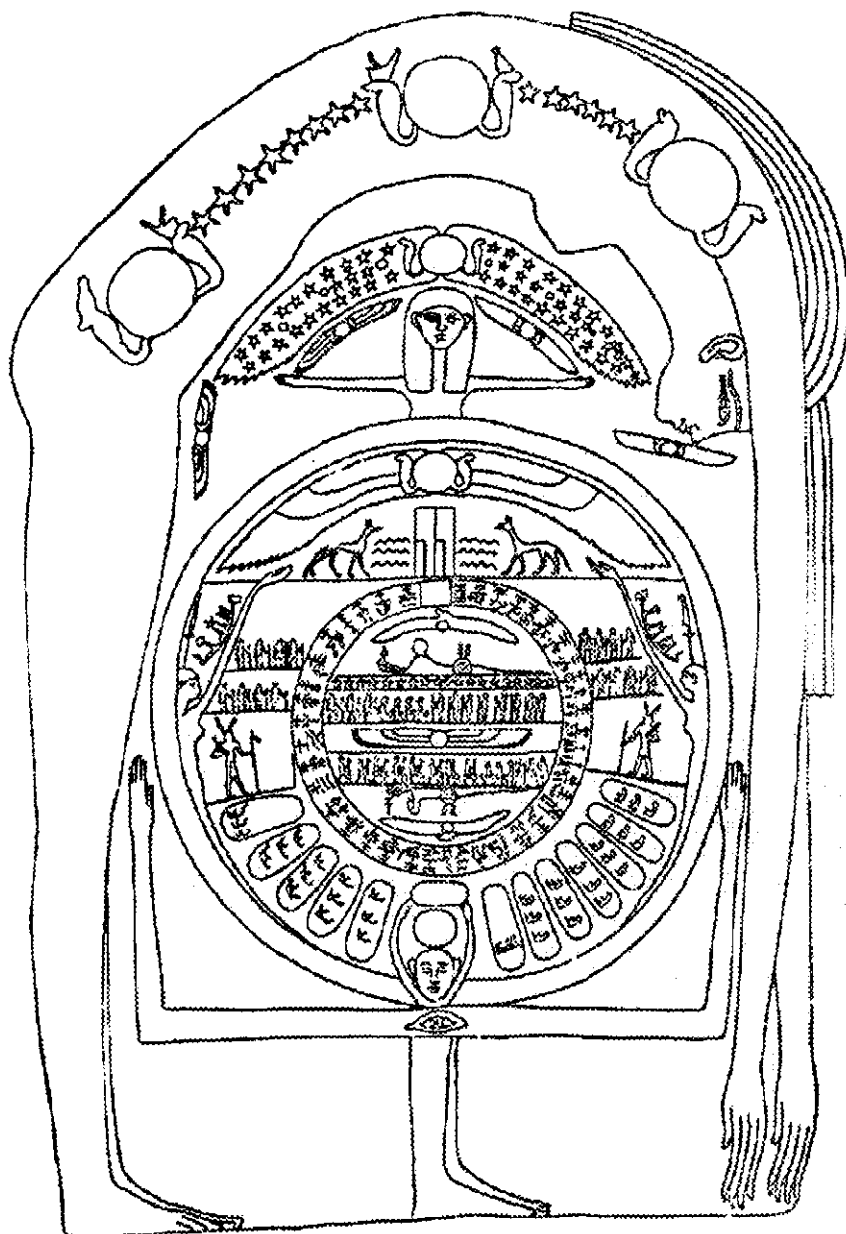


PART 2



CHAPTER 7

INTRATEXTUAL JUSTIFICATION II

7.1 INTRODUCTION

After the various intertextual and metatextual analyses in Part 1, it is time to once again consider the *intratextual* scenario. So far, much of what has been said, asserted and suggested may seem to belong to the realm of theoretical possibility. Indeed, if my hypothesis could be considered as being valid in any sense, more attention has to be paid to the *intratextual* contents of the book itself. It is no use claiming that Qohelet does this or the text says that if these assertions cannot be justified by ample and substantial evidence from the book itself. To use the familiar English idiom, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. In this regard I only have two words to say before I commence with the arguments in favour of my hypothesis. *Bon Appetit*.

7.2 A SELECTION OF THEMES COMBINED WITH Q.S.I. WHICH POSSIBLY ALLUDE TO ANE SOLAR MYTHOLOGY / SYMBOLISM²⁰²

7.2.1 The motto and thematic statement²⁰³ of the book

After the introduction to the implied author in 1:1, the book opens with a statement generally interpreted by many scholars as being a summary of what the book and its message is all about:

הבל הבלים... אמר הקהלת הבל הבלים הבל הבל
מה יתרון לאדם בכל עמלו שיעמל תחת השמש

"Vapour of vapours!", says Qohelet "Vapour of vapours, everything is a vapour!
What does a person profit, from all his toil, which he toils at UNDER THE SUN"?

Many interpreters agree that these words capture the essence of Qohelet's message (cf. Crenshaw 1988:57).²⁰⁴ But *why* does Qohelet qualify his claim that all is "vapour" with the assertion that there is no profit for toiling "*under the sun*"? On the one hand, the reference to toiling "under the sun" evokes the image of someone doing physical labour outdoors in the heat of the day. However, reading Qohelet word for word, this apparent *literal* image of someone slaving away "under the sun" is never employed to illustrate

²⁰² Readers should take note of the fact that I do not consider all the arguments presented in this section of equal merit and validity. At the end of this chapter I shall indicate how I rate each of the ideas discussed here as part of Qohelet's possible allusions to ANE solar mythology / symbolism. There are some of the arguments here that I consider virtually irrefutable but others are, admittedly, less convincing.

²⁰³ This choice of description of the role and function of 1:3 in the book is not my own invention but based on the designations of scholars such as Crenshaw (1988:57). Other ways of rendering includes seeing 1:3 (along with 1:2) as the "thesis" of the entire book (cf. Fox 1999:165).

²⁰⁴ Not all scholars believe that 1:2 and 1:3 forms a unit as Crenshaw (1988:57) does. Some, like Fox (1999:165) places 1:3 on its own. Others, like Murphy (1992:05) place it as the first part of the poem in 1:4 -11). Yet all agree that 1:3 with its reference to the absence of profit "under the sun" is either part of the thesis of the book (Crenshaw 1988), the thesis itself (Fox 1999), or the introductory question acting as a summary of the interrogative element of Qohelet's message (Murphy).

one of the many scenarios which he calls "vapour".

Why does Qohelet mention the fact that the toil takes place "*under the sun*"? Why not simply claim that all is "vapour" and that there is not profit for one's toil, period? Is it not common sense that the toiling referred to takes places "in this world", as dynamic equivalent translations interpret and render the phrase "under the sun"?²⁰⁵ Moreover, if Qohelet felt the image was fitting, why need he employ this phrase "under the sun" *thirty* times? Saying it once allows the reader to get the picture. Even not using the phrase at all would have been no occasion for lament if it was simply meant to be synonymous with "on earth". Where else would Qohelet be looking? Furthermore, that the phrase is not altogether unambiguous can be ascertained from the fact that even *at night* the "vapour" and toil happens "*under the sun*" (cf. 8:16-17).²⁰⁶

If 1:2-3 is indeed the first words of Qohelet in the book (and a summary and opening statement capturing the essence of his message), then it might be best not to take *any* of it for granted. This includes recognising that he meant not only to claim that all is "vapour" but that this so "*under the sun*". As this study hopes to show, the solar reference seems to have been conveniently unappreciated as inextricably part of the "all is vapour" lament. To be sure, this oversight of the solar element in the motto and thematic statement of the book²⁰⁷ might have resulted in a scenario where the rest of the solar imagery is largely ignored as a piece of window dressing. This makes it all the more difficult to recognise the presence of implicit allusions to solar mythology.

In short, the "sun imagery" of the book is no optional extra and not later piece of aesthetic imagery enhancement. Nor is the repetition of the phrase "under the sun" a coincidence or even a superfluous and unnecessary gloss of an author who seems to repeat himself over and over to the point of raising doubts about his literary skills and ability to create a flowing discourse. On the contrary, as this opening statement and, in a sense, the heart of the book clearly implies, the reference to the *sun* is part of the central thesis of the book and inextricably linked to its intended rhetorical functionality.²⁰⁸

Someone might object that this is not all together true since the phrase "under the sun" is absent from the final summary and reiteration of the message of the book in 12:8. While the absence of the "sun imagery" in the end of the book may at first appear not to

²⁰⁵ As noted earlier in this study, it cannot be emphasised enough that traditional interpretations of the meaning and significance of the phrase "under the sun" fails in that it cannot explain satisfactorily: (1) *Why* Qohelet uses this particular phrase (with 'sun') when he himself knew and used alternatives and (2) *Why* he deems it necessary to use it *thirty times* when once or twice (as part of summary texts such as 1:12 - 14; 6:12; 8:17) would have made its omnipresence implicit.

²⁰⁶ There are many aspects of Qohelet's use of the phrase "under the sun" which leaves little doubt regarding its polysemous and ambiguous nature in the context of the book. See, once more, the discussion in chapter 3 of this study regarding the multiple level of meaning possibly associated with the phrase and the problems with traditional interpretations.

²⁰⁷ Furthermore, on the basis of the view of some scholars who see the work of a redactor in 1:1 - 2 in the text, it would mean that the ideas of Qohelet proper actually starts with a question explicitly referring to the sun (i.e. what profit does a human have for all the toil which he toils at, "**under the sun**"[1:3]).

²⁰⁸ Whether 1:3 which contains the reference to the sun is the actual start of Qohelet's thought (cf. Barton [1908]) or whether it is the second part of the central thesis of the book and linked with verse 2 (cf. Crenshaw [1988]) or whether it is the thesis justified by and heading the poem in 1:4 onwards (cf. Murphy [1992]) it is beyond dispute that this interrogative is a summary of the rhetorical question expresses the pessimism that encapsulates the entire book and all the "vapour" claims the author makes.

be amenable to my claims, a closer look at the meaning, role and function of the “sun imagery” throughout the book and then, in the final chapter itself, actually provides a perfect reason as to why the phrase “under the sun” should be absent in 12:8. For, as I shall argue later on, this absence is no oversight on the part of the author of that verse nor does it amount to a falsification of my claim about the central significance of the “sun imagery” in the theme of the book. To be sure, the clue as to why “under the sun” does not appear in 12:8, thus creating an *inclusio* with 1:2-3, may lie in the meaning and function of the solar imagery in the final poem on approaching death (12:1-7). As I shall be suggesting when the passage comes under consideration, what happens to the sun in 12:2 may account for the absence of sun imagery in 12:8.

7.2.2 References to “שמש” apart from the phrase “תחת השמש”

7.2.2.1 “השמש” in 1:5

As noted in chapter 6, some scholars have already identified possible allusions to ANE solar mythology in Qohelet’s depiction of the sun on its daily and nocturnal solar circuits in 1:5.²⁰⁹

זרחה השמש ובא השמש ואל מקמו שואף זורח הוא שם

THE SUN rises and THE SUN sets; to its place it pants, there to rise.

As Barton (1908:71) and Crenshaw (1988:63) have recognised, from the perspective of popular solar mythology and symbolism, everything about this statement of Qohelet is polemical, ironical and deconstructive. First of all, this reference to “the sun” occurs in the context of a depiction of the natural world and the cosmic order as “vapour”. All the popular connotations that were normally associated with the sun’s solar circuit are inverted. Whilst in solar mythology the sun is seen as a hero who has conquered darkness and the powers of the underworld²¹⁰ and traverses his daily circuit with tireless vigour, this “sun” hardly evokes such admirable connotations. It is part of a pointless and wearisome process of nature that never seems to gain anything significant from the effort. To be sure, whilst the “sun” is usually hailed as a hero full of vigour and vitality in ANE solar mythology, Qohelet’s sun is a “Sisyphus” figure who, tired and out of breath, repeats the solar circuit daily. For king Qohelet, the journey evokes little positive association whatsoever (*contra* Wright 1883).²¹¹

Thus, hardly at all perceived as a symbol of life, vitality and justice as it was in solar

²⁰⁹ Cf. already in chapter 6 the introduction to the familiarity of Qohelet with solar mythology through a short recourse to this text which appears to be the only hitherto recognised example of anti solar mythological polemics in the history of interpretation (cf. Barton [1908:70 - 71]).

²¹⁰ It is interesting to note that the “panting” of the sun here refers to its journey from west to east (i.e. through the underworld) and not the solar circuit from east to west with which most scholars compare the journey of the sun.

²¹¹ Many scholars interpret 1:5 without any reference to ANE solar mythology. For example, Murphy (1992:07) who simply contrasts it with the more positive imagery in Psalm 19. While he and others are not “wrong” in doing so, their failure to read the text as possibly alluding to a larger body of religio - cultural discourse acts in subtle ways to divorce the imagery from its context and its associative meaning which is lost for today’s readers unless explicitly mentioned by the interpreter (cf., Crenshaw 1986:63). Some like Fox (1986:171; 1999:166) merely mentions the ambiguity of the verb denoting the sun’s laborious journey yet also seem to believe that a comparative mythology is unnecessary.

mythology, the sun in Qohelet (still personified) appears as simply a part of an unjust and absurd cosmic order. Rather than controlling this order as in solar mythology, the sun seems more like a slave subjected to what was popularly believed to be its domain of dominion (cf. also Fox 1989:171; 1999:166). While this observation may seem matter of fact to us with our modern astronomical perspective, those in the ancient world encountering such a depiction would not have missed the polemical and deconstructive aspects of Qohelet's sun imagery. As many scholars have recognised, this is all a far cry from the popular symbolism that even featured in Israel's solar mythology (cf. Ps. 19; Mal. 3) (cf. Barton 1908:71; Murphy 1992:07).

By describing the sun as a tired journeyman, Qohelet deconstructs the popular associative meanings of vitality and vigour ascribed to the sun (even by those who do not worship the sun). It may therefore be likely that we are dealing with a clear case of polemical irony when Qohelet depicts the solar circuit in a way appearing as a direct antithesis of solar circuit depiction in popular solar mythology and symbolism. Instead of evoking admiration, hope or awe in Qohelet, the daily solar circuit is just a confirmation and a reminder of the validity of his belief that "all is vapour" (cf. Murphy 1992:07; Fox 1999:161).

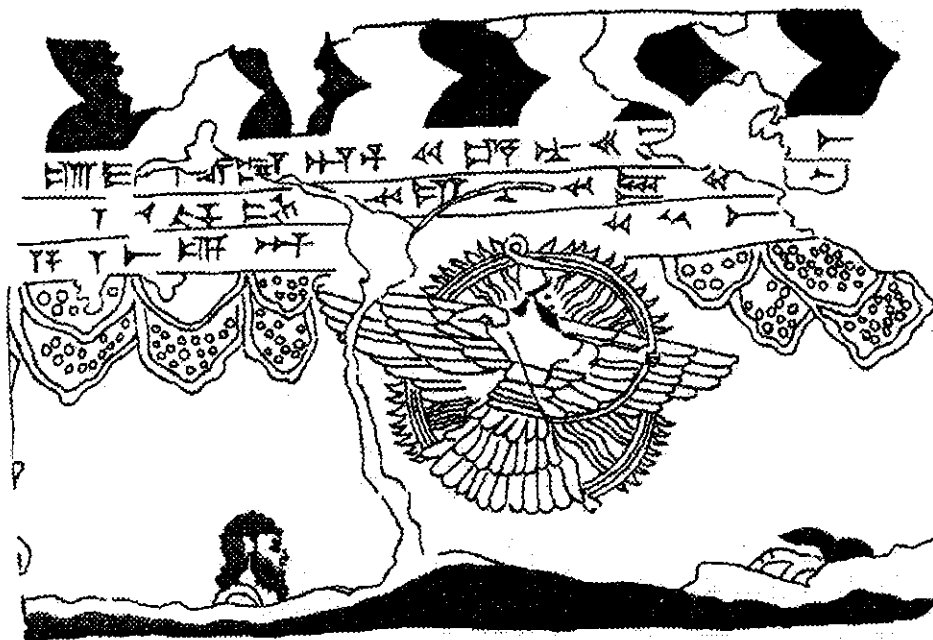


Fig 7.1 A vigorous sun god traversing his solar circuit (cf. Keel 1978:216)

7.2.2.2 "שמש" in 6:5

After 1:5, the next text featuring a reference to the sun, not as part of the phrase "under the sun", is attested in 6:5:

... גם שמש לא ראה ולא ידע נחת לזה מזה...

... though it sees not SUN nor knows anything, it has more rest than he...

From the perspective of this study, this is quite an interesting verse despite the translation difficulties (cf. Fox 1999:243). The context here features an argument by Qohelet where he asserts that a stillborn is more fortunate than a man who, though he lived a long time, was never satisfied with what is good and did not even have a grave (6:3). This stillborn is depicted as coming in a "vapour" and departing in darkness (6:4a). Its name is also covered in darkness. After this obscure illustration, one finds the curious statement by Qohelet in verse 5 where he says that this stillborn did not see nor did he knew (the?) sun. The reasons why this verse is so interesting from the perspective of my hypothesis are as follows:

- The "sun imagery" has the word "שמש" without the definite article, thus giving the reference to the sun the appearance of a proper name;²¹²
- The stillborn is said not to have "seen" the sun and, more sinisterly, not to have "known" it.

With regard to the latter observation, from any perspective other than the one advocated in this study the text seems not to make sense. It seems that there is no direct object given with regard to whatever the author implies was not "known" - other than the "שמש". Is it possible that here (and only here) Qohelet was referring explicitly to the solar deity by name? While not "seeing" (the) sun may indeed be no more than an expression denoting the absence of life (cf. Murphy 1992:54),²¹³ it is indeed puzzling from a perspective other than the one assumed in the hypothesis of this study, why Qohelet should talk about not "knowing" (the) sun (cf. Crenshaw 1988:126).

Whatever the case may be, Qohelet is here clearly claiming that someone who never saw nor knew (the) sun can still be more fortunate than someone who have lived long "under the sun" but who was never happy. While many scholars take the verb to be nominal and not governed by "sun", the reconstruction given here supposing that the noun "sun" governs both is not really a new idea but is, according to the opinion of several interpreters, indeed the case (cf. Barton 1908:134; Crenshaw 1988:126). Moreover, if one takes this language to be intentionally obscure and ambiguous, thus including the possibility of alluding to solar mythology, then there is no grammatical apodictic necessity that the verbs in this section must be construed as nominal.

Nevertheless, the fact that "sun" does appear without the article and that the binary opposites of light / darkness, life / death and knowledge / ignorance is here juxtaposed with the solar imagery seems imply that here may indeed be an allusion to a solar

²¹² On this issue, Crenshaw (1988:127) remarks that the reference to the sun without the article is unusual. He also asks the question regarding the implied object of the verb rendered "know" in this context. According to Crenshaw (1988:127) some interpreters have indeed assumed that both verbs in the verse govern "sun". Other opinions variate between the idea that the verbs are nominalised (cf. Fox 1999:243) to the belief that it is to be construed with "rest" (cf. LXX [Symmachus]).

²¹³ Throughout this study I hope to emphasise that in arguing for my hypothesis regarding allusions to solar mythology in the "sun imagery" of Qohelet I am not denying that he uses phrases which, in popular discourse, might be completely demythologised and without any reference to solarism whatsoever. But it is the argument of this study that, while those phrases referring to "under the sun"; "seeing the sun"; etc. may have once been mythological (and surely have been demythologised to become idiomatic expressions in everyday discourse), Qohelet, with his ambiguous language and other parallels to solar mythology has appears to have *remythologised* those phrases for his polemical purposes.

mythological motif. If not intentional, from the perspective of ANE religious discourse, solar symbolism is still thoroughly deconstructed in this text. After all, the sun (god) was associated with justice, life, health, knowledge and light. Here, however, we find injustice in stillborn's premature departure. He did not see nor knew the sun while the sun was usually depicted as seeing all and knowing all. It is ironic, therefore, that the stillborn can be (relatively) happy without the deity associated with life, health, knowledge, etc. That he departs in darkness implies that, contrary to solar thanatology, sunlight does reach the denizens of the underworld. On the other hand, the man who lived long "under the sun" ends up perpetually miserable, despite having seen and known what was considered the symbol of happiness and life.

7.2.2.3 "השמש" in 7:11

The next 3 references to the sun occur in the 3 chapters where the phrase "under the sun" does not occur. In each case, the ordinary idea of "seeing the sun" is utilised by the author to make a point. The first of these instances can be found in 7:11. Here we find yet another choice of words which, though familiar as a cliché expression in everyday discourse, may contain more than meets the eye:

...תובה חכמה עם נחלה ויותר לראי השמש כי בצל החכמה בצל הכסף יתרון דעת החכמה תהיה בעלה

Good is wisdom with inheritance and an advantage for those who see THE SUN, because in shadow is the wisdom and in shadow is the silver and an advantage a knowledge of wisdom will be to her lord.

From the perspective of my hypothesis regarding the possible polemical and ironical allusions to ANE solar mythology / symbolism in Qohelet, this verse might mean more than interpreters have commonly recognised. While the expression "to see the sun" usually denotes simply the act of living (cf. Crenshaw 1988:138), an ambiguous allusion to solar mythology might be present.²¹⁴ Saying that wisdom and money are "in the shadow" might mean, as the imagery assumes, that sunlight is blocked by some object. While the image or metaphor of shadow may positively refer to security, a negative associative meaning is also attested in biblical literature. In a negative sense, the shadow refers not to protection or security but to something ephemeral and quite similar to the metaphor of the "vapour". This negative associative meaning is actually attested in the book of Qohelet itself, in 6:12, where he says:

For who knows what is good for human beings during life, the few days of their "vapour" that they pass through like a shadow? For who can tell them what comes after them "under the SUN"?

Thus, contrary to most commentators, in the text of 7:11, the reference to "those who see the sun" and to wisdom and inheritance maybe about more than enjoying life with one's riches and protecting it. Once again, this may be the meaning at face value, but

²¹⁴ The idea of Qohelet taking everyday popular speech and using it sarcastically and ambiguously is not novel at all but the basis of popular theories trying to explain the contradictions in the book. Barton (1908), Siegfried (1898), McNeile (1904) and Podechard (1912) viewed contradictions as a result of later additions. Levy (1912), Gordis (1940), Whybray (1981) and Michel (1988) believe the discrepancies are due to the presence of quotations. Miller (1934) and Perry (1993) claimed that the tensions are the result of dialogue in the book. Galling (1932) feels that the difficulties are the product of a "fragmented psyche" (cf. Fox 1999: 14 - 26).

Qohelet seems to have a knack for inverting ordinary language from positive expressions to ones filled with irony and sarcasm. Could it be that, in this case, by claiming that wisdom and silver are in the shadow, Qohelet tries to divorce the sun from these regular associative meanings attested in ANE solar mythology? Was he implying that, if you are looking for wisdom and financial security, you had better forget belief in a solar theology of comfort and prosperity? I am not sure whether this may actually have been the case. However, one thing seems certain. By depicting riches and wisdom as being out of the direct influence of sunlight, Qohelet has implicitly severed a link between the sun and wealth. This in turn possibly implies the presence of a polemical allusion to solar theology where the solar deity was believed to ensure the health of those who acted in accordance with the ways of justice and wisdom.

7.2.2.4 “השמש” in 11:7

...ומתוק האור וטוב לעינים לראות את השמש... ויזכר את ימי החשך כי הרבה יהיו...

Sweet is the light and it is pleasant for the eyes to see THE SUN...but remember that the days of darkness will be many...

In the same sense as in 7:11, the statement in 11:7 may have more to it than a positive reference to the sun. A positive associative meaning is indeed present and the sun as symbol of life is indeed alluded to here (cf. Barton 1908:184; Murphy 1992:116). However, in a manner similar to the way in which Qohelet seems at times to be quoting traditional sayings and then refuting it, the positive symbolism is deconstructed in its present context.²¹⁵ It is well known that the reference to the sweetness of “seeing the light” is hardly original to Qohelet (cf. Crenshaw 1988:283). Nevertheless, what is more original is the warning that qualifies this positive advice afterwards:

...but remember, the days of darkness will be many. All that is coming is a “vapour”.

As Crenshaw (1988:183) recognised, it would seem once again that popular solar symbolism is deconstructed²¹⁶ and relativised against the backdrop of the anomalous “vapours” Qohelet finds “under the sun”. Thus, what at first appears to be positive advice and an affirmation of ideas expressed in popular solar discourse, the “positive” admonition has a bad aftertaste. It is completely relativised by the reference to the eternal darkness that will eventually triumph over the temporary joys of “seeing the sun”. In addition, as M. Fox has recognised, Qohelet’s particular choice of words asserting that it is sweet for the “eyes” to see the sun indicates a statement of subjective value (cf. Fox 1999:317).

In short, though starting out with what appear as optimistic statements related to sun imagery, in the end Qohelet seems to have only set up the reader for a terrible let down. He has, in fact, busted yet another bubble of illusion which he links with solar symbolism but which he feels is hopelessly unrealistic as it fails to recognise the ultimate triumph of eternal darkness over temporary light. Thus, he seems to be saying that, while people should try to enjoy living - and while it is indeed nice to see the “sun” - one should

²¹⁵ Cf. the discussions on 1:5, 6:5 and 7:11.

²¹⁶ And the deconstruction is initiated with the rendering: “...but remember...” and effected with the reference, to “the days of darkness which will be many”. Thus a nice inversion of popular blessings which expressed the wish that the days “under the sun” would be many (cf. 6:5 in the context of 6:3 - 6; 7:11).

remember that a time, an eternal time would eventually come when no one will see the sun ever again. Again, as was the case in 6:5, the reference to the “days” of darkness can be seen as a polemical deconstruction of popular solar thanatology – according to the gospel of Qohelet, the sun does not shine for those in the land of death.

7.2.2.5 “השמש” in 12:2

Finally, we find a reference to the sun at the beginning of a piece of poetry that seems to smack of polysemy. As part of the introduction to a host of mysterious images (the interpretation of which has perplexed interpreters through the ages) one reads in 12:2

זכר את בוראיך ימי בחורתיך עד אשר לא יבאו בימי הרעה והגיעו שנים אשר תאמר אין לי
 בהם חפץ עד אשר לא תחשך השמש והאור והירח והכוכבים...

And remember your creator in the days of your youth before the days of unpleasantness arrive and the years of which you will say I take no pleasure in them. Before THE SUN and the light grows dark and the moon and the stars.

A more elaborate analysis of the entire poem of 12:2-8 will be given later on in this chapter. For now it should be noted, what Qohelet is saying here in the verse quoted above. Scholars agree that “approaching death” is the issue under consideration here. Whether the imagery pertains to the death of an individual or to demise on a larger, social or cosmic scale is not important in the context of present considerations. From the perspective of solar mythology, one finds here the inversion of all positive solar symbolism. Light is replaced by darkness; youth vigour and vitality make way for old age and frailty; life is swallowed by death, happiness by mourning, and creation by collapse, summer by winter, etc. In a sense not alien to the eschatological oracles in the Old Testament, the whole process initiated here by the reference to the darkening of the “sun” may be linked with the idea of divine judgement. How the vivid imagery may possibly allude to solar mythology in ways that can be seen as being ironical, polemical and deconstructive will be discussed later in this chapter.

7.2.3 The denial of justice²¹⁷ “תחת השמש”

The preceding discussion of possible allusions to ANE solar mythology / symbolism in Qohelet’s references to the sun may not have convinced all readers with regard to the validity of my hypothesis. However, whereas some of what was said might admittedly be somewhat contentious, there seems to be a seemingly irrefutable way of demonstrating my theory’s veracity. First of all, nobody would deny that Qohelet finds numerous examples of injustice in a domain he designates as being “under the sun”. In addition, those familiar with solar theology will know that, though the solar deities of the Ancient Near East may differ somewhat in terms of secondary functions and attributes, they were universally worshipped as the gods particularly responsible for and

²¹⁷ All the leading commentaries in recent times on Qohelet recognises that the concept of “justice” is one of the major themes in the book (cf. Crenshaw 1988:26; Murphy 1992:lxvi [“retribution”]; Fox 1999:51-70). However, from the perspective of this study, while all those commentators pay some attention to ancient near Eastern parallels to the Qohelet’s thought and while, on separate occasions they have all recognised both his obsessive reference to both the domain “under the sun” and the “injustices” prevalent there they have failed to recognise the significance of all this given the fact that the sun gods of the ANE were the gods of justice *par excellence*.

concerned with the establishment of justice (cf. Eliade 1958:135). Even in Israel, as I have shown,²¹⁸ the non-deified sun was often associated with the concept of justice, retribution and judgement (cf. Num. 25:4; 1 Sam. 6; Ps. 19). Now, what is striking about Qohelet's "sun imagery" in this regard is that, "under the sun", he observes a myriad of scenarios characterised by lamentable injustice.²¹⁹

As I have noted, scholars universally recognise that Qohelet is concerned with the concept of justice (cf. Fox 1999:51-70).²²⁰ When Qohelet thus calls attention to the fact that he saw this or that example of injustice "under the sun" most scholars simply acknowledge his realism. However, if the reader is familiar with solar mythology, he or she would notice that, again in antithesis to the most cherished dogma of solar theology, Qohelet finds "under the sun" exactly what, according to solar mythology, was not supposed to happen there - injustice, oppression, unfairness, corruption, etc.

**שנאתי אני את כל עמלי שאני עמל תחת השמש שאניחנו לאדם שיהיה אחרי ומי יודע החכם או
סכל וישלט בכל עמלי שעמלתי תחת השמש**

I hated the fruit of the toil for which I had toiled 'UNDER THE SUN' because I have to leave it to the one who will come after me, but who knows whether he will be wise or foolish? Yet he will control all the fruit of the toil for which I toiled 'UNDER THE SUN'²²¹

ועד ראיתי תחת השמש מקום משפת שמה הרשע ומקום צדק שמה הרשע

I observed continually 'UNDER THE SUN': in the place of judgement, wrongdoing! And in the place for justice, wrongdoing! (3:16)²²²

**ושבתי אני וראיתי את כל העשקים אשר נעשם תחת השמש והנה דמעת העשקים ואין להם
מנחם ומייד עשקיהם כח ואין להם מנחם**

Again I saw all the oppressions that were done 'UNDER THE SUN' and, oh, the tears of the oppressed, but there was no one to give them comfort. On the side of their oppressors there was power, but there was no one to give them comfort! (4:1-2)²²³

²¹⁸ Cf. chapter 6 of this study.

²¹⁹ In my hyperbolic claims that Qohelet saw only "injustice" "under the sun" I am overstating the case. I recognise with Murphy (1992:lxvi) and Fox (1999:51-70) that Qohelet does seem to believe in justice and that he does seem to find some in the contexts of God's inscrutable sovereignty. Yet it is beyond a doubt that for the most part, Qohelet is interested in describing "injustices" that he saw "under the sun". The weird form of justice implied in his observations of divine judgement is, as I shall later argue, apparently the result of syncretism amidst his polemics in order to have his own deity absorb the functions (albeit in a modified way) that made the sun god so popular. Cf. also chapter 5 for the way Egyptian sceptical wisdom still believed in Re's justice despite scepticism and the general pessimism concerning ma'at. The tension between injustice and justice in Qohelet seems not very different from the way heliopolitan wisdom understood the problem: Acknowledge injustice and mystery; reject pious dogmatism; cling to inscrutable divine sovereignty (cf. again the discussion of Egyptian solar mythology in chapter 5).

²²⁰ Even though, of course, they differ as to what Qohelet believes in this regard.

²²¹ Here the injustice can be identified as the lamentable situation that while one person has to work hard to obtain wealth, in the end another simply inherits it without having done anything to attain it.

²²² If this verse seem particularly deconstructive of solar mythology as the sun god was specifically linked to "places of judgement / justice" and in Mesopotamia his temple was called the "house of judgement". (cf. Chapter 5)

²²³ While scholars have remarked on the striking differences between the passive laments here and the proactive ones in the prophets they have simultaneously missed the significance of Qohelet's seeing

וטוב משניהם אשר עזן לא היה אשר לא ראה את המעשה הרע אשר נעשה תחת השמש

Better than both: the one who has never lived, who has never seen the evil work that is done 'UNDER THE SUN' (4:3).

אם עשק רש וגזל משפט וצדק תראה במדינה אל תתמה על החפץ...

If you see in a province the oppression of the poor, the violation of right and justice, do not be surprised by the affair... (5:7)²²⁴

את הכל ראיתי בימי הבלי יש צדיק אבד בצדקו ויש רשע מאריך ברעתו

I have seen everything in my vain days: a just person who perishes despite his justice, and an evil person who lives long despite his evil... (7:15)²²⁵

**את כל זה ראיתי ונתון את לבי לכל מעשה אשר נעשה תחת השמש עת אשר שלט האדם באדם
לרע לו ובכן ראיתי רשעים קברים ובאו וממקום קדוש הלכו וישתכחו עיר אשר כן עשו גם זה
הבל**

All this I have seen and I have given my attention to every deed that is done 'UNDER THE SUN' when one person has power over another so as to harm him. Then I saw the wicked buried. They used to come and go from the holy place. But those who had acted justly were forgotten in the city. This is also vapour. (8:9)²²⁶

**יש הבל אשר נעשה על הערץ אשר יש צדקים אשר מגיע כמעשה הרשעם ויש רשעם שמגיע
אלהם כמעשה הצדקים אמרתי גם זה הבל ושבחתי אני את השמחה אשר אין טוב לאדם תחת
השמש כי אם לאכל ולשתות ולשמות והוא ילונו בעמלו ימי חייו אשר נתן לו האלהים תחת
השמש**

There is a vapour that is done on earth: there are just people who are treated as if they acted wickedly and there are wicked people who are treated as if they had acted justly... So I praised joy for there is nothing better for a human 'UNDER THE SUN' than to eat and drink and to be joyous. This can be his part...'UNDER THE SUN'. (8:14-15).

הכל אשר לכל מקרה אחד לצדיק ולרשע לטוב ולטהור ולטמא ולזבח ולאשר אינו זבח כטוב

oppressions "under the sun" (i.e. the very one who was believed to deliver the oppressed and wreaked tangible vengeance on the oppressors. Note also, not only the double reference to the absence of the comforter (the sun god?), but also the double occurrence of the phrase "under the sun". All the traditional interpretations of this phrase cannot satisfactorily account for this repetition which seems unnecessary for their point of view.

²²⁴ Why would the implied reader be surprised? Could it be that he was familiar with the belief that the sun god was the deity who delivered the oppressed and judged the oppressors to restore the social order. Assuming this belief to be true, one would naturally be as surprised as people are today on seeing faithful individuals dying a senseless and absurd death.

²²⁵ Like the popular cliché "now I have seen everything" which is used when one sees something never thought of or something very unlikely, Qohelet has seen what, from the perspective of solar mythology at least, was unthinkable.

²²⁶ The injustice in this example and the next one is self explanatory and obvious. I am not at present interested in anymore regarding these quoted verses than listing them as examples of "injustice" - "under the sun". For more detailed analyses of the texts, see the commentaries in the bibliography.

כחמא הנשבע כאשר שבועה ירא זה רע בכל אשר נעשה תחת השמש כי מקרה אחד לכל

Everything is the same for everybody: the same lot for the just and the wicked, for then good, for the clean and for the unclean, for the one who sacrifice and for the one who doesn't sacrifice, as it is for the good so for the sinner, as is for the one who takes an oath so for the one who fears to take an oath. This is the evil in all that is done 'UNDER THE SUN': there is the same fate for all. (9:2-3)

These observations are but a few of the many examples of injustice that Qohelet finds "under the sun". However, in so far as they are common knowledge, they gnaw away at the very foundations of solar theology. The sun god was supposed to ensure that justice prevails. In his theology and in the hymns composed for him he is hailed and praised as the god of justice who, in his irresistible power, ensures that justice is done and will be done. Now, along comes Qohelet and boldly claims that he saw everything there is to be observed "under the sun" and that the sub solar realm is filled with injustice. Qohelet does not simply claim to have observed injustice. He constantly emphasise that these injustices are to be found under the *sun*. It is difficult to see how, from the perspective of the frame of reference of someone living in the ANE two to three millennia ago, the association of the *sun* with *injustice* can amount to anything other than a most obvious example of deconstructive polemical irony.



Fig 7.2 Another example of Mesopotamian solar mythology. Seated on the right is the solar deity Shamash in his twin capacities of judge and king. He is ensuring that justice prevails...under the sun (cf. Pritchard 1954:175)

7.2.4 Denial of the possibility of divination and esoteric knowledge of the cosmic order "תחת השמש"

The second most important function attributed to the sun god is his role in divination

practices where he supposedly revealed secret knowledge and showed what the future held (cf. Hooke 1953:90-92; Mackenzie 1978:83).²²⁷ Qohelet, on the other hand, claims that humans cannot by any means understand the work of God and discern, "under the sun", what tomorrow may bring. The following texts show how these sentiments are also an important part of author's discourse.

שנאתי אני את כל עמלי שאני עמל תחת השמש שאניחנו לאדם שיהיה אחרי ומי יודע החכם
יהיה או סכל וישלט בכל עמלי שעמלתי ושחכמתי תחת השמש

I hated all my work that I worked at 'UNDER THE SUN' that I will leave to someone after me but who knows if wise he will be or foolish... (2:18)²²⁸

את הכל עשה יפה בעתו גם את העלם נתן בלבם מבלי אשר לא ימצא האדם את המעשה אשר
עשה אלהים מראש עד סוף

...all he made beautiful in its time; also indefinite time he placed in their hearts so that the human cannot find the work that the God does from the beginning to end (3:11)²²⁹

ראיתי כי אין טוב אשר ימשח האדם במעשיו כי הוא חלקו כי מי יביאנו לראות במה שיהיה
אחרי

I saw that there is nothing better than that the human rejoices in his work because that is his portion because who will bring him to see in that which will be after him? (3:22)²³⁰

מי יודע מה טוב לאדם בחיים מספר ימי חיי הבלו ויעשם כצל אשר מי יגיד לאדם מה יהיה
אחרי תחת השמש

Who knows what is good for the human in the life the number of the days of the life of his "vapour" so that he shall make like a shadow for who can tell the human what will be after him 'UNDER THE SUN'? (6:11)²³¹

²²⁷ Cf. Chapter 5 of this study.

²²⁸ Crenshaw (1988:87) notes that the sentence here does not need the expression "under the sun" but believes that Qohelet's fondness for it leads him to add it. One still has to ask why he was so fond of it and what is the purpose for adding it? Furthermore the expression translated as "who knows?" is another regular in Qohelet and occurs several times elsewhere (cf. 2:19; 3:21; 6:12; 8:1). Elsewhere in the Old Testament it is attested in six instances (cf. 2 Sam. 12:22; Joel 2:14; Jonah 3:9; Ps. 90:11; Esth. 4:14 and Prov. 24:22).

²²⁹ One sees here that the deconstruction of solar mythology lies in the denial of the possibility of precognition. On the level of syncretism, the solar theology is inverted in Qohelet in that whereas the solar deity revealed the future, Qohelet's God *conceals* it. The "sun imagery" here is I.S.I.

²³⁰ The "sun imagery" is I.S.I. Contrary to conservative interpretations the implied answer to Qohelet's question is probably not intended to be "God" but, negatively, "not the solar deity".

²³¹ This verse is, like 1:3, recognised as a summary interrogative of Qohelet's ideas. Whereas 1:3 can be conceptualised as concerned with injustice, this second summary, in the middle of the book, is concerned with ignorance, hence scholars recognition that justice and knowledge are two of the main concerns in Qohelet (cf. Whybray 1980). The centrality of the theme of ignorance is further illustrated by the tendency of many scholars to see it as implicitly part of the meaning of "vapour" (thus rendered as incomprehensible; cf. Good [1965] / "incongruous"; Staples [1943] / "cult mystery"; Pennachini [1977] / "absurd" {incomprehensible}; Ogden [1987] / "mysterious, enigmatic"). Fox (1999:34) who translates "vapour" with "absurd" nonetheless believes that while "vapour" is not simply synonymous with incomprehensibility, it does include that notion (cf. 8:17).

...וביום רעה ראה גם את זה לעמת זה עשה האלהים על דברת שלא ימצא האדם אחריו מאומה

... and on an unfavourable day, take note: God made both of them so that a person cannot find out anything that will occur later on. (7:13-14)²³²

רחוק מה שהיה ועמק עמק מי ימצאנו

Far off is what is, and deep...deep, who can find it (7:24)²³³

כי איננו ידע מה שיהיה כי כאשר יהיה מי יגידלו

No one knows what will be, because like what it will be, who can tell him? (8:7)²³⁴

וראיתי את כל מעשה האלהים לא כי יוכל האדם למצוא את המעשה אשר נעשה תחת השמש
בשל אשר יעמל האדם לבקש ולא ימצא וגם אם יאמר החכם לדעת לא יוכל למצא

I saw all the work of God that the human cannot find the work that is done 'UNDER THE SUN'; in as much the human toils to seek and find he will not and even if the wise claims to know he cannot find it (8:17)²³⁵

כי את כל זה נתתי אל לבי ולבור את כל זה אשר הצדקים והחכמים ועבדיהם ביד אלהים גם
אהבה גם שנאה אין יודע האדם

...the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of the God; also love also hate, there is no knowing by the humans of what awaits them (9:1)

כי עתו פגע יקרה את כלם כי גם לא ידע האדם את עתו

...because time and chance befall them all, because also the human knows not his time... (9:11,12)²³⁶

לא ידע האדם מה שיהיה ואשר יהיה מאחריו יגיד לו

...the human does not know what will be, and what will be after him, who can tell him? (10:14b);

תן חלק לשבעה וגם לשמונה כי לא תדע מה יהי הרעה על הארץ

²³² S.I. = I.S.I.; this passage was recognised by Crenshaw (1984:85-86) as a possible polemical allusion to divinatory practices (cf. below).

²³³ S.I. = I.S.I.

²³⁴ S.I. = I.S.I.

²³⁵ The classic statement regarding "ignorance" in Qohelet. Is it possible that the "wise" of this verse were mantic sages involved with solar mythology? Note also the fact that in the previous verse (8:16) the searching of the sages continues into the night time. That implied statement one can seek, "under the sun", at night, shows why traditional interpretations of the "sun imagery" are inadequate and does not fit the scenario presented here. Literalness is also shown to be misplaced.

²³⁶ As in 3:11, "knowledge of the times" is denied here. The combination of two favourite subjects of Qohelet (i.e. ignorance and time) are both potential allusions to solar mythology where these concepts were linked with divination and where the sun god is the appointer of times and thus the revealer of the future. As will be noted later on, the substitution in 3:1 of "under the heavens" for "under the sun" may be intentional in order to sever the link between the I.S.I. and the poem of "appointed times" in order to show God (and not the sun) as the one having this function.

Give a portion for seven and also for eight because you do not know what will be the evil on the earth (11:2);

כאשר אינך יודע מה דרך הרוח כעצמים בבטן המלאה ככה לא תדע את מעשה האלהים אשר יעשה את הכל

Like you do not know the way of the spirit...so you do not know the work of the God who will do it all (11:5)

בבקר זרע את זרעך ולערב אל תנח ידך כי אינך יודע איזה יכשר הזה או זה ואם שניהם כאחד טובים

In the morning sow your seed and for the evening do not let your hand rest for you do not know or this one will succeed, this or that one, or if both of them will be as well as one (11:6)²³⁷

Already a scholar like Crenshaw (1984:85-86) felt that there might be more to some of these passages, where Qohelet appears to be sceptical about certain kinds of knowledge, than what many scholars have recognised thus far. In one study he remarks:

"Perhaps more than meets the eye lies behind Qohelet's polemic here. It may be that certain people amongst the wise have begun to search the signs in order to predict future happenings. If the background for this passage (7:13-14) is an emerging science of the times comparable to the speciality alluded to in the book of Daniel, where chosen officials of the court have the title, "those who know the times", Qohelet's rejection of such a discipline is all the more remarkable."

This is a very interesting remark from the perspective of this study. However, Crenshaw does not seem interested in pursuing his idea further. In a footnote on the first sentence of the passage cited above, Crenshaw refers to G. von Rad and his book *Wisdom in Israel* which discusses this emerging "science of the times". However, Von Rad (1972) does this simply in an attempt to explain the possible relationship between wisdom and apocalyptic. Crenshaw (1984:86) justifiably feels that von Rad's arguments are inadequate because they fail to explain the natural interrelationships between prophecy and apocalyptic. In light of the hypothesis of this study and the remarks made earlier regarding the unnoticed parallels between wisdom and solar mythology, one wonders if a further exploration into this uncharted terrain might explain where both Crenshaw and von Rad failed to recognise wisdom's potential affinity with solarism.

If indeed Qohelet was implicitly denying a "science of the times" as Crenshaw speculates, it might be interesting to note the specific religious context in which this science occurred. For, as I have said earlier, the sun gods of the Ancient Near East were not only concerned with justice and the moral order. In addition, they were very much the gods of choice invoked in divination rituals. This was due to their perceived role in controlling and revealing the cosmic order, the appointment and generation of time and the hidden variables involved in these phenomena (cf. Mackenzie 1978:54; Rogers 1908:84). Could it be that Israelite wisdom traditions not only started as a science of the times by virtue of its being an offshoot of Egyptian and other traditions

²³⁷ In this text and the three preceding it the S.I. = I.S.I. These verses combine the theme of not knowing the future and not knowing the cosmic order.

under the patronship of Re or Shamash? Is it not also conceivable that Israelite wisdom, at least in some camps, later developed along the same lines that solar mythology did? (cf. Würthwein 1976:113-133).

If this was the case, then all these passages where Qohelet denies the possibility of precognition and of knowledge of the hidden workings of the cosmic order make perfect sense from the perspective of my hypothesis. After all, in solar mythology, the sun god was also the deity of divination (cf. van der Toorn 1997:717). Thus, when Qohelet claims that, “under the sun”, no one knows what the future holds or can ever hope to understand the mysteries of the cosmic order, he is making a very significant polemic statement. Is it merely an unlikely coincidence that the knowledge which he denies as possible “under the sun” is exactly that which was most cherished by solar mythology? The denial of the possibility of divination (under the sun) seems to provide another piece of evidence in confirmation of my hypothesis regarding the possible presence of allusions to ANE solar mythology in Qohelet’s polemical rhetoric.²³⁸

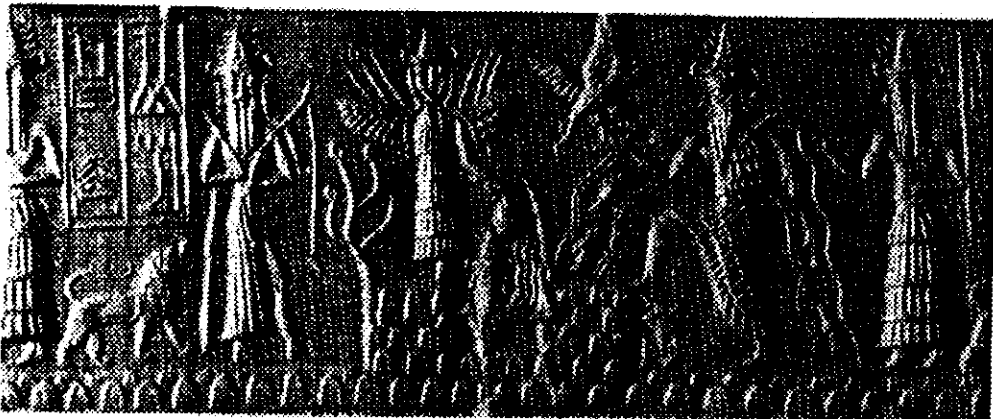


Fig 7.3 The sun god Shamash arises from the underworld in the company of, amongst others Ea, god of wisdom (cf. Pritchard 1954:220)

7.2.5 Royal wisdom, dissatisfaction and folly “תחת השמש”

The king, as implicit author in Qohelet, is an ironical and pitiful figure. He appears powerless in his attempt to find satisfaction in wisdom (1:12-2:12). In addition the rulers in Qohelet generally appear as socio-political misfits (cf. chaps. 8-10). They are partly responsible for the chaos in the social order (5:7-8). On the other hand, they have all the authority and can do what they want. Therefore, Qohelet feels that it may be in the

²³⁸ Traditionally many scholars have argued that the object of Qohelet’s agnostic type of polemics was dogmatic wisdom (cf. Loader 1986:16-24). This hypothesis assumed a now discredited scheme of evolutionary development in Israel’s wisdom tradition. Thus it was thought that wisdom began as informal clan wisdom, became enshrined in a “dogmatic phase” and ultimately broke down in a “crisis phase”. This scheme provided a perspective for scholars of wisdom literature which was a very determinative paradigm for what they could positivistically “see” in the texts. Lately it is recognised that wisdom is not so easily stereotyped and progressive and that these varieties once considered to be chronologically related are now recognised as having been intertwined throughout history. This new perspective necessitates a rethinking of a lot of the interpretation once popular in terms of constructing a polemical context for Qohelet. If the hypothesis of this study is correct then the object of Qohelet’s polemics against “wisdom” may be either construed as against the cult of solar mythology or against Israelite sages who became too caught up with that cult for Qohelet’s liking.

audience's best interest to show the proper respect.

In the Ancient Near East,²³⁹ and especially in Egypt, the king was also known as the "son of the sun". Moreover, this "familial" relation was conceived as being anything from incarnation / adopted son to being the earthly representative of the solar deity (cf. Frankfort 1948:217). According to Frankfort (1948:217), being the earthly counterpart of the sun god, the king was supposed to ensure harmony and justice with regard to the social order. He was responsible to imitate the sun god in relieving oppression, combating corruption, wise government, etc. In addition, the sun god also gave the king wisdom, assisted him in judgement, accompanied him when he goes to war, revealed the future to him through oracles, etc. This is all strikingly distorted in Qohelet's portrayal of the king "under the sun". The kings in Qohelet, including the implied author, are the people "under the sun" who exhibit none of the wisdom, happiness, control and order that sons of the sun was typically associated with. Especially Qohelet himself, the prototypical king who features in the book, is portrayed as being little more than a clown, a character of tragedy.

According to Perdue (1994:198-200), the book Qohelet presents itself as the words of a king who could not understand the world. That this king, this son the sun, found "under the sun" nothing but ignorance and injustice is indeed ironic from the view of the royal ideology which was an important part of solar mythology. The following texts which speak of kings are all polemical and ironical from the perspective of solar mythology where the sun god was the patron of the king while the latter was the earthly representative of the solar deity and had to ensure justice in the social order (cf. also Routledge et al. 1988:308).²⁴⁰

דברי קהלת בן דוד מלך בירושלם הכל הבלים אמר קהלת הכל הבל מה יתרון לאדם
בכל עמלו שיעמל תחת השמש

Words of Qohelet son of David king in Jerusalem, "Vapour of vapours!", said Qohelet, "Vapour of vapours, all is vapour". What profit is there for a man in all his toil at which he toils 'UNDER THE SUN'? (1:1-3)

אני קהלת הייתי מלך על ישראל בירושלם ונתתי את לבי לדרוש ולתור בחכמה על כל אשר
תחת השמים הוא ענין רע נתן אלהים לבני האדם לענות בו ראיתי את כל המעשים שנעשו
תחת השמש והנה הכל הבל

I Qohelet was king over Israel. I gave my heart to seek and to discover through wisdom all that is done 'UNDER THE SUN'. It is an evil task that God gave to the sons of man to busy themselves

²³⁹ And, if the archaeological and Biblical evidence of chapter 6 in this study is anything to go by, Israel too had a royal mythology with solar symbolism and other elements contained within it.

²⁴⁰ Contrary to many recent interpreters (cf. Crenshaw 1988; Murphy 1992; Fox 1999), and in agreement with Perdue (1994), I believe that the king fiction does not end with chapter two. As Perdue (1994:198 - 200) demonstrates, once the influence of Egyptian "grave biographies" is recognised in Qohelet's presentation of his ideas, the traditional objections to the king fiction being present beyond chapter 2 (such as, for example, criticism of royalty, lamentations of a corrupt social order, etc) can easily be refuted. The fact that it appears so unlikely that a king laments the social order and gives instructions to etiquette in the presence of royalty need thus not be seen as being implicative of the discontinuation of the king fiction. To be sure, it may be the poignant expression of polemical irony in the sense that the king could not ensure a harmonious social order. The irony lies in the claim of Qohelet that he could not even do this "under the sun".

with. I saw all the work that was done 'UNDER THE SUN' and look, all was a "vapour" and a shepherding of wind. What is crooked cannot be straightened and what is missing cannot be counted. (1:12-14)²⁴¹

ופניתי אני בכל מעשה שעשו ידי ובעמל שעמלתי לעשות... ואין יתרון תחת השמש

And I (the king)²⁴² turned in all the work that my hands had wrought and in my toil that I had toiled to do... and there is no profit 'UNDER THE SUN' (2:11)

ושנאתי את חיים כי רע עלי המעשה שנעשה תחת השמש כי הכל הבל ורעות רוח

And I (the king) hated life because evil over me was the work that was done 'UNDER THE SUN' because all is a "vapour" and a shepherding of the wind (2:17)

שנאתי אני את כל עמלי שאני עמל תחת השמש שאניחנו לאדם שיהיה אחרי ומי יודע החכם יהיה או סכל וישלט בכל עמלי שעמלתי ושחכמתי תחת השמש

I (the king) hated all the toil that I had toiled 'UNDER THE SUN' that I shall leave for the man who comes after me, and who knows if wise he shall be? Yet he shall rule over all my toil that I had toiled for and which I had been wise 'UNDER THE SUN'. (2:18)

ועד ראיתי תחת השמש מקום משפת שמה הרשע ומקום צדק שמה הרשע

And I (the king) saw 'UNDER THE SUN': in the place of justice there is wickedness; in the place of righteousness, there is wickedness (3:16)

ושבתי אני וראיתי את כל העשקים אשר נעשם תחת השמש והגה דמעת העשקים ואין להם מנחם ומיד עשקיהם כח ואין להם מנחם

I (the king) turned and I saw all the oppressions that was done 'UNDER THE SUN' and look the tears of the oppressed and for them there was no comforter, from the hands of their oppressors there was power but for them there was no comforter (4:1).

טוב ילד מסכן וחכם ממלך זקן וכסיל אשר לא ידע להזהר עוד כי מבית הסורים יצא למלך כי גם במלכות ונולד רש ראיתי את כל החיים המהלכים תחת השמש עם הילדה שני יעמד תחתיו אין קץ לכל העם לכל אשר היה לפניהם גם האחרונים לא ישמחו בו כי גם זה הבל ורעיון רוח

Good is a youth, poor and wise, than a king old and foolish who does not know to be advised anymore. From the house of prison he shall go out to rule because also in his kingdom he was born poor. I saw all the living, those who went 'UNDER THE SUN' with the second youth that stands under him. There was no end to all the people, to all that was before him. Also afterwards they did not rejoice in him. Also this is a "vapour" and shepherding of the wind (4:13-16)

²⁴¹ The irony possibly present in the idea of a king from the ANE, who was perplexed at life "under the sun" and even hated that life "under the sun", has also eluded scholars. From a solar mythological perspective, both the words "under" and "sun" is ambiguous. Not only can it refer to life, literally "under the sun", but also life "under the sun" in the sense of the king being subordinated to his patron, the solar deity (whom he also represented as the one who ensured the social order- on which, cf. chapter 5). A new solution to the mysterious claim "I was king..." is also accounted for later in this study (cf. chapter 8 / "genre").

²⁴² Like I.S.I., the king fiction after chapter 2 is *implicit*. However, its presence will be all but invisible unless one reckons with the perspective of solar mythology, the technique of polemical irony and the genre of grave biography (on which, cf. chapter 8 in this study).

אם עשק רש וגזל משפט וצדק תראה במדינה אל תתמה על החפץ גבה מעל גבה שמר וגבהים עליהם ויתרון ארץ בכל היא מלך לשדה נעבד

If oppression, poverty and corruption of justice and right you see in the province do not be amazed about the matter because high over high protects and the higher ones over them. And an advantage for a country it is when the king tills the field (5:7-8)

אמרתי אחכמה והיא רחוקה ממני רחוק מה שהיה ועמק עמק מי ימצאנו

I (the king) said I would become wise, but she was far from me, far of is what is, deep, deep who can find it? (7:23-24)²⁴³

ראה זה מצאתי אמרה קהלת אחת לאחת למצא תשבון אשר עוד בקש הנפשי ולא מצאתי...

Look, this I did find, said Qohelet, one by one to find a idea, what I sought I did not find...

אני פי מלך שמור ועל דברת שבועת אלהים אל תבהל מפניו תלך אל תעמד בדבר רע כי כל אשר יחפץ יעשה באשר דבר מלך שלטון ומי יאמר לו מה תעשה

Protect the mouth of the king and on the oath of God and do not go quickly from his presence because all that he desires he will do. In the word the king rules and who will say to him what are you doing? (8:2-4)

..את כל זה ראיתי ונתון את לבי לכל מעשה אשר נעשה תחת השמש עת אשר שלט האדם באדם

All this I saw and gave my heart to all the deeds that were done 'UNDER THE SUN' in a time that a man rules another man to his harm (8:9)²⁴⁴

גם זה ראיתי חכמה תחת השמש וחדולה היא אלי עיר קטנה ואנשים בה מעטובא אליה מלך גדול וסבב אתה ובנה עליה מצדים גדלים ומצא בה איש מסכן חכם ומלט הוא את העיר בחכמתו ואדם לא זכר את האיש המסכן ההוא ואמרתי אני טוב החכמה מגבורה וחכמת המסכן בזוי הדברי ואינם נשמעים

Also this wisdom I saw 'UNDER THE SUN' and it seemed great to me: a small city with few people in it and a great king came to it surrounded it and built big ramparts over it. And he found a poor yet wise man in it and could he saved the city in his wisdom but no one remembered that poor man. And I said wisdom is better than might but the wisdom of the poor is scorned and his word is not heard. (9:13-16)²⁴⁵

²⁴³ The irony and deconstruction of these statements lies in the fact that, for Qohelet, the king who was the earthly representative of the solar deity is just as impotent in his domain of kingship as the sun god is in the domain "under the sun" (ambiguous). Just like the realm "under the sun" is filled with injustice, ignorance, death, etc., so too, the king observes that, in that realm under the sun where he himself rules, there is oppression, mystery and general chaos in the social order. That's the tragic irony.

²⁴⁴ It cannot be emphasised enough that the deconstruction of solar mythology becomes readily apparent and indisputable once one recognises that Qohelet sees "under the sun" mostly the direct opposite of what solar mythology claimed to be the reality there.

²⁴⁵ From the perspective of solar mythology there is a double instance of irony in this scenario. It is a no win situation for the solar deity who on the one hand was supposed to assist kings during military campaigns and on the other hand relieve oppression and ensure that justice was done and knowledge revealed. Here the sun god is in a dilemma not unlike Solomon who had to deal with the contradictory

אם רוח המושל תעלה עליך מקומך אל תנח כי מרפא יניח חטאים גדולים

If the spirit over the ruler rises over you do not leave your place for the healing of will lay to rest great offences (10:4)

יש רע ראיתי תחת השמש כשגגה שיצא לפני השליט נתן הסכל במרומים רבים עשעירים בשפל ישבו ראיתי עבדים על סוסים ושרים הלכים כעבדים על הארץ

There is an evil that I have seen 'UNDER THE SUN', a mistake that comes from the ruler: He puts fools in many high places and the rich dwell in low places. I saw slaves on horses and princes walk like servants on the ground (10:5-7)

אי לך ארץ שמלכך נער ושריך בבקר יאכלו אשריך ארץ שמלכך בן חורים ושריך בעת יאכלו בגבורה ולא בשתי

Woe to you land if your king is a youth and your leaders eat in the morning. Happy are you land if your king is an old man and your rulers eat on time in power and not in shame (10:16-17)

What makes the claims of these texts so ironic from the perspective of solar mythology should by now be clear: in solar mythology the king was the "son of the sun". Whereas the solar deity upheld the cosmic order, the king was his earthly representative responsible for the moral order. In order to do this, the sun god gave the king wisdom to govern justly, prevent corruption and remove oppression (cf. Frankfort 1948:217 ff). The king in the ANE was sometimes even considered to be divine and almost omniscient (cf. Ps. 45; 72). But here, in Qohelet, when it comes to royalty, we find an altogether different scenario in the domain under the sun.

- a KING who found his wisdom a burden.....under the SUN;
- a KING who impotently laments oppression.....under the SUN;
- a KING who remarks on the evil in the social order.....under the SUN;
- a KING who claims one cannot know the future.....under the SUN;
- a KING who claims one cannot know the times.....under the SUN;
- a KING who observes injustices where justice should have been.....under the SUN;
- a KING who feels that life is not fair.....under the SUN;
- a KING who doubts life after death.....under the SUN;
- a KING who exposes royal incompetence.....under the SUN;
- a KING who evaluates everything he sees as "vapour".....under the SUN.

claims of two prostitutes who both argued that one child was their own (cf. 1 Kgs. 4). Yet the obscurity as to what actually happened in this scenario in Qohelet (i.e. did the wise man save the town or did nobody remember him so that all perished?) may be intentional to give expression to this theological discrepancy. The satire evident in the "great king" vs. the "small town" and the "poor man" is priceless. Note also the use of the phrase "under the sun" here in a way which is meaningless from the perspective of the traditional interpretations. Its allusion to solar mythology seems a much more plausible way making sense of Qohelet's meaning and motive for the use of it here.

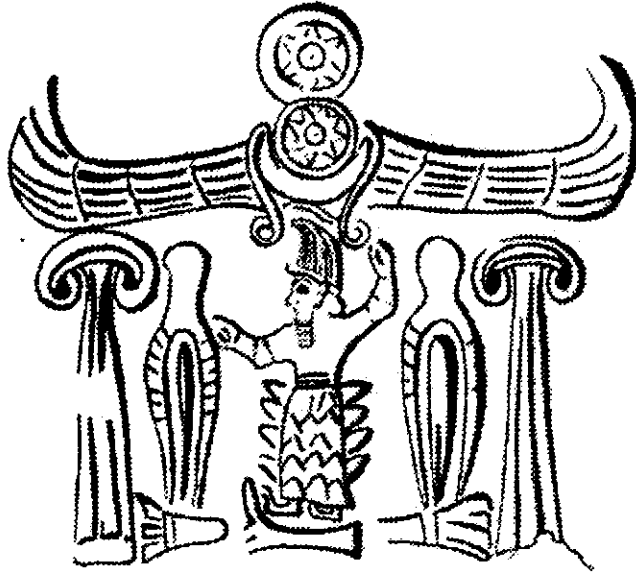


Fig 7.4 In this picture, an Ancient Near Eastern king is shown standing under the sun in close relation to the cosmic mountain (cf. Keel 1978:28)

From the perspective of solar mythology, the irony and sarcasm are unmistakable. One can even speak of a good deal of hubris. For, whereas the sun god was:

- the god of justice and judgement;
- the patron of royalty;
- the revealer of hidden knowledge and wisdom;
- the god of divination;
- the giver of life and the light of the dead;
- the one who made life worthwhile and prosperous for those who served him;
- the one who **sees all** and knows even what goes on in the **hearts** of men;
- the one who has the **king** as son;

here we have a **king**, i.e. a "**son of the sun**":

- who repeatedly tells us what he saw and like the sun he **saw** everything;
- who repeatedly tells us what he said in his **heart**, things the sun also knows;
- who repeatedly emphasises that all that he found was what happened "**under the sun**";
- who repeatedly deny as reality "**under the sun**" all that the sun god was concerned with and believe to ensure.

In short, by recognising the possibility that Qohelet may be alluding to the royal ideology which was an inextricable part of ANE solar mythology, the king fiction and many of the references to royalty in the book suddenly appear in a new light. Could it be that the implicit omnipresent motif of a *king* who observed injustice "under the sun" has more to it than what scholars have hitherto perceived to be the case?

7.2.6 Death and the destruction of life “תחת השמש”

In ANE solar mythology (Egyptian, Canaanite and Mesopotamian) the sun was sometimes depicted as one who conquers death (cf. van der Toorn 1997:750-758; 1302-1306). Being the embodiment of the concepts of life, light, health and vitality, the sun in solar mythology symbolised something diametrically the opposite of death (which is often associated with darkness and disease).²⁴⁶ As mentioned earlier in chapter 5, the sun was believed to descend into the underworld by night from where he emerged triumphantly each morning. This the god did as a conquering hero who prevailed against the dark powers in the underworld. Down under, the sun provided light for the dead and acted as divine judge. His sphere of influence and his conceived role in both the upper and lower worlds were also associated with the conquering and destruction of the powers of darkness and death (cf. van der Toorn 1997:1302).

However, in the thought of Qohelet all this is denied. “Under the sun” all humans are haunted by the certain and unenviable destiny of darkness and death which awaits them all. Everyone has a one-way ticket to Sheol (cf. Davidson 1997:202). For Qohelet, the idea that the sun (god) made the world of the dead any more bearable (and any less dark, gloomy and chaotic) would be a ridiculous notion. This can be seen by observing what Qohelet had to say about death in the many instances he remarked on the subject.

אין זכרון לחכם עם הכסיל לעולם בשכבר הימים הבאים הכל נשכח ואיך ימות החכם עם הכסיל

There is no remembrance for the wise with the fool forever, seeing that in the days to come all will be forgotten. How the wise dies just like the fool. (2:16-17)²⁴⁷

כי מקרה בני האדם ומקרה הבהמה ומקרה אחד להם כמות זה כן מות זה ורוח אחד לכל ומותר האדם מן הבהמה אין כי הכל הבל הכל הולך אל מקום אחד הכל היה מן העפר והכל שב אל עפר מי יודע רוח בני האדם העלה היא למעלה ורוח הבהמה הירדת היא למטה לארץ

The fate of the sons of man and the fate of the beast are one and the same for them; as the one dies so do the other and the same spirit is for them all and there is no advantage for the human above the beasts as all is “vapour”. Everything goes to one place. Everything came from dust and everything returns to the dust. Who knows if the spirit of the sons of man goes upward and whether the spirit of the beast goes downward to under the earth? (3:19-20)²⁴⁸

ושבח אני את המתים שכבר מתו מן החיים אשר המה חיים עדנה וטוב משניהם אשר עדן לא היה אשר לא ראה את המעשה הרע אשר נעשה תחת השמש

I praised the dead more than those who are still alive. And better than both of them is the one who hasn't yet lived to see all the evil that is done ‘UNDER THE SUN’. (4:2-3)

אמרתי טוב ממנו הנפל כי בהבל בא ובחשך ילך ובחשך שמו יכסה גם שמשלא ראה ולא ידע נחת לזה מזה ואל וחיה אלף שנים פעמים פעמים וטוב הלא ראה הלא אל מקום אחד הכל הולך

²⁴⁶ This does not mean that the sun gods did not have darker sides. Yet those “solar deities” associated with “death” and the like became “underworld deities, i.e. Nergal, Osiris. The primary solar deities such as Shamash, Re and Helios usually lacked the darker attributes of their malignant counterparts.

²⁴⁷ Here themes of injustice and ignorance are combined with the antisolarist thanatology.

²⁴⁸ S.I. = I.S.I. Once again themes are combined.

...I say a stillborn is better off than he: for in a "vapour" it comes and in darkness it goes and in darkness its name is covered. Also SUN it does not see and it does not know anything but it has more rest than the other. Even if the man lives a thousand years times two but the good he does not see; does not all go to the same place? (6:3-6)

טוב שם משמן טוב ויום המות מיום הולדו טוב ללכת אל בית אבל מלכת אל בית משתה באשר הוא סוף כל האדם והחי יתן אל לבו

A good name is better than good oil and the day of death better than the day of birth. It is better to go to a house of mourning than to a house of feasting. In what is the end of every human, the living should take heart. (7:1-3)

כי מי אשר יבחר אל החיים יש בטחון כי לכלב חי הוא טוב מן האריה המת כי החיים יודעים שימתו והמתים אינם יודים מאומה ואין עוד להם שכר כי נשכח זכרם גם אהבתם גם שנאתם גם קגאתם כבר אבדה וחלק אין להם עוד לעולם בכל אשר נעשה תחת השמש

For those who are still living there is hope as a living dog is better than a dead lion. Because the living know that they will die but the dead know nothing. There is no more reward for them as their memory is forgotten. Also their love, their hate, also their jealousy have already perished. They have no more portion for ever in anything that is done 'UNDER THE SUN'. (9:4-6)²⁴⁹

ראה חיים אם אשה אשר אהבת כל ימי חיי הבלך אשר נתן לך תחת השמש...כי הוא חלקך בחיים ובעמלך אשר אתה עמל תחת השמש כל אשר תמצא ידך לעשות בכחך עשה כי אין מעשה וחשבון ודעת וחכמה בשאול אשר אתה הלך שמה

...See life with a woman you love all the days of your "vapour" life, that He gave you 'UNDER THE SUN', all the days of your "vapour". Because this is your portion in life, and in your toil that you toil "under the sun". All that your hands find to do, do it with all of your strength for there is no doing, no thinking and knowledge and wisdom in Sheol were, you yourself are going to (9:9-10)²⁵⁰

ומתוק האור וטוב לעינים לראות את השמש כי אם שנים הרבה יחיה האדם בכלם ישמח ויזכר את ימי החשך כי הרבה יהיוכל שבא הבל

Sweet is the light and good for the eyes to see the SUN for if the years are many let man rejoice in them all, but, remember the days of darkness that it will be many...all that comes is "vapour" (11:7-8).

כי הלך האדם אל בית עולמו וסבבו בשוק הספדים... וישב עפר על הארץ כשהיה והרוח תשוב אל האלהים אשר נתנה

...as the human goes to his eternal house and the mourners goes about the street... And the dust returns to the earth as it was and the spirit returns to God who gave it. (12:5-8)

²⁴⁹ Thus an explicit denial of popular solar thanatology which claimed that the sun also shines even in the underworld (cf. Chapter 5).

²⁵⁰ And without the deity who embodied the concepts of life, knowledge, light, etc., the related human capacities and faculties can hardly be thought of, by Qohelet, as being present in the netherworld.

Scholars have often wondered as to why Qohelet holds the particular negative view of death that he does. It seems so at odds with the more fashionable and optimistic post-exilic thanatologies. On the other hand, his thanatology is also not quite identical with earlier views of death entertained in pre-exilic Israel (cf. Spangenberg 1986). While some scholars have viewed optimistic post-exilic Jewish thanatology as the object of Qohelet's polemics, it might be interesting to ask whether the development and origin of these views had anything to do with the thanatological ideas of solar mythology (especially Egyptian and Persian solar thanatology).

As Fox (1999:40) argued, Qohelet's ideas of the absurd extend even to post mortem existence in Sheol (cf. 11:7). Also, in 1:5, the solar circuit of the sun through the under world may be implied. Yet the sun is depicted as being too tired to do anything of significance there (cf. Barton 1908:70). Thus, there is no wisdom or light or emotion in the underworld (cf. 9:5-6). Nor is there a chance that the dead could come back to life and participate in ways of the living. The only "positive" element in Qohelet's thanatology is the claim that the dead are better off than the living in the sense that they have no more affliction of the evil that is done "under the sun"! (4:1-3; 6:3-6).

In addition, while God will judge (cf. 11:9), the wicked and the righteous not only share the same fate but also that of the beasts whose life does not extend post mortem (3:16 - 22). Moreover, while Qohelet may seem at times to have contradictory and ambivalent notions about the comparative value of death, preferring on one occasion death to life (4:3) and at other times the opposite (9:4), all of these beliefs of his still rule out any possibility of the sun playing any significant role in a thanatological context as was the case in solar mythology. While the sun does at times symbolise life (cf. 6:5; 7:11; 11:7), this is always countered and deconstructed with juxtapositioned references to the sun in the context of misery and the ever-waiting eternal darkness of death. Could the pessimistic thanatology of Qohelet be understood as possibly containing polemical allusions to the optimistic views in ANE solar mythology with regard to the sun's revitalising role in relation to the inhabitants of the underworld?

7.2.7 "האלהים" and "השמש" Polemics and syncretism in Qohelet's theology

Who is Qohelet's God? Scholars have never failed to recognise the difference in the way Qohelet thinks of God as compared to the rest of the Old Testament (cf. Murphy 1992:lxviii). Theological peculiarities include the following features:

- Qohelet refers to God as "האלהים", and never as "יהוה";
- Qohelet never mentions the salvation history of his people and seems to implicitly deny the possibility revelation on the level of theophany;²⁵¹
- Qohelet seems to imply that no personal relationship with האלהים is possible;²⁵²
- Qohelet's האלהים is distant, mysterious, capricious and inspires fear;

The view that Qohelet has of האלהים has been somewhat misinterpreted by evangelical Christian theology. In a desperate attempt to harmonise the book's unorthodox notions with evangelical Christianity, evangelicals claim that the book's nihilism is simply due to

²⁵¹ Cf. however, the legitimate warning of Murphy (1992:lxviii) against hasty inference and arguments from silence regarding Qohelet's supposed view of the tradition.

²⁵² Cf., for example, Davidson (1997); Crenshaw (1984; 1988; 1995); Fox (1999).

the fact that the author is trying to show us how life *without* God will be. Surely this is a pious distortion of the book's theology - the dilemma of the author is that life, *because* of God, is **הבל** (cf. 1:14; 2:26; 6:1-2; 9:1-3).²⁵³

While more critical scholars have noticed that Qohelet's God is somewhat unorthodox (cf. Davidson 1997:217), they have failed to see the *apparent syncretism between (the) God and theology of ANE solar deities* in the book. In this regard the characteristics of God (in terms of primary attributes) are strikingly similar to that of an ANE sun god, albeit with modifications and adaptations in several places. The following list of similarities and divergences demonstrates this observation's validity.

Similar to the sun gods, Qohelet's God is characterised as:

- Judge (3:17; 6:10; 11:9-10);
- Dispenser of retribution (6:1-2; 8:12-13);
- Creator (3:9-11; 7:29; 12:1, 7);
- Source of life (9:7-9);
- Appointer of times (3:1-15; 8:7 - 8; 9:3,11-12);
- Controller of the cosmic order (1:15; 3:1-15; 7:13);
- Determiner of individuals' fates (2:24-26; 5:17-6:2; 7:16-17).

While, whereas the solar deity:²⁵⁴

- reveals the future, Qohelet's God conceals it (1:12-14; 3:11; 6:12; 7:14);
- enacts retribution unequivocally; Qohelet's God's agenda is rather unfathomable (8:7-8; 8:12-17; 9:1-3);
- relieves oppression and injustice, Qohelet's God seems somewhat indifferent to human suffering (3:16-22; 4:1-3; 6:1-2; 9:11-12);
- gives happiness, health and wealth to those who deserve it, Qohelet's God dispenses it somewhat arbitrarily (2:24-26; 6:1-2);
- reveals life's secrets and purpose, Qohelet's God has made life incomprehensible and absurd (1:12-14; 3:11; 8:16-17; 11:5);
- challenges the chaotic order by conquering the underworld and giving light to its denizens, Qohelet's God lets dust return to what it was; takes back His spirit, leaving

²⁵³ It is also highly selective to refer only to what appears as an apparently orthodox sentiment in the book such as in 2:24 where it is written that life and happiness is a gift of God. Little attention, however, is paid to the fact that this is in the context, not of divine grace but of divine arbitrariness, the assessment of which just two verses later is not one of thankfulness but of critique when Qohelet refers to these acts of God as "vapour" and a shepherding of the wind (cf. also Fox 1999:49, 55-59).

²⁵⁴ As mentioned in the previous chapter, sun cults distinguished between the sun and the sun god. This is important to keep in mind since the question may be asked, given the claims of my hypothesis, why Qohelet doesn't refer to Shamash, Re, or Helios by name. Far from falsifying my theory, solar mythology's distinction between the sun and the sun god could actually explain why reference to the sun can be ambiguous and also an allusion to the solar deity himself. In all this, Qohelet's allusions are so subtle - albeit so clear from the perspective of his own culture's mythological frame of reference - that he need not explicitly mention the solar deity he was polemising against. However, as will soon be demonstrated, Qohelet may actually have done this by utilising the technique of polysemantic homonymic wordplay in his use of the word rendered as "evil" in the book. In addition, the fact that the word "sun" in Qohelet comes with the definite article is not a problem for my theory. This is because, not only would the reference to the physical sun be associated with reference to the solar deity for whom the sun was an icon or eye, but Qohelet also speaks of God as "the God". In doing so, the use of the relative article in the reference to the sun becomes ambiguous. Does it depersonalise or not?

the person in Sheol's darkness where no one sees the sun (3:16-22; 9:4-10);

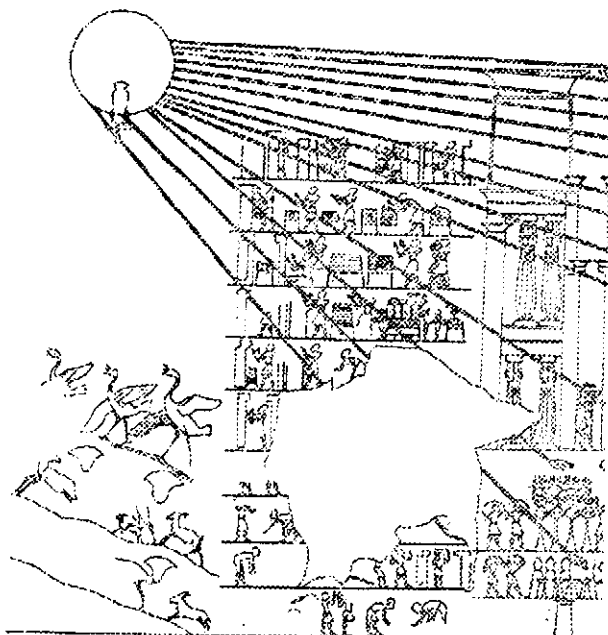


Fig 7.5 Another example of Egyptian solar mythology. This illustration depicts Re as creator and source of life – under the sun (cf. Keel 1978:211)

At this point, the following should be noted with regard to the relation between Qohelet and ANE solar mythology. Although I have argued that there is much anti-solarist polemic in Qohelet's rhetoric, this does not necessarily exclude a generous amount of *syncretism* as well. In fact, it is a familiar tendency encountered in polemical arguments in the Bible. Especially when the arguments are implicit, they not only attempt to disprove the power and authority of the pagan deities in question. They also depict Yahweh as possessing the very same qualities (and more) than the idol (see, for example, cf. 1 Kgs 18 – 20; Ps 29, etc.; cf. also Smith 1990a:passim).

This rhetorical and polemical strategy is very functional since it lessens the cognitive dissonance²⁵⁵ for the audience if they were to make a transition from one form of theology to another. Furthermore, the fact that God is never referred to as Yahweh (but simply denoted as being "the God") may be also be very significant, at least from the perspective of the hypothesis of possible allusions to ANE solar mythology in Qohelet. This manner of designating the deity is reminiscent of the theological rhetoric of the Egyptian heliopolitan wisdom traditions. Egyptian instruction texts like Amenemope (which is believed to have influenced the Proverbs collection in the OT) is also representative of a wisdom tradition which always referred to the deity in neutral universalistic terms i.e. as "the god" (*ntr*) (cf. Boström 1990:105).²⁵⁶

²⁵⁵ On examples of the Biblical authors' rhetorical strategies to minimise cognitive dissonance cf. the study by Carrol (1979).

²⁵⁶ On more of this supposed Egyptian influence on Qohelet's theology, cf. also chapter 8 in this study, where, along with other Egyptian parallels, the primacy of Egyptian influence will be argued. This is once again a bit wayward from contemporary comparative studies which tend to favour rather the Greek or Mesopotamian influence. However, in arguing for the primacy of Egyptian influence I am not claiming that it was the only influence and am not excluding the possibility of other contextual catalysts. Especially in

Could it be that some sages and possibly much of the general populace in Qohelet's day were attracted to sun worship? As I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, flirting with solar theology was a popular pastime throughout the first millennium B.C. in ancient Israel. Especially the sages would have been tempted by solarism because the other nations' wisdom teachers had the sun god as deity of choice. After all, the wisdom traditions were usually little more than an epiphenomenon of solar mythology (especially in Egypt) (cf. Würthwein 1976:113-133). The sages' temptations would result, as mentioned earlier, from the fact that the concerns of the wise and the solar theologians were virtually identical.

As far as the book of Qohelet is concerned, God is depicted in a way very similar to the way the universal solar deity was represented, especially in Egypt at times when sceptical wisdom became more popular due to social disorder. In this regard, Qohelet not only appears to effectively deconstruct solar theology by showing that, "under the sun" (sun god), there is no justice, no knowledge of the times, no divine royalty, no retribution and no afterlife enlightened by the sun. In addition, while Qohelet seems busy in apparently deconstructing solar theology he is also engaged in reconstructing a theology which retains some vital "solar" elements and which he can still subscribe to:

- God is a judge...but no one can fathom His ways;
- God is a giver of life and happiness...but no one can manipulate the deity;
- God appoints times for everything...but no one can know the future;

In thus depicting God, Qohelet's theology seems remarkably similar to that of Re as he was depicted in the sceptical traditions of ancient Egypt- i.e. transcendent, just, but unfathomable. On the other hand, Qohelet offers no theodicy. God can do what he wants because he is God (cf. Davidson 1997:132). Humans have as much rights as animals (cf. 3:16-22). Yet one does detect a certain fear, hubris, resentment and bitterness in Qohelet who seems to have no problem with implicitly and indirectly criticising God:²⁵⁷

- God give evil tasks, burdens to humanity (1:12);
- God has made crooked things which cannot be straightened (1:17);
- God arbitrarily bestows his favour and his grace is also "vapour" (2:26);
- God does things which has no foreseeable advantage (3:9);
- God capriciously denies some people happiness (6:2);
- God made things that are not good and that cannot be rightened (7:13);
- God makes the evil days to deny humans knowledge of the future (7:14);
- God made people good but failed to foresee how they would turn out (7:29);
- God delays retribution which results in the proliferation of evil (8:11);
- God fails to treat people justly (9:3).

But Qohelet does have a spirituality of sorts and can even "love" God in a certain sense

the context of Ptolemaic Egypt, the temporary revival of Egyptian solar mythology mixed with Greek philosophical traditions and the heritage of Mesopotamia, Qohelet's theological oddities makes perfect sense.

²⁵⁷ Cf. also Crenshaw (1988) and Fox (1999) who recognises Qohelet's nerve to criticise even the Deity he fears. Most other scholars, probably because of their particular view of Scripture, seem oblivious to or repressive of this element in Qohelet's theology.

of the word “love”. His “love” for God seems to be analogous to the kind of love-hate relationship man has with, for example, nature. For instance, someone can “love” the sun for its warmth in winter, its light in the dark, its assistance in keeping track of time; its essential role in providing life; etc. However, at the same time man can “hate” the sun for its oppressive heat, its absence in dark and cold nights, its role in droughts, sunstroke, dehydration, etc. Now any “relationship” with the sun can be a mixed bag of emotions such as awe, fear, appreciation, aversion and desire. It seems pointless to blame the sun seriously for causing death either by its apparent absence or presence. It also seems pointless for praising it when it simply does what is in accordance with its nature. Such a scenario may not be very different from what, in the end, appears to be Qohelet’s relationship to God.

It might be interesting, from viewpoint of the psychology of religion, to make a study of Qohelet’s spirituality. While most studies that do mention his psychological bent focus on possible mood and behavioural disorders on the part of the implied author, it might also be interesting to approach the issue from a different angle. If my hypothesis regarding allusions to ANE solar mythology in Qohelet is plausible, and if Qohelet’s theology indicates the presence of both polemics and syncretism with regard to solarism, why not analyse his spirituality via the complimentary perspectives of environmental psychology (of religion) and ecological anthropology. In this regard it might prove interesting to ask how solar phenomena influenced Qohelet’s concept of the divine reality he believes in.²⁵⁸

In short, Qohelet seems to have the ambivalent attitude to the divine that we humans today have to the sun. Thus, while he can rant away with polemical irony against solar mythology it seems that solar symbolism, in the sense than humans experience and relate to the sun, have contributed in shaping the way in which Qohelet views and relates to ultimate reality.²⁵⁹ While the sun may be mythologically deconstructed and stripped of virtually of almost all positive associative meaning in Qohelet, the solar body seems to be almost symbolic of the Jungian “shadow” of Qohelet’s own psyche’s inner turmoil. Is it possible that the alternative phraseology to the phrase “under the sun” i.e. “under the heavens” (cf. 1:12; 3:1) can be seen as amounting to a “Freudian slip” in which “the sun” can even be substituted, in every instance by “under the God”. After all, from Qohelet’s perspective, both the God and the sun are in heaven (5:1) and under both, life is filled with injustice and mystery. And, in the end, the works of God are synonymous with the deeds that are done “under the sun” (cf. 8:16-17).²⁶⁰ Thus, although I have suggested throughout this study that Qohelet may have wanted to

²⁵⁸ For more on psychological perspectives on the spirituality of Qohelet, see, for example, W. James (1902:129); K Galling (1932:281 and passim); E Sheffler (1993:248-271) and Fox (1999:134-138). Also, the main sociomorphic metaphor for God in Qohelet is certainly that of a monarch / king (see below). But remember whom the kings in the ANE often represented and who their patron deity was! While it may be easier to recognise the metaphor of the king in Qohelet’s theology, a consideration of the ANE religious contexts of royalty should soon enough allow one to recognise the solar metaphor that is inextricably linked to it.

²⁵⁹ For the interesting theories of ecological anthropology which studies the way environment effects culture and worldviews as specifically applied to “Biblical culture” (Old Testament) see, for example Deist (2000).

²⁶⁰ No doubt deconstructionists can have a field day with Qohelet who apparently deconstructs not only solar theology but his own version of agnostic theism as well. As Crenshaw (1984:84) notes, for someone who thinks humans can know so little of the Divine, Qohelet seems to know quite a lot when one considers his views regarding what pleases God, etc.

deconstruct solar theology in favour of reconstructing a more credible theological metaphysics, it would seem that he never completely succeeded in doing so. On the one hand Qohelet seems interested in retaining the belief in a sovereign, judging deity on the one hand who is responsible for everything under the sun. On the other hand, he still goes to great lengths in depicting the domain under the sun as being a realm filled with injustice, oppression and evil. To evaluate, via his adopted and adapted solar theology, Qohelet never quite succeeded in avoiding the very same problems inherent in the system of solar theology which he apparently criticizes.

With this interpretation of Qohelet's theology as being influenced by solar mythology on the one hand and the sun in nature on the other, I have independently come to more or less a conclusion not very far removed from that reached by McNeile (1904:15):

"The deity is to him (i.e. Qohelet) "Nature", the sum total of the irresistible and inscrutable forces which govern the world. But at the same time he has not quite lost his Semitic belief that God is more than nature".

From another point of view there is also an element of sociomorphism in Qohelet's theology. This can be seen in the way he depicts God in a way analogous to a sovereign ANE monarch. While in Egyptian solar mythology the king was at times considered as being divine and an incarnation of the sun god, so an inversion of this idea is apparent in Qohelet's underlying metaphorical assumptions of the nature of God. Qohelet's God is much like the king(s) he (Qohelet) presents as causative catalysts of a chaotic social order. Like the king in chapter 2, Qohelet's God has all the power. He made things right and beautiful (cf. 2:1-11 vs. 3:11) Still, out of these attempts also comes the crooked an results which yields no benefit to God and King (cf. 3:9; 7:29b).

Those who are to succeed the king cannot do anything really new "under the sun" (3:12) and neither, it seems, can God (3:15). The king controls the social order, yet injustice reigns despite or because of this (cf. 5:7-8). The same seems to be the case with God (cf. 8:12-14). Also, one should be careful in one's dealings with the king and a healthy fear of royal sovereignty is the appropriate etiquette when in the presence of the king (8:2) or even when one is far away (cf. 10:20). The same goes for one's attitude and actions in relation to God (5:1-6). In the end, an attitude of resignation and acceptance in the face of the king and God's power (cf. 6:10-12) is a wise choice. As Qohelet says of the king (but could just as well have said of God):

"...who can say to him: "What are you doing?" (8:4b)²⁶¹

Qohelet sees God not as a father figure or from the viewpoint of any comfortable metaphor. God, for Qohelet, is a King - a despotic, utterly sovereign, unchallengeable, autocratic Ruler who does what he pleases and is subject to nothing and nobody.

In the ancient world, the king was often referred to as a "sun". Often this designation alluded to the royal ideology of an underlying solar mythology. Moreover, as I have already noted, when Qohelet claims that, "*under the sun*" all is "vapour", he is also implying that all is "vapour" under God, who controls the cosmic and social order. Since

²⁶¹ For a parallel text where God instead of the king is the referent of the statement cf. Job 9:12 and Dan. 4:35 where it is written that one cannot ask of God: "What are you doing" or variants to this such as in Isa. 11:10 where one must not blaspheme by claiming that the Creator does not know what he is doing.

“under the sun” is, in some sense equivalent to under the heavens (cf. 1:12-14) and since “heaven” can also be used as a substitutionary term for referring to God himself. This was a convention already operative during the Persian period. If he was indeed polemising against solar mythology, Qohelet may even be seen as polemising against a Yahwistic form of solar mythology. For, surely, God is depicted so sovereign and powerful in Qohelet that what happens “under the sun” is also God’s doing (cf. 1:12- 15; 6:1-2; 7:13-14).²⁶² In short, “under the sun” = “under the heavens” = “under God”. In any case, deconstructionists can have a field day with the theology of Qohelet.

7.2.8 A “vapour”... “תחת השמש” - the pinnacle of absurdity

A lot of ink has been spilt in arguments about what Qohelet could possibly have meant with his use of the term הבל (cf. Fox 1999:27-49). This is not altogether a useless pursuit because the word “vapour” indeed contains, in a sense, the centre and essence of all his thought. In fact, as is well known, the whole book is an argument seeking to demonstrate the fact that all is הבל. Thus misunderstanding the meaning of this concept would amount to misunderstanding the entire book (cf. Fox 1989:29).

The question to be asked here is whether the theory of the “sun imagery” in this book can provide any new light on this complicated issue. While this study is not primarily concerned with the meaning of הבל, this concept is so central to Qohelet’s thought and so intertwined with his “sun imagery” that it would be unwise not to attempt to see how it might fit in with my thesis. After all, Qohelet is not just claiming that all is הבל but that it is such “under the sun” (cf. Fox 1999:165). What has baffled scholars to a large extent is how this word can be explained in a satisfactory way as to do justice to all the contexts in which it occurs in the book (cf. Fox 1999:35-42).

Before I examine the issue in this sense, I wonder how many scholars have asked the question of *why* Qohelet used this term and not another. Everyone agrees that the use of the term is metaphorical and this metaphor is one featuring the root meaning of the word הבל which is “vapour” (cf. Fox 1999:27). But this is where the consensus ends and a plethora of supposed meanings and translations have been suggested in order to make sense of Qohelet’s metaphor (cf. Staples 1943; Loretz 1964:23; 1965:176-183, Pennachini 1977:508; Ogden 1987:17-21).

In this regard it is interesting to note that almost all translations seems to imply that what we have here is a “dead” metaphor. Accordingly, it further implies that in translation, the literal meaning of “vapour” cannot and should not be retained but should be substituted with the abstract concept the metaphor intends to communicate. Thus one finds the terms absurd, incomprehensible, ephemeral, pointless, useless, vanity, nothing etc. replacing the word “vapour” in virtually all translations.²⁶³ In other words, analogous to the case where the key phrase “under the sun” is translated into its supposed abstract equivalent (i.e. “in this world”, “on earth”, “everywhere”, etc.) it seems that the word

²⁶² Cf. Fox (1999: *passim*) who also recognises that Qohelet’s complaint of the injustice “under the sun” obscures a deeper bitterness against the injustices done by God. This can be seen in the fact that the “works of God” and that “which is done “under the sun” is often for Qohelet one in the same reality (cf. 1:12-18; 8:16-17).

²⁶³ See KJV, RSV, NIV, ASV, NSV.

"vapour" is not up for retention as far as the majority of scholars are concerned.²⁶⁴ I have already implied that the translating away of the solar element in the "under the sun" phrases shows how interpreters have failed to recognise the polemical irony the exact wording of phrase was possibly intended to convey. Now I want to ask, is it possible that the same error may be present in our attempts to translate the word "vapour" into its supposed abstract meaning?

While I would concur with Fox (1999:27-42) that the word **הבל** has the root meaning of "vapour" and ultimately intends to convey the meaning of absurdity, I have a suspicion that contrary to popular belief, the metaphor is a *live* metaphor. In addition, just as the phrase "under the sun", it may have to be translated literally - or the polemical irony may once again be missed. Thus, I am asking whether it may not be possible that, in order to understand what Qohelet meant when he claimed all was **הבל**, one should leave the literal sense of all is a "vapour" just as it is. Now while at first glance this seems rather strange, it is only through the recognition of the significance, function and presence of possible allusions to solar mythology and symbolism in the book that the retention of the literal meaning of the word **הבל** makes quite good sense. From the perspective of this study a whole new view on this whole issue is possible and although I am excited about its heuristic potential, I offer it as a tentative interrogative experiment and not as an absolute claim.

If the thesis of this study is accepted and the phrase "under the sun" can be literally retained and left untranslated because of its ironical and polemical function, then an interesting possible interpretation of the **הבל** metaphor also becomes a distinct possibility. I do not think that this is a dead metaphor and that it need translation into its ultimate abstract meaning.²⁶⁵ The reason for this seems quite complicated from one perspective but quite commonsensical from another. This is because, once the interpreter has recognised the polemical irony of Qohelet's use of the phrase "under the

²⁶⁴ Cf. Fox (1999:30). Of course, there are exceptions and some translations still render "vapour" in a way implicative of the belief that it signifies a live metaphor. Thus Crenshaw (1988:58) (whilst he himself prefer the rendering "futility") notes that the earliest Greek translations render the word "vapour" as *atmis* or *atmos* (breath). In contrast, later translations became more abstract and one finds "vanitas" in Jerome's Vulgate and "mataiotes" in the LXX. A modern-day example of retention of the root meaning of "vapour" and largely the metaphor as "live" is Perdue (1994:206 - 208) who nevertheless render it as "breath" with the intention of denoting ephemerality (cf. also Fredericks [1988:11-32]). There is little difference between "breath" and "vapour" but their semantic and referential scope are not completely identical as breath is confined to living entities whereas "vapour" can denote, for example, non living phenomena such as water evaporating or smoke ascending.

²⁶⁵ What is interesting is that Fox (1989; 1999) finds his parallel not in any ancient source material but in the modern existentialist philosophy of Camus. While Fox seem to have his reasons for proposing such an anachronistic interpretation and while it has been popular to see in Qohelet some historical embryo for existentialist thought I personally am somewhat cautious of reading Qohelet this way. Even if such a reading makes sense it may do so for the very fact that we ourselves have taken such a shine to existentialist ideas and are only too happy to make Qohelet alive to our own times by reading him through the perspective of the existential worldview which we often presuppose in our own metaphysical paradigms. Admittedly, reading the book from the perspective of solar mythology may be controversial and unpopular not because any hermeneutical objections against it can be offered but because it renders the text once again alien and far removed from our own time and faith. While popular existentialist readings have made the book very relevant to many 20th century readers it may be just another example of the complex, subtle and instinctive process called the "domestication" of the Bible, the taming of alien models of reality in our desperate attempt to "hear" something audible from what many believe to be divine revelation (cf. Carrol 1991/1997).

sun” and the need for the retention of the literal words of that phrase is appreciated, the metaphor or image that some things “under the sun” are “vapours” becomes quite an interesting and meaningful claim if viewed in the contexts of anti solar polemics. This view would also explain why Qohelet chose this particular image to convey the abstract meaning of absurdity.

To explain briefly, the following remarks may be helpful in putting this seemingly strange claim of mine into perspective. According to my hypothesis the “sun imagery”, including the phrase “under the sun”, may have a deconstructive, polemical and ironical function. This is because Qohelet is obsessed with showing how, “under the sun”, virtually everything that was supposed to be present there was in fact missing. Thus he couldn’t find justice, knowledge of the future, royal satisfaction and wisdom, etc. “under the sun”. *Now from the point of view of a confirmed solarist this would be the ultimate absurdity because the sun represents or symbolises the sun god who is the god of justice, life, divination etc. What is “absurd” is that there exists, “under the sun”, something that is not supposed to be there i.e. injustice, ignorance etc.*

Now along comes Qohelet and claims that all these things which are not supposed to exist “under the sun” are “vapour” under the sun. Now what can this mean, if we assume that it is a live metaphor and if its ultimate abstract conception is a scenario of absurdity? Quite simply it comes down to this: Under the “mythical” sun it is considered to be absurd that there should be things such as injustice or ignorance, for these were the very things the sun god was supposed to secure and actualise in his sphere of influence. If the antithesis of these things are the actual reality permeating life “under the sun” it would be an absurdity from the perspective of a stubbornly held theology for it would imply that the sun (god) is impotent and cannot even do what he was worshipped for. *Accordingly, under the physical or literal sun the continued existence of a “vapour” is an absurd scenario.* “Vapours” should evaporate under the sun’s heat (power). It seems unthinkable that “under the sun” there could exist perpetual and resistant “vapours that do not disappear when the sun’s shines on them. If the physical sun cannot cause a “vapour” to evaporate it means the sun must be very weak. It is unable to do what it is supposed to be able to by its very nature.

Could it be that this speculative reconstruction of a possible scenario in which the concept of vapour can be literally retained is anywhere near what Qohelet might have had in mind when he chose this concept for his polemical purposes. Is it possible that the metaphor of “vapour” under the sun may thus possibly be a live metaphor? If so, it would convey the biting criticism that, just as absurd as it would be to literally find a “vapour” existing “under the sun”, so it is just as absurd to find injustice and ignorance under the mythical sun (god). The existence of a “vapour” under the sun amounts to an anomaly in nature and would expose a weakness in the sun. Similarly, injustice, ignorance, etc. under the sun (god) would be, from the perspective of solar mythology an anomaly, an absurdity, something that is not supposed to exist and its existence would imply that the sun (god) is impotent and incompetent to do exactly that which his attributes demands of him.

In short, this interpretation would explain perfectly why Qohelet would choose the word “vapour” as a metaphor and a summary for what goes on “under the sun”. It would also imply that this concept of “vapour” should be translated literally, like the phrase “under the sun”, in order not to miss the polemical force of the live metaphor which may be

inextricably bound up and dependant on the S.I. for its effectiveness and meaning.

7.2.9 “הבל” as pejorative term for idols and idolatry - is this polemical sense of the concept in some indirect sense included in Qohelet’s use of הבל?

In 2 Kgs. 17:15 one finds this interesting passage in which the word הבל occurs:

And they hated His rules and his covenant which he had made with their fathers and His witness that He had witnessed in them. And they went after the הבל, and they הבל after the nations which surrounded them of which Yahweh commanded them not to do so.²⁶⁶

It might be well worth remembering that in several other contexts in the Old Testament it is the gods of the nations that are considered to be examples of הבל (cf. Jer. 10).²⁶⁷ Now if this well known use of the word הבל as a degrading name for impotent lifeless gods are kept in mind it might be that, from the perspective of this hypothesis at least, that also in Qohelet the word הבל might not have altogether lost this *connotation* (not denotation).²⁶⁸ If I am correct that the “sun imagery” in the book, in its combination with themes of justice, ignorance, royalty, etc. and God as Creator, Judge, etc., does indeed ambiguously and polemically allude to the sun god, is there not good reason to believe that some polemical-theological associative meaning have been retained in Qohelet’s use of the word הבל?

If Qohelet’s use of the word הבל refers to the literal “vapour”, as it also does in the other Old Testament polemical contexts denoting the nothingness and impotence of false gods, then Qohelet’s claims that all is “vapour” and his repeated references to הבלים / vapours - under the sun - might very well be another example of the Old Testament authors’ degrading way of referring to the unreal pagan deities. In Qohelet, of course, the supposed reference would be seen as more subtle, ambiguous and indirect. In short, I am thus asking, rather than claiming, whether it is possible that one of the many connotations of the word הבל, i.e. that of denoting false deities, is actually subtly present in Qohelet’s use of the term? Did Qohelet I intend to imply that the sun god is another deity to be dismissed as הבל? Is this yet another example of a hitherto overlooked part of the meaning of the polemical discourse in Qohelet?

In the end, whether or not this is the case does not seriously affect the essence of my hypothesis which suggests the possible presence of allusions to solar mythology in Qohelet’s sun imagery. Even if הבל is a dead metaphor and means nothing more than absurdity (Fox) or futility (Crenshaw) it is still amenable to my theory. Thus, Qohelet would generally be saying that solarism is a futile or absurd practise.

²⁶⁶ The translation is my own.

²⁶⁷ Fox (1999:29) notes that “vapour” is often a synonym of words for lies and deceits, such as *kazab*, *sefer*, *’awen*, and *ma’al*. Examples are Zech. 10:2; Ps. 62:10; Prov. 31:30; Job 21:34; etc. The connotations of inefficacy and deceit make “vapour” a fitting epithet for false gods. In Jer. 16:19b, the foreigners say, “Truly, our fathers inherited deceit (*sefer*) - “vapour” in which there is no efficacy; sim. Deut. 32:21; 2 Kgs. 17:15; Jer. 2:5; 8:19; 14:22; Jon 2:9; Zech. 10:2.

²⁶⁸ Note, for example, that in 2 Kgs. 17:15 the deities of the other nations that Israel apostatised to are called “vapour”(s). Remember also, if you will, the discussion of sun worship and solar Yahwism in the previous chapter where 2 Kgs. 17 was discussed as an example of witness to sun worship during the reign of Ahaz.

7.2.10 “Shepherding the wind” and the incompetent “Shepherd”

Along with **הבל**, Qohelet calls a number of phenomena and situations **רעות רוח**.²⁶⁹ The meaning of both these phrases appears to be synonymous in Qohelet (cf. Fox 1999:42 - 43). Formally, the root of **רעות**²⁷⁰ derives from the consonantal root **רעה** (**רעי**)²⁷¹, but there are several homophonic roots based on **רע** and **רעה**. These include pursue,²⁷² shepherd,²⁷³ desire,²⁷⁴ thought,²⁷⁵ friendship, breaking²⁷⁶ and evil.²⁷⁷ While scholars and translations differ as to which of these variants best fit the context one thing seems certain. If Qohelet is up to his usual tricks of exploiting ambiguity and allusions as this study proposes, a host of interesting unconsidered possibilities become apparent.

First of all, if one chooses the option of translating the phrase as “a shepherding of the wind (cf. Crenshaw 1988:passim), then an immediate allusion to solar mythology becomes visible. Amongst other titles, the sun god and the king were often called “shepherds”. If Qohelet says that a “vapour” under the sun is akin to “shepherding the wind” - in the sense of both phrases denoting the abstract concept of absurdity - he may be employing yet another type of polysemantic wordplay. After all, *who* is the subject of the shepherding? Surely this would vary between contexts. However, if this phrase was intended as ambiguous and as alluding to solar mythology, there is no reason why the sun (god) cannot be considered as being the implicit subject. Qohelet may actually have given a clue that this is actually the case.

In his particular depiction of the absurdity in nature in 1:5-6 we find first the sun (god), absurdly traversing his solar circuit with some effort in 1:5. Just after that, in 1:6 we read of the wind that is seemingly blowing out of control:

הולך אל דרום וסובב אל צפון סובב סבב הולך הרוח ועל סביבותיו שב הרוח

Going to the south and rounding to the north round and round goes the wind and on its rounds the wind returns.

²⁶⁹ Cf. 1:14; 2:11,17,26; 4:4,6; 6:9 (and “רעיון רוח” [1:17; 4:16])

²⁷⁰ And that of “רעיון”.

²⁷¹ I follow the convention of using “ה” for “final weak” roots in Hebrew, “י” for Aramaic.

²⁷² This is the usual understanding supported by the parallel between “shepherding the wind” in Qohelet and the expression, “shepherding the east wind” in Hos. 12:2, as well as the equivalence of “seek” in Prov. 15:14.

²⁷³ Cf. previous footnote.

²⁷⁴ This is the meaning of **רעות** in Aramaic. LXX’s *proapsesis pneumatos*, “choosing (or purpose) of wind”, used consistently for this phrase in Qohelet, reflects this understanding, and many modern scholars except this as well; e.g. Delitzsch, McNeile, Barton, et al., and translate “desire of wind” or the like.

²⁷⁵ This is the meaning of **רעיון** in Aramaic and RH. It is generally considered a variant meaning of (a) **רעה**, “desire”.

²⁷⁶ The Peshitta and also the Targum parse **רעות** from **רעה**, an Aramaic root used in Hebrew too. “Breaking of spirit” does suit Qohelet thematically, but the root **רעה** in this sense does not have **ר”י** as a byform.

²⁷⁷ Some of these words might be expansions of a single biconsonantal root but now have distinct meanings. It is often impossible to assign a word to one of the categories to the exclusion of others (cf. Fox 1999:43).

According to Crenshaw (1988:64), the withholding of the subject in 1:6 is the most striking feature of the verse. The subject was the opening word in 1:4 and the second word in 1:5, but in 1:6 the subject is not mentioned until five participles have made their appearance. *The immediate affect is to create the illusion that the movement of the sun is still being described* (italics mine). Was this literary technique utilised to make one think that the actions of the sun and wind are somehow implicitly connected? Why is the sun mentioned before the wind and virtually almost part of its movement? Does the combination of verses 5 and 6 have any bearing on the phrase, “shepherding the wind”?²⁷⁸

To be sure, there is a distinct contrast between verses 5 and 6 as well as definite similarities:

Direction of circuit	Activity
Sun השמש (1:5) - East to west (day) and then west to east (night), and then again east to west (day), etc.	coming and going; coming and going; up and down.
Wind הרוח (1:6) - South to north and then north to south and then south to north.	going and coming; going and coming; left and right ²⁷⁹

From the perspective of this imagery, the sun trying to shepherd the wind would be a perfect illustration of absurdity: their directions and activities are virtually each other's opposite. Moreover, in solar mythology, the sun was often called a “shepherd” and in some way related to other meteorological processes - although this varied in different myths. Yet if one takes the vantage point of solar mythology, where the sun was depicted as the creator and controller of the cosmic order, anyone pointing out the differences between the sun and the wind might be taken to imply the sun cannot control the wind and that it would be absurd to think that the sun could “shepherd” it. The fact that Qohelet mentions the north and south winds whilst, in Palestine, it is mostly the west (from the sea) and east (from the desert) winds that are common has indeed puzzles some interpreters (cf. Barton 1908:71).

Once again, it should be stressed that I am *asking* (not claiming) whether it is possible that the language might be ambiguous in the way suggested here. By “ambiguous” I mean to include the usual meanings one reads on the surface of the text and the possible allusions to solar mythological motifs and to polemical assertions. Thus, I concur that, on the one hand, shepherding the wind is a phrase illustrating the abstract concept of absurdity by way of metaphor. However, in addition I am asking whether the background to that metaphor and the allusions within it was not possibly derived from some motif in solar mythology. I am here concerned with the language on a deeper level, i.e. as is the case with ambiguity, implicit allusions and taken for granted background. In short, could it be that when Qohelet is saying that what happens “under

²⁷⁸ Not that the Hebrew רעות רוח must and can only mean this. But if the language here is intentionally ambiguous as Fox (1999:44-45) suggests then there is no reason to dismiss this connotative variant or to abstain from speculations regarding its semantic and aesthetic functions in Qohelet's rhetoric.

²⁷⁹ If the east (קדמות) is in front (בקדם)

the sun" is a shepherding of the wind, this may be another deconstructive polemical allusion to solar mythology. An allusion where the implied subject engaged in the absurd activity of trying to shepherd the wind is the sun itself. As 1:5 shows, absurdity is as much as can be expected from the sun. In addition, shepherding the wind which blows contrary to the solar circuit (1:6) is precisely the absurd activity that Qohelet may be implying the solar deity is engaged in. Of course, if ambiguity is allowed to go all the way, the alternative possible rendering of רעות רוח as "evilness of spirit" or a "vexation of the spirit",²⁸⁰ becomes a another tempting option possibly part of the polysemantic punning Qohelet might be engaged in.

7.2.11 Appointed times "תחת השמש"

As I have noted before, the sun god was also considered the appointer of times because of his generative role in upholding the cosmic order (cf. Rogers 1908:84-85; Ringren 1979:12-30; van der Toorn 1997:1302-1306). On the one hand, he appointed the times in the sense of determining the fate of individuals and societies. On the other hand, he was a patron deity of divination where he revealed the future "times" to the diviners. In Qohelet, one notices on the one hand the idea of appointed times in 3:1-9, for example). Secondly one finds the references to a hidden future (see earlier). In both cases, as I shall demonstrate, there appears to be an implicit denial of the popular beliefs cherished by solar mythology. There may also be traces of polemical syncretism where the relation of the solar deity to time (and its functions in ordering it) is ascribed by Qohelet to God, albeit in a modified and even inverted manner.

As far as the function of the sun god as appointer of times is concerned, one notices the following. Firstly, Qohelet affirms the concept of appointed times as a reality, even "under the sun". But here it is linked to God and not to the sun (contra Gen 1). In the main passage concerned with times, i.e. 3:1-15, Qohelet introduces the topic with a variant of the phrase "under the sun", i.e. "under the heavens". What is interesting and possibly significant is the fact that this variant occurs only here, at least according to most textual witnesses other than the MT which also has it in 1:13 and 2:3. Was this done by Qohelet almost as if to implicitly sever the connection between the sun and appointed times? The phrase "under the heavens" in this context may be intentionally ambiguous since for Qohelet, both the sun and the God (cf. 5:1) are indicated as inhabiting that realm: Thus in 3:1-8 we read:

לכל זמן ועת לכל חפץ תחת השמים עת ללדת ועת למות עת לטעת ועת לעקור נטוע עת להרוג
 ועת לרפוא עת לפרוץ ועת לבנות עת לבכות ועת לשחוק עת ספוד ועת רקוד עת להשליך אבנים
 ועת כנוס אבנים עת לחבוק ועת לרחק מחבק עת לבקש ועת לאבד עת לשמר ועת להשליך עת
 לקרוע ועת לתפור עת לחשות ועת לדבר עת לאהב ועת לשנא עת מלחמה ועת שלום

²⁸⁰ The Vulgate sometimes render רעות רוח as "*afflictio spiritus*", associating the word with רע, "break", or, perhaps, with רעה, "bad". (etymologically from רע). Jerome attributes this interpretation to a Jewish man who helped him read Qohelet. He says that the sense of 1:14 is: "I considered all that is done in the world and I observed nothing but vanity and evils, i.e. miseries of the spirit by which the soul is afflicted by various thoughts". In this way Jerome combines the notions of affliction and thought, which may be an intended ambiguity in the use of רעות רוח. A "bad spirit" is an unhappy one. In 1 Sam. 16:15,16 etc., a "bad divine spirit" afflicts Saul and provokes disturbances we would label paranoia and depression. Apart from the actual etymology, רעות רוח as a play on words can suggest both "breaking of spirit" and "badness of spirit" and both these connotations are relevant to Qohelet (cf. Fox 1999:44).

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under the heavens, a time to be born, a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to uproot what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to tear down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to of mourning, and a time of dancing; a time to cast stones, and a time to gather stones; a time to embrace, and a time to shun embrace; a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; a time to rend , and a time to sow; a time to keep silent, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.

Notice how all these activities connected with the times are not only familiar but very specific. Why Qohelet should have chosen these particular scenarios is uncertain. However, from the perspective of solar theology, Qohelet's choice of scenarios is indeed significant. To be sure each of the activities can be associated with some theological or ritual practice in solar mythology. However, once again the language is ambiguous with the result that the modern reader unfamiliar with the details of solarism may never recognise the allusions to it because the text seems to make perfect sense from an uninformed perspective.

However, recall if you will what was said in chapter 5 of this study with regard to the activities of solar deities. The solar deity was associated with the same activities that appear in Qohelet's list in 3:1-9.

SOLAR MYTHOLOGY (cf. Chapter 5)

QOHELET (cf. 3:2-8)

- | | |
|--|----------------------|
| • the thresholds moments of life and death..... | born / die; |
| • agricultural activities..... | plant / uproot; |
| • judgement and health..... | kill / heal; |
| • appointing times and determining of the orientations of cultic structures..... | tear / build; |
| • overseeing funerals and feasts..... | weeping / dancing; |
| • seasonal mythical rites (e.g. Tammuz)..... | mourning / dancing; |
| • divination and sexual activity..... | casting / gathering; |
| • searching and losing in epic adventures (e.g. Gilgamesh)..... | seek / lose; |
| • oaths swearing and witnessing..... | silence / speak; |
| • guidance at times of war and peace, etc..... | war / peace. |

Is it possible that these images and references may somehow allude to motifs stemming from ANE solar mythology? On the one hand, the activities seem quite specific and it is not inconceivable how they could have some bearing on particular scenarios associated with solarism. On the other hand, the specific references themselves are, at the same time, also far too general and vague to know for sure what Qohelet intended in terms of the associative detail. In other words, being dogmatic on this issue and pressing the point would be unwise.

Moreover, it may also be significant that the word for time (עת) occurs exactly the same number of times the word "vapour" occurs i.e. 37 times in the book. It always refers to appointed times.²⁸¹ These appointments are made by God. They are also unknowable

²⁸¹ The question of Qohelet's use of the concept of time cannot be resolved on the lexical level since both temporal and substantive appear in the book though not in the catalogue of times in 3:1 - 8. When I speak of appointed times I do not mean this in the sense of determinism in the sense that humans have no free will as to how they act. What however is determined and appointed and where free will becomes intertwined with double causality (human and divine causes) is the time these events become

to humans. Apart from the number of times it occurs in 3:1-8, the word עת also occurs, for example, in the following verses:

את הכל עשה יפה בעתו

He made everything beautiful in its time... (3:11)

אמרתי אני בלבי את הצדיק ואת הרשע ישפטה אלהים כי עת לכל חפץ ועל כל המעשה שם

The just and the wicked God will judge, and a time for every matter and what is done there (3:17)

אל תרשע הרבה ואל תהי סכל למה תמות בלא עתך

Do not be overly evil and do not be a fool. Why should you die before your time (7:17)

שומר מצוה לא ידע דבר רע ועת ומשפט ידע לב חכם

The keeper of the command does not know a word of evil and time and justices the heart of the wise knows.. (8:5)

כי לכל חפץ יש עת ומשפט כי רעת האדם רבה עליו

Because for every thing there is a time and judgement for evil of humans is much over them. (8:6)

..את כל זה ראיתי ונתון את לבי לכל מעשה אשר נעשה תחת השמש עת אשר שלט האדם באדם לרע לו

All this I saw and gave my heart to all the deeds that were done 'UNDER THE SUN' in a time that a man rules another man to his harm (8:9)

שבתי וראה תחת השמש כי לא לקלים המרוץ ולא לגברים המלחמה וגם לא לחכמים לחם וגם לא לגבנים עשר וגם לא לידעים חן עת ופגע יקרה את כלם

I returned and saw 'UNDER THE SUN' that the race is not to the light and not to the strong, the war, and not for the wise bread and also not for the intelligent wealth and also not for the knowledgeable favour, time and chance determine them all (9:11)

כי גם לא ידע האדם את עתו כדגים שנאחזים במצודה רעה וכצפרים האחוזות בפה כהם יוקשים בני האדם לעת רעה

Since also a human does not know its time as fish that are gathered in an evil snare and as birds that are caught in a trap so they are ensnared, the sons of man for in a time of evil (9:12)

When one reads these explicit references to time in their immediate context and also looks at other implicit references (to the past, the future, etc.) there appear to be three interesting features which constantly recurs throughout:

necessitated. Thus, though one can choose to plant or not or build or not, one cannot, from a Biblical perspective, choose when God should cause the circumstances to necessitate the choice for these actions.

- A certain amount of divine determinism;
- A certain element of unpredictability;
- A certain trace of divine judgement.²⁸²

Qohelet seems to be saying that God determines the appointed times and humans can do little to alter, manipulate, understand and predict these appointments with destiny. Moreover, not only from the perspective of Old Testament wisdom, but also from the view of solar mythology (where the sun god was believed to generate and order time and to assist diviners by revealing the future), Qohelet's statements on the subject of appointed times seem quite polemical. He agrees that there are phenomena like appointed times but, contrary to much of mantic wisdom, he denies that these can be known or determined by mere mortals.

I would like to ask whether the polemical motive behind Qohelet's concern with times might indeed have been, as Crenshaw (1984:84-85) suggested, the attempted manipulation and prediction of appointed times in mantic wisdom and divination practices.²⁸³ In addition, I shall go a step further than Crenshaw and enquire about the mythical / theological context within which such ANE divination was practised. Could it be significant that the deity invoked in such rites and associated with such a theology was none other than the sun god? In sum then, it would appear that Qohelet's claim that God is the appointer of times and that no one can know the future may thus have a different polemical intent than what was hitherto considered to be the case.

7.2.12 Evil "רע"... "תחת השמש"

While I am in complete agreement that the word "רע" should be translated as evil, calamity, misfortune, etc., my theory regarding possible allusions to solar mythology makes me wonder whether this word may not be involved in a more sinister type of wordplay than scholars have hitherto recognised. Could it be that, for Qohelet and his initial audience, the word "רע" might actually allude implicitly to the Egyptian solar deity. Consider the following points in favour of such a suggestion:

- Qohelet repeatedly uses the phrase "under the sun" which just happens to correspond, in terms of its spatial reference, to the exact same phase of the Egyptian solar circuit. According to Egyptian solar mythology, when the earth is "under the sun", it is under the sun god as רע (cf. chapter 5);
- Qohelet's juxtapositioning of the phrase "under the sun" with themes popular in the solar mythology particularly associated with רע (i.e. justice, time; royalty, life and death, wisdom, social order, cosmic order, etc). Moreover, in Qohelet the word "רע" is used in a way virtually synonymous with "הבל";
- Qohelet's theology where God is referred to in neutral terms as being "the God".

²⁸² By "judgement" I do not necessarily mean "condemnation" but rather, as Crenshaw (1984) see in based on the reading of Qoh. 9:7; 11:9 where divine judgement is not an eschatological court session but simply the particular inscrutable, sovereignly determined, divinely engineered unfolding of reality.

²⁸³ Cf. also the earlier discussion on knowledge and precognition in this chapter.

This parallels references to the solar deity in heliopolitan wisdom texts. In addition, like רע, Qohelet's God is particularly associated with the acts of judgement, creation, appointing times, giving life, controlling fate, etc.

In the book of Qohelet, the word "רע", in the context where it occurs, has connotations which appears to be rather negative, polemical, hostile and sarcastic. If my theory is correct, Qohelet exploits the polysemy of this word which, in Hebrew consonantal script, can be used to refer to evil, friends, enemies, and of course, the Egyptian sun god. In Qohelet the word is usually used as part of the conclusion with regard to the evaluation of what life under the sun amounts to. Thus, Qohelet repeatedly tell us how:

- he constantly refers to life "under the sun", as "רע" (or evil);
- he tells the reader how he finds רע... "under the sun";
- his conclusion about life "under the sun" is that it is "רע".

In doing so, he establishes a link both with his idea of הבל and his sun imagery. To be sure, on the one hand the word רע is virtually synonymous with the concept of הבל. On the other hand, the word רע exactly 30 times, which is reminiscent of the 30 times the phrase תחת השמש occurs. It may also allude to the significance of the number 30 in Egyptian heliopolitan wisdom traditions where it plays a determinative role in the structuring of legal councils and wisdom texts. If Qohelet did indeed use the word רע *ambiguously*, in the sense suggested here, the pun on words has the desirable polemical effect of deconstructing solar mythology. This is apparent when one observes how Qohelet finds, "under the sun", a perversion of what the solar deity (רע) was believed to be responsible for (justice, knowledge, royal wisdom, etc.). Not only that, he even has the nerve to sum up his arguments by (ironically?) claiming that, under the sun, he found "רע" (evil? Re?).

An selection from the concordance of the 30 texts where the word רע occurs clearly demonstrate this polemical pun on words:

ונתתי את לבי לדרוש ולתור בחכמה כל אשר נעשה תחת השמים הוא ענין רע נתן אלהים לבני האדם לענות בו

I gave my heart to seek and to understand in wisdom all that is done "under the sun": it is an evil (ra) affliction that God has given the sons of man to be afflicted with it. (1:14)

...ושנאתי את חיים כי רע עלי המעשה שנעשה תחת השמש

I hated the life for (it was) evil on me the deeds that were done "under the sun"... (2:17)

... גם זה הבל ורעה רבה

This is also a "vapour" and very evil

וטוב משניהם אשר עדן לא היה אשר לא ראה את המעשה הרע אשר נעשה תחת השמש

... and more fortunate is the one who has not been born and who haven't seen all the evil that is

done "under the sun" (4:3).

ולמי אני עמל ומחסר את נפשי מטובה גם זה הבל וענין רע הוא

For whom do I work and deprive myself of good things? This is also "vapour" and an evil thing. (4:8)

...וקרוב לשמע מתת כסילים זבח כי אינם יודעים לעשות רע

Approach to listen rather than giving the sacrifice of fools for they know nothing else but to do evil (4:17)

יש רעה חולה ראיתי תחת השמש עשר שמור לבעליו לרעתו ואבד העשר ההוא ענין רע...כאשר ... יצא מבטן אמו וערום ישוב ללכת כשבא ומאומה לא ישא בעמלו שילך בידו וזה רעה חולה

There is evil, a sickness that I saw "under the sun", wealth protected by its lord to his evil. That wealth perished in an evil business...As he went forth from the womb of his mother naked he returns to go as he came and nothing can he carry in his toil that go in his hand and this is an evil sickness. (5:11)

יש רעה אשר ראיתי תחת השמש ורבה היא על האדם...

There is evil that I have seen "under the sun"...

את הכל ראיתי בימי הבלי יש צדיק אבד בצדקו ויש רשע מאריך ברעתו

I have seen everything in my vain days: a just person who perishes despite his justice, and an evil person who lives long despite his evil... (7:15)

אני פי מלך שמור ועל דברת שבועת אלהים אל תבהל מפניו תלך אל תעמד בדבר רע...

Protect the mouth of the king and on the oath of God and do not go quickly from his presence. Do not stand in a word of evil... (8:3)

שומר מצוה לא ידע דבר רע ועת ומשפט ידע לב חכם

The keeper of the command does not know a word of evil and time and justices the heart of the wise knows.. (8:4)

כי לכל חפץ יש עת ומשפט כי רעת האדם רבה עליו

Because for every thing there is a time and judgement for evil of humans is much over them.. (8:7)

...את כל זה ראיתי ונתון את לבי לכל מעשה אשר נעשה תחת השמש עת אשר שלט האדם באדם לרע לו

All this I saw and gave my heart to all the deeds that were done "under the sun" in a time that a man rules another man to his harm (8:9).

אשר אין נעשה פתגם מעשה הרעה מהרה על כן מלא לב בני האדם בהם לעשות רע

Because the evil deed is not quickly punished the hearts of human are filled in them do do evil.

זה רע בכל אשר נעשה תחת השמש כי מקרה אחד לכל...

This is the evil in all that is done 'UNDER THE SUN': there is the same fate for all...

כי גם לא ידע האדם את עתו כדגים שנאחזים במצודה רעה וכצפרים האחזות בפת כהם יוקשים
בני האדם לעת רעה

Since also a human does not know its time as fish that are gathered in an evil snare and as birds that are caught in a trap so they are ensnared, the sons of man for in a time of evil.

יש רע ראיתי תחת השמש כשגגה שיצא לפני השליט נתן הסכל במרומים רבים עשעירים בשפל
ישבו ראיתי עבדים על סוסים ושרים הלכים כעבדים על הארץ

There is an evil that I have seen "under the sun", a mistake that comes from the ruler: He puts fools in many high places and the rich dwell in low places. I saw slaves on horses and princes walk like servants on the ground (10:5-7)

והסר כעס מלבך והעבר רעה מבשרך כי הילדות והשחרות הבל

And keep pain from your heart and avoid evil of your flesh because youthfulness and dawn is a "vapour".

וזכר את בוראיך ימי בחורתיך עד אשר לא יבאו בימי הרעה והגיעו שנים אשר תאמר איולי בהם
חפץ עד אשר לא תחשך השמש והאור והירח והעבים ושבו העבים אחר הגשם...

And remember your creator in the days of your youth before the days of unpleasantness arrive and the years of which you will say I take no pleasure in them. Before the sun and the light grows dark and the moon and the stars and the clouds return after the rain...

These are but some of the examples of the occurrence of the word "רע" in Qohelet. Note that I am not saying that he actually ever uses this word explicitly as a proper name. However, because of the homophonic resemblance to the name of the Egyptian solar deity (Ra),²⁸⁴ and given the possibility of numerous other subtle allusions to solar mythology via ambiguous language, there is good reason to include the word רע, "evil" in these allusions as well.

While these ideas may sound far-fetched to some, this may be due to its novelty and underestimating the literary complexity and subtlety of Qohelet. It may also be a result of forgetting the cumulative evidence for allusions to solar mythology in the book, since, on its own, this argument of רע (evil) alluding to רע (sun god), does indeed seem quite far-fetched. In the end I will not be dogmatical about the issue and in this instance I may well have gone too far. However, the validity of my hypothesis is not dependant on this

²⁸⁴ In the 16 instances of the occurrence of the form "רע" the relation is homonymic since the consonants of the two words is identical. In the 14 cases where the word רע is written with a final ה the relation to the proper name is homophonic since, while the spelling differs (given the final ה is added) the word still sounds exactly like the proper name Ra (the he is a *matres lectiones* and therefore silent)

isolated case about possible punning in Qohelet's use of the word רע for its validity. Even if it only means "evil" or something else, such a designation is still significant in as much it is descriptive of the sub solar realm.

7.2.13 To "see" everything "תחת השמש"

The sun god, as he traversed the solar circuit, was praised for being the all-seeing and the all-knowing one. He could see everything "under the sun" (cf. van der Toom 1997:1302-1306). Qohelet also repeatedly reminds his audience that he saw *everything* "under the sun". And having seen it all he judged it to be "vapour" and "רע". Thus, by looking everywhere under the sun, Qohelet appears to emulate the solar deity - he sees all and pronounces judgement. In short, solar mythology is seriously inverted - the one who was the judge (i.e. the sun [god]) who saw everything in his domain ("under the sun"), becomes the judged (via implicit allusion). Qohelet looked at the entire realm under the sun and saw it filled with injustice and ignorance. The following texts give witness to yet these claims of yet another set of possible allusions to solar mythology in Qohelet:

ראיתי את כל המעשים שנעשו תחת השמש והנה הכל הבל

I saw all the deeds that were done 'UNDER THE SUN' and the result: all is vapour... (1:14).

...עד אשר אראה אי זה טוב לבני האדם אשר יעשו תחת השמים ...

...until I see what is good for the sons of man to do under the heavens / sun (2:3)

ועד ראיתי תחת השמש מקום משפת שמה הרשע ומקום צדק שמה הרשע

I observed continually 'UNDER THE SUN': in the place of judgement, wrongdoing! and in the place for justice, wrongdoing! (3:16)

ושבתי אני וראיתי את כל העשקים אשר נעשו תחת השמש והנה דמעת העשקים ואין להם מנחם ומיד עשקיהם כח ואין להם מנחם

Again I saw all the oppressions that were done 'UNDER THE SUN' and, oh, the tears of the oppressed, but there was no one to give them comfort. On the side of their oppressors there was power, but there was no one to give them comfort! (4:1)

וטוב משניהם אשר עדין לא היה אשר לא ראה את המעשה הרע אשר נעשה תחת השמש

Better than both: the one who has never lived, who has never seen the evil work that is done 'UNDER THE SUN'. (4:3)

ושבתי ואראה הבל תחת השמש

Again I saw a vapour 'UNDER THE SUN'...

...ראיתי את כל חיים המהלכם תחת השמש עם הילד השני אשר יעמד תחתיו

...I saw all the living who move about 'UNDER THE SUN', on the side of the second youth who will succeed him... (4:15)

הנה אשר ראיתי אני טוב אשר יפה לאכול ולשתות ולראות טובה בכל עמלו שיעמל
תחת השמש משפר ימי חיו אשר נתן לו האלהים

This is what I have seen as good, as beautiful: to eat and to drink and to prosper for all the toil that one must toil 'UNDER THE SUN' in the limited life that God gives... (5:17)

את כל זה ראיתי ונתון את לבי לכל מעשה אשר נעשה תחת השמש עת אשר שלט האדם
באדם לרע לו

All this I have seen and I have given my attention to every deed that is done 'UNDER THE SUN' when one person has power over another so as to harm him... (8:9)

וראיתי את כל מעשה האלהים לא כי יוכל האדם למצוא את המעשה אשר נעשה תחת
השמש בשל אשר יעמל האדם לבקש ולא ימצא וגם אם יאמר החכם לדעת לא יוכל למצא

I looked at all the work of God: no one can find out what is done 'UNDER THE SUN'; therefore humans searched hard, but no one can find out; and even if the wise man says he knows, he cannot find out. (8:17)

שבתי וראה תחת השמש כי לא לקלים המרוץ ולא לגברים המלחמה וגם לא לחכמים לחם

Again I saw 'UNDER THE SUN' that the swift do not win the race, nor the strong the battle, nor do the wise have bread... (9:11)

גם זה ראיתי חכמה תחת השמש וחדולה היא אלי...

This I also observed 'UNDER THE SUN': (an example of) wisdom which seemed great to me... (9:17)

יש רע ראיתי תחת השמש כשגגה שיצא לפני השליט...

There is an evil that I have seen 'UNDER THE SUN', the kind of error made by one who wields power... (10:5).

It would thus seem that also the repetition of the word "see" is hardly something insignificant (cf. also Michel 1989:34).²⁸⁵ For, from the perspective of solar mythology, this activity, like the repeatedly used phrase "under the sun", seems to be employed by the author in a subtle manner which seem to imply sarcasm, hubris and defiance to sacred tenets of solar theology (i.e. the all seeing and justice ensuring sun god). Once

²⁸⁵ Several terms have been subjected to careful analysis by Michel [1989:24-28; 35-38]]. The verb ראה "see" is one of these and according to Michel there are several passages (i.e. 2:13, 24, for example) where it does not simply refer merely to the experience of seeing but rather to critical observation (*prufend betrachten*). The point is not that Qohelet is registering an empirical datum (an object of vision) as he is doing elsewhere when he "sees". It is a critical evaluation of what he has already seen (cf. 2:12 - 15). See also Murphy (1992:xxx). As mentioned earlier, the verb ראה might be (another) homophonic allusion (along with the word רע, evil) to the name of the Egyptian solar deity רע.

again, the meaning and function of repetition and of the contents of what Qohelet actually saw "under the sun", and the significance of this from the implied perspective of solar mythology have eluded scholars.

Moreover, Qohelet not only pronounced judgement on what he saw transpiring in the sub solar realm. Related to his acts of observation, and probably also very significant, are his repeated references to inner dialogue. Qohelet constantly points to what he said *in his heart* (cf. 1:16; 2:1,15; 3:18, and *passim*). Why the repeated references to what he said in his heart about the sub solar realm may be significant can once again be ascertained by taking cognisance of the related ideas in solar mythology. In this regard, it is almost as if he was defying the solar deity. The sun god was worshipped and feared as the "one who saw all", *including that which is hidden in the hearts of men* (cf. Walton 2000:551). Of course, the fact that it was a *king* (i.e. a son of the sun) who grumbled in his *heart* about the injustice in the domain under the sun is no small matter either.

7.2.14 Other possible allusions to solar mythology

The following discussion provides examples of speculative readings of some popular notoriously obscure references in the book.²⁸⁶ Assuming the possible presence of allusions to solar mythology, some interesting alternative perspectives on these texts become apparent. The choice of texts that will be discussed is motivated by the presence of apparent parallels to some or other tenet of Ancient Near Eastern solar mythology.

7.2.14.1 "Toiling" "תחת השמש"

Qohelet regularly refers to the action of *toiling*. The word thus translated - עמל - occurs throughout the Old Testament and carries mainly *negative* connotations. It commonly denotes burdensomeness, without necessarily denoting labour (cf. Job 3, 16:2; Ps. 73:16). Outside of Qohelet, עמל is not applied to any type of profession. The noun could mean toil but usually denotes "misery" (cf. Ps. 107:12; Deut. 26:7; Isa. 63:11). It refers to toil in Jon 4:10; Ps. 127:1; Prov. 16:26). The noun עמל also usually means "trouble" or "iniquity" and is frequently collocated with words meaning deceit and futility (cf. Isa. 10:1; Ps. 7:15; 94:20; Hab. 1:13; Job 3:10; etc.).

What is interesting with regard to its occurrence in Qohelet is how the word עמל, "toil, misery" is combined with the "sun imagery". For Qohelet, life is not simply filled with toil / misery – it is filled with toil / misery "under the sun":

מה יתרון לאדם בכל עמלו שיעמל תחת השמש

What profit does one have for all the toil with which one toils "UNDER THE SUN? (1:3)"

...ופניתי אני בכל מעשה שעשו ידי ובעמל שעמלתי לעשות... ואין יתרון תחת השמש

²⁸⁶ The miscellaneous readings are not intended to be exhaustive in the sense that all possible allusions to solar mythological motifs are discussed here. Rather, they are but an introduction to the way the perspective argued for by the hypothesis of this paper may provide new perspectives on the text which, in turn, might lead interpreters to rethink old certainties.

Then I turned to all my handiwork...I had so actively toiled for...there is no profit
'UNDER THE SUN'... (2:12)

שנאתי אני את כל עמלי שאני עמל תחת השמש

I hated the fruit of the toil for which I had toiled 'UNDER THE SUN' because I have to leave it to the one who will come after me... (2:18)

ומי יודע החכם או סכל וישלט בכל עמלי שעמלתי וחכמתי תחת השמש

But who knows whether he will be wise or foolish? Yet he will control all the fruit of the toil for which I toiled 'UNDER THE SUN'... (2:19)

אני ליאש את לבי על כל העמל שעמלי תחת השמש

I turned to heartfelt despair over all the toil over all the toil with which I had toiled 'UNDER THE SUN'. (2:20)

כי מה היה לאדם בכל עמלו וברעיון לבו שהוא עמל תחת השמש

For what does one get for all the toil, and the striving of heart, with which one toils 'UNDER THE SUN'? (2:22)

הנה אשר ראיתי אני טוב אשר יפה לאכול ולשתות ולראות טובה בכל עמלו שיעמל
תחת השמש משפר ימי חיו אשר נתן לו האלהים

This is what I have seen as good, as beautiful: to eat and to drink and to prosper for all the toil that one must toil 'UNDER THE SUN' in the limited life that God gives... (5:17)

את כל זה ראיתי ונתון את לבי לכל מעשה אשר נעשה תחת השמש עת אשר שלט האדם
באדם לרע לו

All this I have seen and I have given my attention to every deed that is done 'UNDER THE SUN' when one person has power over another so as to harm him... (8:9)

אין טוב לאדם תחת השמש כי אם לאכל ולשתות ולשמוח והוא ילוננו בעמלו ימי חייו אשר
נתן לו האלהים תחת השמש

...there is nothing better for a human 'UNDER THE SUN' than to eat and drink and be happy, this can be his portion for his toil during the days of his life that God gives him 'UNDER THE SUN'... (8:15)

וראיתי את כל מעשה האלהים לא כי יוכל האדם למצוא את המעשה אשר נעשה תחת
השמש בשל אשר יעמל האדם לבקש ולא ימצא וגם אם יאמר החכם לדעת לא יוכל למצא

I looked at all the work of God: no one can find out what is done 'UNDER THE SUN'; therefore humans searched hard, but no one can find out; and even if the wise man says he knows, he cannot find out (8:17)

ראה חיים אם אשה אשר אהבת כל ימי חיי הבלך אשר נתן לך תחת השמש כי הוא חלקך בחיים
ובעמלך אשר אתה עמל תחת השמש...

Enjoy life with a wife whom you love all the days of the vain life that you are given 'UNDER THE SUN' for that is your portion in life, and for the toil with which you toil 'UNDER THE SUN'... (9:9)

As was noted in chapter 5 of this study, the sun god also symbolised health, wealth, prosperity, vigour, vitality and general quality of life. But when Qohelet speaks of עמל "under the sun", the scenarios in which he places them are often filled with apparent injustice, oppression, misery, death, unhappiness, and wearisomeness. Life "under the sun" amounts to toil "under the sun". This state of affairs seems to Qohelet to yield the conclusion that life just isn't fair. On the one hand one finds in the book combination of the theme of עמל with the "sun imagery". On the other hand, one also encounters the association of עמל with the themes of injustice, ignorance, death, time, etc. in Qohelet. Could it be that, also with regard to the theme of עמל under the sun, Qohelet was polemically and deconstructively alluding to the more optimistic tenets of ANE solar mythology?

7.2.14.2 Breaking oaths "תחת השמש"

In solar mythology, the sun god was also invoked as the one who watched over the ritual of swearing oaths (cf. chapter 5). Being the deity in whose name the oath was sworn, the sun god (Re / Ra, Shamash, Shemesh, Helios) was believed to ensure its sacredness. He was worshipped as the judge who punished those who dared to break a sworn oath. Qohelet, however, saw that "under the sun" none of this was evident. In 9:2-3 he notes:

...לכל מקרה אחד... הנשבע כאשר שבועה ירא... זה רע בכל אשר נעשה תחת השמש
כי מקרה אחד לכל...

For all the same fate, ...like good, like sinner; the one who swears an oath like the one who fears to swear an oath. This is the evil in all that is done 'UNDER THE SUN': that the same fate exists for all...

It would therefore appear that, while Qohelet himself seems to honour the keeping of an oath to God (cf. 8:2), he has found that "under the sun" it makes little difference in what fate awaits the people who keep oaths and the ones who break them.

7.2.14.3 The "lord of wings"

The sun god was believed to be omniscient as he could obviously see everything under the sun as whilst traversing his solar circuit. And, since he knows all, he could reveal hidden secrets. What is interesting in this regard is that, from the witness of iconographic materials depicting the sun, we know that he was usually depicted as a winged disk that flies like a bird from east to west. While doing so, he can see and hear everything – even what men think in their hearts (cf. van der Toom 1997:752). Could it be that this mythological motif might sarcastically be alluded to in the obscure imagery of Qohelet's text in 10:20? . It reads as follows:

**גם במדעך מלך אל תקלל בחדרי משכבך אל תקלל עשר כי עוף השמים יוליך את הקול ובעל
 הכנפים יגיד דבר**

Also, in your chambers do not curse the king and in the rooms of your dwelling do not curse the rich, because a bird of heaven carries the voice and a lord of the two wings will tell a word.

Many interpreters believe that the references to “the winged one” and the “lord of wings” are no more than an allusion to an ordinary bird. While this may indeed be the case,²⁸⁷ anyone familiar with solar mythology may find it ambiguous and recognise another possible ambiguous allusion to the solar deity - as “the winged lord” who knows and tells secrets.

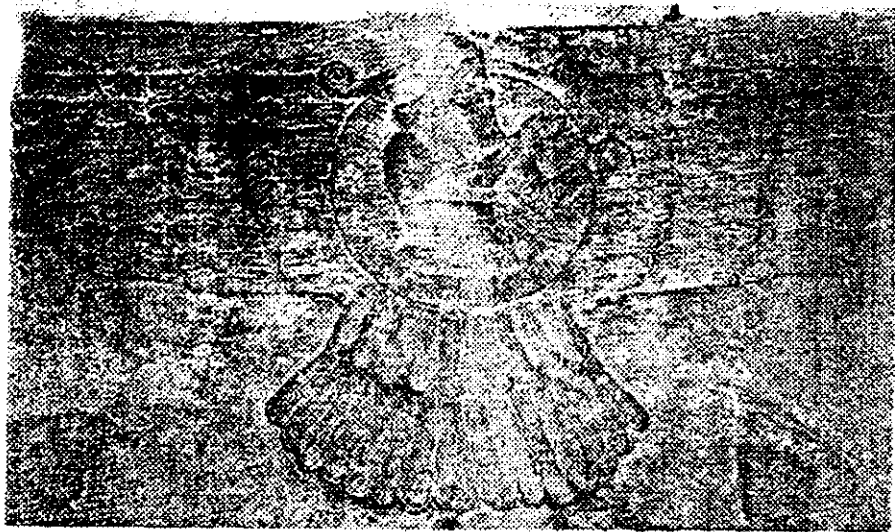


Fig 7. 6 The sun god, alias, “the lord of wings”(cf. Pritchard 1954:220)

7.2.14.4 Snake charming

Interpreters have often found the reference to snake charming in 10:11²⁸⁸ rather puzzling:

²⁸⁷ According to Murphy (1992:106), the idea of a bird conveying secrets was apparently a widespread superstition as can be ascertained from the attestation in the Greek writer Aristophanes (*The Birds*, 601:49 ff) and in Juvenal (*Satires* 9.95f). Some commentators also refer to the saying in English: “a little birdie told me” (cf. Barton 1908:176; Murphy 1992:106). Once again, this does not rule out an allusion to solar mythology for the following reasons: (1) It cannot be proved that Qohelet actually had in mind the meaning suggested in Aristophanes and in the English saying; (2) Even if he had it in mind he might well be, once again, using a familiar image with an obvious meaning in a way that is multivalent and ambiguous; (3) Even the imagery of an ordinary bird may carry an ambiguous allusion to solar mythology since the sun disk was pictured with wings and in solar mythology its role as revealer of secrets was quite familiar; (4) The parallelism with “bird” in 10:20c may be synthetic rather than synonymous and the grammar allows for a rendering not only as “lord of wings” but also as “winged lord” which, in this second part of the parallelism of 10:20c+d, may have progressed beyond the image of the first part.

²⁸⁸ Elsewhere in the Old Testament reference to snake charming is attested in Jer. 8:17, Ps. 58:5 and in Ben Sira in 12:13.

עם ישך הנחש בלוא לחש אין יתרון לבעל הלשון

If the snake bites for the lack of a spell, and there is no profit for the lord of the tongue...

Some commentators suggested the context of wisdom as magic for this reference (cf. Barton 1908:78; Fox 1999:306).²⁸⁹ What these interpreters did not note, but what has already been mentioned in chapter 5 in the discussion of Canaanite solar mythology, was that the feminine solar deity, Shapash, was customarily invoked during snake charming rituals. Moreover, in Greek religion, where the gods were associated with certain animals before they became anthropomorphic, the solar deity Apollo was symbolised as a snake (cf. Harwood 1992:33). While this verse may be interpreted in a variety of ways it could also be read as yet another possible example of Qohelet sarcastically and indirectly alluding to the impotence of the solar deity.

7.2.14.5 The “one shepherd”

The reference to the “shepherd” in 12:11 has also caused a lot of speculation with regard to the identity of the subject:

דברי חכמים כדרבנות וכמשמרות נטועים בעלי אספות נתנו מרעה אחד

“The words of the sages are like goads and like nails planted by the lords of collection, they were provided by one shepherd”.

The “shepherd” referred to in the last part of the verse has been variously interpreted as being God, Solomon or simply a literal shepherd. Whatever the case may be, ANE deities were often called “shepherds” and so was the solar deity (cf. Walton et al. 2000:515). If this word was yet another intentionally ambiguous word by the author then “shepherd”, while having an ordinary reference (God, etc.) may be yet another implicit polemical allusion to the sun god. Both the solar deity and his son (the king) were praised for being the shepherds of the people. Is it possible that what we have here may be another example of polemics plus syncretism? On the one hand Qohelet may be alluding to the sun god or king as shepherd. On the other hand he applies it to his God or to himself as king.²⁹⁰

7.2.14.6 Races, battles, sages and wisemen.

As mentioned in the discussion of Ancient Near Eastern solar mythology earlier, the sun

²⁸⁹ Fox (1989:268) also notes that skills, including magical knowledge, are included in the practice of wisdom. The wise appears in conjunction with other kinds of magicians, see Gen 41:8; Ex 7:11; Isa 44:5; Dan. 2:27; Isa. 3:3 where “one knowledgeable in spells”, stands alongside a חכמים / חכם, one skilled in spells. See also earlier in this chapter in the discussions on “wisdom” for the argument that some of its references may include the mantic arts.

²⁹⁰ Crenshaw (1988:191) notes regarding this reference to shepherd that it might refer to Solomon or to God, since the imagery of a shepherd was used for both royalty and the patron deity in both Israel and Egypt. But Crenshaw does not tell us is that the deity of royalty in Egypt who bore this epithet was the solar deities i.e. Re, Ammon - Re, Atum, etc. It is not the case that Crenshaw should have mentioned this. But from the perspective of this study it would not prove as irrelevant as from perspectives that do not experiment with the frame of reference I have opted for. Also, in Mesopotamia the solar deities who were patrons to royalty, i.e. Shamash, Marduk, Asshur, Tammuz, etc. were also called shepherds. The kings who worshipped those deities were also called the shepherds of the people

gods were also invoked and honoured as overseers and patrons at athletic races. The solar deity was also believed to aid the king and his army during military campaigns and during battle. I also mentioned that the sun was worshipped as the all knowing one who revealed secrets to the sages of mantic wisdom and who ensured the prosperity of those who knew him and lived piously. Now along comes the sage and says the following in 9:11-12:

**שבתי וראה תחת השמש כי לא לקלים המרוץ ולא לגברים המלחמה וגם לא לחכמים לחם
 וגם לא לגבנים עשר וגם לא לידעים חן עת ופגע יקרה את כלם**

I returned and I saw 'UNDER THE SUN': the race is not to the swift, and the battle not to the strong and also not to the wise the food and also not to the insightful riches and also not to the knowers mercy, for time and chance befalls them all.

Note here that, once again, the particular text is introduced with the reference that Qohelet "saw (again)" what happens in the domain "under the sun". And that which he saw, once again, strangely parallels the antitheses of popular beliefs in the religion of solar mythology. As was the case in the discussion of the scenarios in 3:2-8 the references here may be too general and vague to warrant dogmatism in interpretation. Be that as it may, what Qohelet refers to does indeed parallel motifs in solar mythology. Could it be that, in this text, he was actually alluding to that body of religious discourse?

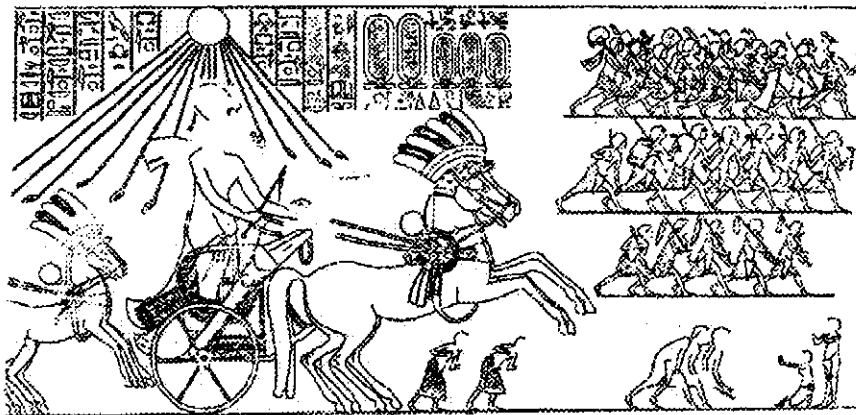


Fig 7.7 In this example of Egyptian solar mythology, the sun god watches over his king during times of war (cf. Keel 1978:283)

7.2.14.7 Mourning and funerary rites

**טוב שם משמן טוב ויום המות מיום הולדו טוב ללכת אל בית אבל מלכת אל בית משתה באשר
 הוא סוף כל האדם והחי יתן אל לבו טוב כעס משחק כי ברע פנים ייטב לב לב חכמים בבית אבל
 ולב בבית שמחה טוב לשמע גגרת חכם מאיש שמע שיר כסילים**

Better is a good name than fine ointment, and the day of death than the day of birth. Better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting. For that is the end of every person and the living should take it to heart. Better vexation than laughter for in a sad face the heart is made well. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning but the heart of the fools is in the house of levity. Better to hear the rebuke of the wise than to hear the praise of fools.

In chapter 7:1-5, Qohelet refers to feasting and funerals. Now, as mentioned earlier, the sun god also played an important role in these events.²⁹¹ Especially in funerary rites, the sun god was invoked and worshipped as the one who is the light of the dead and the source of life. Each night, the sun was believed to conquer the forces of death and darkness and to provide light and life to those in the underworld. However, here we find Qohelet who seems to claim that it is better to be in the house of mourning than at the house of feasting. He also claims that the day of death is better than the day of birth - ironically, since it immediately follows after the claim that a good name is better than good oil.²⁹² In addition, I have already noted how Qohelet's view of death directly contradicts the more optimistic thanatology of solar mythology.

In this regard, but based on speculation, the references to the houses of feasting and mourning in this text may not be to habitations where only human birth was celebrated or human death was mourned. After all, the reason for the feasting and the nature of the feast is not mentioned at all (cf. Crenshaw 1988:134). Maybe both refer to houses where a death occurred but the one mourns because they believe it is the end (Qohelet's choice) while the other feasts because they celebrate the prospect of life after death (the choice of solar mythology). This is just speculation of course but it helps to open one's eyes to alternative possibilities. Possibilities other than the obvious or worn-out interpretations which blind one to see things from different perspectives.

7.2.14.8 The dead lion

כי מי אשר יבחר אל החיים יש בטחון כי לכלב חי הוא טוב מן האריה המת

For whoever is chosen among the living has hope, for a living dog is better than the dead lion (10:20).

In solar mythology, both the king and the sun god was often symbolised in animal imagery as a lion (cf. Spence 1990:201). In 9:4, Qohelet says that a living dog is better than the dead lion. According to Crenshaw (1988:161) the text may be alluding to the highest²⁹³ and lowest of society. If the reference to the "lion" is indeed to the king, then the possibility of an allusion to the sun god, if there is one at all, is not ruled out. After all, the king in the ANE was seen as being a "sun" or "son of the sun"; he was the earthly representative, offspring or incarnation of the solar deity. Most kings in Egypt and many elsewhere had the solar deity as their royal patron and chose to be identified with him and with solar symbolism. In this regard, Barton (1908:158) notes that the lion was a symbol of both royalty and deity. However, he stopped short of identifying

²⁹¹ Cf. chapter 5 of this study. See also the discussion of 12:2 - 7 later in this chapter.

²⁹² Scholars have recognised the contradiction here since the first saying appears to speak more positively about birth than death. However, one can also read the reference to oil as to the oils rubbed in at birth and the good name as something earned after a life of honour and the begetting of many children instead of a good name in the sense of noble birth. Whatever the case, the alliteration in 7:1 **משמן טוב טוב שם** is not only interesting for its aesthetic qualities but also for the overlooked epiphenomenon of pronouncing the phrase without a pause which yields the sound **שמש** in the middle part of it.

²⁹³ If the reference to the "lion" is indeed to the king than the possibility of an allusion to the sun god, if there is one at all, is very possible since the king was also called a "sun" or "son of the sun" and was the earthly representative, incarnation, of the solar deity. Most kings in Egypt and many elsewhere had the solar deity as their royal patron and chose to be identified with him and with solar symbolism (cf. chapter 5 of this study). Barton (1908:158) has noted that the lion was a symbol of both royalty and deity but failed to see any allusions to solar mythology in this.

possible allusions to solar mythology.

Could it be that what we have here may be one of the earliest examples of a “god is dead” theology?²⁹⁴ In this case, of course, the “dead” deity (lion) is the sun god and, like its modern equivalent, this expression can be interpreted either in an atheistic sense - the sun god does not exist. Or it can be interpreted in a theistic or monolatristic sense - the sun god is impotent and not interested in what goes on in his domain. That the reference to the lion might contain an allusion to the solar deity / king can possibly be inferred from fact that the reference to the lion comes with the definite article. It is almost as if Qohelet had a specific “lion” in mind. On the other hand, the reference to the living dog does not have the article.

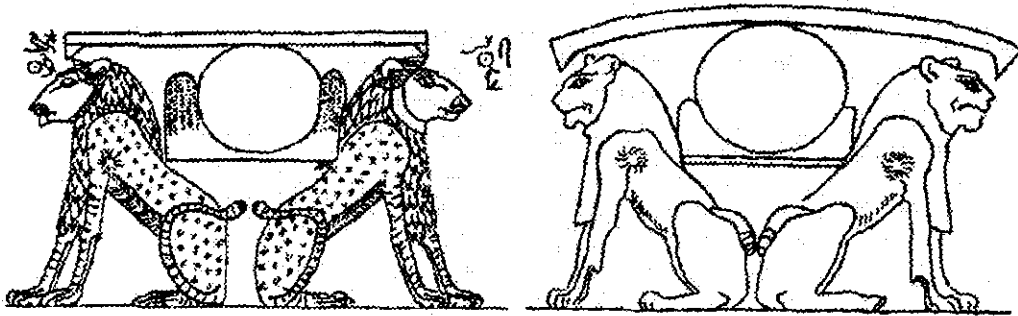


Fig 7.8 In terms of animal symbolism in ANE solar theology, both the sun god and the king were portrayed as lions (cf. Keel 1978:26)

7.2.14.9 Winter, the collapse of the cosmic and social order and the death of the sun god

וזכר את בוראיך ימי בחורתיך עד אשר לא יבאו בימי הרעה והגיעו שנים אשר תאמר אינולי בהם
 הפץ עד אשר לא תחשך השמש והאור והירח והכוכבים ושבו העבים אחר הגשם ביום שיזו
 שמרי בית והתעותו אנשי החיל ובתלו הטחנות כי מעטו וחשכו הראות בארבעות ושגרו דלתים
 בשוק בשפל קול התחנה ויקום לקול הצפור וישחו כל בנות השיר גם מגבה יראו והתחתים בדרך
 וינאץ השקד ויסתבל החגב ותפר האביונה כי הלך האדם אל בית עולמו וסבבו בשוק הספדים
 עד לא וירחק חבל כסף ותרץ גלת הזהב ותשר כד על המבוע ונרץ הגלגל אל הכור וישב עפר
 על הארץ כשהיה והרוח תשוב אל האלהים אשר נתנה

And remember your creator in the days of your youth before the days of unpleasantness arrive

²⁹⁴ The concept of the death of a divinity either in the sense of referring to the deity's non existence or especially in denoting temporary or permanent impotence was actually a very familiar concept in the ANE with their mythology of the dying and rising deities like Osiris, Baal, Tammuz, Adonis (all at times constructed as solar deities) who were considered “dead” in seasons of drought, cold and general social disorder. The euphemism for these “death-of-god” theologies were usually the claim that the God “slept” or that he is imprisoned or bound in the underworld. In Canaanite myth it is the solar deity Shapash who aids Anat in rescuing Baal from the underworld. In Mesopotamian myth it is Shamash who appoints the times and who dies in winter as Bel (later Tammuz) and is rescued by Ishtar and revives in spring as the solar deity Tammuz. If I say Qohelet speaks of the death of (the) (sun-) god it is in the sense of his impotence, rather in the sense of implying solar “atheism” on the part of Qohelet.

and the years of which you will say I take no pleasure in them Before the sun and the light grows dark and the moon and the stars and the clouds return after the rain in the day when the keepers of the house tremble when the powerful men writhe and the grinders are idle their numbers having dwindled and the ladies looking through the windows darken and the doors in the street are closed as the sound of the mill fades low, and the bird begins to sing and all the songstresses are bowed low; and they also fear what is on high and terrors along the way and the almond tree blossoms and the locust becomes laden and the caperberry buds for the man is going to his eternal house and the mourners walk about in the streets Before the silver cord snaps and the golden bowl is smashed and the jug breaks at the spring and the wheel is smashed in the pit and the dust return to the earth as it was before and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

The poem in 12:2-7 has often perplexed interpreters intending to understand its detail. On a literal level, the poem seems to speak of an ominous darkening of natural phenomena (v 2), and what appear to be events leading up to a funeral (v. 3-7). There exist a variety of interpretative traditions cherishing very different interpretations of the obscure language. Of these, one can distinguish between literal interpretations and those that feel that the poem is a metaphor in its entirety. In addition, there are many hybrid interpretations that oscillate between literal and metaphorical readings of the obscure imagery (cf. Fox 1999:333-349).²⁹⁵

As for myself, I shall not claim to have stumbled upon the only possible correct interpretation of the text. However, at least from the perspective of this thesis, it might be interesting to ask if one cannot utilise the frame of reference of solarism to make some sense of the mysterious images. I shall indeed attempt to do so. In addition, apart from my own *solar mythological interpretation*, I also borrow some of the ideas of the following scholars:

- Gregory Thaumaturgus,²⁹⁶ who read the poem as a depiction of the collapse of the cosmic order in a way reminiscent of prophetic eschatology;
- O. Loretz (1964), who reads the poem as descriptive of the onset of winter followed by spring;
- Anat (1970), who interprets the poem as a description and adaption of a dirge ritual.

Please note that I shall not adopt and combine these three readings in their totality but simply make use of some of the ideas represented in them. Thus valid criticism of those readings need not apply here. Furthermore, whatever the merits and problems of the

²⁹⁵ The following are examples of some of the more popular interpretations of the obscure poem: Gilbert (1981) takes the poem as a description of the realities of ageing. He believes that the poem shows not one, but various kinds of people growing old. Ginsburg (1961) sees in the imagery a description of a gathering storm which in turn serves as a figure for the coming of death. Leahy (1952) sees a variety of reactions of people to a fearful thunderstorm. Loretz (1964) believes the poem describes first the coming of winter and in the end the coming of spring. While winter contains the metaphor for ageing, the spring and revivification of nature stands in stark contrast to man who cannot revive. Saywer (1972) thinks that the poem is descriptive of a ruined estate which is metaphorical for human deterioration. Taylor (1874) thought that the poem was intended as a literal description of a household in mourning. Anat (1970) goes a step further and believes the poem is a reworking of an actual dirge. Then of course there are the familiar physical developmental interpretation which reads the poem as an allegory of the deteriorating body and the problems of the elderly. There is also the so-called apocalyptic interpretation which sees the imagery as a description of an eschatological collapse of the cosmic order.

²⁹⁶ As quoted in Plumtre (1881:90f).

other interpretations seem to be, is not the issue I want to address here. Rather, I want to ask whether an alternative interpretation involving the identification of allusions to solar mythology in this poem is in any sense possible. In this regard, if one experiments with a combination of the three readings mentioned above and, in addition, one is familiar with the contents of solar mythology and the seasonal rituals popular in the cult of the sun god, then the finding possible links with solar mythology is not as far fetched as might be assumed.²⁹⁷ The following questions can be asked as an introduction to a solar mythological interpretation of the text in Qohelet:

- Is it significant that the introductory phenomena mentioned are solar (i.e. the darkening of the sun at the beginning of the poem (v2))?
- Could it be possible that the poem depicts, ambiguously, the collapse of the cosmic and social order - two areas which were believed to be the special concern of the sun god who controlled them?
- Furthermore, might the poem, on a literal level, be alluding to popular motifs in Ancient Near Eastern solar mythology - like the mourning rites for the sun god (Tammuz) during the winter season?

A reading based on these assumptions and experimenting with its possible implications might be construed along the following lines:²⁹⁸

12:2a The poem begins with the darkening (dying?) of the sun and light (the two popular icons and major natural manifestations of the solar deity). Note also the reference in v 1 to the "evil day" (wordplay on "day of *Ra*?"). Furthermore, the reference to the "moon and stars" does not necessitate a denial the priority of *solar* allusions: in the mythology of solarism, the moon was believed to be a nocturnal counterpart of the sun. The lunar entity was also known as the "eye" of the sun god by which he looks over the earth even by night.²⁹⁹ Furthermore, is it possible that the reference to the "light" is to the physical sun while the reference to *השמש* is to the solar deity?³⁰⁰

12:2b The reference to rain and clouds blotting out the sun is reminiscent of the mythological battle the sun was believed to be engaged in - the enemies were always symbolised by clouds that darken the sun disk.³⁰¹

12:2c The reference to "clouds and rain" might allude to the onset of the wintry season.³⁰² In solar mythology this is the time when the sun god (Tammuz) dies and

²⁹⁷ Please note that I am here "asking" and not "claiming". The exposition given here is highly speculative and, as noted earlier, not part of the justification for my hypothesis but speculation on its possible exegetical contributions based on the assumption of its validity and heuristic potential.

²⁹⁸ What follows here is my own creative reconstruction of a supposed background of possible allusions. Other ways of linking the imagery to solar mythology might very well be possible.

²⁹⁹ Cf. also chapter 6 in this study and Taylor (1993: *passim*) on this point.

³⁰⁰ The explanation of the light in this verse linking it with the primordial light of the first day in Genesis is possibly incorrect given the sequence here where the sun precedes this light which is mentioned in a combination with moon and stars in such a way that light here seems to refer to the sun while the *shemesh* must be something related yet primary (like a deity?)

³⁰¹ Cf. chapter 5. The idea of the clouds as mythological enemies of the sun was a popular motif in Egyptian solar mythology (cf. Keel 1978).

³⁰² Wetzstein and Wright (cf. Barton 1908:186) as well as Loretz (1964) have suggested that the

goes to the underworld.

12:3a The “house” referred to here might be interpreted as a temple or even a euphemistic designation for the underworld (cf. 12:5 “house of eternity”). To be sure, the reference to “keepers” and “doors” cannot refer to ordinary houses which had only one door and no keepers. The “keepers” of the house, if “house” here refers to the underworld, might then be the mythical keepers who guards the entrance and exits to the underworld. Moreover, 12:3a + b can be seen as a parallelism: the keepers and the strongmen are one and the same. If, alternatively, the house refers to the temple, it might be interesting to read this entire poem as a satire on the rite of the sun cult described in Ezekiel 8 (along with Jer. 7:18 and 44:16 – 19).³⁰³

12:3b Could the reference to the “grinding” ladies who stop their work and are looking out the window be interpreted as an allusion to woman of the sun cult who are involved in the process of preparing cakes for the queen of heaven? (cf. Jer. 7:18, 44:19) In ANE solar mythology it was Isis / Ishtar / Astaroth who was the queen of heaven³⁰⁴ and who had to descend into the underworld to bring up the spring sun (alias Osiris / Tammuz / Baal (Shamaim)). Even the Hebrews knew and practised this rite (cf. Ezek. 8)

12:4 Is it possible that these verses depict the onset of the solar festival / funeral where the “death” of the sun god is mourned? Ordinary activities would come to a standstill because of the ensuing of religious rites which involve the whole community. Along this line, the “birds of song” might be the birds of ill omen in ancient folklore (cf. Taylor 1874:19). The “songstresses bowing low” might be seen as the women in the cult who weep for Tammuz (cf. Ezek. 8:13-14³⁰⁵)

12:5a The fear of “what is on high”³⁰⁶ might be the fear of the winter (sun) whose warming powers are at its lowest; or it could be a superstitious fear of the sun’s enemies, symbolised by the clouds. Along the latter interpretation one can construe it as the first part of a parallelism where, in the second part, the “terrors in the way” might similarly allude, like the image in v 2, to the mythical enemies the sun has to contend with on its solar circuit (clouds, etc).

imagery here describes the onset or darkest days of Palestine's wintry season. If this be the case then no doubt there might be a connection with the seasonal rites and in this case lamentations in the sun cults mourning the “death” of the solar deity (Tammuz). On the other hand, if these images depict not (only) winter but the onset of night (so Michaelis, Delitzsch, cf. Barton [1908:186]) then the nightly “death of the solar deity (for example, Osiris, Ammon) might be the solar mythological motif coming to mind.

³⁰³ In these Old Testament texts we find the abominations which characterised Israel's apostasy to solarism just before and during the exile. The rites and ritual dramas of solar myths were apparently enacted in the temple of Yahweh (cf. esp. Ezra. 8 and the discussion in chapter 6 of this study).

³⁰⁴ At least one scholar (i.e. Dahood 1952) have argued for an interpretation of the “Queen of Heaven” as alluding to the Canaanite sun goddess Shapash.

³⁰⁵ The interpretation of Taylor (1874) has the virtue that, unlike most other interpretations, it does not require and emendation of the MT to make sense of the text. The opinion that the text here might be alluding to ritualised rites of mourning is represented by scholars such as Taylor (1874), Anat (1970), and Fox (1999). See also Am 8:3 and 2 Chron. 35:25 for related Biblical parallels to the scenario described here.

³⁰⁶ While the majority of commentators believe that this verse alludes to old people's fear of inclines (due to acrophobia or some other reason) Anat (1970:379) have argued convincingly for interpreting and translating the reference to what is high in the sense of a divine entity. If this is another allusion to the sun (deity) the imagery can be variously interpreted i.e. as the malignant summer sun (Nergal); as the enemies of Ra; as the weakened and cold winter sun; etc.

12:5b The references to the almond tree, the locust (a plant?) and the caperberry are obscure. Interpreters have mutually exclusive ideas regarding what their meaning is. Be that as it may, whether interpreted as a decline of sexual prowess, a revival of nature or something else, these images also fit into the sequence of the solar mythological perspective experimented with thus far. While it is difficult to be certain about a supposed “deeper meaning” - even the translation and identification of the references of the words are contentious - I shall suggest a possible alternative point of view from which one might make sense of the imagery. If the scene refers to the renewal of nature, this verse might indicate a jump in time where the end of the winter season described earlier is now depicted. Interpreters recognise the beginning of a new topic here (cf. Fox 1999:327). Qohelet might be sarcastic in the sense that he juxtaposes the rebirth of nature with the dying of humans in the next verse. This would then be an illustration of the delusions of solar mythology regarding the belief in the sun’s role in reviving the dead. Alternatively, the three images may refer to flora that played a role in the springtime rites of the sun cult (cf. Ezek. 8:17). However, as far as this verse is concerned, I am far from sure about the intended meaning. The three floras may even somehow allude to the clouded winter sun in some manner - i.e. white (blooming almond tree), weary (heavy grasshopper) and impotent (the useless caperberry).

12:6 The return of man to his “eternal” home is reminiscent of the “dark days that will be many” in 11:7-8 where Qohelet puts a damper on the usually positive idea of “seeing of the sun”. The imagery in this text, however, is that of a funeral - the eternal home is a euphemism for the grave.³⁰⁷ Moreover, in solar mythology the sun was believed to accompany the dead into the underworld and to provide light for them. Qohelet has already claimed that in this “house” there is only darkness and “vapour”, even “under the sun” traversing the under world (cf. 11:8 vs. 1:5b)

12:6a The “silver cord” snapping is an obscure image and there are many divergences among interpreters as to even how the verse should be translated.³⁰⁸ If one follows the *ketib* reading of the MT which understood the text as saying that the silver cord is “distant”, the seasons might have changed in this poem from autumn (v 1), winter (v 2-5a), spring (v 5b-d) and now summer (v6 a-d). In summer there is no rain or thunderstorms (i.e. the silver cord is distant?) Also, the sun god has become hostile and associated with death and drought (i.e. Tammuz [spring sun] has become Nergal [summer sun]).

12:6b The image of the golden bowl is also obscure in terms of its metaphorical reference. And while interpreters have proposed many different alternatives it might be interesting to note that, according to one solar mythological tradition, the sun god traverses the waters of the underworld at night in a golden bowl. If Qohelet says here

³⁰⁷ Cf. Barton (1908:191) who notes that this euphemism for the grave is also attested in Tobit 3:6, the Talmud and the Koran.

³⁰⁸ There are a variety of mutual exclusive interpretations of the imagery of this verse. Many scholars believe that the particular phenomena here are the same as that of Zech. 4:2 - 3 where an apparently similar group of objects are described (cf. the discussion in Barton 1908:191). The Talmud is still allegorising with reference to human anatomy. The various ancient translations differ quite markedly in the rendering of this verse and a variety of different objects have been proposed as that which Qohelet actually alludes to here (cf. also Fox 1989:306 - 307).

that the bowl is shattered, it could mean³⁰⁹ that the solar deity is being depicted as trapped in the underworld and powerless to influence what happens “under the sun” - exactly what Qohelet seems to have been saying when he saw injustice and ignorance and royal folly “under the sun”.

12:6c The description of a jug breaking at the spring might be the image of a jar which breaks because it has cracked from the drought. In addition, the breaking of a vessel elsewhere in the Old Testament is symbolic of the destruction of life.³¹⁰ This would be an apt antithesis to solar mythological beliefs where the sun often symbolised the source and sustenance of life.

12:6d The image of the wheel³¹¹ smashed in the pit is a striking depiction which can easily be linked to solar mythology. The reference to the “pit” could be interpreted as a euphemistic reference to the underworld or grave - an image not alien to the OT. The “wheel” could then be understood as the wheel of the chariot of the sun god (cf. 1:5) which was also familiar iconography to the authors of the Old Testament. In this image then, contrary to solar mythology which depicted the sun in his chariot as a conquering hero, Qohelet depicts the solar deity as one who has met his match in the forces of death. In the end, all that remains of his chariot is the smashed wheel lying in the underworld - the location of his greatest defeated.

12:7 By then concluding that man is dust and returns to the earth at death, Qohelet might be polemically asserting a familiar Old Testament thanatological belief which, in the context of this poem depicting the collapse of the cosmic and social order of the sun god, becomes a polemical affirmation of God (not the sun) as the source of life. Of course there is also the implicit denial of life after death which also amounts to a polemical denial of the beliefs of solar mythology regarding the sun’s thanatological role in accompanying the dead to and sometimes out of the under world.

This reading of a familiar yet notoriously obscure piece of text seems to make some sense of much of the imagery contained therein. Certainly, an interesting new possible frame of reference is provided. Yet, like most of the traditional interpretations of this mysterious poem, there are many verses which I must admit seems not to favour this particular and peculiar reading.³¹² If, in the end, this poem contains no reference to solar mythology whatsoever, my errant interpretative suggestions would not weaken my main theory regarding the “sun imagery” elsewhere in the book. This interpretation, along with many others in this section should all be seen as admittedly speculative and taken with a pinch of salt.

7.2.14.10 Numerological oddities possibly alluding to solar mythology

Throughout this study, references have been made to the possible significance with regard to the number of times certain words or phrases occur in Qohelet. The study of

³⁰⁹ Of course this is all speculation but it is not totally unwarranted, given the inability and disagreement in the academic community in making sense of the obscure imagery.

³¹⁰ Cf. Jer. 18:16, Isa. 30:14, Ps. 2:9.

³¹¹ Although some scholars believe that the MT requires emendation here or that גלגל probably means “bowl” (or the like) rather than “wheel” (cf. Fox 1989:307).

³¹² Although, someone with more familiarity with some details of solar myths and rites might well someday show how each verse might be related thereto if indeed this is the intended meaning.

Wright (1968:313-334) regarding the numerological intricacies of the structure of the book was already mentioned in Chapter 2. If Wright's theory could be considered a remote possibility at all, then maybe the following speculative remarks might not seem so completely preposterous as would otherwise be the case.³¹³

12 - The number of chapters in the book, each with at least one reference to the sun. There are the 12 signs of the zodiac through which the sun travels annually. According to solar mythology, the solar deity has 12 palaces which he visits on his daily circuit. Sunshine makes for a 12-hour day. The solar calendar has 12 months which, added together, constitutes the solar year.

30 - The number of times the phrase "תחת השמש" occurs in the book. Also the number of times the word רע ("evil, misfortune") occurs in the book. The Hebrew word רע is a homonym and can be used to refer to evil, the Egyptian solar deity, a friend or an enemy. Furthermore, in Egyptian wisdom texts the number 30 had special and magical significance - sayings were composed to number exactly 30. Also, the word "הבל" in its root form as *common noun* also occurs exactly 30 times in the book. The other 7 times are adjectival and other derivative forms of the root. 30 is also the number of days in the month of the solar calendar as opposed to the 29 of the lunar calendar. Both were used in Palestine. Finally, the first person singular pronoun אני also appears exactly 30 times in the book.

37 (30 + 7) - The total number of times the word "הבל" occurs in the book. The word עת, "time" also occurs 37 times. Another favourite word, עמל, "toil", occurs 37 times in Qohelet. Finally, for what its worth, the word ידע "to know" also occurs exactly 37 times in the book.

40 - The number of times the word אלהים appears in Qohelet. Incidentally the symbolic number of the Mesopotamian deity Shamash was 20.

47 - The number of times the word "ראה" (see) occurs in Qohelet. On 20 occasions it is used in the first person when Qohelet tells us what he saw under the sun.

Maybe these quantitative oddities are wholly coincidental. Maybe in some of the aforementioned cases there could be something more sinister at work. Is it possible that we might be underestimating the role of numerological intricacies in this sage's literary rhetoric? Maybe it had something to do with a forgotten albeit highly specialised skill, the significance of which only those who had the necessary knowledge could uncover (cf. Prov. 1:1-7; 30:4. To be sure, arguments that depend on the number of times certain words occur are always tenuous given the reality of text critical variant readings. However, just because some variants result in the possibility that the number of times a word occurs may not be what the interpreter with his fancy notions has depended on, this doesn't necessarily mean he is *always* wrong by necessity. Maybe the esoteric numerological structure can help to determine which variant was in the original. The argument may be circular but so is the counter argument.

³¹³ Although personally, I think these ideas are indeed a bit too far-fetched. I provide this discussion for the sake of interest and for its entertainment value.

7.3 POSSIBLE FUNCTIONS OF THE S.I. IN QOHELET

Based on the observations made in this chapter with regard to the “sun imagery” in Qohelet, the E.S.I. and the I.S.I. appear to exhibit the following functions:

7.3.1 Function 1: Ambiguity and allusion

That the “sun imagery” of the book might not be an optional extra as scholars seem to believe - or completely synonymous with the alternative phrases “on earth” or “under the heavens” - can be ascertained from the following observations regarding its occurrence:

- There are over thirty references to the sun in the book. Thirty of them are found in the phrase “under the sun”. In addition there are also five individual references to the sun.
- The fact that the phrase “under the sun” occurs so many times may indicate that it was never intended to be a spatial reference only. If this were the case it would be quite superfluous on too many occasions. On the assumption that it merely indicates “this world”, there is no reason why Qohelet needed to mention this more than once. In fact, he need not have mentioned it at all since its message would have been taken for granted (where else would Qohelet be looking?). This observation leads one to suspect possible ambiguity with regard to the connotations or associative meanings that might be attributed to it.
- Not only does the phrase “under the sun” occur so many times but it features in combination with certain themes i.e. justice, knowledge, the king, time, life, death, etc. It is also juxtaposed with a rather peculiar albeit very specific theology. Finally, the author presents himself as a king. The cumulative totality of these four features on the intratextual level leads to metatextual questions regarding possible allusions to an intertextual body of parallel discourse, i.e. ANE solar mythology.

7.3.2 Function 2: Polemics

In the Ancient Near East, the sun god was the deity:

- who was especially concerned with the issues of justice, judgement and retribution;
- who was believed to see all and know all (including the hearts of men);
- who delivered the oppressed and punished the wicked;
- who appointed the times and controlled the cosmic order;
- who punished the breakers of oaths;
- who rewarded those acting justly and generously;
- who gave kings wisdom, guidance, power and happiness;
- who aided diviners in their quest to uncover the secrets of the future;
- who granted life, health, wealth and prosperity;
- who eagerly, like a hero, vigorously raced his daily solar circuit;
- who gave life and light even to the dead;

Qohelet, however, comes along and claim explicitly, 30 times, - and implicitly all the time - that:

- “*under the sun*”, there was injustice, oppression and absurd retribution;
- “*under the sun*”, he saw everything and said many things in his heart;
- “*under the sun*”, there is no one to comfort the oppressed;
- “*under the sun*”, it is God who appoints the times for everything;
- “*under the sun*”, those who break oaths are not worse off than those who keep them;
- “*under the sun*”, those who act justly and generously die just like the wicked;
- “*under the sun*”, as a king, he found wisdom unsatisfactory;
- “*under the sun*”, no one can know the future;
- “*under the sun*”, health, wealth and prosperity are arbitrarily bestowed luxuries;
- “*under the sun*”, one sees the sun traversing his circuit wearisomely;
- “*under the sun*”, humans are destined for an eternity in darkness.

The *polemical* nature of the allusions to solar mythology seems unmistakable. Note that the polemics are of an absolute quality. Though Qohelet laments the injustice, ignorance, death, etc. under the sun he still seem to believe in and observe instances of justice, knowledge, and happiness in life under the sun. What is significant about the more positive claims are to be found in the context of divine grace. The polemical element in the allusions features in combination with traces of syncretism (see below).

7.3.3 Function 3: Irony

In the ancient world, the king was considered to be the son of the sun (god) - i.e. a son of the god who was:

- The father of the king;
- The one who saw all;
- The one who knew what goes on in the hearts of men;
- The one who ensured justice of the social order;
- The one who revealed secrets of the cosmic order;
- The one who ensured happiness for his servants;
- The one who provided immortality to royalty and lighted up the underworld.

It seems ironic, therefore, when “king” Qohelet - a son of the sun - tells us *repeatedly* that:

- Under the sun, he saw everything and found there many examples of evil;
- Under the sun he criticised the sub solar domain in his *heart*;
- Under the sun he saw injustice and could not do a thing about it;
- Under the sun, he could not become wise nor fathom the secrets of the cosmic order;
- Under the sun, his toiling brought him mostly misery;
- Under the sun, death and darkness awaited him.

It seems indeed ironic when the one who had the sun god as patron and father should so severely criticise the sub solar domain. It is also ironic that a son of the sun found in the sub solar domain the exact opposite of what solar mythology claimed to be the reality in that realm.

7.3.4 Function 4: Deconstruction³¹⁴

Whether one prefers to find in the allusions reference to the solar deity or simply to solar symbolism, the popular connotative meanings which the ancient world (including Israel) associated with the sun are deconstructed by Qohelet. The following table of binary opposites indicate this deconstruction:

ANE solar mythology / symbolism associates the sun (god) with:	Qohelet finds in the domain "under the sun":
• justice.....	injustice
• deliverance.....	oppression
• knowledge.....	ignorance
• competence (royal).....	incompetence (royal)
• light.....	darkness
• happiness.....	misery
• life.....	death
• social order.....	social (corruption)

While Qohelet does find some of the binary opposites of the first column to be present "under the sun" it is usually a result of the capricious whim of the inscrutable deity. At other times, positive scenarios under the sun become relativised or deconstructed in the same pericope by of the observation of its opposite.

7.3.5 Function 5: Syncretism

If it is true that Qohelet's allusions to solar mythology have a polemical function in that they deny as reality "under the sun" everything that was supposed to constitute the sub solar reality it must be admitted that Qohelet did not drop solar elements from his rhetoric altogether. As is the case in many instances in the Old Testament where there are allusions to a pagan deity or mythology, it is common to find the same author compensating for his criticism with a generous amount of syncretism to lessen any anticipated cognitive dissonance. This rhetorical strategy is manifested via the strategies of adoption and adaption:

In terms of **adoption**:

- like the sun god, God is in the heavens;
- like the sun god, God is the creator;
- like the sun god, God is the appointer of times;
- like the sun god, God is a divine judge;
- like the sun god, God is the sovereign source of life, happiness, wealth, etc;
- like the sun god, God controls the cosmic order.

In terms of **adaption**:

³¹⁴ Not "deconstruction" in the "post - modern" sense of the text of Qohelet deconstructing itself (although this has been done easily by post - structuralists exploiting its discrepancies) but in the sense of Qohelet deconstructing solar mythology. This does not imply he himself intentionally deconstructed any particular *texts* in a postmodern manner. It is just that *his* text deconstructs solar mythology.

- while the sun god was believed to be a predictable judge, God is inscrutable;
- while the sun god was believed to be the one who reveals the future, God *conceals* the future;
- while the sun god was believed to be the one who gives life, wealth and health to those who merit it, God arbitrarily, sovereignly and even capriciously bestows these gifts in ways that defy comprehension;
- while the sun god lights up the underworld and gives life to those there, God makes man return to dust and takes light and life away.

This form of syncretism represents an effective offensive polemical strategy in which the readers are implicitly assured that, in accepting Qohelet's views of the matter, they will not be losing something which they have always considered attractive and essential to theology.³¹⁵

7.2 THE STRUCTURAL RELATION OF Q.S.I. TO INTRATEXTUAL AND INTERTEXTUAL THEMES ATTESTED IN SOLAR MYTHOLOGY

In light of what has been said in the last three discussions of this chapter the following summary of the contents of the book of Qohelet can be provided to demonstrate the particular solar mythological perspective through which the book can be read.³¹⁶

Structured contents	Themes related to SM deconstructed	Type of Sun imagery (E.S.I. or I.S.I.)
1:1-2	R > CO	I.S.I.
1:3-11	SI > CO > SO > T	E.S.I. [1:3, 5, 9]
1:12-18	R > K > L	E.S.I. [1:13,14]
2:1-11	R > L > K	E.S.I.[2:11]
2:12-17	R > L > J	E.S.I.[2:17]
2:18-26	R > L > J > K > G	E.S.I.[2:18, 19, 20, 22]
3:1-15	T > L > CO > K > G	I.S.I.[cf. 3:1]
3:16-22	J > L > D > K	E.S.I.[3:16]
4:1-16	J > SO > L > R	E.S.I.[4:1,3,7,15]
4:17-5:8	O > G > SO > J	I.S.I.
5:9-6:9	L > J > G > SI > D	E.S.I.[5:12, 17, 6:1, 5]
6:10-12	G > K > L	E.S.I.[6:12]
7:1-4	L > D > SI > G > K	E.S.I.[7:11]
7:15-22	J > L	I.S.I.
7:23-29	K > G	I.S.I.
8:1-9	R > T > K > SO	E.S.I.[8:9]
8:10-17	J > G > L > K	E.S.I.[8:15, 17]
9:1-10	K > J > L > D	E.S.I.[9:3, 6, 9]
9:11-18	J > CO > R > K	E.S.I.[9:11,13]
10:1-20	R > J > SO > K	E.S.I.[10:5]
11:1-6	K > G > CO	I.S.I.
11:7-12:7	SI > L > G > D > CO > SO	E.S.I. [11:7; 12:2]
12:8-14	K > G > J	I.S.I.

³¹⁵ In the end, the polemical and syncretistic elements of the allusions to solar mythology may remain in a somewhat awkward state of tension. The reason for this is that what happens under the sun, - injustice, etc. - is sometimes ascribed directly to God in the book. Does this falsify my hypothesis? I do not think so. But it may imply that Qohelet's text deconstruct itself at times and that he may not have succeeded in absolving God from the atrocities he would liked to have been linked to solar deities as effectively as he may have intended.

³¹⁶ In its entirety and in accordance with its supposed structure.

R = royalty
 J = justice
 K = knowledge [including precognition, wisdom, etc.]
 L = life
 D = death
 T = time
 S.I. = solar imagery
 SM = solar mythology
 CO = cosmic order
 SO = social order
 G = God
 I.S.I = implicit sun imagery
 E.S.I. = explicit sun imagery
 > = and / as well as

In short, while one cannot structure the book via the E.S.I., by using it as markers for the delineation of pericopes, it is indeed valid to view the book as a whole from a perspective where the "sun imagery" provided a *conceptual coherence*. In addition the issues addressed by the author can be seen as paralleling the concepts that was embodied in the roles, attributes and functions of the solar deities.

7.3 A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE ARGUMENTS FOR THE PRESENCE OF ALLUSIONS TO ANE SOLAR MYTHOLOGY IN Q.S.I.

How would I evaluate my reading of Qohelet as done in this chapter in terms of its credibility? A need for the evaluation of a particular reading of an Old Testament text has been suggested by G Wenham (1991:84-101). He proposed that this could be done using six categories in assessing the overall strength of arguments. Whatever the shortcomings of Wenham's model for evaluation, and despite the subjectivity of a scholar evaluating his own arguments, I have nonetheless considered it a useful complimentary piece of data to indicate to the reader how I view the plausibility of my own arguments as presented in this chapter. I do not consider what follows as something that will evoke a unified response. I merely utilise this model to indicate that I myself do not consider all my arguments on the same level of merit:

ARGUMENT	CERTAIN	VIRTUALLY CERTAIN	HIGHLY PROBABLE	POSSIBLE	CONCEIVABLE	INCREDIBLE
1) The repetition of E.S.I. in Q_____*						
2) The presence of I.S.I. in Q_____*						
3) The significance of S.I. for Q_____*						
4) The combination of S.I. with themes like justice, royalty, ignorance, etc._____*						
5) Parallels with ANE solar mythology_____*						
6) Intentional allusions_____*						
7) Unintentional allusions_____*						
8) Allusions to solar mythology_____*						
9) Allusions to solar symbolism_____*						
10) Justice_____*						
11) Knowledge_____*						
12) Royalty_____*						
13) Thanatology_____*						
14) Time_____*						
15) Ra_____*						

(continued...)

ARGUMENT	CERTAIN	VIRTUALLY CERTAIN	HIGHLY PROBABLE	POSSIBLE	CONCEIVABLE	INCREDIBLE
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16) Syncretism			*			
17) Oaths					*	
18) The dead lion						*
19) Mantic wisdom					*	
20) The lord of wings						*
21) Snake charming						*
22) The shepherd					*	
23) Mourning rites						*
24) Seeing / Heart					*	
25) The collapse of the cosmic order						*
26) Numerology						*
27) Vapour						*
28) Shepherding the wind						*

This is but my own provisional evaluation of the matter. Because this is an entirely new perspective on the particular issue, this evaluation and its variables may very well become outdated as more research into the specific issues is done. In time, more arguments may be added to the evaluation model. What this evaluation does imply is that, as far as arguments 1-5 are concerned, they seem beyond refutation. It is these 5 arguments which constitute the essence of my hypothesis. Arguments 6, 10-11 and 16 are further elaborations on the 5 certain claims. As for the rest of the arguments, they constitute a novice, pioneering and definitely provisional attempt to read the larger part of Qohelet in recognition of the legitimacy of the new perspective which has opened up on Qohelet. In the end, many scholars might like to label more of my interpretations as "incredible". If their criticism is sound, they have every right to do so. But what is new and invaluable and exciting about this study is its establishment of the hypothesis and perspective based on the certainty of the validity of arguments 1-5 (and very possibly 6, 10, 11 and 16). In short, I myself do not consider all that is written in this study as being of equal merit.

7.6 CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I have performed an intratextual analysis in order to justify my hypothesis by presenting concrete examples of possible allusions to solar mythology in Qohelet. I have done this by looking more closely at the sun imagery in the book as it is combined with certain themes which, together, possibly allude to ANE solar mythology / symbolism. The chapter was not intended to provide a detailed commentary on Qohelet. Nor was it meant to be a completely exhaustive discussion of possible allusions to solar mythology in the book. Finally, it was definitely not intended to be read as a host of irrefutable claims with regard to the particular issues under discussion.

What was done here can be likened to a pioneering experiment. I have selected certain issues that I feel indicates the plausibility of my theory. All of what was said should be interpreted along the lines of questions such as: "Is it possible that...?" or "Could it be that...?" That's why my hypothesis and the title of this study contain the word "possible". I know that, while many may agree with me that this study has indeed unveiled a hitherto unrecognised perspective on the book of Qohelet, others will dismiss it as hopelessly mistaken. I do not expect consensus with regard to the value or validity of my research. In addition, some scholars may feel that my apologetic tone and conditional statements justify a reaction of dismissal. Speaking for myself, however, I cannot for the life of me take the history of research and the philosophy of interpretation seriously and at the same time harbour the illusion that my arguments are beyond

criticism and immortally factual.

In the end, however, I do believe that the intratextual analysis in this chapter, in view of what was said in the previous chapter is a good demonstration of the plausibility of my hypothesis as is possible at this stage of research on Qohelet. The choice of issues for discussion was not random or universal. I have tried to create a coherent argument to justify my hypothesis via a calculated selection of those ideas that might best prove that there may indeed be allusions to ANE solar mythology in the book. In sum, the hypothesis seems justified based on the following summary and reduction of what motivated the theory argued for in this study:

- **Who is Qohelet?**
- **Where does Qohelet look?**
- **What does he see there?**
- **How does he think of God?**
- **How does this parallel themes, motifs, beliefs and ideas in ANE religious discourse?**

A completely new and hitherto unrecognised way of reading the book becomes apparent if these questions are answered along the lines suggested in this study. Though many arguments regarding certain details may seem far-fetched, what seems indisputable is the following:

- Qohelet claims to have been a **king** who lived in the ANE;
- Qohelet repeatedly refers to a domain which he designates as “**under the sun**”;
- In this domain, under the sun, he observes phenomena such as **Injustice, ignorance, royal dissatisfaction, appointed times, evil, death, etc.**;
- In Qohelet, **God** is depicted as a Creator, a Judge, a Concealer of knowledge, a Giver of life, an Appointer of times, etc.;
- In **ANE religio-cultural discourse**, these features of Qohelet’s rhetoric have their parallels in **solar mythology / solar symbolism**.

These are the essential features which seem to validate my hypothesis.

CHAPTER 8

POSSIBLE METATEXTUAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I wish to ascertain what my hypothesis, if correct, may contribute to the ongoing debate pertaining to certain basic questions about the book of Qohelet. I also intend to show what the heuristic benefits of my theory might be. Finally, I also hope to answer and anticipate some of the expected criticism that may be levelled at some or other feature of this study. *The ideas that follow below are not part of the justification of my hypothesis. Rather, they represent one possible way of making sense of the possible implications of my hypothesis for our understanding of the issues that were discussed in chapter 2 of this study.*

8.2 SPECULATION ON SOME HISTORICAL ISSUES

From the perspective of the hypothesis on the possible significance and function of Q.S.I., certain conjectural inferences can now be presented as speculations concerning the historical context in which the book of Qohelet may have originated. First of all, with regard to the identity of the author, the following ideas are advanced as possibly implied by the arguments presented in the justification of the hypothesis:

8.2.1 The Solomon connection

In chapter 6 I discussed some solar elements in the Solomonic narratives in the OT (e.g. 1 Kgs 8). Whatever one may think about the tradition of Solomon as having been the author of Qohelet, there are additional features of the OT's characterisation of this king which is particularly interesting, at least from the perspective of this study. In this regard, though Qohelet may have been identified with Solomon because he was reputed to have been a wise king, there may have been a rather more sinister motive for the real author's choice of this pseudonymic identity. Assuming the validity of my hypothesis (regarding the possible presence of allusions to solar mythology in Qohelet), and from the viewpoint of the findings presented in chapter 6 (regarding solar elements in Israelite religion), it would seem that the author of Qohelet may have had some skeletons in his collective closet. Or rather, he may have wished to relieve the reputable king Solomon of the skeletons that tradition implied were in *his* closet. The following OT data should suffice to prove my point.

In 1 Kgs. 3 we read that Solomon became part of the family of the king of Egypt (i.e. a sun worshipper and "son of the sun") when he married the Pharaoh's daughter.³¹⁷ The

³¹⁷ However, the marriage of Solomon to a daughter of the Pharaoh who remains anonymous (1 Kgs. 3:1; 7:8, 9:16, 24; 11:1) has been questioned by many scholars with regard to its historicity. Some have regarded the entire scenario as a fictional embellishment in order to provide honorary propaganda to the legendary monarch. Others who have felt that the claim to historicity can be maintained have identified the Pharaoh with either Siamun (c. 978 - 959) or his successor Psausennes II (c. 959 - 945). For more on this discussion of historical background to Solomon's times cf. the works of Garbini (1988) and Soggin (1993).

text also mentioned that he took her to Jerusalem to live there until the building of the palace and the temple was finished. When this project was complete, Solomon had furnished a chamber in his palace similar to his own throne room for the Egyptian queen. That Solomon and the "son and incarnation of Ra" (i.e. the Pharaoh) was on good terms can be ascertained not only by their family ties but also in their diplomatic relationship. This relationship manifested itself to the extent that the king of Egypt destroyed Canaanite strongholds and gave them as dowry to his daughter, the wife of Solomon (1 Kgs. 9:16).

What is also interesting and may be of some significance for the purposes of this study are the following data pertaining to the events described in 1 Kgs. 3:2-15

- Solomon goes to Gibeon to sacrifice to Yahweh; Gibeon is considered by many scholars to have been a locale for solar Yahwism;
- Solomon used divination to speak to Yahweh - and does this via dream incubation. In the ANE, divinatory practices are particularly linked to solar deities like Shamash / Shemesh;
- Solomon acquires from Yahweh the ability to rule with justice, wealth, wisdom and a long life – all gifts which are usually associated with the blessing of solar deities;
- Kings in the ANE, for the most part, were considered to be sons of the Sun. Does this imply that in Solomon's time Yahweh was conceived of as solar, given his patronage to the king, His cult at Gibeon and His association with justice, life, divination, wisdom, wealth, etc.?

Furthermore, in 1 Kgs. 11, it is also written that Solomon had many other foreign wives from places such as Tyre, Ammon, Moab, Sidon, etc. It is also noted that all these wives tempted Solomon to such an extent that he worshipped all their gods (v. 4-5). The text also says that these gods were Ashtaroth - the god of Sidon, Milchom - the god of Ammon and even the Moabite god - Chemosh. For the latter Solomon built a high place on a hill next to Jerusalem. In verse 8, the tradition also claims that Solomon did the same for the rest of his (700) wives. They all came from foreign royal families. Furthermore, the text also claims that Solomon sacrificed to the gods of his wives.

While the best known names for the solar deities of the Ancient Near East are not mentioned in the text, that Solomon did worship gods like Ra and Shemesh and Baal Shamaim is implied. This can be seen in the claims that he worshipped the deities of his Egyptian, Canaanite and Phoenician wives (respectively). What is particularly interesting in this regard is the fact that the deities whose names are in fact mentioned, i.e. Chemosh and Milchom, were also known to be solar deities or sun gods (cf. van der Toorn 1995:317).³¹⁸ The name Chemosh means "Sun". Milchom means King. Both

³¹⁸ According to the text Song of Songs, which is traditionally linked to Solomon, the king also had a vineyard in Baal Hammon. As noted earlier, Baal Hammon was the title of a popular Canaanite solar deity. Whether he was worshipped by Solomon is unknown - the text makes no explicit link. Still, the reference to Baal Hammon may be a witness to an authentic historical tradition in which Solomon may have indeed worshipped this solar deity. Given the fact that he is said to have married the wives of Kings

these deities appear to be at home in solar mythology. Also, the female deity explicitly referred to, Ashtaroth, was the Canaanite goddess who's name was the west Semitic variant for the Babylonian "Ishtar" - a deity sacred to the sun cults (cf. Harwood 1992:22).³¹⁹

Now while I am in no way interested in trying to argue in favour of supposed Solomonic authorship for Qohelet, the texts witnessing to the prevalence and popularity of solarism in Solomon's day might at least provide another perspective of *why* the author of the book of Qohelet linked himself with Solomon. Was the story of king Qohelet who saw vapour under the sun written with the intention of absolving Solomon from the tradition's all too explicit record of his apostasy? To be sure, aside from the references to solar deities and pagan wives, there are other allusions to Solomon's relationship with solar mythology. These include the solar orientation of his temple,³²⁰ his "divine kingship" (Ps. 45; 72, 89),³²¹ his internationally famed wisdom (with parallels in heliopolitian wisdom traditions linked to Egyptian solar mythology); his general exposure to literature, contexts and contacts all familiar with solar mythology; etc. If these conjectures are worth the paper they are written on they might contribute to a new perspective of why the author of Qohelet chose to argue from the perspective of Israel's wisest monarch. A wise king who, in Qohelet, is depicted as an embittered "son of the Sun" who dares to criticise the way things are going in the realm "under the sun".

8.2.2 The real author

Whoever actually wrote the book of Qohelet, my theory on the possible presence of allusions to solar mythology in the book may contribute to the speculative endeavour of unearthing some relevant data in this regard. The following deductions from this study seem to yield some supplementary information pertaining to the supposed identity of the actual author.

- The author appears to be familiar with solar mythology and seems to be interested in polemically deconstructing its ideologies;
- The author appears to be familiar with a variety of Ancient Near Eastern literary traditions;
- The author seems to be living during a time when he and or his audience had access to the royal court;

throughout Canaan and to have worshipped their deities, it might not be too far fetched to wonder whether he worshipped the solar deity Baal Hammon.

³¹⁹ What often goes unnoticed are the "types" of the deities mentioned in the Old Testament. While the Old Testament only explicitly contains the names of solar deities with solar names such as Shemesh and Ra it is easy to forget (or not even be aware of the fact) that other deities such as Baal, Bel, Tammuz, Milchom, Chemosh, etc. were all at some point in their religious history considered to be either solar or multifunctional deities i.e. deities whose nature included solar elements along with other characteristics.

³²⁰ For an elaborate discussion of the possible solar elements of the Solomonic temple cf. Taylor (1993:66-68).

³²¹ It may be interesting to note that, whereas the king elsewhere in the Ancient Near East and especially in Egypt was known as the "son of the sun", in Israel, the king was at times considered to be the son of Yahweh. Does this possibly imply that Yahweh was considered a solar deity in the context of the monarchy?

- The author seems to be familiar with the Egyptian heliopolitan wisdom traditions as well as the details of Egyptian solar mythology (where the sun god was worshipped as Ra / Re;
- The author seems to have lived in a time when the people were apparently exposed to solar cults and sun worship, even in royal circles and priestly circles;
- The author seems to have lived in a time where pessimism could flourish possibly during a period of political instability;
- The author's familiarity with a variety of international wisdom traditions may imply a historical period of origin when there was a great interaction between Israel and other countries;

Of the above given possibilities, it is especially the presence of the sun cult, the connections with Egyptian solar mythology and the possibility of political crises which seem to imply that the author, whoever he was, lived at a time of significant interaction between Israel and Egypt.

8.2.3 The date of origin

There are theoretically 3 periods during the first millennium which can be considered as candidates for a hypothetical milieu that could have produced an author fitting the profile reconstructed above:

The Solomonic era when there appears to have been close relations between Solomon and the Pharaoh (10th century B.C.). Conservative scholars who understandably argue for Solomonic authorship might find this option especially tempting. Critical scholars wouldn't give it a second glance and consider it impossible. Granted the lesson from the history of research - that one should never say never and that all theories are only credible given the popularity of certain metatextual assumptions - I am nevertheless going to go against the grain of critical consensus. At least according to my theory regarding the possible presence of allusions to ANE solar mythology in Qohelet, this period as a *sitz* for the origin of the book (or its source material), could be considered as a remote theoretical possibility. Though it might well seem inconceivable to many scholars, the period of the early monarchy is one of the three periods when Israelite sages were most exposed to ANE solar mythology.

Another early period suggested by the hypothesis is that time during the **final years of the Judean monarchy**. This was a time when Egypt had momentarily recaptured its status as international superpower - after the collapse of Assyria. It was also a period of much political uncertainty and included the zenith of sun worship in ancient Israel according to archaeological and biblical data. This period, 610-590 B.C., was a time:

- When Judah was a vassal of Egypt and when Jewish communities were living in Egypt;
- When political instability was intense after the collapse of Assyria;³²²

³²² On which, see Soggin (1993).

- When there were still Jewish monarchs to which the author's audience had access to;
- When the mainstream religion was just beginning to rid itself of the solar cult instigated by Manasseh in 696-640 B.C. (cf. 2 Kgs. 23:12);
- During the 26th dynasty in Egypt when it temporarily filled the vacuum left by the collapsed Assyria; a time when there was a lot of international diplomatic and trading activity; and also a time of "renaissance" with old religious traditions being resurrected (i.e. the worship of Ra);
- Just after Assyria had lost its grip on Judea and Assyrian solar mythology (Shamash, Asshur, etc) will have been familiar to the people. Also familiar would be Egyptian solar mythology.

Furthermore:

- Qohelet's critical references to kings might well be references to the kings from Manasseh to Jehoachin;³²³
- Qohelet himself (or his audience) might well have been part of the Jewish communities living in Egypt in the delta region. As such they would have been exposed to Egyptian sun worship. From there Qohelet could be critical of the Judean royalty whilst, at the same time, attempt to preserve his heritage and identity. He might have done so by both syncretism with and polemising against Egyptian solar mythology;
- He might have been a sage who wrote to an audience thus living in at the end of the 7th, or at the beginning of the 6th century B.C. in Egypt (in Israelite communities like Leontopolis, Elephantine or Heliopolis);
- A contemporary of this hypothetical Qohelet, and one who wrote to sun worshipping communities in Egypt at the end of the seventh and beginning of the sixth century, might have been Jeremiah (cf. the setting in Jer. 43-44). Elsewhere the same setting in Judea is described in 2 Kgs. 23 - 24 and 2 Chron. 33-36. Cf. Jer 8:1-3 for the prophet's own critique of solar mythology;
- A contemporary who was not only familiar with our hypothetical Qohelet (living just before the exile) but also with the new upcoming Deuteronomistic theology might have been involved in the creation of the epilogue of the book.³²⁴

Thirdly, assuming the validity of my claim that the book alludes to solar mythology especially from Egypt, a very likely period in which the book might have originated happens to be the **Ptolemaic period** in the second half of the third century B.C. This

³²³ An assumption based on the view that the kings referred to and criticised in Qohelet were part of the royal Jerusalemite solar - Yahwists (cf. chapter 6 of this study.).

³²⁴ Cf. commentaries (ICC; OTL; WBC) on Qoh. 12:9 - 14 which is generally considered to be from the hand of a redactor.

was the period when:³²⁵

- Most critical scholars believe the book was actually written;
- Israel was under the rule of an Egyptian dynasty, albeit a Greek one;
- There was mass deportations and emigrations between Israel and Egypt - the Jewish population in Egypt numbered almost 100 000.
- Hellenisation had started to affect the Jewish community markedly;
- There was another Egyptian renaissance of the older indigenous religions. Sun worship was the central element in these cults. Furthermore, the Greek rulers encouraged this so that syncretism between Greek and Egyptian religion became marked. In fact, it happened to such an extent that the Greek solar deities Helios and Apollo became fused with Egyptian sun gods like Re, Horus, Ammon, Osiris, etc.
- The Greek rulers, like their Egyptian forerunners, were called "sons of the sun". Since the time of Alexander the Great until the time of the Ceasers, the Egyptian priesthood revered the Greek rulers as sons of solar deities.
- During the 3rd century B.C., Greek rulers bought Egyptian cult relics back from Persia. In addition they built or restored many of the old Egyptian temples, including those of solar deities such as Ammon, Ra and Horus.

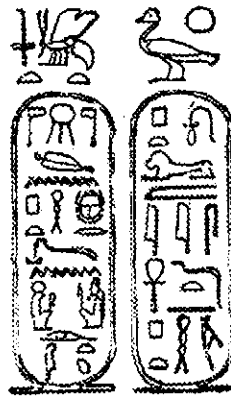


Fig 8.1 Examples of Egyptian solar mythology on the cartouches of Ptolemy VII.
 (Cf. Bevan 1968:172)

The 3 periods given above can be considered as the periods when the contents of Qohelet, as interpreted in this study, *seem* to make the most sense. I assume that most

³²⁵ For a justification of and an elaboration on these claims see the study by Bevan (1968). Bevan demonstrates clearly that Egyptian and Greek sun worship and solar mythology was alive and flourishing in Egypt during the period 332 B.C. (Alexander the Great) to 30 B.C. (Ptolemy XIV). Numerous texts from the period and by later historians amply prove that during the above time span not only that Jews were the third largest population in Egypt behind the Greeks and the native Egyptians but that the cults of the sun gods was of considerable quantity.

readers of this thesis are scholars who assume the correctness of the third option, i.e. of a Hellenistic context. My theory is perfectly compatible with a dating of the book to the Ptolemaic period since this seems to confirm my arguments regarding a supposed Egyptian version of solar mythology which Qohelet may have been polemising against. This in turn would compliment those theories which postulate the influence of a Greek philosophy or *Zeitgeist* on Qohelet. After all, it was during the Ptolemaic period when both Greek philosophy and ancient Egyptian solar theology were both in vogue. Many philosophers had the solar deity as patron and were themselves posthumously deified as sons of the sun god.

On the other hand, no theory has yet stood the test of time and therefore I have made allowance for my ideas to be amenable to the arguments of those who might believe that the book should be dated to another era.

In the end, I find that I am hesitant to commit myself to any one of these periods despite the attractions of each. I personally feel that the contents of the book and the oddities of its language and thought are too elusive to pin down with ultimate certainty. Over zealous positivistic reconstruction of a supposed historical context is not my cup of tea, especially given the controversy which imbues arguments concerning the "history of Israel. Thus, I cannot claim that I am certain that Qohelet was written in one of the three periods mentioned above. What I am claiming is that, if my hypothesis is correct regarding the presence of allusions to Egyptian solar mythology in Qohelet, these three contexts seem to best make sense of the text's polemic and the religio-cultural world in which such ideas might be most relevant.

8.3 THE GENRE OF THE BOOK

Based on what seem to be implied in my theory regarding the possible presence of allusions to Egyptian solar mythology in particular, I think that the suggestion by Perdue (1994:198-200) regarding the parallels between Qohelet and the Egyptian genre of "grave biographies" is particularly interesting. In fact, Perdue's ideas might even provide yet another piece of indirect supplementary evidence for my hypothesis.

From the Old Kingdom through the Hellenistic period, "grave biographies" were texts placed on the walls of Egyptian tombs, inscribed on funerary stelae, and, beginning in the eighteenth dynasty, written on temple statues. Placed in the mouth of the deceased and spoken in the first person,³²⁶ these biographies were presented as posthumous speeches addressed to visitors to the tomb.³²⁷ The life stories normally contained three literary features: an autobiographical narrative, maxims of ethical import, and

³²⁶ It might be interesting to speculate if the similarities between the book of Qohelet and this genre account for both the king fiction and the way it is presented, i.e. in the past tense: *was* king... (1:12). It seems as if the voice of the implied narrator is almost like that of a ghost or one who passed away and wishes others to take note of the wisdom he accumulated during his life. Note also the use of the past tense in book: "I saw"; "I said"; "I turned"; and in the epilogue (which, by the way, sounds suspiciously like an epitaph): "Qohelet was a sage, *still* he teaches knowledge to the people (note the present tense implying that he is dead but he teaches *now* through his legacy of wisdom literature; also...he *sought* to find pleasing words (12:9 - 10). Maybe Hertzberg's assessment that the book has the "smell of the tomb" attached to it is correct in more ways than one.

³²⁷ While the book Qohelet is probably not a tomb inscription, the author might have been impressed by such inscriptions and decided to adopt some of its characteristics in the process of creating a text such as the one we have at present.

instructions and exhortations to visitors to the tomb. The autobiography proper included the titles and accomplishments of the deceased, while the maxims offered were the same that guided the dead speaker through life. Important themes were: faithful performance of duties to the gods and to rulers; responsibilities to family and other members of Egyptian society, including, particularly, the poor; and finally, the expectation that the gods rewarded the god fearers with health, goods, long life, children, a proper burial, and life beyond the grave.³²⁸

Often found in grave inscriptions are found affirmations of the importance of the joy in living: "follow the heart (*sms ib*) points to the fulfilment of one's desires, while "happiness" (*ndm ib*) connotes satisfaction with life, a type of contemplative joy in which one finds contentment in what one has. In addition, the deceased often exhorted visitors to the tomb to reflect on their own death and requested them to offer grave offerings and sacrifices while remembering the name of the occupant of the tomb. The intent of these biographies is twofold: to demonstrate that the deceased have lived in accordance with the principles of Ma'at and to make a bold case for admission into the afterlife. In form and content, grave biographies bear the markings of traditional Egyptian wisdom literature, especially the instructions. This probably results from the fact that the authors of the inscriptions were scribes of lower ranks who studied in the wisdom schools. Indeed the "Instruction of Ptah-hotep" even has features of a tomb biography at its conclusion.

However, from the time of the New Kingdom onward, a darker, more pessimistic strand began to appear in some of the biographies. For instance, there is an increasing emphasis placed on the sovereignty of the gods, to the point that the gods act freely, without the constraint of retributive justice. The more carefree and harmonious existence in the Old kingdom was replaced with increasing doubts about the efficacy of official mortuary religion. This was due, no doubt to the turmoil of the First Intermediate period which witnessed the disruption of political and social stability. Some of the tomb biographies even pointed to death as both a time of great sorrow and loss and an entrance into the dark unknown. Thus, the hope for the continuance of a good name, the remembrance of virtuous deeds, and survival by means of numerous progeny became increasingly important in later periods.

These later Egyptian grave inscriptions exhibit remarkable parallels to Qohelet. The fictional persona of the narrator's voice in the book is that of a wise ruler who has experienced life to the full and is facing his own demise. Indeed, the intrusive third person voice in the epilogue provides a type of obituary for Qohelet, summarising his life in terms of the activities of a sage who taught the people wisdom, wrote words of truth and collected and arranged sayings (12:9-10). Furthermore, the three features of autobiography, sayings and instructions characterise the individual forms present in the book of Qohelet. In 1:12-26 the narrator tells of his position as king over Israel in Jerusalem and outlines the major accomplishments of his reign. The autobiographical style (recounts in the first person) continues throughout the book. Sayings are also

³²⁸ Once again, not only the similarities but also the differences with Qohelet are important. If Qohelet did adopt and adapt this genre and if his intentions with his "sun imagery" was polemical, then it explains very well why the things which he denies as being present "under the sun" is exactly what the sun worshippers claimed was the reality in the sub solar domain. Also, all the virtues that these people considered pious and meritorious is exactly what Qohelet denies as making any difference to the way in which the Divine will treat people.

present in the book (esp. 4:5-6, 9, 13; 5:7; 7:1-13; 10:1-20), while there are several instructions and exhortations to the audience on a variety of topics, including warnings to reflect on the end of life (e.g., 7:2).

Parallels in content to Qohelet are particularly noticeable in grave inscriptions of later periods of Egyptian history. The growing doubt about the efficacy of mortuary religion, the anxiety about death, and the dreadful state of the dead in this later literature find an even darker, more pessimistic expression in Qohelet, who regards the grave as an eternal home where there is neither light nor knowledge nor passion nor activity (9:1-6).

The stress on the total dependence of humans on the will of the sovereign deity³²⁹ in the later periods is also paralleled in Qohelet. The emphasis on the celebration of life in these grave inscriptions also has an important place in Qohelet. Included in both are eating, drinking, love making, a faithful companion, and children. Indeed the celebration of life in these later Egyptian texts forms the major positive counsel that Qohelet issues to his audience (2:24-26; 5:18-20; 9:7-10).

In the end, however, I feel that the book of Qohelet itself is not a grave biography but a wisdom text. Be that as it may, the text was possibly modelled on or strongly influenced by that genre. It seems that no one genre proposed by the scholarly community can do justice to the variety of the book. Rather than forcing the book into a reconstructed genre we might as well consider it a form of hybrid literature.

8.4 THE CULTIC SETTING

In contemporary liturgical practise, the book of Qohelet is traditionally read during the Feast of Booths. What may be of some significance in this regard is the belief of some scholars that this autumnal festival of booths appears to have been a locus for solar Yahwism in ancient Israel (cf. Taylor 1993:250). According to Taylor (1993:250-253) several points support the hypothesis. Though no one point is conclusive, a combination of factors may be outlined:

Firstly, a tradition in the Mishnah relates that, during the Feast of Booths, two priests accompanied by a multitude assembled at dawn at the Eastern gate of the temple area and at sunrise confessed the following as they faced the temple to the west:

Our fathers, when they were in this place turned with their backs to the temple and their faces towards the east, and they worshipped the sun toward the east; but as for us, our eyes are turned toward Yahweh.³³⁰

The clear allusions to Ezek. 8:16 falls short of proving that it was on the same occasion of the Feast of Booths that, at an earlier period, the solar rite to which the Mishnah and Ezekiel refer took place. However it certainly warrants this conclusion as a possibility.³³¹

³²⁹ And yes, of course, the deity that Perdue (1994:200) fails to mention here and which, from the perspective of my hypothesis, makes all the difference, is none other than the sun god Ra (cf. also chap. 5 of this study for a more elaborate discussion of this development in Egyptian wisdom as it relates to the same development in solar mythology. In Egypt these two were inextricably linked and hence my suggestion for a fresh assessment of the relationship between wisdom and solar mythology (cf. chapter 5).

³³⁰ M. Suk. 5.4.

³³¹ Others have made similar judgements about the implications of this particular rite (called the

Also attested in the Mishnah, is a spectacular rite which took place during the night previous to the rite just described and which involved lights (M. Suk 5. 2-4). The light from this rite said to have been so brilliant that it lit up every court in Jerusalem. The light came from four enormous candelabra, lit with wicks made from priestly garments and from burning torches juggled by pious men who danced before a merry throng. Though not certain, an ancient connection of some kind between this spectacular light show and either the motion of the sun at the time of the autumnal equinox or the full moon³³² at harvest is possible as several scholars have observed (cf. Snaith 1947:89-91)

According to Taylor (1993:250), that the solar rite referred to in Ezek. 8:16 took place during the Feast of Booths is also suggested by the fact that a setting "at the Feast" (clearly the Feast of Booths) is assigned to the ceremony of the dedication of the temple in 1 Kgs. 8, a passage with which Ezek. 8:16 has several parallels. Although the Biblical text does not unambiguously assign a time for the solar rite described in Ezek. 8:16, a time at the Feast of Booths is suggested still further by v 17 with which v 16 is probably to be associated. Ezek. 8:17 makes reference to a rite involving the extending of branches which is comparable at many points with the well-known practise of branch waving during the Feast of Booths.³³³

The exact time for the beginning of the Feast of Booths was set at some point in time with reference to the full harvest moon (Tishri 15). In addition, the general date of the Feast of Booths was set with reference to the autumnal equinox.³³⁴ The date of the autumnal festival is thus ideally suited for a cultic celebration in which sun and perhaps also its nocturnal counterpart, the moon, were understood as manifestations or symbols of Yahweh (cf. also Morgan 1983:574-578). Furthermore, according to Taylor (1993:253), language that associates God with light is often used in passages which have as their stated or commonly supposed setting at the Feast of Booths.³³⁵ One of these passages is Ps. 118:26-27, located towards the end of the Egyptian Hallel (Ps. 113-118) and immediately following the cry of v. 25 (whence came the name of the rite of the Feast of Booths, Hoshianah).

"Rejoicing at the Beth Ha-Shoebah") for our understanding of the Feast. For example, Gaster in stating, "this ceremony... was originally a magical rite, its purpose being to rekindle the decadent sun at the time of the autumnal equinox and to hail it when it rose at dawn", assumes a connection between this practice and the original aspect of the significance of the Feast (Gaster 1983:83). Martin Achard (1974:87) writes in a somewhat similar vein stating that, although solar, the rite has been redirected by the rabbis with reference to the one God.

³³² According to Taylor (1993:251 ff), while the notion of the full moon seems to complicate the hypothesis it does not undermine it. In solar mythology the moon functioned as a nocturnal counterpart of the sun. Analogues can be found in Egyptian solar mythology where the moon was representative of the "solar" Horus of Edfu and as the eye of Re.

³³³ Cf. *M. Sukk.* 3.9, 4.5 and the discussion of Ezek. 8:16.

³³⁴ Exod. 23:14 - 17; 34:18 - 26. Whereas the setting of months and exact dates within the month were made with reference to the moon within the framework of a lunisolar calendar, equinoxes (and solstices) were pivotal for regulating the year and seasons within the year, including the beginning of autumn and harvest time which the Feast of Booths commemorates. Regarding the apparently general nature of the relationship between the Feast of Booths and the exact time of the equinox, there is no way of knowing whether this is significant to the hypothesis without knowledge of the exact orientation of the temple and without a better understanding of the nature of the calendar in ancient Israel (Taylor 1993:252 ff).

³³⁵ The passages applicable here are texts like 1 Kgs. 8; Isa. 2:1 - 5, 60:1 - 3; Ezek. 8:16 - 18; Zech. 14:5 - 7; Pss. 113:37, 118:27; etc.

Blessed is he who enters in the name of Yahweh. We bless you from the house of Yahweh. God is Yahweh, he has given light to us. Bind the festal (procession) with branches, up to the horns of the altar.

There are also a few suggestive links between the festival of Sukkoth and the place "Succoth" in the Transjordan which seems to have had some connection with the feast beyond mere correspondence in name (cf. Cohen 1984:449).³³⁶ Taylor (1993:255) notes that the biblical explanation for Succoth occurs in Gen. 33:17 which states that Succoth was so named because, when Jacob travelled there, he built "booths" for his livestock. Perhaps more significantly, however, this description of Jacob's journey to "Succoth" occurs in the verse that immediately follows the description of Jacob's encounter with Esau, a passage for which a solar interpretation has been offered and that in part plays upon the solar connotation of another place name, Penuel, "face of God".

Moreover, the place Succoth is located in an area in which other place names with solar connotations occur, including, "Ascent of the Sun", clearly known to the inhabitants of Succoth (cf. Judg. 8:13-17). In addition, according to the writer of 1 Kgs. 7:46, it was on the ground near Succoth that Solomon himself casted all the bronze implements which Hiram had made for the temple of Jerusalem (and as argued earlier, Solomon, his temple and at least the bronze altar were all inspired at least to some extent by a solar cult). To conclude with Taylor (1993:256), while no single line of evidence is in itself sufficient to warrant the conclusion that an autumnal festival was an important locus for the cultic celebration of Yahweh as (manifested or symbolised in the) sun, the cumulative evidence makes the hypothesis a reasonable one.

Many texts with reference to the Feast of Booths associate God with light. The passages applicable here include 1 Kgs. 8; Isa. 2:1-5, 60:1-3; Ezek. 8:16-18; Zech. 14:5-7; Pss. 113:37, 118:27 etc. What is extremely interesting regarding this discussion on the possible solar nature of the Feast of Booths is that, in the oldest extant rabbinic tradition, the book of Qohelet (with all its repetitive references to the sun) is customarily chosen to be read at this "solar" feast!³³⁷ In other words, the combination of the following observations may well be significant from the perspective of this study:

- the solar elements in the Feast of Sukkoth;
- the public reading of Qohelet at this feast;
- the possible allusions to solar mythology in Qohelet.

We know next to nothing of the original cultic setting in which the book of Qohelet might have been utilised. However, given the tradition of reading the book at the Feast of Booths, and since this is hardly an occasion for making absolute claims, I want to ask a couple of questions

³³⁶ According to Taylor (1993:255), that there must be some connection between the name of this place in the Transjordan and the feast bearing the same name has long been recognised. Cohen, for example, suggests that "this is an old Canaanite place for the observance of the harvest festival which came to bear the same name" (S. Cohen. 1980:449).

³³⁷ The factuality of this has indeed been noted by scholars such as Achard (1974:92) and Taylor (1993:253 ff), but neither of them has hinted in any way that they have looked at Qohelet from the perspective that is proposed in the present study, i.e. solar mythology.

- Is it possible that the custom of reading Qohelet at the Feast of Booths is somehow related to a more ancient tradition linking the book with the same feast?
- Is it significant that scholars have found not only solar elements in that feast but, if this study is valid, also in the book of Qohelet - and what is the significance of this commonality with regard to solar elements?
- Is it possible that the book originally functioned on such an occasion as a piece of ideological literature with a polemical aim of both criticising and absorbing solar mythology?
- Is it possible that a cessation of this hypothetical custom during politically chaotic periods contributed to a hermeneutical alienation between the later audience and original audience so that the subtle allusions to solar mythology eventually became unrecognisable to the people?
- Is it possible that such a severing with the original context, and therefore a failure to interpret the book according to its original intent and meaning, happened in the case of the tradition history of Qohelet. Could such a process be seen as being analogous to the way the Song of Songs has been divorced from its original context and reinterpreted from the perspective of later orthodoxy?

The fact that Qohelet came to be customarily read at the Feast of Booths and the fact that the same feast (and possibly the book) seem to have some connection with solar mythology might indeed be significant. To be sure, the same fact provides ample materials for speculation about the original cultic setting of the book.

8.5 THE ANE BACKGROUND

By now the reader should know that much of this study so far has implied the possibility of strong connections and parallels with Egyptian wisdom literature. This is not to say that Qohelet cannot have been familiar with Mesopotamian or even Greek ideas. To be sure, he might very well have been familiar with those cultures' intellectual treasures. After all, wisdom in the Ancient Near East was an international and cosmopolitan literary tradition. It was popular to learn from, adopt and adapt from all other nations' wisdom. In this regard, the parallels and possible dependency of the book of proverbs with Egyptian wisdom have long been accepted, although scholars differ these days just what that influence actually amounted to. It would therefore not be a complete surprise to conclude, based on the parallels and possible allusions to Egyptian solar mythology in Qohelet that also his author was influenced by the heliopolitan wisdom tradition. Texts listing parallels between Qohelet and other Ancient Near Eastern texts have indeed pointed this out.

However, with my hypothesis on the possible presence of allusions to ANE solar mythology / symbolism in the "sun imagery" of the book, the theories presently in vogue pertaining to extra-biblical parallels to Qohelet may be up for some revisioning. After what has been said so far in this study, I am tempted to conclude that the main ANE influence on Qohelet was derived in the context of a polemical dialogue with the revived heliopolitan wisdom tradition either during the 26th dynasty in Egypt or in the Ptolemaic period. By those times, the Hebrews were quite familiar with the Mesopotamian solar

mythologies of Asshur, Shamash, Bel, Marduk and Tammuz as well. Then there are, of course, the indigenous sun cults of Shemesh, Shapash and Baal (Shamaim) which existed even from before the period of the Israelite monarchy. If the influence of Greek philosophy is insisted on, Ptolemaic Egypt's renaissance of heliopolitan solar mythology coupled with the popularity of Hellenistic philosophy seems a probable ANE milieu in which Qohelet's ideas might have taken shape.

Traces of allusions to all of the ANE solar mythologies may theoretically be present in Qohelet. This can be explained as a result of either first hand familiarity or through second hand contact where the various traditions have been assimilated in a Judean or Egyptian sun cult. In conclusion, I thus favour the theory of the priority of Egyptian influence popular among many scholars on Qohelet. But my choice is not based on a reductionism as if this influence is perceived to be the only influence or even the all-encompassing influence on the author. Rather, Egyptian heliopolitan wisdom may have provided the primary influence and object for Qohelet's polemics and syncretism. However, as a sage who was probably also exposed to the literature of cultures other than that of Egypt, Qohelet might well have been familiar with and was probably also influenced by those cultures (e.g. Mesopotamian and Greek).

To summarise and synthesise what has been implied throughout this study with regard to the ANE influence on Qohelet, I provide the following considerations which seem to justify my suspicion regarding the primacy of Egyptian influence.

- The Egyptian wisdom tradition, as compared to that of Israel's other neighbours, probably exerted the most influence on the Israelite sages in general;
- In Egypt, solar mythology was more popular than anywhere else; in other contexts the solar deity featured less prominently in connection with wisdom;
- The solar deity of Egypt embodied the most attributes which can be related to Qohelet's themes (the other solar deities were mostly concerned with justice, divination and oaths but, in Egypt, a whole host of other functions related to the themes in Qohelet were also ascribed to the sun god);
- Just as there is a tradition linking Qohelet with Solomon, so there is one linking Solomon with Egypt. Also Hezekiah, a later patron of wisdom and possibly a solar Yahwist, might be worthy of some consideration as a role player in some sense.
- The parallels to Qohelet usually thought to have been derived from Mesopotamian sources (i.e. the Gilgamesh epic) or Greek sources (Homer, Hesiod, Theognis, Epicures) is just as familiar to and attested in Egyptian literature;
- Qohelet's reference to the deity as simply "God" or "The God" parallels a popular tradition typical of Egyptian wisdom texts (such as Amenemope);
- Qohelet's depiction of God as transcendent and mysterious as well as his view of the unchangeable inscrutable world order is reminiscent of the developments related to scepticism in the heliopolitan wisdom tradition (with Re and Ma'at);
- The possible role of the number 30 in the book of Qohelet, i.e. as the number of

times the phrase “under the sun” and the word evil (ra) occurs, is reminiscent of the number 30 and its popularity in Egyptian wisdom traditions and in the legal contexts associated with justice and social order (i.e. the court tribunal of thirty);

- As far as the genre of Qohelet is concerned, the Egyptian genre of “Grave Biography” (and possibly the “Royal Testament”) may have influenced Qohelet’s decisions with regard to the form of his presentation;
- Qohelet’s repeated references to himself saying things “in his heart” also parallels Egyptian literary conventions;
- If the reference to the “shepherd” is to the king (Solomon?), this is once again reminiscent of the traditional Egyptian depictions of the Pharaoh as son of Re;
- Since the time of the monarchy, there were Jewish diplomatic communities in Egypt who was certainly exposed to solar mythology. It may have been here that Qohelet’s audience actually lived. The possible threefold wordplay with the word Ra in the book seems to presuppose the audience’s familiarity with the theology of Ra / Re;
- It was in Egypt that “Israel” first encountered solar mythology and from where solar mythology were mostly assimilated into Yahwism;
- As son of the Pharaoh (i.e. as the son of the sun or the sun incarnate) Solomon, as a king or sun who failed to attain wisdom is the ultimate in irony. A form of irony most appreciable in an Egyptian context;
- The story in 4:13-16 seems reminiscent of the tradition of Joseph;
- In the Ptolemaic period, a time to when the book is dated by most scholars, not only was there a lot of Greek philosophy in circulation. In addition, there was also a temporary renaissance of Egyptian solar mythology.

These and possibly other considerations seem to imply that, if what has been said in most of this study is *anywhere near mark* with regard to the historical reality behind the book, then the Egyptian influence on Qohelet may indeed be seen as having been demonstrably dominant. Whether this influence was exerted during the Solomonic era, at the end of the 7th and beginning of the 6th century, or during the Ptolemaic dynasty, I leave for others to decide. Once again, I would like to remind everyone that by suggesting Egyptian influence was primary, this does not mean that I claim that Egyptian influence was the only influence.

Regarding the possibility of Babylonian and Greek influence the following may be noted. The hypothesis argued for in this study can very much accommodate the possibility of these particular influences on Qohelet’s thought for a variety of reasons:

- Wisdom was an international phenomenon - whether Qohelet lived 900, 600 or 200 B.C., the Israelites were exposed to a mixture of not only Egyptian wisdom but also Babylonian and Greek literary traditions.
- It might be interesting to note, as I already have in chapter 5, in attempting to

ascertain the ANE influence on Qohelet, scholars have overlooked the role of the sun god in many of the Babylonian and Greek literary sources alleged to contain parallels to Qohelet. Thus the god of Ahikar was Shamash. The patron deity of Gilgamesh was Shamash. The most popular deity of many Greek philosophers was Helios. What seems to have been overlooked was the striking fact that, of the many suggested parallels to Qohelet, virtually all have some or other relation to solar mythology.

- During the periods suggested as possible historical *umwelts* for the book, Babylonian and Greek literature was readily available. A supposed date of origin in the late 7th / early 6th century might best account for the Babylonian / Assyrian parallels while those favouring the Greek influence may opt for the Ptolemaic period when solar theology was in vogue with Greek philosophical theology. In both instances, the influence of these cultures may have been secondary. Yet, as far as the book of Qohelet may be concerned, they could be combined with the primary Egyptian influence.

Thus, given the fact that while scholars have recognised the possibility of more than one culture influencing Qohelet - as can be expected of a cosmopolitan sage - it is also remarkable and encouraging to find that, in most of the parallel texts that scholars have probed, the sun god or solar mythology is usually never far away and often constituted the overlooked religious background of the wisdom and philosophical traditions. I have no problem accommodating, apart from the proposed primary Egyptian influence, also the influence of other cultural discourses such as the Gilgamesh epic on Qohelet. I also have no problem with comparing Qohelet to Greek philosophy. I just wish to call attention to the fact that, in texts like Egyptian instructions, Ahikar, Gilgamesh and many of the Greek philosophers, none other than the sun god appears as the implied patron deity.

8.6 THE MESSAGE OF THE BOOK

In contrast to what some may think after reading this study, I am not claiming or going to claim that the entire message and the smallest details of Qohelet is reducible to a polemical critique of solar mythology. I agree that the message of the book is first and foremost the claim that all is "vapour". Yet I have also mentioned that this claim is made in combination with the explicit or implicit qualification that it is such "*under the sun*".

On the one hand, I have argued that the conservative interpretation, which reads this qualification as indicative of an apologetically motivated secular / sacred dualism, is anachronistic and based on a history of dogmatic eisegesis. However, if I understand anything about Qohelet it is that he does not claim that life is meaningless without God. On the contrary, at least for Qohelet, it is because of - or despite of - belief in God that life appears meaningless. On the other hand, the critical interpretation fails to recognise the polemical element in the qualification that all is vapour... "*under the sun*". In addition, both conservative and critical interpreters have failed to recognise the possible allusions to ANE solar mythology / symbolism as part of the qualification (under the sun), as it is combined with the themes of justice, knowledge, time, etc.

The recognition of the fact that "all is vapour" is the essential message of Qohelet doesn't help one explain the motive for and the meaning of all the details in the book.

(particularly those in chapters 7 and 10). Similarly, recognition of the possible presence of allusions to ANE solar mythology in the book cannot automatically explain Qohelet's choice of incorporating certain admonitions and observations in his text. Failure to find allusions to solar mythology in every verse of the book, therefore, does not mean that the solar mythological hypothesis is falsified. There is no need to account perfectly for every word in the text. There are many verses with no relation to solar mythology whatsoever. In the same way, there are many verses with no apparent direct relation to the claim that "all is vapour". Though both of these motifs are indeed dominant in the book, they are not the sum total of Qohelet's message.

In other words, with regard to the main message of the book, Qohelet claims that all is "vapour". However, and this is very important since it is often a neglected truism, in justifying this claim, he utilises variables from his contemporary polemical religio-cultural context. In this particular context, anti solar polemic appears to have provided for Qohelet the perfect vehicle for illustrating his thesis. In short, though he primarily wanted to convey the idea that "all is vapour" he does this via illustrating the deficiencies of solar mythology. Such a strategy is not as odd as it might appear at first sight. After all, solar mythology proclaimed all was meaningful and purposeful about the cosmic and social orders, justice, retribution, knowledge, life, time, wisdom, and monarchy. Moreover, by chipping away at the foundations of these issues that were so important to solar mythology in general and wisdom in particular, an effective justification and substantiation of the thesis that all is vapour can be given.

The choice of scenarios illustrating the thesis that "all is vapour", i.e. scenarios providing a deconstruction of the central tenets of ANE solar mythology, is therefore indicative of a certain genius on the part of Qohelet. Not only does it succeed in communicating the idea that everything is absurd. He also does this by polemically deconstructing the major contemporary ideology – solarism – that claimed that such was not the case. By deconstructing solar mythology, he provides a perfect illustration why everything is absurd. If he lived in another time and culture, he might have alluded to some other ideology than solarism to make his point. Nevertheless, for his time and his cultural milieu, the choice of solar mythology as whipping boy is completely understandable. Solar mythology is therefore not the kernel of Qohelet's message. However, it could justifiably be considered as being the husk. All is absurd. For Qohelet, however, it is such *under the sun*.

8.8 THE HEURISTIC VALUE OF THE HYPOTHESIS

If the hypothesis argued for in this study is taken to represent a valid and legitimate interpretation of the contents of the book of Qohelet, the heuristic value of the theory is extremely multifaceted and diverse:

- It accounts for the mysterious **repetition of the phrase "under the sun"** in a historically and religio-culturally valid and enlightening way. In doing so it fills the *crux-interpretum* gap left by the two traditional interpretations;
- It accounts for author's **particular choice of themes / issues of concerns** which are juxtaposed and qualified by the "sun imagery" in the book. This includes themes such as justice, life, knowledge, royalty, time, death, etc.;

- It also explains the particular **content and perspective** Qohelet has on each of these themes and issues;
- It accounts for the author's **peculiar way of speaking about God** and the specific attributes ascribed to Him;
- It succeeds to a large extent in identifying hitherto unrecognised **Ancient Near Eastern parallels** to the book;
- It explains **the contrast with traditional Israelite wisdom** which, as I have pointed out, have many concerns in common with solar mythology and which may actually be, to a large extent, a derivative of heliopolitan wisdom traditions;
- It possibly sheds new light on **the meaning and significance** of the metaphor which constitutes the central claim of the book, i.e. that all is **“vapour”**;
- It exposes a deeper **link with other wisdom literature**. Though the significance of the concept of Ma'at has been recognised by scholars, the larger *solar mythological context* of which the concept of Ma'at was inextricably part, is largely ignored;
- It explains the motive for much of Qohelet's **pessimism** regarding justice, royalty, knowledge, time, etc. since all these were issues of great concern to the solar deity;
- It may be able to **provide new perspective** on certain obscure passages, phrases and words in the book;
- It succeeds in *explaining why scholars have found* **allusions to several Ancient Near Eastern contexts** (i.e. Egyptian, Mesopotamian and Greek) in the book. It also indicates the unnoticed element all those parallels have in common: a link with solar mythology;
- It explains why Qohelet depicted himself as a **king** and exposes the **irony** of this presentation;
- It assists in identifying the **ideological targets** of the author's polemic;
- It provides a **novel and hitherto unrecognised possible perspective** on the book of Qohelet which anyone serious about understanding the book should take cognisance of;
- It reopens the debate *regarding possible answers* to the basic interpretative questions related to the message, date, genre, language and socio-historical context in which the book was written.
- It explains **how the book could originally have enjoyed popularity** despite later recognition of unorthodox elements in it;
- It contributes to our *understanding of the nature and development of* **Israelite religion**;

- It contributes to our understanding of the nature of **Old Testament wisdom**;
- It provides a **supplementary perspective** to be added to what scholars have already discovered about the alienness and richness of the text.

In the end, it would be an understatement to say that this hypothesis, if accepted, will change the way we read the book of Qohelet. It is a completely novel perspective on the book, unheard of in the known history of interpretation. In addition, while turning 2 millennia of interpretation on its head may appear to be a bit presumptuous, it is simply due to the belated recognition of the overlooked body of ANE discourse to which the book alludes. As such it undercuts all other attempts to account for the repetitive sun imagery in Qohelet in a way that is hermeneutically valid. The combination in the book's rhetoric of sun imagery + themes + theology + self-presentation vs. parallels of these issues in ANE discourse cannot justifiably be dismissed as being insignificant.

8.9 AN ANTICIPATION OF POSSIBLE OBJECTIONS TO THE HYPOTHESIS AND THE ARGUMENTS USED TO JUSTIFY IT

Because this theory of possible allusions to solar mythology in Qohelet is so novel, it is only to be expected that it will be criticised for various reasons and on many points. At worst, some critics may simply be reluctant to let go of their favourite reading of the text. In addition, should my interpretation prove to be plausible, it may still be at disadvantage in that it re-establishes Lessing's "*garstige grabe*". Reading Qohelet as ideological literature polemising against an ancient system of solar mythology is surely less attractive than interpreting it as if it was written for people living in the twenty first century. My theory reiterates the alien nature of the text and the fact that it may not be as directly relevant to our own context as interpreters with affinity for existentialist philosophy or evangelical theology may wish to believe.

Moreover, while I welcome sincere and serious criticism, there are a few pieces of critique that may be illegitimate. These invalid objections may be prompted by a misunderstanding of my intentions / ideas or because it is believed that my methodology is somehow flawed. In what follows, I hope to answer some of those objections to my claims which I believe may likely be forthcoming. Whatever the case may be, I have tried to anticipate what I feel may be misplaced criticism resulting from a breakdown in communication somewhere along the lines of interpreting the justification of my hypothesis.

Objection 1

No one has ever read Qohelet from this perspective – the novelty of the theory counts against it.

The interpretation of Qohelet argued for in this thesis is indeed novel and unheard of, at least with regard to the *known* history of interpretation. But of this fact I am actually rather proud. I consider it a hallmark of research on a doctorate level. There are, however, two things wrong with this objection. Firstly, dismissing an idea simply because it is *new and unheard of* is not a valid objection. What is happening in this study is but a belated example and an analogous process to what happened quite often in the last two centuries of biblical research: scholars of the Bible read some ancient

Near Eastern literature and, upon doing so, noticed striking parallels with the Biblical text. They then study these parallels to see whether reading the Biblical text against the background of the intertextual parallel may possibly provide a new perspective on the meaning that the Biblical text might have had for its original author.

To be sure, this can be a hermeneutically risky endeavour. Yet few scholars would deny today that the discovery of Ancient Near Eastern texts have made an invaluable contribution to our understanding of the Biblical text in its original context. One cannot simply object to novel comparative readings because it is unattested in the *known* history of interpretation. What has happened in this study can be seen as probably analogous to what transpired when scholars first started to read, for instance, many of the Psalms in comparison with Ugaritic Baal mythology. More specific, a text like that of Psalm 29 was interpreted in ways unheard of for two millennia. Yet, today no one doubts the validity of the comparison with, or the suggestion of allusions to Canaanite mythology in that Psalm. Was it invalid to propose a completely new perspective on Gen 1-11 after the discovery of the Mesopotamian creation and flood mythologies? Many scholars who assumed that they knew what the text meant had to rethink their perspective. This is simply an occupational hazard of being a scholar who reads the Bible historically and culturally. In theory, the interpretation of any text is tentative and open to revision if a new possible perspective emerges which can make better sense the text. The argument from anti-novelty is a popular fallacy, especially if parties have a vested interest with regard to the possible revolutionary implications of a new perspective. Another way of looking at the whole issue is by realising that if the novel interpretation is actually correct, the novelty element owes its existence only to an incomplete history of interpretation. After all, if the novel interpretation actually reflects the intentions of the original author it is at the same time also the oldest interpretation possible.

In other words, this objection only pertains to what seems to be the case from what is implied by the *known* history of exegesis. If the book of Qohelet was written sometime during the first millennium B.C. - with a *terminus ad quem* of at least 200 B.C. - while we only have access to the history of interpretation as it happened *after* the beginning of the Christian era (and then mainly polemical and allegorical readings of the book) the fallacy in this argument becomes apparent. Since the rise of a more profound historical consciousness about 2 centuries ago, millennia of Biblical interpretation were turned on its head. In the end, this reading of mine is just another attempt to read the text in its implied socio-historical and religio-cultural context. This context is not immediately available to us but has to be reconstructed only on the basis of what is immanent in the text itself. The text is the starting point. Then, in dialogue with what we think we know of ancient culture and myth, we try to ascertain the original meaning of the text.

Excursus: How I stumbled upon the idea of allusions to solar mythology in Qohelet

While I was a third year BA Theology student, I was introduced to a more detailed study of the book Qohelet. I also read a lot of philosophy and, at that point, especially existential philosophy such as Heidegger, Camus and Sartre. As a result, I tended to look at Qohelet as a sort of philosopher. Whether this was legitimate or not is not the issue. Rather, what happened was that I became aware of the repeated phrase "in hierdie wereld" ("in this world") in Qohelet. This was, of course, the translation of the "Nuwe Afrikaanse Vertaling" of the original "onder the son" ("under the sun"), but I did not know it until we read the Hebrew text of BHS. I wondered why the translators chose this particular rendering (which I liked

Since it reminded me of Heidegger's philosophy of Dasein) but did not think it too strange at the time. I also read some commentaries on Qohelet and noticed that, according to the interpreters, Qohelet was concerned with issues such as justice and knowledge, or rather, *injustice and ignorance*. This too was only casually noted. Sometime later I was doing some reading on deities of the ancient world and noticed that a particular sun god, Shamash, was the god of justice and divination and a patron of royalty. He was also the patron deity of Gilgamesh. The latter name sparked the remembrance of how many commentaries on Qohelet made a reference to the epic of Gilgamesh as a parallel to the positive *Carpe Diem* advice in 9.13-16. Suddenly, a whole series of links seem to fall into place. Qohelet's repeated phrase – under the sun – denoting a domain where he, as a king, saw injustice, ignorance, etc. vs. the sun god as the deity of justice, divination, royalty, etc.; Shamash as patron of Gilgamesh vs. Qohelet possibly alluding to the epic... To my surprise, a glance at other ANE solar deities and their attributes and functions revealed similar scenarios: The sun gods were gods of justice, who saw and knew all, revealed mysteries and guided kings. And here we have "king" Qohelet who "saw" everything under the "sun" and denied that there was much justice...under the sun, that divination is possible...under the sun. From then on (and after much further reading) it became quite clear that I might be onto something. Since the validity of the discovery appeared so obvious at first, I was very surprised, as I browsed through more and more literature on Qohelet and solar elements in the OT, that no one else had noticed these parallels. After all, this was biblical studies; if ever a student "discovers" something "new" chances are someone or many before him have already noted the same thing. When I saw that nobody mentioned the parallels between Qohelet and solar mythology I got the idea to do some more research on the topic. Thus began the process that eventually led to the writing of this thesis.

Objection 2

The reference to the sun in the text is not mythological and there are no provable allusions to solar mythology. This hypothesis is simply the result of the fallacies of parallelomania (pan-solarism) and (on a semantic level) illegitimate totality transfer.

First of all, as I have noted repeatedly in this study, I am not so much claiming that reading a geographical reference for the solar discourse in the book is wrong. Rather, I have emphasised that, while partly correct, such a reading cannot account for the incessant repetition of the phrase "under the sun" in the book. Moreover, what else are we to make of the fact that Qohelet combined sun imagery with certain themes and that this combination parallels exactly the contents of solar mythology? Any geographical interpretation is *inadequate in the sense that it fails to recognise that the solar language might be ambiguous* because of what appears to be implicit allusions to solar mythology in the book. In other words, I will be the first to grant that, for Qohelet, the sun is *just the sun*, רע means "evil" and so on. However, if the language contains ambiguous allusions to solar mythology, such ordinary associative meanings may not completely understand all that the author wished to communicate.

That Qohelet's language may have more to it than the reference implied by a surface reading of the text is not a claim resulting from preconceived assumptions that there must a priori be mythological allusions or ambiguous language in the text. Quite the contrary. Qohelet mentions 30 times that he saw things "under the sun". If this simply meant he saw things "in this world" (as I thought initially and as the geographical interpretations imply) Qohelet seems to have been unnecessarily repeating what is obvious. Where else would he look? Moreover, since what he saw "under the sun" was a choice of scenarios all directly linkable to the attributes and functions of the ANE solar deities, a mere geographical reading seems to be ignoring the blatantly obvious intertextual allusions.

It is because of this discovery that I became convinced that, like many other Old Testament texts, the polemical nature of the language was implicit, ambiguous and unrecognisable unless read against an Ancient Near Eastern background. Thus, I was not simply from the start trying to read the book as if every word should be interpreted as alluding to solar mythology. The recognition of the allusions and ambiguity is therefore not the result of over eager eisegesis. It comes from knowing the contents of the book Qohelet and being familiar with the basic theology of solar religion. It comes from starting with the text itself, noticing the repetition of the phrase “under the sun”, recognising its juxtapositioning with descriptions of injustice, ignorance, time, etc. etc and finally, albeit compulsory, enquiring as to what ANE religious discourse may have some bearing on this data. It takes a person not yet saturated by decades of repeated bouts of scholarly “consensus” to see the blindingly obvious.

Therefore, the reason for postulating deeper and ambiguous meaning and more than one level of reference to the “sun imagery” of the book is neither the result of illegitimate totality transfer nor due to a parallelomania motivated by the obsession with identifying allusions to Ancient Near Eastern mythology. Neither is my choice of frame of reference of solar mythology something I was looking to find in the text before looking at the contents. To be sure, based on what appears to be hints in the texts themselves and from acquiring familiarity with solar mythology (long after I already had my own cherished reading of the book) I was forced to rethink everything in light of the new perspective that became apparent to me.

Objection 3

The parallels that can be identified are not peculiar to solar mythology. Other deities were also judges, patrons of kings, gave life, were invoked in divination, etc. Furthermore, the reconstruction of the solar mythology supposedly alluded to in Qohelet is quite selective. There are many elements in solar mythology book that have no relation to Qohelet whatsoever – and vice versa. In addition, Qohelet actually agrees and has positive associations with some beliefs of solar mythology. Not everything he sees under the sun is negatively evaluated.

This objection has already been partly addressed in Chapter 5. However, I remind the reader that my choice of identifying the parallels from the perspective of solar mythology rather than from another frame of reference or mythology is completely justified. It is based on cumulative evidence that implies the need for recourse to that particular body of myth rather than any other. First, of all, the whole idea of even considering a link with solar mythology can start even before one is familiar with it. This is because the repetition of “sun imagery” in the book needs to be accounted for. To do so in a hermeneutically legitimate manner, one need to explore all the possible associative references which the word “sun” might have had in the ancient world.

As I have argued in chapters 3 and 4, the recourse to solar mythology by way of experimentation is simply standard and thorough procedure for anyone who wishes to read in context a 2 millennia old ANE text referring to the sun 35 times in its 12 chapters. In addition, as noted in chapter 5, while other deities may also be linked with some of the themes and concerns in the book, it is only the postulation of possible allusions to ANE solar mythology that can adequately account for the peculiar combination of all the oddities related to Qohelet’s sun imagery in its intra-; and

intertextual contexts. In other words, only via recourse to solar theology / mythology / symbolism can one account for the combination of the following:

- The repeated “**sun imagery**” in the book;
- The **themes** of justice, royalty, knowledge, etc;
- The way Qohelet speaks of **God**;
- An **ANE body of discourse** that (possibly) parallels the data as expressed in the three issues noted above.

While other deities may share some of the concerns of Qohelet, it is **the cumulative hints as manifested in these four aspects** of the book that links it only with solar mythology. If the reference to the sun was absent then one might have considered other deities and myths. To be sure, it is because of the repetition of the reference to the **sun**, combined with certain themes, and a view of God that is reminiscent of solar theology - that the discourse supposedly alluded to by Qohelet was identified as being none other than solar mythology. As I have argued in chapters 3-7, a comprehensive textual perspective (i.e. intratextual, intertextual and metatextual considerations) justifies at least the tentative experimentation with such a supposedly related body of (solar) discourse in order to account for the problems related to understanding Qohelet’s sun imagery with regard to its intended purpose.

Regarding the reconstruction of the solar mythology presumed to have been alluded to by Qohelet and the related charge of selectivity, in my case at least, this is not a valid objection. One need not suppose that an author, when he alludes to a specific body of intertextual literature, should have referred to every possible detail contained therein. Furthermore, there is nothing wrong with the way I extracted those details which seems to have the most bearing on Qohelet’s thought. After all, there would be no point in providing a bulk of undifferentiated solar mythology and leaving it up to the reader to make up their own minds. No study of biblical intertextuality is done without selective reconstruction. The problem is not selectivity per se. Rather it is illegitimate to make a selection that is not representative but actually distortive of the source material. Analogically, one would not consider the arguments for syncretism between Baalism and Yahwism invalid simply because not every scrap of Baal literature was scrutinised or because there are some differences between the two. After all, I am not claiming synonymity or plagiarism with regard to any particular text of solar mythology.

Furthermore, the fact that there are parts of Qohelet seemingly unrelated to solar mythology - and even parts that seem to agree with it - is not a cause for concern. Nor can it be distorted into a critique falsifying my hypothesis. On the one hand, I have repeatedly stated that the polemical deconstruction of solar mythology is not the totality of Qohelet’s message or to be sought in every single word of every verse. It is but one part of it, albeit an important and dominating part. I repeat, there is no a-priori need to relate each and every word and verse to some parallel in solar mythology before my hypothesis can be considered plausible. In fact, such a methodology would be a perfect example of pan-solarism and a hermeneutically illegitimate procedure.

To be sure, the significance of my hypothesis is that it exposes what scholars have

hitherto failed to recognise: the fact that there are parts of the book, very large and significant parts, that do seem to allude to ANE solar mythology. The parts of the book (seemingly) unrelated to it cannot make the allusions present in the rest of the book just disappear or render their identification null and void. After all, we should give Qohelet some credit for creativity. There is no need why he may not write things that are not directly related to solar mythology. Many of his proverbs and moral admonitions fall in this category. There is no need to force such unrelated forms of discourse onto a "Procrustean bed" of solar mythology. Nor need one feel embarrassed when the entire book does not fit neatly in some superimposed scheme or system.

Finally, that there seems to be points of agreement between Qohelet and solar mythology, - for example, God as judge, seeing the sun as pleasant, etc. - is also no cause for concern. I never intended to claim that Qohelet didn't find *anything* good "under the sun". But that Qohelet did find certain less than good things "under the sun" and that these lamentable phenomena pertains to issues of justice, knowledge, royalty, time, etc. - that is what is indisputable; that is what is significant; that is what parallels solar mythology; that is what has hitherto been overlooked. The reality of pleasant scenarios does not detract from the fact that Qohelet's overwhelming emphasis and focus is on the evil "under the sun". As argued earlier, the more pleasant associations with certain scenarios *under the sun* are part of the *syncretism* and *ambiguity* which, as I have demonstrated, are also part of the nature and functions of the allusions to solar mythology in the book. In short, the positive elements are part of his *reconstructive* theology rather than of his *deconstructive* polemics. To be sure, such a mixture of the good and bad is not an indication that my theory is flawed. Rather, it is simply the familiar tendency of OT authors to combine polemics with syncretism when offering a sensitive and all encompassing critique of cherished religious beliefs.

Objection 4

The only reason this study appears somewhat convincing is due to the creation of stereotypes, caricatures, strawmen and also because of reductionism. Both the presentation of Qohelet's themes and solar mythology are oversimplified. This is the only way allusions and parallels can be "discovered".

This is a slight variation of some of the other objections but deserves to be treated as a separate critique. As far as the charge of oversimplifying the contents of the book Qohelet is concerned the following may be said in response to the charges of distortion and reductionism. First of all, that Qohelet is concerned with issues such as justice, knowledge, royalty, time, death, etc. is hardly a controversial statement. In fact, as noted, commentaries like that of Fox (1989, 1999) and Murphy (1992) summarises Qohelet's message in categories not very different from the themes selected in this study. *The isolation of these themes was never meant to act as an all inclusive and exhaustive account of the contents of Qohelet. It was simply the identification of certain issues and categories which concerned Qohelet in various different ways.*

In addition, in arguing for the validity of the hypothesis which suggests that there might be allusions to solar mythology in Qohelet, it is not required from the interpreter to prove that each and every detail of the book contains such allusions. The choice of certain themes, therefore, should not be seen as an attempt to capture or give account of every single thing that Qohelet said. Rather, certain issues were identified since it is from

those perspectives that the allusions are most clearly visible. The choice of themes and the particular choice of concepts in which they were cast do not amount to reductionism or to a distortion of the contents as a whole. They cannot be such, especially since they were never meant to be a perfect summary of the entire book in the first place.

Secondly, with regard to the charge of oversimplifying the beliefs and ideas of solar mythology, I have already answered the charge of selectiveness in this regard. What may be said here is that, as was the case with the selection and isolation of certain themes in Qohelet, the presentation of the various solar mythologies of the Near East were never meant to be exhaustive accounts of all the ideas present in such massive systems of thought. I never claimed identity, plagiarism, synonymy or reproduction as constituting the relation of Qohelet's views to that mythology. In identifying possible allusions to extra-biblical material in the OT, scholars do not have to prove that the OT text and the intertext are identical, that a specific and particular intertext was alluded to or that *all* the details of the intertext are contained in the allusion.

When scholars identify allusions to Canaanite, Mesopotamian or Egyptian mythology they seldom do so as a result of having found the very text the Biblical author was supposedly alluding to. On the contrary, a claim that there are allusions in the OT to an ANE intertext can be justified if it can be shown that there are striking similarities between the texts which cannot be explained satisfactorily in a way other than supposing an allusion is present. The supposed allusion need not be to the particular intertext but can be to a motif or idea to which the intertext itself alludes. Furthermore, for a text to qualify as containing an allusion it need not contain reference to all the detail of the intertext.

Nor does the scholar need to demonstrate the possibility of allusion by discussing all the available data which was possibly part of the larger body of discourse of which the motif/theme was part. It is sufficient to recount only the relevant elements of the intertextual discourse as long as this does not involve distortion of the whole. Though such a process is indeed selective, is not reductionistic. The purpose was never to provide an exhaustive representation of everything present in the intertextual discourse. In sum then, both my discussion of certain themes in Qohelet and in ANE solar mythology is *not open* to the charges of reductionism, distortion or the creation of strawmen / caricatures. In addition, to claim that it is such imply a misunderstanding of the purpose of the comparison and of legitimate methodologies that can be utilised in identifying allusions to ANE texts in the biblical material.

Objection 5

Much of what this study argues for is based on theories no longer popular in the academic community Furthermore, the interpretations of certain texts in the book of Qohelet are disputable if not far-fetched.

I have stated repeatedly that my hypothesis and its credibility is dependant *not* on the details of the secondary interpretations for its validity. If the critic admits that:

- Qohelet plays the role of a *king* of the ANE;
- “*sun* imagery” is significant for Qohelet,
- “under the *sun*” he found *injustice, ignorance, etc.*;

- *God is a judge, creator, etc.*

and finally that:

- the *combination* of these is reminiscent of *solar mythology* albeit in a *deconstructive and polemical manner*;

then my hypothesis is justified and vindicated. *Secondary* justification, about which we can disagree with regard to the correctness of the details, comes from the meta-; inter-; and intratextual arguments used for further elaboration. In short, the refutation of the factuality of any of the arguments on the secondary level does nothing to discredit my hypothesis. Rather, it simply suggests that other ways of filling in the details.

No one is perfect and, regarding the details of interpretation, there will never be absolute final consensus. Any criticism based on this element of admitted imperfection is thus misguided and expects more than any research could possibly hope to provide – there is a continued battle for the “facts” with regard to any subject under the sun. Globally speaking, there is no argument where all of the secondary detail is indisputable. It is a petty exercise to try and discredit a hypothesis based on criticism of *marginal or disposable elements*. It is *naïve* to suppose that one can be absolutely dogmatic about any argument currently in circulation. Post-modern hermeneutics, despite its many flaws, maybe correct in the denial of the existence of raw, indisputable and innocent facts.

Objection 6

This theory is mistaken if it implies that, in terms of the main message, the book as a whole be reduced to a critique of solar mythology.

First of all, in no way do I wish to claim that one will find allusions to solar mythology in every verse of the book. To be sure, there are many verses with no direct relation to solarism at all. On the other hand, the main message of the book, i.e. that all is vapour, is also not exhausted by or explained in terms of supposed allusions to solar mythology. In my view, the allusions to solar mythology in Qohelet are not the sum total of the message. Rather, I view them as the culturally contextual polemical discourse which Qohelet chose to utilise to illustrate what is actually his main message: i.e. that all is vapour.

To illustrate what I mean when I deny that the book can be reduced to allusions to solar mythology, I provide the following analogy. I assume the reader is familiar with the *gospel of John in the New Testament*. Any commentary which has attempted to read that book against its religio-cultural background will inform the reader that the author *alludes* to the beliefs of a worldview known as *Gnosticism*. In John's emphasis on Jesus who came *in the flesh*, John is polemically alluding to the Gnostic disparagement of the material world. On the other hand, despite this and many other polemical allusions to Gnostic beliefs, John also incorporates or assimilates some Gnostic ideas which he adapts for his own purposes. In all this, no one would deny that John alludes to Gnostic beliefs. Moreover, no one would claim that these allusions to Gnosticism in John exhausts his message or constitute the totality of what he has to say. Though important, implicit references to Gnosticism are but a secondary and coincidental part of the main

message of the book: i.e. the gospel of Jesus Christ. Finally, while the average reader may well make sense of much of John's message without familiarity with Gnosticism, a little background knowledge provides a new and illuminating perspective on the book as a whole and also with regard to the significance of much - though not all - of the details.

In a similar manner, I propose, one may see the relation between Qohelet and solar mythology. *The book and its entirety cannot be reduced to anti-solarist rhetoric. Neither does all the detail contain allusions to solar mythology.* To be sure, there may be large sections of the book which contain no allusions to solar mythology whatsoever. However, as is the case with the relation between John and Gnosticism, so the book of Qohelet may feature in relation to solar mythology. In short, solar mythology is not to be seen as the main message of Qohelet just as Gnosticism is not the main message in John. On the other hand, just as is the case with regard to reading John, failure to reckon with the allusions to solar mythology (Gnosticism), though one may be able to understand the main message of the book, all is vapour (Jesus is the Christ), one cannot fully appreciate the significance of what was said as it was expressed in a form of polemics only decodable in relation to contemporary religio-cultural phenomena.

Objection 7

Qohelet never mentions any solar deity by name. Moreover, his references to the sun are to "the" sun which implies he was not referring to a god but simply to the sun in a demythologised manner.

Those readers who have been paying attention to what has been said regarding the relation of the solar deity to the sun on the one hand - and regarding the universality of sun worship on the other hand - could anticipate my rebuttal. First of all, just because "sun" has the definite article, this does not mean that one can rule out the possible presence of an allusion to a solar deity. After all, the sun god was symbolised and associated with the sun disk to the extent that reference to the latter can be ambiguous. In other words, if someone in the ancient world referred to the sun, though technically he is not directly referring to the solar deity, he may be doing so indirectly depending on the context of his discourse.

Moreover, I would not have claimed that this was indeed the case were it not for other cues hinting at such a possibility. I have said time and time again that it is not simply the reference to the sun which leads me to conclude that polemic against solar theology is involved. To be sure, it is the reference to the sun (which was the icon of the solar deity) *combined and juxtaposed* with talk about justice, knowledge, wisdom, time, royalty etc. and with a theology depicting God in a way reminiscent of solar deities in "crisis wisdom". Once again, an analogy might assist in elucidating what I mean: Suppose I speak of the cross or the morning star. Based solely on this decontextualised references one might conclude that I am simply referring to some sort of cross and to the planet Venus. However, if I talked about the cross and the morning star in conjunction with the topics of salvation, sacrifice, prophecy and love, those familiar with the New Testament would surely understand that by referring to the cross and the morning star I am actually referring to Christ. But Christ is neither a cross nor a morning star in any literal sense. These phenomena are imagery with which he is typically associated in Christian religious discourse. If someone were then to write a book about all the evil injustice and ignorance which can be found under the cross - and if

this writer happens to be a militant atheist with an axe to grind - any Christian reader familiar with the associative imagery would know that the atheist is actually saying that under Christ (the cross / the morning star) one can observe evil, injustice, etc. But they would also not fail to notice the polemical intent the deconstruction and the irony in such assertions. After all, the cross is not usually associated with evil and injustice but with goodness and justice.

While no analogy is perfect - and should not be stretched beyond its limits - I hope that it clarifies what I perceive to be the case in Qohelet. Like the cross, the sun was a universal religious symbol. If Qohelet wanted not merely to polemise against a local or particular sun cult (of, say, Asshur, Shamash, Helios or Re) but against solar theology *en bloc*, what better way can there be than simply referring to *the sun*? In addition, by doing just that - and by combining the references to the sun with topics such as justice, retribution, divination, royalty, time, life, etc. - anyone familiar with solar mythology will not miss the possibility of there being implicit allusions to the solar deity - anymore than a Christian would fail to do so if someone mentioned the cross juxtaposed with discourse on love, salvation, religion, etc.

In other words, there was no need for Qohelet to refer to a particular solar deity in any explicit manner. To be sure, if he did refer to a particular solar deity by name it would have been unsuitable if his purpose was to deconstruct solar mythology in general. In the end, even if I am completely mistaken in this regard - i.e. he was only referring to the physical sun as star and not to the sun as icon of the solar deity - my hypothesis not completely invalidated. After all, I did mention on several occasions that if it was not solar mythology that was intentionally deconstructed one could still make a case for the (unintentional?) deconstruction of ANE solar *symbolism*. As demonstrated in chapters 4, 5 and 6 of this study, even amongst the people who did not worship the sun god, the solar disk still symbolised the concepts of justice, knowledge, life, royalty, time, etc.

Therefore, as I have argued at the end of chapter 5, whether Qohelet was referring to the sun god himself, to the sun as the icon of the solar deity or to the sun as demythologised star and symbol, the fact remains that he associates concepts with the domain under the sun which provides the reader with a direct inversion of associative meanings popularly attached to solar imagery throughout the Near East. Whether this was done intentionally or not, the undeniable fact remains: the sun was associated with certain concepts while Qohelet repeatedly tells his audience that he found an absence or distortion of these under the sun. In short, in the text of Qohelet as it lies before us, ANE solar mythology and solar symbolism is deconstructed. Though one may argue about the details of the arguments used to justify and elaborate this fact, the essence of the observation seems indisputable.

Objection 9

One may concede that Qohelet does repeatedly refer to the sun; that he does associate the domain under the sun with injustice, ignorance, royal incompetence, etc.; that he does depict the deity with the functions popularly associated with solar deities and; that these three considerations do at first sight appear to imply allusions to ANE solar mythology. However, I am still not convinced that the author of the book Qohelet intended as part of his rhetoric to intentionally engage in a polemical dialogue with solarism. It seems that the

deconstruction of solar symbolism is just coincidental and reading the book as containing implicit polemical allusions to solar mythology as part of its message is unwarranted. Therefore this study is of no value whatsoever and its hypothesis cannot be taken seriously.

Since this study's particular interpretation of the significance and function of the sun imagery in Qohelet is so novel and possibly revolutionary with regard to its implications for our understanding of Qohelet, some discomfort in accepting what is suggested in the hypothesis is to be expected. Especially those scholars who feel that there is nothing new under the sun and that their particular reading of Qohelet is unarguably correct may feel somewhat disoriented. I am not so naive that I think everyone will accept my ideas and that such an unheard of perspective will be greeted without controversy. On the contrary, I expect criticism and even welcome it. I do not believe that I have written the last word on the mysteriously recurrent sun imagery in Qohelet. However, those who share the sentiments of this particular objection should again read the formulation of my hypothesis, especially the last part. They should also read, once again, what the purpose of this study was. In the end, I cannot claim to know what is actually the case from a god's point of view. This whole dissertation has been an experiment in creative historical cultural interpretation. It facilitated the provision of a new perspective - which, *after all, is what research on doctorate level is all about.* This does not mean that I consider my ideas to be completely unwarranted speculation undeserving of serious consideration with regard to its plausibility. It does mean that I am aware of my own limitations and of the numerous hermeneutical complexities involved in the contemporary interpretation of ancient texts.

Objection 10

While the basic idea proposed in the hypothesis may have some merit, the student is too apologetic. His arguments are too dependent on conditionals and conjectures. While one can go along with the basic idea, the far-fetched nature of some of the claims discredit what might otherwise be a convincing argument.

Throughout this study I have indicated that, with a hypothesis such as this one, there cannot be a *belief that we are dealing with absolute certainties and raw facts.* There are just too many things about the book of Qohelet that we do not really know. I have also noted that not everything in this study should be interpreted as being on the same level as far as credibility is concerned. In my formulation of the purpose of this study I have clearly stated that it was not my aim to provide an indisputable reading of Qohelet. Moreover, several other considerations make it compulsory to be tentative, apologetic and provisional:

- The lessons from the **history of research** which demonstrates, if anything, that the idea of providing an interpretation that can command universal consensus may be wishful thinking;
- The fact that this study proposes a **new and hitherto unheard of perspective** on the solar imagery of the book. Solar imagery that is so inextricable with the message of the book as a whole that the acceptance of my hypothesis might yield revolutionary implications for a variety of issues in Qohelet research;

- The realisation that I am moving in virgin territory with no studies to guide my enquiries as far as the basic elements of my hypothesis are concerned;
- The insights of **critical hermeneutics** which note the complexity of interpreting ancient texts and which stress the role of the interpreter and his context in the construction of an interpretation;
- The pervasiveness, diversity and complexity of solarism in the ancient world which, together with uncertainty concerning the historical context of Qohelet, make absolute certainties in the construction of a background for the reading of the text wishful thinking

For those readers looking for hard facts, dealing with this study may indeed prove to be a frustrating experience. However, keeping in mind the insights from the philosophy of science and philosophical hermeneutics - as well as the informal logical fallacies concerning the nature of scientific enquiry - my study is simply more explicit regarding its tentative hypothetical status. Scholars with a more positivistic inclination who consider only those dissertations which provide supposedly cold hard facts as worthy of scholarship status are deceiving themselves if they believe objectivist rhetoric makes for more indisputable theory. In fact, all research on Qohelet will be speculative and provisional simply because the original author and the historical context in which he wrote is forever beyond our verification. If we do construct a plausible historical background it is not because we have travelled back in time but because we have opted for a certain reconstruction we ourselves created out of a particular reading of certain texts.

All biblical scholarship is in a sense provisional and speculative. Those who are certain that they know exactly what's what can only do so by bracketing the lessons from the history and philosophy of research. Those studies that appear to be filled with unadulterated facts can only generate that illusion because the assumptions and shaky foundations on which those claims depend are never made explicit. Such is, of course, effective and convincing rhetoric. However, in the end it may also be an obstacle to future research. The reason for this is that when scholars do not indicate the speculative elements in their theories, a further history of research follows where other theories may be based on such research. Then, when somebody finally uncovers the erroneous assumptions and conditionals of the particular theory, a whole mess of scholarship becomes suspect. I am not saying one should constantly deconstruct one's own arguments. Rather, if there is any wisdom to be gained from the wreckage-strewn path that is the history of research, it is simply the insight that our hypotheses and our theories are mortal.

Objection 11

The defensive and apologetic tone exhibited in this study, as well as the anticipation of objections, may imply thoroughness on the part of the author, but it is not necessary. The thesis is a good one and the student simply suffers from perfectionism and paranoia.

No comment.

8.10 CONCLUSION

In this final chapter, I have returned to the basic interpretative issues that I initially identified in chapter 2 as matters on which there is little consensus. I cannot claim that I sufficiently answered all the possible questions concerning the dating, authorship, language, genre, structure or some other fundamental and basic facet of the text. However, in light of my hypothesis and some of the possible insights attained in the arguments used for its justification, several interesting possible implications for some of the general questions regarding the book have emerged. It would seem that, if my hypothesis should be considered as plausible, there might well be a need to rethink and revise some theories regarding the basic interpretative issues. In this chapter, I have but provided some speculation as to such rethinking might entail. However, should these inferences be considered invalid, this would not significantly affect the status of the hypothesis itself. That Qohelet possibly alluded to solar mythology seems to me a very plausible theory accounting for his obsession with solar imagery, certain themes, his royal status, his theology, his relation to foreign literature, etc. To draw out the possible implications this perspective might have for issues such as dating, authorship, etc. is actually another matter altogether and beyond the scope of this study. In this chapter, however, I have provided some suggestion as what these implications *may* be. What the *actual* facts regarding the basic interpretative issues might be - should my theory be accepted - I leave for others to consider. All is vapour.