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Yahweh's Winged Form in the Psalms: Exploring Congruent Iconography and Texts

LeMon, Joel M

Abstract: The striking image of the winged Yahweh occurs in six psalms (e. g., Ps 17:8 “Hide me in the shadow of your wings”). Scholars have disagreed on the background, meaning, and significance of the image arguing that it: (1) likens the Israelite deity to a bird; (2) alludes to the winged sun disk; (3) draws from general Egyptian symbolism for protection; (4) evokes images of winged goddesses; or (5) refers to winged cherubim in the temple and/or on the ark of the covenant. These divergent proposals signal a need for clearer methods of interpreting biblical imagery in light of visual-artistic material from the ancient Near East. This volume refines iconographic methodologies by treating the image of the winged Yahweh as one among a constellation of literary images in each psalm. Since the portrayals of Yahweh in each psalm have distinct contours, one finds several congruencies in Syro-Palestinian iconographic material. The congruent iconographic motifs for Yahweh's winged form include (1) the winged sun disk (in multiple form and variations), (2) the Horus falcon, (3) winged suckling goddesses, and (4) winged deities in combat. No single image stands behind the portrayals of Yahweh. In fact, even within a single psalm, more than one iconographic trope can provide congruency with the literary imagery and inform the interpretation of the text. Thus, the winged Yahweh in the Psalms provides an example of a ‘multistable’ literary image, one which simultaneously evokes multiple iconographical motifs.

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Joel M. LeMon

Yahweh's Winged Form in the Psalms

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by

Susanne Bickel, Othmar Keel, Thomas C. Römer, Bernd U. Schipper,
Daniel Schwemer
and Christoph Uehlinger

About the author

Joel M. LeMon was born in Richmond, Virginia on June 25, 1976. He studied at the Shenandoah Conservatory of Music in Winchester, Virginia (1994–1998) before earning the M.Div. degree from Princeton Theological Seminary (2001) and a Ph.D. in the Hebrew Bible program at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia (2007). He is currently Assistant Professor of Old Testament at the Candler School of Theology and the Graduate Division of Religion at Emory University. He is the co-editor (with Kent Harold Richards) of *Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David L. Petersen* (Resources for Biblical Study, 56), Atlanta, Georgia: Society of Biblical Literature and Leiden: Brill, 2009).

Joel M. LeMon

Yahweh's Winged Form in the Psalms

Exploring Congruent Iconography
and Texts



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To my wife Rebekah

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Preface

This monograph is a revised version of my doctoral dissertation submitted to the faculty of the Graduate Division of Religion of Emory University (May 2007). The completion of this project has been made possible by a host of individuals. First, I must express my deep gratitude to my dissertation committee at Emory University: David L. Petersen, Brent A. Strawn, and Gay Robins. Each modeled scholarly diligence and graciousness. Moreover, at every stage of the project, they provided critical reflection and support. I must also thank Carol A. Newsom, who engaged my work at various points, both while I was a graduate student and since. I consider myself profoundly fortunate to be able to call these individuals my senior colleagues at Emory University. In truth, they will always be my teachers.

I also owe a word of thanks to other several scholars outside of Emory. Othmar Keel and Silvia Schroer graciously welcomed me during two visits to Switzerland in 2004 and 2006. I am particularly grateful for their critical engagement with my project. Thanks also go to Christoph Uehlinger for his assistance as I readied this manuscript for inclusion in OBO. My work has also been greatly enriched by my interaction with the steering committee of the Society of Biblical Literature consultation "Iconography and the Hebrew Bible": Thomas Staubli and Izaak J. de Hulster (along with Brent Strawn). Izaak de Hulster, who serves with me as a co-chair on this committee, finished his dissertation at roughly the same time as I did. My manuscript was already complete when his monograph was published earlier this year (*Iconographic Exegesis and Third Isaiah* [FAT 2/36; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009]), so, unfortunately, I have not been able to engage its results in this present volume. Likewise, the recent work of Friedhelm Hartenstein (*Das Angesicht JHWHs: Studien zu seinem höfischen und kultischen Bedeutungshintergrund in den Psalmen und in Exodus 32-34* [FAT 2/55; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008]) only came to my attention in the final stages of my preparing this manuscript for publication. While I have not been able to interact with these important works in the course of this book, I have plans to do so soon in upcoming publications.

I also owe a debt of gratitude to several institutions that supported this project. First, the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of Emory University and the Graduate Division of Religion provided substantial financial assistance, especially for summer research and travel grants to Switzerland. Second, through four years of graduate school as a John Wesley Fellow, A Foundation for Theological Education has provided both financial support and the camaraderie of a community of scholars committed to theological research and education. Third, my sincere thanks go to the Bill and Carol

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Joel M. LeMon
Autumn 2009
Atlanta

Abbreviations

<i>ABD</i>	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York, 1992
<i>ANET</i>	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> . Edited by J. B. Pritchard. 3d ed. Princeton, 1969
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AOTC	Abingdon Old Testament Commentary
ArBib	The Aramaic Bible
ASOR	American Schools of Oriental Research
BDB	Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Oxford, 1907
<i>BHS</i>	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> . Edited by K. Elliger and W. Rudolph. Stuttgart, 1983
<i>BSOAS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CC	Continental Commentaries
<i>COS</i>	<i>The Context of Scripture</i> . Edited by W. W. Hallo. 3 vols. Leiden, 1997
<i>DCH</i>	<i>Dictionary of Classical Hebrew</i> . Edited by D. J. A. Clines. Sheffield, 1993
<i>DDD</i>	<i>Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible</i> . Edited by K. van der Toorn, B. Becking, and P. W. van der Horst. Leiden, 1995
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GKC	<i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i> . Edited by E. Kautzsch. Translated by A. E. Cowley. 2d. ed. Oxford, 1910
<i>HALOT</i>	Koehler, L., W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm, <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Translated and edited under the supervision of M. E. J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden, 1994-1999
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
HKAT	Handkommentar zum Alten Testament
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs

- ICC International Critical Commentary
 IDB *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. Edited by G. A. Buttrick. 4 vols. Nashville, 1962
 IDBSup *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: Supplementary Volume*. Edited by K. Crim. Nashville, 1976
 JEA *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*
 JSOT *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
 JSOTSup *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series*
 KHC Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament
 NEchtBAT Neue Echter Bibel Altes Testament
 OBO Orbis biblicus et orientalis
 OBT Overtures to Biblical Theology
 OEAE *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*
 OEANE *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*
 OTL Old Testament Library
 PEQ *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*
 QD Quaestiones disputatae
 QDAP *Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine*
 RevQ *Revue de Qumran*
 RIA *Reallexikon der Assyriologie*. Edited by Erich Ebeling et al. Berlin, 1928–
 SBLABS Society of Biblical Literature Archaeology and Biblical Studies
 SBS Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
 SBT Studies in Biblical Theology
 STDJ *Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah*
 TDOT *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Edited by G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren. Translated by J. T. Willis, G. W. Bromiley, and D. E. Green. 8 vols. Grand Rapids, 1974–
 UBL Ugaritisch-biblische Literatur
 UF *Ugarit-Forschungen*
 VT *Vetus Testamentum*
 WBC Word Biblical Commentary
 WUANT Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Alten und Neuen Testament
 ZAW *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*
 ZBK.AT Zürcher Bibelkommentar: Altes Testament
 ZDPV *Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins*

Chapter 1

Introduction

1. Research Problem

Images of Yahweh in winged form occur in six psalms:

Ps 17:8	בְּצֵל כְּנָפֶיךָ תִּסְתַּיְרֵנִי	Hide me in the shadow of your wings.
Ps 36:8	אֱלֹהִים וּבְנֵי אָדָם בְּצֵל כְּנָפֶיךָ יִחְסִיִּן	Gods and humans seek refuge in the shadow of your wings.
Ps 57:2	וּבְצֵל־כְּנָפֶיךָ אֶחְסֶה	And in the shadow of your wings I seek refuge.
Ps 61:5	אֶחְסֶה בְּסֹתֵר כְּנָפֶיךָ	I seek refuge in the shelter of your wings.
Ps 63:8	וּבְצֵל כְּנָפֶיךָ אֲרַנֵּן	And in the shadow of your wings I shout for joy.
Ps 91:4	בְּאַבְרָתוֹ יִסֹּף לְךָ וְתַחַת־כְּנָפָיו תִּחְסֶה	With his pinions he will cover you. And under his wings you will find refuge. ¹

Though it seems clear in each of these contexts that the wings connote Yahweh's protection, scholars have disagreed widely about the background, meaning, and significance of this image.

Proposals for interpreting this image can be grouped into five categories. (1) Hermann Gunkel (followed by, e.g., Marjo C. A. Korpel and Peter C. Craigie) maintains that the image of the winged Yahweh draws directly from *common avian imagery*, with the psalms depicting Yahweh as a

¹ My translation.

mother bird.² Following this interpretation, Richard J. Clifford further suggests that the psalmists drew the avian image directly from Exodus traditions that describe Yahweh as a soaring eagle.³ (2) Louis Alexis Frederic le Mat claims that the psalmists intend to evoke the image of the *winged sun disk*,⁴ while (3) Othmar Keel, William P. Brown, and Erhard Gerstenberger argue that the image comes from *general Egyptian symbolism* for divine protection.⁵ (4) Silvia Schroer asserts that the wings evoke images of *protecting goddesses* such as Isis and Nephthys,⁶ who are famously portrayed in the eighth-century Samarian ivories (fig. 1.1).⁷ Finally, (5) Artur Weiser, Hans-Joachim Kraus, and Marvin E. Tate each maintain that the wings of Yahweh in the psalms refer directly to *the winged cherubim* of the temple in Jerusalem.⁸

² Hermann Gunkel, *Die Psalmen* (HKAT; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1926), 57–59; Marjo C. A. Korpel, *A Rift in the Clouds: Ugaritic and Hebrew Descriptions of the Divine* (UBL 8; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1990), 550; Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50* (WBC 19; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1983), 292; Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (trans. David Eaton and James E. Duguid; New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1883), 298.

³ See Exod 19:4; Deut 32:10–12. Richard J. Clifford, *Psalms 73–150* (AOTC; Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 103.

⁴ Louis Alexis Frederic le Mat, *Textual Criticism and Exegesis of Psalm XXXVI: A Contribution to the Study of the Hebrew Book of Psalms* (Studia Theologica Rheno-Traiectina: Disputationes Instituti Theologici in Universitate Rheno-Traiectina conditi 3; Utrecht: Kemink, 1957), 23.

⁵ Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms* (trans. Timothy J. Hallett; New York: Crossroads, 1985), 192; William P. Brown, *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 21. Erhard Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 1: With an Introduction to Cultic Poetry* (FOTL 14; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987), 230.

⁶ Silvia Schroer, "Im Schatten deiner Flügel: Religionsgeschichtliche und feministische Blicke auf die Metaphorik der Flügel Gottes in den Psalmen, in Ex 19:4; Dtn 32:11 und in Mal 3:20," in "Ihr Völker alle, klatscht in die Hände!": *Festschrift für Erhard S. Gerstenberger zum 65. Geburtstag* (ed. Rainer Kessler et al.; Exegese in unserer Zeit: Kontextuelle Bibelinterpretationen aus lateinamerikanischer und feministischer Sicht 3; Münster: LIT, 1997), 296–316.

⁷ On these and other ivories, see J. W. Crowfoot and Grace M. Crowfoot, *Early Ivories from Samaria (Somaria-Sebaste): Reports from the Work of the Joint Expedition in 1931–1933 and of the British Expedition in 1935, No. 2* (London: Palestine Exploration Fund, 1938).

⁸ Artur Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 181; Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1–59* (CC; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 249; Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100* (WBC 20; Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 78. So also, earlier, Charles Augustus Briggs and Emilie Grace Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Repr. ed. [1st ed. 1906], ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960), 1:130. Nota-

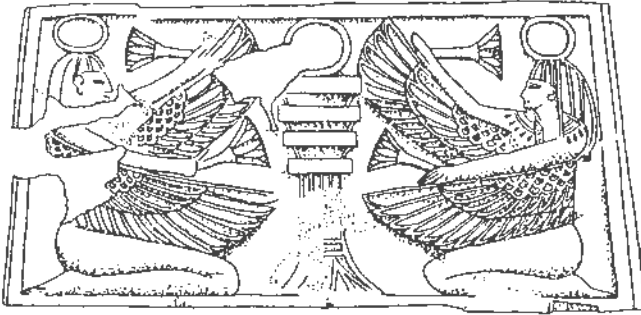


Fig. 1.1. Ivory; Samaria; Iron Age IIB. After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 243.

These different assessments of the origin and background of the image of Yahweh's wings directly affect the interpretation of the image itself and the psalms in which it appears. Weiser's argument offers a prime example. For him, the wings in Ps 17 represent the winged cherubim on the mercy seat of the ark.⁹ The cherubim, in turn, represent the "chariot" of Yahweh—the cloud through which God appeared at Mount Sinai.¹⁰ The image of the wings in the psalm thus belongs to the tradition of the theophany and its celebration at the "covenant festival of Yahweh."¹¹ This cultic situation, according to Weiser, is the *Sitz im Leben* for the "vast majority of the individual psalms."¹²

Though Kraus agrees that the wings belong to cherubim, he claims that the psalms describe the refuge that the temple afforded, rather than a par-

bly, Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger list three possibilities for understanding the image—the winged sun disk, the cherubim, and a mother bird—without favoring one over the others (*Die Psalmen I: Psalm 1–50* [NEchtB 29; Würzburg: Echter, 1993], 117).

⁹ Weiser, *The Psalms*, 181.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 35. Weiser continues: "the hymns describing theophany, which are incorporated in psalms of diverse types, have retained the archaic and mythological colours of the first theophany at Sinai, and are to be understood as reflections of the cultic theophany of Yahweh which took place above the cherubim of the sacred ark, representing the cloud which was the chariot of the Deity" (*ibid.*, 39). I offer a thorough critique of Weiser's view in ch. 2. Let it suffice at this point to highlight briefly the circularity of Weiser's argument. For these psalms, Weiser reconstructs a cultic scenario for which there is little external evidence and then co-opts ambiguous and/or polyvalent imagery within the psalm (such as the "wings of Yahweh") as proof of the psalms' *Sitz im Leben*.

ticular festival celebrating Yahweh's appearance.¹³ Le Mat, by contrast, argues that the wing image is a figure of speech deriving from the image of the winged sun disk. Against Weiser and Kraus, le Mat claims that the wings of the cherubim are not the same as the wings of Yahweh. Thus, the image supports neither a setting in the covenant festival of Yahweh nor a setting in the temple as a place of refuge.¹⁴ Clifford also rejects the cult and temple setting and argues against the interpretation of the sun disk as well, stating that "solar elements were not prominent in Yahwistic religion."¹⁵ Instead, he claims that the image derives from nature, with Yahweh being depicted as a mother bird. As such, the image alludes to the traditions of Yahweh guiding Israel out of Egypt and through the wilderness as described in the avian imagery of Exod 19:4; Deut 32:10–12.¹⁶ By contrast, Schroer's interpretation suggests that the wing image highlights uniquely feminine aspects of Yahweh.¹⁷

After reviewing these proposals, one can identify essentially three different ways that scholars understand the psalmic references to Yahweh's wings. I pose them as questions. Should one understand the wings of Yahweh in the psalms as an aspect of a divine image, with the wings evoking a particular representation of the deity such as a winged sun god? Rather, are the wings a metonym, referring *pars pro toto* to the temple or ark itself? Or, finally, might the image best and most simply be understood as a conceptual metaphor, namely, YAHWEH IS A BIRD?¹⁸

On this final possibility, one should note that since Aristotle's *Poetics*, scholars have labored to define the nature and function of metaphors.¹⁹

¹³ Kraus, *Psalms 1* 59, 249.

¹⁴ Le Mat, *Textual Criticism*, 23.

¹⁵ Clifford, *Psalms 1* 72, 270. For comprehensive arguments to the contrary, that Yahwistic religion did have clear, prominent "solar elements," see, e.g., J. Glen Taylor, *Yahweh and the Sun: Biblical and Archaeological Evidence for Sun Worship in Ancient Israel* (JSOTSup 111; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993); Hans-Peter Stähli, *Solare Elemente im Jahweglauben des Alten Testaments* (OBO 66; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1985).

¹⁶ Clifford, *Psalms 73–150*, 103.

¹⁷ Schroer, "Im Schatten deiner Flügel," 296.

¹⁸ Following the conventions of cognitive linguistics, conceptual metaphors can be characterized through the formula: CONCEPTUAL DOMAIN (A) IS CONCEPTUAL DOMAIN (B) (so, Zoltán Kövecses, *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002], 4). For numerous worked examples of this formula, see George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 3–6.

¹⁹ Among the most influential works in the last half-century are Max Black, *Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1962); I. A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford University Press,

Able summaries of this large body of theoretical literature on metaphor as it relates to biblical studies appear in works by Marc Zvi Brettler, Marjo C. A. Korpel, Martin Klingbeil, and Brent A. Strawn.²⁰ The works of Klingbeil and Strawn are particularly relevant to the present study, for they have each argued specifically and persuasively for the appropriateness of using iconographic data in the interpretation of biblical metaphors.

In Klingbeil's study of "warrior-" and "god of heaven imagery," he identifies a series of metaphors and sub-metaphors for God in the Psalms. He has isolated 507 occurrences of metaphorical language for God, which he then groups into seventeen categories (e.g., God of heaven, God as warrior, God as king, God as rock, God as judge, etc.).²¹ Further, each category contains a series of sub-metaphors. For example, the sub-metaphors for "God as Warrior" include "shooting arrows" and "breaking the arm of the wicked." Klingbeil intends to identify the iconography that interacts with and illumines the larger "God as warrior" and "God of heaven" metaphors by identifying artistic depictions of the various sub-metaphors.

Strawn's study of leonine imagery in the Hebrew Bible and the ancient Near East presumes that the conceptual metaphor GOD IS A LION lies behind the various ways in which Yahweh is depicted using leonine imagery throughout the Hebrew Bible. Strawn emphasizes the point that metaphors are "contextually conditioned," that is, semantic and cultural contexts have an impact on the "construct, reception, and interpretation of a metaphor."²² If the modern reader and ancient writer do not share a common knowledge of the subject of the metaphor and the set of associations it evokes, then, according to Strawn, "the full significance of the user's metaphor may be

1965); Paul Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language* (University of Toronto Romance Series 37; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977); George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*; Earl R. Mac Cormac, *A Cognitive Theory of Metaphor* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985); Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985); George Lakoff and Mark Turner, *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Paul D. L. Avis, *God and the Creative Imagination: Metaphor, Symbol and Myth in Religion and Theology* (London: Routledge, 1999).

²⁰ Marc Zvi Brettler, *God is King: Understanding an Israelite Metaphor* (JSOTSup 76; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 17–28; Korpel, *A Rift in the Clouds*, 1–87; Martin Klingbeil, *Yahweh Fighting from Heaven: God as Warrior and as God of Heaven in the Hebrew Psalter and Ancient Near Eastern Iconography* (OBO 169; Fribourg: University Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1999), 9–27; Brent A. Strawn, *What is Stronger than a Lion? Leonine Image and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (OBO 212; Fribourg: Academic Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), 1–22.

²¹ Klingbeil, *Yahweh Fighting from Heaven*, 28–34.

²² Strawn, *What is Stronger*, 10.

lost to (and on) the receiver.”²³ William P. Brown makes a similar point using George Lakoff and Mark Turner’s terminology of “target” and “source” domains.²⁴ He writes: “For a metaphor to work, an understanding of both domains is presupposed. There must be a correspondence between the metaphor and its target domain that is recognized by both poet and reader; otherwise, the metaphor remains idiosyncratic and indecipherable.”²⁵ Both Brown and Strawn advocate bridging the gap between ancient writer and modern reader by means of careful analysis of material culture—both textual and non-textual (i.e., iconographical) material.²⁶

If a metaphor is indeed at work in the image of the winged Yahweh, an investigation should focus on the ways in which Yahweh and birds interact to create meaning within the literary context of each psalm. Yet ancient Near Eastern iconography complicates this project because of the many artistic contexts in which wings occur. Wings on birds constitute but a fraction of the number of wings in ancient Near Eastern art. Just one artifact from Syria-Palestine illustrates the difficulty of appropriating iconographic material to the interpretation of Yahweh’s winged form. The famous Megiddo ivory (fig. 1.2) depicts a scene in which wings appear pervasively. The tableau might well support three different ways of interpreting the image of the winged Yahweh: metaphor, metonym, and divine image.



Fig. 1.2. Ivory Plaque; Megiddo; Late Bronze Age. After Loud, *The Megiddo Ivories*, pl. 4, 2a and 2b.

Three (winged) birds appear in this scene around the throne of the royal figure: one under the seat and two in flight (before and behind the throne). Does the image of Yahweh’s wings come from such “naturalistic” depic-

²³ *Ibid.*, 13. He writes: “Only by understanding the user’s sign-context, at least at some minimal level, can the receiver make sense of and appreciate the content or tenor of the metaphor in a way analogous to the user” (Strawn, *What is Stronger*, 18).

²⁴ For example, in the conceptual metaphor TIME IS A THIEF, TIME is the target domain, and A THIEF is the source domain (Lakoff and Turner, *More than Cool Reason*, 38).

²⁵ William P. Brown, *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 6.

²⁶ Strawn, *What is Stronger*, 20.

tions of birds? Wings also appear as an aspect of a divine image, namely, the sun disk suspended above the triumphant one in his chariot. Does Yahweh's winged form reflect this image? Finally, wings appear on a cherub adorning the throne of the royal figure. Might Yahweh's wings refer to a similar representation of Yahweh's cherubim throne in the temple? To which of these iconographic motifs, if any, does the verbal image of Yahweh's wings *most closely* relate?

The Megiddo ivory plaque leaves one with a number of questions about the points of connection between Yahweh's winged form and iconographic representations of wings. The questions multiply when one explores all the depictions of wings in Syro-Palestinian art. The diversity of options for interpreting the image of winged Yahweh presents a methodological problem. While contemporary scholarship increasingly affirms the importance of iconographic approaches to biblical texts, a clear method for utilizing ancient Near Eastern images has yet to emerge.

2. Iconographic Methodologies

The study of iconography, which has gained currency among biblical scholars since the 1970s, was first sparked by the publication of Othmar Keel's *Die Welt der altorientalischen Bildsymbolik und das Alte Testament: Am Beispiel der Psalmen*²⁷ and has been subsequently fanned by the many publications of Keel; his students and colleagues at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland (often called the "Fribourg School");²⁸ and a growing cohort of scholars across the world.²⁹ In his *Anchor Bible Dictionary* entry "Iconography and the Bible," Keel defines iconography as "the study of artistic subject matter or content (as opposed to artistic techniques and styles)."³⁰ He continues, "Iconography therefore strives to describe the appearance, development, and disappearance of certain motifs and compositions, or the

²⁷ Zürich: Benziger, 1972; first published in English translation in 1985 as *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms* (trans. Timothy J. Hallett; repr.; Winona Lake, Ind.; Eisenbrauns, 1997).

²⁸ This "school" includes Urs Winter, Sylvia Schroer, Thomas Staubli, Izak Cornelius, and Christoph Uehlinger, among others. On the contributions of the Fribourg School, see comments by Theodore J. Lewis, "Syro-Palestinian Iconography and Divine Images," in *Cult Image and Divine Representation in the Ancient Near East* (ed. Neal H. Walls; ASOR Books; Boston: ASOR, 2005), 69–104.

²⁹ For example, Theodore Lewis, "Syro-Palestinian Iconography and Divine Images," Strawn, *What is Stronger*; K. van der Toorn, *The Image and the Book: Iconic Cults, Aniconism, and the Rise of Book Religion in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (CBET 21; Leuven: Peeters, 1997).

³⁰ Othmar Keel, "Iconography and the Bible," in *ABD* 3:357–74; citation from 357.

substitution of one artistic form by another.”³¹ Following this broad definition, Keel traces the use of ancient Near Eastern iconography by biblical interpreters beginning in the nineteenth century. These early scholars focused their inquiries on monumental art—objects that, almost without exception, were located outside the region of Syria-Palestine. Keel argues that this material, at best, can provide merely “historical illustrations of the Bible.”³² By contrast, he counts his own work,³³ as well as that of Silvia Schroer³⁴ and Urs Winter,³⁵ as a marked turn toward the study of the miniature art of Syria-Palestine, including scarabs, seals, bullae, jar handles, cult stands, and ivories. These items often bear motifs similar to those found on monumental art, but are more valuable to the biblical scholar since the populations of Syro-Palestine handled them daily. In sum, they provide insight into the cultural milieu from which the biblical texts arose.³⁶

As a relatively new venture within biblical and ancient Near Eastern studies, Keel, the “Fribourg School,” and a number of other scholars have liberally applied the rubric “iconographic study” to a variety of pursuits. Even so, one could distill these studies over the past thirty years into three related subfields, each motivated by a different question.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 359.

³³ See especially, e.g., Othmar Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen und Siegelkunst: Eine neue Deutung der Majestätsschilderungen in Jes 6, Ez 1 und 10 und Sach 4* (SBS 84/85; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1977); idem, *Jahwes Entgegnung an Ijob: Eine Deutung von Ijob 38–41 vor dem Hintergrund der zeitgenössischen Bildkunst* (FRLANT 121; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978); Othmar Keel and Silvia Schroer, *Studien zu den Stempelsiegeln aus Palästina/Israel* (OBO 67; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985).

³⁴ Silvia Schroer, *In Israel gab es Bilder: Nachrichten von darstellender Kunst im Alten Testament* (OBO 74; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987).

³⁵ Urs Winter, *Frau und Göttin: Exegetische und ikonographische Studien zum weiblichen Gottesbild im Alten Israel und in dessen Umwelt* (OBO 53; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983).

³⁶ Because many of these items were transported easily, they were also effective media for carrying ideas across vast areas. See Christoph Uehlinger, *Images as Media: Sources for the Cultural History of the Near East and the Eastern Mediterranean: 1st Millennium BCE* (OBO 175; Fribourg: University Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000); Christoph Uehlinger, Othmar Keel, and Madeleine Gasser, *Altorientalische Miniaturkunst: Die ältesten visuellen Massenkommunikationsmittel: Ein Blick in die Sammlungen des Biblischen Instituts der Universität Freiburg Schweiz* (Rev. ed.; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996).

1. *The iconographic-artistic approach.* How does one discern the meaning/significance of an ancient Near Eastern image?
2. *The iconographic-historical approach.* How does one reconstruct ancient Near Eastern history (and religion) with the help of these images?
3. *The iconographic-biblical approach.* How can the images inform readings of particular biblical texts?³⁷

The first question spurs the study of iconography *qua* iconography—what might be called the *iconographic-artistic approach*.³⁸ Scholars engaged in this pursuit presume that each ancient Near Eastern image (i.e., artistic motif) can convey different meanings depending on the contexts in which it is found. The focus of the present study, the motif of “wings,” well illustrates this polyvalence of images. According to H. D. Schneider, for example, when feathers cloak a statue of Ptah (fig. 1.3), the wings symbolize the emergence of new life and cosmic order, in that they represent the goddess of order, Ma’at. Thus the winged Ptah is to be understood as the “Lord of Order.”³⁹ Alternately, when wings appear on a sun disk with a

³⁷ Keel has contributed studies that can be understood as lying within each of these of subfields, though, in his own writing, he acknowledges no distinction between the three types of iconographic pursuits.

³⁸ Edith Porada (cf. Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati et al., eds., *Insight through Images: Studies in Honor of Edith Porada* [Bibliotheca Mesopotamica 21; Malibu, Calif.: Undena Publications, 1986]; Edith Porada, *Man and Images in the Ancient Near East* [1st ed.; Anshen Transdisciplinary Lectureships in Art, Science, and the Philosophy of Culture 4; Wakefield, R.I.: Moyer Bell, 1995]) and Pirhiya Beck (*Imagery and Representation: Studies in the Art and Iconography of Ancient Palestine, Collected Articles* [Journal of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University Occasional Publications 3; Tel Aviv: Emery and Claire Yass Publications in Archaeology, 2002]) have provided seminal examples of this approach. See also Othmar Keel, *Corpus der Stempelsiegel-Anulette aus Palästina/Israel: Von den Anfängen bis zur Perserzeit* (OBO Series Archaeologica 10 & 13; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995); Benjamin Sass and Christoph Uehlinger, eds., *Studies in the Iconography of Northwest Semitic Inscribed Seals: Proceedings of a Symposium Held in Fribourg on April 17-20, 1991* (OBO 125; Fribourg: University Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993); Christoph Uehlinger, ed., *Images as Media*.

³⁹ H.D. Schneider writes, “the winged garment is a materialization of the indissoluble cohesion between Ptah the Lord of Ma’at and this [winged] goddess” (“Ptah in Wings,” in *Essays on Ancient Egypt in Honour of Herman te Velde* [ed. Jacobus van Dijk; Egyptological Memoirs 1; Groningen: Styx, 1997], 297).

human figure drawing a a bow, the wings can convey a sense of movement, aggression, and divine protection of the king (fig. 1.4).⁴⁰



Fig. 1.3. Faience Statuette; 19th Dynasty Egypt. Cf. Schneider, "Ptah in Wings," fig. 1.

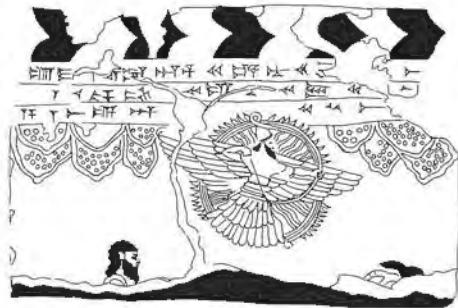


Fig. 1.4. Glazed tile of Tukulti Ninurta II; 888–884 B.C.E. After Keel, *Die Welt der altorientalischen Bildsymbolik*, Abb. 295.

The various representations of caprids provide a further example of the polyvalence of an artistic motif. A common scene on Palestinian Iron Age IIB seals depicts caprids flanking a person, widely understood as an image of the "Lord of the Animals" (fig. 1.5).⁴¹ According to Keel and Uehlinger, in this artistic context, the caprids represent the entire animal world mastered by the human in the center of the scene.⁴² Yet when caprids appear flanking a stylized tree, as in the Kuntillet 'Ajrud pithos A (also Iron Age IIB, fig. 1.6), Keel and Uehlinger offer another assessment of these animals based on the different artistic context found there. In pithos A, they argue, the caprids symbolize blessing and fertility since they surround and feed on a tree, a classic representation of the mother goddess.⁴³ Keel and Uehlinger offer yet another interpretation of the animal when it appears in a cylinder seal from Beth Shean (late eighth / early seventh century B.C.E.). In this seal an archer takes aim at a leaping caprid (fig. 1.7), and Keel and Uehlinger consider the two figures as one of several "star signs" on the seal, possibly representing the astral constellation Sagittarius.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Cf. Klingbeil, *Yahweh Fighting*, 260.

⁴¹ Keel claims this motif appears *textually* in Job 38 (*Jahwes Entgegnung an Ijob*).

⁴² Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 182 (hereafter *GGG*).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 294 n. 6.



Fig. 1.5 Seals; Israel/Palestine; Iron Age IIB. After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, Fig. 196a, b, 197a.

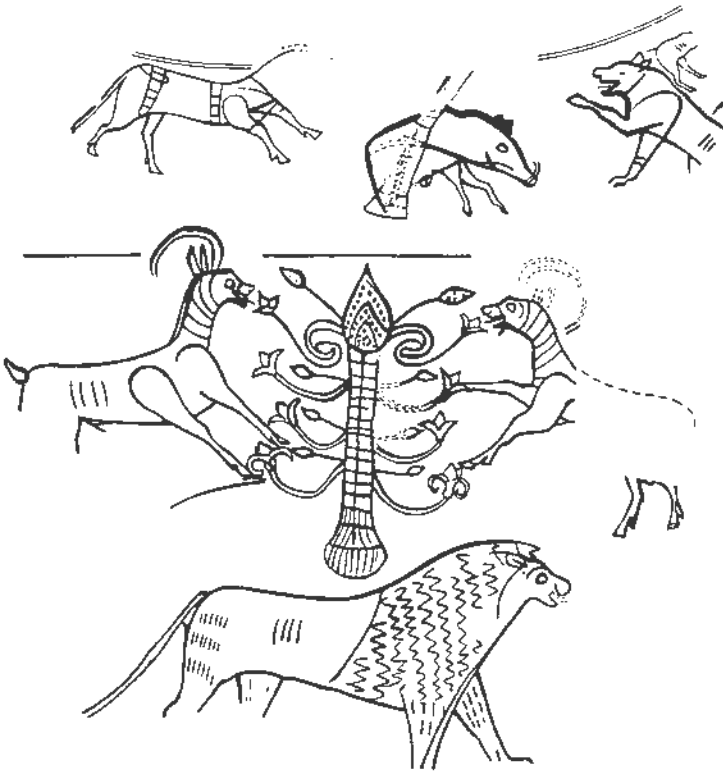


Fig. 1.6. Pithos A; Kuntillet 'Ajrud; Iron Age IIB. After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 219.

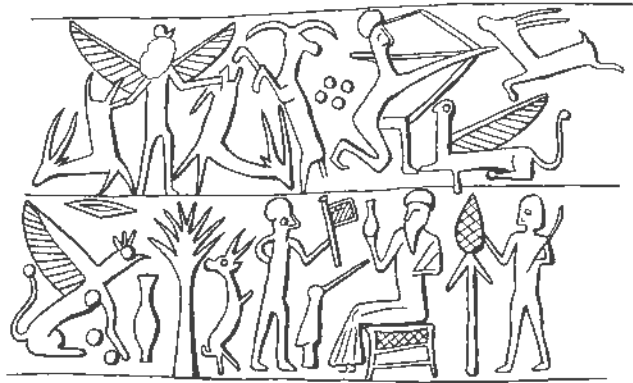


Fig. 1.7. Cylinder Seal; Beth-Shean; Iron Age IIC. After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 308.

As these examples show, according to the iconographic-artistic approach, an image should be understood *within its artistic context*; as contexts change, the meaning and significance of the image will also change. Keel and Uehlinger designate this relationship between individual images as the “iconographical syntax” or the “constellation” of a scene.⁴⁵

The second type of iconographic approach employs iconography for the reconstruction of ancient Near Eastern history and cultural phenomena, the *iconographic-historical approach*. Uehlinger’s recent study of the Lachish reliefs provides a model for this mode of investigation.⁴⁶ He treats the famous reliefs as a “pictorial narrative”⁴⁷ that must be “read for itself”⁴⁸ according to the principles and conventions of Assyrian art, and he argues against those who would treat the material like photographs in a newspaper, that is, “convenient illustrations but not truly independent and complementary historical sources.”⁴⁹ Uehlinger’s primary goal is to treat the reliefs as a unique historical voice, standing alongside archaeological, textual, and bib-

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 22–23. Keel and Uehlinger’s approach to interpreting images within their iconographical syntaxes roughly corresponds to Eleanor Ferris Beach’s five guidelines for interpreting iconography (“Image and Word: Iconology in the Interpretation of Hebrew Scriptures” [Ph.D. diss., Claremont Graduate University, 1991], 92).

⁴⁶ Christoph Uehlinger, “Clio in a World of Pictures—Another Look at the Lachish Reliefs from Sennacherib’s Southwest Palace at Nineveh,” in *Like a Bird in a Cage: The Invasion of Sennacherib in 701 BCE* (ed. Lester L. Grabbe; JSOTSup 363; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 221–305.

⁴⁷ Uehlinger, “Clio in a World of Pictures,” 275.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 244.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

lical sources, which can contribute to a better understanding of Sennacherib's campaign against Judah.

A related goal governs Keel and Uehlinger's *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*.⁵⁰ In this prime example of the iconographical-historical approach, the authors' aim is not to enrich the understanding of a particular historical event, but rather to track the development (i.e., *the history*) of religious traditions in Syria-Palestine using iconography as a primary source of data.⁵¹

The authors maintain that iconography reflects political, social, and religious realities of a given period. Thus, iconography can be "read" to determine the discrete symbolic systems that underlie individual periods of Syro-Palestinian history. Further, an analysis of the changes in the artistic record informs an understanding of the development of Israelite religion.⁵² For example, based on the prevalence of winged solar disks and four-winged scarabs on the royal seals during Iron Age IIB, Keel and Uehlinger conclude that, during this period, Yahweh was likely known and depicted as a sun god—the divine sponsor of the Davidic Kingdom.⁵³ The relative infrequency of these depictions in a subsequent period, Iron Age IIC, reveals a marked change in the contours of Israelite religion at that time. Keel and Uehlinger write:

Stamp seal glyptic art of the period is characterized by a preference for showing the divinities in the form of their cultic symbol rather than in anthropomorphic form or in their actual astral manifestation.... This probably expressed an awareness of the remoteness of the deity and the desire to represent the distant deities in the symbol of their cult-transmitted accessible form.⁵⁴

On the basis of iconography, Keel and Uehlinger characterize the religious systems for each archaeological period from Middle Bronze Age IIB to Iron Age III. They assign descriptive titles to the periods that relay the dominant iconographical conventions and religious contours, such as "Interaction of the Sexes in Middle Bronze Age IIB" and "Political and Warrior Deities Take the Upper Hand in Late Bronze Age."⁵⁵

In *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of Gods*, Keel and Uehlinger intend to reconstruct religious history largely irrespective of biblical texts. However,

⁵⁰ Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, 7–9.

⁵¹ A similar goal obtains for Theodore J. Lewis, "Syro-Palestinian Iconography and Divine Images."

⁵² Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, 7–9.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 401.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 402.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 397.

in the third iconographic approach, the *iconographic-biblical approach*, one consults ancient Near Eastern iconography for the express purpose of interpreting the Bible's literary imagery and figurative language, especially metaphors. Among the most significant studies within the iconographic-biblical approach are Keel's studies of the Psalms, Job, and the Song of Songs;⁵⁶ Klingbeil's investigation of "warrior-" and "god of heaven imagery" in the Psalms; Strawn's examination of leonine imagery; and Brown's metaphorical lexicon of the Psalms.⁵⁷ The present investigation of the image of the winged Yahweh in the Psalms falls within this third iconographic approach. In it, I build upon the methodological advances achieved by these scholars.

Most authors using the iconographic-biblical approach have attempted to avoid a methodological error that has marked many studies of ancient Near Eastern images, namely, "fragmentation," which Keel describes in this way:

Fragmentation ... followed by many biblical scholars, is still typically the way in which Egyptian and Assyrian pictures are presented in illustrating biblical civilization. Very seldom is an entire relief or a complete wall painting reproduced. Usually particular kinds of agricultural activity, specific cult utensils, or single musical instruments are selected for illustration. This is legitimate for those interested in material culture in a narrow sense.... Under such fragmentization the sociological aspect of the pictures is not revealed.... For example, when the great relief of the conquest of Lachish by Sennacherib serves to illustrate "battering rams," "women's clothes," and "wagon types" (K. Galling in *Biblisches Reallexikon* [Tübingen, 1937]) that is indeed useful; but the picture's possibilities for information do not stop there. This method of presenting only fragments, characteristic of all the [Bible] handbooks, pays no respect to the original message of these works, the purpose of which was not the illustration of perceptual material culture, but of concepts like divine rule, world order, kingship and the gods, etc.⁵⁸

In Keel's breakthrough monograph, *Die Welt der altorientalischen Bildsymbolik* (1972), he intends to use ancient art to illustrate the larger social concepts of the Bible and the ancient Near East, rather than only illuminat-

⁵⁶ Keel, *The Symbolism*; idem, *Jahwes Entgegnung*; idem, *Deine Blicke sind Tauben: Zur Metaphorik des Hohen Liedes* (SBS 114/115; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1984); idem, *The Song of Songs* (CC; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994).

⁵⁷ Martin Klingbeil, *Yahweh Fighting*; Brent A. Strawn, *What is Stronger*; Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*.

⁵⁸ Keel, "Iconography and the Bible," 367-69.

ing material culture.⁵⁹ However, this early work itself tends toward “fragmentation”; a quick glance through its pages reveals the frequent use of ancient Near Eastern images separated from their original artistic contexts. In doing so, the monograph stands with the work of the “many biblical scholars” whom Keel later criticizes (i.e., “Iconography and the Bible,” cited above). Clearly, Keel’s understanding of “fragmentation”—and iconographical methodology in general—develop over time.

Keel’s later work—especially his numerous monographic studies,⁶⁰ as well as the co-authored *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of Gods*—and the numerous recent iconographic-biblical studies of the “Fribourg school” (among which one might include the works of Klingbeil and Strawn) have provided sophisticated interpretations of images in their artistic contexts, and thus avoided iconographic “fragmentation.”⁶¹ In contrast, however, the *literary* contexts of biblical images in these studies receive relatively little attention. Thus many of the proponents of the iconographic-biblical approach tend toward literary “fragmentation.” For example, Keel makes the form-critical assumption that the Song of Songs is a relatively random collection of forty-three discrete literary units, each comprising no more than a few verses.⁶² When he employs iconographic data to interpret imagery in the Song, his discussion is limited to these small units of text in which each image resides. Evaluating Keel’s form-critical conclusions is not the goal of this study. I wish only to point out that in this prominent example of the iconographic-biblical methodology, Keel does not assess thoroughly the literary context of each literary image due to the form-critical decisions he has made about the size of the discrete literary units in which the images are embedded.

The thorough treatment of iconographic contexts, along with a relatively spare treatment of literary contexts, pervades the studies of both Strawn and

⁵⁹ A classic, large-scale example of this type of project is Yigael Yadin, *The Art of Warfare in Biblical Lands in Light of Archaeological Study* (2 vols.; trans. M. Pearlman; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963).

⁶⁰ E.g., Othmar Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen und Siegelkunst*; idem, *Jahwes Entgegnung an Ijob*; idem, *Das Recht der Bilder gesehen zu werden: Drei Fallstudien zur Methode der Interpretation aliorientalischer Bilder* (OBO 112; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992); idem, *Goddesses and Trees, New Moon and Yahweh: Ancient Near Eastern Art and the Hebrew Bible* (JSOTSup 261; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998); idem, *Vögel als Boten: Studien zu Ps 68, 12–14, Gen 8, 6–12, Koh 10, 20 und dem Aussenden von Botenvögeln in Ägypten* (OBO 14; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977).

⁶¹ See especially Klingbeil’s discussion of method in *God as Warrior*, 158–65. For a similar assessment of Keel’s analysis of iconographic contexts, see Beach, “Image and Word,” 73.

⁶² For this form-critical analysis of the Song, see Keel, *The Song of Songs*, v–vi.

Klingbeil as well. Strawn's study explores lion imagery and metaphors in biblical and ancient Near Eastern texts alongside Syro-Palestinian and ancient Near Eastern iconography. When analyzing lion metaphors in the Psalms, Strawn identifies one dozen instances in which enemies are depicted using lion imagery, yet the size of the corpus of lion metaphors in the Psalms precludes him from exploring the literary context of each.⁶³ Klingbeil identifies 507 occurrences of Yahweh portrayed as a warrior and/or heavenly god in the Psalms.⁶⁴ Yet, he only treats the literary contexts of the image in eight psalms, and in these psalms, he restricts his discussion to the verses immediately surrounding the image.⁶⁵

In short, as iconographic-biblical approaches have become more prominent and focused on interpreting individual metaphors, the larger *literary* contexts of the biblical images have tended to receive relatively little attention. This tendency does not diminish the value of these studies. Instead, the careful work on metaphors done by Keel, Klingbeil, and Strawn (to name but a few) opens up avenues for scholarship to apply iconographic data to ever-larger literary contexts. Said differently, the next potential advancement of the iconographic-biblical approach is for scholars to bring ever-larger constellations of literary imagery into conversation with congruent constellations of iconographic motifs. Moreover, comparing constellations of literary and pictorial imagery may help one determine the background and significance of literary imagery that might otherwise be tremendously difficult to identify.

Thus far I have discussed the three interrelated modes of iconographic study and indicated that the third, the iconographic-biblical approach, suffers a shortcoming, namely, not treating literary contexts with the same thoroughness given to the iconographic contexts. A study of the wings of Yahweh allows for an opportunity to address this methodological problem. Because of the relatively small number of texts portraying Yahweh in this form, I will be able to analyze thoroughly each literary context. To borrow the terminology of William P. Brown, I will interpret the image of the wings of Yahweh within the "iconic structure" of each individual psalm, which entails understanding the psalm as composed of a constellation of literary images in the same way that an artistic scene is comprised of numerous motifs that come together to convey its meaning.

Brown's recent work, *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor*, distinguishes itself among other studies of iconography and the Psalms by its careful attention to the literary context of psalmic imagery.⁶⁶ Brown de-

⁶³ It should be noted that other texts do receive a more thorough contextual treatment, e.g., Ezek 19 (*What is Stronger*, 248–50).

⁶⁴ Klingbeil, *Yahweh Fighting*, 28–34.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁶⁶ See his introductory comments (Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, x).

scribes his exegetical model as paying attention to a psalm's "iconic structure," that is, attending to the formal elements and literary structure of a psalm while also "identifying the various ways particular images and metaphors interact in the text."⁶⁷

Brown's focus on the interaction of literary images within a given text responds to the problem of literary fragmentation, for it allows one to view a full characterization of all the actors within the psalm. For example, when the enemies are characterized as lions at one point in the psalm, and the psalmist petitions God to save him from enemies at another point in the psalm (e.g., Ps 17), the entire psalm presents a picture of God as lion-slayer—a literary image that has numerous artistic parallels in ancient Near Eastern art.⁶⁸ One would certainly miss this point if one were to train one's iconographic analysis solely on the image of the enemies as lions or on the image of God as warrior. Yet by paying attention to the larger iconic structure of the psalm, one can arrive at a more complete portrayal of God, which one can then analyze in light of the iconographic material.

Before employing Brown's "iconic" structural analysis, I need to examine and evaluate his methodology and his use of terms, particularly the term "iconic," as well as the related terms "image," "imagery," "icon," "iconography," and "iconic metaphor." As reviewers have noted, in general, Brown seems not always to employ these terms consistently.⁶⁹

For Brown, "image" generally means that which the written word conjures in the mind—and, Brown would hasten to add, *in the heart*—of the listener or reader of biblical texts.⁷⁰ Likewise the "imagery" of a psalm is its "constellation of images."⁷¹ Brown differentiates between images and metaphors, characterizing the two as separate aspects of the poem's rhetorical power.⁷² Indeed, images can be "cast metaphorically,"⁷³ but "not all metaphors are images."⁷⁴

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁶⁸ See the following discussion of Ps 17 in ch. 3.

⁶⁹ For example: "Clarification is needed . . . in B[rown]'s definition of metaphor and the application of that definition to his analysis of the biblical material. . . . The book is not so much a study of metaphors as of motifs." Timothy Saleska, review of William P. Brown *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor*, *CBQ* 65 (2003), 600–601. Cf. James Crenshaw, review of William P. Brown *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor*, *Int* 57 (2003), 303–4.

⁷⁰ Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 4.

⁷¹ For Brown, these multiple, interconnected images within the Psalter make it a powerful source for theological reflection. *Ibid.*, 9–10.

⁷² "The wealth of images and metaphors found in poetry constitutes nothing less than 'a kind of concordance of the imagination.'" *Ibid.*, 8.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

To define metaphors, Brown cites Janet Martin Soskice: "The metaphor is that figure of speech whereby we speak about one thing in terms [that] are seen to be suggestive of another."⁵ Yet Brown moves beyond this rather broad definition and settles on a working definition of metaphor that could be characterized as an agglomeration reflecting the work of several scholars, including Max Black, Paul Avis, Ivor Richards, and Paul Ricœur.⁶ Brown adopts George Lakoff and Mark Turner's language of a metaphor's "target-" and "source domains."⁷ Brown also employs Lakoff and Johnson's notions of "root metaphors" or "metaphorical schemas," to describe, for example, the "metaphor of refuge" and the "metaphor of pathway."⁸ Bound within each of these schemes are "a host of particular images and iconic metaphors."⁹ Brown aims to examine each of these images and "iconic metaphors" in their literary contexts and in light of iconographic material.

But how does Brown understand the relationship between the "iconic metaphors" and the iconographic material from Israel/Palestine and the ancient Near East? And what does Brown mean by "icon" and its adjectival derivative "iconic"? Brown's understanding of these terms derives from Jan Assmann's treatment of Egyptian New Kingdom solar hymns.¹⁰ Assmann uses the term "icon" rather than "myth" to characterize the theology of these hymns,¹¹ and Brown adopts Assmann's use of the term "icon" as "an expression or articulation of content that can be realized in both language and image."¹² Thus, an "icon" is neither a visual representation (i.e., visual art) nor a literary trope (e.g., a metaphor), but something that exists outside of both visual art and literature; an "icon" transcends its literary and visual-artistic representations as something to which text and art mutually refer. For Assmann, the "iconography of the solar journey" is the way in which visual images and words come together to describe that which lies outside

⁵ Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 15; Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 5.

⁶ Black, *Models and Metaphors*; Avis, *God and the Creative Imagination*; Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*; Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*.

⁷ Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 6; Lakoff and Turner, *More than Cool Reason*, 38–39. Also see n. 24 above.

⁸ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 61–62; Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 15–16.

⁹ Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 15.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 5, 8. Jan Assmann, *Egyptian Solar Religion in the New Kingdom: Re, Amun and the Crisis of Polytheism* (Studies in Egyptology; trans. Anthony Alcock; London: Kegan Paul International, 1995).

¹¹ Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 5; Assmann, *Egyptian Solar Religion*, 38.

¹² By "image," Assmann means a visual representation such as a painting or relief. Assmann, *Egyptian Solar Religion*, 38.

of them in the mythology—or “the iconography”—of New Kingdom religion.

Assmann claims that in the Egyptian solar hymns, “image and language are equivalent, in the sense that either can be used to express ‘thought’: i.e., to formulate content.”⁸³ Brown quotes Assmann on this point and follows the citation immediately with the assertion, “so also in biblical poetry.”⁸⁴ Yet, by appropriating Assmann’s unquestioned equivalence of artistic and literary imagery, Brown risks oversimplifying the relationship between ancient Near Eastern images and biblical texts. Assmann’s source materials—and thus his interpretive model—differ greatly from Brown’s, for in the corpus of New Kingdom solar hymns, image and text are bound together in an organic relationship. The Egyptian texts come largely from tomb inscriptions, stelae, statuary, and books of the dead,⁸⁵ all of which contain both written texts and visual-artistic material that are “read” together. In the solar hymns from the books of the dead, for example, visual representations of the solar journey commonly appear embedded within the hieroglyphic text. In the papyrus of Ani (c. 1250 B.C.E.), chapter 15 begins with instructions for praising Re as he progresses through the day in the solar bark. The vignette of Ani praising Re in the solar bark (fig. 1.8) stands directly next to text that reads: “Worship of Re when he rises in the horizon until the occurrence of his setting in life. Hail to you, O Re, at your rising, O Atum-Horakhty! Your beauty is worshipped in my eyes when the sunshine comes into being over my breast. You proceed at your pleasure in the Night-bark, your heart is joyful with a fair wind in the Day-bark, being happy at crossing the sky with the blessed ones.”⁸⁶

⁸³ Assmann, *Egyptian Solar Religion*, 65. Further, again referring to Assmann, Brown agrees that icons can bring together “several semantic layers . . . into a relationship of mutual reference: they can be woven together in one icon and various spheres can consciously be ‘seen in one.’” Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 8; Assmann, *Egyptian Solar Religion*, 66.

⁸⁴ Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 14.

⁸⁵ See Assmann’s earlier work with this corpus in Jan Assmann, *Sonnenhymnen in thebanischen Gräbern* (Theben I; Mainz am Rhein: P. von Zabern, 1983); Jan Assmann, *Ägyptische Hymnen und Gebete* (OBO 51; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999).

⁸⁶ Raymond Oliver Faulkner et al., *The Egyptian Book of the Dead: The Book of Going Forth by Day: Being the Papyrus of Ani (Royal Scribe of the Divine Offerings)* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1994), pl. 18.

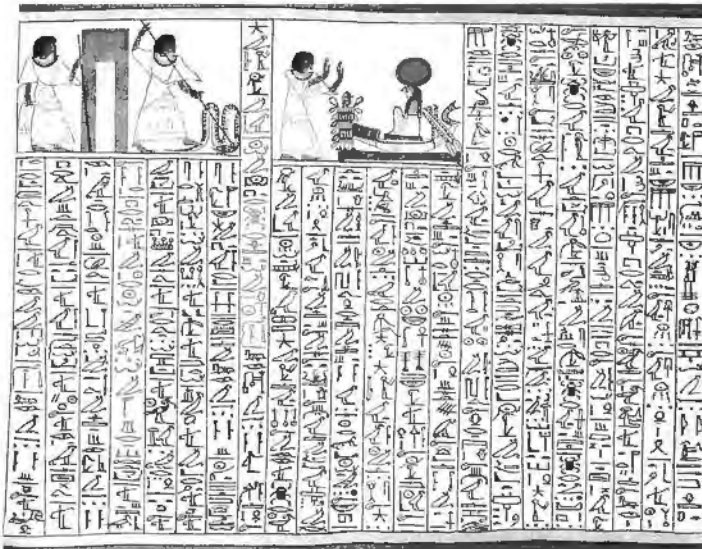


Fig. 1.8. Chapter 15 from the Book of the Dead, the Papyrus of Ani; c. 1250 B.C.E. After Faulkner, et al. *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, fig. 18. © The Trustees of the British Museum

Clearly the text and the visual representation correspond. The text describes Re in his solar bark, and the visual representation portrays just that. Likewise, the text describing Ani's hailing Re appears alongside a visual representation of Ani with his hands raised in adoration.

This close interaction between image and texts in Egyptian literature and art is inherent in the hieroglyphic script, for in Egypt, language and art are united.⁸⁷ Henry George Fischer comments: "If hieroglyphic writing may be described as a series of concrete representations, some of which are phonetic in character and others ideographic, it is equally valid to consider Egyptian sculpture and painting as the equivalent of the ideographic component."⁸⁸

In sum, in the Egyptian solar hymns that Assmann studies, image and language come together to convey meaning, and a constellation of images and texts constitutes the complete hymn. The case is quite different with the

⁸⁷ Henry George Fischer, *The Orientation of Hieroglyphs: Part 1. Reversals* (New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1977), 3. See further Orly Goldwasser, *From Icon to Metaphor: Studies in the Semiotics of the Hieroglyphs* (OBO 142; Fribourg: University Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995).

⁸⁸ Fischer, *The Orientation of Hieroglyphs: Part 1. Reversals*, 3. For similar reflections on the connection between Egyptian language and art, see William Kelly Simpson, "Egyptian Sculpture and Two-dimensional Representation as Propaganda," *JEA* 68 (1982): 271.

biblical Psalms. Unlike Egyptian hieroglyphs, the alphabetic script of even the oldest manuscripts of the Psalms is far removed from any ideographic sense. And, obviously, no pictures (i.e., illustrations) accompany the Psalms. So when Brown adopts Assmann's terminology to speak of "iconic metaphors" and claims that ancient Near Eastern images and biblical texts mutually refer to a single "thought" or "content" lying outside both image and text, Brown has not dealt adequately with the issue of cultural particularity. Assmann does not need to address this issue because his texts and images come from a circumscribed period and culture. His data appear even on the same artifact, so their mutual reference can be easily granted. Brown's data (both biblical and iconographical) come from many different regions, periods of time, and media. So Brown's methodology—built as it is on Assmann's notions of correspondence between image and text—does not equip him to handle contrasting iconographic evidence. Nor does it provide a way of adjudicating the relative value of Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and local "Canaanite" iconographic material as it might illumine psalmic imagery.⁸⁹ Brown's methodological prologue seems to suggest that there is a monolithic ancient Near Eastern "system of thought" that underlies both biblical texts and ancient Near Eastern art. Certainly the picture is more complex.

Since Brown and Assmann are ultimately engaged in two very different projects, in the following study of Yahweh's winged form in the Psalms, I will not use Brown's terminology (inspired by Assmann) of "iconic metaphors," for the term presumes too easy a correspondence between biblical image and ancient Near Eastern art.⁹⁰ In the course of this study, I will clarify some of these methodological difficulties of relating Near Eastern iconography to biblical texts. However, I do understand Brown's general project of "mapping iconic structures" in the psalms to be a highly significant advance for the iconographic-biblical approach.⁹¹ Brown succeeds

⁸⁹ James Crenshaw seems to have identified this problem when he makes this observation about Brown's treatment of the solar aspects of Ps 19: "While Brown provides a wealth of non-biblical texts and illustrations depicting solar worship, he devotes little time to the way in which Canaanite religion merges with Yahwism in this psalm." Crenshaw, review of Brown, 304.

⁹⁰ I will also leave behind Brown's particularized definitions of the terms "image" and "imagery." In the course of this study, I will use "image" and "imagery" to refer both to visual-artistic representations (e.g., scenes inscribed on scarab seals) and literary tropes (e.g., metaphors and similes). In cases where either "image" or "imagery" may be ambiguous, I will clarify by using the adjectives "artistic" and "literary," respectively. On the difficulty of positing a consistent, defensible definition of "image" and "imagery," see W. J. Thomas Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

⁹¹ Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 14.

admirably in isolating and exploring the range of associations of an image within its literary context. Thus, analyzing the iconic structure of each psalm will be a critical element of the analysis below.

3. Utilizing Iconographic Evidence from the Ancient Near East

The problem of relating image and text is fundamental for iconographic studies, and one which has yet to be satisfactorily addressed. J. J. M. Roberts provides this summary critique of the entire program of iconographic studies in his comments about the work of Keel and the Fribourg School: "This is perhaps the most promising direction taken in recent biblical scholarship's use of the comparative material. One can only hope that scholars will begin to give serious attention to non-epigraphic evidence in a *more self-critical fashion*."⁹²

How then should one weigh iconographic evidence from the ancient Near East when interpreting a literary image from the Bible? In his commentary on the Song of Songs, Keel presents the clearest description of his iconographic-biblical method, which might be characterized as the "concentric circles" approach.⁹³ When faced with a difficult or ambiguous literary image, Keel first instructs the interpreter to explore the immediate context of the literary image to find clues to its meaning.⁹⁴ Second, he advocates searching the Song of Songs (the next concentric circle) for similar imagery for comparison. Third, he suggests that one look to the entire Hebrew Bible, giving special consideration to contexts *similar* to that of the Song: "texts that, like the Song, speak of things like the relations between men and women and the joys of love—and not only those texts that do so positively ... but also those that view such things critically and with mistrust."⁹⁵

After textual avenues have been exhausted, Keel finally advocates the engagement of non-textual sources. When dealing with animal imagery—"your eyes are doves (Song 1:15)," for example—Keel cedes that zoology

⁹² "The Ancient Near Eastern Environment," in *The Hebrew Bible and Its Modern Interpreters* (ed. Douglas A. Knight and Gene M. Tucker; The Bible and Its Modern Interpreters, SBL Centennial Publications; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985), 95 (italics mine).

⁹³ Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 27. Keel's methodology is reminiscent of Shamaryahu Talmon's comparative program ("The 'Comparative Method' in Biblical Interpretation—Principles and Problems," in *Essential Papers on Israel and the Ancient Near East* [ed. Frederick E. Greenspahn; Essential Papers on Jewish Studies; New York: New York University Press, 1991], 381–419).

⁹⁴ Though as noted above, his own interpretations often do not reflect this close attention to immediate literary context.

⁹⁵ Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 27.

would seem an appealing place to search for interpretive clues. However, he maintains that one must first inspect the “pictorial images in seals, amulets, ivories, and other valuables with which the well-to-do people ... were daily surrounded.”⁹⁶ Thus, based, in part, on Syrian cylinder seals portraying doves flying from a female goddess who stands with an open cloak (e.g., fig. 1.9), Keel determines that the doves symbolize messengers of love.⁹⁷ He therefore understands the image to mean “your glances are messengers of love.”⁹⁸



Fig. 1.9. Cylinder Seals; Middle Syrian Period. After Keel, *Das Hohelied*, Abb. 24–25.

Keel’s approach provides a helpful guide for gathering data and evaluating the relative importance of biblical versus iconographic evidence. Nevertheless, the “concentric circles” approach is open to critique. Keel offers a general caveat that the comparative value of much ancient Near Eastern textual material is diminished by temporal and geographic distance from ancient Israel.⁹⁹ Yet one is left to wonder: according to Keel’s scheme, in

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 70–71.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁹⁹ Keel argues that formal differences also diminish the comparative value of ancient Near Eastern textual material. See Keel’s comments about the value of the Sumerian love songs for interpreting the Song of Songs (*The Song of Songs*, 28).

which concentric circle does ancient Near Eastern textual material lie? Should this literature be given greater or lesser weight than iconographic material, or, indeed, the same weight, i.e., should it reside within the same concentric circle? Furthermore, one wonders how to judge between contrasting materials within the same concentric circle. Indeed, Keel's comments do not acknowledge the possibility that the data within each concentric circle can—and, very often, do—conflict.

For example, when one applies Keel's method to the issue of Yahweh's wings, one finds contradictory evidence within the "concentric circle" of the Hebrew Bible. Other pteromorphic representations of Yahweh appear in Exod 19:4; Deut 32:11; Ruth 2:12; and Mal 3:20, but these provide little help for understanding the psalmic image. For example, the pentateuchal material portrays God in the form of an eagle (נָשִׂיר) carrying and protecting the people with its wings.¹⁰⁰ In contrast, Mal 3:20 presents an image of Yahweh as winged sun disk, "the Sun of Righteousness with healing in his wings."¹⁰¹ In Ruth 2:12, Boaz invokes the image of the protecting wings of Yahweh, the God of Israel, but few contextual clues inform the meaning of this particular image.

One also finds conflicting information within the concentric circle of ancient Near Eastern art, since wings appear in an incredible variety of contexts. In chapter 2, I present a typology of wing iconography, illustrating the diversity of wing imagery in Syro-Palestinian art.

Due to the many types of wings in Syro-Palestinian art, it is incumbent on the biblical scholar who takes up iconographical data to assess iconographic evidence in order to determine the level and extent of congruency between the texts in question and these various images. For this project, I have established a set of criteria for evaluating iconographic data and determining congruence to biblical texts:

- The psalmic context of the literary image, i.e., the psalm's iconic structure;
- The iconographic context, i.e., the constellation of images that an artifact represents;
- The periodization or historical context of an artifact;
- The geographic distribution of the artifact;
- The material of the artifact.

In the following analysis of images and texts, each of these factors will be taken carefully into account.

¹⁰⁰ For an overview of scholarship on these texts, see H. G. L. Peels, "On the Wings of the Eagle (Dtn 32,11) – An Old Misunderstanding," *ZAW* 106 (1994): 300–303.

¹⁰¹ See, especially, Jack P. Lewis, "'Sun of Righteousness' (Malachi 4:2): A History of Interpretation," *Stone-Campbell Journal* 2 (1999): 89–110.

4. Format of Study

The present study proceeds according to the following format. Chapter 2 presents a typology of wings in Syro-Palestinian iconography, the goal of which is to determine the various iconographic contexts in which wings occur and the significance of the wings in each of these contexts. Chapters 3-8 then present analyses of the six psalms that contain references to Yahweh's winged form (Pss 17, 36, 57, 61, 63, 91). Each of these chapters follows a twofold structure. First, in a literary analysis of each psalm, I explore the images of the psalmist, the enemies, and Yahweh, as well as their relationships to one another. This step is analogous to Brown's program of "mapping iconic structures." Such an analysis produces a constellation of literary images for each psalm, which, in turn, forms a composite picture of Yahweh, the psalmist, and the enemies. As a second step, I then evaluate the congruencies between the literary constellations and the iconographic depictions of wings in ancient Near Eastern art. In this undertaking, my goals are, first, to understand the image of the winged Yahweh in each psalmic context and, only then, to compare that literary image to various representations of wings in Syro-Palestinian art. Chapter 9 summarizes the methodological gains of this study and presents conclusions about the image of the winged Yahweh in these six psalms and the congruencies between these psalms and ancient Near Eastern iconography.

Chapter 2

Typology of Wing Iconography in Syro-Palestinian Art from the Late Bronze Age to the Persian Period

This chapter identifies the various iconographic contexts in which wings occur in Syro-Palestinian art. A description of the numerous types of wings (e.g., wings on falcons, ostriches, cherubim, and goddesses) will orient the reader to the range of iconographic tropes that may provide congruency to the literary image of Yahweh's wings in the Psalms. What follows is not a catalog of wings in Syro-Palestinian art. Assembling such a catalog would overwhelm this study, for wings appear in an incredible variety of media and iconographic contexts.¹ Rather, I present here a typology of wing iconography.

Artifacts from Syro-Palestine clearly present the wing motif in diverse contexts. With very few exceptions, wings are but one element in a constellation of images that convey the overall message (or messages) of a given artifact.² Wings alone do not identify a figure as a bird. Rather, the wings, along with a beak, breast, talons, and so forth, convey together the avian nature of that which is represented. The following typology organizes the range of wing imagery in Syro-Palestinian art:

1. Wings on Birds
 - A. Griffon Vultures
 - B. Falcons
 - C. Doves
 - D. Ostriches
 - E. Other Birds

¹ Even if the study were limited to wing iconography in Israel/Palestine, or further limited to glyptic art from Israel/Palestine, its scope would be massive. The University of Fribourg's catalog of seals from Israel/Palestine contains nearly 10,000 objects, including the complete corpus of seals recovered in scientific excavations (Middle Bronze to Persian period). In July 2006, thanks to a research grant from the Emory University Graduate School of Arts and Science, I was able to study the catalog in Fribourg, and I found that nearly one-fifth (two thousand!) of the seals from Israel/Palestine contain images of wings.

² For the iconographic significance of discrete "disarticulated" wings, see sect. I.B. below.

2. Wings on Numinous Beings
 - A. Hybrid Figures (*Mischwesen*)
 1. Winged Sphinxes
 2. Winged *Uraei*
 3. Winged Beetles
 4. Winged Genii and Demons
 - B. Winged Deities
 1. Non-anthropomorphic Winged Sun Disks
 2. Anthropomorphic Winged Disks
 3. Winged Anthropomorphic Gods
 4. Winged Anthropomorphic Goddesses

Even such a typology, already much smaller than a catalog, must have clear geographic and temporal delimitations. Thus, I have included artifacts dating from the Late Bronze Age—a formative period for the religion and culture of ancient Israel—through the Persian Period, by which time most biblical texts had been composed. I have further limited my survey to artifacts from the region of Syria-Palestine, which, following William Dever's definition, "incorporates the modern boundaries of coastal and south-central Syria (south of the bend of the Orontes River), Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, and part of Egypt's Sinai Desert."³

1. Wings on Birds

Several species of birds appear in Syro-Palestinian art, though it is often difficult to offer precise zoological classifications for many of these types of birds.⁴

1. A. Griffon vultures

The griffon vulture (Lat.: *Gyps fulvus*⁵) frequently appears in Syro-Palestinian art. Its identifying markers include a hooked bill, large wing span (larger than

³ William Dever, "Syria-Palestine," *OEANE* 5:147.

⁴ On the difficulty of providing precise classifications of ancient species according to modern Linnaean categories, see Paula Wapnish, "Ethnozoology," *OEANE* 2:285. For a discussion of the ornithology of Syria-Palestine, see G. R. Driver, "Birds in the Old Testament," *PEQ* 87 (1955): 5–20, 129–40.

an eagle or falcon's), a crooked neck, and down-turned hindquarters.⁶ Throughout ancient Near Eastern cultures—and reaching as far back as the Neolithic period—the vulture bears a close association with goddesses of vitality and regeneration.⁷ In Egypt, for example, the vulture is associated with the ornithomorphic goddesses Nekhbet, lady of Upper Egypt,⁸ and the mother goddess Mut.⁹ In Middle Egyptian hieroglyphs, the vulture itself is the ideogram for the word “mother,” *mw*.¹⁰

In West Asian iconographic traditions, particularly in Old Syrian cylinder seals, vultures are associated with protection of a prince of the city, analogous to Nekhbet's role in Egyptian iconography (fig. 2.1).¹¹ Schroer suggests that in these scenes the vulture also represents the autochthonous nude mother goddess, a figure whom Urs Winter identifies as “die sich entschleiernde Göttin.”¹²

⁵ Again, note that this and other taxonomic identifications in this study are tentative.

⁶ See Silvia Schroer, “Die Göttin und der Geier,” *ZDPV* 111 (1995): 61.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 60–80. Schroer begins her discussion with the Neolithic “Vulture Shrine” at Catalhöyük. She comments: “Der Geier gehörte zur Herrin über Leben (Geburt) und Tod, die alle vier Himmelsrichtungen beherrschte und den ganzen Zyklus des Lebens überwachte” (61).

⁸ On Nekhbet, see Matthieu Heerma van Voss, “Nekhbet,” *LdÄ* 4:366–67. Nekhbet is likely associated with a different species of vulture from that which appears in Syro-Palestine, namely, the Egyptian vulture (*Vultur percnopterus*). On representations of this latter species, see Peter Lacovara, “An Egyptian Royal Pectoral,” *Journal of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston* 2 (1990): 18–29.

⁹ The goddess Mut is often represented as an anthropomorphic deity with a vulture headdress or a vulture head. See Herman Te Velde, “Mut and Other Ancient Goddesses,” in *Ancient Egypt, the Aegean, and the Near East: Studies in Honour of Martha Rhoads Bell* (ed. Jacke Phillips; San Antonio: Van Siclen Books, 1997), 2:455–62; Herman Te Velde, “Mut,” *LdÄ* 4:246–7.

¹⁰ According to the sign list in Alan Henderson Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar* (3d. ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964).

¹¹ Schroer, “Die Göttin und der Geier,” 62.

¹² Urs Winter, *Frau und Göttin: Exegetische und ikonographische Studien zum weiblichen Gottesbild im Alten Israel und in dessen Umwelt* (OBO 53; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 278–80.



Fig. 2.1. Syrian cylinder seal: Middle Bronze Age. After Winter, *Frau und Göttin*, fig. 280.

These Egyptian and Western Asian precedents doubtless influenced the iconography of later Syria-Palestine. Middle Bronze IIB iconography yields a large number of images of vultures, widely regarded as a symbol of the “branch-goddess” (*Zweigöttin*), a goddess of vegetation, eroticism, and vitality (e.g., **fig. 2.2**).¹³ However, the frequency of vultures declined sharply in Late Bronze and Iron Age iconography.¹⁴ One of the very few known examples of vultures in Syro-Palestinian glyptic art from these epochs appears in a seal from Megiddo, which Schroer and Keel and Uehlinger date to the seventh century (**fig. 2.3**).¹⁵ In this representation, the species is not as clearly identifiable as in the Middle Bronze IIB depictions. Yet the schematized head with crooked bill argues for its identification as a vulture.

¹³ Schroer, “Die Göttin und der Geier,” 63.

¹⁴ The vulture’s association with the realm of the goddess is rather certain, and the disappearance of the vulture after Middle Bronze Age IIB is remarkable in light of this fact.

¹⁵ See Schroer, “Im Schatten deiner Flügel,” 304, Abb. 7, 14. Also see Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, 323.



Fig. 2.2. Seal: Tell el-Ajjul; Middle Bronze IIB. After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 4.



Fig. 2.3. Scaraboid; Megiddo; Iron Age IIC. After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 318a.

In Syro-Palestinian representations of vultures, wings can appear both outspread and folded at the sides. When folded, one should consider the wings simply as a constituent part of the vulture; these wings are not emphasized in any way. When outspread, as in certain Middle Bronze Age representations of the vulture, it is possible that the wings convey the idea of protection for figures located beneath the wings. However, since these representations occur prior to the Late Bronze Age, it is difficult to say whether the wings of the vulture carried their associations of protection into the following epochs. In the Iron Age IIC seal from Megiddo, for example, the outspread wings of the vulture may simply indicate that the bird is in flight.¹⁶

1.B. Falcons

Falcons are identified by their small round heads, short necks, and small, hooked beaks. Images of falcons in Syro-Palestinian art clearly borrow from Egyptian iconography, where the falcon represents Horus and is bound to the ideology of kingship.¹⁷ In contrast to vultures, representations of falcons appear

¹⁶ Especially since the gazelle beneath it is leaping, i.e., also in motion.

¹⁷ Othmar Keel, *Studien zu den Stempelsiegeln aus Palästina Israel*, Bd 4 (OBO 130; Göttingen and Fribourg: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht and Universitätsverlag, 1994), 94-95. The iconography of Horus includes multiple iconographic representations: the falcon, the falcon-

in every epoch of Syro-Palestinian glyptic art. Numerous seals from tenth–ninth century Israel/Palestine depict Horus-falcons with outspread wings in a gesture of protection around an enthroned king¹⁸ (e.g., **fig. 2.4**), a development of a longstanding Egyptian iconographic motif (see, e.g., **fig. 2.5**).¹⁹ Falcons with spread wings also flank royal symbols such as the king's *praenomen* in the cartouche (e.g., the name *mn-hpr-rʿ*) for Thutmose III in a seal from Megiddo Strata V [Iron Age IB according to Loud's dating], **fig. 2.6**.²⁰



Fig 2.4. Seal; Unprovenanced; 10th–9th cent. B.C.E. After Keel, *Studien zu den Stempelsiegeln aus Palästina Israel* 4, 125, Abb. 1.

headed man, the winged disk, and the child with a sidelock. Thus, one may speak of several different aspects of the god Horus, or even describe these aspects as unique "Horuses" or "Horus-gods." Edmund Meltzer, "Horus," *OEA* 2:119–22.

¹⁸ Keel, *Studien zu den Stempelsiegeln* 4, 94. Keel's identification of the seated figure as the king rather than the sun god himself represents a modification of earlier judgments (116). For that earlier assessment, see Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Göttinnen, Götter und Gottessymbole: Neue Erkenntnisse zur Religionsgeschichte Kanaans und Israels aufgrund bislang unerschlossener ikonographischer Quellen* (Freiburg: Herder, 1992), 154.

¹⁹ Keel, *Studien zu den Stempelsiegeln* 4, 94. Cf. Alan Henderson Gardiner, Amice Mary Calverley, and Myrtle F. Broome, eds., *The Temple of King Sethos I at Abydos* (4 vols.; London and Chicago: The Egypt Exploration Society and the University of Chicago Press, 1935), 2:pl. 35.

²⁰ *Ibid.*; Gordon Loud, *The Megiddo Ivories* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), 5.

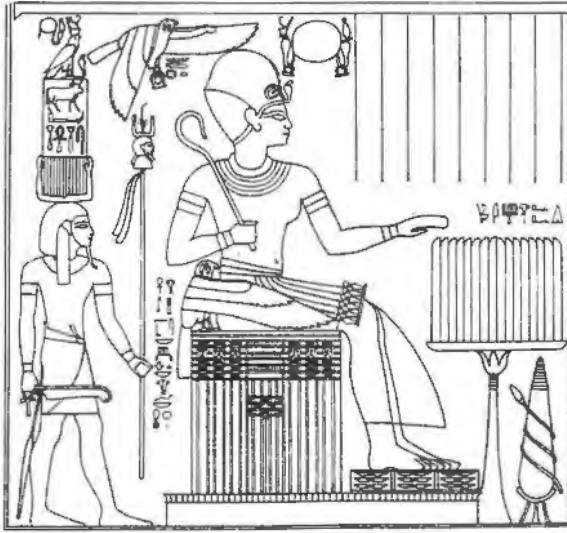


Fig. 2.5. Wall relief of Seti I; Chapel of Seti I at Abydos; 19th Dynasty. After Keel, *Studien zu den Stempelsiegeln aus Palästina/Israel* 4, 131, Abb. 54.



Fig. 2.6. Seal; Megiddo; Iron Age IB. After Keel, *Studien zu den Stempelsiegeln aus Palästina/Israel* 4, 129, Abb. 37.

On these seals (figs. 2.4, 2.6), the wings of the falcons are often schematized almost beyond recognition, and, in some cases, the wings appear disarticulated from the body of the falcon.²¹ Thus, one may conclude that the appendages of the falcon that most clearly indicate protection are, indeed, the out-

²¹ Keel, *Studien zu den Stempelsiegeln* 4, 59.

spread wings. When the falcon's wings appear alone, the entire symbolic freight of the Horus-falcon is distilled into the single image of these wings.

1.C. Doves

The identifying features of doves in Syro-Palestinian iconography, according to Keel and Uehlinger, are the "round head and very prominent breast."²² Like vultures, doves in Middle Bronze IIB art were closely associated with the realm of the goddess, and this association persisted into the Late Bronze Age. For example, a terra cotta cult stand from twelfth-century Beth Shean depicts a goddess holding a dove under each of her arms.²³ A Transjordanian terra cotta dove shrine dated to the ninth–eighth centuries (fig. 2.7) suggests that this association is also attested well into Iron Age I.²⁴

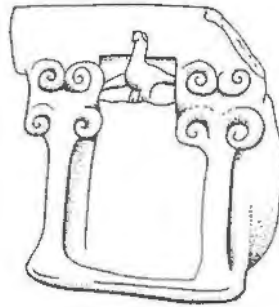


Fig. 2.7. Terra cotta model of a cult shrine; Transjordan; 9th–8th cent. B.C.E. After Keel, *Song of Songs*, Abb. 57.

²² Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, 29–31.

²³ *Ibid.*, 84–86, fig. 104.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 161, fig. 88b. The item was purchased by J. H. Iliffe for the Rockefeller Museum in the 1940s. Iliffe dated the piece initially from the tenth to ninth centuries, on the basis of the "water jug" upon which it seems to have been fashioned. Ziony Zevit, however, dates the shrine to c. 800 B.C.E. on the basis of similarities to the serving vessels that belong to the same "cultic assemblage" as the "dove shrine" (Ziony Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallaxic Approaches* [London: Continuum, 2001], 332. Cf. J. H. Iliffe, "A Model Shrine of Phoenician Style," *QDAP* 11 (1945): 91–92; S. S. Weinberg, "A Moabite Shrine Group," 12 (1978): 30–48; Rudolph Henry Dornemann, *The Archaeology of the Transjordan in the Bronze and Iron Ages* (Milwaukee Public Museum Publications in Anthropology and History 4; Milwaukee: Milwaukee Public Museum, 1983), 143–44.

Doves with spread wings in the form of terra cotta “pillar” figurines have also been found in large numbers in the middle to late seventh century, predominantly in Judah (e.g., **fig. 2.8**).²⁵ These doves appear alone, without iconographic contexts, but often within archaeological contexts of tombs and private homes.

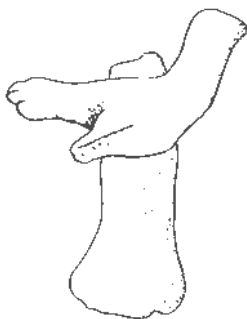


Fig. 2.8. Terracotta dove figurine; Lachish; 8th cent. B.C.E. After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 320.

In Middle and Late Bronze Ages, Keel and Uehlinger argue that the dove, “as an attribute creature of the goddess, appears in place of the goddess. As a messenger, the dove would transmit messages of the goddess’ blessing or love to the buried in any case (not—or only very indirectly—bringing a message from the survivors to the deceased).”²⁶ Representations of doves are by no means limited to the medium of terra cotta, for images of doves also appear in glyptic art of the eighth and seventh centuries in Israel/Palestine.²⁷

²⁵ Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, 323–25.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 325. On the iconographical and literary trope of birds—especially doves—as messengers, see Othmar Keel, *Vögel als Boten: Studien zu Ps 68, 12–14, Gen 8, 6–12, Koh 10, 20 und dem Aussenden von Botenvögeln in Ägypten* (OBO 14; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977).

²⁷ For two seals, see Othmar Keel, *Das Recht der Bilder gesehen zu werden: Drei Fallstudien zur Methode der Interpretation altorientalischer Bilder* (OBO 122; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992), Abb. 113, 114. Also see Benjamin Sass, “Pre-exilic Hebrew Seals: Iconism vs. Amiconism,” in *Studies in the Iconography*, 218.

Summarizing all of these representations of doves, Keel concludes: "Die Taube hat also durchwegs *eine* Bedeutung, wenn auch verschiedene Nuancen da sind. Vom Begleitier der Lebensmutter, wo sei in der Mehrzahl auftritt, zum Inbegriff und Symbol der Verliebtheit und zärtlichen Zuwendung sind nur graduelle Unterschiede."²⁸

How then do the wings of the dove contribute to its "one meaning"? Throughout Syro-Palestinian art, doves appear both with folded and spread wings. Yet as the examples above indicate, the spread-wing posture is more common. While the spread wings of the Horus falcon surely indicate its protection, the spread wings of the dove seem to convey something different. As a messenger of the goddess, the spread wings indicate that this bird is in flight. It is unclear, however, whether and how the significance of the spread wings translates into later periods where the dove becomes increasingly associated with "being in love" and "tender care."

1.D. Ostriches

Ostriches appear frequently in Iron Age IIA glyptic art as part of a constellation frequently called the "Lord of the Ostriches" scene.²⁹ The standard arrangement shows a human figure in the middle of a scene with outstretched arms and two ostriches flanking him (so **fig. 2.9**).



Fig. 2.9. Seal; Beth-Shemesh; Iron Age IIB. After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 162c.

The prevalence of this constellation in Israel/Judah during Iron Age IIA IIB strongly supports Keel and Uehlinger's assertion that the "Lord of the Ostrich-

²⁸ Keel, *Das Recht der Bilder*, 155.

²⁹ Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, 140.

es" was a dominant indigenous deity in Iron Age IIA.³⁰ The iconography represents the idea that lordship over this animal is equivalent to lordship over the steppe region these animals inhabit.³¹ Mastery of ostriches also represents mastery of chaos itself. These animals were an apt symbol of chaos in part because of their habitat and because they were difficult to tame.³² Furthermore, the body of an ostrich is itself chaotic; it breaks all the "rules" of the avian world.³³ It is larger by far than any other bird in most respects. Its head, neck, legs, and breasts exceed all other species. Yet its wings are too small for this frame, so the ostrich runs rather than flies. Thus, not surprisingly, when the wings of the ostrich appear in Syro-Palestinian iconography, they do not serve the same function as the wings on other birds, namely to indicate protection and movement. In short, the representation of an ostrich's nonfunctional wings highlights the bird's chaotic nature.

1.E. Other Birds

Falcons, doves, ostriches, and vultures are the most frequently depicted avian species in the artistic record of Syria-Palestine (note, however, that most vultures appear prior to the Late Bronze Age in Israel/Palestine). Several other types of birds also appear, albeit much less frequently. These include cocks (e.g., **fig. 2.10**), ducks, and other birds of indeterminate species.³⁴ Due to lack of evidence, one can say very little about the symbolic freight of these depictions.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 182.

³² On the symbolic value of the ostrich, Keel and Uehlinger write: "The ostrich, whose relation to humans is not always easy to figure out and that is tamed only with great difficulty, represents not only a deserted, dangerous and sinister world but also a numinous power that commands honor because it can survive mysteriously at the edge of habitable land (cf. the same ambivalent relationship one has to the crocodile, the scorpion, the lion, etc.). Fear and respect for numinous powers that are demonic is not far distant from fascination with such beings." Ibid., 182.

³³ Cf. Keel's discussion of the ostrich as it appears in conjunction with *der Herr der Tiere* motif in *Jahwes Entgegnung and Job*, 102-8.

³⁴ Sass, "The Pre-exilic Hebrew Seals," 220-21.



Fig. 2.10. Inscribed seal; Tell en-Naṣbeh. After Sass, "The Pre-Exilic Hebrew Seals," fig. 102.

2. Wings on Numinous Beings

In the iconography of Syria-Palestine, wings appear on a vast array of numinous beings. While any of these fantastic beings could fall under the category of "hybrid beings" (*Mischwesen*), Assyriologists have generally used this term to describe semi-divine figures such as genii (*apkallu*), griffons, and cherubim (*kuribu*).³⁵ Further distinctions among these Mesopotamian *Mischwesen* include the classifications "demon" and "monster," with the former having the body of a human and the latter being combinations of various animals that walk on all fours.³⁶

Mesopotamian art only occasionally depicts gods and goddesses with animal or vegetal attributes, that is, as "hybrid beings." These anthropomorphic Mesopotamian deities, then, are presented in ways quite unlike the gods of Egypt, who have numerous animal attributes and can be recognized readily in anthropomorphic as well as theriomorphic depictions.³⁷ The various forms of Horus—as a young lad suckled by Isis and as a falcon—present a clear example of the Egyptian convention of divine anthropo- and theriomorphisms.

Syro-Palestinian art from the Late Bronze Age to the Persian Period is replete with Egyptian and Mesopotamian influences. So, while winged hybrid fig-

³⁵ See, e.g., A. Green, "Mischwesen. B," *RIA* 8:246–64; F. A. M. Wiggermann, "Mischwesen. A," *RIA* 8:222–46.

³⁶ Edith Porada, "Introduction," in *Monsters and Demons in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds: Papers Presented in Honor of Edith Porada* (ed. Ann E. Farkas, et al.; Mainz on Rhine: P. von Zabern, 1987), 1.

³⁷ Green, *RIA* 8:247.

ures can generally be considered semi-divine or secondary deities in Mesopotamia,³⁸ one cannot make the same categorical claim of these figures in Syro-Palestinian art because of the constant influence of Egyptian imagery, as well as secondary "Egyptianizing" influences mediated through Phoenician art. Furthermore, Hittite and Syrian art, both to a greater or lesser extent influenced by Egyptian art, readily depict major deities with wings.³⁹ Thus, because of these various influences on Syro-Palestinian art, the task of forming typologies is very difficult, for Egyptian and Mesopotamian (as well as Syrian and Hittite) categories do not necessarily apply. So, if only for the purposes of this typology of wing iconography, I have divided my discussion of winged numinous beings into two parts: semi-divine hybrid figures and winged deities.

2.A. Hybrid Figures (*Mischwesen*)

2.A.1. Winged Sphinxes

Two large groups of winged sphinxes appear in Syro-Palestinian art from this period: human-headed (androcephalic) sphinxes, often identified as cherubim, and falcon-headed sphinxes (hieracocephalic), also known as griffons. Less frequently attested are winged ram-headed (criocephalic) sphinxes (e.g., on a poorly preserved Samarian ivory panel⁴⁰ and two Phoenician ivory panels from Nimrud),⁴¹ as well as winged bulls and winged ibexes. Very often sphinxes appear in the same scene with a stylized tree, which Keel and Uehlinger rightly understand "as a symbol of numinous power ... [that] symbolizes mythologically the garden of the deity, concretely the temple or palace area, and, more abstractly, the ordered earthly cosmos and the life that has been made possible by this order."⁴² The sphinxes appear with these sacred trees to illustrate the sphinxes' guardianship and protection of such trees. This notion is supported

³⁸ Tallay Ornan, *The Triumph of the Symbol: Pictorial Representations of Deities in Mesopotamia and the Biblical Image Ban* (OBO 213; Fribourg: Academic Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht), 87.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ J. W. Crowfoot and Grace M. Crowfoot, *Early Ivories from Samaria (Samaria-Sebaste): Reports from the Work of the Joint Expedition in 1931-1933 and of the British Expedition in 1935*, no. 2 (London: Palestine Exploration Fund, 1938), pl. 6.2.

⁴¹ Eric Gubel, "Multicultural and Multimedial Aspects of Early Phoenician Art, c. 1200-675 BCE," in *Images as Media*, fig. 27.

⁴² Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, 234.

by two eighth-century stamp seals from Megiddo which depict sphinxes flanking the stylized tree (figs. 11a, b).⁴³



Figs. 2.11a, b. Seals; Megiddo; 8th cent. B.C.E. After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 231a, b.

Representations of griffons, such as those in the central registers of these two seals from Megiddo (figs. 2.11a, b.) arose in second millennium B.C.E. in Syria and spread throughout the Near East by the fourteenth century B.C.E. They have the body, hind-legs and tail of a lion and the foreparts of a bird of prey, usually an eagle or falcon.⁴⁴ Such winged griffons appear frequently in Iron Age IIB art, especially on epigraphic and anepigraphic scarabs from Israel/Palestine.⁴⁵ For example, in a scarab seal of a certain *hym* from Tell el-Far^{ah} (South) (fig. 2.12), a winged griffon crouches before a stylized *ankh*, the Egyptian hieroglyph for “life,” and wears an Egyptian double crown. Keel and Uehlinger rightly caution against identifying the griffon as an embodiment of a deity, but see it rather as “guarding and protecting powers in the service of a ‘Most High God’ or a ‘Lord of Heaven’ who is conceived of in solar categories.” In the case of the *hym* seal, the *ankh* sign stands in place of the sacred tree as a symbol of power, regeneration, and order.⁴⁶ In Phoenician contexts, these griffons were associated with a male and female deity of war and with royalty,⁴⁷ an association that explains the presence of the Egyptian double crown on the *hym* seal.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 233–34.

⁴⁴ Green, *RIA* 8:256. See also J. Börker-Klähn, “Greif,” *RIA* 3:633–39; T. A. Madhloom, “More Notes on the Near Eastern Griffin,” *Sumer* 20 (1964): 57–62.

⁴⁵ Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, 252–56.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Gubel, “Early Phoenician Art,” 205.



Fig. 2.12. Scarab belonging to *hym*; Tell el-Far'ah (South); Iron Age IIB. After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 253.

In Mesopotamian art, Wiggermann suggests the griffon corresponds to the Akkadian term *kuribu*.⁴⁸ If that is indeed the case, then the Hebrew cognate *kērûb* is not so narrowly limited to this hieracocephalic sphinx. Instead, *kērûb* more likely refers to sphinxes in general,⁴⁹ such as human-headed sphinxes, two types of which appear in the ivories from Samaria: one demonstrating the inland Syrian style (fig. 2.13a) and the other a coastal Phoenician style (fig. 2.13b).⁵⁰ As is typical, both sphinxes appear with stylized trees and vegetal motifs. The guarding and protective roles of these sphinxes are very similar to the griffons described above.

⁴⁸ Wiggermann, *RIA* 8:243.

⁴⁹ See Carol Meyers, "Cherubim," *ABD* 1:899-900.

⁵⁰ Several studies have attempted to distinguish between the various styles (or workshops) of the Samarian ivories. These sphinxes are among the primary sources for comparison. For an overview of this literature see Christoph Uehlinger, "Die Elfenbeinschnitzereien von Samaria und die Religionsgeschichte Israels: Vorüberlegungen zu einem Forschungsprojekt," in *Crafts and Images in Contact: Studies on Eastern Mediterranean Art of the First Millennium BCE* (ed. Claudia E. Suter and Christoph Uehlinger; *ÖBO* 210; Fribourg: Academic Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), 149-86.



Fig. 2.13a, b. Ivory inlays: Samaria; Iron Age IIB. After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 232a, b.

Syro-Palestinian iconography does not depict sphinxes using their wings to fly. Nor do their wings appear outstretched in gestures of protection (like those of the falcon). Rather, the wings contribute to the fantastic nature of these beings. The wings are one aspect of their mixed form and underscore their other-worldly status. The form of these creatures inspires wonder and fear. Thus winged sphinxes are effective guardians for the deities and their realms.

2.A.2. *Winged Uraei*

The *wraeus* is known from Egyptian iconography as a symbol of protection for the pharaoh.⁵¹ It represents the snake goddess Wadjet, the mythical mother and midwife of the king who was associated with Lower Egypt. Wadjet (Uto) was the counterpart of Nekhbet, vulture goddess of Upper Egypt. The two goddesses occasionally appear side by side as a composite winged creature from the Second Intermediate Period forward.⁵²

When Syro-Palestinian glyptic art borrows the *wraeus*, it changes the species of the snake from the Egyptian cobra (*Naja haje*, unknown in Syria-Palestine)⁵³ to the local black-necked cobra (*Naja nigricollis*), which is capable of spitting caustic serum from its mouth.⁵⁴ This burning poison (or the red color

⁵¹ Nichole B. Hansen, "Snakes," *OFAE* 3:296–98.

⁵² See Lacovara, "An Egyptian Royal Pectoral," 18–29.

⁵³ Hansen, "Snakes," 298.

⁵⁴ Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, 274.

of a snake bite) may well lie behind the Hebrew term *šārāp* (from *šrp* “to burn”).⁵⁵ Though the species are different from those portrayed in Egypt, the image of the *uraeus* in Syro-Palestinian art remains firmly bound to the notion of protection.

The winged *uraeus* appears frequently on seals in Israel and Judah in Iron Age IIB. In Judahite iconography, both two- and four-winged *uraei* occur. On the upper register of an epigraphic seal from Lachish, for example, a two-winged *uraeus* protects a stylized *ankh* with both wings spread forward and at a forty-five degree angle (fig. 2.14a). Another seal from Lachish depicts a differently positioned winged *uraeus*. Also in the uppermost register of the seal, this *uraeus* faces forward and has four widely spread wings, the tips of which are upturned (fig. 2.14b).⁵⁶ It is reasonable to accept Keel and Uehlinger’s suggestion that the increase from two to four wings indicates an augmentation of the protective power of the *uraeus*.⁵⁷ Winged *uraei* like these probably comprise the background for seraphim in Isa 6, though the “textual” seraphim are of the six-winged variety, otherwise unrepresented in Syro-Palestinian (and Egyptian) iconography.⁵⁸



Figs. 2.14a, b. Seal impressions; Lachish; Late Iron Age IIB. After GGG, fig. 274a, c.

One other fantastic hybrid incorporating *uraei* deserves mention, for it demonstrates the prevalence of Egyptian motifs in Syro-Palestinian art, as well as the thorough mixing of these motifs into new forms. An ivory plaque from Samaria of Syro-Phoenician manufacture (fig. 2.15) depicts hybrid beings flanking a clump of papyrus. Each being is comprised of a *wedjat*-eye, the claw and

⁵⁵ HALOT, 1360.

⁵⁶ Keel and Uehlinger, GGG, 274.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 273.

⁵⁸ See Othmar Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen und Siegelkunst*.

lower parts of a falcon or vulture (including down-spread, variegated wing),⁵⁹ and a *uraeus* surmounted with a disk. Taken as a whole, the image testifies to a thorough melding of Egyptian royal and solar imagery.⁶⁰

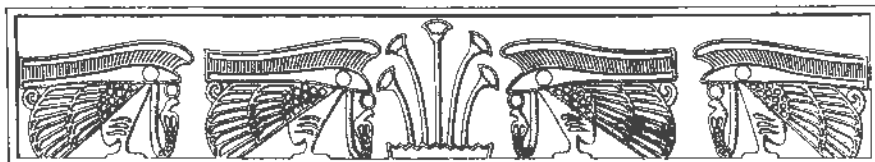


Fig. 2.15. Reconstructed ivory plaque; Samaria; Iron Age IIB. After Crowfoot and Crowfoot, *Early Ivories from Samaria*, pl. III.2a, b.

The wings of the *uraei* in Syro-Palestinian art underscore both their protective power and the supernatural status of these creatures. The wings of the *uraeus* clearly convey a form of supernatural protection when spread toward a figure at a forty-five degree angle. Yet the wings also may suggest that the *uraei* fly, an attribute that confirms their fantastic nature (since real snakes do not fly) and associates them with other heavenly deities who have the same ability, especially the sun god.

2.A.3. Winged Beetles

Winged beetles appear frequently on seals from Israel/Palestine, also part of the larger phenomenon of borrowing from Egyptian iconography during Iron Age IIB. While the Egyptian dung beetle (*Scarabaeus sacer*) does have wings, the bird-like, feathered wings depicted in Egyptian and Syro-Palestinian seals are not entomologically accurate. Like *uraei*, winged beetles from Israel/Palestine come in both two- and four-winged varieties. In Egyptian iconography, the winged beetle pushing the disk is an unambiguous symbol of the sun in its journey across the daytime sky. The winged scarab holds a solar ball with its front feet and another with its rear feet, an allusion to the beetle's rolling a ball of cattle dung, which the Egyptians understood as a symbol of self-

⁵⁹ Cf. Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, 259; Crowfoot and Crowfoot, *Early Ivories from Samaria*, 17.

⁶⁰ Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, 259.

regeneration.⁶¹ Indeed the Egyptian word for beetle, *hpr*, is also a common verbal root, meaning “to be created, to come into being.” Given the frequent portrayals of winged beetles with disks (and in conjunction with winged sun disks, e.g., **fig. 2.22a**), it appears that the image of the winged scarab also represented the rising sun in Syro-Palestinian art.⁶² A seal from Samaria depicts a four-winged beetle with elongated forelegs pushing a (solar) disk before it and toting another disk behind it (**fig. 2.16**).

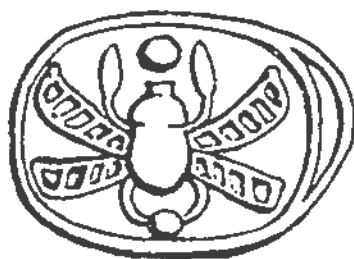


Fig. 2.16. Seal; Samaria; Iron Age IIB. After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 257a.

2.A.4. *Winged Demons and Genii*

I have here followed the Assyriological convention of describing demons as hybrid anthropomorphic beings that walk upright rather than on all fours. During the epochs under consideration in this study, such demons do occur in winged form in Syro-Palestinian iconography. A Late Bronze Age cylinder seal from Tell el-Ajjul, for example, shows a winged demon besieging a recumbent individual (**fig. 2.17**). The human figure on the left with the long locks of hair may be Baal-Seth, who protects the recumbent figure from the lion.⁶³

⁶¹ For a detailed discussion of the beetle's behavior, see Robert Steven Bianchi, "Scarabs," *OEAE* 3:179–81; Othmar Keel, Thomas Staubli, and Susanne Bickel, *Les animaux du 6^{ème} jour: Les animaux dans la Bible et dans l'Orient ancien* (Fribourg: Éditions universitaires; Lausanne: Musée de zoologie, 2003), x.

⁶² Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, 246.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 78.



Fig. 2.17. Cylinder seal; Tell el-Ajjul; Late Bronze Age. After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 90a.

The demon of **fig. 2.17** may indeed be a personification of illness or pestilence, like the Mesopotamian demon Pazuzu (**fig. 2.18**), a chief demon and the spirit of the western wind. Images of Pazuzu, particularly the grotesque canine head, appear throughout Syria in the first millennium B.C.E. as amulets worn around the necks of pregnant women;⁶⁴ for in Mesopotamian iconography, Pazuzu appears as the rival of the lion-headed, donkey-eared Lamashtu demon, responsible for crib death, miscarriage, and various sexual dysfunctions.⁶⁵ In the case of the Mesopotamian Pazuzu, the winged form indicates his association with the hot west wind, which brought disease and plague.⁶⁶ Indeed, Mesopotamian wind demons are uniformly depicted with wings.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ See, e.g., the stone head in the collection of M. C. Carlos Museum, Emory University (I 2001.17.1).

⁶⁵ Nils P. Heessel, *Pazuzu: Archäologische und philologische Studien zu einem altorientalischen Dämon* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

⁶⁶ See *ibid.*

⁶⁷ Wiggermann, *RIA* 8:240.



Fig. 2.18. Bronze Statuette of Pazuzu; Iraq; 800–600 B.C.E. Oriental Institute Museum, University of Chicago (OIM A25413).

Another common anthropomorphic winged figure that draws from Mesopotamian iconography is the winged genius. Although the terms “demon” and “genius” are virtually interchangeable, Assyriologists tend to use *genius* more frequently with respect to the *apkallu* (i.e., “sage”) figures.⁶⁸ These genii, famously depicted in relief on the palace walls of Assurnasirpal II at Nimrud (e.g., **fig. 2.19**), carry out purifying and exorcising functions and are usually associated with the sacred tree.⁶⁹ Such winged *apkallu* figures appear in human- or eagle-headed form (often called “griffon-demons”),⁷⁰ most often carrying a purifying bucket (*banduddū*) and a cone (*mullilu*).

⁶⁸ Green provides a number of summary comments regarding the range of Mesopotamian “divinities”: “In stark contrast to the animal divinities in ancient Egypt, gods and goddesses in Mesopotamia and the rest of the ancient Near East were almost always depicted anthropomorphically, but on occasion they also might have some attributes of animal or vegetal origin or of the elements.... Furthermore, some otherwise fully anthropomorphic gods or demi-gods are sometimes included in the category of *Mischwesen* on account of their often having wings. Such deities may be referred to in modern literature as ‘genies’ or ‘genii’” (*RIA* 8:252).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Wiggermann, *RIA* 8:222–46.



Fig. 2.19. Alabaster relief from Nimrud, 883–859 B.C.E. Metropolitan Museum of Art (32.143.4).

From northern Mesopotamia, images of these winged genii spread throughout the Near East, including Syria-Palestine and the larger ancient Mediterranean world.⁷¹ The Syrian seal of *šg 'dd* (**fig. 2.20**) shows how closely Syrian miniature art mimicked Neo-Assyrian imagery. For example, the musculature of the forward, striding leg, the thick beard and tresses to the back of the neck, and the fact that the lower wing is longer than the upper wing are all elements of the Nimrud relief (**fig. 2.19**). Interestingly, the rudimentary Syrian seal presents more anatomically accurate proportions and positioning of the genius' upper chest, than the image from Nimrud (**fig. 2.20**).

⁷¹ See Eva Andrea Braun-Holzinger and Hartmut Matthäus, "Schutzgenien in Mesopotamien und in den angrenzenden Gebieten: Ihre Übernahme in Zypern, Kreta und Griechenland," in *Images as Media*, 283–321.



Fig. 2.20. Seal of *šg 'dd*; North Syria; Iron Age. After Tallay Ornan, "The Mesopotamian Influence on West Semitic Inscribed Seals," fig. 19. Cf. Sass, *Studia alphabetica*, fig. 29.

When one culture borrows imagery from another, it is often difficult to determine whether and how much of the image's original significance remains in the new incarnation of the image.⁷² Yet, given the Syrian lapidary's sensitivity to reproducing the nuances of the Neo-Assyrian artistic representation of the winged genius, it is indeed safe to assume that the significance of this figure was understood by ancient Syrians. While the winged being would probably

⁷² Echoing this sentiment, Wiggermann exercises extreme caution in introducing his discussion of Mesopotamian *Mischwesen*: "Mesopotamian iconography spread widely beyond the limits of Mesopotamian culture, and served the needs of a variety of religions, each with its own ideas on gods and monsters (Syria, Anatolia, and in part also Assyria). Their names and values should be related to the native theologies, not to Mesopotamian ones. Inside Mesopotamia itself, mythology varies from place to place, and from period to period. Ideally the identity of each monster should be proved for each place and period independently, a demand that in view of the scarcity of relevant texts can never be met. The point of view taken here is that when the identity of a monster is proved for one random time and place, and its history is straightforward, its identity can be confirmed for other times and places. Obviously, however, historical straightforwardness is not an exact datum, and seemingly straightforward cases may have to be reassessed in the future." Wiggermann, *RIA* 8:225.

not be called *apkallu*, the apotropaic and benedictory purport of the image would not be lost in its new context.⁷³

Like other winged hybrid beings, the wings on these demons and genii confirm their fantastic natures. Furthermore, the wings may convey a sense of protection, especially when the wings appear on beings that already have an apotropaic function such as the *apkallu* figures. However, the protection afforded by the wings of the *apkallu* is not expressed as clearly as it is in the wings of the falcon, *uraeus*, and sun disk (see below). On demons like Pazuzu, the wings do not convey a sense of protection, but, rather, inspire fear. The winged form of demons suggests that, like the wind, these beings are able to move speedily through the air to wreak havoc or bring disease.

2.B. Winged Deities

2.B.1. Non-Anthropomorphic Winged Sun Disks

In its classical Egyptian form, the winged sun disk comprises a central disk representing the sun, to which two broad wings are affixed. Occasionally, *uraei* adorn the sides of the disk or are suspended slightly below the wings.⁷⁴ A standard motif in the Egyptian iconographical repertoire, the winged disk became one of the most prominent Egyptian symbols adopted by Syro-Palestinian artists. Indeed, versions of the winged sun disk appear outside Egypt as early as the eighteenth century B.C.E., though the form and significance of the image went through numerous changes as it spread among various cultures.⁷⁵

A clear example of the development of the motif in a Syrian context appears in the limestone relief from Tel Halaf (**fig. 2.21**). In this representation, the winged sun disk is supported by two bull-men. A human atlant, the "hero with

⁷³ For a thorough discussion of this issue, see Tallay Ornan, "Mesopotamian Influence on West Semitic Inscribed Seals: A Preference for the Depiction of Mortals," in *Studies in the Iconography*, 52–73.

⁷⁴ See Gay Robins, *The Art of Ancient Egypt* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 143 fig. 64.

⁷⁵ On the types, prevalence, and significance of the winged disks in ancient Near Eastern iconography, see especially R. Mayer-Opficcius, "Die geflügelte Sonne: Himmels- und Regendarstellungen im alter Vorderasien," in *UF* 16 (1984), 189–236; Dominique Parayre, "Les Cachets Ouest-Sémitiques à Travers l'Image du Disque Solaire Ailé (Perspective Iconographique)," *Syria* 67 (1990): 269–314; Tallay Ornan, "A Complex System of Religious Symbols: The Case of the Winged Disk in Near Eastern Imagery of the First Millennium BCE," in *Crafts and Images in Contact*, 207.

curls" commonly associated with the bull-men in Mesopotamian art,⁷⁶ crouches between the two bull-men, supporting their elbows with each of his upraised hands.⁷⁷ This presentation of a system of atlants for a solar deity likely follows Hittite antecedents.⁷⁸ Yet one should look to Mesopotamian iconography primarily for the pairing of bull-men with the sun, an image belonging to Shamash (𒍪UTU), the Mesopotamian god of justice and righteousness. The association stems from the notion that Shamash traverses the mountains of the horizon, the abode of bull-men and other fantastic creatures.⁷⁹



Fig. 2.21. Wall relief; Tell Halaf; 9th cent. B.C.E. After Seidl, "Das Ringen um das richtige Bild des Samas von Zippar," fig. 2.

⁷⁶ See Green, *RIA* 8:264.

⁷⁷ The stool and the crouching figure beneath the winged sun disk show the influence of Mitanian and Middle Assyrian iconography. Donald M. Mathews, *Principles of Composition in Near Eastern Glyptic of the Later Second Millennium B.C.* (OBO Series Archaeologica 8; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990), 108–9.

⁷⁸ See, for example, the thirteenth-century B.C.E. ivory from the hoard at Megiddo. Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, "Jahwe und die Sonnegottheit von Jerusalem," in *Ein Gott allein?: JHWH-Verehrung und biblischer Monotheismus im Kontext der israelitischen und altorientalischen Religionsgeschichte* (ed. Walter Dietrich and Martin A. Klopfenstein; OBO 139; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), Abb. 2.

⁷⁹ Wiggermann, *RIA* 8:226.

Non-anthropomorphic winged disks also appear with overwhelming frequency in various glyptic contexts in Syria-Palestine and in the larger Near East.⁸⁰ Three Iron Age IIB scarabs, one from Samaria and two from Shechem, illustrate the prevalence of winged disks and their diverse renderings, even among similar locales (figs. 2.22a–c).

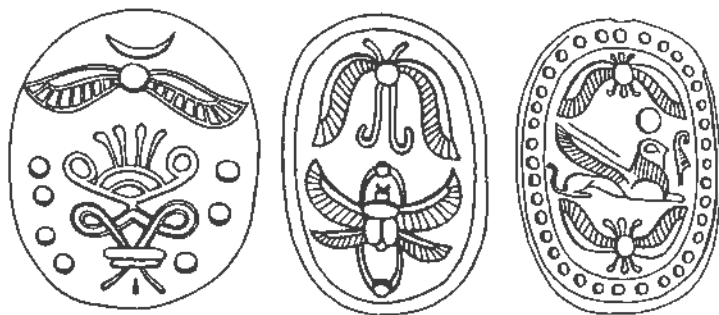


Fig. 2.22a, b, c. Seals; Samaria (a) and Shechem (b, c); Iron Age IIB. After Kcel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 258a–c.

Figure 2.22a pairs the winged sun disk with the four-winged beetle carrying two solar disks. The two appendages below the disk offer a variant of the twin *uraei* appearing in certain Egyptian renderings of the image, while the appendages above the head are a uniquely Levantine development.⁸¹ Further variations on the appendages below and above the disk appear in **fig. 2.22c**. In this scene, the winged griffon between the wings of the disks has a solar disk above its head and an ostrich feather representing *Maat* before its face. This constellation of images clearly shows the prevalence of Egyptian solar iconography in the Levantine context. **Figure 2.22b** binds the Egyptian solar symbol with a heavily stylized Syrian sacred tree and a crescent moon, indicating an agglomeration of numinous powers.

⁸⁰ See Parayre, "Les Cachets Ouest-Sémitiques," 269–314; idem, "À propos des sceaux ouest-sémitiques: le rôle de l'iconographie dans l'attribution d'un sceau à une aire culturelle ou à un atelier," in *Studies in the Iconography*, 27–51.

⁸¹ For a discussion of these and other traits in West-Semitic representations of the sun disk, see Parayre, "À propos des sceaux ouest-sémitiques," 30–38, especially 35 (for her treatment of these three seals [her figs. 22, 24, 25]).

2.B.2. Anthropomorphic Winged Disk

Anthropomorphic winged disks emerged as the Egyptian-style winged sun disk encountered the conventions of Mesopotamian iconography, which tended to depict chief deities such as solar deities or gods of heaven in human form.⁸² An Edomite epigraphic seal reflecting Assyrian traits (fig. 2.23) illustrates this tendency. The other side of the seal (not pictured) contains an inscription that, on paleographic grounds, points to an Iron Age IIC date of manufacture.⁸³ The deity, flanked by two adorers and stationed above astral and lunar symbols, likely represents an autochthonous solar god (Qos?).⁸⁴ Similar representations of anthropomorphic winged disks in Assyria (Assur), Urartu (Khaldi), and Persia (Ahuramazda) support this claim.⁸⁵



Fig. 2.23. Edomite seal of *mnhmt 'st gdmk*; Iron Age IIC. After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 294.

The functions of wings on anthropomorphic and non-anthropomorphic winged disks vary considerably. In the original Egyptian contexts, the wings convey both the movement of the sun god across the sky and the protection that

⁸² See Wiggermann's comments: "Anthropomorphism distinguishes gods from monsters, and helped to shape their contrastive roles in Mesopotamian mythology. Among these major gods two groups can be defined, the astral (Nanna, Utu, Inanna) and cosmic (Enki, Enlil, Ninhursag) gods that became anthropomorphic early, and the chthonic and underworld gods that retained theriomorphic features until the end of the OB period." Wiggermann, *RIA* 8:230–38.

⁸³ I follow Keel and Uehlinger's assessment in *GGG*, 296 n. 11.

⁸⁴ Cf. the PN בְּרָקוֹס "Qos gleamed forth" in Ezra 2:53//Neh 7:55. E. A. Knaut, "Qos," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (ed. K. van der Toorn, et al.; 2d. ed.; Leiden: Brill, 1999 [hereafter *DDD*]), 674–77.

⁸⁵ Keel and Uehlinger, however, associate this image with Gad, based partially on the presence of the theophoric name *gdmk* in the inscription (*GGG*, 296).

the sun god affords to those over whom his wings extend. As the image of the winged sun disk migrates from its original context in Egypt into Phoenicia and the larger Near East, the significance of the image changes, so much so that the winged disk can serve as an image of a non-solar deity, or simply function as a symbol of the heavens. I will explore these variations in the analysis of Ps 17 below.

2.B.3. Winged Anthropomorphic Gods

In addition to anthropomorphic gods within winged sun disks, Syro-Palestinian art contains numerous “free-standing” winged gods, appearing often in ivories and other glyptic arts. A bone carving from Hazor presents an example of a frequent motif in Iron Age IIB Syro-Palestinian art, namely, the four-winged youthful god (fig. 2.24). In this representation, as elsewhere, the four-winged deity is pictured grasping vegetal elements, such as a stylized sacred tree, papyrus stalks, or lotus blossoms. These characteristics point to a representation of the god Baal, who appears as a youthful winged figure as early as the Late Bronze Age.⁸⁶ Keel and Uehlinger reasonably suggest that the wings stress his celestial aspect and omnipresence.⁸⁷

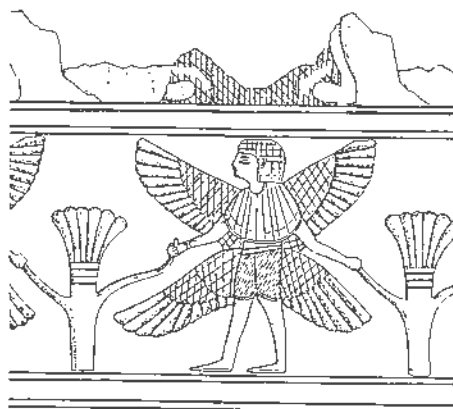


Fig. 2.24. Bone carving; Hazor; early 8th cent. B.C.E. After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 210.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

Baal may be similarly portrayed in a Moabite seal discovered near Dan (**fig. 2.25**). The deity is also depicted striding and grasping vegetal elements, here likely a papyrus stem and a branch. In this figure, Egyptian and Assyrian traits are presented side by side. Following Assyrian conventions, the winged figure is bearded and wears a long skirt; an Egyptian double crown sits on his head.⁸⁸ On the basis of his winged form and association with vegetation, an identification with Baal seems assured.⁸⁹



Fig. 2.25. Moabite Seal of 'z'; Tell el-Qadi (near Dan). After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 211.

The youthful Baal-figure appears in two-winged form in a number of media including ivories (e.g., **fig. 2.26**) and seals (e.g., **fig. 2.27**), though it is possible that the two-winged figure is a genius in the entourage of Baal, the "Lord of Heaven."⁹⁰ As in **figs. 2.24–25**, both gods in **figs. 2.26–27** are grasping vegetal elements and are striding.⁹¹ The wings angled forward at forty-five degrees suggest protection like the wings of the Horus falcon and the *uraeus*, while the upraised hand and extended blossom in the lower arm connote blessing.⁹²

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ See Stefan Timm, "Das ikonographische Repertoire der moabitischen Siegel und seine Entwicklung: Vom Maximalismus zum Minimalismus," in *Studies in the Iconography*, 178; Gubel, "Early Phoenician Art," 123–24.

⁹⁰ Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, 198.

⁹¹ Other fragmentary ivories from the same hoard at Samaria justify the reconstructed image in **fig. 2.26**. See Crowfoot and Crowfoot, *Early Ivories from Samaria*, pl. 14.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 197.



Fig. 2.26. *Champ-levé* ivory; Samaria; Iron Age IIB. After Crowfoot and Crowfoot, *Objects from Samaria*, pl. 14.2.



Fig. 2.27. Israelite seal of *yw'b*; 8th cent. B.C.E. (found in Carthage). After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 212b.

2.B.4. Winged Anthropomorphic Goddesses

The winged gods pictured above are but a sample of the many winged male figures in Syro-Palestinian art. However, male (anthropomorphic) figures are not the only ones represented. Numerous images of winged female figures also occur.

Winged female figures in a posture similar to that of the winged males in **figs. 2.26–27** appear in the hoard of Samarian ivories. For instance, one ivory panel shows two-winged female deities kneeling with arms and wings spread forward at forty-five degrees (**fig. 1.1**, discussed earlier). In gestures of blessing and protection, their hands hold lotus blossoms, as does their two-winged male counterpart (**fig. 2.26**). Between their wings is a *djed*-pillar, an Egyptian symbol associated with mummiform Osiris, suggesting the goddesses are Isis and Nephthys.⁹³ The sun disks surmounting the three main elements in the scene witness the union of Re and Osiris.⁹⁴

⁹³ Schroer, "Im Schatten deiner Flügel," 297.

⁹⁴ Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, 251.

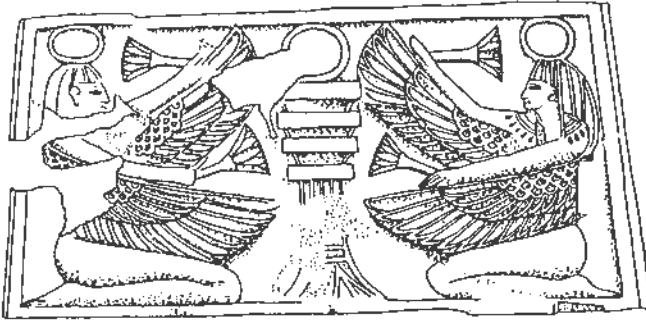


Fig. 1.1. Ivory panel; Samaria; Iron Age IIB. After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 243.

Another winged female figure appears on an unprovenanced seal with a Hebrew inscription (**fig. 2.28**). Based on scattered placement of letters, one can safely assume that the seal was created anepigraphically and only later inscribed with an owner's name. Like Isis and Nephthys on the Samaritan ivory (**fig. 1.1**), this figure carries a blossom in each hand, signifying blessing.⁹⁵



Fig. 2.28. Scarab of [...]*g'l bn s'l*; Northern Levantine; Late 8th / early 7th cent. B.C.E. After *GGG*, fig. 331a.

⁹⁵ The blossoms could be reasonably understood as "star signs." On this possibility, see *ibid.*, 338.

The wings on these male and female anthropomorphic deities convey their celestial aspects. While the figures do not usually appear to be in flight, the wings suggest that they are indeed capable of flying. Further, the wings of these deities occasionally spread forward in gestures of protection, indicating the beneficent character of these beings. The frequent appearance of vegetal elements in their hands confirms the gods' abilities to provide blessing.

3. Conclusion

As one can see in this typology, depictions of wings occur in diverse contexts throughout Syro-Palestinian art. These iconographic contexts determine the meanings and functions of wings. On birds, wings first help identify the various avian species being represented in a scene. Additionally, on these naturalistic representations, wings highlight aspects of the birds that are important for their significance in the scene. For example, when doves are pictured with wings outstretched in flight (e.g., **figs. 2.7–8**), their wings help to stress their function as carriers of the messages of the goddess. Similarly, when the wings of a falcon or vulture appear around a royal figure, they represent the deity's protection manifest in that bird (e.g., Nekhbet for the vulture and Horus for the falcon). On ostriches, wings highlight the odd nature of these flightless birds that inhabit the boundaries of the ordered world.

Wings appearing on numinous beings show that these figures possess certain bird-like qualities. For example, just as birds (e.g., Horus falcons) protect with their wings, numinous figures also show their protective powers by appearing in winged form. Likewise, just as birds use wings to make the sky their domain, winged deities are associated with celestial aspects such as the wind, storms, the sun, and the moon. Finally, just as wings enable birds to fly, wings on numinous figures signify the swift movement and—by extension—the omnipresence of those beings.

Chapter 3

The Iconic Structure of Psalm 17 and Congruent Images in Ancient Near Eastern Iconography

Chapters 3–8 present analyses of the six psalms that contain references to Yahweh’s winged form. The analysis of each psalm has two parts. First, I thoroughly explore the literary context of the image of the winged Yahweh by providing a new translation of the psalm and by analyzing its structure, rhetorical movement, form/setting, and the characterization of its main actors, namely, the psalmist, the enemies, and God. The goal of these inquiries is to establish the psalm’s iconic structure, that is, the way the various images within the psalm interact with one another and inform the image of the winged Yahweh. This careful attention to literary context guards against fragmentary readings that have marked many other iconographic-biblical studies.

In the second part of the analysis, I compare the psalm’s constellation of literary images with Syro-Palestinian iconography in search of congruent images to Yahweh’s winged form. Establishing and evaluating congruencies between image and text requires attention to the criteria outlined in chapter 1. Of these, the most important criterion is the level of correspondence between the iconographic context of the visual image and the literary context of the image of Yahweh’s wings.

1. Translation of Psalm 17

A Psalm of David

- 1 Hear, O Yahweh, righteousness!¹ Give ear to my cry!
Listen to my prayer from lips without deceit!
- 2 From your face² may my justice come.

¹ The MT reads צדק while LXX reads κύριε τῆς δικαιοσύνης μου (presupposing יהוה צדקי). In α' we find δίκαιος "a righteous one" (צדקי), which also agrees with Syr. and Vulg. I understand these variants as attempts to make sense of an unusual phrase in the Vorlage (i.e., a version prior to MT). Since the MT reading is not so difficult as to be impossible, I have kept it.

- May your eyes³ see uprightness.
 3 You examine my heart, you visit me at night.
 You test me and do not find⁴ that I have schemed.⁵
 My mouth does not transgress.
 4 As for the deeds of man—the word of your lips I obey.
 As for the ways⁶ of the violent—[5] my steps hold to your paths

² An idiomatic translation of מִלְפָּנֶיךָ (in front of you) would be preferred were it not for the continuation of the imagery of Yahweh's face that appears in the second half of the line with the description of his eyes.

³ LXX suggests a 1cs suffix instead of a 2ms suffix as in MT. At issue in the variant is: whose eyes are doing the seeing, God's or the psalmist's? The LXX reading, "my eyes see uprightness," amounts to a testimony that the psalmist's eyes are pure, i.e., not beholding wickedness. Reading with MT, "your eyes," the focus of the line stays on God and God's face/presence.

⁴ Some translators render this series of three perfect verbs (בַּחֲנִי, פָּקַדְנִי, צָרַף לִּי) followed by an imperfect verb (מִצְאֵנִי) as a conditional phrase (e.g., "If you try my heart, if you visit me by night, if you test me, you will find no wickedness in me") (NRSV, cf. Weiser, *The Psalms*, 178). However, a conditional sentence constructed this way—and without a conditional particle—is unattested elsewhere in HB. See Charles A. Briggs and Emilie Grace Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (ICC; 2 vols.; New York: C. Scribner's sons, 1960), 134. It makes more sense to view the imperfect מִצְאֵנִי as a habitual non-perfective (so Tanakh, cf. Bruce K. Waltke and Michael Patrick O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* [Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1989], 506).

⁵ MT reads מִשְׁחָמִי. A penultimate accent would be expected for the *qal* perfect 1cs of a geminate root שָׁחַם (consider, purpose, devise) rather than the accent on the ultima as it appears in this verse, prompting some to read it as an infinitive construct (cf. BDB, 273). In any case, the difference in meaning between these two forms is minimal. The context of proclamations of righteousness justifies the translation "I have schemed," with its negative connotation, rather than the more neutral, "I have planned/considered." For a similar sense of the root, see Pss 31:14; 37:12; 140:9. See HALOT 1:273. The LXX (followed by Syr. and OL) ἀδικία suggests an alternate pointing מִשְׁחָמִי or מִשְׁחָמִי (my wickedness, or wickedness in me), which would function as the object of the prior clause. This reading ignores the *'atnāh* in the previous word מִשְׁחָמִי (as does my translation above). For a reading that retains MT's cantillation marks, see Tanakh and Dominique Barthélemy, Stephen Desmond Ryan, and Adrian Schenker, *Critique textuelle de l'Ancien Testament: Tome 4. Psalms* (OBO 50/4; Fribourg: Éditions universitaires; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), 71–73: "Ce que j'ai pensé n'a pa dépassé ma bouche" (That which I have thought has not passed from my mouth).

- My feet are not shaken.⁷
- 6 I call to you, for you will answer me, O God.
Turn your ear to me. Listen to my words.
- 7 Show your loyalty, O One who saves refugees from insurgents by your right hand!⁸
- 8 Guard me as a precious apple of the eye,
Hide me in the shadow of your wings,
- 9 From the presence of the wicked who oppress me.
My mortal enemies surround me.
- 10 They have become rebellious.⁹
With their mouth they speak with pride.
- 11 They advance on me,¹⁰ now they encircle me.¹¹
They fix their eyes to bend [me] to the earth.
- 12 His appearance¹² is like a lion, longing to rend asunder.

⁶ The sense of the *lamedh* prefixed to **לִפְעֻלֹת** at the beginning of v. 4 is carried over via gapping (i.e., ellipsis) to **תִּחַרְחַרְךָ**. On this poetic device, see, e.g., Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques* (JSOTSup 26; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), 303–4.

⁷ This translation does not reflect the syntax as suggested by MT's cantillation marks. See discussion below for an explanation of the arrangement of lines.

⁸ The terms *refugees* and *insurgents* carry a distinctly political overtone in modern English. This particular rendering of the participles is more felicitous than "O one who by your right hand saves *those who seek refuge* from *those who rise up*." However one treats the series of participles in this verse, the word order remains difficult and has prompted numerous suggestions. For a summary of them, see Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50* (WBC 19; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1983), 159–60.

⁹ An idiomatic rendering of the literal MT "their fat they have closed." A similar metaphor appears in Deut 32:15 in the same context as the images of the protecting wings and the apple of God's eye (Deut 32:10–11). *Ibid.*, 161 n. 10a.

¹⁰ Reading **אֲשַׁרְנִי** over MT's **אֲשַׁרְנֵנוּ** "our steps." While treating the root differently (e.g., LXX: ἐκβάλλοντές με, cf. 11QPs^a: גַּרְשׁוֹנִי; Symmachus: μακαρίζοντές με; Vulg. *proficientes me*) most ancient versions support a 1cs suffix over against the MT 1cp. For an extensive argument supporting the reading **אֲשַׁרְנִי**, see Barthélemy, Ryan, and Schenker, *Critique textuelle: Psalms*, 73–75.

¹¹ While the *Qerē* **קִרְבָּנוֹ** is attested in manuscripts from the Cairo Geniza and Aramaic Targums, I have translated the *Kētib* **קִרְבֹּנִי** above, following LXX. On the weight of these sources, see Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis and Assen: Fortress and Van Gorcum, 2001), 160–63.

¹² Note LXX: ὑπέλαβόν με (They lay wait for me), presumably from **יַמְנֵנִי**. The LXX likely attempts to harmonize the third plural subject in v. 11 with the third singular subject in v. 12.

- Like a young lion, dwelling in hiding places.
 13 Rise up, Yahweh, confront his face. Bow him down.
 Deliver my life from the wicked by your sword.¹³
 14 From humans—by your hand O Yahweh,
 From humans, whose portion in life comes from the world,
 And with your reserves you will fill their belly.¹⁴
 Their sons will be sated,
 And they will leave their remainder for their children.
 15 Yet I, in righteousness, will see your face.
 When I awake, let me be satisfied with your image.¹⁵

Excursus: Text-critical Discussion on Psalm 17:14

Verse 14 contains a host of text-critical problems. As a result, any translation of it should be considered tentative. The options for translation range widely—from understanding the verse as a statement of generosity toward the enemies to regarding it as a ruthless imprecation. Since the rendering of this verse bears directly on the characterizations of all the actors in the psalm, a thorough discussion of translation problems is warranted.

Peter Craigie reprints both instances of MT's מִמְּחַיִם (from humans) in v. 14a, to מִמְּחַיִם, a *hip'il* participle of מָחַת with a 3mp suffix (kill them).¹⁶ However, the imperative sense of the participle would have to be characterized as an exceptional usage, so this translation remains unconvincing. In

who is compared to a lion. My translation reflects the MT, with the subject of the sentence functioning as a collective singular.

¹³ One would expect a prefixed preposition on MT's תִּרְבֵּךְ, an oddity which has likely spurred several changes among ancient versions. Syriac reads *wmn lrb'* (and from the sword), and LXX conjoins *βομψαύαν σου* with v. 13 against MT, where תִּרְבֵּךְ is marked with a *söp päsüq*. Briggs suggests reading תִּרְבֵּךְ תִּרְבֵּךְ (cf. Jer 50:21, 27), claiming תִּרְבֵּךְ was lost due to haplography. If this were the case, the omission occurred early in the process of textual transmission, since no versional evidence supports this reading.

¹⁴ See Excursus on the text-critical and translational problems in this verse.

¹⁵ LXX reads ἐν τῷ ὀφθῆναί σου (in seeing your glory) for MT's בְּהַקִּיץ תִּמְנִינֶךָ. The LXX reading is a clear case of theologically motivated emendation. See Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 127–28. It is safe to assume that this change results from a theological motivation, namely, not wanting to describe the psalmist as actually seeing the likeness or form of God. Similarly, Syriac reads *hymwtk*, (your faithfulness).

¹⁶ Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 161 n. 14a.

the ancient versional evidence for the first instance of this term, LXX reads ἀπὸ ἐχθρῶν (from enemies, so also Vulgate), a rendering that seems to presume an understanding of MT as now pointed מִתְּחַמָּה, though, of course, specifying these “humans” more precisely than MT. One should thus take LXX reading as a confirmation of MT as now pointed. In contrast, the reading of the first מִתְּחַמָּה from Aquila, ἀπὸ τεθνηκότων, and Symmachus, ἀπο νεκρῶν (both: from the dead), presumes that the Hebrew word behind these translations is a derivative of the verb חָמַם (possibly מִתְּחַמָּה), as Craigie maintains. In the midst of all of these possibilities for the first instance of מִתְּחַמָּה, Jerome’s reading (*a viris*) accords perfectly with the MT, a correspondence which argues in favor of MT’s reading.

The situation becomes even more complicated with regard to MT’s second מִתְּחַמָּה. The repetition found in MT is retained in Syriac and Aquila, while LXX manuscripts read the two words differently. Codex Vaticanus and Papyrus Londiniensis Musci Britannici 37 read ἀπολ(λ)ύων, possibly reflecting a *hip’il* form of חָמַם, as does Jerome, which reads *qui mortui sunt*. However, the majority of LXX texts (Alexandrinus, Siniaticus, Veronensis) read ἀπὸ ὀλίγων (ἀπὸ γῆς), as does the Vulgate, *a paucis (de terra)*. Kraus is certainly right to discount this expansion as “only an emergency combination (ὀλίγων = חַמָּה in Ps 105:12; γῆς = חַמָּה in Ps 49:1).”¹⁷ Despite its redundancy, I have thus retained MT’s reading: מִתְּחַמָּה מִתְּחַמָּה יְהוָה יִדְּבָר. The prepositional phrase “from humans” intensifies the plea introduced in the previous verse (13), clarifying and reiterating the source of the threat from which the psalmist seeks deliverance.

The reading in LXX, ἀπὸ γῆς (so, too, Vulgate), accords well with MT’s חָמָה. Thus I have seen no need to emend it, despite numerous variants in other ancient versions, some of which have been adopted by modern translators (see below).¹⁸ Further variants among ancient versions in v. 14 are attributable to alternative pointings of MT, such as the readings suggested in the *Kētib/Qērē*. For MT’s חָמָה (their portion), LXX διαμέρισον αὐτούς (divide them) presumes a different vocalization, חָמָה, (*qal* imperative ms with 3mp object suff(ix)). Several scholars have adopted this reading from LXX. Finally, most scholars opt to translate MT’s *Qērē* חָמָה (*qal* pass. participle with 2ms suffix of חָמָה) over the *Kētib* חָמָה (*a hapax lego-*

¹⁷ Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1–59* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 244.

¹⁸ The term חָמָה (cave, pit; cf. חָמָה; HALOT 320) seems to stand behind the readings in Aquila, ἐκ κατὰδύσεως (from the descent); Syriac, *dhpr’* (pit); and Jerome, *in profundo* (in the abyss).

menon and presumably a noun).¹⁹ Yet the translation of this passive participle has at least two possibilities: "Those who are treasured / your treasured ones,"²⁰ or, in the abstract, "that which is treasured / stored up."²¹ LXX (τῶν κεκρυμμένων σου) seems to support the latter reading.

The numerous text-critical and translational problems in this verse have resulted in strikingly different renderings of the verse, which affect the psalm's characterization of Yahweh and the psalmist. A representative sample of these translations follows:

- | | |
|----------|---|
| Kraus: | May a cruel death at your hand, O Yahweh,
A cruel death "put an end" to their portion in life!
What you have put in store for them—(with that) fill their belly,
So that their sons may (still) have their fill
And bequeath a remainder to their children. ²² |
| Craigie: | Kill them by your hand, O Lord!
Kill them from the world,
Their portion from among the living.
But your treasured ones! —you will fill their belly.
Sons will be sated.
They will bequeath their surplus to their children. ²³ |
| Eaton: | They shall be slain by your hand. Lord, slain;
Their portion shall be to go suddenly from this world.
But your treasured ones you will replenish.
And they shall be satisfied with children,
And have increase to leave to their young. ²⁴ |
| Gunkel: | [[v. 13] Mit deinem Schwerte] töte sie, Jahwe, mit deiner Hand,
Vertilge sie aus der Welt, reisse sie heraus aus dem Leben! |

¹⁹ It is difficult to discern the difference in meaning between MT's alternate readings. Indeed, *qatīl* and *qatīl* patterns are closely related. See Waltke and O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 620.

²⁰ I.e., as a collective singular. See, e.g., Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 160; J. H. Eaton, *The Psalms: A Historical and Spiritual Commentary* (London: T&T Clark International, 2003), 99.

²¹ So Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 244; Weiser, *The Psalms*, 179.

²² Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 244.

²³ Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 160.

²⁴ Eaton, *The Psalms: A Historical and Spiritual Commentary*, 99.

Mit ihrem Nachlass fülle sich der Leib ihrer Söhne;
mögen sie davon satt werden und noch überlassen den Rest ihren
Kindern!²⁵

Hossfeld-
Zenger: Rette mich, Herr, mit deiner Hand vor diesen Leuten,
Von denen, die im Leben schon alles haben.
Du füllst ihren Leib mit Gütern,
Auch ihre Söhne werden noch satt
Und hinterlassen den Enkel, was übrigbleibt.²⁶

NRSV: from mortals – by your hand. O LORD – from mortals
Whose portion in life is in this world.
May their bellies be filled with what you have stored up for them;
may their children have more than enough;
may they leave something over to their little ones.

NIV: O LORD, by your hand save me from such men,
from men of this world whose reward is in this life.
You still the hunger of those you cherish;
their sons have plenty, and they store up wealth for their children.

Tanakh: from men, O LORD, with Your hand,
from men whose share in life is fleeting.
But as to Your treasured ones, fill their bellies.
Their sons too shall be satisfied,
And have something to leave over for their young.

Weiser: From men, O Lord, by thy hand
From men whose portion in life may be short-lived.
Fill their belly with what thou hast hidden
That their children still get enough to be satiated
And leave something over to their babes.²⁷

The major point of difference between all of these translations is the level of vindictiveness and animosity that the psalmist shows toward the enemies,

²⁵ Hermann Gunkel, *Die Psalmen* (HKAT; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1926), 55.

²⁶ Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Die Psalmen I: Psalm 1–50* (NEchtBAT 28; Würzburg: Echter, 1993), 115.

²⁷ Weiser, *The Psalms*, 179.

those whom he describes in v. 13 as עֲשָׂוִים . Those who translate צְנוּנָיִךָ “your treasured one,” that is, with the participle referring to humans (e.g., NIV, Tanakh, Eaton, Craigie), invariably understand the last portion of v. 14 as a shift in focus from a plea for salvation from the enemies to a statement of faith: God blesses those whom he treasures.²⁸ Then this statement of faith blossoms in v. 15, when the psalmist claims that he will be among those blessed and that he will see Yahweh. The presence of a וְאֵינִי before צְנוּנָיִךָ could be used to support this translation if it is a וְאֵינִי -adversative that marks a shift in topic from the enemies to God’s treasured ones.

The next option is to understand צְנוּנָיִךָ as an impersonal participle, meaning “your reserves” or “that which you have stored up.” Among those who advocate this translation, several possible meanings emerge. The first is something of a protest, that is, the psalmist is complaining that evil people (and their children) seem to receive blessings in the world, while those faithful to Yahweh, like the psalmist, suffer at their hands (e.g., Hossfeld and Zenger).²⁹ In this translation, the צְנוּנָיִךָ of Yahweh is understood in a positive sense—that one would indeed *want* to have access to Yahweh’s “reserves” (as Hossfeld and Zenger translate, *Güter*).³⁰

Another, *negative*, sense of this word is also possible, namely, that the reserves of Yahweh amount to the stored up wrath that Yahweh will one day pour out on the wicked. This interpretation presents a more vindictive picture, rivaling that of Ps 137:8–9. From this perspective (e.g., NRSV, Gunkel, Kraus), the psalmist asks for Yahweh’s reserves, his צְנוּנָיִךָ , to be

²⁸ Eaton, *The Psalms: A Historical and Spiritual Commentary*, 99; Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 160.

²⁹ Hossfeld and Zenger, *Die Psalmen I*, 115.

³⁰ Barthélemy presents yet another interpretative option with respect to this participle. Barthélemy largely retains the MT and suggests the following translation for v. 14 as an expanded description of the “wicked” (*malfaiteurs*) in v. 13b: “des pauvres hères [par] ta main, Seigneur, des pauvres hères de ce monde [dont la part est dans la vie] et dont tu gaves le ventre [avec] ton garde-manger.” He notes that the term for humans that appears twice in the first line of v. 14, מְתֵיבִים , appears to have a semantic domain that shades into a negative depiction of humanity. Thus, he translates this term *pauvres hères* (poor wretches). This translation supports the notion that the psalmist is asking for blessing and grace on his enemies and their generations following. They are characterized as being poor and weak, so God fills their bellies, not with his stored-up wrath, but with good things. Barthélemy’s treatment, however, requires importing the senses of מְתֵיבִים and חֶלֶד into this context from other instances of the terms in the HB, a move that is neither necessary nor convincing. Barthélemy, Ryan, and Schenker, *Critique textuelle: Psalms*, 78.

poured out on the enemies and their children and their children's children.³¹ Weiser suggests some "mysterious food secretly stored up by God for future retribution."³² I have adopted the tone of this translation because it makes sense of the next verse (v. 15), which begins with the emphatic וְאֵן. The initial וְאֵן (Yet I) marks a sharp change in topic from the wicked enemy punished by Yahweh (in vv. 9–14) to the righteous psalmist who benefits from Yahweh's action.

My translation above keeps reconstruction of MT to a minimum, opting instead to try to make sense of the difficult Hebrew text as it stands. I understand the many different ancient witnesses as attempts to wrestle with an early Hebrew version with awkward syntax. Compounding the syntactical problems is the relatively unsavory portrayal of the deity who emerges in the text (without emendations). Verse 14 depicts a violent deity who acts vindictively against the psalmist's enemies and their following generations. Ultimately, I must agree with Weiser's perception that those who opt for a wholesale emendation of MT might well be doing so in an attempt to create a more palatable portrayal of God and the psalmist.³³

2. *Literary Analysis*

2. A. Structural Outline

- I. Invocation (v. 1)
- II. Confession of trust and proclamation of righteousness (vv. 2–5)
- III. Petition for protection (vv. 6–9)
- IV. Description of the enemies (vv. 10–12)
- V. Petition for salvation, vindication, and retribution (vv. 13–14)
- VI. Confession of trust (v. 15)

2. B. Rhetorical Movement

The psalm begins with an invocation (v. 1), whereby the psalmist calls upon Yahweh to listen. Bound to this opening invocation is the psalmist's central argument, that he is righteous. Verses 2–5, the confession of trust and proclamation of righteousness, reveal the fundamental logic of the psalm: since the

³¹ Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*, 55; Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 244.

³² Weiser, *The Psalms*, 182.

³³ *Ibid.*

psalmist is righteous, he is confident that Yahweh will act on his behalf. Verses 6–9 petition Yahweh for that very saving and protecting action, which Yahweh must now undertake on account of his enemies. In the same way that vv. 2–5 go to great lengths to describe the psalmist and his righteousness, vv. 10–12 turn the focus with equal intensity on these enemies who so desperately threaten the psalmist. Verses 13–14 contain a second petition. While the first petition in vv. 7–8 asks Yahweh for protection in a *defensive* mode, in vv. 13–14, the psalmist begs Yahweh to launch a blistering and unmerciful offensive against the enemies. In the final verse, the psalm returns to the theme of the psalmist's righteousness (v. 15), which justifies his request for Yahweh's intervention. Additionally, the psalmist contrasts his future with that of the enemy. Although the enemy is bowed down by Yahweh (v. 13), the psalmist exults in the presence of Yahweh (v. 15).

2. C. Form and Setting

The reference to testing (v. 3) along with the psalmist's insistence on his own righteousness (vv. 1–4, 15) has led interpreters to argue for a number of rituals of probation that may have served as a setting for this psalm. Craigie calls the psalm a prayer for protection within the larger category of individual lament. Furthermore, he proposes classifying this psalm as a "morning prayer," likening it to Ps 5.³⁴ Kraus argues that this psalm should be understood as a "prayer song"³⁵ rather than a psalm of lament. He imagines "a cultic institution of the dispensation of divine judgment" in which one seeks protection from Yahweh, who, as a divine judge, renders a verdict on the psalmist's righteousness.³⁶ Following Mowinckel, Kraus further maintains that the psalmist is undergoing a ritual of probation within the temple confines, given the reference to being tested by night (v. 3).³⁷ In addition, he considers the refuge of the wings (v. 8)

³⁴ Craigie, *Psalms I* 50, 161.

³⁵ Kraus, *Psalms I* 59, 245.

³⁶ *Ibid.* Kraus follows Walter Beyerlin on this point. See Walter Beyerlin, *Die Rettung der Bedrängten in den Feindpsalmen der Einzelnen auf institutionelle Zusammenhänge untersucht* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970), 105–11. Hans Schmidt was the first to argue that this psalm reflects an ordeal ritual that takes place within the temple. See Hans Schmidt, *Das Gebet der Angeklagten im Alten Testament* (BZAW 46; Giessen: A. Töpelmann, 1928); Hans Schmidt, *Die Psalmen* (HAT 1.15; Tübingen: Mohr, 1934).

³⁷ Kraus, *Psalms I* 59, 245; Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* (trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas; 2 vols. in one; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Dearborn: Dove Booksellers, 2004), 1:241.

to be a reference to the wings of the cherubim within the sanctuary.³⁸ Weiser also draws heavily on the wing image to hypothesize a cultic scenario for the psalm. He claims “the prayer was uttered at the celebration of the cult of the Covenant Festival where Yahweh appears above the sacred Ark to sit in judgment on evildoers and to reveal his salvation to the community of the godly.”³⁹

All of these arguments for specific *Sitze im Leben* are suspect. Gerstenberger is correct in arguing against a setting in an ordeal⁴⁰ or in a “divine judgment institution at the temple” (so Beyerlin, Schmidt, Kraus, Weiser). As Gerstenberger points out, such an “alleged procedure is totally unknown to us and can be reconstructed only circumstantially by so interpreting texts like Psalm 17.”⁴¹ However, Gerstenberger’s own proposal, that the prayer originates from a “prayer service,” suffers from a similar lack of external evidence. In sum, because of this lack of evidence, it is difficult to identify a specific ritual setting in which this psalm would have been used.

2. D. The Image of the Psalmist

Though the precise setting in life for the psalm is not clear, the psalmist provides a relatively clear self-portrait of himself through several statements about his righteousness (vv. 1–6a, 15). At the outset of the psalm, the psalmist considers himself to be righteousness personified (“Hear, O Yahweh, Righteousness [צדק]!” [v. 1]). Further, he exemplifies upright behavior (“May your eyes see uprightness,” [v. 2]).

In the psalmist’s eyes and (so he hopes) in God’s as well, the psalmist is in right relationship with the community; he has not transgressed laws or upset the social order in thought, word, or deed. The psalmist invites close examination of his innermost thoughts and his heart (v. 3). The psalmist refers repeatedly to his organs of communication, his lips (v. 1) and mouth (v. 3), to show how his speech prompts order rather than disorder. The oral imagery in vv. 1, 3 gives

³⁸ Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 245.

³⁹ Weiser, *The Psalms*, 180.

⁴⁰ See Philip S. Johnston, “Ordeals in the Psalms?” in *Temple and Worship in Biblical Israel* (ed. John Day; Library of Hebrew Bible / Old Testament studies 422; London: T & T Clark, 2005), 271–91; cf. T. S. Frymer, “Ordeal, judicial,” in *IDBSup*, 638–40.

⁴¹ Erhard Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 1: With an Introduction to Cultic Poetry* (FOOT 14; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Erdmans, 1987), 95.

way to paradigmatic language of walking, steps, and pathways in v. 4, in which the psalmist describes how his actions accord with God's instruction.⁴²

The psalmist's earnest attempts to show himself righteous indicate that his righteousness is in grave doubt, most likely because of false accusations from his enemy or enemies. The psalmist's enemies are described using military imagery (v. 11). However, such martial diction, on its own, does not support the inference that the psalmist is the king himself pleading for assistance from political threats, as Eaton maintains.⁴³

Weiser suggests that the psalmist displays "a childlike and tender affection for God," as proved in the two "word-pictures" in v. 8, the image of the apple of God's eye and the refuge under God's wings. Despite the argument about the meaning of the wings of Yahweh, both images, at the very least, convey a sense of divine presence, and the psalmist uses them to describe the way in which he seeks to be close to Yahweh. God's nearness spells protection for the psalmist and, conversely, devastation for the enemies (vv. 13–14). The desire for divine presence does not simply reflect the personal piety of the psalmist. Rather, the psalmist desperately needs God's immediate presence to foil his enemies' violent plans against him.

Finally, the psalmist characterizes himself as one who has a well-established relationship with God, a relationship that will be confirmed upon his vindication. The psalmist, as an individual, has a history with God and, as a member of a community, has witnessed God's action on their behalf (v. 7). The psalmist argues that since he has kept (שמר) Yahweh's words (v. 4), Yahweh should keep/guard (שמר) him (v. 8). Since Yahweh has a reputation of providing refuge to those who seek it (v. 7), Yahweh should indeed hide him (v. 8). In v. 7, one should note that the participles חֹסִים (refugees) and מְתַקֵּקִים (insurgents) are both plural. Thus, in the petitions for salvation, the psalmist is calling upon God to act on a personal level in the same way that God acts on a grand scale (i.e., against "insurgents" on behalf of "refugees"). The relationship between Yahweh and the psalmist finds its final confirmation when the psalmist gazes on the image of the victorious, vindicating God. At the outset of the psalm, the psalmist has asked God to see him in his righteous state (v. 2), and at the psalm's conclusion, the psalmist imagines the delight of seeing Yahweh (v. 15).

⁴² On the metaphor of "pathway," see William P. Brown, *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 31–53.

⁴³ See Eaton, *The Psalms: A Historical and Spiritual Commentary*, 100; J. H. Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms* (SBT 32; Naperville, Ill.: Allenson, 1976), 33.

2. E. The Image of the Enemy/Enemies

Verses 4, 9–12 describe the enemies' physical appearance, attitude, and actions. In these verses, the psalmist casts the enemies as the diametrical opposites of Yahweh and himself, so much so that one could understand *antithesis* as a primary trope in the psalm. In contradistinction to his self-identification as righteousness personified, the enemies of the psalmist are wicked oppressors (vv. 9, 13), violent (v. 4), and prideful and rebellious (v. 10). Opposing the "ways of the violent," the psalmist follows Yahweh's paths (v. 5). Yet these "steps" that follow Yahweh's paths (v. 5) are the same "steps" being surrounded by the enemies (v. 11).

The contrasts continue. While Yahweh's mouth and lips are righteous (v. 1, 4), the mouth of the enemy is rebellious and proud (v. 10). While the psalmist's heart has been tested and proven righteous (v. 3), the heart of the wicked is fat, meaning dull and unresponsive (v. 9). Craigie notes that these enemies are "fat and prosperous on the basis of divine provision, but [unlike the psalmist] have forgotten the divine Provider."⁴⁴ While the psalmist hides for protection under the wings of Yahweh (v. 8), the enemies hide in a different place for a different purpose: to seize prey without warning (v. 12).

Through these contrasting states, the psalmist draws a very clear line between himself and those who persecute him. The psalmist wants Yahweh to confront and bow down these enemies / this lion (v. 13), in response to their desire to bend him down (v. 11). The enemies surround the psalmist (v. 9) and advance and encircle him (v. 11). They are ready to attack. The military (v. 9, 11) and leonine imagery (v. 12) for the enemies presents a most frightening picture.⁴⁵ This composite image of slanderous lion-warriors presents a grave threat that Yahweh must overcome.

2. F. The Image of Yahweh

Anthropomorphism is a primary trope in the psalm. God is described as having eyes (vv. 2, 8), ears (v. 1 [denoted by the verb *הִשְׁמַע*, and implied by *שָׁמַע*]), lips (v. 4), a right hand (v. 7), an unspecified hand (v. 14), and a face (vv. 2, 15). Verse 13 further describes Yahweh bearing a sword. The notable excep-

⁴⁴ Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 163. Kraus explains the "fat" somewhat elliptically as referring to "unfeeling secretiveness." Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 249.

⁴⁵ On the use of leonine imagery for enemies in the psalms, see Strawn, *What is Stronger*, 248–50.

tion to the anthropomorphic imagery is, of course, the reference to the wings of Yahweh in v. 8.

Moving beyond Yahweh's physical characteristics to his actions, the psalm clearly depicts Yahweh as a judge. The psalmist—who consistently refers to himself as righteous—appeals to the God of righteousness as judge.⁴⁶ Yahweh creates and preserves orderly relationships, in part, by punishing those who violate the divine order. Kraus notes: “Yahweh is the God who through saving intervention restores confused situations to order again. The appeal to his ‘righteousness’ is a summons to his saving verdict of justice.”⁴⁷

One can identify at least three aspects of Yahweh's judgeship in this psalm: lawgiver, examiner, and executer of justice. Yahweh's aspect as examiner predominates in the first half of the psalm (vv. 1–6). He evaluates the psalmist's adherence to the law, that is, the psalmist's righteousness (vv. 2–3). Accordingly, the psalmist offers up his word, actions, and thoughts for Yahweh's inspection (vv. 3–4). Yahweh's role as lawgiver is evoked in v. 4 with the phrase “the words of your lips.” The psalmist contrasts his behavior—his attention to Yahweh's “words” (God's laws)—with the “deeds of man” (sinful behavior). Further, the reference to walking in the “pathways” of Yahweh is a well-worn metaphor for maintaining upright behavior as mandated by God's law.⁴⁸

Kraus considers the petition “Rise Yahweh!” (v. 13) to be a request for a judge to render judgment and, then, to mete out justice.⁴⁹ This aspect of Yahweh's judgeship dominates the last half of the psalm (vv. 7–15). In these verses, the divine judge merges with the divine warrior. Craigie has demonstrated that in v. 7 the psalmist's descriptions of Yahweh and Yahweh's actions “mirror that of the Song of the Sea” (Exod 15:1–18). He notes the recurrence of פלא חסד and ימין in Ps 17:7 and Exod 15:11–15, which serves as a reminder that Yahweh's mighty saving acts at the Reed Sea and the salvation of the individual are linked.⁵⁰

Yahweh's martial action in this psalm could be characterized as both defensive and offensive. In defensive, protecting gestures, Yahweh guards and hides (v. 8). The image of Yahweh keeping the psalmist as the apple of his eye denotes his proximity to the deity. In the phrase אִישׁוֹן בְּתַעֲנֵן (v. 8), אִישׁוֹן (the little man) is the miniature reflection of a person visible in the pupil, a reflection that

⁴⁶ Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 246.

⁴⁷ Ibid. One can agree with Kraus's understanding of the judgeship of God without embracing his particular notion of the cultic *Sitz im Leben* of the psalm.

⁴⁸ See Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 31–53.

⁴⁹ Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 249.

⁵⁰ Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 163.

can only be seen when standing very near to another. By keeping the psalmist near, Yahweh protects.

Whereas the psalmist exhorts Yahweh to act in a defensive posture in vv. 7–8, the psalmist petitions Yahweh to take blatantly aggressive actions against the enemies in v. 13. In v. 11, the enemies are described as conspiring to force the psalmist to bend down in submission. In v. 13, the psalmist wishes the same upon them, that God would bow them down, for God's rising has the reverse effect on the enemies. The imagery of Yahweh as warrior and excuter of justice continues in vv. 13b–14, which contain a vicious imprecation against the enemies. Yahweh's sword brings deliverance to the psalmist and utter destruction to the enemy, to such an extent that the judgment resounds through the generations of the enemies.

This psalm presents a particularly compelling case for analyzing the image of Yahweh, since the psalmist's great concluding desire is to see that very image (v. 15), that is, Yahweh's "likeness" (תְּמוּנָה). Through the course of the psalm, a composite picture of God emerges, that of Yahweh as a winged anthropomorphic deity who is primarily concerned with preserving order by establishing laws, examining individuals, and meting out justice.

2. G. The Iconic Structure of Psalm 1

The specific images of the psalmist, the enemies, and Yahweh constitute the psalm's iconic structure, that is, the constellations of literary images by which the psalm structures meaning. The psalm depicts Yahweh as a divine warrior in a winged form. This divine warrior actively protects the psalmist by dispatching the enemies of the psalmist, enemies who are portrayed most vividly in martial and leonine form (vv. 11–12). The depiction of the psalmist as paradigmatically righteous and the enemies as his opposite underscores Yahweh's role as a God of Justice—and a winged, anthropomorphic one at that—who gives law and preserves order through swift and decisive judgment.

3. Iconographic Congruencies to the Constellations of Images in Psalm 17

With this iconic structure of Ps 17 in mind, I turn to the iconography of Syria-Palestine to judge the various options for interpreting the image of the wings of Yahweh in v. 8. I will identify artistic images that are congruent with the psalm's depiction of Yahweh's winged form, as well as those images that may have influenced the psalmist's portrayal of Yahweh in this form. The controlling factors for determining congruence and influence are the literary context of

the image in the textual material, the artistic context of the iconographic motif, and the geography and periodization of the artifact. By considering these contextual controls, one can observe evocative congruencies between literary image and artistic representation. Included below are discussions of the iconography of birds, cherubim, winged disks, and winged anthropomorphic deities.

3. A. Winged Birds

Not surprisingly, wings in Syro-Palestinian art occur most commonly on images of birds, particularly, falcons, vultures, doves, and ostriches.⁵¹ Of these four main species, the falcon and vulture are pictured as protecting the king in Egyptian iconography and in the art of the ancient Near East.⁵² In Syria-Palestine, the falcon retains many of these associations from Egyptian art and serves as a symbol of divine kingship, a representation of the god Horus.⁵³ The vulture, too, symbolizes protection of the king, particularly in Old Syrian seals (e.g., **fig. 2.1**, discussed earlier). This association was no doubt adopted from Egyptian iconography of the goddesses Nekhbet and Mut.⁵⁴ But, as Schroer has rightly pointed out, the vulture as a representative of the mother goddess was also a firmly-established Levantine tradition.⁵⁵ The vulture's symbolic freight in Syro-Palestinian iconography thus does not completely rely on Egyptian antecedents.



Fig. 2.1. Syrian cylinder seal; Middle Bronze Age. After Winter, *Frau und Göttin*, Abb. 280.

⁵¹ See discussion of birds in ch. 2 above.

⁵² Schroer, "Die Göttin und der Geier," 62; Keel, *Studien zu den Stempelsiegeln* 4, 94.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 94–95.

⁵⁴ Schroer, "Die Göttin und der Geier," 62.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 61–68.

Schroer has argued that the wings of the vulture—as mother deity—lie in the background of Yahweh's winged form in the psalms. However, she makes this argument briefly in two publications, with slightly differing conclusions: "Die Göttin und Der Geier" (1995) and "Im Schatten deiner Flügel" (1997). I will engage the first one here and the second later in the discussion of winged goddesses. In "Die Göttin und der Geier," Schroer uses iconographical evidence from the ancient Near East to present a persuasive case for understanding the vulture to be closely associated with a (or, indeed, *the*) goddess⁵⁶ of regeneration, renewal, and death: "*die Herrin über Leben und Tod.*" As a result, she maintains that, in the iconography and literature of ancient Israel, the vulture symbolizes regeneration and motherly care.⁵⁷

Schroer then goes on to suggest that the winged Yahweh in the Psalms—appearing as a vulture—evokes the motherly care of Yahweh, who appears like a vulture: "Es ist wahrscheinlich, dass auch die in den Psalmen häufige Metapher vom Schatten der Flügel Gottes, in welchem sich der Beter oder die Beterin vertrauensvoll bergen wollen, auf die schützenden Geiersflügel zurückzuführen ist."⁵⁸ So in Ps 17:8, as in the rest of the Psalter, Yahweh's wings are those of the vulture, according to Schroer. She notes that Keel has previously made this argument, while allowing that the protection under the wings of Yahweh might rather (or also) evoke that of the Horus falcon: "Keel hat diese Möglichkeit bereits früher einmal erwogen, allerdings als eine unter mehreren, darunter auch die schützenden Flügel des Falkengottes."⁵⁹

However, Keel's comments are actually quite ambiguous about the meaning of the image. At one point, he maintains that the wings of Yahweh "in the final analysis, draw from the natural realm,"⁶⁰ that is, the wings of Yahweh are simply a reference to the wings of a bird protecting its young. Later, he goes on to say that the image of the wings function as a hieroglyph: "Even at the outset of Egyptian history, wings were disassociated from the bird-figure as a kind of hieroglyph for 'protection'.... This motif, which originated in Egypt, was adopted in Palestine and Syria at the close of the second millennium and the

⁵⁶ So Schroer speaks of "*der Geier als Attributtier der Göttin.*" (with "the goddess" construed as singular). Schroer, "Die Göttin und der Geier," 61.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 68–70.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 70 n. 61. Schroer is citing Othmar Keel, *Die Welt der altorientalischen Bildsymbolik und das Alte Testament: Am Beispiel der Psalmen* (3d rev. ed.; Zürich: Benzinger), 170.

⁶⁰ Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms* (New York: Crossroads, 1985), 190.

beginning of the first."⁶¹ In the end, it is not clear if Keel suggests that one should import to the literary image the full significance of the birds or other beings to which the wings are attached, as Schroer's remarks imply.⁶²

How then should one evaluate these different proposals? Is the writer of Ps 17 simply making an analogy to the natural world by evoking the protective care of a mother bird (the "naturalistic option" described in chapter 1)? If so, does the writer intend to invoke the image of a particular type of bird, and which one: vulture, falcon, or some other species? As I have suggested in chapter 2, different types of birds carry different associations in the imagery of Syria-Palestine. Alternately, does the writer mean to disassociate the wings from a specific type of bird? That is to say, should one understand the literary image of the wings to function like a hieroglyph (see Keel's remarks above) to indicate a general sense of protection, and, thus, not evoke the image of a specific bird?

To adjudicate these complicated questions one should search for images of birds in Syro-Palestinian art that might provide congruent representations of the literary image in Ps 17:8. An important methodological issue is at stake, namely, the way in which one evaluates ambiguous or contrasting iconographic evidence concerning a literary crux.

An investigation of avian representations in Syro-Palestinian art immediately begins to undercut the proposal that the psalm evokes the image of a vulture, and by extension, the tradition of a mother goddess. First, and most important, the vulture does not appear as a significant iconographic trope from the Late Bronze Age to the Persian Period. The vulture's appearance in the iconography of Syria-Palestine flourished in the Middle Bronze Age, having developed from a long tradition of vultures in association with the goddess, stretching back to the Neolithic Period.⁶³ Yet, the vulture all but vanished from the iconography of Syria-Palestine in subsequent epochs, during which time the composition and shaping of most of the biblical texts occurred.

One of the few depictions of a vulture after Middle Bronze Age IIB is the Iron Age IIC scarab from Megiddo, discussed above in chapter 2 (fig. 2.3).⁶⁴ The image of the vulture in that scarab, appearing with the gazelle and the

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 192.

⁶² Keel notes, as well, that protecting wings appear on geese when they serve as representations of the god Amun (*ibid.*, 170, fig. 341). The connection of Amun to the goose explains the god's epithet "The Great Cackler." See Vincent Arieh Tobin, "Amun and Amun-Re," *OEAÉ* 1:82-85.

⁶³ See discussion in ch. 2.

⁶⁴ See Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, 233-34.

branch, does suggest a connection to the totems of the mother goddess. But the outspread wings of the vulture seem to suggest flight rather than protection in this constellation. In another depiction of the vulture in Iron Age IIB iconography on a scarab from Megiddo discussed above (**fig. 2.11a**), the bird appears hunting(!) a rabbit in the top register of a seal. Again, in this context, the vulture cannot be construed as providing protection.⁶⁵



Fig. 2.3. Scaraboid; Megiddo; Iron Age IIC. After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 318a.



Fig. 2.11a. Seal; Megiddo; 8th cent. B.C.E. After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 231a.

Furthermore, even in Middle Bronze Age IIB glyptic art, the image of a vulture with wings spread in a protective gesture is far from the most common representation of that bird. Rather, the vulture usually appears in profile (e.g., **fig. 2.2**), and the posture of the wings does not suggest protection.⁶⁶ When a vulture does appear with spread wings, it is frequently the only image on the seal, as in a Middle Bronze Age IIB seal from Megiddo (**fig. 3.1**).⁶⁷ The lack of other significant iconographic elements in this context strains the argument that this vulture's posture necessitates the idea of protection, since no obvious subject is being protected.

⁶⁵ Similarly, the bottom register of the seal depicts a lion hunting a gazelle.

⁶⁶ It seems, rather, that the scene simply presents a number of images of the goddess: a female figure, twigs, a lion, and a vulture.

⁶⁷ Following Hittite conventions, the vulture has two heads. The *uraei* in its claws accord with Egyptian conventions. Schroer, "Die Göttin und der Geier," 65.



Fig. 2.2. Seal; Tell el-Ajjul; Middle Bronze IIB. After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 4.



Fig. 3.1. Seal; Megiddo; Middle Bronze Age IIB. After Schroer, "Die Göttin und der Geier," Abb. 3j.

There is however more and stronger evidence to suggest an iconographic congruency between the image of the falcon and the image of Yahweh in Ps 17:8. The falcon, unlike the vulture, appears as a common motif in virtually every period of Syro-Palestinian art.⁶⁸ Furthermore, it appears most often in gestures of protection, that is, with wings outspread over or toward an image of the king.⁶⁹ Yet the falcon with outspread wings does not simply convey a general notion of protection. Rather, in both Egyptian and Syro-Palestinian iconography, the falcon is a symbol of divine protection of the king, divine authorization of his rule, and, indeed, divine incarnation in the person of the king.⁷⁰ The falcon behind the head of Khafra in an Old Kingdom diorite statue presents a prime example of this close connection and testifies to the antiquity of these associations (**fig. 3.2**).

⁶⁸ Keel, *Studien zu den Stempelsiegeln* 4, 86–91.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 94–5.

⁷⁰ See Keel's comments: "Im Gegensatz zum Uräus, der alle möglichen numinosen Objekte schützt, ist der Falke eng mit dem König verbunden, der ihn auf Erden repräsentiert" (*Ibid.*, 95).



Fig. 3.2. Diorite Statue of Khafra; Old Kingdom (4th Dynasty). After Keel, *Die Welt der altorientalischen Bildsymbolik*, fig. 260.

As Keel has rightly noted, the falcon extends its wings behind the head of the king, showing that Horus safeguards and validates Khafra's rule. In this particular representation, the back of the head of the king and the front of the falcon's body merge into one, illustrating a principle of divine kinship. As Gay Robins maintains, "this image is a concrete expression of the notions that the king is both under the protection of Horus and also the manifestation of the god

on earth."⁷¹ Numerous depictions of the falcon in similar gestures occur throughout the history of Egyptian art (e.g., a New Kingdom relief of Seti I from Abydos, **fig. 2.5**, discussed above).

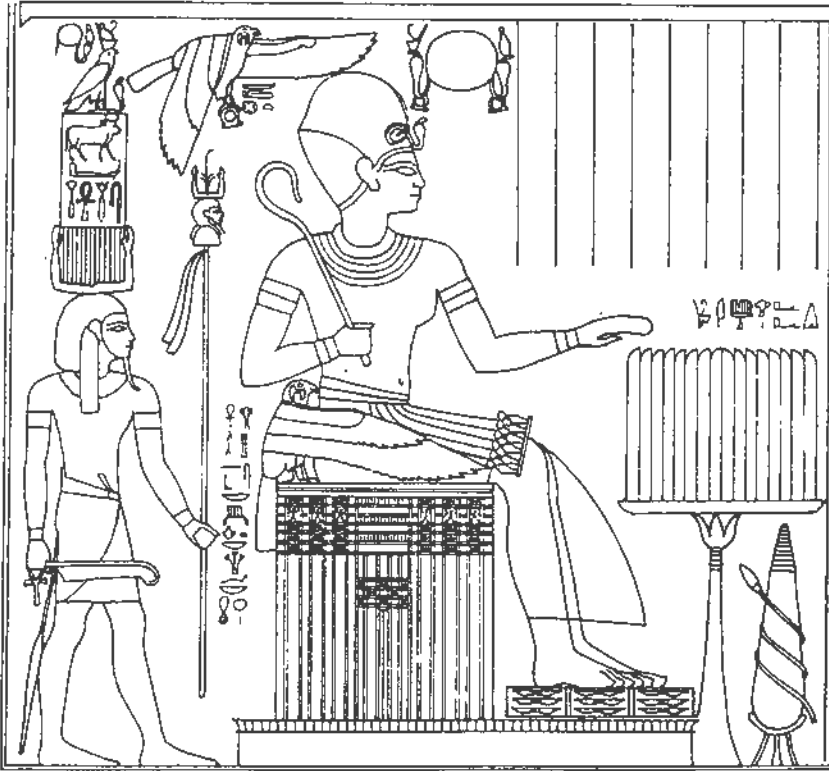


Fig. 2.5. Wall relief of Seti I: Chapel of Seti I at Abydos; 19th Dynasty. After Keel, *Studien zu den Stempelsiegeln aus Palästina/Israel* 4, 131, Abb. 54.

As early as the Fourth Dynasty (middle of the third millennium B.C.E.), the Horus falcon has taken on an association with the solar god Re, a connection that is apparent iconographically in the enduring image of the winged sun disk,

⁷¹ Robins, *The Art of Ancient Egypt*, 51.

comprised of the sun disk Re and the wings of the Horus falcon.⁷² Born of Egyptian ideas of kingship, the iconographic nexus of falcon, king, and sun disk migrates into Syro-Palestinian miniature art—a constellation of images that Keel has studied in great detail.⁷³ Keel argues that when the falcon appears in Iron-age Syro-Palestinian art, its wings are usually spread in a gesture of protection around the king, who is himself the earthly representative of the sun god.

A scarab from Tell el-Ajjul illustrates well this connection between king, sun, and falcon (fig. 3.3, cf. fig. 2.6). The central figure can be identified as king in part because of the classic Egyptian throne upon which he sits.⁷⁴ The figure is flanked by four schematized pairs of falcon wings; the bodies of the falcons are not distinguishable. Above the figure hovers a winged sun disk. Below is a collar representing the hieroglyph for gold, *nbn*. Under the outstretched arm in front of the figure and between the falcon wings in the upper right quadrant is a sun disk, which frequently appears on seals of this type, especially between each pair of falcon's wings (though not in this example).⁷⁵



Fig. 3.3. Seal, Tell el-Ajjul, 10th–9th cent. B.C.E. After Keel, *Studien zu den Stempelsiegeln aus Palästina/Israel* 4, 125, Abb. 7.

This seal confirms Keel's observation that wings can appear schematized to such a degree that the body of the bird is no longer recognizable.⁷⁶ Numerous other Syro-Palestinian seals demonstrate this same tendency. For example, a

⁷² Maya Müller, "Re and Re-Horakhty," *OEAJ* 3:123.

⁷³ "Der Pharao als Sonnengott: Eine Gruppe ägypto-palästinischer Siegelamulette des 10./9. Jahrhunderts," in Keel, *Studien zu den Stempelsiegeln* 4.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁷⁶ Keel, *The Symbolism*, 190.

ninth–tenth-century seal from Achzib pictures a seated king with a *uraeus* extending from his mouth (fig. 3.4). Facing him are two large outspread falcon's wings, the body of the falcon being represented only as a slim stalk-like line connected to the upper wing. Two sun disks appear between the king and the wings, along with a *djed*-pillar, a symbol of stability and order. A *nbw*-collar appears at the bottom of the scene.⁷⁷ So while the falcon's body is not distinguishable, having been radically schematized, the wings are certainly to be understood as belonging to the falcon because of the constellation of images in the scene, including the *nbw*-collar, seated king, *uraeus*, and sun disk(s).



Fig. 3.4. Seal; Achzib; 9th–7th cent. B.C.E. After Keel, *Studien zu den Stempelsiegeln aus Palästina/Israel* 4, 125, Abb. 10.

To return to the textual question at hand, if the image of the winged Yahweh in Ps 17 were to be associated with any bird at all, the wings of the Horus falcon would be the most likely congruent iconographical motif. Because of the overwhelming frequency of the image of the falcon's protecting wings in Syro-Palestinian art, this option seems much more likely than the proposal that the wings evoke those of the vulture and, correspondingly, the mother goddess.

One might argue that the wings of Yahweh are not associated with any particular bird, but with birds in general, since protecting wings can appear on their own—disarticulated, as it were (e.g., fig. 3.3).⁷⁸ However, this proposal requires one to ignore the iconographic context of such disembodied wings. Disembodied protecting wings in Syro-Palestinian iconography are consistently bound to other royal and solar imagery (again, see fig. 2.4). Although protecting wings can appear highly schematized, the rest of the scene in which these

⁷⁷ For a thorough discussion of all the elements in the scene, see Keel, *Studien zu den Stempelsiegeln* 4, 67–72.

⁷⁸ So Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 21; Gerstenberger, *Psalms. Part 1*, 230; and (seemingly) Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World*, 192.

wings appear strongly suggests that the wings belong to the falcon, according to the Egyptian heritage of the constellation.

On the basis of the iconographic representations of wings on birds or belonging to birds, I conclude that the protecting wings of Yahweh are related to the iconography of the Horus falcon. That falcon is not simply any bird, but a bird with strong connections to the ideology of kingship and solar theology, both deriving from Egyptian iconography.

Additional support for this association of Yahweh with the wings of the Horus falcon emerges when one analyzes the literary context of the image in Ps 17. At its climax in v. 15, the psalmist experiences the saving presence of Yahweh when he beholds the form of God upon waking. Mark Smith has raised the possibility that v. 15 refers to "a morning solar theophany in the temple."⁷⁹ In addition, Eaton has suggested that this psalm has "clearly royal content," that is, that the king is the "I" of the psalm. He reaches this conclusion on the bases of the military imagery for the enemy and the intimate tone with which the psalmist addresses God.⁸⁰ The psalm seems to present a constellation of literary images that includes solar language (a morning theophany), a king, and a winged protecting deity.

A careful analysis of congruencies between Ps 17 and Syro-Palestinian iconography suggests that the image of the protecting wings should not be understood in a simple naturalistic manner. The psalmist does far more than simply observe the natural world and employ a metaphor, characterizing Yahweh on the basis of the way a bird cares for its young. Rather, the foregoing analysis of birds in Syro-Palestinian art suggests that the image of the falcon presents a close iconographic congruency to the image of the protecting wings of Yahweh in Ps 17. This congruency is much closer than that of the wings of just any bird or, more specifically, the wings of the vulture, as Schroer has maintained.

3. B. Winged Cherubim

Though a reasonable case can be made for associating Yahweh's wings with those of the falcon, there are other interpretive options. Of all the proposals for understanding the image of Yahweh's wings in the Psalms, the idea that the wings refer, at least in part, to the cherubim in the holy of holies (e.g., 1 Kgs 6:23–28; 2 Chr 3:13) has garnered vast support among scholars of the last cen-

⁷⁹ Though Smith raises this possibility, he does not ultimately endorse it. Mark S. Smith, "'Seeing God' in the Psalms: The Background to the Beatific Vision in the Hebrew Bible," *CBQ* 50 (1988): 175–81.

⁸⁰ Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms*, vii, 33–34. See above.

tury and among a relatively large number of scholars in preceding centuries.⁸¹ If one follows these arguments, the psalmist's desire to hide under Yahweh's wings signals a plea for refuge in the sanctuary.

Biblical texts describe a number of images of cherubim in the iconography of the temple. Carol Meyers divides these various cherubim into the categories "two dimensional" and "three dimensional."⁸² The former includes the cherubim adorning the inner curtains and veil of the holy of holies in the tabernacle (Exod 26:1, 31; 36:8, 35); the cherubim carved on the inner walls of the sanctuary (1 Kgs 6:29; cf. 2 Chr 3:7 and Ezek 41:18–20) and doors (1 Kgs 7:32, 35; cf. Ezek 41:25); and those carved on panels on the stands for lavers (1 Kgs 7:28, 36).⁸³ Three-dimensional cherubim include the golden cherubim covering the ark of the covenant (i.e., the "mercy seat," Exod 25:18–22; 37:7–9) and the gilded, olivewood cherubim filling the temple's innermost chamber (1 Kgs 6:23–28; 8:6–7).⁸⁴

Most scholars who associate Yahweh's wings with cherubim seem to refer to the three-dimensional cherubim within the holy of holies. For example, in his exposition of Ps 17:8, Kraus comments: "the term כַּנְפֵי very likely refers to the extended wings over the cherubim above the ark of the covenant, which are thought of as the symbol of God's protection. The reference of this statement to the holy of holies in the temple, in which the cherubim were located, may be

⁸¹ See, for example, Briggs and Briggs, *Psalms*, 1:130; Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 249; Weiser, *The Psalms*, 18; Hossfeld and Zenger, *Die Psalmen I*, 117; Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*: 298. Cf. Marjo C. A. Korpel, *A Rift in the Clouds*, 550; Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 292. Commenting on the image of Yahweh's protecting wings as it appears in the Ruth 2:12, Zenger suggests that the image draws originally from the way a bird protects her young, but is later "concretized" (*werde konkretisiert*) through the image of the cherubim in the temple as a symbol of the protecting environment of God. Erich Zenger, *Das Buch Ruth* (ZBK.AT 8; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1992), 57. See similar comments by Christian Frevel, *Das Buch Ruth* (Neuer Stuttgarter Kommentar Altes Testament 6 Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1992), 76; Klaus Seybold, *Die Psalmen* (HAT 1/15; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1996), 229. See, too, Pirim Hugger's suggestion that the cherubim themselves may draw from the earlier notion of divine protecting wings symbolizing Yahweh's presence. Pirim Hugger, *Jahwe meine Zuflucht: Gestalt und Theologie des 91. Psalms* (Münsterschwartzacher Studien 13; Münsterschwartzachen: Vier-Türme-Verlag, 1971), 105, 108. Note however that Alice Wood does not argue that the wings of God in the Psalms reflect an image of the cherubim (*Of Wings and Wheels: A Synthetic Study of the Biblical Cherubim* [BZAW 385; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008]).

⁸² Carol Meyers, "Cherubim," *ABD* 1:899–900.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

recognized without difficulty."⁸⁵ Kraus seems to be referring to the golden cherubim of the mercy seat rather than the large, gilded olivewood cherubim that faced the entrance of the holy of holies. However, it should be noted that his comments do not clearly distinguish between the pairs of cherubim. Indeed, many proponents of the "winged cherubim interpretation" fail to make any distinction at all between these two pairs of cherubim within the holy of holies. Furthermore, no interpreter has justified associating the wings of Yahweh with one particular representation of the cherubim over the many "two-dimensional" cherubim in the temple's iconography. For example, Hossfeld and Zenger refer simply to "die Kerubim im Jerusalemer Tempel," with no further explication.⁸⁶ So, one must ask: if the wings of Yahweh in the psalms are intended to be a clear reference to the "temple cherubim," to which particular cherubim does the passage refer and why? So far no one has directly addressed this question.

The primary problem with claiming that Ps 17 refers to the winged cherubim is simply that the text expressly identifies the wings as belonging to Yahweh, not the cherubim: "in the shadow of *your* wings I seek refuge" (*בְּצֵל כַּנְּפֵיךָ*, v. 8). Nowhere in the biblical text or in Syro-Palestinian iconography do the cherubim appear as substitutes for Yahweh or any other chief deity.⁸⁷ The cherubim rather carry and support the deity or king.

Ancient Near Eastern art confirms that the two large cherubim in the holy of holies facing the entrance to the temple would have served as the throne of Yahweh, a claim consistent with the frequent description of Yahweh in the HB as one enthroned upon the cherubim (1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2; 2 Kgs 19:15; 1 Chr 13:6; Pss 80:2; 99:1; Isa 37:16).⁸⁸ Among the numerous examples of such cherubim thrones in Syro-Palestinian art is the Late Bronze Age ivory plaque from Megiddo (**fig. 1.2**).⁸⁹ The scene depicts the victorious return of a king or prince and his installation on the cherubim throne (at left). Exhibiting similar styles are the throne on the sarcophagus of Ahiiram from Byblos (**fig. 3.5**); another small ivory carved throne from Megiddo (both from the Late Bronze Age); and several examples from Phoenician glyptic art.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, 248.

⁸⁶ Hossfeld and Zenger, *Die Psalmen I*, 117.

⁸⁷ Peter Riede, *Im Netz des Jägers: Studien zur Feindmetaphorik der Individualpsalmen* (WMANT 85; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2000), 330.

⁸⁸ See Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen und Siegelkunst*, 15–45.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ For the similarities of these and other thrones to the large olivewood cherubim of the holy of holies (1 Kgs 6:23–28), see *ibid.*

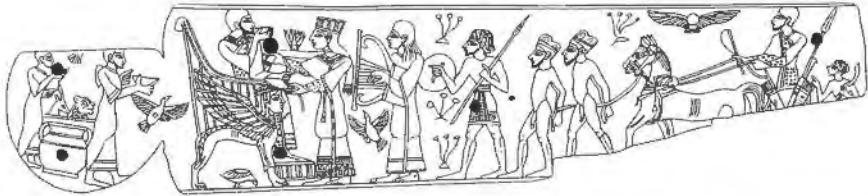


Fig 1.2. Ivory plaque; Megiddo; Late Bronze Age. After Loud, *The Megiddo Ivories*, pl. 4, 2a and 2b.

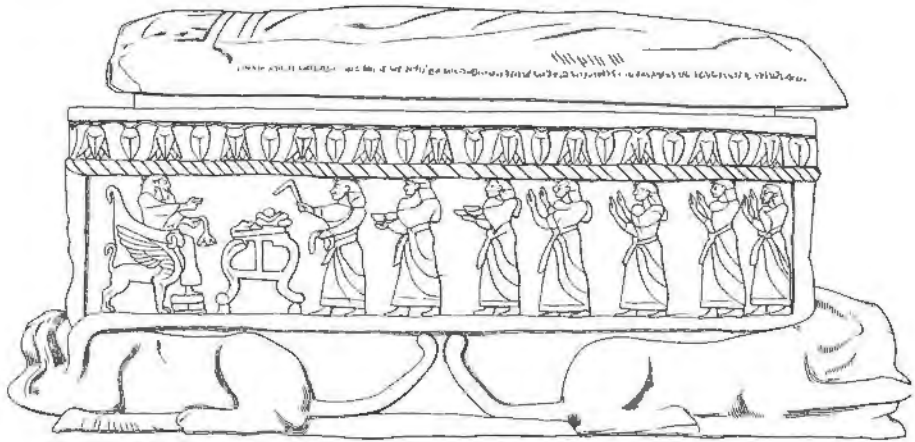


Fig. 3.5. Sarcophagus of Ahiiram; Byblos; 13th cent. B.C.E. After Frankfort, *Art and Architecture*, illus. 317.

The large, gilded olivewood cherubim in the holy of holies no doubt serve as a throne for Yahweh, who is seated invisibly upon them, with the ark of the covenant as his footstool.⁹¹ Keel has provided the following schema of the holy of holies (fig. 3.6), in which the inner wings of each cherub touch, while the outer wings extend diagonally upward to touch the walls and serve as the arms of the throne.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

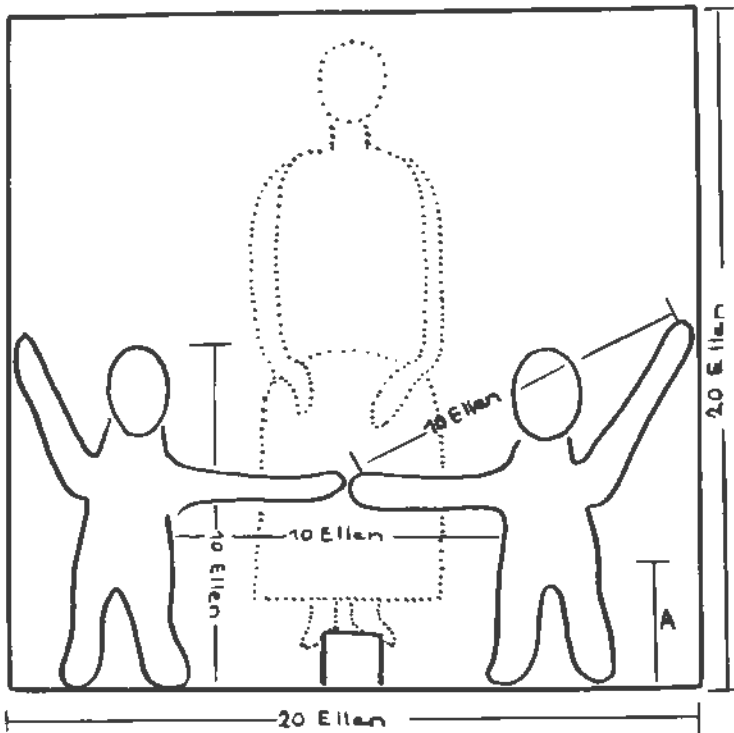


Fig. 3.6. Schematic of the cherubim throne in the holy of holies. After Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen und Siegelkunst*, Abb. 10.

With the wings of an eagle, the head of a man (or other creature depending on the variant), and the body of a lion, the composite features of cherubim attest their tremendous power. Keel remarks, “im Kerub sind die höchsten Kräfte kreatürlicher Macht vereint.”⁹² With attributes drawn from these paradigmatically powerful animals, these hybrid beasts are commonly associated with the kings or gods (cf. Ezek 28:14); and the cherubim convey to the observer the fearful power of the god or king who sits above them.⁹³

⁹² Ibid., 34.

⁹³ Ibid.

On account of their numinous power, these kingly beasts⁹⁴ also serve as guardian beings, frequently depicted flanking a sacred tree or, alternately, with other vegetal elements. Examples of such postures of protection include the depictions of winged griffons flanking a sacred tree in two Iron Age seals from Megiddo (fig. 2.11a, b), while human-headed sphinxes appear with stylized trees or papyrus stalks in numerous Nimrud ivories (e.g., fig. 2.13a, b).



Figs. 2.11a, b. Seals; Megiddo; 8th cent. B.C.E. After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 231a, b.



Figs. 2.13a, b. Ivory inlays; Samaria; Iron Age IIB. After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 232a, b.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

These associations convey the idea that cherubim guard the mythological “garden of the deity,” in which blessings abound (cf. Gen 3:24; Ezek 41:17–19).⁹⁵ In the Jerusalem temple, it seems that the cherubim function both as the throne of Yahweh and as guardians of Yahweh’s holy precincts.⁹⁶

While cherubim clearly guard and protect divine realms, there is little evidence to suggest that their protecting power extends to humans. Throughout Syro-Palestinian art of the Late Bronze Age to the Persian period, there are numerous depictions of humans beneath winged sphinxes, but the significance of these representations is often ambiguous. One common representation is the winged sphinx trampling enemy soldiers, an image that draws from Egyptian depictions of the king in the form of a sphinx treading on foreigners, as, for example, on the arms of the throne of Amenhotep III (fig. 3.7).⁹⁷



Fig. 3.7. Throne of Amenhotep III; 1390–1352 B.C.E. After Metzger, *Königsthron und Gottesthron*, Abb. 234.

⁹⁵ Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, 234.

⁹⁶ The literature on the iconography of the First and Second Temples is, of course, massive. For a comprehensive summary of the critical issues, see Carol Meyers, “Temple, Jerusalem,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (ed. David Noel Freedman; New York: Doubleday, 1992) 6: 350–69.

⁹⁷ Eric Gubel, “Phoenician and Aramean Bridle-harness Decoration: Examples of Cultural Contact and Innovation in the Eastern Mediterranean,” in *Crafts and Images in Contact*, 136. Cf. Martin Metzger, *Königsthron und Gottesthron: Thronformen und Throndarstellungen in Ägypten und im Vorderen Orient im dritten und zweiten Jahrtausend vor Christus und deren Bedeutung für das Verständnis von Aussagen über den Thron im Alten Testament* (AOAT 15: 2 vols.; Kevelaer: Verlag Butzon & Bercker, 1985). For an image of Thutmosis IV as sphinx, see Theodore M. Davis, Howard Carter, and Percy E. Newberry, eds., *The Tomb of Thoutmôsis IV* (Facsim. of 1904 [London: Constable & Co.] ed.: London: Duckworth, 2001), 31–33, fig. 8.

Syro-Palestinian art contains numerous variations on this image, including two chariot trappings from Salamis (figs. 3.8, 3.9).⁹⁸



Fig. 3.8. Bronze disk of chariot B; Salamis; 9th-7th cent. (?) B.C.E. After Karageorghis, *Salamis in Cyprus*, fig. 20.

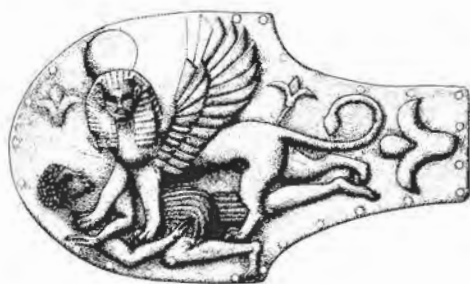


Fig. 3.9. Horse blinker; Salamis; 9th-7th cent. (?) B.C.E. After Karageorghis, *Salamis in Cyprus*, fig. 26.

Both sphinxes appear striding atop human figures that lie prone beneath the creatures in contorted postures. In both cases, the individual's right leg is extended and the left leg is pulled forward as if trying to crawl out from under the sphinx. The arms of both figures are in an unnatural position, which may express injury to the upper body or the arms themselves. Further, the hands of the human figures appear in a posture of fear or reverence with palms facing away from the faces of the men.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ The Phoenician iconography appears throughout the Mediterranean basin and Mesopotamia, with a particularly large number of artifacts discovered in Cyprus. Most of these artifacts were produced by Phoenician artisans who were probably manufacturing these items in workshops outside of Phoenicia. For discussion of Phoenician workshops in Cyprus, see "The Phoenicians and Cyprus," in Glenn Markoe, *Phoenician Bronze and Silver Bowls from Cyprus and the Mediterranean* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 6-12. Cf. Vassos Karageorghis, *Salamis in Cyprus: Homeric, Hellenistic and Roman* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969).

⁹⁹ This observation comes via personal communication from Brent A. Strawn.

Though one sphinx has a human head (**fig. 3.8**) and the other a leonine head (**fig. 3.9**), both heads are surmounted by an image of the sun: a disk alone and a disk between cow horns, respectively. This disk associates these sphinxes with heavenly deities. The vegetal elements so common in representation of sphinxes from the Nimrud ivories (and elsewhere, suggestive of the sphinx's role in guarding the garden of the deity) also appear in these representations as well. In **fig. 3.8** florets appear above and below the sphinx, and in **fig. 3.9**, three similar florets appear, though differently positioned.

Clearly these two Cypro-Phoenician examples accord with well-established Syro-Palestinian representations of sphinxes. Yet an important question remains: do the humans appearing beneath the sphinxes always and everywhere portray the notion of the sphinx conquering or dominating them? Eric Gubel maintains, "in Phoenician art, winged androcephalic and hieracocephalic sphinxes protect rather than trample on fallen soldiers, unless the latter are clearly characterized as soldiers of enemy forces."¹⁰⁰ Gubel suggests that the individuals in **figs. 3.8, 3.9** are indeed being trampled, in part because they display "foreign" characteristics, namely, Assyrian (**fig. 3.8**) and Negroid (**fig. 3.9**) traits. Gubel claims that one example of sphinxes appearing in a protecting gesture above humans appears in a silver bowl from Idalion (**fig. 3.10**). It shows a procession of human- and hawk-headed sphinxes standing over individuals, comprising the central register of the bowl. Gubel maintains that because these recumbent humans have Phoenician or Egyptian characteristics, one should think that the sphinxes are providing protection to these individuals as soldiers who have fallen wounded in battle.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Gubel, "Phoenician and Aramean Bridle-harness Decoration: Examples of Cultural Contact and Innovation in the Eastern Mediterranean," 136.

¹⁰¹ Eric Gubel, "Multicultural and Multimedial Aspects of Early Phoenician Art, c. 1200–675 BCE," in *Images as Media: Sources for the Cultural History of the Near East and the Eastern Mediterranean (1st Millennium BCE)* (ed. Christoph Uehlinger; OBO 175; Fribourg: University Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 195–96.



Fig. 3.10. Silver bowl; Idalion; 7th cent. B.C.E. (?) After Markoe, *Phoenician Bronze and Silver Bowls*, 244.

Both in the line drawing and the original silver bowl,¹⁰² it is extremely difficult to distinguish the features of the individuals beneath the sphinxes. Furthermore, a figure in a very similar posture appears with two Asiatics, ready to receive the deathblow at the hand of the striding figure at center. The apparent similarity between that figure and those lying beneath the sphinxes suggests that humans are indeed not being protected beneath the sphinxes. Rather, the humans are the prey of the sphinxes.

Likewise, it is unlikely that one should construe the humans as receiving protection when they appear beneath ram-headed sphinxes (**fig. 3.11**). In his analysis of these two ivory plaques from Nimrud, Gubel, rightly in this case, suggests that the motif of supporting attendants derives from Hittite representations of atlants, as, for example, in the thirteenth-century B.C.E. ivory plaque from Megiddo (**fig. 3.12**).¹⁰³

¹⁰² See Markoe, *Phoenician Bronze and Silver Bowls*, 245.

¹⁰³ See discussion in ch. 2 above regarding **fig. 2.9**.



Fig. 3.11. Ivory plaques; Nimrud; 8th cent. B.C.E. After Gubel, *Multicultural and Multimedial Aspects*, fig. 27.



Fig. 3.12. Ivory plaque; Megiddo; 13th cent. B.C.E. Frankfort, *Art and Architecture*, illus. 274.

The posture of the upraised hand on these plaques from Nimrud may be reminiscent of the plea for mercy—a gesture of fear, reverence, and submission evident in so many representations of sphinxes trampling humans. So the humans beneath the sphinxes in **fig. 3.11** appear to be atlants or, alternately, to be under the domination of the sphinx. It does not follow that they should be understood as receiving protection from the sphinx standing above them. Ultimately, adjudicating whether and when a sphinx offers protection to humans by striding atop them is beyond the scope of this work. Suffice it to say here that there are no clear examples of the sphinx providing protection to a human. In sum, there is minimal, if any, iconographic evidence to suggest that the psalmist is protected by the wings of the cherubim in the temple.

There are several additional arguments against associating the wings of Yahweh with the cherubim of the temple. The force of these arguments, combined with the iconographical evidence above, all but rules out the possibility that the psalmist refers to the wings of cherubim in Ps 17:8. Arguing against Kraus's notion that the psalmist seeks asylum in the temple, "under the wings of the cherubim," Riede rightly observes that the refugee would never be able to enter the inner portion of the holy of holies and, in doing so, encounter the "shadow" of the cherubim's wings.¹⁰⁴ Further, Riede notes that since Yahweh's cherubim are named explicitly in several psalms (Pss 18:11; 80:2; 99:1), there is no reason to think they would not be named explicitly in Ps 17 (and elsewhere) if their protection indeed extended to the individual psalmists. Where the cherubim are mentioned explicitly in these other texts, the psalms describe them as carriers for Yahweh. They do not protect individuals.¹⁰⁵ So, with Riede, I categorically deny the claim that the wings of Yahweh in Ps 17 and the rest of the Psalter refer to the cherubim.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Indeed, Riede's careful discussion of Yahweh's wings in the psalms is the longest presentation of the issue prior to the present study (*Im Netz des Jägers*, 325–38). H. Jauss has also observed that the cherubim would not be able to provide a shadow, because the holy of holies had no windows and, thus, no light (Hannelore Jauss, *Tor der Hoffnung: Vergleichsformen und ihre Funktion in der Sprache der Psalmen* [Europäische Hochschulschriften 23.412; Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1991], 241). But Riede rightly notes that Jauss has interpreted לַיְי too literally (Riede, *Im Netz des Jägers*, 330). The figurative meaning of לַיְי (protection) is well established in the biblical text. Cf. *HALOT*, 1024–25.

¹⁰⁵ Riede, *Im Netz des Jägers*, 330.

¹⁰⁶ Schoer likewise rejects this option on similar grounds.

3. C. Winged Disks and Winged Anthropomorphic Deities

Having excluded the possibility that Ps 17 refers to images of cherubim from temple iconography, I now turn to two related categories of winged figures in Syro-Palestinian art: winged disks and winged anthropomorphic deities.

Several scholars have suggested that the image of the winged sun disk lies in the background of the image of the winged Yahweh in the Psalms. For example, Hossfeld and Zenger suggest the winged sun disk is one of the possible associations of the image.¹⁰⁷ Zenger (alone and in an earlier publication) draws a connection between the image of the winged Yahweh in the Psalms and Mal 3:20 [ET 4:2], the reference to Yahweh as the “sun of righteousness” with healing in his wings.¹⁰⁸ Concerning the image of Yahweh’s winged form in the Psalms, he asserts confidently: “das ist die altorientalische Metapher von JHWH als geflügelten ‘Sonne der Gerechtigkeit’... Ihr Licht verjagt das Böse und rettet den vom Tod Bedrohten.”¹⁰⁹ Theodore Podella also entertains the possibility that the wings of Yahweh refer to the winged sun disk,¹¹⁰ as does L. A. F. Le Mat.¹¹¹ Schroer also acknowledges the possibility that the winged sun disk stands behind the image of Yahweh’s wings throughout the Psalms, but then quickly dismisses it.¹¹² In this section, I will discuss images of the winged sun disk in Syro-Palestinian art and the Mesopotamian and Egyptian iconography that influence this image. A careful analysis of the image will caution against any hasty dismissal of the appropriateness of the winged sun disk as a congruent image of the winged Yahweh in this psalm.

In chapter 2, I demonstrated that the image of the winged sun disk is one of the most common images in ancient Near Eastern—and, specifically, Syro-Palestinian—art from the Late Bronze Age to the Persian period. Tallay Ornan has recently traced the development of the image of the winged sun disk as it moved from its origin in Egyptian iconography throughout the larger ancient

¹⁰⁷ Hossfeld and Zenger, *Die Psalmen I*, 117. (Hossfeld is the primary author for the entry on Ps 17.)

¹⁰⁸ Erich Zenger, *Ich will die Morgenröte wecken: Psalmenauslegungen* (Freiburg: Herder, 1991), 16.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ See, for example, his comments on Ps 63 (Thomas Podella, *Das Lichtkleid JHWHs: Untersuchungen zur Gestaltlichkeit Gottes im Alten Testament und seiner altorientalischen Umwelt* [FAT 15: Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1996], 192 n. 36).

¹¹¹ His comments to this effect concern Ps 36. Le Mat, *Textual Criticism*, 23.

¹¹² Schroer, “Im Schatten deiner Flügel,” 299.

Near East.¹¹³ Throughout, Ornan does not refer to the image as “the winged sun disk,” arguing instead that the iconography does not necessarily represent a solar deity, particularly in Mesopotamian incarnations where it “could signify major gods functioning as heads of pantheons” (i.e., Aššur and Marduk).¹¹⁴ However, the winged disk representing non-solar deities is the exception rather than the rule. Thus, in the course of this study, I will use the “winged sun disk” unless the iconography clearly suggests something other than solar deity.

As the image of the winged sun disk migrates from Egypt into Syria and Mesopotamia, Ornan observes that military and anthropomorphic elements begin to appear in the iconography, features that were absent in its original Egyptian form. In the Neo-Assyrian broken obelisk (fig. 3.13), for example, anthropomorphic aspects of this winged disk appear, albeit minimally, as two hands extended beneath the feathers that surround the disk. The militarizing aspects are also clear, for one hand holds a bow and arrow. These weapons convey that the celestial deity represented by the winged disk grants military power to the king (here likely *Aššur-bel-kala*, 1073–1056 B.C.E.).¹¹⁵

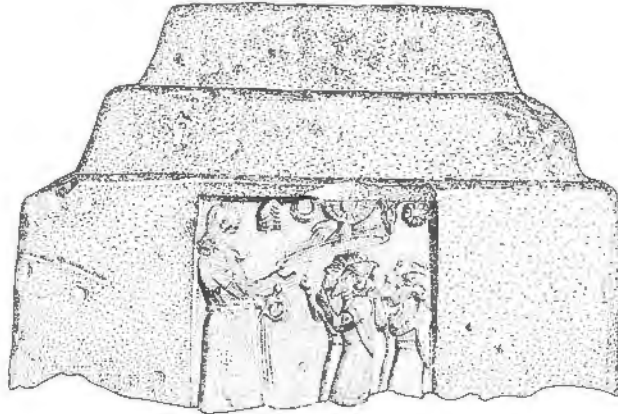


Fig. 3.13. Broken obelisk; Nineveh; 1073–1056 B.C.E.. After Börker-Klähn and Shunnar-Misera, *Alt Vorderasiatische Bildstelen 2*, Abb. 131.

¹¹³ Ornan, “A Complex System,” 206–41.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 206.

¹¹⁵ See Anton Moortgat, *The Art of Ancient Mesopotamia: The Classical Art of the Near East* (London: Phaidon, 1969), 122.

Ornan points to the glazed tile of Tukulti-Ninurta II (890–884 B.C.E.) as a further example of the anthropomorphizing and militarizing of the winged disk (fig. 1.4 discussed earlier). In this tile, the deity appears with fuller human characteristics than on the Broken Obelisk. A two-winged deity with feathers for lower-parts—or wearing a skirt made from feathers—is incorporated within what appears to be a blazing sun disk. Like the Broken Obelisk, the deity in the disk also bears a bow and arrow. The posture is, however, much more aggressive, for the bow is drawn. The slightly-dipped forward wing—discernable by reference to the registers of text above—and the face of the deity in profile combine to suggest that this deity is in motion, even on the attack.

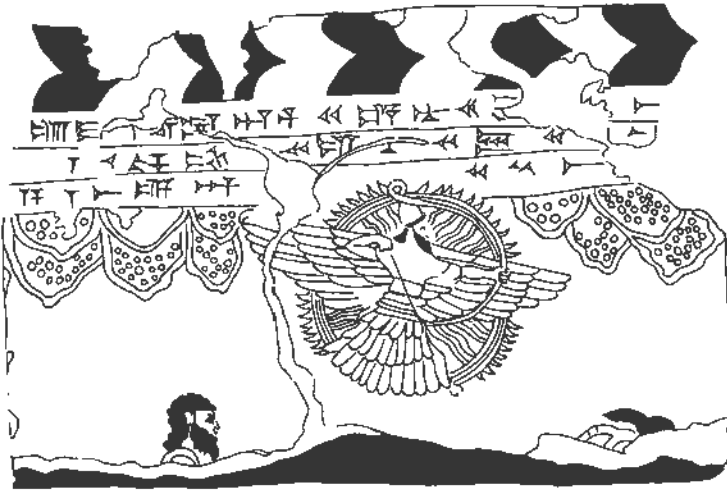


Fig. 1.4. Glazed tile of Tukulti Ninurta II; 888–884 B.C.E. After Keel, *Die Welt der altorientalischen Bildsymbolik*, Abb. 295.

To Ornan's examples, one could also add the deity pictured in a ninth-century relief from Nimrud. In this representation, the torso of the figure appears encircled within the disk (fig. 3.14). This figure is also very clearly on the attack as he draws back his bow and prepares to shoot his arrow.



Fig. 3.14. Relief; Nimrud; 883–859 B.C.E. After Meissner, *Babylonien und Assyrien* 2, Abb. 10.

Ornan highlights one further example of the winged disk from Neo-Assyrian art, one that adorns the draft pole of the war chariot of Tiglath Pileser III as it appears in a wall relief from Nimrud (**fig. 3.15**). While this winged disk is not anthropomorphic, the larger context of the image is decidedly martial, associating the sun disk again with military aggression.¹¹⁶

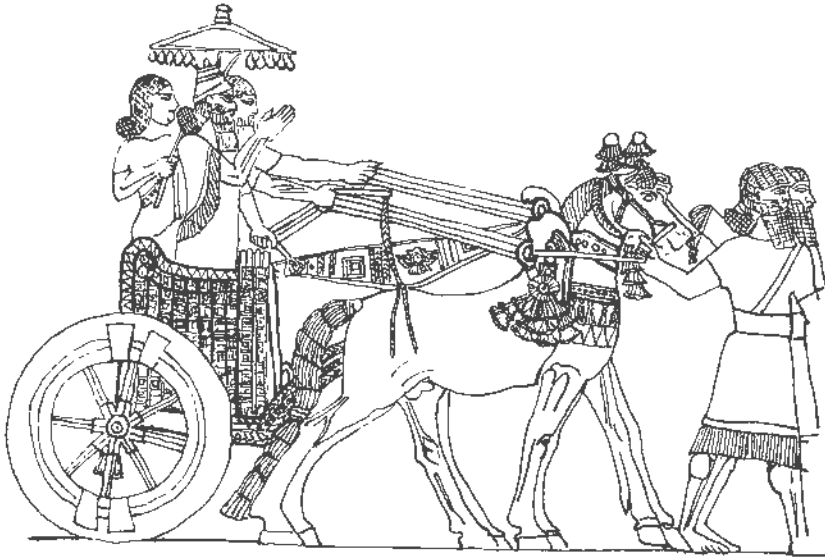


Fig. 3.15. Wall relief of Tiglath Pileser III; Nimrud; 744–727 B.C.E. After Madhloom, *The Chronology of Neo-Assyrian Art*, plate 3.2.

¹¹⁶ See Oman, "A Complex System," 212.

The militarizing of the solar disk appears not to have been limited to Neo-Assyrian art. In the famous ivory plaque from Megiddo (**fig. 1.2**), for example, the winged disk hovers above the victorious prince returning from battle in his war chariot. Military images abound in the right half of the plaque. Before the king, tied to his chariot, are captives (Shasu?).¹¹⁷ A soldier with spear and shield leads the procession and another with a sickle sword processes behind the chariot.

In light of the militarized and oft-anthropomorphized winged disk, a striking congruency emerges in text of Ps 17. When the various images of Yahweh in the psalm are taken together, one sees the picture of a Yahweh with wings (v. 8), eyes (vv. 2, 8), ears (vv. 1, 6), lips (v. 4), a right hand (v. 7), hand (v. 14), and a face (vv. 2, 15). The composite “form” of Yahweh—his *תמונתו*, as it is called in the psalm’s final verse—is thus that of a winged, anthropomorphic deity, one who assumes a violent and aggressive posture toward the enemies, particularly in vv. 13b–14. Throughout the psalm, the enemies appear as violent (v. 4), using military tactics to harm the psalmist (vv. 9, 11, 12). So, fittingly, the psalmist concludes with Yahweh as the divine warrior ruthlessly visiting violence upon the enemies, to such an extent that that violence extends through succeeding generations. These literary and artistic congruencies lead one to associate the wings of Yahweh in Ps 17:8 with the iconography of the militarized winged sun disk.

The psalmist may well have adopted the winged sun disk, an image of another Mesopotamian god, to represent the form (*תמונתו*) of Yahweh. The mobility of the image of the winged sun disk throughout the ancient Near East supports this hypothesis. Yet there is some disagreement as to which Neo-Assyrian deity the winged disk refers in **figs. 1.4, 3.13–15**. Ornan argues that the martial aspect of this winged figure confirms his identity as Aššur.¹¹⁸ This argument puts her at odds, however, with Mayer-Opificius, among others, who argues that Shamash is represented in the disk, for the “Cross of Shamash” appears clearly in a number of other Neo-Assyrian winged disks.¹¹⁹ Such an image appears on the banquet stele of Ashumasirpal II from Nimrud, for example (**fig. 3.16**).¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ See Richard David Barnett, *Ancient Ivories in the Middle East* (Jerusalem: Institute of Archaeology Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1982), 26–7.

¹¹⁸ Ornan, “A Complex System,” 212.

¹¹⁹ Mayer-Opificius, “Die geflügelte Sonne,” 200.

¹²⁰ Textual material also identifies Shamash as the winged disk. See the Stele of Bel-Harran-bel-ušer, the stela of Sargon from Lanarka, and Sennacherib’s Bawain and Judi Dagh rock reliefs. See Ursula Seidl, *Die babylonischen Kuchuru-reliefs: Symbole mesopotamischer*

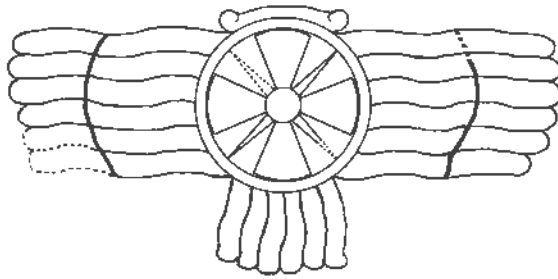


Fig. 3.16. Detail of the banquet stele of Ashurnasirpal II; Nimrud; 879 B.C.E.

Yet Ornan rightly contends that the winged disc could serve as a symbol for two gods in the same culture, in this case, both Aššur and Shamash. As a result, the winged disk in Assyrian art bears a "double meaning."¹²¹ W. G. Lambert makes a similar argument, that the winged disk can allude to one or the other deity depending on the iconographic context. When the winged disk appears as a sole emblem of the king, it represents Aššur, and when in combination with other symbols, the winged disk represents the sun god Shamash.¹²² The complexity of the symbol is consistent with its history throughout the larger ancient Near East. It was originally an Egyptian symbol that was first adopted into Phoenician art and subsequently adopted by Mesopotamian artists. It should come then as no surprise that the winged disk could represent two different deities, even at the same time in the same culture.

The complex symbolism of the winged disk also appears in the art of Syro-Palestine. An example of such a Mesopotamian-style winged disk can be seen in the ninth-century relief from Tell Halaf, in which a winged sun disk is pictured with two bull-men supporting it (fig. 2.21). The constellation is a repre-

Gottheiten (OBO 87; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989), 235; Ornan, "A Complex System," 212.

¹²¹ Ornan, "A Complex System," 231.

¹²² W. G. Lambert, "Trees, Snakes and Gods in Ancient Syria and Anatolia," *BZAS* 48 (1985): 439, n. 27.

sentation of the god Shamash, the Mesopotamian solar god of order, justice, and law.¹²³



Fig. 2.21. Wall relief; Tell Halaf; 9th cent. B.C.E. After Seidl, “Das Ringen um das richtige Bild des Samas von Zippar.” Abb. 2.

That the winged disk could serve as an emblem for both Aššur and Shamash has implications for the interpretation of the wings of Yahweh in Ps 17:8. I have shown that Yahweh is represented clearly as a military deity able and willing to devastate the enemy, like the winged Aššur within the disk. Yet one should also remember that Yahweh is pictured in this psalm as a divine judge, who is concerned with preserving and maintaining order. The judicial role of Yahweh is manifest in the psalmist’s reiteration of his claims of righteousness as well as the descriptions of his potential testing and trial. So Yahweh, in his role as divine judge in the psalm—and particularly in his roles as law-giver and god of order—shares characteristics with Shamash (^dUTU), the winged Mesopotamian solar deity and the god of truth, justice, and righteousness.¹²⁴ By describing Yahweh in winged form, the psalmist has drawn, at least in part, from the iconography of the winged disk in Syro-Palestinian art, a rich image that can evoke the ideas of divine military strength and world-ordering justice.

¹²³ Ornan, “A Complex System of Religious Symbols: The Case of the Winged Disk in Near Eastern Imagery of the First Millennium BCE.” 231.

¹²⁴ For textual expression of Shamash’s role as judge and god of righteousness, see “The Shamash Hymn,” trans. Benjamin Foster, *COS* 1.117.

The winged sun disk also appears in Iron-Age Judahite art in famed *lmlk* seals (e.g., fig. 3.17).¹²⁵

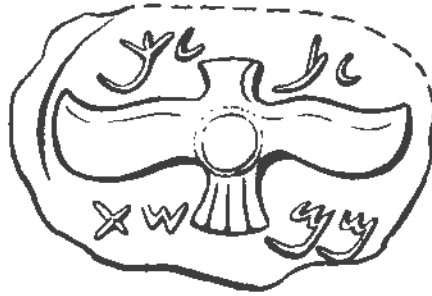


Fig. 3.17. Bulla (Inscription: *lmlk mmšt*); Judah; late 8th cent. B.C.E. After Galling, *Biblisches Reallexikon*, Abb. 78.

While the literature on these seals continues to expand,¹²⁶ there is already something of a consensus that the image is yet another permutation of the winged disk, “usually interpreted as either representing an earthly royalty or an exclusive solar symbol.”¹²⁷ Ornan, however, argues that the winged disk on the seals is an image of Yahweh himself:

Considering the long history of the winged disc in the Levant and western Asia and its role in contemporary Assyrian and North Syrian imagery, it is unlikely that the winged disc on the *lmlk* impressions signified royalty. It should rather be interpreted as a divine emblem employed in official glyptic by virtue of the deity it signified. As in Zincirli, it probably represented a high deity, presumably that of *Yhwh*, the patron god of the ruling dynasty at Jerusalem.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Ornan, “A Complex System of Religious Symbols: The Case of the Winged Disk in Near Eastern Imagery of the First Millennium BCE,” 213.

¹²⁶ Among recent treatments, see especially Andrew G. Vaughn, *Theology, History, and Archaeology in the Chronicler’s Account of Hezekiah* (SBI.ABS 4; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999).

¹²⁷ Ornan, “A Complex System of Religious Symbols: The Case of the Winged Disk in Near Eastern Imagery of the First Millennium BCE,” 213.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

Ornan's interpretation of the *lmk* seals—which are close to the origin of the Psalms in both time and geography—raises an intriguing possibility. If Yahweh was indeed commonly depicted as a winged disk in eighth-century Judah, then his depiction as a winged deity in Ps 17:8 provides congruent literary imagery.

Given all of this evidence suggesting that the winged disk lies behind the image of the winged Yahweh in Ps 17, let us return to Schroer's evaluation of the possibility.

Dass die geflügelte Sonnenscheibe hinter den Psalmenbildern steht, ist schon eher möglich. Allerdings ist die Sonne nicht besonders geeignet, Schutz und ausgerechnet Schatten zu spenden. Die Flügelsonne ist zudem stark mit dem König und dem Königtum verbunden. Wenn wir voraussetzen, dass die geflügelte Scheibe den Himmel, nicht die Sonne verkörpert, machen die Bilder von der Zuflucht unter dem schützenden Himmel nur Sinn, wenn sie mit Flügelsonnen an den Decken oder Eingängen des Tempels zu tun haben, wie wir es aus ägyptischen Tempeln kennen. Von einer solchen Tempelausstattung wissen wir aber nichts, auch passt dazu Abschirmen mit dem Fittich nicht recht.¹²⁹

Schroer judges rightly that the winged sun disk is closely bound to images of kingship. She is also correct, of course, that the sun does not give "a shadow" in the literal sense of the word. However, as already noted, the figurative sense of "shadow" (לְצֵלָה) as "protection" is well established in the Hebrew Bible.¹³⁰ Furthermore, while the winged sun disk can represent "heaven" generally, especially in Mesopotamian-styled winged disks,¹³¹ the wings of the solar disk clearly represent protection and divine authorization of the sun god in certain iconographical contexts, particularly in Egyptian art, as well as in Syro-Palestinian art, which borrowed heavily from Egyptian iconographic precedents.

Examples of the protection and authorization that the winged sun disk affords in Egyptian art appear most readily in funerary steles of the New Kingdom. Here the winged sun disk is a standard feature in the uppermost position of the stele. Far from being a representation of "heaven" alone, the winged sun disk surmounts the elements of a scene and represents the protection of the sun god Re. During certain periods of New Kingdom art, the wings on these steles do not extend over everyone in the scene, showing that they indeed signify pro-

¹²⁹ Schroer, "Im Schatten deiner Flügel," 299.

¹³⁰ *HALOT*, 1025.

¹³¹ Cf. Mayer-Opificius, "Die geflügelte Sonne," 189–236.

tection over some personages and not others. In the eighteenth dynasty, the wings of the sun disk extend only over royalty and gods,¹³² as shown, for example, in the stele of Amenhotep, the high priest of Onnuris (fig. 3.18).

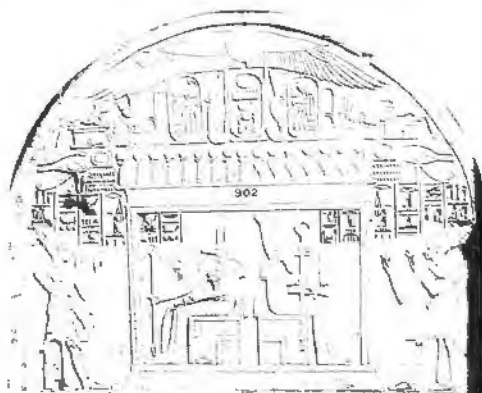


Fig. 3.18. Upper half of the stele of the high priest of Onnuris, Amenhotep; Limestone; 18th dynasty. Cf. Robins, *The Art of Ancient Egypt*, fig. 164. British Museum EA 902; © The Trustees of the British Museum.

That the king is under the authorization of the sun god is amply demonstrated by the elements directly beneath the wings. The cartouche beneath the solar disk contains the throne name of King Thutmose IV *mn-hprw-r^c*. At each side of the cartouche are two *uraei*, one with a crown of Upper Egypt and the other of Lower Egypt. Facing the *uraei* is the cartouche containing the king's "Son of Re name." The final element directly beneath the wings are the hieroglyphs reading *(n)swt bjt(j)*, "King of Upper and Lower Egypt." Within the shrine and also beneath the wings of the sun disk are two deities sitting back to back, Osiris and Wepwawet. The figures facing these gods depict the priest Amenhotep standing with arms raised in adoration. Unlike the gods and the king's name, the figures of the priest are not located under the winged sun disk. Instead, Amenhotep stands under the *wedjat*-eye and *shen*-sign over the water sign. These are also signs for protection, but ones suitable for the blessed dead rather than divinity-royalty.

¹³² The distinction between these two categories is, of course, somewhat difficult to define. On eighteenth dynasty artistic conventions, see Robins, *The Art of Ancient Egypt*, 143.

The same convention is visible in the votive stele of another Amenhotep, this one a viceroy of Nubia (**fig. 3.19**). Though his image has been erased, he originally stood facing the goddess Isis seated before an offering table. In this stele, the winged sun disk appears with only one wing, which extends over the divine figure Isis. A *wedjat*-eye, a symbol of protection appropriate for non-royal individuals, surmounts the side of the stele in which Amenhotep originally stood.¹³³



Fig. 3.19. Upper half of a Sandstone votive stele of Amenhotep, viceroy of Nubia; 18th Dynasty. After Robins, *The Art of Ancient Egypt*, fig. 165. Ashmolean Museum 1983/173.

Although the winged disk remained a prominent feature of Egyptian stele after the eighteenth Dynasty, the protection of the winged sun disk was no longer limited to royal and divine figures. For example, in a Third Intermediate Period stele roughly contemporaneous with Iron Age Israel, the sun disk has become a symbol of protection for non-royal figures as well (**fig. 3.20**). In this stele of Deniuenkhons, a mistress of the house and musician of Amun, both human and divine figures stand under the wings of the disk. Ra-Horakhty-Atum stands at left and Deniuenkhons at right with an offering table between them. The

¹³³ Ibid., 144.

change in artistic decorum reflects an expansion of the protection of the sun god.



Fig. 3.20. Painted sycamore fig wood funerary stele of Deniuenkhons, mistress of the house and musician of Amun; 3rd Intermediate Period. After Robins, *The Art of Ancient Egypt*, fig. 245. British Museum EA 27332; © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Given the longstanding association of the winged sun disk with the protection of the sun god in Egyptian iconography, it follows that notions of protection would accompany the image as it traveled from Egyptian to Syro-Palestinian art. As Parayre has shown, the winged disks of Syro-Palestinian art in general bear a stronger resemblance to the Egyptian artistic traditions than to Mesopotamian ones, (see, e.g., the down-turned, variegated wings in **fig. 2.22a–c**, which are similar to Egyptian, not Mesopotamian style).¹³⁴ It is safe to assume

¹³⁴ See Dominique Parayre, "Les Cachets Ouest-Sémitiques," 269–314; idem, "À propos des sceaux ouest-sémitiques," 27–51.

then that the fundamental Egyptian notion of the protective function of the wings of the sun disk also obtains for Syro-Palestinian representations.

Finally, Ps 17 presents one other arresting juxtaposition of images: Yahweh in the form of a winged anthropomorphic deity, encountering enemies in the form of lions. In the psalm, Yahweh dispatches these lion-enemies with his sword in a brutal and efficient manner (v. 13). This constellation of a winged-anthropomorphic deity slaying a lion appears with relative frequency in seventh-century Cypro-Phoenician art. For example, at the center panel of a silver bowl from Kourion (**fig. 3.22**), we find a winged deity battling a lion with a sword—an image strikingly reminiscent of the psalm’s depiction of the winged Yahweh attacking leontomorphic enemies.



Fig. 3.21. Silver bowl; Salamis; 7th cent. B.C.E. After Frankfort, *Art and Architecture*, illus. 393.

The same scene also appears numerous times on a seventh-century silver bowl from Idalion, albeit not in the center position of the bowl. Rather, it alternates with images of a young hero slaying a griffin (fig. 3.23a, b).¹³⁵

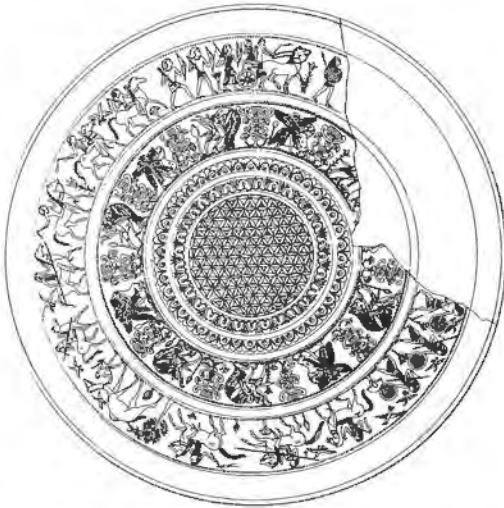


Fig. 3.22a. Silver bowl; Early 7th cent. B.C.E.; **Fig. 3.22b.** Detail of fig. 3.2a Idalion. After Markoe, *Phoenician Bronze and Silver Bowls*, 242.

The lion-slaying hero is a well-established Assyrian artistic tradition, from which these Phoenician artisans borrowed, but with some modifications.¹³⁶ Neo-Assyrian art also provides numerous depictions of winged figures in combat with lions, but never a winged figure with sword fighting against a lion. In a wall relief from Nimrud (fig. 3.23), for example, a winged genius grasps the rear legs of two lions, which in turn are attacking bovines.

¹³⁵ For the dating of this piece, see Markoe, *Phoenician Bronze and Silver Bowls*, 154.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 48. For a discussion of the ancient Near Eastern iconographical trope of “The God(s) Fighting/Encountering the Lion,” see Strawn, *What is Stronger*, 187–90.

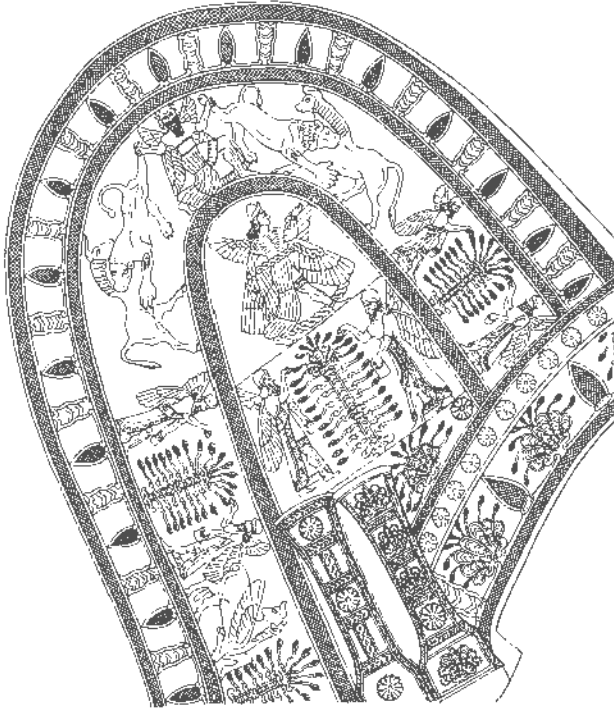


Fig. 3.23. Detail of relief; Nimrud; 9th cent. B.C.E. After Frankfort, *Art and Architecture*, illus. 224.

This image of a winged figure grasping a lion has a very long tradition in ancient Near Eastern art. Such images appear over a wide geographic range. Two figures illustrate this motif: one from a seal impression from Nuzi from the fifteenth century B.C.E. (**fig. 3.24**) and another from Luristan dated from the beginning of the first millennium (**fig. 3.25**). Both figures grasp a lion in each outstretched arm. These winged figures show anthropomorphic features, such as a human head and upright posture. Yet they also have theriomorphic characteristics: talons or paws in addition to wings.



Fig. 3.24. Seal impression; Nuzi; 15th cent. B.C.E. After Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen*, Abb. 11.



Fig. 3.25. Boss of Shield; Luristan; beginning of first millennium. After Strawn, *What Is Stronger*, fig. 4.209.

While these images of winged figures dominating or fighting lions show the prevalence of the motif of winged figures in combat with lions, the only direct parallel to the Cypro-Phoenician bowls is a ninth-century relief from Tell Halaf (**fig. 3.26**). Here a winged figure wields a sword to dispatch a lion, an image that (along with the Salamis and Idalion bowls) provides the most direct iconographic congruency to the image of the winged Yahweh slaying lions with his sword in Ps 17.



Fig. 3.27. Relief; Tell Halaf; 9th cent. B.C.E. After Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen*, Abb. 136.

The remarkable similarity between the Cypro-Phoenician bowls and the Tell Halaf relief—some two centuries later—attests that this particular image was well known throughout Syria-Palestine in the Iron Age and later.¹³⁷ Based on the apparent availability and distribution of this imagery, the psalmist likely drew from it and redeployed it in literary form with reference to Yahweh.

4. Conclusion: The Image of the Winged Yahweh in Psalm 17

Multiple iconographic constellations stand in the background of the literary image of Yahweh’s winged form in Ps 17. In particular, three iconographic representations share numerous points of connection to the imagery in this psalm: the Horus falcon, whose protecting wings spread over the king; the winged sun disk; and the winged figure slaying a lion with a sword. I have also demonstrated that certain other motifs from Syro-Palestinian art do not show congruencies to the image of the winged Yahweh in the context of Ps 17: the vulture (or any other bird for that matter) and the cherubim/sphinxes.

One may understand the multiple “meanings” of the image of the wings of Yahweh in Ps 17 by analogy to the phenomenon of multistability in certain types of visual imagery. Multistability occurs where an image conveys two different, but equally valid, “interpretations” simultaneously.¹³⁸ Two classic examples of this phenomenon are the rabbit-duck (fig. 3.27) and the faces-goblet (fig. 3.28) below. In each of these images, two equally valid interpretations toggle back and forth in the perception of the observer.

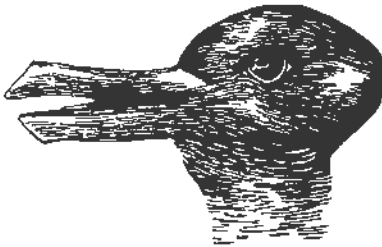


Fig. 3.27. Rabbit or Duck? Cf. Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, 46 fig. 3.

Fig. 3.28. Faces or Goblet? Cf. Rubin, *Synsoplevende Figurer*, fig. 3.

¹³⁷ Thus the motif of the winged lion-slayer with sword appears to be unique to West Semitic iconography.

¹³⁸ W. J. Thomas Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 43.

One may thus construe the winged Yahweh in Ps 17 as a *literary* image that exhibits multistability. Yet, the image of the winged Yahweh is not "unstable." There is a limit to the possible interpretations of that image based on congruent iconographical constellations. By taking iconographic context, periodization, and geography into account, one can exclude certain interpretations: so too with the multistable visual images above. The duck-interpretation and the rabbit-interpretation are the only viable readings of **fig. 3.27**. A forklift, for example, is not a possible reading of the image. And while one could argue for interpreting **fig. 3.28** as two faces or a goblet, or even an inverted candle-stick holder, one cannot interpret this image as, say, a rocking chair. Likewise, the analysis of iconographic congruencies for Ps 17 has excluded certain interpretations (the cherubim and the vulture), but has also established that three images serve as viable interpretations of the multistable image of the winged Yahweh, namely, the winged sun disk, the winged deity slaying a lion, and the Horus falcon.

By way of a summary of the methodology in this chapter, it is useful to return again to the criteria for evaluating iconographic data and determining levels of congruence with biblical text (see p. 24). Most importantly, I have relied heavily upon the psalmic context to guide this iconographic-biblical analysis of the wings of Yahweh in Ps 17. The characterizations of the psalmist, the enemies, and Yahweh have served as an important control for determining what iconography should be considered congruent with the literary image of Yahweh's wings. In addition to the extensive treatment of the psalmic context, I have also considered the larger iconographic contexts of the motif of wings in the iconographic material. In short, the text of Ps 17 produces a rich constellation of literary images. That complex series of images –not simply the isolated motif of "wings" – has served as the point of comparison with the iconographic material. Finally, as I weighed the multiple options for interpreting the image of the wings of Yahweh in Ps 17, I have given preference to those iconographic materials from Syria-Palestine that are contemporaneous with the biblical text.

Chapter 4

The Iconic Structure of Psalm 36 and Congruent Images in Ancient Near Eastern Iconography

1. Translation of Psalm 36

- 1 For the leader, for the servant of Yahweh, for David.
- 2 Rebelliousness speaks to the wicked¹ in the midst of his heart:²
There is no fear of God before his eyes.
- 3 For he flatters himself too much in his own eyes
To discover his iniquity and to hate it.
- 4 The words of his mouth are wickedness and deceit.
He fails to understand how to do good.

¹ MT reads $\text{עֲשָׂה לְ עֲשָׂה־וְרָעָה}$ with the first two words bound by a *maqṣep* as construct chain, literally rendered “an utterance of rebellion of the wicked.” A construction with these two terms is otherwise unknown in the Hebrew Bible and has prompted many emendations. Craigie unbinds the first two words and understands וְרָעָה to stand independently as a title for the first part of the psalm. If this were the case, it would be the only such use of וְרָעָה in the psalms and, indeed, the only case in which a psalm carries an internal title marking its individual sections. By contrast, Le Mat argues on the basis of LXX (φησιν ὁ παράνομος) for repointing עֲשָׂה as a participle עֲשֹׂה along with understanding וְרָעָה as a verb rather than a noun in accordance with later Hebrew (*Textual Criticism*, 4). His translation, “The rebel says: I have resolved to do evil,” is followed by Hossfeld and Zenger, *Die Psalmen I*, 224. Kraus suggests replacing וְרָעָה with וְעָוָה to read: “Pleasing is transgression to the ungodly” (*Psalms I* 59, 396-7). The lack of any support for this reading among ancient versions argues against this reading.

The best option for solving this crux is to understand עֲשָׂה as a personification of sin or rebelliousness, which involves only the minor modification of removing the *maqṣep* in עֲשָׂה־וְרָעָה (so NRSV; Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*, 152; Eaton, *The Psalms: A Historical and Spiritual Commentary*, 160; Weiser, *The Psalms*, 304-5; James Limburg, *Psalms* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000], 116). Such a personification of evil does occur elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Gen 4:7, cf. the evil spirit in 1 Sam 16:14-23; 18:10-11).

² Reading וְרָעָה with LXX, Syriac, and ο εἰς against MT's וְרָעָה . The MT may represent an attempt to avoid “the unparalleled conception of an inspiration of a wicked man in any sense of the term,” so Briggs and Briggs, *Psalms*, 1:316.

- 5 He plots wickedness on his bed.
He takes his stand upon the path that is not good.
He does not reject evil.
- 6 O, Yahweh, your loyalty is in the heavens,
Your trustworthiness extends to the clouds.
- 7 Your faithfulness is like the majestic mountains.³
Your justice, like⁴ the vast deep.
Man and beast, you save, O Yahweh.
- 8 How precious is your loyalty!
Gods⁵ and humans seek refuge in the shadow of your wings.
- 9 They drink their fill from the fatness of your house.
And from the river of your delights you give them drink.
- 10 For with you is the spring of life.
In your light we see light.
- 11 Continue your steadfast love to the ones who know you.
And your righteousness to the upright of heart.
- 12 Do not let not the foot of the proud tread upon me
And let not the hand of the wicked dispossess me.
- 13 There⁶ lie the workers of iniquity,
They are fallen and they are not able to rise.

³ MT reads "mountains of El," an example of the divine superlative (cf. Jon 3:3; Song 8:6; Isa 14:13; Pss 80:10; 104:16).

⁴ An example of ellipsis. MT lacks the prefixed preposition בְּ in this second colon of this line.

⁵ Kraus follows Duhm and reconstructs $\text{בָּאֵלִים יָבִיאוּ}$ (to you they come: *Psalms 1 59*, 397), though this emendation finds no support in ancient translations. Many modern and ancient translations connect בָּאֵלִים here with the previous colon (v. 8a α) rather than considering it as part of a double subject with בְּיָדֵי אֱדֹנָי , as MT's cantillation marks suggest (see, e.g., NRSV; Tanakh; LXX; Vulg.; Craigie, *Psalms 1 50*, 289–90; Hossfeld and Zenger, *Die Psalmen I*, 224–5; Eaton, *The Psalms: A Historical and Spiritual Commentary*, 160). Yet, connecting it to the previous colon makes the *wāw* conjunction difficult to understand. For this reason, I have opted to read with MT (so also NIV; Le Mat, *Textual Criticism*, 21–22).

⁶ MT's שָׁמָּה has been emended by many modern translators because the antecedent is not entirely clear. Gunkel (followed by Kraus, *Psalms 1 59*, 397; and Craigie, *Psalms 1 50*, 290) reads שָׁמָּה ($\sqrt{\text{שמם}}$ to tremble, be awestruck, be devastated; *Die Psalmen*, 153; see HALOT 1563–64). Hossfeld and Zenger understand שָׁמָּה in a temporal sense, rather than a positional one, and translate: "Dann brechen die Bösen zusammen" (*Die Psalmen I*, 225; cf. Pss 14:5; 132:7; HALOT, 1547; so also Weiser, *The Psalms*, 305). NRSV and Tanakh, however, translate "there" as does LXX $\acute{\alpha}\kappa\epsilon\iota$ (cf. Ps 14:5 for similar rendering).

2. *Literary Analysis*

2. A. Structural Outline

Superscription (v. 1)

- I. Description of the wicked (vv. 2–5)
- II. Hymn of praise (vv. 6–10)
 - A. Praise of Yahweh’s character (vv. 6–8a)
 - B. Praise of Yahweh’s saving and protecting acts (vv. 8b–10)
- III. Petition (vv. 11–12)
- IV. Statement of trust (v. 13)

2. B. Rhetorical Movement

Despite the textual difficulties, the opening verses clearly depict the paradigmatic wicked person (vv. 2–5). Within these first verses, the psalmist outlines the psychological characteristics (vv. 2–3) and actions (vv. 4–5) of the wicked, all of which characterize him as utterly depraved.

Beginning in v. 6, the subject of the psalm shifts from the enemy to Yahweh, as the psalmist intones a hymn of praise (vv. 6–10).⁷ The hymn opens by portraying Yahweh through expansive terms, evoking various natural phenomena (vv. 6–8a). In vv. 8b–10, the psalmist praises Yahweh obliquely by referring to those who seek and find his protection and provision. At the conclusion of the hymn (v. 10), the psalmist classifies himself with those who receive Yahweh’s blessing through the use of the first common plural verb (“we see light”).

The sole petition in this psalm comes in vv. 11–12. After having described Yahweh’s *דָּוָה* (vv. 6, 8) and *צַדִּיקָה* (v. 7) earlier in the psalm, the psalmist asks Yahweh to continue to extend them to those who follow Yahweh (v. 11). The petition is twofold. It seeks the wellbeing of the righteous, with whom the psalmist identifies, and the downfall of the wicked, thus combining the two parts (vv. 2–5, vv. 6–10) of the preceding verses.⁸ Verse 11 asks for Yahweh’s much heralded “loyalty” and “righteousness” to be aimed now toward those who serve him. Verse 12 returns to the topic of the wicked, which occupies the first half of the psalm (vv. 2–5).⁹

⁷ Gerstenberger, *Psalms 1*, 249.

⁸ Briggs and Briggs, *Psalms*, 320.

⁹ Craigie sees here a chiasmic structure in the last three verses relating to the themes of the wicked and Yahweh’s *דָּוָה* (*Psalms 1–50*, 291).

2. C. Form and Setting

The opening verses (vv. 2–3) frustrate attempts to determine the genre of the poem because of their multiple text-critical and translational problems.¹⁰ In light of these difficulties, one must arrive at form-critical conclusions with the utmost caution. Craigie and Gerstenberger have rightly noted that this opening section (vv. 2–5) bears marks of wisdom psalms due to its focus on the wicked and his ways.¹¹ Yet despite these sapiential characteristics, the elements of petition and praise in the latter portion of this psalm suggest that it be classified as a lament psalm. Since v. 10 contains a first common plural subject (“we”), one might argue further for its designation as a “communal” lament. However, in the petition of v. 12, the first common singular object (“me”) exclusively appears. The mixing of singular and plural pronouns also warns against arguing too strongly for a particular *Sitz im Leben*. Since the psalm includes diverse formal elements, Kraus wisely discounts Beyerlin’s hypothesis that this psalm originates in the particular *Sitz im Leben* of a divine juridical ritual.¹² As with Ps 17, one must ultimately plead ignorance concerning the precise historical or ritual setting of this psalm.

2. D. The Image of the Psalmist

The text provides only limited information about the psalmist. On the basis of the pleas in vv. 10–13, one can infer that the psalmist is in distress because of oppression by the wicked. The psalmist distinguishes himself from the wicked, who are so carefully described in vv. 2–5, and associates himself instead with a community of the faithful, which relies on Yahweh for protection (vv. 7–8), sustenance, and blessing (vv. 9–10). This community encompasses other people (vv. 7–8), animals (v. 7), and even divine beings (v. 8).

2. E. The Image of the Enemy/Enemies

Discussion of the enemies frames the psalm, occurring at its beginning (vv. 2–5) and ending (vv. 12–13). From the outset, the psalmist provides a remarkable level of psychological insight into the behavior of the wicked individual, as well as a thorough description of that person’s evil words and actions. Rebellion (עֲשָׂה, v. 2) is a force deep within the personality; it governs the

¹⁰ See Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 1*, 153.

¹¹ Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 291. Cf. Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 1*, 155.

¹² Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 398.

wicked's actions and perceptions.¹³ The psalmist highlights the wicked person's skewed sense of perception by focusing on "his eyes" (vv. 2–3). The eyes cannot discern God's power and might (v. 2). Furthermore, these eyes are so blinded by pride and self-absorption (v. 3) that the enemy cannot see his own depravity.

While vv. 2–3 focus exclusively on the enemy's self-perceptions and psychology, vv. 4–5 include a consideration of his words and actions. His wrong actions include his standing in wrong paths and his failure to reject evil (v. 5). Verse 4a describes the wicked words that proceed from his diseased mind, a mind that is utterly occupied with wickedness (v. 4–5). In Ps 17, the psalmist states that Yahweh tests his heart at night, and finds no sin in him (Ps 17:3). The description of the wicked in Ps 36 provides an overt contrast, for the wicked is busy plotting mischief at night on his bed (Ps 36:3). In the end, the reader is left with a picture of the paradigmatically wicked person: one who is thoroughly depraved, from the deep interior of his soul to the manifestations of his mouth, his hands, and his feet. Gerstenberger notes that this meticulous description presents the psalmist's perspective that such evildoers "have lost their capacity to reason and to act humanely."¹⁴

2. F. The Image of Yahweh

The detailed presentation of the wicked is matched by an equally expansive description of Yahweh's character and actions (vv. 6–10).¹⁵ In vv. 6–7a, each characteristic of Yahweh is coupled with a powerful force of nature.¹⁶

Loyalty חֶסֶד – Heavens שָׁמַיִם
 Trustworthiness אֱמוּנָה - Clouds שְׁחָקִים
 Faithfulness צְדָקָה – Majestic mountains הַרְרֵי־אֵל
 Justice מִשְׁפָּט – Vast deep רֶבֶה תְהוֹם

¹³ Weiser comments: "The voice of sin which man hears speaking in his heart has for the wicked the same authority and power as the voice of God has for the prophets." Weiser, *The Psalms*, 307.

¹⁴ Erhard Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 1*, 155.

¹⁵ Weiser calls vv. 2–5 "the dark background against which the radiant picture of loving-kindness is set off so much the more impressively" (Weiser, *The Psalms*, 306).

¹⁶ Charles Briggs conjectures: "These similes are so graphic that they could best be explained by an author standing on one of the summits of Lebanon, where all these things would come naturally into his mind." Briggs and Briggs, *Psalms*, 314.

However, the relationships between the divine characteristics and elements of the natural world are not the same throughout these two verses. In v. 7a, the psalmist employs similes to describe the relationship between Yahweh's faithfulness and the mountains and between Yahweh's justice and the deep. Verse 6 describes the immensity of Yahweh's loyalty and trustworthiness by locating them in the heavenly sphere. Taking these two verses together, one discovers that the psalmist is providing a concrete example of otherwise intangible aspects of the divine personality by binding them to readily observable elements of the universe. In the mind of this faithful poet, then, the elements of nature bear witness to the very nature of Yahweh. The structure of the universe attests Yahweh's righteousness and justice and, as in Ps 17, this psalmist imagines a God who faithfully preserves a well-ordered universe in which wickedness is punished and the righteous prosper. Among these four characteristics of Yahweh in vv. 6-7a, two appear elsewhere in the psalm, emphasizing their importance for the psalmist's understanding of the deity. Yahweh's דָּקָה (vv. 6, 8, 11) and his צִדְקָה (vv. 7, 11) speak to Yahweh's commitment to preserve the right order of the world and to demonstrate his loyalty to those who serve him.¹⁷

In addition to extolling Yahweh's characteristics, the psalmist depicts Yahweh in the acts of saving and protecting (vv. 7b-8). The wings of the deity serve a clear protecting role (v. 8), but due to textual difficulties (see above), there remains some question as to who receives this protection. According to my translation, the psalmist imagines an incredibly powerful deity whose protective sphere is vast, including animals, humans, even gods.

Verses 9-10 portray Yahweh through images of water and light. Images of water and drinking are particularly prominent. Yahweh's refugees drink (רָחַו) from the fatness of Yahweh's house. The reference here may be to liquefied fat from sacrificial meals in the temple.¹⁸ Yahweh's "river" also may be associated with the temple (cf. Ps 46:5 [46:6 NRSV]; Joel 3:18; Ezek 47:1; Zech 13:1; 14:8). Yet the temple may not be the setting for this picture of blessing. Craigie rightly argues that the "house" refers to the whole world as the realm of Yahweh, for it is there that Yahweh provides for animals and humans (v. 6).¹⁹ On the heels of the imagery of life giving water and liquefied delights (v. 9) comes

¹⁷ See Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *Faithfulness in Action* (OBT 16; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985); B. Johnson, "צדקה" *IDOT* 12:239-64.

¹⁸ Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, 399.

¹⁹ Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 292.

the striking and evocative phrase “in your light we see light,” possibly a reference to divine solar theophany.²⁰

The final verse of this psalm begins with an enigmatic וּשׁ (v. 13), which has no clear referent in the immediately preceding verse. If one looks back several verses, however, one notes that the psalmist has described a protective realm over which the deity presides. Beginning in v. 7b and extending to v. 10, images of salvation and provision dominate. The realm of protection is the shadow of Yahweh’s wings (v. 8b), an image that appears alongside the reference to Yahweh’s house (v. 9a) with its rivers and springs. In this realm, Yahweh gives drink to the psalmist (vv. 9–10a) and provides light (v. 10b) that illuminates. In doing so, Yahweh protects life. Thus the psalm seems to describe a protective realm in which the whole earth is infused with the presence of the deity. This is the locale to which the pronoun וּשׁ refers: “there,” in Yahweh’s presence, the wicked that were so vividly described in vv. 2–5 lie defeated.

2. G. The Iconic Structure of Psalm 36

In this psalm, Yahweh appears as a protective winged god. The deity’s wings span the whole cosmos, from its upper reaches in the heavens to the vast deep. Under his wings all life forms—human, animal, and divine—find protection. Light proceeds from this deity, as does life-giving fluid, variously described as water and liquefied fat. Furthermore, this deity is charged with preserving the order of the universe, namely, recognizing evil and punishing it, while rewarding and preserving that which is upright.

3. *Iconographic Congruencies to the Constellations of Images in Psalm 36*

In light of the iconographic congruencies that I explored in the analysis of Ps 17 above, it is clear that the image of Yahweh in this psalm finds its closest iconographic congruency in the winged sun disk. First, the image of the winged Yahweh providing protection to the whole created order accords with the winged sun disk’s location in the upper registers of various scenes throughout ancient Near Eastern art (whether it be New Kingdom Egyptian funerary steles or Mesopotamian cylinder seals). Still, the wings of the sun disk do more than provide divine protection. The wings convey a sense of movement through the

²⁰ See the similar formulations in Pss 4:7; 44:4; 89:16. Also see Smith, “‘Seeing God’ in the Psalms,” 171–83; Hans-Peter Stähli, *Solare Elemente im Jaltweglauben des Alten Testaments* (OBO 66; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985).

air. Nonetheless, this aspect of movement does diminish the wings' protective function. The wings that extend from the sun disk (like the wings of Yahweh in the psalms) offer multiple meanings.

One finds further evidence for associating Yahweh with the winged sun disk since Yahweh provides refuge for "gods and the sons of man" (v. 8b). The inclusion of both divine and human protégés is reminiscent of the image of the sun disk in Egyptian iconographic traditions, in which the wings of the sun god Re appear over both divine and human figures, as seen, for example, in the Third Intermediate Period funerary stele above (fig. 3.20).

A third reason for associating Yahweh wings (v. 8) with the winged sun disk in Ps 36 is the reference to Yahweh's light and his provision of life-giving water (v. 10). This image of a winged deity emanating both light and water accords remarkably with certain Mesopotamian representations of the winged sun disk under which streams of water flow.²¹ The Mesopotamian winged sun disk emanating streams of water illustrates the way in which different aspects of the originally Egyptian image are modified.²²

In Egypt, the sun disk often appears flanked by two *uraei* (fig. 4.1).

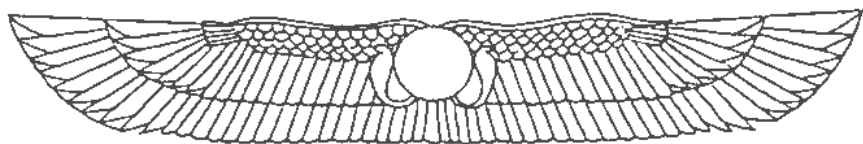


Fig. 4.1. Winged sun disk from a pectoral; Tanis; 3rd Intermediate Period. After Parayre, "Les cachets Ouest-Sémitiques," Pl. 1.2.

This motif of *uraei* flanking the disk (or hanging slightly below it) undergoes a number of variations as the image moves from its original Egyptian context into Phoenicia, Syria-Palestine, and the larger ancient Near East.²³ Outside of Egypt, various appendages appear underneath the sun disk. They may look like tail feathers (fig. 4.2), stylized *uraei* (fig. 4.3), or a variation of the two.

²¹ On this imagery, see particularly Mayer-Opliscius, "Die geflügelte Sonne," 189–236.

²² For unique "West Semitic" characteristics and their antecedents in Egyptian and Mesopotamian imagery, see Parayre, "Les Cachets Ouest-Sémitiques," 269–314.

²³ See *ibid.*



Fig. 4.2. Detail from an Israelite scarab; 8th cent. B.C.E. After Parayre, "Les cachets Ouest-Sémitiques," pl. 2.28.

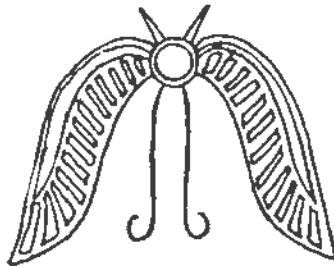


Fig. 4.3. Detail from an Israelite scarab; Samaria; 9th–8th cent. B.C.E. After Parayre, "Les cachets Ouest-Sémitiques," pl. 3.41.

In Mesopotamia, however, the motif of suspended *uraei* is often transformed into streams of water that represent rain falling from the heavens.²⁴ No doubt climatological factors contributed to this development.²⁵ This association of streams of water with the winged sun disk in Mesopotamian art is most interesting when one tries to establish iconographic congruency to Ps 36, particularly to the psalm's juxtaposition of the images of water alongside the images of light. Martin Klingbeil has dubbed the iconographic trope of the winged sun disk with streams of water emanating from beneath the wings as "the water-providing god."²⁶ This title properly avoids assigning a certain identity to the deity such as Aššur, Shamash, or Ea, for example, since the identity of the god or gods responsible for such beneficence is often difficult to determine.

²⁴ Klingbeil, *Yahweh Fighting*, 206.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 205.

The first example of a scene picturing this “water-providing god” is an unprovenanced cylinder seal that can be dated to the Iron Age I on the basis of the Assyrian-style garments (fig. 4.4).

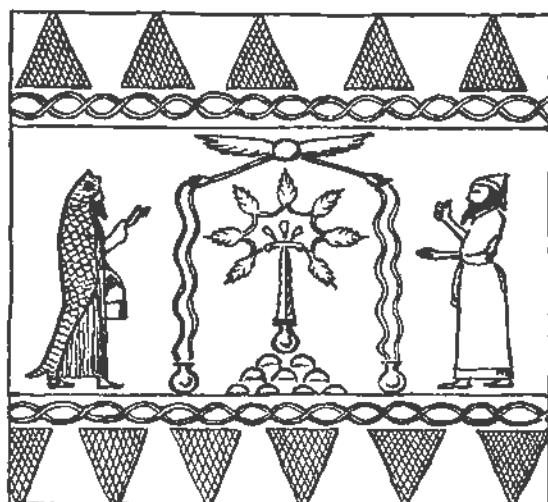


Fig. 4.4. Cylinder Seal; Assyria; 1250–1000 B.C.E. After Frankfort, *Cylinder Seals*, text-fig. 65.

At the center and top of this scene hovers a winged disk with two long straight hands extending diagonally downward from the bottom of the disk. From the open hands flow parallel streams of water, which run directly into two pots. Between the wings and under the disk is a stylized sacred tree standing upon a sacred mound or mountain. The picture presents something of an ecosystem, for the tree grows from a pot like those that receive the water from the winged sun disk. The three pots together, thus, represent the earth’s receipt of the waters of heaven and their power of generation.²⁷ The entire constellation of images represents the life-giving power that comes from the heavens, both in the form of the light (sun) and water (rain). Two figures flank the central constellation of images: a royal figure on the right and a fish-garbed *apkallu* on the left. The figures may be understood as protecting, observing, and/or worshipping²⁸

²⁷ On the connection of the sacred tree and flowing water in Southern Mesopotamian seals, see Mayer-Opificius, “Die geflügelte Sonne,” 205.

²⁸ The gesture of the right hand of the human figure suggests worship and blessing.

this orderly system of growth and fertility. A pattern of intertwined lines and hatched triangles borders the scene, probably representing flowing water and mountains respectively. These are associated with Ea the mountain-god and water-god.²⁹

Another Mesopotamian example of the winged disk emanating water appears in a seventh-century cylinder seal from Nimrud (**fig. 4.5**). In this seal, the water flows directly from the disk and into pots (not clearly distinguishable in the line drawing) that are suspended in midair. Several of the figures in this scene are difficult to discern, including the mound-like object beneath the disk, which Klingbeil suggests is a schematized sacred tree.³⁰ The winged disk is one among several astral signs in the scene, including the seven-pointed star (to the left of the sundisk), the crescent moon, and the Pleades (to the right). Like **fig. 4.4** a bearded figure stands with arms raised in adoration of the sun disk between the moon and Pleades.



Fig. 4.5. Cylinder Seal; Nimrud; 7th cent. B.C.E., After Klingbeil, *Yahweh Fighting*, fig. 47.

One further representation of the sun disk with water deserves mention here: an unprovenanced seal with both Neo-Assyrian and Babylonian characteristics, which permits the object to be dated to the seventh–sixth centuries B.C.E. (**fig. 4.6**).

²⁹ Klingbeil, *Yahweh Fighting*, 212.

³⁰ Cf. B. Parker, "Seals and Seal Impressions from the Nimrud Excavations, 1955–58," *Iraq* 24.1 (1962): 35; Klingbeil, *Yahweh Fighting*, 215.



Fig. 4.6. Cylinder Seal; Assur; 9th-8th cent. B.C.E. After Ward, *Seal Cylinders of Western Asia*, illus. 656.

The seal depicts a winged sun disk with two streams emanating from beneath its wings. Supporting the winged disk is a *lahmu* atlant with his characteristic long beard and rear locks. The significance of his posture is ambiguous. One could understand him as kneeling— analogous to a ninth-century Neo-Assyrian seal (fig 4.7)—or running, as in a ninth–eighth century seal from Assur (fig. 4.8).³¹

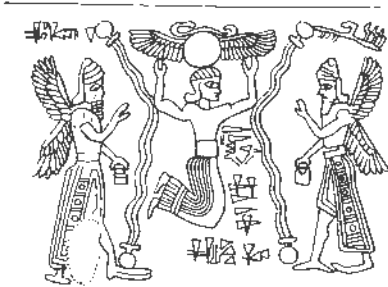


Fig. 4.7. Cylinder seal; 9th cent. B.C.E. After Brentjes, *Alte Siegelkunst*, p. 165



Fig. 4.8. Cylinder seal; Assur; 9th–8th cent. B.C.E. After Klingbeil, *Yahweh Fighting*, fig. 40.

³¹ These two seals provide further examples of the motif of flowing water together with the winged sun disk, even though they do not show the winged sun disk as the exact source of the streams of water as is the case in the other iconographic contexts and in the literary context of Ps 36.

If the figure beneath the winged disk in **fig. 4.6** is indeed running, one may understand it to represent the perpetual motion of the sun in its daily journey across the heavens.³² The running atlant justifies an interpretation of the winged sun disk not simply as a representation of heaven, but as a symbol of the sun god himself, who constantly moves through the sky.

The water that rings the atlant and the disk in **fig. 4.6** is reminiscent of the iconographic representation of the *apsu* (*Süßwasserquellen*).³³ a watery rectangle that usually encompasses images of Enki/Ea in Mesopotamian art.³⁴ In this seal, the waters surrounding the winged disk and atlant likely represent the cosmic waters, while the streams flowing from the winged sun disk symbolize rain, falling from the heavens. Further, the “water-providing god” interacts with the adorant, who stands to the right of the *lahmu* figure. The adorant’s open left hand receives one of the streams of water, indicating that the individual is a direct beneficiary of the water provided by the winged sun disk. Psalm 36:9–10 describes a compellingly similar scene, in which individuals are refreshed and delighted by the rivers of Yahweh.

Although the winged sun disk with streams of water provides a striking congruency to the imagery of Ps 36, there is, however, a difficulty with claiming that the literary and iconographic constellations either draw from the same common imagery, or somehow borrow from one another. The problem is geographical. According to the criteria established in ch. 1 (p. 24), in order to establish clearly the relationship between literary and artistic imagery, the textual and iconographic material must maintain a geographic and temporal propinquity. In this case, the iconography of streams of water emanating from the deity is limited to Mesopotamian representations.

The one possible exception comes from a conoid seal from Gezer dated to Iron Age IIC (**fig. 4.9**). This scene includes a winged griffin facing an adorant, who exhibits Neo-Assyrian characteristics. A crescent moon stands above the griffin, and the winged sun disk appears in the uppermost position. The diagonal wavy lines extending from the base of the winged sun disk are reminiscent of the streams of water in other Mesopotamian constellations and may be schematized representations thereof, but the triple prongs at the ends of the wavy lines could instead be understood as rudimentary hands or claws such as those in **fig.**

³² Cf. Klingbeil, *Yahweh Fighting*, 210.

³³ Mayer-Opificius, “Die geflügelte Sonne,” 119.

³⁴ See Jeremy A. Black and Anthony Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia: An Illustrated Dictionary* (London: British Museum Press for the Trustees of the British Museum, 1992), fig. 19.

4.4. If these lines are, in fact, streams of water, this is the only such representation of this motif in Syro-Palestinian art.



Fig. 4.9. Conoid Seal; Gezer; Iron Age IIC. After Ornan, *Triumph of the Symbol*, fig. 211.

4. Conclusion: The Image of the Winged Yahweh in Psalm 36

In sum, it is probable that the psalmist somehow encountered the Mesopotamian imagery of the winged sun disk emanating water. Indeed, the psalm's description of a winged deity (v. 8) coupled with the images of life giving springs and light (v. 9–10) all seem point to a correspondence with this common iconographic trope from Mesopotamian iconography.

Gods and humans seek refuge in the shadow of your wings.
 They drink their fill from the fatness of your house.
 And from the river of your delights you give them drink.
 For with you is the spring of life.
 In your light we see light. (Ps 17:8b–10)

Yet, since the image is not well attested in Syro-Palestinian art, one must not invest too heavily in the correspondence between these literary and artistic images. Still, although I am unable to provide a definitive link between the water-providing sun disk and the composite image of Yahweh in the psalm, the larger

point—that the winged sun disk stands in the background of the image of Yahweh’s wings in this psalm—remains clear.

With the image of Yahweh as a winged sun disk in the background of this psalm, one can begin to address the problem of classifying this psalm’s genre. In Mesopotamian iconography, the winged disk can serve as a symbol of the sun god Shamash, god of order and justice. Likewise, in Egyptian imagery, the winged sun disk represents the sun god, whose daily journey through the sky demonstrates his mastery over chaos and preservation of *Maat* (order). Cultures both to the east and to the west of ancient Israel confirm the winged sun disk’s association with order and justice and thus inform our understanding of Yahweh’s role as winged guardian and preserver of justice in this psalm. Depicting Yahweh as a winged sun disk confirms the psalm’s fundamental concern with justice, namely, that the wicked, so carefully described in vv. 2–5, do not go unpunished. Furthermore, God’s roles as divine judge and executor of justice—so clearly seen in Ps 17—are also prominent in this psalm. Psalm 36 ends with the picture of the wicked having received their judgment: “There lie the workers of iniquity, they are fallen and they are not able to rise” (v. 14).

Chapter 5

The Iconic Structure of Psalm 57 and Congruent Images in Ancient Near Eastern Iconography

1. Translation of Psalm 57

- 1 For the leader, “do not destroy,” of David, a Miktam.
When he fled from Saul in a cave.
- 2 Be gracious to me, O God, be gracious to me!
For in you does my soul take refuge.
And in the shadow of your wings I seek refuge,
Until destruction passes by.¹
- 3 I call to God most high, to God who accomplishes (it) for me.
- 4 He stretches out from the heavens and he saves me.
He challenges² the one who tramples upon me. *Selah*.
He sends out his loyalty and his truth.
- 5 As for me,³ I lay down in the midst of lions,⁴
The ones that consume⁵ the sons of man.
Their teeth are like a spear and arrows.

¹ In MT the subject הָיָה and verb יַעֲבֹר do not agree, prompting some scholars to emend the text. One could simply understand the subject as a complex plural. See also the iconic structural analysis below on the possibility of the personification of “destruction.”

² On translating חָרָה (*pi'el* perfect) as “challenge to a fight or duel,” see Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100* (WBC 20; Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 74; Roland de Vaux, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1971), 123.

³ I understand נַפְשִׁי to function like a 1cs pronoun, serving as the subject of אֲשַׁכְּבָה (so Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 73).

⁴ MT’s pointing is unique: לְבָיִם. One would expect לְבַיִים for “lions.” LXX (ἐκ μέσσου σκύμνων) supports the notion of “lions” behind the unique MT pointing, though the LXX binds the prepositional phrase with the preceding clause (see previous note). I see no reason to change MT’s syntax.

⁵ MT reads לֹהֲטִים, while LXX reads τεταραγμένους (troubled), modifying the state of the psalmist as he lies (with previous colon). The *qal* להט usually has the sense of consuming with fire, but here, it indicates the ferocity of the lions, so Jerome: *leonum ferocientium*. Cf. Strawn, *What is Stronger*, 311.

- And their tongue is like a sharp sword.
- 6 Be exalted upon the heavens, O God.
Your glory is over all the earth.
- 7 They prepare a net for my feet,
Bending down my soul.⁶
They dig a pit in front of me.
They fall into the middle of it. *Selah.*
- 8 My heart is secure, O God, My heart is secure.
I will sing and make music.
- 9 Awaken my glory,⁷
Awaken harp and lyre.
I will awake the dawn.
- 10 I will give thanks to you among the people, O my Lord.
I will make music among the nations.
- 11 For your loyalty is great, reaching to the heavens.
And to the clouds, your faithfulness.
- 12 Be exalted upon the heavens, O God.
Your glory is over all the earth.

2. Literary Analysis

2. A. Structural Outline

Superscription (v. 1)

- I. Petition (v. 2)
- II. First confession of trust (vv. 3–4)
- III. First description of enemies (v. 5)
- IV. First hymnic refrain (v. 6)
- V. Second description of enemies (v. 7)
- VI. Second confession of trust (v. 8a)

⁶ MT reads קָפְפוּ. The LXX reading κατέκαμψαν, (they bend), with its 3mp subject, seems more appropriate given the context, but draws suspicion because of its facility. Briggs, however, argues on the basis of LXX and Jerome (*ad incurvandum*) for an original infinitive here (קָפְפוּ) rather than MT's pointing (*qal* perfect 3ms) (*Psalms* 2:41). This reading is attractive because it could explain both LXX and Jerome, and it makes more sense in the context of the MT. Because it requires no change in the consonantal text, this reading is also preferable over Kraus's reconstruction קָפְפוּ (*Psalms* 1–59, 529).

⁷ For similar cases in which קָבוֹד indicates one's person, see Pss 16:9; 30:13; 108:2.

- VII. Vow of praise (vv. 8b–11)
 VIII. Second hymnic refrain (v. 12)

2. B. Rhetorical Movement

Psalm 57 begins with an extended superscription—one of the longest of the Psalter⁸—that binds the psalm to an episode in the biblical account of David's life.⁹ The poem commences with a petition for God's gracious protection from an indeterminate foe or oppressive force, *חַמָּה*, which I have translated "destruction" (v. 2). Gerstenberger has named this verse a "double entreaty for mercy" (cf. Pss 22:2; 123:3), a formal category that is "seemingly more impressive in liturgical discourse than the ordinary chains of pleas."¹⁰ A confession of trust follows (vv. 2–4), the first of two in the psalm. In it, the psalmist continues to describe the threat in vague terms using the participle *שֹׁאֵפֵי* (the one who tramples on me), but nevertheless expresses certainty that God will save on account of God's character ("his loyalty and truth"). The psalmist continues to describe that which threatens him. Still trading in evocative ambiguity, he uses leonine and military imagery (v. 5).

The description of the enemies is interrupted momentarily by a hymnic refrain (v. 6). In this context, the hymnic refrain also serves as a plea. It begins with an imperative verb *רִמָּה* (be exalted!) like the opening plea for grace in v. 2 (*חַנּוּנֵי אֱלֹהִים חַנּוּנֵי*).¹¹ Yet the cry "be exalted" is hymnic in that it gives honor to God, by reckoning him worthy of the exaltation. In the psalmist's logic, God's exaltation necessitates the protection and salvation of the psalmist, so to beseech God to be exalted and glorified is simultaneously to ask for help. After the brief hymn/plea (v. 6), the description of the enemies resumes (v. 7). Here the enemies no longer take the form of lions, the most feared hunters in the animal world (v. 5). Rather the imagery shifts to portray the enemies as human hunters who use cunning and technology to do harm to the supplicant. The

⁸ On the title "do not destroy" (appearing as well in Pss 58; 59; 75), see Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 2:214–15.

⁹ Either 1 Sam 22:1 or 24:1–22.

¹⁰ Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 1*, 230.

¹¹ Scholars are divided as to whether the repeated phrase in vv. 6, 12 is indeed a hymnic refrain or rather a petition. Gerstenberger calls it a petition in both verses, though he grants the possibility that it is a "hymnic affirmation," as appears to be the case in Ps 108:6 (*Psalms, Part 1*, 231; likewise Eaton, *The Psalms: A Historical and Spiritual Commentary*, 220). Kraus considers it a petition or plea (*Psalms 1–59*, 530), while Tate calls it a vow of praise (*Psalms 51–100*, 76), as does Limburg (*Psalms*, 190).

psalmist confidently predicts his enemies demisc by the last colon of v. 7, as he describes them falling into the pit that they have dug for him.

The prediction of the enemies' dramatic twist of fate (i.e., falling into their own traps) then propels the psalmist into a full expression of his conviction of his own salvation. The statement of trust (v. 8a) exhibits a repetitive structure ("My heart is secure, O God, my heart is secure") that includes a central vocative אֱלֹהִים. This verse echoes the structure of v. 2a ("Be gracious to me, O God, be gracious to me"). There (in v. 2a) the repetitive structure intensifies the psalm's fundamental plea. In v. 8a, the statement of trust appears equal in intensity and identical in form to the opening plea. This statement (v. 8a) thus functions as a pivot for the entire psalm. After it, the psalmist utters only expressions of trust and praise, including a vow of praise (vv. 8b–11), containing imperative verbs addressed to himself and his musical instruments, followed by first-person imperfect verbs that amplify the initial vow of praise in v. 8b. The vow ends by naming the motivation and cause for such praise, namely, the faithfulness and loyalty of God (v. 11).¹²

The psalm concludes by repeating the hymnic refrain of v. 6. At that earlier location, the imperative verb רַמָּה could well be understood as a plea. However, in this new context רַמָּה is no longer ambiguous. The utterance has taken on a much more confident tone.

2. C. Form and Setting

This psalm is an individual lament in which confidence outweighs complaint. Yet this imbalance certainly should not disqualify it as a lament psalm.¹³ In light of the overwhelming elements of confidence, Kraus classifies the psalm as a "prayer song,"¹⁴ but Tate is correct in noting that this category is too broad and vague to be of any real help.¹⁵

Schmidt formulates a theory, which Beyerlin later develops and Kraus follows in turn, that the psalmist is one falsely accused who stays overnight in the sanctuary with his accusers to await divine judgment.¹⁶ This theory rests partially on the assumption that the protecting wings of Yahweh described here

¹² Because this verse is introduced by כִּי, Kraus calls this verse the "chief element" of the hymn. Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60–150* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 532.

¹³ Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 75.

¹⁴ Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 529.

¹⁵ Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 75.

¹⁶ Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 530. See Beyerlin, *Die Rettung der Bedrängten*; Schmidt, *Das Gebet der Angeklagten im Alten Testament*.

and in Ps 36 indicate the temple (via the cherubim) as the locale of the psalm. Yet the investigation thus far (see the analysis of Ps 17 above) has shown that the wings of Yahweh could not be a reference to "temple cherubim." This finding severely undermines the Schmidt-Bayerlin-Kraus theory that this psalm refers to spending the night in the temple in anticipation of Yahweh's judgment.

2. D. The Image of the Psalmist

The psalm's imagery provides insight into the suppliant's emotional state. His words bear out tremendous fear, courage, and hope. Verses 5 and 7 describe the enemies of the psalmist in terrifying terms. Yet, in both verses, notes of courage and confidence clearly ring out. Verse 5 begins with the psalmist declaring that he "lies down" (שָׁכַב) in the midst of lions. The implication may be that he is indeed so confident in God's protection that he can sleep in the midst of danger. Alternately, the phrase may simply indicate the proximity of the danger: lions are near.¹⁷ In v. 7, the psalmist's confidence comes across more clearly in the face of equally dangerous enemies. Their threatening activity includes setting traps, namely, a net (רֶשֶׁת) and a pit (שִׁיקָה) to ensnare the psalmist. However, in a remarkable turn (v. 7bβ), the psalmist claims that the enemies are indeed digging their own trap.¹⁸ A confidence that appears only ambiguously, if at all, in v. 5 has grown by the end of v. 7.¹⁹

The psalmist's response to God's action (or, indeed, future action) is praise (vv. 8-12). The psalmist describes his public praise in vv. 8-9, where he also reveals himself to be a musician.²⁰ His performance consumes his entire being (עָבַדְתִּי [my glory],²¹ v. 7) and testifies to God's loyalty and faithfulness (v. 11).²²

¹⁷ Tate chooses the latter option (*Psalms 51-100*, 78).

¹⁸ Cf. Prov 1:18-19; 26:27; 28:10; Eccl 10:8; Ps 141:10.

¹⁹ Tate argues that the *selah* at the end of v. 7 serves an emphatic function (*Psalms 51-100*, 76).

²⁰ These verses may have prompted the ascription of David as its author (or, conversely, they might support the notion that the superscription is contemporaneous with the composition of the psalm).

²¹ The evocative "glory" of the psalmist in v. 9 has prompted much comment. See, e.g., Weiser's comments: "The worshippers' whole being is filled with the thought of God; and this state of mind is his 'glory,' which is spread over him like the resplendent majesty of God" (*The Psalms*, 428).

²² Gerstenberger thinks that this detail hints at a context in a ritual of a feast of thanksgiving (*Psalms, Part 2, and Lamentations*, 232).

The time at which this performance takes place merits attention because of its association with the sun. The psalmist claims to awake the dawn (v. 9), and in doing so he personifies the dawn.²³

2. E. The Image of the Enemy/Enemies

Similar to the way in which *dawn* is personified (v. 9), in the opening lines of the prayer the psalmist personifies *destruction*. Interpreting destruction (הָוִיתָ) as a character or force in the psalm might explain why, as a feminine plural noun, it occurs as the subject of יִבָּרַךְ, a masculine singular verbal form. The psalmist might well have in mind a demon or a powerful supernatural entity. He looks to Yahweh for shelter until it passes by (cf. Isa 26:20, "hide yourselves for a little while until the wrath is past").

Following the depiction of personified destruction, a threat to the psalmist appears in v. 4 through the participle שֹׁחֵץ, "the one who tramples upon me." This image of being trampled by a dangerous foe would suit a number of different actors, including lions, which appear in the next description of enemies (v. 5).

Verse 5 presents the reader with similes layered upon a metaphor. The enemies are devouring lions, and their oral features are described in comparison to sharp weapons. The lions' tongue—described here as a collective singular—is sharp, perhaps a reference to cruel words or lies that impugn the character of the psalmist and call into question his righteousness before God and the community.²⁴ However, the tongue here may be described as an organ of mastication as well as communication. Lions use rough papillae on their tongues to cleave meat off a bone, and thus might well be considered "sharp." The leonine imagery for enemies gives way to equally vivid imagery of the hunt (v. 7). All the images of the enemy in vv. 2–7 combine to present a lethal threat to the psalmist.²⁵

²³ Personification of the dawn (שָׁחַר) also occurs in Ugaritic and Akkadian literature, where the cognates *šhr* and *šēru* (respectively) can function as divine names. See Simon B. Parker, "Shachar," *DDD*, 754–55.

²⁴ Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 138–39; Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 531.

²⁵ On leonine imagery for enemies in the Psalms, see Strawn, *What is Stronger*, 50–54, 273–76.

2. F. The Image of God²⁶

The psalmist's praise situates God as a transcendent, heavenly deity who condescends to rescue and protect the psalmist, and in doing so God reveals his faithful character. "My glory" (v. 9) refers to the being or essence of the psalmist, which parallels the double refrain extolling God's glory, that is, God's person or essence (vv. 6, 12). The appearance of God's glory upon the heavens and the earth is consistent with the language of theophany.²⁷ Mention of "the dawn" (v. 9) further confirms this as a solar theophany. In further support of this notion, Hossfeld and Zenger have acknowledged the possibility that the imperative "rise" or "be exalted" (v. 6), "implies the idea of the rising 'sun of justice,'"²⁸ referring to Mal 3:20 [4:2]. In an earlier publication, Zenger argues more strongly for the connection between solar imagery and the appearance of Yahweh's glory: "Um das Aufstrahlen 'der Herrlichkeit' dieser rettenden Sonne auf der ganzen Erde und um ihr 'Aufgehen' über den Himmel hin bitten die beiden 'Refrains' v. 6 = v. 12."²⁹

Throughout the psalm, God is depicted as the supreme God of the celestial realm. Verse 3 refers to the deity with the epithet אֱלֹהִים עֲלִיּוֹן. Likewise, in v. 4, God saves by a stretching out (*√slh*) from heaven toward the psalmist. Two particular characteristics proceed from this heavenly deity: God's חֶסֶד and אֱמֻנָה (vv. 4, 11).³⁰ God's חֶסֶד and אֱמֻנָה should be understood as personified ordering forces within the universe that demonstrate this celestial deity is faithful to

²⁶ This psalm, along with Pss 61 and 63, appear within the so-called Elohistic Psalter. As such, the divine name is indicated not with Yahweh, but Elohim. It seems that the issue of the winged form of Yahweh/Elohim has little bearing on the larger questions about the shape and shaping of the book of Psalms, as well as the editing and liturgical function of the Elohistic Psalter. For a review of recent scholarship on the Elohistic Psalter, see Joel S. Burnett, "Forty-Two Songs for Elohim: An Ancient Near Eastern Organizing Principle in the Shaping of the Elohistic Psalter," *JOT* 31 (2006): 81–101. Cf. Jerome F. D. Creach, *Yahweh as Refuge and the Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (JSOTSup 217; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

²⁷ Cf. Isa 6:3. Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen*, 53–55.

²⁸ Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51–100* (Hermeneia; trans. Linda M. Maloney; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 74.

²⁹ Zenger, *Ich will die Morgenröte wecken*, 16.

³⁰ Following Mitchell Dahood (*Psalms 1: 1–50* [AB 16; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1979], 24, 148), Tate claims that "Loyal-Love and Faithfulness (or Truth)" are personifications of divine attendants, an adaptation of "the concept of two attendants who accompanied a god or deity.... The divine servants will come and help the suppliant in a difficult situation." Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 78.

save. These saving actions are described as both defensive and offensive actions. In v. 2, God's wings shelter (*ḥshh*) the psalmist, while in v. 4 God takes an offensive posture, challenging the enemy to a fight.³¹

2. G. The Iconic Structure of Psalm 57

When these images of God are viewed as an integrated whole, one discovers the image of a winged deity who fights for the psalmist against foes depicted variously as hunters and lions. This winged deity appears in a morning theophany as one utterly transcendent—an exalted God of the heavens who works actively to preserve order by rewarding the faithfulness of his servants. Additionally, this winged deity is accompanied by attendants, “Loyalty” and “Truth,” who minister the protection of the deity to the psalmist.

3. Iconographic Congruencies to the Constellations of Images in Psalm 57

As noted earlier, Hossfeld and Zenger have suggested that the image of the winged sun disk lies behind Yahweh's winged form in Ps 57.³² Zenger's additional comments support this assessment by referring primarily to textual material rather than to iconography, in so far as he likens Yahweh's form in Ps 57 to the image of the “Sun of Righteousness” in Mal 3:20 [4:2].³³

Indeed, Syro-Palestinian iconography provides further support for the association of Yahweh with the winged sun disk in this literary context. The psalmist repeatedly situates Yahweh in the heavens. When Yahweh challenges the enemy using the language of a duel or military conflict (v. 4), the psalmist describes a winged deity “reaching down from heaven” (יְשֵׁלָה מִשָּׁמַיִם) to the earth to devastate foes. I have already identified the iconographic congruencies for this violent heavenly deity and the winged sun disk in the discussion of Ps 17 (see, e.g., figs. 1.4, 3.13–15).

The psalm's refrain (vv. 6, 12) also exhorts Yahweh to “rise above the heavens” (רִמָּה עַל-הַשָּׁמַיִם) and be glorified “above” (עַל) the earth. Yahweh's

³¹ So Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 74; de Vaux, *The Bible*, 123, 127.

³² Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 74.

³³ For a treatment of Mal 3:20 in light of solar theology in the Egyptian Book of the Dead, see Silvia Schroer, “Beobachtungen zur Aktualisierung und Transformation von Totenweltmythologie im alten Israel: Von der Grabbeigabe bis zur Rezeption ägyptischer Jenseitsbilder in Mal 3,20,” in *Mythisches in biblischer Bildsprache: Gestalt und Verwandlung in Prophetie und Psalmen* (QD 209; Hubert Irsigler, ed.: Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2004), 290–317.

supreme location—over the heaven and the earth—finds iconographic congruency again in the image of the winged sun disk in Syro-Palestinian art, which almost always appears in the uppermost position in an iconographic constellation. The reference to the morning theophany that so many have identified in v. 9 further suggests a deity in the form of the sun. Finally, the characteristics of God, his “Loyalty” and “Truth,” are cast in celestial terms (v. 11), that is, their size and scope are described in comparison to the heights of heaven.

As a personified pair of attendants (v. 4), Loyalty and Truth minister Yahweh’s protecting presence to the psalmist and thus provide yet another aspect of congruency between the iconography of the winged sun disk and the portrayal of Yahweh in the psalm. In Syro-Palestinian glyptic art, which draws on a longstanding Mesopotamian tradition, the winged sun disk often appears with a pair of human or humanoid figures standing alongside and below it.

An unprovenanced inscribed seal (fig. 5.1) belonging to a certain *’hyhy* depicts an example of adorers underneath a winged sun disk and flanking a central curved mound, possibly representing a stylized tree.³⁴ The figures have an upraised hand in a posture of reverence toward the mound, the winged sun disk, or both. Another more delicately worked seal belonging to *’ms hspr* shows two antithetical human figures facing the winged disk and a cultic stand or altar beneath it (fig. 5.2). Again, at least one arm is raised in a gesture of adoration.



Fig. 5.1. Seal of *’hyhy*; Northwest Semitic. After Orman, “Mesopotamian Influence,” fig. 62.



Fig. 5.2. Seal of *’ms hspr*; Moabite. After Naveh, *Early History of the Alphabet*, fig. 89.

³⁴ For possible interpretations of this “mound,” see Tallay Orman, “Mesopotamian Influence on West Semitic Inscribed Seals: A Preference for the Depiction of Mortals,” in *Studies in the Iconography of Northwest Semitic Inscribed Seals: Proceedings from a Symposium Held in Fribourg on April 17–20, 1991* (ed. Benjamin Sass and Christoph Uehlinger; OBO 125; Fribourg: University Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 71 n. 23.

A different pair of figures appears below the winged disk in other constellations, namely, atlants. These figures have two upraised arms that support the outstretched wings of sun disks, especially winged sun disks that have been heavily anthropomorphized such as in **fig. 5.3**, the seal of *ddbw*. Beneath the wings of the anthropomorphic heavenly deity are two bull men, which are regularly associated with Shamash.³⁵ The Aramaic seal of *šnhšr* (**fig. 5.4**) also depicts atlants under the wings of an anthropomorphic heavenly god. In this depiction, the common bull-men have been replaced with fully human (though schematized) atlants.



Fig. 5.3. Seal of *ddbw*; Iron Age. After Ornan, "Mesopotamian Influence," fig. 9.



Fig. 5.4. Aramaic seal of *šnhšr*. After Ornan, "Mesopotamian Influence," fig. 9.

It is difficult to discern whether the human figures in an Edomite seal (**fig. 2.23**, discussed earlier) should be understood as atlants or adorants of the anthropomorphic winged disk. Their hands appear in the classic adoring posture, yet may also be interpreted as holding the tail feathers and thus supporting the winged deity.



Fig. 2.23. Edomite seal of *mnḥmt 'št gdmnk*; Iron Age IIC. After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 294.

³⁵ See discussion of **fig. 2.21** above and Wiggermann, *RIA* 8:226.

Finally, we have noted Ps 57, like Ps 17, presents Yahweh in the form of a winged sun disk. Moreover, these psalms share another element: both cast the enemies in the form of lions. Psalm 57 does not present Yahweh with a sword dispatching lions, as Ps 17 does. Even so, the picture of a winged deity battling lions in Ps 57 suggests that the common iconographical motif seen in **figs. 3.21–27** may have been taken up by the psalmist and applied to God's victory over his enemies.

4. Conclusion: The Image of the Winged Yahweh in Psalm 57

Like Psalm 17, whose constellation of images suggests more than one picture of the winged Yahweh, Ps 57 finds strong iconographic congruencies in images of winged sun disks that fight for the psalmist and preserve justice and order. As such, Yahweh in winged form accords with representations of Mesopotamian and Egyptian solar deities. Yahweh's winged form may also reflect the iconography of a winged god battling lions, following a long-standing ancient Near Eastern iconographic motif.³⁷

Two other aspects of Yahweh's form as a winged sun disk must remain open for debate because of a relative paucity of evidence within the iconography of Israel/Palestine. To be sure, the image of Yahweh as winged "water-providing" god has strong affinities with Mesopotamian iconography. In accord with the criteria for establishing congruency described in ch. 1, one would like to see a greater prevalence of this imagery within Syro-Palestinian iconography to confirm its value as an iconographical constellation congruent with Ps 57. Likewise, the personified characteristics of Loyalty and Truth may well be developments of the images of pairs of figures flanking the winged sun disk. Yet, both of these possibilities require further study to become utterly convincing.

³⁷ See discussion of Ps 17 above.

Chapter 6

The Iconic Structure of Psalm 61 and Congruent Images in Ancient Near Eastern Iconography

1. Translation of Psalm 61

- 1 For the leader, upon the stringed instrument, of David.
- 2 Hear, O God, my cry.
Listen to my prayer.
- 3 From the end of the earth I cry to you as my heart faints.
Lead me¹ to a rock that is higher than I.²
- 4 For you are a refuge for me.
A tower of strength before my enemy.
- 5 Let me abide in your tent forever.³
I seek refuge in the shelter of your wings. *Selah*.
- 6 For you, O God, you listen to my vows.
You give the inheritance⁴ of those who fear your name.
- 7 Add days to the days of the king,
His years for⁵ generations.
- 8 May he dwell forever before God.

¹ Reading תחנני as *hip'il* imperfect with an imperative sense.

² MT reads ירום ממני (followed by Sym. and Jer.), which my translation retains. LXX reads ὑψιστός με (you lifted me), which likely retroverts to חרזמכני (*polal* imperfect 2ms with 1es suffix (רוםני), and is followed by Syr. The MT is most likely prior, since the LXX (Syr.) reading could have arisen secondarily due to haplography of one of the internal *mēms* in ממני. Subsequently, the prefixed *tāw* was added to make sense of an otherwise problematic reading.

³ Or "eternal tent" (cf. Isa 26:4; Isa 45:17).

⁴ The reading retains MT's ירשח despite the oft-cited reconstruction ארשח ("desires," e.g., Kraus, *Psalms 60-150*, 8; cf. Briggs, *Psalms*, 2:67), since this emendation finds no support among ancient versions, and MT is not so difficult as to be impossible.

⁵ MT reads כמז, bound by a *maqṣep* to the following word דר. LXX reads ὡς ἡμέρας ("until 'as far as a day," which Bardke retroverts in *BHS* as כמי. Briggs rightly notes that the variation between MT and LXX has no bearing on the general sense of the passage, namely, "that the dynasty of the king is to be perpetual" (*Psalms*, 2:67). Thus I have retained the MT.

- Appoint Loyalty and Truth; they will guard him.
 9 Thus I will sing of your name forever,
 Fulfilling my vows day by day.

2. *Literary Analysis*

2. A. Structural Outline

Superscription (v. 1)

- I. Invocation and plea for hearing (v. 2)
- II. Confession of trust (vv. 3–6)
- III. Prayer for the king (vv. 7–8)
- IV. Vow of praise (v. 9)

2. B. Rhetorical Movement

After the superscription, the psalm's opening verse (v. 2) contains a double plea in a staccato style that calls God's attention to the predicament of the psalmist.⁶ In the confession of trust that follows (vv. 3–6), a general description of current trouble (v. 3a) gives way to a flood of images for strength and security (vv. 3b–6).⁷ Petitions intermingle with statements of trust in these verses; yet, overall, a confident tone prevails,⁸ evident in the psalmist's use of imperfect verbs. In contrast to v. 2, where one finds unambiguously imperative verbs (הקשיבה...שמעו) lending a desperate air to the plea, the petitions in vv. 3, 5 contain imperfect verbs with injunctive and cohortative senses. In v. 3c, תנחמני could be rendered "you will lead me" (future sense) or "lead me!" (injunctive sense). Likewise in v. 5, one could read the first person imperfect verb אגורה "I will abide" (future sense)⁹ or "let me abide" (cohortative sense). The use of the imperfect thus betrays the psalmist's growing conviction that Yahweh will indeed act. As the psalmist recounts Yahweh's strength, his own confidence increases.

⁶ Pleas utilizing imperative forms of שמעו (*qul*) and קשוב (*hup'il*), are quite common. See, e.g., Pss 17:1; 130:2; Job 13:6; 33:31.

⁷ Erhard Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2, and Lamentations* (FOOT), 15; Grand Rapids: Ferrmans, 2001), 3.

⁸ This tone leads Weiser to comment: "the spirit of thanksgiving prevails already from v. 3 [v. 4 MT] onwards over the tone of lament and depression (vv. 1 ff. [v. 2 MT])" (*The Psalms*, 443).

⁹ The ending does not necessarily signal the cohortative on imperfect verbs.

The confession of trust concludes with a כִּי clause (v. 6), which identifies the source of the psalmist's confidence: the belief that God will bless those who fear him.

After the confession of trust, the psalm moves rather unexpectedly to a prayer for the long reign of the king (vv. 7–8). According to the logic of the psalmist, God's presence equals protection; so the king's effective rule is predicated upon his ability to remain in the presence of God. The prayer for the king ends with the psalmist beseeching God to appoint אֱמֻנָה וְאֵתְנָת ("loyalty and truth" [v. 8]) as personified guardians for the king. With these entities nearby, the king will never be far from the protecting presence of God.

The psalm ends with a vow of praise (v. 9). This concluding statement indicates God's protection of the king and prompts the psalmist to praise. This verse also marks the resumption of the classic elements of a lament psalm,¹⁰ these elements having been briefly interrupted by the prayer for the king (vv. 7–8). It may seem that this prayer for the king is out of place in a psalm that otherwise contains only traditional aspects of the lament form—plea (v. 2), confession of trust (vv. 3–6), and vow of praise (v. 9). Yet the prayer for the king proves to be an integral part of this particular psalm, for the psalmist carefully frames it within the larger poem by means of repeated key words.¹¹ Verse 9 makes reference to "my vows" (נִדְרֵי), echoing "my vows" in v. 6 (נִדְרֵי). Likewise, vv. 6 and 9 both contain references to the "name" of God (שֵׁם/שְׁמֵךְ).

2. C. Form and Setting

The introductory plea, confession of trust, and vow of praise mark Ps 61 as a lament psalm. Many interpreters have postulated very specific *Sitze im Leben*. Their arguments hinge on the positive identification of the psalm's speaker (or speakers) and the determination of whether or not the protection described in vv. 5–6 is that of the Jerusalem temple. Opinions on both issues vary considerably.

While the identity of the speaker must ultimately remain uncertain, there is evidence to support the theory that the psalmist is the king, as Eaton has pro-

¹⁰ E.g., invocation, confession of trust, complaint, vow of praise. See Hermann Gunkel, *The Psalms: A Form-critical Introduction* (Facet books, Biblical Series 19; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967).

¹¹ Limburg, *Psalms*, 203.

posed.¹² Eaton offers two suggestions for interpreting the psalm's third-person reference to the king in vv. 7–8: first, these verses are a brief prayer of the temple choir on behalf of the king; and second, the king speaks of himself in the third person in v. 7.¹³ Eaton draws support for this second notion from Zedekiah's third person reference to himself in Jer 38:5, as well as from other royal self-identifications using third person pronouns (e.g., Pss 2:2; 18:51; 63:11; 89:51–52). Eaton also cites the fifth-century Phoenician inscription of the King Yehawmilk, which contains a third-person prayer for the king in the midst of a first-person account in the voice of Yehawmilk himself.¹⁴

Kraus judges vv. 7–8 differently, arguing that the speaker is neither the king here nor elsewhere in the psalm. He draws comparisons to Old Babylonian prayers to Ishtar¹⁵ and the moon God Nanna, both of which end with a sudden, seemingly out-of-place benediction for the king.¹⁶ According to Kraus, one should understand the abrupt prayer for the king in Ps 61:7–8 to be a formal element attested in ancient Near Eastern prayer. When one evaluates, these two respective appeals to comparative textual evidence, Eaton's proposal proves the more compelling, since the Yehawmilk inscription lies closer to the biblical text, both geographically and temporally, than does the Old Babylonian material cited by Kraus. This preference for the fifth-century Phoenician evidence over the Old Babylonian evidence accords with the criteria for adjudicating comparative material presented in ch. 1.

¹² Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms*, 48. Mowinckel also identifies the psalmist as a king, arguing that the king would recite this psalm in the field during a sacrifice before a battle (*The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 1:266).

¹³ Eaton, *The Psalms*, 230.

¹⁴ Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms*, 48. First noted and proposed by Mitchell J. Dahood, *Psalms II: 51–100* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968), 84. See "Building Inscriptions: Yehimilk of Biblos," translated by Franz Rosenthal (*ANET*, 653); "The Inscription of King Yehawmilk," translated by Stanislav Segert (*COS* 2:29).

¹⁵ Adam Falkenstein and Wolfram von Soden, *Sumerische und akkadische Hymnen und Gebete* (Zürich: Artemis-Verlag, 1953), 237; cf. "Hymn to Ishtar," translated by Ferris J. Stephens (*ANET*, 384). The Stephens translation does not include the prayer for the king at the end of the hymn.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 239; Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 9. On the basis of the comparative material, Kraus also cautions against assuming—as Gunkel, Seybold, and others do—that the prayer for the king in vv. 7–8 is simply a later addition. See Hermann Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*, 261. Seybold has argued that a Persian king is the subject of the prayer (cf. Ezra 6:10; 7:23) (*Die Psalmen*, 241). Hossfeld and Zenger see vv. 7–8 as a subsequent interpolation that breaks the "coherent context of vv. 6 and 9" (*Psalms* 2, 107).

Yet my tentative adoption of Eaton's position—that the king is indeed the speaker throughout the entire psalm—does not extend so far as to accept his suggestion that the psalm refers to a royal enthronement festival. Eaton maintains that the king's movement "from Sheol's mouth [i.e., the 'ends of the earth'] to a high rock [v. 3] is suggestive of his enthronement on Zion after processional ascent.... [The king] will be enthroned forever before God, guarded by the angelic graces Fidelity and Truth [v. 8]."¹⁷

Where Eaton sees an enthronement festival, Weiser and Kraus discern other rituals lying behind the psalm. Kraus maintains that the psalm was a "prayer song" for the asylum-seeker at the pre-exilic Jerusalem temple,¹⁸ whereas Weiser posits a "special occasion" in which the psalm would have been used: a "ceremony of the covenant community of Yahweh at which the 'lots' of the land, into which the Promised Land was divided, were distributed amongst the members of the Covenant."¹⁹ This apportionment was the *ירֶשֶׁה*, i.e., the "inheritance" of Yahweh (v. 6).

To strengthen their arguments for a cultic setting at Zion, Weiser and Kraus, among others,²⁰ claim that the wings of Yahweh (v. 5) refer to the cherubim of the ark of the covenant, a proposal which I have already refuted.²¹ Kraus further claims that *צור* designates the temple: "as a place of safety [v. 3], to which the waters of destruction cannot penetrate, [it] is the (mythological) designation for the foundation of creation and the name of the holy place."²² Likewise, both these interpreters construe the tent (*אֹהֶל*) of God (v. 5) to be a transparent reference to the temple.²³

Although the psalm speaks of God's presence in terms that may well be construed as allusions to the temple (e.g., "your tent," v. 5; "vows," vv. 6, 9; "dwelling before God," v. 8; and, possibly "rock" v. 3b), the psalm does not provide enough evidence to suggest a specific temple ritual as Kraus and Weiser have imagined. Ultimately, presuming that these rituals or any like them lie

¹⁷ Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms*, 48–49. Cf. Johnson, *The Cultic Prophet*, 354–56. Johnson concludes that a cultic prophet would utter the psalm on behalf of the king at the temple. The prophet adopts the voice of the king (using the royal "I", as it were) until vv. 7–8, at which point the prophet would have referred to the king in the third person.

¹⁸ Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 8.

¹⁹ Weiser, *The Psalms*, 444.

²⁰ E.g., Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 114.

²¹ Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 8; Weiser, *The Psalms*, 443.

²² Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 9.

²³ Weiser, *The Psalms*, 443.

behind the psalm prejudices all further judgments about the poem's structure, imagery, and message, and leads one unavoidably into circular arguments.²⁴

2. D. The Image of the Psalmist

The image of the psalmist emerges primarily through a statement of his location (v. 2); yet this location is difficult to determine and has been variously understood, owing to the wide range of possible meanings of אֶרֶץ (v. 3).²⁵ The phrase מִקְצֵה הָאָרֶץ (v. 3) might refer to the limits of the world (i.e., the "edge of the netherworld"²⁶) or simply the far reaches of the territory of Israel.²⁷ Yet another possibility is that the מִקְצֵה הָאָרֶץ refers to the situation of exile, for as Tate suggests, the psalm would have proven particularly apt for the exilic community, being "physically far from home, and physically and spiritually feeling themselves to be 'at the end of the earth.'"²⁸

"The end of the earth" signifies a realm in which chaos encroaches on order. This general sense of the phrase becomes clear when one assesses similar notions in Egyptian cosmology and its ideology of kingship. Whereas Egypt saw itself as the land of order and the king as charged with maintaining that order, the areas surrounding Egypt and the people who occupied these lands (i.e., non-Egyptian) were understood as chaos personified.²⁹ Thus, in the Kadesh battle inscriptions of Ramesses II, the pharaoh describes his position fighting at

²⁴ Hossfeld and Zenger are also skeptical of these putative references to the temple, opting instead for a "metaphorical interpretation" of the images for protection in the psalm. They maintain that the petitioner "(only) formulates the hoped-for rescue in metaphors whose Temple-theological aspects are not primary, but only partial or even perhaps non-existent." Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 2, 105.

²⁵ See HALOT 90–91; DCH 1:386–87.

²⁶ So Tate, *Psalms* 51–100, 112.

²⁷ Dahood has proposed, implausibly, that אֶרֶץ means "underworld" in this context (*Psalms* II, 84).

²⁸ Tate, *Psalms* 51–100, 112. Compare Briggs's argument that מִקְצֵה הָאָרֶץ was a gloss to adapt the song to the "later situation of the Diaspora" (*Psalms*, 2:67).

²⁹ Robins, *The Art of Ancient Egypt*, 158. For discussions on the nature and development of the ideology of kingship in the ancient Egypt, see David O'Connor and David P. Silverman, *Ancient Egyptian Kingship* (Probleme der Ägyptologie 9; Leiden: Brill, 1995). On military ideology see Barry J. Kemp, "Imperialism in Ancient Egypt," in *Imperialism in the Ancient World: Cambridge University Research Seminar in Ancient History* (ed. Peter Garnsey and C. R. Whitaker; Cambridge Classical Studies; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 7–57.

the edge of his empire as being at the “end of the earth.”³⁰ Likewise, the psalmist depicts himself as one who is traversing the borderland where chaos threatens to overwhelm order, and his very being. There his heart faints (v. 3).

In response to this problem of proximity, the psalmist asks God to lead him back to a central place where he can experience the localized, saving presence of the deity (v. 3). The wish for God’s presence (v. 5) accords precisely with the wish for the king (vv. 7–8), namely, that the king would “dwell forever *before* God.” The psalmist’s request for the deity’s protective presence for himself and the king strengthens the argument for viewing the king and the petitioner as, indeed, the same individual throughout the psalm.

Finally, the psalmist portrays himself as a constant, enthusiastic participant in the cult, singing (זמר) before witnesses (v. 9) and offering vows (vv. 6, 9). The psalmist’s ceaseless ritual activity parallels the perpetual safeguarding of the king/psalmist, which is afforded by the abiding divine presence. The psalmist speaks of dwelling in God’s tent forever (עולמים, v. 5) and prays that, in his office as king, he might likewise dwell before God forever (עולם, v. 8). The psalmist petitions God to add days upon days (ימים) to the life of the king, and years (שנה) accordingly for generations (דר ודר, v. 7). Furthermore, in the final verse, the psalmist proclaims that his worship, that is, the fulfilling of his vows, will last forever (יום יום, v. 9). The emphasis on divine and human constancy witnesses to the psalmist’s confidence that God will be able to protect him not just now, but for many years to come. The psalmist’s obeisance, in return, will be similarly steadfast. In sum, the psalm presents a picture of an individual, most likely the king, who longs for the presence of God and the order and protection that God’s presence provides.

2. E. The Image of the Enemy/Enemies

The psalm portrays the enemy only obliquely. Indeed, v. 4b contains the lone, explicit reference to the psalmist’s foes through the most general term אויב, which appears without adjectival modification or further elaboration. The initial statement of distress (v. 3) attributes the psalmist’s faint heart to its distance from the divine presence. Far away from God’s presence, the enemy’s power to injure the psalmist is proportionally greater. Yet the precise character of that threat remains unnamed. Likewise, the threat to the psalmist in his kingly role is ambiguous. God’s stationing Loyalty and Truth to protect the king implies

³⁰ See Kenneth A. Kitchen, *Ramesseid Inscriptions, Vol. II. Translations: Ramesses II, Royal Inscriptions* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 7. Gunkel first noted this connection of the Kadesh inscription to Ps 61 (*Die Psalmen*, 261).

that dangers exist, but the psalm provides no specific descriptions of the actual cause of that distress.

2. F. The Image of God

The descriptions of the deity in this psalm involve images of protection and blessing, that is, actions that defend and sustain the psalmist/king. In the psalms I have already discussed, God engages the enemies in mortal combat (e.g., Pss 17:13–14; 36:13; 57:4). Yet in Ps 61, God never acts violently toward the enemy. Instead, God leads the psalmist *away* from danger and toward a defensible position on a high rock (v. 3). God's actions could best be characterized, then, as defensive rather than aggressive.

Anthropomorphisms are also largely absent. God is capable of listening to the pleas and vows of the psalmist (vv. 3, 6), so the image of God who can hear—a god with ears, as it were—may be in the background. Yet the only reference to God's form *per se* comes in the reference to God's wings (v. 5). The image of the pteromorphic deity appears uniquely here in the phrase *בְּסֻתְרֵי כַנְּפֵיךָ* (in the shelter of your wings), in contrast to the more common *בְּצֵל כַּנְּפֵיךָ* "in the shadow of your wings" (Pss 17:8; 36:8; 57:2; 63:8). This singular rendering of the image underlines the sheltering and protecting effect of the wings. While *צֵל* can have numerous senses, including "under the care of" in addition to its more basic meaning "shadow," *סֻתְרָה* unambiguously and consistently refers to a place that provides concealment.³¹ Thus, in this psalm, which contains few descriptions of God's form, the primary (and most vivid) image of the deity illustrates the deity's power to protect and conceal, *not* his power to bring about violence against the psalmist's enemies.

Images of God's stalwart power—a rock (v. 3),³² a refuge, and a tower of strength (v. 4)—accompany equally vivid pictures of intimacy, as conveyed by the image of God's tent and his sheltering wings (v. 5). Hossfeld and Zenger note that the image of God's tent evokes hospitality and care: "unlike the 'palace' or 'house' with many rooms, the 'tent' creates not only intimacy but par-

³¹ HALOT, 772.

³² The refuge on the high rock evokes images of the cosmic mountain according to Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 114. Tate cites numerous studies on the cosmic mountain including Richard J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament* (HSM 4; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972); Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (trans. Rosemary Sheed; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996); Jon Douglas Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (New Voices in Biblical Studies; Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985).

icipation of the 'guest' in the life of the tent's owner."³⁴ Together, these images of security, immediacy, and intimacy suggest that God's presence can be localized in particular settings. Indeed, the king hopes to dwell forever "before God" (אֶלֶהִים לְפָנָי, v. 8).

The psalmist desires to be near Yahweh, since to be near God is to become secure. As the first verses suggest, the psalmist feels far away from God—"at the end of the earth" (v. 3), where chaos overwhelms order. However, even in that far off, disorienting place, the psalmist imagines God hearing his cries and leading him into the refuge provided by the divine presence. This depiction of divine presence presents a paradox. As the psalmist cries out, God is somehow present even in God's absence. Thus, the psalm sets up a contrast between the localized presence—that is, the immanence—of God and the implied transcendence of this deity. Though he is absent, God can hear the cries of the far-off, distressed psalmist and, in so doing, provide him divine protecting presence. Tate finds a similar ancient expression of the paradox of divine presence in the Babylonian prayer formula: "I call to you from distance; hear me from nearness."³⁴ Tate describes the correspondence between this Babylonian material and Ps 61: "The [Babylonian] formula seems to mean that prayer suspends the distantness between the supplicant and the deity. Breaking down a perceived distance and the creation of sense of nearness and presence is a major function of prayer. The Psalms are of great importance in the recognition of distantness ... and in closing the gap."³⁵

Finally, the psalm presents God as the sponsor of the king and thus the preserver of order. Weiser notes: "[Since] the king is the guarantor of the observance and execution of the order based on sacral law; the long duration of his righteous government, for which the psalmist prays, is ... in the material interests of the people of God."³⁶ This king receives the benefits of Yahweh's protection in the form of the personified, ever-present characteristics of Yahweh, his Loyalty and Truth (v. 8).

³⁴ Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 2, 108.

³⁴ Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, 116. See Werner R. Mayer's discussion of this formula (*Untersuchungen zur Formensprache der babylonischen Gebetsbeschwörungen* [Studia Pohl, Series maior 5; Rome: Biblical Institute, 1976], 302-17).

³⁵ Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, 116.

³⁶ Weiser, *The Psalms*, 444. Johnson proposes that the psalm derives from an *exilic* context as a prayer for Zedekiah or Jehoiachin (*The Cultic Prophet and Israel's Psalmody*, 353).

2. G. The Iconic Structure of Psalm 61

God's protection of the psalmist is evident primarily through images of monolithic strength. To these images of localized, protective divine presence—that is, immanence—one discerns a distinct element of transcendence, for God is able to hear, respond, and be present with the far-off psalmist (v. 3). In sum, when the images of psalmist, enemy and God are viewed together, the psalm presents a composite picture of a simultaneously transcendent and immanent deity. As the following iconographic analysis will show, ancient Near Eastern art also offers distinctive ways for expressing the paradox of divine presence, particularly in images of solar deities.

One can identify the psalmist, who both longs for and enjoys this divine presence; he is the king. The deity, in winged form, protects the king/psalmist from the vague—yet no less frightening—forces of chaos. The protection of this deity is administered, in part, by two watchful divine beings who personify God's Loyalty and Truth.

3. Iconographic Congruencies to the Constellations of Images in Psalm 61

God's protective and defensive activity in this psalm argues against associating the image of God with that of the winged warriors discussed above (e.g., **figs. 1.4, 3.21–26**). While this type of iconography provides congruencies with Pss 17 and 57, the context of Ps 61 does not support it. Rather, the lack of anthropomorphisms for God and God's generally defensive posture suggest that congruent images for the winged deity in this psalm should be limited to the winged sun disk and the Horus falcon.

3. A. The Horus Falcon

I have already shown that Syro-Palestinian art associates the protecting wings of the falcon with the ideology of divine kingship (**figs. 3.3–4**), an association that borrows directly from Egyptian iconography (e.g. **figs. 2.5, 3.2**). The literary images in Ps 61 offer a striking parallel to the ninth–seventh-century seal from Achzib (**fig. 3.4**).³⁷ The psalm is a prayer for the king's protection (esp. vv. 7–8) to a deity with protecting wings (v. 5). The seal shows a king receiving protection from the wings of the god Horus in the form of a falcon, an ico-

³⁷ For an entire series of seals containing similar imagery, see Keel, *Studien zu den Stempelsiegeln aus Palästina/Israel* 4, 67–74.

nographic constellation that provides a clear congruency to the constellation of literary images in the Ps 61.

3. B. The Winged Sun Disk

I argued above that the psalm presents a picture of a winged deity that is at once distant from the psalmist (v. 2) and yet somehow powerfully present, able to intervene and preserve the life of the psalmist. I have referred to this dialectic as “the paradox of divine presence,” namely, the way God appears to be both immanent and transcendent in this psalm.

Ancient Near Eastern art often expressed this paradox of divine presence through images of solar deities, for the sun is an image ideally suited to convey both a sense of distance and nearness. Though the sun moves in its course high and far above the earth, one can nevertheless feel the sun’s effects directly and powerfully. Egyptian artists of the Amarna period depicted the simultaneous transcendence and immanence of a solar deity by placing a disk (the *aten*) in the uppermost position of a scene, as in these two reliefs (figs. 6.1, 6.2).



Fig. 6.1. Limestone relief; Amarna; 1377–1358 B.C.E. After Keel, *Die Welt der altorientalischen Bildsymbolik*, Abb. 288.



Fig. 6.2. Limestone relief; Amarna; 1377–1358 B.C.E.. After Erman, *Die Religion der Ägypter*, Abb. 51.

Each of the rays that extend from the central sun disk ends with a hand. When these hands extend before the faces of Akhenaten and Nefertiti, they hold *ankh* signs. These Amarna scenes and many others like them depict a transcendent solar deity. And yet, the king and his family can experience the presence of the deity despite its distance by means of the sun's life-giving light and warmth.

The paradox of divine presence—so apparent in the iconography of the *aten* with extended hands—is also at work in the Ps 61. Though the psalm lacks overt solar imagery for God, the psalm does depict a deity in winged form, which opens the possibility of associating Yahweh with the winged sun disk, as has been the case in other psalms examined heretofore. The iconography of the winged sun disk, like the wings of the Horus falcon, is often associated with the protection of the king, as I have already demonstrated. With the king as the protégé in Ps 61, it is entirely possible—and wholly appropriate on the basis of this iconography—that the god who protects this king would be conceptualized as the winged sun disk.

There is also an evocative correlation between the image of God in winged form in Ps 61 and the stele of the Phoenician king Yehawmilk. The texts of the stele and the psalm share similar formal characteristics: they are both prayers for protection in which the king speaks primarily in the first person. In both texts, the speaker changes voices temporarily to refer to himself in the third person—an embedded “prayer for the king” amidst a larger “prayer of the king.” The text on the Yehawmilk stele appears below a presentation scene. The iconography of the scene includes an image of the king in Persian garb (thus confirming its dating to the fifth century B.C.E.) presenting an offering to a seated goddess Baalat Gubal, the Lady of Byblos; both figures are surmounted by the image of the winged sun disk (**fig. 6.3**).³⁸ The goddess appears in a form consistent with the Egyptian goddess Hathor, with a sun disk and cow horns atop her head. The winged sun disk, in the uppermost position of the stele may well represent the god Baal Shamem, the Lord of Heaven,³⁹ consort of Baalat Gubal, and chief male god at Byblos.⁴⁰ The stele and the psalm thus not only share formal characteristics, the literary imagery of the psalm also resonates with the iconography of the stele. However, the psalm's imagery reflects its monotheistic context; for in Ps 61, the winged god of heaven and the patron goddess merge into one winged deity, who authorizes and sponsors the king.

³⁸ Sabatini Moscati, ed., *i Fenici* (Antiche Civiltà, Milan: Bompiani, 1997), 364.

³⁹ For background and bibliography of Baal Shamem, see Herbert Niehr, “JHWH in der Rolle des Baalšamem,” in *Ein Gott allein?*, 307–26.

⁴⁰ See Glenn Markoe, *Phoenicians* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 117–18.

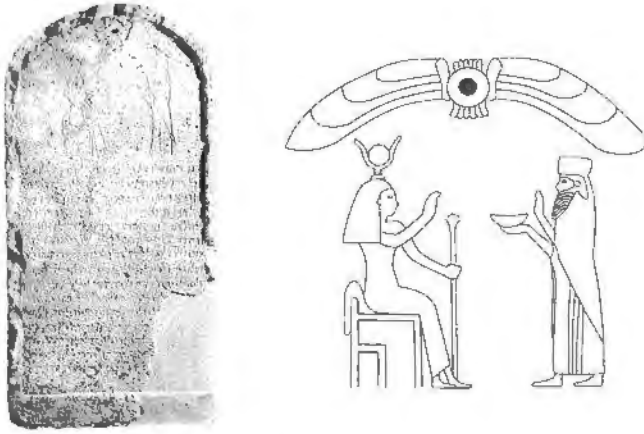


Fig. 6.3. Limestone Stele of Yehawmilk; Byblos; 5th or early 4th cent. B.C.E. Cf. Moscati, *i Fenici*, 400.

One further point of congruence between ancient Near Eastern iconography and the psalm deserves mention, namely, the psalmist's beseeching the winged deity to appoint two numinous guardians to protect the him (v. 8). In the discussion of iconographic congruencies in Ps 57, I suggested that the psalmist has likely adapted the iconography of the winged sun disk with a pair of attendants when he describes God sending out personified guardians, Loyalty and Truth (דָּקָה and אֱמֶת, Ps 57:4). The same iconographic congruency obtains for Ps 61 as well, since the pair of personified divine characteristics, דָּקָה and אֱמֶת, also appears in it. As in Ps 57, the psalmist may be modifying the iconographic tradition of a pair of figures flanking the winged disk (e.g., fig. 5.2), supporting the winged disk (fig. 5.3), or appearing above the wings of the disk (fig. 5.6).

4. Conclusion: The Image of the Winged God in Psalm 61

God's winged form in Ps 61 finds congruent images in the iconography of the Horus falcon and the winged sun disk. The psalmist-king beseeches a deity for protection—a deity who, like the Horus falcon, assumes a winged form to authorize and guarantee the safety of the monarch. The psalm also describes the paradox of divine presence, namely that a far-off (or, indeed, absent) deity is

somehow able to respond to and deliver the one who calls to him. This literary representation of a simultaneously transcendent and immanent deity accords with the iconography of solar deities, who often appear in winged form. Finally, two divine beings, Loyalty and Truth, mediate the protection of God to the king. As in Ps 57, the psalmist has employed and modified the iconographical motif of the pair of attendants of the winged sun disk.

Chapter 7

The Iconic Structure of Psalm 63 and Congruent Images in Ancient Near Eastern Iconography

1. Translation of Psalm 63

- 1 A song of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah.
- 2 O God, you are my God!
I look eagerly for you.
My soul thirsts for you,
As does my flesh for you,
In a land¹ of drought, weary² without water.³
- 3 Thus in the holy place I have seen you,
Beholding your strength and your glory.

¹ MT reads פְּאַרְץ while Syriac reflects פְּאַרְץ. (as/like a land; cf. Bardtke *BHS*). Syriac understands the imagery of dryness as a simile for the soul/flesh of the psalmist, while the MT's reading locates the psalmist—rather more concretely—in a dry land. Syriac finds partial support in Symmachus (ὡς ἐν γῆ), but LXX (ἐν γῆ) reads with MT, so I have retained it. Kraus understands the MT to be “a slip of the pen” replacing כ with ב (*Psalms 60–150*, 18). Interchange of ב and כ on the basis of graphic similarity is well attested in the Aramaic (square) script, but not in paleo-Hebrew script (Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 244–48). If there were a change from כ to ב, it would have been considerably later than the pre-exilic composition of the psalm that Kraus supposes, and LXX's reading with MT militates against this position. Tate translates “like a land” without emending MT, but reading -ב as a *beth essentialis*. Turning again to the Greek, however, LXX's reading supports the most basic sense of the preposition -ב (in).

² It is unclear whether עָיָה (weary) modifies “land” (אֶרֶץ) or “my flesh” (בְּשָׁרִי) from the previous colon. Though separated by the clause “in the dry land,” “weary” most likely modifies “my flesh” because the two words agree in number and definiteness, so Weiser: “my flesh longs for thee, fainting in a dry land” (*The Psalms*, 453). Yet most interpreters consider the adjective to modify “land.” See, e.g., NRSV: “my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land” (v. 1, according to alternate versification).

³ Numerous scholars have considered בְּלִי מִים a gloss for metrical reasons (e.g., Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 18). Yet, since one cannot be confident about meter in Hebrew poetry, this argument must be judged dubious.

- 4 For your loyalty is better than life.
My lips shall praise you.
- 5 Thus I will bless you with my life.
I will lift up open hands to your name.
- 6 As with fat and tallow, my soul is satisfied.
And with ringing lips my mouth will praise you.
- 7 When I remember you upon my bed,
In the watches of the night, I meditate on you.
- 8 For you are my help,
And in the shadow of your wings I shout for joy.
- 9 My soul clings after you,
Your right hand supports me.
- 10 But they who seek my soul for destruction⁴—
May they go down to the lowest parts of the earth.⁵
- 11 They who would deliver him⁶ to the hand of the sword—
May they become a portion of the jackals.
- 12 But let the king rejoice in God.
May all who swear by him boast.
For the mouth of those who speak falsely will be shut up.

⁴ The syntax of the MT is difficult in this colon. Its reading יהמה לשואה יבקשו נפשי has prompted several different ancient and modern translations. LXX reads αὐτοὶ ἐξ ἐλ; μάτην ἐζητήσαν τὴν ψυχὴν μου (they vainly sought after my soul)—possibly reflecting a Hebrew text containing אָשׁוּא rather than MT's לְשׂוּאָה. Again, the difference between MT and LXX (or the Hebrew versions from which they drew) is simply due to the difficult syntax of MT, which is to be considered prior. Turning to modern translations, the NIV reads, "they who seek my life will be destroyed," while NRSV and Tanakh read, "those who seek to destroy my life." Weiser offers the following: "But they that seek my life at the cost of their own ruin" (Weiser, *The Psalms*, 453). Similarly, I have read יבקשו נפשי as a relative clause without a relative pronoun, following Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 124; Johnson, *The Cultic Prophet and Israel's Psalmody*, 280, cf. *GKC*, §155m. I have translated the rest of the colon as literally as possible, following MT.

⁵ Cf. Gerstenberger's colorful translation: "They [shall go] to hell! They seek my life. To the netherworld with them!" Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2, and Lamentations*, 15.

⁶ MT reads יִגְדְּרוּ, (They shall deliver him over; *hip'il* 3mp with 3ms suffix, גִּדְּרָה). The LXX reading παραδοθήσονται possibly reflects יָגֵד (so Bardtke in *BHS*). Numerous modern translations read "they shall be given over" (e.g., Weiser, *The Psalms*, 453), following LXX and the *hop'al* form it suggests. Yet, the meaning of "handing over" for *hip'il* of גִּדְּרָה is attested elsewhere (Jer 18:21; Ezek 35:5, cf. Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 124). Furthermore, the MT reading is completely coherent within the context. Like v. 10a before it, v. 11a functions like a relative clause without a relative pronoun.

2. *Literary Analysis*

2. A. Structural Outline

Superscription (v. 1)

I. Invocation and complaint (v. 2)

II. Confession of trust and vow of praise (vv. 3–5)

III. Thanksgiving (vv. 6–9)

IV. Imprecation and request (vv. 10–12)

2. B. Rhetorical Movement

The psalm begins with an invocation that attests a close relationship between God and the psalmist: אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהֵי אֶתָּה (O God, you are my God).⁷ The conjunction of first- and second person singular pronouns establishes a pattern that appears with striking consistency throughout the entire psalm. First person singular pronouns (including subjects of verbs) appear in vv. 2 (twice), 3, 4, 5 (thrice), 6 (twice), 7 (twice), 8 (twice), 9 (twice), and 10. Second person singular pronouns, always referring to God, appear even more frequently, resulting in rhyme. The suffixed pronoun ך- occurs in vv. 2 (thrice), 3 (twice), 4 (twice), 5 (twice), 7 (twice), 8 (once), and 9 (twice). Additionally, vv. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 12 contain lines that begin with the letter כ, lending an alliterative quality to the entire psalm. Anthony Ceresko has also noted the presence of paronomasia between שׁוּחַ (v. 2), סָכַר, and שָׁקַר (v. 12) that creates an inclusio for the entire psalm.⁸ Throughout, the consistency and repetition of sound underline the psalmist's basic message, that the relationship between God and the psalmist is marked by constancy and unswerving devotion. The repetition of phonetic elements (i.e., inclusio, alliteration, and rhyme) contributes a sense of tonal cohesion to the psalm, which suffers from an otherwise convoluted literary structure.

2. C. Form and Setting

The psalm contains elements fundamental to individual psalms of lament (e.g., invocation, confession of trust, vow of praise, thanksgiving, imprecation), yet

⁷ Gerstenberger claims אֱלֹהֵי אֶתָּה (you are my God) "reflects age-old family and clan customs to adopt a protective deity, as Jacob did during his flight to Haran." Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2, and Lamentations*, 14.

⁸ A. Ceresko. "A Note on Psalm 63: A Psalm of Vigil," *ZAW* 92 (1980): 435–36.

the ordering of these elements is rather difficult to understand.⁹ I have shown above that the psalm demonstrates a remarkable tonal cohesion because of the repetition of phonetic elements—a tonal cohesion that gives order to otherwise haphazardly arranged formal elements. This complex and consistent phonetic repetition argues in favor of the psalm being intentionally and carefully composed. Gunkel fails to realize this in his wholesale reconstruction of the psalm's "unnatural"¹⁰ structure and his deletion of the prayer for the king (vv. 12a–b).¹¹ Kraus rightly discounts Gunkel's reorganization of the psalm as spurious since it is undertaken on "psychological grounds."¹² Instead, Kraus resolves the issue of its convoluted structure by proposing a ritual setting consistent with the psalm's structure. He contends: "The psychological schematism with which Gunkel goes to work in his reconstruction does not do justice to the song. Working out the institutional presuppositions and connections is much more determinative for an understanding of the psalm."¹³ However, Kraus's suggestion that the psalm derives from a pre-exilic asylum ritual in the sanctuary¹⁴ is also dubious because of the paucity of explicit references to Zion or to the temple.¹⁵ While the "holy precincts" (שְׁקֵצָה, v. 3) seems to refer to the temple,¹⁶ there are two other locales mentioned in the psalm—the waterless desert

⁹ Gerstenberger comments: "In absence of acute dangers and without the slightest intimation of enemies in vv. 2–9, the sudden shift to Imprecation (vv. 10–12) is irritating to the modern reader. But we are dealing with liturgical literature, and the breaks and jumps of logical reasoning are due to ceremonial necessities or else to redactional carelessness" (*Psalms, Part 2, and Lamentations*, 14).

¹⁰ Speaking about MT, Gunkel comments: "Es zerfällt, im ganzen betrachtet in drei Teile: I die Klage [vv.] 2, 3 (über 3 vgl. unten), II das gelobte Danklied [vv.] 4–6, III allerlei Trostgedanken [vv.] 7–9. Es fällt auf, dass die letzteren dem Danklied folgen und nicht, wie es natürlich ist, vorausgehen" (*Die Psalmen*, 266). Gunkel suggests the following to be the original order of verses: 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 5, 6, 4, 10, 11, 12c (*Die Psalmen*, 265–67).

¹¹ Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*, 266. Hossfeld and Zenger also consider the prayer for the king a later addition (*Psalms 2*, 122).

¹² Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*, 266–67; Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 18.

¹³ Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 19.

¹⁴ Walter Beyerlin, *Die Rettung der Bedrängten in den Feindpsalmen der Einzelnen auf institutionelle Zusammenhänge untersucht* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970), 135; Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 19.

¹⁵ So Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2, and Lamentations*, 16; Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 122.

¹⁶ Weiser maintains that the psalm sprung from "a pre-exilic festival of the Yahweh cult which was celebrated at the sacred Ark in the royal temple" (*The Psalms*, 454).

(v. 2) and the residence of the worshipper (v. 7)—neither of which supports the idea that the psalm reflects a ritual of asylum in the temple.¹⁷ I agree with Hossfeld and Zenger’s analysis: “it is by no means certain that the presumed location of the petitioner is in the sanctuary. Some things [i.e., the reference to the “waterless desert” (v. 2) and the “bed” (v. 7) of the suppliant] suggest the petitioner is *far from the sanctuary*—and at the same time counts on the fact that he can experience God’s saving and protecting nearness where he is.”¹⁸

In sum, it is exceedingly difficult to characterize precisely the form and setting of Ps 63. Like Willy Staerk, one is tempted to give up on trying to solve these issues. Staerk comments: “Wir erklären uns ausser Stande, die Widersprüche, die hier offenbar vorhanden sind, beseitigen zu können und verzichten darum auf ein abschliessende Erklärung dieses seltsamen Liedes.”¹⁹ With these difficulties in mind, one can support only the most general and, indeed, vague description of the form as has been suggested by Gerstenberger, Tate, and Hossfeld and Zenger, namely, “a song of confidence” that displays a close relationship between the psalmist and his God.²⁰

2. D. The Image of the Psalmist

Though the psalm’s original setting must remain open to debate, one may be reasonably confident that the king is the “I” of the psalm.²¹ The third person reference to the king (vv. 11–12) parallels the similar formulation in Ps 61:7–8 and the Yehawmilk inscription.²² The king, first mentioned explicitly in v. 12, serves as the referent²³ of the object suffix on the verb יָקְרָהוּ at the beginning of

¹⁷ Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2, and Lamentations*, 13.

¹⁸ Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 2, 122. Kraus does not even consider the “waterless desert” to be an actual locale, but rather a simile for the parched soul of the psalmist. See my textual notes above on v. 2 and Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 18.

¹⁹ Willy Staerk, *Lyric: Psalmen, Hoheslied und Verwandtes* (Schriften des Alten Testaments 3; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1911), 74.

²⁰ Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2, and Lamentations*, 15; Tate, *Psalms 51–100*; Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 2, 122. On the song of confidence (*Vertrauenslied*), see Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2, and Lamentations*, 535. See also Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 1*, 244.

²¹ See Eaton, *The Psalms: A Historical and Spiritual Commentary*, 235. Contra Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 21; Weiser, *The Psalms*, 456; Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2, and Lamentations*, 15.

²² So, too, Eaton, *The Psalms: A Historical and Spiritual Commentary*, 235.

²³ Not the antecedent *per se*.

v. 11. Thus, in the climax at the end of the psalm, the psalmist-king appeals to the protection granted him by his office.

In the opening strains, the psalmist depicts himself as utterly desiccated in an arid land (v. 2). His soul (נַפְשׁוֹ) and flesh are parched. Gerstenberger suggests that this dry place may evoke a picture of the "dust-dry netherworld."²⁴ Whether the desert here refers to the netherworld or not, the forces of chaos and death are much more visible here than in the arable land, which remains under the orderly administration of God and his king.

The psalmist first describes his current chaotic situation far from the presence of God (v. 2), then he turns immediately to a description of an intimate experience of the divine presence (v. 3). The psalmist remembers a time when he has seen (רָחַם) God's power on display. The memory of that experience spurs the psalmist to praise (vv. 4b-9).

The images of desiccation from v. 2 are completely reversed in v. 6. A dry mouth and cracked lips (v. 2) now ring with praise to God (v. 6) and meditate (הִגְדָּה) on God (v. 7), because the deity has nourished the psalmist with "fat and tallow" (v. 6). The reference to חֶלֶב and דֶּשֶׁן in v. 6 has prompted several translations, some of which suggest a "cultic meal in the house of the Deity."²⁵ Tate follows this line of thinking with his translation of v. 6a: "as with the food of a feast."²⁶ Yet his translation looses the richness of the double evocation of images of fat, which Kraus dubs "the essence of delight and abundance."²⁷ The reference to fat may indicate eating and drinking, or even primarily drinking. Hossfeld and Zenger note here that the verb שָׂבַע (v. 6) has the sense of "drink oneself full," as in Isa 66:11; Amos 4:8; Ps 104:16.²⁸ If Hossfeld and Zenger are right, the fat so described may be liquefied fat from offerings, or possibly milk, especially if one were to repoint MT's חֶלֶב as חָלָב. The image of the psalmist being filled with liquid nourishment provides the most fitting answer to the problem depicted in v. 2. The psalmist's once-thirsty soul (v. 2) is now satisfied (v. 6).

The soul (נַפְשׁוֹ) of the psalmist is an image that recurs throughout the psalm. Hossfeld and Zenger rightly note the importance of the soul: in v. 2 it thirsts; in v. 6 it is filled and contented; in v. 9 it clings to God; and in v. 10 it is threat-

²⁴ Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2, and Lamentations*, 13.

²⁵ Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 2, 124.

²⁶ Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, 124.

²⁷ Kraus, *Psalms 60-150*, 20.

²⁸ Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 2, 123.

ened by enemies.²⁹ The repetition of נפֿש, along with the numerous first-person singular independent pronouns and pronominal suffixes, underscores the sense of intimacy between God and the psalmist. The most vivid image of the psalmist's relationship to God appears in the image of the soul clinging to God, with God supporting him in return (v. 9). Gerstenberger sums up the situation: "The 'I' is 'glued to God.'"³⁰ The image calls to mind a familial one, that of a child clinging to a parent, which Eaton uses to provide further evidence that the psalmist is the king: "The expressions used here for communion with God are especially warm and intimate, and in the first place depict the ideal of God and his 'Son', his Beloved, his Anointed."³¹

In vv. 10–12, the psalmist calls upon God to protect him against his enemies. To employ the term "my God" (אֱלֹהֵי) confirms the close relationship between the psalmist and God described above—the relationship between a king and his divine sponsor. However, ambiguity arises in v. 12, when the psalmist proclaims a blessing: "May all who swear by him boast" (יִתְהַלֵּל כָּל־הַנִּשְׁבָּע בּוֹ). Who is *him* (י-) in v. 12, God or the king? The ambiguity may be intentional; for, in the psalmist's mind, God and the king are so intimately related that to swear by one is to evoke the authority of the other.³²

2. E. The Image of the Enemy/Enemies

Prior to v. 10, the psalmist describes his trouble as entirely due to his location. These opening verses conjure images of chaotic forces at work in the desert. The psalmist does not speak about his enemies in a specific fashion until the final verses of the psalm. When the psalmist does turn to describe the enemies explicitly, he does so with a powerful series of images of death, providing a stark contrast to the images of intimacy, comfort, and joy that pervade vv. 3–9.

The psalmist employs bitter irony to describe the enemies. The ones who sought the psalmist's destruction are bound for an untimely death (v. 10). They descend "to the lowest parts of the earth" (v. 10), a transparent reference to the realm of the dead.³³ Regarding the identity of the enemies, the psalmist por-

²⁹ Hossfeld and Zenger understand the employment of the term to organize the psalm into three sections: vv. 2–5; 6–8; and 9–12, each beginning with a statement about the soul (*ibid.*).

³⁰ Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2, and Lamentations*, 14.

³¹ Eaton, *The Psalms: A Historical and Spiritual Commentary*, 236.

³² Among those arguing for God/Yahweh as the antecedent are Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 124; Johnson, *The Cultic Prophet and Israel's Psalmody*, 281. Kraus thinks that "all who swear" (v. 12) swear by the king (*Psalms 60–150*, 21).

³³ Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 128.

trays them initially through military images; they wield swords and threaten violence against the psalmist (v. 10). The subsequent description of enemies being eaten by jackals (v. 11) may be yet another military allusion, referring to canines ravaging the bodies of soldiers slain on the field of battle.³⁴

At the very least, one should understand the jackals as a reference to these canines feasting on the flesh of the dead. Indeed, a general association of jackals and the dead obtained in ancient Egypt; since jackals haunted Egyptian necropoleis and the chaotic desert, they were the emblematic animal of Anubis, a god of death and mummification.

Verse 12 indicates that the enemies who seek to destroy the psalmist (v. 10–11) are those who testify against the psalmist. So the imagery seems to move between military and juridical contexts. Despite the diverse portrayal of the enemies, the psalmist's bitter tone remains constant. The psalmist concludes by petitioning that Yahweh will stop up the mouth of "those who speak falsely" against him (v. 12).

2. F. The Image of Yahweh

"Seeing God" comprises a dominant theme in the psalm's opening verses. The psalmist "looks eagerly" (שָׁחַד, v. 2) for God, "sees" (רָאָה) God in the holy place, and "beholds" (רָאָה) God's strength and glory (v. 3). What form of the deity, then, does the psalmist see? Kraus, Tate, and Eaton have suggested that the verb *ראה* evokes the tradition of a divine theophany.³⁵ For example, Kraus argues for a theophanic ritual that took place in this temple, suggesting that the verb *ראה* in v. 2 is a "technical term for seeing in a vision ... associated with the idea of waiting and 'being on the lookout' for the saving meeting of God."³⁶ Gerstenberger, in contrast, suggests that the trope of "seeing (*ראה*) God" (v. 3)

³⁴ So Briggs and Briggs, *Psalms*, 2:74. Weiser understands the enemies not as military opponents, but as enemies from the juridical sphere, i.e., accusers. Thus, for him, these verses describe the "conviction and execution" of the enemies and the "abandoning of their corpses as prey for jackals," which "will take place as a sacred act based on ritual law, in the cultic sphere to which this psalm owes its origin." Weiser, *The Psalms*, 455. Weiser's comments again display his overconfidence in the ability to determine a specific *Sitz im Leben* for the psalm.

³⁵ Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 19; Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 127; Eaton, *The Psalms: A Historical and Spiritual Commentary*, 235.

³⁶ Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 19. Tate (*Psalms 51–100*, 127) and Eaton (*The Psalms: A Historical and Spiritual Commentary*, 235) likewise argue that a visionary experience lies behind the employment of the verb *ראה*.

may have been merely metaphorical.³⁷ Ultimately, the answer to the question about the image of Yahweh does not lie in a close examination of this and other verbs for “seeing” in the psalm. Rather, I will examine the psalm’s constellation of images for deity to discern what the psalmist might have “seen.”

The psalmist highlights certain characteristics of God, including God’s strength, glory (v. 3), and חסד, here translated “loyalty” (v. 4). Of these three characteristics, the loyalty of God receives pride of place: the psalmist proclaims that God’s loyalty is better than life. He expresses this sentiment through a כִּי־טוֹב formula³⁸ that conveys the supreme goodness of God’s loyalty, so much so that nothing can exceed it.

The psalmist expands the trope of loyalty using numerous images of divine care and protection (vv. 8–9), through which the psalm depicts God as the psalmist’s “help” (עֲרֹתָהּ) and as one who supports the psalmist with the right hand (יְמִינֶךָ). With the psalmist “clinging” to God (דָּבַרְתָּ v.9) and God supporting him with his right hand, one imagines God and the psalmist in an embrace—the picture of a child clinging to the arms of a father or mother. Such images are particularly apropos given the notion of kingship as divine sonship (cf. Ps. 2:7). The image of God’s wings (v. 8) seems to confirm this sense of intimate protection, even if one temporarily reserves judgment about the fuller background and significance of the image of the wings.

God as judge—the divine guarantor of order—appears in the final verse (v. 12), in which the psalmist notes that enemies speaking falsely against him have caused his distress. The presence of the norms of justice and order at the end of the psalm provides a fitting conclusion to a psalm that first located the psalmist in the desert, that liminal place where God’s order does not reign, but rather chaos predominates.

One other image of God deserves mention, namely, that of a solar deity. The use of the verb שָׁחַר (*pi’el*) in v. 2 (“I look eagerly [שָׁחַרְתִּי] for you”³⁹) hints that the psalmist has in mind a deity with solar aspects (cf. Ps 78:34; Hos 5:15; Is 26:9; Prov 8:17). Though probably unrelated etymologically to the noun שָׁחַר (dawn), in the larger context of the psalm (v. 7), the term may be used as a pun or “subtle ‘popular etymological’ play”⁴⁰ to mean “look eagerly as one who awaits the dawn.” The language of “looking eagerly for God” may refer to the

³⁷ Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2, and Lamentations*, 16. Cf. Mark S. Smith and Elizabeth M. Bloch-Smith, *The Pilgrimage Pattern in Exodus* (JSOTSup 239; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 75.

³⁸ See Gerstenberger’s comments on this formula (*Psalms, Part 2, and Lamentations*, 14).

³⁹ HALOT, 1465.

⁴⁰ Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 124.

psalmist awaiting an experience of a solar theophany at dawn (cf. Ps 17). A number of scholars have acknowledged this possibility. J. W. McKay, followed by Anthony Ceresko, argues for a setting in which a worshipper keeps vigil during the night for God's deliverance at dawn.⁴¹ Similarly, Mowinckel thinks the psalmist (as king) offers this prayer at daybreak to get help in distress.⁴²

2. G. The Iconic Structure of Psalm 63

The psalm presents a complex constellation of imagery containing a "lurid glimpse of warfare" alongside images of "tender spirituality."⁴³ The psalmist has created an image of God as a winged divine judge who metes out judgment by destroying those who falsely accuse the psalmist. Paired with this cluster of military and juridical images, one can observe another representation of God: a winged deity who provides liquid nourishment for the psalmist. The images of a desiccated psalmist—tentatively identified as the king—are set in contrast later in the psalm to a picture of the psalmist sated by the provisions of his divine sponsor while being supported by God's right hand.

3. *Iconographic Congruencies to the Constellations of Images in Psalm 63*

The image of the winged deity in Ps 63 finds congruencies in the iconography of the winged sun disk and the winged *Dea Nutrix*.

3. A. The Winged Sun Disk

Similar to Ps 17, where justice is a primary theme, Ps 63 presents a winged deity who is concerned with preserving justice and the orderly administration of the kingdom (v. 12), a presentation analogous to the ancient Near Eastern winged solar deities (see discussion above, especially in ch. 3). The psalm presents God as the guarantor of justice in the form of a winged solar deity

⁴¹J. W. McKay, "Psalms of Vigil," *ZAW* 91 (1979): 229–47; Ceresko, "A Note on Psalm 63."

⁴² Though, according to Mowinckel "he does so in a strain of confidence: as yet the emergency is only just on the horizon" (*The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, I:226).

⁴³ Eaton, *The Psalms: A Historical and Spiritual Commentary*, 235. Eaton understands the complexity of the psalm to be solved by identifying the psalmist as the king. He writes: "The two contrasting elements in the psalm—tender spirituality and a lurid glimpse of warfare—then fit together: a king expects war, and prepares by seeking communion with his God, possibly by sleeping in the holy place."

(like Shamash and the Egyptian winged sun disk), one who can restore order to chaotic situations. God metes out justice to the psalmist's enemies (vv. 10–11) who have unjustly accused him (v. 12). The psalm's embedded prayer for the king (v. 12) and, moreover, the psalmist's very identity as king also confirm the congruence of God's winged form in the psalm with the winged sun disk, which is closely associated with the protection and sanction of the king in the iconography of Syria-Palestine.⁴⁴ The psalmist's desire to behold the deity in a morning theophany (v. 3) provides still further justification for associating God with the winged sun disk.

As a winged deity, God provides liquid nourishment that refreshes and satisfies the psalmist (v. 6) who describes his trouble through images of desiccation (v. 2). The image of a winged deity who gives nourishment finds congruence with the iconography of the winged sun disk emanating streams of water (e.g., **figs. 4.4–4.6**) such as those discussed in the analysis of Ps 36.

3. B. Winged *Dea Nutrix*

Another congruent image of a winged deity providing nourishment is so-called Syro-Phoenician "Dea Nutrix" (**fig. 7.1**) from Ugarit.⁴⁵ The small ivory plaque (ca. 12x24 cm) depicts a four-winged goddess suckling two lads. The long, up-curved locks of hair and the sun disk between two cow horns on her head accord with the iconography of the Egyptian cow goddess Hathor.⁴⁶ Yet her overall figure demonstrates a thorough mixing of Egyptian, Syrian, and Hittite styles: the sun disk between the horns is a rosette following Anatolian conventions, and the intricately patterned dress is characteristically Syrian.⁴⁷ Her suckling of the two lads is reminiscent of the Egyptian iconography for Hathor, who is frequently represented (both in bovine and human form) suckling the king.⁴⁸ The parallels to the iconography of Hathor suggest the two lads are princes or gods (or both).⁴⁹ However, the identity of the winged goddess remains con-

⁴⁴ See discussion of the Judean *Imk* seals, **fig. 3.17**, among other representations of the winged disk in the analysis of Ps 17.

⁴⁵ For a summary of various interpretations of this figure, see Urs Winter, *Frau und Göttin*, 397–404.

⁴⁶ On the various forms of and associations of Hathor, see Deborah Vishack, "Hathor," in *OEAÉ* 2:84.

⁴⁷ Winfried Orthmann, *Der Alte Orient* (Propyläen Kunstgeschichte 14; Berlin: Propyläen Verlag, 1975), 289.

⁴⁸ Deborah Vishack, "Hathor," *OEAÉ*, 2:84.

⁴⁹ Winter, *Frau und Göttin*, 398.

tested (proposals include Asherah, Astarte, Anat, Qudshu, and, of course, Hathor).⁵⁰ For the purposes of establishing congruency with Ps 63, the precise identification of the goddess is not of critical importance. Instead, it is necessary to compare the representation of the *Dea Nutrix* with the constellation of images in the psalm.

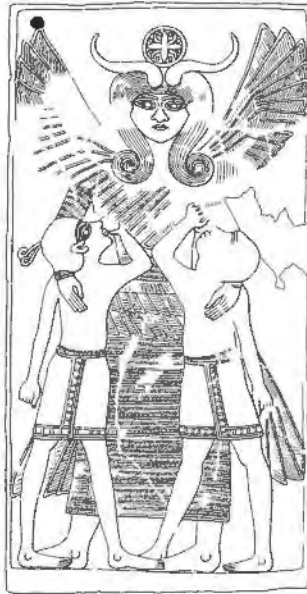


Fig. 7.1. Ivory Relief; Ugarit; Late Bronze Age IIB (Middle Syrian). After Winter, *Frau und Göttin*, Abb. 409.

The chief similarities between the text and the artifact are the description of the psalmist clinging to God (v. 8) and God, in turn, supporting the psalmist with his right hand. The same picture obtains in the ivory plaque. Each lad clings to a breast of the goddess, while the goddess places her hands around on each lad's shoulder in a gesture of support and protection. Furthermore, like the picture of God in the psalm, the winged goddess provides life-giving (liquid) nourishment to the thirsty protégés.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Images of suckling winged deities appear both in early and late Syro-Palestinian art. The ivory from Ugarit is a Late Bronze Age example, whereas an Iron Age III seal from Tel Megadim provides a late expression of this constellation of images (**fig. 7.2**). Like the early Ugaritic example, this image draws heavily from Egyptian iconography, but here the goddess Isis suckles Horus.⁵¹ Isis' wing is clearly outstretched in a gesture of protection around the body of Horus.

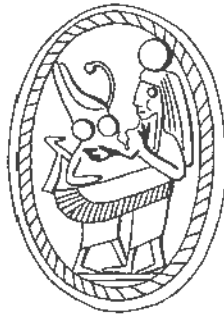


Fig. 7.2. Seal; Tel Megadim; Iron Age III (5th–6th cent. B.C.E.). After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 363b.

4. Conclusion: The Image of the Winged God in Psalm 63

This psalm presents two vivid pictures of God in winged form: the deity as winged sun disk with an effluence of water and God as a winged suckling goddess. Both images portray a winged deity providing liquid nourishment to a desiccated psalmist. By taking literary and iconographic context carefully into account in accordance with the criteria outlined in ch. 1, the analysis shows that one can indeed apprehend the distinctly motherly characteristics of God lying in the background of the image of God's winged form.⁵²

⁵¹ Keel Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses*, 378.

⁵² Cf. Schroer, "Die Göttin und der Geier," 60–80; Schroer, "Im Schatten deiner Flügel," 296–316.

Chapter 8

The Iconic Structure of Psalm 91 and Congruent Images in Ancient Near Eastern Iconography

1. Translation of Psalm 91

- 1 The one who dwells in the shelter of the Most High
Resides within the shadow of the almighty.
- 2 I will say:¹ “O Yahweh,²
My refuge and my fortress,
My God in whom I trust!”
- 3 Indeed, he will deliver you
From the snare of the fowler,
From the pestilence³ of destruction.

¹ MT reads אָמַר (*qal* imperfect first-person common singular), yet LXX’s ἐρεῖ suggests אָמַר (*qal* imperfect third-person masculine singular) or אָמַר (*qal* active participle). The difficult task of determining the speaker of this line and the speaker(s) within the psalm as a whole is confounded by these discrepancies. 11QPsAp^a reads האומר, apparently a participle with the prefixed definite article. Syriac reads with MT, and despite the discrepancies between LXX and 11QPsAp^a, I have not seen sufficient reason to emend the text.

² Reading לֹ— in MT’s לִיהוָה as a vocative with Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 447; Pirim Hngger, *Jahwe meine Zuflucht: Gestalt und Theologie des 91. Psalms* (Münsterschwarzacher Studien 13; Münsterschwarzachen: Vier-Türme-Verlag, 1971), 31. However, reading the לֹ as “of” or “concerning”—following LXX τῷ κυρίῳ—does not change the meaning of the line substantially.

³ MT reads מַדְבָּר, which also appears in v. 6a. LXX seems to reflect a different vocalization of these consonants, along with the addition of the conjunction *wāw*. LXX’s καὶ ἀπὸ λόγου likely reflects מַדְבָּר, as does Syriac and Symmachus. Numerous translators read with LXX (e.g., Eaton, *The Psalms: A Historical and Spiritual Commentary*, 326). Hossfeld and Zenger follow HALOT 1:212, tentatively translating מַדְבָּר as “thorn.” In conjunction with the previous colon, this translation would describe another fowler’s device from which Yahweh provides protection. Yet given the employment of the same מַדְבָּר in v. 6, I have chosen to leave the MT’s vocalization intact and translate the words in both verses the same way.

- 4 With his pinions⁴ he will cover you,
And under his wings you will find refuge.
<His loyalty> is a shield <above you,>⁵
And a buckler,⁶ his truth.
- 5 You shall not be afraid of the dread of night,
Of the arrow that flies daily,
- 6 Of the pestilence⁷ that stalks in the darkness,
Of destruction that devastates⁸ at midday.

⁴ MT has a singular noun *בְּצַנְחָיו*, whereas LXX and Syriac suggest a plural noun here (LXX μετασφρένις αὐτοῦ ... πτέρυγας αὐτοῦ). Of the four times the lexeme occurs in the HB, once it appears in the plural (Ps 68:14). In the two other cases, it occurs in the singular, but likely with a plural meaning (Deut 32:11; Job 39:13). The word may well be a collective singular and ought to be translated with the English plural "pinions" (cf. Tate, *Psalms* 51 100, 448).

⁵ The only word present in the MT in this colon is *צָנָה* (shield). Peter Flint has observed that MT and LXX may have lost a significant portion of a colon that appears in 11QPsAp^a, which reads *צנה עליך צנה חסדו* [*The Dead Sea Psalms Scrolls and the Book of Psalms* [STDJ 17; Leiden: Brill, 1997], 94). Generations of interpreters have argued that MT's v. 4c (*וְצָנָה וְסִחְרָה אֶמְתָּח*) was a later interpolation (e.g., Bardtke *BHS*). Yet the discovery of the DSS evidence suggests that MT's v. 4 is too short rather than too long. Since the reading in 11QPsAp^a is not represented in other traditions, one may surmise that either (1) the line represented in 11QPsAp^a was lost early in the process of textual transmission, or (2) the tradition that produced 11QPsAp^a added *חסדו עליך* to provide a sense of balance to an oddly structured line. The reconstructed version is exceedingly felicitous, and I have adopted it. Interestingly, with the addition of the DSS material, each of the psalms with images of Yahweh's protecting wings includes descriptions of Yahweh's *חסדו*.

⁶ MT reads *וְסִחְרָה* ("and a buckler"), while LXX reads *κακλιώσει σε* ("will cover you") possibly reflecting a Hebrew *Vorlage* *וְסִחְרָה*, (so Bardtke in *BHS*). Macintosh rejects such an emendation ("Psalm XC1 4 and the Root *סחר*," *VT* 23 [1973]: 56–62). On the basis of Arabic and Akkadian cognates, he argues that the MT's *hapax legomenon* should be translated "will protect you," against the Targum *עילא* ["round shield"], cf. David M. Stec, *The Targum of Psalms* [ArBib 16; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2004], 175). However, Macintosh's argument does not make sense of MT's syntax, particularly the *wāw* before *סחרה* in MT. With the inclusion of the material in the previous colon from 11QPsAp^a, the need to posit an alternate translation for MT's *וְסִחְרָה* diminishes.

⁷ While MT reads *מַדְבָּר*, LXX (followed by Aquila and Syriac) reads *ἀπό πράγματος*, reflecting a different pointing of the Hebrew text (*מַדְבָּר*). I have not seen sufficient evidence to warrant an emendation of MT.

⁸ MT reads *יָשׁוּב*. The LXX *καὶ δαιμονίου* (Vulgate: *daemónio*) seems to presume a noun *יָשׁוּב* from the same verbal root as *יָשׁוּב*. Despite Tate's suggestion that the verb comes from *שׁוּב*

- 7 A thousand may fall at your side,
And a myriad at your right hand,
Yet⁹ it will not come near you.
- 8 Surely with your eyes you shall look,
And you will see the wicked brought to an end.
- 9 For you, Yahweh, are my refuge.
O Most High, you have established your dwelling.
- 10 Evil will not be allowed to reach you,
And destruction will not draw near to your tent,
- 11 For he has ordered his messengers to you,
To keep you in all your paths.
- 12 Upon their two hands they shall bear you up,
Lest your foot strike on a stone.
- 13 Upon a lion¹⁰ and a cobra you shall tread.
And you shall trample a young lion and a sea serpent.
- 14 For he clings to me and I will deliver him.
I will set him high for he knows my name.
- 15 He calls to me and I will answer him.
I will be with him in distress.
I will deliver him and I will honor him.
- 16 I will promise him a long life.
I will show him my salvation.

(pour/rush in with force) (*Psalms 51–100*, 448). I have translated it as *qal* imperfect of $\sqrt{\text{דדש}}$, following HALOT 1449, BDB 994, and GKC §67q.

⁹ The initial position of the suffixed preposition תָּלַח in this colon justifies the English adverbial “yet.”

¹⁰ LXX (with Syriac) reads different sets of mythical and/or natural creatures in v. 13: ἐπὶ ἀσπίδα καὶ βασιλίσκου ἐπιβήσῃ καὶ καταπατήσῃς λέοντα καὶ δράκοντα, (upon asps and basilisks you shall tread and you shall trample on the lion and dragon). Modern interpreters have suggested various translations or reconstructions of this verse, based partially on the LXX reading. There seems also to be a general reluctance to imagine the psalmist “treading”/“trampling” on a lion (so Bernhard Duhm, *Die Psalmen* [KHC 14; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1922], 227). For a summary of various options, see Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 449 n. 13a. Nonetheless, later in this chapter, I will demonstrate that this literary image has strong precedent in ancient Near Eastern iconography, and thus should not be excluded. For now, it suffices to follow Kraus’s general observation that in ancient Near Eastern art, conquering deities stand on “demonic beasts as on a pedestal” (*Psalms 60–150*, 224).

2. *Literary Analysis*

2. A. Structural Outline

- I. Refugee: Confession of trust (vv. 1–2)
- II. Divine Proxy: Proclamation of salvation and protection (vv. 3–8)
- III. Refugee: Second confession of trust (v. 9)
- IV. Divine Proxy: Second proclamation of salvation and protection (vv. 10–13)
- V. Voice of Yahweh: Promise of salvation (vv. 14–16)

2. B. Rhetorical Movement

An antiphonal quality pervades the psalm.¹¹ Lines alternate between at least two speakers: one seeking Yahweh's protection and the other responding to this individual. The psalm begins with a participle (כֹּשֵׁב) an ambiguous third-person reference to one who stands in protective proximity to Yahweh. Verse 2, by contrast, begins with the first person *qal* imperfect verb (אֶמְצַד) "I will say / I say." The "one" of v. 1 and the "I" of v. 2 seem to have the same relationship with Yahweh, namely, Yahweh is the divine guarantor of protection for both this "I" and this "one." Hence, the psalm begins with a refugee stating a truism about God's protective care extending to those who seek it (v. 1). Then (v. 2), he affirms that he is indeed the "one" who resides in the protective presence of Yahweh.¹²

Verses 3–8 clearly stem from a different speaker, since these lines contain numerous second-person references to the refugee as "you." The new voice most likely belongs to a priest mediating the promises of Yahweh to the refugee (the "I" of v. 2). This divine proxy issues words of comfort to the refugee.

The voice of the refugee returns briefly in v. 9—repeating the epithet "Most High" (יְהוָה) from v. 1, along with the imagery of refuge introduced in v. 2

¹¹ Early interpretations of the psalm confirm its antiphonal or dialogic character. The Targum, for example, casts the psalm as a dialogue between David and Solomon. Verse 1 serves as an introductory title for the entire psalm. Verse 2 begins "David said." Solomon replies in v. 9, and the "Lord of the World" answers them both with the statements in vv. 10–16. See Stec, *The Targum of Psalms*, 175.

¹² In contrast to every other psalm analyzed thus far, the "I" in Ps 91 is not necessarily the psalmist. The first "I" that appears in v. 2 is no doubt a human suppliant, while the later "I's" are attributable to Yahweh or his representative. Thus, I have refrained from the nomenclature of "psalmist" and have referred instead to the individual as "the refugee."

(מִחָסֵי)—before giving way to the voice of the divine proxy for the remainder of the psalm. Verses 10–13, through the voice of this mediator, describe a host of dangers, which, though terrifying, will not be able to harm Yahweh’s refugee on account of the protection of Yahweh’s messengers (v. 11). The psalm concludes with words that seem to come directly from the mouth of Yahweh (vv. 14–16). Here, by way of climax, the oracle offers God’s very voice and shifts to speaking of the refugee in the third person rather than the second person as in vv. 3–8, 10–13.

Verses 14–15a describe Yahweh’s reciprocal acts of faithfulness toward the psalmist. In these three cola, an act of the psalmist prompts a response from Yahweh: the refugee “clings” to Yahweh, Yahweh delivers; the refugee “knows” Yahweh, and Yahweh “sets him high”; the refugee “calls” to Yahweh, and Yahweh “answers.” These descriptions of the refugee’s action and God’s reaction illustrate the structure and logic of the entire psalm: when one claims God’s protection, God grants it. This call-and-response formula is reflected in the structure of the psalm. In vv. 1–2, the faithful words of the psalmist spur the divine response in vv. 3–8. The second confession of trust (v. 9) launches another divine response.

Verse 15a summarizes the movement of the entire psalm and spells out the nature of the relationship: Yahweh says, “He calls to me and I will answer him” (וַיִּקְרָאֵנִי וְאָעֲנֶהוּ, v. 15). This declaration comes at the end of a string of promises of safety, presence, and care. In total, vv. 14–16 use seven first person imperfect verbs to convey the completeness and surety of Yahweh’s care for the refugee.¹³

2. C. Form and Setting

Modern scholars have attempted to identify the context out of which this psalm emerged.

- 1) Following Seybold, Kraus maintains that the psalm is a prayer song of one who has been ill and who is now at the temple offering thanks for healing.¹⁴ Verses 3–13—which Gunkel classifies as a didactic

¹³ My translation above includes eight “I will” statements; I have translated the verbless clause עָמַדְתִּי וְאָנֹכִי בְּצָרָה in the future tense according to the context. Cf. Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 2, 431 (Zenger wrote the entry for this psalm).

¹⁴ Klaus Seybold, *Das Gebet des Kranken im Alten Testament; Untersuchungen zur Bestimmung und Zuordnung der Krankheits- und Heilungspsalmen* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1973), 19; Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 221.

poem¹⁵ —are, according to Kraus, the instruction of a “pious” person who guides the suppliant and invites him to offer thanksgiving.¹⁶ Weiser also argues that the psalm was used at the temple.¹⁷ Yet, Kraus and Weiser are characteristically overconfident in their ability to determine the particular *Sitz im Leben* of a psalm, and their determinations rest, not surprisingly, on the problematic assumption that the wings of Yahweh are a straightforward reference to the cherubim of the temple.

- 2) Otto Eissfeldt also situates this psalm within a particular ritual setting. He considers Ps 91 to be a “psalm of conversion,” spoken by a priest to an individual who comes seeking Yahweh’s protection. He cites Ruth 2:12 for support, which describes the protecting wings of Yahweh over Ruth, a foreign woman.¹⁸ Eissfeldt considers the psalm to be spoken by a priest who confirms the protection of Yahweh.
- 3) Eaton also endorses the idea that the psalm’s basic structure is antiphonal, and assumes the actors are the king and priest. He argues, “the individual on whom such promises are lavished could hardly be any but the king.”¹⁹ Similarly, Johnson counts this psalm as a liturgy of the king before a battle in which a cultic prophet relates the words of Yahweh.²⁰
- 4) Tate posits, however, that only one voice speaks in vv. 1–13. He considers this psalm a “prayer-oracle” encouraging one to trust in God. He claims, “the speaker is an individual person of faith who bears testimony of his/her commitment while delivering a sermonette-like exhortation on the basis of a ‘text’ (thematic statements) in v. 1.”²¹ At the end

¹⁵ Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*, 403. James L. Mays assents to this formal classification (*Psalms*, 296).

¹⁶ Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 221.

¹⁷ “The promise and assurance of salvation which was pronounced by the priest and brings home to the worshipper in the Temple in powerful and solemn language ... the blessing and strength that flow from placing one’s trust in God” (Weiser, *The Psalms*, 605).

¹⁸ Otto Eissfeldt, “Jahwes Verhältnis zu ‘Elijon und Schaddaj nach Psalm 91,” in *Kleine Schriften* (ed. R. Sellheim and F. Mass; Tübingen: Mohr, 1966), 3:441–47.

¹⁹ Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms*, 57.

²⁰ Johnson, *The Cultic Prophet and Israel’s Psalmody*, 189.

²¹ Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 458.

of the psalm, Tate suggests that vv. 14–16 represent an oracle of salvation since they contain a promise of divine presence and protection.²²

- 5) The oracle of Yahweh (vv. 14–16), unlike the previous verses, speaks of the refugee only in third-person references. Gerstenberger interprets this feature to mean that the verses cannot be a “direct ‘oracle’” from Yahweh to the refugee. Rather, these verses contain reflection on his motivation for saving his client, addressed to the cultic functionary or congregation of worshippers. Gerstenberger ultimately argues that the psalm developed in a “local Jewish community and worship setting where individuals found consolation in their distress. They were comforted by leaders or liturgists of the worship ceremony, in the name of the protective Deity.”²³ In sum, the entire psalm is a “benediction preached to the community in worship.”²⁴

Ultimately, all of these proposals warrant a similar critique, for they demand imagining a particular cultic situation to unlock the meaning and movement of the psalm. Thus, Kraus and Weiser’s positions become no more or less plausible than Gerstenberger’s or Tate’s. With Hossfeld and Zenger, I remain skeptical of all of these postulations of the setting of the psalm.²⁵ Though the psalm probably derives from a particular cultic *Sitz im Leben*, it is, however, impossible to reconstruct a ritual on the basis of this text or to identify a ritual that lies behind this psalm.²⁶

2. D. Images of the Refugee

The refugee appears primarily as one who has a close relationship with God. He declares his loyalty to Yahweh at the outset, by attaching the suffixed common singular pronoun to the titles “Refuge,” “Fortress,” and “God” (v. 2). The euphonic triad *מָחֹסִי וּמְצֻדָתִי אֱלֹהִי* underscores the relationship between the speaker and Yahweh. This refugee’s affirmation of his close affiliation with

²² Ibid., 457. Tate’s interpretation of these final verses represents the consensus position. See also Patrick D. Miller, *They Cried to the Lord: The Form and Theology of Biblical Prayer* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 171.

²³ Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2, and Lamentations*, 167.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 429.

²⁶ Hossfeld and Zenger go a step further and claim that the Ps 91 is at least once removed from such a cultic context. Thus they call the text “a literary staging of an originally cultic ritual” in which “the petitioner himself or herself ‘plays’ the three voices of the psalm.” Ibid.

Yahweh suggests that the refugee is a king. Several factors support this contention: the military imagery in v. 4 (“shield” and “buckler”), and the military imagery implied in v. 7 (“a thousand will fall”) and in v. 10 (the “tent” of the refugee referring to the king’s campaigns).²⁷

The first two verses focus on the location of the one who receives Yahweh’s protection and further underscore the suggestion that the psalmist is the king. The verbal root $\sqrt{\text{שב}}$ occurs alongside $\sqrt{\text{לון}}$ (v. 1). The second colon amplifies the participle ישב by describing “the one who dwells” / “the one who is enthroned” with the *hitpa’el* imperfect of the root $\sqrt{\text{לל}}$. This root carries the sense of spending the night and thus develops the idea that the psalmist has complete trust in God, so much so that he would lie asleep—utterly vulnerable—in God’s presence. The use of these two verbs also demonstrates that the psalmist has access to the deity, since he is able to be in God’s presence continually.

The images of lodging in the presence of the deity give way to an extended series of images about birds and fowling (vv. 3b–4a). To depict the threat to the refugee as the “snare of a fowler” (v. 3) is to depict the refugee himself as a bird.²⁸ The psalm subsequently develops this avian imagery by casting Yahweh as having wings that protect the refugee.

The images of danger move beyond avian imagery in vv. 5–6. I will explore the implications of these presentations of danger in the next section (“The Image of the Enemy”). Let it suffice for now to note that the images depict the refugee as one in great danger and one who benefits from Yahweh’s powerful intervention. The refugee is near God, but also near enough to “see” ($\sqrt{\text{בט}}$ and $\sqrt{\text{ראה}}$) those various forces aimed against him as they are brought to an end (v. 8).

The refugee makes a second pronouncement (v. 9), in which he reiterates his close relationship with Yahweh by invoking the deity by name and with the epithets מחסי (my refuge) and עליון (Most High). Following this pronouncement by the psalmist, the divine spokesperson again asserts the close proximity of Yahweh. Though danger may be near, it will not ultimately reach the refugee (v. 10).

Verse 11 describes the refugee’s progress through “paths” (דרכיך , v. 11). Such imagery may well reflect the well-worn metaphor of “the pathway” to

²⁷ Aubrey R. Johnson, *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1955), 188. To support the notion that the refugee is the king, Eaton translates ישב (v. 1) as “enthroned” (*Kingship and the Psalms*, 17).

²⁸ In light of the proposals that the king is, indeed, the refugee in this psalm, the reference to Hezekiah in the Annals of Sennacherib is evocative: “Himself I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage” (*ANET*, 288).

describe one's patterns of behavior.²⁹ Yet, in the larger context of vv. 11-13, the reference to the pathway is one of several images that describe the refugee in a state of perpetual motion, which necessitates the motility of the divine protecting presence. The refugee moves about, *not* striking his foot as he goes, but rather treading and trampling enemies, here cast as paradigmatically dangerous animals.³⁰ God's protection enables the psalmist to defeat the foes, not simply survive their advances.

Finally, I turn to the character of the refugee, which was an important theme in previously discussed psalms describing a winged Yahweh (e.g., the psalmist's concern for demonstrating his "righteousness" in Ps 17). Psalm 91 does not explicitly state that the refugee is a righteous person. Rather, he trusts Yahweh (v. 2). The only precondition for protection appears to be the act of calling Yahweh's name (v. 1) and identifying him as one who is powerful to save. The logic of Yahweh's deliverance is nowhere more apparent than in v. 14. After describing the victory that the refugee will have over powerful, hostile forces (v. 13), a v clause (in the mouth of Yahweh himself) provides the reason for the success of the individual: the psalmist "clings" ($\sqrt{\text{qwn}}$) to Yahweh.³¹

2. E. The Image of the Enemy/Enemies

All the descriptions of the enemies occur in the speeches of the divine proxy (vv. 5-8, 10-13). The diverse and powerful imagery has prompted much comment, though little consensus on the precise nature of the threat. The proposals range from sickness to military threats to demonic oppression to false witnesses. Tate concludes that the psalmist leaves the identity of the forces intentionally elusive.³² Though the vivid images of danger might seem haphazardly arranged at first glance, there is, in fact, a clear structure to their presentation.

²⁹ See especially "'I Shall Walk in Freedom': The Metaphor of Pathway" in Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 31-53. Cf. Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 156. Alternately, the reference to paths could refer more concretely to the refugee realizing God's protection while on a journey; so Hugger, *Jahwe meine Zuflucht*, 243; Johnson, *The Cultic Prophet and Israel's Psalmody*, 189.

³⁰ Strawn, *What is Stronger*, 51.

³¹ Tate notes that this is the only biblical text in which the word is used to describe an individual's devotion to Yahweh. Elsewhere it describes devotion among people (e.g., Gen 34:8; Deut 21:11) or Yahweh to Israel (Deut 7:7; 10:15). Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, 457.

³² *Ibid.*, 455.

which signifies the order that Yahweh imposes on them as he protects the refugee.

The orderly presentation of threats is particularly apparent in vv. 5–6. Here the psalm limns a quartet of dangers that alternate between the domains of night and day. The metonymy demonstrates that the threats never cease. Yet the refugee is equipped for such diurnal and nocturnal dangers, for he “lodges” (v. 1) in Yahweh’s presence day and night. Even though there is no safe “time,” Yahweh provides a safe place.

Four evil forces appear in vv. 5–6: *יָמָם יַעֲרֹף יוֹמָם* (v. 5), *דָּבָר*, and *קֶטֶב* (v. 6). Each term likely signifies demonic or superhuman personalities that cause disease or death.³³ The rich and evocative images they convey have been the source of much scholarly debate and conjecture. The “terror of night” (v. 5a, *פֶּחַד לַיְלָה*) may well be a demon that comes at night³⁴ functioning like Mesopotamian demons *lilû* and *ardat lilî*.³⁵ *Lilû* as the “wind man” attacks pregnant women and newborns (similar to the demon *Lamashtu*) and also plagues newlyweds on the first night of their marriage.

Though it may refer to human assailants, the phrase *יָמָם יַעֲרֹף יוֹמָם* (arrow that flies by day, v. 5b) more likely presents another reference to demonic power. Theodor Gaster suggests that this “faery arrow” was the name of a demon “or at least alludes to a form of demonic assault,” such as that which Resheph might bring.³⁶ Ugaritic literature (KTU² 1.82:3) depicts this Canaanite plague god as an archer. His arrows are plagues. His association with arrows also appears clearly in the fourth century B.C.E. Kition inscription in the epithet “Resheph of the arrow” (*ršp hš*).³⁷

The terms *דָּבָר* and *קֶטֶב* (v. 6) also allude to supernatural forces. Del Olmo Lete thinks *דָּבָר* means “pestilence” in a general sense when it appears roughly fifty times in the Hebrew Bible. Yet in Ps 91, he understands the term “in a personified sense as a demon or evil deity.”³⁸ Nicholas Wyatt thinks the whole quartet of forces in vv. 5–6 represent two “deities”(!), *Deber* and *Qeṭeb*: “two

³³ So Weiser, *The Psalms*, 608–9.

³⁴ I follow Meir Malul who argues that *פֶּחַד לַיְלָה* should be understood as a *genitivus explicativus* with *פֶּחַד* indicating “the object of fear rather than fear itself or its effects” (see GKC §128k–q for this construction). Meir Malul, “Terror of Night,” *DDD*, 852.

³⁵ For relevant bibliography, see Malul, “Terror of Night,” *DDD*, 851–54. Cf. Song 3:8.

³⁶ T. H. Gaster, “Demon,” *IDB*:1:820.

³⁷ Herbert Donner and Wolfgang Röllig, *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1966), 1:32.

³⁸ Gregorio del Olmo Lete, “Deber,” *DDD*, 231–32. Nowhere else, however, does *דָּבָר* occur in conjunction with the night or as a nocturnal demon (v. 5a).

gods operating by day and night, respectively.... Terror [v. 5a] is *Deber* [v. 6a] while the arrow (of Resheph) [v. 5b] is *Qeteb* [v. 6b], the personification of the destruction the god wreaks."³⁹ However, just as likely, he cedes, is that "Terror = Destruction [*Qeteb*]," and "Arrow (of Resheph) = *Deber*." Wyatt ends his discussion by admitting the tenuousness of this proposed web of associations: "The demonic powers are of protean form and character."⁴⁰ In sum, one should consider all four of these forces (vv. 5–6) as personifications of evil demons or the deleterious effects that these demons cause.⁴¹

The ensuing verses describing the peril of the refugee shade into military imagery (vv. 7–8). While the thousands falling around the refugee may refer to those struck down by illnesses brought by demons (v. 7),⁴² these verses probably describe a number of potential battlefield scenarios: (1) the refugee's comrades lay slain around him; (2) the bodies of his enemies who fell "at his right hand" lay around the refugee; or (3) both situations apply.⁴³ The easy movement between demonic and military imagery (vv. 5–8) should not be surprising, because in ancient Near Eastern cultures, the supernatural forces of chaos and the enemy forces in a military campaign could be understood as manifestations of each other.⁴⁴ The description of the enemies as "wicked" (רָשָׁעִים; v. 8) does little to clarify whether human or supernatural forces are the source of danger. The term could well apply to either one.

Another series of images for the enemies appears in the second divine oracle (vv. 10–13), in which Evil (רָעָה) and Destruction (נָגַע) are personified. Subsequently, the oracle employs animal imagery, specifically that of lion and serpent (v. 13), to depict the enemies. It is unclear whether the lion and serpent are simply animals *qua* animals or they represent "demonic beasts"⁴⁵ or "chaos

³⁹ Nicholas Wyatt, "Qeteb," *DDD*, 673–74.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ While Tate understands רָעָה and קֶטֶב (v. 6) to be "metaphors" for various illnesses, he cedes, "the psalm reflects a thought world in which the presence of demons, demonical possession, and malignant spirits and powers was considered commonplace." Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 455.

⁴² Kraus supports this understanding of the verse against the following military interpretation, which he considers "completely unsuitable" (*Psalms 60–150*, 224).

⁴³ *Ibid.* Indeed, Johnson interprets the whole of v. 7 to describe a battlefield scene with the king as the main protagonist. Johnson, *The Cultic Prophet and Israel's Psalmody*, 188–89.

⁴⁴ See Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, "Fighting the Powers of Chaos and Hell: Towards the Biblical Portrait of God," *ST* 39 (1985): 21–38.

⁴⁵ N. Nicolsky, *Spuren magischer Formeln in den Psalmen* (BZAW 46; Geissen: Töppelman, 1927), 24–25; Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 224.

powers."⁴⁶ Nothing in v. 13 suggests that the animals are hybrid creatures (i.e., there is no mixing of the traits of multiple animals) and, thus, "demonic."⁴⁷ Yet, both animals—particularly deadly to humans—appear frequently in ancient Near Eastern iconography as symbols of the forces of chaos (e.g., numerous representations of Horus the child [Harpokrates] holding lions, serpents, and scorpions by the tail).⁴⁸

Though one cannot claim with certainty that the enemy forces are particular, identifiable demons or demonic forces (as described in other ancient Near Eastern literature), early Jewish interpreters certainly thought that the enemies were demons. Such a reading is suggested by the inclusion of Ps 91 in 11PsAp^a (dated 50–70 C.E.⁴⁹), which contains four "songs against demons."⁵⁰ The Midrash on this psalm also presumes a demonic attack. For example, on the "arrow that flies by day" (Ps 91:5), it reads: "There is a demon that flies like a bird, darting forth like an arrow."⁵¹

2. F. The Image of Yahweh

The image of a winged Yahweh dominates the first part of the psalm. Verse 1 foreshadows the image of Yahweh's wings by introducing the concepts of the shelter (סֶתֶר) and shadow (צֶל) of God. Since both צֶל and סֶתֶר appear in other

⁴⁶ Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms*, 58; Weiser, *The Psalms*, 611–12. Cf. Mowinckel's suggestion that שחל (v. 13) is a mythical beast such as a sea dragon that blends leonine and serpentine characteristics. Sigmund Mowinckel, "Shaahal," in *Hebrew and Semitic Studies Presented to Godfrey Rolles Driver in Celebration of His Seventieth Birthday, 20 August 1962* (ed. David Winton Thomas and W. D. McHardy; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963). Strawn refutes this position at *What is Stronger*, 323–24.

⁴⁷ See discussion of semi-divine creatures in ch. 2.

⁴⁸ For two New Kingdom steles from Deir el-Medina containing this motif, see Strawn, *What is Stronger*, figs. 4.218, 4.219.

⁴⁹ Flint justifies this dating on the basis of the manuscript's Herodian script (*The Dead Sea Psalms Scrolls*, 43).

⁵⁰ Ibid.; Florentino Garcia Martinez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, "Psalms Manuscripts from Qumran Cave 11: A Preliminary Edition," *RevQ* 17 (1996): 73–107.

⁵¹ William G. Braude, *The Midrash on Psalms* (Yale Judaica Series; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 2:102. See also, "The Rabbis said: The latter words refer to a demon.... The demon 'Bitter Destruction' is covered with scale upon scale and with shaggy hair, and he glares with his one eye, and that eye is in the middle of his heart." Likewise, on 91:7 "R. Isaac said: To the left hand, which is empowered to perform the commandment of Tefillin, are assigned a thousand angels to preserve a man from demons," Braude, *The Midrash on Psalms*, 2:103.

psalms in construct chains with the wings of Yahweh (Pss 17:8; 36:8; 57:1; 61:4; 63:8), v. 1 provides an oblique reference to a pteromorph Yahweh. When that image appears directly in v. 4a, it is more extensively developed than in any of the other psalms, with a full bicolon dedicated to the image.

In addition to depicting Yahweh in winged form, the psalm employs several epithets for Yahweh, including "Most High" (עֶלְיוֹן, vv. 1, 9), "Almighty" (יְדִישׁ, v. 1), and "my God" (v. 2). There is some ambiguity regarding עֶלְיוֹן in the syntax of v. 9, namely, whether עֶלְיוֹן refers to a place or a personality. Gerstenberger understands עֶלְיוֹן to be one of two objects of the verb עָשָׂה (You made *Elyon* your habitation),⁵² as do Hossfeld and Zenger, "(thus) have you made the Most High your fastness."⁵³ I have rendered עֶלְיוֹן as a vocative ("O Most High, you have established your dwelling"), though the epithet could serve both as a substantive adjective referring to "most high deity" and as a substantive adjective referring to the "most high place."⁵⁴ עֶלְיוֹן invites one to imagine the spatial location of this deity, that is, in the heavens. The term also conveys the premier position or status of the deity among other numinous beings.

The epithet יְדִישׁ (Almighty) also appears in the psalm. Whether one understands the etymology as reflecting a tradition of a "God of the Mountains"⁵⁵ or the "God of the Wilderness," *El Shadday* "can be connected to the iconographical motif of the 'lord of the animal.'"⁵⁶ Such scenes, frequently represented in Syro-Palestinian art from the Middle Bronze Age forward, depict a human figure mastering a wide variety of animals, including caprids, crocodiles, ostriches, and, notably, lions, and serpents.⁵⁷ The conquest of dangerous animals is an important theme in this psalm. Especially in v. 13, the refugee, empowered by the deity and his messengers, dominates fearsome beasts. Thus it appears that Yahweh's protégé may be patterned after *El Shadday* himself.

There are three other epithets for Yahweh: "my refuge" (vv. 2, 9), "my fortress" (v. 2), and "my God" (v. 2). These titles again confirm the intimate relationship between the deity and the refugee. Yahweh provides protection be-

⁵² Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2, and Lamentations*, 165.

⁵³ Hossfeld and Zenger argue that the parallel cola in v. 9 address different parties (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 2, 426).

⁵⁴ Cf. Eric E. Elnes and Patrick D. Miller, "Elyon," *DDD*.

⁵⁵ William F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968), 94; Frank Moore Cross *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 52–60.

⁵⁶ So Ernst A. Knauf, "Shadday," *DDD* 752. For a recent bibliography and summary of scholarship on *El Shadday*, see Harriet Lutzky, "Shadday as Goddess Epithet," *VT* 48 (1998): 15–36.

⁵⁷ See Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, 141–146, 220.

cause the refugee has adopted the deity as his own and has looked to Yahweh for protection and deliverance. The description of Yahweh's attitude toward the refugee in these three verses demonstrates Yahweh's *מִסְפָּד וְאֶמְתָּ*, which are described in v. 4 (albeit through a reconstruction of the Hebrew text based on 11QPsAp⁴).⁵⁸

Juxtaposed with the image of Yahweh's wings, the psalm casts Yahweh's faithfulness and protection in martial imagery (v. 4). His characteristics of loyalty and faithfulness are defensive weapons that stand between an aggressive force and the refugee. According to the oracle, when the enemy assails, Yahweh as a shield absorbs the blows in his own person. The psalm further develops the imagery of Yahweh as shield by representing dangerous enemies as "arrows" (v. 5).

Yahweh also demonstrates his loyalty to the refugee by commissioning protective beings to safeguard him. These "messengers" (*מְלַאכֵי*, v. 11) foil the forces appearing throughout the psalm. Yahweh's demons, according to the sense of the Classical Greek *δαίμων*, are the "counterimage to the personified demons of evil."⁵⁹ That Yahweh has supernatural powers under his control further establishes his status as the Most High god, chief among deities.

The epithet "Most High" also prompts a query concerning the psalm's notion of Yahweh's location. The protecting presence of Yahweh is both stationary and mobile. The description of Yahweh in v. 9 designates his location by referring to "your dwelling" (*מְקוֹמְךָ*), though it is unclear whether this term refers to the earthly or heavenly abode of the deity (or both). The refugee also repeatedly employs images of Yahweh's steadfastness and place-boundedness using the terms "refuge" and "fortress" (vv. 2, 9). Yet, motile aspects of the protecting presence of Yahweh also obtain, for Yahweh's messengers protect the refugee in his "paths" (v. 11) and are depicted as carrying the psalmist from place to place, as on a palanquin (v. 12), leading Zenger to comment, "the psalm gives strong evidence of the double perspective of protection in the sanctuary and on the road."⁶⁰

2. G. The Iconic Structure of Psalm 91

The psalm presents a picture of Yahweh as a winged, "Most High" god. Yahweh's exalted status affirms his power to deliver the refugee who caught in

⁵⁸ See above.

⁵⁹ Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 2, 431.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 428. Likewise, Brueggemann indicates that the psalm brings together notions of safe places and safe journeys (*The Message of the Psalms*, 156).

the snare of the fowler—also seems to be winged (v. 3). In his winged form, Yahweh functions like a defensive weapon for the refugee (v. 4), absorbing the force of a demonic onslaught (vv. 5–6).

The enemies are presented throughout the psalm as an amalgam of oppressive and terrifying forces. They appear as *Mischwesen*, advancing in the form of military foes with leonine and serpentine characteristics. The mixed picture of the enemies underlines their chaotic nature. Indeed, the enemies seem to be nothing less than evil personified (vv. 6, 10). Yet these foes are ultimately no match for Yahweh in his winged form. This Most High God mobilizes his own rank of supernatural forces (v. 11–12) to intervene on behalf of the one seeking refuge.

3. *Iconographic Congruencies to the Constellations of Images in Psalm 91*

Yahweh's winged form in this psalm evokes congruent iconographic motifs discussed in earlier chapters, including the image of the winged sun disk and the winged warrior deity that dispatches enemies in leonine form.

3. A. The Winged Sun Disk

The epithet מְלִיךָ, “Most High,” occurs twice in this psalm to identify Yahweh. If one were to imagine the various images of the psalm in one visual tableau, one would identify the winged Yahweh occupying the central, uppermost position of the scene as the “Most High” god. Many other numinous beings appear in the psalm, but they exist “beneath” Yahweh as subordinate messengers (v. 11) or enemies whom Yahweh and his forces subdue. In fact, all other figures in the psalm occupy positions “lower” than Yahweh. In this portrayal as the “Most High” god, the image of the winged Yahweh finds congruency with iconography of the winged sun disk, which appears in the uppermost position in numerous iconographic contexts throughout the ancient Near East.

The image of the Most High god in Ps 91 includes martial elements: he is characterized by means of the accoutrements of warfare (vv. 2, 4). The protean enemies of the refugee are also cast in military imagery (vv. 5–8). This picture of Yahweh that emerges in this psalm finds congruency particularly in the iconography of the militarized winged disk, which serves as the symbol of the chief god of Mesopotamian pantheons, such as the gods Marduk or Aššur. Psalm 91 presents Yahweh as just such a winged deity, chief among all the beings that the psalm describes, both those that serve Yahweh and those that are inimical to the refugee.

Threatening forces, which cause the refugee's deep distress, combine to present nothing less than a full-scale assault on the life of the refugee. The forces are human, animal, and demonic beings whose wild, frightening features seem to be the very personification of chaos. Again, Yahweh as winged sun disk provides a congruent image, for the abolition of chaos and establishment of order is the primary task of solar deities throughout the ancient Near East, whether it be Re, Shamash, or here, Yahweh.

Attendants of the winged deity played a major role in Pss 57 and 61 as personifications of the divine characteristics *אֱמֶת וְאֵמֶן*, "loyalty and truth." This pair of characteristics also appears in this psalm. But rather than being personified, the pair is reified as weapons of protection: *חֹסֶן* as a shield and *אֲזִקָּה* as a buckler (v. 4, with reconstruction from 11QPsAp⁴). The presentation of this pair may well be a further adaptation and modification of the motif of the winged disk's pair of attendants. Yet this identification must remain open. When the psalm describes Yahweh's protecting messengers directly (v. 11), it is unfortunately impossible to discern if they are indeed a pair. They are simply called *מַלְאָכָיו*, "his messengers."⁶¹

3. B. The Winged Warrior in Battle

Psalms 17 and 57 exhibit Yahweh in a role of winged lion-slayer, akin to images of a winged deity in combat with lions in Syro-Palestinian art. Like Pss 17 and 57, the enemies in Ps 91 are cast, at least in part, through leonine imagery (v. 13), yet the role of Yahweh in dispatching these lions is somewhat different from his roles in Pss 17 and 57 and their iconographic congruencies.

In Ps 91, though Yahweh sends his messengers to protect the refugee (v. 12), these emissaries do not conquer the leonine enemies. Instead the refugee himself, empowered by his trust in Yahweh, is able to overcome the lions. It seems, then, that the refugee has undergone something of an apotheosis on account of his trust in God. Like the winged deities in ancient Near Eastern iconography, he is now able to overcome lions.

In casting the refugee as treading upon lions (v. 13), the psalmist has modified a widespread iconographic trope of deities (both winged and un-winged) standing or treading upon lions. Numerous examples of this motif obtain both in Syria-Palestine and the larger Ancient Near East, but two seals from Iron

⁶¹ Hebrew has no unique dual construct form for nouns, which would be needed to demonstrate that two messengers are being evoked here.

Age I Syro-Palestinian glyptic art illustrate well the motif of winged deity (in this case Baal-Seth) striding above a lion (figs. 8.1a, b).⁶²



Figs. 8.1a, b. Scarab Seals: Tell Fara; Iron Age I. After Keel, *Studien zu den Stempelsiegeln* 3, p. 144, no. 46-47.

In Ps 91:13, one observes not a winged deity but a human striding above the lion. While the psalmist modifies an image from Syro-Palestinian iconography by placing the human atop the lion, he may actually be making a subtle play, for earlier in the psalm he has referred to the psalmist as winged as well, as one who is susceptible to the snare of the fowler (v. 3).

4. Conclusion: The Image of the Winged Yahweh in Psalm 91

Psalm 91 presents Yahweh as a supreme heavenly deity, the Most High God. Like the Mesopotamian winged disk that represents the chief god of a pantheon, the winged Yahweh both protects the refugee and stands above all other numinous beings, of which the psalm describes many. His preeminent position also allows him to defend the psalmist and vanquish all forces of chaos, including those in leonine form. Thus, the literary picture of Yahweh also finds congruency in the iconography of the winged deity battling lions.

⁶² The figure atop the gazelle is Resheph. See Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, 114.

Chapter 9

Conclusions

A straightforward exegetical inquiry spurred this project, namely, an investigation of the background, meaning, and significance of the image of Yahweh with wings in the Psalms. When I began to explore previous answers to this question, I encountered a fundamental methodological problem: how should one use iconographical evidence in the interpretation of biblical texts? Addressing both the exegetical and methodological issues has been the primary goal of this study.

Building on the work of those who have gone before, I have developed a methodology that requires sustained attention to both literary and iconographic contexts, that is, the literary context of the images of Yahweh's wings and the iconographical context of wings in Syro-Palestinian art. Keel had already won an important methodological advance by studying iconographic motifs within their artistic contexts. His concern for interpreting an image within a constellation of images meant that he avoided the problem of iconographic fragmentation.¹ Iconographic-biblical studies have however tended to read biblical texts in a fragmentary fashion, removing biblical images from their literary context when interpreting them in light of iconographic evidence.

One recent exception to the trend of literary fragmentation is William P. Brown's analysis of metaphor in the Psalms.² Brown's project of "mapping the iconic structure" of a psalm³ has served as the model for my treatment of the six psalms in chapters 3–8. Identifying the iconic structure of a psalm requires careful literary analysis: attending to text-critical and translational issues, determining the rhetorical structure and movement of the text, as well as studying the characterization of the actors within the psalm. As a result of such wide ranging literary analysis, one can discern the psalm as a constellation of literary images. As numerous motifs together convey the overall meaning of an artistic scene, so the constellation of literary images in a psalm comprises the psalm's overall meaning. Since each psalm presents a unique constellation of images,

¹ Keel, "Iconography and the Bible," in *ABD* 3:367–69.

² Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*.

³ *Ibid.*, 14.

the portrayals of Yahweh therein have their own distinct contours, so much so that no psalm presents *exactly* the same image of Yahweh, even though all portray the deity with wings. Thus, it is more accurate to speak of the winged *forms* of Yahweh rather than Yahweh's (one) winged form in these psalms. This conclusion represents a departure from much previous scholarship, which has tended to treat the reference to the winged Yahweh as a static image, one that simply reappears in six different psalms and, arguably, in other portions of the Hebrew Bible as well (Exod 19:4; Deut 32:11; Ruth 2:12; and Mal 3:20).

To show the dynamic nature of literary image of Yahweh's wings, I have recapitulated my conclusions for each psalm below. This summary demonstrates (1) how the image of Yahweh's wings functions within the psalm's iconic structure and (2) how that image finds congruency in Syro-Palestinian iconography.

- In Ps 17, the image of Yahweh's wings appears as one of several descriptions of the "form" of Yahweh. The psalmist is driven by an urge to behold Yahweh in this form, for seeing God means salvation from his foes. In this context, Yahweh's winged form evokes the iconography of the winged deity slaying a lion, the winged sun disk as god of justice, and the Horus falcon, protector of divine kingship.
- In Ps 36, the psalmist is concerned primarily with the issue of justice. The first half of the psalm is dedicated to describing the wicked one who deserves Yahweh's judgment. Again, the psalmist describes Yahweh as a winged solar deity that metes out justice against the wicked and rewards the righteous by providing nourishment and blessing. As such, the psalmist employs an image of Yahweh as winged sun disk from which streams of water flow.
- Psalm 57, like Ps 17, depicts Yahweh as a winged deity who defends the psalmist by dispatching enemies portrayed in leonine form. The psalmist also utilizes the imagery of Yahweh as winged sun disk to describe a heavenly deity who sends out a pair of attendants to minister to the psalmist. In doing so, the psalmist is adapting an iconographic tradition of representing the winged sun disk with a pair of attendants.
- Psalm 61 is the prayer of a king. The psalmist-king calls on God, who appears in the image of a falcon that protects and authorizes the just rule of the king with its outspread wings. In addition to this imagery of divine kingship, the wings of God also reflect the image of a transcendent and immanent deity in the form of a winged sun disk. As in Ps 57, a pair of attendants (Loyalty and Truth) mediates the divine presence, the form of which corresponds with the iconography of the attendants of the winged sun disk.

- Psalm 63, another prayer of a king, presents the image of God in winged form who, like the falcon, protects the king. Furthermore, this winged deity provides justice as a winged sun disk. The image of God as the winged sun disk nourishing the psalmist also appears in Ps 63, as it did in Ps 36. Another aspect of the nourishment of God in winged form obtains in Ps 63, however. The psalmist portrays God in the form of a winged suckling goddess (e.g., the *Dea Nutrix* or Isis) who provides protection to the psalmist with her wings while she holds the psalmist-king to her bosom and feeds him.
- Psalm 91 presents Yahweh as a winged warrior who protects the refugee from protean enemies who embody the forces of chaos. His ability to protect against all foes confirms his position as the Most High god. The psalm depicts this winged Yahweh also as the winged sun disk, preeminent over all numinous beings.

Though these six psalms contain complex and varied pictures of the deity, one can, nevertheless, identify certain remarkable similarities among these winged images. The similarities suggest that there are distinct patterns of congruency between the literary portrayals of Yahweh with wings and the iconography of Syria-Palestine. The predominant iconographic congruency is that of the winged sun disk, which seems to lie in the background of all six psalms. Yet, because the winged sun disk appears in so many permutations throughout the ancient Near East, one must carefully examine each psalm in order to discern the character of the winged sun disk. The anthropomorphic, militarized winged disk (stemming from Mesopotamian iconography and not always signifying a solar deity, e.g., Aššur) finds congruency with the portrayal of Yahweh in Pss 17, 57, 63, and 91. The winged disk with effluence of nourishing liquid appears in Pss 36, 61, 63. The literary analysis of Pss 57 and 61 (and possibly Ps 91) has shown a common motif of the winged God attended by a pair of numinous beings that personify God's characteristics, דָּוָד and אֱלֹהִים . This literary imagery finds congruency in the frequent portrayal of a pair of attendants beneath, beside, or below the winged sun disk.

In addition to the many forms of the winged disk, several other congruencies have emerged, while other interpretations of the winged Yahweh have been excluded. The literary analysis showed no support for associating Yahweh's winged form with the wings of the cherubim. Likewise, the evidence does not suggest congruency with the iconography of the vulture goddess. However, the literary analysis does support a connection between the iconography of the Horus falcon protecting the king and the form of the winged deity in Pss 17, 61 and 63, for the psalmist in each of these texts may well be the

king. Finally, the iconographies of various winged anthropomorphic deities serve as congruent images for the winged Yahweh. The motif of a winged deity in battle with a lion, so common throughout ancient Near Eastern art, appears in Pss 17, 57, and 91, while a winged suckling goddess accords with the presentation of God in Ps 63.

The study has shown that the literary image of the winged Yahweh does not draw from one iconographical motif. Rather, each literary context draws from a unique set of congruent iconographical motifs. The following table represents the relationships between text and iconography in schematic form.

Literary representations of God in the Psalms	Congruent iconographic motifs in Syro-Palestinian art
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A winged deity who acts violently against the enemies of the psalmist in martial contexts (Pss 17, 36, 57, 63, 91) and often against enemies that take a specifically leonine form (Pss 17, 57) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The “militarized” winged disk • A winged deity in combat, specifically with lions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A winged divine judge who is especially concerned with justice and the preservation order (Pss 17, 36, 63) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The winged sun disk (when it represents a “god of justice/order”)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A winged deity appearing as a god of heaven, the “most high” god (Pss 36, 57, 91) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The winged disk suspended above all other elements of a scene
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A winged deity accompanied by pair of attendants, often portrayed as the personified characteristics of the deity (אֲמָתַי and אֲנָשֵׁי) (Pss 57, 61, [and possibly Ps 91]) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The winged disk with a pair of attendants (or atlants) beneath, above, or beside the two wings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A winged deity from whom life-giving liquid flows (Pss 36, 63) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The winged disk emanating water • Winged suckling goddesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A winged deity associated with light and a morning theophany (Pss 36, 57) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The winged sun disk as a symbol of a solar deity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A winged deity who protects and authorizes the rule of the king (Pss 17, 61, 63) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Horus falcon • The winged sun disk

This table shows that no single iconographic trope provides the key to interpreting the images of Yahweh’s wings. Hossfeld and Zenger have anticipated this conclusion by suggesting that three distinct images stand behind the image

of the wings of Yahweh in the Psalms: the cherubim of the temple iconography, a mother bird protecting her young, and the winged sun disk.⁴ Yet these three images do not adequately explain the complexity of the depictions of Yahweh in his winged forms.

With regard to Hossfeld and Zenger's first suggestion, my analysis has excluded the possibility that the wings of Yahweh in the Psalter refer to the wings of the cherubim of the temple. This judgment stems primarily from an inspection of the literary context of the six psalms. In each psalm, the wings of Yahweh belong to Yahweh himself, not to any other creature. Further, while numerous depictions of winged sphinxes appear in Syro-Palestinian art, an examination of the iconographic contexts of these images reveals no clear examples of such creatures providing protection to humans.

As for Hossfeld and Zenger's second option, the analysis has confirmed that the image draws from avian imagery, but not just from any species. I have demonstrated that images of a bird protecting its young are (as yet) unknown in Syro-Palestinian art in the Iron Age to the Persian Period. One can find images of vultures, which appear with outstretched wings in gestures of protection. But these vultures never appear with their young. Also, the images of vultures do not appear in the Late Bronze and Iron Ages, but are largely limited to Middle Bronze Age (and prior epochs). However, images of the protecting wings of the Horus falcon appear pervasively in all periods of Syro-Palestinian iconography. Thus, one can deduce that the images of the protecting wings of Yahweh are not general metaphors from the avian world. Rather, they are likely drawn from the iconography of the falcon, the image of Horus, the sponsor and protector of the king.

Let us turn finally to Hossfeld and Zenger's third suggestion: that the image of the wings of Yahweh draws from the iconography of the winged sun disk. This study has proven their suggestion essentially correct. Yet, there are many types of winged disk in Syro-Palestinian art, owing to this trope's long history of use throughout numerous ancient Near Eastern cultures (e.g., the "militarized" winged disk, the "anthropomorphized" winged disk, the winged sun disk issuing streams of water). Hence, claims about the correspondence between this biblical image and iconographical motif require refinement. To which type of winged disk does the image of Yahweh correspond? Indeed, many forms and aspects of the winged disk seem to be refracted in depictions of the winged Yahweh. Yahweh can be pictured as the winged disk with a pair of attendants, as the winged disk sending forth life-giving waters, as the winged disk representing the Most High god, or as a winged disk serving specifically as an

⁴ Hossfeld and Zenger, *Die Psalmen I*, 117.

image of the solar deity. There is no monolithic meaning conveyed by the general image of the winged sun disk.

Hence, one may conclude that no single image stands behind portrayals of Yahweh in winged form. As the literary contexts change, the meaning and significance of the motif of Yahweh's wings change. Moreover, the analysis has shown that more than one iconographic trope can stand behind the image of Yahweh in winged form *within a single psalm*. While each psalm demonstrates this phenomenon, Ps 17 presents the clearest example. In Ps 17, the image of Yahweh's wings evokes simultaneously the iconography of the "militarized" winged sun disk, the Horus falcon, the winged divine judge, and the winged deity slaying a lion with a sword. The portrayal of Yahweh with wings evokes four distinct iconographic tropes, all within one poem. Thus, the winged Yahweh in Ps 17 provides an example of a multistable literary image, analogous to the visual image of the "duck-rabbit" (fig. 3.27).

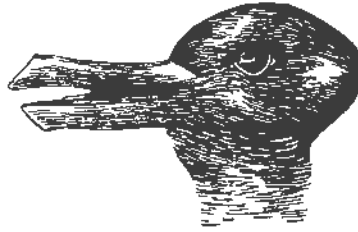


Fig. 3.27. "Duck-rabbit." Cf. Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, 46 fig. 3.

The multistability of the image of the winged Yahweh in Ps 17 is indeed what makes the literary picture so compelling. Yahweh's wings can convey divine protection in numerous distinct and equally striking ways. Describing the allure of visual images that exhibit multistability, W. J. T. Mitchell writes: "the ambiguity of their referentiality produces a kind of secondary effect of auto-reference to the drawing as drawing, an invitation to the spectator to return with fascination to the mysterious object whose identity seems so mutable and yet so absolutely singular and definite."⁵

One can apply Mitchell's comments to the phenomenon at work in the literary image as it appears in Ps 17. For the ancient psalmist, evoking Yahweh's winged form with its "ambiguity of referentiality" may have produced a "secondary effect of auto-reference" to the image of the deity, for the entire context

⁵ Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, 43.

of Ps 17 attests to the psalmist's preoccupation with beholding Yahweh's "image" (תַּמְנִיָּה, v. 15). Thus, the employment of the multistable image of Yahweh's wings reveals the psalmist's fascination with this mysterious divine image, which at once seems so changeable and yet so absolute.

Moving from Ps 17 to the larger implications of this study, the analysis has shown that the winged disk in one or more of its permutations (e.g., "militarized," anthropomorphic, etc.) lies in the background of all six psalms. The predominance of the winged disk thus supports recent theories that Yahweh was worshipped as a solar deity.⁶ However, it would be unwise to build a religio-historical argument solely on the basis of these six texts. By themselves, they do not provide strong evidence for the existence of a solarized Yahwistic cult because of the multistability of the images and the congruency of Yahweh's wings with a number of other (non-solar) iconographic motifs. Yet because the images of Yahweh's wings do find such frequent congruencies in the iconography of the winged sun disk, one should certainly cite the literary images of Yahweh's wings, along with other evidence, to strengthen the argument for the existence of a Yahwism with significant solar dimensions in ancient Israel.

This study has investigated each psalm's portrayal of God as a constellation of literary images, one that can be profitably compared with constellations of images from Syro-Palestinian art. According to this method, every text presents its own composite image of the deity. We might refer to a "pictorial theology" of each psalm that resonates with images of deities from ancient art. Analyzing the constellations of images in these discrete pericopes provides another model for doing biblical theology. Future studies could appropriate this type of analysis to even larger corpora in order to determine the composite image of God that those texts portray.

For those pursuing the iconographic-biblical approach as I have suggested, the focus must be on thoroughly interdisciplinary work. One must employ consistently non-fragmentary and sophisticated readings of iconographic materials within their art-historical context (see, e.g., the works of Keel, Klingbeil, and

⁶ Advocates for such a proposal include Bernd Janowski, "JHWH und der Sonnengott: Aspekte der Solarisierung JHWHs in vorexilischer Zeit," in *Pluralismus und Identität* (ed. Joachim Mehlhausen; Veröffentlichungen der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft für Theologie; Gütersloh: Kaiser, 1995), 214–41; Keel and Uehlinger, "Jahwe und die Sonnegottheit von Jerusalem," 269–306; Taylor, *Yahweh and the Sun*; Stähli, *Solare Elemente im Jahweglauben*; Smith, "The Near Eastern Background of Solar Language for Yahweh," 29–39; idem, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (Biblical Resource Series; 2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

Strawn), while at the same time utilizing the range of historical-critical and literary-critical approaches within rather large literary pericopes. As scholars begin to compare larger constellations of iconographic and literary materials, the dangers of facile comparisons may increase. Yet through careful attention to context, one can identify striking areas of congruency where pictorial and literary imagery interact. Exploring a text's iconic structure helps one realize the complexity and reality of the numerous interactions between art and text. Thus, one can begin to understand and honor the richness of the symbolic texture of the Hebrew Bible.

Figures

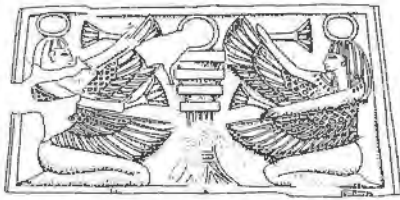


Fig. 1.1. Ivory; Samaria; Iron Age II B. After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 243.



Fig. 1.2. Ivory plaque; Megiddo; Late Bronze Age. After Loud, *The Megiddo Ivories*, pl. 4, 2a and 2b.



Fig. 1.3. Faience statuette; 19th Dynasty Egypt. Cf. Schneider, "Ptah in Wings," fig. 1.

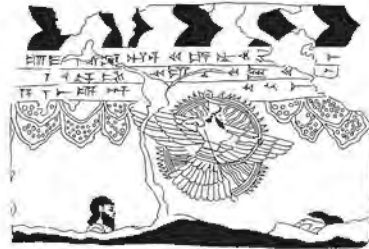


Fig. 1.4. Glazed tile of Tukulti-Ninurta II; 888–884 B.C.E. After Keel, *Die Welt der altorientalischen Bildsymbolik*, Abb. 295.



Fig. 1.5 Seals; Iron Age IIB; Israel/Palestine. After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 196a, b, 197a.



Fig. 1.6. Pithos; Iron Age IIB; Kuntilet 'Ajrud. After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 219.



Fig. 1.7. Cylinder seal; Beth-Shean; Iron Age IIC. After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 308.

Fig. 1.8. Chapter 15 from the Book of the Dead, the Papyrus of Ani; c. 1250 B.C.E. After Faulkner, et al. *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, fig. 18. © The Trustees of the British Museum



Fig. 2.2 Seal; Tell el-Ajjul; Middle Bronze IIB. After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 4.



Fig. 2.3. Scaraboid; Megiddo; Iron Age IIC. After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 318a.



Fig. 2.4. Seal; 10th–9th cent. B.C.E.; Unprovenanced. After Keel, *Studien zu den Stempelsiegeln aus Palästina/Israel* 4,125, Abb. 1.

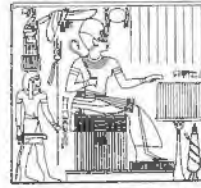


Fig. 2.5. Wall relief of Seti I; Chapel of Seti I at Abydos; 19th Dynasty. After Keel, *Studien zu den Stempelsiegeln aus Palästina/Israel* 4,131, Abb. 54.



Fig. 2.6. Seal; Megiddo; Iron Age IB. After Keel, *Studien zu den Stempelsiegeln aus Palästina/Israel* 4,129, Abb. 37.

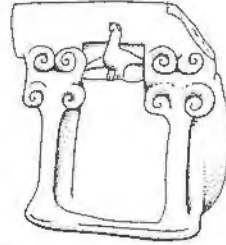


Fig. 2.7. Terra cotta model of a cult shrine; Transjordan; 9th–8th cent. B.C.E. After Keel, *Das Hohelied*, Abb. 57.

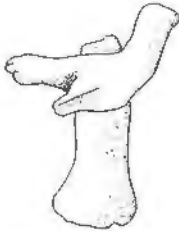


Fig. 2.8. Terracotta dove figurine; Lachish; 8th cent. B.C.E. After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 320.

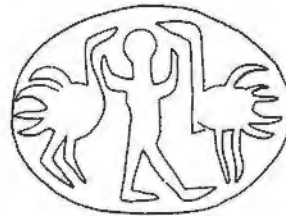


Fig. 2.9. Seal; Beth-Shemesh; Iron Age IIB. After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 162c.



Fig. 2.10. Inscribed seal; Tell en-Nasbeh. After Sass, "Pre-Exilic Hebrew Seals," fig. 102.



Figs. 2.11a, b. Seals; Megiddo; 8th cent. B.C.E. After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 231a, b.



Fig. 2.12. Scarab belonging to *hym*; Tell el-Far'ah (South); Iron Age IIB. After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 253.



Figs. 2.13a, b. Ivory inlays; Samaria; Iron Age IIB. After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 232a, b.



Figs. 2.14a, b. Seal impressions; Lachish; Late Iron Age IIB. After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 274a, c.



Fig. 2.15. Reconstructed ivory plaque; Samaria; Iron Age IIB. After Crowfoot and Crowfoot, *Early Ivories from Samaria*, pl. III.2a, b.



Fig. 2.16. Seal; Samaria; Iron Age IIB. After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 257a.



Fig. 2.17. Cylinder seal; Tell el-Ajjul; Late Bronze Age. After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 90a.



Fig. 2.18. Bronze statuette of Pazuzu; Iraq; 800–600 B.C.E. Oriental Institute Museum, University of Chicago (OIM A25413).



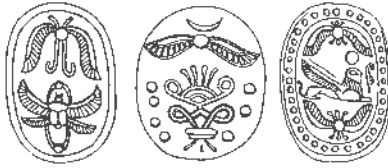
Fig. 2.19. Alabaster relief from Nimrud; 883–859 B.C.E. Metropolitan Museum of Art (32.143.4).



Fig. 2.20. Seal of *šg' dd*; North Syria; Iron Age. After Ornan, "Mesopotamian Influence on West Semitic Inscribed Seals," fig. 19.



Fig. 2.21. Wall relief from Tell Halaf; 9th cent. B.C.E. After Seidl, "Das Ringen um das richtige Bild des Samas von Zippar," Abb. 2.



Figs. 2.22a, b, c. Seals from Samaria (a) and Shechem (b, c); Iron Age IIB. After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 258a-c.



Fig. 2.23. Edomite seal of *mnḥmt 'št gdmrk*; Iron Age IIC. After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 294.



Fig. 2.24. Bone carving; Hazor; early 8th cent. B.C.E. After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 210.



Fig. 2.25. Moabite seal of 'š; Tell el-Qadi (near Dan). After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 211.



Fig. 2.26. *Champ-levé* ivory; Samaria; Iron Age IIB. After Crowfoot, Crowfoot, and Kenyon, *Objects from Samaria*, pl. 14.2.



Fig. 2.27. Israelite seal of *yw'b*; 8th cent. B.C.E.; found in Carthage. After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 212b.



Fig. 2.28. Scarab of ...] g' / bn s' / l; Northern Levantine; late 8th / early 7th cent. B.C.E. After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 331a.

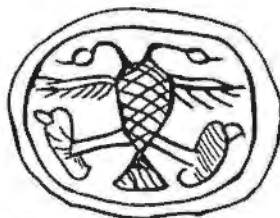


Fig. 3.1 Seal; Megiddo; Middle Bronze Age IIB. After Schroer, "Die Göttin und der Geier," Abb. 3j.



Fig. 3.2. Diorite statue of Khafra; Old Kingdom (4th Dynasty). After Keel, *Die Welt der altorientalischen Bildsymbolik*, Abb. 260.



Fig. 3.3. Seal; Tel el-Ajjul; 10th–9th cent. B.C.E. After Keel, *Studien zu den Stempelsiegeln aus Palästina/Israel* 4,125, Abb. 7.



Fig. 3.4. Seal; Achzib; 9th–7th cent. B.C.E. After Keel, *Studien zu den Stempelsiegeln aus Palästina/Israel* 4,125, Abb. 10.



Fig. 3.5. Sarcophagus of Ahiram; Byblos; 13th cent. B.C.E. After Fraankfort, *Art and Architecture*, illus. 317.

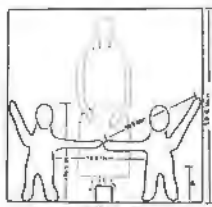


Fig. 3.6. Schematic of the cherubim throne in the holy of holies. After Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen und Siegelkunst*, Abb. 10.



Fig. 3.7. Throne of Amenhotep III; 1390–1352 B.C.E. After Metzger, *Königsthron und Gottesthron*, Abb. 234.



Fig. 3.8. Bronze disk of chariot B; Salamis; 9th–7th cent. (?) B.C.E. After Karageorghis, *Salamis in Cyprus*, fig. 20.



Fig. 3.9. Horse blinker; Salamis; 9th–7th cent. (?) B.C.E. After Karageorghis, *Salamis in Cyprus*, fig. 26.



Fig. 3.10. Silver bowl; Idalion; 7th cent. (?) B.C.E. After Markoe, *Phoenician Bronze and Silver Bowls*, 244.

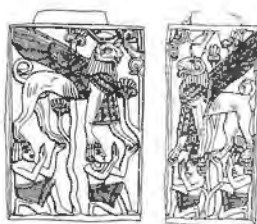


Fig. 3.11. Ivory plaques; Nimrud; 8th cent. B.C.E. After Gubel, "Multicultural and Multimedial Aspects," fig. 27.



Fig. 3.12. Ivory plaque from Megiddo; 13th cent. B.C.E. After Frankfort, *Art and Architecture*, illus. 274.



Fig. 3.13. Broken obelisk; 1073–1056 B.C.E.; Nineveh. After Börker-Klähn and Shunnar-Misera, *Alt Vorderasiatische Bildstelen 2*, Abb. 131.



Fig. 3.14. Relief; Nimrud; 883–859 B.C.E. After Meissner, *Babylonien und Assyrien 2*, Abb. 10.



Fig. 3.15. Wall relief of Tiglath Pileser III; Nimrud; 744–727 B.C.E. After Madhloom, *The Chronology of Neo-Assyrian Art*, plate 3.2.

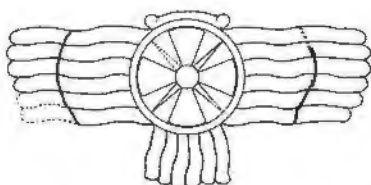


Fig. 3.16. Detail of the banquet stele of Ashurnasirpal II; Nimrud; 879 B.C.E.



Fig. 3.17. Bulla (Inscription: *lmlk mmšt*); late 8th cent.; Judah. After Galling, *Biblisches Reallexikon*, Abb. 78₃₀.



Fig. 3.18. Upper half of the stele of the high priest of Onnuris, Amenhotep; Limestone; 18th Dynasty. Cf. Robins, *The Art of Ancient Egypt*, illus. 164. British Museum EA 902.



Fig. 3.19. Sandstone votive stele of Amenhotep, viceroy of Nubia; 18th Dynasty. Cf. Robins, *The Art of Ancient Egypt*, illus. 165. Ashmolean Museum 1893/173.



Fig. 3.20. Painted sycamore fig wood funerary stele of Deniuenkhons, mistress of the house and musician of Amun; Third Intermediate Period. Cf. Robins, *The Art of Ancient Egypt*, illus. 245. British Museum EA 27332



Fig. 3.21. Silver bowl; Salamis; 7th cent. B.C.E. After Frankfort, *Art and Architecture*, illus. 393.



Fig. 3.22a. Silver bowl; early 7th cent. B.C.E.; Idalion. After Markoe, *Phoenician Bronze and Silver Bowls*, 242.



Fig. 3.22b. Detail of fig. 3.23a.



Fig. 3.23. Detail of relief; 9th cent. B.C.E.; Nimrud. After Frankfort, *Art and Architecture*, illus. 224



Fig. 3.24. Seal impression; Nuzi; 15th cent. B.C.E. After Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen*, Abb. 11.



Fig. 3.25. Boss of shield; Luristan; beginning of first millennium. After Strawn, *What Is Stronger*, fig. 4.209.



Fig. 3.26. Relief; Tell Halaf; 9th cent. B.C.E. After Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen*, Abb. 136.

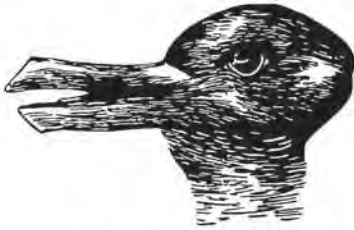


Fig. 3.27. Rabbit or duck? Cf. Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, 46 fig. 3.



Fig. 3.28. Faces or Goblet? Cf. Rubin, *Synsoplevede Figurer: Studier i psykologisk Analyse*, fig. 3.

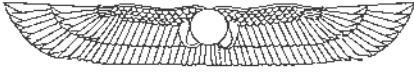


Fig. 4.1. Winged sun disk from a pectoral; Third Intermediate Period; Tanis. After Parayre, "Les cachets Ouest-Sémitiques," Pl. 1.2.



Fig. 4.2. Detail from an Israelite scarab; 8th cent. B.C.E. After Parayre, "Les cachets Ouest-Sémitiques," pl. 2.28.

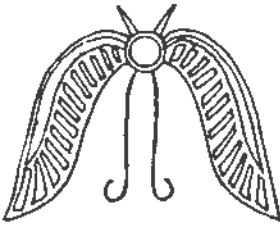


Fig. 4.3. Detail from an Israelite scarab; Samaria: 9th-8th cent. B.C.E. After Parayre, "Les cachets Ouest-Sémitiques," pl. 3.41.



Fig. 4.4. Cylinder seal; 1250-1000 B.C.E.; Assyrian. After Frankfort, *Cylinder Seals*, text-fig. 65.



Fig. 4.5. Cylinder seal; 7th cent. B.C.E.; Nimrud. After Klingbeil, *Yahweh Fighting*, fig. 47.

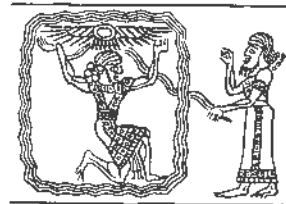


Fig. 4.6. Cylinder seal; 9th-8th cent. B.C.E.; Assur. After Ward, *Seal Cylinders of Western Asia*, illus. 656.



Fig. 4.7. Cylinder seal; 9th cent. B.C.E. After Brentjes, *Alte Siegelkunst*, p. 165.



Fig. 4.8. Cylinder seal; Assur; 9th-8th cent. B.C.E. After Klingbeil, *Yahweh Fighting*, fig. 40.



Fig. 4.9. Conoid seal; Gezer; Iron Age IIC. After Ornan, *Triumph of the Symbol*, fig. 211.



Fig. 5.1. Seal 'hyhy; Northwest Semitic After Ornan, "Mesopotamian Influence on West Semitic Inscribed Seals," fig. 62.



Fig. 5.2. Seal of 'ms hsr; Moabite. After Naveh, *Early History of the Alphabet*, fig. 89.



Fig. 5.3. Seal of ddbw; Iron Age. After Ornan, "Mesopotamian Influence on West Semitic Inscribed Seals," fig. 9.



Fig. 5.4. Aramaic seal of *šnhšr*. After Oman, "Mesopotamian Influence on West Semitic Inscribed Seals," fig. 10.



Fig. 5.5. Cylinder seal; Neo-Assyrian period. After Black and Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols*, fig. 82.



Fig. 5.6. Detail of seal; 8th–7th cent. B.C.E. After Lidzbrski, *Ephemeris für semitische Epigraphik*, p. 146.



Fig. 6.1. Limestone relief; Amarna; 1377–1358 B.C.E. After Keel, *Die Welt der altorientalischen Bildsymbolik*, Abb. 288.



Fig. 6.2. Limestone relief; Amarna; 1377–1358 B.C.E. After Erman, *Die Religion der Ägypter*, Abb. 51.



Fig. 6.3. Limestone stele of Yehawmilk; Byblos; 5th or early 4th cent. B.C.E. Cf. Moscati, *i Fenici*, p. 400.



Fig. 7.1. Ivory relief; Ugarit; Late Bronze Age IIB (Middle Syrian). After Winter, *Frau und Göttin*, Abb. 409.



Fig. 7.2. Seal; Tel Megadim; Iron Age III (5th–6th cent. B.C.E.). After Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 363b.



Figs. 8.1a, b. Scarab seals; Tell Fara; Iron Age I. After Keel, *Studien zu den Stempelsteinen* 3, 144, nr. 46-47.

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Summary

The striking image of the winged Yahweh occurs in six psalms (e. g., Ps 17:8 “Hide me in the shadow of your wings”). Scholars have disagreed on the background, meaning, and significance of the image, arguing that it: (1) likens the Israelite deity to a bird; (2) alludes to the winged sun disk; (3) draws from general Egyptian symbolism for protection; (4) evokes images of winged goddesses; or (5) refers to winged cherubim in the temple and/or on the ark of the covenant. These divergent proposals signal a need for clearer methods of interpreting biblical imagery in light of visual-artistic material from the ancient Near East. This volume refines iconographic methodologies by treating the image of the winged Yahweh as one among a constellation of literary images in each psalm. Since the portrayals of Yahweh in each psalm have distinct contours, one finds several congruencies in Syro-Palestinian iconographic material. The congruent iconographic motifs for Yahweh’s winged form include (1) the winged sun disk (in multiple forms and variations), (2) the Horus falcon, (3) winged suckling goddesses, and (4) winged deities in combat. No single image stands behind the portrayals of Yahweh. In fact, even within a single psalm, more than one iconographic trope can provide congruency with the literary imagery and inform the interpretation of the text. Thus, the winged Yahweh in the Psalms provides an example of a ‘multistable’ literary image, one which simultaneously evokes multiple iconographical motifs.