The Semiotics of Theophany in Text and Image: Isaiah 6 and Phoenician cultic iconography.

The sixth chapter of the book of Isaiah contains one of the Hebrew Bible's most vividly described theophanies. Written in the first person, the chapter presents itself as Isaiah ben Amoz's record of an actual visual experience of YHWH: וארא את־אדני (Isa 6:1). Related to a wider project investigating how certain Hebrew Bible theophany texts use language, imagery, and an implicit theological framework drawn from the (remembered, reconstructed, or invented) Judahite cult to envision the deity's manifestation, this paper is concerned with possible parallels in 'Phoenician' cultic iconography which might serve to illuminate this relationship.

The present paper will proceed as follows: first I will note the basic 'problem of theophany' in Hebrew Bible texts. Second, I will introduce the methodology by which I approach cultic theophany texts, drawn primarily from the work of the Classicist Verity Platt, which makes room for the comparison of both iconographic and written sources. Then, third, I will make a case for the helpfulness of referring to some particular motifs in Phoenician iconography, connected to cult, for trying to understand how Isaiah's theophany might be envisioned.

1. The Problem of Theophany in the Hebrew Bible.

By way of preliminary definition, by 'theophany' I mean the appearance of manifestation of a deity which includes a visual component (thus the Greek φαίνεσθαι and its cognates), i.e. a visionary experience of the god.[1]

The Biblical tradition offers a variety of disparate, perhaps discordant, answers to the question of whether the God of Israel can be seen by humans. This question touches on the recent trend in Biblical research towards studying the Hebrew Bible's various depictions of YHWH's form and corporeality.[2] In Exodus 33, Moses is allowed to see the back of the embodied deity, but not his face, who declares that "You cannot see my face, for no mortal shall see me and live." (Ex 33:20). Deuteronomy 4:15, however, explicitly denies that there was a proper theophany on the mountain: "You did not see any form on the day YHWH spoke

[1] For present purposes, I am content to use 'theophany' and 'epiphany' more or less interchangeably. The former, however, has the advantage of highlighting that the 'problem of theophany' highlighted below is, at root, a theological one.

[2] See particularly, Benjamin Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Mark S. Smith, *Where the Gods Are: Spatial Dimensions of Anthropomorphism in the Biblical World* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2016); Andreas Wagner, *God's Body: The Anthropomorphic God in the Old Testament* (trans. Marion Salzmann; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2019).

to you at Horeb, from the midst of the fire."[3] In Isaiah 6, these two tendencies, broadly understood, regarding the corporeality and visibility of the deity, are both on display. In verse one, there is the explicit claim to have seen the god: וארֹאה את־אדני יֹשב על־כסא רם ונשׂא, "I saw the Lord seated upon a high and lofty throne", yet in verse five is an explicit acknowledgement of the danger and difficulty of visual experience of the divine: ואמר אוי לי כי את־המלך יהוה צבאות ראו עיני […], "And I said, Woe is me […] for mine eyes have seen the King, YHWH of Hosts".

Even in those Hebrew Bible texts which do affirm the possibility of theophany, the general presupposition appears to be that human beings do not generally, and should not ordinarily, see the god. What, then, makes possible those rare occasions when a theophanic experience takes place? What makes a theophanic experience possible within the world the text creates? This line of enquiry seeks to identify and understand the internal, implicit theological framework which sustains the claims made by a text like Isaiah 6 about seeing the deity.[4] I look to the Judahite cult, or perhaps to the Bible's (re)constructed memories of the Judahite cult, for such a framework.[5] At the same time, a related and overlapping research question concerns how the text deploys elements of this theological framework to represent (or re-present) such a claimed theophanic experience. What literary techniques are used, and what imagery is used, to represent the deity's appearing, both to the seer and to the text's reader? I suggest in this paper that elements of Phoenician iconography are useful to envisioning an answer to this second question.

2. Reading visions: The semiotics of Theophany.

The appearance and manifestation of deities to mortals has recently emerged as a significant theme in Classical scholarship. Indeed, the renaissance in the study of epiphany in the Greco-Roman world over the last few decades has only intensified, offering insights and approaches which prove useful when applied to Hebrew Bible theophanies. Greek literature appears from the beginning to have recognised problems of theophany analogous to those

[3] For a recent study of theophany in the Pentateuch, see Nevada Levi DeLapp, *Theophanic "Type-Scenes" in the Pentateuch: Visions of YHWH* (London; New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2018).

[4] In my doctoral project, I approach these questions along the lines of Eliot Wolfson's thesis in his study of mediaeval Jewish mysticism that (claimed) mystical experiences are dependent upon prior theological and religious assumptions, and in which he builds upon Hans Jonas's assertion that "without an attendant dogmatics there would be no valid mysticism", and that "[T]he mystic not only seeks to express his or her experience within an accepted theoretical framework, but it is the latter that informs and shapes the former." Eliot Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 6, drawing upon Hans Jonas, "Myth and Mysticism: A Study of Objectification and Interiorization in Religious Thought", *Journal of Religion* 49 (1969), pp. 315-329.

[5] By 'Judahite cult' I mean primarily the Jerusalem temple of YHWH, though I also consider evidence of cultic practice which might involve other deities, or at sites outside Jerusalem.

discussed above, expressing them explicitly in both the *Iliad,* χαλεποὶ δὲ θεοὶ φαίνεσθαι ἐναργεῖς ('the gods are hard to behold when they manifest themselves clearly')[6]; and the *Homeric Hymns*: χαλεποὶ δὲ θεοὶ θνητοῖσιν ὁρᾶσθαι ('the gods are hard for mortals to see')[7].

Beginning in the 1980's, Pietro Pucci undertook valuable research on the textual nature of divine epiphanies in Greek poetry.[8] Renée Koch Piettre's encyclopaedic doctoral dissertation on epiphany in Greek literature is likewise a major resource for the study of theophany; in particular she offers a complex taxonomy of epiphanic terminology and phenomena, which illuminates the variety of epiphanic encounters narrated in Greek literature. [9]Her study anchors recent approaches to divine epiphany in the Classics in early twentieth-century German surveys of the theme,[10] along with more recent work on divine bodies by Jean-Pierre Vernant.[11]

The present study draws most heavily upon the work of the classicist and art historian Verity Platt, whose 2011 monograph Facing the Gods offers several helpful methodological approaches to Greco-Roman epiphany, including a section on what she calls "the semiotics of epiphany in early greek culture".[12]

Platt considers epiphany to be "the manifestation of deities to mortals", and she claims that it "inspired, and was in turn inspired by, practices of visual and literary representation, generating a mutually reinforcing bond"[13]. Platt understands epiphany in the context of cultural production in ancient Greece, drawing on the 'pictorial turn' in the Classics in the late 1980s and 90s.[14] She grounds her study in terms of "the *visuality* of Greco-Roman epiphany", and Greco-Roman "practices of viewing".[15]

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[6] *Iliad* 20.131.
[7] *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 2.111.
[8] See in particular Pietro Pucci, "Textual Epiphanies in the Iliad", in Pucci, *The Song of the Sirens: Essays on Homer*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 69-80; originally published as Pucci, "Epifanie testuali nell'*Iliade*", *Studi Italiani di Filologia Classica* 3 (1985), 170-83.
[9] Renée Koch Piettre, *"Le Corps des Dieux dans les Épiphanies Divines en Grèce Ancienne*" (Doctoral thesis submitted to the École Pratique des Hautes Études, 1996). Cf. also Renée [Koch] Piettre, "Images et perception de la présence divine en Grèce ancienne", *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome - Antiquité* 113 (2001), 211-224.
[10] Namely: Ludwig Weniger, "Theophanien. Altgriechische Götteradvente", *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 22 (1923-24), 16-57; Friedrich Pfister, 'Epiphanie', *Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* Supplement 4 (1924), 277-323; Elpidius Pax, *ΕΠΙΦΑΝΕΙΑ: Ein religionsgeschichtlicher Beitrag zur Biblischer Theologie* (Munich: Karl Zink, 1955).
[11] Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Corps obscur, corps éclatant", in C. Malamoud and J.-P. Vernant (eds.), *Corps des Dieux* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), 19-45.
[12] Platt, *Facing the Gods*, 50-60.
[13] Platt, *Facing the Gods*, 7.
[14] Cf. Georgia Petridou, *Divine Epiphany in Greek Literature and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 10.
[15] Platt, *Facing the Gods*, 10.

She analyses divine epiphany in terms of the εἴδεα (outward forms) and σήματα (signs) which serve to distinguish deities from one another in Greek literature and art. Platt's terminology is taken from Herodotus's discussion, at *Histories* 2.53, of the influence of Hesiod and Homer (as canonical poets) on the Greeks' conception of their pantheon and its members, and how the gods are to be perceived and recognised by humans[16].

> Ἔνθεν δὲ ἐγένοντο ἕκαστος τῶν θεῶν, εἴτε αἰεὶ ἦσαν πάντες, ὁκοῖοί τε τινὲς τὰ εἴδεα, οὐκ ἠπιστέατο μέχρι οὗ πρώην τε καὶ χθὲς ὡς εἰπεῖν λόγῳ. Ἡσίοδον γὰρ καὶ Ὅμηρον ἡλικίην τετρακοσίοισι ἔτεσι δοκέω μευ πρεσβυτέρους γενέσθαι καὶ οὐ πλέοσι· οὗτοι δὲ εἰσὶ οἱ ποιήσαντες θεογονίην Ἕλλησι καὶ τοῖσι θεοῖσι τὰς ἐπωνυμίας δόντες καὶ τιμάς τε καὶ τέχνας διελόντες καὶ εἴδεα αὐτῶν σημήναντες.
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> Now from where each of the gods came, whether they always were, and what kind of forms they had, they [the Greeks] did not know until yesterday or the day before, so to speak. For the time of Hesiod and Homer seems to me not more than four hundred years ago. It was these [poets] who produced divine genealogies for the Greeks, giving names to the gods, distinguishing their particular honours and competences, and signifying their outward forms.[17]

On this model, Herodotus explains that Hesiod and Homer teach the names (ἐπωνυμίας), honours (τιμάς), competences (τέχνας) and outward forms (εἴδεα), which the poets signify or interpret (σημανεῖν) to their audiences. Knowledge of the divine εἴδεα is therefore mediated though cultural production, "such as mythical narratives and visual representations," so that "humans can only know the gods by means of representations (whether conceptual, verbal or visual)."[18] These representations include, for example, the divinities' distinguishing epithets in archaic poetry ("fleet-footed Iris") and attributes (the *aegis* associated with Zeus). According to Platt's presentation of this model, "to know and worship a divinity was thus to engage with the nature and significance of his or her body."[19]

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[16] Herodotus, *Histories* 2.53. It is worth noting that Platt does not engage directly with modern theories of semiotics, but develops Herodotus's suggestion in dialogue with modern analyses of the σῆμα in early Greek literature. In particular, she relies on the discussion of Homer's use of σῆμα and σημανεῖν in Raymond A. Prier, *Thauma Idesthai: Sight and Appearance in Archaic Greek* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1989), especially pp. 108-112, 200-1.

[17] Herodotus 2.53. Text from Alfred D. Godley (trans. and ed.), Herodotus, *The Persian Wars: Volume I* (Loeb Classical Library; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1926 and 2014); last accessed online 3rd December 2018, DOI: 10.4159/DLCL.herodotus-persian_wars.1920.

[18] Platt, *Facing the Gods*, 52-53.

[19] Platt, *Facing the Gods*, 51. She cites Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion. Archaic and Classical*. Trans. J Raffan (Oxford: OUP, 1985), 182-9; Vernant, *Mortals and Immortals*, (F. Zeitlin, ed. and trans.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); and Koch Piettre, 'Le Corps', 43, on the corporeality of

At its most basic level, then, Platt's model presents an account of how Greek deities are known, and identified within the pantheon, by their distinct εἴδεα and σήματα, how these σήματα are drawn from a received canonical body of conventions in Greek religious representation, and how the representation (and repeated re-presentation) of these εἴδεα and σήματα makes the phenomenon of epiphany possible.

Platt's approach is particularly useful because, in treating epiphany as a kind of cultural production, we can locate the manifestation of deities in the context of both the religious culture of cultic praxis and the literary culture of our extant textual sources. We can furthermore accept a wide definition of cultural production which allows comparison of different media, namely both textual and archaeological (visual) artefacts connected to the cult.

Significantly, Platt's model also describes the relationship of epiphany to a religious system. She describes a system of religious "acts and expectations" engendered by Homer and Hesiod, which begins to resemble the kind of implicit theological framework necessary for theophanic or mystical experience. [20]Platt's model also shows how the re-presentation of the conventional/traditional signs in an epiphany lend credence to and reinforce the semiotic (i.e. religious, cultural, cultic, etc.) system to which they belong: "Indeed, epiphany functions as the cognitive device by which such systems can be proven valid."[21] Platt's model, then, offers the prospect of also accounting for the function of cultic theophany within the Hebrew Bible's presentation of Judahite religion.

This way of reading divine epiphany translates rather effectively for Platt into the sphere of iconography. She discusses as series of Greek votive reliefs as exercises in 'visual theology' in a theophanic mode, beginning with a fourth-century BC votive relief from the sanctuary of Asklepios at Athens.[22]

Greek gods. This emphasis on divine corporeality presages the work of Sommer and Smith in Biblical Studies.

[20] Platt, *Facing the Gods*, 54.

[21] Platt, *Facing the Gods*, 54.

[22] Platt, *Facing the Gods*, 31-39.



Fig. 1. Mid-fourth century BC votive relief from the Asklepieion at Athens. Athens NM 1377. Image from Wikimedia Commons.

A procession of worshippers approaches Asklepios for sacrifice, and mortals and deity meet at the threshold of the sanctuary. The divine figures of Asklepios, Hygieia and Epione inside the sanctuary are depicted naturalistically. They are not obviously cult statues, particularly as they are not placed on pedestals, and this naturalism also highlights the similarity between human and divine bodies.[23] That said, the human and divine figures in the scene are clearly differentiated in stature, as well as their situation in the taller, raised naiskos.[24] Extreme height is here, as in Greek poetry, a signifier of divinity. [25]Asklepios himself is identifiable, of course, by his distinguishing iconographic σῆμα, a serpent-staff, just visible in the far left corner of the image above. His wife and daughter are identifiable as the two female figures juxtaposed with the identified male god. So, here in iconography too, the gods are manifest and identifiable in terms of their εἴδεα and σήματα.

The relief appears deliberately to play with the representation of cultic theophany.

[23] Platt, *Facing the Gods*, 31.
[24] Platt, *Facing the Gods*, 31.
[25] E.g. *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 188-9; *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* 173-4. On the relationship between these examples and visual depictions of theophany, cf. Georgia Petridou, "'Blessed is He, Who Has Seen': The Power of Ritual Viewing and Ritual Framing in Eleusis", *Helios* 40 (2013), 324.

When the viewer stands directly in front of the relief, the deities are partially hidden by the column of the shrine's entrance. To see them better, one can position oneself towards the far right-hand end of the relief, as if joining the tail of the procession of worshippers.[26] The relief has an implicitly didactic theological function: "it suggests that human acts of worship are balanced by a corresponding bestowal of divine presence – that within the network of reciprocity so characteristic of Greek religious practice, the divine goodwill generated by a dedication or sacrifice is rewarded with an epiphany […]"[27]. Yet, as Platt notes, even this repositioning of the viewer is awkward, and partially obscured by the herm which constitutes the border of the scene. She argues that the relief "suggests by example" how the viewer might access the withheld theophany, representing "the ritual and topographical framing necessary for such encounters with the deity.[28]

Another Classicist studying divine epiphany, Georgia Petridou, has categorised the function of such art (and equivalent literature) as generating a "ritual-centred visuality".[29]The basic concept of visuality is derived from the art historian Norman Bryson, who theorised that "vision is socialised", arguing that "[f]or human beings collectively to orchestrate their visual experience together it is required that each submit his or her retinal experience to the socially agreed description(s) of an intelligible world."[30] In cult, then, ritual and iconography combine to orchestrate viewing practices, to create a socialised religious world in which claims to theophanic experience make sense. [31]They create the physical and conceptual space in which divine forms might manifest themselves.

Even a very cursory reading of Isaiah 6 can helpfully be conceptualised in terms of an analogous 'semiotics of theophany'. The scene's cultic setting is strongly implied with reference to the היכל and the בית, signifiers of the temple as YHWH's residence;[32] and the

[26] Platt, *Facing the Gods*, 37.
[27] Platt, *Facing the Gods*, 33.
[28] Platt, *Facing the Gods*, 37.
[29] G. Petridou, " 'Blessed is He, Who Has Seen': The Power of Ritual Viewing and Ritual Framing in Eleusis", *Helios* 40 (2013), pp. 309-341, drawing the term from Ják Elsner, *Roman Eyes: Visuality and Subjectivity in Art and Text* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 25.
[30] N.W. Bryson, "The Gaze in the Expanded Field.", in H. Foster (ed.), *Vision and Visuality* (Seattle: Bay View Press, 1988), 91.
[31] Petridou's article uses the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* and votive images from Eleusius to model the 'ritual-centred visuality' which sustained the Eleusinian Mysteries.
[32] H.G.M. Williamson, *Isaiah 6-12*, (International Critical Commentary; London; New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2018), 43 notes that the heavenly sanctuary is never referred to as בית in the Hebrew Bible, citing George Buchanan Gray, "The Heavenly Temple and the Heavenly Altar", *The Expositor* 7th Series 29 (1908), 385-402, and 30 (1908), 530-46. Cf. the latter's concise argument for Isaiah 6 taking place in the Jerusalem היכל in Gray, *Isaiah I-XXVII* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1912),

מזבח, a signifier of a relationship between deity and worshippers grounded in the offering of sacrifice and liturgy, and further a signifier of the deity's cultic presence brought about or sustained through ritual practice.[33] The theophany scene draws on the semiotic world of the cult to make the manifestation of YHWH conceivable, and in turn the presence of the deity in and via the cult is seemingly validated by Isaiah's vision.

The deity is identified by various names, titles and epithets (אדני, מלך, יהוה צבאות, קדוש) which relate him to, and distinguish him from, the visionary, Judah, the vestigial Canaanite pantheon and perhaps also foreign gods.[34] The high and lofty throne (כסא רם ונשא) can be read as a signifier of kingship. Divine *σήματα* of height ("high and lifted up") and gigantic size ("the hem of his robe filled the Temple") are attributed to him, even though his figure is not directly described. [35]Both the throne and the YHWH's clothing (שוליו) also indirectly signify his anthropomorphic form.[36] The divine form (cf. Greek εἶδος) and identity are signified in ways analogous to those described by Platt.

Just as Platt's reading of the Asklepieion votive showed how the viewer might be encouraged to reorient herself and identify with the procession of worshippers, Isaiah's vision likewise draws the reader into a literary act of viewing. In the vision, there is a movement from the initial glimpse of YHWH to the hem of his robe (6:1), to the attendant seraphim (6:2), to the doorposts (6:4) and finally to the visionary (6:5). More movement is added in verses 6 and 7 as a seraph flies from above YHWH (cf. 6:2) to the altar and then the visionary (6:6), which likely implies that the altar was between the deity and the seer, who may be situated

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103-4. I also argue that status of בית and היכל as residences, analogous to those of men and mortal kings respectively, likely further implies the deity's broadly anthropomorphic form. Cf. Michael Hundley, *Gods in Dwellings: Temples and Divine Presence in the Ancient Near East* (Atlanta: SBL, 2013), 126, 334.

[33] Cf. Verity Platt's comments on altars in depictions of epiphany, *Facing the Gods*, 39.

[34] In my thesis I contend that these titles and epithets are drawn from and reflect usage in the Judahite cult, but limits of space preclude the rehearsal of these arguments here.

[35] Cf. J.J.M. Roberts, 'The Visual Elements in Isaiah's Vision in Light of Judaean and Near Eastern Sources', in J. R. Wood, J. E. Harvey, and M. Leuchter (eds), *From Babel to Babylon: Essays on Biblical History and Literature in Honor of Brian Peckham* (LHB/OTS 455; New York, 2006), 203; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39* (New Haven; London: Yale Academic Press, 2000) 224.

[36] George B. Gray, *Isaiah I-XXVII* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1912), 103 characterises YHWH's שולים as a "boldly anthropomorphic touch" which needed to be "euphemised away by the ancient translators". We can discount the widely rejected view of Driver that it refers to YHWH'S 'lower extremities', and Eslinger's further argument that שול here refers to his *pudenda*. Cf. G.R. Driver, "Isaiah 6:1 'his train filled the temple'" in H. Goedicke (ed.), *Near Eastern Studies in Honor of W.F. Albright* (Baltimore and London, 1971), 87; Lyle Eslinger, "The Infinite in a Finite Organical Perception (Isaiah VI 1-5)", *Vetus Testamentum* 45 (1995), 145-173.

somewhere in the vicinity of the threshold.[37] Francis Landy argues that this sense of movement endows the scene with a "centrifugal impulse".[38] When the text moves from deity to seer we find ourselves as readers beside the visionary, peering back into the half-described theophany within the smoke-filled temple. The use of synecdoche (e.g. 'the hem of his robe') and a kind of minimalist ekphrasis of the cultic space allows the text to signify or represent (cf. the Herodotean σημανεῖν) the theophany, without daring to reproduce it.[39]

Before considering how some examples from Phoenician cultic art might inform such a reading of Isaiah 6, I would like to suggest that the application of a semiotics of theophany to Biblical texts can go beyond Platt in making use of modern semiotic theory. We may note that Biblical scholars have no native Hebrew Bible explicit theory of divine signification equivalent Herodotus 2.53; above I worked from analogous σήματα, titles, epithets, etc. Moving past these basic analogies, we may note the wider linguistic theories of signification from Ferdinand de Saussure onwards.[40] De Saussure modelled the linguistic sign (*signe*) as the combination of the 'signifier' (*signifiant*) and the 'signified' (*signifié*), the former being the written or spoken form of a word, and the latter being the concept to which the signifier points. This connection is arbitrary:[41] there is nothing in the signifier inherently linked to the signified, and so the linguistic sign is not properly referential. For Saussure, signs exist within a system of available language (*la langue*). The signs which make up actual speech (*parole*) are taken from this system, and derive their meaning from pointing back to the system. Meaning is produced when signs are chosen from among the set of available signs (a *paradigmatic* selection) and placed in combination or contrast with other signs (*syntagmatic* presentation).[42] Meaning on a Saussurean model of semiotic relations is therefore differential; signs exist in systems of relations. Already this provides a theoretical framework for the

[37] Cf. H.G.M. Williamson, Williamson,"Temple and Worship in Isaiah 6", in John Day (ed.) *Temple and Worship in Biblical Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar* (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 136 suggests on this basis that Isaiah must at least be within the main building of the בית.

[38] Francis Landy, "Strategies of Concentration and Diffusion in Isaiah 6", *Biblical Interpretation* 7 (1999), 62.

[39] On this function of synecdoche, cf. again Francis Landy, "Strategies of Concentration and Diffusion in Isaiah 6", *Biblical Interpretation* 7 (1999), 62.

[40] Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de Linguistique Générale* (Paris: Payot), 1916.

[41] NB, this is ontological arbitrariness. There can be socially or historically contingent links between a signifier and signified. Cf. Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics: The Basics* (London; New York: Routledge, 2017), 27.

[42] Saussure's original terminology used '*rapports associatifs*' for 'paradigmatic' here; Chandler, *Semiotics*, 98 notes its introduction by Hjelmslev.

function of signs in Platt's reading of Herodotus, and the function of their equivalents in Isaiah 6.

M.M. Bakhtin further developed de Saussure's theories to stress the social specificity of signification: linguistic signs' differential meaning is only produced within particular social, cultural, and political situations.[43] In the context of the present essay, the signs which make up Isaiah 6 produce meaning with reference to the religious system of the Judahite cult, and its implicit theological framework, that the Hebrew Bible remembers (or creates).

There are three further advantages to engagement with semiotic theory, beyond Platt's model, relevant here. First, Saussurean and post-Saussurean theories of how semiotic systems work are a useful conceptual tool for those who want to analyse both texts and images, because a semiotic system (whether of an ancient culture, or, say, of a specific religious institution) can be composed of both linguistic and iconographic signifiers. Second, we can use semiotic systems as a model for the relationships which exist between related cultures. Jo Quinn's recent study of Phoenician identity has shown quite convincingly the limitations of looking at the ancient world in terms of easily quantifiable ethnic identity and clear cultural boundaries.[44] Instead, cultural commonality and a degree of linguistic mutual intelligibility between Israel, Judah and the Phoenician cities might be understood in terms of overlapping and permeable semiotic systems.[45] We might, then, think in terms of how both linguistic and iconographic signifiers can move between these related semiotic systems. Third, modern theories of semiotics are the foundation of intertextual theory, which cannot be discussed here at length, but helpfully models the instability of relations between the sources available to study, in terms of the countless and often irrecoverable prior uses of the signs which make up our textual and iconographic sources.[46] For Julia Kristeva, these signs are fragments of a

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[43] See in particular M.M. Bakhtin/Valentin Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (trans. L. Matejka and I.R. Titunik; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986). NB, the authorship of this work is disputed by some. Cf. Graham Allen, *Intertextuality*, New Critical Idiom (London and New York: Routledge, 2nd edition, 2011), 11.

[44] Josephine Quinn, *In Search of the Phoenicians* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).

[45] Quinn, *In Search of the Phoenicians*, 71. On mutual intelligibility, see Gary Rendsburg, "Semitic Languages (With Special Reference to the Levant)", in S. Richard (ed.), *Near Eastern Archaeology: A Reader* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 71-3. Cf. Françoise Briquel-Chatonnet, "Hébreu du nord et phénicien: Étude comparée de deux dialectes cananéens", *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 23 (1992), 89-126.

[46] On intertextual theory, see the overview of Graham Allen, *Intertextuality*, New Critical Idiom (London and New York: Routledge, 2nd edition, 2011). Foundational to intertextual theory are Julia Kristeva's essays 'The Bounded Text' and 'Word, Dialogue, and Novel', available in Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: a Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art,* trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon S. Roudiez (ed.) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980). On the use and misuse of

'social text' or 'cultural' text, the set of signs available within a given culture, which are reused such that "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations". Only a fraction of the social texts which generated the Hebrew Bible or Phoenician art and literature have survived to the present; Kristeva's theory of intertextuality reminds us that we of the vast realm of irrecoverable oral culture, pedagogy, artwork, etc., in the context of which theophany texts like Isaiah 6 or Phoenician cultic art produced meaning.[47] We must remember that the signifiers which combine to represent divine presences in theophany are drawn from such an unmappable social text.

The above considerations combine to suggest that a semiotic approach to theophany offers the possibility of comparing signification in both literary and iconographic sources, and of understanding the related Levantine cultures of Israel, Judah, and Phoenicia as being composed from overlapping social texts; at the same time they stress the need for epistemic humility in approaching surviving sources, and regarding the provisionality of our conclusions. With this latter point in mind, I wish to stress that this essay's investigation of Phoenician iconography in no way precludes the usefulness of comparing the theophany in Isaiah 6 with other material, e.g. Mesopotamian iconography.[48]

3. Phoenician Iconography and Isaiah 6.

Whereas ancient Israel and Judah bequeathed later scholars a complex and diverse literary tradition, but very little material culture with regard to visual art and iconography, almost the exact inverse is true in the case of the region of the Levant commonly referred to as Phoenicia (and its settlements in the Western Mediterranean).[49] While the term

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intertextual theory in Bibical studies, see in particular John Barton, "Déjà Lu: Intertextuality, Method or Theory?" in K. Dell and W. Kynes (eds.) *Reading Job Intertextually* (LHBOTS 574; London: T&T Clark, 2012), 1-16; also David M. Carr, in M. Nissinen (ed.), 'The Many Uses of Intertextuality in Biblical Studies: Actual and Potential", in *Congress Volume Helsinki 2010* (VTSup 148; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 505-535; B.J. Oropeza, "Intertextuality", in S.L. McKenzie (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation* Vol. 1 (Oxford: OUP, 2013), 453-463; and Russell Meek, "Intertextuality, Inner Biblical Exegesis, and Inner Biblical Allusion: The Ethics of a Methodology", *Biblica* 95, (2014), 280-91.

[47] See e.g. Laura Quick, *Deuteronomy 28 and the Aramaic Curse Tradition*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 50-51, on our inability to access so much of this information, including even knowledge of which particular versions of Biblical texts authors or redactors had access to.

[48] See, for example, Shawn Zelig Aster, *Reflections of Empire in Isaiah 1-39: Responses to Assyrian Ideology* (SBL Ancient Near East Monographs; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 41-80.

[49] As a basic introduction to Phoenican studies see Sabatino Moscati (ed.), *The Phoenicians* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2001). The recent major work on Phoenician religious iconography is Brian Doak, *Phoenician Aniconism in its Mediterranean and Ancient Near Eastern Contexts* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015). For a very basic overview, see Shelby Brown, "Perspectives on Phoenician Art", *The Biblical Archaeologist* 55 (1992), 6-24; and further, Giovanni Tore, "L'art: Sarcophages, relief,

"Phoenician" is controversial on the basis that the inhabitants of the Iron Age Lebanon and its colonies never self-identify as such – φοῖνιξ is, of course, a Greek appellation, and not necessarily an ethnic one – it is used here as a term of general convenience.[50] Within the wider Phoenician world there were observable cultural and religious differences between the different Levantine coastal cities, and between the various overseas settlements, which certainly preclude treating Phoenicia as a cultural monolith. Furthermore, on linguistic, cultural and socio-political levels, the 'Phoenician' cities participated in a wider Levantine, West Semitic world.[51] In particular we can note their role in the geopolitical systems of the area, whether remembered in terms of their engagement with the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah (e.g. the alliance between Solomon and King Hiram of Tyre, 1 Kings 5:26; the reference to a craftsman Hiram at 1 Kings 7:13-14[52]; the dynastic alliance between Ahab of Israel and the Sidonian princess Jezebel 1 Kings 16:31), or in terms of their–willing or unwilling–cooperation in the economic networks and imperial projects of the Mesopotamian and Persian empires.[53] The relative and porous nature of local identities in the Iron Age Levant is perhaps well demonstrated by linguistic commonality: Phoenician, Hebrew, Moabite, Ugaritic, Aramaic languages likely afforded a degree of mutual intelligibility, the former languages being identifiably "Canaanite", and the latter two joining them as part of a West Semitic linguistic family.[54] In terms of semiotics and cultural production, we might

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stèles.", in Véronique Krings (ed.), *La Civilisation Phénicienne et Punique: Manuel de Recherche* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 471-93; Éric Gubel *et al*, *Art Phénicien: La sculpture de tradition phénicienne* (Paris: Musée de Louvre, Départment des Antiquités Orientales, 2002). On Phoenicnain archaeology, see María Eugenia Aubet, "Phoenicia during the Iron Age II Period", in Margaret L. Steiner and Ann E. Killebrew (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of the Levant: c. 8000-332 BCE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 706-16, and Hélène Sader, "The Northern Levant During the Iron Age I Period" *ibid*., 607-23.

[50] On the issue of Phoenician identity as a foreign, historiographical construct, see the excellent investigation of the issue by Josephine Quinn, *In Search of the Phoenicians* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2018), especially chapter two. Cf. Doak, *Phoenician Aniconism*, 4-5.

[51] On points of similarity between the material cultures of the Phoenician cities and Israel, see C.H.J. de Geus, "The Material Culture of Phoenicia and Israel", in E. Lipiński (ed.), *Phoenicia and the Bible: Proceedings of the Conference held at the University of Leuven on the 15th and 16th of March 1990* (Studia Phoenicia XI; Department Oriëntalistiek; Uitgeverij Peeters: Leuven, 1991), 11-16.

[52] The introduction of a second Hiram into the narrative here suggests we should approach the specifics of these 'remembered' links with Phoenician cities with a certain amount of caution. Volkmar Fritz, *1 & 2 Kings: A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2003), 82, argues Hiram the craftsman to be wholly fictional; this despite John Gray, *I & II Kings* (London: SCM Press, 1970), 182, arguing for a historical Huram-abi on the basis of 2 Chron. 2:13; cf. Mordechai Cogan, 1 Kings (The Anchor Bible; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 261.

[53] See, e.g., Josette Elayi, *Histoire de la Phénicie* (Paris: Perrin, 2018), 325-361, on the role of Phoenicia and its navies in the Persian imperial project.

[54] Quinn, *In Search of the Phoenicians*, 71. On mutual intelligibility, see Gary Rendsburg, "Semitic Languages (With Special Reference to the Levant)", in S. Richard (ed.), *Near Eastern Archaeology: A*

therefore expect the cultural or social text of Phoenician religion to be neither identical to, nor far removed from, those of Ugarit or ancient Israel and Judah.

What, then, can we say about Phoenician art, and any potential forays into what Platt christens 'visual theology'? First, that it is intertextual in a fully Kristevan sense. Shelby Brown notes that "The hallmark of Phoenician art is its eclecticism", and that "we recognize Phoenician art by its unusual combinations and modifications of motifs and designs borrowed from a variety of foreign sources".[55] The most common recognisable foreign influence is Egyptian, such that Brown notes that "Egyptian attributes generally dominate, and "Egyptianizing" is the adjective most commonly used to describe Phoenician art."[56] As we shall see, this is reflected in the frequent re-presentation of Egyptian or Egyptianising elements connected to deities, cult and royalty in the material available.

On Platt's basic Herodotean model of the semiotics of theophany, cultural production (i.e. art and literature) teaches the divine forms by which gods may be recognised. The simplest exercise in 'visual theology' is, of course, the visual representation of divine bodies. There is some archeological evidence that the Phoenician cities continued producing bronze anthropomorphic statuettes of deities within the broad tradition of the second millennium BC Levant. Falsone's overview of Phoenician bronzes notes the persistence of typologies he categorises as the 'dieu combattant' and the 'dieu bénissant'.[57] These bronzes exhibit Egyptianizing tendencies which might be considered *σήματα* of divinity: horned disks on the heads of female deities, and the use of Hedjet or Atef crowns.[58]

Various stelae also serve as evidence for how Phoenicians may have envisioned anthropomorphic divinities, two of which I present here as examples here. A mid-ninth or very early eighth century stele from Breidj, near Aleppo, depicts a bearded male deity. The stele's inscription labels the image *lmlqrt*, suggesting the deity be identified with Melqart, the chief god of Tyre.[59] The deity's beard and cap resemble later Phoenician images of Melqart,

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Reader (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 71-3. Cf. Françoise Briquel-Chatonnet, "Hébreu du nord et phénicien: Étude comparée de deux dialectes cananéens", *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 23 (1992), 89-126.

[55] Brown, "Perspectives on Phoenician Art", 8. See also Doak, *Phoenician Aniconism*, 11.

[56] Brown, "Perspectives on Phoenician Art", 8.

[57] Gioacchino Falsone, "Bronzes", in E. Lipiński (ed.), *Dictionnaire de la Civilisation Phénicienne et Punique* (Paris: Brepols, 1992), 80-81, pl. ii, iii.

[58] Falsone, "Bronzes", figs. 52, 53, pl. ii, iii.

[59] Quinn, *In Search of the Phoenicians*, 124; Doak, *Phoenician Aniconism*, 52-4. For a detailed discussion of the inscription, see Gotthard Reinhold, "The Bir-Hadad Stele and the Biblical Kings of Aram", *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 24 (1986), 115-126. On Melqart, see S. Ribichini,

lending credence to the identification of the image with the form of the deity known at Tyre.[60]

The fifth (or perhaps early fourth) century 'Yeḥawmilk stele' from Byblos, also in the Louvre, is another example of a anthropomorphic divine image upon a stele from the Phoenician world.[61] A goddess sits on a throne, her right hand raised in greeting, her left hand holding a *wꜣdj* sceptre, and her feet resting on a low footstool. She is depicted after the fashion of the Egyptian Hathor, with a sun disk and cows' horns on her head. A bearded man wearing a *polos*-style vestment stands before her, apparently meeting her gaze, with his right hand raised to reciprocate her gesture, and his left offering a two-handled cup.[62] Doak suggests his vesture is Persian. [63]Above the two figures is a solar disk, with wings that overshadow two figures easily; the wings hold the two together in the single scene of their meeting. Beneath the figures is an inscription in Phoenician.[64] It details the dedication of the stele by Yeḥawmilk, king of Gubal (i.e. Byblos), who has received this kingship from the Lady of Byblos (בעלת גבל), who may be identified with the goddess depicted on the stele.[65] The male figure should be recognised, then, as Yeḥawmilk himself. The inscription goes on to note that Yeḥawmilk has presented the Lady with a bronze altar (המזבח נחשׁת, l. 4) along with the image.

There is thus a complex web of relations between image and ritual in the context of the Yeḥawmilk stele. The stele exists within a preexisting relationship between a ruler and a deity; the erection of the stele makes the display of the goddess's form part of that reciprocal relationship of recognition and legitimisation. The stele records the provision of an altar for the ritualisation of this relationship. It also directly depicts such a ritualised relationship, with the figure of Yeḥawmilk offering the goddess the two-handed bowl. The representation of direct engagement between the king and the embodied goddess may not be a claim to a real-world theophanic experience, but the image's production of meaning ('visual theology') employs the representation of such an encounter to great effect. On a very basic level the

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"Melqart", in Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, Pieter W. van der Horst (eds.), *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (DDD) Second Edition, (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 563-5.

[60] Doak, *Phoenician Aniconism*, 54, citing William Culican, "Melqart Representations on Phoenician Seals." *Abr-Nahrain* 2 (1960-61) 41-54.

[61] Louvre I.D. no. AO 22368. See Éric Gubel *et al*., *Art Phénicien: La sculpture de tradition phénicienne* (Paris: Musée du Louvre, Réunion des Musées Nationaux; Snoek, 2002), 64-5, no. 50.

[62] Cf. Gubel, *Art Phenicién*, 64.

[63] Doak, *Phoenician Aniconism*, 57.

[64] Transcription and French translation in Gubel, *Art Phénicien*, 65.

[65] On reading בעלת גבל as a proper name, see Anna E. Zernecke, "The Lady of the Titles: The Lady of Byblos and the Search for her "True Name," *Die Welt des Orients* 43 (2013), 226-242.

Yeḥawmilk stele draws on the same constellation of signifiers as Isaiah 6: embodied anthropomorphic deity, throne, altar, and mortal viewer of the divine form.

Isaiah 6 does not, however, directly depict or describe the divine form. As we have seen, the text relies on synecdoche and implication to suggest YHWH's anthropomorphic body. The god's throne serves this purpose, as discussed above, and serves as the conceptual space which the divine form occupies within the vision. Elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, YHWH is perhaps portrayed in a sitting position by the so-called 'cherubim formula', in which the deity is described as יֹשֵׁב הכרבים (1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2; 2 Kings 19:15; 1 Chron 13:6; Isaiah 37:16; Pss. 80:1; 99:1).[66] This has frequently been linked to the well-known motif of Levantine thrones, the arms of which are formed of sphinxes, broadly identifiable with the Bible's cherubim. [67]

Such thrones are extant in Phoenician iconography. Henri Seyrig published a collection of cultic, votive sphinx thrones discovered in the environs of Sidon.[68] The thrones are too small for adult human use. Some are empty, some have holes or cavities in the seat, to which a figure may originally have been attached, and one (Seyrig no. 6) is empty but for two miniature stele on the inside of the throne's back, which likely signify divine presence(s). At least one throne (Seyrig no. 3), admittedly from the first century AD, has a seat so steep that it cannot have supported a cult image, and therefore testifies to a tradition of empty cult-thrones in Phoenicia. Mettinger characterised such artefacts as examples of an "empty-space aniconism where the throne is the seat of the invisibly present deity."[69] Platt noted similar thrones whose emptiness provides space for theophanic experience. Discussing empty thrones of Zeus, with particular reference to his cult at Cilician Olba, she relates such objects to Zeus's reluctance to appear visibly to mortals in Homer. She suggests that "[t]his 'Jovian' tension between anthropomorphised form and withheld epiphany finds an effective material

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[66] On this formula, see in particular Adam Carlill, *Cherubim and Seraphim in the Old Testament*, (unpublished DPhil thesis; University of Oxford, 2013), 138-155. Against this position, see Raanan Eichler, "The Meaning of יֹשֵׁב הַכְּרֻבִים", *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 126 (2014), 358-71.

[67] On this identification, see W.F. Albright, "What Were the Cherubim?", *Biblical Archaeologis*t 1 (1938), 1-3; cf. Roland de Vaux, "Les Chérubins et l'Arche d'Alliance", *Bible et Orient*, (Paris: Le Cerf, 1967), 231-259. Carlill, *Cherubim and Seraphim*, discussed alternatives, especially pp. 112-114. See also Raanan Eichler, "Cherub: A History of Interpretation", *Biblica* 96 (2015), 26-38.

[68] Discussed in Tryggve N.D. Mettinger, *No Graven Image? Israelite Aniconism in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context.* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1995), 100ff.
Published Henri Seyrig, "Antiquités Syriennes 70. Divinités de Sidon", *Syria* 36 (1959), 48-56.

[69] Tryggve N.D. Mettinger, *No Graven Image? Israelite Aniconism in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context.* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1995), 101-2.

counterpart in objects such as the empty thrones that formed the focus of ritual activity in various sanctuaries".[70] We might then, in Platt's terms, want to question whether such an empty throne served as a signifier of the YHWH's presence in the Temple, and created the space in which Isaiah's theophany takes place.[71] This is, at least, its function within the text.

A similar sphinx throne is shown on the side of the so-called Ahiram sarcophagus from Byblos, dating to c. 1000 BC.[72] One of the long sides of the sarcophagus depicts a male anthropomorphic figure (most likely the late Ahiram) seated on a sphinx throne, with a table laden with offerings before him, and beyond that seven figures lined up to pay homage, several of whom raise their hands in greeting or prayer.[73] The first of the supplicants holds the enthroned figure's gaze. Here we see something close to the 'ritual-centred visuality' of Petridou's model. Formally, the scene resembles Greek representations of divine presence in the cult, such as the Asklepion relief discussed above. The offering-table functions like an altar as a sign of the intersection between human and divine worlds, and the apparent eye contact between the seated figure and the first supplicant signifies the kind of reciprocity Platt locates at the heart of depictions of Greek cultic encounter.[74] Of course, Ahiram may not be a divinity *per se*, but the deceased king is here being offered food and homage in death – his status is at least proximate to that of a deity. The Ahiram sarcophagus might, then, be read as depicting something at least analogous to the ritualised encounter between worshippers and an enthroned divine form.

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[70] Platt, *Facing the Gods*, 102.

[71] Cf. Tryggve N.D. Mettinger, *The Dethronement of Sabaoth* (Lund: Gleerup, 1982), 37; Elliot Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 17-18.

[72] Quinn, *In Search of the Phoenicians*, 236 n. 69, suggests it may be as old as the thirteenth or twelfth centuries BC. On the possibility that the sarcophagus may be this old, and only its inscription from the tenth century, see Giovanni Tore, "L'Art: Sarcophages, Relief, Stèles", in Véronique Krings (ed.), *La Civilisation Phénicienne et Punique: Manuel de Recherche* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 472.
On Phoenician sarcophaguses, see Helen Dixon, "Phoenician Mortuary Practice in the Iron Age I-III (ca. 1200-300 BCE) Levantine "Homeland"", Phd diss. University of Michigan, 2013.

[73] See description in Tore, "L'Art", 471; also Silvia Schroer, *Die Ikonographie Palästinas/Israels und der Alte Orient: Band 3 Die Spätbronzezeit* (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2011), 388-9. The major recent work on the sarcophagus is Ellen Rehm, *Dynastensarkophage mit szenischen Reliefs aus Byblos und Zypern: Teil 1.1 Der Ahiram-Sarkophag* (Mainz am Rhein: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 2004), esp. pp. 33-47. Rehm notes the scene's strong similarity to an ivory from Late Bronze Megiddo, in Gordon Loud, *The Megiddo Ivories* (Oriental Institute Publications 52; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), 13, pl. 4:2a.

[74] Cf. Platt, *Facing the Gods*, 33, 39.



Fig. 2. 'Ahiram sarcophagus', tenth century BC [disputed], Byblos. Musée National de Beyrouth. Image: Wikimedia commons.

Isaiah 6 does not only suggest one divine figure seen by the visionary. Much ink has been spilled debating the identity, form and origins of the שׂרפים Isaiah sees above YHWH. The root שׂרף denotes 'burning' in classical Hebrew. In some respects, this coheres with the מזבח and the 'glowing coal' (רצפה) in 6:6, and perhaps the smoke (עשׁן) of 6:4. [75]Elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, a שׂרף is quite unambiguously a serpent (e.g. Numbers 21:6; Deut 8:5),[76] albeit a flying serpent at Isaiah 14:29 and 30:6.[77] In epiphanic fashion, we are given glimpses along the lines of synecdoche: mention is made of their wings (כנפים at 6:2), "his hand" (ידו at 6:6), their faces (פניו at 6:2), and feet (רגליו at 6:2), but there is no further description of their overall form. They both stand and fly (6:2).

It is now the view of an overwhelming majority of scholars that a winged version of the Egyptian *uraeus* serpent – a protective minor deity – stands behind the Biblical [78].שׂרף Karen Joines's research connected the seraphim to the *uraeus* serpent in Egyptian and Egyptian-derived art, a protective symbol of royalty human and divine, which could be portrayed with up to four wings.[79] The motif shows up as a royal symbol featuring Egyptian-

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[75] John 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", *Vetus Testamentum* 29 (1979), 143-151, makes the connection between the seraphim and the smoke of 6:4, going on to suggest that the seraphim be read as literally firey analogues to the lightnings of Baal, non-identical with the deity himself, in Ugaritc literature.

[76] Cf. Karen Joines, "Winged Serpents in Isaiah's Vision", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86 (1967), 410-415: 410-11.

[77] A minority view follows Görg in reading שׂרף as derived from Egyptian *sfr* ('griffin'). So, recently, Nicolas Wyatt, "Grasping the Griffin: Identifying and Characterizing the Griffin in Egyptian and West Semitic Tradition", *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 1 (2009), 29-39: 31-32; cf. M. Görg, "Die Funktion der Serafen bei Jesaja", *Biblische Notizen* 5 (1978), 28-39. Mettinger, "Seraphim שׂרפים," in *DDD*, 473, suggests that this etymology may allow a closer identification with the cherub iconography of the Jerusalem temple.

[78] Cf. Karen Joines, "Winged Serpents in Isaiah's Vision", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86 (1967), 410-415.

[79] Joines, "Winged Serpents", 412. Regarding the protective quality of the uraeus, Provençal, "Regarding the Noun", 374, argues that in Egyptian and Egyptianised Phoenician iconography, the

style crowns in the Samaria ivories, and Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger have documented the winged uraeus on several Judahite seal designs.[80]

It may be, then, that the seraphim belong to an Egyptianised semiotic system of religious iconography and royal ideology. Such imagery was plausibly available to the Judahite author of Isaiah 6, forming part of his broader cultural text, though it beings to disappear from the archaeological record during the seventh century.[81] We may tentatively agree with de Jong that the seraphic imagery of the vision dates to the earlier stages of Isaianic composition in the Neo-Assyrian period.[82]

The שׂרפים have also been linked to the enigmatic object Nehushtan, destroyed by Hezekiah according to 2 Kings 18, which the historian portrays as part of the *realia* of the Judahite cult. According to a probable aetiology for the image in Numbers 21, the image was fashioned by Moses to effect divine healing from the venom of שׂרף snakes. According to 2 Kings 18:4, incense was offered to Nehushtan, though Hendel points out that this may have been "ordinary Yahwistic cultic piety" only retroactively condemned as idol-worship by Biblical authors, and that "[t]he bronze snake probably belonged to the traditional repertoire of Yahwistic symbols."[83] Adam Carlill notes in his 2013 DPhil thesis that the snake image, according to Numbers 21:8-9, was upon a pole (נֵס), and that this might explain the position of the seraphim above YHWH in Isaiah 6:2.[84]

There may be extrabiblical evidence for Nehusthan-like iconography in Levantine material culture. Richard Barnett tentatively suggested identifying a winged *uraeus* on a pole, featured on at least one of the eighth century bronze Levantine bowls found by Sir Henry

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uraeus-cobra is always portrayed upright, a specifically defensive posture, whereas the cobra hunts on its belly. Mettinger, "Seraphim שׂרפים" , 743 notes that "Among the Egyptian designations for the uraeus one finds the word ʒḫt, "flame"," which might indicate a similar indexical sign-relationship to the Hebrew שׂרף. On this, cf. Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen*, 83.

[80] 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), 70-124. See also images of Phoenician winged *uraei*, with royal and solar symbols, available from the University of Oxford's Classical Art Research Centre at http://www.cvaonline.org/gems/scarab/scarab17.htm, accessed 1st November 2018.

[81] Thomas Wagner, *Gottes Herrschaft: Eine Analyses der Denkschrift (Jes 6,1-9,6)* (Leiden; Boston, MA: Brill, 2006), 120. Cf. Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen*, 103ff.

[82] Matthijs J. De Jong, *Isaiah Among the Ancient Near Eastern Prophets: A Comparative Study of the Earliest Stages of the Isaiah Tradition and the Neo-Assyrian Prophecies* (Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 117; Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2007),
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[83] Ronald S. Hendel, "Nehushtan נחשתן," in *DDD*, 616.

[84] Carlill, "Cherubim and Seraphim", 188.

Layard in the North West Palace at Nimrud, with Nehushtan.[85] Here the winged *uraeus* appears to belong to a repetoire of cultic signifiers: also present are winged sphinxes, perhaps equivalent to the cherubim. Barnett's example had both wings and a sun disk. There is also a much less commented upon example of a *uraeus*, without the sun disk but with outstretched wings, on bowl BM N 25, portrayed with other Levantine cultic σήματα.[86] The decorative use of such apparently cultic motifs is an interesting example of how ritual-centred visuality might be disseminated through visual arts. The bowls' presence at Nimrud – almost certainly war booty from Levantine campaigns[87] – is also a fascinating example of how iconographic signifiers may be physically and forcibly moved from one semiotic (religious, cultural, political, economic) system to another.



Fig. 3. Phoenician(?) bowl, North West Palace, Nimrud.
BM N.25. Image: British Museum website.

Nehushtan would appear to be the closest inner-Biblical parallel for any hypothetical cultic realia which might have inspired Isaiah's שׂרפים. Nevertheless, there is another particularly relevant comparison within the sphere of Phoenician cultic iconography. I refer to the architectural motif of a *cavetto* lintel frieze of multiple *uraei*, which might explain the perhaps unexpected positioning of the seraphim above YHWH in Isaiah 6.

The motif has its origins in Egyptian sacred architecture, and appears frequently in in Phoenician *conscious representations* of sacred space, as the major constitutive element of

[85] Richard D. Barnett, "Layard's Nimrud Bronzes and Their Inscriptions", *Eretz-Israel: Archaeological, Historical and Geographical Studies* (1967), 1*-6*: 3*.
[86] BM N.25, image available at: https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=368090&partId=1&searchText=layard+bowl&page=3 , accessed 1st November 2018.
[87] After Barnett, "Layard's Nimrud Bronzes and Their Inscriptions", 4*.

the stylised representation of a shrine-temple (*naiskos*) in various media. Particularly relevant to the present discussion are multiple examples of anthropomorphic deities being depicted inside schematic *naiskos* façades. In a 2018 article Dominique Barcat draws attention traces a Levantine tradition of goddesses being depicted in such shrines. She notes, for example, a stele from Memphis – but originally from the Levant – portraying the goddess Astarte-Hathor receiving worship in a stylised of a shrine-temple, beneath an *uraeus* lintel.[88] The Memphis stele (as reconstructed from its fragmentary form), in contrast to the Yeḥawmilk image, appears to portray the goddess as significantly larger than the priest offering her worship, a σῆμα of divinity discussed with reference to Greek theophanies in the previous chapter. She sits on a winged sphinx-throne, with a cult stand between her throne and the priest. Above her are two divine symbols: an upwards-facing crescent moon and a rosette. [89]Barcat's article demonstrates that this imagery is closely related to a series of eleven Egyptian bronze mirrors of the seventh and sixth centuries which depict a woman in a *naiskos* setting (with the same hathoric columns, and the canonical winged-sun and *uraei* lintel) offering a mirror to the goddess Mut.[90] In the context of the present study, we might consider the Levantine Memphis stele to consist of signifiers drawn from a cultic cultural text very closely related to that of the mirrors.

Barcat also relates the Memphis stele to a scarab seal from the Punic settlement at Tharros on Sardinia, which depicts a deity seated in a stylised *naiskos*, with cultic attendants outside the shrine on either side.[91] Indeed, images on seal impressions constitute a major body of evidence for how Phoenician/Punic religious culture envisioned deities.[92] A great many impressions catalogued online by the University of Oxford's Classical Art Research Centre show seated figures likely to be deities, often with incense stands, suggesting a relationship between cult and the anthropomorphic bodies of Phoenician gods.[93] Several

[88] Dominique Barcat, "L'Égypte et la Méditerranée au Ier Millénaire av J.-C.: Le Naïskos et les « Portes du Ciel »", *Revue archéologique* 66 (2018), 249-78.
[89] Barcat, "L'Égypte et la Méditerranée au Ier Millénaire av J.-C.: Le Naïskos et les « Portes du Ciel »", 256-7.
[90] Barcat, "L'Égypte et la Méditerranée au Ier Millénaire av J.-C.: Le Naïskos et les « Portes du Ciel »", 251-4.
[91] Barcat, "L'Égypte et la Méditerranée au Ier Millénaire av J.-C.: Le Naïskos et les « Portes du Ciel », *Revue archéologique* 66 (2018), 257
[92] Cf. John Boardman, *Classical Phoenician Scarabs: A Catalogue and Study* (Oxford: The Beazley Archive and Archaeopress, 2003). See Culican, "Melqart Representations", cited above; and Doak, *Phoenican Aniconism*, 55-6.
[93] See http://www.cvaonline.org/gems/scarab/scarab17.htm/ [last accessed 12 April 2019] for many examples. That these images are likely to be of deities is suggested by the smaller set of clearly

show seated goddesses possessing larger-than-human bodies, in comparison to worshipping figures.[94] Goddess figures, usually identified as Isis, are often winged; another sign of marking broadly anthropomorphic divine bodies as superhuman. [95]The corpus also contains many depictions of other supernatural non-human beings, such as winged uraei and sphinxes (including many thrones, the arms of which are formed by sphinxes). These too might be counted as divine bodies, or as σήματα of divinity in their own right.

The prominence of the *naiskos* motif in Phoenician representations of divine bodies suggests that the Egyptian-style *naos* shrine may be considered an influential signifier (or set of signifiers) in the production of Phoenician religious visuality.[96] Several model *naiskoi* dating from the ninth to seventh centuries BC have been found at Sidon.[97] These models appear to be miniature representations of the kind of *cellae* found in monumental cultic architecture at, for example, Amrit and Umm el-ʿAmed.[98] Among the best preserved are the near-intact models in the Louvre and the Istanbul Museum.[99]

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related images which show bull-headed anthropomorphic figures enthroned, which are best explained as deities: http://www.cvaonline.org/gems/scarab/scarab21.htm. Ambiguity regarding whether purely anthropomorphic figures are gods are kings might be phrased in terms of the throne, or the scene of enthronement, being 'polyphonic signifiers'.

[94] E.g. http://www.cvaonline.org/gems/scarab/scarab20.htm.

[95] See in particular examples from Ibiza and Cagliari here: http://www.cvaonline.org/gems/scarab/scarab10.htm. The standard catalogue of Ibizan material is John Boardman, *Escarabeos de Piedra Procedentes de Ibiza* (Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Catálogos y monografías 8; Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura, 1984).

[96] I.e. the kinds of socially-constructed practices of religious viewing and envisioning discussed in particular by Platt and Petridou in the previous chapters.

[97] Cf. Anna Maria Bisi, "Un Naiskos tardo-fenicio del museo di Beyrut e il problema dell'origine dei cippi egittizzanti nel mondo punico", in *Antiquités Africaines* 5 (1971), 15-38; Ida Oggiano, "Lo spazio fenicio rappresentato", in X.D. Raventós, S. Ribichini, and S. Verger (eds.), *Saturnia Tellus: Definizioni dello spazio consacrato in ambiente etrusco, italico, fenicio-punico, iberic e celtico; Atti del convegno internazionale svoltosi a Roma dal 10 al 12 novembre 2004* (Rome: Consiglia nazionale delle richerche, 2008), 283-300.

[98] Oggiano, "Lo spazio fenicio rappresentato", 286.

[99] Louvre AO 2060 (cf. also AO 4904) and Istanbul E.803-K.92, respectively. Cf. images and decription in Bisi, "Un Naiskos", 20.



Fig. 4. Left: Model naiskos, Sidon, ninth?-fifth century BC. Louvre AO 2060. Image: my own. Right: Model naiskos, Sidon, sixth-fifth century BC. Istanbul Archaeological Museum E.803-K.92. Image: Osama Shukir Muhammed Amin, creative commons license.

Both examples feature the *uraeus* lintel and winged solar-disk above a recessed doorway. Both appear to contain, within the doorway, the remains of an animal- or sphinx-throne, with some empty space on the seat perhaps originally reserved for an aniconic representation of a deity.[100] The pillars framing the doorway of these *naiskoi* are decorated with a palmette relief, which survives most clearly on the Istanbul model.[101] At least one small model, in painted terra-cotta, contains a squat figure (perhaps the Egyptian deity Bes) standing on a pair of lions.[102] A Sidonian relief of the sixth or fifth century BC shows a seated anthropomorphic figure enthroned in a *naiskos* beneath a frieze of *uraei*.[103] These various *naiskoi* images appear, then, to provide the space for actually represented (iconic or aniconic)

[100] Cf. Doak, *Phoenician Aniconism*, 109-111. Room 11 of the Eastern Temple at Umm el-ʿAmed contained a sphinx throne, though the lintel of the chapel's recessed door is decorated only the winged sun disk, and not the *cavetto uraei* frieze; see drawings in Oggiano, "Lo Spazio Fenicio Rappresentato", 287. At Umm el-ʿAmed the winged sun disk appears particularly to mark entrance thresholds to areas of increased sanctity (the East entrance to the East Temple complex; a side entrance to the main temple building therein; the door to Room 11), *ibid*., 287.
[101] Cf. perhaps I Kings 6:18, 29, 35; 7:18-22.
[102] Cf. Doak, *Phoenician Aniconism*, 48.
[103] Louvre AO 5716. Gubel, *Art Phénicien*, 84.

or imagined divine presence.[104] They are close to being a constellation of signs which together make space for theophany, or theophanically-oriented viewing practices. They suggest some link between viewing representations of divine presence(s) and the semiotic world of the cult.

These model naiskoi are self-conscious representations of cultic architecture. They are deliberately miniaturised, [105]and collapse the depth of a temple building into a more immediate re-combination of liminal doorway and holy place containing the throne. This truncation of represented sacred space serves to intensify the relationship between interaction with sacred architecture and the process of viewing the divine form, or a looser representation of the divine form, or the space where the divine form might be imagined.

It is beyond our knowledge whether the Temple featured uraeus lintels, and so on, but I'd like to finish with the following observation regarding these model shrines and our text. Isaiah 6 is *also* a self-conscious representation of cultic architecture, albeit composed of linguistic rather than iconographic signifiers. It too, plays with space. Instead of compressing entrance and holy place to encourage a particular kind of viewing, instead the scene pulls back from the vision of YHWH on his throne, into the *debir* filled with the divine robe, and brings us to the visionary's own location, on the other side of the altar, somewhere near the doorway.[106] We move from the fleeting glimpse of the Lord on a lofty throne, and find ourselves, in the end, with the visionary at the other end of the building. This identification and this movement creates a sense of sacred space in which Isaiah's theophany occurs.

My basic contention then, is this: it may be that some of the Phoenician iconography discussed in this essay bears a resemblance to the *realia* of the Temple which signified for Isaiah the presence of YHWH, and which – in the manner modelled by Platt and Petridou – constituted the visual context into which the divine form could be inserted, and the likes of

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[104] One fragmentary relief in the Louvre collection, AO 5726, cf. Gubel *et al.*, *Art Phénicien*, 84, shows an anthropomorphic deity seated in a similar shrine.

[105] Ziony Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches* (London; New York: Continuum, 2001), 340. Further discussed in Doak, *Phoenician Aniconism*, 102, citing Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: Chicago Univeristy Press, 1966), 23-25.

[106] As discussed earlier in this essay, as per Francis Landy, "Strategies of Concentration and Diffusion in Isaiah 6", *Biblical Interpretation* 7 (1999), 62. "For the moment, Isaiah simply sees YHWH, without interruption or qualification. The frankness of the gaze is echoed in v. 5, where Isaiah says that his eyes have seen "the Kings, Lord of Hosts." In between sight and acknowledgement there is a description of the vision that moves outwards, from the centre to the periphery. From the Lord we go to his train, his retinue, and the world full of his glory. Then the vision is obscured by the smoke that fills the temple."

which taught figures like Isaiah, or the authors and tradents of the Biblical text, a ritually-centred way of looking at their cult and for their deity.