

ABSTRACT

An Interpretation of Isaiah 6:1-5 in Response to the Art and Ideology of the Achaemenid Empire

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This dissertation is an interpretation of Isa 6:1-5. Imperial art, policies, and ideology are a significant part of the context according to which this interpretation is done. The thesis of this dissertation is that in response to the ideology expressed by the imperial art of the empires of the ancient Near East, specifically that of the Achaemenids, the details of the scene in Isa 6:1-5 advance an alternative ideology in which Yahweh alone is sovereign over all the earth.

Visual depictions from the ancient Near East of royal figures contribute to a context for interpreting the book of Isaiah. Scenes that include the king enthroned, mythic creatures in the presence of the king, and representatives of the nations bringing tribute to the king are especially relevant to the scene described in Isa 6:1-5. With these symbols as a significant element of an ancient Near Eastern Context it is plausible to interpret Isa 6:1-5 as a counter to the claims of sovereignty made by human kings. When reading the book of Isaiah wholistically, the images of chapter 6 contribute to a theme throughout the rest of the book that is critical of empires.

An Interpretation of Isaiah 6:1-5 in Response to the Art and Ideology
of the Achaemenid Empire

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To Kimberly

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The superscription of the book of Isaiah, “the vision of Isaiah ben Amoz,” suggests that the document is either the vision of Isaiah, or concerns itself with that vision. The word *חזון* allows for the possibility that the book of Isaiah is not merely a document to be read and understood, it is also an experience to be seen and imagined. In Isaiah 6 the prophet describes the throne room of Yahweh. The prophet not only witnesses a scene in the throne room, he also becomes a participant. This dissertation focuses on the details of the prophet’s description of Yahweh enthroned, the seraphim, and the chant of the seraphim (6:1-5). Because Isaiah 6:1-5 is a description of what Isaiah saw, the approach of this dissertation will be to read and imagine the scene as described by the prophet. The context within which Isaiah’s description of Yahweh’s throne room will be read and visualized is that of ancient Near Eastern imperial art, specifically that of the Achaemenid Empire. The purpose of this dissertation is to interpret Isa 6:1-5 as a response to the ideological implications of the imperial art of the Achaemenid Empire. The thesis is that in response to the ideology expressed by the imperial art of the Achaemenid Empire, the details of the scene in Isaiah 6:1-5 advance an alternative ideology, according to which Yahweh alone is sovereign over all the earth. The description and interpretation of Achaemenid imperial art occurs within the larger context of the empires in the ancient Near East. The prophet’s response to the

Achaemenid Empire is also considered in light of material throughout the book of Isaiah that is critical of empires and their policies.

Approaches to the Book of Isaiah

Until late in the eighteenth century, the dominant approach to reading and interpreting the book of Isaiah was from the perspective that a lone eighth-century figure, Isaiah ben Amoz, authored the book. Since the contributions of early modern scholars such as J. G. Eichhorn,¹ a proponent of the argument that the book of Isaiah contains two distinct works, and Bernard Duhm,² who argued for three, most scholarly treatment of the book of Isaiah has been from the perspective that the book includes the contributions of multiple authors who wrote in the eighth, seventh, and sixth centuries BCE during the eras of the Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian Empires.³ In addition to scholarship reflecting the perspectives of Eichhorn and Duhm, the twentieth century witnessed the rise of redaction-critical approaches to the book of Isaiah that treat the historical development of the text not in terms of distinctive blocks of formerly independent works, but as a core of text or tradition around which material was added over the course of many years. Redactional analysis searches for layers of redaction within the whole work by isolating

¹J. G. Eichhorn, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* 3 vols. (Leipzig: Weidmannischen Buchhandlung, 1780-1783).

²Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaja* (Handkommentar zum Alten Testament 3.1; 5th ed. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968).

³Two surveys of scholarship on the book of Isaiah are Marvin Sweeney, "The Book of Isaiah in Recent Research," *CR* 1 (1993), 141-62 and Marvin Tate, "The Book of Isaiah in Recent Research," in *Forming Prophetic Literature* J. W. Watts and Paul House, eds., JSOTSup 235 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 22-56; Edgar W. Conrad includes an insightful study of scholarship on Isaiah in his book, *Reading Isaiah* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 3-33.

sections and subsections of the book with the goal of returning to an interpretation of the whole. What these critical approaches to the book of Isaiah have in common is a diachronic approach. Whether they interpret separate books in their historical settings or attempt to interpret the entire book in its stages of redactional development these approaches do not interpret the book holistically.

The Approach of the Present Work

This dissertation assumes the literary and theological unity of the book of Isaiah.⁴ I interpret the book of Isaiah as the product of a single author living in the province of Yehud in the fifth century BCE.⁵ This author/prophet used existing material and supplied original material to compose the book. Redactional analysis is not a part of my work, but one way in which my work is similar to redaction-critical approaches is the understanding that texts undergo changes in meaning as they appear in different historical and literary contexts.⁶ While I concede that the text of Isaiah 6 probably dates to the

⁴Some recent examples of scholars who approach the book of Isaiah as a unified whole are Edgar W. Conrad, *Reading Isaiah* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991); Peter D. Quinn-Miscall, *Isaiah* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993) and *Reading Isaiah: Poetry and Vision* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001); Robert H. O'Connell, *Concentricity and Continuity: The Literary Structure of Isaiah* (JSOTSup 188; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994); and John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33* Revised WBC 24 (Nelson Reference and Electronic, 2005); *Isaiah 34-66* Revised WBC 25 (Nelson Reference and Electronic, 2005).

⁵ Approaching the book as a unified work, requires dating the entire book to the latest material in the book. Texts such as Isa 66:1-2 indicate a completed Jerusalem temple, so I begin with a date that is later than 515 BCE. The apocalyptic material in chapters 24-27 is thought to originate in the fifth century.

⁶Acknowledging that the fifth-century author/compiler used existing materials does not require that these materials circulated as "books" prior to their incorporation into the book of Isaiah; Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 329; Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, xlv; Marvin Sweeney offers a

eighth century BCE, I do not attempt to reconstruct this text's original setting, literary or historical. Nor do I attempt to interpret Isaiah 6 in any literary contexts apart from its place in the entire book as it has been received through the Masoretic tradition.

According to my assumptions about the literary and theological unity of the book of Isaiah, I interpret the details of the description of Yahweh's throne room as they relate to themes that permeate the entire book.

John D. W. Watts

John D. W. Watts shares an approach that is similar to this study in at least four aspects: reading the book of Isaiah as a unity, a poem, a vision, and a Persian-Era document. His work is innovative and creative and he is among the first interpreters in recent critical scholarship to treat the book as a unified whole.⁷

Watts approaches the book of Isaiah as a collection of dramatic speeches that together form a literary whole.⁸ This literary whole is a single composition with a single purpose. That purpose is a depiction of Yahweh's relationship to Israel beginning at the time of Uzziah and spanning to the time of Darius.⁹ Though the book of Isaiah describes Yahweh's relationship to Israel over the course of three centuries, the message is unified

thorough discussion of interpretations of Isaiah 6 in its various historical and textual contexts; *Isaiah 1-39 with an Introduction to Prophetic Literature* FOTL 16 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 43, 51.

⁷The first edition of Watts's two-volume commentary was released in 1985 and 1987; for one precursor see Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 311-38.

⁸Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, lxxiv, lxxvii.

⁹ Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, lxxvii.

and aimed at the author's contemporaries living in the Persian Era. With this single composition and purpose in mind, Watts divides the book according to literary structures. Watts reads the book as being comprised of six dramatic acts, a prologue and an epilogue:

Prologue	1:1-4:6
Act 1	5:1-12:6
Act 2	23:1-27:13
Act 3	28:1-33:24
Act 4	34:1-49:1
Act 5	49:5-54:17b
Act 6	54:17c-61:11
Epilogue	62:1-66:24 ¹⁰

Watts approaches each act as contributing to the overall theme of the book through its own plot.¹¹ By paying attention to literary clues that indicate changes in scenes, speakers, and addressees, Watts identifies acts and speeches within each of the scenes. This approach to organizing the book is significant as a synchronic literary approach in that the structural organization is not based on proposed differences in authorship and date for the units that make up the whole.

Watts also searches for themes that appear throughout the book. These themes correspond to the overall structure that Watts suggests for the book and they contribute to what he views as the main purpose of the book. Watts views the first three acts as being centered on the theme of curse and the final three acts as centered on the theme of Yahweh's promises of comfort and blessing.¹² He also reads the prologue and epilogue

¹⁰Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, lxxviii.

¹¹Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, 77.

¹²Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, lxxvii.

as tying together the entire book in that the epilogue echoes the Zion theme found in the prologue.¹³

Watts treats the book of Isaiah as the production of a contemporary of Haggai and Zechariah who incorporated into his own work written and oral prophetic traditions including those of the eighth-century figure Isaiah ben Amoz.¹⁴ Watts argues for even further specificity when he identifies the author as Meshullam, the eldest son of Zerubbabel.¹⁵ While Watts's argument for Meshullam as the author is interesting and plausible, his identification of the author is not as relevant to this dissertation as is his position on the date and manner of the author's compilation of existing and original materials to create the book of Isaiah.

While agreeing with Watts that the book should be interpreted as a document from the historical context of the rule of the Achaemenids, this work differs from Watts in its understanding of its response to the Achaemenid Empire. Watts argues that Isaiah has the view that Yahweh has consistently worked through empires in the past (Assyria and Babylonia) and continues to do so in the present (Persia) so that the people are called to passively accept imperial rule.¹⁶ I am in agreement with Watts that Isaiah does not desire the citizens of Yehud to attempt a return to a Davidic suzerainty. I interpret the

¹³Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, lxxvii.

¹⁴Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, lxxiv, lxxvii.

¹⁵Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, xlv; *ibid*, "Two Studies in Isaiah," in *God's Word for Our World: Biblical Studies in Honor of Simon John De Vries* (vol.1; J Harold Ellens, et al, eds. (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 135-46; and "Excursus: Meshullam, Son of Zerubbabel," *Isaiah 34-66 Revised WBC 25* (Nelson Reference and Electronic, 2005), 759-761.

¹⁶Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, xxxvii-xxxviii.

message of Isaiah not as one of acceptance of imperial claims to sovereignty but one that is against participation in imperial policies that are idolatrous and oppressive.

Another key to Watts's approach to the book of Isaiah is his understanding of the book as a vision. Watts considers vision as a genre of literature that is acted out as a drama.¹⁷ In this form of literature, the vision is comprised of a series of speeches by Yahweh, members of the heavenly court, the prophets and others. Part of the creativity of Watts is apparent in his description of a cast of speakers performing the vision by presenting its speeches in dramatic fashion.¹⁸ The interpretation of the vision as a drama actually presented on a stage is not as important to this work as is the emphasis on the visual nature of the book of Isaiah; it is to be seen and not just read.

Peter D. Quinn-Miscall

Peter Quinn-Miscall reads the book of Isaiah as a unified work composed in the fifth century by an author or authors who used existing material, both written and oral.¹⁹ Miscall does not attempt in his work to identify or isolate any of the previous material, nor does he attempt to use the text to reconstruct the historical periods out of which the

¹⁷Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, lxxxii.

¹⁸See the excurses in Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, "Drama in Israel and Early Judaism?" and "Literary Drama in the Old Testament?" lxxxiii-lxxxvi.

¹⁹Peter Miscall, *Isaiah* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 11; *Reading Isaiah: Poetry and Vision* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 3.

text grew.²⁰ He interprets the book of Isaiah as a vision that has been written in poetic form.²¹ These two emphases, the visual and the poetic, are important to the present work.

As part of his approach of reading the book of Isaiah as poetry, Miscall looks for literary and poetic features “such as parallelism, figurative language, imagery, and characterization.”²² He reads the book as a whole and his writings often focus on the act and methods of reading the book more than on the resultant interpretations. He does not follow a strictly sequential order when he reads the text, instead following themes and images as he encounters them.²³ My approach involves pursuing images that appear in Isaiah 6:1-5 as they appear elsewhere in the book and considering how these images contribute to interpreting the book as a whole.

When Miscall uses the term vision, he emphasizes that the text provides something to be seen and imagined.²⁴ Instead of thinking of a dramatic presentation, as Watts does, Miscall pursues images as they come to mind for the reader. Miscall contrasts images from concepts, noting that images are concrete and perceptible with the senses, while concepts are abstract.²⁵ Miscall explores how Isaiah develops images by

²⁰Miscall, *Isaiah*, 11-12; *Reading Isaiah*, 3-4.

²¹Miscall, *Reading Isaiah*, 4.

²²Miscall, *Reading Isaiah*, 3.

²³Miscall exemplifies this approach in “Isaiah: The Labyrinth of Images,” *Semeia* 54 (1991): 103-21; Miscall does take a sequential approach in his commentary, though this approach seems to be due more to the nature of a commentary than Miscall’s preferred approach for reading.

²⁴Miscall, *Isaiah*, 12.

²⁵Miscall, *Reading Isaiah*, 20.

providing different aspects of them, for example the image of a plant as it is developed as Isaiah uses terms for a variety of plants and parts of a plant.²⁶ He views Isaiah's repetition and variation of images as holding the different parts and themes of the book together.²⁷ When Miscall encounters the literary text of Isaiah he wants to see as well as read the vision of Isaiah. I also emphasize the visual and imaginative nature of the book of Isaiah, but seek to inform that nature through consideration of some specific images from the book's ancient Near Eastern imperial context. The specific images that I wish to pursue from Isaiah 6 and throughout the rest of the book are images found in Achaemenid imperial art.

An Iconographic Approach

Erwin Panofsky defines iconography as "that branch of the history of art which concerns itself with the subject matter or meaning of works of art, as opposed to their form."²⁸ When Panofsky speaks of form, he is referring to configurations or shapes that represent natural objects accessible and their primary or factual meanings, which are accessible through practical experience.²⁹ When he speaks of subject matter, Panofsky is referring to secondary meanings, associated with the objects through knowledge of

²⁶Miscall, *Reading Isaiah*, 69.

²⁷Miscall, *Reading Isaiah*, 69.

²⁸Erwin Panofsky, "Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art," pages 26-54 in *Meaning in and on the Visual Arts: Papers on Art History* (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1955), 26.

²⁹Panofsky, "Iconography," 28.

themes and concepts, attainable through knowledge of literary sources.³⁰ Objects with secondary meanings are called images. Practicing iconography is describing and classifying images.³¹ The use of iconography as part an approach to interpreting the Bible requires an understanding of images and their meanings before using those images as a context for interpreting the biblical text. Once studied according to their historical and cultural setting, images are primary sources for interpretation just as written texts are.

Othmar Keel

Othmar Keel has led the way in the development and application of an iconographic approach to interpreting the Scriptures.³² Keel defines and describes the aim of iconography as such: “The study of artistic subject matter or content (as opposed to artistic techniques and styles). Iconography therefore strives to describe the appearance, development, and disappearance of certain motifs and compositions, or the substitution of one artistic form by another.”³³ This definition is similar to that of Panofsky’s.

³⁰Panofsky, “Iconography,” 28-29.

³¹Panofsky, “Iconography,” 31.

³²Keel has made numerous contributions to the study of iconography and the Bible including numerous articles and essays as well as the following books: *Jahwe-Visionen und Siegelkunst: Eine neue Deutung der Majestätsschilderungen in Jes 6, Ez 1 und 10 und Sach 4* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1977); *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms* (trans. Timothy J. Hallett; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1997); *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel* (authored with Christoph Uehlinger; trans. Thomas H. Trapp, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998) and *Goddesses and Trees, New Moon and Yahweh: Ancient Near Eastern Art and the Hebrew Bible JSOTSup 261* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).

³³Keel, “Iconography and the Bible,” ABD 3:358.

Keel groups the relationship between ancient texts and images in three categories: first, a biblical text explicitly describes a work of art; second, the implicit description of a work of art when the author appears to be influenced by pictorial representations; third, a text and a picture deal independently of each other with the same subject matter.³⁴ The exploration of how text and image are related is part of what sets apart an iconographical method of interpretation from merely collecting images from the ancient Near East and noting their common features with biblical references.

Keel observes that images and words each have their advantages. Images, for example, are more effective at depicting complicated relationships, while words are better for description of a series of actions.³⁵ Images are advantageous over words when the goal is to ascertain meaning in a context different from our own. This advantage is because words and ideas are more often understood by a hearer according to the cultural heritage of the hearer.³⁶ The image though has a more readily discerned relationship to what it represents and so is more able to transcend an individual's cultural heritage.³⁷ Iconography is therefore an important tool in biblical studies because it aids the interpreter in developing an understanding of the biblical text's historical and cultural context.

Keel's understanding of the function of images in the ancient Near East is also important. He compares the function of pictures to that of Egyptian hieroglyphic

³⁴Keel, "Iconography and the Bible," 358.

³⁵Keel, "Iconography and the Bible," 358.

³⁶Keel, "Iconography and the Bible," 359.

³⁷Keel, "Iconography and the Bible," 359; *Symbolism*, 8.

determinatives in that they represent classes of objects instead of specific individual phenomena.³⁸ Thus a particular event or individual as part of a composition is secondary to a particular understanding of history or the role represented by the individual.³⁹ Additionally, Egyptian paintings are not to be viewed, but read.⁴⁰

Keel does not attempt to argue for dependence by the biblical authors on ancient Near Eastern art, but rather to compare or contrast the view of the biblical authors to the same phenomenon.⁴¹ Dependence would be impossible to prove, but a comparison of visual images and their meanings with the literary texts of the Bible potentially provides insight into both ancient Near Eastern art and the Bible.

Eleanor Ferris Beach

Eleanor Ferris Beach examines a selection of the Samaria ivories and establishes a symbolic set to be used in the interpretation of relevant texts in the Hebrew Bible.⁴² The representations that make up her symbol set are cow and calf, infant on a lotus and winged guardians, and the woman at the window. She applies her methodology to texts from 2 Kings, Amos, and Jeremiah. Beach proposes what she calls an “integral visual exegesis,” in which “visual allusion may carry significance that interacts with and

³⁸Keel, “Iconography and the Bible,” 360.

³⁹Keel, “Iconography and the Bible,” 360.

⁴⁰Keel, *Symbolism*, 7, 10.

⁴¹Keel, *Symbolism*, 10-11.

⁴²Eleanor Ferris Beach, “Image and Word: Iconology in the Interpretation of Hebrew Scriptures” (Ph.D. diss., The Claremont Graduate School, 1991), 16.

augments that of the verbal.”⁴³ Beach brings to her methodology philosophy, literary theory, psychology, cultural anthropology, feminist studies, art history, and semiotics, with the result of an interpretive network made up of representation, denotation, connotation, and abstract form, through which she determines a symbolic set.⁴⁴

Beach’s iconographic approach examines the motif of the woman at the window as an example of a specific visual element that is potentially an intentional part of a literary composition.⁴⁵ As Beach attempts to define a method in which iconographic material might be used in the interpretation of biblical texts, she uses the terminology of correspondence, allusion, connection, and association. Her project is one in which she studies biblical texts as they may be literary adaptations of existing visual depictions, specifically, considering how the authors of Amos, 2 Kings 9, and Jeremiah have interacted with some particular motifs of the Samaria ivories.⁴⁶ Her work relies on the existence and identification of intentionality on the part of the authors of the biblical text and the role of what she calls a “dynamic symbiosis” between text and image so that it is possible in an iconographic approach to move beyond mere textual illustration and to “integral visual exegesis.”⁴⁷

⁴³Beach, “Image and Word,” 16.

⁴⁴Beach, “Image and Word,” i.

⁴⁵Beach, “Image and Word,” 12.

⁴⁶Beach, “Image and Word,” 15.

⁴⁷Beach, “Image and Word,” 16.

Bruce A. Power applies an iconographic approach to interpreting the book of Ezekiel.⁴⁸ Power has gathered ancient Near Eastern art from the first half of the first millennium BCE that he identifies as expressing an ideology of empire.⁴⁹ His argument regarding the book of Ezekiel is that the author interacted with recognizable images and patterns as a method of communicating with the reader.⁵⁰ Power points out that Ezekiel's imagery, rather than being strange and confusing as they have been to generations of interpreters, would have been familiar to his exilic audience and that Ezekiel himself was using and transforming recognizable images.⁵¹ His thesis regarding the central message of Ezekiel is that "Under the rule of YHWH, human history is directional and is moving toward a recreation of human life."⁵²

In his application of an iconographic method to interpreting biblical texts, Power follows a methodology akin to that of Keel.⁵³ Power also attempts to improve on Keel's approach by identifying its underlying suppositions and by articulating a series of

⁴⁸Bruce A. Power, "Iconographic Windows to Ezekiel's World" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1999).

⁴⁹Power, "Iconographic Windows," ii, 3.

⁵⁰Power, "Iconographic Windows," ii.

⁵¹Power, "Iconographic Windows," 5.

⁵²Power, "Iconographic Windows," 27.

⁵³Power points out that his initial plan was to produce a work on Ezekiel similar to Keel's work on the book of Psalms (3) and devotes the bulk of his discussion of iconographic methods to a description of Keel's methodology (28-59).

postulates and goals for his own method.⁵⁴ Power identifies three presuppositions of Keel's work: first, iconographic metaphors were understood by ancient people; second, there were canonical understandings of certain ideas and concepts which could be understood throughout the ancient Near East; and third, iconography is essentially static in nature.⁵⁵ Power also identifies five of his own postulates: first, art was intended to communicate in understandable means; second, artistic traditions of the ANE were more than merely decorative; third, official artistic representations were based on theoretical ideas, even when not clearly understood by artist or audience; fourth, at times the conventions were distorted by unskilled artisans yet still maintained the basic protocol of the artistic language; fifth, skilled artists were not straight-jacketed by the canons of convention.⁵⁶ Power attempts to prove a basic relationship between artistic representations of the ancient Near East and the text of Ezekiel.⁵⁷

Power identifies two important tasks to an iconographic method. One task is to demonstrate the existence of a canonical approach to art in the ancient Near East.⁵⁸ The existence of a canon means that there are accepted and unaccepted manners of depiction according to the perception of the people producing the art.⁵⁹ Whitney Davis defines canon as "a methodical, deliberated effort to map certain properties of the world, which is

⁵⁴Power, "Iconographic Windows," 52-59.

⁵⁵Power, "Iconographic Windows," 52-53.

⁵⁶Power, "Iconographic Windows," 55-56.

⁵⁷Power, "Iconographic Windows," 56.

⁵⁸Power, "Iconographic Windows," 69.

⁵⁹Power, "Iconographic Windows," 71.

fully regularized, consistent, intelligible, and unambiguous given the requirements of all and only its several interpenetrating conventional rules.”⁶⁰ There is no existing ancient work that defines canons in ancient Near Eastern art, so the existence of a canonical approach to art must be derived from examination of the collected works from a society.

The second task is an attempt to identify continuity in the ideals communicated by the iconography of the empires of the ancient Near East.⁶¹ Only the existence of a shared iconography of empire will allow the use of works from different nations from different times and places to shed light on each other and then the biblical text.

Once he has identified the existence of a canon, first in ancient Egyptian art then extending to ancient Mesopotamian art as well as an iconography of empire in ancient Near Eastern art, Power compares iconographic depictions to Ezekiel’s literary descriptions. Power identifies the intent of his work as demonstrating “how iconographic traditions connected with the ideology of empire offer us fresh opportunities to read the book of Ezekiel, and to understand his message as an integrated whole.”⁶² Working with iconography that communicates the ideology of empire, Power identifies a metaphor existing throughout the book of Ezekiel, “YHWH, emperor of the world, takes up arms against rebel vassals, vanquishes all who oppose his reign, establishes his new

⁶⁰Whitney Davis, *The Canonical Tradition in Ancient Egyptian Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1989), 57.

⁶¹Power, “Iconographic Windows,” 69.

⁶²Power, “Iconographic Windows,” 59.

palace/temple, and is finally enthroned as emperor once again – this time ushering in a new age.”⁶³

The careful explanation and description by Power of his iconographical approach and his interaction with Keel have been influential on this dissertation. Also, Power’s identification of an ideology of empire and interpretation of Ezekiel as a response to that ideology coincides with this interpretation of Isaiah 6:1-5 as a response to the ideology expressed in the art of the Achaemenids. I differ with Power and Beach, however, in that I do not attempt to establish a direct relationship between the author of the biblical text and the art that provides a context for interpretation.

Achaemenid Imperial Art

When interpreting the book of Isaiah as a fifth century work, the historical context of the Achaemenid Empire is the point of entry for discussing the royal art that provides the interpretive context for Isaiah 6:1-5. Extant Achaemenid art is available in a wide variety of media and at several locations. This dissertation will deal primarily with Achaemenid monumental art and its portrayals of kings and kingship. Achaemenid art did not appear in a vacuum, however, so the art of other ancient Near Eastern empires provides a larger geographical and chronological context for the interpretation of the art of the Achaemenids.

Margaret Cool Root

Margaret Cool Root has written the definitive study and interpretation of the art produced by the Achaemenid Dynasty, which was the imperial power in the ancient Near

⁶³Power, “Iconographic Windows,” 58.

East from 550 BCE until 331 BCE.⁶⁴ Her study focuses on art that depicts the king or something about the Achaemenid vision of kingship and she organizes her discussion of Achaemenid art around six visions of the king. In the chapter, “Hierarchical Order: The King on High,” Root discusses depictions of the king seated or standing above people who represent the lands of the empire as a means of communicating the Achaemenid vision of the relationship between the king and the people of the empire as one of voluntary support by the people.⁶⁵ The chapter, “The King before Ahuramazda and the Fire Altar,” addresses the special relationship between king and deity.⁶⁶ The chapter, “Behistun: The King Victorious,” portrays the king as the victor over his enemies, including those who would attempt to usurp his reign.⁶⁷ In the chapter, “The King Appearing in State,” Root discusses the emphasis on the splendor of the king.⁶⁸ The chapter, “Mythical Visions of Kingship and Power,” discusses images of the king in combat with cosmic creatures representing any forces that represent a threat to the stability of the empire and its population.⁶⁹ Root’s thesis is that together, these visions of

⁶⁴Margaret Cool Root, *The King and Kingship in Achaemenid Art: Essays on the Creation of an Iconography of Empire* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979).

⁶⁵Root, *King and Kingship*, 131-61.

⁶⁶Root, *King and Kingship*, 162-81.

⁶⁷Root, *King and Kingship*, 227-84.

⁶⁸Root, *King and Kingship*, 285-99.

⁶⁹Root, *King and Kingship*, 300-08.

Achaemenid kingship contribute to a vision of a harmonious, ordered, and peaceful imperial cosmos.⁷⁰

One important characteristic of the art of the Achaemenids is the influence of the artistic traditions of other ancient Near Eastern empires.⁷¹ In each of her chapters, Root examines Achaemenid art with special emphasis on how the Achaemenids adopted and adapted motifs of Egyptian and Mesopotamian empires. This method in which she compares and contrasts the Achaemenid use of particular motifs influenced the approach of my own study. One important reality that this process emphasizes is the continuity that exists in the art of the empires of the ancient Near East. This continuity is both geographical and chronological. Not only did each empire spread the vision of its message to the extent of its borders, the monuments and structures of earlier empires were often preserved, sometimes intentionally and other times not, so that these works were available to later peoples.⁷² Such continuity increases the likelihood that an ancient reader of the book of Isaiah would be familiar with the messages communicated by the art of the Achaemenids. In addition, this continuity offers a larger context within which to interpret the art of the Achaemenids.

Root argues that Achaemenid art can be characterized as a program in that it communicates an intentional and coordinated message about the Achaemenid vision of

⁷⁰Root, *King and Kingship*, 311; Root, "Persian Art," *ABD* 1:441.

⁷¹Root, *King and Kingship*, 4-5; Root, "Persian Art," 440.

⁷²Root, *Kings and Kingship*, 24-28; Root, "Persian Art," 440.

kingship.⁷³ The existence of an artistic program invites a study of how the various portrayals of kings and kingship all contribute to a unified vision of kingship. The Achaemenids designed their art with the goal of disseminating their vision of kingship.⁷⁴ The success they had increases the likelihood that an ancient reader of the book of Isaiah would have been familiar with their vision of kingship and the plausibility of a reader reading Isa 6:1-5 as a response to that vision.

The Achaemenid kings wished to project to the world around them an image of a peaceful and harmonious imperial cosmos.⁷⁵ Their vision of the cosmos is characterized by peace and order, citizens offering joyful support, subdued enemies, and universal recognition of the reign of the Achaemenid king. This vision existed in contrast to the reality that the Achaemenids were just as violent and oppressive as the empires that had preceded them and would follow them. Isaiah also offers a vision of order, peace, and harmony. In this vision, however, Yahweh alone reigns as sovereign ruler of creation and there are no human empires to oppress and destroy. In the book of Isaiah, the rule of Yahweh is characterized not by oppression, but by justice and righteousness. Enemies have been defeated and the rule of Yahweh is recognized by all of creation. There is no room for the imperial policies of any human empire in Isaiah's vision of the reign of Yahweh.

⁷³Root, *Kings and Kingship*, 3; Root, "Circles of Artistic Programming: Strategies for Studying Creative Process at Persepolis," in *Investigating Artistic Environments in the Ancient Near East* (ed. Ann C. Gunter; Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 115-39.

⁷⁴Root, "Persian Art," 446.

⁷⁵Root, *Kings and Kingship*, 2.

Outline

Root's study of the art of the Achaemenids has influenced the organization of this dissertation. Root examines an aspect of the Achaemenid vision of a peaceful imperial cosmos in each chapter of her book. I have taken a similar approach by organizing the chapters of this dissertation around images found in Achaemenid art. Each chapter considers an image and a response to that image in Isaiah's throne room description.

Before engaging the art of the Achaemenids, chapter 2 presents a discussion of the socio-cultural setting for the book of Isaiah and its early readers. The imperial policies of the Achaemenids are a stark contrast to the ideology expressed in their vision of kingship. Oppressive policies, including heavy taxation of the subject peoples of the empire channeled resources from the peripheries of the empire to the center. Temples were integral to policies of taxation; Achaemenid sponsorship of the Jerusalem temple elicited a variety of responses both thankful and critical. The policies and actions of the Achaemenids were always executed in self-interest. Their art contributed to an ideology that justified the power they held over subject nations. The book of Isaiah communicates a message that is critical of empires and functions as a call for exclusive loyalty to Yahweh.

Chapters three through five examine individual elements of the prophet's description of Yahweh's throne room (Isa 6:1-5). In each of these three chapters one element of the throne room scene is interpreted in response to images from ancient imperial art. The first step in each chapter is to identify a part of Isaiah's throne room description with an image found in ancient Near Eastern imperial art. Each chapter then studies versions of the image as they appear in the art of empires prior to the

Achaemenids, and considers how the Achaemenids adopted and adapted those images. Next, the chapter returns to the text of Isaiah 6 and considers the part of the vision under consideration in response to the image in imperial art and in its literary context within the book of Isaiah.

Chapter three is an interpretation of Isaiah's description of Yahweh seated on a "high and lifted throne" as a response to the Achaemenid use of the image of the king seated on a throne that is supported by figures that represent the lands of the empire. This image in art from Egyptian and Mesopotamian empires was a source for the Achaemenids. The image communicates a message of imperial control. Defeated enemies or adoring subjects are held below the plane of the king. Isaiah's response is an image of Yahweh on a lifted throne in chapter 6 and a theme of reversal in which people who exalt themselves are brought down and Yahweh alone remains exalted.

Chapter four explores potential forms and functions for the seraphim, or "fiery ones," who attend to Yahweh in Isaiah 6. The Egyptian uraeus as a legitimating and protective figure is one option, the winged solar disk from which an anthropomorphic deity emerges is another, and a winged composite creature representing hostile forces is still another. Each of these forms that an ancient reader might have envisioned communicates something of the legitimacy and power of the human king in imperial art. In Isaiah 6, it is Yahweh who claims that legitimacy and power.

Chapter five interprets the chant of the seraphim as a response to the scenes of tribute procession at Persepolis. The tribute procession in the art of ancient Near Eastern empires was a claim by the king to the wealth and resources of all the earth. When the seraphim proclaim, "the fullness of all the earth is his glory," they counter this assertion

of imperial control. Elsewhere in the book of Isaiah, hoarding wealth and military might prove useless and the empires who once demanded tribute return to Jerusalem bearing treasures.

Chapter six concludes this project with some reflections on the interpretation of Isa 6:1-5 that has been offered. These reflections include thoughts on the process and method that has been carried out and potential implications for the interpretation of the book of Isaiah.

CHAPTER TWO

Achaemenid Imperial Policy and the Book of Isaiah

Introduction

The first three kings of the Achaemenid dynasty made significant contributions to shaping the socio-cultural setting for ancient readers of the book of Isaiah. The reigns of Cyrus II, the Great (550-539 BCE), Cambyses II (539-522 BCE), and Darius I (522-486 BCE) contributed to the social conditions in Jerusalem in the late sixth and early fifth centuries BCE. These kings, therefore, influenced the setting in which the poet/prophet compiled the book of Isaiah and in which early audiences read and heard the book of Isaiah. It was Cyrus who established the reign of the Achaemenids and allowed the exiles to return from Babylonia, the latter act prompting Isaiah to proclaim that Cyrus was Yahweh's shepherd and anointed (Isa 44:28; 45:1). Cambyses continued the policies of Cyrus and extended the empire to include Egypt. Darius furthered the empire's expansion, pushing the borders outward to their greatest extent. He also aided in the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem, bringing to completion a project that Cyrus had authorized.

The biblical accounts of the early postexilic community are typically understood as depicting Cyrus and Darius in a positive manner. Based on the Achaemenid imperial policies and the ensuing consequences for subjects of the empire, however, it is likely that there were members of Jerusalem's postexilic community who were critical of the Achaemenid rulers. Achaemenid imperial policies and their consequences for late sixth

and early fifth century BCE Jerusalem contributed to a time of both hope and crisis. The Achaemenid Empire called its subjects to allegiance to the Achaemenid monarch who was depicted as benevolent and tolerant. The empire also required the payment of taxes and tribute. A work written and compiled in the context of the Achaemenid Empire, the book of Isaiah bears a message critical of imperial policies and called its early readers to be loyal to only one king, Yahweh the Holy One of Israel.¹

Cyrus the Great

A detailed reconstruction of the process through which the Achaemenids rose to power and Cyrus attained the throne prior to his defeat of the Median, Lydian, and Neo-Babylonian kingdoms is difficult to achieve as ancient sources are scarce and the few available works addressing this process are questionable in their reliability.² Modern historians consider available sources to be more reliable beginning with the record of how Cyrus took control of the Median empire when he captured the Median king Astyages in 550/549 BCE. He later took control of the Lydian kingdom with the capture of the Lydian king Croesus in 547 BCE. On October 29, 539 BCE, Cyrus entered the city

¹James M. Kennedy, "Reclaiming Stolen Thunder: The Book of Isaiah and the Persian Empire" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the SBL, Philadelphia, Penn., November 20, 2005). Kennedy's thesis is that the book of Isaiah is an anti-imperial treatise and thus anti-Persian. Kennedy's paper has functioned as an important source for the ideas and research reflected in this dissertation, especially this particular chapter.

²The Persians provide no extended historical account of their origins. The Greek historian, Herodotus, provides a narrative of the upbringing of Cyrus that appears to be based on ancient legend that bears similarities to Sargon, king of Akkad. Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire* (trans. Peter T. Daniels; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 13-28.

of Babylon and declared a state of peace.³ Through this victory the Achaemenids wrested rule of the Near East from the Neo-Babylonians and became the next empire to dominate the ancient Near East.

When, according to Cyrus's account, the priesthood in the city of Babylon called Cyrus, "the mighty king of Sumer and Akkad, the king of the four quarters of the world," they expressed recognition of Cyrus as the legitimate successor to Mesopotamia's ancient kings.⁴ Cyrus too associated himself with earlier Assyrian kings with the declaration, "I am Cyrus, king of the world, great king, powerful king, king of Babylon, king of the country of Sumer and Akkad, king of the four corners of the earth." The records of his conquest of Babylon thus reveal that Cyrus did not present himself as the destroyer of the older empires, but as a restorer and the legitimate heir.⁵

Continuity was a key characteristic of Cyrus's newly established imperial program. He took great care to emphasize this continuity as a sign of his tolerant treatment of subject peoples. Instead of imposing new administrative or bureaucratic models of his own, Cyrus adopted and adapted for his use the political and religious

³The *Cyrus Cylinder* provides an account of the defeat of Babylon in which the Babylonian deity, Marduk, who is displeased with the Babylonian king, chooses Cyrus to hold "sovereignty over all," and marches at the side of Cyrus through the open gates of Babylon. More likely, the defeat of the Babylonian king, Nabonius, and the capture of Babylon involved military hostility. Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 40-44.

⁴Burchard Brentjes, "The History of Elam and Achaemenid Persia: An Overview," *CANE* 2:1017.

⁵Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 44.

customs of the peoples they conquered.⁶ Cambyses continued Cyrus's policies of adoption and adaption. In Media and Babylon priests and government officials continued in the positions they held prior to Cyrus taking control.⁷ The strategy of retention and adaptation and the successful propagation of a tolerant attitude resulted in a reputation of benevolence on the part of the Achaemenid monarchs, especially Cyrus. When he called Cyrus "a father," Herodotus emphasized the benevolence of Cyrus and contrasted Cyrus to Darius and Cambyses, whom he labeled "a tradesman," and "a tyrant," respectively (III.89).⁸ Herodotus also spoke of Cyrus as one who "in the kindness of his heart always occupied with plans for their (his subjects') well-being" (III.89).⁹

Shortly after defeating the Babylonians in 539 BCE, Cyrus began construction on a royal residence at Pasargadae. The remnants of two palaces remain at the site. One is now known as palace R and dates to Cyrus and the other, known as palace P, dates to either Cyrus or Darius.¹⁰ One characteristic of the architecture and decoration of the

⁶Muhammad A. Dandamaev and Vladimir G. Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran* (New York: Cambridge University Press), 97; Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg, "Darius I and the Persian Empire," *CANE* 2:1040, 1042.

⁷Muhammad A. Dandamaev, *Iranians in Achaemenid Babylonia* (Columbia Lectures on Iranian Studies 6; Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers), 3; Dandamaev and Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*, 90.

⁸Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. Aubrey De Sélincourt (Baltimore: Penguin, 1959).

⁹Xenophon and Plato also advanced the reputation of Cyrus as a kind and benevolent ruler in contrast to the reigns of Cambyses and Darius; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 50.

¹⁰Margaret Cool Root, *The King and Kingship in Achaemenid Art: Essays on the Creation of an Iconography of Empire* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979), 52-58; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 85.

building projects of the Achaemenids is the influence of other cultures. One particular image at Pasargadae that typifies this Achaemenid practice of adopting and adapting the art forms of other peoples is the so-called “winged genius” at the gatehouse of palace R. The figure bears the characteristics of Assyrian, Egyptian, Elamite, and Phoenician works.¹¹ Cyrus also built his tomb near Pasargadae. The white limestone structure, which Alexander the Great later visited, is approximately eleven meters tall and consists of a funerary chamber resting atop six stepped tiers.¹² The structure resembles the ziggurats of earlier Mesopotamian civilizations as well as the stepped pyramids of Djoser from Egypt’s Third Dynasty. Ancient sources describe the tomb as surrounded by a lush garden, or *paradise*, and trees belonging to a variety of species.¹³

The act for which Cyrus is most known and praised in the biblical narrative is his granting permission to the Judean exiles to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their temple (Ezra 1:1-4).¹⁴ While Ezra describes this decision by Cyrus as being specifically aimed toward Judah and piously motivated, the practice of allowing subjected peoples to return to their homelands was the general policy of Cyrus and involved political motivations

¹¹Root, *King and Kingship*, 300-01; Dandamaev and Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*, 243.

¹²Roman Ghirshman, *The Arts of Ancient Iran: From Its Origins to the Time of Alexander the Great* (trans. Stuart Gilbert and James Emmons; New York: Golden Press, 1964), 135.

¹³Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 86.

¹⁴The authenticity of the decree by Cyrus in Ezra has been the subject of much debate. Grabbe provides a summary of challenges to the authenticity of the text (*A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period* v.1 *Yehud: A History of the Persian Province of Judah* [New York: T & T Clark, 2004], 272-76). One challenge to the authenticity of the decree in Ezra is the use of language that is theologically specific to Jerusalem’s postexilic community.

with the desire to facilitate greater control and stability in the empire. This policy was not novel to Cyrus and the Achaemenids, but appears to be a continuation of earlier practices of the Assyrians and Babylonians.¹⁵ While an actual return to Jerusalem by a number of the Babylonian exiles is not in question here, the likelihood that Cyrus took such a personal interest in such a small province is questionable. The authorization for a return to Jerusalem and reconstruction of the temple there were administrative pieces of the larger imperial program.¹⁶

Cambyses II

After Cyrus died in battle in 530 BCE, his son, Cambyses II, ascended to the throne. According to Herodotus, Cyrus had chosen Cambyses to be his successor (I.208). The achievement for which Cambyses has received most recognition is his conquest of the Nile Valley in Egypt, which took place from 525-522 BCE. After the conquests of Cyrus, Egypt was the only remaining national power with the potential to oppose the Achaemenids. The necessity of defeating Egypt was due in part to Egypt's interest in the region between the Euphrates and the Nile, now under control of the Persians. This pragmatic reason for the conquest of Egypt is contrary to the often-suggested irrational motivation on the part of Cambyses to conquer the entire world.¹⁷

¹⁵Amelie Kuhrt, "The Cyrus Cylinder and Achaemenid Imperial Policy," *JSOT* 25 (1983): 83-97; R. J. van der Spek, "Did Cyrus the Great Introduce a New Policy towards Subdued Nations? Cyrus in Assyrian Perspective," *Persica* 10 (1982): 278-83.

¹⁶Khurt, "Cyrus Cylinder," 94-95.

¹⁷Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 51.

After his successful campaign, Cambyses, following the precedent of his father Cyrus when he captured Babylon, proclaimed himself “king of Egypt, king of the countries,” and allowed Egyptian officials to remain in the positions they held prior to his conquest.¹⁸ Herodotus and later writers portray Cambyses as cruel and intolerant in his treatment of the Egyptians, assigning to him the characteristics of a tyrant in his reign.¹⁹ Egyptian sources, however, describe a situation in which Cambyses treated the conquered people as well as could be expected by any conqueror.²⁰ Cambyses remained in Egypt for nearly three years, apparently with the intent of further expanding the empire to the west and south (Herodotus III.17).²¹ In 522 BCE when word of a revolt taking place in Persia reached him, Cambyses left Egypt for Persia, but died *en route* in Syria.²²

Darius I

In 522 BCE, Darius I seized the throne from Gaumata, who had led the rebellion during the absence of Cambyses.²³ After taking the throne, Darius had to put down

¹⁸Dandamaev and Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*, 91.

¹⁹Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 55-56.

²⁰Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 59-61.

²¹Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 54-55.

²²Ancient sources recording Cambyses's death are not clear as to whether the cause was an accident or an assassination. Cambyses apparently received a wound to the thigh, after which gangrene set in, bringing to an end his life and brief reign.

²³Darius claimed that Gaumata was an imposter and look-alike who had murdered the brother of Cambyses, Bardiya. The Behistun Inscription justifies Darius's claim to the throne through his lineage and tells of his defeat of rebels who rose up following his ascension to the throne.

several rebellions throughout the empire, but successfully gained uncontested reign within two years.²⁴ It was under Darius that the kings of Persia came to be known as the Achaemenid Dynasty, based on an eponymous ancestor, Hakhāmanish, known better by the Greek form of his name “Achaemenes,” from whom Darius I claimed descent:

I am Darius the Great King, King of Kings, King in Persia, King of countries, son of Hystaspes, grandson of Arsames, an Achaemenian. Saith Darius the king: my father was Hystaspes; Hystaspes’ father was Arsames; Arsames’ father was Ariaramnes; Ariaramnes’ father was Teispes; Teispes’ father was Achaemenes. Saith Darius the King: For this reason we are called Achaemenians. From long ago we have been noble. From long ago our family had been kings. Saith Daruis the king: VIII of our family (there are) who were kings afore; I am the ninth; IX in succession we have been kings. (Behistun Inscription)²⁵

There is reason to doubt that Darius actually belonged to the line of Cyrus,²⁶ so the term “Achaemenid,” might be considered anachronistic when used in reference to Cyrus and his son Cambyses.

Governance of the Empire under Darius

Darius, after subduing the uprisings early in his reign, organized the empire into districts called “satrapies.” These districts were designed to facilitate more stabilized

²⁴Dandamaev and Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*, 91-94.

²⁵By placing the name Achaemenes before Teispes, an ancestor of Cyrus, Darius makes members of the line of Cyrus a part of the Achaemenid dynasty; David Stronach, “Anshan and Parsa: Early Achaemenid History, Art and Architecture on the Iranian Plateau,” in *Mesopotamia and Iran in the Persian Period: Conquest and Imperialism 539-331 BC*, (ed. John Curtis; London: British Museum Press, 1997), 39.

²⁶The *Cyrus Cylinder*, an older text makes no mention of Achaemenes. Cyrus presents the family line as follows: “Son of Cambyses, Great King, king of Anšan, great-grandson (or “descendant”) of Teispes, Great King, king of Anšan, from a family [that has] always [exercised] kingship.”

administration and more efficient taxation.²⁷ Under Darius, the governor of each satrapy was a “satrap” who was appointed from among Persian officials and often belonging to the royal family.²⁸ This practice of appointing Persian leaders is in contrast to the methods of Cyrus and Cambyses who retained the leaders of conquered nations. Darius began the appointment of Persian satraps out of his desire to have loyal officials in place. He was concerned with the loyalty of these appointed officials because of the several uprisings he had experienced early in his reign.²⁹

Regarding the system of Darius for governing the empire, Herodotus writes, “he proceeded to set up twenty provincial governorships called satrapies. The several governors were appointed and each nation assessed for taxes; for administrative purposes neighbouring nations were joined in a single unit; outlying peoples were considered to belong to this nation or that, according to convenience” (III 89). Herodotus then lists the peoples included in the twenty satrapies and the tribute each satrapy paid (III 89-97).³⁰ One feature in this record of Herodotus that has caused some confusion is his inconsistent use of terms. He at first uses the Greek word *αρχαι* in reference to the Persian term satrapies, but when he lists the satrapies and the peoples belonging to them he uses the

²⁷Dandamaev and Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*, 97-98.

²⁸Lester L. Grabbe, *History of Jews and Judaism*, 132.

²⁹Dandamaev and Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*, 97; Grabbe, *A History of Jews and Judaism*, 132-33. Even after appointing Persian satraps, the satrapies maintained a sense of independence through retention of local laws, weights and measures, monetary systems, etc.; Dandamaev and Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*, 97.

³⁰The list, though, may include satrapies that were not added until after the reign of Darius; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 392.

word *νομός*. This inconsistency has contributed to the difficulties scholars have had when comparing the list by Herodotus with lists found in Achaemenid inscriptions.

The Behistun inscription lists twenty-three lands that were subject to Darius. There have been attempts to identify the lands on the Behistun inscription with the satrapies listed by Herodotus. There are, however, discrepancies between Herodotus and the Behistun inscription regarding the number and names of the lands under the control of Darius. Several explanations for the discrepancies exist, including the fact that satrapies changed over time,³¹ the argument that the list in the Behistun inscription was not intended as a formal list of satrapies,³² and the argument that the lists are of peoples thought worthy of mention, not of satrapies or lands.³³

Judah is not among the satrapies and provinces listed in either Herodotus or the Behistun inscription. Biblical texts indicate that Judah was a *medinah*, or “province,” in the Achaemenid Empire (Ezra 5:8; Neh 1:3; 7:6; 11:3). There is, however, no extant indication of the exact form of government there prior to the reign of Artaxerxes.³⁴ Several seals, bullae, and coins dating to the Achaemenid period have been found in various sites throughout Judahite territory and refer to the province of Yehud and/or to a

³¹Dandamaev and Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*, 99; J. M. Cook, *The Persian Empire* (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), 80.

³²Grabbe, *A History of Jews and Judaism*, 133.

³³George C. Cameron, “The Persian Satrapies and Related Matters,” *JNES* 32 (1973): 47-56.

³⁴Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 487. Briant supports this statement with Nehemiah 5:15-18, “The former governors, my predecessors, had been a burden on the people, from whom they took forty silver shekels each day as their subsistence allowance.”

governor, either the generic office or by name.³⁵ The available data leave little doubt that Judah, or “Yehud,” was an autonomous province with its own local governor and governance in the Achaemenid Empire.³⁶ Yehud was located in the satrapy of Transeuphrates or “Beyond the River.”³⁷ There is no reason why the policies and procedures of the Achaemenids with regard to other provinces should not be considered as normative and applicable when considering the policies and procedures in place in Yehud.

Temple construction and reconstruction were common in provinces throughout the Achaemenid Empire. During the reign of Darius, orders were given for the continuation of the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple. Biblical texts credit these orders directly to Darius, noting that he provided assistance as well (Ezra 6:6-12). In addition, at some point Zerubbabel was appointed governor over the province of Yehud (Hag 1:1; 2:2). Having been at a standstill for more than a decade since the foundation was laid during the reign of Cyrus, work on the temple resumed in 520 BCE with the temple being completed by 515 BCE.³⁸

³⁵Charles E. Carter, *The Emergence of Yehud in the Persian Period: A Social and Demographic Study* JSOTSup 294 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 259-68; Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism*, 60-63; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 488.

³⁶H. G. M. Williamson, *Studies in Persian Period History and Historiography* Forschungen zum Alten Testament 38 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 25-63; Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism*, 140-42.

³⁷Anson Rainey, “The Satrapy beyond the River,” *AJBA* 1 (1969): 51-78.

³⁸There is some question as to whether or not there was any temple construction begun during the time of Cyrus. Comparison of the details found in the accounts in Ezra with those in the accounts found in Haggai and Zechariah has been the source of some

Building Projects of Darius

The monument at Mount Behistun includes a relief and inscription that commemorate the actions of Darius when he took the throne and quelled the rebellions that had risen up in the empire between 522 and 520 BCE. Part of the text reads, “The kingdom which had been taken away from our family, that I put in its place; I reestablished it on its foundation . . . as before, so I brought back what had been taken away. By the favor of Ahuramazda this I did: I strove until I reestablished our royal house on its foundation as (it was) before.”³⁹ The scene on the relief includes Darius and his weapon bearers, the Achaemenid patron god Ahuramazda, and representatives of the rebellious provinces, one of whom Darius pins to the ground with his foot. The relief brings to mind similar depictions of Neo-Assyrian kings, especially Darius’s hair and beard, which are similar to those of Assurbanipal.⁴⁰ The motif of the king as victorious over many peoples reflects scenes depicted in Egyptian and Assyrian works.⁴¹

Susa, the empire’s capital, also reflects diverse influences in its architecture, which has been influenced by earlier Mesopotamian and Elamite architecture.⁴² The

confusion. James Trotter gives thorough treatment to the issue in “Was the Second Jerusalem Temple a Primarily Persian Project,” *SJOT* 15 (2001): 276-93.

³⁹R. G. Kent, *Old Persian: Grammar, Texts, Lexicon* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1950), 120.

⁴⁰Root, “Art and Archaeology of the Achaemenid Empire,” *CANE* 2:2621. The relief at Behistun also resembles the late third-millennium relief of Anubanini at Sar-i Pul.

⁴¹Root, *The King and Kingship in Achaemenid Art: Essays on the Creation of an Iconography of Empire* (Belgium: Université de Liège, 1979), 218-22.

⁴²Root, “Art and Archaeology of the Achaemenid Empire,” 2622.

artwork at Susa includes several common ancient Near Eastern images including composite creatures, lions, and bulls. Additionally, a granite statue of Darius from Susa reflects strong Egyptian influence. Though Darius is clothed in Persian style, the pose is an Egyptian pose.⁴³ The cuneiform text of the monument invokes Ahura Mazda, while hieroglyphic text refers to Atum. There are kneeling figures with raised hands on the base of the statue, reflecting a common motif of thrones in ancient Egyptian sculpture.⁴⁴

In 520 BCE Darius began construction at Parsa, commonly referred to by its Greek name, Persepolis, which means “the city of the Persians.” Construction there continued until around 450 BCE. The platform upon which Parsa rests supports nine major structures and covers around 33 acres. As Cyrus had done before him, and as he had done in his other building projects, Darius incorporated into this project the styles of other peoples and employed artists and artisans from throughout the empire. The architecture and decoration at Persepolis reflects the earlier styles found at Pasargadae and Susa, the works of the Assyrians and Babylonians, and the influence of Greece, Egypt, Elam, Media, and Scythia.⁴⁵ The columns of the large rooms at Persepolis include the influences of Egypt, Syria/Assyria, Ionia, and Iran.⁴⁶ Massive guardian bulls and man-bulls in Assyrian style guard the entrance to the citadel. Another motif found at Persepolis and common to the ancient Near East is that of the royal hero mastering or

⁴³Root, “Art and Archaeology of the Achaemenid Empire,” 2623.

⁴⁴ Root, “Art and Archaeology of the Achaemenid Empire,” 2623.

⁴⁵Michael Roaf, “Sculptors and Designers at Persepolis,” in *Investigating Artistic Environments in the Ancient Near East* ed. Ann C. Gunter (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 112.

⁴⁶Root, “Art and Archaeology of the Achaemenid Empire,” 2627.

slaying animals or monsters.⁴⁷ Regarding the work at Persepolis, Darius proclaims, “By the grace of Ahuramazda I built this fortress. And Ahuramazda was of such a mind, together with all the gods, that this fortress (should) be built. And (so) I built it. And I built it secure and beautiful and adequate, just as I was intending to.”⁴⁸ Through crediting Ahuramazda and claiming his authorization for construction at Persepolis, this text contributes the legitimizing function that building projects were intended to have.

Darius died at the capital, Persepolis, in 486 BCE. His tomb includes a relief and an inscription. The relief depicts Darius standing on a platform born by carriers in what is called an atlas pose, their upper bodies are depicted fully frontal, their heads and lower bodies in profile, and their arms raised and bent at the elbow to supporting the throne dais. Darius faces a fire altar and Ahuramazda, who takes the form of a winged disc, turns toward Darius. According to the inscription, the carriers represent the provinces of his realm:

If now thou shalt think that “How many are the countries which King Darius held?” Look at the sculptures (of those) who bear the throne, then thou shalt know, then shall it become known to thee: the spear of a Persian man has gone forth far; then shall it become known to thee: a Persian man has delivered battle far indeed from Persia.⁴⁹

The inscription also includes testimony that Ahuramazda granted Darius the empire.

The art and architecture represented in the building projects of Darius reflect the strategy that the Achaemenids had of adopting and adapting for their own use the

⁴⁷Root, “Art and Archaeology of the Achaemenid Empire,” 2627.

⁴⁸Root, “Circles of Artistic Programming: Strategies for Studying Creative Process at Pasargadae,” in *Investigating Artistic Environments in the Ancient Near East* ed. Ann C. Gunter (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 118.

⁴⁹Kent, *Old Persian*, 138.

practices and methods of other peoples, not only in governance but also in artistic and iconographic expression. Darius enlisted artists and artisans from throughout the empire and authorized the use of images and styles drawn from and influenced by peoples throughout the ancient Near East to correspond to and reinforce the ideological messages found in the inscriptions that chronicle his deeds.⁵⁰

Taxation and the Temple

The ongoing operation of an empire requires vast amounts of resources. Continued military campaigns, building projects, administrative operations, and the monarch's own desire to amass wealth were all realities for the Achaemenids that required a steady flow of income. For the Achaemenids tribute was an important form of taxation through which the empire sustained its existence.⁵¹

According to Herodotus, Darius required the satrapies of the empire to pay a regular and predetermined tribute (III.90-97). Darius apparently made efforts at depicting himself as lenient and understanding in terms of the amount of tribute paid. His success is reflected in the writings of the second-century CE author, Polyaeus, who said of these efforts:

Darius was the first to levy tribute on his peoples. In order to make it bearable, he did not set the amounts himself, but had them arrived at by his satraps, who set them at an exorbitant amount. On the pretext of kindness to his subjects, Darius reduced the imposts by half. The peoples regarded the diminution as a

⁵⁰ Root, "Circles," 127-29.

⁵¹ Tribute not only provided steady income, but also was an expression of the unity of the empire (Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 388).

considerable benefit awarded by the king and paid the remainder gladly (VII.11.3).⁵²

In addition to tribute as a source of income, were the “gifts” some of the satrapies presented to the king. Herodotus discusses several peoples who were exempt from tribute. These peoples brought gifts in kind to the central authority instead of paying in silver through a satrapal entity.⁵³ These gifts, however, were probably no more voluntary than the tribute assessed on other peoples.

Throughout the Achaemenid Empire, temples served as the central collecting points for taxes. This arrangement of the Achaemenids was a continuation of the Babylonian practice of a mandatory temple tax.⁵⁴ This tax was in the form of a tithe relative to the income of the taxpayers.⁵⁵ Babylonian documents indicate that tithes were brought in kind or in silver or other precious metals.⁵⁶ When tithes were paid in silver, it came in a variety of forms and varying quality.⁵⁷ These silver receipts were sent to the temple foundry where they were melted into ingots and stored in a reserve.⁵⁸ Herodotus describes how precious metals were melted and stored in earthenware jars in the

⁵²See Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 393. Briant also quotes a similar description found in Plutarch who apparently used the same source as Polyaeus.

⁵³Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 394-99.

⁵⁴Joachim Schaper, “The Jerusalem Temple as an Instrument of the Achaemenid Fiscal Administration,” *VT* 45 (1995): 528-39.

⁵⁵Dandamaev and Lukonin, *Culture and Social Institutions*, 362.

⁵⁶Dandamaev and Lukonin, *Culture and Social Institutions*, 361-62.

⁵⁷Charles C. Torrey, “The Evolution of a Financier in the Ancient Near East,” *JNES* 2 (1943): 298.

⁵⁸Schaper, “The Jerusalem Temple,” 531; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 408.

treasuries: “The method adopted by the Persian kings of storing their treasure is to melt the metal and pour it into earthenware jars; the jar is then chipped off, leaving the solid metal. When money is wanted, the necessary amount is coined for the occasion.” (III.96)

This system of collecting taxes through which the temple generated income for the empire had been a practice of the Babylonian king, Nabonidus (555-539 BCE). According to Herodotus, under the Achaemenids, some of the tribute paid by the satrapies remained with the local administration and some went to the king (III.90). This division of income was also a carry-over from Nabonidus. The name for this system of collecting revenue was *quppu ša šarri*, or “king’s chest.”⁵⁹ The individuals chosen by the empire for local administrative positions within the temple bureaucracy, therefore, made up a class that had their livelihood in the resources and productivity of the population who paid tribute to the empire through the taxes and tithes brought to the temple.

In this system much of the silver collected, melted, and cast at the sanctuaries presumably ended up at the central treasuries at Persepolis and Susa.⁶⁰ Franz Altheim called the Achaemenid policy of hoarding precious metals *Hortungspolitik*.⁶¹ According to Altheim, the royal budget was entirely funded by the public economy.⁶²

Charles Torrey has made the case that just as other temples in provinces under the Achaemenids, the Jerusalem temple had a foundry with the purpose of melting precious

⁵⁹Schaper, “The Jerusalem Temple,” 529.

⁶⁰Schaper, “The Jerusalem Temple,” 537.

⁶¹Franz Altheim and R. Stiehl, *Die aramäische Sprache unter den Achaimeniden I Geschichtliche Untersuchungen* (Frankfurt am Main, 1963), 123.,

⁶²Altheim, *Die aramäische Sprache*, 178-79.

metals.⁶³ On the basis of historical and linguistic investigation, Torrey explains that the word *יוצר* in Zechariah 11:13 should be translated “founder” and not “potter.” The verse thus reads, “And Yahweh said to me, ‘Cast it (that noble sum at which I was valued by them) to the founder.’ So I took the thirty shekels and cast them to the founder in the house of Yahweh.” This translation eliminates the awkwardness of “potter” in the verse which has led some interpreters to emend the text to read *אוצר*, “treasury.” Torrey cites the existence of foundries in temples throughout the ancient Near East to argue that the *יוצר*, or “founder,” was a temple official in postexilic Jerusalem.

An Akkadian text dating to the early Persian period refers to the office of a *gitepatu*, probably the same office as the *יוצר*, who worked at the Jerusalem temple.⁶⁴

This official was in charge of the foundry and acted as a subordinate to the *reš šarri bēl piqitti*, the official who was in charge of the *quppu ša šarri*.⁶⁵ The *gitepatu* or *יוצר* was the official in charge of the foundry and the assayer of precious metal while the *reš šarri bēl piqitti* was “the supreme official controlling the inflow and supervision of taxes received by a given temple.”⁶⁶ The existence of these positions in the provinces throughout the empire indicates the development of a temple hierarchy that served as part

⁶³Charles C. Torrey, “The Foundry of the Second Temple at Jerusalem,” *JBL* 55 (1936): 247-60.

⁶⁴Schaper, “Jerusalem Temple,” 531, who cites A. T. Clay, *Business Documents of Murashu Sons of Nippur Dated in the Reign of Darius II (424-404 B.C.)*, 57; M. W. Stolper, *Entrepreneurs and Empire: The Murašū Archive, the Murašū Firm, and Persian Rule in Babylon* (Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul 1985), 92; and Charles C. Torrey, “Evolution of a Financier,” 300.

⁶⁵Schaper, “Jerusalem Temple,” 534.

⁶⁶Schaper, “Jerusalem Temple,” 534.

of the Achaemenid imperial bureaucracy. In addition to the taxes they raised, temples throughout the Achaemenid Empire were obligated to send laborers to work on projects, such as the royal *paradises*.⁶⁷ Documents from Babylonia dating to the Achaemenid period also reveal that royal officials were given the charge of making sure that temples met their fiscal obligations to the state.⁶⁸

Ezra and Nehemiah mention three categories of Achaemenid taxes that were brought to the Jerusalem temple by the citizens of Yehud: the מדה, בלו, and הלך. These three terms have corresponding Akkadian terms: *mandattu*, *biltu*, and *ilku*.⁶⁹

The מדה (Ezra 4:20; 6:8; Neh 5:4) or מנדה (Ezra 4:13; 7:24) was a “tribute tax.”⁷⁰ A royal commissioner was responsible for the collection of this tax which was paid in silver or in kind and was stored at the treasury.⁷¹ Silver would have been melted and cast in the foundry before being sent to the central treasury while taxes paid in the form of agricultural products would have remained at the temple and consumed by the local temple workers, in the case of Yehud the priests and Levites.⁷² During the time of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, Nehemiah records an instance of the people complaining under the burden of the מדה or imperial tribute they were paying (5:4).

⁶⁷Dandamayev, *Iranians in Achaemenid Babylonia*, 19.

⁶⁸Dandamaev and Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*, 363.

⁶⁹I. Eph'al, “Syria-Palestine under Achaemenid Rule,” *Cambridge Ancient History* v. 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 158-59.

⁷⁰Schaper, “Jerusalem Temple,” 535-37.

⁷¹Schaper, “Jerusalem Temple,” 536.

⁷²Schaper, “Jerusalem Temple,” 537.

These people were landowners who had to borrow money against their land in order to pay the tribute owed the empire. The lenders were also members of the Jerusalem community (Neh 5:6-7). The landowners were therefore bearing the burden of the tax itself and the debt incurred to pay the tax.

The בלו (Ezra 4:13, 20; 7:24) was a poll tax or “tax in kind” and was tribute paid to the king.⁷³ The הלך was a property tax (Ezra 4:13, 20; 7:24).⁷⁴ This Aramaic term is related to the Akkadian word *ilku*, meaning “service from the land.”⁷⁵ This tax also went to the king.

In addition to the three taxes levied by the empire, the population of Yehud also paid a tax called the תרומה (Neh 10:40). This tax, paid by the Yehudites in kind, was stored in the storehouse chambers of the temple and went toward the compensation of the workers at the temple. Schaper argues that the biblical texts’ use of this particular term apart from the previously discussed three terms makes it “more and more likely that there were two separate taxation systems operative at the Jerusalem temple, the Persian one, organized at satrapy level to collect the *middā*, *b^elō*, and *h^alāk*, and the local one, based on the *t^erūmā*.”⁷⁶ He also supports his argument for a separate system by pointing out that תרומה is a Hebrew word while the other three are Aramaic.⁷⁷

⁷³Schaper, “The Jerusalem Temple,” 538; Dandamaev and Lukonin, *Culture and Social Institutions*, 179.

⁷⁴Schaper, “The Jerusalem Temple,” 538.

⁷⁵Dandamaev and Lukonin, *Culture and Social Institutions*, 178.

⁷⁶Schaper, “The Jerusalem Temple,” 539.

⁷⁷Schaper, “The Jerusalem Temple,” 539.

Blenkinsopp argues for the existence of a “politically and economically dominant elite” in Yehud made up of the Jews who had come from Babylonia.⁷⁸ This privileged class whom Nehemiah refers to as “Jews”⁷⁹ gained control of temple operations and so held social and economic advantages over the rest of the population.⁸⁰ The group from the population of Yehud who held the temple’s administrative positions on behalf of the empire achieved wealth and power through an imperial system that taxed the productive members of society to the point that some were forced to borrow against their land and even use their children as collateral.

In his argument for the existence of an anti-imperialistic genre that condemns the imperial policy of any king or nation, M. Weinfeld sees in Isa 10:5-11:10 an anti-imperial message against the Assyrian Empire.⁸¹ In his polemic against the Assyrians, Isaiah speaks of removing the yoke and burden of the Assyrians (9:3; 10:27; 14:25). Assyrian documents use the phrase, “put a yoke,” to refer to a king’s subjection over a vassal leading to the understanding that the word “yoke” in Isaiah’s anti-imperialistic texts refers to the forced labor, such as temple workers being sent to work in the empire’s

⁷⁸Joseph Blenkinsopp, “Temple and Society in Achaemenid Judah,” in *Second Temple Studies* v. 1 (ed. Philip R. Davies; JSOTSup 117; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 22-53.

⁷⁹Blenkinsopp, “Temple and Society,” 47.

⁸⁰Blenkinsopp, “Temple and Society,” 45.

⁸¹Moshe Weinfeld, “The Protest against Imperialism in Ancient Israelite Prophecy,” in *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations* (ed. S. N. Eisenstadt; Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1986), 169-82.

paradises, and taxes levied upon subjects of an empire.⁸² Because the taxes and forced labor imposed by an empire resulted in no benefit for the people, the prophets considered them robbery.⁸³ Regardless of whether Weinfeld is correct in his identification of an anti-imperialistic genre in Israelite prophecy, the fact that the book of Isaiah speaks out against the burden of Assyrian exploitation indicates disapproval of the same kind of exploitation taking place under the Achaemenids.

The citizens of Yehud held on to a tradition that valued the Jerusalem temple and its centrality for the worship of Yahweh. Following the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile, there were Yehudites who viewed Achaemenid authorization to build the temple as the work of Yahweh and a sign of Yahweh's desire that the temple be rebuilt (Ezra 1:1-4; 5:1-2; 2 Chron 36:22-23). During the reign of Darius I, Haggai rebuked the people for their lack of diligence in completing the temple and proclaimed that their economic hardship was a result of the fact that they had not completed the temple (Hag 1:1-6). Zechariah, prophesying during the reign of Darius as well, issued both challenge and encouragement regarding the completion of the temple (Zech 1-8). For many who had migrated to Yehud from Babylon a temple in Jerusalem was essential to the continued survival of true Yahwistic religion.

As a source of tension, however, were the realities that not only had the temple cultus in place prior to the Babylonian exile been subject to corruption, the new cult

⁸²Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), 84 n.4.; "Protest against Imperialism," 173. Weinfeld points to the use of the word "yoke" as a reference to hard labor and imperial tribute in Assyrian texts and elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible; "The Counsel of the 'Elders' to Rehoboam and Its Implications," *Maarav* 3 (1982), 35-37.

⁸³Weinfeld, "Protest against Imperialism," 173.

established under Achaemenid rule would advance the wealth and power of the Achaemenid empire on the backs of the community that had to bring their tithes and taxes to the temple. The Achaemenid's authorization and sponsorship of the temple was an expression of the control the empire held over Yehud. It incorporated the temple into the imperial economic structure.⁸⁴ Additionally, the Achaemenid king required that as a part of the daily liturgy in the temple, prayers were to be said on behalf of the royal family (Ezra 6:10). The Achaemenid king, as temple builder and sponsor, held claim to the kingship of Yehud; he was now Israel's king. Members of the postexilic community must have wrestled with the reality that participation in the Jerusalem temple cult involved recognition of and support for the Achaemenid monarchy and its oppressive imperial policies.

Empire, Ideology, and Art

Characteristics of an empire as understood here include centralization, expansion, subjugation, and exploitation.⁸⁵ In the Assyrian, Babylonian, and Achaemenid empires of the ancient Near East, the borders of the empire expanded, bringing more peoples under the power of the empire through occupation, military presence, controlled governments, and vassal-suzerain agreements. The imperial government directed to the center of the empire the wealth and resources of the empire's expanding periphery where

⁸⁴Trotter, "Second Jerusalem Temple," 289-93; Gösta W. Ahlström, *The History of Ancient Palestine* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 842.

⁸⁵Mogens T. Larsen, "The Tradition of Empire in Mesopotamia," in *Power and Propaganda: A Symposium on Ancient Empires* (Mesopotamia: Copenhagen Studies in Assyriology 7; ed. Mogens T. Larsen; Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1979), 75-103. Larsen uses the terms "expansion, domination, and exploitation" (91).

they were placed in possession and control of the monarch and the ruling elite.⁸⁶ To maintain order in this exploitative system of governance, the ruling elite had to justify in the eyes of the citizenry and subjects of the empire the heavy toll in finances and resources placed on the subjects of the empire.

Ideology functions in an empire to justify this unequal relationship between ruler and subject.⁸⁷ Ideologies express how the rulers envision their relationship with the world and how they wish the rest of the world to envision them.⁸⁸ In an imperial context, the ideology attempts either to mask or to legitimize the exploitation taking place by presenting the relationship between exploiters and exploited as ordered and right.⁸⁹ Universalization and eternalization are two of the means through which ideologies communicate the legitimacy of power.⁹⁰ Both universalization and externalization are emphasized through texts and images that portray the deities granting authority to the reigning king.

⁸⁶Larsen, "Tradition of Empire," 79, 97.

⁸⁷ Jonathan Culler, "Structure of Ideology and Ideology of Structure," *New Literary History* 4 (1973), 471-82; Michelle I. Marcus, "Art and Ideology in Ancient Western Asia," *CANE* II, 2487.

⁸⁸ Julian Reade, "Ideology and Propaganda in Assyrian Art," Mario Liverani, "The Ideology of the Assyrian Empire," in *Power and Propaganda: A Symposium on Ancient Empires (Mesopotamia: Copenhagen Studies in Assyriology 7*; ed. Mogens T. Larsen; Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1979), 329; Carl Nylander, "Achaemenid Imperial Art," in *Power and Propaganda*, 345-46.

⁸⁹ Mario Liverani, "The Ideology of the Assyrian Empire," in *Power and Propaganda: A Symposium on Ancient Empires (Mesopotamia: Copenhagen Studies in Assyriology 7*; ed. Mogens T. Larsen; Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1979), 298.

⁹⁰ Marcus, "Art and Ideology," 2487.

Early Mesopotamian kings, such as Naram-Sin enlisted titles such as “King of the Four Quarters” and “King of Totality,” in order to universalize their reigns,⁹¹ intimating that if there is such a thing as the King of the Four Quarters, there can only be one true king. The third-millennium Babylonian king, Lugalzaggisi acknowledged the deity Enlil as the legitimator of his reign over the entire land of Sumer rather than merely over a city-state:

When Enlil, king of all countries,
had given the kingship of the land to Lugalzaggesi;
when he had directed the eyes of the nation towards him,
and had laid all countries at his feet;
and when he had subjected unto him (everything) from East to West –
On that day he (Enlil) pacified (?) for him the roads from the Lower Sea (the Persian Gulf)
along the Tigris and Euphrates to the Upper Sea (the Mediterranean).⁹²

Similarly, Hammurabi attributed his reign to the deities:

When lofty Anum, king of the Anunnaki,
(and) Enlil, lord of heaven and earth,
the determiner of the destinies of the land,
determined for Marduk, the firstborn of Enki,
the Enlil functions over all mankind,
made him great among the Igigi,
called Babylon by its exalted name,
made it supreme in the world,
established for him in its midst an enduring kingship,
whose foundations are as firm as heaven and earth –
at that time Anum and Enlil named me
to promote the welfare of the people,
me, Hammurabi, the devout, god-fearing prince,
to cause justice to prevail in the land,
to destroy the wicked and evil,
that the strong might not oppress the weak,

⁹¹Larsen, “Tradition of Empire,” 90.

⁹²H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 277-78.

to rise like the sun over the blackheaded (people),
and to light up the land.⁹³

The stele upon which Hammurabi's law code is inscribed also includes a relief with a depiction of the solar deity, Šamaš, commissioning Hammurabi (figure 1).



Figure 1. Hammurabi before Šamaš. Top of stele inscribed with Hammurabi's law code; c. 17th century BCE. Diorite. Height of section of stele is 28 in. Louvre. Reprinted from Henri Frankfort, *The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1954), pl. 65.

Kings continued using the titles of earlier kings and used similar images in their visual arts in order to eternalize and universalize their claims to power.⁹⁴ Achaemenid inscriptions such as those at Behistun and on the Darius statue turn to their chief deity, Ahuramazda, for externalizing and universalizing of the reign of the Achaemenid king.

One scene common to ancient Near Eastern empires is that of tribute bearers peacefully approaching the king, thus communicating a sense of order and naturalness to

⁹³James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), 164.

⁹⁴Larsen, "Tradition of Empire," 90-91; Marcus, "Art and Ideology," 2488.

the practice of the flow of wealth from periphery to center (figure 2).⁹⁵ Through visual compositions depicting scenes of kings involved in cultic activity with deities looking with approval upon them, kings also claimed the authorization of the deities. Titularies, links to prior kings, scenes of victory in battle, scenes of tribute bearers, and the authorization of deities all vested cosmic significance in the reign of kings and dynasties, thus communicating the message that their rule was necessary for the maintenance of cosmic order.⁹⁶



Figure 2. East stairway of the Apadana at Persepolis. Tribute bearers from countries throughout the Achaemenid Empire approaching the king. 6th-5th centuries BCE. Stone. In situ. Reprinted from Roman Ghirshman, *The Arts of Ancient Iran: From Its Origins to the Time of Alexander the Great* (trans. Stuart Gilbert and James Emmons; New York: Golden Press, 1964), 182 ill. 228.

The Achaemenid Empire was no exception to the exploitation common to other ancient Near Eastern empires. The practice of *Hortungspolitik* is one example of how

⁹⁵Marcus, “Art and Ideology,” 2491.

⁹⁶Liverani, “Ideology of the Assyrian Empire,” 310; Marcus, “Art and Ideology,” 2504.

these rulers directed resources from periphery to center and the wealth and resources of many were handed over to the ownership or control of a few. Just as with the art of other empires, an examination of the imperial art of the Achaemenids reveals how the Achaemenids wanted to see themselves and how they wanted the world to see them. The Achaemenids advanced through text and image an ideology of tolerance and benevolence on the part of their empire. Achaemenid art uses peaceful compositions that depict willing participation by subject nations and peoples who voluntarily support the king and the empire. For the most part, scenes of battle and violent subjugation common to Assyrian and Egyptian royal art are absent in Achaemenid art.

By the end of the reign of Darius there was a canonization of textual formulae and artistic expressions of the imperial vision of the Achaemenids; all known royal depictions that followed Darius were versions of the motifs already in use by the time of Darius.⁹⁷ The imperial art of the Achaemenids was eclectic; motifs from Mesopotamian and Egyptian royal art are present in Achaemenid art. By the time of Darius, the imperial art of the Achaemenids was also static; kings were not introducing new motifs. These two characteristics of Achaemenid imperial art added to its accessibility to the diverse peoples and cultures that made up the empire. It is plausible to expect that, though heterogeneous in makeup, people throughout the empire might associate similar themes with the images of Achaemenid art.

In royal centers such as Pasargade and Persepolis visual compositions that communicated an ideology of Achaemenid centrality and control surrounded the king,

⁹⁷Root, *King and Kingship*, 40.

members of his court, visiting officials from throughout the empire, and foreign envoys.⁹⁸ According to Root, the Achaemenid vision of kingship and empire was one of “piety, control, and harmonious order.”⁹⁹

Achaemenid imperial art elicits in its viewers, according to Root, “a sense of placidity, refinement, of ordered control.”¹⁰⁰ Their art advances an ideology of voluntary submission and mutual benefits on the part of the imperial ruler and subjected peoples.¹⁰¹ Achaemenid imperial art, depicting subjects that voluntarily support the king, tribute processions, the king victorious over enemies, and the king in the presence of the deity, asserts a world of order and control and in which the Achaemenid king is the center of all things.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter has been to describe a socio-historical context to aid in reading and interpreting the book of Isaiah. Jerusalem was a city within the realm of the Achaemenid Empire. The book of Isaiah bears message critical of empires in general and of the Achaemenid Empire in particular. Ancient readers of the book of Isaiah were living as subjects of the Achaemenid Empire and were targets of an imperial ideology that sought to justify the empire’s centralization of power and wealth around the Achaemenid king. Visual arts were a part of the advancement of this ideology. As noted

⁹⁸Marcus, “Art and Ideology,” 2491-92.

⁹⁹Root, *King and Kingship*, 2.

¹⁰⁰Root, *King and Kingship*, 311.

¹⁰¹Root, *King and Kingship*, 131-33.

above with the examples of the monument at Mount Behistun and the Darius statue, the art produced by the Achaemenid kings is characterized by the influence of prior empires of the ancient Near East and Egypt.

Though the book of Isaiah is a written text, the description of what Isaiah saw in the throneroom of Yahweh evokes in the imagination a visual composition that incorporates the images and themes of Achaemenid royal art. This composition counters the ideology of the Achaemenids and all other empires as well. In contrast to the policies and ideology of the Achaemenids, the book of Isaiah identifies Yahweh as the center of all things and the source of a cosmic order that is characterized by justice and righteousness, not oppression and exploitation which characterize human empires.

CHAPTER THREE

The High and Lifted Throne

Introduction

As Darius sought to advance his own vision of how the Achaemenid king related to his empire and the rest of the world, one characteristic that became evident in his art was “elevation above the plane of ordinary human beings,” present in the rock relief he commissioned at Behistun, his tomb facade, and the platform upon which the city of Persepolis rests (figure 3).¹

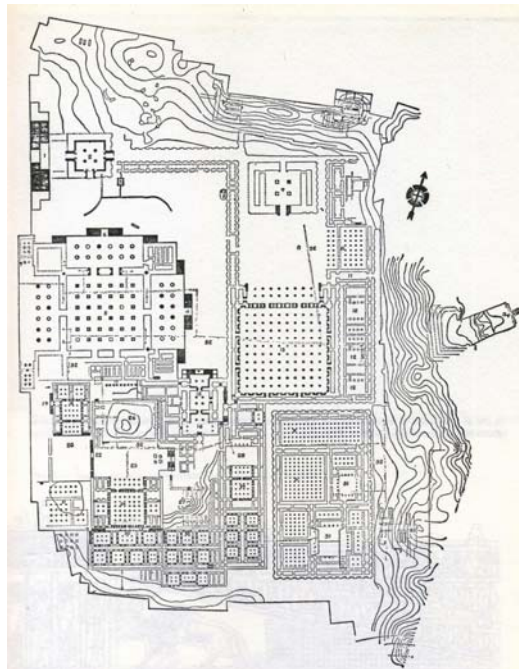


Figure 3. Plan of the city of Persepolis. Reprinted from Edith Porada, *The Art of Ancient Iran: Pre-Islamic Cultures* (New York: Crown, 1965), 149, fig. 82.

¹Edith Porada, *The Art of Ancient Iran: Pre-Islamic Cultures* (New York: Crown, 1965), 147.

Darius and his successors also used in their art a recurring image² of the king seated on a throne that rests on a dais that is supported by human figures representing the various peoples of the empire. Figure 4 is a section of a relief from the Hall of a Hundred Columns. The relief portrays figures in the dress of various people groups of the Achaemenid Empire supporting the throne of Xerxes.

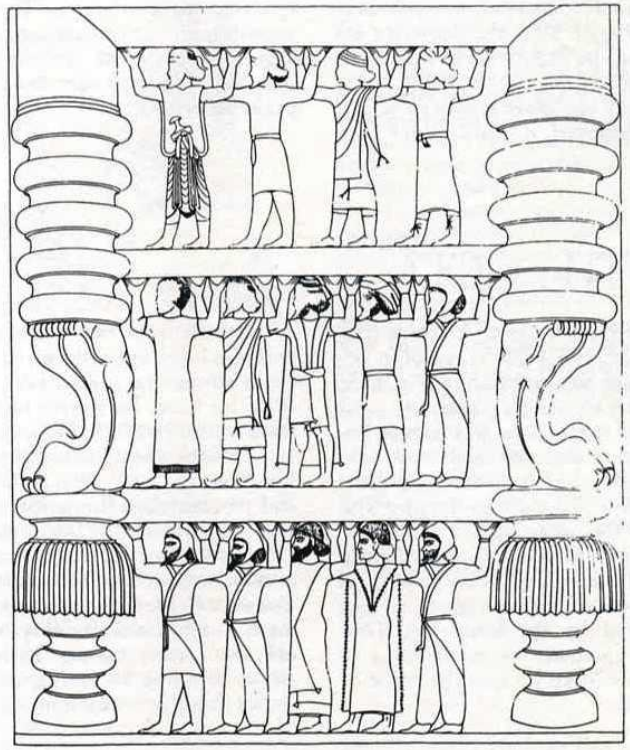


Figure 4. Section of relief showing supporters of the throne of Xerxes. Hall of a Hundred Columns, Persepolis. 5th century BCE. Stone. In situ. Reprinted from Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 351 ill 476a.

²The term “image” appears here according to Panofsky’s definition of an image as a motif that is recognized as the carrier of a secondary or conventional meaning; Erwin Panofsky, “Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art,” pages 26-54 in *Meaning in and on the Visual Arts: Papers on Art History* (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1955), 28-29.

The description that Isaiah uses for Yahweh's throne in Isaiah 6:1, "high and lifted," is also accurate for the raised throne of Darius and his successors. It is also appropriate for the thrones of the Egyptian and Mesopotamian rulers whose thrones were precursors of this image used by Darius. The meaning of being "high and lifted" in the book of Isaiah is also relevant to the ideological message of the raised throne in imperial contexts. This chapter will first examine the image of the raised throne in Egyptian and Mesopotamian imperial contexts before considering its use in Achaemenid royal art. The chapter also discusses the meanings of these images within the context of imperial art. Next, the chapter will discuss how the vision of Yahweh's high and lifted throne in Isaiah 6 visually exemplifies the theme of being high and lifted in the book of Isaiah. The chapter also explores how this image and corresponding theme contribute to a response to the ideology expressed in imperial art that depicts the monarch seated on an upraised throne.

Prior to its appearance in Achaemenid art, the image of the king standing or enthroned above subjects or enemies of the empire was common in Egyptian and Mesopotamian royal art.³ The people depicted beneath the monarch sometimes appear defeated, bound, or dead while at other times they appear without distress, bearing gifts or in postures connoting praise. Figures beneath the monarch appear on the sides of daises upon which the thrones rest, on the sides of the thrones, and on footrests. Such figures also appear on statue bases beneath the feet of the standing or striding monarchs. As with other imperial art, this image communicates something about how the king

³Egyptian examples include the king above the unity symbol and the nine bows. One Mesopotamian example is the relief at Sar-I-Pul in which the King Anubanini stands above defeated foes.

envisioning himself and wishes to be seen in relation to his people and to peoples of other nations. The purpose of this study of the image of the raised throne is to demonstrate the widespread use of the image throughout the ancient Near East, both geographically and chronologically, to establish the plausibility of an ancient reader of Isaiah envisioning a composition of this type when encountering the description of Yahweh's throne as "high and lifted up," and to discuss implications of this image for interpreting Isaiah 6 and the book of Isaiah.

Egypt

Proportion and position are both important in the symbolism of ancient Egyptian art. Rather than representing actual physical size, the size of figures in a composition typically communicates relative importance; the more important the subject, therefore, the greater its size in relation to the other subjects in the composition.⁴ Relative placement also reflects importance or status; to be beneath another figure indicates a status of subservience or vanquishment.⁵ In a textual witness to this meaning, some Egyptian works include the phrase, "under the soles of the feet," in company with depictions of a victor sitting, walking, or riding over the subdued people.⁶ Some examples of the methods of depicting defeated or subdued people are images of corpses in contorted positions and bound prisoners who are being led or kneeling. Subdued

⁴Richard Wilkinson, *Symbol and Magic in Egyptian Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994), 38.

⁵Wilkinson, *Symbol and Magic*, 64; Heinrich Schäfer, *Principles of Egyptian Art* (trans. John Baines; Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), 171.

⁶Schäfer, *Principles of Egyptian Art*, 171.

people also appear in symbolic forms such as the “Nine Bows,” an important and recurring symbol in Egyptian royal art that will be discussed below. These and other symbols of subjugation appear on the bases of statues, throne sides, footstools, and throne daises. The purpose of these symbols of subjugation is to communicate something about the relationship between the royal figure beneath whom they are placed and the people groups represented by the symbols.

The Unity Symbol

The symbol for the unification of Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt is one of the oldest symbolic groups of ancient Egypt (figure 5).⁷ The oldest known version of the symbol consists of a combination of the hieroglyphs for “unite” (the heart and trachea), Upper Egypt (lily), and Lower Egypt (papyrus).⁸ The unity symbol often appears on the sides of a throne or on a throne dais. The symbol also appears below the written form of the king’s name.⁹

⁷Schäfer, *Principles of Egyptian Art*, 155; a familiarity with symbol groups, what they communicate and how they develop, is important to the study of Egyptian art since so much of the art is pictographic writing (Schäfer, 154-55). Hieroglyphs are connected in form and meaning to the representational images in ancient Egyptian art; Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992), 9-10.

⁸Schäfer, *Principles of Egyptian Art*, 155; Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art*, 81.

⁹John Baines, *Fecundity Figures: Egyptian Personification and the Iconology of a Genre* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 2001), 330.



Figure 5. Throne-base of statue of Senwosert I, Twelfth Dynasty (c. 1930 BCE). Limestone, height 200 cm. Egyptian Museum, Cairo. Reprinted from Heinrich Schäfer *Principles of Egyptian art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), plate 37.

Over time, versions of the unity symbol came to include two anthropomorphic figures, one on each side. These anthropomorphic figures vary in forms that include fecundity figures and figures representing the deities of Upper and Lower Egypt, Horus and Seth.¹⁰ Sometimes the figures appear binding the unity symbol. The throne-base of Senwosert I shown in figure 1 is an example of a throne that has carved in relief on the sides two standing fecundity figures binding the unity symbol. On other occasions, the figures are bound to the unity symbol as on an Eighteenth Dynasty footstool belonging to Tutankhamun which depicts an Asiatic and an African each with arms tied behind the back and bound around the neck by a cord tied in a knot to the unity symbol (figure 6).

¹⁰Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art*, 81.

The figures appearing with the unity symbol also changed over time to represent various people groups as they were conquered by the Egyptians.¹¹

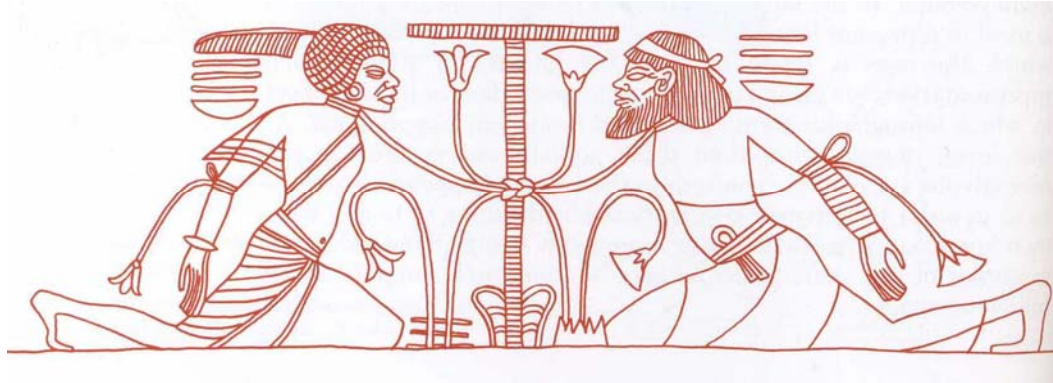


Figure 6. Bound captives on a footstool of Tutankhamun, Thebes, Eighteenth Dynasty. Reprinted from Richard H. Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1992), 18.

Versions of the unity symbol often appear on throne platforms such as on a Fifth Dynasty relief at Abusir of the deceased king Niuserre¹², which depicts two human figures on their knees holding to the plants on the unity symbol.¹² Such placement of the symbol in relation to the king or representation of the king communicates that the king who sits on the throne is above and thus rules over all of Egypt as well as over conquered peoples when they appear in the symbol.

¹¹Schäfer, *Principles of Egyptian Art*, 156; New Kingdom expansion introduced the inclusion of Asiatic and African peoples.

¹²Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art*, 176.

The Nine Bows

The Nine Bows is a symbol for subject peoples and dates to Predynastic times in ancient Egypt.¹³ The bow sign itself represents foreign peoples,¹⁴ while the number nine is the tripling of the number of plurality, three, and thus represents the plurality of pluralities.¹⁵ The origin of the symbol of the Nine Bows may be in the physical act of placing bows beneath the feet of a king.¹⁶

The earliest known example in Egyptian art of a King with the Nine Bows beneath his feet is a statue of King Djoser of the Third Dynasty (figure 7).¹⁷ The statue dates to 2690-2670 BCE and all that remains is the base. Djoser was probably standing and his feet rest on the nine bows, which are etched into the top of the statue base. In addition to the nine bows, on the top of the statue base in front of Djoser's feet, there are three lapwing (or "rekhyt") birds, the symbol of the Egyptian people.¹⁸ The enemies of the Egyptians, therefore, as well as the people of Egypt are beneath the feet of, and so subject to, the king. While the lapwings are not directly below the feet of Djoser, their

¹³Eric Uphill, "The Nine Bows," *JEOL* 19 (1966): 393-420.

¹⁴Alan Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar: Being an Introduction to the Study of Hieroglyphs* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), 511.

¹⁵Wilkinson, *Symbol and Magic*, 137.

¹⁶Uphill, "Nine Bows," 393. For some African peoples, the bow is the symbol that represents the men of a tribe.

¹⁷B. Gunn, "An Inscribed Statue of King Zoser," *ASAE* 26 (1926): 177-96; Uphill, "Nine Bows," 394.

¹⁸Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 470; Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art*, 87.

wings are pinioned, thus they are unable to fly and still under the control of the king.¹⁹

This statue simply and effectively communicates how Djoser envisioned the nature of the relationship between Egypt's king and the world around him.

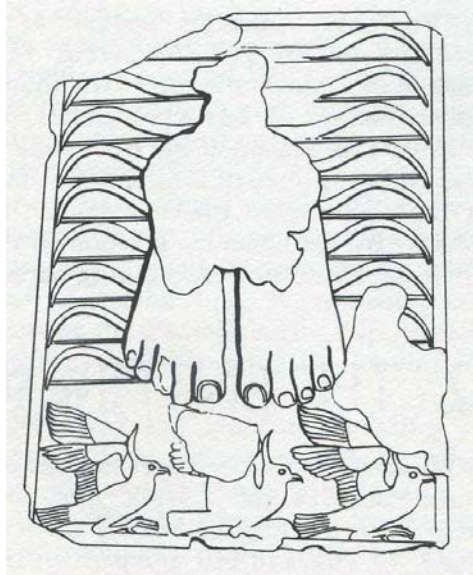


Figure 7. Base of a limestone statue from the exterior of southern temenos-wall of the Djoser Pyramid at Sakarah, Third Dynasty. Length 66.3 cm. Cairo. Reprinted from Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 255, ill. 342a.

Just as the unity symbol, the symbol of Nine Bows appears in the art of ancient Egypt throughout an extended period of time as well as in a variety of forms. The symbol of the Nine Bows associates a people group with each of the bows. In many of its appearances, the symbol consists only of nine bows. For a long time, from Djoser of the Third Dynasty to Tutankamun of the Eighteenth Dynasty, the form of the bows in the symbol displays little change in form. The symbol of the Nine Bows appears on a pair of Tutankhamun's sandals (figure 8). This pair of sandals provides the opportunity for a physical enactment of the symbolism of the Nine Bows when the king with each step

¹⁹Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art*, 87.

treads on the people groups represented by the bows. The subjugation and abasement of the enemies of the king is obvious and striking.



Figure 8. Sandals from the Tomb of Tutankhamun, Thebes. Eighteenth Dynasty. Reprinted from Richard H. Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1992), 184.

As the symbol of the Nine Bows developed and changed in form, it also changed in its capacity of representing Egypt's enemies in general to having the potential to represent specific enemies. Instead of always being in the form of bows, the symbol often appears in a form in which the upper body of a human emerges from the top of a cartouche bearing the name of the people it represents (figure 9).²⁰ When the symbol takes this form, the person has the dress and appearance of the people group identified on the cartouche.²¹

²⁰Uphill, "Nine Bows," 395.

²¹Uphill, "Nine Bows," 395.

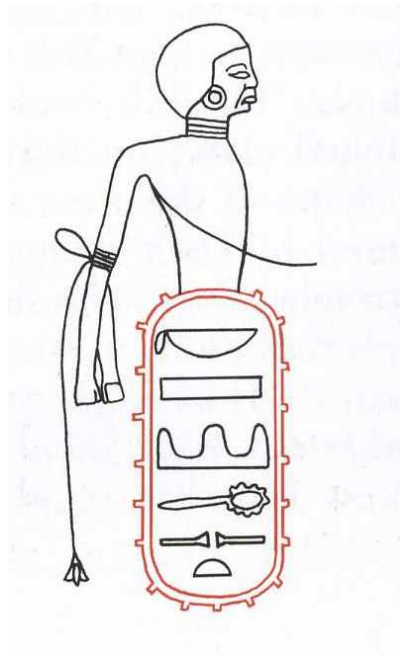


Figure 9. From inscribed captive list on temple wall, Ramses III, Medinet Habu, Twentieth Dynasty. Reprinted from Richard H. Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1992), 194.

The people groups represented by the symbol of the Nine Bows were not fixed, but displayed over time a pattern of expansion corresponding to the expansion of the Egyptian Empire.²² Along with the significance of the number nine, the growing geographical range thus represented the Egyptian claim to worldwide rule. The number of bows or people included in the Nine Bows symbol also became flexible, so that many compositions have more than nine people groups represented. One example of this increase in the number of “bows” is the Colossus of Ramses II at Luxor which includes the unity symbol on the sides of the throne as well as on the sides of the throne dais the Nine Bows symbol in the form of fifteen human figures above their representative cartouches.

²²Uphill, “Nine Bows,” 398, 401.

An inscription at Luxor calls Amenhotep III “sun of the nine bows,” a title that subsequent kings continued to use, and according to which the sun’s journey around the earth is connected to the symbol of the Nine Bows.²³ The bows are symbolic of the entirety of the earth and the path of the sun encompasses this entirety. Again, the totality of the king’s rule receives emphasis. The Pyramid Texts call Egypt’s king, “Lord of the Bows.”²⁴ This title emphasizes the rule or mastery of the king over Egypt’s enemies.

Another common variation on the form of the symbol of the Nine Bows is the appearance of nine bound captives absent bows or cartouches. In these examples it is the number nine associated with foreigners that evokes the symbolism of the Nine Bows. An Eighteenth Dynasty painting at Abd el-Qurna in the tomb of Kanamon portrays nine bound captives as part of a footstool for the crown prince, Amenhotep II, who holds cords tied around their necks (figure 10).²⁵ A similar painting at the tomb of Hekaerneh depicts Thutmose IV as the crown prince seated on the lap of the king and with his feet on a footstool depicting the dead bodies of enemies stacked on one another.²⁶ A painting of Amenhotep III includes the Nine Bows on the dais of the throne upon which he sits, and in this depiction, each of the Nine Bows is a captive who has his arms bound behind his back.²⁷

²³Uphill, “Nine Bows,” 396.

²⁴Uphill, “Nine Bows,” 394.

²⁵Uphill, “Nine Bows,” 396; Keel, *Symbolism of the Biblical World*, 254.

²⁶Othmar Keel, *Symbolism of the Biblical World*, 255; Uphill, “Nine Bows,” 396n.

²⁷Uphill, “Nine Bows,” 395.



Figure 10. Section of a painting from the Tomb of Kanamon, Abd el-Qurna, Amenophis II (1448-1422 BCE). Reprinted from Hugo Gressmann, *Altorientalische Bilder zum Alten Testament* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1927), 59.

The symbol of the Nine Bows located beneath the feet of the monarch in a composition represents the Egyptian king's subjugation of hostile foreign powers. In the royal art of ancient Egypt, the location of the Nine Bows beneath the feet of the king was common, spanning the generations of several dynasties. Portrayal of foreign peoples was not limited, however, to symbol groups such as the Unity Symbol and the symbol of the Nine Bows.

Scenes of Death and Battle

In ancient Egyptian battle scenes, slain enemies often appear in contorted positions. Another martial image, the depiction of the king delivering a deathblow to the

head of an enemy, is common in Egyptian royal art.²⁸ A fatal blow to a single figure represents victory over the group that the enemy represents. This type of scene is a culminating scene that represents the victory of the king over enemies with a single image of violence. The scene is less about a specific historical battle than the concept of kingship that it communicates: the Egyptian king prevails over all hostile forces who would oppose him. Sculptures and throne bases also depict slain enemies, sans battle scene or death blow, below the feet of the king. Though they are absent the violence of the blow itself, such images still communicate a violent end to enemies. The sides of the base of the throne on a Second Dynasty statue of Khasekhem depict slain enemies in a variety of contorted positions (figure 11).

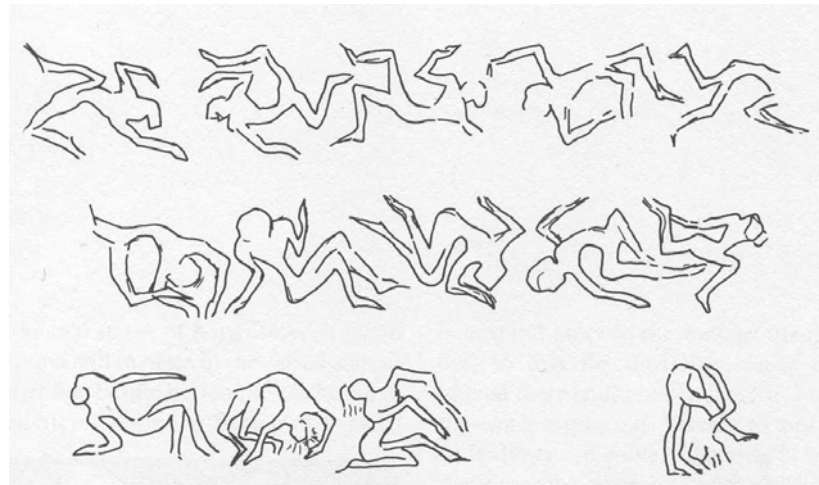


Figure 11. From two bases of statues of Khasekhem, Second Dynasty. Reprinted from W. Stevenson Smith, *The Art and Architecture of Ancient Egypt* (2d ed with revised additions by William Kelly Simpson; New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 51.

²⁸ One well-known example of the king delivering a deathblow to an enemy who represents a people group is the Narmer Palette. For a detailed description and interpretation of the Narmer Palette, see Whitney Davis, "Narrativity and the Narmer Palette," in *Narrative and Event in Ancient Art* (ed. Peter J. Holliday; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 14-52.

These depictions of slain enemies beneath the king indicate that the battle has already been won and the struggle is over. Their placement relative to the king is also significant in that the king is enthroned in victory over his foes.

Scenes of Praise

The discussion up to now includes only examples of peoples beneath the feet of the king in Egyptian art that portray the subdued peoples through images with explicit portrayals of violence or forced subjugation. There are also examples of people below the feet of the king where the subjugation is not obviously hostile or violent. These examples depict people with their arms raised to represent praise or adoration.

A Nineteenth Dynasty image of the deity Amun Re enthroned depicts on the throne dais seven Egyptian figures with their arms upraised in adoration.²⁹ Though this image is of a deity and not a king, the distinction is of little consequence since Egyptian kings were considered gods. A conspicuous difference between this and other throne daises, though, is the fact that the people depicted below the feet of the figure on the throne are Egyptian and not foreign.

Foreigners also appear in adoration of an enthroned figure. In one example, Syrians and Africans appear with raised arms on the throne platform of Ramses II on an Eighteenth Dynasty wall painting at Thebes. The throne dais of Ramses II includes a stairway whose steps are decorated with the Nine Bows so that the person ascending the stairway to the throne treads on a foreign enemy with each step (figure 12). The dais also

²⁹Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art*, 28.

includes on its side panels foreigners not bound or slain, but with their arms upraised, perhaps making an offering to the Egyptian king.³⁰

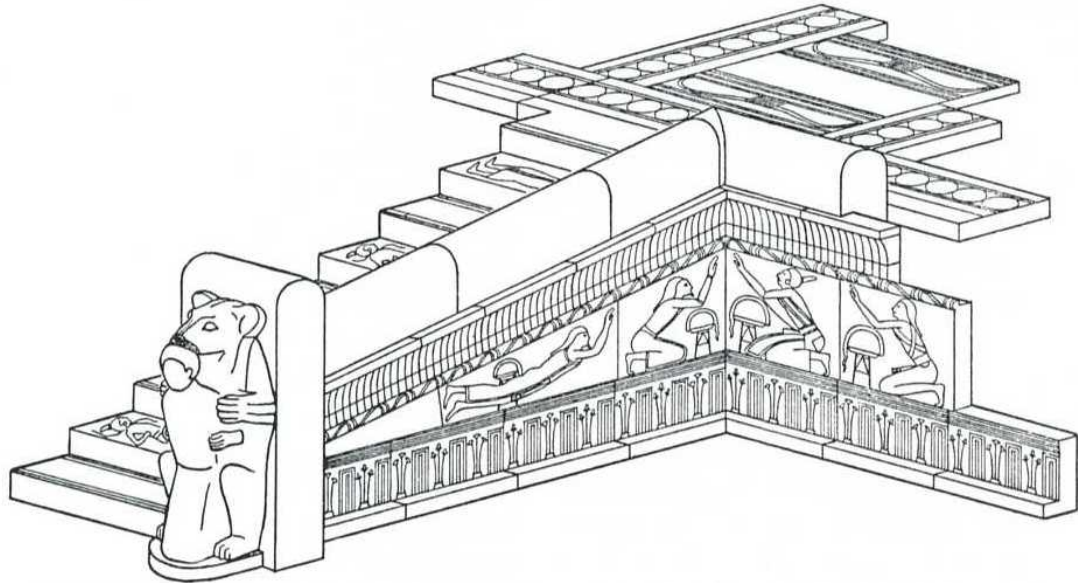


Figure 12. Section of throne dais of Ramses II, reconstructed from tiles and statue. Figure is approximately 1:20 scale. Metropolitan Museum. Reprinted from William C. Hayes, *Glazed Tiles from a Palace of Ramses II at Qantir* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1937; reprinted by Arno Press, 1973), 13.

Summary

Egyptian dynasties, throughout the course of several centuries, included in their royal art images of people and symbols of people groups beneath the Egyptian king. These images and symbols appeared on the sides of thrones, on footstools, and on throne daises. Most often, the peoples were depicted not only as foreigners, but also as hostile enemies.³¹ Always, the people are subdued in some manner, either bound as captives,

³⁰William C. Hayes, *Glazed Tiles from a Palace of Ramesses II at Kantir* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1937), 13-16.

³¹Root, *King and Kingship*, 142; Root points out that the Egyptian hieroglyph for foreigner was the same as that of enemy, a fact that would not only represent but also shape the conception of foreign peoples.

slain, or offering adoration. There is a conscious effort in Egyptian royal art to associate through images of peoples or images that represent peoples the rule of the king over those peoples. Some form of violence or subjugation is usually present when the depictions involve foreign peoples who are subject to the Egyptians. In all cases the king is above the people, greater in size, and in control. The inscriptions on the two colossi of Ramses II at the Luxor temple read:

I unite lands for you with offerings.
I bind the two lands for you.
I bind lands for you with offerings.
I unite lands for you with offerings,
I subdue the nine bows for you.
I bind the two lands for you,
gathered under your sandals.³²

These inscriptions express in written form what the images of the unity symbol, the nine bows, and other depictions of peoples below the feet of the king express pictorially, the relationship between the king and his subjects and enemies.

Mesopotamia

Just as Egyptian royal art, the art of Mesopotamian empires includes images of the king above other figures who represent subjects and enemies of the empire.

Examples from Mesopotamia are fewer in number than from Egypt, but there are still several variations of the motif of the king over his enemies or subjects. These variations appear in statuary, reliefs, paintings, and on furniture.

³²Baines, *Fecundity Figures*, 248.

The King on His Feet

A relief (c. 2300 BCE) of Anu-banini at Sar-I-Pul depicts King Anu-banini standing before the goddess Ishtar (Inanna)³³ (figure 13). Anu-banini pins a man to the ground on his back as he places his left foot on the man's chest. Ishtar faces Anubanini and there are two more captives kneeling behind her. With her left hand she holds a rope that appears to be tied around the neck of the figure nearest her. With her right hand, Ishtar offers to Anubanini a ring, a common motif in Mesopotamian royal art that symbolizes divine sanctioning of the king.³⁴ The captives behind Ishatar and the man Anubanini pins to the ground are of a smaller scale than Anubanini and Ishtar. In a register beneath the feet of Anubanini six figures stand with their hands bound behind their backs. These six men of the lower register are of the same scale as the captives in the upper register and have similar appearance. The figure furthest to the right in the lower register wears what appears to be a crown. The size of the king relative to the captives, the position of the king over the captives, and the presentation of the ring to the king all function as expressions of the king's power.

³³Neilson C. Debevoise, "The Rock Reliefs of Ancient Iran," *JNES* 1 (1942): 80.

³⁴Kathryn E. Slanski, "The Mesopotamian 'Rod and Ring': Icon of Righteous Kingship and Balance of Power between Palace and Temple," in *Regime Change in the Ancient Near East and Egypt: From Sargon of Agade to Saddam Hussein* (ed. Harriet Crawford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 37-59; Slanski argues that the rod and ring represent the relationship between palace and temple.

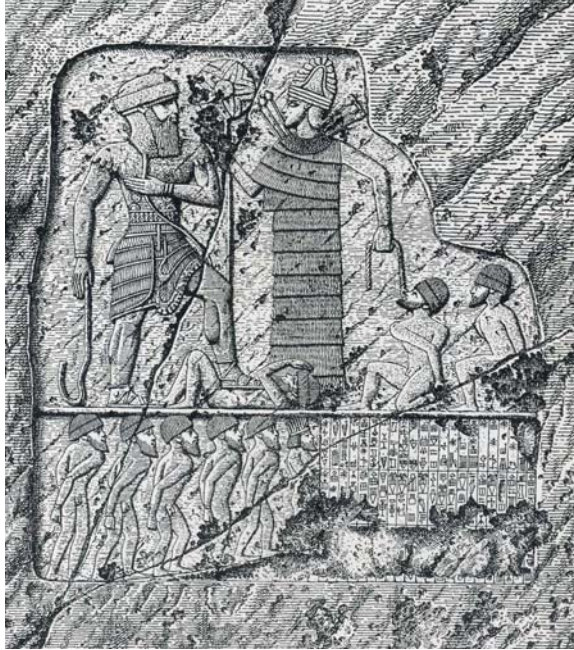


Figure 13. Relief and inscription at Sar-I-Pul, Anubanini and Ishtar, c. 2200-2300 BCE. Reprinted from Hugo Gressmann, *Altorientalische Bilder zum Alten Testament* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1927), 254.

Victory and subjugation of enemies expressed in the form of the king standing on or above figures either slain or offering gifts are themes present also in early statuary from Mesopotamia. An Akkadian-period, life-size limestone statue, which may have functioned as a victory monument, depicts Manishtusu (c. 2275-2260 BCE) standing over the bodies of slain enemies.³⁵ Their contorted bodies are reminiscent of the bodies of enemies depicted in Egyptian art such as those on the throne base of Khasekhem (figure 11). An alabaster statuette of Ur-Ningirsu dating to c. 2130 BCE has carved on its base bearded figures, apparently captives, kneeling with baskets of offerings in their hands. This statue represents for the art of the Sumero-Akkadian revival a shift from the Sumerian to the Akkadian attitude in interpreting the prince-concept, i.e. from the figure

³⁵Prudence O. Harper, Joan Artuz, and Françoise Tallon eds., *The Royal City of Susa: Ancient Near Eastern Treasures in the Louvre* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992), 165-66.

of supplicant to that of conqueror.³⁶ The motifs of the king as a recipient of offerings and the king as military victor in these two examples of statues of a standing king with subject or defeated people on the sides of the base beneath his feet each express the concept of subjugation by a king over other peoples.

Thrones

A Neo-Assyrian relief at Khorsabad includes a procession in which some of the figures carry an empty throne (figure 14). The feet of the throne are inverted cedar cones, a feature common to Assyrian thrones. On the side of the throne beneath the armrests, there are four figures. These men are bearded and each has his hands clasped together in front of him. The clasped hands are part of a posture of submission or humility. The back of the throne is a larger figure standing and holding a goat in one hand. The figures on the side as well as the figure on the back of the throne are facing the same direction that the person seated on the throne would face. They also appear to be in some type of procession, just as the people carrying the throne are. If the throne is being brought to the king as a form of tribute from subject peoples, then the throne itself functions as a symbol of how the king acquired the throne and his power over the people who brought it.

³⁶Anton Moortgat, *The Art of Ancient Mesopotamia: The Classical Art of the Near East* (New York: Phaidon, 1969), 64. Ur-Ningirsu was the son of Gudea (c. 2160-2145); the rulers of Lagash were called “princes of Lagash.”



Figure 14. Relief from Khorsbad; Palace of Sargon II (8th century BCE). Gypsum, 9 ft. 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. British Museum. Reprinted from Hollis S. Baker, *Furniture of the Ancient World: Origins & Evolution 3100-475 B.C.* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 189.

An eighth-century wall painting from the palace of Tiglathpileser III (744-727 BCE) depicts him seated on a throne giving audience (figure 15). Two men stand behind the king. The king holds a rod in his right hand and pieces of cord in his left hand. The feet of this throne are also inverted cedar cones. The side of the throne's arm has an inset that depicts four figures in procession. The four processional figures face in the same direction as the seated king. In this throne as well as in the throne in figure 14, the size and proximity of the king in relation to the figures on the sides of the throne communicates how the king desires to be viewed in relationship to those figures. The portrayal of the figures as gift bearers reinforces this message.



Figure 15. Section of painting from palace at Til Barsip (Tell Ahmar); Tiglathpileser III on his throne, giving audience, 8th century BCE. Length of entire painting is 18 ft. Reprinted from André Parrot, *The Arts of Assyria* (trans. Stuart Gilbert and James Emmons; New York: Golden Press, 1961), 214, ill. 266.

Two reliefs depict Sennacherib seated on thrones on the sides of which there are anthropomorphic figures. One throne has arms and three tiers of figures; the other is armless and has two tiers.³⁷ The throne with three tiers of figures is part of the depiction of the defeat of Lachish by Sennacherib and his army (figure 16). This relief portrays Sennacherib seated on a throne as his own officials approach him and citizens of the defeated city prostrate themselves before him.

³⁷Hollis S. Baker, *Furniture in the Ancient World: Origins & Evolution 3100-475 B.C.* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 189.



Figure 16. Section of relief from Nineveh; Palace of Sennacherib; Sennacherib seated on his throne following the defeat of Lachish, 7th century BCE. British Museum. Reprinted from Hugo Gressmann, *Altorientalische Bilder zum Alten Testament* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1927), 140.

The throne with the two tiers is part of a relief that depicts Sennacherib seated within a city after capturing it (figure 17). Baker suggests that the differences between this throne and the throne upon which Sennacherib sits at Lachish indicate that this throne is not Assyrian, but has been taken from the captured city. This throne lacks the inverted cedar cones at the bottoms of the legs of the chair and footstool and has no armrests, both common features of Assyrian thrones.³⁸

³⁸Baker, *Furniture in the Ancient World*, 189.

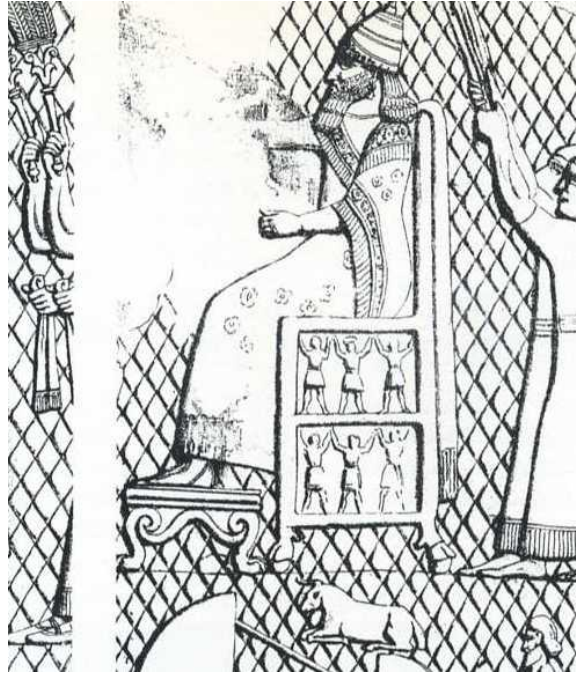


Figure 17. Section of relief from Nineveh; Sennacherib outside a defeated city, 7th Century BCE. Gypsum. British Museum. Reprinted from Hollis S. Baker, *Furniture in the Ancient World: Origins & Evolution 3100-475 B.C.* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 189.

The Atlas Pose. A subject in the atlas pose typically has arms bent at the elbows and raised above the head with the hands supporting some object. The body is frontal, while the head and legs are usually in profile. Versions of this pose appear in Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Persian art. The figures on the sides of the thrones in figures 16 and 17 are in variations of the atlas pose.

In ancient Egypt expressions for “be high,” “rejoice,” and “extol” use a hieroglyph of a man standing with his arms raised, body disposed frontally, and head and feet in profile.³⁹ Figures in this pose appear in scenes that celebrate victories and themes of royal investiture.⁴⁰ The hieroglyph of a kneeling deity with the arms raised is the

³⁹Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 445; Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art*, 27.

⁴⁰Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art*, 27.

symbol for the god supporting the sky and is related to a myth in which deities were created to support the celestial cow when she rose with the sun god Re on her back and became the sky (figure 18).⁴¹ In this painting from the tomb of Seti I, “Heh” deities support the legs of the celestial cow. Shu, the god of the air is in the atlas pose and supports the torso of the cow. The glyph for the “Heh” deities, a kneeling anthropomorphic figure in the atlas pose, is below the head of the cow and above the back of the cow.⁴² Egyptian art, therefore, associates the atlas pose with cosmic themes.

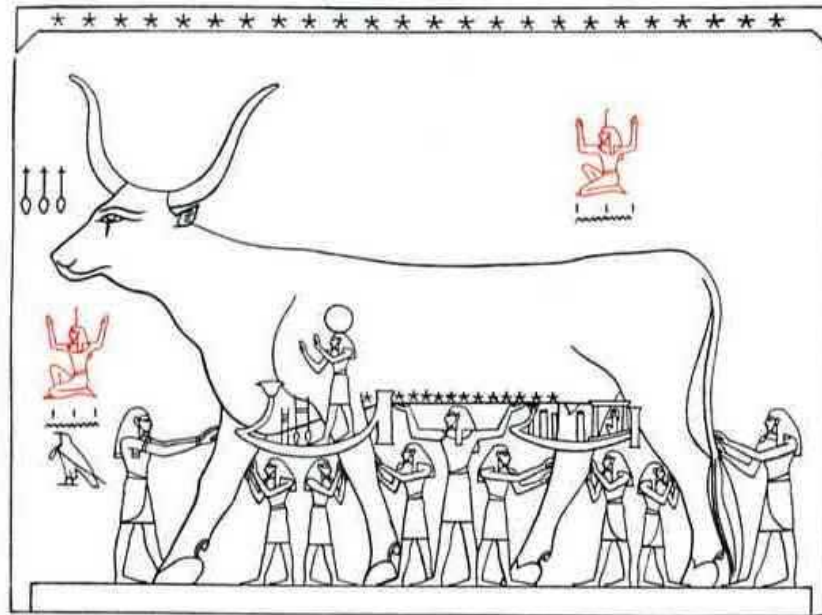


Figure 18. Tomb painting depicting the celestial cow supported by Heh deities, tomb of Seti I, Thebes, Nineteenth Dynasty (1307-1196 BCE). Reprinted from Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art*, 38.

⁴¹Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 449; Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art*, 39.

⁴²Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art*, 39.

Figures appear in the atlas pose in ancient Mesopotamian compositions with cosmic themes.⁴³ A tenth-century Hittite relief at Ain-Dara includes a mountain deity flanked by two genii in the form of bull-men (figure 19).⁴⁴ All three figures are in the atlas pose and are supporting a winged solar disk. In similar fashion, a ninth-century relief from the ancient city of Guzana depicts three genii supporting a winged disc.⁴⁵ The two genii on the outside are bull-men in the atlas pose. A Neo-Assyrian cylinder seal shows the god Šamaš in the winged disc, supported by bull-men in the atlas pose.⁴⁶



Figure 19. Relief at Tell Hallaf, Bull-men and mountain deity supporting a winged solar disk, 9th century BCE. Basalt, height 49 ¼ in. Aleppo Museum. Reprinted from James B. Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East in Pictures* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), 653.

⁴³Henri Frankfort, *Cylinder Seals: A Documentary Essay on the Art and Religion of the Ancient Near East* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1939), 201.

⁴⁴Amiet, *Art of the Ancient Near East* trans. John Shepley and Claude Choquet (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1980), pl. 101.

⁴⁵André Parrot, *The Arts of Assyria* (trans. Stuart Gilbert and James Emmons; New York: Golden Press, 1961), 83, 88.

⁴⁶Jeremy Black and Anthony Green, *Gods, Demons, and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), 103.

As in the examples above, most occurrences of the atlas pose in Mesopotamia involve not explicitly human figures, but genii in some composite form. The many contexts in which figures appear in the atlas pose in the Neo-Assyrian period may indicate that the pose was sometimes used merely as ornament and not always symbolically.⁴⁷ Regardless of whether or not the symbolism was intended, a person familiar with the symbolism might perceive cosmic associations in decorations that involved characters in the atlas pose.

The figures on Sennacherib's thrones in the reliefs previously described are anthropomorphic. In neither relief do the figures actually support the weight of the throne. Functionally then, the figures are merely ornamental. It is possible, considering that the figures do not appear on the dais, explicitly supporting the throne, and that the figures are humans and apparently not genii, that they are not iconographical and do not advance the ideological message that the earlier-described scenes do. It is plausible, though, that they communicate the same sense of subservience as the figures found actually supporting the throne. Calmeyer proposes that the figures in the atlas pose on the sides of Sennacherib's throne in the reliefs may be earlier monarchs who now support Sennacherib in his reign, the pose thus advancing a message of legitimization of the current monarch through his predecessors.⁴⁸

⁴⁷Root, *King and Kingship*, 148.

⁴⁸P. Calmeyer, review of Gerold Walser, *Völkerschaften*, *ZDMG* 123 (1973), 174-79; see Root, *Kings and Kingship*, 152n.

Throne-Room Reliefs

Irene Winter has argued that the reliefs in Neo-Assyrian buildings are narratives, telling the stories of specific events in time, and are able independent of written texts to tell their stories.⁴⁹ The strategy of depicting pictorial narratives of actual events in the reliefs is in contrast to the Egyptian practice of using an icon such as the culminating scene on the Narmer Palette (figure 20). Instead the victories of the Assyrian kings “are not summarized or symbolized as in Egypt, but shown in multifarious detail of their actuality, monotonous when viewed from a distance but full of varying incidents when lived through day after day.”⁵⁰ There are Mesopotamian examples of the practice of a culminating scene, such as on the Stele of Naram Sin.⁵¹ Assurnasirpal, Shalmanezar, and Sargon, however, used in their building projects depictions of specific persons and events to advance the ideology of the centrality of the king.

⁴⁹Irene J. Winter, “Royal Rhetoric and the Development of Historical Narrative in Neo-Assyrian Reliefs,” *Studies in Visual Communication* 7 (1981): 2-38; Winter, “The Program of the Throneroom of Assurnasipal II,” *Essays on Near Eastern Art and Archaeology in Honor of Charles Kyle Wilkinson* (1983), 15-31.

⁵⁰Henri Frankfort, *The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Near East*, 143.

⁵¹Winter, “Royal Rhetoric,” 13, 19; Of the scene on the Naram-Sin victory stele Pierre Amiet writes, “This grandiose scene thus unites all the episodes expressing the mythological conceptions of kingship – usually elaborated in a series of registers – into a single comprehensive vision” (Harper, *Royal City of Susa*, 108).



Figure 20. Narmer Palette. Narmer, the Egyptian king, delivers death blow to an enemy. Hierakonpolis. Slate. Height 64 cm. Cairo Museum. Reprinted from James Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East in Pictures* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), 296.

Winter points out the direct correspondence between image and text and thus the ability of images to communicate independent of the text by comparing Assurnasirpal's titulary in the Standard Inscription and the Ninurta Temple inscription to the images of Assurnasirpal in his throneroom.⁵² The titulary reads, "(I), Assurnasirpal, attentive prince, worshipper of the great gods, ferocious predator, conqueror of cities and the entire highlands...."⁵³ Winter identifies as corresponding to these titles the actual occurrence of Assurnasirpal himself seated on the throne and his depiction on the west wall in the throneroom (attentive prince), depictions of Assurnasirpal as maintaining divine order as he cares for the sacred tree (worshipper), depictions of Assurnasirpal hunting and killing

⁵²Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 21.

⁵³Translation from A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions 2* (Weisbaden: O. Harassowitz, 1976), paragraphs 652 and 539.

wild bulls and lions (predator) (figure 21), and depictions of Assurnasirpal as the warrior in battle scenes (conqueror).⁵⁴ Winter states, “The whole throneroom can then be read as a statement of the establishment and maintenance of the exterior state through military conquest and tribute, and the maintenance of the internal state through cultic observances, achieved through the person of the all-powerful king.”⁵⁵



Figure 21. Relief from Nimrud. Assurnasirpal hunting and killing lions from chariot. Height 39 in. Reprinted from Henri Frankfort, *The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1954), pl. 87.

The use of images to depict specific battle scenes to advance the ideology of the empire, according to Winter, is a strategy reflecting the heterogeneity of the Assyrian Empire:

(T)he growth in complexity of the historical narrative of the period notwithstanding, their proliferation at the expense of cultic and mythological images a lowering of the common denominator of what would be intelligible to a

⁵⁴Winter, “Royal Rhetoric,” 21; Winter points out the definition of kingship, “which straddles the secular and divine, is again well known in the ideology and artistic representations of subsequent periods,” and includes the work of M. C. Root on the Achaemenids as one such example.

⁵⁵Winter, “Royal Rhetoric,” 21.

heterogeneous audience, and that these developments were a direct response to the increased heterogeneity of the Empire as it developed.⁵⁶

The viewer/reader of the narrative depicted on the reliefs is less likely in the heterogeneous environment of the Assyrian Empire to possess the knowledge needed to understand an icon or the ability to read a text, but is likely to be able to interpret the battle scene and the message it communicates regarding the Assyrian king. The message communicated by these reliefs was the same as that of the thrones and throne daises, and because of the nature of the reliefs the message was understandable to a wider audience. This ability to communicate to such a broad audience was important in an imperial context where subjects of the empire and potential visitors of the throne-room would come to include peoples from a larger and more diverse periphery.

Daises

Two extant throne daises of Neo-Assyrian kings, Shalmanezar III and Sargon II, contributed to the ideological programs of their thronerooms. The images on the sides of the dais upon which the throne rests coupled with the physical presence of the king create a lifted throne so that people who approach the throne in person must look up at the seated king. Another effect is the impact of observing the king resting upon, or mastering whomever or whatever is represented by the images on the sides of the dais.

The throne dais of Shalmanezar III depicts people bringing tribute. The walls of the throneroom in Fort Shalmanezar also bear tribute scenes. Other scenes of Shalmanezar III receiving tribute are found in the Northwest Palace, and on the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser. An inscription on a bronze band from one of Shalmaneser's

⁵⁶Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 30.

palace gates accompanies a scene of tribute bearers, “The upper cities of the land of Amurru and the Western Sea I overwhelmed like mounds in the track of a storm. The tribute of the kings of the sea coast I received. Along the coast of the wide sea I marched in triumph.”⁵⁷ The scenes of tribute bearers thus symbolize the defeat of the peoples who are bringing tribute. Shalmanezar’s throne dais, as the base of the statue of Ur-Ningirsu, communicates a message of defeated peoples’ subjugation to the king as they are depicted below his feet and bringing offerings in an act of submission.

The throne dais of Sargon II at his palace in Khorsbad depicts battle scenes. Sargon is shown in his chariot and the chariot travels over the bodies of slain enemies. Sargon’s soldiers stack before him the heads of defeated enemies. On one side, the dais depicts a campaign in a mountainous region and on the other the landscape is flat, suggesting it is near the sea. The result is an east-west inclusion that illustrates the reaches of the empire from the Zagros to the Mediterranean and places the throne of the king exactly in the center.⁵⁸ This dais, as the statue of Manishtusu, communicates the message of the king victorious by using images of defeated people beneath the feet of the king.

Summary

These Mesopotamian precursors to the Achaemenid depictions of the king over subjects of the empire reveal continuity with the tradition as it appeared in Egyptian royal

⁵⁷Léonard W. King, *Bronze Reliefs from the Gates of Shalmanezar, King of Assyria B.C. 860-825* (London: Longman’s & Co., 1915), 23; Frankfort, *Art and Architecture*, 165.

⁵⁸Winter, “Royal Rhetoric,” 19, 20, 26.

art. Whether it was in the royal art of the Assyrians and Babylonians or the Egyptians that the Achaemenids found prototypes for their work, viewers familiar with these conventions would recognize in imperial art the message of power being advanced through these ideological depictions of the king over other people. Additionally, the widespread use, both chronologically and geographically, of images of the king seated or standing above subservient or vanquished peoples makes it likely that there would be within the realm of the Achaemenid Empire a general familiarity with the connotations of such depictions.

The Achaemenids

There are examples, beginning with Darius, of the Achaemenids incorporating into their royal art the motif of the king above subject peoples. Enemies and subjected people groups appear under the feet of the standing or striding king. People representing subject nations also appear in the atlas pose supporting the dais upon which the king sits or stands.

The Behistun Relief

The Behistun Relief depicts Darius with his foot on the chest of another man who lies on his back with both arms raised (figure 22). A text accompanies the scene on the relief and identifies the man as Gaumata. This text describes the events commemorated by the relief. This composition is the only extant example of a monument depicting an Achaemenid king in triumph over a specific historical enemy.⁵⁹ The relief should be

⁵⁹Root, *King and Kingship*, 182; Root does discuss the Moscow seal, which bears the name of Artaxerxes, and seal impressions from Persepolis similar to the Moscow seal. These seals depict a Persian man holding a spear and also holding a rope to lead bound

studied, therefore, as it illuminates the accompanying text and as it reflects the use of existing motifs in ancient Near Eastern imperial art.⁶⁰ The dearth of extant examples of reliefs that do depict specific historical events should be recognized as a conscious choice by the Achaemenids. Their iconography is more concerned with communicating an overall vision of kingship than with retelling historical events.

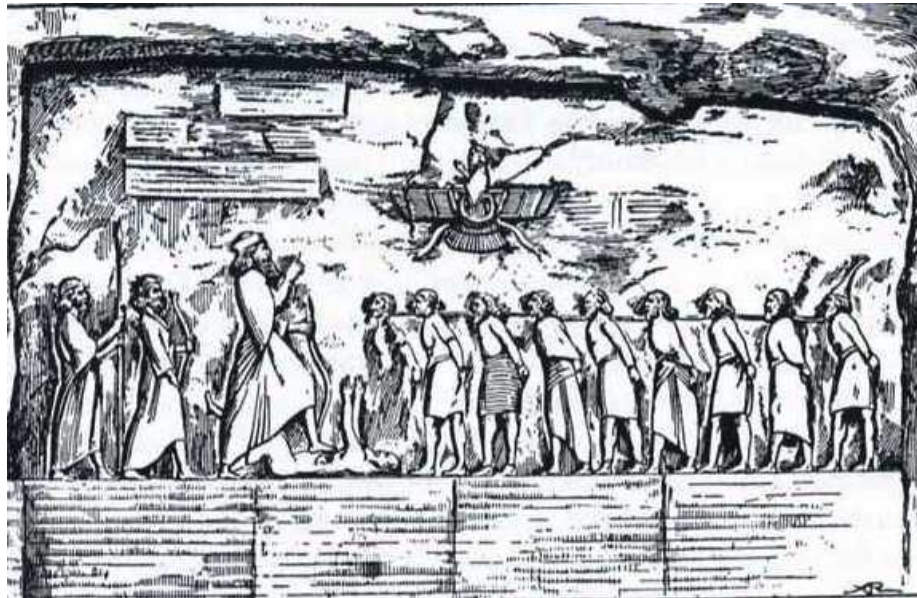


Figure 22. Relief and inscriptions at Behistun; Sixth century BCE, Darius and his weapon bearers, Ahuramazda, and captive rebels; Reprinted from Clément Huart, *Ancient Persia & Iranian Civilization* (New York: Barnes & Noble Publishers, 1927), 53, fig. 4.

In the Behistun Relief, Darius stands with his left foot on the chest of Gaumata, who according to the inscription and Herodotus, had identified himself as the heir to the throne upon the death of Cambyses. Darius has his right hand raised to face level with his palm turned out. Gaumata, lying on his back, has both arms extended up toward

captives. Whether the Persian character on the seals is actually the monarch is unknown, nor is it known if the depiction on the seals is of an actual event (Root, 182-184).

⁶⁰Root, *King and Kingship*, 184.

Darius. Nine additional figures appear standing before Darius. A rope binds the nine, going around each of their necks. Their hands are also bound behind their backs. A text appearing above each prisoner assigns a name and nationality and each prisoner's clothing and appearance corresponds to that nationality. The first eight of these captives are original to the relief and each represents a group who rebelled against Darius in his first year as king, while the ninth is a later addition, added after the Scythian rebellion in 519 BCE.⁶¹ The number nine associated with people groups, either in the relief's original form where the eight standing captives are foreigners and Gaumata is a Persian, or the extant form where there are nine standing figures representing foreign peoples, is consistent with the Egyptian motif of the nine bows.

Two weapon bearers stand behind Darius. Darius is the largest in scale of the human figures, towering over not only Gaumata who lays on the ground, but also the prisoners and the weapon bearers. The only character upon whom Darius is unable to look down is Ahuramazda, who appears in the sun disc above the prisoners and facing Darius.

The inscription is trilingual, written in Old Persian, Akkadian, and Elamite. The inscription itself is to the right, to the left, and below the relief, while descriptive texts, added later, appear above the characters in the relief. The first three columns of the inscription provide the legitimization of the claim of Darius to the throne and a narrative of how Darius came to power through his defeat of the usurper Gaumata. These columns also narrate the ensuing suppression of the rebellions of Darius's early reign as represented by the captives in the relief. The fourth column then provides a summary of

⁶¹Root, *Kings and Kingship*, 185.

the events, but does not present a precise or accurate chronology of the events it describes.⁶² The inscription does, though, present a series of historical events and the relief provides images to represent those events: “Darius with the help of his loyal allies, and by the favor of Ahuramazda, overthrew and killed the usurper Gautama and suppressed all the rebellions throughout the land in order to re-establish security in the empire.”⁶³ The relief and the inscription are capable of working together, therefore, to advance a political message, an ideology, about order and empire.

The Behistun monument is prominently located on a well-traveled roadway between Babylon and Hamadan. Darius meant it to be viewed by the passing travelers who were numerous and diverse. The relief is able to function independent of the text, not necessarily in presenting a detailed account on its own of the specific narrative of the text. The reliefs of the neo-Assyrian palaces are much more detailed in their pictorial accounts of the battles they represent. Both the Behistun Relief and the neo-Assyrian palace reliefs, however, are effective in communicating their respective messages about the monarchs they represent. In the case of the Behistun Relief, the message is that the Achaemenid rulers, aided by Ahuramazda, suppress any and all who rise up against them. Though the tri-lingual text is capable of reaching a diverse audience, travelers reflecting the heterogeneity of the Achaemenid Empire and viewing the monument would not need

⁶²Richard T. Hallock, “The ‘One Year’ of Darius I,” *JNES* 19 (1960): 36-39; Root, *Kings and Kingship*, 187.

⁶³Root, *King and Kingship*, 187; also see Hallack, “The situation is this: after the slaying of Gaumata, Darius is seeking to enforce a dubious claim to the throne;” Hallick, “The ‘One Year’ of Darius,” 37.

to read the text of the inscriptions or be familiar with the uprisings quelled by Darius in order to perceive a message of imperial power and control.

There are several similarities between the Behistun Relief and the relief of Anubanini at Sar-I-Pul. Each king has, with the aid of a deity, defeated enemies who are now depicted as captives. The geographical proximity of the two reliefs, their similar styles and messages make a strong case for the likelihood that the Behistun relief is modeled after the relief at Sar-I-Pul. The Behistun relief therefore provides an example of the Achaemenid tendency to use the art of previous empires as sources for motifs and themes in their own art.

The Darius Statue

Though discovered at Susa, this statue of Darius was made in Egypt and may have had its original place in an Egyptian temple (figure 23).⁶⁴ Carved into the front and rear of the statue base is the Egyptian unity symbol. The symbol is flanked by two anthropomorphic fecundity figures who bind the symbol with cords. Carved into the sides of the statue base so that it appears below the feet of the striding Darius is a version of the symbol of the nine bows. Twenty-four kneeling figures appear above fortress cartouches which represent twenty-four people groups in the Persian Empire. As in the Egyptian versions of the symbol, the figure above each cartouche wears a headdress or coif and clothing according to the people-group named on his corresponding cartouche.

⁶⁴Michael Roaf, "The Subject Peoples on the Base of the Statue of Darius," *Cahiers de la Délégation archéologique française en Iran* 4 (1974): 73; Baines, *Fecundity Figures*, suggests that there may have been several such statues bound for different locations within the empire, 343.



Figure 23. Base of the Darius statue, Susa, 5th century BCE. Granite. Statue is missing the head; with the head, statue stood approximately 3.2 m.; height of base is approximately .5 m. Iran Bastan Museum. Reprinted from Ilya Gershevitch ed., *The Cambridge History of Iran* (vol. 2 *The Median and Achaemenid Periods*; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), plate 26b.

A three-columned inscription on the base of the Darius statue brings to mind the inscription from the Ramses colossi at Luxor which was quoted earlier in the discussion of the symbol of the Nine Bows. The base of the Darius statue reads:

I give you all life and all strength, all stability, all health and all joy (col. 1).
 I give you all countries of the plains and all countries of the mountains united under your sandals (col. 2).
 I give you Upper and Lower Egypt in adoration before your beautiful face like that of Rê eternally (col. 3).⁶⁵

Column two may refer to figures on the front and back while column three may refer to the figures on the sides of the statue since the majority of the peoples represented on the left side of the base are from mountainous regions and the majority of the peoples

⁶⁵Translation in Roaf, "Subject Peoples," 75.

represented are from the plains.⁶⁶ The statue is in this manner similar to the throne dais of Sargon II which also represents the peoples of one region on one side and the peoples of another region on the other side.

The twenty-four peoples that appear on the throne base of the Darius statue also appear on the canal stelae.⁶⁷ Variations of this compilation of people groups appear as well on the royal tombs at Naqsh-e Rostam and Persepolis, doorjambs at the Central Building at Persepolis, the Hall of 100 Columns, the Apadana, the Palace of Artaxerxes I, and the Palace of Darius.⁶⁸ The peoples appear in reliefs where they support daises upon which the king sits or stands and in tribute processions where they bring gifts to the king.

While the statue appears to have been sculpted in Egypt, there are several differences in features on the statue that demonstrate an Achaemenid influence. Roaf lists four: 1) Egyptian works usually divide peoples between Asiatics and Africans while the Darius statue divides them between mountains and plains or east and west; 2) earlier Egyptian works usually place the fortress cartouches in front of the lower bodies of the figures so that only the upper bodies are visible above the cartouches, while the Darius statue places the figures above the cartouches so that the lower bodies and legs are visible; 3) earlier Egyptian works depict the figures with their arms bound behind them instead of upraised as they are on the Darius statue; 4) the figures on the Darius statue

⁶⁶Roaf, "Subject Peoples," 75.

⁶⁷Roaf, "Subject Peoples," 79; the canal stelae are monuments erected to commemorate the completion by Darius I of a canal connecting the Nile to the Red Sea.

⁶⁸Roaf, "Subject Peoples," 84-89.

appear less Egyptian than on earlier Egyptian works.⁶⁹ As with other examples of Achaemenid imperial art, the influences of more than one people group are present in a single work. The choices of which conventions to adopt, which to adapt and the adaptations made should reveal something of the message communicated by the work.

One significant difference between the Darius statue and Egyptian works is the position of the arms of the people above the cartouches; they are upraised instead of bound behind the back (figure 24). On the Darius statue, the torsos of the figures are in profile with both arms held to the front of the figure keeping the upper arm level with the shoulder and bent at the elbow so that the hands are at the approximate level of the top of the head. The palms are turned upward and on each hand the four fingers and the thumb are visible. The position of these characters is similar to the atlas pose, the difference being that both arms are in front of the body instead of one arm to the front and the other to the rear. In Egyptian art, when the palms are turned up, as on these figures, they are supporting or carrying an object.⁷⁰ The position of the arms and upturned palms are similar to the hieroglyphs “rejoice/lift up/extol” and for the symbols for the deities who support the heavens. One implication of this particular pose is that figures above the cartouches on the base appear to be in voluntary support of Darius, a motif that is not typical to Egyptian art, where the figures are depicted bound in defeat.⁷¹ In Egyptian art,

⁶⁹Roaf, “Subject Peoples,” 76.

⁷⁰Roaf, “Subject Peoples,” 77.

⁷¹Roaf, “Subject Peoples,” 78.

this motif of figures with upraised arms and upturned hands supporting something is usually ritual or cosmic in nature.⁷²



Figure 24. From the base of the Darius statue; Susa; 5th century BCE, a cartouche and human figure representing the Medes. Granite; height of image is approximately 25 cm. Reprinted from Michael Roaf, "Subject Peoples on the Base of the Statue of Darius," *Cahiers de la Délégation archéologique française en Iran* 4 (1974), 99.

The Darius statue is an example of Achaemenid royal art adapting Egyptian conventions in order to communicate a message about how he desires the viewers of the statue to perceive the relationship between king and subject peoples. In Egyptian art, the peoples who are underfoot or below the king are portrayed as hostile and defeated while here and in most Achaemenid art subjected peoples appear to be offering voluntary support. Root considers the changes in the poses of the figures to be part of the Achaemenid program of depicting the relationship between the Achaemenid king and the

⁷²Root, *Kings and Kingship*, 149; Roaf, "Subject Peoples," 77.

people as one of the subject peoples offering their voluntary support to the king and empire.⁷³ There also appears to be something of cosmic significance to the ordering of the empire in which all the subject peoples offer their willing support to the king and empire.

Doorjambs of the Eastern Doorway to the Central Building

At the center of the Persepolis Terrace is a building known as the Tripyon, or the Central Building.⁷⁴ This building dates to the reign of Darius, possibly the later years. Each of the building's three doorways has reliefs. The reliefs on the north and south doorways depict Darius walking out of the hall with a staff in his hand and with two attendants following him.

In the reliefs of the east doorway Darius holds a scepter as he sits on a throne (figure 25). Behind him stands another person, thought to be Xerxes, the crown prince, because his beard is similar to that of Darius.⁷⁵ Xerxes has a hand on the back of the throne of Darius, such physical contact also indicates that the figure is a depiction of the crown prince and not a court official. Below Darius and Xerxes are three tiers of men; nine on the first tier, ten on the second, and nine on the third, for a total of twenty-eight. The men are of a significantly smaller scale than Darius and Xerxes and they all have

⁷³Root, *King and Kingship*, 131.

⁷⁴Herzfeld named the building the "Tripylon" because of its three doorways, Ernst E. Herzfeld, *Iran in the Ancient Near East: Archaeological Studies Presented in the Lowell Lectures at Boston* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), 229-30; Root prefers to call the building the Central Building since its function is unknown, *King and Kingship*, 97.

⁷⁵Root, *King and Kingship*, 97.

their arms upraised in the atlas pose, giving the appearance of supporting the level above them. The version of the atlas pose that the men are in is similar to the figures on the base of the Darius statue in that the thumb and four fingers of each hand are visible. The men's arms overlap at the wrist. The men are also attired in the dress of different peoples. Above Darius and Xerxes is a decorated canopy and above the canopy is the deity Ahuramazda floating in a winged sun disk. The reliefs on the door jambs are of the same image and mirror one another. In the reliefs, Darius, Xerxes, Ahuramazda, and the twenty-eight men all face to the west and into the hall.



Figure 25. Darius and Xerxes in relief on a doorjamb of the Central Building, Persepolis; 6th-5th centuries BCE. Stone. In situ. Reprinted from Roman Ghirshman, *The Arts of Ancient Iran: From Its Origins to the Time of Alexander the Great* (trans. Stuart Gilbert and James Emmons; New York: Golden Press, 1964), 198, ill. 246.

The different clothing styles of the men on the three tiers beneath the throne indicate that they represent the various peoples of the empire. The positioning of the hands indicates that the men are to be understood as supporting the weight of the throne. The figures are using their thumbs and fingers to support the tiers above them, which produces an impression of effortless support. This act for them is not burdensome. This lack of an appearance of forced subjugation is characteristic of the art of the Achaemenids. Though the relief depicts them in three tiers, the men should be understood as standing on the same level.⁷⁶ One effect of stacking the rows of throne supporters on one another is that the viewer must look upward at the image of the king.

The reliefs on the doorjambs of the east doorway to the central building continue the motif of the Darius Statue, voluntary support of the twenty-eight people groups which represent the collective realm of the Persian Empire (figure 26). Not only does the viewer encounter an image of the king supported by these peoples, the viewer also must look up to the king who is seated upon a high and lifted throne. In addition, the doorjambs on the North and South doors of the throne hall of Xerxes-Artaxerxes are similar to that of Darius on the Central Building. The similarities between these later doorjamb reliefs and the earlier Central Building doorjambs are an example of the static nature of Achaemenid royal art.

⁷⁶Note for example images in Egyptian art where items on the surface of a table are portrayed in vertical tiers atop the table in order that all items on the table are visible to the viewer. The items are not perceived by the viewer as stacked atop one another, but as overlapping.



Figure 26. Relief in the Hall of a Hundred Columns, Persepolis; 5th century BCE, bearers of the throne of Artaxerxes, each adorned in clothes representing their country of origin. Stone. In situ. Reprinted from Roman Ghirshman, *The Arts of Ancient Iran: From Its Origins to the Time of Alexander the Great* (trans. Stuart Gilbert and James Emmons, New York: Golden Press, 1964), 201, ill. 249.

The Royal Tombs at Naqsh-e Rostam and Persepolis

There are six royal tombs at these sites. The tombs are for Darius I (521-486 BCE), Xerxes I (486-465 BCE), Artaxerxes I (465-425 BCE), Darius II (424-404 BCE), Artaxerxes II (404-359 BCE), and Artaxerxes III (359-338 BCE).⁷⁷ The reliefs on the tombs depict the king standing before a fire altar (figure 27). The king and altar are atop a dais that is supported by thirty figures. The figures represent the peoples of the empire and are dressed according to their representative groups. The tombs of Darius and Artaxerxes II name the countries of the people. Twenty-eight figures are in the atlas pose while two are standing on each side and hold up the bottom of the legs of the dais.

⁷⁷Roaf, "The Subject Peoples," 84-85.

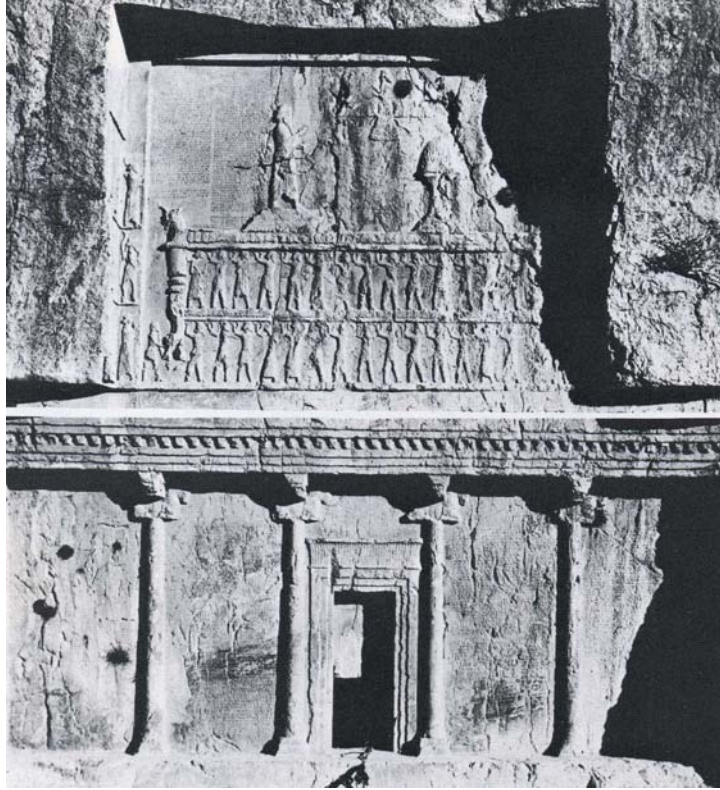


Figure 27. Relief; tomb of Darius at Naqsh-I-Rustam; 5th century BCE. Carved in rock face. Reprinted from Ilya Gershevitch ed., *Cambridge History of Iran* (vol. 2, *The Median and Achaemenian Periods*; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), plate 20.

Just as the doorjambs did, the royal tombs also typify the static nature of the imperial art of the Achaemenids. The image of the king elevated above and often by the subjects and enemies of the empire continues a motif present not only in the art of the Achaemenids, but in the earlier empires of Egypt and Mesopotamia as well. Whether the depiction is one of voluntary submission or violent subjugation, the image of the king above his subjects reflects the reality of imperial rule. In an empire, the ruler and the ruling class exercise power over the subjects of the empire. Power and resources are centralized with the result that much of the population, especially people living in the peripheral subject areas are marginalized. The institutions belonging to the imperial

hierarchy perpetuate the funneling of productivity and resources to the center and the quality of life for most of the population suffers.

The Book of Isaiah

The appearance of Yahweh's throne in Isa 6:1 shapes Isaiah's response to the image and reality of the exaltation of human rulers. Isaiah describes Yahweh's throne as *רם ונשא* "high and lifted up" (6:1).⁷⁸ Forms of these two terms and the term *גבה* appear throughout the book of Isaiah as part of the theme of the exaltation of Yahweh alone and the abasement of all others who exalt themselves. Isaiah's use of these words to describe Yahweh's throne corresponds to images from imperial art in which the monarch is enthroned upon or above subject peoples. When read with this iconography in mind, the image of Yahweh on his high and lofty throne in the vision of Isaiah 6 functions metonymically for the theme of Yahweh's exultation and the abasement of those who exalt themselves.⁷⁹

The two terms Isaiah uses to describe the throne of Yahweh appear together five times in the book of Isaiah (2:12; 6:1; 33:10; 52:13; and 57:15). Three times they describe Yahweh (6:1; 33:10; 57:15), one time they describe humans (2:12), and one time

⁷⁸Though the Masoretic punctuation separates these two descriptors from "throne" so that they modify *Adonai*, their position in the sentence makes it most likely that they modify "throne." John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1-39* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 178; H. G. M. Williamson, *The Book Called Isaiah: Deutero-Isaiah's Role in Composition and Redaction* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 38 n.27; see also the translation of Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12* (trans. Thomas H. Trapp; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 248.

⁷⁹The appearance throughout the book of Isaiah of the terms used to describe Yahweh's throne have been used in attempts by scholars to establish the priority of various sections in the book. See, for example Bernard Gosse, "Isaïe 52, 13 – 53,12 et Isaïe 6," *RB* 98 (1991): 537-43; Williamson, *The Book Called Isaiah*, 38-41.

the servant of Yahweh (52:13). These verses function along with the vision of an upraised throne to communicate the message that Yahweh exalts himself above those who exalt themselves. The terms רוֹם, נִשָּׂא, and גִּבָּה appear throughout the book of Isaiah as part of a theme of exaltation according to which humans who exalt themselves are brought down and Yahweh alone remains exalted.

In an imperial system, when the king is raised up, it is necessary that there are subjects below him. The book of Isaiah uses terms for high and raised in the context of empire and thus implies that there exist people who are brought down. Terms used for those who are held down include שָׁפַל, דָּכָא, and עָנִי. When humans exalt themselves, they bring down other humans. When Yahweh exalts himself, he brings down the proud who have exalted themselves.

Haughty Humans Abased and Yahweh Exalted

Isaiah 2. The reader of the book of Isaiah first encounters the theme of exaltation in chapter 2. This chapter includes both sub-themes of Yahweh's exaltation and humbled humans. After opening with the statement that Isaiah's vision concerns Judah and Jerusalem, the chapter moves to the political, social, and even cosmic implications of the rule of Yahweh. According to Isa 2:2, "in days to come" the mountain of Yahweh's house shall be "raised" (נִשָּׂא) above the hills. The mountain of Yahweh's house is the temple mount, Zion. Though physically shorter than surrounding mountains, because Zion was considered the temple mount, it was the mountain of the deity and the place where the heavens and the earth come into contact.⁸⁰ The Babylonian ziggurat and the

⁸⁰Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, 89.

Genesis 11 account of humankind's prideful attempt at reaching the heavens echo in Isaiah's declaration that it is the mountain of Yahweh's house that is raised above the hills.

In verse 2, Isaiah employs the verb נהרר, which usually describes the flowing of water downhill.⁸¹ This choice of words is a harbinger of the radical reversals of the coming days and Yahweh's new creation where the high and lofty are brought low (2:9, 11, 17) and the lone exalted one dwells with the maltreated and oppressed (57:15). Verses three and four then describe the peace of Yahweh's reign as the nations go up to Zion in order to receive the council of Yahweh. Instead of traveling to the temple mount in order to offer sacrifices or to participate in festivals, the peoples come to receive council from Yahweh. Rather than the presence of constant warfare and conquest as human empires came and went, the state of creation when Yahweh is exalted is one where justice is present and warfare is absent (2:4).

Later in the same chapter (verses 5-8), there is a plea for the house of Jacob to turn away from the deeds and ways of humans and to walk instead in Yahweh's way. The downfall of Israel has been to trust in treaties, riches, armies, and idols, all sources of pride and the workings of human hands. The state of things in Israel and Israel's punishment are tied to those of all of humankind (אדם) beginning in verse 9.⁸² Verses 9-11 declare that these sources of hubris as well as the proud themselves will be brought down: "And so people are humbled, and everyone is brought low..." (v. 9a); "The

⁸¹John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33* (rev. ed.; WBC 24; Nashville: Nelson Reference & Electronic, 2005), 47.

⁸²Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, 57.

haughty eyes of people shall be brought low, and the pride of everyone shall be humbled..." (v. 11a-b). This declaration concludes with the statement that, "Yahweh alone will be exalted on that day" (v. 11c).

Verse 9 contains the command, *אל תשא להם*, "Do not lift up for them." The verb *נשא* also means "to forgive," so this sentence is usually translated, "Do not forgive them." But Isaiah's choice here of the word *נשא*, is striking since throughout the rest of this passage it carries the meaning of "high" or "lifted."

Verses 12-18 continue the theme of what "that day" holds for the high and lifted. Forms of the terms *גבה*, *נשא*, and *רם* permeate these verses as they describe that which Yahweh has planned to bring down. Through verse 12, the reader knows only that the high and lifted will be brought down, but by reading verses 13-17, the reader learns that it is humans in their hubris who are to be brought down.⁸³ The result is that on "that day" Yahweh alone remains exalted (*נשא*) (2:17).

Images from nature and human works are symbols for pride in these verses. Trees and mountains, cities and ships are all objects of Yahweh's wrath on that day. All of the images in these verses represent height, including tall trees and mountains, city towers and walls, and the masts of ships.⁸⁴ Not only do the cedars and oaks represent building projects of humans, they can also represent humans themselves as in Ezekiel 31:3-18 where the empires of Egypt and Assyria are likened to a cedar of Lebanon that

⁸³Michael L. Barré, "A Rhetorical-Critical Study of Isaiah 2:12-17," *CBQ* 65 (2003): 533.

⁸⁴Barré, "A Rhetorical-Critical Study," 525-26.

has become proud because of its height.⁸⁵ Also, in Isa 10:33 Yahweh cuts down the high and lifted (רום גבה) for whom Isaiah uses the image of trees. The high (הרמים) mountains and lofty (הנשיות) hills in verse 14 are a return to the mountains and hills above which the mountain of Yahweh will be raised (נשא) in verse two. Fortified cities and towers are a symbol of human pride as in Gen 11.⁸⁶

The following three verses in the chapter (verses 18-21) return to the condemnation of idolatry and the responses of idolaters in the presence of Yahweh's judgment. The final verse, verse 22, emphasizes one last time the mortality of humans and grants them little esteem.

In summary, Isaiah 2 speaks of "days to come" and "that day" when humans in their hubris are brought down and only Yahweh remains exalted. The image of Yahweh the King seated on a throne supported by all those whom he has brought down is a fitting visual depiction of the events described in this chapter.

Isaiah 5:15-16. The text of Isaiah 5:15-16 also encapsulates the dual theme of abasement of the proud and exaltation of Yahweh. Just after a passage known as "The Song of the Vineyard" (5:1-7), Isa 5:8-24 contains a series of "woes" (הוי) concerning the people of Yahweh's vineyard, Israel and Judah (5:7). The "woes" (5:8, 11, 18, 20, 21, 22) address the activities of the elite and upper social classes ranging from amassing land in verses 8-10 to thwarting righteousness (צדקה) in verse 23. At the heart of Isa 5:8-24 is a statement regarding the result of these people's actions that is reminiscent of Isa 2:11.

⁸⁵Barré, "A Rhetorical-Critical Study," 533 n.30; Oswalt, *Isaiah 1-13*, 126.

⁸⁶Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, 117.

In Isaiah 5:16 Yahweh's exaltation is in parallel with Yahweh's holiness. Justice (משפט) and righteousness (צדקה) are also parallel in verse 16. Justice and righteousness are characteristics of the reign of the ideal king in 9:6 and 16:5. Zion is full of justice and righteousness when 33:5 is exalted. In 5:16 Yahweh is exalted "by justice" and proved holy "by righteousness." Yahweh's exaltation is founded upon his justice through which the arrogant are judged.⁸⁷ Yahweh brings justice and righteousness by bringing down the proud and those who exalt themselves (5:15), in this case the elite of Jerusalem are specified (5:14). Justice brings down people (אִישׁ, אָדָם), and exalts Yahweh. Not only is Yahweh exalted as he brings down the proud, but Yahweh also proves holy through this judgment.⁸⁸ Only the Holy One is worthy of exaltation (6:1-3) and in justice and righteousness he brings down those who would exalt themselves in Yahweh's stead.

Abasement of Human Hubris

Isaiah 14:13-15. Isaiah 14:3-4a introduces a מִשַּׁל, or "taunt poem," against the king of Babylon (14:4b-23). In a preview of the theme of the taunt, the taunt is "raised" concerning a king who will be brought low. This section is a part of the larger section, a מִשָּׁא or "pronouncement" concerning Babylon (13:1-14:32). The reign of this king is characterized by oppression, wrath, and persecution (14:4-6). After his attempts to ascend to the highest places (14:13-14), the king descends to the lowest of places, Sheol (14:15). The king attempts to gain the status of deities, but ends up among the deceased kings of nations (14:9). Earlier in the pronouncement against Babylon, Yahweh

⁸⁷John G. Gammie, *Holiness in Israel*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 85.

⁸⁸Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, 207.

proclaimed that he would **שפל** the insolence of tyrants (13:11c). The description in the **משל** of the Babylonian king's death and descent to Sheol are a fulfillment of that promise.

Robert O'Connell identifies a concentric structure to Isa 14:4b-23 for which verses 12-14 form the axis.⁸⁹ The effect of this structure is that the center or main axis of the taunt poem demonstrates the justice of the punishment of the tyrant ruler in that "his debasement corresponds to his arrogance."⁹⁰ The poem also expresses the reversal through allusions to myths containing the same theme of human characters who attempt to rise above their place in the order of creation. John Geyer calls Isa 14 "a pastiche of mythological themes," and identifies several mythological sources for this text.⁹¹ O'Connell identifies the narrative of the tower of Babel, another concentrically-structured work for which the axis involves a reversal when Yahweh "comes down" to see the tower and overthrows the humans who are attempting to usurp creation's order.⁹² Isaiah 14 also corresponds to the Epic of Gilgamesh where a human attempts to gain immortality, something that belongs only to deities.⁹³ The parallels in theme and some allusions in the Isaiah text to the Gilgamesh Epic "evoke recognition that it is YHWH who vanquishes

⁸⁹Robert H. O'Connell, "Isaiah XIV 4B-23: Ironical Reversal through Concentric Structure and Mythic Allusion," *VT* 38 (1988): 407-18.

⁹⁰O'Connell, *Isaiah XIV*, 409.

⁹¹John B. Geyer, *Mythology and Lament: Studies in the Oracles about the Nations* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 37.

⁹²O'Connell, "Isaiah XIV," 412-13.

⁹³Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, "Isa. 14:12, — $\circ \ll \ell \odot \rightarrow \neg \rightarrow \ell \neg \neg$ and Gilgamesh XI, 6," *JBL* 99 (1980): 173-84.

the pride of Mesopotamian king(s).”⁹⁴ One effect of the mythic allusions is that the poem becomes generic and stereotypical to Assyrian and Babylonian rulers rather than targeting a particular Babylonian king.⁹⁵

W. S. Prinsloo also identifies a concentric structure to Isaiah 14:12-15 of “humiliation, hubris, humiliation” with the message that Yahweh inverts the status of the prideful.⁹⁶ These verses proclaim through the fate of an anonymous Babylonian king that Yahweh brought about the end of the Babylonian empire, thus giving the reader hope for present and future times as well.⁹⁷

Chris Franke points out that terms used in Isa 11 to describe the reign of the messianic king are used in Isa 14 to describe Yahweh’s defeat of the king of Babylon.⁹⁸ She also notes parallels between the taunt of the King of Babylon in Isaiah 14 and the poem about the Virgin Daughter Babylon in Isaiah 47.⁹⁹ One notable parallel is the use

⁹⁴O’Connell, “Isaiah XIV,” 414, 415; Van Leeuwen notes the irony of Isaiah’s use of a Mesopotamian myth in this taunt of a Mesopotamian king, “Isaiah 14:12 and Gilgamesh,” 184.

⁹⁵O’Connell, “Isaiah XIV,” 417; Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, 266.

⁹⁶W. S. Prinsloo, “Isaiah 14 12-15 – Humiliation, Hubris, Humiliation,” *ZAW* 93 (1981), 432-38.

⁹⁷Prinsloo, “Isaiah 14 12-15,” 437. Geyer notes that “The application of the oracle can be changed simply by altering the name,” *Mythology and Lament*, 21; K. Nielsen calls “king of Babylon” a “code name for the world power,” *There is Hope for a Tree*, (*JSOTSup* 65; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1989), 160.

⁹⁸Chris A. Franke, “Reversals of Fortune in the Ancient Near East: A Study of the Babylon Oracles in the Book of Isaiah,” in *New Visions of Isaiah* (eds. Roy F. Melugin and Marvin A. Sweeney; *JSOTSup* 214; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 120-21; Franke also notes that God has taken over the role of the Messianic King in these verses, 121.

⁹⁹Franke, “Reversals of Fortune,” 110-116.

of throne images. In Isa 14:13, the King of Babylon desires to raise his throne above the stars of God while in Isa 47:13, the Virgin Daughter Babylon is dethroned and sits on the earth.¹⁰⁰

The attempt at raising himself above the “stars of God” (14:13b) and to the tops of the clouds (14:14a) goes beyond the exaltation kings receive in royal iconography. Though they place themselves above other humans and at times in larger scale, human kings do not place themselves above the level of deities or in a larger scale. In Isaiah’s eyes, any human who exalts himself above other humans has assumed a place only appropriate for Yahweh and attempted to “make myself like the Most High” (14:14c).

Achaemenid kings, even in death, maintained their position above the realm of the people. Cyrus’s tomb was atop a ziggurat-like structure and the tombs of Darius and his successors were carved high into the cliffs at Persepolis. In the poetic text of Isaiah 14, not only does the king lose his place above the plane of humankind, he even loses his place in the grave (14:19). Though this poem is directed against the Babylonian king, the Persian-Era reader would have recognized the contrast between the attempts of kings at their deaths to remain exalted and the descent into the depths of Sheol by the tyrant ruler.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰Franke, “Reversals of Fortune,” 111; Franke also notes parallels between Isaiah’s mention of thrones in these verses and thrones in the Ugaritic myth in which El descends from his throne to mourn the death of Baal, 112.

¹⁰¹See Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, 266; the poem is not “specifically tailored for the king of Babylon” but “is a masterful poem to be sung over a tyrant who has fallen victim to his own ambition and pride.”

Isaiah 26:5-6. Those whom Yahweh brings low in these verses are the ones dwelling (ישב) in the heights (מרום) and the lofty (נשגה) city. The image of a raised and fortified city was a common one throughout the ancient Near East. For the reader in the context of the Achaemenid Empire, the royal city of Persepolis on its raised platform and the images of the Achaemenid kings on their raised thrones correspond especially well with this description. The reader of Isaiah has encountered the words ישב and רום in the description of Yahweh on his throne in 6:1. As in chapters 2 and 14, humans do not belong in places of exaltation. The word “heights” was used in 24:4, 18, 21 to refer to the heavens, but here in 26:5, “heights” is a reference to human pride and as in chapter 14 is a contrast to that which is brought down.¹⁰²

The language regarding the fate of the city and its occupants in 26:5 is similar to 25:12.¹⁰³ In the prior verse, the pride of the Moabites is brought down (25:11). Though the reader of Isaiah knows that it is Yahweh who brings down the high and lofty, in a continuing pattern of reversal, Isaiah in 26:6 declares it is the poor and needy ones who tread over the proud.¹⁰⁴

The Exaltation of Yahweh

Isaiah 33:5, 10. In verse 5, Yahweh is exalted (נשגב) and dwelling on high (מרום) (שבן). As in 5:16, justice and righteousness are present when Yahweh is exalted. To say

¹⁰²Wildberger, *Isaiah 13-27*, 548; Peter D. Miscall, *Isaiah* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 69.

¹⁰³Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah 1-39*, 473.

¹⁰⁴Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 13-27* (trans. Thomas H. Trapp; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 548.

that Isaiah dwells in the heights is to say that Yahweh dwells in heaven (66:1), on Zion (31:5, 9), and with the oppressed (57:15).¹⁰⁵

In verse 10, Yahweh stands (קום) and then exalts (רום) and lifts (נשא) himself.

The following verses describe (11-16) Yahweh's actions of justice and righteousness and their results. Verse 16 promises that the righteous will live (שכן) in the heights (מרום).

Yahweh is exalted (נשגב) in 2:11, 17 and 33:5 while in 33:17 the righteous find refuge (משגב). Verses 17-22 are enveloped with mention of Yahweh the king and describe the goodness of his reign.

Isaiah 57:15. This verse proclaims that Yahweh, who dwells in the high and holy place, also dwells with the crushed and lowly. Just as Yahweh crushes and brings down the proud and arrogant so that he remains the only exalted one, he also makes his dwelling place among those whom the powerful had brought down.

Yahweh's Servant Exalted

Isaiah 52:13. This verse continues the theme of radical reversal. The servant of Yahweh is high and lifted indeed very "high," (ירום ונשא וגבה מאד). This verse is the only verse where all three of these terms appear together in the book of Isaiah. In an imperial system and in the book of Isaiah, it is only the king who attains the position of being high and lifted. Here though, the servant is at the same level of the throne of God.¹⁰⁶ In the scene as it is envisioned, the servant has the physical status of a king.

¹⁰⁵Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 28-39* (trans. Thomas H. Trapp; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 273-74.

¹⁰⁶Gosse, "Isaïe 52, 13 – 53,12 et Isaïe 6," 539.

Of the five pairings of the words **רום** and **נשא**, three refer to Yahweh. By speaking of “my servant,” Yahweh maintains the role of king;¹⁰⁷ he has not relinquished his status. At the same time, however, the radical reversal that takes place in Yahweh’s reign brings down all who have exalted themselves. As those who have exalted themselves are abased, it appears that the formerly oppressed and maltreated are exalted. At another place in the book, while Yahweh remains exalted, Yahweh declares that his dwelling place is not only high and holy, but also with the oppressed (57:15).

Yahweh’s Throne

Isaiah 37:16. This reference to Yahweh enthroned above the cherubim occurs in a prayer in which Hezekiah asks Yahweh to judge Sennacherib and deliver Judah (Isa 37:14-20). In the narrative of Sennacherib’s siege of Jerusalem (Isa 36:1-37:38; cf. 2 Kgs 18:13-19:37), Hezekiah goes to the “house of Yahweh,” spreads a letter from the Assyrians before Yahweh and prays (37:14-20). In the prayer, Hezekiah addresses Yahweh with the epithet, “Yahweh of Hosts enthroned on the cherubim” (37:16). The epithet is one that has roots in the ark tradition (2 Sam 6:2; 1 Chr 13:6).

The prayer fits the development of the theme of Yahweh’s bringing down those who would exalt themselves as not only are Sennacherib and his armies defeated, but Sennacherib himself suffers murder at the hands of his sons. This is the only reference to Yahweh’s cherub throne in the book of Isaiah. There are several examples from Egypt

¹⁰⁷Kennedy, “Consider the Source: A Reading of the Servant’s Identity and Task in Isaiah 42:1-9,” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the SBL, Atlanta: Georgia, November 24, 2003); Kennedy notes the function of the terms **אֲדֹנָי** and **מֶלֶךְ** in their binary relationship to the term **עַבְד**. For example, Isaiah refers to Yahweh in 6:1 as **אֲדֹנָי** and **הַמֶּלֶךְ**; Yahweh refers to Isaiah as **עַבְדִּי** in 20:3.

and the Levant of kings seated on thrones for which a cherub or sphinx is part of the seat and sometimes the back of the throne. In Isaiah the verb ישב used with the cherubim emphasizes that Yahweh is king. This identification of Yahweh as king also occurs in 6:1 and 33:22.

The cherubim are winged composite beings.¹⁰⁸ Wings often symbolize protection and in royal art, wings around or above the monarch can symbolize the protection of the monarch. Wings also symbolize the heavens. A being like the cherub that combines characteristics of ground-dwelling creatures such as humans and lions with the wings of flying creatures may be a sort of visual merism of creation, i.e., the verbal merism “heaven and earth.” To place this creature beneath a king potentially symbolizes the king’s all-encompassing reign. Yahweh is indeed, “God of all the kingdoms of the earth” (37:16). If the wings of the cherubim are symbolic of the heavens, the cherubim also have cosmic connotations. As figures supporting a throne in the atlas pose suggest something of the cosmic order, so might a composite winged being.

The description of Yahweh’s throne as “upraised” in the sense of being supported by representatives of the kingdoms and enemies of the empire and the cherub throne need not be mutually exclusive. To envision Yahweh in the book of Isaiah on an upraised throne in chapter 6 and on the cherub throne in chapter 37 is consistent with at least one known throne. A relief at Maltaya depicts a procession of deities in which the second deity, a goddess, sits upon a throne that is borne by a lion and has on the sides of its dais griffins or sphinxes and on its side panel a scorpion man and human figure in the atlas

¹⁰⁸ For fuller discussion on the appearance and functions of the cherubim see Freedman and O’Connor “ברוב,” *TDOT* 7:307-19; T. N. D. Mettinger, “Cherubim,” *DDD* 189-92.

pose, supporting the throne (see figure 28). While the example of the throne at Maltaya provides only one example that uses both anthropomorphic and composite figures in support of a throne, the point here is that the two images can be used together and would not necessarily create a conflict in the mind of an ancient reader. The anthropomorphic figures supporting the throne of the goddess are in the atlas pose. The composite creatures in the base of the throne have in common with figures in the atlas pose the sense that there is something about the reign of the one seated on the throne that has cosmic implications. The cosmos is ordered when this figure is in power.



Figure 28. Relief at Maltaya; 7th century BCE, procession of deities with the Assyrian king at each end. Carved in rock face. Reprinted from Hugo Gressmann, *Altorientalische Bilder zum Alten Testament* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1927), 335.

Isaiah 40:22-23. In these verses, Yahweh sits or is enthroned above the circle of the earth and humbles princes and rulers. Yahweh's size and height give the inhabitants of the earth the appearance of grasshoppers. Thus continues the theme that Yahweh alone is exalted and all others who would claim such a position are brought low.

Isaiah 66:1. Here Yahweh proclaims his sovereignty over all creation. The heavens and earth make up the throne and footstool of this king. All that is has been brought under the rule of the divine king in this image of absolute sovereignty.

Summary

Images in ancient Near Eastern imperial art that depict a king seated on a throne supported by defeated enemies or willing subjects communicate a vision about how the king desires himself to be viewed in relation to everyone around him. Whether the supporters of a king's upraised throne do so willingly or under compulsion, the reality is that for the king to be raised up, others must be held low. Subjects of an empire experience oppression through mandatory service and financial obligation. The people most affected are typically those already belonging to the lower socio-economic strata.

When Isaiah describes Yahweh's throne as high and lifted, it is a plausible suggestion that an ancient reader living in an imperial context would associate Yahweh's throne with the image of a king seated on a throne supported by subjects. Throughout the book of Isaiah, this image of Yahweh exalted above others is reinforced by the theme of the abasement of humans who have exalted themselves above others. The supporters of Yahweh's throne are not the typical subjects of the empire nor are they the peoples of conquered nations. Instead, those who hold Yahweh's throne aloft are the arrogant and oppressive rulers who have for so long oppressed and mistreated the people over whom they ruled. The oppressed and afflicted, i.e. those who are faithful to Yahweh, can expect to be exalted as well (Isa 52:13).

CHAPTER FOUR

The Seraphim

Introduction

The word שרפים (sg. שרף) in Isaiah 6 holds the potential for even more possibilities for the imagination than the word “throne.” When the reader of Isaiah 6 encounters the word “throne,” a chair of some sort is imagined. When the descriptors “high and lifted” modify the throne, versions of a particular style of throne from the imperial art of ancient Egypt and the ancient Near East fit that description. The word “seraph,” or “flaming one,” is compatible with a much wider array of visual forms than the word “throne,” even when one takes into consideration the existence many different styles of thrones.¹ Reflection on the visual form of the seraphim is important since the form of the seraphim as envisioned by the reader of Isaiah contributes to the function of the seraphim in Isaiah 6 and throughout the entire book of Isaiah.

The Form of the Seraphim

Throughout the history of reading and interpreting of the book of Isaiah, the form of the seraphim in Isaiah 6 has been elusive. The Septuagint, for example, transliterates שרפים to σεραφιν in Isa 6:2, 6. In 14:29, the translation for שרף מעופף to σφεις πετομενοι, “flying serpents.” The translation of the phrase שרף מעופף ו אפעה in 30:6 is ασπιδες και

¹There is the possibility that the Hebrew word שרף was for ancient readers a precise term with a definite reference, but today’s readers cannot be certain if there was such a referent and what that referent might have been, thus the ambiguity regarding the form of the seraphim in Isaiah 6.

εκονα απιδων πετομενων, “cobras and brood of flying cobras.” The different choices for translating or transliterating this one word are demonstration that the earliest of translators of the Hebrew text did not simply equate the form of the seraphim in Isaiah 6 with those of chapters 14 and 30. This chapter turns now to some more recent opinions regarding the form of the seraphim.

E. Lacheman argues that the seraphim are merely the sculpted cherubim that stood over the ark in the *debir* of the temple.² Sunlight reflecting off the gold surface of the cherubim gave the impression of their being aflame and the prophet imagined the glaring statues to be burning and moving about. The seraphim, according to Lacheman, are not distinguishable from the cherubim; they are not separate beings that attend to Yahweh on his throne. Rather, the seraphim are merely the cherubim as the “hosts” of Yahweh.³ Lacheman’s opinion is a demythologization of the seraphim to the point that they are a mere illusion and a figment of the prophet’s imagination.

There are also zoological explanations meant to shed light on the winged seraphim. Philippe Provençal argues that the Hebrew word “seraph” as it occurs in Numbers 21 simply means cobra.⁴ He explains the winged seraph by turning to the natural world. The wings of the seraph correspond to those of the uraeus in Egyptian art and are representations of their outstretched hoods, and the significance of the word

²E. Lacheman, “The Seraphim of Isaiah 6,” *JQR* 59 (1968): 71-72.

³Lacheman, “Seraphim,” 72.

⁴Philippe Provençal, “Regarding the Noun שרף in the Hebrew Bible,” *JSOT* 29 (2005): 371-79.

“burning” is related to the venom that the cobra spits in the face of an antagonist.⁵

Provençal suggests that ancient texts support his zoological explanation for the seraphim.

Herodotus, for example, wrote of flying serpents in the Negev (iii, 109).⁶

Karen Joines argues that the seraphim of Isaiah 6 are a version of the winged uraeus in Egyptian royal art.⁷ In support of his argument, Joines examines the appearances of the word שרף in the Hebrew Bible, and compares it to winged serpents in Egyptian royal art and texts. Textual and pictorial data make plausible the argument that the seraphim of Isaiah are similar in form to the winged uraei in ancient Egyptian art. Othmar Keel in his study of royal seals with an eighth-century Levantine provenance also argues for the Egyptian uraeus as the source for the form of the seraphim.⁸

J. De Savignac considers the form of the seraphim as well as their symbolism of both the destructive power and kindness communicated by the uraei in Egyptian art to reflect similar symbolism in their association with Yahweh.⁹ This interpretation corresponds to the activities of the uraei in ancient Egyptian myth and art. In addition to considering the Egyptian uraeus as significant for an interpretation of the seraphim, John Day looks to Canaanite myth and identifies the seraphim with Baal’s seven thunders and

⁵Provençal, “Regarding the Noun שרף,” 375-76.

⁶D. J. Wiseman, “Flying Serpents?” *Tyndale Bulletin* 23 (1972): 108-110.

⁷Karen R. Joines, “Winged Serpents in Isaiah’s Inaugural Vision,” *JBL* 86 (1967): 410-15; Joines, *Serpent Symbolism in the Old Testament: A Linguistic, Archaeological, and Literary Study* (Haddonfield, N.J.: Haddonfield House, 1974), 42-60.

⁸Othmar Keel, Othmar Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen und Siegelkunst: Eine neue Deutung der Majestätsschilderungen in Jes 6, Ez 1 und 10 und Sach 4* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1977).

⁹J. De Savignac, “Les ‘Seraphim,’” *VT* 22 (1972), 320-25.

lightnings.¹⁰ Day separates the form of the seraphim, which he agrees is that of the winged uraei, and the function of the seraphim, which he considers to be akin to that of Baal's lightning servants, or personifications of Baal's lightning.¹¹ Not only the term "seraph," which means "burning one," but also the serpentine body contribute to the likeness between the seraphim of Yahweh and the lightnings of Baal.¹² Day goes on to compare the cherubim, upon which Yahweh is seated, to the sphinx of Egyptian origin and the thunders upon which Baal rides.¹³

Opinions regarding the visual form of the seraphim vary in their emphases on naturalistic or zoological perspectives and mythological perspectives. Should the seraph be imagined primarily as associated with the natural world, i.e., as a cobra with its hood spread and poised to spit burning venom at the eyes of an antagonist? Or is the seraph a mythical reptilian creature: some lesser deity, fiery and composite in form? The noun שרף occurs four times in the book of Isaiah (6:2, 6; 14:29 and 30:6) and elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible in Num 21:6, 8 and Deut 8:15. Considering the cumulative descriptions of these texts suggests that seraphim in the Hebrew Bible are fiery serpent-like composite beings, having wings, feet,¹⁴ hands, faces, and the ability to speak. The fact that the seraphim in Isaiah's vision appear "above" Yahweh is also favorable to the serpent form

¹⁰John Day, "Echoes of Baal's Seven Thunders and Lightnings in Psalm XXIX and Habakkuk III 9 and the Identity of the Seraphim in Isaiah VI," *VT* 29 (1979): 143-51.

¹¹Day, "Echoes," 149-50.

¹²Day, "Echoes," 150.

¹³Day, "Echoes," 150.

¹⁴While interpreters often point out the euphemism of "feet" for genitalia, I prefer the appearance of "face" and "feet" in 6:2 to be a merism; see Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen*, 76.

in that anthropomorphic figures do not appear above deities in ancient art, nor do they appear above kings, unless the figures above the kings are depictions of deities.¹⁵

Keeping the array of opinions regarding the appearance of the seraphim in mind, this chapter will consider figures appearing in ancient Egypt, the Levant, Mesopotamia, and Persia and how those figures may contribute to understanding the form and function of the seraphim in Isaiah 6. The potential for a variety of plausible forms visualized by an ancient reader proves to be particularly relevant with the seraphim and imperial art. The winged serpent is quite common in ancient Egyptian royal art and makes its way into the art of the Levant, but with some apparent shifts in meaning. Winged serpents are much less frequent in Mesopotamian and Persian royal art and appear only to be present where there is an Egyptian contribution. Someone who reads the book of Isaiah in the historical and social context of the Achaemenid Empire may have envisioned the seraphim as winged uraei or perhaps some other kind of fiery being.

Egypt: The Uraeus and Its Origins

Content and style make the art of ancient Egypt recognizable. The wide array of objects available for study includes paintings, reliefs, statues, and jewelry. These objects hold in common symbols¹⁶ that are aesthetically pleasing to view and also communicate something of the beliefs of the people who commissioned, crafted, and viewed them. One of the enduring figures in ancient Egyptian art is that of the uraeus, or cobra. Extant

¹⁵Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen*, 54.

¹⁶Symbols and symbol groups in ancient Egyptian art that originate in pictographic writing and representational images in ancient Egyptian art are close to their related hieroglyphs in meaning; Schäfer, *Principles of Egyptian Art*, 154-55; Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art*, 9-10.

examples of the uraeus appear in ancient Egyptian art from as early as c. 3200 BCE and continue up to 30 BCE.¹⁷

The uraeus, or *iaret*, is a cobra. The word reached its Latinized form through the Greek form *ouraios*. The hieroglyph for the uraeus, *iaret*, is a rearing cobra and its translation is, “the Risen One.”¹⁸ In her study of the uraeus in pre-dynastic and early dynastic Egypt, Sally B. Johnson organizes representations of the uraeus into eight categories: with animal or deity symbols, in divine and royal names, on royal or divine headdress in relief, on standard, as architectural element, on royal clothing, sculpture, and on royal headdress in sculpture.¹⁹ Johnson’s study reflects the variety of styles and contexts in which the uraeus appeared in the Old Kingdom and continued to appear throughout the history of ancient Egypt.

Wadjet: Goddess and King

The goddess Wadjet²⁰ was local to the Delta marshes and was the goddess represented by the uraeus worn on the crowns of the pharaohs. Wadjet’s cult center was at the city of Per-Wadjet, later known as Buto.²¹ Wadjet was the goddess of lower Egypt

¹⁷Sally B. Johnson, *The Cobra Goddess of Ancient Egypt: Predynastic, Early Dynastic, and Old Kingdom Periods* (New York: Kegan Paul International, 1990), 190.

¹⁸See Gardiner’s *Egyptian Grammar*, “I 12 and I 13;” Johnson, *Cobra Goddess*, 5; Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art*, 109.

¹⁹Johnson, *Cobra Goddess*, 19-28.

²⁰Also known as Udjat, Edjo, or by her Greek name, Buto.

²¹D. B. Redford, “Notes on the History of Ancient Buto,” *BES* 5 (1983): 67-94.

and she appeared along with Nekhbet, the goddess of Upper Egypt, as symbols of unified Egypt.

One depiction of these two goddesses, dating back to a first dynasty tablet, the Nagada Tablet, portrays them as the cobra and the vulture, perched on top of two baskets accompanying the *nbty* name of the Pharaoh (see figure 29).²² The *nebt* name, second of the five formal titles of the Pharaoh, was “He of the two Ladies.”²³ The two goddesses were known as *nebt*, meaning the Two Ladies or Mistresses²⁴ and it is the basket, or *nebet* sign, meaning “lord/lady” or “master/mistress,” that visually indicates the divine nature of the vulture and serpent.²⁵



Figure 29. Nekhbet and Wadjet atop baskets. Relief, Shrine of Sesostri I, Karnak, 12th Dynasty. Reprinted from Richard H. Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art: A Hieroglyphic Guide to Ancient Egyptian Painting and Sculpture* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1992), 84.

²²Johnson, *Cobra Goddess*, 20.

²³Lesko, *Great Goddesses*, 64.

²⁴Barbara S. Lesko, *The Great Goddesses of Egypt* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 72; Johnson, *Cobra Goddess*, 5.

²⁵Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art*, 199.

An inscription from the stele of Tanutamun (25th Dynasty) reflects the importance of these two goddesses in relation to the legitimacy of the Pharaoh's reign:

In the year one of his coronation as king – his majesty saw a dream by night: two serpents, one upon his right, the other upon his left. Then his majesty awoke and found them not. His majesty said: "Wherefore [has] this [come] to me?" Then they answered him, saying: "Thine is the Southland; take for thyself (also) the Northland. The 'Two Goddesses' shine upon thy brow, the land is given to thee, in its length and its breadth. [No] other divides it with thee."²⁶

One detail to note in this inscription is the potential variety in the symbolism of the uraeus in that here "two serpents" represent Wadjet and Nekhbet instead of a cobra representing Wadjet and a vulture representing Nekhbet.

While the text from the stele of Tanutamun refers to "two serpents," the Two Goddesses, Wadjet and Nekhbet, on the front of the crowns of the Pharaohs are often a uraeus and a vulture (figure 30). Whether two uraei or a uraeus and a vulture, the Two Goddesses on the forehead of the pharaoh symbolize the Pharaoh's control over all of Egypt, the authority granted him by the goddesses, and the power that the goddesses infused into the ruling Pharaoh.

The two goddesses are at times portrayed in the form of two uraei, one example being the appearance of the two uraei with the solar disk in figure 31. Note that one of the uraei wears the crown of upper Egypt and the other wears the crown of lower Egypt.

²⁶J. H. Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt* 5 vols. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 4:460.



Figure 30 Mummy-mask, King Tutankhamun, 28th Dynasty. Tomb in Valley of the Kings, Thebes. Gold, glass, lapis lazuli, obsidian, carnelian, quartz, feldspar, faience, h. 54 cm. Cairo Museum. Reprinted from Vagn Poulsen, *Egyptian Art* (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society Ltd., 1968), 148.

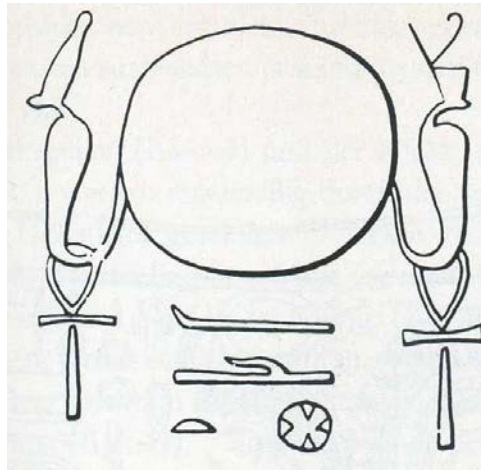


Figure 31. A solar disk flanked by twin uraei. Reprinted from Othmar Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen und Siegelkunst* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1977), 89.

The crown worn by the king was not merely an image of the cobra goddess, but personified her and bore her power.²⁷ When enthroned, the new Pharaoh would address his crown:

“O Red Crown, O Inu, O Great One, O Magician, O Fiery Snake!
Let there be terror of me like the terror of thee.
Let there be fear of me like the fear of thee.
Let there be awe of me like the awe of thee.
Let me rule, a leader of the living.
Let me be powerful, a leader of spirits.”²⁸

In addition to granting authority to the Pharaoh, the goddess Wadjet also exhibited destructive powers either in defense of the Pharaoh or leading him in battle. Several texts describe the serpent-crest worn by the Pharaoh as active in striking down the enemies of Egypt. In one inscription, Amon-Re says to Ramses III (20th Dynasty), “Dreadful is thy serpent-crest among them; the war-mace in thy right hand.”²⁹ In another inscription, Amon-Re says to Sheshonk (22nd Dynasty), “Thy war-mace it struck down thy foes, the Asiatics of distant countries; thy serpent-crest was mighty among them.”³⁰ A painting depicts Ramses II (20th Dynasty) with his bow drawn and striding over enemies (figure 32). In the painting, Nekhbet flies above Ramses III with her wings in a protective posture, while the uraeus on the front of his crown is visible. The defeated enemies, lying on the ground beneath the feet of Ramses III, are a version of the symbol

²⁷Patricia Springborg, *Royal Persons: Patriarchal Monarchy and the Feminine Principle* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 75.

²⁸H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 108.

²⁹Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, 4:77.

³⁰Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, 4:357.

of the Nine Bows. Both of the goddesses, Wadjet and Nekhbet, are present to protect the Egyptian king, destroy his enemies, and assure his victory.

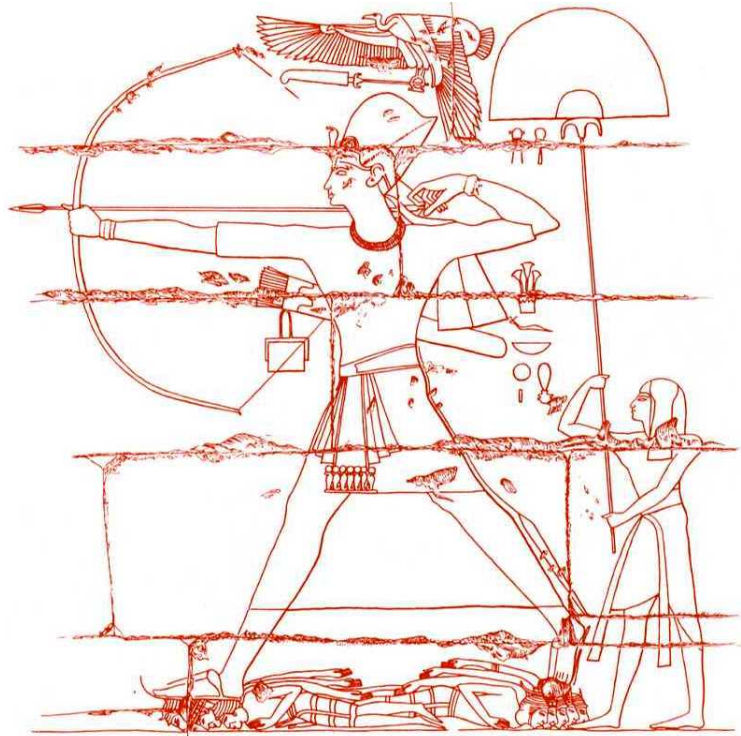


Figure 32. Ramses III, 20th Dynasty, Medinet Habu, Thebes. Reprinted from Richard H. Wilkinson, *Symbol & Magic in Egyptian Art* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1994), 55 ill. 33.

Johnson notes that representations of Wadjet “are always closely associated with Horus, the falcon, or king.”³¹ The order maintained by the Pharaoh through the power of Wadjet extended beyond Egypt to include the entire cosmos, but without her he was powerless.³² Associated with the king, the goddess Wadjet as the uraeus represented both the legitimacy of the king through divine approval and the protection that the deities provided for the king.

³¹Johnson, *Cobra Goddess*, 19.

³²Lesko, *Great Goddesses*, 73.

The Eye of Atum: The Sun and the King

The uraeus plays an important role in the creation myth told on the Bremner-Rhind Papyrus, a fourth-century BCE text.³³ Atum creates Shu and Tefnut who are “air” and “moisture” respectively. When Shu and Tefnut become separated from Atum, Atum sends out his eye to find and return them. Upon its return, Atum’s eye is enraged to find that Atum has replaced it with a “brighter one” who is the sun. The eye changes itself to a cobra, raised and with its hood expanded. Atum then takes the first Eye and puts it on his forehead, “so I promoted it to the front of my face, so that it could rule the whole world.”³⁴ The cobra or eye was therefore thought of as an impassioned goddess. Also just as in Egypt the burning sun is a potentially destructive force so is Atum’s eye in its anger. The sun’s association with Wadjet in the form of a uraeus worn on the foreheads of the pharaohs was symbolic of their powers. Through its role in the creation myth, the cobra or eye, with the feminine *t* ending in hieroglyphic texts, became the personification of female power. This sign represented the power protecting the gods from the encroachment of chaos and kings from foreign enemies.³⁵ Atum’s appeasement or pacification of the angry cobra that had been his eye was the symbol of the establishment of the monarchy and the uraeus became symbolic of legitimate kingship and unity.³⁶

³³Johnson, *Cobra Goddess*, 6.

³⁴R. O. Faulkner, *The Papyrus Bremner Rhind Part I* (Brussels: Édition de la Fondation égyptologique Reine Élisabeth, 1933), 22.

³⁵Johnson, *Cobra Goddess*, 6.

³⁶Johnson, *Cobra Goddess*, 6.

The Eye of Horus: Fiery Destruction

In a myth from the temple of Horus at Edfu, Horus battles Seth after taking the form of a winged disk.³⁷ As the winged sun disk, Horus places himself between the two uraeus-goddesses, Nekhbet and Uto, who terrify Seth's minions. Horus is victorious over his foes and the end of the myth associates the king with Horus and assures the king that as Horus's enemies were slain, so will be the king's enemies. The myth also states that the winged sun disk will be made the face of the king. The uraeus-flanked winged sun disk is a popular image in ancient Egyptian art (figure 33) and given the context of this myth, this version of the disk represents the assurance that the king has of victory over his enemies because of the protection the deities offer him. Elsewhere, Horus says to the serpent, "Open thy mouth, distend thy jaws, belch forth thy fire against the enemies of my father, burn up their bodies, and consume their souls by the fire which issueth forth from thy mouth and by the flames which are in thy body."³⁸ The uraeus represents destructive powers aimed at the enemies of the solar deity and therefore the king.

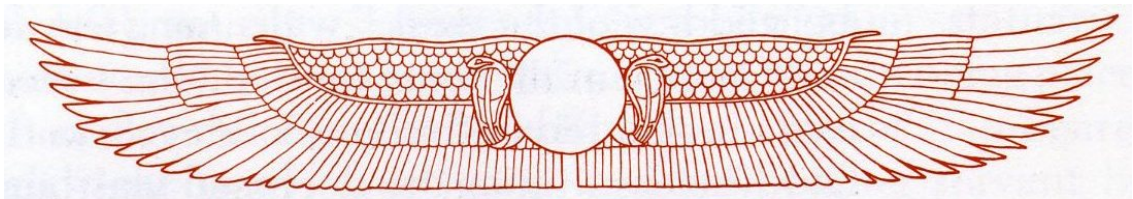


Figure 33. Winged solar disk with uraei. Reprinted from Richard H. Wilkinson, *Symbol & Magic in Egyptian Art* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1994), 66, ill. 44.

³⁷H. W. Fairman, "The Myth of Horus at Efu – 1," *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 21 (1935): 26-36.

³⁸E. A. Wallis Budge, *Osiris and the Egyptian Religion of Resurrection* 2 vols. (New York: Kegan Paul, 2002), 2:233.

The winged solar disk appears in many contexts and its protective nature is central to its use. When appearing over an entryway as the winged solar disk often does, the wings of the sun disk protect the king or entryway above which the sun disk is found, while the uraeus or uraei around the sun disk guard the sun disk.³⁹

The Tuat: The Sun, Uraei, and the Afterlife

The “Book of the Pylons” (also known as the “Book of the Gates”) and the “Book of that which is in the Tuat” each provide a guide for the deceased person who must travel through the Tuat, often called the “underworld.”⁴⁰ The Tuat is a great valley, the mountains on one side dividing the valley from heaven and the mountains on the other dividing it from earth. A river runs the length of the valley of the Tuat and creatures hostile to those who travel through the Tuat dwell on either shore of the river. The Tuat is the place through which the sun (Ra) passes each night after setting (or dying) and before rising the next day. These two texts describe the Tuat in twelve sections or stages, corresponding to the twelve hours of the night. A deceased person who had been buried according to the proper rituals traveled the Tuat with the guidance of the sun for safety. Earlier texts concerning the Tuat contained only textual descriptions, but later works included pictorial depictions of the Tuat and the creatures inhabiting it.⁴¹

Serpents and uraei are present in both the “Book of the Pylons” and the “Book of that which is in the Tuat.” In the Book of the Pylons, fire-spitting uraei guard several of

³⁹Schäfer, *Principles of Egyptian Art*, 237.

⁴⁰Budge, *Gods of the Egyptians*, 1:170-71.

⁴¹Budge, *Gods of the Egyptians*, 1:173.

the pylons or gates. In the fourth division, ten uraei who have risen out of the Lake of the uraei are on the right side of the boat and use their fire against the enemies of Ra.⁴² In the eighth hour a giant serpent belches fire on the first figure in a line of twelve bound men who are enemies of Osiris.⁴³ In the tenth hour, a winged uraeus called Semi is among the figures to the right of Ra's boat; these figures are present to help Ra along to the sunrise.⁴⁴

Westendorf traces the depiction of the twin uraei which appear to hang from the solar disk to the role the uraei had in the "Book of the Tuat" as actual transporters of the sun through the realm of the dead.⁴⁵ The uraei in figure 34 use their hands to pull the solar barque along through the Tuat. In another depiction related to their task of transporting the solar bark, uraei push a solar disk, above which there is a winged scarab (figure 35).

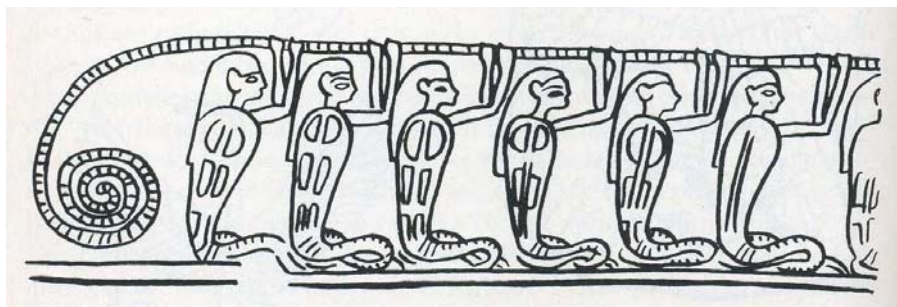


Figure 34. Tomb of Ramses VI. Uraei with human faces and hands pull the solar barque. Reprinted from Othmar Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen und Siegelkunst* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1977), 78, ill. 34.

⁴²Budge, *Gods of the Egyptians*, 1:184.

⁴³Budge, *Gods of the Egyptians*, 1:192.

⁴⁴Budge, *Gods of the Egyptians*, 1:199-200.

⁴⁵Wolfhart Westendorf, "Uräus und Sonnenscheibe," *Studien zur altägyptischen Kultur* 6 (1978): 201-25.

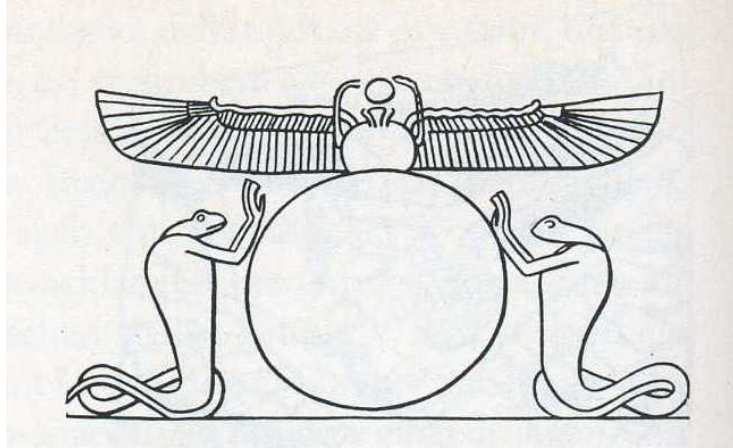


Figure 35. Reprinted from Othmar Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen und Siegelkunst* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1977), 78, ill. 34.

The “Book of the Pylons” and the “Book of that which is in the Tuat” provide in their textual and visual depictions multiple examples of uraei acting in their protective function. The uraei assist in the transport and protection of the sun god Ra as he sets or dies each night and travels through the Tuat. The dead accompany Ra through the Tuat to safely reach the afterlife and also benefit from the protection of the uraei. The activities of the uraei in the books of the Pylons and that which is in the Tuat reinforce the association of the image of the uraeus with the sun.

The Uraeus and Other Goddesses

In The “Book of the Pylons” and the “Book of that which is in the Tuat,” the uraeus is not necessarily symbolic of the goddesses Wadjet and Nekhbet, but rather of protective beings that accompany the sun on its nightly journey. Uraei also came to symbolize several goddesses other than Wadjet and Nekhbet. Skhmet, for example, was Ptah’s consort and the defender of the divine order; she brought war and strife, and

destruction on Ra's enemies; she also nearly destroyed humankind.⁴⁶ Sakhment was considered the eye of Ra and represented as a lioness-headed woman wearing the solar disc and uraeus. Mertseger is another example. She was a goddess who pursued the unjust, striking them blind, and while dangerous, she could be merciful.⁴⁷ She appears sometimes as a cobra and sometimes as a woman with a cobra's head. Wadjet, Nekhbet, Sakhmet, and Mertseger are just four of the goddesses represented by the uraei. Johnson notes that "Wadjet is eventually assimilated with all goddesses, and the cobra hieroglyph becomes the determinative at the end of the word, *ntrt*, "goddess."⁴⁸

Summary of the Functions of the Uraeus in Egyptian Royal Art

The Uraeus is a figure of power and destruction; it is also a symbol of stability and legitimation. The cobra (uraeus) was associated with actions of protection, but its protective actions are achieved by destructive means. The uraeus protected the monarch and aggressively attacked the enemies of the monarch.⁴⁹ The uraeus, ready to strike, appears upon and above the heads of kings and deities. The burning venom that the cobra spits at the eyes of an enemy as well as the burning heat of the sun associated the uraeus with fire.

Johnson effectively describes the legitimizing function of the uraeus in Egyptian art:

⁴⁶George Hart, *The Routledge Dictionary of Egyptian Gods and Goddesses* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 138-39.

⁴⁷Hart, *Routledge Dictionary of Egyptian Gods and Goddesses*, 91-92.

⁴⁸Johnson, *Cobra Goddess*, 8; Gardiner; Faulkner, 142.

⁴⁹Johnson, *Cobra Goddess*, 8.

Presence of the vulture (Nekhbet) and cobra (Wadjet) goddesses combined (Nebty) with Horus or the king of Upper and Lower Egypt signified the legitimacy of the crown as well as protection of it; alone, a cobra goddess could insure continued power and vitality (Aket, Seby, Nesret), as well as prosperity and order (Rennewtet, Maat); and worn on the forehead of kings, queens, gods and goddesses, she signified all of these advantageous qualities.⁵⁰

Whether or not a uraeus represented a particular deity, it was a legitimizing symbol.

Through solar associations, the uraeus carried with it the symbolism of creation as well as the king's descent from the gods. The close association between the uraeus and the monarch suggests that the ruling monarch reigned with divine approval and protection. It also suggests that the order of the cosmos was tied to the monarch's reign.

Winged Serpents in Levantine Art

Raised serpents with and without wings are present in the art of the Levant. The serpents are cobras and reflect Egyptian style. Stamp seals are the most common object upon which these Levantine uraei appear.⁵¹ Ivories, cultic furniture, and statuary from the Levant also provide examples for study.

Up until the latter half of the eighth century BCE, Egyptian influence is present in stamp seals of Judean and Israelite provenance. This influence derived primarily through Phoenicia for the northern kingdom of Israel and through Egypt or other Levantine peoples for the southern kingdom of Judah.⁵² Deities from the Near East appear in the iconography of the northern kingdom of Israel during Iron IIB (925-720/700). Egyptian deities and hybrid creatures are more common as well as a general

⁵⁰Johnson, *Cobra Goddess*, 190.

⁵¹Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen*, 92-93.

⁵²Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods*, 16.

Egyptian influence in Phoenician-Israelite art.⁵³ From Iron IIB, images with Israelite and Judean provenance include, more than ever, winged creatures, such as uraei, scarabs, griffins, and falcons. These figures often have solar-celestial associations as they are often in the company of a winged solar disk.⁵⁴

As in Egypt, the uraeus in Levantine art serves as a protector. Wings on a variety of figures such as uraei and sphinxes symbolized protection. The owners of these seals sought the protection of the creatures on the seals whose function was to serve the “Most High God” to whom they were in service and to maintain on the earth the rule and order of that deity.⁵⁵ On stamp seals, winged uraei sometimes appear in protection of an object while at other times they protect the name of the seal’s owner. Keel observes that two-winged uraei are usually protecting an object and four-winged uraei usually protect the owner of the seal, with the additional wings potentially offering more protection.⁵⁶

Two-Winged Uraei on Stamp Seals. In one example of the two-winged uraei, a seal from Lachish portrays in the top of three registers a uraeus in profile, its wings stretched forward to protect a stylized Egyptian life-sign (figure 36).⁵⁷ The name of the seal’s owner, who was a Judean, appears in the lower registers.

⁵³Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods*, 249, 401.

⁵⁴Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods*, 401.

⁵⁵Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods*, 256.

⁵⁶Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods*, 273.

⁵⁷Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen*, 103; Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods*, 272.



Figure 36. Stamp Seal. Reprinted from Othmar Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen und Siegelkunst* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1977), 104, ill. 87.

A similar name seal, perhaps from Galilee, portrays in the lowest of three registers a uraeus with its wings spread to the side; the middle register contains a shortened form of the name of the seal's owner, and the top register contains an Egyptian life-sign (figure 37).⁵⁸



Figure 37. Stamp Seal. Reprinted from Othmar Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen und Siegelkunst* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1977), 104, ill. 86.

An impression on a jar handle from Shechem bears a sun disk beneath which two winged uraei with their wings forward face each other and protect some small object located between them.⁵⁹ The design is similar to New Kingdom motifs (sixteenth to

⁵⁸Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen*, 103; Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods*, 252.

⁵⁹Siegried Horn, "Scarabs and Scarab Impressions from Shechem II," *JNES* 25 (1966): 55.

thirteenth century BCE), and the impression is on an eighth-century jar, indicating the longevity of seals.⁶⁰ Based on the limited quantity of “Egyptian-type objects” found there, Horn argues that the mountain cities in the Levant had relatively few Egyptian connections.⁶¹ Still though, the winged uraeus functions in one of the capacities of the Egyptian uraeus, that of protection.

Four-Winged Uraei on Stamp Seals. The four-winged uraeus originated in Judah and is common in the art of Judea but is very rare in Egypt.⁶² A four-winged uraeus appears in the top register of an eighth-century seal belonging to a Judean (figure 38).⁶³



Figure 38. Stamp Seal. Reprinted from Othmar Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen und Siegelkunst* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1977), 109, ill. 88.

Another seal impression, this one from a jar handle at Ophel, also portrays a four-winged uraeus above the name of the seal’s owner (figure 39).

⁶⁰Horn, “Scarabs and Scarab Impressions,” 55.

⁶¹Horn, “Scarabs and Scarab Impressions,” 48.

⁶²W. A. Ward, “The Four-Winged Serpent on Hebrew Seals,” *Rivista degli studi orientali* 43 (1968): 135-43; Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen und Siegelkunst*, 105.

⁶³Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen und Siegelkunst*, 106.



Figure 39. Stamp Seal. Reprinted from Othmar Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen und Siegelkunst* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1977), 104, ill. 87.

Another seal has a large four-winged uraeus above the name of the seal's owner (figure 40).



Figure 40. Stamp Seal. Reprinted from Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel* (trans. Thomas Trapp; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 275 ill. 274d.

A seal, bearing the name, Ahimelech, has a four-winged uraeus on it.⁶⁴ A seventh-century seal from outside Megiddo portrays a four-winged uraeus wearing a double crown and resting above the text, "Belonging to Elishema son of the king."⁶⁵

⁶⁴W. A. Ward, "Four-Winged Serpent," 135-43.

⁶⁵Herbert G. May, "Critical Notes: Seal of Elamar," *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 52 (1936): 199; C. C. Torrey, "A Few Ancient Seals," *AASOR* ; A. H. Sayce, "The Early Jewish Inscriptions on Mr. H. Clarke's Seals," *PEQFQS* (1909), 155-156.

While these two seals have royal connections, Levantine stamp seals are not limited to royal ownership. Levantine stamp seals bearing images of uraei belong to royal and non-royal individuals, and males as well as females. The presence of such creatures on private seals may suggest what Keel and Uehlinger call an “individualizing and democratizing,” of the ideas connected with the deity usually guarded by these creatures.⁶⁶ The more widespread the ownership of such seals, the more likely it was that there was a common understanding of the meanings of the symbols on the seals, for example the protective powers of the winged cobra.

Another name seal from Megiddo portrays in its upper register a pair of winged and horned uraei facing one another with their wings spread protectively toward the front while in its lower register there is an Egyptian-style winged sphinx (figure 41). May thinks the “horns” are crests worn by the uraei.⁶⁷ Though similar in form and meaning to Egyptian deities, when protective figures such as the uraeus or sphinx appear, they are not depictions of a specific Egyptian deity; rather they are symbols of protection intended to emphasize “the significance and importance of the one they are protecting.”⁶⁸ There is thus a legitimating function to the symbols that accompanies their protective function.

⁶⁶Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods*, 256.

⁶⁷Herbert G. May, “Seal of Elamar,” 197.

⁶⁸Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods*, 400.



Figure 41. Name seal from Megiddo. Reprinted from Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel* (trans. Thomas Trapp; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 253 ill. 246.

Winged Uraei in Samaria

In addition to stamp seals, uraei appear in Levantine ivories. Winged uraei, carved from ivory and found near the palace in Samaria, have their wings extended frontally in a protective manner (figure 42).⁶⁹ This protective pose is similar to that of two-winged uraei in many Egyptian compositions.

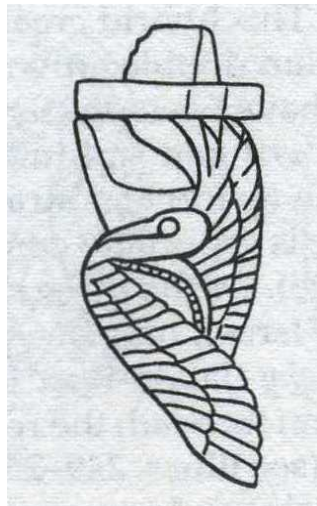


Figure 42. Ivory carvings from Samaria. Reprinted from Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel* (trans. Thomas Trapp; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 253 ill. 245.

⁶⁹Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods*, 251.

One striking example of the association of the uraei with solar symbolism is a Samaria ivory that depicts together a uraeus, a solar disk, the eye of Horus, and a falcon claw (figure 43).⁷⁰ The Horus-eye, the falcon, and the uraeus (even without the solar disk above its head) all have direct solar connections. This ivory is one more example of continuity in the function of uraeus symbols between Israel and Egypt.



Figure 43. Reprinted from Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel* (trans. Thomas Trapp; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 258 ill. 60.

Uraei in Phoenician Art

The art of the Phoenicians reflects an eclectic mixture of Egyptian, Aegean, Syrian, and Assyrian influences which the Phoenicians often modified into a style of their own.⁷¹ Though most of the Phoenician art available for study was found outside of Phoenicia, the distinctive characteristics to Phoenician art such as its eclecticism make it easy to identify as Phoenician.⁷² Uraei, sphinxes, and beetles are some of the Egyptian motifs found in Phoenician art. As in Egyptian art, winged figures are important to

⁷⁰Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods*, 257.

⁷¹Shelby Brown, "Perspectives on Phoenician Art," *BA* 55 (1992): 6-8; W. A. Ward, "Three Phoenician Seals of the Early First Millennium B.C.," *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 53 (1967): 69.

⁷²Brown, "Perspectives," 7.

Phoenician art and their wings are symbolic of protection.⁷³ Uraei and beetles often appear with two wings in Egyptian art, but the Phoenicians, as did the Judeans, adapted the motif so that uraei and beetles appear with four wings,⁷⁴ apparently offering twice the protection as the two-winged varieties.

Versions of the Egyptian uraeus appear on seals, cult stands, and decorative ivories from Phoenicia. An eighth-century seal bearing the name Yahziba'al has a Horus-hawk as its central figure, with a winged uraeus behind it; the uraeus rests on a lotus flower, a novel appearance up to this date in Phoenician seals (see figure 44).⁷⁵ This seal combines multiple elements of solar symbolism.



Figure 44. Stamp seal impression. Reprinted from N. Avigad, "Notes on Some Inscribed Syro-Phoenician Seals," *BASOR* 189 (1968): 45.

⁷³Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods*, 251.

⁷⁴W. A. Ward, "Four-Winged Serpent," 135-43; Ward, "Three Phoenician Seals," 70; A. D. Tushingham, "A Royal Israelite Seal (?) and the Royal Jar Handle Stamps (Part One)," *BASOR* 200 (1970): 75-76.

⁷⁵N. Avigad, "Notes on Some Inscribed Syro-Phoenician Seals," *BASOR* 189 (1968): 49.

In another seal that combines solar images, a winged solar disk separates a winged uraeus and a winged hybrid creature in top from an oval in the lower portion that is perhaps flanked by uraei (figure 45).⁷⁶



Figure 45. Reprinted from Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel* (trans. Thomas Trapp; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 258 ill. 259b.

Uraei appear on the top level of two known Phoenician cult stands (figures 46 and 47).⁷⁷ The rows of uraei and winged sun disk over the doorway are of an Egyptian style⁷⁸ and similar to reliefs found at the chapel of Prince Taktidamani and the Osiris chapel at Karnak.⁷⁹ A winged sun disk above the entry of a temple identifies the temple gates with the gates of heaven.⁸⁰

⁷⁶Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods*, 257.

⁷⁷Hugo Gressmann, *Altorientalische Bilder zum alten Testament* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1927), fig. 520l; Keel, *Symbolism*, fig. 221-222.

⁷⁸Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen und Siegelkunst*, 100-101.

⁷⁹See figure 238 in Keel, *Symbolism*.

⁸⁰Keel, *Symbolism*, 172.

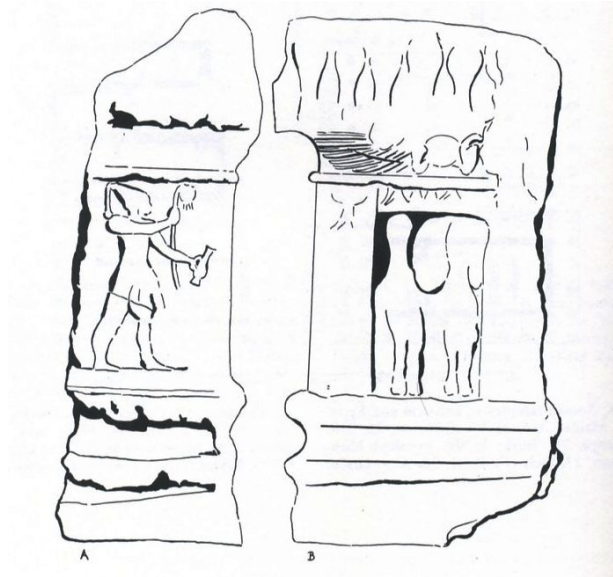


Figure 46. Cult stand from Sidon, 5th century BCE. Limestone, height 60 cm., width 32 cm. Louvre. Reprinted from Othmar Keel, *Symbolism of the Biblical World* (trans. Timothy J. Hallet; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 160, ill. 221a, 221b.

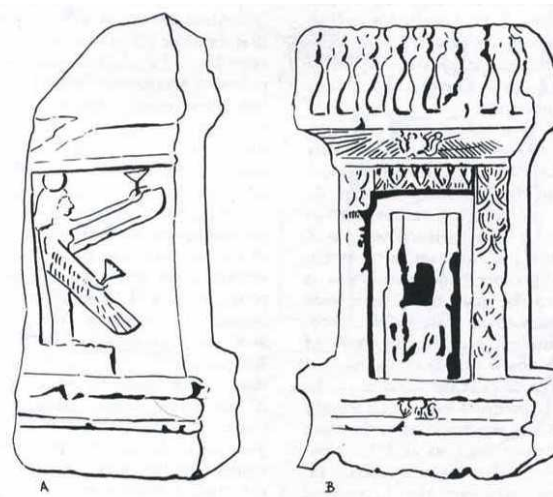


Figure 47. Cult stand from Sidon, 5th century BCE. Limestone, height 65 cm., width 36 cm. Reprinted from Othmar Keel, *Symbolism of the Biblical World* (trans. Timothy J. Hallet; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 160 ill. 222a, 222b.

Both the protective and solar characteristics of the uraei are featured in Phoenician portrayals of the uraei. These visual portrayals reveal that continuity remains between the perceived function of the uraeus in Phoenician art and Egyptian art. This

continuity exists even if the uraeus has lost in the art of the Phoenicians its connections with particular deities or myths.

Summary on Uraeus in Levantine Art and Thought

The origin and widespread use of various forms of uraei in ancient Egypt along with Egypt's close contact with the peoples of the Levant support the argument that the people of the Levant who used the uraeus in their own art were familiar with the meanings that the Egyptians associated with the uraeus. The contexts in which uraei appear in Levantine art also suggest that the people of the Levant had meanings in mind similar to those in Egypt when they used the uraeus in their art. For example, the uraeus and Eye of Horus are associated with the solar deity in Phoenicia and Israel.⁸¹

People living in the Levant would have imagined winged uraei as possessing both protective and solar characteristics. The continuity of symbol groups between Egypt and the Levant in both the north and the south contributes to this conclusion. The presence of Egyptian solar deities, solar disks, and wings imply astral and solar associations with winged hybrid creatures including the uraei.⁸² Uraei with and without wings, in the Levant as in Egypt, belong to the symbol group associated with solar deities.⁸³ Winged hybrid creatures appear wearing the double crown of Egypt or with the solar disk, indicating not that they are representations of particular solar deities, but rather that they

⁸¹Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods*, 257.

⁸²Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods*, 251, 279.

⁸³Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods*, 259.

are “in the service of a ‘Most High God’ or a ‘Lord of Heaven’ who is conceived of in solar categories.”⁸⁴

The uraeus is protective and its wings symbolize its protective powers. While the uraeus is not associated with a particular deity, it does have solar connotations. As in Egypt, the fiery nature of the uraeus may be connected not only to its venom, but also to its solar nature. In Egypt, the solar deity is closely tied to the monarchy and since the uraeus is present to protect the owner of the seal, it may provide royal legitimacy by connecting the king to the deity – perhaps a deity with solar identity.⁸⁵

The Seraphim in Isaiah 6

The above survey of the uraeus in ancient Egypt and its appearance in the Levant as a product of Egyptian influence provides reason for agreement with scholars such as Joines and Keel who argue that the form of the seraphim in Isaiah 6 was that of the winged uraeus. With regard to the composite form of the seraphim in Isaiah 6, hands, faces, feet, and wings all appear on uraei in various contexts in Egyptian art, pertaining to what particular function the uraei are performing.⁸⁶ The characteristic of being “fiery” is appropriate as well since in Egyptian and Levantine art the uraei have strong solar connections and in Egyptian contexts sometimes spit fire just as the Egyptian cobra spits venom. Also, multiple uraei often appear above or around a seated king, not necessarily representing a particular deity, but representing the legitimation and the protection of the

⁸⁴Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods*, 256.

⁸⁵Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods*, 259.

⁸⁶Joines, “Winged Serpents,” 414-15.

monarch by the deities.⁸⁷ In Isaiah 6, the seraphim, instead of offering protection for Yahweh with their wings must protect themselves as they are in the presence of Yahweh.⁸⁸ In addition, the seraphim do not grant Yahweh legitimacy, but confess his legitimacy with their chant, “Holy, Holy, Holy, Yahweh of Hosts.”

When the seraph uses a live coal from the altar to cleanse Isaiah of his impurity, the seraph is similar to the uraeus in its use of fire as a destructive means of defeating something hostile to the king, in this case Isaiah’s impurity. Isaiah uses three similar-sounding words in the context of smelting or burning in order to remove impurity; in 1:25 Yahweh will refine (צרף) Israel’s dross, while in 6:6 a seraph (שרף) uses a live coal (רצפה) to purify Isaiah.⁸⁹ Though Yahweh is not threatened by the presence of impurity, the holy and impure cannot come into contact with one another, so the protection offered by the seraph is in the form of cleansing and for the safety of Isaiah. Note Isaiah’s cry upon seeing Yahweh and considering his own impure condition: “Woe is me!” Just as the cobra goddesses in various contexts burn and destroy the enemies of the sun or the king, so also the seraphim burn away the impurity from Yahweh’s prophet and the people of Yahweh. Isaiah’s use of the winged fiery one differs from the Egyptian use of the uraeus in at least one important aspect. The uraeus symbolized divine authorization and protection of the Egyptian monarch in part through its destructive, burning power. In

⁸⁷One is reminded of one of the thrones belonging to Tutankhamen which has the wings of uraei as part of its arms and several other winged uraei adorning the throne; Joines, “Winged Serpents,” 413; ANEP 415-17.

⁸⁸Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12* (Continental Commentary; trans. Thomas H. Trapp; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 265; Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen*, 112-14.

⁸⁹Peter D. Miscall, *Isaiah* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 34.

Isaiah's vision the burning is not limited to destruction, but also has the purpose of purification and redemption.⁹⁰ The prophet in Isaiah 6 appears before Yahweh as a representative and a representation of the people of Israel. Just as Israel, the prophet is impure and must experience a fiery purification. The fiery ones represent that purification in their form and bring that purification to the prophet with the burning coal just as Yahweh will bring purification through judgment.

Throughout the book of Isaiah, fire is a means through which Yahweh brings destruction and purification. Flames and fire appear metaphorically as the judgment of Yahweh. Judah's cities are burned with fire, אש, (1:7) as are the "root" of Jerusalem's elite (5:24). Yahweh's anger is kindled, חרה, against his people (5:25). In 9:17-19 Yahweh's judgment takes the form of "calamity" and the people, with each behaving like a relentless consuming fire, (בערה and אש). Yahweh's judgment in the form of fire and flame (אש and להבה) bring destruction (10:16-17). Babylon will be like Sodom and Gomorrah (13:19). Fire for the adversaries of Yahweh consumes the wicked (26:11). The flame of a consuming fire accompanies Yahweh when he visits Ariel (29:6). Yahweh burns in anger and has a tongue like consuming fire (30:27) and Assyria will experience the flame and destruction of the burning wrath of Yahweh (30:29-33). Yahweh's fire, אור, and furnace, תנור, are in Zion/Jerusalem (31:9). When Yahweh exalts himself his breath consumes and burns his adversaries (33:10-12) and the sinners in Zion recognize that they cannot dwell in the presence of Yahweh's fire and flames, אש and מוקד, (33:14). Yahweh comes in fire to judge his enemies (66:15-16). The book

⁹⁰Joines, "Winged Serpents," 415.

closes with the statement that the fire that burns the rebellious ones is never quenched (66:24). In the vision of Isaiah 6, the fiery ones surrounding Yahweh and purifying the impure one who encounters Yahweh capture in a single scene the theme in Isaiah of the judgment and purification through fire of Israel, the nations, and creation.

Uraei and the Noun Seraph in the Book of Isaiah

The noun *seraph* appears four times in the book of Isaiah. It appears twice in the throne-room vision of chapter six (v. 2, 6). The noun appears again in 14:29 within an oracle against the Philistines where the seraph represents a royal figure who is called the fruit or offspring of an “adder” which is the offspring of a “snake.” The final appearance of the noun seraph in the book of Isaiah is in 30:6 in an “oracle concerning the animals of the Negev,” where Isaiah includes the flying seraph among the dangerous animals inhabiting the Negev.

Isaiah 14:29. The “flying seraph” (שרף מעופף) in 14:29 appears in the oracle against the Philistines. The material surrounding this oracle emphasizes falling kings and empires (chapters 13-23; cf. especially 14:4-32). In 14:29, just as in chapter six, the seraph appears following the chronological marker of the death of a king (6:1 and 14:28). The notice of Ahaz’s death (14:28) and the death of the royal figure represented by the seraph follow the taunt against the oppressive ruler in 14:3-21 which includes mocking that ruler regarding his death and ultimate destiny (14:9-11, 15-20).

The death of a king was a time of uncertainty and perhaps opportunity for the enemies of a nation. The Philistines are tempted to rejoice at the death of a king. The “rod” that struck the Philistines spoken of in verse 29 may be a reference to Ahaz with

the root and the fruit of the root being the descendants of Ahaz. While some interpreters note that it seems unusual for Isaiah to use snake imagery for Judahite kings,⁹¹ the warning not to rejoice occurs immediately after the notice of Ahaz's death. It is also Ephraim and Judah who "fly" (ִפְּעוּ) onto the back of Philistia in 11:14. Isaiah uses here the same verb as is used with the seraph who destroys the Philistines in 14:29. Ongoing adversity between Judah and Philistia might give the Philistines cause to rejoice when any king of Judah might die. The conflict between Judah and Philistia may not have been the one in mind. The timing of the death of the Judean king, Ahaz, may have been viewed by the Philistines as an opportune time for revolt against the Assyrians since Ahaz had been loyal to Tiglath-Pileser and the Assyrians (7:5ff).⁹²

Instead of Judean kings, Watts suggests that the rod/snake and adder/seraph are the Assyrian kings Shalmanezzer and Sargon.⁹³ The Assyrians were in control of Palestine at this time and at the death of Shalmanezzer, the Philistines may have thought it was an opportune time for a revolt. There were rebellions in Palestine in 718 and 714 that were put down by Sargon. According to Wildberger, it was during the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III that the Philistines were under the greatest oppression by the

⁹¹Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39* (Anchor Bible; Garden City: Doubleday, 2000), 292; John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33* (Word Biblical Commentary 24; rev. ed.; Nashville: Nelson Reference & Electronic, 2005), 277.

⁹²Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 13-27* (Continental Commentary; trans. Thomas H. Trapp; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 99; Marvin Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39 with an Introduction to Prophetic Literature* (FOTL 16; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 238.

⁹³Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, 277.

Assyrians.⁹⁴ Blenkinsopp is less hopeful about determining which Assyrian king Isaiah refers to here and points out that the prophet's point remains to emphasize that Philistia and Judah have two very different destinies.⁹⁵

Wildberger divides 14:29-32 into two parts: verses 29-31 are a warning to the Philistines not to rejoice but to lament, while verse 32 is an answer to be given to the Philistine envoys who have come to Jerusalem looking for an alliance against the Assyrians.⁹⁶ Just as the "whole earth" in 14:7 broke into song following the death of the tyrant ruler, the Philistines are prone to rejoice at the death of the Assyrian ruler who has oppressed them. The warning to the Philistines, however, is that things are going to get a lot worse. The offspring of the rod, who is called the "root of the snake," will be the adder; taking 29c as parallel to 29b, the fruit of the snake (not the adder) is a flying seraph. Wildberger notes that the pairing of the words "root" and "fruit" emphasizes total destruction.⁹⁷ Note that in verse 30 both the root and the remnant die: a situation present in 5:24 and 14:22.⁹⁸

In verse 30 the adder/seraph (it) kills the last of Philistines. Verse 31 calls for the city to lament and notes that smoke comes out of the north. Melting in 31a and smoke in

⁹⁴Wildberger, *Isaiah 13-27*, 93; See Clements who notes that while Ahaz's death in 725 BCE was around the same time as the death of Tiglath-pileser, a redactor makes the chronological reference so the prophecy probably dates to Shalmanezar V's death in 722 BCE; *Isaiah 1-39* (NCBC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 148-49.

⁹⁵Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, 292-93.

⁹⁶Wildberger, *Isaiah 13-27*, 94.

⁹⁷Wildberger, *Isaiah 13-27*, 96.

⁹⁸Miscall, *Isaiah*, 51.

31b are both easily associated with the “winged fiery one” who comes from the north. In this case, Assyria and its armies who will destroy Philistia.

One result of the attack of the seraph on the Philistines is that the “insignificant” and the “poor” are granted food and rest (Isa 14:30). As elsewhere in Isaiah, destruction is accompanied by feeding and lying down (5:17; 13:20-21; 17:2).⁹⁹ In his diachronic approach to the text, Wildberger discusses the transformation of the meaning of the words for “poor” and “wretched” into a reference to the pious ones who are faithful to Yahweh.¹⁰⁰ According to Wildberger, the message of 14:29-31, though addressed to Philistine messengers who have come to Zion seeking help, is really a message for Jerusalem/Judah and is a call for trust in Yahweh alone as was 7:9.¹⁰¹ If the Philistines were seeking a military alliance to revolt against Assyria during the tumultuous time of the death of the Assyrian king, the answer of Yahweh and the prophet, is that military resistance is futile. The successors of the dead Assyrian king will prove to be worse for the Philistines.¹⁰² While the pious ones find rest in Zion, the seraph or “fiery one” identified by smoke coming out of the north (31b), acts against those who sought military alliances, bringing famine (30b) and melting Philistia before it (31a).

The seraph in this passage behaves much as the uraeus in an Egyptian royal context. The seraph brings fiery destruction upon the enemies of the true King, Yahweh,

⁹⁹Miscall, *Isaiah*, 51.

¹⁰⁰Wildberger, *Isaiah 13-27*, 90-91; Wildberger cites Donner, *Israel unter den Völkern* VTSup 11 (1964), 145; see also Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, 293.

¹⁰¹Wildberger, *Isaiah 13-27*, 91; Childs, *Isaiah* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 128.

¹⁰²Childs, *Isaiah*, 128.

and his people. The snake and asp found in nature are not adequate for Isaiah's description of the coming destruction of the Philistines. Instead, the mythical fiery serpent (seraph/uraeus) is the symbol of Yahweh's judgment.

Isaiah 30. The seraph in Isa 30:6 is one of the animals of the Negev. In 30:6-7 an oracle or burden, מִשָּׂא, appears to be spoken against the beasts of burden that carry treasure through the treacherous Negev. The double meaning of the word מִשָּׂא is relevant especially to these animals that carry their burdens through such a dangerous area on a futile mission of seeking the aid of the Egyptians.¹⁰³ It is truly a judgment against them that they must undertake this mission. The animals of the Negev (lioness, lion, viper, and seraph) pose danger for the people who carry their riches and treasures on the backs of donkeys and camels as they seek the aid of Egypt. Egypt, though, unlike the animals in the desert is tamed and unthreatening (30:7). Isaiah points out Egypt's impotence even while he calls to Egypt by the name of the dragon, Rahab. The caravan travels through a place of ever-increasing danger, lioness to roaring lion; viper to flying seraph in order to reach the great sea monster, Rahab, who has been tamed and poses no threat to anyone.¹⁰⁴ The attempt of nations to form military alliances proves futile.¹⁰⁵ Isaiah reiterates the impotence of Egypt in 31:1-5; especially note 31:4-5 and its growling lion, recalling the lions in 30:6, and "flying" (עֹפֹת) birds, recalling the "flying" seraph in 30:6.

¹⁰³Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, 399-400.

¹⁰⁴Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, 400; Wildberger, *Isaiah 28-39* (Continental Commentary; trans. Thomas H. Trapp; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 138; Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, 465.

¹⁰⁵Wildberger, *Isaiah 28-39*, 133-34.

Isaiah uses the term **אַפֶּעָה**, “viper,” next to the similar-sounding term, **מַעֲוֹפֵי שָׂרָף**, “flying seraph” in 30:6. Philippe Provençal argues that the specific identity of the seraph is the red spitting cobra; its wings are its outstretched hood and its fire is the venom it spits in the eyes of an enemy.¹⁰⁶ Flying snakes are present in the Negev according to at least two ancient sources outside the Hebrew Bible; both Esarhaddon and Herodotus mention flying serpents.¹⁰⁷ In the Hebrew Bible, Numbers 21:4-9 also describes an encounter with these dangerous flying seraphs. While many have attempted to identify what creature from the animal world this might be, it may be most beneficial to associate the flying snakes and seraphim with mythological creatures, an argument supported by the connection between the Egyptian word, *šfr*, which is a winged creature with the Hebrew **שָׂרָף**, the winged fiery one in Isaiah’s vision. While the physical realities of its hood and venom might contribute to background of the wings and fire of the uraeus in Egyptian iconography, the wings and fire also communicate in the mythological context the solar characteristics of the uraeus. In the *Tuat*, uraei are present to protect and aid the sun and the traveler who must pass through a dangerous valley. In the Negev, however, the seraph/uraeus is one of the menacing creatures inhabiting the desert country between Judah and Egypt, threatening anyone who would seek a military alliance with powerless Egypt.

The noun שרפה in the Book of Isaiah. The noun **שרפה** appears twice in the book of Isaiah. In 9:5 it is the fire in which the boots of warriors and garments rolled in blood

¹⁰⁶Philippe Provençal, “Regarding the Noun **שָׂרָף**,” 371-79.

¹⁰⁷Wildberger, *Isaiah 28-39*, 136; Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, 465.

are burned. In 64:11 the Jerusalemites mourn because, “Our holy and beautiful house, where our ancestors praised you, has been burned by fire (שרפה), and all our pleasant places have become ruins.” The reader of Isaiah, however, knows that the activities at the temple have not been a source of satisfaction for Yahweh, but rather a symbol of the oppressive violence of Jerusalem’s elite and the imperial elite (1:1-15; 65:25; 66:3). In each of these instances, the fire is Yahweh’s means for bringing to an end the violence of people against people.

The verb שרף in the Book of Isaiah. The verb שרף appears four times in the book of Isaiah (Isaiah 1:7; 44:16, 19; 47:14). In 1:7 the verb appears in a description of the fate of the cities of Judah as a result of their iniquities. Only Zion has been spared the fate of becoming like Sodom and Gomorrah. In 44:16 and 19 the verb appears in Isaiah’s discussion on the absurdity of idols since the images are carved from wood that has a destiny of being burned in the fire that the craftsman uses to cook and keep himself warm. In 47:14 the Babylonian stargazers are burned in a fire that is not fit for sitting at and warming oneself. Themes of violent judgment and idolatry are a part of the context of the verb שרף in Isaiah.

Seraphim and Uraei in the Book of Isaiah

When interpreters attempt to identify the form of the seraphim in Isaiah 6, they often begin with the zoomorphic realm and argue that the seraphim are winged cobras. While Egyptian iconography supports the notion that the winged fiery ones are indeed winged cobras, perhaps it is the fiery characteristic that should be emphasized over the

serpentine.¹⁰⁸ In Isaiah 14:29 and 30:6, ordinary snakes are not enough; it takes mythical creatures with destructive burning powers to communicate their danger. Rather than using 14:29 and 30:6 to determine the form of the seraphim in chapter 6, though, perhaps their first appearance in 6:2 and 6 ought to influence the reading of the later verses. The winged burning ones who appear in the throne room of Yahweh and who use a burning coal to bring purification create the image for the winged burning ones that bring ruin to Philistia and dwell in the Negev.

The argument that the seraphim have the form of winged uraei is certainly plausible, and can be helpful in understanding their function(s) in Isaiah's throneroom vision of chapter 6 and the rest of the book of Isaiah. Francis Landy considers the seraphim in Isaiah 6 "metonymies for the divine wrath, fire, and the capacity for metamorphosis; they are both hostile entities and emissaries."¹⁰⁹ The seraphim represent in Isaiah the fiery judgment of Yahweh in both its danger and absolute destruction and the new life that it brings.

Mesopotamia: The "Fiery One" and the Solar Disk

Winged cobras, or uraei, do appear in art found in Mesopotamia. Their frequency is limited, though, and so the question comes to mind of what a reader with limited exposure to the winged uraeus in royal art might envision when encountering the verbal description of a winged fiery one hovering above the enthroned monarch.

¹⁰⁸R. S. Hendel, "Serpent," *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999), 746.

¹⁰⁹Francis Landy, "Seraphim and the Poetic Process," in *The Labour of Reading*, Fiona C. Black, Roland Boer, and Eric Runions eds. (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999), 27.

Ivories at Nimrud

The Phoenician ivories found at Nimrud are similar to those found in Samaria; they were either sent to Assyrian kings as tribute or crafted locally by Phoenician artisans and display the Egyptian influence common to Phoenician art.¹¹⁰ On an ivory cheek-piece for a horse dating to the early eighth century a winged sphinx has a sun disk with uraeus above its head and a winged uraeus forward before it; the wings of the uraeus are extended forward in a protective position (figure 48).¹¹¹



Figure 48. Ivory cheek-piece for a horse; Nimrud, NW Palace, 8th century BCE. Length 7 ¼ in. Metropolitan Museum, New York. Reprinted from M. E. L. Mallowan, *Nimrud and Its Remains* (2 vols. New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1966), 1:126, pl. 67.

Uraei are part of the border of a scene on a plaque in which humans grasp the branches of a magical tree (figure 49).¹¹² Bearded men in the top register hold the branches of a

¹¹⁰Joan Lines, "Ivories from Nimrud," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 13 (1955): 235.

¹¹¹Lines, "Ivories from Nimrud," 239.

¹¹²Sir Max Mallowan, *The Nimrud Ivories* (London: British Museum Publications, Ltd., 1978), 32.

sacred tree, while clean-shaven youths do the same in the lower register. This plaque is similar to another from Fort Shalmanezer on which two pharaoh-like figures hold the branches of a sacred tree and above whom is a winged solar disk and above the disk are thirteen horned uraei with solar disks above their heads.¹¹³



Figure 49. Ivory plaque, Nimrud, Fort Shalmanezer, 8th century BCE. Height 30.5 cm. Reprinted from M. E. L. Mallowan, *Nimrud and Its Remains* (2 vols. New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1966), 2:579, pl. 539.

Uraei are part of a winged sun disk that is above Astarte who stands on a lotus and holds a papyrus plant (figure 50). The goddess is Phoenician in style with Egyptian influences.¹¹⁴

¹¹³Mallowan, *Nimrud Ivories*, 548-48, see ill. 481.

¹¹⁴Mallowan, *Nimrud Ivories*, 39.



Figure 50. Reprinted from Sir Max Mallowan *The Nimrud Ivories* (London: British Museum Publications, 1996) 38, pl. 36.

Apart from these examples of Phoenician art in Assyria, the uraeus does not appear with the same frequency in Mesopotamian art as it does in the art of Egypt and the Levant. Snakes appear as symbols of chaos and of deities, often on kudurrus and there are several Elamite examples of scenes in which a high god sits on a throne of coiled snakes.¹¹⁵ The underworld deity, Ningishzida, has a horned snake that emerges from his shoulders.¹¹⁶ Snakes in Mesopotamian art appear most often to represent threatening underworld forces. The lack of available examples in which winged uraei appear in Mesopotamian royal art around or above a monarch call into question the likelihood that someone familiar only with Mesopotamian royal art would envision a winged uraeus when encountering the term seraph. The solar associations with the uraeus in Egypt and Palestine as well as the definition of the word seraph as “fiery one” lend to the

¹¹⁵Hendel, “Serpent,” 744.

¹¹⁶Hendel, “Serpent,” 744.

plausibility that in a Mesopotamian context the seraph might be envisioned as some form of winged solar disk.

The Winged Solar Disk

The winged disk appears to have become a part of Mesopotamian royal art through the influence of Egypt.¹¹⁷ The uraei, though, disappear from the disk, except in compositions like those above that reflect some direct Egyptian contribution to their style. Visible on some disks are appendages that are similar in shape and location to the uraei that appear to dangle from the sun disk in Egyptian art. Gressmann suggests that the uraeus disappears because it lacks meaning in the Babylonian context.¹¹⁸ Frankfort agrees that symbols may lose a particular significance or meaning when they move from one context to another.¹¹⁹

Of particular interest because of their function in various contexts are the winged sun disks with an anthropomorphic figure emerging from them. In Babylonian and Assyrian art, a male figure from the torso up appears in the sun disk (figure 51). The figure is generally thought to be Assur, the national deity of the Assyrians, and the three-pronged arrow is lightning that he shoots from his bow.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷H. Frankfort, *Cylinder Seals: A Documentary Essay on the Art and Religion of the Ancient Near East* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1939), 208-09.

¹¹⁸Hugo Gressman, *Altorientalische Bilder zum alten Testament* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1926), 89.

¹¹⁹Frankfort, *Cylinder Seals*, 209.

¹²⁰Keel, *Symbolism*, 215.



Figure 51. Relief from Nimrud, 9th century BCE. British Museum. Reprinted from Othmar Keel, *Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms* (trans. Timothy J. Hallet; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 217, ill. 296.

He appears with his hand forward at times and at other times appears with a bow.

Mendenhall connects the image of the deity in the sun disk with the Akkadian terms *melammu* and *puluhtu* which describe an aura or nimbus and a fiery garment, both worn by the deity.¹²¹

In Egyptian art, the uraeus represents deities and its close association with the king symbolizes in part the legitimization of the king by the deities. The uraeus is also symbolic of the connection between the king and the solar deity. The uraeus on the crown confers to the king powers of the deities. The uraeus also provides protection to the king. Just as the uraeus spits fire and destroys the enemies of the sun, so also it is ever present to protect the king. The protective function of the uraeus is also symbolized by the presence of wings on the uraeus. Mesopotamian art, in the absence of the uraeus, symbolizes divine legitimization and protection with the winged solar disk. In the iconography of the Levantine stamp seals, the uraei ceased to represent specific deities, instead representing protection for the owner of the seal. In the iconography of the

¹²¹George E. Mendenhall, "The Mask of Yahweh," in *The Tenth Generation: The Origins of the Biblical Tradition* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 44-46.

Assyrians and Babylonians, there is a return to associating a divine figure with the solar disk, but the deity is represented anthropomorphically. The deity in the solar disk provides legitimization and protection for the king.

In an eleventh-century scene on the “broken obelisk” that suggests both blessing and protection two hands extend from a solar disk above an Assyrian king (figure 52).¹²² One hand is open, in a gesture of blessing, and the other hand holds a bow.¹²³ For Assyrian kings, it is Assur who oversees the accession of the king and his activities.¹²⁴



Figure 52. The hands of Assur emerge from the solar disk, presenting his bow to the king. The “broken obelisk,” Nineveh, 11th-10th century BCE. Height 30 cm. British Museum. Reprinted from H. Frankfort, *Cylinder Seals: A Documentary Essay on the Art and Religion of the Ancient Near East* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1939), 207, fig. 63.

A ninth-century enamel tile depicts Assur with his bow drawn and within a sun disk (figure 53).¹²⁵ He is in the sky among rain clouds and above a chariot scene, and in this depiction, the wings are attached to the anthropomorphic figure, rather than the disk. His position is reminiscent of chariot scenes in Egyptian art where a sun disk, often

¹²²Frankfort, *Cylinder Seals*, 211 (text-fig. 63).

¹²³Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East in Pictures*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 440.

¹²⁴Frankfort, *Cylinder Seals*, 207.

¹²⁵Pritchard, *ANEP*, 536.

adorned with uraei, or a winged uraeus is above the Egyptian king in his chariot and in battle. In such an image, the protective function of the disk and deity are in the forefront.

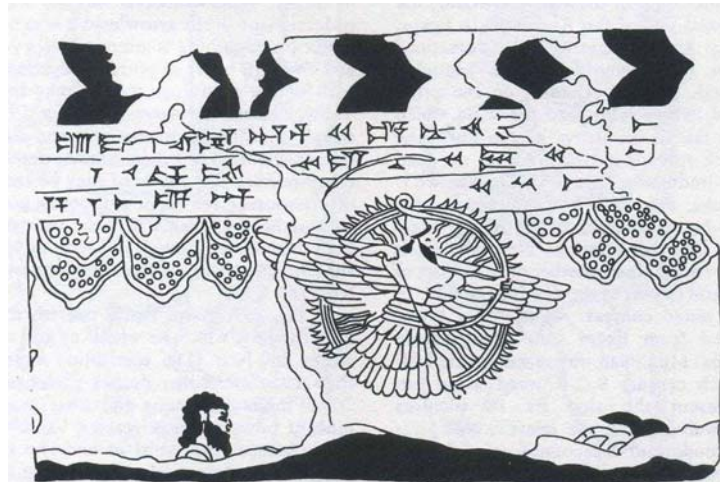


Figure 53. Assur in solar disk with bow drawn. Enamel tile; height 11 in. British Museum. Reprinted from Othmar Keel, *Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms* (trans. Timothy J. Hallet; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 216, ill. 295.

Reliefs of Assur-nasir-pal II portray the deity of the sun disk with bow drawn and undrawn. In a scene of battle, the deity is in the sky above the king with his bow drawn, but as the king returns from a victorious battle, the deity is above the king with his bow undrawn. King and deity in “mirror image” communicate the link between god and king; the policies, actions, and authority of the state are inseparable from the deity.¹²⁶

The winged solar disk with the chief deity emerging from it seems to serve the same function in the royal art of the Assyrians as does the uraeus in the royal art of the Egyptians. Legitimation of the ruling king is communicated visually through divine blessing and divine protection in the symbol of the solar disk with deity as it is with the

¹²⁶Mendenhall, “The Mask of Yahweh,” 47. A connection between the drawn and undrawn bow of the deity and Yahweh exists in the flood narrative of Genesis 6-9 when Yahweh hangs his bow as a sign that he will never again resort to the violent flood to punish creation.

uraeus. In scenes where a solar disc appears above a royal figure it is an anthropomorphic figure that emerges from the disk instead of a cobra or cobras. A reader who encounters the written description, “fiery ones” and the additional description of their wings might envision a winged solar disk with the accompanying anthropomorphic figure. This understanding is most plausible if the person is unfamiliar with the art of Egypt and the Levant but familiar with the art of Mesopotamia. Three features in Isaiah 6, however, make the winged solar disk an unlikely image for Isaiah’s “fiery ones.” First is the fact that there are multiple seraphim hovering around or above the enthroned Yahweh. There is only one sun and one chief deity, Assur.¹²⁷ Second is the use of the word seraph in later passages that seem to favor a serpent figure. Third is the fact that the figure is anthropomorphic and since the enthroned character is not a human king, but Yahweh, Keel’s observation regarding anthropomorphic figures above the deity works against it.

Achaemenid Royal Art and Isaiah’s Seraphim

As eclectic as they were in putting to use the styles and motifs of earlier empires into their own work, including that of the Egyptians, the Achaemenids apparently did not embrace the uraeus as a symbol of the legitimation and protection of the king. Serpent imagery does appear in ancient Iran prior to the Achaemenids, including art found in Susa and Elam.¹²⁸ In Elamite contexts, the serpent appears to have chthonic associations,

¹²⁷Multiple “fiery ones” hovering in the throne room potentially functions as a polemic against the chief deity as legitimator of the monarch. The supreme deity, Yahweh, is the true king and there exists no other figure to hover in a solar disk above Yahweh. The seraphim are the hosts, or lesser deities, in attendance to the king.

¹²⁸M. C. Root, “Animals in the Art of Ancient Iran,” *A History of the Animal World in the Ancient Near East* (Boston: Brill, 2002), 173-77.

both helpful and destructive.¹²⁹ The snake is a common feature in the hero motif of the Elamites but is virtually nonexistent in the seals of the Achaemenids.¹³⁰ It may be that the form of Zoroastrianism, or “Mazdaism,” practiced by the Achaemenids prohibited them from using serpent images because of Ahuramazda’s association with light and truth and the serpent’s chthonic and destructive characteristics.¹³¹ For whatever reason the image of the Egyptian uraeus or any other serpent does not appear above or around a royal figure in the context of granting authority or providing protection for the Achaemenid king.

The Uraeus in Achaemenid Art

Uraei appear in Achaemenid art only where there appears to be direct Egyptian influence. One example of uraei in Achaemenid art is on the headdress worn by the four-winged genius on a doorjamb to a building known as Palace R at Pasargade (figure 54). The crown is an Egyptian *atef* crown, the robe is Elamite, and the wings conjure images of Assyrian genii.¹³² A trilingual inscription, “I am Cyrus the King, an Achaemenian,” originally accompanied the figure, but is no longer visible.¹³³

¹²⁹Root, “Animals,” 176-79.

¹³⁰Mark B. Garrison and Margaret Cool Root, *Seals on the Persepolis Fortification Tablets: Volume 1, Images of Heroic Encounter* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2000), 294; Root, “Animals,” 176-78.

¹³¹Root, “Animals,” 180.

¹³²M. C. Root, *The King and Kingship in Achaemenid Art: Essays on the Creation of an Iconography of Empire* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979), 302; Edith Porada, *The Art of Ancient Iran: Pre-Islamic Cultures* (New York: Crown, 1965), 158.

¹³³R. G. Kent, *Old Persian: Grammar, Texts, Lexicon* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1950), 116.



Figure 54. Winged genius at Pasargade. In situ. Stone, h. 9 ft. Reprinted from Ilya Gershevitch, *The Cambridge History of Iran: Volume 2, The Median and Achaemenian Periods* (7 vols. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

The identity and the purpose of the figure are unknown. Winged genii do appear with apotropaic purposes in Assyrian royal contexts, and this figure has been judged by some to have such a function, guarding the entrance to Palace R at Persepolis.¹³⁴ According to this understanding of the genius, the inscription bearing Cyrus's name indicates that Cyrus is responsible for the construction of the palace. Root disagrees with the interpretation of the being as an apotropaic, noting that the figure faces into the

¹³⁴Porada, *Art of Ancient Iran*, 158; H. Frankfort, "Achaemenian Sculpture," *American Journal of Archaeology* 50 (1946), 6-14.

building rather than outward as most guardian figures do.¹³⁵ She identifies the figure as Cyrus himself perhaps with the function of symbolizing the diversity and unity of the empire or offering a mythical view of kingship.¹³⁶ The uraei on the crown of the genius in this relief, rather than holding some significant interpretive value on their own, seem to be a part of the Egyptian presence in the crown; their unmistakable Egyptian origin is more relevant than retaining any aspect of the function they have in Egyptian iconography.

Other occurrences are on the canal stelae, one of which is portrayed in figure 55. The four canal stelae were erected upon the completion by Darius of the ancient Suez Canal.¹³⁷ Uraei flank the solar disk at the top of the stelae, and as with the winged genius at Pasagarde, it is difficult to imagine the uraei having significant meaning apart from emphasizing their Egyptian origin.

One important observation regarding the near absence of uraei in Achaemenid art given the Achaemenid propensity toward eclecticism is that it must have been a conscious decision to exclude them.¹³⁸ One question to ask given the rarity of the uraeus in Achaemenid art is how likely it is that a reader of Isaiah within the context of the Achaemenid empire would associate the fiery one of Isaiah's vision with the Egyptian uraeus.

¹³⁵Root, *King and Kingship*, 301.

¹³⁶Root, *King and Kingship*, 302-03.

¹³⁷Root, *King and Kingship*, 61.

¹³⁸Root, "Animals," 179.

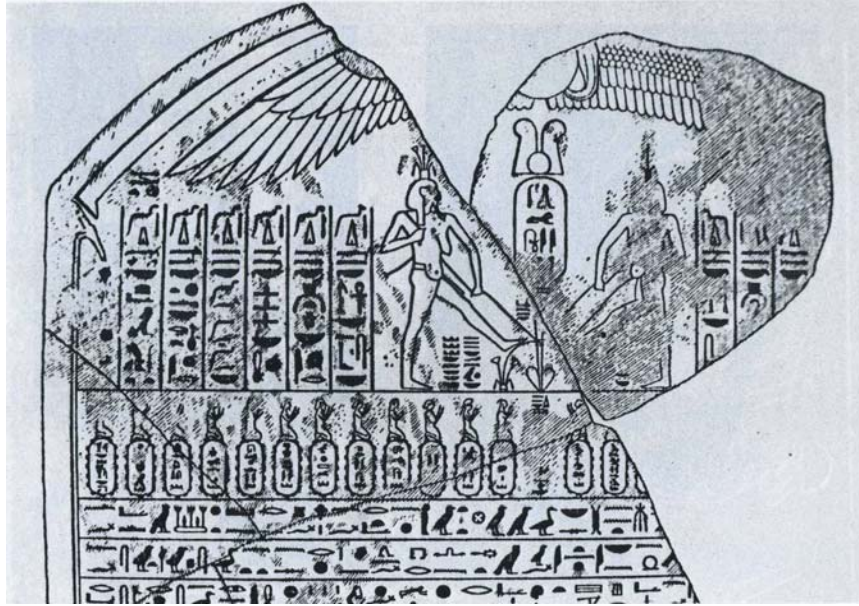


Figure 55. Section of one of the Canal Stelae. Red granite; height c. 3.15, width 2.1 m. Reprinted from M. C. Root, *The King and Kingship in Achaemenid Art: Essays on the Creation of an Iconography of Empire* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979), pl. 9.

Ahuramazda and the Winged Solar Disk

Several of the reliefs at Persepolis include a winged disk from which a bearded anthropomorphic figure emerges, and nearly every Achaemenid seal includes a winged disk.¹³⁹ The figure emerging from the disk resembles the king and is generally thought to be Ahuramazda. Worshippers of Ahuramazda considered him to be the source of light.¹⁴⁰ Fire-worship was also a part of the religion of the Achaemenids and on several stamps on treasury tablets, Ahuramazda hovers above a fire altar that is attended to by

¹³⁹Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire* (trans. Peter T. Daniels; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 248.

¹⁴⁰Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 252.

worshippers.¹⁴¹ The Achaemenids as early as Cyrus II also worshipped Mithra, a solar deity.¹⁴²

The enthroned figure of Darius on the doorjamb of the Central Building sits beneath a canopy decorated with a winged sun disk in an Egyptian style, but absent the uraei (figure 56). Above the canopy, Ahuramazda emerges from his winged disk.¹⁴³ A winged solar disk also adorns the front of the eastern stairway of the Apadana.¹⁴⁴ Darius stands, facing Ahuramazda in his disk and a fire altar on the façade of the tomb of Darius. On the Behistun relief, Ahuramazda in his disk, hovers above some of the prisoners and faces Darius.¹⁴⁵



Figure 56. Ahuramazda and solar disk. Note the appendages beneath on the lower part of the disk and their similarity to the uraeus in location and shape. Reprinted from Hugo Gressmann, *Altorientalische Bilder zum alten Testament* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1927), 311.

¹⁴¹Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 249-50.

¹⁴²Dandamanaev and Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 327-28.

¹⁴³Porada, *Art of Iran*, 154.

¹⁴⁴Porada, *Art of Iran*, 151.

¹⁴⁵Porada, *Art of Iran*, 142.

The verbal description of a “fiery one” hovering above the enthroned Achaemenid king fits several visual depictions of Ahuramazda. Ahuramazda also appears in Achaemenid reliefs in order to provide legitimacy to the monarchy through expressions of divine approval and protection. The identification of the “fiery ones” as Ahuramazda in his solar disk, however, encounters the same difficulties as did the anthropomorphic figure emerging from the solar disk in Mesopotamian royal art.

The Seraphim as Hostile Forces

Several versions of combat scenes portray a Persian man fighting mythical creatures. Portrayals of a man in combat with various creatures, both natural and mythical, are found on numerous seals inscribed with the name of the Achaemenid king.¹⁴⁶ Renditions of this “hero” stabbing some dangerous creature are also present on the doorjambs of the Palace of Darius (figure 57), the “Harem,” and the Throne Hall at Persepolis.¹⁴⁷

The man in the reliefs is most likely the Achaemenid king. The hero in the Achaemenid reliefs wears a plain headband instead of a crown and the strapped shoes worn by non-royal figures in Achaemenid art.¹⁴⁸ For Root, the garb of the Achaemenid king creates an archetypal connection between the king and the “Persian Man”; though a royal figure, the king is also a hero with whom all Persians could identify.¹⁴⁹ Root points

¹⁴⁶Root, *King and Kingship*, 303; Garrison and Root, *Seals* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2000).

¹⁴⁷Root, *King and Kingship*, 303.

¹⁴⁸Root, *King and Kingship*, 304.

¹⁴⁹Root, *King and Kingship*, 305; Garrison and Root, *Seals*, 57.

out that the inscription on the tomb of Darius also identifies the king with the “Persian Man”:¹⁵⁰ “(L)ook at the sculptures (of those) who bear the throne, then shalt thou know, then shall it become known to thee: the spear of a Persian man has gone forth far: then it shall become known to thee: a Persian man has delivered battle far indeed from Persia.”¹⁵¹ The image might have in part a legitimating function by connecting Darius, whose claims to the throne were somewhat dubious, not only to prior kings but to “everyman” of Persian descent.¹⁵²



Figure 57. Royal hero battling lion-headed monster. Persepolis, Palace of Darius, north jamb of southern doorway, 5th century BCE. In situ, stone, height 4.8 m. Reprinted from Edith Porada, *The Art of Ancient Iran: Pre-Islamic Cultures* (New York: Crown Publishers, inc., 1965), 157, pl. 44.

While Root points out the garb of the king in the “heroic encounter” reliefs, Porada discusses the action of the king. For Porada, the seals and reliefs that depict the

¹⁵⁰ Root, *King and Kingship*, 305.

¹⁵¹ Kent, *Old Persian*, 138.

¹⁵² Root, *King and Kingship*, 305-06; Porada, *Art of Ancient Iran* 159-60.

Achaemenid king in combat with mythic monsters create a direct connection between the king, who in the reliefs has super-human powers, and the divine.¹⁵³ These images reflect a tendency of Darius in his iconography to elevate the king “into the sphere of super-terrestrial powers,” in a manner that is similar to Egyptian conceptions of the king as deity.¹⁵⁴ This tendency is in contrast to the Achaemenid inscriptions which present the king “gratefully dependent on the help of his god, Ahuramazda.”¹⁵⁵ This emphasis on the actions of the king does not stop at divine approval for the king, but directly associates the king with the divine, thus granting legitimacy to his reign.

The creatures in these depictions are important as well in that they symbolize forces that are hostile to the king and empire.¹⁵⁶ Viewers take comfort in the fact that the king is victorious over such forces, but also are cautioned. Those entering the area into which the doorways lead find themselves moving in the same direction as the slain creatures.¹⁵⁷ The message is the same as that of the relief at Behistun: usurpers will be defeated. The creatures also say something of the continuing rule and order of the empire. The same creatures engaged in battle with the king on the doorjambs appear on the columns that support the ceilings of the same buildings (figure 58). Following their

¹⁵³ Edith Porada, review of Erich F. Schmidt, *Persepolis II. Contents of the Treasury and Other Discoveries*, *JNES* 20 (1961): 66-71.

¹⁵⁴ Porada, review of Schmidt, 68.

¹⁵⁵ Porada, review of Schmidt, 68.

¹⁵⁶ Root, *King and Kingship*, 307; Assyrian reliefs that depict the king hunting and killing lions communicated the king’s role in maintaining cosmic order through the defeat of chaotic powers; Michael B. Dick, “The Neo-Assyrian Lion Hunt and Yahweh’s Answer to Job,” *JBL* 125 (2006): 243-79.

¹⁵⁷ Root, *King and Kingship*, 307.

defeat and subjugation by the king, they become a helpful and necessary part of the imperial order.¹⁵⁸ Root observes, “In any pastoral/agrarian society the capricious forces of nature which embody all that is most feared and most destructive are also those upon which life, prosperity, and social stability depend.”¹⁵⁹ Threatening powers, whether foreign nations or cosmic forces, are brought under control by the king and the order that is necessary for harmonious existence is maintained by king and imperial structure.

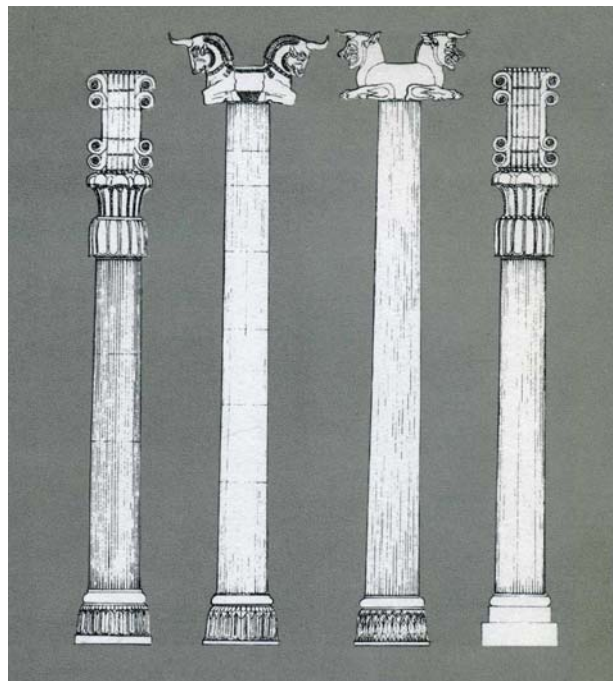


Figure 58. Columns at Persepolis, horned bulls and horned lions, 6th-5th centuries, BCE. Reprinted from Roman Ghirshman, *The Art of Ancient Iran: From Its Origins to the Time of Alexander the Great* (trans. Stuart Gilbert and James Emmons; New York: Golden Press, 1964).

¹⁵⁸ For a similar view regarding Assyrian iconography see Chikako E. Watanabe, *Animal Symbolism in Mesopotamia: A Contextual Approach* (Wiener Offene Orientalistik 1; Vienna: Institut für Orientalistik der Universität Wien, 2002): “The function of the royal lion hunt may therefore be regarded as transforming destructive violence into something positive and productive, thereby restoring cultural order in society” 83.

¹⁵⁹ Root, *King and Kingship*, 308.

The Egyptian uraeus was present throughout the ancient Near East including the era of the Achaemenid Empire as well as in a very limited role in Achaemenid art. That an Achaemenid-era reader of Isaiah 6 and the rest of the book of Isaiah would have imagined the fiery ones hovering around Yahweh as winged uraei seems likely. It seems less likely that such a reader would have conceived of the seraphim as representations of major deities as they were in Egypt or as lesser deities as in the Levant. Instead, a winged serpent above the king might evoke in the imagination of an Achaemenid-era reader a defeated mythical creature, now in the service of the king.

Seraphim in the book of Isaiah are dangerous beings to be feared by humans. In the service of Yahweh, though, are the agents cleansing (Isa 6:6-7) who purify Isaiah. The seraphim in Isaiah 6 are mythic and cosmic symbols of Yahweh's defeat of all hostile powers. If one follows Mary Douglas in her explanation of impurity,¹⁶⁰ the composite form of the seraphim is an example of impurity. Thus the most impure of creatures, a serpent with hands, feet, and wings, has become for Yahweh an agent for cleansing. Elsewhere in the book of Isaiah, Yahweh masters cosmic creatures that represent chaotic forces (27:1; 51:9-10). Just as the raised throne in Isaiah 6 captures the theme of Yahweh's bringing down the powerful and proud, the seraphim capture the theme of Yahweh's defeat of the threatening forces of chaos and impurity.

Summary Thoughts

¹⁶⁰Mary Douglas, "The Abominations of Leviticus," in *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), 41-57; R. Hendell considers the Cherubim and the "flame" in Gen 3:24 to be taboo according to Douglas's explanation; "'The Flame of the Whirling Sword': A Note on Genesis 3:24," *JBL* 104 (2004): 671-74 (see n. 23).

The image of winged burning ones hovering above the enthroned Yahweh contributes to a larger theme of fire in the book of Isaiah. Images of flames and fire communicate the message that it is Yahweh who defeats and judges oppressive empires. Yahweh's people are not to put their trust in alliances with nations to defend themselves against their enemies. Rather, they are to put their trust in Yahweh. The seraphim also represent threatening forces in the form of impurity or chaos. The seraphim overcome Isaiah's impurity with a burning coal. Just as Yahweh purifies the prophet through fire, Yahweh will also purify his people through fire. It is Yahweh alone who overcomes the threatening forces of chaos and impurity. The seraphim in Isaiah's vision contribute to the theme of exclusive devotion to Yahweh as they embody the fire that consumes whatever is hostile to Yahweh, whether that hostility is present in the form of impurity or imperial regimes.

Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel, does not hover above a human king, granting him legitimation and protection. Neither does Yahweh place in the hands of humans the task of maintaining cosmic order. The presence of the seraphim in Isaiah's vision of the throneroom of Yahweh contribute to Isaiah's message that instead of placing their trust in a human king and an imperial system, the people of Yahweh are to recognize Yahweh alone as the one true king.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Fullness of All the Earth

Introduction

The seraphim voice a two-part chant in Isa 6:3. The first half of the chant of the seraphim, קדוש קדוש קדוש, proclaims Yahweh's holiness and is known as the Trisagion. The Trisagion may have been a part of the temple liturgy¹ and it contributes to an interpretation of the entire chant of the seraphim that emphasizes its cultic characteristics. The setting is in the temple (6:1, 4). Isaiah's recognition of his impure state (6:4) and the presence of an altar (6:6) also contribute to a cultic reading of the vision. Sweeney notes that Yahweh's appearance in the temple and the fact that judgment takes place are indications that Isaiah was a priest and that the vision takes place in the temple during the ceremonies of the Day of Atonement.² The terminology used throughout the description of Isaiah's throne room vision and the setting contribute to the plausibility of a cultic setting for the vision and the ensuing interpretation that the chant is a proclamation of Yahweh's world-filling presence.

The rest of the book of Isaiah offers reasons to move beyond a cultic interpretation of Isaiah's experience in the throne room of Yahweh. When Isaiah sees

¹Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 265; Robert Hayward, "The Chant of the Seraphim and the Worship of the Second Temple," *Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association* 20 (1997), 63-80.

²Marvin A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39 with an Introduction to Prophetic Literature* FOTL XVI (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 140.

Yahweh enthroned, he also sees that the hem of Yahweh's robe fills the temple. In Isa 57:15 and 66:1-2, Yahweh's dwelling place is not described in cultic terms, but rather in cosmic terms. Also, the chant of the seraphim rattles the very foundations of the temple (6:4). A cosmic rather than cultic reading of the chant also fits within the context of imperial art in which the king's rule coincides with the order of the cosmos.

The most common approach to translating and interpreting the second half of the seraphim's chant in Isaiah 6:3, מלא כל־הארץ כבודו, is apparent in the English translation, "The whole earth is full of his glory." Such a translation reflects and promotes the understanding of the word כבוד as a reference to Yahweh's presence. The translation also uses the word מלא as a verb. The interpretation that follows this translation is that the presence of Yahweh is not limited to the temple, but extends throughout all the earth.³

Verb forms of the word מלא appear twice in Isaiah's description of what he saw in the throne room of Yahweh. In Isa 6:1, Yahweh's שול, "the hem of his robe,"⁴ fills the temple (היכל), while in 6:4, עשן, "smoke," fills the house (בית). Both of these objects, the hem and the smoke, represent the physical manifestations of a theophany. Isaiah sees the hem and presumably sees and smells the smoke. The word מלא in these two verses is a verb for which the subject is some form of Yahweh's presence and for which the object is

³Clements notes that the word can be used to mean both "earth" and "land," so this declaration is recognition that Yahweh is national deity of Israel-Judah and the universal deity; R. E. Clements, *Isaiah 1-39* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 74.

⁴The meaning of שול in this verse has been the topic of much discussion; see G. R. Driver, "Isaiah 6:1 'His Train Filled the Temple,'" *Near Eastern Studies in Honor of W. F. Albright* ed., H. Goedicke (Baltimore: , 1971), 87-91; Lyle Eslinger, "The Infinite in a Finite Organical Perception (Isaiah VI 1-5)," *Vetus Testamentum* 45 (1995), 145-73; whatever translation on which one settles, the term still refers to some manifestation of Yahweh's presence.

a place, the Jerusalem sanctuary, where one would expect to encounter the presence of the deity.

Apart from 6:3, the noun כבוד in the book of Isaiah often functions as a reference to Yahweh's magnificent presence (3:8; 4:5; 11:10; 35:2; 40:5; 58:8; 59:19; 60:1, 2; 66:18, 19). Elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, the verb מלא appears with כבוד as its subject and the temple or tabernacle as the place that Yahweh's presence, his כבוד, fills (Exod 40:34; 1 Kgs 8:11; Ezek 10:4; 43:5; 44:4).⁵ The use of the two terms, מלא and כבוד in Isaiah 6:3, therefore, are compatible with the interpretation that finds the declaration, מלא כל-הארץ כבודו, to mean that Yahweh's presence fills all the earth. Some interpreters argue for a difference between Yahweh's קדוש, proclaimed by the seraphim in the first half of their chant, and Yahweh's כבוד, suggesting that Yahweh's קדוש is his nonphysical inner nature and the כבוד is the manifestation of his being.⁶ This understanding of כבוד also corresponds to the other terms referring to the physical manifestation of Yahweh in the temple (שול in verse 1 and עשן in verse 4).

A New Interpretation

Consideration of ancient imperial iconography introduces the possibility for an alternative interpretation of the chant, מלא כל-הארץ כבודו. The art of the Achaemenids

⁵M. Weinfeld, "כבוד *kābôd*," *TDOT* 7:29.

⁶John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33* (WBC 24; rev. ed.; Nashville: Nelson Reference & Electronic, 2005), 107; Brevard Childs, *Isaiah* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 55; Millard C. Lind, "Political Implications of Isaiah 6," in *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah* (ed. Craig C. Broyles and Craig A. Evans, vol. 1; New York: Brill, 1997), 320.

and other ancient empires depict tribute processions as part of a program that advanced their imperial ideology. Tribute processions in which representatives of all the lands of the empire presented gifts to the king, may have been occasions marked by ceremonies. With regard to the Achaemenids, both Root and Briant are skeptical about the existence of an annual ceremony surrounding a tribute procession at Persepolis.⁷ Regardless of the occasions of their historical occurrence, the depictions of these processions in an imperial context functioned as symbols of the universal reign of the king and in addition to being a display of loyalty, the treasures brought to the king symbolized the ideological claim that all the treasures and resources of the earth were the property of the king. A reader familiar with the imagery of the tribute procession and the ideology it was used to promote may have recognized some alternative functions and definitions for the terms in Isaiah's description of his throne room vision.

The word מלא in the Seraphim's chant in Isa 6:3 is a noun. Since Isaiah uses a verb form for the other two occurrences of the term in his vision account (6:1, 4), the choice to use a noun form here is good reason to pause and consider some of the potential meanings for the word. Out of its 35 occurrences in the Hebrew Bible, the noun מלא most often "expresses the entirety of the earth and its contents or abundance."⁸ The word מלא appears with בל־הארץ, "all the earth," in Isa 6:3, with הארץ, "the earth," in 34:1 and

⁷Margaret Cool Root, *King and Kingship in Achaemenid Art: Essays on the Creation of an Iconography of Empire* (Acta Iranica 19; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979), 277-79; Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire* (trans. Peter T. Daniels; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 183-86.

⁸M. V. Van Pelt and W. C. Kaiser, Jr., "מלא," NIDOTTE 2:941.

with הים, “the sea,” in 42:10. In each of these, the noun מלא refers to what fills something, either the earth/land or the sea.

In Isa 6:3, instead of translating מלא as a verb, “is full,” the decision to leave the word as a noun allows it to function as the subject of the sentence. This change from verb to noun results in the translation of the chant, “The fullness of all the earth is his glory.” Wildberger translates the chant this way, but understands כבוד to mean “honor,” and the interpretation that in Isaiah 6, “the representatives of the host of the Holy One point out that everything which fills the earth is also involved in praising Yahweh’s majesty. His כבוד (glory) can be seen in all the richness of its manifestations throughout the earth, all of which are the works of Yahweh.”⁹ Wildberger interprets the chant to mean that all of creation proclaims the honor or glory of Yahweh.

Not only do “glory” and “honor” belong in the definition of the word כבוד, the concept of riches or wealth is also part of the definition.¹⁰ Isaiah uses כבוד as a reference to wealth in 10:3; 61:6, and 66:11, 12.¹¹ A translation of Isa 6:3 that uses כבודו in this sense, “The fullness of all the earth is his wealth,” corresponds to the function of scenes of tribute processions in ancient imperial iconography. Tribute scenes are a visual claim to the wealth and resources of the earth while the chant of the seraphim functions as a verbal claim. An ancient reader who is familiar with the ideology of the tribute scene might interpret the chant of the seraphim as a counter to the claims of the empire. Just as

⁹Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, 266-67.

¹⁰Weinfeld, “כְּבוֹדִי *kābôd*,” TDOT 7:27; C. Westermann, “כָּבֵד *kbd* to be heavy,” TLOT 2:590-602.

¹¹Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, 108.

the image of the upraised throne and the presence of the seraphim contribute to the theme of exclusive loyalty to Yahweh, so does this verbal response to the tribute procession. In response to the iconographic scenes of tribute processions by which kings claim ownership to the wealth and resources of the earth, the seraphim proclaim that the fullness of the earth belongs to Yahweh.

The Tribute Procession in Ancient Near Eastern Imperial Art

The rulers of empires communicated that their reigns extended throughout the earth and that their universal reigns were on account of the desires of their deities. Darius states, in his inscription at Naqš-I-Rustam,

A great god is Ahuramazda, who created this earth, who created yonder sky, who created man, who created happiness for man, who made Darius king, one king of many, one lord of many.

I am Darius the Great King, King of Kings, King of countries containing all kinds of men, King in this great earth far and wide, son of Hystaspes and Achaemenian, a Persian, son of a Persian, an Aryan, having Arian lineage.¹²

With this statement, Darius claims his place as the Great King of all the earth. A list of lands conquered by Darius and bearing tribute to Darius follows this claim and following that list, Darius states, “Ahuramazda, when he saw this earth in commotion, thereafter bestowed it upon me, made me king; I am king. By the favor of Ahuramazda I put it down in its place; what I said to them, that they did, as was my desire.”¹³ When the king conquers foreign territories and takes possession of the resources of those lands, he is acting on the authority and desires of the deity.

¹²Kent, *Old Persian*, 138.

¹³Kent, *Old Persian*, 138.

Compositions that include portrayals of tribute processions are present in Egyptian, Assyrian, and Achaemenid art. Root identifies two functions of tribute in an imperial context: the first is taxation owed by a subject nation and the second is a gift as encomium, i.e., “an expression of gratitude and continued allegiance to a greater power.”¹⁴ Root does not consider tribute to be the same thing as booty taken at the conclusion of a battle and so compositions depicting defeated peoples bringing various objects of value to the king do not carry the same symbolism as compositions depicting tribute processions.¹⁵ Portrayals of processions often have a ceremonial appearance and include representatives bringing gifts from their lands, often in the form of luxury items. These processions symbolize the power the empire held over those lands and the compositions depicting these processions communicated the message of imperial rule.¹⁶ Root points out that these depictions of tribute processions in imperial art were created during the times when those empires were most engaged in imperial activities: in Egypt’s Eighteenth Dynasty, during the neo-Assyrian Period in Mesopotamia, and during the rule of Darius in Persia.¹⁷

Tribute and Tribute Procession in Ancient Egypt

¹⁴Root, *King and Kingship*, 227-28.

¹⁵Root, *King and Kingship*, 228.

¹⁶Root, *King and Kingship*, 229.

¹⁷Root, *King and Kingship*, 230.

The ordered cosmos consisted of the Egypt's united two lands, while foreign nations situated outside the ordered cosmos represented chaos.¹⁸ The “fullness of all the earth” according to an Egyptian imperial ideology would include all that is under control of the land of Egypt. Foreigners were enemies whose defeat was the defeat of chaos. Imperial expansion, therefore, was not conquering the lands of sovereign nations, but the expansion of the ordered cosmos, over which the Egyptian monarch was rightful ruler. This manner of conceiving the world beyond the borders of Egypt is apparent in Egyptian portrayals of tribute processions.

Some scenes of tribute processions in Egyptian art provide examples of royalty shaping reality into a scene that portrays something they want to communicate. The reliefs at Hatshepsut's temple at Deir el Bahari are the only extant example of an Eighteenth Dynasty royal monument that portrays a tribute procession.¹⁹ These reliefs portray Puntites bearing tribute in a procession toward the queen and an accompanying inscription claims that the Puntites brought tribute every year.²⁰ Egypt, however, was in a relationship that involved trade and commerce with Punt rather than one where they could demand tribute from Punt.²¹ This practice by the Egyptians indicates that they

¹⁸ John Baines, “Ancient Egyptian Kingship: Official Forms, Rhetoric, Context,” in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (JSOTSup 270; ed. John Day; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 22.

¹⁹Root, *King and Kingship*, 244.

²⁰E. Naville, *The Temple of Deir el Bahari* (London: Offices of the Egyptian Exploration Fund, 1894-1908), 16.

²¹W. C. Hayes, “Egypt: Internal Affairs from Tuthmosis I to the Death of Amenophis III,” *Cambridge Ancient History* (3rd ed.; vol. 6; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 24-30; Root, *Kings and Kingship*, 241.

understood the symbolism of bringing tribute as indicating the power of the nation receiving tribute over the nation bringing it. This portrayal of a tribute scene reflects how the Egyptian monarch wished to be seen in relationship to the world and was in contrast to the monarch's actual relationship with the world.

A tribute scene that emphasizes the extent of the Egyptian empire is found in the tomb of Rekh-mi-Re. This composition includes four registers with tribute bearers in the four registers from the outer edges of the lands with which the Egyptian empire was concerned: from the south, Nubians and Puntites, from the west, Minoans, and from the east, Syrians.²² The message communicated by the empire was one of control to the reaches of the empire and the empire's ability to extend its control as far as it willed.

A painting from the tomb of Menkheper-Seneb includes a depiction of a tribute procession. The scene consists of two registers in which Aegeans and Asiatics bring tribute (figure 59). At the left of the top register, three chieftans lead the tribute procession: the first, whose feet and lower body are visible in the upper register, prostrates himself before the king, the second kneels with his hands raised, and the third holds up a child.²³ In the lower register the standing chieftan, identified as the Prince of Kadesh, raises a two-handled vase.²⁴

²²Root, *Kings and Kingship*, 247.

²³W. Stevenson Smith, *The Art and Architecture of Ancient Egypt* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1958), 142.

²⁴Smith, *Art and Architecture*, 142.

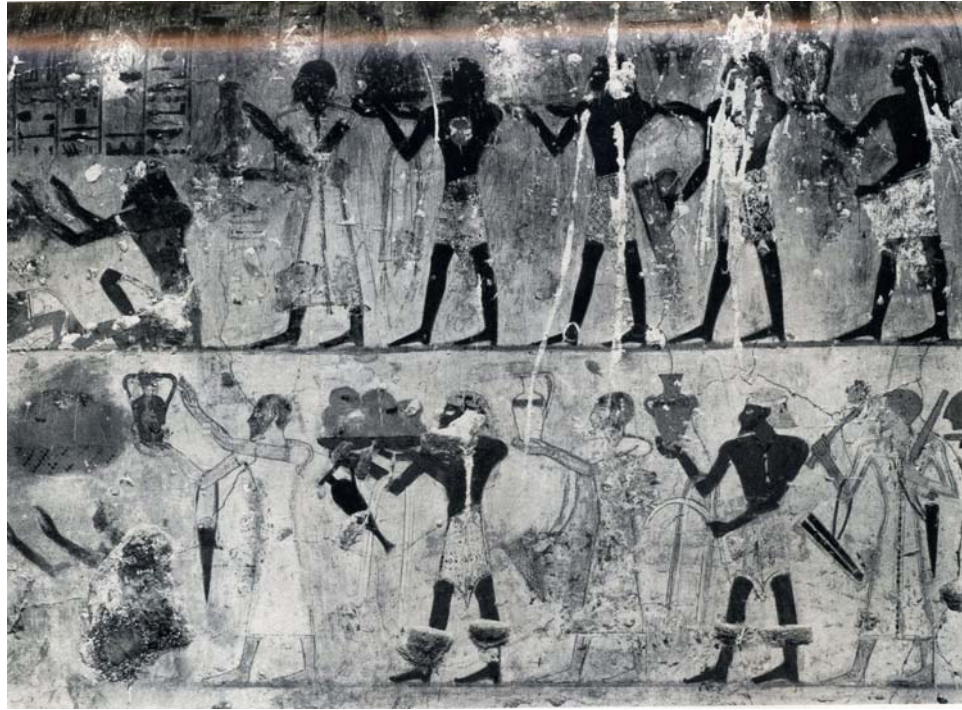


Figure 59. Tribute scene from the tomb of Menkheperre-Seneb, Thebes, 18th Dynasty. Reprinted from W. Stevenson Smith, *The Art and Architecture of Ancient Egypt* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1958), pl. 105.

The Egyptian subjugation of foreigners as portrayed in scenes of tribute processions, whether accurate or not, is symbolic of the defeat of chaos. Root's conclusion that Egyptian scenes of tribute processions "stress the military power of the pharaoh over the subjects bringing gifts even in cases where in historical reality the pharaoh had no such power"²⁵ corresponds to this Egyptian view of the outside world as chaos and the equation of foreigners to enemies.

Tribute and Tribute Procession in Mesopotamia

Several extant depictions of tribute processions in Mesopotamian royal art date to the neo-Assyrian Period. Ivory panels from the throne room dais of Assurnasirpal II in the temple of Nabu at Nimrud portray the Assyrian king receiving tribute (figure 60). In

²⁵Root, *Kings and Kingship*, 283.

figure 60, the king is third from the left and holds a ceremonial bow while two Assyrian attendants, one with an umbrella and another with a fly whisk, attend to him and sword-bearing Assyrian officers lead foreigners bringing various items of tribute to him.²⁶ In the tribute scenes, the foreigners all lean slightly forward at the waist and carry items such as cauldrons, jugs, bowls, furniture parts, and wineskins.²⁷



Figure 60. Reconstruction of an ivory panel from throne room dais in the Temple of Nabu at Nimrud (9th century BCE). Length 59.5 cm. Reprinted from M. E. L. Mallowan, *Nimrud and Its Remains* vol. 1 (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1966), 248-49 fig. 211.

A relief on the exterior façade of the throne room of the Northwest Palace at Nimrud includes a larger than life-size portrayal of figures in a tribute procession.²⁸ Foreigners and Assyrian officials are in the scene in which the foreigners bring a variety of gifts to the Assyrian king. In lists from the Standard Inscription, which corresponds to the reliefs, Assurnasirpal describes the tribute he received from the lands he conquered as including gold and silver and exotic animals.²⁹ The foreigners in this scene are bent

²⁶M. E. L. Mallowan, *Nimrud and Its Remains* (2 vols.; New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1966), 1:249-50.

²⁷Mallowan, *Nimrud*, 1:250.

²⁸Irene J. Winter, "Royal Rhetoric and the Development of Historical Narrative in the Neo-Assyrian Reliefs," *Studies in Visual Communication* 7 (1981): 16-17; Root, *King and Kingship*, 253.

²⁹Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 16-18; A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions* 2 (Weisbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1976), 584-86, 653.

forward at the waist, and some of them assume a gesture of submission with their hands clenched in fists and at eye level (figure 61).³⁰ Root points out the symbolic importance of the foreigners voluntarily raising their fists in this submissive gesture as it contrasts the images of forced submission in battle scenes.³¹ Figures who assume this posture of submission as part of a tribute scene contribute to the overall message of submission communicated by the scene.



Figure 61. Section of relief from the north façade of Assurnasirpal's Northwest Palace at Nimrud (9th century BCE); foreigners are part of a tribute procession. Stone, height 2.6 meters. British Museum. Reprinted from M. E. L. Mallowan, *Nimrud and Its Remains* vol. 1 (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1966), 101 fig. 48.

Shalmaneser's Black Obelisk, throne dais, and bronze gates all contain portrayals of specific historical tribute scenes.³² The Black Obelisk depicts foreigners bringing tribute to Shalmaneser III (figure 62).

³⁰Mallowan, *Nimrud*, 1:101.

³¹Root, *Kings and Kingship*, 265.

³²Root, *Kings and Kingship*, 254-55.



Figure 62. Detail from the Black Obelisk of Shalmanezzer III (9th century BCE). From Nimrud. Black alabaster. British Museum. Reprinted from Anton Moortgat, *The Art of Ancient Mesopotamia* (New York: Phaidon, 1969), pl. 271.

This obelisk uses pictures and text to describe five specific events in which foreigners brought tribute to Shalmanezzer III. The twenty pictorial panels on the obelisk include the submission Sua, the Gilzanite, and Yehu, son of Omri.³³ Included in the tribute brought to Shalmanezzer III are animals such as camels, elephants, and monkeys. The Black Obelisk, therefore, commemorates specific historical events in order to communicate the ideological aims of the Assyrian empire.

³³Henri Frankfort, *The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient* (Fifth ed.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 156-57.

The bronze bands on the gates of the palace of Shalmanezzer III at Balawat also commemorate specific historical events. The upper register of one of the bands includes a scene in which ships from Tyre arrive with tribute on them (figure 63). Porters carry a variety of objects in bails, trays, and cauldrons as tribute to the Assyrian king, Shalmanezzer III. In this scene as well as another scene of tribute on the bronze bands in which tribute bearers from the city of Bit Dakuri offer tribute to the Assyrians, the context is imperial conquest.³⁴ The lower register in the band of figure 63 depicts the Assyrian army leaving their camp on the way to capture the city of Khazazu.³⁵ The scenes in the upper and lower registers complement one another with their movement to the right and the arrangement of the figures in the scenes as they tell the story of the conquests of Shalmanezzer III.³⁶ As with the Black Obelisk, the emphasis of the narrative portrayed by the pictures on the bands is to record the imperial expansion achieved by Shalmanezzer III.

³⁴Frankfort, *Art and Architecture*, 164-67.

³⁵Frankfort, *Art and Architecture*, 165-66.

³⁶Frankfort, *Art and Architecture*, 166.

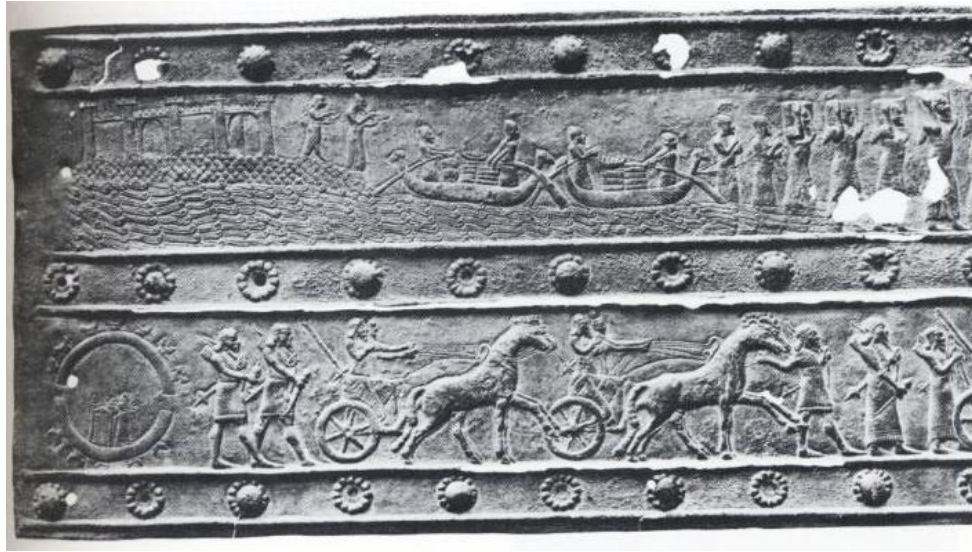


Figure 63. Section of bronze band from gate from palace of Shalmaneser at Balawat (9th century BCE). Total height 1.62 m. British Museum. Reprinted from Henri Frankfort, *The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient* (Fifth ed.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 165 ill. 191.

Several rooms in Sargon's Khorsabad palace also contain tribute scenes. In one of these scenes, foreigners bring models of cities and grooms lead horses toward the king (figure 64). In the Khorsabad throne room, processions advance toward the king from every side, symbolic of the ever-expanding empire and the king's position at its center.³⁷ Rather than drawing attention to specific accomplishments of the king in battle or hunting, the scenes at Khorsabad offer, without narrative, a portrayal of royal power.³⁸

An inscription at the gateway of the palace may indicate that these tribute processions actually took place as part of a ceremony:

From the princes of the four regions (of the world), who had submitted to the yoke of my rule, whose lives I had spared, together with the governors of my land, the scribes and superintendents, the nobles, officials, and elders (?), I

³⁷André Parrot, *The Arts of Assyria* (trans. Stuart Gilbert and James Emmons; New York: Golden Press, 1961), 39.

³⁸Frankfort, *Art and Architecture*, 174.

received their rich gifts as tribute. I caused them to sit down at a banquet and instituted a feast of music.³⁹

This inscription emphasizes the extent of the reign of the king with its mention of “the four regions.” The inscription also places the tribute within the context of a celebration rather than some explicit form of forced submission.⁴⁰ The foreign officials are portrayed in the inscriptions as grateful to the Assyrian king and as joyful participants in the ceremony.



Figure 64. Relief from Khorsabad (Tel-Vigneau) portraying tribute bearers (8th century BCE). Gypseous alabaster; height 5 ft. 4 in. Louvre. Reprinted from André Parrot, *The Arts of Assyria* (trans. Stuart Gilbert and James Emmons; New York: Golden Press, 1961), 38 fig. 44.

Scenes of tribute processions omit any notion of trade or exchange of goods; all the goods are brought to the Assyrian king. The visual display of a tribute procession reflects the reality of an imperial system where wealth and resources continually flow from the periphery to the center. This one-way flow of goods is an indication of the

³⁹D. D. Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1926-27), 2:50-51.

⁴⁰Root, *Kings and Kingship*, 262.

power of the king and the empire.⁴¹ The willingness of the participants in the scenes that portray tribute processions contributes to the ideological message of the king by which he justifies the subjection by the few of the many.

Tribute and Tribute Procession in the Achaemenid Empire

The movement of resources and wealth from periphery to center in an empire was necessitated by the expenses of imperial activity: construction projects, military expeditions, gift giving, and the costs of court activity.⁴² In addition the necessary revenue that tribute brought to the center of the empire, the activity of bringing wealth and resources from all around the realm of the empire bore ideological symbolism. Lands that were conquered by the Achaemenids were under their authority; all that was in those lands belonged to the Achaemenids and the exotic gifts brought to the emperor represented all the commodities of subject countries.⁴³

Darius commissioned the earliest Achaemenid portrayals of tribute processions and these are located at Persepolis on the north and east stair façades of the Apadana, or Audience Hall.⁴⁴ The Treasury at Persepolis probably functioned first as a place to store

⁴¹Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 17.

⁴²Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 388.

⁴³Briant, *Cyrus to Alexander*, 396, 415; Briant calls tribute "a metaphor for imperial dominion itself," 388; Root calls the tribute procession, "the supreme visual statement of imperial order," *Kings and Kingship*, 249.

⁴⁴Root, *Kings and Kingship*, 227; later tribute scenes appear at Palace H and the Palace of Darius.

the tribute brought to the Achaemenid king at Persepolis.⁴⁵ The tribute brought to Persepolis and stored in the Treasury did not serve an economic purpose, but was symbolic of the tribute people's allegiance and submission to the king as well as the divine right of the Achaemenid to rule over them.⁴⁶

Depictions of tribute processions have the same function as inscriptions with lists of conquered countries, lists of countries that provided materials and/or labor for construction projects, and images of peoples supporting the throne: they all communicate the message of the king's control over the represented groups.⁴⁷ A text from the Behistun Inscription of Darius places tribute within the context of empire; this quote follows a listing of 23 provinces: "Saith Darius the King: These are the countries which came unto me; by the favor of Ahuramazda they were my subjects; they bore tribute to me; what was said unto them by me either by night or by day, that was done."⁴⁸ In an example of how later ancient historians understood the Achaemenid kings' gathering of goods from the empire, Dino states, "The Persian kings had water fetched from the Nile and the Danube, which they laid up in their treasuries as a sort of testimony of the greatness of

⁴⁵Nicholas Cahill, "The Treasury at Persepolis: Gift-Giving at the City of the Persians," *AJA* 89 (1985), 373-89.

⁴⁶Cahill, "Treasury," 387-88.

⁴⁷Briant, *Cyrus to Alexander*, 172-77.

⁴⁸Roland G. Kent, *Old Persian* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1953), 119.

their power and universal empire” (Plutarch, *Alex.* 36.4).⁴⁹ The gifts brought to the king represented the king’s dominion over the lands that those gifts represented.⁵⁰

In the Apadana reliefs, three registers of horizontal reliefs appear on either side of a central panel (figure 65). When facing the reliefs, the three registers to the left of the central panel portray members of the royal entourage including guards, dignitaries, horses and chariots.⁵¹ The registers to the right of the center panel portray twenty-three delegations of tribute-bearers. Trees form vertical borders which separate the delegations from different nations and an usher dressed in Persian or Median attire leads each delegation. The dress of the figures in the delegations and the forms of tribute they bring correspond to their nationalities.⁵²

The movement of both sides is toward the central panel. Above the central panel is a winged solar disk, representing Ahuramazda. The central panel that is currently in place depicts eight guards, four on each side, facing a blank inscription panel. This panel is not, however, the original central panel of the reliefs. The original central panel, found in the Treasury, depicts the king who is seated and is being approached by an official whose duty may be to announce the arrival of the foreign delegates with their tribute (figure 66).⁵³

⁴⁹Briant, *Cyrus to Alexander*, 179.

⁵⁰Briant, *Cyrus to Alexander*, 186.

⁵¹ Edith Porada, *The Art of Ancient Iran: Pre-Islamic Cultures* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1965), 151.

⁵²Root, *Kings and Kinship*, 232, 235.

⁵³Root, *Kings and Kinship*, 88, 282.



Figure 65. Tributaries from various countries on the north façade of the stairway of the Apadana at Persepolis (6th-5th century BCE). Stone. In situ. Reprinted from Roman Ghirshman, *The Arts of Ancient Iran: From Its Origins to the Time of Alexander the Great* (trans. Stuart Gilbert and James Emmons; New York: Golden Press, 1964), 182 fig. 229.



Figure 66. Section of the original central panel of the Apadana reliefs at Persepolis (6th-5th centuries BCE). Stone; height 98 ½ in. Archaeological Museum, Tehran. Reprinted from Roman Ghirshman, *The Arts of Ancient Iran: From Its Origins to the Time of Alexander the Great* (trans. Stuart Gilbert and James Emmons; New York: Golden Press, 1964), 205-06 fig. 255.

The movement from periphery to center, where the king sits, is reflective of the reality of imperial policy and practice. All resources and wealth belong to the king and their continued flow to the center of the empire facilitates the existence and further expansion of the empire. The presence of Ahuramazda above the seated king contributes to the message of the deity's approval and enablement of the king's activities.

In the scenes of the Apadana reliefs, Persian officials lead the foreign tributaries by the hand into the presence of the Achaemenid king (figure 67). In Egyptian portrayals of tribute processions, the foreigners prostrate themselves or fall to their knees and in Assyrian portrayals, the foreigners kiss the feet of the king or take the submissive posture of holding their fists at face level.⁵⁴ The motif of hand-holding while approaching a deity or greater power is present in Egyptian and Mesopotamian art.⁵⁵ Thus a comparison of the Achaemenid reliefs to the Egyptian and Mesopotamian precursors places the Achaemenid king in the place of the deity. The fact that the representatives from the nations are lead before the Achaemenid king in this manner may indicate the attitude in which they were to approach the king, that being one of reverence and pious trepidation.⁵⁶ This hand-holding motif is another example of how the king saw himself in relation to the world and how he expected the world to view him.

⁵⁴Root, *Kings and Kingship*, 267.

⁵⁵Root, *Kings and Kingship*, 267-72.

⁵⁶Root, *Kings and Kingship*, 282-84.



Figure 67. Section of Apadana reliefs at Persepolis; Persian official leads foreigner by the hand. Stone. In situ. Reprinted from Roman Ghirshman, *The Arts of Ancient Iran: From Its Origins to the Time of Alexander the Great* (trans. Stuart Gilbert and James Emmons; New York: Golden Press, 1964), 170, fig. 216.

The Empires of the Achaemenids, Egyptians, and Assyrians all included in their art at some stage scenes of tribute processions. While there may have been nuances in what the royal sponsors wanted to emphasize in their art, the claim of the empire to the wealth and resources of the world is always central to the message communicated by the tribute procession. When the seraphim in Isaiah's throne room vision proclaim of Yahweh, "The fullness of all the earth is his treasure," they delegitimize the claims made by empires and their scenes of tribute procession. Wealth and resources do not belong to any human empire, but to Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel.

Riches, Treasure, and the Fullness of All the Earth in Isaiah

The semantic range for the word כבוד includes the concept of riches. Thus words used to describe riches, such as אוצר “treasures,” חיל “wealth,” כסף “silver,” and זהב “gold,” are all related to כבוד. As noted earlier, Isaiah uses the word כבוד as a reference to wealth in 10:3; 61:6; 66:11, and 12. Beginning with the image of the tribute procession and how the tribute procession symbolizes the ideology that justifies the centralization of wealth and resources in an empire, we can consider the appearances of these words for wealth and treasure where Isaiah uses them in contexts of the wealth of nations.

Isaiah 2:7-8

In these verses, the land of Jacob (Israel) is filled (מלא) with silver and gold (7a). The results of such wealth include the filling of their land with horses and chariots (7b), symbols of military might.⁵⁷ The ultimate result is that their land is filled with idols (8). This situation is reminiscent of the great wealth of Solomon (1 Kgs 10:14-22), his military might (10:26-29), and his idolatry (11:4-10).⁵⁸ In the book of Isaiah, gold and silver are often associated with idolatry (2:20; 30:22; 31:7; 40:19; 46:6) and there are warnings against trust in military might (7:1-25; 12:29-32; 20:1-7; 30:1-7; 31:1-4).

⁵⁷Clements does not equate the horses and chariots with military might, but rather with trading caravans by which foreign goods were imported; R. E. Clements, *Isaiah 1-39* NCB (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 44; Wildberger claims that horses were kept only for warfare; Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, 108.

⁵⁸Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, 57.

Jacob's wealth, armament, and idolatry ultimately prevent Jacob's participation in the procession of the nations to Yahweh's mountain described in 2:1-4.⁵⁹

In Isa 2:1-4, Yahweh's house is high and raised and "all the nations stream to it" (2:1-2). In this procession, the nations do not bring their treasures. They instead come to Zion to receive instruction and justice. The presence of peace and justice among the nations is a result of Yahweh's universal reign (2:3-4). Part of the ideology of empires is the claim that the king who reigns establishes justice within his kingdom, and as he expands the empire establishing his rule over other nations, he brings justice, peace, and prosperity.⁶⁰ Kings, however, amass gold and silver through taxation and tribute in order to maintain standing armies for the purposes of warfare and expansion.⁶¹ Isaiah brings the message that when humans amass wealth the result is warfare and idolatry which lead to God's judgment according to which exalted humans are brought down and the land that was once full is made desolate (2:9-4:1).⁶² The imperial practices of conquest and hoarding wealth were performed with the claim that they were divinely sanctioned. Isaiah refutes this claim with the description of the peaceful universal reign of Yahweh and the judgment against human pride.

⁵⁹Marvin A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39 with an Introduction to Prophetic Literature* (FOTL 16 Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 90.

⁶⁰Peter D. Miscall, *Isaiah* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 26.

⁶¹Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, 108.

⁶²Miscall, *Isaiah*, 26-27.

Isaiah 39:1-8

Hezekiah was the fourth and final king whose reign overlapped the prophetic activities of Isaiah ben Amoz (Isa 1:1). Chapters 36-39 of Isaiah narrate the prophet's interaction with king Hezekiah in the context of the Assyrian attack on Judah and Jerusalem. Isaiah's narrative places the visit of the Babylonian envoys after the Assyrian crisis and after Hezekiah's illness. In each case Yahweh brought deliverance, first by striking down the Assyrian armies and Sennacherib himself (37:36-38) and then by granting the dying Hezekiah fifteen additional years of life (38:1, 4-6). When the Babylonians arrived, Hezekiah proudly showed them his store of treasures, including silver, gold, spices, oils, and armor (39:2).

The literary position of chapter 39 provides a transition with its prediction of the Babylonian exile (39:6-8) to the theme in chapter 40 of the end of Judah's punishment, but a historical order of events might place the Babylonian's visit to Jerusalem prior to the Assyrian attack.⁶³ The visit appears to be connected to the pursuit of an alliance between Babylon and Judah against Assyria. Hezekiah received a *מנחה*, "gift," which was often a payment or tribute given with the purpose of allying with the ruler of another nation (1 Kgs 5:1 [Eng. 4:21]; 10:25; Ps 45:13 [Eng. 45:12]; 72:10).⁶⁴ The Babylonians appeared to be favorable allies against the Assyrians because the distance between Babylon and Judah made them an unlikely threat (Isa 39:4). Even though he was just the king of a small nation, Hezekiah tried to impress the visitors with all the wealth and

⁶³Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 286.

⁶⁴Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 28-39* (trans. Thomas Trapp; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 474.

armament he had amassed in his storehouses.⁶⁵ This sought-after alliance enhances Isaiah's later use of the exodus from Egypt as an image for the return from the Babylonian exile: Babylon is Egypt, Egypt is Babylon. In Isa 30:1-7 and 31:1-5, there is the warning against allying with Egypt against the Assyrians, while in 39:1-4, Hezekiah pursues an alliance with Babylon.⁶⁶ In 36:4-10, the Rabshakeh mocks the alliance with Egypt and in 39:5-7 Isaiah foretells the disastrous consequences of Hezekiah's overtures toward Babylon. Just as the Israelites had carried treasures out of Egypt, the Babylonians would in the future carry away all the treasures stored by Jerusalem's kings (39:6). Hezekiah and his fathers (39:6) had behaved as the kings of the nations, claiming and hoarding wealth as their own and relying on military might and alliances for maintaining their sovereignty and prosperity. Isaiah's prophecy for Hezekiah does not involve nations bringing their treasures to Jerusalem. Instead, the theme of reversal continues when the Babylonians cart away all the wealth that Hezekiah and his ancestors had stored up in Jerusalem.

Isaiah 60:1-17

The vision in Isaiah 60 recalls the scene in chapter 2 in which the nations stream to Zion. In chapter 2, the nations received instruction and judgments from Yahweh (2:3) while in chapter 60 the nations bring their wealth to Zion (60:5). The procession is so large and steady that the city gates must remain open night and day in order to facilitate the arrival of the wealth of the nations (60:11). John Goldingay points out two themes

⁶⁵Wildberger, *Isaiah 28-39*, 474; the main purpose of all of the stored wealth would have been to fund military and political pursuits.

⁶⁶John Goldingay, *Isaiah* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2001), 220.

that are present in this description of tribute arriving at Zion: first is the theme of reversal and second is the theme of the recognition by the nations that Jerusalem is the city of Yahweh.⁶⁷ The theme of reversal also continues. The city that had once been plundered and empty is now the royal city of King Yahweh, filled with the wealth of the nations that belong to Yahweh's domain. Jerusalem's former plunderers become servants of her population (60:14).⁶⁸

Isaiah provides in chapter 60 a verbal image of what the Apadana reliefs at Persepolis provide visually: a portrayal of an empire that is peaceful and ordered under the reign of its king.⁶⁹ The list in Isaiah 60:6-9 of foreign lands and the tribute they bring is reminiscent of the compartmented scenes in the Apadana reliefs of delegations bringing their tribute to the Persian king.⁷⁰ Delegations from Midian, Ephah, Sheba, Kedar, Nebaioth, Tarshish, and Lebanon are singled out as they bring tribute that is characteristic of their lands (60:6-7, 8, and 13). Just the Achaemenid reliefs do not portray Persians bringing tribute, so also the inhabitants of Jerusalem who were once oppressed now enjoy the wealth brought by the nations (61:1-7; 66:10-12).

Watts argues that the procession of wealth into Jerusalem is due to the policies of the Achaemenids, Cyrus and Darius, and that Yahweh has granted legitimacy to their

⁶⁷Goldingay, *Isaiah*, 338.

⁶⁸Childs, *Isaiah*, 497.

⁶⁹Brent Strawn discusses the images of orderliness and control in Isaiah 60 and the Apadana reliefs; Brent A. Strawn, "'A World under Control': Isaiah 60 and the Apadana Reliefs from Persepolis," in Jon L. Berquist, ed., *Approaching Yehud: New Approaches to the Study of the Persian Period* (Boston: Brill, 2008), 85-116; Strawn interacts throughout his essay with M. C. Root, *Kings and Kingship*.

⁷⁰Strawn, "World under Control," 104.

reign over Yehud.⁷¹ The Achaemenids themselves, however, claimed to act with the authorization of Ahuramazda and their policies of oppression were just the kind that Yahweh abhors. The tribute flowing into Zion is not symbolic of the legitimacy of the power of a human king. The glorification of the capital city of Zion is performed in acknowledgment of Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel.⁷²

This procession of wealth into Jerusalem is not like the taxation levied by an empire upon its subjects. Yahweh does not require revenue to support the wars of empires (Isa 2:4; 9:5; 60:18) and the people of Yahweh's realm need not worry about going hungry (55:1-2). As with the processions at Persepolis, the tribute brought to the king is not for revenue, but rather symbolizes the participants' recognition of the king's reign. Indeed, the "fullness of all the earth is his wealth."

Summary

Imperial rulers pursued policies of expansion and centralization supported by an ideology of divine authorization and aid. The king held rights to the wealth and resources of all the earth because of his commission to bring order and justice to all the lands. In imperial art, depictions of tribute processions, in which willing representatives of subject nations brought gifts to the king, were symbolic of the king's divinely authorized claims of ownership. The willingness and orderliness of the procession in the Apadana reliefs communicate that the participants acknowledge the claims of the king. At Persepolis, the

⁷¹ Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 863-64.

⁷² Childs, *Isaiah*, 497.

gifts brought to the king were not converted to revenue, but stored in the Treasury as symbols of the king's reign.

In the book of Isaiah, kings and leaders gather and hoard wealth. The storing up of wealth and treasures by humans is connected to warfare and idolatry (2:7-8; 39:1-8). Kings claim treasure that is not their own and rely on military strength for security. The chant of the seraphim, מלא כל-הארץ כבודו, when interpreted in the context of imperial claims to territory, resources, and wealth, functions as a polemic against those claims. Finally, when Yahweh establishes his reign in Zion, the ones who once demanded tribute can do nothing but acknowledge Yahweh's rule (60:1-16).

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusions

Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation has been to develop an interpretation of Isa 6:1-5 that is plausible for a setting in the context of the Achaemenid Empire. The method of interpretation has been an iconographic method in that Isa 6:1-5 has been interpreted in light of motifs found in Achaemenid imperial art. The Achaemenids adopted and adapted these motifs from previous empires and incorporated them into a program that advanced their ideology throughout their empire. The thesis of this dissertation is that in response to the ideology expressed by the imperial art of the Achaemenid Empire, the details of the scene in Isaiah 6:1-5 advance an alternative ideology, according to which Yahweh alone is sovereign over all the earth. These details as part of a synchronic reading of the book of Isaiah contribute to an interpretation of the book as containing an anti-imperial message.

Isaiah and Empire

The policies of the Achaemenids were in large part a continuance of previous empires. The Achaemenids allowed exiles to return to Jerusalem and also sponsored the rebuilding of their temple. These acts were not benevolent, but were rather part of the policies of the empire through which revenues and resources were collected from the peripheries of the empire and funneled to its center. Imperial taxation, for which the temple was a center, created an oppressive burden for the lower classes of society to bear.

Citizens of Yehud who were in privileged positions were able to benefit from the oppressive imperial policies of the Achaemenids.

Isaiah prophesied against violence and injustice, two central characteristics of any empire. The Achaemenids used visual images as a means of disseminating their ideology. As tools of ideology, these images were used sometimes to mask and at other times to justify the violence and oppression of the empire. The effectiveness of the Achaemenids in disseminating their ideology coupled with their use of images that were previously present throughout the ancient Near East contributes to the plausibility of the interpretation developed in this dissertation.

The Iconographic Approach

The three chapters that interpret details of the vision in light of images from Achaemenid iconography each represent a variation in the approach. The chapter on the high and lifted throne involves a specific image from Achaemenid art as it relates to the descriptors for Yahweh's throne. The chapter on the Seraphim explores the implications of possible variations in the form of the seraphim in Isaiah's description of the throne room. The confidence with which a specific form is associated with the seraphim is much less than that of the throne. The chapter on the chant of the seraphim is unique in that it does not involve an image in Isaiah's description, but the image that the chant plausibly brings to mind. These variations in the approach create the opportunity for future discussion of how images ought to function in interpreting biblical texts.

This dissertation has explored variations of only three motifs from ancient imperial art: the raised throne, winged, fiery beings, and the tribute procession. Numerous motifs remain to be studied and brought into the interpretation of the book of

Isaiah. One example is the hero in combat with various creatures, both mythic and natural. The Achaemenids used this motif in their monumental art and on stamp seals. How might the Achaemenid examples of this motif contribute to interpreting the function of animals and mythic creatures that appear throughout the book of Isaiah? These creatures in Isaiah, just as in imperial art, are sometimes hostile and at other times subdued. It is my hope that methods of incorporating the visual arts of the ancient Near East will continue to be explored and refined and that some elements of this dissertation will contribute to that ongoing process.

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