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Seeing Visions with the Prophet: Toward an Iconographic Hermeneutic of Joel

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An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
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in Graduate Division of Religion
Hebrew Bible
2023

Abstract

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By Brady Alan Beard

This project examines the Book of Joel by utilizing iconographic exegesis to intervene in interpretive debates around the book's rhetorical structure, origins, and historical situation. In so doing, it begins by considering recent developments in the Book of Joel, the Book of the Twelve, and iconographic exegesis. The project engages in delimitation criticism to set the boundaries of textual units before identifying the iconic structure of a given text. Then it presents and considers relevant iconography from the ancient Near East that allows interpreters to visually contextualize the prophetic book. The project concludes by encouraging future studies of the Book of Joel, as well as other prophetic works from the Hebrew Bible, to engage visual materials as informative sources for contextualizing and materializing the texts within the ancient world. In so doing, it attempts to add images to the comparative toolkit of biblical exegesis.

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Acknowledgements

As one might expect, there are far too many individuals to adequately thank for their support in a project like this. First, I would like to thank my family, the Beards and the Wilsons, for their patience and (genuine and sometimes feigned) interest in what sort of thing I was doing across the country. Thank you.

Throughout this project, I thought of my teachers many times: Brad Embry, Ron Herms, Blaine Charette, and Kari Brodin were responsible for introducing me to the academic study of the Bible. Choon-Leong Seow, Chip Dobbs-Allsopp, Dennis Olson, and Jacqueline Lapsley helped me to see that I could delve deeper and deeper into the Bible. They were open and honest with me, not only about their journeys into the academic study of the Bible, but also helped me to see my own strengths and weaknesses clearly. Finally, the Hebrew Bible faculty at Emory during my years in course work: Brent A. Strawn, Joel M. LeMon, Jacob L. Wright, Carol A. Newsom, and William K. Gilders treated me as a colleague and formed in me the academic values that allowed me to read the Bible anew. Thank you. To my committee: Brent, Joel, Jacob, and Ryan Bonfiglio, thank you for your guidance, patience, countless hours, piercing questions, and keen insights. My editor, Katy Scrogin, went above and beyond on every page. Any errors are, of course, my own.

My colleagues at Pitts Theology Library were part and parcel of this project in more ways than one. Y'all saw in me a burgeoning librarian and I'm so grateful for your good humor, insights, tenacity, and values. I couldn't ask for better colleagues. Bo Adams, Anne Marie McLean, Kailyn Middleton, and Liz Miller, y'all especially deserve my gratitude.

Alongside family and teachers, my friends made this journey bearable. "The Commune" was there at every step of the way, literally from the earliest days at PTS to the final days of the project. We did ok, y'all: some master's degrees, a few PhDs, pups and cats, and babies too. I'm proud of us. Without the support and engagement of the #sharedbrain this project would have been far less interesting. Because of Becky and David, I can see all of the spin-offs. JP O'Connor and Tyler Davis were constant companions. I'm a better thinker because of you two. Sarah Bogue, your friendship, unwavering support, and constant encouragement has meant the world to me. I aspire to teach, write, and think like you do. To my HB colleagues, Caralie Cooke, Richard Purcell, and Adam Strater, I'm glad we could walk through this process together. Hyun Woo Kim and Chelsea Mak, you both were always ready with a cup of coffee and a listening ear. I am grateful to you all.

Finally, to Carlee, Phoebe, and Lewis, I say thank you! Carlee, you've been there through it all. From the first day in Kirkland, to the excitement about moving to Princeton, and then Atlanta. Together we've celebrated every good thing and you've been there for every frustrating step (including a pandemic). I'm lucky to have had a friend and partner like you. I love you. Thank you. Phoebe, one day I'll probably tell you not to do a PhD but until then, your friends will have to call me "doctor."

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

How ought biblical interpreters understand the prophet Joel, sometimes called the “problem child of the Old Testament?”¹ Several recent studies have set out to answer this question by giving attention to the rhetoric, imagery, and structure of the book. For example, Elie Assis has recently argued that Joel contains two historical details relevant to the book’s interpretation: locusts, in chapters 1 and 2, and political salvation after exile, in chapters 3 and 4. The present project reexamines the book of Joel in terms of its imagistic dimensions in order to provide new inroads for understanding the function of the book’s rhetoric and metaphors. Its major theoretical consideration is the role that iconographic analysis can play in approaching the entire book’s interpretive cruxes.

This project attempts to inform Joel studies by introducing new data sets, in particular iconography from the Levant, Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Persia, to interpretive debates. It aims to advance iconographic exegesis by setting forth a method for examining an entire book, not just isolated textual units. In conversation with these two fields, Joel studies and iconographic exegesis, the present work demonstrates that close attention to visual and verbal images will significantly impact the interpretation of several interpretive conundrums, including the use of locust imagery in Joel and the relationship of chapters 1 and 2 to chapters 3 and 4. What is learned from this project may apply to other iconographic studies of entire books, and in particular, to works within the prophetic corpus.

¹ Adalbert Merx, *Die Prophetie des Joel und ihre Ausleger von den ältesten Zeiten bis zu den Reformatoren: eine exegetisch-kritische und hermeneutisch-dogmengeschichtliche Studie* (Halle: Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1879), iii–iv.

This introductory chapter outlines several key methodological issues that inform this work, then turns to engagement with the text of Joel and the book's congruent iconography. It engages first with major recent developments in Joel studies in order to determine the current shape of scholarship and the central interpretive questions of the book. It then turns to the general contributions and methods of iconographic study of the Hebrew Bible, and of iconographic exegesis more specifically—a discussion that demonstrates this work's place within phenomenological approaches to iconography and the Hebrew Bible. Finally, the chapter concludes by outlining the method this project employs.

The methodological approach of this study addresses the question of iconographic exegesis of the book of Joel with several tenets in mind. First, it emphasizes the need to study entire books as a way of avoiding iconographic and textual fragmentation. In short, although working with large textual units may be difficult, doing so can help the interpreter to avoid isolating verbal images from the larger literary contexts in which they are found. Thus, just as the iconographer must consider the entire context of an image, the iconographic exegete must engage the entire textual unit.

Additionally, this project demonstrates the need to identify textual units apart from their thematic, visual, metaphorical, and even theological analysis. The question of identifying the beginning and end of textual units is heightened for iconographic exegetes who must determine which parts of a text are congruent with which parts of a visual image. Thus, a form of textual control is needed in order to prevent the image from identifying the unit and the unit from identifying the image. This project delivers that control by employing delimitation criticism as set forward by Marjo C. A. Korpel and others.

Finally, this project provides a mechanism for identifying a constellation of images and a focal image within larger units. Identifying a constellation of images—what I describe as an iconic structure—provides the framework for comparing the text to congruent iconography. For the purposes of this work, I rely on the practices of iconographers including Othmar Keel in order to avoid fragmenting the text or iconography by lifting aspects out of their larger context. I then use the work of David Morgan to identify the focal image of the structure, in order to best understand how the various elements cohere. Only after this methodological approach has been finalized do I turn to congruent iconography in order to make comparisons with the text.

Joel Studies

To date, the study of Joel has focused primarily on the book's textual and literary levels. The most important development in the previous generation of Joel scholarship comes from the work of James Nogalski on the composition of a so-called "Book of the Twelve." Nogalski's work in this area has by and large introduced a shift not only in prophetic studies more broadly, but in Joel studies specifically. Since Nogalski's initial publication of *Redactional Processes in the Book of the Twelve* and *Literary Precursors to the Book of the Twelve*, all studies of the Book of the Twelve, and hence of Joel must address his basic arguments. Such a statement perhaps to place too fine a point on the importance of Nogalski's work, but his approach does represent a useful point of departure for thinking about the Book of the Twelve, and, therefore, about Joel.²

² Taken together, three essays in particular provide a comprehensive picture of the role of Joel within conversations that have taken place over the last thirty years regarding the composition of the Book of the Twelve. These summaries also provide excellent fodder for those interested in a more intensive exploration of scholarship on Joel than I am able to provide in this project. See Richard Coggins, "Joel," *CurBR* 2 (2003): 85–103; Paul L. Redditt, "Recent Research on the Book of the Twelve as One Book," *CurBR* 9 (2001): 47–80; Ronald Troxel, "The Fate of Joel in the Redaction of the Twelve," *CurBR* 13 (2015): 152–74.

Joel and the Twelve

Nogalski's work and responses to it provide an excellent starting place for this project, in part because they represent a transition from the standard study of prophetic literature, a standard that Joel itself eschews. For the greater part of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the study of prophetic literature was motivated by a desire to see beyond the ink on the page and to glimpse the real world of the prophets. Such attempts can clearly be seen in hunts for the *ipsisissima verba* of the prophet and the *Sitz im Leben* of the form (*Gattung*). While these attempts have their place within the pantheon of biblical scholarship, and while their resulting studies are no doubt useful, these approaches are not a good fit for the study of Joel. Indeed, Joel itself attempts to resist such a straightforward reading. Instead of aiming to engage historical features of the text's origins directly, Nogalski's work can be characterized as an attempt to read Joel within the confines of its canonical location.³ To read it, in other words, as a prophetic text within a prophetic corpus.

Joel and Form Criticism

Additional foci of Joel scholarship include textual analysis, particularly Joel's use of scripture, its *Gattung*, and the literary qualities of the book.⁴ Still other studies have focused on the role of

³ This work is, of course, deeply connected to the theological project of Brevard Childs.

⁴ John Strazicich's work examines scriptural allusions to other biblical texts before moving on to analyze Joel's afterlife in the New Testament. Taking the book as a response to two natural disasters—the locust plague and a drought—Strazicich proposes that the use of scriptural allusions throughout Joel demonstrates that the book is “adapting them for [its] unique *Sitz im Leben*” (*Joel's Use of Scripture and Scripture's Use of Joel: Appropriation and Resignification in Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity*, BIS 82 [Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2007], 248). Colin Toffelmire's approach addresses many of the common features of Joel studies through the singular lens of

the prophet as scribe.⁵ In moving beyond text critical analysis, these investigations attempt to understand the book's interpretive difficulties by rethinking its compositional aspects. They seek to understand how Joel maintains its rhetorical power in spite of its complex compositional nature, and they view that complexity as a core tenet of the book's message.⁶ In the words of Ronald Troxel, Joel is best understood as a type of literary composition, scribal prophecy (*schriftgelehrte Prophetie*), that above all relies on accepted canon and other authoritative texts in order to communicate within a "rhetorical situation."⁷

systemic functional linguistics. His goal is to show that linguistic analysis of the book can offer both insights into its "social-semiotic contexts" and interpretive suggestions for how to resolve questions that have plagued interpreters. Toffelmire situates his work within the larger project of form criticism, especially new form criticism. From a form critical perspective, Toffelmire's work does not attempt to assign a specific and identifiable—and universal—form to the texts that make up Joel. In other words, his project is not one of essentializing the textual units to some etic framework, but of better understanding how those units relate to each other. Ultimately, such an approach allows the reader to avoid situating the book against something that cannot be ultimately known: its historical setting—or, in the language of form criticism, its *Sitz im Leben*. See Colin Toffelmire, *A Discourse and Register Analysis of the Prophetic Book of Joel*, SSN 66 (Boston: Brill, 2016), 28, 187–88.

⁵ Joel Barker's monograph sets out to examine the "imagery and meaning" found in Joel by examining the language used throughout the book and the limitations of human speech and thought more generally, and to conceive of the text as a "literary unit." Barker concludes his study by pointing to the book's unified persuasive organization, arguing that the work "moves from scenes of devastation to promises of restoration" as a way to convince its audience to turn to Yhwh. He suggests that no textual unit can accomplish such an end on its own. Moreover, attention to the persuasive character of Joel as a unified work allows the contemporary reader to understand the unique contributions that Joel makes to the Book of the Twelve (Joel Barker, *From the Depths of Despair to the Promise of Presence: A Rhetorical Reading of the Book of Joel*, Siphut 11 [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014], 1, 33, 262). Ronald Troxel argues that questions about Joel's composition cannot properly be asked of redaction criticism, primarily because Joel is a work of scribal prophecy (*schriftgelehrte Prophetie*). By this assertion Troxel means that the book itself is far too complex to properly parse out its redactional layers, in part because of the work's complex relationship to other prophetic literature. In other words, Joel is too closely bound up with the other prophetic writings to benefit from identifying compositional layers that are untouched or uninfluenced by other prophetic writings. This complexity effectively muddies the water to such an extent that redactional questions of Joel remain moot. More importantly for Troxel, however, is the tendency to view this feature of Joel as a development in prophetic literature. See Ronald Troxel, *Joel: Scope, Genre[s], and Meaning*, CSHB 6 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 50–70.

⁶ Aaron Schart, *Die Entstehung des Zwölfprophetenbuchs: Neubearbeitungen von Amos im Rahmen schriftenübergreifender Redaktionsprozesse*, BZAW 260 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998), 278; Siegfried Bergler, *Joel als Schriftinterpret*, BEATAJ 16 (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1988); Martin Beck, *Der "Tag YHWH" im Dodekapropheten: Studien im Spannungsfeld von Traditions- und Redaktionsgeschichte*, BZAW 356 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005), 174.

⁷ Troxel, *Joel*, 50.

Joel and the Commentaries

Monographs and commentaries on Joel continue to focus on the book's historical context and theological message. Many recent attempts to grapple with its historical setting and theology benefit from Nogalski's work on the Book of the Twelve.⁸ Reading Joel within the larger literary context of the Twelve demonstrates the work's singularity. For instance, in the book, the people are not directly blamed for the tragedy; instead, the prophet mourns with and encourages the people.⁹ Given the fact that Joel follows Hosea, the reader of the Twelve may infer that Joel responds to the wrongdoing described in Hosea. In other words, Joel performs the repentance that Hosea calls for.¹⁰

The identity of the events in Joel, whether a locust plague or military invasion, influence how interpreters understand the rest of the book both implicitly and explicitly. For instance, Elie Assis argues that based on the theological promises of the prophet, the book must refer to the Babylonian devastation. In his estimation, the locusts, which function as both a reference to an actual locust plague and a metaphor for the Babylonian army, allow the book to speak to the crisis without casting blame on the people for that situation—certainly an irenic goal. In Assis's estimation, Joel's "sophisticated rhetorical strategy" allows the people to become receptive to what would otherwise be a difficult message to accept.¹¹ But while the question of the historical

⁸ Christopher R. Seitz, *Joel*, International Theological Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 3.

⁹ Elie Assis, *The Book of Joel: A Prophet between Calamity and Hope*, LHBOTS 581 (London: T & T Clark, 2013), 257.

¹⁰ Seitz, *Joel*, 57.

¹¹ Assis, *The Book of Joel*, 257.

location of the events is important, interpreters often overlook crucial iconographic data that aids in a more fulsome understanding of the text.

In contradistinction to the approaches described above, the present work attempts to consider the interpretive cruxes found in Joel by means of iconographic exegesis. The goals of such an approach are to incorporate overlooked comparative data and to understand the work's literary qualities through images—as Othmar Keel put it, to “see through the eyes of the ancient Near East.”¹² Images, the argument goes, are not ancillary to the texts of the ancient world, but are another way of figuring the “thought-world” of the ancients. By utilizing iconographic methodology, this project will provide overlooked data and insight into the literary qualities of the entire book.

Iconographic Method

As previously mentioned, iconographic exegesis is grounded in the study of the texts and material culture of the ancient Near East. In its early origins, its methodology was significantly formed by the insights of art historians, archaeologists, and textual scholars of the major civilizations of the ancient world. As the methodology evolved, however, it became increasingly informed by developments in art history and material culture studies more broadly. With the rise of visual studies, iconographers quickly overhauled the theoretical strength of existing approaches. Two main branches of iconographic study grew out of this development.

¹² Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 8.

Othmar Keel and the Fribourg School

In 1972, Othmar Keel published his book *Die Welt der altorientalischen Bildsymbolik und das Alte Testament*. Upon its publication, no less a scholar than Samuel Sandmel immediately recognized the impact that Keel's "most beautiful and useful book" would have on biblical studies.¹³ In 1978, Keel's work was translated into English as *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms* (referred to henceforth as *SBW*). This volume became Keel's first major English monograph on iconography and the biblical text, and effectively introduced the Anglophone world of biblical studies to a new way of engaging ancient Near Eastern art and architecture.

Keel's book followed on the work of Hugo Gressmann and James Pritchard, who in their extensive collections of images had both made attempts to present the visual world of the ancient Near East to biblical scholarship.¹⁴ These volumes, however, did not accomplish what Keel did (nor, it should be added, did they set out to accomplish what Keel did). Gressmann's and Pritchard's respective works attempted to interpret the images as ancillary to the texts of the ancient world, including the Bible.¹⁵ Keel, on the other hand, sought to shed light on the biblical texts by presenting the "thought-world" of ancient Near Eastern images and figures and

¹³ Sandmel, "Othmar Keel," 115.

¹⁴ Hugo Gressmann, *Altorientalische Bilder zum Alten Testament*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1927); James Bennett Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East in Pictures Relating to the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969). It should be noted here that Gressmann and Pritchard were not alone in their quest; one of the most (in)famous attempts to relate the Hebrew Bible to images of the ancient Near East occurred in George Smith's work on his "Adam and Eve Cylinder," which claimed that the two seated figures flanking a tree were Adam and Eve alongside the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil (George Smith, *The Chaldean Account of Genesis* [London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1876], 90–91). Smith's claims have since been relegated to the heap of "Pan-Babylonism." See Samuel Sandmel, "Parallelomania," *JBL* 81 (1962): 1–13.

¹⁵ Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East*, vii.

arranging these images in direct relationship to the Hebrew Bible. In doing so, he provided verse references to accompany each of the images, and organized the material phenomenologically.¹⁶ In his work, Keel dealt both implicitly and explicitly with the phenomenological and verse-citational connections he made to ancient Near Eastern images, stating (explicitly) that the task of the iconographer was to “see through the eyes of the ancient Near East.”

Certain scholars within what came to be known as the Fribourg school continued Keel’s legacy of close attention to the material data and pushed Keel’s phenomenological approach toward a historical analysis of images from which they could make inferences about ancient Israelite culture and religion.¹⁷ In some ways, this work was a move toward understanding the ancient Israelites beyond their representation in the Hebrew Bible.¹⁸ The images were treated as objects that, like texts, could be gleaned for information about what the ancients believed, did,

¹⁶ This feature of Keel’s work was recognized almost immediately as a boon to the work of biblical scholars. It must be added, though, that the publication of *Symbolism of the Biblical World*, and its subsequent reviews, led to important methodological questions about Keel’s work. See Samuel Sandmel’s review of *Symbolism of the Biblical World*, “Othmar Keel, *Die Welt der Altorientalischen Bildsymbolik und das Alte Testament: Am Beispiel der Psalmen*,” *CBQ* 36 (1974) 113–115. See also Brent A. Strawn, “Introduction: Othmar Keel, Iconography, and the Old Testament,” in *Jerusalem and the One God: A Religious History*, by Othmar Keel, trans. Morven McClean (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), xxv–xxix.

¹⁷ Keel and Uehlinger’s study centers on minor art, for two major reasons: 1) the donation of a major collection of stamp seals to the University of Fribourg, which was Keel and Uehlinger’s scholastic home; and 2) the fact that these stamp seals are the most widely available visual evidence from Israel/Palestine. Keel and Uehlinger thus developed a methodology that centered the study of stamp seals as primary evidence in the reconstruction of Israelite religion. Such widely available objects, they argue, should almost certainly impact and guide how iconographers read and interpret the Bible, which is often understood instead as an object created by the literate-elite (*Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998], 1–2).

¹⁸ Examples of this approach include Othmar Keel, *Corpus der Stempelsiegel-Amulette aus Palästina/Israel: Von den Anfängen bis zur Perserzeit* (Fribourg/Göttingen: Academic Press/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010) and Silvia Schroer, *Die Ikonographie Palästinas/Israels und der Alte Orient: Eine Religionsgeschichte in Bildern (IPIAO)*, 4 vols. (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2005).

and thought.¹⁹ This drive emphasizes the need for historical propinquity between image and potential recipients for whom it was originally intended.

The Emory Annex and Iconographic Exegesis

An additional, differently focused approach to iconographic study developed out of Keel's early work. This approach, iconographic exegesis, analyzes biblical texts using insights derived from ancient Near Eastern images. This approach, sometimes attributed to the so-called Emory Annex of the Fribourg school, originates with the scholarship of Brent A. Strawn and his students and colleagues.²⁰ Strawn's work is primarily concerned with interpreting the Hebrew Bible and Israelite religion alongside of, and perhaps more importantly, in comparison with, ancient Near Eastern iconography. Take, for instance, his essay "Material Culture, Iconography, and the Prophets." Strawn argues that consideration of material culture more broadly contextualizes the Hebrew Bible; can assess "specific cruxes" in prophetic literature; and may illumine particular "tropes, motifs, and/or themes" within that literature.²¹ In other words, Strawn asserts that interpretive dilemmas within the Bible may be "solved" by considering similar issues in ancient Near Eastern iconography.

¹⁹ The theological value of Keel's approach is demonstrated in Othmar Keel, *Die Geschichte Jerusalems und der Entstehung der Monotheismus*, ed. and English introduction Brent A. Strawn, 2 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), as well as in Othmar Keel and Silvia Schroer, *Creation: Biblical Theologies in the Context of the Ancient Near East*, trans. Peter T. Daniels (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015).

²⁰ Strawn's monograph provides the methodological foundation for much of the work of the Emory Annex. See *What Is Stronger than a Lion? Leonine Image and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, OBO 212 (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2005).

²¹ Brent A. Strawn, "Material Culture, Iconography, and the Prophets," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Prophets*, ed. Carolyn Sharp (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 87–88.

By considering leonine imagery in Amos, Strawn uncovers the ways in which Yhwh is like a lion, and situates this claim within a larger contextual picture. What is notable about Strawn's introduction to the iconography of Canaan/Israel in this instance is his well-founded assertion that despite scholars' best efforts, the process of determining *when* and *how* ancient Israelites recognized images of Yhwh remains difficult and open ended. In his words, "Whatever the case, it is quite possible that Yhwh might have been 'seen' by Yahwists in any number of images—even Canaanite ones—not unlike how, in contemporary times, people 'see' Jesus in various images or find Mary on various objects."²² This last point is an instructive development in the work of those centered around Emory, namely that images themselves are not static, and exist in a dynamic relationship with the viewer.²³ Thus, just as textualists must be aware of difficulties that arise when making overconfident declarations about intertexts or direct textual influence, iconographers must also proceed with caution when ruling out or determining as "valid" a particular image to be used in textual comparison.²⁴ On this point, Strawn notes that stamp seals are especially important because they resist easy categorization. Because of their size, great number, and portability, very little evidence exists to suggest who might have seen them and in which contexts they might have been seen.

²² Brent A. Strawn, "Canaanite/Israelite Iconography," in *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, ed. Jonathan S. Greer, John W. Hilber, and John H. Walton (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 180.

²³ Elsewhere, LeMon and others refer to this trait as an image's multistability.

²⁴ Strawn's own work builds upon the insights of scholars such as David Morgan, John Berger, and Strawn's former student Ryan Bonfiglio. See David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London; New York: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 2008); Bonfiglio, *Reading Images, Seeing Texts: Towards a Visual Hermeneutics for Biblical Studies*, OBO 280 (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2016).

Others within the Emory Annex also recognize the value of using iconographic exegesis to open interpretive conundrums, but they do so with different emphases. Joel M. LeMon, for instance, suggests that iconographic exegetes must heed the iconic constellations of the text.²⁵ By this suggestion, LeMon means that readers must give special attention to the features of a text in order to uncover its imagistic valence. Building on William Brown's work, LeMon proposes that interpreters must inquire about the ways that the various elements of the text, the "verbal level of iconography," connect to one another to form a "constellation of images" that convey meaning. In other words, a coherent verbal picture may emerge from the text.²⁶ Thus in Psalm 17, interpreters must consider all possible literary imagery and, if they care about iconography, must "bring ever-larger constellations of literary imagery into conversation with congruent constellations of iconographic motifs."²⁷

The avoidance of "iconographic fragmentation" becomes a chief methodological concern in iconographic exegesis. Fragmentation occurs when scholars focus solely on one element of a text or an image to the detriment of a larger literary or iconographic context. While Keel was in fact the first to suggest that iconographers avoid textual fragmentation, he himself was guilty of

²⁵ Joel M. LeMon, *Yahweh's Winged Form in the Psalms: Exploring Congruent Iconography and Texts*, OBO 242 (Fribourg; Academic Press, 2010), 16.

²⁶ Brown discusses the "iconic metaphor" in his assessment of the Psalms. The notion in his work is that, despite the Decalogue's prohibition of images, the biblical text, especially the Psalms, is replete with "a verbal level of iconography that more than compensates for the prescribed absence of images on the material level of ancient orthodox practice." William P. Brown, *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 4. LeMon speaks about this idea of replete verbal iconography as a constellation, or grouping, of images that communicate meaningfully and effectively in the text *and* that can be mapped and compared to images from the material record throughout the Near East.

²⁷ Joel M. LeMon, "Iconographic Approaches: The Iconic Structure of Psalm 17," in *Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David L. Petersen*, ed. Joel M. LeMon and Kent Harold Richards, RBS 56 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2009), 152.

it, most clearly in *SBW*.²⁸ One of the solutions for this problem, alongside attention given to the constellation of images, is the consideration of the *multistability of images*, or an image's ability to resist a singular interpretation. This consideration is not undertaken without difficulty, however. Holistic attention to the features of a given text will likely delimit the otherwise latent multistability of that text's images. In short, nonfragmentation of texts and images should ideally lead the interpreter to a selection of one iconographic-exegetical interpretation over and against another. Such a decision requires a fulsome accounting of the iconic structure of a given text, as well as a defense for why a comparative image was selected in the first place.

While it is important to acknowledge the various aspects and interpretations of various images, including their meaning within diverse cultures, attention to the full literary context of a text ensures that interpreters select *one* motif or comparand, since a constellation of images will necessarily point in one direction over another. This cannot be done, however, without robust attention to the full text at hand, which will necessarily require attention to rhetorical features, and to the *Gattung* of a given text. In brief, vigilantly avoiding literary fragmentation involves more than "reading in context;" it requires an accompanying, if not motivating, literary analysis, the more fulsome the better.

Ryan P. Bonfiglio's work to provide a theoretical basis for the use of images in the study of the Hebrew Bible is a much-needed contribution to iconographic methodology. Bonfiglio's work takes its cues from visual studies, especially from luminaries in the field such as W. J. T. Mitchell, David Morgan, and David Freedberg, and attempts to provide a foundation that explains *why* attention to images is crucial for the study of the Hebrew Bible. Additionally,

²⁸ LeMon, *Yahweh's Winged Form*, 14–17; see also Othmar Keel, "Iconography and the Bible," *ABD* 3:360–61.

though, Bonfiglio outlines and justifies the need for the comparative study of images alongside the biblical texts. First, he demonstrates that images are central to all human cultural development.²⁹ Second, he argues that images, especially in the ancient world, must be considered a fundamental form of human communication, and understood as *more* influential than textual literacy.³⁰ And finally, Bonfiglio asserts that although biblical scholars must turn to iconography in order to better understand the biblical text, iconographic methodology itself must be rethought in light of theoretical conceptualizations within visual studies.

Bonfiglio's development toward a more self-aware iconographic theory reflects an important stage in iconographic studies also reached by other disciplines: namely, that images must be treated as more than simply illustrative points. They are not merely snapshots of the ancient world (indeed, even snapshots are never mere representations). In the words of Christoph Uehlinger, images "should not be viewed as mere *reflections* of their time and place, but rather as *extensions* of the *social contexts* in which they were commissioned and produced."³¹ That is to say that in so far as they are framed by the contexts in which they originate, they also frame that context.

A more recent dissertation out of the Emory Annex further refines the theoretical relationship between text and image by probing the topic through the use of poetics. In his study, "The Power of Images: The Poetics of Violence in Lamentations 2 and the Ancient Near East," M. Justin Walker demonstrates that iconography can inform not only what the biblical texts

²⁹ Bonfiglio, *Reading Images*, 2–5.

³⁰ Bonfiglio, *Reading Images*, 43–48.

³¹ Christoph Uehlinger, "Neither Eyewitnesses, Nor Windows to the Past, but Valuable Testimony in Its Own Right: Remarks on Iconography, Source Criticism and Ancient Data-Processing," in *Understanding the History of Ancient Israel*, ed. H. G. M. Williamson, Proceedings of the British Academy 143 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 223. Italics original.

mean, but how they make meaning as well.³² For Walker, the goal of iconographic exegesis is to understand how meaning appears through interconnections between images and texts from the ancient world.³³

Likewise, David Morgan's work stresses that the image, which a viewer gazes upon (that is, the content of the image), cannot be separated from the event of seeing the object (that is, the action of seeing). These actions, Morgan suggests, are bound up with one another and are culturally situated. Put more succinctly, Morgan stresses that images integrate "the individual [the viewer] into larger communities or networks of human and nonhuman actants."³⁴ Thus, in Morgan's purview, images do more than simply convey information. Instead, "images do things."³⁵

The above works, and others like them, demonstrate how effective iconographic exegesis can be when employed in the study of specific literary themes or motifs within the biblical corpus. They stop short, though, of a full-scale iconographic study of a biblical book in its final form. Even Keel's masterful study on the Psalms approaches the book thematically and not

³² M. Justin Walker, "The Power of Images: The Poetics of Violence in Lamentations 2 and Ancient Near Eastern Art" (PhD diss., Emory University, 2019), 2.

³³ Walker categorizes this search for understanding as a phenomenological approach. The point, according to his argument, is that images have power that demands a response. Humans must make sense of what they see. This sense making is achieved by making connections between the perceived images in the real world and one's own imagining of the image. He writes, "our comparison of the 'power' of artistic and poetic images capitalizes on the shared cognitive structures that enable the perception of both media and the shared cognitive experience evoked by the visual and verbal sister arts" ("The Power of Images," 28). Moreover, the way poetic images are construed relates to the artistic features that inform the visual image, especially when they are, as he puts it, "congruent or contiguous" (28).

³⁴ David Morgan, *Images at Work: The Material Culture of Enchantment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 50.

³⁵ Morgan, *Images at Work*, 51.

exegetically.³⁶ The current project advances iconographic exegetical method by applying iconography to the analysis of an entire work.

Full Study of the Book

In this study, I build on the work of the Emory Annex of iconographic exegesis, particularly the phenomenological method set out by Walker and others.³⁷ This means that unlike the emphasis on historical propinquity by some members of the Fribourg school, my method utilizes an expansive field of iconographic motifs. In many ways, my methodology can be understood to be something like a return to the method implicit in Keel's *SBW*.³⁸ The direction of influence regarding the iconographic motifs does not depend necessarily on the possibility that a man named Joel saw them and recorded them in his prophetic writing. Rather, the comparative data—

³⁶ These themes are 1) the cosmos, 2) the human before God, 3) the enemy, 4) the temple, 5) the king, and 6) destructive forces. In each section, Keel provides a focused discussion of both the visual motif and its relation to the Psalms. For instance, in his section on the human in relation to God, Keel discusses the psalmist's plea in Psalm 17 that God "hide him in the shadow of his wings" alongside an image of Horus's protective wings wrapping around the head of Pharaoh Kefren (Keel, *SBW*, 190).

³⁷ According to Hans Belting, the realm of the realm of the imagined must relate to the material realm as one of "two sides of the same coin." Hans Belting, "Image, Medium, Body: A New Approach to Iconology," *Critical Inquiry* 3 (2005): 304. According to Rudolf Arnheim, cognition—which includes sensory perception, thinking, and memory—cannot be separated from perception. In other words, the cognitive methods of thought cannot simply be based or constructed upon perception, but are part and parcel of the act of perception itself (Rudolf Arnheim, *Visual Thinking*, 2nd ed. [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004], 13). Put another way, "The images that the orator dreams up and re-presents to his audience have to be carefully attuned to the audience's sense of what is real and true in the situations of the world that are conveyed. If the orator does try to present as real that which is not a shared feature of the audience's social reality... then the orator sacrifices himself for it—the audience finds him absurd. It is by involving oneself personally in a sight from close up that one gains the experience to re-present to the audience, and it is by attending to what kind of image will sustain social perception of nature's givens that the orator is able to convey a vivid sense of reality to the audience." J. M. F. Heath, *Paul's Visual Piety: The Metamorphosis of the Beholder* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 92.

³⁸ See Brent Strawn's description of Keel's work as a phenomenological approach in "The Iconography of Fear: *Yir'at Yhwh* (יראת יהוה) in Artistic Perspective," in *Image, Text, Exegesis: Iconographic Interpretation and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Izaak J. de Hulster and Joel M. LeMon, LHBOTS 588 (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 128–129.

image and text—“reveal” rather than “explain” the meaning of a given biblical text.³⁹ Both image and text contribute to the *Denkbild* of the ancients.⁴⁰ Both text and image reveal the belief that “lay behind” the textual and visual constructions (i.e., text and image relate to the underlying *ur-myth*).⁴¹

The very fact that images communicate demands that viewers “make sense” of the images. Moreover, the images must communicate something sensible. It is within this dynamic of object and viewer that the insights of visual studies come to bear on the iconographic interpretation of a biblical text like Joel. Bonfiglio argues that it is precisely the culturally constructed conventions surrounding images that allow them to convey meaning. In other words, images, and texts for that matter, do not communicate within vacuums, and consumers of such information do not constitute a *tabula rasa* upon which meaning is imprinted. Rather, in order to make sense of the arbitrariness of images and references, viewers must employ knowledge of the natural world, special training, and a general imagistic literacy.⁴² Thus, Bonfiglio contends that

³⁹ Walker, “The Power of Images,” 30. On the comparative method, see Brent A. Strawn, “Comparative Approaches: History, Theory, and the Image of God,” in *Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David L. Petersen*, ed. Joel M. LeMon and Kent Harold Richards, RBS 56 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2009), 117–42. For a slightly different approach, see the work of Brett E. Maiden, *Cognitive Science and Ancient Israelite Religion: New Perspectives on Texts, Artifacts, and Culture*, SOTSMS (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), Maiden argues that religious concepts, be their verbal or visual, do not arise *ex nihilo* and that all features that make up a religious notion can be properly contextualized within the material and mental architecture of human cognition.

⁴⁰ Keel, *SBW*, 12–13.

⁴¹ This move was in contradiction to the work of scholars such as William Dever, who argued that texts explained belief, while images and material culture elucidated cultic practice. See Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images*, 7–8.

⁴² Bonfiglio, *Reading Images*, 47–48.

iconographic exegetes must attend to the image's "mode of signification"—the correlation between visual signa and intended referents in the physical world.⁴³

In a more practical consideration, the value of precise historical propinquity may be overstated at times. By their very nature, extant images from the ancient world are more durable than many textual materials, especially the relevant biblical texts, from the same time period. Some of the monumental artworks discussed at length in iconographic studies continue to remain in their original context to this day, while minor art and other wearable items could be passed down through generations and had remarkable staying power. From time to time, ancient artisans intentionally utilized the styles, techniques, and practices of artists from other cultures, geographies, and historical periods.

As is the case with theological language, imagistic languages have long histories in the ancient Near East, and many images and motifs can be found across cultures, thanks to complex systems of relation between civilizations and cultures in the ancient world.⁴⁴ On one hand, such a reality provides the reader and interpreter with some amount of freedom: the ancient world was far more connected than we often assume. On the other hand, from a comparative perspective, the interpreter faces new challenges, and may become susceptible to making broad generalizations and failing to demonstrate precise avenues of influence.⁴⁵ Thus, the anchoring of

⁴³ Bonfiglio, *Reading Images*, 154.

⁴⁴ Morton Smith, "The Common Theology of the Ancient Near East," *JBL* 71 (1952): 135–47; Marian H. Feldman, *Communities of Style: Portable Luxury Arts, Identity, and Collective Memory in the Iron Age Levant* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 31–36. See also Feldman's summary of her findings, "Style as a Fragment of the Ancient World: A View from the Iron Age Levant and Assyria," in *The Tiny and the Fragmented: Miniature, Broken, or Otherwise Incomplete Objects in the Ancient World*, ed. S. Rebecca Martin and Stephanie M. Langin-Hooper (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 99–115. On the interconnections of the ancient world via complex trade routes before the Iron Age see Eric H. Cline, *1177 B.C.: The Year Civilization Collapsed*, Turning Points in Ancient History (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

⁴⁵ Such a problem, however, is not new for the biblical scholar. In recent years, appeals to the "intertextual" nature of the biblical corpus have been treated by some as a workaround to a similar challenge on the textual side.

Joel to a particular period via iconography is not incontrovertible. Undertaken with the appropriate nuance, however, making such a connection can provide observations about and suggestions regarding influence between one period or culture and another. As I will show, an iconographic study of the book of Joel results in fresh inroads into the major interpretive cruxes within the book—to such an extent that it becomes clear that previous studies of Joel that have focused exclusively on *textual* issues and comparands have worked with only one partial data set. Only after consideration of related iconography can interpreters properly contextualize and engage this vivid book.

Delimitation Method

Another difficulty of determining the relevance of images to text in a study like the present one arrives at the level of the textual unit. The delimitation or demarcation of pericopes is a fraught matter, and scholars delimit the units of Joel in various ways with little agreement.⁴⁶ Even so, the

The challenge of textual influence is always one that requires precise terminology—what, for example, is an allusion versus a quotation versus a reference?—and a clear line of influence that must first be organized chronologically and then studied diachronically before it can be synthesized. The contestable nature of such studies, of course, appears when interpreters disagree on questions of a text’s chronology, geographic location, availability to an author, and even its coherence (i.e., similarity) to the text in question. Such issues plague iconographic studies as well because the iconographer is occasionally called to account for his or her dating of a text and whether or how a textual creator or redactor *might have* known of specific motifs. Thus, some have appealed to careful historical reconstructions and identified specific regions where certain images could have been known and influenced a text directly, but such reconstructions are *always* reconstructions, and are never a sure thing. The other option, the one I intend to employ throughout this project, is to appeal to common conceptions, themes, or motifs that, for a variety of reasons, can be said to be widespread through the ancient Near East. Such a move is at times universalizing, and totalizes cultural specificities around motifs, but in my view, relies more confidently on demonstrably shared tropes and cross-cultural motifs that remain extant for us to probe today without relying on subjective scholarly reconstructions of influence. In some ways, this move is a return to Othmar Keel’s original work in *Symbolism of the Biblical World*, which was an attempt to “see through the eyes of the ancient Near East.” I will return to this point later in this chapter. On the challenge of congruence, correlation, and contiguity, see Joel M. LeMon, “Iconographic Approaches,” 146–51; and Bonfiglio, *Reading Images*, 69–89.

⁴⁶ William S. Prinsloo, *The Theology of the Book of Joel*, BZAW 163 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1985), 12.

attempt must be made to determine where the limits of individual units fall. In order to do so, I incorporate delimitation criticism as set forward by Marjo Korpel and others.

In her study of the book of Ruth, Korpel sets forth a methodology of delimitation criticism for entire books. She begins by defining the features of textual units. A *foot*, the smallest unit, refers to a group of single words or phrases that together bear one stress. A series of feet grouped together form a *colon*: “a designation of a clause or group of clauses” that does not imply anything about the poetic quality of the text. *Lines* consist of a colon or *bicolon*. A *strophe* begins after the Masoretic *soph pasuq*, and is essentially a verse containing one or more lines. *Paragraphs* are units made up of one or more strophes. Beyond paragraphs, Korpel identifies macrostructural units that she calls *subcantos*, which make up *cantos*, and ultimately *cantatas*.⁴⁷

According to Korpel and J. C. de Moor, the largest textual units, *cantos* (chapters) and *cantatas* (books), are better attested than the smallest units, *feet*.⁴⁸ The methodology set forward by Korpel argues that the traditional delimitation of the Masoretic text, marked first by the *pethuha* and *setumah*, ought to be compared with other, non-Masoretic manuscript traditions. Decisions are then to be made based on textual features, not upon the thematic or theological features that interpreters identify, often with little explanation of their methodology. Korpel’s approach, then, can be described as an attempt to demarcate texts through empirical means.

Korpel and de Moor notes that units are sometimes marked by transitions that may be identified from the LXX traditions after being compared with the Rabbinic tradition. Often,

⁴⁷ Marjo C. A. Korpel, *The Structure of the Book of Ruth*, Pericope 2 (Assen: Koninklijke Van Gorcum, 2001), 32–47.

⁴⁸ Marjo C. A. Korpel and J. C. de Moor, *The Structure of Classical Hebrew Poetry: Isaiah 40–55*, OTS 42 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 646–53.

Masoretic cantillation helps scholars to identify the cola. The main indicators of delimitation, the markers of disjunction, include the *silluq* at the end of the line and *atnah* at either the midpoint of each line or at the end of each colon. As one of the most versatile disjunctives, the *zaqef* can mark the midpoint or the first or last third of a line.⁴⁹ Attention to parallelism, which is often understood as a defining feature of Hebrew biblical poetry, can also determine the delimitation of the line.

In order to avoid confusion with terminology loaded with poetic meaning, I use the words *unit* and *subunit* to describe the *subcantos* and *paragraphs* of the book of Joel. For the purposes of this project, the textual traditions that inform my analysis of textual units are Leningradensis, the First Rabbinic Bible, the Second Rabbinic Bible, Codex Alexandrinus, and Codex Vaticanus.⁵⁰ I identify textual units based on the best witnesses to textual delimitation in the textual traditions.

⁴⁹ For a discussion of the importance of the cantillation marks for delimitation, see E. J. Revell, “The Accents: Hierarchy and Meaning,” in *Method in Unit Delimitation*, ed. Marjo Korpel, Josef Oesch, and Stanley Porter, Pericope 6 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 61–91. On the accuracy of cantillation marks, see Marjo C. A. Korpel, “Introduction to the Series Pericope,” in *Delimitation Criticism*, ed. Marjo C. A. Korpel and Josef Oesch, Pericope 1 (Assen: Koninklijke Van Gorcum, 2000), 30.

⁵⁰ Other textual witnesses to the Minor Prophets include the Cairo Codex and fragments from Qumran. Of the Qumran fragments, 4QXII^c, 4QXII^e, MurXII, and MS Schøyen 4612/1 contain lines from Joel. Greek witnesses include the OGHevXII, the Freer Manuscript, and the Barberini version. The Old Latin fragments witness to a similar text as the Vulgate. Syriac and Aramaic witnesses include the Peshitta and the Targum, which are similar to the MT. On the textual witnesses to the Minor Prophets, see Christopher J. Fresch, “Textual History of the Minor Prophets,” in *The Hebrew Bible: Pentateuch, Former and Latter Prophets*, ed. Armin Lange and Emmanuel Tov, Textual History of the Bible 1B (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 589–90.

Constellation of Imagery and Iconic Structure

The iconic structure of a given passage must intentionally make or break visual sense. This intention is challenged, however, when the interpreter must consider the shape of a textual image in order to identify the passage's "focal image" (by which I mean a single point of comparison) or iconic structure (a multipoint assemblage of pieces that give rise to a single conception). In other words, the motivating question for this step is: what is iconic structure? And what is the image's central feature? One troubling aspect of iconographic exegesis and visual hermeneutics is the fact that the identification of a textual unit (pericope) depends upon the scholar's own theological inclinations, professed ingenuity, appeals to redactional processes, or sometimes even the identification of an iconic structure or focal image itself. In short, this type of approach to the iconic structure leads to an interpretive circle whereby the textual unit presents a particular iconic structure because it reveals a particular theology or structure, which then itself becomes the foundation for the iconic structure.

In order to break out of this interpretive circle, the interpreter must anchor their pericope within a material reality (just as they do with images) and offer a "control method" to constrain the textual structure *before* relating it to an iconographic comparand. One way to do this sort of evaluative work might be by turning one's attention to the text's literary structure and the passage's focal image.⁵¹ Another way, and the one selected for this project, is to examine the text via the work of delimitation criticism, which seeks to understand the traditional and historical textual units within the extant witnesses. While this method certainly does not allow for the interpreter to claim anything like authorial intent—or even an implied audience for that matter—

⁵¹ On the new form criticism, see especially the work of Martin Buss, *The Changing Shape of Form Criticism: A Relational Approach* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010).

it does allow them to work with demonstrable evidence outside of their own (independent) reconstructions of a textual unit.

Only after this initial work can the interpreter begin to explore the network of features that give rise to an iconic constellation. Here, David Morgan's theories, and especially his notion of a cultural icon described in *Images at Work*, become important for identifying and understanding the function of images within certain networks, how a central image reveals the way in which the whole constellation hangs together. In other words, the iconic constellation can only make sense once it is understood with reference to the central, motivating—and recognizable—feature, whether that feature is the locust, the martial deity in a solar disk, or the pouring out deity. The point of such investigation is to understand how the use of a single well-chosen image could provide fodder for interpretive comparisons between image and text.

The study of the Hebrew Bible in light of ancient Near Eastern iconography often appears easier than it actually is. In short this is because Keel and so many of his proteges and co-thinkers demonstrate a stunning control over a vast set of wildly diverse artifacts—which all contain varying layers of defining features such as a particular chronology, geographical origin or dispersal, material composition, method of production, and use—alongside a solid understanding of the ways in which motif, influence, tradition, and communicative value guide myriad interpretive choices about those artifacts. All these decisions tend to be masked by Keel's impressively approachable body of work. His axiom, "to see through the eyes of the ancient Near East," often seems deceptively straightforward. The purpose of this project, though, is to process what Keel's method might look like when applied to entire books instead of isolated and excised textual units.

To undertake such an investigation means that one must address both textual and iconographic concerns. In the following chapters, I attempt to develop this line of thought by first identifying traditional textual units that can be grounded in evidence and argumentation outside of purely literary or theological justification. In short, the visual turn in this study also includes a material turn toward the objects of study themselves, the manuscript witnesses. Second, I identify an iconic constellation by appealing to the motivating features of the text. These motivating features might be a central focal point, “the cultural icon,” as David Morgan puts it, or an extended metaphor or literary development upon which the text depends.⁵²

Conclusion

The following chapters set out to provide an iconographic exegetical study of the entire book of Joel. To do this, each chapter first addresses one of the book’s major textual units, then discusses that unit’s iconographic qualities. Next, it examines congruent iconography from the ancient world before offering concluding remarks about how such iconography impacts current debates in Joel scholarship.

Chapter 2 addresses Joel 1. The chapter is divided into two parts based on the delimitation of Joel 1: vv. 1–12 and vv. 13–20. The first section, vv. 1–12, focuses on the role and iconography of locusts in both the unit and ancient Near Eastern iconography. Locusts, it finds, were typically associated with military endeavors in Egypt, and appear on a number of Levantine stamp seals. This comparison suggests that the locusts mentioned in Joel 1:4 likely function as a metaphor for a human army that destroys Yhwh’s fig tree (v. 7), Judah.

⁵² Morgan, *Images at Work*, 124.

The second unit, 1:13–20, explores the reaches of the destruction described in the previous unit. Here, the prophet calls the people to lament the approaching Day of Yhwh and its resultant agricultural disasters. Iconographically, this section considers the role of domesticated and wild animals in Levantine stamp seals, and suggests that in such contexts, wild and domesticated animals functioned as bellwethers for divine presence and blessing. Thus, their destruction conveyed the loss of divine blessing and a reversal of the established order.

Chapter 3 examines Joel 2 with a focus on the relationship between the two units vv. 1–14 and vv. 15–27. The relationship between the first and second halves of the chapter have been the subject of much debate. Delimiting the units based on textual witnesses provides structures for identifying the flow of the chapter. Scholars have attempted to describe the relationship between the events in Joel 2 and those in Joel 1.

In the first unit, vv. 1–14, the work focuses on the description of Yhwh at the head of his army (v. 11) and the invasion itself. From an iconographic perspective, this section examines congruent imagery of invasions from Neo-Assyrian wall reliefs, particularly those of Assurnasirpal II. In these reliefs, Assur participates in battle against Neo-Assyria's enemies, even leading troops at the front of the army. The surrounding imagery depicts Neo-Assyrian troops engaging in activities similar to those described in 2:1–14. This section concludes by arguing that careful attention to Yhwh's appearance in the passage is congruent with depictions of Assur in battle.

The second section analyzes vv. 15–26. This unit carries forward the imagery from the prior unit, vv. 1–14, by describing the results of the invasion in terms congruent with images of solar deities. The constellation of imagery points to the destruction and restoration of the high god. Thus, like Assur, Yhwh brings with his appearance not only destruction, but also the rains

that restore the people and the land. In this section, solar imagery from Mesopotamia and the Levant is discussed.

Chapter 4 explores the next unit, 3:1–4:8. Since Bernhard Duhm's work on the Twelve, the interpretive consensus has been that chapter 3 begins a late redactional unit from the later Persian period or even the early Hellenistic period. Taking this consensus as a point of departure, chapter 4 examines the unit in light of Achaemenid iconography. In doing so, it considers the complex iconic structure of the unit and compares it to images from the Apadana at Persepolis and Bisitun. The chapter argues that Yhwh's restoration of his people and his judgment of the nations are congruous with the iconographic expression of the *Pax Persica* found in the two monumental works.

Chapter 5 examines the final unit of Joel, 4:9–21. This unit explicitly combines the imagery of warfare and agriculture by enlisting the Divine Warrior tradition from other prophetic texts (Isa 63; Zech 14; Jer 25). After identifying wine and wine production as the focal point of the iconic structure of Joel 4:9–21, the chapter turns to viticultural iconography and images of enemies being trampled underfoot. Such imagery was employed in Egypt, Persia, and the Levant. The chapter concludes by connecting the agricultural imagery in Joel 4 to that in Joel 1.

This work demonstrates that, while complex, the verbal imagery deployed in Joel remains coherent throughout the entire book. Attention to the iconographic qualities of the book shows that the crisis affecting the people of Judah is neither a military invasion nor an agricultural plague, but is rather both at once, an agricultural disaster brought on by military invasion. Failure to engage in iconographic study of Joel results in a bifurcated and confused interpretation—while the addition of previously unnoticed iconographic data expands the book's interpretive possibilities.

CHAPTER 2: JOEL 1: LOCUSTS AND OTHER ANIMALS

The first chapter of Joel introduces a crisis that motivates the prophetic message. According to many interpreters, the events of the first chapter depict an invasion followed by a drought. The chapter begins with a *Lehreröffnungsruf* (“call to receive instruction”), and is followed by a Call to Communal Lament, which introduces each subunit with an imperative verb.¹

Previous scholarship on Joel 1 concerns itself with the historicity of the described events. Essentially, interpreters discern either a locust plague or a military invasion. Overwhelmingly, this focus on the historicity of the events overlooks certain key features of the text. For instance, interpreters gloss over the fact that locusts represent divine displeasure and retribution in Deuteronomy, that the object of their destruction in Joel is Yhwh’s fig tree and vine—common prophetic metaphors of Israel and Judah—and that the destruction happens by means of fire and drought, tools not typically employed by locusts.² By contrast, I intend to demonstrate that the primary feature of the passage (the locusts) function within particular textual and iconographic

¹ For instance, vv. 8–10 instruct the people to wail like young women mourning the death of their husbands because the fields, grain, wine, and oil have been destroyed. Throughout the passage, the words used to describe the destruction are terms with wide-ranging, generalizing semantic meanings: אבד, שדד, שמם, נכר. On the nature of the forms see Hans Walter Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, trans. Waldemar Janzen, S. Dean McBride Jr. and Charles A. Muenchow, ed. S. Dean McBride Jr. Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1977), 20–21. Wolff explains the use of the first-person singular pronoun in vv. 6–7 as an example of the prophet speaking as the gods’ messenger (21).

² For a study of tree imagery in Israel and the Hebrew Bible, see William Russell Osborne, *Trees and Kings: A Comparative Analysis of Tree Imagery in Israel’s Prophetic Tradition and the Ancient Near East*, BBRSup 18 (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2019). For the vine and viticulture, see Carey Ellen Walsh, *The Fruit of the Vine: Viticulture in Ancient Israel*, HSM 60 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000). Ultimately the destruction of Yhwh’s fig tree and vine exemplifies the destruction of Judah and Israel via a *pars pro toto* structure. For phytomorphic metaphors in prophetic literature more generally, see Göran Eidevall, “Trees and Traumas: On the Use of Phytomorphic Metaphors in Prophetic Descriptions of Deportation and Exile,” in *Images of Exile in the Prophetic Literature*, ed. Jesper Høgenhaven, Frederik Poulsen, and Cian Power, FAT 2 103 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 217–32.

traditions that understand locusts as agents of chaos and use them to picture armies (as in Jer 51:27). By destroying Yhwh’s fig tree and vine, the metaphorical “locusts” destroy the nation of Israel, and this crisis reaches its climax in Joel 1 by affecting also the wild and domesticated animals, symbolizing Yhwh’s displeasure, as described by Deuteronomistic theology.³ My central claim is that ancient Near Eastern iconography supports interpretations that understand the locusts as a metaphor for human armies, likely Babylonian troops, and that the book does not describe a locust infestation followed by a long-term drought.⁴

Though scholars debate the precise date of Joel, its *terminus a quo* is likely found in the early sixth century near the end of the monarchic period, shortly after what Oded Lipschits calls “the long seventh century.” As such, it reflects a Neo-Babylonian Judean context.⁵ The focus of

³ Walter Brueggemann, “Isaiah 55 and Deuteronomistic Theology,” *ZAW* 80 (1968): 191–203; John G. Grammie, “Theology of Retribution in the Book of Deuteronomy,” *CBQ* 32 (1970): 1–12; and John D. W. Watts, “The Deuteronomistic Theology,” *Review & Expositor* 74 (1977): 321–26.

⁴ This reading places Joel well within the context of ancient texts that use animal imagery in descriptions of violence and warfare (as in the case of Jer 51, which depicts Yhwh’s punishment of Babylon). See T. M. Lemos, “Neither Mice Nor Men: Dehumanization and Extermination in Mesopotamian Sources, *Hērem* Texts, and the War Scroll,” in *With the Loyal You Show Yourself Loyal: Essays on Relationships in the Hebrew Bible in Honor of Saul M. Olyan*, ed. T. M. Lemos, Jordan D. Rosenblum, Karen B. Stern, and Debra Scoggins Ballentine, AIL 42 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2021), 250–65.

⁵ According to Marvin Sweeney, the placement of the book among sixth-century prophets in the LXX makes greater literary sense—in terms of the overall structure of the Book of the Twelve—and suggests it was written during the Neo-Babylonian period, while internal references to the temple and the role of priests suggests later redaction in the Persian period; “The Place and Function of Joel in the Book of the Twelve, in *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve*, ed. Paul L. Redditt and Aaron Schart, BZAW 325 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 152–153. The possibility exists that the first half of the book, chapters 1–2:27, could relate to a Neo-Babylonian crisis in which the temple still exists, while the second half, chapters 2:28–4, could stem from a Persian, postexilic period. Following Oded Lipschits, I consider what he calls the “long seventh century” as a central definitive period for understanding the book of Joel. Lipschits’s “long century” includes roughly 150 years spanning from 732 to 586 BCE. It is during this period, according to Lipschits, that the economy and administration of Judah faced enormous influence from three major kingdoms: Assyria, Egypt, and Babylon. As a result, this period remains critical for the study of the Bible and historical developments within Judah because it was a vassal state of the Assyrian Empire. During this period, the material culture of Judah moved from unstandardized, small-scale productions to a centralized mode of production. See Oded Lipschits, “The Long Seventh Century BCE: Archaeological and Historical Perspectives,” in *The Last Century in the History of Judah: The Seventh Century BCE in Archaeological, Historical, and Biblical Perspectives*, ed. Filip Čapek and Oded Lipschits (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2019), 27. On the compositional nature of the book see William Douglas Watson, “Let the Priests Lament: A Study of the Composition of the Book of Joel” (PhD diss., Emory University, 2013), 161–68.

this chapter rests upon iconography derived from the Levant during the seventh to the sixth centuries.⁶ Rather than an attempt at anchoring a comparison with images available during the Neo-Babylonian period as a suggestion that the authors, editors, and redactors of Joel ever saw these images, the method of this chapter should be understood contextualization of the imagery and metaphors of the book within a specific visual culture belonging to a likely shared historical horizon.⁷

Neo-Babylonian iconography was heavily indebted to the traditions of the Neo-Assyrian period, which were themselves enriched by the traditions of the Arameans and other northern Levant people. This period also witnessed a reawakening of Egyptian influence on the artistic traditions of Israel/Palestine. Thus, to focus on the region of Judah in this period means that one must be attentive not only to the Neo-Babylonian works, but also the Aramean, Neo-Assyrian, and Egyptian traditions that found their home at this crossroads along the eastern shores of the

⁶ Iconographers debate the value of limiting iconographic treatment of biblical texts to proximate historical and chronological contexts, and many take differing approaches. As Ryan P. Bonfiglio shows, approaches to explaining the relationship between images and texts are diverse. At a certain level, however, all iconographic works must contend with the relationship between a given image and text. Some attempt to anchor their comparisons by means of historical or geographic boundaries (Strawn and Uehlinger) while others attempt to use the broad, cross-cultural connections throughout the ancient Near East as reason enough for wide-ranging comparisons (Brown and the early works of Keel, especially *SBW*). For Bonfiglio's analysis of image-text congruence, contiguity, and correlation see Ryan P. Bonfiglio, *Reading Images, Seeing Texts: Towards a Visual Hermeneutics for Biblical Studies*, OBO 280 (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2016), 71–88.

⁷ Like texts, images are interpreted within already existent traditions, “grammars,” and motifs that demonstrate remarkable consistency over time and across geographies despite culturally specific meanings. Thus, any motif from the sixth to fifth century will necessarily have antecedents that shape how the image conveyed meaning in its ancient context. Moreover, images demonstrate a longevity that pushes an image from one period into another. Ancients regularly reused images in radically new contexts while still making meaning of the objects. Thus, a ninth-century BCE stamp seal could “speak” just as easily in the fourth century BCE. Iconographic exegeses should therefore be rightfully cautious about limiting the potential impact of an image or motif on the biblical text because of chronological constraints. Nevertheless, beginning with images uncovered from periods close to a biblical book, and within a reasonable geographic range, can provide a standard starting point for comparison.

Mediterranean.⁸ Moreover, materials that come directly from find sites within Israel and Judah are the most important. As a result, the iconography in this chapter is essentially limited to the stamp seals, bulla, and other miniature art that is so plentiful in the region.⁹

In this chapter, I explore the two pericopes that make up chapter 1. The first, verses 1–12, introduces the crisis, the destruction of Yhwh’s fig tree and vine. The second, verses 13–20, extends this description to the fields and pastures, and to wild and domesticated animals of Judah. Subsequently, the text transitions from the prophet’s “Call to Communal Lamentation” to the content of the lament. Following the rhetorical movement, I discuss first the role of locust imagery within ancient Near Eastern textual and iconographic traditions and then turn to the imagery of wild and domesticated animals. My iconographic exegesis focuses on congruent imagery from the Levant during this period and suggests that Joel presents a picture of general distress not limited solely to a locust plague. To anticipate my findings, the artistic data helps to clarify the nature of these locusts as metaphorical and iconographic—a point that prove helpful in the interpretation of the chapter.

⁸ The Neo-Babylonian era spans from 626 to 539 BCE. Artisans of this culture drew their influence from the iconography and images of the past, including Assyrian and other Mesopotamian periods. They transitioned old motifs and images to their own context and relied on older traditions to create compositions and motifs. Despite the influence of the northern Assyrian styles, Neo-Babylonian iconography developed its own traditions. Seal carvings especially evidence the tendency toward older Assyrian motifs while being applied to different media such as stamp seals. Zainab Bahrani has discussed in detail the Babylonian interest in the past and skill in “looking back” while still developing modified and distinctly Babylonian traditions (*Mesopotamia: Ancient Art and Architecture* [London: Thames and Hudson, 2017], 287–89).

⁹ Some of the seals in the region are imported from the major empires around Israel/Palestine, but others are local products made in Israel. See Brent A. Strawn, “Canaanite/Israelite Iconography,” in *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, ed. Jonathan S. Greer, John W. Hilber, and John H. Walton (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 180.

Joel 1:1–12

The “Call to Communal Lament” in Joel 1:1–12 instructs the implied audience to respond to the destruction with mourning.¹⁰ In stark contrast to other prophetic literature, the prophet provides no explanation for why the destruction takes place. Instead, he simply announces it and suggests that lament is the only suitable response. The text employs multiple imperative addresses to support his call to lament, a designation of the addressees, and a justification for the lamentation.¹¹ Each call connects features of the destruction to a particular group within Judean society.

Delimitation

Following the delimitation method of Marjo Korpel and others, I suggest that the first unit includes Joel 1:1–12.¹² In the case of Joel 1, the *petuhah* and *setumah* mark a consistent break at

¹⁰ According to Michael Floyd, the “Call to Communal Complaint (Aufruf zur Volksklage)” is marked by a direct appeal to a community on the verge of a disaster. These calls often include multiple imperatives directing particular kinds of action. The culmination of the imperatives is direct appeal to Yhwh. Floyd calls the call in Joel 1:2–14 “the most fully developed example” (*Minor Prophets: Part 2*, FOTL 22 [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000], 627–628); see also, Marvin A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39 with an Introduction to Prophetic Literature*, FOTL 16 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 516. This form has parallels in the Former and Later Prophets and the writings: 2 Sam 3:31; 1 Kgs 21:9, 12; Amos 5:16; Isa 14:31; 22:12; 23:1–14; 32:11–14; Jer 4:8; 6:26; 7:29; 22:20; 25:34; 36:9; 49:3; Ezek 21:17; Jonah 3:7–8; Zeph 1:11; Zech 11:2; Ezra 8:21; 2 Chr 20:3.

¹¹ The reasons for these actions are varied and throughout the pericope one finds reasons, often introduced by a *ו* clause, but sometimes without, for the instructions. Wolff takes the opening stanza, vv. 2–3, as a *Lehreröffnungsruf*, a call to receive instruction, that he claims was popular in wisdom circles to garner attention. See Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 21.

¹² For an overview of delimitation method, see Marjo C. A. Korpel, “Introduction to the Series Pericope,” in *Delimitation Criticism*, ed. Marjo C. A. Korpel and Josef M. Oesch, Pericope 1 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2000), 1–50. For a monograph length study see Marjo C. A. Korpel, *The Structure of the Book of Ruth*, Pericope 2 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2001). For an overview of the use of LXX delimiters see W. M. de Bruin, “Interpreting Delimiters:

the end of verse 12 across the dominant Hebrew traditions (Codex Aleppo, Codex Leningrad, and the 1525 Rabbinic Bible).¹³ The traditions of the 1517 and 1525 Rabbinic Bible, as well as Codex Alexandrinus, help to identify the smaller subunits. These are marked by large capitals in the left margin and can appear just below the start of the line if it begins in the middle of a column.¹⁴ Thus, delimitation by manuscript features breaks the text into roughly five subunits: verses 1–3, verse 4,¹⁵ verses 5–7, verses 8–10, and verses 11–12. Each subunit is then broken into smaller “microunits” by attention to the Masoretic cantillation and poetic parallelism.

As a result of this division, one finds that each subunit, apart from the one in verse 4, begins with an imperative verb addressed to a class of people. Following this imperative, each

The Complexity of Text Delimitation in Four Major Septuagint Manuscripts,” in *Studies in Scriptural Unit Division*, ed. Marjo C. A. Korpel and Josef M. Oesch, Pericope 3 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2002), 66–89. For others who identify a unit here, see also Arvid S. Kapelrud, *Joel Studies* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1948), 4; Elizabeth Achtemeier, “Joel,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible: Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature, Daniel, The Twelve Prophets*, 7 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 306. Willem S. Prinsloo identifies 1:2–14 as a unit on the basis of lexical repetition, the strategic use of imperatives, the concomitant vocatives, and the regular use of ׀ in *The Theology of the Book of Joel* (New York: de Gruyter, 1985), 12. Hans Walter Wolff, Douglas Stuart, James Crenshaw, and John Barton all extend the unit from 1:2–20. See Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 20; Douglas K. Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, WBC 31 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 239; James L. Crenshaw, *Joel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 24C (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 84; and John Barton, *Joel and Obadiah: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 40. Importantly, Rudolph Scharneck also identifies the demarcation of the first unit at this point in the text by comparing Hebrew manuscripts. He concludes that the demarcation at this point has interpretive implications that strengthen the position of those scholars who hold that the crisis in chapter 1 is a military invasion. Part 2 of the chapter, vv. 13–20, then presents the cultic response to the invasion. See Rudolph Scharneck, “The Demarcation of the First Pericope of Joel,” *JSem* 19 (2010): 555. Scharneck is the only one who demarcates the unit by comparing manuscript evidence. The rest rely on rhetorical or theological analysis of the text. My analysis follows the pattern set forth by Scharneck and anchors the pericope to manuscript features of the text rather than my own rhetorical or theological reading.

¹³ In all these traditions, the setumah indicates the major break in the chapter. The setumah is also distinct due to its large space—taking up almost two-thirds of a line—in the 1517 Rabbinic Bible. This space is followed by an indentation on the next line. In short, these traditions decisively end the first pericope after v. 12.

¹⁴ de Bruin, “Interpreting Delimiters,” 71. Generally speaking, Codex Vaticanus does not use enlarged capitals, instead preferring to precede the new text line with a space and then offset the first line of a new unit to the left (76).

¹⁵ Stuart suggests that v. 4 is a “description of tragedy.” It is figurative and metaphorical rather than literal. By standing on its own, apart from the other subunits, verse 4 lends a quality of disruption and displacement to the unit. See Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 241.

subunit provides an explanation for the action of the imperative. Each subunit also connects the description of actions to a particular class. For instance, the elders are told to recount the events to their offspring (vv. 2–3), the drunkards are told to mourn because of the absence of wine (v. 5), and the tillers and vintners are told to lament over the destruction of produce (vv. 11–12).

Delimiting the text according to (empirical) manuscript features benefits the interpreter by allowing them to assess the theology, rhetoric, or in this case, imagery, of a textual unit (pericope) without relying on rhetorical or theological analysis to determine where a text begins or ends. As Korpel suggests, “*Any* literary analysis, of whatever type, has to take the ‘hard’ data of the ancient traditions with regard to unit division seriously.... Of course everybody is free to reject the sectioning of the text by the ancient scribes. But as with textual criticism, one has to argue carefully on the basis of the fullest possible manuscript evidence why one favours any particular delimitation.”¹⁶ Attending to the manuscript data for Joel allows for us to discern units by means of a textual control—the practice of ancient scribes—so that we can isolate pericopes and apply iconographic method to the textual units.

Translation

¹A word of Yhwh, which came to Joel, a son of Petuel.

²“Listen to this, O Elders,
incline your ears, all you dwellers of the land.
Has this happened in your days
or in the days of your ancestors?”

³Recount it to your children
and your children to their children
and their children to the generation after.

¹⁶ Korpel, “Introduction,” 17. Italics original.

⁴The remnant of the cutting locust,¹⁷ the swarm¹⁸ has eaten
and the remnant of the swarm, the multiplying locust have eaten.
And the remnant of the multiplying locust, the crop-destroying locust¹⁹ have eaten.

⁵Wake up, you drunkards and weep;
howl, all you drinkers of wine,
over the sweet wine
for it has been cut off from your mouth.²⁰

⁶For a nation, mighty and without numbering,
has come up upon my land.
Its teeth are the teeth of a lion
and it has fangs of a lioness.

⁷It set out to desolate my grapevine
And to splinter my fig tree.
Surely it has stripped it and thrown it down
They have bleached its branches white.

⁸Wail like a young maiden girded in sackcloth
over the husband of her youth.

⁹The grain offering and the drink offering are cut off
from the house of Yhwh.

The priests, the ministers of Yhwh, mourn.

¹⁰The fields are demolished²¹

and the ground dried up.
When the grain was demolished

¹⁷ From חָגַג “cut off.” Something that devours as in Amos 4:9. Used only in Joel and Amos. G and V have κάμπτης “caterpillar” or “silkworm” (LS, 873). Gelston suggests the G and V are ignorant of the lexeme. See Gelston’s notes in the textual critical apparatus, *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 28.

¹⁸ Translated “swarm,” the root רבה meaning to “be great, numerous.” This meaning is not uncontested, however, and Franz Delitzsch suggests a I-aleph root, ארב “to destroy.” Occasionally, this word is translated as “destroyer.” In either case, the word refers to locusts, which are well known throughout the Hebrew Bible and ancient Near Eastern literature for their destructive behavior and ravenous appetites. References to locusts in the Hebrew Bible include Lev 11:22; Exod 10; Ps 78:46 (parallel הַסִּיל); 105:34 (parallel to יִלֵּק); Deut 28:38; as a mark of plague in 1 Kgs 8:37/2 Chr 6:28; Job 39:20 (simile); Ps 109:23 (simile). In addition to the insect, the word can also refer metaphorically to enemies, as in Judg 6:5, 7:12; Nah 3:15, 17; and Prov 30:27 (real but combined with militaristic language). See BDB, 915.

¹⁹ From the root הָסִיל “to finish off, consume, bring to an end.” See Deut 28:38 for locusts that destroy crops, as well as 1 Kgs 8:37; 2 Chr 6:28; Ps 78:46. They are occasionally used metaphorically for enemy armies, as in Isa 33:4. Gelston determines that the G and V variants are the result of ignorance of the lexeme. See *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 28

²⁰ The LXX adds “joy and gladness are removed from your mouth.” Gelston suggests this is an assimilation with v. 16. See, *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 28.

²¹ Of Moab, Isa 15:1; Nineveh, Nah 3:7; Israel, Jer 4:20; and trees, Zech 11:2.

the wine dried up
the oil dried up.

¹¹Be ashamed, O tillers,
howl, O vinedressers.
over the wheat
and over the barley
for the harvest of the field has perished.

¹²The vine dried up
and the fig tree languished.
Pomegranate, palm, and apple;
all the trees of the field have dried up.
Indeed, exultation²² dries up
from the sons of earth.

Iconic Structure of Joel 1:1–12

The iconic structure of the text emphasizes a central image: locusts devouring Yhwh's fig tree and vine.²³ This destructive image extends to the entirety of the people's agricultural system through terms like שדה and אדמה as well as imperatives directed at agricultural workers (כרים and כרמים). Furthermore, the destruction of these crops creates a crisis in the cultic system since the produce used for specific offerings is gone. By the last subunit, the pericope returns to the

²² Used in Hos 2:13 as an element of the cult practice of Israel. Listed with festivals, new moons, sabbaths, and appointed times.

²³ On the iconography of trees, see Barbara N. Porter, "Sacred Trees, Date Palms and the Royal Persona of Ashurnasirpal II," *JNES* 52, no. 2 (1993): 129–139; Barbara N. Porter, *Trees, Kings, and Politics: Studies in Assyrian Iconography*, OBO 197 (Fribourg: Academic Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003); Simo Parpola, "The Assyrian Tree of Life: Tracing the Origins of Jewish Monotheism and Greek Philosophy," *JNES* 52, no. 3 (1993): 161–208; Irene J. Winter, "Ornament and the 'Rhetoric of Abundance' in Assyria," *Eretz-Israel: Archaeological, Historical and Geographical Studies* Hayim and Miriam Tadmor Volume (2003): 252–64; and Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 233–36. On the lion imagery that is pertinent to Joel, see Brent A. Strawn, *What is Stronger Than a Lion?: Leonine Image and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, OBO 212 (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2005), 53, 273–276.

emphasis on major elements of Israelite agriculture. To begin, I will focus my engagement on the central crux of the chapter: the locusts.

Additional, complex imagery can be found throughout the pericope as well. For instance, verses 2 and 3 include imagery about ancestors and children. Verse 6 adds leonine imagery to the description of destruction. Verses 8–10 depict marital and ritual imagery. As important as these images may seem, they serve a rhetorical purpose to push the central image of agricultural destruction forward. In other words, the leonine imagery (v.6) adds to the description of destruction and the ritual imagery (vv. 9–10) demonstrate the implications of the destruction. While intriguing in their own right, I contend that they are not the focal, or central image, but expand the imagery around the destruction of Yhwh's fig tree and vine.

First Subunit (vv. 1–3)

Verse 1 opens by introducing the oracle as the word of Yhwh that was directed to Joel. Similar formulae occur in other prophetic books including Hosea, Amos, Jonah, Micah, Zephaniah, Haggai, and Zechariah.²⁴ In the context of a prophetic work, דבר can indicate a visionary experience on the part of the prophet.²⁵ In stark contrast to the above prophetic books, the superscription (v. 1) lacks a historical denotation. As a result, scholars can claim very little about the prophet Joel's historicity. The name appears occasionally in families that are closely associated with Israelite prophets—one of Samuel's sons is named Joel (1 Sam 8:2), and Nathan has a brother named Joel (1 Chr 11:8). The name also appears in different tribes in Chronicles

²⁴ Prinsloo, *The Theology of the Book of Joel*, 11.

²⁵ Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 40.

(Simeon, 1 Chr 4:35; Rueben, 1 Chr 5:4,8; Gad, 1 Chr 5:12; Levi, 1 Chr 6:21; 15:7, 11; 23:8; 26:22; 2 Chr 29:12; Issachar, 1 Chr 7:3; and Manasseh, 1 Chr 27:20). Ezra-Nehemiah also mentions two people named Joel (Ez 10:43 and Neh 11:9).²⁶ In an effort to biographize the book, some interpreters, among them Oswald Loretz, Siegfried Bergler, and Ronald L. Troxel, have suggested that Joel was a member of the priesthood because of the cultic language throughout the book.²⁷ Although the book does contain cultic features and focuses on the ritual system, based on the evidence this proposition says more than scholars can claim. Joel is not only concerned with cultic elements and does not draw a direct line between the cult and the prophet since Joel is not alone in the Twelve or the larger prophetic corpus in its attention to the cult.²⁸ As Jason LeCureux has shown, nothing in the book of Joel suggests that the prophet had a unique relation to the cult; neither does the book suggest that the prophet was a priest or member of the cultic elite. Moreover, LeCureux argues that Joel may present a challenge to the cultic system.²⁹

Verses 2 and 3 dramatically introduce the disaster facing the people by calling for their attention. First, the prophet calls to the ruling elders and then the inhabitants of the land. These

²⁶ Because the name appears in late texts, Crenshaw argues that it was popular in the late fifth and early fourth centuries. See Crenshaw, *Joel*, 21–22.

²⁷ Oswald Loretz, *Regenritual und Jahwetag im Joelbuch*, UBL 4 (Altenberg: CIS-Verlag, Akademische Bibliothek, 1986). Others have suggested that the book comes from an individual who was, perhaps, closely associated with the daily functions of the temple cultus. Some suggest that he was a “scribal prophet” responsible for recording the words of priests and prophets as a means of affirming their messages. See Siegfried Bergler, *Joel als Schriftinterpret*, BEATAJ 16 (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1988); Ronald L. Troxel, *Joel: Scope, Genre(s), and Meaning*, CSHB 6 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015).

²⁸ See Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, ed., *Priests and Cults in the Book of the Twelve*, ANEM 14 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016).

²⁹ Jason T. LeCureux notes that the explicit use of terminology like *דָּבַר* and the drink and grain offerings are limited to the first two chapters of Joel. See his “Joel, the Cult, and the Book of the Twelve,” in *Priests and Cults in the Book of the Twelve*, ed. Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, ANEM 14 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 78.

individuals, representative of the entire community of Israel, are then commanded to tell their children of the distinctness of the coming events. Scholars debate whether the reference to the elders suggests a specific governing body or if the word refers to the eldest individuals in the land.³⁰ The possibility that the word refers to the oldest members of Judahite society would necessarily include that group's role as *de facto* authority figures within Israelite and Judahite society. But use of the term "elders" may refer to those who have been around the longest who would purportedly be able to actually answer the rhetorical question, "Has such a thing ever happened before?" The reference to the dwellers of the land could, therefore, be a reference to those who remained in Judah during or after the Babylonian exile, the עַם הָאָרֶץ, who were governed by a set of elders.³¹ The reference to the elders and dwellers of the land therefore suggests the civic leaders and the *polis*.

The unit introduces an unprecedented event by means of the "polar question" marked by the interrogative הֲ and the אִם particle, which suggests that the event has no comparand.³² The identity of the event is not clear. The locusts are not mentioned until verse 4 and the invasion is not mentioned until verse 6. Stuart, Wolff, Barton, and Crenshaw take the event to be either the

³⁰ There is substantial debate related to the identification of Joel's "elders." Some, such as Wolff and Lester L. Grabbe, have understood these elders as a reference to the ruling elders of Israel. These individuals appear as governors of Yehud in the Persian period. Thus, both Wolff and Grabbe take this line as a reference to a postexilic *Sitz* for the book. See Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 25–26. For an overview of Yehud in the Persian period, see Lester L. Grabbe, *Judaism from Cyrus to Hadrian*, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 1:119–45. In a related but distinct argument, Erhard Gerstenberger suggests that the Yehudites organized themselves around kingship structures, which were led by the eldest males (זְקֵנִים) of the family. See Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Israel in the Persian Period: The Fifth and Fourth Centuries B.C.E.*, trans. Siegfried S. Schatzmann, *Biblische Enzyklopädie* 8 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2011), 106. Others, including Crenshaw and Barton, simply understand the term to refer to the eldest individuals in the society with no distinct leadership responsibilities. See Crenshaw, *Joel*, 86; Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 42.

³¹ Seth Schwartz, "Judaism: From the Exile to the Arab Conquest," in *RPP7* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 58.

³² Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 684.

invasion (Stuart) or the locusts (Wolff, Crenshaw, and Barton).³³ Rhetorically, verse 2 conceals the referent and allows the reader to anticipate the great tragedy about to unfold. If anticipating the locusts, the question's rhetorical force is dependent on one of two possibilities: that the locust infestation is somehow distinct from all other locust plagues.³⁴ Such a distinction would be unusual since locust infestations are relatively common in arid climates. While it's possible that the verse may be employing hyperbole, it may be that the Babylonian invasion—an event with devastating outcomes—may be in mind.³⁵

Second Subunit (v. 4)

Most interpreters take the central event to be the arrival of the various locusts and treat it as an element of the first subunit (vv. 2–3).³⁶ No matter where the verse is placed, it occupies the majority of interpreters' focus.³⁷ The four words *הסל, ילק, ארבה, גזם* have been interpreted as four

³³ Stuart, *Joel*, 241; Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 26; Crenshaw, *Joel*, 86; and Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 42.

³⁴ Stuart argues for the Babylonian invasion on the grounds that the severity of the event in 587/86 was unlike anything previously experienced in Judah (*Hosea-Jonah*, 241).

³⁵ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 26.

³⁶ Prinsloo identifies the subunit as a *Lehreröffnungsruf*. See Prinsloo, *The Theology of the Book of Joel*, 13; Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 42. By contrast, Kapelrud suggests that the *Lehreröffnungsruf* starts the next section of lamentation (*Joel Studies*, 14).

³⁷ Those in favor of a reference to physical locusts include Christopher R. Seitz, *Joel*, International Theological Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (London: Bloomsbury, 2016); Joel Barker, *From the Depths of Despair to the Promise of Presence: A Rhetorical Reading of the Book of Joel*, Siphut 11 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014); Elie Assis, *The Book of Joel: A Prophet between Calamity and Hope*, LHOTS 581 (London: T & T Clark, 2013); Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*; Wolff, *Joel and Amos* (though Wolff does distinguish between the events of chapter 1 and chapter 2); D. W. Nowack, *Die kleinen Propheten: übersetzt und erklärt*, HKAT 3/4 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1897); Bishop of Cyrrhus Theodoret, *Commentaries on the Prophets*, trans. Robert C. Hill (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2006). Many of the interpreters who support an interpretation of actual locusts stake their claim on anecdotal accounts of locust infestations. Among such interpreters are Harold Brodsky, “‘An Enormous Horde Arrayed for Battle’: Locusts in the Book of Joel,”

different species or four developmental stages of locusts,³⁸ while others identify the locusts in question by various activities of destruction.³⁹ Early allegorical interpreters often identified the locusts with specific enemy nations of Judah and Israel, where each word stood for one of the four major invaders: Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Rome.⁴⁰ On the basis of grammatical similarity, one important parallel exists in Amos 4:9, in which locusts eat Israel's olive and fig trees, *ותאניכם וזיתיכם יאכל הגזם*. Joel 1:5–12, however, depicts the locusts devouring Yhwh's fig tree and vine.⁴¹ A familiar sight in the ancient world, locusts were well known as both terrifying destroyers of crops and, because people ate them, a potential source of sustenance.⁴² As both an eating and eaten thing, locusts have a complicated symbolic heritage in ancient Near Eastern texts. In swarms they were greatly feared, but for most of its existence as a solitary creature the locust was harmless.⁴³

Bible Review, August 1990; and Benjamin Mazar, *Views of the Biblical World: Later Prophets*, 3 (Jerusalem: International Publishing, 1960), 225. Scholars in favor of a more metaphorical understanding of the locusts in v. 4 include Josef Lössl, "When Is a Locust Just a Locust? Patristic Exegesis of Joel 1:4 in the Light of Ancient Literary Theory," *JTS* 55, no. 2 (2004): 575–99; Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*; Pablo R. Andiñach, "The Locust in the Message of Joel," *VT* 42, no. 4 (1992): 433–41; and Bishop Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on the Twelve Prophets*, trans. Robert C. Hill, FC 108 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 105.

³⁸ Karl August Credner, *Der Prophet Joel übersetzt und erklärt* (Halle: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1831). Credner's argument has been picked up by Israel Aharoni, Ovid Sellers, and John Thompson. For a full discussion, see Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 27.

³⁹ See for instance, Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 42.

⁴⁰ Most notably, Jerome, Ephraem the Syrian, and Targum Jonathan.

⁴¹ The use of divine first-person speech is well-known, see Isa 22:12; 32:13; and Jer 6:26.

⁴² Insofar as human societies have depended on plant crops for survival, swarming insects have provided a daunting danger. Thus, those cultures and areas that plant more than one type of crop tend to fare better in the face of insect swarms. The grasshopper and locust, however, are "generalists" that present an all-consuming danger. Gilbert Waldbauer, "People and Insect Plagues," in *A World of Insects: The Harvard University Press Reader*, ed. Ring T. Cardé and Vincent H. Resh (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 113, 117. On the cooking methods of locusts and their consumption, see Karen Radner, "Fressen und gefressen werden: Heuschrecken als Katastrophe und Delikatesse im Alten Vorderen Orient," *WO* 34 (2004): 19–20.

⁴³ Allen S. Gilbert, "The Flora and Fauna of the Ancient Near East," in *CANE*, 1:172.

Overall, the general understanding in antiquity was that the gods could, and did, use insects to bring about punishment. Indeed, one gets no farther than the second book of the Hebrew Bible before this becomes clear (Exod 7–10). In the ancient world, as with many life-endangering situations, the only way to get rid of such pests was through prayer and supplication (Exod 10:19; 1 Kgs 8:23–25).⁴⁴ Such an understanding was not limited to the world of the ancient Israelites, since the Greeks, Romans, and others also attempted to fend off such disasters by appeasing the gods.⁴⁵ Beyond the physical insect proper, writers also regularly employed locust swarms as metaphors for large groups, especially armies.⁴⁶ Such use can be found in both texts and images from the ancient Near East. To explore this theme in more detail, I briefly explore texts from Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Hebrew Bible that deal with locusts. These examples demonstrate the existence of a traditional and widespread metaphor that imagined military forces as locusts. This metaphor emphasized the swarming and insatiable nature of locusts and applied it to armies, sometimes one’s own and sometimes one’s enemies. This understanding can also be found in some iconographic depictions from these same regions, and I survey the major motifs below.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Lemos, “Neither Mice nor Men,” 264.

⁴⁵ Waldbauer, “People and Insect Plagues,” 119.

⁴⁶ “Erbu,” *CAD* 4:253.

⁴⁷ In what follows, I examine the iconography of locusts following a methodology similar to what de Hulster identifies as using a “theme as Starting Point” exemplified by Brent Strawn’s approach in *What is Stronger than a Lion?* This approach begins with the identification of a theme, in this case the locusts, then examines related verses in the Hebrew Bible and other ancient Near Eastern texts, then the iconographic and archaeological record of Israel/Palestine, then the iconography of ancient Near Eastern cultures, and finally makes conclusions regarding the theme in question. For this description, see Izaak J. de Hulster, *Illuminating Images: An Iconographic Method of Old Testament Exegesis with Three Case Studies from Third Isaiah* (Utrecht: Universiteit Utrecht, 2008), 164. My approach can be classified as “modified” because my starting points are slightly different. First, I begin with texts involving locusts from the ancient Near East and then turn to the Hebrew Bible; then I examine the iconography of Mesopotamia and Egypt before turning to the iconography of Israel/Palestine. I modify the approach for two reasons. First, the major commentaries and articles on Joel’s locusts begin by examining the comparative texts

The question at hand is not whether the ancient audiences of Joel were familiar or unfamiliar with locust plagues, but whether Joel's words and descriptions of events in chapter 1 better fit an actual or a metaphorical interpretation of the locust image. Ultimately, these data attest to the polyvalence of the locust imagery, which complicates a straightforward interpretation of the locusts in Joel 1. So any comparison of "textual locusts" with "iconographic locusts" demonstrates that attention must be paid to the larger iconic structure of the biblical text at hand.

The Ugaritic *Legend of Kirta* (KTU 1.14) describes the army mustered by Kirta as "like locusts that dwell on the steppe, like grasshoppers on the borders of the desert" (*mddth . k irby tškn . šd km . ḥsn . paat . mabr*).⁴⁸ The narrator describes Kirta's army, made up of a ragtag cross-section of society, as a swarm of locusts and grasshoppers that march without ceasing for several days before finally wiping out the villages and towns of King Pabel. This description is repeated in column iv, lines 19–23 as the army accomplishes Kirta's mission. These soldiers are such a powerful force that people lock themselves in their houses to escape the invasion.⁴⁹

Several Mesopotamian texts use locusts as metaphors for armies because of their number and their ability to cover large tracts of land. Such descriptions fit enemy nations, as in the case

before turning to the Hebrew Bible. Thus, I attempt to follow the way that the conversations have taken place before this work. Second, I examine the materials from the ancient Near East before the texts of the Hebrew Bible and the iconography of Israel/Palestine as an attempt to first provide some access to the cultural context in which such images arose.

⁴⁸ H. L. Ginsberg, "Ugaritic Myths, Epics, and Legends," in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 143–44. The Ugaritic comes from KTU³.

⁴⁹ In fact, Ginsberg describes the use of locust metaphors as a "stock simile for a vast multitude" and cites Judg 6:5; 7:12; Jer 46:23; 51:27; and Nah 3:16, 17 in "Ugaritic Myths, Epics, and Legends," 144 n. 13.

of *The Curse of Agade*, and in other texts for the armies of Sennacherib and Sargon.⁵⁰ Perhaps the most important Mesopotamian comparand comes from the work of Victor A. Hurowitz, who first drew attention to the similarities between Joel 1:4 and Sargon II's *Hymn to Nanaya* by emphasizing similarities such as the use of multiple terms for locusts, the destruction of the crops and the cutting, and the resulting end of the offerings to the gods.⁵¹ Hurowitz's transliteration and translation follow:

ṣennu erebu muḥalliq ašna[n]
lemnu zirziru mubbil ṣippāti
pārisu sattukkī ša ilī u išarā[ti]
šēmēki Ellil māharki Tutu
ina qibītīki limmani zaqīqīš

The evil locust which destroys the crop/grain
the wicked dwarf-locust which dries up the orchards
which cuts off the regular offerings of the gods and goddesses—
(Verily) Ellil listens to you, and Tutu is before you—
may by your command [*sic*] it be turned into nothing.⁵²

⁵⁰ See, for instance, the description of the mountain people in lines 157–60 in S. N. Kramer, “The Curse of Agade: The Ekur Avenged,” in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 649. Andiañach, “The Locust in the Message of Joel,” 438.

⁵¹ Victor Hurowitz, “Joel’s Locust Plague in Light of Sargon II’s Hymn to Nanaya,” *JBL* 112 (1993): 599. According to Hurowitz, the portion of the prayer in question has no parallel in the Mesopotamian corpus. If true, then the text would likely not have provided a larger motif on which the prophet could have drawn.

⁵² Clearly, the text shares one cognate with Joel, *erebu*—ארבה. Regarding the use of the two terms *erebu* and *zirziru* as a merism, Hurowitz writes: “The mention of two types of locusts indicating locusts of many types fulfills the same function as Joel’s enumeration of four species of locusts at the beginning and the end of his oracles (1:4; 2:25)” (Hurowitz, “Joel’s Locust,” 599). While it is tempting to take the two types of locust in Sargon’s Hymn as a merism, it is less clear that such a device is being used in Joel, since merism by definition requires two, and only two, distinct features. See S. A. Geller, “Hebrew Prosody and Poetics, Biblical,” *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Roland Greene et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 611. Hurowitz raises another point of difference between the Mesopotamian text and the Hebrew text. The locusts in the prayer are described as “wicked,” *ṣennu*, and “evil,” *lemnu* (599). No such adjectives are applied to the locusts in Joel. The full strength of Hurowitz’s argument comes in his discussion of the entire prayer, which identifies the locusts as a destroyer of crops, fields, and harvests and relates it to the dying up of the crops in Joel 1:10, 11, 12, 17, and 20. Thus, Hurowitz argues that the phrase *mubbil* ($\sqrt{abālu}$) *sippāti* correlates to Joel’s phrase: כל־עצי־השדה יבשו (600). These passages in Joel play in the verb יבש and describe the drying up of wine, farmers, vines, grain, and water. On this, Hurowitz, claims that “a full functional and lexical correspondence” exists between the Akkadian and Hebrew texts. He writes: “It should be noted, incidentally, that the reference to dryness in the biblical text serves as confirmation to a certain extent of the now commonly accepted interpretation of the Akkadian expression!” (600). Hurowitz suggests that the phrase *pārisu sattukkī ša ilī u išarāti*, “which cuts off the daily offerings of the gods and goddesses” should be read in parallel to the statement: הכרת מנהה ונסך מביית יהוה, “vegetable offerings and libations

If Hurowitz correctly identifies a parallel or dependence between Joel and Sargon's Hymn, then several key questions arise. Why does Joel include four stages or types of locusts when the *Hymn to Nanaya* only includes two? What is one to make of the intriguing language in both the Akkadian document and the Hebrew text? More importantly, what does one make of the apparent distinctness of the *Hymn to Nanaya* within Mesopotamian literature? Given the singularity of the reference in the *Hymn to Nanaya*, is it possible to suggest that Joel 1 and the hymn texts share in anything more particular than a cross-cultural fear of locusts and their destruction? How one answers these questions has implications for how one understands verse 4. Without doubt, the description of the locusts indicates total destruction. They have left nothing in their wake.⁵³

Egyptian texts also employ locusts as metaphors in the case of the Kadesh Battle Inscriptions of Ramses II (1279–1213 BCE), which recount his battles with Hatti in his fifth regnal year. These inscriptions, found on the walls of Abydos, Luxor, Karnak, Abu Simbel, the Ramesseum, and two hieratic poems on papyri, describe Ramses II's military exploits and victories. In the account from the Ramesseum, the enemies of Ramses II "cover the mountains

have been cut off from the House of Yhwh." He calls the operative verb *parāsu*, "to cut off," the "interdialectal equivalent of Hebrew *krʾ*" even though כרת also has a direct Akkadian cognate (*CAD* 8:215). Finally, the prayer ends with a request for the gods to stop the destruction of the locusts, which Hurowitz identifies as a "pervasive" parallel to Joel 2:18–27 (601). He further argues that the correlation between the Akkadian text and Joel require explanation. Regardless of Hurowitz's ability to convince, both texts treat locust infestation as a danger in the ancient Near East.

⁵³ Miloš Bič, *Das Buch Joel* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1960), 16–17.

and valleys...like locusts in their multitude,”⁵⁴ thus making Ramses II’s victory over the Hatti all the more impressive.

Several texts in the Hebrew Bible also describe armies in this manner, though in those cases the Hebrew Bible does not describe the armies of Israel and Judah with locust imagery but applies it to the armies of invading forces. Judges describes Israel’s neighbors as being as thick as locusts (Judg 6:3–7; 7:12). Jeremiah 46:22–23 describes Babylon as being “more numerous than locusts; they are without number” (כי רבו מארבה ואין להם מספר). Nahum 3:15–17 describes the inhabitants of Nineveh as locusts quick to flee in the face of their sudden destruction. Here, as in the other examples, Israel’s nemeses are described as locusts to emphasize their innumerability, their insatiability, and their overall size and power.⁵⁵

In short, ancient Near Eastern literature often employed the locust metaphor in its descriptions of military forces. The life of this metaphor extends across exceedingly broad chronological and geographic distances. Therefore, we must reckon with several specific complications in its use.⁵⁶ The Hebrew Bible, for instance, does not treat locusts solely as a metaphor for invading armies and the resulting destruction.

Deuteronomy lists both locust plagues *and* invading armies in the curses that result from disobedience to Yhwh (Deut 28:38–42). Here, the distinct sense is that Yhwh uses *two* types of

⁵⁴ Miriam Lichtheim and Hans-W Fischer-Elfert, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 2, *The New Kingdom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

⁵⁵ One also finds striking descriptions of the Midianites and Amalekites as locusts who destroyed the produce of the land whenever Israel planted seed. Perhaps this depiction recalls the curse in Deut 28:38.

⁵⁶ One’s ability to conceive of one element in terms of the features of another element governs the effectiveness of conceptual metaphors. See George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 5.

events, not one, as recompense. Likewise, the most prominent description of a locust plague appears in Exod 10:1–20, a text that portrays an actual, not a metaphorical, plague of insects. Nevertheless, the texts from the ancient Near East cited above demonstrate that locusts often served as a metaphor for military forces. Based on the numerous references to Deuteronomic theology throughout Joel, it is probable that the invocation of the locusts in chapter 1 recalls the Deuteronomic curses and, therefore, implicitly provides a justification (i.e., punishment for idolatry) for the coming events.

Third Subunit (vv. 5–7)

The third subunit, verses 5–7, forms a distinct subunit arranged by three imperatives directed at specific members of the community.⁵⁷ The event in question explicitly refers to the arrival of a mighty nation, either an infestation of locusts metaphorized as a nation or an actual nation that possesses qualities like locusts.⁵⁸ This verse, however, muddles more than clarifies the image because it describes the nation in leonine terms. Moreover, a “nation” (גוֹי), the only clear antecedent of the third person masculine singular pronominal suffix, attacks Yhwh’s grapevine and fig tree.⁵⁹ The speaker directs the imperatives at those who drink wine, recalling the first woe

⁵⁷ Bič, *Das Buch Joel*, 16–17.

⁵⁸ Nations are regularly characterized as mighty. See Gen 18:18; Isa 8:7; Mic 4:3.

⁵⁹ Elsewhere the phrase “my vineyard” clearly refers to Jerusalem (Jer 12:10).

oracle of the Song of the Vineyard in Isaiah (Isa 5:11–12).⁶⁰ The description of the attackers shifts the image from locusts to a mighty, insatiable nation with teeth like a lion and fangs like a lioness (v. 6).⁶¹ Contrary to the opinions of several interpreters, no linguistic feature appears in verse 6 that explicitly connects the locusts to the nation that is responsible for the destruction.⁶² There are clear reasons *not* to understand the reference as relating to the locusts. The primary reason is that the clause in this context is not linking the nation to the locusts but is instead providing a justification for the mourner’s response, just as the phrase does throughout the rest of the pericope.

Verse 6 is removed from the introduction of the locusts and separated by an additional phrase in v. 5: הקיצו שכורים... והיללו כל־שתי הילק. The phrases cannot be related by enjambment. Throughout the rest of the subunit, the verbs and pronouns refer to a third masculine singular antecedent, the nation. A literary perspective would suggest that the rhetorical question in verse 2 implies that the described event is historically distinct, that there is nothing like it. A locust infestation would likely not be such an event. Moreover, on the grounds of delimitation, the introduction of the nation is a separate and distinct unit from the locusts. Finally, the locusts are

⁶⁰ Prinsloo, *The Theology of the Book of Joel*, 16. Seitz, *Joel*, 132. Kapelrud suggests that wine was “coupled with the fertility cult” (Kapelrud, *Joel Studies*, 18). As a result, he takes the verse to be an overwhelming prophetic critique of wine drinkers as members of the Baal cult.

⁶¹ Several interpreters suggest that the nation referenced in v. 6 is meant to describe the locusts of v. 4. This interpretation is not straightforward, however. First, in direct response to the imperative to wake, wail, and weep in v. 5, v. 6 provides the reason by means of a כִּי. Second, there is no indication that v. 6 introduces a metaphor or simile of any kind. Instead, the verse simply announces that “a nation has risen up against my land” כִּי־גוי עלה עלי-ארצי. Third, the use of singular pronouns beginning in v. 6 and continuing through v. 7 fit most clearly with the singular “nation” in v. 6. Presumably, one would expect plural pronominal suffixes if the locusts in v. 4 were intended as the subject (Seitz, *Joel*, 132). Crenshaw and Barton rely on the proverb of the ants, badgers, and locusts in Prov 30:25–27 to emphasize that the militaristic nature of the insects is less than convincing since just as many examples can be found that describe armies as hordes of locusts (Crenshaw, *Joel*, 95; Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 43–44, 51).

⁶² Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 51.

not mentioned again by name until chapter 2:25—a verse that may be attributed to a later insertion.⁶³

Yhwh’s land, fig tree, and vineyard are (vv. 6, 7) the object of the nation’s destruction.⁶⁴ The image of the fig tree and vineyard is common as a metaphor for Israel and Judah, as in Hos 9:10, where Yhwh claims to have found Israel like grapes in the wilderness and like the first fruits of a fig tree. The nation that attacks Yhwh’s fig tree and vine strip it bare. The verb *הִשָּׁח* is used throughout the prophetic literature in a sexualized sense. In Jer 13:26, for instance, Yhwh “strips off” Judah’s skirts and exposes its shame, and in Isa 47:2 Babylon strips itself of its robes and exposes its shame. In Isa 20:4, Yhwh causes the Egyptians and Ethiopians to go into exile with their buttocks stripped bare. The scope of destruction is larger than the destruction of agricultural produce alone; it may, based on other prophetic texts, include the destruction of Judah itself and its subsequent exile.

Fourth Subunit (vv. 8–10)

The next subunit describes the danger in language that, despite the preceding mixed metaphor, is clear. The imperative is not directed at any group in particular, but the feminine singular ending of the verb may suggest that it is directed at the nation, which is often depicted as a woman.⁶⁵

⁶³ Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 89–90.

⁶⁴ The distinction between the prophet and Yhwh is fluid in prophetic speech. See Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 240.

⁶⁵ Prinsloo, *The Theology of the Book of Joel*, 18.

The unit extends the devastation directly to the מנחה and the נסך offerings of the cult and emphasize the total destruction of the fields and arable land as well as the agricultural produce. Finally, the farmers and vintners mourn. Just as the priests and ministers must wait for the destruction of the means of their work, the various offerings, so too the farmers and vinedressers lament the destruction of their means and labor (vv. 11 and 12). Verse 12 provides resumptive repetition with verse 7 by reintroducing the fig tree and vine.

The subunit shifts the imagery from the wine drinkers and the destruction of vineyards to the image of a young woman mourning the loss of her husband (v. 8). The implied reason for this lamentation is that the grain and drink offerings have been cut off from Yhwh's house and the priests and ministers mourn over the destruction of the fields and grain. In this stanza, it becomes clearer that the objects of destruction are the fields and agricultural goods of Judah.⁶⁶

The language in this subunit introduces—or at least reconceptualizes—the invaders' damage by shifting the imagery from the fig tree and grapevine to the fields, the earth, and Judah's agricultural produce: grain, wine, and oil. Elsewhere these elements are indicative of Yhwh's blessing (Jer 31:12; Hos 2:10) and their removal suggests his displeasure and his punishment (Hos 2:24). In Deuteronomy, the prospering of these elements results from obedience to Yhwh's ordinances and covenant (Deut 7:13; 11:14). The people must tithe from these elements and they are, therefore, important features of the cult (Deut 12:17; 14:23; 18:4). According to the Chronicler, righteous kings, like Hezekiah, were rewarded with storehouses full of such goods (2 Chr 32:28). Likewise, disobedience to Yhwh's commands results in a foreign nation, of strange tongue, consuming all the fruits of the ground, including the grain, new wine,

⁶⁶ The reference to the drink and grain offerings, מנחה ונסך, as a reference to the daily sacrifices of the temple is unusual outside of texts from the Persian and postexilic periods. As a result, some interpreters have understood this usage to underscore the text's identification as a postexilic work (Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 53).

and oil. Haggai invokes a drought on these products until the house of Yhwh is rebuilt (Hag 1:11). Curiously, however, the damage done to these central products is not the destruction generally wrought by locusts, but by drought. The grain is destroyed, the ground dries up, new wine dries up, and the wine dries up. Thus, the event that destroys Israel seems to be a drought. Verse 10 provides the explanation to the “cutting off” of the grain offerings in verse 9. Simply put, the offerings no longer exist because the ground no longer produces the products that made up the offerings.

Fifth Subunit (vv. 11–12)

Verses 11 and 12 address the farmers and vinedressers and begin like the rest of the subunits with an imperative, *הבישו*. The announcement and the delimitation of the text indicate a new audience while both continuing the image of dried-up produce and returning the focus of the pericope to the initial foci of destruction—the fig tree and the vine—by addressing the caretakers of the plants explicitly. Ultimately, the destruction of the crops results in the dismay of the farmers and vintners.

Throughout the passage, the metaphor of the devastation of Yhwh’s fig tree and vine is standardized by references to the destruction of Judah’s agricultural system. Notably, the agent of destruction is not always an external force, and at times the earth and plants simply dry up and wither away. Interpreters explain this feature by suggesting that the pericope describes a drought that follows the locust plague.⁶⁷ Finally, the next unit, verses 13–20, describes the events for

⁶⁷ Thérèse Frankfort, “Le *יָבֵשׁ* de Joël 1:12,” *VT* 10 (1960): 445–48.

which no locust could be responsible: the drying up of the waters and fields destroyed by wildfires.

Iconography

Despite the lack of repeated reference to locusts in Joel 1:1–12, the insects feature prominently in interpretation of the pericope. As the destroyer of Yhwh’s fig tree and vine, discerning the role of the locust in the passage is important. Textual analysis of locusts has already been discussed.

What has been lacking is attention to iconographic analysis of locusts. In the following, the iconographic point of departure comes from a set of Levantine stamp seals that depict locusts. I argue that these materials build upon traditions and motifs from Mesopotamian and Egyptian sources.

As these images suggest, locusts were incorporated into iconography to demonstrate a set of associations: their potential for destruction; their unpredictability; and the need to control locusts. Success in defending against locusts and controlling them indicated the success of the king and nation. The materials below come from the eighth through the sixth centuries, spanning several cultures. They exhibit the influence of both Egyptian and Neo-Assyrian art. While this chronological range may be considered too distant from the sixth- to fourth-century dating of Joel, recall that locust images are widely distributed and that the use of locusts in visual materials from the ancient world goes back at least to the Old Babylonian period (2000–1600 BCE) and the Old Kingdom of Egypt (2686–2181 BCE).⁶⁸

⁶⁸ See the “Old Babylonian” cylinder seal (34.1443) held by the Boston Museum of Fine Art: “Cylinder Seal,” <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/247207/cylinder-seal>. For the locusts in the scene on the west wall of the

Locusts appear in the fine and minor arts of Egypt. Some scholars have suggested that the image of the locust in Egypt was related to good fortune and protection. For example, cosmetic boxes appear in the shape of locusts, and it is thought that the symbol protected not only the contents of the box, but also the person who used them.⁶⁹ Amulets and other items of jewelry in the shape of insects, particularly beetles, flies, and locusts, were popular in ancient Egypt as well.

Positive associations of insects are common in Egyptian jewelry and iconography. Flies in ancient Egyptian iconography are a good example. Gold fly pendants were given to particularly valiant or successful soldiers for their behavior in battle. It may be that the



Figure 2.1. Dagger decorated with two lions and four locusts. Bronze. 1525–1500 BCE. Louvre Museum. E27218.

Chapel of Kagemni, see Patrick F. Houlihan, *The Animal World of the Pharaohs* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 192.

⁶⁹ See Christiane Desroches Noblecourt, *Gifts from the Pharaohs: How Ancient Egyptian Civilizations Shaped the Modern World* (Paris: Flammarion, 2007), 44. Still others have suggested that the container was selected because the cosmetics were made primarily from grasshopper oil. See Houlihan, *The Animal World of the Pharaohs*, 193. Both suggestions are quite speculative.

persistence and aggression of flies recalled the actions of soldiers in battle.⁷⁰ In the Eighteenth Dynasty, the number of gold flies he had earned accompanied a soldier's name and were listed among his accomplishments. Other scholars have suggested that flies were helpful in conveying the soul or spirit of a person (*ka*) to the afterlife. Locusts may also have been understood as conveyers of a person's *ka* to the afterlife.⁷¹ Additionally, they feature prominently on seals or amulets and may also have had some significance with military activity, as some texts suggest.⁷² Some scholars have suggested that locust amulets bestowed fertility, plenty, or riches, based on the swarming behavior of the insects, such descriptions need not necessarily refer to destruction in a negative sense.⁷³ Others have argued for a purely apotropaic function of the insect-shaped amulet, proposing that it was useful for warding off locust invasions.⁷⁴

Hieroglyphically, the sign of the locusts, *snhm*, is polyvalent and can refer to locusts and to other insects, be a determinative for places, and refer to the multitudinous qualities of a group.⁷⁵ Positive associations were thus possible between individuals and locusts even while being associated with the destructive or fleeting nature of the insects. The motif of the Pharaoh

⁷⁰ See Hansen, "Insects," in *OEAE* 2:162; and Dorothea Arnold, "Egyptian Bestiary," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin: New Series* 52, no. 4 (1995): 48.

⁷¹ Arnold, "Egyptian Bestiary," 49.

⁷² Gene Kritsky, "Beetle Gods, King Bees, and Other Insects of Ancient Egypt," *KMT: A Modern Journal of Ancient Egypt* 4, no. 1 (1993): 36–37.

⁷³ Mohamed Ragab Sayed, "Locust and Its Signification in Ptolemaic Texts," *Journal of Historical Archaeology and Anthropological Sciences* 3, no. 4 (2018): 585.

⁷⁴ Mohamed A. Kenawy and Yousrya M. Abdel-Hamid, "Insects in Ancient (Pharaonic) Egypt: A Review of Fauna, Their Mythological and Religious Significance and Associated Diseases," *Egyptian Academic Journal of Biological Sciences* 8, no. 1 (2015): 21.

⁷⁵ Dimitri Meeks, "De quelques 'Insectes' égyptiens entre lexique et paléographie," in *Perspectives on Ancient Egypt: Studies in Honor of Edward Brovarski*, Supplement ASAE 40, ed. Zahi Hawass, Peter Der Manuelian, and Ramadan B. Hussein (Cairo: SCA, 2010), 291.

standing on and over his enemies and trampling them underfoot is well attested in the Egyptian record.⁷⁶ Certain ceremonial items, like a dagger belonging to Queen Ahhotep, depict Egypt's armies, and at times its enemies, as locusts (fig. 2.1).⁷⁷ The dagger is significant because, like Joel, it combines leonine imagery with locust imagery.



Figure 2.2. Stamp seal with locust. Carnelian. Jerusalem. Unknown provenance. Moussaieff Collection. Avigad and Sass, WSS 140, fig. 310

Levantine Stamp Seals with Locusts

Locusts appear occasionally in West Semitic iconography. Two stamp seals bearing locusts have an unknown provenance, and their authenticity has been debated.⁷⁸ Other seals bearing similar images have been found *in situ* at Meggido. Some scholars, like Avigad, accept the unprovenanced seals as authentic because of



Figure 2.3. Stamp seal with locust. Private collection. Unknown provenance. Avigad and Sass, WSS, 141, fig. 313.

⁷⁶ The single-field divider challenges the interpretation that the sphinx treads upon the locusts. Sass takes it to be a family emblem. See Sass, "The Pre-Exilic Hebrew Seals," 217–18.

⁷⁷ Christiane Desroches Noblecourt has argued, on the basis of comparable texts such as the Ramesside inscriptions, that these locusts represent Egypt's army, which stands ready as a swarm of locusts to devour her enemies. She writes: "The locusts...generally suggested the idea of multitude, comparable to groups of soldiers 'swarming like locusts,' ready to decimate the enemy" (*Gifts from the Pharaohs*, 44). By contrast, Jaromir Malek argues that the locusts represent the pharaoh's enemies and that the dagger depicts the royal responsibility of subduing enemies and maintaining order. Malek makes explicit comparison between the prostrated enemies who raise their heads and the shape of locusts to support his argument. See Jaromir Malek, "Locusts on the Daggers of Ahmose," in *Chief of Seers. Egyptian Studies in Memory of Cyril Aldred*, ed. Elizabeth Goring et al. (New York: Kegan Paul International, 1997), 210. See also the throne of Amenhotep III in Othmar Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen und Siegelkunst: Eine neue Deutung der Majestätsschilderungen in Jes 6, Ez 1 und 10 und Sach 4*, SBS 84/85 (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1977), 90, Abb 49.

⁷⁸ G. Garbini, "I sigilli del regno di Israele," *OrAnt* 21 (1982):170–171.

the provenanced seals (fig. 2.3). The most that can be said about the unprovenanced seals is that they bear Yahwistic names. One possible interpretation of seals like figures 2.2 and 2.3 is that the locusts functioned as the owner's family emblem.⁷⁹ In this case, the owner would likely choose or be assigned the insect because of a symbolic quality associated with the creature.⁸⁰ It stands to reason that such qualities would be positive and not negative.

The seal from Meggido (fig. 2.4) presents an elegant depiction consisting of two Egyptianizing images with a register.⁸¹ In the upper register stands a griffin wearing the double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt, as well as a kilt. The creature faces the *ankh* symbol, the hieroglyph for "life." Interspersed between its legs are the Hebrew characters *het*, *mem*, and *nun*, comprising the Hebrew name "Hamman." Though based on circumstantial evidence, it is possible, and has been suggested by David Ussishkin, that this seal belonged to a government official.⁸² In the bottom register is a locust, which faces the same direction as the griffin.⁸³ The seal is clearly an Egyptianizing form



Figure 2.4. Stamp seal with sphinx and locust. Scaraboid. Black serpentine. 8th century. Jerusalem. WSS, 99, fig. 160.

⁷⁹ Benjamin Sass, "The Pre-Exilic Hebrew Seals: Iconism vs. Aniconism," in *Studies in the Iconography of Northwest Semitic Inscribed Seals: Proceedings of a Symposium Held in Fribourg on April 17–20, 1991*, ed. Benjamin Sass and Christoph Uehlinger, OBO 125 (Fribourg: University Press, 1993), 217–18.

⁸⁰ Othmar Keel and Thomas Staubli, *Im Schatten deiner Flügel: Tiere in der Bibel und im Alten Orient* (Fribourg: University Press, 2001), 28.

⁸¹ While the register may depict two distinct images, I follow Staples, who suggests that the overall image fits within a broader motif of Pharaoh and his representatives trampling over Egyptian enemies.

⁸² David Ussishkin, "Gate 1567 at Megiddo and the Seal of Shema," in *Scripture and Other Artifacts: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Honor of Philip J. King*, ed. Michael D. Coogan, J. Cheryl Exum, and Lawrence E. Stager (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 423.

⁸³ Griffins, sun disks, and sphinxes were common symbols associated with royal and divine iconography and were often incorporated into local workshops of Palestine. See Pirhiya Beck, "The Art of Palestine during the Iron Age II: Local Traditions and External Influences (10th–8th Centuries BCE)," in *Images as Media: Sources for*

since the griffin is a well-known figure in Egyptian stamp seals and less so in Mesopotamian seals.⁸⁴ Despite the use of the register that divides the scene, Staples suggests that a victory scene of the griffin of the multitudes may be intended by this seal.⁸⁵

Moreover, as representations of the king, griffins and sphinxes trample their enemies.⁸⁶ In Israel and Judah, the falcon-headed griffin and the human-headed sphinx were often associated with solar imagery of the deity.⁸⁷ Thus, an Israelite or Judean context for these seals may be charged with associations with the solar god, which Keel and Uehlinger refer to as the “Most High God,” triumphing over his enemies.⁸⁸ Another suggestion may be that the locust is meant



Figure 2.5. Seal of Ahisur. Carnelian. 8th century. Jerusalem. Bible Lands Museum. WSS, 286, fig. 763.

to be apotropaic, a charm to ward off locust-related destruction. *Mischwesen*, such as griffins and

the Cultural History of the Near East and the Eastern Mediterranean (1st Millennium BCE), ed. Christoph Uehlinger, OBO 175 (Fribourg, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 165–83.

⁸⁴ W. E. Staples, “An Inscribed Scaraboid from Megiddo,” in *New Light from Armageddon: Second Provisional Report (1927–29) on the Excavations at Megiddo in Palestine*, ed. P. L. O. Guy, OIC 9 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931), 51.

⁸⁵ Staples, “An Inscribed Seal,” 63.

⁸⁶ Christoph Uehlinger, “Mischwesen,” in *NLB* (Zürich: Benziger Verlag AG, 1991), 2: 819.

⁸⁷ Christoph Uehlinger, “Mischwesen,” 2: 819–20. Beck argues that the ways in which traditional Egyptian motifs and symbols were used in Israel and Judah show that they “had a life of their own, not necessarily related to the role they played in their culture of origin.” Beck, “The Art of Palestine,” 165–66.

⁸⁸ Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*, 222. The transition of Egyptian royal iconography to Judean solar symbols toward the end of the eighth century is well documented. The heightened usage of Egyptian monarchic symbols for Judean religious themes may be evidence of the growing Egyptian influence of the region as Yhwh becomes the “Most High God” and the “Lord of Heaven.” See Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*, 270–81. These terms are also applied to the Egyptian god Horus, whose symbol was a falcon and who was closely associated with the pharaoh. See Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1948), 37.

sphinxes, commonly function as guardians of sacred trees, important people, and sacred sites. With this protective function of the griffin in mind, the image depicts the griffin dutifully protecting the *ankh*-symbol—life, that is—from the potential destruction of the locusts.

Two Aramaic seals bear Assyrian motifs that contain locusts. Furthermore, one clay bulla depicts a locust in the upper register above an inscription bearing the date, owner, and father of the owner.⁸⁹ The kneeling man motif in the West Semitic Seal (fig. 2.5) is known



Figure 2.6. Scaraboid seal with griffins and locust. Quartz. End of 6th c. Paris. Syria. Bibliothèque Nationale. WSS, 306, fig. 819.

from the first-millennium Mesopotamian seals and as far back as the Old Babylonian period and Middle Assyrian period. The kneeling man fits within motifs of the atlantid scene traditions and, according to Ornan, has origins in Old Babylonian and Middle Assyrian Periods. As such, the figure should be identified as a semidivine protector akin to the *apkallu* and *lahmu*.⁹⁰ The atlantid scene relies on a motif of humans, semidivine demons, stools, or other bearers supporting an inanimate object such as a sun or crescent disk. In this case, the kneeling man in a short tunic fits within the Mitannian, proto-Assyrian motif that forms a coherent group in the fourteenth century.⁹¹ Matthews suggests that while early forms of this motif depicted heaven, the Assyrian versions after Tukulti-Ninurta emphasized the divine nature of the *lahmu* as a royal symbol and

⁸⁹ This collection is also held by Shlomo Moussaieff. See Robert Deutsch, “A Hoard of Fifty Hebrew Clay Bullae from the Time of Hezekiah,” in *Shlomo: Studies in Epigraphy, Iconography, History and Archaeology in Honor of Shlomo Moussaieff*, ed. Robert Deutsch (Tel Aviv-Jaffa: Archaeological Center Publication, 2003), 60.

⁹⁰ Talay Ornan, “The Mesopotamian Influence on West Semitic Inscribed Seals: A Preference for the Depiction of Mortals,” in *Studies in Northwest Semitic Inscribed Seals: Proceedings of a Symposium held in Fribourg on April 17–20, 1991*, ed. Benjamin Sass and Christoph Uehlinger (Fribourg: University Press, 1993), 60.

⁹¹ Donald M. Matthews, *Principles of Composition in Near Eastern Glyptic of the Later Second Millennium B.C.*, OBO.SA 8 (Fribourg: University Press, 1990), 109.

with strong associations to kingship.⁹² In the carnelian seal, the muscular *lahmu* figure supports a winged sun while facing a gazelle and a locust, thus emphasizing his maintenance of the divine order in the face of the traditional elements of the wild and unknown.⁹³ The Aramaic scaraboid in figure 2.6 presents an image of a winged sun disk over two griffins facing one another. They sit above a locust, and the remaining space is filled with the Aramaic inscription *lnnz* (or possibly, *lnni*) that has parallels with Judean bullae from the end of the sixth century.⁹⁴ Bordreuil suggests that the seal may have been reused in a later period.⁹⁵ Griffins often bear the solar disk in atlantid scenes. In scene on fig. 2.6, however, the griffins sit on their haunches over the locust and under the winged sundisk. The scene does not depict battle or even an attempt to actively control a foreign or wild danger. Thus, it should be viewed as a peaceful scene where in the griffins offer divine protect and favor. Keel and Uehlinger make a similar adjudication in their interpretation of seated griffins on seals from Meggido.⁹⁶ Notably, they associate the standing or crouching/sitting griffin with symbols of life, protection of the solar deity, and kingship. Thus, this scene may function within the royal or kingship motif along with the previous seal.

⁹² Matthews, *Principles*, 109. See also Nahum Avigad, "Notes on Some Inscribed Syro-Phoenician Seals," *BASOR* 189 (1968): 45.

⁹³ Gazelle were renowned for their adaptability and quick flight. They have never been successfully domesticated on a large scale and are found in the desert plains and mountainous regions. See Edwin Firmage, "Zoology," *ABD* 6: 1141.

⁹⁴ Pierre Bordreuil, *Catalogue des sceaux ouest-sémitiques inscrits de la Bibliothèque Nationale, du Musée du Louvre et du Musée biblique de Bible et Terre Sainte* (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1986), 95.

⁹⁵ This grammatical form may come from the early part of the sixth century. See Bordreuil, *Catalogue*, 95.

⁹⁶ Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, 254.

Conclusion

The question of the locusts in Joel 1 is heavily dependent on the “direction one reads” the metaphor of the locusts and the army. In other words, interpreters must decide for themselves whether the locusts are a metaphor for a human army, or if the description of an army later in chapter 2 is a metaphor for the locusts. The question is: What is the metaphor? And what is the relationship between the frames of reference?⁹⁷ Most interpreters take the locusts in this chapter as a reference to an actual locust plague and interpret the description of an army in chapter 2 as a metaphor for the destruction the locusts wrought. Thus, the work of the army in chapter 2 describes what the locusts do.

In the preceding section, however, I showed that locusts, in both images and texts, routinely function as symbols for the destructive power and size of human armies. In this case, the point of reference is a group of human beings who function *like* locusts. It stands to reason that Joel would draw on a similar conceptual practice to describe militant groups of humans as ravenous locusts and would not describe locusts in terms of human armies.⁹⁸ To say that an army is a locust swarm is not the same thing as saying that a locust swarm is an army.

⁹⁷ For a helpful discussion of metaphor and metaphor theory, see Paul K.-K. Cho, *Myth, History, and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 19–24. In his discussion, Cho takes up the complex relationship between the “frames of reference” that make up a metaphor, and he complicates the conversation by considering as well the “real” world in which the author sits and the “fictive” world which the author fabricates. He points out that not only can a metaphorical relationship exist between frames of reference within a text, but the text can also exist metaphorically to the world outside of the text (26). Thus, there is no reason, especially within poetic speech, to collapse the fictive world into the real world. On the relation between metaphorical and literal meanings, see the discussion in Joseph Lam, *Patterns of Sin in the Hebrew Bible: Metaphor, Culture, and the Making of a Religious Concept* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 6–14.

⁹⁸ Metaphors rely on a particular kind of relationship between part A and part B. In other words, a metaphor can be boiled down to the formula “A is B.” But such a formula does not state that “A is not B” or that “A is like B.” Thus the fundamental feature of metaphor depends on a “nonequivalence” between the two frames of reference (Cho, *Myth, History, and Metaphor*, 27, 33–34). For a summary of metaphor and its importance to biblical studies and imagery in the Hebrew Bible, see Tyler R. Yoder, *Fishers of Fish and Fishers of Men: Fishing Imagery in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016).

Whatever the case, the textual and iconographic data from the ancient Near East combine to suggest four options. First, the locusts in Joel 1 could be a metaphorical description of an invading army approaching the land with the purpose of totally destroying the land. This interpretation is textually supported by the description of Judah as Yhwh's vulnerable fig tree and vine. Moreover, the emphasis throughout the chapter (vv. 1–12) on the destruction of the land uses language that generally belongs in the realm of military destruction and not locust plagues. The Egyptianizing examples of locusts under the feet of a sphinx may suggest triumph of a royal guardian over a devouring force.

Second, the invocation of locusts near the beginning of Joel's call to response functions similarly to the appearance of locusts in Mesopotamian iconographic cultic scenes and textual invocations. In other words, based on comparison between the textual and iconographic depictions of locusts in Old Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian materials, Joel's use of locust imagery should be understood as a specific literary device and not a description of an historical event. It is notable that throughout the first unit of Joel's message, the locusts never function as the subjects of verbs or the referent of the pronominal suffixes. Interpretations to the contrary must regularly justify their position by viewing the nation, *יג*, in verse 6 as a metaphor for the locusts in verse 4. Another plausible explanation is that the locusts are the metaphor for the nation.

Third, locusts appear in Assyrian iconographic contexts as controlled agents of chaos. They appear alongside mythic or semidivine figures like the kneeling man, winged griffins, and winged anthropoid genii, which govern over the locust and other powers. The semidivine figures often appear under the auspices of the winged solar disk.

Fourth and finally, the iconography of Egypt, particularly from the New Kingdom, uses locusts to represent Egypt's military forces and enemies by means of images inscribed on

ceremonial weapons and are given as awards to soldiers for valor in battle. In these cases, the usefulness of the locusts as a metaphor for soldiers likely relates to their relentlessness and ravenousness. The association of traits of locusts with individuals can also be found on seals from Israel/Palestine. While it is beyond our ability to know which locust traits the owner of these seals wished to invoke, it may be presumed that positive associations existed between the owner and locusts.

In the end, the polyvalent use of locusts in the ancient Near East and the Hebrew Bible requires a reconsideration of the interpretation of the locusts in Joel 1:4. At first glance, the opening units of the book of Joel provide several interpretive options. Interpreters have typically focused on two of these: either the words of Joel 1 refer to an actual (that is, historical) plague of locusts sent by Yhwh as part of Judah's punishment, or they represent the human enemies who lay siege to Jerusalem and devastate the countryside. When the locusts are contextualized within the iconography of the Levant and surrounding regions, however, one discovers that they function much more often as metaphorical depictions of enemies and armies, who *like* locusts devour everything in their midst. Moreover, attention to the textual description of the locust in verses 6–7 demonstrates the additional metaphors stacked on top of the locust: namely, that they have teeth like lions, and that they destroy Yhwh's fig tree, itself a prophetic metaphor for Judah and Israel (Jer 24:6; Hos 9:10).⁹⁹ In order to make sense of Joel's message, one need not read the locusts of verse 4 as a reference to a historical infestation. As I have shown, locusts functioned as symbols for invading armies and generalized chaos throughout the Near East.

⁹⁹ On tree imagery in the prophets, see Göran Eidevall, "Trees and Traumas."

Joel 1:13–20

The forces that destroy Yhwh's fig tree and vine extend their work to the ultimate reaches of Judean society. Surprisingly, the destruction is not marked by words associated with locusts. Instead, the text relies on other images of destruction: drought and fire. Ultimately, the disaster burns up the food stores and dries up the water sources, in so doing affecting both wild and domesticated animals. This section explores the iconography of the final image of the oracle: the wandering cattle, the suffering sheep, and the panting beasts.

Delimitation

The unit from 1:13–20 is defined primarily by the existence of the *setumah* and the *petuhah*, which have already been discussed.¹⁰⁰

Translation

¹³Gird yourselves and lament O Priests,
Howl O ministers of the altar.
Come, lodge in sackcloths O servants of God.
For grain offering and drink offering are withheld from the house of your God.

¹⁴Consecrate a fast, call an assembly¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Both the Aleppo and the Leningrad codices introduce *setumot* at this point in the text. The stop is indicated by a space roughly five or six characters wide. The *petuhot* are made up of similar spacing. 4QXIIg, v. 14 is followed by a *vacat*.

¹⁰¹ 4QXII^g adds a *vav* before the imperative קראו and proposes אסופו rather than the MT's אספו. Gelston attributes the latter difference to a difference of grammar. See, *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 29.

gather elders, all dwellers of the earth at the house of Yhwh your God.
Call out to Yhwh!

¹⁵Woe for the day!
For the day of Yhwh is near
and like destruction from Shaddai¹⁰² it comes.

¹⁶Is food not cut off before our eyes
joy and rejoicing from the house of our God?

¹⁷The seed¹⁰³ shrivels¹⁰⁴ under their shovel
the storehouses are desolate
granaries are destroyed
for the grain¹⁰⁵ has dried up.

¹⁸How the beasts¹⁰⁶ groan
the herds of cattle wander
for there is no pasture for them
even the herds of sheep suffer.¹⁰⁷

¹⁹To you, O Yhwh, I cry out
for fire devoured the pastures of the wilderness,
and a flame burned up the trees of the field.
²⁰Even the beasts of the field pant for you
because the rivers of water have dried up
and fire devoured the pastures of the wilderness.

¹⁰² Leningradensis contains an error by not placing a *dagesh* within the *shin*. Aleppo and the Cairo Codex produce the correct spelling. The Vulgate, the Syriac, and the Targum read with Aleppo and the Cairo Codex. The OG introduces an error by haplography. See, Gelston, *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 30.

¹⁰³ Based on פרת¹⁰³, 4QXII^c, Targum, Old Greek and Syriac read “heifer.” Vulgate reads *iumenta* as an exegetical expansion. See, Gelston, *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 30.

¹⁰⁴ 4QXII^c reads עקשו instead of עבשו, which Symmachus, the Vulgate, Syriac, and Targum attest. See, Gelston, *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 30.

¹⁰⁵ Aquilia supports the MT by means of a different vocalization. The Old Greek and Targum read “trough.” See, Gelston, *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 30.

¹⁰⁶ 4QXII^c reads בהמה with the Vulgate, Syriac, and Targum. See, Gelston, *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 30.

¹⁰⁷ The meaning here is difficult. According to Gelston, G and T rely on an assimilation based on the root שׁמם for their reading “obliterated.” V and S provide their reading of via semantic liberty. See, *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 30.

Iconic Structure of Joel 1:13–20

The first two units continue the structure from verse 12 by means of the continued imperative-causation pattern. In a resumption of the previous units, the call to action ends with mention of the major categories of people: the priests, the elders, and the dwellers in the land. All are called to come to the house of God, an apparent reference to the temple, to fast, and to call out to Yhwh. Notably, the people are not called to offer sacrifices. They are, presumably, unable to offer anything because of the destruction of the fields and of the animals described in the previous verse.

The units move from a description of the destruction of grain offerings and drink offerings (v. 13) to the total absence of food (vv. 16–17), to the suffering of the animals that lack adequate food and water (vv. 18–20). The second major iconic constellation focuses on the animals of the land and their suffering on account of the destruction described in the previous section. Ultimately, the destruction wrought by the nation described as ravenous locusts impinges on the well-being of the cattle and other domesticated herds of Judah. While the passage also includes ritual language and lamentation that accompanies the response to the destruction, the animals function as the foundation of the passage. They do so in two ways. First, they demonstrate the depth of destruction and the reach of Judah's troubles; even the animals suffer. Second, since agricultural produce and livestock make up the backbone of the Yahwistic sacrificial system, the destruction of the animals, their pastures, and the fields in which produce is grown will have a direct and profound impact on the ability to make sacrifices to Yhwh. Thus, the destruction of even the beasts of the field will have economic and ritual impacts on the nation. Hence, the constellation of images here demonstrates the intertwining nature of the agricultural life with ritual life in the ancient world.

First Subunit (v. 13)

The first unit of this pericope (the fourth subunit in the entire announcement) addresses the priests and the ministers within the house of God, presumably the temple in Jerusalem. The instructions given to the cultic actors suggest traditional forms of lament that are well known in the Hebrew Bible.¹⁰⁸ The donning of sackcloth is, of course, one of the most prominent and recognizable features of lament. The reason for the priests' lamentation is the fact that the various grain offerings and drink offerings are withheld.¹⁰⁹ The cessation of these offerings indicates the stoppage of routine offerings to Yhwh, but also suggests that the devastation that afflicted the dwellers of the land now afflicts the priests. In short, they too are no longer able to eat or drink their requisite portions of the temple sacrifices.

As with the rest of the chapter, this unit frustratingly avoids clear subjects for the verbal forms by using passive verbal forms. For instance, the *niphal* form of מנע obfuscates the agent. Although some interpreters take the verb as a reference to the locusts from verse 4, there is no clear indication that locusts should be the subject of the verb in verse 13. In fact, מנע is never used of pestilence in the Hebrew Bible, and is only twice associated with drought (Jer 3:3; Amos

¹⁰⁸ Most prominently in Josh 3:7–8; but also in 1 Kgs 21:9, 12; Amos 5:16; Isa 22:12; Jer 36:9; Ezek 8:21; 2 Chr 20:3. For a full discussion of the “Call to Lament” genre see Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 21.

¹⁰⁹ The מנחה in the Priestly system seems to indicate a specific type of grain offering rather than a “gift offering” (Lev 2). Even as a gift offering, however, the usage in Joel 1 may still indicate an undercutting of the economic element of Israelite society (Gary Anderson, “Sacrifice and Sacrificial Offerings [OT],” in *ABD* 5:875). Libation sacrifices (נסך) appear regularly with grain offerings (מנחה) in P and, together, may be a supplement to the עלה (Dohman, נסך *nāsak*, *TDOT* 9:458).

4:7). Often, the word refers to God's actions of withholding or restraining people and events.¹¹⁰

Ultimately, then, the agent of this passage should be understood not as the locusts of verse 4 but as Yhwh, who enacts punishment against the people via the nations of the earth.

Second Subunit (v. 14)

The second subunit places the solution to the problem at the location of the problem: within the house of God. The solution is also, conveniently, a likely outcome of the problem.¹¹¹ If food and drink are cut off, what can one do other than fast?

Debates around the chronological position of the book focus on the phrase בית יהוה אלהים by understanding it as a reference to the temple, either the first or second temple.¹¹² Scholars who take chapters 1–2:27 as a work of the preexilic period must answer for the fact that the book lacks any reference to a king, a feature common in other preexilic prophetic works. Likewise, scholars with a preference for a Second Temple period origin must address the problem of what may be a postexilic militaristic danger posed to Judah and the fact that other textual evidence for

¹¹⁰ The verbal form often relates to the notion of “restraining” another. For instance, God withholds or restrains (Gen 30:2; Num 24:11; 1 Sam 25:26 [bloodshed]; Ezek 31:15 [Sheol]; Ps 21:2; 84:11; Job 38:15; Neh 9:20). Additionally, individuals can withhold items (Num 22:16; Prov 3:27; 11:26; 23:13; 30:7; Eccl 2:10; Jer 48:10 [sword]). People can withhold specific actions (Job 20:13; 22:7; 31:16). Prophets withhold messages (Jer 4:24). Those who wield power over others, like kings, can restrain other individuals (2 Sam 13:13; 1 Kgs 20:7). A person can restrain parts of their body, or have those elements restrained by someone else (Jer 2:25 [feet]; 31:16 [voice]; Prov 1:15 [foot]). Conceptual notions like sin can also restrain or withhold (Jer 5:15).

¹¹¹ Perhaps this is an attempt to “ritualize” their reality by making the starvation into a ritual and liturgical act. See James R. Linville, “The Day of Yahweh and the Mourning of the Priests in Joel,” in *The Priests in the Prophets: The Portrayal of Priests, Prophets, and Other Religious Specialists in the Latter Prophets*, ed. Lester L. Grabbe and Alice Ogden Bellis, JSOTSup 408 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2004), 104, 110; and Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 108–9.

¹¹² Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 55.

a later date is vague at best.¹¹³ In short, what this verse suggests is not that sacrifices cannot happen because of the destruction of the temple, but instead, that cultic practices are at risk because of the absence of the very materials needed to make food and drink offerings. Thus the appropriate response is a cultic response that is not necessarily dependent on sacrifice, namely consecration, assembly, and fast. Such acts culminate in the calling out to Yhwh “your God,” a common Deuteronomic phrase that appears regularly in the first half of Joel.¹¹⁴

Verse 14 demonstrates the far-reaching consequences of agricultural destruction. When the fields and their produce are destroyed, the implications go beyond merely feeding oneself to challenging the foundational structures of society. In this case, the destruction of produce directly impinges on the worship of Yhwh. The remaining subunits extend the implications of the destruction even further to the wild beasts and domesticated animals in Judah.

Third Subunit (v. 15)

The third subunit begins the formal lament. Joel’s cry does not lament the arrival of the locusts in verse 4 by name, but instead focuses on the arrival of the Day of Yhwh. Although the precise meaning of the phrase remains unclear, we should not ignore the theocentric focus of the subunits to this point. The text instructs the people to cry out to their God (v. 14) because the Day of Yhwh (v. 15) is near. Moreover, the objects of destruction to this point have been Yhwh’s land (v. 6), his fig tree and vine (v. 7), the grain offering and drink offering (v. 9 and 13), and the

¹¹³ Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 16. One explanation is that the reference to the “house of God” is an extrapolation to suggest that Joel’s calls to the elders and “all the dwellers of the land” to come to the temple provide evidence of the “smallness of the postexilic community of Jerusalem and Judah” (Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 33).

¹¹⁴ Elsewhere: 2:13, 14, 23, 25, 27; 4:17.

agricultural produce (vv. 10–11). Clearly, the affliction of the land extends beyond merely the agricultural and economic realms of Judah and pierces its most significant realities.

The lament begins with a phrase typical of similar laments in prophetic literature.¹¹⁵ The introductory cry introduces this subunit as a lament.¹¹⁶ Often, these laments are addressed directly to Yhwh.¹¹⁷ Like the cry in Ezek 30:2, Joel's cry announces the approach of the Day of Yhwh. The Day of Yhwh, according to Joel, brings destruction for Shaddai. Thus, lamentation is the only appropriate response to the arrival of this day. The Day of Yhwh is a central theme within Joel and possibly within the Book of the Twelve.¹¹⁸ The destruction of Shaddai fits within other descriptions of the Day of Yhwh as a day of violent divine wrath.¹¹⁹ So also in Joel, the Day depicts an attack on the people of Judah (2:1–11) and is a day of judgment for the nations (4:1–2).

¹¹⁵ See, for instance, Isa 13:6 (an almost perfect parallel); Ezek 30:2–3; and Zeph 1:7. This phrase appears earlier in Joel's announcement (v.5) and continues the form. However, whether Joel's use is ritually or liturgically accurate may be subject to debate (Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 23).

¹¹⁶ See, for instance, Josh 7:7; Jer 4:10; 14:13; 32:17; Ezek 4:14; 9:8; 11:13; 21:5.

¹¹⁷ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 23.

¹¹⁸ For a recent study of the Day of Yhwh, see Paul-Gerhard Schwesig, *Die Rolle der Tag-JHWHs-Dichtungen im Dodekapropheten*, BZAW 366 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006). For an analysis of the differences and similarities that characterize the Day of Yhwh in the Book of the Twelve, see Rolf Rendtorff, "Alas for the Day! The 'Day of the LORD' in the Book of the Twelve," in *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggemann*, ed. Tod Linafelt and Timothy K. Beal (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 186–97.

¹¹⁹ In Gerhard von Rad's form critical study of the Day of Yhwh, he stresses that the prophets depict the day in Isa 13:6–8 (cf. Isa 34), Zeph 1:7, 10–11, 13–18 and Joel 2 as a "day of battle and of the complete victory of Yahweh" ("The Origin of the Concept of the Day of Yahweh," *JSS* 4 [1959]: 99). Despite the clear associations of the day with the Divine Warrior and battle, von Rad concludes that the day of Yhwh in Joel must be a locust plague that the prophet merely describes as a battle (100). Regardless, von Rad argues that the Day of Yhwh originally referenced a day of Yhwh's salvation on behalf of Israel and that some prophets, like Joel, turn this motif on its head to describe Yhwh's retribution against Israel (105). In contrast to von Rad, K. Cathcart identifies Amos 5:20 as the earliest reference to the Day of Yhwh ("Day of Yahweh," *ABD* 2: 84–85). John Barton argues that even if Joel is significantly later than Amos, the book presumes a similar day of judgment on Israel and Judah's enemies ("The Day of Yahweh in the Minor Prophets," in *Biblical and Near Eastern Essays: Studies in Honour of Kevin J. Cathcart*, ed. Carmel McCarthy and John F. Healey, *JSOTSup* 375 [London: T & T International, 2004], 73).

While the depiction of destruction in Joel at this point is not as clearly imagined as it will be in Joel 2:1–14, the predicament becomes increasingly dire. The disaster that befalls the people of Judah fits within a specific pattern of events. Namely, it identifies the major issue as one of divine wrath and terror. From an iconographic perspective, we can begin to anticipate that the destruction which is coming must be associated with the divine realm in some way, even as the focus here remains on the agricultural produce, the cult, and livestock. As we will see, wild and domesticated animals functioned as a sort of iconographic bellwether for divine blessing and divine wrath. Beasts depicted at peace and in a calm repose were closely associated with divine blessing. The lack of peace then infers divine wrath or reprisal.

Fourth Subunit (vv. 16–18)

Unsurprisingly, the content of the lament relates to the situation of the people as being without food. Importantly, in the lament the grain and fields are not devoured by locusts and the description is far more general and suggests that the grain simply wastes away.¹²⁰ The rest of the language describes destruction of the built environment. The *niphal* form of שׁמם to desolate, regularly indicates the destruction of physical places such as roads (Lev 26:22; Isa 33:8), high places (Amos 7:9), altars (Ezek 6:4; 25:3; 32:15; Zeph 3:6; Zec 7:14; Ps 69:26), lands (Jer 12:11; Ezek 29:12; 30:7; 36:34; 36:35), and cities (Isa 54:3; Ezek 36:35; Amos 9:14; Jer 33:10).¹²¹ Likewise, the *niphal* form of הרס refers to the destruction of the built environment, objects not

¹²⁰ The hapax legomenon of עִבַּשׁ “to shrivel” is not in agreement with the apparent subject פְּרִדּוֹת. The sense “to shrivel” comes from an Arabic cognate.

¹²¹ In other forms, the word applies to devastating events more generally.

generally destroyed by locusts, but often destroyed by armies.¹²² Once again, the textual description of the events in Joel 1 affirm a military attack that affects the entirety of Judah's society.

The result leaves the animals—the cattle and flocks of smaller sheep and goats—dismayed because of the destruction of their fields and pastures. At this point, most interpreters shift their attention away from locusts as a possible cause of destruction, and instead suggest drought as the cause.¹²³ Although such a shift in perspective seems demanded by the text, any willingness to abandon the locust plague as the *raison d'être* for Joel's prophecy is surprising since the argument requires two distinct disasters: of locusts *and* of drought. One way to solve the distinction is by expanding the metaphor to describe the locust swarm as a devouring fire (anticipating v. 19), leaving scorched earth in its wake. But such gymnastics are not needed since the destruction of granaries, fields, and agricultural produce by fire is a well-known feature of warfare in the ancient world.¹²⁴ More importantly, the vocabulary in this unit is consistent with military destruction in other passages of the Hebrew Bible and not with natural disaster (Isa 33:8; 49:19; 61:4; Jer 10:25; 12:11; 19:8; 33:10; 49:17; 50:13; 50:45; Ezek 30:14; 32:15; 33:28; 36:35; Amos 9:14; Zep 3:6; Zec 7:14). By recognizing that the language of the passage relates to military destruction more than it does with natural disaster, we can see that the crisis that Joel

¹²² See Jer 50:15 and Ezek 30:4, for instance.

¹²³ Barton makes the transition quite clear when he writes: "Incidentally, the locusts seem no longer to be in focus at all; references seem to be drought [vv. 17–18] and perhaps destruction of the crops by fire [vv. 19–20], unless 'fire' is some kind of symbol for devastation brought by the locusts" (*Joel and Obadiah*, 62).

¹²⁴ Towns, fields, granaries, homes, and other property were destroyed by a variety of means in ancient warfare, often with the hope of preventing resettlement of places. See Yigael Yadin, *The Art of Warfare in Biblical Lands* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), 2:322. Siege warfare worked by destroying food supplies and stopping up waterways to force civilian populations from cities and other strongholds. Trees were also cut down as a way of making the land barren and unusable. See Jeffery R. Zorn, "War and Its Effects on Civilians in Ancient Israel and Its Neighbors," in *The Other Face of the Battle: The Impact of War on Civilians in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Davide Nadali and Jordi Vidal, vol. 413 of *AOAT* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2014), 81–82.

describes is a military invasion, likely one of the Babylonian intrusions into Judah in 598 or 588 BCE.¹²⁵ The destruction of the event goes beyond simply affecting the farmers and people but impacts the cult directly (v. 13) and even affects the animals who are dazed, wander about, and groan for lack of feed and pasture (v. 18).

Fifth Subunit (vv. 19–20)

Over the course of the lament, the speaker addresses Yhwh directly with a cry of distress. The lament is anchored in the people's experience of destruction. Fire devours the pastures of the wilderness. By combining the pastures with the wilderness (v. 19), the speaker combines two disparate places to illustrate how far the destruction reaches. The phrase is found elsewhere only in Jeremiah and Ps 65, where it refers to the destruction that the nations wrought against Jerusalem (Jer 9:9) and the results of drought (Jer 23:10). It also refers to the bounty of God's restoration (Ps 65:13). Fire also burns up the trees of the field.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Stuart, *Hosea–Joel*, 225–226.

¹²⁶ Such activities were part and parcel of Assyrian siege warfare and a defining feature of the move from warfare in open fields to siege warfare of towns and cities. The Assyrian iconographic record also depicts the destruction of fields and trees as a central element of the sacking and razing of a city. See Jeremy D. Smoak, "Assyrian Siege Warfare Imagery and the Background of a Biblical Curse," in *Writing and Reading War: Rhetoric, Gender, and Ethics in Biblical and Modern Contexts*, ed. Brad E. Kelle and Frank Ritche Ames, SBL Symp 42 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2008), 84–85. With the exceptions of the Etemenanki inscription, Istanbul fragment, and BM 63570+, few resources about Neo-Babylonian warfare are extant from the ancient world. Knowledge about the Neo-Babylonian system and its process of militarization are limited to these texts that demonstrate that many of the institutions of warfare remained in place in the transition from the Neo-Assyrian to the Neo-Babylonian empires. See John W. Betlyon, "Neo-Babylonian Military Operations Other Than War in Judah and Jerusalem," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*, ed. Oded Lipschits and Joseph Blenkinsopp (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 266; John MacGinnis, "Mobilisation and Militarisation in the Neo-Babylonian Empire," in *Studies on War in the Ancient Near East: Collected Essays on Military History*, ed. Jordi Vidal, AOAT 372 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2010), 156.

Unsurprisingly, the burning of the pastures affects the domesticated and wild animals who rely on the fields for sustenance. That they pant for Yhwh’s aid suggests both their own thirst and the acknowledgment that Yhwh is the only one who can help them. The only other usage of “pant” (תַּעֲרוֹג) appears in Ps 42:2, where the deer, panting after water, becomes a poignant metaphor for the psalmist’s own desire for God. According to William Brown, “[The psalmist’s] distress is heightened by God’s absence... and like the doe whose head is stopped as it searches for water, her soul is ‘downcast.’”¹²⁷



Figure 2.7. Stamp seal with doe. 7th c. BCE. BODO 34797. http://www.bible-orient-museum.ch/bodo/details.php?bo_mid=34797

The iconic constellation of Joel 1:13–20 unit revolves around the impact of the destruction on the beasts of the field, the wild and the domesticated animals (fig. 2.7–2.8).¹²⁸ The use of fire, blockage of water sources, and destruction of pastures and fields together extends the language of drought beyond that of a natural disaster and once again is best understood as a function of military tactics.¹²⁹ As previously mentioned, the repeated description of the destruction on cultic practices and the animals stresses the profound impact of the violence enacted against the people. Moreover, Joel depicts the consequences of war extending to spheres

¹²⁷ William Brown, *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 150.

¹²⁸ Figure seven depicts the seal of Yirmeyahu. It may date from the 8th century BCE. See Ruth Hestrin and Michal Davagi-Mendels, *Inscribed Seals: First Temple Period, Hebrew, Ammonite, Moabite, Phoenician and Aramaic, from the Collections of the Israel Museum and the Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums* (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1979), 69.

¹²⁹ Soldiers would divert water sources by means of tunnels and use cisterns to collect the water outside of the city. See Yigael Yadin, *The Art of Warfare in Biblical Lands*, 1:24. In fact, Cyrus the Great captured Babylon in part by blocking up the river and diverting the water. See Charlie Trimm, *Fighting for the King and the Gods: A Survey of Warfare in the Ancient Near East*, RBS 88 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 26–62.

beyond the human, namely the divine and animal spheres. Essentially, there is nothing left to sacrifice and even the animals struggle to forage. The destruction, then, can be said to be cosmic.

Iconography

Since female wild and domesticated animals figure prominently in the destruction within the chapter, this section examines their role in Judean iconography. In his landmark study of iconography and the book of Psalms, Othmar Keel points to the existence of a grazing or drinking doe in Judean iconography from the late seventh century (fig 2.8).¹³⁰ While the deer is not mentioned by name in Joel, it is a



Figure 2.8: Scarab seal with doe. Brown carnelian. Unprovenanced. GGG, 185; 200b.

quintessential nondomesticated grazing beast and relates to this passage by the use of the root ערג, which is used in only one other place in the Hebrew Bible, Ps 42:2. In the psalm, the soul's desire for God is likened to a doe panting for water.¹³¹ Thus, the image is one of a righteous individual whose thoughts and emotions are correctly ordered.¹³²

¹³⁰ For comparands, see Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God*, 184–86; Othmar Keel, *Jerusalem and the One God: a Religious History*, ed. Brent A. Strawn, trans. Morven McClean (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), 113; Othmar Keel, *Die Geschichte Jerusalems und die Entstehung des Monotheismus*, *Orte und Landschaften der Bibel IV/1* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 2:548–50. Keel also discusses deer iconography in his commentary on the Song of Songs. See Othmar Keel, *The Song of Songs: A Continental Commentary*, trans. Frederick J. Gaiser, CC (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 89–102. The grazing deer motif is also known in the cache of ivories from Arslan Tash: BODO 34757, “Elfenbeinschnitzerei,” <http://www.bible-orient-museum.ch/bodo/details.php?bomid=34757>.

¹³¹ Joel contains a high level of interbiblical quotation and allusions—so much so that some scholars have suggested that the book does not reflect the *verba ipissima* of a prophet but rather is a work of a “writing prophet” (*Schriftprophetie*).

¹³² Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 323.

In their study of imagery in Israel/Palestine, Keel and Uehlinger make the case that the use of animals, especially caprids, was indicative of a movement away from anthropomorphic depictions of deity.¹³³ Thus, a depiction of animals in the stamp seals of Israel/Palestine function as a reference to Yhwh and his lordship without picturing him directly. The doe was preferred in Judah where, according to Keel and Uehlinger, the animal was valued not as a divine attribute, but as a metaphor for the faithful person who desires the devout life.¹³⁴ Elsewhere Keel especially associates the image with temple piety after the fall of Israel, during the reforms of Josiah, that would eventually become central to the experience of the Judean community in the Babylonian period.¹³⁵ Thus, in the iconographic record, as well as the textual record, the image of deer reflects a religious value associated with faith, contentment, and trust in God.

Domesticated, like the cow in figure 2.8, and nondomesticated (fig. 2.7) herbivores function within specific and significant historical traditions in the stamp seals of Israel/Palestine (fig. 2.8, for instance, comes from the Iron Age IIA). Ivory carvings of male deer come from the Samarian ivories, collections from Arslan Tash, and Nimrud.¹³⁶ Some scholars have identified Phoenician and other North Syrian styles and motifs that were highly valued by the Neo-



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Figure 2.9. Scarab seal with cow and calf. Hematite. 10th century. Shechem(?). Rockefeller Museum. GGG, 142. IAA, 751.

¹³³ Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*, 184.

¹³⁴ Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*, 186.

¹³⁵ Keel, *Jerusalem and the One God*, 112–13.

¹³⁶ Ivory was an important aspect of international trade in the ancient world. It was greatly valued throughout the ancient Near East and was widely associated with the craftsmanship of the Arameans, Phoenicians, and other people of the Levant, including Israel, and was treasured by the major empires for its intrinsic value and craftsmanship. Phoenician ivories have been found as far south as Lachish and Beth Zur and as far east as Nimrud and Khorsabad. See Irene J. Winter, “Phoenician and North Syrian Ivory Carving in Historical Context: Questions of Style and Distribution,” *Iraq* 38 (1976): 12.

Assyrian kings. These carvings form what Irene Winter refers to as a “shared *koinē* of motifs and object-types.” By her account, this shared style and centralization of distribution may convey a “South Syrian” style with its origins in Damascus.¹³⁷ Motifs like the grazing deer attest to one possible feature of Damascene style, making the grazing deer a distinct feature of Israeli/Palestinian iconography.¹³⁸

There exists a clear association of grazing animals with lament and the desire for Yhwh and his protection and blessings.¹³⁹ Thus it should come as no surprise that the destruction of the habitat and grazing lands of the animal would provide a picture of distress in Joel 1:13–20.

Bovine iconography is also well known from Israel/Palestine. Perhaps the most familiar images are the Iron Age bull figurine from Dothan and the drawings of cows on the pithoi and walls of Kuntillet Ajrud (Pithos A).¹⁴⁰ Ivory carvings of the “cow and calf” motif (figs. 2.8– 2.9) can be found in the



Figure 2.10. Conoid seal with cow and calf. Limestone. Date unknown. Megiddo, Rockefeller Museum. GGG, 142. IAA 3558.

¹³⁷ Irene J. Winter, “Is There a South Syrian Style of Ivory Carving in the Early First Millennium B.C.?” *Iraq* 43 (1981): 130. These motifs include items like the winged sun disk, sphinx, and other shared motifs common to the ancient Near East, but also include more distinct Aramean images, such as the “woman at the window.” Whether the items were created in Damascus or simply redistributed from that center remains a subject of some debate. Regarding the possibility of a centralization of the carved ivory trade in Damascus, Winter writes: “probably not just one but *most* of the major cultural centers in the Levant of the early first millennium B.C. were engaged in the production and exchange of luxury goods—of which ivory constituted one of the most important commodities—does seem to be holding” (129, 130).

¹³⁸ After the eighth century, carved ivories become less common. Winter suggests that the trend can be attributed to Neo-Assyrian governance of trade routes, which disrupted the market (“Phoenician and North Syrian Ivory Carving,” 18). The motifs continue, however, in the carved bone stamp seals of Iron Age IIB as well as in metal carvings (Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*, 184).

¹³⁹ Keel, *Symbolism of the Biblical World*, 323.

¹⁴⁰ On the bull figurine, see Amihai Mazar, “The ‘Bull Site’—An Iron Age I Open Cult Place,” *BASOR* 247 (1982): 27–42. For the drawings of Kuntillet Ajrud, see Pirhiya Beck, *Imagery and Representation: Studies in the Art and Iconography of Ancient Palestine: Collected Articles*, ed. Nadav Na’aman (Tel Aviv: Emery and Claire Yass Publications in Archaeology, 2002); and Joel M. LeMon and Brent A. Strawn, “Once More, Yhwh and Company at Kuntillet ’Ajrud,” *Maarav* 20 (2015): 83–114, pls. VI–VII.

collections of ivories from Nimrud and Arslan Tash.¹⁴¹ Through a series of associations and related phenomenon, bovine imagery came to be associated in the ancient Near East with power, thunder, and fertility.¹⁴² As a symbol associated with both gods and goddesses, bulls and heifers figured prominently in the iconography of divine beings. In motifs that concern daily life, however, care of cattle and other domesticated animals emphasized fertility and prosperity. Thus, they often provided a visual shorthand for depicting a peaceful and prosperous life.

The image of a calf or caprid nursing has a long history within ancient Near Eastern iconography.¹⁴³ Known as the “cow and calf” motif, it was associated with goddesses and especially Anat or Astarte.¹⁴⁴ This motif was not limited to cows but could also be expressed by goats, deer, and other caprids.¹⁴⁵ In the context of Israel/Palestine, such depictions, according to Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, connote fertility as a blessing of the gods. An

¹⁴¹ The Metropolitan Museum of Art, “Openwork Furniture Plaque with a Cow Suckling a Calf,” <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/325662>; Metropolitan Museum of Art, “Furniture Plaque Carved in Relief with a Cow Suckling a Calf,” <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/324689>. See also Pauline Albenda, “Some Remarks on the Samaria Ivories and Other Iconographic Resources,” *The Biblical Archaeologist* 57, no. 1 (1994): 60.

¹⁴² For bovine imagery in the Hebrew Bible and its relation to ancient Near Eastern texts, see Jack M. Sasson, “Bovine Symbolism in the Exodus Narrative,” *VT* 18, no. 3 (1968): 380–87.

¹⁴³ Though not the earliest, a clear example of this motif can be found on an Egyptian faience bowl from the twelfth century BCE. This bowl depicts a deer with her fawn grazing among wild lotus (a common pairing). Another play on this motif can be found in the oval stamp seal from the eighth century BCE, which depicts a young gazelle nursing under its mother, flanked by a branch and an *ankh* symbol. Below, two other registers depict a name *štrt’z* and beneath that a palmette flanked by two uraei; see Othmar Keel, *Deine Blicke sind Tauben. Zur Metaphorik des Hohenlieds*, SBS 114/115 (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1984), 86–87, 106, figs. 86 and 111. See also Bordreuil, *Catalogue*, 30. The motif extends into the early Hellenistic period (“Münze, Silber,” BODO 2713, <http://www.bible-orient-museum.ch/bodo/details.php?bomid=2713>). A tablet seal from the Persian period demonstrates that this motif was used in that period as well. See P. R. S. Moorey, “The Iconography of an Achaemenid Stamp-Seal Acquired in the Lebanon,” *Iran* 16 (1978): 144.

¹⁴⁴ Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*, 241; and Jürg Egger, “Iconography of Animals in the Representation of the Divine (Palestine/Israel),” in *Iconography of Deities and Demons: Electronic Pre-Publication* (Zürich: Universitätsverlag, 2009), 4.

¹⁴⁵ See, for instance, an Eighteenth-Dynasty Egyptian scarab seal: “Skarabäus,” BODO 9171, <http://www.bible-orient-museum.ch/bodo/details.php?bomid=9171> and Schroer, *Die Ikonographie Palästinas/Israels und der Alte Orient: Eine Religionsgeschichte in Bildern* 3 (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2005), 4:80–81.

unpublished hematite seal (fig. 8), because of its style and technique, likely had a northern origin in Syria.¹⁴⁶ Another seal from Megiddo, though unstratified, shows a similar usage of the motif. These seals ought to be viewed alongside other conoids and scarab seals that portray the goddess standing in between suckling, horned animals.¹⁴⁷ In Israel/Palestine, the seals operate within the associated commonplaces of fertility and blessings of a goddess; hence Keel and Uehlinger's suggestion that they belong within the realm of the "Mistress of the Mother Animals" in Israel/Palestinian Iron Age IIA art.¹⁴⁸ This depiction stressed divine motherliness and care, which, in the Israelite context, came to stand for Yhwh's care of his own people, Israel.¹⁴⁹ Bovine imagery, however, can suggest more than just bucolic blessing.¹⁵⁰ The care of a mother for her calf, then, included the promise of fertility and blessing, protection and sustenance, while bull imagery suggested divine power, aggression, and the work of the weather gods. Female bovines, on the other hand, denoted care, fertility, and the nurturing of the gods.

It is unlikely that Joel has the presence of a goddess in mind in the lament of chapter 1. Thus, situating the images above to a Yahwistic context is necessary. In a Yahwistic context, the domesticated and nondomesticated animals illustrate notions of fertility and divine blessing. In Joel, the grazing animals directly relate to the agricultural world of Judah. Therefore, the iconography of wild beasts and domesticated animals represented the blessings of the deity and

¹⁴⁶ Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*, 143.

¹⁴⁷ Othmar Keel and Silvia Schroer, *Studien zu den Stempelsiegeln aus Palästina/Israel*, OBO 67 (Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985), 33–38.

¹⁴⁸ Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*, 143.

¹⁴⁹ Othmar Keel and Silvia Schroer, *Schöpfung: Biblische Theologien im Kontext altorientalischer Religionen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 2002), 65.

¹⁵⁰ Silvia Schroer, "Ancient Near Eastern Pictures as Keys to Biblical Texts," in *Torah*, ed. Irmtraud Fischer et al. (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2011), 51–53.

the fertility of Judah. The use of domesticated and nondomesticated animals to demonstrate divine blessing is well established within the glyptic art of Syria and Palestine by the time of the destruction of Israel. Seals with images of suckling calves were still in use as late as the Babylonian period. Moreover, the use of the motif in carved ivories that were popular in Assyria demonstrate their broad appeal and “staying power.”

The destruction described in Joel 1:13–20 affected the animals and illustrates the overwhelming, and far-reaching, destruction. The loss of agricultural lands and noncultivated areas would have been understood as a reversal of divine blessing and order, and indicate to Joel’s audience a removal of God’s protection and favor. Even though the prophet lists no wrongdoing in his calls to lamentation, his description of the destruction suggests that the people have done something that deserves divine retribution. Hence, his call to lamentation carries within it an indictment and call to repentance.

Conclusion

This chapter explores two prominent features of Joel’s call to lament: the locusts and wild and domesticated animals, and the lament itself. Attention to contiguous iconography suggests that the events that Joel describes originate in the people’s actions and indicates a removal of divine blessing and favor. Elsewhere in the biblical corpus, all the animals, even the wild ones, belong to Yhwh (Job 38:41; Pss 104:21; 147:9), and their livelihood serves as proof that Yhwh has ordered and orders the cosmos.¹⁵¹ Further, the imagery suggests that the passage envisions a

¹⁵¹ Keel and Schroer, *Schöpfung*, 70.

military invasion that deeply affects the natural and divine worlds. When locusts are properly contextualized within the iconographic record, they appear as metaphor for armies and not actual locusts. Thus, the description of their violence and destruction, which linguistically fit human action, needs no additional metaphorization and can be read at face value. That is, Judah is destroyed by fire, not locusts acting like fire. When this attention is shifted from anecdotal accounts of locust plagues to an actual examination of the destruction of the passage as well as an iconographic exploration of the imagery, one finds that locusts were common metaphors and images for armies, that the destruction wrought in Joel fits with other descriptions of military violence, and that the use of animals and agriculture may indicate a reversal of divine blessing and protection. As we will see, properly contextualizing the locusts and their destruction enables a reading of chapter 2 that is framed by the thick description of a military invasion. Thus, readers do not require linguistic gymnastics to understand the relationship between chapter 1 and chapter 2.

The pericope also makes intensive use of additional images. Indeed, within this short unit, one can find images of armies, lions, and generalized human emotion. All such images also found in the iconographic contexts of the ancient Near East. Rather than uncover and compare all possibilities, this chapter has instead focused on the focal points of the passage the locusts and the animals. As I have shown, these focal points are also of interest to the historical questions put to the text by scholars. Moreover, the entangling of the images themselves makes isolating specific images a difficult task. Take, for instance, the leonine imagery that accompanies the military imagery. The nation bears teeth like lions (v. 6) and yet devours fruit bearing plants (v. 7). Nevertheless, Joel 1: 4–7 does not combine locust, martial, and leonine imagery *ex nihilo*. Such combinations can be found in the Egyptian record as discussed above. Likewise, prayer,

supplication, divine blessing, and wild and domesticated animals function together in the ancient Levant. Joel's use of these images is complex and interpretations of them must be attuned to iconographic data.

CHAPTER 3: JOEL 2: THE SOLAR GOD'S RETRIBUTION AND RESTORATION

Joel 2 presents a complex and puzzling description of events. The primary question is whether and how the contents of chapter 2 relate to chapter 1. Additionally, scholars have questioned the relationship between verses 1–14 and verses 15–27. In a further complication, commentators rarely agree on the scope and boundaries of the pericope itself. Some end the pericope after verse 11 (Crenshaw, Sweeney, Barton, Simundson, Nogalski, Seitz),¹ and still others after verse 17 (Stuart, Limburg).

Commentators are also at odds over the actors in chapter 2. In his commentary, Hans Walter Wolff suggests that the subject is the “numerous and mighty people” who share a description “similar” to that of the locusts.² In contrast to Wolff, Douglas Stuart leaves the true identity of the invaders ambiguous, referring to the events only as an “unstoppable invasion” by an “enemy.”³ Likewise, James Limburg suggests that the locust plague of chapter 1 is merely a forerunner to a future event, the Day of Yhwh, that *may* bring another plague of locusts. He emphasizes, however, that the nature of the invader is not entirely clear.⁴ James L. Crenshaw argues that the passage illustrates the Day of Yhwh by emphasizing the “pervasive force” of Yhwh’s army through its depiction as a swarm of attacking locust.⁵ Marvin Sweeney posits that

¹ These interpreters often take vv.12–14 as a subunit.

² Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 44.

³ Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, WBC 31 (Waco, TX: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 250–51.

⁴ James Limburg, *Hosea-Micah*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 64.

⁵ James L. Crenshaw, *Joel*, 128–29.

the invaders of chapter 2 are the “human counterpart to the natural threat of locust plague in Joel 1:2–20,”⁶ while John Barton suggests that the description of events in chapter 2 is simply a retelling of the locust plague in chapter 1.⁷ So too, Daniel Simundson argues that the events of chapters 1 and 2 describe a singular locust invasion.⁸ James Nogalski refers to the invaders of chapter 2 as Yhwh’s cosmic army, which he suggests “move[s] forward like a (locust) horde.”⁹ Christopher Seitz proposes that the purpose of Joel 2 is “to ramp up the description of the locust plague, imbue it with the metaphorical clarity of national assault and put before Israel the possibility of a final reversal of fortune.”¹⁰

To address the issues in Joel 2, I will first outline the based on the major textual traditions, as I did with chapter 1. I will then identify the focal point of the pericope before turning to a comparison of iconography of gods in scenes of warfare.¹¹ In the second part of the

⁶ Marvin A. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*. Berit Olam (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 1:161.

⁷ John Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 70. He writes: “What is predicted is a perfectly literal locust invasion, described with magnificent poetic hyperbole, rather than some even that breaks the mold of human history; and I would distinguish this from the language and imagery of 2:28–31, where we are in a different world and can genuinely begin to use the term *apocalyptic*.”

⁸ Daniel J. Simundson, *Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*, AOTC (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 134. He argues: “Joel compares the locusts to the invasion of a ‘great and powerful army’ (vv. 2, 4–9). Though only small insects, their enormous numbers give the effect of warhorses and chariots drawn up for battle (2:5).”

⁹ James D. Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve: Hosea-Jonah*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary 18a (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2011), 231.

¹⁰ Seitz, *Joel*, 147.

¹¹ Throughout this chapter I utilize the term “icon,” by I refer to what David Morgan describes as a special category of image that shares qualities with the thing it represents. According to Morgan, icons play upon viewers’ desires and ability to make sense of the visual materials—and I argue in this case the textual materials—and world around them. See David Morgan, *Images at Work: The Material Culture of Enchantment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 115. In “Images of Marilyn Monroe, Greta Garbo, Che Guevara, Jesus, and John Lennon,” he writes, “all command attention because viewers recognize in them something that they and many others want to see” (120). Iconic images function by virtue of their ability to simplify complex features of any depicted person or object. Thus, icons traffic in particular aspects, traits, or features of the object or person and downplay others (130). Icons also depend on their reception by viewers—or readers—within a given culture. Thus, prognosticating about whether or not an image will become “iconic” is not easy. The reception of an image as iconic depends on the

chapter, I examine how the destructive and restorative god fits within conceptual traditions of the role of the high god, and will argue that such a dichotomy is central to his visual depiction. Finally, I offer concluding thoughts on the images. In brief, my argument is that Yhwh's position at the head of an invading army resonates with Neo-Assyrian depictions of Assur leading the Neo-Assyrians into battle from his solar disk. Yhwh's association with solar imagery, including solar disks, provides additional reason to make this connection.

Joel 2:1–14

The first unit describes the Day of Yhwh with elements from the theophany traditions. The day is described as filled with darkness and clouds (v. 2), devouring flames (v. 3), and ravenous armies (vv. 4 and 7), the subunit records the shaking of heavenly and earthly spaces (v. 10).¹² The pericope ends with a divine promise of grace and mercy when the people invoke appropriate ritual observances (vv. 12–14). Curiously, most interpreters pay little attention to the theophanic nature of this pericope.¹³ Those who do rarely connect the content of the text to a

viewer's ability to recognize and identify the image as a particular (re)presentation. In many ways, the icon becomes a trace or shadow of the real thing, revealing the referent's absence but still mediating its presence, and specific qualities of its presence, to viewers by virtue of its recognizability and familiarity. As Morgan puts it, "An icon pictures what devotees already know but do not fully possess" (137).

¹² As Prinsloo points out, "Yahweh himself is behind these events." *The Theology of the Book of Joel*, 48.

¹³ Christopher Seitz, for example, does not discuss this feature prominently in his recent commentary, instead preferring to focus on how the militaristic imagery fits with the locust metaphor of chapter 1. His discussion of "theophany" is purely explanatory for the use of "Eden" in the text, an "undoing" of creation. See Seitz, *Joel*, 159–60. So too, Douglas Stuart ignores the theophanic features of this text in *Hosea-Jonah*, 250–53. John Barton briefly mentions the theophany tradition at work in the text but abandons it rather quickly to connect the passage to the locusts of chapter 1. He also prefers to identify it as "apocalyptic" in *Joel and Obadiah*, 72. Crenshaw prefers to let the "locusts" rather than the theophany lead in *Joel*, 128–132. In *From*

theophanic *Gattung*.¹⁴ Instead, they opt to identify the text by nature of the opening line: תקעו שופר. Interpreters who make this identification classify Joel 2 as an *Alarmbefehl mit Feindschilderung*.¹⁵ This *Gattung* begins with a call to sound an alarm because of an approaching danger (v. 1). Other texts that include an *Alarmbefehl* are Hos 5:8; Jer 4:19; 6:17; and Ezek 3:17; 33:7. The clearest comparand is Hos 5:8. In Hosea, the *Alarmbefehl* begins with a call to blow a shofar בגבעה שופר תקעו. Following this command, the description of the events follow: Ephraim will be made desolate and taken into Assyria (vv. 9, 11, and 13), Yhwh will punish the leaders of Judah and become like rot to Ephraim and Judah (vv. 10 and 12), and Yhwh will tear them to pieces like a lion (vv. 14 and 15).¹⁶

An examination of Joel 2, however, reveals that the chapter employs theophanic elements that distinguish this pericope from the *Alarmbefehl Gattung* and therefore the theophanic elements ought to lead in interpretation. Consider, for instance, a comparison with one of the best known theophanies in the Hebrew Bible: Ps 18:7–15 and 2 Sam 22. In the psalm, the speaker describes the actions that Yhwh, as the Divine Warrior, takes to rescue him. The earth shakes

the Depths of Despair, Joel Barker describes the rhetorical situation of Joel 2:1–11 as “an imminent military invasion that also contains some theophanic overtones” (109). Nevertheless, he argues that it is an actual locust infestation in Joel 2 as an eschatological or apocalyptic event (116). Elie Assis makes no reference to the theophanic language in Joel 2:1–11 other than simply describing it as a connection between Joel 2 and Deut 4:11–12 and the Sinai traditions (*The Book of Joel*, 129). Those who take it as a theophany include Sweeney and Wolff.

¹⁴ Marvin A. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, 162. See also Hans Walter Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 40. Zion is also the home of many theophanies of Yhwh, which is where the call to blow the *shofar* is center. See Donald E. Gowan, “Theophany,” *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Theology*, 2:372.

¹⁵ Prinsloo, *The Theology of the Book of Joel*, 45. According to J. Jeremias, the *Gattung* of a theophany often figured in cultic contexts and was at times accompanied by the blowing of a trumpet. Joel 2 would be among J. Jeremias’s second “type;” that is, the depiction of Yhwh as a warrior manifested “through the powers of nature which causes alarm among his enemies.” J. Jeremias, “Theophany in the OT,” *The Interpreter’s Bible: Supplementary Volume*, 5th ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984), 896.

¹⁶ John Strazicich, *Joel’s Use of Scripture and Scripture’s Use of Joel: Appropriation and Resignification in Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity*, BIS 82 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2007), 115.

and quakes (Ps 18:7; 2 Sam 22:8), smoke and consuming fire come from Yhwh's presence (vv. 8–9), deep darkness is under his feet (vv. 9–10), his very presence is brightness (vv. 12–13), and he thunders from heaven (vv. 13–14).

In Joel 2, the Day of Yhwh is a day of darkness and deep darkness (v. 2). Consuming fire precedes the ambiguous subject (v. 3). The heavens quake and the earth trembles (v. 10). Finally, from the front of the army, Yhwh thunders (v. 11). Regularly, Yhwh thunders from his residence in the Heavens or in Zion (Joel 4:16; Jer 25:30; 2 Sam 22:14; Amos 1:2).¹⁷ All usages express the divine warrior tradition, which features many instances of Yhwh fighting alongside Israel's military (Ex 15; Deut 33; Judg 5; Hab 3; Ps 68).¹⁸ The divine "giving of voice," or "thundering," is a central feature of the appearance of the divine warrior in biblical literature.¹⁹ The thunder causes nature to respond to his presence by releasing rain, and trembling or shaking in response.²⁰ If Joel 2 is in fact properly understood as a theophany, as Sweeney and Wolff have suggested and as I am suggesting here, then it stands to reason that readers should go god hunting, and would find where the god appears in verse 11.²¹ This means that the operative

¹⁷ The phrase נתן קולו, literally "he gives his voice," has associations with the leonine representation of Yhwh in places such as Jer 25:30 and Amos 2:8 (on parallelism). See Strawn, *What Is Stronger than a Lion?*, 59.

¹⁸ Although these texts are often taken to be some of the "earliest" examples of divine warrior theophany, many of their dates are subject to much debate. For discussion of the role of the divine warrior in Israel's military conceptions, see Theodore Hiebert, "Warrior, Divine," in *ABD*, 6:877. While the language is fitting of leonine imagery, it also recalls the image of the divine warrior. See Strawn, *What Is Stronger than a Lion?*, 61.

¹⁹ Mark Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 80.

²⁰ Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 162–63. See also Crenshaw, *Joel*, 128.

²¹ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 40; Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, 1: 162. Douglas Stuart refers to v. 11 as "central and pivotal" to the passage; Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 249. Likewise, the divine warrior is regularly featured "riding" various objects. Baal's epithet is *rkb 'rpt* "cloud rider," in Ps 68. Yhwh "rides over the steppes" לרכב בערבות בערבות. Though a thorough comparison cannot be made here, it should also be mentioned that horses and chariotry are regular features of the divine warrior. While it is usually he who rides upon them (Hab 3:8, 15), in Joel

image, or the focal point, in Morgan's terms, is the image of Yhwh leading his vast troops into battle.²² Thus, by focusing on the description of the army with little attention paid to the theophany of the commander of these troops, most scholars have overlooked the key piece of interpretive evidence and have instead focused on the identity of the hordes mentioned in verses 4–9.

Verses 4–9 are often treated as if they were the main description of the chapter. This tendency is revealed by the extensive discussions on the nature and identity of the invaders. By focusing on these verses, scholars ignore other key features of the text, namely the appearance of Yhwh in verse 11. Including the passage's theophanic elements allows us to construct a "network of relations" that bring the true focal object into focus: the appearance of Yhwh.²³ This new focal object in turn provides a useful point of contact with ancient Near Eastern visual materials. Having discussed central thematic issues in this text, I now turn to the second interpretive issue, the delimitation of the pericope. Moreover, the unit ends by another announcement of Yhwh's speech (v. 12) and a description of his favor and restoration (vv. 13–14).

² it is the plural subject which has an appearance like horses (מִסִּים), "war-horses" (NRSV; פִּרְשִׁים), and have the sound of chariots (מִרְכָּבוֹת).

²² Morgan, *Images at Work*, 77–87; 90–112.

²³ Morgan, *Images at Work*, 70–89.

Delimitation

Attention to the traditions of delimitation of the passage can settle differences between interpreters regarding the pericope's beginning and end. The first major textual demarcation in the Hebrew manuscripts is the *petuhah* before verse 15. The marker signals a break between two major sections, each of which begins with the imperative *תקעו שופר* (vv. 1 and 15). The 1525 Rabbinic Bible does break the unit between verses 14 and 15 with an extended line break, and begins verse 15 with a clear indentation. Likewise, the Rabbinic Bible of 1517 presents an extended line break before and after verse 15. Thus, the major Hebrew traditions do not indicate an additional paragraph break beyond the *petuhah* of any kind on this level.²⁴

The Greek traditions present a more complicated structure. Codex Sinaiticus ends the first unit in verse 18. The manuscript indicates a new unit by means of an extended *vacat* and uses the remainder of the line and the hanging initial capital as a marker of a new subunit.²⁵ The Hebrew texts, however, continue verse 18 directly after verse 17. The Old Greek *Vorlage* of Joel 2 is relatively similar to the Masoretic Text.²⁶ Because Codex Alexandrinus demarcates pericopes and strophes with large capital letters, this manuscript is one in which it is easiest to identify larger textual units. Importantly, Codex Alexandrinus sets off verse 18 with a large capital K in the inner margin. Throughout the pericope, the text demarcates smaller units. For

²⁴ 4QXII^g places a *vacat* between verses 8 and 9.

²⁵ Generally, Codex Sinaiticus uses a series of dots—lower, middle, and upper—to delimit various units. While difficult to define, W. M. de Bruin suggests that the high dot is the weightiest and marks the beginning of a spoken word, sets off certain names, and makes the end of a line. The middle dot may overlap with some of these usages. The lower dot, which may have been secondary, indicates the smallest unit delimiter. See de Bruin, “Interpreting Delimiters,” 81.

²⁶ Anthony Gelston, “Introduction and Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets,” in *The Twelve Minor Prophets* / תרי עשר, ed. Anthony Gelston, vol. 13 of *BHQ* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2010), 7. Although it should be stated at the outset that the Hebrew *Vorlage* seems to have been textually close even though the order of the first six books of the Minor Prophets is different. See Jennifer M. Dines, *The Septuagint* (New York: T & T Clark, 2004), 21–22.

instance, verse 15 functions as a unit with a capital Σ (C). Verse 12 is interrupted by the capital E from ἐπιστραφητε, which is preceded by an extended line break after the phrase: και νῦν λέγει κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὑμῶν. Similarly, verse 11 is separated by an extended break after αὐτοῦ and διότι, which is replicated in Alfred Rahlfs's LXX by the diacritical apparatus.²⁷ Likewise, verse 11 begins with a new section at the first και in the line preceded by a *vacat*. Verse 7 marks a new unity with the capital Ω (W). For the purposes of this project, we will follow the majority and end the pericope at the petuhah before verse 15.

Translation

¹Blow a shofar in Zion,
cry out on my holy mount,
let all who dwell in the land tremble.
For the Day of Yhwh comes;
it is near!

²It is a day of darkness and deep darkness,
a day of cloud and thick clouds,
like the dawn²⁸ spreading out over the mountains.
A people, great and mighty;
there has been nothing like it²⁹ from eternity,
and after it will not be again
until the years of the generations.

³Before it, a fire consumes, and after it a flame burns,
like the Garden of Eden is the land before it,
and after it the Wilderness of Destruction.

²⁷ See Rahlfs, 521. Sinaiticus and the MT read this as simply ὅτι.

²⁸ BHK and BHS both suggest emending this word to read “blackness” (כְּחֹשֶׁךְ). The NRSVUE even carries this emendation through to translation. However, there is no reason to emend the text here. See Gelston, “Commentary on the Critical Apparatus,” *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 75.

²⁹ The nearest masculine singular (collective) antecedent is נַפְשׁוֹ. The antecedent could also potentially be a reference to דָּוִד.

There is no escape from it.

⁴Like the appearance of horses is its appearance,
and like warhorses thus they run.

⁵Like the sound of chariots on the tops of the mountains they leap.
Like the sound of a flame of fire burning stubble.
Like a mighty people arranged for battle.³⁰

⁶Before it peoples writhe;
every face shines.³¹

⁷Like warriors they run
like men of war they ascend walls.
They go, a man in his own path,
they do not swerve their ways.

⁸They do not jostle each other
they go, a warrior in his highway³²
and behind weapons,
they burst; they are not cut off.

⁹On the city they leap
on the wall they run
over the houses they go up
they enter through the windows
like a thief.

¹⁰Before it the earth quakes
the heavens shake.
The sun and the moon are darkened.
And the stars gather their shining.

¹¹Yhwh thunders before his army
for very great is his camp!

³⁰ In 4QXII^g, an initial *lamedh* is added above the line by the original scribe. The variants in Old Greek, Vulgate, and Syriac, however, do not reflect this text and, according to Gelston, reflect a translational need for a preposition at this point. See, Gelson, *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 31 (notes) and 75 (commentary).

³¹ The Old Greek, Vulgate, Syriac, and Targum struggle with this phrase. Gelston suggests that they all read פרוור in their *Vorlage* rather than פארור. The likely meaning then is that the faces appear as a pot or kettle. See “Commentary on the Critical Apparatus,” 76.

³² The Greek reads: “weighed down by their own weapons” Gelston suggests that the Old Greek reading arises from a corruption within the Greek traditions. See “Commentary on the Critical Apparatus,” 76. The Vulgate, Syriac, and Targum reflect the MT.

For mighty are the doers³³ of his word!
 For great is the Day of Yhwh
 and very fearsome
 who can endure it?³⁴

¹² Even now, an utterance of Yhwh,
 Return to me with all your heart
 and with fasting and with weeping and with lament.

¹³ Rend your hearts and not your clothing³⁵
 and return to Yhwh your God.
 For gracious and merciful is he
 slow to anger, great with mercy,
 and relenting regarding evil.

¹⁴ Who knows? Return and he may relent.
 He may leave after him blessing,
 a grain offering and a drink offering to Yhwh your God.

Iconic Structure of Joel 2:1–14

The language and linguistic structure of Joel 2:1–14 reveal a theophanic scene. Much of this section's most crucial imagery not only depicts the nature of the warrior Yhwh himself, or of the great people, but also describes the coming of the Day of Yhwh. Since this is the case, a logical iconographic description must begin with the appearance of Yhwh. Simply put, the iconic structure of Joel 2:1–14 depends heavily on the description of Yhwh before his army and not of the ambiguous horde. Refocusing scholarly attention on Yhwh can lead to new exegetical insights. This is true for two reasons.

³³ Old Greek reads “works.” Geslton suggests that this arises from dittography of the final *mem* from the previous word. See Gelston, “Commentary on the Critical Apparatus,” 76.

³⁴ 4QXII^c has יכלכלנו, which Gelston posits is a difference of grammar. See *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 32.

³⁵ 4QXII^c introduces a consonantal error. See *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 32.

First, previous scholarship has been, for the most part, concerned with making literary connections between chapter 2 and chapter 1. By doing so it has placed an emphasis on identifying the people (vv. 2, 7) with the locust (v. 1:4).³⁶ This move has often been an attempt to identify a historical context for the entire book.³⁷ This preoccupation has prevented a thorough examination of the entire structure of Joel 2:1–14. Thus, turning attention to other, overlooked, aspects of the text stands to shed new light on the very questions scholars are interested in, namely the historical context of the book.

Second, refocusing the attention on Yhwh can lead to fresh comparative data. That data may come from the Hebrew Bible prophetic corpus, but can also come from iconography of deities in battle. By comparing Joel 2:1–14 to images of relevant ancient Near Eastern iconography of gods at war, it becomes clear that Joel 2:1–14 describes Yhwh acting in war. Typically, Mesopotamian iconography depicts the relevant deities in battle alongside their people, thus ensuring the people's victory over the enemy. The ambiguity of this passage muddies such a clear interpretation. Thus, the Day of Yhwh is a day of trembling and gloom because Yhwh has come in sure victory, but his appearance inspires repentance not celebration.

First Subunit (vv. 1–6)

The first striking feature of 2:1–14 is the announcement of the Day of Yhwh, which is presented as a day of darkness and gloominess of clouds and thick darkness (v.2). The description of a day

³⁶ E.g., Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 44; Limburg, *Hosea-Micah*, 64; Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, 161.

³⁷ E.g., Simundson, *Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*, 134.

of thick darkness is consonant with eschatological descriptions of the Day of Yhwh's judgment elsewhere, including Ezek 34:12, 13 and Zeph 1:14–16. It also recalls the plague of darkness of the Exodus (Ex 10:22). Immediately, the description of the Day of Yhwh as darkness (שָׁהָר) ends, and another threat, the great and mighty people, arrives. At this point, the text still retains the usage of the third-person masculine singular suffix, suggesting two possible antecedents: עַם רַב or יוֹם יְהוָה. Because עַם רַב is closer, the most reasonable explanation is that the intended antecedent is the עַם רַב.

The critical apparatus of the *Biblica Hebraica Stuttgartensia* suggests amending קָשָׁהר to כְּשָׁהר, that is, from “like dawn” to “like blackness.” BHQ makes no such argument.³⁸ Such a change may be desirable considering the previous phrases, which describe the Day of Yhwh as a day of darkness and deep darkness (v. 2). Associations with the morning and the dawn, however, may draw upon latent solar imagery that only comes to the fore when verse 2 is read in light of the larger iconic structure of the passage, which, as I will argue, reveals Yhwh leading his troops from the winged solar disk. Moreover, the tendency to repoint the text stems from attempts to read the “great people” as a vast locust plague, which blocks the sun. Such repointing is unnecessary if one incorporates the appearance of Yhwh.

A devouring fire goes before the horde, and behind it follows a burning flame (v. 3). This description has analogues in the Hebrew Bible, where many similar descriptions depict warfare or military invasion (Nah 3:13; Zech 11:1; Job 22:20). Psalm 78:63 connects this phrase to the description of Israel's captivity resulting from their disobedience of God. So complete and utter is the destruction wrought by this day that the earth, like the Garden of Eden before it, becomes a

³⁸ Gelston argues that there is no reason to support the purported emendation; see “Commentary on the Critical Apparatus,” 75.

wasteland. The image of the Garden of Eden becoming a wasteland is a reversal of the description of Ezek 36:35, where the restored exiles rebuild the ruined places. As a result of Yhwh's restoration, the desolated land (הארץ הנשמה) will become like the Garden of Eden. Within the book of Joel, this fate is, of course, the same fate awaiting Edom (4:10). Jeremiah uses the same phrase to describe the destruction of Yhwh's vineyard (כרם) and field (הלקה) as a result of the people's rebellion (Jer 4:8–9). So complete is this destruction that there is no escape from it.

In verse 4, the appearance of the people, referenced by the third-person masculine singular suffix הוּ, is likened to chariot horses. The couplet continues and compares the people to the charging of warhorses. The plurality of this verb has confounded commentators and has sent many on a hunt to find a plural referent. Many have gone back to chapter 1 to identify the locusts as the subject of this verb. Barton, for instance, writes: "Verse 4 compares [the locusts's] appearance with that of warhorses charging into battle, while v. 5 describes the sound they make as like the rumbling of chariots."³⁹ A simpler explanation can be found by reading the pronoun as referring to עַם, a collective noun that can receive both singular and plural pronouns.⁴⁰

Verse 5 continues the new metaphor by shifting topics from the appearance of the people to their sound. They rumble like the sound of chariots on the tops of the mountains and are like the sound of a flame of fire consuming stubble. Moreover, they are described as being like a

³⁹ Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 73. This argument hinges explicitly on the phenomenological argument popular in earlier German commentaries. See above.

⁴⁰ Crenshaw takes the verbal ending as an energetic nun (*Joel*, 121). On the pronoun for collective nouns, see Paul Joüon and Takamitsu Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, Subsidia Biblica 27 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2006), 446, n. 3.

mighty people arranged for battle. Several commentators take the description of the consuming fire to be a reference to the destructive power and ravenous appetites of locusts.⁴¹

Fire is regularly featured as an implement of Yhwh's divine judgment, especially in theophanies.⁴² Such an interpretation, however, complicates the image more than necessary. Throughout the ancient Near East, destruction of cities by burning was a regular feature of warfare. Consider, for instance, the Annals of Assurnasirpal II. In the accounts of Assurnasirpal's numerous sieges, he recounts not only attacking the cities through siege and pillage, but by burning the cities and even the residents, including children and adolescents.⁴³ The devouring fire appears elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.⁴⁴ Deut 4:24; 9:3 and Exod 24:17 describe Yhwh as a consuming or devouring fire. In the tradition of theophany, consuming fire comes out of Yhwh's mouth (Deut 32:22 and Ps 50:3) and in the prophetic corpus, Yhwh's judgment is announced as a devouring fire that punishes the nations (Amos 1:4, 7, 19, 12, 14; Isa 10:17; 30:30; Jer 49:27; 50:32; Ezek 28:18) and Israel (Amos 7:4; Hos 8:14; Isa 29:6; Jer 17:27; 21:14; Ezek 15:7; 21:3).

The phrase *לֶהָבֵשׂ* appears in several theophanies, including Exod 3:2; Ps 29:7; Isa 29:6; 30:30; and 66:15. It often describes Yhwh's judgement against Israel's enemies and surrounding

⁴¹ See, for instance, Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 72; Crenshaw, *Joel*, 120.

⁴² Vinzenz Hamp, “*שֶׂשׁ* 'ēsh,” *TDOT*, 1:425. The root *לֶהָבֵשׂ* rarely occurs alone and is often used in close relation to *שֶׂשׁ*; J. Hausmann, “*לֶהָבֵשׂ lahāḇ*,” *TDOT* 7:471.

⁴³ Albert Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC (1114–859 BC)*, RIMA 2 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 206. The annals from the Ninurta temple recount that burning the cities and inhabitants was a regular strategy utilized by the forces of Assurnasirpal. See also *CAD* I/1, 254; and Julian Reade, “Ideology and Propaganda in Assyrian Art,” in *Power and Propaganda: A Symposium on Ancient Empires*, ed. Mogens Trolle Larsen, Mesopotamia 7 (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1979), 334.

⁴⁴ Magnus Ottoson, “*לֶהָבֵשׂ 'ākhāl*,” *TDOT*, 1:237.

nations, although in Lam 2:3 and Joel the phrase is directed back at Israel.⁴⁵ The text in Joel reverses the imagery of judgment against Israel's enemies from Isa 29:6 and 30:30 and instead points the judgment squarely at the people who inhabit Zion. Verse 5 elegantly combines all the imagery. First, the martial imagery continues through the comparison of the subject with chariots. Then the comparison shifts to a consuming fire and relies on the terminology previously utilized in verse 3: אֵשׁ, אָכַל. Finally, it reiterates the nature of the people as a great people arranged for battle.

Verse 6 returns to the singular pronominal suffix. Before it (the עַם רַב), the peoples (עַמִּים), a different group than the עַם רַב, writhe and all their faces become shine. The root קִבֵּץ describes the judgment of Assyria in Nahum. Nahum provides a close comparison to Joel since the destruction of Assyria in Nah 2:10 takes place in terms akin to those of Joel. Joel's usage once again reveals a stunning reversal of language employed throughout the prophets to describe Yhwh's judgment upon Israel's enemies.

The use of the word פֶּאֶרְוֵר has led to consternation among interpreters regarding the versions.⁴⁶ The most popular suggestion for its meaning is that the term refers to the dark patina left over from burning a pot. Thus, ὡς πρόσκαυμα χύτρας in the Old Greek and *redigentur in ollam* "render in a pot" in the Vulgate. This comparison becomes most clear in the Targum, which utilizes the preposition כּ to drive the point home: אַתְּחַפְּאוּ אַכְרוּם אוּכְמִין כְּקִדְרָא.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Hausmann, "להב *lahab*," 7:472.

⁴⁶ See comments on the versions above.

⁴⁷ Kevin J. Cathcart and Robert P. Gordon, *The Targum of the Minor Prophets*, The Aramaic Bible 14 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1987), 68.

The root פָּאֵר, however, appears in Isa 60:7, another text with strong tendencies to solar imagery, which also shares in many key theophanic features such as its use of עֶרְפֵּל and הַשֶּׁךְ.⁴⁸ The phrase in Nah 2:12 leads to many of the same difficulties and solutions as the text in Joel 2. Two possible interpretations seem most likely: either that the faces of the people grow pale at the appearance of the Day of Yhwh, or that they shine, perhaps with the reflection of the rising dawn which spreads over the mountains in verse 2. In either case, it is unlikely that the faces darken like a pot, as many of the versions would have it.

Second Subunit (vv. 7–10)

At this point, several commentators begin to make explicit reference to the description of the unnamed comparand to the גְּבוּרִים.⁴⁹ They argue that the description of the men of war climbing up walls and staying in their course without jostling each other refers to the locusts' movements.⁵⁰ The root רוּץ regularly describes the actions of warriors in battle.⁵¹ The subject of the verb is almost always a human. In only two instances—three, if one includes the ambiguous reference in Joel—does the verb relate to the running of animals. Amos 6:12 speaks of the

⁴⁸ Brent A. Strawn, “‘A World Under Control:’ Isaiah 60 and the Apadana Reliefs from Persepolis,” in *Approaching Yehud: New Approaches to the Study of the Persian Period*, ed. Jon L. Berquist (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2007), 102; Izaak J. de Hulster and Brent A. Strawn, “The Power of Images: Isaiah 60, Jerusalem, and Persian Imperial Propaganda,” in *Iconographic Exegesis of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: An Introduction to Its Method and Practice*, ed. Izaak J. de Hulster, Brent A. Strawn, and Ryan P. Bonfiglio (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 199.

⁴⁹ Wolf, *Joel and Amos*, 46; Crenshaw, *Joel*, 123–24.

⁵⁰ Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 72. Even P. Maiberger in his entry on רוּץ in *TDOT* 13 explains the root is used to describe the “plague of locusts” in Joel; 13:419.

⁵¹ Maiberger, “רוּץ *rûṣ*,” *TDOT* 13:419.

running of horses and Dan 8:6 the rampaging of the male goat from the west.⁵² Its Akkadian cognate refers to troops rushing into battle.⁵³

Verse 7 contains no significant issues with the *Vorlage*; merely a spelling difference that results in a firsthand reading in Leningradensis and a semantic liberty taken by T *vis-à-vis* the Old Greek, Vulgate, and Leningradensis (Biblica Hebraica Quinta). The verb in question, יַעֲבֹטוּן, is a *hapax legomenon* and, on the virtue of a possible cognate in Akkadian, *ḫabātu*, likely means “to wander, or be lost,” though this meaning is tenuous.⁵⁴ Other possibilities include the Greek rendering: ἐκκλίνωσιν, “to bend aside,” and a second possible Akkadian, *ebētu*, “to bend.”⁵⁵ The Targum may express some semantic liberties with its use of מַעֲכִיבִין, “do not delay” or “hesitate.”⁵⁶ In any event, the meaning seems clear enough and commentators have taken this verb to mean that the invaders do not leave their paths, each one going in a straight line.⁵⁷

The root קָהַךְ in verse 8 remains difficult to translate since it appears scarcely in the Hebrew Bible and has few cognates. In Judg 21:8, the root describes the oppressions suffered by the Israelites in the period of the judges. In Joel 2:8, however, it seems to refer to an action closer

⁵² Maiberger, “רִיץ *rûṣ*,” 13:416.

⁵³ *AHW*, 2:960a. It also has a second meaning, “to bring help,” that is unknown in the Hebrew Bible.

⁵⁴ Like the Hebrew, the Akkadian cognate has multiple meanings, including “to borrow” (for Hebrew see *HALOT*, 2:778). The sense here, however, seems more in line with meaning D of *ḫabātu*, “to move across, make an incursion, etc.” (*CAD* 6:12) since the context and meaning share martial tones.

⁵⁵ Wolf, *Joel and Amos*, 38.

⁵⁶ Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli, and Yerushalmi and the Midrashic Literature* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005), 1077–78. See also Cathcart and Gordon, *The Targum of the Minor Prophets*, 68.

⁵⁷ Barton, for instance: “Each keeps to its own course, they do not swerve from their paths” (67); Crenshaw: “each going in its own trail; it does not encroach on others’ paths” (116); Wolff: “They move ahead each on his way, they do not change their courses” (38).

to “thrust” or “jostle” based on Targumic usages.⁵⁸ Verse 8 emphasizes the orderliness of the attack.

There are no significant textual difficulties in the first half of the line in verse 8; however, Symmachus translates יְהִי as πλησίον “neighbor.” The larger issue stems from the Old Greek version: καταβαρθνόμενοι ἐν τοῖς ὅπλοις αὐτῶν “weighed down by their weapons” (NETS). Gelston attributes this difference to an inner-Greek corruption on the basis that ὁδοῖς “road” was read as ὅπλοις “weapon.”⁵⁹ The verb יִבְצְעוּ “they cut off” poses a difficulty because it is a transitive verb that requires an object. In verse 8, however, it lacks an object and ends a line. Thus, the critical apparatus suggests that this word could be subject to corruption and that a better reading may be יִבְקְעוּ “they break through,” reading with the object from verse 9 בְּעִיר 9. This solution does little to solve the problem and simply punts it down the road via conjecture. Moreover, this change requires transposing the negative particle before the יִפְלוּ and the word בְּעִיר to the end of verse 8.

The root שָׁקַק (v. 9) refers once to the leaping of locusts (Isa 33:4) outside of Joel. However, the word describes to the rushing of chariots or bears (Nah 2:4; Prov 28:15). While the root of this word is somewhat uncertain, it sometimes means “attack,” “storm,” or “rush around.”⁶⁰ Most scholars take the root to mean “rush” or “storm” upon. Hence, in this instance, it describes the attack levied by the enemy horde. So too, the Septuagint interprets the verb as a

⁵⁸ Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim*, 293; Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period*, 2nd ed. (Ramat-Gan; Baltimore: Bar Ilan University Press; Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 143.

⁵⁹ Gelston, “Twelve Minor Prophets,” 76.

⁶⁰ *HALOT* lists two possible etymologies. The first, Akkadian *šakāku(m)* means “to thread,” or “to harrow.” The second meaning, *šaqāau*, a Canaanite loanword attested in the El Amarna letters, seems to better fit the Hebrew cognate, “to rush.” This reading has come under question in recent discussions, however (*HALOT*, 4:1647).

reference to martial activity: ἐπιλήμψονται (from ἐπιλαμβάνομαι) “to seize,” “to lay hold of.”⁶¹ Generally, this term refers to seizing as in grasping an object (Gen 25:26; Ex 4:4; Isa 3:6; Ps 34:2; Zech 8:23; 14:13; metaphorically in Ps 47:7; Jer 30:13; 51:23; Prov 4:13), or refers to a predator’s seizing of prey (Isa 5:29). However, it is also used to describe the works of one nation against another, as the description of Egypt as “staff of reeds” against Israel in Ezek 29:7 and 30:21 or in Isa 27:4, which describes the taking of cities.

Verse 10 shifts the focus from the invasion itself to the invasion’s terrestrial and cosmic ramifications. In short, the earth responds to the invasion and the Day of Yhwh. The language describing the response is typical of theophanic language elsewhere. The root רגז also occurs in Joel 2:1 as an imperative that all the people should “tremble” at the sound of the alarm (see also Deut 2:25). With reference to the earth, the root רגז generally refers to an earthquake of some kind (Amos 8:8; Ps 77:19; 1 Sam 14:15; 2 Sam 22:8; Prov 39:21; Job 9:6; of mountains: Ps 18:8; of the Heavens: Isa 13:13).⁶² The cosmic entities, the sun, moon, and stars, darken. Such descriptions are typical of a theophany and the appearance of the divine warrior (Jer 4:28), the Day of Yhwh (Zech 14:6), or results from the judgment of those who lead God’s people astray (Mic 3:6).⁶³

⁶¹ T. Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, rev. ed. (Louvain: Peeters, 2009), 275.

⁶² Often the result of a theophany.

⁶³ Consider also the *hiphal* usage in Ezek 32:7 where, during the judgment of Pharaoh and Egypt, the stars shall “darken.” *HALOT* lists a possible emendation to Zech 4:6 that would include this root’s usage in connection with the Day of Yhwh in Zechariah (*HALOT*, 3: 1072).

Third Subunit (v. 11–12a)

From in front of his army Yhwh gives a battle cry (v. 11). The phrase “gives his voice” appears elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.⁶⁴ In Jeremiah 2:15 the phrase describes the lions who roar against Israel, another reference to Israel’s destruction by surrounding nations, not an indication of a specific plague. Jeremiah 25:30 describes the roaring of Yhwh from on high before the nations. This shout echoes throughout the earth and results in the judgment of the nations and inhabitants of the earth.⁶⁵ Elsewhere in Joel, Yhwh shouts from Jerusalem, though this time as a stronghold for Israel during the judgment of the nations (Joel 3:16). Amos too demonstrates the power of Yhwh’s voice to change the landscape: “Yhwh roars from Zion and from Jerusalem he gives his voice. The pastures of the shepherds dry up, and the top of Carmel dries up.” (Amos 1:2). Throughout the usages in Joel and Amos, Yhwh’s theophany before the nations remains a constant. Only in Joel 2, however, does Yhwh cry out from at the head of his army. In all other instances, he calls out from Zion and Jerusalem.

⁶⁴ Most notably in 2 Sam 22:14 and Ps 18:14, texts that do not mention locusts, everything is expressed in terms of an attack by enemies of war. This text also picks up on the temple. Note especially the verses in 8–16. They follow the logic of Joel’s claims quite closely. First a call to God (2 Sam 22:7/Ps 18:3/Joel 2:17). Likewise Ps 77:17 describes a theophany in response to which the heavens “give voice” in thunder and lightning. So too in Hab 3:10 where the deep “gives voice.” See also Jer 10:13; 51:16; Ps 46:7; 68:34. In Proverbs, Wisdom calls out and gives voice: 1:20; 2:3; 8:1.

⁶⁵ Again, this text shares in important theophanic themes and language. See also Jeremiah’s oracle in 22:20 in which Shallum, king of Judah, cries out in mourning. The response to the destruction of Moab is also one that results in deep crying out (Jer 48:34).

Fourth Subunit (v. 12b–14)

Verse 12a introduces the content of Yhwh’s speech. This subunit, an oracle of Yhwh, shifts from the previous form to a new statement.⁶⁶ Even in the late time, in the midst of an advancing attack, the people can expect to hear the content of Yhwh’s utterance and the invitation to return to him. ׀א indicates that the message is a direct utterance of Yhwh through the mouth of the prophet.⁶⁷

Verse 12b begins Yhwh’s oracle. The oracle itself conveys a message that is at home in the theology of the Deuteronomic History. As Wolff points out, features of this message exist within Amos, Hosea, Jeremiah, and Deuteronomy itself;⁶⁸ all feature the act of returning to Yhwh, not only with cultic actions of fasting, weeping, and mourning, but also with a return of the heart, the seat of thought and intention.

The picture of ritual actions continues in verse 13, which describes the rending of the people’s hearts employing terminology more usually seen in cultic actions of lament. Again, the Deuteronomic nature of Joel’s reasoning shines through as he calls the people to return to Yhwh. Joel’s description of Yhwh as one slow to anger, great with loving kindness, and relenting from wickedness suggests that hope still exists amid the destruction all around.

The hope that return will result in a better situation for the people arrives in verse 14, which concludes the subunit by asking a rhetorical question about the nature of Yhwh, his

⁶⁶ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 40. For the use of ׀א as a particle of interest that calls special attention to a certain statement, see Bruce Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 300, §16.3.5b.

⁶⁷ Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 1–12*, CC (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 67; Rolf Rendtorff, “Zum Gebrauch der Formel *n^e’um jahwe* im Jeremiabuch,” *ZAW* 66 (1954): 27–37; Friedrich Baumgärtel, “Die Formel *n^e’um jahwe*,” *ZAW* 73 (1961): 277–90.

⁶⁸ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 48.

compassion, and his ability to exchange disaster for a blessing, including the necessary items for grain and wine offerings, conspicuously destroyed by the advancing army. Joel does not simply invent this rhetorical question, but rather depends on a sequence of similar statements throughout the Hebrew Bible—statements that are central to the identity and character of Yhwh.⁶⁹

The first unit depicts the Day of Yhwh as one of theophany (vv. 2–3, 11), solar imagery (vv. 2, 5, 6) and warfare (vv. 7–10). Yhwh’s appearance (v. 11) in the passage depends on a theophanic tradition that is expressly associated with descriptions of the Divine Warrior traditions (Ps 18 and 2 Sam 22). Moreover, the passage utilizes imagery that is militaristic and descriptive of siege activity (vv. 7–10). Similar descriptions can also be found in the wall reliefs of Assurnasirpal II. These scenes depict Assurnasirpal II’s camp, the presence of the high deity within solar imagery participating in battle, and the orderly way that the siege is enacted. Despite the chaos of war, the Neo-Assyrian wall-reliefs depict a specific vision of warfare that communicates realities about Assyrian kingship and power.

Iconography

This section examines several relevant scenes from ancient Near Eastern iconography that depict deities in battle. The image of deities participating in or watching over battle features widely throughout the iconographic programs of the major empires that surrounded Israel/Palestine throughout its history. Many of the focal points that will be examined here can be found in both the major art (reliefs) and the minor art (stamp seals and other personal items) from the period.

⁶⁹ Joseph Ryan Kelly, “Joel, Jonah, and the Yhwh Creed: Determining the Trajectory of the Literary Influence,” *JBL* 132, vol. 4 (2013): 805–26; and Nathan C. Lane, *The Compassionate, but Punishing God: A Canonical Analysis of Exodus 34:6–7* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010).

Thus, the focal object was both known in some of the most private areas of culture, such as a monarch's private quarters, and were widely circulated, as evidenced by the cylinder and stamp seals, which were intended to be worn by their owner. Moreover, in some cases the focal object of the deity within a solar disk was featured in propagandistic materials—wall reliefs and standards—that demonstrated the king's power, fitness, and ability to rule the empire. While this section is by no means intended to be exhaustive, it demonstrates the impact that such motifs could have across cultures and within Israel/Palestine. Conceptions like the solar deity at the head of an army would have congruence with a reader of Joel after the Neo-Assyrian period.

In this section, I will examine several iconographic scenes that depict a deity at the head or front of an attacking army. Generally speaking, in these images, the god appears near the sovereign who leads the attack. This position generally connotes divine protection, approval, and, in some cases, participation in the battle. Notably, the deity is always depicted as being on the side of the successful attacking army.⁷⁰ These images share in important features outlined in Joel 2. In them, one finds depictions of horses, chariots, and orderly warriors engaged in siege attacks all under the depiction of the high god within a solar nimbus. Moreover, Othmar Keel has argued that theophanies function like these scenes (especially that of Assur).⁷¹ Yhwh's appears in Joel 2:1–14 in a mix of solar imagery (vv. 2, 6, and 10) and imagery from the theophanic traditions that also utilize solar imagery (2 Sam 18; Ps 22). As a result, Assur's appearance in the solar nimbus in the reliefs below become operative.

⁷⁰ Most unsuccessful battles or invasions were not memorialized in iconography or text.

⁷¹ Keel, *SBW*, 215–16.

The Solar God at War

Images of warring deities can be found throughout the Assyrian iconographic record.⁷² Consider for instance the winged nimbus of Assur on a glazed brick from the reign of Tulkulti-Ninurta II or the tenth-century BCE image of Shamash” (see below).⁷³ There is little doubt that the Assyrian use of the winged nimbus can be traced back to the Egyptian use of solar imagery and winged solar discs, which has been called “one of the most prominent Egyptian symbols.”⁷⁴ The Egyptian image combined features of three deities: Nekhbet, represented by a flying vulture; Wadjet, represented by uraei; and Re, represented by the solar disk. As such, the multistable

⁷² Not only did deities fight in the battles, but they were often consulted about the outcome of battles. Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal, for instance, consulted Shamash before attempting a campaign. See Zainab Bahrani, *Rituals of War: The Body and Violence in Mesopotamia* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 183.

⁷³ The glazed brick likely comes from the temple of Anu and Adad. Although most scholars take the image to be that of Assur, some scholars believe the god to be Shamash. This image, notably, combines elements of the weather god—rain droplets and clouds—with that of the solar deity—sun rays and winged nimbus. Whoever the deity is, it is clear that the image brings together the sun god and the weather god as one. See Martin Klingbeil, *Yahweh Fighting from Heaven: God as Warrior and as God of Heaven in the Hebrew Psalter and Ancient Near Eastern Iconography*, OBO 169 (Fribourg: University Press, 1999), 260–61. Another example is Assur handing a bow to the king on the Broken Obelisk from Nineveh, a public monument. The Broken Obelisk depicts Shamash (or possibly Assur) as a feathered, solar nimbus lowering an extended hand that lowers a bow to the king while the other hand extends a gesture of blessing. Frankfort suggests that this image provides a general statement of blessing for military excursions and Assyrian conquests. See Henri Frankfort, *The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*, 5th ed., Pelican History of Art (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 134; Klingbeil, *Yahweh Fighting from Heaven*, 259; John Malcolm Russell, “Obelisk,” in *RIA*, 10 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000), 6.

⁷⁴ Joel M. LeMon, *Yahweh’s Winged Form in the Psalms: Exploring Congruent Iconography and Texts*, OBO 242 (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2010), 38–39, 156; Frankfort, *The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*, 134–35. The solar disk appears as an international symbol as early as the eighteenth century BCE, but was especially prominent during the reign of Akhenaten, when the Aten was intended to represent the “sole” deity of Egypt. The solar disk, both in its winged and unwinged forms (though always flanked by Nekhbet and Horus as a vulture and falcon) figure prominently in the reliefs of Sety I, Ramesses II, and Ramesses III. These reliefs depict the kings’ forays into foreign lands and describe their battle victories against their enemies. See Clive Broadhurst, “An Artistic Interpretation of Sety I’s War Reliefs,” *JEA* 75 (1989): 229–34; William J. Murnane, ed., *Reliefs and Inscriptions at Karnak, Volume IV: The Battle of King Sety I: The Epigraphic Survey*, OIP 107 (Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 1986); K. A. Kitchen, “New Light on the Asiatic Wars of Ramesses II,” *JEA* 50 (1964): 47–70; and Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World*, 198. On the international nature of the image, see Tallay Ornon, *The Triumph of the Symbol: Representations of Deities in Mesopotamia and the Biblical Image Ban*, OBO 213 (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2005), 152–53.

image allows viewers the ability to recognize multiple aspects of divine blessing, protection, and power in a single icon.⁷⁵

Solar imagery arrives in Judah toward the end of the eighth century and is likely due to the dual Assyrian and Egyptian influence (along with consistent north Syro-Phoenician influence) that arose in this period under the reign of Hezekiah (725–697 BCE).⁷⁶ And Yhwh was also referenced through winged solar disks in miniature art. Joel LeMon has argued convincingly against assertions that such depictions were merely “ornamental” on the grounds that images were communicative within their historical and societal contexts. Thus, they bear the weight of a variety of associations with the image.⁷⁷ Such an image would likely convey concepts such as divine security and immediacy, just as their Egyptian and Mesopotamian counterparts would.⁷⁸ These images bring to the fore notions of the patron god’s presence and protection over those whom his wings cover.⁷⁹ Other solar imagery for the central deity was not unfamiliar between the eighth and sixth centuries in Israel and Judah. The integration of

⁷⁵ For a definition of multistable images see LeMon, *Yahweh’s Winged Form in the Psalms*, 192.

⁷⁶ Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images*, 272.

⁷⁷ According to LeMon, in Egypt, the winged solar disk was “one of the most prominent Egyptian symbols adopted by Syro-Palestinian artists...as early as the eighteenth century B.C.E., though the forms and significance of the image went through numerous changes as it spread among various cultures” (*Yahweh’s Winged Form in the Psalms*, 50). See also Eva Strommenger, *5000 Years of the Art of Mesopotamia*, trans. Christina Haglund (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1964), 41. Strommenger writes: “So centralized and consequently intensified an artistic activity naturally had some influence also upon adjacent areas.” These styles were themselves influenced by northern Syrian and Babylonian practices, although Assurnasirpal II’s art is paradigm shifting, and he “breaks free” from the Aramaean influence. See Anton Moortgat, *The Art of Ancient Mesopotamia: The Classical Art of the Ancient Near East*, trans. Judith Filson (London: Phaidon, 1969), 125ff.

⁷⁸ Contra Eliat Mazar, “A Seal Impression,” *BAR* 44 (2018), 637; and Joel M. LeMon, “The Hezekiah Seal,” *HebAI* (forthcoming).

⁷⁹ LeMon notes that the “conventions of Mesopotamian iconography” are indebted to the solar imagery of the Egyptian-style winged sun disk (*Yahweh’s Winged Form in the Psalms*, 54).

Assyrian and other Egyptianizing motifs wove their way into the material culture of the region.⁸⁰

In order to better understand this motif, we now turn to an extended use of the winged solar nimbus in Assyrian reliefs from the palace of Assurnasirpal II.

Assurnasirpal II's Northwest Palace at Nimrud, The Throne Room Reliefs

Known for his expansive military campaigns, Assurnasirpal II was perhaps the most important builder of the Assyrian Empire.⁸¹ His palace at Nimrud (ancient Kalhu)⁸² was one of his most impressive projects.⁸³ The palace project initiated a decisive style of Assyrian art and combined sculptural practices with architecture. Anton Moortgat puts it, “created the point of departure for the progress of Assyrian art throughout the following two centuries.”⁸⁴ The bas-reliefs of Assurnasirpal were revolutionary in the Assyrian art world.⁸⁵ In fact, Mehmet-Ali Ataç argues

⁸⁰ Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images*, 283. Keel and Uehlinger draw lines of direct influence between items like the glazed brick of Tukulti-Ninurta and the image of a sun god in a lotus nimbus on *Tridacna* shells from Arad and Bethlehem (345, 347).

⁸¹ Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC*, 189. Knowledge of Assurnasirpal comes almost exclusively from the inscriptions created by him at Nimrud. See “Assurnâṣapli II,” *RIA* 1:214.

⁸² Full accounts of the excavations can be found in the following works: Irene J. Winter, “The Program of the Throneroom of Assurnasirpal II,” in *Essays on Near Eastern Art and Archaeology in Honor of Charles Kyrle Wilkinson*, ed. Prudence Oliver Harper (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1983), 15–31; J. E. Reade, “Texts and Sculptures from the North-West Palace, Nimrud,” *Iraq* 47 (1985): 203–14; John Malcolm Russell, *From Nineveh to New York: The Strange Story of the Assyrian Reliefs in the Metropolitan Museum and the Hidden Masterpiece at Canford School* (New Haven: Yale University Press; In association with the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997). For a summary of the finds and history of excavations see John Curtis, “Nimrud,” *OEANE*, 3: 141–44.

⁸³ Nimrud had been an important center in the thirteenth century BCE.

⁸⁴ Moortgat, *The Art of Ancient Mesopotamia*, 132.

⁸⁵ Moortgat posits that if Assurnasirpal II had not made such a decisive break in style, the landscape of Assyrian art would be entirely different. Moortgat, *The Art of Ancient Mesopotamia*, 126, 132.

that the art of Assurnasirpal II's Neo-Assyrian programs represent "a cultural and intellectual high point, with a royal ideology that is simultaneously novel and traditional."⁸⁶

Nimrud's reliefs depart from the simple stonework and painted scenes of earlier periods. The bas-reliefs from Nimrud were much larger and set precedence for the rest of the Neo-Assyrian period.⁸⁷ Several reliefs were set in relatively public places like the throne room. The public reliefs depicted the sovereign's exploits in the hunt and on the battlefield. Private spaces depicted the king in religious and ritual scenes. The program of depiction has been described as "a fourfold Assyrian ideology comprising military success, service to the gods, divine protection, and Assyrian prosperity; and second, that the subject and placement of the decorations in each suite of rooms was influenced by the function of that suite."⁸⁸ In these media and techniques, known as architectural sculpture, the works of Assurnasirpal II's emphasized his royal kingship, power, and imperial expanse.⁸⁹

Architectural sculpture, including bas-reliefs, allow for the presentation of complex notions within a large spaces and contexts. While contemporary viewers tend to see isolated images in the various reliefs as individual photographs or publications, in their original context they participated within a larger coherent context. In the case of Assurnasirpal II's reliefs, the palace is the context. Thus, the must reliefs be viewed and understood in relation to the reliefs that are nearest them, but they also need to be viewed within the context of the throne room and

⁸⁶ Mehmet-Ali Ataç, *The Mythology of Kingship in Neo-Assyrian Art* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 15.

⁸⁷ Ataç, *The Mythology of Kingship in Neo-Assyrian Art*, 14.

⁸⁸ John Malcolm Russell, "The Program of the Palace of Assurnasirpal II at Nimrud: Issues in the Research and Presentation of Assyrian Art," *American Journal of Archaeology* 102, no. 4 (1998): 712.

⁸⁹ Moortgat, *The Art of Ancient Mesopotamia*, 130.

the entire structure. Thus, consideration of the entire program of visual materials at Nimrud can reveal several important features.⁹⁰ The question of viewing the reliefs in their historical context remains an important and not easily solved aspect of viewing the images.⁹¹ The reliefs prove useful for biblical exegesis because they demonstrate ancient Near Eastern understandings of history, but also because they situation specific ideas, like gods at war, within larger pictorial programs. In terms of understanding the meaning and context of the images, two scholars are helpful for our purposes: John Malcolm Russell and Irene Winter.

Within the context of the larger program, viewers of the reliefs would have approached the facade of the throne room, which Russell deems “the most public part of the state apartments.”⁹² From here, they would have passed by the various *apkallu* and other purifying guardians (the two- and four-winged *genii*, bull and lion colossi, the “sacred-tree,” and others).⁹³ Upon entering the throne room, visitors would immediately see images of the king at war.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Russell argues that the initial scholarly conclusions about the reliefs were limited by the organization and presentation of the data. Additionally, the scholarly consensus was limited by reliefs being sporadically and partially published by museums or other institutions who held only pieces of the larger relief program. Thus in this case, the incomplete, fragmented, or partial publication of the palace reliefs from a partial or fragmented context indisputably led to incomplete, fragmented, or partial conclusions. Russell goes on to argue that since the context of the finds was unavailable, the only recourse left was the iconography and typological study of the reliefs within a pictorial study. Nevertheless, the findings, he argues that scholars arrived at significant conclusion regarding the pictorial and iconographic program of the reliefs (“The Program of the Palace of Assurnasirpal II at Nimrud,” 657–658).

⁹¹ For many years, the bas-reliefs from Assurnasirpal’s palace were known without reference to their original building context. Two issues contributed to this situation. First, as Layard excavated the rooms of the palace at Nimrud, some reliefs were parted out and sent to the British Museum and other collections, while others were reburied (Russell, “The Program of the Palace of Assurnasirpal II at Nimrud,” 655).

⁹² Russell, “The Program of the Palace of Assurnasirpal II at Nimrud,” 713.

⁹³ Russell, “The Program of the Palace of Assurnasirpal II at Nimrud,” 705.

⁹⁴ As Barbara N. Porter writes, “As the visitor advanced past further images of conquest to approach the king, the tree scene slab B-13 was repeated, this time framing the king himself, where its benevolent image became the climax of the room’s decorative program. Here, the scene was flanked by winged gods, emphasizing—and perhaps even creating—divine support for the king.” Barbara N. Porter, “Intimidation and Friendly Persuasion: Re-Evaluating the Propaganda of Ashurnasirpal II,” *Eretz-Israel: Archaeological, Historical and Geographical Studies* Hayim and Miriam Tadmor Volume (2003): 186.

These images, according to Russell, “were probably intended to bolster the loyalty of both friend and potential foe.”⁹⁵ Turning to face the royal dais would reveal an image of the king attending to the “sacred-tree,” flanked by two protective *genii* standing beneath the divine nimbus. Such an image expressed a “bestowal of authority.”⁹⁶ Thus, emanating from the dais and from the scene above it were the historical, successful exploits of Assurnasirpal II. These images culminate in room C on the eastern end of the throne room, where the king is depicted as participating in ritual service to Assur in the winged nimbus. In both the images of the king at war and attending the sacred tree, Assur in the solar disk would be visible.

The two types of depictions of the king justify his rule. The large images of the king in ritual service form the foundation for his success in hunts and on the battlefield. In other words, he succeeds because of his righteous behavior and the gods’ approval.⁹⁷ By combining these features of the king’s actions, the throne room creates, contributes to, and reinforces key notions of Assyrian ideology: military success, service to the gods, divine protection, and Assyrian prosperity.

In a slightly different tone, Irene Winter makes an argument similar to Russell.⁹⁸ In essence, she suggests that the visual emphasis of the throne room concentrates on the king and that the images create a type of “microcosm” of the state.⁹⁹ In its presentation, the throne room

⁹⁵ Russell, “The Program of the Palace of Assurnasirpal II at Nimrud,” 711.

⁹⁶ Russell, “The Program of the Palace of Assurnasirpal II at Nimrud,” 710.

⁹⁷ Russell, “The Program of the Palace of Assurnasirpal II at Nimrud,” 711–12.

⁹⁸ In fact, Winter’s work influences much of Russell’s.

⁹⁹ Winter, “The Program of the Throneroom of Assurnasirpal II,” 28.

communicates assumptions regarding the order and boundaries of the empire.¹⁰⁰ In Winter's telling, the program reveals an ideology of royalty: the king as sovereign, the king as divine attendant, the king as heroic hunter, the king as victorious in battle.¹⁰¹

Based on her readings of the inscriptions in the nearby Ninurta Temple, Winter argues that the images represent specific events that correlate to the temple inscriptions. Additionally, the annals of Assurnasirpal II repeatedly refer to Assur's support of his campaigns.¹⁰² Assur's presence in several of the bas-reliefs supports this idea. The bas-reliefs, Winter argues, can be characterized by precise correlation to the textual accounts of various events. She writes: "only one mention occurs in an account that combines a record of an attack with the description of crossing a river on floats, and this is at Charchemish. Carchemish is also the only state mentioned as providing tribute in ivory tusks to the Assyrian king, and just such tusks are represented among metal vessels and other goods being received by Assurnasirpal from a subservient king in the lower half of the same slab, B17a."¹⁰³ Moreover, argues Winter, "this accuracy should not be at all surprising, as Assurnasirpal himself announces...that he has decorated the palace walls with scenes representing his 'historic deeds'—that is to say, with specifics, not generics."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Winter, "The Program of the Throneroom of Assurnasirpal II," 24.

¹⁰¹ Winter, "The Program of the Throneroom of Assurnasirpal II," 24.

¹⁰² He is even commanded by Assur to engage in his campaigns and is given weapons by the gods. Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC*, 194; 1:9b–17a.

¹⁰³ Winter, "The Program of the Throneroom of Assurnasirpal II," 22.

¹⁰⁴ Winter, "The Program of the Throneroom of Assurnasirpal II," 17. Even more impressive is Winter's suggestion that the reliefs themselves are oriented with a geographic organization moving from the southwest/west to the north in the Assyrian heartland. Such an orientation cannot be known since the north wall is incomplete (22–24).

Winter also proposes an interpretation of the images from which Russell diverges. Building on her notion of the throne room as a microcosm, she suggests that the walls of the throne room represent the furthest reaches of the Assyrian Empire. The walls themselves function as the ends of the Assyrian Empire, and in doing so situate the throne as the center of that empire.¹⁰⁵ Winter's interpretation relies on a totally different viewer orientation to the space. Contra Russell, she views the "pivot point" of the room as the image of the king caring for the sacred tree.¹⁰⁶ The king in ritual service to Assur, then, becomes the point of reference for visitors entering the throne room.¹⁰⁷ Only after seeing this image would viewers turn to the images of hunts and conquest.¹⁰⁸ Winter's reading explicitly connects Assurnasirpal II's successes to his ritual service to the gods. When understood within their larger context, each slab depends on the others to convey the overall message of the throne room.

Without an understanding of the larger context, it is easy to overlook the message the images communicate about the gods, the king, and the empire. Within the larger system of reliefs in Assurnasirpal II's throne room, the king and high god within the nimbus function as the

¹⁰⁵ Winter, "The Program of the Throneroom of Assurnasirpal II," 24.

¹⁰⁶ Winter, "The Program of the Throneroom of Assurnasirpal II," 17.

¹⁰⁷ Winter, "The Program of the Throneroom of Assurnasirpal II," 21. So not only is the physical context of the palace important, but individuals, i.e., the king, contribute to the context of the throne room as well. In the absence of the king's physical presence, are the images fragmented?

¹⁰⁸ Winter, "The Program of the Throneroom of Assurnasirpal II," 18. One difficulty with this suggestion is that it requires that some slabs, namely B3-B11, could have remained unknown to visitors. Russell and Winter agree that some sort of public access would have been had access only to the throne room (Winter, "The Program of the Throneroom of Assurnasirpal II," 27; Russell, "The Program of the Palace of Assurnasirpal II at Nimrud," 714). Barbara N. Porter argues that the reliefs are not meant for intimidation since the images were likely unknown by foreign entities and meant for the Assyrian elite and the gods. Thus, the annals and the reliefs were meant to persuade Assyrian insiders that Assurnasirpal II had done his job (*Trees, Kings, and Politics*, 83, 85). Regarding other throne rooms, Russell has elsewhere argued that those with access included laborers, tributaries, ambassadors, guards, staff, courtiers, foreigners, officers and officials, advisors, visitors of royal banquets, the royal household, scribes, and servants. See John Malcolm Russell, *Sennacherib's Palace Without Rival at Nineveh* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 223.

central icons. Thus, the king and the high god stand near one another. As I have already discussed, the Joel 2:1–14 goes to great lengths through its theophanic language and solar imagery to make Yhwh the central icon of its depiction. On this basis, both the text and the images depict the gods with specific attributes (solar), traits (at war), and features (divine presence) that can be recognized and reemployed by viewers and readers.



Figure 3.1. Assurnasirpal II assaulting a city under the protection of the god Ashur. Gypsum wall relief. Neo-Assyrian. 865–860 BCE. Northwest Palace Room B Panel 3 (top). Nimrud (Kalhu). British Museum 124555.

In the reliefs depicting battle, the king, Assurnasirpal, can be seen aiming his bow from his chariot (fig. 3.1). Accompanied by a driver and a shield bearer, this depiction fits the Assyrian standard of the king in his chariot. Behind Assurnasirpal follow the chariots below the fallen, decapitated bodies of the enemy. Near the king, the god Assur rises in his feathered, winged solar disk and aims his own bow in the same direction.¹⁰⁹ To the immediate right,

¹⁰⁹ The winged solar disk may anticipate the winged sun of Ahura Mazda. See Moortgat, *The Art of Ancient Mesopotamia*, 132.

Assyrian infantrymen “disarm” a fallen enemy.¹¹⁰ Beneath the horses and chariot, fallen troops are trampled, as are the trees around the base of the besieged city. On the right region of the



Figure 3.2 Assurnasirpal II in his chariot with Ashur above. Gypsum wall relief. Neo-Assyrian. 865–860 BCE. Northwest Palace Room B Panel 11 (top). Nimrud (Kalhu). British Museum 124540.

relief, the walled city stands, guarded by archers. In the bottom left, just under the city, Assyrian troops assail foes who have attempted to hide in the vegetation. In these and other reliefs from the period there exist some disproportions between humans and the landscape, which includes the city.

Assur appears in his solar disk repeatedly throughout the scenes that depict warfare (figs. 3.2). Adad and Nergal also appear within the standard of each chariot (fig. 3.3).¹¹¹ He always faces the direction of Assurnasirpal II and aims his weapon at the enemies of the Neo-Assyrians. The repetition of the high god throughout the slabs convey the centrality of the gods’ presence in each stage of warfare whether actual—in the solar disk—or representational—in the standard. As

¹¹⁰ For a complete study on disarticulation in ancient Near Eastern iconography, see Joel M. LeMon, “Cutting the Enemy to Pieces: Ps 118,10–12 and the Iconography of Disarticulation,” *ZAW* 126, vol. 1 (2014): 59–75.

¹¹¹ Throughout the reliefs the chariots contain standards bearing the images of the gods.

narrative art, the individual reliefs depict distinct parts of a larger event.¹¹² Thus, it is reasonable to interpret the scenes as depicting Assur's participation taking place at every stage.¹¹³

Another bas-relief from the same palace throne room shows Assurnasirpal returning triumphantly from his conquest (fig. 3.4). Accompanying him, as it did in the invasion, is the winged solar disk of Assur. This time, the deity takes a more benevolent posture and lowers his bow as the army returns to his camp. The corpses of Assurnasirpal's slain enemies line the road home.



Figure 3.3 Archers shooting at enemies in brush. Chariots include the standard with Adad and Nergal. Gypsum wall relief. Neo-Assyrian. 865–860 BCE. Northwest Palace Room B Panel 4 (top). Nimrud (Kalhu). British Museum 124542.

¹¹² Dominique Collon, et al. “Ancient World,” Narrative Art, Grover Art Online, updated 30 July, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T061028>.

¹¹³ Assur appears in the scenes where Assurnasirpal II makes peace with his enemies in bottom relief on slab B-7. He also appears in the ritual scenes of the throne room above the sacred tree and Assurnasirpal's ritual actions.



Figure 3.4. Assurnasirpal II returns triumphantly. Gypsum wall; relief. 865–860 BCE. Northwest Palace Room B Panel 5 (top). British Museum 124551.

The bas-reliefs convey information about the king, kingdom, and the gods, and they summarize the king's career and accomplishments.¹¹⁴ In short, the depiction of the king throughout the scenes featured on the reliefs reinforces his role as keeper and maintainer of the Assyrian Empire, endowed as he is with the power and support of the gods.¹¹⁵ In this role, the king is invincible because “he has god on his side.”¹¹⁶ The invincibility of the king was directly tied to his dependence on and the support of the deity. Thus, Julian Reade argues that images of the king that show him victorious in killing a lion or overcoming other threats to the kingdom, even simply the image of the king drawing his bow, can be read as symbols of divine support.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Samuel Michael Paley, *King of the World: Ashur-Nasir-Pal II of Assyria 883–859 B.C.* (New York: Brooklyn Museum, 1976), 20.

¹¹⁵ Importantly, he is not portrayed as a god. He does not wear the horned crown or participate in the visual traditions of the Akkadians, which often depict the god as king. This is not to say that the conceptualization of the king as god is lost under the Neo-Assyrians, but that the visual depiction is different, distinct. On this change, see Bahrani, *Rituals of War*, 158.

¹¹⁶ Reade, “Ideology and Propaganda,” 332.

¹¹⁷ Reade, “Ideology and Propaganda,” 332. This motif is easily shared, and Israel/Palestine borrows it as well. Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images*, 248–77.

In any case, evidence of divine support and approval of the sovereign is not limited simply to his actions in battle or the hunt; it is also apparent in scenes of ritual action and celebration.¹¹⁸ The viewer of the images would see that Assur was supportive of and even a participant in the king's exploits.¹¹⁹ As Zainab Bahrani suggests, "The course of battle was determined by the gods."¹²⁰ The gods' presence, in actuality and in representational forms, was essential to victory.¹²¹

It is clear that the winged sun disk was a central feature of depictions of gods in various situations, but especially in warfare.¹²² The image of the sun disk, especially the winged sun disk, is much more than a motif within ancient Near Eastern art; it is, to borrow from David Morgan, an *icon*, an image that depends on and reveals networks of associations, and that therefore returns the gaze of the viewer.

I argue that these reliefs pertain to Joel on the basis of their depictions. First, the armies are led into battle by the winged solar disk, as in figure 1 (v. 11). Additionally, the high god also appears on the standard on the king's chariot, and the king himself relates closely to the high god so that his person may also indicate divine presence.¹²³ Second, the images depict the use of chariots and war horses, elements typical of Assyrian military presence (vv. 4–5). Third, the

¹¹⁸ Reade, "Ideology and Propaganda," 336.

¹¹⁹ Reade, "Ideology and Propaganda," 342.

¹²⁰ Bahrani, *Rituals of War*, 183.

¹²¹ Bahrani, *Rituals of War*, 197.

¹²² Ornan, *The Triumph of the Symbol*, 152.

¹²³ Indeed, the king and the high god were closely related in the ancient world, often understood as the god's regent, the king could, at times, stand for the deities presence. In these images, however, by accompanying the king, the winged solar disk communicates that the god's presence is with the king and participates in his military excursions. See Mehmet-AliAtaç, "'Time and Eternity' in the Northwest Palace of Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrud," in *Assyrian Reliefs from the Palace of Ashurnasirpal II: A Cultural Biography*, ed. Ada Cohen and Steven E. Kangas (Hanover, NH: Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College; Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2010), 172.

soldiers attack a walled enclave. Fourth, the brunt of the attack is delivered by foot soldiers climbing the walls via ladders (vv. 7–9). The images depict chaos—in spite of which the bodies of the Assyrian troops remain orderly, in contrast to their enemies, who are depicted in various states of amputation, disarray, and grotesque twists (v. 8). The soldiers attack the very foundations of the city with tunnels, shovels, and siege machinery (v. 10). And finally, the Assyrian forces greatly outnumber their enemies (v. 5).

Considering the image of the solar disk, especially the winged solar disk, as a Morganian icon allows readers of Joel’s theophany to recognize Yhwh’s depiction within the network of the solar disk icon. Icons, to borrow from Morgan, need not be static to function.¹²⁴ Indeed, to be static would merely be to reproduce the image. Instead, the icon necessarily contains, and glorifies in, the differences between representations and the icon and the thing. These inconsistencies allow the viewer to make sense of the icon, “even if it’s not an image.”¹²⁵ The very ability of the sun disk to transcend cultures marked by remarkable differences in geography, language, and artistic media (for instance, the difference between major and minor art) demonstrates its iconic status.

Conclusion

Several interpretive issues have appeared in this assessment of Joel 2:1–14. First, I have argued that the iconic structure of the pericope demonstrates an emphasis on theophany and solar

¹²⁴ That is to say that the icons must exist within a sort of “recognition loop” by which any new representation of the image must play upon the traditions and features of previous iterations. In Morgan’s terms, they must “reconnect to the source” while still contributing to new cultural contexts and engaging viewers—and readers—in new situations. *Images at Work*, 134–35.

¹²⁵ Morgan, *Images at Work*, 114.

imagery. Second, as the one to whom the theophany points, Yhwh becomes the focal object, and his location within the text a central image. Like Assur in the Neo-Assyrian reliefs, Yhwh leads an army into battle, and the solar imagery directly supports this identification. The reliefs from Assurnasirpal II's throne room relate to the text in content and also relate closely historically. While these images were displayed in a closed setting, they function within a history of standard Neo-Assyrian iconographic practices, texts, and royal ideologies. Once correlation between text and image is recognized, difficult textual features—such as the root *שָׁהַר*—prove not so difficult. For instance, these features include the Day of Yhwh appearing as the dawn (v. 2), his appearance causing the people's faces to glow (v. 6), and the dimming of the astral lights during Yhwh's appearance (v. 10). What this section has argued is that without explicit reference to locusts in Joel 2, there is no need treat verses 1–14 as if they were describing an actual, historical locust plague. Yhwh's appearance in this text at the head of his army fits well alongside certain depictions of ancient Near Eastern motifs of gods in battle, particularly the sun god accompanying his king in battle against the enemy.

Joel 2:15–26

The next major unit in Joel's oracle begins with the same introduction as the previous unit. This time, however, the prophet implores the people to proclaim a fast (v. 15) and gather an assembly from the whole population (v. 16).¹²⁶ The priests and the ministers speak to the people words of

¹²⁶ By and large, interpreters find in this pericope a *Gattung* that relates to repentance (for an account of the perspectives see Prinsloo, *The Theology of the Book of Joel*, 52). In contrast, see Wolff's description of the pericope as a *Klagefeier*, a national lament, which is less dependent on Judah proclaiming wrongdoing and instead simply seeking mercy.

comfort and restoration (v. 17). They remind the people that Yhwh is jealous for them, and that he has pity on them (v. 18). In response to their apparently contrite actions, Yhwh sends to the people classic elements of fertility and blessing: grain, wine, and oil (v. 19).¹²⁷ Additionally, Yhwh responds by removing the “northern army” from their midst, dividing it into two halves: one to be driven into the eastern sea and the other into the western sea (v. 20).

Finally, the prophet speaks to the soil and animals with a promise of fertility before turning his message to the people and promising rain, grain, wine, and oil (vv. 21–24). Moreover, Yhwh offers full restitution for the “years” that his great army has devoured (vv. 25–27). With the enemy disbanded and dispatched, the people will eat in peace and never again risk the shame of defeat.

Readers should not overlook the shift in focus in this second pericope. After the incredible destruction in the previous pericope, Yhwh restores all things, the people, the ground, and the beasts of the fields. This act of recreation results in a call to rejoice and praise Yhwh as the one who restores, even though he was seemingly responsible for the destruction. While Prinsloo makes his case based on the internal logic of the pericope, suggesting that the later pericope is dependent on what has already transpired in the first chapter,¹²⁸ I contend that the iconic structure reveals the close relation between verses 15–27 and the earlier pericope (vv. 1–14).

¹²⁷ It should be noted here that the people have yet to actually participate in any of the acts of confession or contrition suggested. Throughout this section of Joel, the prophet speaks to the people in terms of third-person jussive verbs, and therefore, incomplete actions. He does not describe them by means of “perfect” verbs, which would convey a sense of completeness in the narrative. On the lack of repentance in Joel see, Douglas Watson, “Divine Attributes in the Book of Joel,” *JSOT* 37 (2012): 121.

¹²⁸ Prinsloo, *The Theology of the Book of Joel*, 78.

Delimitation

Codex Leningradensis does not include any significant demarcation in verses 15–27 and treats the section as one unit.¹²⁹ The First Rabbinic Bible (1517) arranges the subunits as such: verses 15–16 make up the first subunit, verses 17–18 comprise the second, verse 19 is the third, verses 20–26 are the fourth unit, and verse 27 is the final subunit. The Second Rabbinic Bible (1524) organizes the text by identifying verses 15–20 as the first subunit, verses 21–23 as the second subunit, verses 24–25 as the third, and verses 26–27 as the last one. Alexandrinus demarcates verses 15–17 as the first subunit, followed by verses 18–20 as the second subunit, verses 21–22 as the third, and concluding with verses 23–27. Like Codex Leningradensis, Codex Sinaiticus provides no subunits and only demarcates at the level of the pericope.

Translation

¹⁵Blow a shofar in Zion
 sanctify a fast!
 Call an assembly!
¹⁶Gather the people!
 Sanctify a gathering!
 Bring near the Elders!
 Gather the children
 and the tender ones of the breast!
 Let the bridegroom leave his room
 and the bride her chamber.
¹⁷Between the vestibule and the altar
 let the priests, ministers of Yhwh, weep.
 Let them say: “Spare, O Yhwh, your people!
 and do not give your inheritance to reproach
 as a proverb to the nations.”

¹²⁹ 4QXII^c places a *vacat* at the end of verse 15, beginning the new unit at verse 16.

Why do they say among the people, “Where is their God?”

¹⁸Yhwh became jealous for his land
and pitied his people¹³⁰

¹⁹Yhwh answered saying to his people,
“My grace I am sending to you
the grain and the wine and the oil
and you will be satisfied¹³¹ with them.

And I will not make you again a mockery of the nations.

²⁰The northerner I will remove from upon you
and drive it to a parched and desolate land
its face to the eastern sea
and its rear to the western sea.

Its stench will go up
and its smell will go up
For great things are done!”

²¹Do not fear O ground,
be glad and rejoice for great things Yhwh is doing!

²²Do not fear, O beasts of the field,
for the pastures of the wilderness are green.

A tree bears its fruit;
a fig tree and a vine yield their might.

²³O Children of Zion, be glad and rejoice in Yhwh your God
for he has given to you the rain for vindication
and poured out for you rain;¹³²
early rain and latter rain as before.¹³³

²⁴The threshing floors are full of grain
and the vats overflow of wine and oil.

²⁵I will pay you for the years which the locust ate,
the hopper, and the destroyer, and the cutter

¹³⁰ Theodotian’s text reads the two verbs as jussives. Gelston suggests that Theodotian reads this subunit as a continuation of the prayer. See “Commentary on the Critical Apparatus,” *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 76. 4QXII^c does not provide any additional insights into the reading. See *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 33.

¹³¹ 4QXII^c reads “you shall eat and you shall be satisfied.” According to Gelston, this word is written above the line in the same hand. Gelston suggests that this reading is due to assimilation between v. 19 and v. 26. See “Commentary on the Critical Apparatus,” *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 76.

¹³² Symmachus, Vulgate, and Targum read this as “teacher.” The Old Greek and the Syriac reflect yet another reading. Gelston suggest that OG and S read a different or damaged *Vorlage*. See “Commentary on the Critical Apparatus,” *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 76.

¹³³ Gelston suggests that the Old Greek and Syriac misread the *beth* for a *kaph* while the Targum understands the sense of the MT and simply paraphrases. See “Commentary on the Critical Apparatus,” *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 76.

The mighty army which I sent against you.
²⁶And surely you shall eat and be satisfied
 and praise the name of Yhwh your God
 who has done with you wonders
 and my people shall never again be shamed.
²⁷You shall know that in the midst of Israel, I am
 And I am Yhwh your God and there is no other
 and my people shall never again be put to shame.¹³⁴

Iconic Structure of Joel 2:15–27

First Subunit (vv. 15–17)

In addition to the *petuhah* and the opening line, which repeats the question in the previous pericope, the disjunctive imperatives provide a syntactical signal to take verse 15 as the start of the new unit.¹³⁵ Unlike the opening line of the previous pericope, however, the phrase *תקעו שופר בציון* summons the people instead of warning them to flee.¹³⁶ Joel 2:15–27 introduces the national call to lament as a response to the violence and destruction in the previous pericope.¹³⁷ Prinsloo notes that this call differs from previous calls (1:13–14 and 2:1–2) in its length and detail.¹³⁸ By recalling elements of Joel 1:2–20, the present pericope does not merely respond to the earlier events, but provides a turning point where destruction meets hope for restoration.¹³⁹ In other words, the call “where is their God?” is not merely a rhetorical question, but signals the change

¹³⁴ Gelston argues against BHK and BHS’s omission of this clause and that there is textual evidence for not emending the text here. See “Commentary on the Critical Apparatus,” *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 77.

¹³⁵ Marvin A. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, 167.

¹³⁶ Prinsloo, *The Theology of the Book of Joel*, 52.

¹³⁷ Prinsloo, *The Theology of the Book of Joel*, 60.

¹³⁸ Seitz, *Joel*, 168; and Prinsloo, *The Theology of the Book of Joel*, 62.

¹³⁹ Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, 167.

in Yhwh's relation to his people, from the one who wreaks devastation to the one who restores and renews. The central, and most important, feature of this subunit is the call for the priests to perform their ritual duties between the vestibule and the altar.

Second Subunit (vv. 18–20)

This subunit begins Yhwh's response to the people and outlines his promise of restoration. Notably, this restoration takes place through the agricultural elements—grain, wine, and oil—that were at risk of destruction in chapter 1 and were, as already noted, central to the sacrificial system of the temple cultus. Verse 18 relates to the previous subunit by means of the *waw*-consecutive, which suggests that Yhwh's response is causally related to the holy gathering and the words of the priests. While verse 18 does indicate a striking, even transitional, moment in the pericope, it does not necessarily indicate a shift in theme.¹⁴⁰ Instead, the restoration and the destruction connect on a fundamental level.

The use of the phrase “the northerner” to describe the enemy has naturally led to great debate about the identity of the referent.¹⁴¹ As I have already shown in chapter 1, the identity of the invader is almost immediately open to debate, especially when one considers the role that the

¹⁴⁰ On the nature of verse 18 as a “turning point” in the book, see Prinsloo, *The Theology of the Book of Joel*, 63. Prinsloo rightly points out that the verse does not necessarily depict a new section, since the work has anticipated Yhwh's salvation already (vv. 1:13–16). Instead, he argues, it is the fulfillment of the promise earlier in the book (64).

¹⁴¹ See, for instance, Brevard Child, “Enemy from the North and the Chaos Tradition,” *JBL* 78 (1959): 187–98; C. van Leeuwen, “The ‘Northern One’ in the Composition of Joel 2,19–27,” in *The Scriptures and the Scrolls: Studies in Honour of A. S. van der Woude on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, ed. F. García Martínez, A. Hillhorst, and C. J. Labuschagne, VTSupp 49 (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 85–99; Kevin Chau, “Conceptual Blending in Joel 2:1–11: God's Apocalyptic Storm-Locust-Warriors,” in *T & T Clark Handbook of Asian American Biblical Hermeneutics*, ed. Uriah Y. Kim and Seung Ai Yang (New York: T & T Clark, 2019), 273–284.

locusts play in ancient Near Eastern iconographic and textual records: as figurative means of portraying hordes of soldiers, either one's own or those of one's enemy. Likewise, the phrase "the northerner" complicates the idea that the destruction Joel describes is due to a locust plague. Within the prophetic corpus, the enemy of the North routinely indicates either the Assyrian or Babylonian military.¹⁴² Throughout Jerermiah (1:13–15; 4:5b–8, 11–17, 19–21, 29–31; 5:15–17; 6:1–5, 22–25), for instance, this enemy is clearly human, described as "mighty men" who speak a foreign language.¹⁴³ Childs refers to these and the other accompanying descriptors as "plastic," not intended to "identify [the enemy] with an historical nation."¹⁴⁴ In Isa (10:5,12; 10:28), the phrase clearly refers to the Assyrian soldiers.¹⁴⁵ In Hab 1:5–11, these forces ride horses and come from afar.¹⁴⁶ Clearly we are not in the realm of locusts. Childs remains disinterested in the precise historical identification of the enemy, whether Assyrian or Babylonian.¹⁴⁷ Instead, his attention turns toward the mythic character of this enemy and positions the appearance of an enemy from the north within the *Chaoskampf* motif. This motif fits entirely with the description of events in Joel 2:1–14, which depicts the Day of Yhwh using language of theophany and the chaos myth. As a result, Childs seems largely correct in suggesting that the description of the enemies is not a demythologized account, but rather a "mythologized" history.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴² Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, 170.

¹⁴³ Childs, "Enemy from the North and the Chaos Tradition," 190.

¹⁴⁴ Childs, "Enemy from the North and the Chaos Tradition," 190.

¹⁴⁵ Childs, "Enemy from the North and the Chaos Tradition," 191.

¹⁴⁶ Childs, "Enemy from the North and the Chaos Tradition," 191.

¹⁴⁷ In the case of the phrase in Joel, however, Childs remains convinced that the phrase "describes a locust plague which ushers in the day of Yahweh." "Enemy from the North and the Chaos Tradition," 197.

¹⁴⁸ Childs, "Enemy from the North and the Chaos Tradition," 198.

Third Subunit (vv. 21–24)

Disjunctive imperatives introduce the third subunit, which some interpreters mark off as an entirely new pericope based on form critical arguments.¹⁴⁹ The justification for this organization comes from the disjunctive imperatives that mark a shift in tone (vv. 21–23). They do not, however, necessarily indicate a completion of something altogether new. After all, the imperatives provide reassurances that are dependent on Yhwh’s ability to remove the enemy and restore Judah.

This subunit address a broad range of elements—the land, animals, and humans—and calls attention to Yhwh’s restoration of the elements that the enemy destroyed in what Prinsloo refers to as a “cosmic catastrophe.”¹⁵⁰ Thus this subunit, along with the rest of the pericope, reverses the destruction that takes place in 1:5–14. Especially notable are the references to the fig tree and the vine that, though once destroyed, will bear fruit according to their full yield (v. 22), thus reversing the destruction of Joel 1:7. By appealing to the earth, the vegetation, the animals, and then finally the people, the subunit participates in a logical result of Yhwh’s restoration (vv. 25–27). This restoration occurs naturally because of the promised rain that Yhwh brings (v. 23).¹⁵¹ While the restoration of the vegetation, animals, and food sources are important for life,

¹⁴⁹ Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, 171. Sweeney begins a new pericope that encompasses vv. 2:21–3:8.

¹⁵⁰ Prinsloo, *The Theology of the Book of Joel*, 78.

¹⁵¹ The phrase *המורה לצדקה* has resulted in divergent interpretations. Perhaps most famously, Joel 2:23 was the likely source adapted by the Qumran community as the “Teacher of Righteousness/The Righteous Teacher” (*המורה* can mean “teacher,” though the phrase in 1QpHab 10 is slightly different). This text, then, was used to identify an early leader of the sect with Yhwh’s restoration and later blessing. Most simply, however, this phrase refers to a second (or later) rain. See Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, 172.

they are also central to the sacrifices in the temple. Thus, their reconstitution presumes the possibility of participating again in sacrificial rituals.

Fourth Subunit (vv. 25–27)

Yhwh speaks in the first person in verses 25–27, a marked shift in voice that brings about the climax of the pericope.¹⁵² In this subunit, Yhwh explains his actions and compensation for the devastation of the locusts in chapter 1. Curiously, Yhwh promises to restore the years that they ate (v. 25). Presumably, this metaphorical language relates to the fact that the people have been years without food.¹⁵³ This curious phrase complicates interpretation for those who take the mention of locusts as a reference to a historical plague. Since locusts do not eat years, the text must be understood to be speaking metaphorically. Thus, a non-metaphorical reading requires interpretative acrobatics that understand “years” to refer to an annual harvest.¹⁵⁴ Another possibility is that the damage wrought by the locusts has implications for years on end.¹⁵⁵ Either way, the text strains at expressing the depth of the destruction. Most importantly, however, the locusts are described as Yhwh’s great army. The fundamental question of verses 15–27 is that of

¹⁵² Prinsloo, *The Theology of the Book of Joel*, 78.

¹⁵³ Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, 172–73.

¹⁵⁴ See, for example, Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, 172–73.

¹⁵⁵ Seitz, *Joel*, 181. On the potentialities of the destruction of locusts and their management see the editorial “Use Science to Fight the Locust Plague,” *Nature* 584 (2020): 497; and Ayenat Mersie, “How to Rid East Africa of Locusts? Serve Them in a Kebab or Drive Them to Cannibalism,” *Reuters*, 2 July 2020: news.trust.org/item/20200702061455-6thv0/.

restoration after destruction, especially since Yhwh is ultimately responsible for the destruction in the first place.

The restoration results in the proclamation of Yhwh's promise that the people shall never again be shamed. Once again, readers must confront the result of the terror with its cause, namely, Yhwh, who brings both fire and rain, destruction and renewal. As we will see, this dichotomy, which modern readers might find confusing, is a central aspect of iconographic representations of high gods in Neo-Assyrian visual materials.

Iconography

Neo-Assyrian traditions of the high god leading his army in siege warfare provides a visual context for Joel's depiction of Yhwh at the head of his army. In the traditions from Assyria, the high god is depicted in a winged nimbus that combines elements of the weather god with solar imagery. This is likely due to influence from the western reaches of the ancient Near East, including Egypt and Anatolia.¹⁵⁶ Importantly, this image is not only one that is viable for images of power and destruction. In its multivalency, it also connotes fertility and new life. These concepts are often associated with natural elements like water, rain, and the sun. Thus it should come as no surprise that the shift from Yhwh's ferocity to his compassion is joined by images of fertility, the refreshing of the earth, provisions for wild beasts, and a renewed promise of full

¹⁵⁶ Mehmet-Ali Ataç, "Visual Formula and Meaning in Neo-Assyrian Relief Sculpture," *The Art Bulletin* 88 (2006): 83. See also Jeremy Black and Anthony Green, *Gods, Demons, and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia: An Illustrated Dictionary* (London: The British Museum, 1992), 185–86.

harvests and overflowing vats of wine and storehouses of grain. In this section, I will explore relevant iconography of fertility imagery (*Fruchtbarkeit*).¹⁵⁷

The Fertile Solar God

As I have argued, Joel 2:1–14 presents Yhwh as a solar deity who leads his armies. In Joel 2:15–27 depicts Yhwh as a deity who leaves behind rain and fertility. The question remains: how does fertility result from the apparent devastation that takes up the earlier unit? Attention to the iconic structure of Joel 2:15–27 answers the question nicely. Destruction and fertility are carefully combined into the iconographic depictions of the weather god in Neo-Assyrian iconography. As I will show, the rendering of a god within a solar nimbus is often accompanied by features also associated with rain and clouds. In the process of a developing monotheism in Judah, such an image was useful for Judean theologians, like Joel, who had no deity to turn to but Yhwh when faced with the realities of disaster and restoration. If, as I have contended so far, Yhwh’s location at the head of an army is comparable to depictions of Assur leading Neo-Assyrian armies, then we must further probe the iconographic value of the solar god.

Images of winged sun disks appear throughout the glyptic records of Israel/Palestine. The depiction of Yhwh as a deity with wings, and as a deity with solar features, is well documented.¹⁵⁸ Yhwh’s identity as a winged solar god does not arise *ex nihilo*, but like Neo-

¹⁵⁷ Othmar Keel and Silvia Schroer already anticipated such a reading in *Schöpfung*, 86–88. For the English translation see Keel and Schroer, *Creation: Biblical Theologies in the Context of the Ancient Near East*, trans. Peter T. Daniels (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 67; and Keel, *SBW*, 149–63.

¹⁵⁸ See for instance LeMon, *Yahweh’s Winged Form in the Psalms*; Klingbeil, *Yahweh Fighting from Heaven*.

Assyrian depictions of Assur, depends on active iconographic traditions from Egypt and Anatolia and remains in use through the Persian period.¹⁵⁹ This winged sun god paradoxically brings both militaristic wrath and fertile blessings. This section will focus on the nature of the Assyrian weather god, and will draw comparison to Yhwh's depiction in Joel 2:1–17.

Enameled Brick of Tukulti-Ninurta II

The divine nimbus as a symbol of divine support and presence did not, for Assurnasirpal, materialize out of thin air. Indeed, it has a lineage in the iconography of other Assyrian rulers who preceded him. One of the most significant depictions of divine support for the king, especially divine military support, comes from an enameled brick belonging to Tukulti-Ninurta II, Assurnasirpal II's predecessor, who reigned from 890 to 884 BCE.

Like the earlier depiction of Yhwh in verses 1–14, the enameled brick combines solar imagery with imagery typically associated with weather gods. In the enameled brick, Assur rises in a solar nimbus as he appears with bow drawn. Flanking him on both sides are clouds containing rain drops. In this image the conquering solar god—depicted with drawn bow, winged nimbus, and flames—is also the restorative weather god who brings not only destruction but restoration via life-giving water. So too, Yhwh leads his armies in verses 1–14, but turns to restoration in verses 15–27.

¹⁵⁹ On the influence of Egyptian influences on NA imagery of the solar disk, see Ataç, “Time and Eternity,” 170.

The brick (fig. 3.5) depicts a high god, likely Assur, in a winged solar disk.¹⁶⁰ The god draws a bow, and the lower half of his body resembles the feathered tail of a bird.¹⁶¹ Since the lower register is not preserved, we cannot know the entire image context. However, at the place of the break, one can discern the remains of



Figure 3.5. Fired clay brick. Tukulti-Ninurta II. 890–884 BCE. Kalah Shergat. British Museum 115706.

a horse's head and the head of a charioteer.¹⁶² Thus the vibrant image depicts Assur as a war god aiding the army in their attack.¹⁶³ Walter Andrae describes it this way:

The flying god Ashur [*sic*] is represented here as unusually beautiful. He is wearing the round white cap of the gods, with two yellow horns, and not the upright crown of later Assyrian times, brought from Babylon. The head and the uppermost part of the body seem to have been white, and the wing feathers yellow and blue. He is flying towards the right with the charioteer, and bending a little downwards, is aiming at the enemy, [*sic*] a double yellow ring in his flaming nimbus. Great flaming streamers fly back from him. His bow and nimbus run into each other in a remarkable way. Above, the inner ring of the nimbus makes a loop.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ E. Douglas van Buren, *Symbols of the Gods in Mesopotamian Art*, *Analecta Orientalia* 23 (Rome: Pontificium institutum biblicum, 1945), 95–96.

¹⁶¹ James Bennett Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East in Pictures Relating to the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 314.

¹⁶² Glazed bricks were used along the bottom registers of orthostates to guard the wall from damage, not unlike the stone orthostates found in other palaces. For more on the use of glazed bricks, see Walter Andrae, *Coloured Ceramics from Ashur, and Earlier Ancient Assyrian Wall-Paintings: From Photographs and Water-Colours by Members of the Ashur Expedition Organised by the Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft* (London: KPaul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1925), 25.

¹⁶³ Andrae, *Coloured Ceramics from Ashur*, 27.

¹⁶⁴ Andrae, *Coloured Ceramics from Ashur*, 27.

Henri Frankfort also describes the image as depicting the deity's support of Tukulti-Ninurta II.¹⁶⁵ Frankfort points out that this image is replete with various meanings. First, the clouds with raindrops along the top of the register reinforce Assur's identity as one who holds power over nature. Second, since rain is associated with the god, rain itself should be understood as a divine blessing. Finally, the details surrounding Assur's appearance, the wings and feathered tail, could be understood as "a derivation from Egypt, where Horus, the god incarnate in Pharaoh and manifest in the falcon, was represented as a sun disk between (originally: supported by) two wings."¹⁶⁶ A detail Frankfort accepts as originating in Egypt with the solar disk.¹⁶⁷

This enameled brick precedes Assurnasirpal II's rule and informs the use of the solar nimbus in the wall reliefs of his palace. Thus, the high god in those images likely also carried associations of restoration and blessing. Beyond Tukulti-Ninurta II and Assurnasirpal II, however, the images of the high god in a nimbus were informed by larger ancient Near Eastern traditions such as those in Egypt and Anatolia.

Both Othmar Keel and Martin Klingbeil have connected this image of Assur to the motif of the storm or weather god throughout the ancient Near East. For his part, Klingbeil has argued that the figure from this glazed tile depicts the sun god as the weather god, based completely upon the raindrops that accompany the image around the border. Following Frankfort, he argues explicitly for a full association of this image with a weather deity. He writes: "the association of the god with rain clouds demonstrates [*sic*] his identification with a storm and weather deity, while the wide wings symbolize the dark, thundering heaven. The atmospheric phenomena are

¹⁶⁵ Frankfort, *The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*, 134.

¹⁶⁶ Frankfort, *The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*, 134.

¹⁶⁷ Frankfort, *The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*, 134.

directed against the enemies of the Assyrian king, thus creating a complex image of the god fighting from heaven with meteorological weapons.”¹⁶⁸ Though in his opinion, the depicted god is not Assur, but Shamash.¹⁶⁹ Regardless of the precise identity of the deity, what we have here is undoubtedly one instantiation of a long-standing Assyrian motif that demonstrates the divine support and protection of the king.

A depiction of the high god at war accompanied by the very features of restoration and fertility—clouds and rain— helps us contextualize Yhwh’s actions in 2:15–27. Moved with compassion, Yhwh responds to the land and his people (v. 18). He promises renewed fertility (v. 19) and the removal of the enemy (v. 20). Here the nonhuman elements—soil, beasts, pastures, trees, and vines—are promised a return to their fruits (vv. 21–22). Yhwh brings rain (v. 23) and replenishes the threshing floors and vats (v. 24).

Yhwh’s Depiction as a Solar Deity in Israel/Palestine

The motif of the winged sun disk was known in Syria-Palestine and was connected to Yhwh in Judah. Several examples of these winged disks can be found in the miniature art of Syria/Palestine.¹⁷⁰ The development of solar iconography arrives in Judah toward the end of the

¹⁶⁸ Klingbeil, *Yahweh Fighting from Heaven*, 260–61; Martin Klingbeil, “Psalms 5: Iconography,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings*, ed. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 647.

¹⁶⁹ See Klingbeil’s comments in Klingbeil, *Yahweh Fighting from Heaven*, 261.

¹⁷⁰ This motif begins in the Northern Kingdom before it finds a home in the Southern Kingdom. Israel/Palestine’s fascination with Egyptian symbols of royalty and power are well documented. See Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images*, 270. LeMon notes that the *uraei* would likely have lost their precise meaning in a Levantine context. Here, they no longer protect the sun god, and instead emanate from the disk as rays of light, conveying the nearness of the presence of the distant sun god. (LeMon, “The Hezekiah Seal”).

eighth century and is likely due to dual Assyrian and Egyptian influence (along with a consistent



Figure 3.6. Scarab seal of a minister of King Ahaz. Scarab. 925–586 BCE. Judahite. After Galling, ZDPV 64, 121; see also Keel and Uehlinger, GGG, 275, fig. 273.

north Syro-Phoenician influence) that arose in this period under the reign of Hezekiah (725–697 BCE).¹⁷¹ One of the clearest examples of the use of the solar disk in a royal setting comes from the seal of a minister of King Ahaz (fig. 3.6). In this seal, the solar disk wears an *atef*-crown and is flanked by two *uraei*. Keel and Uehlinger suggest that this motif contributes to the solarizing

symbolism of Judah’s evolving religious symbolism.¹⁷²

A second Judahite example comes from the “Hezekiah Bulla” (fig. 3.7). Such symbols bear the weight of their associations with the image. In other words, such an image would likely convey concepts such as divine security and immediacy, just as their Egyptian and Mesopotamian counterparts would.¹⁷³ These images bring to the fore notions of the patron god’s presence and protection over those whom his wings cover.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images*, 272.

¹⁷² Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images*, 272. Keel and Uehlinger suggest that the explicit Egyptian forms in the Judahite glyptic of this period likely relate, though indirectly, to the Assyrian empire and its growth of power in the region.

¹⁷³ Contra Mazar, “A Seal Impression,” 637.

¹⁷⁴ LeMon notes that the “conventions of Mesopotamian iconography” are indebted to the solar imagery of the Egyptian-style winged sun disk. LeMon, *Yahweh’s Winged Form in the Psalms*, 54.

As the tradition of the solar disk develops in Israel/Palestine, it contributes to what Keel and Uehlinger refer to as the “astralization” of powers beginning in the eighth century and moving through the seventh into the beginnings of the sixth century (Iron Age IIC). The period is one in which deities are increasingly referenced by astral symbols. This era can be broadly configured as one of systematic integration of vassal states into the empire by way of deportation and resettlement of literati within Assyrian provinces.¹⁷⁵ A more direct iconographic comparand to Tukulti-Ninurta’s painted brick can be found in the image of the anthropomorphic figures of this period. Keel and Uehlinger argue that the two fragmentary images from Arad and Bethlehem depict a sun god situated in the center of a lotus nimbus (figs. 3.8 and 3.9).¹⁷⁶



Figure 3.7. Seal bulla of Hezekiah. 8th–7th c. BCE. Judahite Ophal Excavation. Jerusalem. After Mazar.

¹⁷⁵ Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images*, 283.

¹⁷⁶ Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images*, 345, 347, figs. 337a and b. The shell from Bethlehem also depicts two sphinxes with wings extending toward the figure from the inside edges of the shell. Such figures are common on *Tridacna* shell objects. The British Museum, “Decorated Shell,” https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=1439513&partId=1&searchText=decorated+shell+bethlehem&page=1.

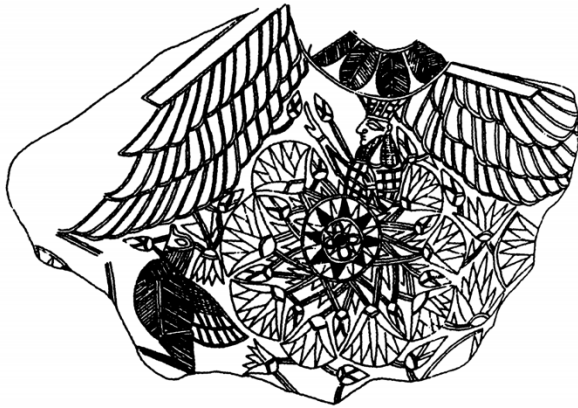


Figure 3.8. Deity in a lotus nimbus. *Tridacna* Shell. Bethlehem. 925–586 BCE. Levantine. After Keel and Uehlinger, GGG, British Museum E48287.

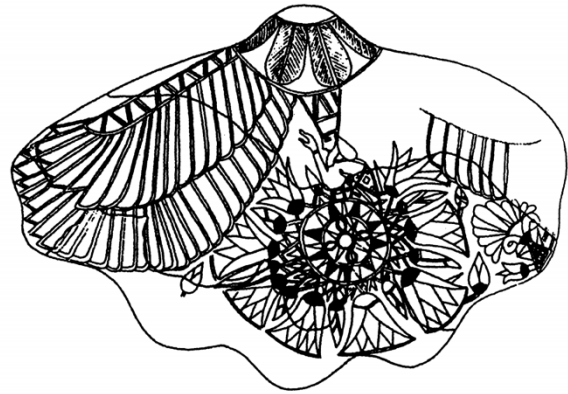


Figure 3.9. Deity in a lotus nimbus. *Tridacna* Shell. Arad. 925–586 BCE. Levantine. After Keel and Uehlinger, GGG.

While not explicitly or exclusively associated with Yhwh, these depictions may have had some association with concepts of Yhwh in the seventh century—due, in part, to the process of astralization.¹⁷⁷ These figures seem to relate to the notion of the mobility of the sun god, who rides through the heavens, just as Assur moves across the battlefield or Yhwh flies on the cherubim and the wings of the wind.¹⁷⁸

If Joel 2:1–14 depicts Yhwh in a manner that fits within a larger tradition of depicting high gods at war, then the relationship with verses 15–27 is clarified. One need not contrast

¹⁷⁷ Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images*, 348.

¹⁷⁸ Baruch Brandl suggests that there was a localization of an industry of carving and engraving these figures at Jerusalem and Arad. See Baruch Brandl, “The Engraved *Tridacna*-Shell Discs,” *Anatolian Studies* 34 (1984): 19. According to Brandl, this industry began in the Neo-Assyrian era when the Assyrian campaigns into Syria and the Levant ended the Syrian ivory engraving industry by “liquidating” the source of the ivory, the Syrian elephant. During the Neo-Assyrian period (esp. 630–580 BCE), the engraving of *Tridacna* shells replaced the ivory trade. It too came to an end, though likely after the Assyrian Empire’s withdrawal, with the Babylonians some fifty years later. Baruch Brandl, “Two Engraved *Tridacna* Shells from Tel Miqne-Ekron,” *BASOR* 323 (August 2001): 59–60. Several other examples can be found from Sippar and Abu Habba. See for instance, The British Museum, “Cosmetic-Container,” https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=282829&partId=1&searchText=tridacna+shell&page=4.

Yhwh's actions in verses 1–14 and verses 15–27. There is an iconographic precedent that combines the militaristic might and compassion of the high god in Mesopotamia.

Conclusion

This chapter began by interrogating relationship between Joel 2 and Joel 1. As I pointed out, interpreters' options for determining the meaning of chapter 2 hinge on decisions—particularly regarding the locust—that they make in chapter 1. What I have attempted to show is that the iconic structure of chapter 2 should be compared to visual depictions of military invasions from the ancient Near East. In particular, the position of Yhwh at the head of his army fits alongside Neo-Assyrian traditions of the king and the high god Assur leading Assyrian troops into battle. Thus, the description of Yhwh at the head of his army makes use of iconic constellations such as those found on the palace walls at Nimrud. Based on comparative visual materials, Yhwh was known in the Levant to also be associated with solar disks. Thus, as I argue, the first pericope of Joel 2:1–14 presents Yhwh in a form comparable to Assur in battle.

In the second pericope, verses 15–26, Yhwh restores what has been destroyed. Like depictions of gods in solar disks, Yhwh's presence brings light, rain, and warmth to make the ground and animals fertile again. Yhwh's position within the solar disk and its associations with weather reveal a combination of associations common with other solar imagery. The most significant constellation of images appears in the Glazed Brick, which depicts Assur in the solar disk accompanied by storm clouds and raindrops. The combination suggests that after the victory of the solar deity, rain falls, leading to fertility and prosperity.

This chapter has aimed to clarify the relationship among the images representing Yhwh and his army (vv. 1–14) and the fruitful restoration hoped for in the prophet’s call to repentance (vv. 15–27).¹⁷⁹ Too often the interpretive thrust of this passage rests on harkening back to a poorly defended “locust plague” because, the thinking goes, locusts wreak destruction on vegetation and Yhwh promises to restore the vegetation of the land.¹⁸⁰ By introducing the iconographic themes associated with the martial presentation of gods in solar disks, we find a logic strange to contemporary readers but fitting in the ancient world. Namely, that the god who leads in battle is the god who leads in restoration.

¹⁷⁹ Several commentators have noted that the transition between these two pericopes is “rough” or “intolerable.” See Adalbert Merx, *Die Prophetie des Joel und ihre Ausleger von den ältesten Zeiten bis zu den Reformatoren: Eine exegetisch-kritische und hermeneutisch-dogmengeschichtliche Studie* (Halle a.S.: Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1879), 16; and Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 87.

¹⁸⁰ See, for instance, Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 64–65; Crenshaw, *Joel*, 146–163; and Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 87–90.

CHAPTER 4: 3:1–4:8: THE NATIONS AND THE POURING-OUT GOD

Since the publication of Bernhard Duhm's essay on the Twelve Prophets, interpretive consensus has attributed chapters 3 and 4 to a late redactional addition, from either the later Persian period or early Hellenistic period.¹ The most compelling reasons to place the origins of this section of the work at a later date stem from the mention of the Greeks in 4:6. Additionally, interpreters have noted a rhetorical and theological shift at this point.² Such shifts, however, are difficult to ground because the evidence is often interpreted differently by different readers. Nevertheless, I maintain that the second half of the work dates from the Persian period at the earliest. Thus, the iconography that remains relevant for the last two chapters of Joel comes primarily from the Persian period.

In this chapter, I argue that the Achaemenid tribute scenes can illumine our interpretation of Joel 3–4:8. Taken as a single unit, the text reveals two central features: the “pouring out god”—images of gods as the source of water or other life-giving blessings—and the enemy nations in judgment. These features relate to key elements of the Achaemenid iconographic program, which emphasizes Persian rulership over the nations as established by the high god Ahura Mazda and the orderly participation of the subjugated nations. Sometimes this participation is coerced (as depicted at Bisitun) and at other times the nations participate willingly (as shown at Persepolis). In both representations, however, Ahura Mazda appears in the scene as or within a winged solar disk. At Bisitun, the disk shoots forth streams of water, giving

¹ Duhm places it within the context of the Maccabean period. See B. Duhm, “Anmerkungen zu den Zwölf Propheten,” *ZAW* 31 (1911): 187.

² Joel Barker, *From the Depths of Despair*, 200.

life and blessing to the king for his work in subduing the enemy nations. As I will demonstrate, this constellation of images builds upon Mesopotamian and Egyptian iconography and conveys blessing, fertility, and divine pleasure. The Bisitun relief brings together the water-providing solar disk, the subjugated nations and the effluence of divine blessing, in a way similar to Yhwh's response to the people's repentance in Joel 3–4:8.

Joel 3:1–4:8

The conclusion of the events in the previous units leads to a climactic description of the result of the Day of Yhwh, complete with wonderous signs and astrological changes associated with theophany. Even though none shall escape the Day (2:11), a remnant remains and finds refuge in Jerusalem. To them, Yhwh promises to pour out his spirit on all flesh (vv. 1–2), set astral signs in the sky (vv. 3–4), and provide an escape to those who call on his name (v 5).³ Yhwh promises to return the exiled captives to Jerusalem (4:1), bring the nations to judgment in the Valley of Jehoshaphat, and sell the enemy nations in bondage far away (vv. 4–8).

³ On the role and development of Yhwh's name and its importance to the Hebrew Bible see Sandra L. Richter, *The Deuteronomistic History and the Name Theology: leshakken shemo sham in the Bible and the Ancient Near East*, BZAW 318 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2002); and Trygve Mettinger, *In Search of God: The Meaning and Message of the Everlasting Names*, trans. Frederick H. Cryer (Philadelphia: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2005). As Richter and others have pointed out, references to divine names appear frequently in victory inscriptions. See *The Deuteronomistic History*, 130–99.

Delimitation

The unit in question extends from 3:1–4:8. This demarcation places my reading at some odds with the majority of interpreters who, citing a shift in tone or rhetoric between the material in 3 and what follows in 4, conclude the pericope at the end of chapter 3. This division, however, does not accord with the commonplace delimitation of the verses.

According to multiple manuscript traditions, the text of what is now known as chapters 3 and 4 should be read as a single unit. In other words, these traditions suggest that 3:1–4:8 should be read as one pericope. Aleppo and Leningradensis, for instance, combine chapters 3 and 4 and do not break the unit until the end of 4:8. The First Rabbinic Bible of 1517 seamlessly transitions between chapters 3 and 4, providing a major break at the end of verse 8 and minor breaks at verses 3, 5, and 7. Likewise, the Second Rabbinic Bible keeps the chapters together as a major unit, but provides a small *vacat* to indicate a new section: 4:1–3 as a subunit, followed by verse 4 as a subunit, and finally by verses 5–6 as the last subunit of the pericope. The next major pericope consists of verses 4:6–21.

The major Greek traditions represent two distinct layouts of the text. Codex Vaticanus places a major break before 4:9, and it presents no indicators of a new unit except for minor breaks. More importantly, Vaticanus does not distinguish a unit between chapters 2 and 3. Thus, what later becomes chapter 3 falls within a unit that begins with 2:19. Alexandrinus comes the closest to the demarcation tradition in modern bibles by using the large, marginal capitals and additional spacing at 3:1 and 4:1 to indicate a strong break.

Following the majority tradition for the Hebrew manuscripts, my delimitation includes 3:1–4:8. This pericope reveals that the speech in chapter 3 closely relates to the material that

starts chapter four.⁴ The division at 4:8 also follows the rhetoric of the passage, dividing the two parts of the speech into sections that close with the phrase “Yhwh has spoken” (v. 8).

Translation

^{3:1} And behold after that

I will pour out my spirit⁵ on all flesh.
Your sons and your daughters will prophesy.
Your old men will dream dreams.
Your young men will see visions.

² On male servants and female servants
I will also pour out my spirit⁶ on that⁷ day.

³ I will set signs in the heavens and on earth:⁸
blood and fire and pillars of cloud.

⁴The sun will be turned to darkness;
and the moon to blood
before the great and terrible⁹ Day of Yhwh comes.

⁵ Each one who calls on the name of Yhwh will escape.
For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there is deliverance just as Yhwh said

⁴ Indeed, the entirety of chapter 4 makes up Yhwh’s speech. See Elie Assis, *The Book of Joel*, 198.

⁵ The Old Greek assimilates this verse with Num 11:17, 25. The Targum adds “my holy spirit.” See, Gelson, *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 34.

⁶ The Old Greek assimilates here as it does in verse 1. See, Gelson, *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 34.

⁷ According to Gelston, Mur contains a correction in a second hand to bring this text in line with the MT. See, Gelson, “Commentary,” in *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 77.

⁸ According to Gelston, several witnesses to the Old Greek amplify this phrase. See, Gelson, *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 34.

⁹ The Old Greek reads ראה by means of verse 2:11. See, Gelson, *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 34. Gelston discusses this error, which also appears throughout the Twelve, in “Some Difficulties Encountered by Ancient Translators,” in *Sôfer Mahîr: Essays in Honour of Adrian Schenker Offered by Editors of Biblia Hebraica Quinta*, ed. Yohanan A. P. Goldman, Arie van der Kooij, and Richard D. Weis. VTSupp 52 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 47–58.

and among the survivors¹⁰ are those who call on Yhwh.

^{4:1} For behold, in those days and at that time, when I will return the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem,

² I will gather all the nations to the Valley of Jehoshaphat¹¹ and I will judge their people there on account of my people and my heritage Israel which were scattered¹² in the nations and my land they divided.

³ Because they have cast lots for my people and traded my sons for strangeness¹³ and girls they sold for wine and drunk it down.

⁴ What are you to me, Tyre and Sidon and all the regions¹⁴ of Philistia? Are you paying me recompense?

If you are paying recompense to me, swiftly, speedily, I will return your recompense on your head.

⁵ My silver and my gold you have taken and my rich treasures you have taken into your temples.

⁶ The sons of Judah and the sons of Jerusalem you have sold to sons of the Greeks,¹⁵ in order to remove them far from their borders.

⁷ Behold I am stirring them from the place which you have sold them there and I will turn your recompense on your heads.

⁸ And I will sell your sons and your daughters to the hands of the sons of Judah and I will sell them to the Sabeans¹⁶ to a nation far away.

¹⁰ The Old Greek reads the Hebrew root בשר “glad tidings.” See, Gelson, *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 34.

¹¹ Theodotian and the Targum read “judgment.” See, Gelson, *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 35.

¹² The Old Greek and Syriac read the *piel* as a *pual*. See, Gelson, “Commentary,” *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 77.

¹³ The Old Greek and Vulgate misread the ך and read “gave boys to harlots” and “made boys into prostitutes” respectively. See, Gelson, “Commentary,” *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 77.

¹⁴ Various manuscripts, including 4QXII^g, render the singular form instead of the plural. Whether or not these readings rise to the level of a different *Vorlage* is an open question. See, Gelson, “Commentary,” *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 77.

¹⁵ Literally “children of Javen,” which may be a reference to the Greeks. See Isa 66:19; Ezek 27:13; Dan 8:21; 10:20; 11:2; and Zech 9:13. This people group is closely associated with Tyre (Ezek 27:13). See Barker, *From the Depths of Despair*, 231; see also James L. Crenshaw, *Joel*, 182.

¹⁶ The Old Greek likely has a damaged *Vorlage* that accounts for its reading. See, Gelson, “Commentary,” *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 77.

Yhwh has spoken.¹⁷

Iconic Structure

The iconic structure of the passage centers on the fourfold promise that Yhwh speaks throughout the passage. First, he will pour out his spirit on all flesh (3:1). Second, he will provide a refuge for those who call on his name (v. 5). Third, he will return the captives and gather the offending nations (4:1). Finally, he will repay the nations in kind for their actions against the people of Judah and Jerusalem (vv. 7–8). The image of the “pouring-out” god is a well-documented iconographic motif throughout the ancient Near East. The concept of a god pouring water or life and power out over his servant suggests purification, blessing, and preparation, and is attested in the Akkadian period, the Twenty-first Dynasty of Egypt, and the Bisitun reliefs of Darius.¹⁸

The Persian traditions were indebted to the Mesopotamian and Egyptian systems that preceded it, even as rulers like Darius I and Cyrus added to those traditions.¹⁹ The Bisitun relief, for instance, closely emulates the work of Cyrus, as well as the Assyrian elements that characterized Achaemenid sculpture up to that point.²⁰ In this relief, Darius stands on the head of

¹⁷ 4QXII^c includes a supralinear addition suggesting that it contained the additional word צבאות. See, Gelson, “Commentary,” *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 77.

¹⁸ For an Akkadian example, see the cylinder seal BM103317 in the British Museum. This item depicts Ea, controller of groundwater and the depths, with water flowing from his upper body. “Ea Cylinder Seal,” https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_1911-0408-7. See also Silvia Schroer, *Die Ikonographie Palästinas/Israels und der Alte Orient: Eine Religionsgeschichte in Bildern: Vom ausgehenden Mesolithikum bis zur Frühbronzezeit* (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2005), 1:350–51, fig. 255.

¹⁹ Matt Waters, “The Far Side of the Long Sixth Century: Mesopotamian Political Influence on Early Achaemenid Persia,” in *In the Shadow of Empire: Israel and Judah in the Long Sixth Century BCE*, ed. Pamela Barmash and Mark W. Hamilton, ABS 30 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2021), 144–45.

²⁰ Ryan Bonfiglio, “The Art of Control: Iconography of the Early Achaemenid Empire,” in *In the Shadow of Empire: Israel and Judah in the Long Sixth Century BCE*, ed. Pamela Barmash and Mark W. Hamilton, ABS 30 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2021), 36.

a defeated rebellion leader, Gaumata. Above the scene, Ahura Mazda rises in a winged disc with outreaching streams of water.²¹ The entire scene, displayed along a highway and meant to be seen publicly, served as a powerful visual about Darius's power and his relationship to Ahura Mazda, who made him victorious against his enemies and ensured the future successes of the nation. Like the Bisitun relief, Joel 3:1–4:8 depicts elements of a classic victory scene accompanied by tribute. Yhwh promises to pour out his spirit. He gathers his enemies, judges them, and then sells them to faraway lands. Afterward, Yhwh's people find refuge in him and can rest in his recompense and salvation.

First Subunit (3:1)

Joel 3:1 begins the pericope by describing the realities of the days after (אחר־יָיִן) the tragic events of the previous chapters. No longer will the people mourn in vain; now Yhwh will respond by pouring out his very spirit on all flesh. More importantly, the promise of Yhwh's spirit poured out on all flesh follows the restorative vision of the previous pericope. According to Wolff, the language of this unit transforms the remaining oracles into promises for a coming time.²²

A second point of scholarly emphasis has been on the spirit (רוּחַ) falling on all flesh.²³ Sweeney, resisting a reading that understands the "spirit" as an essential aspect of God's character, connects the dispersion of the locust to the powerful eastern winds known throughout

²¹ Ann R. Farkas, *Achaemenid Sculpture*, Uitgaven van Het Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul 33 (Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut in het Nabije Oosten, 1974), 29–32.

²² Hans Walter Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 65.

²³ Marvin A. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, 173.

the region.²⁴ Thus, he writes: “When read as wind, this recalls an important element of the locust plague in Exodus 10, i.e., the strong east wind that brought the locusts upon Egypt (Exod 10:13) and the west wind that carried them away (Exod 10:19).”²⁵ While fascinating, this line of interpretation fails to consider what and how gods in the ancient Near East poured out aspects of themselves on their subjects. This reading also depends upon the identification of the events of Joel as an actual locust plague.

As already mentioned, the notion that Yhwh could pour out his רוח fits within paradigms of blessing and promise from the ancient Near East. More importantly, however, the phrase אֲשַׁפֹּךְ fits with biblical images of individuals pouring out liquids, including water.²⁶ In Hosea 5:10, Yhwh “pours out” his “wrath like water” and in Amos 5:8 and 9:6 he pours out the waters of the seas upon the earth. The centrality of water in Israelite images of Yhwh’s blessing is well known. The Bronze Sea, lavers, and psalms that praise the “fountain of life” (Ps 36:8) demonstrate this point.²⁷ Genesis 1:2 also associates the רוּחַ of Yhwh with water. Throughout the ancient Near East, rivers and seas took on numinous aspects that were simultaneously capable of creating or destroying life.²⁸ The image of Yhwh as one who pours out his own רוּחַ combines two

²⁴ Later Jewish interpretation does make the connection between Yhwh and “my holy spirit” אֲשַׁפֹּךְ יְתֵ רוּחַ (Targum Jonathan 3:1).

²⁵ Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, 174.

²⁶ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 65. One can, for instance, pour out blood (Lev 7:4, 13) and water (1 Sam 7:6).

²⁷ Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World*, 186.

²⁸ Othmar Keel and Silvia Schroer, *Creation*, 30–31.

importance conceptions: Yhwh is the foundation of life, and he is the sustainer of the promised, new future.²⁹

Second Subunit (vv. 2–5)

Yhwh’s promise, and its accompanying astrological signs, build on the theophanic imagery that characterizes his appearance and actions throughout the book.³⁰ The images of signs in the heavens recall the events of the Exodus (especially 7:14–24 and 9:22–23) and feature prominently in theophanic descriptions of Yhwh’s appearance (Isa 13:10; 60:19–20; Ezek 32:7; Joel 2:10). The darkening of the sun, the moon no longer shining, and the invocation of the Day of Yhwh feature prominently in Yhwh’s appearances, as the references in Joel 2 make clear. As a result, this pericope functions with a certain amount of polyphony that allows the reader first to recall the events of chapter 2 with its destruction, and second to hope for the promises of restoration. In short, the Day of Yhwh is a day of both destruction and restoration, a juxtaposition found in the solar representation of deities throughout the ancient Near East.

While the text associates these events with divine judgment, those events can also convey a positive message of salvation. Consider the darkening of the celestial lights in Isaiah 60, which portrays the cessation of heavenly light as a positive result of Yhwh’s presence with the people in restored Jerusalem. In Isaiah’s case, the meaning of the sun, moon, and stars is made explicit: “Yhwh will be for you an eternal light and your days of mourning will be completed” (Isa

²⁹ For a discussion of Yhwh’s pouring out as an indication of divine favor, see Barker, *From the Depths of Despair*, 205–7.

³⁰ Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, 173.

60:20). As happens with the rest of the book, interpreters occasionally attempt to “naturalize” these events by claiming that the smoke of battle blots out the sun and the moon. Such interpretations, though, strain against the text and themselves obscure the emphasis, which falls not on the possibility or practicality of the events but on the features to which they witness, the appearance and promise of Yhwh’s presence and restoration.³¹

The promise of Yhwh’s restorative deeds is available to those beyond the confines of Israel and Judah: Yhwh’s spirit pours out on all flesh, and all who call on the name of Yhwh will be saved. As Sweeney puts it, this promise sufficiently ends the threat of destruction and violence wrought by the events of chapter 2 and means that “human beings might live in the world of creation. It marks the end of the threat posed by the nations whom Yhwh brings to attack Judah.”³²

The appearance of such universal language near theophanic events, and the reference to Zion, once again recalls Persian period themes like those found in Trito-Isaiah, which portray Yhwh as the God of all the universe who draws the nations unto himself.³³ It may be that Joel depends on later prophetic texts like Obadiah 17–18, which promises an escape for those of the

³¹ See for instance, Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, 175. Others, however, correctly read the text for its emphasis on Yhwh’s action, presence, and promise. See Barker, *From the Depths of Despair*, 212; see also Douglas K. Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 261.

³² Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, 175.

³³ It should be mentioned here that some interpreters believe the universalization applies only to those within the Judahite community. That is, they take it as a question of *democratization* rather than universalization. Such interpretations are based on a similar phrasing found in Ezek 39:29, wherein Yhwh pours out his spirit on the “house of Israel.” For those who take it as democratizing see Barker, *From the Depths of Despair*, 207–8. As he points out, however, the rhetorical force of chapter 3 centers on the power of Yhwh to pour out his spirit on whomever he will, without limitation.

house of Jacob.³⁴ It remains equally likely, however, that Joel 3 depends on the theological paradigm set by Zion theology and Persian-inspired theology to arrive at this point.³⁵

Third Subunit (4:1–3)

Verse 4:1 introduces the subunit by asserting again the promise of future days.³⁶ On this day, Yhwh will restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem and begin his judgment of the nations. Bearing a remarkable similarity in ideology to Trito-Isaiah, Joel combines two issues: restoration of the people's fortunes and the judgment of the nations.³⁷

The location of Yhwh's judgment, the Valley of Jehoshaphat, is central to most interpretations because of its root: שפט. Thus, the location depends on a pun with the verb "to judge" and likely does not indicate an actual location, although some interpreters have identified it with the Valley of Berachah.³⁸ Valleys figure prominently in prophetic literature as locations

³⁴ Siegfried Bergler, *Joel als Schriftinterpret*, 301–3.

³⁵ On the latter see Brent A. Strawn, "A World Under Control," 85–116. For the existence of a Zion tradition at work in Joel, see William S. Prinsloo, *The Theology of the Book of Joel*, 86–87.

³⁶ Prinsloo, *The Theology of the Book of Joel*, 92.

³⁷ On the use of שבות, see the entry in *HALOT* 2:1386. Suffice it here to say that this term is of complex origins, though it seems to be limited to texts from the Persian period and conveys the sense of reversing captivity and debt. Thus, the sense of the phrase here should be taken, not as an explication of the people's material wealth, but rather as a reversal of their status from captive to free. Barker suggests that the phrase שוב שבות, which occurs twenty-seven times in the Hebrew Bible, generally indicates "reversal of Yhwh's judgment and restoration for the Judahite community." Barker, *From the Depths of Despair*, 223.

³⁸ For the option that Jehoshaphat is Berachah, see Merx, *Die Prophetie des Joel*. More contemporary scholars understand the location symbolically. See Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 265–68; Crenshaw, *Joel*, 175; Ronald Simkins, *Yahweh's Activity in History and Nature in the Book of Joel*, ANETS 10 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1991), 226; and Barker, *From the Depths of Despair*, 224.

of Yhwh's judgment.³⁹ The association likely results from the use of valleys as places of war throughout the ancient Near East.⁴⁰

Valley and open-field battles played an important role in ancient Near Eastern conflicts. According to Charlie Trimm, battles were often fought near strategic natural spaces, like mountains, that offered strategic defenses.⁴¹ Open spaces, like valleys,⁴² provided the rare opportunity to engage in a more fierce and variable attack.⁴³ Literary records show that open-field battles were places to engage in effective hand-to-hand combat, to route opponents, and to capture enemy kings.⁴⁴ The nature of open-field fighting was often short, as cover was rare and armies with archers and cavalry stood at a distinct advantage. Israel especially had a strong tradition of fighting in open-field battles every spring (2 Kgs 13:20–21).

That Joel would recount Yhwh's judgment of the nations in a valley, a common location of battles in the ancient Near East, should thus come as no surprise. Throughout the book, the dominant imagery for Yhwh has been that of a god at war. Moreover, the prophetic tradition—and the memory of battles with Moab and Edom in the valleys of the Transjordan—make valleys

³⁹ This association can be found in Isa 22:5; Jer 31:40; Ezek 37:1–14; 39:11, 15; Hab 4:12.

⁴⁰ On the geography of warfare in the ancient Near East, see Fabrice De Backer, *The Neo-Assyrian Shield: Evolution, Heraldry, and Tactics*, in collaboration with Evelyne Dehenin (Atlanta: Lockwood, 2014). On Assyrian open-field battles, see Davide Nadali, "Assyrian Open Field Battles: An Attempt at Reconstruction and Analysis," in *Studies on War in the Ancient Near East: Collected Essays on Military History*, ed. Jordi Vidal, AOAT 372 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2010), 117–52. On the tactics and strategies of the open-field battle—also known as the pitched battle—see Fabrice De Backer, *The Neo-Assyrian Shield*, 103–77.

⁴¹ Charlie Trimm, *Fighting for the King and the Gods*, 188.

⁴² The term עמק refers to a general topographic designation. See Susan E. Haddox, "Valley," *NIDB* 5:727. Davide Nadali describes the open-field battle as a battle that takes place near the cities that would be conquered. Nadali, "Assyrian Open Field Battles," 117.

⁴³ Trimm, *Fighting for the King and the Gods*, 188.

⁴⁴ Trimm, *Fighting for the King and the Gods*, 189–200.

a natural location to imagine Yhwh's wrath against the nations. These traditions conjure notions of Yhwh as one who claims the people as his own and acts on their behalf. Moreover, the accusation that the nations scattered Yhwh's people, cast lots for their goods, and sold their children into slavery (vv. 2–3) connote clear associations with war booty and the division of military plunder.

This unit also introduces the second major image: Yhwh's condemnation of the nations. The condemnation of the nations in 4:1–3 can help readers understand the book's central crisis earlier in chapters 1 and 2. If a locust plague was the event that caused destruction, then there would be little reason to introduce the nations' punishment at this late stage of the book. However, if the nations are prefigured earlier in the book, as I have suggested they are, then the prophet's admonition against them begins to make sense. Barker writes:

The inclusion of other nations as addressees of divine imperatives represents an interesting development in the shape of the text's implied audience. The purpose of addressing these nations is made evident in the final promises of restoration and blessing of the Judahite community. Joel 4:17 presents an address from YHWH to the Judahite community that includes the phrase *יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם* 'YHWH your God', while Joel 4:18–21 details the aftermath of YHWH's declaration to dwell in Zion. Consequently, even though on the surface the text addresses foreign nations, underneath there is an implied Judahite audience in view who hears YHWH's commitment to it expressed through the interactions with the nations.⁴⁵

There is no doubt that Barker correctly identifies the way that a message of retribution would be received by an implied Judahite audience that has suffered at the hands of the nations. The question, however, remains as to why such a message would be relevant to a community that has suffered the worst locust plague in their memory. Surely, the Judahites would not hold the surrounding nations responsible for the disaster resulting from ravenous locusts. Rather, the

⁴⁵ Barker, *From the Depths of Despair*, 221.

address to the nations presents further support, perhaps the central reason for understanding the disaster to be an invasion of Judah. Thus, as will be seen in the next unit, Yhwh's promise of restoration results from a functional *lex talionis* announced to the nations. As they did to his people, so he will do to them. Yhwh's claim over his people and Zion is also a claim over the nations.

Fourth Subunit (4:4–8)

The fourth and final subunit introduces the specific addressees of Yhwh's indictment: Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia (v. 4).⁴⁶ While these nations regularly receive vilification throughout the Hebrew Bible, they also receive a specifically prophetic condemnation in Amos 1:10–11; Jer 47:4; and Zech 9:3 as well as in some Deuterocanonical literature (1 Macc 5:15 and 2 Esd 1:11). As such, we might surmise that they are late, or at least postmonarchic, enemies of Judah.⁴⁷ Throughout the Hebrew Bible, however, they are, as Wolff put it, “minor” enemies until the fifth century.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Importantly, Tyre receives condemnation throughout the prophetic corpus because of its close association with Babylon during the Egyptian and Levantine rebellions against Babylon (Ezek 26:2). Like the rest of the Levantine states, however, Tyre's association with Babylon did not help when Nebuchadnezzar defeated Neco and laid siege to Tyre in 585–573 BCE. Eventually, however, Tyre formed a tenuous treaty with Babylon. (See H. J. Katzenstein and Douglas R. Edwards, “Tyre (Place),” *ABD* 6:686–92.) Sidon too seems to have suffered severely at the hands of the Babylonians, but was raised to a status of some importance during the Persian period. Like Tyre, Sidon under the Persians became a central hub of trade and governance of the distant realms of the Persian empire. See Philip C. Schmitz, “Sidon (Place),” *ABD* 6:17–18.

⁴⁷ On the possibility that Amos 1:9–11 refers to a composition after 587 BCE see Göran Eidevall, *Amos: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 24G (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 107.

⁴⁸ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 77–78.

Until the period of Neo-Assyrian rule, Tyre remained a relatively strong and influential province. According to Kings, Tyre functioned as a major ally of both David and Solomon, helping to build the temple under the latter by supplying building material (1 Kgs 7:13). After the rise of the Neo-Assyrian kings and their subsequent demise under Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (Ezek 26:7), however, Tyre fell to Babylonian hands, which held it until the Persian period. In the prophetic corpus, Tyre represents wealthy merchants (Isa 23:8), the ultimate representation of hubris (Ezek 26:2–4), and betrayers of kinship (Amos 1:9).

Tyre's twin city, Sidon, was one of the most prominent cities of the Phoenician coastland (Gen 10:15). The coastal city has a long history as a major port on the Mediterranean dating back to at least the third millennium. Sidon was conquered by Neo-Assyrian forces under Sennacherib in the seventh century. In the prophetic corpus, Sidon produces seafaring merchants (Isa 23:4; Ezek 27:8), is numbered among the recipients of Yhwh's wrath (Jer 25:22) and deserves destruction at the hands of more powerful nations (Jer 47:4).

Of the three nations mentioned in Joel 4, Philistia is perhaps least surprising. Throughout the Hebrew Bible, the Philistines appear as one of the archenemies of Israel. Indeed, Philistia is the only nation that cannot be construed as a former ally of Israel or Judah. As such, Philistia receives an overwhelmingly negative portrayal in the Prophets.⁴⁹ In the prophetic corpus, Philistia represents the epitome of human pride (Jer 47:4; Zech 9:4), terrorizes Israel/Judah by subjecting their inhabitants to slavery (Amos 1:8), provokes Yhwh with its lewd behavior (Ezek 16:27, 57), and is destroyed completely at the restoration of Judah (Isa 14:31). As a traditional enemy of Israel, Philistia culminates the list of Judah's enemies in Joel 4. Philistia and its main city, Ashdod, were conquered under Sargon II and participated in several anti-Assyrian

⁴⁹ Barker, *From the Depths of Despair*, 229.

rebellions until the seventh century, when they became cooperative vassals under Assurbanipal. The region was later reconquered by Nebuchadnezzar and placed under Neo-Babylonian rule after a failed Egyptian-inspired coup.

According to Barker, the rhetoric of the nations' description in Joel 4 focuses more on the restoration of Judah rather than the condemnation of its enemies.⁵⁰ Their punishment centers around two roots, each of which appears four times in the subunit: גמל and מכר. The unit begins with a rhetorical question directed to the nations: "Are you repaying me?" As Barker points out, the irony of Yhwh's question rests on the fact that he engages in a litany of deeds, which he repays to the nations for the treatment of Judah.⁵¹ It is Yhwh who has something to repay, not the nations.

The nations have robbed Yhwh of his silver and gold and have sold his sons and daughters. The reference to the silver and gold that was carried off likely indicates the despoiling of temple precincts that accompanied military sieges (2 Kgs 24:12–16; 25:11–17).⁵² Crenshaw suggests that this point stems from the Babylonian incursion, or a distant memory of a Philistine incursion.⁵³ מכר is the quintessential verb of merchant activity. Both its Akkadian and Ugaritic cognates focus on the role of merchants in buying and selling. In Biblical Hebrew, the word refers to the buying and selling of land (Isa 24:2), livestock (Exod 21:35), grain (Neh 10:32), household items (Prov 31:24), and people such as children (Gen 31:15) and slaves (Deut 21:14). The point of this description is to accuse the foreign nations of enslaving the children of Judah.

⁵⁰ Barker, *From the Depths of Despair*, 230. It is also possible that this coalition of nations results from a shared tradition between Joel and Amos or Obadiah. See Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, 178.

⁵¹ Barker, *From the Depths of Despair*, 230.

⁵² On the role of plundering and looting see Trimm, *Fighting for the King and the Gods*, 334–346.

⁵³ Crenshaw, *Joel*, 181.

The purpose of selling children into slavery seems to have been a tactic of empire management. The people are sold “in order to send them far from their borders.”⁵⁴ As Barker points out, this description rhetorically sets up the need for Yhwh’s restoration and the people’s return to their homeland from faraway regions like the Ionian peninsula.

While many interpreters have used the reference to the Greeks, הַיּוֹנִים, as a *terminus post quem* to support a Hellenistic date for Joel, or at least the redactional layers of chapters 3 and 4,⁵⁵ references to the Greeks appear in Assyrian sources as early as the eighth century.⁵⁶ Moreover, the trove of bullae found at Wadi ed-Daliyeh date to the Persian period, and around half of the bullae display what Stern describes as a “remarkably Greek style.”⁵⁷ Beginning in the early first millennium, Phoenicia led the way in trade with the regions of the Mediterranean. According to Avraham Faust and Ehud Weiss, by the seventh century, Phoenicia was “at the peak of [its] commercial success and were responsible for the majority of the maritime trade at the time, including the transportation of commodities to and from Ashkelon.”⁵⁸ Thus, not only could

⁵⁴ The results of large-scale deportations established populations as a way of “maximizing the agrarian potential of the vast territory under (the Persian) control.” Kenneth Hoglund, “The Achaemenid Context,” in *Second Temple Studies: Persian Period*, 2 vols., ed. Philip R. Davies, JSOT Supp 117 [Sheffield: JSOT, 1991], 65.

⁵⁵ Other biblical texts that reference the Greeks include Gen 10:2, 4; Isa 66:19; Ezek 27:13, 19 Zech 9:13; Dan 8:21; 10:20; 11:2; 1 Chr 1:5, 7. On the dangers of using this unit to identify a historical location for Joel see Prinsloo, *The Theology of the Book of Joel*, 92.

⁵⁶ Philip C. Schmitz, “Archaic Greek Names in a Neo-Assyrian Cuneiform Tablet from Tarsus,” *JCS* 61 (2009): 127–31. See also research related to the port of Al Mina during the reign of Sargon II. Ceramic pottery unearthed at this locale suggests a Greek presence. See R. A. Kearsley, “Greeks Overseas in the 8th Century B.C.: Euboeans, Al Mina and Assyrian Imperialism,” in *Ancient Greeks West and East*, ed. Gocha R. Tsetskhladze, Mnemosyne Supp, 196 (Leiden: Brill, 1999): 109–34.

⁵⁷ Ephraim Stern, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible II: The Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian Periods 732–332 BCE*, ARBL (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 541.

⁵⁸ According to Faust and Weiss, economic systems between Mediterranean regions, Philistia, and Judah were already well at work before the seventh century and were an “economic driving force” of the region. See Avraham Faust and Ehud Weiss, “Between Assyria and the Mediterranean World: The Prosperity of Judah and Philistia in the Seventh Century BCE in Context,” in *Interweaving Worlds*, ed. Toby C. Wilkinson, Susan Sherratt, and John Bennet, Systemic Interactions in Eurasia, 7th to the 1st Millennia BC (Oxbow Books, 2011), 194.

Mediterranean culture have been known before Hellenistic culture and militarism expanded into Palestine; it also becomes increasingly unlikely that residents of Judah could have remained ignorant of the regions beyond the sea. Rather, the emphasis should fall on the rhetorical force of the passage, which already reflects a historical reality: that the regions of Greece and Phoenicia were already sufficiently ingrained in trade systems that allowed them to sell Judahites to those across the Mediterranean Sea. Thus, the reference to the Greeks need not be a *terminus post quem*.

Beginning in verse 7, Yhwh announces his restoration of the people, rousing them from the places into which they have been sold and turning the nations' own deeds against them. Notably, Yhwh's actions are not new or different but simply a "return" (שוב) of their deeds. Like a faulty curse, their actions simply fall on their own heads. Thus, the work of Yhwh against the nations can be read as a *lex talionis*.⁵⁹ The sons and daughters of the nations, who once sold Judahites into bondage, will themselves be sold to the Judahites and to the Sabeans (v. 8).

When compared to the Greeks in verse 5, it appears that the reference to the Sabeans plays an important rhetorical role. Like הַיּוֹנִים, the Sabeans, שַׁבְאִים, were prominent traders with the cities of Phoenicia.⁶⁰ Their inclusion here points to the trade regions between Phoenicia and the southeast. Barker emphasizes their illustration of the distant regions into which the children of Tyre and Sidon will be sold.⁶¹ They are "afar off" (v. 8). Rhetorically, Yhwh's promise fulfills the demands of *lex talionis*.⁶²

⁵⁹ Barker, *From the Depths of Despair*, 232.

⁶⁰ The Sabeans also appear in 1 Kings 10:1. See, Crenshaw, *Joel*, 185.

⁶¹ Barker, *From the Depths of Despair*, 232–33.

⁶² Crenshaw describes the reference as a correspondence to the earlier reference to the Greeks. See Crenshaw, *Joel*, 185. See also Barker, *From the Depths of Despair*, 233.

This unit concludes by summarizing Yhwh's speech and introduces a sharp break between this unit and the remaining portions of Joel.⁶³ To emphasize this point, Barker borrows forensic language to describe Yhwh's judgment. In sum, the subunit finalizes Yhwh's judicatory conclusion.⁶⁴ The pericope focuses on two motivating images: the first, the pouring-out god, provides salvation and refuge for his captive peoples; and the second, the judgment of the nations, connects the punishment with the crime.

Iconography

The literary images of the pouring-out god and of the subjugation of nations are rooted in the iconographic traditions of the ancient Near East. As early as the Akkadian period, for instance, Mesopotamian cylinder seals depict the god of the ground water, Ea/Enki, as a divine hero. He regularly appears with streams of water flowing from his shoulders, arms, and upper torso.⁶⁵ This tradition continues into the later periods and appears in images of mountain deities in Kassite cylinder seals from the fourteenth century.⁶⁶ An important development in Mesopotamian iconography takes place as the water-providing deity combines with the deity of the sun disk.

⁶³ Prinsloo's demarcation follows this reading. See Prinsloo, *The Theology of the Book of Joel*, 91.

⁶⁴ Barker, *From the Depths of Despair*, 233.

⁶⁵ Keel and Schroer, *Creation*, 30, fig. 12 and 53, fig. 47. Similar motifs appear in the Neo-Assyrian period in the Assur temple. See Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World*, 140, fig. 185.

⁶⁶ Keel and Schroer, *Creation*, 31, fig. 13. Mountains were often associated with primeval blessings and were often considered important dwelling places of the gods. Within the Hebrew Bible, Yhwh dwells in the mountains within the Sinai and Zion traditions. Yhwh thunders from the mountains and they obey his voice (Ps 76:33–34). Another eighteenth-century limestone statue from Mari depicts a female deity with a fountain vessel. See Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World*, 188, fig. 256.

In several images from the twelfth through ninth centuries, water streams directly from the winged sun disk, either from its wings or its stylized feet. Within the Assyrian corpus, the connection between the winged deity who offers both light and water is well known.⁶⁷ The development of the connection between the solar disk and the pouring-out gods likely comes by way of Egyptian influence. The Egyptian motif of the winged sun disk with hanging *uraei* seems to have been reinterpreted in the Mesopotamian tradition as streams of water.⁶⁸

Within Egyptian traditions, pouring-out deities include Nut, who provides water and refreshment from within the trunk of a tree.⁶⁹ This tree-goddess motif functions as an important conceptual myth in Egyptian theology, for Nut is the mother of the gods and provides food and drink, as well as shade, from her place within the sycamores.⁷⁰ Thoth and Horus also pour water, which contains *ankh* signs and *was* scepters, onto the dead. This purification act prepares the deceased to enter the afterlife.⁷¹

While the motifs have distinct origins in Egypt and Mesopotamia, they cross over in significant ways. First, both the typologies of the pouring-out god convey notions of sustenance and prosperity. In a quite literal way, the images suggest that life would be impossible apart from the blessings of light, water, food, and protection. Second, the blessings are sourced from the gods and not from human hands. In other words, they are clear indications of human reliance

⁶⁷ Joel M. LeMon, *Yahweh's Winged Form*, 120. For a full history of this development see R. Mayer-Opificius, "Die geflügelte Sonne. Himmels-und Regendarstellungen im alten Vorderasien," *Ugarit Forschungen* 16 (1984): 189–236.

⁶⁸ LeMon, *Yahweh's Winged Form in the Psalms*, 121.

⁶⁹ Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World*, 187, fig. 255.

⁷⁰ Silvia Schroer, *IPIAO* 4:230–33.

⁷¹ Schroer, *IPIAO*, 4:1145.

upon divine action. Finally, it should be clear from this brief description that Yhwh is not unique in his actions of pouring out. In fact, based on the images of Thoth and Horus, one could even make the case that the action conveys divine elements such as spirit, life, and power from the gods to a mortal recipient. Any benefit from the divine realm relates closely to the notion of “the water-providing deity.”

The Achaemenid empire drew upon the iconographic programs of its historical predecessors and took great pains to incorporate distant artisans from across the empire into its iconographic programs. The result is a cosmopolitan, global style that puts older motifs and practices to new communicative use. That is to say, the Achaemenids knowingly employed recognizable motifs and styles to communicate their ideology throughout the far reaches of the empire. The Achaemenids also took great pains to convey ideology and propaganda through the empire by means of both minor and monumental art, even at times producing versions of monumental art in portable, and therefore widely impactful, forms.⁷²

Because of the tendency to date Joel 3:1–4:8 to the Persian—and sometimes even the Hellenistic—period, Achaemenid iconography is relevant.⁷³ The influence of Persian

⁷² Ryan P. Bonfiglio, “Visualizing Literacy: Images, Media, and Method,” *Biblical Interpretation* 25 (2017): 298.

⁷³ Multiple studies on the influence of Persia on material culture exist. They include Ephraim Stern, *Material Culture of the Land of the Bible in the Persian Period, 538–332 B.C.* (Jerusalem and Warminster: Israel Exploration Society, Aris & Phillips, Aris & Phillips, Israel Exploration Society, 1982); Ephraim Stern, “Notes on the Development of Stamp-Glyptic Art in Palestine during the Assyrian and Persian Periods,” in *Uncovering Ancient Stones: Essays in Memory of H. Neil Richardson*, ed. Lewis M. Hopfe (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 135–46; Ephraim Stern, “Assyrian and Babylonian Elements in the Material Culture of Palestine in the Persian Period,” *Transeuphratène: Recherches pluridisciplinaires sur une province de l’Empire achéménide* 7 (1994): 51–62; Martin G. Klingbeil, “Syro-Palestinian Stamp Seals from the Persian Period: The Iconographic Evidence,” *JNSL* 18 (1992): 95–124; Mary Joan Winn Leith, *Wadi Daliyeh. I: The Wadi Daliyeh Seal Impressions*, DJD 24 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); Astrid Nunn, *Der figürliche Motivschatz Phöniziens, Syriens und Transjordanien vom 6. bis zum 4. Jahrhundert v. Chr.*, OBO.SA 18 (Freiburg, Schweiz: Göttingen: Universitätsverlag; Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2000); Christoph Uehlinger, “‘Powerful Persianisms’ in Glyptic Iconography of Persian Period Palestine,” in *The Crisis of Israelite Religion: Transformation of Religious Tradition in Exilic and Post-Exilic Times*, ed. Bob Becking and Marjo C. A. Korpel, OtSt 42 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 134–79.

iconographic motifs, traditions, and styles undoubtedly shaped the development of local workshops within Palestine, even if the impact was generally limited. Even more importantly, however, there seems to have been very little development away from the iconography of minor art in Palestine between the Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian periods.⁷⁴ Put positively, the bulk of seals from the period demonstrate iconographic consistency with the motifs and traditions of earlier periods. We should expect to see in the records from Israel/Palestine itself a continued blurring of traditions, including Egyptian, Assyrian, and Persian elements.⁷⁵

Whatever influence Persian iconography claimed on the glyptic of Palestine and the surrounding regions was likely mediated by and through the Persian officials who used such images for the official business of the empire.⁷⁶ Thus, the possibility of Persian iconographic influence, especially on the *literati* of Judah, should not be ignored.⁷⁷ Additionally, one should not ignore the far reach of Persian imperial ideology. Consider for instance the Judahite colony at Elephantine. A copy of the inscription from the Bisitun relief was found in Aramaic, the *lingua franca* of the period, translation in Elephantine between 1906 and 1980. The text dates between 417 and 411 BCE and contains the names of several Judahite members of the Elephantine

⁷⁴ Uehlinger, “Powerful Persianisms,” 172.

⁷⁵ For a discussion of the status of Persian iconography within the records of Israel/Palestine see Uehlinger, “Powerful Persianisms”; Stern, “Notes on the Development of Stamp-Glyptic Art in Palestine during the Assyrian and Persian Periods”; and Klingbeil, “Syro-Palestinian Stamp Seals from the Persian Period.”

⁷⁶ Uehlinger, “Powerful Persianisms,” 174.

⁷⁷ Due to the continuity of material culture in Palestine and Judah, the general tendency in recent biblical scholarship has been to view any exilic events as happening to a minority group of literate elites. See Hans M. Barstad, *The Myth of the Empty Land: A Study in the History and Archaeology of Judah during the “Exilic” Period*, SO 28 (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press), 1996. It stands to reason, then, that any Persian influence would take place primarily in the upper echelons of society, among those who crafted and formed Judah’s scriptures. If Joel should be taken as an instance of *schriftgelehrte Prophetie*, then its author(s) and editor(s) may have been familiar with Persian imperial iconography. On the use of Persian iconography to read Persian-period prophetic literature see Ryan P. Bonfiglio, “Archer Imagery in Zechariah 9:11–17 in Light of Achaemenid Iconography,” *JBL* 131 (2012): 507–27.

community. Such a discovery implies that the text, in Aramaic, of the Bisitun relief was still active within a Judahite community nearly one hundred years after the reign of Darius I, the king depicted on the relief and lauded in the inscription. Gard Granerød suggests that this text was used to legitimate the reign of Darius II by way of redeploying the ideology and propaganda of Darius I.⁷⁸ Elephantine itself was in regular contact with Jerusalem and Samaria. Thus it stands to reason, as Granerød does, that though a similar text has not been found in the Judahite capital, it is likely that similar propaganda occurred in Judah/Yehud.⁷⁹

Beyond textual and iconographic data, one should also consider the impact of Persian garrisons on Judah. These garrisons would have been administered by Persian officials or local administrators with close ties to Persian officials. Several locations, such as Ramat-Rahel and Lachish, have provided material culture beyond stamp seals.⁸⁰ Operating a kingdom as expansive as the Persian Empire was no doubt a complex and complicated task. By governing through an expansive form of linguistic diversity, a deliberately decentralized population spread out over an expansive rural region, an effective commercialization of transportation of goods over long distances, and the military presence throughout the satrap “Eber-Nari,”⁸¹ Persia was able to

⁷⁸ It is no coincidence, then, that Darius II, né Orchus, utilized Darius I’s throne name as well. See Gard Granerød, “‘By the Favour of Ahuramazda I Am King’: On the Promulgation of a Persian Propaganda Text among Babylonians and Judaeans,” *JSJ* 44 (2013): 473.

⁷⁹ Granerød, “By the Favour of Ahuramazda I Am King,” 479.

⁸⁰ Granerød, “By the Favour of Ahuramazda I Am King,” 479. The Persians developed a robust management system of Yehud and Phoenicia as a way of maintaining access to the Mediterranean coast. Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming, *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period* (Winona Lake, IN: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 27.

⁸¹ Despite the small size of Yehud, Charles E. Carter argues that it was an important region in the Persian Empire because of its location adjacent to the Mediterranean coastal regions to the west and Egypt to the south. Charles E. Carter, “The Province of Yehud in the Post-Exilic Period: Soundings in Site Distribution and Demography,” in *Second Temple Studies 2: Temple Community in the Persian Period*, ed. Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and K. H. Richards (Sheffield: JSOT, 1994), 139. The boundaries of Persian-period Yehud have been hotly debated. However, the size of the settlements in Yehud remained relatively small and focused on agricultural production and

remain an effective presence through the eastern Mediterranean and south toward Egypt. Finally, by attending to the national and ethnic realities of the regions under its control, Persia was essentially “maximizing the agrarian potential of the vast territory under (the Persian) control.”⁸² The large-scale deportations established populations in a more connected and cosmopolitan way than ever before.⁸³

Charles Carter has raised several points regarding the system employed by the Persians when managing Yehud. He suggests that rule was concentrated in the central hill region.⁸⁴ This, he argues, would have allowed the empire to manage the region based on “geographically self-contained units” that were analogous to the “natural geographic borders” of Yehud.⁸⁵ As the capital of Persian Yehud, Jerusalem was an especially important center of the small region. As an urban center, Jerusalem functioned as a distinct site of activity among the educated and literary classes.⁸⁶ Most importantly, the city itself was refortified by the Persians and designated

were not primarily military outposts. See Diana Edelman, “A Time of Change in Persian-Era Yehud,” in *A Time of Change: Judah and its Neighbours in the Persian and Early Hellenistic Periods*, ed. Yigal Levin, LSTS 65 (New York: T & T Clark, 2007), 53, 64.

⁸² Hoglund, “The Achaemenid Context,” 65.

⁸³ Hoglund, “The Achaemenid Context,” 66.

⁸⁴ Carter, “The Province of Yehud in the Post-Exilic Period,” 107. For additional studies of the size and role of Jerusalem in Persian Yehud see Ephraim Stern, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible: The Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian Periods*, ABRL (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); David Ussishkin, “The Borders and De Facto Size of Jerusalem in the Persian Period,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period*, ed. Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 147–66; Diana Vikander Edelman, *The Origins of the “Second” Temple: Persian Imperial Policy and the Rebuilding of Jerusalem* (London: Equinox, 2005); Oded Lipschits, “Achaemenid Imperial Policy, Settlement Processes in Palestine, and the Status of Jerusalem in the Middle of the Fifth Century B.C.E.,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period*, ed. Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 19–52; and Israel Finkelstein, “Jerusalem in the Persian (and Early Hellenistic) Period and the Wall of Nehemiah,” *JSOT* 32, no. 4 (2008): 501–20.

⁸⁵ Carter, “The Province of Yehud in the Post-Exilic Period,” 114–15.

⁸⁶ Carter, “The Province of Yehud in the Post-Exilic Period,” 137. See also Ehud Ben Zvi, “Exploring Jerusalem as a Site of Memory in the Late Persian and Early Hellenistic Periods,” in *Social Memory among the Literati of Yehud*, BZAW 509 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019), 482–503.

as an outpost to secure the rest of the western regions along the Mediterranean coast.⁸⁷ All of this suggests that the literati of Jerusalem would not have lacked for connection to the Persian imperial systems. In short, the world of Persian-period Yehud was one of international connections.

The constellation of imagery present in the pericope includes the pouring-out deity, standing either in a stance of blessing or pouring out water, with the enemy nations standing before the deity in condemnation, experiencing judgment for their actions. As such, we should consider one of the most prominent iconographic depictions of Persian triumph, the Bisitun relief. In Achaemenid iconography, the motif of the pouring-out god closely relates to images of anthropomorphic gods in sun disks, which we have already examined. As Martin Klingbeil points out, the pouring-out god appears in contexts with the winged sun disk and developed as a distinct iconographic motif in its own right. As such, he has identified this motif as the “water providing god.”⁸⁸ Moreover, the very depiction of a winged deity connotes protection and sanction, which within the Hebrew Bible can also imply nourishment and refreshment. As LeMon points out, the winged deity in Psalm 63 provides nourishment and protection in ways congruent with images of winged sun disks.⁸⁹ Iconographically, the God of Heaven and divine warrior motifs depend on the motif of winged images. Thus far, Yhwh’s description in this chapter as the divine warrior strengthens the relation to the iconography of winged deities.

The trope of tribute scenes, war victories, and the bondage of one’s enemies is particularly important as a second point in the constellation. The image of the high deity within a

⁸⁷ Carter, “The Province of Yehud in the Post-Exilic Period,” 143.

⁸⁸ Martin Klingbeil, *Yahweh Fighting from Heaven*, 205.

⁸⁹ LeMon, *Yahweh’s Winged Form in the Psalms*, 165.

winged solar disk in victory above his enemies, holding their bonds or surveying tributes, is well documented throughout the ancient Near East. This trope is best known in the Bisitun relief. In the next section, I examine the role of the god in the solar disk and of tribute scenes before turning to the Bisitun relief.

Achaemenid Iconography

My reference to Persian iconography essentially includes the visual traditions and material culture of the Achaemenid Dynasty, which lasted from the mid-sixth century, 550 BCE, until the incursion of the Greeks under Alexander the Great in 332 BCE. Achaemenid art is renowned for its exquisite attention to detail, its careful combination of techniques and motifs, and its communicative function within Achaemenid imperial propaganda.⁹⁰ This artistic system followed a careful program that communicated central features about the king, his right to rule, divine approval of his leadership, and proper response from all those under the king's rulership.⁹¹

Achaemenid art is especially known for its reliance on foreign influence; Greek and Assyrian influences are especially important to the program.⁹² Equally important, however, are Egyptian and Elamite influences.⁹³ Moreover, it is quite possible that the Achaemenids saw themselves as the rightful heirs to the Assyrian Empire. In sculpture, they increased the size and

⁹⁰ One of the most important studies on Persian iconography continues to be Margaret Cool Root, *The King and Kingship in Achaemenid Art: Essays on the Creation of an Iconography of Empire*, Acta Iranica 19 (Leiden: Brill, 1979).

⁹¹ Root, *King and Kingship*, 4–5.

⁹² Zainab Bahrani, *Mesopotamia*, 293.

⁹³ The Persians themselves utilized the labor of foreign artisans in their architectural and sculptural projects. See Dominique Collon, *Ancient Near Eastern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 177. See the gate R relief at Pasargadae (Bahrani, *Mesopotamia*, 278).

prominence of elements of Assyrian motifs such as the *apkallu*,⁹⁴ and Cyrus even refers to himself as the predecessor of Assurbanipal.⁹⁵ In many respects, a closer examination of Achaemenid art, its influences and its own influence, mark a sea change in the scholarly discourse regarding mutual influence and cultural sharing in the ancient Near East.⁹⁶

The Sun Disk

In Persian iconography, both in monumental and minor art, Ahura Mazda commonly appears within a solar disk.⁹⁷ This presentation is likely due to the influence of the solar disk in Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian iconography.⁹⁸ And as is true for the Achaemenids, the Neo-

⁹⁴ Collon, *Ancient Near Eastern Art*, 178.

⁹⁵ He does so in the Cyrus Cylinder. See Root, *King and Kingship*, 38.

⁹⁶ It is in fact true that Nebuchadnezzar employed Persian artisans. See Root, *King and Kingship*, 5–15; 28–42.

⁹⁷ Whether or not Ahura Mazda appears as a humanoid figure in a sun disk remains a debated question in both iconographic study and religious studies. As the all-seeing and all-powerful god of Zoroastrianism and in Achaemenid texts, Ahura Mazda receives praise as the creator of all life, and appears in the textual record as early as the eighth century BCE in an Assyrian text. Some textual references suggest that his presence was conveyed aniconically. Herodotus refers to an empty chariot that might have contained Ahura Mazda as going into battle with the Persians (*Persian Wars* 1.189). Visual references to Ahura Mazda do, however, occur with Cyrus the Great and the rest of the Achaemenids. This depiction using the empty chariot was later disputed by Zoroastrians who advocated for an aniconic worship of the high god. See M. Boyce, “Ahura Mazdā,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, I, fasc. 7 (New York: Bibliotheca Persica, 1984), 654–87. Orthodox Zoroastrianism rejects images of gods, and thus some scholars have operated under the assumption that if a deity is portrayed, he *de facto* cannot be Ahura Mazda. As Margaret Cool Root points out, however, this assumption is not clearly at work within the Achaemenid period. In fact, she goes so far as to discount Herodotus’s description of Ahura Mazda’s aniconic presence in battle. Moreover, she asserts that Ahura Mazda is the *only* deity who should be associated with the winged sun disk. See Root, *King and Kingship*, 169–70.

⁹⁸ Paul Naster, “De la représentation symbolique du dieu Assur aux premiers types monétaires achéménides,” in *Compte rendu de l’onzième rencontre assyriologique internationale*, 11 (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1964).

Babylonian usage can be seen in monumental and minor art, with some important differences from its predecessors.⁹⁹

The winged sun disk appears early in the monumental iconography of the Achaemenids. Consider the Qyzqapan tomb of the sixth through fifth centuries.¹⁰⁰ Carved in relief on the outer wall, near the entrance to the tomb, three gods appear. On the left, a left-facing humanoid god rises out of a disk flanked by four wings, curled stylized rays, and a feathered tail (fig. 4.1). On the center panel, a humanoid deity rides in a lunar bark. To the right of the entrance is an eleven-pointed star. Bahrani suggests that the god within the solar disk is likely Ahura Mazda, while the pointed star likely refers to Ishtar-Anahita.¹⁰¹ I will return to monumental art below. For now, suffice it to note that the winged solar deity appears in the Achaemenid period. The image of Ahura Mazda in the solar disk also appears in minor art, on stamp and cylinder seals from the

⁹⁹ Achaemenid artisans and architects also drew deeply upon Greek motifs and techniques. The earliest instantiations of sculpture, Pasargadae, demonstrates the influence of Assyrian and Egyptian motifs by depicting both the standard Assyrian *genii* and the Egyptian *atef* crown. The depiction of the kings and Ahura Mazda are especially noteworthy for their reliance on Assyrian motifs. This is not to say, however, that the Achaemenids did not innovate—they most obviously did—but rather that they knew the origins of their own visual traditions well enough to create their own distinct form while communicating within a coherent ancient Near Eastern visual vocabulary. See Edith Porada, *The Art of Ancient Iran: Pre-Islamic Cultures* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1965), 158–59.

¹⁰⁰ For a detailed primary analysis of the site see C. J. Edmonds, “A Tomb in Kurdistan,” *Iraq* 1 (1934): 183–92. The study by P. R. S. Moorey places the Qyzqapan relief in a broad Achaemenid context. See P. R. S. Moorey, “The Iconography of an Achaemenid Stamp-Seal,” 143–54.

¹⁰¹ Bahrani, *Mesopotamia*, 300–301.



Figure 4.1. Ahura Mazda. Qyzqapan Tomb. 6th–5th century BCE. Persian. Colombia University: Art and Architecture Photographs. https://library-artstor-org.proxy.library.emory.edu/#/asset/AWSS35953_35953_43461056

same period. In contrast to the typical depiction of the deity within a sun disk in Neo-Assyrian iconography, Ahura Mazda does not threaten, but rather raises his hand in a gesture of acceptance and blessing. He holds not a bow but a ritual cup indicating participation and approval in the events depicted on the rest of the façade.

In a scaraboid stamp seal displaying a similar visual constellation (fig. 4.2), Ahura Mazda appears again in the winged solar disk.¹⁰² This time, however, two worshipers flank the sun disk,

¹⁰² Due to the rounded headdress of the figures, T. C. Mitchell has suggested that the seal is Neo-Assyrian or Neo-Babylonian. See his “An Inscribed Neo-Assyrian Stamp Seal,” in *Beschreiben und Deuten in der Archäologie des Alten Orients*, ed. Manfred Dietrich and Oswald Loretz, *Altertumskunde des Vorderen Orients: Archäologische Studien zur Kultur und Geschichte des Alten Orients* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1994), 193. On the reverse, this seal bears an inscription that reads “Belonging to Menahemeth wife of Gad-melek” and may refer to an Aramean deity.



Figure 4.2. Scaraboid seal with Ahura Mazda. Chalcidony. Achaemenid. Jerusalem. 6th–5th century BCE. British Museum. 136202. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_1974-1207-1

and Ahura Mazda rises above a multipointed star and a crescent moon. This seal demonstrates that as late as the Persian period, the notion of a high god depicted within a winged solar disk was alive and well in the Judean context.

The solar disk also appears in coinage and cylinder seals depicting scenes of the king with bow or in archery poses. Ryan Bonfiglio discusses the so-called Type I coins, and suggests that the depiction of the king in this series may relate to Neo-Assyrian depictions of Assur based on his regular appearance with a

drawn bow.¹⁰³ In the Seal of Darius from Thebes, Ahura Mazda appears above the chariot of King Darius while the king hunts lions. The motif could almost be ripped from the walls of Assurbanipal's palace because of how closely it is related in structure and style. Likewise, the court style of a small collection of seals from the Persepolis Fortification Archive depicts Ahura Mazda within the solar disk.¹⁰⁴

Though the preceding has been only a brief excursion into the visual representation of Ahura Mazda, it should suffice to show that the representation of the deity within a solar disk

¹⁰³ Bonfiglio, "Archer Imagery in Zechariah 9:11–17," 514.

¹⁰⁴ Bonfiglio, "Archer Imagery in Zechariah 9:11–17," 517.

existed across very broad geographic and chronological boundaries. Moreover, such representation can be found both within the heart of the empire and in distant outposts like Jerusalem. Without doubt, the representation of the high Achaemenid god existed in the preceding ancient Near Eastern traditions and was especially dependent on Neo-Assyrian representations of Assur. When combined with textual elements like the Cyrus Cylinder and the overall imperial program, such representation goes beyond mere coincidence or historic chance. Rather, the evidence reveals a calculated and carefully orchestrated dependence on older traditions. In doing so, the Achaemenids conveyed messages through visual means that legitimized and strengthened Achaemenid power and rule.

Tribute Scenes

Tribute scenes in the ancient Near East convey ideological representations and complex realities.¹⁰⁵ First, such depictions could convey victory in battle. Therefore, tribute scenes demonstrate a ruler's ability to defend his nation and defeat his enemies. Second, tribute scenes demonstrate administrative prowess and imperial expansion through taxation. Thus, they can be viewed as succinct statements on the relationship between the ruling monarch and the nation by depicting the requirements of a vassal nation to the suzerain nation for protection and administrative services, as required by the agreement between the two nations. Finally, tribute scenes construe the necessary actions required by various nations to create or maintain some

¹⁰⁵ For a study of the role of tribute scenes in the Hebrew Bible and the ancient Near East, see Michael Chan, *The Wealth of Nations: A Tradition-Historical Study*, FAT 2 93 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017). This work outlines the role of tribute scenes in the "Wealth of Nations Tradition." Chan argues that the tradition was widespread in the ancient Near East and included elements like homage, deference, and submission. See especially the discussion on pages 168–175 and 190–192.

semblance of good will in the ever-delicate balance of powers.¹⁰⁶ Thus, they reveal the influence of the ruling monarch in surrounding lands, even if he does not rule them directly. Depicting a king or hero in a victorious setting could, and often did, communicate a historical reality, but also emphasized the gods' partnership and pleasure with the monarch.

Tribute scenes depend on a certain series of iconographic constellations. One of the major features of the scenes is the presence of the nations of the world in subjugation to the king—often depicted in a position of power—in the presence of his god. These constellations allow the interpreter to place the tribute scenes within a long tradition of imperial imagery regarding imperial administration and justice. For our purposes, the central features that are worth further exploration include the use of individuals as representatives of entire nations and those individuals' relationship to the king, who appears larger than the enemy nations.¹⁰⁷

The Achaemenids relied heavily on the traditions that came before them, and their use of tribute scenes is one of the most well-known motifs that depends on previous works.¹⁰⁸ However, as is true of many of their artistic innovations, the Achaemenids perfect the image for the purposes of their ideological visual system. In the following section, we will examine Achaemenid usage and innovations in a more in-depth discussion before considering why the

¹⁰⁶ Root does not believe tribute scenes belong in any sense to the realm of victory in battle nor that the tribute-bringing nations should be interpreted as bringing the spoils of war. Rather, she argues that tribute scenes belong in a category of their own and that they employ a logic dependent upon the economic and governmental aspects of imperial protocols. See Root, *King and Kingship*, 228.

¹⁰⁷ The portrayals of the nations in tribute scenes convey a particular imperial ideology. First, in portraying the king as larger than his enemies, the tribute scene pictures the power dynamic between the weightier king and his minor enemies. Second, by portraying him over his enemies in some way, artists could represent an unmistakable insinuation of victory. Finally, the use of exotic gifts, animals, and enslaved persons conveyed the widespread power of the king vis-à-vis his subjects. In other words, he alone can command distant lands to obey him, and he alone has access to the offerings of foreign peoples. See Root, *King and Kingship*, 229.

¹⁰⁸ The Egyptian Nine Bows, for instance, clearly influences Achaemenid statues, steles, and thrones. The Achaemenid king routinely appears supported or held up by subjected peoples. See Root, *King and Kingship*, 144–53.

Persian tradition is the closest comparand for Joel 3–4:8. Out of necessity, I will discuss the Apadana reliefs from Persepolis before examining the Bisitun relief, even though the latter appears chronologically before the former. As I will argue, the Bisitun relief shares several conceptions with Joel.

Apadana of Persepolis

The Apadana reliefs (fig. 4.3) are perhaps one of the most striking visual systems remaining from the ancient world. The Apadana reliefs figure in this chapter because of the size and influence of the reliefs and because of the representation of the nations in them. The enormous site on which they are found is often considered to be the crowning achievement of the Achaemenid empire's iconographic program. As one of the most prominent displays of Persian



Figure 4.3. Apadana. March 2008. Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain.
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Apadana2008.jpg>

ideology and kingship, it embodies the telos of Achaemenid iconographic communication up to this time, and is the point of departure for iconographic representations that will come after it.

The reliefs form the façade of the Great Hall of the palace at Persepolis (modern-day Takht-I Jamshid), the capital city of the Persian Empire. Construction on the palace began during the rule of Darius (521–486 BCE) and was completed under Artaxerxes I (464–423 BCE). The complex was large, and likely served as a place for celebrating Persian festivals and ceremonies.¹⁰⁹ The base of the complex stands on a platform forty-six feet above the surrounding region and measures some 1,400 by 1,000 feet.¹¹⁰

As one entered the Apadana from the Gate of All Lands, one would view the façade, whose symmetry and dynamism are immediately apparent. Two stairways, each flanking the central image of the solar disk of Ahura Mazda, portray figures climbing the steps. Many of these figures climb with one foot raised onto the next step, creating the illusion that the figures perpetually “climb” the stairs with the dignitary or visitors.¹¹¹ Thus, as the visitor climbs the stairs, he and the images themselves participate in the same action. He is surrounded by these figures and passes the crowds as he approaches the king. As Bahrani notes, the movement of all the images, the stairs of the Apadana and Tripylon, and the doorframes carved with images of the king shaded by servants standing beneath Ahura Mazda’s solar disk, push the energy toward the center of Persepolis and convey a sense of eternal continuity.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Assyrian palaces also served as sites of various events and “compulsory appointments.” See Ludovico Portuese, *Life at Court: Ideology and Audience in the Late Assyrian Palace*, *Marru 11* (Münster: Zaphon, 2020), 101–103.

¹¹⁰ Bahrani, *Mesopotamia*, 306.

¹¹¹ Bahrani, *Mesopotamia*, 310.

¹¹² Bahrani, *Mesopotamia*, 310.

On the sides of the Apadana itself are carved guards, identical and repeating. Some scholars speculate that these guards are meant to depict the Ten Thousand Immortals of Persia, so named due to the belief that they were replaced as quickly as they were lost.¹¹³ The guards



Figure 4.4. Apadana stairway relief. 6th–5th c. BCE. Persepolis. Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain.
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:201312_iran_Shiraz_70_\(12476164433\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:201312_iran_Shiraz_70_(12476164433).jpg)

and royal retinue of the Persian court stand on the furthest edges of the scene. Here they stand in the background, yet contain the action of the scene as the tribute bearers approach the center of the throne room. This arrangement may also represent the realities of the kingdom as the Persian Empire pushed farther out and depended upon military power to contain its vast boundaries

¹¹³ Herodotus, *The Persian Wars*, trans. A. D. Godley, LCL 119, 7.83.

while simultaneously ordering the interior.¹¹⁴ On the eastern wing (panel A), those farthest away from the center are the guards believed to be the Ten Thousand Immortals and Persian dignitaries (fig. 4.4). Moving toward the center appear the nobles in alternating military and official dress.

On the western stairwell (panel B) are the foreign dignitaries (fig. 4.5). The figures include representatives of twenty-three nations, including Assyrians, Babylonians,



Figure 4.5. Apadana, eastern stairway. Tribute Procession. 6th–5th c. BCE. Persepolis. Image 1969. https://library-artstor-org.proxy.library.emory.edu/asset/BRYN_MAWR_955_955_1382101.

Cappadocians, Ethiopians, Armenians, Lydians, Syrians, and Gandarans from India. They are led by Persian officials, dressed as court officials or military officers, holding the hand of foreign

¹¹⁴ Construction of the Apadana likely began in 515–13, and the reliefs may have been completed around 500. According to Root, these dates place the construction of the confines at an apex period when peace at the empire's center allowed the Persians to push to the outer reaches of their borders. Margaret Cool Root, "The Parthenon Frieze and the Apadana Reliefs at Persepolis: Reassessing a Programmatic Relationship," *AJA* 89 (1985): 89.

dignitaries, leading them toward the throne. Trees demarcate each national unit, breaking the larger scene into smaller pieces.



Figure 4.6. Apadana current central panel. 5th–6th c. BCE. Persepolis. CC 1.0 Universal.
<https://www.livius.org/pictures/iran/persepolis/persepolis-apidana/persepolis-apidana-east-stairs/persepolis-apidana-east-stairs-central-frieze-1/>

In the center of the Apadana sits a panel (panel C) toward which the iconography moves. The central panel that now sits at Apadana (fig. 4.6) is likely not the original.¹¹⁵ In this image, eight Persian figures, in alternating courtly and military garb, face inward toward an empty space. Flanking the outside of the image, symmetrical lions attack bulls. Beyond the lions, reeds fill the scene. Above the figures sits a winged solar disk likely depicting Ahura Mazda. On either end of the panel, human-headed sphinxes face inward toward the disk. The wings are supported

¹¹⁵ Root, *King and Kingship*, 88.

by vegetation, and the whole scene is surrounded by reeds. Between the sphinxes sits a row of rosettes, separating the two scenes.

According to Root, “The central scene must be read to suggest an activity taking place within the great hypostyle hall up on the platform.”¹¹⁶ The original panel displayed an altogether different scene that culminated in delegates appearing before the seated king, his attendants, and guards (fig. 4.7).¹¹⁷ Here, two figures dressed in courtly attire stand on the edge of the scene behind the throne. Each of these figures holds a spear and a pole, perhaps indicating a standard.



Figure 4.7. Apadana original central panel. 6th–5th c. BCE. Persepolis National Museum, Tehran. CC 1.0 Universal <https://www.livius.org/pictures/iran/persepolis/persepolis-apidana/persepolis-apidana-north-stairs/persepolis-apidana-central-relief/proskynesis-relief/>

Each of their two counterparts, symmetrically opposite to them, holds a spear and a bucket.

Within the confines of the image, the king fills the center. He sits on his throne with his feet on a pedestal and holds a staff that rests on the floor; his left hand grasps a flower.¹¹⁸ Four additional

¹¹⁶ Root, “The Parthenon Frieze and the Apadana Reliefs at Persepolis,” 109.

¹¹⁷ Root, *King and Kingship*, 246.

¹¹⁸ Root suggests that the motif of the king seated on a dais under the baldacchino is borrowed from Egyptian depictions of Pharaoh sitting in a similar location. This, she argues, reveals the distinctly Egyptian influence on Persian representation and on the Apadana reliefs in particular. See Root, *King and Kingship*, 237. Other examples of Egyptianizing can also be found in the Hall of Hundred Columns. In one depiction, Artaxerxes I

court figures fill the remainder of the scene. These men hold ceremonial items including weapons, an ax, and a bow case. Before the king stands the third figure. He stops at the incense burners and places his hand over his mouth in respect and greeting.

The original panel was found in the compound's treasury. Because of this, it is thought that the panel was removed for safekeeping¹¹⁹ According to Root the depiction intends to create a visual setting for the scenario playing out in front of the viewer.¹²⁰ In other words, the image does more than merely describe or represent actual events; it conveys information about how to behave in the presence of the king.

Each element of the central scene corresponds to the larger pictorial, and actual, context of the space. The central figure is, obviously, the king. He is larger than any of the other figures and sits directly in the middle of the scene.¹²¹ As Strawn points out, were the original panel still in its original position, the king would sit directly under the solar disk.¹²² Thus, one's eye would move from the outside of the reliefs to the center, and then up from the king to Ahura Mazda. The king sits and the crown prince stands, both with their backs to the Ten Thousand, whose presence reminds the viewer of the military power of the empire.¹²³ Likewise, both king and

sits enthroned above an image of Atlas figures who bear his throne with upraised arms. See Bahrani, *Mesopotamia*, 313.

¹¹⁹ Root, *King and Kingship*, 94.

¹²⁰ Root, *King and Kingship*, 237.

¹²¹ For this reason, the relief on its own appears slightly unbalanced.

¹²² Strawn, "A World Under Control," 95.

¹²³ According to Strawn, the size of the king and crown prince, and their orientation with the Ten Thousand literally at their backs, suggest that "it is clear that the Persian side is and will be the victor of this encounter." Strawn, "A World Under Control," 95.

prince face the oncoming tribute bearers, and the king receives the announcement of those who arrive.

The reliefs at the Persepolis Apadana reveal an orderly and glad involvement in the administration of the empire. The figures move toward the center from both sides, converging on the central panel (originally the enthroned Darius). Thus, the image depicts a scene played out in a thousand ways at Persepolis, the center of the Persian Empire, where the furthest reaches of that empire met its core—the nations paying tribute. At the center of it all, of course, are the king and his divine guardian, Ahura Mazda.¹²⁴ The images of the Apadana and, as far as one can tell, the rest of the Persepolis relief program, do not attempt to tell an historic and evolving visual account of the Persian Empire. Rather, they give a sense of something enduring already. In other words, they reveal the realized end of Persian rule, the *Pax Persica*, a world rightfully ordered.¹²⁵

In many ways, the scenes at the Apadana depict the apex of Achaemenid iconography. They offer a glimpse into a program of visual shorthand: the king, who is the rightful representative of Ahura Mazda on earth, offers peace and harmony to the nations of the world. In doing so, the images portray an idealized vision of the world and the nations' relationship to Persia. In short, above all else, Persian scenes communicate Persian power.

¹²⁴ There is some discussion in the secondary literature regarding the nature of the images at the Apadana. Do they reflect a specific procession or celebration, or are they general images meant to convey a visual rhetoric of Persian power and ideology? Root, reading Xenophon, suggests that the images on the Apadana façade may represent an “abbreviated” version of an actual ceremony. See Root, *King and Kingship*, 239. Bahrani, on the other hand, suggests that the images are “a visual metaphor, conveying the diverse nature of the empire as the foundational throne for Achaemenid kingship” and that such meaning can be obtained from the textual descriptions of Persian ideology and propaganda. See Bahrani, *Mesopotamia*, 311. Regardless of the position one holds, the images are clearly communicative of the power and strength of the Achaemenids.

¹²⁵ Root, *King and Kingship*, 309–11; T. Curler Young Jr., “Persepolis,” in *ABD* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:236.

Both the Apadana and Joel 3:1–4:8 depict the nations as subjects of the Persian king and Ahura Mazda. The reliefs at Apadana, although close in chronology to the description of events in Joel 3 and 4, constitute an imperfect comparison. For one, the reliefs depict a peaceful and joyous scene in which the nations approach the great king and his god. This description, of course, is not consistent with the description of the nations in Joel 3 and 4. Moreover, in the absence of a king, it is Yhwh who binds the enemy nations and subdues them to himself and Zion in Joel 3:1–4:8. Nevertheless, the events in Joel 3 and 4 take place soon after Yhwh’s battle and his judgment over the nations. Thus, we must consider another example of Persian visual ideology. Particularly instructive in the Apadana reliefs, however, are the form, centrality, and complexity of the tribute scenes. For this, we turn now to the public-facing roadside relief of Bisitun.

Bisitun.

Located on the side of a mountain in the Zagros range, the Bisitun relief rises 250 feet above the ancient roadway that connected the capital cities of Babylon and Ecbatana, in Media. The relief itself is accompanied by an inscription translated into three different cuneiform scripts: Old Persian, Elamite, and Babylonian. The entire composition is almost fifty feet high and over eighty feet wide. The scene celebrates King Darius I’s rise to power and visually depicts his victory over his enemies. As Granerød notes, Bisitun and its inscription are perhaps the most well-known and studied of the Achaemenid programs due to the relief’s public visibility and the propagation of the inscription throughout the ancient world.¹²⁶ Moreover, the scenes and motifs

¹²⁶ Granerød, ““By the Favour of Ahuramazda I am King,”” 480.

of reliefs like Bisitun were integrated into the minor art and could be distributed far more widely than the relief.¹²⁷

The scene depicts Darius I standing before a line of bound prisoners (fig. 4.8). Like the figures in the Nine Bows, each individual represents a national group. In the inscription the figures are named and labeled, although their nationality is also signaled by their different attire. Above the scene, Ahura Mazda raises a hand in a gesture like the one that Darius employs. The god wears the three-horned crown topped with a star, a sign of his divinity. In characteristic Persian form, the king is the largest figure in the relief, standing head and shoulders above his enemies and the Persian officials—who are also larger than the prisoners. Darius stands with one foot on a bound prisoner, Gaumata, a rival to the throne. In his left hand, Darius holds his bow, and his right hand is raised with palm facing out. Behind him stand two Persian officials; one holds a spear, and the other a bow.¹²⁸ The final bound prisoner, a Scythian, recognizable by his

¹²⁷ Strawn, “A World under Control,” 112.

¹²⁸ These officials likely build on the Neo-Assyrian prototypes of helpers and other persons who support the king in his royal and divine duties of maintaining the kingdom and cultic practices. See Root, *King and Kingship*, 209–10.

pointed hat, is Skunkha, whom Darius defeated in 519 BCE, and who was likely a later addition to the scene.¹²⁹

Darius I was an outsider to the lineage of Achaemenes, and the accompanying inscription describes the king's lineage and his rise to rulership in Persia, describing his victory over



Figure 4.8. Bisitun relief, Zagros Mountains. 6th c. BCE. Public Domain.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Behistun_Inscription#/media/File:Behistun_inscription_reliefs.jpg

Gaumata and emphasizing Darius's right to rule by recounting his success at ending the rebellion and strife in the empire. Herodotus outlines the complex nature of the king's rise to power in colorful terms, recounting Darius's careful planning and his influence among the Persians left to rule after Cambyses's death.¹³⁰ In contrast to the narrative history of Herodotus, the Bisitun relief condenses Darius's rise into a single scene, depicting him as at once victorious over the

¹²⁹ Scholars know that Skunkha was an addition to the scene because part of the Elamite inscription had to be defaced in order to fit the Scythian in. See Root, *King and Kingship*, 60.

¹³⁰ Herodotus, *The Persian Wars*, trans. A. D. Godley, LCL 118, 3.7071.

pretender to the throne, the Gaumata, as well as later rebels. In the words of Bahrani, the Bisitun relief retells the account in “a timeless and emblematic image.”¹³¹

The inscription recounts Darius’s rise and victory, as well as his quelling of rebellions that happened after he had come to power. Throughout this description, Darius credits Ahura Mazda for his victories and claims divine favor for his actions (DB IV). As a result of the god’s favor and his own successes, Darius submits himself to Ahura Mazda’s lordship. The inscription reflects the images and communicates features central to Persian kingship in a visual context. Thus, the central feature of the relief is its communicative quality, not its historical accuracy.

Column 1 of the inscription recounts Darius I’s lineage and claims for him an ancient nobility (2–4), and also lists the various territories that make up Darius I’s empire (6).¹³² The twenty-three nations which Darius rules include Persia, Elam, Babylonia, Assyria, Arabia, Egypt, Lydia, Ionia, and Media (6). The inscription also honors Ahura Mazda for giving the kingdom to Darius (5, 7–9). The submission of Gaumata appears in lines 10–15 and the Babylonian rebellion under Nebuchadnezzar III in 16–19. Columns 2 and 3 contain details of additional attempts at revolution by the Elamites, Medians, Parthians, and Persians. Column 4 summarizes the inscription, affirms its truth, and includes blessings and curses for the safekeeping of the images and the inscription. Likewise, the image depicts the nations and territories subject to Darius by means of bound individuals in national costume. Gaumata lies underneath Darius’s foot. Throughout the inscription, Darius claims to have succeeded because

¹³¹ Bahrani, *Mesopotamia*, 304.

¹³² The text of the lines and columns comes from L. W. King and R. Campbell Thompson, *The Sculptures and Inscription of Darius the Great on the Rock of Behistûn in Persia: A New Collection of the Persian, Susian and Babylonian Texts* (London: Longmans, 1907).

of his worship of Ahura Mazda (e.g., 5.75). In the image, Ahura Mazda rises above the human figures and offers gestures of blessing.

By depicting the king as larger than the other figures, standing with his bow at rest and a foot on his enemy, mimicking the gesture of Ahura Mazda and backed by Persian troops, the image communicates central ideas about kingship in general and Darius in particular. For instance, the king's size connects his abstract power as monarch to his physical body. The king's posture connects him explicitly to the deity. And the king with his bow at rest demonstrates that he has already vanquished any potential threat. No one, the image shows, can compare to Darius I.

The king with his bow remains a significant motif in the visual system of Persia, particularly in its minor art. As hunter and archer, the king demonstrates his power and violent might by use of his drawn bow.¹³³ These depictions, often credited first to Darius I, could be found in cylinder and stamp seals as well as the coinage of the Persian Empire. In addition to his militaristic might and prowess as a hunter, the drawn bow may unite the king with the deity, especially since the Neo-Assyrian tendency was to portray Assur with his bow drawn in the solar disk.¹³⁴ Moreover, the Persepolis Fortification Archive contains cylinder seals that depict divine *Mischwesen* with human torsos drawing bows in a hunting motif.¹³⁵ The purpose of such a pose, either to demonstrate power or a unique degree of closeness to the divine realm, served to solidify the king's, and particularly Darius's, right to rule. To portray him with his bow at rest,

¹³³ For a discussion of the archer motif and its relevance to biblical texts from the Persian period see Bonfiglio, "Archer Imagery in Zechariah 9:11–17."

¹³⁴ Naster, "De la représentation symbolique du dieu Assur," 10–11.

¹³⁵ Bonfiglio, "Archer Imagery in Zechariah 9:11–17," 518.

not drawn, signaled that he completed his task and subdued the danger. Like the rest of the Achaemenid monumental visual program, the depiction of the king's bow at rest focuses the imagery on the resolution of an unseen contest and presents him as victorious and never at risk. This concept is reduplicated in the image of Darius striding on Gaumata and of his reception of the bound prisoners.¹³⁶

One of the main distinctions between the Bisitun relief and its Neo-Assyrian counterparts appears in the orientation of Ahura Mazda's solar disk.¹³⁷ Throughout the ancient Near East, the god in the solar disk faces the same direction as his appointed regent. This feature is clearly apparent in the reliefs where Assur faces the same direction as Assurbanipal. By facing the deity and king in the same direction, artists could depict a singular purpose in both the divine and human realms. Depicting the god in a way that mirrors the king allows the viewer to understand not only that both shared the same will, but also that a close relationship existed between the two. As if to solidify this point even further, the god mimics the earthly motions of the king—or rather vice versa—and aims his own divine bow in the direction of the king's earthly enemies.

By facing Darius, however, Ahura Mazda's orientation communicates something entirely different. Instead of suggesting a shared will or singular purpose, placing Darius I directly in Ahura Mazda's line of sight allows the image to convey the god's affirmation of Darius's actions

¹³⁶ Though the bow at rest may depend on a certain knowledge of the Achaemenid imagistic program. Root suggests that the bound prisoners, recognizable by their national dress, and Darius's foot on Gaumata could be universally understood. See Root, *King and Kingship*, 200.

¹³⁷ The nearest comparand, in both location and motif, comes from a rock relief that celebrates the victories of the Akkadian king Anubanini (ca. 2000 BCE) on the Sar-i-Pul Relief. This relief, found roughly one hundred miles from the Bisitun site, depicts Anubanini stepping on a defeated enemy while he holds his bow at rest in his left hand and raises his right in a gesture akin to Darius's. See Bahrani, *Mesopotamia*, 305. Root argues that the Bisitun relief may borrow features from the Sar-i-Pul relief, but that the Bisitun scene cannot be said to depend on the entire motif. Root, *King and Kingship*, 184, 194, 198.

in quelling any rebellion.¹³⁸ Importantly, Ahura Mazda grasps a ring, a symbol of power and might, and reaches out his hand in a gesture of welcome and blessing, perhaps in a “transference of power.”¹³⁹ The entire scene recalls presentation scenes of the king or other individual before the gods. Thus, the image demonstrates what Root refers to as the “reciprocal relationship” between Ahura Mazda and Darius.¹⁴⁰ In a moment of victory, Ahura Mazda receives his king and works to quell the rebellion. As a public victory scene, the orientation of the two most important figures of the relief would undoubtedly solidify Darius as the rightful ruler, highly favored by god.

Finally, we ought to pay attention to the forked rays or streams that appear underneath the solar disk. Since this image recalls Neo-Assyrian influences, one must consider a feature in the Neo-Assyrian visual canon in which the streams become streams of water bursting forth from the divine being.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Root, *King and Kingship*, 189.

¹³⁹ Root, *King and Kingship*, 212.

¹⁴⁰ Root, *King and Kingship*, 189. Some have implied or argued that the scene depicts Darius worshipping the great god. This argument comes about because of Darius’s hand being raised toward Ahura Mazda. If this were the case, one wonders what to make of Ahura Mazda’s own raised hand as it gestures toward Darius. Surely the great god does not pray to his regent? For this reason, Root is likely correct in her discussion (*idem*) of the open-palm gesture when she suggests that it is best understood as a summoning gesture. Thus, the king summons his bound enemies to himself, and Ahura Mazda summons his faithful servant into his presence.

¹⁴¹ On the Neo-Assyrian influence at Bisitun and the Egyptian influence at Persepolis see Root, *King and Kingship*, 214–17. These rays were likely originally *uraei* in the Egyptian context, which by way of Levantine influence, migrate from an upright position to their present position in Levantine and Neo-Assyrian art, where they become tail feathers or hanging *uraei*. See LeMon, *Yahweh’s Winged Form in the Psalms*, 120.

I have already discussed at some length the way that the solar disk simultaneously represents the solar deity and the weather god.¹⁴² The logical connection between the two rests on conceptions of the pouring-out god, fertility, and the power to dominate the heavens. As LeMon and Klingbeil have pointed out, however, the winged disk with streams of water also fit within a larger motif of “the water-providing god.”¹⁴³ This god emanates rays or streams of water, and appears within a nonanthropomorphic solar disk. The image was popular as far back as the Iron Age I cylinder seals (fig. 4.9).

In such representations, the winged solar disk hovers above a scene and pours water beneath it. In certain cases, as that depicted in figure 5.9, the water nourishes a sacred tree. The implications are that the god nourishes and blesses life from above. In particular, the image unites two distinct aspects of divine blessing: light and water.¹⁴⁴



Figure 4.9. Cylinder seal. Assyrian. 1200–1000 BCE. Nimrud. BODO 4319. <http://www.bible-orient-museum.ch/bodo/details.php?bomid=4319>

As one might expect, there is much that we can glean from the subtle features of the Bisitun relief, since several constellations come to bear on the viewer. First, the image no doubt conveys notions of Ahura Mazda’s

¹⁴² See my discussion in chapter 2.

¹⁴³ LeMon, *Yahweh’s Winged Form in the Psalms*, 121; Klingbeil, *Yahweh Fighting from Heaven*, 205.

¹⁴⁴ LeMon, *Yahweh’s Winged Form in the Psalms*, 122. One image in particular seems especially pertinent for the representation at Bisitun: the Gezer conoid. In this scene, a worshipper faces a griffin who sits beneath a crescent and the water-giving solar disk. The undulating streams end in a distinct fork that may recall the hands of the cylinder seal above. See LeMon, *Yahweh’s Winged Form in the Psalms*, 126.

sovereignty, as evidenced by his pleasure in Darius's work to overcome his enemies. Second, the images of the bound enemies of Bisitun fit within a larger Achaemenid context that emphasizes the divine right of the king, and by extension the Persians, to conquer and subdue the enemy nations. After all, doing so is ultimately divine work. Finally, the work culminates in divine blessing, both in terms of the god's presence in the scene, but also in his giving of water, life, and might.

Conclusion

In Joel, the pouring-out god and the bound nations take center stage. The Bisitun relief also draws together these two central features. Bisitun reveals a god appearing in victory pouring out water and life upon his king, who gathers bound nations before him. The relief functions by combining elements of victory scenes from the traditions that preceded it. First, it clearly draws the image of the pouring-out god in the solar disk. This motif connects the winged solar deity to both the benefits of water and divine approval. In the Mesopotamian traditions, the divine blessing was conveyed through divine water that nourished sacred plants and brought fruitfulness to the ground. Notably, the winged deity was at once the life-giving solar god and the terrifying storm deity, and so combined restoration with destruction. As such, the deity mirrored meteorological reality. Storms could wreak destruction as easily as they could nourish the ground. Second, the bound prisoners, representative of the nations in both dress and explicit label, recall scenes of judgment and tribute. Third, without doubt, the iconography of Bisitun presents Darius I as an effective and victorious king, the rightful ruler of the Persian Empire, and, perhaps most importantly of all, favored and blessed by Ahura Mazda.

Without claiming a direct influence on Joel 3:1–4:8, I highlight the congruence between Bisitun and the depiction in Joel. While the pericope in Joel lacks any reference to a divinely approved and installed king, it does make reference to the people of Judah as Yhwh’s favored people. Like Ahura Mazda, Yhwh demonstrates his approval via the act of pouring out. Unlike Bisitun and the Mesopotamian traditions before it, Yhwh pours out his רוה. The רוה is an element of his own character and nature. Thus, Yhwh pours out more than rain, and offers elements of his own being. From the beginning of his appearance in Joel, however, Yhwh’s depiction recalls the functions and depictions of solar deities in Mesopotamian and Egyptian iconography. He appears with elements of both solar deities and storm deities, and leads armies in battle. Now, in Joel 3, we see Yhwh appear in the final stage of the solar god at war, pouring out his blessings in victory.

The image of the pouring-out deity is not the only image of victory, however. We also find enemy nations bound and sold for their actions against Judah. On an initial read, the image of Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia bound and led away seems like a reflex of the *lex talionis*: as they did to Judah and Jerusalem, so Yhwh does to them in return. When placed within the larger iconographic context discussed here, however, the image of Judah’s enemies, and therefore Yhwh’s enemies, bound and led into captivity, does more than provide a limited and specific judgment. It likens Yhwh’s response and lordship to the traditions of other great nations.

In the Bisitun relief, Ahura Mazda and Darius I have no need to participate in battle because the signs of their victory are apparent: Darius stands on his bound enemy while Ahura Mazda rises above the rest of the captives and offers his blessing to Darius. In return, Darius gives Ahura Mazda the honors of the successes. Like Ahura Mazda and his regents, Yhwh

orchestrates his peace and restoration through demonstrations of force and power. He judges the nations and rescues his people by merely speaking.

In the end, it is the same deity who judges and restores. In many ways, Yhwh's victory appears similar to that of Ahura Mazda, the one who is capable of delivering judgment and restoration. Just as the winged solar disk contains a multiplicity of meanings, so Yhwh contains the ability to curse or bless, destroy or restore. This congruence can shed light on the book of Joel in a few ways.

First, I suggest that attention to the constellation of imagery reveals a congruence unique to the ideology at Bisitun. Because Bisitun has no direct iconographic parallel, a level of congruence between image and text may offer a glimpse into a specific chronological period or iconographic context in which the author of Joel 3:1–4:8 developed his own imagery. In other words, the author of Joel could only imagine what was possible within the realities of his time, and the shared congruence between Bisitun and the text might suggest close chronological proximity. Both Joel 3:1–4:8 and Bisitun use a solar deity pouring out his blessing alongside imagery of enemy nations bound and defeated. Despite the fact that Bisitun has no direct iconographic parallel, I suggest that the author of Joel may have been familiar with the distinct parts of the picture, but also with the iconography itself.

The Bisitun relief and inscription were circulated into the far reaches of the Persian Empire, and while no evidence shows that such elements made it into Judah, it remains possible that at least some reaches of the empire did see or read representations of Bisitun without ever having seen the actual relief. More important, however, is the fact that the Bisitun relief depended on features and traditions at work in the minor art of Persian, Neo-Babylonian, and Neo-Assyrian cultures. Thus, by envisioning Bisitun at work within a larger image context, it is

possible to recognize that the portrayal of Ahura Mazda as a pouring-out deity; the bound nations would also be recognizable by a Judean audience and author. It is in the combination of the pouring-out deity and the bound nations that the congruence begins to come to the fore.

Why then does congruence matter for Joel 3:1–4:8? If a level of congruence exists between the Bisitun relief and the pericope, interpreters may be able to make more sense of the apparent shift in tone, images, and theology in the latter part of Joel. No longer would the latter half of the book need to be recognized as a distinct literary unit with only superficial connections to the crisis of the earlier chapters. Indeed, the appearance of the pouring-out god, Yhwh, and his subjugation of the nations would fit naturally with his destruction and ferocity depicted earlier in the book. As the solar nimbus in Mesopotamian and Persian art offers two sides of the same coin (see the previous chapter), so Yhwh functions as both destroyer and restorer. Moreover, iconographic congruence between Bisitun and Joel 3:1–4:8 begins to offer a *terminus post quem*. In other words, Joel 3:1–4:8 must be limited to a period after the Bisitun relief was finished and had become known throughout the Persian Empire.

The constellations of imagery within the entire system of Bisitun and the pericope in Joel 3:1–4:8 suggest a congruence between the two. Moreover, this correlation may be evidence for dating the latter portion of Joel. The images in chapter 3, however, must be understood within the larger context of the text and images of the entire book. With such an understanding, we can demonstrate the coherence of Joel 3:1–4:8 with the other images at work in the book, and can perhaps provide an overlooked data set for its chronological contexts.

CHAPTER 5: JOEL 4:9–21: HARVEST AND JUDGMENT

The final unit of Joel combines much of the imagery that has permeated the book up to this point. In verses 4:9–21, the text weaves together images of warfare with imagery borrowed from the agricultural sphere, specifically grape harvest and vinting. The combination of these images is not without precedent; such imagery underlies several important prophetic texts such as Third Isaiah (Isa 63). It also features prominently in instances of the divine warrior tradition (Zech 14; Jer 25:17–38). Joel’s use of this imagery, along with his Zion-centric theology, has been treated by other iconographers, namely Keel and Schroer, who have focused on the fruitfulness depicted within the passage, the promise of future harvest, and the overflowing blessings of Yhwh.¹

Keel and Schroer’s investigations focus on the cosmic maintenance of the earth, agriculturally based economic systems, and the role of the Jerusalem temple as central to the cult of Yhwh.² While the images of fruitfulness and harvest are certainly important aspects of the pericope, past investigations seem to miss the forest for the trees. By focusing on one element of the text, the plentitude of harvest (vv. 11, 18), iconographers have overlooked an equally important feature of the unit, namely Yhwh’s call for war and the coming judgment of Yhwh, which is presented as the final judgment.

¹ See for instance Keel and Schroer, *Creation: Biblical Theologies*, 64–69. See also Izaak J. de Hulster, *Iconographic Exegesis and Third Isaiah*, FAT 2 36 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 230–66.

² Keel, *Jerusalem and the One God*, 125–26.

Joel 4:9–21

In this chapter, I analyze the focal point of Joel 4:9–21: Yhwh the victorious warrior who tramples the nations. I attempt to situate the elements of wine production and harvest imagery within a larger conceptual framework of divine judgment and warfare. I do so by showing how the language of the pericope connects these two seemingly disparate spheres. I conclude by arguing that iconographic exegesis of Joel 4:9–21 reveals coherence between warfare and agricultural production and destruction. The harvest imagery in 4:9–21 serves as an immediate and understandable mechanism for probing the depth of the book’s crisis. Instead of describing the destruction of the horticultural system as a crisis in and of itself, the book’s horticultural imagery provides the foundation for a description of total annihilation.

Delimitation

The final unit is defined by the setumah in printed critical editions of the Masoretic Text. The setumah reflects a traditional break between units that can be found in the standard codices, including Vaticanus, Alexandrinus, Aleppo, and Leningradensis. The smaller subunits can be traced back to divisions in Alexandrinus, Aleppo, and the Rabbinic Bibles.

As one would expect, Vaticanus provides no smaller breaks other than demarcating a major break before 4:9. It continues the pericope to 4:21. Alexandrinus places a small break before 4:9 (3:9 A). Larger breaks indicated by *vacats* appear before 4:13, 14, 18, and 19. Within these subunits, the smaller units are delineated as follows: 4:9–10a, 10b–12, 13, 14, 15–17, 18, 19, 20–21. Aleppo offers only two subunits by means of a line break between verses 17 and 18. Thus, the first subunit in Aleppo is 4:9–17 and the second is 4:18–21. Like Vaticanus,

Leningradensis begins a new unit at verse 9 and continues through verse 21. The First Rabbinic Bible closely resembles the breaks in Alexandrinus. In this tradition, verses 9–14 and verses 15–17 are set off by large *vacats*. Alexandrinus concludes by grouping together verses 18–21 as the final subunit. The Second Rabbinic Bible introduces the pericope with a large break between verses 8 and 9. Verse 9 is set off from verse 10 by a smaller break. This subunit includes verses 10–14. The second subunit includes verses 15–18 and the final subunit continues from verses 19–21.

Based on the witnesses of multiple traditions in Greek and Hebrew, the final textual unit begins in verse 9 and ends in verse 21. Additionally, the most commonly represented subunit break occurs between verses 17 and 18, which divides the pericope into two larger subunits. Smaller units can then be detected by appealing to the Codex Alexandrinus and the Second Rabbinic Bible, which roughly group the units into verses 9–14, 15–17, and 18–21.

Translation

^{4:9}Proclaim this among the nations:
 Prepare for war!
 Rouse the warriors!
 Let every man of war draw near and come up!³
¹⁰Beat your plowshares into swords
 And your pruninghooks into spears!
 Let the weakling⁴ say, “I am a warrior!”

³ The Old Greek differentiates from other Mss in its reading by assimilating the phrase with other vocabulary from the context. See, Gelston, *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 36.

⁴ The Old Greek introduces an error reading “ὁ δυνατός.” See, Gelston, *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 36.

¹¹Come and hasten⁵, all you nations, gather⁶ all around.
Bring down your warriors there Yhwh.⁷

¹²“Let the nations rouse themselves
and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat.⁸
For there I will sit to judge the nations all around.

¹³Send out the sickle,
For the harvest⁹ is ripe.
Go in, tread,
for the winepress is full.
The vats overflow
for their wickedness is great.

¹⁴Multitudes, multitudes
In the Valley of Decision
For the Day of Yhwh is near
In the Valley of Decision.”

¹⁵The sun and the moon darken
And the stars withdraw their brilliance.

¹⁶Yhwh shouts from Zion
and from Jerusalem he thunders.
The Heavens and Earth shake.
Yhwh is a refuge¹⁰ for his people
And a stronghold for the children of Israel
¹⁷“And they will know that I am Yhwh their God
Dwelling in Zion my holy mountain.
And Jerusalem will be holy
And foreigners will not cross over it again.”

¹⁸And it will be on that day

⁵ This *hapax legomenom*'s difficulty is reflected in various manuscripts. According to Gelston, the Vulgate may be reading *הושיע* while the Targum reads it as a jussive. The Old Greek reads *συναθροίξεσθε* “gather together.” See, Gelston, *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, “Critical Notes,” 36, and “Commentary,” 77.

⁶ The Old Greek, Vulgate, and Syriac assimilate the meaning within the larger context of the passage. See, Gelston, *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 36.

⁷ 4QXII^g, Mur, and Vulgate read the MT, the Old Greek, Syriac, and Targum read differently. See, Gelston, *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 36, and the discussion in “Commentary,” 77. Gelston does not believe that the differences can be attributed to different *Vorlagen*.

⁸ 4QXII^c assimilates with 1 Chr 11:43; 15:24. The Targum assimilates with v. 14. See, Gelston, *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 36.

⁹ 4QXII^c, the Vulgate, and Syriac support the MT, the Old Greek and Targum presume a different vocabulary. See, Gelston, *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 36.

¹⁰ The Old Greek reads “spared,” which Gelston describes as a lexical and syntactical error. See, Gelston, *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 36.

The mountains will drip¹¹ sweet wine
 And the hills will flow with milk.
 And all the streams of Judah will run with water.
 And a spring will go forth from the house of Yhwh
 And it will be watered by the Wadi Shittim.¹²
¹⁹Egypt will be waste
 And Edom will be as a wilderness¹³ of waste.
 Because of the violence of the children of Judah,
 which they poured out innocent blood in their land.
²⁰But Judah will dwell forever,
 And Jerusalem for generation to generation.
²¹Surely their blood I will not forget¹⁴
 For Yhwh dwells in Zion.

Iconic Structure

The iconic structure of this pericope combines several themes found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. The text draws together references to harvest, warfare, divine judgment, and the appearance of the Divine Warrior. Outside of the Book of the Twelve, similar combinations can be found in Third Isaiah, particularly in chapter 63; Ezek 36; and Jer 30–31 and 46–51. Any influence of these texts on Joel is implicit since the work does not explicitly cite these texts. The

¹¹ 4QXII^c assimilate with Amos 9:13. See, Gelston, *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 36.

¹² The variants in the Old Greek and Vulgate fail to recognize this as a place name. The Old Greeks rendering can also be found in Micah 6:5 where the word also appears. See, Gelston, *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, “Critical Notes,” 36, and “Commentary,” 77.

¹³ 4QXII^c doubles this word above the line. See, Gelston, *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, “Commentary,” 77.

¹⁴ The versions paraphrase and misread this line because of the difficulty of נקיתי. According to Gelston, it is uncertain of the versions had a different *Vorlage*. See, Gelston, *BHQ: The Twelve Minor Prophets*, “Commentary,” 77.

implicit influence is likely because Joel does, however, cite directly from Isaiah (2:4) and Micah (4:3) by means of a reversal, which suggests a familiarity with other prophetic works.¹⁵

Throughout the prophetic corpus, the Day of Yhwh is compared to grain harvests (Jer 51:33), first fruits, and even sacrificial animals (Ezek 44:28–31). The combination of themes demonstrates an image central to many prophetic texts, namely that the Day of Yhwh is like the culmination of the harvest period. Notably, Joel 4:9–21 focuses on one aspect of agricultural harvest in the Levant: making wine. Joel’s articulation accords closely with Isa 63 and suggests that Isa 63 may guide iconographic interpretation of this passage.

First Subunit (vv. 9–14)

The final unit of Joel begins with a command to proclaim the approaching war of the Day of Yhwh (vv. 9–11). The opening line “Proclaim this among the nations, sanctify for war” fittingly connects the contents of the final pericope with the earlier pericope in chapter 1:2, 3, 5, 8, and 11 by virtue of its direct address via *Qal* plural imperatives (קראו, קדשו, יגשו, כתו). The connection is further strengthened by the use of קרא and קדש, also found earlier in the book (1:14).

Additionally, the people must “stir up” (v. 9) warriors and let all the men of war “come near” and “come up” (v. 9). This language recalls the actions of the invaders in 2:7–9. The shared vocabulary and organization reinforce the connection between the end of the book and its

¹⁵ On the opposition in these texts, see James Brennehan, “Canon(s) in Conflict: Negotiating Texts in True and False Prophecy: Isa 2:2–4/Micah 4:1–4 vs. Joel 4:9–12 (Eng 3:9–12),” (PhD diss., The Claremont Graduate School, 1994); Seung Ho Bang, “For Whom the Plowshares and Pruning Hooks Toil: A Tradition-Historical Reading of Joel 4.10,” *JSOT* 39 (2015): 489–512; and Marvin A. Sweeny, “Swords into Plowshares or Plowshares into Swords? Isaiah and the Twelve in Intertextual Perspective on Zion,” *TJT* 34 (2018): 97–110. For a somewhat different approach to these passages, see Shira J. Golani, “Swords That Are Ploughshares: Another Case of (Bilingual) Wordplay in Biblical Prophecy?” *Biblica* 98 (2017): 425–34.

beginning by means of an inclusio, poetically and linguistically returning to themes introduced in the opening stanzas.

In verse 10, the text reverses well-known imagery from Isa 2:3–4 and Mic 4:3. In Isa 2:3–4, Isaiah receives a vision regarding Jerusalem and Judah in the “last days.” According to Isaiah, many peoples (עמים רבים) will gather at the mountain and temple of Yhwh as he judges the nations. In this eschatological vision, the people no longer settle their disputes through warfare and thus “beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.” Micah’s vision looks forward to the coming days, when Yhwh’s mountain is established as the highest mountain and the peoples (עמים רבים) and nations (גוים עצמים) come to it to learn to walk in God’s ways. Micah foresees that the nations will no longer rely on the strength of war to decide conflicts between themselves but will rely solely on Yhwh. As a result, they have no need for weapons and can transform their implements of war into tools of horticulture. Within this tradition, Yhwh subjects the nations to his lordship and protection from Jerusalem. This can be read as a form of Yahwistic imperialism.¹⁶

Joel 4, by contrast, reverses the imagery. In his vision of “those days,” the scene at the mountain of Yhwh will not be one of peaceful arbitration but one of war. As the warriors prepare and the soldiers draw near, they are told to “beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears” (v. 10). Even the weakling finds his place among the battle lines (v. 11). This reversal of imagery certainly builds on the prophetic traditions that preceded it (Isa 2:3–4; Mic 4:3). It also connects the harvest and viticulture imagery to Yhwh’s judgment. In fact, the warrior’s weapons come directly from the realm of winemaking.

¹⁶ J. J. M. Roberts, “The End of War in the Zion Tradition: The Imperialistic Background of an Old Testament Vision of World Wide Peace,” *HBT* 26 (2004): 4.

While fruit trees are not mentioned directly in this unit, their products feature prominently. According to Oded Borowski, both the אַת (plowshare) and the מזמרה (pruning hook) were tools used in the training and pruning of grapevines.¹⁷ Because the אַת falls within a list of farming implements, including the plow (מַחֲרִישָׁה), in 1 Sam 13:20–21, Borowski reasons that it must refer to something other than a plow.¹⁸ Following Cohen, Borowski suggests that it must be close to a hoe or other implement used to get in between the rows of grapevines.¹⁹ Shorter and thicker than a sickle, the pruning knife (מזמרה) helped a vinedresser to cut and train the branches of the vine and was likely used during the harvest season.²⁰ Both implements were made of iron and attached to wooden handles or another object. Because iron was a valuable and scarce resource, converting farm tools into weapons is a reasonable step in preparing for war (1 Sam 13:19–21), and so Joel’s reversal of Isaiah and Micah should be understood as a necessary action to defend oneself. The allusion is at once a reference to early prophetic literature and a description of the necessary precautions for invasion.

Fruit trees and grape vines, in contrast with grains, sometimes require years to mature. In other words, while one can grow grains and cereals within the time span of a few months from planting to harvest, grape vines and fig trees require years of care and attention before they begin to yield produce. The early stages of maturity, however, will not produce as much as a plant in late maturity.²¹ The potential destruction of fruit trees, vineyards, and orchards, and their

¹⁷ Oded Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel*, reprint (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1987), 109.

¹⁸ Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel*, 108.

¹⁹ Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel*, 108.

²⁰ Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel*, 109.

²¹ See Ehud Weiss, “‘Beginnings of Fruit Growing in the Old World’—Two Generations Later,” *Israel Journal of Plant Sciences* 62 (2015): 75–85; and Daniel Zohary, Maria Hopf, and Ehud Weiss, *Domestication of*

resulting calorie-rich foods, ensured complete and lasting devastation, devastation that could take years and even generations of plants to repair. The effort and time dedicated to raising calorie-rich fruit crops, such as grapes and figs, demanded protection, even if that meant converting tools to weapons.²² Even though grapes and wine are not mentioned directly, the references to materials involved in the production of wine demonstrate that it is the central metaphor in this passage.

In the last line of verse 10 and into verse 11, the imagery shifts and moves from harvest to the realm of warfare. The subunit juxtaposes the “weakling” with the warrior. Though generally translated as “weakling,” the root *חלש* carries a valence that can include the act of crushing, scratching off, or even carrying off the dead (e.g., Job 14:10).²³ The nominal forms, from which the adjective in Joel 4:10 comes, are translated by the JPS, NRSV, KJV, and NIV as “weak” or “weakling,” but the verbal forms of the root instead refer to an act of defeating in battle (Ex 17:13 and Isa 14:12).²⁴ In other words, the phrase can be read as “let the defeated one become a warrior” (v. 10). Understood in the latter sense, this verse anticipates the coming vision of judgment. This interpretation builds upon the potent imagery of war and establishes connections between harvest imagery and battle imagery. In this sense, the passage begins to

Plants in the Old World: The Origin and Spread of Cultivated Plants in West Africa, Europe, and the Nile Valley, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford, 2012), 114.

²² The destruction of fruit trees, and especially fig trees, was especially problematic. The loss of one hectare of fig trees meant the loss of 15 million kilocalories compared to the loss of 1.3–2 million kilocalories given the destruction of the same space of wheat or wheat interspersed with olives. See Jacob L. Wright, “Warfare and Wanton Destruction: A Reexamination of Deuteronomy 20:19–20 in Relation to Ancient Siegecraft,” *JBL* 127 (2008): 435.

²³ On the possible meanings, see Alfred Guillaume, “The Use of *חלש* in Exod. XVII.13, Isa. XIV. 12, and Job XIV.10,” *JTS* 14 (1963): 91–92. For the meaning in Job 14:10 as “swept away,” see G. R. Driver, “The Resurrection of Marine and Terrestrial Creatures,” *JSS* 7 (1962): 16.

²⁴ Guillaume points out that Onqelos is perhaps closest in its rendering of “broke up.” See “The Use of *חלש* in Exod. XVII.13,” 91.

reveal the latent reversal of fortunes. Likewise, verse 11 instructs the nations to gather around, and implores Yhwh to bring down his warriors from heaven. This call sets up Yhwh's hosts as the saviors and vindicators of Judah, a reversal of their role earlier in the book, where Yhwh's army leads the charge against the people (2:11). Yhwh and the nations clash in the Valley of Jehoshaphat, where he will sit and judge the nations (4:2).

The harvest imagery resumes in verse 13, fully integrating the passage with the metaphor of harvest used to stand in for warfare. The people send out the sickle when the harvest is ripe (v. 13). They are also commanded to enter and tread the full wine press, נָא .²⁵

Because the color of crushed grapes is most vibrant at earlier stages of wine production, the text presents vivid images to convey the violence implicit in scenes of judgment and divine wrath.²⁶ The resultant red liquid and its tendency to stain clothing likely informed wine's metaphorical connection with blood.²⁷ Such a connection is at play throughout passages that combine violence with wine making. Isa 63, for instance, describes the Divine Warrior as one covered in red liquid (v. 1), and treading the winepress (vv. 2–3) signifies the location of the

²⁵ On the role of viticulture and grapevine metaphors in the prophetic corpus, see Tina M. Sherman, "A Prolific Vine: Metaphorical Construction of National Identity in Prophetic Condemnations" (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 2021). On wine production, see Rafael Frankel, *Wine and Oil Production in Antiquity in Israel and Other Mediterranean Countries* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999).

²⁶ Many factors, including biology, chemical composition, vinting process, and age, inform the pigmentation of a vintage. One of the factors influencing pigmentation is fermentation. Generally, the longer a wine has fermented, the darker it becomes. See Tim Unwin, *Wine and the Vine: An Historical Geography of Viticulture and the Wine Trade* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 54–57; and David F. Lee, Ewald E. Swinny, Robert E. Asenstorfer, and Graham P. Jones, "Factors Affecting the Formation of Red Wine Pigments," in *Red Wine Color: Revealing the Mysteries*, ed. Andrew L. Waterhouse and James A. Kennedy, ACS Symposium Series 886 (Washington, D.C.: American Chemical Society, 2004), 125. See also Jack Sasson, "The Blood of Grapes: Viticulture and Intoxication in the Hebrew Bible," in *Drinking in Ancient Societies: History and Culture of Drinks in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Lucio Milano, History of the Ancient Near East Series 6 (Padua: Sargon, 1994), 401–402.

²⁷ For a brief discussion of the role of wine in the ancient Israelite diet, see Nathan MacDonald, *What Did the Ancient Israelites Eat? Diet in Biblical Times* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 22–23.

messiest treading.²⁸ This is a text to which we will return later. Elsewhere, Lamentations also employs the *תל* as the metaphorical locale of Yhwh's treading of Judah (with *תל*; 1:15).²⁹

As a result of the fullness of the vats overflow.³⁰ The root *קב* refers to something hollow; it is translated in the Septuagint as the vessel or vat that receives wine, and in the Vulgate and Targumim as the room that housed a winepress. Jordan suggests that the term may refer to the fermentation vat, again signifying that these implements refer to initial stages of the wine-making process.³¹ The vats often appear in poetic grammatical parallel to the threshing floor in texts that call upon the fullness of Israel's harvest imagery (e.g., Joel 2:24; Hos 9:2; Jer 48:33; Isa 16:10; 5:2). In these texts, the vats and threshing floor stand as a merism of the entirety of the harvest seasons (Deut 16:13; Num 18:27, 30).³² Thus, the reference to the vats here does not only call to mind the result, but also harvest as judgment.

The call continues in verse 14 as the prophet specifies the place of Yhwh's judgment: the Valley of Decision. The harvest imagery continues through this verse by means of a paronomasia on the root *קב*, which translators (NRSV, KJV, JPS, NIV) render as "Decision." The root, however, can also refer to the "threshing floor."³³ The imagery of harvest, and particularly of

²⁸ Note the use of *תל* and *תל*.

²⁹ Nehemiah 13:15 uses this term within a description of the work Judahites do on the Sabbath.

³⁰ Sweeney notes that the purpose of this image combines harvest with the destruction of enemy warriors so that the vats overflow with the blood of the nations. See Marvin A. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, 182.

³¹ Victor H. Matthews, "Treading the Winepress: Actual and Metaphorical Viticulture in the Ancient Near East," *Semeia* 86 (1999): 20.

³² Bread, wine, and oil have been called "the Mediterranean Triad" because of their centrality in the diets of many Mediterranean cultures. Grains, grapes, and olives made up the majority of crops in ancient Israel. The press and the threshing floor were necessary components in the production of the Mediterranean Triad. See MacDonald, *What Did the Ancient Israelites Eat?*, 19–24.

³³ The only time that this word is translated as "decision" is in Joel 4:14. Elsewhere it refers to an incision or cut, the place or implement of cutting/threshing (*HALOT* 1:352). Ahlström suggests this reading as an intentional

grape harvest and wine production, shines through in the last two verses of this subunit (vv. 13–14). The people transform their weapons of war into implements of harvest, and Yhwh’s judgment functions like the treading of grapes and production of wine. Finally, all of this happens in a valley named for the act of cutting or threshing.

To understand the rhetorical effect of this subunit, readers must be attuned to the close connection between imagery of warfare and that of wine production. The tools that Joel transforms into weapons belong to the realm of viticulture (v. 10). The Valley of Jehoshaphat is imagined as a winepress (vv. 12–13). Building on prophetic metaphors of the vine, wine, and judgment, the subunit (vv. 9–14) conceptualizes a connection between horticulture and divine judgment implicit in the rest of the book. Rhetorically, this unit clarifies the use of harvest imagery throughout the rest of the book (vv. 1:5–7, 9, 11–12, 17–20; 2:19, 22–24) by demonstrating the connection between Yhwh’s judgment and the destruction of the agricultural landscape.

Second Subunit (vv. 15–17)

In the second subunit, the Divine Warrior appears in his full strength. In the final subunit (vv. 15–17), Yhwh appears in his theophanic glory. As in chapter 2:10, the brightness of Yhwh’s appearance darkens the solar and astral bodies.³⁴

reference to harvest imagery. See Gösta W. Ahlström, *Joel and the Temple Cult of Jerusalem*, VTSup 21 (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 81. Barton and Crenshaw note this possibility, but do not allow it to influence their comments. See Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 105; Crenshaw, *Joel*, 192.

³⁴ On the relation of Joel 4 to Joel 2, see Crenshaw, *Joel*, 192–96. The darkening of the astral bodies is also a part of larger Zion traditions (Isa 13:10; Ezek 32:7–8). The darkening of the astral bodies may also be a cognizant attempt to demonstrate a cosmic disruption by reversing creation. See Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, 183.

Joel 4:16 alludes to 2:11, 15 by means of the phrase “shouts from Zion.” The phrase is used elsewhere in the prophetic corpus to describe the work of grape-treading. For instance, it appears in Jeremiah 25:30, where Jeremiah proclaims: “The LORD roars from on high...He utters shouts like the grape-treaders” (JPS). According to the prophet, Yhwh will punish the King of Babylon and the surrounding nations, including Edom and Egypt, and will cause them to drink a cup of wrath.

Verse 17 concludes the subunit by claiming that Yhwh dwells in his holy mountain, Zion, and that with his presence, Jerusalem will be holy. Furthermore, no stranger will pass through Jerusalem again. By placing the final unit in Zion, Joel builds on the foundations of Zion theology from elsewhere in the prophetic corpus (namely, Isa 31:4, 9; 12:6; 40:2; 51:3; 60:1–22; 65:18; 66:18–24; Jer 3:17; Hag 2:6–9; Zech 14).³⁵ In this tradition, Mount Zion in Jerusalem becomes the site of Yhwh’s reign and the center of his empire. Yhwh is also envisioned as the universal sovereign (Ps 93:1; Jer 10:7, 10) who brings all the nations to himself, whether for salvation or punishment.³⁶ Rhetorically, the second subunit grounds the ending of Joel within theologies of Zion as Yhwh’s dwelling place and his lordship over the nations.

³⁵ On the importance of the Zion motif in Joel, see Frederick Poulsen, *Representing Zion: Judgment and Salvation in the Old Testament*, Copenhagen International Seminar (New York: Routledge, 2015), 52–54.

³⁶ In summary, J. J. M. Roberts identifies the main features of Zion theology: Yhwh is great king, Jerusalem is his dwelling place, Yhwh protects Zion and rebukes his enemies, the nations acknowledge Yhwh’s kingship, and Yhwh blesses the inhabitants of Zion. See J. J. M. Roberts, “Zion Theology of the Davidic-Solomonic Empire,” in *Studies in the Period of David and Solomon and Other Essays*, ed. Tomoo Ishida (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1982), 94. Poulsen’s study demonstrates that speaking of one Zion tradition is untenable. Instead, he argues that the prophetic corpus points to multiple traditions in which Zion is either unshakeable or totally destroyed and rebuilt (*Representing Zion*, 77–188). Joel participates within the second motif.

Third Subunit (vv.18–21)

The final subunit of Joel’s last pericope begins with a reference to the Day of Yhwh (יום ההוא). On that day, the mountains will drip with sweet wine and the hills will flow with milk (v. 18). Joel’s vision of the Day of Yhwh proves to be a day of abundance and sustenance for the people of Judah despite the earlier warnings that the day is one of terror and dread. At this point, the final vision of judgment comes into full realization as a day of grape harvest and wine making, as well as being characteristic of other signs of fertility and blessing. At the resumption of Yhwh’s judgment of the nations in the Valley of Decision and the preparation of the wine vats and presses, the mountains drip with sweet wine (עסיס).

עסיס appears five times in the Hebrew Bible: Isa 49:26; Joel 1:5; 4:18; Amos 9:13; Song 8:2. Likely originating from the verb “to crush” (עסס), עסיס probably refers to the juices resulting from the preliminary stages of wine production.³⁷ In Isa 49:26; Joel 1:5; 4:18; Amos 9:13 it refers to the fresh grape juice from the harvest processes. In Song 8:2 it refers to the juice of a crushed pomegranate. The Septuagint and Vulgate translate it as γλυκασμόν and *dulcedinem*, “sweetness.” Earlier in Joel 1:5, the word appears in poetic parallel with יין, which may suggest that it refers to some sort of intoxicating drink in the early stages of fermentation.³⁸ The vision introduced by this verse is more than simply a restoration of agricultural bounty; it is a specific vision that combines Yhwh’s restoration and Judah’s vindication.³⁹

³⁷ Lawrence Stager and Philip King suggest that the word refers to a nonfermented juice. See Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, Library of Ancient Israel (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 101.

³⁸ Sasson, “The Blood of Grapes,” 402.

³⁹ On the types of agricultural bounty restoration see Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 270.

In Isa 49 and the surrounding passages, Yhwh responds to the cries of Zion, who claims that Yhwh has abandoned her as a woman might abandon the child of her womb. In his response, Yhwh promises to restore Zion, revive the city's desolated streets, repopulate the region, and disband the attackers (vv. 8–10). Yhwh will cause the nations, the ones responsible for exiling Zion's populace, to return the children of Zion, and pledges that their kings and queens will serve the former exiles (vv. 15–24). Furthermore, Yhwh promises to replace the goods and riches stolen from the land and in his deliverance “make your oppressors eat their own flesh, they shall be drunk with their own blood as with wine” (v. 26). The promise of renewal in Isaiah relies on the rescue and vindication of the people of Judah and the punishment of their enemies, which plays on the associations of wine with blood.

In addition to Isa 49, Amos 9:11–15 shares much of the imagery of Joel 4:9–21. In this text, Yhwh promises to restore his people Israel and to rebuild the booth of David (v. 11). In so doing, Yhwh promises that the people of Israel will possess Edom (v. 12). Yhwh's justice is meted out by grape treaders (v.13). Furthermore, he will rebuild the fortunes of Israel, by restoring the destroyed cities, the devastated vineyards, and the gardens (v. 14). This renewal is permanent, since Yhwh promises that the people shall never again be forced from the land. Thus, the promise of mountains dripping with wine indicates a total reversal of situation and a renewal of status as Yhwh's own people with a permanent dwelling in the land.

Thus, outside of Joel, the promise of “sweet wine” combines two notable features. First, it evokes a symbolic relationship with the blood of one's enemies. The promise in Isaiah, and the implied promise of Amos, suggest that the restoration of Israel/Judah can only happen once their enemies have been appropriately remunerated for their actions against Yhwh's people. Second, the vision of hills and mountains flowing with “sweet wine” falls within the general concept of

renewed fertility and blessing, but only in relation to Yhwh's rescue, restoration of Israel, and punishment of its enemies.⁴⁰ Within Joel, the image of the mountains flowing with sweet wine and milk promises restoration that culminates with a flowing spring from Yhwh's house and water in the wadis and streams of Judah.⁴¹ This imagery builds upon the metaphor of the production of wine, and depends on the crushing and treading of grapes underfoot.

Verse 19 outlines Yhwh's response to the enemy nations, naming Edom and Egypt. As the historic enemies of Israel and Judah, the two nations experience what they have done to Israel.⁴² By contrast, verse 20 outlines the eternal quality of Judah and Jerusalem, which will be inhabited forever. Finally, the pericope and the book end with Yhwh's promise to remember innocent blood and dwell in Zion forever (v. 21). The question of innocent blood is one that has troubled interpreters because of the apparent incongruence with the locust crisis of chapters 1 and 2. Such a reading is only irreconcilable, of course, if one takes the crisis of chapters 1 and 2 as a locust plague. If one instead reads the crisis as a human invasion described in terms of a natural disaster, then, contrary to Marvin Sweeney, the final pericope of Joel is not incongruous after all.⁴³

Joel 4:9–21 employs traditional imagery of the prophetic corpus to present the Day of Yhwh as a positive event. In doing so, the pericope reiterates Yhwh's promises to the people of Judah and Jerusalem. The prophet introduces the Day of Yhwh using traditional language of harvest imagery combined with motifs from the divine warrior traditions. He expands the

⁴⁰ Milk (בָּלֵן) also appears in Isa 55:1, another text that identifies Yhwh as Judah's savior and provider.

⁴¹ It is possible to read "the wadis of Shittim" as "the wadis of acacia." Acacia are trees known for their ability to grow in the exceedingly dry regions around Jerusalem. See Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 170.

⁴² Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 170.

⁴³ Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, 185.

imagery by employing viticultural metaphors. These metaphors build upon traditional prophetic imagery (Isa 5:1–7; 51:17, 21–22; Ezek 19:10–14) that connect the production of wine, with its requisite crushing of grapes and deep red colors, to the victorious warrior who crushes his enemies and spills blood. Joel situates the restoration and future fertility of the land within the context of Yhwh’s vindication and judgment of the nations. Mount Zion will drip with wine and milk, and water will flow from even the most arid regions of Judah (vv. 18–21). Finally, if the punishment of Judah’s enemies were not clear enough, Joel names them and connects their violent and wicked acts of bloodshed to Yhwh’s righteous treatment of the nations and his promise to dwell in Zion forever.

The iconic structure of the pericope derives from its viticultural imagery. The imagery, from the call for weapons made from pruning hooks to the mountains dripping with sweet wine, enforce the connection between Yhwh’s judgment and the horticultural realm. Because of this connection, imagery of wine and wine production becomes the focal point for iconographic exegesis and Joel 4:9–21.

Iconography

Wine and wine production were central to life in the southern Levant.⁴⁴ As a foundational feature of the agricultural system, the fruit of the vine ensured security and prosperity for the future.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ According to King and Stager, wine is mentioned 185 times in the Hebrew Bible (*Life in Biblical Israel*, 101). During the Late Iron Age, Judah is marked by an increase in production of wine and oil. The largest wine production facility was in Ashkelon in the seventh century BCE; see Joshua Theodore Walton, “The Regional Economy of the Southern Levant in the 8th–7th Centuries BCE” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2016), 67–78.

⁴⁵ On the importance of viticulture for survival in Israelite culture, see Walsh, *Viticulture in Ancient Israel*, 40.

For this reason, grapes and the vine became powerful images in Israelite life. They demonstrated God's blessing, the productivity of the land (Num 13:23), and security for the future (Gen 27:25). The *Tale of Sinuhe* describes Israel/Palestine as "a good land...Figs were in it, and grapes. It had more wine than water."⁴⁶ Grapes and wine were important aspects of the ancient diet, which centered on bread or grains, wine, and olive oil.⁴⁷ Images of grapes, vineyards, and wine production also play a significant role in Near Eastern iconography. In many ways, such depictions portray an ideal world that looks ahead to the fruit of one's labor and the promise of future flourishing.⁴⁸

Aside from providing sustenance, viticulture was dominant in the economies of the ancient Near East. Viticulture and wine production started in the eastern Mediterranean as early as the fourth millennium.⁴⁹ The regions along the eastern shores of the Mediterranean were especially well suited to grape production because of their hot and dry summers and mild but wet winters. Sites like Gibeon (el-Jib) confirm continuous grape growing and wine production in the regions around Jerusalem during the Iron Age and perhaps into the Persian period.⁵⁰ Wine

⁴⁶ John A. Wilson, "The Story of Si-Nuhe," in *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures*, ed. James B. Pritchard, foreword by Daniel E. Fleming (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 7.

⁴⁷ On the role of fruit, both fresh and dried, in the ancient Israelite diet, see MacDonald, *What Did the Ancient Israelites Eat?*, 28–31; for a discussion of the caloric model of the ancient Israelites, see 43–49.

⁴⁸ On the societal importance of wine production, see Walsh, *The Fruit of the Vine*, 179–86.

⁴⁹ Viticulture should be distinguished from wine production. The former refers solely to the horticultural practice of growing and tending grapes and grapevines, while the latter refers to the specific practice of producing wine. On the terminology of grapes and wine in the Hebrew Bible, see David John Jordan, "An Offering of Wine: An Introductory Exploration of the Role of Wine in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Judaism through the Examination of the Semantics of Some Keywords" (PhD diss., University of Sydney, 2002). See also Walsh, *Viticulture in Ancient Israel*, 43–85.

⁵⁰ Hulster, *Iconographic Exegesis and Third Isaiah*, 233.

production in the region is also discussed in biblical and nonbiblical texts.⁵¹ In addition to texts, iconographic representations of grapes, vines, and viticulture appear prominently throughout the ancient Near East. These images have long histories and, as Izaak de Hulster points out, the imagery and iconography of grapes appear regularly as late as the Hellenistic period on coins found throughout Palestine.⁵² As a result of this widespread history and its centrality to economic systems, wine became an integral aspect of the ancient world and its iconographic systems.

De Hulster maps out four areas in which viticultural imagery functioned iconographically: the wine press and treading, the trampling king or deity, viticulture and punishment, and clothing.⁵³ These areas can be found throughout the ancient Near East and Mediterranean worlds with differing emphases. As a result, the iconographic constellation of Joel 4 can be understood to build upon a metaphor found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (Isa 63) and the ancient Near East (especially Egypt) that combines the trampling of a victor in war with the vigneron's trampling of grapes.⁵⁴ The actions of the vigneron and the warrior make the same motion, resulting in red liquid, and emphasize the final step of harvest and warfare. Treading

⁵¹ For biblical texts see 2 Kgs 25:12; Jer 52:16; Neh 13:15. As de Hulster suggests, these texts provide evidence of wine production in the Babylonian and Persian periods (*Iconographic Exegesis and Third Isaiah*, 234).

⁵² Hulster, *Iconographic Exegesis and Third Isaiah*, 234–35.

⁵³ Hulster, *Iconographic Exegesis and Third Isaiah*, 235.

⁵⁴ For the latter, see de Hulster's study *Iconographic Exegesis and Third Isaiah*.

grapes must take place after the fruit has been gathered. Walking upon one's enemies can happen only after their bodies lie before the victor.

Viticultural Iconography

One of the most prominent iconographic representations of viticulture comes from a minor tomb



Figure 5.1. Detail from the Tomb of Nakht. 18th Dynasty (1410–1370 BCE). Norman de Garis Davies, Nakht and Family Fishing and Fowling, Tomb of Nakht, Graphic Edition, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1915. Public Domain. Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Norman_de_Garis_Davies,_Nakht_and_Family_Fishing_and_Fowling,_Tomb_of_Nakht,_Graphic_Expedition,_Metropolitan_Museum_of_Art,_1915_CROPPED.jpg.

in the Theban City of the Dead (fig. 5.1). The Tomb of Nakht (TT52), which dates to approximately 1410–1370 BCE, depicts several scenes of the deceased man, his family, and his estate. Images like this one, which go beyond presenting an idealized picture of the life of the deceased, depict the peace and prosperity of the afterlife. This imagery also revealed that the dead person would exist in his death. Depicting death as akin to life was significant, since the afterlife in Egyptian thought was not merely a new location, but a transformation of one's state.

The danger posed by death culminated in physical and social isolation from others.⁵⁵ Thus, the ancient Egyptian desire for continued integration despite death is understandable.

During the New Kingdom (1570–1070 BCE), nonroyal tomb chapels depicted a variety of daily events, including offering and ritual processions, hunting, fishing, and other everyday activities. These scenes connected the deceased with the living, and were used not only in a family's remembrance of the deceased individual, but also in festivals such as the Festival of the Wadi. During this celebration, families visited the tombs and shared meals with the deceased inside of the tomb.⁵⁶ Thus, the imagery of the tombs served not only as an *aide-mémoire* of the deceased's life, but also represented the deceased's continued presence in the family's home and fields, as well as in the land of Egypt.⁵⁷

The images of grape harvest and wine production (fig. 5.1) speak to historical realities and practices in ancient Egypt. It should be mentioned, however, that wine production in Egypt was limited by geography and climate.⁵⁸ Nakht's tomb depicts men treading grapes in a wine press on the left and grape pickers working under the vines and tendrils on the right. Another

⁵⁵ Jan Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, trans. David Lorton (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 31, 39–63. According to Assmann, the Egyptian afterlife was inextricably tied up with the daily life of the living through the concept of the *ba*. That is to say, Nakht might have passed into the afterlife, but he could still be very much in the home or garden. See also Mara Müller, "Afterlife," *OEA*, 1: 32–37.

⁵⁶ Gay Robbins, *The Art of Ancient Egypt*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 138.

⁵⁷ Norman de Garis Davies, *The Tomb of Nakht at Thebes*, Robb de Peyster Tytus Memorial Series 1 (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art Egyptian Expedition, 1917), 55.

⁵⁸ In Egypt, beer was the alcohol of choice in the alluvial plains along the Nile. It was a staple food even in Predynastic Egypt. Jiajing Wang, Renee Friedman, and Masahiro Baba, "Predynastic Beer Production, Distribution, and Consumption at Hierakonpolis, Egypt," *JAA* 64 (2001): 1–16.

laborer checks the quality of the juices emptying into a vat. Above his head sit a series of amphora, containing, no doubt, fermenting wine.⁵⁹

The imagery of Nakht's tomb, like other New Kingdom tombs, conveys an ideal picture alongside historical details. These images portray the deceased patron as one righteously engaged in the maintenance of order in the cosmos, participating in some way with both the pharaoh and the state, as well as the god.⁶⁰ Such actions characterized a righteous person and productive life. The image thus conveys more information than merely historical representation.⁶¹ The living family participate by visiting the grave, remembering the deceased, and incorporating him into the social spheres of the living.⁶² By living righteously and remembering the dead, the living family could ensure the continued presence of the deceased ones in everyday life.⁶³ Thus, the cycle of righteous life and death ensure that the name of the deceased was not forgotten and that their memory endured.

Imagery of the grape harvest was not only utilized in remembering a deceased person and picturing them in a peaceful, ordered place. Grape imagery could also be used to picture the unknown terrors associated with death. De Hulster argues that several papyri also point to the use of wine presses as metaphors for judgment after death. In particular, he discusses the Torino Papyrus and the Papyrus Berlin P3148, which depict associations between wine presses, blood,

⁵⁹ Features of wine production, including the well-known "Canaanite" amphorae, were imported from the southern Levant. These containers were favored for their size (30 liters) and design, and they could be easily stacked and carried by means of their handles and narrow bottom. They were also durable. See P. E. McGovern, "Wine of Egypt's Golden Age: An Archaeochemical Perspective," *JEA* 83 (1997): 78.

⁶⁰ Robbins, *The Art of Ancient Egypt*, 138.

⁶¹ The accompanying texts around the image refer to Nakht as "justified" and as a pious man. See Lise Manniche, "The Tomb of Nakht, the Gardener, at Thebes (No. 161) as Copied by Robert Hay," *JOEA* 72 (1986), 61.

⁶² Robbins, *The Art of Ancient Egypt*, 139.

⁶³ Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, 221.

and punishment. Though they portray a twisting, not treading, extraction method, these images show human beings crushed in a press-like net or sack that squeezes or wrings out the blood of the dead in a form of tortuous punishment.⁶⁴

The point that de Hulster makes is that regardless of the precise mechanism of drawing juice from grapes, the activities of wine production are closely associated with the realms of the dead and divine judgment or punishment. Furthermore, de Hulster suggests that while the papyri in question were known as late as the third century BCE, they likely originated during the Eighteenth Dynasty in Egypt. Because they were copied as late as the 200s, de Hulster argues that they might have been influential during the Persian period, when Third Isaiah was written.⁶⁵ Joel 4 and Isa 63 utilize a larger cultural conception of wine production and justice. The god who treads and those who tread with him enact a form of righteous judgment, and produce justice as a result.

Most likely the association among treading, wine, and judgment revolve around the color of crushed grapes and of blood. The importance of color cannot be overstated in texts like Isa 63, where the one who comes from Edom is clothed in robes stained red or, perhaps better, dyed with wine (חמוץ).⁶⁶ The common vocabulary in Joel 4 and Isa 63 should not be overlooked. Both texts refer to Edom, make ample use of vinting imagery, and depict divine judgment on the peoples of the earth and the enemies of Israel. Thus, the appearance of a red-stained warrior treading his enemies is cause for celebration and joy on the part of those he defends. By demonstrating the connections between wine production and divine judgment, de Hulster

⁶⁴ De Hulster, *Iconographic Exegesis and Third Isaiah*, 238.

⁶⁵ De Hulster, *Iconographic Exegesis and Third Isaiah*, 246. Though he cautions against arguments for direct influence.

⁶⁶ On the disputed meaning of the root see D. Kellermann, “חמוץ, חמץ,” *TDOT*, 4:487–93.

identifies a conceptual blend, which is all too easily bifurcated by contemporary readers as two distinct and remote spheres of life, harvest, and warfare.⁶⁷ By showing how the connection between violence and viticulture relies on the crushing of grapes and bodies and the production of blood or wine, de Hulster's analysis of Isa 63 informs an iconographic exegesis of Joel 4. As a result, we see that Joel's viticultural imagery does not solely depict future agricultural restoration. Instead, the book relies on viticultural imagery to connect the militaristic destruction with a promise that God will defeat Judah's enemies.

Trampling the Enemy

Depictions of kings and victorious powers trampling their enemies are widespread throughout the ancient Near East. Trampling enemies appears most prominently in Egyptian iconography, where the pharaoh appears striding over his vanquished foes in monumental art. In minor art, the image appears on seals, and may depict the pharaoh as a man or sphinx striding over, standing on, or otherwise trampling his foes or wild beasts. The image comes into Israel/Palestine by way of Egyptianizing designs in various ivories that incorporate the sphinx astride its foes. In Egyptian iconography, the conception emphasizes pharaonic power. It appears as early as the Narmer Palette and in the traditions of the Nine Bows.

⁶⁷ Hulster, *Iconographic Exegesis and Third Isaiah*, 234–48.

Narmer Palette

Figure 5.2. Narmer Palette. Green schist. 1st Dynasty (c. 3100 BCE). Hierakonpolis. Public Domain. Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Narmer_Palette.jpg.

The Narmer Palette (fig. 5.2) comes from the first dynasty of the Early Dynastic Period (3100–2686 BCE). The ceremonial palette is a monumental version of palettes that were used to mix cosmetics.⁶⁸ On the recto, Narmer stands in the center of the palette with a raised club in his right hand while his left grasps the hair of an enemy. Narmer wears the white crown of Upper Egypt, a bull tail, and a short tunic. Behind him stands a male figure carrying the monarch's sandals. Narmer faces Horus, who perches atop a symbolic enemy and controls him with a tether through the nostrils.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ On the appropriateness of the term “monument” to describe the Narmer Palette, see David O’Connor, “Context, Function and Program: Understanding Ceremonial Slate Palettes,” *JARCE* 39 (2002): 23.

⁶⁹ This image conveys Narmer’s dominance over the northern land by the southerners. As W. Stevenson Smith states, “This is expressed by the domination over the northern land by the state-god of the south whose

On the verso, one finds additional scenes of Narmer's victory. In the bottom register, a bull strides atop a slain enemy while a walled encampment sits in the background. In the images of both the recto and the verso, Narmer appears larger than life. His size relative to the other figures in the images conveys his physical strength and military might. His power is also demonstrated by bull imagery. Narmer wears the bull tail, his name appears inscribed along the top between the bull heads presented *en face*, and the bull in the bottom register of the verso mimics Narmer's stance by treading on an enemy.⁷⁰ He stands victorious among his enemies.⁷¹ Finally, the bottom register recalls Narmer's might as portrayed on the front side via continued use of bull imagery. Taken together, these images portray Narmer as the founding king of a united Egypt.⁷²

embodiment upon earth is the Horus Narmer." *The Art and Architecture of Ancient Egypt*, rev. William Kelly Simpson, Pelican History of Art (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 13.

⁷⁰ The bull heads may refer to Hathor, but this is uncertain. See Smith, *The Art and Architecture of Ancient Egypt*, 13.

⁷¹ The palette comprises several registers that construct a narrative of Narmer's conquest of the northern regions of Lower Egypt and unification of Egypt. The front side of the palette shows Narmer in his militaristic might, poised, ready to crush an enemy while trampling on the bodies of his slain enemies. On the reverse, the three registers reveal the outcome of Narmer's actions. The king wears the crown of Upper Egypt and processes toward the mutilated corpses of his enemies. In the second register, two men control mythical beasts, representing pharaonic control and order either of Upper and Lower Egypt or the natural world. On the connection between enemies and animals, see Othmar Keel, "Der Bogen als Herrschaftssymbol: Einige unveröffentlichte Skarabäen aus Ägypten und Israel zum Thema 'Jagd und Krieg,'" *ZDPV* 93 (1977): 141–77; and Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World*, 89–95.

⁷² Steve Vinson, "Narmer," *OEA*, 2:494–95.

The images that make up the palette fit within conceptions of Egyptian kingship that emphasize the power and control afforded to the ruler of Egypt. As the divine ruler of Egypt, the pharaoh held unique access to the realm of the divine, as well as distinct responsibilities for maintaining *maat* in the mortal realm. Victory, in this responsibility, resulted from the favor of the gods.⁷³ Iconographically, this responsibility was displayed by depicting Pharaoh standing over, striding upon, or trampling his enemies.⁷⁴ As will be seen, this image was an essential element of regnal images.



Figure 5.3. Seated statue of King Djoser. Step Pyramid at Saqqara. Painted Limestone. 3rd Dynasty. Egyptian Museum. Cairo. Public Domain. Wikimedia Commons. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Djoser.jpg#/media/File:Djoser.jpg>

Trampling the Nine Bows

As discussed in chapter 3, the motif, by which I mean a recurring artistic theme, of the Nine Bows was a central and long-lived feature of Egyptian iconography.⁷⁵ The “Nine Bows” refers to a motif in which the traditional enemies of Egypt were signified by the use of bows and, occasionally, captive West Asian, Libyan, and Nubian peoples.⁷⁶ Rulership over the Nine Bows was viewed as a divine right and

⁷³ B. J. Kemp, “Imperialism in New Kingdom Egypt (c. 1575–1087 BC),” in *Imperialism in the Ancient World: The Cambridge University Research Seminar in Ancient History*, ed. C. R. Whittaker and Peter Garnsey, Cambridge Classical Studies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 11.

⁷⁴ Such images were often combined with animal or hunting scenes to stress the chaotic, animalistic quality of non-Egyptians. See Kemp, “Imperialism in New Kingdom Egypt,” 8, 13.

⁷⁵ Eric Uphill, “The Nine Bows,” *JOEL* 19 (1967): 393.

⁷⁶ See Stuart Tyson Smith, “Peoples,” *OEA*, 3:31.

available to the pharaoh through his unique association with Ra.⁷⁷ The image of the Nine Bows may refer to the depiction of stereotypical ethnic peoples or nine actual bows. Either way, the Nine Bows represent the subjugation of Egypt's enemies. As the Nine Bows have already been discussed with reference to Persian imagery, we will only examine two examples here.

Seated King Netjerikhet (Djoser)

One of the earliest examples of this tradition can be found in the Step Pyramid complex and the seated statue of King Djoser (ca. 2650–2575 BCE) (fig. 5.3). This statue, which was a part of a larger monumental construction that likely included royal women, includes a set of nine literal bows carved in relief on the base. His seated, nonconfrontational stature suggests calm control and triumph over the chaos of his enemies, a notable contrast to the violent imagery of the Narmer Palette.⁷⁸ The early image demonstrates the longevity of the motif of the Nine Bows, which extended far into the pharaonic period.

The bows appear under Djoser's feet and are clarified by hieroglyphs that suggest the bows are people groups and not specific geographic regions or countries.⁷⁹ Uphill notes that Djoser's seated statue is the first appearance of the Nine Bows appearing directly under the feet of the king. Though this example is quite early, it is important, and demonstrates just how

⁷⁷ Kemp, "Imperialism in New Kingdom Egypt," 10.

⁷⁸ Robbins, *The Art of Ancient Egypt*, 45.

⁷⁹ Uphill, "The Nine Bows," 394.

embedded the image is within the Egyptian iconographic system.⁸⁰ The use of the Nine Bows extends well into the New Kingdom, where several examples shine, and a standard list of the nine representative groups develops.⁸¹

Tutankhamun

The tradition of the king trampling on his enemies represented by the Nine Bows becomes literal representation in a pair of ceremonial sandals discovered in Tutankhamun's tomb. The eleventh king of the Eighteenth Dynasty, Tutankhamun (1355–1346 BCE), may be the most well-known pharaoh of ancient Egypt. The discovery of his tomb was the most widely discussed archaeological discovery from the early twentieth century because it was discovered intact. Coming after the reign of the heretic king Akhenaten, Tutankhamun's rule restored much of the religion and iconography that his predecessor destroyed.⁸² This period represents a time of

⁸⁰ Similar depictions of the enemies subdued under the king's feet can be found on pieces such as the Scorpion mace head and in the iconography of Thutmose III. Uphill, "The Nine Bows," 394.

⁸¹ Uphill, "The Nine Bows," 395.

⁸² Robbins notes that the transition from the rule of Akhenaten to Tutankhamun was marked by a restoration of the traditional cults, secession of Akhenaten's building program, and a resumption of building projects planned before Akhenaten's reign. See Robbins, *The Art of Ancient Egypt*, 158.

transition in Egyptian art.⁸³ The motif of the pharaoh trampling his enemies can be found in two primary cases in the treasures unearthed in the Valley of the Kings (KV62): the king's footwear (fig. 5.4) and an intricately decorated box (fig. 5.5).

The sandals portray the traditional image of the Nine Bows. These sandals, along with the representations of bound prisoners on the footstools, allow the king to tread enemies quite literally wherever he goes.⁸⁴ Much of the rest of the furniture in the tomb contains similar motifs that emphasize the king's power in battle and his might against his enemies.⁸⁵ Treading upon the Nine Bows, and therefore subduing them, was a divine prerogative and responsibility.⁸⁶



Figure 5.4. Tomb of King Tutankhamun (KV 62). Sandals with enemy figures and nine bows motif. 18th Dynasty. Cairo Museum. Carter 397. Emory University Art History Department Collection. 197663. https://library-artstor-org.proxy.library.emory.edu/#/asset/SS35507_35507_20833815..

⁸³ Smith, *The Art and Architecture of Ancient Egypt*, 195.

⁸⁴ Robbins, *The Art of Ancient Egypt*, 158.

⁸⁵ Robbins, *The Art of Ancient Egypt*, 158.

⁸⁶ Kemp, "Imperialism in New Kingdom Egypt," 10, 12–13. See, for instance, the words of Amenhotep III, in which he refers to himself as "the sun of the Nine Bows," *AEL* 2:58.

As Kemp points out, the subjugation of enemy lands was not only a theological concern, but was also an issue of immediate import.⁸⁷ Conquest of the surrounding lands provided economic gain, security, and prestige.⁸⁸ Images of conquest of the Nine Bows can be found on other furniture in Tutankhamun's tomb; his footstools, staffs, and other royal accoutrements display his appropriate execution of this divine responsibility and his provision for the land. One striking example, a painted chest (fig. 5), deserves further discussion since it also brings to light the iconographic displays of the king's power over both the chaotic enemy forces of beasts and the people of Nubia and West Asia.



Figure 5.5. Battle scene on the painted chest of Tutankhamun. Thebes. 18th Dynasty. Cairo Museum. Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%C3%84gyptisches_Museum_Kairo_2019-11-09_Tutanchamun_Grabschatz_26.jpg. Additional images are available at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Polychrome_chest_of_Tutankhamun.

⁸⁷ On the theological implications of warfare in the Eighteenth Dynasty, see Anthony J. Spalinger, *War in Ancient Egypt: The New Kingdom*, Ancient World at War (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 70–82.

⁸⁸ Kemp, “Imperialism in New Kingdom Egypt,” 20.

Across this box, Tutankhamun tramples his enemies, both human and animal. The peoples whom the pharaoh tramples can be identified as Nubians and Syrians, in part because of their appearance and dress. In the hunting scenes, the king fires his bow into herds of caprids, wild dogs, and ostriches. In the military scene in figure 5, we see the ideology of Egyptian kingship play out. The pharaoh stands in strength on his chariot, ready to release his arrow. His face betrays no sense of emotion, just a singular purpose, the establishment of order upon the world around him. He faces the mangled, chaotic hordes of his enemies. In his wake, he leaves orderly lines. Above his head, the gods, appearing via their appropriate emblems, grant him life and protection through the *ankh* and *shen* symbols. Accompanying the image, the text reads: “Perfect god, likeness of Ra, who appears over foreign lands like the rising of Ra, who destroys this land of vile Kush, who shoots his arrows against the enemy.”⁸⁹ Thus, the conquest of the enemy and the wilderness, depicted by their being trampled underfoot, denotes not only the king’s power and victory, but also the establishment of an orderly world.

On the other side of the box, yet another version of the trampling motif appears. This time, Tutankhamun, represented by two sphinxes in atef crowns, tramples his enemies: Nubians and Syrians. As in the larger scenes, he is protected by deities in the form of vultures who offer the requisite symbols of divine protection, power, and life. The sphinxes flank cartouches that bear the king’s name. The side panels of the lid, now removed, contained an image of a winged solar disk, with wings outstretched over the entire scene below. In the center of the image, just below the solar disk, the royal cartouche is guarded by uraei facing outward on either side.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Translation from Robbins, *The Art of Ancient Egypt*, 160.

⁹⁰ This motif was of course not an innovation of Tutankhamun, but a part of a much larger iconographic tradition. See the pectoral pendant of Amenemhet III (1853–1805 BCE), for instance: BODO <http://www.bible-orient-museum.ch/bodo/details/php?bomid=33715>.

In the case of both the sandals and the box, Nubians and Syrians function as representatives of the rest of the world, in part because they are the primary threats to the South and North of Egypt.⁹¹ Despite the fact that the trampling scenes on the box and sandals were not meant to be viewed by the public, they still played a significant role in Egyptian iconographic depictions of the cosmos. Images like these were profound statements and were considered “efficacious in protecting Egypt from foreign hostility.”⁹²

The Nations Underfoot at Persepolis

The previous discussion focuses on Egyptian iconographic traditions that predate the book of Joel by hundreds of years. This time difference of course makes it difficult to draw direct comparisons to Joel 4:9–21. The imagery of the king over the Nine Bows, whether seated, standing, or walking, however, is not limited to the New Kingdom, or even to Egypt for that matter. The motif of the Nine Bows lives on well into the Persian period, and can even be found at Persepolis in the Central Building East Door and the Throne Room.

⁹¹ Both nations functioned in specific ways for Egyptian imperialism. See Kemp, “Imperialism in New Kingdom Egypt,” 20.

⁹² Kemp, “Imperialism in New Kingdom Egypt,” 8.

In the door scene, Darius appears in his seated state, as in the central image of the Apadana. In this image, however, he sits above the bows. Below the dais, representatives of the nations lift his throne and hold the king aloft. Mark B. Garrison suggests that the representatives connect the image of the seated king to other instantiations of the image throughout Achaemenid iconography. He writes, “Perhaps conceptually connected to these static scenes of the seated or standing king with attendants are the many files of domestic attendants and palace guards that occur on numerous structures at Persepolis.”⁹³ Margaret

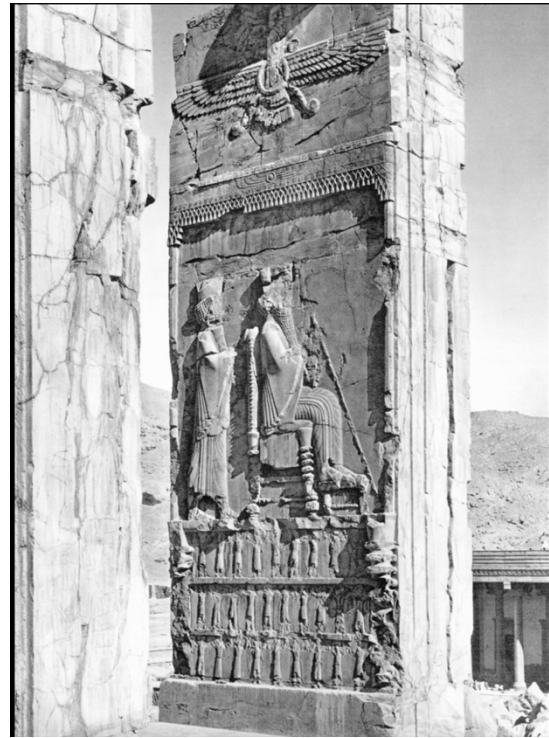


Figure 5.6. East doorway relief. Council Hall. Persepolis. 6th–5th century BCE. https://library-artstor-org.proxy.library.emory.edu/#/asset/AWSS35953_35953_31682052.

Cool Root argues that the image of the king raised by representatives of the nations results from a direct borrowing of the Nine Bows motif in Egypt. Tracing this motif back to the Predynastic period, she suggests that the Achaemenids represent foreign lands as “unfettered, dignified men.”⁹⁴ Even more pointedly, she suggests that the representatives of the nations beneath the king, lifting him up, constitute “a conscious reworking of a traditional Egyptian scheme.”⁹⁵ Such an image, she argues, represents the nations as literally supportive of the king and his rule (fig. 5.6). Likewise, the South Door from the Throne Room (fig. 5.7) depicts a similar scene. Root

⁹³ Mark B. Garrison, “Royal Achaemenid Iconography,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Iran*, ed. Daniel T. Potts (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 578–80.

⁹⁴ Root, *The King and Kingship*, 142.

⁹⁵ Root, *The King and Kingship*, 146.

argues that these scenes present the viewer with a conception of the nations subject to Persian rule. Not only do they lift the king; since they all face the same direction, they also appear to carry him.⁹⁶ Such a presentation suggests that the Persians desired a more positive portrayal of the king's relationship to the nations than the Egyptians did. Nevertheless, to borrow from Root, the Persian allusions to Egyptian and Assyrian forebears suggest an intentionally created royal depiction of the king and his relationships to the subjugated nations.⁹⁷

The iconography from Persepolis allows us to see just how widespread and impactful the image of

the foreign nations underfoot was for the ancient superpowers. Moreover, while one must be careful about hypothesizing any direct route from Predynastic Egypt to Darius's throne room, domination of the enemies underfoot was operative at the time that Joel was composed.

Additionally, the notion of the enemy underfoot can be found in minor art from Israel/Palestine.



Figure 5.7. South doorway relief. Throne Hall. Persepolis. 5th century BCE. https://library-artstor-org.proxy.library.emory.edu/#/asset/ABRMAWR_MEL_LINKIG_10310735683.

⁹⁶ Root, *The King and Kingship*, 153.

⁹⁷ She goes as far as suggesting that Darius may have known the image from Egypt directly. See Root, 155–60.

Trampling in Levantine Stamp Seals

Evidence from minor art demonstrates that motifs like the ones above were well known in Israel/Palestine. The subjugation of foreigners was a feature of Egyptian art throughout the nation's history on a variety of media from temple reliefs to household objects.⁹⁸ Even in Israel-

Palestine, images of the pharaoh subduing his enemies by trampling them are well attested before the Exilic period. These images fall within three general groups: the king in his leonine or sphinx form trampling enemies, the king trampling enemies with his chariot, and



Figure 5.8. Scaraboid seal. Tel el-Fara South. Jerusalem. 1279–1213 BCE. Rockefeller Museum IAA I.9783. BODO 18438. <http://www.bible-orient-museum.ch/bodo/details.php?bomid=18438>.

the king trampling enemies with his feet. All three tropes can also be found in larger monumental reliefs outside of Israel, as well as other miniature forms within an Israeli/Palestinian context, such as jewelry or furniture. The first group may prove especially important to Joel 4, in which Yhwh roars from Zion (4:16).

The motif of the pharaoh trampling his enemies is well known from scaraboid seals and oval plates from the southern parts of Palestine. Many of these images originate during the period of the Eighteenth Dynasty in Egypt. Their Egyptianizing motifs, features, and hieroglyphs evidence a form of Egyptian power in the region during the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages. Many of the examples discussed below come from Tel el-Fara (South), which sat near a trade route in the Negev that connected Egypt, Syria, and Mesopotamia. The seals depict kings of the New Kingdom and reveal the Egyptian influence on the region during that period.

⁹⁸ Ann Macy Roth, “Representing the Other: Non-Egyptians in Pharaonic Iconography,” in *A Companion to Ancient Egyptian Art*, ed. Ann Macy Roth and Melinda K. Hartwig (Chester, UK: Wiley & Sons, 2014): 155–74 (esp. 156).

In the first two seals under consideration, Ramesses II tramples his enemy while riding a chariot. In the first seal (fig. 5.8), Ramesses accompanies two captives in victory. The king,



Figure 5.9. Scaraboid seal. Tel el-Ajjul. 1279–1213 BCE. Rockefeller Museum, IAA 32.3031. BODO 15733. <http://www.bible-orient-museum.ch/bodo/details.php?bomid=15733>.

riding in a single-axle chariot, wears the blue crown and holds the horses' reins and a whip. The horse wears a double-feather headdress. Above the king's head appears his throne name. In the second seal (fig.

5.9), the captives are absent. The king once again

wears the blue crown, and the horse wears the double

feathers. Above the king appears his throne name and a

solar disk and uraeus, suggesting the close association between Ramesses II and the gods.

In contradistinction to other chariot seals in which the pharaoh pulls back his bow, ready to fire at a beast or enemy, the motif in these seals depicts Pharaoh in victory at the end of his



Figure 5.10. Scaraboid seal. Tel el-Fara South. 1279–1213 BCE. London Institute of Archaeology E.VI 3. BODO 33857. <http://www.bible-orient-museum.ch/bodo/details.php?bomid=33857>.

conquest. The scenes depict images of the pharaoh's triumph

and the power of his rule.⁹⁹ Ramesses II's military presence was

known throughout the Levant, in part because of his military

excursions into Syria.¹⁰⁰

A second type of trampling motif comes in

another Ramesside seal from Tel el-Fara (South) (fig.

5.10). In this seal, the king, Ramesses II, represented by a lion, tramples on a fallen enemy. In

⁹⁹ Othmar Keel, "Berichtigungen und Nachträge zu den Beiträgen II–IV," in *Studien zu den Stempelsiegeln aus Palästina/Israel*, ed. Othmar Keel, Menakhem Shuval, and Christoph Uehlinger, vol. 3, *Die frühe Eisenzeit* OBO 100 (Fribourg, University Press; Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990), 285.

¹⁰⁰ K. A. Kitchen, *Pharaoh Triumphant: The Life and Times of Ramesses II, King of Egypt*, 3rd ed. (Warminster, Mississauga: Aris & Phillips, Benben, 1985), 53–70.

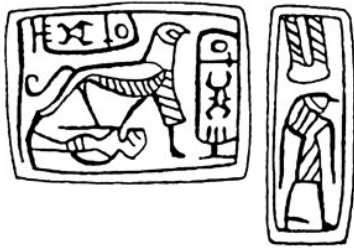


Figure 5.11. Cuboid seal. Steatite. Lachish. 1428–1397 BCE British Museum TD 5129/32. BODO 33860. <http://www.bible-orient-museum.ch/bodo/details.php?bomid=33860>.

front of the lion appears a cartouche with Ramesses's throne name and title, "Lord of the Two Lands." The seal shares this trampling motif with an oval plate from Tel el-Ajjul, as well as with an Egyptian chariot's inner wall and Tutankhamun's painted chest.¹⁰¹

The trampling motif, though with a griffin instead of a lion, also appears on seals that predate the Ramesside period. For instance,

in the seal featured in figure 5.11, which bears the throne name of

Amenhotep II, a griffin strides over the body of a supine enemy. The god of war, Month, appears on the side. The combination of the fallen enemy, striding griffin, duplicate cartouches, and the



Figure 5.12. Scarab seal. Steatite. Unprovenanced. Ramesses II (1279–1213 BCE). Freiburg SK 1989.9. BODO 5607. <http://www.bible-orient-museum.ch/bodo/details.php?bomid=5607>.

god of war place this seal within a victory scene, which is itself connected to warfare.¹⁰²

Finally, one Ramesside seal places the king directly over

his fallen enemies. In this image, the pharaoh Ramesses II

directly tramples his enemies with his feet. The king is flanked by

protective and supportive divine emblems—the falcon with

outstretched wings and the solar disk with uraei. While grasping a bound enemy placed in front

of him, he stands on a prone enemy beneath his feet (fig. 5.12). Ramesses II carries a staff under

his arm, just as he does in reliefs from Karnak and as Ramesses III does on reliefs at Medinet

¹⁰¹ For the palette, which depicts the throne name of Amenhotep II, see BODO; <http://www.bible-orient-museum.ch/bodo/details.php?bomid=15961>; for the chariot wall and the palette, see Silvia Schroer, *Ikongraphie Palästinas/Israels* 4, 88, fig. 571 and 572. The chariot, like Tutankhamen's painted box, pairs the image on the inside—of the sphinx trampling its enemies—with an image on the outside, of the king trampling his enemies in scenes of war (*ANEP*, fig. 314). On the classification of these images, see Bertrand Jaeger, *Essai de classification et datation des scarabées Menkhéperre: Prix de la confédération internationale des négociants en œuvres d'art 1979*, OBO.SA 2 (Éditions Universitaires/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982).

¹⁰² Schroer, *Ikongraphie Palästinas/Israels* 4, 92, fig. 578.

Habu. Directly in front of the king sits a humanoid figure, while the pharaoh captures and dominates his enemies.

The seals discussed above appear in contexts related to the Late Bronze and Early Iron periods, at least several hundred years from the potential earliest point of composition for Joel, and likely well before the final composition of the book. Thus, the problem of chronology once again raises its head. How can we link the text of Joel to such early images? The time between the earliest appearance of motifs related to trampling an enemy to the tradition's artistic high



Figure 5.13. Scaraboid seal. Bone. Lachish. 840-700 BCE. British Museum 15804. After Schroer, *IPIAO*, 4:419; fig. 1377.

points, as in the New Kingdom, is very long. Additionally, stamp seals' size allowed them to be preserved and used over long periods of time. In other words, as small, personal, and distinctly identifiable, stamp seals could be useful beyond the immediate context of their creation, and would likely have conveyed information and meaning beyond the historical period of their first user.

By the end of the Iron Age in Judah, the motif of the pharaoh in his human or sphinx form trampling his enemies transitions to a more appropriately southern Levantine motif, the lion trampling its enemies.¹⁰³ The image, according to Keel and Uehlinger, is the central feature of an Egyptianized royal motif in Israel/Palestine Iron Age (IIB).¹⁰⁴ Keel and Uehlinger argue that the seal (fig. 5.13) from Lachish fits within the motifs on seals such as those from Tel el-Fara

¹⁰³ On the preponderance of the image of the lion throughout the southern Levant, see Strawn, *What is Stronger than a Lion?*.

¹⁰⁴ Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God*, 268–69. An Egyptian seal bearing a similar motif can be seen at The Metropolitan Museum of Art: “Scarab with Contest Scene (Man and Lion)” 89.2.458, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/553349>.

(South) in the Bronze Age, arguing that this way of depicting the king emphasized his lordship and divine power.¹⁰⁵

At this point, we are far from Nakht's tomb painting of the grape harvest. Nevertheless, several points should be noted. Though imagery pertaining to viticulture may be used to refer to divine judgment, it is not the only way this judgment is visually depicted. The related function of trampling or treading on one's enemies is widespread both chronologically and geographically. Trampling imagery demonstrates not only mastery of one's enemies and victory in warfare, but also divine approval of and justification for those actions, as well as the ordering of the world. In other words, in trampling his enemies, a ruler ensures victory for his nation, but he also sets aright a disordered world and subdues the chaotic realms that threaten the cosmos.

Conclusion

This chapter has set out to reframe the harvest imagery in Joel 4 as judgment and warfare imagery. The two conceptual realms found in Joel appear elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible—primarily in Third Isaiah and Jeremiah. Additionally, connections between harvest, judgment, viticulture, and wine making can also be found throughout the ancient Near East. While grape imagery is not necessarily connected to warfare, the notions of trampling or treading a winepress and one's enemies are conceptual bedfellows.

To be sure, additional iconographic possibilities remain. One could, for example, examine the juxtaposition of fertility and waste in vv. 18–21 or the astral imagery in vv. 15–16.

¹⁰⁵ Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God*, 269, 82.

Much of this imagery builds upon earlier textual depictions in Joel of Yhwh as the Divine Warrior (Joel 4:15–16, 19–20; Zech 14; Jer 25:17–38). The goal of this chapter, however, was not to exhaust every possible iconographic comparison—indeed, that would be impossible—but instead to attend to the image on which the text itself focuses. As I have argued above, the focal image is Yhwh as a victorious warrior triumphing over the nations by trampling them as the vintner treads the wine press.

The iconographic traditions of trampling one's enemies are not limited to Egypt. Eventually, they make their way into the iconographic systems of the Achaemenids, and can also be found throughout Persepolis. Direct Egyptian influence of this motif is also attested in the iconographic record of minor art in Israel/Palestine. The widespread geographic evidence of this motif, as well as its longevity in the chronological records, suggests that it is relevant for a reader of Joel 4 who could recognize the imagery of this pericope and picture it within visual traditions that rely on motifs of the victor trampling his enemies.

When viewed in light of iconographic motifs of trampling and treading on one's enemies, Joel 4:9–21 becomes more than simply a reversal of agricultural realities. That is to say, the bulk of interpretation of this pericope has read vv. 4–19 as a reversal of the locust plague: the insects devour the fields in chapter 1 and Yhwh restores them in chapter 4.¹⁰⁶ This attention to the locusts' devastation has overlooked the martial imagery that proliferates throughout the book. By reading the imagery of Joel 4 against both iconography of trampling and biblical texts that connect grape harvest with divine judgment via warfare, we can clearly see that Joel 4 reflects military imagery as much as it does harvest imagery.

¹⁰⁶ See for example Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 80–84; Crenshaw, *Joel*, 195–96; Achtemeier, *Joel*, NIB 7:335–36; Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 104.

Joel 4:9–21 combines traditional imagery of viticulture and judgment. As de Hulster points out, the correlation between the of pressing grapes and judging one's enemies by trampling them can be found in texts and images alike. Thus, interpretation of Joel 4:9–21 should focus on wine production and enemies trampled underfoot. Textual reasons to investigate this connection can be found throughout the passage.

In Joel 4:10, the people turn their implements of viticulture into weapons of war. Yhwh treads the winepress and the vats overflow (v. 13). Yhwh shouts like vigneron in the winepress (v. 16), and the mountains drip with sweet wine (v. 18). The pericope concludes by recalling the blood of the innocents of Judah, and Yhwh promises to remember them and to dwell in Zion (vv. 20–21). Throughout the passage this imagery is combined with traditional imagery of Yhwh as the divine warrior; he judges (v. 13–14), and the astral bodies darken in his bright presence (v. 15). He defends Jerusalem and Zion (vv. 16–17), and he restores the despoiled region and the dispersed peoples (vv. 18, 20–21). The constellation of imagery from the realms of viticulture and the Zion traditions creates a textual unit that recalls the horticultural imagery from early in the book and combines it with militaristic imagery. In view of iconographic exegesis, this passage reveals that Judah has been destroyed at the hands of its human enemies, and that Yhwh restores Judah by judging its enemies.

An iconographic approach to the passage demonstrates that the crisis Judah faced was not merely one of agricultural destruction. Instead, we see a picture of a small nation destroyed by its enemies and restored by its god. The imagery combines elements of the horticultural and militaristic realms in order to describe that destruction and restoration. When the horticultural imagery is properly situated within its larger iconographic context, we find that the problem

affecting the people of Judah is not a locust plague followed by a drought, but is instead the assault of enemy nations depicted in traditional images and languages.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The major claim of the present study is that attention to the visual context of the ancient Near East is vital to making sense of the Book of Joel, sometimes called the “problem child of the Old Testament.” By limiting their study of Joel to comparisons only with other texts, scholars have misunderstood certain aspects of the book, and have failed to appreciate it in its entirety. Comparing ancient Near Eastern iconography to the work of Joel is one way to expand the data sets available to assist in understanding the text.

This dissertation makes two major contributions: one to the study of the Book of Joel and one to iconographic exegesis. First, the iconographic approach taken here shows that pictures can restore some of the interpretive cruxes in Joel. The widely shared scholarly insistence on making an actual locust plague the crisis of the book, for example, is misguided in light of the iconography of locusts throughout the ancient Near East. When seen through the artistic data, locusts are clearly metaphors for armies. The association between locusts and military groups resulted from the large numbers that made up both groups, their ability to cause destruction, and the destruction wrought in their wake. This metaphor could be either positive, for the victor, or negative, for the loser.

Second, this project has been the first to offer an iconographic study of an entire biblical book. Relating images to texts is difficult, especially with texts that lack clear boundaries. There can be little doubt that the Psalms have attracted extensive iconographic attention because of their vivid imagery, but also because of the clarity of the Psalter’s textual units that can be more straightforwardly mined for iconographic purposes. Things are much more difficult, however, in

works like Jeremiah, Isaiah, or Joel, in which delimitation of pericopae is unclear. Scholars have typically relied on various methods and skills to demarcate manageable and interpretable units. In order to address this difficulty, this project relies on delimitation method to identify textual units before identifying a unit's iconic structure.

Chapter 1 outlined the need for a holistic iconographic study of the Book of Joel, and plotted a methodology for comparing the text with images from the ancient Near East. With respect to the work of Othmar Keel and especially those within the Emory Annex of iconographic exegesis, this present study justifies a phenomenological comparison between the Book of Joel and images from the ancient world. Necessary to this approach is the identification of textual units that could be examined and then compared with images on the basis of their content and congruence. Such methodology requires keen attention to the biblical text and ancient Near Eastern iconography, as well as a discussion of their larger historical and artistic contexts.

Chapter 2 initiated the study of the Book of Joel and set the methodology for comparing the work to iconography from the ancient Near East. First, using data from the dominant Hebrew manuscript traditions (Codex Aleppo, Codex Leningrad, and the First and Second Rabbinic Bibles), I isolated the first unit of Joel 1 as verses 1–12. This pericope is made up of a series of imperatives directed at various groups of people within Judah. The imagery of the passage conceptualizes the destruction as desolation wrought by locusts with leonine features who destroy Yhwh's fig tree (vv. 4–7). The destruction results in the desolation of the grain houses (v. 9), fields (v. 10), grain harvest (v. 11), fruit harvest (v. 12), and finally in death.

I argue that the iconic structure of the unit assembles around the destruction of the agricultural system, and especially Yhwh's fig tree. The description of the destroyers as locusts

with leonine teeth occupies the attention of many interpreters. I, however, suggest that the unit's focal object is the destruction of Yhwh's fig tree and vine. The result of this approach is that readers can situate the passage—and the locusts—within a larger conceptual tradition of warfare. My central claim in this argument is that locusts function as metaphors for human armies in the iconography of the ancient Near East.

Iconography from Egypt suggests that insects known for their persistence and aggression, specifically flies and locusts, were associated with successful soldiers. The clearest association comes from Queen Ahhotep's ceremonial dagger, which depicts both locusts and lions running down the blade toward the point.¹ In the Levant, locusts appear on several inscribed stamp seals that include images of locusts with individual names. Based on the Egyptian data, there likely exists a positive association between the individual named on the seal and the image of the locust. Additional seals portray locusts in atlantid scenes or near striding or seated sphinxes. In these images, it may be that the locust embodies chaotic forces of the unknown natural world or one's enemies. In these images, the locusts appear in contradistinction to standard images of divine or royal protection and order. The result of this investigation suggests that locusts could, according to the witness of text and iconography (especially when considered together), function as metaphors for human armies and individuals.

The second unit, Joel 1:13–25, expands the image of agricultural destruction to every part of Judahite society, including wild and domesticated animals. The disaster that befalls Judah, according to vv. 13–25, impacts the temple (v. 13), the fields, storehouses, and granaries (v. 17), and the wild beasts, cattle, and other livestock (vv. 18 and 20). I argue that the tragedy builds

¹ Christiane Desroches Noblecourt, *Gifts from the Pharaohs: How Ancient Egyptian Civilizations Shaped the Modern World* (Paris: Flammarion, 2007), 44

until it strikes even those nonhuman creatures who do not require agricultural systems to eat. By placing these creatures at the end of the long description of evils, the prophet builds a thick description of the wide-ranging impact of the events of the Day of Yhwh. As a result of this rhetoric, I suggest that the domesticated and wild beasts of the field function as the focal image of the constellation of imagery in Joel 1:13–25.

Iconography from stamp seals throughout the Levant portray wild and domesticated animals. In his work on the Psalms, Keel suggests that the psalmist's words in Psalm 42:1–2 draw on the motif of the grazing or drinking doe.² Building on his suggestion, I suggest that iconography of grazing wild and domesticated animals, when contrasted with the situation in Joel 1:13–25, reveals the gravity of the dire situation. Moreover, the impact on the animals suggests that the event is supernatural and a reversal of divine favor. Such a reading clarifies Joel's message as one that carries lamentation as well as indictment, a call to mourn and repent.

One of the curious aspects of Joel's message is that it contains no clear accusation of wrongdoing despite its calls for actions that look like rituals of repentance (vv. 13–14). The description of events in Joel 1, and its imperatives to action, can be better understood when Joel's imagery is situated within an iconographic context of military invasion and a reversal of divine favor.

As discussed in chapter 3, the relationship between Joel 1 and Joel 2 has been the subject of much scholarly debate. By utilizing the methods that I applied in chapter 2, I argue that Joel 2 depicts Yhwh leading his army in warfare, and that this depiction iconographically fits within the destructive and restorative properties of the Neo-Assyrian high god.

² Othmar Keel, *Jerusalem and the One God: A Religious History*, ed. Brent A. Strawn, trans. Morven McClean (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), 113.

The first unit, Joel 2:1–14, describes the Day of Yhwh as a day of siege warfare. It portrays a group of people (v. 2) as a consuming fire (v. 3), and as horses (v. 4) and foot soldiers (v. 7) that clamber over the city walls and attack the city (v. 9). The unit also depicts the day as one of theophany. It is characterized by Yhwh's appearance and the sound of his voice (v. 11), as well as by the darkening of the astral bodies and earthquakes (v.10). It envisions clouds and deep darkness (v. 2), and describes Yhwh's presence as a great light (vv. 2, 5, 6). I argue that the description of the day as one of theophany is essential to the text's iconic structure, which focuses on the appearance of Yhwh at the head of his army in verse 11.

The combination of solar imagery (vv. 2, 5, 6) and warfare (vv. 4, 7–10) place the text squarely within the traditions of the appearance of the Divine Warrior, and provide fertile grounds for comparison with depictions of Neo-Assyrian battle reliefs that show Assur within his solar disk leading Assyrian armies into battle. To make this connection, I examine the wall reliefs that portray siege warfare in Assurnasirpal II's throne room. The reliefs depict many of the same items and actions described in Joel 2:1–11. For instance, Assur leads the troops as they advance on an enemy city (Room B Panels 3, 11) and as they return from battle (Room B Panel 5). Chariots participate in the siege (Room B Panels 3, 4, 11) and the soldiers advance against the city by climbing over walls (Room B Panel 3). The presence of the high god within the solar disk is not only a suggestive analog to the description of Yhwh in Joel 2; it also functions as a focal image throughout the entire throne room to demonstrate that the depiction of events is determined by the gods and ensures the success of the campaign.

The next unit, Joel 2:15–27, maintains the same form as the previous unit while shifting the imagery dramatically. One of the most striking differences between the two units can be found in Yhwh's position related to his land and his people. In Joel 2:1–14, Yhwh stands in

opposition to his people and calls them to repent. In Joel 2:15–27, however, Yhwh becomes jealous for his land (v. 18) and sends grace to the people (v. 19). These events, though, only happen after the prophet calls for a fast (vv. 15–16). As a response to the people’s repentance, Yhwh revives the crops (v. 19); removes the enemy (v. 20); and promises to restore the ground (v. 21), the beasts of the field (v. 22), and the pastures and trees (v. 22). He promises to send rain (v. 23), fill the granaries and vats (v. 24), repay what was lost (vv. 25–26), and be the people’s God and prevent their shame (v. 27). The thoroughness and speed with which Yhwh responds to the people has caused some interpreters to question the relationship between these verses and those that immediately precede it. In contrast to interpretations that emphasize the dissimilarities between Yhwh’s actions in 2:1–14 and 2:15–27, I argue that the imagery follows an iconographic logic based on solar imagery of high gods.

In order to support the claim that the transition in Joel 2 moves from warrior solar deity to rain-providing solar deity, the chapter examined iconographic depictions of solar deities in Neo-Assyrian and Levantine images. During the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta II, Assurnasirpal II’s predecessor, Assur is depicted aiming a bow from his solar nimbus. Flanked on either side of the disk are wings. He is also accompanied by clouds and rain drops. Like Assur, Yhwh has been associated with solar disks and rain.³ In several stamp seals from the Levant, solar disks accompany the names of individuals associated with the royal court. In addition to stamp seals, tridacna shells also display a deity within a nimbus accompanied by wings and lotus blossoms.

Chapter 3 demonstrates that Joel’s use of the solar god at war in 2:1–14 leads naturally to the depiction of Yhwh as the one who restores with rain in vv. 15–27. It is the combination of

³ Martin Klingbeil, *Yahweh Fighting from Heaven: God as Warrior and as God of Heaven in the Hebrew Psalter and Ancient Near Eastern Iconography*, OBO 169 (Fribourg: University Press, 1999), 260–61.

rain, warmth, and sun that cause the crops to regrow and the animals to become fertile again. In short, the same God who leads in battle leads in restoration.

Chapter 4 focused on images of gods who pour out their blessings on the righteous and pass judgment on the wicked. While the precise dating of Joel remains difficult, scholarly consensus ever since Duhm's publication on the Twelve Prophets attributes the second half of the work, chapters 3 and 4, to a later period than the first two chapters. Generally, Joel 3 and 4 are placed squarely within the Persian period. This transition is due in part to shifts in rhetoric, theology, and textual references and terminology, such as the mention of the Greeks in 4:6. Taking this consensus as a point of departure, chapter 4 examined Joel 3:1–4:8 in light of Achaemenid iconography.

Joel 3:1–4:8 describes a series of events that take place after Yhwh's restoration of Judah. Yhwh promises to pour out his spirit on his servants (3:1–2), set signs in the heavens (3:4–5), and save those who call upon him (3:6). Yhwh then describes the time when he will return the captives to Judah and Jerusalem (4:1). Following this, he will gather the nations for judgment on account of their deeds against Israel (4:2–3). He accuses Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia by name, and promises to act in kind for their deeds: robbing the temple treasuries and selling the children of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks (4:4–6). Yhwh promises to sell the children of the nations into slavery to Judah and to the Sabeans (4:7–8).

In Joel 3:1–4:8, the image of Yhwh pouring out his spirit on his people combines with the image of him gathering the nations in judgment. The notion that the gods poured out divine blessing, life, and power appears regularly throughout the ancient Near Eastern iconographic programs. Such depictions often accompany images of individuals rightly adjudicating divine order on earth. Additionally, the gathering of the nations for judgment is a feature of

Achaemenid tribute scenes. Chapter 4 argues that the combination of imagery in Joel 3:1–4:8 provides a congruent structure with these tribute scenes, which portray the king receiving divine support while he judges the nations. In order to build this case, the chapter discussed the Egyptian and Mesopotamian influences on Achaemenid iconography of the high god, Ahura Mazda, as well as various tribute scenes. Recognizing the importance of the iconographic programs in Achaemenid rule, the chapter then explored their congruence with the images in Joel 3:1–4:8.

The winged sun disk appears early in Persian iconography, and is quickly associated with the high god, Ahura Mazda. It is generally accepted that this influence came to the Achaemenids primarily through the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian iconographic traditions. Images of Ahura Mazda within a solar disk are featured in monumental and miniature art. The solar disk is present at the center of one of the most prominent examples of Achaemenid iconography, the Apadana at Persepolis.

The relief program of the Apadana presents a complex façade of images replete with meaning. Like the reliefs in Assurnasirpal II's throne room, the reliefs in the Apadana present an idealized vision of the Persian empire. The main façade of the Apadana depicted the solar disk of Ahura Mazda flanked by two stairways. On each stairway, representatives of the Persian military and tributaries appear. They seem to perpetually climb the stairs and direct the viewers' attention to the center of the scene, beneath Ahura Mazda's solar disk. These scenes portray the orderly functioning of the Achaemenid empire, the *Pax Persica* of the king.⁴ Both the Apadana and Joel 3:1–4:8 depict enemy nations as being subjected to the high god, but they also contain notable

⁴ Brent A. Strawn, "'A World Under Control: Isaiah 60 and the Apadana Reliefs from Persepolis,'" in *Approaching Yehud: New Approaches to the Study of the Persian Period*, ed. Jon L. Berquist (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2007), 115

differences. The Apadana lacks an explicit pouring out from Ahura Mazda toward the king, despite the implied nature of their relationship throughout the images, and the scene at the Apadana is far more peaceful than the scene in Joel. For another example of an Achaemenid scene that depicts the high god judging the nations we must turn to Bisitun.

Like the Apadana relief, the Bisitun relief portrays the king receiving tribute from his enemies. However, unlike the Apadana scene, Bisitun is located on the side of an ancient roadway that connected the capital cities of Babylon and Ecbatana. As a result of this public visibility, Bisitun is likely one of the most well-known Achaemenid reliefs—and is also accompanied by an inscription translated into Old Persian, Elamite, and Babylonian. In this relief, Darius I stands before a line of bound prisoners, each of whom is labeled and dressed in national garb. Above the scene, Ahura Mazda raises a hand similar to the one raised by Darius, and wears various trappings of his divinity. Beneath Ahura Mazda's solar disk appear forked rays or streams. While their precise identity remains debated, there is reason to interpret these streams as flowing water bursting forth from the divine being. If interpreted this way, Bisitun depicts Ahura Mazda gathering the nations beneath him and delivering them bound to his servant, Darius, while also pouring out a divine element such as water. This representation begins to cohere with the picture in Joel 3:1–4:8 of Yhwh delivering his people, binding the enemy nations, and pouring his spirit out on those who call upon his name.

Chapter 5 demonstrated how Joel's final unit, 4:9–21, returns the focus of the work to the images that open the book itself: agricultural images. The imagery that the final unit employs can be found in other prophetic texts like Third Isaiah (Isa 63), as well as in texts that depict the divine warrior tradition (Zech 14, Jer 25:17–38). This imagery commonly depicts the promise of fruitful harvest and the overflowing blessings of Yhwh. Chapter 5 presented Yhwh as the

victorious warrior who, like the vintner trampling grapes, tramples the nations. Thus, I situate this depiction of Yhwh within larger conceptions of divine judgment and iconography of trampling. Chapter 5 concluded by arguing that the Joel 4:9–21 draws on traditional imagery of warfare and agricultural production.

Joel 4:9–21 issues a call to arms. The people are told to prepare for war and to turn their tools into weapons (vv. 9–10). The nations are gathered (vv. 11–12) and Yhwh judges them (v. 13–14). During Yhwh's judgment, the astral bodies darken (v. 15), Yhwh shouts from Zion and Jerusalem (v. 16), and he promises to be the stronghold for his people (v. 17). Yhwh's actions restore the fertility of the region (v. 18) and turn the nations to wasteland (v. 19). The unit concludes by emphasizing that Yhwh's dwelling place is Zion and that it will be established forever (vv. 20–21). The prominent imagery throughout the passage belongs to the realm of grape harvest and wine production (vv. 10, 13, 18) as well as imagery related to the divine warrior traditions (vv. 15–18, 21).

The iconic structure of this unit draws together imagery of harvest, warfare, judgment, and the Divine Warrior—a combination of imagery that can be found in other texts from the prophetic corpus. In Isaiah 63, for instance, Yhwh, in crimson-stained cloths, tramples a winepress and treads on the nations. In this passage the relationship between blood, the color red, and wine production is explicit (v.3). Like Isaiah 63, Joel 4 builds upon traditions of the Divine Warrior as one who appears in battle as a treader of grapes. Drenched in blood, Yhwh the Divine Warrior tramples his enemies.

Wine and wine production played an important role in the southern Levant. Grapes were a foundational element of the agricultural system, and wine provided a way to prolong the fruits of the harvest and add additional calories to the diet. Grapes and wine appear regularly as

features of God's blessing, denote the fertility of the land, and suggest the need for future caretaking. Viticultural imagery was common throughout ancient Near Eastern iconographic programs because of the importance of wine in ancient peoples' economy and diet.

The discussion of relevant iconography began with an examination of viticultural scenes from Egyptian tomb paintings. These reliefs connect an idealized picture of the present with life after death. Following Izaak de Hulster's work, this chapter considered the role of grape harvest and wine production as it was associated with the afterlife. Explicit scenes of a victorious warrior trampling his enemies can also be found in the ancient Near Eastern pictorial record, perhaps most prominently in the iconography of ancient Egypt and the construction of the Nine Bows.

The portrayal of the pharaoh trampling his enemies can be found in multiple motifs from Egypt. The Narmer Palette, one of the oldest of those motifs (3100 BCE), shows King Narmer trampling the bodies of his enemies. Here, both the pharaoh and his enemies are depicted as humans. In a later development of the trampling motif, the enemies of Egypt are rendered as nine bows, each representing a stereotypical ethnic and national group. As in the portrayal of the seated king Netjerikhet ([Djoser], ca. 2650–2575 BCE), the bows appear under the king's feet in an orderly manner. Another version of this motif can be found on a pair of sandals from King Tutankhamun's (1355–1346 BCE) tomb. The ceremonial sandals feature the nine bows above and below human figures who represent Egypt's traditional enemies. A chest from the tomb depicts a more violent version of the motif, in which Tutankhamun tramples his enemies in his chariot.

The Achaemenids also employed the motif of the Nine Bows at the monumental reliefs of Persepolis. Margaret Cool Root argues that the reliefs are an intentional borrowing from Egypt, and that the national representatives who appear underneath the feet of the king lift him up and

bear his throne as if to literally support the king. The trampling pharaoh motif can also be found within Levantine stamp seals from the regions of Judah. These seals portray the king trampling his enemies not only in a humanoid form, but in leonine and sphinx forms as well.

Chapter 5 used iconography of grapes being pressed and trampled in order to reframe the harvest imagery of Joel 4:9–21 as a distinctly militaristic image. Like many of the units examined in this section, a number of details are present that could draw the iconographic exegete's attention. The goal of this chapter, however, was to focus on the iconic structure of the passage and on the rhetorical emphasis of the unit as a whole rather than fragmenting the interpretation into individual images. Ultimately, Joel 4:9–21 combines traditional imagery of viticulture and judgment in order to illustrate Yhwh's acts to reverse Judah's subjugation. Reading the passage in light of the relevant iconography demonstrates that Judah's crisis was not only one of agricultural destruction; here, Joel also utilized agricultural imagery in order to reimagine the martial situation and experience during a politically fraught period.

The present project has attempted to demonstrate why iconographic data must be considered in the interpretation of Joel. It has shown that interpretive details can be understood anew in light of congruent iconographic data. Additionally, this project has demonstrated how the application of iconographic methods to an entire book is able to reveal the close connections between passages sometimes considered unrelated. By not considering iconographic data, interpreters unnecessarily limit their use of comparative materials able to aid in understanding the historical context of the text.

Applying iconographic data to an entire book while focusing on specific interpretive cruxes is crucial to the success of the methodology set forth in this project. To accomplish this

task, I relied on the work of David Morgan and his notion of the “focal object” or “icon.”⁵ In Morgan’s project, the focal object can be understood as a node that draws together aspects of the iconic structure or constellation of the larger image. It is the centerpiece or most important point within the iconographic context. In addition to being a connecting node, it is also the point at which the viewer enters the image and addresses what the image wants.⁶

The focal object becomes an icon when the focal object becomes repeatable and recognizable. This recognizability occurs in relation to the viewer and is not solely the intention of production of the artist. Recognizability and repeatability gives the icon its power as it moves the focal image into a particular type of relationship with the viewer. In religious terms, Morgan argues, the icon also relates to the presence of the represented thing. Thus, the focal image draws the viewer in, allows the viewer to make sense of the rest of the image, and becomes an icon as it is recognized by and relates to the object that the viewer seeks to engage.⁷ “Perhaps the most important fact about an icon,” Morgan writes, “is that imagining the referent, what the icon evokes, is impossible without beholding the icon.... An icon must be some manner of widely reproduced, broadly circulating artifact that evokes something people instantly recognize.”⁸

Considering the interpretation of Joel set forth in this project, readers can begin to understand the depiction of Yhwh in Joel as an icon—better, *the* icon—that occurs within a larger ecology of solar imagery and deities at war in the ancient Near East. In brief, in the Book

⁵ David Morgan, *Images at Work: The Material Culture of Enchantment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 90–137.

⁶ Morgan also refers to the focal object as a mask. A mask is a feature of mediation between the viewer and what it obscures, thus the focal object looks back at the viewer “in a network of relations that construct a visual field” (*Images at Work*, 90).

⁷ Morgan, *Images at Work*, 114.

⁸ Morgan, *Images at Work*, 114–115.

of Joel, Yhwh's icon in Joel is the image of the warrior god riding his winged solar disk. He brings destruction and also restoration. He attacks and he also pours out. To be sure, attentive readers of the book can see easily enough Yhwh's presence therein and, also, at least at times, have experienced it in some way during periods of trauma and need. In light of Morgan's work, however, an iconographic approach goes further still: it shows how it is precisely Joel's focal - image presentation of Yhwh that mediates the divine presence to audiences, whether antique or of late.

The methodology set forth in this project thus speaks to both the iconographer and the biblical scholar. This project demonstrates the usefulness of iconographic study for whole books while still addressing specific interpretive cruxes. Future work using the methodology employed in this project can do several things. First, iconographers can now begin to address iconographic studies at the level of the book building out from a careful use of delimitation criticism and attending to the focal image of the text at hand. Second, after a book's textual units and iconic structures have been identified, the iconographer can turn their attention to the icon that lives at the level of *the whole book*. Third, attention to the icon of an entire book can, in turn, inform interpreters' decisions regarding the thematic and theological consistency of a given book or textual unit. Such attention will provide additional layers of data when considering compositional questions. As this project shows, the depiction of Yhwh as a particular type of (divine) icon can inform whether the thematic differences between textual units rises to the level of a compositional difference.

My hope is that this work shows that although Joel's verbal imagery is complex, it does not appear *ex nihilo*, and can be better understood when examined from an iconographic perspective. When making use of this perspective, the crisis that precipitates Joel's writing

should be understood as a militaristic, not solely an agricultural, disaster. Additionally, iconographic exegesis can show that the work's imagery is not bifurcated and confused, but that it builds on traditional themes and motifs—ultimately on the God whom Joel presents as responsible for wraite and restoration.

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