

BAALS OF BASHAN

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SUMMARY

This essay argues that the phrase “Bulls of Bashan” is not about famous cattle but about cultic practice. Although this has been suggested before, this essay uses archaeology and climatology to show ancient Golan was no place for raising cattle.

SOMMAIRE

Cet essai fait valoir que l'expression « Taureaux de Basan » ne concerne pas les célèbres bovins mais des pratiques rituelles. Bien que cela ait été suggéré auparavant, cet essai utilise archéologie et climatologie pour montrer que le Golan antique n'était pas un endroit pour l'élevage du bétail.

The phrase “Bulls of Bashan” occurs twice in the Hebrew Bible (Ps 22:12; Ezek 39:18; cf. Jer 50:19), along with Amos 4:1's mention of “Cows of Bashan.” The vast majority of commentators have understood this to refer to the “famous cattle” of Bashan, a region supposedly renowned for its beef or dairy production.¹ I would like to challenge this

¹ Thus, inter alia, Mitchell DAHOOD, *Psalms AB* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1979), 1.140; Klaus KOCH, *The Prophets: The Assyrian Period* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 46; Avraham NEGEV, ed., *Archaeological Encyclopedia of the Holy Land* (New York: Continuum, 2005), s.v. “Bashan,” 68; Jonathan TUBB, *The Canaanites* (Tulsa: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 91; Walter C. KAISER, *History of Israel* (Nashville: Broadman

interpretation, arguing not only that the phrase Bulls of Bashan refers not to the bovine but to the divine, but moreover that Iron Age Bashan would have been a terrible land for grazing and the last place to be famous for beef or dairy cattle.

Alongside the many scholars automatically commending Bashan beef have been a few who have suggested that there might be some idolatrous overtones to the phrase. This has particularly been the case with Amos 4's denunciation of the powerful women of the Northern Kingdom as cows of Bashan.² Most thorough here was Hans Barstad, who extensively illustrated the cultic nature of the denunciation in Amos 4 and the use of "Bashan" and "cows" in the Hebrew Bible, to which we shall return, and showed "cows of Bashan" must here refer to all of the inhabitants of Israel as Baal-worshippers.³ There are small holes in his argument, as the link to Baal in particular is weak and based in part on now-outdated understandings of Ugaritic material,⁴ but aside from that, his exegesis is irreproachable. Paul Jacobs and Gregorio del Olmo Lete consider instead that the bovine fertility god in Amos 4 is, in fact, Yahweh, the bull of Kuntillet Ajrud,⁵ and del Olmo Lete extends the mythological reading to "bulls of Bashan" in other pericopes.⁶

These interpretations approach the question from the text itself and from the history of religions. I would like to support these interpretations by showing that it is impossible for "bulls of Bashan" to refer to famed cattle. The key to this argument is the reconstruction of the Iron Age environment of the Bashan. The Bible considers all of the central and southern Golan Heights, as well as the modern Al-Lajat to the east along the Yarmouk, to be Bashan. The term applies as well to the increasingly mountainous territory moving northwest toward Mount Hermon.⁷

and Holman, 1998), 25; Paul NADIM TARAZI, *Prophetic Traditions* (Yonkers: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1994), 48.

² M. BIČ, *Das Buch Amos* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1969), 82-84; A. J. WILLIAMS, "A Further Suggestion about Amos iv 1-3," *VT* 29 (1979) 206-211, here 206.

³ Hans BARSTAD, "Die Basankühe in Am iv 1," *VT* 25 (1975) 286-97; BARSTAD, *The Religious Polemics of Amos* (Leiden: Brill, 1984), 37-44.

⁴ Barstad, *Religious Polemics*, 41-42.

⁵ Paul F. JACOBS, "'Cows of Bashan': A Note on the Interpretation of Amos 4:1," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104 (1985) 109-110; Gregorio DEL OLMO LETE, "Basan O El 'Infierno' Cananeo," *Studi Epigrafici e Linguistici sul Vicino Oriente antico* (1988) 51-60, here 53.

⁶ del Olmo Lete, "Basan O El 'Infierno' Cananeo," 55.

⁷ Bashan is distinguished from Hermon only in 1 Chron 5:23; John B. CURTIS, "Har-Basan, the Mountain of God (Ps 68:16[15])," *Proceedings of the Eastern Great Lakes Biblical Society* 6 (1986) 85-96, here 86. "Jaulan" refers to the area from Hermon south

Faunal remains, unfortunately, are of no help. There are abundant animal bones from the Roman and Byzantine periods, at Qazrin and Kanaf, for example.⁸ But for reasons to be outlined shortly, we cannot assume the same fauna for pre-Hellenistic periods. There are no bones from Middle Bronze Age Qazrin or Early Bronze II Qasr Bardawil. There are animal remains from the Middle and Upper Paleolithic Golan, and these include large bovids, probably wild aurochs.⁹ But these, too, are irrelevant for the biblical period, as the bovids had disappeared by Pre-Pottery Neolithic A, largely replaced by gazelle.¹⁰

We will have to instead reconstruct the ancient environment and determine what agriculture it would best support. The method of Webley's "Soils and Site Location in Prehistoric Palestine" (1972) was simply based on soil type.¹¹ Webley calculated the percentage and total area within the catchment of each site that belonged to each soil zone.¹² Webley's procedure, however, was much too simple. It failed to take into consideration adequately variations in precipitation, slope, and standing pre-cultivation vegetation. What is more important, soil depletion in the Golan since antiquity renders mapping of modern soil zones useless.¹³

Other scholars such as David Hopkins have attempted more elaborate reconstructions of the productivity potential of various regions in the Southern Levant, but because they rely on modern or 19th-century analogies for soil yields, still run into the problem of the changes to soil due

to the Yarmouk River, see Chayim BEN DAVID, "The Preservation of Roman and Byzantine Place Names from the Golan Heights," *Semitica et Classica* 3 (2010) 265-271, here 265; "Hauran" includes the Jaulan as well as Jebel Druze to the east and the area in between. The Hula Valley does not belong to any of these, but was included in the Late Roman administrative district of Paneas; Ben David, "Preservation," 268 n.18.

⁸ Brian HESSE, "Pig Lovers and Pig Haters," *Journal of Ethnobiology* 10 (1990) 195-225, here 218; Billy J. GRANTHAM, "Qasrin and the Druze," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 63 (2000) 9-19, here 9. These remains show a predominance of chickens.

⁹ Simon J. M. DAVIS, Rebecca RABINOVICH and Na'ama GOREN-INBAR, "Quaternary Extinctions and Population Increase in Western Asia: The Animal Remains from Biq'at Quneitra," *Paleorient* 14 (1988) 95-105, here 95-96.

¹⁰ Davis, Rabinovich and Goren-Inbar, "Quaternary Extinctions," *Paleorient* 14 (1988) 95, 101.

¹¹ D. WEBLEY, "Soils and Site Location in Prehistoric Palestine," in *Papers in Economic Prehistory*, ed. E. S. HIGGS (Cambridge: University Press), 169-80.

¹² Webley, "Soils and Site Location," 178.

¹³ R. KARSCHEON and Y. ZOHAR, *The Arboreal Vegetation of Golan*, Vol. 3 (Ilanot: Israel Forestry Association, 1968) 3, 8-9, 11-24; Frank NEUMANN et al., "Holocene Vegetation and Climate History of the Northern Golan Heights," *Vegetation History and Archaeobotany* 16 (2007) 329-346, here 331. The flora are also completely changed since antiquity, secondary flora having replaced the Tabor Oak, Mt. Atlas Mastic (*Pistacia Atlantica*), elm, maple, and almond (cf. Ezek 27:5-6).

to the last millennium of erosion and over-grazing.¹⁴ Certainly, such analogies can be quite useful for understanding the dynamics of peasant farming in such regions or for consumption figures, but not for soils.

Work must begin somewhere else. Extensive studies have shown that climate, at least, has remained unchanged in Bashan since the Chalcolithic period.¹⁵ This can enable the mapping of environmental zones, which is the preface to reconstructing and mapping production schemes. Pollen samples from deep cores are also useful, and those taken from Birkat Ram show a dramatic change in the flora during the Hellenistic period, when the dense forest of deciduous oak disappeared.¹⁶ This skeleton of data can enable a reconstruction of the environmental zones based on other analogous regions of the world.

The modern climate, rainfall, and so forth, can be applied to the ancient period.¹⁷ Elevation of various parts of the Golan is also obviously a constant. Elevation can be combined with rainfall, along with some minimal soil information: for example, basalt has always eroded to red and brown loam soil or heavy clay, and never did otherwise. The combinations of these factors define distinct environmental zones, and these zones can be compared with analogous regions that exist today in the world (many of them in Tasmania and New Zealand). Those analogies can fill in the rest of the information needed to decide what subsistence strategies would have been most profitable in the Golan.

Temperatures on the Golan range as low as 3.1 degrees Celsius and rarely above 19 degrees.¹⁸ Rainfall is between 400 and 1200mm per year, the lower rainfall the further south.¹⁹ There is more rain on the western slopes than the eastern flanks.²⁰ The rock of the Golan is Plio-Pleistocene

¹⁴ E.g., Israel FINKELSTEIN, "The Land of Ephraim Survey 1980-87, Preliminary Report," *TA* 15-16 (1988-89) 117-183, here 126; David C. HOPKINS, "Agriculture," *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Ancient Near East* 1 22-30. Even in the early modern period, however, the Golan was not beef country. Only winter crops were sown there in the 19th century, with grazing done down in the Huleh Valley, creating a form of transhumance between the high country and the valley; Y. KARMON, "The Settlement of the Northern Huleh Valley since 1838," *Israel Exploration Journal* 3 (1953) 4-25, here 8, 19.

¹⁵ Neumann et al., "Holocene Vegetation," 329, 342.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 338-39, 342.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 341.

¹⁸ Karschon and Zohar, *The Arboreal Vegetation of Golan* 6; A. REIFENBERG, "The Soils of Syria and the Lebanon," *Journal of Soil Science* 3 (1952) 68-88, here 81.

¹⁹ Karschon and Zohar, *The Arboreal Vegetation of Golan*; Neumann et al., "Holocene Vegetation," 331.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

basalt,²¹ which erodes to red loam, brown loam, and, when mixed with quartz grains from Aeolian dust, heavy clay of brown Mediterranean soil.²²

Such basaltic soils are poor in calcium carbonate and phosphorus.²³ Ferrous-iron content is low, and aluminum oxide greatly increased.²⁴ Hydraulic conductivity is low, which leads to the formation of perched water tables, and low hydraulic conductivity means low infiltration rate. Base saturation is relatively high. Heavy clay soils' lack of sufficient surface and under-drainage keeps them cool well into the spring²⁵ and results in poor herbage yields.²⁶

There are regions identical in rainfall, altitude, temperature, and soil in parts of Tasmania (near Swansea and Glamorgan) and the South Island of New Zealand (near Southland and Marlborough). These are caprovid zones, along with wheat and barley farming, not cattle ranches.²⁷ Rainfall under 900mm per year on this soil at this temperature is considered too low for effective dairy farming, which would eliminate all but the north-western Shebaa Farms region of the Golan.²⁸ Less than 10% of farming on the South Island of New Zealand involves cattle.²⁹ The same situation obtains for this particular part of Tasmania – sheep grazing and barley farming, but no cattle.³⁰

²¹ Golan basalt is higher in strontium than Galilee basalt; O. WILLIAMS-THORPE and R. S. THORPE, "Geochemistry and Trade of East Mediterranean Millstones from the Neolithic to Roman Periods," *Journal of Archaeological Science* 20 (1993) 263-320, here 296. There is Jurassic limestone higher up on Mount Hermon, but this need not concern us; Reifenberg, *Soils* 70.

²² Yuval GOREN, Israel FINKELSTEIN and Nadav NA'AMAN, *Inscribed in Clay: Provenance Studies of the Amarna Letters and Other Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, 23 (Tel Aviv: Institute of Archaeology, 2004); Reifenberg, *Soils* 74. The difference between the red and brown loams is the differences in color between ferric oxide and ferrous oxide silicic-acid soils, based on the mineralogical composition of the basalt; Reifenberg, *Soils* 79.

²³ Reifenberg *Soils* 79; A. R. WHITSON and E. J. DELWICHE, "The Management of Heavy Clay Soils," *University of Wisconsin Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin* 202 (February, 1911) 1-17, here 3.

²⁴ Reifenberg, *Soils* 82.

²⁵ Whitson and Delwiche, "The Management of Heavy Clay Soils," 1-17.

²⁶ L. SHALLOO et al., "Comparison of a Pasture-Based System of Milk Production on a High Rainfall, Heavy-Clay Soil with that on a Lower Rainfall, Free-Draining Soil," *Grass and Forage Science* 59 (2004) 157-168, here 158.

²⁷ Briscoe MOORE, *From Forest to Farm* (London: Pelham Books, 1969) 85-86; *New Zealand Agriculture* (Auckland: New Zealand Rural Press, 1990) 12, 24, 85; Whitson and Delwiche, "The Management of Heavy Clay Soils," 12.

²⁸ Moore, *From Forest to Farm* 85-88.

²⁹ NEW ZEALAND DAIRY BOARD, *The New Zealand Dairy Industry* (Wellington: New Zealand Dairy Board, 1971) 1; *New Zealand Agriculture* 40-46, 109

³⁰ R. LAKIN, *Primary Industries, 1967-68, and Meteorology, 1968* (Hobart: Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, 1969) 8, 12, 25.

There are good reasons for this. Heavy clay soils are particularly bad for cattle. Grazing on such soils, compounded in Bashan by soil water logging caused by both the seasonal perched water tables and the more than 200 basalt springs known in the Golan,³¹ results in compacted soils with decreased porosity. This alters the microsite conditions that control the performance of pasture plants' roots, on which their persistence depends.³² The poor herbage yields result in milk production too low to be economically sustainable.³³ No one puts cows on heavy clay soil.³⁴

Brown loam is no better. Where it has been used for grazing, the mineral and hydraulic deficiencies that obtain for any basaltic soil, outlined above, resulted, in 1969, in a loss of \$69 per beef farmer per year.³⁵ Where herds were less than fifty head of cattle, losses grew to \$102 per farmer per year.³⁶ Only by selective winter grazing crops and, in New Zealand, confining grazing to small cells has beef production become sustainable on brown loam.³⁷ And even then, the cows were selenium-deficient, a condition that results in white muscle disease in calves, retained placentas, low fertility, abortions, poor weight gain, and lowered immune response.³⁸

There are more problems than the soil. The relatively primitive Durum wheat of the Iron Age Golan had a low sodium level.³⁹ When cattle graze on pastures of it, the negative effect on lactating dairy cows could be quite marked.⁴⁰

³¹ Elad DAFNY, Haim GVIRTZMAN, Avi BURG, and Lorian FLEISCHER, "The hydrogeology of the Golan basalt aquifer, Israel," *Israel Journal of Earth Sciences* 52 (2003) 139-153, here 142.

³² T. VIDRIH, "Effect of Cattle Trampling on some Physical Properties of Heavy Clay Soil," *Sodobno Kmetijstvo* 28, no. 12 (1995), 574-579.

³³ Shalloo et al., "Comparison," 157, 165-66.

³⁴ M. RAGUSH and F. F. CLINE, *Farm Practices in the Weyburn Loam and Regina Heavy Clay Soils of Saskatchewan* (Ottawa: Canada Department of Agriculture, 1953) 7.

³⁵ I. P. BOX Jr., R. J. MARTIN and T. D. PHILLIPS, "Costs and Returns from Beef Cattle in the Brown Loam Area of Mississippi," *Mississippi State University Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin* 776 (November, 1969) 3-27, here 7-10.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 11-12.

³⁷ Troy KIGHT, "Brown Loam Branch Station: More Beef is the Aim," *Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experimental Station Research Highlights* 52, no. 10 (October, 1989) 4-5, here 4; Troy KIGHT, "Wintergrazing Research at Brown Loam," *Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experimental Station Research Highlights* 53, no. 7 (July, 1990)1-2, here 2.

³⁸ Jeff LEHMKUHLER, "Selenium and Beef Cattle," *University of Wisconsin Extension Fact Sheet*, December 2005.

³⁹ Gio BRAIDOTTI, "Surprise Salt Gene Find for Durum," *Ground Cover* 69 (July-August 2007) 19; Romola DAVENPORT et al., "Control of Sodium Transport in Durum Wheat," *Plant Physiology* 137, no. 3 (2005), 807-818.

⁴⁰ R. J. W. GARTNER and G. M. MURPHY, "Evidence of Low Sodium Status in Beef Cattle Grazing Colonia Guinea Grass Pasture," *Proceedings of the Australian Society for Animal Production* 10 (1974) 95-98, here 95, 98.

Social voles (*Microtus socialis*) have been present in Bashan since the Late Pleistocene.⁴¹ “During winter 1985 the vole population density in the Golan peaked and almost all grazing was eliminated. The damage to cattle ranchers was considerable, because additional fodder had to be provided for the cattle.”⁴² The ancient Golan was full of predators, including jungle cats (*Felis chaus*) and Asiatic jackal (*Canis aureus*).⁴³ Predation from the latter even today is “claimed by some farmers to be as high as 10% of all calves born.”⁴⁴

So if they are not bovids, what might the “Bulls of Bashan” be? We can begin an answer with a look at Bashan. Bashan is often mentioned with its ruler, King Og (Num 21:33; Deut 1:4; 3:1-3, 13; 4:47; Josh 9:10). Og is a giant (Deut. 3:11), the last of the Rephaim, and Bashan is called the Land of Rephaim (Deut 3: 11, 13; Josh 12:4-5; 13:12).⁴⁵ Og’s cities are listed as Edrei and Ashtaroth (Deut 1:4; Num 21:33; Josh 12:4; 13:12).

The Rephaim probably represent the spirits of the dead kings, both in the Bible (Ps 88:11 [10]; Prov 2:18; Isa 14:9-11; 26:14, 19; Job 26:5; LXX 2 Sam 5:18, 22) and at Ugarit (KTU 1.15 iii 2-4, 13-15; KTU 1.108 i 1; KTU 1.20 i 1-3; KTU 1.161 R 2-3, 8-12; KTU 1.6 vi 47-53).⁴⁶ Remarkably, the Rephaim at Ugarit are linked to the exact same cities as Og is

⁴¹ Narges HASHEMI and Jamshid DARVISH, “Rodents and Lagomorphs Remains from Late Pleistocene and Early Holocene Caves and Rockshelter Sites in the Zagros Region, Iran,” *Iranian Journal of Animal Biosystematics* 1 (2006).

⁴² Yoram YOM-TOV, Shoshana ASHKENAZI and Omer VINER, “Cattle Predation by the Golden Jackal in the Golan Heights, Israel,” *Biological Conservation* 73 (1995) 19-22, here 19.

⁴³ DA HOOIJER, “The Fossil Vertebrates of Ksar’Akil, a Palaeolithic Rock Shelter in the Lebanon,” *Zoologische Verhandelingen* 49, no. 1 (1961) 1-68; Nimrod MAROM and Guy BAR-OZ, ““Measure for Measure”: A Taphonomic Reconsideration of the Kebaran Site of Ein Gev I, Israel,” *Journal of Archaeological Science* 35, no. 2 (2008), 214-227.

⁴⁴ Yom-Tov, Ashkenazi and Viner, “Cattle Predation,” 19-22. Actual predation numbers are closer to 1.5-1.9%; *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴⁵ If the translation is correct, an early 5th-century BC tomb inscription from Byblos summons “The Powerful Og” against anyone who would disturb the dead person’s remains (Byblos 13.2), replacing the term Rephaim in similarly formatted Phoenician tomb inscriptions Tabnith and Eshmunazzar (KAI 13.8 and 14.8); Wolfgang RÖLLING, “Eine Neu Phoenizische Inschrift Aus Byblos,” in *Neue Ephemeris für Semitische Epigraphik*, Vol. 2, (1974) 1-15, here 2.

⁴⁶ Nick WYATT, “À la recherche des Rephaïm perdus,” in *The Archaeology of Myth*, ed. Nick WYATT (London: Equinox, 2010) 76; Pierre BORDREUIL, “Ugarit and the Bible: New Data from the House of Urtenu,” in *Ugarit at Seventy-Five*, ed. K. Lawson YOUNGER (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2007) 89-99, here 89-91; SANG Youl Cho, *Lesser Deities in the Ugaritic Texts and the Hebrew Bible*, Vol. 2 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2007) 220.

given in the Bible – Athtarat and Edrei (KTU 1.108).⁴⁷ Both locations are on the eastern edge of the Bashan. Ashtaroth, Ugaritic Athtarat, is probably Tell el-Ashtereh (M.R. 175.096);⁴⁸ Edrei is Daraa.⁴⁹ And the Rephaim can be bulls: KTU 1.161 gives the “Ancient Rephaim... Rephaim of the Underworld” (lines 8-9) the title “Bull Eternal” in lines 7 and 24.⁵⁰

The term “Bashan” itself can be equated with the Ugaritic *bṯn* (cf. Akk. *bašmu*, Aram. *ptn*, Arab. *bathan*; *KB*³ 1.165), which is used to describe Yamm/Leviathan in KTU 1.5 i.2.⁵¹ In Ps 68:23 [22], Bashan is in parallel with Yamm.⁵² God himself lives on Mount Bashan in verse 15 [16].⁵³ Del Olmo Lete perhaps pushes things too far in arguing that Bashan was the Canaanite “hell.”⁵⁴ But a final link between the Bashan region and

⁴⁷ Ashtaroth and Edrei, which Bible and Ugarit agree are Rephaim cities, belong to Og in the Bible and to *Rāpi’u*, “king of eternity” and head of the Rephaim in KTU 1.108, identical to *Milku* (KTU 1.100:40-41 and 1.107:42’), since *Milku* lives at Ashtaroth in KTU 1.100:41; Dennis PARDEE, *Ritual and Cult at Ugarit*, Vol. 10 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002) 204-205. Margalit’s view that KTU 1.108.2b-3a translates “El sits enthroned in Ashtoreth, El rules in Edrei” is to be rejected for multiple reasons; John DAY, “Ashtaroth,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel FREEDMAN (New York: Doubleday, 1992).

⁴⁸ Yoel ELITZUR, *Ancient Place Names in the Holy Land* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2004) 253 n.10; Goren, Finkelstein and Na’aman, *Inscribed in Clay* 218.

⁴⁹ Juha PAKKALA, “What do we Know about Geshur?” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 24 (2010) 155-173; T. FOURNET and Thomas M. WEBER, “Adraha (Deraa) Romain et Byzantine,” in *Hauran V* 191 (Beirut: Presses de l’IFPO, 2010) 172-197, here 183; Gunnar LEHMANN, *Bibliographie Der Archäologische Fundstellen und Surveys in Syrien und Libanon* (Rahden: Verlag Marie Leidorf, 2002) 281.

⁵⁰ The translation of the second word, *‘lmm*, as “eternal” is debatable, but the first term, “bull” is clear.

⁵¹ J. A. CHARLESWORTH, “Bashan, Symbolism, Haplography, and Theology in Psalm 68,” in *David and Zion*, eds. B. BATTO and K. L. ROBERTS (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2004) 351-372, here 355-56, 358.

⁵² Maria Luisa Mayer MODENA, “Il Tabu Linguistico e Alcune Denominazioni del Serpente in Semitico,” *Acme* 35 (1982) 173-190, here 183. Strictly, Bashan is in parallel not with Yamm but with the “depths,” מַצְלוֹת; Nick WYATT, “‘Water, Water Everywhere...’: Musings on the Aqueous Myths of the Near East,” in *De la Tabula a la Inteligencia Artificial* (Madrid: CSIC, 2003) 189-237, here 223.

⁵³ Charlesworth, “Bashan, Symbolism,” 362; J. H. EATON, *The Psalms* (New York: T & T Clark, 2003) 249. John Day believes this use of geographical Bashan eliminates any possibility of translating Mt. Bashan as “Serpent Mountain,” noting that *bṯn* already enters Hebrew as פִּתּוֹן (e.g., Ps 91:13, in parallel with תַּנִּין; cf. Arab. *baṭanun*; Day 1985:115). But common sources can often lead to two ulterior forms in a second language; Wyatt, “Water,” 222; Curtis, “Har-Basan,” 89, and there is no reason to think that “Bashan” is Hebrew in any case; Wyatt, “Water.” Moreover, Deut 33:22, which says Dan springs forth from Bashan, uses an oddly sea-serpentesque verb בָּקַע, hardly what one expects of the “whelp of a lion,” while Gen 49:17 actually calls Dan a serpent (both נָחָשׁ and שָׂפִיץ); Wyatt, “Water” 216; Curtis, “Har-Basan,” 91.

⁵⁴ del Olmo Lete, “Basan O El ‘Infierno’ Cananeo,” 51-60.

Baal in particular is the probable mention of Lake Hula as *tmq* in KTU 1.10 ii 6-12, a place “abounding in bulls” where Baal hunts (but not the *tmk* in KTU 1.22 i 17).⁵⁵

So Bashan is an abode of the dead and other monsters in Ugaritic and biblical tradition, including probably the “Legion” of demons Jesus encounters there in Mark 5 (pars. Matthew 8; Luke 8). There are a few links to Baal, but Barstad perhaps makes too much of them. It is, after all, El who is a bull at Ugarit, not Baal. Nevertheless, as Michael Rice writes, “From late Upper Paleolithic times to the end of antiquity the bull is always honoured as a divine creature, as the manifestation of a god or as the witness of a god’s presence.”⁵⁶ The connection Jacobs and del Olmo Lete draw to Yahweh are not unreasonable, given both Jeroboam’s bulls (1 Kings 12), one of which is at Dan not far from Bashan, and the golden bull calf of Exodus 32, and the semantic connections between the two many have noted.⁵⁷ Schaeffer, Wyatt, and others have argued that Jeroboam’s bull is El.⁵⁸

Not all is lost for Baal, however. KTU 1.12 ii.54-56 likens Baal to a *tor* and an *‘abir*. Anat and Baal give birth to an *abir* in KTU 1.10 iii.35-37. Baal of Ugarit is the Aramean Haddad the storm god, who is depicted as a bull on seals found throughout the Aramaized Neo-Hittite kingdoms.⁵⁹ And behind Aramean Haddad lies the Hittite storm god, Tarhuna, represented as or on a bull,⁶⁰ as was the Hurrian storm god Teshub.⁶¹ He

⁵⁵ Wyatt, “Water,” 245 n.98; del Olmo Lete, “Basan O El ‘Infierno’ Cananeo,” 35. Aliquot combines the two identifications and dismisses both; Julien ALIQUOT, “Sanctuaries and Villages on Mt. Hermon,” in *The Variety of Local Religious Life in the Near East in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods*, ed. Ted KAIZER, 164 (Leiden: Brill, 2008) 73-96, here 85 n. 45.

⁵⁶ Michael RICE, *The Power of the Bull* (New York: Routledge, 1997) 5.

⁵⁷ Nick WYATT, “Of Calves and Kings: The Canaanite Dimension in the Religion of Israel,” in *The Mythic Mind* (London: Equinox, 2005) 72-91. Yahweh is also called a bull in P. Amherst 63, column 11.

⁵⁸ Ibid, noting the parallelism of El and Bull in Num 23:22 and 24:8.

⁵⁹ Dominik BONATZ, “The Iconography of Religion in the Hittite, Luwian, and Aramaean Kingdoms,” in *Iconography of Deities and Demons*, (2007) 10. Cf. also images from Arslan Tash (ANEP 501) and Djekke (ANEP 500). In 18th-16th century Mesopotamia, Adad is always depicted with a bull; VAN BUREN, *Symbols of the Gods in Mesopotamian Art*, Rome, Pontificium Institutum Biblicum (1945) 35.

⁶⁰ Ph. H. J. HOUWINK TEN CATE, “Hittite Storm God: His Role and his Rule According to the Hittite Cuneiform Sources,” in *Natural Phenomena: Their Meaning, Depiction, and Description in the Ancient Near East* ed. By Diederik J. W. MEIJER (Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences 1992) 108. Examples include a vase from Inandiktepe; Maciej POPKO, *Religions of Asia Minor* (Warsaw: Academic Publishers Dialog, 1995) 78.

⁶¹ Bonatz, “Iconography,” 3.

continues to be represented as a bull, as late as a Roman-period image of the god Termessus from Cappadocia.⁶² The Rephaim stand in relationship with Baal. KTU 1.22 i 8-9 calls them “Rephaim of Baal, Warriors of Baal.” KTU 1.108 juxtaposes Baal with the Rephaim in the royal blessing for Ugarit.⁶³

Direct archaeological support for theriomorphic gods in Bashan is lacking, but there is an 8th-century basalt stele from Bethsaida, on the western foot of Bashan, depicting a bull’s head atop either a pole or a human figure. It seems likely that this image belongs to the West Semitic storm god.⁶⁴ A 9th-century plaque from Tel Dan, Plaque B, depicts a bull being ridden by a god and a worshipper adoring the pair.⁶⁵

Perhaps it is enough to say the biblical authors used “Bulls of Bashan” as a multivalent term that might include spirits of the dead, giants, Baal, Legion, or even manifestations of El or Yahweh.

Finally, does this understanding of the term work in the biblical passages? Ezek 39:18 says, “You will eat the flesh of *mighty men*,” a loaded term from Genesis 6, “and drink the blood of the princes of the *aretz*,” which often means underworld⁶⁶ – “rams, lambs, male goats, and all the fattened bulls of Bashan.” It works quite well, even alongside the list of caprovids (cf. Isa 13:21; 34:14, for demonic goats). In Psalm 22, the Psalmist laments “Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me. Roaring lions that tear their prey open their mouths wide against me.” Patrick Miller identified all of these as “demonic powers who are perceived as the cause of sickness and suffering.”⁶⁷ And, as Barstad has shown, it works very well for Amos’s Cows of Bashan.

There were no famed bulls from the ranches of ancient Bashan, neither for beef nor for milk. Ancient Bashan was one of the worst possible places in ancient Israel’s environs for the raising of cattle. In the biblical tradition, as at Ugarit, Bashan is not the land of cattle but of spirits and trolls. Not bulls, but Baals.

⁶² Ibid. 12.

⁶³ Mark S. SMITH, *Poetic Heroes: The Literary Commemoration of Warriors and Warrior Culture in the Early Biblical World*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, forthcoming) 271.

⁶⁴ Tallay ORNAN, “The Bull and its Two Masters,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 51 (2001) 1-26, here 14, 23.

⁶⁵ Avraham BIRAN, “Two Bronze Plaques and the Huṣṣot of Dan,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 49 (1999) 43-54, here 54.

⁶⁶ Nick Wyatt, *The Mythic Mind* 92-101.

⁶⁷ Patrick D. MILLER, *Interpreting the Psalms* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) 105.