

D.Phil

Cherubim and Seraphim in the Old Testament

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For Gill

Preface

The production of a thesis brings with it many challenges, especially when doing it part time over an extended number of years. Consequently there are quite a few people to whom I am indebted. Firstly I must thank my supervisor, Prof. John Day. Initially, after an absence of nearly twenty years from formal academic study, John was one of the three people who was prepared to write me a positive reference for my application to take this course of study. Since then he has been consistently positive and encouraging. I am grateful to him for his attention to detail, wise advice and constant good humour. He has made many, many suggestions that have served to improve what is written here. However, any remaining failings that the reader will find within it are my own.

I have been working as a parish priest in Tilehurst, Berkshire, throughout the period of study, and I must thank the staff team at St. George's and St. Mary Magdalen's who have been generous in their support, primarily by allowing me the time to keep going to Oxford and study. The Revd. Duncan White, The Revd. Michael Oke and The Revd. Peter Grosse have all been supportive, along with other members of the team, Lyle Brome, Sister Win Rivers and Len Harris. Sadly Win and Len have not lived to see the fruits of my labours, but I hope that what they are now experiencing of Cherubim and Seraphim will, at least in some small way, concur with what I have written here.

In addition to the team at St. George's and St. Mary Magdalen's there are several members of the congregation who have been supportive over the years: Peter and Mair Mayers have helped with transport; Brenda Hunt has shown detailed interest in the subject of the thesis; more recently Daniel Hand, who has also shown similar

interest, has proof read the first draft and made extensive comments which have served to improve its style. Both congregations more generally have been stimulating in their response to my Sunday sermons which have been more than a little affected by what I have been reading. I am not sure if they thought I had lost the plot when I told them about Asherah and the giant footprints at 'Ain Dara, but if they did, they were very polite about it.

In addition to the support I have received from people in the parish I shall be forever indebted to the members of my clergy support group: The Revd. Paul Hunt, The Revd. Canon Ruth Oates and The Revd. Dr. Susan Shooter. They have been spiritual companions throughout this journey, and our twice-yearly residentials in Church Stretton have been a source of great strength and inspiration.

Finally I must thank my family. Without them and their love this whole exercise would be pointless. My wife's parents, Les and Ann Murrells, have been generous in their emotional and financial support. Les' death last year was an unexpected blow, but Ann has continued her support since. My parents, Richard and Val, while living at considerable distance, have listened well to my D.Phil ramblings and shown real pride in my work. My two children, Harriet and Ranulph, have never known any life other than the one in which Daddy was in the study too much and rather grumpy too often from having been burning the candle at both ends. I apologise for the ill temper and absence that they have endured, and thank them both from the bottom of my heart. When I started the M.St in preparation for the D.Phil, Ranulph was only a few weeks old and Harriet had not turned two, and I hope that they will both be able to read this with some understanding in due course. Lastly, to my wife, Gill, must go my biggest vote of thanks. She is my emotional rock. Her patience with me seems to be limitless. Her quiet and practical approach to the complications that

arise from holding down a full time post, studying part time and bringing up two children has been the most powerful antidote to the negative feelings which sometimes have seemed too much to bear. I only hope that, now this is finished, I can repay some of the debt I owe her.

Adam Carlill

Michaelmas Term 2012

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Cherubim and Seraphim in the Old Testament

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Short Abstract

This thesis is the first modern joint study of biblical Cherubim and Seraphim. I begin by setting out the recent history of their interpretation, before taking each of the biblical texts in turn. Chapter 1 looks at the references to Cherubim in Ezekiel. I argue that the Cherubim in Ezek. 1-11 are based upon the two large Cherubim in the sanctuary in Jerusalem. I investigate the different traditions represented by LXX and MT versions of Ezek. 28 and identify a tradition which may account for the MT of this chapter. Chapter 2 covers the other descriptions of living Cherubim in the biblical texts in Gen. 3 and Ps. 18. I argue for a conscious link with the Jerusalem Temple in both texts but for their independence from each other. All the references to Cherubim in the Temple and the Tabernacle are looked at in Chapter 3, and I offer a radical re-imagining of the two large Cherubim in the Solomonic Temple and on the Kapporeth in the Mosaic Tabernacle. In Chapter 4 I question the validity of translating the Cherubim Formula as “enthroned upon the Cherubim”, and offer an alternative translation which makes reference to all the Cherubim mentioned in the text. In Chapter 5, looking at the references to שֶׁרָפִיָּם, I follow Joines and others in arguing for a serpentine form for the Seraphim, but argue that this identity was forgotten at an early stage of the textual transmission, and that they were then seen as part of Yhwh’s heavenly host. Finally, I argue that the role of Cherubim and Seraphim is similar, being primarily apotropaic, but that both are associated with theophany and, less frequently, with heavenly worship.

Cherubim and Seraphim in the Old Testament

D.Phil *A. J. Carlill, St. Peter's College* *Michaelmas Term 2012*

Long Abstract

This thesis brings together for the first time a study of biblical Cherubim with a study of biblical Seraphim. Cherubim and Seraphim are the only winged heavenly beings in the Bible. I begin by setting out the recent history of their interpretation, pointing out that they have been treated as separate subjects. It is the purpose of this thesis to assess whether this assumption is justified. I argue that the biblical writers did not themselves make any overt connection between them, but that the writer of Ezek. 1 LXX was the earliest writer to do so, subtly altering the text in order to facilitate this identification.

In chapter 1 I look at the references to Cherubim in Ezekiel, including the living creatures of Ezek. 1 which are identified as Cherubim later in the book. I argue that in Ezek. 1 the prophet is in a state of anxiety caused by the fact that Yhwh is no longer dwelling in Jerusalem. I then propose that the first eleven chapters of Ezekiel present Yhwh's judgement in a series of concentric circles emanating out from the sanctuary in Jerusalem. I interpret the vision complex in Ezek. 8-11 as a series of three visions of the same judgement process, with the Cherubim marking the literary boundaries between each vision. With regard to Ezek. 28 I look at the different traditions represented by the LXX and MT versions of this chapter, arguing for the priority of the former over the latter. However, building on the work of R. R. Wilson, I point out a connection with the tradition that the stones of the high priest's breastplate were deposited with the Cherubim in *The Biblical Antiquities* of Pseudo-Philo, and that this is a tradition which may account for the MT of this chapter in

addition to the usual argument of scribal error over the pointing of **כרוב**. I posit the idea that the poem against the King of Tyre was inspired, not only by an Adamic myth, but also by the destruction of the Temple Cherubim and the murder of the High Priest.

In chapter 2 I turn to the only other descriptions of living Cherubim in the biblical texts: Gen. 3: 24; Ps. 18: 11 (ET 10). I look in detail at the appearance of Cherubim in the story of the Garden of Eden. I argue for a conscious link in the mind of the writer of Gen. 2-3 between the Garden of Eden and the Jerusalem Temple and that the position of the Cherubim is a reflection of the position of the Cherubim on the doors of the Temple. In Ps. 18 I discuss the differences in the MSS, and how they affect the numbering of the Cherub/Cherubim. I point out the distinction that needs to be made between whether Yhwh is riding a Cherub and whether he is in some sort of chariot behind several Cherubim. I argue that the writer of Ps. 18 and the writer of Gen. 2-3 were probably independent of each other, since their use of Cherubim is so different, but that the Jerusalem Temple lies behind both texts.

In chapter 3 I take each of the references to Cherubim in the Solomonic Temple and the Mosaic Tabernacle in turn. I point out the conscious similarities between them and I offer a new reconstruction of the two large Cherubim in the Solomonic Temple based on the description in 1 Kings. Similarly I offer a new and radical re-imagining of the form of the Kapporeth and its relation to the Ark. Both reconstructions are faithful to the details of the texts in each case in a way that recent reliance on particular artefacts has not been. I argue that the texts do not permit the reader to envisage an empty throne in either the Temple or the Tabernacle. I argue that the descriptions of Cherubim in 1 Kings are designed to be faithful to a historical reality that was known to the writer, but that the Chronicler and the person describing the Mosaic Tabernacle had no first-hand knowledge of the items described. This has

also led me to question whether we should look to objects like the Ahiram sarcophagus in this context.

In the light of the previous chapter, in chapter 4 I question whether the ubiquity of the translation “enthroned upon the Cherubim” in modern translations of the Cherubim Formula is justified. I investigate the three possible variables which the translator needs to address: the meaning of the verb יָשַׁב; the relationship of יָשַׁב to הַכְּרֻבִים; the use of a preposition in translation. I offer an alternative translation, “enthroned among”, which makes reference to all the Cherubim mentioned in the text and not just the two Cherubim associated with the Holy of Holies and / or the Ark.

Finally, in chapter 5, I turn to the Seraphim. I look in detail at each of the texts which include the word שֶׁרָפִיָּה (Num. 21: 6, 8; Deut. 8: 15; Isa. 14: 29; 30: 6) before turning to the vision of Isaiah in Isa. 6. I follow Joines and others in arguing for a serpentine form for the Seraphim in all these texts. However, I also argue for a direct and conscious link in the mind of the writer between the Seraphim of Isa. 6: 2 and the Seraph of Isa. 14: 29. While I argue that the original writer was describing winged snakes, based on Nehushtan, I also argue that this identity was forgotten at an early stage of the textual transmission, and that they were seen as part of Yhwh’s heavenly host.

Throughout this thesis I argue that the Jerusalem Temple was central to all the interpretations of both Cherubim and Seraphim, and that the texts exhibit a great deal of unclarity about their actual form. Additionally I argue that the creativity of the writers allowed them to pull the concept of Cherub and Seraph in different and sometimes contradictory directions.

The contention of this thesis that the centrality of the Temple in Jerusalem to both Cherubim and Seraphim in the Bible is their defining context is argued in each

chapter. I argue that in Ezekiel the four creatures of the visions are inspired by the two large Cherubim of the Solomonic Temple and that they serve as the groundwork for Ezekiel's new theology of a mobile Yhwh who dwells with the exiles. The story of the Garden of Eden has behind it the imagery of the Temple, reflected in the combination of Cherubim and sacred vegetation as well as the apotropaic role of the Cherubim at the entrance to both Eden and the Temple. Psalm 18 and its parallel in 2 Sam. 22 contain an overt reference to the Temple. The descriptions of the Mosaic Tabernacle are based on the Temple in terms of its layout and the position of the Cherubim within it. It is possible that the Cherubim formula had a history that antedates the Jerusalem Temple going back to the sanctuary at Shiloh, but the only other possible context for this formula is the Temple in Jerusalem. Isaiah's Seraphim are in the Temple, and most likely relate to Nehushtan which was part of the cult there.

The unclarity of the descriptions of both Cherubim and Seraphim is the main interpretative problem. The unclarity of Ezekiel's visions is part of the tension between a detailed description of theophany and the devotional reticence at describing the divine form. I point out that the tension is greater in Ezek. 1 than in Ezek. 8-11 and that this reflects a change in the theology of the prophet, partly resolving the distress at realising that Yhwh is absent from Jerusalem with the positive note that he is concomitantly present among the exiles. In Gen. 3 the form of the Cherubim is not significant and very little can be read into the text on this point. However, I argue that this should be taken seriously by the reader of the text and that undue speculation about the form of the Cherubim here should be avoided. The same is true of the description in Psalm 18, although I allow that the parallelism with the clouds of the theophany could be an interpretative clue. In the descriptions of the Temple Cherubim

the reader is invited to imagine what they looked like. The dimensions, engineering solutions and decorative details contained in the texts provide us with enough detail to suggest a radical re-imagining of the nature of the two large Cherubim in the Solomonic Temple, and of the Kapporeth on the Ark of the Covenant. I challenge the scholarly *status quo* that a model throne was envisioned, and envision a shoebox arrangement for the Ark and Kapporeth which may reflect a possible historical reality in the Solomonic Temple. As regards the Chronicler's descriptions I argue that their unclarity reflects the writer's temporal distance from the subject, and that this represents one of the earliest surviving attempts to make sense of the text in 1 Kings.

Finally, I argue that the role of Cherubim and Seraphim is similar, being primarily apotropaic, but that there are additional associations with theophany and heavenly worship. At this point it had been my intention to include a section on the history of the interpretation of the Cherubim and Seraphim, in which I investigated how they related to each other in the tradition. However, it became apparent that this task would have to form a second study in its own right.

Abbreviations

<i>2 Bar.</i>	<i>2 Baruch</i>
<i>4 Bar.</i>	<i>4 Baruch</i>
AB	Anchor Bible
<i>AJA</i>	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
<i>AJSL</i>	<i>American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures</i>
<i>AJSR</i>	<i>Association for Jewish Studies Review</i>
<i>AJT</i>	<i>The American Journal of Theology</i>
<i>ANEP</i>	J. B. Pritchard, ed., <i>The Ancient Near East in Pictures</i> (2nd. ed.; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969)
<i>ANET</i>	J. B. Pritchard, ed., <i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts relating to the Old Testament</i> (3rd. ed.; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969)
<i>Apoc. Abr.</i>	<i>Apocalypse of Abraham</i>
<i>Apoc. Mos.</i>	<i>Apocalypse of Moses</i>
<i>Assump. Mos.</i>	<i>Assumption of Moses</i>
<i>ASTI</i>	<i>Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute</i>
ATD	Alte Testament Deutsch
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BDB	<i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Brown, F., Driver, S. R., Briggs, C. A.; Oxford; Clarendon Press, 1951)
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
<i>BW</i>	<i>The Biblical World</i>
<i>BWAT</i>	<i>Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten Testament</i>
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
<i>CAD</i>	<i>Chicago Assyrian Dictionary</i> (Chicago, Ill: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1956 - 2010)
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>CT</i>	<i>Cowen Tracts</i>
<i>DDD</i>	<i>Dictionary of Deities and Demons</i> (2nd ed., ed. K. van der Toorn; Leiden: Brill and Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1999)
ET	English Translation
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
G-K	<i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i> (ed. E. Kautzsch; ET by A. E. Cowley; 2 nd . ed.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910)
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament

HCOT	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
HKAT	Handkommentar zum Alten Testament
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
ITC	International Theological Commentary
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JB	Jerusalem Bible
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
KJV	King James Version
<i>Lad. Jac.</i>	<i>Ladder of Jacob</i>
<i>LAE</i>	<i>Life of Adam and Eve</i>
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
Luc.	Lucian
LXX	Septuagint
MS(S)	Manuscript(s)
MT	Masoretic Text
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NCB	New Century Bible
NEB	New English Bible
<i>NETS</i>	A. Pietersma and B. G. Wright, eds. <i>New English Translation of the Septuagint</i> (New York, NY; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIV	New International Version
NJPSV	New Jewish Publication Society Version
NRB	New Jerusalem Bible
NKJV	New King James Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OTL	Old Testament Library

OTS	Oudtestamentische Studiën
<i>Par. Jer.</i>	<i>Paraleipomena of Jeremiah</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
REB	Revised English Bible
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SP	Samaritan Pentateuch
Syr.	Syriac
<i>Test. Isaac</i>	<i>Testament of Isaac</i>
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
Vg.	Vulgate
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
θ	Theodotion
Σ	Symmachus

Ancient Writers

Irenaeus	
<i>Adv. Haer.</i>	<i>Adversus Haereses</i>
Josephus	
<i>Ant.</i>	<i>Antiquities of the Jews</i>
<i>War</i>	<i>War of the Jews</i>
Origen	
<i>Contr. Cel.</i>	<i>Contra Celsum</i>
Philo	
<i>Leg.</i>	<i>Legum Allegoriarum</i>
<i>Agr.</i>	<i>De Agricultura</i>
Pseudo Philo	
<i>Bib. Ant.</i>	<i>The Biblical Antiquities</i>

Introduction

It may seem strange but throughout the modern period of biblical criticism there has never been a study solely devoted to Cherubim and Seraphim as a pair. This is remarkable, given the long history in Christian liturgy in which they appear as a pair of heavenly beings, not least in the *Te Deum*: “To thee cherubin and seraphin continually do cry.”¹ Alice Wood acknowledged the need for such a study in the conclusion to her thesis on biblical Cherubim,² and it is my intention to address that need here.

Survey of Literature

Although there has been no joint study, as with most biblical subjects there is a huge bibliography relating to Cherubim and Seraphim. In this introduction I will focus on the most influential names in the area. More detailed bibliographical resources will be discussed throughout the thesis.

Albright on Cherubim

William Albright suggested that Cherubim were winged sphinxes,³ based on the ubiquity of their occurrence. The winged sphinx emphasises the Phoenician link with the Solomonic building programme (1 Kgs. 7: 13-14).⁴ Sphinxes are usually considered to be lion-bodied figures with human heads,⁵ but there is evidence that in the Greek world sphinxes were also identified with griffins, and therefore could be

¹ Book of Common Prayer (1662).

² Wood, 2008: 207.

³ Albright, 1938: 2.

⁴ Dessenne, 1957: 192.

⁵ Dessenne, 1957: 11.

eagle-headed as well.⁶ Sphinxes originated in the third millennium in Egypt and Mesopotamia.⁷

Although not the closest in form to the Solomonic Temple,⁸ the temple remains from 'Ain Dara, forty kilometres north of Aleppo (Syria), include a series of large stone reliefs depicting lions and winged sphinxes.⁹ Although the temple may be dedicated to Ishtar,¹⁰ and the dating of the reliefs is not secure (anything between the twelfth and eighth centuries BCE), they reflect Hittite design,¹¹ and may have influenced Solomon's craftsmen.

Mettinger on Cherubim

Assuming that Cherubim are winged sphinxes, several depictions of them exist from Syria/Palestine.¹² Of particular interest is a relief on the stone sarcophagus of Ahiram of Byblos. This 33cm section from the late second millennium BCE depicts "a god or king sitting on a cherubim throne".¹³ Only one cherub is visible and its outer wing forms the side of the throne while the inner wing presumably supports the seat of the throne or is the seat itself. A similar design is depicted on a 13cm ivory plaque, and on a small ivory model of a cherubim throne, both from Megiddo (1350-1150 BCE).¹⁴

Although not alone,¹⁵ in his book, *The Dethronement of Sabaoth*, Tryggve Mettinger is the clearest exponent of the idea that the Cherubim of the Temple in

⁶ Brown, 1968: 187-188.

⁷ Dessenne, 1957: 175.

⁸ The ninth-century temple at Tell Tainat in Upper Syria is closer in form to Solomon's three-room Temple (Parrot, 1954: 23).

⁹ Abou-Assaf, 1993: 12 and fig. 15.

¹⁰ Abou-Assaf, 1993: 13-14.

¹¹ Stone and Zimansky, 1999: 3.

¹² Dessenne, 1957: 194-196.

¹³ Mettinger, 1982b: 21.

¹⁴ Mettinger, 1982b: 22.

¹⁵ Gray, J., 1970: 172; Keel, 1977: 23-29; Janowski, 1991: 241-253.

Jerusalem formed a throne in much the same way as the depictions in the Ahiram sarcophagus and the Megiddo ivories.¹⁶ Mettinger argues for the replacement of כְּבוֹד theology with שֵׁם theology as a direct result of the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, and in particular of the Ark and Cherubim contained within it. He gives a more detailed argument for the throne form of the Temple Cherubim in his article of the same year, “YHWH SABAOTH - The Heavenly King on the Cherubim Throne.”¹⁷

Evidence of this idea can be found in modern translations of the Bible in which the Cherubim formula, יְהוָה זָכָאוֹת יֹשֵׁב הַכְּרֻבִים, is rendered, “the LORD of hosts who is enthroned on the cherubim.”¹⁸ I shall discuss this further in Chapter 4.

Other Treatments of Sphinxes Relating to Cherubim

Sphinxes generally appear as guardians of individuals, buildings or trees. As hybrid animals, bringing together elements of humans, lions and sometimes eagles, they are symbols of both mental and physical strength and agility, making them excellent guardians. However, other examples exhibit different characteristics. Some appear as female figures, or in a prone position, worshipping the deity.¹⁹ Helck sees these winged sphinxes from the New Kingdom in Egypt as representations of the wives of Syrian kings because of their particular headgear.²⁰

Another variation has been identified by Cleveland.²¹ A relief from South Arabia, dating to the second or first century BCE,²² shows “cherubs” standing either

¹⁶ Mettinger, 1982b.

¹⁷ Mettinger, 1982a: 109-138.

¹⁸ 2 Sam. 6: 2. NJB reads “Yahweh Sabaoth, enthroned on the winged creatures,” for the same verse.

¹⁹ Helck, 1955: 1-10.

²⁰ Helck, 1955: 10.

²¹ Cleveland, 1963: 55-60.

²² Cleveland, 1963: 57.

side of a tree. Rather than guarding it, they are eating its fruit.²³ While this post-dates the period of our enquiry and is not an example of sphinxes in the strict sense, it suggests that sphinxes/Cherubim may not have been simply guardians.

In his discussion of Sumerian door guardians, Douglas Van Buren describes them questioning those who enter the sacred precincts,²⁴ guarding a tree,²⁵ and appearing in the form of lions²⁶ and a winged gate.²⁷ He then notes that “the *talimê* (twin guardians) were related to Anu by ties of blood or of hereditary service; they were, in fact, components of the ‘family’ of Anu”.²⁸

Cherubim appear elsewhere in the Temple: on the inner walls, on the doors and on the sides of the stands.²⁹ Kapelrud sees the cherubim as the doors themselves, based upon the image of Sumerian winged door deities.³⁰ This rather forces the description though since in the biblical text they are described as carved on the doors rather than being the actual doors.

Wood on Cherubim

Alice Wood’s study of biblical Cherubim, *Of Wings and Wheels*,³¹ questions the way in which treatments of the Cherubim have been based upon archaeological rather than textual evidence. She is unhappy with the conventional translation of the Cherubim formula as “enthroned” and proposes an alternative translation, “dweller”.³² She argues that archaeological evidence should be limited temporally and

²³ Cleveland, 1963: 56.

²⁴ Van Buren, 1947: 314.

²⁵ Van Buren, 1947: 322-323.

²⁶ Van Buren, 1947: 324-325.

²⁷ Van Buren, 1947: 326-328.

²⁸ Van Buren, 1947: 322.

²⁹ 1 Kgs. 6: 29, 32, 35; 7: 29, 36.

³⁰ Kapelrud, 1950: 153.

³¹ Wood, 2008.

³² Wood, 2008: 9-14.

geographically to the period and provenance of the texts, although she does not entirely rule out going outside the boundaries of Israel and Judah.³³

Despite her reservations about the archaeological input to the discussion, Wood's conclusion sees the archaeological evidence as illuminating the text, while the concept of the Cherubim is flexible within it.³⁴ The main problem with trying to identify plastic evidence for the biblical descriptions is the lack of accurate portrayals. For example, Ezekiel describes the Cherubim of the future Temple as having two faces.³⁵ Unger, in a list of fifty-one different types of hybrid-animals from the ancient Near East, only identifies two examples of double-headed creatures.³⁶ Landsberger only found one example of a two-headed animal.³⁷ None of these correspond to Ezekiel's description.

The biblical texts are internally inconsistent. The ubiquity of hybrid animals in the archaeological record makes a connection with biblical descriptions likely, but the complexity of the biblical texts make specific identifications impossible. All we can do is look at the texts in their own right and try to understand their conceptual framework. It may be that the biblical writers were less interested in the physical form of the Cherubim than modern interpreters. While Wood has opened up the debate about what the texts themselves say about Cherubim, a more detailed treatment of them in their own right is required, particularly focusing on the point of view of the writers and how they relate to each other.

³³ Wood, 2008: 161-164.

³⁴ Wood, 2008: 203-204.

³⁵ Ezek. 41: 18-19.

³⁶ Unger, 1927: 198. Cf. Oppenheim, 1931: pl. XXXIII A.

³⁷ Landsberger, 1947: 233, pl. 4.

Joines, Keel and the Serpentine Seraphim

Turning to Seraphim, the main treatment of them is by Karen Joines in her rare book, *Serpent Symbolism in the Old Testament*.³⁸ In this she argues that the Seraphim of Isaiah's vision are serpentine. She argues this position from the fact that in other parts of the Old Testament, שָׂרָפִים is a snake of some sort. Also she brings together a considerable body of archaeological and literary evidence in support of her thesis. Chapter 3 of her book³⁹ focuses on the vision of Isa. 6 and particularly on the Egyptian archaeological record.⁴⁰ She then argues in the following chapter that the worship of Nehushtan was a fertility cult.⁴¹ Although some of the details of her thesis are open to question, the link between Seraphim and serpents is well made.

Othomar Keel takes a similar line to Joines, but grounds his conclusions in a wider body of evidence. His works, *Jahwe-Visionen und Siegelkunst*,⁴² *Orte und Landschaften der Bibel*⁴³ and *Göttinnen, Götter und Gottessymbole*⁴⁴ are invaluable resources for comparing biblical texts with their cultural contexts. There is evidence of belief in desert-dwelling flying serpents. Esarhaddon reports seeing two-headed serpents and flying animals.⁴⁵ Herodotus describes bones believed to be from flying serpents.⁴⁶

Although the Seraphim possess faces, hands, and feet,⁴⁷ and offer human worship, there are examples of snakes with human attributes, including legs, feet,

³⁸ Joines, 1974. Cf. also Joines, 1967: 410-415.

³⁹ Joines, 1974: 42-60.

⁴⁰ Joines, 1974: 45-49.

⁴¹ Joines, 1974: 73-74.

⁴² Keel, 1977.

⁴³ Keel, 1983.

⁴⁴ Keel, 1993.

⁴⁵ *ANET* 292.

⁴⁶ Herodotus, II 75; cf. III 109; Josephus *Ant. II* 10. 2; Pliny, *The Natural History* X 28.

⁴⁷ Eslinger, 1995: 163-164 attributes these to Yhwh. Feet is a euphemism for genitals (Isa. 7: 20; Exod. 4: 25; cf. Ezek. 16: 25. Stendebach, 2004: 315).

hands and faces, in Egyptian iconography.⁴⁸ In the Book of the Dead serpents possess feet.⁴⁹ In Babylon images of serpent-headed composite creatures were found at the Ishtar Gate at Babylon dating from the time of Nebuchadnezzar II between 605-562.⁵⁰ Artefacts include various stamp seals.⁵¹

There is a Neo-Hittite humanoid six-winged genie from Tell Halaf.⁵² The figure holds what may be serpents or staves.⁵³ It is similar to other two-winged figures,⁵⁴ so the number of wings may be incidental. Keel says it is unique,⁵⁵ but there exists another six-winged figure on a seventh- to fifth-century stamp seal from Deve Hüyük.⁵⁶ Either way Keel discounts any influence of the Tell Halaf figure since it is temporally and geographically distant from Isaiah.⁵⁷

Snakes (uraei) are common in Egyptian literature and iconography.⁵⁸ Derived from the cobra on royal headgear and paraphernalia,⁵⁹ they supposedly protected the Pharaoh by “fire” (poison).⁶⁰ One Egyptian word for the uraeus was “flame”⁶¹ and Uraei were frequently winged.⁶²

⁴⁸ Keel, 1977: 77-78 for images.

⁴⁹ Piankoff and Rambova, 1957: Pap. 16, 26. Cf. also an image of a serpent with arms and legs on a ptolemaic papyrus, Brooklyn Museum of Art 47.218.136 (Charlesworth, 2010: 87).

⁵⁰ *ANEP* 761.

⁵¹ Keel, 1993: 313, image 274b. Cf. also Keel, 1977: 77; 2001: 258-259.

⁵² Oppenheim, 1931: 172, pl. XXXIb; *ANEP* 655.

⁵³ Or streams of water (Van Buren, 1933: 141-2).

⁵⁴ *ANEP* 654, 656. Oppenheim, 1931: 172 suggests that three pairs of wings are common and are characteristic of female figures.

⁵⁵ Keel, 1977: 75.

⁵⁶ Moorey, 1980: 114, ill. 474.

⁵⁷ Keel, 1977: 75.

⁵⁸ Joines, 1974: 45-49; Keel, 1977: 85-90 for images.

⁵⁹ *ANEP* 412-417.

⁶⁰ In Hebrew also poison is “heat” (חַמָּה): Deut. 32: 24; 32: 33; Job 6: 4; Ps. 58: 5 (ET 4); 140: 4 (ET 3).

⁶¹ Mettinger, 1999: 743.

⁶² Keel, 1977: 89-90, ill. 48-50.

The Egyptian connection with Temple iconography in Jerusalem is acknowledged,⁶³ and the uraeus similarly influenced Palestinian iconography⁶⁴ on Middle Bronze Age and Iron Age seals.⁶⁵ Serpents appear on Palestinian chapel friezes,⁶⁶ eighth- to ninth-century in design.⁶⁷ These are above the deity,⁶⁸ as in Isa. 6: 2, but they are wingless⁶⁹ and outside the shrine, while Isaiah's Seraphim were probably inside the Temple.⁷⁰ Some four-winged uraei exist on eighth-century seals.⁷¹ However they use all four wings to fly (*contra* Isa. 6: 2), so the six-winged Seraphim cannot be an intensification of them.⁷²

Attempts to Link or Equate Cherubim and Seraphim

The writers surveyed so far have treated Cherubim and Seraphim separately. There have, however, been three attempts to link the two.

Lacheman

A brief paper by Ernest Lacheman, "The Seraphim of Isaiah 6",⁷³ suggested that the Seraphim were the Cherubim in the Temple with the sun shining on them. This may be simplistic but he attempts to understand how the physical description of

⁶³ Day, 1979a: 150. De Vault argues that the discovery of a five-inch long copper serpentine temple guardian at Timnah (Keel, 1983: 303, image 222) also suggests a connection between Num. 21: 4-9 and Isaiah's Temple vision (de Vault, 1972: 235-237). On the link to Timnah cf. also Sturdy, 1976: 147-148; Wenham, 1981: 156-157; Staubli, 1996: 286. These images occur on Palestinian seals as well from the Middle Bronze Age through to the Iron Age, often in pairs (Keel, 1977: 95, 96, 99, images 51-73).

⁶⁴ Joines, 1967: 413-414.

⁶⁵ Keel, 1977: 95, 96, 99, ill. 51-73.

⁶⁶ Keel, 1977: 100, ill. 74-76.

⁶⁷ Keel, 1977: 98.

⁶⁸ Keel, 1977: 111-112 cf. also *ANEP* 675 where entwined serpents are above the deity on an early third-millennium Egyptian cylinder seal, thought to represent fertility, but it should be noted that the serpents are wingless (Mettinger, 1999: 743).

⁶⁹ Mettinger, 1999: 743.

⁷⁰ Williamson, 2005: 124-126.

⁷¹ Keel, 1977: 109, ill. 88-96. Cf. also Charlesworth, 2010: 116-122, 444.

⁷² Keel, 1977: 113.

⁷³ Lacheman, 1968: 71-72.

the Solomonic statues relates to the visionary description of Isaiah. Nevertheless it has received little attention.

Cherubim and Seraphim as the Embodiment of Cloud and Lightning Respectively

The idea of personified lightning is not new.⁷⁴ Yhwh makes wind and fire his ministers (Ps. 104: 4). In the Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice some of the ministering host are described like lightning and coals of fire.⁷⁵ Lightning is part of Yhwh's storm theophany.⁷⁶ More widely, storm theophany is associated with the Temple.⁷⁷ In this context the smoke (עָשָׁן Isa. 6: 4) is important. Procksch interpreted the smoke of Isa. 6: 4 as condensed breath,⁷⁸ Leupold as a symbol of the wrath of God,⁷⁹ Wildberger as incense.⁸⁰ However, nowhere is עָשָׁן used of incense.⁸¹ Day, following Duhm and others, sees the smoke as emanating from the Seraphim.⁸² עָשָׁן is used of divine theophany to Abraham⁸³ and at Sinai.⁸⁴ In addition it is part of the storm theophany of

⁷⁴ For this idea see Cheyne, 1880: 36-37; Nordell, 1889: 344-345 (citing Cheyne); Skinner, 1896: 44; Murison, 1905: 121; Jacobsthal, 1906: images 9-15; Haupt, 1907: 7; Wade, 1911: 39; Procksch, 1930: 54; Snaith, 1967: 280; Day, 1979a: 149-151. Widyapranawa, 1990: 31, while accepting the idea that Seraphim originated as sphinxes, sees Seraphim as "fire spirits" and Cherubim as "air spirits", which is not quite the same idea as lightning and cloud, but still a meteorological pairing. There is no evidence of any images that combine serpent and lightning motives (Keel, 1977: 80-81). Lightning is associated with healing in *2 Bar.* 53: 9, "Now that lightning shone exceedingly, so as to illuminate the whole earth, and it healed those regions where the last waters had descended and wrought devastation", which may suggest a tentative link to the healing properties of the Seraph's action and that of Moses' bronze serpent. It is interesting to note that, while there are no plastic images from the ancient Near East which combine serpent and lightning motifs, one group of Sumerian // Akkadian magical texts, not noted in this context before, combine both images in a description of evil spirits (Thompson, R. C. 1903: 33, 35, 51, 53, 89, 91, 155; 1904: 23, 65, 81, 133).

⁷⁵ 4Q403 I. ii. 5-6, Newsom, 1985: 229.

⁷⁶ Exod. 19: 15 (ET 16); 20: 18; Ps. 77: 19 (ET 18); 97: 4; Rev. 4: 5; 11: 19.

⁷⁷ 1 Kgs. 8: 10-11; 2 Chron. 5: 13-14; 7: 1-2 (cf. Exod. 40: 34-35; Rev. 15: 8); Ps. 18: 7-16 ET 6-15 (// 2 Sam. 22: 7-16); Ps. 29: 9 (Day, 1979a: 143 links this psalm to Baal's seven thunders). For imagery of Baal and lightning: *ANEP* 501, 533, 537, 651.

⁷⁸ Procksch, 1930: 55.

⁷⁹ Leupold, 1977: 133.

⁸⁰ Wildberger, 1980: 269; Childs, 2001: 55.

⁸¹ Williamson, 2005: 136.

⁸² Day, 1979a: 149.

⁸³ Gen. 15: 13.

⁸⁴ Exod. 19: 18; cf. Isa. 4: 5; Joel 3: 3 ET 2: 30.

Ps. 18: 7-16 (ET 6-15).⁸⁵ Yhwh is enveloped in cloud and riding on Cherubim, “on the wings of the wind”. One suggested Hebrew root for כְּרֻבִים (“Cherub”) is by metathesis from רֶכֶב־ (“chariot”)⁸⁶ in Ps. 104: 3 in which Yhwh’s chariot is created out of the clouds. Foote interprets the wooden Cherubim in the Solomonic Temple as symbolic of the covering cloud.⁸⁷

The idea that the Cherubim embody the cloud of the storm theophany while the Seraphim represent the lightning is ingenious but is dependent upon several things being true. It implies that there is a conscious connection between the two beings in the minds of the writers, something which would need to be demonstrated in order for this to be more than just speculation. It would also require that Cherubim and Seraphim are distinct and complementary rather than completely dissociated or, at the other end of the scale of interpretation, equated. Again I hope to clarify whether any of these statements are true or not.

A Joint Semitic Root for Cherubim, Seraphim and Griffin

A more likely root for כְּרֻבִים is the Akkadian term *kuribu*.⁸⁸ This is derived from the verb *karābu*, which means “pray, bless, greet (persons), worship (deities and persons), promise or offer sacrifice”,⁸⁹ and is thought to be related to the west Semitic root *brk*. Two derivative nouns from this root are *kāribu* and *kārubi*,⁹⁰ “one who blesses”. These were cultic figures whose primary task was the worship of the deity.⁹¹ *kuribu* is a diminutive derivative noun. This is a cult image, which is a “representation

⁸⁵ Day, 1979a: 149.

⁸⁶ Dhome, E., 1926: 331.

⁸⁷ Foote, 1904: 282.

⁸⁸ Kmoskó, 1913: 227-232.

⁸⁹ Freedman and O’Connor, 1995: 308.

⁹⁰ Westermann, 1984: 274.

⁹¹ Grelot, 1957: 275.

of a protective genius with specific non-human features”.⁹² There is no definite link, though, between this word and כְּרוּבִים. Other suggestions from Sumerian, Old South Arabic, Ethiopic, Classical Arabic, Phoenician and Aramaic are no more helpful.⁹³

The Seraph has been related to the Egyptian *sfer*, and the Akkadian *šarāpu*⁹⁴ and it is the first of these suggestions that has been resurrected recently by Nick Wyatt.⁹⁵ Wyatt makes the point that Egyptian *sfer* (*srrf*) is a griffin, as is the Greek word γρουψ and that these could be cognate with שְׂרָפִים and כְּרוּבִים respectively.⁹⁶ The theory that שְׂרָפִים derives from Egyptian is not a new one.⁹⁷ However, in order for this theory to be accepted two assumptions have to be made. Firstly, the Seraphim of Isaiah cannot be linked with the other Seraphs mentioned in the Bible. I shall address this issue in Chapter 5. The other assumption is that the etymological direction of travel is from West to East rather than the other way round.

Of the three attempts to link Cherubim and Seraphim this is the most attractive, but it remains unproven and some prior assumptions have to be made for it to work.

Thesis Structure

It is clear from this brief survey that Cherubim and Seraphim are separate subjects. The three attempts to link or equate them have not received widespread support. However, the archaeological record suggests that, even in the ancient world,

⁹² *CAD*, Vol. 8: 559.

⁹³ Freedman and O'Connor, 1995: 309-10.

⁹⁴ Cook, S. A., 1925: 54.

⁹⁵ Wyatt, 2009: 29-39.

⁹⁶ Wyatt, 2009: 31.

⁹⁷ Dillmann, 1890: 55-56; Duhm, 1892: 44-45; Marti, 1900: 64 (Marti also considers whether they were genies); Condamin, 1905: 45; Fullerton, 1907: 127-128. Wade considers it but rejects it in favour of the lightning idea (Wade, 1911: 39). Cf. also Reider, 1937: 94; Gray, G. B., 1949: 105; Barnett, 1957: 74 (cf. Porada, 1959: 93); Wildberger, 1965 Vol. 1: 264-265; Vol. 2: 136-137; Widyapranawa, 1990: 31.

there may have been a link between the two.⁹⁸ Wood's comment that a joint treatment is needed makes the assumption that they are separate entities. I want to trace whether such an assumption is justified.

I shall survey the biblical references for both שָׂרָף and כְּרוּב, beginning with the latter, since it occurs more often. I shall pay particular attention to the internal logic of the text before introducing any archaeological evidence where appropriate. Recent treatments of the Cherubim and Seraphim have focused too much on trying to reconstruct a mental image of a historical reality. My intention here is to see what mental image of these creatures can be reconstructed from the texts themselves, before taking into consideration any plastic evidence. The probability that several of the biblical writers may not have known what the Cherubim looked like themselves justifies this approach.

I shall begin with the treatment of living Cherubim in Ezekiel (Chapter 1) followed by the other animate Cherubim in Psalm 18 and Genesis 3 (Chapter 2). I shall treat the descriptions of the plastic images of Cherubim in the Mosaic Tabernacle and the Jerusalem Temple together in Chapter 3. The Cherubim formula will be addressed in Chapter 4 and the Seraphim in Chapter 5. Naturally there are inherent links between the first four Chapters since they all deal with Cherubim, as well as some potential confusion about whether the figures are animate or not. However, I will be trying to identify what, if any, are the roots of the different treatments to see if any priority can be assigned. The question of the Seraphim and whether they can be identified with the Cherubim will always be in the background but not specifically addressed until the last chapter.

⁹⁸ See below, pp. 186-188.

Chapter 1: Ezekiel's Cherubim

Introduction

Any presentation of biblical Cherubim has to attempt some reasonable explanation of their description in Ezekiel.⁹⁹ These are the most vivid descriptions of them and, if combined with the description of the living creatures in the initial vision of 1: 4-28, they offer more detail than any other references. Unfortunately, these verses present a huge number of problems which have vexed students of the Old Testament for centuries. In this chapter I shall begin by laying out the most fundamental issues. I shall then proceed to look at the different references in more detail, and subsequently offer some suggestions as to how they may be understood in relation to other references to Cherubim elsewhere in the Old Testament. I shall also attempt to shed some light on possible connections with the Seraphim.

Methodological Problems

Textual Difficulties

In 1851, Fairbairn said of the LXX of Ezekiel: "How little confidence can be placed in emendations derived from such a source, no one can need to be told who is in the least degree acquainted with the character of the Septuagint translation generally, and, in particular, with its translation of this book."¹⁰⁰ He treated MT as the definitive text.¹⁰¹ In contrast, Cornill based his entire approach to the book on a reconstruction of the Hebrew text from Greek versions. He was closely followed, for

⁹⁹ Ezek. 9: 3; 10: 1-9, 14-16, 18-20; 11: 22; 28: 14, 16; 41: 18, 20, 25.

¹⁰⁰ Fairbairn, 1851: 15.

¹⁰¹ Fairbairn, 1851: 15-16.

example, by Bertholet,¹⁰² but noted the limitations of his approach stating that scholars were unlikely to unearth an original text.¹⁰³ Cooke's introductory treatment of this question illustrates the complexity of the problem. He makes a detailed list of the differences between MT and LXX.¹⁰⁴ On some occasions he prefers LXX to MT,¹⁰⁵ on others MT to LXX.¹⁰⁶ To complicate matters further he also produces a list of places where he considers LXX to have changed MT.¹⁰⁷ The fact that 28: 16 occurs in all three of these lists shows just how minute some of these judgements are.

It is almost certain that both the MT¹⁰⁸ and LXX¹⁰⁹ textual traditions have undergone considerable development prior to their existing form. Indeed, there may be several versions which pre-date the book in its present form.¹¹⁰ To make matters worse, scholars are divided over the nature of the LXX text itself.¹¹¹ Interestingly for our subject Turner points out that the evidence for several different translators is greater in the more important chapters such as chapters 1 and 10,¹¹² and concludes that the translators showed greater reverence for the text in these places.¹¹³ One cannot argue that either MT or LXX should automatically take precedence.

¹⁰² Bertholet, 1936: 12-13.

¹⁰³ Cornill, 1886: 12.

¹⁰⁴ Cooke, 1936: xli-xliv.

¹⁰⁵ Ezek. 1: 8, 11, 13-16, 20, 23-25b, 27; 10: 12, 14; 28: 16. In this and the following two references only the verses which concern Cherubim and living creatures are cited.

¹⁰⁶ Ezek. 1: 7, 24a; 10: 4, 18a; 28: 16.

¹⁰⁷ Ezek. 1: 4, 7, 20-21, 23; 10: 1, 6-7, 9, 17, 21-22; 28: 16.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Eichrodt on the use of the divine name (Eichrodt: 1959: 9*), but also Zimmerli, 1969: 117* on the Chester-Beatty Pap. 967.

¹⁰⁹ David Halperin's assertion that LXX Ezek. 43: 2-3 is a midrash of Ezek. 1: 24-25 is a good example of the secondary nature of the Greek text, at least in part (Halperin, 1982: 353; cf. also Dijkstra, 1986: 77).

¹¹⁰ Zimmerli, 1969: 116*.

¹¹¹ For a full discussion of the history of this subject cf. McGregor, 1985: 1-19. Those who divided the book into three translations include Schäfers, 1909: 289-291 and Herrmann, 1913: 70-87. McGregor accepts that the single divine name in LXX, κύριος, (cf. Pap. 967) seems to be original, as opposed to the MT double form, אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה (McGregor, 1985: 73-74), but argues that chapters 1-25 and 40-48 are by the same translator (McGregor, 1985: 193-199). Olley is unconvinced and considers the matter inconclusive (Olley, 2009: 15-16).

¹¹² Turner, N., 1956: 17-20.

¹¹³ Turner, N., 1956: 23.

Consequently, the reader might legitimately consider MT superior in one place and LXX in another. However, the judgement either way will be made using other criteria.

What Sort of Material is It?

Unfortunately, the nature of the content makes the search for such criteria still more difficult. Ezekiel is a book unlike any other. While Keil could point to a uniform system throughout the book,¹¹⁴ von Orelli emphasised the multiplicity of genres.¹¹⁵ Skinner said the book was full of free invention,¹¹⁶ and Davidson considered that “in Ezekiel we have a peculiar mind”,¹¹⁷ Broome, less flatteringly, that his mind was abnormal.¹¹⁸ Eichrodt described Ezekiel as an intellectual and multi-faceted poet¹¹⁹ who introduced surprising new ideas.¹²⁰ His vocabulary is unusual and there are many *hapax legomena*.¹²¹ This, in turn, makes any argument about the general nature of Ezekiel’s Hebrew potentially unsafe.¹²² Conversely, Stalker notes, while discussing how much the Temple was at the forefront of the writer’s mind,¹²³ that his style was prosaic with “little of invention or originality”.¹²⁴ For the purpose of this discussion,

¹¹⁴ “Die Anlage und Gliederung der einzelnen Teile nach einem bestimmten, überall durchsichtigen Plane und die Einrahmung der Visionen und Gerichts- und Heilsverkündigungen durch Überschriften und Einleitungsformeln ist durch das ganze Buch gleichmäßig durchgeführt.” (Keil, 1882: 5). Zimmerli points to unified style and form in the book but attributes this to an Ezekiel school (Zimmerli, 1969: 35*-38*).

¹¹⁵ “Im übrigen finden sich in den Sprüchen dieses Propheten alle Gattungen der Bildrede beisammen.” (von Orelli, 1896: 3).

¹¹⁶ Skinner, 1895: 29.

¹¹⁷ Davidson, A. B., 1924: 74.

¹¹⁸ Broome, 1946: 284-286.

¹¹⁹ Eichrodt, 1959: 17*-18*.

¹²⁰ Eichrodt, 1959: 32*.

¹²¹ Zimmerli, 1969: 32*-35*. Freedy acknowledges that some of the glosses which he identified may have been due to Ezekiel’s originality (Freedy, 1970: 130, 148). For further comments on Ezekiel’s originality see Wevers, 1969: 16-22; Brownlee, 1986: xxxiii-xxxv; McKeating, 1995: 13; Block, 1997: 15-17.

¹²² Rooker argues on this line that Ezekiel marks a transition point from early to late biblical Hebrew. Cf. Rooker, 1990: 79, 88, 128, 162-163 with regard to Ezek. 1; 9-11.

¹²³ Stalker, 1968: 25.

¹²⁴ Stalker, 1968: 27.

however, I accept the majority view, that the material in the book of Ezekiel shows a great deal of originality, and that this attitude may well have had an effect on the way in which existing ideas and images about the Cherubim are handled.

If we add to this originality the extra point that chapters 1, 8-11 and 40-48 consist of visionary material there are other potential variables. The significance of the visionary experience is played down by some,¹²⁵ and seen as crucial by others.¹²⁶ Daniel Block, in particular, argued that the emotional state of the prophet was the key to understanding the different textual problems of 1: 4-28.¹²⁷

Possible Editorial Activity

A further question arises. Does a single hand lie behind the book or a

¹²⁵ Berry, 1937: 116; Matthews, 1939: xxxiii.

¹²⁶ Skinner, 1895: 31; Curtis, E. L., 1899: 125; Cooke, 1936: 8, 28; Wevers, 1969: 12; Zimmerli, 1969: 206-209; Vawter, 1991: 63.

¹²⁷ Block, 1988: 428-433.

multiplicity of editors and literary processes?¹²⁸ Once more, the scholarly community has been divided. There is little point in rehearsing the history of the debate here. Duguid provides a useful summary,¹²⁹ although his comment that one should begin with the text “as it stands” before identifying the “tension”,¹³⁰ rather begs the question, “What is the text as it stands?” Joyce similarly describes the futility of using hard and fast rules to dissect the text,¹³¹ and his quotation from Peter Ackroyd is pertinent: “The complexity of the literature and other problems attaching to the book of Ezekiel is such that any discussion ought ideally to be prefaced by a full-scale

¹²⁸ Toy omitted the reference to the Cherub in 10: 7 (Toy, C. H., 1899: 114) and omitted 10: 14-15 entirely from his translation (Toy, C. H., 1899: 14). Kraetzschmar places 10: 4 in parenthesis, as well as 10: 15, with 11: 1-21 interrupting the surrounding material (Kraetzschmar, 1900: 107-118). Karl Marti maintained that the compilation of the whole book could not have been done by Ezekiel because of the abrupt breaking off of the discourse in 3: 15 and 10: 7, in the expansion of the call-vision at 3: 6-21, the lack of order in chapters 4-5 and 44-46 and the purposelessness of the repetition of the cherubim account in chapter 10 (Denio, 1901: 340). Herrmann argued that 1: 6-26 was an insertion (Herrmann, 1924: 14), that 10: 2-6, 8-17 was secondary (Herrmann, 1924: 66-68), as well as the references to the cherubim in 9: 3 and 11: 22-23 (Herrmann, 1924: 69-70). Hölscher saw at least four levels of interpolation (Hölscher, 1924: 77-79). Taylor comments that Hölscher had reversed his opinion about the unity of the book (Taylor, 1969: 17). Cf. also Sprank and Wiese 1926: 55-68, 73. Cooke assigned chapter 1 to the prophet (Cooke, 1936: xxiv), but with a number of glosses (1: 4, 20-21, 23-24), “accidental repetitions” (v. 11 of vv. 8b, 9a; v. 12 of v. 9b, v. 14 of v. 13) and corruptions (Cooke, 1936: 9). He saw 10: 2, 7, 18-20 as original (Cooke, 1936: 111-119). Matthews saw the Cherub references as by a later hand (Matthews, 1939: xxxvi-xxxvii) with a complex editorial process including a Babylonian editor (Matthews, 1939: xlvi). Steinmann removes the reference to the Cherub in 9: 3 as a doublet (Steinmann, 1953: 61), reduces chapter 10 to vv. 2-3, 4-5, 18-19 (Steinmann, 1953: 62) and omits v. 14 from chapter 1 (Steinmann, 1953: 173). Cf. also Fohrer, 1955: x-xii, 7, 9, 11, 13, 53, 56-58; Ellison, 1956: 45; Eichrodt, 1959: 16*, 33*, 1-2, 6. Eichrodt omits all references to the Cherubim in 8-11 (Eichrodt, 1959: 45-54)! Bruno’s textual reconstructions are radical and not based upon a set of rules that can be identified, in addition to his reconstruction of the entire book in metrical form. It is difficult, if not impossible, to justify this approach, especially in the light of textual corruption (Bruno, 1959: 34-46). Howie sees chapter 10 as from an editor with vv. 18-19 as the central theme (Howie, 1962: 31-32). Additionally, cf. Stalker, 1968: 45-49, 94-95; Zimmerli, 1969: 39*, 23-30, 59-70, 237-240; Freedy on the six types of glosses (Freedy, 1970: 129-152); Houk, 1971: 52-54; Garscha, 1974: 250, 254-255; Carley, 1974: 3; Cody, 1984: 26; Hossfeld, 1986: 158-165; Vawter, 1991: 3-5; Biggs, 1996: 4, 30; Sedlmeier, 2002: 49-56. Among those who have argued for unified authorship cf. von Orelli, 1896: 9; Redpath, 1907: xiv. Davidson saw the book as a compositional unity (Davidson, A. B., 1924: ix), though acknowledging the possibility that it is a pseudepigraphon (Davidson, A. B., 1924: xxxii; cf. Becker, 1986a: 145 for a similar conclusion although arguing for multiple redactions). He preferred to see annotations in chapter 10 rather than excising verses altogether (Davidson, A. B., 1924: 74). Cf. also Taylor, 1969: 20; Blenkinsopp, 1990: 8. For a *via media* see Allen, 1994: xxiii-xxiv. Block describes how a theme is introduced, dropped and then expanded later (Block, 1997: 20-25).

¹²⁹ Duguid, 1994: 3-8, especially the diagram on p. 4.

¹³⁰ Duguid, 1994: 8-9.

¹³¹ Joyce, 2008: 8-13. Cf. also Cooke, 1936: 30; Greenberg, 1983: 52.

consideration of the view that is to be adopted.”¹³²

The important question, however, concerns the motivation for one approach or another. Those who have attempted to dissect the text¹³³ have generally sought to make the text more logical,¹³⁴ or to make it fit a preconceived set of criteria, such as the impossibility of Josianic reforms being reversed within a generation¹³⁵ or two of Ezekiel writing oracles against Jerusalem when he was not there.¹³⁶ Recourse to editorial activity is certainly legitimate, but one has to wonder at the competence of the editorial staff whose interventions, according to some, were so manifold that the text ended up bearing hardly any relation to a posited original whatsoever. However, those who have sought to avoid any suggestion of editorial activity leave the impression that some questions are being prejudged.¹³⁷ Barr rightly points out that no hard and fast rule can be made about whether to follow a difficult or an easy reading,¹³⁸ and Avi Hurvitz provides salutary warning: “In other words, what we need above all is a minimum of expansion and a maximum of concentration; a minimum of axioms and a maximum of facts; a minimum of imagination and a maximum of restraint.”¹³⁹ In the light of these textual difficulties my approach to the relationship

¹³² Ackroyd, 1968: 103, quoted in Joyce, 1989: 21.

¹³³ It is generally agreed the first serious attempt at this was by Kraetzschmar (1900), but Hengstenberg had already allowed that 10: 3-5, for instance, was in parenthesis (Hengstenberg: 1869: 87, 89).

¹³⁴ For example, Kraetzschmar wanted to remove the reference to faces at the end of 1: 8 and the beginning of 1: 9, but questioned whether this was an original text, even though it was smoother (Kraetzschmar, 1900: 12). Cf. also Cooke, 1936: 12-15; Wevers, 1969: 40; Zimmerli, 1969: 205-206; Carley, 1974: 63-64.

¹³⁵ Torrey, 1930: 18-23.

¹³⁶ Smith, J., 1931: 23-41; Steinmann, 1953: 15; Brownlee, 1986: xxiii-xxxiii; Pohlmann, 1996: 27-34. For a critique of this view see Wevers, 1969: 26.

¹³⁷ Cf. Joyce’s discussion of this issue (Joyce, 2008: 15-16).

¹³⁸ Barr, 1992b: 216. Barr’s argument is particularly pertinent when approaching something like Fechter’s reconstruction of the relationship between LXX and MT of Ezek. 28: 14 (Fechter, 1992: 166-167), since the rationale for his argument is made insecure.

¹³⁹ Hurvitz, 1982: 19. Cf. Joyce, 2008: 12 for a similar sentiment: “an important safeguard is to draw upon a broad range of evidence, employing wherever possible different criteria side by side.”

between chapter 1 and chapters 8-11 will be appropriately restrained, and both LXX and MT will be seen as distinct textual traditions in their own right.

The internal narrative of the book of Ezekiel indicates that chapters 8-11 post-date chapter 1. The dating seems to indicate that the one post-dated the other by about fourteen months. 8: 1 dates the vision complex in 8-11 to the fifth day of the sixth month in the sixth year. 1: 2 dates the initial vision to the fifth day of an unnamed month in the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin. 1: 1 dates possibly the initial vision¹⁴⁰ to the fifth day of the fourth month of the thirtieth year. Two assumptions can be made, not unreasonably: firstly, that the date in 1: 2 is the same date as 1: 1, being as they are in neighbouring verses, so the month is the fourth month; and secondly, that the sixth year in 8: 2 is also the sixth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin, there being no other suitable candidate to refer to. These two assumptions create a fourteen month gap between the two visions. Internally, 10: 15, 20, 22 also indicate that 1: 4-28 is the root vision.

Early exponents of editorial activity accepted this sequence. Toy harmonises the description on the wheels in 10: 9-22 with that of chapter 1,¹⁴¹ and Kraetzschmar sees 10: 1, 8-17 as a later expansion of the chapter based upon the ground text of chapter 1.¹⁴² According to Herrmann, 8-11 explain the meaning of chapter 1.¹⁴³ However, Hölscher, as part of his radical explanation of the poetic origins of the book, argued that the vision of chapter 1 was secondary, linking the material to the

¹⁴⁰ It may of course refer to the final drafting of the whole book, but the change from first person to third person and back again complicates the issue.

¹⁴¹ Toy, C. H., 1899: 115. Harford takes a similar line, arguing that the differences between 10 and 1 are a sign of editorial activity (Harford, 1935: 58).

¹⁴² Kraetzschmar, 1900: 104-106.

¹⁴³ Herrmann, 1924: 19.

theophany of Sinai (Exod. 24: 10)¹⁴⁴ and the vision of Isaiah (Isa. 6).¹⁴⁵ Also, Sprank and Weise argued that chapter 1 was edited in the light of chapter 10.¹⁴⁶

It is worth noting that some details of Ezekiel’s vision of a new Temple, although not reproduced in 1 Kings, reflect the Solomonic period. The description of the gates (Ezek. 40: 6-16) is very similar to “Solomonic city-gates”¹⁴⁷ at Hazor, Gezer (which had been given to Solomon as a dowry¹⁴⁸) and Megiddo.¹⁴⁹ Some connection with the pre-exilic situation is not unreasonable. Bearing that in mind, and in order to avoid undue speculation about multiple editorial layers, I accept the priority indicated in the narrative, while allowing for possible editorial activity in either place. For the purpose of this exposition I shall treat the basic text of chapter 10 as secondary to the basic text of chapter 1, insofar as the “basics” can be established.

The Four Living Creatures of Chapter 1

Ezekiel 1: 4-14 וַאֲרָא וְהִנֵּה רוּחַ סַעְרָה בָּאָה מִן־הַצָּפוֹן עָנָן
גָּדוֹל וְאֵשׁ מִתְלַקַּחַת וְנִגְהָ לּוֹ סָבִיב וּמִתּוֹכָהּ כְּעֵין הַחֹשֶׁמֶל
מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ: ⁵ וּמִתּוֹכָהּ דְמוֹת אַרְבַּע חַיֹּת וְזֶה מֵרְאִיָּהוּן
דְמוֹת אָדָם לְהִנָּה: ⁶ וְאַרְבַּעַה פָּנִים לְאַחַת וְאַרְבַּע כְּנָפִים
לְאַחַת לָהֶם: ⁷ וְרִגְלֵיהֶם רִגְלֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכַף רִגְלֵיהֶם כַּכַּף רִגְלֵי
עֹגֵל וְנִצְצִים כְּעֵין נְחֹשֶׁת קָלִיל: ⁸ (וַיְדוּ) [וַיְדִין] אָדָם מִתַּחַת
כְּנָפֵיהֶם עַל אַרְבַּעַת רַבְעֵיהֶם וּפְנֵיהֶם וּכְנָפֵיהֶם לְאַרְבַּעַתָּם:
⁹ חִבְרַת אִשָּׁה אֶל־אֲחוֹתָהּ כְּנָפֵיהֶם לֹא־יִסְבוּ בְלִכְתָּן אִישׁ
אֶל־עֵבֶר פָּנָיו יִלְכוּ: ¹⁰ וְדְמוֹת פְּנֵיהֶם פָּנֵי אָדָם וּפְנֵי אַרְיֵה
אֶל־הַיָּמִין לְאַרְבַּעַתָּם וּפְנֵי־שׁוֹר מִהַשְּׂמֹאֵל לְאַרְבַּעַתָּן
וּפְנֵי־נֶשֶׁר לְאַרְבַּעַתָּן: ¹¹ וּפְנֵיהֶם וּכְנָפֵיהֶם פְּרֻדוֹת מִלְמַעְלָה
לְאִישׁ שְׁתֵּים חִבְרוֹת אִישׁ וּשְׁתֵּים מְכֹסוֹת אֶת גּוֹיֵיהֶנָּה: ¹²

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Greenberg, 1983: 50.

¹⁴⁵ Hölscher, 1924: 49; cf. Pohlmann, 1996: 55.

¹⁴⁶ Sprank and Wiese, 1926: 34-37. Cf. previously Redpath, 1907: 5-6 for a similar view. These few references represent a fair summary of opinion on this matter. There is insufficient room here to detail others that are essentially of a similar nature.

¹⁴⁷ Although the tenth-century origin of these gates has been questioned (e.g. Finkelstein, 1990: 109-114), the dating of stratum V at Tel Rehob to 935-898 BCE (Mazar, 1999: 40-41) means that such questions cannot go unchallenged. Either way this may be evidence for Ezekiel’s knowledge of the first Temple.

¹⁴⁸ 1 Kgs. 9: 16.

¹⁴⁹ Howie, 1950: 43-46; Zimmerli, 1969: 352-353.

וַאִישׁ אֶל-עֵבֶר פָּנָיו יִלְכוּ אֶל אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה-שָׁמָּה הַרוּחַ
לָלֶכֶת יִלְכוּ לֹא יִסְבוּ בְּלִכְתָּן: ¹³ וְדַמּוֹת הַחַיּוֹת מֵרְאִיֵּיהֶם
כְּנִחְלֵי-אֵשׁ בְּעֵרוֹת כְּמֵרְאֵה הַלְּפָדִים הִיא מִתְהַלֶּכֶת בֵּין
הַחַיּוֹת וְנִגְהָ לְאֵשׁ וּמִן-הָאֵשׁ יוֹצֵא בָרָק: ¹⁴ וְהַחַיּוֹת רָצוּא
וְשׁוֹב כְּמֵרְאֵה הַבְּזָק:

Ezekiel 1: 4-14¹⁵⁰ As I looked, a stormy wind came out of the north: a great cloud with brightness around it and fire flashing forth continually, and in the middle of the fire, something like gleaming amber. ⁵ In the middle of it was something like four living creatures. This was their appearance: they were of human form. ⁶ Each had four faces, and each of them had four wings. ⁷ Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the sole of a calf's foot; and they sparkled like burnished bronze. ⁸ Under their wings on their four sides they had human hands. And the four had their faces and their wings thus: ⁹ their wings touched one another; each of them moved straight ahead, without turning as they moved. ¹⁰ As for the appearance of their faces: the four had the face of a human being, the face of a lion on the right side, the face of an ox on the left side, and the face of an eagle; ¹¹ such were their faces. Their wings were spread out above; each creature had two wings, each of which touched the wing of another, while two covered their bodies. ¹² Each moved straight ahead; wherever the spirit would go, they went, without turning as they went. ¹³ In the middle of the living creatures there was something that looked like burning coals of fire, like torches moving to and fro among the living creatures; the fire was bright, and lightning issued from the fire. ¹⁴ The living creatures darted to and fro, like a flash of lightning.

Ezekiel 1: 22-28 וְדַמּוֹת עַל-רֵאשֵׁי הַחַיּוֹת רָקִיעַ כְּעֵין הַקָּרָח
הַנוֹרָא נֹטוּי עַל-רֵאשֵׁיהֶם מְלֻמְעָלָה: ²³ וְתַחַת הַרָקִיעַ
כְּנִפְיֵיהֶם יִשְׁרוֹת אִשָּׁה אֶל-אַחֹתָהּ לְאִישׁ שְׁתֵּים מִכְּסוֹת
לְהִנָּה וּלְאִישׁ שְׁתֵּים מִכְּסוֹת לְהִנָּה אֶת גּוֹיֹתֵיהֶם: ²⁴ וְאֲשַׁמְעַ
אֶת-קוֹל כְּנִפְיֵיהֶם כְּקוֹל מַיִם רַבִּים כְּקוֹל-שֹׁדֵי בְּלִכְתָּם
קוֹל הַמְּלָחָה כְּקוֹל מַחְנֶה בְּעַמּוּדֵם תִּרְפִּינָה כְּנִפְיֵיהֶן: ²⁵
וַיְהִי-קוֹל מֵעַל לְרָקִיעַ אֲשֶׁר עַל-רֵאשֵׁם בְּעַמּוּדֵם תִּרְפִּינָה
כְּנִפְיֵיהֶן: ²⁶ וּמִמַּעַל לְרָקִיעַ אֲשֶׁר עַל-רֵאשֵׁם כְּמֵרְאֵה
אַבְן-סַפִּיר דְּמוֹת כֶּסֶף וְעַל דְּמוֹת הַכֶּסֶף דְּמוֹת כְּמֵרְאֵה
אָדָם עָלָיו מְלֻמְעָלָה: ²⁷ וָאֵרָא כְּעֵין חֲשַׁמּוֹל כְּמֵרְאֵה-אֵשׁ
בֵּית-לָהּ סָבִיב מִמֵּרְאֵה מִתְנַיִו וּלְמַעַלָּה וּמִמֵּרְאֵה מִתְנַיִו
וּלְמַטָּה רְאִיתִי כְּמֵרְאֵה-אֵשׁ וְנִגְהָ לּוֹ סָבִיב: ²⁸ כְּמֵרְאֵה
הַקֶּשֶׁת אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה בְּעֵנֵן בַּיּוֹם הַגֹּשֶׁם כִּן מֵרְאֵה הַנִּגְהָ סָבִיב
הוּא מֵרְאֵה דְּמוֹת כְּבוֹד-יְהוָה וָאֵרָאָה וָאֶפְלַע עַל-פָּנָי
וְאֲשַׁמְעַ קוֹל מְדַבֵּר: ס

Ezekiel 1: 22-28 Over the heads of the living creatures there was something like a dome, shining like crystal, spread out above their heads. ²³ Under the dome their

¹⁵⁰ All English quotations from the Bible are taken from the NRSV unless otherwise stated.

wings were stretched out straight, one toward another; and each of the creatures had two wings covering its body.²⁴ When they moved, I heard the sound of their wings like the sound of mighty waters, like the thunder of the Almighty, a sound of tumult like the sound of an army; when they stopped, they let down their wings.²⁵ And there came a voice from above the dome over their heads; when they stopped, they let down their wings.²⁶ And above the dome over their heads there was something like a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was something that seemed like a human form.²⁷ Upward from what appeared like the loins I saw something like gleaming amber, something that looked like fire enclosed all around; and downward from what looked like the loins I saw something that looked like fire, and there was a splendor all around.²⁸ Like the bow in a cloud on a rainy day, such was the appearance of the splendor all around. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. When I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of someone speaking.

Is The Vision of Chapter 1 Positive or Negative?

Daniel Block provides a helpful, though not exhaustive, list of the problems that face the reader of MT of 1: 4-28.¹⁵¹ Block's thesis that most, if not all, of these problems can be accounted for by the emotional state of the prophet, is a neat explanation.¹⁵²

“We all know from common experience that attempts to describe mental pictures while in a state of high excitement often come out garbled with incomplete sentences, erratic grammar, confused vocabulary, and incoherent structure.”¹⁵³

Block considers the vision in chapter 1 to be garbled because of the emotional state of the recipient, while chapter 10, a year later, is a mature reflection on it.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Block, 1988: 419-425.

¹⁵² Block, 1988: 430-431.

¹⁵³ Block, 1988: 433.

¹⁵⁴ Block, 1988: 431-433; 1997: 89-91.

While Block provides us with a pretty good explanation for the huge number of linguistic and stylistic difficulties in chapter 1 (and, additionally, for the disappearance of at least some of them in chapter 10), he does not address the issue of why the prophet is in such turmoil. Is his emotional state due to excitement or distress?

Allen addresses this question and concludes, following Kraetzschmar¹⁵⁵ and Brownlee¹⁵⁶ and contrary to the scholarly norm,¹⁵⁷ that, for Ezekiel, the vision of chapter 1 is wholly negative.¹⁵⁸ His arguments are persuasive, emphasising the elements in the text which are typical of judgement material.¹⁵⁹ However, the writer's distress might be for a more specific reason.

The prophet's anxiety could be caused by the fact that this vision is of Yhwh who *should* be dwelling in Jerusalem. The departure of Yhwh from the Temple has been caused by the sins of the people there.¹⁶⁰

The Concentric Judgement in Chapters 4-11

In chapters 4-7 there is a series of oracles that picture waves of judgement flowing outwards from the Temple in Jerusalem in concentric circles. The circles represent the actual process of judgement and its effects rather than any literary format of the book. The judgement process begins from the defiled sanctuary in

¹⁵⁵ Kraetzschmar, 1900: 21, n.5.

¹⁵⁶ Brownlee, 1986: 18.

¹⁵⁷ E.g. Howie, 1962: 22-23; Carley, 1974: 19; Craigie, 1983a: 12; Andrew, 1985: 12-16; Hals, 1989: 16.

¹⁵⁸ Allen, 1993: 153-161; 1994: 168.

¹⁵⁹ Allen, 1993: 153-160. Joyce is aware of this debate and initially hedges his bets (Joyce, 2008: 31) before erring on the positive side (Joyce, 2008: 75).

¹⁶⁰ This is why Ezekiel falls on his face (1: 28) and is the subject matter of the material throughout chapters 2-7. Ezekiel is sent to an utterly rebellious house of Israel (2: 1-8; 3: 4-9, 11). The scroll he is given to eat is full of lamentation and woe (2: 9 - 3: 3). The reiteration of the vision (3: 12-13) emphasizes the holiness of Yhwh in the vision that Ezekiel has seen, but there is no sense (yet) of it being in any way a comfort to him. Indeed, his response is complete astonishment and he is dumbfounded for a week (3: 14-15). Ezekiel is reminded of his unpleasant duty (3: 15-21) and again the vision knocks him off his feet (3: 22-23). Furthermore, he is to be bound and silenced (3: 24-27).

Jerusalem, then moves outwards into the city and further outwards into the land and beyond. First Jerusalem itself is depicted in chapter 4 in a prophetic drawing or model, in which the siege of Jerusalem is reenacted. The prophetic theme continues in chapter 5. Jerusalem and its inhabitants suffer under the judgements of famine, pestilence and slaughter (5: 16-17). The key sin of the citizens of Jerusalem, and therefore the centre of the process, is the defilement of the sanctuary (5: 11). The punishments also occur in concentric circles: pestilence and famine in the city, massacre in the surrounding countryside, and exile abroad (5: 12). In the second oracle the circle of judgement moves outwards from Jerusalem to the mountains of Israel (6: 1-3). The sins of the inhabitants are, once again, cultic (6: 3-10), and there is the first note about those who are grieved at what has happened (6: 9). Chapter 7 is also addressed to the mountains of Israel, but the concentric circle has moved outward still further to take in the international form of destruction that will come upon the land.

There are two things to be noted about this series of oracles. Firstly, the concentric circles move outward from Jerusalem, both in terms of the announcement of judgement and the execution of it. The centre of the circles is the Temple, because of the reference to the defilement of the sanctuary (5: 11). Secondly, no distinction is made between the culpability of the inhabitants of Jerusalem and that of the exiles (5: 12). Judgement is upon both of them and the criterion of salvation is whether individuals in either group are grieved or not (6: 9).

At this point in the narrative of the book, Ezekiel receives his second vision (8-11). The two themes of the concentric judgements in response to cultic sin and the attitude of the individual are brought into clearer focus. The cultic sin in the Temple is described in more detail (8: 1-18). The judgement begins in the Temple and moves

outwards into the city (9: 4-7; 10: 1-7). Those who groan and lament at the cultic practices that are going on are spared (9: 4). While the sins of the elders begin in Jerusalem (11: 6), they will be judged outside it (11: 7, 9), and punished at the border of the country (11: 10). Jerusalem starts as the cauldron of judgement (11: 7), but that is no longer the case (11: 11). The judgement moves to the borders of Israel. Ezekiel interprets the final vision of this outward-moving judgement as including the exiles (11: 13).¹⁶¹ There follows the first positive note about the departure of the glory from Jerusalem (11: 16-21): the exiles were included in the judgement, but for them, as for those marked in 9: 4, there is the possibility of salvation. The departure of the glory of the Lord from the Temple now has a positive spin. Unlike his response to the first set of visions (1-3), Ezekiel this time can speak to the exiles straight away, rather than remaining stunned for a week (11: 22-25).

The ripples of judgement circle outwards from the Temple in Jerusalem in chapters 8-11, and 1: 4-28 is the initial crushing presentation of this reality. The whole narrative thread of chapters 1-11 revolves around the announcement of judgement, beginning in the Temple and moving outwards to Jerusalem, the mountains of Israel and on into the exiled community. Ezekiel is paralysed by the process up to the point where he is told that the sanctuary is now mobile (11: 16).¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ Parunak's assertion, that the changes from chapter 1 to chapters 8-11 reflect the change of context from Palestine to Mesopotamia, does not take sufficient account of this conflation in the writer's mind (Parunak, 1980: 66).

¹⁶² Mettinger's assertion that the Kabod does not leave the country (Mettinger, 1982b: 108) fails to take this into consideration. In fact, the dwelling of the Kabod with the exiles could be paralleled with the Tabernacle terminology of the Exodus, a point which Mettinger misses (Mettinger, 1982b: 113-114).

What is the Meaning of “The North”?

However, there is a problem. In 1:4 we are told that the vision comes “from the north”. Scholars have been divided into two camps in their interpretation of this phrase.

Firstly, there are those who see it as a reference to the geographical north.¹⁶³ Keil saw the vision as originating in Jerusalem.¹⁶⁴ He is followed by von Orelli,¹⁶⁵ Fohrer,¹⁶⁶ Andrew¹⁶⁷ and Allen.¹⁶⁸ It seems odd, though, that the God of Israel, who could march across the wilderness (Ps. 68: 8, ET 7), should need to follow a caravan route. Toy, on the other hand, rejects the connection with Jerusalem altogether.¹⁶⁹ Some favoured the idea that this was a natural atmospheric phenomenon which came from the north,¹⁷⁰ or that this was something to do with Ezekiel’s ecstatic disposition.¹⁷¹

The second body of opinion consists of those who see “the north” as the divine dwelling place, Zaphon. In the days before the discoveries from Ras Shamra, Kraetzschmar saw Ezek. 1: 4 as a reference to the mythic north, as in Isa. 14: 13; Ps. 48: 3 (ET 2); Job 37: 22, but questioned why the glory should depart to the east when the home of Yhwh was in the south.¹⁷² He likens the north to the unknown, as in Ezek. 38: 1ff and Jer 1: 14; 4: 6, but equating the home of God with the home of the

¹⁶³ E.g. Cooke, 1936: 10.

¹⁶⁴ Keil, 1882: 35; cf. Roberts, T., 1851: 29-30.

¹⁶⁵ Von Orelli, 1896: 11.

¹⁶⁶ Fohrer, 1955: 7, 12.

¹⁶⁷ Andrew, 1985: 13.

¹⁶⁸ Allen, 1994: 25.

¹⁶⁹ Toy, C. H., 1899: 94.

¹⁷⁰ Taylor, 1969: 54; Greenberg, 1983: 42-43; cf. Lind, 1996: 29, but cf. Brownlee, 1986: 10.

¹⁷¹ Bertholet, 1936: 4.

¹⁷² Bertholet argues similarly that the home of Yhwh was Sinai (Bertholet, 1936: 3).

forces of evil seems odd,¹⁷³ and this argument cancels out the one about the home of God in the south.¹⁷⁴ Redpath takes a similar line,¹⁷⁵ as does Herrmann,¹⁷⁶ while Davidson tentatively links it to Eden.¹⁷⁷ Ellison saw the north as the home of the Mesopotamian gods and that if the Cherubim were based on Babylonian statuary “it simply means that not only has Jehovah defeated the gods of Babylon on their own ground, but has also carried off their servants to be His slaves.”¹⁷⁸

Despite the fact that nowhere else in Ezekiel is Yhwh pictured as dwelling in the north, mythic or otherwise, in the face of such normative usage it is impossible to argue definitively for צפון in anything other than a geographic sense, in which case the reference must be entirely incidental to the central themes of Ezek. 1. However, if the reader suspends judgement for long enough to read the text with Morgenstern’s idea that צפון could be the inner sanctuary in Jerusalem,¹⁷⁹ we find ourselves with a simpler reading of this chapter. Furthermore, if the same sense were applied to a reading of chapters 8 and 9, the force of the cultic sins described in them is intensified, since they would take place, not in some vaguely northern corner of the inner court, but inside the sanctuary itself. This makes the absence of any depiction of

¹⁷³ Fitzpatrick argues (Fitzpatrick, 2004: 107) that the references are deliberately ambiguous, and that the many nations (עַמֵּי רְבִים) are a pun on many waters (מַיִם רְבִים), thus referring to Baal’s seaside abode: “It is at first curious that Yhwh would come from Zaphon rather than Sion, his dwelling. It is unlikely that it is suggesting that Yhwh lived on Mt. Zaphon, the site of Baal’s palace. It is not meant to be a conflated reference to Sion-Jerusalem which in fact lies west of Babylon. Rather, the point is that Yhwh can come from any direction he pleases, even that which is supposed to be the home of the storm deity.” (Fitzpatrick, 2004: 115-116)

¹⁷⁴ Kraetzschmar, 1900: 9.

¹⁷⁵ Redpath, 1907: 4.

¹⁷⁶ Herrmann, 1924: 13.

¹⁷⁷ Davidson, A. B., 1924: 4.

¹⁷⁸ Ellison, 1956: 22.

¹⁷⁹ Morgenstern, 1941: 87. Vawter suggests a similar idea for the “inner Temple” of Ezek. 41: 15 (Vawter, 1991: 193).

the inside of the sanctuary in those chapters understandable, since Yhwh is utterly alienated from it, already standing at the entrance to it at the beginning of the vision (8: 3-4).¹⁸⁰ However, it should be noted that references in chapters 8-9 read equally easily with the understanding of צפון as a compass point. Furthermore in the final vision sequence (40-48) it is impossible to understand צפון as anything other than “the north”. My suggestion here is a speculative one in the name of a simpler reading which may be attractive to some.

Chapter 1: Initial Conclusions

Chapter 1 is a vision of Yhwh driven from the sanctuary in Jerusalem by the cultic sins of the people. A reading of 1: 4 which equates צפון with Jerusalem, the divine dwelling place, is plausible, since it simplifies the reading of the chapter, though this is impossible to substantiate beyond reasonable doubt. Ezekiel is described as initially devastated by Yhwh’s unannounced departure from Jerusalem, since the national disaster goes right to the heart of Israel’s religious life: Yhwh has been made homeless.

The Living Creatures of Ezekiel 1 (MT)

Connections to the Temple Cherubim

It would not be surprising to find references to the Temple Cherubim in this description. The connection is not made straight away, but it is there.¹⁸¹ The wings of the creatures are stretched out like the wings of the Solomonic statues (1: 6). The wings were “spread out upwards” (פָּרְדוֹת מִלְּמַעְלָה).¹⁸² The use of מִלְּמַעְלָה is almost

¹⁸⁰ See below, pp. 56-57.

¹⁸¹ Greenberg plays down the connection because it is not made immediately (Greenberg, 1983: 55).

¹⁸² Ezek. 1: 11.

exclusively linked to descriptions of the Temple,¹⁸³ the Mosaic sanctuary¹⁸⁴ and material that is generally associated with P¹⁸⁵ or from Ezekiel.¹⁸⁶ Of the two remaining references, Jer. 31: 37 is presumably from a priestly background, which leaves Judg. 8: 13 as the only reference that does not have a priestly background, and gives a slightly different meaning to the word anyway. The wheels, although apparently redundant, are reminiscent of the Temple carts (1 Kgs. 7: 27-37).¹⁸⁷ The throne above the creatures could be similar to the role of the Temple Cherubim covering the Ark, Yhwh's footstool.¹⁸⁸ However, the list of differences from the Temple Cherubim is quite long. There are four of them rather than two. They have four wings rather than two.¹⁸⁹ They have four faces, although we are never told the number of faces of the Temple Cherubim. If the wheels are connected to the carts, apart from the mention of Cherubim in the decoration, there is nothing else to connect them. Finally, these are living creatures and not statues or frescos. The prophet could be forgiven for not making the connection straight away. We shall need to turn to chapter 10 for a more considered description of the living creatures, but before we do that we need to note an extra tension in the text, and then look at the LXX treatment of this vision.

¹⁸³ 1 Kgs. 7: 25; 8: 7; 2 Chron. 4: 4; 5: 8.

¹⁸⁴ Exod. 25: 21; 26: 14; 36: 19; 39: 31; 40: 19, 20; Num. 4: 6, 25.

¹⁸⁵ Gen. 6: 16; 7: 20; Josh. 3: 13, 16.

¹⁸⁶ Ezek. 1: 11, 22, 26; 10: 19; 11: 22; 37: 8.

¹⁸⁷ Houk, 1971: 51, who also links the cloud in 10: 3 to the glory filling the Temple in 1 Kgs. 8: 10. Smend points out that the position of the wheels next to the living creatures rather than under them suggests that they do not form a chariot (Smend, 1880: 12-13). Skipwith speculates that there was originally only one wheel representing the wheel of heaven and that Ezekiel introduced another three to make them into the four winds (Skipwith, 1907: 699; cf. Fisch, 1985: 6). Eichrodt takes a different line and relates them to the cart used to carry the Ark during David's reign (Eichrodt, 1959: 54; cf. 1 Sam. 6: 7; 2 Sam. 6: 3). It is interesting to note that this was an emergency situation and that Yhwh's action of leaving the Temple might also be described as requiring emergency transport.

¹⁸⁸ Zimmerli notes, however, that it is never stated that the Cherubim carry the throne (Zimmerli, 1969: 52).

¹⁸⁹ Zimmerli notes that four is significant elsewhere in the book and attributes some of these changes to Ezekiel's originality (Zimmerli, 1969: 53-54, 208). Cf. Carley, 1974: 14.

The Wings of the Living Creatures

Block's list of the textual problems was thorough but not exhaustive. There is tension in the text over the nature of the wings and the way in which they appear static at first and then dynamic later in the chapter. We may assume that the wings were spread anywhere between horizontal, as in the description of the wings of the two Solomonic statues¹⁹⁰ to a high angle so that they are "above". They may even have been vertical, since the normal meaning of פָּרְדּוֹת, here translated as "spread" or "stretched", is "divided, separated". If this is the case it is possible that the creatures were close together if their wings were touching (חִבְרוֹת).¹⁹¹ If the wings are horizontal, then "above" refers to the point where the wings join the body of the animal; in other words, on its back if the body is non-human, and on its shoulders or head if the body is human.¹⁹² At this point the description is static.¹⁹³ It then changes. One pair of wings was loud (1: 24, 25; 3: 13; 10: 5), raised (10: 16, 19; 11: 22) for movement and "let down" (תַּרְפִּינָה) when standing still (1: 24, 25), all of which makes the description of the wings in v. 11 difficult to picture, irrespective of their position. It is difficult to imagine the wings moving while stretching and touching each other. The only other winged creatures which move are the Seraphim in

¹⁹⁰ 1 Kgs. 6: 24, 27; 2 Chron. 3: 11-13.

¹⁹¹ Ezek. 1: 11.

¹⁹² Davidson concluded, following Kraetzschmar, that the wings formed a rectangle (Davidson, A. B., 1924: 6, 9). Torrey concluded that they covered the bodies "all over" (Torrey, 1939: 69-71).

¹⁹³ Taylor sees some tension on this issue with vv. 13-14 where the creatures, if they are equated with the coals of fire and lamps, "dart about" (Taylor, 1969: 56). Greenberg applies the static nature of the wings to the legs also (Greenberg, 1983: 44; cf. Allen, 1994: 30-32 who sees the wings as dynamic in v. 11, though). Andrew denies that they are static (Andrew, 1985: 14).

Isaiah.¹⁹⁴ Could the writer have had them in mind?¹⁹⁵ Given the list of differences from the Temple Cherubim noted above, such a connection is not impossible, but, as with the Cherubim, the differences from the Seraphim make such a connection, at least initially, insecure.¹⁹⁶ If nothing else, these creatures have four wings while the creatures in Isa. 6 had six.¹⁹⁷ Whether referring to the Seraphim or not, this point of tension within the narrative cannot be resolved without recourse to some reworking of the material.

The Living Creatures of Ezekiel 1 (LXX)

So far we have only dealt with MT of chapter 1. The first thing to note about the LXX version is how much neater the narrative is. The second thing is the possible references to the Seraphim.

The Differences from MT

The substantive differences are as follows. In v. 4 the large cloud is in the approaching fire, and the other references to “fire” (MT) are translated as, or altered

¹⁹⁴ Cf. Smend, 1880: 10; Cooke 1936: 11-12.

¹⁹⁵ In both visions Yhwh is enthroned as King above the altar (Skinner, 1895: 33). Cf. also Bertholet, 1936: 12-13. Fohrer sees three sources for the vision: storm theophany, especially Ps. 18: 2; prophetic calling accounts, especially Isa. 6: 3; and the throne chariot tradition (Fohrer, 1955: 8-9). Eichrodt links chapter 1 to the name theology and glory theology of the Ark (Eichrodt, 1959: 22*-23*). Zimmerli believes the Isa. 6 was known to Ezekiel, pointing particularly to the razor imagery which is used in Ezek. 5: 1 and Isa. 7: 20 (Zimmerli, 1969: 128, cf. 67*, 19-21). Cf. also Sedlmeier, 2002: 74.

¹⁹⁶ Fairbairn argued that they were the Seraphim but in a different form (Fairbairn, 1851: 32). I do not agree with Smend who sees a link to Isa. 6: 8 in the voice of the Lord in Ezek. 1: 28 - 2: 1 (Smend, 1880: 17). Von Orelli rejected a connection with the “schlangenartigen Seraphim” (von Orelli, 1896: 12). Herrmann, on the other hand, argued for a connection based upon his understanding that they and the living creatures were humanoid, and that the wings were stretched out for flying (Herrmann, 1924: 15-16). It is interesting to note that Joyce does not make reference to Isa. 6 in his section on earlier traditions (Joyce, 2008: 33-41) but does acknowledge some connections in his treatment of chapter 1 (Joyce, 2008: 70-73).

¹⁹⁷ Kraetzschmar suggested that the reduction from six to four was to fit the linking of the throne-chariot to the four major compass points (Kraetzschmar, 1900: 13). Cooke thought that only four were required because they were not worshipping unlike the Seraphim (Cooke, 1936: 15). Taylor concluded that there were only four wings because they did not need to fly (Taylor, 1969: 55-56). This contradicts the movement described elsewhere, though. Job points out that the throne in Isa. 6 is not mobile (Job, 1983: 15). Brownlee suggests that they did not need the extra pair of wings because they were not in the direct sight of God, being underneath the firmament (Brownlee, 1986: 12).

to, “brightness”, φέγγος. The final phrase “from the heart of the fire” is rendered καὶ φέγγος ἐν αὐτῷ. In v. 7 the feet are feathered,¹⁹⁸ πτερωτοὶ οἱ πόδες αὐτῶν, with wings that were small or insignificant, ἐλαφραὶ αἱ πτέρυγες αὐτῶν.¹⁹⁹ V. 8 omits the detail that there were four wings as well as four faces. That the wings were joined in pairs is absent in v. 9. The apparently redundant reference to their faces at the beginning of v. 11 is absent, while an additional reference to “the four” is included. MT v. 13 is nonsensical: the living creatures have the appearance of fiery objects which move about between the living creatures. LXX tidies this up so that the fiery objects are never equated with the creatures themselves: καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τῶν ζώων ὄρασις ὡς ἀνθράκων πυρὸς καιομένων ὡς ὄψις λαμπάδων συστρεφομένων ἀνὰ μέσον τῶν ζώων καὶ φέγγος τοῦ πυρὸς καὶ ἐκ τοῦ πυρὸς ἐξεπορεύετο ἀστραπή. V. 14, which also implies that the living creatures actually are fiery objects, is entirely absent in LXX.²⁰⁰ In v. 21 LXX omits the first reference to the wheels but this is purely stylistic rather than substantive. V. 22 LXX states that the firmament was above the wings of the living creatures while MT puts it above their heads.²⁰¹ (V. 25 LXX agrees with MT on this point.) V. 23 is a simpler if less clear version of MT but the sense is fundamentally the same, although there is a reference to the flapping of the wings here which is not present in MT.²⁰² V. 24 omits several of the asyndetic phrases noted by Block, only describing the sound of the wings as being like many waters: ὡς φωνήν

¹⁹⁸ Kraetzschmar, 1900: 11.

¹⁹⁹ Halperin puts forward this idea (Halperin, 1982: 353-363), tracing its origins to Palestinian R. Abbahu (ca. A.D. 300): “It is written, Seraphim were standing over him, etc. (Isa 6: 2). With two [wings] he would fly-giving praise. With two he would cover his face - that he might not look at the Shechinah. With two he would cover his feet - that they might not be seen before the Shechinah. As it is written, And the soles of their feet were like the sole of a calf’s foot (Ezek 1: 7); and it is written, They made themselves a molten calf (Exod 32: 8)” (Halperin, 1982: 362).

²⁰⁰ Kraetzschmar sees vv. 13 and 14 as representing two different recensions (Kraetzschmar, 1900: 14-15).

²⁰¹ Cooke, 1936: 19.

²⁰² Cooke, 1936: 19-20.

ὑδατος πολλοῦ. The second mention of the wings being let down is omitted in v. 25.

The pregnant positioning phrase at the beginning of v. 26 is also absent from LXX.

The first asyndetic reference to the appearance of fire in v. 27 is absent from LXX.

The differences in vv. 4, 11, 13, 14, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27 can all be accounted for by a desire to tidy up the text, and, in particular, reveal a dislike on the part of the writer(s) or translator(s) (it does not really matter which or how many) for asyndetism. Charged with the task of reproducing the vision at some distance from a previous account, the translators, or Hebrew editors, would, not unreasonably, have tried to make sense of the emotionally charged account that they had before them. Nevertheless, in doing so, they have shown reverence for the existing text. They have reproduced most, if not all, of the comparative nouns and particles which are crucial to the understanding of the text. They have been faithful to the general thrust of the passage when changing the text in vv. 22-27 and they have changed the text of vv. 15-21 very little.

However, there are a number of differences in the description of the living creatures which are substantive. The total number of wings is omitted in LXX v. 8. The number is given in v. 6, but the translator/editor may have had an ulterior motive for not mentioning it a second time. In v. 7 the legs are described as feathered and with a small pair of wings, presumably additional, given the position.²⁰³ The reference to their being small can only be to explain why they were not included in the original total count of wings in v. 6. The omission of the total count in v. 8 would therefore be deliberate, because the reader of LXX now knows that there are in fact six wings.

²⁰³ This interpretation is dependent upon understanding “feet” as the subject of the adjectives and the relative pronoun in the second half of the verse. This is quite possible, given that the masculine plural noun, ζώων, has not appeared since v. 5.

Two of these six wings cover the bodies,²⁰⁴ two cover the feet, and two are stretched out, presumably for flight, since the creatures rise up from the earth (v. 19). The LXX translators, or the authors of their *Vorlage*, appear to have made a direct connection with the Seraphim of Isa. 6: 2, and have adjusted the text accordingly.

Ezekiel Chapter 1: Conclusions

Chapter 1 presents us with a figure in a state of high anxiety, seeing a vision of Yhwh who should have been dwelling in Jerusalem. I tentatively propose reading $\text{יְהוָה בְּצִפְּוֹן}$ (1: 4) as a reference to the divine dwelling place in Jerusalem, and possibly even to the sanctuary itself. This idea is not proven, and the reference to the heavens being opened in 1: 1 could imply that the heavenly dwelling place is being referred to.

However, if Yhwh dwells separately from the Temple in heaven at the beginning of the book, this introduces a dichotomy in the mind of the reader which is difficult to explain. At the very least the heavenly dwelling should not be so dissociated from the Jerusalem Temple that questions arise as to why the Temple is so central to the later visions of 8-11.

The description of the living creatures is based on the Cherubim of Solomon's Temple but at this stage the recipient of the vision, whether real or literary, has not made that connection, mainly because these are living beings rather than cult objects, and because of the substantial differences in form. In view of that, it is unlikely that any connection to Seraphim would have been intended either, something which would

²⁰⁴ LXX Codex Alexandrinus adds a reference to the wings covering the faces as well as the bodies at v. 23, which makes the reference even clearer (Smend, 1880: 14; Cooke, 1936: 27). Fairbairn argued that 1: 23 shows evidence of six wings (Fairbairn, 1851: 29), but it is not clear to me that there is any reference here to any more than four wings.

be dependent upon a particular understanding of Isaiah's vision anyway. There is some reworking of the vision in the change from a static presentation of the living creatures' wings to a dynamic one. This may be in the light of the description of the relative movement of the wings and wheels together or it may reflect a link to the Seraphim. The LXX writers, however, do make the link with the Seraphim. In an otherwise relatively faithful rendition of chapter 1 (apart from the stylistic and logical housekeeping), the LXX represents a conscious reworking of the description of the living creatures to equate them with the Seraphim of Isa. 6: 2.

The Cherubim of Chapters 8-11

Ezekiel 9: 3 וְכַבֹּד אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נִעְלָה מֵעַל הַכְּרוּב
 אֲשֶׁר הָיָה עָלָיו אֵל מִפֶּתַח הַבַּיִת וַיִּקְרָא אֶל־הָאִישׁ הַלְבָּשׁ
 הַבְּדִים אֲשֶׁר קָסַת הַסֵּפֶר בְּמַתְנִיּוֹ: ס

Ezekiel 9: 3 Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub on which it rested to the threshold of the house. The LORD called to the man clothed in linen, who had the writing case at his side.

Ezekiel 10: 1-9 וַאֲרָאָה וְהִנֵּה אֶל־הַרְקִיעַ אֲשֶׁר עַל־רֹאשׁ
 הַכְּרוּבִים כְּאֶבֶן סַפִּיר כַּמְרָאָה הַמּוֹת כִּסֵּא נְרָאָה עֲלֵיהֶם: ²
 וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־הָאִישׁ לְבַשׁ הַבְּדִים וַיֹּאמֶר בֹּא אֶל־בֵּינֹת
 לַגִּלְגָּל אֶל־תַּחַת לְכְרוּב וּמִלֵּא חֲפָנֶיךָ גַּחֲלֵי־אֵשׁ מִבֵּינֹת
 לְכְרוּבִים וְזָרַק עַל־הָעִיר וַיָּבֹא לְעֵינַי: ³ וְהַכְּרוּבִים עֹמְדִים
 מִימִין לַבַּיִת בְּבֹאוֹ הָאִישׁ וְהֵעֵן מָלֵא אֶת־הַחֲצֵר הַפְּנִימִית:
⁴ וַיֵּרָם כְּבוֹד־יְהוָה מֵעַל הַכְּרוּב עַל מִפְתַּח הַבַּיִת וַיִּמְלֵא
 הַבַּיִת אֶת־הָעָנָן וְהַחֲצֵר מִלֵּא אֶת־נֹגַהּ כְּבוֹד יְהוָה: ⁵ וְקוֹל
 כְּנָפֵי הַכְּרוּבִים נִשְׁמָע עַד־הַחֲצֵר הַחִיצוֹנָה כְּקוֹל אֶל־שֹׁדֵי
 בְּדָבְרוֹ: ⁶ וַיְהִי בַצּוֹתוֹ אֶת־הָאִישׁ לְבַשׁ־הַבְּדִים לֵאמֹר קַח
 אֵשׁ מִבֵּינֹת לַגִּלְגָּל מִבֵּינֹת לְכְרוּבִים וַיָּבֹא וַיַּעֲמֵד אֶצְלֵ
 הָאוֹפֶן: ⁷ וַיִּשְׁלַח הַכְּרוּב אֶת־יָדוֹ מִבֵּינֹת לְכְרוּבִים
 אֶל־הָאֵשׁ אֲשֶׁר בֵּינֹת הַכְּרוּבִים וַיִּשָּׂא וַיִּתֵּן אֶל־חֲפָנֵי לְבַשׁ
 הַבְּדִים וַיִּקַּח וַיֵּצֵא: ⁸ וַיִּרְא לְכְרוּבִים תְּבֵנִית יַד־אָדָם תַּחַת
 כְּנָפֵיהֶם: ⁹ וַאֲרָאָה וְהִנֵּה אַרְבַּעַה אוֹפָנִים אֶצְלֵ הַכְּרוּבִים
 אוֹפֵן אֶחָד אֶצְלֵ הַכְּרוּב אֶחָד וְאוֹפֵן אֶחָד אֶצְלֵ הַכְּרוּב
 אֶחָד וַיִּמְרָאָה הָאוֹפָנִים כְּעֵין אֶבֶן תְּרִשִׁישׁ:

Ezekiel 10: 1-9 Then I looked, and above the dome that was over the heads of the cherubim there appeared above them something like a sapphire, in form resembling a

throne. ² He said to the man clothed in linen, “Go within the wheelwork underneath the cherubim; fill your hands with burning coals from among the cherubim, and scatter them over the city.” He went in as I looked on. ³ Now the cherubim were standing on the south side of the house when the man went in; and a cloud filled the inner court. ⁴ Then the glory of the LORD rose up from the cherub to the threshold of the house; the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of the glory of the LORD. ⁵ The sound of the wings of the cherubim was heard as far as the outer court, like the voice of God Almighty when he speaks. ⁶ When he commanded the man clothed in linen, “Take fire from within the wheelwork, from among the cherubim,” he went in and stood beside a wheel. ⁷ And a cherub stretched out his hand from among the cherubim to the fire that was among the cherubim, took some of it and put it into the hands of the man clothed in linen, who took it and went out. ⁸ The cherubim appeared to have the form of a human hand under their wings. ⁹ I looked, and there were four wheels beside the cherubim, one beside each cherub; and the appearance of the wheels was like gleaming beryl.

Ezekiel 10:14-20 וְאַרְבַּעַה פָּנִים לְאֶחָד פְּנֵי הָאֶחָד פְּנֵי הַכְּרוּב וּפְנֵי הַשְּׁנַי פְּנֵי אָדָם וְהַשְּׁלִישִׁי פְּנֵי אַרְיֵה וְהָרְבִיעִי פְּנֵי-נֶשֶׁר׃ ¹⁵ וַיִּרְמוּ הַכְּרוּבִים הִיא הַחַיָּה אֲשֶׁר רָאִיתִי בְּנֶהְר־כְּבָר׃ ¹⁶ וּבִלְכַת הַכְּרוּבִים יָלְכוּ הָאוֹפָנִים אַצְלָם וּבִשְׂאֵת הַכְּרוּבִים אֶת-כַּנְפֵיהֶם לָרוּם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ לֹא-יִסְבּוּ הָאוֹפָנִים גַּם-הֵם מֵאֲצָלָם׃ ¹⁷ בְּעִמּוּדָם יַעֲמֻדוּ וּבְרוּמָם יִרְוּמוּ אוֹתָם כִּי רוּחַ הַחַיָּה בָּהֶם׃ ¹⁸ וַיֵּצֵא כְבוֹד יְהוָה מֵעַל מִפְתָּן הַבַּיִת וַיַּעֲמֹד עַל-הַכְּרוּבִים׃ ¹⁹ וַיֵּשְׂאוּ הַכְּרוּבִים אֶת-כַּנְפֵיהֶם וַיִּרְוּמוּ מִן-הָאָרֶץ לְעֵינַי בְּצֵאתָם וְהָאוֹפָנִים לְעִמּוּתָם וַיַּעֲמֹד פֶּתַח שַׁעַר בֵּית-יְהוָה הַקֶּדְמוֹנִי וּכְבוֹד אֱלֹהֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל עָלֵיהֶם מִלְמַעְלָה׃ ²⁰ הִיא הַחַיָּה אֲשֶׁר רָאִיתִי תַחַת אֱלֹהֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּנֶהְר־כְּבָר וָאֲדַע כִּי כְרוּבִים הֵמָּה׃

Ezekiel 10: 14-20 Each one had four faces: the first face was that of the cherub, the second face was that of a human being, the third that of a lion, and the fourth that of an eagle. ¹⁵ The cherubim rose up. These were the living creatures that I saw by the river Chebar. ¹⁶ When the cherubim moved, the wheels moved beside them; and when the cherubim lifted up their wings to rise up from the earth, the wheels at their side did not veer. ¹⁷ When they stopped, the others stopped, and when they rose up, the others rose up with them; for the spirit of the living creatures was in them. ¹⁸ Then the glory of the LORD went out from the threshold of the house and stopped above the cherubim. ¹⁹ The cherubim lifted up their wings and rose up from the earth in my sight as they went out with the wheels beside them. They stopped at the entrance of the east gate of the house of the LORD; and the glory of the God of Israel was above them. ²⁰ These were the living creatures that I saw underneath the God of Israel by the river Chebar; and I knew that they were cherubim.

Ezekiel 11: 22 וַיֵּשְׂאוּ הַכְּרוּבִים אֶת-כַּנְפֵיהֶם וְהָאוֹפָנִים לְעִמּוּתָם וּכְבוֹד אֱלֹהֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל עָלֵיהֶם מִלְמַעְלָה׃

Ezekiel 11: 22 Then the cherubim lifted up their wings, with the wheels beside them; and the glory of the God of Israel was above them.

There is not room here to go into all the problems of these four chapters. We have to restrict ourselves to those parts which affect the Cherubim.

Ezekiel 8-11: Some Problems

Ezek. 9:3; 10: 1-4

In 9: 3 the glory of the Lord rises up from a single Cherub to the threshold of the Temple. (LXX has plural Cherubim.)²⁰⁵ At the beginning of chapter 10 the dome is said to be above the head (singular) of the Cherubim (plural). The man dressed in linen is then told to approach a wheel beneath the Cherub (both singular, although not in LXX) and take some fire from between the Cherubim (plural, 10: 2). Once again the glory of the Lord is said to move from the Cherub (singular) to the threshold (10: 4), just as in 9: 3, although the verb “to rise” is different.

Ezek. 10: 5-8

In v. 5 the plural Cherubim at this point may still be seen as separate from both the singular Cherub and the glory of the Lord. Vv. 6-7 confuse the issue, though. In v. 6 the man is again told to approach a wheel, only this time it is between the Cherubim (plural) rather than beneath a single Cherub as in v. 2.

In v. 7 a single Cherub stretches out its hand from between the Cherubim to the fire in between the Cherubim and gives it to the man. The reader no longer knows whether the singular Cherub is separate from the plural Cherubim or one of them.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ For those who see the singular Cherub as distributive cf. Keil, 1882: 101; Kraetzschmar, 1900: 100.

²⁰⁶ Dijkstra argues that if all the references to Cherubim in 10: 2, 6, 7 were genuine there would be a multiplicity of them and he argues for a complex redactional process which introduced them bit by bit (Dijkstra, 1986: 67-76). Abrams traces the more esoteric tradition which identifies the figure on the throne as yet another chief Cherub (Abrams, 1994: 306-316). Strong similarly sees the single Cherub as additional to the four (Strong, J. T., 2000: 87-88). Sedlmeier sees the additional “Cherub” as the throne (Sedlmeier, 2002: 152).

The LXX translator understandably has a completely different reading of the whole verse, making the man the one who takes the fire and not an unidentified Cherub. Unfortunately, the man then appears to give the fire to himself, which is odd, unless God is the subject of vv. 6-7.²⁰⁷

In v. 8 MT then notes that the hand of v. 7 was underneath the wings of the Cherubim. This makes the assumption that the Cherub (singular) of v. 7 is being equated with one of the Cherubim. LXX at this point also refers to the Cherubim in the plural but dissociates this note from the previous verse by making the hand plural so that it cannot be connected with the hand of the man dressed in linen, who according to this version is the subject of the previous verse.

Ezek. 10: 8-9, 14-20; 11: 22

The rest of chapter 10 and 11: 22 are easier to deal with. The Cherubim are consistently plural again. The singular forms are either distributive (10: 9) or refer to one of the four faces (10: 14). The only sting in the tail is the use of the singular phrase **כַּרְבֻּבַיִם אֶחָד** at vv. 15, 20. However, this can be explained in the same way as the singular forms in chapter 1.

Ezekiel 8-11 and the Vision of Chapter 1

Yhwh Has Already Been Driven From the Sanctuary

Clearly the LXX translator has glossed over the problems by treating all the singular Cherubs as representative of all of them or as one of them. Only in 10: 9 does the singular form remain, but there, as we have noted, it is distributive. In doing so, the assumption is made that the singular Cherub is always one of the four. However,

²⁰⁷ Both translations in Olley (Olley, 2009: 89) and *NETS* appear to take the second of these options. Olley notes the problem (Olley, 2009: 293) and that later LXX MSS follow MT and insert a Cherub as the subject.

there is some narrative tension here, because the glory of the Lord moves from the Cherubim to the threshold (9: 3; 10: 4) and then back from the threshold to the Cherubim again (10: 19). In between, the Cherubim rise up without the glory of the Lord on their backs (10: 15). The only possible way to explain the narrative of events here is that the glory of the Lord is independent of the Cherubim, but then we are left with the feeling that the Cherubim are purely for show and essentially redundant.²⁰⁸ An alternative interpretation is to view the references to the Cherub in 9: 3 and 10: 4 as to at least one of the Solomonic statues in the Temple.²⁰⁹ This fits the logic of the vision, in which Yhwh is being driven out of the Temple and the living Cherubim provide his royal transport. The problem with this interpretation is that the glory of the Lord is already outside the sanctuary in 8: 4, in the inner court, and the most natural interpretation of 9: 3 is that the glory moved from the inner court, in which case it would have been nowhere near the Solomonic statues. In fact the reader of chapters 8-11 is never taken inside the sanctuary at all, although it is mentioned enough (8: 6; 9: 6 - מִקְדָּשׁ; 8: 16 – הַיְכָל). All the action takes place in the courts outside the sanctuary, and the surrounding buildings. These outer buildings are called the house (8: 14, 16; 9: 3, 6, 7; 10: 3, 4, 18, 19; 11: 1).²¹⁰ There is one confusing reference, 9: 6. This is to the twenty-five elders standing in front of the Temple facing the rising sun. In 8: 16 it is said that they have their backs to the הַיְכָל. However, in 9: 6 they are between the porch and the altar in front of the house (הַזְקֵנִים אֲשֶׁר לְפָנֵי הַבַּיִת). It appears that on

²⁰⁸ Renz sees this point as undermining any link to the Cherubim formula “enthroned upon the Cherubim” (Renz, 1999: 63).

²⁰⁹ This rabbinic view (*Rosh Hashanah* 31a) was rehearsed in the modern period by Breuer (Breuer, 1921: 53; Patai, 1964: 279; Greenberg, 1983: 198-199; Fisch, 1985: 7; Klein, 1988: 60; Allen, 1994: 151; Block, 1997: 305-306, 319-320). Breuer also omitted any translation of the Merkabah sections of the visions in line with the rabbinic prohibition on the discussion of these details (Breuer, 1921: 5-7, 60-61). For those who identify 9: 3 with the chariot see Smend, 1880: 56.

²¹⁰ Cf. Block, 1997: 326.

this occasion **הַבַּיִת** might be **הַהֵיכָל**. However, if we equate the twenty-five elders of 8: 16 with the twenty-five elders of 11: 1 (see below), their position has moved further away from the sanctuary, and the reference to the house holds good. Throughout this extended vision, Yhwh is not in the sanctuary.²¹¹ The vision reiterates the basic fact from chapter 1: there was no way that the glory of Yhwh could be present in the defiled sanctuary (5: 11). The command now is that the defilement of Jerusalem should begin at the entrance to the sanctuary. The inner and outer courts are to be defiled next (9: 7; 10: 2-3, 7; 11: 1, 7-13), the judgement spilling out into the city and beyond.

A Triple Vision of Judgement

But what of the movement of the glory of Yhwh independently of the Cherubim? This makes narrative sense if we see the glory moving out of the way of the man in linen, so that he can perform the task of collecting the coals from between the Cherubim and beneath the throne.²¹² That solution is simple enough, but how do we account for the fact that the glory rises twice?²¹³ The simplest way of solving this problem is to read the vision complex of chapters 8-11 as several presentations of the same event, namely, cultic sins leading to judgement and the departure of Yhwh.²¹⁴ Once taken to Jerusalem, the prophet sees the glory somewhere in the inner court (8:

²¹¹ Strong interprets the vision in a similar way, though he distinguishes between Yhwh and the glory, stating that it is the glory that is the hypostasis sent out on his behalf to administer judgement, while Yhwh himself remains in the throne room (Strong, J. T., 2000: 86-87).

²¹² Bertholet, 1936: 55; cf. Zimmerli, 1969: 232.

²¹³ For the view that these are two separate incidents see Keil, 1882: 105. Alternatively, that these verses represent the same event see Toy, C. H., 1899: 114. Bertholet (Bertholet, 1936: 52) reconstructed 10: 4, suggesting that the verb **יָרָד** should be read as **יָרַד**, “south”. Certainly, this unusual word occurs frequently enough in Ezekiel (20: 46; 40: 24, 27-28, 44-45; 41: 11; 42: 12-13, 18).

²¹⁴ Not dissimilar to the note about the doubling of Pharaoh’s dream, Gen. 41: 32.

4),²¹⁵ and is shown a series of cultic sins (8: 5-18).²¹⁶ The exact position of these things is not clear, but if we move out of the inner court at all, it is not very far, and we end up back in the inner court by the end of the series. Six agents of destruction appear and stand in the inner court (9: 1-2).

There follow three accounts of the judgement process: 9: 3-11; 10: 1-7;²¹⁷ 11: 1-13,²¹⁸ which prefigure the actual fall of Jerusalem.²¹⁹ In the first two the judgement is initiated by Yhwh giving an order to the linen-clad figure, having risen up from the Cherubim on both occasions (9: 3-4; 10: 2-4).²²⁰ This links the first and second accounts.²²¹ The first and third accounts are linked by the twenty-five elders (9: 6-7; 11: 1-13) and Ezekiel's desperate plea for mercy (9: 8; 11: 13). Ezekiel is seeing the same process of judgement three times. The fact that Ezekiel does not limit his understanding of the visions to the people of Jerusalem, but extends it to include the exiles, shows that he is not recounting a historical narrative. The whole complex is nightmarish and the repetition is rubbing it in. The references to the Cherubim and the movement of the glory of Yhwh are the glue that holds it all together.²²² The extended description of the wheels and Cherubim (10: 8-22) serves merely to link the whole vision to the first one (1: 4-28).²²³

²¹⁵ Sprank and Wiese, 1926: 6, 8, 18.

²¹⁶ There is some confusion about the nature of the hole and the entrance in 8: 8-9, but, whatever is going on here, it is not in the Temple itself since it is in secret.

²¹⁷ This fits with Parunak's double chiasm, 10: 1-7 and 10: 8-22 (Parunak, 1980: 68-69).

²¹⁸ Block sees the third episode, not as a repeat of, but as a resumption of the first (Block, 1997: 357).

²¹⁹ Brownlee, 1986: 152.

²²⁰ Cf. Block, 1997: 320; 2000: 38.

²²¹ Horst also makes this connection. He sees 9: 1-11; 10: 2, 6, 7 as a criminal court sitting in Jerusalem (Horst, 1953: 346-350). 10: 3-5, 18-19a; 11: 22-23 describe the departure of the glory of Yhwh (Horst, 1953: 350-352), while the account is enriched by 8: 2-3a; 10: 1, 8-17, 20-22 (Horst, 1953: 352-354) and framed by 8: 1, 3b; 11: 24 (Horst, 1953: 354-357). Andrew, however, sees the commands as distinct, a massacre followed by a conflagration (Andrew, 1985: 52). This argument is weakened, however, by the fact that the conflagration is never described. Klein also sees 11: 1-13 as a second judgement (Klein, 1988: 63-65).

²²² Lind, 1996: 75.

²²³ Joyce sees the pedantic link in 10: 13, 15, 20 as by the hand of a glossator (Joyce, 2008: 107).

In fact, the three accounts of judgement that we have are really the second, third and fourth in a series of four, the first being the initial vision in chapter 1. Ezekiel's response, as in chapters 1-3, is one of terror and shock (9: 8; 11: 13), but now he understands that Yhwh's mobility enables him to act outside the borders of the land. Yhwh may have left the building and be giving orders in the car park where his sentient throne chariot patiently waits for him, but once he has left the country he can regroup among the exiles and prepare a people to cleanse and bring back in due course. They will build a new Temple in which the new Cherubs will be depicted on the walls (41: 18, 20, 25).

This interpretation hinges on reading the singular Cherub references in MT as distributive,²²⁴ except for 10: 7. This would fit with the way in which singular and plurals are used in chapter 1. It means that LXX's use of the plural in these places is a tidying up exercise and consistent with the intention of MT and therefore respectful of it. The one point where LXX seems to have altered the sense of the text is in 10: 7.²²⁵

The Form of the Cherubim in Ezekiel 8-11

Mesopotamia versus Phoenicia

Various writers have speculated that Ezekiel is influenced by Mesopotamian cultic statuary.²²⁶ If he is, it is purely incidental.²²⁷ While there may be echoes of *kuribi*, there is enough unclarity in the written descriptions for any connection to be no stronger than speculation. A greater case could be made for Egyptian or

²²⁴ Cf. e.g. Becker, 1986a: 144.

²²⁵ *Yoma* 77a says that the cherub hands the coal to the man in order to reduce the effects of the destruction on Jerusalem (Fisch, 1985: 51).

²²⁶ Harper, 1894: 186-187; Zimmerli, 1969: 56.

²²⁷ Allen distinguishes three relevant types of artefact: a pair of creatures carrying a throne, winged men as sky-bearers, two-faced humanoid figures both from Mesopotamia and Megiddo. None fit the description in its totality (Allen, 1994: 27-30, 152-154).

Phoenician artistic influence through the Cherubim of the Solomonic Temple,²²⁸ but, again, the description of chapter 1 is enough unlike the Temple Cherubim for the connection not to have been made straight away.²²⁹ The main driving force behind the descriptions is a cautious,²³⁰ but faithful, attempt to describe an emotionally charged and terrifying pair of visions. The root vision in chapter 1 makes no mention of Cherubim, and it is only upon reflection that this connection is made in chapters 8-10.²³¹

Reflections from Chapter 1

So how has the writer of MT adapted the description of the Cherubim in chapter 10? The equivalent verses are as follows: 10: 1 // 1: 26; 10: 5 // 1: 24; 10: 8 // 1: 8; 10: 14 // 1: 6, 10; 10: 21 // 1: 6, 8; 10:22b // 1: 9b.²³² 10: 1 is substantively the same, but without any mention of the figure on the throne, and the constructions read more easily. In 10: 5 the noise of the movement of the wings is described using only one simile. This is similar to the treatment of the first vision in LXX. 10: 8 tells us

²²⁸ Keil links Ezekiel's vision to both Mesopotamian and Egyptian statuary, but sees the main image behind the vision as the Ark of the Covenant (Keil, 1882: 42). Von Orelli disagrees, rejecting any connection with the sphinx or griffin (von Orelli, 1896: 12). Toy links the imagery to a variety of cultic imagery through the prophet's imagination, but does not discuss the differences and why they should be there (Toy, C. H., 1899: 95-96). Redpath sees inspiration in the Ark and Babylonian *kuribi* as well as linking to the griffin (Redpath, 1907: 3, 44-45). Cf. also Hines, 1923: 64; Herrmann, 1924: 16. Davidson argues for an Akkadian root for the word Cherub, but considers it to have had an independent history in Hebrew culture (Davidson, A. B., 1924: 74). Cooke saw the four faces as Mesopotamian and the eyes covering the wheels as Egyptian (Pfeiffer, 1938: 156). Brunner says that the vision of Ezekiel is God's action to communicate with Ezekiel following the loss of the Temple and using Babylonian imagery (Brunner, 1944: 19-25). Steinmann suggests that Ezekiel coins Cherubim as a new name for the Seraphim based on the *kuribi* that he saw in Mesopotamia (Steinmann, 1953: 175, n.9). Eichrodt links to Phoenician throne imagery and a throne interpretation of the Cherubim formula as well as Ps. 18 and Gen. 3: 24 (Eichrodt, 1959: 6-7). Cf. also Taylor, 1969: 55. Sedlmeier argues for a link to ancient Israelite traditions of storm theophany and in particular the storm imagery in Genesis rather than Mesopotamian imagery, (Sedlmeier, 2002: 80, 82-83, 86-88).

²²⁹ Davidson, A. B., 1924: 73-74.

²³⁰ Brownlee emphasises this aspect of the description with the excessive use of comparitors (Brownlee, 1986: 10), as does Davis (Davis, E. F., 1989: 84-85).

²³¹ For a similar view see Zimmerli, 1969: 108*.

²³² Zimmerli, 1979: 231. This list does not include the equivalent descriptions of the wheels.

that there was a hand under the wings of the Cherubim. In MT this is the hand that gives the coals to the man (10: 7), but in 1: 8 the reading is confused between one hand (*kethibh*) or many hands (*qere*). So far these changes are fairly straight forward. In chapter 10 the writer is calmly cleaning up the hasty description of the first chapter.²³³

Things then get complicated. 10: 14 begins with the exact wording of 1: 6, and then describes the faces. The description is tidier with each face numbered: first, second, third and fourth. This solves the problem of the positioning of the faces in 1: 10 where only the position of the lion (on the right) and the ox (on the left) are noted. It is possible that in 1: 10 the construction means that there are a pair of faces on each side,²³⁴ but while this might work for the first two faces (the man and the lion) the other two are clearly distinguished by the use of a conjunction and the phrase **לְאַרְבַּעַתָּן**.²³⁵ This could be another example of the hasty nature of the description in chapter 1 which the writer has tidied up upon reflection. However, there are yet more problems that the reader faces. The face of the ox has been replaced with that of a “Cherub”. Writers for centuries have taken this as a sign that Cherubim were bovine,²³⁶ and that Ezekiel’s visions were introducing a hitherto unknown form for the Cherubim, namely, three extra faces. Consequently, this verse would be the one point so far in which there was a reference to pre-existing forms. There is still another problem, though. The subject at the end of the preceding verse is the wheels. The

²³³ This is contrary to Smend who argues that the confusions in chapter 10 are due to the ecstatic nature of that vision (Smend, 1880: 48).

²³⁴ Cf. Hutchinson, 1737: 373. Hutchinson’s writings come with a serious health warning since his philological position is fanciful.

²³⁵ Cf. also Fairbairn, 1851: 102; Davidson, A. B., 1924: 72; Brownlee, 1986: 151; Block, 1997: 325 for discussions about the relative position of the prophet.

²³⁶ In the modern period see Skipwith, 1907: 697; Redpath, 1907: 44-45. Bertholet saw it as a gloss referring back to the Cherub of 10: 7 (Bertholet, 1936: 57), Cooke that it was an accident (Cooke, 1936: 117). Block is unwilling to speculate (Block, 1997: 324).

subject of the following verse is the Cherubim. Halperin has suggested that these faces are not in fact the faces of the Cherubim, but those of the wheels which are the earliest description of them as animate beings in what became a standard part of Jewish angelology.²³⁷ Such an introduction at this point would seem unlikely. No other new elements are introduced in the description of this chapter, and the writer points out that the vision is the same as chapter 1. Consequently, although a little awkward, it seems most likely that the faces are those of the Cherubim. The description of the wheels in 10: 9 is always subordinate in the narrative to the Cherubim.²³⁸ Their description interrupts that of the Cherubim and it is made clear in vv. 11, 16, 17 that the wheels were subject to the Cherubim. In the light of this discussion, it is not unreasonable to assume that the writer of 10: 14 believed the Temple Cherubim to have been bovine in at least facial form.²³⁹

Moving on with the description, 10: 21 informs us that there are four faces and four wings to each creature along with human hands (plural) under the wings. This does not necessarily contradict 10: 8 where the singular hand refers back to the agent of movement in 10: 7. However, it may account for the confusion of form in 1: 8 noted above, should that complication have arisen at an editorial stage of chapter 1. Chapter 10 finishes on the note that the Cherubim moved straight forward. This has repeatedly been pointed out (1: 9, 12, 17, 19, 20, 21; 10: 11, 16, 22). The only reason I can think of why this aspect of the Cherubim is so important to the writer is that it reflects the ability of Yhwh to move around anywhere, which underpins the positive

²³⁷ Halperin, 1976: 135-140; Blenkinsopp, 1990: 22. Cf. Calvin, 1849 Vol. 1: 82.

²³⁸ Additionally Eichrodt notes, of course, that the Cherubim are subject to the Spirit (Eichrodt, 1959: 7).

²³⁹ Harper saw the same change in faces as evidence that the vision was based upon Assyrian statuary (Harper, 1894: 186-187).

note struck towards the end of the vision complex.²⁴⁰ In any case, whatever the reason for it, there is continuity between the two chapters. The writer has ironed out some of the confusing verbal expressions, as well as the confusions of gender and number. It is interesting that this desire to neaten the text is shared with that of the LXX, which may indicate a relatively close connection between them.

The Form of the Cherubim in 8-11, Conclusion

Apart from the desire to tidy up the description,²⁴¹ the following points about the presentation of the Cherubim in chapters 8-11 should be noted. They are mobile and dynamic. This reflects the development that has already been noted in chapter 1, only here it is consistent throughout the vision while in the first chapter they were initially static. This dynamism is reminiscent of the Seraphim, but still there is no reason to suppose that the writer had in mind Isaiah's description, anymore than he would have been subject to the artistic influence of cultic imagery from Mesopotamia or elsewhere.

The main conscious reference in these chapters is to the Cherubim of Solomon's Temple, and the replacement of the ox face with the Cherub face in 10: 14 is potential evidence of that influence. While we cannot rule out the influence of Mesopotamian cultic imagery, the emotional impact of the Temple in Jerusalem on the writer would be far greater.

In chapter 1 it was not clear whether the glory of Yhwh referred to the whole

²⁴⁰ Skipwith suggested that it is because they represent the wind which cannot change direction (Skipwith, 1907: 696), Bernheimer that spirits could not go round corners (Bernheimer, 1939: 650, n. 1). In a related interpretation Eichrodt interprets the dome as the firmament of heaven cf. Gen. 1:6 (Eichrodt, 1959: 7-8). Cook takes this further and views the Cherubim as an expression a Jungian archetype, the "quaternary" (Cook, S. L., 2004: 180-182). In chapter 10 they represent the structured universe with God above them and the coals beneath them. They mark the borders around the coals and represent action in a horizontal plane (Cook, S. L., 2004: 182-190). Isaiah's Seraphim, he says, are different because God is in heaven and they are above him (Cook, S. L., 2004: 186).

²⁴¹ Cf. Houk, 1971: 45-48.

vision or just the figure on the throne. This matter is cleared up, since the independence of the glory makes the former interpretation impossible.²⁴² Adopting the former standpoint for chapter 1 would necessitate finding a reason for that change of meaning. It is simpler²⁴³ to adopt an understanding which minimises the number of potential editorial strata.

While it is interesting that this desire to neaten the text and remove such confusions is shared with that of the LXX, the desire in LXX to harmonise with the description of the Seraphim apparently is not. Furthermore there is no evidence in the LXX version that the link with Seraphim was conscious in chapter 10. Indeed, the one point where the LXX might have exploited the link, the hand reaching to get the coals of fire (10: 7),²⁴⁴ is the one point where LXX departs substantially from MT thus making the link less likely. From this it follows, either that the writer of LXX 8-11 did not have the same agenda as the writer of LXX 1, or that it was not of sufficient importance to affect the version at this point.

The Prince of Tyre and the Cherub of Paradise

Introduction

Among the oracles against the nations (Ezek. 25-32) there is a collection of poems about Tyre. Chapter 25 contains a group of short oracles against Ammon, Moab, Edom and Philistia, all Judah's immediate neighbours. The rest of the series comprises two large collections of oracles. The first collection is against Tyre (Ezek.

²⁴² Mettinger sees a development here in the meaning of Kabod theology (Mettinger, 1982b: 107-108, 122-123).

²⁴³ *Contra* Houk, 1971: 45.

²⁴⁴ Smend, 1880: 59; Bertholet, 1936: 55-56; Taylor, 1969: 106.

26: 1 – 28: 19)²⁴⁵ and the second against Egypt (Ezek. 29: 1 – 32: 32). The Tyre collection contains four poems: an oracle of judgement against Tyre (Ezek. 26) followed by a lamentation (Ezek. 27), and then another oracle of judgement against the Prince of Tyre (Ezek. 28: 1-10) similarly with a lamentation for him (Ezek. 28: 11-19).

It is this second lamentation that contains references to a Cherub. In the poem the Prince of Tyre is pictured, like Adam, living in the Garden of Eden before being expelled for hubris. The poem either equates the Prince with a Cherub (MT) or places him with the Cherub in the garden (LXX). Whatever reading we follow, the main question is whether this Cherub has anything to do with the Cherubim already described earlier in the book.

The Prince of Tyre: The Texts

אֱת־כְּרוּב מִמִּשְׁחָ הַסּוּכָה וְנִתְתִּיךָ בְּהַר קָדְשׁ
 אֱלֹהִים הָיִיתָ בְּתוֹךְ אֲבְנֵי־אֵשׁ הַתְּהַלְכֶתָ׃

Ezekiel 28:14 You were a towering cherub which covers;²⁴⁶ I established you; You were on the holy mountain of God; You walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones.

Ezekiel 28: 13-14 ἀφ' ἧς ἡμέρας ἐκτίσθης σύ μετὰ τοῦ χερουβ ἔθηκά σε ἐν ὄρει ἁγίῳ θεοῦ ἐγενήθης ἐν μέσῳ λίθων πυρίνων

Ezekiel 28:14 From the day you were created, I placed you with the cheroub in a holy, divine mountain; you were born in the midst of fiery stones.²⁴⁷

בְּרֹב רַכְלִתְךָ מָלֵא תוֹכְךָ חֲמֹס וְתַחֲטֵא
 וְאַחֲלִלְךָ מִיָּהָר אֱלֹהִים וְאַבְדְּךָ כְּרוּב הַסּוּכָה מִתּוֹךְ אֲבְנֵי־אֵשׁ׃

²⁴⁵ Ezek. 28: 20-23 is a short oracle against Sidon, appropriately placed with the Tyre oracles since the two places were often paired. Ezek. 28: 24-26 is a short editorial addition about the restoration of Israel.

²⁴⁶ My translation, cf. n. 250 below. The rest of the verse is NKJV. NKJV is one of the few modern translations to favour MT.

²⁴⁷ NETS.

Ezekiel 28:16 By the abundance of your trading You became filled with violence within, And you sinned; Therefore I cast you as a profane thing Out of the mountain of God; And I destroyed you, O covering cherub, From the midst of the fiery stones.²⁴⁸

Ezekiel 28: 16 ἀπὸ πλήθους τῆς ἐμπορίας σου ἔπλησας τὰ ταμίειά σου ἀνομίας καὶ ἥμαρτες καὶ ἐτραυματίσθης ἀπὸ ὄρους τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἤγαγέν σε τὸ χερουβ ἐκ μέσου λίθων πυρίνων

Ezekiel 28:16 From the abundance of your commerce you filled your storehouses with lawlessness, and you sinned and were wounded from God's mountain, and the cherub drove you from the midst of the fiery stones.²⁴⁹

The text of Ezek. 28: 14, 16 is difficult.²⁵⁰ The first problem is the feminine pronoun at the beginning of v. 14.²⁵¹ The pronominal suffixes in the verses surrounding it are masculine, as is the second person pronoun in v. 15.²⁵² The LXX reads instead a preposition: μετὰ τοῦ χερουβ. This can easily be produced by repointing אַתָּה to אַתָּה,²⁵³ and the use of a preposition at the beginning of a verse or phrase fits very nicely with v. 13 (בְּעֵדֶיךָ), v. 14b (בְּהֵרֶךָ), v. 14c (בְּתוֹךְךָ), v. 16 (בְּרֵבֶךָ), v. 18 (בְּרֵבֶךָ).²⁵⁴ LXX then has no equivalent of the *waw* before וַיִּנְתְּתִיךָ. It seems that this reading could represent Hebrew *Vorlage* without the *waw*. If there had been a *waw* at this point, we would have expect a *waw* consecutive, there being no other simple

²⁴⁸ NKJV.

²⁴⁹ NETS.

²⁵⁰ Yaron sees Widengren's translation (*The Ascension of the Apostle and the Heavenly Book*, Uppsala: Lundequistska Bokhandeln, 1950 – this book was unavailable to me) as the only one which leaves the MT intact: “Thou wast a cherub, oh, what an anointed of the Shadower, and I placed thee on the holy mountain. A god thou wast, in the midst of stones of fire thou walked.” He rejects this on the basis that Ezekiel would not have called the King of Tyre a god and argues that in no other place are gods in the singular. He further argues in favour of reading with LXX but does not explain how MT came to be created (Yaron, 1964: 29-31).

²⁵¹ Breuer suggests that the feminine form is because the city is female, although he does refer to the other two masculine usages of this form (Breuer, 1921: 228). Stalker proposes keeping the preposition form but making it the indirect object of the final verb of v. 13 and the Cherub the direct object: “to thee I joined the guardian Cherub” (Stalker, 1968: 219). The NEB translation “I set you with a towering Cherub” seems to take a similar line, although making use of both אַתָּה and אַתָּה at the same time!

²⁵² Fechter, 1992: 166.

²⁵³ The earliest reference to this solution which I can find is Sharp, 1755: 187.

²⁵⁴ Cf. Day, 2000: 176, n. 92.

waws in this or the surrounding chapters.²⁵⁵ מְזַשֵׁחַ is a *hapax legomenon* and has no equivalent in LXX. Neither does the rest of the phrase, הַסּוֹכֵךְ.²⁵⁶

LXX offers a different reading of the vocative phrase “O covering Cherub” (כְּרוּב הַסּוֹכֵךְ) from v. 16, making the Cherub the one who casts the Prince out from the stones of fire instead of God being the agent of judgement: ἡγαγέυ σε τὸ χερουβ ἐκ μέσου λίθων πυρίνων. The form of וְאַבְרָךְ is unusual,²⁵⁷ and it is very simple to repoint this form so that the Cherub becomes the subject, וְאַבְרָךְ.²⁵⁸ However, this would lead again to an anomalous simple *waw*. Also the Cherub as the agent of judgement sits awkwardly, though not impossibly, with the subsequent first person verbs of judgement in vv. 17-18: וְאַתְנִיךְ, וְאַוְצֵךְ, וְנִתְחַיֶּךְ, הַשְׁלַכְתִּיךְ and וְאַתְנִיךְ.

The conundrum is further complicated by the second person singular aorist passive verb, ἐτραυματίσθης, “you were wounded,” (28: 16) which treats the verb וְאַחֲלִילְךָ as from *hll* I, “bore, pierce,” instead of the root *hll* III, “pollute, defile, profane”.

²⁵⁵ Although they do occur elsewhere: Ezek. 22: 29; 25: 12; 37: 10; 40: 24 (Johnson, B., 1979: 78-81).

²⁵⁶ Keil sees them as stative constructs (Keil, 1882: 278). While following Toy in seeing the “covering” as a reference to the Solomonic statues, Foote also suggests that there may be other references to this attitude elsewhere but which do not actually mention the Cherubim by name: Ruth 2: 12; Ps. 17: 8; 36: 7; 60: 7 (Foote, 1904: 282-283). Day, 2007: 75-76 disagrees. Bramley-Moore refers to the anointing of kings (Bramley-Moore, 1906: 166). It is interesting to note that Bramley-Moore is familiar with the works of Jane Lead (Bramley-Moore, 1906: 8-9, 197) whose treatments of Cherubim and Seraphim at the end of the seventeenth century were, like his, particularly esoteric. Redpath suggests reading the two words as “extended” and “anointed” and referring to the Mercy Seat (Redpath, 1907: 153). For an explanation of the Akkadian *mašāhu*, (also Aramaic מְזַשֵׁחַ) “measure” for מְזַשֵׁחַ see Smith, J., 1931: 107; Greenberg, 1997: 583 (cf. BDB 603; G-K 423). This may explain Σ (καταμετρούμενος), Vg. (*extentus*) and NEB “towering”. Alternatively, if מְזַשֵׁחַ derives from the Hebrew root, מִשַׁח, this explains θ (κεχρισμένου) and Syr. (e.g. Cooke, 1936: 317, 323; Allen, 1990: 91). Wevers says the article on הַסּוֹכֵךְ is deictic, (Wevers, 1969: 217), suggesting that מְזַשֵׁחַ is a gloss on הַסּוֹכֵךְ, from סוֹךְ, “anoint”.

²⁵⁷ *Piel* imperfect 1st singular with elided א.

²⁵⁸ *Piel* perfect 3rd singular.

There are two possible reasons for the differences between MT and LXX. Either the problems of MT baffled the LXX translator and he reconstructed the entire section as best he could, changing the identity of the Cherub in the process, or the LXX is based upon an independent form of the text which it reflects more accurately.²⁵⁹ The early textual history of either possibility cannot be determined.²⁶⁰ Either way, both the LXX and MT texts are important enough in the tradition for us to take seriously both witnesses. The LXX reads more easily, but MT includes the important, if opaque, phrase, *מִמְּשָׁה הַסּוֹבֵב*.²⁶¹ If following MT, however, the reader needs to explain how the Prince of Tyre can be identified with the Cherub in this context, without resorting to the lazy strategem of treating the whole thing as an extended metaphor!²⁶²

²⁵⁹ Few modern scholars follow MT (Fairbairn, 1851: 311-312; Hengstenberg, 1869: 242-244; Keil, 1882: 278). Barr is the most persuasive (Barr, 1992b: 215-219; cf. also Mettinger, 2007: 87) noting that in MT there are five places where the *kethib* has *אִתּוֹ* but that the *qere* restates it as the normal *אִתּוֹ* (BDB 61b: 1 Sam. 24: 19, ET 18; Ps. 6: 4, ET 3; Job 1: 10; Eccles. 7: 22; Neh. 9: 6) in addition to the two other places where *אִתּוֹ* is masculine (Num. 11: 15; Deut. 5: 27[24]). Barr argues that the strength of the textual tradition in MT and the provenance of unusual forms in this passage bolster the case for MT over LXX, and that, as a result, Tyre is the Cherub and not the first man. Unsurprisingly, Cornill follows LXX (Cornill, 1886: 361-363) Presumably the justification for this is the *qere* readings just noted. Irwin replaces the feminine form of the pronoun with a masculine form (Irwin, 1943: 218). Others who follow LXX include Skinner, 1895: 257-258; Toy, C. H., 1899: 48, 155; Kraetzschmar, 1900: 217; Herrmann, 1924: 183; Davidson, A. B., 1924: 225; Cooke, 1936: 317-318; Eichrodt, 1959: 389-390; Howie, 1962: 62; Craigie, 1983a: 206-207; Fuhs, 1984: 153; Andrew, 1985: 136; Blenkinsopp, 1990: 124; Allen, 1990: 91; Pohlmann, 1996: 390 and Day, 2000: 176-177. Bertholet, while amending the MT to fit LXX, offers a bizarre reconstruction of the text, which is quite unjustified: *אֵת הַכְּרָבִים מְתָקָה סוֹבֵב* (Bertholet, 1936: 149-150). Those who fail to come down one way or the other are Redpath, 1907: 153; Carley, 1974: 190-192; Garscha, 1974: 162-164; Lind, 1996: 237. Hölscher sees 28: 11-19 as one of the few genuine Ezekiel poems, but avoids the complications of the Cherub entirely by translating it as ‘Greif’ v. 14 and ‘Greifen’ v. 16 (Hölscher, 1924: 140-141). Bruno follows the MT for the pointing of the preposition but omits the difficult forms, *מִמְּשָׁה* and *הַסּוֹבֵב* (Bruno, 1959: 126).

²⁶⁰ Patmore comes to a similar conclusion. He favours the idea of a Hebrew text which differed from MT, but accepts the impossibility of identifying what that text was like prior to the second century BCE (Patmore, 2012: 9-14, 169-177, 208-210).

²⁶¹ Greenberg asserts that LXX has misunderstood the complexity of the poem (Greenberg, 1997: 590-591).

²⁶² Keil, 1882: 44. Smend gives some justification for this line of thought by treating the metaphor as sarcastic (Smend, 1880: 220-221; cf. Ellison, 1956: 110-111), a possibility noted above with regard to my translation of 28: 14 MT. Fohrer follows the LXX reading but translates as “Als Kerub” (Fohrer, 1955: 161). Fisch, 1985: 192 translates as “you are a Cherub” but the commentary treats it as “you are compared to a Cherub”.

While there are those who see the text as heavily edited,²⁶³ taking the cautious approach which I adopted earlier, I shall treat both texts as a unity, with any anomalies being accounted for by the unique nature of Ezekiel's writing.²⁶⁴

The Prince of Tyre: Mythical and Literary Background

An Adamic Myth

There have been a number of different approaches to the mythical background of this passage.²⁶⁵ Some link it to Gen. 2-3 because of the Garden of Eden.²⁶⁶ There are obvious thematic connections with Gen. 2-3: the primeval man in the Garden of Eden is cast out, the man acquires knowledge which has sinful consequences,²⁶⁷ the man presumes to overstep the boundary between mortal and divine, and there is a Cherub present.²⁶⁸ For some the Prince of Tyre is the primeval man²⁶⁹ and not a Cherub. Davidson is unhappy that a Cherub, a divine figure, should be created, suggesting that it is one of the sons of God who were there at creation (Job 38: 7).²⁷⁰

²⁶³ Thackeray argued that the two different translations for Tyre was a sign of different hands (Thackeray, 1903: 400): Σορ - 26: 2-4, 7, 15; 27: 2-3, 8; Τύρου - 28: 2, 12, 18. However, the translation is consistent within chapter 28. Similarly, Zimmerli's attempts to shoehorn the text into a preconceived lament form does not help, since he fails to answer why the editors would feel free to depart from the "standard" form when the original author did not (Zimmerli, 1969: 676-680).

²⁶⁴ Eichrodt, 1959: 394; Allen, 1990: 94; Fechter, 1992: 189, 197. Fechter sees the text as basically sound with a chiasmic structure centred around v. 15b/16a (Fechter, 1992: 175, 178, 180-183). Greenberg, similarly, sees a poetic structure underlying a fundamentally original text (Greenberg, 1997: 587-589).

²⁶⁵ Skinner relates it to the Babylonian home of the gods (Skinner, 1895: 257-258).

²⁶⁶ McKenzie, J. L., 1956: 326-327; Block, 1998: 113-114. Cf. May, 1962: 168 who also relates it to Prov. 8. James sees the Cherub as a guardian as in Gen. 3, but of the "magic stones" (James, E. O., 1968: 243). Callender argues that the connection to Gen. 3 makes LXX the original text (Callender, 2000: 178, n. 8), Day that the theme of the originally perfect figure (cf. also Job 15: 7-8 for the surpassing wisdom of the first man) and the presence of the Cherub amounts to conclusive evidence for linking the two passages. He further argues that the expulsion of a Cherub is unique in Jewish thought (Day, 2000: 176).

²⁶⁷ Ezek. 28: 3-5. While many scholars view these verses as secondary (cf. Mettinger, 2007: 90-91), should they be original this would weaken the link between Ezek. 28 and Gen. 2-3.

²⁶⁸ For a recent discussion of the connections between these passages see Mettinger, 2007: 85-98.

²⁶⁹ Hengstenberg, 1869: 533. Hengstenberg justifies his earlier position of following MT by seeing the Cherub as an ideal creature (Hengstenberg, 1869: 242-244). Cf. also Howie, 1962: 62; Cody, 1984: 138.

²⁷⁰ Davidson, A. B., 1924: 226.

Some link the passage to the Mount of Assembly, Zaphon.²⁷¹ Some have focused on the “stones of fire”. They are part of Baal’s abode,²⁷² astral deities²⁷³ or lightning.²⁷⁴ Some have seen combinations of references, such as Bevan, who links it to the worship of the temple at Tyre, and, through that, to Solomon’s Temple.²⁷⁵

The LXX reading of Ezek. 28: 14, 16 makes a stronger connection between this passage and Gen. 2-3 in that the Cherubim there are, if not the actual agents of the expulsion of Adam, at least bound up with it. There are still quite a few differences, though. In Gen. 2-3 the Cherubim are a preventative measure once the expulsion has taken place; in Ezek. 28 (LXX) the Cherub is the one who carries out the sentence. Furthermore, in Ezek 28 (LXX and MT) there is no suggestion that the Prince would ever consider the possibility of trying to get back in again. Other differences in Gen. 2-3 include the lack of a mountain location, the extra characters (Eve, the animals, God appearing in the garden) and the process by which the characters acquire knowledge, as well as the emphasis on disobedience and its consequences.²⁷⁶ If the writer of the MT version of Ezek. 28 knew Gen. 2-3, or an underlying myth, he made some substantive changes. The stronger connections of Ezek. 28 (LXX) with Gen 2-3 might be accounted for by the harmonising agenda, that we have already identified in the first vision of chapter 1.

²⁷¹ A good example of this is Yaron who links Eden to the Temple, and the sanctuary to Mt. Zaphon, as well as the Temple Cherubim to the Cherub of Ezek. 28, but denies that 1:4 refers to the mountain (Yaron, 1964: 41-45).

²⁷² Pope, 1955: 99-101. Cf. Cook, S. L., 2004: 192-194 who links the poem to the Myth of Athtar (KTU 1.6.1).

²⁷³ E.g. Steinmann, 1953: 146-147. Steinmann’s following of LXX reading (Steinmann, 1953: 312) leads him to the conclusion that the Cherubim are the “sons of fire”. Also Eichrodt, 1959: 393; Hanson, 1977: 209. May argued against this interpretation on the grounds of the ubiquity of references to precious stones (May, 1962: 170).

²⁷⁴ Fensham, 1959: 273-274; Day, 2000: 177.

²⁷⁵ Bevan, 1903: 500-505. Cf. also Morgenstern, 1960: 152 for a Tyrian King-God cult. Taylor notes the link to Gen. 2-3 but that there are other references as well (Taylor, 1969: 197). Greenberg sees the debate as inconclusive (Greenberg, 1997: 592).

²⁷⁶ See Mettinger, 2007: 94-97 for a more detailed description of this list.

The High Priest

There are clearly links with some sort of Adamic myth. However, we need also to bear in mind the case for identifying the Prince with the High Priest since, of all the allusions, this seems to be the most detailed.²⁷⁷ We turn to Wilson for a statement of this case. He begins by arguing that vv. 16, 18a, 19 present the Prince as the representative of the city.²⁷⁸ Having discounted other mythical reconstructions as tentative at best, he maintains that Pope's application of the Ugaritic myths about Baal deposing El, even though it is more substantive than the others, does not account for all the details of the poems or for their structure.²⁷⁹ In particular, he points out that the Cherub motif is not found in Ugaritic literature, and the figure seems more human than divine.²⁸⁰ He notes that the list of stones in v. 13 is closely linked to Exod. 28: 17-20; 39: 10-13 (LXX makes the list exactly the same),²⁸¹ and that **מִסְכָּה** refers to the position of the stones in the breastplate of the high priest.²⁸² In v. 12 he links **תְּכַנִּית חוֹתָם** to the seals of Exod. 28: 11, 21, 36; 39: 6, 14, 30. The garden is the Temple in Jerusalem and the Cherub is one of the Cherubim of the Temple.²⁸³ He posits that the poem was originally nothing to do with the Prince of Tyre, but was then attached to a genuine anti-Tyre oracle 28: 1-10. He acknowledges that there is a problem with his thesis, in that the High Priest is not mentioned elsewhere in Ezekiel

²⁷⁷ Cf. Yaron, 1964: 36-38.

²⁷⁸ Wilson, 1987: 212.

²⁷⁹ It should be noted that the speculative nature of Pope's reconstruction of the Baal epic has led to his position about this falling into disfavour. There is no internal evidence from Ugaritic literature to suggest that Baal deposed El (L'Heureux, 1979: 4-7).

²⁸⁰ Wilson, 1987: 213-214.

²⁸¹ Even though the list in MT is not exactly the same, the form of each logion is. Furthermore the combinations of logions (**אֲדָם** + **פִּטְרָה**, **תְּרָשִׁישׁ** + **שֶׁהָם** + **וַיִּשְׁפֹּה**, **סַפִּיר** + **נִפְדָּךְ**) exactly reproduce what is written in Exod. 28: 17-20; 39: 10-13, with the exception of the omission of one copulative *waw*. The most likely explanation for these forms is textual corruption of an originally exact quotation.

²⁸² Wilson, 1987: 214.

²⁸³ Wilson, 1987: 215. It is interesting to note that Mettinger sees traces of Zion-Sabaoth theology in Ezek. 28: 2, 13-14 and the use of **מוֹשָׁב** and **יֵשֵׁב** (Mettinger, 1982b: 27).

and it is not one of his themes.²⁸⁴ If Wilson is correct, the Prince of Tyre is being equated with the High Priest in the Jerusalem Temple, wearing the breastplate with the twelve stones on it and ministering before God. Despite Wilson's reservation about the lack of a High Priest in Ezekiel, the simplest solution is to follow LXX, and see the Cherub as part of the surrounding cultic paraphernalia, one of the gold statues that cover the Ark of the Covenant.²⁸⁵ It should also be noted that the connection to the Temple in Jerusalem in no way precludes a link to an Adamic myth as noted above. The Temple decorations of palm trees and Cherubim provide enough evidence that the Temple itself was seen as an ideal garden.²⁸⁶

This all works with the LXX reading, but not so well with the MT reading. How can a Cherub in the Temple be adorned with the twelve stones from the High Priest's breastplate? There is one text from late antique Judaism which might fit with the MT reading. A first-century CE²⁸⁷ Palestinian²⁸⁸ document, *The Biblical Antiquities* of Pseudo-Philo, described by Goodenough as "inherently dull",²⁸⁹ retells

²⁸⁴ Wilson, 1987: 218.

²⁸⁵ Cf. Yaron, 1964: 39-40 for the idea of the Priest-King.

²⁸⁶ One might also point to the Syrian tradition that identified the Jerusalem Temple Mount as the site of Eden, but this is a much later (Budge, 1927).

²⁸⁷ Most scholars date this work to the first century CE (Cohn, L., 1898: 326-327; James, M. R., 1917: 31-33; Kisch, 1949: 15-19; Dietzfelbinger, 1975: 95-96; Bogaert, Harrington, and Perrot, 1976: 66-74; Harrington, D. J., 1983: 299; Murphy, 1988: 275, 285; 1993: 6, 263). The reference to the destruction of the "place where they will serve me" (19: 7) may be a reference to 70 CE because of its apparent agreement with the date of the conquest of Jerusalem by Titus according to the Talmud (*Taanith* 4: 6; cf. Cohn, L., 1898: 327). The lack of any other reference to the catastrophe of that year implies an earlier date. 32: 3 appears to presuppose familiarity with an active sacrificial cult. Similarly 22: 8 describes the existence of a sacrificial cult "unto this day". Cohn, however, argued that the lack of detailed references to the cult suggested only historical interest in it (Cohn, L., 1898: 325-326). The methodological problems of identifying a particular text with a particular first-century Jewish setting are described by Hadot (Hadot, 1985: 154-159), who plumps for a connection with the Essenes (Hadot, 1985: 159-171). The *terminus a quo* for the book is 135 BCE if the identification of Getal (39: 8) with "Zenon, surnamed Cotylas" (Josephus, *Ant.* 13: 8. 1; *War* 1: 2. 4) is accepted. Levison makes a case for a first-century CE date based on a comparison of the presentation of inspiration in *Bib. Ant.* and first-century Greek and Latin literature (Levison, 1995: 297-329).

²⁸⁸ Harrington, D. J., 1971: 1-17. Harrington's argument is that the text appears to be closer to Lucianic or Proto-Lucianic texts than to MT (Babylonian provenance) or LXX (Egyptian provenance), and is therefore, by a process of elimination, Palestinian. If Harrington is correct, then this text would have been suppressed around 100 CE. Cf. also Dietzfelbinger, 1975: 96.

²⁸⁹ Goodenough, 1951: 395.

the biblical story from Adam to David, and, in the section about Kenaz,²⁹⁰ there is a passing reference to the two Cherubim of the Temple.

And God said to Kenaz, ‘Take those stones and put them in the ark of the covenant of the Lord²⁹¹ along with the tablets of the covenant that I gave to Moses on Horeb; and they will stay there until Jahel,²⁹² who will build a house in my name, will arise, and then he will set them before me upon the two cherubim, and they will be before me as a memorial for the house of Israel.’²⁹³

The twelve stones mentioned are miraculously produced by God and are the stones of the High Priest’s breastplate.²⁹⁴ In this passage Cherubim are given the role of bearing the twelve stones. This tradition is independent of the Aaronite priesthood. In the absence of the High Priest the Cherubim are adorned with the twelve stones. This reference to the Cherubim having this role is unique, but it does raise the interesting question about what was important at a time when there was no High Priest.

Wilson’s reservation about the lack of a High Priest in Ezekiel can be understood if we accept the dating of the Tyre oracles. They are dated to the year after

²⁹⁰ Chapters 25-28; cf. Judg. 3: 9-11 for the biblical background to Kenaz.

²⁹¹ Strangely, Harrington renders the divine name in upper case, as if reading Yhwh in Hebrew. However, since the Latin, *Domini*, (Bogaert, Harrington, and Perrot, 1976: 212) does not render it in upper case, it seems reasonable not to do so in English either.

²⁹² Although this should be Solomon, Harrington suggests that this might be the angel Jael from *Apoc. Abr.* 10: 4, 9. If it refers to Jael the Kenite of Judg. 4-5, then this is a completely unknown temple, in which case the Cherubim are presumably those on top of the Ark of the Covenant.

²⁹³ *Bib. Ant.* 26: 12, Harrington, D. J., 1983: 338.

²⁹⁴ Exod. 28: 17-21, 29. For other parallels of the hiding of the stones cf. *2 Bar.* 6: 4-10; *4 Bar.* 3: 7-14; *Assump. Mos.* 1: 17; *Ant.* 18: 4. 1; *2 Macc.* 2: 4-8 (Murphy, 1993: 124, n. 21).

the fall of Jerusalem (26: 1),²⁹⁵ when the High Priest had been murdered by the Babylonians (2 Kgs. 25: 18, 21). The vessels of the Temple were removed to Babylon, but no mention is made of the High Priest's vestments. Not everything went to Babylon. There is some doubt over what happened to the Ark (Jer. 3: 16),²⁹⁶ and neither the Cherubim themselves nor the High Priest's regalia are specifically listed among the things removed by Nebuchadnezzar.²⁹⁷ Presumably they were destroyed. In *The Biblical Antiquities* we have, at the very least, an example from late antiquity of the Cherubim having the twelve stones of the High Priest's breastplate on them. While *The Biblical Antiquities* is most likely to be dependent on MT of Ezekiel on this point, it can be cited as evidence that this interpretation was accepted in antiquity by at least some. This makes it possible to identify the Prince of Tyre, not necessarily with the High Priest (LXX), but with one of the Cherubim (MT). Additionally, if we accept that the Solomonic Cherubim were among those objects destroyed by the Babylonian army, this unique presentation of a Cherub cast out of paradise is justified. Solomon's Cherubim were cast out of the Temple, never to be returned, just as the Prince/Cherub was evicted from Eden, never to go back; only the frescos of Cherubim are restored in Ezekiel's vision of the reconstructed Temple. It is reasonable to assume that the olive wood statues could have been part of that vision, if they had been seen as sacred or necessary. The writer of Ezek. 28 MT seems to have

²⁹⁵ Two years after the fall if we follow the dating of LXX A.

²⁹⁶ Cooke notes its complete absence from Ezekiel's vision of the Temple (Cooke, 1936: 114). This may well be because in the vision the inside of the sanctuary is never seen. In which case, I can still concur with Day's conclusion that the most likely explanation for the disappearance of the Ark is that it was destroyed by the Babylonians when they sacked Jerusalem (Day, 2005: 261-265), since the vision of the Temple is dated before Jerusalem's destruction, whereas the poems of Ezek. 28 were delivered after it. Mettinger suggests that because the Cherubim were stripped of their gold in 597 and were effectively profaned, they amounted to uninteresting spoil in 586 (Mettinger, 1982b: 61).

²⁹⁷ *Yoma* 21b notes five things that disappeared at this time. The Cherubim were one of the five. The last of the list was the Urim and Thummim, which were kept in the High Priest's breastplate (Exod. 28: 30). The breastplate itself is not mentioned, but as the container for the Urim and Thummin it is not unreasonable to think that it is included with them.

desanctified them and paralleled their fate in a unique depiction of a fallen Cherub in his oracle against the Prince of Tyre.

The Prince of Tyre and the Cherub of Paradise, Conclusion

While the Cherub of this poem derives from both Eden and the Temple, there does not appear to be any direct connection with the living Cherubim of the vision complex. The Cherubim of chapters 8-11 and the Cherub of chapter 28 are two separate lines of interpretation which have the Temple as their source, but there is little or no interaction between them.

Conclusion

It seems, through a cloak of textual issues, that the dominant conceptual image behind the treatment of the Cherubim in Ezekiel is the Jerusalem Temple. Yhwh's absence from that Temple is what drives at least the first eleven chapters of the book. The Temple in Jerusalem is the mythical dwelling place of God and primeval garden paradise which underlies both the visions of 1, 8-11, and the lament over Tyre in 28: 11-19. Ezekiel's Cherubim are Jerusalem Cherubim, but with a twist. His prophetic originality has introduced hitherto unknown features. That the Cherubim were winged, that they were partly bovine, that they possibly formed some sort of throne, was nothing new. Now they have multiple faces, inanimate cult objects have become animate beings, and they are associated with a hubris/nemesis myth of a fallen god,²⁹⁸ something not unknown in Hebrew literature (Gen. 6: 1-4; Ps. 82; Isa. 14: 12-15).²⁹⁹ That they are associated with storm theophany³⁰⁰ and the garden of Eden is also

²⁹⁸ Farquhar demythologises this theme by seeing the Cherub as a representation of humanity's fallen nature (Farquhar, 1878: 41).

²⁹⁹ Greenberg, 1997: 591.

³⁰⁰ Bertholet, 1936: 55 re. 10: 5.

attested elsewhere, but these references, if known to Ezekiel, would be incidental.³⁰¹ It is Yhwh's departure from the Temple in Jerusalem which leads to his entire prophetic ministry, and it is the cult images within that Temple, in particular the Solomonic statues in the sanctuary, that lie behind his living creatures. Their destruction at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar's army may also have been the inspiration for the description of the fallen Cherub in Ezek. 28 MT. Fundamental to this interpretation is the possibility that cult images can lead to visionary and poetic material about live creatures. This process may account for both similarities and differences, but in the discussion of the other biblical texts and their interrelations, the nature of this process is significant. For the author of the early chapters of this book, the transition from physical objects to living beings was hammered out in a traumatic experience. The Babylonian attack and subsequent disaster elicited both vision and poetry.

There is one further point, though. Cherubim are closely associated with coals of fire, **נְחֹלֵי אֵשׁ** (Ps. 18: 13, 14 ET 18: 8, 12, 13 // 2 Sam. 22: 14 ET 13; Ezek. 1: 13; 10: 2-7)³⁰² and stones of fire, **אֲבִי־אֵשׁ** (Ezek. 28: 14, 16).³⁰³ Whether these are judgemental or purgatorial is a matter of debate,³⁰⁴ but not a discussion which is significant for us here, since it is possible for these two ideas to coexist. However, the

³⁰¹ Cf. Smend, 1880: 2-4.

³⁰² Cf. **נְחֹלֵי אֵשׁ** (Ps. 18: 9 // 2 Sam. 22: 9). Vawter's point that the coals serve no purpose in Ezek. 1 (Vawter, 1991: 26-27) may strengthen the case for a link between the vision and the altar in the Temple. Why else would the writer introduce an otherwise pointless image? However, he later suggests that the wheels formed some sort of portable altar of incense, and that a redactor decided to fit the vision of the glory of the Lord to the Ark of the Covenant (Vawter, 1991: 72). Block argues that the coals of fire in 10:7 could not be the altar of incense, because the narrative does not allow that identification (Block, 1997: 322), but it is possible to argue that Ezekiel is seeing some sort of theophanic equivalent of them, much as he is seeing a living equivalent of the Temple Cherubim.

³⁰³ Wilson, 1987: 316; Day, 2000: 177.

³⁰⁴ Block, 1997: 322. Wong (Wong, 2001: 157-179) argues that chapters 8-11 depict a purification process rather than a retributive one, linking the chapters to the purgation of the prophet Isaiah (Isa. 6: 6-7).

coals of fire could link the Cherubim of the sanctuary to the Seraphim of Isaiah.³⁰⁵ The Seraphim are ministers of holy fire, **רִצְפָּה** (Isa. 6: 6),³⁰⁶ which is taken from the altar just as the **גְּהִלֵּי־אֵשׁ** are by the High Priest (Lev. 16: 12). Any conscious link between Ezekiel's Cherubim and the Seraphim is unlikely,³⁰⁷ but the holy fire that links them thematically could be one of the reasons why the LXX translators, or the writers of their *Vorlage*, made the identification later on. Ezekiel's Cherubim are animate beings seen in a prophetic vision which are probably based on cult artifacts. The possibility that this is also the case for Seraphim is a serious one which will need to be considered in Chapter 5.

³⁰⁵ Kraetzschmar, 1900: 14; Bertholet, 1936: 7, 54; Fisch, 1985: 51. (Bertholet also sees a link between 1: 13-14 and Gen. 3: 24. Certainly the fiery sword and the use of the *Hithpael* of **רָלַךְ** would indicate a possible link, but conceptually it is a different idea from the altar coals.)

³⁰⁶ It should be noted that the use of **רִצְפָּה** here is unique. Elsewhere it means some sort of paving stone (2 Chron. 7: 3; Est. 1: 6; Ezek. 40: 17, 18; 42: 3).

³⁰⁷ Joyce's suggestion that the bronze of 1: 7 may suggest Nehushtan (Joyce, 2008: 70) is tempting. It should further be noted that there is a paraphrased citation of Jer. 5: 21 at Ezek. 12: 2 concerning people who have eyes but cannot see and have ears but cannot hear, which itself could be a conscious reference to Isa. 6: 10 (cf. 32: 3 also), but while this may be used as evidence that the writer of Ezekiel was familiar with the Isa. 6 passage, it cannot be used as proof that he identified the Cherubim with the Seraphim.

Chapter 2: Living Cherubim in Genesis 3 and Psalm 18

Introduction

Turning to two passing references to Cherubim in Gen. 3 and Ps. 18 (// 2 Sam. 22), these are treated together in this chapter because, outside Ezekiel, they are the only texts which treat Cherubim as living beings. No assumptions about whether the texts are linked to each other or not is being made, and so I will treat the texts separately before suggesting any possible links between them.

The Cherubim of Gen. 3: 24

When Adam and Eve are ejected from the Garden of Eden, God bars their way to the tree of life with mysterious guardians: Cherubim and some sort of flaming sword. In terms of the biblical narrative this is the earliest reference to Cherubim, and traditionally was understood as the root of the concept in the mind of the Mosaic author.³⁰⁸ Modern critical scholarship reads the verse differently.

Genesis 3: 24
וַיִּגְרֹשׁ אֶת-הָאָדָם וַיִּשְׁכֵּן מִקְדָּם לְגִן-עֵדֶן
אֶת-הַכְּרֻבִים וְאֵת לֶהַט הַחֶרֶב הַמִּתְהַפֶּכֶת לְשָׁמֹר אֶת-דֶּרֶךְ
עֵץ הַחַיִּים: ֵס

Genesis 3: 24 He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life.

³⁰⁸ This traditional reading has even led to speculations about how long the Cherubim stayed where they were (Young, 1966: 163).

The Versions

In MT and LXX of Gen. 3: 24 there are two variant readings. There are minor variations in the versions: some LXX MSS omit the definite article;³⁰⁹ in the Vulgate it is not clear whether “cherubin” is plural or singular, definite or indefinite; at least one Ethiopian MS mentions Seraphim alongside Cherubim.³¹⁰ All of these can be attributed to the nature of the translation or to later interpretations of the text.

However, LXX represents a different and possibly independent reading.

καὶ ἐξέβαλεν τὸν Ἀδάμ καὶ κατώκισεν αὐτὸν ἀπέναντι τοῦ παραδείσου τῆς τρυφῆς
καὶ ἔταξεν τὰ χερουβιμ καὶ τὴν φλογίνην ῥομφαίαν τὴν στρεφομένην φυλάσσειν τὴν
ὁδὸν τοῦ ξύλου τῆς ζωῆς (LXX)

And he cast out Adam and caused him to dwell over against the garden of Delight,
and stationed the cherubs and the fiery sword that turns about to keep the way of the
tree of life. (Brenton, 1851)

In the MT reading the objects of the *Hiphil* verb, **וַיִּשְׁמְרֵם**, are the Cherubim and the **לְהֵט הַחֶרֶב**. LXX has translated this verb **κατώκισεν** with Adam as the object.

There is then another verb, **ἔταξεν**, of which the Cherubim and the **φλογίνην ῥομφαίαν** are the objects. Most commentators favour the MT reading,³¹¹ and the note about the positioning of Adam raises two issues. The first is that the Cherubim’s position in relation to the garden is unknown. The second is that the meaning of **וַיִּשְׁמְרֵם** is given a

³⁰⁹ Wevers, 1974: 95.

³¹⁰ Bodius, 1755: 8, “Et exire Adamum, ac habitare fecit eum ante hortum laetitiae, et praecepit Seraphim ac Cherubim, gladio ignis versatili ut custodirent viam arboris vitae.”

³¹¹ E.g. Cassuto, 1961: 174.

particular sense: “stationed”. For the purpose of the discussion here I shall concentrate on the MT reading, because the assumption that the position of the Cherubim was known affects how to read this verse in relation to other texts. Also, the MT reading opens up other possibilities for the sense of **וַיִּשְׁכֵּן**, although the interpretation given in LXX cannot be ruled out. In the event that LXX represents an earlier reading, it limits the hermeneutical possibilities of Cherubim rather than enhances them, so MT gives the reader, if nothing else, more to talk about.

The Place of the Cherubim in the Narrative

One of the important elements to notice about the Cherubim in this text is their insignificance. Many commentators ignore them altogether.³¹² It is particularly extraordinary that Mettinger ignores them.³¹³ He does not even place them in his list of named characters.³¹⁴ Others simply refer the reader to other biblical references³¹⁵ or

³¹² Dods, 1888: 15-27; Chambers, 1957: 6-9; Renckens, 1959; Westermann, 1971; Todd, 1978: 45-46; Cundall, 1981: 12; Brueggemann, 1982: 40-54; Toy, J., 1989: 16; Baruk, 1990: 16; Armstrong, 1997: 32; Brodie, 2001; Bouter, 2004: 26. It may be argued that many of these commentaries are non-technical and so would be bound to skim over some subjects, but in recent years scholarly commentaries also have ignored the Cherubim: Berrigan, 2006: 57-59; McKeown, 2008: 36-39; Arnold, 2009: 52-75; Reno, 2010: 96-97.

³¹³ Mettinger, 2007: 5-11 surveys approaches to the different trees in the story, but does not mention the Cherubim, while going into some detail about the tree of life. Apart from a passing reference to the textual debate over Cherub in Ezek. 28 (Mettinger, 2007: 87) Cherubim do not form part of Mettinger's discussion. It is possible that this is due to his stance with regard to Cherubim in *The Dethronement of Sabaoth* (Mettinger, 1982b). He distinguishes between the apotropaic role of the Cherubim in the Garden and their role as throne bearers (Mettinger, 1982b: 21), seeing the change from the latter to the former as part of the overall change from throne theology to **כְּבוֹד** and **שֵׁם** theology (Mettinger, 1982b: 51, 87).

³¹⁴ Mettinger, 2007: 29-32.

³¹⁵ Gunkel's preferred link is with Ezekiel and, through him, to the Temple and Tabernacle (Gunkel, 1901: 20-21). Skinner begins from the idea of the personification of cloud, followed by the link to the tree of life, which in turn leads to the Cherubim's appearance in cult centres and then to the Ezekiel material (Skinner, 1912: 90). Banister's descriptions are wholly dependent on the descriptions of the Ark and the Ezekiel passages (Banister, 1924: 128-132). Alter's reading (Alter, 1996: 15) is even narrower, being solely dependent on Ps. 18: 11 (ET 10) Cf. also Ryle, 1914: 59; Forrester-Brown, 1920: 245-246; Sarna, 1989: 375; Turner, L. A., 2000: 20-24.

general theories about Cherubim³¹⁶ with little attempt to explain why Cherubim are mentioned specifically here. Consequently, much of the ink that has been spilt in commentaries on this verse is not relevant to this discussion, consisting as it does of more general comments about Cherubim in other parts of the Bible. Furthermore, suggestions about possible links to archaeological data frequently do not assist in interpreting the Cherubim in this context, with the exception of the connection to the tree of life, which I shall discuss below. Nothing can be derived from this verse about whether the Cherubim were in the form of humans (partly³¹⁷ or otherwise), sphinxes³¹⁸ or griffins,³¹⁹ or whether they are angels,³²⁰ genies³²¹ or the highest form of creation. Etymological comments similarly are imposed upon the reading rather than derived from it.³²² Allegorical interpretation persists into the modern period but does not have a part to play in this thesis.³²³ Likewise Kraemer's psychological reading is interesting,³²⁴ but takes us too far away from the matter in hand, namely trying to assess how this text relates to Cherubim and Seraphim in other parts of the

³¹⁶ König, while acknowledging Assyrian etymology and storm imagery, in the end resorts to the allegory of "der Weltgegenwart Gottes" (König, 1925: 259-260). For general theories that do not specifically touch on Gen. 3: 24 cf. Maher, 1991: 48.

³¹⁷ Fritsch, 1960: 34; Gibson, 1981: 140 (who describes them as half human, half bird)

³¹⁸ Richardson 1953: 78; Knight, 1981: 48; Fox, 1983: 17

³¹⁹ Delitzsch, 1887: 114; Dillmann, 1887: 170; Heinisch, 1930: 133.

³²⁰ E.g. Morgenstern, 1965: 60; Davies, J. D., 1971: 252-254 (this is an essay on angels generally hung on the reference to Cherubim rather than discussing what is distinctive about them).

³²¹ Chaine (Chaine, 1949: 52-53) confidently asserts that the Cherubim are higher types of genies and that there are two of them, one to the right and one to the left of the entrance of the garden.

³²² Dillmann, 1887: 171. Leupold's suggestion that the Cherub derives from a word meaning "brilliant appearance" (Glanzerscheinung) is unusual, but sadly unsupported by any evidence (Leupold, 1942: 183-184). Dockx, unconvincingly, links it to כַּרְיִם by metathesis (Dockx, 1981: 105). For those who link this verse to Akkadian cf. Speiser, 1964: 24; Davidson, R., 1973: 48; Hamilton, 1990: 210. To be fair to the commentators, though, if one of the tasks of a commentator is to provide background information for the reader, the writers referred to here have done their job admirably.

³²³ Hand in hand with allegory I have also ignored the more negative comments of those who wish to dismiss Cherubim as mere human invention (Knight, 1981: 48) or wholly invaluable.

³²⁴ For him the Cherubim are the pictorial embodiment of the actions of the divine court (Kraemer, 1931: 146).

Old Testament. Ancient interpretation, while touched on by some,³²⁵ and followed by others,³²⁶ is outside the scope of this thesis but a subject I hope to return to at a later date.

So what are the issues that are relevant? There are a number of questions which affect how to read this verse. How and why are the Cherubim linked to the tree of life? What is the nature of their task? How do the Cherubim relate to the sword? How do the Cherubim relate to the serpent? What is the meaning of וַיִּשְׁכֵּן? What is the meaning of לְגַן-עֵדֶן מִקְדָּם? How does the verse (and indeed Gen. 2-3 in its entirety) relate to Ezek. 28?

Guardians of the Tree of Life

There are two trees mentioned in Gen. 2-3, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and the tree of life. The two trees could be equated if it were not for Gen. 2: 9 and 3: 22. In Gen. 2: 9 the tree of life is described as the tree in the middle of the garden, and therefore the same as the tree of knowledge, but there is an additional clause which sees the tree of knowledge as a separate tree. In Gen. 3: 22 the tree of life appears to be distinguished from the tree from which the man and woman have eaten, apparently contradicting part of Gen. 2: 9. In the former verse Barr maintains, following Humbert, that פְּרִי-יְשִׁילָח could not include any idea of continuity: “And now, lest he continue to reach out ...”³²⁷ This has been challenged by Stordalen, who cites

³²⁵ Cohn, L., 1892: 29-30; Harl, 1986: 111-112; Basser, 1987: 29. Braude refers to the interesting Rabbinic interpretation that the Cherubim were placed at the garden by God to protect himself from Adam’s blaspheming (Braude, 1962: 269): “R. Tanhuma cites Resh Lakish an Amora of the 2nd century who asserts that even as in Hezekiah’s prayer the God who sits upon the cherubim was invoked by Hezekiah because of Sennacherib’s revilings and blasphemies, so here cherubim had to be placed east of Eden because of Adam’s revilings and blasphemies.” Jervis’ (Jervis, 1993: 243) suggestion that the Cherubim of Gen. 3: 24 are the angels of 1 Cor. 11: 10, because they are referred to as angels in *Apoc. Mos.* 27:1-2, is speculative.

³²⁶ Blocher, 1979: 188-189.

³²⁷ Humbert, 1940: 131; Barr, 1992a: 58; Wood, 2008: 59.

Gen. 45: 11; Exod. 1: 9-10; 33: 3; 1 Sam. 13: 19; 2 Sam. 12: 27-28 as examples of this very phenomenon.³²⁸ Should Stordalen be correct, the possibility remains that the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil are one and the same. However, on closer inspection, some of his examples do not sustain his thesis. There is no sense of continuity in Gen. 45: 11. The *Niphal* verb, תִּנְרַשׁ, which is linked to פָּן, has not occurred before in Genesis and there is no sense in the narrative before this point that Jacob and his sons were already dispossessed. On the contrary, Jacob goes down to Egypt with all that he had, וְכָל-אֲשֶׁר-לוֹ (Gen. 46: 1). The four other occasions of this phrase in Genesis (Gen. 12: 20; 24: 36; 25: 5; 39: 6) all imply a substantial amount of inheritance. Joseph's comment in Gen. 45: 11 is really anticipating the dispossession of the entire Egyptian population (Gen. 47: 13-26), and is intended to show that his family would be protected from this. Similarly the phrase פָּן-אֶכְלֶךָ (Exod. 33: 3) is hardly continuous either. At no point in the Exodus narrative has God actually "consumed" the people of Israel, although he has threatened to do so and, significantly, been placated by Moses (Exod. 32: 10-12). Joab's comment to David that he was about to capture Rabbah of the Ammonites (פָּן-אֶלְכֶר) is not continuous either since it refers to a decisive moment in the battle rather than the on-going siege. The two examples that do imply the prevention of a continuous action are Exod. 1: 9-10 and 1 Sam. 13: 19. However, out of a total of over 130 examples of this construction, this number is slim, and while the possibility of a continuous reading of Gen. 3: 22 is theoretically possible, it is not generally accepted and statistically unlikely. The logic of the story also suggests that Adam and Eve had not already eaten

³²⁸ Stordalen, 2000: 231.

of the tree of life, since then they would have been immortal, and presumably immune to God's curse.

Cherubim and Sacred Vegetation

Whether there are one or two trees,³²⁹ though, does not really affect the Cherubim. They are linked to the tree of life, and this has been enough to get archaeologists excited. Winged sphinxes and other animals appearing with vegetation occur quite frequently in the physical record.³³⁰ Wood correctly points out that the expression "tree of life" does not occur outside Genesis and Proverbs.³³¹ Nevertheless, the imagery of sacred vegetation is ubiquitous in the ancient Near East and could easily have informed the narrative. Particular note should be made of connections with the Gilgamesh Epic, in which Gilgamesh seeks a plant that gives immortality, but is prevented from getting it by a serpent.³³² However, even though Akkadian literature was known in ancient Israel, the writer of Gen. 2-3 was essentially creating a completely new work.³³³

A more reliable tool is to link this passage to other references to Cherubim that also mention vegetation of some sort. Of these there are the following references: 1 Kgs. 6: 29, 32, 35; 7: 36; Ezek. 41: 18, 20, 25. These all refer to the Temple in

³²⁹ Mettinger notes that the existence of two trees, one giving life and the other giving wisdom, fits with the themes in the Adapa Epic. In this epic Adapa receives wisdom but not eternal life, just as Adam and Eve receive one and not the other (Mettinger, 2007: 100-108).

³³⁰ E.g. Vawter, 1957: 54, 71. Petit sees the origins of the Asiatic sphinx in Egypt (Petit, 2011: 19-21) and provides an extensive catalogue of their appearance in association with stylised trees (Petit, 2011: 22-29). He is also the latest scholar to see the imagery of the Garden of Eden and the Temple as a literary equivalent of these (Petit, 2011: 36).

³³¹ Gen. 2: 9; 3: 22, 24; Prov. 3: 18; 11: 30; 13: 12; 15: 4. (Wood, 2008: 57, n. 86.)

³³² Tablet XI, lines 303-310 (George, 2003: 99; cf. Charlesworth, 2010: 294-296). Charlesworth also notes the connection with the *huluppu* tree on tablet XII (Charlesworth, 2010: 295). Cf. Heinisch, 1930: 133; Day, 1996: 236. Day has also made a strong case for the dependence of Eccles. 9: 7-9 on Gilgamesh (Day, 1995: 59-60).

³³³ Those commentators who have concluded that this verse has specific links with Canaanite or Mesopotamian art and literature include Fripp, 1892: 663; Dillmann, 1887: 170; Holzinger, 1898: 37-39; Albright, 1922: 27; Kraeling, 1947: 289; Richardson 1953: 78; Morgenstern, 1965: 60; Harrington, W. J. 1976: 60; Wenham, 1987: 86. Westermann is reticent to derive the Cherubim of Gen. 3: 24 from Akkadian words (Westermann, 1984: 274).

Jerusalem, either Solomon's or the one from Ezekiel's vision. They all refer to wall reliefs on the inside of the Temple and to the carvings on the doors, apart from 1 Kgs. 7: 36 which refers to the decoration of the bronze stands. It is worth noting what is not mentioned in connection with vegetation: the Ark, the Tabernacle, the Mercy Seat and the two olive wood Cherubim of the Jerusalem Temple. Even though in the Temple there are several Cherubim in the reliefs and carvings combined with several trees as well, the descriptions of the wall and door reliefs are the closest contextual references to Gen. 3: 24, in that the Cherubim are paired up with vegetation of one sort or another, usually palm trees. It would not be unreasonable, therefore, to posit some connection between the Genesis story and the Jerusalem Temple.³³⁴

Concerning Ezek. 28 it is worth noting that, although the Cherub of Ezek. 28: 14 is linked to Eden, the garden of God (Ezek. 28: 12), no trees are mentioned, while gems and precious metal play a more significant role. Trees are mentioned repeatedly in Ezek. 31, and in connection with the Garden of God (vv. 8-9), but it appears that the poet has ignored them in chapter 28. The description of the Eden of the King of Tyre, the mountain of God,³³⁵ has more in common with the mining industry than Sherwood Forest. In respect of the tree of life, the texts that most directly inform our reading of the Cherubim of Gen. 3: 24 are the descriptions of the Jerusalem Temple.

³³⁴ For those who have formerly followed this idea see Anon., 1903: 393. Wenham's comment that the Cherubim have cultic overtones does not acknowledge the relative strength of the connection to the Temple over against the connection to the Tabernacle (Wenham, 1987: 86), but he had previously made a strong case for seeing the Garden of Eden as a sanctuary (Wenham, 1985: 19-25). Amos' simple summary of Cherubim as "fierce winged beasts whose statues originally guarded temples" (Amos, 2004: 26) reflects this conclusion but also must be numbered among the cursory treatments noted above.

³³⁵ Mettinger, 2007: 16 suggests that the flowing rivers of Gen. 2: 10-14 show that Eden was on a mountain. Four "head waters" (Gen. 2: 10) divided from an original source would certainly imply mountain streams, possibly at the western end of the Tigris in the mountains of Armenia.

Cherubim as Boundary Markers

But what is the nature of the Cherubim's task? They are "to keep the way" to the tree of life, לְשָׁמֵר אֶת-דֶּרֶךְ עֵץ הַחַיִּים. Most commentators interpret this as barring the way.³³⁶ A few have tried to see a positive connotation, interpreting their role as showing the way back to the tree of life.³³⁷ However, Gen. 3: 22 clearly implies that the man and woman are being ejected from the garden in order to stop them getting to it. While it is tempting to read into the narrative a potential happy ending, the story as it stands does not suggest this. It is an aetiology of the current human condition, not its future possibilities, and the Cherubim mark the limits of human existence. It is significant that in the list of references to the Temple in Jerusalem, particular attention is paid to the fact that the Cherubim were carved on the doors. Door deities were not unheard of and the door-keeper ritual that seems to lie behind Ps. 24: 7-10 implies that the doors themselves may have been seen as animate guardians. Hamilton links the Cherubim to the Levitical guardians of the Tabernacle (Num 1: 51, 53), since they "keep the charge" (וְשָׁמְרוּ הַלְוִיִּם אֶת-מִשְׁמֶרֶת) of the Tabernacle.³³⁸ One could conceivably extend this idea to the door-keeper role of the Levites in the Chronicler's Temple, but this would be anachronistic and, since the Chronicler has not included the Cherubim in the descriptions of the Temple walls and doors, it is best to assume that no connection is being made. Several commentators have linked this guardian role to Assyrian statues, but the number of logical assumptions that have to be made for this to work make this line of argument tentative

³³⁶ E.g. Von Rad, 1958: 79; Kidner, 1967: 72-73; Dockx, 1981: 105.

³³⁷ Anon., 1851: 31. Goldstein (Goldstein, 1928: 12) took the positive view with the Cherubim representing the Torah. Sacks' reading is an interesting negative twist on this view, since he comments that any attempt to seek a way back to the tree of life would be pagan since, he says, the Cherubim were basically pagan images (Sacks, 1990: 37).

³³⁸ Hamilton, 1990: 210.

at best. The guardian Cherubim has been linked to the serpent. Arnold, following Huidberg, suggests that the serpent represents Baal, one of the guardians of the sacred tree.³³⁹ However there is no evidence that Baal was ever symbolised by a serpent. This is certainly not the role of the serpent as presented in this version of the myth, but, if such an idea were to underlie it, it would be an interesting parallel to the MT version of Ezek. 28 in which it is the guardian Cherub who is punished.

The Cherubim are not the only boundary markers, though. How do the Cherubim relate to the sword? The exact translation of לַהֵט הַחֶרֶב does not affect this discussion.³⁴⁰ The sword appears to be animate, something not unknown in Ugaritic literature.³⁴¹ While the phrase, לַהֵט הַחֶרֶב, is similar to the Phoenician phrase, *ršp ḥs*, “Reshep of the Arrow”,³⁴² any animate interpretation of the sword as some sort of deity alongside the Cherubim is forcing the text.³⁴³ There are several references to God wielding a sword of some sort,³⁴⁴ but in none of them is the sword animate, other than in Zech. 13: 7, but even this is probably only a metaphor. God himself may be the sword,³⁴⁵ but there is no sense of the sword having a life of its own. Three angels appear carrying swords (Josh. 5: 13; Num. 22: 23, 31; 1 Chron. 21: 16, 27), which has led some to imagine that there was a single Cherub wielding the sword outside Eden.

³³⁹ Arnold, 2009: 62-63. Mieke Bal makes a similar assertion, though not related to Baal (Bal, 1985: 35): “If, as many middle-eastern myths have it, the serpent, as the representative of immortality because of its capacity to renew its skin, is God’s helper as the guardian of the tree of life, then our serpent does an excellent job. Also, the serpent with its double tongue, evolving into the dragon with its flaming tongues, may very well be the same creature as the cherubim with flaming sword of Gen. 3: 24.”

³⁴⁰ For a discussion of the semantic possibilities see Wood, 2008: 53-57.

³⁴¹ KTU 1.2 i 32-33; 1.3 iii 45-46.

³⁴² Hendel, 1985: 672-674.

³⁴³ Skinner suggests they may be a pair of wind demons (Skinner, 1912: 90). Cassuto believes that the Cherubim are among those being referred to by the first person singular plural in the divine speech in Gen. 3: 22 (Cassuto, 1961: 172).

³⁴⁴ Deut. 32: 41-42; Ps. 7: 13 (ET 12); Isa. 27: 1; 34: 5-6; 41: 2; Jer. 47: 6 (the sword is addressed here, but it does not make it animate); Ezek. 21: 3-28;

³⁴⁵ Deut. 33: 29

Neither MT nor LXX can be read in that way, though.³⁴⁶ This may also account for those who use military terms, referring to a detachment or phalanx³⁴⁷ of Cherubim. Alternative suggestions include linking the sword to the lightning of Ezek. 1: 13, the “stones of fire” in Ezek. 28, or to the coals of fire noted previously.³⁴⁸ These connections can at best be described as loose or indirect. We are left with a unique image, of Cherubim on the one hand and a moving sword on the other.³⁴⁹ None of the other references to Cherubim associate them with weapons of any kind.³⁵⁰ Indeed, if one assumes a largely bovine form for them, the ability to hold the sword would be problematic,³⁵¹ but since Ezekiel allows for hands in addition to hoofs and wings, anything is possible. The linking of Cherubim with a flaming sword in Gen. 3: 24 is unique.

The Meaning of וַיִּשְׁכַּן

What is the meaning of וַיִּשְׁכַּן? A number of proposals have been made which affect the interpretation of Cherubim. Foote noted that the *Hiphil* of the verb is used at Exod. 24: 16, when Yhwh descends on Sinai.³⁵² It would only be a short mental step to go from this link to the Cherubim of the Ark and the Tabernacle (cf. also Josh. 18: 1). Indeed it has been suggested that, since “Tabernacle” (מִשְׁכָּן) and וַיִּשְׁכַּן share the same root, the cultic paraphernalia is being obliquely referred to. Gunkel suggested that it meant “causing an animal to lie down” (cf. Ezek. 32: 4 of birds) and concluded

³⁴⁶ Cf. Skinner, 1912: 89.

³⁴⁷ Gibson, 1981: 140.

³⁴⁸ See above, pp. 78-79, n. 305, cf. p. 72.

³⁴⁹ The idea, popular in earlier interpretation, that the sword was a Seraph, cannot be entertained (cf. Banister, 1924: 130).

³⁵⁰ Foote’s attempt to link the sword to the lightning of Ezek. 1: 13 and therefore to the Cherubim is forced and only succeeds by ignoring the military imagery (Foote, 1904: 283).

³⁵¹ Wood, 2008: 57.

³⁵² Foote, 1904: 283.

from this that Cherubim were bestial in form.³⁵³ However, the *Hiphil* form is also used of someone's soul (lit. "glory"), Ps. 7: 6 (ET 5), as well as wickedness (Job 11: 14) and the tribes of Israel (Ps. 78: 55). On its own this verb is too broad in meaning to make the connection with any particular object. However, since the Jerusalem Temple is the main controlling idea behind this verse, the use of the verb to denote divine presence and sacred space becomes the most likely possibility. It is going a step too far, though, to link it to the word *shekinah* and to the vision of the throne-chariot, requiring, as that does, a two-stage step, via the Aramaic of later commentary, to get from Genesis to Ezekiel.

There is one more detail to add to this idea. The Cherubim, according to MT, are said to be placed to the east of Eden (מִקְדָּם לְ). Of the two possible meanings of this phrase ("from ancient times",³⁵⁴ "to the East"³⁵⁵) the more likely meaning is "to the East".³⁵⁶ There is no other reference to an entrance to Eden being in any particular direction, so why put one here? Again, there is a clue in the positioning of the doors of the Temple in Jerusalem. These faced East. Just as the Cherubim carved on the Temple doors symbolically guarded the entrance to the East of the sanctuary with its sacred palm trees, so the Cherubim (and the sword) of Gen. 3: 24 guard the way to the garden enclosure and the tree of life from the East. Although one might argue that it is the two Cherubim in the holy of holies who are the primary guardians, they are less equivalent to the Cherubim in Gen. 3: 24 because they are on the inside of the sanctuary while the Eden Cherubim are outside the garden.

³⁵³ Gunkel, 1964: 24.

³⁵⁴ Gawler, 1851: 27-29, cf. e.g. 2 Kgs. 19: 25; Ps. 68: 34 (ET 33); Prov. 8: 20; Isa. 37: 26; 45: 21.

³⁵⁵ E.g. Wood, 2008: 52.

³⁵⁶ LXX apparently renders this phrase, ἀπέναντι, "opposite".

Gen. 3: 24 and Ezek. 28: 11-19

It appears that the strongest clues for interpreting the Cherubim of Gen. 3: 24 point to the Jerusalem Temple. But how does this verse relate to the vexed passage of Ezek. 28: 11-19? I have already argued that both MT and LXX readings of that passage may refer to the defunct olive-wood Cherubim of the Jerusalem Temple. Although in Ezek. 31 the Garden of Eden is identified with Lebanon, this does not rule out the possibility of multiple meanings in Ezekiel. After all, if the royal palace in Jerusalem can be named after Lebanon (“The House of the Forest of Lebanon” – 1 Kgs. 7: 2; 10: 17, 21) why could not some connection with the Temple be made as well? The focus of Ezek. 31 is on the nature of the trees of Eden, which would make a connection with Lebanon quite natural. It has already been noted that there is no mention of trees in Ezek. 28, so a different take on Eden is as work there.

What, though, are the possible literary connections between it and Gen. 2-3? Any answers to this question rest on a number of assumptions. First of all, which version of Ezek. 28: 11-19 is being read, MT or LXX, or is there something that lies behind either or both?³⁵⁷ Secondly, does Gen. 2-3 date earlier or later than the Ezekiel passage? Thirdly, does one text derive from the other, or is there a common nexus of ideas behind the two of them? Firm answers to these questions are highly unlikely, but it may be possible to point out some relative possibilities.³⁵⁸

Because the textual tradition behind both MT and LXX reading of Ezek. 28: 11-19 is complex and opaque, we have to consider both alongside each other as well as potential earlier versions. As to the dating, no version of the Ezekiel passage is

³⁵⁷ It is surprising how many commentators avoid discussion of this issue (E.g. Wenham, 1987: 90; Rogerson, 1991: 65-66; Ruppert, 1992: 167).

³⁵⁸ S. R. Driver concluded that Ezek. 28 (LXX) was based upon more ample traditions about paradise and “the fall” (Driver, 1926: 60-61).

likely to date prior to the sacking of Jerusalem (Ezek. 26: 1), but what of Gen. 2-3? If Gen. 2-3 is a part of Gen. 1-11, or more widely part of the patriarchal narrative in Gen. 12-50, then a pre-exilic date is virtually certain.³⁵⁹ On the other hand there is some debate over the literary integrity of the Eden narrative,³⁶⁰ and the subject matter, the description of the basic human condition, could be applicable to virtually any situation. Nevertheless, if it were argued that Gen. 2-3 post-dated Ezekiel, it would also have to be explained how it found its way into the overall narrative of Genesis. It is simpler to accept the position of the story as it is and treat it as pre-exilic.

So, assuming that Gen. 2-3 ante-dates Ezekiel, theoretically the poet may have been aware of it. However, why would the writer move from a universal story of humanity's condition to the rather more parochial matter of the King of Tyre? Why would he introduce new elements such as the gem stones, and the phrase, "mountain of God"? The originality of Ezekiel has been noted above, but it is very difficult to argue for direct literary dependence on the Eden narrative. There is too much else going on.³⁶¹ It is more likely that some shared nexus of ideas and mythology underpin

³⁵⁹ Nicholson and Emerton make the point that the portrayal of Esau in the patriarchal narrative does not reflect the animosity to Edom following the sacking of Jerusalem (Nicholson, 1998: 159-160; Emerton, 2004: 127). The acceptance of a multiplicity of sanctuaries implies a date prior to the Josianic reforms. While van Seters casts doubt upon the reasons for questioning the pre-exilic dating of this material, his positive arguments for a late date do not close the question either (Van Seters, 1975: 148-153). Indeed, he admits that the question should remain open and avoids it in his later book (Van Seters, 1992: 4-5).

³⁶⁰ I note the possibility that Gen. 3: 23 is secondary to 3: 22, 24 (e.g. Dockx, 1981: 60-61, 62, 64; Westermann, 1984: 271).

³⁶¹ This is reflected in von Rad's conclusions. He believes Gen. 2-3 to ante-date Ezek. 28, but that the Ezekiel passage is a more archaic version of the Eden myth (von Rad, 1958: 79-80), and the same could certainly be said of Job 15: 7-8 (Day, private communication). Cassuto has a similar, if more detailed theory. He sees MT of Ezek. 28 (he does not discuss LXX) as a saga based upon the subsequent expulsion of one of the Cherubs who were placed in the garden of Eden in Gen. 3: 24 (Cassuto, 1961: 81) and sees this as in the same cycle of saga as Gen. 6: 1-4. He links the mention of bdellium and onyx in Gen 2: 11-14 to the stones of the High Priest and Ezek. 28 (Cassuto, 1961: 120), and interprets the task of the man in Eden (Gen 2: 15-16) as service with the sense of guarding because of the use of שומר, concluding that the Torah has "purified" the tradition of this being done by Cherubs and placed a man there instead (Cassuto, 1961: 123). Blocher considers Ezek. 28 to be a free depiction of "the Fall" (Blocher, 1979: 125).

their different literary creations.³⁶² Each writer had a different agenda. Gen. 2-3 is part of a larger narrative about the dispersion of humanity and the beginning and flourishing of evil. Like in Ezekiel, the Jerusalem Temple lies behind Gen. 2-3, but, unlike Ezekiel, the writer of this text was grappling with universal concepts of good and evil, life and death. Both passages assume that the reader knows what Cherubim are,³⁶³ but again, the differences in their presentation make an argument for direct literary dependence unlikely.

Has Ezek. 28 had an effect on the later literary history of Gen. 2-3? Even if we follow LXX and view the Cherub as the agent of expulsion rather than the chief protagonist, this seems unlikely. There is more than one Cherub in Gen. 2-3, and while their role is apotropaic in both, the Cherubim of Gen. 3: 24 have a specific role which is to prevent re-admittance to the garden rather than to effect ejection from it in the first place.

Gen. 3: 24, Conclusion

The reference to Cherubim in Gen. 3: 24 is relatively insignificant. There are small pieces of evidence, though, to show that the most likely concept lying behind the verse is the decoration on the walls and doors of the Temple in Jerusalem. Although anachronistic, the depictions of sphinxes and sacred vegetation in Cleveland's article are the most helpful images for the reader trying to visualize both the Temple Cherubim and those of the Garden of Eden.³⁶⁴ While there is an overlap of mythological data between this passage and Ezek. 28: 11-19, the differences are

³⁶² For this line of thought cf. e.g. Ruppert, 1992: 167.

³⁶³ Cassuto, 1961: 174-175; Sarna, 1989: 30.

³⁶⁴ Cleveland, 1963: 55-60.

substantive enough for the two passages to be largely independent of each other in their conception and execution.

The Cherub of Ps. 18: 11 (ET 10) // 2 Sam. 22: 11

The Texts

Psalm 18: 11 על־כַּנְפֵי־רוּחַ: וַיַּעֲף וַיִּרְאֵהוּ עַל־כְּרוּב וַיִּרְאֵהוּ עַל־כַּנְפֵי־רוּחַ:

2 Samuel 22: 11 וַיִּרְאֵהוּ עַל־כְּרוּב וַיִּרְאֵהוּ עַל־כַּנְפֵי־רוּחַ:

Psalm 18: 10 He rode on a cherub, and flew; he came swiftly upon the wings of the wind.

2 Samuel 22: 11 He rode on a cherub, and flew; he was seen upon the wings of the wind.

Psalm 17: 11 καὶ ἐπέβη ἐπὶ χερουβιμ καὶ ἐπετάσθη ἐπετάσθη ἐπὶ πτερύγων ἀνέμου

2 Samuel 22: 11 καὶ ἐπεκάθισεν ἐπὶ Χερουβιμ καὶ ἐπετάσθη καὶ ὤφθη ἐπὶ πτερύγων ἀνέμου

Psalm 18 (LXX 17) is described as a Psalm of David and linked to deliverance from enemies. It is largely reproduced in 2 Sam. 22 among the appendices to the David cycle. It contains a passing reference to either a Cherub or Cherubim (depending on which version is read), which presents a different image from the ones elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.

וַיִּרְאֵהוּ and וַיִּרְאֵהוּ

There are a number of textual issues which affect our interpretation of this verse. First of all Ps. 18: 11 (ET 10) uses the verb, **וַיִּרְאֵהוּ** (fly swiftly),³⁶⁵ in the second half of the verse, while the equivalent verb in 2 Sam. 22: 11 is **וַיִּרְאֵהוּ** (was seen). It is easy to see how confusion between the two readings could have occurred, requiring as

³⁶⁵ This verb is used of an eagle (Deut. 28: 49; Jer. 48: 40; 49: 22), cf. Hirsch, 1882: 121.

it does a simple confusion of ר and ר , something which is frequent in the Old Testament textual tradition. Which is the preferred reading? Syriac, Targum and Vulgate all follow the Ps. 18 version at this point. The *Niphal*, רָוַרְו , is suspicious. It is the only verb in the entire poem where God is the subject of a passive verb. This does not fit the general description of God as active and engaged in response to the plea for help. Furthermore, it seems quite possible that it may have been confused with the use of the same form in 2 Sam. 22: 16. There the subject is “the channels of the sea”.³⁶⁶ Wood also makes the point that Yhwh is surrounded by cloud and darkness which would suggest that, if anything, he was hidden rather than visible.³⁶⁷

The LXX translator of 2 Sam. 22: 11 has followed the text as it is now. The LXX of Ps. 18: 11 (ET 10), however, has used the same verb for both רָוַרְו and רָוַרְו : ἐπετάσθη. It is not clear why this is so. Either there is another form of the verse now lost in which the verbs are the same, or this is a free translation.

How Many Cherubim?

The second issue concerns how many Cherubim there are. MT mentions only one. LXX uses a plural form,³⁶⁸ which might or might not be a collective singular.³⁶⁹ The suggestion that a plural form was original in order to be parallel with the plural “wings” of the second half of the verse is unnecessary. Also, it is easier to argue that the plural was introduced later in order to harmonise with other places where Cherubim are usually in pairs or fours. If the original reading were plural, it would be

³⁶⁶ So is MT of this verse. Syr. reads “waters” as does MT of Ps. 18: 16 (ET 15).

³⁶⁷ Wood, 2008: 85-86. Kidner, however, sees this tension reflected in Ezek. 1: 4, where the cloud discloses what is hidden inside (Kidner, 1973: 92).

³⁶⁸ Cross and Freedman’s emendation of the MT to “restore” a plural is arbitrary (Cross and Freedman, 1953: 24, n. 28; cf. McCarter, 1984: 457).

³⁶⁹ Cf. Briggs, 1906: 143; Oesterley, 1955: 165; Anderson, 1989: 260; Caquot, 1994: 601; Goldingay, 2006: 263, n. 26. It is surprising that NIV takes this line along with the new rendering “mounted” in both Ps. 18 and 2 Sam. 22.

very difficult to explain why a singular form crept in, when there is only one other place in the Hebrew Bible where one Cherub clearly appears on its own: Ezek. 28: 14, 16.³⁷⁰ Consequently, it is more likely that the singular form is original. This has important implications for the overall interpretation of the image.

Poetic Issues

Wood has described in some detail the options available to the reader when it comes to poetic parallelism.³⁷¹ Is Cherub in parallel with “thick darkness under his feet” (Ps. 18: 10b, ET 9b),³⁷² or with “the wings of the wind” (Ps. 18: 11b, ET 10b),³⁷³ or both? If the former, is there any connection with the next verse: יָשַׁת חֹשֶׁךְ סְתָרוֹ,³⁷⁴ “he made darkness his covering”? Although this phrase is not reproduced in 2 Sam. 22: 12, it is in the LXX of that verse, which implies that Ps. 18: 12 (ET 11) is the preferred reading.³⁷⁴ There is a difference of emphasis in these two possibilities. The darkness implies a protective role, while the wings of the wind suggests a dynamic one. It is possible that the poet intends both ideas to be read into the Cherub, but it is worth considering them separately. The protective role would fit the apotropaic nature of the Cherubim elsewhere, at the entrance to the Garden of Eden, on the doors and walls of the Temple and Tabernacle, over the Ark, and possibly in Ezek. 28. The dynamic role is something that only occurs elsewhere in Ezekiel’s visions, and even that is not consistent. It is hard to reject either of these emphases.

³⁷⁰ Dahood argues that there is a connection with Ezek. 28: 14, and that this is evidence that the reading of the Psalm should be singular (Dahood, 1966: 107).

³⁷¹ Wood, 2008: 88-91.

³⁷² E.g. Craigie, 1983b: 174.

³⁷³ Curtis, A., 2004: 37.

³⁷⁴ Wood, 2008: 89-90.

What of the connection to יֵשֶׁת חֲשָׁד סְתֵרֵוּ? Although סְתֵר has a range of meanings, both secular and sacred, here it is related to the sanctuary. Indeed, Ps. 61: 5 (ET 4) quite specifically connects it with Yhwh's wings and with the sanctuary. While the former may not be the Cherubim in that verse (Yhwh is described with wings elsewhere),³⁷⁵ the nexus of imagery suggests either the Ark underneath the large Cherubim of the pre-exilic Temple or the Mercy Seat as described with the Cherubim in the Mosaic Tabernacle. The imagery is rich and should certainly not be reduced to seeing the Cherub as some sort of personification of cloud or storm,³⁷⁶ despite the interesting connections to Exod. 15,³⁷⁷ Ps. 104,³⁷⁸ Hab. 3³⁷⁹ and the Ugaritic "rider of the clouds".³⁸⁰

Horse or Chariot?

So is Yhwh riding directly on the Cherub³⁸¹ or is he driving some sort of chariot?³⁸² The singular Cherub, while not ruling out the chariot idea entirely, tends to suggest some sort of mount.³⁸³ The plural requires some explanation in terms of a

³⁷⁵ Exod. 19: 4; Deut. 32: 11 (cf. Day, 1990: 127).

³⁷⁶ Cf. Ewald, 1880: 129; Cheyne, 1888: 50; Wellhausen, 1898: 170; Seybold, 1996: 81; Eaton, 2003: 105. Allison's conclusion that the Cherubim are the lightning (Allison, 1906: 89) seems odd in view of the comparison to thick darkness. Dhorme's suggestion that there may be a connection with Marduk (Dhorme, P., 1910: 426, "Le Seigneur prit le déluge, sa grande arme, Il monta, comme char, la tempête sans rivale, effrayante ...") is attractive apart from the fact that no heavenly beings are mentioned alongside the deity. While Weiser is among those who suggest the embodiment-of-cloud idea, he, unusually and specifically, links this verse to the Cherubim of the Ark (Weiser, 1959: 128). This idea possibly lies behind Rodd's description of the imagery as being volcanic as well as meteorological (Rodd, 1963: 38).

³⁷⁷ Craigie, 1983b: 173.

³⁷⁸ Cf. Delitzsch, 1871, Vol. 1: 257; Foote, 1904: 281; Hertzberg, 1960: 326 ("cloud chariot"); Stuhlmüller, 1983: 127.

³⁷⁹ This connection is made in the Midrash of this verse (Braude, 1959, Vol. 1: 243-244). Cf. also Eaton, 1967: 63.

³⁸⁰ Johnson, A. R., 1967: 108-109; cf. Dahood, 1966: 107.

³⁸¹ Brueggemann, 1990: 341; Alter, 1999: 338; Eaton, 2003: 105; Alter, 2007: 54 ("the charger ridden by the sky god in Canaanite mythology").

³⁸² Gunkel hedges his bets (Gunkel, 1925: 63), while there are those who think that either image is absurd or offensive (e.g. Rhodes, 1960: 45). Kittel is hardly complementary: "die Kerube selbst sind von Hause aus nichts anderes als die Träger und Gehilfen, die den Blitz schleudernden Diener des Gewittergottes" (Kittel, 1922: 65).

³⁸³ *Contra* Mettinger, 1982b: 102, who sees the single Cherub as representing the entire chariot.

chariot pulled by Cherubim or the throne chariot idea of Ezek. 1.³⁸⁴ The latter idea would be evidence of harmonisation with Ezekiel’s vision,³⁸⁵ or, even later, with the Chronicler’s interpretation of it. There has been some debate about the meaning of רכב “mount”.³⁸⁶ Could it mean “drive”,³⁸⁷ or does it simply refer to someone riding, for instance, a horse? The overwhelming meaning of רכב with על refers to riding some sort of beast,³⁸⁸ so it seems most likely that that is the sense here. In which case, the Cherub in this verse is, uniquely, being ridden by Yhwh.

³⁸⁴ For those who assume some sort of chariot or throne lies behind the image see Delitzsch, 1871, Vol. 1: 257; Maclaren, 1893: 173; Briggs, 1906: 143; Leslie, 1949: 260; Goldman, 1951: 327; Kissane, 1953: 79; Leupold, 1972: 167; Cohen, 1985: 46. Kraus assumes that it is some sort of throne, but interestingly suggests that this sacral idea has been linked to storm theophany as part of a kerygmatic liturgical presentation of the Ark (Kraus, 1978: 260-261). For a similar treatment cf. Hossfeld, 1993: 126.

³⁸⁵ Commentators have not always been clear about the distinction between riding on an animal and riding in a chariot. For instance, Barnes notes that “on such a monster JEHOVAH came swiftly through the storm to Ezekiel in Babylon” (Barnes, 1931, Vol. 1: 82). Mauchline argues that the psalmist is compressing the chariot idea (Mauchline, 1971: 308). Robinson simply describes the Cherub as both the seat and the vehicle (Robinson, G., 1993: 273). Davidson’s comment is equally confusing (Davidson, R., 1998: 66). In contrast to this, the Midrash is alert to the issue and offers an explanation of why it is a chariot in Ezekiel and a single mount in the Psalm (Braude, 1959, Vol. 1: 243-244): “R. Aha told a parable of a king to whom it happened that kidnappers came and led away his son. As the king’s servants made ready a coach to pursue the kidnappers, the king said: ‘If I wait for the coach to be made ready for me, my son will perish.’ What did the king do? He unhitched a horse from the coach and pursued the kidnappers. Just so did the Holy One, blessed be He. Out of the throne of glory He took a cherub and rode upon it and made war against Pharaoh and against Egypt, as it is said ‘He rode upon a cherub, and did fly.’ Whence did God take the cherub? From between the wheels of the chariot.” Gordon is also clear about the distinction (Gordon, 1986: 305).

³⁸⁶ In addition to the standard translations (German – “fuhr”, English – “rode”, French – “monté”) alternatives vary: Ewald, 1880: 123 “advanced”; Boylan, 1920: 59 “mounted” (this, despite the fact that Boylan reads “Cherubs” and assumes they are pulling a chariot – Boylan, 1920: 63; cf. Bird, 1927, Vol. 1: 163, 178 for the same confusion); Gunkel, 1925: 60 “bestieg” (cf. also Bruno, 1930: 68; Schmidt, H., 1934: 26); Maillot, 1961: 109 “chevaucha” (despite this apparently equine verb, Maillot likens the Cherubim to Assyrian statues and cloud formations, p. 119). Auzou offers the widest range of suggestions: monte, s’avance, vole, plane, siegeant sur, chevauchée sur (Auzou, 1968: 262, n. 51; 353).

³⁸⁷ Mowinckel, 1962: 278-299.

³⁸⁸ Wood, 2008: 87-88.

Dating

Commentators have dated this poem anywhere from the early monarchy³⁸⁹ to the Maccabean period.³⁹⁰ Today there is a broad consensus that this is a pre-Exilic royal psalm.³⁹¹ While the editorial notice in the Psalter, and the placement of the psalm in the Davidic cycle cannot be cited as reliable evidence of date, the internal evidence suggests a pre-exilic context. It is a psalm of thanksgiving after at least one battle, in which the main voice has been victorious. This voice is a Davidic king (Ps. 18: 51, ET 50 // 2 Sam. 22: 51).³⁹² It has been suggested that this could have been written at a later date in order to glorify an essentially fictional David.³⁹³ While the Temple is mentioned,³⁹⁴ something which would post-date David and therefore indicate that the Psalm is retrospective, it is a step too far to see this as evidence that David is a fictional creation for the writer. If the composition took place in the early days of the pre-exilic Temple a closer connection would be possible, while a fictional creation would be more likely, should the Temple referred to be the post-exilic one. To date the psalm as late as the second century is unwise, and any period between the

³⁸⁹ Baldwin, 1988: 286.

³⁹⁰ Duhm, 1899: 53 for the Maccabean period. Battenwieser dates it to the reign of Artaxerxes II because, he says, of the sense of peril (Battenwieser: 1938: 462), as if such a sense were unique to this period.

³⁹¹ Day, 2004: 225-229.

³⁹² Anderson, 1989: 262. Clifford works with this sort of date (Clifford, 2002: 105) but his suggestion that this is the installation of the king after Yhwh's cosmic victory is pushing the evidence too far.

³⁹³ Goldingay notes the idea (Goldingay, 2006: 256).

³⁹⁴ Although 2 Sam. 22: 8 reads **הַשָּׁמַיִם הַקְּדוֹשִׁים**, possibly implying that the previous verse refers to Yhwh's heavenly temple, Ps. 18: 8 (ET 7) reads **וּמִזְבֵּי הַקְּדוֹשִׁים**. This reading does not affect the nature of the temple in the previous verse one way or the other, so it can be treated as either the physical temple or the heavenly one. LXX follows both readings in either case. The addition of "holy" in LXX of Ps. 18, while a unique reading, does not add to the debate about whether this temple is physical or heavenly.

fall of Jerusalem in 597 and the Maccabean era simply would not fit the triumphalist note. Consequently I date this reference to a Cherub somewhere during the time of the Jerusalem monarchy.

Cherubim and the Temple

So what is the significance of the Cherub in this verse? Wood points out, correctly, that it is the only specifically supernatural element in the description.³⁹⁵ This suggests that the Cherub has the role of tying what would otherwise be just another storm theophany down to a particular context. If Terrien is also correct in seeing this verse as the turning point of the first part of the Psalm,³⁹⁶ the significance of the Cherub is enhanced. What is that context?

Before answering that question, it is worth pointing out two similarities between the use of this Cherub here and in Gen. 3: 24. First of all, the previous paragraph notwithstanding, the Cherub is insignificant in the overall theme of the psalm. It is a single element of one section of the psalm. Were the Cherub not present in the poem, the psalm would lose nothing of its theme of divine salvation. As with Gen. 3: 24, this insignificance is reflected in the omission of any comment on Cherubim by many interpreters.³⁹⁷ Secondly, the writer of the poem, as with the writer of Gen. 2-3, assumes that the reader knows what a Cherub is.³⁹⁸ In themselves, these two points do not amount to evidence for a connection with Gen. 3: 24. However, as

³⁹⁵ Wood, 2008: 91.

³⁹⁶ Terrien, 2003: 190, 194.

³⁹⁷ The number of commentators who ignore the Cherub(im) is not insignificant, but is a smaller proportion of the whole than commentators of Gen. 3: Smith, H. P., 1899: 378; Schmidt, H., 1934: 26; Conroy, 1983: 132.

³⁹⁸ This should be distinguished from the reader knowing what they looked like. Caquot makes the point that the decorative form of the Cherubim may have been forgotten (assuming a late date for the verse), even though the reader would have known that they were supposed to have adorned the Temple (Caquot, 1994: 601).

with that text, the biblical reader has only got the other biblical references to go on. Which ones are relevant?

A possible link to the Mosaic tent in the use of כַּתָּר has already been noted. While it is possible that traditions about the tent of meeting existed in the pre-exilic period, most scholars tend to date the description of the Mosaic tent and cultic paraphernalia to a later date. I would not want to base a reading of this verse on the premise that this late dating is incorrect. It is safer to turn to the other piece of internal evidence in the psalm which links the theophany to the Temple (Ps. 18: 7, ET 6).³⁹⁹ The writer of this psalm is describing Yhwh's deliverance in a storm theophany, and, if the Temple is the earthly one, the Cherub could have the role of pinning the imagery down to the Temple. It is the only word that specifically connects the two. The writer introduces an interesting element into the description, though, namely the element of dynamism. The picture of Yhwh riding a Cherub like an animal is unique. However, given the unique nature of this image, it is possible that this also is the only reference which links a Cherub to Yhwh's heavenly Temple. Given the propensity, though, of other references to Cherubim being related to physical sanctuaries, this seems the less plausible option, and that the role of the Cherub in the psalm is to evoke the Jerusalem Temple in the mind of the reader.

Conclusion: The Relationship of Ps. 18, Gen. 3 and Ezek. 28

Ps. 18: 11 (ET 10) is a unique interpretation of the role of the Cherubim and is probably the earliest reference to a Cherub as a living creature. It takes as its starting point the Cherubim of the Jerusalem Temple but, unlike Gen. 3: 24, treats them in a different way. In Gen. 3: 24 they continue their apotropaic role. In Ps. 18 // 2 Sam. 22

the Cherub is additionally a divine war horse. Although this is a unique image, it suggests that the Cherubim were largely bestial in form, something which was impossible to discern from Gen. 3: 24.⁴⁰⁰

Did the writer of Gen. 3: 24 know of this reference to a Cherub? There is nothing in the presentation of the Cherubim in the Eden story to suggest that he does. Neither is there any sense of the Cherub in Ezek. 28: 14, 16 having a similar role. However, all these texts are linked, in that the Cherubim are sentient supernatural beings which relate in some way to the cultic images of the Jerusalem Temple. They are expected to obey Yhwh's will, and, with the exception of Ezek. 28: 14, 16 (MT), they do.

³⁹⁹ Mettinger, 1982b: 32-36; Broyles, 1999: 104. Both Mettinger and Broyles, however, interpret the Cherub of the Psalm as a throne chariot in the light of the Temple connection.

⁴⁰⁰ This point may suggest that the MT reading of Ezek. 28: 14, 16 is a later one, since it is a human being who is being equated with the Cherub, and not an animal.

Chapter 3: The Images in the Tabernacle and the Temple

Introduction

In Ezekiel, Genesis and Psalm 18 the Jerusalem Temple is the key point of reference for all the texts which describe or refer to Cherubim, and it is to the Temple itself that we now turn. I shall survey the texts about the Solomonic Temple in the same chapter as the texts about the Mosaic Tabernacle because there are clear connections between the two. Both the Tabernacle and the Temple have a main room and an inner room. Both are surrounded by a court. Both have two sets of doors or veils. In both, the Cherubim appear in close connection to the Ark of the Covenant (itself the central cultic item), as well as on the walls and on the doors or veils. The Tabernacle descriptions, which, for want of a better label, I shall describe as Priestly material, are based upon the format of the Temple. Whether this is due to the second-hand influence of the literary descriptions of the Temple, or through first-hand knowledge of it on the part of the Priestly writer, is a moot point. Although P is generally dated to the fifth or sixth century BCE and is the latest of the Pentateuchal sources, the possibility that some sections of it may have an earlier history means that, with regard to the Tabernacle descriptions, an open mind needs to be kept on this issue.⁴⁰¹

I shall begin with the descriptions of the Solomonic Temple in Kings, seeing as these are more likely to antedate the Tabernacle material than the other way round.

⁴⁰¹ The main recent proponent of the pre-exilic date of P has been Haran, 1978. Cf. also Jenson, 1992: 19-29; Friedman, 1997: 246-255. For useful discussions cf. Milgrom, 1991: 1-35; Schwartz, 1996: 104; Zevit's discussion of Kaufman's 1935 proposal (Zevit, 2001: 45).

Then I shall turn to the descriptions of the Tabernacle, before looking at how the material is treated by the Chronicler. I shall also propose some referents from the archaeological record for the Temple Cherubim and for those of the Tabernacle, before drawing conclusions.

The Cherubim of Solomon's Temple in the First Book of Kings

Introduction

There are two assumptions that could be made in describing this material. On the one hand, we could assume that the descriptions in Kings are based on eye-witness material about the pre-exilic Temple.⁴⁰² The note at 1 Kgs. 8: 8 which states that the poles of the Ark were visible “to this day”, עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה, implies an eyewitness account. Although there are proposals of editorial layers in the material,⁴⁰³ because these do not substantially affect the discussion of the Cherubim themselves, they are not relevant here. Even if there are editorial layers, it is quite possible that these also are based on first-hand knowledge of the artefacts. If, on the other hand, the texts were written some time after the destruction of the Temple, it is quite possible that both editorial material and the original material are distanced from the physical reality they purport to describe.⁴⁰⁴ Either way, the descriptions in Kings are the nearest thing

⁴⁰² Noth's original thesis that the Deuteronomistic History was a sixth-century work comprising Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings (Noth, 1981), with proposed variations of it (Smend, 1971: 494-509; Dietrich, 1972; Cross, 1973: 274-289), along with subsequent discussions (e.g. Nelson, 1981; Römer, 2005; Geoghegan, 2006) of the nature and extent of different revisions of the History do not directly impact on this thesis since the material describing the Cherubim may or may not have been an independent source available to the writer or writers of the Deuteronomistic History.

⁴⁰³ Goff, 1939: 155; Gray, J., 1964: 163; Rehm, 1979: 66.

⁴⁰⁴ Waterman's suggestion, however, that the Cherubim and the Ark could not have existed in the Temple because of their absence in Ezekiel and other differences in P and Psalm 18, is illogical (Waterman, 1947: 163). His general idea that the Temple was a royal treasury is reductionist and does not account for the additional material in the text (cf. Wright, G. E., 1948: 53). Patai's bizarre interpretation of the Debir as the divine bed-chamber (Patai, 1970: 206) also ignores the text, in favour of the Talmudic tradition of copulating Cherubim (*Yoma* 54a-b). For a full discussion of the disappearance of the Ark see Day, 2005: 250-270.

we have to a description of cult artefacts from the pre-exilic Temple in Jerusalem, and any question about the internal unity of the text can only be raised in answer to any logical problems about the Cherubim themselves.⁴⁰⁵

Throughout the description here, I shall be trying to envisage the Cherubim using the information that the text contains. Whether this relates to the actual reality of the pre-exilic Temple, or simply to how the writer imagined it, does not really matter. I am trying to make sense of the text in its own right, rather than trying to impose a solution from archaeology upon it. The archaeological record is useful in helping to envisage what the writer might have had in mind, but the text must be the source of any controlling concepts rather than the other way round. Most of the references to Cherubim are in name only, but we start with the largest and most detailed description of the two Cherubim in the Debir.

The Two Large Cherubim in the Debir (1 Kings)

1 Kings 6: 23-28 וַיַּעַשׂ בַּדְּבִיר שְׁנֵי כְרוּבִים עֲצֵי-שִׁמֹן עֵשֶׂר אַמּוֹת קוֹמָתוֹ: ²⁴ וְחֲמִשׁ אַמּוֹת כְּנָף הַכְּרוּב הָאַחַת וְחֲמִשׁ אַמּוֹת כְּנָף הַכְּרוּב הַשֵּׁנִית עֵשֶׂר אַמּוֹת מִקְצוֹת כְּנָפָיו וְעַד-קְצוֹת כְּנָפָיו: ²⁵ וְעֵשֶׂר בְּאַמָּה הַכְּרוּב הַשֵּׁנִי מִדָּה אַחַת וְקָצַב אֶחָד לַשְּׁנַי הַכְּרוּבִים: ²⁶ קוֹמַת הַכְּרוּב הָאֶחָד עֵשֶׂר בְּאַמָּה וְכֵן הַכְּרוּב הַשֵּׁנִי: ²⁷ וַיִּתֵּן אֶת-הַכְּרוּבִים בְּתוֹךְ הַבַּיִת הַפְּנִימִי וַיַּפְּרְשׂוּ אֶת-כְּנָפֵי הַכְּרוּבִים וַתִּגַּע כְּנָף-הָאֶחָד בְּקִיר וְכָנַף הַכְּרוּב הַשֵּׁנִי נִגְעַת בְּקִיר הַשֵּׁנִי וְכַנְפֵיהֶם אֶל-תּוֹךְ הַבַּיִת נִגְעַת כְּנָף אֶל-כְּנָף: ²⁸ וַיִּצַף אֶת-הַכְּרוּבִים זָהָב:

1 Kings 6: 23-28 In the inner sanctuary he made two cherubim of olivewood, each ten cubits high. ²⁴ Five cubits was the length of one wing of the cherub, and five cubits the length of the other wing of the cherub; it was ten cubits from the tip of one wing to the tip of the other. ²⁵ The other cherub also measured ten cubits; both cherubim had the same measure and the same form. ²⁶ The height of one cherub was ten cubits, and

⁴⁰⁵ A good example of a speculative historical reconstruction can be found in Würthwein, 1985: 91, who sees traces of tension between the Ark tradition and the Jerusalem Temple tradition. Earlier, Würthwein assigns some Cherubim to a first literary layer (Würthwein, 1985: 79-81) and others to a second (Würthwein, 1985: 61, 69-70), while at the same time claiming that their form is unclear.

so was that of the other cherub. ²⁷ He put the cherubim in the innermost part of the house; the wings of the cherubim were spread out so that a wing of one was touching the one wall, and a wing of the other cherub was touching the other wall; their other wings toward the center of the house were touching wing to wing. ²⁸ He also overlaid the cherubim with gold.

1 Kings 8: 6-7
אֶל-מְקוֹמוֹ אֶל-דְּבִיר הַבַּיִת אֶל-קֹדֶשׁ הַקְּדָשִׁים אֶל-תַּחַת
כְּנָפֵי הַכְּרוּבִים: ⁷ כִּי הַכְּרוּבִים פָּרְשׂוּ כְּנָפֵיהֶם אֶל-מְקוֹם
הָאָרוֹן וַיִּסְכּוּ הַכְּרוּבִים עַל-הָאָרוֹן וְעַל-בְּדָיו מִלְמַעְלָה:

1 Kings 8: 6-7 Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the LORD to its place, in the inner sanctuary of the house, in the most holy place, underneath the wings of the cherubim. ⁷ For the cherubim spread out their wings over the place of the ark, so that the cherubim made a covering above the ark and its poles.

The Texts

Two wooden Cherubim are described here, and their position in relation to the Ark of the Covenant. They are said to be ten cubits tall, with wings that are five cubits in length, producing a total wing span each of ten cubits (v. 24). This means that they stand half the height of the twenty-cubit cube that is the Debir, the inner sanctuary. They are covered in gold leaf (v. 28).⁴⁰⁶

There are a number of problems with the description of these two large Cherubim. The singular suffix on קוֹמָתוֹ in v. 23 is awkward, since there is no singular noun for it to refer to.⁴⁰⁷ Several commentators suggest moving v. 26 to solve this problem.⁴⁰⁸ The nature of עֲצֵי-שִׁמֹן is debated, what type of wood it is.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁶ Leithart's idea that the two Cherubim are represented outside the Temple by the two large pillars, Jachin and Boaz (Leithart, 2006: 56), is entirely speculative.

⁴⁰⁷ Cf. e.g. Benzinger, 1899: 36.

⁴⁰⁸ Burney, 1903: 73; Montgomery, 1960: 155; Noth, 1964: 123.; Gray, J., 1964: 161; Mulder, 1998: 269.

⁴⁰⁹ Stieglitz, 1970: 56 sees its antecedent in Ugaritic *šmn* which is paralleled with "cedar". Mulder, 1998: 268 suggests that it means "wild olive wood" as opposed to cultivated, עֲלִי-זֵית (Neh. 8: 15). Cogan, 2001: 244 translates "pinewood".

The main issue, though, is the lack of clarity in the description.⁴¹⁰ The size is described twice: once in v. 23, **קַוְמָתוֹ עֵשֶׂר אַמּוֹת**; and again in vv. 25-26, using a different phrase, **עֵשֶׂר בְּאַמָּה**, in which the identical nature of the two Cherubim is emphasized.⁴¹¹ Although the wings are said to be five cubits long, their width, thickness and shape are not described. The wings touch the walls and meet in the middle (v. 27).⁴¹² It is not certain how many wings there are. The singular **כַּנָּף** in v. 27 could be a collective, and it is possible that the “first” and “second” of v. 24 could refer to the Cherub rather than the wing.⁴¹³ They face inwards, **הַבַּיִת הַפְּנִימִי**,⁴¹⁴ but it is not clear how that works out.

There has been some debate about whether **אֶל-מִקְדָּשׁוֹ** is a technical term referring to a sanctuary,⁴¹⁵ and even whether the Tabernacle itself was placed in its

⁴¹⁰ This unclarity makes visual reconstructions such as Schmidt, E., 1899: 166; Garber, 1951: 13, 15, 21 and Ritmeyer, 2000: 62-63 unjustified.

⁴¹¹ De Vries sees the use of **אַמָּה** with the preposition **בְּ** as a sign of original architectural records (De Vries, 1985: 92-93).

⁴¹² Slotki makes the point that for the sizes to be correct the wings need to meet on the backs of the Cherubim as well (Slotki, 1983: 44). Jones unjustifiably treats v. 27 as secondary (Jones, G. H., 1984: 170).

⁴¹³ Cf. Blake, 1915: 139. Rice sees the outspread wings as positioned for flight similar to Ezek. 1 (Rice, 1990: 53).

⁴¹⁴ Montgomery, 1960: 155 argues that this phrase is derived from Ezekiel. For a more detailed discussion of the possible direction in which the Cherubim were facing see below on the Chronicler’s version. Mulder, 1998: 270 says it is the inner part of the house rather than the Debir.

⁴¹⁵ Mulder, 1998: 387.

entirety in the Debir.⁴¹⁶ Either way, the Ark and its poles are somehow covered by the wings of the Cherubim, and yet the poles are said to be still visible in some way (1 Kgs. 8: 8) because of their length. Sadly the length of the poles is nowhere given, so how they relate to the wingspan of the Cherubim is unknown. However, the implication of the comment is that only the ends of the poles could be seen. If they were placed perpendicular to the length of the Temple, then it should be assumed that the Ark in the middle was masked, but not the sides of the Debir. If the dimensions of the Cherubim are accepted with their wings covering the Ark in the middle but not the poles towards the sides, the reader would have to envisage the inner wings covering more than the outer wings. Additionally, the poles of the Ark would have to extend nearly twice the length of the Ark (assuming the dimensions of P) in either direction to reach beyond the bodies of the Cherubim. On the other hand, if the Cherubim were over or behind the Ark, why would there be a special note about only the ends being visible? It is possible that the doors to the Debir, referred to later, might only cover the centre of the Debir and not the sides, but this would be a little odd. One could

⁴¹⁶ Friedman, 1980: 245-246. He says a reduced sized Tabernacle, 20 x 10 x 8 cubits would fit between the Cherubim. This theory is based on accepting the notes at 1 Kgs. 8: 4 and 2 Chron. 5: 5 that the tent of meeting was brought to the Temple along with the Ark. He also notes Josephus *Ant.* 8: 103, which says the winged Cherubim appeared as a tent. For counter arguments, see Murray, 1990: 302, who argues that אֶל־מִקְדָּשׁוֹ is merely the locus of the Ark. Hurowitz notes Helga Weippert's point against Friedman that the ten cubit height of the Tabernacle would not allow enough room under the wings of the ten cubit high Cherubim, assuming that the wings were not at the very top of the Cherubim. He then notes Friedman's rejoinder that the wings may rise vertically and then horizontally (Hurowitz, 1995: 133, 142; cf. ANEP, nos. 332, 456, 520, 534, 614, 617, 644-647, 649, 651-656, 659, 705, 706, 809, 815, 829, 855). All of these arguments could be discounted if the Cherubim were imagined as frescos that were higher than floor level. Gooding's discussion of the LXX of 1 Kgs 6: 19 is relevant to this, since the LXX of this verse states that the Debir is ἐν μέσῳ of the house (Gooding, 1965: 410-412). Buis, however, disagrees, seeing the phrase as "à l'intérieur" (Buis, 1997: 71), no doubt reflecting the Arabic derivation of Debir. Gooding's argument is weak, though, because LXX goes on additionally to use the word ἔσωθεν. Ouellette argues that the term Debir originally denoted some sort of dividing wall (Ouellette, 1970: 338-340), but this makes for an unnecessarily complicated reading of the text. His suggestion that floor was raised up, so that the extra ten-cubit height of the Temple could be accounted for is more reasonable (Ouellette, 1970: 341).

argue, though, that the doors may not always have been shut, or that the reference to the visibility of the poles was simply a theoretical one.

If the Ark were imagined to be lengthwise in the Debir⁴¹⁷ with the ends sticking out of the front of the Debir into the main part of the Temple, that creates even more problems. One solution is to imagine some sort of covering for the Ark which is not described in Kings (such as the veil and other waterproof coverings for transportation in Num. 4-5, out of which the poles protrude for the purpose of carrying). Another way to deal with this problem is to suggest that the text about the poles existed independently of the verses describing the Cherubim themselves.⁴¹⁸ If that is the case, then we should take seriously the possibility that the note about the Cherubim “covering” is also separate, since it forms part of the same section.⁴¹⁹ Such an interpretation would rely on one layer of text being incompatible with the other,⁴²⁰ or on some significant artefact from the Temple being completely ignored. None of these solutions is particularly satisfactory, but we will need to reserve judgement on this matter for the time being.⁴²¹

It is not clear whether the Cherubim are two-dimensional or three-dimensional, nor whether they are on the floor or, if some sort of fresco, higher up the wall.⁴²² Most scholars assume that they were three-dimensional, but the text does not demand it. If they were two-dimensional then the speculations about the Tabernacle become more plausible. As already noted, the number of wings is also not specified.

⁴¹⁷ Mettinger’s confidence in the orientation of the Ark belies the evidence (Mettinger, 1982b: 87).

⁴¹⁸ Jones, G. H., 1984: 194-195 associates this section with P, De Vries, 1985: 124 with P and D.

⁴¹⁹ This would undermine Nicholson’s argument (*contra* Beyerlin) that the sapphire pavement of Exod. 24: 9-11 cannot be compared to the Cherubim throne since that was hidden while the pavement was not (Nicholson, 1974: 91).

⁴²⁰ Mettinger, 1982b: 51 sees 1 Kgs. 8: 1-11 as a conscious suppression of the throne idea.

⁴²¹ Waterman’s proposal that the Debir was created to cover the Cherubim but not the Ark simply does not make sense (Waterman, 1943: 291-292).

⁴²² Cf. De Tarragon, 1981: 10.

The position of the Cherubim in relation to the Ark is not clear, because the meaning of אֶל־תַּחַת could be “behind” or “beneath”,⁴²³ and the nature of the “canopy”,⁴²⁴ וַיִּסְבּוּ, is unclear, since סָכַךְ could mean “cover” (Ps. 140: 8, ET 7), “hedge about” (Job 40: 22),⁴²⁵ “screen” (Exod. 40: 3) or “wrap up” (Lam. 3: 44).⁴²⁶ This means that a number of reconstructions could be made. The Cherubim could be large-leaved doors at the front of the Debir,⁴²⁷ although given that the doors to the Debir are given a separate notice elsewhere, this seems unlikely. Alternatively, they could form the top half of the back wall of the Debir,⁴²⁸ and it is even possible that their wings formed part of the ceiling.⁴²⁹

Archaeological Data

All of these possibilities are made purely with reference to the texts. Looking at the archaeological data, the prime candidate for a referent for these two Cherubim is the winged sphinx.⁴³⁰ The speculative suggestion of earlier generations that the calves of Jeroboam I were somehow a counterpart to the Cherubim can be

⁴²³ Cf. Noth, 1964: 179.

⁴²⁴ Cogan, 2001: 279.

⁴²⁵ Gray, J., 1964: 194.

⁴²⁶ Mulder, 1998: 387. Cogan, 2001: 279 links to Ezek. 28: 14.

⁴²⁷ Kapelrud, 1950: 153.

⁴²⁸ Conroy, 1983: 152.

⁴²⁹ Whatever the physical appearance of the wings, Walsh concludes that the festival in which the Ark was placed under the wings of the Cherubim was Sukkoth, because of this description (Walsh, 1996: 109, n. 5).

⁴³⁰ Albright, 1938: 1-3; Wright, G. E., 1941: 27-28 (Wright points out the lack of Mesopotamian-style sphinx in Syria and Palestine); 1944: 73. Wiseman, 1993: 110 gives a convenient and clear summary of the possible archaeological referents: 1. winged Syro-Phoenician sphinxes; 2. protective figures on doorways; 3. forming a throne like the Megiddo or Nimrud Ivories. He adds a fourth interpretation that the Cherubim represent the protecting and overshadowing wings of God all around. Cf. also Smith, M. S., 1997: 87-91, 98.

discounted.⁴³¹ For many commentators, the assumption is made that the Cherubim form some sort of throne with their wings, under which the Ark is placed as the divine footstool.⁴³² The throne idea is quite unsatisfactory because it is simply not justified by the description in the text,⁴³³ and, even if there were a physical reality along the lines of a throne that existed in the pre-exilic Temple, we should be forced to ask why this form was ignored by the writer of Kings.

Eichler has recently proposed that the Cherubim could be upright, drawing particular attention to the winged, humanoid deities on the sarcophagus of Tutankhamun.⁴³⁴ Turning to Petit's recent survey of Levantine, Cypriot, Phoenician and Greek guardians of immortality, there are a number of upright winged beings,

⁴³¹ Although this idea antedates twentieth-century scholarship (e.g. Spencer, 1727, Vol. 2: 855), it is worth noting some of its modern advocates (Waterman, 1915: 253; Meek, 1921: 129, n. 1; Wright, G. E., 1947: 17, n. 31; Kaufman, 1951: 188-189; Ginsberg, H. L., 1961: 345) and in particular one opposing voice, Jacob Hoschander: "There is another original statement that the Cherubim of the Ark of the Covenant were a representation of the Deity just as the Golden Calves of Jeroboam . . . , which has not the least historical basis, and which any person who has some reverence for Israel's religion will regard as little short of blasphemy." (Hoschander, 1926: 436.) The debate is also noted in Aberbach and Smolar, 1967: 135; Danelius, 1967: 98; Rundin, 2004: 484, n. 35. Goldstein and Cooper use the comparison and then put forward the suggestion that the Cherubim represented the acceptance of carved or hammered images but not cast ones (Goldstein and Cooper, 1990: 28). Day argues that, while the Cherubim formed some sort of pedestal for the deity, the calves were themselves images of the deity going back to El symbolism (Day, 2000: 34-41), and therefore not a counterpart to the Cherubim at all.

⁴³² E.g. Gray, J., 1964: 162. Gray also says that the Cherubim could have been diagonal, which is rather different (Gray, J., 1964: 163). Robinson allows the throne idea (Robinson, J., 1972: 79-80), but interestingly does not see the role of the Cherubim in it as apotropaic, something which he says was introduced in P after Mesopotamian influence. I am not convinced that we can be that specific about either such a change in role, or about the influence of Mesopotamian imagery over P. Rehm argues that the Ark was originally the throne itself but became the footstool when placed underneath the Cherubim (Rehm, 1979: 93). Other commentators who accept the throne form include Ross, 1967: 80, 82, 83, 86, 90; Cogan, 2001: 244; Werlitz, 2002: 82-83, 93; Fritz, 2003: 74; Hens-Piazza, 2006: 78. Perhaps the most detailed argument in favour of the throne is in Mettinger, 1982a: 109-138, especially 116. The earliest overt reference to this idea that I can find is Simon Patrick (Patrick, 1731: 205).

⁴³³ Cf. Segal 1963: 234-235, who advocates empty space aniconism instead, while accepting the idea that the Ark was the footstool.

⁴³⁴ Eichler, 2011: 178, 179, 180. Cf. Eaton-Krauss, 1993: Plates 1-17, which show the female winged humanoid figures protecting the corpse. Phrases from the inscriptions, "my arms are round about your corpse" (Eaton-Krauss, 1993: 26), "my arms are round about you" (Eaton-Krauss, 1993: 29), "my arms embrace you" (Eaton-Krauss, 1993: 30), and "my arms envelop him who is within", (Eaton-Krauss, 1993: 30) all imply that it is various deities who are protecting the deceased person. Of course, this form would have little to do with the descriptions in Ezek. 1 and Isa. 6.

both animal and humanoid which complement Eichler's suggestion.⁴³⁵ A gold-plated silver bowl, from Kurion in Cyprus,⁴³⁶ contains winged animals and winged humanoid figures, one of which is very similar in stance to the Tutankhamun figures. On the bowl the humanoid figure stands upright with wings outstretched horizontally. This is effectively the same stance as those on the sarcophagus. The right angle formed by the wings of the latter is dictated by the shape of the sarcophagus. A similar plate from Rome, but Cypro-Phoenician in style, shows a winged humanoid figure with outstretched wings above another figure in a chariot in a gesture of protection of the second figure.⁴³⁷

That the Cherubim are upright is suggested in Kings, since only their height is given, and not their length.⁴³⁸ The winged deities to which Eichler refers stand at the corners of the sarcophagus, which would not fit the description in Kings, if we assume that the wall referred to in v. 27 is the side wall. The wings outstretched in either direction, however, would fit, if we imagine the wings that touch the wall to be touching the back wall.

With this in mind it is possible to envisage the two Cherubim's wings as forming the front and sides of a ten-cubit long and five-cubit deep, open-topped cuboid in the centre of the rear half of the Debir, within which the Ark resided, the Cherubim themselves standing at the corners in a similar way to Tutankhamun's sarcophagus. The footprint of this cuboid would have similar proportions (4 x 2) to the footprint of the Ark (5 x 3), as described by P. The Cherubim could be either two-dimensional or three-dimensional, humanoid or non-humanoid, and with two or more

⁴³⁵ The idea of looking in Phoenician art for forms that help the reader imagine the physical appearance of Solomon's Temple is nothing new. Cf. e.g. Foote, 1904: 284.

⁴³⁶ Petit, 2011: fig. 34.

⁴³⁷ Petit, 2011: figs. 83-84. Cf. also fig. 126 for prone winged figures on a Mycenaean ivory comb.

⁴³⁸ Kitchen, 1987: 128.

wings. This form potentially could solve the problem of the poles as well. If the wings that are spread along the front and sides of the cuboid were along the top, as in the sarcophagus, or if the poles were placed towards the bottom of the Ark (their position is never specified), there would be a suitable gap lower down for the poles to protrude, while still remaining in the Debir. The role of such Cherubim would be apotropaic. The problem with this reconstruction, though, is that it is dependent on the outer wings of the Cherubim touching the same wall, the back one, and the text specifies two walls (v. 27). One way round this is to imagine that the wings are hinged (like the main doors to the Temple) and so *would* reach to the side walls, *if* opened up. We would have to question why this detail was not mentioned though, in the same way that there is a note about the hinged main doors to the Temple. Alternatively, one might argue that הַשְּׁנַיִם is present due to dittography, coming as it does so close to the phrase הַכְּרוּבִים הַשְּׁנַיִם.

Conclusion

What are the details that seem certain? The upright nature of the figures is reasonable. The humanoid figures from the sarcophagus of Tutankhamun and the Cypriot bowl would best fit the description, though not with their wings at a right angle. The multiplicity of forms of winged creatures in the archaeological catalogue precludes certainty in identifying a physical artefact that fits the Kings text, but I offer the reconstruction above on the basis that it is no less plausible than the throne reconstruction which has been so widely accepted. Unlike the throne idea, it allows a mental image of the Cherubim to be reconstructed which does not require the reader to ignore large elements of the text, or to add details which are not described. The need to ignore the reference to the “second” wall in v. 27 is a problem, as is the alternative of introducing a hinged element to the Cherubim themselves. However,

this reconstruction opens up interesting possibilities for how we imagine the Cherubim of the Kapporeth which we shall investigate shortly. Before turning to the Mosaic Tabernacle, though, we need to look at the remaining Cherubim in the Temple.

The Cherubim on the Temple Walls (1 Kings)

1 Kings 6: 29 וַאֲתָּ כָּל-קִירוֹת הַבַּיִת מִסָּבִיב קָלַע פְּתוּחֵי
מִקְלָעוֹת כְּרוּבִים וְתַמְרוֹת וּפְטוּרֵי צְצִים מִלְּפָנִים וְלַחֲצוֹן:

1 Kings 6: 29 He carved the walls of the house all around about with carved engravings of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers, in the inner and outer rooms.

On all the walls of the Temple there were a combination of Cherubim, flowers (פְּטוּרֵי צְצִים) and palm trees (תַּמְרוֹת). The combinations of winged creatures and sacred vegetation in the archaeological catalogue are too numerous to be listed here.⁴³⁹ However, the role of the Cherubim has been seen as apotropaic, devotional⁴⁴⁰ or a combination of the two. Given the apotropaic nature of the two Cherubim in the Debir, the simplest solution is to see these as having the same role. Their appearance on the doors would suggest a similar conclusion. The reference to them being “within” and “without” (מִלְּפָנִים וְלַחֲצוֹן) is generally seen as referring to the two internal parts of the Temple,⁴⁴¹ but the existence of winged sphinxes on the outside of the Temple at ʿAin Dara,⁴⁴² begs the question whether the outside walls are being referred to.⁴⁴³ The description of a three-storey annex around the outside of the Temple makes this seem unlikely, though.

⁴³⁹ Cf. In particular Petit, 2011: 23-36.

⁴⁴⁰ Cf. Brueggemann, 2000: 91 for this view.

⁴⁴¹ Mulder, 1998: 271.

⁴⁴² Abou-Assaf, 1993: 12 and fig. 15

⁴⁴³ Gray, J., 1964: 163 is agnostic on this point.

It has been pointed out that v. 29 clashes with 1 Kgs. 6: 18 where Cherubim are not mentioned among the carvings of the Temple.⁴⁴⁴ This does not affect the appearance of the Cherubim in terms of their form, but it does raise questions over the validity and consistency of the descriptions.⁴⁴⁵

The Cherubim on the Doors of the Debir (1 Kings)

1 Kings 6: 31-32
וְאֵת פֶּתַח הַדְּבִיר עָשָׂה דְלָתוֹת עֵצ־שֵׁמֶן
הָאֵיל מְזוּזוֹת חֲמִשִּׁית: ³² וּשְׁתֵי דְלָתוֹת עֵצ־שֵׁמֶן וְקָלַע
עֲלֵיהֶם מְקַלְעוֹת כְּרוּבִים וְתַמְרוֹת וּפְטוּרֵי צִצִּים וְצַפְפָּה זָהָב
וַיָּרֶד עַל-הַכְּרוּבִים וְעַל-הַתְּמָרוֹת אֶת-הַזָּהָב:

1 Kings 6: 31-32 For the entrance to the inner sanctuary he made doors of olivewood; the lintel and the doorposts were five-sided.³² He covered the two doors of olivewood with carvings of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers; he overlaid them with gold, and spread gold on the cherubim and on the palm trees.

The doors⁴⁴⁶ of the Debir were made from the same wood (עֵצ־שֵׁמֶן) as the Cherubim within the Debir. A different wood (עֵצ־בְּרוֹשִׁים) was used for the doors of the Temple itself, although the former wood was used for the posts. The Cherubim of the doors were carved like those on the walls of the Temple, and overlaid with gold leaf.⁴⁴⁷ Also, like the Cherubim on the walls, they were combined with flowers and palm trees. Nothing in these descriptions adds to our knowledge of the form of the Cherubim, but the presence of doors to the Debir raises interesting questions about how the poles of the Ark might be seen in the Temple, as noted above.

⁴⁴⁴ Curtis, E. L., 1910: 325. The Chronicler has a similar inconsistency (2 Chron. 3: 5), and the nature and possibility of doublets is discussed by Steins, 1995: 389-392.

⁴⁴⁵ Cf. also Montgomery, 1960: 154 who sees these descriptions of the walls as dependent on Ezek. 41: 18-25.

⁴⁴⁶ Burney, 1903: 77 discusses whether the phrase וּשְׁתֵי דְלָתוֹת was suggestive of post-exilic style, but then undermines his argument by accepting an earlier date for the same phrase later in the chapter. Mulder, 1998: 275 notes the awkward nature of this phrase and interprets it consequently as a gloss.

⁴⁴⁷ The *Hiphil* of רָדַד is unique and refers to some method of pressing or spreading (Cf. Slotki, 1983: 45; Jones, G. H., 1984: 172).

The Cherubim on the Doors of the Temple (1 Kings)

1 Kings 6: 33-35 וְכֵן עָשָׂה לַפֶּתַח הַהֵיכָל מְזוּזוֹת עֲצֵי-שֹׁמֶן מֵאֵת רְבַעִית: ³⁴ וּשְׁתֵּי דְלָתוֹת עֲצֵי בְרוֹשִׁים שְׁנֵי צְלָעִים הַדְּלַת הָאֶחָת גְּלִילִים וּשְׁנֵי קְלָעִים הַדְּלַת הַשְּׁנִית גְּלִילִים: ³⁵ וְקָלַע כְּרוּבִים וְתַמְרוֹת וּפְטָרֵי צִצִּים וְצִפָּה זָהָב מִיָּשָׁר עַל-הַמְּחֻקָּה:

1 Kings 6: 33-35 So also he made for the entrance to the nave doorposts of olivewood, four-sided each, ³⁴ and two doors of cypress wood; the two leaves of the one door were folding, and the two leaves of the other door were folding. ³⁵ He carved cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers, overlaying them with gold evenly applied upon the carved work.

There are extra details about how these doors work, with some sort of folding leaves. They would have been bigger than those of the Debir, so maybe this was a practical aspect of heavier doors. The Cherubim are again placed with flowers and palm trees, but there is an extra piece of information about how the gold is applied: *הַמְּחֻקָּה מִיָּשָׁר*. The *Pual*⁴⁴⁸ *מִיָּשָׁר* confirms the assumption made above that the Cherubim were covered in gold leaf, otherwise the carvings would not be visible.⁴⁴⁹ As with the Cherubim on the walls and other doors, no indication of their form or size is given.⁴⁵⁰

The Cherubim on the Cult Stands (1 Kings)

1 Kings 7: 29 וְעַל-הַמְּסַנְדוֹת אֲשֶׁר בֵּין הַשְּׁלָבִים אֲרִיּוֹת בְּקָרְוִים וְעַל-הַשְּׁלָבִים כֵּן מִמַּעַל וּמִתַּחַת לְאֲרִיּוֹת וּלְבָקָר לִיּוֹת מַעֲשֵׂה מוֹרָד:

1 Kings 7: 29 on the borders that were set in the frames were lions, oxen, and cherubim. On the frames, both above and below the lions and oxen, there were wreaths of beveled work.

1 Kings 7: 36 וַיִּפְתַּח עַל-הַלְחָת יְדֵיָּהּ וְעַל

⁴⁴⁸ “Incised”, so Cogan, 2001: 247.

⁴⁴⁹ Cf. Montgomery, 1960: 157; Cogan, 2001: 244.

⁴⁵⁰ Fritz, 2003: 75 does not give a reason why he thinks that there would not be room for the Cherubim on these doors.

מִסְגְּרֹתֶיהָ כְּרוּבִים אֲרִיֹּת וְתַמְרוֹת כַּמְעַר־אִישׁ וְלִיֹּת סָבִיב:⁴⁵¹

1 Kings 7: 36 On the surfaces of its stays and on its borders he carved cherubim, lions, and palm trees, where each had space, with wreaths all around.

I am not going to attempt here a reconstruction of the actual form of the cult stands described. It has been suggested that artefacts from Enkomi are the most likely referent for these,⁴⁵² but apart from some interesting winged sphinxes no single artefact really provides a useful image for the reader.⁴⁵³ The combination of Cherubim with lions and oxen in one place, and then with lions and palm trees in another has been used as an argument for two different sources.⁴⁵⁴ However, the appearance of lions and oxen without Cherubim muddies the water somewhat.⁴⁵⁵ It is too speculative to rest a theory of editorial layers on incidental descriptions of engravings.⁴⁵⁶ The fact that the Cherubim do not appear anywhere else in connection with lions is curious, and I cannot see any particular significance in their appearance on the cult stands that adds to the information already described. Perhaps the main point to be discerned is that the Cherubim here add to the overall number that were in and around the Temple, and that this should inform the discussions of the Cherubim formula in Chapter 4.

⁴⁵¹ Reading *qere*.

⁴⁵² Cf. Jones, G. H., 1984: 186.

⁴⁵³ Dikaïos, 1969, Vol. 3a: Plate 179, nos. 5 (1591) and 6 (1261).

⁴⁵⁴ Burney, 1903: 91-92; Gray, J., 1964: 178-179; cf. Jones, G. H., 1984: 171. Mulder, 1998: 349 argues that the two different lists refer to two different parts of the stand. This assumes the meaning of **בְּ** to be “base” (BDB, 487). Cogan, 2001: 265 interprets the word as an adverbial particle, rather than a spatial preposition.

⁴⁵⁵ Mulder, 1998: 334 notes that Josephus *Ant.* 8: 82 replaces Cherubim with eagles and suggests that this reflects the influence of Ezekiel. This seems unlikely, though, since Josephus elsewhere describes the form of the Cherubim as unknowable (*Ant.* 3: 137; 8: 73).

⁴⁵⁶ So Cogan, 2001: 267.

The Cherubim of the Mosaic Tabernacle According to P

Introduction

In the descriptions of Solomon's Temple there were five groups of Cherubim: 1, in the Debir; 2, on the walls; 3, on the doors to the Debir; 4, on the doors to the main body of the Temple; 5, on the cult stands. In the descriptions of the Mosaic Tabernacle four of these groups have equivalent Cherubim: 1, on the Kapporeth; 2, on the inside of the Tabernacle; 3, on the veil; 4, on the screen (LXX only). There are no equivalent cult stands. These correspondences are too numerous to be accidental.⁴⁵⁷ Whatever the date of the P descriptions in relation to the Temple, one way or another there is a conscious link between them. That said, any differences have to be accounted for.

The Cherubim of the Kapporeth

Exodus 25:17-22 וְעָשִׂיתָ כִּפֶּרֶת זָהָב טָהוֹר אֲמֹתַיִם וְחָצִי אַרְכָּהּ וְאַמְמָהּ וְחָצִי רֹחְבָּהּ: ¹⁸ וְעָשִׂיתָ שְׁנַיִם כְּרֻבִים זָהָב מִקָּשָׁה תַעֲשֶׂה אֹתָם מִשְׁנֵי קְצוֹת הַכִּפֶּרֶת: ¹⁹ וְעָשִׂה כְּרוֹב אֶחָד מִקְצֵה מִזֶּה וְכְרוֹב אֶחָד מִקְצֵה מִזֶּה מִן־הַכִּפֶּרֶת תַּעֲשֶׂה אֶת־הַכְּרֻבִים עַל־שְׁנֵי קְצוֹתָיו: ²⁰ וְהָיוּ הַכְּרֻבִים פְּרָשֵׁי כַנָּפִים לְמַעַלָּה סֹכְכִים בְּכַנְפֵיהֶם עַל־הַכִּפֶּרֶת וּפְנֵיהֶם אִישׁ אֶל־אָחִיו אֶל־הַכִּפֶּרֶת יִהְיוּ פְנֵי הַכְּרֻבִים: ²¹ וְנָתַתְּ אֶת־הַכִּפֶּרֶת עַל־הָאָרֶן מִלְּמַעְלָה וְאֶל־הָאָרֶן תִּתֵּן אֶת־הָעֲדָת אֲשֶׁר אֲתָן אֵלֶיךָ: ²² וְנוֹעַדְתִּי לְךָ שֵׁם וּדְבַרְתִּי אִתְּךָ מֵעַל הַכִּפֶּרֶת מִבֵּין שְׁנֵי הַכְּרֻבִים אֲשֶׁר עַל־הָאָרֶן הָעֲדָת אֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר אֲצַוֶּה אוֹתְךָ אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: פ

Exodus 25: 17-22 Then you shall make a mercy seat of pure gold; two cubits and a half shall be its length, and a cubit and a half its width.¹⁸ You shall make two cherubim of gold; you shall make them of hammered work, at the two ends of the mercy seat.¹⁹ Make one cherub at the one end, and one cherub at the other; of one piece with the mercy seat you shall make the cherubim at its two ends.²⁰ The cherubim shall spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings. They shall face one to another; the faces of the cherubim shall be turned

⁴⁵⁷ For a similar line cf. Haran, 1962: 14-15. Also cf. Rehm, 1979: 83-84.

toward the mercy seat. ²¹ You shall put the mercy seat on the top of the ark; and in the ark you shall put the covenant that I shall give you. ²² There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the covenant, I will deliver to you all my commands for the Israelites.

Exodus 37: 7-9 וַיַּעַשׂ שְׁנֵי כְרֻבִים זָהָב מִקְשָׁה עָשָׂה אֹתָם מִשְׁנֵי קְצוֹת הַכַּפֹּרֶת: ⁸ כְּרוֹב־אֶחָד מִקְצֵה מִזֶּה וְכְרוֹב־אֶחָד מִקְצֵה מִזֶּה מִן־הַכַּפֹּרֶת עָשָׂה אֶת־הַכְּרֻבִים מִשְׁנֵי קְצוֹתָיו: ⁹ וַיְהִיו הַכְּרֻבִים פְּרָשֵׁי כַנָּפִים לְמַעַל סַכְכִּים בְּכַנְפֵיהֶם עַל־הַכַּפֹּרֶת וּפְנֵיהֶם אִישׁ אֶל־אָחִיו אֶל־הַכַּפֹּרֶת הָיוּ פְּנֵי הַכְּרֻבִים:

Exodus 37: 7-9 He made two cherubim of hammered gold; at the two ends of the mercy seat he made them, ⁸ one cherub at the one end, and one cherub at the other end; of one piece with the mercy seat he made the cherubim at its two ends. ⁹ The cherubim spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings. They faced one another; the faces of the cherubim were turned toward the mercy seat.

Numbers 7: 89 וַיִּשְׁמַע אֶת־הַקּוֹל מִדְבַר אֱלֹוִי מֵעַל הַכַּפֹּרֶת אֲשֶׁר עַל־אֲרֹן הָעֵדֻת מִבֵּין שְׁנֵי הַכְּרֻבִים וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹוִי:

Numbers 7: 89 When Moses went into the tent of meeting to speak with the LORD, he would hear the voice speaking to him from above the mercy seat that was on the ark of the covenant from between the two cherubim; thus it spoke to him.

General Points

As with the two large Cherubim in the Temple the greatest discussion takes place concerning the two Cherubim that were attached to the Kapporeth. They were made of wrought gold and were either joined to the Kapporeth or formed from it. It could be argued that they were soldered onto it, ⁴⁵⁹ because they were made of a lower grade gold (זָהָב), ⁴⁶⁰ as opposed to the טָהוֹר זָהָב of the Kapporeth. Alternatively, the reference to the gold of the Cherubim could be referring back to the pure gold of the Kapporeth, since they are made מִשְׁנֵי קְצוֹת הַכַּפֹּרֶת. The sense of מִן־הַכַּפֹּרֶת is key

⁴⁵⁸ Reading *qere*.

⁴⁵⁹ Driver, 1911: 271.

⁴⁶⁰ Propp, 2006: 389.

here. Does it denote position⁴⁶¹ or form?⁴⁶² The Kapporeth itself is described only very simply, with two dimensions. Either the thickness was too small to be described, in which case it would be a rectangular plate, or the third dimension was too complicated to allow a particular thickness to be noted.⁴⁶³ Nevertheless, it seems odd that a complicated form is ignored, unless that form were the Cherubim themselves. Whatever the form of the Kapporeth, the name should be taken primarily as a technical cult term denoting the place of expiation,⁴⁶⁴ especially in the context of Lev. 16 where the *Piel*, כָּפַר, “make atonement”, occurs ten times in conjunction with the Kapporeth’s four appearances. Even if it appears physically to be in the form of a lid,⁴⁶⁵ something which is by no means certain, its “lidness” is not what is being referred to.⁴⁶⁶

The Kapporeth

More importantly, there is nothing in the description about how the Kapporeth stays attached to the Ark. Its length and breadth are identical, and yet it and the Ark are inseparable throughout the P narrative, even when covered with the veil and various other protective paraphernalia. Common sense demands that there be an

⁴⁶¹ Propp, 2006: 389. Propp refers to Exod. 28: 8 for a similar phrase, כְּמוֹעֵשֶׁתָּהּ מִזָּנָהּ, concerning the attachment of the Ephod to the breastplate.

⁴⁶² Those who see the Cherubim as being formed of one piece with the Kapporeth include Gawler, 1851: 5-9. Kalisch, 1858: 504 argues that the ancient writers took this view, and that the Cherubim were included at Exod. 26: 34 where only the Kapporeth is mentioned (Kalisch, 1858: 515). Cf. also Cassuto, 1967: 332; Hyatt, 1971: 267. For an agnostic treatment of this question see Cole, 1973: 191; Mackay, 2001: 444.

⁴⁶³ De Tarragon asks similar questions to these, arguing against it being a cover that is closely connected with the Ark (de Tarragon, 1981: 7-8).

⁴⁶⁴ Haupt, 1900: 61, 80; Zimmern, 1901: 92; Michaeli, 1974: 230 (although he sees the idea as ambiguous on p. 233); Childs, 1974: 524; Janowski, 1982: 347; Durham, 1987: 359-360; Lang, 1995: 298; Motyer, 2005: 254. Görg, 1977: 115-118 (cf. Mettinger, 1982b: 88), notes a possible link to an Egyptian phrase, *kp (n) rdwy*, meaning “sole of the feet”, but Day argues that it would be odd for a footstool to have such a name (Day, 1988: 60).

⁴⁶⁵ Pixley, 1987: 193. The idea that this is primarily a cover is perpetuated, nevertheless, not least because of the NIV rendering of it as an “atonement cover” or more simply as a “cover” (Exod. 25: 18-22; 37: 7-9).

⁴⁶⁶ For this debate in the context of the Chronicler cf. Jarick, 2002: 154. Cf. also Holzinger, 1900: 122.

overlap of some sort, however small. At this point I would like to draw attention to the crown of the Ark, **זָרְזָהָב סָבִיב** (Exod. 25: 11). Again this is a very cursory note attached to the end of the description of the gold plating that covers the Ark inside and out, and its precise nature is not clear.⁴⁶⁷ Similar crowns are described on the altar of incense (Exod. 30: 3) and on the table for the bread of the Presence (Exod. 25: 24). Only items in the Tabernacle have a crown. On the table it is attached to a border (**מִסְפָּרֶת**). It appears that this crown was some sort of decorative addition. It is presumably technical in nature, but it is not unreasonable to assume that it is near the top of the item, since crowns tend to adorn heads rather than feet. While this does not help us directly with identifying how the Kapporeth might sit atop the Ark, it does give us an example of a technical detail which stands proud of the basic dimensions of the Ark itself.⁴⁶⁸ It is quite reasonable, therefore, to allow that similar incidental details existed, in order to make them work.

The Two Cherubim

Let us return to the Cherubim. There are two. They are made of wrought gold (**מִקְשָׁה**), either the gold of the Kapporeth itself, or some alternative gold⁴⁶⁹ which is somehow fixed into position on either end of the Kapporeth. The other wrought items are the candlestick (Exod. 25: 31) and the silver trumpets (Num. 10: 2), both of which are three-dimensional.⁴⁷⁰ However, it is a moot point to ask whether a hammered fresco is two-dimensional⁴⁷¹ or three-dimensional, so I shall not attempt to resolve that issue.⁴⁷²

⁴⁶⁷ Holzinger, 1900: 121.

⁴⁶⁸ For similar comments in which he compares the Ark to a jewellery box see Beer, 1939: 131.

⁴⁶⁹ Jacob, B., 1997: 773.

⁴⁷⁰ Jacob, B., 1997: 772.

⁴⁷¹ So Heinisch, 1934: 202; Scharbert, 1989: 103.

⁴⁷² Cf. Ashby, 1998: 122.

The wings are described using terms which all occur in the Kings account of the equivalent Cherubim in the Temple. Their wings are in a position that is “divided” or “spread”, פְּרָשִׁי כְּנָפַיִם, (cf. וַיִּפְרְשׂוּ, 1 Kgs. 6: 27). They are “upwards”, לְמַעַלָּה. They “cover”, סִכְכִּים, the Kapporeth. The wings are עַל־הַכַּפֹּרֶת, just as the wings in the Temple are עַל־הָאֲרוֹן. All of these phrases have an identical meaning, if not form, in 1 Kgs. 8: 7. This has to be deliberate. Nevertheless, as with the Kings description, the reader is left with several possible mental images, not least the number of wings.⁴⁷³

The description of the direction of the faces of the Cherubim presents a problem. The faces of the two Cherubim are pointing in two directions: towards each other (אִישׁ אֶל־אָחִיו)⁴⁷⁴ and towards the Kapporeth (אֶל־הַכַּפֹּרֶת יְהִיוּ פְּנֵי הַכְּרֻבִים).⁴⁷⁵ It could be argued that these two phrases refer to the same general direction,⁴⁷⁶ and are not intended to be entirely accurate. However, the fact that the second part of this description is a separate phrase, and that the former phrase is marked with an *athnah* by the Massorettes, implies that these are complementary details rather than variations of a single idea. Somehow the reader is supposed to imagine that the Cherubim could be facing the Kapporeth and each other *at the same time*. Given how vague is the description of the Kapporeth itself the reader is left guessing. However, whatever the form of the Kapporeth, the only possible way that the Cherubim could face each other and the Kapporeth, is for them to be *on the sides*. If the Kapporeth is three-

⁴⁷³ Commentators generally assume two (Kalisch, 1858: 480), but the text does not specify this.

⁴⁷⁴ 4QpaleoExod^m and Sam. read אַחַד אֶל אַחַד (Propp, 2006: 323).

⁴⁷⁵ Cf. Houtman, 2000: 388.

⁴⁷⁶ E.g. Kalisch, 1858: 480; McNeile, 1908: 161; Driver, 1911: 271; Durham, 1987: 359-360; Mackay, 2001: 447. Propp discusses this issue in some detail (Propp, 2006: 391-392) and concludes that the two phrases form a chiasm with a single idea. He rejects the possibility of their reflecting independent sources.

dimensional that is easy enough to envisage. If it is two-dimensional the reader is forced to picture them, at least in part, as lower than the top.

How does the Kapporeth relate to the Ark, though? It is said to be placed *עַל־הָאָרֶן מִלְּמַעְלָה*. What is the meaning of this phrase? As noted in the chapter on Ezekiel,⁴⁷⁷ the exact form, *מִלְּמַעְלָה*, only occurs in P or in material relating to things of interest to priests. Its specific usage in the Tabernacle descriptions produces an interesting parallel. The leather covering (*מִכְסֵה*) for the Tabernacle is said to be *מִלְּמַעְלָה* (Exod. 26: 14; 36: 19; 40: 19). It is used with the same preposition, *עַל*, and the combination of these two words in the hands of the same writer is likely to mean the same thing. The covering for the tent, while not given any dimensions, is clearly a waterproof layer for protection from the weather. This means that it would cover the sides as well as the top. If this idea is applied to the Kapporeth, it is reasonable to assume that it too covers the sides of the Ark as well as the top. If the crown protrudes from the sides, then that might mark the lower limit of the Kapporeth/Cherubim. Alternatively the crown may be an adornment on the top and not affect the dimensions of the Kapporeth at all. Either way, I would like to propose that, in the mind of this writer, the Kapporeth “covers” the Ark in the same way that the protective leather for the Tabernacle covers the Tabernacle itself. If my reconstruction is correct, the position of the expiatory is not so much spatially above the Ark as *all over it*. It is the Ark and its contents, covered on all sides by the Kapporeth, that represents the place where God meets with Moses.⁴⁷⁸ God can speak *מִעַל* the

⁴⁷⁷ See above, pp. 47-48.

⁴⁷⁸ De Tarragon also questions the meaning of *מִלְּמַעְלָה* but does not make the connection that I have made here (De Tarragon, 1981: 7).

Kapporeth and מִבֵּיַן the Cherubim and עַל the Ark, because he is not pictured in the worshipper's mind as tied to a particular spot, but resides more generally within the locus of the Ark and its covering cult items.⁴⁷⁹ Yhwh will meet (נֹוֹעַדְתִּי)⁴⁸⁰ and speak (וְדַבַּרְתִּי) with Moses.⁴⁸¹ It is as if the Ark, Kapporeth and Cherubim together form a mini sanctuary.⁴⁸²

This is inevitably a speculative reconstruction but, while my reconstruction of the Cherubim in the Debir of the Solomonic Temple necessitated questioning one word of the description or adding in an element not described, this reconstruction does not abuse the text at all. Every aspect of what the writer has to say has been taken into consideration. It allows for the Cherubim to be two- or three-dimensional, to be hammered out of the Kapporeth or soldered onto it. It takes seriously the phraseology of P in the context of the Tabernacle. Crucially it does not assume anything to be present that is not in the text, unlike those who imagine some sort of throne sitting on top of the Ark.⁴⁸³ It allows for ambiguity. However, before moving on to the rest of the Cherubim, there are some artefacts which will help to illustrate the concept.

⁴⁷⁹ While it can be argued that the Numbers reference is from a later hand (Morgenstern, 1938: 372), because it does not contradict the Exodus descriptions, such a possibility has little impact on the overall discussion here.

⁴⁸⁰ So Exod 25: 22 MT, נֹוֹעַדְתִּי. LXX reads γνωσθήσομαι, presumably from נֹוֹדְתִי.

⁴⁸¹ Zimmermann, 1944: 462-463 rejects the idea that the last two words of this verse, וְדַבַּרְתִּי אֵלָיו, introduced a now lost divine speech, arguing that they are a textual variation on וְדַבַּרְתִּי אֵלָיו. For the Rabbinic discussion of the this unusual *Hithpael* cf. Yadin, 2003: 702-705.

⁴⁸² Interestingly Holzinger argued that the cover for the Ark was in fact the Tabernacle itself and its embroidered Cherubim (Holzinger, 1900: 128). He tried to show that, consequently, there would be no need for a second Kapporeth within the Tabernacle (Holzinger, 1900: 123). Myers notes this possibility (Myers, 1965a: 29).

⁴⁸³ This idea has been accepted in both academic and popular commentaries: Delitzsch, 1884: 350; Morgenstern, 1960: 186; Cassuto, 1967: 334-336; Cole, 1973: 191; Cundall, 1981: 111; Sarna, 1991: 161. For the claim that Nahmanides (1194-1270) saw the Cherubim forming a throne cf. Wolfson, 1989: 146-147.

Archaeological Data

The purpose of archaeological referents here is not to make a case for some historical reality. Neither is that the intention of the mental reconstruction that I have offered. The purpose of these artefacts is to assist the reader of the text to make some sense of the description presented. If physical artefacts can help in this process, that is all to the good. At no point am I suggesting that this makes the text more or less reliable as a witness to some object which might, theoretically, be excavated by a miraculously fortunate archaeologist. I emphasize the point here especially, because it is almost universally accepted in scholarly circles that the Mosaic Tabernacle is a literary fiction.⁴⁸⁴

There are a couple of interesting artefacts which may assist the reader. Some model temples from Megiddo serve as possible examples of what the Ark might have looked like in the writer's mind. This was suggested by H. G. May in 1936. He proposed that the Ark might have been decorated with Cherubim.⁴⁸⁵ However, he did not engage in detail with the descriptions in Exodus (or 1 Kings), and ignored the Kapporeth completely. The reconstruction that I have suggested above makes the Ark and Kapporeth combination look very similar to the models from Megiddo. The fact that they are made of wood, rather than the pottery of the Megiddo artefacts, would make a shoebox type arrangement more conceivable, but the overall effect would be to have one object surrounded by the wings of the Cherubim.⁴⁸⁶ This concept is

⁴⁸⁴ Although for most scholars, the existence of the Ark and Cherubim were not. E.g. Clements assumes their existence when discussing apparent Deuteronomic demythologising of the Ark by their removal from the descriptions (Clements, 1965: 302-303). This is not to discount the possibility of an older independent tradition for the tent in Exod. 33: 7-11; (e.g. Childs, 1974: 589-593) Num. 11: 14-17, 24-30; 12 (e.g. Mettinger, 1982b: 81).

⁴⁸⁵ May, 1936b: 216-217, cf. Cross, 1947: 67.

⁴⁸⁶ It is interesting to note that May translates the Cherubim formula as "inhabiting the Cherubim" and moves away from any idea of enthronement. Cf. Morgenstern, 1960: 186 who describes the enthroned Yhwh as "surrounded" by Cherubim, which implies more than simply the two on the Ark. Kawashima also uses the word "inhabit" (Kawashima, 2006: 229). Cf. Propp, 2006: 517 ("among").

physically similar to the sarcophagus imagery with which I compared the Kings texts.⁴⁸⁷ I also noted that the proportions of the Cherubim were similar to those of the Ark. It is looking increasingly likely that we have a common style or referent for both the Kings and Exodus texts.⁴⁸⁸

Conclusion

While there might be a common style for both the Cherubim of the Temple and the Ark/Kapporeth/Cherubim in P, there are three important differences. The Cherubim in the Temple are much bigger than the Ark, they stand separate from it⁴⁸⁹ and no mention is made of a place of expiation in the Temple, even if it is assumed that something of that nature were taking place there. The changes could be accounted for if the P description is based upon a physical reality in Jerusalem,⁴⁹⁰ but which was unknown to a writer of Kings, who was describing things much later while knowing the P descriptions. In that case the writer of Kings would be creating a literary fiction as well as P. However, we would then have to explain why the Kings writer omitted any language about expiatory cultic actions. It makes more sense to give literary priority to Kings over P.⁴⁹¹ P has clearly accepted the section describing the covering by the Cherubim and the protrusion of the poles. If P were to envisage the Temple Cherubim much as I have described it, and created a pre-conquest literary

⁴⁸⁷ May argues that the Cherubim may have been on the corners (May, 1936b: 218), which would also coincide with the sarcophagus imagery. It is also worth noting the early suggestion of John Spencer that the Ark has connections with Egyptian coffins (Spencer, 1727, Vol. 2: 829-834). Such an arrangement means that the Cherubim have a specific role to play in such a portable, model shrine, which overcomes Herbert's objection to the idea, namely that their appearance would be unaccounted for (May, 1946: 279).

⁴⁸⁸ Note also at this point Propp's description of the Cherubim's wings as a sort of "miniature tabernacle" (Propp, 2006: 390).

⁴⁸⁹ Knoppers' comment that the Temple Cherubim (admittedly he is discussing the Chronieler's description of them) are attached to the Ark is odd (Knoppers, 2004: 934).

⁴⁹⁰ Milgrom dates the cultic elements of P prior to 586 BCE (Milgrom, 1970: 148, n. 33).

⁴⁹¹ Noth, 1959: 165-167; Scharbert, 1989: 103.

equivalent,⁴⁹² he would not have felt compelled to follow the Temple descriptions slavishly.

So could this mental image of the Temple have some basis in history? There is no hard evidence. There are three possible solutions here that are relatively simple. 1. The Kings writer was describing something that looked different from how I have envisaged this, and consequently the form of the poles and Cherubic covering is a secondary editorial layer which does not quite fit. 2. There is no secondary editorial layer and the description has omitted a key element in how the poles related to the Cherubim. 3. The wings of the Cherubim were at right angles and touched the back wall rather than the side walls, something that is possible, either by imagining a hinge mechanism that is not mentioned, or by removing one word from the text on the grounds that it has crept in due to dittography at an early stage of transmission.

Before drawing final conclusions, though, there are other Cherubim to be considered in the Mosaic Tabernacle.⁴⁹³

The Cherubim on the Tabernacle, the Veil and the Entrance

וְאֶת־הַמִּשְׁכָּן תַּעֲשֶׂה עֵשֶׂר יָרִיעֹת שֵׁשׁ מִשְׁזָר
וְתַכְלֵת וְאַרְגָּמָן וְתֹלַעַת שָׁנִי כְּרֻבִים מַעֲשֶׂה חָשֵׁב תַּעֲשֶׂה
אֹתָם:

Exodus 26: 1 Moreover you shall make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine twisted linen, and blue, purple, and crimson yarns; you shall make them with cherubim skillfully worked into them.

וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כָּל־חֲכָמֵי לֵב בַּעֲשֵׂי הַמְּלָאכָה
אֶת־הַמִּשְׁכָּן עֵשֶׂר יָרִיעֹת שֵׁשׁ מִשְׁזָר וְתַכְלֵת וְאַרְגָּמָן וְתֹלַעַת
שָׁנִי כְּרֻבִים מַעֲשֶׂה חָשֵׁב עָשָׂה אֹתָם:

⁴⁹² Fretheim argues more strongly that P was referring to portable tent traditions which were opposed to the Temple forms (Fretheim, 1968: 319).

⁴⁹³ Halevi is the only commentator that I can find who mentions the other Cherubim on the Tabernacle, but not the two on the Kapporeth (Halevi, 1980: 136-139, 141).

Exodus 36: 8 All those with skill among the workers made the tabernacle with ten curtains; they were made of fine twisted linen, and blue, purple, and crimson yarns, with cherubim skillfully worked into them.

וְעָשִׂיתָ פְּרָכֶת תְּכֵלֶת וְאַרְגָּמֹן וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי
וְשָׁשׁ מִשְׁזָר מֵעֵשֶׂה חֹשֶׁב יַעֲשֶׂה אֹתָהּ כְּרֻבִים:

Exodus 26: 31 You shall make a curtain of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen; it shall be made with cherubim skillfully worked into it.

וַיַּעַשׂ אֶת־הַפְּרָכֶת תְּכֵלֶת וְאַרְגָּמֹן וְתוֹלַעַת
שָׁנִי וְשָׁשׁ מִשְׁזָר מֵעֵשֶׂה חֹשֶׁב עָשָׂה אֹתָהּ כְּרֻבִים:

Exodus 36: 35 He made the curtain of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and fine twisted linen, with cherubim skillfully worked into it.

Exodus 37: 5 καὶ ἐποίησαν τὸ καταπέτασμα τῆς θύρας τῆς σκηνῆς τοῦ μαρτυρίου ἐξ ὑακίνθου καὶ πορφύρας καὶ κοκκίνου νειησμένου καὶ βύσσου κεκλωσμένης ἔργον ὑφάντου χερουβιμ

וַיַּעַשׂ מִסָּךְ לַפֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל תְּכֵלֶת וְאַרְגָּמֹן
וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי וְשָׁשׁ מִשְׁזָר מֵעֵשֶׂה רָקֵם:

Exodus 36: 37 He also made a screen for the entrance to the tent, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and fine twisted linen, embroidered with needlework;

I am considering all of these references together, because in detail they do not tell us very much about the Cherubim. Apart from some occasional discussion about their size⁴⁹⁴ and number,⁴⁹⁵ there is very little to be said about them. Rabbinic speculation about the nature of the embroidery is interesting,⁴⁹⁶ but not particularly illuminating. It seems strange that MT of Exod. 36: 37 omits Cherubim from the entrance to the Tabernacle, when this clearly would be an equivalent to the Temple doors in Jerusalem. LXX has either corrected this omission, or MT is faulty at this

⁴⁹⁴ Mackay's discussion of the different sizes of cubit is particularly helpful (Mackay, 2001: 441).

⁴⁹⁵ Strong, J., 1893: 273; Halivni, 1996: 106 (referring to a tradition in the Babylonian Talmud – *Sukkah* 5b – that the face of the Cherubim was not smaller than a handsbreadth).

⁴⁹⁶ Kalisch, 1858: 511; Durham, 1987: 371. *Yoma* 72b records a difference of opinion over whether the embroidery was double-sided or not (Sarna, 1991: 167).

point.⁴⁹⁷ As with the Temple, the combination of Cherubim and vegetation is significant, but the position of the Cherubim particularly on the veil and screen (in the case of LXX) suggests that they were guardians of the sacred enclosure.

We are very nearly at a point when some conclusions can be drawn about how these texts which describe the Tabernacle and the Temple Cherubim fit together. But before we do that, we need to consider the descriptions of the Chronicler.

The Cherubim of Solomon's Temple in Chronicles

The main purpose of this section is to point out how the Chronicler has developed the description of the Cherubim. Writing later than all the previous descriptions it is apparent that the Chronicler was aware of the earlier texts, but handled them in a new way.

The “Chariot” of the Cherubim (1 Chronicles)

1 Chronicles 28: 18 וְלַמִּזְבֵּחַ הַקָּטָן זָהָב מְזָקָק בְּמִשְׁקָל
וְלַתְּבִנִית הַמְרֻכָּבָה הַכְּרֻבִים זָהָב לְפָרָשִׁים וְסֻכְכִּים
עַל־אֲרוֹן בְּרִית־יְהוָה:

1 Chronicles 28: 18 for the altar of incense made of refined gold, and its weight; also his plan for the golden chariot of the cherubim that spread their wings and covered the ark of the covenant of the LORD.

The most striking feature of the Chronicler's Cherubim is the description of them as forming some sort of chariot: הַמְרֻכָּבָה הַכְּרֻבִים.⁴⁹⁸ For the Chronicler, it is a convenient way of combining the descriptions of 1 Kings and Exodus (the use of

⁴⁹⁷ Houtman points out that the absence of the Cherubim from this entrance veil signifies that the Cherubim themselves are part of what is being hidden (Houtman, 2000: 418). If this were the case, this would be a unique idea. Meyers simply sees it as a sign that this screen was less elaborate (Meyers, 2005: 236). It is also worth noting at this point that Targum Neofiti omits the Cherubim from Exod. 26: 1 (Propp, 2006: 327).

⁴⁹⁸ The possibility of word play between these two words (McKenzie, S. L., 2004: 216) cannot be discounted.

לְתַבְנִית at Exod. 25: 9, 40 is a bit of a giveaway that Exodus is being referenced⁴⁹⁹) with those of Ezekiel, without having to describe the image in detail.⁵⁰⁰ This verse forms part of an inventory of the contents of the Temple, which David makes before his death. There is some debate about how the list works exactly,⁵⁰¹ but it does not substantially affect this discussion. The spreading and covering actions of the Cherubim are emphasized,⁵⁰² using the same verbs as 1 Kgs. 8: 7: לְפַרְשִׁים וְסַכְכִּים. No mention is made of the Kapporeth at this point, but the Chronicler is aware of it (1 Chron. 28: 11). It is reasonable to assume that, for the Chronicler, the chariot of the Cherubim is its equivalent.⁵⁰³ The Chronicler is unclear whether the Cherubim were made of wood and covered with gold or simply made of gold.⁵⁰⁴ If the latter, presumably this reflects the entirely gold form of the Cherubim on the Ark in P.

The Cherubim on the Temple Walls and the Veil (2 Chronicles)

וַיִּתֵּךְ אֶת-הַבַּיִת הַקְּדוֹת הַסָּפִים וְקִירוֹתָיו
וַדְּלִתוֹתָיו זָהָב וּפְתַח כְּרוּבִים עַל-הַקִּירוֹת:

2 Chronicles 3: 7 So he lined the house with gold - its beams, its thresholds, its walls, and its doors; and he carved cherubim on the walls.

וַיַּעַשׂ אֶת-הַפְּרָכֶת תְּכֵלֶת

⁴⁹⁹ De Vries, 1989: 219.

⁵⁰⁰ The idea that the Ps. 18 is also being referred to (Curtis, E. L., 1910: 299) is unjustified, unless the Chronicler were aware of a form of the Psalm which followed LXX. Japhet's connection of the Chariot idea with the "old" Cherubim formula (Japhet, 2002: 450-451) is unconvincing. Johnstone also suggests a connection to Isa. 66: 15 (Johnstone, 2007: 281). These are multiple chariots, however, which does not quite work.

⁵⁰¹ Bertheau, 1873: 217; Slotki, 1952: 151; Braun, 1986: 269. If the Cherubim are part of the Ark, a possibility noted by Klein (Klein, 2006: 526-526), then we could assume that these are different from the Cherubim of 2 Chron. 3: 10-13. If they are not, then the opposite would be true. It seems odd, in the former case, for there to be no further reference to these other Cherubim. The simplest solution is to see the Cherubim in apposition to the Chariot, but not as part of the Ark, and therefore the same as the large Cherubim mentioned later.

⁵⁰² Anticipating the placement of the Ark beneath them later on (Japhet, 1993: 578).

⁵⁰³ Michaeli's suggestion, that the chariot was something other than the two large Cherubim of the Debir (Michaeli, 1967: 136, n. 5), is not convincing because the reference to the wings spreading and covering can only suggest them.

⁵⁰⁴ Dirksen, 1996: 435-436 sees the phrase "Cherubim of gold" here as a scribal addition. He proposes altering the phrase לְפַרְשִׁים וְסַכְכִּים to הַפְּרָשִׁים וְהַסַּכְכִּים.

וְאַרְגָּמָן וְכִרְמִיִּל וּבָוֶץ וַיַּעַל עָלָיו כְּרוּבִים:

2 Chronicles 3: 14 And Solomon made the curtain of blue and purple and crimson fabrics and fine linen, and worked cherubim into it.

The internal walls and doors of the Temple are decorated with carved frescos of Cherubim covered with gold leaf. The Chronicler has simplified the reference to the doors. This may be so that he can detract from the fact that he has replaced the doors to the Debir with the veil from the Mosaic Tabernacle.⁵⁰⁵ It is easy for the reader to pass over this point, believing that the Chronicler is faithfully reproducing the description from 1 Kings, when a subtle omission is actually being made. The lack of vegetation is also a subtle change. There are two reasonable explanations for this. Either the significance of the vegetation has been forgotten by the Chronicler's time, or it is because the vegetation does not appear in the first two visions of Ezekiel when the Cherubim are described in some detail. However, in response to this second point, it should be noted that there are palm trees on the walls of Ezekiel's future Temple (Ezek. 41: 18, 12, 25).

2 Chronicles 3: 8 καὶ ἐποίησεν τὸν οἶκον τοῦ ἁγίου τῶν ἁγίων μῆκος αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ πρόσωπον πλάτους πήχεων εἴκοσι καὶ τὸ εὖρος πήχεων εἴκοσι καὶ κατεχρύσωσεν αὐτὸν χρυσίῳ καθαρῶ εἰς χερουβιν εἰς τάλαιντα ἑξακόσια

LXX adds a note that there were Cherubim in the Holy of Holies (the Chronicler uses the phrase from Exodus here, rather than “Debir”, although this term is used elsewhere by the Chronicler). MT does not note this, but the general description of the walls and doors in the previous verse could include the walls of the Debir.

⁵⁰⁵ The suggestion that he is reflecting the existence of a veil in Zerubbabel's Temple (Curtis, E. L., 1910: 327-328) is speculative: cf. Becker, 1988: 16.

The Cherubim of the Debir (2 Chronicles)⁵⁰⁶

2 Chronicles 3: 10-13 וַיַּעַשׂ בְּבַיִת־קֹדֶשׁ הַקְּדוֹשִׁים כְּרוּבִים שְׁנַיִם
מְעֹשָׂה צַעְצְעִים וַיִּצְפּוּ אֹתָם זָהָב: ¹¹ וְכַנְפֵי הַכְּרוּבִים אָרְכָם
אַמּוֹת עֶשְׂרִים כַּנֶּף הָאַחַד לְאַמּוֹת חֲמֵשׁ מִנְעֵת לְקִיר הַבַּיִת
וְהַכַּנֶּף הָאַחֶרֶת אַמּוֹת חֲמֵשׁ מִגִּיעַ לְכַנֶּף הַכְּרוּב הָאַחֵר: ¹²
וְכַנֶּף הַכְּרוּב הָאַחַד אַמּוֹת חֲמֵשׁ מִגִּיעַ לְקִיר הַבַּיִת וְהַכַּנֶּף
הָאַחֶרֶת אַמּוֹת חֲמֵשׁ דְּבָקָה לְכַנֶּף הַכְּרוּב הָאַחֵר: ¹³ כַּנְפֵי
הַכְּרוּבִים הָאֵלֶּה פְּרָשִׁים אַמּוֹת עֶשְׂרִים וְהֵם עֹמְדִים
עַל־רַגְלֵיהֶם וּפְנֵיהֶם לְבַיִת: ס

2 Chronicles 3: 10-13 In the most holy place he made two carved cherubim and overlaid them with gold. ¹¹ The wings of the cherubim together extended twenty cubits: one wing of the one, five cubits long, touched the wall of the house, and its other wing, five cubits long, touched the wing of the other cherub; ¹² and of this cherub, one wing, five cubits long, touched the wall of the house, and the other wing, also five cubits long, was joined to the wing of the first cherub. ¹³ The wings of these cherubim extended twenty cubits; the cherubim stood on their feet, facing the nave.

2 Chronicles 5: 7-8 וַיָּבִיאוּ הַכֹּהֲנִים אֶת־אֲרוֹן בְּרִית־יְהוָה
אֶל־מְקוֹמוֹ אֶל־דְּבִיר הַבַּיִת אֶל־קֹדֶשׁ הַקְּדוֹשִׁים אֶל־תַּחַת
כַּנְפֵי הַכְּרוּבִים: ⁸ וַיִּהְיוּ הַכְּרוּבִים פְּרָשִׁים כַּנְפֵּים עַל־מְקוֹם
הָאֲרוֹן וַיִּכְסּוּ הַכְּרוּבִים עַל־הָאֲרוֹן וְעַל־בְּדָיו מִלְמַעְלָה:

2 Chronicles 5: 7-8 Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the LORD to its place, in the inner sanctuary of the house, in the most holy place, underneath the wings of the cherubim. ⁸ For the cherubim spread out their wings over the place of the ark, so that the cherubim made a covering above the ark and its poles.

The description of the two large Cherubim in the Debir relies heavily on that in 1 Kings,⁵⁰⁷ but there are significant differences. The Chronicler omits any reference to their height. The entire wingspan of the two Cherubim together is specified: twenty cubits. There are a couple of technical terms. They are said to be carved in some way, צַעְצְעִים. This *hapax legomenon* is assumed to derive from a root צוּע, found in

⁵⁰⁶ Steins' reference to 11 QT 6: 6; 7: 10, 13 with regard to this section (Steins, 1995: 393) is insecure, because columns 3-12 of this scroll are too badly mutilated to allow a secure reconstruction.

⁵⁰⁷ Curtis, E. L., 1910: 327-328.

Arabic, meaning “form” or “fashion”.⁵⁰⁸ The wings are also “joined”, רִבְּקָה, rather than simply touching. There is an additional note that the Cherubim are standing on their feet, וְהֵם עֹמְדִים עַל־רַגְלֵיהֶם. The only other reference to the feet of the Cherubim is Ezek. 1: 7, following the interpretation given later in chapter 10 of that book that the living creatures referred to there are Cherubim. How they were standing in this description is left open. We are left guessing whether they were biped or quadruped. The Chronicler simply could not have known. Their faces were לְבַיִת. In the first seven verses of this chapter, בַּיִת refers to the entire Temple six times. In vv. 8 and 10 we find the phrase בְּבַיִת־קִדְשׁ הַקִּדְשִׁים used twice,⁵⁰⁹ presumably meaning the same thing. Consequently, according to the Chronicler the two Cherubim were facing out of the Debir and into the main part of the Temple.

The note about describing the placement of the Ark under/behind the wings of the Cherubim (2 Chron. 5: 7-8) reproduces the text of 1 Kgs. 8: 6-7 exactly, except that there is a different verb used to describe the covering wings. In 1 Kgs. 8: 7 it is וַיִּכְסּוּ, a *Qal* imperfect third masculine plural of סָכַךְ. Here it is וַיִּכְסּוּ, a *Piel* imperfect third masculine plural of כָּסָה. Unlike סָכַךְ, כָּסָה more clearly denotes some sort of covering. While the two forms are very similar, and could have occurred due to metathesis,⁵¹⁰ it is possible that this change signifies the writer’s particular

⁵⁰⁸ BDB, 847. Cf. Bertheau, 1873: 246; Slotki, 1952: 169; Williamson, 1982: 209. Myers and Williamson suggest that they are molten images, rather than wood (Myers, 1965a: 15; Williamson, 1982: 209). Certainly that they are made of wood is omitted, but it seems unlikely that the Chronicler would make this change from 1 Kings, unless he were making a reference to the metal Cherubim of the Tabernacle, and even then the Tabernacle Cherubim are wrought rather than cast. Japhet similarly interprets this word as “refined” (Japhet, 1993: 496-497).

⁵⁰⁹ In 1 Kgs. 8: 6-7 Noth considers this to be a gloss (Noth, 1964: 178).

⁵¹⁰ Cogan, 2001: 279.

understanding of what the Cherubim were for, namely a protective covering.⁵¹¹ The Chronicler omits any reference to the protrusion of the poles. Perhaps he has struggled, as I have, to imagine how that description of them might work.⁵¹²

The Chronicler's Cherubim, Conclusion

The Chronicler has given a conflated interpretation of the Tabernacle and Temple descriptions, with one eye on Ezekiel. However, he is fundamentally guessing since the Cherubim were long gone. His descriptions are more elegant, but details such as the precise meaning of **כַּרְבּוּבִים** have been lost. The fact that the reader of this description is still at a loss as to how to visualise the Cherubim, despite the technical terminology, shows that the Chronicler was unable, or unwilling, to clarify the matter. He was more interested in showing that David's Cherubim (let us face it, for the Chronicler, David was the effective builder of the Temple) and the Mosaic heritage were linked, and that what Ezekiel saw fitted in as well.

Really, the Chronicler is perhaps the earliest attempt to interpret the texts from Kings, Exodus and Ezekiel in a meaningful way for the people of his day.⁵¹³ He was trying to do what we are trying to do today, visualise the descriptions that he has received, but without doing violence to the text.⁵¹⁴ His solution is a galant one, harmonising three sources, adding technical details here and there and simplifying the description elsewhere. His description, though, is more of a postscript to the more detailed debate about 1 Kings and Exodus. He is too far removed from the first

⁵¹¹ Hayes points out that, for the Chronicler they are protecting the Law (Hayes, 1963: 421). Myers sees them as a canopy (Myers, 1965a: 29). Selman's suggestion that the Ark is "completely covered" is speculative (Selman, 1994a: 319).

⁵¹² Pratt suggests that in Chronicles the Cherubim cover the poles as well as the Ark (Pratt, 2006: 318), but this cannot be discerned from the text.

⁵¹³ Cf. Coggins, 1976: 156; Williamson, 1982: 209; Japhet, 1993: 496-497.

⁵¹⁴ This contrasts with some of the wilder confluences such as the anonymous writer of the Cowen Tract of 1851 (Anon., 1851: 29-30). Such multiple faces are rejected by Curtis (Curtis, E. L., 1910: 327-328).

Temple to be an authority on it or its contents. While some would argue that the same could be said of the other writers as well, their descriptions of the Cherubim are the root texts for any other descriptions, and, as such, they are the starting point for the discussion.

Conclusion

The texts which describe the Cherubim in Exodus are dependant on the descriptions in 1 Kings. They are a literary creation which imagine the Cherubim of the Kapporeth to be covering the Ark, in the same way that the protective covers were draped over the Tabernacle itself. The writer is dependant on the Kings narrative, especially with reference to the covering of the Ark and the spreading of the wings. The literary context of the Tabernacle descriptions, however, enables the writer to reduce the size of the Cherubim and more closely join them to the Ark itself. Only their faces and wings can be imagined from the text. It is futile to imagine some historical reconstruction of these Cherubim, although the temple models from Megiddo and, to a lesser extent, the winged deities on the Tutankhamun sarcophagus and Cypriot bowls, help the reader to imagine a form that makes sense.

The Cherubim in the Temple are less clear, although, from a literary point of view, they are the root description. It is possible that there are two layers to the description, one describing the Cherubim in the Debir and another describing the position of the Ark and poles. If this is the case, the description of the Cherubim is quite opaque. If there were no secondary editorial layer, and the reader imagines the Cherubim's wings to be outstretched in a straight line, then the section about the poles has to be ignored. If the wings of the Cherubim were at right angles and touched the back wall rather than the side walls, the reader can reasonably envisage something which looks similar in the mind's eye to the Cherubim of the Kapporeth.

On balance the third of these proposals seems to be the best option since it takes into consideration the most number of details in the text and does least damage to it. These two Cherubim, however, were not the only ones. They also occur on the walls and the doors, in combination with sacred vegetation. Their primary role is protective.

At no point in this discussion has any comparison been made with the Seraphim. Apart from the fact that they are winged creatures, and their locus is probably the Temple, the writers of 1 Kings, Exodus, and Chronicles, if they were aware of them, have not taken the trouble to make that connection.⁵¹⁵ The multiplicity of images would count against that connection being made, if the reader were assuming only two Seraphim in Isaiah's vision. However, the lack of clarity in the descriptions does not preclude reading the Seraphim into the text.⁵¹⁶ The multiplicity of Cherubim, however, on the walls and entrances to both the Temple and the Tabernacle will have an important effect on the translation of the Cherubim formula, and this is the subject of the next chapter.

⁵¹⁵ Cf. Jarick, 2007: 41-42.

⁵¹⁶ E.g. Heinisch, 1934: 202.

Chapter 4: The Cherubim Formula

Introduction

The Cherubim formula, יֹשֵׁב הַכְּרֻבִּים, occurs seven times in the Old Testament (1 Sam. 4: 4; 2 Sam. 6: 2; 2 Kgs. 19: 15; 1 Chron. 13: 6; Isa. 37: 16; Ps. 80: 1; 99: 1) and, additionally, one further time in the Apocrypha (Dan. 3: 55).⁵¹⁷ Of these 2 Sam. 6: 2 and 1 Chron. 13: 6 are parallel, as are 2 Kgs. 19: 15 and Isa. 37: 16. The syntax of the phrase admits many different translations, primarily because of the lack of preposition in the Hebrew text, when one is required in translation to make any sense of it. There are, in fact, three variables: firstly, the translation of יֹשֵׁב; secondly, which preposition to use; and thirdly whether the relationship between the two words is objective or genitive.⁵¹⁸ The difficulty the translator faces is how to choose from the possibilities available, without necessarily imposing any preconceptions about what form the Cherubim may have taken, or what purpose they may have served.⁵¹⁹

After presenting the texts, I shall look at the three variables individually, and then assess how modern critical conclusions about the physical descriptions of the Cherubim affect the discussion, with regard to the earliest setting for the formula.

The Texts

1 Samuel 4: 4 וַיִּשְׁלַח הָעָם שְׁלֹחַ וַיִּשְׂאוּ מִשָּׁם אֶת אֲרוֹן
בְּרִית־יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת יֹשֵׁב הַכְּרֻבִּים וְשָׁם שְׁנֵי בְנֵי־עֲלִי
עַם־אֲרוֹן בְּרִית הָאֱלֹהִים חֲפְנֵי וּפִינְחָס:

⁵¹⁷ I have not discussed this verse, since this chapter will concern itself primarily with how to understand the Hebrew phrase. Greek, like English, inevitably has to make some assumption about that understanding in order to produce a sensible translation. With the exception of 1 Sam. 4: 4, which is a literal translation, LXX inserts the preposition ἐπὶ to give sense to the formula.

⁵¹⁸ Wood, 2008: 9-14.

⁵¹⁹ Mettinger sees the Cherubim formula as the corollary of the throne and footstool imagery (Mettinger, 1982b: 23-24, 36-37), but he does not consider other possible interpretations.

1 Samuel 4: 4 So the people sent to Shiloh, and brought from there the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, who is enthroned on the cherubim. The two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.

1 Samuel 4: 4 καὶ ἀπέστειλεν ὁ λαὸς εἰς Σηλωμ καὶ αἴρουσιν ἐκεῖθεν τὴν κιβωτὸν κυρίου καθημένου χερουβιμ καὶ ἀμφότεροι οἱ υἱοὶ Ηλι μετὰ τῆς κιβωτοῦ Οφνι καὶ Φινεεç⁵²⁰

2 Samuel 6: 2 וַיֵּלֶךְ דָּוִד וְכָל־הָעָם וַיֵּלְכוּ מִבַּעֲלֵי יְהוּדָה לְהַעֲלֹת מִשָּׁם אֶת אֲרוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר־נִקְרָא שְׁם יְהוָה יוֹשֵׁב הַכְּרוּבִים עָלָיו:

2 Samuel 6: 2 David and all the people with him set out and went from Baale-judah, to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the name of the LORD of hosts who is enthroned on the cherubim.

1 Chronicles 13: 6 וַיַּעַל דָּוִד וְכָל־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֵלְתָּה אֶל־קִרְיַת יַעֲרִים אֲשֶׁר לִיהוּדָה לְהַעֲלֹת מִשָּׁם אֶת אֲרוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים יְהוָה יוֹשֵׁב הַכְּרוּבִים אֲשֶׁר־נִקְרָא שְׁם:

1 Chronicles 13: 6 And David and all Israel went up to Baalah, that is, to Kiriath-jearim, which belongs to Judah, to bring up from there the ark of God, the LORD, who is enthroned on the cherubim, which is called by his name.

There are some stylistic differences between these two versions,⁵²¹ but the most important difference is the use of the name **יְהוָה יוֹשֵׁב הַכְּרוּבִים** in one, and not the other.⁵²² Questions of originality cannot be established,⁵²³ but the possible historical settings for the formula in early Israelite religion will need to be considered later.

The syntax of **אֲשֶׁר־נִקְרָא שְׁם יְהוָה ... עָלָיו** in 2 Sam. 6: 2 is odd.⁵²⁴ The version in 1 Chron. 13: 6, transferring the phrase, **אֲשֶׁר־נִקְרָא שְׁם יְהוָה** to the end of the sentence, is another way of stating the same thing,⁵²⁵ that the Cherubim formula is here

⁵²⁰ LXX omits “covenant” and “hosts”.

⁵²¹ Cf. Curtis, E. L., 1910: 205.

⁵²² It is also omitted in 4Q Sam^a.

⁵²³ Ackroyd sees the Chronicler “correcting” the text (Ackroyd, 1973: 57).

⁵²⁴ Coggins says it makes no sense (Coggins, 1976: 78), cf. Klein, 2006: 333.

⁵²⁵ The omission of **עָלָיו** is still awkward, though (cf. Braun, 1986: 173).

associated with Yhwh. The place upon which the title is named could be the Ark,⁵²⁶
but it could also be the Temple in Shiloh.⁵²⁷

2 Kings 19: 15 וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל חִזְקִיָּהוּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה
אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל יֹשֵׁב הַכְּרֻבִים אַתָּה הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים לְבַדְּךָ
לְכֹל מַמְלָכוֹת הָאָרֶץ אַתָּה עָשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ:

2 Kings 19: 15 And Hezekiah prayed before the LORD, and said: “O LORD the God of Israel, who are enthroned above the cherubim, you are God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth.”

Isaiah 37: 16 יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל יֹשֵׁב הַכְּרֻבִים
אַתָּה הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים לְבַדְּךָ לְכֹל מַמְלָכוֹת הָאָרֶץ אַתָּה
עָשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ:

Isaiah 37: 16 “O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, who are enthroned above the cherubim, you are God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth.”

The wording of the formula in these texts is exactly the same, except for the inclusion of צְבָאוֹת.⁵²⁸ As with the previous pair, originality cannot be established, so it is only possible to say that the Cherubim formula was associated with the name, יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת, in the mind of one writer, and not the other.⁵²⁹

Psalm 80: 2 רְעֵה יִשְׂרָאֵל
הָאֵזִינָה נִהְגַּ כְּצֹאן יוֹסֵף
יֹשֵׁב הַכְּרֻבִים הוֹפִיעָה:

Psalm 80: 1 Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock! You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth.

⁵²⁶ Curtis, E. L., 1910: 205; Campbell, 2005: 65.

⁵²⁷ Myers avoids this problem entirely by translating the phrase “whose legend reads” (Myers, 1965b: 100). Ackroyd suggests that this phrase is subsequently taken up by the Deuteronomist, which would imply that he sees this part of the text as original (Ackroyd, 1971: 64). Selman considers the opposite view that the phrase in this context refers to the sanctuary in Jerusalem (Selman, 1994b: 152-153). Baale Judah may also have been the locus of the Cherubim as well (1 Chron. 13: 6) and it is not inconceivable that the Ark and Tabernacle were kept at Gibeon during the building of the Temple, given the latter’s importance (1 Kgs. 3: 4).

⁵²⁸ Syr. and Luc. both include צְבָאוֹת in 2 Kgs. 19: 15.

⁵²⁹ Long describes its use here as “hymnlike” (Long, 1991: 226).

As with Hezekiah's prayer, the Cherubim formula is here used as part of a vocative phrase.

יֵשֵׁב כְּרוּבִים תְּנוּט הָאָרֶץ: Psalm 99: 1
מֶלֶךְ יְהוָה יִרְגְּזוּ עַמִּים

Psalm 99: 1 The LORD is king; let the peoples tremble! He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake!

Although in Hebrew there is no change to the formula, some scholars consider the sense of this verse to be different from the others. Whereas the other occurrences of the formula suggest that Yhwh is static on his throne, it has been suggested that this verse describes Yhwh taking his place on his throne, in a similar way to Ps. 47: 6, 9 (ET 5, 8).⁵³⁰ This would be an enthronement psalm in the strict sense.⁵³¹ Either way the sense of Yhwh sitting on a throne is present.

The First Variable: The Meaning of יֵשֵׁב

Since the second half of the nineteenth century the vast majority of scholars and popular writers have rendered יֵשֵׁב as “enthroned”.⁵³² This is reflected in the consistent use of “enthroned” or “throned” in the NEB, REB, NRSV, NASB, NIV,

⁵³⁰ Gunkel, 1925: 428; Leslie, 1949: 83; cf. Johnson, A. R., 1967: 62-63; Brueggemann, 1984: 148. The English translation of Hirsch's comment is particularly interesting: “the Lord has begun his reign ... He has established Himself upon Cherubim” (Hirsch, 1882: 190). Clifford disagrees with this and keeps the static sense of the participle (Clifford, 2003: 129-130).

⁵³¹ This could be a heavenly or earthly throne (Kraus, 1989: 269).

⁵³² These include Cheyne, 1888: 225, 270; Hupfeld, 1888, Vol. 2: 285, 408; Wellhausen, 1898: 85, 104; Benzinger, 1899: 183; Duhm, 1899: 208, 234; Briggs, 1907: 202; Curtis, E. L., 1910: 205; Kittel, 1922: 268, 321; Boylan, 1924: 50, 154; Kraeling, 1928: 154; Schmidt, H., 1934: 152, 181; Herkenne, 1936: 274, 323; Buchanan, 1936: 36; Bittenwieser, 1938: 232, 361; Kissane, 1954: 48, 132; Hertzberg, 1960: 33; Myers, 1965b: 100; Dahood, 1968: 254, 367; Oosterhuis and Plas, 1968: 76; Gehrke, 1968: 48, 261; Ackroyd, 1971: 64; Mettinger, 1982b: 90-94; Klein, 1983: 46; Würthwein, 1984: 425, 428; Cohen, 1985: 263, 322; Hentschel, 1985: 94; Becker, 1986b: 64; Gordon, 1986: 94, 231; Kraus, 1989: 137, 267; Anderson, 1989: 96; Wiseman, 1993: 281; Robinson, G., 1993: 31, 180; Hentschel, 1994: 62; Seybold, 1996: 316, 387; Davidson, R., 1998: Alter, 1999: 22, 225; Brueggemann, 2000: 508; Cohn, R. L., 2000: 136; Davis, D. R., 2000: 42; Werlitz, 2002: 217; Curtis, A., 2004: 169, 199; Dirkson, 2005: 196; Campbell, 2005: 65; Davis, D. R., 2006: 279; Johnstone, 2007: 171; Cogan and Tadmor, 1988: 226 and Grogan, 2008: 168.

NJPSV, JB⁵³³ and NJB.⁵³⁴ In contrast, the use of “seated” or “sits” has been considerably less popular.⁵³⁵ In any case, many writers use a combination of “sitting” and “enthroned”,⁵³⁶ and indeed it could easily be argued that the concept of a king sitting⁵³⁷ is tantamount to enthronement anyway. However, it is not at all clear whether or not Yhwh is being viewed as a king in the Shiloh narratives, or on the lips of the King of Judah.

The translation “dwell” appears often enough to be significant,⁵³⁸ although it is probable that this stems from the use of “dwell” in six out of the seven occasions in the KJV. Usually, the verb which indicates God “dwelling” anywhere but in heaven is שָׁכַן.⁵³⁹ While this may not preclude translating יָשַׁב as “dwell”, it may indicate that the meaning of the Cherubim formula refers to God’s heavenly existence, as in Ps. 2: 4; 29: 10; 113: 5, were this translation to be understood.

Where possible, the context of the seven uses of the Cherubim formula should be used to discern the meaning of יָשַׁב. As already noted Ps. 99 suggests the enthronement of Yhwh. The use of מָלַךְ in the same verse makes this clear, and the

⁵³³ JB uses “enthroned on” except at 1 Sam. 4: 4; 2 Sam. 6: 2; 1 Chron. 13: 6 where it reads “seated on”.

⁵³⁴ Similarly in modern German translations the use of *thronen* has become almost universal, being used exclusively in *Der Einheitsübersetzung der Heiligen Schrift* (1980), *Der Lutherbibel* (1984), with the exception of Ps. 99: 1, and *Der Elberfelder Bibel revidierte Fassung* (1993). In contrast the 1545 Luther Bible uses a combination of *sitzen* and *wohnen*.

⁵³⁵ Bird, 1927: 71, 167; Eerdmans, 1947: 384, 452; Goldman, 1951: 22, 220; Oesterley, 1955: 367, 428; Gerstenberger, 2001: 104; Jarick, 2002: 93; Goldingay, 2007: 535.

⁵³⁶ Delitzsch, 1883: 570, 661; Jones, W., 1879: 99 “sitteth throned”; Maclaren, 1893: 404 (cf. 1894: 71); Cobb, 1905: 220, 275; Dhorme, P., 1910: 47, 319; Wales, 1929: 20; 1930: 17; Weber, 1930: 383, 401; Weiser, 1959: 371, 438; Maillot, 1966: 182, 287; Auzou, 1968: 262; Leupold, 1972: 579; McCarter, 1984: 161, 168-169; Gelandner, 1991: 48; Caquot, 1994: 73, 410; Buis, 1997: 268; Eaton, 2003: 289, 346; Clifford, 2003: 129-130; Terrien, 2003: 575, 685, 687.

⁵³⁷ The royal connection in Ps. 99 in particular is overt.

⁵³⁸ Plumer, 1867: 767, 890; Spoer, 1904: 102; Gordis, 1928: 259; Hobbs, 1985: 277; Whittaker, 1985: 68; Ellsworth, 2002: 214.

⁵³⁹ Merrill, 2004: 186.

reference to the footstool (v. 5) could mean the Ark itself.⁵⁴⁰ Could the same thing be applied to the other instances? Ps. 80 contains no references to God reigning. Most of the imagery is agricultural. Nevertheless, God is invoked as the supreme authority over Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh (Ps. 80: 3 ET 2),⁵⁴¹ the one who “leads” (נָהִיג) Joseph, something appropriate to monarchs (2 Chron. 25: 11; Isa. 20: 4).⁵⁴² The two accounts of Hezekiah’s prayer (2 Kgs. 19: 15; Isa 37: 16) are situated in the Temple. It is emphasised that Yhwh is the God of all the kingdoms (מִמְּלְכוֹת) of the earth. The Temple is the place where Isaiah had seen “the King, the LORD of hosts” (Isa. 6: 5). It is quite likely that the Kingship of Yhwh is intended in both Ps. 80 and in Hezekiah’s prayer, and therefore his “sitting” would be “enthronement”. However, in Ps. 80, Yhwh may be in heaven (v. 15 ET 14).⁵⁴³ In this context the Cherubim may not be cult objects but spiritual beings. It is possible, though, for the phrase to refer to both the heavenly reality and its physical equivalent.⁵⁴⁴

⁵⁴⁰ Day, 1990: 128; 2005: 263-264; Pratt, 2006: 175; Day, 2007: 73-74. Maher confuses the imagery, seeing the Ark as the footstool and the throne (Maher, 1977: 95). Baldwin also first sees the Ark as the footstool (Baldwin, 1988: 69) and then the Cherubim as the footstool of the heavenly throne (Baldwin, 1988: 206-207). Mettinger, 1982b: 29-32 makes a good case for showing that both the heavenly and the earthly throne were implied, although I do not believe it necessarily follows that the Cherubim formed a throne.

⁵⁴¹ Rhodes suggests that this reference to northern tribes may mean that there were also Cherubim in the north (Rhodes, 1960: 116-117). This is similar to Halpern’s speculation that if the bulls in Dan and Bethel were the equivalent of the Cherubim and God “dwells between them” then the entire country would be his throne (Halpern, 1976: 32, n. 5). However, Day and Clifford both see Ps. 80 as set in the south (Day, 1990: 35, 119; Clifford, 2003: 53), which would preclude Halpern’s suggestion. Day points out that the Psalm seems to look back to the Davidic/Solomonic empire when Shiloh had lost its importance and the focus was in the south.

⁵⁴² Foote links this verb to the Exodus narrative in Ps. 78: 14 (Foote, 1904: 281).

⁵⁴³ Cf. Boylan, 1924: 51, who relates this to the idea that the Cherubim may have been the embodiment of cloud. Eerdmans oversteps the mark in pursuing this latter idea when he translates the formula in Ps. 99: 1 as “sitteth on the dark clouds” (Eerdmans, 1947: 452). Maillot also considers the possibility that the Cherubim are “montures célestes de Dieu” (Maillot, 1966: 183).

⁵⁴⁴ Kraus, 1989: 269; Terrien, 2003: 687, cf. Hupfeld, 1888: 288; Leupold, 1972: 579. Weiser sees Ps. 99 referring to the heavenly throne and Ps. 80 as the Ark (Weiser, 1959: 438). Eaton takes the physical view, seeing the Cherubim here as winged sphinxes, throne-bearers of an invisible deity (Eaton, 1967: 200, cf. 238). Maher treats it as the Ark (Maher, 1977: 56). For a similar ambivalent verse see Ps. 11: 4.

But what of the references which relate to Shiloh? The Kingship of Yhwh is not mentioned in these passages at all. Indeed, the only place in the entirety of 1 and 2 Samuel that Yhwh is called King is 1 Sam. 12: 12, Samuel's speech, which is pointedly contrasting the human king with the divine one. Many scholars consider this speech to be part of a late editorial layer. It appears that, if the two references to the Cherubim formula are also retrospective insertions⁵⁴⁵ (including the name **צְבָאוֹת יְהוָה**) they may be indications that Yhwh was an enthroned King in the mind of the editor. On the other hand, if they are part of an original narrative, they may be anything but.⁵⁴⁶ Nevertheless, even if this were part of such a narrative we could argue that the use of the phrase **צְבָאוֹת יְהוָה** may indicate that Yhwh is the king of a heavenly army. This brings us to the nub of the problem. How much of the material about the Temple and the Ark can be used as evidence for reconstructing the nature of Israelite religion in the period before the Jerusalem Temple? I shall return to this question later.

To conclude so far, it is reasonable to translate **יָשָׁב** as “enthroned” in four out of the seven occurrences, and possibly in the other three, especially if they are considered editorial. Questions remain about the relationship between the formula and any artefacts that may or may not have existed in Shiloh and later in Jerusalem. These questions are affected by which preposition is understood. Before considering that, however, I shall consider the nature of the relationship of the two words of the formula.

⁵⁴⁵ Smith, H. P., 1899: 34; Dhorme, P., 1910: 319.

⁵⁴⁶ Freedman says the formula originates in the period of the Judges (Freedman, 1960: 156). Dahood also considers it “ancient” (Dahood, 1968: 254).

The Second Variable: The Relationship of יָשָׁב to הַכְּרֻבִּים

Wood has proposed a translation which understands the relationship between the two words to be nominal rather than verbal, based on a construct relationship between them.⁵⁴⁷ The construct could be subjective (“the Cherubim dweller”) or objective (“the dweller of the Cherubim”). Either way this idea increases the likelihood of the formula referring to more than just the two main Cherubim near the Ark. It could refer to all the cult images in the Temple, or even to their heavenly equivalents as well.

Wood argues that יָשָׁב means “dweller”, as in Num. 21: 1; cf. 33: 40. The King of Arad is the יָשָׁב הַנִּנְבֵּה. Wood is not the first to have suggested this relationship. Robert Gordis,⁵⁴⁸ commenting on Amos 8: 14 suggested repointing הַדֶּרֶךְ בְּאֶרֶץ־שֶׁבַע to הַדֶּרֶךְ בְּאֶרֶץ־שֶׁבַע (“your dweller of Beersheba”). He suggests that this may be similar to the Cherubim formula, but inserts a preposition into the latter, discounting the genitive relationship. McKane notes Weiser’s suggestion that יְשֻׁבַת הָעֵמֶק (Jer. 21: 13) could be similar to the Cherubim formula.⁵⁴⁹ While this is very similar in sense to Num. 21: 1, Weiser translates the phrase “Thronen auf dem Tal,” and McKane makes the point that “valley” is not an animate object, without suggesting the need for a genitive construction. McKane’s criticism may also be levelled at Wood’s suggestion. The lack of any example of an animate object in a construct relationship to יָשָׁב, combined with the clear understanding of יָשָׁב as “enthroned” in at least Ps. 99: 1, and probably in Ps. 80: 1; 2 Kgs. 19: 15 and Isa. 37: 16 leads to the conclusion that

⁵⁴⁷ Wood, 2008: 12-14.

⁵⁴⁸ Gordis, 1928: 259.

⁵⁴⁹ McKane, 1982: 72; cf. Weiser, 1960: 182.

Wood's suggestion is incorrect, and that the relationship between the two words of the formula is verbal rather than nominal, requiring a preposition in translation.

The Third Variable: The Preposition

A survey of the translations used for the Cherubim formula reveals considerably less consensus over which preposition to understand than there is over the translation of **כַּיְשֹׁבֵעַ**. In English,⁵⁵⁰ prepositions include: “between”,⁵⁵¹ “above” / “over”,⁵⁵² “on” / “upon”.⁵⁵³ It is interesting to note that there is little discussion of what preposition should be used.⁵⁵⁴

The use of “between” is influenced by Num. 7: 89, where Yhwh is said to speak with Moses from between (**בֵּינֵי**) the Cherubim. This may account for the popularity of this preposition in conservative evangelical commentaries, and those nineteenth-century writers whose descriptions of the Cherubim attempt to harmonise

⁵⁵⁰ For the equivalent in German cf. Delitzsch, 1883: 570, 661, 662 (“ob” and “auf”); Hupfeld, 1888, Vol. 2: 285, 408 (“auf”); Kittel, 1922: 268, 321 (“auf”); Gunkel, 1925: 351, 428 (“auf”); Schmidt, H., 1934: 152, 181 (“auf”); Herkenne, 1936: 274, 323 (“auf”); Weiser, 1959: 371, 438 (“auf”); Seybold 1996: 316 (“über”), 318 (“Cherubenthroner”), 387 (“auf”); Werlitz, 2002: 217 (“Kerubenthroner”); and in French cf. Dhorme, P., 1910: 47, 319 (“sur”); Weber, 1930: 401 (“sur”); Maillot, 1966: 182, 287 (“sur”); Auzou, 1968: 262 (“sur”); Caquot, 1994: 73, 410 (“sur”); Buis 1997: 268 (“sur”).

⁵⁵¹ Plumer, 1867: 767, 890; Peters, T. M., 1886: 82; Andrews, 1886: 62, 63, 65; Whittaker, 1985: 68; Wiseman, 1993: 281; Ellsworth, 2002: 214; Grogan, 2008: 168.

⁵⁵² Spoer, 1904: 100-102 (Spoer's translation is of an amulet inscription, but reflects his understanding of the Cherubim formula: “I pray thee, O Yahweh, God of Israel, who dwellest above the cherubim, show grace and compassion and pity and mercy to thy servant who wears this amulet, Zacharyah, the child born of Leah”); Curtis, E. L., 1910: 205; Leslie, 1949: 83, 244; Myers, 1965b: 100; Leupold, 1972: 579, 695; Slotki, 1983: 282; Brueggemann, 2000: 508; Eaton, 2003: 289, 346; Davis, D. R., 2006: 279.

⁵⁵³ Jones, W., 1879: 99; Ewald, 1881: 193; Cheyne, 1888: 225; 270; Maclaren, 1893: 404; 1894: 71; Smith, H. P., 1899: 292; Cobb, 1905: 220, 275; Briggs, 1907: 202; Boylan, 1924: 50, 154; Bird, 1927, Vol. 2: 71, 167; Wales, 1929: 20; 1930: 17; Barnes, 1931, Vol. 2: 389, 469; Buchanan, 1936: 36; Bittenwieser, 1938: 232, 361; Eerdmans, 1947: 384, 452 (in this latter reference from Ps. 99, Eerdmans renders Cherubim as “dark clouds” no doubt influenced by Ps. 18 and the “embodiment of cloud” idea); Goldman, 1951: 22, 220; Kissane, 1954: 48, 132; Oesterley, 1955: 367, 428; Hirsch, 1882: 76, 190; Dahood, 1968: 254, 367; Oosterhuis and Plas, 1968: 76; Gehrke, 1968: 48, 261; Ackroyd, 1971: 64; Mettinger, 1982a: 109-138; Klein, 1983: 46; Conroy, 1983: 30-31, 104-105, 234-238; McCarter, 1984: 161; Würthwein, 1984: 425, 428; Cohen, 1985: 263, 322; Becker, 1986b: 64; Cogan and Tadmor, 1988: 236; Kraus, 1989: 137, 267; Robinson, G., 1993: 31, 180; Hentschel, 1994: 62; Mays, 1994: 262; Davidson, R., 1998: 263, 324.

⁵⁵⁴ The only discussion I could find was in Hertzberg, 1960: 33, 35, 225.

the different texts into one single concept.⁵⁵⁵ The idea that God would be between the Cherubim would also fit with the P description of the wings of the Cherubim covering the Mercy Seat (Exod. 25: 20; 37: 9) while the Cherubim bodies were somehow flanking it.

“On” and “upon” should be linked together and distinguished from “over” and “above”, since the two pairs suggest a different spatial relationship between the deity and the Cherubim. In the first pair, the prepositions imply that the deity is touching the Cherubim. The second pair give the impression that Yhwh is floating in the vicinity of them. This distinction is subtle, but because of the unclarity of this aspect of Ezekiel’s vision in Ezek. 1, it is important to recognise it. It also becomes relevant when we consider the apparent independence of Yhwh from the Cherubim in Ezek. 8-11. If the divine bottom is actually touching the Cherubim, it is far easier to imagine the Cherubim forming a throne, even if the deity is invisible.⁵⁵⁶ On the other hand, if Yhwh is floating, even though the Cherubim may form a throne beneath him, one is forced to ask whether he is properly enthroned or even seated at all. “Above” and “over” allow for a certain amount of movement of the deity, though limited.

The preposition “between” is less precise. It leaves open the question of whether Yhwh is in contact with the Cherubim or not. It also leaves open the question of whether they form a throne. Even if they do, one might say that, with the Cherubim forming the sides of the throne, God is between them.

⁵⁵⁵ Meredith, 1860: 44-46 (Meredith is an unusual and early example of this, arguing that Yahweh was a fire god who dwelt between the Cherubim which he considered to be “idols”). Modern scholars have avoided making their interpretations dependent on Num. 7: 89 because of the assumption that it is a late text, but confusion of imagery still creeps in (e.g. Rogerson and McKay, 1977: 157, 228; Broyles, 1999: 330). Alter (1999: 22) describes the Cherubim as “fierce winged beasts” and “God’s celestial steeds” and concludes (“and so”) from this that they form a throne!

⁵⁵⁶ For a completely different interpretation of how Yhwh might be touching the Cherubim, German Kabbalistic literature interpreted the formula to mean that the divine name was inscribed upon the heads of the Cherubim (Wolfson, 1993: 53).

The prepositions considered so far (“between”, “above”, “over”, “on”, “upon”) all presuppose the proximity of Yhwh to either the two Cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant, the two large Cherubim of the Temple, or some combination of them.⁵⁵⁷ They do not envisage the other Cherubim of the Temple or the Tabernacle as included in the formula. This deficiency has already been pointed out by one or two scholars, most recently Wood.⁵⁵⁸ An interpretation of the text which only takes into consideration two of the Cherubim rather than all of them is flawed. We have seen in the previous chapter that there is no guarantee that the two large Cherubim formed a throne, and the reader of the text needs to be liberated from a fixation with the Ahiqar sarcophagus which precludes other parts of the text. The use of “between” rules out too many options for it to be a safe translation. The other Cherubim should get a look in.

The other problem with all these prepositions is that they imply a static deity, the final comment with regard to “over” and “above” notwithstanding. Yhwh is a potentate who is made impotent by his very title. Yhwh is seated, dwells, inhabits, is enthroned in a particular place (heavenly or earthly, it does not really matter) and that is that. While the Cherubim may well be apotropaic,⁵⁵⁹ as the divine keepers they not only keep the people out but they also, psychologically, keep the deity in.⁵⁶⁰

The contexts of the Cherubim formula suggest a certain amount of movement of the deity, but only insofar as his actions extend outwards from a central point. Ps. 99 is entirely static in its setting, namely the worship of God in Zion (v. 2), his holy

⁵⁵⁷ The German and French equivalents suggest similar referents.

⁵⁵⁸ Wood, 2008: 3.

⁵⁵⁹ The idea that the role of the Cherubim is basically apotropaic cannot seriously be disputed. It is interesting to note Jarick's idea that the Chronicler had in mind the earthly keepers of the Temple (Jarick, 2002: 93).

⁵⁶⁰ Of course, one person's confined deity is another person's permanent and restful one, cf. Jones, W., 1879: 99.

hill (v.9). The previous enthronement psalms, however, refer to God's action further afield. In Ps. 98 his power is seen to the very ends of the world (v. 3), and he comes to judge the world (v. 9). In Ps. 97 his judgements are again world wide with fire and lightning going before him (vv. 3-4). In Ps. 96 the sanctuary (heavenly or earthly are not specified) is the focus of attention (v. 6), but combined with the idea of his coming in judgement (v. 13). Turning to Ps. 80 the dynamic from God's dwelling place outwards is similar, only it is more a plea for action than a celebration of it. Ironically, while the psalms which suggest more strongly the idea of enthronement of the deity (Pss. 95-99)⁵⁶¹ also celebrate his world-wide activity, this psalm which pictures God habitually out and about seems to imply that he is more static than is desired.⁵⁶² The psalmist asks that he shine forth (הוֹפִיעָה), but infers that he is not doing so at present. Turning to Isa. 37: 16; 2 Kgs. 19: 15 the static Yhwh fits the context. Hezekiah is famously shut up like a bird in a cage by the King of Assyria. Apparently, so also is Yhwh, despite both the narrator's, king's and prophet's assertions to the contrary. Any movement in these passages is tied to the sanctuary. Yhwh sits in judgement and his power extends outwards. He himself, however, remains tied down.

These contexts suggest somehow that Yhwh's enthronement, if that is what it is, transcends the Temple itself. If anything he is enthroned in the heavens, from where his cosmic actions begin. Any devotee of Yhwh-who-dwells-in-Zion would have had one eye on the heavens, just in case.⁵⁶³

⁵⁶¹ Whether or not these Psalms can be imagined as part of an enthronement ceremony along with Ps. 47: 6-9 (ET 5-8) is a moot point (cf. also 2 Sam. 6: 15), but taken on their own they could be used in a static sense as well.

⁵⁶² Goldingay, 2007: 535.

⁵⁶³ Mettinger, 1982b: 29-32.

It is virtually impossible to tell whether God is static in the Samuel narratives or not. His presence is associated with the Ark, which is moved from place to place. If the Ark is associated with the throne, however, he would still, theoretically at least, be seated on it. However, within the Temple at Shiloh he comes and stands in Samuel's first vision (1 Sam. 3: 10).⁵⁶⁴ On at least one occasion, if Yhwh was enthroned, he removes himself from the throne to communicate with Samuel within the Temple precincts at Shiloh.

The preposition "among" has been proposed on at least one occasion,⁵⁶⁵ in order to take into consideration the other Cherubim both of the Temple and the Tabernacle. This preposition would also allow Yhwh some independence from the proposed throne. Alternatively, one might use "with". Both prepositions allow God to be enthroned in the sanctuary, but also to be free to roam within the hallowed courts. He walks with his creatures in the Garden of Eden, and dwells among the trees and Cherubim of the Temple as well. This does not preclude the possibility of some sort of throne arrangement in the Temple paraphernalia, but it does not demand it either. Given the lack of clarity in the descriptions of the Temple and Tabernacle furnishings, it seems reasonable for the translator to adopt a translation which does not presuppose something for which there is little evidence.

Should the preposition be "among" / "amidst" or "with"? The preferable option is "among", because it implies that Yhwh is somehow surrounded by Cherubim rather than alongside them. This gives a stronger sense of their apotropaic role. Yhwh is central to their existence. He is above them in nature and in rank.

⁵⁶⁴ This point was discussed in 1907, but the writers failed to draw any conclusions from it about how the formula should be rendered (Price and Smith, 1907: 148).

⁵⁶⁵ Hobbs, 1985: 277.

Historical Issues: Shiloh, the Jerusalem Temple and P

There is now one more issue to consider. Is Yhwh *enthroned* among the Cherubim, or does he *dwell* among them? It is clear that “enthroned” works in Ps. 80: 1; 99: 1; 2 Kgs. 19: 15; Isa. 37: 16, and “dwell” could seriously be considered if the heavenly throne were also being indicated. There is still a logical problem, though. While discussing the Temple in Jerusalem, there is a useful description of it in 1 Kings, and a further one in 2 Chronicles.⁵⁶⁶ It is not unreasonable to posit a first edition of Kings which was dated to the reign of Josiah.⁵⁶⁷ Even the descriptions in P, of the Ark, Tabernacle and Mercy Seat, can and have been used to make sense of the Cherubim formula, not least by the writer of Num 7: 89. It seems clear that this writer would not have understood the meaning of יָשָׁב as “dwell” in terms of Yhwh’s presence in the tent itself, neither would the writers of Ps. 80: 1; 99: 1; 2 Kgs. 19: 15; Isa. 37: 16, with regard to the physical Temple in Jerusalem.

However, there are problems when discussing Shiloh.⁵⁶⁸ There is no description of the Temple at Shiloh, other than incidental material in the early Samuel narrative. According to the narrative, there were door posts.⁵⁶⁹ There was some sort of

⁵⁶⁶ It does not necessarily follow that the Cherubim formula could not have been used after the destruction of the cult objects. Plumer (1867: 768) rejects this possibility. Duhm, on the other hand envisages a later period when the Cherubim formula was “rhetorical” (Duhm, 1899: 208). Cobb, who dates Ps. 80 to the Maccabean period sees the formula as linking the psalm back to the time of David (Cobb, 1905: 277). Bird takes a similar line to Plumer, arguing that Ps. 80 refers to the Ark and therefore must be pre-exilic (Bird, 1927: 74). Carleton also links the psalm to the Ark (Carleton, 1945: 220, 265; cf. also Leslie, 1949: 244). Heinemann argues that the Cherubim formula cannot have been used after the end of the monarchy because he considers it to be a military term (Heinemann, 1950: 299-300).

⁵⁶⁷ Cross, 1973: 278-287; Nelson, 1981: 121-123; Day, 2000: 230.

⁵⁶⁸ This is not to say that the biblical narratives surrounding Shiloh are not basically correct (Cf. Day, 1979b: 87-94 in which he argues for an eleventh-century destruction of the city, based on the notice in Jer. 7: 12, 14 that Shiloh was where Yhwh placed his name *at first*, namely before Jerusalem in the tenth century). The eleventh-century destruction of Shiloh was later confirmed by archaeological evidence (Finkelstein, Bunimovitz and Lederman, 1993: 338-339). It is merely that they do not tell us very much about the form and nature of the worship there, especially the Cherubim.

⁵⁶⁹ 1 Sam. 1: 9 (בְּזוֹרֵהוּ).

communal area for boiling meat.⁵⁷⁰ There were doors which were closed on a daily basis,⁵⁷¹ at least one lamp,⁵⁷² and the Ark was usually kept in there.⁵⁷³ The destruction of Shiloh is not described, but it may be inferred from the fact that Samuel leaves Shiloh after the battle of Ebenezer,⁵⁷⁴ the Ark is not returned there,⁵⁷⁵ and the destruction of Shiloh became legendary,⁵⁷⁶ although possibly a nominal prophetic presence remained there.⁵⁷⁷ 1 Sam. 4: 4 mentions the Cherubim formula at the time of Shiloh, but this does not tell us what they looked like or what they were. That is not to say that Cherubim were not there, merely that any reconstruction of what form they might have taken can only be based on descriptions that are both anachronistic and fundamentally about other places, namely the Jerusalem Temple and the Tabernacle.⁵⁷⁸

Alternatively, reconstructions can be based upon the archaeological record, and famously have been,⁵⁷⁹ especially following the form of the Megiddo ivory plaque and the sarcophagus of Ahiim of Byblos.⁵⁸⁰ The strongest proponent of this view has been Mettinger.⁵⁸¹ He argues that the Cherubim formula should be linked to the phrase **יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת**.⁵⁸² However, in this he does not take sufficient notice of the

⁵⁷⁰ 1 Sam. 2: 13-16.

⁵⁷¹ 1 Sam. 3: 15.

⁵⁷² 1 Sam. 3: 3.

⁵⁷³ 1 Sam. 3: 3.

⁵⁷⁴ 1 Sam. 7: 17.

⁵⁷⁵ 1 Sam. 7: 1.

⁵⁷⁶ Ps. 78: 60; Jer. 7: 12, 14; 26: 6, 9. It is worth noting that the oracle in Jer. 7: 12, 14 assumes that there are visible ruins of Shiloh for people still to see, which also suggests some sort of building there.

⁵⁷⁷ 1 Kgs. 14: 2, 4.

⁵⁷⁸ We could argue more generally about the nature of the Ark in Baale-Judah. While the place name undoubtedly ante-dates any controversies over Baal worship (Curtis, E. L., 1910: 205), and it is quite possible that the Ark in some form existed there, the descriptions of the Ark and its construction in Exodus cannot necessarily be superimposed upon that place.

⁵⁷⁹ Scholars who take this line begin with Eichrodt 1959: 6-7 and Roland de Vaux 1960: 93-124, and the theme is echoed by Cross 1973: 198-215; McCarter 1980: 105-106; Anderson 1981: 582; Kraus 1989: 141; Mays 1994: 262, 315; Tsumura 2007: 192.

⁵⁸⁰ Mettinger, 1982b: 21-22.

⁵⁸¹ Mettinger, 1982a: 109-138.

⁵⁸² Mettinger, 1982a: 113.

texts which do not include it. He describes the main artefacts noted above, and writes of the Cherubim “it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the inner pair of wings met horizontally .. and formed the throne seat.”⁵⁸³ This is despite the fact that none of the Old Testament descriptions suggest this. His argument that there was a Cherubim throne at Shiloh⁵⁸⁴ is speculative. The “fragile mosaic of materials”⁵⁸⁵ is a little too fragile to be the basis of an entire theory.⁵⁸⁶ Mettinger does not offer arguments against this being a retrospective projection from Jerusalem to Shiloh, and a possible connection to bull-worship at Bethel⁵⁸⁷ scarcely constitutes hard evidence.

While it may be valid to speculate about a Cherubim throne at Shiloh, it goes beyond the evidence to say whether that throne was somehow attached to the Ark⁵⁸⁸ itself (as in P), or whether it was a fixed part of the Temple furniture (as in Jerusalem).⁵⁸⁹ Such speculation could also include suggestions about the internal and external decoration of the Temple and its precincts. Might there have been Cherubim on the external walls like those at ‘Ain Dara? Could it be that there were stands there like the one from Enkomi? Such ideas would have to be based on temporal and geographical proximity, as well as having some connection to the literary descriptions in the Bible, however anachronistic. Finally, while it seems unlikely that the Temple

⁵⁸³ Mettinger, 1982a: 116; cf. 1982b: 22-23.

⁵⁸⁴ Mettinger, 1982a: 128-134.

⁵⁸⁵ Mettinger, 1982a: 130.

⁵⁸⁶ It is worth noting how Cross makes similar leaps of logic. He states that **יְשֻׁבֵי הַכְּרֻבִּים** is “evidently an *ʿEl* epithet applied to Yahweh” (Cross, 1973: 69) and makes the assumption that the P descriptions of the Mosaic Tabernacle go back to “the Tent of David” (Cross, 1973: 72).

⁵⁸⁷ Mettinger, 1982a: 134 cf. Cross, 1973: 198-215 and Halpern 1976: 31-42.

⁵⁸⁸ Klein’s description of the Ark in this context as a “war palladium” (Klein, 2006: 332; cf. Cross, 1973: 231) may be a good one, but it can only be based upon the narrative of the text, rather than any particular imagery from either text or artefact.

⁵⁸⁹ Two writers illustrate this issue very nicely. Haran argues that there was no link between a Cherubim throne and the Ark in the Samuel narrative because there is no mention of **הַכְּפֹרֶת** either here or in D (Haran, 1978: 249). Schley, on the other hand argues for the possibility that the entire Tabernacle may have existed at Shiloh in addition to a temple there because of the reference to it in Ps. 78: 60 (Schley, 1989: 140-142). Neither argument is conclusive because of the potential distance between the cited texts and the historical setting.

at Shiloh and the Ark contained no representations of Cherubim at all, it is possible that they were not as detailed or prolific as the biblical descriptions, especially since the latter are trying to emphasize how unusually extravagant were both the Temple of Jerusalem and the Tabernacle and Ark.⁵⁹⁰

In conclusion, while there may have been some sort of Cherubim throne like those in the archaeological record, there is considerable distance between the object itself and the literary descriptions of the Old Testament. This being the case, the translator of the Cherubim formula should take very seriously the idea that more than one interpretation is quite valid, not least those of the biblical writers themselves, none of whom actually describe a Cherubim throne as is found in the archaeological record.⁵⁹¹ The translator should also consider that both the archaeological and literary record provide evidence of the possibility of a multiplicity of forms of Cherubim which may also have existed at Shiloh. All things considered, the translation of **יֵשֵׁב הַכְּרֻבִים** for the Cherubim formula in 1 Sam. 4: 4; 2 Sam. 6: 2; 1 Chron. 13: 16 should be either “who dwells among the Cherubim” or “who sits enthroned among the Cherubim”. If it were an editorial anachronism, the second choice would be better. If it were to represent pre-monarchic Israelite religion, either translation would be possible, but neither would be provable. On balance, then, and for the sake of consistency in translation across the Old Testament, “he who sits enthroned among the Cherubim” seems to be the most appropriate translation for 1 Sam. 4: 4; 2 Sam. 6: 2; 1 Chron. 13: 16.

⁵⁹⁰ Campbell is pushing the bounds of logic in the other direction by stating that the image in 1 Sam. 4: 4 is different from the imagery in the Temple and P (Campbell, 2003: 66). We simply do not know.

⁵⁹¹ This lack of clarity can lead to a varied interpretation. For instance, Hirsch, allegorically, sees the throne as the law which is beneath the wings of the Cherubim (Hirsch, 1882: 190).

Conclusion: “he who sits enthroned among the Cherubim”

What I have tried to do in this chapter is avoid circular argument. It is all too easy to decide in one’s own mind what the Cherubim look like, and then translate the Cherubim formula to fit in with that preconception.⁵⁹² By using the preposition “among”, speculative reconstructions of the Cherubim on the Ark and in the Temple have not been ruled out. Indeed, the use of “enthroned” in at least four of the seven occurrences would still allow those wishing to reconstruct a Cherubim throne to do so. However, “among” brings the other Cherubim into the picture, allows Yhwh to get out of his throne, and presents us with a more dynamic deity. Yhwh does not simply “sit” among the Cherubim, he moves among them. Neither is he simply a God who floats ethereally above. His feet are on a footstool, probably the Ark, and he lives and walks among mortals as and when he chooses.

⁵⁹² In recent commentaries the tendency to leave the question open is becoming more popular (e.g. Alter, 2007: 346).

Chapter 5: The Seraphim

Introduction

With regard to the Seraphim, prior to the modern period there were few scholars proposing that they were serpentine in form.⁵⁹³ Most popular commentaries treated the Seraphim as angelic⁵⁹⁴ or allegorical⁵⁹⁵ or both. The serpentine idea was slow to get started and is reflected in BDB which has two entries for the references under שָׂרָפִים I and שָׂרָפִים II.

שָׂרָפִים I - Num. 21: 6, 8; Deut. 8: 15; Isa. 14: 29; 30: 6.

שָׂרָפִים II - Isa. 6: 2, 6.⁵⁹⁶

This etymological separation can be traced back to the LXX reading of Isa. 6:

⁵⁹³ The earliest I can find is Tenison, 1678: 351.

⁵⁹⁴ This is something that has tailed off in recent years, despite an increase in popular interest in angelology. It is interesting to note that the medieval angelic hierarchies have disappeared in modern poetry: “Nineties poets showed almost no interest in the traditional lore of angelology, as expounded by medieval theologians like the Pseudo-Dionysius. One finds no reference in recent poetry, for example, to the ancient classification of angels into three triadic hierarchies” (Gilbert, 2001: 246). However, the angelic still finds occasional supporters - Watts, 2005: 106.

⁵⁹⁵ Modern commentaries tend to ignore allegorical interpretation. However, for a useful, though not exhaustive, list of patristic interpretation see Lienhard, 2001: 241-242 (his list includes Bede, *Homilies on the Gospels* 2: 18; Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 94; Ephrem the Syrian, *Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron* 16: 15; Augustine, *Explanation of the Psalms* 74: 4; Gregory Nazianzus, *Oration* 45: 22) and McKinion, 2003: 49, 125 (he cites Chrysostom, *Against the Anomoeans* 3: 24; Eusebius of Caesarea, *Commentary on Isaiah* 6: 2; Origen, *De Principiis* 1: 2; 4: 3; Gregory the Great, *Morals on the Book of Job* 6: 33, 62). In the early modern period, Cherubim and Seraphim have even been likened to Oriental Orthodox liturgical fly swatters (Sophocles, 1860: 501).

⁵⁹⁶ BDB p. 977. A Judahite of the same name occurs in 1 Chron. 4: 22.

2, 6. LXX treats שֶׁרָפִים in these verses as a transliterated proper name: Σεραφίμ.⁵⁹⁷ Is this justified? The first set of references are clearly something to do with snakes. The context of all of them requires this. However, the picture in Isa. 6, while not precluding a serpentine interpretation, does not require it. The question for the interpreter is whether or not to apply the serpentine interpretation to Isa. 6 or not, without simply reading in a pre-conceived idea.

I shall begin this chapter with a review of the etymological issues surrounding שֶׁרָפִים, because the conclusions drawn about them have a direct impact upon the

⁵⁹⁷ The notion that the Seraphim were serpentine gained considerable ground as the modern period progressed. Knobel did not believe they were serpentine (Knobel, 1861: 109-110). Delitzsch does not quote the Hebrew word for Seraph when discussing Isa. 14: 29; 30: 6 (“flying dragon” in his translation), thus drawing the readers’ attention away from any possible connection with Isa. 6 (Delitzsch, 1866: 201, 315). William Rainey Harper goes so far as to deny any reference to Seraphim other than Isa. 6 (Harper, 1896: 44). Harper is typical of non-critical interpreters. Elsewhere he simply confuses Cherubim and Seraphim completely (Harper, 1897: 55). Skinner (Skinner, 1896: 44) sees the Isa. 6 references as unique but at the same time acknowledges a link with the snakes, distancing the two by suggesting that Nehushtan (2 Kgs. 18: 4) was an intermediate link. He also goes on to decry flying snakes as a creation of popular imagination (Skinner, 1896: 120, 227). The following commentators also separate them: Gray, G. B., 1903: 277-278; Baentsch, 1903: 575-576; Holzinger, 1903: 92-93; Wade, 1911: 39; Hehn, 1913: 314; König, 1926: 89-90; Roberts, L. G. A., 1931: 17; Reider, 1937: 94; Kissane, 1941: 74 (they have “nothing in common with serpents except the name”); Muckle, 1960: 25; Mauchline, 1962: 90; Young, 1965 Vol. 1: 239-240; Wildberger, 1965 Vol. 1: 264-265 (though Wildberger, like Skinner, understands the link to snakes through Nehushtan – Wildberger, 1965 Vol. 2: 96-97); Sturdy, 1976: 147-148; Wenham, 1981: 157, n. 1; Jensen, 1984: 86; Jacob, E., 1987: 99; Motyer, 1993: 76; 1999: 70. Heinisch’s comment on Num. 21 that “the snakes are called ‘seraphim’” implies that he separates the two, seeing the snake references as an alternative use for the proper name (Heinisch, 1936: 82). Stacey objects to any speculation about the form of the Seraphim: “If we begin to speculate about the form of the Seraphim, we shall soon find ourselves asking what colour Yahweh’s robe was, and we shall have lost the sense of awe and mystery” (Stacey, 1993: 43). Those who do make the connection include Wake, 1873: 389 (cf. also Wake, 1888: 47, although Wake mistakenly identifies Seraphim with teraphim – Foote, 1902: 28); von Orelli, 1887: 28; Dillmann, 1890: 55-56 (quoting Gesenius); Marti, 1900: 64 (although he translates Isa. 14: 29; 30: 6 as “flying dragon” pp. 131, 220). The view was put forward for discussion at the Twelfth Congress of Orientalists in Rome in 1899 by Paul Haupt, (Anon., 1900: 220), and, interestingly on that occasion, combined with the lightning theory (cf. Haupt, 1907: 7). Others who link the Seraphim with serpents include Schneider, 1909-1912: 17; Meek, 1921: 118; Povah, 1925: 131 (who links the whole idea to psychology, with the Seraphim representing the male libido – cf. Hines, 1928: 223 - contrast Joines’ description of their feminine side – Joines, 1967: 409, 415; cf. Terrien, 1970: 321; also the identification of both genders in Elizabeth Barrett’s poem, “The Seraphim”; cf. Straight, 2000: 269-288); Irwin, 1928: 86-87; Procksch, 1930: 54; Hippisley, 1944: 20; Fohrer, 1960 Vol. 1: 23; Kaiser, 1972: 76; de Saignac, 1972: 320-325; Joines, 1974: 42-54; Kilian & Zapff, 1986: 48; Beuken, 2003: 169, 171. Gray was agnostic on whether they are serpentine or not (Gray, G. B., 1949: 105; cf. Oswalt, 1986: 179; Davies, E. W., 1995: 217). Childs accepts the serpentine link, but only as distant background information (Childs, 2001: 55). For the idea that the snakes might be dragons cf. additionally Smith, G. A., 1918: 122; König, 1926: 187.

resulting interpretation of the texts. Then I shall look in more detail at the individual texts themselves, before drawing some conclusions about Isa. 6 in particular.

Etymology of שָׂרָף

As just noted, BDB gives two entries for שָׂרָף. The verb associated with both is שָׂרַף, “he burns”. The association of fire imagery and snakes is widely acknowledged. The fire refers to the effect of the snake’s bite (some sort of fever or burning sensation in the skin),⁵⁹⁸ or to the venom itself.⁵⁹⁹ Others have speculated that the fiery reference is to the movement of the snake, like lightning, or its markings.⁶⁰⁰ Either way, the association in popular imagery of desert-dwelling serpents with fire is strong enough for this connection to make sense. As regards Isaiah’s vision, the burning connotation has been used imaginatively over the centuries. People have frequently speculated about the angelic, largely humanoid form, of the Seraphim, while indulging in allegorical interpretations of their burning attributes. The fiery nature of Seraphim can be intransitive, with the Seraphim representing some sort of hypostatic embodiment of fire, or transitive, with the emphasis on how they burn or purge those around them, in this case, Isaiah. The fiery etymology works comfortably with both serpentine and angelic ideas, and so does not help in deciding how to read Isaiah’s vision.⁶⁰¹

⁵⁹⁸ Elliott-Binns, 1927: 138-139; Reider, 1937: 94; Craigie, 1976: 188, n. 8; Mayes, 1981: 193; Davies, E. W., 1995: 217; Tigay, 1996: 95; Levine, 2000: 87; Veijola, 2004: 209, n. 517.

⁵⁹⁹ Riggans, 1983: 158; Christensen, 1991: 176-177 claims that Cazelles is the originator of the idea that “fiery” refers to the venom itself rather than the effects of it. Unfortunately I was unable to find a copy of *Le Deuteronomie* (Paris: du Cerf, 1958), p. 54, to check this.

⁶⁰⁰ Kaiser, 1972: 76.

⁶⁰¹ Motyer’s argument that the lack of a definite article means that the word is descriptive is incorrect (Motyer, 1999: 70), since the definite article occurs in Isa. 6: 6. It could simply mean that there were an undefined number.

Should שֶׁרָפָיִם be treated as a noun or an adjective?⁶⁰² If it is adjectival, the interpretation will focus, as above, on the fiery or burning nature of the object that it describes. Should it be a noun, one is forced to make conclusions about the type of creature - spiritual, mythical or otherwise - to which it refers. Again, however, decisions have to be made based on contextual information.

It seems that the decision to separate the references into two categories is arbitrary and based upon preconceived ideas about the text in each case. A more detailed look at the texts and how they interact with each other may assist in arguing for or against this stance. Before looking at the texts, though, further consideration should be given to one etymological interpretation which is associated with neither fire nor snakes.

In the introduction I noted the attempts to see Seraphim as griffins.⁶⁰³ This theory only works if two meanings for שֶׁרָפָיִם are allowed. It seems utterly implausible to argue that the references under שֶׁרָפָיִם I (Num. 21: 6, 8; Deut. 8: 15; Isa. 14: 29; 30: 6) could refer to griffins. The theory makes the assumption that a separate meaning for שֶׁרָפָיִם exists. Unfortunately, as with traditional angelic interpretations of Isaiah's Seraphim, the etymological conclusion is forced by preconceived notions. The griffin theory, though, is particularly interesting, since it is one of the few attempts to link Seraphim with Cherubim. However, there would need to be other arguments in favour of equating these beings for this reading to be justified, but I shall only address this question at the end of this chapter in the light of a more detailed textual study. Even if the textual study shows that this etymology is unlikely, how do we account for the

⁶⁰² Jensen notes this question (Jensen, 1984: 86).

⁶⁰³ See above pp. 29-30.

existence in the ancient world of a line of interpretation which equates Seraphim and Cherubim, and for the view that Isaiah's Seraphim are angelic? Perhaps a closer inspection of the individual texts can shed more light on this.

Numbers 21: 6, 8

Numbers 21: 5-9 וַיְדַבֵּר הָעָם בְּאֱלֹהִים וּבְמֹשֶׁה לֵמֹה
הֲעֲלִיתָנוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם לָמוּת בְּמִדְבָּר כִּי אֵין לֶחֶם וְאֵין מַיִם
וּנְפָשָׁנוּ קָצָה בְּלֶחֶם הַקֶּלֶקֶל: ⁶ וַיִּשְׁלַח יְהוָה בְּעַם אֶת
הַנְּחָשִׁים הַשֶּׂרָפִים וַיִּנְשְׁכוּ אֶת־הָעָם וַיָּמָת עַם־רַב מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל: ⁷
וַיָּבֹא הָעָם אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמְרוּ חֲטָאנוּ כִּי־דִבַּרְנוּ בִיהוָה וּבְךָ
הַתְּפִלָּל אֶל־יְהוָה וַיִּסַּר מֵעֲלֵינוּ אֶת־הַנָּחַשׁ וַיִּתְּפֹלֵל מֹשֶׁה
בְּעַד הָעָם: ⁸ וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה עֲשֵׂה לְךָ שֶׁרֶף וְשִׂים
אֹתוֹ עַל־נֹס וְהָיָה כָל־הַנִּשְׁוֹךְ וְרָאָה אֹתוֹ וְחָי: ⁹ וַיַּעַשׂ מֹשֶׁה
נָחַשׁ נְחֹשֶׁת וַיִּשְׁמְהוּ עַל־הַנֹּס וְהָיָה אִם־נִשְׁךְ הַנָּחַשׁ אֶת־אִישׁ
וְהָבִיט אֶל־נְחַשׁ הַנְּחֹשֶׁת וְחָי:

Numbers 21: 5-9 The people spoke against God and against Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food.” ⁶ Then the LORD sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. ⁷ The people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned by speaking against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD to take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. ⁸ And the LORD said to Moses, “Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live.” ⁹ So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

Of all the passages which associate snakes with שֶׁרֶף, the account of Moses’

brazen serpent is the most detailed.⁶⁰⁴ Yhwh sends הַנְּחָשִׁים הַשֶּׂרָפִים as a

punishment.⁶⁰⁵ Whatever these snakes may have been, the use of נָחַשׁ has to denote a

serpent of some sort.⁶⁰⁶ The role of שֶׁרֶף in this passage, though, is confused. In v. 6 it

⁶⁰⁴ For a discussion about the historical background to the setting of the story see Snaith, 1967: 279.

⁶⁰⁵ Knierim, 2005: 237 argues that the punishment is ongoing because there is no mention of the Israelites breaking camp.

⁶⁰⁶ This has nothing to do with נחש II – divination. The noun from it only occurs in Num. 24: 1 so it is unusual. Furthermore the reference within this passage to the people being bitten implies some sort of wild animal.

is either an adjective describing the nature of the נָחָשׁ,⁶⁰⁷ or it is a noun, presumably introduced as some sort of gloss, or simply added as an embellishment in apposition with the preceding word.⁶⁰⁸ In v. 8 it is clearly a noun,⁶⁰⁹ something that Moses is told to make. The matter is further confused, because v. 9 tells us that what Moses actually makes is a נָחָשׁ נְחֹשֶׁת.⁶¹⁰ Similarly vv. 7 and 9 only refer to the snakes that bit the people as הַנְּחָשִׁים.⁶¹¹

The change in the references to the snakes that bit the people does not suggest any firm conclusions about שָׂרָף. If it is an adjective, then the narrative does not require it to be used again. Similarly, if it is some sort of explanatory noun, it makes sense in subsequent verses to limit the account to the use of the primary noun, נָחָשׁ. Any repetition of שָׂרָף in either sense is unnecessary.

But why does the narrator change the noun with regard to the object that Moses is commanded to make? Is it to indicate that Moses makes something that is not exactly what Yhwh had in mind? Does שָׂרָף represent something metaphysical (Isa. 6) as opposed to Moses' magical totem?⁶¹² Is the נָחָשׁ נְחֹשֶׁת a semi-oblique reference to Nehushtan,⁶¹³ the bronze object which Hezekiah removed from the Temple (2 Kgs. 18: 4)? Or are the two nouns synonymous? Is the reader supposed to

⁶⁰⁷ Cf. Greenstone, 1939: 223 following Rashi, ibn Ezra and Kimchi.

⁶⁰⁸ Either a gloss or in apposition (Oettli, 1893: 46).

⁶⁰⁹ Keel, 1977: 71-72; Ashley, 1993: 404-405, *contra* Seebass, 1993 Vol. iv / 2.5: 321. Certain Samaritan MSS of Num 21: 6 have a passive participle, שָׂרָפָה, but they still have a noun at v. 8.

⁶¹⁰ Words which sound like a snake hissing (Charlesworth, 2010: 348).

⁶¹¹ Noth rejects the idea that these two words represent two different sources (Noth, 1966: 136-137). For a contrary view see Scharbert, 1992: 84.

⁶¹² For the view that this story is about sympathetic magic cf. Seebass, 1993 Vol. iv / 2.5: 324 (who compares it to the Philistines' gold mice and tumours -1 Sam. 6: 22); Olson, 1996: 136; Levine, 2000: 88 (who also suggests that the goat for Azazel is another example of sympathetic magic).

⁶¹³ Presumably the name is a pun on the metal from which it was made or its red, coppery colour (Gray, G. B., 1903: 278; Greenstone, 1939: 242; Licht, 1985 Vol. 2: 226-227). Wenham notes that red is also the colour of expiation (Wenham, 1981: 158, n. 2) and that the redness of the copper may have been to counteract the redness of the bites themselves (Wenham, 1997: 52-53).

know what a שָׂרָף is, and that a נֶחֱשׁ נֹחֲשֵׁת is a perfectly reasonable form of it? The fact that Yhwh instructs Moses actually to make something and put it on a pole implies a physical object is intended in the command. If שָׂרָף were metaphysical, presumably Moses would have been told to make a copy or an image of it. This suggests that the שָׂרָף in v. 6 is also a noun, probably in apposition with נֶחֱשׁ.

It appears that the simplest interpretation of this passage treats שָׂרָף as a type of snake, and that the reader was supposed to know what it was.⁶¹⁴ That the passage is connected to the account of Hezekiah's actions in the Temple is indisputable.⁶¹⁵ Whether we should treat it as an aetiology of that account,⁶¹⁶ or the other way around, is a matter of debate, though, which has a potential effect on the dating of the passage. This in turn impacts on its relationship to the other שָׂרָף references, especially those in Isaiah, but sadly hard and fast conclusions about the date are difficult to achieve. It is difficult to pin down exactly how this passage relates to the documentary hypothesis,⁶¹⁷ although the most likely source would be J. Traditionally E is

⁶¹⁴ For those who take this line cf. Knobel, 1861: 243 (despite the translation “Brandschlangen”); Dillmann, 1886: 118; Watson, 1894: 46; Baentsch, 1903: 575-576; Wenham, 1981: 157, n. 2. For a mythological interpretation see Procksch, 1930: 202, 204, 387-388. I do not agree with Charlesworth's suggestion that the use of two words for snake implies two different species (Charlesworth, 2010: 330) since a copulative *waw* would be expected between הַנְּחָשִׁים and הַשָּׂרָפִים.

⁶¹⁵ Watson, 1894: 48; Fullerton, 1907: 127-128; Mays, 1964: 115-116. Charlesworth draws attention to the large number of ophite forms in the archaeological record (Charlesworth, 2010: 60-83), noting that their absence from the Jerusalem environs may have been because of Hezekiah's reforms (Charlesworth, 2010: 77-78). He sees this record as good reason to believe that the reference to Nehushtan in the Temple is reliable and that elements of Num. 21: 4-9 can also be dated earlier than Hezekiah's reforms (Charlesworth, 2010: 328, 345-347).

⁶¹⁶ E.g. Sturdy, 1976: 147-148.

⁶¹⁷ Gray treats the passage as JE (Gray, G. B., 1903: 274), as does Budd (Budd, 1984: 232-233). Baentsch says it is “fundamentally” E (Baentsch, 1903: 575-576). Holzinger suggests that it is J (Holzinger, 1903: 92-93), as does Knierim, 2005: 238. For Procksch it is E (Procksch, 1930: 202, 204, 387-388). Noth also sees it as E (Noth, 1966: 136-137). He sees the references to Yhwh as secondary, with J (Num 14: 25b) and P (Num. 20: 22-29) providing the narrative framework. Interestingly, Noth does not see this story as an aetiology of Nehushtan since, he claims, the writer does not know about the bronze object in the Temple. He does, however, view the story as the root of the belief in the existence of dangerous snakes in the wilderness. Charlesworth has also recently assigned this to E, dating it in its current form to the seventh century with elements going back to the ninth (Charlesworth, 2010: 326).

associated with the northern kingdom, and, since Nehushtan was in Jerusalem, this connection is less likely. We can rule out D, since it seems unlikely that a story celebrating a Mosaic artefact, which had fallen into disfavour and been destroyed as part of a cultic revolution during Hezekiah's reign, would be either written or influential in the aftermath.⁶¹⁸ Consequently, it is best to date this story to some time before Hezekiah's reign.

The LXX translators did not see שֶׁרֶפֶד as a noun, but as an adjective.

Throughout the passage, נִחָשׁ is translated consistently as ὄφις, including v. 9 where נִחָשׁ נִחָשׁ is translated literally as ὄφις χαλκοῦν. הַשֶּׁרֶפֶד הַנִּחָשִׁים is rendered τὸς ὄφεις τὸς θανατοῦντας, clearly an adjectival phrase, “deadly snakes”.⁶¹⁹ In v. 8, where שֶׁרֶפֶד is a noun, LXX simply uses the standard noun, ὄφις. It seems very unlikely that the translators would treat the first incidence of שֶׁרֶפֶד as an adjective describing נִחָשׁ, and then the second as a synonym of it. It is more likely that they did not understand it as a noun, and simply harmonised Yhwh's command with the action that Moses took.

Num. 21: 6-9 suggests that there was a type of desert-dwelling snake, known as a שֶׁרֶפֶד, presumably either because of its appearance like fire, or because of the

⁶¹⁸ Sakenfeld, on the other hand, sees the story as having been written as an apology for the making of Nehushtan (Sakenfeld, 1995: 117-118). Knierim, 2005: 238 argues that 2 Kgs. 18: 4 is an “anti-Moses reformation” since Moses figures very strongly in Num. 21: 4-9 and Moses is specifically mentioned in the 2 Kings account. Furthermore Moses' association with snakes of one sort or another is an important part of the story (Exod. 4: 3; 7: 15 - נִחָשׁ; Exod. 7: 9-10 - תַּנִּיךְ). If so, this strengthens the case for this story pre-dating Hezekiah's action.

⁶¹⁹ Holzinger notes that the phrase is also used of a different type of snake in Jer. 8: 17 (Holzinger, 1903: 92-93). Maarsingh, unusually in the modern period, follows LXX (Maarsingh, 1987: 75-76). Cf. also Philo's allegorical interpretation, dependant on the LXX reading, that the snakes symbolise the mortification of the passions - *Leg. III* 83-87 (Dogniez, and Harl, 1992: 172). Cf. additionally the allegorical interpretations in Philo, *Leg. II* 20; *Agr.* 22 as well as *Wisd.* 16: 6f; *John* 3: 14 (Davies, E. W., 1995: 214).

nature of its bite. This snake was the subject of a judgement narrative relating to the Exodus story. The Hebrew reader, early in the textual tradition, would have understood what a שָׂרָף was, while this knowledge was lost by the time of the LXX translators, who treated שָׂרָף as an adjective.

Deuteronomy 8: 15

Deuteronomy 8: 15
 הַמִּזְלִיכָךָ בַּמִּדְבָּר הַגָּדֹל וְהַתְּהוֹמָה נָחָשׁ
 וְעַקְרָב וְצִמְאוֹן אֲשֶׁר אֵין־מַיִם הַמּוֹצִיא לְךָ מֵיָם מִצּוֹר
 הַחֲלָמִישׁ:

Deuteronomy 8: 15 who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, an arid wasteland with (saraph)⁶²⁰ snakes and scorpions. He made water flow for you from flint rock, ...

The passing reference to שָׂרָף נָחָשׁ in Deuteronomy is intriguing.⁶²¹ The fact that it is a passing reference in itself tells us that the writer (or preacher, if some theories of the origins of Deuteronomy are to be believed),⁶²² or glossator⁶²³ was comfortable with the term.⁶²⁴ The form, שָׂרָף נָחָשׁ, raises similar questions to those surrounding הַנְּחָשִׁים הַשָּׂרָפִים in the previous passage. Again, are we dealing with an adjective or a noun? Either is grammatically possible and, either way, the equivalent result would be similar to the interpretation of Num. 21: 6. It could be an adjective, in

⁶²⁰ My translation. NRSV has “poisonous”, treating שָׂרָף as adjectival.
⁶²¹ Most commentators either ignore the reference or deal with it only briefly. Driver links it to Isa 30: 6 and Num. 21, saying that the former reference was “of the same region” (Driver, 1895: 110). Buckland describes this verse as a description of God’s training regime in the desert, without specifically mentioning the details (Buckland, 1930: 46). Cf. also e.g. Cunliffe-Jones, 1951: 68-69; Blair, 1965: 43-44; Thompson, J. A. 1974: 136-137; Gelbard, 1980: 59-60; Batsri, 1983: 25; Braulik, 1986: 72; Tigay, 1996: 95; Clements, 2001: 39-40; McConville, 2002: 165; Nicholls, 2006: 96-106.
⁶²² Budd, 1984: 234.
⁶²³ König rejects the translation “Brandschlange” and translates as “Schlange, ja Giftschlange” (venomous snake) seeing שָׂרָף as a gloss based upon Num 21:6 and explaining נָחָשׁ (König, 1917: 106).
⁶²⁴ Unlike later Jewish commentary which favoured speculation about their fantastic size “as big as beams” (Finkelshtayn, 1969: 30).

which case it is just describing the nature of the נִחַשׁ.⁶²⁵ It could be a noun in apposition or a gloss identifying the type of נִחַשׁ, presumably something the writer or glossator would expect the reader to know about. Alternatively, שָׂרַף could be the original word with נִחַשׁ as the gloss.

The choice of these interpretations is affected by the rhythm of the verse. If the verse has a rhythm at all (rhetorical rhythm is by no means an exact science), it is most likely to be based upon pairs of adjectival phrases or words.

הַמּוֹלִיכְךָ בַּמִּדְבָּר
הַגָּדֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא
נִחַשׁ שָׂרַף וְעַקְרָב
וְצִמְאוֹן אֲשֶׁר אֵין־מַיִם

After the introductory phrase, “who led you in the wilderness,” there are three adjectival pairs. The first, הַגָּדֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא, consists of adjectives, both referring to the wilderness. The second, נִחַשׁ שָׂרַף וְעַקְרָב,⁶²⁶ uses at least two nouns which are in a genitive relationship to the wilderness.⁶²⁷ In the third pair, וְצִמְאוֹן אֲשֶׁר אֵין־מַיִם, the form is changed again, using one noun introduced with a simple conjunction and having a relative clause as its parallel. The question is, how does שָׂרַף fit into the second pair, and does it intrude? The first and third pair only use two nouns, and it would make sense for the second pair also only to have two nouns. If this is the case then one of the possible interpretations of שָׂרַף may be ruled out. It is unlikely to be an

⁶²⁵ Oettli, 1893: 46. Smith treats it as a collective noun (Smith, G. A., 1918: 122). Cf. also Steuernagel, 1923: 82; Nielsen, 1995: 109; Rütterswörden, 2004: 226.

⁶²⁶ SP’s omission of the *waw* consecutive in this phrase (cf. Christensen, 1991: 172-173) is awkward and, given its appearance in the neighbouring phrases, probably due to scribal error.

⁶²⁷ Weinfeld, 1991: 387, 394-395 notes that the identical phrase occurs in Esarhaddon’s inscriptions: “wo Schlangen und Skorpione wie Ameisen das Feld bedecken” (Borger, 1956: 56, line 4). The second reference which Weinfeld cites (Borger, 1956: 112, RS lines 5-7), however, is not an exact equivalent but the poetic sentiment is the same.

original noun in apposition with נִחַשׁ. This leaves two possible explanations. Either שָׂרָף is a gloss, or נִחַשׁ is the gloss. If שָׂרָף is a gloss the glossator clearly assumes that the reader understands what a שָׂרָף is. Alternatively, one might argue that נִחַשׁ is the gloss, explaining to a later audience what this obscure word is, in which case the use of שָׂרָף is a wonderfully poetic noun the exact meaning of which has been forgotten.⁶²⁸

This verse is most closely related to Num. 21: 5-9 and Isa. 30: 6. The first connection has already been pointed out. The second link is due to the the subject-matter of שָׂרָף, and the fact that it appears as part of a description of the wilderness. However, the difference in this second connection is that the שָׂרָף in Isa. 30: 6 is winged, whereas here it is not.⁶²⁹ While there was a belief in the ancient world that desert-dwelling flying snakes were a natural, if rather remarkable, phenomenon, the change in our texts from flying snakes to non-flying snakes may imply that one text is referring to fantastic snakes, while the other is not.⁶³⁰ This does not help in deciding whether שָׂרָף in Deut. 8: 15 is an adjective or a noun, but it does suggest some conceptual distance between this verse and Isa. 30: 6. Whether that distance is temporal remains to be seen, depending on the date of Isa. 30: 6, but I would certainly want to date Deut. 8: 15 considerably later than Isaiah of Jerusalem and Num. 21: 5-9.

⁶²⁸ Seebass, 1993 Vol. iv / 2.4: 316. Nelson points out that the heat of the שָׂרָף, and accompanying drought, contrasts with the water that flowed from the rock at Meribah (Nelson, 2002: 109), but this could illustrate the poetic nature of the passage rather than providing hard evidence for the use of שָׂרָף as an adjective.

⁶²⁹ This does not automatically rule out the possibility that there is a tradition of winged snakes in the wilderness wanderings behind Deut. 8: 15, but, as with the interpretation of the Cherubim descriptions, I am trying to take the absence of specific information seriously in my reading of the text.

⁶³⁰ Von Rad, 1966: 73 for the natural interpretation. Mayes believes they were fabulous (Mayes, 1981: 193), and it is impossible to identify any particular species (Craigie, 1976: 188, n.8).

What both Isa. 30: 6 and Num. 21: 6 have in common, though, is that שָׂרָף is a noun. If שָׂרָף in Deut. 8: 15 is an adjective, then it is the only example of it in the Hebrew Bible. The other references to שָׂרָף are all nouns in form, if not intention. Consequently, it is most likely that, in Deut. 8: 15, either שָׂרָף is an explanatory gloss, primarily introduced in order to make a reference to Num. 21: 6-9, or נִחָשׁ is the gloss explaining the existing text which uses the noun in the same way as Num. 21.

If שָׂרָף is a noun here, then this has been misinterpreted by the LXX translators, just as in Num. 21: 6. LXX reads ὄφις δάκνωσιν (literally “biting snake”)⁶³¹ for שָׂרָף נִחָשׁ, treating the second word as adjectival and rendering it with a participle. In Deut. 8: 15, then, שָׂרָף is a type of snake, known to the author or glossator, but unknown to the LXX translators.

Isaiah 30: 6

Isaiah 30: 6-7
 וְלִישׁ מִהֶם אִפְעָה וְשָׂרָף מֵעוֹפֵף יִשְׂאוּ עַל-כַּתְּף עֵינִי
 חִילָהֶם וְעַל-רִבְשֵׁת גַּמְלִים אוֹצְרֵתָם עַל-עַם לֹא יוֹעִילוּ:⁷
 וּמִצָּרִים הֶבֶל וְרִיק יַעֲזְרוּ לָכֵן קָרָאתִי לָזֹאת רַהַב הֵם
 שָׁבַח:

Isaiah 30: 6-7 An oracle concerning the animals of the Negeb. Through a land of trouble and distress, of lioness and roaring lion, of viper and flying serpent, they carry their riches on the backs of donkeys, and their treasures on the humps of camels, to a people that cannot profit them.⁷ For Egypt's help is worthless and empty, therefore I have called her, “the silenced Rahab.”⁶³²

This reference to שָׂרָף מֵעוֹפֵף occurs in a short oracle (Isa. 30: 6-7) written to discourage political alliance with Egypt during a time of Assyrian political

⁶³¹ It is likely that the use of δάκνωσιν here may reflect awareness of the other text.

ascendancy. The image is of a camel train crossing the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt, heavily laden. But their journey is pointless. Egypt will not respond. These two verses are part of a wider section on this anti-Egyptian alliance theme, specifically including 30: 1-5 and the whole of chapter 31. The wider section is a complex one and does not affect the debate here. However, an oracle written against Egypt in the face of Assyrian aggression (cf. Isa. 31: 8-9) would be best dated to the end of the eighth century, probably during the reign of Hezekiah, when the temptation to appeal to Egypt would be greatest. The theme of Zion's inviolability, which underpins this material, would also fit with both the period and an anti-Egyptian and anti-Assyrian stance. As such, it seems that this oracle dates to this period, considerably before Deut. 8: 15, but in close temporal proximity to Num. 21: 5-9.

What, then, is the **מְעוֹפֵף שָׂרָף**? As already noted, some believed such creatures really existed.⁶³³ Detailed scientific knowledge of desert fauna would be limited at the time. However, with the reference to Rahab (v. 7) and, possibly, the

⁶³² This translation involves repointing **הֵם שָׂרָפִים** to **הֵם הַמְּשֻׁבָּתִים** (cf. Day, 1985: 89). This solves the problem of the plural **הֵם** with the singular **רָהַב**, while at the same time providing a meaning for **שָׂרָפִים** which fits the context quite nicely.

⁶³³ Esarhaddon reports seeing two-headed serpents and some sort of flying animal in the desert (*ANET* 292). Herodotus describes some bones, which Egyptians believed to have been from flying serpents, and that these were destroyed by ibexes (Herodotus, II 75; cf. III 109). The connection with the ibex is also noted by Josephus, who attributes their introduction to Egypt to Moses (*Ant. II* 10.2; cf. Pliny, *Natural History* X, 28). Bruno favours a naturalistic interpretation, rejecting the idea of “flying” in favour of the adverbial “speedy” (Bruno, 1953: 132; cf. Auvray, 1972: 264-265 “dragon volant”) although, strangely, he accepts the idea in 14: 29 (Bruno, 1953: 93). Wiseman suggests a completely different meaning for **מְעוֹפֵף שָׂרָף** as “jab, prick” following Akkadian *appu, uppu* (Wiseman, 1972: 109-110), though this suggestion may have been motivated by unhappiness with any sort of mythical creature having a place in the Bible. This means that the only other reference to this word, in Ezek. 32: 10, as a sword makes more sense, and the **עַפְעַפֵּי שָׁחַר** of Job 41: 10, the “eyelids of the dawn”, could refer to the first shafts of sunlight. Rüterswörden, 2004: 225 connects it with Middle Hebrew **שָׂרָף** to suck or slurp. He argues that here **שָׂרָף** may not be serpentine, and that the emphasis is on the “root and fruit” imagery. However, LXX does not translate root and fruit, using the words “seed” and “descendant” instead. Clements sees it as mythical (Clements, 1980: 245). Blenkinsopp, 2000: 413; Childs, 2001: 225; Quinn-Miscall, 2006: 97 (“savage animals”) all see them as natural.

beasts (בְּהֵמוֹת - v. 6), the oracle spills over into mythical realms.⁶³⁴ None of the other animals in the oracle are overtly mythical, but שָׂרָף מֵעוֹפֵף could be.⁶³⁵

The form of the oracle is odd, though. As in Deut. 8: 15, the wilderness – in this case a land (אֶרֶץ) – is described by three phrases. Each of these is a pair of nouns.

צָרָה וְצוּקָה
לְבִיא וְלִישׁ
אֶפְעָה וְשָׂרָף מֵעוֹפֵף

The problem is that מְהָם intrudes clumsily between the second and third descriptive pairs. NRSV ignores this by simply not translating the offending word. KJV (“into the land of trouble and anguish, from whence *come* the young and old lion”) treats מְהָם as referring to the land, which is possible, but clumsy, and there are still a pair of snakes awkwardly tacked on afterwards. The only other suitable candidates as an antecedent to מְהָם are “the beasts of the south” (“animals of the Negeb” – NRSV) or the “lioness and roaring lion”. The first candidate is part of the title of the oracle. Since there are other beasts in the oracle, namely camels, asses, and, not least, Rahab, this makes “the beasts” an unlikely antecedent. This leaves the two lions, לְבִיא וְלִישׁ. It appears the writer is suggesting that the שָׂרָף מֵעוֹפֵף are somehow derived from the lions. This is most reminiscent of the form of Isa. 14: 29 in which the שָׂרָף מֵעוֹפֵף is the offspring of either a נָחָשׁ or a צִפְעָה.⁶³⁶ Even so, it still seems odd that the writer imagines snakes somehow coming forth from lions. My

⁶³⁴ Muckle says, “The title is a catchword based on the following sentence. The ‘fiery flying serpent’ suggests the imagery here is that of a dream or vision.” (Muckle, 1960: 105.) Budd links the flying serpent to the primeval chaos because of the reference to Rahab (Budd, 1984: 234).

⁶³⁵ Cf Cheyne, 1880: 168; Fohrer, 1960 Vol. 2: 88, n. 103. Mauchline says that they are “demons and malign powers” (Mauchline, 1962: 208), Jensen that it was a weird legend (Jensen, 1984: 235, cf. 152).

⁶³⁶ For a discussion of the issues surrounding these alternatives see below.

preferred reading of this verse is, like NRSV, to omit מִהָם. It appears to be a gloss which has been inserted in an attempt to link this oracle to 14: 29 and emphasise the link with the only other reference to שָׂרָף מֵעֹפֵף, by suggesting that the snakes in the poem would be unnaturally generated from lions as part of divine judgement, just as one type of snake would be unnaturally generated from another in 14: 29.⁶³⁷ The original poem was simply a vivid and semi-mythical description of the howling desert, which employed an offensive and rather amusing pun against Egypt as a mythical monster and also a dumb animal. The שָׂרָף מֵעֹפֵף is an incidental part of the poem, which dates most likely to the reign of Hezekiah.

But what of the LXX? Here is the text set out roughly according to the poetic phrasing just identified.

ἢ ὄρασις τῶν τετραπόδων τῶν ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ
 ἐν τῇ θλίψει καὶ τῇ στενοχωρίᾳ
 λέων καὶ σκύμνος λέοντος ἐκεῖθεν
 καὶ ἀσπίδες καὶ ἔκγονα ἀσπίδων πετομένων

The first point of interest is the use of ἐκεῖθεν after λέων καὶ σκύμνος λέοντος. Presumably it is the equivalent of מִהָם, but means something different, “from there.” It appears that the translator was not sure what to do with מִהָם. However, the phrase ἔκγονα ἀσπίδων πετομένων suggests that the offspring idea was understood. It has been included in the more logical place, namely the third pairing, but between the two snakes, so that the second snake is the offspring of the first and, from a poetic point of view, parallel with it.

Of the thirty-three uses of ἐκγόνος in LXX, on only three occasions is it used

⁶³⁷ Kaiser is unsure whether there was a specific link between this verse and Isa. 6: 2, 6; 14: 29 (Kaiser, 1974: 290).

in conjunction with ἀσπίς (Isa. 11: 8; 14: 29; 30: 6) which itself is used thirty-one times in all. In only two of these verses is the form exactly the same (Isa. 14: 29; 30: 6), being ἐκγότων ἀσπίδων in Isa. 11: 8. This suggests that, whatever the motive for the inclusion of מִהָמָה, LXX has made the connection with Isa. 14: 29 more overt. It is unlikely that LXX is following an alternative Hebrew text here, because the position of ἐκεῖθεν suggests the wording of MT.

In this poem the שָׂרָף מְעוֹפֵף is a type of snake, possibly fantastic and probably dating to the earliest stratum of this text. In addition to the connections noted in MT and LXX, as only one of two references to שָׂרָף מְעוֹפֵף, the likelihood that these two verses are connected at an early stage in their transmission is very great, quite possibly being penned by the same writer. The LXX translator, while noting overtly the connection between the two passages, has treated שָׂרָף differently from the translators of Num. 21: 6 and Deut. 8: 15. There LXX treats it as an adjective, here as an actual snake.

Isaiah 14: 29

²⁹ **Isaiah 14: 28-32** בְּשֵׁנַת־מוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחָז הָיָה הַפֶּשֶׁא הַזֶּה: אֶל־תִּשְׂמְחוּ פְלִשְׁתֵי כְלָף כִּי נִשְׁבַּר שִׁבְט מִכָּף כִּי־מִשְׂרַשׁ נָחַשׁ יֵצֵא צִפֵּעַ וּפְרִיֹו שָׂרָף מְעוֹפֵף: ³⁰ וְרָעוּ בְכוֹרֵי דָלִים וְאֲבִיוֹנִים לִבְטַח יִרְבְּצוּ וְהַמְתִּי בְרָעַב שְׂרִשָּׁד וּשְׂאֲרֵיתָךְ יִהְיֶה: ³¹ הַיְלִילִי שֶׁר זַעֲקֵי־עִיר נִמוּג פְּלִשְׁתֵי כְלָף כִּי מִצָּפוֹן עֵשָׂן בָּא וְאֵין בּוֹדֵד בְּמוֹעֲדָיו: ³² וּמִה־יַעֲנֶה מִלְּאֲכֵי־גוֹי כִּי יִהְיֶה יֶסֶד צִיּוֹן וּבָהּ יִחָסוּ עַנְיֵי עַמּוֹ: ס

Isaiah 14: 28-32 In the year that King Ahaz died this oracle came: ²⁹ Do not rejoice, all you Philistines, that the rod that struck you is broken, for from the root of the snake will come forth an adder, and its fruit will be a flying fiery serpent. ³⁰ The firstborn of the poor will graze, and the needy lie down in safety; but I will make your root die of famine, and your remnant I will kill. ³¹ Wail, O gate; cry, O city; melt in fear, O Philistia, all of you! For smoke comes out of the north, and there is no straggler in its ranks. ³² What will one answer the messengers of the nation? “The LORD has founded Zion, and the needy among his people will find refuge in her.”

As with Isa. 30: 6-7, in Isa. 14: 28-32 we have a short, esoteric oracle, which appears to be a prophetic response to a Philistine political delegation. The tone is disparaging to Philistia, warning them not to rejoice that “the rod” that struck them was broken, because it would be replaced by something worse.

There are problems over the dating of the oracle, mainly because of v. 30. The idea that the poor will feed, presumably in Philistia, does not really fit with Isaiah’s treatment of the “the poor” elsewhere.⁶³⁸ Normally they are victims of injustice (Isa. 3: 14-15; 10: 2; 32: 7) or are looking directly to Yhwh for assistance (Isa. 11: 4; 25: 4; 29: 32). The closest we get in Isaiah 1-39 to the sense of the poor triumphing over their enemies is in Isa. 26: 6, but Isa. 24-27 is generally seen as post-exilic.⁶³⁹ Taken out of context Isa. 14: 30 seems to describe the poor in similar terms. If it is an inherent part of the oracle, and the actions of the poor are merely against the Philistines, then this is a unique and slightly odd proposition. The alternative solution of dating the whole oracle to a late period is also problematic. The chances of identifying an exilic or post-exilic period when a Jerusalem prophet could preach the inviolability of Zion (v. 32), at the same time as threatening a neighbouring state with destruction from “the north”, are pretty much non-existent,⁶⁴⁰ except in the case of an eschatological conflict such as Zech. 12; 14. As with Isa. 30: 6-7 this scenario best fits the message of Isaiah to Hezekiah during Assyrian aggression in the area.⁶⁴¹ The inviolability of Zion is not yet discredited, something that would surely have been the

⁶³⁸ Wildberger, 1965 Vol. 2: 91. Wildberger also points out that verse 30a interrupts the oracle (Wildberger, 1965 Vol. 2: 94). The confusion of first and third persons in Q Isa. and LXX do not strengthen the case for the originality of this verse either (Kaiser, 1974: 50).

⁶³⁹ Day, 1996: 243-248.

⁶⁴⁰ Duhm treats the oracle as referring to the campaigns of Alexander the Great (Duhm, 1892: 101). Cf. also Kaiser, 1974: 52-53; Kilian & Zapff, 1986: 107. Gray, G. B., 1949: 265-266 opposes a later date.

⁶⁴¹ E.g. Muckle, 1960: 58-59.

case during Babylonian political expansion, but the threat to the region was a real one. The other problem with dating the whole oracle late is the superscription which dates it to the death of Ahaz. Those who propose a late date are forced to resort to reading this as the work of a well-meaning but uninformed scribe.⁶⁴² The use in the superscription of the phrase, הַיְהוָה הַמְשִׁא הַיְהוָה, should be treated as a separate matter.⁶⁴³ Either it is a gloss which does not affect the overall thrust of the oracle, or it is the original form of the superscription.⁶⁴⁴ If it is the former then some other introductory phrase would be required. Either way it does not affect the interpretation. If the oracle is dated late the context does not work and the superscription is awkward. If the oracle is dated early the context and superscription both work, but v. 30 is, at best, unusual and, at worst, out of place. It seems easier to argue for the insertion of v. 30 as a pious interpretation of the oracle in favour of “the poor”, which picks up on the “root” theme of v. 29, rather than trying to explain a difficult context.⁶⁴⁵ Consequently I date at least the majority of this oracle to that given in the superscription, the year that King Ahaz died, some time between 727 and 715 BCE.

At this point, then, it is clear that the two uses of שָׂרָף מְעוֹפֵף are closely linked temporally. Are they linked thematically? It is not unreasonable to suppose that the oracles in which they occur are from the same hand, with the exception of the minor points already noted. The שָׂרָף מְעוֹפֵף in Isa. 30: 6 was potentially, though not

⁶⁴² Cheyne, 1880: 91; Kissane, 1941: 179; Blenkinsopp, 2000: 292.

⁶⁴³ Dillmann, 1890: 143; Skinner, 1896: 120.

⁶⁴⁴ The use of מְשִׂא as “oracle” rather than “burden” (2 Kgs. 9: 25; 2 Chron. 24: 27; Prov. 30: 1; 31: 1; Isa. 13: 1; 15: 1; 17: 1; 19: 1; 21: 1, 11, 13; 22: 1; 23: 1; 30: 6; Ezek. 12: 10; Nah. 1: 1; Hab. 1: 1; Zech. 9: 1; 12: 1; Mal. 1: 1) is a standard introductory word, especially in the Isaiah corpus, which was used as antiprophetic ammunition by some (Jer. 23: 33, 34, 36, 38) but it cannot be tied to a particular date.

⁶⁴⁵ Most commentators date v. 29 to Isaianic authorship (Kaiser, 1974: 53), although Kaiser’s proposed reordering of the verses to 29, 31, 30a, 32b (Kaiser, 1974: 56) is conjectural and does not really solve anything.

definitely, mythical. Is this the same in Isa. 14: 29? There are two other snakes mentioned in the verse, נָחָשׁ and צִפְּעִי. The former is easily seen as a natural phenomenon. The second, while being a *hapax legomenon*,⁶⁴⁶ and as such with potentially mythical overtones, could also simply be a type of snake.⁶⁴⁷ However, the image of one type of snake giving birth to another type of snake is anything but natural. The prophet is using an image which, in physical terms, is impossible, to make the point that, if the Philistines thought the first snake was bad, the others would be far worse. Moving from natural to supernatural is a nice rhetorical device.⁶⁴⁸ The מְעוֹפֵף שָׂרָף is a mythical creature, at least in terms of its generation.⁶⁴⁹

But what of the poetic structure? There are two possible ways of approaching the second part of this verse, which affect the overall interpretation.

כִּי־מִשָּׂרֵשׁ נָחָשׁ
 יֵצֵא צִפְּעִי
 וּפְרִיּוֹ שָׂרָף מְעוֹפֵף

כִּי־מִשָּׂרֵשׁ נָחָשׁ
 יֵצֵא צִפְּעִי וּפְרִיּוֹ שָׂרָף מְעוֹפֵף

In the first form there are three generations of snake. The נָחָשׁ gives birth to a צִפְּעִי. This then gives birth to a מְעוֹפֵף שָׂרָף. In the second form there are only two generations: the צִפְּעִי and מְעוֹפֵף שָׂרָף are parallel, both being the offspring of the נָחָשׁ. Grammatically either reading is plausible. The question for the reader is, which is most likely? For the poem to intend three stages of woe against the Philistines would mean treating it as an allegory. Isaiah, and indeed the pre-exilic prophets generally,

⁶⁴⁶ But closely related to צִפְּעוֹנִי (Isa 11: 8).

⁶⁴⁷ Bodenheimer, 1935: 190 identifies only one poisonous snake in the region, the *vipera xanthina*.

⁶⁴⁸ Stacey, 1993: 109.

⁶⁴⁹ Cheyne sees this as a mythological image (Cheyne, 1880: 92).

were not known for their allegorical prowess. Allegory was much more the territory of late prophetic literature and apocalyptic.⁶⁵⁰ The oracle is linked to some sort of political delegation, presumably occasioned by a specific event, namely the rod that was broken. That is one event, not two. It is a lot easier to read the second form and see the **שָׁרָף מְעוֹבָה** and **נִפְעָה** as a parallel pair. It has more emotional power and is artistically more satisfying. Any remaining question in the reader's mind, then, over the mythical nature of the image, now evaporates. The naturally occurring snake, which was bad enough for Philistia, would be replaced by something far worse, and the prophet employs both an unusual word and a frightening one to make that point. This oracle is designed to scare the delegation.

So what is the rod,⁶⁵¹ and what does the prophet have in mind as the more serious threat to Philistia? There are broadly three camps on this question. The first, and by far the most common, interpretation is that the rod and the three snakes refer to Assyrian hegemony, either generally⁶⁵² or more specifically in the form of particular Assyrian monarchs.⁶⁵³ The second line of thought is that the rod and snakes refer to

⁶⁵⁰ Kaiser, 1974: 52.

⁶⁵¹ I am assuming that the rod and the first snake are one and the same because of their close proximity. Elliott-Binns suggests that this connection reflects the story of Moses' rod turning into a snake (Elliott-Binns, 1927: 140-141; cf. Hayes, 1987: 237; Motyer, 1999: 123).

⁶⁵² Seitz, 1993: 137.

⁶⁵³ Smith, G. A., 1889: 272-273. Kellner's commentary on Isaiah (1895) does not specifically discuss the Seraphim but since the entire premise of his book is that Assyria is the main subject (the frontispiece quotation is "Ah, Assyria, the rod of mine anger"), we may safely assume that he also took this line. Cf. also Skinner 1896: 119; Condamin, 1905: 45; Wade, 1911: 104-105; König, 1926: 187; Roberts, L. G. A., 1931: 43; Kissane, 1941: 179; Muckle, 1960: 58-59; Mauchline, 1962: 144-145; Young, 1965 Vol. 1: 450-451; Auvray, 1972: 165-166; Clements, 1980: 149; Jensen, 1984: 152; Brueggemann, 1998: 136. Allan asserts that the broken rod is most likely to be Sennacherib (Allan, 1930: 84-85). Watts and Donner take the line that the second two snakes represent the same person, namely Sargon (Donner, 1964: 110-113; Watts, 2005: 106). Fohrer thinks that the broken rod is either an Assyrian King, or the occasion of a Philistine delegation to invite Hezekiah to enter an anti-Assyrian alliance (Fohrer, 1960 Vol. 1: 184-185). Hanno of Gaza rebelled against Assyrian rule in 722-720 (and Gaza fell forthwith) as did Ashdod in 713-711 (Wildberger, 1965 Vol. 2: 93-94). This series of events would fit with the death of Shalmaneser V in 722, which could also be the year of Ahaz's death.

the Judean monarchy.⁶⁵⁴ The third is that there is a cosmic aspect to the poem which is asserting Yhwh's authority in the situation.⁶⁵⁵

There is some difficulty of identifying which Assyrian kings or which Assyrian campaigns could be relevant.⁶⁵⁶ While Assyrian advances in the region are well documented, as are the deaths of its monarchs, no Assyrian king is named in this text and no battles are cited. The tidiest solution is to date the death of Ahaz to the same year as the death of Shalmaneser V (722), which coincides with Hanno of Gaza's rebellion (722-720).⁶⁵⁷ An alternative possibility would be a Philistine delegation asking for an anti-Assyrian alliance following Assyrian military success in the region,⁶⁵⁸ the rod being wielded rather than broken. Either way, this Assyrian interpretation is supported by the reference to the north, the direction from which the invading forces would come.⁶⁵⁹

The second suggestion is that the prophet is referring to Judean kings. The superscription would suggest this, and the death of a Judean king would be a natural

⁶⁵⁴ This was the line taken by Eusebius of Caesarea in chapter 69 of his commentary (Ziegler, 1975: 106). Cf. also Hayes, 1987: 237. Motyer suggests that the rod was David himself, David having been successful against Philistia (Motyer, 1993: 147-148).

⁶⁵⁵ Quinn-Miscall, 1993: 51. Quinn-Miscall points out that the people rejoice over a broken rod in Isa. 9: 2-7, which would suggest non-Israelite oppressors, but the birth of a new hope in that oracle would presumably be Israelite. If these two oracles were to be linked, it would have to be assumed that the rod in 14: 29 is an unnamed non-Israelite aggressor, presumably Assyria in some form, but that the snakes were not. Unfortunately this would be a circular argument. However, it is worth noting that in addition to the broken rod in both oracles (9: 4; 14: 29) there is also the fiery judgement of Yhwh (שָׁרִיף - 9: 4, שָׁרִיף - 14: 29). This strengthens the argument somewhat, although not necessarily with the result of a cosmic interpretation.

⁶⁵⁶ The three candidates are Tiglath-Pileser III, Shalmaneser V and Sargon II (*ANET* 284-288). The death of Tiglath-Pileser c.727 is potentially the closest date to the death of Ahaz (Oswalt, 1986: 331), but this is hardly satisfying. The problem is compounded by the fact that the date of Ahaz' death is not exactly certain either (Childs, 2001: 128).

⁶⁵⁷ I am grateful to Prof. Day for this suggestion. The biblical chronology would therefore be Ahaz d. 722, Hezekiah (722-695), Manasseh (695-641), Amon (641-639), Josiah (639-609). This is not a perfect solution since Hezekiah is said to reign twenty-nine years (2 Kgs. 18: 2), but it solves most of the dating issues.

⁶⁵⁸ Fohrer, 1960 Vol. 1: 184-185.

⁶⁵⁹ Oswalt, 1986: 333.

occasion for a diplomatic mission from a neighbouring state.⁶⁶⁰ The note about the death of Ahaz suggests some connection between him and the rod that was broken.⁶⁶¹ If the שִׁנָּה were Ahaz, then the other two snakes would either both be Hezekiah, or one would be Hezekiah and the other would be his unborn son.⁶⁶² It is worth noting that the three generations interpretation makes less sense when Hezekiah's son was not even a twinkle in his father's eye. Nor would the prophet ingratiate himself with the new, twenty-five year old king by suggesting that his as yet unplanned son would be greater than him. The problem with the Judean interpretation is that there is no reason to believe that Ahaz was ever a force to be reckoned with in Philistia.⁶⁶³ The one reference by the Chronicler (2 Chron. 26: 6-7) to Uzziah's success in this area⁶⁶⁴ hardly amounts to a major event in Philistine politics, when compared with Assyrian occupation of the region. Some have tried to get round this problem by suggesting that the oracle refers to the house of David, and hearkening back to the origins of the monarch when Israelite-Philistine relations were at their worst. This idea, however, does not fit the specific historical context suggested by the superscription and the final verse. The other problem with this theory is the reference to the north: Judean kings would hardly be a threat from that direction. If this reference is treated as a proper noun, Zaphon, and referring to Zion,⁶⁶⁵ then this objection would be overcome. The

⁶⁶⁰ Cf. David's disastrous delegation to the Ammonites on the occasion of the death of their king. See below, n. 669.

⁶⁶¹ It is strange that the death of Ahaz is mentioned if it is the death of another that is important (Oswalt, 1986: 332).

⁶⁶² Manasseh was not born until Hezekiah has been king for some seventeen years (2 Kgs. 18: 2; 21: 2).

⁶⁶³ Stacey, 1993: 109. Blenkinsopp's argument that the prophet would be unlikely to compare a Judean king to a snake (Blenkinsopp, 2000: 292) does not allow for the positive side of snakes, nor for their use as personal names (שִׁנָּה – 1 Chron. 4: 22; שִׁנָּה – 2 Sam. 17: 25, 27; נִחְשִׁיךְ – Exod. 6: 23; Num. 1: 7; 2: 3; 7: 12, 17; 10: 14; Ruth 4: 20; 1 Chron. 2: 10, 11; cf. Schneider, 1909-1912: 17-18).

⁶⁶⁴ Lowth, 1995: 99. Lowth's interpretation is that Uzziah is the first snake, Ahaz the second and Hezekiah the third. Although well before the modern period (Lowth's work was first published in 1778) his interpretation still merits noting even though it is rather odd, since Ahaz was Uzziah's grandson.

⁶⁶⁵ Quinn-Miscall, 1993: 51.

reference to Zaphon at 14: 13 is widely acknowledged to be the divine dwelling place rather than the compass point. However, the reference to ranks of soldiers in 14: 31 does suggest a human source. Alternatively, Ahaz's conciliatory attitude to Assyria (2 Kgs. 16: 7-10) could make him a symbol of Assyrian hegemony. There was a subtle change in this attitude under Hezekiah. He was forced to conciliate Sennacherib (2 Kgs. 18: 13-16), while Isaiah was prophesying disaster for the Assyrian threat (2 Kgs. 19: 20-31). There are textual difficulties in the accounts of the Assyrian invasion and difficulties in identifying when it might have taken place, but the presentation of Hezekiah and Isaiah is consistent: Hezekiah is doing what he can, practically, to put off the Assyrian threat, while Isaiah is preaching the sovereignty of Yhwh over the whole situation. This difference in attitude may be reflected in this oracle as well.

The third suggestion is that the oracle is cosmic.⁶⁶⁶ The supremacy of Yhwh and Zion is important in Isaiah, but bears little relation to the harsh political realities of the day. The reference to the north in this context is less significant, since Yhwh's authority can come from anywhere, be it Zaphon or the compass point to which it refers.

It seems likely that there are some elements of all three interpretations in this, and that this is made possible by the prophet's ambivalent approach to the Assyrian threat. This oracle has a number of different layers to it. The top layer refers to the Judean kings Ahaz and Hezekiah. Ahaz (and behind him, Shalmaneser V, if they died the same year) is the rod that was broken. The rod (שֵׁבֶט) in Isaiah is primarily Assyrian (9: 3 ET 4; 10: 5, 15, 24; 30: 31).⁶⁶⁷ However, all the references to the

⁶⁶⁶ While not stepping into the realms of the cosmic, Kaiser approaches it by seeing verse 29 as messianic (Kaiser, 1974: 51).

⁶⁶⁷ It is a Judean King in 11: 4, but this may well be a late text. It is also Babylonian in 14: 5, but one would hardly date this to the eighth century, so it is not relevant.

Assyrian as the rod occur in the context of criticism of Assyria. Yhwh wields the rod of Assyria, not the other way round,⁶⁶⁸ and, because of Assyria's abuses, that rod will be broken. It was a negative, ungodly rod. This movement from seeing Assyria as a valid agent of Yhwh's will to seeing Assyria as the great oppressor is reflected more generally in the treatment of Assyria in Isaiah 1-39. The more positive line occurs during the reign of Ahaz (7: 17, 18, 20; 8: 4, 7), naturally enough, given how indebted Ahaz was to Assyria for getting the Syro-Ephraimite alliance off his back. Thereafter, and particularly during Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem (Isa. 36-37), Assyria is the great aggressor whom Yhwh keeps at bay. The oracle in 14: 28-32 can refer to both Yhwh and Assyria, depending on what the hearer believes. Although it refers to a broken rod, which might be Assyria, unlike Assyria the rod is morally neutral, possibly reflecting Isaiah's view of Ahaz as the legitimate, if rather tiresome (Isa. 7: 13), custodian of Yhwh's place of authority during the Syro-Ephraimite crisis, tainted as this was by Ahaz' pro-Assyrian policy. The rod is Assyrian, but in the guise of Ahaz, the Assyrian puppet.

Underlying this top layer is a second layer which asserts the authority of Yhwh over the international situation. Yhwh reigns from Zion and, although apparently contradicted by the *Realpolitik*, he is in charge of affairs. This point is important for two reasons. Firstly, it provides a rationale for the political boast that Hezekiah would have any sway over Philistia. Clearly such a situation never occurred, but this oracle is rhetorical. Secondly, the international situation was in turmoil, with the northern Kingdom of Israel changing from being a real threat to the Judean state to a non-

⁶⁶⁸ Williamson, however, argues that the references to Assyria being Yhwh's rod are intended to undermine a misplaced Judaeen nationalism (Williamson, 2008: 26, 32).

existent entity in the space of a few years. Hezekiah's political entourage could have been forgiven for having ambitions which came to nothing in due course. The prophet would be merely expressing that ambition in theological terms.⁶⁶⁹

The LXX version has made a number of changes to the oracle, but, while being substantial, they do not impinge upon the discussion of the **שָׂרָף מֵעוֹפֵף**. The Philistines are now Gentiles more generally (οἱ ἀλλόφυλοι). The diplomatic delegation have become βασιλεῖς ἔθνων. The threat still comes from the north, but the cosmic interpretation is suggested rather than a specific political one, so this does not present a problem. As regards **שָׂרָף מֵעוֹפֵף**, LXX translates it as ὄφεις πετόμενοι. As in Isa. 30: 6 it is a noun, a type of snake, whether real or mythical.

Isa. 14: 29 refers to a flying snake, the **שָׂרָף מֵעוֹפֵף**, which represents Yhwh's authority, as wielded by the newly crowned king, Hezekiah. It is a classic piece of prophetic and political posturing in a volatile international situation. The home of the oracle is Zion,⁶⁷⁰ but there is enough in it that is potentially cosmic for the

⁶⁶⁹ I would like to propose a third, speculative, interpretation, which I do not believe has been suggested before. The occasion of a diplomatic delegation from Philistia to Jerusalem on the occasion of the death of Ahaz was similar to the context of David's disastrous delegation to the Ammonite King, Hanun (2 Sam. 10: 1-5). Hanun made a huge political gaff by abusing David's diplomats and sending them back half naked. As part of the political archive in Jerusalem, whether fictional or not, and at a time when confidence in the Jerusalemite house of David was high, it is quite plausible that this story was known to the literary elite, "Hezekiah's men" (Prov. 25: 1), including the prophet. I would like to suggest that the reference in this oracle to the **שָׂרָף**, with its nasty offspring, could refer to that particular story, since the name of Hanun's father was **שָׂרָף**. In both texts **שָׂרָף** is the deceased king. (Schneider, 1909-1912: 17-18 argues that the use of this name suggests that snakes were seen as positive. Cf. also the place names, **עֵין הַתַּנִּין** - "dragon's / serpent's well" Neh. 2: 13 - and **אֶבֶן הַזִּקְלָה** - possibly "stone of the snake" 1 Kgs. 1: 9 - and the general argument that serpent worship originated in Jebusite culture - Rowley, 1939: 137; Seebass, 1993 Vol. iv/2.5: 324; Davies, E. W., 1995: 215-216.) In both texts a diplomatic delegation has been sent on the occasion of the death of that king. In both texts the delegation is sent away with a flea in its ear by the dead king's son or his officials. It is amusing to speculate (and I must emphasize that this suggestion amounts to no more than speculation) that, when the prophet used the word **שָׂרָף**, the civil servants in Hezekiah's court could have picked up that he was making a rather smutty joke at the Philistine diplomats' expense. They, of course, would have been none the wiser!

⁶⁷⁰ Wildberger, 1965 Vol. 2: 100.

interpretation of צפון not to matter.⁶⁷¹ It is possible to read v. 29 as referring to Ahaz and Hezekiah with v. 31 referring to Yhwh's action through the Assyrian threat.⁶⁷²

However, there are important connections between this oracle and the vision of Isaiah in chapter 6.

First of all there is the superscription. Isa. 6: 1 and 14: 28 are the only places in the Hebrew Bible where this formula occurs: "In the year that King X died" followed by the verb.⁶⁷³ Secondly, both of these oracles can be dated to the time of Isaiah. Thirdly, they both contain references to at least one winged שרף. Fourthly, they are focused on Zion and the throne of Yhwh. Fifthly, they both contain references to smoke (עשן) as part of Yhwh's manifestation (cf. also 4: 5).⁶⁷⁴ Whatever the political interpretation of Isa. 14: 28-32, the connection with Isa. 6 is strong. This means the reader has to take seriously the idea that the מעופף שרף of Isa. 14: 29 and 30: 6 is the same thing that Isaiah saw in Isa. 6: 2, 6, namely fantastic winged snakes.

Isaiah 6: 2, 6

Isaiah 6: 2-4 שרפים עמדים | ממעל לו יש כנפים שש
כנפים לאחד בשמים | יכסה פניו ובשמים יכסה רגליו
ובשמים יעופף: ³ וקרא זה אלזה ואמר קדוש קדוש
קדוש יהוה צבאות מלא כל הארץ כבודו: ⁴ וינעו אמות
הספים מקול הקורא והבית ימלא עשן:

Isaiah 6: 6 ויעף אלי אחד מן השרפים ובידו רצפה
במלקחים לקח מעל המזבח:

⁶⁷¹ This fits with Irwin's consideration that צפון in this context could be Zaphon, but that the threat is still Assyrian (Irwin, 1928: 83-86).

⁶⁷² Sweeney, 1996: 238.

⁶⁷³ Wildberger notes the similarity but without drawing this conclusion (Wildberger, 1965 Vol. 2: 88). Kaiser emphasises the fact that no nation is named (Kaiser, 1974: 51), but then neither are any other oracles given on the occasion of a political delegation. Oswalt notes that only three oracles in Isaiah are dated - 6: 1, 14: 28; 20: 1-2 (Oswalt, 1986: 331).

⁶⁷⁴ Christensen, 1976: 398; Beuken, 2003: 172. This connection would be strengthened if we accept that צפון refers to Zion, the place where the smoke originates in Isa. 6: 3. Motyer, 1993: 147-148 ascribes the smoke to the approaching army which robs it of any theophanic power.

Isaiah 6: 2-4 Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew.³ And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.”⁴ The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke.

Isaiah 6: 6 Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs.

Finally we turn to the main Seraphim references.⁶⁷⁵ Whatever the Seraphim were, there is no justification for treating these references in isolation from Isa. 14: 29; 30: 6. The vision in chapter 6 is clearly something metaphysical and, as such, allowances need to be made for incongruities and dream-like contradictions.⁶⁷⁶ But there are some further questions to be cleared up first.

Was Isaiah in the Temple?

It has been suggested that the vision was not of the Temple but of the heavenly palace,⁶⁷⁷ since **הֵיכָל** can mean either, of which the earthly Temple was the copy

⁶⁷⁵ Almost all commentators see this vision as original to the eighth-century prophet. Eichrodt dates it to either 747 or 735 (Eichrodt, 1960: 17). However, his placing of the text at the beginning of the book (Eichrodt, 1960: 13) is unjustified, even if one were to posit that the vision took place at the beginning of Isaiah’s prophetic ministry, a supposition which is by no means certain. An exception to this early dating is Whitley, but his argument, that the awkward grammar of Isa. 6: 1 suggests a late date, is very weak (Whitley, 1959: 38-39).

⁶⁷⁶ This point is frequently made by commentators: e.g. Delitzsch, 1866: 112; Cheyne, 1880: 35-36. Cheyne sees the visions of Isaiah as “a gracious proportion between the revelation vouchsafed and the mental state of the person receiving it.” He contrasts this doctrine, which is accepted by “even” orthodox critics in Germany, with a more fanciful poetic trend of interpretation in England, citing the poetry of William Blake as an example of the latter. Interestingly this reference to the poet is omitted in later editions of his commentary. Also cf. Duhm, 1892: 43. Eichrodt suggests that the Seraphim are a psychological representation of the heavenly equivalent of the Cherubim (Eichrodt, 1960: 21-22).

⁶⁷⁷ König, 1926: 89-90. He argues that if Isaiah meant the earthly Temple he would have spoken of Cherubim rather than Seraphim, which is curious logic. Haran, on the other hand concludes that he cannot have been speaking of the Cherubim because he was not in the Temple (Haran, 1977: 387). Logically this makes more sense, even if we do not agree with Haran’s premise. Brueggemann, 1998: 58, also sees it as the heavenly throne room.

(Exod. 25: 9, 40).⁶⁷⁸ However, there are several points which suggest that this vision is based upon the earthly Temple.⁶⁷⁹ Yhwh's robe filled the sanctuary, which could not be the heavenly one, since there would be no room for the rest of Yhwh. An architectural term is used, אֲמוֹת הַסָּפִים.⁶⁸⁰ There is a logical progression from the inner part of the Temple to the vestibule: God's throne (Isa. 6: 1) to the הַיָּכֹל (Isa. 6: 1) to the threshold (Isa. 6: 4) to the בַּיִת (Isa. 6: 4).⁶⁸¹ The prophet is conscious of his physical presence in the midst of the people.⁶⁸² The mention of the altar, presumably of incense, suggests the earthly sanctuary. The throne of Yhwh could be seen as physically present in the Temple according to the enthronement interpretation of the Cherubim formula.⁶⁸³ However, since the Seraphim are part of a theophany, something particularly suggested by the smoke (cf. Isa 4: 5; Ezek 10: 4; Exod 14: 19),⁶⁸⁴ it is possible that additional features may be included which are not from the Temple.

⁶⁷⁸ Delitzsch saw the vision as spiritual, but of the heavenly temple as in Amos 9: 1 (Bergler points out that not only is the shaking of the Temple similar to this verse, but also the fact that Yhwh is standing by the altar in it, the same altar from which the Seraph takes the coal – Bergler, 2000: 469 – one might also add that, as part of that vision Yhwh sends a snake out as punishment – Amos. 9: 3, cf. Maneschg, 1981: 73); Ezek. 8-11; Acts 22: 17 (Delitzsch, 1866: 113). Cf. also Smith, G. A., 1889: 62; Duhm, 1892: 43; Skinner, 1896: 43; Fohrer, 1960 Vol. 1: 22. Wade assumes that Isaiah was in the court in front of the Temple (Wade, 1911: 39). Other commentators continued to assert that he was in the Temple itself: Roberts, L. G. A., 1931: 17; Kissane, 1941: 74. Others still are agnostic: Young, 1965 Vol. 1: 236.

⁶⁷⁹ Williamson, 2005: 124-126.

⁶⁸⁰ Isa. 6: 4. LXX ὑπέρθυρον suggests the top of the door posts. MT suggests the entire doorway.

⁶⁸¹ This contradicts Morgenstern's ideas that the sanctuary was open (Morgenstern, 1938: 369 - otherwise Isaiah would not have been able to see inside it), and that the shaking of the threshold suggests Yhwh's entry into the Temple (Morgenstern, 1938: 371, n. 126).

⁶⁸² Cf. Amos 9: 1. Cf. also Gray, G. B., 1912: 104.

⁶⁸³ See Chapter 4, above.

⁶⁸⁴ Meredith, 1860: 46; Kissane, 1941: 74; Moye, 1990: 597-598; Eslinger, 1995: 160-161. Smith's interpretation of the smoke, as the "mist which ever arises where holiness and sin touch each other" is edifying but hardly justified (Smith, G. A., 1889: 69). Nor is Clements' statement that it "must" be the incense (Clements, 1980: 75; cf. Oswalt, 1986: 182; Stacey, 1993: 43): nowhere is עָשָׁן used of incense (Williamson, 2005: 136). Leupold sees it as a symbol of the wrath of God (Leupold, 1977: 133). Day, following Duhm and others, sees the smoke as emanating from the Seraphim (Day, 1979a: 149). Levenson suggests that the final line of the Seraphim's song should be translated "the fullness of the world is his glory." Just as the smoke is his glory in the Temple, so the fullness of the world is his glory elsewhere (Levenson, 1984: 289-290).

Where Were the Seraphim in the Vision?

According to MT, the Seraphim were standing *above* Yhwh. LXX says they were standing *around* Yhwh.⁶⁸⁵ The end of 6: 2, however, says that they flew, and indeed one flies down to Isaiah. Were they standing at one point and then flying at another?⁶⁸⁶ It has been objected that, since Yhwh's train filled the Temple, they would have been standing on it!⁶⁸⁷ This takes the description too literally, though, and it should be remembered that this was a visionary experience. The most common solution to this issue is to say that they were standing in attendance, much as a cup-bearer would be standing behind the seated dignitary ready to serve if required. In that sense they would be both above and around, "standing" and flying.⁶⁸⁸ This point is significant for the discussion of whether they might be inspired by the Cherubim.⁶⁸⁹

How Many Seraphim Were There?

Origen, following his Jewish teacher, believed that there were only two,⁶⁹⁰ which he interpreted as the second and third persons of the Trinity.⁶⁹¹ Two protecting

⁶⁸⁵ If this is an intentional alteration (Wildberger, 1965 Vol. 1: 249) this may be motivated by a desire to clarify the apparent contradiction between standing and flying, or by a desire to harmonise with the surrounding Cherubim frescos, or because it was considered improper for the Seraphim to be above the deity.

⁶⁸⁶ This paradox is discussed in Blowers, 1992: 160.

⁶⁸⁷ Dillmann, 1890: 55-56. Duhm rejects this idea: Duhm, 1892: 44-45.

⁶⁸⁸ Delitzsch rejects the "near by" interpretation saying that they are "above" (Delitzsch, 1866: 113). Cf. also Dillmann, 1890: 55-56. Smith prefers "around": Smith, G. A., 1889: 63. Among those who accept the idea of in attendance are Duhm, 1892: 44-45; Skinner, 1896: 44; Box, 1908: 44 ("standing before"); Procksch, 1930: 51 ("behind"); Kissane, 1941: 71 ("standing by"); Bruno, 1953: 68 ("standing around"); Muckle, 1960: 25; Fohrer, 1960 Vol. 1: 20 ("schwebten um ihn"); Knight, 1961: 13; Young, 1965 Vol. 1: 231 ("standing around"); Oswalt, 1986: 178 (quoting Gen 45: 1; Judg 3: 19; 2 Sam 13: 9); Kilian & Zapff, 1986: 48 ("stood above"); Hayes, 1987: 111; Seitz, 1993: 54 (flanking the throne); Brueggemann, 1998: 57 ("in attendance above"); Childs, 2001: 49 ("about him were attendant seraphim"); Beuken, 2003: 160, 169 ("Seraphim standen von oben her zu ihm"). Young (Young, 1965 Vol. 1: 240) specifically argues that the meaning of the preposition, עַל, can be applied to attendants (Gen 18: 8; Exod 18: 3) – cf. also Motyer, 1999: 70 on this.

⁶⁸⁹ See below, pp. 186-188.

⁶⁹⁰ For those in the modern period who cite this cf. Krauss, 1892: 154.

⁶⁹¹ Origen, *De Principiis* 1: 3. 4; 4: 1. 26. Cf. also Augustine, *To Januarius* 16: 29.

deities were common in ancient Near Eastern iconography.⁶⁹² Linguistically, it has been argued that the Seraphim are plural, and that they would have been dual in form if there were only two. However, the two carved Cherubim in the Temple (1 Kgs. 6: 23) are not dual either. The lack of the definite article on Seraphim may imply more than two.⁶⁹³ However, the most natural reading of Isa. 6: 3 is that there are two because of the singular verbs **סָרְפָּיִם**⁶⁹⁴ and **וְסָרְפָּיִם**, combined with **אֶל־יְהוָה יְהוָה**.⁶⁹⁵ Elsewhere this idiom refers to two individuals (1 Kgs. 3: 23) or two camps (Exod. 14: 20), but it can be used of larger groups (1 Kgs. 22: 20). Isa. 6: 6, “one of the seraphs”, is inconclusive either way.⁶⁹⁶ In any case 1QIsa^a has a plural form for **סָרְפָּיִם** but reverts to singular for **וְסָרְפָּיִם**. The fact that this question is inconclusive opens up a further one: if there were potentially more than two Seraphim could there have been a host of them?

Were the Seraphim the Heavenly Host, Members of the Divine Court?⁶⁹⁷

Central to this argument is the similarity between Isa. 6 and the vision of Micaiah ben Imlah in 1 Kgs. 22: 19-22. In both passages the prophet has a vision of Yhwh’s throne room, Yhwh’s hosts are mentioned (1 Kgs. 22: 19; Isa. 6: 3, 5), the royal court is present and the question is asked “Who will go?” (1 Kgs. 22: 20; Isa. 6:

⁶⁹² Keel, 1977: 115. For instance there were two serpents on Tutankhamon’s headgear, and two winged serpents on the arms of his throne (*ANEP*, 415-417).

⁶⁹³ Gray, G. B., 1912: 105; G-K 126i.

⁶⁹⁴ Vg. *et clamabant alter ad alterum* implies two. Cf. Gray, G. B., 1912: 107-108. Q^a has a plural verb here, revealing an assumption by the writer or editor that there were more than two Seraphim.

⁶⁹⁵ Gray, G. B., 1949: 105. The number of the Seraphim is not affected by the fact that the verb has a continuous sense (Muckle, 1960: 25). Fohrer says that the Seraphim could be a multitude but in two choirs (Fohrer, 1960 Vol. 1: 23; cf. also Young, 1965 Vol. 1: 241).

⁶⁹⁶ Kaiser, 1972: 76 opts for more than two.

⁶⁹⁷ Boutflower, 1930: 27; Cross, 1953: 275-277 (who also argues that there is evidence for it in Isa. 40: 1-11; cf. Seitz, 1990: 232, 239-240); Wildberger, 1965 Vol. 1: 264-265; Leupold, 1977: 130. Nicol, 1979: 503 suggests a link to Dan. 7: 9 on the basis of the worship of the heavenly beings in both texts, and likens the flying of the Seraph to Isaiah and touching him to the similar action of Gabriel in Dan. 9: 21; 10: 16 (cf. 8: 18; 10: 1, 18).

8). Both prophets describe God's deception (1 Kgs. 22: 22; Isa. 6: 9-10). Also, the dynamic of the vision is similar to Isa. 6: Micaiah, by reporting what he has seen, effectively gives the game away, telling Ahab that he has been deceived, but it makes no difference to the outcome. Ahab listens, but does not understand (Isa. 6: 9). On the other hand the spirits in Micaiah's vision are the ones who offer suggestions to Yhwh's question rather than the prophet.⁶⁹⁸ The hosts are standing to Yhwh's right and left, rather than above him, reflecting the LXX positioning of the Seraphim.

That the Seraphim were at least part of the heavenly host is an attractive suggestion, but what form did they take? If the discussion of the other Seraph references is anything to go by, it is logical to assume that they are winged snakes. In doing this I acknowledge the importance of the suggestion that the winged snakes of Egyptian provenience may have inspired the prophet.⁶⁹⁹ However, while Egyptian influence on the Phoenician designs of the Solomonic Temple is generally recognised, none of the biblical descriptions of the Temple decoration and furnishings make any mention of snakes at all. If these decorations did exist, one would have to explain their absence from the written texts. It could be argued that the writers were offended by them. Clements' suggestion that the uraeus existed on thrones but not in the Temple does not solve the problem,⁷⁰⁰ since then we would have to account for their transference from the secular to the sacred realm. The evidence for the Egyptian link is, at best, circumstantial. The existence of Nehushtan, and the story of its creation by Moses, are much stronger candidates as inspiration for Isaiah's vision.

⁶⁹⁸ Knierim, 1968: 51.

⁶⁹⁹ Joines, 1967: 414-415; de Saignac, 1972: 320-325; Day, 1979a: 149-151; Clements, 1980: 74; Jacob, E., 1987: 99 (although Jacob does not see the Seraphim in Isa. 6 as snakes); Milgrom, 1989: 173-174, 460. See above, pp. 25-27.

⁷⁰⁰ Clements, 1980: 74; Kaiser, 1981: 127.

So the Seraphim are snakes, but where have the extra features which Isaiah describes come from? They have six wings.⁷⁰¹ They have feet, hands and faces. They have human voices. They apparently speak Hebrew.⁷⁰² (In itself this latter point does not tell against them being snakes, since the serpent in Gen. 3 is also a Hebrew speaker.) Many have argued that these features alone preclude the serpentine form.⁷⁰³ However, this argument will not do. There is enough archaeological and literary evidence to show that mixed beings could include serpentine elements and still retain the necessary human and ornithological features that Isaiah describes.⁷⁰⁴ In addition, one can plead the argument of visionary originality. If the arguments presented above for dating and dependence hold good, Isa. 6 is the earliest of the references to winged Seraphim, with Isa. 14: 29 directly referring to it and Isa. 30: 6, or at least one version

⁷⁰¹ Assuming that this is a distributive dual (Emerton, 2000: 196; G-K 88f; 134q), and not six pairs of wings as in the fifteenth and seventeenth-century MSS of *Apocalypse of Abraham* 23:5 (the fourteenth-century Slavonic Codex Sylvester correctly numbers them as three pairs). Is it possible that Beuken is suggesting six pairs? – “Sechs Flügelpaare hatte ein jeder” – (Beuken, 2003: 160). Qa’s four wings is either a mistake (Wildberger suggests haplography - Wildberger, 1965 Vol. 1: 249) or a deliberate change influenced by the description of the Cherubim in Ezekiel. The ubiquity of winged creatures (Miller, 1967: 416) makes arguments for or against connecting Seraphim and Cherubim rather weak.

⁷⁰² Unless, like Harry Potter, we assume that Isaiah was a Parselmouth (Rowling, 1998: 146).

⁷⁰³ Gawler argued that they could not have been serpentine because of their ability to praise God (Gawler, 1851: 46-47). Nevertheless he did assert that they were linked with the brazen serpent in that the latter represented Christ while the multitude of Seraphim represented Christians (Gawler, 1851: 33-34). Cf. also Skipwith, 1907: 697; May, 1936a: 198, n. 5 (May argues that they are positive in Isa. 6 and negative elsewhere); Jensen, 1984: 86. Young states that they are “personal, spiritual beings, ... they have faces, feet and hands, they employ human speech and understand moral concepts” (Young, 1965 Vol. 1: 239-240).

⁷⁰⁴ See above, pp. 25-27. In later Jewish and Christian writings animals and mixed beings are seen offering praise to God (Rev. 4: 6-8; 12: 3-9; cf. Ezek: 1; 10; 1 Enoch 61: 10-13 cf. 71: 7; 2 Enoch 9: 13-14; cf. 11: 18; *Test. Isaac* 11: 5; 12: 9; *Lad. Jac.* 2: 6-13; *Par. Jer.* 9: 4). Furthermore Gen. 3: 14 presupposes that the snake in the garden of Eden was originally upright. This was the understanding of patristic writers (Josephus, *Ant.* 1: 1. 4; Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer. IV* Pref. 4; LAE 26; *Apoc. Abr.* 23: 5). Other ancient traditions associate snakes with angels. Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews* 10. While describing an Ophite document, Origen reports an epithet or description of Raphael (the archangel) as “the serpent-like”. He appears to accept the epithet as valid (*Contr. Cel. VI* 30). He also refers to Gnostic beliefs in “serpent-like ruling angels” (*Contr. Cel. VI* 37). Tertullian describes a Roman belief that the God of the Christians was a mixed being with “serpent legs, with wings sprouting from back or foot” (Tertullian, *Apology* 26). He also refers to a belief in a god, which was “goat-shaped or serpent-shaped, and winged in foot, head, and back” (Tertullian, *Ad Nationes I* 14). Pfeiffer accepted that they were “strange composite creatures” (Pfeiffer, 1938: 156). It is interesting to note the suggestions of artefacts which might be Seraphim but which do not contain any serpentine features: e.g. an Etruscan gem in the British Museum (Six, 1885: 285).

of it, referring in turn to that.⁷⁰⁵ As with Ezekiel's vision of the Cherubim in Ezek. 1, there is a root vision for these oracles also, namely Isa. 6.

Was Isaiah's Inspiration for the Seraphim in the Physical Temple?

It is reasonable to suppose that some recognizable object inspired the vision, otherwise the readers of the account would have been as confused as the LXX translators. A number of suggestions have been made. Because of their singing duties the Seraphim have been likened to the priestly choirs in the Temple,⁷⁰⁶ and certainly the use of snakes in personal names⁷⁰⁷ makes this suggestion plausible. The coals from the altar may have played a part in inspiring Isaiah's vision. Their use by the Seraph connects the two.⁷⁰⁸

Nehushtan is the obvious candidate,⁷⁰⁹ but since there is only one it is not perfect. Additionally, Nehushtan is not described as winged.⁷¹⁰ However, Day argues that Nehushtan could have had wings,⁷¹¹ and that the multitude of fiery serpents could suggest more than one.⁷¹² One might also argue that the position of the Seraphim above Yhwh reflects the position of Nehushtan on a pole (נֹשֶׁט).⁷¹³ With the exception of Num. 26: 10, a נֹשֶׁט is always high up.⁷¹⁴ It is usually used with נֹשֶׁטָא or נֹשֶׁטָא: Isa. 5: 26; 11: 12 (cf. 10); 13: 2; 18: 3; 49: 22; 62: 10; Jer. 4: 6; 50: 2; 51: 12, 27. It is a

⁷⁰⁵ This may also reflect a particular interest in serpents in First Isaiah which has the most extensive serpent vocabulary in the Old Testament (Charlesworth, 2010: 444).

⁷⁰⁶ Smith, G. A., 1889: 63; Dillmann, 1890: 55-56; Fohrer, 1960 Vol. 1: 23.

⁷⁰⁷ See above, n. 663.

⁷⁰⁸ Quinn-Miscall also points out the similarity of the consonants (Quinn-Miscall, 1993: 34).

⁷⁰⁹ Noth, 1966: 137; Hayes, 1987: 111; Seebass, 1993 Vol. iv / 2.5: 324. McFadyen considers both Nehushtan and the Temple choirs (McFadyen, 1909: 92). Blenkinsopp notes that the Seraph takes the coal from the altar of incense and that incense was offered to Nehushtan (Blenkinsopp, 2000: 225).

⁷¹⁰ Williamson, 2005: 131.

⁷¹¹ Williamson's argument that the Num 21 serpents "were certainly not winged" (Williamson, 2005: 131 n.19) is based on absence of evidence. However this is also true of Day's suggestion.

⁷¹² Day, private communication.

⁷¹³ Num. 21: 8, 9.

⁷¹⁴ Levine notes that the standard would be lofty (Levine, 2000: 88).

military standard visible in battle (Ps. 60: 6 ET 4; Isa 31: 9; Jer 4: 21), it is set on a hill (Isa. 30: 17), or it is a sail on a ship's mast (Isa 33: 23; Ezek. 27: 7). 4Q525 15, 3⁷¹⁵ emphasises this aspect of the story. As regards the lack of wings, Milgrom has drawn attention to an eighth-century bronze bowl from Assyria, which has engraved on its rim a winged snake perched on a standard “precisely as one would imagine it” upon recollecting Num. 21: 9.⁷¹⁶ There are in fact two winged snakes on poles (one each either side of a winged scarab on another pole), and they are surrounded by two winged sphinxes (leonine with human heads). This makes for an interesting comparison for the supposed relationship between a pair of Seraphim and the pair of Cherubim in the sanctuary. The snakes may not have been described as winged, but it does not rule the idea out entirely.

What About the Cherubim?

Could the Seraphim be the living equivalents of them?⁷¹⁷ The texts which describe the Temple Cherubim are unclear enough for the two large olive wood Cherubim to be imagined as standing upright behind the Ark and Mercy Seat (see Chapter 3). Similarly, if the serpentine interpretation of the Seraphim in Isa. 6 is set aside, the role of the Seraphim as royal attendants could also put them in this

⁷¹⁵ שרף ובחלח[ל]ה ידולל פתן בעליון[ן]

⁷¹⁶ Milgrom, 1989: 460. Charlesworth believes that this object is plunder, brought back from Israel by Tiglath-pileser III or Sennacherib, because of the Hebrew name inscribed on it (Charlesworth, 2010: 16). For an image of this artefact see Barnett, 1967: 3, fig. 2.

⁷¹⁷ A chapel frieze from the eighth century and found in Megiddo (Keel, 1977: 102, image 84) shows two snakes above and a Cherub/sphinx below. Arguments against identifying them include these. The Seraphim are above rather than below (Nordell, 1889: 344-345; Efos, 1951: 374). Smith points out that the Ark is not mentioned in Isaiah's vision (Smith, G. A., 1889: 63). Whether this is significant for the idea that the Seraphim were therefore replacements of the Cherubim is debatable. Others who identify the Seraphim and Cherubim include Eichrodt, 1960: 21-22; Gray, J., 1961: 14; Mauchline, 1962: 90 (possibly); Houston, 2000: 264-265 (although his argument that they should be identified because they are mixed creatures is not very strong, since the number of different types of mix precludes any automatic identification of one with another).

position.⁷¹⁸ Furthermore, it could also be argued that the wings were covering Yhwh's face and feet just as the Cherubim cover the Ark, in which case their role would be, at least in part, apotropaic.⁷¹⁹ One might add the argument that the gold-plated Cherubim glinting in the morning sunlight could be described as burning.⁷²⁰ Smoke is part of the storm theophany of Ps. 18: 7-16 ET 6-15 (cf. verse 9 ET 8 // 2 Sam. 22: 9),⁷²¹ which specifically suggests a connection with the Cherubim. Alternatively, if the reader is imagining more than two Seraphim, the Cherubim frescos in the Temple would be numerous enough to serve as the inspiration for choirs of the figures.⁷²²

These connections can only be made by somebody who did not understand that the Seraphim were basically winged snakes. Similarly, it is unlikely that somebody who understood Cherubim as winged sphinxes would give them the role that Isaiah sees, flying around the throne with tongs. Consequently, it seems most likely that, for Isaiah, the Seraphim were not inspired directly by the Cherubim in terms of their form. However, it seems likely that his prophetic imagination might

⁷¹⁸ Procksch seems to take this line (Procksch, 1930: 53).

⁷¹⁹ Jerome noted the possibility in his Commentary on Isaiah (Wilken, Christman and Hollerich, 2007: 69-70). Brueggemann, 1998: 58 describes the Seraphim as "heavenly winged servants of Yahweh in rapt attentiveness, utterly devoted to Yahweh, fluttering around the Holy One, honouring him and covering him in order to guard and enhance Yahweh's holiness," while the translation he uses on the previous page of his book implies that their wings cover themselves. Delitzsch compares the Seraphim covering their own feet to the Cherubim's wings covering their backs – Ezek. 1: 11 (Delitzsch, 1866: 113). Whitley (Whitley, 1959: 38-39) sees the following additional similarities between the Seraphim of Isa. 6 and the Cherubim of Ezekiel's visions: their thundering voices (Isa. 6: 4; Ezek. 1: 24-25), and the cloud filling the house (Isa. 6: 4; Ezek. 10: 3-4). Auvray is agnostic on this point (Auvray, 1972: 87). Eslinger's idea that they are covering Yhwh's pudenda is rather offensive (Eslinger, 1995: 160-161). Keel points out that "head – feet" imagery in Hebrew may be a phrase expressing the totality of the body (Keel, 1977: 75, cf. Lev. 13: 12). Against this, it should be noted that Isa. 6: 2 refers to the "face" and not the head.

⁷²⁰ Lacheman, 1968: 71-72.

⁷²¹ Day, 1979a: 149.

⁷²² While not equating them and rejecting the idea that they were angelic beings, Cheyne did see both Cherubim and Seraphim as guardians (Cheyne, 1880: 36-37). Toy linked them (Toy, C. H., 1881: 63-64). Nordell suggested that they were linked in the popular mind but in fact were different. He says that the Seraphim "seem to possess a more independent, self-conscious personality. They appear, not simply as the fiery guardians of the divine holiness, but as exalted spirits whose unceasing employment is the proclamation of this holiness." (Nordell, 1889: 344-345). Dillmann separated them on the basis of form and function (Dillmann, 1890: 55-56).

have been inspired by the form of Nehushtan combined with the multiplicity of mixed beings decorating the Temple, and that he saw the hosts of Yhwh in semi-serpentine form. The fact that the people had been offering incense to Nehushtan (2 Kgs. 18: 4) shows that Isaiah's imagination existed in a live cultic situation where it was commonly believed that the bronze serpent represented a heavenly reality. If the dating of Num. 21: 4-9 to the period just before Isaiah is correct, aspects of the snakes in that story may also be inspirational for this vision. Firstly, there is a multiplicity of living snakes which could account for the heavenly host idea. Secondly, the negative living snakes and their positive bronze counterpart reflects the awesome nature of the Seraphim in Isa. 6: 2-3 and Isaiah's terrified response (Isa. 6: 5) as well as their medicinal action (Isa. 6: 6).⁷²³ The image of the burning coal, while having a positive effect, is far from comforting from Isaiah's point of view during the administration. It is only after he has had the courage to allow his lips to be touched with the coal that his healing is announced.⁷²⁴ Thirdly, in both stories the movement of the snakes is a missionary one⁷²⁵ in response to human behaviour: in Num. 21: 4, they are sent⁷²⁶ to bite the people as a result of their persistent grumbling; in Isa. 6: 5-6 they respond to

⁷²³ The debate about whether the action is purgatory or expiatory (Motyer, 1999: 72) does not affect the overall sense of the positive side of the Seraphim. (Beuken thinks it is apotropaic - Beuken, 2003: 169, 171 - which, while being a clever link to the magical interpretation of Num. 21, may be stretching a visionary experience a little too far.) Williamson, 2005:132 sees the influence of Nehushtan in the purging ritual (Isa. 6: 6-7), since it was a symbol of life and healing. For images of serpents in healing rituals: *ANEP* 657, 658, 660.

⁷²⁴ Noth notes the positive and negative aspects of the snakes in Num. 21 (Noth, 1940: 178-180; 1966: 137-138). Knierim also makes the interesting suggestion that the threefold use of נָחַשׁ in Isaiah's lament (Isa. 6: 5) may correspond to the threefold use of שִׁרְיָן by the Seraphim (Knierim, 1968: 56). Again, this reflects a direct correlation between the positive and negative aspects of the vision. I do not agree with Clements that this is a trial by ordeal (Clements, 1980: 75), since there is no sense in which Isaiah is being tested or judged. He is being cleansed or healed.

⁷²⁵ Riggans takes an unusual line on this. He links Num. 21 to Isa. 6 in that Seraphim were messengers from God in both cases, but he denies that they were snakes (Riggans, 1983: 158). Elsewhere snakes appear to do Yhwh's bidding when he "sends" them: Deut. 32: 24b; Amos 5: 19; 9: 3 (Maneschg, 1981: 73). Similarly Yhwh sends other wild animals (Ezra 5: 17; 14: 21; Ps. 78: 45).

⁷²⁶ Leibowitz, 1980: 261-262 notes that the use of Pi'el means "released" rather than "sent." Cf. Seebass, 1993 Vol. iv / 2.4: 313 (who notes a similar dynamic behind the serpent's action in Gen. 3); Levine, 2000: 87.

Isaiah's penitential cry. Fourthly, the snakes in both texts are agents of Yhwh. Fifthly, unlike the Temple paraphernalia, the snakes in Num. 21 are living beings. While it is possible for a cult object to inspire a vision of living beings,⁷²⁷ it seems easier for one living being to lead to another.

Conclusion

There is no good reason for treating the references to שָׂרָפִים as two separate groups. All the MT references are best understood as some sort of snake. The story in Num. 21: 4-9 was probably the earliest use of the term שָׂרָפִים. Isaiah of Jerusalem then made the word his own, adding wings and other features. Hands are not specifically mentioned but they are implied by the Seraph's use of tongs. Whether the feet were feet or genitals is a matter of debate. If the latter are being referred to, then the Seraphim could have been more truly serpentine. These were members of the heavenly host that surrounded Yhwh and worshipped him. In that respect, and in that respect only, the Seraphim in Isaiah's mind may have been connected to the Cherubim which adorned the Temple in various ways.⁷²⁸ Isaiah coined the term שָׂרָפִים מְעוֹפְפִים, and used it a couple of times in short political oracles against Philistia and Egypt.⁷²⁹

However, Isa. 6 does not include any overt references to snakes. As such this interpretation is dependent upon the reader knowing the references elsewhere. The author (or glossator) of Deut. 8: 15 knew it. By the time of the LXX translators this knowledge was gone, as was any memory of the form of the Cherubim. At this point

⁷²⁷ See Chapter 1.

⁷²⁸ Cf. Kingsbury, 1964: 281-282.

⁷²⁹ Budd's contention that for the Yahwist the שָׂרָפִים is "evidently a temple creature (cf. Isa. 6:2; 14:29; 30:6)" is curious (Budd, 1984: 234).

the decision was made to treat Isa. 6: 2, 6 differently and the difference stuck. This opened up the possibility of a tradition which equated the Cherubim and Seraphim. This tradition in turn strengthened the case for there being only two Seraphim, rather than a multitude. The loss of serpentine identification also made it possible for later generations to see the Seraphim and Cherubim as particular types of angels. If there were more than two Seraphim, and they were members of the heavenly court, then, more by luck than judgement, the followers of this tradition were not far wrong. This conclusion is similar to that of John Watts,⁷³⁰ but it has been reached by a rather circuitous route and with a much more interesting and diverse mental picture of the angelic host, one which includes the features of both snakes and sphinxes. It's angelic life, Jim, but not as we know it.

⁷³⁰ Watts, 2005: 106.

Summary and Conclusions

Summary of Specific Arguments

In this thesis I have, for the first time, brought together a study of biblical Cherubim with a study of biblical Seraphim. It will be immediately apparent to the reader that there is considerable justification for scholars treating these two subjects separately. Anybody reading this thesis may be forgiven for wondering, by the beginning of Chapter 4, when we are ever going to get round to the Seraphim. However, I have noted a number of points of connection between them. Cherubim and Seraphim are the only winged heavenly beings in the Bible. (Angels are never specifically winged in the scriptures.) They are both associated with and able to handle fire. While the Cherubim are clearly apotropaic, the Seraphim have the potential to be so. Both have some form of cultic referent in the Temple in Jerusalem: the Cherubim are specifically mentioned, while Nehushtan is the best candidate for the inspiration of Isaiah's vision. The Seraphim are inherently dynamic, flying in close proximity to Yhwh, while the dynamic element is introduced in Ezekiel. Both could be seen as members of the heavenly host more generally. The biblical writers did not themselves make any overt connection between them, but I have argued that the writer of Ezek. 1 LXX does, subtly altering the text in order to facilitate this identification.

Unlike previous studies I have paid particular attention to whether we are talking about a supposed historical reality or whether we are concentrating on the mental picture of a particular writer. This is especially pertinent in Chapter 3. There I have argued that the descriptions of Cherubim in 1 Kings are designed to be faithful to a historical reality that was known to the writer. The person who describes the Mosaic

Tabernacle, on the other hand, had no Mosaic Ark and Kapporeth upon which to base those descriptions. Similarly the Chronicler had no way of knowing what the Temple Cherubim looked like. The reader should keep this in mind when looking for archaeological referents. This has led me to question whether we should look to objects like the Ahiram sarcophagus in this context.

Taking each chapter in more detail, in Chapter 1 I have argued that the prophet is in a state of anxiety. Ezekiel's distress (whether Ezekiel is historical or a literary fiction does not really matter) is caused by the fact that Yhwh is no longer dwelling in Jerusalem. I have argued that the first eleven chapters of Ezekiel contain a consistent presentation of concentric waves of judgement, emanating out from the central point, the sanctuary which has been abandoned by Yhwh. I am not aware that this approach has been taken before. This reading has, in turn, led me to make the radical suggestion that we might be justified in reading מִן־הַצִּפּוֹן in Ezek. 1: 4 as a reference to Jerusalem and possibly even to the sanctuary itself. Furthermore, I interpret the vision complex in Ezek. 8-11 as a series of three visions of the same thing. I note that at no point is the reader taken within the sanctuary and that the Cherubim mark the literary boundaries between each vision. Again, I believe that this is a new approach to the text.

Building on Wilson's work which links Ezek. 28 to the High Priest, I show a connection with the tradition that the stones of the high priest's breastplate were associated with the Cherubim in *The Biblical Antiquities* of Pseudo-Philo, and that this is a tradition which may account for the MT of the chapter. I posit the idea that the poem against the King of Tyre was inspired, not only by an Adamic myth which is widely acknowledged already, but also by the destruction of the Temple Cherubim and the murder of the High Priest. Having said that, I hold the majority view that the

LXX version of Ezek. 28 is more likely to represent an earlier form of the text with the Cherub as the agent of expulsion from Eden rather than the object of it.

In Chapter 2 I argue for a conscious link in the mind of the writer of Gen. 2-3 between the Garden of Eden and the Jerusalem Temple. In itself this is not a new idea. However, I argue that the position of the Cherubim is a reflection of the position of the Cherubim on the doors of the Temple. Using my approach of concentrating on the position of the writer I have argued that the writer of Ps. 18 and the writer of Gen. 2-3 were probably independent of each other, since their use of Cherubim is so different. Nevertheless I argue that the Jerusalem Temple lies behind both texts.

Chapter 3 is the most radical part of this thesis. In it I offer a new reconstruction of the two large Cherubim in the Solomonic Temple based on the description in 1 Kings. Similarly I offer a radical re-imagining of the form of the Kapporeth and its relation to the Ark. I offer some archaeological referents to illustrate my case, but my prime argument is textual, in that both reconstructions are faithful to the details of the texts in each case in a way that recent focus on particular artefacts has not been.

The conclusions of Chapter 3 lead me in Chapter 4 to question whether the ubiquity of the translation “enthroned upon the Cherubim” in modern translations of the Cherubim formula is justified. I offer an alternative translation, “enthroned among”, which is designed to bring the Temple frescos in from the cold in this respect.

Finally, in Chapter 5, I follow Joines and others in arguing for a serpentine form for the Seraphim. However, I also argue for a direct and conscious link in the mind of the writer between the Seraphim of Isa. 6: 2 and the Seraph of Isa. 14: 29.

Summary of Global Points

There are a number of conclusions that we can draw from this study of biblical Cherubim and Seraphim. Firstly, the Jerusalem Temple was central to both sets of texts. Secondly, the texts exhibit a great deal of unclarity about their actual form which is important to consider when interpreting them. Thirdly, the creativity of the writers allowed them to pull the concept of Cherub and Seraph in different and sometimes contradictory directions.

The Centrality of the Jerusalem Temple

The centrality of the Temple in Jerusalem to both Cherubim and Seraphim in the Bible is the defining context that we have discovered in this thesis. Whether living beings or cult artifacts, these creatures are bound up with the belief systems of all the writers who mention them.

In Ezekiel, teasing out from the complex textual problems some sense of order in the first eleven chapters, the centrality of Yhwh's departure from the Temple covers most of the subject matter in those chapters. The concentric waves of judgement which Ezekiel describes have the sanctuary at their centre. Yhwh has left his defiled sanctuary and the Cherubim with him. The four creatures of Ezekiel's visions seem to be inspired by the two large Cherubim of the Solomonic Temple. The Cherubim in the frescos and the doors of the Temple would have been destroyed in the conflagration of 586 BCE. Since they were not mentioned in the list of articles taken to Babylon it is reasonable to assume that the two large Cherubim were also destroyed at this time. The destruction of the physical Temple and the priestly hierarchy possibly leads the writer to retreat from this harsh reality into the heavenly realms where the Temple images are transformed into their heavenly equivalents.

They are dynamic and powerful, serving as the groundwork for Ezekiel's new theology of a mobile Yhwh who dwells with the exiles.

The story of the Garden of Eden, while theologically concentrating on the nature of the human condition as represented by Adam, has behind it the imagery of the Temple. Such imagery is not uncommon in the ancient Near East, with Cherubim and sacred vegetation occurring frequently. The position of the Cherub facing east at the entrance to the garden reflects the position of the Cherubim particularly on the doors to the Jerusalem Temple.

A looser portrayal of this Adamic myth by Ezekiel also brings the Cherub into play, but in a unique way. Ezek. 28 LXX is similar to Gen. 3 in that the Cherub is without fault and has a role similar to that of the Cherub in Gen. 3. Unlike MT Ezek. 28 LXX sees the Cherub as the agent of expulsion from the garden. This probably reflects a more primitive form of the text. Ezek. 28 MT introduces a hitherto unseen aspect of the Cherub's moral culpability which is difficult to account for. It is quite probable that this occurred due to scribal confusion over the meaning of **כַּרְבּוּב**. I have argued here, though, that this also may be a reflection on the destruction of the two large Cherubim (and indeed the other Cherubim in the Temple, since they would have burned with it).

Psalm 18 and its parallel in 2 Sam. 22 contain an overt reference to the Temple. The smoke and the coals of fire also provide a link to the Seraphim of Isa. 6, something which was also present in the description of the Cherubim in Ezek. 9-10. Cherubim and Seraphim, while being guardians of the deity, also signified the divine presence. Their theophanic role in Ezekiel, Isaiah and Psalm 18 is both dramatic and evocative.

The descriptions of the Mosaic Tabernacle are a retrospective based on the Temple or its perceived form at the time of writing. The similarity of the layout and the position of the furnishings and decoration is not coincidental. On several occasions the wording of the descriptions has been taken directly from the descriptions of the Temple in Kings.

The one set of texts which may not be derived from the Temple in their entirety is that in which the Cherubim formula is cited. It is possible that this formula had a history that antedates the Jerusalem Temple and goes back to Shiloh. However, even if that is the case, it is not unreasonable to assume that the form and decoration of that Temple was not dissimilar to the Jerusalem one, if less extravagant. If the Cherubim formula did not go back to Shiloh, the only other serious candidate as a context for this formula is the Temple in Jerusalem. If so, the associations of the formula with Shiloh are a historical retrospective, not dissimilar to that made with regard to the Mosaic Tabernacle. Either way, though, the formula is associated with the physical sanctuaries of Shiloh and Jerusalem.

Isaiah's Seraphim are in the Temple, and most likely relate to Nehushtan which was part of the cult there before Hezekiah. It is difficult for the modern reader to imagine them as snakes, though, because their serpentine connection was discredited and the particular word which Isaiah uses seems to have been misunderstood at an early stage of its transmission. There is evidence that the LXX of Ezekiel 1 has identified them with the Temple Cherubim.

The Unclarity of the Texts

If the centrality of the Jerusalem Temple which lies behind all or nearly all of the texts is the central theme of this thesis, the writers' lack of interest in comprehensive descriptions of them has been the dominant problem to solve. What is

the reader supposed to think while reading a description of a physical object or spiritual being which only gives tantalising pieces of the image? Certainly we have to entertain the idea that this was unimportant to the biblical writers, as well as the possibility that the form was forgotten at the time of writing.

The unclarity of Ezekiel's visions is part of the tension between a detailed description of theophany and the author's devotional reticence at describing the divine form. The Cherubim provide a useful buffer between the human and divine worlds which enable the writer to give a sense of the majesty and power of God, while at the same time acknowledging human inability to do it justice in any creative form. This tension is represented by the fascination which these texts have elicited in Jewish mysticism and the unease with which it has been treated by others. The tension of the confusing description in Ezek. 1, which may represent the psychological disturbance of the central character, is reduced in Ezek. 8-11. This may be due to the writer having time to reflect on it (if we follow the book's dating literally), but also due to the resolution of the theological problem of Yhwh's departure from Jerusalem. The writer is presenting a theological way forward, but against a background of national disaster. The tension is not completely removed, and it would be unreasonable to suppose that it should. It is merely lessened.

The unclarity of the Cherubim in Gen. 3 is less significant than in Ezekiel. While the figure is central to the plot of the story, its form is not. Very little can be read into the text on this point, and it merely remains to be said that it is unwise to try. The variety of forms in other texts makes it impossible to know what form was in the mind of the writer or the readers. This, of course, does not preclude the reader, ancient or modern, from indulging their fancy while reading. Indeed, it would be impossible

not to do so. But conclusions drawn from such speculation could not be considered secure.

Similar issues surround the description in Psalm 18. However, the parallelism of the Cherub with the clouds (Ps. 18: 11, ET 10) gives us some justification for seeing Cherubim as an embodiment of them. There would be no justification for extending this description to the other texts, albeit unless we were to associate the Cherubim with the theophanic cloud of the Mosaic Tabernacle and the Solomonic Temple.

Given the centrality of the Temple in the interpretation of both Cherubim and Seraphim, the unclarity of the descriptions of the Temple Cherubim is frustrating. Of all the texts this is the point where the reader is particularly invited to imagine what the Cherubim looked like. Unlike Ezekiel, we are talking about cult images rather than heavenly beings, so it is acceptable to look at the details. Indeed, that is what the writers imply that we should do. They give us dimensions, engineering solutions and decorative details, all of which are designed to engage the imagination of the reader, but they stop short of actual diagrams. The temptation to fill in the details is frequently too great to resist, and I have at this point made the attempt to do this. I have suggested a radical re-imagining of the nature of the two large Cherubim in the Solomonic Temple, and, following on from this, of the Mercy Seat on the Ark of the Covenant. I do not believe this has been suggested before in the form I have imagined it, but I believe it makes most sense of the descriptions of the Temple in Kings and the Tabernacle in P. That the Cherubim over the Ark formed some sort of box in both situations seems the best solution to the problems that the texts present. This challenges the *status quo* that a model throne was envisioned. Even if the historical

reality was a throne, there is no evidence that this was what was in the minds of the biblical writers in either case.

The unclarity of the Temple descriptions in Chronicles is for a different reason. The writer is so far removed from the historical reality that he has tried to gloss over the problems of previous texts. The attempt of the Chronicler to give some coherent description highlights how fortunate the modern interpreter is in having archaeological material to turn to. I have turned to physical artifacts to illustrate my suggestion about the Mercy Seat and the Holy of Holies, but I have not made them the controlling piece of evidence. The text is both the starting point and the end point. Nevertheless, physical models from the ancient world are invaluable in helping the reader to imagine what was being described or hinted at.

The Creativity of the Texts

The fluidity of the concept of the Cherubim begs the question of how this is so. Summary descriptions of Cherubim which assume some sort of harmonisation between texts do not satisfy. We need to account for the differences, not merely in terms of what they are, but also why they are.

I have already offered a suggestion as to why Ezekiel has changed the cult objects of the Temple into living beings, but it is not clear why they have taken the form they have, with four faces and composite features. The answer “that’s what he saw” does not really satisfy. Some sort of reference to the cult objects of the day seems most reasonable. Given the prophecy is set in Mesopotamia, it makes sense to look to the artefacts of that area to explain the differences between the Temple objects and the descriptions in Ezekiel. No exact matches have been found, even if an exact description were being offered, which it is not. Nevertheless, the statuary of Mesopotamia is a good candidate for an inspiration of the writer’s prophetic

imagination along with the cult images from Jerusalem, but the creativity of the writer should not be discounted either. The writer has brought together cult images from Jerusalem, cult objects from Mesopotamia and hammered out a unique image in the cauldron of the theological crisis of the day.

The treatment of the Cherub in the poem about the King of Tyre (Ezek. 28: 11-18) is the most imaginative in the Bible, especially if we are talking about the MT version. The very idea that a Cherub could be morally depraved is difficult to accept (although the story of the fallen angels in Gen. 6: 1-4 is not dissimilar), and yet the audacity of the idea of a sinful Cherub makes me unwilling to treat it as unimportant in its own right.

The Cherub of Eden is merely one part of the creative genius of the writer of Gen. 2-3. I believe that the writer is reworking an earlier form of the myth that is used in Ezek. 28, but that one of the figures from the Temple frescos or from the doors has been animated as part of the story. This shows that considerable literary freedom was being exercised here. Similarly in Psalm 18, the poet's description is evocative, powerful and unique. The Cherub is a divine steed who flies like the storm clouds that herald Yhwh's presence.

In all of these texts, Ezek. 1, 8-11; 28; Gen. 3; Ps. 18, the writers show a huge amount of freedom with objects that are central to the Jerusalem cult. The living creatures that were believed to lie behind the objects are described creatively. They are mysterious beings and it is inevitable that people should speculate about them in creative ways, beginning with the biblical writers themselves.

Something similar seems to have happened in Isa. 6. The prophet has created a description based on a model bronze snake on a pole which has captivated the imagination of generations. Six-winged, dangerous fire-carrying beings who circle the

deity and terrify the prophet are a far cry from a static object, however much it may have been associated with the very early history of the nation.

When we turn to the other writings there is less creativity. The descriptions in Kings and P of the frescos, embroidery and images of the Tabernacle and Temple are functional. The reader passes over them quickly and with little thought as to their form and function. Compared to the creative and colourful descriptions of writers of Genesis, Ezekiel, Psalm 18 and Isaiah of Jerusalem, these texts are emotionally dead. There is more concern with the simple facts of the description of the cult than with literary speculation about the heavenly realities that lie behind them. This reverence for the objects themselves is taken a stage further by the Chronicler who not only is trying to describe long forgotten cult forms, but is trying also to be faithful to difficult texts that have come down in the tradition. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that these texts have become the preserve of specialist scholars rather than popular Bible interpretation.

The Possible Identity of Seraphim

In the last Chapter, on Seraphim, their identity was investigated. While my conclusion concerning the writer's intention is that he was describing winged snakes, based on Nehushtan, the early stage at which this connection was forgotten makes alternative candidates possible to the interpreter. It is quite possible that winged snakes were seen as part of Yhwh's heavenly entourage, since so many of them are sent out to bite the people in Num. 21. However, their form is less important than their obedience to Yhwh and the effect of their bite on the people. If Isaiah is describing snakes, it does not matter that this is quickly forgotten, since the thrust of Isa. 6 and the message to the people whose ears will not hear and whose eyes will not see has been quoted so frequently, especially in Christian circles, that its greater influence

must be acknowledged. Jewish and Christian communities have existed for so many centuries in ignorance of the serpentine connection that we would do them a great injustice by insisting on the necessity of its inclusion now.

The Role of the Cherubim and the Seraphim

So far I have not commented in this conclusion about the role of the Cherubim and Seraphim. It is clear that the role of both beings is very similar, being primarily apotropaic. The Cherubim of Ezekiel are a frightening reminder of how powerful Yhwh is, as are those of Gen. 3 and Ps. 18. Similarly the Seraphim mark the boundary between Isaiah and the deity. In Ezek. 1, 8-11; 28 (LXX); Gen. 3; Isa. 6 both Cherubim and Seraphim, at Yhwh's command, initiate a process of judgement. In Ezek. 9-10 and Isa. 6 this involves the handling of live coals. It is possible that the nature of Isaiah's encounter with the Seraph's coal is similar to that of the judgement of Jerusalem in Ezekiel. Yhwh is cleansing the sanctuary, the Temple, the city and the land. The final vision of Ezek. 48 envisions a pure land in which priestly cult cleanliness is restored. Similarly, Isaiah is being purged of his uncleanness so that he can be Yhwh's messenger.

The oracular nature of the Cherubim and Seraphim is inherent in the prophetic texts. The prophets stand in the presence of Yhwh and see him. It is also present in Num 7: 89. There it is Moses who encounters God in between the Cherubim.

It is tempting to add another thread to the role of the Cherubim and Seraphim, namely one of devotees. Certainly the Seraphim perform a devotional role, proclaiming the holiness of Yhwh. The Cherubim do not overtly do this in the biblical texts but perhaps there is an inherent devotion in their proximity and obedience to the deity.

Areas for Further Research

During my research for this thesis, I spent considerable time looking at the early history of the interpretation of Cherubim and Seraphim. It was my original intention to include this in the thesis to illustrate how some of the themes I have described here were handled in later centuries. However, there was not space in this thesis to do them justice. A further part of my studies led me to look at the renaissance and early modern history of the interpretation of Cherubim and Seraphim since the end of the fifteenth century. Again there was not space to include the results of this here. My studies in these two areas have produced work amounting to 80,000 words. It is frustrating that I could not include these, but I have enough material to produce a second thesis on how Cherubim and Seraphim have been treated in nearly two millennia of interpretation.

The history of the interpretation of the Cherubim and Seraphim would be a helpful supplement to this thesis. I have raised questions about what constitutes a valid interpretation, given the differences between MT and LXX recensions in particular. If it is acceptable for the biblical writers to speculate in sometimes contradictory ways about the form of the Cherubim and Seraphim to the extent that at times they are irreconcilable and at others they become equated in the minds of many, why should not the modern reader do the same? I have not mentioned the *putti*, the little winged babies which are equated with Cherubs in art and popular imagination, since they have nothing to do with the concepts that were in the minds of the biblical writers. However, if it is uncontroversial to forget that Seraphim were snakes, and equally unproblematic that the bestial forms of the Cherubim should pass out of mind, who decides that the interpretative imagination has gone too far?

However, at this point I am fast moving into the realms of the philosophy of biblical reading and reception theory. Perhaps, before I burn my fingers on the coals of fire that lie in that sanctuary, I need to invoke some new Cherubim and Seraphim to guard the boundaries of my studies. Others may feel more able to tread those hallowed courts, but for me, I will be happy to stay outside them and merely speculate as to the form and function of the mystical objects that lie within.

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