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Grasping the Griffin: Identifying and Characterizing the Griffin in Egyptian and West Semitic Tradition[1]

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Abstract

The griffin is commonly understood to be an eagle-headed winged lion. I argue here that the Egyptian version has a falcon head, identifying it as a form of Horus; as an allomorph of the sphinx (seen most clearly on the axe-head of Ahmose), it represents the ka of the king. A digression into Judeo-Christian iconography argues that the bird among the evangelical symbols, derived from Ezekiel's vision of the divine chariot, is not an eagle, but a falcon, the four forms being all derived from Egyptian images of the king (as lion, bull, man, and falcon). The iconography of cherubs (commonly supposed to be of Mesopotamian inspiration) is perhaps more directly linked with griffins, since the Hebrew kᵉrûb *is claimed to be the source of Greek* γρυψ *("griffin") by J. P. Brown. The other symbolic beast of the Israelite repertoire is usually understood to be serpentine: here I argue that the Hebrew* śārāp, *"seraph," is better explained as derived from Egyptian* srf/sfr, *"griffin," having the same sense. A semantic (though perhaps not morphological) equivalence of* śārāp *and* kᵉrûb *seems reasonable. The frequent incidence of griffins in West Semitic glyptic art in the second and first millennia is shown to perpetuate the Egyptian solar and royal symbolism, which was also transmitted to the Aegean world.*

The griffin (also *griffon*, *gryphon*) is generally understood to be a lion with the wings and head of an eagle, though I propose to qualify this description with regard to its earlier forms. Its origins are disputed, but it is attested in Elam and Egypt from the late fourth millenium and Syria in the early second millennium BCE,[2] and thereafter is found widely throughout the ancient Near East, eventually entering the Greek and Roman artistic repertoire. The griffin survived into the Christian era in the armorial bearings of many medieval towns and cities, and even into modern commerce in the logos of such companies as the Saab and Vauxhall motor manufacturers (to say nothing of the world of Harry Potter). Since it does not appear in antiquity with written documentation, its significance can only be inferred from contextual study, and there are very different readings of its early history.

The griffin belongs within a wider repertoire of composite beasts or chimeras, which we may distinguish broadly as follows:

1.	**Egypt**	Wingless sphinx (human head on recumbent lion)
2.	**Mesopotamia**	Standing winged bull (human head)
3.	**Mesopotamia**	Standing winged lion (human head)
4.	**Syria-Mesopotamia**	Winged human (avian head)[3]
5.	***passim***[4]	Winged lion (avian head): the true griffin; may be rampant, couchant, or passant; occasionally wingless (see note 2)
5a.	**Mesopotamia**	Reverse of 5: the *Anzu* ("Imdugud")
6.	***passim* (but not Egypt)**	Dragon[5]

Category 5 was also ubiquitous in Syria and the Mediterranean lands from the early second millennium, on into Assyria in the first millennium, and in Persia and Scythia from the Achaemenid period. Whether these oriental versions were derived entirely from the earliest Susean tradition, or were also or partly reflexes of the occidental (ex-Egyptian) tradition is still debated, and a detailed treatment is beyond the scope of this study—though the latter seems more probable to me. Frankfort noted that "Assyria created its first national style out of Mesopotamian and Western elements, and the griffin belonged evidently to the latter," and went on to remark that "the immediate source of non-Mesopotamian motives [motifs] in Assyrian art is the kingdom of Mitanni, which from about 1600 to 1350 BCE united the Assyrian territory as far east as Kirkuk with the North Syrian plain."[6] With the relatively late date Frankfort gave, this certainly opens up the possibility that for all the discussion in this present paper, we should see a Western (i.e., Egyptian) element as the ultimate source of every example as far east as Nimrud. Frankfort appeared to allow this, though he temporized.

Though Frankfort wrote of the griffin only "occasionally penetrating Egypt,"[7] others have pointed to an Egyptian origin. A kind of proto-griffin, albeit of somewhat indeterminate features, appears on a predynastic palette from Naqada, the so-called Oxford palette or small Hierakonpolis palette.[8] The earliest example so far of the classic form, exhibiting all the features of the pharaonic iconogram, and beyond doubt representing the ideo-

logical content of all later griffins (at least in Egypt, and I think probably, *mutatis mutandis*, throughout at least its Western distribution), seems to be the one that Hornblower claimed to be present in the Abusir tomb of Sahura of the Fifth Dynasty (2491–2477 BCE), representing the king trampling his fallen enemies. The plate in Borchardt's edition has the caption "König als Greif, Feinde zertretend," but the head of the animal is missing, so that we may only say with certainty that the king tramples his enemies in the form of either a sphinx or a griffin. However, in favor of the latter interpretation is the appearance of a folded wing on the animal's back. Egyptian sphinxes are not winged, unlike Asiatic versions.[10] What is striking is that the king is identified in this relief *as* a griffin, not merely associated with one.

A perfect copy of this scene, appearing together with a mirror image with the wings similarly folded along the body and the head now clearly visible, is found in the cloisonné pectoral from the tomb of Mereret, a daughter of Sesostris III of the Twelfth Dynasty.[11] Absent in the case of Sahura, an ibis feather headdress identifies the figure as the ka of the king (whose fourth name contains the conventional *k3* formation "The kas of Ra appear in Glory"). This corresponds precisely to the later, more conventional sphinx form of Tutankhamen (also with the ibis feathers), shown on a painted casket trampling his enemies in mirror images, and on the interior side panel of a state chariot,[13] in exactly the same posture as the trampling griffins noted above.

If the human head on a sphinx can be a likeness of the king, as in the case of Khafra, portrayed on the Great Sphinx of Giza, then it is reasonable to interpret the falcon face in these forms also as representing the king, as Horus (the avian head on the Egyptian examples is clearly a falcon, not an eagle). It might be possible to identify the falcon as the war god Montu given the military context, but an identification as Horus seems to be confirmed by a similar portrayal of the king as a griffiniform Horus, balanced by Seth, and flanking an image of the goddess Bat (Hathor), on another Twelfth Dynasty pectoral from Dahshur at Eton College.[14] These two gods, conventionally brothers when of equal rank, represent two aspects of kingship.

We also have examples of griffins from the Middle Kingdom tombs at Beni Hassan (Eleventh to Twelfth Dynasties). In tomb 5, the creature has milk-filled nipples like a lioness in cub, the wings (if present) are highly stylized almost as a textile, and it appears to be on a lead. In tomb 15, the griffin marches second in line of a series of four creatures: the Seth-animal, the griffin, a snake-headed lion, and possibly a rhinoceros. It is unclear what ideological meaning is to be discerned here, though it probably has divine and perhaps royal significance, the first two representing Horus and Seth.

A ceremonial axe of Ahmose (Eighteenth Dynasty) with a griffin on one side of the blade has a matching sphinx on the other side.[15] The balance of the two forms implies a symbolic equivalence of the two. The beak on the griffin is now becoming aquiline rather than falconiform, but this is probably stylistic rather than symbolic, or perhaps relates to the victory of Ahmose over Asiatic enemies (the Hyksos).[16] It should be noted that the scene above the griffin is of a head-smashing rite.[17] Frankfort interpreted the axe as the product of a Phoenician workshop, sent to the king as a gift, which would explain the Asiaticizing tendency.[18]

Given that the evidence so far clearly points to an Egyptian origin for the griffin, at least so far as stylistic (and, as we shall see, ideological) influence in the Mediterranean region is concerned, it occurs relatively rarely within Egypt itself.[19]

According to Frankfort, the griffin appeared in crested form in Syria from the eighteenth century, becoming popular in cylinder seals, and became prominent in Mitannian and Middle and Late Assyrian art.[20] He noted that in the later work, its destructive symbolism, drawing on the leonine aspect, was "especially emphasized."[21]

There is an indirect way of confirming my belief that the griffin maintained a royal function in its further dispersion, which will also clarify the issue of the original species of bird involved in its composition and throw light on the Asian examples of the griffin still to be considered.

The matter of species requires a digression, so let us move forward through the history of the motif and associated themes into the present era. Representations of Christ as Pantocrator and judge, generally placed in tympana on the west façade of European churches and cathedrals from the Romanesque and Gothic periods, show him enthroned in a mandorla and surrounded by four figures:[22] a man (rather than an angel, as is sometimes supposed), a lion, a bull, and a bird (usually identified as an eagle). In context, these settled down after some variability[23] as the symbols of the four evangelists—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, respectively.

But in their earlier life, (transmitted by means of the mediation of Revelation 4:6–8[24]) they were the faces of composite (quadrupedal) creatures on the chariot of Yahweh seen by Ezekiel during his inaugural vision when the heavens opened and the deity appeared. We have two accounts, first in Ezekiel 1:5–12 and again in 10:10–14 in a subsequent vision of the departure of the divine glory. According to the first account they had the appearance of men (as far as the body and limbs are concerned), but each also had four wings, cloven bovid hooves,[25] and four faces (apparently four to *each* creature) oriented with the man to the front, the bird to the back, the bull to the left, and the lion to the right.[26] In the second account, which now identifies the figures as cherubs (*kᵉrûbîm*), the bull's "face" has become a cherub's.

The obvious question to ask of Ezekiel's figures is how did he imagine them? That is, where did he get the visual idea? The two accounts differ crucially: in the first they are, at least by some stretch of the imagination, anthropomorphic, while in the second they are quadrupedal and cherubic, which means that they are winged sphinxes, conforming to the conventional Asiatic form, apart from their different physiognomies and hoofed feet (see note 25).

The first explanation of this appearance was offered by Layard, the first excavator of Nimrud and Khorsabad.[27] He recognized in Ezekiel's descriptions the guardian figures of Assyrian iconography: the *kurību* hybrid forms. Later the anthropologist Tylor developed the case further.[28]

While there is no earlier evidence from within the Old Testament to prove an Israelite provenance for these forms (except perhaps for the cherub featured in ark and temple iconography, though we have no exact account of its form), we have no reason to suppose that the vision Ezekiel had was derived directly from the Mesopotamian iconographic tradition, though this has been claimed.[29] Ezekiel was after all a priest of the Jerusalem temple, and would carry the images of this (pre-exilic) sanctuary in his mind's eye,[30] not those of his hated place of exile.[31] Indeed, when we look at early Levantine art, we find one overwhelming influence at work, which certainly determined style in a comprehensive way, and also provided, above all in royal ideological contexts, at least some of the imagery which that style expressed, including the common sphinx found widely in West Semitic glyptic art. This was primarily Egypt, not Mesopotamia. Thus the jar-stamps of the royal household of Judah[32] had winged scarabs, obviously of Egyptian inspiration, later followed by either winged discs or, more likely, winged scrolls (this latter motif is *not* Egyptian[33]) as the device indicating royal possession. Diringer thought that the change dated from the time of Josiah's religious reforms.

Let us now, therefore, consider the four faces of Ezekiel's vision in the context of Egyptian iconography and ideology. First, however, we should note the basic sense of the Hebrew term *nešer*. It is commonly translated as "eagle" in modern versions (already Septuagint *aetos*, Vulgate *aquila*); however, the Ugaritic *nišru* and Arabic *nisr* mean "raptor."[34] When the Ugaritic hero Aqhat is killed by such birds (KTU 1.18 iv 27–37), it is the language of falconry that is used. And when the king of Babylon is called "the great *nešer*" in the allegory of exile in Ezekiel 17:3, it seems more likely that this is to be seen in royal ideological terms, here translated from Egypt, the historical foe, to Babylon, the present one, as "the great falcon"—that is, the king as Horus.[35] The fact that such a designation was not strictly appropriate for a Babylonian king would not have troubled Ezekiel. He was transferring a symbol of oppression from one tyranny to another.

So let us follow the logic of supposing that the avian head remained that of the falcon Horus in Ezekiel's mind. The bull head can then be readily understood in similar terms. The formula *k3-mwt.f*, "Bull of his Mother,"[36] was used both of the god Amun and of various kings. In the former case, "his mother" was presumably the king's mother, mythically identified at Thebes with Mut, Amun's consort (though there may have been a double entendre), and implying Amun's paternity of the king. In the case of kings it was a theological statement.[37] "Bull" (*k3*) often appeared independently in royal names, in the formula *k3 nḫt* "Bull of Power," which probably played on the ambiguity of *k3*, which, according to the determinative signs used, meant either "bull" or "divine power."[38]

Iconographically, the king appears as a bull on the bottom register of the obverse of the Narmer Palette,[39] where he gores a fallen enemy by a city, a motif already present on a predynastic palette.[40] The bull (*k3*) was an embodiment of the divine force (*k3*) that flowed through the king. The lion in Egyptian thought often functioned as a guardian of boundaries, as with the Giza sphinx, guardian of the necropolis of the Fourth Dynasty. More specifically, the sphinx could represent the ka of the king, indicating his role in joining two worlds, those of men and the gods (a point noted above).

So at least in the time of Ezekiel (the beginning of the sixth century BCE), the royal elements of Egyptian iconography were still apparently in force at least in the southern Palestinian kingdom of Judah. Let us now turn to the Levantine evidence down to this period to see whether it is in accord with our findings.

To begin, consider the etymology of the terms in use for our creatures. The Egyptian for "sphinx" was *sfr*, also *sfrt*,[41] or *srf* by metathesis,[42] the latter form giving rise to *srrf*, meaning "a mythological creature" according to Budge,[43] and appearing with either the deity or the griffin determinative. He also cited the terms *ḥḥ* and *šsp*, variant *šp*,[44] which are less interesting for present purposes. Eggebrecht cited *sfr*, *tštš*, and *ḥḥ* as terms for "griffin," also meaning "sphinx."[45]

The West Semitic terms for "sphinx," appearing in Aramaic and Hebrew, are *kᵉrûba* and *kᵉrûb*, respectively. These are normally understood to be derivatives of Akkadian *kurību*, a by-form of *karabu* and *karibu*.[46] But I think it more probable, given the likely west-to-east movement of the motif (the Susa form complicates this), that the reverse may be the case—that is, the term is a loan word into Akkadian from the west. However, the term does not seem to be so far attested in Ugaritic, our only sure second millennium (North)West Semitic language.[47] The Greek form γρυψ—meaning "griffin"!—in turn looks suspiciously like a direct borrowing from the West Semitic form *kᵉrûb*. Some have expressed doubts, but J. P. Brown cut the Gordian knot by asserting that "Greek *gryps* and Hebrew 'cherub' must be the same word; structurally they are identical."[48] Again, the direct link proposed here seems to me more probable than the indirect mediation of Akkadian, though we cannot be certain.

The situation is made more complicated by Revelation 4:6–8, cited above, for the creatures there are described as having six wings. This feature clearly evokes the seraphim of Isaiah's inaugural vision (Isaiah 6), and suggests that the distinction normally assumed to exist between cherubim and seraphim was not as firm as we would like to think. Indeed, rather than seeing "seraph" (*śārāp*) as deriving from *śārap*, "to burn,"[49] some have taken it to be a loan word from the Egyptian *srrf* noted above, meaning "griffin."[50] Now while this does sound attractive, it seriously compromises the usual view that the seraphim are serpentine in nature, derived from the Egyptian uraeus (Egyptian *jʿr.t*, "cobra"), an important iconographic form in the display of royal divinity.[51]

So let us digress again to see if we can resolve the issues. Seraphim are found as follows in the Hebrew Bible:

Numbers	21:6	Then Yahweh sent burning snakes (*hannᵉḥāšîm hāśśārāpîm*) against the people...
	21:7	take the snakes (sg: *hannāḥāš*) away from us...!
	21:8	make a *śārāp* and put it on a pole...
Deuteronomy	8:15	[Yahweh] who led you through the great and dreadful desert with burning snakes (sg: *hannāḥaš hāśśārāp*) and scorpions...
Isaiah	6:2	*śᵉrāpîm* stood around [Yahweh], each with six wings, with the first pair hiding his face, with the second pair his legs,[52] and with the third pair they flew.
	6:6	Then one of the seraphs (*hāśśᵉrāpîm*) flew over to me with a burning ember in his hand...
	14:29	for from the stock of a snake (*nāḥāš*) comes forth a viper (*sepaʿ*) and its fruit is a flying *śārāp*.
	30:6	In a land of sorrow and affliction, from which come lion and lioness, cobra (*ʾepʿeh*) and flying *śārāp*.

(Author's translation)

The first thing to recognize in these passages is that there are two quite distinct categories of being. First, Numbers 21:6–8, Deuteronomy 8:15, and Isaiah 14:29 and 30:6 have to do with snakes, evidently poisonous ones. The expression *hannᵉḥāšîm hāśśārāpîm*, "burning snakes," in Numbers 21:6 and Deuteronomy 8:15 probably simply means "venomous snakes," the venom causing a burning effect. In Numbers 21:8 and Isaiah 14:29 and 30:6, we have naturalistic accounts of the denizens of the open country. The "flying" nature of the (venomous) snakes may allude to flying venom, as that of a spitting cobra (several varieties of spitting cobra are present in Northeast Africa, and in antiquity may well have been present in the Levant).[54] But in any event, there is no need to see the supernatural in this language. In these passages, the term *śārāp* is to be identified as *śrp I*, a by-form of *ʾsrp* with initial *samekh*.[55]

Second, the creatures of Isaiah's vision *are* supernatural, acting as intermediaries between the prophet and Yahweh. The term *śārāp* here is to be interpreted as the Egyptian term *srrf* noted above. It is of course entirely possible that the first, natural, form has become assimilated to this in the course of the history of the text, both morphologically and semantically, because of the religious instinct to see the supernatural at every turn. But originally, two different categories (and two different lexemes) were involved.

This brings us back to the question of the shape of Isaiah's seraphim. Were they serpentine? I think not, though this is the common perception. Joines took them to be a local version of the winged uraei of Egyptian iconography,[56] and there certainly were such representations: from seventh-century Lachish, a seal with uraeus belonging to Shephaiah ben Asiahu, and from seventh-century Judah, a seal with uraeus belonging to Jeremiah ben Asa.[57] We cannot simply jump from the existence of such forms to the supposition that the seraphim were serpentine. Their literary description precludes it.

The seraphs were winged—indeed with perhaps an excessive number of wings—but this enumeration may simply be intended to reflect the impressionistic nature of Isaiah's vision (rather like Ezekiel's, with their inner contradictions and tensions), in which they were simultaneously performing a number of functions. In my translation above, I have taken it as Yahweh's face and feet that they hide with their wings.[58] Other interpreters take it that it is their own hands and feet that they hide. On this understanding, they have legs and feet[59] as well as wings, and so are also somewhat stretching the definition of a snake.

Perhaps we can see the beginnings of the fusion of ideas in the iconography. One tantalizing issue is the philological relationship, if any, between griffins (*śrp*) and cherubs (*krb*), remembering that Greek used one lexeme to denote the other, thus apparently identifying them generically. Their names share two phonetically similar elements (*r*, *p*/*b*), though the first, the initial sibilant in the first and guttural in the second, cannot have morphed from one to the other, though this does happen in Indo-European languages.[60] So this issue cannot be easily resolved.

We should not turn from the Egyptian to the wider Near Eastern instances of the griffin as an iconogram on the assumption that the symbolism remained the same, even though we might expect this to be the case. Is there any evidence in support of the supposition? In Ugaritic royal ideology, there were a number of purely Semitic dimensions to the ideological complex,[61] but there were also Egyptian elements. The description of the imminent death of King Kirta, for example (KTU 1.15 v 18–21) reads as follows:

> To the going in of the sun Kirta will indeed come,
> to the setting of the sun our master.[62]
> And [Ya]sib will reign over us,
> and will [succeed] Kirta the votary over us.[63]

While allusive in style, it is clearly based on the Egyptian formula of the assimilation of the old and new kings to the sun:

> The god (Amenemhet I) ascended to his horizon;
> The Sedge and the Bee Sehet-ib-Ra was taken
> up to heaven
> And united with the sun-disc.
> The body of the god merged with him who made him.

> King Tuthmosis (III) went up to heaven; he was united with the Sun-Disc. The body of the god joined him who had made him. When the next morning dawned the Sun-Disc came forth, the sky became bright, King Amenhotpe (II) was installed on the throne of his father.
>
> (Frankfort 1948, 102–103)

This description of Kirta's death with its close Egyptian analogue is the closest to an explicitly solar connection with the person of the king in Ugaritic thought. The undoubtedly present solar dimension in Ugaritian royal ideology was expressed more indirectly in the person of Athirat, the consort of the chief god El and mythic mother of the king. She was a sun-goddess, an aspect of Shapsh. This comes out particularly clearly in text KTU 1.23, where the king's birth is described (in twin form[!]: king and ka[64]) as that of the morning and evening stars Shahar and Shalem (sc. Venus: Athtar) from the goddesses Athirat and Rahmay, while post-partum purification rites are then ordered for Shapsh, of whom they are evidently avatars.[65] She appears as a mother suckling (royal) twins in panel B4 of the royal bed ivories.[66]

Since the indigenous Semitic ideology was broadly stellar and celestial (the king was seen in different aspects as representing Athtar and Baal on earth,[67] with solar elements belonging specifically to the ideological function of Athirat), the solar language cited here is best explained as an import, an aspect of the general cultural influence of Egypt throughout the Levant and beyond. This is clear in the description of Kirta's impending death. Another element that is clearly of Egyptian origin and becomes an important symbol of royal authority throughout the ancient Near East is the winged disc. In Egypt this represented Horus of Behdet (the patron deity of Edfu), who also acted, according to the Ptolemaic era inscriptions at Edfu temple, as the king in his warrior function.[68] The winged disc appears in Ugarit on a "cult stand" (incense altar?), RS 78.041 + 81.3659,[69] above the figure of the king, and on the "El" stela RS 8.295,[70] on which a seated El faces the king, who appears to be pouring a libation. With the sun-disc above representing Athirat, this is a triadic image of royalty.[71]

Other examples of the winged disc in second millennium Syria are, among others, a cylinder seal of Ini-Teššub of Carchemish,[72] and the Hittite royal seal of Mursili II, both found at Ugarit, RS 17.158 and 14.202.[73] Though these of course directly reflect Hittite royal ideology, they are part of the pervasive royal use of solar imagery. Both the Ugaritian and Hittite material, incidentally, reflect a matrilineal royal descent system paralleling the Egyptian pattern. The winged disc in both contexts represents the sun-goddess, royal mother Athirat.

While we have no direct information concerning the griffin in a royal context in Ugarit (though griffins are frequent enough), two important artefacts from Phoenicia show the king enthroned, with a cherub flanking the throne, just like the sphinxes on Egyptian thrones. These are the sarcophagus of King Ahiram of Tyre[74] and an ivory from Samaria.[75] If the equivalent of sphinx and griffin as ciphers for the king holds true in Egypt, it may well have been sustained in the Levantine and further borrowing of the latter.

Let us now revert briefly to our mention above of the liminal nature of sphinxes, cherubs, and, I suggest, griffins. The Great Sphinx guards the necropolis of Giza, notably the temple and pyramid of Khafra. Like all leonine forms in Egyptian iconography, they are essentially guardians of boundaries. This is exactly the role played by cherubs, *kurību* figures, and seraphs (read: griffins) in the Semitic world.

Griffins on orthostats protected the sacred precinct of many ancient Near Eastern temples, as in examples from Iron Age Zincirli and Tell Halaf of a griffin passant (to right; the identity of this is uncertain, as it is anomalous)[76] and a griffin rampant (to left) on orthostats,[77] respectively, in addition to the damaged example given by Kantor.[78]

Genesis 3:24 reflects Israelite thought when it describes the cherubs that guard the gate to the Garden of Eden following the expulsion of Adam and Eve:

> And [the Lord of the gods (*yhwh 'lhym*)] drove out the Man, and he set before the garden of Eden the cherubs and the flame of the whirling sword to guard the way to the Tree of Life.
>
> (Author's translation)

This may be reflected in the motif of griffins seen in association with a tree (a trait they share with goats, antelopes, and cherubs). Thus we have a silver belt from Tell Halaf with griffins and cherubs flanking trees,[79] and an eighth-century Megiddo seal, with griffins flanking a tree.[80]

The tree may stand not only for fertility in the most general sense, but also for sacred places and territory as possession, all themes associated with royalty. Furthermore, the tree could stand as a symbol of the king himself,[81] to say nothing of Asherah the royal goddess in Israel and Judah being represented by the surrogate tree (*'ašērâ*).[82] Trees were also the medium of royal oracles.[83] Thus for all the broadening of association we may discern in the following examples, the royal connection may be a constant. Insofar as these are private seals this may be no more than reflected glory, though many owners, as presumably literate people with their names engraved, would no doubt be high officials, and therefore participants in the hierarchical milieu with the king at its center.

A variation on the tree motif shows the griffin in a browsing posture, as though emphasizing the nourishment the Tree

of Life accords the people. Examples occur over several centuries, and the present examples closely parallel many Aegean representations: an ivory from twelfth- to thirteenth-century Megiddo, showing a griffin browsing,[84] and three from eighth-century Nimrud with a griffin or griffins[85] browsing.[86] More specifically royal elements are found in many examples of griffins crowned or trampling fallen enemies (echoing Tutankhamen's sphinxes above): the eighth-century seal of Chaim from Tell el Farah, showing a griffin with double crown;[87] a ninth-century Levantine ivory showing a griffin with double crown and lotus flowers;[88] an ivory horse cheek-piece from seventh-century Nimrud showing a griffin trampling or perhaps protecting a king;[89] and an eighth-century bronze bowl from Nimrud showing crowned griffins and scarabs.[90] While other Nimrud items and the Megiddo ivory show an aquiline griffin, these last two examples (and all the seals noted below) retain the falconiform version, which arguably continues to transmit the specifically royal Egyptian aspect.

Specifically solar associations are retained[91] in the following examples:

- Late Bronze seal from Ugarit, fifteenth to early fourteenth century, depicting a griffin with sphinx and sun[92]
- MBII (?) Palestinian seal showing a griffin with solar disc and ankh[93]
- Eighth-century seal from Tell el Farah showing a griffin wearing a solar disc,[94] while a seal from Shechem (IAII) shows a griffin with sun-disc, winged scarabs, and feather of Maat[95]
- Eighth-century seal from Megiddo, with a degree of solar overkill, showing a griffin with double crown, uraei, an Eye of Horus, a rising sun "appearing in glory," and a meaningless cartouche[96]

Keel and Uehlinger (1998, §250a) is anomalous among all these, in that it is the only one shown here[97] that appears to have a shoulder ornament, which is typical of Aegean griffins. The implications of this ornament have been discussed by Richard H. Wilkinson and are explored in the present issue of this journal by Nanno Marinatos.

These seals strongly support the view that at least some ideological content was retained in the constant reuse over many centuries of these motifs, although we should not underestimate the purely aesthetic appeal of Egyptian art, which was so widely copied throughout the Levant, on account of its exotic forms. There was also undoubtedly, even when the complexity of the symbolism was perhaps not always understood, a profound appreciation of the theme of power conveyed by these conventional forms, and a constant tendency among the minor dynasties of the region to ape the mores of the imperial powers. Through trade and military and diplomatic involvement, Egypt had a massive presence in the Levant lasting three millennia, particularly in the mid-second millennium and then later the Ptolemaic period.

Notes

1. Paper read at the conference Minoan Civilization Ouside Crete—Griffins and Royal Symbolism in Crete, Egypt, and the Near East, held at the University of Illinois, Chicago, on March 10, 2008.
2. A. M. Bisi, in Lipinski 1992, 196, noted that the griffin was already known in Elam and Egypt from the fourth millennium. On the links between the two cultures, see Vertesalji 1992 and Pittman 1996. What purports to be one appears in Susa in the fourth millennium (Frankfort 1937, 106 and Figure 1, and see id. 1941, 355). He remarked, "like the other Elamite monsters of this period, it disappears without leaving a trace." The Elamite example is in any case *sui generis*: the entire forepart is avian, including bird feet and talons, except for the heavy lion's mane. We must also be careful about the identification of griffins: some evolve in academic tradition! Thus Frankfort 107 Figure 4, showing in his words "a winged, tailed and taloned dragon which spat fire," has become in Goldman 1960, PLL. 89–90 and Porada 1993, 570 and Figure 19, "a lion-griffin." This has become canonical in Aruz 2003, 215. A griffin ought by definition to have an avian head and leonine body, and this is the position accepted here. I am happy to see winged and wingless versions as equally "griffins." Richard H. Wilkinson has called the wingless version the "hieracosphinx" (personal communication). I prefer to see the wingless variety as still a representation of a griffin; it does after all have the two essential forms in combination—raptor and lion. As noted, there are commonly local variations, (e.g., the lion's mane on the Elamite example), which suggest the adaptation of the broad symbolic figure to various local contexts.
3. Sometimes called the "griffin-demon," though such a name is inappropriate for reliefs of priests with bird-masks performing the cult of the Assyrian sacred tree. At other times, they denote the *apkallu*, legendary (antediluvian) wise men and later lesser gods. See Reiner 1961, Greenfield 1999, Porter 2003, 16, 36.
4. Found in Egypt (Abusir, Beni Hasan, Saqqara, Thebes), Israel (Beth-Shean, Hazor, Megiddo, Samaria, Shechem), Judah (Lachish), Phoenicia, Syria (Ain Dara, Aleppo, Tell Ahmar, Tell el Fara, Tell Halaf, Ugarit), Assyria (Nimrud), Babylonia, Iran (Persepolis), Scythia, Oxiana, Greece (Mycenae, Pylos), Crete (Knossos), Thera (Akrotiri), Cyprus (Idalion), Italy (Etruria), etc.
5. The primary role of the dragon in Western Asia seems to be as the representation of chaos (see Wyatt 2005b, 151–189 and bibliography), though they could also evolve into guardians (cf. Litanu and Leviathan [Ugaritic and Hebrew, respectively], and Greek Ladon). Their conception and more generalized function is similar, though their form various widely. Some are merely huge snakes, others are winged, and others again have three, seven or even nine heads.
6. Frankfort 1937, 110.
7. Frankfort 1937, 106.

8. Also called the "Two Dogs" palette. Published Quibell 1900–1902; Petrie 1953, pll. F15, 16.
9. Borchardt 1910-13 ii pl. 2. Hornblower 1933, 80.
10. But see my observation in note 13.
11. Müller and Thiem 1998, 112–113 §220, Westerndorf 1969, 97. The considerable time lapse (some 600 years) between these early examples shows that there must have been continuity in representation, despite the absence of surviving examples.
12. The ibis plumes and disc belonged to the god Onuris and formed the fetish of Abydos, a city sacred to Osiris. They also appeared elsewhere, on the *atef* crown of Osiris, on some manifestations of Ptah-Ta-Tenen, on sphinxes, and on the cartouches of dead kings, as in the king-lists of Karnak and Abydos, and seem to have represented the Ka.
13. Noblecourt 1989, pl. XVI and pl. XIX, respectively. To the latter scene cf. the war-chariot panel of Tuthmosis IV: Frankfort 1937, 111 Figure 12. Incidentally, both these sphinxes are winged: were they intended to be shown as griffins?
14. Müller and Thiem 1998, 96 §197. See also Mercer 1942, 174 Figure 90, and the variants on 174–175, Figures 92 (falcon-headed crocodile [Horus-Sobek]), 93 (falcon-headed hound), and 94 (falcon-headed fish). On 174, Figure 91, Horus and Seth are combined in a griffin. Frankfort thought of a connection with Montu (1937, 112). See also n. 15.
15. Saleh and Sourouzian 1987, §§121a and 121b; Müller and Thiem 1998, 138 §§272 and 273. Frankfort drew attention to a connection here with Montu (1937, 112): the griffin (beneath a smiting scene!) is accompanied by the formula *mri mnṯw*: "Beloved (or Begotten) of Montu." But this is a royal cognomen (cf. the more common *mri imn* or *mri ptḥ*), identifying the king as embodied in the griffin, rather than a formal identification of griffin and god; that is, the cognomen belonged to the king, not the griffin. On the formula, see Wyatt 2007, 13–22. This interpretation would support my view that the griffin represents the king.
16. Many of the Levantine sphinxes discussed below remain falconiform rather than aquiline, which reinforces the point of the Egyptian ideology.
17. This motif was also widely exported from Egypt. See Wyatt 2007, 155–166.
18. Frankfort 1937, 113–114.
19. Other Egyptian examples appear in Mercer 1942, 115 (Figure 42), 143 (Figure 79), 174 (Figures 90 and 91), and 175 (Figure 93).
20. Frankfort 1970, 135, 263.
21. Frankfort 1970, 264.
22. A fine early example can be seen at Chartres.
23. Cooke 1936, 14.
24. The complex four-faced creatures of Ezekiel's vision have now become single-faced figures, but they have gained six wings apiece, clearly aligning them, as their cry of exaltation (v. 8) confirms, with the seraphs of Isaiah 6. This has a direct bearing on their conceptualization, as we shall see below.
25. In this respect they differ from griffins, which are leonine.
26. Given orientational conventions, these represented east (human), west (falcon > eagle), south (lion), and north (bull), respectively. On the significance of orientation in cosmic construction, see Wyatt 2001, 33–52; 2005a, 125–50. This suggests, and is in conformity with the iconographic program, that the bull (north) represents the past, the Old Testament; the lion (south) represents the present, the New Testament; the falcon (west) represents the future and the Last Judgment; and the human (east) represents transcendence or eternity.
27. Layard 1849 ii 460–464, cited by Giovino 2007, 39 note 87.
28. Tylor 1890, 390–391, cited by Giovino 2007, 39 note 88.
29. See Giovino 2007, 39–43.
30. Thus Mettinger 1999a, 191: "Ezekiel chaps 1 and 8–11 represent a visionary development of the iconography of the first temple."
31. Unless of course there were *already* a Mesopotamian influence in Levantine art. An attempt to find a Babylonian source was made by Brownlee 1986, 11: he identified the bull ("ox") with Marduk, the lion with Nergal, the eagle (sic) with Ninib, and the man with Nabu. He attributed this interpretation to Matthews 1939 (no page given).
32. See Diringer 1949. The scarabs have four wings.
33. Cf. Zechariah 5:1–2: *megillâ ʿapâ*, "flying scroll."
34. Watson 2007, 13; cf. *DUL* 650: "bird of prey, conventionally eagle or falcon" Akkadian *našru* = "eagle:" *AHw* 761, *CAD* N2, 79.
35. The falcon surmounting the *serekh* (palace façade) contained the first name of the pharaonic titulary, the so-called "Horus name."
36. That is, impregnator of his mother, because the god-king regenerates himself eternally. See the language used of the ithyphallic Amen-Apet in a graffito at Luxor, van der Plas 1987, 3–4 (my verse arrangement):

> Amen-Apet, bull who lifts his arm,
> who gives birth to the gods,
> great living god, chief of the gods:
> he is the image of Ra.
> King of Upper and Lower Egypt,
> who gave birth to the primeval gods.
> Bull of his mother (*k3-mwt.f*) who begot his father...
> who created the Ogdoad,
> the father of fathers (sc. grandfather) of the eight
> primaeval gods,
> who rises in... (Nun?).
> Everyone lives by seeing his rays,
> who appears continuously from the
> primeval lotus
> in order to be king at the beginning of the decade;
> Amen-Apet of Djeme, great living god,
> chief of all gods, lord of heaven, earth and
> netherworld.

37. The royal title *k3-mwt.f*, "Bull of his mother," which shows a king's self-regenerative capacity (shared with such gods as Amen-Apet and Min), suggests that he was the "impersonal vital force" (as Frankfort defined *k3*, 1948, 67) which impregnated his

mother, and thus regenerated himself, like the god Amen-Apet. The image was beyond a merely sexual one. It meant that it was the king's divine aspect that took possession of his mother's womb to be born again from it. Or it was the divine power which made itself incarnate in the king through the agency of his mother. It is similar to the idea of the divine conception imposed on Mary. Amen-Apet was also called *km-it.f*, "the one who completes his time," which also alludes to his regenerative nature. And while it has no etymological connection, it is inconceivable that the theologians did not also deliberately echo the similar sounding phrase, construed alternatively as "He who completes his father" (*it.f*), and also the title we have met, *k3-mwt.f,* "Bull of his mother," where of course Mut (*mwt*) is also the name of Amun's wife. Indeed the link between the two is established by the existence of a third element in the wordplay: *k3-it.f*, "Bull of his Father"). The stress we have placed on wordplays of this kind is no fancy: we need only look at any ancient theological text to see it as almost a pathological obsession. See Lesko 1991, 105.

38. It was used by all kings of the Eighteenth (except Ahmose, Hatshepsut [f.!], and Smenkhkare), Nineteenth (except Amenmesses and Siptah), and Twentieth (except Ramesses VIII) Dynasties, and was placed within the *serekh* of the Horus name. See the extended cartouches listed in Budge 1920 ii 932–936. "Bull" had the bull determinative ( /); "divine power" had the *k3* biliteral ().
39. Schulz and Seidel 1998, 29 §§38, 39; Frankfort 1948, Figures 2 and 3.
40. The goring motif also occurs on a predynastic palette, Westendorf 1969, 17 = Frankfort 1948, Figure 28.
41. Budge 1920 ii 665. Neither Badawi and Kees 1958 nor Faulkner 1981 mentioned the lexeme.
42. Budge 1920, ii 611 (bolt), ii 681 (folded cloth).
43. Budge 1920 ii 681. *HALOT* iii 1360 cites *sfrr* as source of *srrf* by metathesis.
44. Budge 1920 i 135, and ii 752.
45. *LÄ* ii 895–896. Barnett 1957, 74–75, followed by Goldman 1960, 328, linked the Egyptian, Hebrew, and Akkadian terms, as a "burning creature" (Semitic *śrp* = "burn").
46. *HALOT* ii 497; Mettinger 1999a, 190.
47. *DUL* i 454 gives two lexemes *krb*, the first linked by Huehnergard to Arabic *karaba*, Syriac *'ekreb* and Ethiopic *karaba*), perhaps meaning "twist, curl, bend;" the second is the PN *krb* ("etym. unc."). The latter is compared with other PN forms *grb*[*n*] and *grp*. We may see here a morphological bridge with the Greek form here, but hardly more. (See also *HALOT* ii 497 for Punic, Ethiopic, and Syriac forms.)
48. Brown 2003, 58. See also his very interesting discussion in 1968, 184–188.
49. Ugaritic *šrp* ("burn"; noun = "holocaust"): *DUL* ii 844–845; Akkadian *šarapu*, "burn": *CDA* 360, *CAD* ŠII, 50–53. It is possible that the Egyptian term is of Semitic origin (cf. note 42).
50. Mettinger 1999b, 742–743, citing Joines 1974 (she actually wrote, 44, of "flying serpent[s]"), Görg 1978. See note 44.
51. Thus Joines 1967, 1974, 42–54, esp. 52; de Savignac 1972. Day 1979 saw them as indigenous West Semitic manifestations of Baal's lightning. *HALOT* iii 1360–1361 already recognized the problem of morphology.
52. "His": perhaps Yahweh's rather than their own, covering the naked image of the god. Yahweh's "feet" are probably his genitals. Cf. the *šûl* of v. 1: Wyatt 1996, 342 and Eslinger 1995. But for another view of this see M. S. Smith 2001, 88.
53. Does this term perhaps have some relation with Egyptian *šsp*, variant *šp*, cited above?
54. There are a number of so-called "flying" snakes, all found in Southeast Asia: *Chrysopelea ornata*, *C. paradisi*, *C. pelias*, *C. rhodopleuron*, and *C. taprobanica*. They actually glide, throwing themselves from trees. Are the serpents' "wings" referred to in biblical texts perhaps the hoods of cobras?
55. *HALOT* ii 770, iii 1358.
56. Joines 1974, 52–54.
57. §§274a and 274d, respectively, in Keel and Uehlinger 1998.
58. Above, note 51.
59. Cf. Isaiah 6:2: *śᵉrāpîm ʿōmᵉdîm*, "standing seraphs."
60. E.g., Sanskrit *aśva* becomes Greek *hippos* and Latin *equus*. But it is Greek *p* and not Latin *q* that is at issue here.
61. See in particular Wyatt 2005b, 221–230.
62. "Going in" (*ʿrb*), "setting" (*ṯbia*) of the sun: formulaic language also appearing at KTU 1.15 iv 47–50. The same word-pair was carried over into Greek in Odyssey 20.356 as *erebos* and *zophos*.
63. The dying king accompanied the setting sun into the west, and his successor assumed his throne on the following sunrise. This was the language of Egyptian royal ideology.
64. I have also argued for ka-theology as lying behind the birth of Solomon and his brother who had died perinatally (see 2 Samuel 11:2–5): Wyatt 2005b, 49–53.
65. See KTU 1.23.52–54:

> Word was brought to El:
> "The two wives of El have given birth!"
> "What have they borne?"
> "Shahar and Shalem have been born."
> "Raise up an offering to Shapsh, the Great Lady,
> and to the stars who have been begotten."

Cf. KTU 1.15 ii 25–28:

> She will bear Yasibu the heir:
> he will drink the milk of A[th]irat;
> he will drain the breast of Virgin [Rahmay]
> the suckling of [goddesses].

For explanatory notes to each passage, see Wyatt 2002, 333, notes 48–51, and 209–210, notes 147–150.

66. Cornelius and Niehr 2004, 41, Figure 65, 60–61, Figures 101a, 101b, 102a, and 102b. See also www2.div.ed.ac.uk/other/ugarit//museum/room001/cabinet4/welcome.htm.

67. Wyatt 2005b, 221–230.
68. See Gardiner 1944. While the texts are late, the motif is already well known in the New Kingdom. Door lintels at Deir el Bahri (mortuary temple of Hathshepsut) and Medinat Habu (mortuary temple of Rameses III) have many examples. The connection with the king was expressed thus by Gardiner 1944, 51:

> The Winged Disc and name of the king are so inextricably interconnected and blended that we cannot but regard the symbol as an image of the king himself, though simultaneously also of Ra^{c} and of Horus, all three united into a trinity of solar and kingly dominion.

69. Cornelius and Niehr 2004, 58, Figure 98.
70. Cornelius and Niehr 2004, 45, Figure 68; Galliano and Calvet 2004, 165, Figure 148; Wyatt 1983.
71. See Wyatt 1983.
72. Cornelius and Niehr 2004, 47, Figure 74.
73. Galliano and Calvet 2004, 105, Figure 74.
74. Moscati 1973, Figure §1.
75. Moscati 1988, 36–37; Keel and Uehlinger 1998, §65.
76. Von Luschan 1902, pl. XXXVIII; Orthmann 1971, 542, pl. 59d. Mus. cat. VA 2710.
77. Freiherr 1955, 87–88, pl. 89b. Mus. cat. Op 18 (A. 3,155). Both examples in the Pergamon Museum, Berlin. My thanks to Dr. Martin Lutz of the museum staff for this information.
78. Kantor 1956, 165, Figure 5.
79. Westenholz 2004, §99.
80. Keel and Uehlinger 1998, §231a.
81. See Wyatt 2001, 169–172.
82. Wyatt 1999.
83. O'Bryhim 1996, Wyatt 2007, 167–192.
84. Westenholz 2004, §60, Kantor 1956, 163, Figure 3.
85. Moscati 1988, 515.
86. Westenholz 2004, §61; Moscati 1988, 406.
87. Keel and Uehlinger 1998, §253.
88. Unpublished: Westenholz 2004, 62.
89. Oates 2001, 95, Figure 55. Cf. the very similar motif on a seal (§16, no provenance given), a Phoenician ivory (§16, no provenance given), and the central ring of the Idalion bowl (§18 = Moscati 1988, 442), all in Gubel 1993, 108. For the view that it is protection rather than trampling, see Avigad 1985, 6–7, cited Gubel *ad loc*. I am not convinced of this: the Egyptian examples shown above of both sphinxes and griffins are much more likely to be trampling the enemy; they belong thematically with the ubiquitous head-smashing motif. Frankfort remarked (1937, 110), "Egyptian iconography knows the griffin exclusively as a destroyer of the king's enemies." On the smiting motif see Hall 1986, and for its transmission into the wider Mediterranean world, Wyatt 2006 (note 18 above)
90. Moscati 1988, 438.
91. Goldman's view (1960, 327) that the solar symbolism is a secondary development, seems wide of the mark.
92. Amiet 1992, §464. Amiet gave numerous examples of griffins on Ugaritan seals §§28 (from 1850–1750 BCE), 67–80, 404, 405, 410, 458, 459, 460, 466–471. The latter are all classified as Cypriot or Cretan.
93. Keel and Uehlinger 1998, §250a. It appears to be unprovenanced.
94. Keel and Uehlinger 1998, §251.
95. Keel and Uehlinger 1998, §258c.
96. Keel and Uehlinger 1998, §254a: they described the text as "rudimentary hieroglyphs... perhaps a reference to *mn-ḫpr-r^{c}*."
97. See also Amiet 1992, §§68 and 80. He noted that these betray Cypriot or Cretan influence.

Abbreviations

AHw von Soden W. 1965. *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*. 3 vols. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

CAD Oppenheim A. L. et al., eds. 1956–. *The Assyrian dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.* Chicago: Oriental Institute; Glükstadt: Augustin Verlagsbuchhandlung.

CDA Black J., A. George, and N. Postgate, eds. 1999. *A concise dictionary of Akkadian*. SANTAG Arbeiten und Untersuchungen zur Keilschriftkunde 5. 2nd corrected imprint. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

DUL del Olmo Lete G. and J. Sanmartín. 2004. *A dictionary of the Ugaritic language in the alphabetic tradition.* Trans. W. G. E. Watson. 2nd edition. Leiden: Brill.

HALOT Koehler L. and W. Baumgartner. 1994–1999. *Hebrew and Aramaic lexicon of the Old Testament*. 5 vols. Rev. W. Baumgartner and J. J. Stamm. Trans. M. E. J. Richardson. Leiden: Brill.

LÄ Helck W. and E. Otto, eds. 1975–1992. *Lexikon der Ägyptologie.* 7 vols. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

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