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> . Edited by James B. Pritchard. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1950
AnOr	Analecta Orientalia
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
BDB	<i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907
<i>BeO</i>	<i>Biblia e Oriente</i>
BHS	<i>Biblia hebraica stuttgartensia</i>
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation: A Journal of Contemporary Approaches</i>
BIS	Biblical Interpretation Series
BN	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CAT	Commentaire de L'Ancien Testament
CBC	The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CIS	Copenhagen International Seminar
CSA	Copenhagen Studies in Assyriology
CTA	<i>Corpus des tablettes en cunéiformes alphabétiques découvertes à Ras Shamra-Ugarit de 1929 à 1939</i> . Edited by A. Herdner. Paris: Imprimerie nationale Geuthner, 1963
DSS	Dead Sea Scrolls
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
FCB	The Feminist Companion to the Bible
FFF	<i>Foundations and Facets Forum</i>
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
<i>GTJ</i>	<i>Grace Theological Journal</i>
HCOT	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HSS	Harvard Semitic Studies
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
ICC	The International Critical Commentary
ITC	International Theological Commentary
<i>JAAR</i>	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>

<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JNSL</i>	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JSOTSup</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
KJV	Authorised King James Version
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NEB	New English Bible
<i>NedTts</i>	<i>Nederlands theologisch tijdschrift</i>
NICOT	The New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OAN	Oracles Against the Nations
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OT	The Old Testament
OTG	Old Testament Guides
OTL	Old Testament Library
<i>OTS</i>	<i>Oudtestamentische Studiën</i>
POS	Pretoria Oriental Series
<i>RA</i>	<i>Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
<i>RHPR</i>	<i>Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses</i>
<i>RivB</i>	<i>Rivista biblica</i>
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SAA	State Archives of Assyria
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
<i>SJOT</i>	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
TBC	Torch Bible Commentaries
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren. Translated by J. T. Willis, G. W. Bromiley and D. E. Green. 8 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>UF</i>	<i>Ugarit Forschungen</i>
UUÅ	Uppsala Universitets Årskrift
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten Neuen Testament
<i>ZA</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Assyriologie</i>
ZBK	Zürcher Bibelkommentare

## INTRODUCTION

It is not surprising that Nahum is largely ignored by the non-academic Bible readers, pew-sitters and preachers. Comprising only a few pages, it is easily overlooked in the midst of the twelve Minor Prophets. When a reader does stop in passing, the book appears to be brief, brutish and uncomfortably violent. Regular Bible readers, looking closely, may observe echoes of other much greater prophets, such as Isaiah and Ezekiel, perhaps even of the Psalms, and conclude that the book is a rather second-rate pastiche of other writings, although it is peppered with some rather brilliant poetry.

Academic readers have also been discomfited by the content of Nahum. It is theologically awkward, apparently superficial, vengeful and nationalistic, demanding a defiant defence of YHWH's right to punish the wicked, or a sideways manoeuvre into an "it was appropriate for the times" sort of argument. Mostly there is an embarrassed silence or disdain. The focus of scholarly study has primarily fallen on textual and philological problems, the possible existence and significance of acrostics and, of course, the usual questions of the book's historical background, setting and redaction.

Two quite separate aspects of the book of Nahum recommended it for further study. The first was a gap I perceived in scholarship and the second was my response to the book as a reader. The first aspect focused on the passage of Nah 3:4–7, where "somebody" was stripped and humiliated. There has been considerable interest in this type of imagery, by feminist scholars in particular, in recent years, but most of the discussion has centred on its occurrence in other books. Generally, the instance of this motif in Nahum has only been a footnote in the examination of the other prophets, or on the book of Revelation. My attention, drawn initially by the imagery of 3:4–7, then shifted to examine what other feminine references were to be found in the book and how these might be related to the passage in ch. 3. When I began to read previous work done on the book of Nahum the lack of comment by many of the scholars concerning the feminine element in Nahum was notable. The second aspect of the

book that drew my attention was the strange feelings with which I was left as a reader. On reading Nahum, I was imbued with a sense of uncertainty, a deep feeling of unease. I found myself constantly checking back and forth through the text, trying to establish identities and events. It was as if the smoke of the battle still lingered and I was struggling to clear my vision. The combination of the presence of the feminine with reader uncertainty was haunting.

There were other questions too that needed consideration. For example, was it significant that there was no mention of Zion, of Jerusalem, or of the Temple? What of the more general question concerning the point of writing down a prophecy that appeared to be addressed to a group of people that would never read it? However, it seemed the identification of the feminine and the accompanying sense of uncertainty were in some way connected, and perhaps, in finding that connection, answers to the other questions might be found.

After delving into the possibilities of a psychoanalytic approach, I stumbled on recent work in biblical studies which used theories of the literary fantastic to illuminate the text. The "stumbling" was due to the fact that I had a mistaken idea that fantastic theory involved discussion of psychological fantasy in a "day-dreaming" sense. However, while that turned out not to be the case, fantastic theories offered an exciting and, perhaps, more appropriate method of examining Nahum and making the connection between the feminine and the "uncertain" aspects of the book.

My intention in this volume is to explore further the presence of the feminine in the book of Nahum; the extent to which it is present in the text; how the structure of the text makes the feminine both present and absent; and possible reasons why this is so. Two methodological approaches are taken. The first sets out to show that it is possible that a feminine deity is present in the text of Nahum using the type of close reading of the text typically used in exegesis, with textual and historico-literary, critical tools brought to play. The second approach engages three theories of the literary fantastic with the text, taking into consideration the findings of the historical and exegetical work. I have chosen the three particular theories because each offers a slightly different definition, together with differing possibilities, for interpretation. Each also has its limitations and I shall note these where I find them. A consequence of using a more traditional exegetical approach, together with the theories of the literary fantastic, is the chance to observe how well these two different methods interact and support each other.

Due to the possibility that this study may be of interest to students and scholars in several areas of biblical studies which do not necessarily

overlap—those with a special interest in Nahum, those with an interest in different literary approaches and perhaps those with an interest in historico-political issues—I have attempted to structure the book with this in mind.

In the first chapter I begin by establishing the scholarly context, and while I have given some attention to the usual questions of dating and redaction and so forth, I have focused on scholarly discussion concerning the possible theological and political purpose of the book and the mythological and ancient Near Eastern connections that may be found in it. I am particularly interested in the suggestions concerning the original form of the book and for whom the book was intended.

Then in the second chapter I offer an outline of the religious and political extra-text of the author(s) of Nahum, which I have taken broadly to be Judah of the seventh century BCE. This establishes not only evidence that may support the presence of a feminine deity in the text of Nahum, which will be called on in the following exegetical chapter, but it also provides basic background information for easy reference when the issue of the extra-text (of both possible authors and readers) is raised in the later discussion of the fantastic and Nahum. It must be noted that the information contained here is by no means exhaustive and cannot do justice to the scholars working in the historical fields. The work being done in the study of the development of monotheism is lively and constantly increasing. The information provided here should be considered representative of the recent discussions.

In the third chapter I offer a complete translation of the text of Nahum. This translation makes explicit the gender and person shifts which are usually difficult to detect in English translations of the Hebrew text. The shifts in gender and in the identity of the addressors and addressees are summarized in table form. Since the exegetical chapter that follows contains grammatical detail which may be of limited interest to those who are inclined more to literary theory than Hebrew grammar, in Chapter 3 I have provided a discussion of the findings of the exegesis in a form that I hope is less technical and more accessible for those without training in Biblical Hebrew. I highlight the experience of reading and the difficulties that the reader has in making clear identification of both characters and events.

A selected exegesis of the text of Nahum follows in the fourth chapter. The criterion for the selection is that the texts chosen contribute to the discussion of the feminine content of the book. The exegesis is overtly gender biased since I am seeking feminine connections and wish to make the most of every possibility. The passages left out are largely gender “neutral” poetry, such as Nah 3:2–3.

In the fifth chapter, I aim to cater for those who may not be familiar with theories of the literary fantastic. I introduce the writers in the field of the literary fantastic, their theories and some of the discussion that surrounds them. I also look briefly at how readers in the field of biblical studies are using some of these theories to establish a critical context for the present approach. While I have chosen the work of only three of these theorists with which to examine Nahum, the discussion surrounding their contributions is important and other authors are also called upon to illuminate various points of significance.

In the sixth chapter, the three theories offered by the chosen theorists of the fantastic, Tzvetan Todorov, Eric Rabkin and Rosemary Jackson, are joined in discussion with the text of Nahum and the observations that have been made in the exegetical chapter regarding the presence of the feminine in the book. The material from the earlier chapter concerning the socio-political and religious environment of the extra-text is also called upon in this chapter.

A reader of an earlier version of this study described my approach as "inductive," largely because of what seems to be suspended judgment especially regarding previous scholarship. This is quite deliberate. I endeavour to put forward possibilities and then show how Nahum itself remains open to all or some of the options regarding the extra-text and exegesis. I do not consider that there is enough information at present to make definitive statements regarding the religious extra-text of Nahum, but even if this were not the case I would be reluctant to pre-empt the text (or your reading) of Nahum itself. Nahum is a text that seems even more than other biblical books to have striven to maintain the option of multiple interpretations. My aim is not to close Nahum down, to come up with one decisive reading, instead I play with the options. This is also in keeping with my use of theories of the literary fantastic. As we shall see, for Todorov, at least, hesitation in the reader is an essential element of the fantastic. However, this does not mean that I do not make some concrete suggestions. In the final chapter, I point to some possibilities regarding the purpose and social background of the production of Nahum which I consider deserve serious consideration. Fantastic theories alone cannot establish the original meaning of a text, let alone the provenance of a text, but I hope to show that an engagement with this type of approach can illuminate concerns that the text was written to address.

It should be noted at this point that while on the whole the text is viewed in its final form, which is a necessity in fantastic theory, at times in the exegesis it is important to consider the possibility and significance of editing. I have also read the text independently of the context of the

book of the Twelve, although I am aware that some redaction may have taken place at the time of the Twelve's collation. The study of the Twelve in the light of fantastic theory would be fascinating in itself but is beyond the scope of this book; instead, I offer this examination of Nahum as an illustration of those possibilities.



## Chapter 1

### ISSUES IN NAHUM AND ORACLES AGAINST THE NATIONS STUDIES

I will now turn to previous scholarship on the book of Nahum. Some of the debate, particularly the arguments for dating and redaction, will not be long dwelt upon. My interest centres upon proposals concerning the purpose and possible provenance of the book and the identity of both the addressors and addressees. Some of the material will foreshadow the issues raised in following chapters and in turn I hope to provide support for earlier arguments.

#### 1.1. *The Book of Nahum*

##### 1.1.1. *Provenance, Setting and Identities*

As can be expected in biblical scholarship, debate surrounds the dating of Nahum, but perhaps not quite as much as it does other texts. Some see the dating of Nahum as clear cut, suggesting that it falls between two events mentioned in the book itself. The first event is the sack of the Egyptian city of Thebes, “No-amon” (Nah 3:8), by Esarhaddon of Assyria. The city was finally captured in 661 BCE. The second event is the fall of Nineveh in 612 BCE to Cyaxares the Mede in alliance with the Babylonians. The first event is surrounded by controversy since the identity of No-amon is not by any means certain, and the second assumes that the book is a genuine prediction of the future.<sup>1</sup> A larger group of scholars would support the view that the first material, perhaps all of it with the exception of the theophany, was pre-612 BCE but had later material added in exilic or post-exilic redactions.<sup>2</sup> The majority opinion would then date

1. R. Mason, *Micah, Nahum, Obadiah* (OTG; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 60.

2. K. Spronk, J. J. M. Roberts, K. Keller, B. Becking and I. H. Eybers are among those who see the dating as between the sack of Thebes and the fall of Nineveh. Their work will be referred to further and full references given (with the exception

the bulk of the material in Nahum as approximately mid-seventh century, and I accept this as the relevant period for my later examination of the possible extra-text of Nahum. I hope to show that any dating of Nahum should admit a strong Assyrian influence in the society to which the book was addressed, which of course would be most likely before 612 BCE and probably twenty years before that. Yet, as many post-colonial societies show, foreign influence has a long half-life.<sup>3</sup>

The idea that the book has a liturgical form was raised at the turn of the twentieth century by Paul Haupt who suggested a very late final redaction for the book well into the Maccabaeian period.<sup>4</sup> This is an idea that has had support down through the generations of scholars, though with modifications suggested on the way (cf. DeVries, Christensen and Jeremias). Paul Humbert, like Haupt, also viewed the book as a prophetic liturgy which he felt was written initially for the celebration of the fall of Nineveh at the New Year festival in the autumn of 612 BCE.<sup>5</sup> It was thus part of the enthronement festival and meant for the glorification of YHWH. He viewed the book as the product of an eyewitness, or eyewitness accounts, written after Nineveh had already fallen and so is *ex eventu* prophecy. Humbert appears to be the first to question the identity of the addressees of the text, noting that the Assyrians to whom the text appeared to be addressed would not hear it and, if it was addressed to the Israelites before the fall of Nineveh, the prophecy could only be seen as foolish presumption.<sup>6</sup> As it stands, the book is a celebration of the universal empire of the god of Israel.

The view that Nahum is liturgical, or written for a specific festival, was rejected by Alfred Haldar. He also disagreed with Paul Humbert's view that the text was written by an eyewitness, or was a reported eyewitness account, immediately after the fall of Nineveh.<sup>7</sup> Haldar divided

of Eybers whose opinion can be found in I. H. Eybers, "A Note Concerning the Date of Nahum's Prophecy," in *Proceedings of the Twelfth Meeting of "Die Ou-Testamentiese Werkgemeenskap in Suid-Afrika"* [ed. A. H. van Zyl; Potchefstroom: Pro Rege-Pers Bpk, 1969], 9–12). Scholars who see a pre-612 core and later material added include O. Eissfeldt, S. J. DeVries, K. Seybold, H. Schulz, B. Renaud and J. Jeremias who will also be referred to further.

3. The astral worship and possibly the Queen of Heaven recorded in the book of Jeremiah may indicate cultural influence many years after Assyria's political power had declined. The debate surrounding the Queen of Heaven will be discussed below.

4. Paul Haupt, "The Book of Nahum," *JBL* 26 (1907): 1–53.

5. Paul Humbert, "Le Problème du livre Nahoum," *RHPR* 12 (1932): 1–15.

6. *Ibid.*, 3.

7. Alfred Haldar, *Studies in the Book of Nahum* (UU Å 1946/7; Uppsala: Lundequistska; Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1947), 3–5.

the book into five sections: 1:2–2:1, which concerns the mythical combat between YHWH and his enemies and includes sea references; 2:2–6, which continues the theme of ritual combat; 2:7–8, which has no connection with that which precedes or follows it; 2:9–14, in which Nineveh's destruction is announced; and Nah 3, which is totally separate, "forming a lampoon against the Assyrian capital."<sup>8</sup> Haldar argues that the disparate nature of the composition does not support a liturgical purpose for the book. Significantly, he notes that the vagueness of the text allows for the merging of both political and cultic enemies, indicating the potential for political use of a religious text. Nahum was then a propaganda tool used against the declining Assyrian Empire.<sup>9</sup>

The uncertainties regarding the identity of the enemies and the other persons of the book was later acknowledged by Simon DeVries.<sup>10</sup> He also addresses the issue of the lack of reference to Judah's sin in Nahum, a feature usually expected to be present in the prophets, but rather than classing Nahum as among the so-called "false prophets," he sees this as an indication of the book's victorious, celebratory nature.

DeVries' concerns about the lack of comment on Judah's sins were addressed by the work of Jörg Jeremias. His contribution to the scholarship on Nahum was part of a larger examination of the relationship between cult prophets and prophetic judgment against Israel before the exile.<sup>11</sup> He considers Nahum a primary source of information because, with Habakkuk, it is structured in a liturgical manner and both prophets speak out against nations that threatened Israel. Jeremias argues, nevertheless, that Nahum is not a liturgical unity. It is made up of two parts (1:2–2:3 and 2:4–3:19) of received material that was reinterpreted in the light of the Babylonian experience in either late exilic or post-exilic times. Jeremias finds a ground layer of accusations and judgments directed against Israel, Jerusalem and the king in the text (1:11–14; 2:2–3; 3:1–6, 8–11). These accusations are the work of Nahum, the salvation prophet, not a cult prophet. His lack of specific naming of friend or foe, and the book's general ambiguity leaves open the later interpretation of

8. Haldar, *Studies in the Book of Nahum*, 88.

9. *Ibid.*, 149.

10. S. J. DeVries, "The Acrostic of Nahum in Jerusalem Liturgy," *VT* 16, no. 4 (1966): 476–81 (480–81). Hermann Schulz also supports the understanding of the book as triumphalist text and draws attention to an injection of an eschatological tone into Nahum, especially in the use of the theophany by the post-exilic community, see *Das Buch Nahum: Eine redaktionkritische Untersuchung* (BZAW 129; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1973), 9–43, 67–96.

11. Jörg Jeremias, *Kultprophetie und Gerichtsverkündigung in der späten Königszeit Israels* (WMANT; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1970).

the book as entirely anti-Assyrian. Yet in this base layer of work, Nahum *did* issue words against Assyria (2:4–14; 3:7, 12–19). The words of woe against Assyria, probably originating shortly after 612 BCE, are not backed up with specific accusations and may have been headed with 1:1a. According to Jeremias, there are no signs of animosity against Assyria in Nahum's words; not at any time, in Jeremias's interpretation, is Assyria accused of crimes against Israel. The "death songs" of 2:12 and 3:7–18 describe facts that, at most, express satisfaction that YHWH will complete his task.<sup>12</sup> YHWH's task is the responsibility for the well-being of all peoples; his judgment falls on all to create a better world for everyone.<sup>13</sup>

Jeremias's opinion that there were woe oracles originally addressed to Jerusalem in the text was rejected by Carl Keller. He rejects, particularly, Jeremias's view that because certain language is used against Israel elsewhere, it should automatically be inferred that it is also used against Israel in Nahum, when the entire biblical and post-biblical traditions know Nahum as a "*Ninevepropheten*."<sup>14</sup> In Keller's view, Nahum can be considered a "prophetic performance," an idea he has gained from H. W. Wolff's discussion of Hosea. Keller also considers the fall of No-amon in 664/3 BCE as an indicator of dating. The "godless tyrant" (בלעי) is Assurbanipal who, according to 1:9–2:11, will not walk through Judah again. Assurbanipal had humiliated Judah when he passed through the coastal plain and received the homage of local kings, one of whom was Manasseh.<sup>15</sup> This is offered as evidence to support the view that Nahum was written shortly after the defeat of No-amon, when Assurbanipal was at the peak of his power.<sup>16</sup> Keller delivers a strong attack on those who suggest Nahum should be dated not long before the fall of Nineveh in a period of decreasing Assyrian influence. He questions the assumption that a prophet cannot denounce a flourishing kingdom, the question

12. Ibid., 46–47.

13. Ibid., 48.

14. Carl A. Keller, "Die Theologische Bewältigung der Geschichtlichen Wirklichkeit in der Prophetie Nahums," *VT* 22, no. 4 (1972): 399–419 (403).

15. Ibid., 408–9.

16. See also Bob Becking, "The Divine Wrath and the Conceptual Coherence of the Book of Nahum," *JSOT* 9 (1995): 277–96. Regarding the dating of Nahum, Becking entered into dialogue with R. E. Bee, who proposed a statistical formula based on the proportion of unstressed words not joined by a *maqṣeph* to the following word within the text. When applying this formula to Nahum, Becking found six dates ranging from 752–488 BCE, and concluded that the formula is false. For the debate, see Ronald E. Bee, "An Empirical Procedure for Old Testament Prophecy," *JSOT* 11 (1979): 23–35; Bob Becking, "Bee's Dating Formula and the Book of Nahum," *JSOT* 18 (1980): 100–104; and R. E. Bee, "Dating the Book of Nahum: A Response to the Article by Bob Becking," *JSOT* 18 (1980): 104.

being: Why only predict the future when everyone knows what is going to happen anyway?<sup>17</sup> By the time of Josiah, Assyria's lion had lost its teeth, and the fall of Nineveh was a non-event, therefore an earlier date would be much more likely. Keller answers the question of an apparent description of the fall of Nineveh by observing that none of the description in the book of Nahum is sufficiently peculiar to Nineveh to warrant the idea of an eyewitness account.<sup>18</sup> Rather, Nineveh is the paradigm of the universal, godless city.

Duane Christensen finds a unity in Nahum that he attributes to a skilled scribe who was far more talented than a mere copyist, but was rather an artist who reworked the original material. Christensen claims to have reconstructed a source used by the "author,"<sup>19</sup> taking as his starting point the idea that the acrostic structure would indicate that the book was a literary composition from its beginning.<sup>20</sup> The book was written before the last campaign of Ashurbanipal (ca. 639–637 BCE). The introductory hymn shows YHWH as the Divine Warrior set against Assyria and an allusion to Assurbanipal's campaign can be found in 1:11. Christensen is among those who consider political motivations as the primary ones behind the book of Nahum, in common with other Oracles Against the Nations (hereafter OAN).<sup>21</sup> The book should first be considered an attempt to motivate future revolt against the Assyrians, but it found a theological use in liturgy to celebrate fulfilled prophecy.<sup>22</sup> Julia Myers

17. Keller, "Die Theologische Bewältigung," 409.

18. *Ibid.*, 411.

19. Duane L. Christensen, "The Book of Nahum: The Question of Authorship within the Canonical Process," *JETS* 31 (1988): 51–58 (52). The view that the book had one author is a minority one (Van Wyk, Becking). Christensen here seems to hedge his bets by suggesting an editor who was almost an author.

20. Cf. A. S. Van der Woude, "The Book of Nahum: A Letter Written in Exile," *OTS* 20 (1983): 109–11.

21. Duane L. Christensen, "The Book of Nahum: A History of Interpretation," in *Forming Prophetic Literature: Essays on Isaiah and the Twelve in Honour of John D. W. Watts* (ed. James W. Watts and Paul R. House; JSOTSup 235; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 187–94.

22. Duane L. Christensen, "The Acrostic of Nahum Reconsidered," *ZAW* 87 (1975): 17–30 (28–29). Christensen has done a considerable amount of work on the book of Nahum and considers that it has little textual corruption and was written with a strong musical rhythm indicating that the book was meant to be sung. Much of Christensen's work relies on prosodic analysis and *mora*-counting. See Duane L. Christensen, "The Book of Nahum as a Liturgical Composition: A Prosodic Analysis," *JETS* 32 (1989): 159–69. See also his "The Masoretic Accentual System and Repeated Metrical Refrains in Nahum, Song of Songs, and Deuteronomy," in *VIII International Congress of the International Organization for Masoretic Studies*,

O'Brien in her recent book also suggests that Nahum could be considered resistance literature aimed against the oppressive Assyrians.<sup>23</sup> While I think it is likely that the book is resisting something, I am not convinced that it is the Assyrians. Whether Nahum can be considered a call to revolt against the Assyrians and how successful it could be for this task will be considered below.

Klaus Seybold also suggests that the earliest texts that constitute Nahum were a form of protest literature.<sup>24</sup> The dates of the earliest texts range from approximately 663 BCE (the fall of Thebes) to 650 BCE—dates that thus tie in with the peak period of Assyrian ascendancy. These texts, with some minor additions, may have been circulated as a pamphlet around, or following, the fall of Nineveh in 612 BCE. Later, during the Babylonian exile, promises of salvation for Judah were added. Finally, around 400 BCE, the theophanic hymn was added and also 1:9–14, which was probably originally a marginal note. Seybold suggests the writer, or rather singer, of Nahum masked his anti-Assyrian rhetoric by singing what appeared to be soldiers' songs, judging by the rhythm and contents, which were later incorporated into the framework of a religious text.<sup>25</sup> However, Nahum's theme was not just anti-Assyrian, but protests the state of the world generally, especially that of the large cities. The prophet/poet does not try to give a theological meaning to what Seybold describes as the uncannily (*"unheimlicher"*) precise fate of the world capitals. Rather the poet writes in profane language leaving a theological interpretation to later commentators.

Seybold begins with the view that the songs were of secular origin and he defines the later additions to the book as those with theological content. Thus, the exclusion of specifically theological language to show that Nahum was a secular prophet is an approach which Becking rightly suggests is circular reasoning.<sup>26</sup> However, the issue of whether there is a

*Chicago 1988* (ed. E. J. Revell; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1990), 31–36. I tend to agree with K. Spronk's criticism of Christensen's approach which can be found in "Synchronic and Diachronic Approaches of Nahum," in *Synchronic or Diachronic? A Debate on Method in Old Testament Exegesis* (ed. Johannes C. de Moor; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 159–86 (167).

23. Julia Myers O'Brien, *Nahum* (Readings: A New Biblical Commentary; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 112–17.

24. Klaus Seybold, *Profane Prophetie. Studien zum Buch Nahum* (SBS 135; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1989). See also his *Nahum, Habakuk, Zephania* (ZBK 24/2; Zürich: Theologische Verlag, 1991).

25. Seybold, *Nahum, Habakuk, Zephania*, 14.

26. Bob Becking, "Passion, Power and Protection: Interpreting the God of Nahum," in *On Reading Prophetic Texts: Gender-Specific and Related Studies in*

secular aspect to the book and whether there are indications of dissatisfaction with cities warrants further discussion. I consider that Seybold was right to point in this direction and I will take up the topic of cities in both the exegesis and the final chapter.

The conclusion that Nahum was addressed not only to Assyria but also to Judah is drawn by Marvin Sweeney in his attempt to show that there is a coherent structure to Nahum based on the apparent disputation pattern of the prophetic speech:

its purpose is to address *both* Judah and Assyria in order to argue that the fall of Nineveh contradicts their previously held view of YHWH's impotence in the face of the Assyrian empire.<sup>27</sup>

As a consequence of his view that the book was addressed to both parties in the form of refutation speech derived from the disputation pattern, he places the date of the final work very close to the fall of 612 BCE, because Nineveh's destruction is shown in Nahum to be a foregone conclusion.

Paul House is particularly interested in the canonical coherence of the twelve Minor Prophets and proposes that Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah form a unit.<sup>28</sup> Not only do they have similar themes, but also a similar use of alternating speakers that creates movement and drama. The different styles and persons of the speeches highlight the two aspects of YHWH: the compassionate and merciful (delivered through indirect speech), and the righteous judge carrying out a judicial sentence (delivered through direct speech). The prophet is portrayed as YHWH's close associate. I will be arguing that this association between YHWH and the prophet in Nahum becomes so close at times that the two become indistinguishable. House notes that while Israel and the nations are the spoken to, they do not, or cannot, respond. Although the books are "speech-orientated," House maintains they move the characters (YHWH, prophet, nations and Israel) toward a resolution.<sup>29</sup> House's work highlights a major tension in the scholarly approach to Nahum—the question of its oral or literary nature. For House, the question of the absence of criticism of Judah/Israel is not a problem because if the book is taken with Habakkuk, Judah's sinners are indeed addressed. Then in Zephaniah, the wicked

*Memory of Fokkelen van Dijk-Hemmes* (ed. B. Becking and M. Dijkstra; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 1–20 (14 n. 43).

27. Marvin A. Sweeney, "Concerning the Structure and Generic Character of the Book of Nahum," *ZAW* 104 (1992): 364–77 (366 [my emphasis]).

28. Paul R. House, "Dramatic Coherence in Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah," in Watts and House, eds., *Forming Prophetic Literature*, 195–208.

29. *Ibid.*, 204.

of all nations are considered. While House's approach offers a solution to one of the important questions concerning Nahum and has much to recommend it, I will not be considering the canonical setting of Nahum—rather I will focus on the book as an independent text. Even if the book was redacted at the time of incorporation into the Scroll of the Twelve, it remains demarcated as a separate “chapter” and that is enough to recommend it for individual study.

For the present discussion, Jeremias and Sweeney offer the most interesting ideas. I would support Jeremias's view that there is judgment against the prophet's own people in Nahum, but would lean towards Sweeney's view that both Assyria and Judah were addressed, rather than this being a work *only* intended as a judgment of Judah. I, however, strongly support the view of Jeremias that ambiguity leaves this book open to interpretation as entirely anti-Assyrian and makes it easy to ignore a condemnation of Israel's activities that later readers/redactors would prefer to be forgotten. The view that the book is protest literature is attractive, but I would question whether the Assyrians are the only object of this protest or perhaps even an object of protest at all.

### 1.1.2. *The Theophany*

The theophany of 1:2–8 is the most discussed section of Nahum due to the apparent presence of an acrostic. Yet it can be differentiated from the remainder of the text on account of its content as well as its form. The possible functions of this poem as a preface to the book of Nahum will be explored further, but here I am particularly interested in what previous discussion on the nature of the theophany has raised in terms of Nahum's possible purpose and the book's use of mythological imagery.

Most commonly, the acrostic is considered to include only 1:2–8, making the theophany unique in that it is the only acrostic of half the alphabet, involving just the first eleven letters. However, controversy is aroused due to the amount of emendation needed to establish even this degree of completion. If emendations to 1:9–10 are included, the acrostic can be continued by a further four letters. Other acrostics occurring in Psalms and Lamentations<sup>30</sup> may be linked with the Jerusalem cult, suggesting that there is a tenuous link between it and Nahum.<sup>31</sup>

30. Norman Gottwald lists the canonical acrostics as Nah 1:2–8; Pss 9–10; 25; 34; 37; 111; 112; 119; 145; Prov 31:10–31; Lam 1–4, in his *Studies in the Book of Lamentations* (London: SCM Press, 1954), 23 n. 2.

31. Richard J. Coggins and S. Paul Re'emi, *Israel Among the Nations: A Commentary on the Books of Nahum, Obadiah and Esther* (ITC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 19.



The overwhelming majority of scholars view the theophany as an acrostic and most of them see it as a later addition, although J. J. M. Roberts suggests that the author adapted an existing acrostic at the same time as the rest of the book was worked.<sup>32</sup> W. C. Van Wyk also sees the acrostic as a deliberate introduction to a whole work, but holds that it was original to Nahum and should not be considered in any way an addition. Van Wyk unconvincingly concludes the hymn was composed by the author of the whole book who completed only half an acrostic because he had reached his focus, Nineveh, by the time he arrived at letter *mem* (which appears half-way through the Hebrew alphabet).<sup>33</sup> Eissfeldt's suggestion that the scribe ran out of space on his scroll seems equally unlikely.<sup>34</sup> Christensen's proposal regarding the abbreviation of the acrostic is a little more interesting, but perhaps, not more convincing. Basing his observations on N. K. Gottwald's comments about the purpose of an acrostic being a conceptual form rather than a sensual one, and quoting Gottwald's view that "The function of the acrostic was to encourage completeness in the expression of grief, the confession of sin and the instilling of hope,"<sup>35</sup> Christensen suggests that the semi-acrostic of the theophany may indicate that there is more judgment to come, although he himself admits that the argument is not convincing.

A. Van Selms argues for the presence of an acrostic but denies any connection between it and the rest of the book. He suggests that the acrostic was a northern, pre-Deuteronomic work taken over by Nahum, and considers there may be links with Amos and the cult at Bethel. His most interesting suggestion is that there is only half an acrostic because the other half contained references to other deities and cults which Nahum had no wish to perpetuate.<sup>36</sup> While this may at first glance seem a little unlikely, if Van Selms' suggestion is correct, then it may be possible that the remaining text does indeed still hold references to other deities and cults, but in such a subtle way that they escaped the redactor's eraser. Van Selms' proposal also brings to mind the possible connection between

32. J. J. M. Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox), 48–51.

33. W. C. Van Wyk, "Allusions to 'Prehistory' and History in the Book of Nahum," in *De Fructu Oris Sui: Essays in Honour of Adrianus Van Selms* (ed. I. H. Eybers et al.; POS 9; Leiden: Brill, 1971), 222–32 (231–32).

34. Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (trans. Peter R. Ackroyd; Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), 416.

35. Christensen, "The Acrostic of Nahum Reconsidered," 24–25, quoting Gottwald, *Studies in the Book of Lamentations*, 28.

36. A. Van Selms, "The Alphabetic Hymn in Nahum 1," in van Zyl, ed., *Proceedings of the Twelfth Meeting*, 33–45.

form and function in Nahum. It may be that the order of the acrostic and then the complete disintegration of order in the remainder of the book—particularly immediately following the acrostic—is a deliberate attempt to contrast the superiority of YHWH to the negative characteristics of the other deity or deities.

Kevin J. Cathcart<sup>37</sup> asserts that the theophany at the beginning of the book is based on Canaanite mythology.<sup>38</sup> Observing the motif of “YHWH the Divine Warrior” in this passage, he views the battle as a supernatural event with YHWH and his heavenly warriors fighting alongside the human soldiers, rather than a strictly natural event in which the Babylonians are portrayed defeating the Assyrians.<sup>39</sup> This is also supported by the presence of a messenger—who mediates between the gods and human-kind—announcing YHWH’s will and triumph in Nahum.<sup>40</sup> However, Cathcart considers that the “Day of YHWH” language used in Nahum was also influenced by seventh-century treaty-curse language.<sup>41</sup>

Like Cathcart, Carl Keller also observes a strong mythological component in the theophany which, he suggests, foreshadows the mythic structure that underlies the events in the remainder of the book.<sup>42</sup> Thus, both Cathcart and Keller would consider the theophany the overt display of a mythology that, while still present later in the text, becomes submerged. The theophany certainly has marked thematic links with various other books<sup>43</sup> and its mythological content is apparent—it is reminiscent

37. Cathcart’s major work on Nahum is a comparative study using Northwest Semitic evidence to offer solutions to the textual problems of the book. He believes that the themes and imagery of the acrostic are consistent with the seventh century, rather than the post-exilic period, and supportive of J. M. P. Smith’s suggestion that Nahum was a contemporary of Jeremiah. See Kevin J. Cathcart, *Nahum in the Light of Northwest Semitic* (BeO 26; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973).

38. Kevin J. Cathcart, “The Divine Warrior and the War of Yahweh in Nahum,” in *Biblical Studies in Contemporary Thought* (ed. M. Ward; Somerville: Greeno, Hadden & Co., 1975), 68–76.

39. *Ibid.*, 71–72.

40. Interestingly, the word Cathcart is referring to here is מַבְשֵׁר in Nah 2:1, not the possible מַלְאֲכַי of 2:14. He considers the former a divine messenger, possibly the prophet himself. The significance of these two words will be considered further below.

41. Kevin J. Cathcart, “Treaty-Curses and the Book of Nahum,” *CBQ* 35 (1973): 179–87 (179). See also his “More Philological Studies in Nahum,” *JNSL* 7 (1979): 1–12; and “The Divine Warrior,” 68–76.

42. Keller, “Die Theologische Bewältigung,” 419.

43. For Nah 1:3a, see Exod 34:6–7; Num 14:18; Ps 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2. For Nah 1:4a, see Isa 33:9; 50:2. There are references to Bashan in Ps 68:15–16, see Isa 2:12 (Klaas Spronk suggests this passage may have influenced the writer of

of Baal's fight with the waters of chaos. However, in Spronk's view the reuse of the imagery from Canaanite mythology has the effect of emphasizing YHWH's replacement of the Canaanite gods and his hegemony over creation.<sup>44</sup> I am not convinced that the reuse of this imagery necessarily has the effect that Spronk suggests. These issues will be revisited later in the exegetical discussion.

Despite the body of opinion that accepts the use of the acrostic form in the theophany, a few scholars, among whom Michael H. Floyd is the most recent, have demurred.<sup>45</sup> Floyd does so on the grounds that (1) the acrostic fails to work without rearrangement of the existing text, (2) only half the alphabet can be detected in the reconstructed acrostic and (3) there is an awkwardness of the relationship between the so-called acrostic and non-acrostic parts of the unit 1:2–10. Floyd argues that in view of 1:9–10, the opening theophany cannot be regarded as a hymn and rejects the idea of redefining the unit to 1:2–8 as a solution. Not only is the characteristic call to praise absent, but, unusually, rhetorical questions are present. Floyd concludes that the passage is a prophetic interrogation with elements derived from the wisdom tradition.<sup>46</sup>

Becking suggests that the way to see the book as a unity is to look at it as a "conceptual coherence" linked by the metaphors of "wrath."<sup>47</sup> The nature of the relationship between the hymn, which appears to be an expression of faith, and the remainder of the book, which he considers an expression of nationalism, is a critical question for Becking. Behind the language of the hymn he finds belief in God's ability to appear in history and give judgment. Confidence is expressed in his justice and covenant loyalty.<sup>48</sup> It is difficult to see just how Becking can view the remainder of the book as entirely free of expressions of faith. However, the question regarding the relationship of the theophany to the rest of the book remains important and will be considered in later discussion.

Nahum, *Nahum* [HCOT; Kampen: Kok, 1997], 41). For Nah 1:5, see, for example, Ps 78:8; Isa 24:3–4. For Nah 1:6a see Ps 76:8; Mal 3:2.

44. *Ibid.*, 39.

45. Michael H. Floyd, "The Chimeral Acrostic of Nahum 1:2–10," *JBL* 113, no. 3 (1994): 421–37. For others who have argued against the acrostic, see Walter A. Maier, *The Book of Nahum: A Commentary* (Ann Arbor: Concordia, 1959), and Haldar, *Studies in the Book of Nahum*. For those in favour besides those already mentioned, see DeVries, "The Acrostic of Nahum in the Jerusalem Liturgy," 476–81, and Van Selms, "The Alphabetic Hymn in Nahum," 33–45.

46. Floyd, "The Chimeral Acrostic," 437.

47. Becking, "Divine Wrath and the Conceptual Coherence," 277–96. See also his "Is het boek Nahum een literaire eenheid?," *Ned Tts* 32 (1978): 107–24.

48. Becking, "Passion, Power and Protection," 7.

I do not wish to argue for or against the presence of an acrostic. I tend to find Floyd's arguments convincing, although the possible meanings that the presence of an acrostic might raise are inviting, particularly the idea of a deliberate contrast between order and chaos. However, I will focus more upon the comparison of content of the theophany and the remainder of the book, than upon a comparison of form.

As we have seen, the discussion surrounding the theophany raises other issues besides that of the presence of an acrostic. The issue of Canaanite influences and mythological language is raised, which in turn alerts us to the possibility that the supernatural and natural may both be present in the remainder of the book in a way which is not, at first, apparent. Both Keller and Spronk's suggestions indicate that the foe in question may not be the political one most immediately apparent.

### 1.1.3. *The Presence of Myth, Deities and Other Ancient Near Eastern Connections*

Scholars have been finding "pagan" or mythological allusions, not only in the initial theophany but elsewhere in the book of Nahum, for centuries. In his discussion of Nah 2:8, J. M. P. Smith (in 1911) proposed that it is much more probable that the passage refers to the goddess of Nineveh than an earthly queen, citing Abarbanel (d. 1508) and Gebhard's *Gründliche Einleitung in die zwölf kleinen Propheten* (1737) as his predecessors in this opinion. The maidens referred to in the passage are thus the devotees of Ishtar, although Smith draws no theological implications from this. He later refers to the personified city: "Nineveh is a captive woman exposed to shame."<sup>49</sup>

Alfred Haldar was the first to focus specifically on the ancient Near Eastern mythological allusions or connections that could be found in the book. Haldar begins by applying the properties of the storm god in the *Enuma Elish* to YHWH. He rejects Mowinckel's suggestion that Nahum's religion derives from the politics of war, but rather sees it based upon an understanding of the "high God" which long precedes Nahum. Seeking vengeance was a legitimate expectation of a god as much as it was of humankind. He connects the material in Nah 1:2–6 to the *Enuma Elish*, Ugaritic texts and draws parallels with the "Tammuz Liturgies."<sup>50</sup> He shows that the Nahum passage uses motifs and a theology which for centuries had been part of the religious and literary environment from which the writer of Nahum emerged.

49. J. M. P. Smith, W. H. Ward and J. A. Brewer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Micah, Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Obadiah and Joel* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1911), 339.

50. Haldar, *Studies in the Book of Nahum*, 99–100.

With regard to 1:8, he makes some interesting observations regarding the flood imagery. In Isa 8:5–8, the flood is understood as the threat of the Assyrian king sweeping down on the people of Shiloah,<sup>51</sup> whereas in Nahum, this appears neatly reversed, with the flood being directly represented as YHWH's instrument of destruction. This idea of the flood as the instrument of the gods occurs elsewhere in Mesopotamian religious texts where the river has also been conceived of as Judge, acting independently of any other god.<sup>52</sup>

Haldar also relates the darkness of the day of YHWH to the nether world of Mesopotamian precedents, drawing a direct parallel between a Tammuz text and Nah. 1:12–13, and citing the motifs of destructive waters of chaos and the yoke of oppression as grounds for this connection.<sup>53</sup> In this parallel, Haldar relates the netherworld to Nineveh and Tammuz to Jerusalem or Judah. He also picks up other details in the text which bear comparison with ancient Near Eastern sources, an example of this being the phrase to "gird the loins" in Nah 2:2, which elsewhere (the example given is the *Enuma Elish*) is applied only to a god leading an army.<sup>54</sup> In 3:7, Haldar suggests that the harlot is the goddess Ishtar, citing a ritual in which Ishtar hands herself over to the enemy when the god is dead. For Haldar, her display as a spectacle is the reverse of a passage where Tammuz also stands as a spectacle, not of defeat, but of glory brought about by his having successfully conquered his enemies.<sup>55</sup> In his

51. Ibid., 106. Haldar refers here to the river as the Euphrates. The river is a sign that carries the meaning of chaos. The chaos is transferred to the king by his connection to the river. Interestingly, the NRSV capitalizes the word "River," indicating that perhaps the river is God, although J. J. M. Roberts in the accompanying notes declares that the river symbolizes the Assyrians ("Isaiah," in *The HarperCollins Study Bible* [ed. Wayne A. Meeks et al.; New York: HarperCollins, 1993], 1011–1109 [1024]).

52. Haldar, *Studies in the Book of Nahum*, 97. He quotes from A. Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942), 63.

53. Haldar, *Studies in the Book of Nahum*, 117–18. He cites M. Witzel, *Tammuz-Liturgien und Verwandtes* (AnOr 10; Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1935), 112.

54. Haldar, *Studies in the Book of Nahum*, 124. His approach to 2:6b is an interesting example of the possibilities which arise when giving priority to mythological or ancient Near Eastern connections. He translates the verse as, "they hasten towards the wall and the 'overshadowing one' is set up." He rejects the reading of סֶכֶךְ as a "mantelet" or "shield," preferring the use of the word in Ezek 28:14, where it has been interpreted as "the overshadowing one." Haldar writes, "Undoubtedly, this passage gives us the solution. In Nah 2:6, סֶכֶךְ must then refer to the emblem of the god being raised in connection with the running of the chariots" (Haldar, *Studies in the Book of Nahum*, 51–52).

55. Ibid., 137.