

2014 CO-WINNER BERN ESSAY

**INTIMACY AND POWER:
A DUSTY CONCEPTION OF PERSONHOOD IN GENESIS 2:7a**

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1. Introduction

This essay explores personhood within the ancient Levant. Accordingly, I take it as given that Israelites believed in a *being*, which I call “the person.” Broadly speaking, then, I ask, “What did it mean to be a ‘person’ in ancient Israel?” I use this global question to frame a more pointed enquiry into Genesis 2:7a: “וַיִּצֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם עֹפָר מִן-הָאֲדָמָה”¹ Scholars have long recognized that the pottery imagery evoked by the verb used to describe God’s formation of Adam, יִצֶר, draws on a long history of Ancient Near Eastern creation myths.² How, then, did the Israelites appropriate and interpret this pottery theme, what I call the “formation? In other words, what makes the Israelite version unique? How did ancient Israelites use Genesis 2:7a to understand their dusty origins, and how did this interpretive crux serve as a hermeneutical framework for understanding personhood? How does this theme frame the ancient understanding of the relationship between the person and God, the Celestial Potter? In what follows, I will explore the formation’s trajectory through Ancient Near Eastern mythology, highlight where the formation of Genesis 2:7a diverges, and discuss the implications that these differences have on the Israelite notion of personhood. As I will show, Genesis 2:7a depicts the person in an intimate relationship with a powerful, protective god.

1.1 Personhood

In the questions posed above, I suggested that the person-God relationship plays a crucial role Israelite conceptions of personhood. I must emphasize, however, that, in highlighting this element, I do not suggest that it alone defines biblical personhood. On the contrary, my choice to focus on that aspect of personhood indicates that I view the biblical person as a multifaceted

¹ Genesis 2:7a.

² Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis* בראשית, 17; Paul Niskanen, “Yhwh as Father, Redeemer, and Potter in Isaiah 63:7-64:11,” 404; Claus Westermann treats the pottery theme extensively. See Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, 203-208. For the many nuanced pottery images associated with the word, see *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 427-428

totality. This approach, thus, challenges current theories of personhood because anthropology, in addition to sociology, philosophy, and psychology, tend to separate the person, self, individual, and identity from each other.³ Biblical personhood, in contrast, does not make such distinctions. Instead, each of these each of these concepts—individual, self, identity, human, society, culture, rational thought, emotion, sensations, and more—describes an inextricable aspect of biblical personhood. Thus, Robert A. Di Vito calls “the person...an undifferentiated psychosomatic unity,”⁴ yet, one which “if... acknowledged—as it must be, because of the capacity various members and parts of the body have to incorporate and to express the person as a whole...is certainly a complex and differentiated unity, not merely a simple one.”⁵ The “psychosomatic unity” of which Di Vito speaks echoes Aubrey R. Johnson’s famous description of “[t]he conception of man as a psycho-physical organism.”⁶ Unlike modernity, which tends to separate the person’s “mind...from the body,”⁷ the Israelites pictured the two as part and parcel of the person.⁸ Thus, whereas contemporary society might speak of an out-of-body religious and/or spiritual experience (i.e. a *unio mystica*), the biblical person did not. On the contrary, he

³ In other words, each of these “entities” has an essence that not only defines it but that also distinguishes it from the others. For example, in her article, “Concepts of Individual, Self, and Person, in Description and Analysis,” 599-612, Grace Gredys Harris explicitly sets out to distinguish the individual, self, and person from one another (“Concepts of Individual, Self, and Person,” 599). For her, the individual denotes membership “of the human kind” (ibid., 600); the self describes “the human being as a locus of experience” (ibid., 601); and the person refers to “a ‘somebody’ who authors conduct construed as action” (ibid., 602). In other words, the person has agency (ibid., 603). Whereas this analysis subsumes different aspects of experience under the rubrics of individual, self, person, etc., the biblical person did not make such distinctions.

⁴ Robert A. Di Vito, “Old Testament Anthropology and the Construction of Personal Identity,” 218.

¹⁰ Ibid., 228.

⁶ Aubrey R. Johnson, *The Vitality of the Individual in the Thought of Ancient Israel*, 37.

⁷ McGuire, “Religion and the Body: Rematerializing the Human Body in the Social Sciences of Religion,” 284.

⁸ Unlike the contemporary, naturalist approach to the human being, the Israelites’ concern for the person resulted more from their interest in the person’s intellectual, emotional, and spiritual capacities and less from their curiosity in its biological workings. As John W. Cooper writes, “What is striking about the stomach, liver, bile, bowels, kidneys and heart is not so much their physiological functions, which the Israelites knew little if anything about. It is rather that they are the locations and sources of the higher human capacities” (John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul & Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debates*, 41).

interacted with God *through* the “totality” of his person, for, in personally forming the person from the dust of the earth, God had inscribed Himself in his body.

1.2 Thesis

In this paper, I argue that the Jahwist (J), the source associated with the second creation account (Genesis 2:4b-2:25),⁹ radically departed from preceding Ancient Near Eastern formation traditions in which the person’s earthy composition shackled him to the ground in agricultural service to the gods. In contrast to this motif in both *The Song of the Hoe* and *Atrahasis*, Genesis 2:7a celebrates humanity’s dusty provenance as a source of intimacy with the Creator, for God affectionately molds Adam from עָפָר with all the sensitivity of a potter. Formed by God’s hands, the person bears divine affection throughout his body. Additionally, J’s scriptural activity occurred concurrently with the proliferation of burnished pottery, the emergence of the ancient kingdom of Israel, and Yahweh’s ascendance in the Israelite cult. Therefore, I contend that J’s metaphor of God as the Celestial Potter spoke not only to His tenderness for the person, but it also elevated the Israelites and their god over and against other Ancient Near Eastern peoples, who were constructed as powerless, because their inferior gods now had to bow to Yahweh, the chief of the Divine Council and the God of Israel.

2. The Formation: The Celestial Potter in Genesis 2:7a¹⁰

The Old Babylonian¹¹ text, *The Song of the Hoe*,¹² preserves one of the earliest formation accounts. Largely a collection¹³ of cosmogonic, cosmological, and etiological explanations,¹⁴ it

⁹ P.E.S. Thompson, “The Yahwist Creation Story,” 199.

¹⁰ I find it necessary to explain briefly why I do not include the Priestly human creation account in this paper. Theologians and some scholars alike have long read Genesis 1:26-1:27 as a more exalted depiction of human creation than that of Genesis 2:7. I believe that they have done so largely because the *imago dei*, to some, evokes a sort of holiness or divinity within humanity. The human being, who rises from dust, by contrast, has often fallen far below the human made “בְּצִלְמֵ אֱלֹהִים.”¹⁰ I do not discuss Genesis 1:26-1:27, then, because I find it unproductive; rather, I choose to focus on Genesis 2:7 precisely because I believe that the view of the person in Genesis 2:7 as somehow inferior seriously oversimplifies the matter.

describes how the air god, Enlil,¹⁵ creates the world with his hoe. According to Gertrud Farber, “Hoe and basket are tools used for brick making and processing. The hoe stirs the clay and puts it in brick molds.”¹⁶ Enlil thus enlists the hoe to create man from a mold.

In order to create the first man in Uzumúa [“the place where flesh sprouts”] with the pickax [hoe],
He [Enlil] put the first of mankind in the mold.
Before Enlil, (the people) of the *kalam* (=Sumer) broke through (the surface) of the earth.
He looked with favor on his black-headed people [“the Sumerians”].¹⁷

Using his pickax, Enlil places “the first of mankind in the mold.” How this phase in the creation process leads to humanity’s rising from the earth remains, admittedly ambiguous. Farber suggests that the text has conflated two traditions: “the creation from seeds where mankind grows like a weed and breaks through the soil, and through the molding of a clay model.”¹⁸ Regardless of its literary history, however, the myth certainly depicts Enlil as a sort of potter who

¹¹ Farber, “1. Myths: The Song of the Hoe (1.157)”, 511. Farber believes it possible to date the text even more precisely to the Isin period (ca. 2017-1794 B.C.E.) (Jeremy Black et al., trans. and eds., *The Literature of Ancient Sumer*, xvii). Richard J. Clifford similarly places the text in “the Early Dynastic period (ca. 2500 B.C.)” (Richard J. Clifford, *Creation Accounts in the Ancient Near East and in the Bible*, 30).

¹² Kramer titled the work “The Creation of the Pickaxe” (Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology*, 51). Some scholars, like Farber, note the text’s satirical elements, but there seems no reason to question its understanding of creation.* Clifford even goes so far as to call it “[t]he most important Nippur text on the creation of man.”**

* Because of the hoe’s pervasive role throughout the narrative, the story “should probably be categorized as a satirical school text composed for use in the Edubba (= school) and for other learned people...The thread winding through the whole text is the syllable /al/ which is a Sumerian logogram meaning hoe but which also occurs as part of other words or as a grammatical element” (Farber, “1. Myths: The Song of the Hoe (1.157)”, 511). For the satirical nature, Farber refers the reader to C. Wilcke, “Hacke – B. Philogisch,” *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* 4, 37.

** Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 30.

¹³ “The composition has no coherent topic or theme” (Gertrud Farber, “1. Myths: The Song of the Hoe (1.157)”, 511).

¹⁴ The text consists of one hundred nine lines, but Farber includes only ninety-two of them (Farber, “1. Myths: The Song of the Hoe (1.157)”, 511). He breaks his selection into eight sections: “Creation of the World (lines 1-7),” “Introducing the Hoe (lines 8-17),” “Creation of Mankind (lines 18-27),” “Assignment of Tasks to the Human Race (lines 28-34),” “Building of Temples (lines 35-58),” “Other Gods and Their Relationship with the Hoe or the Syllable /al/ (lines 59-70),” “The Syllable /al/ Occurs in Sumerian Words in all Aspects of Life (lines 71-93),” and “The Practical Use of the Hoe (lines 94-106).” Farber, “1. Myths: The Song of the Hoe (1.157)”, 511-513.

¹⁵ Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology*, 35. According to Kramer, “Enlil... was the leading deity of the Sumerian pantheon” during the 3rd millennium B.C.E. (ibid). For more on Enlil, see David Adams Leeming, *Creation Myths of the World: An Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO), s.v. “Enlil.”

¹⁶ Farber, “1. Myths: The Song of the Hoe (1.157)”, 511.

¹⁷ *Praise of the Pickax*, J. van Dijk, trans., ll. 16-20 in Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 31. Farber explains that the “black-headed people” refers to “the Sumerians” (Farber, “1. Myths: The Song of the Hoe (1.157)”, 512).

¹⁸ Farber, “1. Myths: The Song of the Hoe (1.157)”, 511-512.

forms man as a clay figurine. Although this myth does not—at least at the outset—state the reasons behind man’s creation, that Enlil recruits humanity “for the gods to provide (for them),” giving them “hoes into their hands (...to work),”¹⁹ certainly indicates that man serves the gods.²⁰ In *The Song of the Hoe*, then, Enlil molds the person from clay and into servitude.

In the Babylonian myth, *Atrahasis* (ca. 18th c. B.C.E.),²¹ the creation of man, in addition to clay, also requires divine blood, and, like in *The Song of the Hoe*, humanity serves the gods. Largely a “Primeval History,”²² which ends when the eponymous Atrahasis survives the great flood,²³ the poem thus begins by describing how “[t]he god’s load was too great.”²⁴ Accordingly, the Anunnaki assign a disproportionate amount of the work to the Igigi; yet, after three thousand six hundred years, they have tired of the task. When the Anunnaki admit that they mistreated them, they create man to carry the burden instead.

He [Ea] made a purification by washing.
 Ilawela who had intelligence,
 They [the gods] slaughtered in their assembly.
 Nintu mixed the clay
 With his flesh and blood.
 ...
 The Igigi, the great gods,
 Spat spittle upon the clay.
 Mami made her voice heard
 And spoke to the great gods,
 ‘I have carried out perfectly
 The work that you ordered of me.
 You have slaughtered a god together with his intelligence
 I relieved you [the Igigi] of your hard work,

¹⁹ *The Song of the Hoe* (Farber, ed. and trans., “1. Myths: The Song of the Hoe (1.157)”, 512).

²⁰ Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 32.

²¹ Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others*, 3. William L. Moran calls *Atrahasis* “the most important single witness to Babylonian speculation on the origins and nature of man” (“The Creation of Man in Atrahasis I 192-248,” 48).

²² Marks, *The English Bible*, 1710.

²³ In the Noahide account, God floods the earth “to put an end to all flesh, for the earth is filled with lawlessness because of them” (Gen. 6:13). However, in *Atrahasis*, the gods cast the deluge because people have grown so “numerous” and loud that Enlil cannot sleep. (*Atrahasis*, Stephanie Dalley, trans., *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 20).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

I have imposed your load on man.’²⁵

Ea makes a “purification by washing” to expiate the gods from the “impurity” that they contract upon killing Ilawela.²⁶ After his death, Nintu, the mother goddess, also known as Mami, mixes Ilawela’s blood and flesh with clay. The Igigi, whom man relieves, spit on this concoction, and Mami declares her work successful. ““I relieved you [the Igigi] of your hard work, / I have imposed your load on man.”” Man now exists, and he bears the Igigi’s former burden.²⁷ Here, as in the *Song of the Hoe*, the formation stresses the person’s subservience to the gods.

As I have endeavored to show, the formation and the notion of the person as the gods’ servants permeated Ancient Near Eastern societies. Although many have noted these common motifs before me, few have pondered their significance, and none, to my knowledge, have connected the two. I do so here.

According to John H. Walton, “Clay or dust signifies connection to the land.”²⁸ In *The Song of the Hoe*, this bond manifests as humanity’s taking the earth’s clay to build temples to the gods out of subservience to them.²⁹ These sanctuaries not only honor the likes of Enlil, Inanna, and Nidaba, but they also become a source of divine sustenance, a place “with regular food deliveries.”³⁰ In this way, the human’s clay origins predestine him to a permanent connection to the land, one which explicitly benefits the gods. The person’s dusty provenance necessitates his servility to the Sumerian pantheon.

²⁵ *Atrahasis*, tab. I, col. iv-v (Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 15-16).

²⁶ Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 79.

²⁷ As Dalley puts it, “[M]an’s purpose in life was to relieve the gods of hard labour” (*Myths from Mesopotamia*, 4).

²⁸ John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible*, 197.

²⁹ *The Song of the Hoe*, ll. 35-58, p. 512.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, l. 6, Farber, p. 512.

In *Atrahasis*, man's "connection to the land"³¹ means he serves as the gods' breadwinner. Before the creation of him, "The Igigi had to dig out canals, / Had to clear channels, the lifelines of the land."³² The focus on "canals" and "channels" strongly hints at agricultural work. Without the water gathered in these bodies, crops would not grow. In this way, these waterways literally become "lifelines of the land." Here the "land" works by metonymy, pointing to the people or, here rather, to the gods. In summary, then, the Igigi work the land to feed the Babylonian pantheon. But with the inception of humanity, people free the Igigi of their backbreaking labor. "They [People] took hold of...,"³³ / Made new picks and spades, / Made big canals / To feed people and sustain the gods."³⁴ The text explicitly connects the "canals" to sustenance: "They...Made big canals/ To feed people and sustain the gods." This fact, then, supports my interpretation of the Igigi as farmers, for they also dug "out canals."³⁵ Here, however, the Igigi eagerly hand off their task to humanity. In other words, as the word play on *awilu* (god) and *lullû* (man) suggests,³⁶ they switch places, and they do so because, unlike the gods, man consists of clay. The Igigi never had a permanent bond to the land; man did. He had no choice but to serve as the gods' reaper.³⁷

Just as the primeval Sumerian and Babylonian person's clay provenance tied him to the land from which he came, so too did it with Adam. Many have "laid great emphasis on the interrelation between אדם and אדמה."³⁸ Although much disagreement has emerged over the

³¹ John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible*, 197.

³² *Atrahasis*, tab. I, col. i (Dalley, trans., *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 9).

³³ "Omission dots indicate an unknown word or phrase" (Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, xiii).

³⁴ *Atrahasis*, tab. I, col. vii (Dalley, trans., *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 18).

³⁵ *Atrahasis*, tab. I, col. i (Dalley, trans., *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 9).

³⁶ John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible*, 195. For more on word plays, see T. Abusch, "Ghost and God: Some Observations on a Babylonian Understanding of Human Nature," 368.

³⁷ Cf. Jacques Briand, "La Création d'après l'épopée d'Atra-hasis," 27.

³⁸ Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, 206.

precise meaning of אָדָם, I do not think it possible to deny the morphological similarities between the two. I in no way equate the terms, but I just as strongly disagree with Claus Westermann when he writes, “Nor can one simply explain the relation of אָדָם to אֲדָמָה by saying that the person must be thought of as a farmer... The words do not allow this.”³⁹ Although אָדָם does not mean אֲדָמָה, it certainly has such a connotative aura about it. As Hermann Gunkel writes:

The idea that the man was formed from אֲדָמָה also serves to explain the name of the man: His name is אָדָם because he originated from the אֲדָמָה. According to vv 5, 6, אֲדָמָה is the...cultivated land, the field. The life of the אָדָם is very closely related to this אֲדָמָה: he lives on the field (3:23), and he returns to the field when he dies (3:19).⁴⁰

Considering Gunkel’s comment and the Ancient Near Eastern tradition of the person as the gods’ farmer (as in *Atrahasis* and, to some extent, in *The Song of the Hoe*)⁴¹ and that God “placed him [Adam] in the garden of Eden, to till it and tend it,”⁴² Westermann’s denial of a deep connection between אָדָם and אֲדָמָה seems untenable. Still, caution must also guide the reader against the equally incorrect belief that God forces Adam to farm on His behalf. On the contrary, God demands nothing from the fruits of his labor.

This crucial distinction that Adam works on his own behalf radically departs from the Sumerian and Babylonian tradition where the gods birth humanity into servitude (see figure 1).

³⁹ Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 206.

⁴⁰ Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis*, 6.

⁴¹ Here, for *Song of the Hoe*, I use agriculture to encompass the role of the breadwinner in general. Since people build the gods’ temples, bringing with them “regular food deliveries” (*The Song of the Hoe*, l. 6, p. 512) for the gods, the person does, to some extent, provide the Sumerian pantheon nourishment.

⁴² Gen. 2:15.

<u><i>The Song of the Hoe</i></u>	<u><i>Atrahasis</i></u>	<u>Genesis 2:5, 15</u>
<p>“The foremost of heaven and earth, the lord Nunamnir (=Enlil), named the strong and important leaders [among the people] (...)” and recruited them for the gods to provide (for them).”^{***}</p>	<p>““I relieved you [the Igigi of your hard work, I have imposed your load on man.”^{****}</p>	<p>“[T]here was no man to till the soil... The LORD God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden, to till it and tend it.”^{*****}</p>

Figure 1

Although God puts Adam “in the garden of Eden, to till it and tend it,” He neither requires nor asks Adam for the fruits of his labor. Adam works the garden for his own well-being, not for God’s. As Alexander Heidel remarks, “God did not ask for any returns. Man’s purpose in life was not idleness and useless enjoyment but pleasant and profitable work,”⁴³ to which I would add, on his own behalf.⁴⁴ In Genesis 2:7a, Adam’s familiarity with the land from whence he came enhances his life. Unlike *The Song of the Hoe* and *Atrahasis*, Genesis 2:7a portrays the person’s earthy origins as a “blessing,” not as a curse.

How, then, should the reader understand this departure concerning the purpose of human creation? Walter Brueggemann views the formation in Genesis 2:7a as a “royal formula of enthronement,”⁴⁵ that is, he sees the raising up of the human being from dust as an analogy for the enthronement of Davidic kings. Drawing from similar imagery in I Kings 16:2-3, I Samuel 2:6-8a, Psalm 113:7, and others, he makes an attractive argument. Unfortunately, Brueggemann

* (...) indicates an omitted line.

** *The Song of the Hoe*, ll. 28-31, p. 512.

*** *Atrahasis*, 15-16.

**** I use the Jewish Publication Society’s translation.

⁴³ Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*, 121.

⁴⁴ Jacques Briend similarly comments, « Le texte biblique souligne au contraire [of the creation in *Atrahasis*] qu’entre Dieu et l’homme il s’agit d’un lien de gratuité. Bien plus, l’homme reçoit une responsabilité qui prend une forme particulière dans l’instauration du couple, mais qui s’élargit au monde des animaux ainsi qu’à toute la nature (Gn 2) » (« La création d’après l’épopée d’Atra-hasis, » 27).

⁴⁵ Walter Brueggemann, “From Dust to Kingship,” 2.

predominantly compares Genesis 2:7a with much later sources. In other words, he supports his thesis of an 11th c. B.C.E. text by enlisting texts as late as the 7th c. B.C.E. Of all the sources that he uses, only I Samuel 2:6-8a seems to have existed coterminously with Genesis 2:7a.⁴⁶ I

Samuel 2:6-8a reads:

The LORD deals death and gives life,
Casts down into Sheol and raises up.
The LORD makes poor and makes rich;
He casts down, He also lifts high,
He raises the poor from the dust [מִן־עָפָר],
Lifts up the needy from the dunghill,
Setting them with nobles,
Granting them seats of honor.⁴⁷

The first three lines show that “*He*,” God, decides the state of man. The author follows this description of God’s power⁴⁸ with a motif of reversal in which God moves the subject from a state of poverty and powerlessness to one of wealth and authority. Brueggemann writes:

The verses speak of being nothing and then being given a place of power and importance, or conversely, being in a place of power and importance and suddenly losing it all. Following Wijngaards’ suggestion, the word pairs⁴⁹ speak of the status of being in covenant and then out of it. And because the language is of royal treaty, we may suggest that being in covenant means having royal power and authority and being out of covenant means losing it. On the one hand it is to be “in the dust”. On the other, it is to “sit with princes”. The phrase “from the dust” appears here also as a formula relating to enthronement.⁵⁰

In short, according to Brueggemann, God can and does alter man’s circumstances for the better.

In this reversal, “[t]o be taken ‘from the dust’ means to be elevated from obscurity to royal office.”⁵¹

⁴⁶ John T. Willis, “Song of Hannah and Psalm 113,” 141. Willis provides extensive notes on the text’s early origins.

⁴⁷ I Sam. 2:6-8.

⁴⁸ The writer does not judge God’s power; he merely states that He has it.

⁴⁹ “kill—bring to life

bring down—raise up

make poor—make rich” (Brueggemann, “From Dust to Kingship,” 3).

⁵⁰ Walter Brueggemann, “From Dust to Kingship,” 3.

⁵¹ Brueggemann, “From Dust to Kingship,” 2. Comparing this notion to King David, Brueggemann writes, “If the dust motif means to suggest dependence and the lack of merit, then David has a similar experience: I took you from

Despite the allure of Brueggemann's thesis, one cannot maintain, as he does, that Genesis 2:7 functions as an enthronement formula, much less assert that it directly refers to the Davidic kingship. As I have already shown, except for I Samuel 2:6-8a, Brueggemann's argument has no support. Moreover, one cannot conclusively connect Genesis 2:7 to I Samuel 2:6-8a in the way that Brueggemann does. Indeed, the passage seems far more to describe *God's* power than it does a king's authority, for:

The **LORD** deals death and gives life,
 Casts down into Sheol and raises up.
 The **LORD** makes poor and makes rich;
He casts down, **He** also lifts high,
He raises the poor from the dust [מִעֲפָר],
 Lifts up the needy from the dunghill,
 Setting them with nobles,
 Granting them seats of honor.⁵² [emphasis added]

In each case, the text stresses God's awesome power to redeem man from his distress.

Brueggemann thus misunderstands when he writes, "The verses speak of being nothing and then being given a place of power and importance, or conversely, being in a place of power and importance and suddenly losing it all."⁵³ On the contrary, the Song of Hannah praises God's power and kindness. Indeed, without Him, Hannah would never have conceived Samuel.

The question thus remains: in departing from the Sumerian and Babylonian tradition where the formation enslaves man, what does Genesis 2:7a say about the Israelite person and his relationship with God and why? I assert that the verse portrays the person as the Creator's beloved creation. Whereas in both *The Song of the Hoe* and *Atrahasis*, the person's clay provenance dictated his servant status, Adam's earthy provenance becomes a source of intimacy.

the pasture, from following sheep (2 Sm 7, 8). Moreover the picture of 1 Sm 1 shows that David had no claim to an exalted place, but was chosen by Yahweh in his wisdom and graciousness" (Brueggemann, "David and His Theologian," 177).

⁵² I Sam. 2:6-8.

⁵³ Brueggemann, "From Dust to Kingship," 3.

A consideration of the affective dimension of the craft of pottery may further illustrate how ancient writers understood this relationship. Many modern potters express sentiments, similar to those above, towards their own creations.⁵⁴ Paulus Berensohn writes, “Pinching slowly, we know clay *slow* and *savour* [sic] in our sensitive hands. Our connection with it deepens: from I-it to I-thou, as Martin Buber suggests.”⁵⁵ Through her bodily interaction with the clay, her relationship with the material evolves from an I-It to an I-Thou rapport. Her use of “know” resembles far more the biblical sense of knowing as sexual intercourse, connoted by $\sqrt{\text{דע}}$. Indeed, “slow,” “*savour* [sic],” and “sensitive” do not evoke the knowing of cold empiricism but, rather, that of intimacy. Moreover, her comparison of the I-Thou to her relationship with the clay speaks to the remarkable care and affection she has for her final creation. Accordingly, I believe that J uses $\sqrt{\text{דע}}$ to evoke this same intimacy between God and the person, or, as Chad R. Martin notes, “[T]he God-as-potter metaphor... is an I-Thou, relational image characterized by intimacy.”⁵⁶ The Celestial Potter motif in Genesis 2:7a serves to elevate the relationship between the person and God to that same status of affection; precisely for that reason, then, Genesis 2:7a departs from the “man-as-gods’-servant” motif, so pervasive throughout the Ancient Near East.

In summary, in Genesis 2:7a, personhood entails the enjoyment of an intimate relationship with God. This shift from a rapport of subservience to one of care serves as a myth of origins, establishing Israelite identity over and against that of other peoples. Because of His affection for His creation, God will protect the Hebrews, instilling them with a power that the

⁵⁴ See, for example, Martin Astor, “Psychology of Mud,” 102.

⁵⁵ Paulus Berensohn, *Finding One’s Way with Clay: Pinched Pottery and Working with Colored Clays*, 159, quoted in Chad R. Martin, “God-as-Potter, Creativity, and the Theology of Art-Making,” 195. Cf. Martin Astor, “Psychology of Mud,” 102, quoted in Martin, “God-as-Potter, Creativity, and the Theology of Art-Making,” 196.

⁵⁶ Martin, “God-as-Potter, Creativity, and the Theology of Art-Making,” 196. Although Martin examines the potter metaphor in Jer. 18:1-11, his conclusions on the intimacy between potter and pot, creator and creation, God and man, equally apply to Genesis 2:7.

loveless, subservient Sumerians and Babylonians lacked. In Genesis 2:7a, then, God affectionately descends from the heavens to create man personally, molding him into existence with His very hands.

Of course, many would object, averring that the care, which modern artists display for their work, did not apply to the Israelite craftsman whose pottery largely served utilitarian purposes.⁵⁷ However, one who would maintain this position would also neglect that “[p]ottery...could also serve as a marker/symbol of individual or group identity and status.”⁵⁸ Avraham Faust believes that a certain type of pottery that began flourishing in Iron Age II (ca. 1000-540 B.C.E.)⁵⁹ Israel served this very purpose.⁶⁰

Burnished pottery permeated the Ancient Near East for millennium.⁶¹ Production involved two crucial steps. The first, burnishing, “is simply a finishing technique. The [p]otter uses a hard tool to rub the leather-hard vessel before firing to produce a glossy surface.”⁶² The second, slip, “is a liquid mixture of clay and water applied over the surface of the vessel, coloring it and giving it a different texture.”⁶³ Because one finds this decoration on “dining” vessels (for food and drink),⁶⁴ one would expect women to have handled them since “work classified in the category of cooking—that is, food preparation activities occurring within the residential compound—was done predominantly by women.”⁶⁵ Here, Meyers highlights women’s role within the “residential compound,” thereby pointing to both a gendered “division

⁵⁷ Robert H. Johnston, “The Biblical Potter,” 88.

⁵⁸ Anne Porter and Thomas L. McClellan, “Pottery, ancient Near East,” 5465.

⁵⁹ Mark S. Smith, *God in Translation: Deities in Cross-Cultural Discourse in the Biblical World*, xxii.

⁶⁰ Avraham Faust, “Pottery Talks: What Ceramics Tell Us about the Social World of Ancient Israel,” 53, 55.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁶² *Ibid.* Here, Faust paraphrases Carla Sinopoli’s explanation from her *Approaches to Archaeological Ceramics*, 227.

⁶³ *Ibid.* Again, Faust summarizes Sinopoli’s explanation from *Approaches to Archaeological Ceramics*, 229.

⁶⁴ Faust, “Burnished Pottery,” 56.

⁶⁵ C. Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context*, 145-146, quoted in Faust, “Burnished Pottery,” 59.

of labor” and of space.⁶⁶ Whereas the Israelite woman lived in the realm of the private, the man occupied that of the public, each performing the role associated with that position.⁶⁷ That “[v]essels used for food preparation...and storage...were not usually slipped or burnished”⁶⁸ becomes critical, for it strongly suggests that women did not handle burnished pottery. In contradistinction, men did,⁶⁹ but why?

Faust believes that the burnishing specifically served to sharpen the boundary between the male and the female sphere—the former, that of culture, and the latter, that of nature.⁷⁰ “[B]urnished ware became transformed: this pottery no longer looks ‘natural.’”⁷¹ In other words, the craftsman “marked” burnished pottery with the stamp of culture, for its decorative elements distinguished it from the plain “earthenware” of nature.⁷² “[T]hat polishing was conducted exclusively by males”⁷³ further buttresses Faust’s argument for locating burnished pottery within the male, Israelite “universe.” This theory, then, accords not only with the notion that gender hierarchy emerges with the creation of the state,⁷⁴ but that a deepening complexity of spatial perception comes with it also. The appearance of the four-room house at this time confirms this theory,⁷⁵ pointing to a discrimination between public and private space.⁷⁶ As I have already mentioned, during this period, the Israelite male’s “occupation” within the *public* sphere and the

⁶⁶ Faust, “Burnished Pottery,” 59-60.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 61; C. Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 123-125, quoted in Faust, “Burnished Pottery,” 61.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ R. Barkai, “First Stone Axes as Cultural Marker: Socio-Economic Changes as Reflected in Holocene Flint Industries of the Southern Levant,” 316, quoted in Faust, “Burnished Pottery,” 61-62.

⁷⁴ Faust, “Burnished Pottery,” 63. Faust cites R. Rohrlack who takes this position as her thesis: “It is the thesis of this paper that a critical factor in state formation is the emergence of patriarchy” (“State Formation in Sumer and the Subjugation of Women,” 76).

⁷⁵ Faust, “The Social Structure of the Israelite Society During the 8th -7th Centuries BCE according to the Archaeological Evidence,” cited in Faust, “Burnished Pottery,” 63.

⁷⁶ S. Kent, “A cross-cultural study of segmentation, architecture, and the use of space,” 150, quoted in Faust, “Burnished Pottery,” 62.

woman's within the private solidified. Burnished pottery played a part in that process because "burnishing was applied especially to vessels that seem to have been used mainly in the consumption of food and beverages," activities that would have occurred in public and among males.⁷⁷ Accordingly, burnished pottery becomes doubly symbolic of the gender hierarchy and of the division between public and private space.⁷⁸ These notions spread because "'standardization' of pottery...created a vehicle through which messages, seen as normative, were spread... (see also Sinopoli 1991: 121)."⁷⁹ This "standardization" includes the normalization of burnished pottery because production climaxed in sites *throughout* ancient Israel during this time.⁸⁰ Thus, burnished pottery itself disseminated these messages of gender hierarchy and spatial complexity. "It seems, therefore, as if the processes that impelled complexity within Israelite society, and whose results were statehood and more complex perceptions of space and gender, are also responsible, on a different level, for the appearance of slipped and burnished pottery."⁸¹

While I agree with Faust's conclusion, I think it possible to go further.⁸² I view the "more complex perceptions of space and gender," which burnished pottery conveyed, not as the be-all and end-all, but as representative of both its communicative power and of the implications that its combined messages had on Israelite society. As Faust, following Barkai,⁸³ notes himself, "[P]olished raw material was regarded as strong, dangerous and powerful, and polishing was

⁷⁷ Faust, "Burnished Pottery," 60.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁷⁹ Sinopoli, *Approaches to Archaeological Ceramics*, 121, quoted in Faust, "Burnished Pottery," 64.

⁸⁰ Faust, "Burnished Pottery," 54-55.

⁸¹ William G. Dever, "Archaeology and the 'Age of Solomon': A Case-Study in Archaeology and Historiography," 66.

⁸² Thus, I have used Faust's work not because his thesis on burnished pottery's connection to gender hierarchy and spatial division helps my thesis but, rather, because his theoretical model allows me to go further.

⁸³ Barkai, "First Stone Axes as Cultural Marker," 316, quoted in Faust, "Burnished Pottery," 61-62.

conducted exclusively by males.”⁸⁴ Could the polishing of burnished pottery reflect a larger dynamic? Might it also reflect the immense power that the Israelites demonstrated when they “overcame the ecological and topographical difficulties of the environment?”⁸⁵ Did this explosion of burnished pottery, in evoking a sense of foreboding aggression to others, reveal a message about Yahweh’s might and his favor for the Israelites?

Yahweh’s ascendance and cultic changes suggest so. William G. Dever writes:

The general category of ideology is always somewhat difficult to specify in the material culture record. But in so far as archaeology properly deals with ‘material correlates of behavior,’ it is able to infer certain aspects of individual and collective thought.⁸⁶

Dever filters these “aspects” into three groups: “cult,” “religion,” and “industries.”⁸⁷ Under religion, he writes of an efflorescence of cultic developments during the 10th c. B.C.E.⁸⁸ Among the many sites he mentions, he notes the “stunning terra cotta cult-stands” at Ta’anach,⁸⁹ one of which may possibly portray the earliest image of Yahweh.⁹⁰ If it does, it would seem to reflect the 10th c. B.C.E. “elevation of Yahweh as the national deity. This did not exclude the worship of other deities, of course...But it provided significant impetus for Yahweh to emerge above El and Baal and set Yahweh on the course to become the national high god for Palestine,”⁹¹ a process in which elites, such as J,⁹² would have played an integral role.

Regardless of the cult-stand’s Yahwistic nature, pottery and, for that matter, clay “created a vehicle through which messages...were spread” in ancient Israel (see also Sinopoli 1991:

⁸⁴ Faust, “Burnished Pottery,” 61-62.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁸⁶ Dever, “Archaeology and the ‘Age of Solomon,’” 228.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 229.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 228.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Taylor J. Glen, “Was Yahweh Worshipped as the Sun?” 140.

⁹¹ Robert Karl Gnuse, *No Other Gods: Emergent Monotheism in Israel*, 199-200. In addition to many other sources, Gnuse cites H. Vorländer, “Der Monotheismus Israels als Antwort auf die Krise des Exils,” in *Der einzige Gott*, B. Lang ed. (Munich: Kösel, 1981, 63-70, esp. 101-102.

⁹² Because so few possessed the ability to write, J’s elite status seems quite likely.

121),”⁹³ religious and cultic ones included. Accordingly, J’s metaphor of the Celestial Potter in Genesis 2:7a, the proliferation of burnished pottery, and the concurrent rise of Yahweh hardly seem coincidental. On the contrary, by using $\sqrt{\text{צִרְי}}$ to associate Yahweh with pottery, J encoded the formation with a message about the emergence of a kingdom and its inhabitants, a message that pitted the Israelites over and against their Ancient Near Eastern neighbors. It said that their God created them from dust in intimacy, not in supremacy; yet, as the powerful God who had superseded the likes of Enki, El, and Baal, He would protect His people against all foreign nations, and He would not hesitate to crush them.

3. Conclusion

In this paper, I located Genesis 2:7a within its Ancient Near Eastern milieu to highlight precisely how J continues certain creation traditions while departing from others. I posited that J enlists the formation in such a way that he not only polemicizes against Sumerians and Babylonians and their theological ideologies, but I also asserted that, in doing so, he established the emerging kingdom of ancient Israel and its national deity, Yahweh, over and against other peoples and their gods. To buttress this claim, I have demonstrated that whereas the person’s association with the ground in *The Song of the Hoe* and in *Atrahasis* chains him to his origins such that he serves the gods as breadwinner, in Genesis 2:7a, the person’s עֲפָרָה becomes a source of celebration, testifying to the intimate relationship between the Celestial Potter and His creation. Indeed, He molds him with His own hands, stamping him with the ink of affection. Yet, I also showed how J, fully aware of burnished pottery’s efflorescence, uses the pottery metaphor as a statement of Israelite identity where an emerging kingdom considered itself not only secure under the auspices of the mighty Yahweh but also powerful. In summary, Genesis 2:7a purports

⁹³ Sinopoli, *Approaches to Archaeological Ceramics*, 121, quoted in Faust, “Burnished Pottery,” 64.

a personhood of transcendent intimacy with Yahweh, a god who, the Israelites believed, would not hesitate to exercise terrifying clout to defend His beloved people.

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