YHWH VERSUS THE KINGS OF MIDDLE EARTH: ROYAL POLEMIC IN EZEKIEL'S ORACLES AGAINST THE NATIONS

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Discussions of kingship have always held a special place in the study of the Book of Ezekiel. Perhaps because of the otherwise unsavoury theology of this curmudgeonly priest, scholarly attention has focused on the rosy promise of a coming Messiah hoping to find relevance in a text that largely eludes modern applicability.[1] But whatever promise Ezekiel appears to hold out for the future return of David, his presentation of the monarchic institution more broadly is oddly reserved.[2] The idiosyncratic use of נשיא as the royal designation for Israel's kings[3] and a vision of restoration in Ez 40-48 that appears to sideline royalty, the prophet's stance towards the royal institution leaves much to be desired. For most,[4] Ezekiel's dismissiveness stems from his priestly heritage, any antagonism exhibited toward the royal institution being somehow derivative of a priestly worldview[5] or an outright attempt to supplant king with priest as the leader of Israel.[6] Attempting to move beyond this 'priestly' reading of the book, there has been a move by some to view the negative evaluation of monarchy as the primary casualty of a wider theological exercise undertaken by the book. According to this reading, the monarchic institution is significantly curtailed for the purpose of elevating Yhwh to royal standing, with the result, in fact, that the prophet has chosen to supplant king with deity as the leader of Israel.[7]

As part of this larger debate rarely is the prophet's stance on foreign kings considered. No doubt this is due in part to the assessment of Ezekiel's 'personality'. Ever the conservative and loyal to his host in Exile, Ezekiel is cautiously deferent on the subject of foreign power. For the region's superpowers, the 'Great Kings' of Babylon and Egypt, alone does he reserve the royal title מלך, and concerned with matters much weightier, the prophet leaves them far from his sight. Overlooked in such an evaluation are the Oracles against the Nations in Ez 25-32, which stand out principally because of their royal subject. Above and beyond the usual condemnation of a nation guilty of a divinely determined crime, Ezekiel's series puts on trial and finds guilty the kings of those nations surrounding Israel. More than a prophetic 'quirk', I will suggest in the following discussion that the royal nature of the series is purposefully constructed in order that at its end the only monarch remaining is Yhwh.

The Crocodile who ate the Man who lived amongst the Cedars in the Garden that Yhwh Built

Integral to the book, as to many of the prophetic collections in the Hebrew Bible, is the series of Oracles Against the Nations,[8] in which the full gamut of Israel's neighbours find themselves attacked for mistreatment of Yhwh's people when displaced. Like the major series in the books

[1] This very point was confirmed by a car license plate I spotted this summer that read 'EZEK 34'.
[2] Joyce 1998 contains an excellent overview of the prophet's stance towards monarchy.
[3] For a current discussion on the term נשיא in Ezekiel, see Bodi 2001 and Duguid 1994.
[4] Positive readings still abound: Block 1995; Duguid 1994; Laato 1997; Levenson 1976; Rooke 2000; (caustiously) Tuell 1992.
[5] Albertz 2003; Smith 1987.
[6] This hierocratic reading comes, of course, from Hanson 1975, though is undoubtedly influenced by the still mainstream Wellhausian interpretation of Ez 40-48.
[7] Stevenson 1996; Nevader 2009.
[8] For the format of the 'Oracle against the Foreign Nation' in the Hebrew Bible, see Christensen 1975.

of Isaiah and Jeremiah, smaller Levantine neighbour states will be punished for taking advantage of Israel's misfortunes and the great empires of the day for the abuse of a power afforded them by divinely bestowed political might. As intimated already, unique to the series in Ezekiel is its explicit royal flavour insofar as many of the oracles are addressed specifically to the king of each nation, not the body politic.[9] While it may be that the nation stands accused through its king or that we have here evidence, as elsewhere, that the singular king stood for the composite parts of his nation, the specificity of attack against the royal person stands out in the text. Equally noteworthy in these royal oracles is the nature of the criticism levelled against each king. It is not for their behaviour towards Israel that these kings stand accused; rather it is for their royal actions evaluated independently. The traditional claims of kingship challenged in each instance, more than a promise of due reward, the attack on the royal pretensions of the addressee can be construed as a polemic against his claims to royalty.

The Man

The first king to find himself under the scrutinous eye of Yhwh is that of Tyre in Ez 28. The two poems addressed to the king throw up a multitude of difficulties for any would be interpreter.[10] The relationship between the oracle in vv.1-10 and lament in vv.12-19 is far from clear.[11] Interpreters disagree how much of the passage stems from Ezekiel himself[12] and indeed cannot seem to agree even on the identity of the figure condemned.[13] Much if not all of this, however,

[9] Royal figures also appear in the oracle series in the book of Amos (Amos 1.5, 8, 15; 2.3), but their mention is only as part the punishment each nation will receive, not as the cause or subject of the oracle. (For other similarities between the oracle series here and that in Amos, see Geyer 1986: 131-32.) There is, of course, the great poem levelled against the king of Babylon in Isa 14, but it stands outside the usual tendency in Isaiah to condemn the nation as a whole, and has more in common with Ezekiel than it does with the book in which it is included.

[10] Saur 2008 contains the most recent assessment of the textual and historical issues that plague the chapter.

[11] The chapter throws up too many difficulties to be very certain about the relationship. Block 1998: 87-90 makes a strong case for reading the poems together based on linguistic and thematic affinities. Equally helpful are the insights of Hals 1989: 200-01 who points out that, as here, a dirge often follows announcements of punishment throughout the book. Though the difficulties of the text are multiple, there is little reason to take the divisions in the chapter to signify opposing hands at work. Even if there are multiple authors, the קינה of vv.11-19 sits as the logical conclusion to vv.1-10.

[12] This will be a problem for every oracle addressed in our discussion. As representative of the two sides of the debate, in each instance I will refer readers to Block 1997; 1998 as indicative of the more synchronic reading and Zimmerli 1979; 1983 of the diachronic. If divided, vv.3-5 and 9 are traditionally excised from the judgment oracle on grounds of discontinuous repetition (Zimmerli 1983: 76; Wilson 1987: 212). From a different perspective, there are various discussions about the pre-Ezekielian origin of the poems. Some have suggested a Ugaritic *Urtext* because of the explicit references to El (van Dijk 1968; Page 1996:140-44), but as Van Seters has convincingly argued, there is little in either poem that cannot be set firmly within normative Yahwistic traditions (Van Seters 1989).

[13] While the identity of the first poem's subject has gone unquestioned by most, there seems to be little consensus on the identity of the subject of the קינה. Contenders for its subject at present are Adam as Primal Man, the king of Tyre or the Jerusalem high priest. The argument of Wilson 1987: 214-18 for the last of these suggestions can be easily dismissed (see also Bogaert 1991 and recently Tuell 2009: 187-88, 196-98 for the priestly reading). So little is known about this figure in the pre-exilic cult, not least his existence (see Rooke 1998; 2000: 43-81), that the presence of 'priestly imagery and language' can hardly be sufficient grounds for finding a priest in the background to this poem. More at issue, there is little language applied to the priesthood that could not have been applied to the king, making the priestly reading of Ez 28.11-19 by no means the 'logical' interpretation assumed by its proponents. The remainder of the debate has centred on whether the chapter was composed specifically against the king of Tyre or as a poem about the king as prototype only secondarily applied to the Tyrian monarch (Van Seters 1989: 335-39; Wyatt 1990: 26-28). I am in general agreement with the likes of Van Seters that here we have a poem specifically about Man as prototype and as such one against Man as king (I also agree with Van Seters 1989: 337 that there is no reason to read the poem as one concerned with an *Urmensch*, a classification that has erroneously be applied from the Gen 2-3 story), which has secondarily been modified to address the king of Tyre. Why he should become the subject of derision

need not be of particular concern for the present task. What is important is that both oracle and lament as they now stand are concerned with a king[14] and provide a caustic, if nostalgic, musing on the fall of the prototypical wise monarch. Characteristic of any Near Eastern royal ideology, this king commands a special place before the deity, both spatially (Ez 28.13-14)[15] and in standing (Ez 28.7b, 12),[16] and commensurate with his royal identity has been gifted superlative wisdom: "הנה חכם אתה מדנאל כל סתום לא עממוך" (Ez 28.3; cf. Ez 28.12). The error of his way comes in the mistaken correlation of divinely bestowed wisdom and divinity itself, the possession of the former allowing him, incorrectly, to claim that he is a god, "אני מושב אלהים ישבתי בלב ימים אל" (Ez 28.2).[17] Furthermore, the profound wealth that naturally derives from royal wisdom (Ez 28.4) has by this king been ruinously misapplied for his own vainglorious ends (Ez 28.5, 16-17), resulting in the sum corruption of his person and nation (Ez 28.18). The final irony, we are told, will be on him, for as punishment he will be ejected from his divine abode (Ez 28.16), abased in the sight of the nations over whom he once held sway (Ez 28.18b-19), and banished after a violent death to the farthest recesses of the Pit, consigned to that section of the underworld fit only for the uncircumcised (Ez 28.9-10).

The poems either split or taken as a whole have been interpreted by all as a warning against staggering hubris. This "tragedy of princes"[18] acts as an "everyman's story"[19] to show that Yhwh stands as "the Sovereign Lord of History,"[20] but also to warn against the "temptation of raising the political head of a successful political body to the sphere of the divine."[21] The truth, however, is that this is no more an 'everyman's story' than the court narratives of David and Solomon. Ez 28 is above all a *royal* story and one that pits two claims of status against one another, that of the king and that of Yhwh. This is not to deny that an explicit accusation of hubris lies at the heart of these two poems. The first condemnation of the royal figure is structurally and thematically organised around two יען-clauses (Ez 28.2, 6), which clearly lay out the monarch's failure – because he has claimed to have the heart of a god, he will be derided before the nations and die a mortal's death. Similarly, the subsequent lament accuses the king of allowing wealth to

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is not difficult to reconstruct. Though the nation does eventually fall to Babylon in 571 BCE (cf. Ez 29.18), it and its king repelled the advances of Nebuchadnezzar on more than one occasion and surely thought itself in a special position (divine perhaps?) much as Judah did when spared miraculously from Sennacherib more than a century prior. Whether it is Man as King or the Tyrian ruler that stands in judgment, the characteristic that they both share is their royalty.

[14] The only dissenting voice is Page 1996: 142, who takes the introduction in Ez 28.2 (אמר לנגיד צר) at face value and reads the first judgment oracle as being levelled against a prince, the king of Tyre becoming the subject of Ezekiel's interest only in the קינה.

[15] This passage is the only instance in the Hebrew Bible where the Eden garden and mountain of Elohim are understood as being one and the same location (see Wyatt 1990). Able to call both his home, the king is positioned in a space more divine than it is mundane.

[16] Jeppesen 1991: 91-92.

[17] I am inclined to translate the king's statement as "I am a god, I live in the dwelling place of the gods in the heart of the seas," but even this is a 'toned down' translation. The royal claim could just as easily read, "I am El. I dwell on the throne of gods in the heart of the Seas." If so the king would not simply be claiming the status of a secondary god, one of the אלים, he would be claiming to be El, the father of the gods (so Page 1996: 141).

[18] Zimmerli 1983: 95.

[19] Zimmerli 1983: 95.

[20] Block 1998: 115.

[21] Zimmerli 1983: 80. Many have pointed out the similarities between the king's dismissal in Ez 28.2 (אתה אדם ולא אל) and the rebuttal to Judah's propensity to raise Egypt to divine status in Isa 31.3 (ומרצים אדם ולא אל). Similar as these warnings appear to be, in Isa 31.1 it is a people inappropriately raising another nation to god-standing that the author condemns. In Ez 28 it is the claim of the royal himself, and thus the warning, more precisely, is not against the tendencies of a third-party onlooker, but against the intentions of the poem's subject. The nation (either Judah or Tyre) is not at fault in this instance (as in Isa 31), it is the royal subject alone.

tarnish his perfect splendour, for which he has wagered the integrity of his wisdom. If ever there was a precursor to the Faustian tragedy it is this tale of a royal compromised by corruption.

What remains less explored is the precise nature of the royal claim itself, scholarship too quick to dismiss this king as somehow emblematic of leadership's tendency towards self-aggrandisement. For it seems that before one can do so, one must first determine whether the sentiment of his assertion is pure hubris (I am God) as traditionally read, or suffers simply from a hubristic tendency (I am a god), which when placed within its own context would not only make a certain logical sense, but more importantly would lessen the perceived hubristic motivation of its voice. As analogy, consider the final competition played in the United States in the game of baseball, called the 'World Series.' Not only is the series one that excludes teams from the remainder of the world, but the title could be (and often is) interpreted by those outside as hubristic. Does it reflect poorly on Americans that we assume any sporting event to take place within our country is a universal event? Without a doubt. If asked whether we had ever thought of such narrow mindedness as hubris or a conscious attempt to place ourselves over all others? Perhaps naïvely, never. The purpose of drawing such an analogy is not to deny that the content of certain claims can be classified as hubristic, but that to do so is an evaluation of material whose intention, far from springing from arrogant conceit, instead derives from the culturally constructed rhetoric of a people or institution. Evaluated internally, such rhetoric may not derive from hubristic motivation, but instead may fall naturally within the spectrum of the culturally or institutionally 'acceptable'.

Determining the parameters of the 'acceptable' in the northern Levant is not the easiest of tasks. Minimal literary sources from this period warns at the very least that we should exercise care when attempting to reconstruct what a monarch was or was not able to claim with respect to his (divine) status.[22] But neither should we necessarily take Yhwh's position as being somehow reflective of the normative stance on the limits of royal rhetoric by nature of him being 'God'. Indeed, the royal status of the king even in its most mundane articulation placed him above all men, such that a statement 'אתה מלך ולא אדם', hypothetical as it may be, is not only one that could legitimately be addressed to a monarch, but is in fact more normative of a Levantine worldview organized by the structures of a royally determined hierarchy. Thus it seems entirely within reason to ask, given the sentiments surrounding divine sonship (Ps 2.7) and the hyperbolically ascribed divinity of the king (Isa 9.5; Ps 45.7) in the Hebrew Bible, whether a Phoenician monarch,[23] as son of El and the earthly counterpart to one of the children of the divine pantheon to which he returned in death, could legitimately claim, 'אל אני - I am a god'?[24] If so, and in which case we have a statement that lies well within the legitimate spectrum of royal rhetoric,[25] the text signals a purposeful shift in sentiment towards monarchic ideology. The divine accusation levelled against the king may be of hubris, but by establishing his words as such and consequently denying the king a degree of divinity rightly his, Yhwh is attacking the principles of royal rule by delegitimizing the very foundation upon which its ideology is constructed.

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[22] This cannot be the place to delve into the seemingly irresolvable problem of the divinity of the king in Judah and/or the northern Levant. See Wyatt 1999 and Ahlström 2000 for two different, but complementary summaries of West Semitic kingship ideology.

[23] If there is a pre-Ezekielian myth behind Ez 28, the author may be taking issue not only with Phoenician royal ideology, but Judahite ideology as well (cf. Van Seters 1989 and Jeppesen 1991).

[24] So Page 1996: 141, "The Tyrian king would, to a limited extent, be correct in equating himself with Canaanite El, his right to rule having been decreed by El and the council of gods."

[25] Returning to Van Seters 1989 and Jeppesen 1991, far beyond the royal claims reflecting what can hypothetically be reconstructed as plausible royal rhetoric, the positive language in Ez 28 reflects an *Urtext*, which held the king in high regard, and may even have understood him outright as divine.

If, however, I have overstepped the boundaries of the text by falsely bestowing upon the king a divinity not his to claim, or conversely, by making his boast too pedestrian when in fact he is claiming to be El, it seems to me that the endgame remains largely unaltered. For in this case, the judgment and lament raised against the king of Tyre are such a biting satire – crime, punishment, and even pre-lapsarian utopia described in preposterously embellished language – that the king is turned into an asinine buffoon. Through the hyperbolic over-inflation of royal rhetoric, both the royal caricature and the ideal of monarchy from which he has so shockingly deviated are dismantled; the former self-evidently, but the latter because it has for the first time become the object of ridicule.[26] Transformed to sophomoric ruler by Yhwh, the once cherished monarch is laughed to the underworld, tumbling both as individual and as archetype from a throne ideologically compromised.[27]

A text that has always been discussed within a divine context as god against God, the fundamentally royal nature of Ez 28 should not be overlooked. For read either positively or negatively, Ez 28 is a confrontation between Yhwh and a king over what the latter can legitimately claim for himself as monarch. Read positively, whereby Yhwh reclassifies a standard component of royal rhetoric as hubris, the casualty of this competition is the king, dethroned (unjustly?) for expressing a royal claim otherwise safely integrated into the matrix of normative royal ideology. Read negatively, whereby Yhwh reclassifies a standard monarch into a hubristic despot, the casualty of this competition is the king, sardonically turned into an anti-monarch. Though ending in an outcome that recognizes only one אל, either interpretation sees Yhwh engage directly with the wise king in an ideological debate over royal right to rule.

The Crocodile[28]

The Tyrian tirade complete, what follows is the remarkable seven-part oracle series against Egypt in Ez 29-32.[29] Often compared to the Egypt oracles in Jeremiah (Jer 46.2-24; cf. 25.19; 43.10b-13; 44.30), the Ezekiel series exhibits a number of important idiosyncrasies. Most topical for our discussion, whereas Pharaoh is naturally mentioned alongside his nation as a figure deserving special ridicule in Jeremiah,[30] Ezekiel addresses over half of the Egypt oracles not against the Egyptian nation, but specifically to and against Pharaoh as king (Ez 29.1-16; 30.20-26; 31.1-18; 32.1-16).[31] The first of these royal oracles (Ez 29.1-16) will concern us initially.[32] In it Pharaoh

[26] Monarchs are warned, even condemned for misbehaviour, but the ejection of this king from the Eden garden is a major departure from anything that has yet to be expressed in the Hebrew Bible.

[27] Readers will immediately recall the fate of the Babylonian king in Isa 14, a text with which Ez 28 has much in common. For a discussion of Isa 14 that includes what the author believes to be the similarities shared by these two oracles, see Shipp 2002.

[28] As the discussion below will indicate, translation of the תנים to which Pharaoh is compared in the oracle series depends largely on whether one emends the text. It is only recently, however, that 'crocodile' has been abandoned as its translation, which originated firstly with Gunkel 1895. The use of logic (a river serpent with feet [Ez 32.2] can only be a crocodile of some description) and the identification of Thutmose III as this very animal by his god, Amon-Re (Lichtheim 1973:36-38), still makes the translation an attractive one. For a vociferous denial, see Day 1985.

[29] The standard treatment of the Egypt series remains Boadt 1980.

[30] See, amongst others, the school yard insult, "קראו שם פרעה מלך מצרים שאון העביר המועד"(Jer 46.17).

[31] As such, it is difficult to agree with Zimmerli 1983: 105 that, "Ezekiel's oracles against Pharaoh and against Egypt are along exactly the same lines as those of Jeremiah." The fact that five of the oracles are levelled against Pharaoh alone should warn against such an immediate correlation with Jeremiah. Beyond the issue of royal subject, Ezekiel diverges in other significant ways from Jeremiah. Whereas the Jeremiah oracles are scattered throughout the book, the oracles against Egypt in Ezekiel form a concise literary unit in and of themselves. Also, whereas Jeremiah devotes one section to the condemnation of Egypt with morsels of destruction dotted elsewhere in the text, Ezekiel devotes roughly half of the space given over to the condemnation of foreign nations to the subject of Egypt alone. Whatever the series' redactional history, as presently organized, it is a truly unparalleled collection, single-mindedly focused on the condemnation of Egypt.

is pictured as a marauding sea creature (Ez 29.3) who will be caught by Yhwh, victoriously dismembered, and whose blood will be split over the face of the land now in shock at his violent end (Ez 29.6). His lamentable demise, we are told, stems specifically from words he has uttered concerning his power and status:

הנני עליך פרעה מלך מצרים התנים[33] הגדול הרבץ בתוך יאריו אשר אמר לי יארי ואני עשיתני׃	Behold, I am against you Pharaoh, king of Egypt, the great dragon sprawling in the midst of the channels of his Nile, who says, "To me does my Nile belong! Indeed, I made it for myself[34]!"

With Ez 28 very much in mind,[35] it will hardly come as a surprise how the customary interpretation of the passage unfolds: the hubris of Egypt's reptilian king stems from assuming not only ownership of the Nile, but in declaring with vain disregard for its true Creator (Yhwh) that he has fashioned this River of Rivers. Used as a parallel to Pharaoh's hubristic claim and as confirmation of his guilt, it is common among interpreters to draw attention to a 12th BCE century text rebuking an upstart prince from Byblos:[36] "There is no ship upon the river which does not belong to Amon! The sea is his, and the Lebanon is his, of which you say, 'It is mine!'."[37] Whilst both rulers voice an identical sentiment with regard to ownership of a body of water, to conclude, on the one hand, that this is by nature the claim of hubristic kings, and on the other, that Pharaoh is guilty of the same boastful affront as the Prince of Tyre is to take the parallel far beyond its natural limits. For one, the Prince of Byblos, indeed *any* prince of Byblos, is no Pharaoh, the son, according to one strand of the Egyptian royal tradition, of Amon himself.[38] As the tradition stands, Pharaoh is in fact the only individual in whose mouth such a statement would naturally (and legitimately) be found. If scholarship is correct that behind this mythic תנים is an allusion to the crocodile,[39] itself called "the fearful and unapproachable Lord of the water,"[40] would we expect anything less from Pharaoh than to claim that the Nile belongs to him, the very lord of the River? More important still, Yhwh appears to accept as given Pharaoh's ownership of the River with the use of the suffixed יאריו in v.3b, to which the only possible referent can be the king. If Yhwh acknowledges that the Nile belongs to Pharaoh, it seems a gross misinterpretation to

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[32] Zimmerli 1983: 115 (vv.1-6a are original to the prophet with vv.6b-9a being added after 587 BCE); Block 1998: 132-33.

[33] The literal meaning of תנים as 'jackal' renders the text incomprehensible and is universally emended to תנין on the basis of the Targum and the Syriac, as well as the reference to Nebuchadnezzar as תנין in Jer 51.34. Though the emendation is almost universally accepted, we must assume that the error in the MT has occurred twice with the same mistake occurring in Ez 32.2 (ואתה כתנים בימים). Convincing is Boadt's suggestion that תנים is variant spelling of תנין, perhaps corrupted by Aramaic influences (Boadt 1980:26-27).

[34] See Boadt 1980:29-30 for the rare use of a dative suffix.

[35] An immediate comparison with Ez 28 is by no means unjustified. Structurally and thematically they have much in common: both are structured around יען-clauses that articulate and then restate the crime of the king (Ez 28.2, 6; 29.9), which in both is that of hubris. Both kings are condemned to an unfortunate death by at the hands of foreigners, and though not articulated specifically in Ez 29, the king of Tyre and the king of Egypt will meet face to face in Sheol where Yhwh is sending them both (Ez 32).

[36] Boadt 1980: 28; Tuell 2009: 201.

[37] ANET 27b.

[38] Though scholarship is now much more discerning about the manner in which it is discussed (Baines 1998; Fransden 2008), the divinity of Pharaoh must always be in the back of our minds with these oracles. This is not to agree with Boadt 1980: 169-71 that the Egypt series is fundamentally concerned with idolatry. It is only to remind that when we speak of Pharaonic ideology, it is of one that holds the king in divine standing.

[39] As indicated earlier, Pharaoh is compared to a crocodile in an address of Amon-Re to Thutmose III. Block 1998: 137 n. 44 is tempted also to read Pharaoh's description as an allusion, either direct or veiled, to the Egyptian crocodile god Sobek. (Zimmerli 1983: 111).

[40] ANET 374.

accuse him on this account of conceit. The claim may position Pharaoh within sight of Yhwh's scornful gaze, but it cannot be because of a false assumption of ownership.

Now, I will be the first to admit that the second of Pharaoh's assertions smacks of astounding hubris, so outrageous that one cannot help but smile at its audacity. And perhaps this is the intention of the text – a parodic over-inflation of royal rhetoric much along the lines of what we saw at play in Ez 28. However, if Block is able to assert that Pharaoh's claim "fits perfectly within Egyptian doctrines of divine kingship,"[41] already then the text begs an interpretation beyond that of the mundane.[42] Admittedly we lack material that explicitly awards Pharaoh with direct responsibility for creating the Nile,[43] but again I would draw attention to the divine origins of the Pharaonic throne. Irrespective of the divine father from whom Pharaoh claims descent – Amon, Re, or Aten – each is accredited with the creation of the world by his respective cosmogony. As incarnate son of the creator deity,[44] one wonders therefore whether far beyond something as banal as hubristic self-inflation, Pharaoh gives voice here to a creative agency supported by the tenets of Egyptian kingship ideology.

Both of Pharaoh's statements shown to be firmly grounded in the plausible royal rhetoric of Egyptian monarchy, we have an identical turn of events here as that which occurred with the king of Tyre. The words spoken by Pharaoh are not in and of themselves hubristic in intention (and may in comparison with the king of Tyre have a more legitimate base), but by being specially marked out for Yhwh's ridicule, their meaning is transformed into such. With another legitimate royal claim dismantled, so too is the legitimacy of this second king found accused by Yhwh.

Thematically, therefore, the first oracle against Pharaoh has much in common with that concerning the king of Tyre. One significant point of departure, however, is the explicit transformation of Pharaoh into the תנים.[45] Variant spelling aside, the creature with which Pharaoh is identified should be familiar. The serpentine figure is counted amongst the sea creatures that accompany creation (Gen 1.21; Ps 148.7) or against whom Yhwh must battle in order to subdue

[41] Block 1998: 137.

[42] Dismissed immediately must be the common assumption that Pharaoh's arrogance derives from claiming a power over creation that belongs to Yhwh alone (Tuell 2009: 203), if for no other reason than there appears to be very little in the text to imply that this is so. Not only are creation motifs muted (if not entirely absent) in Ezekiel, but nowhere, in opposition to Pharaoh, does Yhwh claim to have been the river's creator. Pharaoh may be incorrect in boasting that the Nile is his creation, but his error does not stem from a rival claim of Yhwh to have fashioned it either!

[43] For an overview of Pharaoh's association with the Nile, see Huddlestun 2008. Typical of royal rhetoric, often Pharaoh's importance for the wellbeing of his nation is superlatively compared to that of the river ("He is one who illuminates the Two Lands more than the sun disk. He is one who makes the Two Lands more green than a high Nile. He has filled the Two Lands with strength and life" [in Frankfort 1948:59]). Similarly, the Nile is said to be his to control, hence funerary inscription of the same Thutmose III: "Thutmose[s] is in heaven like the moon. The Nile is at his service. He opens its caves to give life to Egypt" (Frankfort 1948:190). The evidence suggesting incontrovertibly that the Nile is part of that realm over which Pharaoh exercises his sovereignty, it nevertheless should not be assumed that being the river's master, necessarily implies being its creator.

[44] I have purposefully chosen to express the relationship between Pharaoh and his father in this manner for its explicit Christological overtones. Though the 'Son' is not considered to be the Creator in Christian theology, nor is he denied this power by fact of being somehow derivative of the Father. Clearly the relationship between Pharaoh and the Sun God is a world apart from the Christian conception of the Father-Son relationship, but if we are willing to allow the Son power to claim the world as his own, I think we must at least entertain the possibility that Pharaoh could do the same.

[45] Most assume that the Tyrian king remains a man throughout his judgment and lament, and so has not undergone a transformation similar to what takes place with Pharaoh. Jeppesen 1991: 90-92, however, has taken the grammatical difficulties in Ez 28.14 to suggest that the king is turned into a Cherub. If so, it would be a positive transformation (as opposed to here where it functions negatively) and therefore does not play into the denunciation of the king as it will with Pharaoh.

the forces of chaos (Isa 51.9; Ps 74.13; Job 7.12). [46] Which of these two, animal or mythic beast, the author wishes us to understand when applied to Pharaoh is not immediately clear. The description of his seizure and death in Ez 29.4-5 seems to indicate that an animal capable of being caught and removed from a watery abode is intended even if it is from the great River. If so, the passage is yet a further example of the chaos monster historicized, in this case so much so that the term is applied not simply to a nation, but to a human figure outright.[47] But introducing Ez 32.1-10 into the discussion, where Pharaoh is similarly compared to the תנים, one is able to detect more 'mythological' overtones than the purely 'historical' reading allows. Here a rehearsal of the sea creature's impending death reads along lines almost identical to the familiar defeat of Tiamat in the *Enūma Eliš*.[48] It may be that I am assuming too close a connection between these presentations of the defeated chaos serpent.[49] As two sea creatures, the carving up of Tiamat and Pharaonic תנים will naturally overlap without necessitating the literary dependence of Ezekiel on the Marduk myth. But considering Ezekiel's well-documented use of the traditions of his host nation,[50] one of which was the presentation of the enemy in battle as chaos personified,[51] the pregnant ambiguity in identifying the תנים as both helpless animal and mythic monster is most likely intentional.

But to what end? On one level, Yhwh's words must read as a profound insult levelled against his opponent. Acerbically he mocks, "כפיר גוים נדמית ואתה כתנים בימים" (Ez 32.2). With the close association between royalty and the leonine metaphor, the opening line of this lament is plain as day. At heart, Yhwh is taunting Pharaoh's ability to play king – 'You consider yourself a king of the nations, but in fact you are nothing more than chaos'. Against any royal post-holder, Yhwh's sneer would be interpreted as an insult. But when placed against the specific backdrop of Egyptian royal ideology, its force is even more pointed. The king's primary responsibility being the guardianship and maintenance of *Ma'at*, to accuse Pharaoh of functioning as the agent of

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[46] See Day 1985 for a discussion of the relevant texts and literature on תנין/תנים in the Hebrew Bible and Ugaritic material. For a discussion of the Ezekiel passages directly, see Day 1985: 88-95.

[47] Both Day 1985:88 and Block 1998:137 argue for the complete historicization of the monster tradition in Ez 29. Day determines that a tradition has been 'historicized' when it ceases to apply to the chaos monster directly and is instead used in reference to a nation (so too Block). Already, though, Ez 29 stands out. Here, it is not to a nation that the monster tradition refers, but to an individual. Moreover, unlike Jer 51.34 where Nebuchadnezzar is compared to the creature (בתנין [בלענו<בלעני - cf. Ez 32.2), Pharaoh is said to *be* the תנים. Thus, while there is a certain convenience in assuming that the תנים has been historicized, the very opposite, that Pharaoh has been mythologized, may in fact be more correct.

[48] Like Tiamat whom Marduk ensnares (*EE* IV 95), throws down once dead (*EE* IV 104) and then slices in two like a fish for drying (*EE* IV 137), the Pharaonic תנים is ensnared (Ez 32.3), thrown to the ground (Ez 32.4) and though never described as a fish *per se* nevertheless has an aquatic home provided for him in Ez 32.2 (cf. Ez 29.2-4). On less stable ground, the pan-terrestrial spread of Pharaoh's carcass and blood as well as the darkening of the celestial beings may recall the terrestrial landscape fashioned from Tiamat's divided body and population of the skies that inaugurates the creation of the world (*EE* V 9-12, 53-58). Though in this case, it would be the reversal of the creative process. Perhaps in light of the quasi-apocalyptic outcome for the land, many have compared the outcome of Pharoah's death to the eschatological יום יהוה in Joel (Boadt 1980:142; Block 1998: 206). The parallel is by no means uninformative, but concepts surrounding the יום יהוה most likely have their grounding in an understanding of Yhwh as warrior in primal battle, in which case the allusion is looking backwards not forward.

[49] Others have drawn parallels to both the Baʿal Cycle and the death of Osiris in the Horus Myth of Edfu (see especially Boadt 1980: 30-34,137). Ezekiel's use of Mesopotamian traditions elsewhere in the book makes me favour the *Enūma Eliš*, but this mustn't be to the exclusion of others. Ezekiel seems readily aware of Egyptian and Ugaritic traditions, and is willing to use both to his end. To one extent or another, identifying the tradition with which Ezekiel is playing is inconsequential. The importance of the passage lies in the fact that Pharaoh has been turned into a monster as Yhwh's cosmic opponent.

[50] See Bodi 1990: 35-51 for a survey of works that have highlighted Ezekiel's indebtedness to things Akkadian as well as his excellent treatment of Ezekiel read along the side of the Erra Poem.

[51] See McCormick 2002 and Crouch 2010.

disorder by likening him to a chaos creature, is to reduce him to the antithesis of his royal ideal. On another level, the transformation of Pharaoh into the תנים allows Yhwh to be set firmly in a context of royal battle. If he is fighting Pharaoh turned muddy crocodile, Yhwh claims victory over the single most powerful ideal of monarchy articulated in the author's environs with nothing more than a net. Establishing his reputation as valiant warrior, Yhwh shows himself the fisherman of this king who can do little to protect himself from the might of his rival in war. If the designation of Pharaoh as תנים is intended to overlay history with myth, the royal underpinning of the confrontation remains intact. For whatever the variations on or setting of the *Chaoskampf* in the literature at our disposal, the fundamental purpose of the myth is to articulate the gaining of a royal status by the victorious party.[52] Thus in fighting Pharaoh as תנים, Yhwh is proclaiming himself victorious king, a title he is able to gain legitimately as his own only by fact of having silenced the royal claims of his opponent. Pharaoh defeated and his carcass strewn throughout the land, Yhwh can take up his rule over Pharaoh's jurisdiction, revealing himself to his rival's subjects as that power at whose hand their king fell and to whom they now owe allegiance (Ez 29.6; 32.15).

The Cedars

We turn finally to the fifth oracle against Egypt in Ez 31.1-18,[53] which within the context of the larger oracle series stands out both in its composition and literary structure. Though Ez 31.2a and 18 make clear that the poem is addressed once again to the king of Egypt, as an allegory, it serves a further didactic purpose insofar as its content is concerned not with Egypt directly but with Assyria,[54] and through the arboreal metaphor with the Assyrian king specifically.[55] "אל המונו אל מי דמית בגדלך" asks the prophet of his royal audience (Ez 31.2). His unsolicited answer provides the comparison "הנה אשור ארז בלבנון" (Ez 31.3). And indeed the lesson seems immediately apparent – as self-assumed successor to Assyria, Pharaoh should listen and learn. From here, the poem proceeds much as one might expect. Ez 31.3-9 speaks to the luxuriant cedar that stands as both a variation on the cosmic tree and as a hymnic passage of sorts celebrating the nourishment that a royal tree provides as guardian over the land (cf. Ez 17.23-24). Nothing proved its equal such that it grew to a stature of true incomparability over all the trees in the garden of Elohim. But praise turns sharply to shame when in Ez 31.10 we learn that the exalted status of the tree led it to revel in its heavenly heights with the result that its heart grew too proud. As punishment it was cut to pieces by the princes of the nations, no more to rise (Ez 31.13).

Like the oracles considered thus far, our allegory is interpreted as one accusing the royal, be he of Egypt or Assyria, of hubris. As the Tyrian king and the Pharaonic תנים, so the Assyrian Cedar misconstrues its grandeur and is governed by pride. And like that of the poems that precede it, there is little incorrect about this surface interpretation. But given so, are we able to detect in this further musing on hubristic self-inflation the tendency towards royal polemic that has become apparent? The oracle, perhaps above all others in the series, has proven particularly malleable to

[52] At risk of sounding like a broken record, allow me to emphasise again that Yhwh does not engage with Pharaoh as creator. Though the *Chaoskampf* is included as part of certain creation myths (*Enūma Eliš* and Ps 74), other uses are entirely devoid of a creative element (the Baʿal Cycle as one example). What all uses of the *Chaoskampf* have in common is the battle of one power over another and the assumption of kingship by the victor.

[53] Zimmerli 1983: 148-52 (vv. 1-2, 9, 10-18 all secondarily added to prophetic core); Bloch 1998: 178-81.

[54] Most, following *BHS*, emend אשור in v.3 to תאשור, providing a second tree to which Pharaoh is commanded to compare himself. In retaining the MT, I am following Block 1998:184-85, who presents a convincing argument to leave the text as is.

[55] Though it is not made explicit in Ez 31, use of the cedar elsewhere in the book (Ez 17.3, 22, 23) indicates that this must be an allegory to do with the Assyrian cedar as king.

mythological explication. Some have ventured as far as to suggest that behind the allegory is an original hymn praising the security afforded by Assyrian rule,[56] while others, due to the Eden setting, have pointed towards the Tree of Life or cosmic tree variously manifested.[57] Against the tendency towards the mythological reading, however, Block has raised a warning, stating that the differences between Ez 31 and the Near Eastern mythological soup from which most tree tradition arise far outweigh any similarities that they might exhibit. Ezekiel's allegory is, by contrast, entirely devoid of what Block refers to as "mythological baggage."[58] The cedar standing as nothing more than the foremost political figure of the prophet's day, the allegory is uniquely pragmatic, functioning only to denounce the proud monarch.[59]

In attempting to draw out the distinctiveness of Ezekiel's political satire, one suspects that Block has veered too far from the mythological underpinnings of this text.[60] Oddly, it seems that his negative conclusion, that this allegory has been overlaid with political intentionality, is precisely the polemical thrust of the oracle. But why to assume as much necessitates that the allegory be stripped of its mythic connotations is not made clear in Block's objection. For, as he readily admits, the tree as mythological canvas has an extensive range:

> The tree represented one of the most common iconographic and mythological symbols, and could be exploited for a variety of purposes – as a symbol of deity, as a protective cosmic symbol, as a symbol of life and prosperity, as a symbol of the divine-human relationship. Ezekiel's cedar bears his own distinctive stamp.[61]

Despite the multiplicity of uses Block correctly ascribes to the tree,[62] what the cedar rarely represents in the symbolic word of the Near East is the king,[63] and *here* I would suggest lies Ezekiel's 'distinctive stamp'. Perhaps I am engaging Block in a debate over the shades of a black canvas, but the distinction is worth making. For by presenting the monarch as cosmic Cedar,[64] the prophet is innovatively applying a metaphor to a subject ordinarily untouched by its

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[56] Schweizer 1985: 210-12.

[57] It is common both to mention the Norse Yggdrasill (Boadt 1980:104-05; Block 1998: 187-88) and to draw attention to what is deemed a parallel passage in the *Poem of Erra*, which praises the beauty and pan-terrestrial reach of the cosmic tree: "Where is the *mēsu* tree, the flesh of the gods, the ornament of the king of the univ[erse]? That pure tree, the august youngster suited to supremacy, whose roots reached as deep down as the bottom of the underwor[ld]: a hundred double hours through the vast sea waters; whose top reached as high as the sky of [Anum]" (*Poem of Erra* I 150-53).

[58] Block 1998:188.

[59] Block 1998:187-89.

[60] Block raises two further 'difficulties' for the argument that Ez 31 is somehow indebted to Mesopotamian traditions (particularly that of the *Erra* poem): Ezekiel's monotheism and his dependence on the Eden tradition in Gen 2-3. But it is unclear to me how these pose the difficulty Block envisions. The absence of other gods in Ez 31 need not differentiate the basic allegory. Ezekiel's 'radical theocentricity,' now largely used as a catch phrase to explain the egocentric focus of the book, surely provides ample scope to explain the difference. As for the priority of Gen 2, the difficulties are too numerous to address sufficiently here. Block is certainly in the majority in assuming that the prophet had the Gen 2-3 narrative in mind, but those voices arguing for the priority of Ezekiel do have firm ground upon which to stand (Van Seters 1989). Irrespective of one's stance on the relationship between the two garden narratives, it remains unclear how either Gen 2 or Ez 31 can be devoid of 'mythological baggage.' The baggage may be different between them and even more so between them and the garden mythology of *Erra*, but each carries a suitcase of its own.

[61] Block 1998:188-89.

[62] See further Lambert 1985

[63] Kings, at least in the Mesopotamian tradition, are usually associated with the date palm (Porter 1993). Though there is a strong tradition connecting kings with the Cedar Forest of Lebanon (Richter 2002: 160-70; Shipp 2002), the only instance that I am aware of where a king is equated specifically with a cedar is a reference to the Sumerian king Shulgi as "a cedar rooted by abundant waters, of pleasant shade are you" (in Boadt 1980: 101).

[64] Here I must disagree outright with Block on the supposed 'vagueness' of the text that prevents one from seeing an allusion to the *mēsu* tree in Ez 31. Not only does the description of the Cedar's subterranean nourishment and heavenly height (Ez 31.3-4) read almost identically to the description of the *mēsu* tree, but the indebtedness of Ezekiel to the *Poem of Erra* is now so well established that to argue to the contrary comes across as counter-intuitive.

mythological range, buttressing the royal with a mythic storyline not traditionally his. But the prophet has not undertaken this exercise to support the king's majesty. Rather, he has presented him as such in order to make his subsequent fall that much greater.[65] Like the transformation Pharaoh underwent, the mythologization of the royal as Cedar and its fall at the behest of Yhwh allows the author opportunity to parade in front of his audience not only the death of the king, but through him the death of the royal myth.

Bringing myth and king together to construct yet another anti-monarch, the allegory in Ez 31 nevertheless signals a noticeable change in the presentation of royalty. By introducing the Assyrian king as the predecessor to whom Pharaoh would naturally liken himself, the prophet is placing his survey of inglorious kings onto an historical grid. Doing so allows him to establish a cyclical pattern of behaviour and to construct a gallery of royal models, which when sequentially placed shows that history is replete with numerous examples of the failed monarch.[66] Familiarity with the use of history elsewhere in the book should allow the theological implication of this step to fall into place. Like the cyclical presentation of Israel's behaviour in Ez 20, which makes just the seemingly unjust punishment of the nation by its deity, so the 'history of monarchy' as constructed by the prophet presents an institution whose observable nature elicits unequivocal condemnation. As much is confirmed by the conclusion of the allegory:

על מפלתו ישכנו כל עוף השמים ואל פארתיו היו
כל חית השדה: למען אשר לא יגבהו בקומתם כל
עצי מים ולא יתנו את צמרתם אל בין עבתים ולא
יעמדו אל יהם בגבהם כל שתי מים כי כלם נתנו
למות אל ארץ תחתית בתוך בני אדם אל יורדי בור:

On its fallen trunk settle all the birds of the air,
and among its boughs are all the beasts of the field.
This in order that no trees by the waters may grow in
their height or set their tops amongst the clouds, and
that no trees that drink water may endeavour to stand
amongst them in height. For all of them have been
handed over to death, to the world below amongst
mortals, those who go down to the Pit. Ez 31.13-14

With nature inhabiting the carcass trunk of the Assyrian king, it is in the ruins of a felled monarchy that nature now finds its protection, polemic enough to raise questions over the future of the monarchic institution.[67] But the outcome for the institution in my estimation does not come until v.14, which articulates the purpose of the king's fall – that no other king will again achieve the grandeur of this mythic monarch.[68] Rather, all trees of the garden, by which the author clearly intends all kings, have been sent to the underworld to die amongst mortals. Far from a lesson warning future monarchs of the outcome of proud ambition, this allegory acts as a death sentence for any and all holders of a royal post.[69]

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[65] In contrast, here Block 1998: 180 and I do agree.

[66] Most would, of course, say that the reason for each failed monarch is his hubristic nature. So much is irrefutable. But one does begin to wonder at this point whether something more fundamental is being communicated. If to be a king is to be hubristic, is it possible that monarchy itself is the misdemeanour?

[67] My reading of v.13 is against the general trend of scholarship to understand the state of nature after the tree's fall as dystopic (Boadt 1980: 115-16). All I can offer is the simple observation that the animals seem to be doing just fine to me. They may not be procreating as they did under the tree when it was standing (v.3), but they have continued on without the protection of the Cedar (*pace* Block 1998:192). What this says about the tree (and perhaps through it, monarchy) is that it has become obsolete.

[68] The subtlety of the purpose clause in v.14 often escapes notice, but when acknowledged, the result for the monarchic institution is damning. We are told that the Cedar is felled in order that all other trees will be unable to grow great in height or place their tops in the clouds. Returning to the first half of the allegory, notice that it was not the Cedar's height with which Yhwh took issue, rather that such height allowed the tree to become proud (v.10). Indeed, it was the height of the tree - that it *was* great and its top *was* in the clouds - that made it the epitome of protective kingship. If so, v.14 is not saying that future kings will never again be in a position to make themselves proud. It is saying that trees will never again become royal.

[69] Space does not afford us the opportunity to address Ez 32.22-32, but the conclusion reached here is supported by the final section of the oracle series. Beyond simply being a further lesson for Pharaoh, Ez 32.22-32 acts as

Where Eagles Fear To Tread

Considering the course of our discussion as it has unfolded, one element that marks Ezekiel's oracle series out as unique is the absence of one addressed to Babylon.[70] One must assume that the restoration envisioned in the book (Ez 34; 37; 40-48) intimates Babylon's failure, but in contrast to other prophetic collections, the author shows deference to Judah's suzerain to the extreme. Like Assyria that acts as the great instrument of Yhwh's anger in Isaiah (Isa 10.5, et.al.), Babylon is the agent of Yhwh's fury both against and for his people (Ez 17.12; 19.9; 21.19, 21; 24.2; 30.24, 25; 32.11). But the instrument is very much the king of Babylon. Indeed, it might seem that the only king to survive unscathed is Nebuchadnezzar, who like Cyrus in Deutero-Isaiah, acts as Yhwh's puppet. It may be that he is the agent of destruction in contrast to Cyrus, the agent of restoration, but he is the single person through whom Yhwh unleashes his wrath on the nations of the earth. Thus to fall to Yhwh's sword is to fall to the sword of Nebuchadnezzar (cf. Ez 30.25), wielded with the assurance and ferocity afforded only by divine favour. Nevertheless, in light of the consistency with which Yhwh condemns foreign kings for the exercise of power, the presentation of Nebuchadnezzar is somewhat anomalous. As the force to which the naked eye would ascribe universal dominion and power, one might assume a competition to arise between the 'Great King' and Yhwh.

The only passage in which Yhwh and king of Babylon appear in comparison with one another is the Eagle Allegory of Ez 17.[71] The passage begins with a riddle of two eagles playing gardener to an uprooted sprig (v.3) and a pernicious vine (vv.5-10). As is customary of any משל, the narrative continues by providing an interpretation (vv.11-21), which explicates the identity of the botanical characters, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah, the latter's crime and the punishment that awaits him for having broken covenant loyalty with Yhwh through political infidelity to the first eagle, Nebuchadnezzar. The passage finishes with a resumption of the allegorical language in vv.22-24 where Yhwh promises to do as Nebuchadnezzar had done by picking a cedar sprig of his own, planting it on his high mountain, and through it initiating the restoration of Israelite monarchy.[72] The allegory's interpretation has acted very much as the spine for discussions of monarchy in the book and remains largely determined by Levenson's reading, the importance of which for him lies in two interrelated messages.[73] First and foremost, the allegory is concerned with the restoration of the Davidic line now in exile. Yhwh has not forgotten his promise made to David (2 Sam 7) and in returning the offshoot (Zerubbabel) of the sprig initially removed by Nebuchadnezzar, will usher in the universal reign of his messiah.[74] Secondly, the allegory informs us of the relationship between Yhwh and the new Cedar. As Nebuchadnezzar was to Zedekiah, so Yhwh will be to the coming Davidic scion. And as Zedekiah should have been loyal to Nebuchadnezzar, so the messiah will be to Yhwh with the expected result that stability will overtake the land upon his planting.

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the theological denouement of the entire series by cataloguing the new royal inhabitants in Sheol. All kings, past and present, have been banished to the underworld, leaving the terrestrial world deprived of its shepherds.

[70] Scathing condemnations against the power that brought exile to the land are found in both Isaiah (Isa 13-14) and Jeremiah (Jer 50-51).

[71] Zimmerli 1979: 363-64, 66 (vv. 8, 11-21, 22-24 secondarily added); Bloch 1997: 537-39.

[72] Ez 17.22-24 is universally considered to be secondary to the original allegory, though Block 1997: 549-50 remains cautiously on the fence. Zimmerli 1979: 366-67 points to the similarities in vocabulary and intent shared by Ez 17 and Ez 31, suggesting that the former has been redacted in light of the latter, through Ez 19 (cf. Allen 1994: 260-61).

[73] Levenson 1976: 79-84.

[74] Levenson is not entirely forthcoming on this point, though considering his positive stance towards the coming messiah in the remainder of his work, I doubt I am falsely representing him. For a fulsome reconstruction of the utopia to come, see Zimmerli 1979: 367 and Block 1997: 553-54.

With scholarly interest focused solely on the potential outcome for the future of the monarchic institution, the messianic hysteria that often accompanies the allegory's interpretation has obscured a crucial function of the text. Before moving on to the nature of the messiah promised in Ez 17.23, Levenson mentions in passing what I take as the central purpose of the allegory:

> YHWH is to the messiah as Nebuchadnezzar is to Zedekiah. What YHWH does when he raises up the messiah is what a great emperor does when he places a vassal on the throne of a hostile state… [As] Nebuchadnezzar is simultaneously king and king-maker (*hammelek hammamlîk*, v.16) without diminishing his dominion in the act…[h]ere YHWH is *hammelek hammamlîk*, the king and king-maker.[75]

If Levenson's formal analogy is correct, and I think it must be, Ez 17, whilst reflecting to some degree on the nature of the coming messiah, is concerned primarily with presenting Yhwh as king. As it stands, Ez 17.22-23 functions to set up a comparison between Yhwh and the two eagles on the topic of king-making, whereby Yhwh proves himself to be the superior actor.[76] The second Eagle does little save wreak havoc[77] and the efforts of the first Eagle do not seem to fare much better – by re-potting the cedar shoot within his own greenhouse and tempering with a seed that is not even a royal species, chaos ensues. But the efforts by Yhwh to undertake exactly the same exercise result in success.

How to Make a King in 3 Easy Steps

	Ez 17.3-8	Ez 17.22-23
Actor	Eagle (King of Babylon)	Yhwh
Action	Tear off (קטף)	Tear Off (אקטף)
Object	Shoot (ראש יניקותיו)	Shoot (ראש יניקותיו)
Origin	Top of Cedar (צמרת הארז)	Top of Cedar (צמרת הארז)
Destination	Land of Merchants	High mountain of Israel
Outcome	Seed Sprouted to become vine Attempted nobility (היא שתולה לעשות ענף ולשאת פרי להיות לגפן אדרת)	Achieved nobility (ונשא ענף ועשה פרי והיה לארז אדיר)
Consequence	Death	Security

As the Eagle takes a shoot from the cedars of Lebanon (Ez 17.3-4), so will Yhwh (Ez 17.22). As the Eagle plants his in the city of merchants (Ez 17.4), so Yhwh will plant his on a high and lofty mountain within Israel (Ez 17.22c-23a). But whereas the Eagle's subsequent actions only result in an absent cedar shoot and a useless vine (Ez 17.5-10) that is incapable of providing royal protection despite its efforts, Yhwh's cedar shoot will grow into a luxuriant tree under which all can find protection (Ez 17.23). Thus for every royal act undertaken by the Eagle, it is equalled by Yhwh and the result is superior at every turn. If one allows for the analogy to take place on the level between Eagle and Yhwh in the manner that has been suggested, it seems to me that the passage is more concerned with the gardener than the plant, the king-maker than the king, with

[75] Levenson 1976: 80.

[76] It is not for lack of attention that this conclusion is missing from all interpretations of the allegory. Nearly everyone draws attention to the similarities between Ez 17.3-4, 8 and Ez 17.22-23, but seem largely unconcerned with what this might mean. I do not agree with Allen 1990: 260 that Yhwh has simply taken over the great eagle's earlier role. Zimmerli 1979: 367 is exactly right that, "The action of Yahweh is, in detail, a lofty counter to the action of the eagle."

[77] The second eagle (most likely Psammetichus II) seems largely secondary to the allegory. As much as it could potentially help my argument, Block 1997: 546 is surely incorrect in assuming that the second eagle is Yhwh. The interpretation really only manages to confound the allegory further.

any message on the nature of the monarchy being entirely derivative of the larger point that concludes the allegory in Ez 17.24:

וידעו כל עצי השדה כי אני יהוה השפלתי עץ גבה הגבהתי עץ שפל הובשתי עץ לח והפרחתי עץ יבש אני יהוה דברתי ועשיתי׃	Then all the trees of the field shall know that I am Yhwh. *I* bring low the high tree, *I* make high the low tree; *I* dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish. *I* Yhwh have spoken; *I* will accomplish it.

The statement unequivocal on the fact that it is Yhwh who determines the fate and behaviour of trees (= kings), it is interesting that once again the context of Yhwh's apology is decisively held within the realm of human monarchy. Yhwh's efficacy as a political puppeteer is established through a simple comparison of action and result between himself and the 'Great King' of Babylon. It may be that Yhwh engages in what is no more (or no less!) than a verbal thumb wrestling match with his rival, Nebuchadnezzar, but that he would engage in the present competition at all should give pause for thought. For Yhwh is not competing against another deity for recognition as history's master, he is entering himself into a competition with a human political rival to claim as his the title 'המלך הממלכת'. The majestic Eagle of Babylon shown to be ineffective, Yhwh stands victorious over the greatest of his royal rivals as the true 'Great King' of the four corners of the Earth.

Conclusions: The God Who Would Be King

In his analysis of Ezekiel's oracles against Egypt, Boadt suggested some years ago that the primary task for understanding the masterful collection was our ability to recognize and appreciate "the delineation of the religious message behind the surface structures"[78] of the text. It has been to this end that our discussion has been aimed. Broadening the horizon of the discussion beyond Egypt to the remainder of those nations condemned in the larger series, the analysis of the surface structures of Ezekiel has shown that below even the 'religious message' lies a purposeful dialectic with the nature of royal rule.

Each of the oracles discussed in Ezekiel's parade of accused monarchs exhibits multiple levels of interpretation, most of which have largely gone unexplored by the series' interpreters. In part this is undoubtedly due to the unyielding consistency with which the surface level of the text has been constructed. Every king raised for consideration shows himself accused of hubris, hovering too close to the divide between אדם and אל and turning his reign into Babel revisited. But a more nuanced reading of the passages has revealed that a complex substructure of polemic lies at the foundation of these royal lessons. In each case, it is possible to locate an expression of royal ideology that assumes as legitimate the claims with which Yhwh takes issue. At this level of the text, what our kings give voice to is nothing more 'hubristic' than a vocabulary long established in the rhetorical world of the monarchic institution. By classifying this language as somehow anathema, Yhwh is dismantling the semantic base of royal power. But the text goes farther still. As we have seen, the presentation of the royal 'fall' has in every instance been couched in explicit mythological language, out of which I can see two conclusions stemming for the interpretation of the text. On the one hand, whether the author is engaging specifically with a myth inherited (the King of Tyre) or supplementing his subject with mythic brush strokes not usually applied (Pharaoh and the Cedar), royal mythology as presented in the text results only in bad kings, suggesting on some level that our monarchs have been mythologized in order to subvert the mythology of kingship. On the other, what Page has called the "historical non-

[78] Boadt 1980: 169.

specificity and rich mythological overlay"[79] of the oracles creates a pattern of mythic anti-monarchs. That every king, however manifested in space (Tyre or Egypt) or time (Assyria or Egypt), is condemned to Sheol raises the possibility that the author is in the business of constructing an oracle against the royal institution, not simply those who make up its numbers. Ultimately, irrespective of the level on which one engages the text, the outcome remains largely unchanged for any evaluation of monarchy. Every king condemned for acting as was his royal right, if the institution has not been undermined, any figure presuming to take up the royal position nonetheless finds himself ingloriously exiled to the farthest recesses of the underworld.

Conspicuously missing from the otherwise inclusive list of condemned kings is the king of Babylon, who, one might assume, escapes the dethronement suffered by all other foreign kings. But a discussion of the political analogy that underpins the Eagle Allegory in Ez 17 showed that he too is engaged by Yhwh in a competition over dominion and proves to be the inferior of the two royal actors. The nature of the contest that unfolds in Ez 17 reveals an important tendency already intimated in the oracle series, namely that the platform upon which Yhwh chooses to engage in his battles for power is very much within the human realm, his primary competitor consistently being a royal figure.[80] That this is so may strike one as odd considering the theocentric concerns of the book. But perhaps this is where our answer lies. If Yhwh is claiming power over all, he must assert power too over the kings of the four corners of the earth and in doing so must engage them in a contest on the terrestrial level. Behind his claim, however, is more than a wish for recognition as an omnipotent deity.[81] Supplanting the kings of Babylon, Assyria, Egypt, and Tyre, and consigning all the trees of the divine garden to death, Yhwh is engaged above all in an apologetic exercise for their jurisdiction and realm of power. Given the royal nature of the apology as it unfolds, it seems that Yhwh is appealing not to the power afforded to him as deity, but rather is striving to manifest a universal supremacy that can be his only after usurping the royal throne of the kings with whom he battles. All royal competitors falling victim to his might, from the ashes of a silenced royal institution Yhwh alone remains as the 'Great King'.

[79] Page 1996: 140. Page is only referring to the language surrounding the royal figure in Ez 28, but the consistent mythological presentation of subsequent kings in the series allows his observation to be applied to all.

[80] Rarely, if ever, is Yhwh pitted against other gods, Ezekiel's attitude being remarkably straightforward on this point – 'If you are going to worship other gods, go ahead. Just don't worship me at the same time' (cf. Ez 30.29).

[81] Every oracle in the series is concluded with some articulation of the Recognition Formula, which Boadt 1980:170 takes as Yhwh's decisive claim to be the only God. In this case, one might expect the formula to read 'אני יהוה אלהים'. All will know, however, that the formula is 'אני יהוה', which suggests that the issue at stake is not recognition of Yhwh as deity, but recognition in the first instance.

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